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The Graphic Novel

An Introduction

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Chapter

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# 3   Underground Comix and Mainstream Evolutions, 1968–c.1980

This chapter continues the historical analysis of the development of the ==graphic novel== in further chronological order by taking our narrative forward from the 1960s into the 1970s. In it we underline the role of the underground comix in changing the form and the creation of its first cultural star, Robert Crumb. While no clear notion of the ==graphic novel== existed in the public mind for much of this period, one can very clearly put forward for discussion works that would be hugely influential on future creativity, such as Justin Green's *Binky Brown Meets the Holy Virgin Mary* and Jaxon's *Comanche Moon*.[1] Equally, it is important to describe how the pioneer ==graphic noveli==sts Will Eisner and Art Spiegelman were greatly influenced by the milieu of comix.

The chapter does not therefore propose any revisionism in the standard history of comics, and in fact we here recommend several important existing histories written by Jean-Paul Gabilliet, Charles Hatfield, Paul Lopes, Mark James Estren, and Patrick Rosenkranz.[2] However, in its concluding paragraphs, we discuss how some parallel developments outside the world of the comix were also leading to the contribution of long-length, adult-focused comics quite similar to our present-day ==graphic novels== (e.g., newspaper strips in collected editions by Charles Schulz and Garry Trudeau), and how in a corner of the sci-fi community there were

also ambitions for longer, implicitly more literary works, which gave rise to insiders from this world labeling some works as graphic novels or the similar term "illustrated story." By the end of the 1970s, there was no full consensus on when to use "graphic novel," but in works such as Eisner's *A Contract with God: A Graphic Novel* (1978) and Archie Goodwin and Walter Simonson's *Alien: The Illustrated Story* (1979), people were producing and reading works with close relation to today's publications.

## Comix: foundations for the graphic novel

We do not propose to write a new history of the underground comix scene but rather to summarize briefly how that culture fed into the graphic novel. What is important to recognize is that in the mid- to late 1960s, it was on university campuses (Michigan State, University of Texas-Austin, and University of California, Berkeley, to name some of the better-known) and in the radical districts of major urban spaces (including Haight-Ashbury and the Village in New York) that graphic narratives aimed at adults, and with little or no connection to superheroes (including pop and the post-pop noir variants) were first circulated, printed on the new off-set presses that facilitated self-publishing and small press endeavors. Robert Crumb, Gilbert Shelton, Kim Deitch, Jaxon, and Justin Green, among others, produced new amusing, sexually explicit, and often satirical strips in self-produced magazines or in supplements to student newspapers. Their work was self-conscious, sometimes quasi-autobiographical, and utterly irreverent. For them, no topic was taboo. Sex, race, hippies, old mainstream comics, and the alternative drop-out scene itself, as well as targets in straight and conservative America, were all fair game for satire.

College humor magazines created a network of venues and distribution for young satirical cartoonists. Similarly, nationwide humor magazines (e.g., *Mad* and *Help!*) featured clever one-to-two-page satires from unknown artists who had not worked for superhero or other mainstream strips (see also Chapter 2). In 1965 free newspapers and magazines such as *East Village Other*, *LA Free Press* and *Oracle* developed and provided

alternative noncommercial newspapers for students and anyone else interested in alternative media perspectives. Momentum was then gained in 1968 when three individual artists self-published landmark comix. In San Francisco, Gilbert Shelton created his *Feds 'n' Heds* and Robert Crumb made *Zap*, while in Chicago, Jay Lynch and Skip Williamson completed *Bijou Funnies*. These three publications heralded a revolution, and within a relatively short period a booming self-sufficient market could sustain three hundred different titles, with new material being printed in runs of twenty thousand.[3]

The underground comix changed preexisting assumptions of what comics could achieve. Both in style and in subject, they laid the groundwork for the alternative comics and the breakthrough of the graphic novel in the later years of the 1980s. Charles Hatfield explains further in his landmark study *Alternative Comics: An Emerging Literature* that the underground artists addressed topics that would become subjects of graphic novels in years to come; notably, autobiography and introspective strips about creators' lives and outlooks (original exponents being Crumb and Justin Green, as well as women's underground strips that didactically asserted selfhood and gender interests in counterpoint to the sexist objectifications in much of the male-produced work). Hatfield also underlines in *Alternative Comics* that the comix scene created a market of production and consumption outside of mainstream superhero comics. Here the artists owned their own work and were not employees for a commercial comics concern. The underground community demonstrated that artists could achieve success without becoming entangled in the formal comics industry. The comix culture also disproved the notion that comics had to be based on extended runs of serialized plots, either in a daily or weekly newspaper or in a weekly DC/Marvel comic. Hatfield implies that this shaking up of the form of comics was significant. It prepared artists, publishers, and readers for graphic narratives to be available in almost any mode, including the longer form of the one-shot "novel." We can add too that undergrounds – exiled outside of the mainstream comic book industry – could deal directly with literary publishing houses

that had different distribution approaches and royalty schemes than the old industry did. In other words, the most successful underground titles were carried in some mainstream bookstores as well as the head shops that were the sale points near campus or in the alternative communities nearby.

Let us next discuss a little further the direct significance of Crumb's career. *Grosso modo*, in the figure of Crumb the underground and the mainstream media that reported on him created their own star comic artist and writer, and in so doing established a public framework for appreciating individual creative talent in the field. In short, the very success of Crumb in the late 1960s and early 1970s prompted the idea of the comix artist as a figure of comparable significance to a novelist, filmmaker, or any other important cultural worker. Though based on his depiction in the biographical movie *Crumb* (director Zwigoff, 1995) it is easy to imagine Crumb as a socially marginalized outsider producing absurdist – and often offensive – comix, it is also the case that his comix broke through from small circulation campus-level material to gain significant national prominence. To put it simply, Crumb became a legend in his own time, a star graphic novelist, *avant la lettre*. His originally self-published work from venues such as *Zap Comix* was relatively quickly anthologized and repackaged by mainstream publishing houses. For example, Viking Press brought out a first mainstream anthology in 1968, and then two years later Ballantine provided a new version of the earlier underground collection *Head Comix*. In 1969 Ballantine also marketed its collected edition of Crumb's infamous *Fritz the Cat* strips. Simultaneously, Crumb's work broke into at least the margins of the fine art scene. It was exhibited as part of a wider underground art event at Berkeley and was also featured in a Whitney show dedicated to the "Grotesque in American Art" (October 1969–March 1 1970, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, and University Art Museum, University of California, Berkeley). This fascinating event shows how Crumb and two others were briefly penetrating the fine art circle. Its catalogue, *Human Concern/Personal Torment*, includes samples of comix from Crumb alongside work from S. Clay Wilson and Spain Rodriguez.[4]

The music scene was also part of the consecration of Crumb. Famously, Janis Joplin recruited Crumb to provide cover art to her album *Cheap Thrills*. In 1970 the Grateful Dead released the song "Truckin," after the phrase "Keep on Trucking" that Crumb had popularized in his strips.[5] Crumb himself became part of a blues and folk band, "The Cheap Suit Serenaders." Equally important is the fact that cultural commentators recognized Crumb as an important figure. The novelist Terry Southern noted that Crumb continued where *Mad* magazine left off. Others added further praise, with art historian Robert Hughes describing Crumb in an essay for *Time* magazine (May 22, 1972) as "a new world Breughel." National newspapers caught the mood of interest in Crumb and popularized him further beyond the underground. New publications coming from academia were not far behind when an early issue of *Journal of Popular Culture* (*JPC*) featured Harvey Pekar's essay on the artist. There Pekar highlighted the fascinating nature of Crumb's work and guided scholarly readers: "Crumb is a very hip guy with big eyes for what's going on around him."[6] Such material is all the more important in the invention of Crumb precisely because *JPC* was a serious academic journal that, though interested in popular culture, was being edited to high scholarly standards and aimed to be taken seriously by sociologists, literary scholars, and historians.

The adaptation to cinema of *Fritz the Cat* added greatly to Crumb's fame. *Fritz the Cat* – the movie (1972) – was a critical and commercial success. Though Crumb hated the work and subsequently blamed his then-wife for selling the rights to the picture, Ralph Bakshi's animation was hugely successful. Reading through the original press reviews, one can see quite clearly how Fritz and his creator had broken out from the counterculture to become a radical element inside the mainstream. Indeed, within a short period of time the first movie had spawned a sequel, *The Nine Lives of Fritz the Cat*. And for a while radical cartoon animation was available in cinemas. Director Bakshi followed up his work with two original features of his own, *Heavy Traffic* (1973) and then the controversial *Coonskin* (1975). Art Spiegelman's achievement of a special Pulitzer Prize for *Maus* in 1992 was awarded some thirty-eight years after Fredric

Wertham's *Seduction of the Innocent*. Let us not forget that in the inter-vening years Robert Crumb found almost instant cultural legitimacy and for while in light of his success, comix were a relatively mainstream part of popular culture (in select quarters and obviously not with everyone).[7]

For the future graphic novel, the collapse of the underground comix scene in the mid-1970s is itself quite as significant as its first emergence. Underground publishing was severely impacted after the United States Supreme Court ruled in June 1973 that the definition of obscenity should be left to local authorities. Moreover, the heady atmosphere of the late 1960s and early 1970s could not be sustained. With the war in Vietnam ending and the wider counterculture contracting, the underground had given birth to a handful of powerful and determined artists, but now they had no audience or fixed place for publication. For example, dis-cussing the negative situation in 1979, the young Art Spiegelman raised the case of Mark Beyer in an interview piece for *Cascade Comix Monthly*. This innovative artist had been working on a book-length work, and he was finding publication frustrating. According to Spiegelman, five years earlier there would have been no problem publishing Beyer's project, but now the "traditional undergrounds" were facing too much economic strain, and those in the business were only interested in commercially reliable works, the paradoxical beast of "mainstream underground" comix to which Beyer did not conform.[8] In addition the head shops were no longer so popular, and they were less and less fashionable locations for bohemians. The slow and sometimes painful end of the underground left a vacuum that was filled only slowly by figures such as Spiegelman and publications such as his and Françoise Mouly's magazine of collected strips, *RAW* (first published in 1980 and discussed further in Chapter 4). And, generally speaking, the same cultural space of the underground continued to be redeveloped when, in the 1990s and 2000s, graphic novel publishing houses republished and commissioned new works from vet-erans Kim Deitch and Robert Crumb.[9]

In summary, the underground comix invented formats and contents for future graphic novels, and then their own slow death presented a cultural-economic gap to be filled, albeit over the course of several years.

In self-produced short comix such as *Zap*, *Head Comix*, *Feds 'n' Heads*, *Bijou Funnies*, and *People's Comix*, among others, a generation of artists and writers cut their teeth, experimented, and worked out a direction and purpose to their art. More than anything, the revolution allowed artists to practice, draw, redraw, design, narrate, and then publish. The majority of graphic novelists born before 1960 and whose careers became publicly and widely recognized as being of literary-cultural interest in the 1980s and 1990s (Crumb, Deitch, Trina Robbins, Spiegelman, and others) learned their trade through the underground. For a short while Crumb had taken comix out of the underground and into the mainstream, setting up future possibilities for their wider recognition.

## Between comix and graphic novels: four exemplary figures

The lines between the underground scene and the emergence of the graphic novel can be drawn directly and straightforwardly, just as surely as one can chart some of Miller's and Moore's works of superhero violence back to being an antithesis to the pop camp of the *Batman* television serial. In particular, works from Justin Green, Jaxon, Eisner, and Spiegelman are worth discussing further here. These creators were preparing material in the late 1960s to 1970s that established themes later to be associated with the graphic novel. The borderlines – at this historical threshold – are understandably fuzzy. Late comix look forward to what within years is publicly constituted as graphic novel work, while early publications that sported the label graphic novel were clearly shaped by underground aesthetics. Maybe ultimately what these examples indicate is that what a production is labeled is not as significant as what its common properties are. What works from Green, Jaxon, Eisner, and Spiegelman share is innovation, original content, extended length of narrative, and a push for the material to be considered as somehow richer than its antecedents, including comix.

The less well-known figures Green and Jaxon produced great work for the underground comix/alternative press scene. Their works in underground comix stand out because these figures were two of the first

to be producing longer-length comix that marked up content that would be greatly taken forward in graphic novel creation: autobiography and history. In 1972 Green published the relatively long, critical self-exploration of a Catholic education *Binky Brown Meets the Holy Virgin Mary*. In a preface to the recently reprinted edition, Spiegelman highlights its importance to him and the later creation of *Maus*. Two aspects are noted. First, at forty-four pages in length, for its time, this was an unusually long one-shot comix that, with the benefit of hindsight, Spiegelman describes as "epic." Second, the intimate autobiographical, sexual details that form the narrative content of the work were distinctive. Spiegelman is again helpful. "Justin turned the comic book boxes into intimate, secular confession booths and thereby profoundly changed the history of comics," he says of this "pioneering work." In the afterword to the same reprint, Green offers a modest summary of the influences that had shaped him: "Autobiography was a fait accompli, a low fruit ripe for the plucking. Binky's story was contingent on my having seen the early work of other underground cartoonists. In addition to Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, I was also aware of Philip Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint* and James T. Farrell's *Studs Lonigan Trilogy*. J. D. Salinger, too, was a hero from an early age. His *Catcher in the Rye* was a literary touchstone for my generation." Of course what these novelists could not achieve, but that Green could through the comix, was to combine narrative of anti-Catholic, teenage sexual angst with powerful explicit and implicit metaphorical images. The explicit content was not very new, nothing much more shocking than could be found in an average early 1970s comix, but rather its insertion as part of a self-reflexive, everyday, extended discussion of a teenage education was different. Dream, nightmare, satire, and self-obsession blur together into a complex meditation on Binky's life. The colorful depictions of writhing snakelike penises were not especially radical for the world of comix. The emphasis on Green's childhood daily reality was, however, new. So too were the more banal and semi-realist frames that underlined the combination of boredom and oppression of a conservative upbringing surrounded by the requirements of strict Catholicism.

Jaxon's work also stands out from the deluge of crude comedy comix of the period, and like Brown's, it points the way to content now more commonly mined in the contemporary graphic novel. A father figure of underground comix and press in Texas, by the later 1970s Jaxon was using graphic narratives to write extended historical treatments on the story of his home state. These are remarkable pieces (e.g., *Comanche Moon*, 1978) that reject the crude drawing style and content of the majority of the comix in exchange for extended, highly detailed, long, and thoroughly researched depictions of the nineteenth-century Southwest frontier. What is interesting here is not only how clearly Jaxon was influenced by the comix revolution but also how his aesthetics revived precision and detail from earlier comics such as EC horror and war material and *Classics Illustrated*. On the one hand, Jaxon's narrative radicalism is clearly inspired by the alternative, anarchic politics of the underground. On the other hand, visually the work is conservative, detailed, and meticulous. The black-and-white hatching, obsessive detail, and careful, clear shaping of backdrops suggest some influence and mutual respect toward Crumb; more important though are the very stable and conventional page layouts which provide sequences of repeated framings and often wider panels for landscapes prior to close ups. *Comanche Moon's* approach to aesthetics harks back to the educational comics and *Classics Illustrated* of the 1950s, as well as to EC horror comics that, although violent in content, maintained very regular and controlled layouts and panel usage.

Published in 1978, *Comanche Moon* is described in its title page as "A Picture Narrative about Cynthia Ann Parker." The phrase is historically interesting because it underlines that Jaxon and his publisher, Rip Off Press/Last Gasp, recognized that the material was not comix (the immediate past/context) or comics but somehow required a better label for marketing and general description. The term gestures toward the need for something akin to the label "graphic novel," but probably because Jaxon did not want his material associated with fiction, "Picture Narrative" was deemed more appropriate. Others, such as Joseph Witek, have called the work a "trade paperback," which again notes the departure from existing kinds of graphic narrative and hints implicitly to something

akin to conventional literary publishing. As we know, by the later 1980s, "graphic novel" was the phrase that stuck; what is more important is that in work from Jaxon and Green, graphic narratives were shifting out of the comix conventions, becoming longer, addressing new subjects, and being published in book-length formats. The comix heritage was, of course, ever-present in their work, yet they were also creating work distinctive from common or garden-variety "sex and drug"-themed short strips.

One of the most fascinating and sometimes overlooked examples of the fuzzy lines that exist between underground comix and the development of the graphic novel is the case of Will Eisner, the man who in the same year *Comanche Moon* was published started using "graphic novel" to try to distinguish his work from other forms of comic or humorous publication (satire or joke books). In retrospect, one can see clearly that Eisner's *A Contract with God – A Graphic Novel* (1978) developed straight from the underground milieu, despite the originality of its subtitle. Eisner, long retired from his work on mainstream comics in the 1930s and 1940s, became associated with the underground world in the 1970s, and it was that milieu that sparked his return to creating. Attending a comix's convention in New York in 1971 (New York Comic Art Convention) and meeting some of the young artists, he was slowly inspired to rethink making comics and found contacts willing to reprint his earlier superhero-style work from the 1940s (*The Spirit*), notably Denis Kitchen of Kitchen Sink Press. Eisner recalled: "To a buttoned-down type like me, this should have sent me running in the other direction. However, it didn't take great genius to see that what was afoot was a reprise of the frontier days of 1938."[10] Looking back on the 1970s, Eisner recognized that it was through mixing with these people that he could begin to imagine how he could return to graphic narratives and make something new and different. It was because of discovering the underground approach to comics that Eisner was able to conceive of returning to making comics for adult readers. The summation of this encounter was, then, his publication of *A Contract with God*, the first significant work to describe itself as a graphic novel on the title page of its paperback edition. Taking a closer look at that work, one can see some direct influences shading through from Eisner's

encounter with the underground. Though not directly autobiographical, its subject was close to Eisner's heart: the struggles and hard times faced by the migrant Jewish community in New York during the Depression. Moreover, the title story in the collection addressed the theme of a father losing his adopted daughter to illness, the terrible experience suffered by the Eisner family. Eisner did not explain this on publication in 1978, and it was only in providing a preface to a new edition in 2004 that he articulated in public the full autobiographical scope of the story: "The creation of this story was an exercise in personal agony.... My grief was still raw. My heart still bled. In fact, I could not even then bring myself to discuss this loss. I made Frimme Hersh's daughter an 'adopted child.' But his anguish was mine."[11] Alongside that hidden autobiographical aspect, the collection also featured the "Cookalein" short story, a piece on growing up and youth culture that contained relatively explicit imagery of sexual encounters. Again Eisner was learning and adapting from the underground by drawing on his own experience and memories rather than using fiction/genre or the comics tradition to which he had so contributed. This section was richly informed by Eisner's own experiences and captures the New York Jewish community's annual vacation and how teenagers thrilled at the opportunities for fun it brought. Finally, the new underground comics influenced Eisner's art for *A Contract with God*. Now, Eisner abandoned any formal grid page layout and preferred a looser, more relaxed, and more radical mixture of layouts.[12]

In summary, Eisner saw *A Contract with God* as radical innovation: "A Graphic Novel." However, its themes and style drew on underground preoccupations. Eisner reorganized them into a nonsatirical, explicitly ethnically positioned narrative (Jewish) with historical setting disguising its tragic autobiographical content. He clearly saw it as distinct from comix, and in many ways it was. However, as with Green's or Jaxon's works, Eisner's work from the later 1970s was on the cusp between comix and something new, and Eisner wanted that break to be underlined in its subtitle and classification in bookstores.

Students should also appreciate that Art Spiegelman's *Maus* directly developed out of the world of underground comix. It was here

in an underground collection that his original vision that first pointed to *Maus* was published. This is found in the four-page strip Spiegelman contributed to the underground collection *Funny Aminals* (1972). Similarly, the "Prisoner on the Hell Planet" sequence from *Maus* that so brutally narrates Spiegelman's mother's suicide was first published in the underground collection *Short-Order Comix* (1973) and again in *Breakdowns* (1977). The very spirit of *Maus* was also more subversive than many critics have imagined, and here again one can see comix bleeding into the graphic novel (Illustration 3). Its dominant frame, "a comic about the Holocaust," was as provocative a move as any seen in the underground. Moreover, Spiegelman made readers consider attitudes and think about their own prejudices toward history and the Holocaust. His use of mice as a metaphor for Jews is most telling and double-edged. Certainly it is a clever attack on the Nazis's own anti-Semitic mindset that identified Jewish people as vermin. Yet it was also a way of making contemporary readers ask why they were comfortable and sympathetic to Holocaust victims when imagined as gentle mice, yet were maybe less willing to come to terms with the scale of the crimes of the Nazis when presented with straightforward images or detailed historical documentation. Before *Schindler's List* (1993), Hollywood had rarely addressed the Holocaust, and for years after the war many Americans preferred not to think about anti-Semitic genocide, as evidenced by the 1959 Hollywood adaptation of *The Diary of Anne Frank* removing contextual reference to Anne's religion. Often the critical and subversive politics of *Maus* are hidden because Spiegelman also wanted to tell a straight story and guide his readers through his experiences (on one level). Nonetheless, the more radical mode breaks through to disturb and provoke, often in highly memorable single images or short passages of narration. Thus, there is the famous image of Spiegelman at work drawing, sitting at his desk atop a pile of corpses. That is a picture that opens to a more radical and violent politics in the work that asks what images mean and why some are comfortable and others not so palatable. Or in the deeply ironic passages that follow, there is the section that describes

the Spiegelman family driving their car, with father Vladek abusing a black hitchhiker, while the reader is left to decode the pretty-looking gaslike images coming from the tailpipe. It is a juxtaposition of images and themes redolent of a terribly sarcastic humor on Spiegelman's part. These images in comix would no doubt have been presented more crudely and with greater directness, yet nonetheless, they are something one can associate back to that tradition. This is not to say that *Maus* is influenced only by comix or evokes only that aesthetic. Not discussed significantly in this book, the "silent" woodcut art book narratives from Lynd Ward, made in the 1930s, were also an influence on Spiegelman's work.

## Repackaged newspaper comic strips and the "serious" sci-fi

Alongside the underground, the graphic novel also developed out of other centers and peripheries of graphic narrative. Mainstream newspaper comics (e.g., *Peanuts* and *Doonesbury*) have had a long tradition of hugely successful republications in individual single-volume editions, therefore looking similar to graphic novels, *avant la lettre*. Although not graphic novels per se, these works were single-authored graphic narratives that gained huge commercial success and no doubt assisted in the legitimization of the longer form comic. Already in 1962, Schulz's collection *Happiness Is a Warm Puppy* was a national bestseller, and by the end of the 1960s, some thirty single-volume *Peanuts* titles were charting in the book-sales league tables alongside books by high-powered novelists and biographies of U.S. presidents. In addition, the newspaper strip inspired a successful off-Broadway musical that then toured across the States. This was itself a prototype for holiday-themed television animations that gained appreciative audiences through the 1970s and early 1980s.[13]

*Opposite page:* 3. The emergence of the graphic novel during the comix era. Excerpt from *Breakdowns: Portrait of the Artist as a Young %@&*!* By Art Spiegelman, copyright © 1972, 1973, 1974, 1975, 1976, 1977, 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2008 by Art Spiegelman. Used by permission of Pantheon Books, an imprint of the Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, a division of Random House LLC. All rights reserved.

In addition, Garry Trudeau's *Doonesbury* merits acknowledgment for its influence in creating a reading culture disposed to adult strips with serious themes. Through the 1970s and to the present day, collected daily newspaper strips have been sold as single-volume, themed collections, the first being *Still a Few Bugs in the System*, released in a pocketbook formula in 1972. The *Doonesbury* format of republication next started to look more like European *bande dessinée* strips, with strips appearing in larger collected formats that gathered together several years of work in one place. These *Doonesbury* reprints were made legitimate by the inclusion of prefaces and introductions by important writers whose professional credentials were unrelated to the world of graphic narratives. For example, Gary Wills, a journalist and historian, introduced the first extended collection. As with Crumb and Schulz, Trudeau's work also gained further public legitimacy through its re-presentation in multimedia forms. Now long forgotten, *A Doonesbury Special*, a twenty-five-minute long animated film, proved a hit at the 1978 Cannes Film Festival and the Academy Awards. Similarly, Robert Altman worked on a television series, *Tanner 88*, that was inspired by the strip. In 1975, Garry Trudeau was the first graphic narrator to be awarded a Pulitzer Prize for editorial cartooning.[14]

The successes of Schulz and Trudeau illustrate that the rise of graphic novels in the contemporary period is established against a background of some remarkable previous achievements in the closely related text-image forms of newspaper cartoons (of which we just mention one or two notable examples here). Trudeau is particularly important for us to recognize, as his work has so often shifted from the short satire on daily life/politics of the original newspaper format into long-running, complex, and implicitly serious plot lines. Given the already slippery and contested nature of the term "graphic novel," it is appropriate to note his longstanding contribution. Indeed, Trudeau's career is in many respects close to that of the more widely discussed Crumb, Spiegelman, or graphic novelist Joe Sacco. As with them, his work has engaged with contemporary issues, including war, human suffering, and loss (not least in Trudeau's depictions of U.S. military deployments post 9/11). Also like

them, his work started in what might be broadly defined as underground cartooning, with the first versions of *Doonesbury* created by Trudeau for the Yale student magazine *Yale Daily News* (1968). One can say that a direct influence on Sacco can be quite precisely traced. Trudeau and Joe Sacco cover modern warfare in some detail, the one (Trudeau) offering bleak satire through extended daily episodic stories about U.S. troops, diplomats, generals, and spies, while the other (Sacco) writes and draws what he has encountered while living and reporting from conflict zones. Their mediums are similar, and their general subjects almost identical, although their style of drawing is significantly different, with Sacco evoking the grotesque body shapes of Crumb (not exclusively) and Trudeau using clean, almost European, clear line characterizations with little or no backdrops and – because of his strip's original context of newspaper publications – including no larger images (so-called splash pages).

When Schulz and Trudeau were popularizing the power of comics, few if anyone was using the term "graphic novel." While graphic novel-like collections of *Doonesbury* and *Peanuts* were being widely read, re-mediatized, and publicly acclaimed, it was only in the margins of the underground scene that the term itself was gaining currency. Before Eisner picked up and used the label to describe the paperback edition of *A Contract with God*, it was writers and publishers working on genre comics close to the underground scene who were first touting the phrase to distinguish their works from both comics and comix. R. C. Harvey underlines that it was Richard Kyle who first used the phrase "graphic novel" to describe his contribution to sci-fi comic magazine *Wonderworld*.[15] Kyle then continued to use terms such as "graphic novel" or "graphic story" to describe serious narrative comics with better quality art. Thus, when in 1976, he and a colleague published George Metzger's sci-fi strip *Beyond Time and Again*, they used the label "graphic novel." Also in the intersections between underground comix, sci-fi, and illustration, Byron Preiss was frequently using words such as "graphic novel" and "graphic story form" to describe his illustrated and reconceptualized science fiction publications. For instance, Howard Chaykin worked with Preiss to produce what they called a "Graphic

Story Adaptation" of Alfred Bester's science fiction short story *The Stars My Destination* (1979). This was an original piece of graphic design. It was plainly not a comic, since it eschewed any standard page layout panels or speech balloons; however, it was also something more than an illustrated work of fiction. Thus, rather than separating Chaykin's imagery from Bester's words, Preiss instead melded them together by bringing text and image into unusual and abstract sequences that were more than conventional illustration but less formal than a comic. Prior to publication, *The Stars My Destination* was previewed in the sci-fi comic magazine *Heavy Metal*. Similarly, Preiss had worked with Jim Steranko on a comparable project, *Chandler*. Later he would become one of the first to see the possibilities of multimedia publishing, leading in the field of early online material.

A standard style even developed for these sci-fi illustration-graphic novels. There are, for example, great similarities between Preiss and Chaykin's aforementioned *The Stars My Destination* and Richard Corben's adaptation of a Robert E. Howard story, *Bloodstar*. Published in 1976, this title was maybe the first of its kind to use "graphic novel" as a marketing concept. Its preface begins: "*Bloodstar* marks the great leap forward for the art of the comic strip through its revolutionary synthesis of ideas and artforms. In this book, the imagination and visual power of comic art are wedded to the complexity and depth of the traditional novel, producing an enthralling hybrid which might best be labeled – the graphic novel."[16] What follows again aims for a kind of visual seriousness: pages are not filled with panels but include some strategically placed across a page next to empty white spaces. Speech bubbles are shaped in relatively consistent forms and avoid all extravagant wavy lines that might hint of comics or comix. Text sits alongside the images or in the space of the page, and not in very comic-like panels. In retrospect, it looks very crude and unsophisticated, whereas it was intended to be radical, modern, and distinctive.

By the turn of the decade, it was a Hollywood film that inspired a highly successful one-shot that was very close to the titles described

above, but rather more stylish and modern-looking by our standard. This was Archie Goodwin and Walter Simonson's *Alien: The Illustrated Story*.[17] Rereading this title reveals the clear sophistication of the material compared to either relatively contemporary comics or standard comix. While the narrative provides a loyal adaptation from the film script on which it is based, the visual presentation in the extended "illustrated story" format is distinctive. Simonson's work – in particular, panel and page layouts – provided a careful and coherent shape to the work that brings the characters and tension of the plot to the greater attention of the reader. This is achieved by offering some standard panel frames but then quite regularly breaking images outside of the panels and organizing the page in this more free-form style. More traditional grid panels are present – unlike in, for example, Eisner's *A Contract with God*, where there are none – but frequently these disappear or are reduced, and then representations of characters and backdrops, without framing, lend the work a confidence and readability that is impressive. Similarly, this free-flowing but highly planned approach prepares for three double splash pages of major scenes that present the discovery of the spaceship where the Aliens are first encountered and two passages of violence when the Alien attacks. Similarities with Eisner's recent work can also be seen in the rendering of the people. Simonson avoids making any body shapes or lines too comic-like and instead draws sketchy, "realistic" depictions of the crew of the spaceship, Nostromo. The balance of these – often close-ups – and then the larger-scale double-page horror sequences is a powerful device. The reader is invited to engage with the characters and to then, as in the movie, be shocked at their quick and violent demise. Of course, the work is genre based and derivative, but the form developed makes it impressive and powerful.

Thus, through the 1970s, the idea of graphic novels was gaining some currency in paraliterary areas where illustration had always been important. It was being used by innovative creators looking for alternative ways to create fiction for fans attracted to visual as well as textual material. This was plainly the case in the subfield of science fiction, where

television and cinema had asserted the importance of visual narrative for some extended period – Kubrick had completed *2001* in 1968, and *The Planet of the Apes* premiered in the same year (both features also inspired comics, the former drawn by Jack Kirby). However, in the mid-1970s, this usage was relatively limited, and it was not being applied to the far more commercially successful book-length compilations of newspaper comics, despite work such as *Doonesbury*, which was charting terrain close to that of the graphic novels of the present era: world politics, history, the blurring of fact with reality, student and youth culture, and imagining average middle-class American life.

## Conclusion

The underground comix established themes and publishing structures that were influential on subsequent production. It was out of this context that self-publishing, distinct from publishing inside the traditional comics industry, fully developed in the most significant way, and the comix graphic narratives were explicitly produced to be read by adults. In the figure of Robert Crumb, the United States generated an art-media celebrity, a paradigm to be emulated. Because this history of comix is so interesting, rich, and important, newspaper cartoons and their reprints of extended storylines are often neglected altogether. This chapter has started to fill this lacuna and underlines the historical role of Schulz and Trudeau. Trudeau remains a fascinating figure, and his work is illustrative of how coming to fixed definitions of what is or is not a graphic novel can be rather reductive. More important to note is that his political satires form a long and powerful force in book-length cartoons and that repeatedly their content has reflected some of the most serious contemporary themes, including in recent times post-combat stress and rehabilitation.

This chapter has also highlighted works from the complex middle years of the 1970s, titles between comix and the recognizable graphic novel of the late 1980s. Works from Green, Jaxon, Eisner, Spiegelman, as well as works from the sci-fi world, all indicate how graphic narratives were enriched by comix practice, and yet individual creators were

pushing material in new directions away from the more clichéd and crude humor strips. Likewise the publishers of these works shared a common appreciation that the titles were not comix but something different, precisely because they were lengthier, more serious, reflexive, and sophisticated. This breach between comix and different, implicitly more serious works is how the need for a label such as "graphic novel" essentially arrived. This may not have been the best term (the word "novel" too often implies fiction, when common a subject matter of graphic novels is autobiography or history), but it did gesture helpfully toward a new classification for works that were not slavishly sticking to preexisting conventions.