

INTRODUCTION*

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Recent comic book scholarship has examined the influence of comic books and comics culture in various countries and regional areas other than the three big traditions (US, Japan, and France-Europe). *Comics and the US South* (2012), and various essays on cultural identity in Québec, Scotland and other countries in *Comics as a Nexus of Cultures: Essays on the Interplay of Media, Disciplines and International Perspectives* (2010), are two examples. Jason Dittmer reflected on Canadian superheroes in regards to Captain America in his *Captain America and the Nationalist Superhero: Metaphors, Narratives, and Geopolitics* (2013),¹ in which he demonstrated how Captain America and Captain Canuck embodied a nation-state but neglected to address issues of multiculturalism. Bart Beaty, one of the most prominent Canadian comics scholars, preceded Dittmer's analysis on the topic in 2006 with "The Fighting Civil Servant: Making Sense of the Canadian Superhero," in which he concluded, "It is clear that the overt nationalism of Canadian superheroes in their contemporary era had as much to do with frustrations over sustaining a viable Canadian comics publishing industry [against the overwhelming American comics tradition and mass media power] as it did with representational issues of Canadian identity" ("Fighting Civil Servant" 438).

In this introduction, we will first give a brief overview of the scholarship on Canadian comics, and then look at the individual essays, mainly focused around issues of Canadian identities.

CANADIAN COMICS IN SCHOLARSHIP: AN OVERVIEW

Summarizing research on Canadian comics is simultaneously easy, because it seems

that there is not much on the subject, and difficult, because it is scattered all over various media, technologies (paper, online), fields (literary studies, media studies, and comics studies), and the two official languages, and growing with new websites, articles, MA and PhD theses, and, recently, several books every year.

Our definition of what constitutes a Canadian comic used the Joe Shuster Award's statement as a starting point. This Canadian award, created in 2004, considers eligible anyone who has Canadian citizenship or permanent residence.² The popular conception of comics has been understood as a broad category that embraces editorial cartoons (Brian Gables for the *Globe and Mail*), graphic novels (Chester Brown), comic strips (Lynn Johnston), and art books (Leanne Shapton). The essays here encompass all of the various elements of this comic arena. Few scholars apart from the Canadian senior archivist John Bell and the French scholar Jean-Paul Gabilliet have written on the development of Canadian comics in both official languages. While the non-scholarly but key book by Patrick Loubert and Michael Hirsh, *The*

6 *Great Canadian Comic Book* (1971, reprinted in 2007), focused almost exclusively on the WWII Canadian Comics known as the "Canadian Whites," Bell could certainly be considered the precursor of scholarship on Canadian comics with his first book, *Canuck Comics* (1986), followed by *Guardians of the North* (1992), which focused on Canadian superheroes. Bell was also the author of *Invaders from the North: How Canada Conquered the Comic Book Universe* (2006), which emphasized the slow but steady Canadian conquest of the comics media, leading up to a boom that started after 1989. Bell gave the first historical overview of Canadian comics, but there is not much information on the contemporary scene, which has seen an extraordinary mini-boom of newly published and internationally acclaimed comic book creators. These Canadian artists have been producing original works of extraordinary diversity of topics and styles. They, therefore, are deserving of much more than a simple mention.

French scholar Jean-Paul Gabilliet, in his chapter on Canadian comics, "Comic Art and Bande Dessinée: From the Funnies to Graphic Novels" in *The Cambridge History of Canadian Literature* (2009), offered a very good overview of Canadian trends and key names (authors and titles) including many from the long-standing French-Canadian tradition.³ In 2005, John Lent published *Comic Art of the United States through 2000: An International Bibliography*, with the first chapter focused on Canada, with 713 entries on cartooning, cartoonists, animation, comic books, comics strips, and political cartoons. Although certainly very useful, Lent's chapter on Canada is, unfortunately, inadequate in its French references, and misses most of the contemporary Canadian boom in graphic narratives.

Many scholars mention or even analyze comics, and Canadian comics in particular, either as a transparent historical document, as lighthearted entertainment, or as a pedagogical tool to explore language, visual literacy, ethics, social studies, or history. Alyson King, one of our contributors, did so in her article "Cartooning History, Canada's History in Graphic Novels" (2012). Ariela Freedman in "Comics, Graphic

Novels, Graphic Narrative: A Review” (2011), and Catherine Labio in “What’s in a Name? The Academic Study of Comics and The Graphic Novel” (2011), while simply presenting overviews of comics, do cite Canadian examples. Similarly, the Belgian comics scholar Pascal Lefèvre, in “The Construction of Space in Comics” (2009), mentions some Canadian artists to prove a theoretical point rather than to reflect on the importance of Canadian comics. Many other prominent scholars specifically refer to Canadian comics artists, at least in passing, such as Charles Hatfield in *Alternative Comics* (2005) and Beaty in a chapter entitled “Selective Mutual Reinforcement in the Comics of Chester Brown, Joe Matt, and Seth” (2011) and place them on the same footing as the American creators in their discussions.

Until very recently, an unfortunate aspect of Canadian scholarship was that many of the French and English authors and scholars remained distanced from each other. In Canada, officially a bilingual country, the language barrier in the comics world is still a big concern. Consequently, most articles written in English are about English-Canadian creators, and most articles about French creators are in French. Similarly, bibliographies tend to focus on one language, such as Michel Viau’s *BDQ: Répertoire des publications de bandes dessinées au Québec: Des origines à nos jours* (1999). However, recently the situation has been changing for both artists and scholars. On the one hand, they are both becoming more influenced by the globalization of the publishing market and by the fact that there are more cross-translations available, such as the second book by Viau, in collaboration with Bell, *Au-delà de l’humour: L’histoire de la bande dessinée au Canada anglais et au Québec* (2002). Scholars such as Federico Zanettin are also now focused on comics and translation within the growing market of translation studies in the world of comics. With the burgeoning interest in multiculturalism, teachers are trying to include other cultural and linguistic traditions in their respective “national curriculum” classes, although, as Jean-Pierre Thomas explained in “Enseigner la bande dessinée à Toronto: Questions de traditions” (2012), there are difficulties in doing this. Charity Slobod published her MA thesis on translation of comics across linguistic borders in Canada (2015), including a chapter on self-translation in Doucet’s work. Bart Beaty, a possible forerunner of this transcending of the “Two Solitudes” in comics, works with both French and English languages in his publications, *Unpopular Culture: Transforming European Comic Book in the 1990s* (2006) and *Comics Versus Art* (2013).

Many of the renowned Canadian comic book creators have garnished a following with scholars both within and without our borders, but usually because of wide interest in one or two titles from their repertoire. For example, while Chester Brown is one of the most researched Canadian comics creators, most research on Brown discusses *Louis Riel*, a national bestseller and also an international success, even though he published nine other graphic novels. Most of these articles are about the novel’s “historicity,” but all of them discuss the rhetoric peculiar to comics. Some examples include Andrew Lesk’s “Redrawing Nationalism: Chester Brown’s *Louis Riel*: A Comic-Strip Biography” (2010) and Valérie Morisson’s “Histoire, histoires...

Blood Upon the Rose de Gerry Hunt et *Louis Riel. A Comic Strip Biography* de Chester Brown” (2011).⁴ Some of the research on Brown also dealt with the representation of women, a significant issue in comics because of the medium’s long patriarchal tradition; a representative discussion is Samantha Cutrara’s “Drawn out of History: The Representation of Women in Chester Brown’s *Louis Riel: A Comic-Strip Biography*” (2012). There has not yet been anything published regarding Brown’s controversial graphic novels dealing with prostitution, such as *Paying for It* (2011). Other comic-related analyses incorporate Brown’s work as an exemplifier: Sean Carmey’s “The Ear of the Eye, or, Do Drawings Make Sounds?” (2008), Tim Lanzendörfer’s “Biographiction: Narratological Aspects of Chester Brown’s *Louis Riel*” (2011), Tanis MacDonald’s “Voice in the Gutter: Comics in the Classroom” (2012), and Douglas Wolk in “Chester Brown: The Outsider” (2007). Chester Brown’s importance in the comics world is demonstrated by the fact that he was the first Canadian to be the sole subject of an edited collection. *Chester Brown: Conversations* (2013), edited by

8 Dominick Grace and Eric Hoffman, started a new series, the “Conversations with Comic Artists Series,” at the University Press of Mississippi. This book gathers 16 interviews by scholars and journalists, preceded by a valuable introduction (7-31). Ironically, and perhaps as a result of that much research already dedicated to him and his work, Chester Brown is not included in the scope of the essays in this collection.

Dave Sim is a monumental figure in the history of Canadian and international comics, not only for his epic hero and 6000-page epic story, but also for his “epic” biographical and artistic itinerary from self-published author to controversial icon. In *Cerebus the Barbarian Messiah: Essays on the Epic Graphic Satire of Dave Sim and Gerhard* (2012), after a long and informed introduction by the editor Eric Hoffman, Gerhard’s role in the creation of *Cerebus* showing the complex interaction between the two artists is (re-)examined. He selected eleven scholars from different fields who employed various theoretical approaches to explore Sim’s work. This volume was followed by *Dave Sim: Conversations* (2013), which also included eleven interviews by various journalists and scholars and a short introduction. Jean-Paul Gabilliet wrote an early study of Sim’s work entitled “Anatomy of a Canadian Comic Book: *Cerebus the Aardvark*” (1987), showing how, right from the first issues of *Cerebus*, the characters are identifiable visually and linguistically. Gabilliet continues his reflections on Sim’s work with a chapter entitled “*Cerebus: Le retour au texte*” in the book *Images et récit: littérature et arts visuels du Canada* (1993). As with Chester Brown, Sim’s work and influence are not discussed in this collection.

Bryan Lee O’Malley can be considered the second-most researched Canadian comic book creator, if only for the world bestseller *Scott Pilgrim*, originally published in six volumes (2004-10). Most of the research focused on multimodality and transmedia because of the overall storyline, its aesthetic influences (video games and manga), and because of its successful movie adaptation. These works include Aine Liang Young’s “I See What You Are Saying: Visual Representations of Comic Sound in Edgar Wright’s *Scott Pilgrim vs. The World*” (2010), Padmini Ray Murray’s

“Scott Pilgrim vs the Future of Comics Publishing” (2012), David Murphy’s “Virtual Canadian Realities: Charting the Scott Pilgrim Universe” (2012), Matt Berninger’s “Scott Pilgrim Gets It Together: The Cultural Crossovers of Bryan Lee O’Malley” (2013), Jamie Skidmore’s “Implicit and Explicit Video Game Structure in *Shaun of the Dead* and *Scott Pilgrim vs the World* (2014), and Jeff Thoss’ “Tell It Like a Game: Scott Pilgrim and Performative Media Rivalry” (2014). As one can see from the titles of these works, these scholars are not especially concerned with representations of Canadian culture and identity in these articles. Several articles tackle multiculturalism, such as Brenna Clarke Gray’s “An Innocent at Home: Scott Pilgrim and his Canadian Multicultural Contexts” (2014), while Ryan Lizardi addresses the issue of gender in “Scott Pilgrim vs. Hegemony: Nostalgia, Remediation, and Heteronormativity” (2013).

However, while Seth may not be considered a bestseller, he is certainly a favorite of comics scholars, such as Katie Mullins’s “Questioning Comics: Women and Autocritique in Seth’s *It’s a Good Life, If You Don’t Weaken*” (2009) and Simon Grennan’s “Demonstrating Discourse: Two Comic Strip Projects in Self-Constraint” (2012). Daniel Marrone’s exploration of “Seth’s Ironic Identities: Forging Canadian Identity,” included here, is a very welcome addition to the growing scholarly appreciation of this artist.

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Jeff Lemire, on the other hand, has been the subject of very few scholarly articles so far. Katherine Kelp-Stebbins’s “Hybrid Heroes and Graphic Posthumanity: Comics as a Media Technology for Critical Posthumanism” (2014) and Jessica Ruzek’s MA thesis “The Trace Beyond the Human” (U of Lethbridge, 2014) were all that was available until the publication of the essay by Dale Jacobs and Greg Paziuk, included in this collection, which focuses also on only one work, the *Essex County* trilogy.

Ann Miller was one of the earliest scholars to write about Julie Doucet, in “Transgressive Bodies in the Work of Julie Doucet, Fabrice Neaud and Jean-Christophe Menu: Towards a Theory of the Autobiobd” (2004) and again in “Autobiography in Bande Dessinée” (2011). A similar perspective was taken by Alisia Chase in “You Must Look at the Personal Clutter: Diaristic Indulgence, Female Adolescence and Feminist Autobiography” (2013).

Very few people beyond our borders realize that Lynn Johnston is also Canadian. She is not only the most successful Canadian comics artist; she was the first woman syndicated in the comic strip industry in 1979. She is mentioned in several articles, especially as an example of children’s comics or literature. In “Lynn Johnston’s ‘Theratoons’: Extending the Limits of the Comic Strip” (2005), Faith Balisch defends Johnston both against accusations of anti-feminism and oversimplified narratives to recontextualize the content about women and the form within the comic strip tradition and its constraints, formal and social. In her study, the Calgary artist and writer Sam Hester contends that, despite the recognition by [Canadian] readers that “‘For Better or For Worse’ is synonymous with ‘Canada’, a national setting has not always featured prominently in [...] Johnston’s work” (par. 11). She argues, however,

that Johnston is always confident in her sense of a Canadian setting and that “it was a matter of recording a family’s outward progress from a neighborhood to a nation” (par. 11). She invites scholars “to take a closer look at Johnston’s brilliant and complex storytelling” (par. 11). Kate Beaton has found popularity with her autobiographical comic strip and, perhaps even more so, with her re-imaginings of famous figures of Canadian history. She began her career by publishing *Hark! A Vagrant* on her blog, allowing independent distribution far away from the patriarchal gatekeepers. Although her work had not been the focus of academic articles as of yet, comic book creators Jeff Smith and Trina Robbins welcomed her in Smith’s *The Best American Comics 2013* (32-33) and Robbins’s *Pretty in Ink* (171); she is also mentioned by Naomi Hamer in her “Jumping on the ‘Comics for Kids’ Bandwagon” (2013). Her body of work will surely be explored by scholars in the future. Jillian Tamaki and Mariko Tamaki have achieved international success with their first title, *Skim*, which was analyzed by Patti Luedecke in “Affect and the Body in Melville’s *Bartleby* and Jillian
 10 Tamaki and Mariko Tamaki’s *Skim*” (2009). This was followed by their multi-award winning title *This One Summer*, which will certainly be the focus of many scholarly writings very soon.

Dave Collier has been the focus of several scholarly works. Deena Rymhs provided a short but very insightful first analysis of Collier’s graphic novel in “David Collier’s ‘Surviving Saskatoon’ and New Comics” (2007), and Kevin Ziegler dedicated a chapter to Collier’s work in his PhD thesis, “Drawing on the Margins of History: English Language Graphic Narratives in Canada” (U of Waterloo, 2013). Other scholars have focused on relatively unknown Canadian comic book creators, such as Rand Holmes in *The Artist Himself: A Rand Holmes Retrospective*, edited by Patrick Rosenkranz (2010).

First Nations’ comics are the subject of great interest in scholarly communities within Canada. Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas’s *Red* is the topic of “Creating a Haida Manga: The Formline of Social Responsibility” by Miriam Brown Spiers (2014); and *7 Generations* and *Helen Betty Osborne* have both been studied in high schools and have been the subject of several articles for educational purposes, such as “Teacher’s Guide for *7 Generations* Series” by NiigaaNwewidam James Sinclair. Nelvana may be the most studied of Canadian comic book heroines. Created by Adrian Dingle, she was re-examined several times over the years in feminist scholarship, Native studies scholarship, and comic studies. Most recently, Jason Dittmer and Soren Larsen include her as a main superheroine strategically though ambiguously used to contain Canada’s enemies in “Aboriginality and the Arctic North in Canadian Nationalist Superhero Comics, 1940-2004” (2010; study expanded in Dittmer’s book cited above). Comic book historian Hope Nicholson, with her efforts republishing the Nelvana series of comics, has made her even more widely known to fans and non-Canadian scholars with a plethora of articles, blog postings, videos, radio and television interviews. Nelvana has a prominent role in several of the essays in this collection.

In the French-Canadian comics world, apart from studies on Doucet, articles

have been written on other French “auteurs de bandes dessinées.” Michel Rabagliati and his *Paul* series have often been cited in articles about teenage and young-adult culture by scholars such as Janette Hughes and Alyson King, in “Dual Pathways to Expression and Understanding: Canadian Coming of Age Graphic Novels” (2010). Articles by Dardaillon and Meunier, such as “La série *Paul* de Michel Rabagliati: récits d’espaces et de temps” (2013), show that the *Paul* series is also part of a growing crossover literature that could/should also be read by adults. Similarly, Michel Hardy-Vallée, in his chapter “The Carrefour of Practice: Québec BD in Transition” (2010), shows how Rabagliati’s series favoured intercultural interactions between the “Two Solitudes.” Michel Rabagliati’s *Paul à Québec* offers readers an insider’s look at Québec City before exploring life in Montreal. Family dynamics, social mobility, multiculturalism and the dichotomy between tradition and modernity are relevant themes in this work, which incorporates diverse linguistic styles: international/standard French, colloquial French, and Joual, along with instances of English vocabulary. In 2001, Rabagliati won the Harvey Award for Best New Talent and was nominated for Eisner awards for most of the books in his *Paul* series. He won the Doug Wright Best Book Award for *Paul Moves Out*. *Paul à Québec* has been released as a full feature film in 2015.

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If the books in the *Paul* series are almost entirely rooted in Québec, Guy Delisle’s stories take place worldwide, and the scholarship reflects its global scope. Research can be found in Québec with Tassia Trifiatis’s MA thesis “Nouveaux explorateurs: les bédéistes et leurs récits de voyage dans *Shenzhen* de Guy Delisle et *Missionnaire* de Joann Sfar” (U of Montreal, 2009); in Anglophone Canada with “La bisociation comme stratégie d’innovation chez Guy Delisle” by Sylvain Rheault (from Regina University, 2013); in France by Canadian scholar Nancy Pedri with “Re-Visualizing the Map in Guy Delisle’s *Pyongyang*” (2014); in Belgium with Dick Tomasovic’s “Le Regard interdit: A propos de *Shenzen* de Delisle” (2011); and also in the US, in Giorgia Banita’s chapter “Cosmopolitan Suspicion: Comics Journalism and Graphic Silence” (2013). In addition, Natalie Mojziso’s thesis “Témoignage en bande dessinée” (2013) was written at the University of Brno, in the Czech Republic.

Authors Jimmy Beaulieu and Genevieve Castrée have also been the focus in “Les modes d’expression du projet autobiographique dans la bande dessinée québécoise” by Stéphanie Lamothe (U du Québec à Montréal, 2011) et “La bédé-réalité: La bande dessinée autobiographique à l’heure des technologies numériques” by Julie Delporte (U de Montréal, 2001). Other contemporary artists such as Zviane and Iris have already become the subject of research (by Sylvain Lemay, Ecole Multidisciplinaire de l’Image, Université du Québec en Outaouais).

Other Canadian artists not usually considered within the comics research field received some attention from researchers in literary studies with strong connections within the (Canadian) comics world. Such is the case of bpNichol, with studies that range from the very concise discussion in Gabilliet’s “Comic Art and bande dessinée” (467) to a full book edited by Carl Peters (2010) and a compelling article by Mike

Borkent (2010).

This overview ends with Doug Wright, a name that may not be very familiar outside of Canada. Although his name is attached to the other big Canadian prize in comics (see <http://www.dougwrightawards.com/>), almost nothing has been published on his work. He has been mentioned more or less extensively in only one graduating extended essay in 2011 (by Tracy Hurren, Simon Fraser U), one MA thesis in 2006 (Benjamin Woo, Simon Fraser U), and one chapter in a PhD thesis in 2013 (Kevin Ziegler, U of Waterloo).

OVERVIEW OF THE ESSAYS

12 The initial questions in our quest to explore Canadian identity/ies in the world of comic books focused on works about Canada, its culture and history, works created by Canadians, and mostly published by Canadian publishers of comic books. We asked, “What is Canadian, if anything, in the artist’s work you choose to write about? How does each artist deal with his or her Canadian identity/ies? How is it explicit or not in his/her work?” When we crafted our call for papers to address these questions, we had certain expectations of the types of papers that would be submitted, but as each of the proposals arrived in our inboxes, we quickly realized that the scale of our project was much wider and diverse than we had originally envisioned. Not only did the idea of Canadian identity resonate differently, but the scope of comics from coast to coast was also open to interpretation. Thus, we ended up with something much richer and more encompassing than we could have ever anticipated. Scholars included in this collection are as varied as their topics, both in their academic interests and their domiciles, and we are very appreciative of their unique vision, their interest, and their patience in bringing this project to fruition.

The papers we received, for the most part, reflected on regionalism in Canada, a more microscopic exploration of identity that, at first, resembles a jigsaw puzzle of cultural and local fascination. Bringing the lens out and reading the collection as a whole offered a unique and balanced exploration of what Canadian identity means to its citizenry. To be sure, several prolific contemporary comic book creators all renowned beyond our borders, such as Seth, Jeff Lemire, Julie Doucet, and Fiona Staples, are the focus of several of the articles in this collection. Other essays examine works and creators that may not be as well known beyond their regional or specialized audience, but, with the publication of this special issue, will now be introduced to a wider audience. We limited our focus to Canadian identity/ies in an effort to begin the dialogue and, frankly, to test the waters in scholarly comic book research in this country. We have already made brief references to some of these essays in the overview of scholarship. What follows is a broad overview of the diverse scope of the essays presented here. Several commonalities were introduced in the various papers: Canada is often described by its landscape and its long history of colonialism,

instances of cultural appropriation, the use and abuse of stereotypes, and an often ironic self-identification as “not American.” Not unexpectedly, the ethos of hockey plays a large part in several of the explorations. We are very excited to have discussions on First Nations authors, specifically works highlighting people of the Cree, Haida, and Inuit nations. As to be expected in a collection of papers on the comic book format, there is also dialogue on these various elements including the gutter, a major focus in the discussion of *Red: A Haida Manga*, and several discussions of page layout and panels, the use of sound balloons and narrative boxes that are embedded in many of the essays.

With the exception of Drawn and Quarterly, Canada is not known for its large comic book publishing houses. Because of this, the smaller independent publishing houses are afforded more space in the discourse of this special issue. An important aspect of this collection is female comic book creators and readers. Almost two-thirds of our contributors are female, demonstrating the importance of female readership and scholarship to the field of comic book studies, and the growing place of feminist and gender critique in this field. There is a booming interest in Canadian comics by women such as Doucet, Beaton, and Staples.

Four broad thematic units emerged as the essays arrived. The first section, exploring Aboriginal comics and artistic interpretations, contains three investigations of First Nation identity/ies as explored by First Nations comic book creators. Sarah Henzi, a Visiting Scholar at McGill University (McGill Institute for the Study of Canada) and Co-Organizer/Lecturer of the Graduate Summer School on Indigenous Literature and Film, Université de Montréal (CÉRIUM), analyzes First Nations identity in Canadian society as portrayed by Gord Hill (*The 500 Years of Resistance Comic Book*), Richard Van Camp (*Kiss Me Deadly*), and David Alexander Robertson (*The Life of Helen Betty Osborne*). The comic book medium in the hands of these authors and illustrators and others like them, Henzi contends, eloquently conveys the tragedies of the residential school system, teen suicide and missing and murdered aboriginal women in a meaningful and non-stereotypical manner. David Alexander Robertson’s graphic novel, *The Life of Helen Betty Osborne*, illustrated by Scott B. Henderson, was republished in 2015 under a slightly different title: *Betty: The Story of Helen Betty Osborne*.

Debra Dudek’s paper offers a close reading of the graphic novel *7 Generations* by David Alexander Robertson, author of *The Life of Helen Betty Osborne*, discussed in the previous article. Dudek, Associate Dean (International) in the Faculty of Law, Humanities and the Arts and Director of the Centre for Canadian-Australian Studies at the University of Wollongong in Australia, pays particular attention to the powerful metaphor of the river, which is used in the three sections of the graphic novel, and which functions as a literal landscape present through the history and awareness of its people. Richard Harrison of Mount Royal College in Calgary offers an evocative examination of Michael Yahgulanaas’s analysis of cultural viewpoints on reading the comic book gutter in his innovative graphic novel *Red: A Haida Manga*.

Harrison's contention is that the gutter, as discussed by comic book critics such as Scott McCloud, represents a western interpretation that is contrary to the black gutter employed and celebrated by Yahgulanaas. This difference in interpretation of the role of the gutter is, according to Harrison and Yahgulanaas, indicative of the differences between indigenous and colonial behaviour and thought.

Several discussions of Canadian regional issues explore the vast and diverse nature of this country and its inhabitants. Dale Jacobs and Greg Paziuk, both of the University of Windsor, offer an examination of Jeff Lemire's *Essex County* and the role of hockey as a marker of cultural identity for rural Ontario and Canada as a whole. *Essex County* has been the recipient of numerous awards, including the Young Adult Library Services Association Alex Award in the United States for *Essex County Volume 1: Tales from the Farm*, the first volume in the trilogy, and was selected, but later rejected, as a contender for *Canada Reads* in 2011.⁵ It was, however, awarded first place in a "People's Choice" poll. Lemire has won two Joe Shuster Awards for
14 Outstanding Cartoonist (2008 and 2013), and the 2008 Doug Wright Award for Best Emerging Talent, along with his nominations for an Ignatz, a Harvey, and two Eisner Awards in the United States.

The third group of essays examines iconic Canadian images in comic books and related aspects of popular culture. Lindsay Thistle of Trent University explores the movement of the figure of Johnny Canuck from political cartoons to superhero comics and to the stage. Her essay addresses the question of Canadian identity in keeping with the initial rationale for the creation of Johnny Canuck as a response to outside threats during World War II. Thistle demonstrates that through its adaptation for the stage, and its subsequent erasure of the colonial past, the reworking emphasizes the same Canadian stereotypes as the original comic: ordinariness, rural settings, nature, the northern landscape, and survival. Captain Canuck, recognized by Canada Post in the 1990s in a series of stamps of Canadian superheroes, has recently made a comeback in an animated web series, a well-orchestrated web presence, a Facebook profile, and the republication of his stories in a handsome hardcover compilation. Alyson King of the University of Toronto examines the utilization of comic book storytelling elements in the Canadian children's magazine *Kayak* in visualizing Canadian cultural identity for younger readers. She maintains that the representations of history and culture in the comic book format through serial fiction, non-fiction, and sound bites were not as successful as they could have been, since those representations contain inaccuracies, omissions, and ambiguities. Michelle Bauldic, professor at the School of Canadian Studies at Carleton University, evaluates the image of the Oopik as ambassador of Canadian culture in the 1960s on several occasions.

The superheroine Nelvana of the Northern Lights, pre-dating Wonder Woman by several months, was an Inuit demigoddess and a fierce defender of the Arctic against enemies from space or exploitation of its resources by enemies on earth. She, like Captain Canuck, has recently been revitalized, primarily through the efforts of a Kickstarter project by comic book historian Hope Nicholson to publish all of the early

stories.⁶ The actual Nelvana was an Inuk elder whom the painter Franz Johnston met in the Northwest Territories: “He was so impressed with her that when he returned to Toronto, he relayed his experiences to his friend Adrian Dingle, a local artist. Adrian Dingle created a superhero based on this elder, but made her younger, partially based on the appearance of his wife Patricia Dingle” (*Nelvana Comics*).

Comic book historian Ivan Kocmarek provides an overview of the wartime comics of Bell Features Publications. During World War II, Canadian comics were the only option for comic book readers. These comics were different from their American counterparts in their scope as well as their levels of violence and patriotism. Kocmarek also refers to Golden Age Canadian comic book icons such as Nelvana and Johnny Canuck, and emphasizes the role of readers through letters and contests provided by Bell Features that aided in the affirmation of Canadian identity and pride. One of the contests, of course, featured hockey, which, as previously demonstrated by Jacobs and Paziuk’s examination of *Essex County*, provided a glue for Canadian cohesiveness. Canadian history, as seen through prolific comic book artist Seth’s iconic lens, is the focus of the essay by Daniel Marrone, a comic book cultural researcher. He analyzes how and why Seth’s iconic blend of actual and imagined history in his body of work creates a powerful sense of Canadian distinctiveness. Finally, in her interview, Matilda Roche, from the University of Alberta, provides an exciting glimpse of an equally prolific and award-winning comic book artist, Fiona Staples, who, while residing in Alberta, is gaining international notice with her work on *Saga* and the new *Archie* series.

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This special issue offers a fulfilling passage through the world of Canadian comic books and comic book artists but, at the same time, highlights the fact that there is much more to be said about this corpus, its influences within Canada and beyond, the utilization of comics as a lens for reading history as well as contemplating the future of artistic interpretations of Canadian identity. We look forward to an ongoing dialogue, offering these papers as an overture to demonstrate the richness of the comic book format in all aspects of the Canadian worldview.

These are exciting times: many other Canadian comics authors are still waiting for their scholars, from forgotten comic strips of the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, to the unknown 1960s underground artists, and the later alternative trends with Marc Bell and David Boswell, to contemporary and upcoming promising artists such as Faith Erin Hicks, with her webcomics and growing body of print material. Scholars still have many hours of work (exploration, archiving, analyzing, writing) before we can really say that Canadian comics are now part of the Canadian heritage, as dreamt by Seth in his amazing *GNB Double C*. There are still many areas to be discussed involving comics and Canadian institutions: awards (their history, controversies—see the debate on *Canada Reads* on CBC about Lemire’s *Essex County* and the one generated with *Skim* by the Tamaki cousins for the Governor General Awards), publishers (with the “heroic” role of Drawn and Quarterly), art schools, scholarship, and historiography (Beaty’s institutional approaches vs. traditional

authors' approaches).

- A stimulating example of this growth in interest in Canadian comics scholarship is the *Old Trout Funnies*, originally created and published in the 1970s and distributed locally in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia. Because of the research initiated by Ian Brodie, assistant professor of folklore in the Department of Heritage and Culture at Cape Breton University in Sydney, Nova Scotia, Cape Breton University Press published a complete reprint of the three comics in November 2015, including never-published spin-off stories and the entire series of Cape Breton Liberation Army wall calendars produced between 1979 and 2000. The volume was annotated by Brodie, who also included an essay on the context of the work. The publication coincided with an exhibition of MacKinnon's work at the Cape Breton University Art Gallery, an active Facebook page, and several traveling exhibits in the area. The underground comix movement, which was marked by a dissociation from the wider community, and the strong friendship of creative minds have produced not only comics, but calendars that are now accessible thanks to Cape Breton University Press. It is our hope that this special issue will inspire many other similar initiatives.
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NOTES

* All images in this special issue are reproduced with permission.

1. See also his previous articles (2007, 2009) with Soren Larsen.
2. There is a second Canadian Comics Award, the Doug Wright Award, created the same year, 2004.
3. See also numerous references to the Canadian comics in *Of Comics and Men: A Cultural History of American Comic Books*, originally published in French in 2005.
4. See also Juan Meneses's "A Bakhtinian Approach to Two Graphic Novels: The Individual in Art Spiegelman's *Maus* and Chester Brown's *Louis Riel*" (2008), and Hugo Demers's MA thesis, *La biographie historique de bande dessinée; une histoire alternative: une étude de cas sur Louis Riel* (U of Manitoba, 2012).
5. This may demonstrate how comic books are not yet accepted as legitimate works of literature by the literary establishment in Canada and beyond.
6. Nicholson has also been instrumental in reviving the stories of early Canadian Golden Age comic book heroes such as Brok Windsor, and in overseeing the publication of a contemporary anthology of First Nations' work in *Moonshot*.

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