Performativity, Cultural Construction, and the Graphic Narrative
draws on Performance Studies scholarship to understand the social impact of graphic novels and their socio-political function.

Addressing issues of race, gender, ethnicity, war, mental illness, and the environment, the volume encompasses the diversity and variety inherent in the graphic narrative medium. Informed by the scholarship of Dwight Conquergood and his model for performance praxis, this collection of chapters makes links between these seemingly disparate areas of study to open new avenues of research for comics and graphic narratives. An international team of authors offers a detailed analysis of new and classical graphic texts from Britain, Iran, India, and Canada as well as the United States.

This book will be of interest to students and scholars in the areas of communication, literature, Comics Studies, Performance Studies, sociology, languages, English, and Gender Studies, and anyone with an interest in deepening their acquaintance with and understanding of the potential of graphic narratives.

Leigh Anne Howard is Professor of Communication Studies at the University of Southern Indiana. She researches the performance of personal and social identity as well as performance methodology and community-based theatre.

Susanna Hoeness-Krupsaw teaches English and Humanities at the University of Southern Indiana. Her research interests include American and Canadian literature, and the graphic novel. She has recently published on “The Role of Talk Story in Maxine Hong Kingston and Amy Tan,” “Teaching March in the Borderlands between Social Justice and Pop Culture,” and “Mary Gordon.”
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Performativity, Cultural Construction, and the Graphic Narrative

Edited by
Leigh Anne Howard and Susanna Hoeness-Krupsaw
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Contributors

Sara Austin is Visiting Assistant Professor of English at Miami University. Her work investigates bodies and identity in children’s and young adult media and culture. In addition to co-editing the 2016 special issue of the Children’s Literature Association Quarterly on genre and African American children’s literature, she has published articles in Transformative Works and Cultures, The Lion and the Unicorn, The Looking Glass: New Perspectives in Children’s Literature, and The Journal of Graphic Novels & Comics. Her forthcoming book examines monsters in children’s media as metaphors for bodily difference and as agents of cultural change.

Alissa Burger is an Assistant Professor of English and Director of Writing Across the Curriculum at Culver-Stockton College. She teaches courses in research, writing, and literature. She is the author of Teaching Stephen King: Horror, The Supernatural, and New Approaches to Literature (Palgrave, 2016) and The Wizard of Oz as American Myth: A Critical Study of Six Versions of the Story, 1900–2007 (McFarland, 2012), and the editor of Teaching Graphic Novels in the English Classroom: Pedagogical Possibilities of Multimodal Literacy Engagement (Palgrave, 2017).

Partha Bhattacharjee is Assistant Professor of English at the Amity Institute of English Studies and Research at Amity University in Patna, India. In 2012 and 2016, respectively, he completed his MA and MPhil from The University of Burdwan, Burdwan, India. His research interests include memory and postmemory, Trauma Studies, popular fiction, and graphic narratives. He has also presented papers which focus on gender sensitivity, memory, trauma, and history of graphic narratives at conferences in India.

Melissa M. Caldwell received her PhD at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in English Literature with a focus on Early Modern Literature. She currently works as an Associate Professor of English at Eastern Illinois University, where she teaches classes on the Renaissance and war literature. Her research interests include ethics and literature, hybridity in literary-philosophical texts, and the relationship
between word and image in literature. Her most recent publication is *Skepticism and Belief in Early Modern England: The Reformation of Moral Value* (Routledge, 2016).

**Susanna Hoeness-Krupsaw** is Associate Professor of English at the University of Southern Indiana. She has over thirty years of teaching experience at the undergraduate and graduate level, including courses in the graphic novel. Her research interests include modern American and Canadian fiction as well as graphic narratives. She has recently published and presented on Marguerite Abouet’s *Aya* and John Lewis’s *March*. She earned her PhD in English at Southern Illinois University.

**Leigh Anne Howard**, Professor of Communication Studies and Graduate Director of Communication at the University of Southern Indiana, studies the performance of personal and social identity as well as performance methodology. She has published articles in journals including *Text and Performance Quarterly, Journal of Applied Communication Research, Communication Education, American Behavioral Scientist, Journal of Intercultural Communication* (formerly *World Communication Journal*), and *Journal of Fandom Studies*. She earned her PhD in Speech Communication from Louisiana State University.

**Winona Landis** received her PhD in English with a certificate in Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies from Miami University (Ohio). Her work has been published in *South Asian Popular Culture, Continuum: Journal of Media and Culture*, and the anthology *Food, Feminisms, Rhetorics* (Southern Illinois UP, 2017). Her dissertation, entitled “Illustrating Empire: Race, Gender, and Visuality in Contemporary Asian American Literary Culture,” analyzes graphic narratives and the use of visuality in transnational Asian American media and literature. She is a Visiting Assistant Professor, Asian/Asian American Studies at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio.

**Melanie Lee** earned her PhD in rhetoric and composition, and a graduate certificate in Women’s and Gender Studies from Ohio University. As Associate Professor of English and Affiliated Associate Professor of Gender Studies at the University of Southern Indiana, she studies the social construction of masculinized L/logos and its impacts. She teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in digital and professional writing, rhetoric and composition, histories of rhetoric, writing pedagogies, theories, and Gender Studies. Recent research includes her co-authored chapter, “Toward a *Researcherly* Ethos: Building Authority with Inquiry in Information Literacy and Writing,” in *Teaching Information Literacy and Writing Studies Volume 2: Upper-Level and Graduate Courses* (Purdue University Press, 2019) and “Masculinities: More Rhetorical Questions than Answers” in the *Companion to Gender Studies* (Wiley, forthcoming).
Grace Martin is Assistant Professor of Spanish at Bridgewater College in Virginia. Her academic research focuses on posthumanism in Latin American science fiction, although her scholarly interests extend to all fantasy and speculative genres. Martin has also developed and taught first-year seminars on superheroes and intersectional identities.

Alane L. Presswood is Director of Forensics at West Chester University. She earned her doctorate in Rhetoric and Public Culture from Ohio University in 2017. Her research generally focuses on the intersections of feminism, digital media, and public address, with occasionally forays into the gothic or superhero genres.

Jamie Ryan is a PhD candidate in English Literature at Queen’s University in Kingston, Ontario, Canada. He studies sports literature and gender, and his thesis is on women’s hockey narratives. His research interests include Canadian nationalism and national myths in sport as well as gender, queer theory, and graphic novels.

Chris Ruíz-Velasco is an Associate Professor in the English, Comparative Literature, and Linguistics Department at California State University, Fullerton. His current work is focused on graphic novels, crime fiction, and the work of Chester Himes and Walter Mosley. Among Ruíz-Velasco’s publications are “‘Lost in these Damn White Halls’: Power and Masculinity in Walter Mosley’s Fiction” in *Midwest Quarterly* and “Order Out of Chaos: Whiteness, White Supremacy, and Thomas Dixon Jr.” in *College Literature*.

Chad Tew is Associate Professor of Journalism at the University of Southern Indiana. His research interests include media ethics and new technologies. His PhD is from Indiana University.

Priyanka Tripathi is an Assistant Professor of English at Indian Institute of Technology Patna. Her PhD dissertation in 2011 from Indian Institute of Technology Kharagpur was titled “Sexual is Political: Gender, Body and Language in Indian Women’s Short Fiction in English.” She has published with *Muse India*, *IUP Journal of English Studies*, *Atlantic Literary Review*, and *The Commonwealth Review*. She works in the area of Indian writing in English, Gender and Sexuality Studies, and literary censorship.

Michelle D. Wise attended the University of South Alabama in Mobile, where she received her BA and MA in English. After moving to Nashville, TN, she pursued her doctoral degree and graduated with her PhD in English from Middle Tennessee State University. Her areas of study are Film Studies and Victorian literature; however, her research interests vary across several academic areas of study, such as Gothic Studies, children’s literature, comics and graphic novels, popular culture, and Women’s Studies.
We have thought about this book for several years, and we owe thanks to many for their help and faith as we have worked to realize its publication. Perhaps our most heartfelt thanks go to the contributors to the issue. Our colleagues patiently worked long and hard with us to situate this creative experience as a dialogue about our work and the potential of graphic narratives, and we appreciate their willingness to engage with us.


We owe gratitude to others who were particularly helpful along the way. We recognize Matthew Smith and Randy Duncan, editors of the Routledge Advances in Comics Series, for their encouragement as we started to consider what our anthology might contribute; Alissa Burger, Culver-Stockton College, for her encouragements; Sally Ebest, University of Missouri, St. Louis, and Khani Begum, Bowling Green State University, for their insightful reviews of our proposal; Dan Heaton and Sharon Croft, Capital University, for some last-minute reading and reminders; Laura Tutor for copyediting one of the chapters; Dawn Paris for her technical support; Jonathan Gray at Southern Illinois University for leading the way in exploring comics and performance; and numerous others who formally through conference presentations and informally in the halls or over dinner joined our conversation with enthusiasm to consider the impact of thinking about the graphic narrative in performative terms.

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1 Introduction, or transformations and the performance of text and image

Leigh Anne Howard and Susanna Hoeness-Krupsaw

In this volume, we draw on Performance Studies scholarship to offer, as Hillary Chute suggests, a different rubric for understanding the impact of graphic narratives (“Reading” 452). This rubric positions Performance Studies scholarship and its decades of research about literature, interpretation, textual bias, embodiment, transaction, and sociopolitical function as central to understanding more about how graphic narratives work and their potential for social and political change. Both performance and comics—in their role as product and process, their reliance on the verbal and visual, their insistence on audience engagement, and their subversion of a long-established textual bias—exist in what Dwight Conquergood calls a “borderland terrain” (“Ethnography” 80). Informed by Conquergood’s model for the way performance functions, this collection of chapters makes links between these seemingly disparate areas of study to open new avenues of research for comics and graphic narratives. Following Conquergood’s terminology, we have divided this collection into three parts—mimesis, poiesis, and kinesis—to illustrate the three functions graphic narratives have for social construction and audience engagement.

From cartoons to graphic novels to manga—the variety of comics, in combination with an awareness of their expressive potential, has generated both popular and scholarly interest over the last decade. Comics has experienced a revival and reassessment in the form of book-length, often more sophisticated, and better produced graphic narratives. Their readership has expanded beyond the young, male demographic to interest people of all ages, genders, races, and ethnicities, as attested by Elaine Martin’s survey of international developments in graphic narratives. This increased readership in combination with excitement about the genre itself has initiated a wave of publications that focuses on comics and their expressive potential. The first wave addressed how educators might utilize these narratives and their unique properties in the classroom at the middle school, high school, and post-secondary levels (e.g., Burger 2018; Carter 2007; Dong 2012). These publications emphasized or justified comics as a legitimate area of study. Because of its hybrid form and unusual conventions, comics had long been considered a lesser
genre and form, and its value was seriously contested by readers and scholars. For the longest time, the graphic narrative could not be taught in schools or discussed in academic articles without fear of scorn or ridicule, though perhaps ironically they were seen as a gateway to reading and understanding “better” or “real” literature. So, scholars interested in the graphic narrative sought to explain its merit—and potential.

Part of the scholarly justification entailed determining what to call texts that include words and images and how to distinguish between the different ways those texts appear and function on the page. Building on the ground-breaking work of Will Eisner, Scott McCloud embraced the idea that comics is essentially “sequential art” (5) or, in a more comprehensive definition, “juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer” (9). Having laid the groundwork for more detailed and complex analyses, McCloud’s definition still offers a solid starting point. The next generation of scholarly ventures is well represented through the work of Hillary Chute who was among the academics who first promoted inquiries into graphic narratives in well-respected journals, such as Modern Fiction Studies, PMLA, and Critical Inquiry. For Chute, “[c]omics might be defined as a hybrid word-and-image form in which two narrative tracks, one verbal and one visual, register temporality spatially” (452). She distinguishes comics from the graphic novel which she sees as a “book-length work in the medium of comics” (453).

As a result of the work of Eisner, McCloud, and Chute, among other scholars, we have seen the emergence of an exciting scholarly approach which examines comics through numerous critical lenses or with a range of theoretical orientations. For example, the field of narratology has entered the quickly growing arena of Comics Studies with an issue of SubStance edited by Jared Gardner and David Herman and an edited collection by Daniel Stein and Jan-Noël Thon. In their 2011 introduction to a special issue of SubStance, Jared Gardner and David Herman, deploring the absence of detailed applications of narrative theory to the comics genre, introduce a variety of narrative approaches to diverse comics and graphic narratives. In addition, as Bart Beaty has suggested, comics scholars have applied the terminology of film, cinema, and other technologies to their discussions of comics and graphic narratives or explore transmedia narrative strategies. Writing in Cinema Journal, Bart Beaty reflects on current developments in Comics Studies through comparisons with Film Studies fifty years earlier. Like Film Studies, he believes that Comics Studies will have to develop its own terminology and “move beyond the narrowly thematic readings of key works and begin to offer critical insights into comics as a social and aesthetic system that has broader transmedia and intermedia implications” (108).

Matthew Smith and Randy Duncan in 2011 have paved a path for moving the study of comics forward. With their 2011 publication, they
call for a new form of Comics Studies (4) that they hope can operate outside of established fields to embrace new technologies and new media. Each chapter in Smith and Duncan’s book illustrates a particular approach to the study of comics through a variety of critical lenses, such as feminism, Marxism, and reader response. Each chapter also includes a sample critical reading. Unfortunately, their excellent book, while addressing Comics Journalism and ethnography, does not include Performance Studies or cinema.

We hope our volume can contribute to this critical conversation. By focusing their critical lenses, the authors in this anthology initiate robust, critical conversations about how comics forms work and how they might contribute to our social, cultural, and political understanding. Though some of the comics discussed in the anthology are written expressly as a graphic narrative, many have been adapted from source works of fiction and non-fiction from multiple genres—the novel, film, animation, memoir, and news headlines, as well as other graphic narratives and comics styles. This ability to move between genres and across media illustrates what we might call a “transmedia performativity” in that they can easily cross now defunct boundaries, transform ideas, and challenge reader perceptions.

Because of the disciplinary “silos” academics so frequently inhabit, one of our greatest challenges has been gaging the levels of knowledge our reader may have about both comics and performance so that we neither overestimate the reader’s familiarity with those areas, nor patronize the readers who have a more sophisticated grasp on the scholarship in comics and performance. Our intended reading audience resembles our friends who, like us, enjoy reading comics and graphic narratives, perhaps have even taught them and want to find out what others think about them or want to expand their knowledge of graphic narratives beyond superhero stories. We also anticipate an academic audience with more familiarity with comics than with Performance Studies, and so, in this introduction, we review some basic ideas central to Performance Studies and to the connection we are making in the volume about a performance-centered approach to the graphic narrative.

Performance, performativity, and the graphic narrative

Few scholars have shown an interest in connecting Performance Studies with comics scholarship. Some of this reticence may be attributed to Scott McCloud’s claim that comics is not like a performance (McCloud 69). Two notable exceptions include Jonathan Gray’s article, “Comics and Performance/Experiments and Inquiry,” which reminds us performance is more than entertainment but is a potential mode of inquiry for “phenomena not usually considered performance” (n.p.). The other exception is Lisa Annalisa di Liddo’s book, Alan Moore: Comics as
Leigh Anne Howard and Susanna Hoeness-Krupsaw

Performance, Fiction as Scalpel, which takes an interest in Alan Moore’s work because, in addition to doing comics, Moore is also a performing artist (22). Unfortunately, she addresses performance only in the conclusion of her book when she mentions Moore’s theatricality and his dedication to an “intrinsically performative medium like comics, where the illusion of mimesis is incessantly broken by the blatant antirealism of the lines that intertwine on the page” (164). In both cases, these scholars reference a connection between Performance Studies and comics that warrants more exploration given the similarities between these two dynamic, multimodal forms.

One way to unravel perceptions of disparity about the connection between the graphic narrative and performance requires understanding what we mean by performance and what performance shares with graphic narratives and other comics. For one thing, “performance,” like comics, is a contested term, as well as a contested site of knowledge. People use the term “performance” to reference any number of activities: we seek to perform well in the workplace to have positive performance evaluations; we might attend a performance in the form of a concert or other types of staged art; we perform identities of gender, race, culture, age, and ethnicity; we perform in everyday life when we converse; and when we display wit, humor, or satire, we employ conventions of verbal performance. However, of equal importance to the performance scholar is how performance is a process and what those processes uncover. Thus, as Mary Strine explains, “performance” may mean any number of “activities, events, and processes, all of which share the common dimension of ‘restored behaviors’ or expressive (re)presentation of experience for someone, typically for an audience” (312). While performance scholars explore a range of performance activities as components of their scholarly agenda, several shared understandings about performance are pertinent particularly to our discussion of performance and the graphic narrative. These understandings can be broadly summarized according to performance as product and performance as process. Using this frame, we can also see the relationship between performance and comics, and how this relationship expands our consideration of the way comics can also function as product and process.

Comics and performance as product

A focus on performance as a product—event, activity, staged production—means clarifying what kinds of performance and in what way they function. Though certainly the productions staged by many performance scholars may use the conventions of traditional dramatic productions, performances from a Performance Studies perspective usually look quite different than the plays with which most people are familiar. One difference entails the material performed. Traditional theatre usually means
acting out the roles in dramatic literature (i.e., a staged play). This form’s meaning is conveyed when characters show on stage what audience members need to know to follow the plot. Performance Studies, in contrast, take on a wider variety of source materials—non-fiction, ethnographic materials, popular culture, poetry, and prose. With these types of sources, a performance practitioner can extend the modes of conveying meaning. These modes comprise another difference between traditional drama and staged performances from a Performance Studies perspective. Certainly, characters can show audience members what they see, hear, and experience. However, these performances may also engage in “telling,” a lyrical mode that permits the personae on stage to communicate directly to audience members, or they may use a combination of showing and telling, or an “epic mode.” In these types of performance, one or even more narrators appear on stage alongside the characters to provide additional clues to enhance audience understanding. These modes also present another difference pertinent to our conversation: unlike dramatic productions that establish a fourth wall as a barrier between audience performers, the personae in Performance Studies productions use a presentational performance style that embraces techniques—such as direct address—that acknowledge the presence of audience members and let them share the action. These productions also rely on suggestion through minimal props, costumes, and sets. In contrast to the representational style of drama—using conventions to provide every detail to help audience members sink into the staged scene—performance practitioners stage scenes which rely on the power of suggestion. They establish markers audience members need to complete in order to follow the story or characters and that completion must be made by them to determine an understanding of what they see. Each of these factors establishes a performance event that requires more engagement of an audience than one might expect in a traditional dramatic production.

Function is another point to consider when describing staged performances. Mary Strine, Beverly Whitaker Long, and Mary Frances HopKins assert that performance appeared in multiple locations to accomplish multiple goals. Consequently, they explain, performance has multiple “sites” that can function as sites of “aesthetic enjoyment,” as well as a form of “intellectual inquiry,” “cultural memory,” “political action,” and therapeutic practice (Strine, Long and HopKins 186–188). Performances are entities that build social relationships as they serve social functions.

Like staged performances, comics is also a product—a work, text, series of panels, and frames and images—usually that appears in print form, a form that might make performance an unusual approach. Because it emerges in print form and is usually seen as a literary genre, comics may seem fixed or static at first glance; this status as text corresponds to a similar paradigm Conquergood identified for Performance
Studies in that the text creates a domination that distances, detaches, and denies the transactional nature of performance, and, as we argue, the graphic narrative. Comics, like performance events, is subject to a textual bias, one that denies the dynamic interaction a comic has with its readers, or given this performance-based rubric, audience members.

Although we see very keen connections between comics and performance, McCloud sees comics and performance as very different. He attributes them with separate reading strategies and mental processes. Although he acknowledges that comics panels look like slow-motion movie shots, he insists film or performance requires less interactivity than comics (Chute and Jagoda 3; McCloud 69). With these conclusions, though, McCloud may be falling prey to the false assumption that “performance” means a dramatic production in the “showing” rather than the epic mode valued by performance practitioners and that requires both showing and telling. Moreover, when one looks at key features of the forms, one can see connections between performances and comics: they both embrace multiple source materials; they rely on the verbal and visual—a showing and a telling—to help audiences engage; they rely on the power of suggestion to encourage that audience engagement; and that suggestion is carefully crafted or balanced in terms of what they provide and what they leave for the audience to provide. In short, both require audiences to engage, like Leslie Irene Coger explains, in a “theatre of the mind” (157).

**Comics and performance as process**

For decades, Performance Studies scholars have offered insight about performance as a way of knowing, particularly as an overarching lens to clarify literature, popular culture, and human behavior. Performance Studies, like comics, suggests that “reading” the words and images on the page is only the start of the audience member’s experiences with the narrative and that the “real” work comes not when individuals encounter the written work—words and images—but when they take on the process of analyzing the work, “trying on” the experiences, and decentering texts to include a wider range of interpretive activity. Performers offer a physical display of embodied thinking; and audience members do not just read and look at the images, but they recognize that they must give more to the process by making leaps between what is apparent, what is suggested, and what is left off the pages altogether in order to make sense of the story. To this end, performance is “revelatory,” as it “furnishes,” “completes,” and “executes” (Long and HopKins xiii) and as it necessitates to generate understanding. By situating performance as a mode of inquiry, performance becomes a frame that heightens our awareness of events, people, places, institutions, identity, and
social constructions of cultural categories that mark people and society. Usually, performances aspire to some level of transformation.

Just as comics encourages the reader to engage, Performance Studies involves a process that repositions the audience from a passive reader who may “skim and skip and scavenge” (Bacon 10) to a key collaborator in the creative process, for without those leaps the performance—or the graphic narrative as comics scholars agree—fails to achieve its aims. Louise Rosenblatt explains that written works exist only in the trans-action between reader and texts, or when a reader engages a text. And most importantly, given these two factors, such a paradigm asserts that the most important activity is the interpreting process, or what happens in the liminal space between the physical pages of the graphic novel and the minds of audience members as they bring their ideas, emotions, and experiences to the interpretive field. McCloud’s insights are somewhat consistent here, in that he sees the creator and audience in a “silent, secret contract” (69). However, unlike McCloud who sees creating “something out of nothing” (205), a Performance Studies perspective suggests the “dance” (208) isn’t about creating something from nothing but rather the articulation of something (i.e., the transaction) that is already there waiting to be completed. This transaction echoes one of the longest-held tenets of Performance Studies scholarship: by actively engaging the text, by drawing on sensory experiences to embody that text, and by using those emergent experiences in combination with critical insight, one can more fully understand human and literary experiences. Both performance and comics, then, set up what Strine describes as an intense creator-audience relationship where both are responsible for generating meaning (Strine 313).

However, graphic narratives do not just generate a performance in that space between the pages of the story and the minds of audience members. In addition to creating a site of performance, graphic narratives stand as a performance. Like other literary works, graphic narratives stand as an “arrested performance,” one that awaits its completion by an interpreter (HopKins and Long 236). As a performance, the graphic narrative permits artists and authors to “create and recreate” performances that are “in relation to the ‘real’ world” and that have some impact—aesthetic, social, political, ethical—on audiences (Pelias and VanOosting 220–221).

As performances set up a frame within social and political parameters (Bell 35–36), they also form a way to better understand such parameters. These abilities establish performance as a vital and viable way to enact change and to be change; consequently, performance is performative. When Mary Strine discusses the connection between performance and performativity, she begins her explanation by referencing J.L. Austin’s *How to Do Things With Words*, where he outlines essential aspects of speech-act theory, including the performative characteristics
of utterances. Some utterances, which he calls conservatives, describe things as they are, while performatives are endowed with additional impact as they accomplish what is uttered. So, when one promises one is performing a promise (Strine 313–314), or when one apologizes, one is performing an apology (Conquergood, “Beyond the Text” 32). In short, by saying something, Austin claims we bring it into being, though Strine argues that Austin’s concept fails to acknowledge that performative potential of all utterances and cites Jacques Derrida and Judith Butler for their broader approach to performativity.

The impact of performativity points out the powerful nature of performance and its capacity for encouraging social change and standing as social change. Conquergood explores the nuances of performance and its relevance for transformation when he discusses performance as mimesis, poiesis, and kinesis (Conquergood “Ethnography”). Conquergood uses these terms to describe performances that imitate life or to reflect the vision an author has of reality. Because that vision is subjective, Conquergood notes the imitation creates a “binary opposition between reality and appearance” that may “sustain an antiperformance prejudice” (“Ethnography” 84) because the imitation is acknowledged as a depiction or a recreation which is fake. For his second category, Conquergood draws on the work of Victor Turner to describe performance as poiesis, or construction. Performances in this category take on the role of “making, not faking,” and resemble J.L. Austin’s performative utterances as both are a kind of invention or creation that calls some action into being. Thus, these performances do not reflect life or even a different way of life; these performances construct a certain way of living or being in the world. For Conquergood’s last category, kinesis, performances take on an urgent, revolutionary function in that they serve as a breaking and remaking—an intervention, interrogation, and reinvention—as suggested by Homi K. Bhabha. These performances do not construct a way of being; they resist what already exists and serve as a new way to offer alternative social or political action. As Conquergood writes, “Performance, flourishes in the liminal, contested and recreative space between deconstruction and reconstruction, crisis and redress, the breaking down and building up....” (“Beyond the Text” 32).

Just as performance can be situated as mimesis, poiesis, and kinesis, so too can graphic narratives take on this type of performativity. Authors and illustrators of comics can imitate and report the world they see, construct the world they want, and reconstruct the world they need in order to accomplish social transformation. Graphic novels take on a mimetic function with their ability to create a make-believe story world that renders people and events with enough details to give readers the impression of photographic realism. With this function, graphic narratives use conventions to depict a story or world, one a reader visits in the encounter with the text. In other words, graphic novels can “fake”
reality. Other graphic narratives operate in more sociopolitical ways as they may help audience members create understanding of the familiar or problematic. These stories, as poiesis, have the capacity to engage the audience more actively because the involvement required is extending the story to understand how that story constructs a broader view of lived experience. There is yet a third category, however, that breaks with norms and traditions and lets readers see the world from an entirely new angle that can generate political activism. These graphic narratives with their capacity to reinvent stand as Conquergood’s kinesis because they are both texts that illustrate the change that needs to happen, or because they stand as a step in the actual change; they are an alternative way of seeing and being in the world. The goal of graphic novels as kinesis is in the reconstructing that which is evident to something more promising for human experience.

By asserting a performance-based rubric, one celebrates comics’ more fluid concepts, which Conquergood also uses to describe performance and how the audience members make sense of their encounter: immediate, involved, and intimate (“Beyond” 25–26). A Performance Studies approach to comics and graphic narratives highlights the openness of both fields of study. Like performance, comics is playful, creative, and frequently ambiguous and open-ended. Like performance, comics thrives on liminality through the openness of the gutter space. All of the comics characters discussed in these pages owe their existence to important social interactions and require reader engagement to come alive on the page.

About this volume

For this collection of original chapters, we invited scholars in various disciplines (including Communication Studies and journalism, Film Studies, world languages, and literature) to bridge the fields of Comics Studies, Performance Studies, Cultural Studies, and literary criticism to contribute their innovative and original ideas about the impact of graphic narratives. Their chapters illustrate some of the challenges and opportunities in any cross-disciplinary research, but they also signal possibilities for developing new approaches to graphic narrative theory and their capacity for performativity. Our first attempt at sorting the chapters was aligned with types of social construction (i.e., traditional categories such as gender, race, and ethnicity). However, as the chapters progressed and our thoughts about the way these constructions worked were challenged, we shifted our organization to focus on the performative functions or activity graphic narratives have for social construction. To this end, our structure is derived from Dwight Conquergood’s work on mimesis, poiesis, and kinesis, and the relationship of each to social construction or transformation. As Shannon Jackson notes, Conquergood’s work saw
performance, as well as its theory and practice, as a way to transform society and bringing to the fore the voices and experiences of underrepresented populations (Jackson 29). We saw the same interest and potential in our collection and in the comics analyzed in each of the chapters, although they vary in the way they work to reflect, construct, or reconstruct social circumstances. We hope this approach opens new lines of thought about the work comics and graphic narratives perform.

Part I—Mimesis: imitating and illustrating

The four chapters in this section examine autobiographical and fictional accounts of contemporary phenomena, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among soldiers, panethnicity, racialized spaces, and mental illness. The chapter authors meticulously investigate how their respective graphic narratives perform the difficult task of representing politically charged topics in visually engaging formats. Melissa Caldwell’s “‘Did You Kill Anyone?’: The Pathography of PTSD in The White Donkey” examines Maximilian Uriarte’s depiction of an Iraq War veteran’s difficult return to civilian society through the image of a white donkey that is strategically placed alongside the soldier’s traumatic experiences. Caldwell highlights how Uriarte documents military training practices that exacerbate the soldier’s condition. Moreover, insufficient medical attention—accompanied in the graphic narrative by medical data and sample psychological tests—further substantiates Uriarte’s supposition that the system has failed the soldier.

Grace Martin’s work on Marvel’s America, “I Don’t Have Any Ancestors, OK? Let’s Just Drop It: Miss America and (Pan)Latinx Representation in Marvel’s America,” focuses on representations of Latinx characters in comics. After a survey of past failures and current successes in representing such characters in comics, Martin focuses both on the Miss America character’s ability to appeal to a wide range of diverse Latin readers and on the impossibility of realistically doing so. Marvel’s panethnic approach, as Martin asserts, necessarily leads to Miss America’s stereotypical embodiment of too many ethnic appeals to arrive at an entirely successful rendition.

In “Space, Conflict, and Memory in Shaft: A Complicated Man,” Chris Ruiz-Velasco examines how David F. Walker’s and Bilquis Evely’s adaptation of Ernest Tidyman’s novel renders contested spaces and associated power struggles in the graphic medium. Space is shown to be an active agent in the formation of Shaft’s identity while also serving as a setting for memory recovery.

This unit concludes with an exploration of how graphic narratives permit readers to empathize with individuals who suffer from mental illnesses through realistic depictions of their struggles and survival. Alissa Burger’s “Illustrating Mental Illness and Engaging Empathy
Introduction

Through Graphic Memoir” discusses three increasingly personal and engaging graphic memoirs. Darryl Cunningham’s Psychiatric Tales: Eleven Graphic Stories About Mental Illness, like Uriarte’s novel discussed in Caldwell’s chapter, operates with clinical annotations and medical terminology. Ellen Forney’s Marbles: Mania, Depression, Michelangelo, and Me is a piece informed by both Forney’s personal and professional experiences. Finally, Katie Green’s Lighter Than My Shadow is shown to deliver intimate insights into her experiences with institutionalization and recovery.

Part II–Poiesis: making and constructing

Instead of faithfully rendering real-life experiences, spaces, and events—the works discussed in the four chapters included in Part II look at the way graphic novels construct or are themselves constructed by audience members, and in this way, the graphic narratives exemplify Conquergood’s ideas about poiesis. In some cases, the chapters work with social scientific data or transfer the lived experiences of people to the comics platform. Interestingly, nearly all of these chapters also address some aspect of family—from immigrant to superhero families, from the depiction of fictional families in Pride and Prejudice and the impact of slavery in family formation—each chapter touches upon how the comics can depict family, or influence our understanding of family life.

The first two chapters in Part II address family, family relations, and the particular challenges families face. Winona Landis examines two Vietnamese American graphic memoirs that redraw familiar geographic places through personal family histories. Landis’s chapter “Mapping the Nation and Reimagining Home in Vietnamese American Graphic Narratives” shows how public refugee discourse can be refashioned to bear on private family concerns and in so doing challenges common misconceptions about refugees and immigrants to the United States, their expectations, and their experiences. Family relationships are also at the heart of Sara Austin’s “‘Real Men Don’t Smash Little Girls’: Inter-Hero Violence, Families, Masculinity, and Contemporary Superheroes.” Austin’s research shows that bonding among superheroes derives from ancient dueling practices. The appeal and pressure of the resulting team spirit are so strong that, until recently, female superheroes also had to embrace the same violent tactics to prove themselves. Newer emergent female characters are performing more communal and caregiving functions to bond with members of their group.

Susanna Hoeness-Krupsaw’s “Graphic Performances in Octavia Butler’s Kindred” expands the familial connections observed in graphic narratives to include a time-traveling protagonist who, by recovering her family history, also draws attention to the painful intersections of past and present. The adaptation’s graphic narrative style is shown to lead to
strong empathetic reader reactions, according to Hoeness-Krupsaw. Another exploration of a graphic novel adaptation, “Austen’s Audience(s) and the Perils of Adaptation” by Leigh Anne Howard, focuses on different audience reactions to graphic novel adaptations. Based on each reader’s familiarity with the material, graphic novel adaptations must meet explicit reader expectations to prevent failure, and when the source material is a successful, well-known prose novel much beloved by its fans known as “Janietes,” the adaptations require more than skillful attention to plot but also the careful consideration of audience.

**Part III–Kinesis: breaking and remaking**

Whereas graphic novels discussed in Part II relay familiar materials to illustrate how texts and audiences construct ideas about graphic novels and the experiences they portray, the narratives discussed in Part III tend to attack norms and cross boundaries to illustrate the more urgent social function and subversive potential of the graphic narrative aimed at changing audience perception, motivating them to action, and standing as social change. Melanie Lee’s “Graphical, Radical Women: Revising Boundaries, Re(Im]agining Écriture Féminine in the Novels of Bechdel and Satrapi,” for instance, illustrates the powerful textual and graphic devices used by Marjane Satrapi and Alison Bechdel as they depict their respective protagonists’ adolescence and coming-of-age stories. Lee is able to highlight particularly well what can happen in the gutter space and how subversive the outcomes can be. Likewise, Partha Bhattacharjee and Priyanka Tripathi’s “Bridging the Gutter: Cultural Construction of Gender Sensitivity in Select Indian Graphic Narratives after Nirbhaya” illustrates the way graphic narratives can advocate for social change and indeed be the start for social change. The authors deftly demonstrate how one collection of graphic shorts and one graphic novel series, both published after violent attacks on women in India, specifically set out to change social habits and create greater gender sensitivity among readers. Gender issues also dominate Michelle Wise’s chapter titled “There Are No Monsters Like Us”: Gothic Horrors, Lesbianism, and the Female Body in Marguerite Bennett and Ariela Kristantina’s InSEXts.” Wise first examines how the gothic genre permitted the breaking of 19th-century gender boundaries, and then she illustrates how Bennett and Kristantina’s novel series uses both gothic and Victorian tropes to assert women’s authority and to celebrate their creative potential.

The next two chapters also look at the way graphic narratives can offer new ways of looking at cultural scripts. Jamie Ryan’s chapter, titled “(De)Forging Canadian Identity in Michael DeForge’s Sticks Angelica, Folk Hero,” examines the connection between nature and Canadian national identity and argues that Michael DeForge uses the graphic novel platform to offer something different. Beginning with an account of five common nature myths in classic Canadian stories, Ryan shows how
DeForge’s character, Sticks Angelica, debunks these myths to arrive at a new conception of Canadian identity. This ability to reshape identity or audience expectations thereof is also a major concern in Alane Presswood’s “A Killer Rhetoric of Alternatives: Re/Framing Monstrosity in My Friend Dahmer.” Presswood illustrates how Derf Backderf’s personal account of Jeffrey Dahmer manages to lead readers to reformulate their preconceived notions of who or what a serial killer is.

Redefinitions of objective tenets in journalism drive the work of Joe Sacco discussed in Chad Tew’s “The Contextualization of Palestinian Experience in Joe Sacco’s Comics Journalism,” which concludes our conversation by discussing Sacco’s evolution from being a journalist with a traditional reporting style to a more engaged and performative graphic style. Sacco creates a “Comics Journalism” that liberates him from journalistic standards in order to provide more context for readers about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Like the other chapters in this section, Tew’s work shows how Sacco fractures commonly held ideas about journalism and reconstructs assumptions about news—content and form. Tew explains graphic narrative’s potential to emphasize the lived experiences conveyed in news stories and how that emphasis might engage readers.

Including diverse graphic narratives, our interdisciplinary collection of chapters responds to Duncan and Smith’s appeal for new types of methodologies to be applied in Comics Studies. Each graphic narrative probes into the ways in which individual or social identities are illustrated, constituted in relation to others, or how these interactions and relations often compel critique. Performance and comics share numerous qualities, as both playful, creative, and frequently ambiguous products, but also as processes that thrive on liminality, embodiment, and audience engagement. Both use verbal and visual cues to encourage the development of communitas (Bell 133) with those who engage the texts. Moreover, both performance and graphic narratives provide audience members the opportunity to see how others experience the world, to construct (perhaps new) understandings of those experiences, and to reconstruct that which they thought they knew. Thus, graphic narratives, like performances, are particularly apt at effecting change and transformation. As other scholars discover the fertile ground offered by Performance Studies and Comics Studies, as well as alternative approaches to the study of comics, ever more and richer collaborations will offer new and exciting insights that can propel our understanding forward.

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Note

1 The White Donkey has been published without pagination. All quotations from the novel lack page numbers.

1 The terms Latinx and Latinxs (plural) are used throughout this chapter to designate people and elements of Latin American origin, ancestry, and/or heritage in a gender-neutral way. The terms “Latino,” “Latina,” and “Latinos/as” may also appear when citing sources that used these gender-specific variations.

2 America Chavez also appears as a key character in Marvel’s ensemble series Young Avengers (2013) and Ultimates (2015), as well as in supportive/cameo roles in various recent Marvel titles. These portrayals of America Chavez, some of which have been previously explored by scholars such as Frederick Luis Aldama, are beyond the scope of my study.

3 This study, released through the Media, Diversity, & Social Change Initiative at the University of Southern California Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism, is “the most detailed intersectional and longitudinal representational analysis conducted to date” (Smith et al. 6). Although it excludes data from 2011, the study covers 900 films (the top 100 grossing films in the United States for each of the nine years included) and examines the demographics and social identities of both speaking and non-speaking characters. The films in the study include a wide range of genres, including superhero films based on major graphic novels.

4 Aldama identifies only two instances of Latinx representation in recent DC Universe films: a gas station attendant and an infantry soldier in the 2013 Superman film Man of Steel, and a group of Latinx people wearing Day of the Dead attire and standing on the Mexican side of the U.S.-Mexico border in the 2016 film Batman vs. Superman: Dawn of Justice. These characters play insignificant roles in both films and cater to stereotypes of Latinxs in the United States (Aldama 6). A notable exception to this trend is the Sony/Columbia/Marvel animated film Spider-Man: Into the Spiderverse (2018), which features Afro-Latinx character Miles Morales—a new incarnation of Spider-Man—as its protagonist. This Afro-Latinx-led superhero film achieved overwhelming critical and popular success, evident in its $362.9 million box-office earnings worldwide and the awards it received for Best Animated Feature Film at the Academy Awards, the Golden Globes, and the BAFTA Awards in 2019 (“Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse (2018)” [IMDb]). Without a doubt, Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse is a groundbreaking instance of highly visible, positive Latinx representation in mainstream superhero film.

5 In his study of previous iterations of America Chavez (before the 2017 solo series was launched), Aldama also finds the character to operate in highly physical ways only when absolutely justifiable, never without reason. Ultimately, she appears “not as a hothead but as a Latina superhero driven to right wrongs and take supervillains” (Aldama 86).

6 Like the flower, with so much love (my translation).
The word “chancleta” refers to rubber house slippers or flip-flops and has become culturally associated with the disciplining of disobedient children by parents, particularly mothers and grandmothers, in multiple Hispanic countries and U.S.-Latinx communities.

Mejía defines mixed-status Latinx chosen families as “a [Latinx] family made up of U.S. citizens and undocumented folks” and includes non-biological relatives (1–2).

1 Shaft: A Complicated Man does not use page numbers, so I have tried to describe the scene and the panel as best I can to indicate where the quotations come from.

1 Both Cunningham and Forney’s graphic memoirs feature black-and-white illustrations, which serve to lend a serious and straightforward tone to their work, in a visual choice that distinguishes them from many mainstream graphic narratives and follows in the tradition of other graphic memoirs on sober topics, like Spiegelman’s Maus and Satrapi’s Persepolis. In contrast, Green’s use of pastel-colored pages follows this serious focus but utilizes color to visually emphasize Green’s shifting emotional tone and context throughout her narrative.

2 Cunningham uses this same representational approach to very different effect in his chapter on “Anti-Social Personality Disorder,” where he begins with a horizontal line representing an eye, followed by a series of panels featuring successively larger images of the eye rendered more realistically as the size increases. However, while readers may expect to read the eye as a metaphor for identity, individualism, and as the so-called “window to the soul,” Cunningham subverts this expectation, with the accompanying text explaining the cold detachment and lack of empathy that characterize anti-social personality disorder (44–45).

1 Espiritu also works with Jodi Kim’s conceptions of U.S. empire here, when she references Kim’s notion that “the refugee is simultaneously a product of, a witness to, and a site of critique of the gendered and racial violence of U.S. wars.” (Body Counts, 18, citing Kim’s Ends of Empire (U of Minnesota P, 2010) 10.)

2 Such instrumental volumes in the field of Southeast Asian American and refugee cultures include Pelaud’s This is All I Choose to Tell: History and Hybridity in Vietnamese American Literature; Espiritu’s Body Counts: The Vietnam War and Militarized Refugees; Minh-ha’s Elsewhere, Within Here: Immigration, Refugeeism and the Boundary Event; Lan P. Duong’s Treacherous Subjects: Gender, Culture, and Trans-Vietnamese Feminism; and Nhi T. Lieu’s The American Dream in Vietnamese.

3 Mimi Nguyen explores this more in her work, as does Neda Atanasoski in Humanitarian Violence: The U.S. Deployment of Diversity (U of Minnesota P, 2013).

1 I am referring here to the original android version of the character, not Johnny Storm of the Fantastic Four.

1 In the highly acclaimed, 2018 Eisner Award-winning Duffy-Jennings team, Abrams ComicArts found excellent artists to handle this challenging project. Damian Duffy—a graduate of the University of Illinois with an MS and PhD in Library and Information Science, according to his web page—considers himself a “cartoonist, scholar, writer, curator, lecturer, teacher.” The award-winning author took on the task of adapting Butler’s text to the graphic novel medium and providing the lettering while John Jennings was responsible for the illustrations. Jennings, who teaches Media and Cultural
Studies at the University of California, Riverside (Batiste et al. 18), is the co-founder (with Jonathan Gayles, Deirdre Hollman, and Jerry Craft) of the Schomburg Center’s Black Comic Book Festival which “celebrates the rich history of Black independent comic book characters and creators” (Asari 34).

I follow David Herman’s lead in the use of the term “worldmaking” (196).

Performance Studies scholars have done more work than other disciplines to document how the performance of literature does indeed improve understanding of literary and social texts and cultivate groundwork for personal and social change. See Wallace Bacon’s, Leslie Irene Coger’s, and Beverly Whitaker Long and Mary Frances HopKins’s work for more information on the relationship between performance and understanding.

Katherine Lashley’s article suggests that Dana’s amputated arm alludes to Sojourner Truth’s disabled hand.

Award-winning author Nancy Butler has written twelve Signet Regencies and has been twice awarded the prestigious RITA award from the Romance Writers of America. In addition, she has received two Romantic Times awards and has been inducted in the New Jersey Romance Writer’s Hall of Fame. Her graphic novel collaborations with Hugo Petrus include of Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*, which made the New York Times Best Seller List and *Sense and Sensibility*. She has adapted two other Austen novels: *Emma* with Janet K. Lee and *Northanger Abbey* with Lee and Nick Filardi.

Neither *Pride and Prejudice* nor *Emma*, the graphic novels discussed in this chapter, have page numbers.

Two excellent books that discuss Jane Austen fandom include Deidre Lynch’s edited volume, *Janeites: Austen’s Disciples and Daughters* and Deborah Yaffee’s *Among the Janeite: A Journey Through the World of Jane Austen Fandom*.

As a Performance Studies scholar, I appreciate Hutcheon’s audience-centered approach to adaptation, as well as her discussions across media. Hutcheon’s rich and sophisticated discussion, updated in 2013 to accommodate newer, digital media, helps us to understand the complexities associated with story (re)telling.

Heidi Hammond has also explored the way young readers of graphic novels respond to comics. Building on Rosenblatt’s reader response theory, her research explores the impact graphic narratives have on multimodal literacy in secondary education.

For this project, twenty youth (eighteen females, two males), ranging in age from fourteen to eighteen years, volunteered to read either Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* and its Butler/Petrus adaptation, or *Emma*, and its Butler/Lee adaptation. After the participants completed their reading, they participated in either a one-hour individual or focus group interview about their reading experience. Participants were asked what they liked and/or disliked about the novel and the graphic novel adaptation, and to share their ideas about why they described their reading experiences in those particular ways. This project was approved by the Institutional Review Board and was subject to its guidelines for working with human subjects in general, and these participants as members of a protected population given their age. Because of the inductive nature of the project, I used a grounded theory approach to generate theories about why participants responded as they did in this project and to understand how they negotiated their interpretations of the texts and constructed their understanding of the texts they engaged. I used an open coding to build links between the experiences expressed by the participants in the interviews. Themes and categories emerged from the data to reflect the
knowledge of processes residing in and emerging from the data. For more on grounded theory, see Glaser and Strauss, and Charmaz.

7 However, considering the ideas about audience engagement and about physical, mental, and emotional embodiment from a performance studies perspective also means reconsidering Hutcheon’s position about what encompasses “showing.” If one acknowledges the full potential of performance to engage the audience and to embody experience, performance, too, must shift to an interactive mode.

1 The information regarding the Nirbhaya-2012 has been collected from some of the leading newspapers such as The Hindu, Hindustan Times, and The Times of India and from some of the leading news channels, such as Zee News and Aaj Tak.

2 This quotation has been taken from Priti Salian’s web-article published on October 1, 2016. www.thenational.ae/arts-culture/priya-s-mirror-highlights-issues-of-gender-inequality-and-violence-against-women-1.151583.

3 In India, young girls are the most typical victims of cat-calling. The illustrator in this story has deliberately chosen the word “girl” not only to further emphasize this phenomenon but also to unmask the misogyny of a patriarchal society that frequently does not want to see the progress of a girl. Most of the times, young females are married off so that they cannot have their own freedom.

4 Maa Kali, according to Hindu mythology, is a goddess who is revered as Divine Mother or Adi Shakti.

5 Goddess Parvati is the wife of Shiva, according to the Hindu mythology. She is the epitome of courage and divine energy.

6 This is an app available in iOS and Google Play Store.

7 This news article was published in BBC Asia. www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-30288173.

1 I use nature and wilderness interchangeably in this chapter.

2 Sticks Angelica, Folk Hero does not have page numbers, so I try my best to provide appropriate context or plot description to situate the quotes. This quote comes from the first fully illustrated page of the graphic novel.

3 I would like to be clear that in my reading of Canadian nature myths, I am not intending to re-inscribe a structuralist reading of literature; rather, I propose that there are numerous myths that do not always apply to literature but that do linger in popular discourse. In other words, while structuralists like Frye or Atwood try to neatly structure literature into a single road that leads to a very nationalistic sentiment, I am contesting the limitations of such an approach to Canadian literature and identity.

4 The “Canadian North” is often framed as empty because so few white settlers live there. However, in reality, Indigenous communities do occupy these spaces, but acknowledging their presence complicates our Canadian narrative of nature as Canadian. Renée Hulan calls this refusal to acknowledge, or the convenient forgetting that occurs, “The Forgotten North” where “forgetting operates as an agent of colonialism” (56). In fact, Nature Myth #6 could be: Nature is Empty—but I do not have enough space in my chapter to fully explore this, and Renée Hulan’s “Lieux d’oubli: The Forgotten North of Canadian Literature” already does a brilliant job of covering this topic.

5 For instance, James Cameron, Denis Villeneuve, David Cronenberg, Ivan Reitman, Norman Jewison, Jason Reitman, and Jean-Marc Vallée.
6 First, in the quote I cited earlier in the paragraph, later when a goose and Otter-With-Mushroom are discussing “Sensual Canada,” and lastly when a gosling falls out of their nest in the last pages of the graphic novel.

7 Again, in the history of Canada and canonical Canadian literature, Indigenous peoples are often erased, and white settlers are cast as the true inhabitants of the land.

8 People often have a hard time admitting that Canada is a capitalist country, and American capitalism is often invoked to lessen or dismiss the capitalism of Canada.

9 Lisa says this during a page-long vignette before she comes back to Monte-rey to help Sticks with Girl’s trial.

10 Lisa Hanawalt is a real cartoonist and friend of Michael DeForge who is the production designer and producer on the animated Netflix show, Bojack Horseman. Therefore, her inclusion draws connections between how characters in both Bojack and Sticks Angelica straddle the line between humans and animals.

11 These representations are most clear in American film comedies. However, some famous fictional Canadian characters in comics who fit this stereotype are Scott Pilgrim and Dudley Do-Right, while characters like Deadpool or Terrance and Phillips (from South Park) are meant as parodies of Canadian politeness.

1 Reporters created a consistent image of Dahmer as an inhuman monster via the language they used to describe him across the articles covering his arrest, his trial, and his murder. His crimes were described as gruesome, his actions as “outlandish,” “evil,” or “unbelievable”; to separate him from mainstream society, Dahmer himself was described as “a drugged zoo animal” (Sherrill B1). Rarely did coverage ever include testimony from the criminal himself, and typically personal details were only included when they underscored the idea of Dahmer as a screwed-up, dangerous social outcast (such as the indecent exposure charges against him, the fact that he dropped out of Ohio State University after just one semester, or his military discharge). For a brief but representative sample of the articles that typified the Dahmer coverage, see Booth; Howlett; Sherrill; Atkinson; Terry; Rozansky; or Freedland.