



**Giuseppe Martinico and Gianpaolo Maria Ruotolo (ed),
Graphic Law and Drawn Justice: A Legal Analysis, London
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Abstract

This contribution reviews the recently published book *Graphic Law and Drawn Justice: A Legal Analysis*, edited by Giuseppe Martinico and Gianpaolo Maria Ruotolo.

Research that examines the relationship between law and other fields such as society, ethics, politics, and justice is alive and well. As Martinico and Ruotolo note in *Graphic Law and Drawn Justice*, however, research in the field of law and popular culture is rare in the continental European academic context. Their edited book, therefore, is a welcome addition that broadens reading lists.

In eight substantive chapters, authors based mainly in Italy as well as Spain and the Netherlands explore comics, novels, TV series, movies, and music that represent law. They focus on the Anglo-American Daredevil movie, the TV series *Suits*, and the Batman and X-Men comics, heavy metal music from the global North and South, the comic adventures of the Spanish secret agents Mortadelo and Filemón, and graphic trial reports published in the French satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo*. Concerned with issues in legal theory, domestic and international law, contributors raise questions concerning justice, politics, ethics, and the role and qualities of lawyers. Their chapters deal with issues of identity, inclusion, (legal) discrimination, systemic (in)justice, the dramatic dimensions of court proceedings, and how to criticise laws and political systems.

For example, Daredevil's cinematographic representation allows Paolo Addis and Maria Giulia Bernardini to identify legal and political shortcomings that necessitate super-heroic intervention. Like the Batman comics discussed by Giuseppe Martinico, Daredevil the movie highlights tensions between (il)legality and justice. A lawyer by day

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and a superhero by night, Daredevil embodies the (in)justice of and beyond the law, challenging it as well as the legal architecture. His blindness brings to the fore socially constructed hierarchies between different disabilities, hierarchies of vulnerability, and politics and ethics relating to accessibility of physical spaces. While he is socially included, his ability to effectively use his surroundings in his fight for justice emphasises his extraordinariness. This raises the question whether the movie promotes equality or views disability as a deficit that must be compensated, whether it sees limits as socially constructed and therefore universal or as arising from a distinctiveness of individual existence.

Luca Pietro Vanoni also engages with issues of diversity, integration, and (resistance to) discrimination. In his chapter, the X-Men become a powerful metaphor for real-world conflicts and cultural tensions. He explains the intersectional diversity of the mutant community that leads to intra- as well as inter-community conflicts that highlight the dilemma between peaceful coexistence and domination, between integration and asserting identity and otherness. Vanoni compellingly argues that comics, including X-Men, have always been political but the way they engage with politics has changed. The narrative arcs, inner journeys, and personal conflicts of the X-Men characters were a commentary on the complexity of the human experience and served as a lens through which readers viewed their social and political realities. They were shaped through the lens of American socio-political movements and continue to comment on changing gender roles, racism, religious extremism, nationalism, and environmentalism. However, with a shift in narrative dynamics that now foreground social and political issues, comic heroes have transformed from windows that allowed empathetic immersion into universally relatable themes of struggle and perseverance into mirrors that prioritise identification.

Like Vanoni, Angela Maria Gallo explains that fictional worlds mirror reality. Her chapter is an enjoyable read of the Wizarding World of Harry Potter, depicting state structures such as the separation of powers and a UN-like international community composed of states that collaborate to ensure global security. This international community of witches and wizards recognises state responsibility and customary norms formed through consensus, prohibits unforgivable curses that resemble *jus cogens* norms, protects minorities such as magical creatures, and grants self-determination to Centaurs. The functions of the International Magical Trading Standards Organization is reminiscent of the World Trade Organization and the Warlocks' Convention that outlawed dragon-breeding has similarities with the 1979 Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora. Beyond trade, both the extradition of Gellert Grindelwald by the Magical Congress of the United States of America to Europe to try him for his crimes and the organisation of the Quidditch World Cup demonstrates that international cooperation extends to criminal matters and sports.

Gianpaolo Maria Ruotolo's chapter continues the book's engagement with international law. It presents an innovative focus on themes related to international law in Afrobeat, Hip-hop, Alternative and Classic Rock, and heavy metal, complete with a playlist. Commenting mainly on lyrics but also considering sound and visual artwork, Ruotolo identifies a wide range of themes including Bretton Woods, the right of veto in the UN Security Council, the principles of distinction, proportionality, and *uti possidetis*, (de)colonialisation, (civil) war, self-determination, displacement and migration, religious freedom, environmental concerns, land grabbing, corruption, oppression, and social injustice. In conclusion, Ruotolo notes a distinction between heavy metal music from the

Global North and South. While the former is generally aligned with traditional interpretations of international law, the latter offers a critical response to existing power structures. The chapter's world tour is particularly welcome in a book that seeks to travel beyond Anglo-America.

Also stepping outside the world of Anglo-American pop culture, Yasco Horsman analyses graphic trial reports made by Jean Cabut on the cases of Klaus Barbie and by Laurent Sourisseau on Paul Touvier and Maurice Papon, all published in the French satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo*. Commenting on style, narrative mode, and comic sensibility, he notes that the artists focus on what took place in court during the trial, zooming in on the defendants, legal paraphernalia and technology, and architectural features. This way, they explore new ways of trial reporting that contrast and critique sensationalist journalism. Reminiscent of traditional journalistic courtroom sketches, Cabut and Sourisseau emphasise the separation between the dramatic dimension of legal trials and ordinary life outside court.

As exemplified by the chapters summarised above, *Graphic Law and Drawn Justice* demonstrates the extensive reach of law, touching every aspect of life. Therefore it comes as no surprise to see and hear legal issues represented in pop culture. All chapters raise thought-provoking questions in this regard as well as about the relationship between law, justice, and pop culture. As the editors note, in that sense, the book serves as a basis for further reflection. To make those reflections accessible to readers without specialised knowledge and to fulfil the educational potential of pop culture mentioned by Martinico, it is crucial to follow Gallo's and Ruotolo's approach. They offer clear explanations and well-chosen examples, effectively drawing connections between their media and the legal issues they raise. Highlighting the significance and broader implications of arguments can further strengthened the case for pedagogical and scholarly engagement with pop culture.

Author Contributions H.B. wrote the book review.

Data Availability No datasets were generated or analysed during the current study.

Declarations

Competing Interests The authors declare no competing interests.

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