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Pasts, Presents, and Futures of Canadian Comics

Candida Rifkind and Zachary J. A. Rondinelli

Where does the story of Canadian comics begin?[1]

Does it begin with Indigenous peoples' illustrated narratives—the petroglyphs, rock paintings, totem poles, button blankets, wampum belts, and other forms of visual stories from across the territories now known as Canada? As Tahltan comics scholar Camille Callison notes, such artifacts and practices continue to support the "intergenerational transfer of knowledge" and create "unique memory pathways for stories with key cultural components" (Callison et al. 149). It is not surprising, then, that Indigenous comics creators are at the forefront of Canadian comics production today. Yet both popular and critical responses to works by Indigenous graphic novelists, such as Richard Van Camp (Dogrib), David Alexander Robertson (Swampy Cree), and Katherena Vermette (Métis), as well as Indigenous cartoonists, such as Gord Hill (Kwakwaka'wakw) and Cole Pauls (Tahltan), often characterize Indigenous comics as a response to twentieth-century Euro-American comics rather than situate them as a continuation of much older, culturally significant, visual storytelling traditions.

Or does the story of Canadian comics begin with the arrival of Europeans and colonial visual storytelling on paper? Illustrated maps, sketchbooks, travelogues, botanical illustrations, newspaper advertisements (including those for runaway slaves), pamphlets, and catalogues from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries all point to an active popular and literary visual culture in which images accompany words to tell stories, both explicitly and implicitly, of settler-colonial ideologies (Spike 10-11).

Or perhaps Canadian comics begin with the advent of popular cartooning in the colonial Canadian press? By the late-nineteenth century, editorial cartoons in newspapers and satirical magazines were a popular form of political commentary, the most famous being *Grip* (1873-1894), and they introduced techniques of caricature that continue today (Nielson; Desbarats and Mosher). However, editorial cartoons are single-panel gags rather than sequential narratives, and so perhaps another beginning for Canadian comics and graphic narratives is the newspaper comic strip, a form whose popularity has yet to be matched by the scholarship, and that still needs more locating, collecting, studying, and even translating.[2]

These questions about genealogies, history, and historiography inspired 80 Years and Beyond: A Virtual Symposium on Canadian Comics, on which this

special issue is based.[3] The symposium acknowledged the eightieth anniversary of the 1940 War Exchange Conservation Act (WECA), which restricted the importation of non-essential goods and launched the Golden Age of Canadian comics and the first, albeit short-lived, domestic comic book industry. The term *Golden Age* has been adopted by Canadian comics historians to describe the period of comics publishing in Canada that occurred between 1941 and 1946.[4] Whereas the term has traditionally referred to the 1940s to 1950s US superhero comics that launched the likes of Superman and Wonder Woman, its Canadian counterpart pays attention to the similarly thrilling superheroes (with Canadian twists) born from Canada's WECA comics, such as Nelvana of the Northern Lights and Johnny Canuck.[5] As comics historians John Bell and Ivan Kocmarek discuss in their keynote, edited and published in this volume, the 1970s rediscovery of the WECA comics by fans and collectors coincided with a moment of anti-American cultural nationalism and allowed a new generation to find an origin story and inspiration for a homegrown comics market.

But the symposium also challenged the dominance of WECA comics in Canadian comics history by finding different traditions and entry points, and by recognizing that wartime patriotism often depended on xenophobia and racism. Over the two days, presenters added an exciting range of topics to expand the field, from the role of 1950s librarians and parents in censoring comics for young people, to the need to bridge French and English comics studies, to the role of GLAM institutions (galleries, libraries, archives, and museums) in Canadian comics research, to filling gaps by studying literary small press comics, psychedelic comic strips, and social media comics, alongside comics by Black, Indigenous, Asian, and Jewish Canadian artists. While we could not include all this new research here, we are pleased to have assembled a variety of voices and approaches that reflect the diversity of work in Canadian comics studies. As with the symposium, our goal in editing this special issue is to make a critical intervention: we want to ensure that, as both the canon of Canadian comics and the story of Canadian comics history start to become part of mainstream academic discourse, we attend collectively to the processes of inclusion and exclusion, recovery and forgetting, that shape the salutary embrace of comics in academia.

The six articles we publish here use methodologies drawn from a variety of disciplines, including literary criticism, media and communications, education, history, graphic medicine, and diaspora studies.

In the first three essays, questions of ethnicity, race, and place shape the ways that our authors look beyond the traditionally accepted Canadian comics narratives (white settler European), and in some cases directly write back against them, in order to reveal experiences and understandings that have been historically underrecognized. Lucas Tromly's "Invisibility, Transnationalism, and Filipino Canadian Comics" shines a spotlight on the oft-overlooked contributions of Filipino Canadian creators and stories. This

article represents a long-overdue shift in Canadian comics studies towards reading Canadian comics within larger global networks and diasporic cultures. In his article "Unsettling the Canadian Whites: A Writing Back of Indigenous, Black, and Jewish Comics," researcher-creator Jamie Michaels thinks about how the field of Canadian comics studies has taken, and is taking, shape, and how underrepresented writers and artists are using comics to "write back" against white colonial history. In "'The Land Is Our Greatest Teacher': Richard Van Camp's *Three Feathers* as a Land-Based Pedagogy for Indigenous Masculinities," Aman Kaur Virk brings together literary studies, Indigenous masculinity, and comics studies to explore Van Camp's vision of a future where justice, decolonial land-based pedagogies, and Indigenous masculinities come together to reshape myopic imaginings and colonial heteropatriarchy.

The next three articles work to reveal long-forgotten (or intentionally unexplored) histories of Canadian comics and provide opportunities to better understand our present and future. Darren Wershler's article, "Canadian Comics Studies, Canons, the Coach House, and *The Cage*," discusses Martin Vaughn-James' *The Cage* within the larger context of small press publishing (and republishing) in Canada. His essay will be of particular interest to readers familiar with Coach House and it also brings experimental Canadian literature publishing and Canadian comics production into dialogue. Amie Wright's essay, "Alberta's Forgotten Censor: The Advisory Board on Objectionable Publications (1954-1976) and the Continued Campaign against Comics Post-1954," deepens the postwar story of comics censorship beyond the famous 1950s US Senate hearings. Wright's revelations about comics censorship in 1950s Alberta offer an important context for contemporary battles against censorship in schools and libraries, such as the recent decision of the Durham District School Board in Ontario to remove David A. Robertson's *The Great Bear* from school libraries (Dawson). Amy Mazowita's article, "Towards a Network of Graphic Care: The Comics, Comments, and Communities of *Instagram*," is a timely contribution on COVID-19 comics that asks enduring questions about relationships between cartoonists, social media, and audiences in the twenty-first-century Canadian (and global) landscape.

While these articles address the past and present of Canadian comics, this issue's forum points to the future and the need to preserve Canadian comics for public access. We are grateful to Meaghan Scanlon (Library and Archives Canada) for convening this forum for GLAM professionals to discuss the current state and future needs of Canadian comics as artifacts, and we urge journal readers to work with colleagues in these institutions, and at our own institutions, to ensure these crucial cultural documents remain preserved and accessible.

This volume has a more robust Opinions & Notes section than most issues because comics studies is a field where knowledge production often happens outside of conventional peer-reviewed publications. Most importantly, we wanted to ensure that valuable voices beyond the academy are represented

and recorded. We include an edited transcript of the first symposium keynote, featuring Canadian comics historians John Bell and Ivan Kocmarek, who discuss first-hand experiences with the process of recovering WECA comics in the 1970s and the challenges contemporary and future comics archivists and historians face. The second symposium keynote was a conversation between comics artists: Toronto-based Ho Che Anderson and Vancouver-based Yukon artist Cole Pauls (Tahltan). Their edited conversation reveals important insights into their influences, practices, politics, and current concerns, as well as their shared love of comics, films, and geek culture in general.

Feminist comics icon Fiona Smyth participated in our symposium and generously allowed us to publish her short comics memoir, "From Sad Clowns to Psychedooolia." This autobiographical comic reflects Smyth's characteristic personality and visual prowess, while also presenting an honest reflection on her experiences in the Toronto alternative comics scene of the early- to mid-1980s. In the first of two interviews, Black Montreal surrealist artist Stanley Wany talks with Candida Rifkind about his personal and artistic background, the relationship between fine arts and comics art, and the importance of representation through authenticity. Speaking about his most recent book, *Helem*, Wany shares insights into his creative process that should inspire Canadian literary critics to expand their understanding of the Quebec Automatiste movement as an ongoing, intergenerational, decolonial project. The second interview features prolific Toronto alternative cartoonist Michael DeForge in conversation with Zachary J. A. Rondinelli. Speaking about his unique visual style and influences, DeForge opens up about his complicated relationship with the nation of Canada and how his art (and all art, more generally) can be politically useful. A set of book reviews on recent Canadian comics and graphic narratives, as well as scholarly works of interest to comics researchers, rounds out this special issue.

So, where do we go from here?

Canadian cartoonists have been prominent voices within the global comics landscape for quite some time, recently their renown has grown thanks to numerous prizes and honorifics. Seth was awarded the Prix Spécial du Jury in 2020 during France's Festival d'Angoulême and was recently honoured as Chevalier of the Order of Arts and Letters by the French minister of culture. Joe Ollman's recent work, *Fictional Father*, received the distinct honour of becoming the first comic or graphic novel to be nominated for a Governor General's Literary Award for Fiction, and in 2022 Julie Doucet was awarded the Grand Prix at the forty-ninth Angoulême International Comics Festival (the highest award in European cartooning). As Anderson so eloquently puts it in his keynote with Pauls, "[Canadian] work is world-class," and these recognitions remind us of this important fact. Of course, with this prestige comes a renewed interest in understanding the different traditions and

influences that have shaped individual cartoonists and asking how—perhaps even if—their identities as Canadians matter to their art. This special issue represents what we hope will be a reorientation of the Canadian comics conversation, which has long languished in the rhetoric of nationalism and patriotism ignited during the WECA era and refueled in the 1970s when Leishman and Comely's Tom Evans pulled up his red and white spandex to become Captain Canuck. We say this to reiterate that the story of where Canadian comics began is not the same as when Canadian comics publishing began; contrary to how it might look today, the multi-faceted, aesthetically diverse, and globally networked histories of Canadian comics have yet to be fully captured.

Notes

1. We are grateful to Christine Kim and the staff at *Canadian Literature* for their dedicated support of this issue, and to all the authors, reviewers, and artists who contributed their time and expertise. The publication of this issue was supported by a grant from the University of Winnipeg.
2. See, for example, Larisa Nadya Sembaliuk Cheladyn's "Forgotten Immigrant Voices," which recuperates and examines the work of 1920s Ukrainian Canadian cartoonist Jacob Maydanyk.
3. The symposium was hosted by Brescia College and took place in October 2021.
4. For a discussion of this era of Canadian comics, see John Bell's chapter "Smashing the Axis: Canada's Golden Age of Comics, 1941-1946," from his book *Invaders from the North*.
5. For discussions of these characters and their origins, see John Bell, *Invaders from the North*, and Ivan Kocmarek, "Truth, Justice, and the Canadian Way."

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Lucas Tromly

Invisibility, Transnationalism, and Filipino Canadian Comics

In their introduction to a 2020 issue of the *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics* devoted to Canadian comics, Barbara Postema and Andrew Lesk observe that recent scholarship in Canadian comics studies has both consolidated the field and pointed toward ways in which it could be further expanded.[1] Postema and Lesk propose a new canon of contemporary comics creators, including Chester Brown, Julie Doucet, and Seth, and call for more attention to be paid to young and emerging creators (497-98). However, the work of bringing new creators into academic consideration has proceeded unevenly when it comes to Asian Canadian comics. Historically, Canadian studies has been slow to address Asian Canadian cultural production, as Donald Goellnicht (1-3) and Timothy Yu (47-48) have observed. While some scholarly attention has been paid to Asian Canadian creators, including the work of Michael Cho (Stanley and Barnwell), Bryan Lee O'Malley (Berninger; Gray and Wilkins), and Mariko Tamaki and Jillian Tamaki (Stanley), to date Filipino Canadian comics have been neglected. This is a notable oversight, given the growing demographic significance of Filipinos in Canada and the rich and diverse body of comics that Filipino Canadian creators have produced.

This special issue of *Canadian Literature* is a welcome opportunity to think critically about two interrelated questions: the ways in which Canadian comics must be considered in terms of global culture, and the reasons that some Canadian comics have received less attention from a national readership than others. This article will explore these issues through four Filipino Canadian comics: Emmanuelle Chateauneuf's *Queen Street* (2017); Lorina Mapa's *Duran Duran, Imelda Marcos, and Me* (2017); Allan Matudio's *Kasama* (2021); and J. Torres and Elbert Or's *Lola: A Ghost Story* (2020). I pair these texts according to some obvious similarities. Chateauneuf's *Queen Street* and Mapa's *Duran Duran, Imelda Marcos, and Me*, both of which have strong autobiographical dimensions, feature the experiences of first-generation immigrants from Manila. Matudio's *Kasama* and Torres and Or's *Lola*, both set in the Philippines, draw heavily on Filipino folkloric monsters. All four texts have a powerful, if sometimes oblique, engagement with spaces and histories beyond Canada's borders and do not privilege Canada, or any bounded nation, as the only determinant of identity.

In these texts, the Philippines is not merely a backdrop to an immigrant's present life in Canada or an exotic, depoliticized homeland to be celebrated in service to Canadian multiculturalism. Rather, these Filipino Canadian comics, to different degrees, share a transnational sensibility that is an important part

of much diasporic Filipino cultural production. This engagement with life in different global spaces may make it difficult for Filipino Canadian texts to be neatly categorized as being "Canadian" when that term is used narrowly.

Visibility and Visuality

Canada is becoming increasingly Filipino.[2] Filipinos constitute the country's fourth-largest minority group, and it is growing quickly (McElhinny et al. 7-12). Migration from the Philippines to Canada is a relatively recent development. In the 1950s and 1960s, small numbers of people, many of whom were professionals, began to migrate to Canada. More recently, much migration from the Philippines has taken place through global flow of care labour, facilitated by the Foreign Domestic Movement Program (1981) and the Live-In Caregiver Program (1992) (Pon et al. 9). Filipinos in Canada remain an under-recognized group culturally, politically, and socially. The lack of purchase Filipino Canadians have on mainstream Canadian culture evokes the condition of invisibility that is frequently used to characterize Filipinos living in diaspora (McElhinny et al. 5). Globally, the invisibility of diasporic Filipinos is produced by a number of factors. Oscar V. Campomanes links it to America's deliberate refusal to remember its colonial history, which extends to a reluctance to recognize Filipinos in the US, who are products of that history (299-300). Eleanor Ty observes that, historically, labour available to Asians in North America, such as domestic service, required "silence, obsequiousness, and invisibility" (21). She suggests a dialectic of visibility and invisibility in Asian American history, arguing that conspicuous racial visibility puts white spectators "in a position of knowledge, mastery, and power" over racialized bodies while, conversely, social invisibility promises freedom and acceptance at the cost of political agency and psychic health (11, 22). The ongoing Filipino Canadian presence in gendered and underpaid care industries surely extends this legacy.

American imperialism caused comics to become a prominent cultural form in the Philippines and seeded a vibrant Filipino *komiks* industry that continues to this day (Lent 187-205; Rouleau 188-223).[3] Comics are also an important form of art in the Filipino diaspora. Filipino North American creators have produced a rich body of work that spans different genres and styles, including superhero comics for major publishing houses, independent comics, and graphic novels.[4] However, in the context of comics studies, the invisibility of diasporic Filipinos manifests itself in the scarcity of attention paid to Filipino North Americans as either subjects of representation or as widely recognized creators, apart from the work of Lynda Barry.[5] The Filipino Canadian creators I discuss below have been given only a small degree of media attention in mainstream Canadian newspapers and comics fan sites.[6] While making diasporic Filipino comics visible to mainstream audiences through popular or academic attention is important, the goal of mainstream visibility risks reinforcing a narrative of assimilation. In his consideration of

queer Filipino Canadians, Robert Diaz cautions that the critical attempt "to produce new archives of invisibility or visibility . . . may end up mimicking logics of state-sanctioned multiculturalism by attempting to locate and foreground new bodies in order to flatten out their contradictions" (xxxiii). This cautionary note serves for the comics I discuss as well. It is equally important that an emergent body of Filipino Canadian comics be fully visible to Canada's Filipino communities. The degree of community awareness of the comics I discuss below is difficult to quantify. While some attention has been paid to them by Filipino Canadian community media outlets, only Matudio's *Kasama* is published by a Filipino-focused press (Winnipeg's ANAK Publishing).[7] Chateauneuf's and Mapa's work are published by small Canadian presses (Chapterhouse and Conundrum, respectively), and Torres and Or's *Lola* is published by Oni, a larger US publisher.

Comics studies in Canada must be mindful of the possibility of exacerbating Filipino Canadian invisibility. In their introduction to a 2016 issue of the *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature* devoted to comics, the editors share the questions they put to contributors: "What is Canadian, if anything, in the artist's work you choose to write about? How does each artist deal with his or her Canadian identity/ies?" (Reyns-Chikuma and Vos 12). The assumption that the meaning of "Canadian identity/ies" is self-evident risks becoming an unintentional mechanism for passing over comics informed by transnational perspectives. The editorial criteria noted above is a particular impediment for discussions of Filipino Canadian comics, which are ill served when considered through narrow paradigms of nation. An underlying consistency among the texts that I discuss below is the absence of unequivocal assertions of belonging in Canada (or, indeed, in the Philippines). Filipino Canadian comics can be usefully considered in light of critical discussions of the diasporic nature of Asian North America. Timothy Yu usefully characterizes diaspora as "a *spectrum* of experience that moves between the national and the global, between essentialism and pluralism, occupying neither pole but in restless motion between them" (6). Scholars have considered Filipino diasporic cultural production through a number of perspectives, including neocolonialism (San Juan Jr.), queerness (Diaz; Ponce 2-3, 19-28), global flows of labour (Rodriguez), and gender and the global caregiving industry (Suarez 5-12). Arguably, the concept of diaspora is particularly relevant to Filipino Canada, as the relative newness of the population means that its ties to the Philippines may be vital and ongoing.

The group of comics creators whose work I discuss below indicates the demographic diversity of Filipino Canadians: Mapa and Torres were born in the Philippines and emigrated to Canada, while Chateauneuf and Matudio were born in Canada, the former of mixed parentage. (Illustrator Elbert Or is based in the Philippines.) Their work is heterogenous in other ways as well. Chateauneuf and Mapa write about and for adults, while Matudio's *Kasama* and Torres and Or's *Lola* are narratives about young people that are nominally

targeted at younger audiences, though both texts offer sophisticated critique for older readers. *Queen Street* is set in Canada, *Imelda Marcos, Duran Duran, and Me* splits its attention between Canada and the Philippines, and *Kasama* and *Lola* are set entirely in the Philippines. Despite these differences, all four narratives require readers to remain aware of the significance of events or histories at a global remove from the texts' specific settings. Events that take place elsewhere may be represented briefly or obliquely, but nevertheless are important to the narratives in which they make themselves felt. These texts reflect Yu's characterization of the "spectrum" of diasporic experience without trying to give full representation to each point in that spectrum.

Before turning to a discussion of individual Filipino Canadian comics, it is necessary to address the relationship between the inherently visual art form of comics and the condition of invisibility to which Filipino North America has historically been consigned. Invisibility can trouble comics' foundational representative strategies. Comics operate on readers' pre-knowledge of visual signs, which means that stereotyping is an unavoidable aspect of the medium's representation of race. Monica Chiu (5-6) and Theresa Tensuan (416-17) explore ways comics can frame, critique, or undo racial stereotypes to deny them a fixed meaning even as they are being employed. For example, the destabilization of racial stereotypes is an important visual strategy in Gene Luen Yang's *American Born Chinese* (2006). Filipino North American comic creators arguably do not work with the same density of established, if potentially dehumanizing, stereotypes at hand. The Philippines is a racially diverse, multiply-colonized country, where English is widely spoken and American popular culture is pervasive, and therefore it may be insufficiently "other" to have generated the same widely recognized stereotypes associated with China and Japan. Visual stereotypes of Filipinos certainly circulated in early-twentieth-century political cartooning about US imperial policy (Ignacio et al.; Tensuan 421). However, the stereotypes of Filipinos they offer up (dark, animalistic, or infantilized figures, frequently wearing grass skirts to denote primitivism and carrying spears to denote aggression) may not be of particular use to contemporary Filipino North American creators.

Diasporic Filipinos in Canada: *Queen Street* and *Duran Duran, Imelda Marcos, and Me*

Emmanuelle Chateauneuf's *Queen Street* captures the Filipino Canadian condition of invisibility both within its narrative and through the relationship of text and image. *Queen Street* tells the story of Aimee, an emigrant from Manila who lives in Sault St. Marie with her precocious daughter Melodie. Her husband, a white Canadian man, is frequently called away by his work as a trucker and only appears over the telephone. Tonally, the narrative swings between moments of humour, explosions of ornately fantastic illustration, and brief discussions of racism, exploitation, and abuse. Exaggerated visual expressions of fancy and whimsy overshadow Chateauneuf's quieter

engagement with the difficult realities of Aimee's life, suggesting the invisibility of those experiences to those around her.

*Queen Stree*t begins with a short exploration of the circumstances of Aimee's relocation to Canada. The first three pages follow a newspaper carrier on a bicycle who passes through lively but poor neighbourhoods in Manila before entering a more affluent area, in which armed guards stand outside of businesses. On this stately street is the law firm where Aimee works as a lawyer. She is interrupted from her work by a telephone call from her Canadian boyfriend, who proposes marriage. She accepts with teary-eyed joy, and Chateauneuf uses hatching on Aimee's face to suggest the blush of romance. These pages suggest a dynamic of fulfillment and social advancement, marked out by the cyclist's route through increasingly affluent parts of Manila and capped off with Aimee's decision to marry and relocate to Canada. However, the optimism of the opening pages is immediately qualified when the text jumps forward twelve years to Aimee's life in Sault Ste. Marie. Since moving to Canada, she has worked a series of menial jobs, mainly in Asian restaurants, despite her professional status in Manila. Indignation at the way employers have treated her has led Aimee to quit several such jobs. Chateauneuf shows us Aimee complaining about work to a neighbour; the hatching on Aimee's face, which once signalled love, now indicates that she is overwhelmed with frustration (fig. 1).[8] Though some secondary characters see Aimee as being headstrong or irritable, or a snob, the text uses her work situation to emphasize the extent to which her expectations about life in Canada have been undercut.

Repeatedly in *Queen Street*, Chateauneuf provokes contrasts between different emotional registers. Much of the text features traditional panelling and realistic drawing that shades into manga stylization of facial expression and dynamic line. However, at times the book's visuals become fantastic, and these moments are linked to the rich imagination of Aimee's daughter, Melodie. Melodie's imagination is explored several times in large, exuberant panels that often capture her playing games in which she is a heroic or commanding figure. These dynamic panels suggest Melodie's rich inner life and self-assurance. At one point, Aimee blames Melodie's penchant for heroic fantasy on her appetite for comic books. Aimee makes this comment in exasperation, but nevertheless raises an important point about the way comics sustain children who must deal with racism and other social challenges.

While scenes that depict Melodie's imagination are exhilarating, they pull attention away from difficult aspects of Aimee's experience as a first-generation immigrant, particularly concerning her relocation to Canada. We learn details of Aimee's experience through quiet scenes in which she talks with secondary characters. For example, the happy and romantic framing of her emigration to Canada at the start of the narrative is punctured when, during a phone conversation with her husband, Aimee alludes to her past in Manila: "Well you know my life. What my uncle did to me . . . All I cared

about then was getting high grades and getting out." These comments, which are never pursued, completely reframe the joyful beginning of the story. Later, the friendly neighbour who was present during one of Aimee's outbursts about work speaks with a third character, and says, "Hell, just look at Aimee . . . She used to be a lawyer in the Philippines! And now she couldn't be happier! Amirite, Aimee?" This character, who has seen Aimee raging against a series of racist bosses and unrewarding jobs, nonetheless thinks that she is happier simply by virtue of being in Canada. Aimee's neighbour voices an exceptionalist narrative of nation that underscores her failure to apprehend her friend's experience as an immigrant of colour in Canada.

Figure 1. Emmanuelle Chateauneuf. *Queen Street*. Chapterhouse, 2017. Reproduced with permission from Emmanuelle Chateauneuf.

Aimee is rendered somewhat invisible in her own story, both to other characters and even to the reader, who may be dazzled by the fantastic visuals produced by Melodie's imagination. The extent to which the pain of emigration fails to register on those around her is underscored in *Queen Street*'s final scene. A small fire forces the residents of Aimee and Melodie's apartment building to shelter in a nearby Chinese restaurant. While Melodie is thrilled by the late-night adventure, Aimee's experience of the fire is informed by her experience as a Filipino in diaspora. Speaking in Tagalog with

a server at the restaurant, Aimee links the events of the night to the Marcos-era violence that triggered much emigration from the Philippines in the early 1970s: "The last time I was forced to leave my home in the middle of the night, there was civil war." Following this exchange, the text's tone modulates when, over a double-spread page, Melodie visualizes the group's meal as a fantastic mash-up of the Last Supper and *Alice in Wonderland*. This visual flourish underscores the scene as a happy one, in which a group of people from disparate backgrounds form an impromptu, supportive community. However, in text boxes superimposed on this image, Aimee acknowledges that she no longer feels the sense of wonder that her daughter does, and the fantastic feast-scene overshadows the difficult memories that the fire calls to mind for her. Even those closest to Aimee seem unaware of her experiences, and *Queen Street* leaves her feeling isolated in a moment of community.

Familiar narratives of immigration inform Chateauneuf's *Queen Street*. Though Aimee ruminates on her past in the Philippines, the text's exploration of racism and intergenerational tension takes place within the bounds of her new country. Other comics explore Filipino Canadian experience through a more directly transnational perspective. A preoccupation with the Philippines is a feature of much Filipino North American literature: N. V. M. Gonzalez and Oscar V. Campomanes observe that "figurations of exilic displacements, nostalgia for the old country, leave-taking, dispossession, and imagined 'homecomings' are implicit and explicit refrains in Filipino American cultural products" (85). Lorina Mapa's graphic memoir *Imelda Marcos, Duran Duran, and Me* is a powerful example of the "gestures toward return" (Campomanes 301) in much Filipino North American cultural production.

In *Imelda Marcos, Duran Duran, and Me*, a painful return to a country of origin energizes a renewed sense of self in Canada. Mapa's comic tells the story of Rina, an artist from an affluent Manila family who lives in Quebec with her white Canadian husband and their children. The death of her father, with whom she was extremely close, calls her back to the Philippines. Most of the narrative takes place there, either in the present or in extended flashbacks to her childhood and adolescence.

Rina's family life in Manila is presented as being emotionally rich, made up of warm relationships with immediate and extended family. Even her discussion of major historical events feels intimate. She emphasizes the energy and co-operation of protestors during the 1986 People Power Revolution. In this part of the narrative, Mapa's grey-scale art becomes vivid as panels fill with yellow, the colour of the revolution. By contrast, Rina's life in Canada seems to lack such colour. We learn little about the circumstances of her emigration or her life in Canada beyond her immediate family and her daily routine. In the wake of her father's death, she feels extremely isolated, especially when she compares her disconnected life in Canada to the immersive family networks around her in Manila. Moreover, during this period of melancholy she feels

that her creative work has become derivative and uninspired. Rina's crisis of self comes to a head on a page in which her adult self tries and fails to grasp her childhood self, who floats away like a balloon into an inky-black sky (127). This crisis is resolved when she makes peace with loss and the ghosts of the past by telling their stories. She excitedly decides to "do a graphic novel about my life growing up in the Philippines" (130)—which is, of course, the text we are reading—and by doing so knits together a hybrid Filipino Canadian identity that recovers experiences outside of Canada through art.

Mapa's narrative is preoccupied with interiority and memory and says little about her experiences in Canada beyond her immediate family. Nevertheless, her renewed sense of self seems to coincide with a revitalized connection to Canada. Rina is at home alone when the scope of her project comes to her. She takes a telephone call from her husband and, conspicuously, Canada's 2014 gold medal hockey game plays on television in the background (figs. 2-3). Rina cheers the winning goal, her new-found sense of wholeness and purpose aligning with this moment of national victory. Her social orientation seems to shift from a melancholic awareness of loss and distance to a feeling of imagined community, in Benedict Anderson's use of the phrase, with the millions of other Canadians with whom she celebrates.[9]

Duran Duran, Imelda Marcos, and Me focuses on one individual's expanded personal and national affinities, but in doing so passes over important questions of labour and racialization. The text's focus on Rina's interiority is possible because of the character's privilege, which arises from her family's wealth and cultural capital. The text is certainly sensitive to inequalities of wealth in the Philippines, expressed in evocative panels of the poverty that surrounds Rina's family's properties in gated communities in Manila. Rina's privileged global mobility informs scenes in which she crosses borders and is asked for the reason for her travel. Upon declaring bereavement as a motive, Rina is met with sympathy by border security in the Philippines and in Canada. The state mechanics of work visas have no part in Rina's global journey of mourning (her first trip to study in the US under a student visa is not represented). Roy Miki writes that "it has been at the point of entrance—the point of arrival at the borders of the nation-state—that the most intense beams of racialization have shone" (305). Rina's easy passage across borders is consistent with the absence of discussions of racialization and racism in Canada throughout the text. This absence, in turn, facilitates the emergence of Rina's sense of national belonging.

Heritage, Monsters, and Diasporic Return: *Kasama* and *Lola: A Ghost Story*

The transnational dimensions of Filipino Canadian comics are also reflected in comics that capture Filipino Canadian experience without representing Canada at all. In Matudio's *Kasama* and Torres and Or's *Lola*, Canada is a *present absence*, in Ann Collette's use of the phrase.[10] For Matudio,

setting his comic in the Philippines helps him explore different positionalities among Filipinos around the world; for Torres and Or, a Filipino Canadian's difficult trip to the Philippines makes readers aware of unsettling experiences in Canada that are never directly represented.

Figure 2. Lorina Mapa. *Duran Duran, Imelda Marcos, and Me*. Conundrum, 2017, p. 130. Reproduced with permission from Lorina Mapa.

Figure 3. Lorina Mapa. *Duran Duran, Imelda Marcos, and Me.* Conundrum, 2017, p. 131. Reproduced with permission from Lorina Mapa.

Before turning to Matudio's *Kasama* and Torres and Or's *Lola*, it is necessary to touch on the diverse and colourful folk tradition of monsters in the Philippines, which are sometimes gathered under the umbrella term *aswang*. Matudio and Torres and Or's work feature the *kapre* and the *manananggal*, both of which are described in the glossary of *aswang* in Torres and Or's *Lola*. *Kapres* are "[l]arge, often giant, goblin-like nocturnal creatures who dwell in trees or are found sitting beneath them waiting to play tricks on (and sometimes befriend) humans: in times past, fireflies were believed to be

embers from the kapre's cigars or tobacco pipe" (Torres and Or).[11] The *manananggal* is defined as "'the separator,' an evil flesh-eating, blood-sucking monster or witch that can separate at the waist and fly off in search of its favourite prey: sleeping pregnant women; in times past, these creatures were an explanation for miscarriage" (Torres and Or). These arresting creatures lend themselves to adaptation in visual media, including Filipino film and comics. Bliss Cua Lim argues that the long-standing tradition of *aswang* has been taken up at different points in history and by different artists for highly divergent ends, noting that *aswang* have been used to demonize Indigenous Filipino religions (137-39) and to characterize political corruption (97, 140-42), and that they have even been weaponized by the CIA during anti-Communist initiatives (139-40). (Lynda Barry also draws upon the figure of *aswang* in her autobiographical comic *One! Hundred! Demons!*)

When Montreal-based artist Allan Matudio writes about the Philippines, he does so as an outsider. In *Kasama*, a term that translates as "[c]ompanion, partner, associate, ally," Matudio writes about the Philippines with the heritage tourist's self-awareness and conscious desire to learn. In an interview, he candidly admits that he has no idea how his work might be received by an audience in the Philippines ("Decolonizing Perspectives" 00:29:35-30:10). Matudio is alert to the very different lives that Filipinos around the world lead; in keeping with its title, *Kasama* reflects on how different Filipino identities can understand and support each other in the face of supernatural and neocolonial threat.

Matudio draws upon the *aswang* tradition to pose a critique of the interconnected legacies of colonialism and diaspora. In *Kasama*, a group of Filipinos of different backgrounds band together in the fictional Filipino setting of Orkidias City to battle a *manananggal*. Within what might seem to be a relatively straightforward narrative of monster hunting, Matudio offers very different figurations of global Filipino experience. The hunt for the *manananggal* is led by two young women, Allison and Kia. Their visual characterization challenges the colonialist tradition of the sexualization of Filipino women. Matudio has noted that he "wanted to desexualize and dewesternize" Allison ("Project Babaylan"); Kia's hair is short, and she has an androgynous appearance. That said, Matudio depicts the two characters in very different ways, and these differences figure different political identities and demographic histories (fig. 4).[12] Allison wears sneakers and a fanny pack, and *Kasama* emphasizes her outsider status in the Philippines. Though she is familiar with Filipino food, Allison gravitates toward a food stall that caters to tourists, and she has an outsider's perspective on the Philippines that occasionally resonates with those of a group of white tourists that intermittently appear in the narrative. Matudio has stated that the character of Allison is intended to represent "the greater Filipinx people" ("Project Babaylan"), and her clothes and her apparent status as an outsider render her a figuration of diaspora. Significantly, Allison's status as an outsider in Orkidias

City does not make her an "inauthentic" Filipino. She carries a *balisong*, a traditional weapon, and seems to have a familiar relationship to a benevolent *kapre*, who hints that she may not actually be human. *Kasama* does not pursue these ambiguities, but there are experiences that the diasporic Allison has clearly not had first-hand; yet this does not devalue her connection to the Philippines or to other Filipinos.

Figure 4. Allan Matudio. *Kasama*. ANAK, 2021.
Reproduced with permission from Allan Matudio.

If Allison is an embodiment of Filipinos in diaspora, Kia reflects an embeddedness in region and tradition. Kia "is from south central [M]indanao" and "the daughter of a warrior and weaver" ("Project Babaylan"). She is particularly incensed by neocolonial incursions on the cultures of the Philippines. During a visit to a chain restaurant called Burgerbee (a barely disguised Jollibee), Kia is frustrated by the Americanization of food in the Philippines. Elsewhere she is painfully aware of the neocolonial implications of the tourist industry and explains her critique of tourism as being an insight from a "decolonized mind." Kia is obsessed with hunting and killing *aswang*, which is explained when we learn that her village was devastated by an *aswang* raid. Her hatred of *aswang* and her anger about foreign interference in the

Philippines blur together and align the predation of supernatural monsters with neocolonial exploitation.

We learn little about Allison and Kia's past together but understand that they were once companions who became estranged. Kia accuses Alison of having a "toxic positivity" that is "patronizing, ignorant and dismissive." The pairing of Allison and Kia captures tensions within a coalitional activism that must navigate differences produced by colonialism in the process of resisting it. However, their co-operation suggests that cultural, economic, and social differences do not preclude solidarity among different parts of the global Filipino community.

Not all of Matudio's *manananggal* hunters are allegorical. Allison and Kia are assisted by a local boy named Jay and his grandmother, characters that allow Matudio to introduce aspects of Filipino experience that might otherwise get lost in the supernatural world he creates. For example, Matudio addresses the social impact of the millions of Filipinos who have left the Philippines to work abroad, categorized as Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs). Early on, Allison helps Jay when he is being bullied because both his parents are OFWs working abroad. Matudio also reminds us of the dispersal of the Filipino family in a scene of Jay's grandmother's bedroom stacked full of *balikbayan* boxes, which contain material remittances sent to family in the Philippines by people living abroad. A book entitled *Living in Canada* sits on her bedside table. This is the only direct reference to Canada in *Kasama*, and it underscores the global scope of the Filipino diaspora (and, potentially, Canada's complicity in the separation of Filipino families).

Kasama reaches its climax when Allison and Kia do battle with the *manananggal*. Matudio's treatment of the *manananggal*'s daytime, "human" identity is telling. Jay's grandmother observes that though the *mananaggal* is infamous for preying on babies specifically, it "takes whatever is most precious to you. That can be as superficial as wealth, cliche [*sic*] as love, unconditional as family . . . and foundational as culture." This comment underscores the linkage of the *manananggal* and the colonial destruction of Filipino culture and identity. Matudio briefly leads us to believe that the *manananggal* is a white tourist who "consumes" vacation experience through the neocolonialist tourist industry. Eventually, though, the *manananggal* is revealed to be the food-stall owner who caters to white people by serving dishes that substitute ingredients like pork blood with more tourist-friendly fare, a choice that links the *manananggal*'s hidden monstrosity to a buried and corrosive colonialism. Fighting the *manananggal* becomes a confrontation with the legacy of colonialism: as they do battle, Allison tells her, "Aswang or not, you're also Filipino. Do you know how much harm you're causing? You're destroying everything that we are!" This accusation could apply equally to the *aswang*'s daily activity of compromising Filipino culture for tourist dollars or her nightly hunt for babies. *Kasama* ends when, after a pitched battle, the *manananggal* flies away with an unconscious Allison, leaving Kia on the

ground bellowing for revenge. The openness of this ending is significant, given *Kasama*'s allegorical dimension, for the *manananggal*'s escape signals the ongoing struggle against the legacy of colonialism.

The preoccupations of the comics I have discussed—diasporic invisibility, the significance of experiences and networks outside of Canada, and the meaning of folk belief to outsiders—all inform J. Torres and Elbert Or's *Lola*. *Lola* is the story of Jesse, a teenage Filipino Canadian from Montreal, who has come to his extended family's countryside house in the Philippines for his grandmother's funeral. Mourning is a more ambiguous experience for Jesse than it is for Mapa's Rina because he is caught between cultural traditions and experiences that he cannot reconcile.

Though it is not his first visit to the Philippines, Jesse is ill at ease there. Initially, his disquiet seems to come from cultural alienation and his self-consciousness as a visitor. However, the text gradually reveals the real reason that Jesse is on edge: he is literally haunted by his Filipino heritage. It is family lore that Jesse's grandmother had supernatural powers of perception and prediction, and Jesse seems to have inherited her abilities. For Jesse's grandmother, these gifts were a boon that allowed her to help people, build her family's fortune, and fight supernatural evil. For Jesse, however, being in possession of supernatural powers is deeply unsettling. We are not given a full account of the onset and scope of his powers, and our uncertainty mirrors Jesse's own lack of insight into this aspect of himself. He seems able to see into the future and the past, which makes the experience of his grandmother's funeral harrowing. On facing pages, he sees the mourners among whom he sits as they are and then as the mouldering corpses that they will someday become. He also sees the funeral from an eschatological perspective: as the priest delivering rites reads from 1 Thessalonians 4:16 ("and the dead in Christ will rise first"), a hand emerges from within his grandmother's coffin and begins to slide the lid open (39-40). Elsewhere in the narrative a *kapre*, bellowing smoke, reaches into Jesse's bedroom as he sleeps. Though it does not seem a physical threat to him, the *kapre* is not a dream, and as it climbs into his room Jesse pulls his bedcovers over his head in terror.

Beyond their inherent visual shock, Jesse's visions are unnerving because he lacks the cultural framework or spiritual community to understand them. His predicament is eloquent of difficult diasporic experience—he is confused, lonely, and pulled between different cultural traditions and ways of knowing. Jesse's teenage cousin, Maritess, who lives at the family house, understands the powers that Jesse possesses better than he does, though she does not share them. She tells him, "God gave you these powers for a reason! You're the 'Chosen One,' just like in the movies!" (84). However, as a diasporic Filipino, Jesse lacks the cultural framework to take on the responsibilities that his powers entail with confidence. He has grown up in a place that causes him to understand his visions as private moments of horror, not as privileged visions, and his adversaries are different from the ones that his Lola faced. Maritess

asks Jesse, "Are there *manananggal* in Canada?" (49), and the answer seems to be no, though he does tell her that his Montreal classroom is plagued by goblins. Worse, the visions that haunt him at school are invisible to those around him, including his teachers, friends, and even his parents, who have become disconnected from the traditions with which they grew up (85). Maritess encourages Jesse to tell others of his visions and cannot understand the painful state of double consciousness into which they plunge him.

Over the course of *Lola,* Jesse manages to use his powers to help those around him, including ridding the family home of the ghost of his young cousin and former playmate JonJon. By helping his family to heal, Jesse becomes his Lola's grandson. Though his understanding of his powers is still vague, he begins to accept the responsibility that comes with them.

Lola, however, does not allow Jesse's predicament to be so easily resolved. While Jesse seems to have begun the process of making peace with his heritage during his trip, his confusion and fear re-emerge as he prepares to return to Canada. His newfound capacity to use his powers to help others becomes undone in Manila's airport where the airport's security area and departure lounge are filled with blank-eyed, ghostly figures that only Jesse can see. Perhaps these are apparitions of people who have already died, but the fact that they haunt the airport also suggests that by leaving the country they have become ghosts to the families and communities they have left behind.

In the staggering conclusion of *Lola* (fig. 5), Jesse sees a spectral airplane on fire through a window. The ghostly figures in the process of boarding it stare at him, as though they are waiting for him to intervene. However, it is not clear how Jesse is meant to act on this vision. Is the burning plane the one he himself is about to board? If so, to return to Canada would be to knowingly go to his death. Should he refuse to board, and stop his parents and other passengers from doing so? He lacks the cultural authority—an authority that, presumably, his Lola might have possessed—to make this warning in a convincing way. Or is this a crash that will take place at some point in the future when Jesse will not be in Manila to stop it? In that scenario, what sort of guilt will he bear for having left for Canada? An unattributed speech bubble echoes Maritess' command for Jesse to "say something" (102), but what can he say? Who will be able to hear and understand him? The predicament captured at the end of *Lola* suggests that though Jesse has begun to embrace his family heritage, he will continue to be plagued by ghosts and portents invisible to others.

While Filipino Canadian cultural production is still relatively new (McElhinny et al. 12), the body of Filipino Canadian comics already exceeds these four comics. Filipino Canadian artist April dela Noche Milne has illustrated *The Blue Road: A Fable of Migration*, written by Wayde Compton (2019). Using the creator name *jocabako*, Winnipeg-based Joanna Cacao has published a webcomic *Toxic for You*, a queer romance serial that ran from 2015 to 2018, and her first graphic novel *The Secret of Ravens* is forthcoming.

The Toronto-based collective Kwenton Bayan ("Community Stories") use comics to document the history of Filipino caregivers and critique the state policies under which they enter Canada. Their piece "Labour of Love" is included in the anthology *Drawn to Change: Graphic Histories of Working-Class Struggle* (2016). Filipino Canadians have also worked on franchise comic series for large publishers, including J. Torres (*Teen Titans Go!*), Francis Manapul (*The Flash*, *Detective Comics*), Mike del Mundo (*Astonishing X-Men*, *Thor*), and Adrian Alphona, who provided the art for a well-received version of *Ms. Marvel* that featured Kamala Khan, a young Muslim woman, as Ms. Marvel's alter ego. Work for major comics publishers raises important questions about the position of Filipino Canadians within the transnational networks of comics production. Several creators in the Philippines have worked for large American comics publishers, a labour relationship that cannot but call to mind the colonial histories between these two countries. The intermediate position of Filipino Canadian creators in this transnational and neocolonial production process provides important context for celebrations of comics as straightforward avenues for visibility.

Figure 5. J. Torres; illustrated by Elbert Or. *Lola: A Ghost Story*. Oni, 2021, p. 102. Reproduced in greyscale, with permission from J. Torres.

The ongoing growth of Filipino Canadian comics does not necessarily mean this work will receive sustained mainstream attention. A 2018 interview with the *True North Country Comics Podcast* with Emmanuelle Chateauneuf suggests as much. During this interview, Chateauneuf reports that even though *Queen Street* was well regarded by readers of colour, it did not speak to a mainstream readership in the same way. Some readers were perplexed that her comic did not present narratives of immigration with which they were familiar, such as "fighting toward the American Dream" ("Emmanuelle Chateauneuf" 00:07:46), and she received feedback that "her immigrant story wasn't immigrant-y enough" (00:04:14). This telling complaint not only reflects the blind spots of readers whose experience has not been racialized, but also it betrays a received understanding of nation that *Queen Street* does not reflect back to them. Indeed, readers with a strong interest in Canadian comics may struggle with diasporic Filipino cultural production that is able to "surpass or elude the nation as the default form of imagining community" (Ponce 2). One hopes that the growth of Filipino Canadian comics coincides with the capacity of readers and scholars of Canadian comics to find them visible.

Notes

1. I am grateful to the organizers of the conference 80 Years and Beyond: A Virtual Symposium on Canadian Comics for the opportunity to share an early version of this essay. Many of the creators discussed in this article participated in a symposium on Filipino Canadian comics hosted at the University of Manitoba in March 2022. The event was funded by the University of Manitoba Institute for the Humanities and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. A recording of this event is available at "Filipino Canadian Comics Symposium."
2. An awareness of the overlapping contexts of gender, sexuality, imperialism, and transnational linguistic differences have made scholars working in Filipino North American studies reconsider their terminology. Instead of using the term *Filipino* some scholars use *Filipina/o*, *Filipin@*, *Filipinx*, or *Pinoy/Pinay*. I will use the more traditional *Filipino* and *Filipino Canadian*, as these are the terms used in the comics I discuss. I use the term *Filipino* in a gender-neutral sense, which is how it is used in the Philippines. See Kevin L. Nadal, *Filipino American Psychology* (8-10).
3. See also Cherish Aileen Aguilar Brillon, "Superhero from the Margins," and Anna Katerina Gutierrez, "American Superheroes."
4. Filipino American comics creators include Rina Ayuyang, Bren Bataclan, A. J. Dungo, Malaka Gharib, Andrew Lorenzi, Jonathan Luna, and Joshua Luna, among others.
5. For Barry, see Melinda L. de Jesús, "Liminality," and Susan E. Kirtley, *Lynda Barry*.
6. For newspaper articles about Filipino-Canadian comics creators in mainstream Canadian news outlets, see Justin Chandler, "With Her Erotic Comic," Eric Dicaire, "Montrealer's Debut Graphic Novel," and Jane van Koeverden, "How a Great Loss Inspired Lorina Mapa's Graphic Memoir." Lorina Mapa has also published "Pass the Pancit" for the CBC. The Canadian comics podcast *True North Country Comics* has posted short interviews with Emmanuelle Chateauneuf, Allan Matudio, and J. Torres: see "Emmanuelle Chateauneuf," "MCAFF 2022," and "Interview."
7. For discussion of Filipino Canadian comics in Filipino Canadian community media,

see Ida Beltran-Lucila, "Allan Matudio," Rachel Ramos-Reid, "For Emmanuelle Chateauneuf," and "Decolonizing Perspectives."
8. *Queen Street* is not paginated.
9. See Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, especially pp. 6-7.
10. See Colette, "Why Don't You Write about Canada?," especially pp. 81-93.
11. This glossary of folk monsters appears in an unpaginated section at the end of *Lola*. Matudio's *Kasama* also offers a glossary that translates the terms he uses, sometimes contextualizing them in anti-colonial history.
12. *Kasama* is not paginated.

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Jamie Michaels

Unsettling the Canadian Whites: A Writing Back of Indigenous, Black, and Jewish Comics

As a Jewish Canadian comics creator, I have been struck by a tension between the rise of Canadian anti-Semitism and the lack of public knowledge about the history of Jew hatred in Canada. Fewer than half of Canadians under thirty-five believe that anti-Semitism exists in Canada today (Schoen Consulting). Their rosy outlook doesn't match reality. Canadian Jews comprise only one per cent of the population yet remain the victims of sixteen per cent of all police-reported hate crime, the highest per capita in the country (Moreau 3). Today, over one hundred "white nationalist and alt-right groups are active in Canada" ("Rising Tide" 4). The connection between education and tolerance has been well established. Regrettably, Canada has failed to confront the prejudices of its own historical record, making the bigotries of the present more difficult to see. Hatred is flourishing accordingly. Since its inception, the Canadian comics industry has enabled intolerance to thrive. Comics featuring a nationalism that prioritized whiteness, appropriated Indigeneity, and either caricatured or omitted representations of racialized minorities, including Jews, were a common characteristic of Golden Age Canadian comics. However, today there are writers capitalizing on the transgressive potential of the comics form to re-examine Canadian history outside of the confines of a white-settler national narrative. For example, in "Border Studies in the Gutter," Brenna Clarke Gray presents case studies from three different groups—white, Asian Canadian, and Indigenous communities—to explore how comics makers from varying backgrounds approach the gutter to construct the nation and its borders. I concur that the devices used by comics creators will (and should) invariably shift to foster culturally specific creative practices such as those described by Gray. As a comics maker, however, I am also interested in sharing and understanding general (as opposed to culturally particular) comics techniques that may better enable the process of writing back against dominant readings of history. Anti-racist, decolonial comics are new neither in Canada nor globally.[1] As they consolidate into a countermovement, it is worthwhile to look at the field and reflect upon how creators might benefit from each other's practices. In this article, I investigate the contours of a countermovement of *writing back* from these communities in the Canadian context.

First, I explore the role of the collected series in David Alexander Robertson's Tales from Big Spirit series (2014-2016). By including biographies of Tommy Prince and Shawnadithit in a single collection, Robertson's series highlights how Indigenous national figures have either been appropriated to fit

within settler framings of history or banished to the periphery of discourse. Next, I consider John Olbey's *Now* magazine webcomics (2020), which illustrate the adversity that Black Canadians continue to face, and the way in which the settler education system fails to propagate a nuanced understanding of Black Canadian history, enabling systemic racism. Last, I discuss the comics-specific devices I make use of in my graphic novel *Christie Pits* (2019), created in partnership with illustrator Doug Fedrau, to depict the jarring history of Toronto's anti-Jewish Christie Pits Riot. My focus on Jewish Canadian comics as my central case study emphasizes a writing back that has received relatively little academic attention and has, to a degree, also been siloed—as a racialized minority standing outside popular understandings of race—to the margins of contemporary discussions of discrimination despite the statistical reality. By presenting these three case studies together as part of a minority movement of writing back against a white colonial history, I am not suggesting that Indigenous, Black, and Jewish Canadians have had equivalent experiences. Nor am I suggesting that these case studies—limited as they are in scope—present either the genesis or a conclusive history of minority writing back in Canadian comics. Rather, I aim to highlight some of the under-studied works within a consolidating movement of comics creators who are telling their own histories, and in doing so are changing the trajectory of an industry from which they have been historically excluded. During this process I aspire to showcase creative practices that may help enable other comics makers to bring lesser-known, but equally important histories into the national consciousness, as well as to emphasize the need for further scholarship in the field.

I. Problematic Foundations: The Canadian Whites

Canadian comics have historically promoted a nationalism that has prioritized whiteness and sustained settler-colonial mythologies. Canada passed the War Exchange Conservation Act in 1940 against the backdrop of the Second World War (Lent 70). This act restricted the import of non-essential goods, including comics. Correspondingly, the emerging Canadian comics industry faced less competition from imports produced in the more established American market, resulting in Canada's golden age of domestic production (Lent 70). The comics emerging during this period—printed with black-and-white interiors—became known as the Canadian Whites (Gray 173).[2] The Canadian Whites embodied wartime patriotism. They featured nationalist heroes such as Johnny Canuck, Canada Jack, and Nelvana of the Northern Lights, who fought the Nazis while promoting a Canadian national identity (Beaty 429-30). This first generation of Canadian comic book heroes "created a template upon which future generations of comic-book fans and professionals would draw when seeking to produce superhero comic books that could be reconciled to the particular demands of

Canadian nationalism" (Beaty 430). Unsurprisingly, the Canadian Whites embodied the nationalism of their time, along with its inherent prejudices.

Adrian Dingle's Nelvana (1941) comics portrayed an Indigeneity that was appropriative, commodifiable, and rife with stereotypes (Dittmer and Larson, "Aboriginality" 57). Nelvana is "very much a white princess ruling over a savage people" (Gray, "Canadian Comics" 68), embodying what Chris Klassen terms "a white colonial feminism" (176). Dittmer and Larsen argue that "nationalist superheroes are notable for their purported embodiment of national values, effectively rescaling the complex and excessive nation-state into a single, reductive body politic" ("Aboriginality" 52-53). In the case of Nelvana, this celebrated body politic was decidedly white and settler. Male superheroes such as Johnny Canuck (1942) and Canada Jack (1943) are also problematic by contemporary standards. These heroes functioned as "hatless Mounties out of their scarlet tunics" (Kocmarek 150), white heroes protecting a "law and order" Canada. The Canadian Whites were short lived. Following the end of the War Exchange Conservation Act, American imports resumed their dominance, grinding Canadian production to a halt. However, the legacy of the Canadian Whites was long lasting, setting a tone for the Canadian comics industry that would replicate and transmogrify the initial problematic tropes of the form when domestic production resumed in the 1970s.

Captain Canuck (1975) is perhaps Canada's best-known superhero. The comic had a circulation of 2.3 million, and the character has appeared in merchandise, on a postal stamp, and as the subject of several museum exhibitions (Dittmer and Larson, "*Captain Canuck*" 736). Like his forebearers in the Canadian Whites, Captain Canuck represents a decidedly "Anglo-Canadian version" of Canadian nationalism (740). The Captain's perpetually rewritten origin story oscillates between representing him as a "sentimental, ardent nationalist" and a Mountie who fights crime "just because he can" (746). The heroes of the Canadian Whites, and their ubiquitous successor Captain Canuck, imbue Canadian comics with a dominant national myth of heroic law enforcment, white civility, and benign colonial dominance. These tropes were a staple of depictions of the Mountie in popular culture (Rifkind 127) and had a direct effect on how Canadians perceived the process of colonization. Michael Dawson draws attention to the role of the Mountie myth in obscuring a more nuanced perception of Canadian history:

> The myth of the heroic Mountie conceals the actual history of a Force that repressed Native peoples, spied on and crushed working-class organizations, discriminated against women and persecuted homosexuals. The force has been little more than an instrument of coercion, siding with elites against marginalized Canadians. (13)

Historically, the Canadian comics industry has been an active participant in fostering this mythology, mirroring common practices in Canadian popular culture and history education that champion settler values while sweeping the costs of colonization under the proverbial carpet.

II. Questions of Authorship: Who Writes Back?

This paper is concerned with creators from historically disenfranchised communities writing back in a form from which they have traditionally been excluded. However, it is not meant to imply a linear transition from white-dominated comics to a self-representing countermovement. Paradoxically, several of the bestselling comics that also challenge established settler readings of history come from comics creators outside of the communities they represent. Mike Borkent draws attention to the concern that these depictions—which, due to their commercial success, loom large in the public imagination—risk "inadvertently misrepresenting or distorting Indigenous figures and events through a lack of awareness and experience necessary to inform rich multimodal representations of particular cultures" (273). Gord Downie and Jeff Lemire's *Secret Path* (2016), for example, tells the story of Chanie Wenjack's tragic death trying to escape from a residential school. Neither of the creators is Indigenous. Their work, although certainly a writing back against the dominant settler-national myth, has been criticized for "subsum[ing] Indigeneity under the Canadian national umbrella" (Macfarlane 108). Similarly, Chester Brown's *Louis Riel* (2003), a canonical staple of Canadian comics, proffers Métis history in the absence of Métis authorship. Brown, in turn, has been called to account for defeatist portrayals of Riel's legacy (Gray, "Border Studies" 176), as well as for ignoring the contributions of Métis women (Cutrara). A rigorous discussion of the ethics of situated authorship is outside the scope of this work. However, it is important here to mention the tension between settler and Indigenous standpoints, as it highlights the challenges faced by writers telling the stories of their own communities, as they compete for space within the dominant narratives of the comics industry, as well as space from which to write back.

III. Forms of Resistance

Recent comics scholarship has explored the ways that historical and documentary comics represent difficult knowledge while engendering empathy through the teaching of history. Kare Polak's *Ethics in the Gutter* (2017) examines how comics are an ideal form to "engage the reader's emotions and ethical norms in complex ways in the representation of historical atrocity . . . to comment on representational ethics, the ethics of spectatorship, and how point of view creates pathways for identification" (2). By emphasizing its own created nature, comics present readers the opportunity to also consider the created nature of historical narrative. Hilary L. Chute writes that the comics form provides a "constant tension between what can be contained within the frame and what cannot be contained within it—both in terms of historical realities and in terms of the burden of expressing those realities" (140). Uniquely, comics illicit emotion while—through the use of the gutter—encouraging an examination of the disjuncture between the represented and unrepresented. This makes comics an ideal form for re-examining absences in the historical record.

IV. Unsettling the Narrative: Indigenous Comics

In *Unsettling the Settler Within* (2010), Paulette Regan makes the case that "Canada's national account remains very much a celebratory settler story" (74), and that "holding onto such myths enables the dominant-culture majority to maintain a false innocence about a problematic past" (75). Drawing on the work of John Paul Lederach, Regan suggests that breaking the cycle of colonial violence will require a *restorying* of Canadian history (73). The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) was an important social catalyst for bringing public awareness of the deplorable impacts of the residential-school system, the destructive realities of the Indian Act, and a general understanding of the unjust ways in which the Canadian government has engaged with Indigenous peoples. Sylvain Rheault identifies the TRC as a catalyst, marking a social shift in Canadian consciousness alongside which "the 'sudden' emergence" of Indigenous graphic novels occurs (501). The TRC defines education as "the key to reconciliation," acknowledging that ongoing racism is enabled by "gaps in historical knowledge" (Truth and Reconciliation Commission 285). Although Indigenous comics were certainly extant before the TRC process—Niigaanwewidam James Sinclair calls them "the oldest and most creative form of Indigenous writing" (qtd. in Callison et al. 140)—they have proliferated in the last decade (Rheault 504), playing a vital role in the continuing process of answering the TRC's calls to action while simultaneously working towards the restorying of Canadian history.

"Indigenous Comics and Graphic Novels: An Annotated Bibliography" draws attention to the work of Indigenous creators representing post-contact history from an Indigenous vantage point. In an interview with Sylvain Rheault, David Alexander Robertson, a Swampy Cree comics creator working out of Winnipeg, describes being motivated by two questions: "What could have been different for me as an Indigenous kid, and what could have been different for my non-Indigenous classmates? Simply: with proper education in this area, how would our lives and attitudes have changed?" (qtd. in Rheault 502). Recent scholarship surrounding Robertson's work has focused on how his comics portray the trauma of residential schools and male settler violence against Indigenous women.[3] Doris Wolf's "Unsettling and Restorying Canadian Indigenous-Settler Histories in David Alexander Robertson's *The Life of Helen Betty Osborne* and *Sugar Falls*" also unpacks how Robertson's comics act as Indigenous testimony that "can challenge settlers' comfortable assumptions about the past in ways that enable a paradigm shift in the present" (208), and in doing so contribute to the ongoing process of reconciliation.[4]

This restorying of history is evidenced within Robertson's Tales from Big Spirit, a comics series, illustrated by Scott B. Henderson, that targets an elementary school audience and that focuses on "great Indigenous heroes from Canadian history—some already well known and others who deserve to

be."[5] Through this framing the series draws attention to the fact that some "Indigenous heroes" have been appropriated and celebrated by the dominant settler mythos, while others who "deserve to be" have instead been excluded from it. By presenting these figures in a singular collection, Robertson is not only restorying history—but also drawing attention to the process of how settler narratives have selectively embraced and appropriated Indigeneity when advantageous, and marginalized it when it functions outside of canonical national narratives.

Robertson's *The Scout* (2014) recounts the exploits of the oft-celebrated Tommy Prince, one of Canada's most decorated Indigenous war veterans. The story begins with Pamela, an Indigenous youth on a field trip to Kildonan Park in Winnipeg. She meets an Indigenous veteran who recounts the story of Prince to her. Through this intergenerational narrating of history, Pamela learns about Tommy Prince and his military exploits. Prince has been canonized as an Indigenous Canadian hero. He fought for Canada with distinction in both the Second World War and the Korean War, winning eleven medals. He has since been championed in the public sphere "as the prime example of the important contributions that Native peoples made to the Canadian war efforts of the twentieth century" (Lackenbauer 27). As an admired national figure, Prince has become a symbol for Indigenous-settler collaboration. His willingness to die for "his country" indirectly suggests his support for the settler-Canadian nation-building project. Prince has been incorporated into the nationalist myth accordingly. Upon Prince's return from the Second World War, the *Winnipeg Free Press* termed him "a soldier's soldier and a man Canada can proudly claim" ("More about Sgt. Prince").[6] Today, Canadian streets, schools, scholarships, and military facilities bear Prince's name. Prince's "Heritage Minute" (Historica), his forthcoming likeness on a new stamp from Canada Post ("Details"), his war medals on display at the Manitoba Museum, a biography by Sealey and Van de Vyvere, and a children's book by Terry Barber all celebrate his contributions to Canada.

The Scout's depiction of Prince is unique from other depictions in popular media. By presenting a national hero who draws attention to the injustices inherent in settler nationalism, Robertson's Prince paradoxically demonstrates questioning nationalism as a national value. Although the comic champions Prince's wartime and civilian accomplishments, it also problematizes the value of service to a nation that cannot provide a good life for all of its citizens. On the concluding page of the comic, the narrator reminds Pamela that "despite everything [Prince] did for his country, he wasn't even allowed to vote . . . and he couldn't get veterans benefits unless he gave up his Indian status" (fig. 1). Despite Prince's contributions, Canada failed to offer him basic civil rights or military benefits. By challenging the dominant perception of Prince in the public consciousness as someone who embraced and was embraced by settler Canada, *The Scout* restories Prince's relationship with Canada.

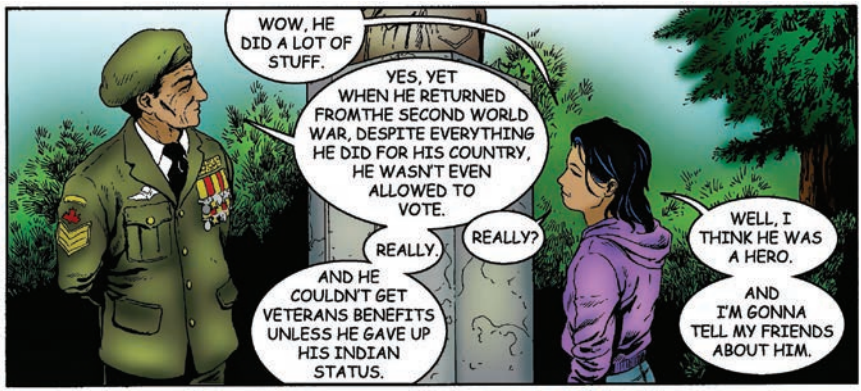

Figure 1. Sgt. Tommy Prince and Pamela discuss the failure of Canada to provide equal opportunities for Indigenous veterans. David Alexander Robertson and Scott B. Henderson. *The Scout*. Highwater Press, 2014, p. 30.

The story of Prince can, like any historical narrative, "reinforce colonialism or act as a decolonizing force" (Regan 72). Sean Carleton critiques Robertson's use of linear left-to-right storytelling in another of his works, *Sugar Falls* (2012), for suggesting "that Canadians have moved from a racist past to a present pregnant with reconciliation" (521). *The Scout* also uses this convention, and the storytelling is inarguably linear. It depicts a narrator (implied to be the spirit of Prince), situated on panel left, and Pamela, situated on panel right. However, Robertson's use of gutters and blocking ensures that he does not imply the inevitability of reconciliation but instead speaks to the importance of transmitting this history between past and present in a way that demands decolonizing action. The conversation about Canada's failures to support Prince and other Indigenous veterans fills a large panel at the top of the page, giving space for the fictional Prince to tell his own story unbroken by gutters and the potential for reader inference (Robertson 30).

Pamela leaves the encounter determined to share this nuanced version of Prince's story. The sharing of the story—like the process of reconciliation—remains as work to be done. In contrast, the gutter separating this unbroken panel from that depicting Pamela's return to her school group leaves the reader to imagine how she will share and use this history (Robertson 30). The gutter has been theorized as a space "continuously ask[ing] to be filled" (Postema 125), where readers can "add their own narrative details" (Wallner 820). By leaving the readers to infer how Pamela might share this story, Robertson creates the space for them to reflect on how they too might take part in the restorying of history.

In *The Ballad of Nancy April: Shawnadithit* (2014), Robertson showcases the tensions between Indigenous land conservation and colonial extraction that culminated in the enslavement and genocide of the Beothuk people in what is now called Newfoundland. Wolf writes that disturbing the myth of

Canada as a benevolent peacemaker involves "telling accounts of the past that refuse the nation's peacemaker myth and foreground instead the violence that lies at the core of Indigenous-settler relations in an unbroken line from past to present" (208). Robertson's biography of Shawnadithit dispels the myth of peaceful westward expansion in explicit detail. The comic follows the European slaving expeditions, resource abuses, and overharvesting that led to the complete annihilation of the Beothuk. Shawnadithit, the last surviving member of the group, "dies from tuberculosis. Her remains are sent to London" (Robertson 28). The comic centres Europeans clambering to obtain land and resources as the direct cause of Beothuk suffering, a difficult story to appropriate into the colonial myth of peaceful westward expansion. Correspondingly, there are no streets, postage stamps, or Heritage Minutes to memorialize the Beothuk. Instead, a small plaque on the Riverhead Wastewater Treatment Facility in St. John's marks Shawnadithit's approximate place of burial. She is also commemorated with a statue in the woods behind the Beothuk Interpretation Centre in Boyd's Cove, Newfoundland. However, these monuments have failed to receive the same public space as celebrated European explorers such as Gaspar Corte-Real or John Cabot, statues of whom are displayed prominently at the Confederation Building in St. John's.

Even the Beothuk Interpretation Centre fails to mention European involvement in the fate of the Beothuk, instead inviting visitors to "imagine a now-extinct people with a unique language and culture, thriving on the rich resources of the land and sea: seals, birds, fish" (*A Time in Twillingate*) and to visit a sculpture that "evokes the tragedy of the Beothuks' demise" (*Provincial Historic Sites*). Nowhere in the promotional material for the site are Europeans mentioned as playing a role in the Beothuks' fate. This is a stark contrast from the comic's depiction of frequent slave expeditions (9), forced starvations (10), and "bounty for capturing the Red Indians" (20). Shawnadithit is more challenging to appropriate as a nationalist hero and therefore her story is lesser known. By including *The Scout* and *The Ballad of Nancy April* in the same collection, Robertson presents the opportunity to reflect on which figures are appropriated into a national narrative and which are omitted.

V. Writing Back against Anti-Blackness

Rinaldo Walcott writes that in Canada, "black appeals for social justice remain unheard by those in authority, and this is largely due to the continuing ambivalent place of black peoples in the national imagination" (12). As with Indigenous peoples, Black Canadians have also seen their histories ignored by Golden Age Canadian comics and their historical experiences relegated to the periphery of national memory. This is not to suggest that these are equivalent histories, but rather to highlight what Tiffany Lethabo King and colleagues describe as a relationality between settler practices of racisms and colonialism (6). These omissions of Black Canadian history have led to a Canada that remains ignorant of "the histories of enslavement, segregation, displacement,

and marginalization of generations of African Canadians" (Jean-Pierre and James 709).

Jon Olbey's collection of webcomics published in *NOW* magazine (2020) draws attention to the myriad of ways systemic racism continues to affect Black Canadians. In "So Like . . . Let's Have a Laborious Conversation," an autobiographical Olbey encounters an obnoxious co-worker at the watercooler who, realizing that Olbey is not white, asks a series of increasingly problematic questions: "So like . . . what are you? Like, where are you from? No, I mean like what's your nationality? Wait! No! Like, where are your parents from? C'mon, you know what I mean." As Eva Mackey and other critics point out, part of the problem with Canadian multiculturalism is that it "implicitly constructs the idea of a core English-Canadian culture, and that other cultures become 'multi-cultural' in relation to that unmarked, yet dominant, Anglo-Canadian core culture" (2).[7] In satirizing the co-worker's presumption that white, "old-stock Canadians" are the default, Olbey echoes this critique. The comic rejects the pretense of existence as equality, wherein "the mere physical presence of ethnic and racial diversity . . . is tangible 'proof' of the successes of the inclusive goals of Canadian multiculturalism" (McGarry 123), and whose outcome is a form of "perpetual foreigner syndrome" (Wu 14). Through practice, the autobiographical Olbey unifies these theories, making the case that inclusion alone is not equality, while satirizing the absurdity of the co-worker's assumption of whiteness as the Canadian default.

As the dialogue between the co-workers continues, Olbey answers the "where are you really from?" interrogation by responding, "My dad's side of the family, well, like many Black families, our exact geographical origins are obscured by slavery." The co-worker replies, "But there was never slavery in Canada." Olbey responds with the correction that slavery did in fact exist in Canada, and that Black Canadian settlement in Canada precedes the American Civil War. The racist exchange itself dispels a common myth that Canada is somehow a uniquely post-racist society. Additionally, the conversation frames a lack of historical awareness as the soil in which this racism thrives. Although Olbey's workplace presents a pretence of multiculturalism, it is predicated on presence alone. True multiculturalism demands that multiple cultures operate alongside each other without a hierarchical system of values, free from the default of whiteness. McGarry argues that tokenist multiculturalism, although perhaps appearing benevolent, deprives Canadians of the historical context needed to combat systemic racisms (122). Olbey's work operates on two levels, challenging the everyday manifestations of racism that he experiences personally while tying these racisms to the failure of Canada to teach Black Canadian history.

Intriguingly, Olbey's comics have recently begun to blur the line between art, critique, and practice. In collaboration with law professor Bryant Greenbaum, Olbey has been using comics to educate legal professionals about

the ways in which racial stereotyping affects legal proceedings (Macnab). Olbey and Greenbaum's Representing Race courses draw attention to elements of Canadian history that exist outside of the myth of an anti-racist Canada while highlighting the social consequences of not addressing this history.[8] Representing Race fulfills the requirements of the mandatory Continuing Professional Development (CPD) hours required of Canadian lawyers. As such, the comics course backchannels under-represented viewpoints into state-recognized educational mechanisms. Commenting on the use of the form, Greenbaum notes that comics "are the perfect tool to address this often neglected area of legal practice, namely, addressing the stereotypes of decision-makers, addressing stereotypes that come out to play when there's a cross examination" (Greenbaum qtd. in Macnab). Greenbaum notes that conventional mediums cannot always challenge conventional ways of knowing: "We need novel, new tools to address them. Not just dialogue, not just attending a CPD session, and sitting back and listening to someone speak for 20 minutes or an hour. That's no longer satisfactory."

The comics included on the *Representing Race* website are simultaneously autobiographical and historical. An autobiographical Olbey—in conversation with Greenbaum—discusses personal experiences of racism while critiquing how the history of Black Canadians has been ignored and erased in the face of the myth of a uniquely anti-racist Canada. The comics Olbey states bluntly, "Canadians need to be honest about racism in our country. We need to have a more nuanced understanding of how African Canadians have been treated historically" (Olbey and Greenbaum). As the comic continues, the imagery shifts from illustrations to archival photographs of Buxton, Ontario, one of Canada's earliest Black communities (fig. 2). By bringing in conventional archival material to supplement his family's history of early discrimination, Olbey takes the reader by surprise through both a change of formatting and the introduction of an unknown history. By capitalizing on comics-specific devices, Olbey challenges conventions of both medium and message.
Nancy Pedri writes that the inclusion of photographs in comics functions at multiple levels. Their presence bears witness to "the authenticity and truth of the event told and, by extension, its narration" (348). Beyond this evidentiary understanding, this device of including photographs in comics also acts to "complicate, disrupt, and subvert understandings of the documentary as dependent on singular truths by highlighting subjectivity as central to knowledge" (Pedri 348-49). Through the inclusion of archival photographs, Olbey's comic invites readers to consider how this framing reacts against other, exclusionary framings that fail to capture the reality of Black experience in Buxton. As such, the addition of documentary photographs both bears witness to a particular Black Canadian experience while also drawing attention to the inherently subjective nature of representing history.

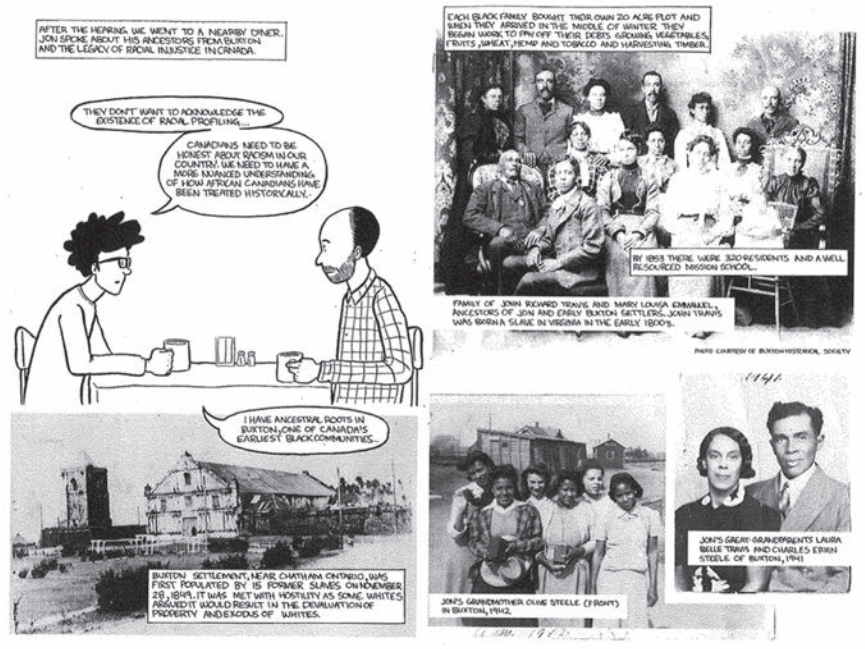

Figure 2. Jon Olbey and Bryant Greenbaum discuss the need for a more nuanced understanding of African Canadian history. Jon Olbey and Bryant Greenbaum. "Learning Tools." *Representing Race*, 2020.

VI. Picturing Anti-Jewish Hatred: The Making of *Christie Pits*

In the first half of the twentieth century, Jew hatred was a conventional, inseparable feature of mainstream Canadian society. In the words of Irving Abella, "until the 1950s it had respectability; no one apologized for being anti-Jewish—no one asked them to." Newspaper caricatures in the 1930s reflected this reality. Canadian fascist leader Adrien Arcand's *Le Goglu* printed "loathsome stereotypes of the kind associated with Julius Streicher's *Der Sturmer*" (Betcherman 11). *The Canadian Nationalist*, *The Thunderbolt*, and *Le Faciste canadien* printed similar libel accompanied by hateful editorial cartoons (fig. 3).[9] Overt hate—although certainly a growth industry—is no longer in vogue in Canadian polite society. The media landscape now is almost unrecognizable from the one then. Yet echoes from the past reverberate in the present. Contemporary publications across the country continue to be criticized for printing anti-Jewish editorial cartoons.[10] The Internet has globalized hate speech. Online caricatures demonizing Jews remain a staple of the digital world ("Happy Merchant"). Accordingly, Jewish Canadian comics creators must overcome two challenges: the omission of Jews from dominant readings of Canadian history, as well as a century of anti-Semitism accompanied by ill-intentioned caricature in both print and digital media.

Figure 3. An anti-Jewish editorial cartoon.
"The Invasion of the University by the Youpins Still Continues." *Le Goglu*, 9 Sept. 1933.

I wrote my historical fiction graphic novel *Christie Pits* in response to the startling lack of knowledge about Jewish Canadian history and the horrifying rise of Canadian anti-Semitism. A recent survey reveals that a third of North American students "don't know what to think about the Holocaust, think the number of Jews who died has been exaggerated, or question whether the Holocaust even happened" (Lerner). However, after being exposed to Holocaust education, young people said they would be more likely to intervene if they witnessed an anti-Semitic event (Lerner). By exposing readers to the historical realities of Canadian anti-Semitism and the social conditions of the 1930s that preceded one of Canada's worst outbreaks of racial violence, I aspire to expand public historical consciousness and engender a willingness to act in the face of intolerance. To accomplish these goals, my graphic novel focuses on three devices to foster reader engagement: 1) the incorporation of visual archival material juxtaposed with comics art to emphasize the historicity of the events depicted and to highlight that all histories are framed and constructed; 2) the use of *braiding* (Groensteen 89) to invite the reader to consider how anti-Semitic events exist within a continuum of locations and temporalities; and 3) the inclusion of primary textual sources to showcase the cultural underpinnings and normalization of Canadian anti-

Semitism in the 1930s and to foster reflection about how these same sources might continue to enable the same intolerance in contemporary Canada.

The comic's introductory materials include a three-panel grid (fig. 4). The first image is an archival photo of the Brunswick Avenue Young Men's Hebrew Association (YMHA). The second archival photo is of a Jewish peddler carting his wares down Bloor Street. The third image is an illustration of a Jewish man walking past the YMHA that both unifies and modifies the preceding photos. In the third image, the YMHA building exterior is tightly framed, reducing what the viewer can see. The peddler still wears the clothing of his time but no longer has his cart of goods, without which he becomes a pedestrian, visibly Jewish yet no longer identified by his profession. Kate Polak suggests that historical fiction comics highlight "the role perspective plays in mediating any historical event" (29). She also draws attention to how "graphic novelists' careful manipulation of point of view demonstrates how we are positioned in relation to the story inflects how we read." By including these images at the outset, I invite the reader to consider the nature of the comic as a work grounded in history, yet deliberately framed. In doing so, I encourage the reader to become an active participant in the reading, and to enter "a space of self-reflexive ethical and affective negotiation" (Polak 29).

Figure 4. Archival juxtapositions. (*left*) The Brunswick Talmud Torah, ca. 1950. Ontario Jewish Archives, Blankenstein Family Heritage Centre, fonds 61, series 2-2, fill 44, item 2. (*centre*) Jewish Peddler, Bloor Street West, City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 1244, item 616. (*right*) Unifying archival materials. Jamie Michaels and Doug Fedrau. *Christie Pits*. Dirty Water Comics, 2019, p. 3.

Braiding is used throughout *Christie Pits* in multiple ways, two of which I highlight here: the mirroring of iconic contemporary imagery, to suggest a correlation between past and present, and the non-linear conversation between panels within the comic, both of which provide a supplemental effect for readers able to infer the connection. Defining *braiding*, Groensteen writes,

> Braiding can sometimes be likened to the more common procedure of quotation. When a work or an image, quoted from elsewhere, makes an appearance in a comic (and contemporary comics cultivates all kinds of intertextuality and intericonicity), readers who have the correct reference in their personal encyclopaedia are offered the pleasure of

> spotting it; in principle if the quotation goes unnoticed, the reader is not disconcerted by an absence of meaning. (89)

Braiding is used throughout *Christie Pits* to allude to the continuum of white supremacy in North America. An angry mob marching through the streets of Charlottesville to chants of "Jews will not replace us" during the Unite the Right rally has become a ubiquitous signpost of the public return of white supremacy. Samuel Corum's iconic photograph of a screaming, tiki-torch wielding Peter Cytanovic appeared on newspaper front pages and social media platforms around the world (McAndrew), becoming the definitive image of this moment. In *Christie Pits*, members of the Swastika Club are shown in the same framing as Corum's photo (115) (fig. 5). Although the two events are never explicitly correlated in the text, those familiar with the iconic photograph will be rewarded with an additional opportunity to consider the broader context of both events, and how they might be part of a larger discourse of anti-Semitism in North America.

Figure 5. (*left*) Samuel Corum's iconic photograph of Unite the Right white supremacists. Samuel Corum, *White Supremacists March with Torches in Charlottesville*, Anadolu Agency, courtesy of Getty Images. (*right*) Members of the Toronto Swastika Club. Jamie Michaels and Doug Fedrau. *Christie Pits*. Dirty Water Comics, 2019, p. 115.

Braiding can also occur within a comic itself without the use of extratextual references. I used this approach in *Christie Pits* to enable comics panels to "enter into dialogue with other panels not currently visible, establishing relationships among non-adjacent pages" (Groensteen 89). To be clear, this braiding is not necessary to comprehend the narrative of a comic; however, it does offer an accompanying effect to those attuned to its usage (94). *Christie Pits* begins with two brothers, Areyeh and Yiddel, leafing through a newspaper covering the latest atrocities committed by Nazi Germany (9). The details of the newspaper stories are not revealed through the text, and the paper's images are illustrated as black scratches, evoking a censored document. As such, the reader is left to infer the content of the paper based on the dialogue between the two brothers. When Areyeh leaves for the YMHA, he is confronted by a stranger and racially slurred for being Jewish (11). After this interaction, Areyeh and his friend Sammy discuss the closure

of the Canadian border to Jewish refugees and wonder if the new Nazi barbarisms will elicit a response from the international community (13). The chapter ends with a newspaper collage of headlines from the *Toronto Daily Star* that reveal ongoing Nazi human rights violations in shocking detail (17). The collage—illustrated in a different style from the rest of the comic—is able to surprise readers in multiple ways. For some readers, the inclusion of jarring archival material may challenge a social myth about benign Canadian immigration policy or reveal how much Canadians knew about Nazi atrocities as early as the 1930s. Moreover, those who braid the newspaper collage with the sequences that precede them will be rewarded with a potential supplementary reading. Considered together, these frames ask the reader to retroactively consider how these experiences of everyday racism might have felt to characters saturated with the horrific, specific details of the rise of Nazism. Both braiding and archival juxtapositions have the potential to achieve effects that would not be possible outside the comics form.

In the second chapter of *Christie Pits*, Tev, a young Jewish student at the University of Toronto, reacts against the "everyday" anti-Semitism displayed by his fellow students while attending a lecture in the English department. The confrontation between Tev and his peers is interspersed with dialogue balloons from their professor who is reading from Shakespeare's notoriously anti-Semitic *The Merchant of Venice*. The intersection between embedded material (as read by the professor) and the dialogue of the comic (as argued between Tev and his classmates) functions at multiple levels. William Boerman-Cornell argues that, due to the conventions of comics panelling, embedded materials within a graphic novel are encountered within the "primary textual flow" of the narrative, offering "temporal contextualization that is not available in a standard text approach" (210). This is to say, the embedded material—in this case *The Merchant of Venice*—although supplemental to the dialogue driving the narrative of the comic, "is as much a part of the primary flow" as the main dialogue. The argument between Tev and his colleagues is continually interrupted by the text from *The Merchant of Venice*. A fellow student remarks, "Hey Tev, I bet you were the only one rooting for the Jew" (Michaels 29). Before Tev can respond, a text balloon from *The Merchant of Venice* reading "to be cut off" interrupts the dialogue, while simultaneously captioning Tev's social isolation as the lone Jewish student in an anti-Semitic classroom. Through the integration of embedded primary source material, the comic showcases how the comic's anti-Semitism is reinforced by historical anti-Semitism, drawing a continuum from past prejudices to current practices.

The sequence continues with a splash panel that fills the following page. Tev faces the fourth wall, confronting both the professor and the reader. He angrily draws attention to the Canadian education system's canonization of works by Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Dickens, all of which feature strong anti-Semitic themes, asking: "So I guess my question is, are we going to cover

any material where the theme isn't hero defeats Jew? I'm only an undergrad, but I'm pretty sure that makes us the villains" (30). The framing of the panel, the only full splash page of the chapter, raises the same questions to a contemporary reader: How might an anti-Semitic primary source that fosters intolerance within the comic be part of a similar process outside of the comic? Tev, staring outwards from the foreground of the panel, implicates the reader in his questioning. He not only challenges anti-Semitic cultural touchstones of 1933, but also—through the use of primary source material embedded in the comic—challenges these same touchstones as they exist as cherished texts in contemporary Canada.

In "Illustrating Racism: Challenging Canada's Racial Amnesia with Comics" (2013), Sean Carleton highlights an intriguing paradox. Many historians remain dubious about the value of the comics form to teach history (509), despite an increasing body of scholarship championing "the process of reading comics, which requires readers to piece together the story through their own interpretation of the visual and textual material provided" (509-10), thereby engendering an appreciation of history as a process of interpretation, as well as actively fostering an emotional participation in the narrative. Defenders of normative whiteness have no doubts about the power of comics. A Tennessee school board recently voted to ban Art Spiegelman's Pulitzer Prize-winning Holocaust graphic novel *Maus* (Mangan). Neil Gaiman rebuked the decision, writing, "There's only one kind of people who would vote to ban *Maus*, whatever they are calling themselves these days" (@neilhimself). The Canadian context also remains permeated by "racist ideas [that] have been 'pressed into service' by white settlers throughout Canada's history to protect their power and privilege to the disadvantage of other racialized peoples" (Carleton 522). Comics remain an important form of intervention to challenge these practices.

In *Ethics in the Gutter,* Kate Polak draws on Michael Rothberg's work in *Multidirectional Memory* (2009) to emphasize how the perception of history is inextricably tied to contemporary applications of state power. Rothberg writes, "Questions about recognition and representation are crucial for establishing and contesting *what* form justice will take, *who* gets to count as a subject of justice, and *how* or under what jurisdiction justice will be adjudicated" (310).[11] How a shared Canadian past is understood has a direct impact on the ability of Canadians to enact a just future. In the words of Polak, when some group "memories are left out of a broader cultural narrative, our shared history is impoverished" (30). Systemic injustices are difficult to combat if they are not understood as systemic. Early Canadian comics were—perhaps unsurprisingly—complicit in propagating the myth of a white settler Canada. A contemporary movement of comics creators is writing back against the form's settler origins. In doing so, these creators present transgressive narratives that provide emotionally impactful windows into communities whose histories have all too often been relegated to the periphery.

Notes

1. See, for example, Gord Hill, *500 Years*, Chester Brown, *Louis Riel*, and Ho Che Anderson, *King*.
2. In "Truth, Justice, and Canadian Way," comics scholar Ivan Kocmarek writes, "I prefer to call these books 'WECA' books because they were born out of the War Exchange Conservation Act" (161n1). However, I retain the term *Canadian Whites* here to reflect the common usage as well as the thematic content of the works. See Kocmarek's essay for a discussion of what he calls "the 'First Age of Canadian Comics'" (148).
3. See, for example, Doris Wolf, "Unsettling and Restorying Canadian Indigenous-Settler Histories," Sean Carleton, "Illustrating Racism," and Debra Dudek, "Good Relationships."
4. As her key terms disclose, Dudek arrives at these conclusions via reference to Paulette Regan's *Unsettling the Settler Within*, which I cite earlier.
5. This citation is from the back jacket of *The Scout*, the third instalment of the Tales from Big Spirit series.
6. I owe this citation to Lackenbauer (65).
7. See also Kogila Moodley's essay "Canadian Multiculturalism as Ideology," which Mackey references.
8. The comics included in Olbey and Greenbaum's course will also appear in their forthcoming book *Carded in Toronto: Racial Profiling, Street Checks, and Police Violence at the Neptune 4 Hearings*.
9. The author has made all reasonable attempts to locate the copyright holder of this image.
10. See, for example, Fraiman, "Edmonton Newspaper Under Fire," which discusses the controversy around the appearance of Malcolm Mayes' comic "What's in Your Wallet?" in the *Edmonton Journal*.
11. This understanding and articulation of justice draws significantly on the thinking of the influential political philosopher Nancy Fraser, as Rothberg acknowledges in an endnote.

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Aman Kaur Virk

"The Land Is Our Greatest Teacher": Richard Van Camp's *Three Feathers* as a Land-Based Pedagogy for Indigenous Masculinities

In the book trailer for the graphic novel *Three Feathers*, Tłı̨chǫ author Richard Van Camp discusses the real life events in his small town of Fort Smith, Northwest Territories, that inspired the novel's premise. Three young men had been stealing from the community, including from Van Camp's home, before they were caught by authorities and sent to jail for two years (Van Camp, "Three Feathers" 00:40-00:44). He read the boys' statements in the newspaper, about how they did this "because we were always starving, our parents were never home" (00:50-00:55). As he was following the case, he thought to himself,

> What if we sent them out on the land? What if we trusted them and taught them their language? What if we taught them how to hunt? What if we taught them how to provide for their future families? What if we just gave them the gift and the responsibility and the teachings of what it means to be a young man today in the Northwest Territories? (01:02-01:21)

Van Camp and illustrator Krystal Mateus take these questions up in *Three Feathers*, which has been published in three Indigenous languages. The form of the comic allows Van Camp and Mateus to reach a wide range of readers, including young Indigenous men who might have the most to learn from its teachings. Through both its narrative and its form, *Three Feathers* becomes a pedagogical guide for readers to imagine what might happen when colonial processes of retributive and punitive justice are rejected and restorative justice rooted in Indigenous ideals is embraced instead.

The text that Van Camp and Mateus gift readers is beautifully imaginative in its rendering of what kind of futurities might become available when authority is given to the wisdom and guidance of Elders and Indigenous practices of justice in which "the land is our greatest teacher" (Van Camp, *Three Feathers* 21). It plaits together teachings about justice, decolonial land-based pedagogies, and Indigenous masculinities in a way that makes it difficult to unravel and understand one without the others. When given the chance to learn, instead of just repent, the young men in the novel, Flinch (Tłı̨chǫ), Rupert (Dene), and Bryce (Cree), are able to connect to the teachings of the land with the guidance of their Elders, especially women Elders like Irene, and to become transformed into "warriors in a new way. A good way" (24). At the end of their time on the land, they are able to reject the myopic

imaginings of warriorhood and manhood that they inherited from the colonial heteropatriarchy, and to reorient their masculinities as an ethic of respect, humility, and a deep sense of responsibility, all of which they must strive towards and earn.[1]

Indigenous Masculinities

As Van Camp's last question in the book trailer suggests, the gifts, responsibilities, and teachings given to the characters in *Three Feathers* are meant to connect them to their particular subjectivities as *men* in the Northwest Territories, thus implying the value in analyzing their learning through the gendered lexicon of masculinity. In *Indigenous Men and Masculinities*, a number of scholars warn against singular, conflated, and colonially constructed masculinities that are imposed on Indigenous men. In his contribution to this collection, Brendan Hokowhitu articulates a thorough criticism of "traditional" Indigenous masculinities as describable objects that are somehow recoverable from the pre-colonial past (94). He writes that the "strategic function" of this essentialization is to limit "Indigenous men to heteropatriarchal, hypermasculine, stoical, staunch, and violent discursive formations; often channelling them into destructive behaviours" (94). Beyond these potential dangers, some Indigenous scholars question the need for Indigenous masculinities as discursive categories at all, as they "reinforce the colonial gender binary, centering cisgendered straight men (who are already centered in everything) instead of dismantling heteropatriarchy, and that the binary set up between feminisms and masculinities casts queer people out" (Simpson 137). Scott Morgensen echoes this concern about the replacement of "distinctive gender systems among Indigenous peoples" with hegemonic "colonial masculinities" (38).

The portrayal of Indigenous masculinities in *Three Feathers* addresses these concerns by clearly organizing the young men's masculinities around ethics rather than anatomically determinate identities, thereby embodying "the decolonial potential of Indigenous masculinities that exceed both colonial simulations and static notions of tradition" (McKegney, *Carrying the Burden* xxx). An important part of the young men's learning on the land is cultivating a sense of responsibility to the deeply important kinship relationships of their community, as "only masculinities built on the freedom *of* responsibility, rather than freedom *from* responsibility, will foster empowered individual identities and meaningful Indigenous continuance" (McKegney, "Beautiful Hunters" 218). Van Camp also foregrounds the young men's unlearning of the colonial masculinities that they had started to replicate by addressing "one of the symptoms of Indigenous masculinity's mimicry of invader masculinity"—namely, "the divestment of the feminine out of the masculine" (Hokowhitu 88). In his novel *The Lesser Blessed*, Van Camp strongly "implies the inseparability of the masculine and the feminine while suggesting that aspects of both are required for individuals to truly benefit their communities" (McKegney, "Beautiful Hunters" 219n3).

In *Three Feathers*, this Indigenous understanding of gender complementarity is embodied most saliently in the strong leadership of Irene, the Elder who leads the young men in their development of ethical masculinities. Although her husband also teaches them important lessons, only Irene is named, and her husband is only referred to in reference to his relationship to her, thus centring and emphasizing Irene's role as the leader. Her husband also insinuates that she is the one who had taught him these lessons and given him the space to "earn [his] fire" (13), just as she must allow the men to now do under her leadership. Her role helps orient the relationship between genders in the novel as one of "balance, complementarity, and reciprocity" (Anderson 50). In one of his interviews on Indigenous masculinities, Van Camp talks about the privilege of driving Elders around when he volunteered to drive the handi-bus in his town in his early twenties, and he names Irene Sanderson among other "great matriarchs" who first made him feel "welcomed into my role as an Aboriginal man" ("Strong Men Stories" 247). In *Three Feathers*, Irene welcomes the young men into their role and responsibility as Indigenous men and brings them into the kinship networks to which they must learn to become accountable.

Land as Pedagogy and Restorative Justice

Van Camp imagines what kind of learning process is required to transform these young men and connect them to this sense of responsibility, and this process centres land *as* pedagogy. Their kinship network includes "the People, the land, and the cosmos," which are all inherently linked "together in an ongoing and dynamic system of mutually affecting relationships," (Justice, *Our Fire* 24), and Irene helps them learn how to nurture these relationships so they can receive the teachings and the gifts of the land. Receiving gifts in this context is very meaningful, as "the essence of the gift is that it creates a set of relationships" and requires reciprocity (Kimmerer 28). Nishnaabeg scholar Leanne Simpson articulates the theory and methodology of learning from the land in her chapter "Land as Pedagogy," where she describes this kind of learning as "coming into wisdom" (151), which connotes the agency of the student to give consent and enter willingly into wisdom when they so choose. The pedagogical process for the student to come into wisdom, as Simpson describes it, "takes place in the context of family, community, and relation," "lacks overt coercion and authority," and "is learner led and profoundly spiritual in nature." These conditions directly oppose the strict and coercive methods of indoctrination and assimilation that colonial systems impose, most saliently and explicitly through residential "schools," which separated children from all of their relationships to family, community, and land, using violent coercion to destroy their spiritual connections.

The pedagogy of the land is necessarily non-coercive, as the land exists and functions naturally and effortlessly in its own wisdom, always ready to teach those who are willing to learn through observation and interaction. In

Braiding Sweetgrass, Robin Kimmerer says that the wisest and most eloquent teacher she has ever had are plants, "who wordlessly in leaf and vine embody the knowledge of relationship" (140). She refers to "land as teacher, land as healer" (333) and "land as responsibility" (335), with this last title again conveying the importance for humans to understand the ongoing relationship of reciprocity that they enter when receiving gifts from the land. The young men in Van Camp's story also learn from their Elders that "the land is our greatest teacher" because "it is through our experiences on the land that we learn humility and respect" (21). Reciprocity is centred in their relationship with the land, as their learning is contingent on how much respect they cultivate and how much they "open[] their heart to listen to the spirit of the land and all her gifts" (24). The most prominent example that embodies this reciprocity is the community fire they are responsible for keeping alive—as they tend to the fire to keep it alive, the fire gives them warmth, light, and connection to their ancestors and to the Creator, directly facilitating their transformation into their true selves (15). They learn for themselves what Simpson asserts in "Land as Pedagogy," that each individual's entire "existence is ultimately dependent upon intimate relationships of reciprocity, humility, honesty, and respect with all elements of creation, including plants and animals" (154). Coming from diverse Indigenous nations, Kimmerer, Van Camp, and Simpson each capture the importance of learning from the wisdom of the land and all of creation, which is an ideology central to most Indigenous spiritual and cultural ways of being and ways of knowing.

When harm is caused to the land, it requires ecological restoration, which the National Research Council defines as "the return of an ecosystem to a close approximation of its condition prior to disturbance" in both form and function (qtd. in Kimmerer 330). Restorative justice, which has its roots in many Indigenous practices of justice, operates on the same principle, giving space for addressing harms and making reparations in order to heal the community-ecosystem. It posits that punishing those who cause harm to a community does nothing to restore or repair it, as was the case in the real life story that inspired *Three Feathers*, as the young men were sentenced to the violent Canadian carceral system, in which Indigenous men are already hugely overrepresented. Some critics even "place the residential school and the prison on a continuum with one another in their containment of Aboriginal youth and in the similar type of cultural rupture they produced" (Rymhs 3).

Both in theory and in praxis, colonial ideas of criminality and systems of punitive justice harm Indigenous peoples and are fundamentally antithetical to Indigenous epistemologies and ideologies. Van Camp provides an important decolonial intervention and speculation of what might happen if Indigenous systems of justice are embraced instead. Cree scholar John Hansen describes *opintowin*, which is the Cree word describing restorative justice, "as a process that 'involves the principles of repairing harm, healing, restoring relationships, accountability, community involvement and community

ownership'" (6).[2] Hansen writes that forcing Indigenous peoples to use an "alien justice system" suggests that "we do not have acceptable ways of dealing with our conflicts," which "is detrimental because a group of strangers (the State) do not know us intimately" (5). Although only one of the three protagonists in Van Camp's graphic novel is Cree, the novel's advocacy for exactly this kind of holistic, restorative justice is clear. At the end of the novel, Irene says, "Traditionally, when a family is harmed, it has to be restored to better than before" (35), indicating the community's commitment to upholding strong relationships and collective well-being, which underpin the decisions that they make in their justice systems.

"Sentencing" the young men to "nine months on the land" (7) makes the community's hope for their rebirth abundantly clear, and this decision also reflects the community leaders' belief in the reciprocal nature of caretaking. The community's and Elders' process of restorative justice places the young men in a direct chain of reciprocal restoration by sending them to live on the land, where they must learn how to receive the land's gifts and teachings and lend their own care and gifts to the land. This teaches the young men both how to care and how to be cared for; it teaches them how to become part of the network of "relational accountability" (McKegney, *Carrying the Burden* xvii) to which they need to commit in order to heal and restore themselves and, concomitantly, their community. At the end of the graphic novel, their reflections, their commitment to reparations and selfless community service, and their request to be adopted by Gabe in order to create a formal ongoing relationship of caretaking prove that they have embodied the full potential of land-based restorative justice.

Graphic Novel Form as Pedagogy

Van Camp's decision to use the graphic novel form is of course intentional and critical in imparting the wisdom of this story and guiding readers to receive the story in the most intuitive and effective way. Turning this story into a graphic novel allows Van Camp to reach a wider audience, including audiences of young Indigenous men. On an episode of the CBC Radio program *Unreserved*, Van Camp describes how comic books were his own gateway into reading as a young child (35:08-35:55). In the same episode, host Rosanna Deerchild (Cree) also talks to several other guests about the power of graphic novels and comics to tell Indigenous stories. Hope Nicholson tells Deerchild that comic books are similar to "traditional methods of storytelling," including "oral storytelling," "birch bark scrolls," and "buffalo robes," all of which "combined pictures to tell stories" (05:50-06:07). When Deerchild asks how he thinks "the genre of comic books lends itself to Indigenous storytelling," Van Camp says that comic books can be used to "deal with some of the hardest hitting issues facing our communities," like "sexual health, gang violence prevention, and mental health," and that they are a way to talk to young people because young people "trust" comic books (37:25-37:52).

Deerchild introduces Van Camp's storytelling as existing "somewhere between reality and the dream world," (26:13-26:20), and Van Camp responds that "usually my stories start with a wound," which he then thinks about how to fix (30:32-30:38). Van Camp paraphrases Lee Maracle's belief that "the beauty of fiction is you get to fix what has been broken in your life . . . You get to resurrect the dead" (30:39-30:51). In *Three Feathers*, he speculates how the wounds caused by colonial violence can be addressed with the healing power of the land, by having the comic embody the very non-coercive pedagogy that it advocates in the story.

Traditionally, the panels in graphic novels and comic books enclose specific spatial and temporal moments, which they arrange sequentially and often chronologically. Yet the conventions of the genre also allow for spatiotemporal disruptions, which can give the story greater impact. Van Camp and Mateus tell their story through visual details and chronological disruptions as much as they do through words and narrative. The more time that readers spend in observing and paying attention to the visual, temporal, and spatial details, the more meaning they can derive from the story's message. The form of the comic becomes pedagogical for readers just as the land becomes pedagogical for the characters, imparting wisdom in ways that are subtle yet also demanding.

As an example of this overlap between comics form and the land, consider how the young men learn their responsibility to networks of relational accountability, as these are visually and narratively embedded into an ecosystem where everything and everyone has a role. For this teaching and many others in the novel, Van Camp and Mateus use different visual strategies to guide readers through the story, in ways that embed the teachings themselves into the methods required to read each page. One strategy is the use of close-ups, often of facial expressions or physical actions, which are then embedded within wider shots of the setting. On page 10, for example, the top panel shows the boys travelling in their canoe to go live on the land after their sentencing. A close-up of the boys' facial expressions appears in a smaller panel in the corner, on top of the larger visual of their setting, which includes the body of water on which they are travelling and the broader expanse of the land. Their canoe also appears in this larger frame, along with a second canoe, which look indistinguishable from each other and minuscule in comparison to the wide bodies of sky, water, and land around them. This visual layout emphasizes the boys' positionality as single humble components among many within a larger ecosystem. It visually situates the boys' role in this ecosystem, signifying their responsibility to live in harmony and contribute as citizens of both the land and the community to which they belong. As a meta-narrative strategy, the novel's manipulation of panels, viewpoints, and chronologies teaches the reader the pedagogical lessons that the characters in the story learn from the land and from their elders.

To depict how the young men connect to the teachings of the land, Van Camp and Mateus disrupt chronology in the storytelling process several times, oscillating between the young men's experiences on the land and their return to Fort Erie, but also flashing back to their childhoods to demonstrate how the land reparents them and heals the wounds of their inner child. Upon their return home, Bryce hugs Gabe, the Elder whom the young men injured during their robbery. As "Bryce hugs Gabe, he remembers the hunt," after which appear several flashback panels displaying Gabe burning sage and watching a moose breathe it in and walk towards him through shallow water (37). The images of the moose are all close-ups, accentuating the vulnerable position of the animal. Bryce says that they asked the moose "to give itself to our community, especially to Gabe and his family," and that they promised "to honour the moose for the rest of our lives" (38). This interaction shows that although Bryce had a clear chance at taking the moose's life by force, he chose to respect its vulnerability and ask for its consent as a sacrifice to feed and nourish the community. The scene is presented like a mutual encounter of recognition between Bryce and the moose, deeper than that of just predator and prey.

The encounter represents the aspirational masculinities that the young men are in the process of developing—masculinities defined by reciprocity and mutuality rather than by opposition. Bryce expresses his masculinity not by defeating the moose but by honouring it and demonstrating ongoing commitment to its sacrifice. This directly contrasts how the boys had taken advantage of Gabe's vulnerability and tried to steal from him forcefully in order to feed and nourish themselves. Bryce's reflection on what he learned from his encounter with the moose illustrates the connections that he is able to make between what he learned from living on the land and how this applies to nurturing new relationships in the community of Fort Erie. The teachings that the men learn from the land about respect, humility, and the importance of consent in relationships allow them to enter a consenting, reciprocal relationship of care with their community members.

Relational Accountability

The sentencing at the beginning of the story provides some insight into how Bryce, Flinch, and Rupert grew up and what kind of environment might have led to their harmful behaviour in the first place. The men are brought in front of their community and a healing circle of Elders after they break into Gabe's house and accidentally injure Gabe, who has a stroke when he tries to stop them, putting him in a wheelchair for life. Due to their lack of role models growing up, the boys cultivated behaviours that made them selfish, dangerous, and harmful and that transformed them into subjects of heteropatriarchal violence in their community.

As I mention above, Van Camp notes in the book trailer "Three Feathers" how the real boys who committed these crimes "were always starving" and

that their "parents were never home" (00:40-00:44). In her speech to the community at the end of their sentencing, Irene similarly mentions that "these boys did not have much of a home" (20). Growing up in an environment where they were unable to hunt, to learn from the animals and the land, and even to receive guidance from parents or other guardian figures, the boys had no positive sources from which to learn their masculinities. Perhaps a more accurate framing of this issue is that the violence of settler colonialism disrupted many communities' ways of living with each other and with the land, leading to generations of children whose would-be role models and mentors were taken or traumatized by state institutions like residential schools, child-care services, and carceral systems.[3]

Even though they did not mean to hurt Gabe, the boys show a lack of accountability at the beginning of the story and only seem to regret getting caught. During their sentencing, Bryce blames his community for being "drunk and stoned" all the time, yelling "You're the hypocrites! And you're the adults!" (8). The young men invalidate the "stupid big chief sentencing circle," and Bryce even threatens them, saying, "You wait 'til we get back. You ain't seen nothin' yet!" Their behaviour demonstrates blatant disrespect for Elders, community, tradition, and ceremony, but it also reveals deep pain from not having the community support networks necessary to create a life that would give them everything they need to learn healthy masculinities. This is not to justify or excuse their actions, because their individual responsibility lies in asking for help and actively seeking out ways to earn a livelihood as others do in their community. However, contextualizing the characters' actions is important. What it uncovers are the personal impacts of the colonial imposition of a capitalist system, the state guidelines that stop Indigenous communities from accessing and hunting on their own lands, the intergenerational trauma and cycles of harm, and the violence of a colonial heteropatriarchy that imposes nuclear family structures and breaks up broader and deeper kinship networks.

Van Camp and Mateus depict the re-parenting of each young man's inner child to show how their learning "*from* the land and *with* the land" (Simpson 150) helps them to heal from these traumas and to grow into better men. At a formal level, the authors accomplish this through visual and temporal manipulations of the panels. Irene narrates the boys' transformations at the community gathering upon their return, over panels showing their time on the land as they "open[] their heart to listen to the spirit of the land and all her gifts" (24). As she narrates, Bryce, Flinch, and Rupert are depicted as boys sitting on chairs at the gathering, smiling and listening attentively (19). Their present-day selves as grown men are portrayed with close-ups of their faces above each boy. The boys and men exist on the page as separate but connected figures, indicating that each character's inner child is present as they listen to Irene narrating over panels that show them learning and engaging with the land. The way they become the warriors that they are now—"in a new way. A

good way," as Irene says (24)—is by reconnecting to "their childlike innocence," since "the child is a direct link to the Creator" (25).

To portray this transformation, Van Camp and Mateus have the men growing visually smaller and younger with each panel as they continue learning on the land. This visual and temporal manipulation illustrates the boys' re-parenting, which becomes possible once they open their hearts to receive the gifts of the land and the maternal love of Irene. In the second-last panel on the page, they turn into teenage versions of themselves, smiling and collecting feathers in the middle of a hike, and in the last panel they become young children with big smiles and looks of pure joy and victory at the top of the mountain they have been hiking (25).

In order to become "warriors in a new way," they must each heal the wounds of their inner child and unlearn the cynicism imposed on them by the dark legacies of historical and contemporary colonial violence, which defines their embodied masculinities in the period leading up to their sentencing. They must reconnect with their "childlike innocence" and consent to being reparented by Irene and by the land, who allow them to experience the joy, love, and intimacy that they deserved to have growing up. This scene is a rejection of hegemonic masculinities that shut men off from their inner child and in fact measure their masculinity by how far they can distance themselves from the vulnerability, humility, and joy associated with children. Irene witnesses and supervises their journeys inwards along with the land with which they interact, play, and learn, and this witnessing validates the joy and love as part of who the men are becoming.

In the last panel on page 25, the young boys smile at Irene, who is looking towards the boys with her back to readers, reminding us that she is the one helping to facilitate this joy, as the boys hike up towards the top of the mountain and towards their inner child. As the boys immerse themselves in the beauty, wonder, and joys of creation, she says that "they make the Creator smile" (25). Irene seems to act almost as an interlocutor to the Creator, for whom she speaks and whose joy she expresses. The children are a direct link to the Creator, as she says, and she herself is the one who allows them to connect to their inner child and experience this link. Once again, a relationship of reciprocity emerges as the Elder Irene and the children connect each other to their inherent spiritual relations. This scene simultaneously rejects the colonial notion of the spiritual role of Indigenous women and the Christian notion of piety, especially men's piety, as something that necessarily involves strictness and self-deprivation. Throughout the story, Irene's responsibilities extend to healing each character's inner child, to their spiritual learning, and to the transformative process of justice. Through Irene's leadership in helping the young men develop ethical masculinities, the graphic novel defines gender relationships as complementary and mutual rather than as conflictual.

Tending to the Community Fire

Along with teaching the young men the joys of learning from the land, Irene and her husband teach them the discipline and hard work that is needed as part of their commitment to the land and to their community. One of the most significant tasks that the Elders assign them is to tend to the community fire for the entirety of their nine-month stay on the land. The Elders remind the young men that it is a privilege to be given this responsibility and that they are expected to honour it with full commitment. After Irene describes the physical duties (like gathering wood) associated with this task, her husband instructs the young men on how to tend the fire with intention. Irene's husband tells the young men to "use this fire to release yourselves from the scars and armour around your heart," to "fill your hearts with the breath of the Creator," and to "pray for everyone you've ever hurt" (15). Lastly, he instructs the young men to "drop tobacco" as an offering to the fire since this will facilitate their release, connection, and prayer. The succession of these instructions reflects the process by which caretaking becomes healing. The hard work of gathering wood to feed the fire and keep it alive will sustain the fire, which will then give them life-sustaining warmth and serve as the centre of ceremony, healing, prayer, and spiritual practice. The fire that they build reciprocates this care by accepting their tobacco offerings, which fill their hearts "with the breath of the Creator" and become their conduit for divine connection and communication.

In an interview with Sam McKegney in *Masculindians*, the Cree author Neal McLeod says, "So, the fire, you need it to live, you need it for life, but it can also burn you inside, and sometimes those around you, I would say. Particularly when social circumstances and individual circumstances become difficult" (209). As in the true story upon which the novel is based, the boys had been stealing because they were starving and needed to feed themselves and their families, putting them in the difficult social and individual circumstances to which McLeod alludes. If the fire here is a symbol of masculinity, then the young men had let it burn them inside, and those around them, by using harmful means to fulfill their sense of responsibility to provide for themselves and their families. By learning to provide through hard work of their own, they are able to channel this sense of responsibility through ways that help both their immediate and extended families, including members of their community and their other-than-human kin. More than the outcome, the process through which they earn and provide for their families is important. Instead of gaining and providing by stealing from others, they learn to see others as part of their responsibility and to understand how a widened accountability to care fulfills them in a much deeper way.

When the men first arrive for their time on the land, Irene's husband tells them that their first lesson will be about how to make fire because "fire is life, and you deserve a happy life. Fire is medicine. It represents a living force, a gift from the Creator" (14-15). He reminds them of their responsibility to keep the

fire alive so that it never goes out, instructing them to "feed the fire with food for our ancestors as a way to show gratitude for a second chance at life" (15). The Elders' instructions simultaneously convey the specific duties that the men must be responsible for, as well as the gifts that they will be granted for carrying out these duties. They must keep the fire alive and give it life, and in return, the fire sustains their life and also grants them the chance at a renewed second life. Bob Antone, writing in the context of Haudenosaunee beliefs, says "that fire derives the continuation of life," which is both "symbolized and experienced in the fire itself" as a "source of warmth, the energy for cooking food, the light in the darkness, the energy used to work with wood to fashion homes, protection, and to create a safe, secure environment" (32-33). It also gives the characters the chance to become new men by giving them the opportunity for forgiveness and reconnection. The fire facilitates their connection to their ancestors and to the Creator by passing on their offerings, and it becomes medicine that transforms their internal burning into a source of fuel and light, allowing them to release their traumas and embrace the new warriors that they are in the process of becoming. The representation of fire in the novel transcends categories of literary metaphor or motif and becomes the physical and spiritual source of the men's transformations.

Becoming "Warriors in a New Way"

Living and learning from the land and their Elders also rekindles the protagonists' desire to learn their respective languages and to live by the ideals of their nations. In a speech to the community at the end of the graphic novel, Bryce says, "We want to learn our language; we want to be warriors you can all be proud of. Mahsi cho" (46). He says they want to become warriors that their community can be proud of, instead of claiming that they have already become warriors, reflecting a humility that was not there before their sentencing. This humility also reflects and reframes their understanding of manhood and warriorhood, as now the young men want to strive towards masculinities that their community can benefit from and be proud of, not ones that take from their community and replicate the extractive nature of colonial heteropatriarchal violence. When McKegney considers what "flexible, non-dominative, vulnerable, sensual, embodied, and empowered masculinities look like" in an Indigneous context (*Carrying the Burden* xxx), he summons the concept of *rotiskenrakéh:te*, a Kanien'kéha word that is generally translated as *warrior* or one who "carr[ies] the burden of peace," as Kanien'keha:ka artist Ellen Gabriel defines it (xxxi).[4] McKegney thinks of this concept as a possibility for reflecting on "the decolonial potential of Indigenous masculinities" (xxx), and Van Camp's use of it in the novel suggests that he may also be thinking of this potential. The term *warrior* is used in the novel to represent an ethic, especially in Irene's speech when she invites the community to "look at these men now. They are warriors in a new way. A good way" (24). This insinuates that the "warriorhood" the young men had been living by

earlier was different and harmful, as they had been using their physical strength and energy to steal from their community instead of protecting it.

Now, by reconnecting to the land and decolonizing their inherited colonial iteration of masculinity, they become warriors who provide for others, have deep respect for all of the kinship networks to which they are accountable, and have a sense of responsibility to their wider community, instead of maintaining a singular responsibility to themselves and their nuclear families at the expense of their community. They begin to reflect an idea of warriorhood that resonates with Van Camp's own understanding of the term, as he explains in his *Masculindians* interview. When McKegney asks, "What would you desire young male readers—or any readers—to glean from your work about what a positive idea of warriorhood might be?," Van Camp responds, "I think a protector and a nurturer and a giver" (193). The men in his story gain these qualities through a process that reinforces the symbiotic nature of the land's pedagogy; they gain these qualities because the land and their elders protect them, nurture them, and give to them endlessly. They are given protection through shelter and nourishment, but more importantly they are taught how to create their own shelter and find their own nourishment from the land, so they can protect themselves and others for their whole lives.

Nurturing Intimacies

Similarly, the nurturing that they receive during their time living on the land is what truly transforms them into nurturers themselves. Van Camp and Mateus use depictions of physical closeness and touch as metrics for intimacy and acts of nurturing throughout the novel. For example, Irene increases physical contact with the men as they grow closer to her and develop more trust and vulnerability, allowing them to receive her love and allowing her love to transform them. She touches Rupert's shoulder, arm, or face in many panels, to guide him, comfort him, and connect with him. Page 26 has the most prominent example of this physical affection, as Irene holds Rupert's face close to her own and smiles with her eyes closed after Bryce tells her that Rupert, who is deaf, is signing "your eyes are magic" to her (26). By treating them with such affection, Irene gives them the experience of being nurtured and connected through touch. Her love embodies "the generative power of intimacy as a decolonial ethic" (McKegney, *Carrying the Burden* xxviii) and allows them to combat harmful colonial stereotypes of Indigenous men as stoic and unfeeling. Allowing these men to feel the intimacy and vulnerability of deep emotional relationships of care helps them renounce these internalized stereotypes. The generative power of the intimacies that they experience on the land is signified through their increased physical affection and visual connection to others when they return to their community. At the beginning of the novel, the only masculine physical contact that takes place is the physical altercation between the young men and Gabe that results in Gabe's injury (4), as well as the police handcuffing and physically restraining

Bryce when they arrive to arrest him (5). When Gabe's daughter yells at them for the harm that they have done, she is on one side of the panel, with her baby daughter held close to her chest, and the three boys are on the opposite side with noticeable physical distance in between them, as they listen with furrowed brows and angry expressions, signifying their lack of connection to those they have hurt (7).

In contrast, when they return, they are in physical contact with others in almost every panel. On page 36, the middle panel shows Gabe smiling with his arms open, and the next panel shows Bryce pushing Gabe's wheelchair while Flinch and Rupert hold on to each of his arms. Several panels are dedicated to displaying Rupert's physical affection for his wife and his daughter at the end as well (47), as they rekindle the love that seemed absent in the beginning. Rupert comes back a better man but also a better partner and father, again bringing attention to the far-reaching and generative power of love and intimacy that can transform so many lives and relationships. All three of the young men appear in many group shots and even a family portrait with Gabe's family after Gabe agrees to adopt them (48). These visual displays of physical affection signify the emotional vulnerability that these men have developed through their time on the land. In addition to the closeness they developed with Irene, they had also been in constant physical engagement with the land and all of its elements, as they grew, hunted, and prepared their own food, started their own fire, created their own lean-tos for shelter, learned to sew, and even created art, which they present to Gabe upon their return (40). As they learn to open their hearts to receive the land's gifts, their hearts learn to remain open to receiving the gifts, help, and love from everyone they are in relationship with, including their human and other-than-human kin and all of creation. This vulnerability is necessary to their learning of ethical Indigenous masculinities, and to their rejection of colonial masculinities, which are predicated on emotional suppression.

Their vulnerability manifests in important ways at the end of their sentence, allowing them to express their apologies and take ownership of their mistakes, to share their experiences of learning on the land, and to request forgiveness with humility rather than entitlement. As McKegney reflects on the words of Indigenous writers like Erica Violet Lee (Cree) and Lindsey Nixon (Cree-Métis-Saulteaux), he gleans that "forgiveness is neither a given nor an impossibility; it is a relational ethic that demands accountability and 'work'; it is an objective that must be weighed in relation to community well-being and safety" (*Carrying the Burden* xxvi). Trust needs to be earned, and re-earned if broken, and still it is up to those for whom the stakes are highest in trusting someone who has broken trust before. Irene reminds everyone in her speech that when harm is caused to a family, "it has to be restored to better than before" (35). Instead of expecting to be forgiven just for completing their sentence and asking for forgiveness, the young men do everything that they can to genuinely apologize, repair the harms they have

caused, and commit to taking on additional duties, like "chop[ping] wood and shovel[ling] for anyone in town," to lend their skills and efforts in helping their community (31). They take accountability and commit to putting in the "work" but still allow the community and Gabe to make the final decisions.

Not only do the men seek forgiveness and desire restoration in their community, but they also return with a deep sense of responsibility to their community, as seen through their request asking Gabe to adopt them as his sons, since he has never had a son and they all grew up without fathers (36). They clarify that this request is meant to formalize their commitment to taking care of Gabe, "so we can help you now" (36). Kim TallBear (Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate) writes that "beyond biological family, we have ceremonies to adopt kin," and "we also engage in legal adoption" as a way to challenge "colonial violence against our kin systems" (150). As the characters learn, kinship is a "verb, rather than a noun," since it is something that needs to be "*done* more than something that simply *is*" (Justice, "Go Away, Water!" 150). They tell their community, "Irene and the elders taught us that traditional adoption is stronger than blood because it is the family you choose" (36), thereby acknowledging the agency and opportunity for mutual consent involved in their requests to be adopted. Irene chooses to adopt them as her sons and says that the boys also "listened to us and adopted us as family" (29), reinforcing the mutuality of these decisions. Their adoption of and by both Irene and Gabe demonstrates that these adoptions function formally to declare and lock in the deep commitment that the men feel in their relationships with both Elders, entering familial connections with both not through blood relation or marriage but through a loving commitment that is just as binding.

Conclusion

In *Three Feathers*, Van Camp speculates how his community can begin to address cycles of violence that originate from and are continually perpetuated by settler colonialism. His speculation captures the kind of radical reimagining that is needed to create the new futures he describes—ones that lead out of the restrictions of colonial logics and into a world where all people connect to their responsibilities with respect and commitment, just as all of creation already knows how to do. With its various narrative decisions, *Three Feathers* embodies the non-coercive pedagogy of land-based learning for which it advocates in the way that it invites readers to engage with the story. The more time that a reader spends in observing and paying attention to the graphic novel's visual, temporal, and spatial details, the more meaning they can derive from the story's message. At every level, Van Camp and Mateus emphasize process over outcome; they show that defining Indigenous masculinities in terms of the processes and pedagogies that are necessary to discover them is much more useful than ascribing static and monolithic qualities to them, so that each person can find their own unique "gifts" and

"voices" (20). Through the manipulation of spatial bearings in the panels, the characters are connected relationally to their wider environment and kinship networks. Through the narrative oscillation between their time on the land and their integration back into the community, they are connected to the teachings and the gifts of respect and humility that they have received from the land and their Elders. Through chronological disruptions in the panels, their experiences on the land connect them to childlike wonder and joy, showing that they must tend to their inner child before they can be transformed into better men. All of these teachings together connect them to ethical masculinities that are based on both a deep sense of responsibility and the embracing of a hopeful, carefree joy. They learn all of this from the land but only with the necessary leadership and guidance of Irene as well as her husband, demonstrating just what is lost when Indigenous kinship networks and pedagogies are disrupted and outlawed by settler colonialism. Even though Van Camp only fixes what is broken in his community through fiction, the power of both his story and his storytelling provide hope for the fiction to inspire new real life events—ones that give young people "the gift and the responsibility and the teachings" on how to become better relatives to all of their kin (Van Camp, "Three Feathers" 01:02-01:21).

Notes

1. For this notion of Indigenous masculinities as an ethic, see Sam McKegney, *Carrying the Burden of Peace*, especially pp. xii-xx.
2. Here Hansen is citing from the final report of the 2004 Commission on First Nations and Métis Peoples and Justice Reform. See chapter 4, p. 1.
3. As with residential schools, Indigenous children were taken into child-care services against the will of their parents and communities, especially during the Sixties Scoop.
4. For Gabriel's original discussion of *rotiskenrakéh:te*, see her blogpost "Those Who Carry the Burden of Peace."

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Darren Wershler

Canadian Comics Studies, Canons, the Coach House, and *The Cage*

What are the practices and techniques that different communities use to create value from the comic books that they produce, circulate, and consume? More specifically, what happens when a comic book crosses the fuzzy interzone that divides one community from another? What sense of value, if any, travels along with it? And what is ignored or overlooked because, for whatever reason, it hasn't made it through the membrane?

This story takes place in a neighbourhood in downtown Toronto called the Annex. For about fifty years, from the 1960s to the early twenty-first century, the Annex was a petri dish of cultural eccentricity, teeming with too many overlapping bohemias and demimondes and cliques and avant-gardes and gangs and scenes and cults and factions to ever possibly count. I lived there for most of twenty years.

For five of those years, every day I walked past one of the Annex's major cultural institutions, The Beguiling Books and Art, a comics store on its western border (now relocated south to College Street due to gentrification) to go to work at another of its major cultural institutions, the Coach House Press, as the editor. Founded in 1987, The Beguiling is a full-service comics shop with stock that goes back to the 1930s, and it enthusiastically supported the surge in popular interest in graphic novels and the indie comics boom. Coach House Press, located on the Annex's eastern border and started by Stan Bevington in 1965, remains one of the most influential literary presses in Canadian history, but gained a huge amount of its reputation because it was a lodestone for hippie counterculture. There are many points of contact between the cultural spheres around these two locations, but the one that concerns me at the moment is the work of Martin Vaughn-James, especially *The Cage*, published by Coach House in 1975.

The problem with the ongoing discourse in the comics world around *The Cage* is precisely that it is taking place solely within the comics studies community even though the graphic novel had its relative beginnings not just in the comics worlds but in the overlapping communities of 1970s Canadian small-press publishing and the international neo-avant-gardes. Taking a cue from Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar and Elizabeth A. Povinelli's essay "Technologies of Public Forms: Circulation, Transfiguration, Recognition," what we need to consider and ask is, What happens when public forms (in this case, a few books of comics by Vaughn-James) cross the boundaries of such communities (394-95)? How do they reconfigure the communities in question, and how are they are transfigured themselves in turn?

In the fourth decade after its publication, Vaughn-James' *The Cage* is having a moment in comics studies. Despite the history of its production, circulation, and consumption having occurred almost entirely outside the realm of comic-book culture, it is now, by many critical accounts (particularly in Europe),[1] a formative title in the history of the graphic novel.[2] In a 2009 post on the *Comics Comics* website, prominent comics critic Jeet Heer describes Vaughn-James' books as "Proto-Graphic Novels."[3] Since then, the prefix *proto* has largely fallen away from descriptions of Vaughn-James' work; in a comment on Heer's piece from the same year, comics historian Andrei Molotiu questions the necessity for its use in the first place, insisting that Vaughn-James had "complete mastery over the full language of comics."

Born in Bristol in late 1943, Vaughn-James moved along with his family "to Australia in 1958 where he studied art at the National School of Art in Sydney" (Heer, "The Racing Brain"). He married poet Sarah McCoy in 1967, "and the two moved to Canada the following year." The work for which he has received the most critical attention consists of four books published shortly after his move to Canada: *Elephant* (1970), *The Projector* (1971), *The Park* (1973), and, above the others, *The Cage* (1975).[4]

Because Vaughn-James also lived and worked in France, major comics critics on both sides of the Atlantic have begun to publish about his work, notably in new editions aimed at larger audiences than those for the Canadian literary small press. Thierry Groensteen wrote an essay to accompany the Impressions Nouvelles edition of *The Cage* (2010). During his tenure as the visual poetry editor and curator of *Ubuweb*, the oldest and largest repository of avant-garde arts materials on the Internet, poet, critic, and arts administrator derek beaulieu assembled an open collection of many of Vaughn-James' works as PDFs, which he posted along with a short introduction in 2011. Most recently, Heer and Seth have edited a new single-volume edition of *The Projector* and *Elephant* (2022). Bart Beaty and Benjamin Woo spend an entire chapter on *The Cage* in *The Greatest Comic Book of All Time*. Much of this attention derives from the book's liminal status; it's just controversial enough that its inclusion can be debated without fear of actually having to exclude it from consideration as an important graphic novel.

In order to capitalize on this resurgence of interest, Coach House printed a new edition of *The Cage* in 2013. The format of the new edition is substantially different from the first: paperback rather than hardcover; 23.5 cm x 16.5 cm rather than 32 cm x 23 cm; printed on cream stock rather than the heavy brown card of the original; and the text has been reset in Goluska. Goluska is a contemporary typeface by Rod McDonald, whom Luc Devroye describes as "perhaps the greatest Canadian type designer ever." McDonald named the typeface after Canadian small-press designer Glenn Goluska, who died in 2011.[5] These changes to the material format of Vaughn-James' book make it financially feasible to print what would otherwise have been a very expensive job, but they also retrench the book within the

Canadian small-press tradition by referring specifically to figures deeply involved in the history and aesthetics of its design and typography. Goluska typeset and designed books at Coach House in the 1970s (Steeves), and McDonald consulted regularly with Stan Bevington while I was at Coach House from 1997 to 2002. During this period, Coach House was the first press to use typefaces that McDonald was developing, such as Cartier Book.

Another series of changes in the new edition points toward Coach House's desire to retrospectively recontextualize *The Cage* within the popular discourse of the graphic novel. An introduction by Seth, one of Canada's most prominent cartoonists, and the addition of a preface written by Vaughn-James in 2006, are the most prominent of these changes. But changes to the flap copy, back matter, and blurbs also deserve comment because of how they position Vaughn-James' work to travel across the barriers between interpretive communities. Understanding how and why these changes occurred requires a closer look at the historical context in which Vaughn-James' books first appear.

In their chapter on *The Cage* in *The Greatest Comic Book of All Time*, Beaty and Woo do an admirable job of situating the book for those who are unfamiliar with it, but their argument requires some qualifications. "While Vaughn-James can be placed in a tradition of concrete and visual poetry within which *The Cage* is an intelligible work," they write, "it was part of no comparable movement within the comics world; Vaughn-James worked alone" (70).

While it's true, as Beaty and Woo note, that Coach House Press (publisher of *The Projector*, *The Park*, and *The Cage*) was "at the time . . . Canada's foremost publisher of avant-garde poetry" (68), the press published not only experimental fiction, but also reams of knobby and irreducible material that was much harder to situate in terms of format and genre—material that Vaughn-James describes in his preface to *The Cage* as "all that was energetically new, however extreme, obscure, marginal or 'Canadada'" (10). More simply, we could call this material *intermedia*. A detailed discussion of this term follows. Briefly, concrete and visual poetry are part of what critics have in mind when they use the term *intermedia*, and the interpretive community that originally purchased and read Vaughn-James' books would have been the same that purchased and read concrete and visual poetry. Yet the terms aren't synonymous.

The other issue is the claim that "Vaughn-James worked alone." If this is true at all, it is only in the most limited sense, in that he was part of "no comparable movement within the comics world." This is very different from asserting that Vaughn-James was not a long-time comics reader, or not a working cartoonist, because he was both. In "The Cage: Image-Making Machine," which appears as the preface to the 2013 Coach House edition, Vaughn-James describes how although "I didn't come from a culture of comics . . . my adolescence in Australia was marked by the incomparable

Mad magazine of the late fifties with its marvellously anarchic satires and astonishing draftsmanship" (9-10). From shortly after the time of his arrival in Toronto with "a folder of crudely drawn surrealistic comic strips," Vaughn-James was a working cartoonist, publishing his comic strips in mainstream publications like "*Saturday Night* magazine and the *Toronto Star*, as well as in various underground journals of the period" (9). Moreover, at the exact same time as Coach House was publishing Vaughn-James' books, it was publishing not only fiction, poetry, and intermedia works but also a significant number of other books that are identifiably comics. With his use of the first-person plural in his preface—"as we saw it" (10)—Vaughn-James situates himself and his work in the thick of this welter of production. He was definitely not working alone, and he was not cut off from comics consumption and production. He was just not where a twenty-first-century comics critic would expect to find him. There's more to say about all of this, so I'll deal with the subject of intermedia first, then move on to the other Coach House comics contemporary with Vaughn-James' titles.

At the beginning of the 1970s, one of the most exciting concepts in the discourse of artists and publishers was what Fluxus co-founder and Something Else Press editor Dick Higgins dubbed *intermedia* (in his influential 1965 essay of the same name). Briefly, intermedia corresponds to the artistic versions of what Raymond Williams calls "pre-emergent" phenomena—that is, the set of cultural practices that are "active and pressing but not yet fully articulated" (126). What intermedia is, exactly, is constantly shifting, because it is defined by practices that create relations between cultural forms rather than by the inherent qualities of objects. In his 1995 retrospective "Intermedia Chart," Higgins takes the term to include elements of mail art, conceptual art, performance art, dance, theatre, science art, happenings, Fluxus works, concrete poetry, action music, sound poetics, graphic music notation, object music, object poems, poesia viva, and visual novels.[6] The chart also includes several areas filled with question marks to indicate unknown and pre-emergent forms.

With the help of the concept of intermedia, Higgins was interested in establishing a critical vocabulary for describing the flood of work that was coming from performance art and the small presses—work that fell "between media" (49). Higgins had in mind the sort of work that he was publishing at Something Else and that Bevington was publishing at Coach House—work that fused the textual with other forms, including visual art, narrative, dance, poetry, performance, and architecture. Featuring many people who were to become prominent members of various neo-avant-gardes, Jerry G. Bowles and Tony Russell's intermedia anthology *This Book Is a Movie: An Exhibition of Language Art* demonstrates how widespread Higgins' concept was at the time.[7] When the portmanteau word *boovie* appeared on the back cover of *Elephant* as a descriptor, it situated the book within a recognizable if highly specialized context.[8] By 1971, Vaughn-James was influencing the shape of this discourse himself.

The biographical note for Vaughn-James on the back flap of *The Projector* in 1971 describes both *Elephant* and *The Projector* as examples of the "visual-novel" form. (Note the presence of the hyphen, indicating an attempt to assert parity between these elements.) Both the front and back flaps of *The Cage* also refer to the book as a "visual-novel." In his 1981 revision of the "Intermedia" essay, Higgins remarks explicitly on how, from the perspective of a decade later, the visual novel (no hyphen) has developed from its pre-emergent, intermedial stage to become an identifiable emergent form in its own right:

> Further, there is a tendency for intermedia to become media with familiarity. The visual novel is a pretty much recognizable form to us now. We have had many of them in the last 20 years. It is harping on an irrelevance to point to its older intermedial status between visual art and text; we want to know what this or that visual novel is about and how it works, and the intermediality is no longer needed to see these things. (53)

By this point in history, Higgins is comfortable writing that there were plenty of examples of the visual novel between 1960 (rather than 1970) and the early 1980s; he has retroactively included space for works that were not visible to him and other critics at the time he published the first version of the essay. But by "visual novels," Higgins is referring more to works of experimental typography and design (like *A Humument*, by Tom Phillips, or Raymond Federman's *Double or Nothing*) than what the general public and marketing departments (more than comics scholars) now call the dominant (i.e., fully incorporated into mainstream culture) version of this form: graphic novels.

At minimum, Higgins must have been familiar with Vaughn-James' "Scythes in the Night," a short piece that appears in Richard Kostelanetz's anthology *Breakthrough Fictioneers*, which Higgins published under the Something Else imprint in 1973. But Higgins does not refer directly to cartoons or comics when writing about visual novels in the "Intermedia" essay, and he is openly dismissive of pop art, which was busy incorporating comics into its own repertoire at the time.[9] If Vaughn-James' books look like graphic novels now, they didn't when they first appeared and not for at least a decade and a half afterward, because they were produced, circulated, and consumed inside an entirely different interpretive community than the one that was inventing the very idea of the graphic novel during the same period. While reassessing the past in terms of the present may help to make some relationships visible in retrospect, it simultaneously obscures others because it ignores historical context.

In the early twenty-first century, graphic novels are big business. Intermedia, not so much. What dominant culture does in order to grow is to seek out marginal cultural forms that it can claim for its own purposes; Raymond Williams calls this process *incorporation* (124-25) and describes it as follows:

> [I]n advanced capitalism, because of changes in the social character of labour, in the social character of communications, and in the social character of decision-making, the dominant culture reaches much further than ever before in capitalist society into hitherto "reserved" or "resigned" areas of experience and practice and meaning. (125-26)

As graphic novels and perfect-bound comics collections became part of mainstream culture, the publishing industry reached further back into the nooks and crannies of past artistic endeavour to incorporate every object that it could find that could conceivably turn a profit—see, for example, the Penguin Classics Marvel Collection (Rotor). As print-drawing intermedia became visual novels, visual novels in turn became graphic novels, not because of their ostensibly inherent qualities, but because of market forces.

Just as the New Press back-cover text for *Elephant* positions it as a new intermedial form, the Coach House biographical note in the back matter and the blurbs on the back cover of the 2013 edition reposition *The Cage* as part of the relative beginnings of the graphic novel. The back-cover blurb states, "First published in 1975, *The Cage* was a graphic novel before there was a name for the medium . . . Considered an early masterpiece of the graphic novel medium, the Canadian cult comic has been out of print for decades in its English version." On the colophon page, the biographical note reads, "Martin Vaughn-James (1943-2009) was a painter and groundbreaking comics artist who published four graphic novels . . . Vaughn-James is widely recognized as a pioneer in the development of the graphic novel" (192). These tiny changes are part of a set of operations that facilitate the movement of the book across the boundaries that divide readers and critics of the 1960s neo-avant-gardes from the alternative-comics community of the 1990s and beyond. The new introduction and preface make even larger contributions to this process, but before proceeding to them, it's instructive to stop for a moment to think about the preconditions that allowed *The Cage* to move across community boundaries in the first place.

The confluence of interest in the work of Vaughn-James in general and *The Cage* in particular is no mystery if you think in terms of the respective techniques that 1970s hippies and early-1990s independent comics artists in the Annex used to produce cultural value for themselves and their work. In my experience, the early Coach House aesthetic was based on counterfeit, mystification, obfuscation, and a general creation of confusion for all but the initiated few. The aesthetic of Seth and his close friends Joe Matt and Chester Brown (an admittedly small and homogeneous corner of the Annex indie comics community but the one that has been most industrious in creating symbolic value for their own work) is complementary, based precisely on discovering or uncovering occulted or forgotten cultural objects. The respective aesthetics of these two communities fit together like a jigsaw puzzle.

Both Seth and Joe Matt have drawn scenes set in the early 1990s Annex, where each gleefully displays forgotten comics that they have discovered in

some second-hand shop to the others in order to provoke envy.[10] In *Distinction*, his book on the subject of taste, Pierre Bourdieu outlines how people whom he describes as "apprentice intellectuals" pursue "maximum 'cultural profit' for minimum economic cost"; they derive value precisely from locating rare works and talking about them in their own work (270). This is an ongoing theme in the early works of Seth, Matt, and Brown: how cheap they are, and how much recondite comics lore they know.

This practice also appears as a ritual that Seth recounts learning (from an older cartoonist) in his afterword to *Graphic Witness: Four Wordless Graphic Novels*, an anthology published in 2007 of woodcut works by Frans Masereel, Lynd Ward, Giacomo Patri, and Laurence Hyde:

> An older, more knowledgeable cartoonist had pulled a copy of Lynd Ward's *Madman's Drum* off his bookshelf and pronounced that it was an early and serious attempt at a comics novel. At the time, this was an exciting idea to me—a piece of comics history I'd never heard of before. This old book was obviously a work of REAL art—completely free of the pulp fiction origins of modern comics. (415)

As he has himself matriculated into the role of the older, more knowledgeable cartoonist, Seth has formalized this practice by becoming the author of a number of introductions and afterwords to new editions of lesser-known graphic novels.[11]

In his introduction to the 2013 edition of *The Cage*, Seth relates a very similar story about Toronto bookseller and downtown countercultural figure Charlie Huisken, who

> excitedly corner[ed] me one day to let me know he'd acquired a stack of first-edition hardcovers of *The Cage* and *The Projector*. I had no idea what he was talking about, but from his tone of voice I gathered that a cultured person *would* know about such things and so I played along. I bought both books. (5)

A few paragraphs later, Seth is calling *The Cage* a "masterpiece." Indeed, some of the later sequences in his own *Clyde Fans* (especially pp. 452-55) evoke *The Cage*'s cold, unpopulated interiors and elliptical narration.[12]

What is most interesting about Seth's "Man Fears Time" essay—his introduction to the new edition of *The Cage*—is that it describes in considerable detail the work that Seth had to undertake in order to transfigure *The Cage* and *The Projector* from "some old 'hippy psychedelia'" into "a visionary graphic novel, far ahead of its time" (6). In order to convince others of the merits of Vaughn-James' books, Seth has to become the kind of reader who can appreciate them himself (i.e., not so much to impress Huisken, but in order to imagine himself as "a cultured person"). This requires not only the desire to take Vaughn-James' work seriously, but the employment of several different reading techniques. Seth first compares the books in Vaughn-James' oeuvre to each other in order to assure himself that *The Cage* is

in fact a comic book (and therefore worthy of his attention), as well as to develop a narrative of artistic progression, with *The Cage* as its culmination.[13] He then changes his focus to study the minutiae of *The Cage*'s internal structure, noting that this exercise requires "*great* attention" and "extraordinary scrutiny" (7).[14] The result of all this labour isn't anything like an interpretation in the literary sense, though, as Seth asserts that he remains baffled by the book's narrative (8).

Seth leaves the reader with, as the culmination of his labours, a different object, one that is accessible (and presumably important) to a much larger audience in an entirely different interpretive community. On the one hand, *The Cage* remains where a literary, Canadian studies, or cultural studies scholar would situate it, "snugly alongside the works of Marshall McLuhan, Glenn Gould and Norman McLaren" (Seth, "Man Fears Time" 8). But because of the work that Seth has put into it, *The Cage* is no longer "cold and impenetrable—maybe even off-putting" (6); it is now *also* "a singular work" among the "serious, artistic—even masterful—graphic novels [that] have been published" (8). In closing, Seth writes, "My fondest hope is that young Canadian cartoonists will embrace the ambition that Martin Vaughn-James showed as a narrative artist" (8). For Seth, the express purpose of this new edition of *The Cage* is to continue to transfigure Canadian cartooning culture as it circulates.

From my perspective, part of this transfiguration should include the acknowledgement that *The Cage* isn't as singular as it might appear to a comics critic unfamiliar with 1960s and 1970s small-press output, and that the barrier between the comics world and the neo-avant-gardes is more porous than it first appears.

From its relative beginnings to the present, Coach House has published a significant number of comics. Coach House comic books employ a wide range of formats that should interest comics critics: not just European-style *Bandes dessinées* (BD) albums (though there are also more of these), but also single-issue saddle-stapled comics printed on pulp stock, "big little" books, *fumetti*, chapbooks, zines, and digest-sized perfect-bound Mexican *historietas*, to name a few. The fact that the only one of these publications to receive any critical interest to date is a hardbound album reinforces my sense that what's happening in criticism around *The Cage* is a relatively unreflexive moment of Canadian comics criticism continuing to legitimate its project for itself, if not some imagined general audience. But *The Cage* is not a singularity; it's part of a collective, varied, decades-long engagement with a range of different comics worlds, in all phases of its production, circulation, and consumption.

Coach House published several significant book-length comics that are exact contemporaries of *The Cage*, and many significant shorter works during the same period. What these books demonstrate is that the authors and editors at Coach House were engaged with the comics world of the 1960s and 1970s in all of its forms, though the reverse might not have been true. Some of them

(notably bpNichol) were lifelong collectors of mainstream and underground comics alike;[15] others (like John Riddell) collaborated directly with professional cartoonists working in the mainstream industry;[16] and still others (David McFadden and Greg Curnoe in *The Great Canadian Sonnet*;[17] and Victor Coleman, AA Bronson, Jorge Zontal, and Felix Partz, to name only a few of the contributors to *Snore Comix*, Coach House's underground series[18]) were writing, illustrating, and publishing comics and comix in a variety of formats. There is a significant diversity of authorship in these works (*Snore* especially), which points to the copious and vibrant production of comics by and about women and LGBTQ+ authors in and around the Annex for the last half century. For many reasons, these works merit full-length essays of their own.

In the 1980s and 1990s, there were also more points of contact between the Annex literary small-press world and the Annex indie comics world than have been acknowledged in comics criticism to date. One of them directly involves Seth's peer and friend Chester Brown. In 1987, bookseller, publisher, historian, and sometime Coach House bindery worker Nicky Drumbolis published an edition of John Riddell's novel *Shit* (printed at Coach House), with a frame from "The Man Who Couldn't Stop" sequence from Chester Brown's comic *Yummy Fur* (later collected in *Ed the Happy Clown*) as its cover image. Drumbolis also asserts that he was the first bookseller in Toronto to have carried Art Spiegelman and Françoise Mouly's *Raw* magazine.[19]

In the same year as *Shit*, Coach House also printed *Maintenance in the Year of--* by Stephen Cruise. Like *The Cage*, it is a hardcover album-format sequence of drawings and texts; whereas the former is oneiric in its logic, the latter comprises actual excerpts from Cruise's dream journals. The artist drew each page in pencil in the morning and inked it in over the course of the day. As a kind of material analogue for this process, the lines on the early pages of *Maintenance in the Year of* are printed very lightly, as if in graphite, and gradually become darker as you read the book. Cruise's drawings are looser and more organic than Vaughn-James', but every bit as impressive.

Coach House also published successful comics right up to the turn of the millennium. Patricia Seaman's *New Motor Queen City* (which first appeared as a series of chapbooks and went into three printings as a paperback) has probably circulated more actual copies than *The Cage*. (*The Cage*'s colophon says 1,500 copies. But as a former press editor who spent five years immersed in the lore of the Coach House and its occupants, I subjectively but sincerely doubt that many were ever manufactured, let alone distributed or sold.) The only critical mention of *New Motor Queen City* that I can find is a single page in David Steiling's 2006 doctoral dissertation (81). As a heady mix of Marguerite Duras, Kathy Acker, Situationism, B movies, pop music, and sardonic humour in *historieta* form, *New Motor Queen City* offers a lot of conceptual handles for readers to grab.

The key take-away from these too-brief examples is that while the narrative of complete separation between the comics world and the neo-avant-garde small press makes for compelling reading, it strains credulity in the face of the evidence.

The pivotal question that I want to pose is for critics. When thinking about what comes next for comics studies in Canada, is smuggling objects to venerate from across the disciplinary borders of literary studies and conceptual art sufficient? What is obscured by employing with a straight face (as Seth does in his introduction to *The Cage*) concepts like "masterpiece" and authorial "genius" to talk about graphic novels? It has been literally decades since critics of the prose novel were celebrating the putative dismantling of concepts like the literary canon, the great book, and the author fully in control of their material. Beaty and Woo praise *The Cage* as an exemplar of "an aesthetics of difficulty" (70), arguing that such works are "waiting to reshape the borders of what we recognize as comics" (72). But it seems to me that all that's happening is the replacement of one canon with another. From this perspective, the historical project that Paul Williams calls *novelization* in *Dreaming the Graphic Novel* (6-11)—i.e., the cultural legitimation of the graphic novel by authors, publishers, readers, and critics—is an ongoing process.

Notes

1. For details of the history of *The Cage*'s critical reception in Europe following the publication of its 1986 French translation, see Bart Beaty and Benjamin Woo, *The Greatest Comic Book of All Time*, especially pp. 68-9.
2. *Graphic novel*, of course, is a contentious term. This article concerns some of the ways in which some of the competing discourses of comics criticism and publicity mobilize it in relation to Vaughn-James' work. For a book-length detailed historicization of the discourse around comics as graphic novels, see Paul Williams, *Dreaming the Graphic Novel*.
3. *Comics Comics* was an online publication whose editors were later absorbed into the staff of *The Comics Journal*.
4. *Elephant* is Vaughn-James' first book, *The Projector*, the first published by Coach House.
5. The colophon of the 2013 edition of *The Cage* adds, "Goluska was one of Canada's finest designers, who had a life-long love for the work of noted American typographer William Addison Dwiggins. The typeface Goluska is an homage to Dwiggins' font, Electra" (192). For an obituary, see Philip Fine, "Book Designer Glenn Goluska."
6. The journal *Leonardo* includes Higgins' 1995 "Intermedia Chart" with their 2001 republication of the original essay, along with an appendix by the art historian and intermedia artist Hannah Higgins, who is also Higgins' daughter.
7. The phrase *this book is a movie* is much older than the Bowles and Russell book title, which alludes to the work of Bob Brown in the 1930s. See, for example, Brown's contribution to the June 1930 issue of *Transition*, as well as *The Readies*, a collection of Brown's work published in 2014.
8. In the 2006 preface to *The Cage*, Vaughn-James notes how this was the publisher's idea: "The publishers gave it a subtitle to speed it on its way; they called it a 'boovie'" (10).

9. "Pop art? How could it play a part in the art of the future? It is bland. It is pure. It uses elements of common life without comment, and so, by accepting the misery of this life and its aridity so mutely, it condones them" (Higgins 49). For pop art's incorporation of comics, see especially Bart Beaty's chapter "Roy Lichtenstein's Tears: *Ressentiment* and Exclusion in the World of Pop Art," from his 2012 book *Comics versus Art*.
10. See, for example, Seth's *It's a Good Life, If You Don't Weaken* (2-3, 17-19) and Joe Matt's *Spent* (9-10, 88, 91-96, 118-19).
11. See, for example, Seth's introduction to Raymond Briggs' *Gentleman Jim*.
12. Vaughn-James typically uses only one image per page and a fine line whereas, in the later parts of *Clyde Fans*, Seth employs heavily brushed ink and a dense, variable page grid. But the combination of the empty spaces and the elliptical, impersonal narration creates a similar effect.
13. If *The Cage* "were the only book he'd ever produced I might be more likely to think he'd patterned it on a children's picture book. It is only when you look at Vaughn-James' full body of work that it becomes obvious that *The Cage* is definitely a comic book . . . The progression from *Elephant* to *The Projector* is an obvious one, as is the progression from *The Projector* to *The Cage*. Only when you look at the jump from *Elephant* to *The Cage* do you see what a real artistic leap that is: *Elephant* is an interesting early experiment at an artsy comic book novel, and *The Cage* is a fully realized artistic masterpiece of the comics medium" (Seth, "Man Fears Time" 6).
14. "I tried to puzzle out how the words and images connected (or didn't connect), what symbols recurred throughout the book and what they might mean, how time operated within the story and, ultimately, what the story meant" (7).
15. Nichol's papers at Simon Fraser University include, among other things, a collection of four-panel *Dick Tracy* comic strips clipped from newspapers between 1939 and 1952, 191 issues of *Dick Tracy* colour comics from between 1940 and 1960, and six volumes of colour *Dick Tracy* comics serials clipped from US weekend colour supplements between 1931 and 1977. Nichol was also a collector of original comic strip art flats. See "bp Nichol Fonds."
16. Riddell's output is vast and heterogeneous, but his best-known work is the anagrammatic comic *Pope Leo: El ELoPE: A Tragedy in Four Letters*. Two versions of *Pope Leo* were published with bpNichol as illustrator, by Nichol's Ganglia Press (1969), and in the Nichol-edited *The Concrete Chef* (1970). A third version appears in Riddell's *Criss-Cross* (1977), illustrated by Franc Reyes, a professional comics artist who worked at Disney, Marvel, and DC on titles that include *The House of Mystery, The House of Secrets, King Conan, Arik Khan, Tarzan*, and *Weird War Tales*. Reyes was also "involved with the 1970s underground Canadian comix publisher Andromeda" (beaulieu and Emerson 2). See derek beaulieu and Lori Emerson, "Media Studies and Writing Surfaces," and John Riddell, *Writing Surfaces*.
17. McFadden and Curnoe are the author and illustrator, respectively, of *The Great Canadian Sonnet, Part One*, and *The Great Canadian Sonnet, Part Two*, both published by Coach House in 1970 and as an omnibus edition in 2001. Both books are formally identical to the Big Little Books that the Whitman Publishing Company began to produce in 1932 (beginning with a *Dick Tracy* title), with facing pages of cartoons and text—a layout that was then widely copied by other publishers ("Big Little Books Collection"). Big Little Books of any sort, let alone avant-garde ones, remain a neglected subject in the field of comics studies. The year before the publication of *The Great Canadian Sonnet* and the *Bright Things* issue of *Snore* (which closely resembles underground comix in format), Curnoe was also heavily involved in the production of the catalogue for the *Heart of London* exhibition of work by young artists from London, Ontario—a catalogue that took the format of an underground

comic, complete with staples, a slick cover, and acid colours in the interior. Contributing artists included John Boyle, Jack Chambers, Greg Curnoe, Murray Favro, Bev Kelly, Ron Martin, David Rabinowitch, Royden Rabinowitch, Walter Redinger, Tony Urquhart, and Ed Zelenak. See Curnoe, *Heart of London*.

18. The only sustained comics-world writing on *Snore* consists of two detailed posts by Brian Campbell on *Comic Book Daily*: "Snore Comix" and "The Coach House Nose Who's Who." Campbell's contention that *Snore* is "perhaps the most bizarre, frustrating and difficult to engage comic book publication of the Canadian Silver Age" ("Snore Comix") should both evoke Seth's professed bafflement with *The Cage* and serve as further proof that in the context of the larger body of titles published by Coach House in the exact same period, Vaughn-James' work is not an anomaly. Campbell and his colleagues do a good job of sleuthing out who is behind many of the pseudonyms in the *Snore* masthead (including all three members of the General Idea collective, who eventually settled on being AA Bronson, Jorge Zontal, and Felix Partz), but there is a great deal more to say about this series.
19. See Mark Medley, "Wonder of Thunder Bay."

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Amie Wright

Alberta's Forgotten Censor: The Advisory Board on Objectionable Publications (1954-1976) and the Continued Campaign against Comics Post-1954

Released in spring 1956, the fourteen-page pamphlet *What's Wrong with Comic Books?* (fig. 1) served as a warning to parents, educators, and young readers about the dangers of comic-book reading.[1] The bulletin opens with an urgent call to action:

> The "comic" book problem is of world-wide concern. It has assumed such serious proportions that many governments, including those of Canada, the United Kingdom, the United States, and the United Nations, have appointed committees to study this matter. In response to a growing outcry from parents, educators, religious leaders and others, the Government of the Province of Alberta issued an Order in Council in 1954 which states: "[I]t is deemed advisable and in the public interest to establish a Board to be known as the Advisory Board on Objectionable Publications to study and investigate the question of crime and other objectionable comics and salacious magazines and to recommend effective action to prevent their sale and distribution in the Province."

Previous scholarship on comics censorship has focused on the 1954 US Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency comic-book hearings and the testimony of Dr. Frederic Wertham as the fever pitch in the North America-wide comics moral panic.[2] Wertham, author of *Seduction of the Innocent* (1954), had been one of the most strident anti-comics voices since the late 1940s, and in 1954 his message found an even wider audience during the televised US hearings. Following the hearings, comic books were censored—by their own industry. The Comics Magazine Association of America introduced a comprehensive new Comics Code for content—sanitizing depictions of violence, marriage and sex, and criminality (Nyberg 166-69). Jean-Paul Gabilliet describes the period after 1954 as a "calming of passions" in which "even if Dr. Wertham continued his crusade, he did so increasingly alone as mass media and, consequently, the public lost interest in this exaggerated moral panic" (237). Bradford Wright similarly notes how Wertham's crusade "generated little interest beyond his own shrinking audience" in "the second half of the 1950s" (178). However, this spotlight on the US hearings and singular figures such as Wertham overlooks what happened after 1954—specifically the continued and collective efforts of citizen action committees in Canada, the United States, and elsewhere to continue the comic-book fight.[3]

Figure 1. Cover of "*What's Wrong with Comic Books?*" (1956) Provincial Archives of Alberta, GR1992.0197.

In Alberta, this fight took the form of the Advisory Board on Objectionable Publications (ABOP), which existed from 1954 to 1976 and functioned: 1) to control the sale of objectionable comics, tabloids, and magazines in the province and 2) to foster a public awareness of the danger inherent in permitting young people to read unwholesome material (ABOP, annual report). The Board's private working arrangement with distributors and law enforcement resulted in the removal of hundreds of titles from newsstands (20-25% of all periodicals in the province), including *Playboy* (1962) and *Rolling Stone* (1969). At the same time, the ABOP publicly worked to problematize youth comic-book reading, most notably through the 1956 publication of *What's Wrong with Comic Books?* and their outreach campaign. In total, more than forty thousand copies of this pamphlet were printed and distributed to schools, public libraries, women's organizations, and faculties of education and librarianship throughout Alberta and across North America.

The following article attempts to illuminate this underreported chapter in Canadian history and the history of comics censorship by examining previously unpublished and unprocessed materials from the Provincial Archives of Alberta in Edmonton. As this study investigates, the reaction against comics in Canada not only persisted past 1954 but also intensified in

regions such as Alberta. Further, by reinvestigating the anti-comics fight after 1954, this work examines how a concern for child health normalized censorship and gatekeeping behaviour on the part of community organizations well into the 1960s and 1970s. This analysis also complicates intellectual freedom history on a broader level. Generally known as *defenders* of intellectual freedom and vanguards of reading, librarians and educators were a cornerstone of ABOP leadership and operations. Serving as a self-appointed community standard on decency and "good reading," the ABOP functioned as a de facto censor and newsstand monitor in Alberta for decades with influence across North America—influence which was sustained and reinforced by library and educational leaders and networks.

Additionally, this work on historical censorship seeks to better understand the present through the past. In 2021 and 2022, more book bans and challenges were reported to the American Library Association (ALA) Office of Intellectual Freedom than at any time in the last twenty years. At the same time, award-winning comics, including Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (1991), Maia Kobabe's *Gender Queer* (2019), and Jerry Craft's *New Kid* (2019), have been deemed "objectionable" and pulled from school and library shelves—often by parents, educators, and librarians.[4] I would argue that it is impossible to discuss comic-book reading and scholarship in the present without contextualizing the deep, complicated, and intertwined histories of citizen action committees and censorship—particularly in libraries and education.

An Emergency of Crime Comics (1954)

When it "was created on December 29, 1954, by Order-in-Council (O.C) [*sic*] 1801/54 through Section 3 of the Cultural Development Act" ("Provincial Archives"), the ABOP joined a larger constellation of citizen action committees already fighting the comic-book battle. This included American colleagues, such as the National Organization for Decent Literature (NODL), which was founded by Bishop John Francis Noll and served as a lay organization within larger Catholic civic networks (Hajdu 75-77; Nyberg 23). This network of American committees also included the Citizens' Committee for Better Juvenile Literature in Chicago (Twomey) and the Committee for the Evaluation of Comics in Cincinnati (Ash). In Canada, the Crime Comics Committee of the British Columbia Parent-Teacher Association, led by strident anti-comics activist Eleanor Gray, was amongst the most well-known and influential groups (Glegg). Further, these groups did not operate in a vacuum. They were in active contact with each other and were aware of international movements, such as the UK Comics Campaign Council, which was underpinned by the National Union of Teachers and targeted horror comics (Barker 14-15). These committees were not only united in their anti-comics fervour but also in their belief that they could objectively evaluate materials and uphold what they perceived to be "community standards." As John Dutton expressed it during an ABOP meeting on June 23, 1955, "we are

carrying out the will of the people." In postwar Canada, these standards centred on preserving heteronormative family values and protecting youth morality (Adams 136-54).

These concerns collided in November 1948 when two children in Dawson Creek, BC, took potshots with a rifle at passing motorists on the Alaska Highway, fatally striking one. Though initial inquests in the case considered explanations for the juveniles' behaviour, including lack of parental supervision at home, on December 2, 1948, the *Peace River Block News* announced, "Juveniles in Fatal Shooting Nov. 12, Sentenced: Comments of Crown Counsel and Presiding Judge—Reading of 'Comic Books' Held Responsible for Crime Committed by Two Boys" ("Juveniles"). Spurred on by constituents in Kamloops, BC, Member of Parliament E. Davie Fulton introduced a private member's bill to include "crime comics" under obscene materials in 1948 (Glegg 29; McGinnis 9-10, "Bogeyman"). A little over a year later and bolstered by national coverage of the Dawson Creek incident—including a front-page headline in the *Toronto Daily Star* that proclaimed, "Blame Comic Books as Boys 11, 13 Charged with Murder"—the "Fulton Bill" passed into law in 1949. Section 163(1)b of the Criminal Code made it a crime to possess, print, publish, or sell "crime comics" for the purposes of sale:[5]

> Until 2018, the Canadian *Criminal Code* used the term *crime comic* to refer to a magazine, periodical, or book that exclusively or substantially comprises matter depicting pictorially (a) the commission of crimes, real or fictious; or (b) events connected with the commission of crimes, real or fictious, whether occurring before or after the commission of the crime. ("Justice Laws")

The label *crime comics* was first introduced to target the perceived "how-to" crime comic manuals such as *Crime Does Not Pay*. By the late 1940s or early 1950s, however, it had become an all-encompassing moniker for any comics content deemed obscene or otherwise problematic. By means of an expanded definition of obscenity law and a widened interpretation of the term *crime comics*, even classic comics such as *Dick Tracy* were pulled from newspapers (Connery 172).

Acting in parallel and often complementary ways in this period were diligent initiatives by various community associations, women's institutes, and educators, whose purposes were to police moral standards and children's reading. These initiatives included more than a dozen resolutions from the Catholic Women's League between 1929 and 1960 targeting the dangers of "immoral reading matter" and "salacious literature," including a 1951 resolution against "crime comics" ("Archived Resolutions"). Educators were also very active, including an August 1949 resolution from the Ontario Federation of Women Teachers Association that included the claim that reading comic books "contributes to juvenile delinquency and the lowering of moral standards and taste" ("Women Teachers"). These organizations also encouraged youth participation in anti-comics fervour. Two notable examples

include the "monster bonfire in the schoolyard," which was lit in October 1949 by students at Our Lady of Mercy Separate School in Coniston, Ontario ("Children"), as well as the oratorical prize won by then ten-year-old future prime minister Brian Mulroney for a speech on the dangers of crime comics (Bell 94-95).

These initiatives also aligned with long-standing campaigns since the 1920s by public and school librarians both to codify "good reading" practices and to integrate them into an emerging sense of Canadian citizenship. In *Picturing Canada: A History of Canadian Children's Illustrated Books and Publishing* (2010), Gail Edwards and Judith Saltman describe the importance that early-twentieth-century librarians, especially children's librarians, placed in guiding young readers and shielding them from the objectionable (40-41). As Edwards and Saltman narrate it, librarians did not perceive these forms of guidance as a type of censorship but rather as preventing moral harm (52-53). This focus on "good reading" was explicitly intertwined in anti-comics endeavours. A vital part of the Citizens' Committee's comic-book control in Chicago was Operation Good Reading, a partnership with the Chicago Public Library that included recommended reading lists, a children's story hour, and the Vacation Jamboree summer reading program (Twomey 626). While definitions of good reading varied, many groups (including the ABOP) cited all-age prose classics like Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book* (1894) or Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows* (1908) as exemplars of good reading, juxtaposing these "good" titles against the "bad" and harmful reading of comic books and other salacious literature.

Through the late 1940s and early 1950s, the question around moral harm and youth comic-book reading continued to percolate in Canada and abroad. In Canada, the comics debate was covered in popular reporting, including a feature story in *Macleans* by Sidney Katz in December 1948, a CBC Radio citizens forum in January 1949, and in May 1949 a spotlight article in *Chatelaine*, "Are the Comics Really a Menace?" In April 1952, a UN conference on press, radio, and cinema for children called for a world ban on "sex and crime comics," concluding that such reading impacts responsible youth citizenship and creates the potential for juvenile delinquency (Castell). In 1952 and 1953, the Canadian Senate staged its own Special Committee on Sale and Distribution of Salacious and Indecent Literature. This increased scrutiny of the dangers of crime comics found the support of Fulton but also of future prime minister John Diefenbaker (McGinnis, "Bogeymen" 8-10).

In 1954 Wertham's *Seduction of the Innocent* was published and brought renewed attention to the Canadian comics situation—chapter 11 is entitled "Murder in Dawson Creek: The Comic Books Abroad." When testifying in the US comic book hearings, Wertham speaks to the situation in Canada in the following terms: "All I know is that they are very much worried about the effect of comic-books on delinquency, that they have not been able by this one amendment to the criminal code to curb this situation" (91).[6] Wertham's

claims were further bolstered by the testimony on June 4, 1954, of a special invited guest, Fulton, who described the current Canadian situation as an "emergency of crime comics" (United States, *Juvenile Delinquecy* 253). Echoing Wertham's plea for action, Fulton disclosed that the Canadian government was looking at complementary mechanisms for enforcement, including a campaign by the Home and School Federation to raise awareness about the dangers of comic books and youth (251). The Advisory Board on Objectionable Publications was Alberta's answer to this "emergency."

The Alberta Advisory Board on Objectionable Publications (1954-1976)

Six banker boxes of unprocessed materials at the Provincial Archives of Alberta make up the archival memory of the Alberta Advisory Board on Objectionable Publications: typewritten board minutes, handwritten notes, copies of purchase orders, newspaper clippings, colour-coded index cards used for title evaluation, and extensive correspondence. Among the letters in the Board's archive are messages from government officials, including Fulton and Governor General Vincent Massey, notes from chiefs of police, and ongoing correspondence with other citizen action committees in the United States, especially branches of the NODL. Tucked in among the creased folders is also correspondence from *Playboy* creator Hugh Hefner in 1962 and *Rolling Stone* editor Jann Wenner in 1969 in which both query why their magazines—targeted at adult readers—had been removed from newsstands.

The Board files possess an exhaustive amount of literature and research on obscenity law in Canada and the United States, newspaper clippings (often from the *Edmonton Journal* or *Calgary Herald*) that mention the Board, and detailed notes on best practices for publicity and marketing campaigns. Contained in the folders is an abundance of source works that the Board used for inspiration and information, including lists and pamphlets from the NODL, as well as a reprinted supplemental copy of Wertham's 1953 article "What Parents Don't Know about Comic Books," which was originally published in *Ladies' Home Journal*. The board meeting minutes register a common complaint among the members: that outside critics do not understand that they are an advisory board, not a censorship board. Yet the carefully repeated actions of twenty years to restrict newsstand sales and gatekeep standards around good reading—under the guise of a fear of comic books—tell a different story.

Operating from 1954 to 1976, the ABOP's "effective action to prevent [comics and magazine] sale and distribution in the Province" included two public outreach pamphlets: 1) the widely circulated *What's Wrong with Comic Books?* (1956), with a print run of over forty thousand copies, and 2) the more modestly circulated *The Choice Is Yours* (1962), with a print run of ten thousand copies. The ABOP consisted of seven citizen members from around the province who were appointed for two-year terms and represented different geographic, demographic, and professional sectors of Alberta. Members

included librarians, educators, housewives, and lawyers. The Board met six times a year to discuss their ongoing list of over one hundred publications that they deemed objectionable and recommended against provincial distribution.

Parallel to the Board's actions to restrict sales on the newsstands, was its mission to safeguard young people from reading unwholesome material and to promote the benefits of "good reading." The ABOP worked with the Canadian Library Association, Young Canada's Book Week, and public libraries and schools throughout Alberta. In one instance, the ABOP partnered with Grade ten students at St. Basil's School in Edmonton to develop a student-created code and rubric for evaluating good reading. The code, created by and typed up by Grade ten students, stressed that, "good literature builds up the morality of teenagers so that they will be better citizens and better fit to run the government of tomorrow" ("Code"). This commitment to "good reading" was reinforced by the ABOP's membership. At every juncture in the Board's twenty-year history, at least one member was a prominent provincial librarian, including Anna Maure (ABOP Chair 1954-1960) and Aleta Vikse (ABOP Chair 1969-1971), as well as Bruce Peel, Louise Riley, and John Dutton ("Provincial Archives").

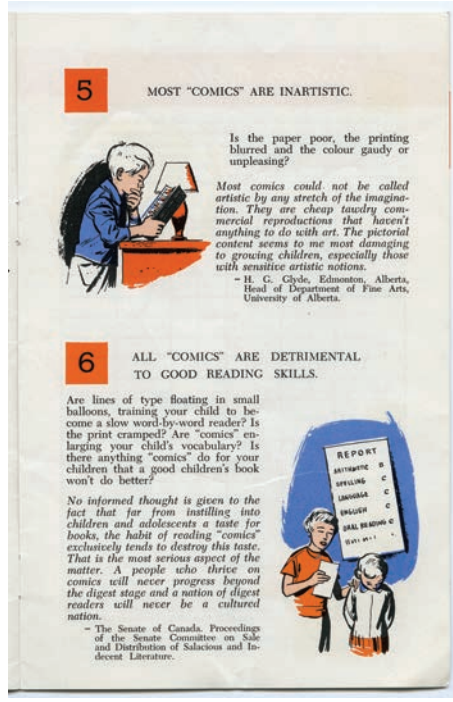
What's Wrong with Comic Books? (1956)

Printed in three eye-catching colours by Edmonton printer Hamley Press, and ironically featuring comics-like illustrations throughout, *What's Wrong with Comic Books?* persuasively pulled together many popular anti-comics arguments and solidified the Board's position on the need to guide children to good reading. After opening with a declarative statement about the worldwide comic book problem, the second page of *What's Wrong with Comic Books?* asks, "Do You Know What Your Child Is Reading?" Featuring quotes from the Canadian Senate Special Committee on Salacious and Indecent Literature (1952-1953), Wertham's *Seduction of the Innocent*, and Governor General Vincent Massey, this section points to the crucial importance of parents safeguarding the physical and mental well-being of their children. *What's Wrong with Comic Books?* then lists its six major objections to comics: 1) In glorifying "crime and criminals, they encourage the commission of crime and contempt for lawful authority"; 2) "Some 'comics' present a distorted, unhealthy and immoral concept of sex and marriage," while 3) others "foster prejudice against class, race, creed, and nationality"; 4) "Some 'comics' portray violent death, [and] grotesque, fantastic and unnatural creatures with repulsive realism"; 5) "Most 'comics' are inartistic," but 6) all of them "are detrimental to good reading skills."

Each of these six objections includes supporting testimony—what the pamphlet describes as "selected opinions of recognized authorities"—from sources such as law enforcement, Canadian and American government officials, and educational stakeholders at local and national levels. Included as an expert on objection 4, C. W. Mellish of the Canadian Home and School and Parent Federation remarks, "One wonders what place [comics] have in the life of a child

other than to fill him with unnatural fears and forebodings." In support of objection 5, H. G. Glyde, Head of the Department of Fine Arts at the University of Alberta, declares, "Most comics could not be called artistic by any stretch of the imagination . . . The pictorial content seems to me most damaging to growing children, especially those with sensitive artistic notions." As seen in fig. 2, objection 5 is also accompanied by an illustration of a child reader straining their eyes with a look of consternation on their face as they read a comic book.

What's Wrong with Comic Books? closes out its major objections with a reminder that *all* comics are harmful to student success. As seen in fig. 2, objection 6 features an illustration of a worried parent clutching a report card, their hand on the shoulder of a child with a downcast face. In the background of the image is an enlarged graphic of the student's C grades in spelling, language, English, and oral reading. This sixth objection concludes with an empathetic admonition from the Senate Committee on Sale and Distribution of Salacious and Indecent Literature that "[a] people who thrive on comics will never progress beyond the digest stage and a nation of digest readers will never be a cultured nation."


5

MOST "COMICS" ARE INARTISTIC.

Is the paper poor, the printing blurred and the colour gaudy or unpleasing?

Most comics could not be called artistic by any stretch of the imagination. They are cheap tawdry commercial reproductions that haven't anything to do with art. The pictorial content seems to me most damaging to growing children, especially those with sensitive artistic notions.

– H. G. Glyde, Edmonton, Alberta, Head of Department of Fine Arts, University of Alberta.

6

ALL "COMICS" ARE DETRIMENTAL TO GOOD READING SKILLS.

Are lines of type floating in small balloons, training your child to become a slow word-by-word reader? Is the print cramped? Are "comics" enlarging your child's vocabulary? Is there anything "comics" do for your children that a good children's book won't do better?

No informed thought is given to the fact that far from instilling into children and adolescents a taste for books, the habit of reading "comics" exclusively tends to destroy this taste. That is the most serious aspect of the matter. A people who thrive on comics will never progress beyond the digest stage and a nation of digest readers will never be a cultured nation.

– The Senate of Canada. Proceedings of the Senate Committee on Sale and Distribution of Salacious and Indecent Literature.

REPORT

Figure 2. Objection 5 and objection 6 in "*What's Wrong with Comic Books?*" (1956) Provincial Archives of Alberta, GR1992.0197, p. 6.

Echoing the takeaways of earlier comics critics like Sterling North, who proclaims in 1940 that "the antidote to the 'comic' magazine poison can be found in any library or good bookstore," the fourteen pages of *What's Wrong with Comic Books?* also feature several sections on encouraging and promoting "good reading":

- A one-page rubric or "rating scale" for parents to gauge how "the 'comics' in your home rate by these standards," asking questions such as, "Does the 'comic' glorify crime and criminals?" or "Does it overemphasize sex?"
- A two-page guide to "inexpensive books" that explains to parents how "[l]imiting 'comics' should not deprive your child of reading material. You can substitute inexpensive good books for bad 'comics.'" These good books include selections "for older boys and girls" from Dent's Children's Illustrated Classics, such as Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* (1883), and from the Puffin Story Books series, with titles such as Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* (1884). Recommended texts for younger readers include the Little Golden Library Books series and classic titles such as Helen Bannerman's *The Story of Little Black Sambo* (1899)—which the Toronto School Board removed "from all classrooms and school libraries" in February 1955 due to objections from Black parent organizations that it promotes racial prejudice (Plummer). Many librarians, though, including Jean Thomson of the Toronto Public Library, believed that in their experience this title was not objectionable to young readers (Plummer). It is perhaps surprising to see the Board's recommendation of this title in light of its third objection that some comics "foster prejudice against class, race, creed, and nationality."
- A three-page "prescription" entitled "Rx for 'Comics': Guiding Your Child to Good Reading," authored by Louise Riley, chairperson of the Alberta Library Board. This section directs parents to two recommended guides for "good reading": "*Books for Boys and Girls* edited by Jean Thomson of the Toronto Public Library, and *Junior Bookshelf* compiled especially for the children of Alberta by Grace McDonald and Dorothy Rogers, Children's Librarians of the Public Libraries of Edmonton and Calgary."
- A one-page list of resources "For Your Further Information," with three selections from Frederic Wertham, a guide to "Acceptable Comics" from the NODL, and "An Evaluation of Comic Books" by the Committee on Evaluation of Comic Books.

The last page of the pamphlet includes a call to action for diligent readers to "do everything in your power to make better use of good reading material obtainable from your Public Library and other sources." While the final takeaway of *What's Wrong with Comic Books?* may not have been as strident as North's assertion that "[t]he parent who does not acquire that antidote for his child is guilty of criminal negligence," its mix of expert testimonies and attention to child health and success works to create a sense of accountability on the part

of the pamphlet reader and that urgent action and attention was needed.

Between 1956 and 1957, more than forty thousand copies of *What's Wrong with Comic Books?* were sent out by the ABOP and the Alberta Department of Economic Affairs. Of note is the large number of intimately connected transnational women's organizations, religious groups, and youth fellowships who were the recipients of the fourteen-page pamphlet. Copies were dispatched to the NODL, the Cincinnati Committee, and the United Parents Association of New York City. One hundred copies of *What's Wrong with Comic Books?* were also distributed to attendees at the 1956 Canadian Library Association Annual Conference in Niagara Falls, Ontario.

Providing a snapshot of the organizations with which the ABOP was in communication on a provincial level, the following table (fig. 3) details the circulation of roughly fifteen thousand of the forty thousand copies of *What's Wrong with Comic Books?* dispersed April and May 1956 in Alberta:

Alberta Federation of Home and School Associations	5000
Public Libraries	3400
• Edmonton Public Library (1000)	
• Medicine Hat Public Library (200)	
• Lethbridge Public Library (400)	
• Calgary Public Library (1000)	
• Rural libraries in Alberta (500-750)	
Edmonton Members of the Advisory Board and Office	2000
Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire headquarters, Calgary	2000
Farm Women's Union of Alberta (FWUA)	800
Government Publicity Bureau (Mr. E. Bryant)	500
Boy Scout Association (Alberta)	300
Council on Child and Family Welfare, Calgary	300
Alberta Women's Institute	200
Girl Guide Association (Alberta)	200
Edmonton Ministerial Association	175
Catholic Women's League	140
Catholic Diocese of Edmonton	100
Junior Hospital League	100
Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues	55
YMCA (Edmonton)	25
YWCA (Edmonton)	25

Figure 3. Table detailing circulation of *What's Wrong with Comic Books?* April and May 1956 in Alberta. Compiled by author.

The Board received enthusiastic correspondence on this mailout from the NODL's John S. Brennan, who in a letter to ABOP Chairperson Anna Mauer writes, "Congratulations on your success with the distributors in Alberta who are withdrawing publications at your request," as well as from University of Alberta Faculty of Education lecturer L. Doris Baker, who thanks the Board

for their work while noting that "this problem of the comic book is a plague in my home province also." They also received a message from Fulton, who writes,

> Since the *Criminal Code* now provides penalties, I would like to see the pattern established that any of those who persist in selling publications which offend under the Code will be prosecuted . . . The efforts of organizations such as yours in pointing out so clearly to the public the dangers will be very helpful in creating the demand for effective enforcement. Once again may I express my congratulations and appreciation.

However, this support of the Board's actions was not universally shared. An editorial in the *Calgary Herald* of June 13, 1955, argues that parents should have the right to choose children's reading materials and that, further, the Board was acting in secretive and restrictive ways, "which seems to afflict all officialdom in this province" ("Lulling Parents"). A second op-ed piece entitled "The Report" appears in the same issue, criticizing the millions of dollars made in Alberta oil profits while the province's school debts increase and its "out of date" temperance liquor laws persist. It concludes that although the Social Credit Party claims to be "sound" and "good" for business, it seems anything but. While Alberta in the 1950s had a film censor, a liquor control board ("mixed" drinking between men and women was not commonplace until the late 1960s), a significant eugenics and institutionalization program, and a long-standing conservative leadership under the Social Credit Party (1935-1971), it also had strong beliefs around government interventions and individual rights (Wood).[7] Aritha van Herk describes Alberta's paradoxical politics as simultaneously pluralist, grassroots, populist, and "mean and ornery" (349). This push and pull is both reflective of local Alberta politics and larger censorship discussions—how do ideas of harm and intellectual freedom intersect, and who gets to choose and how?

The Choice Is Yours (1962)

By 1962 few objectionable comic books—or comics at all—populated Alberta newsstands. However, the ABOP's follow-up pamphlet entitled *The Choice Is Yours* continued to declare the urgent need for "constant vigilance of the public" around undesirable materials—including comics—and for parents to carefully monitor their child's reading:

> Do you set an example to your children for reading good books, using public library facilities, and purchasing and making available in the home interesting and well written books for your children? Do you assist your children in selecting reading material? Do you advise them and give guidance to them in their selection of library books? Do you place reasonable and enforceable restrictions on your child's reading of comic books and magazines? Do you know what your child reads in his or her spare time, both inside the home and away from home? If every parent could answer "yes" to the above questions there would be no

> necessity for the creation or continuance of the Advisory Board on Objectionable Publications. What it all comes down to is—the choice is yours.

Though entitled *The Choice is Yours*, the Board's second pamphlet continues to reiterate the need for a committee such as the ABOP to exist and to choose proper children's literature for and on behalf of its community members. However, though the ABOP's belief in its mission remained largely unchanged, the public tenor towards the Board was turning, foreshadowing the de facto end of its operations in 1973 and its official demise in 1976. Though originally convened to address the problem of youth comic book reading, by the 1960s and 1970s the Board's focus had migrated to adult periodicals with a singular focus on obscenity. This expanded newsstand censorship of adult materials—and the Board's lack of transparency in their process—would be its undoing.

One of the strongest public criticisms in this period was the Board's opaque process for identifying and removing titles from Alberta newsstands. Though the ABOP often looked to best practices developed by the NODL and the Cincinnati Committee, they did not follow a similar strategy in regard to objectionable materials lists. Whereas the NODL publicly promoted their list of objectionable titles, and the Cincinnati Committee published their work in popular platforms like *Parents' Magazine* (Nyberg 23), the ABOP did not release or publicize their objectionable list—even to allies in other provinces. When asked to share the ABOP list of restricted titles with a colleague in Victoria, BC, who was hoping to start a similar committee, the Board said no. They did, however, agree to share with their BC colleague "the subjects we watch for—namely, perversion, sadism, and undue exploitation of sex" (Board meeting minutes, 1965).

Among the Board's files, few complete lists of objectionable titles exist. One list of 141 titles survives from May 1962 (two months before *Playboy* was deemed objectionable). While some comics appear (including *Amazing Detective* and the romance comics *My Love Secret* and *My Story*), what is notable is the large number of adult periodicals. This includes a number of men's magazines such as *Ace: The Magazine for Men of Distinction*, *Male Life*, *Man's Best*, and *Men's Digest*; true crime and adventure stories for adult readers such as *Challenge for Men*, *Battlefield*, and *Manhunt: Detective Story Monthly*; and salacious celebrity tabloids *Hush-Hush* and *Top Secret*. Surprising too is what is not on the list. Although a concerned parent reported it to regional ABOP member M. Parker as objectionable for youth audiences, the Board concluded that though "somewhat shallow in content," *Mad* magazine was not objectionable (Parker). In correspondence on the matter in December 1960, Board secretary Louise Lalonde notes that the criterion they were looking for in objectionable materials involved obscenity and brutality. Missing from this assessment are earlier concerns from *What's Wrong with Comic Books?* that

centred on youth reading and other objections including contempt and ridicule of lawful authority.

Such broad powers of censorship—with shifting objectives and standards—had been a concern since the proposed addition of "crime comics" to the obscenity clause in the late 1940s. Though supportive of limiting the availability of crime comics, BC Attorney General Gordon S. Wismer worried that expanded Criminal Code parameters of "obscene" materials in Canada could create the "possibility of a censorship board"—a prospect that he deemed would set "a very dangerous precedent" ("Censorship"). Nonetheless, the ABOP continued to maintain that their powers were advisory only, a stance that increasingly brought frustration from vendors and distributors. In a 1967 *Calgary Herald* editorial entitled "Nobody Will Claim Censor's Role: But Books Get Banned," the writer Bill Musselwhite observes how there was no public appeal process to challenge ABOP decisions. In the editorial, Musselwhite also paraphrases ABOP representative J. D. Palmer as effectively saying that "persons would have no reasons to appeal to the provincial board" because it was the distributors who were withdrawing the materials; the Board was merely advising.

How voluntary was this removal by distributors and retailers? Throughout its history, the Board maintained strong working partnerships with law enforcement and the Attorney General's office. In a 1956 letter to D. J. MacEachern, a colleague in Nova Scotia who hoped to start a similar committee, ABOP chairperson Anna Maure baldly states, "The attorney-general in Alberta will prosecute distributors on the recommendation of the Advisory Board." In the ABOP board meeting minutes of November 24, 1958, the Deputy Attorney General of Alberta reiterates support for the organization's actions and the Attorney General's commitment to prosecuting non-compliant distributors. While few prosecutions for "crime comics" ever occurred in Canada (McGinnis, "Police"), the ABOP leveraged the threat of prosecution and capitalized on the widespread fears of crime comics to strong coercive effect during the majority of their tenure. Board chairperson Aleta Vikse was particularly thorough with correspondence to law enforcement, sending alerts to police departments each time a new title was added to the objectionable list. More than fifty of these memos can be found in the Board's archive files. Often, Vikse postmarked these memos on letterhead from her day job as Associate Director of the Edmonton Public Library.

For the years 1971-1973, there is little correspondence and few actions of note in the ABOP files except for discussions at a provincial level about the Board's future and the need for such a group at this time. These discussions coincided with other social and legal changes enacted by the newly elected Progressive Conservative government and Premier Peter Lougheed to modernize Alberta. These changes included repealing the Alberta Eugenics Board and Sexual Sterilization Act (1928-1972), updating Alberta's "archaic" liquor laws, and reinvesting oil and gas profits into provincial arts, culture, and educational programs—the latter a long overdue promise made by the Social

Credit Party (Wood 91-92).[8] After debating the ABOP's future for several years, the province moved to officially disband the organization on November 2, 1976, by Order-in-Council (O.C.) 1194/76 ("Provincial Archives").

Conclusion

Though widely reported on throughout the 1950s and 1960s in Alberta newspapers like the *Calgary Herald*, the *Edmonton Journal*, and the *Herald Tribune*, no historical or retrospective biographies, library or local histories, or educational documents consulted for this study reflect the Board's existence from 1954 to 1976. Moreover, the ABOP was not alone. Based on correspondence in the Board's files, similar organizations operated in the 1940s to 1960s in British Columbia, Nova Scotia, Ontario, Manitoba, Quebec, and New Brunswick. Though further research is needed to determine the scope and membership of these groups, the presence of the ABOP and the possibility of other such citizen action committees complicates the narratives of anti-comics movements in North America. Save for the work by a few scholars like Marie Louise Adams, Bart Beaty, John Bell, and Mona Gleason, the Canadian anti-comics campaign remains under studied, and the work that has been done focuses primarily on individual figures, such as E. Davie Fulton (McGinnis, "Bogeymen") or Eleanor Gray (Glegg). Additionally, there is minimal discussion or mention of the Home and School Federation campaign or government-aided support of this endeavour by politicians like Fulton, who was later appointed Minister of Justice under Diefenbaker.

Moreover, this paper opens up an investigation of how "good reading" initiatives operated as censoring mechanisms in postwar Canada. These findings critique ideas of libraries and librarians as historically and politically "neutral"—a critique that is also a focal point in current library and information science research. Studies such as Schlesselman-Tarango (2016), Ettarh (2018), and Steele (2018) bring a *critical librarianship* lens to library-archival power structures, examining how and what materials are collected and how this gatekeeping functions as soft censorship. These studies also interrogate the vocational norms of a historically white, heteronormative, and often socially conservative profession, with Ettarh's concept of *vocational awe* further querying assumptions "that libraries as institutions are inherently good and sacred, and therefore beyond critique." Additional study is needed on the pedagogical impact of prominent educators and librarians working with faculties of education and librarianship on such censorship endeavours. How has this impacted vocational ideas of "good reading" and intellectual freedom?

Presently, libraries and schools are not only weathering a twenty-year high in book bans and challenges but also enduring legacies of soft censorship and gatekeeping. In 2018, the Edmonton Public School Board's "Books to Weed Out" list included the graphic novel *7 Generations* (2012) by award-winning Cree author David A. Robertson (Derworiz). The School Board

maintained that they were not removing these titles from classrooms; they were only advising that "the series was not recommended for use in Edmonton public schools because it contains 'sensitive subject matter and visual inferencing of abuse regarding residential schools'" (Derworiz). In May 2022, another title from Robertson, *The Great Bear* (2021), was pulled from shelves in the Durham District School Board due to content that does "not align with the recently updated DDSB Indigenous Education policy and procedure" (DDSB qtd. by Follert). The DDSB did not provide further information, and later said that it had removed the book due to concerns from Indigenous community members—but it also declined to provide further details (Follert). Each of these instances—with its use of the phrase "not recommended" and its opaque processes for removal—echoes the ABOP's "advisory" actions that were actually censorship and gatekeeping.

The comic book moral panic peaked in 1954, according to popular memory and research on the period. For many, this panic was rooted in nationalism and a fear of American comic books.[9] Yet the reaction to this panic was undeniably Canadian, and it lasted for longer than previously documented, with impacts on Canadian legal and social history. Re-examining the comics moral panic through a Canadian lens illuminates how the reaction can linger long after the threat has passed. In 2018, Section 163 of the Canadian Criminal Code was finally updated; removed were the words "crime comic." No longer in Canada would the sale or distribution of an "obscene or crime comic" be a criminal offence ("Justice Laws"). However, from 1948 to 2018, it was.[10]

Notes

1. A reprinted copy of *What's Wrong with Comics Books?* is available for purchase from the Provincial Archives of Alberta website at atms.alberta.ca/paa/store/Selection.aspx?item=871. A digital copy is also available to view or download via the website *Internet Archive* at archive.org/details/P010878.
2. See, for example, Jean-Paul Gabilliet, *Of Comics*, Amy Kiste Nyberg, *Seal of Approval*, and Bradford W. Wright, *Comic Book Nation*.
3. *Citizen action* and *civic action* are phrases used by the Committee on Evaluation of Comic Books (Cincinnati) and the Citizens' Committee for Better Juvenile Literature (Chicago). I use these phrases to refer to groups of private, non-comics-industry-affiliated citizens who—in their commitment to upholding what they perceive as "community standards"—work in a volunteer capacity towards an "objective" evaluation of comic book materials. This definition builds on the Cincinnati Committee's description of their work in the US Congressional report *Comic Books and Juvenile Delinquency*.
4. *Gender Queer* was the most challenged book of 2021 ("Top 10"); however, as the ALA cautions, "82-97% of book challenges—documented requests to remove materials from schools or libraries—remain unreported and receive no media" ("Top 10"). Notably, the high-profile removals of *Maus* and *New Kid* do not appear on the ALA top-10 list, but they were extensively covered by news networks, including CNN (Boyette) and NBC News (Li). For additional information, see also the Comic Book

Legal Defense Fund webpage "Banned Comics," the PEN America webpage "Banned in the USA," and the National Coalition against Censorship "Youth Censorship Database." At present Canada does not have equivalent organizations that track book bans. The closest is the Canada Border Services Agency's *Quarterly List of Admissible and Prohibited Titles*, which does not track or account for titles that have been internally banned in Canada. See also the Freedom to Read webpage, "Censorship at the Canadian border, 1985-2021."

5. In the early 1950s, "crime comics" and "obscene materials" fell under Section 150 of the Criminal Code. By the 2010s, as additional sections were added, these materials fell under section 163. For more on the legal history of crime comics, see Fodden, "Crime Comics," McGinnis, "Bogeymen," and the Government of Canada "Justice Laws Website," which archives historical changes to section 163.
6. For Wertham's full testimony, see United States, *Juvenile Delinquency*, pp. 79-97.
7. For a history of eugenics and institutionalization in Alberta, see Claudia Malacrida, *A Special Hell*.
8. See also Fil Fraser, *Alberta's Camelot*.
9. For discussions of the relation of nationalism to Canadian comic book legislation, see Bart Beaty, "High Treason," and Mona Gleason, "They Have a Bad Effect."
10. What follows is an ABOP list of objectionable titles from May 1962: *Ace*, *Adventure All Man*, *Amazing Detective*, *Art Advertiser and Studio News*, *Bar Room Tales*, *Battle Cry*, *Battlefield*, *Best Photography*, *Best True Detective*, *Big Adventure*, *Blast*, *Bold*, *Caper*, *Carnival*, *Cavalcade*, *Celebrity*, *Challenge for Men*, *Champion for Men*, *Chicks & Chuckles*, *Complete Police Cases*, *Confidential Confessions*, *Contour*, *Crime Confessions*, *Danger*, *Dare*, *Demi-Gods*, *Detective Cases*, *Escapade Annual*, *Escape to Adventure*, *Epic*, *Expose*, *Expose Detective*, *Feminine Form*, *Flash*, *Follies*, *Frolic*, *Fury*, *Gala*, *Giant Manhunt*, *Glance*, *Guilty*, *Guy*, *Headquarters Detective*, *Helios*, *Helios Fotoprint*, *High*, *Hi Life*, *Hit*, *Hit Show*, *Hush*, *Hush Hush*, *Illustrated Detective*, *Inside Story*, *Intimate Story*, *Jem*, *Joy*, *Justice Weekly*, *Keyholes*, *Light and Shade*, *Lovelies*, *Low Down*, *Male Life*, *Male Point*, *Manhunt*, *Man to Man*, *Man's Action*, *Man's Adventure*, *Man's Best*, *Man's Conquest*, *Man's Daring Action*, *Man's Day*, *Man's Life*, *Man's Look*, *Man's Smashing Stories*, *Man's Story*, *Man's Time*, *Men's Digest*, *Men's Pictorial*, *Men Today*, *Midnight*, *Modern Sunbathing*, *Monsieur*, *Mr.*, *My Love Secret*, *My Story*, *Offbeat*, *Official Police*, *Official Police Cases*, *Ogle*, *On the Q.T.*, *Peril*, *Personal Romances*, *Photo Crime*, *Picture Scope*, *Picture Spotlight*, *Picture Week*, *Police Detective*, *Police Dragnet*, *Pose*, *Pulse*, *Quick*, *Rage*, *Real Adventure*, *Real Crime Detective*, [typewritten name obscured in archival record], *Scamp*, *Scan*, *Scene for Men*, *Secrets*, *Sensational Exposés*, *Show*, *Showdown*, *She*, *Sir*, *South Seas Stories*, *Special Detective*, *Spur*, *Suppressed*, *Sunshine and Health*, *Swank*, *Tab*, *Tempo*, *Top Secret*, *Trapped*, *True Action*, *True Adventure*, *True Affairs*, *True Crime*, *True Men's Stories*, *True Mystery*, *21*, *TV Girls and Gags*, *Uncensored*, *Uncensored Confessions*, *Untamed*, *The Vagabond*, *Valor*, *Vice Squad*, *Vue*, *The Young Physique*.

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Amy Mazowita

Towards a Network of Graphic Care: The Comics, Comments, and Communities of *Instagram*

Comics and graphic narratives are generally not categorized as mental health resources. Nor are they widely recognized as such. However, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, and its associated strain on public health systems, has caused significant lapses in the availability of "nonemergent" health care (World Health). This includes decreases to the already limited availability of psychiatric and psychological intervention: medicalized services that are often inaccessible to begin with, pandemic notwithstanding. Amid the ongoing pandemic, many individuals have chosen to seek support and care from alternative sources, one such place being the hub of information, advice, and entertainment that is social media. This essay does not claim to stand in for professional medical, psychiatric, or psychological literature, nor does it intend to argue that comics, those posted to social media or otherwise, can replace professional or medicalized support. Rather, it explores the ways in which individuals are using *Instagram*-based comics to form grassroots communities based in self- and collective care. While the comics I point to in this discussion are created and shared online by Canadian cartoonists, the reach of social media-based comics—and the conversations they incite—have the potential to traverse geographical boundaries and unite individuals with common experiences on a global scale.

Although channelling experiences of mental illness through nonfiction comics or other media can be therapeutic in and of itself, it is perhaps even more comforting to find a sense of solidarity among individuals who choose to engage with and perpetuate that content. To illuminate how *Instagram*-based comics are providing cartoonists and their followers with platforms for engaged mental health support, I look to Montréal illustrator and comics maker Sandra Dumais, who shares her experiences of anxiety with audiences via her *Instagram* account @sandradumaisbooks (previously @moonandsparrowsandra). Although Dumais' mental health webcomics are part of a large group of similarly focused *Instagram* content, the artist's social media presence—and the engagement it garners from followers—is particularly evocative of the type of networked community I am interested in: an informal popular culture space turned virtual support system. In the pages that follow, I discuss two of Dumais' single panel *Instagram* comics, as well as the comments that are generated in response to them. However, while not thoroughly discussed in this essay, it is also worth noting that Dumais' webcomics—particularly those responding to and representing the artist's pandemic-related anxieties (fig. 1)—have also influenced and been replicated

by other artists.[1] In this way, Dumais' *Instagram*-based artwork serves as an example of the ways in which graphic representation is able to forge connections between audiences and artists alike.

Figure 1. Sandra Dumais [@sandradumaisbooks], "Covid Night Terrors," *Instagram*, 22 May 2020, www.instagram.com/p/CAg3HPjnZFO/.
Reproduced with permission from Sandra Dumais.

In the case of Dumais' work, making her experiences visible allows the artist to connect with social media users who share her experience, and therefore allows her to use the representation of her anxiety as a means for virtual community building. With this in mind, I liken the development of the resulting comment thread conversations to danah boyd's definition of *networked publics,*[2] which for my purposes, is best defined as the communities which form in response to the mental health comics of *Instagram.* Of course, boyd's definition encompasses the many variations of social media-based relationships and is not specifically tied to mental health comics. However, I believe that this concept is certainly applicable to the patterns of engagement developing around social media-based comics such as those created by Dumais. As such, by considering the convergence of comics, mental health, and social media as the centre point of a "networked public" (boyd), we can begin to identify the formation of what I have previously referred to as

networks of graphic care (Mazowita, "Graphic Communities"), i.e., the communities of support that develop in response to the mental illness comics of *Instagram*.

For the purposes of this discussion, my interest in social media is informed by its ability to host networks that allow users to engage with images of mental illness. It is also informed by the proliferation of mental illness-related comics on social media platforms, which I believe induce a specific response from platform users, as well as a unique opportunity for engaging with stories of lived experience. This discussion is therefore situated at the intersection of mental health, comics, and social media, and explores a relatively under-studied area of interdisciplinary research. For this reason, I will first outline how mental health has been represented in comics, as well as the ways in which virtual networks are operating as hubs for community-based mental health care. As such, I begin this essay by tracing the proliferation of mental health representation in comics and graphic narratives and follow with a discussion of social media affordances.

Canadian Mental Health Comics Across Platforms

Auto/biographical comics provide many unique opportunities for representing and engaging with narratives of mental health and illness. The form of comics is at once an accessible and comprehensive format for storytelling: comics incorporate visual imagery and verbal dialogue, can be read and understood by readers from most demographics, and have the ability to depict both simple and complex stories. For comics studies and graphic medicine[3] scholars, the multimodal format of comics provides new openings for representing lived experiences of illness and disability (Czerwiec et al.). Namely, comics provide opportunities for telling stories about lived experience in ways that exceed the possibilities of prose text or verbal language alone (DeTora 38-39; Squier qtd. in Mannon). While representing mental illness in social media-based webcomics is a relatively new phenomenon, the comics that appear on social networking platforms are indicative of a much longer historical trajectory. That is, the practice of representing mental health in and by graphic memoir. As I have mentioned elsewhere (see Mazowita, "Graphic Communities"), the practice of depicting mental health experiences—whether personal or that of a loved one—can be recognized in the work of many prominent Canadian cartoonists,[4] such as Chester Brown, whose comic strip "My Mom Was a Schizophrenic" (1998) outlines the experience of living with a mentally ill parent; Clem and Olivier Martini, whose collaborative text *Bitter Medicine: A Graphic Memoir of Mental Illness* (2010) merges the experiences of two brothers: one who lives with schizophrenia and one who often takes up the role of mental health caregiver; and Teresa Wong's *Dear Scarlet* (2019), an autobiographical narrative that reveals the difficulties of living through postpartum depression. Because comics are less restricted by the confines of their form, comics artists are

capable of consistently reimagining and reinventing new ways of representing lived experience. There is no predetermined layout in which panel sequences must be organized, no "rules" by which characters must communicate with each other, and infinite space to experiment with and create new ways of representing stories. As such, not only do comics provide a comprehensive platform for sharing stories of mental illness and disability, but they also allow artists and writers the flexibility to be formally innovative so that they may represent themselves in ways that account for the particularities of their experiences.

The affordances of drawing what cannot usually be seen or immediately understood—i.e., a character's thoughts and feelings—is not only pertinent to graphic narratives that represent individualized lived experience, but also crucial to the representation of mental illness and disability. Not only do graphic medicine narratives provide mainstream readers with a visual portrayal of illness and disability so that they may understand the author/artist's experience; comics that depict medical, psychiatric, and psychological events can also serve as a means of therapeutic self-care for those who read *and* create them (Leavitt qtd. in Czerwiec et al.). As cartoonist and creative writing instructor Sarah Leavitt suggests,

> Graphic medicine [can comfort and sustain us] in hard times: both reading others' work and creating [our] own. The comics we call graphic medicine can actually act as medicine themselves—the kind of medicine that makes you feel better with no side effects. Like a sedative that lets you feel. Or homemade soup. Or a blanket. (qtd. in Czerwiec et al. 168)

Put differently, the creating, sharing, and consuming of graphic medicine narratives all contribute towards furthering mainstream acceptance and understanding of mental illness and disability experiences while also contributing to the self-care of the individual who is drawing *their* experience. Therefore, while my discussion is centred around the representation of mental illness in graphic narratives, specifically those created and shared by Dumais, my focus in this essay is not necessarily the comics in and of themselves. Rather, I am interested in *how* comics readers and/or viewers of social media-based comics are *using* these texts as resources for self- and collective care. Therefore, the following discussion is grounded in the specific affordances of the virtual comics platform, as opposed to being centred around a visual or discourse analysis of the web-based texts I point to.[5]

Mental Health Online: The Affordances of Social Media

In many ways, social media is not conducive to mental health. Internet trolls,[6] cyber bullies, and the pressure to emulate and keep up with curated content are common barriers to positive social media experiences and are often responsible for inciting platform-related anxiety (Hendry). However, although there are instances in which the content posted to social media is

detrimental to the mental health of users, there are also opportunities for social media platforms to be used as resources for individual and collective mental health care.

One such way is the possibility of finding communities of individuals who share similar experiences and who, through the sharing of visual images, provide other social media users with an "affective sense of belonging" (Hendry 8). This belonging is not dependent on professional medical diagnosis or determined by a strict list of predetermined symptoms, but is largely based upon various levels of self-identification and cultural context. That said, it must be noted that socio-economic factors like class, race, and gender produce and affect mental health experiences that are different from those of the white and privileged middle class (Thelandersson 12). While some individuals have access to prescription medication and cognitive therapy, those from marginalized communities are disproportionately less likely to have access to similar resources (Thelandersson). Furthermore, separate from the differences between privilege and marginalization are the infinite ways in which mental illness is experienced and treated. While some reject the medicalization of mental illness and disability, others are liberated and empowered by receiving a professional diagnosis. It must be acknowledged, then, that mental health and disability are fluid and variously defined. What works for some may not work for others, and how some feel about their illness or disability may be diametrically opposite to how others approach this facet of their identity. This point is crucial in understanding the ways in which social media functions as a site of self- and collective care, and in recognizing the void that virtual interaction may fill for those who experience mental health non-normativities.

In addition to the ability to self-identify and/or seek out and create communities based in mutual experience is the option for users to increase or limit interaction and visibility. Preferential content is filtered according to previous engagement (Rettberg 35), and social media users may keep their "real" identities hidden if they so choose (Samuels 238). In fact, individuals who feel disconnected—or who intentionally keep themselves distanced—from in-person mental health communities are often drawn to the optional anonymity of virtual networks, and are therefore more inclined to share experiences with peers from online spaces (Samuels). With this in mind, social platforms afford users the option to seek out specific topics concerning mental health, which further allows them to tailor their social media experience to their own specific needs. Doing so presents a "'narrow, captured view' . . . that directs researchers towards an algorithmic 'coded gaze'" (Hendry 1) which may:

> analyze mental health-related content collected by a shared hashtag on Instagram or track mentions of psychiatric terminology on Twitter. This gaze potentially misinterprets dynamic and diverse digital practices as well as changing platform cultures. Equally, it directs

> researchers and practitioners toward particular . . . practices that engage with mental health or illness (such as self-injury or suicidal content) at the expense of more quotidian media practices and what might influence these. (Hendry 1)

As such, although looking to social platforms for mental health support may sometimes result in negative experiences for users, social media can also be regarded as a resource for engaging with mental illness-focused content and as a platform for engaging with those who share similar mental health experiences.

There are many ways of representing mental illness experiences on social media, not all of which are immediately visible to each and every person who may view them (Hendry 2). I make this distinction to acknowledge the potential difficulties that surround using social platforms in this way. Although the presence of mental illness stories is becoming increasingly commonplace, sharing stories about mental illness online is also extremely personal. While the availability of virtual support is essential to some, the potential for toxicity must not be overlooked. In "Young Women's Mental Illness and (In-)visible Social Media Practices of Control and Emotional Recognition," Natalie Ann Hendry argues that "being visible to others on social media potentially produces anxiety and burdens [users] to respond to others' questions or unhelpful support" (1-2). Hendry suggests that user anxiety often stems from the sharing of personal details and posits that this anxiety can be both immediate and long-lasting (1-2). She goes on to argue that "[sharing stories of mental illness online] is as much about the *potential* for being seen . . . as it is about [the] actual or lived experiences of being seen" (Hendry 1-2). In other words, although sharing mental illness experiences can be cathartic, the very act of doing so has the potential to trigger additional periods of anxiety or other mental illness symptoms. That being said, in our increasingly digitized world, and in light of the ongoing pandemic, I nonetheless believe that the beneficial and arguably therapeutic outcomes of engaging with social media-based content outweigh the threat of negative experience. Social media, then, must be understood as having both barriers and affordances to mental health: although virtual platforms can, at times, be detrimental to users' mental well-being, they also have the ability to render mental illness experiences "visible" while allowing users to engage with a network based in mutual experience.

Bringing attention to the varying affordances of and barriers to becoming visible on social media is crucial to the understanding of social media's allowances for user agency. Not only do account holders and platform users have the choice to keep their identities and/or mental health experiences hidden from other individuals in their social networks, they also retain the agency to choose when they will engage with other community members, as well as the ability to preserve content on their account's main feed or to delete it when and if they should so choose (Hendry 5). Finally, the visibility afforded

by social media ensures that users hold the power to their own identification. Social platforms allow users to keep their disability or mental illness status proprietary, while also providing users with the option to keep physical or otherwise identifying features hidden from the networks they frequent (Hendry 5).

In her work as a social media and digital culture scholar, Hendry suggests that mental illness-related content is often represented via

> ambiguous, supportive, or humorous practices, or, through *imagined intimacy*[7] . . . with images that *feel* relatable to [users with mental illness] even if the images do not depict recognizable mental illness content or employ recognizable hashtags or titles. These insights complicate "what counts" as mental illness–related content or practices on social media and challenge researchers and practitioners to consider the sociotechnical contexts that shape young people's mental health. (1)

Although social media platforms may not count as "legitimate" (i.e., medically recommended or supported) mental health resources, I argue that mainstream medicalized legitimacy is not indicative of their value to mentally ill or disabled publics nor is it important when analyzing the ways in which platforms are being employed as mental health networks. What *is* important is how individuals are engaging with what they consider to be mental illness-related images. In this regard, Hendry's argument can also be linked to media studies scholar Fredrika Thelandersson's discussion of how social media users, specifically those who use *Tumblr*, leverage platform affordances to create networks of care based in mutual experience (2). The ability to see and engage with familiar content incites a "shared notion of mental health that is different than the one provided in traditional psychiatric discourse and mainstream cultural narratives" (Thelandderson 11). As such, social media platforms have the ability to act as informal mental health support groups by allowing users to connect with those who have lived with mental illness and who thus understand what the other person is going through. In other words, social media users "legitimize each other's experiences" (Thelandersson 2) by making their mental illness stories public and by engaging with the content of their virtual peers. As noted above, the posted content does not always mimic that which the general public might view as mental health content, and certainly does not fulfill the expectations of medicalized treatment. Rather, it takes on a myriad of forms and tones depending on the needs and preferences of the individual user and offers a new way of engaging in community-based mental health care.

Thelandersson's discussion of how *Tumblr* allows users to write and share stories of their mental illness experiences—as well as the ways in which these experiences affect their bodies, minds, and identities—is similarly applicable to the study of *Instagram*'s mental health content and communities. As *Tumblr* allows users to share a variety of media formats, one of which is webcomics, I use Thelandersson's ideas as a template for thinking through how social media

users are approaching and engaging with the mental illness comics of *Instagram*. Much like the content shared on *Tumblr*, *Instagram* comics offer users a platform for legitimizing each other's experiences of mental illness (Thelandersson). While it is true that some comics, like other media, are guilty of romanticizing the experiences of living with depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, and other mental illnesses, I argue that they can also represent mental illness experiences in ways that challenge both stigma and fetishization. This is due, in part, to the memetic[8] circulation and redistribution of content related to mental illness across social media (Thelandersson 2). These exchanges or "re-shares" create a "collective discourse" of mental illness experience in which "traces and fragments become linked together to assume a collective authorial voice" (Blackman qtd. in Thelandersson 2). There is, however, an important justification to be made here: while comics depicting mental illness may also appear to represent "a collective authorial voice" (Thelandersson), the voices using comics as a medium of mental health care position themselves as both collective and individual. The verbal/visual format allows creators to normalize their shared experiences of mental illness while employing their unique artistic styles as a means of demonstrating their personal realities. In other words, graphic narratives make mental illness *doubly visible* by suggesting that mental health conditions are both commonplace *and* non-homogenous. By sharing mental illness comics via social media platforms like *Instagram*, artists are able to control the visibility of their identity, not only by deciding when and how to draw their experiences, but by being able to choose what and how much is shared with their followers via grid posts, stories, and comment thread exchanges. The virtual comics of *Instagram* create an opportunity for what I would like to call *layered in/visibilities*—that is, identities, or part thereof, that can be peeled away or replaced at the artist's discretion. Furthermore, what is most interesting about the comics of social media is their adaptability of anonymity. Artists, writers, and creators are able to portray themselves however they choose, leaving out certain details of their experience while highlighting others. Characters can take on pseudonymous personalities or act as replicative avatars for the author or artist. Thus, the intersection of comics, mental health, and social media provides a unique and comprehensive space for representing mental illness and disability experiences, as well as a space in which audiences may adapt their engagement with mental illness-related content to suit their own specific needs.

Comics on Social Media

Regardless of their chosen level of visibility on social media platforms, artists and users who become part of virtual mental health communities are often able to find support and camaraderie among the content they engage with. The implementation of self-reflexive, and at times self-deprecating, humour, for instance, is one method of coping which proliferates on social

media (Hendry 7). This representational tactic is evident in both COVID and non-COVID-related webcomics, and can be used to put a lighthearted or sarcastic spin on the everyday traumas of living with a mental health condition. The often unavoidable experience of feeling "too much" (i.e., the increased sense of panic that comes with anxiety, the amplified feelings of sadness and emptiness that come with depression, the physical responses that accompany many mental health conditions) can be regulated by a well-intentioned joke, and humorous content has the ability to make stigmatized experiences more accessible and palatable to broader audiences. Instead of being vilified for their controversial non-normativity, mental illness experiences are recognized by many as having immense comedic value (Hendry). This recognition is not limited to those directly associated with the networks that create and initially share this material but is also legible to users who have not experienced a mental health condition. More importantly, the content works to unite platform users by making light of what is often considered a non-normative experience.

For example, Dumais, whose pandemic-inspired comics include images of anxiety personified, adopts a position of sarcastic joviality when drawing her anxiety as a "giant beast of dread" ("Just taking a nice relaxing break"). In a one-panel comic posted to Dumais' *Instagram* account in February 2021, the artist's likeness is pictured alongside a large, hairy figure with blacked-out eyes (fig. 2). The beast looms behind Dumais as she carriers her groceries. Her eyes are shifted to the left as she watches the beast over her shoulder, and she wears what appears to be a blue surgical mask. A borderless caption reads, "Just a fun trip to IGA . . . ," and a pink thought balloon outlines Dumais' panicked inner monologue. The accompanying text describes the event from Dumais' perspective:

> Here's me a couple of weeks ago doing groceries at IGA. I had been having a hard week, and was going to bring some stuff to my dear friend who shattered her ankle into smithereens while barrelling down a toboggan hill with her kid (shout out to all RAD MOMS out there).
>
> But there was my beast of dread in the checkout line, yammering in my ear all the worries of the world. I had a meltdown upon leaving the store and instead of delivering the treats I sat on a bench in the sun with my melty groceries and Public Cried. ("Just a fun trip to IGA . . . ")

Using lighthearted humour to represent the feeling of decreased mental wellness—especially in situations of widespread trauma, i.e., the current circumstances of the pandemic—increases social connection by "creat[ing] solidarity . . . that is premised on the assumption of a shared recognition of layered meanings" (Hendry 7). This solidarity is amplified by the feeling of being "emotionally recognized" by fellow community members, as well as by the recognition that others have gone through and/or witnessed similar mental illness experiences (Hendry). In the case of "Just a fun trip to

IGA . . . ," this emotional recognition stems from the collective—and perhaps global—fear of entering public spaces during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic. While all those who empathize with the image of Dumais' personified anxiety may not know the cartoonist personally, the ability to view experiences similar to one's own—and to engage with them on a social platform—allows physically distanced individuals to make virtual connections with people from various locations. The comfort of these social network-based connections comes from the act of "being *together* alone" (Hendry 8). In other words, the camaraderie afforded by virtual mental health networks, including those which prioritize graphic narrative-based content, provides "a sense of comforting [online] togetherness" (Kanai qtd. in Hendry 8) between individuals with shared, or perceivably similar, experiences. As Hendry contends, humorous mental health content "offers a type of support that allows participants to feel in control [of] their feelings and the affective experience of [their] mental illness" (Hendry 8). Put differently, Dumais' *Instagram* comics, and those which take up similar subject matter, generate a platform for sharing experiences that is not tied to formal diagnosis or professional opinion, but to the very act of using mutual *feeling* as a catalyst for creative engagement.

Networks of Graphic Care: Collective Experience and Comment Thread Camaraderie

For those who use *Instagram* and similar digital platforms as mental health resources, the experience of absorbing social media content is elevated by the opportunity to engage with fellow users in the comments sections of each post and by the ability to follow, re-post, and share content created by others. These features allow users to interact with their virtual peers while creating digital communities based in mutual experience (Thelandersson). For those who live with mental illness, in-person interactions with community members are not always accessible. The opportunity to use a social network site for do-it-yourself care, so to speak, while certainly not interchangeable with professional intervention, is at times necessary for individuals who experience the affects and effects of mental illness—especially when care has become less accessible amidst the ongoing global health crisis. Furthermore, due to the physical distancing guidelines of COVID-19 public health measures, mental illness visibility is not only increasing in public, in-person spaces, but has become a common topic of discussion on—and basis for community building within—the shared spaces of virtual platforms. Subsequently, it has become a common theme of social media-based comics, and a pertinent topic of conversation among those who engage with virtual graphic narratives.

This increase in awareness, conversation, and shared experience—while born from the mental health struggles of many individuals—not only incites the need for additional resources but encourages mainstream societies to challenge their understanding of what it means to be mentally ill. The pandemic has not

only brought attention to the "public feeling"[9] of mental illness—i.e., the idea that depression and other non-normative mental health conditions are identified by the ways they are perceived in and by normative societies (Cvetkovich)—but has undoubtedly resulted in a widespread increase of collective panic. As disability studies scholar Jackie Orr explains in *The Panic Diaries: A Genealogy of Panic Disorder* (2006), anxiety and panic are forces of "emotional contagion" that emulate "the very nature of the 'social'" (6). Furthermore, feelings of panic are intertwined with notions of knowledge and power, and mainstream ideologies of mental illness, specifically as they relate to panic disorders, are "situated in shifting historical networks of power" (Orr 10). Coupled with the widespread availability of social media, the panic of contracting COVID-19 can be both perpetuated and calmed by one's participation in virtual networks—especially those that provide platform users with content that mimics or responds to their personal experiences. In other words, while the panic and anxiety of social media users is likely to ripple through their associated networks (Rettberg 24), these networks are also capable of offering community-based care on an as needed and always available basis.

Figure 2. Sandra Dumais [@sandradumaisbooks]. "Just a fun trip to IGA . . . ," *Instagram,* 16 Feb. 2021, www.instagram.com/p/CLXAxwIni0S/.
Reproduced with permission from Sandra Dumais.

I return now to Dumais' COVID-19-inspired *Instagram* comics. While the content itself is representative of collective feeling during (and outside of) the pandemic, the most interesting part of Dumais' posts—to me, at least—is how users are *responding to them*. By this I mean the ways in which Dumais' followers are engaging with the content itself and the conversation threads that develop in the comment section of each post. In another post featuring Dumais' "giant beast of dread," the artist draws herself sitting next to the brown, hairy figure that represents her anxiety (fig. 3). Dumais' likeness is pictured reading as she and the beast both reach into the same bowl of snacks. Their foreheads touch at the top of the image, indicating their unrelenting connection, and Dumais frowns slightly while looking down at her book. The accompanying caption explains that Dumais has been experiencing heightened anxiety and describes how the artist came to name and portray her symptoms as a "giant beast of dread."

Figure 3. Sandra Dumais [@sandradumaisbooks]. "Just taking a nice relaxing break reading + snacking with my giant beast of dread." *Instagram,* 15 Feb. 2021, www.instagram.com/p/CLUz5P2H0T2/. Reproduced with permission from Sandra Dumais.

Following the caption, in which Dumais addresses her followers directly with a casual "[h]i buddies," is the post's comment thread. In this section, Dumais' followers respond to the post with messages expressing support and similar experiences (figs. 4-6). These comments highlight the vulnerability of Dumais' comics and applaud her ability to unite platform users (fig. 4). They allow users to share their own experiences with pandemic-related anxiety (fig. 5). They give users the opportunity to make meaningful connections while contributing towards a community of virtual support (fig. 6). Finally, they provide a potential opening for a back-and-forth exchange between artist

and audience. For the sake of brevity, I have opted to include only one example of the comment threads that are generated in response to social media-based mental health comics. However, there are many accounts that host similar discussions, and many instances of users offering support while sharing their own experiences of mental illness. These conversations, which develop among followers who post and reply to each other, result in comment threads that imply a deep sense of communal understanding. Furthermore, they indicate the development of platform-based do-it-yourself mental health care: commenters not only understand and commiserate with the feelings depicted in Dumais' comics but use the affordances of *Instagram*, to create the above-mentioned *networks of graphic care* (Mazowita "Graphic Communities").

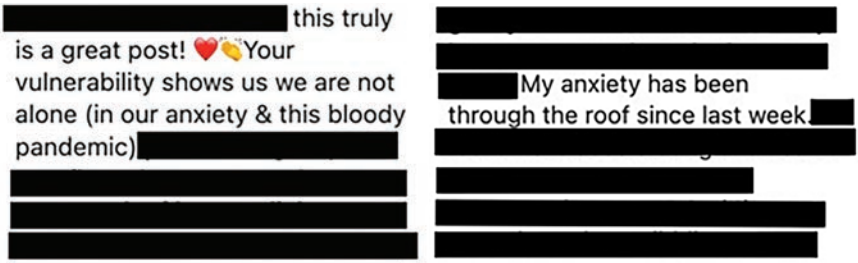

Figure 4 (*left*) **and 5** (*right*). Excerpts from the comment section of Dumais' above *Instagram* comic "Just taking a nice relaxing break." User handles, information that may unintentionally identify commenters, and unrelated content have been blacked out to ensure commenter anonymity. Reproduced with permission from Sandra Dumais.

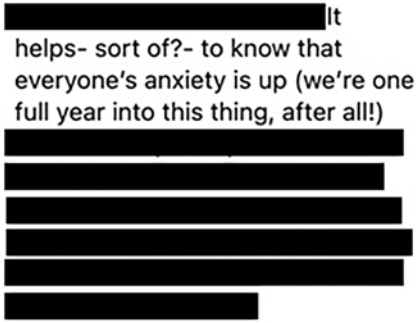

Figure 6. Excerpt from the comment section of "Just taking a nice relaxing break." User handles, information that may unintentionally identify commenters, and unrelated content have been blacked out to ensure commenter anonymity. Reproduced with permission from Sandra Dumais.

Networked Futures: Adaptive Content, Diverse Experience, Accessible Care

Although this discussion is primarily focused on Canadian *Instagram* comics, specifically those created and shared by Sandra Dumais, the fact that

these texts appear on social networks (rather than as print publications) suggests that the affordances they come with can traverse geographical borders. By doing so, the experiences shared by Dumais and others have the potential to connect individuals from various communities, cities, and countries. Because the reach of social media is so widespread, it must also be noted that the comics which appear there are available to a wide range of users from various socio-economic backgrounds. This means that a broad demographic of social media users—many of which may not have the privilege of face-to-face mental health care and/or cannot access in-person community support—are able to either recognize their experiences being reflected back to them, or read their experiences into the narratives that appear on their *Instagram* feed. As such, the grassroots communities surrounding *Instagram*-based mental health comics must be viewed as legitimate and necessary sites for social engagement and community organization—a point that I believe is exemplified by the positive responses to Dumais' virtual artwork. Although I end this discussion here, the work concerning the intersection of mental health, comics, and social media is just beginning. Likewise, the recognition of this intersection serves as a starting point for tracing the interconnected (and likely innumerable) linkages between various visual and virtual networked communities. Future explorations of this convergence will necessitate analyses of multiple accounts, posts, comics, and responses. The potential for social media mental health comics—and their associated networks—to be viewed as open-access resources is vast. It is my belief that examining the particularities of how these virtual comics are functioning as mental health resources in the current moment will create a basis for understanding how they may be intentionally used as such in a post-pandemic world.

Notes

1. See Dumais' *Instagram* comic series "Staying In," which documents the experience of self-isolating during the early months of the pandemic. Following Dumais' lead is fellow Montreal artist Julie Prescesky (@julieprescesky), with her similarly focused *Instagram*-based series "The Stay at Home Club."
2. boyd describes networked publics as the interactions that take place on social networks, and how these interactions form a web of connections and, in turn, develop into a virtual community. For a more thorough description see boyd's "Social Network Sites as Networked Publics: Affordances, Dynamics, and Implications."
3. M. K. Czerwiec et al. define graphic medicine as a diverse and growing body of graphic non-fiction that is focused on telling stories of illness, injury, disease, and disability. It also includes the interdisciplinary scholarship written in response to these texts. The scholarly work on graphic medicine is interested in how comics seek to disrupt the dominant ideologies of medical narratives while deconstructing conventional power imbalances between caregiver/patient and subject/writer (3, 20).
4. While my article highlights the historical trajectory of representing mental illness experiences in Canadian comics, I must also acknowledge that Canadian cartoonists

who draw stories about mental health or illness are part of a diverse international group of creators who take up similar subject matter. These include American cartoonists Justin Green (*Binky Brown Meets the Holy Virgin Mary)* and Art Spiegelman (*Maus: A Survivor's Tale*). Commonly regarded as influential works of auto/biographical non-fiction (Kunka), *Binky Brown* and *Maus* respectively depict the experiences of living with obsessive-compulsive disorder (Green) and Holocaust-induced depression and anxiety (Spiegelman).

5. A note on terminology: although the term(s) *social media user*, and/or the simplified *user,* can be understood as referring to both account holders (i.e., the artists who post and share their mental health experiences), and their followers (i.e., the audiences who like, comment on, and engage with said content), I distinguish account holders from their followers by: 1) identifying the account holder as the artist/cartoonist whenever they are discussed; 2) referring to the artist/cartoonist's followers as *users, social media users,* and/or *platform users* throughout the remainder of this essay.
6. In *Hacker, Hoaxer, Whistleblower, Spy*, Gabriella Coleman defines Internet trolls as platform users who target both individuals and virtual communities. They attack the reputations and beliefs of others, and seek to humiliate and stigmatize especially vulnerable victims (23).
7. Hendry defines *imagined intimacy* as "images and practices [that] are not easily 'seen' or 'visible' as mental illness–related; practices [that] are 'invisible,' and afford a *feeling* of emotional recognition, affective community or intimate co-presence." Hendry also focuses on "visual presence and visibility, not because media approaches are dominated by the visual, but as it attends to what it means to 'be seen' as unwell.… [Coupled with this distinction is] its flow on *potential* affects (such as distress, inadequacy, anxiety, fatigue, etc.)" (1-2).
8. Social media scholar Ryan Milner credits the term *meme* to Richard Dawkins, who used the term to "label units of cultural transmission" (Dawkins qtd. in Milner 16)). In Dawson's words, "[j]ust as genes propagate themselves in the gene pool by leaping from body to body via sperms or eggs, so memes propagate themselves in the meme pool by leaping from brain to brain via a process which, in the broad sense, can be called imitation" (Dawson qtd. in Milner 16). As Milner concludes, "memes are cognitive replicators, passing from person to person through social imitation. … the concept and its controversies have made their way to the social sciences and humanities … [and] the term *meme* has also evolved within participatory media collectives" (16).
9. For more details on mental illness as "public feeling" see Ann Cvetkovich's *Depression: A Public Feeling.*

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Amy Mazowita (she/her) is a PhD student in the Department of Communications at Concordia University (Tiohtiá:ke) and currently located in Winnipeg, MB (Treaty 1). Her SSHRC-funded research is situated at the intersections of Communication and Media Studies, Comics Studies, Critical Disability Studies, and Mad Studies, and focuses on representations of mental illness in auto/biographical comics. She is interested in how readers of print and web comics engage with graphic mental illness narratives, and use 'the comics scene' as a site for self- and collective care. Amy is a core member of Concordia's Access-in-the-Making Lab and a member of the Feminist Media Studio.

A GLAM Future for Canadian Comics

Introduction

Meaghan Scanlon

The first day of 80 Years and Beyond: A Virtual Symposium on Canadian Comics closed with a panel of five participants on the role of GLAMs—that is, galleries, libraries, archives, and museums—in preserving Canadian comics. I moderated the panel, which included five other panelists who brought a variety of perspectives on comics and GLAMs to the discussion.

We were fortunate to have with us two comics creators, Joe Ollmann and Mark Shainblum, who also have experience in the GLAM sector. Ollmann is the award-winning cartoonist behind books such as *Mid-Life* (2011) and *Fictional Father* (2021, nominated for the Governor General's Award for English-language fiction) who also co-curated the exhibition *This Is Serious: Canadian Indie Comics* for the Art Gallery of Hamilton in 2019. Shainblum, who was inducted into the Canadian Comic Book Hall of Fame in 2016, is the creator of the Canadian superhero Northguard and has been involved in the comics scene for decades. He spoke not only from the perspective of a creator who has placed his work in an archive, but also as a GLAM practitioner: Shainblum is embarking on a new career as a library technician.

The other participants were library and archives professionals from Canadian universities. Rick Stapleton, head of Archives and Research Collections at McMaster University, represents an institution that has very strong archival holdings related to Canadian literature and publishing and that is currently seeking to expand its collecting mandate into the comics arena. Deborah Meert-Williston is the special collections librarian at Western University, which is the home of one of the largest library collections of published comics in Canada, the Dr. Eddy Smet Comic Book Collection. Her perspective is that of a librarian who doesn't have a background in comics but who sees the value of the collection under her care and wants to develop the expertise necessary to bring it forward.

Finally, Lucia Cedeira Serantes is an assistant professor at Western University in the Faculty of Information and Media Studies who has also worked as a librarian. Comics reading practices, particularly among young adults, are her primary research interest. She is the author of *Young People, Comics and Reading: Exploring a Complex Reading Experience* (2019) and teaches a course on Exploring and Understanding Comics in Libraries at Western.

The panel discussion touched on topics such as the sometimes precarious state of original artworks and other archival materials stored in creators' homes, the difficulty of providing adequate descriptions for published comics in library catalogues, and the lack of dedicated resources within GLAMs for acquiring, preserving, and amplifying comics-related holdings. The panel was recorded and is available to view on the Society for the Promotion of Canadian Comics' *YouTube* channel.

Contributions to this forum reflect and expand on the panel discussion, with perspectives from two of the participants (Lucia Cedeira Serantes and me) as well as from two other voices. We hear the donor's perspective from Eddy Smet, the prolific collector whose comics form the backbone of the extensive collection at Western University. Rotem Diamant, the librarian and artist who founded the non-profit Canada Comics Open Library (CCOL) and the Canadian Cartoonists Database, offers a comic expressive of the hope behind the CCOL project—a hope for a wide-open future that I'm sure all lovers of Canadian comics share.

Meaghan Scanlon is a Special Collections Librarian at Library and Archives Canada.

The Long Journey

Eddy Smet

I was born in Belgium in 1943 and moved to Canada in 1950. I accumulated my first, and much loved, collection of four hundred to five hundred comics in the 1950s.

From the 1950s to the early 2000s, I also continuously collected airplane magazines. On one of my trips to a magazine shop in late 1971, some comics drew my attention, and my second phase of comic book collecting began. At this time, I collected not only most of the American comics being published but also books about comics and back issues, especially those related to my original collection. New comics were poorly distributed at the time. My wife and I opened London, Ontario's first comics shop in 1979 and operated it until 1987, when we sold it to a customer. I stopped collecting in 2014.

Two stories from the Second World War-era Canadian title *Wow Comics* that I saw reprinted in Patrick Loubert and Michael Hirsh's *The Great Canadian Comic Books* (1971) appealed to me. In 1972 or 1973, I also saw the travelling exhibit of artwork from wartime publisher Bell Features at the London Public Library. Thus I became interested in collecting at least some Canadian wartime comics, but they were very scarce. I strongly felt that these comics should be preserved so that they would not be lost in time. Therefore,

I started collecting whatever Canadian wartime comics I could find and afford to buy, not for my own collection but for eventual donation to some public archive.

Of the first six published Canadian wartime comics, four were black-and-white reprints of then current American comics, and *Robin Hood* no. 1 was a reprint of a daily comic strip. *Better Comics* no. 1 was the only one of these comics that consisted of original material, and thus it is the real first Canadian comic. In July 2001, a copy of *Better Comics* no. 1 was listed on eBay for US $1,500 (CAD $2,314). I had never before nor have I ever since paid so much for a single comic. However, this was such an important comic that I could not let the opportunity pass. My wife and I went to Toronto to pick up the book. It was truly a marvellous day.

Part of my collection was used as stock for our store and part was sold on commission by the new owner in order to help him survive after he took over. These were mainly Marvel and DC superhero comics.

Western University has a special aviation collection. In 2002, I approached the university to see if they were interested in adding my aviation collection. I also mentioned my comic book collection. Western was interested in the aviation collection, but I did not pursue the matter again until 2007, by which time I had retired for health reasons from my mathematics teaching position at Huron University College. At this time, I donated a significant part of my aviation collection. More importantly, we began to discuss the donation of my Canadian wartime comics and possibly even the rest of my comic book collection.

I had reservations about donating to a public archive. The biggest reservation was my fear that perhaps the institution might decide that a comic book collection was not worth the resources that it took to maintain it and might thus dispose of it badly. Another reservation concerned how the material would be handled and stored, since comics are inherently quite fragile.

I had an excellent meeting with two faculty members and the head of Special Collections at Western. The meeting made it clear to me that the university recognized the value of the collection and I decided to go ahead with the donation. I began contributing the collection in parts. The first four donations occurred in 2008 and the most recent in 2021. To date I have made thirty donations totalling almost 10,800 comics and 1,800 books, magazines, and other such materials.

I collected comics much, much faster than I had time available to read them, and health matters dashed my hopes of reading the bulk of them after I retired. Donating the comics as I did gave me the time to look at them somewhat. Making the donation in parts over several years also meant that I received a number of smaller tax credits, rather than a single large tax credit. This allowed me to space out the tax benefit in a more effective way. I donated them roughly in the order that I could bear to part with them. The only comics

I have yet to donate are those related to the ones I treasured most when I started collecting in the 1950s.

The Canadian wartime comics were part of a 2015 donation, and they were subsequently certified by the Canadian Cultural Property Export Review Board. This was the most significant part of my collection, and the cultural property designation is very important since it means that the university cannot arbitrarily dispose of the comics and, importantly from a donor's perspective, that any capital gains due to the appreciation of the books' value need not be reported as income.

Eddy Smet is a retired math professor and long-time comic book collector.

Canadian Comics Memory: Making, Preserving, and Communicating

Lucia Cedeira Serantes

In 2018, Annie Koyama announced that in 2021 she would be closing Koyama Press, a Toronto-based small publisher. Since its founding in 2007, this unique, beloved, and idiosyncratic Canadian publisher had become a staple in the North American and international comics scenes, and its disappearance was felt by creators, readers, and comics journalists. Upon hearing this news, my first reaction as a comics and library and information studies scholar was to consider what Canadian comics culture was losing and whether there was any way of preserving it. Publishers' archives are a common historical and bibliographic tool for studying the literary field (Millar). Since this publisher was virtually a one-woman company, were there any archives? If they did exist, had any institution contacted Annie Koyama to negotiate their receipt? If not, how would future comics or Canadian literature scholars study this singular project and its influence on Canadian comics culture? Around the same time, I read Roal Daenen's chapter in *Comics and Memory*, where he describes and reflects on the issues involved in preserving Belgian comics heritage. Daenen concludes "that Belgium, the 'comic strip country,' is very careless with its history" (264). When I considered this reading with the context of Koyama's demise in mind, it sparked my curiosity about the state of Canadian comics heritage, past and present, and the need to formalize discussions and actions to preserve Canadian comics memory and culture. Historically, comics occupy a marginal position relative to other forms of Canadian media. Today, they grow more popular and steadily receive more mainstream scholarly acknowledgement. This increased recognition marks the present as a fertile moment to push GLAM institutions towards

greater involvement in preserving and making comics cultural memory more accessible. As is evident, my first inclination is to look to GLAM institutions and universities as sites for centralizing these efforts. However, my own research on comics readers prompts me also to look outside of these institutions and envision potential collaborative projects. Such projects include other agents like readers, collectors, creators, and publishers. These agents are crucial to the development of comics cultures and should also be part of any initiative regarding Canadian comics memory.

The good news is that this process need not start from scratch. There are already people, publications, institutions, and events that work to document the rich landscape of Canadian comics in such a way as to distinguish the Canadian story from that of other larger and more dominant comics cultures. The following list is not comprehensive, but it attempts to be inclusive. My goal in composing this list is to signpost and give more visibility to the labour of different actors in the Canadian comics community. If I am missing you, I apologize in advance, and I would appreciate it if you were to reach out. So, here is a list of these actors and resources in no particular order:

- In 2015, Montreal publisher Drawn & Quarterly released *Drawn & Quarterly: Twenty-Five Years of Contemporary Cartooning, Comics, and Graphic Novels* to celebrate the cartoonists who have worked with this press. One year later, Nova Scotia publisher Conundrum published *20×20: Twenty Years of Conundrum Press,* a retrospective volume dedicated to the history of their press. These anthologies will become reference tools for the history and histories of these two publishing houses, both of which are integral to the cultural fabric of Canadian comics.
- There are more than twenty comics festivals and conventions held regularly in cities across Canada ("Canadian Comics"). Among them, the Toronto Comic Art Festival, often referred to by its acronym TCAF, is a North American trailblazer in creating a partnership between a comics store (The Beguiling) and a public library system (Toronto Public Library). Among others, the Vancouver Comic Arts Festival (often referred to by its acronym VANCAF), the Prairie Comics Festival, and Canzine (with its several provincial events) are also sites where Canadian comics culture is continuously curated and produced.
- Curated by John Bell, the Library and Archives Canada (LAC) archived online exhibit *Guardians of the North: The National Superhero in Canadian Comic-Book Art* collects and expands on the 1992 archival exhibition of the same name ("Guardians of the North"). This project collects a wealth of knowledge and sources for those researching Canadian comics history. LAC also provides digital access to the collection for the Second World War-era publisher Bell Features ("Bell Features").
- For those doing comics research, some Canadian academic libraries have been working on building collections that are currently accessible at different levels. The University of British Columbia is working

on several special comics collections of "comic books written by Vancouver-based artists whose work is primarily Vancouver or British Columbia focused" ("Comic Book Collections"). In 2013, the University of Manitoba launched their Mazinbiige Indigenous Graphic Novels Collection, which "was developed by the first Indigenous Library Services Librarian, Camille Callison," to provide "students with an unconventional way to explore Indigenous stories" ("Mazinbiige"). The Archives and Special Collections department at Toronto Metropolitan University has also made their small but unique collection of Second World War Canadian comics locally available for research and teaching ("WECA"). Rotem Diamant is the founder of the grassroots non-profit Canada Comics Open Library (CCOL), an "inclusive, educational, and recreational" physical and digital space dedicated to "showcasing the work of Canadian creators" (*Canada Comics*). Among other projects, they have created and made available an online database of Canadian comics creators ("Canadian Cartoonists"). Zine and comics culture are closely connected, which is why the OCAD U Zine Library is also an important resource for anyone interested in studying Toronto and Canadian zine culture ("OCAD"). As I write, Western Libraries is working on recommendations for managing and making accessible the donations that it has received from collectors such as Eddy Smet and Dale Hoose. These donations amount to approximately seventy thousand volumes of mostly Canadian and American comics, making this collection one of the largest at a Canadian institution.

- John Bell's 2006 publication *Invaders from the North: How Canada Conquered the Comic Book Universe* was a pioneering text in Canadian comics scholarship. Two more recent publications that follow in its footsteps are 2016's *Canadian Graphic: Picturing Life Narratives*, edited by Candida Rifkind and Linda Warley, and *The Canadian Alternative: Cartoonists, Comics, and Graphic Novels*, edited by Dominick Grace and Eric Hoffman. These publications signify a moment when Canadian scholars are both documenting the history of Canadian comics and are turning their attention to the kaleidoscopic production of the current comics landscape. The publications reflect English-language and Francophone creators and publishers, the increasing role of Indigenous creators and narratives, and the prominent space that female and queer creators have historically occupied. Similarly, the exhibit *This Is Serious: Canadian Indie Comics*, co-curated by Alana Traficante and cartoonist Joe Ollmann at the Art Gallery of Hamilton, represents an effort to give visibility to cartoonists who are influential not only in the Canadian comics field but also worldwide. One of the cartoonists featured in the exhibit was Julie Doucet, who has recently received the Grand Prix at the Angoulême International Comics Festival, the highest award in European cartooning awarded at one of the most prestigious comics festivals in the world.

The Canadian comics scene is small in comparison with the dominant US, Japan, and France-Belgium markets. Nevertheless, Canadian comics and creators are recognized internationally, and Canadian publishers are praised abroad for their diverse editorial agendas, which balance support for local

and national talent with hosting international creators and trends. Despite the Canadian scene's small size, its high level of activity and international stature have resulted in the creation of a rich media landscape that is currently under-documented. Developing the sustainable, equitable, and accessible infrastructure that is needed to preserve this landscape will not be an easy task. At 80 Years and Beyond: A Virtual Symposium on Canadian Comics, many presenters and audience members spoke of the need for a unified approach to the preservation of comics and related collections that are representative of various readers or local comics communities. Given the size of the country, this approach must place digital access at its foreground. Making this a reality would require an extraordinary commitment of resources: not just financial but also logistical (time, the development of physical and digital spaces) and human (staff, advocacy, education). It would require the involvement of multiple institutions, organizations, and individuals, across different scholarly and professional fields (comics creation and publishing as well as libraries, archives, and museums). The conversations that started at the 80 Years and Beyond symposium represent a hopeful beginning, and we need to have high hopes.

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Hope and Comics

Rotem Diamant

Rotem Diamant is an artist and librarian. They are the founder of Canada Comics Open Library.

A Comics Community of Practice

Meaghan Scanlon

I have been a comics reader since I was in university. Like many women of a certain age, I found my way into comics via Neil Gaiman's *Sandman* series, which I discovered thanks to the music of Tori Amos. From there, my interests expanded to include superhero (mostly Marvel) comics, which I bought from the Silver Snail in Ottawa (RIP).

When I moved from Ottawa to Vancouver to attend the University of British Columbia's School of Information (then called the School of Library, Archival, and Information Studies), I took my weekly comics subscription with me from the Snail to Vancouver's Comicshop (RIP). I also worked my love of comics into my studies: I wrote a paper on the preservation of comics for my preservation class; I evaluated the Vancouver Public Library's collection of comics and graphic novels for my collection development class.

After I graduated from UBC in 2010, I started working as a librarian at Library and Archives Canada (LAC, formerly known as the National Library of Canada) with the Rare Book Collection. Much to my delight, I learned during one of my first days on the job that among the holdings I would be responsible for were two major collections of Canadian comic books: the Bell Features Collection, consisting of about four hundred comic books printed in the 1940s by Bell Features; and the John Bell Collection of Canadian Comic Books, which includes over four thousand comics published in Canada or published abroad by Canadians, dating from the 1940s into the twenty-first century.

I didn't know much about the history of Canadian comics at the time, but my general interest in comics made me eager to spend time with these collections and learn more. In particular, I dug into the Second World War-era titles in the Bell Features Collection, but I also worked on getting the John Bell Collection more fully described. For a period in 2011, I was able to hire Rachel Richey—who went on to publish reprint editions of Canadian Golden Age comics featuring Nelvana of the Northern Lights, Johnny Canuck, and Mr. Monster—to work on the John Bell Collection.

Over the course of my career so far, I've spent a lot of time with the John Bell and Bell Features collections, and I've explored the rest of LAC's Canadian comics holdings. I've worked to make LAC's comics more widely known through the institution's online presence as well as through my own research and publications. In 2016, I curated the exhibition *Alter Ego: Comics and Canadian Identity* for LAC; *Alter Ego* got a second life when it was presented at the Toronto Public Library in 2018. In conjunction with the exhibition, the Bell Features Collection was fully digitized and those comics are now freely

available online. (Search "Bell Features Collection" in LAC's online library catalogue, Aurora, to find them.)

I've done all this because I love comics and enjoy working with them. But I wasn't hired by LAC to be a comics librarian, and (sadly) comics are not my full-time job. As we discussed during the GLAMs panel at the symposium, there may not be a single library in Canada that has a full-time comics librarian position. John Bell also touched on the topic of staff resources during his keynote discussion with Ivan Kocmarek, noting how frequently there is only one person driving an institution's comics-related activity. Quite often, that person is doing comics off the side of their desk, so to speak. (John, a retired LAC employee, knows this well, having helped usher LAC into the comics world despite the fact that his job was in the political archives section.) It is not their core work, and if they retire, find a new job, or lose interest, the comics may disappear among other institutional priorities. I don't think my predecessor at LAC cared much about comics, for instance, and of course it's impossible to say what might happen after I leave.

While this may seem discouraging, one of my main takeaways from the symposium is that there is an enthusiastic and relatively large community of people in Canada who have an interest in preserving and making known the country's comic book heritage. There are academics, creators, publishers, retailers, collectors, independent researchers, fans, and librarians and other heritage professionals who understand the value of comics and want to promote them more widely. Some are experts who've dedicated years to researching and writing about Canadian comics. Others are new to the field but are keen to learn and do more.

There is also a growing recognition that comics have a place in heritage collections. During the symposium, we heard from Ho Che Anderson and Mark Shainblum, two comics creators who've been working in the field for over thirty years. Both commented on how much the situation has changed since their early days, when they had little thought of seeing their archives preserved because this just didn't really happen with comics. But Shainblum and his collaborator Gabriel Morrissette placed some of their materials with LAC in the 1990s. Anderson recently sent original artwork from *King*—his biography of Martin Luther King, Jr.—to the Billy Ireland Cartoon Library and Museum at Ohio State University, and some of his earlier work is going to McMaster University. At the symposium, cartoonist Cole Pauls mentioned, too, that the Yukon Permanent Art Collection had acquired a few pieces from him. So it appears that GLAMs are making space for comics in their vaults and on their shelves, even if they may not (yet) be committed to hiring dedicated staff members for their care.

Given the lack of permanent institutional resources, my feeling is that the future of comics studies in Canada consists of collective efforts from interested individuals and groups working outside the "official" GLAMs context. There will likely never be a major GLAM in Canada with a focused comics mandate.

Comics-related materials will probably continue to be spread out around the country in various institutions that have varying degrees of interest in comics at various times.

I don't think this is necessarily a bad thing. As noted above, the Canadian comics community includes people who bring diverse perspectives to the material. It should therefore be possible for this community to create resources that are useful and appealing to a broad spectrum of comics readers and researchers—something that might prove difficult in an institutional setting where staff are bound by policies and standards not developed with comics in mind. Community-created resources could live on the WEB forever, as long as there is someone left in the community to maintain them. One need only look at the Canada Comics Open Library and the affiliated Canadian Cartoonists Database created and maintained by Rotem Diamant to see the potential in this type of project. If Rotem ever decides to move on, there's no reason their work should be lost.

The main challenge as I see it is communication. Canadian comics people need to be able to find each other. Events like the 80 Years and Beyond symposium are a strong start: we came away from it with a to-do list and a lot of momentum. I know that I personally felt energized after attending the event, and I hope others did too. There is great potential for the development of a community of practice around comics in Canada. I'm optimistic we'll see that potential realized.

From Pulps to Prestige:
A Conversation between Canadian Comics Historians John Bell and Ivan Kocmarek

Edited by Anna Savard and Candida Rifkind

Introduction

This fascinating discussion took place on October 15, 2021, as a keynote for 80 Years and Beyond: A Virtual Symposium on Canadian Comics. What follows is an edited version of the conversation, which begins with a first-hand history of the recovery of Canadian Second World War (War Exchange Conservation Act or WECA) comics in the 1970s and then moves on to discuss challenges in archiving, preserving, and maintaining access to Canadian comics, past and present.

The Conversation

Ivan Kocmarek: How did you become aware of Canadian comic books and become interested in them?

John Bell: Well, like you, as a boy I was a Marvel addict. I almost felt like a junkie. I had to buy every Marvel comic book published. You know, there were even weeks where the only Marvel comic was *Millie the Model*—okay, I'd buy it!

Like you, I discovered Michael Hirsh and Patrick Loubert's book *The Great Canadian Comic Books* in 1971.[1] I was working in an independent bookstore in Halifax at that time, and I was stunned to discover that there had been Canadian comic books, that there was a generation of Canadian kids who grew up with Canadian heroes, Canadian graphic narratives. That was just an absolute revelation.

You know, for those of us who grew up on the US superhero comics—and they were thrilling, they were powerful, especially the Jack Kirby narratives—it was for us, as Canadians, a particularly alienating experience, because you always knew in the back of your mind that, for me, living in Halifax and Montreal, the Fantastic Four weren't coming to Halifax—it wasn't going to happen! It underscored the notion that we were living in a bit of a hinterland, a place bereft of heroes.

My own interest in Canadian comics was sparked by that Hirsh and Loubert book, but when I really started to explore it was a little later, after I graduated from Dalhousie University and joined the staff of the University Archives. At that time, I started getting interested in some of the marginal aspects of our culture, particularly Canadian science fiction and fantasy and Canadian comics. I can trace that back to the discovery of *The Buyer's Guide for Comic Book Fandom*.[2] It was a weekly tabloid devoted to comics published in the US, usually three sections, well over one hundred pages every issue. It had some editorial content, like interviews and some reviews and profiles of creators, but it was mostly classified ads for comics, fanzines, and small-press publications. It's through the pages of that magazine I connected with Gene Day and Dave Sim and a lot of the people active in the science fiction and fantasy and comics semi-pro milieu in Canada.[3]

I came to realize that there was activity in Canadian comics and there were actually people in the mid-1970s creating Canadian comics. About that same time, I discovered *Orb* and *Captain Canuck* on local newsstands, so that, I think, is sort of where my interest began.[4] At a certain point, though, it became obvious to me that Canadian science fiction and comics had really been seriously neglected, and there was very, very little work out there touching on either of those traditions. So, I started to think, as I was working in an archive within a library setting, that maybe I should start work on a bibliography of Canadian science fiction and fantasy, and maybe also a checklist of Canadian comics and just see what's out there and start digging. So that's how it all started.

Not long after that, I had the good fortune to meet Owen McCarron, who ran the giveaway studio Comic Book World.[5] He was an extremely generous, open person. He was working for Marvel at that time, and he invited me out to his studio. I went out, and I left there with copies of virtually every single giveaway that he had produced, and he'd taken the time to date them all as well. So, as a bibliographer of Canadian comics, this was pretty exciting, walking off with thirty or forty new entries touching on these obscure comics that most people weren't even familiar with. And then, maybe a year after that, I stumbled on a small archive of Bell Features material in a science-fiction bookstore in Halifax. I have no idea what the provenance of this material was—how it ended up in Halifax I don't know. What it consisted of was hundreds of Bell Features production negs, textual records, including contracts and correspondence, and a lot of file copies of Bell Features comics. So that really helped me along in terms of building my Golden Age collection. The obvious thing for me working on that comic-book checklist was that I realized there were no institutional holdings to speak of. If I was going to document

Canadian comics, I had to accumulate my own research collection, which is what I started doing in the mid-1970s.

IK: American comic fandom has stratified its comic book history. It produced such terminology as the Golden Age or Silver Age, Bronze Age, and so on. Is that a template that we can transpose to Canadian comics? Or do you think there must be a different way of looking at them?

JB: I think there is a different way. I'm uncomfortable with those American demarcations, all the various ages. I mean what are we in now, the Lithium Age? I do think, though, that there are distinct periods in our history. I've pointed to those and outlined them in my book *Invaders from the North*, but I think I should really underscore that that's just one person's opinion. I would expect other people to look at the history of Canadian comics and define those periods differently, maybe weigh it all in a different fashion, and I would welcome that. In fact, I encourage people to challenge my narrative, my take on it all.

IK: I agree with you, I think we just can't transpose the American template right on Canadian comics. It's such a varied history, and I have watched Canadian comics develop from a very marginal existence up to many Canadian graphic narratives that fill our bookshelves, stores, and our libraries. Comics scholarship and comics, in general, have grown in acceptability. Are we at the point where we can say there is a definite Canadian comics legacy or tradition? Even given the global world we live in, can we still think about Canadian comics as having a legacy and a tradition?

JB: Well, we certainly have our own tradition, we have our own distinct history—particularly if you factor in Quebec. That makes us quite unique. I think that the bicultural aspect of our comic tradition means we have our own stories. We have our own heroes and anti-heroes. But whether we're distinct in terms of formal or stylistic considerations, that's another matter altogether. You know: is there a uniquely Canadian way of doing comics, of making comics?

IK: Going back to its origins and those strange wartime comics, we did have a Canadian take on comics. It was so patriotic as we were involved in the war, but they quickly became marginalized after the war was over and disappeared into history. Then it was hard for us to chip out and eke out some sort of Canadian comic book identity, which happened in the 1970s, as you say. I think there is a legacy and we need to celebrate that legacy, not just a pure celebration but also to recognize the voices that have been left out and need to be heard in that legacy. So, I would say there is one. Now, connected to that, part of the pursuit of Canadian comics has been to produce a sort of national or nationalistic hero. What is the role of a nationalistic hero in our tradition of comics?

JB: Well, I think it's inevitable. When comic book artists and writers in Canada discovered the Hirsh and Loubert book, and the wartime comics and our wartime superheroes, you could see that reflected in the small-press comics of that same era and in the fanzines. A real nationalist current emerged in Canadian comics. That was a natural reaction to that discovery—and to the domination of American comics in our culture. I'm not sure how successful anyone has been in creating a Canadian national superhero, but I think it's something that will remain an extremely important current within the field of comics. It's natural that Canadian creators and fans of superhero comics will endeavour—and there have been many of them over the years—to create a distinctly Canadian superhero. It's something that we will just see happen cyclically over and over again. That seems inevitable.

IK: Now, aside from the superhero comics, we've got a magnificent tradition of graphic narrative. And I think of Joe Ollmann's recent selection for the final list of Governor General's Awards nominations in literature, with his work *Fictional Father*. It's a wonderful level to get to. What is your take on the growth of graphic narrative in the Canadian comics tradition?

JB: You and I have talked about this before. Comics have become extremely mainstream. That is certainly a welcome development. When I was a kid, and when you were growing up as well, comics were everywhere; they were widespread, they were in the grocery stores, they were in drugstores, they were in corner stores, they were in tobacco stores. You could find them practically everywhere but bookstores and libraries! Now you go into Indigo and there are huge sections devoted to graphic narratives and bound volumes of comics, and that's fantastic. I think it's something that we should certainly welcome. But the more respectable comics become, I hope that we also don't lose sight of comics' more pulpish roots and of less respectable forms of graphic narrative.

IK: Yes, there is an essential dialectic there.

JB: I think that's part of the challenge for the library and archival community. It's easy now to document mainstream Canadian comics, graphic narratives, and graphic novels, but there's still marginal stuff going on out there. That's a real challenge, to continue to document the little Xerox local fanzines, the really edgy and fringe stuff. That takes an enormous amount of imagination and effort—and effort, of course, translates into resources and money for institutions that set out to document Canadian comics.

IK: How important is a main repository, or at least a network of varied repositories, that can be accessed by researchers and people who are just interested in Canadian comics?

JB: I think it's crucial for anyone doing research and anyone who's trying to take a historical perspective on the development of Canadian comics. It's absolutely necessary that we see more institutions making an effort to document the comics, but working co-operatively to share. Whether we have a single national institution that takes on that challenge, maybe that's not so important. I'm really glad to see that Library and Archives Canada is making an effort, but I'm glad to see that collections are also emerging at other institutions—university archives and university libraries. The key for researchers would be that these institutions find some way to collectively describe and share information about their holdings.

IK: Not only repositories or archives, but we've had a rise of Canadian comics in galleries, libraries, and even museums. In the last century, Canadian comics seemed marginalized. Now, I don't think we should simply wave our maple-leaf flags in the celebration of eighty years of Canadian comics without the sobering recognition of the voices that are marginalized and have been marginalized throughout the tradition. Throughout those eight decades, from that first Canadian floppy, the voices of women, of Indigenous peoples, of queer communities, of immigrants, and so on, have not been very loud. One thing that I'm very proud and happy about is that these voices are growing in our comics now. What is your take on this?

JB: Well, I think it's important that we realize that comics are cultural artifacts. They tend to reflect the societal values and attitudes of their time. But this would be true of just about every aspect of our popular culture—not just comics. We should definitely welcome and encourage attempts to come to terms with any legacy of racism and marginalization. You know, personally, I'm keen to see new approaches to the history of Canadian graphic narrative. As I've said before, it was probably my main motivation for donating my collection, the hope that people would look at the comics in a different way and read and reinterpret our history from all kinds of different vantage points. So that's all to be welcomed, as far as I'm concerned.

IK: You were involved in the archival sense of Canadian history in Canadian comic books, but you also helped put on a bunch of exhibits and developed an online presence for this information. How important is it for our comic book legacy in Canada not just to be shut behind closed doors in archives but to be accessible through galleries and libraries and museums?

JB: I think that's incredibly important. When you look back and realize that the Hirsh and Loubert book was accompanied by a National Gallery exhibition that toured the country, it had an enormous impact. It received an incredible amount of media attention and allowed people to rediscover this neglected aspect of their history. It probably would rank it as one of

their most successful exhibitions ever. At the end of that exhibition and the tour of the material, the National Gallery decided that maybe this stuff wasn't for them, though, in terms of making it part of their holdings. I think they encouraged Hirsh and Loubert to talk to people at the Archives and that perhaps it would be more appropriate for the material to go there.

I know that the *Guardians of the North* exhibition that I did at the Museum of Caricature received an incredible amount of attention in the national media and even some international coverage. In fact, the first person to cover it in the media was a guy working for the *International Herald Tribune* and *Washington Post* who wrote a piece that was picked up by other American newspapers. The gist of the story was, "You're not going to believe this, there is such a thing as Canadian superheroes!" All of a sudden, the Canadian media, noting that the American media was interested, became very interested. We were deluged with requests for interviews and that sort of thing. But what was great about that show was that people could come to the museum and we had the original artwork, we had drafts of scripts, they could learn about how comics were produced and what a comic-book script looked like—and the dialectic between the two. That's really important, but whether or not institutions are prepared to do that in this new era, I don't know. I think they're more inclined to do a web exhibition, but it's important for people to see the original artwork.

IK: Few people know that at the Library and Archives they have over 2,300 pages of original Bell Features artwork. This came from Loubert and Hirsh, who managed to acquire it from John Ezrin back in 1971 or 1972.[6] Can you say anything else about things that you'd like to see done in a gathering like this, or how significant it is?

JB: Well, I certainly welcome events like this, and I certainly appreciate the invitation to attend. My concern would be that I would hate to see symposiums like this—and gatherings of this kind—be overreliant on the academy and dominated by the academy. I hope that there will always be room for independent researchers, creators, publishers, and other non-academics. I think they have a lot to contribute as well.

IK: Yes, that was exactly the essence of our mandate, what we thought of when establishing this symposium. My last question to you is, do you have any thoughts on the future of Canadian comics in another eighty years or even in the near future? What do you see happening in Canadian comics?

JB: That's really difficult to anticipate, I mean the comics are here to stay, comics are mainstream. I think there will always be a marginal current within our comics. I hope that there are people out there that will make an effort to document that. Who can anticipate where technology is going? That's obviously going to have an enormous impact on comics and graphic narrative. There's one thing I could point to, though, in terms of

scholarship. I hope that someday, someone's going to take up the challenge to produce a full bibliography of English Canadian comics and continue the work that I did with *Canuck Comics* and that you did with your guide to wartime comics. In Quebec they're fortunate people like Michel Viau and Rosaire Fontaine have done remarkable work in documenting their comics. We need someone to do that in English Canada—a bibliography, and it doesn't have to be a price guide. In fact I hope it isn't, but a bibliography like that would be a foundation for further scholarship. Let's document the full scope of the production of comics in Canada. I hope that we see someone tackle that challenge.

Notes

1. *The Great Canadian Comic Books* is one of three projects on 1940s WECA comics by the young Toronto filmmaking duo Michael Hirsh and Patrick Loubert, in addition to a segment for the CBC program *Telescope* (aired October 5, 1971) called "The Great Canadian Comics" and a touring art exhibit for the National Gallery of Canada titled *Comic Art Traditions in Canada 1941-45*. *The Great Canadian Comic Books* is a glossy coffee-table book that reprints pages from the WECA comics. See Kocmarek.
2. Founded in 1971 by a young comics collector, Alan Light, and subsequently called the *Comics Buyer's Guide*, this was the longest-running periodical dedicated to the comics industry before it ceased publication in 2013. See "Comics Buyer's Guide."
3. Gene Day (1951-1982) was a Toronto underground and independent cartoonist who also did inking and pencilling work for Marvel. Day was a mentor to Dave Sim (b. 1956), with whom he collaborated on some late 1970s indie comics.
4. *Orb Magazine* was an independent Canadian comics magazine published by JamesWaley in Toronto between 1974-1976, with support from the Ontario Arts Council. *Orb Magazine* no. 2 introduced a new Canadian superhero, Northern Light, the first patriotic superhero since the WECA comics. See "Orb Productions." *Captain Canuck* was an independent comic "[c]reated by cartoonist Ron Leishman and artist/writer Richard Comely" in July 1975 ("Captain Canuck"). It has appeared sporadically ever since. See Dittmer and Larsen, as well as Edwardson.
5. Owen McCarron (1929-2005) was a prolific cartoonist and comics publisher based in Halifax, Nova Scotia, who made his name under Stan Lee at Marvel in the 1960s and 1970s. At the same time, he wrote, drew, coloured, and published dozens of giveaway comics for children through his own company, McCarron Advertising and Comic Book World. McCarron was inducted into the Canadian Comic Book Creator Hall of Fame in 2006.
6. John Ezrin was a wartime investor in Bell Features, which published many of the WECA comics. In 1947, he bought over two thousand original pages of artwork and the rights from Cy Bell, and in April 1971 Hirsh and Loubert bought the collection, which they then sold to the National Archives. See Kocmarek.

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Ivan Kocmarek was born in Blackburn, Lancashire, in the United Kingdom. He received his doctorate in comparative religions (Eastern religions) from McMaster University in 1981 and taught sessionally there for eight years. He received his BEd from the University of Toronto in 1989 and taught secondary school for twenty-three years in Hamilton, Ontario. Since retirement in 2012, he has become an independent researcher of comics that were produced in Canada during World War II, leading to a long-running online column, the appraisal of two university archival collections of these comics, and a number of publications on the subject.

John Bell, a former senior archivist at Library and Archives Canada, is the author or editor of more than twenty books touching on various aspects of Canadian history and culture. Much of Bell's research and scholarship has focused on neglected aspects of Canadian popular culture, particularly science fiction and fantasy, the pulps, and comics. Among his books are Canuck Comics: A Guide to Comic Books Published in Canada *(1986),* Guardians of the North: The National Superhero in Canadian Comic-Book Art *(1992), and* Invaders from the North: How Canada Conquered the Comic Book Universe *(2006). He lives in Lunenburg, Nova Scotia.*

Comics, Stories, Slings and Arrows: An Interview with Cole Pauls and Ho Che Anderson

Edited by Anna Savard and Zachary J. A. Rondinelli

Introduction

This conversation with comics creators Cole Pauls, Ho Che Anderson, and Dr. Candida Rifkind took place on October 16, 2021, as the second-day keynote for 80 Years and Beyond: A Virtual Symposium on Canadian Comics. This is an edited version of the conversation, which includes brilliant insights about Pauls' and Anderson's work, stylistic influences, and views on the state of the Canadian comics industry today.

Self-Portrait of the artist, Cole Pauls. Reproduced with permission from Cole Pauls. (©Cole Pauls 2022)

The Conversation

Candida Rifkind: Cole, can you tell us about your breakout hit, *Dakwäkāda Warriors*, and how Southern Tutchone works in your comics?

Cole Pauls: *Dakwäkāda Warriors* was my first graphic novel. It's bilingual, so it has English and Southern Tutchone in it.[1] It's about Indigenous Power Rangers Wolf and Crow, who fight against evil pioneers and a cyborg sasquatch. I did three issues of it, and Conundrum Press released the collection two Septembers ago (2019).

I use a lot of Southern Tutchone in my comics to reclaim Indigenous space in the comics scene. There have been so many decades of misrepresentation of Indigenous people in all media but especially in comics, so finding ways to incorporate my hometown's language into my work has been important to me. I often use resources from the Yukon Native Language Centre to help me with this, but I also have a couple of language preservers, Vivian Smith and Kershaw, that I can contact, as well.[2] So, between the Internet and the people I can rely on, I write Southern Tutchone into all my comics.

CR: Have you been surprised by the success of *Dakwäkāda Warriors*?

CP: Oh, yeah. It's been nice because while I really wrote it for Yukon youth, or maybe Yukoners in general, I think that the accessibility of the comic—how easy it is to pick it up and get a grasp of Yukon and Southern Tutchone culture—is what really boosted the popularity. It was drawn for Yukoners, but it's not just for Yukoners if that makes sense.

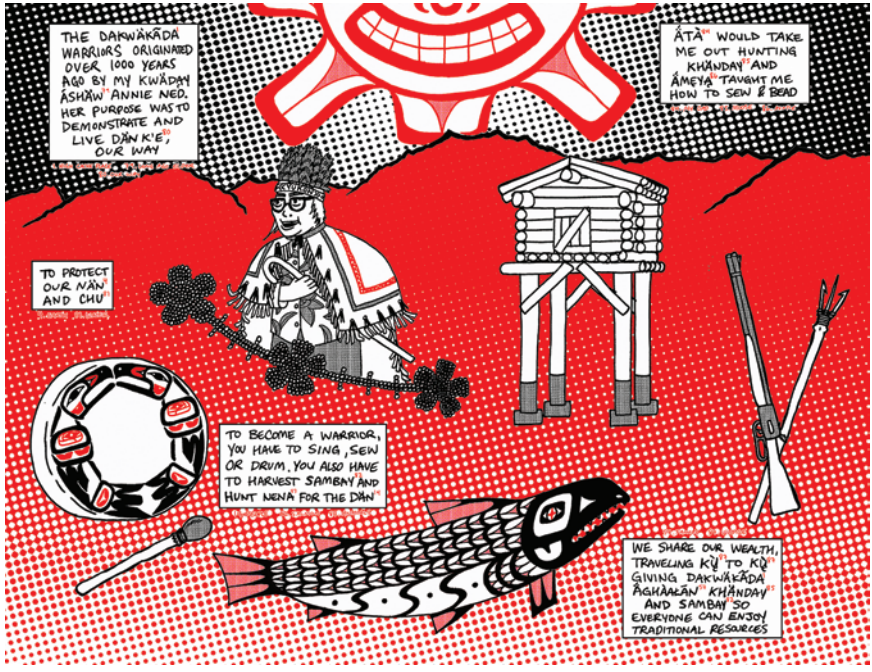
CR: Ho Che, can you tell us a little bit about your style? Some people describe you as very cinematic, and of course, you are a filmmaker, as well. Can you give us a sense of how you feel your style has shifted over your career, or even over the course of *King*?

Ho Che Anderson: It's kind of difficult to step outside of yourself and see your work objectively, but I have always had an attraction to cinematic language, and that has definitely leached its way into my comic book work. Although, as my career has gone forward in both streams, I'm less and less interested in applying cinematic techniques to my comics work. I'm more interested in exploring what is unique only to comic books and focusing on that. There's no point to me any longer in cross-pollinating the two. But that's definitely there in the foundation of my work, for sure. I'd have to describe my style as really kind of restless because I've always been attracted to stuff that is, for example, photo referenced, but also stuff that is entirely cartoony. I'm very attracted to work that is line based exclusively, but I also love picking up a brush and a tube of oil paint or acrylic paint and doing full-colour illustration.

There's just such a broad variety of styles, techniques, and approaches to art. I've always wanted to kind of dabble a little bit in each of them, see if I can match them and wrangle them to my own ends as much as possible. But, if anything, my stuff tends towards a certain didacticism, and a certain dynamism. I've always been very attracted to, for example, Soviet propaganda art for its propagandistic nature and its ability to force an idea on you through dynamic image. But work that is more subtle is also really appealing to me, so I'm a little bit of a magpie stylistically.

CR: Cole, can you tell us a bit about your distinctive style? Where does it come from and what has influenced it?

CP: When I was fourteen, I took a trip down to Vancouver, and visited the Vancouver Art Gallery. It was on my way out, as I walked through the gift shop, that I discovered Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas' *Red: A Haida Manga* had just come out, and it blew my mind because it was an Indigenous comic, a purely Indigenous comic.[3] I had always wanted to see something like that, but I had also always wanted to make my own. So, seeing someone who had successfully done it really shaped my brain into being like, "Woah. I could do this too."



From *Dakwäkäda Warriors*. Reproduced with permission from Cole Pauls.
(©Cole Pauls 2019)

As for influences on my style, when I was a kid I was really into manga—*Shonen Jump* and stuff like that—so I find that I'm most confident in black and white. I think that, from the sheer amount of black-and-white comics that I've absorbed in my life, it's kind of a crutch to me now. I make a drawing, I fill in the blacks, I add in some Zip-A-Tone, and then I consider it done. So, yeah, black-and-white comics are a big influence on me, too. And then, Gord Hill is also a huge influence on me, and he did a pin-up in the back of the *Dakwäkãda Warriors* book.

CR: When I look at your work as an outsider, I do see a kind of West Coast, Pacific Northwest Indigenous form line working there. Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas has also done really interesting things with bending the line and breaking the comics grid. Can you talk about your relationship to that iconic idea of what West Coast, Yukon, Tahltan, and Haida visual culture looks like?

CP: For Indigenous people, our art has a lot of story to it. We spoke our stories vocally, and I consider comics just another storytelling method. It's kind of a big deal to call yourself a storyteller in my culture because then you're like the keeper of knowledge and you have to master learning these legends and stories that you're supposed to be able to retell in the perfect cadence. You have to meet a high standard to call yourself a storyteller. So, I guess I'll still call myself a comics artist and, if my community calls me a storyteller, then I'll accept it.

CR: Ho Che, there are very few Black Canadian cartoonists, but you're certainly one of those groundbreaking creators depicting Black characters, Black lives, and Black political movements, like the Civil Rights movement. I asked Cole about being an Indigenous cartoonist, now I want to ask you about being a Black cartoonist in Canada.

HCA: Yeah, it's a little bit of a lonely position, to be honest with you. When I started out, I couldn't really point to anybody in this country that I was aware of that was doing the kind of stuff that I was doing. I didn't have an experience like Cole had where I got to see a Black person in a comic book or know that a person of colour had created that work. The closest I got to that was the work of the Hernandez brothers, Mexican American cartoonists producing work that was very much about their culture in the 1980s in Los Angeles. That stuff was a real revelation to me. Aside from the brilliance of their cartooning, just the fact that they were a voice outside of the norm really galvanized me.

It was actually mostly in cinema that I got to see representations of people like myself through the work of Spike Lee, Charles Burnett, John Singleton, the list goes on. So that was more energizing to me. I was able to take that influence and put it into the work that I was doing in comic books at that time. That's changed, fortunately, over the years; there are

From *Dakwäkāda Warriors*. Reproduced with permission from Cole Pauls. (©Cole Pauls 2019)

more female voices and people of colour who are doing their thing, so I can actually look to them as examples. But when I was starting out it was a lonely playing field, I can't lie.

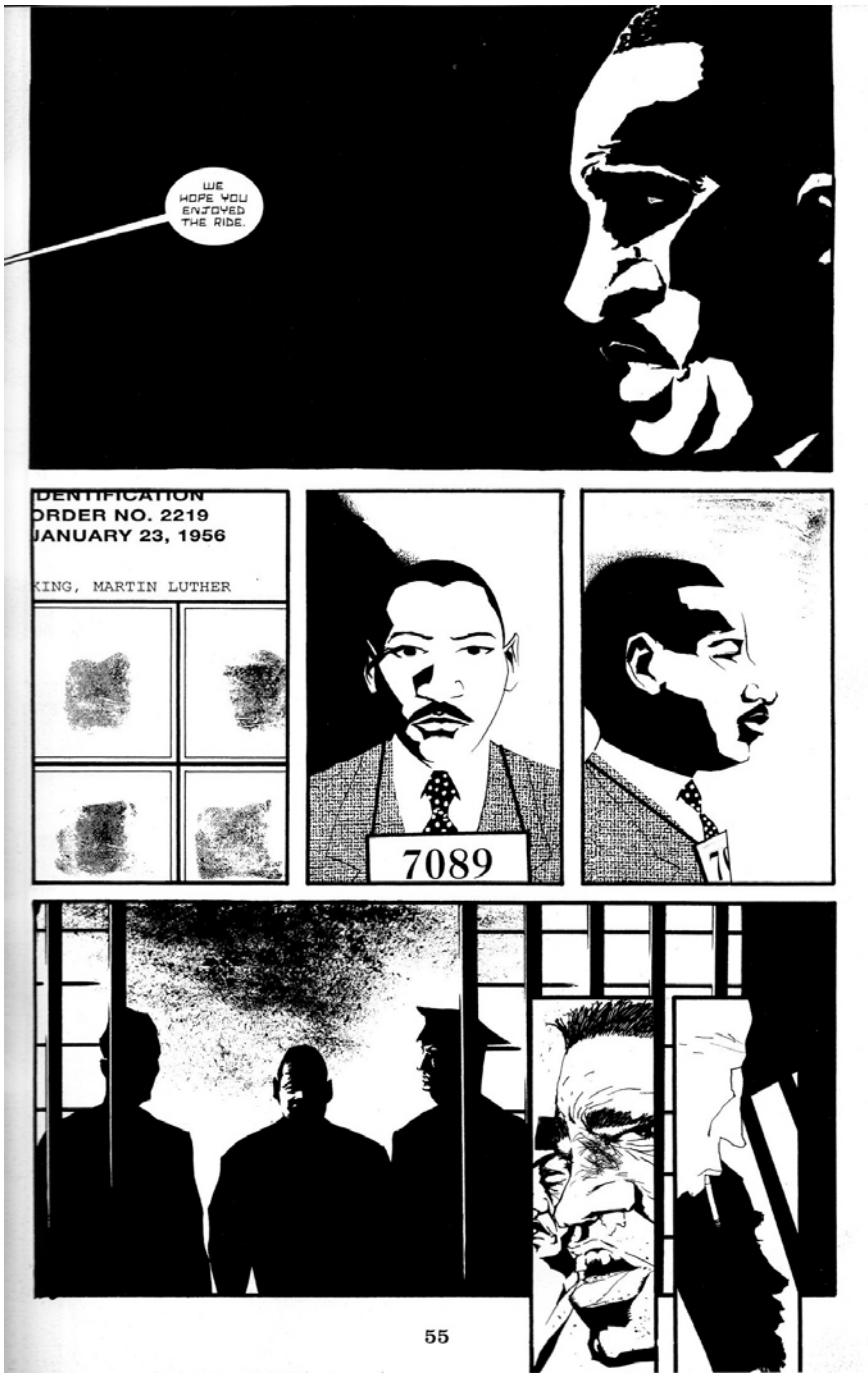
CR: I want to ask a question specifically about *King*—I know that you've published many other things—but I'd like to hear from you about that line between historical so-called fact and invention, creativity, and fiction. In *King*, you invent a female character to be there with the male leadership, which seems to be a feminist gesture that speaks to the under-explored historical role women played during that time, although the conventional ways that the story is told depict it as very much a masculine movement. So, what do you see as your responsibility in the telling of historical stories, when depicting real people, while balancing your artistic licence?

HCA: Well, I'll tell you, I don't know that I'd make that choice today. What I was trying to do was, as you say, reveal something about the prevailing depiction of the movement as male-dominated. The people who got the most coverage at the time, and even today, might have been the men, but so much of the work being done behind the scenes was by women. And so, lacking a recognizable female lead who could stand toe to toe with the guys, I thought, "Why don't I just composite a bunch of different people and then create somebody who can be with them on the day-to-day." And that worked out just fine for that time period, but I think if I were to tackle that book now, I would probably just have more female characters come in and out of the story—a series of real people as opposed to a composite character.

CR: Since its publication, have you heard from the King family or received any feedback from them about the book?

HCA: Initially. It was originally published in three volumes and, when the first volume came out, we heard from their estate. They were none too pleased. I think that's because I wasn't trying to do hagiography, but rather I was trying to be objective about who this person was. Families don't always want you to be honest about the flaws of the person you're doing a biography about; they often prefer you to just paint a rosy picture, which I can understand. But that's not the game I was playing.

So, they were not too happy with us. They asked us to cease and desist, but we were kind of punk rock ourselves back then and just decided we were going to do what we had to do. At that time, I wasn't concerned about lawsuits or legal ramifications of any kind, and my publisher followed suit. Today, we're a little older, a little more conservative, so maybe if *King* were being published now, we might be a little bit more concerned about that, but I suspect not. The truth needs to be told, and if you have to suffer a few slings and arrows in the process then maybe it's worth it.



From Ho Che Anderson's *King: The Special Edition* (Fantagraphics, 2010).

CR: Cole, you're in Vancouver and we tend to think of the Canadian comics scene as very Toronto-based, not least because of the TCAF, but also because we tend to always gravitate towards there.[4] So, I was wondering how you see yourself within the Canadian comics scene as a Vancouver artist.

CP: Not living in Toronto, you see that a lot. For example, a new Canadian comics show will be announced and something like nine out of ten artists are Toronto-based artists, only leaving room for maybe one or two from the rest of the country. But, in terms of where I see myself, I would consider myself a Vancouver artist because I've lived here for almost nine years now. That said, my comics and subject matter are almost exclusively about the Yukon, and I definitely have a place back home too. So, I guess it's both.

You know, a lot of people ask me what it is like being "the Yukon's" comics artist, and I go, "Oh, well I'm not *the* artist, there's a bunch of other people there." I guess that's why we're here; we're here to celebrate other Canadian comics. And when people ask me that question, I always go, "Oh, do you know Chris Caldwell? Do you know Doug Urquhart? Do you know Kim Edgar, and Hecate Press out of Dawson City?"[5] There's a community of comic strip people in the North that hasn't been discussed in Canadian comics, and they're really good. Eventually, I'm going to do a big write-up about Northern representation and comics because I don't feel like it's discussed a lot.

CR: Ho Che, what do you think about the state of Canadian comics and the industry today?

HCA: I began my career in the 1980s right here in Toronto, working for a Canadian publisher called Vortex Comics.[6] Publishing at the same time out of Montreal, and somewhere else in Canada, were Matrix Comics and Caliber Comics.[7] So, there was a little bit of a homegrown industry. But what I really liked about Vortex Comics was the fact that they focused outside of the superhero genre, and they were more about the cutting edge of what was possible in comic books at that time. So, I came of age with the mindset that our talent and our publications didn't have to take a backseat to anybody. That's an attitude I have maintained ever since. We've produced cartoonists like Hal Foster, Todd McFarlane, Seth, Chester Brown, Ken Steacy, Julie Doucet, Paul Rivoche, Adrian Dingle, Ramón K. Pérez, Becca Kinsey, the list goes on and on. Our work is world class as far as I'm concerned.

Publishers like Drawn & Quarterly and Lev Gleason Presents (formerly known as Chapterhouse) have continued to set the high standard of publishing in Canada.[8] It's difficult to kind of look up from my computer or drawing board, as someone churning out work on a day-to-day basis,

to take stock of the industry as a whole. I guess if I had to say anything, it would be that we're in as good a place as we can expect to be with the behemoth that is the United States right below us. We will always have to deal with its size, but we're never going to be less than what is produced down there. As far as I'm concerned, we produce the best cartoonists in the world and will continue to do so.

Notes

1. Southern Tutchone is "one of seven Athapaskan languages in the Yukon" and "is spoken in the southwestern part of the territory" ("Southern Tutchone"). There are several dialects of the language, each with their own distinct differences, but these differences do not prevent speakers of different dialects from understanding one another. "The language has a rich sound system," with "seven vowels, three diphthongs, and four tones," and "as many as 43 consonants" ("Southern Tuchtone").
2. The Yukon Native Language Centre supports Yukon First Nations in language revitalization efforts through "training, capacity building, technical expertise, advocacy" and through acting as a central repository of language resources and training (*Yukon*). They believe that "[l]anguage learning is lifelong" and connected holistically "to cultural vitality, land, identity, health, and success in life."
3. *Red: A Haida Manga* is a 2009 graphic novel by artist Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas. The full-colour, hand-painted graphic novel has been described as "a groundbreaking mix of Haida imagery and Japanese manga" and was nominated for both a Joe Shuster Award and a Doug Wright Award in 2010 ("*Red*").
4. The Toronto Comics Art Festival (TCAF) "was founded in 2003" and "is an internationally acclaimed comic book festival held annually in Toronto" ("Our Story").
5. Chris Caldwell is a Yukon artist whose satirical illustrations appear in *Scenic Adventures in the Yukon Territory* (2006). Doug Urquhart (1947-2015) was a Whitehorse biologist, environmentalist, and editorial cartoonist whose "PAWS" comic strip appeared in thirty-four Northern newspapers. "Kimberly Edgar is an award-winning artist living on Tr'ondek Hwech'in land in so-called Dawson City, Yukon, Canada" (*Kimberley Edgar*). They have received multiple awards, including a Broken Pencil Zine Award, and have "been nominated for two Doug Wright Awards." They are also the founder of Hecate Press, which works with artists from Northern Canada to build connections across circumpolar regions (*Hecate Press*).
6. Vortex Comics was "a Canadian independent comic book publisher" that operated from 1982 to 1994 "[u]nder the supervision of president, publisher, and editor Bill Marks" ("About").
7. Matrix Graphic Series operated in Montreal, Quebec, from 1984 to 2002. Today, it is most notably recognized as the original publisher of John Bell's *Canuck Comics* (1986), which is "the first major book on Canadian comics" ("Matrix").
8. Drawn & Quarterly is an internationally renowned comics publisher operating out of Montreal, Quebec. Lev Gleason Presents began operation in 2020 by reviving the previously defunct Lev Gleason Publications, which had closed operations in 1956. Operating with four imprints, Lev Gleason Presents subsumed former Canadian comics publisher Chapterhouse Comics, and the Canadian characters associated with it ("Lev Gleason's Legacy").

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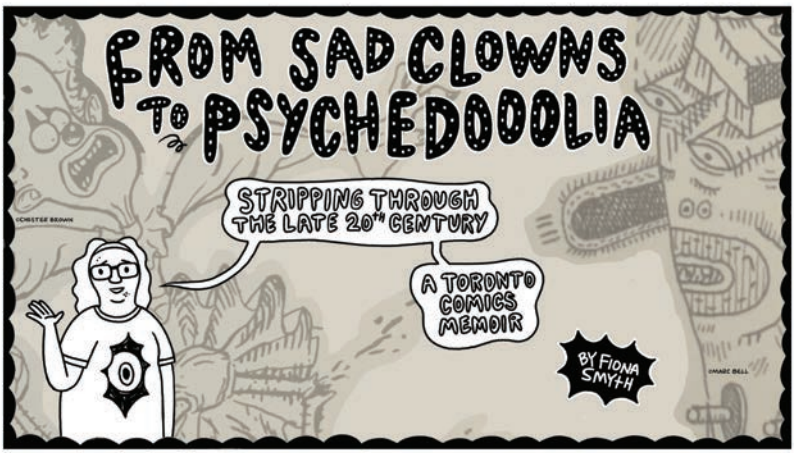
Yukon Native Language Centre. www.ynlc.ca/index.html.

Cole Pauls is a Tahltan comic artist, illustrator, and printmaker hailing from Haines Junction (Yukon Territory) with a BFA in Illustration from Emily Carr University. Residing in Vancouver, Pauls focuses on his two comics series, the first being Pizza Punks*, a self-contained comic strip about punks eating pizza, and the other being* Dakwäkãda Warriors*. In 2017, Pauls won Broken Pencil Magazine's Best Comic and Best Zine of the Year Award for* Dakwäkãda Warriors II*. In 2020,* Dakwäkãda Warriors *won Best Work in an Indigenous Language from the Indigenous Voices Awards and was nominated for the Doug Wright Award categories, The Egghead & The Nipper.*

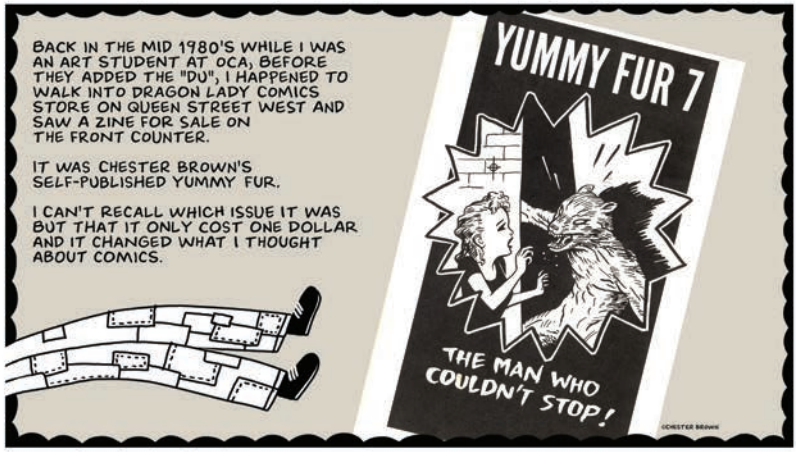
Ho Che Anderson is a Toronto artist and filmmaker who was born in London, England, and named after the Vietnamese and Cuban revolutionaries Ho Chi Minh and Che Guevara. Anderson began his career as the author of numerous graphic novels, including King*, a biography of the Reverend Doctor Martin Luther King Jr.; the horror-thriller* Sand & Fury*; and the science fiction action-adventure* Godhead*. Anderson wrote and directed his first feature in 2018, the supernatural heist thriller* Le Corbeau*, for Canada's Telefilm, and is currently in development on a second feature. He also recently directed his first animated short,* Governance 2020*, for the National Film Board of Canada. Next up is the supernatural graphic novel,* The Resurrectionists*, for Abrams Books imprint Megascope, and another NeoText novella,* Rizzo*, following his latest release,* Stone*.*

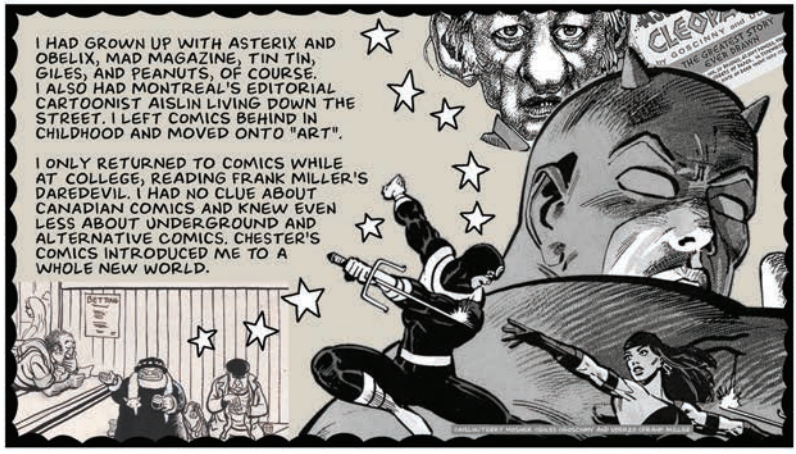
From Sad Clowns to Psychedooolia

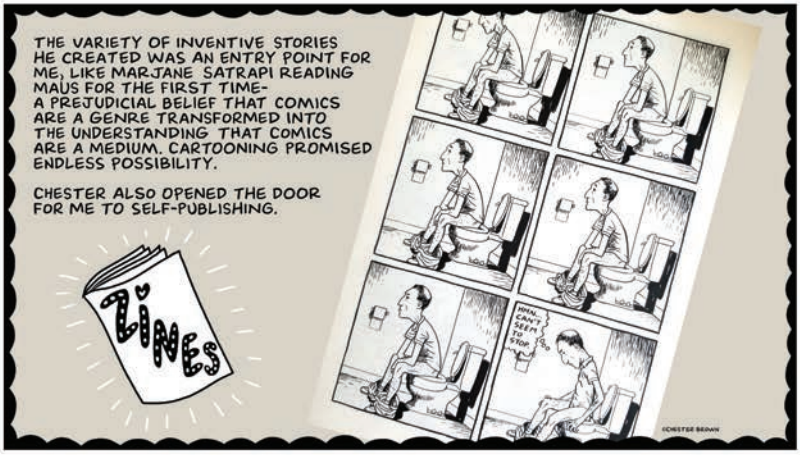
Fiona Smyth

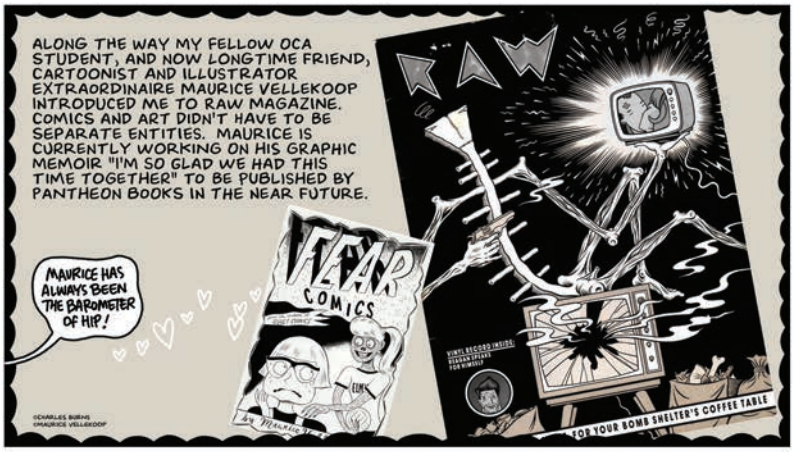


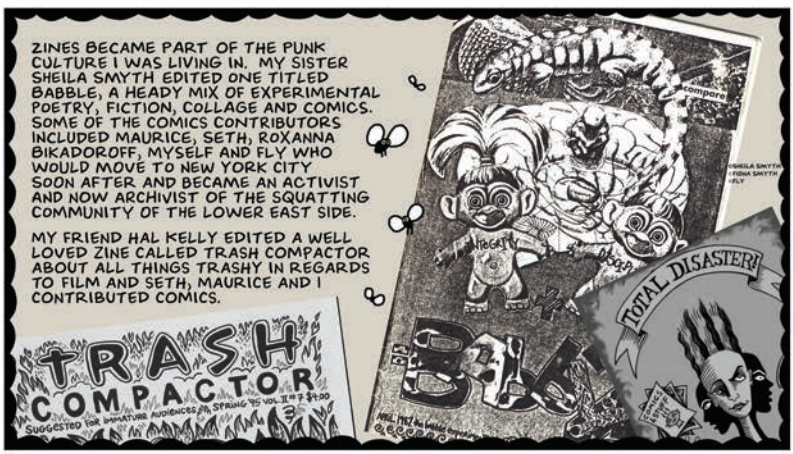
Toronto feminist painter, illustrator, cartoonist, and comics educator Fiona Smyth (she/her) collaborated with sex educator Cory Silverberg on the award-winning kids' books What Makes a Baby, Sex Is a Funny Word *and, released in 2022,* You Know, Sex *(Seven Stories Press).* Somnambulance*, a thirty-year collection of her comics, was published by Koyama Press in 2018. Fiona was inducted into the Doug Wright Awards' Giants of the North Canadian Cartoonist Hall of Fame in 2019.*

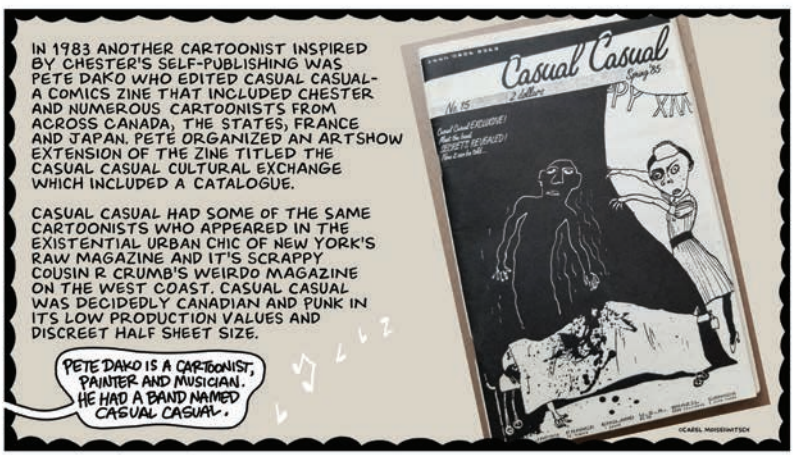

BACK IN THE MID 1980'S WHILE I WAS AN ART STUDENT AT OCA, BEFORE THEY ADDED THE "DU", I HAPPENED TO WALK INTO DRAGON LADY COMICS STORE ON QUEEN STREET WEST AND SAW A ZINE FOR SALE ON THE FRONT COUNTER.
IT WAS CHESTER BROWN'S SELF-PUBLISHED YUMMY FUR.
I CAN'T RECALL WHICH ISSUE IT WAS BUT THAT IT ONLY COST ONE DOLLAR AND IT CHANGED WHAT I THOUGHT ABOUT COMICS.
YUMMY FUR 7
THE MAN WHO COULDN'T STOP!
©CHESTER BROWN

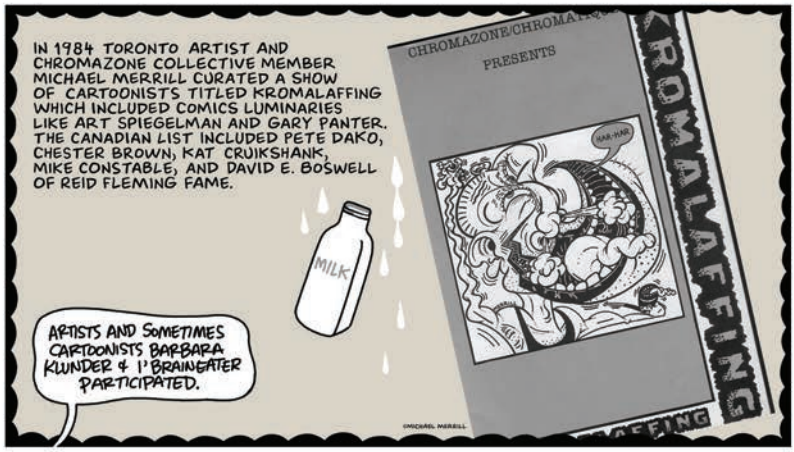

I HAD GROWN UP WITH ASTERIX AND OBELIX, MAD MAGAZINE, TIN TIN, GILES, AND PEANUTS, OF COURSE. I ALSO HAD MONTREAL'S EDITORIAL CARTOONIST AISLIN LIVING DOWN THE STREET. I LEFT COMICS BEHIND IN CHILDHOOD AND MOVED ONTO "ART".
I ONLY RETURNED TO COMICS WHILE AT COLLEGE, READING FRANK MILLER'S DAREDEVIL. I HAD NO CLUE ABOUT CANADIAN COMICS AND KNEW EVEN LESS ABOUT UNDERGROUND AND ALTERNATIVE COMICS. CHESTER'S COMICS INTRODUCED ME TO A WHOLE NEW WORLD.
CLEOPATRA
THE GREATEST STORY EVER DRAWN
DETOX

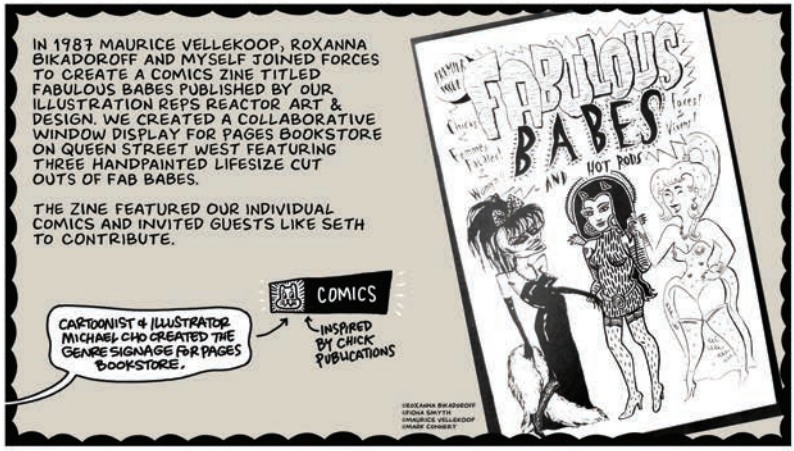

THE VARIETY OF INVENTIVE STORIES HE CREATED WAS AN ENTRY POINT FOR ME, LIKE MARJANE SATRAPI READING MAUS FOR THE FIRST TIME- A PREJUDICIAL BELIEF THAT COMICS ARE A GENRE TRANSFORMED INTO THE UNDERSTANDING THAT COMICS ARE A MEDIUM. CARTOONING PROMISED ENDLESS POSSIBILITY.
CHESTER ALSO OPENED THE DOOR FOR ME TO SELF-PUBLISHING.
ZINES
HMM. CAN'T SEEM TO STOP.
©CHESTER BROWN

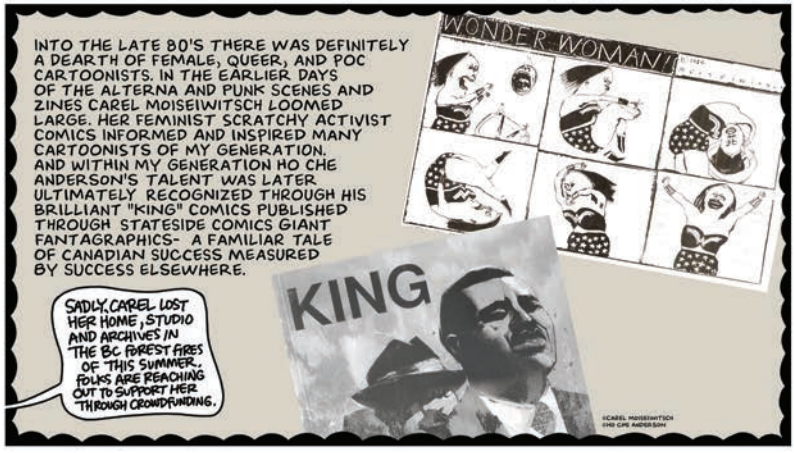

ALONG THE WAY MY FELLOW OCA STUDENT, AND NOW LONGTIME FRIEND, CARTOONIST AND ILLUSTRATOR EXTRAORDINAIRE MAURICE VELLEKOOP INTRODUCED ME TO RAW MAGAZINE. COMICS AND ART DIDN'T HAVE TO BE SEPARATE ENTITIES. MAURICE IS CURRENTLY WORKING ON HIS GRAPHIC MEMOIR "I'M SO GLAD WE HAD THIS TIME TOGETHER" TO BE PUBLISHED BY PANTHEON BOOKS IN THE NEAR FUTURE.
MAURICE HAS ALWAYS BEEN THE BAROMETER OF HIP!
RAW
FEAR COMICS
FOR YOUR BOMB SHELTER'S COFFEE TABLE
©CHARLES BURNS ©MAURICE VELLEKOOP

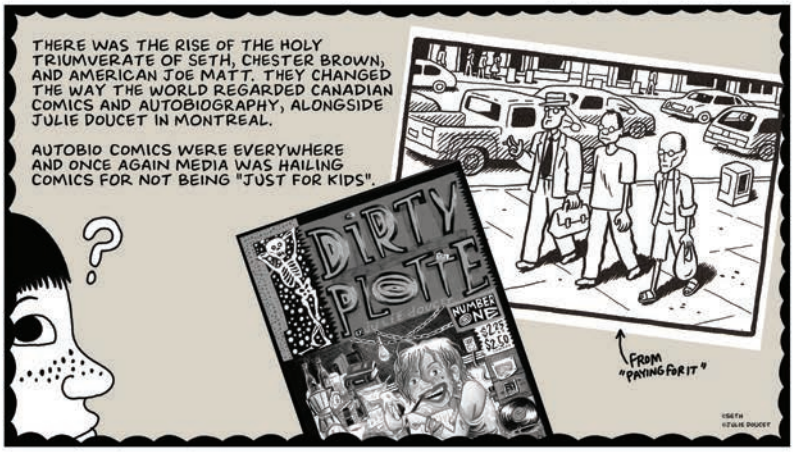

ZINES BECAME PART OF THE PUNK CULTURE I WAS LIVING IN. MY SISTER SHEILA SMYTH EDITED ONE TITLED BABBLE, A HEADY MIX OF EXPERIMENTAL POETRY, FICTION, COLLAGE AND COMICS. SOME OF THE COMICS CONTRIBUTORS INCLUDED MAURICE, SETH, ROXANNA BIKADOROFF, MYSELF AND FLY WHO WOULD MOVE TO NEW YORK CITY SOON AFTER AND BECAME AN ACTIVIST AND NOW ARCHIVIST OF THE SQUATTING COMMUNITY OF THE LOWER EAST SIDE.
MY FRIEND HAL KELLY EDITED A WELL LOVED ZINE CALLED TRASH COMPACTOR ABOUT ALL THINGS TRASHY IN REGARDS TO FILM AND SETH, MAURICE AND I CONTRIBUTED COMICS.
TRASH COMPACTOR
TOTAL DISASTER!

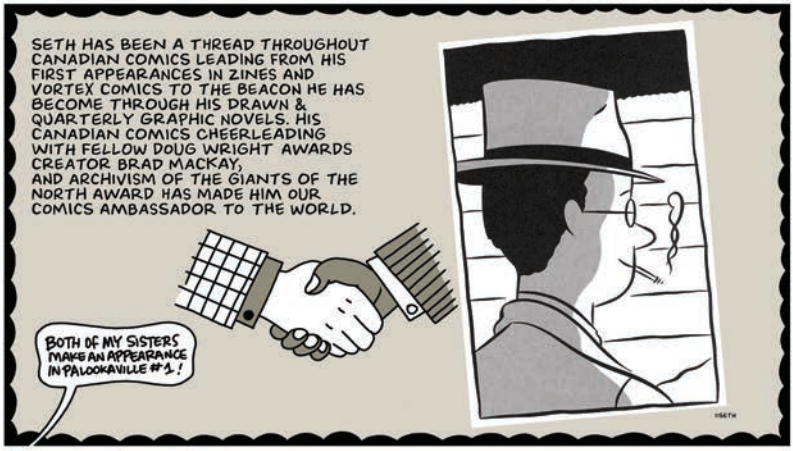

IN 1983 ANOTHER CARTOONIST INSPIRED BY CHESTER'S SELF-PUBLISHING WAS PETE DAKO WHO EDITED CASUAL CASUAL- A COMICS ZINE THAT INCLUDED CHESTER AND NUMEROUS CARTOONISTS FROM ACROSS CANADA, THE STATES, FRANCE AND JAPAN. PETE ORGANIZED AN ARTSHOW EXTENSION OF THE ZINE TITLED THE CASUAL CASUAL CULTURAL EXCHANGE WHICH INCLUDED A CATALOGUE.
CASUAL CASUAL HAD SOME OF THE SAME CARTOONISTS WHO APPEARED IN THE EXISTENTIAL URBAN CHIC OF NEW YORK'S RAW MAGAZINE AND IT'S SCRAPPY COUSIN R CRUMB'S WEIRDO MAGAZINE ON THE WEST COAST. CASUAL CASUAL WAS DECIDEDLY CANADIAN AND PUNK IN ITS LOW PRODUCTION VALUES AND DISCREET HALF SHEET SIZE.
PETE DAKO IS A CARTOONIST, PAINTER AND MUSICIAN. HE HAD A BAND NAMED CASUAL CASUAL.
Casual Casual
©CAROL MOSEWITSCH

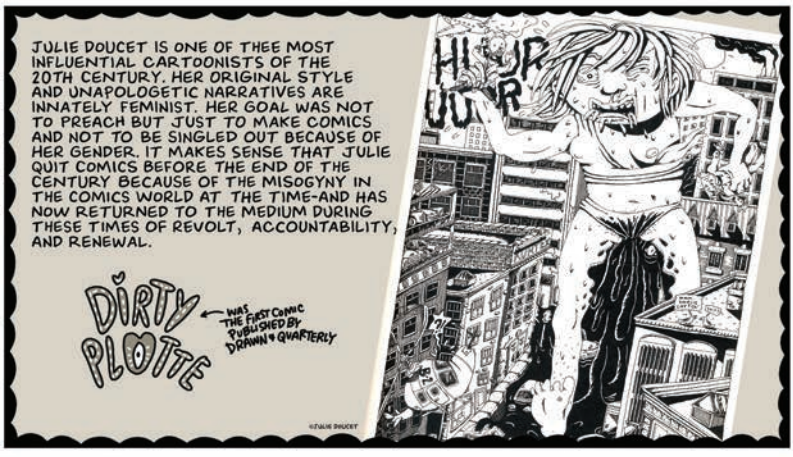

IN 1984 TORONTO ARTIST AND CHROMAZONE COLLECTIVE MEMBER MICHAEL MERRILL CURATED A SHOW OF CARTOONISTS TITLED KROMALAFFING WHICH INCLUDED COMICS LUMINARIES LIKE ART SPIEGELMAN AND GARY PANTER. THE CANADIAN LIST INCLUDED PETE DAKO, CHESTER BROWN, KAT CRUIKSHANK, MIKE CONSTABLE, AND DAVID E. BOSWELL OF REID FLEMING FAME.
CHROMAZONE/CHROMA
PRESENTS
KROMALAFFING
MILK
ARTISTS AND SOMETIMES CARTOONISTS BARBARA KLUNDER & I'BRAINEATER PARTICIPATED.
©MICHAEL MERRILL


IN 1987 MAURICE VELLEKOOP, ROXANNA BIKADOROFF AND MYSELF JOINED FORCES TO CREATE A COMICS ZINE TITLED FABULOUS BABES PUBLISHED BY OUR ILLUSTRATION REPS REACTOR ART & DESIGN. WE CREATED A COLLABORATIVE WINDOW DISPLAY FOR PAGES BOOKSTORE ON QUEEN STREET WEST FEATURING THREE HANDPAINTED LIFESIZE CUT OUTS OF FAB BABES.
THE ZINE FEATURED OUR INDIVIDUAL COMICS AND INVITED GUESTS LIKE SETH TO CONTRIBUTE.
FABULOUS BABES AND HOT RODS
COMICS
INSPIRED BY CHICK PUBLICATIONS
CARTOONIST & ILLUSTRATOR MICHAEL CHO CREATED THE GENRE SIGNAGE FOR PAGES BOOKSTORE.
©ROXANNA BIKADOROFF
©FIONA SMYTH
©MAURICE VELLEKOOP
©MARK CONBERT


INTO THE LATE 80'S THERE WAS DEFINITELY A DEARTH OF FEMALE, QUEER, AND POC CARTOONISTS. IN THE EARLIER DAYS OF THE ALTERNA AND PUNK SCENES AND ZINES CAREL MOISEIWITSCH LOOMED LARGE. HER FEMINIST SCRATCHY ACTIVIST COMICS INFORMED AND INSPIRED MANY CARTOONISTS OF MY GENERATION. AND WITHIN MY GENERATION HO CHE ANDERSON'S TALENT WAS LATER ULTIMATELY RECOGNIZED THROUGH HIS BRILLIANT "KING" COMICS PUBLISHED THROUGH STATESIDE COMICS GIANT FANTAGRAPHICS- A FAMILIAR TALE OF CANADIAN SUCCESS MEASURED BY SUCCESS ELSEWHERE.
WONDER WOMAN!
KING
SADLY, CAREL LOST HER HOME, STUDIO AND ARCHIVES IN THE BC FOREST FIRES OF THIS SUMMER. FOLKS ARE REACHING OUT TO SUPPORT HER THROUGH CROWDFUNDING.
©CAREL MOISEIWITSCH
©HO CHE ANDERSON


THERE WAS THE RISE OF THE HOLY TRIUMVERATE OF SETH, CHESTER BROWN, AND AMERICAN JOE MATT. THEY CHANGED THE WAY THE WORLD REGARDED CANADIAN COMICS AND AUTOBIOGRAPHY, ALONGSIDE JULIE DOUCET IN MONTREAL.
AUTOBIO COMICS WERE EVERYWHERE AND ONCE AGAIN MEDIA WAS HAILING COMICS FOR NOT BEING "JUST FOR KIDS".
?
DIRTY PLOTTE
NUMBER ONE
FROM "PAYING FOR IT"
©SETH ©JULIE DOUCET


SETH HAS BEEN A THREAD THROUGHOUT CANADIAN COMICS LEADING FROM HIS FIRST APPEARANCES IN ZINES AND VORTEX COMICS TO THE BEACON HE HAS BECOME THROUGH HIS DRAWN & QUARTERLY GRAPHIC NOVELS. HIS CANADIAN COMICS CHEERLEADING WITH FELLOW DOUG WRIGHT AWARDS CREATOR BRAD MACKAY, AND ARCHIVISM OF THE GIANTS OF THE NORTH AWARD HAS MADE HIM OUR COMICS AMBASSADOR TO THE WORLD.
BOTH OF MY SISTERS MAKE AN APPEARANCE IN PALOOKAVILLE #1!
©SETH

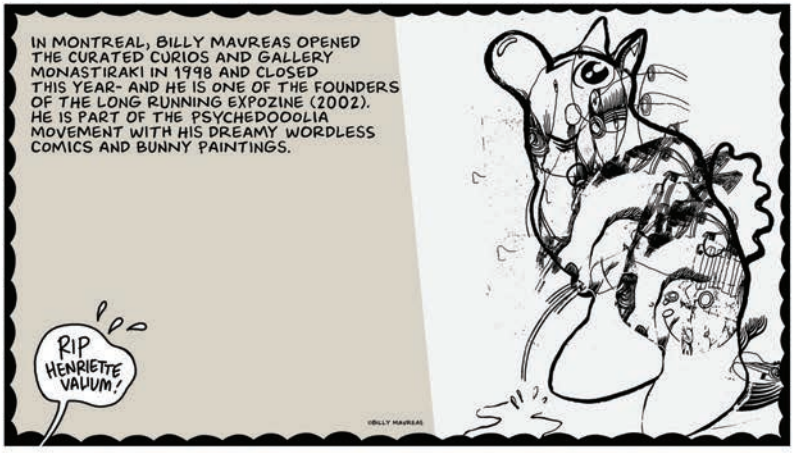

JULIE DOUCET IS ONE OF THEE MOST INFLUENTIAL CARTOONISTS OF THE 20TH CENTURY. HER ORIGINAL STYLE AND UNAPOLOGETIC NARRATIVES ARE INNATELY FEMINIST. HER GOAL WAS NOT TO PREACH BUT JUST TO MAKE COMICS AND NOT TO BE SINGLED OUT BECAUSE OF HER GENDER. IT MAKES SENSE THAT JULIE QUIT COMICS BEFORE THE END OF THE CENTURY BECAUSE OF THE MISOGYNY IN THE COMICS WORLD AT THE TIME-AND HAS NOW RETURNED TO THE MEDIUM DURING THESE TIMES OF REVOLT, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND RENEWAL.
DIRTY PLOTTE
← WAS THE FIRST COMIC PUBLISHED BY DRAWN + QUARTERLY
©JULIE DOUCET

EXCLAIM MAGAZINE (1992) AND VICE MAGAZINE (1994) INCLUDED COMICS IN THEIR PAGES. THIS WAS A BOON FOR CARTOONISTS AND COMICS FANS- REGULAR COMICS VENUES FOR WORKS WITHOUT EDITORIAL RESTRICTIONS ALBEIT WITH LITTLE OR NO PAY.

IN THE EARLY 90'S AN ANONYMOUS TEENAGER FROM ETOBICOKE BEGAN TO LEAVE MYSTERIOUS MINI-ZINES AROUND TORONTO. MARK CONNERY'S RUDY COMICS WAS A PIVOTAL MOMENT IN A "MOVEMENT" OF WHAT CANADIAN CARTOONIST ORIGINAL MARC BELL LATER COINED AS "PSYCHEDOOOLIA". PSYCHEDOOOLIA TO MY UNDERSTANDING IS WORK OF A DECIDEDLY DOODLEY ORIGIN- AN ANTI-DESIGN, STREAM OF CONCIOUSNESS, PUNKY/NO RULES, LOW PRODUCTION VALUES, PRODUCED BY OUTLIER/OUTSIDERS. THESE WORKS EXIST OUTSIDE CAPITALIST CONSTRUCTS AND MAINSTREAM NORMS.

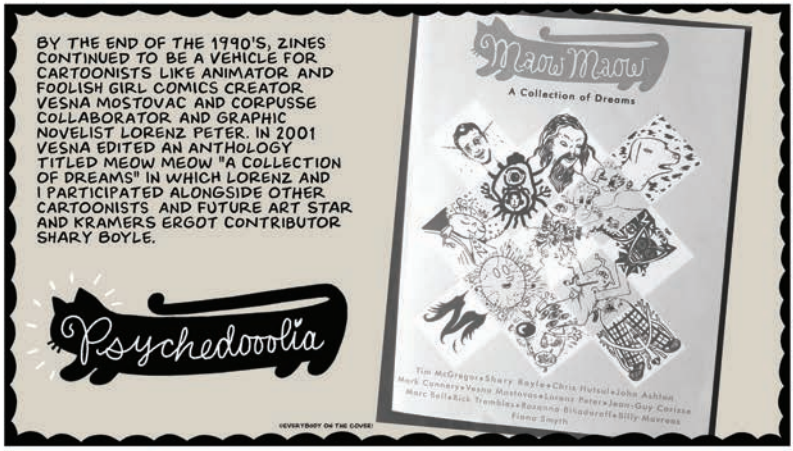
MARC BELL IS A SINGULAR VISIONARY CARTOONIST. HE IS THE EPITOME OF CANADIAN CARTOONING- DREAMY, SILLY, INSIGHTFUL, ARTFUL, AND COLLABORATIVE AS EVIDENCED BY HIS NUMEROUS WORKS WITH FELLOW CARTOONISTS AND ARTISTS INCLUDING MARK CONNERY, JASON MCLEAN, AND AMY LOCKHART.

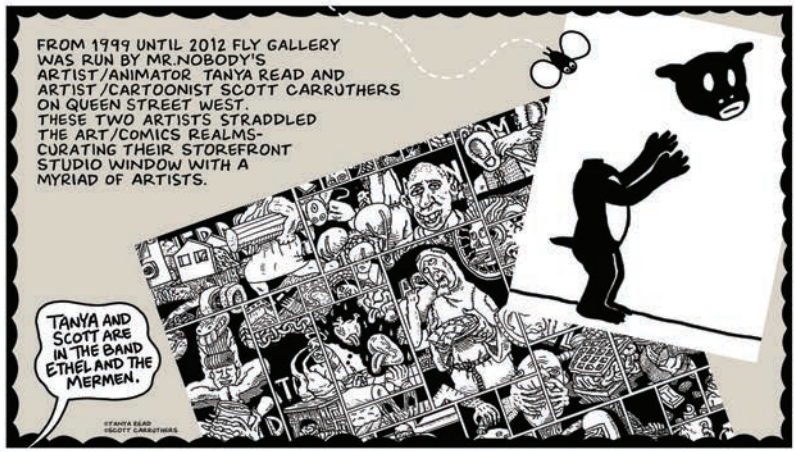

AMY LOCKHART HAS LEAD THE WAY IN MASHING TOGETHER ART, COMICS, FILM, AND ANIMATION. HER FEMINIST AND FUNKY ART IS FROM AN ANARCHIC/ DYSTOPIAN/TRANSGRESSIVE ANGLE. SHE IS HARD TO DEFINE LIKE A CHILD OF JOHN WATERS AND LOUISE BOURGEOIS. SHE SHOCKS, TITTILATES AND MAKES YOU CRAP YOUR PANTS FROM LAUGHING SO HARD. SHE IS THE QUEEN OF PSYCHEDOOOLIA.
©AMY LOCKHART

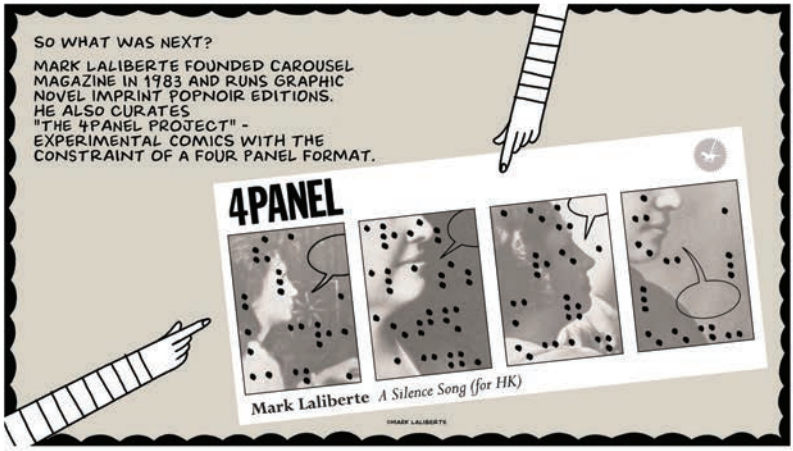

IN MONTREAL, BILLY MAUREAS OPENED THE CURATED CURIOS AND GALLERY MONASTIRAKI IN 1998 AND CLOSED THIS YEAR- AND HE IS ONE OF THE FOUNDERS OF THE LONG RUNNING EXPOZINE (2002). HE IS PART OF THE PSYCHEDOOOLIA MOVEMENT WITH HIS DREAMY WORDLESS COMICS AND BUNNY PAINTINGS.
RIP HENRIETTE VALIUM!
©BILLY MAUREAS


EAST COAST'S ONE AND ONLY ANDY BROWN'S CONUNDRUM PRESS BEGAN IN 1996 AND INCLUDED BOOKS BY COMICS CREATORS LIKE JOE OLLMANN WHO WOULD GO ON TO CO-CURATE THIS IS SERIOUS WITH ALANA TRAFICANTE AT THE ART GALLERY OF HAMILTON IN 2019. CONUNDRUM PUBLISHED THE SHOW'S CATALOGUE.
THIS IS SERIOUS
A HISTORIC SURVEY OF INDIE COMICS!
JOE'S NEW GRAPHIC NOVEL "FICTIONAL FATHER" IS OUT NOW THROUGH D+Q!

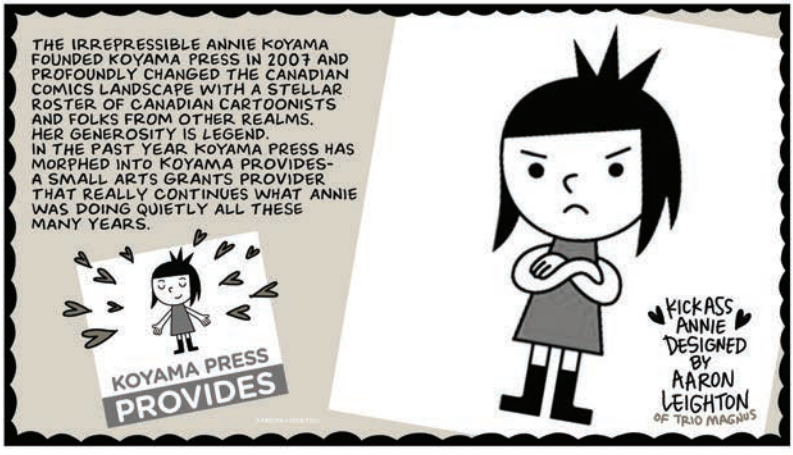

INTO THE LATE 1990'S CARTOONISTS CHRIS HUTSUL AND MICHAEL COMEAU ENTERED THE COMICS ZINE SCENE- LATER CHRIS EMBRACED A CAREER AS A FILM DIRECTOR AND MICHAEL GAINED FAME THROUGH CREATING POSTERS FOR WILL MUNRO'S QUEER DANCE NIGHT VAZALEEN AND FOR HIS RE-ENVISIONING OF WOLVERINE'S VERY CANADIAN STORY IN HELLBERTA. MICHAEL IS A MEMBER OF PSYCHEDOOOLIA AND HE IS IMMORTALIZED IN BRYAN LEE O'MALLEY'S SCOTT PILGRIM AS THE COOL-KNOWS-EVERYBODY-AND-EVERYTHING "COMEAU" CHARACTER.
CHRIS WAS THE FIRST CARTOONIST ANNIE KOYAMA PUBLISHED.
MY PARTNER CRAIG DANIELS PLAYS WOLVERINE IN THE FOTO-NOVELLA PART OF HELLBERTA!
©CHRISTOPHER HUTSUL ©MICHAEL COMEAU
FRIDAY JUNE 24
2 FLOORS OF LEE'S PALACE
SATURDAY JUNE 25
2 FLOORS OF LEE'S PALACE
PUCK BUNNY

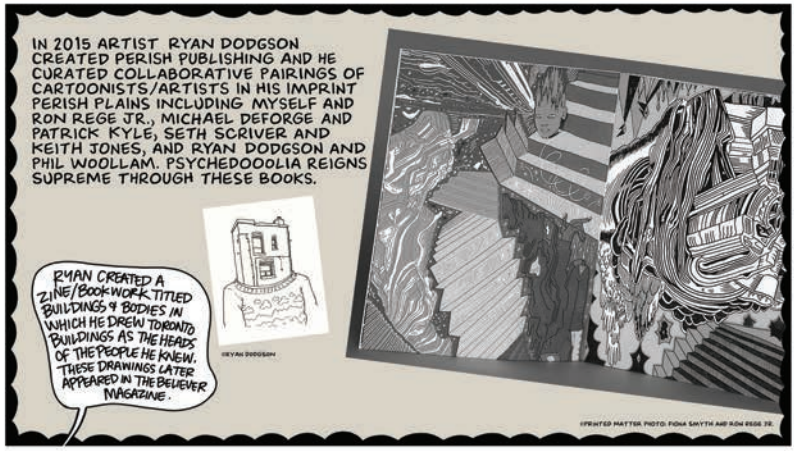

BY THE END OF THE 1990'S, ZINES CONTINUED TO BE A VEHICLE FOR CARTOONISTS LIKE ANIMATOR AND FOOLISH GIRL COMICS CREATOR VESNA MOSTOVAC AND CORPUSSE COLLABORATOR AND GRAPHIC NOVELIST LORENZ PETER. IN 2001 VESNA EDITED AN ANTHOLOGY TITLED MEOW MEOW "A COLLECTION OF DREAMS" IN WHICH LORENZ AND I PARTICIPATED ALONGSIDE OTHER CARTOONISTS AND FUTURE ART STAR AND KRAMERS ERGOT CONTRIBUTOR SHARY BOYLE.
Psychedooolia
Meow Meow
A Collection of Dreams
Tim McGregor • Shary Boyle • Chris Hutsul • John Ashton
Mark Connery • Vesna Mostovac • Lorenz Peter • Jean-Guy Cotisse
Marc Bell • Rick Trembles • Roxanna Bikadoroff • Billy Mavreas
Fiona Smyth
(EVERYBODY ON THE COVER!


FROM 1999 UNTIL 2012 FLY GALLERY WAS RUN BY MR.NOBODY'S ARTIST/ANIMATOR TANYA READ AND ARTIST/CARTOONIST SCOTT CARRUTHERS ON QUEEN STREET WEST. THESE TWO ARTISTS STRADDLED THE ART/COMICS REALMS- CURATING THEIR STOREFRONT STUDIO WINDOW WITH A MYRIAD OF ARTISTS.
TANYA AND SCOTT ARE IN THE BAND ETHEL AND THE MERMEN.
©TANYA READ ©SCOTT CARRUTHERS


SO WHAT WAS NEXT?
MARK LALIBERTE FOUNDED CAROUSEL MAGAZINE IN 1983 AND RUNS GRAPHIC NOVEL IMPRINT POPNOIR EDITIONS. HE ALSO CURATES "THE 4PANEL PROJECT" - EXPERIMENTAL COMICS WITH THE CONSTRAINT OF A FOUR PANEL FORMAT.
4PANEL
Mark Laliberte A Silence Song (for HK)


IN 2003 THE BEGUILING FOUNDED THE NOW INTERNATIONALLY ACCLAIMED TORONTO COMICS ART FESTIVAL.
THE COMICS/ART COLLECTIVE OF WOWEE ZONK- THE INHERITORS OF PSYCHEDOOOLIA- CHRIS KUZMA, GINETTE LAPALME AND PATRICK KYLE CURATED THE SMALL PRESS BROWSERY AT TCAF FOR MORE THAN A DECADE OF CUTTING EDGE COMICS AND ZINES- WITH A CELEBRATION OF QUEER, TRANS, POC, AND INDIGENOUS CREATORS INCLUDING COLE PAULS, ELI HOWEY, TOMMI PARRISH, ERIC KOSTIUK WILLIAMS, XIOAXIAO LI, JAIME Q, JAMIYLA LOWE, AND KENDRA YEE.
TCAF
JOHN PORCELLINO!
EPIC


THE IRREPRESSIBLE ANNIE KOYAMA FOUNDED KOYAMA PRESS IN 2007 AND PROFOUNDLY CHANGED THE CANADIAN COMICS LANDSCAPE WITH A STELLAR ROSTER OF CANADIAN CARTOONISTS AND FOLKS FROM OTHER REALMS. HER GENEROSITY IS LEGEND. IN THE PAST YEAR KOYAMA PRESS HAS MORPHED INTO KOYAMA PROVIDES- A SMALL ARTS GRANTS PROVIDER THAT REALLY CONTINUES WHAT ANNIE WAS DOING QUIETLY ALL THESE MANY YEARS.
KOYAMA PRESS PROVIDES
KICKASS ANNIE DESIGNED BY AARON LEIGHTON OF TRIO MAGNUS


IN 2015 ARTIST RYAN DODGSON CREATED PERISH PUBLISHING AND HE CURATED COLLABORATIVE PAIRINGS OF CARTOONISTS/ARTISTS IN HIS IMPRINT PERISH PLAINS INCLUDING MYSELF AND RON REGE JR., MICHAEL DEFORGE AND PATRICK KYLE, SETH SCRIVER AND KEITH JONES, AND RYAN DODGSON AND PHIL WOOLLAM. PSYCHEDOOOLIA REIGNS SUPREME THROUGH THESE BOOKS.
RYAN CREATED A ZINE/BOOKWORK TITLED BUILDINGS & BODIES IN WHICH HE DREW TORONTO BUILDINGS AS THE HEADS OF THE PEOPLE HE KNEW. THESE DRAWINGS LATER APPEARED IN THE BELIEVER MAGAZINE.
©RYAN DODGSON
PRINTED MATTER PHOTO: FIONA SMYTH AND RON REGE JR.


IN 2013 JONNY PETERSEN'S CARTOONIST/ZINESTERS/ARTISTS' HANG OUT WEIRD THINGS CONTINUED TO CARRY THE PSYCHEDOOOLIC FLAG PROUDLY UNTIL THIS PAST SUMMEROF 2021. THE SPACE IS BECOMING CARTOONIST/ ARTIST/KOYAMA PRESS' GINETTE LAPALME'S TOUTOUNE GALLERY- ANOTHER PURVEYOR OF PSYCHEDOOOLIA.
WEIRD THINGS NORMAL THINGS
↑SETH SCRIVER MADE A "NORMAL THINGS" SIGN FOR THE EMPTY NEIGHBOURING STOREFRONT.
AMY LOCKHART
NATE ROMERO

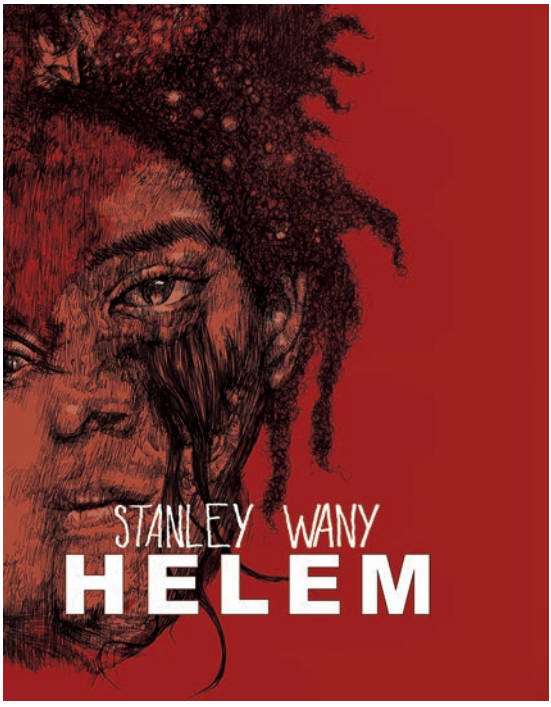

MICHAEL DEFORGE, JILLIAN TAMAKI AND MARIKO TAMAKI, HARTLEY LIN, NINA BUNJEVAC, JESSE JACOBS, CONNOR WILLUMSEN AND WALTER SCOTT ARE SOME OF THE CARTOONISTS LEADING THE WAY IN CANADIAN COMICS EXCELLENCE AND INNOVATION, SOME OF WHOM STARTED THEIR CAREERS SELF PUBLISHING ZINES MUCH LIKE CHESTER BROWN BACK IN THE 1980'S.
I SEE THE FUTURE OF CANADIAN COMICS BURNING BRIGHT IN PUBLISHERS CLEOPATRIA PETERSON, TERRENCE ABRAHAMS, AND YASMIN EMERY'S COMICS ZINE FORMAT OLD GROWTH PRESS IN SHARING THE BIPOC/LGBTQ2S+ VOICES OF TODAY.
it's just the beginning!
Five Minutes In Karachi
Misbah Ahmed
WHAT THEY DON'T KNOW
Riley J. Flowers
NATURALLY

“I’m trying to create an experience”: Stanley Wany on Representation, Surrealism, and Drawing *Helem*

An edited conversation with Candida Rifkind

About Stanley Wany

Stanley Wany is an Afro-Canadian artist based in Montreal as well as in Canada’s national capital region. His practice includes graphic novels, pen and ink drawings, and paintings. He is currently pursuing a Master of Fine Arts and Media at the Université du Québec à Montréal. Wany has founded two independent publication companies, Éditions Tripcomix, and recently Argle Bargle Books. The basis of his practice in comics and visual arts explores mainstream culture, the subconscious, and myths, specifically as these relate the experience of people of African descent in Western society.



Cover of *Helem* (Conundrum Press, 2021).

Helem was published by Conundrum Press in 2021. It combines Wany's *Agalma* (2015) and *Sequences* (2017), both published by Éditions Tripcomix, and adds new material. A largely wordless graphic narrative, *Helem* explores the lives of an unnamed woman who is dealing with losing "her sister to suicide," and a man who "has lost his way" having spent the last ten years "working in a call centre" (Oliver).

In his review for *Broken Frontier*, Andy Oliver writes,

> *Helem* then is a graphic stream-of-consciousness as worlds merge in and out of each other, one surreal scenario evolving and emerging from another, the consciousnesses and thought processes of both characters communicated through a symbolism that is both oblique and yet, on a visceral level, strangely connective too. This is one of those narratives that asks us to bring something of ourselves to it; as such every reader will take something different from it, reacting and interacting with its pages in distinct and individual ways.

The following is an edited conversation with Stanley Wany that took place over Zoom on April 6, 2022.

Candida Rifkind: Instead of starting with how you started drawing comics, I want to ask about what kinds of comics you read as a kid?

Stanley Wany: I immigrated to Canada from Haiti at the age of six, and comics became a means through which I could interact with the new society. I have an interesting background because, although both my parents met in Haiti and I was born in Haiti, their parents are not really Haitian. We're really Caribbean on my mother's side because my grandfather is from Trinidad and my grandmother is from Cuba. And on my dad's side, I think my grandfather is Cuban and my mom told me my grandmother was a white Spanish woman. There's a lot of diversity in my background and that informs the way I perceive things and my work.

I started reading comics at a very young age, and the ones that I was really interested in were *Shang-Chi, Master of Kung Fu*, and *Warlock*, anything by Jim Starlin that was philosophical and dark. My family were intellectuals, we were upper middle class, and we read a lot, so my relationship to culture was very precise at a young age. I read Dante's *Inferno* at the age of eight or nine, and I had to sleep a whole week with the lights on!

I was never really interested in the French *bandes dessinées*. I remember reading *Tintin in the Congo* at a young age and finding it very problematic, so I left BDs behind because I thought comics offered storylines that were more interesting.

CR: Can you tell us about how you became a comics artist and your background as an artist?

SW: I remember one of my aunts who knew me when I was a baby said all you had to do was give me a pen and paper and you could leave me all day and I would just draw, I was one of those kids. My family was very close knit and most of my family live in the States. I had an uncle who lived in New York, so we would spend most of our summers in Queens in the 1970s and 1980s, when hip hop was taking hold, and that was a big influence on me. I had a cousin who was into comics, wrestling, horror movies, TV shows, and so on, and he got me into that stuff.

My parents were quite strict and wanted me to become an engineer or a doctor or something like that, and so when I went to CEGEP I was going to become an electrical engineer. But there are some people who are artists, whether they like it or not, and I think I am one of those people. But for several years I didn't make art at all. Then I left home early, at nineteen, and that's when I really immersed myself into art, music, and exploring and discovering new things. I was soaking everything up in the Montreal 1990s scene. I was aware of the Quebec comics scene in the 1990s, but I didn't have a direct relationship with those artists. I did spend a lot of time at Les Foufounes Électriques, and Henriette Valium had his studio on top of the club, so I was aware of the Quebec comics people, but they weren't that interesting to me at that time.[1]

CR: You also have training in fine arts. How do you see the relationship between fine arts and comics or graphic narrative?

SW: I think the relationship is a slow progression. I'm interested in art that is saying the thing without saying the thing. The reason I was interested in Starlin and all those comic book guys is because they were addressing the big ideas, but their superheroes were aways grey, not black and white. They didn't have the moral fortitude other superheroes had, it was always ambiguous. I have always explored ideas of, not so much superhero exploits, but what actions do to the person. For me, as a displaced person from one culture to another, there is always the question of, who am I and where am I? And slowly, as I got into the comics publishing business, I started to get into drawing and writing comics, and I got back into these questions. I was less interested in drawing a guy saving somebody than looking at the effects of their actions and decisions, in characterization, psychology, ethics, and morality. And this is combined with questions about representation.

The great works of comics can deal with all these aspects, and so I don't see comics and visual arts as separate things because they are both drawing. I mean, what would take me one hundred pages to say in a comic book would take me one installation piece to say in visual arts, but it's just the means through which I'm saying it that are different. And then there's also the public. A couple of years ago there was this discussion about the

difference between a comic and a graphic novel, and to me the difference is the public that receives them. It's the same for me between visual arts and comics, it's a question of who I'm trying to address. I really dislike the connotation that comics should only be for kids, or that comics should only be funny and not serious, or cartoonish. I should be able to talk to an audience at large doing both kinds of works.

CR: Has your style changed much over the years?

SW: I've always had a relationship with drawing and it's funny because as I evolved, it evolved. What I'm realizing now is that drawing is an act of remembering. The line work is like going through the layers of time trying to remember something. There's also the link to surrealist drawing and stream of consciousness that makes drawing a way to communicate something subconscious. I think it is more honest than if you try to consciously inject meaning into your drawings.

When I was starting out, I had a really classic way of working, pencilling, then inking, and I've always loved black-and-white because I'm a big fan of Kurosawa's films, so there's lots of cross-hatching. Then, after working in the comics industry for a while, I decided to go back to school and went to the UQO comics program.[2] This expanded the kind of work I was doing: I was using a lot of collage and integrating photography and exploring more.

One thing that annoys me is when the drawing is too perfect. I need to see those accidents, those imperfections in the scratching and the layering. When you draw you are solving a problem, and you solve that problem and then move on, and then there is another problem and you solve it, and so on.

CR: Can you describe your drawing process for *Helem*?

SW: The story behind these drawings is that after my first son, William, was born, he wouldn't sleep at night. I'm an insomniac and usually need to sleep in the early hours of the morning, but he wouldn't let me sleep, so instead I would go down into my basement and draw. At some point I was just so tired that my conscious mind was in a daze, and so I made these weird drawings. At the time, my co-publisher at Trip Comix,[3] Marc Tessier, saw these drawings and said I should make them into a book. I said, "I don't know what these things are, there's no story," and he pointed out they were all drawn in the same frame of mind, so there's something there. I started thinking about that and putting a book together, even though it made no sense.

CR: Can you talk a little more about your relationship to the 1940s and 1950s Quebec Automatistes, and which of them in particular influence you?

SW: I was especially interested in the sound poetry of Claude Gauvreau, where you don't get attached to words but to the feeling. I think I draw my stories in the same kind of way because I'm not necessarily trying to tell you something or give you a story, I'm trying to create an experience. The way different people receive the word in Gauvreau's poetry is vastly different, and to me that's a good thing.

With *Helem* there is no wrong interpretation. When people see something in it, it's probably because it's there, and the reason why I say "probably" is because I didn't consciously put anything there, my drawing is an unconscious act in the sense it's meant to be a true act, an honest act, and if people see something in it, I'm not going to tell them they're wrong.

The Automatistes were so aesthetically radical, playing with language and elements of language, but they were also politically radical, rejecting religion and their parents' generation. Their politics and the Quiet Revolution were of their own generation, but it's still relevant because, unfortunately, as human beings we seem to keep making the same mistakes all over again.

Now, instead of being a group of white middle-class artists, it's the Black middle class and African descendants in North America who are questioning the very nature of the society in which they're living. We're questioning how we are represented in this society, what this society does for us, and what we do for it. These are questions about colonialism, too, and Indigenous people are asking them as well. And although they were a group of white middle-class artists, the Automatistes had an energy, they questioned things and went against the grain, and I think there's a link there.

CR: *Helem* is full of images of transformation and mythical creatures who are various kinds of shape-shifters or boundary crossers. What kinds of mythologies influence your visual storytelling? Why do you think mythology speaks to something in our psyches?

SW: The thing about *Helem* is these are not all huge events in the characters' lives, those typical comics action-adventure things, because what's important to me are really personal moments. That's what mythologies speak about, going inwards and facing these moments, because nobody can create a scarier monster than yourself. I think the internal landscape is the interesting one to explore. In *Helem*, the two characters, the man and the woman, are opposite each other. The woman goes inside her apartment and inside the subconscious, but the man goes outside his apartment to go drinking. They both arrive in the same landscape, but in a different way.

In a way, I'm very lucky, because at a young age I was exposed to

Caribbean and African myths, and I've also always been interested in European myths. Someone like Joseph Campbell, who went around the world classifying myths, is very influential to me because he shows there are similar myths and figures everywhere you go. To me, the interesting part about myth is that when you go inside, basically we're all the same. We all experience pain and suffering, or passion and hate, and, to me, myth is the precursor of psychology in mapping out the human psyche. The really important aspect of myth to me is the hero's journey quest, which is funny because my books are boring as hell! There's no quest in *Helem*, but actually there is an internal quest.

CR: There are some incredible shifts in layout in *Helem*, such as double-page spreads and split panels. Can you talk a little a bit about the relationship between the panels and the visuals?

SW: The keyword for me in terms of the comics grid is pacing, because panels mark time. This is why I don't use an extravagant grid system, I just like four panels because they allow me to break up time in a way I can pace the story. You may notice that sometimes the grid will repeat an image, which is a way for me to isolate a moment through focusing on the eyes, the mouth, or whatever, and forcing the reader to stop on that detail. And this is when you know that reading the image becomes important.

When the grid is exploded, we're no longer in a confined moment. Now we're in the subconscious, or we're in a landscape, in which time and space no longer take precedent. The splash pages allow the image to transcend the grid, and I use that as a reading mechanism to suggest you are now in a space where things like gravity don't matter, and you need to watch out!

CR: In *Helem*, there is such attention to setting and the spaces in the real world the characters inhabit. The first part is very clearly Montreal, and I wonder if you could speak a little bit about how you see Montreal as a character in the book, or how it shapes your characters?

SW: For me, this is a timeless Montreal, or it is the Montreal from the time when I was younger and exploring. Montreal is the love of my life. It's like your first girlfriend or boyfriend, you always have a soft spot for that first love, and I fell in love with Montreal and the music scene (I'm a metal guy and the city is so great for that, very punk, very working class) because it was so vibrant in the 1990s.

Helem also has this duality between the constructed versus the natural, between Montreal and the forest, which is like the male-female duality in the story. But all these dichotomies are interacting and bouncing off each other. The woman stays in the structured environment in her apartment, and to me, having the female enclosed in that space speaks to the notion of confinement, of being stuck somewhere. And then the man is in the

forest and the natural landscape, although it would be more typical to put the female figure in nature. But I really wanted to put each of them in an environment to experience self-discovery at a deeper level in an environment which they don't control or is not natural to them.

CR: Another striking element of the book is the attention to faces and bodies, including nudity and sexuality. The book begins and ends with Black lovers in erotic embrace. We don't often see Black bodies in Canadian comics (Ho Che Anderson's work being the notable exception here), especially in such intimate scenes. Can you talk about why you wanted to draw Black characters so intimately, not just in terms of sexuality but in terms of the many close-ups on faces?

SW: I think it's so important for us to represent ourselves in a way that isn't the typical caricatures of those European comics I saw growing up. I need to show that Black characters are not just here for comedy, but that we are people who suffer and feel joy. We experience pleasure, we experience intimacy, but in our society it's like the Black body has been reduced to economics or entertainment.

It's so important for me to show a different side because there is not that history, and the representation of Black bodies is one of my frustrations with comics. I think there needs to be a conversation about what we're trying to do, how we address people, and the fact that we too often see Black people suffering. I mean, who else knows more about suffering than Black people in North America, but I wanted *Helem* to guide these characters through hard times and show that they're suffering, but they're also loving, and they're survivors.

CR: Finally, who or what is Helem? Does the title have a specific reference in the book?

SW: Helem has two meanings. In the Bible, Helem is a name that means *dreaming* and *healing*. But it also means *hammering* in Hebrew. So, both characters are healing through their dreams, but then there's a notion of hammering.

In terms of what Helem represents, there's an amazing story in the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, where a person passes, but they don't realize they are dead. A great monster appears in front of them, and the monster actually turns into a guide that assists the newly departed through the netherworld. To me, that amazing image is what Helem represents.

Notes

1. Henriette Valium (1959-2021) was known as "the pope of Montreal's underground" for his prolific output of hallucinogenic comix and paintings. See Marc Tessier's tribute to Valium.
2. Université du Québec en Outaouias offers programs in comic strip design.
3. Éditions Trip is a Montreal alternative comics publisher.

Works Cited

Oliver, Andy. "*Helem*: Two Lives at Critical Junctures Are at the Forefront of Stanley Wany's Visual Stream-of-Consciousness Graphic Novel." *Broken Frontier*, 15 Mar. 2022, www.brokenfrontier.com/helem-stanley-wany-conundrum-press/. Accessed 11 Apr. 2022.

Tessier, Marc. "Henriette Valium, 1959-2021." *The Comics Journal*, 13 Sept. 2021, www.tcj.com/henriette-valium-1959-2021/. Accessed 6 Apr. 2022.

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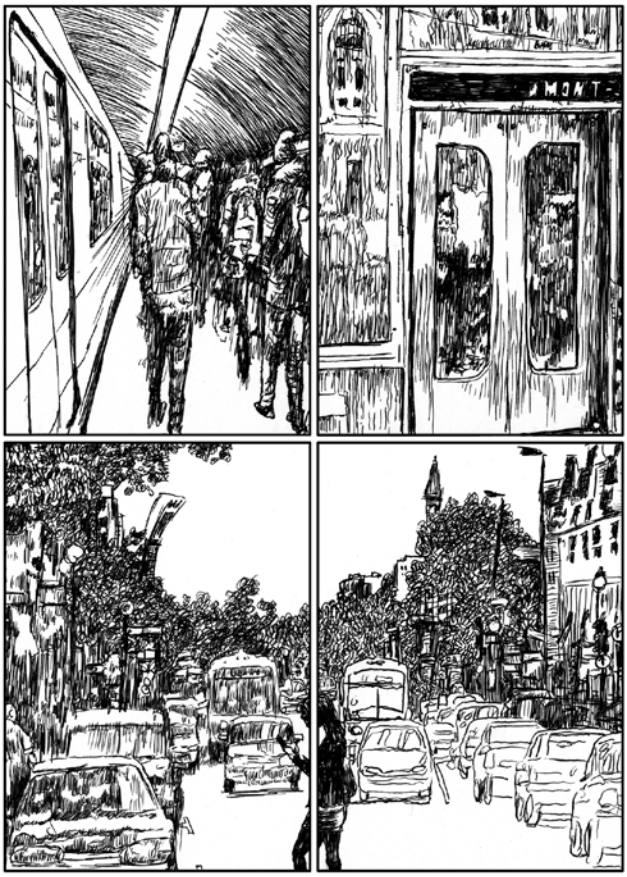

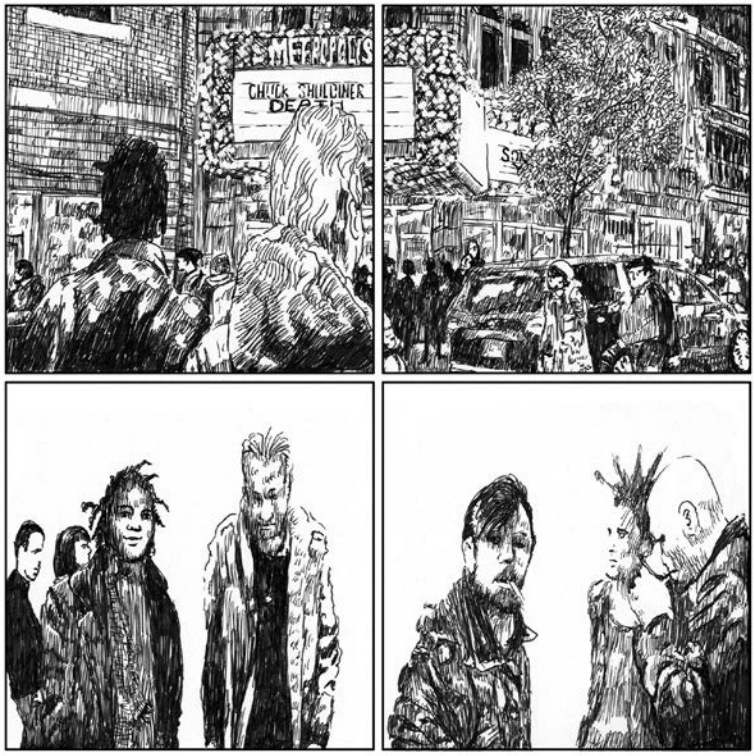

Stanley Wany's work has been exhibited in Canada, the United States, France, Portugal, Finland, and Australia and is found in private and public collections. Agalma, *his first graphic novel, was nominated in 2016 for a Doug Wright Award for the best experimental comics at the Toronto Comics and Arts Festival. As an author, Wany has participated as a guest and panelist in festivals in Canada, France, Finland, Portugal, and the United States. In 2018, he completed an artist residency at the Arteles Creative Center in Tampere, Finland, and over the years he has been the recipient of several travel and creation grants from the Canada Council for the Arts and the Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec.*

Imagining New Alternatives:
Michael DeForge on Comics, Politics, Art, and Canada

An edited conversation with Zachary J. A. Rondinelli

The following has been edited from a series of conversations that took place online in May 2022.

Zachary J. A. Rondinelli: Please tell us how you came to be working in comics. Did you find comics or did comics find you?

Michael DeForge: Growing up, there were lots of comics around the house. My family had collections of *Mutts*, *The Far Side*, *Peanuts*, *Bloom Country*, and *Calvin and Hobbes* lying around, and it was the latter three that really resonated with me as a kid. I basically learned to read and draw off those things. I went through the stock arc of being into superhero comics as a kid and then getting introduced to both alternative comics and manga in high school.

I started self-publishing zines around that same time as I entered the DIY scene and learned to stencil and silkscreen. I was particularly inspired by Fort Thunder and the posters Séripop were making out of Montreal at the time.[1]

Michael DeForge. Photo credit: Matthew-James Wilson.

ZR: Why have comics become the primary form through which you like to tell your stories?

MD: That's always a funny question to answer because at a certain point, I just think of it as the medium I chose and am sort of stuck with. I'm interested in animation and film and am often even more actively engaged with what's going on in that side of things than I am with what's going on in comics. Still, I started in comics and feel like there's a lot of exploring I have left to do there before I really feel finished with them.

I definitely appreciate that even though making comics can be demanding and time-intensive, it's still fairly cost-efficient all things considered. It often requires less money and infrastructure than film, animation, music, or printmaking. Even if my relationship with my publisher was to somehow go sideways tomorrow, I could still walk across the street to a Xerox machine and print and staple something myself. I can afford to do a lot of cheap, low-stakes experiments in comics, which isn't always the case with other formats.

I'm not a natural collaborator either, so not having to navigate a bunch of working relationships also appeals to me about comics.

In terms of formal stuff, I like that comics aren't beholden to the same spatial or temporal relations that film is. It's not like you can't break those rules in film also, but it will usually call attention to itself, whereas comics does it very discreetly—these non-linear, cubist ways of depicting time.

ZR: I think there are a lot of descriptors that could be used to discuss the comics art you do, but the one that always comes to my mind when I hear your name and see your work is *unique*. That said, I'm interested to know how *you* would describe your work and why this style resonates so powerfully with you?

MD: Some of the things that come up in my drawing over and over again I credit to my experience making gig posters, especially the flat compositions, elaborate lettering, and a preference for loud, garish colour schemes.

I think my writing sometimes has a more identifiable voice than my drawings since so many of my stories keep coming back to the same set of narrative concerns. A lot of my longer comics have been about what Ursula K. Le Guin called "ambiguous utopias," and the messy mediation of the social formations within them.[2] I write a lot about paranoia and surveillance, about living in a time where our personal lives have become particularly porous and exposed. Suicidal ideation has come up in my work a lot. I used to be afraid of repeating myself too often, but I've made peace with that since a lot of my favourite artists are ones who kept re-examining their same big themes from slightly different vantage points

throughout their careers.

ZR: How do you see your drawing style working together with the types of stories you choose to tell?

MD: I try to change my visual approach from story to story because obviously something that works for one project isn't going to work for another. In comics like *Brat* (2018), *Stunt* (2019), and *Familiar Face* (2020), I was really pushing myself to be a more elastic cartoonist. I wanted to put the bodies in those comics through the ringer and to have characters bend and break according to emotional swings in the story. There are other comics where I'm more rigid—strips like *Birds of Maine* (2022) and *Leaving Richard's Valley* (2019) are still very stylized, but I'm not iterating on any formal stuff very much, since those were supposed to be a little more "grounded." Formally, those works aren't all that different from, like, *Garfield* or something. And then of course other projects fall onto different points on that spectrum.

ZR: A moment ago you mentioned that "identifiable voice" in your writing, and it made me wonder about the ways that your work has or has not reflected your personal and political philosophies. Having read so many of your comics, and followed you on *Twitter* for years, it's pretty clear that you are an artist with a strong set of principles and, I think, that is often quite evident in the work that you do. But it also seems more and more common that people (especially those thinking from within the mainstream comics industry) believe that art and politics should or can remain mutually exclusive realms. What are your thoughts on the myth of apolitical art, and how has that impacted your work in comics?

MD: My go-to line is that all art is political but not all art is politically useful, and I'd guess that most of what I make is the latter. I assume it's pretty easy to suss out my beliefs from reading a few of my comics, but I'm also realistically not converting many people, which isn't really a goal I have with my writing.

To the extent that art *can* be politically useful, I think it can help depict the faults in our world that we might recognize but haven't been able to fully articulate before. I think it can also help imagine new alternatives. This is partially why I'm interested in writing about utopias more. My comrade Daniel Sarah Karasik has written very beautifully about the importance of "revolutionary dreamwork."[3]

ZR: One question that came up during last November's Beyond 80 Years: A Virtual Symposium on Canadian Comics was this question about whether there is a truly "Canadian" style of doing comics. Every time that question was asked, I kept coming back to your work. So, I have two questions related to this. First, do you think that the stylistic work you engage in can

be defined as "Canadian?" And second, what characteristics do you think comics art would need to have to be categorized as "Canadian?" Is it even possible?

MD: I'm personally not that interested in constructing any sort of national canon. I'm sure that I recall giving interviews in the past that ascribed a sort of "gentle surreality" to Canadian cartooning—Marc Bell, Keith Jones, Ginette Lapalme, Fiona Smyth, et cetera—but when I think about it now, I'm really just describing a few specific, local scenes. But that local stuff is way more interesting to track anyway! Especially since these histories seem to slip away at a faster and faster clip lately. It's so easy for individual artists or individual works to get memory-holed. I was really happy to see Katherine Collins' *Neil the Horse* get re-appreciated, recontextualized, and reprinted a few years ago.

ZR: Can you talk a little bit about how you understand Canada, being Canadian, and whether it plays a role in your work?

MD: I have definitely tried to write about Canada—it's come up in *Sticks Angelica, Folk Hero* (2017) most recently and *Spotting Deer* (2010) and "Canadian Royalty" (2012) earlier on in my career. All those comics are explicitly about trying to deflate certain myths about this country. I've thought about those three a little, and in retrospect think I was a little too gentle with my satire. I don't regret them, but I think I was giving some of these nationalist concepts a gentle ribbing, and if I were to take them on now, would feel obligated to be a lot more forceful than that.

I'd say that my present politic both in and outside my work is "death to Canada."

ZR: I know you mentioned that you'd handle them differently if you were to tackle them today, but I wonder if you have any interest in exploring those national myths, or even tackling this provocative "death to Canada" politic, through your work at this point in your career? In what ways do you think it might or might not be politically useful to do so?

MD: I've exhausted my interest in delving into our national brain rot for the time being, although I imagine I'll circle back around to some of those ideas eventually. Both *Leaving Richard's Valley* and *Birds of Maine* are about imagining what could replace where we're at currently, which is also what I mean when I mentioned my interest in writing about utopias. The same goes for some of my short stories recently: "New Museum" and "Recommended for You" from *Heaven No Hell* (2021), for instance. That's presently how I want to articulate a sort of "death to Canada" sentiment, I guess, by trying to talk through ideas about what could come next. I'm not sure how productive it'd be for me to just keep pointing out the problems, both because there's no shortage of writers who do a much better job at

that than me, and because I think most people already recognize we're living in hell. Nobody's happy with how things are except for a small population of powerful psychopaths. The problem is one that's been identified for a few decades at this point, but people just have a hard time imagining anything changing for the better.

ZR: Seems to me as though reading more of your work could be a good remedy for that! Coincidentally, I'd like to talk more specifically about some of your comics, now.

I first encountered your work in 2017-2018 when a friend of mine in grad school told me to check out *Sticks Angelica, Folk Hero*. I remember being blown away by your artistry, really liking the way you "built" Sticks' character throughout and getting a kick out of the meta-inclusion of yourself as a character in the story. I wanted to start with this one because it seems to be one of your most recognizable works and is one that remains popular to this day. What is it about Sticks (the character or the work) that you think causes people to continue returning to her/it?

MD: Sticks was a fun one to write since she's basically the opposite of me in both her demeanour and worldview, which was partially why I wrote myself into the comic for her to basically bully around. I wanted her to start out a bit villainous—or at least villainous to me, as she enters the forest very entitled and believing in all these noxious, harmful settler myths about nature and frontierism and whatever—but to give her an arc that eventually has her fully join this community and embrace all these entanglements.

ZR: Now that you've brought it up, I think that this notion of entanglements is a really interesting way to think about your work even more broadly. *Familiar Face* is a good example because it forces us to confront the way that we live our daily lives in an ever-changing, or ever-updating, technological society and challenges us to (re)consider the relationship that we have with these technologies. In what ways do you see *Familiar Face* engaging with this notion of entanglement and what does it have to teach us about the direction that our society is headed in?

MD: I think of *Birds of Maine* and *Familiar Face* as sister works, even though one is a utopia and the other a dystopia. I'm interested in writing about the ideologies that animate certain technologies. We often have this very flat way of thinking and talking about technology as though it's this neutral thing that develops on its own and can be applied for good or evil depending on who wields it. But that of course isn't true. Whether it's data collection or automation or cryptocurrency or anything else—these aren't ideologically discrete technologies, they didn't invent themselves, and they didn't develop on their own. We're all currently stuck on this nightmare libertarian hell version of the Internet, but it didn't have to be that way. I

think it's become kind of corny to be a guy talking about Project CyberSyn all the time, romanticizing the utopian promise it had, but I do think it's productive to imagine what an Internet that had developed along those socialist principles might have looked like.[4] Adam Greenfield, James Bridle, Evgeny Morozov, Bianca Wylie, and Sherry Turkle's writing have informed the way I think about this stuff in different ways.

ZR: Besides your long-form comics, you've also done a lot of shorter comics. Your most recent published work, *Heaven No Hell*, for instance, is your fifth collection of short comics, and each work included in the collection takes the reader on "a relentless journey of philosophical quandary and political exploration that, though thematically and ideologically connected, alternate mood, tone, and genre" (Rondinelli). Tell us a little bit about your decision to get back into short story comics in *Heaven No Hell*. What affordances do they provide that other comics formats don't?

MD: I still think of myself as a short story specialist, mostly because it allows for the sort of experimentation you mentioned. Lots of narrative and visual ideas I want to explore wouldn't really make sense for more than a dozen pages. I also sometimes feel like I need to rapidly cycle through those ideas to see which feel potent enough for me to explore further, and which are fine to more or less leave behind. Early on in my career, I looked to Dash Shaw, Kevin Huizenga, Lynda Barry, and Gary Panter as models, because I really loved how many one-off projects they seemed to do, and how none of them felt married to any single format. I think there's a Panter quote that's like, "People have made entire careers out of drawing styles I used for one week," and I think about it a lot. But I might be getting the quote totally wrong or attributing it to the wrong guy.

Short stories were the format I organized my *Lose* (2009-2015) issues with Koyama Press around, and prior to that I was putting my short comics in zines. I get lost in the big picture and can only really tackle narrative in smaller chunks. Even most of my lengthier books only came about after breaking things down into serialized parts—either in strip format like *Ant Colony* (2014), *Sticks Angelica*, *Leaving Richard's Valley*, or *Birds of Maine* or into chapters like *Stunt* or *Brat*.

ZR: You've also spoken in the past about how you enjoy drawing daily comics. *Leaving Richard's Valley* began as a daily comic strip on *Instagram*, and you're currently working on *Birds of Maine*, which is another daily *Instagram* comics strip that will soon be published by Drawn & Quarterly. What I find most interesting about this side of your work is the fact that it's being done on social media and therefore involves the public, audiences, and fans in the process much more actively. Can you talk a little bit about how you see social media factoring into the future of comics and, also, how this level of public engagement in your work impacts your

creative process?

MD: It doesn't affect the nitty-gritty of my creative process very much, except for one instance when serializing *Leaving Richard's Valley*. When I introduced the character Caroline Frog, she was immediately hated, as I was intentionally writing her to be kind of unlikeable. I didn't really intend for her to be a main character at that point, but I was so delighted by how much commenters hated her that I took it on as a challenge to make her a key part of the narrative and win readers over to her. I think it worked, as she became both my favourite character to write and the most popular character in the series. I also think she went through the comic's most satisfying emotional arc.

I've just always posted my work online, starting out in high school while on *LiveJournal*.[5] I learned a lot from incubating there and sharing my work with other cartoonists at the time. A lot of my closest friends and collaborators were people I met from that little micro-circle. Aside from distributing zines, it's the cheapest way to get work out there, so it felt natural. I obviously hate being beholden to certain websites to such a huge degree, and like many others, have suffered from having my livelihood tied up in the whims of these social media corporations. Patreon, *Twitter*, and *Instagram* are all run by people who have nothing but contempt for their userbases, but I'm optimistic about efforts to create worker-owned alternatives.

ZR: I'd like to end with a really broad question. As one of the individuals playing an active role in shaping it, what future do you envision for Canadian comics?

MD: I'm not sure I could articulate any artistic vision for the future of comics except to say I'm always pleasantly surprised by the new and baffling directions cartoonists are pushing the medium in.

I do hope for better working conditions for art workers in both my corner of the industry and the more mainstream side of things. There used to be such a focus on getting comics to be treated as a "serious" art form for so many years, and I know the fight to get comics noticed at all was a hard-won battle. But now we're in this weird place where comics have actually won all that respectability, legitimacy, prestige, and attention and have additionally proven themselves to be fairly profitable. There's no end in sight to the current barrage of blandly competent blockbuster superhero movies, every literary journal or art magazine inevitably publishes some sort of "comics issue," comics are represented in museums and literary festivals, and the visual language of comics gets pilfered by the worlds of fine art, graphic design, illustration, film, and television. But despite all this, cartoonists themselves don't seem to be seeing much of these profits and don't get to reap many material rewards from this "renaissance"

they're creating. And this obviously isn't a problem specific to comics, since these middlemen are leeching off the labour of art workers in all sorts of other mediums and industries. It sucks. I'm luckier than most, and it still sucks. So that is the one big thing I'd like to see change, and I do think there's already some momentum there.

Notes

1. "In terms of its place in comics, Fort Thunder describes the group of artists who made mini-comics and cartoon art while living in Providence's Fort Thunder work and living space in the mid to late 1990s" (Spurgeon). Séripop are award-winning concert poster creators Chloe Lum and Yannick Desranleau. See "Bio."
2. *The Dispossessed* (1974) is a work of anarchist utopian science fiction by American novelist Ursula K. Le Guin. In later printings, it was retitled *The Dispossessed: An Ambiguous Utopia*.
3. In "Revolutionary Dreamwork," Daniel Sarah Karasik describes the need for "artists, writers, and other popular educators" to collaborate in "seeding left dreams in the soil of culture" through imaginatively aesthetic, social, and intellectual projects as a way to "build the political power necessary to realize those dreams."
4. "Project Cybersyn was a Chilean project from 1971 to 1973 during the presidency of Salvador Allende aimed at constructing a distributed decision support system to aid in the management of the national economy" ("Project Cybersyn"). See also Medina.
5. *LiveJournal* is a social networking and community publishing platform.

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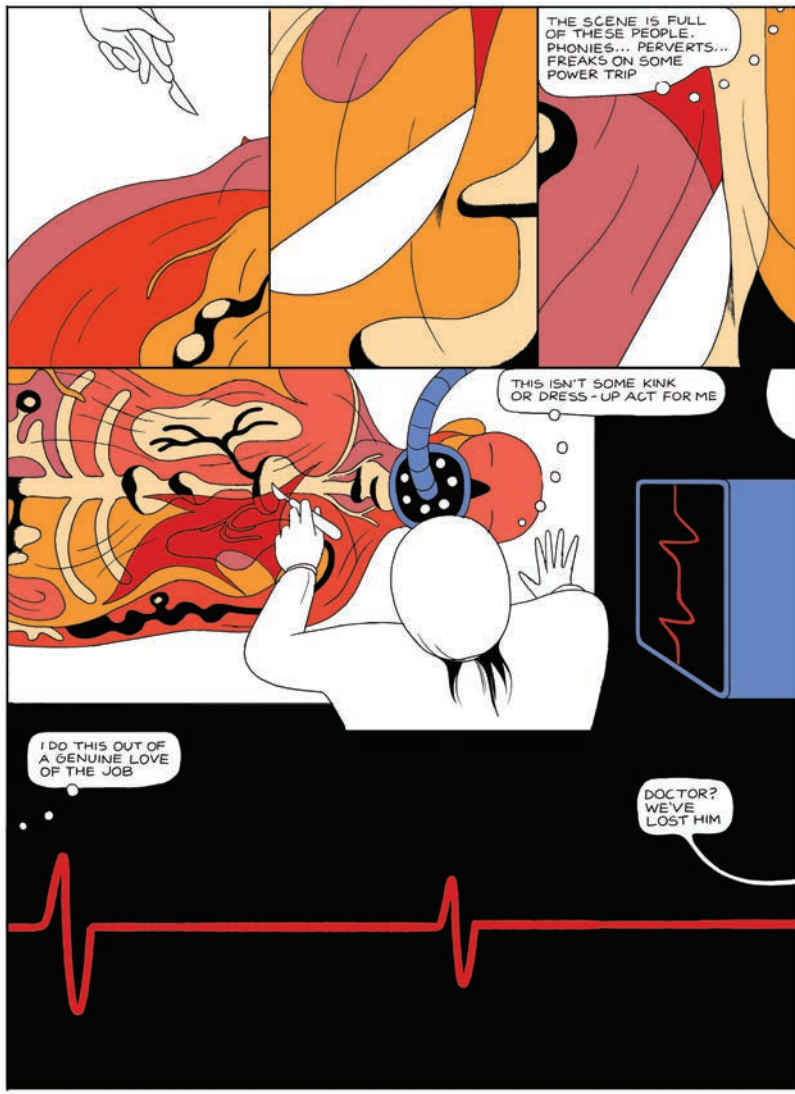
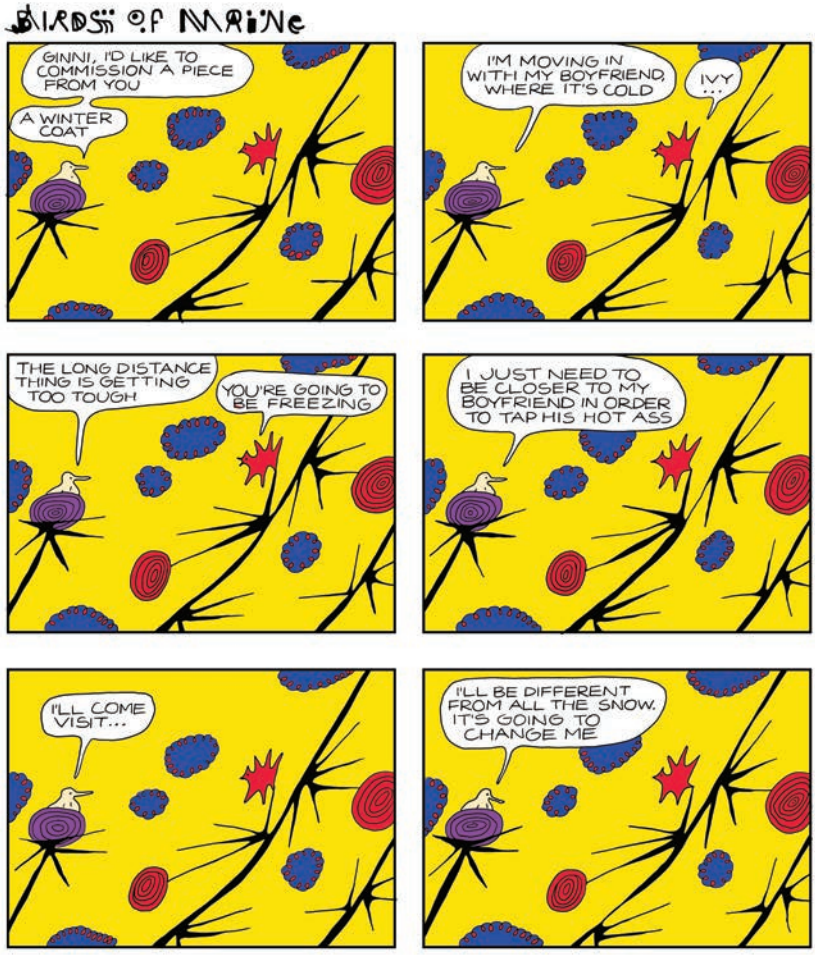


From *Heaven No Hell*. Reproduced with permission from Michael DeForge.

From *Heaven No Hell*. Reproduced with permission from Michael DeForge.



From *Birds of Maine*. Reproduced with permission from Michael DeForge.

Michael DeForge lives in Toronto, Ontario. His comics and illustrations have been featured in Jacobin, New York Times, Bloomberg, The Believer, The Walrus, *and* Maisonneuve. *He worked as a designer on* Adventure Time *for six seasons. His published books include* Very Casual, A Body Beneath, Ant Colony, First Year Healthy, Dressing, Big Kids, Sticks Angelica, Folk Hero, A Western World, Leaving Richard's Valley, Familiar Face, *and* Heaven No Hell. *His ongoing daily comic,* Birds of Maine, *was published by Drawn & Quarterly in 2022.*

Cohen's Mythology

Philippe Girard
Leonard Cohen: On a Wire. Drawn & Quarterly $29.95

Reviewed by Jessica Fontaine (McGill University)

"I need pills . . . and red wine . . . and religion . . . and fasting . . . and cigarettes . . . and women, of course," declares Leonard Cohen—while kissing Joni Mitchell against what appears to be a hotel room door—in Philippe Girard's graphic biography *Leonard Cohen: On a Wire* (60). Cohen's admission, which occurs across six panels midway through Girard's book, draws together the sacred and fleshy themes of Cohen's mythic persona—the artistic genius, the legendary "ladies' man," and the obsessive lyricist melding religion, culture, and sex—that the comic explores overall. Like other cartoonists who have tackled biographies of iconic musicians, such as Reinhard Kleist, who interrogated the legend of the Man in Black in *Johnny Cash: I See a Darkness*, Girard faces the conjoined challenges of navigating Cohen's myth, visualizing his music and writing process, and narrating his life in the comics form. Girard embraces this task by offering us a vast body of Cohen life stories and songs in which to meditate on their intersections.

Published in 2021, *On a Wire* opens on the night of Cohen's death in 2016 with a shadowed and elderly Cohen falling out of bed in his Los Angeles home. This episode's dark blue-grey colour scheme brings to mind *You Want It Darker*, the last album Cohen released before his death, the title track of which concludes with "I'm ready, my Lord." In Girard's opening, Cohen recognizes that he will die, and Girard returns to and extends this episode throughout the comic, giving the sense that Cohen is reflecting on his life and work alongside us.

Still, the 112-page clear-line comic has a quick pace. Cohen's long life flickers by across six- to nine-panel grids in a warm palette of mostly blushes, browns, and reds. The book makes the expected stops. Girard follows Cohen from childhood and early adulthood in Montreal to Hydra and his love affair with Marianne Ihlen—the subject of the 2019 documentary *Marianne & Leonard: Words of Love*—to New York and the Chelsea Hotel, and finally to the Buddhist monastery and Los Angeles. We never linger too long anywhere or with anyone, catching only glimpses of relationships and the contexts in which Cohen wrote and performed his best-known works.

As in Cohen's work itself, most of the women in *On the Wire* appear as "muses—quasi-mystical figures who inspire the poet's imagination and then conveniently disappear" (Bloom). Many of the social or romantic interactions depicted refer to Cohen's lyrics, song titles, and albums. These moments suggest that the poet mined everyday experience for the creative sparks that inspired his songs. As such, the represented women act more as icons of Cohen's works and legend rather than depictions of complex individuals whose lives intersected with his.

Yet Girard keeps these bursts of inspiration in tension with Cohen's ongoing pursuit of the right words, even in moments of success or grief. In one sequence, Cohen keeps watch at his son Adam's hospital bed after Adam has been injured in a car crash. Almost losing his son leads Cohen to work through sixty verses for the song "Democracy." His desire to capture life in word and song is both tireless and tiresome. It's this dynamic that

On the Wire captures best. Girard offers a window into what Cohen's long life of pills, red wine, religion, fasting, cigarettes, and women might have been.

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Coming Home to Canada

Starkie Mak
Coming to Canada. At Bay $21.95

Reviewed by Cheryl Cowdy (York University)

"You are stronger than you think, dear" (79). This is the message communicated by an imaginary rabbit named Robert to the unnamed child protagonist of Starkie Mak's gorgeously illustrated graphic novel *Coming to Canada*. The line hearkens back to a favourite from my own childhood, *The Monster at the End of This Book*, in which Grover asks the child reader, "Do you know that you are very strong?" In this echo is a reminder that great books for and about children carry powerful messages without resorting to heavy-handed didacticism. They also can be enjoyed across generational lines. This is certainly true of *Coming to Canada*, which can be equally appreciated by children and adults, whether reading alone or together. The dual appeal is unsurprising as Mak is an artist and writer who also teaches art to children.

Through beautifully crafted contrapuntal movements of image and text, Mak tells a luscious story of loss, immigration, and the power of the imagination. Like her protagonist, Mak has experience with immigration, having moved to Toronto from Hong Kong in 2018. She deftly represents her human and animal characters in all their complexity; human characters are featureless, encouraging readers to identify with them and their experiences. As the narrative opens with a loving image of two mothers and a child reading cozily together in bed, Mak depicts the "great love" the child receives in the home of her same-sex parents without making the non-traditional family the focal point of the tale.

Whimsical lines and brush strokes capture both the joy and the cruelty of childhood. The child reads to her bunny, Ruby, mirroring the opening scene of love and care in which the mothers read with their child. Only two pages later, Mak captures the potential for childhood cruelty as two faceless children beat Ruby to death with sticks. The moment is conveyed with the same quiet presence as the earlier illustrations, with brush strokes softening the trauma for young readers as the image hints at violence. With respect for readers and her child protagonist, Mak engages in the ensuing pages with the child's first experiences of grief and loss, as conveyed by the sparseness of the child's dialogue with her deceased friend—rendered in Mak's charming calligraphy—and by the richly rendered forest landscape where she buries Ruby.

As the safety of home is compromised by violence and the survival needs of the forest's animal inhabitants, the child must learn to trust those she meets during her journey to find a safe place to call home without the protection of family. The narrative

explores how a child navigates the need to follow her instincts while also tempering bias as she encounters frightening animal guides in a strange land. A wolf, a lynx, and a bear offer protection while remaining true to their own instinctual need to survive. *Coming to Canada* becomes a lovely fable of immigration as the child, encouraged by her imaginary friend, the rabbit Robert, seeks a new home. Some of my favourite images are those in which the pair pauses to share joyful moments of presence and play that celebrate the beauty of now. With resonant images that hearken back to *The Secret Garden* and communicate the precious qualities of friendship and imagination, Mak captures equally the fears and joys that are part of a child's quest for belonging.

Braving the Storm

Sophie Bédard
Lonely Boys. Pow Pow Press $27.95

Reviewed by Amy Barlow (York University)

When I read the graphic novel *Lonely Boys* by Sophie Bédard for the first time I was hit by intense feelings of nostalgia. It brought back memories of being curled up on the couch with one of my favourite childhood books, *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott. While the settings and timelines of these narratives differ significantly, the similarities of the female journey from adolescence to adulthood made this story feel familiar. One quote from *Little Women* connects these two stories best for me. Alcott's character, Amy March, exclaims, "I am not afraid of storms, for I am learning how to sail my ship" (463). This quote describes both stories well by describing, in the case of Alcott, and showing, in Bédard's case, perseverance through fear, anxiety, sisterhood, and relationships. These themes allow many young women to easily relate to the characters.

In *Lonely Boys*, Bédard takes the reader on a journey that follows three female protagonists in their early twenties through their seemingly mundane yet dramatic lives. Jen, Ella, and Lucie are long-time friends and roommates that are reunited when Ella comes back to town looking for a place to crash after an unexplained year-long absence. Emotions run high throughout all aspects of their lives as they navigate the challenges of relationships, jobs, and re-establishing trust and friendship.

The main characters all display drastically different personalities, which makes it easy for the reader to be able to identify with at least one of them. Starting from the first page, these characters grip the reader with emotion. On the one hand, Lucie's despair over a recent breakup not only engulfs her life but also affects all those around her. Her emotional state draws her closer to Ella as she looks for comfort. Jen's standoffish attitude, on the other hand, keeps Ella at a distance. As she works through her issues, Ella looks for support from less prominent characters. These characters help add some interesting twists to the story.

Bédard draws on the daily struggles of young women while also introducing what could be considered controversial topics in the storyline, highlighting issues with which many young women have difficulty dealing. These issues allow the girls to strengthen their relationships while also learning more about themselves in the process. While *Lonely Boys* is a story about young women, Bédard uses her characters to portray issues relatable to all genders navigating young adulthood. One of the aspects I found most interesting is how Bédard uses actual places in Montreal in her story. In an interview with Pow Pow Press she explains, "That coffee shop where the girls spend a lot of time is a place where I would go to write and draw . . . When they go to Pho Mylys, it's just because I wanted to draw

that restaurant because I was there all the time!" ("An Interview").

Bédard's use of a monochromatic simple line drawing style works well to showcase emotion, making it easier for the reader to empathize with her characters. This style allows the reader to easily immerse themselves in the storyline without getting lost in detailed artwork, which can sometimes overwhelm the narrative.

Lonely Boys is a great addition to any collection of graphic narratives. I believe that Bédard's story contains valuable lessons for all ages and genders, though due to some content would probably be best reserved for ages fifteen and above.

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"Eat Your Heart Out, Deadpool"

David A. Robertson; Scott B. Henderson and Donovan Yaciuk, illus.
Breakdown: The Reckoner Rises, Volume 1. HighWater Press $21.99
Version Control: The Reckoner Rises, Volume 2. HighWater Press $23.00

Reviewed by Anah-Jayne Samuelson (Red Deer Polytechnic)

The storyline of David A. Robertson's young adult trilogy The Reckoner (2017-2019) continues in the graphic novel series The Reckoner Rises with volume 1, *Breakdown* (2020), and volume 2*, Version Control* (2022). Robertson's initial trilogy focused on Cole Harper, a Cree teenager with debilitating anxiety who returns to Wounded Sky First Nation. Cole and his friends (the Bloodhound Gang) investigate the suspicious activities of Mihko (Cree for blood) Laboratories. The third volume in the trilogy was not the end, but, as Robertson notes, "an origin story," as Cole and some of the Gang gain superhuman powers from the forced experimentations at Mihko Laboratories (Robertson qtd. in van Koeverden). Now that the Bloodhound Gang have powers akin to those of comic-book superheroes, it is only fitting that the *Reckoner* story transition from prose novel to graphic novel. The transition not only reflects the subject matter, but also meets Robertson's goals of "tackling representation issues that have always existed in comics for Indigenous people" and presenting a "true Indigenous superhero" rather than the "savage Indian . . . noble savage or a dead Indian" depicted in comics that Robertson read as a child (Robertson qtd. in van Koeverden).

In this transition, Robertson is joined by illustrator Scott B. Henderson, who has worked with Robertson on nearly fifteen previous projects, and colourist Donovan Yaciuk, who is well acquainted with superheroes because of his past work with Marvel, DC, and Dark Horse Comics. The trio creates a world in which Marvel, DC, and other superheroes also exist; for example, Eva, Cole's girlfriend, declares she is "no Robin. I don't have to wait around for Batman" (*Breakdown*), and Cole is compared to Superman and Wolverine when his ability to heal is discovered. It is a meaningful decision to include such references—rather than running parallel, *Reckoner Rises* intersects with the superhero tradition and positions Indigenous superheroes as capable and worthy of inhabiting the same space as these predominantly white heroes.

Cole and Eva are vehicles for the creators to further fill gaps in representation. In the opening pages of *Breakdown*, Cole confides to his therapist that he's experiencing anxiety from the trauma Mihko Labs has inflicted upon him and others. The type of mutation Cole has gained from the Mihko experiments creates a dark irony: his body is self-healing, but this does not extend to any mental and spiritual harm; mental trauma is thus depicted as being more complicated to heal. Further, Cole carries survivor's guilt: he has emerged physically restored from events that claimed the lives of others, many of whom now literally haunt him. Cole's post-traumatic stress reflects the experiences of thousands who continue to manage traumas induced by settler-colonial infrastructures designed to control, manipulate, and erase Indigenous bodies. In *Version Control*, Eva is the protagonist, a choice that, Robertson explains, offered an opportunity to present "a really strong, non-sexualized, authentic female and Indigenous superhero character" (Robertson qtd. in Laskaris). With the long history of female sexualization in comics, not objectifying a female superhero is a tall order; even the most self-determined female superheroes, like Wonder Woman, are put into costumes that invite the audience to look *at* them rather than through their eyes. This is not the case with Eva. Her superhero "costume" is practical and well suited to the winter in Winnipeg: she wears a black balaclava, a thick, long, brown scarf, a winter jacket, full pants, and knee-high, fur-trimmed winter boots. Never depicted as a damsel in need of rescue, Eva is self-determined and capable: she can fly, control the air, direct the wind, and fight several Mihko agents on her own. Though Eva can protect herself, she does not isolate herself (as Cole does), but rather relies on her community to provide information and emotional support. With Eva, the creators depict a strong, empathetic, self-reliant, community-driven Cree woman.

Reading the *Reckoner* trilogy prior to *The Reckoner Rises* is not required, but strongly recommended. There is some exposition in *The Reckoner Rises* that provides context, but often the creators rely on readers' prior knowledge. However, there is compelling suspense that could pull new readers forward. The mystery around Mihko's intentions and goals has the potential to hook readers. Likewise, the human experimentation plot positions the series alongside foundational comic characters—the X-Men, Captain America, Luke Cage, and Deadpool, to name just a few—and the ethical questions they tackle. The ways in which Mihko Labs' experimentations echo settler-colonial infrastructures—like the nutrition experiments run at several residential schools, or the testing of new medications in residential schools and Indigenous communities—reflect continued trauma and cast an urgent light on the graphic novels' subject matter. In this way, Robertson and Henderson's work joins the realm of popular culture superheroes while simultaneously gesturing towards Canada's insidious past and the ways in which settler-colonial infrastructures continue to function. *The Reckoner Rises* creates strong and compelling superheroes who battle conventional comic enemies as well as threats that speak to our reality.

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The Bear Necessities

S. Bear Bergman; Saul Freedman-Lawson, illus.
Special Topics in Being a Human: A Queer and Tender Guide to Things I've Learned the Hard Way about Caring for People, Including Myself. Arsenal Pulp Press $24.95

Reviewed by Lauren Chochinov (Sheridan College)

In *Special Topics in Being a Human*, S. Bear Bergman, a self-described writer, storyteller, and advocate, imparts wisdom based on his advice column, "Asking Bear." As Bergman explains in the book's introduction, "to be afraid and uncertain is deeply human and . . . reaching out for some validation and assistance is an act of belief in oneself, and an act of courage." Bergman's advice is thoughtful, often poignant, and heavily focused on connectivity and reflection. Each topic is a heavy hitter, from "How to Apologize (Properly, Not like a Republican Congressman)" to "How to Keep Going When You Just Want More than Anything to Stop, for G-d's Sake." *Special Topics in Being a Human* is not interested in life's minor annoyances. Bergman tackles big, often essential questions that require both empathy and wisdom.

Advice is subjective, but Bergman finds the universality in life's challenges and provides answers in the form of step-by-step instructions for navigating relationships, disappointments, a variety of feelings both pleasant and unpleasant, and queer/gender advocacy. Bergman has an awareness of the complex nature of problems—how they can be simultaneously ubiquitous and unique. Yet each chapter acknowledges and mines that duality to create attainable solutions.

As in a cookbook that relies entirely on pantry staples, Bergman never asks readers to reach for the impossible. Each step towards resolution involves community—family, friends, co-workers, or neighbours. Bergman imagines a world where his readers must reach within and without in order to come to a greater sense of serenity or understanding. Alongside advice come warnings wherein Bergman cautions against certain types of people (avoid "yes men") or psychological traps (rest is good!). He acknowledges that problems are rarely black and white and that adaptability is necessary.

While most of the advice pertains to negotiating complex emotions and interpersonal relationships, the book also includes sections that highlight Bergman's advocacy. The chapter "How to Get Someone's New Name and/or Pronouns Right, Every Time, Sooner than You Think," for example, guarantees success within six months of practising Bergman's three-part instructions that emphasize accountability.

Illustrations by Saul Freedman-Lawson punctuate each chapter, creating a visually appealing and easily readable text that never feels as if it's preaching. Each chapter is visually intelligent—the images not only support the text but create layout divisions that prevent the advice from feeling too dense or complex. Freedman-Lawson's work is subtle and helps depict some of Bergman's more flowery words of wisdom. "Put your ex in the freezer of your heart" is, of course, illustrated with images of a walk-in freezer, which works to ground the potentially abstract metaphor.

Bergman's tone is conversational and personal; he refers to his reader as "my friend," and his obvious kindness and empathy pervade each chapter. He presents each problem not as an individual failure but instead as an acknowledgement that to be human is an often difficult and confusing affliction. Partly a self-help guide, partly an opportunity to impart wisdom, *Special Topics in Being a Human* concludes that there are no simple answers to life's most difficult questions, but that asking for help—or reading the book—is a crucial first step towards clarity.

Medium as Message in Comics about Place

Laura Ķeniņš, ed.
Nova Graphica: A Graphic Anthology of Nova Scotia History. Conundrum Press $20.00

Reviewed by Jennifer Vanderburgh (Saint Mary's University)

Storytelling relates to politics and power. Historians Ian McKay and Robin Bates, for example, chronicle how narrative has been used strategically to mobilize a sense of Nova Scotia's "Scottishness." This largely invented concept, they argue, problematically operates as an origin story, eclipsing competing cultural narratives that reflect the province's actual historical complexities and diverse lived experiences, especially those that have been harmed and disenfranchised by its effects. *Nova Graphica* is a literary work and activist project that aims to disrupt this legacy by asserting different ways of conceptualizing the province's narratives-of-place. As its title suggests, its anthology structure and general approach to representing Nova Scotia's history embraces plurality, tension, and even a degree of uncertainty. Not only do the twelve short comics that comprise this anthology take on a range of different topics, but they also look very different from one another. Graphic storytelling, as a result, is this book's medium and also functions as a meta-reflection on how historical accounts of the province reflect the perspectives of their creators.

Arguably, the curatorial strategy of this anthology is a figurative manifestation of the idea that histories of place reflect multiple ways of seeing. Sara Spike's masterful introduction to the volume foregrounds the long history and practice of this concept, from the province's petroglyphs to the strategic aesthetic rendering of its maps and satirical print journalism. While Spike sees the collection as an intervention in the province's representation, her introductory essay also locates the work within a long history of authorial, literary, and visual representations of Nova Scotia. Many of the comics in the collection feature hand-drawn panels and lettering, which also foregrounds the varied ways in which the province's historical narratives are conceptualized and rendered through authors' and artists' hands and lenses. In this sense, the collection offers itself up as a "sampler" of Nova Scotia history that invites future editions.

Nova Graphica's comics take on a wide range of subjects, tones, and subject positions, but there is not a lobster or fiddle in sight. Aside from Rebecca Roher's moving and original take on the now canonical Viola Desmond story, the comics in this collection are unconventional in their subject matter. Folktales, ghost stories, and personal experiences of place are featured in this anthology alongside accounts of known but under-represented landmarks such as the now-demolished Halifax Infants' Home and the Spryfield Rocking Stone. Lesser-known aspects of the province's built environment are also given careful attention in Laura Ķeniņš' Marxist account of the Cape Breton company home, and in JJ Steeves' feminist reading of the contribution of carports and double sinks to the 1960s homes of Halifax's Clayton Park neighbourhood. Felt experiences of place are also given agency in contributions such as Sarah Mangle's rendition of a job interview at the 1990s Wolfville women's bookstore, Seekhers, and in Rebecca Thomas and Rachel Hill's collective articulation of frustration over the continued defence of anti-Indigenous public monuments.

The foregrounding of *medium* has a double-meaning in this collection, as many of the selections deal with folklore, ghost stories, and hauntings. The idea that experiences of place are ephemeral and illusive is an important and arguably political throughline that guides this work. Concepts of *place* and *home* are also central thematic concerns,

as many of the contributions question whether Nova Scotia is a location, or an individual or collective idea experienced in a moment. Kris Bertin and Alexander Forbes' contribution features many panels of a man drinking a beer, deep in thought, wearing an East Coast Lifestyle sweatshirt. This sense of place as located-thoughtfulness-in-time may be this book's most accurate and moving thesis statement. It's certainly relatable. Even at the time of publication, with the news of the pandemic and Portapique's deadly mass shooting, Laura Ķeniņš' editor's foreword draws attention to the important central fact of this collection, that the story of Nova Scotia resists stasis, is subjective, and keeps on moving.

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From *Essex County* to Outer Space

Dale Jacobs, ed.
Jeff Lemire: Conversations. UP of Mississippi $25.00 USD

Reviewed by Dominick Grace (Brescia University College)

The Conversations with Comics Artists series published by the University Press of Mississippi includes over thirty volumes. The thirty-first, edited by Dale Jacobs, covers Jeff Lemire, the fourth Canadian to be so examined. Lemire's importance in comics over the last quarter century is significant, but strangely, Jacobs does not spell out what makes Lemire worth a volume like this. It may be that the likely audience for the book—academics working in comics studies—does not need to be told why Lemire is significant, or it may be that Jacobs thought that the interviews themselves would make Lemire's importance clear. Regardless, I would flag this as the book's one significant weakness: at 222 pages, the volume is about average length for this series, so there would have been room for a more comprehensive introduction than the nine pages Jacobs provides. Nevertheless, readers interested in hearing directly from Lemire will learn a lot—especially if they have followed only one side of his career.

Though the divide between so-called mainstream comics (mainly superhero books from Marvel, DC, and others) and alternative comics has been blurred in the last three decades, Lemire is one of the few creators to manage long-term success both with creator-owned independent work and with mainstream work-for-hire projects. Most comics creators remain primarily in one camp or another, and many shift from the independent world to the mainstream when they are able; although one loses autonomy and a degree of artistic freedom, one gains exposure and often greater financial reward. Lemire's career and success really began with *Essex County*, a magical-realist narrative anchored in Essex County, Ontario, and playing on both overtly Canadian themes and topics and conventional comics tropes (e.g., one character imagines himself as a superhero). *Essex County* became the first (and to date only) graphic novel nominated for *Canada Reads*; it was also the first book eliminated in the 2011 round in which it was nominated. Lemire continued to work in the field of independent comics but drew the attention of DC and Marvel and has produced multiple series and graphic novels for both, to general critical acclaim and commercial success. He has won or been nominated for multiple awards,

including two Shuster awards, one Doug Wright award (both Canadian awards), and an Eisner award. Thus, he merits inclusion in a series such as this.

Jacobs collects twenty-nine relatively short interviews from an array of sources ranging from print media to websites and blogs. The earliest is from 2007, before *Essex County* was published, and the most recent is from 2019; the book covers the range of Lemire's career. Much of interest is covered, notably Lemire's influences (David Lynch especially, but other filmmakers as well, which probably won't surprise those familiar with his independent work or who knew that he studied film), his working methods on solo and collaborative projects, and his straddling the independent and mainstream comics worlds. The interviews suggest some ambivalence on Lemire's part about, on the one hand, enjoying working with iconic comics characters he loved as a child and getting the exposure and financial reward mainstream work can bring, and, on the other, the extent to which mainstream work can be artistically constricting, in part because of corporate demands. However, Lemire is rarely pushed on this topic, mainly because most of the interviews are from sites and sources that are primarily fan-focused. Many interviews function, in effect, as promotional pieces, designed to be press for whatever project Lemire had on the go. This does not mean that they provide no insight, but many cover the same basic territory, and few hit Lemire with challenging questions.

One subject on which he is challenged more than once, albeit usually gently, even by Dr. waaseyaa'sin Christine Sy in the arts quarterly *Maisonneuve*, is his work representing Indigenous peoples. Lemire gained increased recognition when he created the superhero Equinox, touted as DC's first Cree superhero, and for his graphic novel collaboration with Gord Downie, *Secret Path*, which adapts Downie's song cycle about Chanie Wenjack. Indigenous characters also feature elsewhere in Lemire's work. Lemire dutifully acknowledges that these may not have been his stories to tell but also points to his research and the support he received. For instance, he notes that Wenjack's family endorsed *Secret Path*. For readers of *Canadian Literature* especially, *Conversations* may be of interest for how it allows Lemire to recount his engagement with culturally sensitive material, which risked accusations of appropriation.

Readers working through the entire book will note that certain points and stories are repeated, sometimes several times, but will also be able to track interesting shifts in Lemire's thinking (e.g., about TV or film adaptation of his work, which goes from being something he has no interest in to something in which he is actively involved). The book would have benefited from (at least) one in-depth, probing career-retrospective interview, but apparently no such interview exists.

Scholars interested in Canadian comics and in the changing landscape of the comics field (especially the mainstream/alternative divide) should find this book useful, as Lemire is one of the major figures who has navigated that territory this century. However, they probably only need to read the selections that address their particular interests. Beware, though; Lemire has been so productive, and is so good at teasing and enthusing about his projects, that you may be tempted to track down something other than *Essex County*, perhaps even travelling as far as the edge of colonized space in the year 3797 (in *Trillium*).

Domestic Gutters

Susan E. Kirtley
Typical Girls: The Rhetoric of Womanhood in Comic Strips. Ohio State UP $36.95 USD

Reviewed by Brenna Clarke Gray (Thompson Rivers University)

It's tempting to open this review of Susan E. Kirtley's readable, engaging analysis of depictions of femininities in newspaper comic strips with something trite, like "Comics aren't just for boys anymore!" In the popular imaginary, comics—and especially comic books—have for much of the last eighty years been pegged as something for a particular kind of reader: young, male, perhaps reluctant to read other types of stories. Of course, girls and women have always been present in the readership of all kinds of comics. But there is one place where stories about women's lives—sometimes even written by women!—have been a recognized mainstay of comics: the newspaper funny pages.

It's refreshing to see this book-length study take on the domestic stories that populate(d) those pages. Kirtley offers chapter-length analyses of each of Cathy Guisewite's *Cathy*, Lynn Johnston's *For Better or for Worse*, Nicole Hollander's *Sylvia*, Lynda Barry's *Ernie Pook's Comeek*, Barbara Brandon-Croft's *Where I'm Coming From*, Alison Bechdel's *Dykes to Watch Out For*, and Jan Eliot's *Stone Soup*. Kirtley's selections are well made, offering an opportunity to trace the way feminism and women's lives have been depicted on the comics page from 1976 to the present; they include Black and queer stories, with more attention to representation and diversity than we see reflected on newspaper comic strip pages themselves. The analysis explores how debates in the wider world about feminism, gender stereotypes, women's roles, and the shifting makeup of the family found themselves articulated—sometimes challenged and sometimes mimicked—in these comic strips. Kirtley is clear eyed, and her admiration for the form is as present as her desire to see comic strips as a whole take more from the examples she draws upon; she reflects on the structural limitations of these critiques and representations nestled in between strips that trade in gender stereotypes. As Kirtley notes towards the end of the chapter on *Stone Soup*, which serves as a de facto conclusion, the newspaper funny pages remain "a stalwart bulwark against change" reflecting a "simulacrum of a conservative, homogenous society that never really existed." This is what makes the selections Kirtley focuses her attention on so compelling: the patriarchal comics mainstream *can* make space for an array of voices, but so often—as, perhaps, with mass media and culture writ large—chooses not to.

Overall, the scholarly comic strip reader will find a lot to enjoy in this collection, as will anyone interested in newspaper print culture, and the book functions well as a cohesive whole. I had few quibbles with the analysis, though there are certainly places in the chapter on *For Better or for Worse* where readers of *Canadian Literature* will twig to the typical elisions of a reading that largely subsumes Johnston's iconic Canadian comic strip under a larger reading that serves the book's purpose of exploring "those comics created by women that rendered and reflected the history of feminism in the United States." This is forgiven, though, in light of the nuanced and careful analysis Kirtley provides of what I would argue is a woefully under-studied comic with huge cultural significance given its readership and ubiquity. (Indeed, with the exception of Bechdel and Barry, the cartoonists Kirtley analyzes have been similarly under-studied, and the light she shines on these texts is an important contribution to the discipline.) Kirtley is attuned to the complexity of Johnston's depiction of motherhood, which is rooted in Johnston's own traumatic childhood and her struggles to find herself as a parent and as a woman. This is

the strongest chapter of a strong book; it fills a gap in Canadian comics scholarship and sits well alongside work by Sam Hester and Christine Schreyer in exploring the cultural resonances of this long-running institution.

Reading *Typical Girls* was a reminder of the once-critical communal space of the daily or weekly newspaper, where the zeitgeist was explored, reflected, challenged, and consumed across sections and modalities. It is particularly fascinating—and indeed inspiring and invigorating—to see how critiques of social norms and expectations find their way into the otherwise hegemonic, patriarchal structure of the newspaper, snuck in through the "back door" of the funny pages. Kirtley's analysis is astute and timely, and it offers a thoughtful reimagining of the possibilities of these kinds of spaces. *Typical Girls* also leaves room for further analysis: as Kirtley notes, many readers have fled to webcomics to find more diverse and representative stories, and it would be productive to extend her political analysis to those spaces to consider how the structural changes impact what is possible. It would be likewise interesting to compare these texts with some of the dominant stories about women not penned by women, like *Mary Worth* (pre-2004) and *Sally Forth*. *Typical Girls* reminds us that the comic strip is fertile ground for analysis, with much work left to be done. It is a welcome addition to this emergent field.

The Social Life of Comics

Benjamin Woo and Jeremy Stoll, eds.
The Comics World: Comic Books, Graphic Novels, and Their Publics. U of Mississippi P
$30.00 USD

Reviewed by Austin Kemp (Quinsigamond Community College)

Editors Benjamin Woo and Jeremy Stoll's *The Comics World: Comic Books, Graphic Novels, and Their Publics* acts as a probe into the unknown and expansive futures of comics studies by haphazardly launching fourteen diverse yet thematically linked articles into the uncharted cosmos of possibility. Rather than purporting academic authority by delineating boundaries and "grand narratives" within the comics studies field, *The Comics World* benefits from an unmitigated curiosity and willingness to value questions over answers. The shift in perspective brought on by framing comics as research within social science disciplines marks an uncommon, though not unheard of (by any means), departure from the tried-and-true humanities approaches and bears this distinction with authenticity rather than ego. The text holds no illusions of being either comprehensive or definitive, choosing instead to problematize comics in terms of a given comics world's relationship with its public. Drawing on comics scholar Bart Beaty and other critics, the editors define the comics world as "a social system with distinctive ways of knowing, speaking, and doing comics" and the comics public as all of the human agents within a given comics world (xiii).

The Comics World is divided into three sections: "Production," "Circulation," and "Reception." These sections loosely present a theoretical entryway into the social life of comics and establish thematic direction for their respective chapters. By leaning into the field's interdisciplinary advantages while avoiding self-conscious definition or justification, this book manages to expand the field purely in its intrepid attitude and commitment to advancing multi-faceted avenues of questioning.

Part 1, "Production," of *The Comics World* is composed of five distinct articles that collectively aim at a more malleable and inclusive definition of comics production. Benjamin Woo's initially daunting yet conclusively comforting "The Comics Workforce"

posits an ecological lens to English-language comics production that challenges the traditional conflation of production and publication while also conceptually expanding what it means to be a producer of comics. Amy Louise Maynard's "The Melbourne Scene," arguably the strongest entry in this section, expands on the notion of ecology by charting and analyzing the evolution of Melbourne's comics industry into a communally motivated creative economy. Further explorations of production include John A. Lent's "Women and Asian Comics Art," which admirably and importantly (and albeit a bit distantly) spotlights overlooked Asian women producers in the comics industry in order to challenge misconceptions about who produces comics. *The Comics World*, having established a comfortably loose and intentionally scattershot exemplification of multiple comics worlds within the realm of production, then moves into untangling the intricate meaning-making relationships that develop once comics are released into circulation.

"Circulation," or part 2, focuses on the perpetual mobility afforded to comics as social objects in an effort to examine how they are shaped by the publics they encounter. The high points of this section are undoubtedly Shari Sabeti's "All That Shakespeare Stuff" and Valerie Wieskamp's "Learning to 'Speak without Shame.'" Sabeti examines pedagogical questions that underpin various comics and manga adaptations of Shakespeare's plays and calls into question the impact that preconceived cultural values may have when imposed during the adaptation process. The thematic imposition of cultural values extends into Wieskamp's "Learning to 'Speak without Shame,'" wherein the author responds to the 2012 New Delhi gang rape of a woman by articulating key aspects of Ram Devineni and Dan Goldman's graphic novel *Priya's Shakti*. In lambasting the world media's imposition of Western-centric solutions to gender inequality and sexual violence, Wieskamp demonstrates *Priya's Shakti*'s ability to utilize Hindu iconography and Indian culture to circumvent the misconceived infallibility of Western morality and equality. Though Sabeti's and Wieskamp's entries are the strongest, they work in tandem with the rest of part 2 to convey radically shifted lines of questioning about comics and the publics in which they circulate.

The final section, "Reception," exemplifies the idea of looking for questions where they're least expected by extrapolating from comics' reception and instigating conversation about how readers and comics communicate with one another. Christopher J. Galdieri's "Follow the Readers" examines a time in DC Comics' history when readers could vote for the leader of the Legion of Super-Heroes. Since this voting not infrequently inaugurated female and (potentially) queer leadership of the Legion, Galdieri's analysis of these DC Comics elections and their historical contexts points towards a plethora of poignant and promising problematics. "Pirates and Publishers," by Kalervo A. Sinervo, jumps a few decades ahead to examine the relationships between comics and digital comics piracy. Setting aside the capitalist economic ideas of ownership and piracy, Sinervo exposes an early period of grassroots digital archiving, focusing on various "comics scanning groups (or *crews*)" (209) and their equally various methods and ideologies. Sinervo's identification of these publics, along with his extrapolation from their under-observed effects on the comics publishing industry, develops a more nuanced view of the constantly evolving relationships between comics and those who consume them.

The Comics World opens with a contextualization of its own cover art; repeated in triplicate underneath the title, an ominously oblong humanoid figure awash in psychedelia strikes a meditative pose while reading a comic. Originally from a one-page strip by Ontario-based cartoonist Jesse Jacobs called "Comics and Commerce in Canada," this figure looms over a diegetic comics utopia in Canada. As Woo and Stoll paraphrase it, the delightfully ludicrous narration in Jacobs' comic informs us of a Canadian "approach to paper production that involves growing maple trees under water and then slicing the

logs like bologna" (ix). It also includes terminology—like "tax breaks" and "government incentives"—that is largely foreign to most comics worlds (viii). Though this satire relies on our acknowledgement of the less-than-ideal circumstances of contemporary comics production, it also indicates the multiplicity of comics as social objects. Like *The Comics World*, this multiplicity reframes comics studies within a broader, more open perspective. Neither a guidebook nor a core text, *The Comics World* presents a new reality for comics studies, one where discovery, expansion, and inquiry are the only ways forward for something as decidedly interdisciplinary as comics.

Mennonite Your Way

Jonathan Dyck
Shelterbelts. Conundrum Press $20.00

Reviewed by Kathleen Venema (The University of Winnipeg)

The complex demands and rewards of the graphic form make it an ideal genre for exploring a close-knit traditional community as it grapples with change. In Jonathan Dyck's recent *Shelterbelts*, tension reigns in Hespeler, a fictional Mennonite town in rural Manitoba, when a non-denominational mega-church opens on its outskirts, forcing long-standing ideological differences to the surface. Less a novel than a series of interwoven vignettes, *Shelterbelts* mobilizes the inherent tensions of the graphic form—its simultaneous deployment of words, images, design elements, and movement among panels and pages—to explore community members as they choose between traditions and the demands of the contemporary world. Multi-layered characters and myriad, often very subtle references to history, geography, culture, theology, literature, music, and food regularly complicate *Shelterbelts*' black-and-white clear-line style and its surface nostalgia for a simpler time. In a wonderfully understated early irony, for instance, a history teacher borrows a copy of *Resident Aliens* from his pastor but is presumably undeterred by the book's argument (essentially that Christians should not involve themselves in secular politics) and protests a Remembrance Day military recruitment site with his guitar and peace songs from the 1960s.

A reader-viewer does not need to be expert in Mennonite history and theology to appreciate *Shelterbelts*, but it helps to have a working knowledge. The high-school English teacher is a useful character in this regard, as she delves into her family's history across several of the vignettes. Eager to challenge her people's desire to see themselves as exceptions and as exceptional, she grapples with the disturbing realization that some of the community's revered conscientious objectors, including one of her grandfathers, spent their war years teaching at Residential Schools. Belying its accessible appearance, *Shelterbelts* tackles complexity, discomfort, contradiction, and conflict on almost every one of its initially straightforward-seeming pages.

Dyck, an award-winning illustrator, designer, and cartoonist based in Winnipeg, puts comics' resources through their paces, deftly manipulating panel size and page layouts to shift tempos, temporalities, and perspectives, often in quietly humorous ways. He knows, for instance, that vehicles are essential to rural life, and regularly invites us to see his interconnected characters in their cars and pickup trucks and to view the world and one another as they do through their windshields and their (often deceptive) side- and rear-view mirrors. Dyck reserves his most explicitly beautiful work for scenes in nature, lingering visually on an abundant late-summer berry harvest, delicate foliage, or shallow

pools of flitting minnows. It is especially ironic, in this frequently ironic text, that the only double-page spread features carefully rendered heavy machinery tearing up trees to make way for the mega-church expansion.

Most of *Shelterbelts*' vignettes are relatively straightforward, but a few use subtly positioned flashbacks to deepen perspectives on potentially unlikeable characters. In "Better Times," for instance, we discover that the middle-aged farmer who argues unpleasantly with environmental activists has been caring for his disabled brother all his life, sometimes to his own emotional and material detriment. *Shelterbelts* raises a plethora of contemporary issues—LGBTQ+ inclusion, Indigenous land rights, environmental and climate concerns, and the Mennonite legacy of pacifism—but it deals with none of them sufficiently. That sounds like a criticism, but it is the opposite. More than anything, *Shelterbelts* reads like the first book in a series, a whip-smart, visually intricate invitation to search out many more stories about this complicated community, which is home to, among others, the youth rebel turned mega-church pastor, the not-quite-closeted forty-year-old on the verge of love, and the curious librarian heading to the pipeline protest carrying boxes filled with homemade food.

Working, Drawing in the Oil Sands

Kate Beaton
Ducks: Two Years in the Oil Sands. Drawn & Quarterly $39.95

Reviewed by Rachel Webb Jekanowski (Memorial University)

On my first trip to Newfoundland (where I now live and teach), a cab driver drew me into conversation on our way to the airport. He said he drove taxis when summer tourists flooded the island between rotations in Fort Mac. Men like him yoked northern Alberta and Atlantic Canada together, he told me, travelling back and forth, following the jobs to support families back home. In the years since, I've had many more conversations with rotational workers, often aboard taxi cabs and airplanes, about working in the oil sands.

In her graphic memoir *Ducks: Two Years in the Oil Sands*, Kate Beaton offers her own perspective on working in this dangerous, highly politicized industry. Beaton, from Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, moved to northern Alberta in 2005 after graduating from Mount Allison University to pay off her student loans. *Ducks* follows Beaton as she works for several different companies between 2005 and 2008, recounting her daily routines and conversations with fellow workers, as well as the job's physical hazards and the isolation of the temporary work camps. *Ducks* builds out from two earlier "scrolling webcomics about living and working at a tar-sands mine—'Night Shift' and 'Ducks'" (Unrau 58). It also reflects Beaton's signature animation style, recognizable from her collections of humorous historical comics *Hark! A Vagrant* (2011) and *Step Aside, Pops* (2015).

Alternatively funny and gut-wrenching, *Ducks* explores the ethical compromises people make when faced with economic survival, while centring on women's experiences in this male-dominated industry. The memoir is divided into chapters, each of which focuses on a different location: Cape Breton, Fort McMurray, Syncrude's operations at Mildred Lake and Aurora, and the Long Lake work camp operated by OPTI-Nexen. Beaton introduces these places with detailed illustrations, many of which extend across the page fold, rendering these industrial landscapes in black-and-white line drawings doused in blue-grey wash. Such "bird's-eye" views of the earth scraped bare at Aurora and the billowing stacks of the Mildred Lake refinery may remind some readers of Edward Burtynsky's famous photographs of the

oil sands, or even of the eponymous waterfowl themselves. The memoir's title alludes to the five hundred-or-so migrating ducks that landed in a Syncrude tailings pond in 2008, dying en masse and capturing the attention of national and international news. This disaster marks Beaton's growing awareness of the oil sands' complex environmental costs, and parallels the deadly threats posed to human residents and workers: mysterious skin welts, workplace accidents, unusually high rates of cancer.

Throughout *Ducks*, Beaton is surrounded by fellow workers from the Canadian East Coast. They are introduced by name at the start of each chapter, with their illustrated portraits arranged as in a family album. This technique works to humanize her fellow camp workers who, as Beaton notes in the memoir's afterword, are often overlooked within today's highly politicized conversations about oil and gas and the climate crisis (435). Through snippets of dialogue and brief glimpses into workers' home lives, Beaton reveals a complex portrait of the oil sands' human costs—and how economic pressures complicate relationships with home. In an early pane, for instance, a young Beaton, reflecting on her decision to move to Alberta, informs the reader that "[t]here is no knowing Cape Breton without knowing how deeply ingrained two diametrically opposed experiences are: A deep love for home, and the knowledge of how frequently we have to leave it to find work somewhere else" (12). This narrative thread interweaves Beaton's conversations with other workers with her own motivations for seeking work. In one vignette from Aurora, Beaton's younger self is surprised to learn that Ambrose, a middle-age mechanic from Newfoundland, used to work in the cod fisheries. "I'm still a fisherman," he retorts, "I'm just here" (115). These exchanges prove to be powerful yet subtle reminders of the economic and social inequalities on which extractive industries depend to source their workers.

Beaton also levies particular criticism at the industry's workplace culture, which fosters a bizarre culture of "workplace safety" while "hiding away the human wreckage" caused by mental health challenges, companies' cost-cutting measures, and a hypermasculine environment (435). The mandatory "safety meetings" featuring extremely graphic workplace safety videos become one of Beaton's running jokes. Beaton also pays particular attention to the rampant sexual harassment and interpersonal violence women experience in the overwhelmingly male work camps. Even with this emphatic attention to gender and class, the memoir's perspective remains constrained by whiteness. Beaton is aware of this shortcoming, stating that *Ducks* reflects her own ignorance of Indigenous rights and colonial violence in the early 2000s. As she explains in her afterword, "I can only tell you about my oil sands, where my world was very small and very white" (436).

Amidst vignettes of life in the camps, Beaton's emergence as a comics writer and illustrator becomes another prominent thread in the graphic memoir's second half. As an example of *petro-media*—that is to say, a cultural text mediated by oil in form, content, or mode of production—*Ducks* fits into a larger cultural conversation about the impacts of extractive industries like oil and gas on Canadian settler society and Indigenous communities. Beaton was able to pay off her student debt by working in the oil sands, prompting the question of how these years shaped her career as a comics artist. Read in this light, *Ducks* serves as a mediation on the links between oil and art, and another example of the hidden ways that oil permeates contemporary culture.

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"Time Not Space"

Seth
Clyde Fans. Drawn & Quarterly $39.95

Reviewed by Zachary J. A. Rondinelli (Brock University)

Last summer, my then four-year-old son and I took a walk together around Dufferin Islands, a small assemblage of islands connected by bridges and walking paths overlooking Niagara Falls. As we walked hand in hand, he ran his other hand across the leaves we passed and laughed at the sounds hidden within the brush. As we neared the end of one particularly long walking path, I vividly remember my son turning around and saying, "Look at our footprints, Daddy!"

While reading Seth's *Clyde Fans*, this very personal memory played on near repeat in my mind. The philosophical musing on the nature of time, memory, and presence are scattered throughout this picture novel as if waiting for the reader to uncover the secret majesty of it all. *Clyde Fans* should be considered Seth's magnum opus; the zenith of his oeuvre's rumination on nostalgia and personal history, it not only finds ways to reveal the common themes of Seth's work to the reader, but it also challenges them to see the formal qualities of comics as capable of bearing the communicative load.

To appreciate this work's compulsion to understand the impact of time on relationships and memory, a reader must understand the book's journey to publication. Intended to be Seth's "second book," *Clyde Fans* "lingered on well past it's [*sic*] time" and took an astonishing twenty years to complete (Author's Note). While this is admittedly longer than Seth had intended it to take him to write the story of the Matchcard brothers, it reflects the novel's preoccupation with time in a way that feels fated. Abraham (Abe) and Simon both understand, each in their own way, that it is the past (or more accurately, time) that keeps them frozen and unable to move forward with their lives. Seth reveals time's presence through Abe's failure to adapt alongside the evolving technology of the twenty-first century, which leads to the loss of his father's company, and through Simon's (undisclosed) agoraphobia, which prevents him from truly living in the present, choosing instead to reflect on his past.

Seth masterfully prepares readers for this philosophical narrative reflection on temporality by drawing their attention to the formal characteristics of his chosen medium. In book one near the end of Abe's long contextual soliloquy, he (for the first time) speaks directly to the reader, saying, "By the way, pay no attention whatsoever to the clocks. I'd be very surprised if any of them are still wound or working" (51). This metafictional address causes the reader to pause and consider the importance of this moment. Narratively, it signals the way in which the Clyde Fans Company is a relic of the past, frozen in time. Formally, it forces the reader to question all that we see. Of course, the clocks aren't "wound or working." They're static pictorial images—but then, so is everything else.

This acknowledgement of the narrative and visual power of time is further elaborated in book three, which features another (quasi)soliloquy, this time from the perspective of Abe's brother, Simon. Whereas Abe's soliloquy is spoken out loud (represented in speech balloons), Simon's, reflective of his introverted nature, is silent (represented by caption boxes as interior monologue). But the contents of their thoughts are, surprisingly, quite similar. Simon says, "Time not space is the barrier that keeps us apart" (200).

One could accept this rumination on time, memory, and visual presence as simple narrative content. But that would fail to recognize the virtuosity of Seth's cartooning and the way that his work inspires readers to think about how the principles of engagement

specific to the comics medium lead to deeper and richer understanding. This principle, termed *closure* by cartoonist-theorist Scott McCloud, describes the process whereby a reader creates the comics' narrative by reading from panel to panel. Closure turns the reader into "a willing and conscious collaborator" and acts as "the agent of change, time and motion" (McCloud 65). In other words, without active engagement on the part of the reader, the characters within *Clyde Fans* are literally, as well as figuratively, frozen in time.

This narrative/formal theme culminates at the end of book three. Simon sits alone on his mother's bed and looks around her room. He says, "I believe this room is as familiar to me as mother herself" (282). Yet, readers are never truly given a chance to meet the Matchcard matriarch as a result of her worsening dementia. That said, as Simon recounts his mother's stories about the knick-knacks in her room, these items begin to inform his personal recollection of her. Ultimately, these memories of the past, unfrozen by the reader as we move from panel to panel, give shape to her character through her absence.

Clyde Fans is a brilliant and powerful story of loss, failure, personal family history or tragedy, memory, and learning to live in the presence of absence. The patriarch of the Matchcard family, Clyde, is a powerful ghost throughout the story; his absence weighs heavily on both the characters (through memory) and the reader (he has been removed from all of the photos and we never see his face in either brother's memories). The matriarch is unknowable to us without the power of memory fueled by the formal characteristics of Seth's chosen medium. Ultimately, this is a story about two very different brothers, their inability to relate to one another, and the widening gulf of separation that was formed in their respective pasts and now manifests in their present.

In his author's note, Seth reveals that his characters (though fictional) are based upon the pictures of two middle-aged men that hung in the real Clyde Fans storefront in Toronto, Ontario. Those photos of the past marked their absence with presence in much the same way that my footprints and my son's footprints did that day in Dufferin Islands. I've often thought about that moment with my son, seeing our two sets of footprints in the dirt along the path and how those footprints, our very recent past, both signalled our absence and our eternal presence. In this way we've been there, we are there, and we will be there for the rest of time. Just me and my son . . . and the millions upon millions of people who have been there before us, are there now, and will be there in the future.

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