

Rebooting the Academy: Why Universities Need to *Finally* Start Taking Comic Books Seriously

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Has the age of the comic book dawned at last? Comic book superheroes dominate movie theatres across the land. *The Walking Dead* scares millions on television, while others tune in to *Gotham*. Clothing stores are filled with t-shirts bearing Superman's "S" and the Bat symbol. And bookstores now hold large graphic novel sections, while comic book style novels like *Captain Underpants* (Pilkey, 1997) and *The Diary of a Wimpy Kid* (Kinney, 2007) are best sellers.

Yet for all the excitement that comic books and comic book based ideas have generated in popular culture, there still remains skepticism about the scholarly value of studying comic books and graphic novels. If a person searches hard enough, it is possible to find a course about comic books here or there or a graphic novel on a few required course reading lists. A few departments have comics studies scholars laboring away in them, and there are more books and articles about comic books and graphic novels now being published by academic presses. Yet job ads asking for knowledge of the comics studies field are rare, and the most prestigious academic journals contain few articles that discuss comic books and graphic novels.

This means comics studies scholars are forever having to defend the genre they find so compelling. Every comics studies scholar knows how frustrating it is to always have to face the eyebrow raising, snickering, questioning, and "Ohhh, you're studying those things" comments from colleagues, administrators, and students. In a word, the constant defense of comic literature in academia is *exhausting*.

Of course some of the blame for this problem does lie with how comic book stories have evolved over the years. There are countless examples of comic book literature containing male power fantasies, hyper-sexualized depictions of both male and female characters, and convoluted continuities that challenge even the most ardent comic book readers.

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Yet despite their limitations in some areas, comic books and graphic novels are an incredibly rich and under-studied genre. There are so many places to which one can turn to support the case for comics studies in academia. There is the question of why comic books were singled out for the most intensive self-censorship of any art form in history, censorship that followed the publication of Frederick Wertham's (1954) *Seduction of the Innocent* and the 1954 United States Senate Subcommittee Hearings into Juvenile Delinquency, which led to the creation of the Comics Code Authority. Or, one might consider how Robert R. Crumb in the 1960s became a pioneer who challenged the very notions of art and expression (Hajdu, 2008). The list of academically worthy comic book creators and scholars is also easy to construct: Jenette Kahn, Neal Adams, Frank Miller, Alan Moore, Peter Coogan, Steve Ditko, Grant Morrison, Art Spiegelman, Stan Lee, Jack Kirby, Bill Finger, Scott McCloud, Chris Claremont, Gene Luan Yang, Will Eisner, Brian K. Vaughan, Marjane Satrapi, and Allison Bechdel. And that's just barely getting the list started.

Unfortunately, all the good work being done in and about comic books these days just doesn't seem to be enough. Recently, *The Chronicle of Higher Education's The Chronicle Review* published an opinion piece by Archie comics scholar Bart Beaty (2015) entitled "Taking Comics Seriously." Beaty shares our view that comic books and graphic novels are highly worthy of study. But, he says, "Despite the significant advances made by scholars working in comics studies over the past two decades, it remains a precarious area of study" (p. B20). Beaty argues that scholarship in the humanities tends to be conservative, and so many scholars hide their interest in comic books in favor of more acceptable areas of study. Beaty says his own dissertation advisor had warned him "not to endanger my career before it had even started by writing in an area that many still regard as frivolous." Beaty claims that no English departments are hiring in comics studies and that he only felt safe to publish his comics studies scholarship, the book, *Twelve-Cent Archie*, once he had tenure.

Even academics who don't outright dismiss comic books still tend to treat them as light entertainment, an interesting diversion from more serious academic endeavors. "Comic books? Really?" many scholars will say. "Sure, they're fun, but we have real work to do." Implied in this skepticism is a series of questions: Is there actually anything in most graphic novels that merits close reading? How can such a fantastic medium be taken seriously? Can graphic novels and comic books really be used to facilitate discussions and analyses of profound issues? Do comic books really belong in institutions of higher learning?

All of this skepticism can be boiled down to one key question: Why should academics take the comic book seriously? We know comics studies scholars would like to respond that comic books should be taken seriously because of their multimodal nature; because of the rich histories of their characters; because they require multiliteracy skills to be understood; and because they are a medium which has widespread sociocultural influence. We know all of that is true. Yet we want to make an even more pragmatic argument for

why comic books should be made a more important part of today's curricula: Comic books have the power to draw students to the study of the humanities.

Rebooting the Humanities

In a 2014 review of *Enter the Superheroes: American Values, Culture, and the Canon of Superhero Literature* (Romagnoli and Pagnucci, 2013), John Branscum said the book represented "a refreshing 21st century humanism, which while grounded in an acknowledgment of the value of deconstructing ideals, value systems, and the very idea of the hero, also argues for literature, specifically superhero literature, which functions as 'beacons' of hope and as embodiments of ideals" (2014, p. 298-299). Refreshing the humanities is an important thing to think about because, at so many institutions of higher learning, the humanities are hurting. For example, at many higher education institutions, the number of English majors has declined: "When we use the late 1960s as a benchmark, the downward trajectory is striking: the percentage of undergraduates majoring in fields like English or philosophy has fallen by more than half since 1970" (Saul, 2013). Chace (2009) cites data comparing the number of students majoring in a field in 1970-1971 to 2003-2004: He says over that time, the number of students nationally majoring in English has dropped from 7.6% to 3.9% and in history from 18.5% to 10.7%. *Forbes* cites philosophy and religious studies, history, and English language and literature as among the ten worst college majors to choose, citing an unemployment rate of 9.2% for "recent grads" and 6.2% for "experienced grads" (Goudreau, 2012). These statistics are sobering, but they also provide an impetus to reevaluate both why this is a current trend in humanities studies and what can be done to address these declines.

In comic book literature, "rebooting" is the process of taking a story or series of stories and starting over while maintaining its essential elements. The concept of "rebooting" is discussed at length in *Enter the Superheroes: American Values, Culture, and the Canon of Superhero Literature* (2013, pp. 59-79). That analysis focuses on how reboots are a vital characteristic of superhero literature. Perhaps, though, the time has come to borrow the concept and try to reboot the study of humanities as a whole.

Comic book publishers normally initiate reboots when sales of a comic book title begin to drop or when readers (en masse) begin to voice boredom or displeasure with storylines and/or characters. If comic book publishers, whose very fates depend on a paying readership, need to reassess their practices and their stories, then maybe it's time for English and History and other Humanities departments, whose very fates depend on a paying student body, to consider a reboot as well.

There was a time when budgets were flush and enrollments were high and faculty could teach their classes and conduct their research and not worry about marketing their discipline. That time has passed. Today, resources are scarce, and students and their parents are worried about how an expensive college education is going to lead to

employment. So, it is not enough to just hope students will gravitate to the humanities. Today, students need to be aggressively recruited.

Rather than bemoan this change, we want to argue that these changing economic realities have created new opportunities for the humanities. Popular genres like comic books can be used to market a discipline to more diverse students. Valuing popular cultural texts can also help students to see a place for themselves within a curricular program. But, where a course on comic books might attract students as an elective, humanities programs should consider embracing and including Comics Studies and Popular Culture Studies into their basic infrastructure.

English Studies, Vol. 2

We believe any academic discipline could be enhanced by the inclusion of comic books in its curriculum, and this volume includes examples of scholars who use comics to teach mathematics, history, criminal justice, and linguistics. But, our own discipline is English, so we want to make a direct case for making comics studies a more vital part of English curricula. To use comic book inspired language, we want to cancel the old English studies title and reboot it as “the all new, better than ever” *English Studies Volume Two*.

College costs are continuing to rise, and high paying jobs are becoming ever more scarce. This makes students and their parents very cautious when selecting a university and major. In the face of these realities, the field of English needs to enhance the skills and knowledge it is able to provide to students in order to better equip its majors to be competitive when they enter today’s job market.

Thus, if we want to stem the decline in the number of students majoring in English, we need to rethink what we are doing as a discipline. In *English After the Fall*, Robert Scholes (2011) asserts that the idea and nature of literature and literary studies needs to change in order to reflect how culture, society, and technology have evolved in recent times. For Scholes, “...we need to redefine English as the study of textuality rather than literature” (p. 34). Scholes goes on to define “textuality” as “...the broadening of the objects we study and teach to include all the media and modes of expression. All the kind of texts students regularly encounter in their lives should be studied in this field” (p. 35). There is a singular wisdom in Scholes’ argument for the value of studying “textuality.” Expanding what English Studies encompasses is one way to attract new majors to English. This is preferable to maintaining a limited and insular field of study that does little to attract new and fresh ideas and, in fact, can result in the recycling of established ideas. This is not to say that traditional literary texts are without value: far from it. As English scholars and teachers, we are well aware of the power traditional texts possess. What we’re arguing here is that given the dwindling state of English as a major, it’s time to consider broadening our collective horizon.

In *Blow Up the Humanities*, Toby Miller (2012) pushes Scholes’ ideas even further. Miller argues that disciplines like English have been languishing because they represent an older type of thinking, what he calls Humanities One (H1). This is the original vision of the

humanities conceived as the study of the great works of the literary canon, those venerable books that are brilliant but also complex, difficult and often inaccessible. While that vision guided humanities study effectively for decades, Miller argues that H1 has become elitist and cut off from the economic marketplace. Miller says Humanities Two (H2) is tied more directly to job markets and is built on teaching communications skills and media studies. Miller then argues that the best way to reinvigorate humanities study and make it relevant is to combine H1 and H2 into a new curriculum that taps the best of both older foci: "A third form [of humanities] must come from a blend of political economy, textual analysis, ethnography, and environmental studies such that students learn the materiality of how meaning is made, conveyed, and discarded" (p. 105). Like Scholes, Miller is really arguing that the humanities need to evolve in order to attract students in today's more competitive educational environment.

Making Comics Studies a part of English fits very well with Miller's and Scholes' arguments. In fact, Miller specifically says that "the push for the study of media texts that reflect issues of consequence to the broad population can be central to renewing the humanities" (p. 95). We would argue that comic books have been dealing with issues of concern to the general public for decades now, and dealing with those issues in ways that are lively and inviting to readers. If English, as a field of study, hopes to remain a viable major for students to pursue in their collegiate studies, then there must be an expansion of the texts used and studied by the field. This expansion can and should be broad and encompassing: reality television shows, documentaries, instructional manuals, web sites, podcasts, video games, and of course, comic books and graphic novels.

We believe the study of comic books and graphic novels offers three important dimensions useful for "rebooting" English studies. Using comic books and graphic novels can help English Studies tap into interdisciplinary thinking, multiliteracy skills, and popular culture. If English Studies is to remain relevant in the 21st century, then it must be aligned with this shift toward visual literacy and interdisciplinary thinking. This realignment can be accomplished by making the study of comic books and graphic novels a central part of English studies, but this means more than offering one token course. At the very least, English departments should develop multiple courses that explore the nature of the graphic novel. The genre's historical roots need to be studied. This means it might be useful for English departments to offer courses that explore and deconstruct popular and influential graphic novels such as *Maus* by Art Spiegelman (2003), *Persepolis* by Marjane Satrapi (2007), and *American Born Chinese* by Gene Luan Yang (2006). But, English departments should be careful not to limit themselves to just the most well known graphic novels. English courses should also be offered that cover important superheroes, like Superman and Spider-Man, but also less well known but fascinating characters such as Moon Knight, Daredevil, the Black Orchid, Ex Machina, Miracleman, and Red Sonja. English courses could also explore the creation of major comic books and graphic novels by focusing on comic book industry figures like Stan Lee, Jack Kirby, Jerry Siegel, and Joel Shuster.

When we originally set out to write the book *Enter the Superheroes*, our hope was to use a broad focus on the medium of comic literature encompassing an academic analysis of humorous comic books, serious comic books, horror comic books, and superhero comic books. It quickly became clear to us in the drafting stages that covering all these comic book genres would be too much for a single book. Therefore, we decided to stick with what we felt was the most popular, and most ostracized, of the comic book medium's genres: superheroes. Nevertheless, we recognized that one of the strengths of the comic book medium remains its great diversity of content. That diversity of genres gives comic book literature a strength that makes it ideal for academic study.

The Comics Studies Multiverse

For too long comics studies has existed on the periphery of academia. We believe this is a major loss for education, especially for the humanities. We want to see the study of comic books and graphic novels made a much more important part of higher education. We believe the study of comic books can engage and energize students. We feel the time has come for comics studies to take its rightful place as a full-fledged citizen of the Academy. The time has come for the Comics Studies Multiverse.

That's a tall order, we know. But in the world of comic books, we think big. To understand what we mean by the Comic Studies Multiverse, we need to briefly explain two concepts which are central to the world of comic books: the concept of the "universe" and the "multiverse." These concepts originate in the genre of superhero comic books, and they are one of the form's most unique and interesting traits. In the genre, different superheroes from different comic books are all viewed as existing in the same universe. That is why Iron Man and Captain America, who both had their own comic books and later films, could appear together in the superhero team The Avengers. Their publisher, Marvel Comics, conceives of them as existing in the same universe. They live in the same world, and so it is possible for them to meet up and have adventures together.

This linking of superheroes from separate stories has been going on for decades. Typically, stories about superheroes are published on a monthly basis in individual comic book titles. Thus, most superheroes appear in their own individual comic book titles. But as early as June 1940, two superheroes who had their own titles, the Sub-Mariner and the Human Torch, appeared together in *Marvel Mystery Comics* #8 (Burgos & Everett, 1940/1997). Not long after that, an entire team of superheroes—who all had their own individual titles—appeared together in *All-Star Comics* #3 (DC Comics, 1997) to form the Justice Society of America. In the 1960s, legendary comic book writer Stan Lee expanded this idea so that all the superheroes from one comic book publisher were treated as part of one big comic book universe: "a multifaceted, multilayered universe where one character's actions could affect other characters" (Romagnoli & Pagnucci, p. 42).

But when it comes to comic books, you can never have too much of a good thing. So eventually, comic book writers expanded the no-

tion of the comic book universe even further, creating multiple superhero universes, or “the multiverse.” This genesis of the multiverse concept really began in 1956 when DC Comics used *Showcase #4* (Kanigher, Broome, & Infantino, 1956/1998) to introduce a reboot of a superhero called the Flash, who had originally appeared back in the 1940s, commonly known as the Golden Age of Comics (see Coogan, 2006; Romagnoli & Pagnucci, 2013). Comic book historian Bradford Wright (2001) notes that at this time the comic book industry was in a major recession caused by the collapse of the American News Company which had distributed comics, the imposition of the Comics Code following U.S. Senate investigations into comic book content, and the arrival of television, which competed for readers’ attention (pp. 180-2). According to Wright, to counter these problems, “DC editor Julius Schwartz decided to revise one of his favorite characters from the company’s past, the Flash. But instead of simply reissuing the old Flash, Schwartz revamped the character for modern times and reinvented him as police scientist Barry Allen” (p. 183). The original Flash wore a red and blue uniform and a metallic helmet with wings modeled after the war helm of the Roman god Mercury, the lightning quick messenger of the ancient gods. Artist Carmine Infantino updated the look of the new Flash by giving him a sleeker, all red costume and red hooded mask that replaced the metal helmet (Kanigher, Broome, & Infantino, 1956/1998). The reboot was a success and soon led to other rebooted heroes, like Green Lantern, Hawkman and the Atom (Wright, 2001, p. 183), and helped DC become the dominant comic book publisher at that time (p. 182).

While the Flash was important to the financial success of DC Comics at the time, even more important historically was that the origin story of the new Flash included Barry Allen reading an old comic book which featured the original Flash from the 1940s (Kanigher, Broome, & Infantino, 1956/1998). To Barry Allen, the original Golden Age Flash was just a comic book character who helped inspire Allen’s own superhero costume when Allen gained super speed. But just a few years later, in 1961, writer Gardner Fox, artist Carmine Infantino, and inker Joe Giella capitalized on this notion of there being two Flashes, the new one and the Golden Age one, in a story called “The Flash of Two Worlds.” In this story, the new all red Flash runs so fast that he travels into the world of Jay Garrick, the original, red and blue, metal helmet wearing Flash of the Golden Age (Fox, Infantino, & Giella, 1961/2009). In the comic book Fox made it possible for the two Flashes to meet by having them exist in different, parallel universes. In the story the molecules of these two separate universes were vibrating at different speeds so that those molecules could exist at the same time and place without ever touching, at least until the new Flash used his speed to cross from his universe into the other Flash’s universe. The new Flash, Barry Allen, even explained to the original Flash, Jay Garrick, and their readers, the complex scientific theory that made this historic meeting possible in Flash #123: “The way I see it, I vibrated so fast—I tore a gap in the vibratory shields separating our worlds! As you know—two objects can occupy the same space and time—if they vibrate at different speeds” (Fox, Infantino, & Giella, p. 15). Physicist Alan Guth is credited with the real scientific theory of parallel universes (Ro-

magnoli & Pagnucci, p. 68), but it was “The Flash of Two Worlds” story that brought the concept to the comic book reading masses. As comic book writer Geoff Johns (2009) notes in the introduction to the graphic novel *DC Comics Classics Library The Flash of Two Worlds*, Flash #123 became “one of the most important stories in the history of the DC Universe” (p. 6) because it introduced “the concept of the multiverse. The multiverse was an infinite number of parallel worlds, but the first one we ever saw was Earth-2” where the Golden Age Flash Jay Garrick lived.

In comic books, you can have your cake and eat it too. Using the idea of the multiverse, DC Comics could work out of print superheroes from past decades into current stories. At one point DC Comics even used the multiverse concept to bring every single character it had ever published into one multi-issue comic book series that was linked to every DC Comics title then in publication and, by extension, every title which DC Comics had ever published in its then 50-year company history. This multiverse focused story was the landmark series *Crisis on Infinite Earths* (Wofman, Perez, Giordano, Ordway, & DeCarlo, 2001). The story involved the destruction of all the parallel universes DC Comics had written into existence since that first issue of Flash #123 had gotten the multiverse growing. DC Comics used the series to kill off some superheroes, notably Super Girl and, ironically, the Flash who was Barry Allen, and to introduce some new characters, such as Harbinger and Lady Quark. The series also enabled DC Comics to re-introduce superheroes like the Blue Beetle, whose rights they had acquired from other comic book publishers like the Blue Beetle’s original publisher Charlton Comics. The story eventually led to the collapsing of all of DC Comics’s universes down to five and, finally, one single universe where every DC Comics character was supposed to live. But, since the multiverse concept is such a rich one, DC Comics soon was back to writing more stories about parallel universes (see Byrne & Kesel, 1987), re-establishing its use of the multiverse concept.

And although the multiverse concept is normally limited to an individual comic book publisher’s titles, in 1976 rival publishers DC Comics and Marvel Comics agreed to jointly publish *Superman vs. the Amazing Spider-Man: The Battle of the Century* (Conway, Andru, & Giordano), in effect connecting all the superheroes of all time in one grand multiverse.

The beauty of the multiverse concept is that it links the work of all comic book writers and artists together. The multiverse concept asks readers to think of all those comic book creators’ individual efforts as inherently collaborative in nature. No matter what comic book a person reads, that reader is linked to all the other comic book readers and their creators through the idea of the multiverse. This is collaboration on a cosmic scale. And for comics studies scholars, this is vital because it means we are all in this together. Together, we are all creating the Comics Studies Multiverse.

Which brings us to the action-packed, collector’s item classic issue you are holding in your hands, the present volume of *Works and Days*. In this volume, you will find a diverse group of articles that aims to further build the Comics Studies Multiverse. The teacher-

scholars whose work graces this special edition includes literary scholars, historians, a high school English teacher, a mathematics teacher, education specialists, and even criminologists. This volume has it all. We like to think of it as a Giant-Sized Issue, like the special giant comic books publishers used to put out once a year that kids saved their nickels for a long time to buy off the newsstand.

This volume is a gateway into the Comics Studies Multiverse. We and our contributors are working to add to the proud literature of comics studies, literature you will find cited throughout this volume. We are also working to expand the reach of comics studies, to show that comics studies can impact the university in an even wider range of ways than it already has. We hope this work inspires still more academics to turn to comic books and graphic novels for their teaching and their scholarship. There is a lot left for all of us to learn.

We want comics studies to matter, and so the first section of this volume focuses on how to enhance teaching by using comic books. We start off with an article by Oriana Gatta that reexamines the very notion of composition pedagogy. Gatta asserts that graphic texts offer teachers and students a unique forum in which to explore questions of one's own identity construction. Gatta says such questions can be explored in particularly powerful ways through the use of software that allows students to compose their own graphic novels. Alec Lapidus looks at how ESL education can be enhanced by the teaching of visual literacy and multimodal texts, specifically graphic novels. Edel Reilly describes how mathematics students explored issues of diversity as well as complex mathematics concepts through the creation of their own math-focused superhero comic books. Scott Moore and Steven Schroeder explain how they use zombie comic books and films to help bring historical events to life (or afterlife) for their students. Jonathon Cooper and Robert Stallings explain how they use the graphic novel *Caliber: First Canon of Justice* (Sarkar & Gastonny, 2008) to teach students about subtle understandings of the concept "justice." John Reilly, both a teacher and comic book author, analyzes his own journey as a comic book author by focusing on how his experiences writing a comic book helped him become a better writer, both academically and personally. The incorporation of comic books and graphic novels into all these different kinds of classrooms shows how truly interdisciplinary comics studies can be.

From there, we move from teaching to talking about superheroes. We do this because, as we have argued, superheroes are one of the most important but under-studied comic book genres. Superhero literature is a rich area for study, and this volume contains several pieces that will be of use to comics studies scholars studying these fascinating characters. Jeremy Larance discusses how Alan Moore's *Miracleman* (2014) set the stage for the turn to "realism" in superhero stories that has been shaping the medium in powerful ways ever since. Brandon Galm describes how he uses *Superman: Red Son* (Millar & Johnson, 2012) in his composition class as a text that helps facilitate delicate discussions of fear, xenophobia, and politics. Jason Tondro provides an outline and analysis of an English course he taught which had students analyze the superhero across varying forms of media to examine how the superhero narrative is con-

structured and how different media reconstruct the nature of the superhero story. Brian Burke explores the visual rhetoric of superhero comics by providing an analysis of how the depictions of certain superheroes reflect socio-cultural views of perfection, sexuality, and nostalgia. As the scholars in this volume reveal, superhero comic books and graphic novels are texts rich with possibilities for teaching and learning.

We then move to issues of gender equity in comic book literature. The scholars in this section explore the implications of depicting and discussing sexuality in comic books. Joshua Begley examines how contemporary comic book writers work to deconstruct the “male gaze” in the comic books *Red Sonja* (Simone, Geovani, Lucas, & Bowland, 2014) and *Grindhouse* (De Campi, Peterson, Fraser, Panosian, & Francavilla, 2014). Shana Kraynak explores how Brian K. Vaughan and Tony Harris’ *Ex Machina* (2005) develops ideas of masculinity in a Post-9/11 world. Sandra Eckard explores the character Lois Lane and how her changing portrayal over the years acts as an avatar for gender transformations in social history. Michael Dittman discusses how comic book readership communities respond, collectively, to issues of sexuality in comic books in ways that influence comic book creators. These pieces present informative and challenging views on the very idea of sexuality in contemporary comic books and graphic novels.

Finally, we turn to exploring the comic book as a literary art form. For comics studies to be taken seriously, we require scholars to build on the tradition of treating comic books as worthy scholarly readings. Edmund Cueva sets the stage for this treatment by discussing how the first Greek and Roman novels were just as denigrated as comic books have been. He then works to critique and counteract this bias. Forrest Helvie discusses how adaptations of classic medieval works into graphic novels presents both benefits and deficits for literary studies and how these new adaptations encounter questions of legitimacy when compared to their original source material. Tanya Heflin discusses how memoirists who write graphic novels use the gutter, the blank space between panels, to make visible the psychological depths of their remembered experiences. Sara Van Ness analyzes Alison Bechdel’s *Fun Home* (2006) to describe how the main character’s experiences with death in the graphic novel affect her ability to effectively emote. John Branscum discusses how the Manga series *Mushishi* uses both Asian philosophies and modern scientific discoveries to explore the very notion of human nature and humanity’s place in the world. Christopher Kuipers examines *Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth* (Ware, 2000) and asserts that the text can be linked to pastoral literature, especially that of the anti-pastoral tradition. All of these articles add to the work of comics studies scholars that aims to help us understand the complex ways that the comic book form impacts readers and shapes narrative thought.

Our volume concludes with a very special piece that we publish posthumously in honor of the late Wendy Carse, a beloved English teacher of Indiana University of Pennsylvania. Her colleague and friend John Marsden has finalized the article about zombies and *The Walking Dead* that Dr. Carse was working on at the time of her pass-

ing. The article explores how *The Walking Dead* in both film and graphic novel form uses traditional motifs from the horror literary genre to develop its narrative while at the same time making innovations that rework those motifs. We offer this article in tribute to Wendy's memory.

Academic Free Comic Book Day

Comic books are worth studying. Comics studies scholars already know this. The articles in this volume of *Works and Days* show that comic books and graphic novels are excellent vehicles for teaching and learning. Unfortunately, that's not enough. It's not enough to publish a good journal volume that we know our comics studies colleagues will enjoy. We need to do more than that. We need to help the rest of the academy see that comic books should be taken seriously, that comic books hold the key for drawing students to the study of all the things we hold dear. Comic books are a powerful art form that resonates with today's culture. It's time to get everyone on board with studying comic books.

When we think about the reason why so many academics are indifferent to comic books or, worse, look down upon them, there is actually a simple explanation: Most academics just don't know how good comic books can be. True, we won't try to claim that every issue of *Captain America* has been a good one, but Jeph Loeb's *Fallen Son: The Death of Captain America* (2009), in which Captain America's friends must work through the grieving process after his death, is just one of countless fine comic books that have been published over the decades. Comic books can be as moving as any work of great art. What is needed, then, is to get more academics to read a few good comic books.

In 2002, the comic book publishing industry launched Free Comic Book Day, an annual event held the first Saturday in May where comic books are given free to anyone who visits their local comic book shop (Diamond Comic Distributors & Comics PRO, 2015). The idea of Free Comic Book Day was to attract new readers and re-interest former comic book readers.

So, in the spirit of our favorite holiday, Free Comic Book Day, we issue the following call to our fellow comics studies scholars: Start giving your colleagues free comic books. Hit the dollar boxes at the next Comicon you go to, pick up a bunch of good issues, and put them in your department's mailboxes. Give graphic novels as Christmas gifts. Leave a stack of comic books by the department coffee pot. We mean it. If we want to get the rest of the academy to start seeing the value in reading comic books, we need to get them to actually read this stuff. We need an *Academic Free Comic Book Day*. Comic books are great, and if we get more academics to read them, we'll create more true believers as we build the Comics Studies Multiverse. It's time to reboot the academy, and the best way to do that is with one comic book at a time.

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