

THE GOLDEN AGE OF REPRINTS:
CLASSIC COMICS IN A CONTEMPORARY INDUSTRY

by

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ABSTRACT

This report focuses on the comics reprints environment in 2011 through an analysis of the reprinting activities at Montréal's Drawn & Quarterly. The report introduces the reader to Drawn & Quarterly by examining the comics environment from which it emerged in the 1980s and exploring the development of the company to the present day. The complete history of comics reprints in North America is explored, highlighting the role of reprints in creating the foundation of the comics industry. The reprints market in 2011 is discussed by analyzing Drawn & Quarterly's key competitors and their individual roles within the industry, and exploring the idiosyncrasies of the company's four main reprint series: *Nipper*, *Walt and Skeezix*, *The John Stanley Library*, and *Moomin*. Finally, the report closes with comments on trends in the marketplace, Drawn & Quarterly's current stance on comics reprints, and ideas on what reprints may look like in the future.

Above: 150 words.

Keywords: comics canon, comics reprints, comics series, D&Q, Drawn & Quarterly, Doug Wright, history of comics reprints, John Stanley, John Stanley Library, Moomin, Nipper, Seth, Walt and Skeezix

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THE GOLDEN AGE OF REPRINTS

AN ANALYSIS OF CLASSIC COMICS IN A CONTEMPORARY INDUSTRY

1. INTRODUCTION

Since their initial appearance within North American popular culture in the late 1890s, comics have existed in many media, from newspapers to dirty magazines, poorly printed pamphlets, and, more recently, between the covers of exquisitely designed and produced books. In their infancy, comics were regarded as lowbrow entertainment; today, society regards them as an art form worthy of further examination and exploration, representative of a range of tastes. With comics' elevated status within popular culture, the forces that limited the medium in the past have been removed, and the future of comics is as limitless as the imaginations of those involved. Although the maturity of the industry has helped to drive the medium forward, it has also facilitated the revisiting of underappreciated works from comics' history.

Comics' ephemeral nature throughout the better part of their existence has left the documented history of the form incomplete. Today, comics publishers like Montréal-based Drawn & Quarterly (D&Q) are investing significant resources in culling forgotten comics treasures, bringing much-deserved attention to those that have been buried in landfills, or later, dropped off at recycling plants. The act of revisiting these classic works in a contemporary setting fills gaps within comics history: new aspects of the classic works are discovered, and the lineage of contemporary cartoonists can be understood more completely.

Reprints have existed within the comics industry in North America since its inception in the late nineteenth century; the shape they currently take, however, is miles ahead of their original form. Contemporary comics are among some of the most exquisitely designed books available today. Collections of comics reprints conform to these high standards—standards that, while in part are a result of the maturity and evolution of the form and the sophistication of the audience, are also a product of the efforts of revolutionary comics publishers, including the reference company for this report, D&Q.

The report starts with an analysis of the comics environment in the 1980s from which D&Q emerged, followed by a brief history of the company's accomplishments to the present day. The report then explores the history of comics reprints in North America beginning with their first appearance in the late nineteenth century, focusing on their role in building the foundation of the comics industry, and ending in the mid-1990s with the demise of the first wave of modern reprints. A synopsis of the reprint environment in 2011 follows, including an analysis of D&Q's key competitors. Next, the report focuses on D&Q's reprinting activities, examining

series acquisition and series development. To explore series development, D&Q's reprints of Doug Wright's comics are analyzed. D&Q's reprint series of Frank King's classic strip, *Walt and Skeezix*, is also explored, highlighting the effects of placing classic strips in a new context. As the basis for understanding series design approach, the *John Stanley Library* and the notes of the series designer, Sethⁱ, are evaluated. Lastly, this section of the report looks at comics reprints' role in constructing the comics canon and creating our remembered/documentated history of the medium. The report concludes with observations on current trends in collector culture and its influence on reprint publishers, and an examination of D&Q's current stance on comics reprints.

i Pen name for Canadian born cartoonist and designer Gregory Gallant.

2. HISTORY OF DRAWN & QUARTERLY

2.1 COMICS CULTURE IN THE 1980S

The 1980s was an important time for comics in North America. The industry was by no means flourishing, but the accomplishments of a new generation of cartoonists and innovative publishers throughout these years formed the basis of the burgeoning industry we see today. Some of the finest contemporary comics artists including the Hernandez Brothers and Dan Clowes got their start during these seminal years by creating some of the first alternative comicsⁱⁱ. Evolving from the underground comix of the late 1960s and early 1970s, which created an audience for uncensored, adult-oriented comics in North America, alternative comics provided a less transgressive, more intellectually driven outlet for these adult readers—and artists—to sate their appetites (Mouly in Kartalopoulos, 2005). But the underground comix tradition had not died entirely—it survived in the works of the father of the form, Robert Crumb, including his magazine-sized comix anthology *Weirdo*ⁱⁱⁱ, which continued to push the genre in innovative directions, publishing renowned artists such as Gilbert Hernandez of the aforementioned Hernandez brothers, Terry Zwigoff (who would later direct the movie adaptation of Clowes’s most successful comic, *Ghost World*), Gary Panter, Harvey Pekar, and Kim Deitch. Also published in *Weirdo* were many artists who would later be published by D&Q, including Charles Burns, Dan Clowes, David Collier, Julie Doucet, Debbie Drechsler, Joe Matt, and Joe Sacco. *Weirdo* remained an influential publication within the industry until the publication of the twenty-eighth, and last, issue in 1993.

Publishing comics at the same time as *Weirdo* was Seattle-based Fantagraphics. In 1976 Fantagraphics launched the *Comics Journal*^{iv}, the industry’s first trade magazine; the company embarked on publishing activities that extended beyond the magazine in 1982 when it began publishing some of the first alternative comics in North America. Though moving the medium in a direction divergent from underground comix tradition, Fantagraphics began their comics publishing endeavors with close ties to the underground. While underground comix were produced across North America, they especially flourished on the West Coast. Based in the West, the influence of underground comix is evident in Fantagraphics’ early alternative publications. The company published the top artists of the early alternative scene, Daniel Clowes, Peter Bagge, and the Hernandez brothers; in the years to come,

ii Although the term “alternative comics” is still used by some, alternative comics are, today, more often simply referred to as comics.

iii *Weirdo* was published by San Francisco-based Last Gasp from 1981–1993. Control of the publication was turned over to cartoonist Peter Bagge with issue 10, and then Crumb’s wife, and fellow cartoonist, Aline Kominsky-Crumb, with issue 18.

iv The last regular print issue of the *Comics Journal*—issue 300—was published in November of 2009, at which point the publication moved online. On March 5, 2011, *The Comics Journal* relaunched their online publication, revitalizing the format and changing over the staff. The magazine is now run by *Comics Comics* (a web-based critical comics analysis blog that was retired with the launch of the new *Comics Journal*) editors Dan Nadle and Tim Hodler.

these five artists would be cited as inspiration for all those who became involved in the medium, including D&Q publishers Chris Oliveros (Oliveros, interview).

While west-coast Fantagraphics had roots in the underground, emerging simultaneously on the East Coast was something entirely different. Françoise Mouly created *Raw Magazine*—the highbrow alternative to lowbrow underground comix—In 1980. Co-edited by Art Spiegelman, *Raw* soon became the seminal alternative comics publication. Although the best known comic to be published in *Raw* was Spiegelman's *Maus*, the magazine also published the works of other influential cartoonists of the 1980s, many of whom later joined D&Q's stable, including Lynda Barry, Charles Burns, Julie Doucet, R. Sikoryak, and Chris Ware, who before contributing to the magazine spent his college days staring at the pages of *Raw*, mimicking the works of Gary Panter, Jerry Moriarty, and Kaz (Ware in Kartalopoulos, 2005). In an interview with comics critic Bill Kartalopoulos, Mouly describes the intent of *Raw*:

There was a goal that was to show an audience, a world, or whatever, to make it manifest how good comics could be. I mean, it was to fight the prejudices against comics as toilet literature, that they should be printed only on newsprint, and disposable...So here the large size, and the good paper, and the fact that it was non-returnable, were meant to force people to see how beautiful, and how moving, and how powerful, the work could be. And it should have Europeans and Americans and people from all over. It should bridge a lot of gaps. That was the intent. (Mouly in Kartalopoulos, 2005)

Throughout *Raw*'s life, Mouly followed these goals—goals that, for those familiar with D&Q, should ring a bell. Mouly's commitment to quality content, design, and production set new standards for the comics industry.

2.2 DRAWN & QUARTERLY: THE EARLY DAYS

Amongst the budding cartoonists influenced by *Raw* was Chris Oliveros, founder and publisher of Drawn & Quarterly. At the time of the company's inception, although Fantagraphics and *Raw* were driving the medium in new directions, the comics industry was still dominated by superheroes (Bell, 2002). Living in Montréal, Oliveros was privy to a wider range of comics than many: not only did Montréal have thriving anglophone and francophone comics scenes, but, unlike elsewhere in North America, European comics were relatively well represented (Bell, 2002). With exposure to a variety of comics styles, including those represented in *Raw*, *Weirdo*, and Fantagraphics' publications, it was clear to Oliveros that in order for the North American comics scene to mature creatively, it would need to be steered

v *Maus* was later collected in two volumes and published by Pantheon Books (an imprint of Random House). The first volume appeared in 1986; the second in 1991. Spiegelman received the Pulitzer Prize for *Maus* in 1992.

away from its fascination with capes and toward the likes of the aforementioned alternative publications (Bell, 2002). Oliveros published the first issue of his comics anthology, *Drawn & Quarterly*, in 1990. Early issues of the anthology included the works of Chester Brown, Joe Sacco, and Maurice Vellekoop, who remain leaders within the comics community today. Oliveros entered the scene with a commitment to publishing first-class comics by Canadian and foreign cartoonists; he saw comics as more than a popular form of entertainment—he regarded them as art, and published them accordingly. D&Q emerged in a post-*Raw* environment in which comics were now clearly aimed at an adult audience, and were, however gradually, being accepted as more than lowbrow ephemeral entertainment (Devlin, interview).

Paramount to the early success of D&Q were the multifarious and provocative nature of its expertly curated list and Oliveros's dedication to producing books with high production values. In an interview with *Canadian Business* magazine, Jeet Heer, co-editor of *Arguing Comics* and author of several introductions to comics reprints series, was quoted saying, "Oliveros was the first publisher who really cared about design...You'd think comics people would be sensitive to that, but the obverse is true" (McBride, 2009). Artist Jerry Moriarty once said, "Françoise [Mouly] would throw her body on the printing press if the work was not up to her standards" (Moriarty in Kartalopoulos, 2005). While Oliveros may not have been the first publisher to pay attention to comics' production and design values, he certainly was a leader. D&Q's high standards of quality, like those of *Raw*, attracted artists, some of the world's best cartoonists among them, and the company has consistently maintained those standards. The early success of D&Q in pushing alternative comics forward in North America was recently noted by Mouly in an online interview in which she acknowledged that the reason she ceased the publication of *Raw* in the early 1990s was because she felt the magazine was no longer necessary: *Raw* was created to fill a niche—alternative comics were underrepresented in North America—but the magazine acted as a catalyst, and publishers, notably D&Q, were able to pick up where she left off, continuing to drive the medium forward (Mouly in Dueden, 2011).

The late 1980s and early 1990s saw the emergence of several alternative comics publishers within Canada; of these publishers, only D&Q remains (Bell, 2002). Whenever Oliveros is questioned about his accomplishments—about how he was able to build, from the ground up, one of the top comics publishing houses in the world—his answer is always the same: "We just publish what we think is good." Oliveros's stock answer is as modest as the man himself, and although the statement may be the company's focusing line, the reality of the establishment and continued success of D&Q is the company's unrelenting commitment to the form that supports it.

2.3 MORE THAN A MAGAZINE

Although D&Q began as an anthology publisher, the company quickly expanded into pamphlets^{vi}, the first of which was Montréaler Julie Doucet's *Dirty Plotte*, followed shortly after by Seth's *Palooka-Ville*, Joe Matt's *Peepshow*, and Chester Brown's *Yummy Fur*, *Underwater*, and, later, *Louis Riel* (Bell, 2002). Although the majority of comics we see today are published in book form, the pamphlet format remained prominent in comics for most of the 1990s. As late as the year 2000, D&Q, an industry leader in book-format comics, only published about four books a year. Although Oliveros claims the progression from pamphlet to book format was natural, D&Q played an important role in pushing the industry in this direction: mainstream media outlets were enamoured of the company's "lavishly, lovingly produced" titles, and the popularity of book-format comics drove their dominance (McBride, 2009). Prior to the twenty-first century, traditional, pamphlet-style comics were only available through the direct market comics shops; in a 2004 article in the *New York Times Magazine*, D&Q, along with Fantagraphics, is given credit for expanding the comics retail market into traditional bookstores (McGrath, 2004). Although the quality of these companies' titles clearly contributed to their success in bookstores, the leading factor behind D&Q and Fantagraphics' success in delivering their product to the book market, which was omitted from the *New York Times Magazine* article, was their alignment with two of the most prestigious literary publishers of the twentieth century—Farrar, Straus and Giroux and W.W. Norton & Company, respectively.

Still based in the same Montréal neighbourhood—but no longer out of Oliveros's two-bedroom apartment—D&Q operates with five full-time employees, two part-time, and several interns. Two key members of D&Q's team—who moved to Montréal in 2002 from New York to take on their new roles within the company—are associate publisher Peggy Burns and art director Tom Devlin. With the addition of their expertise and unrivaled dedication, the company has become one of the leading comics publishers in the world: only ten percent of D&Q's sales are in Canada. Seventy-five percent of revenue comes from the United States, while the remaining fifteen percent of sales are made in Europe. The esteemed publisher produces thirty books a year; on average, six of these titles are reprints. D&Q's current reprint series include *The John Stanley Library*, *Walt and Skee-zix*, *The Collected Doug Wright*, *Moomin*, and, beginning in the fall of 2011, *Everything*, which will be a comprehensive collection of comics legend Lynda Barry's work. Though not a series, D&Q also reprints collections of Yoshihiro Tatsumi's short stories.

vi Traditional comic book form is the pamphlet format, which Unesco defines as a "printed publication of at least 5 but not more than 48 pages exclusive of the cover pages" (Unesco, 2004). Pamphlets are generally saddle stapled.

3. HISTORY OF REPRINTS

3.1 THE CREATION OF THE COMIC BOOK

Despite the relative youth of comics as a medium, comics reprints are old hat. In fact, the first comic book ever published in America, which appeared in March of 1897, was a collection of reprints of Richard F. Outcault's *Hogan's Alley*. Titled *The Yellow Kid in McFadden's Flats* and published by G. W. Dillingham Company (with permission from the copyright holder, Hearst), the 196 page, black and white, hardcover collection sold for fifty cents (Olson, 1997). Used for the first time in North America, the phrase "comic book" was printed on the book's back cover (Coville, 2001). Similar in format to the comics reprints we see today, *The Yellow Kid in McFadden's Flats* took a much different shape from the pamphlet comics that preceded it. This collection was also unique in that it contained supplementary material written by E. W. Townsend, the strip's writer (Coville), a feature that, though unprecedented at the time, is now commonplace in comics reprints. On many levels, *The Yellow Kid in McFadden's Flats* displays the essential characteristics of contemporary comics reprints.

Although the late eighteen hundreds saw innovation with the emergence of the first comic book, over the next thirty years publishers continued to produce collections in the same vein as the *Hogan's Alley* collection, reprinting newspaper strips—either previously published or rejected (Hajdu, 2008). While the early collections were generally hardcover, publishers slowly began to experiment with size, colour, and pricing (Coville, 2001). Intrinsically, comics at this time were disposable ephemera, designed to be enjoyed daily and then used to wrap up the trash. Because of this, their value—derived "from their freshness, like produce or journalism"—diminished after they were printed (Hajdu, p. 21). And so in 1933, with no intent to actually sell the comic book, which was comprised entirely of reprinted material that was perceived to be worthless, Harry Wildenberg struck a deal with Procter and Gamble to produce one million copies of a four-colour comic book to be given away as a promotional item (Coville). The comic, titled *Funnies on Parade* and printed by Eastern Printing, was the first comic book to take the classic comics pamphlet form—saddle stitched, measuring eight by eleven inches (Hajdu).

The success of *Funnies on Parade* had much to do with the format. Either Wildenberg or his salesman, Maxwell Gaines, discovered that eight pages of a comic could be printed on a single page of newsprint, and that the printing could be done cheaply during the press's downtime (Hajdu, 2008). With its minimal overheads, *Funnies on Parade* was so successful as a promotional item that within the year, Gaines created a second book, *Famous Funnies*, which again featured ads for common household products. By early 1934, Gaines struck a deal with American News Company, a major distributor, and began selling his advertisement-backed comics on newsstands for ten cents (Hajdu). While comics had been trickling onto the newsstands in various forms for several years, *Famous Funnies* was the first to achieve wide-

scale distribution, establishing comics' presence on newsstands (Hadju). Thus, as a vehicle for advertisements and a venue for devalued newspaper strip reprints, comic books, as we know them today, were born, becoming a prominent element within North American popular culture.

The success of these comics in the first half of the 1930s—still comprised entirely of reprinted material—led Eastern Printing to form an equal partnership with George Delacourt of Dell Publishing; Gaines later partnered with DC Comics to create *All American Comics* (Coville, 2001). In 1935, one year after the second issue of *Funnies on Parade* hit stands, the first comic book containing new material, *New Fun*, was published by Major Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson (Hadju, 2008). Realizing there was an alternative to paying newspapers for their previously used or discarded strips, Wheeler-Nicholson commissioned new comics to be created especially for publication within *New Fun* (Coville). While collections of reprinted material continued to be published, reprints were no longer the only material gracing the pages of comic books, and comics containing new material overshadowed the reprints. Although comics reprints established the foundation for the comics industry, notable developments within the reprint market would not be seen again until late in the 1970s.

3.2 THE FIRST WAVE OF MODERN COMICS REPRINTS

In spite of the comics industry's early reliance on reprints, the popularity of these books waned as new material found its way between the covers. One of the first publishers to dive extensively into comics reprints since these foundational years was Kitchen Sink Press. Created by the Comic Book Legal Defense Fund founder David Kitchen in 1969, Kitchen Sink Press began publishing reprinted classics in 1972, including Will Eisner's *The Spirit*, George Herriman's *Krazy Kat*, Alex Raymond's *Flash Gordon*, Al Capp's *L'il Abner*, and Milton Caniff's *Steven Canyon* (The Comic Book Database). Kitchen Sink was joined in the reprint market by many, often small, independent publishers throughout the 1980s. These emerging reprint publishers tended to pop up and produce reprints for a year or two before folding (Oliveros, interview). While the reprints being published in the 1980s were of higher production values than those produced in the 1970s, they were, nonetheless, cheaply produced, poorly designed paperbacks devoid of context (Oliveros). Confined by the technology of the day, these reprints were little more than photocopies of the original strips placed between monochromatic covers (Devlin, interview). In some cases, when the photostats were not available, the reprints were derived from traced versions of the originals (Devlin). In other cases, in an attempt to make the strips conform to standard comic book format, publishers would reformat the content in various sizes within the same book, creating a jarring experience for the reader.

Of the publishers to venture into reprints extensively in the 1980s, Fantagraphics is one of the few that continues to thrive today—or even exist, for that matter. Fantagraphics' reprint activities included the magazine *Nemo, the Classic Comics Library*, edited by comics historian Rick Marschall, and an imprint, the Nemo Bookshelf. The magazine ran for thirty-three issues, and unlike the bare-bones reprints that were common in the 1980s, it went beyond simply reprinting vintage comic strips and included supplementary information on the history of the strips. Fantagraphics' reprint imprint, the Nemo Bookshelf, included Harold Gray's *Little Orphan Annie*, Walt Kelly's *Pogo*, Will Gould's *Red Barry*, Milton Caniff's *Dickie Dare*, E. C. Segar's *Popeye* and Harold Foster's *Prince Valiant* (The Comic Books Database). Although the production value of these reprints conformed to the standards of the day, Fantagraphics' early innovation with reprints can be seen with their *Popeye* and *Prince Valiant* collections, which were both complete collections in an era when “best of” collections were the norm.

Another publisher to venture into reprinting complete collections during the first wave of modern reprints was industry powerhouse DC Comics with DC Archive Editions in 1989. The editions collect early material previously published by DC Comics, including *Batman*, *The Flash*, *Green Lantern*, *Justice League of America*, *Superman*, *Teen Titans*, and *Wonder Woman*, as well as some comics originally published by other companies, such as Will Eisner's *The Spirit* and Wally Wood's *T.H.U.N.D.E.R. Agents*. Following a rigid design template that makes it difficult to tell the over one hundred books in the series apart, DC Archive Editions is the only reprint series that existed in the 1980s that continues to exist today. Its importance stems not only from the fact that it was among the first series to reprint complete collections—for better or worse—but also that DC was the first publisher to reprint comics in hardcover editions since the early nineteenth hundreds. However flawed the series may be, it planted the seed of archiving in hardcover, setting a standard among collectors seeking to read series in hardcover book form, a format that today is the norm for such collections.

Although reprints were common in the 1980s and early 1990s, by the mid-1990s the reprint industry had withered, and the industry saw few collections of reprinted material until the second wave of modern reprints began in 2002 (Oliveros, interview). Many factors contributed to the disappearance of these reprint lines, including the comics industry's decline during the 1990s due in part to the failure of several major distributors (Devlin, interview). Another reason for the failure of reprints, however, was the packaging. The reprints of the late twentieth century were marketed to their original audience—to collectors and readers who had enjoyed the strips when they were originally published—in a fashion that was nothing more than nostalgic and antiquated (Burns, interview). The reprint publishers during these years failed to introduce the material to new readers, and the limited customer base was not enough to sustain the industry, which, at this time, was still limited to comic shops, as interest from mainstream media and bookstores had not yet been piqued.

4. REPRINTS TODAY

4.1 EVERYMAN'S COMICS

Shortsighted vision and a floundering comics industry effectively killed the production of comics reprint by the mid-1990s; however, by the early 2000s the industry had made an unpredictable comeback, and technological advancements finally made quality reproductions of classic comics possible. Brought on in part by the unprecedented success^{vii} of Chris Ware's *Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth* after its 2000 release by Pantheon Books under the editorship of landmark designer Chip Kidd, the mainstream media began to pay attention to comics, and this attention meant that, for the first time, bookstores began to stock graphic novels (Oliveros, interview). Before this distribution expansion, comics publishers were limited to the direct market; the acceptance of comics into the general book trade meant the production of deluxe, hardback reprints was possible, as the market was finally large enough to make these collections financially feasible (Oliveros). In addition to the hugely successful *Jimmy Corrigan*, other titles published during these years include Joe Sacco's *Safe Area Goražde* (2000, Fantagraphics) and *Palestine* (2002, Fantagraphics), Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* (2003, Pantheon), Adrian Tomine's *Summer Blonde* (2002, Drawn & Quarterly) and Daniel Clowes's *Ghost World* (1997, Fantagraphics) and *David Boring* (2000, Pantheon)—all titles that garnered a plethora of mainstream media attention and were instrumental in gaining mainstream acceptance for comics. The success of these titles was partly because of the building hype surrounding the “graphic novel,” but these books were also building the hype that was helping to sell them. Satrapi and Sacco captured their readers and brought them into war zones, like Spiegelman had done with *Maus* a decade earlier, bringing vividly to life with the skillful combinations of image and text a world that readers could not enter with text alone; similarly, Tomine, Clowes, and Ware pushed the boundaries of fiction with innovative form that captured the attention of readers in a way that comics that predated this period had not achieved. Although several comics achieved similar mainstream acclaim in the mid-1980s, including Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, Gilbert and Jaime Hernandez's *Love and Rockets* series, and Alan Moore's *Watchmen*, the movement lacked teeth because these quality titles were sparse; the critical mass of quality books required to achieve mainstream acceptance and prolonged media attention was not achieved until the turn of the century (McGrath, 2004).

In a 2004 *New York Times Magazine* article, D&Q and Fantagraphics were credited as the “enterprising publishers” that “managed to get their wares into traditional bookstores” (McGrath, 2004). This achievement, however, could not have been accomplished without the unprecedented partnerships between D&Q and Farrar, Strauss and Giroux and between Fantagraphics and W.W. Norton & Company.

vii In 2001 *Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth* won the Guardian Prize for best first book, a prize that had previously been awarded to authors including Zadie Smith, Jonathan Safran Foer and Philip Gourevitch (McGrath, 2004).

Pantheon Books' success with *Jimmy Corrigan* was partly the result of the publisher's success in selling the book through the book trade, a success that was made possible because of Random House's book trade distribution. For independent comics publishers, like D&Q and Fantagraphics, the success of this title made it clear that times were changing within the comics industry, and partnerships would need to be formed with distributors that were able to facilitate the transition away from solely the direct comics market and towards the much larger general book trade. D&Q formed its partnership with Farrar, Strauss and Giroux in 2004 after dissolving a distribution partnership with Chronicle Books that was established in 2002; Fantagraphics aligned itself with W.W. Norton in 2001.

In addition to these exceptionally successful titles and expansion in distribution channels, Hollywood adaptations of several comics helped to bring even more attention to the medium, including a film adaption of Dan Clowes's *Ghost World* in 2001 and Harvey Pekar's *American Splendor* in 2003, as well as a second wave of superhero comic adaptations, including *X-Men* (2000), *Spider-Man* (2002), *Daredevil* (2003), *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* (2003), and *Hulk* (2003), which helped to revitalize popular culture's interest in the medium.

4.2 THE REPRINT REVOLUTION

With the wider acceptance of comics by mainstream culture, publishers were finally in a position to produce the reprint collections they had been dreaming of for decades, but that previously would not have attracted a large enough audience to make their production feasible. Spring 2002 marked a paradigm shift in comics reprints; the poorly reproduced paperback collections of the past were trumped by a superior product, one that honoured classic comics in a package that represented the contents' cultural value. The second wave of modern comics reprints—the Golden Age of reprints—began in 2002 with Fantagraphics' reprint series of George Herriman's *Krazy Kat*, titled *Krazy and Ignatz* because of copyright restrictions. Gorgeously designed by Chris Ware, not only was it the first reprint series to pair a contemporary cartoonist with an influential comic series—a strategy that is commonplace in reprint series today—but the design captured the spirit of the comic, drawing on the time period in which it was originally created. *Krazy Kat* had been reprinted in the past by numerous publishers, dating back to the first comic books in North America, but unlike its antecedents, the design of the series added a new element to the content, and following the tradition that Fantagraphics began in the 1980s with *Prince Valiant* and *Popeye*, *Krazy and Ignatz* was to be a complete series, including all of Herriman's Sunday and daily strips. Today, the publication of the dailies is complete, and Fantagraphics has begun reprinting the Sundays.

Krazy and Ignatz is an important series for Fantagraphics partly because *Krazy Kat* is one of the most popular comic strips of the twentieth century, being the first to break out beyond the lowbrow status of comics with such fans as Gertrude Stein,

Picasso, and William de Kooning, but also because the comics were in the public domain, which allowed Fantagraphics to cheaply experiment with the addition of a celebrity designer. The series also includes introductions/tributes by Jeet Heer, Ben Schwartz, and Bill Blackbeard. In addition to everything the paperback series has to offer, it has a low price point (\$19.95–\$24.95), which has helped to cement the success of the series, and to this date, it is one of the most successful comics reprint series in existence.

Although *Krazy and Ignatz* was the first reprint series to be published in a deluxe format with a contemporary cartoonist as the series designer, more often Fantagraphics' *The Complete Peanuts* series, which did not appear until 2004, is given credit for pushing reprints in this new direction. However, if it were not for the success of *Krazy and Ignatz*, Fantagraphics may have never published *The Complete Peanuts* in the format it now takes, a format that has become the norm within the comics reprint industry. Although thousands of books over the past forty years have reprinted various *Peanuts* strips, no publisher had attempted a complete collection (Douresseau, 2004). Beautifully designed by Seth, *The Complete Peanuts*, now on its fourteenth volume, is scheduled to span twenty-five volumes, which will include all fifty years of the strip. At a rate of two books per year, the entire collection will be complete in the fall of 2016; each volume includes two years of strips and invaluable introductory material.

Perhaps part of the reason why *The Complete Peanuts* series overshadowed *Krazy and Ignatz* as the leader in modern comics reprints was because Fantagraphics bought the rights from United Media, and therefore had the power of one of the biggest and most influential syndication companies today, as well as, and even more important among hardcore *Peanuts* fans, the explicit consent, support, and promotional assistance of Charles Schulz' widow, Jeannie Schulz. In addition, every *Peanuts* books, no matter the subject or format, debuts on the *New York Times* bestseller list, and as a result so did Fantagraphics' editions. Because of these factors, Fantagraphics knew their series would sell, and, coupled with the public's newfound acceptance of comics, launching the most extensive marketing campaign in history in support of a reprint series was not much of a gamble. And, with the new shape the industry was taking, for the first time, the primary focus of the marketing efforts, which included counter displays, promotional posters, and media efforts across all four media—print, TV, radio, and internet—was the book trade (Reynolds in Douresseau, 2004).

Series designer Seth responds modestly to claims that *The Complete Peanuts* revolutionized comics reprints; however, he does acknowledge the series' role in steering the marketplace towards complete collections rather than selections from treasuries. Although complete collections had been done in the 1980s, they had never been done with such success, or care, and they were never the rule, but always the exception. While this element of *Peanuts* is quintessential to the modern reprints movement, similar to *Krazy and Ignatz*, the other two defining features of the series—the inclusion of supplementary information and the focus on exquisite

design—have played an equally vital role in the reprints that have entered the marketplace since the release of Fantagraphics' *Krazy and Ignatz* and *Peanuts*. When questioned about the shift in reprints post *Peanuts*, Seth responded as follows:

I suspect something in *The Complete Peanuts* seemed 'new' at that moment in time. It did seem to make a dividing point between the reprinting activity from before and the reprinting activity after. I'm not entirely sure why... but it might have to do with the care that was focused on the packaging and format. It was the start of a period where comic related books were starting to be assembled with a lot more care than the collections of previous decades. In life, timing is everything and *The Complete Peanuts* came at just the right moment. (Seth, interview)

While timing played a role in *Peanuts*'s success, Seth's rethinking of *Peanuts* in a design sense also played a vital role. *The Complete Peanuts* is perhaps the perfect amalgamation of business and art. What sets Seth's design apart from that of other *Peanuts* reprints is that he *rethought* the strip. Seth added an emotional melancholy element with his design never before seen in a *Peanuts* book. So while the design is exquisite, the approach to the design is also groundbreaking. Seth saw the melancholy, depressed nature of *Peanuts* (perhaps from reading it himself as a child) and designed the series using dark, melancholy colors to highlight this aspect of the comic. Previous collections of *Peanuts* were generally designed using very poppy and kid-oriented palettes. Seth intentionally avoided such colours, in part to make the series more attractive to adult readers (Seth, interview).

Whether it was a result of the marketplace sitting in a prime position, the on-point series design, the effectiveness of the marketing activities, or the inherent quality of the strips, *The Complete Peanuts* quickly became the most successful reprint series in comics history. More likely, however, it was no single element that garnered the series' success, rather a convergence within the marketplace. *Peanuts*'s signature elements, which it shares with *Krazy and Ignatz*, define the modern comics reprint, and together the two series influenced a flurry of reprint projects that closely follow in their footsteps.

4.3 THE REPRINT ENVIRONMENT IN 2011

Following the release of *The Complete Peanuts*, the reprint industry quickly expanded; publishers across North America began developing their own reprint collections, and, in some cases, devoted imprints solely to reprinting classic comics. Fantagraphics, too, developed several additional reprint series, including two titles that they had previously published as part of their Nemo Bookshelf imprint in the 1980s, *E.C. Segar's Popeye* and *Prince Valiant*. While both these series had been previously completed in softcover, the new editions conform to the deluxe twenty-first-century reprint production standards.

Not only did Fantagraphics set the bar for the modern comics reprint, but Seth's design of *The Complete Peanuts* had a major impact on subsequent reprint series. In fall 2006 IDW Publishing released the first volume of *The Complete Chester Gould's Dick Tracy*. While Seth played no role in the production of this series—the credited designer is Ashley Wood—the series design is strikingly similar to Seth's work with *Peanuts*. While the ethics of IDW's design decisions are questionable, perhaps it was also a case of Fantagraphics changing the way people looked at comics reprints (Devlin, interview). One way or another, IDW came to the conclusion that Fantagraphics' *Peanuts* was how comic strip reprints in the twenty-first century were suppose to look, and IDW carried on this tradition with the establishment of their imprint—the Library of American Comics—in 2007, dedicated to “preserving, in definitive editions, the long and jubilantly creative history of the American newspaper comic strip” (“The Library of American Comics”). IDW now has one of the largest lists of comic strip reprints in the industry. With *Dick Tracy* volumes being released on a quarterly schedule and *Little Orphan Annie* volumes being released three times a year (both of which, like Fantagraphics' collections, have introductions by industry experts), IDW's list is growing at a rapid pace; fourteen strips are currently reprinted as part of the library, including beloved *Archie*, *Family Circus*, and *Blondie*. All the titles in the library are hardback and of archival quality, and generally include supplementary information.

Deeply involved in comics reprints, IDW has a second reprints imprint—Yoe! Books. Created specifically for the comics collector and accomplished creative mind of Craig Yoe, the imprint draws on his very large, idiosyncratic comics collection (Devlin, interview). Yoe! Books is an example of collectors' prevalent role in the reprints industry. While Yoe is more than simply a collector—earlier in his career he was the creative director of *The Muppets*—he represents collectors' influence on the reprints market. With an industry saturated with reprints sourced from a handful of collectors, the shape of comics history can easily shift to reflect these collectors' personal taste^{viii}.

Another player in the North American reprints game is the Milwaukee-based publisher Dark Horse. While Dark Horse reprints collections of comics from mainstream publisher Marvel, they also reprint Marjorie Henderson Buell's *Little Lulu* and *Tubby*. They began reprinting *Little Lulu* in 2005. Dark Horse differs from other classic comics reprint publishers today in that their collections focus less on the added value of first-class design and supplementary material, and more on achieving a price point that will put the product in as many hands as possible. The inexpensive format of the mainstream publisher's paperback reprints is similar to that of their typical publications; it is unclear whether this is a strategic decision to keep the price point low or just a case of the publisher sticking with what they know (Devlin, interview).

viii Comics collectors and their influence on shaping comics' documented history are discussed further in chapter six.

Another key publisher producing reprints today is New York-based Abrams. What sets Abrams apart from the rest is that they are not strictly a comics publisher, but rather an art book publisher. Their books are not series, but more often coffee table books that display the art of a particular artist over the years—*The Art of Jamie Hernandez*—or cover a pivotal moment in a comic’s run—*Archie Marries*—or the history of a creator—*Jerry Robins: Ambassador of Comics*. Abrams publishes the art history books of the comics medium. Perhaps the most influential book published by Abrams is Dan Nadel’s *Art out of Time*, which collects the work of forgotten cartoonist from comics history. This book is discussed in more detail in section 5.5.

These four publishers—Fantagraphics, IDW, Dark Horse, and Abrams—are D&Q’s key competitors within the reprints industry today. The titles produced by these companies share similarities; however, each of them, including D&Q, satisfies unique roles within the marketplace, serving its own niche audience. Each of these publishers represents a certain standard of quality and a certain price point within the market—each company produces a product that satisfies today’s deluxe reprint standards, with the exception of Dark Horse, whose products are marketed to consumers concerned primarily with price point and less with the quality of the packaging or collectability.

5. REPRINTS AND DRAWN & QUARTERLY

D&Q has a distinctive list; unlike many general trade publishers, the company's list is cohesive in content and design to such a degree that savvy readers can pull a D&Q book off the shelf and identify it as such without checking the logo on the spine. Regardless of whether the book is hardcover or softcover, verging on pocket sized or covering the top of a coffee table, the high production values of D&Q's books are an integral element of the company's brand. D&Q has built its reputation on publishing comics that push the medium forward; the company's titles that look back—the reprints—are no exception. Despite their differences, the reprints at D&Q, progressive in their own right, share many similarities with their contemporary titles. From the start, Oliveros built the company on one earnest ambition: the desire to publish *good* comics. Regardless of the decade a comic was created in, D&Q seeks to bring quality content to readers—content that deserves to be read, and demands to be recorded in comics history—in a package that properly denotes the contents cultural value. With its publishing vision, D&Q's rescued master-of-the-medium Doug Wright from slipping into obscurity, enabled the genius of Frank King's *Gasoline Alley* to be fully realized, archived a pack of John Stanley's rug rats—Melvin the Monster, Tubby, Nancy, Judy and Val, just to name a few—in a package tailored to honour Stanley's exemplary skills, and introduced Tove Jansson's daily *Moomin* strips to a North American audience for the first time.

The comics in D&Q's early reprint stable pushed the medium forward in their day, and continue to add momentum to the form today through their influence on contemporary cartoonists. Regardless of how progressive a cartoonist may be, the comics they create are a palimpsest of comics history. Not long after Chester Brown's *Louis Riel* was released in 2004, readers began noting the similarities between Brown's artwork and that of Harold Gray in *Little Orphan Annie* (Heer, 2003). Likewise, only after reading *Gasoline Alley* does one notice the influence of Frank King on Chris Ware (Devlin, interview). And no matter how hard "alternative comics" readers try to separate their favourite works from superhero genre comics, the quintessentially alternative work of the Hernandez brothers cannot be divorced from its superhero influence. Comics history is intricately woven into the contemporary medium. Classic comics' vital role in the progression of the medium is highlighted and explored through comics reprints, and this genealogy is something that D&Q's readers—smart comics readers who care not just about where the medium is going, but also where it came from—are interested in, particularly when one starts to notice elements of a classic cartoonist's work popping up on the pages of their favourite contemporary artists. Understanding classic comics gives context to comics today, and, as is the case with *Louis Riel*, adds new depths to already complex titles.

Classic comics' below-the-radar influence on the industry today coupled with their role in shaping the medium's remembered history makes reprints at D&Q an important aspect of the company's publishing activities, from both business and

cultural perspectives. While many logistical considerations regarding publishing reprints are similar to those regarding the publication of contemporary comics, there are several aspects of publishing reprints that are unique; these idiosyncrasies will be explored in the following sections of the report, including specific copyright considerations and the impact of collector culture on reprint series acquisition, the value of creating a new context for classic content to exist within, reprint series design best practices, and lastly, the cultural and historical impact of the specific comics that contemporary publishers decide to revisit.

5.1 SERIES ACQUISITION: COPYRIGHT AND COLLECTOR CULTURE

D&Q is in the enviable position of being an industry leader. As such, industry members, cartoonists, and readers alike have a lot of faith in the titles that the company selects for publication. For a company producing such a reliably strong list, D&Q's selection criteria are remarkably simple—the editors simply ask themselves, how much do we love it? (Oliveros, interview). Though relying on one's personal taste may not be a textbook method to develop a stable enterprise, within publishing, throughout history, most brilliant publishers, including Penguin's Allen Lane, have been able to anticipate demand, as much as they satisfy it, which means they have a big hand in shaping reading preferences or taste, as is the case with D&Q's acquiring editors, Chris Oliveros, Tom Devlin, and Peggy Burns. Although the decision to publish reprints essentially comes down to how much the editors like the content, there are several other factors that are considered by D&Q before embarking on a reprint series.

A primary consideration when determining the feasibility of reprinting a classic comic is whether a comic is protected by copyright or it falls within the public domain. Determining who (if anyone) owns the copyright to classic comics is not always an easy task. Because copyright applies to individual issues of a comic and not to a series in its entirety, the rights to each issue within a series have to be checked individually. In text-based publishing, the one aspect of a text that is exempt from copyright is the title; in comics, however, many characters—whose names often double as the series title, as we saw earlier with *Krazy Kat*—are trademarked, adding one more legal obstacle to an already complex equation. In addition, because of the age of many classic comics, and the drastic metamorphosis the comics industry has been through since many classic comics were created, often the original copyright holder has long ago sold their rights to another party, making it difficult to ascertain who is currently in possession of the rights. The last factor affecting rights is whether or not the copyright has expired. The American copyright act of 1909 (which most classic comics are protected by) ensured protection to all works containing published notice for a term of twenty-eight years, with the option to renew protection for another twenty-eight years at any point within the last year of protection (Devlin, interview). If the copyright is not renewed at some point in the twenty-eighth year, the work falls into the public domain (Devlin).

To assist with determining who owns the rights to classic comics, a copyright lawyer is retained by D&Q.

D&Q's most complex copyright encounter involved the reprinting of Marjorie Henderson Buell's *Tubby*. The company released their first volume of *Tubby* in the summer of 2010 as part of the *John Stanley Library*^{ix}, about one month before another comics publisher, Dark Horse, released their first volume of a reprint series of the same comics. Having purchased rights to reprint *Tubby* from Classic Media, it came as quite a surprise to Dark Horse that another publisher was reprinting the same material—a situation that negatively impacted the sales of both publishers' editions (Oliveros, interview). Although the copyright uncertainties have since been resolved, at the time, Classic Media—a company whose sole purpose is to buy and sell rights—maintained that they owned all rights to the material, including the trademark on the stylized version of Tubby Tompkins; however, as copyright to the issues passed hands throughout the years—first from Buell to Western Publishing Company, and then to Golden Books, whose assets were later acquired by Classic Media—the rights on several issues of *Tubby* were never renewed, leaving those issues in the public domain, and available for publication by any interested company, an opportunity that D&Q embraced. Additionally, the trademark on Tubby Tompkins expired in 2007 and was never renewed—again, likely a clerical oversight by Classic Media. While Dark Horse's edition of the series will be comprehensive, D&Q is limited to the issues in the public domain—twelve in total. D&Q's first volume contained four of those issues, number nine to twelve, and was published under the no-longer-trademarked title, *Tubby*. Although D&Q had originally intended to publish more than one volume, the realization that Dark Horse was publishing the same material led D&Q to reconsider the viability of the series. With the lower price point of Dark Horse's paperback volumes and the saturated market (a common problem with content in the public domain), D&Q will likely not publish a second volume of *Tubby*, despite the desire to showcase the content within its *John Stanley Library*.

Determining the availability of a series involves more than assessing the copyright status: unlike with text-based reprints where the entirety of the content is already collected, before a comics reprint series can be given the green light, a complete source for the collected material must be tracked down. In their infancy, comics were ephemeral—disposable entertainment delivered to one's doorstep in the morning and intended to be placed on the curb with the trash in the evening. With their traditional lowbrow status, extensive archives do not always exist, and publishers often rely on dedicated collectors as a source for their material—someone must have previously invested much time, and often money, in collecting these classic comics of the past before they can be reprinted in the present.

Comics collector culture began to take shape in the 1960s with the development of the direct market. At the time, comics were distributed through magazine distribu-

^{ix} John Stanley, being a journeyman cartoonist and scripter, wrote stories for Buell's characters, and, in some cases, created the art as well.

tors who were unwilling to disseminate the adult-centric underground comix that were quickly rising in popularity; underground comix publishers were forced to create their own counter-cultural distribution networks, which, in accordance with the focus of the material, was centred on record stores and head shops, bringing comix directly to their niche consumers (Wolk, 39). While major publishers were unwilling to undertake large print runs at the time because of market uncertainties, underground comix publishers were able to move up to five or ten thousand copies of a book through this direct distribution channel; this distribution system evolved into the direct distribution comic-book stores that emerged in the mid-1970s and still exists today (Wolk, 39). These early comics shops created a place for comics fans to gather and talk about comics. Comic book conventions, which also emerged in the 1960s, were another venue for such activities (Devlin, interview). Together these two emerging forces—comics shops and conventions—formed the foundation for collector culture within the industry.

Even with the extensive collector culture surrounding comics, it has never been easy to compile complete collections. Though fictional, Seth's *Wimbledon Green* is a realistic portrayal of the lengths collectors will go to assemble complete collection—and the prices they will pay. When comics collecting began in the 1960s, however, the activity did not necessarily require a fat wallet, simply a lot of time and the patience to dig through crates (Devlin, interview). As time passed, and the prices of aging comics began to rise, it became unreasonable for an individual to acquire a comprehensive collection of any particular comic (Devlin). In 2010, *Detective Comics no. 27*, the issue in which Batman makes his debut, set the record for highest selling price of a single issue in comics history, \$1.075 million; one month later, Superman beat out Batman, and Superman's debut issue, *Action Comics No. 1*, sold for \$1.5 million (Nguyen, 2010).

Because of the high price of classic comics, reprint publishers often rely on pre-existing collections as their source. Although today reprint series are generally dependent on the collections of individuals, there are several public institutions across North America that have extensive archives of artists' work, and in some cases even own the originals^x. Within the United States, the largest comics archive resides at Ohio State University. Both in depth and scope, the archive is extensive, and a vital resource to anyone embarking on a reprint series. D&Q utilized Ohio State's archives for the first volume of *Walt and Skee-zix*. Though the collection at Ohio State is extensive, the use of public institutions is, often, prohibitively expensive, and because of this, many reprint publishers have turned to private collections as a more affordable source of classic comics collections. Although D&Q used the archives at Ohio State for portions of the first volume of *Walt and Skee-zix*, for all succeeding volumes, the private collection of cartoonist Joe Matt was the primary source of content.

^x IDW's *The Complete Little Orphan Annie* is an example of a series reprinted from archived original art. Harold Gray, the comic's creator, saved virtually all of the original art, which he donated to Boston University in the 1960s. The superior quality of the strips reprinted in this series is noticeable.

D&Q's *Nipper* series is another example of a series relying in part on the collection held by a public institution. Although not all of the original art is available, the majority of it was donated by the artist's family to the Canadian National Gallery. Because of the high price of scanning the gallery's collection, D&Q paid to have only the best years of Wright's work scanned, and opted to utilize the private newspaper clipping collections owned by Wright's family and series designer, Seth, to complete the company's collection. Since the collection owned by the National Gallery is original art, the strips printed from these scans are superior to those printed from scans of yellowed newspaper clippings; however, with improvements in digital retouching software, publishers are able to restore newspaper clippings much more effectively than they could in the 1980s.

With the advent of the internet, it has become easier, and less expensive, to track down scarce material, making the use of costly public institutions even less of a necessity. When publishers are missing a strip in a series, often all it takes is a digital request sent out to the nerd network—the legions of comics fans trawling comics industry blogs (Burns, interview). Oftentimes, they come though with missing comics almost instantly, whereas, before the internet, that one missing strip could take months, or even years, to track down (Burns). Comics collectors are often so pleased to see collections of their favourite classics being published that they are happy to lend or sell their comics to publishers at a reasonable price.

Determining the availability of a comic—through private or public collections—is just the first step in deciding whether reprinting the material is a viable business decision. The second factor to consider is whether or not there is a viable market for the material, or whether one will have to be developed. Part of the success of *The Complete Peanuts* was that the strip had not yet faded from the collective memory of North American society. With many of the strips D&Q reprints, the artist's work is no longer prominent within the cultural milieu. Regardless of the historical significance of a comic, or how well respected a publisher is within the industry, it is not always possible to build an audience for a classic comic within our contemporary environment. D&Q published a collection of Clare Briggs's *Oh Skin-nay!* comics in 2006. Despite the quality of the work, D&Q was unable to cultivate an audience for the material, and, sadly, no subsequent reprints of the artist's work have been published. In some cases, however, all the comic needs is a modern-day champion, a prominent cartoonist to put their name behind the strip—this is where a respected series designer comes in. By attaching a big name within the industry, like Chris Ware or Seth, to a series, publishers can more easily find a home for forgotten or obscure content within our contemporary industry.

As we've seen, acquiring a reprint series can be an extensive process; however, there are several financial benefits to reprinting classic content. Acquiring content from the public domain accrues no costs to the publisher. Although acquiring the rights to some copyrighted work can come with an unwieldy price tag, often the rights can be acquired for very little cost. Without having the financial burden of large

advances, acquiring reprint series can be an excellent way to expand one's list with few upfront costs.

5.2 SERIES DEVELOPMENT: FORMAT, PRICE POINT, AND DOUG WRIGHT

Once the viability of a reprint series is established, the extent of the series needs to be determined. The industry trend is towards comprehensive collections, and, for the most part, D&Q's reprints conform to these standards; however, for a small company like D&Q, committing to a comprehensive series is a major undertaking, especially since sales dwindle as a series progresses (Burns, interview). In France for example, series are the norm—bookstores and libraries are accustomed to stocking complete series and readers look forward to seeing a series through to the end. The opposite is true in North America. Although retailers are becoming increasingly versed in stocking series with the recent success of *Harry Potter* and *Twilight*, change is slow. After all, trade bookstores are still learning how to shelve comics, let alone reprint series^x. Because publishing series is not a trade tradition in Canada, it is understandable that a retail tradition does not exist either. The push for maximizing return per square foot of retail space controls the products available in bookstores; unfortunately, this means that stocking every volume within a series that is now on its eighth or twelfth volume is not a priority for many retailers, and this unavailability of complete series negatively impacts sales. The success of comics series such as Jeff Smith's *Bone*, which was picked up by Scholastic, and Bryan Lee O'Malley's *Scott Pilgrim*, which was turned into a major motion picture in 2010, has helped to train bookstores to effectively stock, and therefore sell, comics series, but retailers still have a lot to learn (Oliveros, interview). Even if a bookstore wanted to shelve an entire series, there would likely be logistical obstacles—there is only so much room in bookstores, leaving little room to shelve *The Complete Peanuts*, for example, which will comprise of twenty-five volumes when it is complete.

Whether due to retailers accustomed to single title promotion/merchandising and pumping bestsellers, or a reading culture that is unaccustomed to the form, declining sales over the life of a series often results in price increases as a series progresses. Selecting a price point—and, therefore, format—that will be sustainable over the life of the series is ideal. The publisher needs to balance the desires of devoted fans, who often want high-end reprints, and newcomers to the material, who need the content and the price to be accessible (Mullaney in Lorah, 2008). Regardless of how strategically the initial format decisions are made, in all likelihood, pricing hikes will still need to occur in order to maintain the production of the series. Luckily, this trend tends to be a reality that most reprint comics readers are familiar with, and once they've committed to a series, dedicated readers generally stay faithful to the comics even when faced with the imposition of price increases (Burns, interview).

x A 2010 article in *Publisher's Weekly* talked extensively about the difficulty trade bookstores have in shelving comics, which are a medium, not a genre; since bookstores are organized by genre, shelving comics in one section is exclusive and limits their exposure to a broader bookstore audience (Reid, 2010).

This was the case with D&Q's *Walt and Skeezix*: after the fourth volume the price increased to \$39.95 from \$29.95. Despite this somewhat drastic price increase, the series still has enough faithful readers to support its continued production (Burns). The casual reader, the reader without any previous relationship with the comic, however, is easily driven away by the higher price tag.

Another factor that can prohibit readers from reading books within a series is volume numbering. When readers have no previous relationship with a series they are often reluctant to pick up in the middle of the series and start reading, even though in many cases there is no disadvantage to beginning in the middle. To counteract this problem, with the *Moomin* series, D&Q chose to exclude numbers from the spines of the books. This decision has helped to facilitate higher sales of later volumes within the series.

Whether as a solution for declining sales, or simply because the original format is not the best fit for the content, adjustments to format can breathe new life into a series. While it is ideal to maintain the format of a series throughout its run, sometimes changing the format is the best solution (Devlin, interview). D&Q's Doug Wright series illustrates this point succinctly. The first book in the series, *The Collected Doug Wright Volume One*, was released in the spring of 2009. Designed by Seth, the oversize, metallic-hardcover tome measures nine by fourteen inches, spans 240 pages, and weighs in at just under five pounds^{xii}. The first volume of *The Collected Doug Wright* is a comprehensive look at both the life and career of one of Canada's most beloved and most successful mid-century cartoonist. Reprinting material from Wright's family's and Seth's personal collections, as well as the National Gallery's, it includes thousands of pieces of art, pictures, letters, and unique excerpts from the artist's journals, creating a picture for the reader of not only Doug Wright the cartoonist, but also the individual (Burns, 2009). The book includes Wright's earliest work through to the early days of his seminal pantomime strip, *Nipper*. With a biographical essay by Brad Mackay and an introduction by Canadian cartoonist and creator of the landmark strip *For Better or Worse*, Lynn Johnston, *The Collected Doug Wright Volume One* is a book all comics collectors and book fetishists should have on their shelves.

The \$39.95 cover price is not necessarily prohibitive in itself (though pushing it for some readers); however, the book has several other barriers to entry. Although Doug Wright was a household name at the peak of *Nipper's* popularity, the strip was largely a Canadian phenomenon. In the United States, where the majority of D&Q's market resides, the lovable, bald-headed children in Wright's strip had no cult following—readers did not know what to make of the deluxe tribute to an unfamiliar cartoonist (Burns, interview). Even within Canada, where the strip was syndicated for over thirty years, the only existing collection of the strip outside of the artist's family's belongs to the series designer, Seth. For a cartoonist

xii Spare copies around the office are used to weigh down the scanner lid when scanning material with creases.

that today is virtually unknown, especially outside of Canada, the lavish format may have hindered rather than helped sales.

Since the primary goal of *The Collected Doug Wright Volume One* was to introduce Wright's work to a new generation of readers, the format was rethought, and the focus shifted from collectability to accessibility (Oliveros, interview). With a new format and stripped down content, the second book in the collection, *Nipper 1963–1964*, achieved the goal of reaching new readers. With much of the material on the history, carrier, and life of Wright removed, the reader is left with only the meat—two years of the enduring comic strip *Nipper*, as well as a brief introduction by Brad Mackay. Still designed by Seth, and still lovely in its own right, this paperback edition measures eight by five-and-a-half inches and sits at 112 pages: it's almost small enough to carry in one's pocket. At less than half the price of the first volume, *Nipper 1963–1964* fared much better in the market than the previous volume, receiving very good reviews, including mainstream media coverage from powerhouses *Boing Boing* and *Entertainment Weekly* (Burns, interview). In addition, positive word of mouth within the comics community really helped to sell the book (Oliveros). The inexpensive paperback format does not suit all of D&Q's reprints—indeed, it is the only series like it—but it seems to be just the (W)right format for *Nipper*.

The third book in the collection, *Nipper 1965–1966*, is scheduled to be launched in the fall of 2011 and will continue to be released annually in the same paperback format as the second book. With such a sustainable format, D&Q's staff is confident that they will be able to keep churning out volumes until they run out of material (Burns, interview). Wright's body of work, a vital part of twentieth century Canadian cultural history, escaped obsolescence thanks to D&Q's publishing vision and ability to adapt to the demands of the market, finding the appropriate form to bring Wright's work to the reader. Learning from the success of *Nipper's* new format, D&Q has become increasingly aware of the necessity of selecting the best format for the content, even if at times it means straying from the deluxe packaging that has come to define the company's brand.

5.3 CONTEXT AND WALT AND SKEEZIX

In 2000, in volume three, issue one of D&Q's flagship anthology, *Drawn & Quarterly*, Oliveros began reprinting Sunday pages of the American cartoonist Frank King's *Gasoline Alley*, retitled *Walt and Skeezix* because of copyright restrictions. Beginning as a satire of the post-ww1 car craze, *Gasoline Alley* quickly transformed into the story of a family. The strip was one of the first cartoons to use contemporary America as its setting, and King's characters age in real time, painting a succinct portrait of life in America—of America's collective cultural history—in the twentieth century (Burns, 2005). At the time, only reprinting the Sundays, Oliveros did not have grand designs to reprint a complete collection; he

did have an interest in reprinting the dailies, but it was still too early in the evolution of the comics industry to conceive of a comprehensive collection that was up to the high production standards that Oliveros had set for the company (Oliveros, interview). In 2000 the comic shop direct market was all that comics publishers had to work with, and with all its limitations, including its limited reach, a reprint series the likes of which we see today would not have been possible (Oliveros). At this time, D&Q was only publishing about four books a year; the remainder of the company's titles were pamphlets (Oliveros).

By 2004, however, the industry had changed drastically. The inclusion of comics in the book trade created a much larger market for comics; all of a sudden the production of books instead of pamphlets was viable (Oliveros, interview). In addition, the success of Fantagraphics' *Krazy and Ignatz* and *The Complete Peanuts* gave hope to those with aspirations to produce similarly ambitious reprints projects. As the industry transformed before his eyes, Oliveros saw an opportunity to reprint *Gasoline Alley* in the format he wanted to, but he knew that taking on a reprint series of this nature would be a serious commitment. Indeed, to this day, the *Walt and Skeezix* collection is D&Q's most extensive reprint series. Not only would embarking on such a series be a big commitment, but the act of tracking down a reliable source for forty years worth of daily strips was daunting. D&Q artist Joe Matt had been collecting the strip for years, and encouraged Oliveros to publish a comprehensive collection from his own archives; however, because of the nature of syndicated strips, Oliveros knew he would need a secondary source against which he could check Matt's collection. Since *Gasoline Alley* appeared in four hundred newspapers across America, some newspapers would print the strips on the wrong day (Oliveros). Luckily, Ohio State University has microfiche copies of the *Chicago Tribune*, which was the newspaper that held the rights to King's strip. With the *Chicago Tribune's* collection available to check the dates on Matt's strips and fill in the occasional gap or replace damaged strips in his collection, Oliveros realized that the publication of a comprehensive collection would be possible. At the same time, Oliveros was in contact with King's granddaughter; to his delight, he discovered that she had extensive archives of her grandfather's work, including photographs, letters, and other ephemera that could be used as supplementary content within the collection. The collection that Oliveros did not think would be possible back in 2000 was finally fully realizable. With series designer Chris Ware—who often cites *Gasoline Alley* as one of his favourite comic strips—on board, in addition to series editor Jeet Heer and collector Joe Matt, the first volume of *Walt and Skeezix* was published by D&Q in 2005. Currently reprinting only the dailies, the series is now D&Q longest running reprint collection.

Walt and Skeezix is the first multi-volume collection of King's classic strips. Even when the strip was at its peak, no publisher collected it in book form, which meant that after each daily strip graced the newspaper's page, the content was thrown in the trash, essentially obsolete the day after publication (Burns, interview). The obscurity of the strip posed both an opportunity and a challenge: unlike commonly reprinted comics like *Popeye* or *Little Orphan Annie*, there were no

competing collections of the work floating around used book stores or being auctioned online; however, *Gasoline Alley*, undiscovered and underappreciated, did not have much of a built-in audience, which was part of the challenge of marketing the collection (Burns). Luckily, with famous cartoonist Chris Ware^{xiii} as the designer, the series received a great deal of attention upon release of the first volume, and despite the fact that the strip was largely unknown, the first volume achieved widespread acclaim.

The annual volumes, now five in total, are each over four hundred pages, cloth bound, debossed, and jacketed, showcasing Ware's design at its finest. Each volume collects two years of daily strips (beginning in 1927 when the dailies first appeared) and includes a unique eighty-page introduction by Heer, illustrated with photos and ephemera. Part of the magic of Heer's introduction is that it is a biography within a reprint series; it is a time capsule. Though many publishers have since followed, D&Q was the first to include supplementary material of this magnitude in a reprint series, and with its inclusion, *Walt and Skee-zix* is more than just a reprinted classic comic strip: it is the story of one of America's finest cartoonists.

The new context in which King's strips are placed not only creates a stunning package for the material, but also presents the content to the reader in a way that maximizes the strengths of King's storytelling, making the content even more accessible today than it was when it was originally published almost a century ago and delivered daily to the doorsteps of over thirty million readers across America (Burns, interview). The strip's pacing is what makes it so unique today. When it was originally published, the continuous nature of the strip made it difficult for casual readers to enjoy. In a newspaper article written by the series editor Jeet Heer and published shortly after the release of the first volume, Heer notes that *Gasoline Alley* has not been canonized with comics classics such as *Peanuts* or *Krazy Kat* because "as a strip that dwelt on the daily travails of ordinary people, *Gasoline Alley* needs to be read in bulk to be appreciated" (Heer in Rizzo, 2005). In the new context of its collected form, the reader experiences King's pacing in a much more concentrated way, one that makes King's strip more engaging and optimizes his story telling abilities. The condensed format also makes the strips more accessible to today's comics readers who are used to faster-paced content.

Although *Walt and Skee-zix* is the reprint published by D&Q that benefits most from the contextual change brought on by its collection in the book format, regardless of the comic, placing classic comics that were once ephemera into a contemporary package affects the way the comics are perceived and enjoyed. Aside from the obvious fact that collecting classic comics and placing them within the context of a book adds posterity to the content, making it easily accessible to a new generation of readers, the new context also plays a role in how the content is perceived by the reader.

xiii Chris Ware was also the series designer behind the first reprint series of the second wave of modern reprints, *Krazy and Ignatz*. In addition, he is one of the finest contemporary cartoonists today. Volume twenty of his comic series *The Acme Novelty Library*, which was released in the fall of 2010, has virtually sold out less than half a year later. The print run was twenty-five thousand.

For example, Dark Horse and D&Q each placed their *Tubby* reprints in different contexts: Dark Horse published the content in a paperback format more closely resembling the original context in which the comics appeared, while D&Q produced exquisite hardcovers, with embossing and foil stamping. Neither format is incorrect. Dark Horse's format does little to alter the context in which the content is consumed, which, it can be argued, is the right way to reprint classic comics, as it most closely resembles the context in which the creator intended the work to appear. Conversely, D&Q's format highlights the content's importance within comics history and adds value and collectability to content that was previously ephemeral in nature. Regardless of the approach taken by a publisher, it is important to consider the effect that the new context will have on the material, and select a format that is most suitable to the content. For *Walt and Skeezix* this meant a comprehensive collection that highlighted King's gift for pacing, while Doug Wright's work, widely unknown, benefits from a minimalist approach that keeps the comics affordable, and thus encourages readers unfamiliar with the content to give it a try.

5.4 SERIES DESIGN AND THE JOHN STANLEY LIBRARY

Designed by world-renowned cartoonist Seth, D&Q's *John Stanley Library* plays a vital role in celebrating Stanley's underrepresented works. A journeyman cartoonist who made his name on licensed properties like *Little Lulu*, Stanley's other work is widely forgotten. The library includes several series written—and sometime drawn—by Stanley, including *Melvin Monster*, a story about a good little monster who has a tough time fitting in with all the bad monsters in Monsterville, *Thirteen Going on Eighteen*, which is often considered a smart alternative to *Archie*, *Tubby*, an offshoot from *Little Lulu* where the title character has more time to shine, and *Nancy*, a comic centred around the title character, a self-assured young girl who spends much of her days outsmarting the boys. Since these works are not among Stanley's best known, Seth's role in the series has been instrumental to its success.

Regardless of whether a series' design is done in or out of house, there are some initial decisions regarding the shape of the collection that need to be made before a designer can begin. When choosing the format and size of a series, not only does it need to reflect an appropriate price point, as discussed earlier, but it also must be suitable for the contents: the format and size of the book needs to work for the entire collection, which in some cases means it must be adaptable to material of varying sizes (Devlin, interview). While D&Q does not currently publish any collections of reprinted comics that include both daily strips and Sunday pages, other publishers have faced this challenge with mixed results. Published by Abrams, Dan Nadel's *Art Out Of Time* is an example of the challenge of finding a format that accommodates the varying sizes of its content. The daily strips and comic book pages in this collection are well suited to the format; however, the Sunday pages, which were originally much larger, and therefore shrunk down considerably, are illegible. Though to a much lesser extent, the varying sizes of the contents played a role in

selecting the format for the *John Stanley Library*. Throughout Stanley's long cartooning career, comic books became smaller; D&Q's art director, Tom Devlin, had to select a format for the series that would accommodate content that came from any stage of Stanley's career.

Another factor in choosing a format is the intended audience. In the case of the *John Stanley Library*, the content was designed to be enjoyed by children; Devlin selected a large format and decided to only collect three or four comic book issues in each volume to keep the page count low and therefore easily handled by little hands. By keeping the length of the volumes short the books are also quick reads, which preserves the original reading experience. The format keeps the comics in children's territory, conforming to a classic children's format, but also accommodates the varying sizes of the works contained within.

The amount of material to be collected in the complete series also affects the length of each volume. When a series' run is short, like *Melvin Monster*, these decisions are simple: the series only spanned nine issues so it was clear that each volume would contain three issues. With a longer running series, it is important to plan out all the volumes before the initial design stages begin so pacing is consistent through to the last volume.

Once these initial format decisions are made, the design of the series can begin. Because the *John Stanley Library* includes several different titles, it was important that that design of the series be adaptable. Seth discusses his solution:

With the [*John Stanley*] *Library* I tried to build a design-system based on the very simple idea that these were a "Library." I have always had a real fondness for children's encyclopedias and I wanted to get some feeling of these old books into the series. By building the look of these books around a simple grouping of horizontal rules (and the [*John Stanley Library*] seal) I knew that I could easily create simple variations in the arrangement of these elements on the book covers to allow an almost endless number of new titles to be added to the series. They could look basically the same as the other books—and yet, by simply moving these elements up or down, here or there, they could have their own specific places in the series. This would allow them to sit together on the shelf as a unified whole in a way that wouldn't be as cohesive if each series was entirely its own design. I also knew, though, that each book could probably stand alone as a nice children's book because of the bold images on the covers and the bright colours involved. Basically they needed to work individually, *and* as a title (say *Nancy*) *and* as part of an overall library. The idea of a pepped-up encyclopedia model was a simple solution. (Seth, interview)

In addition to his over-arching design concept, Seth selected a colour palette that would appeal to children. With *The Complete Peanuts*, Seth deliberately chose low-key colours because he wanted to avoid an association with children's publishing;

with the *John Stanley Library*, however, he wanted to emphasize those elements, so he chose to work in bright tones to create an appropriate mood (Seth, interview). Although Stanley's reprint history is limited, the previous collections of his work have always been aimed at adult collectors; with his design, Seth hoped to make the books appeal more to children, since they were Stanley's intended audience, after all.

It was also important to Seth that Stanley's characters, being central to his work, played a central role in his design. Stanley's characters were "big and bright and extroverted...eccentric (yet likable)," which were rare traits in comics of that time period as most characters were "remarkably vapid and cardboard" (Seth, interview). The personalities of these characters come alive in Seth's design, flawlessly expressing their quirks.

Another aspect of Seth's design, which is visible in all the series he designs in addition to the *John Stanley Library*, is the attention he pays to creating a complete package for the content: the reading experience begins with the front cover and ends with the back cover, effectively leading the reader into the work and easing them out. As a designer, Seth notes his enjoyment in designing the front matter of books:

Chip Kidd once said to me that the pages between the half title page and the [start of the body text] are the place for a book designer to shine—to use some poetry. He's right, I never forgot that. I love those introductory pages. They have a rhythm to them that can really be special if you can balance images, the spreads, the text etc. It should roll by the reader like a panorama—setting the emotions for what is to come in the book itself. (Seth, interview)

The success of Seth's design comes not only from his exemplary design skills, but also his love of the content. In fact, it is Seth's respect for Stanley's work that led him to design the series. Years ago when Devlin was editing a special issue of the *Comics Journal* Seth wrote an essay about Stanley to be included in the journal; years later when Devlin conceived of the *John Stanley Library*, Seth was an obvious choice for series designer (Seth). Much as Frank King shaped the work of *Walt and Skee-zix* series designer Chris Ware, Stanley had an influence on Seth's work:

He moved his characters through space and time in interesting ways and my first chapter of *Clyde Fans* was heavily influenced by Stanley's signature trait of having characters talk endlessly to themselves while engaged in other matters. I've also been a student of how he structured his comic books—the care and thought that went into each decision on how his separate short stories and one-pagers fit together. (Seth, interview)

While Seth's exquisite design has contributed to the success of the series, the quality of the content, of course, is what keeps readers coming back. Stanley was ahead of his time, writing protofeminist cartoons with women in dominant roles at a time

when this was not the norm, and these aspects of his cartooning result in comics that continue to hold up today, where many comics created during these years do not. If Stanley had been working in a different medium, film, for example, he would be remembered by society at large, but instead, he was creating comics in a time when what he was doing was considered the lowest of low culture (Oliveros, interview). Though the design is secondary to the content, Seth's packaging has been instrumental in introducing this quality content to a generation that may otherwise never have known it existed.

5.5 THE COMICS CANON AND MOOMIN

The first chapter of Douglas Wolk's comics theory book *Reading Comics and What They Mean* is titled "What Comics Are and What Comics Aren't." Although the opening chapters of other comics theory books may not be so blunt in their intent, they all tend to revolve around asserting some sort of defining statement regarding what should be included in the realm of comics and what should be excluded. Art Spiegelman defines comics as "writing, drawing, and this other stuff that's somewhere between the two" (Spiegelman in Kartalopoulos, 2005), which, being a non-definition, is perhaps the best definition of comics that I've come across. If someone attempted to define comics fifty years ago, surely some of today's best comics would be excluded from the antiquated definition. An example of this is Lynda Barry's recent work: when Amazon first received *What It Is*—having no idea what to make of the thing—they classified it, to Barry's delight, as science fiction. Similarly, if one were to use Spiegelman's definition, Maira Kalman's work, residing as it does in liminal territory, could be classified as comics; others, including Kalman herself, who fervently denies any similarities between her work and comics, would disagree, but to many, the distinction is not so clear. Comics are a young medium, and throughout their century of evolution in North America, the form has grown and expanded in delightfully unpredictable ways. Boxing comics in with definitions—or panel walls, as it were—not only hinders the creativity of the medium, but is also a waste of time, as the defining elements of *what makes a comic a comic* are sure to expand in the years to come.

Looking forward, with artists like Barry pushing the medium in unexpected directions, the diversity of the medium will continue to expand. Looking back into comics history, however, diversity within the medium is not easily visible. It is not the case that unique works created by fully-formed artists were not being created; rather, for many years, there was no celebration of comics as an art form, and those works that were not greeted with immediate monetary affirmation were quickly dropped by publishers, leaving a plethora of first-class work without support because it lacked mass appeal (, 2006). These works quickly faded into obscurity, often the moment they were tossed in the trash. Because of comics' ephemeral nature and low-art status, there is a wealth of history that has yet to be uncovered. The comics documented in history are primarily those that achieved commercial

success—although these comics are deserving, they form an incomplete picture of comics history (Nadel).

Enforcing this canon are books like Wolk's *Reading Comics*, but also art exhibits like *Masters of American Comics* and *the Comics Journal's* 210TH issue, which listed the one hundred best comics of the twentieth century. In addition, by making the material available to readers, comics reprints play an instrumental role in canon construction. To this date, the majority of comics that continue to be reprinted, and therefore shape comics history for society at large, are these canonized works. The literature canon wars of the 1980s were fought to broaden what was being taught in classrooms to include more works by women and minority writers; similar expansion has occurred within the art history canon (Donadio, 2007). Both literature and art have a well-documented history, making the exclusion of widely forgotten works correctable; with comics, however, the history is undiscovered, and therefore malleable (Campbell, interview). The exclusion of works today could mean their permanent exclusion within a generation (Oliveros, interview).

Until recently, the canon was shaped by heavy hitters like Stan Lee and collectors like Bill Blackbeard and Rick Marshall who have connections within the publishing industry (Spurgeon, 2006). The same names—Richard F. Outcalt, Windsor Mackay, George Harriman, E.C. Segar, and Walt Kelly—chiefly belonging to white, American men, pop up time and again (Devlin, interview). These greats were established as such in the 1960s when the fandom began to take shape and comics folks began meeting and talking at conventions (Devlin). Without someone to champion comics from the past in the modern day, their ephemeral nature leaves them marginalized (Spurgeon). Even Fantagraphics, which built its reputation on challenging the status quo, rigorously upholds the canon with its reprint series (Devlin).

As in literature and art, women have long been excluded from the comics canon. Marjorie Henderson Buell, who created *Little Lulu*, which, until *Peanuts*, was the most licensed strip in comics history, and Dale Messick, creator of *Brenda Starr, Reporter*, which ran in newspapers from 1945 to 2011, are rarely mentioned among the great cartoonists of the twentieth century. And although *Little Lulu* is now being reprinted, for such a popular comic, it is astonishing that it was never reprinted until 2005; *Brenda Starr, Reporter* has never been reprinted.

Although the majority of reprints today enforce the canon, we are starting to see publications that broaden the lens, focusing less on the established American classics. Forward-thinking publishers like D&Q have played an instrumental role in this expansion. One such comic championed by D&Q is Tove Jansson's *Moomin*. Although the strip was syndicated in forty countries around the world and enjoyed a readership of several million, *Moomin* had never been syndicated in North America and, therefore, was virtually unknown on the continent. Furthermore, despite its popularity in Britain, it had never been reprinted in English, only in Scandinavian languages where Jansson was a celebrity. In addition to being gender exclusive, comics reprints tend to be geographically myopic. Until D&Q began

reprinting *Moomin* in 2006, the only European comics series to be successfully reprinted in the United States was *Tintin*. Expanding the North American canon on two fronts—gender and geography—*Moomin* has become the company’s top selling reprint series; with 45,000 copies in print, the first volume is in its seventh printing. Deservedly, and at last, Jansson has been given the position she deserves within the North American comics history. But the D&Q series not only awarded Jansson with the readers she deserved in North America, the series also spawned an international interest in reprinting the work, sparking many foreign editions—most using D&Q’s design.

While D&Q consistently challenges the canon, they are not the only publisher to do so. Dan Nadel, publisher at Picture Box and co-editor of the *Comics Journal*, is well known for his efforts in bringing much-needed attention to under-appreciated works from comics history. Published by Harry N. Abrams, Nadel compiled two comics history books—*Art Out of Time: Unknown Comics Visionaries 1900–1969*, and *Art in Time: Unknown Comic Book Adventures, 1940–1980*. As the titles suggest, these collections focus on the “lost comics” (Nadel, pg. 9, 2006). Nadel saw holes in the documentation of comics history, and, with these two books, found a place for many under-appreciated artists within the narrative of comics history. In addition to giving more obscure works a few moments on centre stage, Nadel has managed to broaden the diversity of work that the industry takes seriously. In *Art Out Of Time* Nadel takes widely unknown cartoonists like Boody Rogers and Fletcher Hanks and looks at them less as freak oddities and outsiders, and more as individual artists (Devlin, interview). The context in which these works were published—as forty-dollar art books published by an esteemed art book publisher—helps to increase the perceived value to these underappreciated works.

Culturally, reprints’ role in expanding the comics canon is perhaps the most valuable aspect of continuing to publish these works. For publishers like D&Q who have long worked to push the medium forward, reprinting these invaluable works is not only a pleasure, but a duty—an effort to right the wrongs that exist within this “impure medium” (Nadel, pg. 6, 2006).

6.) CONCLUSIONS

6.1 COLLECTOR CULTURE AND CULTURAL VOGUE

Part of the reason why comics reprints in the 1980s were not sustainable was that the primary audience for the books was comics collectors; today, however, that audience has expanded and it is not just collectors that are interested in classic comics. In part the expansion of the audience is because of comics presence in trade bookstores, but also, as Jeet Heer points out, because the historical consciousness of our current culture is stronger than ever, and people are seeking to learn about the past through other means than history textbooks (Heer, 2002). The success of shows like *Canada: A People's History*, historical novels by Margaret Atwood, and biographical comics like Chester Brown's *Louis Riel* highlight the current trend towards informing oneself about history through popular culture (Heer, 2002). Reprinted comics, particularly when presented with supplementary information, provide a history lesson for readers. In the case of *Walt and Skeezix*, the reader learns about the collective history of America during the 1900s.

But it is not just the historical consciousness that is helping to sell comics reprints. Collector culture is creeping its way out of niche countercultural pockets into the mainstream in many ways; similar to complete seasons of television shows presented on DVD, or discographies of artist's completed works, comprehensive collections of classic comics are aligned with the current cultural trend towards collecting popular culture in complete packages (Taylor, 2005). Although people's attraction to completeness is nothing new—some anthropologists speculate that our desire to do so stems from our instincts to hunt and gather—its prevalence in mainstream culture has not been this strong since the popularity of stamp collecting waned in the early 1900s (Rubin, 2008). This current trend is favourable to publishers such as D&Q, who invest a substantial portion of resources in the production of volume after volume of reprints.

6.2 THE FUTURE OF REPRINTS AT DRAWN & QUARTERLY

Although reprints are not among the highest selling books at D&Q, they provide a stable and predictable source of income for the company. Despite the success of D&Q's reprints, the model is still in flux and the future of each reprint series is as unpredictable as the future of the publishing industry itself. Declining sales of a series as it progresses is currently the top obstacle for the company, but D&Q is committed to finding creative solutions—even if it means straying from the preferred hardcover format, as we saw with *Nipper*—in order to keep its reprint series alive. Initially D&Q approached its reprint series from the same perspective that it approached all of its titles: if the content was good, the company would publish it as a deluxe, hardcover book (Oliveros, interview). Publisher Chris Oliveros is

the first to admit that this approach has some flaws. He notes that, as we saw with *Nipper*, the hardback format is not always the best fit for the content, and, as was the case with an early reprint, Clare Briggs's *Oh Skin-nay!*, the company's assurance of quality is not always enough to sell a book. There are currently no plans to alter the format of any more of the company's reprints series, but there is constant chatter around the office about ideas for new series, and about innovative formats and approaches that could maintain the sustainability of reprinting classic comics in the years to come.

Likely, particularly with the success of *Nipper*, D&Q will experiment with other paperback reprint series in an attempt to lower its overheads and keep the editions at a price point that is not prohibitive and places the content in the hands of as many readers as possible. This format will lend itself particularly well to collections of children's comics, which are likely to be seen from D&Q in the near future. Although various formats will be explored, Oliveros's personal vision—to publish *good* comics, which to Oliveros means first-rate content and production—is still the sole driver behind the company's activities, and will continue to be the reason why comics readers trust D&Q as an authority on quality content.

Although the reprint industry will likely remain similar in form for the next several years, speculations regarding what it may look like further into the twenty-first century produce some interesting questions, many of which, at this point, do not have answers. With comics' evolution from staple-bound pamphlets to hardcover books, and movement from newspapers' pages to computer screens, what impact will the art's increased posterity and existence within more long-lasting formats have on reprint collections in the future? Will the same careful curation be necessary when the work is already available in various forms? How much longer can the reprints industry survive before all the comics considered "worth" reprinting are exhausted? Or will the well simply be replenished as contemporary comics age and become classics? In our current environment, the internet is flooded with webcomics and reproductions of vintage comics, and, brought on by the increased popularity of comics beginning at the turn of the century, the print comics industry has become oversaturated. What impact will comics' increasingly mass appeal have on the medium? Despite the uncertainties, D&Q's assurance of quality and role as a gatekeeper will remain valuable to comics readers, and, likely, will become even more valuable as uncurated digital content becomes even more prevalent.

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