

## **FOR RYERSON UNIVERSITY ADVANCEMENT RELEASE**

### **A Champion of Comics: Ryerson Postdoctoral Fellow Dr. Barbara Postema Receives Prestigious Fellowship and Launches New Book**

**Toronto, September 2013.** Enjoyed by adults and children around the world, comics are a popular culture and pleasure reading staple. Their critical reception varies widely according to the national audience, however, and they have tended to garner little critical weight in North America. Yet comics, composed of familiar serialized images and text, are incisive repositories of social, political, and historical formations that necessitate serious attention. Dr. Barbara Postema intends to bring to our attention the scholarly inroads made in countries such as Belgium, France, and Japan, where comics are not denigrated as “pulp” or understood as children’s fare, and expand comics studies as a burgeoning field in North America.

Indeed, the serious study of comics has long been the research mission of Dr. Barbara Postema, a new postdoctoral fellow in Ryerson’s Modern Literature and Culture and Research Centre (MLCRC) and the English Department. Her compelling research program contends that comics are an artistic and narrative form endowed with the ability to communicate sophisticated social and cultural messages. She submits that this popular genre is part of a long-running tradition of pictorial narrative that tracks back to the earliest forms of human communication.

Internationally educated with a PhD in English (2010) from Michigan State University, an MA (2000) from the University of Warwick in Britain, and a BA (1998) from the University of Amsterdam, Dr. Postema is elated by the opportunity to draw on the impressive resources at Ryerson University. It is here that she hopes to place her research within an international scope. “Ryerson has widely acknowledged expertise in the study of visual and popular culture,” Dr. Postema explains, adding that her research space is “the perfect environment for this work.” Her research benefits from the MLCRC’s state-of-the-art technology, including new digital imaging technology implemented with the help of a recent Canada Foundation for Innovation grant, which allows her to store and analyze data with ease.

Dr. Postema’s research program is funded through a prestigious postdoctoral fellowship by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), awarded to Dr. Postema for a two-year period, from 2013 to 2015. During her tenure at the MLCRC, Dr. Postema will focus on a special form of comics that intentionally leaves out words and text bubbles. These so-called “silent comics” have important cross-cultural relevancy, as their ability to signify takes on universal breadth.

“Dr. Postema’s research reveals how readers make meaning through the visual, and how diverse cultures establish visual literacies that enable transnational understanding,” explains Dr. Irene

Gammel, professor of English and Canada Research Chair in Modern Literature and Culture, who supervises Dr. Postema's postdoctoral research. She continues: "Where verbal text may serve to create boundaries, images can be translated across different cultures, opening up circuits of mutuality and exchange." In conducting her research, Dr. Postema will capitalize on the thriving community of comics artists in Toronto, by engaging, for example, with Toronto's Comic Art Festival, which attracts more than 18,000 aficionados annually. Her research will culminate in the publication of a second scholarly monograph.

Dr. Postema is inaugurating her Ryerson research program by launching her first book, *Narrative Structure in Comics: Making Sense of Fragments*, on October 10th. The scholarly book, which is generously illustrated with color images, is being published as the first book of the Comic Studies Monograph Series published by Rochester Institute of Technology Press.

Dr. Postema's book will be launched at the newly renovated **MLC Research and Innovation Zone, 111 Gerrard Street East, First Floor** on **Thursday, October 10, 5-7 pm**. The launch features Dr. Postema in conversation with Dr. Andrew O'Malley, a comics scholar and associate professor of English at Ryerson, followed by a book signing. Guests will be able to browse original comics from Dr. Postema's collection. The event is free of charge and open to the general public. Refreshments will be served.

*Established in 2006, the Modern Literature and Culture Research Centre is dedicated to studying the literary and cultural production of the modern era (from 1880 to 1940) with an emphasis on the relationship between avant-garde and popular cultures.*

**For more information and to RSVP attendance:**

**Dr. Esther Berry or Catherine Russell, MLC Research and Administration**  
[admin@mlc.ryerson.ca](mailto:admin@mlc.ryerson.ca) | 416 979 5000 ext. 7668

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