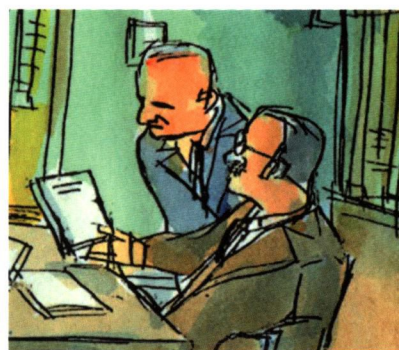
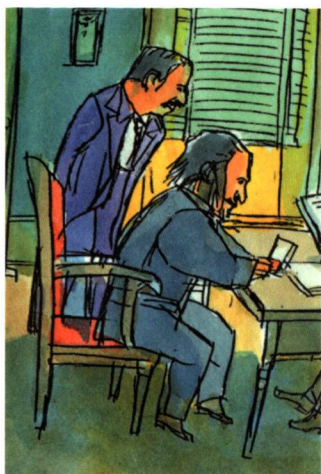




Visualizing Jewish Narrative

Jewish Comics and Graphic Novels

Edited by
Derek Parker Royal

B L O O M S B U R Y

Examining a wide range of comics and graphic novels—including works by creators such as Will Eisner, Leela Corman, Neil Gaiman, Art Spiegelman, Sarah Glidden, and Joe Sacco—this book explores how comics writers and artists have tackled major issues of Jewish identity and culture. With chapters written by leading and emerging scholars in contemporary comic book studies, *Visualizing Jewish Narrative* highlights the ways in which Jewish comics have handled such topics as:

- Biography, autobiography, and Jewish identity
- Gender and sexuality
- Genre—from superheroes to comedy
- The Holocaust
- The Israel-Palestine conflict
- Sources in the Hebrew Bible and Jewish myth

Visualizing Jewish Narrative also includes a foreword by Danny Fingeroth, former editor of the *Spider-Man* line and author of *Superman on the Couch* and *Disguised as Clark Kent*.

Derek Parker Royal is a Clinical Associate Professor in the School of Arts, Technology, and Emerging Communication at the University of Texas at Dallas, USA, and is the founder and former Executive Editor of *Philip Roth Studies*. He is also the cofounder, cohost, and producer of *The Comics Alternative*, a podcast network bridging scholarly inquiry with comics fandom.

LITERARY STUDIES

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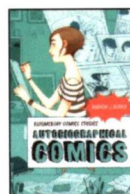
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Randy Duncan, Matthew J. Smith, and Paul Levitz

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Sheena C. Howard and Ronald L. Jackson II

In loving memory of my mother, Nancy Lipe Royal.

*Unlike the case in most families, it was you, Mom,
who strongly encouraged me to read comics.*

Contributors

Samantha Baskind, professor of art history at Cleveland State University, is the author of several books, including *Raphael Soyer and the Search for Modern Jewish Art* (2004) and a solely authored encyclopedia, *Encyclopedia of Jewish American Artists* (2007). She also coauthored *Jewish Art: A Modern History* (2011) with Larry Silver and coedited, with Ranen Omer-Sherman, *The Jewish Graphic Novel: Critical Approaches* (2008). Her newest book, *Jewish Artists and the Bible in Twentieth-Century America* (2014), was funded by a year-long National Endowment for the Humanities Fellowship. She served as editor for US art for the twenty-two-volume revised edition of the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (2006) and is currently series editor of “Dimyonot: Jews and the Cultural Imagination,” published by the Pennsylvania State University Press.

Ofer Berenstein is a PhD candidate in the Department of Communication, Media, and Film at the University of Calgary, where he studies visual political culture. He is a comics writer, editor, and critic, and he is a founding member of the Israeli Comic Books Readers and Collectors’ Society. He has written and presented on Israeli comics internationally, including at such venues as the Royal War Museum in London and the US Library of Congress.

Daniel M. Bronstein is an ordained rabbi and holds a PhD in Jewish history. His dissertation “Torah in the Trenches: The Rabbi Chaplains of World War II, 1940–1946” (2009) examines intra-Jewish relations in the context of world war and the Holocaust. Having served as a congregational rabbi, he is an independent scholar and educator and currently teaches for the Departments of History and Sociology at Hunter College, among other venues. Dr. Bronstein has also published on a variety of topics and is a contributor to *Jews and American Popular Culture* (2006), *The Cambridge Dictionary of Judaism and Jewish Culture* (2011), and *Jewish Theology in Our Time* (2012).

Cyril Camus teaches English in the Pyrenees, in a prep course for future students of business and engineering schools. He is a former teaching assistant and doctoral student at the Université de Toulouse-Le Mirail, where he wrote a thesis on Neil Gaiman’s works in comics, literature, and cinema, earning him a PhD in Studies of English and English-Speaking Cultures. His writings on Neil Gaiman, Alan Moore, and postmodern fantasy have been published in the French journals *Otrante* and *Caliban*, the US journal *Shofar*, the British journal *Studies in Comics*, and the edited collection *Mountains Figured and Disfigured in the English-Speaking World* (2010). Other articles are scheduled to be featured in the journal *Studies in the Novel* and in an e-book about intersemioticity published by Presses Universitaires du Midi.

Brannon Costello is an associate professor of English at Louisiana State University, where he also directs the Master of Arts in the Liberal Arts program. His research and teaching interests include US Southern studies and comics studies, and he is the author of *Plantation Airs: Racial Paternalism and the Transformation of Class in Southern Fiction, 1945–1971* (2007), the editor of *Howard Chaykin: Conversations* (2011) and *Conversations with Michael Chabon* (2015), and the coeditor of *Comics and the U.S. South* (2012). He is currently at work on a book-length study of cartoonist Howard Chaykin.

Lan Dong is an associate professor of English at the University of Illinois Springfield. She is the author of *Mulan's Legend and Legacy in China and the United States* (2011), *Reading Amy Tan* (2009), and a number of journal articles, book chapters, and essays on Asian American literature, children's literature, and popular culture. She is the editor of *Transnationalism and the Asian American Heroine* (2011), *Teaching Comics and Graphic Narratives* (2012), and *Asian American Culture: From Anime to Tiger Moms* (2016). Currently she is working on a project on comics and Asian American experiences.

Tof Eklund is a non-binary transgender scholar and author. They teach creative writing and game design at Full Sail University, focusing on the combination of creative technique, technical proficiency, and critical awareness in new media. Their publications include *Autumn Harvest: Maiden* (2015), a postcolonial feminist fantasy romance; *The Unconventional Dwarf* (2013), a tabletop role-playing book; and edited special issues of comics studies journal, *ImageText*. Their first commercial computer game, *Autumn Harvest: Rites of Spring*, is due out in 2016.

Ellen Rosner Feig is an associate professor of composition and literature at Bergen Community College in New Jersey. As the codirector of the Center for Peace, Justice, and Reconciliation, Dr. Feig develops workshops, programming, and courses focused on peace studies, genocide studies, restorative justice, and historical context. In addition, as the founder and director of the college's TEDx event, Feig has created four large-scale events that have brought together well-known figures such as Gabriel Bol Deng, Gary Lucas, and Peter Nelson, NY Director of Facing History and Ourselves.

Danny Fingeroth was the editorial director of Marvel's Spider-Man comics line and writer of many comics featuring Spider-Man, Iron Man, Superman and other iconic characters. He is the author of *Superman on the Couch: What Superheroes Really Tell Us About Ourselves and Our Society* (2004), *Disguised as Clark Kent: Jews Comics and the Creation of the Superhero* (2007), *The Rough Guide to Graphic Novels* (2008), and co-editor (with Roy Thomas) of *The Stan Lee Universe* (2011). Fingeroth is a consultant to Will Eisner Studios and Wizard World Comic Conventions, and has spoken on comics-related topics at Columbia University, the Smithsonian Institution, The New York Historical Society, and many other venues. For more info go to www.DannyFingeroth.com.

Wendy Stallard Flory is Professor of English at Purdue University. Her article, "The Psychology of Antisemitism: Conscience-Free Rationalization and the Deferring of Moral Choice," appeared in *Antisemitism in the Contemporary World*, edited by Michael Curtis (1986). She has published *Ezra Pound and the Cantos: A Record of Struggle* (1980) and *The American Ezra Pound* (1989), both with Yale University Press. Her completed book manuscript, "Inside Stories: The American Romance and Its Characters in Depth," presents an original critical approach that it demonstrates with eleven chapter-length readings of individual romances.

James Goldberg's family is Jewish on one side, Sikh on the other, and Mormon in the middle. His plays, essays, and short stories have appeared in *Shofar*, *Drash*, *The Best of Mormonism: 2009*, *Sikh Chic*, and other publications. Goldberg has taught persuasive and creative writing at Brigham Young University and now writes web content for the LDS Church History Department.

Nicole Wilkes Goldberg earned an MA in English literature in 2009 at Brigham Young University. She has presented at the Jewish American and Holocaust Literature Symposium and the North American Levinas Society. She currently divides her time between teaching English at Brigham Young University and raising her children.

Jean-Philippe Marcoux is a professor of American literature at Université Laval in Québec, Canada. He is the author of the monograph, *Jazz Griots: Music and Historiography in the 1960s African American Poem* (2012), and he has published in the journals *MELUS*, *Re-Marking*, *The Langston Hughes Review*, *College Language Association*, and *Canadian Poetry*, among others. He is currently working on book-length study of the Umbra poets and workshops that will focus on the literary production of the group. The working title is "*Prophets of the Planets: The Umbra Poets and the Shaping of a Black Aesthetic*."

Chantal Catherine Michel studied media and cinema studies at Université Paul Valéry (Montpellier, France), Montclair State University (NJ) and in 2010 received her PhD from Freie Universität (Berlin, Germany). She attended many national and international conferences with lectures on Yiddish cinema and published several articles about this topic as well as her book, *Das Jiddische Kino* (2012). Having always been interested in comic books and graphic novels, she taught several classes on the comics medium, film versions of comic books and on political comics.

Ira Nadel, Professor of English at the University of British Columbia, is the author of biographies of Leonard Cohen, Tom Stoppard, David Mamet, and Leon Uris. He has also published *Joyce and the Jews: Culture and Texts* (1989) and *Modernism's Second Act: A Cultural Narrative* (2013), as well as edited *The Cambridge Companion to Ezra Pound* (2007) and *Ezra Pound in Context* (2010). Forthcoming from him are both a critical biography of Virginia Woolf and a short study of Pound's *Cathay*.

Tahneer Oksman is an assistant professor and director of the Writing Program at Marymount Manhattan College. Her book, *"How Come Boys Get to Keep Their Noses?": Women and Jewish American Identity in Contemporary Graphic Memoirs*, will be published in 2016 by Columbia University Press. She has published articles in *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies*, *Studies in Comics*, and *Studies in American Jewish Literature*, as well as in *The Forward*, *Lilith*, and the *Los Angeles Review of Books*. She is currently the graphic narratives reviews editor at *Cleaver Magazine*.

Matt Reingold teaches in the Judaic Studies program at TanenbaumCHAT in Toronto, Canada. He is a recent doctoral graduate from York University's Faculty of Education, where he was a Wexner Fellow and Davidson Scholar. His areas of research are arts-based learning in secondary Jewish education and Jewish graphic novels.

Derek Parker Royal is a professor in the School of Arts, Technology, and Emerging Communication at the University of Texas at Dallas, and also the general editor of Bloomsbury Academic's new "Bloomsbury Comics Studies Series." He is the coauthor of *Philip Roth's American Pastoral* (2011) and the editor of *Philip Roth: New Perspectives on an American Author* (2005) and *Unfinalized Moments: Essays in the Development of Contemporary Jewish American Narrative* (2011). His essays on comics, American literature, and film have appeared in a variety of edited book collections as well as scholarly journals, including *College Literature*, *Modern Fiction Studies*, *Contemporary Literature*, *MELUS*, *Critique*, *Post Script*, *Literature/Film Quarterly*, *Poe Studies/Dark Romanticism*, *The Mark Twain Annual*, *Nathaniel Hawthorne Review*, *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, *Midwest Quarterly*, *ImageText*, *International Journal of Comic Art*, *Modern Drama*, *Modern Jewish Studies/Yiddish*, *Shofar*, and *Studies in American Jewish Literature*. He is the founder and former executive editor of *Philip Roth Studies*, and he has guest edited eight different special issues of scholarly journals, covering topics such as contemporary Jewish narrative, multiethnic comics, the Hernandez brothers, superheroes and gender, comics and world politics, and Woody Allen's post-1990 films. His books *Coloring America: Multi-Ethnic Engagements in Recent Comics* and *The Hernandez Brothers: Conversations* are forthcoming from the University Press of Mississippi. He is also the cohost and cocreator of the popular podcast, *The Comics Alternative*, which can be found at ComicsAlternative.com.

Stephen E. Tabachnick is a professor of English at the University of Memphis and has been teaching courses in the graphic novel for more than twenty years. He is the editor of *Teaching the Graphic Novel* (2009), the coeditor of *Drawn from the Classics: Essays on Graphic Adaptations of Literary Works* (2015), and the author of *The Quest for Jewish Belief and Identity in the Graphic Novel* (2014). He is also the author of *Fiercer Than Tigers: The Life and Works of Rex Warner* (2002), and the author or editor of several books about Lawrence of Arabia and Charles M. Doughty (author of *Travels in Arabia Deserta*).

Eli Valley is a writer and artist whose work has been featured in *The New York Times*, *New York Magazine*, *The Nation*, *The New Republic*, *The Guardian*, *The Daily Beast*,

The Intercept, *Gawker*, *Saveur*, and elsewhere. His art has been labeled “ferociously repugnant” by *Commentary* and “hilarious” by *The Comics Journal*. The 2011–2013 Artist in Residence at the *Forward* newspaper, he has given multimedia performances fusing comics with personal narrative in the United States, Europe, Africa, and Israel. His website is www.EliValley.com.

Robert G. Weiner is associate humanities librarian at Texas Tech University, where he is the liaison for the College of Visual and Performing Arts as well as film studies. He is on the editorial board for the *Journal of Graphic Novel and Comics* and has published in the *International Journal of Comic Art*, *Journal of Popular Culture*, *Texas Library Journal*, and the *Journal of Pan African Studies*, among others. He is the author of *Marvel Graphic Novels: An Annotated Guide* (2007) and editor of *Graphic Novels and Comics in Libraries and Archives* (2010) and *Captain America the Struggle of the Superhero* (2009). He is also the coeditor of such collections as *The Joker: A Serious Study of the Clown Prince of Crime* (2015), *Graphic Novels and Comics in the Classroom: Essays on the Educational Power of Sequential Art* (2013), *Web Spinning Heroics* (2012), and *James Bond in Popular and World Culture* (2010).

Al Wiesner is a writer, illustrator, and publisher. He created *Shaloman* in 1983, a series now spanning forty issues across five volumes. In 2010, Wiesner was honored with an Inkpot Award, and he has been recognized in numerous journals and scholarly literature as an advocate for Judaic awareness within the comics industry.

Foreword

What Hath Will Wrought?

If you've ever wondered, "Is Superman more like Moses or Jesus?" or "Is the Spirit really Jewish?" or "Is it really appropriate to discuss the Holocaust in comics form?" then this is the book for you. Through a variety of approaches, *Visualizing Jewish Narrative* examines the many and varied aspects of Jewish comics and graphic novels, all of them offering thought-provoking insights into what could broadly be called "Jewish comics" (the sequential art type; not Shecky Greene and Buddy Hackett).

Of course, just like defining, "What is a Jew?" can lead to all sorts of strange permutations of thought and emotion, ditto for, "What makes a comic Jewish?" I have no more idea than anyone else, but I am somewhat obsessed with the question, as are the smart people writing in this book like Daniel Bronstein, Robert G. Weiner, Brannon Costello, Samantha Baskind, Catherine Michel, Stephen E. Tabachnick, and the rest of the remarkable roster of writers brought together by Derek Royal (which seems to be his real name, not one chosen to disguise his Jewishness—he claims he's not—or his superhero secret identity—he likewise claims he's not one of those, either—but I have my doubts about the latter).

But whether or not he's from the planet Krypton, Derek has devised a working definition of visual Jewish narrative that encompasses stories with some kind of Jewish theme or connection—be it the wise-guy humor of Will Elder's "chicken-fat"-infused *Mad* comics, or the quest for identity that is embarked upon in Marvel and DC's superhero comics, as well as in memoir-style graphic novels like *How to Understand Israel in 60 Days or Less*.

An especially strong aspect of *Visualizing Jewish Narrative* is that while it certainly helps to have read the comics and graphic novels cited, the authors manage to bring them to life as they comment on them. Ideally, this will create a feedback loop where people interested in the comics will read the book, and people intrigued by the book will seek out the comics.

Worth noting as well as a subtext of the book is how the narrative works cited, "Jewish" in whatever way, have become of interest to large segments of society that are by no means Jewish. Perhaps, as with Jewish American novels and films, "Jewish" is a metaphor for "human." Philip Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint* may be about a specifically Jewish narrator and his relation to his ethnic and religious background, but really, it's about everyone's weird family and how growing up in it affects one as an adult.

So what this book's essays and the works they comment on perhaps have in common is the need we all have to be different and yet to fit in, to be individuals while simultaneously part of a community.

In this light, since there are two essays about Will Eisner in this book, Eisner may be a reasonable figure to take a moment to examine and to keep in mind while reading the essays within.

Broadly speaking, Eisner (1917–2005) had two phases to his career that were relevant to this book. In his first phase, he created the weekly *Spirit* comic that appeared as a newspaper insert from 1940 to 1952, and is generally considered a high point in the development of comics. Set in a version of New York he called Central City, Eisner populated *The Spirit* with various ethnic types, including Yiddish-accented, urban Jews. While many, notably Jules Feiffer, have described the Spirit himself—a masked crime-fighter who has some attributes of a superhero—as being Jewish, this is something that has to be read between the lines to discern.

However, starting with 1978's *A Contract with God*—Eisner's collection of comics stories that helped jumpstart the modern graphic novel movement—the cartoonist focused on Jewish life in America in the twentieth century, a topic that he would explore until he passed away in 2005. Like prose novelists Roth, Saul Bellow, and Bernard Malamud, Eisner found fertile storytelling ground looking back with insight at the world from which he had emerged. Eisner also became passionately concerned about anti-Semitism, which he especially addressed in his final graphic novel, *The Plot: The Secret Story of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, the history of the notorious fraudulent document that continues to plague the world to this very day.

In these two phases of his career, Eisner goes from telling “coded” Jewish stories in *The Spirit*—including the Feiffer-scripted “Ten Minutes” about an ill-fated hustler from a seemingly (although not explicitly) Jewish neighborhood in the 1940s Bronx—to graphic novels, such as *To the Heart of the Storm*, that specifically deal with issues relating to Jewish life in America and Europe in the 1930s and 1940s as recalled decades later. One could say that Eisner, as much as any individual creator can, embodies the development of visual Jewish narrative. I would even go so far as to suggest that many of the comics and graphic novels discussed in this book are highly involved with Eisner, somehow engaging with his work, either continuing from it, expanding on it, or arguing with it—sometimes all three simultaneously. Food for thought, I hope, even if you don't necessarily agree.

In any case, I'll close by saying *mazel tov* to Derek and the rest of the writers of the book. May it sell 120,000 copies and open 120 million minds. Now, dear reader, go forth and explore this fascinating volume.

Danny Fingeroth

Acknowledgments

It is with deep gratitude that I acknowledge Daniel Morris and Zev Garber, who were the coeditors of *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* when this project first appeared as a special issue of the journal in 2011. Nancy Lein, *Shofar's* managing editor at the time, was indispensable in helping me to pull everything together, and in a coherent and visually attractive manner. It was their support and encouragement that drove me to transform that seven-essay study into this much more expansive collection.

Thanks also to those friends and colleagues who have served as sounding boards for this project as well as exciting discussants on the topic of Jewish comics. These include Danny Fingerroth, Ben Katchor, Steven E. Tabachnick, M. Thomas Inge, Steven M. Bergson, Harry Brod, Ranen Omer-Sherman, and my fearless cohost of *The Comics Alternative* podcast, Andrew J. Kunka.

Of course, I could not have brought this collection to fruition without the help of everyone at Bloomsbury Publishing, specifically David Avital and Mark Richardson. I thank you guys, as well, for being the home of the new Bloomsbury Comics Studies Series, an idea that I first hammered out with David back in 2012. I am proud to be the series' general editor. Here's wishing us years of productive collaboration on comics-related scholarship!

The following essays in this collection were originally published in the 2011 special issue of *Shofar* devoted to Jewish comic and graphic novels (volume 29, number 2), most in shorter form:

Lan Dong, "Thinly Disguised (Autobio)Graphical Stories: Will Eisner's *Life, in Pictures*."

Wendy Stallard Flory, "*The Search*: A Graphic Narrative for Beginning to Teach about the Holocaust."

Robert G. Weiner, "The Servant: Marvel Comics and the Golem Legend."

Cyril Camus, "The 'Outsider': Neil Gaiman and the Old Testament."

Nicole Wilkes Goldberg and James Goldberg, "'You Wouldn't Shoot Your Fellow Jews': Jewish Identity and Nostalgia in Joann Sfar's *Klezmer*."

Derek Parker Royal, "There Goes the Neighborhood: Cycling Ethnoracial Tensions in Will Eisner's *Dropsie Avenue*."