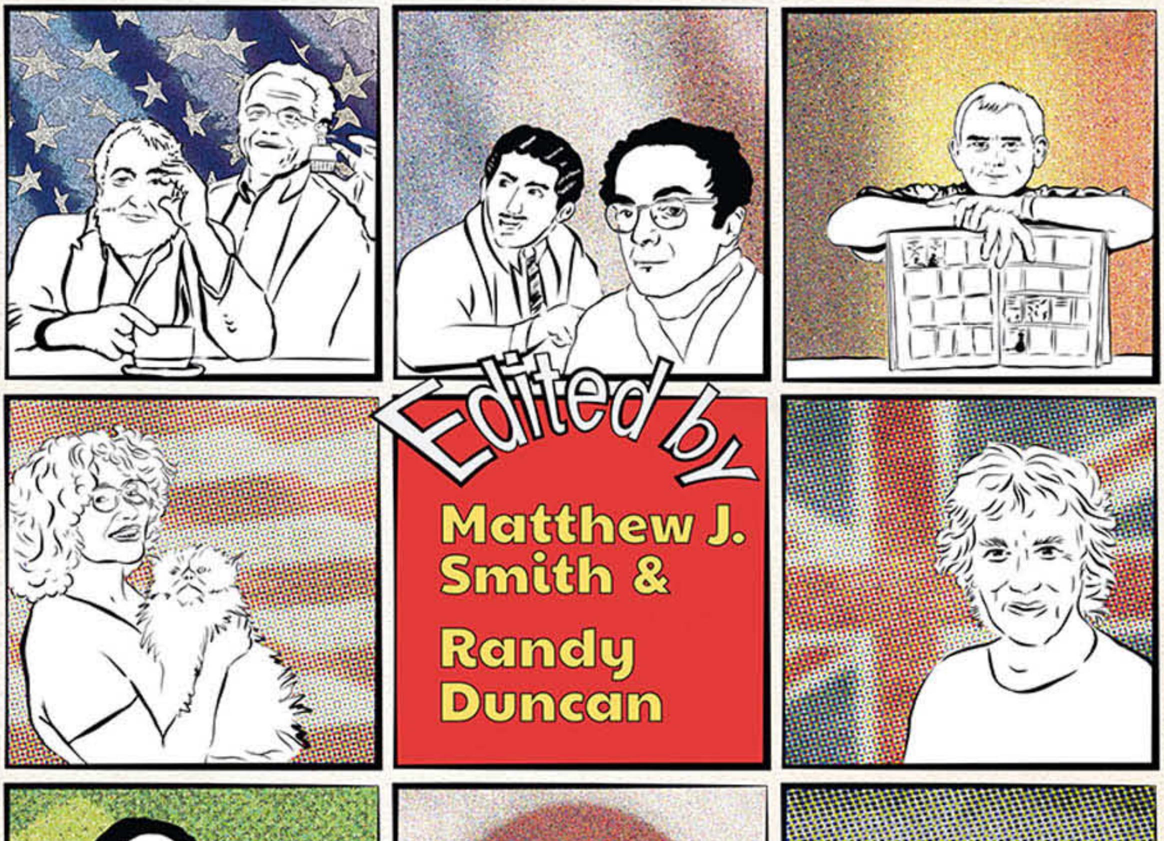
FOREWORD by CHARLES HATFIELD

The SECRET ORIGINS of COMICS STUDIES



Edited by

Matthew J. Smith & Randy Duncan

ROUTLEDGE

THE SECRET ORIGINS OF COMICS STUDIES

In *The Secret Origins of Comics Studies*, today's leading comics scholars turn back a page to reveal the founding figures dedicated to understanding comics art. Edited by comics scholars Matthew J. Smith and Randy Duncan, this collection provides an in-depth study of the individuals and institutions that have created and shaped the field of Comics Studies over the past 75 years. From Coulton Waugh to Wolfgang Fuchs, these influential historians, educators, and theorists produced the foundational work and built the institutions that inspired the recent surge in scholarly work in this dynamic, interdisciplinary field. Sometimes scorned, often underappreciated, these visionaries established a path followed by subsequent generations of scholars in literary studies, communication, art history, the social sciences, and more. Giving not only credit where credit is due, this volume both offers an authoritative account of the history of Comics Studies and also helps move the field forward by being a valuable resource for creating graduate student reading lists and the first stop for anyone writing a comics-related literature review.

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THE SECRET ORIGINS OF COMICS STUDIES

Edited by Matthew J. Smith and Randy Duncan

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
NEW YORK AND LONDON

First published 2017
by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

and by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Names: Smith, Matthew J., 1971– editor. | Duncan, Randy, 1958– editor.
Title: The secret origins of Comics Studies / edited by Matthew J. Smith and Randy Duncan.
Description: New York: Routledge, 2017.
Identifiers: LCCN 2016042603 | ISBN 9781138884519 (hardback)
Subjects: LCSH: Comic books, strips, etc.—History and criticism. | Graphic novels—History and criticism.
Classification: LCC PN6710 .S44 2017 | DDC 741.5/9—dc23
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2016042603

ISBN: 978-1-138-88451-9 (hbk)
ISBN: 978-1-315-71603-9 (ebk)

Typeset in Bembo
by codeMantra

Matt and Randy dedicate this book to Randy's fellow Comics Arts Conference organizers: Peter M. Coogan, Kathleen McClancy, and Travis Langley. Their hard work makes possible the conference that has, for a quarter of a century, nurtured young scholars and helped to build a Comics Studies community.

Matt also wishes to express his gratitude to Wittenberg University for its support in the initial development of this project.

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FOREWORD

Comics Studies, the Anti-Discipline

Charles Hatfield

Comics made my academic career. They inspired me to keep my nose to the grindstone long enough to become an English professor. Comics Studies gave me the means to imagine myself as a career academic and the passion to work past the hurdles, the daunting rites of passage. But they also made me impatient with doing things the conventional English studies way—that is, they either enabled or forced me to see my discipline from the vantage point of an outsider as well as insider. If comics helped place me in academia, Comics Studies has kept me continually looking for a place.

What could it mean to build a "place" for a field that cannot quite *be* placed, one that has operated on the margins and in the interstices among the disciplines—literature, art, mass communications, film and media studies, design, philosophy, sociology, and many others? Comics Studies is a liminal field, defined by the unresolved nature of its very object of study. As a social object, comics occupies many places and yet institutionally has been perfectly at home in none. Comics Studies, I would argue, is an *anti*-discipline: a way of slipping between the universes, academically speaking.[1] So what can it mean to build a place for it, and why should that matter?

I do think it matters.

To seek a place, or center, for a field that will not yield to the centripetal force of academic "disciplining": that is the contradiction from which Comics Studies speaks. That is the perspective from which the following introduction seeks to (re)tell the history of Comics Studies. My biases, of course, should be taken as just that and not the fault of my fellow contributors or our kind editors—but I hope that what I have to say will help place in perspective this very book, a timely and much-needed volume on the "secret origins" of our field.

Until recently, comics scholars have almost always become comics scholars by dint of self-directed independent study (an observation I owe, like many things, to Joseph "Rusty" Witek). Comics Studies has been an ad-hoc phenomenon, a field generated not by institutional mandate but by the eager scurrying of independent actors, opportunistically seeking niches here and there in which they can study this neglected art form and its culture. Finding ways to study comics academically has been about finding allies and protectors and about learning how to describe comics in terms that make sense within one's home discipline. In my case, I've been acutely conscious of being a literature scholar who "happens" to do comics—a matter of not only professional survival but also stubborn pride. But of course the disciplinary fit has not been easy, or seamless. For one thing, I can now see that the refusal (or mistrust) of images has been one of the basic ideological moves of literary studies. For another, the interdisciplinary field of word and image studies—which is where I have often hung my hat—is exactly that, interdisciplinary, and cannot be bound by literary study in the conventional sense that I learned as a student. Finally, my experiences at conferences such as the Popular Culture Association and the International Comic Arts Forum have often involved working with scholars from outside English, a kind of experience that has helped me see my discipline from other vantage points.

Until now, Comics Studies has been only loosely institutionalized, often through klatches of friends and colleagues. It has required much independent study by students and teachers alike. We have made it up on the go. If that has been a source of vitality for Comics Studies—and I believe it has—it has also been a source of difficulty. This has been a field without a hub, like a wheel built from its spokes alone, with no center (no place). Or perhaps there *have* been contenders for a center, but none so widely recognized as to enable the field to garner attention from the outside, and to grow. Yet now that Comics Studies is a recognized field, I believe we do need to build inward to a center—that is, we need to find and stake out some specific institutional ground.

Comics Studies is not innocent of history. A great deal of work had already been done in the field before the upsurge of the past 20 years. It's just that that work was scattered, under-recognized, and often unread; teachers and students had to do a lot of independent seeking, with few guides. Though Comics Studies is not a new academic field, until recently we have acted as if it were. The field's history is hard to trace because it happened mainly on the margins rather in the center of anything. It seems that we still often forget that history and what it might tell us—that we reinvent wheels, or that our students end up seeking to reinvent them, because we cannot see where our field has come from. This insight has been driven home to me by years of serving on committees that vetted paper abstracts in order to organize conferences and by the trouble I've had, until recently, when it comes to pointing students to the essential reference works, landmark texts, important debates, and sponsoring institutions of Comics Studies. To do even that basic work, as an advisor, has been a challenge.

Exactly when did academics begin to show interest in comics, and under what terms? The question may defy a clean and easy answer, as scattered journal articles appeared as early as the 1920s, and a few isolated theses appeared in the '30s and beyond.[2] Use of comics as instructional aides, as Carol Tilley shows in this volume, may be nearly as old as the comic strip business, and became increasingly common (and a topic of professional reflection) in the '40s. The earliest period of *sustained* academic attention to comics—that is, the first noticeable wave of academic journal articles—dates from the 1940s and on into the '50s. This wave consists mainly of pedagogically and psychologically oriented research that frames comic books in terms of their supposed effects on young readers, literacy education, and the larger social fabric. Such articles were written in response to the greater controversy, or moral panic, inspired by comic books in the '40s. In general, these articles follow what we would now call a media effects model, or focus on the way comics supposedly interfere with or retard literacy education. They sometimes target the alleged psychological or social effects of comic books, anticipating or echoing the work of Fredric Wertham; they sometimes recommend ways to wean comic book readers onto better stuff. Either way, they are topical and often polemical, in that they conceive of comic books as a moral and political problem to be dealt with. Seldom do these early articles theorize about the comics form or about the process of reading comics as anything other than a source of trouble. There is little analysis of particular examples of comics, and scant acknowledgment that one could actually ask aesthetic questions about comics. There is no recognition of the possibility of artistic autonomy or the struggle for autonomy among comics creators and no recognition that comics might speak to important questions about word and image, writing and art. The popularity of comic books posed an educational, social, moral, and psychological quandary, seen in stark terms. Beyond that, comics were of little interest as readable texts. The fact that millions of readers of diverse ages did read them seems to have been dismissed as a mere embarrassment or symptom of cultural malaise.

After the censorious early 1950s, which included the adoption of the Comics Code of self-censorship by most of the American comic book industry, the comic book retreated to a strictly policed, and marginal, corner of American culture. Meanwhile, the newspaper comic strip (entrenched since the early 1900s) continued to be a respectable medium of adult as well as children's entertainment, but no longer drew the audience of millions that once followed newspaper serials from one tense day to the next. In the wake of commercial television's rapid rise in the United States, comic books appeared less important as a target of media effects research; rather, the impact of TV became the focus of research and anxiety (just as similar panics, and research programs, have since been spurred by pop records, video gaming, and cyberculture). Comics research in the American academy dwindled and did not show an uptick until the '70s.

But something important was happening in the meantime. Unregarded by academia, the comics hobby, meaning fandom and collectordom, transformed the comic book into an object of intense nostalgia. Comic book-oriented fanzines began to sprout in the early 1960s, among the best-remembered being *Xero, Alter Ego*, and *Comic Art.* By mid-decade bookshops specializing in old comics (providing a public venue for the shadow economy of fandom and anticipating the later surge in comic shops) were a known if rare phenomenon. The first comic book conventions happened around the same time, with New York's conventions of 1964–65 and the Detroit Triple Fan Fair in 1965 being the most often-cited breakthroughs (regarding the rapid growth of fandom circa 1964–1965, see Schelly, 1999, particularly Chapters 6 and 7). These trends gained media attention, and a number of newspaper articles in the mid-'60s incredulously reported on the collecting hobby. All these things were signs of the growing self-awareness if not clout of organized fandom. Jules Feiffer's watershed book of 1965, *The Great Comic Book Heroes*, signaled a self-conscious nostalgia for vintage comic books, superheroes in particular, and this same emotional investment by fans actively shaped the content of the new DC and Marvel superheroes of the so-called Silver Age revival. At the same time, nostalgic kitsch, now turned ironic and neon-tinted, inspired a merchandising blitz in the form of Batmania, sparked by the campy *Batman* TV series produced by William Dozier, a fad that blazed and faded with dizzying speed from 1966 to 1968. A garish Pop Art sensibility, associated with Lichtenstein and Warhol but also trumpeted by comic book publishers themselves, fueled the partial revival of the comic book, certainly of the superhero, and foretold the nostalgic turn of American popular culture in the Nixon era. Comic books reached the early '70s with a nostalgic investment in their own history, but, truth to tell, a shrinking audience, as new comic books no longer fetched enormous profits for anyone. Despite the brief upsurge of the '60s, and the appeals of nostalgia, the industry seemed to be living on borrowed time.

This may appear unrelated to Comics Studies in academia, but consider that in 1967–68 Ray Browne founded the Center (later the Department) of Popular Culture at Bowling Green State University, as well as the *Journal of Popular Culture*, and later co-founded, with Russell Nye, the Popular Culture Association (launched in 1971). Nye's book *The Unembarrassed Muse* (1970) devotes a chapter to comics and became a touchstone in popular culture studies. These developments helped make Comics Studies possible. They happened at the same time as the nostalgic revival of interest in old comics—and ideologically the two trends were intertwined.

As Joseph Witek long ago pointed out to me, popular culture studies, as pioneered by Nye, Browne, and company, rejected the grand pessimism of the Frankfurt School and other roughly mid-century Marxist theorists of mass culture (see Witek, 1999). Instead, the new popular culture studies took a frankly celebratory view. Browne (2001) saw popular culture as "the voice of democracy, speaking and acting, [and] the seedbed in which democracy grows" (these words have been reprinted often, and Browne often returned to them). He further claimed that popular culture is a "way of living we inherit, practice and modify as we please [...]. It is the dreams we dream..." (Browne and Browne, 2001, pp. 1–2).[3] This view contrasts sharply with pessimistic analyses of the culture industry as a top-down tool of mass deception or inculcator of false consciousness. If the Popular Culture Association rejected what it saw as the elitism of academia, particularly in the fields from which Nye and Browne came, American Studies and English, it also rejected the despairing assessment of mass culture by the most influential academics and public intellectuals who had bothered examining mass culture up to that point. Nye, Browne, and their colleagues celebrated the popular as the dream-life or bedrock of American democratic culture, a position embedded from the start in the institutions of the popular culture studies movement.

That movement began in the 1960s, during America's Vietnam War nightmare, an era of wrenching social division—and it doesn't take much to see the PCA's pro-popular culture stance, in those days, as a way of healing, rejoining together, and celebrating a democracy already felt to be in crisis. Depending on your outlook, this stance was either backward-looking, a rearguard defense of America's beleaguered democratic self-image, or forward-looking, rejecting the fusty elitism of a deaf and blind academy. That debate has not been settled. Either way, this movement laid the groundwork for the academic reconsideration of comics—at precisely the time when the comic book was being salvaged, and increasingly shaped, by nostalgic hobbyists and collectors.

In the 1970s, the growth in comic book specialty stores, catering to fans, coincided with the tentative emergence of the new academic paradigm for Comics Studies that emerged through the Popular Culture movement, a paradigm that diverged sharply from earlier studies of comics as a social problem and from Marxist critiques of the culture industries. As early as 1973, M. Thomas (Tom) Inge began championing comics scholarship at the PCA, and indeed even the first PCA program in 1971 paid some attention to cartooning and comics (that program is reprinted in Browne, 2002). However, the new paradigm crystallized when the Comics (or "Comic Art and Comics") Area of the PCA launched in 1975, the very year the Association began to organize itself officially *by* Area. The establishment of that Area marked an important institutional commitment: the PCA was the first recurring national academic conference to devote a division to comics scholarship. Its sibling, the *Journal of Popular Culture,* ran articles about comics as well, but it was the conference activity within PCA's Comics Area that established the first steady venue for academic Comics Studies. Much of the work in that community went unpublished, and Comics Studies remained fairly invisible academically outside of PCA, but the Association did sustain comics scholarship, establishing a beachhead. This relationship encouraged, yet may also have isolated and cordoned off, the field, given the qualms that some academics expressed about PCA as a non-juried, populist conference (and Browne's resistance to theorizing).[4] In any case, Comics Studies developed with a pronounced populist, or anti-elitist, inclination from the first.

Despite this activity, book-length scholarship on comics during this period—from the late '60s and on through the '70s—remained mostly popular rather than academic in nature, in the tradition of Martin Sheridan's *Comics and Their Creators* (1942) and Coulton Waugh's *The Comics* (1947). Take for example the seminal *All in Color for a Dime*, a nostalgically oriented anthology of essays edited by Dick Lupoff and Don Thompson (1970). Though published by Arlington House, *All in Color for a Dime* was built out from a series of articles that ran in the SF and comics fanzine *Xero*, edited by Dick and Pat Lupoff (with art direction by Bhob Stewart) starting in 1960. On a personal note, a paperback copy of this book, along with Jim Steranko's *History of Comics* (1970–72), and eventually Feiffer's *Great Comic Book Heroes* and Maurice Horn and company's *World Encyclopedia of Comics* (1976), became my first windows onto the history of the form. All these publications benefited from a general nostalgia for old comic books, a trend that went mainstream in the '70s. *All in Color for a Dime* moved from hardback to paperback in a year and was followed in 1973 by another Arlington House collection on comics edited by Lupoff and Thompson, *The Comic-Book Book*. Interestingly, Lupoff and Thompson's introduction to *The Comic-Book Book* notes not only the advent of the annual Overstreet Price Guide for collectible comic books but also, with mixed feelings, the academic research going on at Bowling Green. They call this research "pedantic," and in a line since echoed by many comics scholars writing in and out of academia, complain that these "self-consciously scholarly publications...lose sight of the fact that [comics are] intended to be entertaining" (p. 12). These remarks testify to an already tense relationship between academic and fan-based ways of knowing.

Academic comics research in the 1970s and early '80s was largely confined to popular culture studies on the PCA model. At the same time, outside of academia, the comics hobby produced (besides ever-updated price guides) ever-more fanzine and occasional book-length work documenting the history of comics, particularly American comic books. A paper trail of comics scholarship began to build up, though of variable quality and without firm institutional footing. Much of it went out of print in short order and became hard to find.

The landmark books from this period reveal an uneasy straddling of scholarly, populist, and commercial appeals. For example, in 1967 a group of French scholars from SOCERLID (a group whose name roughly translates to the Society for Comics Study and Research) mounted *Bande Dessinée et Figuration Narrative*, an exhibition on comics at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in the Palais du Louvre. In conjunction with that exhibition, the Society assembled a book that was then republished in an English translation by Crown the following year as *A History of the Comic Strip.* This "society" traced its roots to the French comics scholarship of the early '60s and such organizations as the *Club des Bandes Dessinées*, which arose from fandom yet sought to encourage rigorous scholarship. These were not academic organizations but did set out to garner intellectual respectability: Club became Center, then birthed a Society, and so on (a pattern that recurred in the early '70s when the fanzine *Schtroumpf* renamed itself *Les Cahiers de la bande dessinée*). Consistent with this pattern, the Society's exhibition and book seek credibility by emphasizing organizer Pierre Couperie's academic credentials. As Ann Miller (2007) has pointed out, *Bande Dessinée et Figuration Narrative* treats comics as a mass medium deserving of attention precisely because it is "mass," rather than seeking to make elevated claims for comics as capital-A Art, although appreciation of the art remains an important strand (p. 23). Of course this book belongs to the larger trajectory of French Comics Studies, which included work informed by academic theories, semiotics in particular, well before American academics took up the charge; its English translation, however, went through multiple printings, reaching a generation of Anglophone fans. Though it is not an academic text, it does seek to model smart essayistic criticism. Tellingly, *A History of the Comic Strip* was a mass-market book, sold as a brainy yet popular study of a popular form.

The French vogue for comics appreciation appears to have been part of an international fascination with the form under the warrant of Pop Art. This period produced several books on comics that sought to bridge the scholarly and the popular, such as Perry and Aldridge's *Penguin Book of Comics*, published in Britain in 1967, and Reitberger and Fuchs's *Comics: Anatomy of a Mass Medium*, published in Germany in 1970 and translated into English in 1972. Both of these are extensively researched, and *Anatomy* in particular boasts an academic style informed by mass communications studies. Like the *Penguin*, though, and like the translated French *History* too, *Anatomy* was published in an oversized trade edition in what seems to have been a bid for popular appeal. All these books, despite their serious scholarship, were published by non-academic houses, in the same period as *All in Color for a Dime* and Steranko's *History*. Yet they are informed by academic media studies, not rooted solely in fandom.

A notable academically based American book put out by a trade publisher was Arthur Asa Berger's *The Comic-Stripped American* (in 1973), published first by Walker and Company, then by Penguin. Berger offers a reflection theory of comics on ideological terms, again from the standpoint of communication studies; his outlook is sociological. This too is a book with an academic mindset that, rhetorically, attempts to address dual or multiple audiences. Yet to me the most dramatic of the early contributions to academic comics study came out of art history: David Kunzle's monograph *The Early Comic Strip*, the first volume of his monumental two-volume *History of the Comic Strip*. Published in 1973 by the University of California, *The Early Comic Strip* locates the origins of the medium in 15th-century Europe and traces its international growth as a means of popular moral and political satire to the cusp of the 19th century. Kunzle too is interested in comics as a mass medium, but from an art-historical perspective influenced by a Marxist vision of social history. If he is far from taking the celebratory stance of the popular culture movement, Kunzle also stands apart from the reflection theory of communications scholars like Berger or Reitberger and Fuchs. The academic historiography of comics essentially begins with Kunzle, though his work is an outlier to the main growth of Comics Studies in the 1970s and '80s because it does not intersect with mass communication theory, American Studies, or English. (It would be some time, 20 years or more, before comics scholars in the academy would seriously engage Kunzle.)

During this period, Comics Studies had little to do with peer-reviewed journals. The first notable example of the new Comics Studies within an academic journal was a special section in an issue of the typically un-refereed *Journal of Popular Culture* in 1971. Said section, with Arthur Asa Berger leading off, included half a dozen articles about comics. This number of the *JPC* (5.1) appears to have been the first English-language academic journal issue devoted to comics since the *Journal of Educational Sociology* published two special issues on comic books back in the 1940s. It was followed in 1979 by another special section in *JPC* (12.4) titled "The Comics as Culture," edited by Tom Inge, a pioneering effort that includes seven articles, among them Bob Harvey's "The Aesthetics of the Comic Strip" (which Harvey later worked into his book *The Art of the Funnies*). If Berger and many of the other preceding books approached comics from the standpoint of mass communication, Inge and company approach comics from a Russell Nye sort of angle, with expertise in literature and folklore (very much in the PCA vein).

In short, academic comics research at first focused on media and American Studies, but arose in step with, or even a step behind, popular scholarship that emerged from fandom under the umbrella of Pop Art. This popular scholarship at its best was *essayistic* in Craig Fischer's sense: neither narrowly fannish nor strictly academic, but written by enthusiasts with a broad frame of reference (see Fischer, 2010, par. 13). Some of it was terrific (take for example Les Daniels's book *Comix: A History of Comic Books in America*, from 1971). This popular scholarship was largely independent of established institutions and was personal, quirky, even anarchic, rooted in a club mentality rather than the University. It influenced everything to come, much as the French *Cahiers du Cinéma*, though not itself academic, changed film criticism so profoundly that it influenced academic film studies from then on (the non-academic *Comics Journal* has shaped academic discourse on comics in a similar way). As academia began to take interest, media studies provided a strong impetus, as did, belatedly, English and American Studies through their offshoot, the PCA movement. Again, faultlines appeared early on between populist studies and the so-called pedantic or allegedly joyless academic studies, yet in some cases academically trained scholars produced brightly packaged popular books on the medium. The main institution to take up comics academically, the PCA, espoused a notably *anti*-academic or at least anti-elitist line. Ray Browne's official history of the Association was originally (1989) titled *Against Academia*, even though it was published by Bowling Green State (and the line of books that Ray and Pat Browne started there is now an imprint of the University of Wisconsin Press). The fear that academic study would "lose sight" of the joy of comics and an insistence that Comics Studies take place in an environment friendly to fans and creators as well as career scholars has strongly influenced the growth of Comics Studies ever since.

It bears repeating that comics scholars have been at work for a long time. Yet the sense of Comics Studies as a brand-new undertaking, a brave, foolhardy David against academia's institutional Goliath, still persists. Part of the mythology of Comics Studies (which perhaps performs an important identity function for us) is that we are quixotic rebels, outnumbered and misunderstood. This is the story we so often tell ourselves. But why, if Comics Studies has been around for so long? Despite more than 40 years of growing academic interest in comics, despite more than a quarter century of the Comics Arts Conference, despite more than 20 years of the International Comic Arts Forum, despite the Modern Language Association's Comics and Graphic Narratives Discussion Group, founded in 2009, it appears we still have institution-building to do.

I believe that, for Comics Studies to grow, the work of scattered scholars needs to be recognized as part of a common endeavor, so that our students can get beyond the radical uncertainty and wheel-rebuilding that comes with working in a nascent field. Furthermore, the anti-academic outlook that once propelled Comics Studies is something I believe we have outgrown. Comics Studies shouldn't be "against" academia, but rather should be seeking to show what academic ways of knowing can do when they are freed of narrow, self-preserving conventionalism and elitism. Comics Studies need not hold on to a self-marginalizing identity, and indeed that kind of identity denies our field and our students the resources needed to grow. I believe we must secure those resources and provide a more stable foundation for the future of this field. The trick is, how do we do this? How do we build a hub, when our field falls between the worlds and has a history of rejecting strict disciplinarity and seeking new forms of exploration?

If Comics Studies in the United States has had an anti-institutional bias, and has insisted that scholarship stay rooted in the experiences of fans and creators, in my view we're far beyond needing to worry about that now. Often I have heard comics scholars argue that we must avoid what has happened to other academicized fields, which, so the argument goes, have abandoned vernacular criticism, fans, and creators in favor of a blanched academicism that is too narrowly specialized, too "theoretical," or too hard to read. Comics Studies ought not to worry about this any longer. First off, the field is in no danger of losing sight of the joys of comics; our history teaches us otherwise. Comics Studies will continue to include and reflect upon the experiences of creators and fans, as it must. Historically, this is so deeply engrained in our field that we need not worry about becoming remote or out of touch. Second, I do not believe Comics Studies will recapitulate the development of other, already-established fields. Comics Studies will not follow the developmental path of any existing discipline, for we are living in a changed academic world; out of necessity, our work must ally with communities and projects outside of academia. Service learning, the open-access movement, digital culture, and other innovations are opening up opportunities for academics to reach out and connect to broader publics. In any case, Comics Studies is growing up in an environment of heightened self-awareness about method, discipline, and purpose (at a moment when other, longer-established fields are starting to question *their* identity). Comics scholarship is rising up at a moment of both opportunity and crisis within higher education, so its developmental story will not be like that of film studies, American Studies, or any other discipline. Historical analogies only explain so much; we are at a moment unlike any before.

The danger we do face, though, is that we will make the job we have to do harder for our students and advisees to come, because we don't have solid institutions in our field to which they can look for encouragement and guidance. Instead, we have a track record of making things up as we go. While institutions like the Popular Culture Association have created places where our independent studies can sometimes come together, they have stopped short of asking the necessary tough questions about how to develop the field further. We would benefit from more and better institution-building and self-reflection.

If Comics Studies has been slow to develop institutionally, the most important reason for that is one that actually gives me hope. Comics scholarship has no disciplinary status in the traditional sense, no cohesive, clearly demarcated, self-contained disciplinary identity—and I would argue that it cannot have one. That is, it cannot have a disciplinary identity that serves to isolate it and shore up its borders, for two reasons: one, because the heterogeneous nature of comics itself means that, in practice, comics study has to be at the intersection of various disciplines (art history, communication, literature, design, and so forth); and, two, because this multidisciplinary nature of comics represents, in principle, *a challenge to the very idea of disciplinarity as the academy is used to practicing it.* Comics Studies forcefully reminds us that the disciplines cannot be discrete and self-contained; in effect, our field defies or at least seriously questions the compartmentalizing of knowledge that occurs within academia. Inevitably, Comics Studies will bring together various disciplines and methodologies in a workspace that is at least multidisciplinary, and, we hope, truly and deliberately *inter*disciplinary. Comics Studies can foster collaboration across disciplinary and program boundaries.

What happens when your object of study compels you to work the boundaries, margins, and overlaps between the disciplines? What *can* happen? On what grounds can we build departments, communities, programs—that demand resources—in a higher education system already in crisis, a system that has sometimes called for interdisciplinarity but seldom fostered it? The institutional life of Comics Studies going forward will depend on our ability to answer these questions: to step back far enough to see where our individual disciplines can work together, and what they can contribute to a truly interdisciplinary project of knowledge-making. Comics Studies can occupy a special place in the ecology of knowledge—a place that is no place, if you like, or many, many places. That is a complex mission, one that may complicate our institution-building, but it is an exciting one, at the intersection of fields and cultures, the crossroads of disciplines. Comics Studies can occupy such a place, if we have an honest dialogue about the history of our field. We have to learn ways to discuss and value our differences in Comics Studies and yet still band together to build that hub.

Being in Comics Studies—in my case, being an English professor in Comics Studies—means being simultaneously on the inside and the outside. My connections with scholars outside of English, I believe, have made me a better comics scholar *and* a better English professor. Of course I advise up-and-coming comics scholars to find ways to make comics answer core questions in their home disciplines; that is solid career advice, after all, and a way of bringing comics scholars from the margins to the center. But the joy of Comics Studies, for me, is partly in the way it has enabled me to pose those disciplinary questions from outside as well as within. In other words, comics has profoundly affected the way I've learned to see my discipline, and comics is my passport to working across disciplines. It has shaped how I see my role as an academic citizen.

Obviously, there is a contradiction between celebrating Comics Studies as an anti-discipline and at the same time seeking to build an institutional place for it. I have inhabited that contradiction for some time. Many of us have. In an effort to resolve it, I and many colleagues have worked together to found the Comics Studies Society, a professional association and learned society launched in 2014 and now supported by hundreds of members from diverse countries and disciplines. This society is not exclusively academic, but does have the professional needs of academics at its heart. Naturally I do not believe academics have a monopoly on useful knowledge (any survey of the history of our field would tell us otherwise), but I do believe that academic comics research needs and deserves greater institutional resources. We need more degree programs, more interdisciplinary programs, and more concerted discussion of practice. We need a refereed journal of record. We need resources for young scholars, for teachers and job-seekers. We need awards and recognitions. In short, we need the resources, traditions, and service opportunities that come with an acknowledged discipline. To build such resources requires, ironically, recognizing comics as an anti-discipline that refuses boundaries and pigeonholes. For comics scholarship in the academy to be something other than a prescription for lifelong independent study, we need to step back, reflect on the historically divided and heterogeneous nature of this field, understand our differences, and build partnerships despite, or rather because of, those differences. We need resources, and to build them we must get past the anti-academic mindset and lay claim to an actual academic identity, one with pluralism and interdisciplinarity at its core.

If Comics Studies, which has grown so spectacularly in recent years, is to survive and thrive during this time of academic crisis, it will be because we have found a way to inhabit simultaneously a space of freedom, of anti-disciplinarity, and yet of responsibility too. It will be because we have found, or rather built, a place.

Notes

1. I have taken up this issue of Comics Studies versus disciplinarity on other occasions, notably in the ejournal Transatlantica (2010) and in a plenary talk at the Rocky Mountain Conference on Comics and Graphic Novels, Denver, Colorado, in June 2014, where the present piece began to take shape. Many thanks to William Kuskin for inspiring and guiding the early revisions of this essay.
2. Tracing the rise of Comics Studies in academia remains a challenge, and I have found myself grasping at, if not straws, then the littlest clues, which come here and there, often from unexpected sources. White and Abel, 1963, approaching comics from a mass communications standpoint, declare that serious “analytic” study of the comics began in “the early 1920s” (p. 293), and offer an extensive bibliography divided into, essentially, books, professional journals, general periodicals, and theses. It contains a number of sources prior to 1940 (though these are often brief and journalistic in nature). The earliest thesis it identifies dates to 1939. Gene Kannenberg, Jr.’s expansive list of “Comics-Related Dissertations & Theses,” at ComicsResearch.org, funnels together many sources and shows the richness of the field, though it finds no examples before the 1940s and very few examples from the ’40s and ’50s. Sol Davidson’s *Culture and the Comic Strips* (NYU, 1959) has been cited as the first Ph.D. thesis on the medium (see Davidson, 2003). More recently, scholars such as Brad Ricca and Sean Howe (Ricca, 2014) and Carol Tilley (2016) have uncovered pioneering Master’s theses from the ’40s. Beyond theses, the backstory of Comics Studies is diffuse and hard to track. I recommend the “Pioneers of Comic Art Scholarship” series, edited by John A. Lent for the *International Journal of Comic Art*, a series that offers revealing personal accounts of what it was like to work in Comics Studies before the field had a name; see in particular *IJOCA* 5.1 (Spring 2003), 5.2 (Fall 2003), and 7.2 (Fall 2005). Speaking personally, I cannot thank enough Michael Rhode and John Bullough’s online Comics Research Bibliography (1996–2011) and the massive series of print bibliographies compiled by John Lent (Greenwood Press, four vols., 1994–1996, and Praeger, six vols., 2003–2006). Lent’s volumes together make up an astounding record of international comics scholarship. The global bibliography that comprises *IJOCA* 11.3 (Winter 2009), compiled by Rhode and Lent, extends that work even further. See Rhode, 2007, to put this wealth of bibliographic work into context.
3. This passage, the most quoted in Ray Browne’s work, appears in numerous biographies and tributes. I have drawn it from the introduction to Ray Browne and Pat Browne’s edited reference work, *The Guide to United States Popular Culture* (2001). It also occurs in, e.g., the Ray and Pat Browne-authored introduction to Browne, 2005; and, in slightly changed form, in the posthumous Browne and Urish, 2011. I first encountered the passage (unsourced) in Gary Hoppenstand’s profile of Ray and Pat Browne in Browne and Marsden, 1999, p. 61.
4. Browne’s resistance to what he called “fads” in theory colors a great deal of his writing about academia, but is perhaps most clearly expressed in his 1995 essay, “The Theory-Methodology Complex: The Critics’ Jabberwock,” which likens “structuralism,” “post-modernism,” and other talked-about theoretical perspectives to a devious siren song that few in popular culture studies “have fallen for.” These “highly esoteric and irrelevant theories,” Browne argues, make sense

to "no one but academics" (145). In general, Browne treats the word *academics*, when used in the plural to describe his profession, as a pejorative; his writings are peppered with characterizations of the academic class as narrow, elitist, unthinkingly devoted to the status quo, and prone to rarefied, hair-splitting debates, yet also flighty and faddish. When I read these passages, I feel as if I am hearing the echoes of an old and bitter quarrel – one that has perhaps also fed into elitist dismissals of the PCA. That Browne fought that fight is one of the reasons I am able to write these words at all today, though what I am recommending is that we rethink the terms of the fight.

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PREFACE

Matthew J. Smith and Randy Duncan

As an undergraduate at Indiana University in the early 1970s, Michael Uslan had an unorthodox idea: to teach a class about the comics he had grown up with and loved. Although his proposal was initially met with skepticism from the university officials reviewing it, once approved the course received a good deal of attention, both from the students who wanted to take it and the media who were fascinated by its existence. Stories about his course drew attention from media outlets ranging from the Associated Press to *Playboy* magazine. Uslan did not remain in academia, instead charting a course that would lead to success in Hollywood as a producer on virtually every Batman film adaptation since director Tim Burton's 1989 blockbuster *Batman* to director Christopher Nolan's Academy Award winning Dark Knight Trilogy and beyond.

With the contemporary media coverage of the course, his popular autobiography (*The Boy Who Loved Batman*), and his many convention appearances, Michael Uslan may be the most famous comics teacher, but he was by no means alone in those early days. It was also in 1972 that Sonia Maria Bibe Luyten developed the Comics Publishing course at Universidade de São Paulo. Luyten left the university in 1984, but the course is still taught there to this day (see Waldomiro Vergueiro's essay). It was the year before that Université Paris-Sorbonne hired Francis Laccassin to teach a course on the history and aesthetics of comics as the self-styled chaire d'histoire de la bande dessinée (see Jeremy Larance's chapter on Organizations). It was in 1967 that Arthur Asa Berger wrote to editor Stan Lee hoping to get free sets of Marvel comics for the course, The Comic Strip (and Book) and Society, he was attempting to develop at San Francisco State College (Stan Lee Archives). Berger was one of at least a dozen teachers and professors who contacted Lee in the late 1960s or early 1970s asking for free comics they could use in their classrooms (see Robert Weiner's chapter on Educating about Comics). Unfortunately, not every early contributor to Comics Studies will be mentioned in this book.

Comics Studies is an academic field maturing into its own, but one previously bereft of any authoritative account of its own history. *The Secret Origins of Comics Studies* is an in-depth study of the individuals and institutions that have created and shaped the field of

Comics Studies over the past 75 years. We believe that Comics Studies is overdue for a text that documents the emergence of our field.

Rather than attempt a single narrative of the field's emergence and development, we've elected to incorporate multiple voices in recounting how the endeavor began, welcoming the contributions of some of the leading contemporary scholars. Reading each contribution to this anthology should be like examining a facet of a gem, giving a different perspective to a structure that is, ultimately, united in the common enterprise that has become Comics Studies.

Many comics scholars will first engage with this book by turning to the index and looking for their names. If you are reading this you have probably already visited the index. It is inevitable that some people for whom we have great admiration will feel slighted. Each essay writer had to make decisions about which ideas, authors, or events to emphasize, but they also had to deal with editorial restrictions and natural barriers (language and availability).

Because the primary purpose of this work is to explore the foundations of Comics Studies rather than the recent trends, just a few years hence this work will seem to have glaring omissions. Some of the leading contemporary scholars (Bart Beaty, Jean-Paul Gabilliet, Jeet Heer, Richard Scully, Anne Magnussen, Thierry Smolderen, etc.) are scarcely mentioned, if at all. Some approaches that have been the subject of recent books—the representation of disabilities in comics, the materiality of comics—received only sidebars.

The next edition of this book, or some other work that takes up the task, will have a major essay on other perspectives. For example, a number of monographs and anthologies that examine issues of identity and representation in comics are in progress, and some of them will be published before this book goes to press.

Another emerging approach that will warrant attention is data-driven research. Neil Cohn contends that most scholarship about the structure and functions of the comics art form has been based on speculation rather than hard evidence, and he is a strong advocate for systematically gathering data to support claims. Cohn has initiated a number of ongoing research projects that range from measuring physiological reactions of people reading comics to cataloguing the linguistic content of large numbers of comics. The *What Were Comics?* project spearhead by Bart Beaty, Benjamin Woo, and Nick Sousanis challenges the traditional comics historiography that focuses on the exceptional and seeks to create a data-driven history of the typical American comic book. Carol Tilley, Kathryn La Barre, and John Walsh are developing a digital Comic Book Reader Archive that will allow research about comics readership and fandom to be based on big data gleaned from letter columns, fanzines, convention records, etc.

The language barrier has limited the scope of a number of essays. Comics scholarship produced in Japan could have figured into a variety of the essays, but little of this work has been translated and few of the contributors to this volume read Japanese. This is why we asked Nicholas Theisen to write an essay on manga scholarship. Portuguese presents another barrier. Brazilian comics historians and theorists have been actively publishing since 1970, yet they are seldom mentioned in the essays that follow. There are many multilingual comics scholars, but few of them read Portuguese.

In the final sidebar of this volume Pascal Lefèvre urges comics scholars to cross borders. He wants us to occasionally leave our "islands" of methodology or genre, but more importantly he wants us to cross (at least with Skype if not airplanes) international borders. He calls for more comparative research to be undertaken collaboratively by international teams. We hope that this book will facilitate such collaborations.

The contributions are organized according to four broad themes: the educators, the historians, the theorists, and the institutions. Within each thematic unit are several chapters that explore more specific areas within the field. Although this approach has the tendency to produce some overlap, we believe it's an exciting means to think about the interconnected ways in which the interdisciplinary movement has developed. For instance, even though the work of Donald Ault factors into the development of education, he also helped establish some of the foundational institutions in the field, including the online journal, *ImageText*.

In addition to the detailed accounts provided by our featured contributors, we are also fortunate to have brief contributions by some of the pioneers in the field. Their short essays provide perspective in looking back at what transpired in the formation of our field and look ahead to what they foresee for its growth. We are honored to have a few of those foundational figures help us to think about how we got to this point and the work that needs to be done, even as we celebrate the work that they have accomplished.

There are now hundreds of academics who self-identify as comics scholars. We hope that *The Secret Origins of Comics Studies* is a useful work for any comics scholar undertaking a review of the literature and an indispensable tool for students seeking to justify a thesis or dissertation on comics. And as Comics Studies continues to grow, we hope that those who come after us can appreciate the foundation laid before them by looking back to the ideas and institutions shaped by our predecessors.

Special thanks to David Stoddard of Henderson State University, who executed the cover concept, honoring the first issue of the comic book *Secret Origins* (1961), featuring some of the pioneering figures in Comics Studies: (left-to-right, top tier) John Lent and M. Thomas Inge, Maurice Horn and Pierre Couperie, Pascal Lefèvre, (middle tier) Trina Robbins, David Kunzle, (bottom tier) Waldomiro Vergueiro, Yoshihiro Yonezawa, Reinhold Reitberger and Wolfgang J. Fuchs. Our thanks to the pioneers who supplied reference photographs and to Kim Munson and Jaqueline Berndt for their help in securing others.

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PART 1

The Educators

1

EDUCATING WITH COMICS

Carol L. Tilley

Comics have been part of classrooms for at least a century. In the early 20th century, for instance, when tuberculosis was still a prominent health threat in the United States, a writer in the *Journal of Education* proposed that having students draw comics to highlight hygienic practices related to the disease was a useful instructional strategy (Routzahn, 1910). Around the same time, an English teacher at Columbia Teachers College's Horace Mann School reflected on an instructional unit on newspapers and other periodicals. One group of students, he wrote, delivered a "highly interesting reflectoscope talk on cartoons" (Abbott, 1913, p. 423). A history teacher in Baltimore praised the use of comics in making history vital to students. He wrote, "a cartoon is, so to speak, a double exposure. It is a picture, not only of an individual, but of a public" (Millspaugh, 1914, p. 682).

This early interest in using comics as instructional aides is unsurprising. In the years after the Civil War in the United States, editorial and political cartooning flourished in popular periodicals and newspapers. In the first decade of the 20th century, newspapers' pages swelled with cartoons and the new comic strips, incurring wide readership. These developments in the comics medium coincided with an interest in the new Progressive educational techniques of child-centered instruction, active learning, and the broader use of visual aids and technologies such as comics and reflectoscope, an early opaque projector (cf. Cremin, 1961, Saettler, 2004). The result was a burgeoning interest in bringing comics into educational settings.

This chapter surveys efforts—some systematic, others more idiosyncratic—to infuse comics into teaching and learning. It will emphasize cartooning in all of its forms, unlike McCloud's *Understanding Comics* (1994), which excludes single-panel editorial and gag cartoons from comics' sphere. Furthermore, the chapter will focus on efforts to integrate comics in primary and secondary-level teaching and learning in the United States during roughly the first half of the 20th century. Rather than focus exclusively on schools, this chapter will include libraries, museums, and similar sites of informal learning for young people. Further, it extends previous work by Nyberg (2002, 2010), Thomas (2011), Tilley (2013), and Tilley and Weiner (2016).

The Pioneers: Comics as Educational Tools before 1940

The examples noted in this chapter's introduction describe some of the earliest documented uses of comics in primary and secondary school classrooms, but they are not the only ones. Of the early attempts to integrate comics into classrooms, perhaps none was as widespread or as widely known as *Texas History Movies*. The brainchild of *Dallas Morning News*' managing editor E. B. Doran, *Texas* ran Monday through Friday during the school years 1926–1927 and 1927–1928. Dallas school superintendent Dr. J. F. Kimball reportedly gave his blessing to the project and came up with the name. Through more than 400 strips, *Texas* showcased the state's history from the 16th through the 19th century. During the next several decades, these strips were collected into published volumes and distributed for use in schools throughout the state. Despite racial stereotyping common in comics of this era and an Anglo-centric focus, *Texas* seemed to be popular with teachers and students. Pulitzer Prize-winning writer Larry McMurtry recalled, "*Texas History Movies*...stopped two generations of Texas public school students dead in their tracks where history is concerned...The effect, not to mention the irreverence, of those comics would be hard to overstate" (2004, pp. 92–93).

In contrast to the widespread use of *Texas History Movie*, most other classroom applications of comics were modest and singular. Published editorial cartoons made their way into social studies classes, but at least one teacher proposed that students also draw their own cartoons to connect with current and historical events; in providing guidance to teachers who wished to emulate his practice, he encouraged them to emphasize "the idea involved and not the artistry of the production" (Wilson, 1928, p. 197). In language arts classes, comics provided opportunities for active learning. For instance, students presented on current events as expressed in editorial cartoons (Russell, 1914), gathered examples of grammar errors in comic strips and then created comics explaining preferred usage (Trovillion and Renard, 1917), and created comics for a class newspaper (Burkholder, 1914). In a secondary school English class in Athens, Ohio, students engaged in a variety of projects to help them understand *Treasure Island*. According to the teacher, one of the projects was "a booklet of the story done in pen pictures, with short sentences explaining each. The order was that of the comic strips minus the conversation" (Bryant, 1932, p. 139). Interestingly, the format Bryant described is similar to the one adopted by the artists who serialized *Treasure Island* in Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson's National Comics publications in the mid-1930s (cf. Tilley, 2013a).

It is quite likely that comics found their way into more classrooms than one might ascertain from reports by teachers. The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), the key organization representing language arts teachers at primary, secondary, and collegiate levels, published its first national curriculum document in 1935. As with many standards documents, one might argue that *An Experience Curriculum in English* (Hatfield, 1935), which embodied more than five years of work, articulated current practices as much as it set expectations for teaching and learning. The NCTE document included topics and activities that integrated more traditional language arts experiences with activities representing the everyday worlds of younger students. As detailed in Tilley (2013b), *An Experience Curriculum* encouraged teachers to discuss comic strips as part of lessons on taste discrimination and humor. It also urged teachers to use then-contemporary mass media such as newspapers in the classroom, heightening the likelihood of school-based encounters with comics.

Through clubs and convocations, schools helped young people engage with comics outside of formal learning activities. For instance, junior high students in Rochester, New York, in the 1920s could join more than five-dozen clubs (Sheehan, 1921). One of these clubs was Cartooning, which had a membership cap of 25 students and required prospective members to submit work samples for approval by the club's director. A similar club was open to students at Ambridge Junior High School in Pennsylvania (Grose, 1929), and Cartooning was one of the representative high school clubs mentioned in an educational guidance text (Hill and Mosher, 1931). In at least one school, a cartoonist was invited to speak about his work: Herbert Johnson, a conservative political cartoonist with the *Saturday Evening Post*, spoke to students about newspaper and magazine comics during a convocation at the McKinley Preparatory School in Lincoln, Nebraska (Pyrtle, 1915).

Museums and libraries capitalized on children's interests in comics to fulfill their goals for outreach and instruction. For instance, during the last half of the 1930s, the Cleveland Museum of Art began a cartooning club—for boys only—for children of members (Munro, 1936). In Chicago, the Art Institute offered occasional lectures on cartooning aimed at young people such as the one advertised for October 1927 (Bulletin, 1927). Chicago's Field Museum of Natural History created a comic strip story, Joe Elk, to go along with one of its exhibits of North American Mounds Dwellers. It justified its decision by pointing to the comic strip-like Mixtec Codexes from the 15th century that shared the story of Eight Deer Jaguar Claw (Winn, 1944). At least one library, the Enoch Pratt Free Library in Baltimore, intended to use comic strips commissioned from cartoonist Richard Yardley of the Baltimore Sun, to help educate younger library users about library practices (Wheeler, 1935).

A handful of educational researchers studied the instructional value of comics during these years. One of them, Laurance Shaffer (1930), a doctoral candidate at Columbia's Teachers College, studied more than a thousand children in grades four through twelve to understand how young people developed in their abilities to understand editorial cartoons. He found that the period of greatest development occurs in junior high-aged students and that the facility to interpret cartoons requires knowledge and skill just as progress in reading and mathematics does. In his conclusion, he recommended that cartoons be used in elementary school classrooms. A similar study by Lena Roberts Smith (1940) showed that there seems to be an association between interpretative abilities and intelligence, but that children regardless of ability would benefit from direct instruction in interpreting cartoons. Furthermore, she argued that "subject materials which may appear dull might be made to appear just a little brighter by the proper use of cartoons" (Smith, 1940, p. 67). Another researcher, Lewis Smith Jr. (1938) examined the literary merit of comic strips such as *The Gumps* and *Tarzan*. Using his analytic framework that included emotional richness and characterization, Smith determined that existing strips as a whole failed to meet the criteria of "literature." Still, he proposed that "the construction of a comic dealing with child experience and utilizing the appeals of children on a literary level would result in the placing of literature in the hands of more children. Comics could become one of the most effective non-school educational agencies" (Smith, 1938, p. 94). This early and eclectic enthusiasm for comics, though, gave way to more focused attempts.

The Legitimizers: Comics in Classrooms during the 1940s and 1950s

Comics publishers—in particular, National (DC) Comics and its sometimes affiliate All-American Comics—helped to make comics a more legitimate tool for teaching and learning. As Tilley (2013a) details, National Comics, under the direction of its founding publisher Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson, included a number of serialized classics such as *A Tale of Two Cities* and *Ivanhoe* in the pages of its general comics magazines throughout the mid- and late-1930s. National also experimented with reviews of juvenile books and illustrated poems. In the early 1940s, National and All-American Comics, the latter helmed by M. C. Gaines, regularized juvenile book reviews, printing a contribution from Josette Frank of the Child Study Association of America in the pages of nearly every issue between 1941 and 1945. National also worked with libraries to sponsor the "Superman Good Reading" project, which used the superhero to recommend books for young readers. Although none of their endeavors lasted more than a few years, both Wheeler-Nicholson and Gaines seemed to understand the educative and communicative potential of comics. Gaines in particular strived to make comics tools for learning through his later Educational Comics (EC, which became Entertaining Comics a few years after his death) line of *Picture Stories from the Bible* and similar titles.

More than publishers' efforts, the sheer force that was comic books in the mid-20th century United States demanded that educators pay attention. The 1930s invention of comic books coincided with young people's growing economic power and leisure time, quickly making this new format a publishing phenomenon that could not be ignored. Only two years after Superman's debut in *Action Comics*, comic book sales outstripped traditional children's books by a five to one margin (Bechtel, 1941), made all the more impressive by considering comics' 10-cent cover price in comparison to the typical children's hardcover that might cost two dollars. Comic books' popularity astounded educators and educational researchers, and while many of them responded to the new format with fear and suspicion (cf. Tilley, 2007), some resolved to understand how this format might be usefully integrated into teaching and learning.

Foreign language instructors found easy purchase in comics of all kinds. A high school Spanish language instructor, for instance, reported ordering a variety of comics from Mexico, Venezuela, Cuba, Argentina, and Spain to supplement his students' regular texts. He reported that students' oral fluency had improved since reading comics, and that these books "broaden the range of pupils' vocabularies and deepen their knowledge of structure, thus increasing reading comprehension" (Vacca, 1959, p. 291). Plus, he reported that their attitudes toward the class and language improved. In another instance, a teacher from the New Mexico Military Institute enlisted the school's librarian for assistance in ordering Spanish-language Sunday newspapers so he could provide students with comics and other high-interest materials for reading (Hespelt and Williams, 1943, p. 454). Newspaper comics also found their way into college-level language classes. At the University of Cincinnati, Spanish students acted out the dialogues from the comics, taking the roles of various characters (Hutchings, 1946), while at Baldwin-Wallace College, students offered extemporaneous descriptions of action in nearly wordless comic strips like *Henry* (Sinnema, 1957).

NCTE's *Experience Curriculum* continued to hold sway during these decades, making comics a continued feature of language arts classes. Often in English and similar classes, teachers made comics the center of discussions on reading taste and aesthetic appeal, hoping to persuade impressionable and dedicated comics fans to look elsewhere for their recreational reading. The approaches differed: for example, junior high students in Pennsylvania conducted surveys, held discussions, and even created their own comic strips, all in an effort to extend their reading beyond comic books (Something Better, 1952), while elementary school students in California investigated the folkloric and literary origins of characters like