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VAN LENTE
DUNLAVEY
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THE **FOUR COLOR**

COMIC BOOK HISTORY COMICS



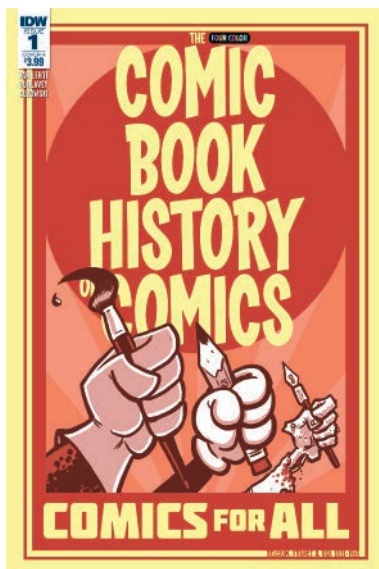
COMICS FOR ALL

BELOW FRANCE 2 USA 1831 1945



Comic Book History of Comics Vol. 2 #1
 "Birth of the Graphic Novel"
 - Belgium, France & USA 1831-1986

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REGULAR COVER
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SUBSCRIPTION COVER
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IT RHYMES WITH TRAFFIC HOVEL



WILL EISNER IS OFTEN CREDITED WITH FATHERING THE GRAPHIC NOVEL, AND FOR THIS REASON, AMONG HIS MANY OTHER CONTRIBUTIONS TO COMICS, THE AMERICAN INDUSTRY'S HIGHEST AWARD IS NAMED FOR HIM.

MANY BELIEVE, HOWEVER, THAT THE HONOR OF THE GRAPHIC NOVEL'S CREATION -- INDEED, OF CREATING THE COMIC STRIP ITSELF -- BELONGS MORE RIGHTLY TO SWITZERLAND'S RODOLPHE TÖPFFER (1799-1846).

BAH! AMERICANS-- ALWAYS HOGGING CREDIT FOR EVERYTHING!





Töpffer's father was a professional painter and served as "drawing master" to Empress Joséphine of France, but he took his art much less seriously. As headmaster of a private school and later a professor of literature, Rodolphe doodled his satiric "picture-stories" solely for the amusement of himself and his friends. Töpffer's "novels" -- pages like this one you're reading now, up to six panels with accompanying narrative captions (but no word balloons) -- poked fun at 19th century religion, education, and high society.

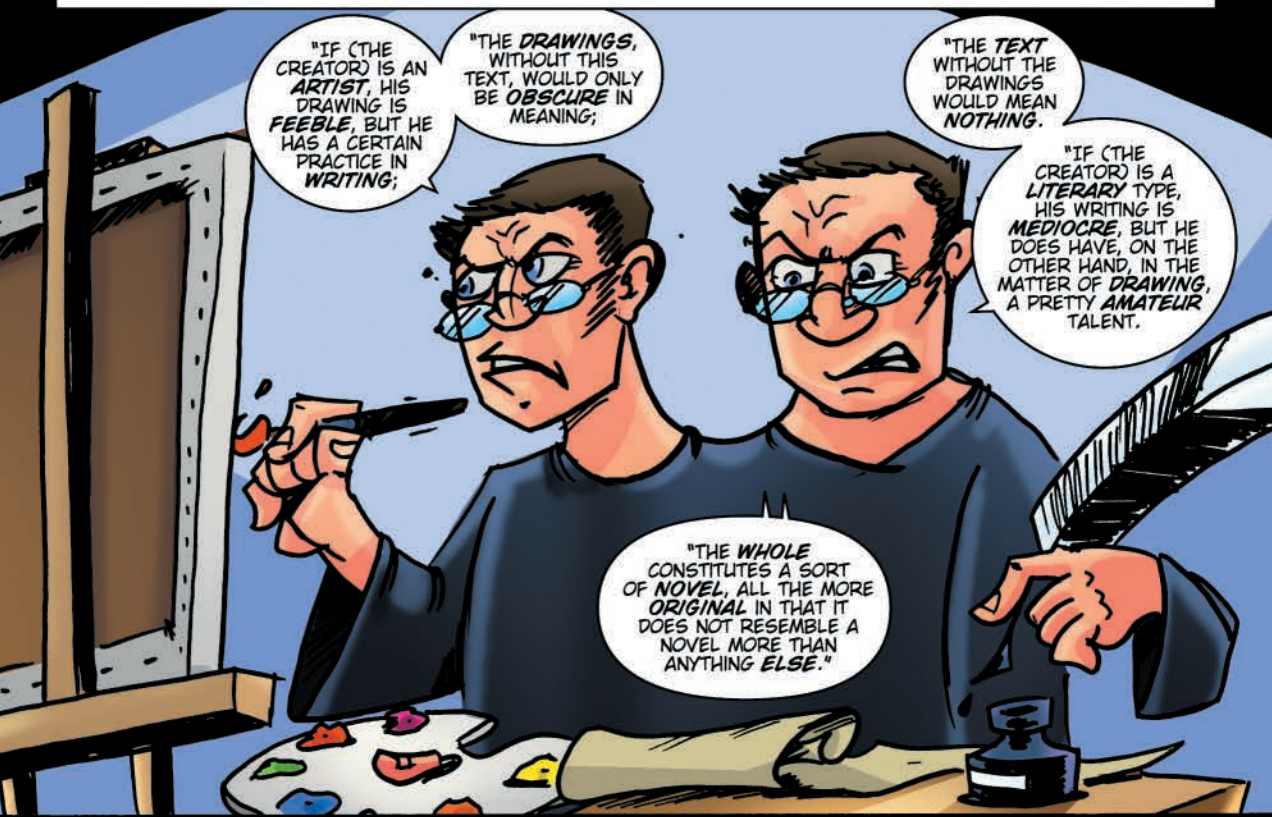


But it wouldn't be until his science satire "Le Docteur Festus" reached "Faust" author Johann Wolfgang von Goethe that Töpffer was inspired to publish for a mass audience. The father of modern German literature praised Töpffer as "the most fertile inventor of combinations ... (with) innate, gay and ever-ready talent." Thus emboldened, Töpffer allowed his works to be published across Europe to great success.



His "Histoire de M. Vieux Bois," about a dunderhead's romantic misadventures, was translated into English as "The Adventures of Obadiah Oldbuck" and published in its entirety as a newspaper supplement in New York in 1842 -- making it the first American comic book/strip/graphic novel/what-have-you, beating out the Yellow Kid by more than a half-century.

EVER **SELF-DEPRECATING**, TÖPFFER WROTE AN ANONYMOUS **BAD REVIEW** OF HIS FIRST PUBLISHED WORK, *HISTOIRE DE M. JABOT* (1833), THAT HIGHLIGHTS THE CHALLENGES FACED BY COMICS CREATORS OF **ANY ERA**:



"IF (THE CREATOR) IS AN **ARTIST**, HIS DRAWING IS **FEEBLE**, BUT HE HAS A CERTAIN PRACTICE IN **WRITING**;

"THE **DRAWINGS**, WITHOUT THIS TEXT, WOULD ONLY BE **OBSCURE** IN MEANING;

"THE **TEXT** WITHOUT THE DRAWINGS WOULD MEAN **NOTHING**.

"IF (THE CREATOR) IS A **LITERARY TYPE**, HIS WRITING IS **MEDIOCRE**, BUT HE DOES HAVE, ON THE OTHER HAND, IN THE MATTER OF **DRAWING**, A PRETTY **AMATEUR TALENT**.

"THE **WHOLE** CONSTITUTES A SORT OF **NOVEL**, ALL THE MORE **ORIGINAL** IN THAT IT DOES NOT RESEMBLE A NOVEL MORE THAN ANYTHING ELSE."



TÖPFFER INTENDED HIS SATIRES TO AMUSE A SOPHISTICATED **ELITE**.

EUROPE'S **NEXT** GENERATION OF PICTURE STORY-TELLERS, HOWEVER, FOUND INSPIRATION IN THE **STARK CLASS STRUGGLES** OF THE EARLY 20TH CENTURY.

FLEMISH ILLUSTRATOR FRANS MASEREEL PERFECTED HIS BLOCKY BLACK-AND-WHITE NEWSPAPER SPOT ART STYLE USING **WOODCUTS** TO CREATE A WORDLESS "**NOVEL**" OF ONE PANEL PER PAGE, 25 IMAGES DE LA PASSION D'UN HOMME, IN 1918.

HIS MOST FAMOUS WORK, *MON LIVRE D'HEURES* (BETTER KNOWN IN ENGLISH AS **PASSIONATE JOURNEY**), FOLLOWED NEXT YEAR, THE 167-WOODCUT ACCOUNT OF A YOUNG MAN'S REBELLION AGAINST CONVENTIONAL SOCIETY AND NATURE ITSELF.

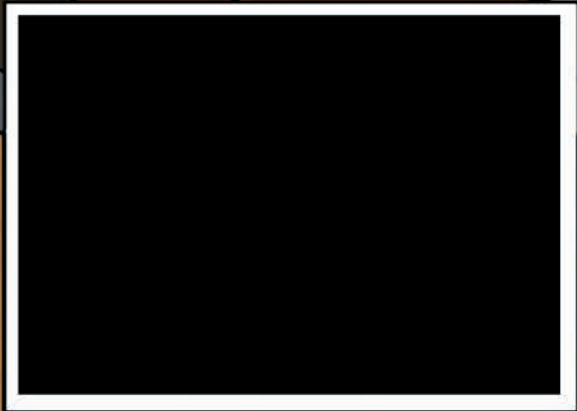
AMERICAN ART STUDENT **LYND WARD** DISCOVERED MASEREEL'S "PICTORIAL NARRATIVES" (WARD'S WORDS) WHILE STUDYING **PRINTMAKING** IN LEIPZIG.



INSPIRED, HE CREATED A WOODCUT ALLEGORY OF HIS OWN, ABOUT A NEOPHYTE ARTIST WHO MAKES A SUPERNATURAL BARGAIN FOR SUCCESS, BUT AT TERRIBLE PERSONAL COST.

WHY THE POPULARITY OF THE **OLDEST** PRINT MEDIUM FOR SUCH A **MODERN** FORMAT? WARD PROPOSES:

"THE **WOODBLOCK**, WHETHER CUT WITH A KNIFE OR ENGRAVED, DEVELOPS ITS IMAGE BY BRINGING DETAILS OUT OF **DARKNESS** INTO THE **LIGHT**."



"THIS SEEMS TO GIVE IT AN **ADVANTAGE** OVER WAYS OF WORKING THAT START WITH AN EMPTY **WHITE** AREA."



"IN A SENSE, WHAT IS HAPPENING IS ALREADY THERE **IN** THE DARKNESS, AND CUTTING THE BLOCK INVOLVES LETTING ONLY ENOUGH LIGHT INTO THE FIELD OF VISION TO **REVEAL** WHAT IS GOING ON."

"IN ADDITION, THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN **CUTTING TOOL** AND THE **RELUCTANT WOOD** IMPOSES A DEGREE OF **ARBITRARINESS** OF RENDERING ON A VARIETY OF SUBJECTS, WHICH SEEMS TO BIND **UNIT TO UNIT** MORE EFFECTIVELY THAN IS TRUE OF OTHER TECHNIQUES."





GODS' MAN, WARD'S WORDLESS "NOVEL IN WOODCUTS," WAS PUBLISHED IN OCTOBER 1929 -- FOUR YEARS BEFORE FAMOUS FUNNIES AND THE WEEK THE STOCK MARKET **CRASHED** -- TO SURPRISE **SUCCESS**, SELLING 20,000 COPIES OVER THE NEXT FOUR YEARS.

THE GENERATION THAT HAD GROWN UP WATCHING **SILENT MOVIES** HAD NO TROUBLE READING **SILENT COMICS**.



GODS' MAN RECEIVED THE SINCEREST COMPLIMENT OF SUCCESS -- A **PARODY**, FROM NO LESS A TALENT THAN NEWSPAPER GAG MAESTRO **MILT GROSS**.

HE DONE HER WRONG: THE GREAT AMERICAN NOVEL (AND NOT A WORD IN IT!), CAME OUT IN 1930 AND DREW FROM WARD'S BOOK AS WELL AS SILENT COMEDY TROPES TO WEAVE A SLAPSTICK TALE OF A YUKON STRONGMAN RESCUING HIS TRUE LOVE FROM A NEW YORK SWINDLER.

THE ADVENT OF THE COMIC BOOK LATER IN THE '30s DIDN'T END COMICS' ATTEMPTS TO BE "NOVELISTIC"... THE FORM THEY TOOK JUST **MUTATED** TO MATCH NEW MARKETPLACES AND DEMOGRAPHICS.

YET THE COMICS SERIES THAT SWORE UP AND DOWN IT WAS THE MOST "LITERARY" WAS **PUBLIC ENEMY NUMBER ONE** ON GOLDEN AGE TEACHERS' FOUR-COLOR HATE LIST...



I'D LIKE TO REGALE THE CLASS IF I MAY, MRS. HODGKISS, WITH MY BOOK REPORT ON **GOETHE'S FAUST**...

WAIT A...

...DID YOU READ THE **BOOK**, OR THE **CLASSICS ILLUSTRATED** VERSION?!

CLASSICS ILLUSTRATED WAS FOUNDED IN 1941* BY ALBERT LEWIS KANTER, A RUSSIAN IMMIGRANT WHO HAD PREVIOUSLY CREATED A **TOY TELEGRAPH**.



HMMM...MY **THREE MUSKETEERS** IN **MORSE CODE** ISN'T REALLY COMING ACROSS...

I KNOW! I'LL TRY **COMICS**!

THEIR COMIC BOOK ADAPTATIONS OF CLASSIC WORKS OF LITERATURE LIKE **ROBINSON CRUSOE**, **MACBETH**, AND **GULLIVER'S TRAVELS** PROVED SO IMMENSELY POPULAR...

* ORIGINALLY CLASSICS COMICS; THE NAME CHANGED IN 1947, PROBABLY TO AVOID ADULTS' GROWING OUTCRY AGAINST ALL THINGS COMICS-Y.