EDITORIAL: WAR AND CONFLICT IN SEQUENTIAL ART

by Katja Kontturi, Martin Lund, Leena Romu, and Fredrik Strömberg

Dear reader,

It has been a year and a half since NNCORE – The Nordic Network for Comics Research held its second international conference, titled "War and Conflict in Sequential Art," at the University of Oslo. At the two-day seminar, several presentations examined the comics medium's potentials for conveying stories, experiences, and themes related to the grim side of humanity. This issue of SJoCA presents two articles that evolved from the conference. Both of them discuss war and conflict by taking a look at two very different ways the Second World War has been brought to the pages of comics.

First, Pascal Lefèvre's article "What if the Japanese could alter WW2? – A case study of Kawaguchi's manga series Zipang" discusses Kawaguchi's series by contextualizing it within the specific history related to Japan's role in the Second World War. Lefèvre introduces a model in which Kawaguchi's series can be considered as an alternate history in comparison to other genres that combine history and fiction in various ways, such as historical fiction, revisionist history, and science fiction. The article shows how the series not only comments on the past but contributes to contemporary discussions about Japan's position in the world of today.

Second, in "Early Representations of Concentration Camps in Golden Age Comic Books," Markus Streb studies the visual motif of concentration camps in early US comic book and shows how the representations were affected by genre conventions of horror, adventure, and war comics. Streb argues that especially after the war, many comics exploited German atrocities but only a few acknowledged the Jewish dimension of Nazi atrocities. The article shows how a detailed comics analysis together with contextual information about political and societal discussions can help us understand how comics participate in the construction of social representations.

This issue's forum text is provided by Maarit Mutta, who discusses the *Asterix* series from the perspective of Gallic identity. Mutta reads the series as offering stories of resistance that, despite their seemingly humorous nature, convey a profound message about the importance of solidarity and sense of community.

In addition, we have three interesting book reviews by Leena Romu, Jani Ylönen, and Martin Lund. Romu examines Hillary L. Chute's *Disaster Drawn – Visual Witness, Comics, and Documentary Form* (2016); Ylönen discusses *The Comics of Joss Whedon – Critical Essays* (2015); and Lund writes about *The Myth of the Superhero* (2013), *On the Origin of Superheroes* (2015), and *The New Mutants* (2016).

"What if the Japanese could alter WW2? – A Case Study of Kawaguchi´s Manga Series

by Pascal Lefèvre

To the general public abroad, Japanese manga may seem a type of graphic narratives that excel in escapist, fantastic stories, and consequently to be less rooted in factual history or in contemporary daily life. While Kaiji Kawaguchi's *Jipangu* (translated as *Zipang* in English and French) contains a certain amount of fantastic aspects, it is, on the whole, rather serious and "naturalistic," because it not only uses the Second World War as its detailed setting, but also because it questions in an explicit way postwar Japan's coping with the wartime period. The author establishes this link between contemporary times and the wartime past by having a 21st century Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF)-vessel transported, in an unexplained but seemingly natural way, to the Pacific in 1942. Once the ship arrives in this historical context, the crew faces many dilemmas, such as how to save as many Japanese as possible without hurting any Americans, their 21st century Allies.

Gradually and inevitably, the narrative diverges from the historical record, leading after almost 9,000 pages to a different outcome of the Second World War. A quite different postwar Japan emerges, but one that is not necessarily better or worse than the actual Japan we know. Therefore, the series can be considered as an example of the alternate history genre, but one in which effort has been put into making it as plausible as possible. The focus in this manga series lies precisely on the continuing debate (especially among the 21st century crew) about what course the changes to history should take and how the 21st century crew should or should not interfere with the historical past. Consequently, the sensitive issues in the manga series have relevance in today's controversy about Japan's role in the international context and Japan's supposedly inadequate addressing of the past.

The series *Jipangu* started in 2000 in the popular Kodansha manga magazine *Weekly Morning*, with an average weekly circulation of 400,000 to 450,000 copies.[1] Readers were taken on a fantastic journey that, with a weekly rhythm, would last for more than nine years, traced in 442 weekly episodes of about twenty or twenty-two pages each. Like other popular manga series, the weekly installments were collected in tankoubon volumes of some two hundred pages, consisting of eleven chapters or weekly episodes each.[2] By 2010, some fifteen million copies had been sold in Japan.[3]

[1] Maxey 2012, 3.

[2] Since I cannot read Japanese, this analysis will be based on the complete French translation of the forty-three tankoubon volumes. References to the French edition are made as follows: the number of the volume in Roman numerals followed by page number.

[3] Maxey 2012, 3.

Zipang has to date attracted only limited academic attention; the main exceptions are the studies published by myself and historian Trent Maxey.[4] Of course, the fact that the complete series is not widely translated may explain this lack of critical attention. Nevertheless, as I will try to argue, there are good and urgent reasons to consider this series in more detail because it inhabits a somewhat particular place both in the genre of alternate histories and in the contemporary debate about Japan's military. Before going into more detail about the narrative and its possible political meanings, it is important to briefly sketch the broader context in which the narratives are situated, more precisely the genre of alternate history and the specific Japanese historical background. Both aspects are crucial for a better understanding of this manga.[5]

THE GENRE OF ALTERNATE HISTORY

Various genre labels like war story or time travel can be applied to *Zipang*, because it contains a mixture of various genre aspects (war, SF, thriller, spy story, historical fiction), but for the purpose of this article, I will focus primarily on its alternate history aspects. Stories with changed historical pasts are usually called alternate histories, or "uchronia" (meaning "in no time"), "allohistory" (other history), or "what if-stories." This kind of historical speculation has a long tradition. Already in ancient Greece, the historian Herodotus speculated about the possible consequences that would arise if the Persians had defeated the Greeks at Marathon. Gavriel Rosenfeld, one of the first scholars to write a critical piece about the genre, acknowledges:

> Ever since antiquity, the posing of counterfactual questions has constituted an implicit, if underacknowledged, component of historical thought, helping historians establish causal connections and draw moral conclusions in interpreting the past. Yet, with the rise of modern "scientific" historiography in the nineteenth century, allohistorical reasoning became stigmatized as empirically unverifiable and was banished to the realm of lighthearted cocktail party conversations and parlor games. As a result, alternate history slowly migrated to the field of imaginative literature.[6]

[4] Lefèvre 2009; Maxey 2012.

[5] I thank Martin Lund, Leena Romu and Katja Kontturi of Scandinavian Journal of Comic Art and two anonymous reviewers for their useful comments, criticisms, and suggestions.

[6] Rosenfeld 2005, 5.

Literary critic Karen Hellekson notes that writer Murray Leinster's *Sidewise in Time* (1934) is generally recognized as the first alternate history in genre SF.[7] After the Second World War the marginalized genre of alternate history gained both in popularity and respectability (including growing critical attention), but its real explosion as a mainstream literary genre dates only to the 1990s. Alternate histories can be found in Japanese fiction from the 1960s on, but it was only in the 1980s that the Asia-Pacific War became a topical focus.[8]

Moreover, the genre of alternate history extends far beyond written prose: there are also alternate history films, games, websites, and examples from numerous other media. Alternate histories have been written as spy thrillers and fictional autobiographies, mysteries, and historical novels. Alongside these works of fiction, there is also a branch of historical scholarship that uses what if-hypotheses. Such counterfactual history is promoted and practiced by military historians such as Niall Ferguson or Robert Cowley.[9] In contrast to most historians, who do not accept thought experiments as appropriate tools for historical research, various philosophers of history have argued that counterfactuals are a legitimate part of the most serious historical studies.[10] Through counterfactuals, historians can investigate responsibility, historical causes, and discover the importance of key events, says Johannes Bulhof.[11] Alternate history scholar Matthew Schneider-Mayerson remarks that, although the alternate history is undoubtedly a genre, it defies easy categorization.[12]

Furthermore, one has to ask how the genre of alternate history relates to neighboring genres such as historical fiction, revisionist history, and SF. The definition of any generic label remains highly problematic, and I do not here have the ambition to go into detail about every label and discuss all the possible variations and nuances, or the historical evolution of every genre. Rather, I am concerned with the most remarkable differences and similarities regarding the assumed roles of the creator and the reader, and the assumed status of events. The following comparative table

[7] Hellekson 2009, 454.

[8] Maxey 2012, 1. On p. 2 Maxey notes that he believes that "imaginary war chronicles offered their audiences an escape from both, providing a fictional past free of pacifist constraints and the recriminations of victims."

[9] Cowley 2001.

[10] Bulhof 1999; De Mey & Weber 2003; Nolan 2013.

[11] Bulhof 1999, 168.

[12] Schneider-Mayerson 2009, 71.

(table 1) does not describe all the possible variations within a genre, but rather focuses on what is generally considered its prototypical core or main tendency.[13] Therefore, these general assumptions should not to be taken as normative or definitive. Moreover, there remains a difference between these assumptions (implicitly or explicitly made by the creator, be it an author or film director or publisher) and how readers in practice will deal with these assumptions.

TABLE 1: COMPARISON OF VARIOUS GENRES

	Historical fiction (of the past)	**Revisionist history** (of the past)	**Alternate history** (of the past)	**SF** (of the future)
Assumed role of the creator	primarily inventing, but with historical knowledge	historian	primarily inventing, but with historical knowledge	primarily inventing
Assumed digression from accepted history	few or minor	often major	often many and major	(not applicable)
Assumed status of events	mix of fiction and fact, but fiction is dominant	facts	mix of fiction and fact, but fiction is dominant	fiction

In fact, most fiction, historical fiction included, could be considered as partly alternate, in the sense that most stories locate some fictive events in a past that is largely historically correct. All kinds of complex relations between facts and fiction can be woven.[14] The difference is that the events in so-called historical fiction in principle do not significantly alter the historical course of events. In contrast, alternate histories concern fictive events that supposedly have quite fundamentally changed the course of history as we know it – for instance by giving another outcome to a crucial battle. Though the narrative of an alternative history presents itself seemingly as some kind of real history, both writer and reader are well aware that is it basically fiction.

[13] Table 1 is partly inspired by the categorization in Roscoe and Hight 2001, 54.

[14] Ryan 2006.

To find out how audiences perceived media realism, and if their conceptualizations of realism comported with or differed from those that had been developed by researchers, communications scholar Alice Hall interviewed forty-seven young adults in a focus group setting.[15] The participants had to discuss the degree of realism in several films and TV programs and came up with six distinct means of evaluation of the reality of media texts:

1. plausibility of the events or behaviors portrayed,
2. typicality, "the type or range of people whom the media portrayal resembled,"[16]
3. factuality, accurate representation of a specific, real-world event or person,
4. emotional involvement, the potential to become involved with or to relate to the characters,
5. narrative consistency (internally coherent story),
6. perceptual persuasiveness, the degree to which a compelling visual illusion is created.

Hall found that "different realism conceptualizations tended to be used for different media genres and the conceptualizations tended to focus on different features of the evaluated text."[17] Unfortunately no similar studies specifically concerning graphic narratives are available, but I will use the categories of Hall to discuss the tactics of *Zipang*. It is clear that various of these means (like narrative consistency) are played out to various degrees in the series. In contrast to the striking schematizations and deformations in many other manga, Kawaguchi and his assistants have taken great care in making the drawn pictures look quite naturalistic (in sense that comics historian Joseph Witek has defined naturalistic visual style[18]) and thus underpinning perceptual persuasiveness.

Furthermore, the authors have used a lot of historical reference material (factuality argument). First of all, a large number of appendices are added in the tankoubon editions, which helps readers to contextualize the alterations introduced in the story. The detailed timelines that compare historical events with events in the narrative are meant to educate readers in the actual

[15] Hall 2003.

[16] Hall 2003, 632.

[17] Hall 2003, 624. These findings were later confirmed by Cho et al. 2014.

[18] Witek 2012, 32, explains that the naturalistic visual style derives from the conventions of realism in the visual arts and particularly in photography, but that its narrative techniques are closely connected to those of cinema: "The spatial depth created by the use of perspective is available for the movement of characters, who may be seen from a variety of angles and at varying visual distances. Figures likewise remain stable as physical entities, with any changes in shape and size accounted for by the familiar conventions of visual distance and perspective."

history of WW2.[19] Secondly, in the narrative itself, the vessels and the backgrounds are on the whole historically correct, and widely known historical figures are featured, including Adolf Hitler, Mao Zedong, and various Japanese figures such as fleet admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, general Kanji Ishiwara, or politician Mitsumasa Yonai. When Kawaguchi includes such historical figures, he tries to stay as closely as possible to their historical behavior and political stance (typicality argument). There is thus an interesting mix of real world figures and fictive characters in this alternate history. In this mixture of historical realism and proper imagination, some fictional events may be less believable, but from the moment the reader accepts the fantastic premise of time travel, the story appears as quite plausible.

It also is crucial, as philosopher Kathleen Singles stresses, that the reader of alternate history can contrast the narrated events with his or her historical knowledge of real past events.[20] After all, both the reader and the creator remain well aware that it is purely fiction. This is an important point of difference from revisionist history. In the case of revisionist history, a historian or would-be historian tries to change generally accepted historical knowledge, either through methodologically sound research or through distortions of historical records. In both cases historians present their reasoning as fact, not as fiction.

Although alternate histories are often discussed in SF encyclopedias or companions such as those edited by writer and literary critic David Pringle or literary and cultural critic Mark Bould and colleagues, not every alternate history incorporates prototypical SF-elements.[21] Contrary to the widespread view of SF as a genre committed to the future, historian and literary critic Tom Shippey states that SF "can be also a literature which challenges history, decentering it, and rendering it critically contingent."[22] Nevertheless, media scholar Matt Hills acknowledges that

> historiography and sf have themselves made variant uses of counterfactuals. For historians, it has been primarily deployed as a device to illuminate the actual historical contingencies and factors operating in and on "the past" as we culturally understand it, while sf has both

[19] Maxey 2012, 5.

[20] Singles 2013, 8.

[21] Pringle 1996; Bould et al. 2009.

[22] Shippey 1981, 26; Hill 2009, 438.

> developed this aim and used counterfactuals for purposes of melodrama and narrative experimentation.[23]

While *Zipang* is constructed as a fictional narrative instead of a historical reasoning, it basically stands much closer to a historiographical approach than to the typical approach in science fiction described in the Hills quote. The density of historical information surrounding the manga is, according to Maxey, "as important as the alterations to history, giving it attributes of a realist historical novel."[24] It is crucial to understand the ambivalence of historical discourse. Historian Tessa Morris-Suziki explains that since as early as the 19th century, historians and philosophers have debated "the contentious connection between the infinitely complex lived experience of history itself and the stories that we tell about that experience."[25]

Alternate histories are also different from science fiction about future events, because in the latter case future events, which have not yet taken place at the time of writing, are staged.[26] So there can be no comparison with events that we already know about, but fictional events in the future may refer to the reader's own time or to the historical past.

Schneider-Mayerson sees two general features as the bedrock of alternate history: first its emphasis on military and physical force as the prime movers of history (which is true to a certain extent also for *Zipang*) and, secondly, a deep-seated distrust of centralized government.[27] This second feature is less present in *Zipang*, where the possibility of democratic government is not excluded, but presented as something difficult to realize in practice: in the alternate postwar Japan of *Zipang,* the new government has not succeeded in building a perfect democracy.

[23] Hills 2009, 434.

[24] Maxey 2012, 5.

[25] Morris-Suziki 2005, 20.

[26] I do not here include sub-genres like steampunk (for a discussion of this genre see Guffey and Lemay, 2014).

[27] Schneider-Mayerson 2009, 72.

JAPANESE CONTEXT AND CULTURAL REPRESENTATIONS OF WW2

The cultural and political context in which *Zipang* has been both created and read is also quite crucial for a good understanding of its alternate history. As one of the defeated Axis nations of WW2, Japan has a peculiar and ambiguous stance on war. The introduction of the Constitution of Japan, written by the Americans and approved by the Japanese parliament in 1947, consecrated a spirit of ultimate non-violence. Article 9 explicitly renounced war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as a means of settling international disputes. The clause also stated that land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war-making potential, would never be maintained. Despite these constitutionally formulated war-renouncing and peaceful aims, Japan has, in fact, turned from a shattered, occupied, and disarmed country after WW2 into one of the world's strongest military powers.[28] In September 2014 a groundbreaking reinterpretation of Article 9, proposed by Prime Minister Shinzō Abe and his government, was approved by the Diet, which circumvented the constitutional amendment procedure: the SDF is now permitted to deploy in acts of collective self-defense (generally understood to be the right to use force to repel an armed attack against a foreign country that has a close relationship with one's own country).[29] There were many public protests, as for instance when constitutional scholars from every respected Japanese university put out a declaration condemning the bill as unconstitutional.

Postwar Japan has also had to deal with representation of the lost war, and, as sociologists Akiko Hashimoto explains: "Narrating war history in a defeated nation is a complicated, painful project. [...] it is part of a long process of repairing the moral backbone of a broken society after a monumental national fall."[30] Although postwar Japanese culture has nurtured a strong popular yearning for peace and an aversion to war,[31] Japan's media and public opinion have, after the collapse of the Cold War system, increasingly supported a new policy of active national security that is eroding domestic anti-militaristic principles.[32] Several authors have argued that there is an

[28] Lind 2003, 39; Hughes 2009.

[29] Choong 2015, 173.

[30] Hashimoto 2015.

[31] The few war manga of the 1950s all had an anti-war bent (largely due to American censorship). From the early 1960s on, pro-war views began to creep back into the media and manga, while others responded to this new trend with an anti-war viewpoint (eg. Nakazawa's Hadashi no Gen / Barefoot Gen). See Thompson 2007, 217.

[32] Shinoda 2007; Hughes 2009.

increasing pro-military slant in Japanese education.[33] For political scientist Tsuneo Akaha this shift is a result of three factors: first, the changing nature of the US–Japan alliance into an organization for regional and global stability; second, the political need to transform Japan into a "normal state"; third, concerns about the military built up in North Korea and China.[34] A comparative study of the patterns of war reconciliation in Japan and Germany showed that, as opposed to its former Axis ally, Japan has failed to reconcile with its former victim nations.[35] Today, Japanese accounts of war memories are diverse and divisive.[36]

Unfortunately, there is no academic consensus on the modalities of the effects of cultural representations. Various theorists of the social field may claim that representations influence the way people perceive reality or history, but establishing such a causal relation is still hazardous, because it remains extremely difficult to isolate only one factor and empirically test its possible effects.[37] Concerning the comics medium, Morris-Suziki assumes particularly strong effects:

> Their stark, dramatic images also have the power to burn themselves into our memories, influencing the way in which we see the present and re-member the past.[38]
>
> [T]he comic drawing's stark outlines and exaggerated features imprint themselves on our minds in the way that simple shapes imprint themselves on the mind of an infant.[39]

Recent experimental aesthetics research emphasizes that the sensory, perceptual, and cognitive processes that underlie experiences with art works are "driven by a complex interaction among characteristics of the art object, the viewer, and the physical, social, and historical contexts in which the experience takes place."[40] In our case, the experience of the same manga can be quite diverse for readers in different contexts.

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[33] Eg. Saburo 1993; Jeans 2005; Gibson 2011; Sand 2016.

[34] Akaha 2005, 15–16.

[35] Hein 2010.

[36] Hashimoto 2015; Seaton 2007, 7.

[37] E.g. Raudsepp 2005, Jodelet 1989, Barker 2002, Morris-Suzuki 2005, Bukh 2016.

[38] Morris Suzuki 2005, 164.

[39] Morris Suzuki 2005, 182.

[40] Locher 2011, 697.

Moreover, our visions of history are drawn from diverse sources, a kaleidoscopic mass of fragments: not only history books, but also historical novels, photographs, exhibitions, oral tradition, comics, the Internet, and numerous other sources.[41] Furthermore all these sources do not necessarily form a coherent whole or message. In his study of history in contemporary popular culture, literary historian Jerome de Groot points out that discourses of pastness are various, multiple, multifaceted, unstable, and possibly contradictory.[42]

Scholarly opinions differ on how to interpret the interaction between politics and culture in Japan, especially in relation to politically sensitive themes like WW2 and the military. On the one hand, there are scholars like political scientist Naoko Shimazu, who claim that representations of the past in postwar Japan have tended to reflect the conservative political environment.[43] By assuming the role of victim, the Japanese could disregard the uncomfortable truth "that they were also aggressors, whose victims in Asia and elsewhere still demand an apology and compensation." Popular works in a number of media (such as *Eien no Zero*[44]) that use fictional narratives of the nation's wartime history are often branded as rightist or nationalistic.[45] However, on the contrary, historian Matthew Penney believes that many Japanese WWII narratives manifest important anti-war, anti-militarist themes: an example is the lengthy manga series *Hadashi no Gen* (*Barefoot Gen*, Keiji Nakazawa, 1973–87), about the bombing of Hiroshima and its terrible consequences.[46] The manga also sheds a critical light on some dark elements of Japanese history, like the maltreatment of Korean workers during the war. Since the historical events are mostly viewed from the perspective of an innocent child who is physically, mentally, and socially heavily affected by the bomb, the reader is quickly swept up in his unfair fate.[47]

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[41] Morris-Suzuki 2005, 2.

[42] de Groot 2009, 4, 248-249.

[43] Shimazu 2003, 115–116.

[44] Eien no zero (The Eternal Zero) was originally a novel by Naoki Hyakuta (2006), but it has also been adapted as a manga (Naoki Hyakuta and Sōichi Sumoto 2010–2012) and as a live action movie (Takashi Yamazaki, 2013). The narrative starts with two grandchildren wondering if their grandfather, a kamikaze pilot, should be regarded as similar to the terrorists of 9/11. They start interviewing people who knew their grandfather and eventually learn the real (and comforting) truth about him.

[45] US Naval Institute Staff, 2014.

[46] Penney 2007.

[47] Lefèvre 2010.

Japanologist Roman Rosenbaum also claims that revisionist works are contested by powerful counter-narratives in Japan.[48] Many works have indeed openly challenged the "victim's history" view and the government silences on the darker aspects of the country's wartime past, particularly by presenting Japanese atrocities.[49] Moreover, many such works have been met with financial and critical success.[50] In this vein, comparative literature scholar King-fai Tam and colleagues contend that Japan has

> a striving, cacophonous and competitive postwar culture in which arguments continue to rage about the meanings of the war. [...] In countless battle histories, memoirs, ceremonies, exhibitions, comics, reports by investigative journalists, television dramas, anime productions and feature movies, one finds, alongside regret for and criticism of war, accounts of heroic combat, elegies for doomed missions, first-person blood and guts recollections of battle, accusatory laments for massive civilian deaths for which both the Allies and the Japanese authorities are blamed, and defeat-defying affirmations of the Japanese moral fibre.[51]

So, Japanese culture in relation to the Second World War may be more diverse than often thought outside Japan.

ZIPANG, AN ALTERNATE HISTORY

Kaiji Kawaguchi (born 1948) began creating manga in the mid 1970s. His most famous series is *Chinmoku no Kantai* (Silent Service, 1988-1996), a military-political series related to the debates about Japan's role in a contemporary geopolitical context. Since this manga and its anime

[48] Rosenbaum 2013, 8.

[49] E.g. Junpei Gomikawa's novel Ningen no joken (The Human Condition, 1958), about the Japanese occupation of China, which was adapted into a movie trilogy (Masaki Kobayashi 1959-61) and twice into manga (by Kenji Abe in 1971 and by Shotaro Ishinomori in 1988).

[50] Penney 2007.

[51] Tam et al. 2015, 5.

adaptation have been already widely discussed, I will not further discuss this series, but immediately focus on *Zipang*.[52]

As already noted, *Zipang*'s narrative involves time travel, which has been used in hundreds of SF narratives. *Zipang* itself briefly alludes to classic time travel stories, like H. G. Wells' *Time Machine* (III:95, IX:59) or *The Flying Dutchman* (XIV:99). But the beginning of Zipang is also reminiscent of Ryo Hanmura's novel *Sengoku jieitai* (*Time Slip*, 1974) or its movie adaptation (Kosei Saito 1979), wherein a unit of SDF infantry find itself transported four centuries back in time. There is also the famous American movie *The Final Countdown* (Don Taylor 1980), where an American aircraft carrier is transported to the moment right before Pearl Harbor. In *Zipang,* a 21st century Maritime Self-Defense Force (SDF) ship is transported back in time to June 1942 during a heavy, appearing just before the crucial battle of Midway between Japan and the US. Starting with the intrusion of the 21st century vessel in the midst of the Pacific war, a counterfactual history of Japan gradually takes shape: at the end of *Zipang*, Japan avoids surrender and successfully reaches a peace agreement with the Allied Forces. Unlike in *The Final Countdown, Zipang*'s 21st century crew and its ship cannot return to their own time. Almost the entire crew dies, and their technologically advanced ship is sunk.

The author of *Zipang* may also have been inspired by the alternate Japanese history of *Konpeki no Kantai* (originally a novel by Yoshio Aramaki, later also adaptated in manga, anime, and a game). In that counterfactual history, we see a technologically advanced Imperial Japanese Navy and a radically different World War II.

Given the historical context sketched above, it is interesting to consider the reaction of the 21st century Japanese crew when they find themselves in the turmoil of a World War, sixty years in their own past. As popular media have the potential to give us access to a diverse range of perspectives,[53] *Zipang* allows quite contrasting opinions and arguments to be uttered by various characters, but a dominant point of view seems lacking.[54] This corresponds with the ideas of philosopher Laurent Gervereau, who calls a war a "plurifocal" phenomenon (one having many

[52] See for example Schodt 1996, 164-168; Kinsella 2000, 86-87; Napier 2005, Mizuno 2007.

[53] Morris-Suziki 2005, 29-30.

[54] Kawaguchi had more or less the same strategy for his Chinmoku no Kantai series, as Kinsella (2000, 87) explains: "While accused in 1990 of supporting the ideas of Right-wing military groups, Silent Service in fact reflected the experimental fusion of left-wing and right-wing ideas and symbols in a new political era."

possible perspectives), meaning that there is not one right image of a war; every war should be regarded from diverse and complementary viewpoints.[55]

Zipang's main hero, Yosuke Kadomatsu, the second in command of the vessel, clearly dissociates himself from Imperial Japan, when he deplores all the lives lost in the war as a result of a "strategy thought up by arrogant, pretentious people" (I:90). The militarist war government of Hideki Tōjō is thus regarded as very bad. Nevertheless, there are nuances; other former prime ministers such as Fumimaro Konoe and Mitsumasa Yonai come out as ethically better – at least from a postwar perspective.[56] Maxey, in his analysis of the series, stresses that the character of Kadomatsu ensures that the ideals of the SDF have a masculine champion.[57] The series' image of the SDF remains ambivalent, just as it does in the real world: on the one hand, SDF stands for pacifism and humanitarianism, and on the other hand, it is a military force.

The other crucial character is the Imperial officer Kusaka, who is rescued from drowning by Kadomatsu. Kusaka often takes on an antagonistic role. He learns about Japan's fate in the war and decides to change the course of history as we know it. He resents the way postwar Japan has been shaped, critiquing for instance the fact that Japan can only have a Self-Defense Force rather than a real army. He ridicules the crew of the 21st century SDF (VIII:47):

> You don't protect sovereignty or the people. You're nothing but pawns for the interests of the United States. SDF… what are you, really? The reasons for your existence are nothing but lies: you're simply an army that wags its tail for other countries.[58]

What this fictive wartime officer says is thus more in tune with what is an increasingly common belief in contemporary Japan. Political scientist Christopher W. Hughes claims that Japanese society nowadays seems to be more tolerant of military and patriotic education and to the use of

[55] Gervereau 2003, 85.

[56] For example, Fumimaro Konoe is willing to undermine the militarist government (XXXI:97).

[57] Maxey 2012, 9-10.

[58] The French translation of the Japanese text reads: "Vous ne protegez ni la souveraineté, ni le peuple. Vous n'êtes que des pions servant les intérêts des Etats-Unies/ La force d'autodéfense… qui êtes-vous, finalement ? Les raisons de votre existence ne sont que mensonges : vous n'êtes qu'une force armée qui remue la queue devant les autres pays…"

force for national security ends. Members of the SDF, however, are hesitant to wear their uniforms off-base.[59]

Another political scientist, Ellis Krauss, supposes, without presenting any statistical data in support, that there is a demographic divide emerging between the postwar generation and the more nationalistic younger generations.[60] Furthermore, a revisionist, nationalistic agenda is being advanced by the powerful lobby group Nippon Kaigi, according to *The Economist* (June 6, 2015). So, the character Kusaka in *Zipang* may express opinions that sit well with these revisionist tendencies in Japan, but Kawaguchi presents Kusaka as antagonistic to the interest of the protagonists, the 21st century crew. Nonetheless, Kusaka may be an attractive, powerful character for readers: he is dauntless in trying to realize his grand objective of founding "Jipangu," an undefeated Japan different from the one we know. As Maxey stresses, the chasm separating the postwar Japanese from the prewar Japanese in the manga is the fundamental experience of defeat.[61] Since Kadomatsu and Kusaka differ very much in opinion about which course to take, they are trying to neutralize each other in the long course of the narrative. Kusaka, for instance, wants to use extreme devices like the atom bomb to change the course of the war.[62] Nevertheless, in the end, under extreme physical and mental pressure, both characters come to agree that the number of casualties has to be reduced and that Japan should seek peace with the US, so as to be spared from bombardment and occupation by the US Armed Forces. Kusaka dies, or rather sacrifices himself, but he is able to convince Kadomatsu to pursue his grand objective of Jipangu.[63] Indeed Kadomatsu later succeeds in convincing the US government to seek peace with Japan. By consequence, in *Zipang* the war in the Pacific ends already in the autumn of 1944, and Japan can develop as an independent state with a new, more democratic government than it had during the war.

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[59] Hughes 2009, 142; see also the ethnographic study by Frühstück 2007, 63.

[60] Krauss quoted in Hudson Teslik 2006; see for instance the testimony of Amamiya 2010.

[61] Maxey 2012, 7-8.

[62] In this alternate history Kusaka obtains enriched uranium from Nazi Europe and succeeds, with the help of a Japanese scientist, in assembling an atom bomb.

[63] A wounded Kusaka, clinging to the lifeboat where Kadomatsu is lying in, tries to convince Kadomatsu that the postwar world needs order and that he can never return to his Japan (XXXII:10-13,21-27). The final destruction of the Mirai later strengthens Kusaka's statement (XXXII:145-167). Kusaka pleads that Kadomatsu let him go to the depths of the sea. For Kusaka, it is of utmost importance that Kadomatsu survives to fulfill their shared mission (XXX:62-74). This crucial plot twist is unfortunately neglected in the analysis by Maxey (2012).

In this, *Zipangu* differs somewhat from typical Anglophone alternate histories. In Anglophone contexts, Rosenfeld sees fantasy scenarios or nightmare scenarios as the norm:

> Fantasy scenarios envision the alternate past as superior to the real past and thereby typically express a sense of dissatisfaction with the way things are today. Nightmare scenarios, by contrast, depict the alternate past as inferior to the real past and thus usually articulate a sense of contentment with the contemporary status quo. Allohistorical fantasies and nightmares, moreover, each have different political implications. Fantasies tend to be liberal, for by imagining a better alternate past, they see the present as wanting and thus implicitly support changing it. Nightmares, by contrast, tend to be conservative, for by portraying the alternate past in negative terms, they ratify the present as the best of all possible worlds and thereby discourage the need for change. To be sure, these particular psychological and political implications do not stand in a necessary or deterministic relationship to the two scenarios.[64]

Conversely, *Zipang* results in neither a fantasy, nor a nightmare scenario. In *Zipang,* there are on the one hand several hundred thousands of casualties fewer in the Pacific War (e.g. no atom bombs are dropped on two Japanese cities) and Japan develops partially as an independent democratic society (XXXIII). The Japanese army is both reduced and modernized as a National Defense Military, not that different from the actual SDF (XXXIII:112). But on the other hand, the alternate postwar Japan is not presented as a utopian society (e.g. many of the militarist wartime government serve in the new government – here too, is a similarity with actual history). There are measures taken to rebuild the economy and to reform to a democratic society (as another leading Japanese, Kisaragi, tells Kadomatsu, XXXIII:129). However, one of the surviving officers of the 21st century crew, Kikuchi, considers the democratization process in the first ten years after the war to be insufficient:

> The feeling of liberation, which was born after the war, is dissipating with the economic growth of the country. […] The people see everything they have lost and the little they have won. They live with a feeling of dissatisfaction towards the peace… The strongest criticism comes from those who haven't experienced the front. They criticize the government, arguing that it should have continued the war. It is certain this Japan will not experience a growth as impressing as the Japan we've lived in. But… nobody knows (XXXIII:139–140).[65]

[64] Rosenfeld 2002, 11.

[65] The French translation of the Japanese text reads: "Et le sentiment de libération né après la guerre se dissipe depuis dix ans au rythme des progrès économiques de ce pays. […] Les gens voient tout ce qu'ils ont perdu et le peu qu'ils ont gagné. Ils vivent avec un sentiment d'insatisfaction envers la paix…Les critiques les plus dures viennent bien sur de ceux qui n'ont

In a way, this can be interpreted as a consolation for the contemporary reader: our real, contemporary Japan is not so bad after all. As Rosenfeld notes, alternate history is inherently presentist: "It explores the past less for its own sake than to utilize it instrumentally to comment upon the present."[66]

Maxey thinks that *Zipang* challenges its readers: "The very ambiguity of the causal relationship between war, defeat, and postwar success strikes at the core of Japanese ambivalences between remembering and forgetting, trauma and pride, responsibility and evasion."[67] Although *Zipang* is a skillful demonstration of how a war manga may appeal to readers of different backgrounds, it is in the first place meant for Japanese readers, who may differ in opinion in regard to Japan's experiences in WW2 and the nation's position in the world today. Morris-Suzuki believes that our relationship with the past is not only forged through factual knowledge, but that it also involves imagination and empathy with the people of the past.[68] This is in line what *Zipang*'s author has stated in an interview:

> Deep inside, I have a double sentiment: one that wants to repudiate the Japanese (of WW2), and another that wants to be proud of them. On the one hand, I think I should, through my drawings, bluntly show why the Japanese started this war, how they were wrong; on the other hand, I also want to be proud of them. However, even this last case, I cannot present them [...] without highlighting their bad sides. But I think many Japanese are probably like me, they have this dual feeling towards Japan, a sensitivity that is perhaps specific to the Japanese people (XXII:188).

On a larger scale, *Zipang* taps into a real vein of Japan's remilitarization and new assertive military role, without being explicitly revisionist like other manga such as *Gomanism Sengen* (*My Arrogant Declaration*, Yoshinori Kobayashi, 1995–2003) or *Manga Kenkanryu* (*Hating the Korean Wave*, Yamano Sharin, 2005–2009). *Gomanism Sengen* exhibits a belligerent attitude towards the US and

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pas connu le front. Ils critiquent le gouvernement, arguant que ce dernier aurai dû continuer la guerre. Il est certain que ce Japon-là ne connaîtra pas une croissance aussi impressionnante que celle vécue par le nôtre... "

[66] Rosenfeld 2002, 93.

[67] Maxey 2012, 8-9.

[68] Morris-Suzuki 2005, 22.

argues that there was no objective evidence that the Japanese committed war-crimes.[69] *Manga Kenkanryu* is, as its title immediately shows, a plain anti-Korean manga.[70]

The contemporary context is important. The continued interest in WW2 stories in Japan is striking. Representations of the wartime past in Japanese popular culture and the war fantasy genre seem more important than ever.[71] Consider the latest animated film by Hayao Miyazaki, *The Wind Rises* (2013), a fictionalized biopic about Jiro Horikoshi, the designer of some of the most famous Japanese fighter planes. Moreover, the Japanese military has been collaborating on various recent projects by Japanese film production companies, including the movie *Ore wa, kimi no tame ni koso shini ni iku* (*I Go To Die For You*, Taku Shinjo, 2007), about the kamikaze pilots of WW2. According to the *Telegraph*'s Japan correspondent, Colin Joyce, the release of this film confirmed a growing nostalgia in Japan for its wartime generation.[72]

In other cases, like the game *KanColle,* or the Kantai Collection, there is also a kind of desensitization to WW2 at work. In this free-to-play web game, with some three million registered players, World War II naval warships are depicted as cute girls, known as "Fleet girls," that the player must build, repair, and deploy against an alien fleet. Akky Akimoto of *The Japan Times* reports that a South Korean paper has interpreted *KanColle* as evidence of a conservative political shift amongst young people in Japan. This is a view that Akimoto does not share; for him, *KanColle* is just an "incidental hit."[73]

Recently, the author of *Zipang* started *Kubo Ibuki* (*Aircraft Carrier Ibuki*), a new series published in *Big Comic*, about a contemporary conflict between China and Japan: China invades some Japanese islands (Senkaku, Yonaguni, and Ishigaki) and Japan, together with the US Navy, takes on the Chinese forces. Simultaneously, in the real world, the constitutional limitations on the deployment of the Self-Defense Force was reviewed in September 2014 by the Japanese parliament, which, over and against many public protests, circumvented the constitutional amendment procedure in doing so.

[69] Kinsella 2000, 87-89.

[70] See the nuanced analysis in Sakamoto and Allen 2007.

[71] Penney 2007. See also Otmazgin & Suter 2016.

[72] Joyce 2007.

[73] Akimoto 2014.

CONCLUSION

Two main conclusions can be drawn from the above analysis and contextualization of *Zipang*. The first important element to stress is that this manga, while offering an alternate history, makes a concerted effort to convince readers of its plausible and naturalist stance. Despite its fantastic or SF time travel premise and its thriller-like intrigue, the visual realism and the almost educational didacticism of the historical context makes the series adhere primarily to a realistic mode, rather than to a modernist or postmodernist approach. *Zipang* does not question its fictive reality; when other fictions with time travel (like H.G. Wells' *Time Machine*) are evoked by the characters, it is mainly to differentiate the "reality" of their world from those fictional worlds. Kawaguchi and his team use the various factors (plausibility, typicality, factuality, emotional involvement, narrative consistency, and perceptual persuasiveness) that contribute to perceived realism to lend an air of realism to their own alternate history.

Second, it has become clear that *Zipang* must also be read in the context of postwar Japan and recent debates about the reinterpretation of Article 9 of the Constitution, which has led to Japan partly abandoning the war-renouncing path imposed on the nation by its former American occupier. Still, the manga's constitutive moral ambiguity makes it suitable and attractive for readers with rather divergent political views. Especially through the character Kusake, the manga calls into question various achievements of the Japanese nation and the way it positions itself in international relations (especially towards the US). With its serious and nuanced tone about the war, *Zipang* differentiates itself not only from outspoken anti-war manga (like *Hadashi no Gen*), but also from explicit nationalist and revisionist propaganda manga (such as *Gomanism Sengen* or *Manga Kenkanryu*), and from completely fantastic and desensitizing approaches like the game *KanColle*. By blending real historical elements and counterfactual history, Kawaguchi delivers an interesting and intelligent debate about Japan's WW2 and its aftermath.

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Early Representations of Concentration Camps in Golden Age Comic Books: Graphic Narratives, American Society, and the Holocaust

by Markus Streb

INTRODUCTION

The Golden Age of American comic books, lasting roughly from 1938 until 1955, is not only notable for the emergence of superheroes, but also for its confrontation with the USA's ideological enemies. As the Nazis rose to power in Germany and the extent of their terror became known, they frequently appeared in comic books in the later 1930s. By the 1940s German concentration camps found their way into comic books as well: there are more than three dozen Golden Age comic books from between 1940 and 1955 that explicitly depict concentration camps. Although the visual language of some covers of superhero comics, the largest genre at the time, hints at German atrocities committed in concentration camps, however, the camps themselves play a role in only a few stories.

Camp depictions can be found mostly in horror, war, and adventure stories, genres that were on the rise in the early 1950s. Whereas 1955's masterpiece "Master Race" by Al Feldstein and Bernard "Bernie" Krigstein is most commonly referred to as the first US comic depicting Nazi atrocities, it will be the most recent of the works examined in this article. Apart from a few isolated publications that attempt an overview,[1] the depiction of concentration camps in early comic books has mainly been discussed in internet forums or blogs. One outstanding exception is the second chapter of *Comics, the Holocaust and Hiroshima*, published in 2015 by comics scholars Jane L. Chapman, Dan Ellin and Adam Sherif, in which they show how persecution and genocide are dealt with in a sample of wartime Quality Comics publications.[2]

In the following, I will provide an overview of the early stage of concentration camp depictions in comic books, placing them in their historical context, and discussing the key motifs. I will show to what extent the comic book representations of Nazi atrocities and concentration camps correspond with the

[1] Weiner and Fallwell 2011, 465; Palandt 2015.

[2] Chapman et al. 2015, 13–28.

United States' perception of and reaction to what was later to become known as the Holocaust. Furthermore, I will show to what degree the comic books reflect what was known and published in the United States about the extermination of European Jewry at the time. Beforehand, I will make some remarks on the historical context and the terminology used in this article.

CONTEXT REMARKS AND DEFINITIONS

The term "concentration camp" often serves as an umbrella term. However, the Nazi regime had different kinds of camps that could fulfill different functions. The Germans had been using concentration camps as an instrument of terror in the six years before they started the Second World War. The camps were a very effective instrument for the oppression and killing of political opponents and others who did not fit into their concept of the so-called *Volksgemeinschaft*. Among the victims of Nazi oppression and extermination were Jews, Sinti and Roma, homosexuals, political and religious opponents, mentally and physically disabled people, prisoners of war, people of color, and so-called *Asoziale* (anti-socials) – as well as those whom the Nazis had assigned to one of these categories. The various groups of people who were imprisoned did not all receive the same treatment during their internment.

The war eventually created a frame in which a radicalization of already established practices and plans could be expanded and which led to the systematic extermination of European Jewry.[3] This extermination was carried out mainly in the occupied parts of Eastern Europe, where several extermination camps had been established, beginning in 1941. Other camps functioned as forced labor camps, though their main purpose remained the eventual extermination of the prisoners. The interrelationship between the war and the extermination of

[3] The process that led to the Holocaust is, of course, complex and heavily disputed among researchers, as can for instance be seen in the debates between the so called Structuralists and Intentionalists.

European Jewry is not limited to simple co-occurrence, and it becomes even more obvious with a closer look at the perpetrators. Not only the SS, but also various units and personnel of the German military and police took part in the extermination and fought in the war.

When seriously dealing with what is most commonly referred to as the "Holocaust" or "Shoah,"[4] the singularity and the exterminationist dimension of the Nazi's Jewish genocide need to be taken into account, which is why I distinguish it analytically from other German atrocities.

CONCENTRATION CAMP DEPICTIONS UNTIL 1946

After the Nazis came to power in Germany in 1933, they immediately started oppressing political and social enemies, for example in the early concentration camps. As the international media reported on the events in Germany, Nazi politics were reflected in popular culture more and more. By this time, the comic book format was already established in the US, and in the late 1930s, "American comics were full of anti-Nazi imagery, from humor comics to the newly established superhero genre."[5] After the Germans invaded Poland, Nazi villains appeared in increasing numbers in comic stories, many of which feature German dictator Adolf Hitler.[6] Some of the most famous comic book covers of the 1940s show superheroes fighting the Nazis. The cover of *Marvel Mystery Comics #4* (February 1940)[7] shows the Sub-Mariner attacking a German U-boat and the

[4] These terms have been critically discussed since their first appearances. An exemplary critique can be found in Giorgio Agamben's book Remnants of Auschwitz, pp. 28–31. Historian Leon A. Jick offers an overview of the establishment of the term Holocaust in his article "The Holocaust: Its Use and Abuse within the American Public," pp. 301–309.

[5] Murray 2010, 436.

[6] Tillmann Courth, a publicist and specialist in 1950s horror comics, is an expert in depictions of Adolf Hitler in comics. A small selection is presented at: http://www.comicoskop.com/aufmacher/aufmacher-juni-2015-hitler-in-us-comic-books/.

[7] Schomburg 1940.

cover of *Daredevil Comics #1* (July 1941)[8] shows Hitler himself being attacked. Perhaps the best-known example is the first issue of *Captain America* (March 1941)[9] where the protagonist punches Hitler in the jaw. War-related covers, including those portraying concentration camps, were used to "promote sales in a war-conscious market and to communicate a number of war-related messages."[10]

One Superman story even caught the attention of the Nazis in 1940. In the two-page story "How Superman Would End the War" (February 27, 1940),[11] that appeared in *Look* magazine, Superman fights against German troops. He finally takes Hitler and Stalin to a meeting of the League of Nations, where both are pronounced "guilty of modern history's greatest crime – unprovoked aggression against defenseless countries." The April 1940 issue of the SS magazine *Das Schwarze Korps (The Black Corps)* responded with an article that defamed Jerry Siegel, one of Superman's Jewish creators, with vulgar anti-Semitism.[12] Superman kept on fighting on the home front and many comics themselves became part of US war machinery, for instance by promoting war bonds.[13] But the social climate during wartime was very complex. Whereas many people supported the still widespread American isolationism, others saw the necessity of joining the war to fight the Germans and liberate Europe side by side with the British. Furthermore, American historian Francis MacDonnell emphasizes that during wartime many Americans feared that Nazi agents, the so-called Fifth Column, could secretly

[8] Biro and Wood 1941.

[9] Kirby 1941.

[10] Chapman, Hoyles et al. 2015, 111.

[11] Siegel and Shuster 1940.

[12] An English translation of the article can be found at: http://research.calvin.edu/german-propaganda-archive/superman.htm.

[13] Lund 2016, 117f.

infiltrate and undermine the country, a widespread idea that was also transported into contemporary comic books.[14]

There are hundreds of Golden Age comics that feature Nazis and other members of the Axis, who had become "the main topic of all action-oriented comics."[15] After Pearl Harbor and the mutual declarations of war of the US and Germany in December 1941, the media and comics alike perpetuated the tendency to defame German and Japanese soldiers and civilians.[16] Superhero comics were established as a means of propaganda by depicting contemporary enemies and thereby reflecting reality.[17] Comics, of course, were not the only medium to make the war a topic. They referred to sources of inspiration like "Hollywood films, advertisements, propaganda posters, and political cartoons, all of which employed similar rhetorical strategies and comparable imagery in representing the Nazis."[18] The impact of comics' propagandistic tone on the morale of US soldiers should not be underestimated. One quarter of the magazines shipped to US troops overseas were comic books.[19] According to comic researcher Andreas Knigge, forty-four percent of the 12 million US soldiers read comic books regularly. Another twenty percent read them occasionally.[20]

[14] MacDonnell 1995, 5; Lund 2016, 111ff.

[15] Gabilliet 2010, 22.

[16] Wright 2003, 40ff.; Yanes 2009, 59ff.

[17] Sistig 2002, 18.

[18] Murray 2010, 437.

[19] Chapman, Hoyles et al. 2015, 4.

[20] Knigge 1996, 127.

Whereas comics demonizing and/or mocking Nazis are almost uncountable, concentration camps are rarely mentioned in comic strips[21] and comic books of the early 1940s. There were early mentions, but no visualizations, of camps in several comics. The five-page story "The Defeat of Radolf" (June 1940)[22] is one of the first to depict a concentration camp. The protagonist Neon frees a concentration camp named Rachaw in the country of Dunland, and defeats the dictator Radolf. The names and the imagery make clear that the story is referring to Germany, or *Deutschland* in German, Dachau concentration camp, and the dictator Adolf Hitler. The fact that the US was not yet at war with Germany can be considered a reason for the usage of fictive names in this story.

The rescue of camp prisoners, introduced in "The Defeat of Radolf," is a key motif of the early stories dealing with concentration camps. In an untitled ten-page story that was published in *Blue Ribbon Comics #14* (July 1941),[23] several months before Germany and Italy were officially at war with the US, the superhero Mr. Justice rescues one man and three women from three different camps. Other stories that feature the rescue motif are an untitled The Destroyer story (October 1941);[24] "London" (August 1941);[25] "Death Patrol" (December 1941);[26] "Espionage" (November 1942);[27] an untitled Ghost Story (October 1942);[28] an untitled Wonder

[21] Bernhard Schaffer gives examples of concentration camp depictions in US newspaper strips (Schaffer 1994, 89–91). Further, the Vic Jordan strip featured a story referring to a concentration camp: http://allthingsger.blogspot.de/2014/01/no-laughing-matter.html.

[22] Maroy and Blum. 1940.

[23] Blair and Cooper 1941.

[24] Lee and Binder 1941.

[25] Robinson 1941.

[26] Berg 1941.

[27] Blum, Binder, and Kotzky 1942.

[28] Berg 1942.

Woman story (February–March 1943);[29] an untitled Black Terror story (February 1943);[30] an untitled The Unknown story (March 1943);[31] and "The Heart of the Patriot" (February 1944).[32]

Figure 1. One of the earliest comic book portrayals of a Nazi concentration camp. Davis, Bob, "The Man of Hate," Your Guide Publications, 1941. © public domain.

The already mentioned comic book *Daredevil Comics #1* (July 1941) contains a two-page text story named "Man of Hate" alongside a seven-page graphic biography of German dictator Adolf Hitler, titled "The Man of Hate."[33] Three panels on the third page of the comic story refer to the Nazis' oppression of the intelligentsia and of political opponents. Concentration camps are mentioned in two panels. The concentration camp depiction is remarkable, because it contains

[29] Marston and Peter 1943.

[30] Hughes and Wexler 1943.

[31] Gabriele 1943.

[32] Camy 1944.

[33] Davis 1941.

smoke coming out of the chimneys of a house flying a swastika flag (fig. 1). If the author R. B. S. David did not mean to represent a kitchen or an industrial building, this can be considered a first anticipation of the burning of dead bodies in concentration camp crematoria. Even though killings are not mentioned explicitly, the caption of the following panel says that "the brutality of these camps is unique in all history."

In 1942, several stories were published which featured Nazi atrocities or referred to, but did not depict, Nazi concentration camps, such as "The Amazing Adventures of the Three Shadows" (November 1942),[34] about a Czech, a Pole, and an Austrian who escape from a concentration camp, or "Merchant of Hate" (November 1942),[35] which deals with the destruction of the town of Lidice by the Germans as revenge for the assassination of Reinhard Heydrich. In late 1942 members of the Justice Society fed starving concentration camp prisoners in one of their adventures.[36] In 1943 the aforementioned story in *Wonder Woman* #3 appeared and the superhero The Unknown visited "the notorious Nazi concentration camp at Dachau," in order to rescue a French prisoner in *National Comics* #30 (March 1943). Nazi atrocities are not shown explicitly in this story, but the camp is called a "horror camp." The camp is made of bricks, resembling a medieval castle. This comic stands out because of its depiction of cattle cars transporting prisoners to the Dachau camp, which shows that by 1943, at the latest, the deportation of Nazi victims had found its way into comics. A short time after D-Day, the three-page story "Photo Fighter" appeared in *True Comics* #37 (July 1944).[37] The comic portrayed American war photographer Thérèse Bonney and showed her visiting a concentration camp. In the educational comic

[34] Koda 1942.

[35] Burlockoff 1942.

[36] Fox and Sherman 1942.

[37] Unknown author 1944a.

"There Are No Master Races!" (September–October 1944),[38] German anti-Semitism was dealt with in a simplistic way over two panels, but Nazi atrocities were not mentioned.

During the war, there were not only comic book stories dealing with the camps, but several covers on which concentration camps were represented but then did not appear in the actual stories. The cover of *Mystic Comics* #10 (August 1942)[39] shows The Destroyer fighting men of the German *Sturmabteilung* (Stormtroopers), and a sign on a wall reads: "Concentration Camp No. 5." As on the cover of *Mystic Comics* #6 (October 1941),[40] the camp features thick walls, reminiscent of castles or fortresses. The cover of *Real Life Comics* #3 (March 1942)[41] features a small depiction of a concentration camp, next to an angry looking Adolf Hitler, firing a gun and holding a skull. Probably one of the most famous and most explicit examples of a depiction of Nazi atrocities on a comic cover during the war is issue #46 of *Captain America* (April 1945).[42] On it, you can see German soldiers in the process of putting a man into the oven of a crematorium. The feet of the next victim on a stretcher following the first, and the bones lying around the room, evoke the impression that corpses are being cremated here continuously. The man is marked with a red tag around his neck, as are several men and women who are waiting in line in the background. Although the tags could be read as signaling their Jewishness, their identity is not made explicit on the cover.

[38] Unknown author 1944b.

[39] Gabriele 1942.

[40] Schomburg 1941.

[41] Unknown author 1942.

[42] Schomburg 1945.

One explicit reference to the Jewish identity of Nazi victims can be found in "Lest We Forget," a two-page text story[43] illustrated with two pictures, that appeared in November 1945 in *Real Life Comics* #26.[44] Speaking about the time of his military service in Germany, the narrator refers to sights that "are not fit for human eyes," in which "Jews and other non-Aryans" were the victims.

Since wartime depictions of Nazi atrocities were not limited to the United States, it might be noteworthy that there are examples from Europe in which the Jewish identity of victims plays at least a small role. The first one, "Mickey au camp de Gurs" (Mickey in the Gurs Camp) (1942) by Horst Rosenthal, shows Disney's famous character Mickey Mouse in the Gurs internment camp. It reflects the personal experience of Rosenthal, an imprisoned Jew, but without foregrounding his ancestry. Rosenthal's work was discovered decades after he was killed in Auschwitz. The second is the fable-like story "La bête est morte!" (The Beast is Dead) (1944/1945), by Victor Dancette, Jacques Zimmermann, and Edmond François Calvo, and published by Editions G.P, which shows the shooting and deportation of French Jews in two pictures.[45] These two remarkable examples stand in contrast to wartime comics in the US. The victims in US comics were – if their identities were revealed at all – political opponents, part of the intelligentsia or the resistance. For example, in "The Defeat of Radolf" the focus is on victims who were "some of the greatest minds" and "men of genius." If the victim's nationalities are mentioned, they are German or French.

Given that countless comics were released between 1939 and 1945, appearances of concentration camps are remarkably rare. By the end of the war, the first phase of superhero comics waned, as other genres ruled the comics market. Superheroes did not continue to fly to concentration camps and rescue people, as Wonder

[43] Text stories had been a common feature of Golden Age comic books in order to take advantage of magazine postal rates. Artists often wrote these stories under a pseudonym.

[44] Alexander 1945.

[45] On Rosenthal's work see Rosenberg 2002; on Calvo's work see Sistig 2002, 64–67 and Ribbens 2010, 18–26.

Woman, Mr. Justice, or The Unknown had done. After the liberation of several camps had started to make the magnitude of Nazi atrocities known, two references to extermination camps occurred: the cover of *Captain America* #46 and the text story "Lest We Forget," which can be read as immediate reactions to the liberation of concentration camps by Allied troops. Only a few months after the end of the war, the eighteen-page story "The Golem" (July–September 1946)[46] offers the first known visual depiction of Jewish victims of the Nazis in Golden Age comic books. The action-driven story is set in 1944, during a Nazi raid in the Ghetto of Prague. The creators Joe Kubert and Bob Bernstein focus on hatred and violence against Jews from the very beginning of the story. In the third panel a German officer commands: "Enter every house. And **Kill Every Jew** you find!" and the first caption on the second page reads: "The Nazis were bent on wholesale extermination…" Some Jews are eventually rescued by an American whose plane has crashed in the Ghetto. Most of the following story is a narrated flashback about Rabbi Loew and the Golem he allegedly created in the Prague of the 16th century in order to fight anti-Semitism. In the end, the story of the Golem and the Allied struggle against the Germans are paralleled. The story is entirely devoted to the fate of European Jewry, without referring to concentration camps.

As noted, the camps' inmates in most comics before 1946 were predominantly political opponents and resistance members, and the camps themselves were depicted more or less like POW camps or prisons.[47] Wartime comics were hardly able to even fathom what really happened inside the camps. I have presented a few notable examples, in which the depicted architecture bears a certain similarity to Gothic castles or US prisons of the era. Although few camps actually had similar appearances,[48] this tells us how little the artists knew about the

[46] Kubert and Bernstein 1946.

[47] Klaus Nordling's "Shot & Shell" (December 1941) from *Military Comics #5* is a revealing example, with uniformed Allied inmates behind barbed wire.

[48] Mauthausen for example, or the so called *kleine Festung* (little fortress) in Theresienstadt.

camps and how they functioned. Regarding the depiction of Germans during wartime, "much of the imagery, especially in Timely comics, was drawn from horror films. For some reason Nazi strongholds were invariably gothic castles, and they employed medieval torture methods on helpless victims."[49] This imagery would play a more prominent role in a new genre in the postwar years.

HORROR COMICS

It would be several years after the end of the war until comics attended to Nazi atrocities again. In the early 1950s horror comics made their depictions of torture methods more explicit than they had been in the war years, due to the inner logic of the horror genre and the available information and rumors about Nazi atrocities that had spread since the liberation of the camps. The artists added phantasmagorical elements like zombies or walking skeletons to their stories. Many of the examined horror comics include items made of human skin. Lampshades are depicted most often, but gloves and boots appear as well. Ralf Palandt, an expert on the depiction of Nazism in comics, has argued that those depictions most likely refer to media reports about Ilse Koch, who was married to the commandant of Buchenwald concentration camp. Many people believed, and still believe, that she had lampshades of camp prisoner's skin made for her amusement. There have been several charges against her, which have attracted much attention in US media.[50] The depiction of items made of human skin fulfilled one of horror comics' major objectives: it shocked and thrilled readers, as did the references to Nazi atrocities in general, and this helped to make the comic books financially successful.

Against the backdrop of media reports, Nazi atrocities were exploited to make the thrills appear as if they were based on historical fact. The stories about

[49] Murray 2010, 438.

[50] Palandt 2015.

concentration camps appeared amidst fantastic horror stories and largely shared their lurid narrative style and frequent depictions of the undead. In many stories, undead concentration camp prisoners haunt and torture former tormentors or their family members. The motif of revenge taken by prisoner's revenants can be found in "The Torture Room" (June 1951);[51] "The Devil's Due" (December 1951);[52] "A Gravedigger's Terror" (December 1952);[53] "Corpses of the Jury" (January 1953);[54] "The Tattooed Heart!" (March 1953);[55] "The Butcher of Wulfhausen" (July 1953);[56] "Out of the Grave" (September 1953);[57] "The Torture Master" (November 1953);[58] "The Dead Remember" (January 1954);[59] "Terror of the Stolen Legs" (June 1954);[60] and "The Living Dead" (October 1954).[61] The depicted Germans appear as cruel torturers or mad scientists; ideological motivation is disguised in most stories. The perpetrators are frequently described as monsters, sadists, torture masters or devils. Several panels in "The Face of Terror," from *Weird Chills #2* (September 1954),[62] a series that was well-known for its vulgar imagery, depict the torture of naked concentration camp prisoners.

[51] Rico 1951.

[52] Unknown author 1951.

[53] Unknown author 1952.

[54] Unknown author 1953a.

[55] Unknown author 1953b.

[56] Kweskin 1953a.

[57] Roche 1953.

[58] Heath 1953.

[59] Blummer 1954.

[60] Altman 1954.

[61] D'Agostino 1954.

[62] Unknown author 1954.

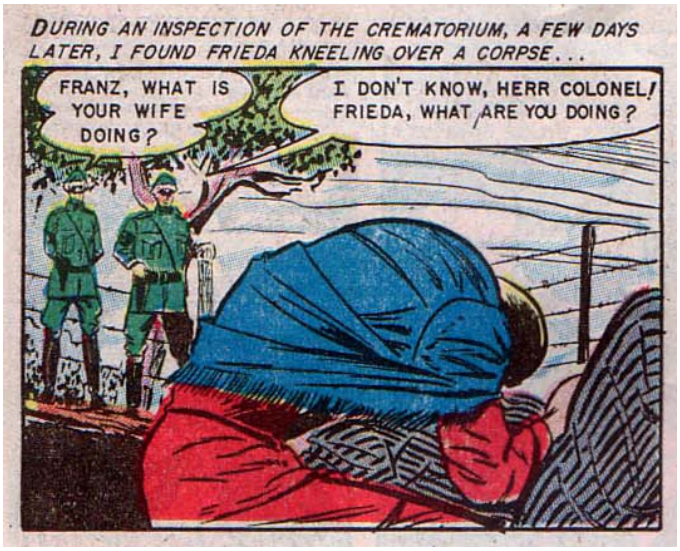

Figure 2. Nazi vampire Frieda sucking the blood of a concentration camp prisoner. Unknown author, "A Gravedigger's Terror," Story Comics, 1952. © public domain.

Horror comics rarely mention victims' identities. Whenever identity is made explicit, the victims are part of some resistance against the Germans. Most women in the horror stories are either portrayed as sadistic instigators or objects of the desires of male protagonists. In "A Gravedigger's Terror," a woman becomes a guard at a concentration camp. The story reveals the true cause of her cruelty: it is not her political beliefs but the fact that she is a vampire, longing for prisoners' blood (fig. 2).[63] "Corpses of the Jury" portrays a nameless woman who refuses to flirt with a Nazi commandant and is murdered. Her ghost takes revenge and orders other ghosts to skin the commandant alive.[64]

These stories can be read as examples of the dialectical relationship which many horror comics offer. The comics use Nazi crimes as a reference that guarantees authenticity, because of its historicity and at the same time they offer a reading that mystifies the Holocaust and places it in the phantasmagorical sphere. Apart from the depiction of sexually explicit content, horror comics partly anticipated

[63] Unknown author 1952.

[64] Unknown author. 1953b.

what is nowadays known as the exploitation of National Socialism, or Nazisploitation.[65] Since the 1960s Nazisploitation has spread more and more throughout several media like film, comics and, most recently, computer games.[66]

ADVENTURE AND WAR COMICS

Figure 3. The first depiction of a gas chamber in comic book history. Napoli, Vince, "Escape from Maidenek," Youthful Magazines, 1952. © public domain.

In contrast to horror comics, adventure and war comics dealing with Nazi atrocities did not use phantasmagorical elements. The first known example of an adventure story that includes Nazi atrocities is "Escape from Maidenek" (April

[65] The combination of Nazi exploitation and sexually explicit content in comics grew more frequent in the 1970s. As with Nazi exploitation films, most early comics of this type, like *HESSA*, originated in Italy.

[66] Whereas most research on Nazisploitation focuses on film, Craig This has examined the revival of Nazisploitation in superhero comics after 9/11 (This 2012).

1952)[67] by Vince Napoli, in which Eli Panyck, a fictive Polish political prisoner, manages to escape Maidanek extermination camp.[68] The caption in the first panel after the splash speaks of "living corpses." Similar to the visual depiction of Nazi victims in horror comics, this can be read as an analogy to the trope of the "Muselmann," a term that was used in many survivors' testimonies to refer to camp inmates who were on the brink of death.[69] The story's realistic drawing style, its pale colors, and its use of shadows create a very intense reading experience. After turning the second page the reader is confronted with the inside view of a gas chamber, where corpses are scattered across the floor (fig. 3). The third page is dominated by depictions of corpses and a German guard. Against the backdrop of these more serious, historically contextualized panels, the end of the story, in which the protagonist escapes by crawling underneath an electric fence, appears implausible.

But the inclusion of scenes depicting the transportation and burial of dead extermination camp prisoners by other prisoners in a comic as early as 1952 makes "Escape from Maidenek" a remarkable work. It is perhaps the first comic to depict the interior of a gas chamber and the work of the *Sonderkommando* (Special Detachment) – prisoners who were forced to assist in the extermination of other prisoners. The story provides the reader with a brief picture of the workings of an extermination camp, but it ignores the important historical reality that a *Sonderkommando* usually consisted of Jewish prisoners.

The war story "Desert Fox!" (November–December 1951)[70] by Harvey Kurtzman and Wallace Wood is about Erwin Rommel, one of Germany best-known officers.

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[67] Napoli 1952.

[68] The spelling Majdanek is more frequent. Because Majdanek belonged to the city of Lublin, the camp's official name was K.L. (*Konzentrationslager*) Lublin.

[69] Sofsky 1993, 229ff.

[70] Kurtzman and Wood 1953.

In the first five pages, Rommel's military operations in Africa are shown and the story "keeps switching between scenes of his military prowess and scenes of Nazi atrocities."[71] Then, abruptly, the last panel on the fifth page shows the piled-up corpses of German concentration camp inmates. This starts a series of eleven panels confronting the reader with depictions of Nazi victims, accompanied by captions that further underscore Nazi brutality. The portrayed victims are said to be of various backgrounds: there is a partisan, a POW, an intellectual, among others. The third panel's caption exclaims, "Look! A Jew! This man was put on a methodical program of **starvation!**" The picture shows a naked, haggard corpse with an open mouth amidst other corpses. Another panel presents another Jewish victim who "was used in a scientific experiment and **frozen to death!**"

There are only two other known war comics of the early 1950s that deal with German concentration camps in detail. The first one is "City of Slaves" (February 1953),[72] which appeared in *Battlefield* #8. Comic artist and war veteran Sam Kweskin drew the story and it is very likely that he scripted it himself, or at least contributed to the writing process. The intense splash panel depicts three prisoners standing behind barbed wire. The comic is told from the perspective of a Frenchman named Allan, who is surprised by the German assault on France in May 1940 and brought to Dachau concentration camp for unknown reasons. The third panel on the third page shows the interior of a boxcar on the way to the Dachau camp (fig. 4). The desperation of the men and women is portrayed with an intensification of the already prominent use of shadows and black ink. Upon Allan's arrival at the camp there is black smoke in the sky, billowing from a chimney inside the camp. Kweskin has a prisoner refer to the pressure chamber experiments that were carried out at the camp. The comic references images that became well-known after the camp's liberation, in which corpses are piled inside boxcars. In contrast to the imagery, Allan draws hope from his thoughts of a

[71] Bacon 2010, 98.

[72] Kweskin 1953b.

vengeance that will make the Germans "choke on the world they are trying to swallow." The mood eventually changes when Allied bombers break through the clouds of smoke and the camp the prisoners start an uprising, before uniting with American liberators.[73] The final panel shows a prisoner, presumably Allan, in the striped prisoner's outfit. He is kneeling on the floor, in the center of a spotlight. Looking to the sky he says, "Thank the Lord! It is over now! The living must avenge the dead! It is for us to make a new world where the dignity of man is upheld!"

Figure 4. The deportation to the concentration camp in Dachau. Kweskin, Sam, "City of Slaves," Marvel Comics, 2011 (1953). © Marvel Comics.

[73] Kweskin provides us with his own more dramatic and action-driven version of the liberation, in which the prisoners play an active role, and which differs from the historic events (Marcuse 2001, 50f.).

Here, Kweskin's version of revenge apparently differs from the revenge-driven zombies that dominate the depiction of concentration camps in horror stories.[74] Comics historian Michael Vassallo, who was a friend of Kweskin, states that the subject matter of "City of Slaves" was "very personal to Kweskin, who had Polish Jewish ancestry on his mother's side and had served in WWII with the 83rd Chemical Mortar Battalion."[75] Kweskin's unit was involved in the liberation of Dachau.[76] Although it deviates from the chronology of and events surrounding the camp's liberation, "City of Slaves" reflects the experiences of Kweskin and his comrades during the last days of the Second World War, which makes his work dealing with Nazi atrocities even more noteworthy. Nevertheless, in "City of Slaves," Kweskin tells the story of a Frenchman who is brought to a German concentration camp – despite his own Jewish ancestry and his firsthand knowledge about Dachau concentration camp and the Jewish catastrophe.

The next relevant story is "Atrocity Story," which appeared in *Battlefield #2* (June 1952).[77] The story was written by Hank Chapman and penciled by Paul Reinman. Chapman was a former sergeant in the Second World War. The Dutch comic historian and expert on Hank Chapman's work, Ger Apeldoorn, claims that "he was not a liberal, he had lived through a war and knew how necessary it could be. But he also knew how terrible it could be and by showing that he may have made the most anti-war and off-putting comics of this time."[78] Reinman was a German Jew who became involved with the comic industry shortly after he had escaped to the US in 1934. According to the Israeli journalist Gideon Remez, Reinman had

[74] This contrasts with "The Butcher of Wulfhausen," in which Kweskin himself adopts the idea of revenge which dominates the aforementioned stories and which can be read as a typical example of anticommunist instrumentalization of the Holocaust, through the equalization of National Socialism and communism.

[75] Vassallo 2013.

[76] Email from Michael Vassallo to the author, February 2, 2016.

[77] Chapman and Reinman 1952.

[78] Apeldoorn 2015.

worked as a designer and painter in Germany, and some of his drawings had been related to Jewish culture.[79] His relationship to his Jewish ancestry is reflected in "An Army is Born" (February 1953),[80] a six-page story about a battle fought in the First Israeli–Arab War.

With "Atrocity Story" Reinman and Chapman created an intense comic featuring a playful use of perspective and a newsreel style that abstains from a conventional plot or conventional narration. The exposition of different crimes is accompanied only by brief captions. Suggestive questions and an overwhelmingly explicit depiction of cruelty add to the propagandistic style of the comic. It reports on alleged atrocities of North Koreans during the Korean War, starting with a splash page showing dead US soldiers. On the fourth page the narrator asks the reader to imagine what would have happened if the atrocities had taken place in the United States. The next two pages show Nazi atrocities, their impact on the victims, the hanging of German perpetrators in Nuremberg, and public perception of Nazi atrocities in the US. The final page deals with the Korean War again and closes with an open question about how to end it. German atrocities are framed by those attributed to the North Koreans and the captions conflate both, offering a visualization of the idea of totalitarianism. Similar to "The Butcher of Wulfhausen" by Sam Kweskin, "Atrocity Story" is a prime example of disparaging communism by comparing it to Nazism.

Kweskin and Reinman, both of Jewish ancestry, instrumentalized the portrayal of concentration camps in the context of the Cold War.[81] Their stories appeared in a time when the widespread anti-Semitism in US society often associated Jews with

[79] Remez 2012.

[80] Reinman 1952.

[81] Among the countless scholarly works about comics and the Cold War, the anthology York and York 2012 offers a good overview of the variety of topics depicted.

communism.[82] By speaking out actively against communism in the post-war era, many Jews tried to avoid being targeted with anti-Semitism and to prove that they conformed to the prevailing political beliefs. Similar to what historian Peter Novick writes about Jewish Americans in the early Cold War, a motivation for Jewish artists to introduce totalitarianism into comics could have been the "fear of seeming to confirm a less ancient but potentially more threatening stereotype."[83]

THE GOLDEN AGE ENDS – "MASTER RACE"

Figure 5. One of the few references to Jewish victims in Golden Age comic books. Krigstein, Bernard, "Master Race," EC Comics, 1955. © William M. Gaines, Agent, Inc.

[82] Dinnerstein 1994, 118f.

[83] Novick 1999, 92

The last Golden Age comic story that features and visualizes Jewish victims is "Master Race."[84] It appeared in the first issue of *Impact* magazine (April 1955). It was written by Al Feldstein, a leading figure in Entertaining Comics (EC), and drawn by Bernard Krigstein. Krigstein demanded twelve pages, unusual for the time, but in the end was permitted to draw eight.[85] The story is about Carl Reissmann, who is haunted by memories of his past in Nazi Germany. He runs into a man on the subway. It is left unclear who is the victim and who is the perpetrator for several pages. A three-page flashback refers to the history of the Third Reich, presenting concentration camps as well as a lampshade made of human skin. Eventually, on the second to last page, Reissmann's identity as the former commandant of Belsen concentration camp is revealed. The story does not disclose whether the man he sees is really his victim or if the encounter only occurs in his imagination. Driven by anxiety and haunted by his perceived former victim, Reissmann falls in front of a train and dies.

"Master Race" refers to trauma and offers more depth than the superhero comics or the revenge-driven horror comics. German comic historian Martin Frenzel emphasizes that the train as a symbol for the Holocaust plays an important role throughout the story.[86] Although it is often misread as referring to the Holocaust, "Master Race" explicitly refers to the Jewishness of Nazi victims in only one panel, where shop windows are smashed and a man marked with a Star of David is beaten by Germans in Nazi uniforms (fig. 5). This panel is situated next to the burning of books and the oppression of other Nazi victims, who are referred to as the protagonist's countrymen. The flashbacks of "Master Race" depict a large variety of Nazi atrocities without singling out any particular group of victims.

[84] Feldstein and Krigstein 1955.

[85] Sadowski 2002, 177ff.

[86] Frenzel 2011, 273.

Nevertheless, the story is the best-known early thematization of Nazi atrocities in comics.[87]

The first wave of comics depicting concentration camps and the Holocaust abated around the time when Bernie Krigstein's ground-breaking story was published. By the second half of 1954 comic publishers formed the Comics Magazine Association of America (CMAA). This led to a "set of regulatory guidelines primarily concerned with sex, violence and language drawn up by publishers and enforced by the 'code authority,' a euphemism for the censor employed by the publishers."[88] Effects of the so-called "Comics Code" made it impossible for crime and horror comics to continue with their use of language and explicit expressions of violence. Since camps were previously depicted primarily in horror comics, the number of such appearances decreased accordingly.[89]

GOLDEN AGE COMICS AND THE HOLOCAUST

In the documentary *Comic Book Heroes Unmasked*, Will Eisner claims retrospectively that comic book artists remained silent about the Holocaust, because they felt that the "audience wouldn't be interested in that, they wouldn't understand it."[90] In the foreword to his fictional Holocaust memoir *Yossel: April 19,1943* Joe Kubert writes that during wartime he considered the stories about the events in Europe to be "[h]orrible fairy tales," which he only believed after the

[87] Krigstein's work is seen as a masterpiece in comic book history because of its style rather than its content. John Benson, David Kasakove, and Art Spiegelman, creator of *Maus*, offer a detailed analysis in *Squa Tront #6* in 1975. Most works on the Holocaust in sequential art refer to "Master Race" in some way. The story has even found its way into other media, like Howard Jacobson's 2008 novel *Kalooki Nights*.

[88] Nyberg 1998, I.

[89] Palandt 2015.

[90] Quoted after Yanes 2009, 62.

war.[91] Considering this retrospective statement, it is remarkable that Kubert drew "The Golem" in 1946, as an immediate reaction to the Jewish catastrophe. Unfortunately, there are no statements known in which Golden Age artists explicitly talk about their motivations for employing concentration camps in their stories. In fact, little is known about most of these Golden Age artists in general. At a 1972 EC fan convention publisher Bill Gaines and Al Feldstein, who was responsible for the story of "Master Race," were asked about the sources for their ideas. Feldstein replied that he and Gaines published "what we called 'preachy' stories – our own term for a story that had some sort of a plea to improve our social standards."[92]

Ralf Palandt considers "Master Race" one of those "preachy stories" that were supposed to be more than mere entertainment.[93] Referring to the Jewish heritage of Feldstein, Gaines, and Krigstein, writer and poet Martin Jukovsky writes in his foreword to a 1988 reprint of "Master Race," that "American Jews were most conscious of what the Nazis had done, and it is perhaps no coincidence that the artist, editor, and publisher involved in 'Master Race' were all Jews."[94] Indeed, it appears to be the case that Jewish comic artists were more likely to know about the annihilation of Jews in Europe.[95] However, "Master Race" cannot be considered a story dedicated to the fate of European Jewry, since the Jewish dimension of the atrocities is only mentioned in passing, occupying at most only one panel. This corresponds with Novick's claim that "there was nothing about

[91] Kubert and Carlsson 2011.

[92] Benson 1978, 22.

[93] Palandt 2015.

[94] Jukovsky 1988.

[95] Although individual knowledge and concern cannot be retraced, there were a variety of avenues by which Jewish Americans might have acquired special knowledge of the events in Europe. Some lost family members and friends during the catastrophe. News and rumors spread among colleagues, friends and family members. Since 1942, the American Jewish press was full of reports about the fate of European Jewry and parts of the heterogeneous Jewish communities in the United States tried to raise awareness of the fate of Jews in Europe (Wyman 2007, 24).

the reporting on the liberation of the camps that treated Jews as more than *among* the victims of the Nazis; nothing that suggested the camps were emblematic of anything other than Nazi barbarism in general."[96] The text story "Lest We Forget" and the comic "Desert Fox" both function in a similar way, as Jews are said and shown to be among the victims, but are not pointed out prominently. "The Golem" by Bernstein and Kubert is an outstanding exception, as the fate of Jews is the center of the story. All of the other Golden Age comic books, some of whose artists were also Jewish, were completely silent about the Jewish catastrophe. Referring to the depiction of Nazi victims in Paul Reinman's "Atrocity Story," Israeli journalist Gideon Remez states that "the Jewish identity of most victims is never mentioned."[97] His observation is also true for the other early stories to depict concentration camps, aside from the aforementioned exceptions.

Additionally, hardly any of the depicted camps are extermination camps. In "Escape from Maidenek," where an extermination camp is shown, the Jewish dimension does not play any role whatsoever. Auschwitz, the camp that has become synonymous with the Holocaust,[98] is not even mentioned in early concentration camp portrayals in comics. Not surprisingly, the camps mentioned are mostly camps that were liberated by the British or US armies. Before 1955, Bergen-Belsen, Dachau, and Mauthausen are the places that are mentioned most often in the comics.

To explain the United States comics artists' silence about the Holocaust, it is necessary to look at the society in which the comics were written and released. Scholarly research has pointed out that comics can be considered authentic

[96] Novick 1999, 65.

[97] Remez 2012.

[98] Caplan and Wachsmann, 2.

sources that both reflect and influence societies.[99] The presented comics emerged from a social climate in which "the Nazi concentration camp was the most common symbol of the enemy regime, and its archetypal inmate was usually represented as a political oppositionist or member of the resistance."[100] Reports about Nazi atrocities in the 1930s mainly focused on the imprisonment of political enemies in German concentration camps. Little was known about the extermination of European Jewry until late 1942, by which time the so-called *Endlösung* ("final solution") was in full effect. And although more and more information was available after the end of 1942, "in all media and in almost all public pronouncements, there was throughout the war not much awareness of the special fate of the Jews of Europe."[101] Historian David S. Wyman states that "the very popular *March of Time* news series did not touch the extermination issue, nor did the official U.S. War films in the *Why We Fight* series."[102] Film historian Ilan Avisar has shown in his book *Screening the Holocaust* that Hollywood almost completely ignored the Jewish catastrophe, with only rare exceptions.[103] "In the Hollywood version of the camps, which perhaps reached more Americans than any other, it was the dissident or *résistant* who was the exemplary victim."[104] This was the case, for example, in the popular film *The Seventh Cross* (1944), based on the novel of the same name by Anna Seghers.[105]

[99] E.g. Palandt 2015; Gundermann 2007, 88; Chapman, Hoyles et al. 2015, 1ff.

[100] Novick 1999, 26.

[101] Novick 1999, 28.

[102] Wyman 2007, 322.

[103] Avisar 1988, 96f.

[104] Novick 1999, 27.

[105] William Sharp, born Leon Schleifer, of German Jewish ancestry, illustrated text excerpts from the novel in 30 episodes (advertised as "pictorial version") which first appeared in US newspapers in 1942.

Novick states that "little was known with any certainty, and the fragmentary reports reaching the West were often contradictory."[106] And yet, as Deborah Lipstadt convincingly argues in the introduction to her detailed study of how the American press dealt with information about Nazi atrocities, "there was practically no aspect of the Nazi horrors which was not publicly known in some detail long before the camps were opened in 1945."[107] However, many could not or did not want to believe. The reports reminded them of World War I propaganda or they could just not imagine the extermination of a whole people.[108]

But even after the war, when the evidence of extermination could not be denied, the Jewish identity of Nazi victims was rarely mentioned in media and popular culture and it "was congruent with the wartime framing of Nazi atrocities as having been directed, in the main, at political opponents of the Third Reich."[109] Additionally, thriving anti-Semitism was another reason that made huge parts of US society and popular culture ignore the Jewish dimension of Nazi atrocities before and after the war.[110] In response, many Jews remained silent, choosing to highlight their identities as Americans (Ne'eman Arad 2000, 12).[111] In her book *The Americanization of the Holocaust*, historian Hilene Flanzbaum describes the situation in the 1950s as a "culture that prized consensus and assimilation, and whose Jews were notably silent about the genocide in Europe."[112] Consistently,

[106] Novick 1999, 22.

[107] Lipstadt 1986.

[108] Wyman 2007, 27.

[109] Novick 1999, 64. Although books like *After the Holocaust: Challenging the Myth of Silence*, edited by David Cesarani and Eric J. Sundquist, present valuable studies which show the vast variety of early Jewish responses to the Holocaust, the visibility of these cultural products and the focus on Jews as victims outside the Jewish communities were very limited.

[110] Hake 2012, 39; Dinnerstein 1982, 5ff.

[111] Ne'eman Arad 2000, 12.

[112] Flanzbaum 1999, 11.

Jewish and non-Jewish Golden Age comic artists alike were largely silent about the Jewish dimension of Nazi atrocities, the Holocaust.

This silence would last for several years, until in the 1960s and 1970s the Jewish identity of Nazi victims was mentioned intermittently in comic books, reflecting a parallel change of attitude in US society as a whole.[113] Only after Art Spiegelman's in many ways groundbreaking comic *Maus* did the Jewish victims of German atrocities began to appear more frequently in comic books.

CONCLUSION

Concentration camps were first depicted in US comic books in 1940. Only a few stories, as well as comic book covers, depicted concentration camps during wartime, and these representations paralleled contemporary media reports on German atrocities. The stories had a propagandistic tone, decrying Nazism frequently and directly. The camps' portrayal as prisons or castles is an indication of the rudimentary information available to the artists at the time. Protagonists of wartime superhero comics would fly to Germany and rescue prisoners from the camps, but the comics rarely mentioned or showed German atrocities explicitly. In 1945, the year the war ended and reports grew more frequent, extermination camps were referred to on one cover and in one two-page text story. One year later, "The Golem" appeared, which is the only story of the era exclusively dedicated to the fate of European Jewry. The comics of the late 1940s were silent about Nazi atrocities. Only in the early 1950s did horror comics begin to refer to concentration camps, adding phantasmagorical elements like zombies or vampires to the stories. Nevertheless, many artists and writers used and exploited German atrocities in order to thrill their readers and to sell their comics. In many of the horror comics, revenge is a key motif: zombie versions of concentration camp inmates haunt and kill their former tormentors. Besides the horror comics,

[113] Rosenfeld 2011, 77.

there were a few war and adventure comics that depicted concentration camps during the 1950s. Some artists used the reference to concentration camps as a means of propaganda against communism. Further, the stories "Desert Fox" and "Master Race" present Jews as being among a large variety of Nazi victims in a total of three panels. The victims in all of the other stories are, if their identity is revealed at all, political prisoners, members of the resistance or the intelligentsia. The image of concentration camps of the early 1930s, when reports had first spread around the world, still dominated the understanding of Nazi atrocities in comics of the 1940s and 1950s. Extermination camps are rarely mentioned.

Although more than thirty Golden Age comic books featured concentration camps, either on their covers or in a story, there are only three known comic book stories depicting Jews as victims of the Nazis. This trend corresponds with the way in which large parts of US society and media dealt with the extermination of European Jewry. During wartime, as well as into the 1950s, comic books were far from the only medium to refer to German concentration camps but, like the other media, comics generally ignored the Jewish dimension of Nazi politics. The reasons were various and complex. For instance, no political or social advantages were seen in drawing attention to the fate of the Jews, and there were fears that doing so might even provoke increased anti-Semitism. Many people did not believe the news and rumors about the Jewish catastrophe. Besides, for Jews and non-Jews alike, "the murder of European Jewry, insofar as it was understood or acknowledged, was just one among the countless dimensions of a conflict that was consuming the lives of tens of millions around the globe."[114]

The tendency to ignore or downplay the extermination of European Jewry in comics corresponds to tendencies present in the society at large. Golden Age comic book stories were a reflection of the dominant contemporary understanding of Nazi concentration camps and victims in US society, and thus

[114] Novick, 29.

remained almost silent about the Holocaust. Although there were occasionally comics that depicted and referred to German atrocities after the establishment of the "Comics Code," the mid-1950s marked a clear turning point. It would take decades before the depiction of concentration camps and the Holocaust could become more frequent and established.

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THE ASTERIX SERIES: GALLIC IDENTITY IN A NUTSHELL?

by Maarit Mutta

INTRODUCTION

Since its original publication in *Pilote* magazine in 1959, the *Asterix* comics series has frequently been related to the French Resistance during the Second World War.[1] In the series, a small but relentless nameless village inhabited by Gauls resists Roman occupation, which could be seen as symbolizing WWII and the Axis occupation during the war. Nicolas Rouvière, maître de conférence in literature at the Joseph-Fourier University in Grenoble, suggests that the publication of this first *Asterix* can be seen as a remembrance of Charles de Gaulle, who was the leading figure of the Resistance.[2] It also worth remembering that de Gaulle's time and the political stance is called Gaullism (*gaullisme*), which further illustrates the analogy between Gauls and de Gaulle, names that both have the same meaning: French (*le Français*).[3]

Asterix, both the leading character of the comics and the series as a whole, personify a certain image of this Gaullism, albeit one that seems malleable. A great many of myths or suppositions have been read out of or read into the *Asterix* series: for instance, it has been said to represent left-wing politics; to represent right-wing politics; or to be Gaulliste.[4] The journal *Le Monde* dedicated a November–December 2015 special issue ("hors-série") to *Asterix*. The title of that issue, *Un héros, une oeuvre. Astérix l'Irréductible* inspired this forum text, which discusses the role of the *Asterix* comic series as a symbol of Gallic identity.

Asterix's main protagonists, Asterix and Obelix, and the other villagers are described in the comics as *bagarreur* ("pugnacious"), a characteristic that creates conflicts both inside and outside of the village. The series is well known in Europe and seems to fulfill reader expectations, as it attracts old and new readers from album to album. But what has made the series so enduringly successful among readers of all ages for several decades? Perhaps it is its references to historical events, though anachronistic, or to contemporary culture and politics. Or perhaps it is the conflicts and violence that seem to not cause any damage, or even its ambiguous hero Asterix and the small village's resistance to a powerful occupying force. I will briefly explore the role of each of these possibilities in the following sections.

[1] Rouvière 2015.

[2] Rouvière 2015, 7. Nicolas Rouvière has written several books on Asterix; see Rouvière 2006; 2008.

[3] See, however, the dialogue between Louis Martineau and Charles de Gaulle about the origin of de Gaulle's name and its meaning. Available at: http://www.dialogus2.org/GAU/degaulleetlagaule.html.

[4] Cf. Quillien 2015, 119; also King 2001.

BIRTH OF A GALLIC SYMBOL: THE STRENGTH OF THE COMMUNITY

In 1959, writer René Goscinny and writer-artist Albert Uderzo created the adventures of a Gaul warrior, Asterix, for the newly launched magazine, *Pilote*. They wanted to create a humorous series that parodied the image of the Gauls presented in the old school books they remembered from their childhood with added elements of current social tribulations.[5] A Gaul was described traditionally in school books as a robust man with large pants, a helmet, a braid, and a blond moustache. This description fits Vercingetorix, the heroic chieftain of the Gallic tribes, who, nevertheless, was defeated and captured by Caesar.[6] For its part, the Gaul village seems to represent the democratic values of the Third Republic, based on secularism and school or educational values. For instance, the druid Getafix (Magigimmix in the American version) outwardly resembles the secular teachers of that time (Panoramix in the original French).[7] Both creators had an immigrant background and had to face racism and difficulties in integrating in French society; Goscinny was Jewish, the son of a Polish father and a Ukrainian mother, and Uderzo had Italian parents. These immigrant backgrounds inspired them to create the series *Asterix* in which they could present their view of "Frenchness" ("*francité*"), a collective French identity that they portrayed in a sympathetic but ironic way.[8] French editor and journalist Alain Duhamel says that the *Asterix* series also represents the whole political spectrum of French society,[9] and thus creates a mirror image of today's world.

Asterix is often compared to the Gallic resistance hero Vercingetorix, with the difference that the comics character always defeats the enemy, "thus giving the iconography an optimistic 'happy ending'."[10] The figure of Asterix is drawn in stark physical contrast to a traditional hero-image; rather, he represents an anti-superstar, a small figure with a connotatively small name (the asterisk being a small typographical symbol). The small stature of Asterix, the warrior, might make the reader think about the biblical battle between David and Goliath, but if the two are in any way connected, Asterix is "a grotesque reincarnation" of David.[11] Obelix, the other heroic

[5] Samuel 2011; Fottorino 2015; Rouvière 2015.

[6] King 2001.

[7] Rouvière 2015, 9.

[8] Rouvière 2015, 7.

[9] In Plougastel, 2015, 67; see also Beard 2002.

[10] King 2001, 12.

[11] Frappat 2015, 76.

figure in the series, does not have big muscles and a trained body either, but is rather portly.[12] Thanks to a magic potion, Asterix and the villagers still manage to win all their battles, even if they appear to mess things up in each volume.[13] This always repeating and reassuring setting seems to appeal to readers and fulfill their expectations. The character of Asterix therefore incarnates the Gauls' pride and resistance against invaders, and it gives birth to a sort of "international resistance movement" among other nations.[14] The French journalist and editor Bruno Frappat suggests, however, that, in fact, Asterix does not want to conquer the Gauls or attack Rome, but instead wants only to live peacefully in his village, even if he is ready to obey his chieftain and help other nations – and even Caesar – to resist invaders or other oppressive powers.[15] In my opinion, in this respect, he represents the myth of the "peaceful" warrior who wants to live in peace but is ready to fight for the right cause if necessary; and quite often it seems that there is someone who needs his help.

While Asterix and the male villagers are described as hot-tempered, the women are assigned a secondary or almost non-existent role for many volumes.[16] As a result, Goscinny and Uderzo were criticized for being misogynist in the 1960s. In response, Goscinny gave two reasons for the omission of pugnacious female characters: first, one cannot render female characters ridiculous and a laughing stock ("Les femmes n'aiment pas le ridicule," he said in an interview in 1972); second, in accordance with a 1949 law that regulated publications for youth, the scriptwriter and the illustrator had to censure the series so that there was no gender mixing.[17] Then, in 1965, the authors responded to their critics with their sixth volume, which included one of the most famous female figures in history: Cleopatra.[18] Gradually, female characters were given more space in the stories, especially in Uderzo's work.[19] The series now includes a range of female figures, from kind young girls like *Falbala* (Panacea in the English version) to *Bonemine* (Impedimenta), the

[12] Rouvière 2015.

[13] Beard 2002.

[14] Quillien 2015, 118.

[15] Frappat 2015, 77; Rouvière 2015, 10.

[16] It is worth keeping in mind that in France women only got the right to vote in 1945. Even today, when you open a bank account in France, you have to present your wedding certificate if you are married.

[17] Picaud 2015, 95.

[18] Picaud 2015, 96.

[19] Picaud 2015, 97.

matriarchal wife of the village chief. Women have domestic fights with their spouses, but are also ready to defend the village if necessary.

The village in particular plays an important role in the adventures, even though it is never named in the series. It is the place where all the stories end with a final banquet for the villagers, where even women are allowed to join in in more recent volumes – only Assurancetourix, the bard, is excluded (Cacophonix/Malacoustix in the British/American English versions). The final banquet unites the villagers and lets them live peacefully together. The Gauls' slogan could be "together we are strong." It could be concluded that the village is the real hero of the *Asterix* series. It represents the strength of the community against invaders or tough times. The same phenomenon can be seen in contemporary French society when people gather together to show strength in the face of terrorist attacks or new labor laws.

APPEALING HUMOR

What is behind the enduring success of *Asterix*? According to historian Mary Beard, the basic storylines have broad appeal across Europe, and the United States seems to be "the only country in the west where *Asterix* has remained a minority of taste."[20] Beard explains that some French critics have suggested that this American dislike is based in cultural chauvinism (i.e. *Asterix* is too sophisticated for Americans), while some others think that the underlying reasons are political (i.e. it is seen as an attack against American imperialism) or that *Asterix* is simply too European, based as it is in a common history and myths that are difficult for Americans to penetrate.

Goscinny and Uderzo's objective with *Asterix* was to make people laugh, and they have refused to give any other reasons for creating the series: "Our only ambition is to have fun."[21] Goscinny and Uderzo have left their artistic work to speak for itself. On the other hand, their immigrant backgrounds gave them observers' lenses through which to describe their own "Frenchness," i.e. their culture and people, as well the cultures of others. By stereotyping and even caricaturing common cultural features, they make readers laugh at themselves, which enables them to recognize the alterity in themselves. Consequently, the comical effects of *Asterix* function on at least three levels: first, in the universe shared with the reader; second, in the stereotyped French gaze on others; and third, in mockery of certain cultural features.[22] For instance, in *Asterix in*

[20] Beard 2002.

[21] Goscinny cited in Beard 2002.

[22] Rouvière 2015, 13-14.

Britain you can find pubs, the Tower Bridge, red buses, middle-class homes, the concept of privacy, and the politeness of British soldiers, which remains even as they are insulted by Roman invaders. In *Asterix in Spain*, the bullfighting tradition and the pride of the Spanish people are presented with light mockery.[23] However, some of the series' judgments of historical events are pejorative, as when, anachronistically, Asterix, decides to help Caesar against a common enemy coming from the East, namely Germanic invaders in *Asterix and the Goths* (1963). The volume contains a barely veiled allusion to the Nazi gas chambers, when it shows the pressure cookers (*cocotte pression*) the Goths use to torture the enemy.[24]

This anachronistic transposition of people and events is another reason for the series' success. The reader enjoys finding intertextual relationships with references to real famous people, mainly actors, athletes, and politicians.[25] For instance, former French President Jacques Chirac is portrayed as a pretentious Roman economist, whereas actors Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy are legionnaires in *Obelix and Co.*; the famous English rock band The Beatles appears in *Asterix in Britain*; the James Bond actor Sean Connery is a Roman secret agent Zérozérosix/Dubbelosix in *Asterix and the Black Gold*; the actor Raimu from Marcel Pagnol's film *Marius* (1931) appears in *Asterix and the Golden Sickle* and in *Asterix and the Banquet*; and Arnold Schwarzenegger is a super-clone with a more than passing resemblance to Superman in *Asterix and the Falling Sky*. The *Asterix* volumes also contain references to social phenomena (e.g. HLM = *habitation à loyer modéré* – "rent-controlled housing" – the French taste for spending summer holidays in Spain, or Jacque Chirac's economic policy).

Sometimes these intertextualities may remain unnoticed by a foreign reader, as they are so culturally related to French society (characters resembling, for instance, the game show host Guy Lux, singer Annie Cordy, or advertiser Jacques Séguéla).[26] This does not have any impact on the overall reading experience, but it means that there is one humorous layer fewer for non-French readers to appreciate. This kind of intertextual knowledge is also needed to understand some transpositions of events. For instance, *Asterix in Belgium* contains allusions to the battle of Waterloo where Napoleon was defeated. This event is described in Victor Hugo's poem *Les Châtiments* (1853). The album *Asterix in Belgium* borrows the famous sentence from Hugo's poem when the Roman legionnaires run away crying "Sauve qui peut, Sauve qui peut" (i.e. "every man

[23] Cf. Mutta submitted.

[24] Rouvière 2015, 10.

[25] Le Monde 2015, 60-64; also Beard 2002.

[26] Le Monde 2015, 61-63.

for himself").[27] In *Asterix the Legionary*, Uderzo has drawn a picture of pirates on a raft in a reference to Théodore Géricault's painting *Raft of the Medusa* (1818-1819) combined with the line "Je suis médusé" ("I'm medusa-ed/dumbfounded") to make the reference more transparent to readers.[28] In *Asterix in Spain* there is a famous scene in which Caesar frees a captured red-haired man as an act of clemency. A man (A) in the audience asks another (B) about the event, and through wordplay, the answer presents two equally possible readings:

> A: "Que fait César?" ("What is Caesar doing?")
>
> B: "Il affranchit le rubicond" (He will free the red-haired man"), or, "Il a franchi le Rubicon" ("He crossed the river Rubicon.").[29]

These intertextualities and/or anachronistic transpositions underline the fact that the *Asterix* series can be read on several levels and is not only children's reading.

Another important ingredient of *Asterix*'s success worth considering is the role of violence in the series. All the villagers seem to have an *esprit gaulois*, a French spirit or mindset, as outlined in texts such as school books, folklore, and tourist guides. Goscinny and Uderzo transcended these collective characteristics of the Gauls in their series. The Gauls are described as a pugnacious people with a frank cheerfulness and a love of good food,[30] or as extrovert, intractable *bon viveurs*.[31] Archeologist Matthieu Poux said in an interview in *Le Figaro* that

> Today Asterix and Obelix overwhelmingly symbolise the Gauls, despite numerous errors that litter the albums. The comic has made hay from preconceived ideas in schoolbooks and has added the image of the Gaul who 'resists'. [...] Likeable heroes who are fond of a bit of good flesh, who are poorly disciplined but have a sense of being in a group [sic]. We have here a kind of synthesis of the positive values of contemporary society and of the imaginary world created by Antiquity.[32]

[27] King 2001, 13.

[28] Beard 2002.

[29] Mutta submitted.

[30] Rouvière 2015, 12.

[31] Ory 2015, 80.

[32] Quoted in Samuel 2011.

Le Monde editor Yann Plougastel affirms that the fights between the villagers and their many enemies can be described as a national sport that Goscinny and Uderzo use as a running gag to help create the series' comedy.[33] Goscinny worked in New York in the 1940s and was familiar with Anglo-Saxon humor, which can be seen in the use of several running gags in the series.[34] These running gags have great comic effect: we find the pirates who seem to sail into Asterix and Obelix at every turn, lose the fights and sometimes even sink their own ship to avoid perilous meetings; Obelix must be constantly prohibited from drinking the magic potion, since he fell into a cauldron of it as a child and has had permanent super strength ever since; and the freshness of the fish sold by Unhygienix (Ordralfabétix) is eternal question and a perennial cause for a fight in the village. Repetitions are an essential part of the narrative structure of comics,[35] and in *Asterix*, readers expect to find the same events occurring in a slightly varied form.

The violence in the series follows a repetitive narrative structure. The Romans and the pirates are beaten up in almost every volume, but these conflicts and violent acts do not cause any permanent damage. Neuroscientist Marcel Kamp and his colleagues have analyzed thirty-four *Asterix* albums and noted over 700 hundred head injuries in the *Asterix* comics.[36] They found that the majority of those involved in these injuries were adult males. The largest group of head-injured characters were Romans (63.9%), the major cause of trauma was assault (98.8%), and over 50% of these traumas were classified as severe enough that they could cause neurological deficit or even death.[37] But in the comics, the most common symptom was alteration of consciousness, which seemed to be the only noticeable damage done; all characters are left seemingly unharmed with the exception of some bruises.

A reader could be excused for being turned off by the series' continuous fighting and its prevalent head-trauma. However, it must be noted that the violence does not represent real life, and is not supposed to; it rather resembles the so-called slapstick style present, for instance, in the American animated series *Tom and Jerry*.[38] Moreover, not all acts of resistance in the series are violent. One of my own favorite acts of resistance appears in *Asterix in Britain*, when a Briton with

[33] Plougastel 2015, 42.

[34] Frappat 1950, 76; Plougastel 2015, 29.

[35] Groensteen 2011; Daures 2014.

[36] Kamp et al. 2011.

[37] Kamp et al. 2011, 1351.

[38] The American animated sitcom The Simpsons parodies Tom and Jerry in an even more violent animated series, Itchy and Scratchy. See also Collins 2011.

a javelin in his hand stops Roman soldiers who are pursuing the Gauls cross over his well-groomed lawn. One of the soldiers asks how he dares to oppose Rome and the Briton answers: "My garden is smaller than your Rome, but my pilum [javelin] is harder than your sternum"; this represents strong-minded but non-violent resistance with both javelin and words.

There is much more behind the *Asterix* stories than punches and knockouts, among which we can single out Goscinny's talent for writing manuscripts. Comics scholar Thierry Groensteen describes comics as stories in images with a "predominantly visual narrative form."[39] The image and text cannot be separated; they support each other. But there is no good comic book without a good script. Another comics scholar and comics writer, Benoît Peeters, argues that a tradition that derives from other art forms, such as cinema and popular literature, affirms this primacy of the text.[40] Comic books are, however, multimodal combinations of texts and images, and there is no comic book without an illustrator. The first twenty-four volumes were made by Goscinny and Uderzo, the next ten by Uderzo alone, and the two latest volumes, *Asterix and the Picts* and *Asterix and the Missing Scroll*, are illustrated by Didier Conrad and written by Jean-Yves Ferri. The stories follow Goscinny's running gags tradition, but it is still too early to say if the series' success will continue.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Turning to the topic of war and conflict, the theme of this issue of *SJoCA*, it is worth noting that *Asterix* has not been used directly in terms of propaganda. Its relationship to war is instead a transposition of the representative image of French resistance to the resistance of a Gaul village and its inhabitants against Roman occupation. The Gaul region might be occupied by the Romans, but the small village resists and, through its resistance, makes the soldiers of the surrounding Roman garrisons adopt a *paix gauloise* (Gallic peace) lifestyle, which is illustrated by a *laisser-aller*, or "let-it-go," spirit.[41] Goscinny and Uderzo said they just wanted to make people laugh, but their creation reveals a more profound message, as it generates sympathy and evokes a common collective memory in its French readers.

[39] Groensteen 2011, 14.

[40] Peeters 2003, 161–163.

[41] Rouvière 2015, 8.

There seem to be several factors that make readers enjoy these volumes of symbolic and symbolized Gallic identity. They make allusions to historical and contemporary events, use humor and running gags, and employ a repetitive narrative structure to reassure that the readers will find a familiar plot and an optimistic happy ending. Even the conflicts and violence are harmless and no one is really hurt; this also fulfills reader expectations. Goscinny and Uderzo advocate dialogue between cultures and defend liberty against all imperial powers.[42] Fighting for liberty is a central message in these volumes. In our own time, when racism and hatred of immigrants are burgeoning in several societies, Goscinny and Uderzo's message is of utmost importance. It is not Asterix or other individual characters that represent the heroic image of the Gallic people; it is the village, the strength of the whole community that brings strength against oppressive powers.

[42] Rouvière 2015, 14.

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Detailing the Traces of War: Comics, Conflicts, and Documentary

by Leena Roomu

Hillary L. Chute. *Disaster Drawn – Visual Witness, Comics, and Documentary Form.* The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge & London, 2016. ISBN 978-0-674-50451-6. 359 pages.

A substantial amount of research has been written about Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, Keiji Nakazawa's comics about Hiroshima, and Joe Sacco's graphic reportages – works that very much have helped define how nonfiction genres of comics have developed last the past few decades. However, in her book *Disaster Drawn – Visual Witness, Comics, and Documentary Form*, Hillary L. Chute unequivocally shows that there is still much to discover. Chute's insightful point of departure is to contextualize these works in relation to the history of documentary drawing. Alongside Spiegelman, Nakazawa, and Sacco's works, Chute analyzes war-related drawings, starting with the 17th century French series of etchings by Jacques Callot, *Les Grandes Misères et les Malheurs de la Guerre*, and continuing with Francisco Goya's prints of the Spanish War of Independence in the 19th century. Chute's beautifully and abundantly illustrated book provides examples of those preliminary works side by side with modernist art as well as early and contemporary comics.

The book is divided into five chapters, of which two construct the historical, contextual and methodological framework. In the first chapter, Chute introduces the documentary works by Callot and Goya, establishing them as exemplary for later documentary comics. Goya was inspired by Callot's attempts to render the brutality of war, whereas later cartoonists have mentioned both artists as influential inspirations for their own work. Chute's book's indisputable merit is its building of a bridge between the early war illustrations and later documentary comics. The journey from 17th century etchings to contemporary comics is long, but, in chapter two, Chute assists the reader by providing a brief but explanatory history of comics, mentioning the key figures and works of the medium. The chapter does more than just repeat the now well-known history of comics – it crystallizes Chute's views on the most central formal characteristics of comics and theoretical standpoints which she has introduced in her previous writings. As such, the chapter works as a nice prelude to the following three chapters which concentrate on in-depth analyses of Nakazawa's comic book *Ore Wa Mita* (1972) or *I Saw It* (1982), Spiegelman's first "Maus" story (1972), and Sacco's graphic narratives *Palestine* (1992–1995), *Safe Area Goražde: The War in Eastern Bosnia 1992–1995* (2000), *The Fixer: A Story from Sarajevo* (2003), and *Footnotes in Gaza* (2009). A chapter per artist is a structure that Chute also used in her previous book *Graphic Women – Life Narrative and Contemporary Comics* (2010), in which she analyzes the works of Aline Kominsky-Crumb, Phoebe Gloeckner, Marjane Satrapi, Lynda Barry, and Alison Bechdel.

Dedicating one chapter for each artist is not only a reader-friendly format, but it also enables a detailed and descriptive analysis of each artist – a matter which I will discuss later in this review.

The tension between form and accuracy motivates the main claim of the book. In the introduction, Chute reflects how the form of comics has not been considered the most appropriate form for documenting history and presenting accurate evidence about historical events. In the age of photography, hand-drawn images have been regarded as subjective and intrinsically fictional, whereas objectivity has been seen as the mechanistic recording of reality. Although hand-drawn images in documentary comics strive to operate with evidentiary force, they always bear the subjective mark of their maker. Drawn images consist of choices, both in terms of style and content. As in her previous book, Chute suggests that hand-drawn images make the artist's physical labor visible for the reader – composing comics is "a way of to put the body on the page," as she writes in *Graphic Women* (p. 10).

In *Disaster Drawn*, Chute concentrates more on the embodied experience of the reader, and comics' potential to create an affective and, thus, corporeal effect. One could claim that Spiegelman and Nakazawa's certain artistic and stylistic choices – e.g. anthropomorphic animal characters in *Maus* and a simplified realization of the characters in *I Saw It* – estrange the reader from the depicted cruelties. However, Chute shows that the minimally rendered characters against the detailed and almost realistically drawn backgrounds produce affective images – images that convey the lived experience of the people witnessing or experiencing the disaster. As Chute notes, Spiegelman and Nakazawa's comics picture the mundane alongside atrocities, the everyday with extremities. The comics resonate with the reader's embodied experience, thus activating their ability to imagine the pain of the depicted Others. In Spiegelman and Nakazawa's works, the minimalistic style and animal metaphors facilitate readerly identification with the sufferers.

The potential of comics to create affects and emotions in the reader was associated with the medium already in the 1950s. Reading comics was connected to affective bodily reactions, which worried parents and authorities, who demanded more cultivated and intellectual reading habits.[1] Since then, especially feminist literary critics have highlighted the need to reconsider the embodied aspect of reading, and have tried to dismantle the evaluative dichotomy of emotional and intellectual or rational reading. In *Disaster Drawn*, Chute proves that the exploration of the bodily aspects of reading is essential, especially regarding comics that clearly and powerfully aim at affecting the reader with stylistic and structural choices or content.

[1] Gardner 2012, 84–85.

Instead of considering comics' potential for affectivity as a hindrance, Chute suggests, it could be regarded as an ability to produce emotional visual languages. Many contemporary comics encourage the reader to slow down the process of reading, to scrutinize drawn lines, text boxes, and page layouts. Chute argues that the hand-drawn images of comics could be reconsidered as a new way to materialize history, and offering a "new seeing" (p. 38). On the one hand, drawn images enable the reader to see disastrous events such as the Holocaust, the A-bomb of Hiroshima, or the crimes in Palestine, Sarajevo, and Goražde. On the other hand, Chute suggests that seeing is a more multilayered issue in documentary drawings. The drawings of Callot, Goya, Nakazawa, Spiegelman, and Sacco all have in common their representation of the act of witnessing. Documentary drawings and comics compel the reader to become aware of herself as a seeing subject "looking and looking at others looking upon horror" (p. 60). This "triangulated ethics of vision" draws the attention to looking and seeing as an act of witnessing.

Chute connects the formal experimentation of contemporary comics to the comics of the early 20th century, especially those of Winsor McCay, whom she calls a bold experimenter of conventions and a pioneer of treating the space of the page as an essential unit of information. The importance of treating space as a medium-specific quality of comics echoes in Chute's comprehensive analyses, which epitomize her methodological approach to comics as an art of details. Chute's comics analyses are precise and thorough, which makes the book an enjoyable read. Especially in Sacco's case, Chute provides lengthy ekphrastic descriptions of visual details, such as the number of houses, cars, or people on the page.

Sacco's visibly labor-intensive work and closely packed pages may exhaust the reader, as Chute notes. The density of Sacco's comics makes them work against easy consumption – a quality that very few graphic narratives possess, according to Chute. Sacco's comics are time consuming for both the artist and the reader, but this discussion would have benefitted from some mention of other works of underground and alternative comics that also demand substantial cognitive engagement from the reader. In addition, I would have appreciated more reflection on the qualities of graphic narratives that challenge easy reading – and definitely more critical questioning of the role of the reader. Chute seems to share Spiegelman's claim that graphic narratives are the last bastions of literacy[2], but is there really a need to build a canon of more or less demanding comics? Chute manages to prove the formal complexity of the comics in question, especially those of Spiegelman and Sacco – a point which, in the light of a plethora of previous scholarly work, seems quite obvious. Nevertheless, Chute's observations about the formal,

[2] See Chute 2008.

aesthetic, narrative, and affective qualities of graphic narratives inspire further research on the rhetoric of comics.

What Chute brings into the discussion of the much-researched comics she analyses is her skill at weaving a rich descriptive analysis of the comics together with contextual information about the depicted conflicts and theoretical insights about documentary, trauma, and ethics. As a result, the micro and macro levels of comics analysis merge in her work in a beneficial way. Only the last part, "Coda – New Locations, New Forms," reveals that Chute could have a lot more to say about the political aspect of cartoons and comics. In her Coda, Chute refers to many contemporary events that demonstrate the possibility of drawn images to affect people and cause material damage. Chute discusses the Danish Jyllands-Posten's Muhammad cartoons and Charlie Hebdo briefly, but their relevance for the book's overall arguments about documentary and witnessing remains a bit unclear.

By situating contemporary comics in a long line of works of witnessing war, *Disaster Drawn* provides a rich and well-contextualized source for readers interested in the questions of visual witness, comics, and documentary form – as the subtitle of the book promises. It also exemplifies the importance of a detailed analysis that takes into consideration the spatial, graphic, verbal, and visual qualities of a comics page. Further, the book is exemplary in its multitude of well-printed images that facilitate the reader's ability to take part in the in-depth analysis. I recommend Chute's book for all those who share the view that well executed close readings and culturally sensitive contextualizing are crucial for the development of comics studies.

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Less Focus on Comics than Stated

by Jani Ylönen

The Comics of Joss Whedon: Critical Essays. Ed. Valerie Estelle Frankel. McFarland, 2015. ISBN: 978-0-7864-9885-7. 247 p.

In 2017, it has been twenty-five years since the world was first introduced to Buffy Summers, the protagonist of the 1992 film *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and the 1997–2003 television series of the same title, which made Joss Whedon's character a pop cultural icon. Since then, with his many television series and films, Whedon has built a reputation as an auteur, a creator of media products with an identifiable style. While many of his post-Buffy productions have struggled with mainstream success and longevity, he has also broken box office records by writing and directing the Marvel Cinematic Universe blockbusters *The Avengers* (2012) and its sequel, *Avengers: Age of Ultron* (2015).

While industrious on big and small screen alike, Whedon has also been prolific in comic book production over the last twenty years. From Buffy onwards, he has written or overseen comics that continue or augment his audiovisual productions, but he has also written comics not affiliated with his other works. While these comics are not as well-known as his film productions, they have won acclaim both individually and as extensions of his canons, adding a further sheen to his auteur image.

Whedon has been the object of a substantial amount of academic interest. There are journals and conferences devoted to his works and several books especially on the "Buffyverse," as his most famous fictional universe is called, in both academic and fan discourse. However, as Valerie Estelle Frankel, editor of and the contributor to *The Comics of Joss Whedon: Critical Essays*, states, Whedon's comics have received relatively little academic attention. Frankel and her fellow writers hope to amend this situation with their collection. *The Comics of Joss Whedon* collects seventeen essays by writers from fandom and academia, even if it sometimes difficult to distinguish one sort of writer from the other. Combined, the essays discuss all the comics that Whedon has had a part in to date, in mostly chronological order.

Joel Hawkes' "*The Origin* of a Superhero: Sacrifice, Choice and the Significance of Merrick in Buffy's Journey" begins the book with Buffy's origin story, both in its film form from 1992 and its comic book rewrite from 1999. Hawkes argues that, unlike its predecessor, the latter version presents Buffy as a superhero with similarities to famous comic book superhero origin stories. Hawkes is followed by Lisa Gomez's chapter "Buffy Is in Bed with a Woman? Problematic and Perfect Gay and Lesbian Representation" that discusses the controversial lesbian scene from Buffy's eighth season, which was published in comics form from 2007 to 2011. While the latter

provides an interesting critical reading, the two essays also display two of the central problems with the collection.

Gomez's essay, among others, raises the question of identity, not only of the characters, but inadvertently also of the collection's overall one. Her critical reading is thorough and makes references to several sources, yet the expertise is built from a fan's perspective and the sources are selected essays from the Internet. While Gomez does not claim to be a scholar, an attempt to follow academic guidelines and strictures is made in her text with a fair, but not complete, success. However, it would be harsh to blame Gomez, when the problem clearly lies with the collection. There is simply too significant a difference between the writers' academic credentials (or lack thereof) and the collection, which on its covers, in its dedication, and in its preface markets itself as a scholarly work attempting to fill a gap within the academic scholarship on Whedon and on comics in general.

Often, this ambition results in interesting essays with a few academic sources, which are at times fairly dated, added to the beginning and the end. The problem is that while the analysis in between can be very interesting, it is more in the vein of popular, yet well-constructed essays than it is scholarship. One example is S. Evan Kreider's "Mind/Body Dualism vs. Materialism. Personal Identity in *Dollhouse: Epitaphs*," which discusses an issue that is central to both this particular story world, current social discourse, and to modern theoretical discussion, but fails to seriously engage with philosophers or scholars more recent than Thomas Hobbes or Rene Descartes. On the other hand, Kreider avoids the second major problem that affects the collection: an inability to concentrate on comics. While Frankel in her preface declares the need to study Whedon's neglected comics as a major inspiration for the collection and establishes comics as a worthy field of inquiry, the essays that follow have a problem with focusing on the specified material. Although, for example, discussing both the film and the comic is relevant for Hawkes' article, the trend of examining Whedon's works across media is repeated with lesser justification in many of the following chapters. Indeed, in some cases the references to the television or film releases seem to only emphasize the writers' knowledge of the overall "Whedonverse," while problematically taking space and attention away from deeper analysis of the comics in what are mostly short essays.

Of course, it would be difficult to separate the audiovisual works from the comics that often function as supplementary material to Whedon's earlier television or film productions. Indeed, the collection's unannounced strength lies in the discussion of transmediality of/in his works. For example, David Kociemba and Mary Ellen Iatropoulos' "Separate Worlds or One? Canonicity, Medium and Authorship" offers a fascinating reading of how the "Buffyverse" translates from one

medium/writer to another. The interaction between media, writers, and fans in connection to the "Whedonverse" becomes one of the central sub-themes of the collection, one that deserves a collection of its own. Here, however, it only draws attention from the area of interest that is explicitly declared in the book's title.

As it stands, the title could be *Everything Related to Comics by Joss Whedon*. The discussion of the Marvel Cinematic Universe, which is the topic of the final two essays, fails particularly to adhere to the mission statement, as Whedon has not written any comics connected to *The Avengers* films or the *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* television series. That said, one of these essays, Leora Haras' "Authorship Assembled: Joss Whedon as Promotional Auteur in Marvel's *The Avengers*," is a thought-provoking essay about how Whedon's auteur image was commercialized and used in the marketing of the blockbuster film and is one of the highlights of the collection.

Overall, the collection leaves me with a sense that Frankel and associates took the ambition to discuss all of Whedon's comics-related works in one book too far. The result is a collection that not only does not follow its own stated purpose, but one that is also of uneven quality. On one hand, texts such as Tracy S. Morris' "Joss Whedon, Alan Moore and the Whole Horrible Future" fails to convince the reader of the similarities between Alan Moore and artist Dave Gibbons' *Watchmen* graphic novel and Whedon's live action video (and not comic book) *Dr. Horrible's Sing Along Blog,* especially in its claim that the latter is a dystopia. On the other hand, the varied nature of the essays does result in some interesting essays, such as Thalia M. Mulhivill and Christina L. Blanch's "*Do Serenity* Comics Forecast Our Pedagogies of Identity Construction?," which analyzes how Whedon's comics can be used to discuss the malleability and intersectionality of identity in classroom environments and offers a different and refreshing perspective compared to the surrounding writings.

While *The Comics of Joss Whedon: Critical Essays* establishes a need for further study on Whedon's comics, it fails to address this need itself. Too often the essays fail to reach their potential, whether in the depth of their analysis or in the connection to comics scholarship. Too frequently the writers emphasize their knowledge of the filmed "Whedonverse" at the expense of discussing the comics or comics scholarship. Consequently, the book does little to further the latter, especially on a theoretical level. Nonetheless, editor Valerie Estelle Frankel, who herself contributes two essays, and the other essayists inadvertently accentuate the need to discuss Whedon's works from the viewpoint of transmedia theories. They prove that the relationships and interactions between his films and comics, as well as their connections to fans, offer an interesting topic for further research. Indeed, Whedon might be a prime example for studying

how ideas of authorship and media has changed during the last twenty years. So, while the collection falls short on its original ambition, it does raise questions for future studies.

Redefining the Superhero through Selective Reading

by Martin Lund

Arnaudo, Marco. *The Myth of the Superhero*. Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013. ISBN 978-1421409535. 206 pages.

Gavaler, Chris. *On the Origin of Superheroes: From the Big Bang to Action Comics No. 1*. Iowa City, University of Iowa Press, 2015. ISBN 978-16093838l7. 295 pages.

Fawaz, Ramzi. *The New Mutants: Superheroes and the Radical Imagination of American Comics*. New York, New York University Press, 2016. ISBN 978-1479823086. 316 pages.

Much has been written about the superhero and the genre it inhabits, though the issue of definition has continued to plague the field in spite of its increasing growth. Richard Reynolds articulated his famous seven features of the superhero in 1992.[1] In 2006, Peter Coogan argued that the three central aspects of the superhero are superhuman powers, a prosocial mission, and a secret identity.[2] Karline McLain singled out six "essential features" that for her define superheroes in 2009: "extraordinary powers, enemies, a strong moral code, a secret identity, a costume, and an origin story that explains how the hero acquired his powers and sets forth his motivations."[3] Still, what the superhero actually *is* remains slippery, and it is unlikely that any final definition will ever be arrived at. This has caused some writers on superhero topics to throw out attempts at definition, claiming that superheroes "defy conventional definitions because they contain too many conventions."[4]

The "classic" definitions, however, are not meant to be all-encompassing, the way some of their detractors caricature them. They are attempts at capturing the superhero that are entirely sufficient for any study of their exploits, if one keeps in mind what scholar of religion Bruce Lincoln has noted: language is imperfect and definitions cannot ultimately escape their own origin as "the historical product of discursive processes." This, Lincoln concludes, "hardly renders

[1] Reynolds 1992, 12–16. As Reynolds saw them, superheroes are marked out from society, often growing up without their parents; at least some superheroes are like earthbound gods in power, while others consort easily with these earthbound deities; superheroes have a devotion to justice that overrides their devotion to the law; superheroes' extraordinary nature contrasts with their ordinary surroundings; this extraordinary nature also contrasts with the mundane nature of the superheroes' alter egos; superheroes are capable of considerable patriotism and moral loyalty to the state; and superhero stories blend science and magic indiscriminately. I want to thank Sean Guynes for his helpful comments and suggestions on this piece.

[2] Coogan 2006, 30–43.

[3] McLain 2009, 1.

[4] Gavaler 2015, 3. More on this book below.

futile all efforts at definition, however, particularly when one understands these as provisional attempts to clarify one's thought, not to capture the innate essence of things."[5]

A few recent books have taken a different road, and have instead tried to define superheroes through a focus on what they *do* and what they *say*, arguing in their own ways for a different sort of definition. This is a review of three such books and a chronicle of their failure to move the field or the question of definition forward in any significant, constructive way.

MYTH OF THE SUPERHERO

To begin, Marco Arnaudo's *The Myth of the Superhero* exemplifies everything that is wrong with the study of superheroes – the book's stated purpose – and the subfield that studies comics and religion, my particular professional interest, on which I will focus here. Put simply, *Myth* is a rapid progression of strained over-interpretations; drawing "parallels" with little critical payout and unsourced grand claims.

Claiming there is a vast array of scholarship on superhero comics – but not citing a single example – Arnaudo intends the book to address the superhero genre's relationship to myth, religion, society, literary genre, and epistemological frameworks. Rather than setting out to offer a "crib note," or a presentation of "common knowledge" about the superhero genre, he wants to "construct a discourse that builds on all the aforementioned (and oft-discussed) topics in order to identify certain symptomatic characteristics of the superhero comic that converge in my overall thesis" (p. 2). It is Arnaudo's self-expressed belief that this "thesis" provides a deep understanding of the nature of the superhero comic and its role in contemporary society. What his thesis is, however, remains undisclosed: "As in the best 'cliffhanger' tradition so dear to comics, I won't disclose this thesis here and will instead let the reader discover it over the course of the book" (p. 3).

Addressing the issue of superhero seriality, Arnaudo conflates form with function and perception with historicity. He claims, for example, that the Batman and Superman comics that have been published since the 1930s constitute a singular narrative, or "*one* story," as he puts it. He writes that the way some people react with shock when they find out that the Golden Age Superman killed people "wouldn't even be imaginable if the character narrated in the stories of the twenty-first century weren't perceived as being the same individual as before" (p. 4). That might well be true of fans, but for scholarship, we must be able to bracket the claims that we are reading "*one*

[5] Lincoln 2006, 2.

story" and see characters like Superman and Batman for what they are, patchwork products of numerous and often competing creative visions and ideologies. Not so according to Arnaudo, who at one point concludes, in a highly counterproductive way, that the fact that there have been different iterations of Superman published makes it "necessary to consider the character's chronology as a whole in forming judgments of him" (p. 102). In a baffling formulation, Arnaudo writes about the different version of Superman's adoptive parents: "Even if we can distinguish the most enduring and successful versions of the character, ultimately, all the variations are equal in terms of their degree of reality in the narrative universe that they belong to" (p. 138). In the spirit of disclosure, I should mention that I have elsewhere argued the exact opposite, that for the same reason – that there are different versions of Superman, or of almost any character – it is incumbent upon us as scholars to clarify which version of the character we are working with, so as to be able to properly contextualize and historicize our text and to avoid ahistorical projection or blending of vastly different ideas into a single entity.[6]

Conversely, Arnaudo selects one cultural moment and uses that as his baseline, often regarding other configurations as deviations, rather than as different iterations with their own framing and characterizations. The superhero's power as myth and allegory, the very power Arnaudo is trying to convince us of, is thus weakened by being divorced from the time in which it was articulated. On the basis of this view, Arnaudo treats superheroes as if they were real people, able to make decisions on their own, without the guidance of the writers, artists, and editors who tell their stories at any given time. Superheroes might form the center of a "collective narrative millions of pages long," but it is not a cohesive or unbroken one. Seriality no doubt affects how stories are told, but it does not divorce the storytellers or characters from history; nor are the characters and their pasts safe from changing circumstances, as the frequency of retcons attests.[7] Every new creative team is beholden to previous continuity, but those same people bring new perspectives, and contexts change, meaning that every character-iteration has its own unique genealogy that cannot be ignored if cultural analysis is to properly "respect the historical, formal and material components of its object" (p. 3).

By treating the characters as cohesive wholes, where elements from different decades and creators are treated as equal and not distinguished, the historicity of the characters becomes blurred and their presentation ahistorical (as on p. 65–66, where Superman is presented as an immigrant figure in an argument that is impossible to support, since it freely mixes character iterations).

[6] Lund 2015; 2016.

[7] Captain America, for example, was famously retconned in the 1970s, and the failed 1950s "Commie Smasher" version was made into a different person to fit both with current continuity and politics. The coexistence of different versions of Superman was even made into a central plot point in DC's 2005–2006 Infinite Crisis.

Furthermore, Arnaudo does not hold himself to his own selection criteria very well; although limited series and alternative continuities are said to be bounded out, such series are discussed several times, as are film versions of the characters, which are even further removed from the "*one* story" he purports to study (cf. pp. 5, 23-25, 44–49, 85, 91–95, 130).

Comics scholar Jean-Paul Gabilliet warns against studying comics as existing *sui generis*, as does Russell McCutcheon about his own field of religious studies[8]; Arnaudo often treats both comics and religion as *sui generis*, as when he builds up the idea that "shamanistic" elements are inherent to the genre and then reads a Batman retcon in a supposedly "shamanistic" style as revealing "something previously latent in the series" (p. 24). But the book loses all scholarly credibility with the heading "New Golems," which signals Arnaudo's treatment of Judaism and comics. In discussing the process of selecting material for the study, Arnaudo calculates that he would have needed to read over two million pages of comics to cover everything that has been published; true enough, but his explanation for how he chose his few examples is not convincing: his methodological "take" can be likened to the historical map, "which marks solely those components of the landscape that enable the representation of the dynamics of past events" (p. 8). From this starting point, he unselfconsciously cherry-picks examples that fit the image he wants to present.

This selectivity, it seems to me, counteracts the explicit intention to cover the superhero in the *longue durée*, as it were (cf. p. 5). Especially since Arnaudo in several critical instances does not even provide a single textual example of his chosen series or character. Instead he often relies on secondary literature, which in some cases is highly flawed.[9] The back cover promises close readings of comics, but the author's presentation of Superman and his supposed connection to Judaism is entirely based on a popular, ethnically celebratory literature.[10] The same old tired "points of contact" are restated by Arnaudo as fact, in a run-through riddled with anachronisms and assumptions; indeed, the destruction of Krypton and the threat of murder directed at the children of the people of Israel are used as a basis for the claim that "Superman's Kryptonian origins echo the Moses story *so precisely* that it seems highly likely that, whether consciously or

[8] Gabilliet 2010, xv; McCutcheon 2003.

[9] In his treatment of Magneto, for instance, Arnaudo relies on Malcolm (2010), an article that makes grand claims about forty years of publication history on the basis of about a dozen comic books, cherry-picked evidence, and distorted quotes. I have discussed Malcolm's piece in Lund 2015, paras. 28–30.

[10] Weinstein 2006; Fingeroth 2007; Kaplan 2008. The book also uncritically uses normative Christian theologies, such as Skelton 2006.

otherwise, the Jewish background of the authors had at least some measure of influence" (p. 30; my emphasis).[11]

And, as in so much previous writing, Superman's "original" Kryptonian name, Kal-El, is put forward as proof of his Jewishness, because it contains "El," a Hebrew name for God. Never mind that even a cursory investigation of the comics will show that Siegel and Shuster never used that name, or that it is easy to find out that it was Superman radio show producer and announcer George Lowther who introduced it in his 1942 Superman novelization. Further deepening Arnaudo's ahistorical impression, the lone comic book used to support this argument is a 1998 60th anniversary story that made explicit homage to Siegel and Shuster and called Superman a golem and an angel; from this story, Arnaudo, like so many other writers on the subject, draws the conclusion that Superman was likely derived from golems and angels (p. 30). These "parallels," and a few other forced ones culled from the same literature, later morph into a claim about how the suddenly "profound Jewish roots of the superhero comic" have been "recodified" into Christian models (p. 47).

Arnaudo, like all other writers who have claimed that Superman's origin reflects Moses' story fails to mention what it would actually *mean* if such is the case. Here, and throughout most of the book, he is content to point out "similarities" and move on. His method of choice is to draw broad parallels between the superhero genre and earlier myth on the basis of superficial similarities and refracting them through the highly abstracted and generalized world of myth as presented by comparative myth scholars like Joseph Campbell and Mircea Eliade, who themselves made broad generalization that are difficult to prove empirically or, indeed, to tease any real meaning out of.

This goes on through two more chapters after Arnaudo is done with religion, one about "ethics and society" and one about "epic and neobaroque," neither of which diverges much from the established model of using outdated theories to draw simplistic parallels between superheroes and some other aspect of culture writ large. Ultimately, instead of providing a grounded, critical survey, the book reads like a love letter to superheroes, an attempt to prove that they come from respectable (religious and mythical, epic and baroque) roots rather than popular ones, and that they foster a positive ethics and sociability in their readers. In claiming so often that superhero comics are unique in how they do this, Arnaudo's book is far from unique; it now rests on my shelf next to the large number of comics theologies, mythologies, and ethics books that have come out in recent years to propose the same thing. Indeed, Arnaudo's *Myth* not only fails to offer anything new, but at best treads familiar waters, and at worst pulls the field down.

[11] I address this and many other similar example at length in Lund 2016.

ON THE ORIGIN OF SUPERHEROES

Released a couple of years after Arnaudo's book, Chris Gavaler's *On the Origin of Superheroes: From the Big Bang to Action Comics No. 1* is the latest in a series of books that try to speak in broad terms about where the superhero came from and what it means as a cultural figure. Unsurprisingly, it leaves much to be desired.[12] Overall, the book is a cherry-picked collection of overused (and often mixed) metaphors and judgments of personal taste. It has a chatty and disjointed style that at times comes close to stream-of-consciousness writing, and lacks much in the way of scholarly rigor. This is not what one would expect from a university press offering. Indeed, after reading the disavowal of academic stricture in the opening chapter (p. 9), I could not help but wonder *why* an academic press published it at all.

The problems start early on. After creating a straw man out of earlier attempts to define superheroes, Gavaler rejects them, replacing definition with a disingenuous but supposedly "common sense" perspective, described as a series of "boxes" (p. 3) to be ticked off on a "census bureau checklist" (p. 31). This is a good trick, but a circular one: with "checklist" in hand, anything Gavaler regards as belonging to the superhero gets its box, and then, by checking that box, Gavaler's pet characters or texts confirm that the boxes are part of the superhero make-up as he sees it. It is also self-serving, since it allows Gavaler to shoehorn anything and everything he wants into the book, because… I honestly could not tell you why. The purpose of the book is never really made clear.

Although the title explicitly references *Action Comics* #1, cover-dated June 1938, there is no framing in this book, no context, and no historical grounding. Gavaler's "census" flows back and forth in time, projecting things from years or even decades after whatever he is currently writing about onto his definition in order to make his claims. Further, in making the argument that there were things floating around in the cultural stew before *Action Comics* #1 that would later become central conventions among superheroes, he lumps together any and all stories – comics, literature, mythology – that he wants to use as examples, and builds his house of cards from that. This, of course, is a form of cherry-picking that cannot actually prove or illustrate anything other than that if there is nothing that defines or frames the superhero, anything can define or frame the superhero. But still, one example after another is cemented as central to the genre, more often than not without actual examples from any comic enlisted in support, before the author moves on to the next grand claim.

[12] Arnaudo's book is another example, as is Marc DiPaolo 2011. I cannot discuss DiPaolo here, but I can at least make an observation: it suffers from many of the same major historical and methodological defects as Gavaler and Arnaudo's books.

There is also a highly problematic essentialism running throughout the book: if one text that Gavaler personally likes can be said to have inspired another text (and his own preference seems to be the primary guide here, as in all aspects of the book), which then perhaps inspired another text, then that is somehow proof enough that a particular character was inspired by *the first text*; there is an imagined wholesale transferal of properties from the first text through all other variations that can also be seen in much writing about superheroes and golems (the worst precedent for this is probably Thomas Andrae's essay in *Siegel and Shuster's Funnyman*, where the golem is traced from a movie through numerous different vehicles before landing in Superman).[13] This transferal of properties is how Jane Austen becomes part of Gavaler's Superman genealogy: Jerry Siegel supposedly liked the Scarlet Pimpernel, and, well, Gavaler notes that the Pimpernel's author had probably not read Austen either, but other people at the time had, so Austen's ideas were in the air when the Pimpernel story was written, and so therefore Jane Austen inspired Jerry Siegel's Clark Kent (207–208). And because one author might have read a story that was then possibly read by another author, whose own story was then perhaps read by one of Batman's co-creators, "Batman is the KKK in a cooler costume" (189-190). This is not scholarship; it is a fannish game of six degrees of separation.

One of the most egregious abuses of history I have come across (time and again) in my work on Jewish American history and superhero comics is the repeated use of a piece of Nazi propaganda published in 1940, in response to a Superman comic strip. According to this piece, Superman's Jewish co-creator Jerry Siegel saw the "resurgence of manly virtues" in Germany and decided to steal it ("there is nothing the Sadducees won't do for money," wrote the Nazis, leaning on anti-Semitic stereotypes of Jews as greedy cultural parasites).[14] All too often, the piece becomes ground for claims that the Nazis acknowledged Superman's Jewish roots; most recently, this happened in an article in the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz*.[15] Although he includes a work that makes this claim in his bibliography, Gavaler chooses instead to give the Nazis credit in a different way. Because he does not like the ideology he sees promoted in superhero comics today (and I cannot fault him for seeing highly questionable mythologies and ideologies being perpetuated on the comics page), Gavaler brushes past the actual comic strip the Nazis objected to with a single sentence and without a moment's pause to explain or historicize it. Instead, he quotes the Nazis and then concludes: "Americans are still swallowing massive doses of that superhero morality, *only now Nazi German isn't left to complain*" (p. 199; emphasis added). Yes, Gavaler wrote this: a violently

[13] Andrae 2010, 38–41.

[14] Bytwerk 1998.

[15] Anderman 2016; see also Weinstein 2006, 25–26; Tye 2012, 66.

anti-Semitic piece of propaganda published by the SS is somehow used in a positive sense, because a highly abridged version of it supports his own ideas. Bad scholarship does not even begin to describe what is happening here.

I would not recommend Gavaler's book to anyone. Its methodology is highly flawed, its reading of its chosen texts far too loose and unstructured to be of much use, and its attempt to define the superhero genre signals a step or two backward, at the very least. It is starting to become a hackneyed cliché that comics studies is a field still in its infancy. By now, the field has been around long enough that it should have started to show signs of maturity. And it has. There is good work out there. A lot of it. But books like Gavaler and Arnaudo's show that the field still has a long way to go.

NEW MUTANTS

Finally, there is Ramzi Fawaz's *The New Mutants: Superheroes and the Radical Imagination of American Comics*. "In *The New Mutants*," writes Fawaz, "I argue that Superman's death [in 1992] and the subsequent fracturing of his identity bookended nearly three decades of creative innovation in American comics that transformed the superhero from a nationalist champion to a figure of radical difference mapping the limits of American liberalism and its promise of universal inclusion in the post-World War II period" (p. 3). *The New Mutants*, he adds, "narrates the history of this creative transformation by showing how the American superhero, once an embodiment of nationalism and patriotic duty, became a popular fantasy of internationalism and the concept of universal citizenship in the second half of the twentieth century." This is a bold claim, and one that utterly fails to convince me.

Rather than engage with previous attempts to define superheroes, and going somewhat against the notion of transformation that he claims as central, Fawaz makes up his own pseudo-definition:

> In its commitment to protecting the political interests of these alienated social groups the superhero had the potential to redefine the meaning of political freedom in America by recognizing the rights of those excluded from the national community. The lack of definition surrounding the superhero's ethical purview–whether her commitments ended at the borders of the nation or the broader sphere of humanity or included all life in the cosmos–and to whom the superhero was ultimately accountable in the use of her powers made the figure a generative site for imagining democracy in its most radical form, as a

> universally expansive ethical responsibility for the well-being of the world rather than an institutional structure upholding national citizenship (p. 7).

This ad hoc definition of the superhero – a "generative site for imagining democracy in its most radical form" – requires a flattening of the history of superhero comics over several decades of tumultuous political, social, and cultural life. Nonetheless, it is operationalized and used by Fawaz as his perennial measuring stick, against which, curiously, the first generation of superheroes does not measure up. As the next sentence reads: "During World War II this creative potential was mitigated by the superhero's affirmative relationship to the state." The racism and misogyny of the original Superman, as well as the jingoism and racism of the World War II era more generally, is seen as aberrant, rather than constitutive; the first superheroes did not live up to what superheroes, in Fawaz's view, would become and simultaneously have always been.

Admittedly, Fawaz's reading goes against the grain, and as such could be refreshing. But this is also one of the book's biggest issues. *New Mutants* has a sense of tunnel vision to it. Starting in the late 1950s, Fawaz writes, superheroes changed from nationalist do-gooders into "cultural outsiders and biological freaks capable of upsetting the social order in much the same way that racial, gendered, and sexual minorities were seen to destabilize the image of the ideal U.S. citizen." He goes on:

> Rather than condemn these figures, superhero comics visually celebrated bodies whose physical instability deviated from social and political norms. Consequently they produced a visual lexicon of alliances between a variety of 'inhuman' yet valorized subjects as a cultural corollary to the cosmopolitan worldviews of movements for international human rights, civil rights, and women's and gay liberation [...] In the chapters that follow I show how postwar superhero comics made fantasy a political resource for recognizing and taking pleasure in social identities and collective ways of life commonly denigrated as deviant and subversive within the political logics of cold war anticommunism and an emergent neoconservatism (p. 4).

There exists an extensive literature that argues the exact opposite of what Fawaz claims here and in much of the rest of the book, but he does not engage with it. Throughout the book, Fawaz asserts a "radical" politics in his chosen comics, giving example after example, but fails to convincingly argue for almost all of his interpretations. Moreover, he rarely engages with previous research on superheroes or on comics at all (but he makes several unsourced and general claims about what others have said about them; e.g. 4, 6, 29, 96-97). When writing about the Cold War, Fawaz ignores an extensive literature that roots the Marvel Age in the exact politics that he

dismisses.[16] When writing about the X-Men, he barely mentions the series' frequent use of ethnoracial metaphors, and does not consider the possible problems this use might cause.[17] No consideration is given to the myriad scholars who have tried to illustrate US superhero comics' historical problems with race, gender, and sexuality, nor with those who have engaged with other issues of power or cultural history.[18] The few examples from the existing scholarship that he does cite are either buried in footnotes or engaged selectively.[19] Moreover, scholarship that problematizes Fawaz's overarching theory of development and transformation, notably claims about the conservatism built into the superheroes' seriality or their heroic work, is never considered.[20]

These criticisms are not to suggest that Fawaz has to agree with previous research, but ignoring the larger scholarly tradition to which they belong goes completely against the core of what scholarship is supposed to be. Instead of a critical engagement with scholarly precedent, Fawaz repeatedly offers sweeping claims about postwar comics in general, about the comics industry, and about US culture, with very few sources to back them up and with very little context to link comics to the history they are placed in.

That said, the book is not without merit. Each chapter provides some new insight into the series discussed. Chapter five is particularly good. I hasten to add that I say so not because of its part in making the larger argument, but because it deals with its period in terms of developments within the industry; the conclusion that "where the urban folktale [one of Fawaz's subcategories of superhero comics] emerged out of the conditions of and against the corporate restructuring of the comic book industry, it ultimately devolved into a celebration of the neoliberal politics of personal responsibility grounded in bootstrap individualism" (p. 198) is among the most insightful in the book. It follows on a multifaceted discussion that touches on issues of diverse representation, class politics, and creators' self-interests in a (for the book) particularly complex way.

[16] E.g. Genter 2007; Costello 2009; Capitanio 2010.

[17] These issues are addressed, for example, in Shyminsky 2006.

[18] A few examples include Murray 2000; Gordon et al. 2001; Smith 2001; Johnson 2011; Strömberg 2011; Pustz 2012; Phillips and Strobl 2013; Magnussen et al. 2015.

[19] Yockey 2005, an article that directly challenges Fawaz's reading of the Fantastic Four, is buried on 71n13; Wright 2001 is cited throughout the book, but only when a claim supports one of Fawaz's.

[20] E.g. Eco 1981; Brown 2011, 78; Lewis 2014, 25–26.

Ultimately, however, in spite of providing some insights, the small selection of comics that Fawaz discusses cannot possibly illustrate what he sets out to show. Even if one does agree with any single case study – or with all of them – no sample is even remotely large enough to be as representative as Fawaz claims it is. Even if one accepts Fawaz's claims about any single text of his, the "radical" politics that he claims are his texts are only a drop in an ocean full of other political counter-currents that are completely ignored, as if they play no role in the history of US superheroes. One cannot generalize about superhero comics in a given period from so small a sample and then claim that what is said applies to everything being published at the time, as Fawaz repeatedly does throughout his introduction and within the separate chapters. In the final analysis, the superhero has always been and will continue to be far bigger than *The New Mutants* ever lets on. Once one tries to generalize the claims it makes, they begin to tear at the seam and rip, as any too-constricting garment will do.

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All three books discussed in this review article share the same overarching problems. They all establish their own definitions of superheroes that pass over the general, structuring function of definitions to instead make claims about what superheroes say or do. They do so not as a result of an investigation of a representative sample of comics, but are asserted as the starting point (even in Arnaudo's book, which withholds its main thesis as a cute gimmick), and then proceed to present small selections of examples that conform to this definition, as if that were enough to bound in eighty years of continuous publication. And they do all of this with casual disregard for almost all previous scholarly work on superheroes and with little regard for context, whether creative, historical, or cultural. As a result, each author myopically makes their own perception of superheroes stand for the whole. Inadvertently, the three books end up emphasizing the need for inclusive but structured definitions of the superhero. The force and pull of gravity is a good metaphor here, for two reasons: first, without determining every move we make, gravity keeps us grounded and pulls us towards a concrete center, rather than floating around aimlessly in the vastness of space; and second, it helps us appreciate what, exactly, is so special about anyone who can defy it.

I have made no secret of my opinions about the type of writing these books represent.[21] The drive to make grand claims that these books evince goes against what I regard as cornerstones in superhero studies. They do not pay nearly enough critical attention to history, context, or creator biography, and they do not let the size of their material sample determine the scope of their

[21] Cf. Lund 2015, wherein I present an abridged version of my research on the X-Men and contrast it with other recent writing on that series; and Lund 2016, in which I discuss recent writing about Superman.

conclusions. If these books are indicators of where superhero studies is heading, then it is a subfield that is in serious danger of becoming irrelevant.

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