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Comics and Graphic Novels

Robin Brenner

Brookline Public Library

As the story of comics has shifted across time, continents, and formats, so too have readers' interests and tastes. Robin Brenner details the history of creating and marketing comic books, in all its forms, from the mid 1800s to the present, while never taking her eye off the readers who, today, keep the books circulating at breakneck pace through libraries, bookstores, and online sources. The rise and popularity of this multi-faceted form—among adults and children, critics and consumers—suggests that its literary and artistic qualities hold endless potential for reshaping what and how we read stories. Following Brenner's descriptive history and analysis, Gareth Hinds' illustrated essay takes readers through the creative process of transforming well-known stories into a visual, graphic novel format. The chapter concludes with a comic essay, "The Beginning," by Raina Telgemeier, that brings into focus a young reader's first, deeply felt, encounter with a book-length comic.

Skeptics voice many concerns over comics and graphic novels, wondering why anyone would read them in the first place, and why they should be considered "real" reading. I have been challenged as to why avid fans of the format should be indulged by library collection policies, giving comics that stamp of approval. Many feel that reading graphic novels and comics will delay readers in seeking out quality literature and lead them away from inspiring or educational tales.

When I was first building a collection of graphic novels for the teen section of a public library, I sought out the opinion of our local graphic novel and comics readers as much as possible. I quickly grew to know the variety of readers we had. I met children poring over *Calvin and Hobbes* (e.g.,Watterson, 2005), teens desperate for the next volume of *Naruto* (Kishimoto, 2003), and adults discovering the format through bestsellers like *Persepolis* (Satrapi, 2003) and *Watchmen* (Moore, 1987). I got to know one teenage girl who in her reading habits fit all the stereotypes that skeptics seemed to fear would lead her astray. She loved Japanese manga (print comics), and amid the hundreds of volumes to choose from, she sought out almost exclusively girls, or shojo, manga. Devouring stories of school romance and epic fantasy, she rarely read outside the sub-category, and although she did also read prose novels, she usually checked out stacks of the latest swoony manga soap.

One day, she surprised me by asking about a comic she'd just finished: *The Golden Vine* by Jai Sen (2005). *The Golden Vine* is an alternate history of Alexander the

Great, veering off from history to speculate on how Alexander might have proceeded if he had not razed the Persian city of Persepolis to the ground but instead integrated the Persian empire into the greater collective he dreamed was possible. The art was created by three Japanese artists, each tackling a different chapter of Alexander's life, and this teen picked up the book entirely because of the Japanese art. The tale of Alexander told in its pages is rich in history, political intrigue, and the challenges of integrating cultures. Those familiar Japanese lines had led her miles away from her customary school romances and melodramas. She quizzed me about Alexander, about what had really happened and what was speculation, and we ended up chatting for over 40 minutes about ancient history and Alexander's influence. By the end of our talk, we had consulted reference books, and I sent her home with a recommended reading list of more novels and nonfiction on Alexander and his time.

Discovering an innovative story or comprehending a confusing topic is a key appeal of the graphic format. We learn very early that reading is defined by parsing letters, understanding words, and relishing a well-turned phrase, but as picture books too often fade into childhood, we forget that images have just as much power, subtlety, and information packed into them as prose. Graphic novels and comics integrate both words and images so completely that the story cannot be told another way. The format itself appeals to the learned joy of reading text and whirls it together with the instinctive, emotional connections images bring a reader. Graphic novels and comics are a different way of both telling and digesting stories, neither better nor worse than prose as a delivery method for stories, and as they challenge how reading is defined, their addition to canon increases the variety and reach of storytelling.

Terminology and Definitions

Vocabulary describing comics, comic books, and graphic novels is still fluctuating, and while a few terms have settled into pop culture awareness, the exact definitions can and do change depending on the perspective of the user. I have heard the format referred to as *comics, comix, graphic novels, graphic fiction, graphica, graphic albums,* and *manga*. Some underground artists in U.S. counterculture prefer comix, the "x" distinguishing their work from mainstream superhero titles, indicating mature content and a willingness to push artistic and social boundaries (Sabin, 1996). Many readers and educators are annoyed by the term "novel" in the identifier graphic novel as it incorrectly implies that all titles are fiction, and therefore adopt other terms such as *graphica* instead. Manga can be used to identify any graphic novel that mimics the style of creators from Japan, although in translation manga is simply the Japanese word for print comics. In the United States, manga means comics originating from Japan, whereas in Japan manga means everything in the format no matter the country of origin.

In interacting with the general public, as I do every day, the most recognized terms are "comics" and, for bound books, "graphic novels." Despite their flaws as all-encompassing terms and the connotations each bring to the table, these are the names most readers use and will recognize. In the course of this chapter, I use the term "comics" as an umbrella term: the one that contains all other permutations of the format. This term hopefully also acts as a reminder that all comic strips, comic books, and graphic novels are essentially the same format. The shift between these are not differences in storytelling technique but in length, from (approximately) four panels to 30 pages to anywhere from 100 to 1,000 pages. The literacy required for reading these formats grow more complicated as the stories get longer, and require more close reading in between the panels, but the structural elements are the same.

All versions of the format, from comic strips to graphic novels, contain the same trademark parts, usually but not always including images, text, word and thought balloons, sound effects, and panels. In *Understanding Comics,* Scott McCloud (1993) clarified Will Eisner's (1985/2008) term from his landmark work *Comics and Sequential Art*, defining sequential art as "juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer" (McCloud, 1993, p. 9). The most important terms in this definition are juxtaposition, images, and sequence. Variations exist, from wordless tales to prose-heavy tomes, but the essential nature of comics is that they use pictures to convey information and story, and they do so by placing images next to each other in a sequence on a page. Wordless comics, and wordless sequences, show that while the reader may not be processing words in the final product, a writer or artist did construct that visual sequence, using images to "write" a narrative sequence even if no words are ultimately on the page.

A number of titles have appeared in recent years to challenge the accepted definition of graphic novels, from Jeff Kinney's (2007) charming hybrid series starting with *The Diary of a Wimpy Kid* to Brian Selznick's (2007) substantial combination of prose and filmic images, in *The Invention of Hugo Cabret.* What makes these titles graphic novels or not graphic novels? There are arguments to be made from both sides: *The Invention of Hugo Cabret* undoubtedly contains images in sequence (propelled forward by flipping the page, akin to the films it is intended to mimic), but does not include other trademark elements like word balloons, panels, or sound effects. *The Diary of a Wimpy Kid* is a true hybrid in that portions of the story are told as comics and portions are told in prose. Is it simply a question of how much comics content there is? If it is more than 50%, does that make a text a graphic novel? Many of these questions are still being debated, as they should be, and we may never see a resolution that satisfies all interested

parties. The one conclusion that seems most important is this: it matters very little to the readers what we call it—if it's a strong story and well told, then they will read it, and readers care less and less about distinctions unless someone asks them to examine the format itself.

Comics Literacy

Graphic novels have elements that are similar to everything from picture books to video games to traditional prose, but they function differently in what they demand from the reader. There is still the idea that comics aren't "real" reading. Our definition of literacy benefits from broadening rather than denying the skill it takes to comprehend a graphic novel. Teenagers can instinctively read graphic novels, even if they've never read one before, much more competently than many adults. Our world is filled with media that breaks apart and integrates text and images in new ways, from television and film to the Internet to video games. Kids and teens learn from an early age to parse combinations of images and text in a variety of ways, and so reading a graphic novel feels new but within their scope of understanding.

Previous generations, particularly those who have much less experience with visual media in general, can be baffled by what they should be doing, feeling there must be a correct way to read a graphic novel that unlocks all of its mysteries (Rudiger, 2006). Reading comics requires self-direction: the reader chooses what to look at first, the images or the text, and chooses how much of the page to concentrate on. Some readers take in the whole page, read the text, and then go back to re-read the text with the context of images. Some read the images first, getting a sense of the sequence, and then add in the dialogue in a second run-through. Some do a lightning quick combination of both techniques. The self-direction required in reading a graphic novel can be intimidating, especially for prose readers used to little variation in how you are supposed to read words: left to right, top to bottom. Artists and writers have different techniques for leading a reader through the page, and the best of them do so with compelling dexterity. Yet, ultimately it is up to the reader to create the story out of its presented parts.

If inexperienced in processing the format, there are a number of adjustments new readers have to make. The main difference in reading is paying attention to the visual portion of the story. Readers more accustomed to prose start by reading only the text, consciously or unconsciously ignoring the visual aspect until they finish the words on the page. Graphic novels are constructed so that the text cannot make sense without the images and vice versa, so it is vital to process the images. In the images are the description, asides, and background information that are found in traditional prose, and skimming over them leaves readers with the impression of a lack of detail, character development, or world-building.

Panel progression can be simple or complicated. It's up to the artist to lead you to the logical next panel, but it's also part of the format's conventions. As Scott McCloud (1993) articulated in *Understanding Comics*, the types of panel transitions are vital to comprehension and the deeper awareness of how comics work. Panel transitions can be divided into six types: moment to moment, action to action, subject to subject, scene to scene, aspect to aspect, and non-sequitur (pp. 72–75). Film uses many of the same edits, and new readers can get a more immediate grasp on reading graphic novels by thinking of them in cinematic terms. Moment to moment is a function of time, showing the shift of a character or scene from one second to the next—a blink or a hand wave.

Action to action is cause and effect, showing a character throwing a punch in one panel to see his opponent fall down in the next. Subject to subject is familiar from movies, where the camera flips back and forth between two speakers, or the view shifts from a man drinking coffee in a diner to a ticking bomb under the table. Scene to scene directs the reader from one place to another, as when you flip to a different set of characters at another location. Aspect to aspect is the hardest to articulate partially because it is not used as prevalently in U.S. comics or cinema (though it is a staple of Japanese manga).

Aspect to aspect uses the view of each panel to highlight a different element of a scene: a character's angry expression, a slammed down coffee cup, a jostled flower in a vase, and retreating feet might all come together to indicate a character's abrupt departure from dinner. This kind of transition requires connections be made by the reader in a more active process than more instinctive transitions, and is partly the reason Japanese manga can seem more incomprehensible to new readers (McCloud, 2006).

Aside from the most noticeable aspects of comics including text, images, and panels, a myriad of smaller elements further distinguish the format and become a code new readers must break to get the most out of their reading. Symbols of all sorts, many culturally defined, have taken on significance of their own in comics. Most readers start off with an awareness of some comics elements. Most know what signifies a speech balloon, a thought balloon, or that somebody yelling is shown by lettering in all caps. Accepted symbols include a lightbulb going on over someone's head, birds circling around after someone's been bonked on the head, or a tiny thundercloud showing anger. Caricature and exaggeration are also familiar parts of graphic narrative, especially in defining character traits. Characters who are evil will look evil, although traditions may also be subverted to confound or surprise the reader. Other visual elements are left up to the reader to interpret including how the words are lettered—for example, in Neil Gaiman's (e.g., 2006) *Sandman*, the lead character of Dream speaks in elegant, looping black speech balloons lettered with white text. Every reader is left to interpret what his voice might sound like from those

speech bubbles, but you know immediately he does not sound like everyone else.

Sound effects add a cinematic layer to graphic novels and take on a life of their own, acting as asides and jokes in their own right. Many readers already know the twang of an arrow being released, or the ka-pow of a solid punch, but more subtle sounds include the pounding of rain, the rattle of a teaspoon, and the crinkle of a food wrapper. Sound is integrated to an even greater degree in Japanese manga where thousands more words are used for sound effects that English cannot approximate, including making a dramatic entrance (*za*!), a heartbeat (*doki doki*), and blushing (*po*).

A Brief History of Comics

Cartoons and comics have a long artistic legacy, arguably reaching back to Egyptian heiroglyphs and ancient Greek pottery, but the first landmark cartoons in the modern European tradition appeared in the 1730s with the publication of *A Rake's Progress* by noted satirist, painter and engraver William Hogarth (see also Sipe's commentary in the preceding chapter of this volume). *A Rake's Progress* includes illustrations and captions presented in sequence and is a prime example of the kind of cartooning accepted as satire and criticism in the newspapers and magazines of the day (Sabin, 1996). By the 1840s, a Swiss gentleman named Rodolphe Töpffer produced a number of what he termed picture stories, complete with panels in sequence, dialog, and captions. Akin to *A Rake's Progress*, Töpffer presented a satirical view on his society, and though most were made to entertain his acquaintances, they proved quite popular with the general public (Willems, 2008). In 1841, the British political humor magazine *Punch* launched, and the artistry and variety of cartooning visible in its pages propelled comics forward as a powerful critical medium. In the 1880s and 1890s, a number of comic strips and stories appeared in Europe led by the 1860s German comic strip *Max und Moritz* by Wilhelm Busch. These strips in turn inspired *The Katzenjammer Kids* by Rudolph Dirks in the United States and during the same period the *Ally Sloper* comics magazine series in England (Becker, 1959; Sabin, 1996). R. F. Outcault can claim popularizing the first major comic strip character in the United States with his creation of the Yellow Kid in the strip *Hogan's Alley*, and his work is notable for the first use of color as well as his famous struggle for rights to the character between William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer (Silverman, 1994).

From Comic Strips to Comic Books

Out of comic strips were born comic books, and once again Europe lays claim to initial innovations in expanding the form. In the 1920s, the Belgian comic *Tintin* by Hergé (e.g., 1994) was published in a special supplement to the newspaper, *Le Petit Vingtième*, and was soon collected and on sale bound in book form. European comics, particularly francophone comics published mainly in Belgium and France, are to this day most commonly sold as bound volumes rather than anything approximating the more ephemeral comic book. Their immediate shift into bound volumes demonstrates the long-standing respect for the medium that has led France to count comics as fine art rather than low culture (Sabin, 1996).

In the United States, as comic strips and Sunday supplements gained in popularity, including Windsor McKay's *Little Nemo*, George Herriman's *Krazy Kat*, Milton Caniff's *Terry and the Pirates*, and Chester Gould's *Dick Tracy*, the reading audience was primed for longer form comics (Becker, 1959). The first American comic book superhero, *Superman*, created by Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, appeared in Action Comics #1 in 1938 by Detective Comics—soon to be known as DC (Weiner, 2003). The appeal of superhuman heroics in the late 1930s, with the world already embroiled in the conflicts that would become World War II, cannot be emphasized enough and undoubtedly drove the immediate success of superhero tales. Masked vigilantes began to crop up from a variety of publishers, including the still dominant DC Comics and Marvel Comics, keen to cash in on the immediate demand for more.

Introducing the Comics Code

Comics flourished in the 1940s, and while superheroes intended for kids and teens initially dominated the market, adult science fiction, fantasy, mystery, and crime comics skyrocketed in popularity once they were introduced. Action-packed, lurid series published by EC Comics including *Weird Science*, *Crime Does Not Pay*, and *The Vault of Horror* exemplified this trend. This broadening of the market, however, was short-lived. Widespread anti-comics sentiment, best captured by child psychologist Frederick Wertham's (1954) *Seduction of the Innocent*, a well meaning but misguided indictment of comics as a major cause of juvenile delinquency, placed extreme pressure on the United States comics industry (Hadju, 2008). Amid public outcry and Senate hearings on the negative impact of their work, the comics industry created the internal regulations known as the Comics Code Authority. The Comics Code was similar to the Hayes Code in the film industry, intended to ensure appropriate content for young readers. Its creation, paired with comics publishers simultaneous loss of a major distributor, effectively squashed adult-oriented comics. As comics continued into the 1950s, they narrowed their aim exclusively to children and teens. The lingering conviction that these are the only appropriate audiences for comics is still powerful in American culture today (see McGillis, Caswell, Filipi, & Smith, this volume).

Superheroes: Gods and Geeks

The waning popularity of comics in post-War culture in the United States led to a boom in the one genre still

considered acceptable: superhero comics. The war-driven need for heroes was replaced by a new range of heroes, with science fiction origins rather than magical destinies, and DC Comics introduced reinvented heroes, including the Flash, Green Lantern, and the entire Justice League of America. Marvel Comics responded by launching in quick succession some of their most popular characters, many created by Stan Lee: The Fantastic Four, Spider-Man, the X-Men, and assembling their own superpowered team in The Avengers, led by a revived Captain America. The defining element of these comics is a shift toward character driven stories and Marvel's decision to make their heroes more human and fallible (Weiner, 2003). Spider-Man was not, like the previous generation's Superman, an invulnerable alien, but instead a geeky teenager from Queens: young, awkward, and not at all sure of himself. Marvel's intent was to explore heroics that came from ordinary men and women, not the unreachable ideal of gods, and Spider-Man remains one of the most iconic superheroes of our time.

Finding Comics: Underground and Direct Markets

Underground comics, also known as comix, arose from a reaction against both mainstream superhero comics and the Comics Code Authority and are represented by the imaginations of R. Crumb, Harvey Kurtzman, Art Spiegelman and as unleashed in the pages of *MAD* magazine, *RAW*, and *Zap Comix*. The "x" added to comic implied both their difference from mainstream comics, including the artistic investigation of the form, a desire to reject the Comics Code, and frequently x-rated content. Comix were a strong part of the 1960s counterculture, including the hippie movement as it grew in San Francisco. Famous for publishing just what the Code opposed, artists and publishers purposefully skirted submitting any content to the Comics Code Authority by distributing comics through non-comics outlets including head shops, i.e., stores selling drug paraphenalia (Sabin, 1996). When the counterculture movement waned at the start of the 1970s, comix lost their sites of distribution, but their legacy lived on in alternative comics, still thriving in opposition to the comic shop mainstream today and represented by such creators as Charles Burns, Chris Ware, Daniel Clowes, Adrian Tomine, and Harvey Pekar.

By the 1970s, the Comics Code had lost much of its grip on the industry; opening the way, by the late 1980s, for the direct market, which became the main distribution point. Comics stores sold both approved and non-approved comics. At this time, comics were marketed mainly to collectors: those avid fans who would buy issues of comics series every Wednesday at their local comics store, read it once if at all, and then carefully store it in a plastic sheath for posterity and potential future profit. While collectors kept the market afloat, aiming only for the collector limited publishers' ability to appeal to new readers.

A few landmark moments jolted publishers out of this trend. Will Eisner, legendary creator of *The Spirit* (see 2005) and one of the first well known graphic novels, *A Contract with God* (1978/2006), was a determined champion of the format as a worthwhile medium for long-form stories (Eisner, 2008; Gravett, 2005). Eisner also rejected the idea that comics should be limited to any particular genre, including superheroes; or age range, writing expressly for adults in *A Contract with God*. In 1986, Frank Miller *(The Dark Knight)* and Alan Moore *(Watchmen)* dismantled the expectations of the superhero genre and pushed the format into psychologically and literarily complex territory (Wolk, 2007). Art Spiegelman (1986) winning the Pulitzer Prize for his Holocaust memoir *Maus* in 1992 provoked readers to recognize that prejudices against the format were no longer valid (Weiner, 2003). Despite the accolades associated with Speigelman's and others' creative works, it would take more than a decade for comics to gain the widespread acceptance in the literary world that would bring them to be reviewed and acclaimed in literary bastions like *The New Yorker, The New York Times Book Review,* and *Time Magazine.*

The shift toward the bookstore market happened gradually and was less a demand from readers than a result of innovations from publishers and corporate buyers. Borders Group graphic novel buyer Kurt Hassler is credited for leading the charge in 2000 to get graphic novels stocked at bookstores, a move that led to the format's greater visibility and acceptability in the world of bookstores and libraries. Bookstores were dubious about the potential success of a graphic novel section, but as a fan of both graphic novels and manga, Hassler had a strong sense of what the graphic novel audience was looking for, and made smart selections that turned a largely ignored bookstore section into a money-maker (see, for example, Icv2.com [Internal Correspondence version 2]: "ICv2's Top Ten," 2006). At the same time, Japanese manga publishers made two major decisions that led their titles, and businesses, to tremendous success: they decided to publish mainly paperbacks, rather than continuing to attempt enticing traditional comic book readers with comic book versions; and they decided to leave titles "unflipped," in the traditional, right to left Japanese reading order. This allowed Japanese manga publishers to print more titles at a lower cost for both themselves and their readers. At the same time, publishers like Tokyopop decided to publish shojo manga—manga targeting girls and women rather than adult men, drawing in an as-yet untapped market: teenage girls.

A Brief History of Japanese Manga

During the 1950s, comics were taking off in another vital region key to readers today: Japan. When Japan opened its borders to the West in the late 1870s, all types of Western culture and arts quickly flooded the country, embraced by a government determined to become a modern nation as

quickly as possible. Amid all of the influences of Western culture, Japanese artists devoured Western comic strips and political cartoons such as those seen in London's *Punch* magazine. An Englishman, Charles Wirgman, started the *Japan Punch* in 1862, and while at first Japanese cartoonists mimicked their English counterparts, creators quickly learned to alter the style of Western comics by introducing Japanese art traditions and symbols. Artists drew from diverse sources including ukiyo-e, the vivid woodblock prints of the 1600s through the 1800s, and the long history of Japanese caricature and sequential storytelling that began in the Choju Giga, a caricature scroll drawn by a Buddhist monk around the 12th century (Schodt, 1983).

Comic Strips to Magazines

The history of comics in Japan follows much the same path as Western comics, starting with political cartoons and cultural critique in the late 1800s, then moving on to comic strips and full page stories in magazines in the 1920s and 30s (Gravett, 2005). Japanese comic strips are created as four-panel sequences, often vertically aligned, and are known as four koma tales. Initially comic strips gained popular attention, including the everyday life of a young housewife in Hasegawa Machiko's (1926) *Sazae-san*. With the rise of ultra-nationalism in the 1930s, comics became a powerful medium for the Japanese public, and the arrival of conflict led to the government giving creators limited choices for continuing their work: create comics as propaganda for the government, give up creating comics, or leave the country to create comics elsewhere (Schodt, 1983). World War II had an indelible effect on the creative output of Japan, not in the least because the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki became a cultural touchstone for the following generations of artists (Drazen, 2003). Post-war culture in Japan was particularly receptive to manga, or print comics: childrens and adults alike thirsted for low-cost, high-value entertainment (Schodt, 1983). Reading manga provided a quiet, absorbing past-time that neither bothered your neighbors nor required a lot of money. The manga supplements in children's magazines proved to be enormously popular in the 1930s, and so when creators decided to begin creating manga post-war, they quickly determined that comics anthology magazines were the most popular and affordable method for distributing comics. Beginning with comics magazines aimed at boys, starting in the late 1940s and expanding into major titles like 1959's *Shonen* magazine (shonen meaning boy), anthologies were and continue to be the main way to publish manga (Gravett, 2005). These anthology magazines range from 100 to close to 1,000 pages, all printed in black and white on cheap newsprint and collecting multiple different series in one phone book sized collection. Magazines come out monthly and weekly, and are marketed by age, gender, and niche audience. Japanese creators, once they realized the strength of the market, also quickly recognized that there were audiences worth pursuing aside from young men. Comics magazines aimed at girls began with the collections *Nakayoshi* (1954) and *Ribon* (1955), and the first comics aimed at adult men arrived with *Young Comic* (1967) as well as more experimental manga published in *Garo* (1964). By the end of the 1960s there were stacks of manga magazines for a broad range of age and inclination.

Redefining Manga's Audiences

Tezuka Osamu is revered as the "God of Manga" in Japan, and his profound influence on manga as a creator is palpable even today. Starting in the late 1940s and early 1950s, Tezuka defined manga's form in a variety of ways, including emblematic character design (drawn from Western cartoon inspirations including Disney and the Fleischer Brothers' Betty Boop), extended pacing and editing techniques drawn from film, and the feeling that a story of any length could and should be told, leading to manga works thousands of pages long. Tezuka's first hit was *Astro Boy* (see Tezuka, 2002–2004), starting serialization in 1951, and from there he created iconic manga series including *Princess Knight* (2003–2008), *Buddha* (2003–2005), and *Phoenix* (2001). Tezuka can also be given credit, much like Will Eisner in the United States, for recognizing early on that manga should not be limited in audience or appeal: He and his mostly male colleagues are responsible for manga quickly growing to include titles for adult men (Gravett, 2005).

On the side of female creators and audiences, a group still largely ignored by mainstream U.S. comics, many of the trademark elements of today's shojo (or girls) manga are inherited from tales like Ikeda Riyoko's (1981) *Rose of Versailles* and the output of the Year 24 Group, a group of young female artists hired in the 1970s to boost interest in shojo manga. Shojo manga was varyingly successful in the 1950s and 1960s, but as most tales were created by male artists they failed to resonate with the young female audience. *Rose of Versailles* burst onto the manga scene, telling the tale of a young woman, raised as a man and now captain of the royal guard, who is caught up in the court politics of Marie Antoinette. Romance, sweeping historical melodrama, and lush art engaged readers' imaginations, especially girls. At the same time, the Year 24 Group (named for the fact that most of the women involved were born in Showa year 24, or 1949) marked the first time women were given relatively free reign to create comics for girls and women. Their intensely emotional, psychologically complex stories set a new standard for girls manga. Their work, ranging from Takemiya Keiko's (2007–2008) science fiction epic *To Terra* to Hagio Moto's (1974) romance between boys, *Heart of Thomas*, pushed boundaries narratively and artistically. The Year 24 Group focused on emotions and character-driven stories, and their page and panel design was at once breathtakingly beautiful and formally nontraditional (Gravett, 2005). This new type of shojo manga was embraced enthusiastically

by teenage girls and adult women, and from that time on female creators have dominated the shojo market.

From the 1970s onward, the manga industry has maintained a steady presence in Japanese culture, and while there are periodic public criticisms of risque content, the industry never suffered the backlash U.S. comics experienced in the 1950s. Manga is an accepted part of everyday entertainment in Japan, similar to the ubiquity of television here in the United States, and everyone from businessmen to senior citizens to students indulge in their weekly manga fix. Unlike the U.S. market, Japanese manga were and continue to be written on any topic, from sports comedies to romance to nonfiction guides to the workplace, and no one genre (like superheroes) dominates the market. The general age categories today are shonen manga (boys), shojo manga (girls), seinen manga (adult men), and josei manga (adult women) (Schodt, 1983).

As manga are created via a strong partnership between the editor and the main artist, who in turn is supported by a group of artistic assistants, manga series are notable for being the product of one or two imaginations rather than the committee of creators often required in superhero comics (Kinsella, 2004). Manga publishers produce comics at a much higher rate, with your typical manga artist and cadre of assistants expected to produce anywhere from 50 to 150 pages of comics a week (Brenner, 2007). When a creator is finished with one tale, they can easily decide where to head next: a shojo manga artist may decide to take a turn at seinen audiences, or a writer known for romances may give sports a try. Manga are thus creator-driven, rather than character-driven, and fans follow creators from work to work rather than just seek out the latest X-Men or Batman comic. The structure of the industry allows series to begin and end when the creator feels the story is finished, leading to an expectation for new stories rather than stories about the same character or within the same world.

Reading Comics: Stereotypes and Misconceptions

When readers are initially introduced to comics, from comic strips to graphic novels, most react with cultural preconceptions that skew their impressions. U.S. readers think of comics as being solely humorous, fluffy stories for kids, or else make immediate connections to superhero comics, given their dominance in the U.S. pop culture scene for decades. As a result, stateside readers have little sense of the variety of subject and style currently available. Readers from France consider comics on par with great literature and as one of many fine arts. Readers from Japan dive into comics as a release from the pressures of a busy life focused on work or study; and they read them at all stages of life in the same way many U.S. viewers take a break with TV (Gravett, 2005).

Adults in the United States still consider comics as a juvenile medium, unaware that comics have, for the past 30 years, been primarily aimed at adult readers, not children or teens. On the flip side, adults worry that comics are wildly unsuitable for their children, full of either pornographic sexuality or excessive violence, startled by pages taken out of context from Alan Moore's (1987) *Watchmen* or an adult-oriented Japanese manga volume like Koike Kazuo's (2000–2009) *Lone Wolf and Cub* or Shirow Masamune's (2004) *Ghost in the Shell*. New readers begin reading comics with the idea that all comics are fine for children. However, while one title they pick up will confirm this belief, if they venture further into the format they discover content aimed at mature adults without understanding the creator's intended audience. The creation of the Comics Code Authority in the 1950s and the ensuing inoffensive superhero comics aimed at kids and teens still dominate the Baby Boom generation's sense of what comics should be. While the later generations, especially those who were kids in the 1960s, are more aware of comics' breadth, only the most recent generations of comics readers come to the medium without the "comics are for kids" preconception.

Book Challenges

The continuing strength of these stereotypes can be seen in the well-publicized challenges to graphic novels in library and school collections. In 2006, Alison Bechdel's (2006) *Fun Home* and Craig Thompson's (2003) *Blankets*, both award-winning titles, were requested to be removed from the public library by local patrons in Marshall, Missouri, for being pornographic (Simms, 2006). That particular incidence of challenges was resolved by the library in creating a collection development policy and, after a public meeting allowing townspeople to speak, they decided to keep the titles in the collection in the open stacks (Harper, 2007). That same year, in Victorville, California, a mother of a 16-year-old boy demanded the removal of Paul Gravett's (2004) academic work on the history of Japanese manga, *Manga: 60 Years of Japanese Comics*, and by contacting a local politician she succeeded in getting the title pulled from all of the county's libraries ("Suburban LA County"). In Sioux Falls, South Dakota, in October 2009 the comic anthology *Stuck in the Middle: Seventeen Comics from an Unpleasant Age*, edited by Ariel Schrag (2007) was removed after a challenge from the circulating collection of two middle schools. In a troublesome incident, in Nicholasville Kentucky, two library staff members saw fit to remove *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen: The Black Dossier* from the collection for over a year and then, when a patron requested the title, to cancel the request so that no patron could see the title they deemed inappropriate (Wilson, 2009). News stories covering a parent's outrage at discovering what they consider inappropriate content in a comic book or graphic novel, as happened in June 2009 in Charlotte, North Carolina, (Ruebens, 2009) are almost always accompanied by admissions that adult readers presumed most comics were fine for their children to read.

Challenges and visual art. Part of the issue that arises with content concerns is the fact that comics are, by their very nature, visual. In a culture where videogames, television, and films are rated for appropriateness, it should come as no surprise that consumers are concerned with the images presented in comics as more problematic than the same events presented in prose. There is no standard ratings system for comics, though individual publishers have created their own systems for indicating content and suggesting intended audiences. Additionally, the sting of the memory of the Comics Code Authority crackdown has made many comics publishers resistant to stricter or overarching attempts to rate their products.

Publishing Comics: Collectors Versus Readers

Libraries have been a part of what is a distinct shift in the recognized market for graphic novels. As more trailblazing graphic novels like Craig Thompson's (2003) *Blankets* and Marjane Satrapi's (2003) *Persepolis* arrived and were discovered by book clubs and adults who had either never read or forgotten why they read comics, readers became a vital audience for graphic novels. Readers in this case, as opposed to collectors, are consumers interested not in the physical object of the book or comic issue but in the content. They are driven to read comics in a package most similar to novels: bound volumes of longer stories that may be serial, yet still contain a significant portion of plot per volume. Comics publishing has been traditionally driven by characters: profits are made from having Spider-Man or Batman continue on indefinitely, and the universe of each character and publisher are frequently rehashed and reinvented to draw in new readers and invigorate creators. Starting in the late 1970s and early 1980s, creators and publishers broke with the traditional model and produced graphic novels with limits, complete in one volume like Will Eisner's (2006) *A Contract with God* or Don McGregor's (1998) *Sabre*, or with at least a definite beginning and end, as with Neil Gaiman's (e.g., 2006) *Sandman* series or Alan Moore's (1989) *V for Vendetta* (Sabin, 1996).

Book publishers, including Random House, entered into the domain of specialty comics publishers, bringing out more stand alone titles that departured from the canon-driven superhero serials that remain the bread and butter of the mainstream comics industry as represented by Marvel and DC Comics. Collectors still account for a large portion of what's known as the direct market sales in speciality comics stores, whereas readers have become at least an equal if not more substantial force for both bricks and mortar and online booksellers. There is still a substantial divide between the direct market and the bookstore market, and the two have yet to win over each other's core audiences. Traditional superhero comics fans are often unaware of the works and creators arriving on the book market, and traditional prose readers can be unaware of the artistic quality or literary work going on within the comics industry and thus disdainful of the idea that comics could ever produce anything as worthy as the latest literary novel.

The comics industry's reliance on direct market sales leads to missed opportunities in gaining new audiences as titles are deemed failures and canceled before they even reach graphic novel readers who browse bookstore and library shelves rather than the comic book racks at their local specialty shop.

The most integrated location to find graphic novels, from mainstream comics to alternative comics to manga, are the bookstores, both bricks and mortar and online. Chain bookstores, most notably Borders and Barnes and Noble, show that highlighting the format and particular works meets a heretofore unrecognized demand, and independent bookstores have also taken up the charge. Libraries, by turn, have become a place where, like the dime store racks and newsstands of the past century, children first encounter comics and develop their interest in pictures into a strong love of story. As more and more libraries stock collections in Children's, Teen, and Adult departments, they meet their patrons' demands and encourage an awareness of the range and depth of what the format offers readers.

A Graphic Novel for Every Reader

In looking at who reads graphic novels today, perhaps the more apt question should be who doesn't read graphic novels? Certain audiences have been recognized as notable consumers of comics and graphic novels: initially, teenage boys and adult men, and more recently teenage girls, as the manga boom dominated the market. Kids up to age 12 have been left out of the major publishers' market equations for decades, and only now are publishers and creators creating and marketing comics expressly for children. The format in itself appeals to a broad range of readers, especially those who are visual learners, and for today's generations raised with the visual diversity of television, film, and the Internet, comics are a natural combination of forms, not a confusing language to be decoded.

Given the history of comics, it's been heartening to witness the boom of publishing diversity in the past 10 years paired with the growing awareness of the validity of the format in popular and literary culture. Libraries and schools have played, and will continue to play, a substantial role in advocating for the format. Most generation Xers and Millennials had no reason to see or read comics, with the exception of the Sunday funnies still prevalent in newspapers. Comic books had disappeared from the corner stores, grocery stores, and magazine racks that once propelled their popularity. Fans were created by word of mouth: if you had a comics fan around you, you would likely at least see a comic book, and potentially join the ranks of fans. If not, there was no easy way to discover

the format, and the narrowing of the market appeal to adult men in the 1980s meant there was no obvious way to hook new readers.

Graphic novels have long been included in library and school collections for one reason: they circulate in high numbers (Raiteri, 2003). Some of the volume of circulation can be adjusted by the understanding that graphic novels are faster reads than novels and, akin to DVDs, are checked in and out much faster. If you take into account the internal circulation, or how many times a graphic novel is read in-house, the circulation jumps even higher. Within my own library's teen collection, graphic novels in 2008 made up for 35% of the collection's total circulation, beating out even the DVDs and paperbacks as the most popular format in the collection. In pure circulation counts, 16 of the top 20 circulating titles in the entire collection are graphic novels, 13 of those manga volumes. The most popular titles in each have circulated over 23–28 times, compared to the most popular hardcover fiction, including Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* volumes, clocking in at 17–25 circulations each. Each graphic novel averages 9 circulations per volume, whereas hardcover fiction averages 3 circulations per volume. Graphic novels and comics are by far the books the library staff must clear up and put away at the end of the day, their only close rival being magazines. In addition, comics anthology magazines, like *Shonen Jump*, and magazines about comics are the magazine titles most read.

Adult graphic novel collections are just starting to be separated out in terms of placement and statistics, but even in our library's smaller collection, circulation has gone up over 50% in the last year. As comics in the library and education world were first collected as a way to appeal to teenagers, particularly teenage boys, for a long time comics and graphic novels have been relegated to teen collections. There has always been an awareness of adults as an audience for graphic novels and comics, but because adults are not as vocal about their fandom as teens, adult graphic novel collections have been slower to establish in libraries and universities. Adult fans have become more and more visible recently, especially when the release of feature films like *Sin City, 300, V for Vendetta,* or *Watchmen* spark adult readers' interest in the source material and inspires them to seek out similar types of comics. As more and more libraries collect specifically for adults, more adult patrons recognize the library collecting a format they desire and take advantage of their own power in requesting more titles be added to the collection.

Similary, the demand for comics for children keeps rising, and while superhero titles are no longer automatically the go-to titles for children, favorites embraced by adult readers and children, like Jeff Smith's (2005) *Bone*, have paved the way for the success of Jennifer and Matthew Holm's (2005) *Babymouse*, Andy Runton's (2004) *Owly*, and Scott Morse's (2008) *Magic Pickle* series. Many titles for children come from independent creators and book publishers rather than traditional comics publishers. Independent creators, including Jimmy Gownley (2006), Joshua Elder (2007), Kean Soo (2008), Kazu Kibuishi (2008), and Raina Telgemeier (e.g., Martin, 1995), have all led the charge in creating comics targeted for younger readers. Book publishers getting in on the action have successfully lent more credence to comics for kids, especially as notable titles including Shaun Tan's (2007) *The Arrival* have caught the attention of both the children's literature world and the comics world (Bickers, 2007; Lyga, 2006; see also Campano & Ghiso, and Sipe, this volume). In 2008, legendary wife and husband team Francoise Mouly and Art Speigelman launched TOON books, a publishing venture devoted entirely to titles for the youngest audiences, children ages four and up. Their hard work was rewarded when one of their titles, Eleanor Davis's (2008) *Stinky*, was awarded as an honor book for the Theodor Seuss Geisel Honor Award in 2008 ("'Stinky' Named Geisel 'Honor Book'," 2009), and in 2009 Geoffrey Hayes's *Benny and Penny in the Big No-no* won the award. Currently, demand for kids comics is outpacing production, but publishers and creators are poised to release more quality titles into the market.

Current Trends

Today's comics readers are an eclectic group. Many of the expected divisions remain: superhero fans still seek out their favorite spandex clad crime fighters, and manga devotees leave with stacks of volumes of their favorite series. Independent comics fans still gravitate toward the comics' equivalent of literary fiction, while kids still embrace the humorous action of *Calvin and Hobbes* (Watterson, 2005) alongside Jeff Smith's (2005) *Bone* family. At the same time, browsing collections allows for more crossover, and more and more readers are discovering the format itself through its inclusion in library and school collections, not to mention the local Barnes and Noble.

Superheroes are still a dominant form, though their main audience is arguably the adult fans who follow the universe-driven story lines from Marvel and DC Comics, and while younger readers cheerfully list their favorite superheroes, many know them from films or television rather than the pages of their favorite comic. The visible demand from young audiences, both kids and teens, is for Japanese manga, and the appeal of manga continues to attract and challenge U.S. publishers. Manga's presentation of stories and genres that appeal strongly to female readers has been vital in proving the power of an audience previously ignored by mainstream comics, demonstrating the buying power of teenage girls (Thompson, 2007).

The continuing acceptance of graphic novels into the literary and high culture sphere has helped weaken the impression that reading comics is not "real" reading, and lent the format a respectability it could never previously claim. The lessening of superhero tales' hold on the ma-

ket has led to a welcome variety of genres and subgenres, especially outside the direct market. Alison Bechdel, an independent creator most known for her long-running comic strip *Dykes to Watch Out For*, gained critical acclaim for her literary memoir (2006) *Fun Home*, named Time Magazine's Book of the Year in 2006. Gene Luen Yang's (2006) *American Born Chinese* was the first graphic novel to win the top literary award for teen literature, the Printz Award, in 2007. In March of 2009, the *New York Times* debuted a new best seller list, this time tracking graphic books sales divided between hardcover, softcover, and Japanese manga (Gustines, 2009). Films based on comics, including such diverse fare as *Ghost World* (Clowes, 1998), *Road to Perdition* (Collins, 2002), *A History of Violence* (Wagner, 2004), *Batman Begins* (Franco & Nolan, 2005), *300* (Miller, 1999), *Sin* City (Miller, 2005), *Speed Racer* (2008) and *Watchmen* are rolled out by Hollywood at an increasing pace, which in turn feeds viewers' desire to uncover the source material.

The participatory and vibrant fan culture of the internet has unleashed a variety of opportunities for comics creators. The internet allows for the creation of everything from Munroe's (2006) stick figure characters in *xkcd* to Kurtz's (1998) full color *PvP* comics; in either short form traditional comic strips or long form comic book or graphic novel length. Starting online also means building an audience without the intermediary of either a publisher or editor—anyone can and does create their own comics. The freer structure of a webpage does not confine creators to a traditional page size or reading order, allowing for increased innovation in how webcomics are both presented and read.

Publishers are also venturing into releasing more and more content online. Initially most publishers concentrated on posting mainly previews and brief excerpts to advertise their print editions, but more and more publishers are testing the waters of releasing substantial material online. In 2007, DC Comics introduced ZudaComics, a site devoted to independent content that depends on site visitor voting and ratings to succeed ("DC Plans," 2007). The same year, Marvel created a subscription service, Marvel Digital Comics Unlimited which allows readers, for either $9.99 a month or $59.98 a year, to read over 2,500 comics, although titles must be at least 6 months old to appear via the service ("Marvel Launches," 2007). In 2007, they also announced they would be publishing content exclusively online ("Marvel Launches Original," 2007). In May 2009, VIZ ventured online with five titles from a monthly magazine from Japan, *IKKI*, as a way to build audiences for their adult-oriented VIZ Signature line and test popularity of titles before they go into print ("VIZ Launches," 2009). VIZ was able to release Rumiko Takahashi's (2009) new manga, *Rin-Ne*, at the same time as the title was published in Japan by releasing the title online at their Shoneny Sunday site, set up on the IKKI model ("New Takahashi," 2009).

One of the major problems facing publishers also arises directly out of participatory online fan culture: the distribution of comics, especially Japanese manga, via various channels on the Internet. Fans, driven by enthusiasm for the format, are easily able to scan and publish favorite comics online for other fans to read. Similar to music file-sharing and the legal wrangling over Napster faced by the music industry, the comics industry has been challenged by fans file-sharing their own favorite comics with no regard for copyright or legal permission. U.S. companies have attempted to deal with scanned titles by sending cease and desist letters to websites hosting scans of copyrighted works, but it seems to be a losing battle given the ease with which new sites pop up ("Marvel and DC Target," 2007).

Japanese manga publishers have faced a much more entrenched fan culture. Works still only available in Japanese, are "scanlated": fans scan in the pages, translate the text, and publish the results online for reading or download. These practices do have a positive side for publishers, raising an awareness of a property before it officially arrives and even allowing manga publishers to gain a strong sense of how popular a series would be were it licensed and published in the United States. Nonetheless, although scanlation has been a part of manga and anime fan culture for years, the ease of digital sharing has made the practice much more threatening to the business of anime distributors and manga publishers.

As publishing online continues to gain ground, the future of comics and graphic novels is likely to spread across platforms including PDAs, cell phones, and digital book readers. Ultimately, the hope is that graphic novels will become as ubiquitous and as accepted as any other format like television, audiobooks, or prose. The format, however, will remain the same, and while the delivery device may shift from paper to screen, there is no sign of readers' fondness for the format slowing down.

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