

Abstract

The subject matter of the bachelor thesis is the evolution of Anglo-American mainstream comic books in the post-World War II era, with principal focus on the epochs that have transformed this art form the most during the past seventy years. The thesis aims to present Anglo-American comic books as a medium with substantial storytelling potential that had to struggle with harsh censorship and the unforgiving dynamics of the entertainment industry in order to maintain its position in Western popular culture. The continuous efforts of comic books to remain socially relevant and to connect with audiences are explored through an overview of key decades in the medium's history, which are accompanied by the analyses of select works. The contents as well as format of these works show that comic books are a remarkably adaptive art form that can not only operate within a wide array of genres but also merge with other forms of popular entertainment, transcending the boundaries of traditional media.

The first chapter contains a brief overview of the origins and post-war development of comic books, while the subsequent passages offer a more detailed analysis of three crucial periods in the medium's history. The first era discussed are the 1950s, during which socially conscious mainstream publications refusing to feed the self-satisfaction of American popular culture emerged on the market. The short stories "In Gratitude," "The Whipping," "The 10th at Noon," and "Judgment Day" published by Entertaining Comics are used to illustrate how some highly popular comic books of the decade openly criticized racism in American society and depicted the Cold War as a gateway to mutually assured destruction. The chapter also examines the escalating attacks on the supposedly amoral content of comic books, and the repercussions of the severe censorship that the industry adopted in reaction to them. The next section looks at the resurrection of superhero comics, examining the problematic aspects of this genre, but also illustrating its maturation on the examples of Frank Miller's *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* and Alan Moore's *Watchmen*.

The last major chapter is concerned with the development of the comic book industry in the past twenty five years, and examines how shrinking sales led publishers to seek ways in which comic book franchises could become a part of other, more profitable forms of popular entertainment. This section looks at the advantages that movie, television, and video game adaptations of comic books enjoy, as well as the challenges they face. Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight Trilogy* is presented as one of the most compelling examples of what such adaptations can achieve. The conclusion summarizes the findings of the previous chapters and reaffirms the position of comic books as an enduring and quintessential part of Western

popular culture. Apart from the analysis of primary sources, the thesis also relies on secondary literature, most notably Bradford W. Wright's *Comic Book Nation* and *The Power of Comics: History, Form and Culture* by Randy Duncan and Matthew J. Smith