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*Comics and Conflict: Patriotism and Propaganda from WWII through Operation Iraqi Freedom.* By Cord A. Scott. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2014; pp. 224. $49.95 cloth.

*The Comic Art of War: A Critical Study of Military Cartoons, 1805–2014, with a Guide to Artists.* By Christina M. Knopf. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2015; pp. 252. $39.95 paper.

*Disaster Drawn: Visual Witness, Comics, and Documentary Form.* By Hillary L. Chute. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016; pp. 376. $35 cloth.

Uncle Sam has a furrowed brow. His eyes have lost their twinkle, and his skin, his clothing, indeed his entire disposition is worse for the wears of war. He looks wearier than he once did—almost ragged. Yet his visage is severe and resolute, although he no longer points fingers. "Get off that throne!" he proclaims, with lips sealed. In his hand is a pistol. It is pointed at you.

This image appeared on the cover of *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* (*Leslie's Weekly*) in December 1917.[1] The paper predates the Civil War.

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During World War I, it produced an entire series under the heading "The War in Pictures," of which the gun-wielding Uncle Sam is a part. Uncle Sam imagery typifies the historical role of comics in capturing wartime civic responsibilities, iconographies of war cultures, and the simple truth of armed conflict and violence. These factors, and more, have origins in the nineteenth-century editorial cartoons of Thomas Nast, such as one picturing Uncle Sam riding atop a snail (labeled "45th Congress") with a scowl on his face and the payroll for the Army and Navy in his arms. By World War II, Uncle Sam was a reincarnation of the American Spirit (from a soldier slain in the Revolutionary War) and a character of Will Eisner's *National Comics* in the early 1940s, then later a supporting member of the 1970s series *Justice League of America*. Two of Uncle Sam's earliest superpowers were Liberty and Freedom, the roots of what Martin E. Marty might call the civic religion of an American way of life. Put simply, comics are not only embedded in histories of war; wars, too, mingle with the rhetorical history of comics.

Each book under review here engages comics and their artful portrayals of everything from tired stereotypes of Americanism to the diffuse traumas of war. Each book also shows how comics shift the register from demonstration to documentation. This essay is therefore concerned with how comics serve as records of war. However, these books do not approach records solely as bare facts or accounts of bygone proceedings but also as proofs of consequences and implications. To throw war into comic relief is to call combat to mind, to revisit it, and to etch its impressions into visual-verbal form. Comics make up a tradition of showing forth what otherwise might not be said or seen, blending reality with fantasy and humor with humorlessness. I argue that comics of warfare constitute records of pain, propaganda, and combat experiences had by those on the home front and those on the frontlines. But to see these records is, first, to see what Hillary L. Chute calls the "visual idioms" that make up the graphic matters of comics and their rhetorical expressions.

## PARDONED EXPRESSIONS

A comic license allows for frank and even profane depictions under the cover of the expression "just joking." Comics, too, are pardoned for portrayals of truths that seem to transcend, if not descend into, harsh realities.

As Chute puts it: "Comics is not illustration—it is not about accuracy in rendering—but rather is a type of expressive language" (72). This is particularly the case in times of war, which epitomize SNAFU.[2]

Graphic imagery is endemic to warfare. Chute traces it back to scenes from the *Iliad* imprinted on vases during the Attic period of ancient Greece. More specific to the United States, World War II brought the so-called Golden Age of Comics. The Cold War saw magazines regularly featuring cover pictures like one from *Time* on July 2, 1951, which shows the Pentagon as a "five-sided brain" with the body parts and regalia of Army and Navy officers, and a coil of red tape insinuating the coordinated security efforts under McCarthyism. At the same time, cartoonist Herblock was mocking a "freedom-from-fear" ethos and the hypocrisy of "Tail-gunner Joe." In January 1962, the cover of *Life* imagined nuclear fallout with cross-section artwork of an urban "community shelter," advertised as the best of atomic age accommodations. More recently, in July 2008, a cover of the *New Yorker* drew on rumors that then presidential candidate Barack Obama was a Muslim (if not a domestic terrorist) with a sketch of him standing in the Oval Office dressed like Osama bin Laden. The future first lady, Michelle, is next to him in military garb, fist-bumping her husband while an American flag burns in the fireplace behind them. A year later, there was *Barack the Barbarian*. In December 2016, newly elected President Trump was satirized in *Dark Knight III: The Master Race* as a foolish sage in the war against Kryptonians. Each of these images bespeaks how comics writ large do with words and pictures what other visual genres cannot: make records of warfare that turn witnessing into a *post hoc* rhetorical art. Comics draw out tensions between the actualities of warfare—from cultural embattlements to armed conflict—and what is actually seen or known about them. In other words, comics evince the "fantasies, nightmares, and delusions" (Scott, ix) that filter through public judgments of warring pasts and of future fights that will surely come to fruition despite (or *to* spite) our councils of war.

There are multiple genres of comics. These include books, strips, graphic novels, editorial cartoons, underground comix, and manga. Notably, any comic's creation is, at base, a *drawn* means of rhetorical expression. Or, better, it is the product of "vocabularies of the visual-verbal" (Knopf, 6), whereby words can be drawn and pictures can be written.[3] Comics studies comingle with image studies, display rhetorics, and visual semiotics, not to mention Martin J. Medhurst and Michael A. DeSousa's foundational work

on the visual rhetoric of political cartoons as modes of "graphic persuasion" (in both senses of the term).[4] Increased attention has been paid to imagery in war reportage. Following Chute, Knopf, and Scott, the comic's record of war is less about coverage or description than documentation. Comics provide artful depictions of events. They also issue vivid, even explicit, displays from which judgments can be drawn.

There are two key ways that all three authors characterize comics-style recording. One is storytelling. The other is enthymematic impression. Chute offers the most complete take on drawn acts of witnessing. For her, witnessing is about seeing as well as putting observations on view (71). Comics artists "witness" inasmuch as they express what others might not see. When they witness war, they show forth ways of seeing that might not be present in prevailing plotlines and proofs. Their narrativity is therefore in their renewal of war imagery, which is why Chute aligns "documentary comics" (5) with "the presentation of evidence" (2, 18). The comics form, she argues, combines artificial, artful, and artifactual elements in various acts of "counterinscription" (4), "countermarking" (136), and "counterarchiving" (205). Together, these amount to a sort of disjunctive "countervisuality" (136, 140). Chute hearkens to such scholars as Tom Gunning, Elaine Scarry, Susan Sontag, and Michael Taussig to suggest that drawing disaster is part and parcel of documenting warpaths that are marked by "the unrepresentable" and "the unimaginable" (17). Put differently, comics artists disrupt "how people remember and reenact their own histories" and witness war by confronting inadequate records (263).

Comic "documentarians of wartime atrocity," Chute says, turn the immediacy and intimacy of war reportage into opportunities for inhabitation (41). Take the representative works of Jacques Callot and Francisco Goya. In Callot's *Les Grandes Misères et les Malheurs de la Guerre* (1633) and Goya's *Los Desastres de la Guerra* (created between 1810 and 1820, published in 1863), reader-viewers are urged to encounter "the *act* of looking and witnessing" what Sontag might dub the pain of others by "looking and looking at others looking upon horror" (59, 60). The same is true of Henry Darger's 15,000-plus-page otherworldly graphic novel, *In the Realms of the Unreal*, which was motivated by Darger's witness of a harrowing photograph of Elsie Paroubek, a Czech American girl who was kidnapped from her Chicago home in 1911 and subsequently murdered. Works like those of Callot, Goya, and Darger enliven the all-too-strange truths of "fictional"

accounts and, likewise, typify the capacity of documentary comics to impel an audience to reprocess or even relive the complexities (and cruelties) of human conflict. Of course, they also illuminate a lack in Chute's argument, namely, regarding her idea that comics (unlike, say, photographs) are "at once static and animate" (16).[5] Chute turns to Barthes's theory of a "third meaning" (or "obtuse meaning") that emerges out of relations between audiences, texts, and images. But she seems to ignore "anchorage" and "relay" as key Barthesian terms for explaining how attention is directed or how atrocity is dispatched in the interplay of comics' words and pictures. Chute—echoing the work of scholars like Laurie E. Gries and W. J. T. Mitchell—proclaims that comics provoke alternative viewpoints that show image-making for its tensile, proliferative, and dispersed practices (84). To rephrase Barthes from "The Rhetoric of the Image," comics might actually compel *charivari*, or a clash of experiences in the plentitude of visualities.

Here is where Scott's take on "comic illustrations" (1), and specifically "war-themed comics" (x), fills out Chute's thesis about witnessing. As Scott states, the comics genre "was never intended to be strictly accurate in a documentary sense" (2). It was, however, established as a means of looking at histories and historical war traumas "obliquely" (3). Principally in comic books dealing with war, Scott observes the blurry "lines between entertainment, reportage, and propaganda" (19). From Superman to Captain America, he argues, one can witness "traditional story lines, enemies, and formats" in images of things like American ideals, national character, civic duty, stereotypes (and archetypes) of good and evil, and fantasies of superheroism (78). For Scott, these images recur in modern history because comics tend to reappropriate visual tropes and topics in combat narratives as well as to mimic a "documentary style" that captures "patriotic conceits" in journalistic aesthetics and the historical attitudes of war cultures (135, 136). Comics are not all that different from much propaganda and many pictures of war, at least in leitmotif.

Where Knopf diverges a bit in her approach is in the focus on "comics drawn by warriors" (13), such as World War II veteran Bill Maudlin. According to Knopf, inside jokes about war provide privileged information about American militarism, including the everyday lives of service members, hierarchies within the military establishment, foreign operations, friend-enemy relationships, racial and sexual politics, combat geographies, and overarching effects of warfare. Knopf argues that military comics artists

have made regular soldiers into double agents of the citizenry, serving their country while also reporting on the "meta-rhetorical vision of the military" (153). Knopf sees these comics for the stories they aggregate into myriad rhetorical visions, which she highlights through a collection of fantasy theme analyses of the abovementioned topics.[6] Fantasies, for Chute, reflect the capacity of comics to disrupt the lure of representational reality. Scott observes how comics can make fantasy spaces into sites of engagement rather than escapism. For Knopf, one can extrapolate the idea that both insider and outsider comics artists are capable of laying the realities and fantasies of war bare when they elicit new imaginations. Dr. Seuss once quipped that fantasy is derived from looking through "the wrong end of a telescope."[7] The paradox is that a "gritty realism" gets magnified in so many comics fantasies (Knopf, 2). After all, to telescope is actually to condense, minimize, or constrict.

Comics rhetoric ultimately boils down to Töppfer's Law: the character of human beings and their (mis)adventures are best understood through crude artistic proofs. "Broken lines," says David Kunzle, "are sufficient to render expression and character."[8] So it is that war elicits so many broken comics with imagery of its personal (or physiognomic) and public (or cultural) impacts. Hence the complicated truths in their "plain" style of documenting the explicit—or *graphic*—details of warfare, to which I now turn.

## BROKEN RECORDS AND DOCU-TRAUMAS[9]

In a 2009 TED Talk entitled "The Visual Magic of Comics," Scott McCloud argued that comics help people get closer to real life by "reentering the world" with an ability to see it differently.[10] This reentry is encouraged in part because "the comics form carries out major and minor acts of hypostatization," breaking up diegetic assumptions of narrative cohesion and trading in "ruptures of visibility."[11] On the one hand, such disruptions (or, in Chute's terms, disjunctions) celebrate a fractured "visual record of truth."[12] On the other, they point to the traumatic experiences and rhetorical forces of witnessing embedded in recollections of things (un)seen, (un)said, (un)known, and (un)imagined. Important synergies in these books revolve around the realness of war traumas that need to be sorted through, taken in, and worked out. In fact, it is the real experiences of war

that goad any number of good reasons to reconsider comics witnessing as a rhetorical activity very often carried out by onlookers twice removed. War comics bear witness as much as they *bare* witness. And they do so by toeing the not-so-subtle line between glory and grief.

According to Chute, 1972 was a turning point in comics history. This was the publication year of Keiji Nakazawa's *Ore Wa Mita* (*I Saw It*), which gave way to the manga series *Barefoot Gen: A Cartoon Story of Hiroshima*. The series takes a critical look at Japanese imperial militarism and American-styled warfare around the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. It was also, for Chute, a foundational moment for "documentary comics of witness" (112). Nakazawa's work normalized comics that lend visuals to traumatic feelings harbored by artists and, by extension, witnessed by those who either were not there or lack a faculty for drawing out their own recollections. Comics thus pronounced the nonfictional, expressive documentation of evidence *within* the bodies of survivors (as psychical or physical sufferance) and in *outward appearances* like corporeal disfigurements and even geographical destruction. Chute goes so far as to suggest that corporeality is a connecting point for audiences to comics content, animating the mark left by an artist and the impression made on anyone who encounters it (178). As Sara Ahmed argues, marks record the "intensifications of feeling" by reshaping relationships between bodies and structures of knowledge when impressions "become see-able."[13] Nakazawa made his mark with a main character of *Barefoot Gen*, the badly burned artist, Seiji Yoshida, who scrambles to sketch bodies in an effort to document death. Comics documentaries make certain war traumas seen by marking them *as* seen.

Chute furthers the case for such traumatic markings in her discussion of Art Spiegelman's epic graphic novel, *Maus*. The disjunctures and tensions apparent in collisions of "the representational and the nonrepresentational" (186) are apparent in the very ill logic of a "death camp" as at once a place for habitation (however temporary) and a site for human extermination. Chute posits witnessing as a dual sense of being there and experiencing trauma along with others. *Maus*, she claims, expresses the perils and profundities of what Maya Angelou might call the "human family." For instance, Chute points to the animalisms as epitomes of a comics license to abstraction and vulgar aestheticization, which begins with the very first image for *Maus* from the original three-page strip that was published in *Funny Animals*—a comix anthology—in 1972. The image is a recreation of Margaret Bourke-

White's iconic photograph of the Third Army's liberation of Buchenwald in April 1945, and it exemplifies the entire two-book compilation of *Maus*. "*This is what it was like*, these pictures seem to say," reads *Time*'s reflection on the original document of Nazi atrocities during the Holocaust. "*This is what happened. This is the moment. This is what we remember.*"[14] Chute adds to this sentiment by sharing the inspiration Spiegelman derived from the Adolf Eichmann trial, from Justin Green's comic book *Binky Brown Meets the Holy Virgin Mary* (1972), and from numerous postwar narratives printed in Polish, Yiddish, and Ukranian small-press pamphlets. In many ways, Chute's argument was made by Robert S. Leventhal in his 1995 essay on *Maus* as a "working-through" comic of war trauma that subverts cultural norms of showing and telling "the traces" of our "broken connection to the past and to history."[15] What Chute adds is the urgency in documentary comics of witnessing war to *un*make perspectives that trauma cannot be cohabited by those who saw (and still feel) it firsthand and those who have been made to see (and feel) it in new ways.

Scott's views of comics complement Chute's book in his transhistorical analysis that makes clear how little changes when one looks upon war in light of *hamartia* as a national flaw, with human error as the shared foundation for our age-old comedies of armed conflict. Scott argues that comics have long expressed a clash of war cultures, one of which sees warfare as the last but no less crucial resort of America-the-Good and the other that sees it as the nadir of politics by other means. Scott's history is extensive. It traverses a litany of examples from the Second World War through the War on Terror. And it includes the most recognizable comics from publishers like that of the DC Universe to those from Apple Comics, which operated briefly in the late 1980s and early 1990s but nevertheless published such works as Don Lomax's *Vietnam Journal* (a comic that eventually inspired the *Gulf War Journal*).[16] Lomax's work was known for its "quasi-journalistic approach" to the representation of "brutal facts" and broader themes of the barbarity, immorality, grotesquery, and debauchery of American war makers (81). This approach drives Scott's own sense of so-called "combat realism" in comics as a euphemism for combat *trauma*.

If 1972 was indeed a turning point for war comics, it is no surprise to read Scott's observation that, during the Vietnam era and thereafter, the public was exposed to "more personalized, autobiographical accounts" of warfare (69). In WWII, to be prowar was to be pro-America. Antiwar attitudes existed.

However, they were largely subsumed in righteous mobilizations of citizens and soldiers alike against the malevolence of Nazism. Even at the outset of the Cold War and the height of McCarthyism, political vigilance and cultural vengeance prevailed in war comics that situated American militarism as a force for putting might on the "right" side of history. Yet, as Scott argues, from the Korean War through the war in Vietnam, WWII-era images of morality, heroism, and nostalgia resurged in war comics that detailed real-life standpoints of soldiers and the corruptions of wartime citizenries. In the 1950s, comics like *Two-Fisted Tales* and *Frontline Combat* recalled "fear and indecision rather than steely resolve" (45), with portrayals of gruesome imagery that were so countervailing to American sentimentality that in 1954 Congress instituted the Comics Code so publishers might police content and prohibit anything that sullied American patriotism. But, whereas many prowar comics like DC's *Tales of the Green Beret* and *Star-Spangled War Stories* followed news that supported military efforts as well as official government lines, antiwar comics like *Blazing Combat* and even *MAD* magazine travestied the consequences of American foreign policy and pugnacity. The underground comix movement, too, contributed alternative histories and confrontational takes on civic identity, as in Julian Bond's *Vietnam: An Antiwar Comic Book*, and *The Legion of Charlies*, which compared military exploits in the My Lai Massacre to the murderous rampage of the Manson Family. Plainly, "graphic violence" has become the literal and figurative marker for expressing heroic (and *un*heroic) military activities (Chute, 126) and for materializing the stresses and strains of combat.

Consequently, another key reminder in Scott's study is that wartimes are moments of crisis. The facts of actual war are hard. The comeuppance of sufferance is cold. So, there is a trend in war comics of trying to reconcile, in Frank Capra's terms, "why we fight." Notwithstanding cautionary tales, today's reconciliations turn more readily to "the futility of war" (Scott, 109). Historically, there are characters and rhetorical characteristics that trouble nationalistic artifices of pride and prejudice. Sergeant Rock in *The 'Nam* is an antithesis to the "real American hero" of the *G.I. Joe* series. Frank Castle (a.k.a. the Punisher) and Captain America compose a Janus face of American militarism, one hawkish on principle, the other warlike out of necessity. Then there are out-and-out fantasies like the involvement of Superman, Spider-Man, and the X-Men in post-9/11 culture, whereby the worlds of superheroes meet the realities of global warfare. It is unsurprising that, with all the bastardized patriotism and frustrated nationalism that he finds across

U.S. war cultures, Scott turns to the works of Garth Ennis (creator of the Punisher) and his darkly comic documentaries. While Marvel was busy reviving Captain America as a super soldier for all wartimes, Ennis was writing things like *Born* (2003) and *Fury: Peacemaker* (2006) and developing storylines of cannibalism on the Russian front in WWI, debaucheries of Allied troops, soldiers and war profiteers making deals with the devil, and so on. The utmost trauma of warfare is that "figures of fantasy" often show themselves to be figures of farce (126). So it is that, for Scott, a driving force of *comics* realism is the traumatic display of ever "more graphic depictions of war's danger and destruction" (135). Such depictions, following Ennis, are the very stuff of "the Great Beast" that was born of the military-industrial complex.

To round out these pictures, Knopf does the important work of illuminating public understandings of combat experiences and war traumas by going back to those who report from battle zones. Both Chute and Scott make similar gestures with their references to, say, Joe Sacco. Chute devotes an entire chapter to Sacco's "comics journalism" and his realistic accounts of "the complexities of particular, war-torn ordinary people" (201). Across four major works—*Palestine* (1994), *Safe Area Goràzde* (2000), *The Fixer* (2003), and *Footnotes in Gaza* (2009)—Sacco, says Chute, reincarnates testimonies provided by witnesses to war traumas, transforming atrocities into "an ethics of attention" (249). Scott, too, sees in Sacco a comics artist willing to exhibit war cultures at war with themselves and to report on their "frustration, sadness, and agony" (98). During the Iraq War, Sacco published comics like "Complacency Kills" and "Trauma on Loan" to deal with the trials and tribulations of American soldiers as well as the tortured lives of Iraqi prisoners of war. Sacco's comics depict the paradox of humanizing warfare by putting its all-too-real (and all-too-rhetorical) carnage on display.

While acknowledging that war comics basically provide histories of violence, Knopf argues they reveal how artists at arms characterize military comradeship. They do so, in Knopf's view, by channeling both light and dark humor to record the horrors and the humdrums of combat. These records are evident in comics that make it from the battlefield to the discourses of the body politic, like the Kilroy graffiti, Mort Walker's "Beetle Bailey," or Tad Foster's *The Vietnam Funny Book (an Antidote to Insanity)*. Knopf points out how military cartoonists have long generated a comics oeuvre for taking on war troubles in droll amusement, from coping with

posttraumatic stress through training (and educating the public) to recruit-
ing new blood—all with an unstated assumption that, whether or not
warfare makes sense, we are all in it together.

Beyond the overarching rhetorical vision of "comrades at arms" in
soldier-drawn war comics (Knopf, 155), there is an underlying theme that
comics constitute a rhetorical force for nugging and exposé. The traditions,
customs, and shared wisdoms—in short, the doctrines—of an espirit de
corps are all game for criticism in a comics space that is relatively safe for
lambasts of the grunts as well as the brass. Still, Knopf's view of how comics
document war sufferance is most apparent in her observations of friend-
enemy relations. One chapter accounts for outsiders and the "caricaturiza-
tions" that encapsulate them (81). Knopf's observations are familiar. Beasts,
insects, sea creatures, and Huns, in addition to contrivances and contrap-
tions, all make up a "visual shorthand" for stereotyping different degrees of
dehumanized enemy others (75). In some cases, they are seen as barbarians
and brutes recognizable by "facelessness, demons, death, illness and mad-
ness, torturers, rapists, aggressors, megalomaniacs, criminals, and strang-
ers" (75). In others, they are defined by images of "deadly bullets, shells,
bombs, and planes" (78). Then there are characters in Eisner's military
manual *PS, the Preventive Maintenance Monthly*, like Master Sergeant
Half-Mast and Private Dope, or the core (read *corps*) principles as they
appear in the guise of "Sad Sack," a namesake of a WWII-era comic book
created by Sgt. George Baker.[17] *Doctrine Man* is a more contemporary Web
comic series driven by "a cast of parodic superheroes, antiheroes, and
sidekicks designed to reflect particular outlooks and practices in the U.S.
military" (67). This cast includes characters like the Good Idea Fairy and the
Ghost of Clausewitz. Mauldin's comics, too, put forth stock characters
Willie and Joe, who are ragtag caricatures of soldiers unto themselves. They
are also caricaturizations of the cruelties of enemies in the face of a war ethic
that says kill or be killed, whether on the field of battle or in the battle-
grounds of rhetorical expression. Hence the significance in Knopf's subse-
quent argument that civilians, or "sillyvillians" in a military argot, are
embodiments of adversaries at home. There is no such thing as a spectrum
with a military ethos on one end and a civilian ethos on the other (138). But,
even if we share a view of the enemy, soldiers are often seen as broken
citizens. Mauldin makes this case in *Willie and Joe Back Home* with his
comics commentary on the trauma of reentry and reintegration. And Roger

Stahl has said as much in his identification of so many deflections and dissociations that absolve U.S. body politics from civic responsibilities in wartimes. Following Knopf, "sillyvillians" are sometimes silly civilians and sometimes silly *villains*. The citizen-soldier divide lies in the differences between war cultures, with the military establishment representing one and those on the home front reflecting another.

In sum, it is not only that war comics alter the content of other portrayals of warring moralities, enemy corruptions, chauvinistic sexual politics, general human frailty, and the like. It is the *way* they visualize and verbalize these images with an admixture of realism in fantasy, deathly seriousness in ribaldry, and morality in a cohesive yet sometimes coerced morale. This is how a militarized *mythos* of the "good" life gets mired up in myths of "good" deaths, and how wartimes end up drawing out so much evidence of war itself as always already the same old story and the new normal.

## CONCLUSION: THE FOLLIES OF WAR

> Of all deeds which win praise, isn't war the seed and source? But what is more foolish than to embark on a struggle of this kind for some reason or other when it does more harm than good to either side?
>
> —*Erasmus,* In Praise of Folly *(1511)*

There is a powerful comic in Spiegelman's sketchbook. He drew it in April 2007. It was published in *Autophobia* (2008). The comic features 12 squares in a large grid. In the top is a sequence of images showing the growth of a boy to a man. "MAKE BOXES," reads some text. Then there is a picture of a skull. "FILL THEM." A live mouse. "CARTOONISTS." A combat scene. "AND UNDERTAKERS . . . " The skeleton of a dead mouse, and a thought bubble containing a question mark. "SAME BUSINESS." Chute references this drawing at the end of her chapter on Spiegelman's *Maus*. The reference fits. As each of the books in this essay shows, war comics illustrate those who lived and died through armed conflict. But they also bring the dead back to life. War comics provide archives for reliving warfare in all of its fogs and fallouts. Those archives call anyone who bears witness to respond by (not) allowing history to be repeated.[18]

In *Praise of Folly*, Erasmus writes that there is nothing more lofty or heroic than war, and yet nothing more foolish. War, in Erasmus's view, is the touchstone for an eternally recurring comedy of human error. And where some might see a situation in which generation after generation ends up laughing at such folly, Erasmus sees so many councils of war spoiling for a fight that everyone will always lose. War comics thrive on this quandary, adding "falsities" to true-to-life wartime circumstances as a means of accounting for the absurdity, madness, and evil that urge comics artists to proclaim a la Taussig: "I swear I saw this!"[19] For Chute, comics are radically visible insofar as they recount and recuperate the sorts of traumas that originate at the nexus of what is (or was) seen, or not (223). Sacco demonstrated this when he documented the horrors in so-called United Nations–declared safe zones in Srebrenica with graphics of massacres and mass graves. Scott, in kind, acknowledges the power of comics to manage the everyday realities in an ever-widening war culture when he recalls Ted Rall's graphic novel *To Afghanistan and Back* (2003), a travelogue that "tells it like it is," at least "graphically speaking."[20] Finally, Knopf remarks on the role of testimonies about what one can expect as a member of the military, both on deployment and among ordinary citizens, by showing how soldier artists express the nonsense of war as no less real for its farcicality. All of this and more is no doubt why Erasmus preferred the ostensive disadvantages of peace to the false justices of war.

In the end, war comics seem to be about just this matter: doing justice to ways of seeing war by drawing out their banalities as well as their blind spots—thus it has been *documented*. If we are fated to repeat our follies, it is unwise to imagine that we could draw ourselves out of them. War comics offer assurance, though, that combat mindsets, mentalities, and even miseries can be redrawn. So maybe there is hope that, even though warfare cannot be unmade or undone, it can at least be expressed in a comics mode that will ever make traumas difficult to be unknown, unsaid, or unseen.

## NOTES

1. The artist was James Montgomery Flagg, who illustrated the infamous "I Want You" poster long after he gained popularity for his comic strip, "Nervy Nat," which was published in *Judge* from 1903 to 1907.

2.  SNAFU is military slang for the expression "Situation Normal: All Fucked Up" and the idiomatic inspiration for Private Snafu, the infamous star of numerous propaganda and instructional cartoons produced by Warner Bros. between 1943 and 1945.

3.  I borrow this phrasing from Jessica Abel and Matt Madden, *Drawing Words and Writing Pictures: A Definitive Course from Concept to Comic in 15 Lessons* (New York: First School, 2008).

4.  Martin J. Medhurst and Michael A. DeSousa, "Political Cartoons as Rhetorical Form: A Taxonomy of Graphic Discourse," *Communication Monographs* 48 (1981): 197–236.

5.  Note here that Hariman and Lucaites define photography in terms of a "mythic sense of eternal recurrence" (182). That is, they see a stoppage where Chute sees a sort of *dynamis*. See Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites, *No Caption Needed: Iconic Photographs, Public Culture, and Liberal Democracy* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

6.  Fantasy theme analysis as a form of rhetorical criticism dates back to the 1970s and 1980s, beginning with Ernest G. Bormann and taking shape with appraisals and appropriations by William L. Benoit, James W. Chesebro, Margaret E. Duffy, G. P. Mohrmann, Charles E. Williams, and others. It is somewhat out of vogue these days but reflects a persistent scholarly interest in how some (sets of) images encapsulate and/or evoke grand narratives.

7.  Quoted in Judith Morgan and Neil Morgan, *Dr. Seuss & Mr. Geisel: A Biography* (New York: De Capo Press, 1996), 10.

8.  David Kunzle, *Father of the Comic Strip: Rodolphe Töpffer* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007), 116.

9.  I borrow this phrase from William Booth of the *Washington Post*. See William Booth, "Docu-Trauma: For Political Films, the Box Office Is More Bombo than Boffo," *Washington Post*, November 2, 2004, *http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A17419-2004Nov1.html*.

10. Scott McCloud, "The Visual Magic of Comics," lecture, TED, February 2005, *https://www.ted.com/talks/scott_mccloud_on_comics*.

11. Michael A. Chaney, *Reading Lessons in Seeing: Mirrors, Masks, and Mazes in the Autobiographical Graphic Novel* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2016), 15, 16.

12. Chaney, *Reading*, 26.

13. Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 24, 183.

14. Ben Cosgrove, "Behind the Picture: The Liberation of Buchenwald, April 1945," *Time*, October 10, 2013, *http://time.com/3638432/behind-the-picture-the-liberation-of-buchenwald-april-1945/*.

15.  Robert S. Leventhal, "Art Spiegelman's *MAUS*: Working-Through the Trauma of the Holocaust," Responses to the Holocaust: A Hypermedia Sourcebook for the Humanities, 1995, *http://www2.iath.virginia.edu/holocaust/spiegelman.html*.

16.  Lomax also wrote for *The 'Nam* in the 1990s, a popular comic published by Marvel Comics.

17.  In military lingo, a "sad sack of shit" is a heedless if not inept soldier.

18.  This sentiment is all the more pertinent given that another book, *Comics, Trauma, and the New Art of War* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2017) by Harriet E. H. Earle, essentially reiterates Chute's (and Scott's) view of war comics as anything but "old" news.

19.  See Michael Taussig, *I Swear I Saw This: Drawings in Fieldwork Notebooks, Namely My Own* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

20.  Ron Callari, "Graphically Speaking: Ted Rall Tells It Like It Is," Independent Publisher, n.d., *http://independentpublisher.com/article.php?page=615*.