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Annotated Bibliography: *Watchmen*

Beaty, Bart. “The Recession and the American Comic Book Industry: From Inelastic

Cultural Good to Economic Integration.” *Popular Communication*, vol. 8, no. 3,

July 2010, pp. 203–207. *EBSCOhost*, doi:10.1080/15405702.2010.493421.

**Summary**

In the article “The Recession and the American Comic Book Industry: From Inelastic Cultural Good to Economic Integration,” Beaty addresses the history and cultural impacts over the years for the comic book industry. The American comic book was geared specifically for younger people and debuted in 1933. By 1936, there were four main comic books available but by 1952, “the industry reached its zenith, that number was 3,161, and the total circulation was estimated at more than a billion copies annually.” ([1], p. 46) By the mid-1950s political, economic, and technological changes decreased the interest in comics and only the superhero genres were able to survive. During the 1970s Marvel characters, Spider-Man, the X-Men, Iron Man, and the Hulk, along with DC, the publishers of Superman, Batman, and Wonder Woman were all able the survive the transformation from mass media market to the niche media market again. Catering almost exclusively to young males in the 1980s, the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles brought in a sizeable amount of cash, but ultimately low-quality comic industry gimmicks forced Marvel Comics to file for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection in 1996. During the late 1990s, Pokémon provided massive interest in comics again and in the early 2000s, Spiderman and X-Men became Hollywood blockbusters, allowing Marvel and DC to capitalize on their graphic novel versions of old superheroes. Comics can drive filmmaking as evidenced by Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons’ *Watchmen.* Published in 1986, it reached its top selling comic status in 2009 following the release of the film *Watchmen*. Due to bookstore space and the possible demise of comics overall, agreements were made for comics to be done in more of a novel style. Although this form of delivery does challenge the comic market in sustaining its unique niche, the comic market continues to maintain a steady level of interest, even today.

**Evaluation**

Beaty currently works in the English department at the University of Calgary as a Professor. In 2015, he was awarded $281,000 from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada to pursue a big project on the evolution of stylistics in the American comic book industry. To date, he has written eight monographs and focuses on the “typical” products rather than just the “exceptional” ones. Beaty’s writing gives validation to the cultural good of comics in literary terms. It is easy to read and follow along with the content of his writing.

**Application**

For someone researching the history and future of the comic world, this article would prove beneficial. Also, anyone researching the overall effects of the Recession, as well as liability in the comic industry will find parts of this article helpful. It provides insight into where the process once was versus where it is today. Change is constant, even in the comic world, but the essence of it will forever linger, which is the idea that Beaty carries throughout this piece of work.

Davison-Vecchione, Daniel. “Graphic Justice: Intersections of Comics and Law.” *Law & Humanities*, vol. 12, no. 1, June 2018, p. 143. *EBSCOhost*, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edb&AN=130244106&site=ed s-live.

**Summary**

In the article “Graphic Justice: Intersections of Comics and Law,” Davison-Vecchione uses 14 essays written by multiple members of the Graphic Justice Research Alliance considered professionals of law and comic scholars. Their editor was Thomas Giddens. Their essays are divided into three parts: “‘Introducing Comics and Law’, ‘Graphic Criminology’, ‘Graphic Justice International’.” Part one focuses more on what can be learned from substantive use of content graphic in nature and utilized in a manner that allows the medium to translate the content. “Richard Glancey explores the use of comic books as a pedagogical tool for enhancing students’ understanding of constitutional theories.” (54) Utilizing “judges” in Judge Dredd stories, they use the executive legislative and administrative powers and challenge and “question the value of the separation of powers theory.” (64) The final essay of part one is considered the most powerful of the part one series because it tests the boundaries of “cyberization.” Part two of the collection focuses on criminology, criminal justice, and vigilantism. They have long been a part of the hero groups. All working to control crime without always taking into consideration due process make the road to justice more difficult. For the third portion of the collection that is looked at from the global perspective, a commentary on the “Obama administration’s drone programme via a recording of Judge Dredd” (201) was used, followed by graphic reporting of human rights violations including real world atrocities. Well written objectives of Graphic Justice allowed for a different superhero genre. Graphic Justice focused little on the visual dimensions of comic books, but rather to the aesthetic portions of graphic fiction when related to law, order, and justice. It is said if a person’s background is shaped through art theory, they are more inclined to approach graphic fiction through visual medium and find increased interest in the aesthetic traits. For those who are literary theory driven, the preference would likely be favor analysis.

**Evaluation**

Davison-Vecchione has a PhD in Sociology, as well as a master’s degree in Law. He is a social theorist that is interested in genealogy of sociological concepts. His article offers strong validation of the increase in publication titles, the continued scholarly analysis of comic books and other types of graphic fiction and other comic mediums. Continuing to have the mainstream stories involved lawyers, jurists and the criminal justice system. The use of the Graphic Justice Research Alliance, the Watchmen and Judge Dredd allow for continuing evolving design that provides the opportunity for superheroes and super villains to alter perceptions of heroism versus villainy and how comic artists continue to use symbols of justice in both subversive and destructive ways.

**Application**

This article would prove to be beneficial for anyone researching law and comics by assisting an understanding of the difficulties that can accompany the niche market of comics. What most people see is only on the surface, but this article provides a more in-depth look. This would serve as a very valuable source in reference of a California case concerning the Batmobile, which altered copyright laws and the ability of others to make a replica of a character, even from comics, without the written permission to do so from the creators. This was a pivotal point in the comic world, making the information in this article valuable for anyone researching the history and law of comics.

Dietrich, Bryan D. “The Human Stain: Chaos and the Rage for Order in Watchmen.” *Extrapolation*, no. 1, 2009, p. 120. *EBSCOhost*, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsgao&AN=edsgcl.20486885 6&site=eds-live.

**Summary**

Considered a graphic novel, *Watchmen,* by Alan Moore and David Gibbons assess humanities condition in the same philosophy as Emerson with the notion of the “transparent eyeball,” a philosophy that allows us to “look at the world with new eyes” (48). The comic world’s first encounter with the *Watchmen*, published by DC Comics from 1986-1987 though an American book, it was authored by those from Britain. The *Watchmen* uses flashbacks and varying techniques to change perspective and narratives. There are four main characters: Rorschach, Dr. Manhattan, Nite Owl, and Silk Spectre II. Ozymandias kills the Comedian when the Comedian discovers Ozymandias’ plan to kill millions to save billions. Rorschach, also known as Walter Joseph Kovacs, considered to be a sociopath, is someone they feel would be a serial killer if he had not been able to express himself behind a mask that allows him to act in the name of what he considers to be law. It should be noted that his views are smeared and stained, considering his ability to mutilate and dispose of an animal’s body and then apprehend the criminal and act as judge and jury. “He leaves the man a choice: cut off his hand and escape, or die.” (VI.18-25) Rorschach feels he is clear sighted in his vision of the Law. Both Dr. Manhattan and Rorschach represent how far humanity will go to organize the world. In describing the two, Brent Fishbaugh says that Dr. Manhattan is a man “who has become a scientist to the extent of losing his humanity, his appreciation for the beauty of science” (10) and Rorschach “is all passion and no reason”. (10) Interpretation becomes an issue and the lines begin to blur on what is right and what is wrong. There are basically two schools of thought on the making of Rorschach and Dr. Manhattan viewing “two men symbolizing two ways of seeing, two men for two eyes”. *Watchmen* is a look into how we as humans view life. Symbolism is a huge part of the story and the blood of Rorschach, Dr. Manhattan, the Comedian, New York City, and humanity first appear in the smiley face button and become part of the full 12-part tale of *Watchmen*. The smiley face image with a streak of blood across the right eye angling from upper left to lower right will be an image or a variant thereof more than fifty times in the book. The *Watchmen* tells us that seeing an event can be altered with time as to any perceived meaning or any given event what is considered bad at one time can later be viewed or considered good. “The reverse stain on one “eye”, then, apparently occludes the reflection of another, reversed, “eye.” (VII.overleaf-4) Laurie and Daniel Dreiberg, also known as Nite Owl, are both hero and human being. They have difficulty making human connections, although at one time, chose to save humanity. They have so taken on their superhero persona that they cannot remember who they are without the costumes and capes. Ultimately the *Watchmen* is set in a time and place perceived to be the end of days with the Cold War heightened when talks between Reagan, Russia, and Berlin were falling into place and the explosion at Chernobyl seemed to bolster the idea of the end times. The fact that the final chapter begins with a clock at Madison Square Gardens indicates that the interpretation is up to the one reading the blots. The central question of the *Watchmen* is, “what is a hero, and even what is a comic book, but it also asks, what do we know and how do we know it?” *Watchmen* asks you to ask is there really anything to watch, can we truly watch anything? When we are watching, are we watching ourselves? The fear of “mutually assured destruction” (M.A.D.) is found throughout the *Watchmen*, as well as throughout the 80s culture. In the final pages of *Watchmen,* Rorschach is leaving Ozymandias’s Antarctic retreat. During this time, Dr. Manhattan asks questions of Rorschach, which reveals a philosophical stance concerning Ozymandias’ act as both horrifying and hopeful. Rich in complexity and depth, *Watchmen* is a beneficial reread due to its highly symbolic and semiotic cataloging.

**Evaluation**

Bryan Dietrich is the author of a book-length study on comics and has published poems in many reputable journals and papers. He has already won multiple prizes and awards and has been nominated for both the Pushcart and Pulitzer prize. His article “The Human Stain: Chaos and the Rage for Order in Watchmen” offers a unique look into the niche world of comics. Although the article is complex and multi-faceted, Dietrich is able to convey the meaning behind comedy, evolution, and the human design, it’s in our blood and for our symbolistic purposes, we are the stain and should utilize our own two eyes for seeing as we watch the Watchmen, because we are the *Watchmen*.

**Application**

This article would be most beneficial if accompanied with reading the *Watchmen* so that the reader has a better understanding of what this author is referring to. It brings much clarity to the heavy use of symbolism in comics to get a point across-to be impactful with insinuation. With the seriousness of the *Watchmen*, this novel was vital to the rejuvenation of the comic world in the mid-1980s, leading to more literary credence being given to comic novels.

Dockterman, Eliana. “All the Watchmen Easter Eggs and References You Might Have Missed.” *Time.Com*, Oct. 2019, p. N.PAG. *EBSCOhost*, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=bth&AN=139325828&site=eds -live.

**Summary**

The 1985 graphic novel *Watchmen* is canon, but the HBO TV show, the Watchmen takes liberties and tells a different story from the 1987 graphic novel from which it takes its name. There is an undertone concerning white supremacy and the feeling by law enforcement to wear a face mask for safety. The scenes have heavy smiley face and clock imagery referring to the heavy symbolism in the original *Watchmen* series. Rorschach is stated to live by black and white moral code and is known to have many prejudices. People began to question their own thoughts and beliefs when thinking of his actions. In the graphic novel, Rorschach writes, “all the whores and politicians will look up and shout, ‘Save us!’…and I’ll look down and whisper, ‘No.’” Dr. Manhattan is on Mars and has gained supernatural powers during a radioactive accident. He becomes discouraged with humanity and goes to Mars, building a giant sand clock. He predicts everything that will be said and done because he can see everything. Silk Spectre II realizes her father is the Comedian and although she felt she was born of a rape, she later finds that it was a consensual relationship. As in the book, the smiley face is used as a symbolistic means to tell the story and President Nixon, as well as white supremacists show up repeatedly during the show. The conspiracy theories concerning fake alien attacks on New York are in direct relation to the events in the final pages of the *Watchmen*. Introducing a show within a show, the *Minutemen* come into play. The *Minutemen* are a group of men and women in the 1940s that fight crime together, for better or for worse. In the 1980s, it was a younger group of heroes. During both times, motives and codes of ethics came into question and the *Minutemen* have become a part of the American mythology. In the novel, the Comedian has a drop of blood fall on a happy face pin. In the series first episode on HBO, a drop of blood on the police chief’s badge reveals the same imagery of the Comedian’s pin from the graphic novel. The imagery takes on multiple meanings, just as it did with the Comedian. There is always more to a story than meets the eye.

**Evaluation**

Eliana Dockterman is New York based American journalist. She graduated from Yale with a bachelor’s degree in Humanities and is a reporter and writer at TIME magazine. Her preferred focus is on feminism and diversity. This article offers a modern look at the *Watchmen* concept that has been studied for years. The article is easy to read and understand, but it does have “spoilers”, which some may prefer. While the article is very informational and helps gain better understanding into the symbolism used so heavily in *Watchmen*, the understanding really retains more personal value. Everyone that reads it will perceive it differently.

**Application**

This article would prove beneficial to someone reading the *Watchmen* that is lost or not understanding what is happening. It provides clarity in the symbols and the many meanings that they may have. To gain full understanding, one must know what is happening. While elements from the original graphic novel are recognized, the article clarifies the distinct differences between the novel and the HBO show. For someone new to the comic world, Dockterman writes in a way that helps one understand what to look at, how to look at it, and why.