

## **Graphic Novels & Psychoanalysis: Alison Bechdel & D. W. Winnicott**

01:090:295:03 Index# 12775

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TTH 02:50-04:10P

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In several recent graphic memoirs, the memoirist includes episodes of going to a psychotherapist—e.g., David Small's *Stitches*, Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, and Alison Bechdel's *Are You My Mother*. In all cases, the interactions are positive, and enable the memoirist to gain insight and motivation. Bechdel's becomes intensely connected to the work of D. W. Winnicott, who is not her therapist but an influential English psychoanalyst who specialized in working with children. He wrote about play, the good enough mother, and the true and false selves. Bechdel cites him in her second memoir, *Are You My Mother?* (psychoanalysis is very much part of the story rather than an incident in it).

The course will study this case of Bechdel and Winnicott. We will read both of Bechdel's memoirs—*Fun Home* is her first—and, of course, P.D. Eastman's original *Are you My Mother?* We will also read the works of Winnicott that Bechdel cites to better understand her understanding of Winnicott. The course invites a general question about why an artist might cite someone else's work—it is common phenomenon—but a more particular one about the nature of the relationship Bechdel chooses to have with Winnicott. We will be interested in why Bechdel has such a strong feeling for Winnicott. He becomes nearly a character whose thinking and observations she values—at times he seems like a *deus ex machina*, Winnicott appears with an insight. Graphic novels have complexities of their own, so the course will begin by reading Scott McCloud's work on the graphic novel form, and obtain a conceptual frame with which to look into the graphic material.

Students will develop a portfolio that will include: weekly writing and peer responses focused on close readings of scenes in Bechdel; commentary on critical essays on Bechdel's work; commentary on Winnicott's essays; two papers (7-10 pages) that will grow out of the weekly work—i.e., students will generate their own topics.

MARTIN GLISERMAN is an English Professor and a Psychoanalyst. He teaches a wide array of courses—Literature and Psychology, Digital Literary Studies, Introduction to the Graphic Novel, Psychoanalytic Theory, Introduction to Literary Studies, and seminars of Virginia Woolf, Ralph Ellison, Chester Himes, and others. His research project involves data mining one hundred novels written in English between 1719-1997, looking at the semantic code of the novels. The focus of his psychoanalytic interest is on trauma.