Comic books, politics and readers: the influence of the 2000AD group of comics creators on the formation of Anglo-American comics culture.


ABSTRACT

This thesis accounts for the influence on the mainstream American comic book industry of a group of comics creators from the cult British science fiction magazine 2000AD in the early 1980s. It details the way in which these creators developed new methods for approaching politics in comic books and delivering that to a more diverse group of readers as a response to censorship in Britain of the boys magazine Action.

The thesis looks at the way the medium’s publishing history has interacted with the development of its modes of communication; in particular it explores how the reader in comics is positioned in relation to character and narrative development. To support this argument two chapters are devoted to the methodology and discussion of how the medium works. Comics consist of sequences of images that require reader input to produce a narrative. The chapters on form explore the implications this has for close analysis. These chapters use Hergé’s iconic character Tintin and Grant Morrison and Chas Truog’s surreal Animal Man: Deus Ex Machina as examples and draw upon and critique the theoretical work of Scott McCloud and Thierry Groensteen, among others.

The core of the thesis revolves around close analysis of eight texts, three from the UK and five from the USA. These are grouped into categories that broadly represent the different phases of the phenomenon. The first includes John Wagner, Alan Grant and Ian Gibson’s RoboHunters: Play It Again Sam; Alan Moore and Ian Gibson’s The Ballad of Halo Jones and Alan Moore and David Lloyd’s V for Vendetta. These readings are then tested against roughly contemporary American published comics in the form of Chris Claremont and John Byrne’s X-Men: The Dark Phoenix Saga and Frank Miller’s Daredevil before looking at Alan Moore, Steve Bissette and John Totleben’s Swamp Thing as a direct transferral of values developed on 2000AD to the American market. The thesis then moves on to consider how British creators influenced American comics moving forward by looking at an example that was clearly influenced by the movement in Frank Miller’s Batman: The Dark Knight Returns again using his earlier comic Ronin for comparison. Throughout the thesis these readings are used to show how these comics imagined new political configurations in response to the right-wing politics of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan and attempted to do so while engaging a more diverse readership than was previously the case in either the British or American adventure comics mainstream.

The thesis as a whole advances comics studies in terms of contributing to theoretical work on how the medium communicates and by providing a detailed look at this period in the history of comics. It also contributes to a framework for future research in cultural studies to approach different aspects of the medium.

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Comic book icons like Alan Moore, Neil Gaiman and Grant Morrison all had some of their earliest work published in “Tharg’s Future Shocks.” Over the years, the feature has spawned several other variations on the basic idea throughout the “2000 AD” publishing line. Tharg’s presence in the title of this series is equally important. Tharg’s Crypt Keeper-esque role in “2000 AD” might seem outdated by modern standards, but he is a unifying presence across decades of the series. The core of the thesis revolves around close analysis of eight texts, three from the UK and five from the USA. These are grouped into categories that broadly represent the different phases of the phenomenon. The first includes John Wagner, Alan Grant and Ian Gibson’s RoboHunters: Play It Again Sam; Alan Moore and Ian Gibson’s The Ballad of Halo Jones and Alan Moore and David Lloyd’s V for Vendetta. These readings are then tested against roughly contemporary American published comics in the form of Chris Claremont and John Byrne’s X-Men: The Dark Phoenix Saga and Frank Miller’s Daredevil before looking at Alan Moore, Steve Bissette and John Totleben’s Swamp Thing as a direct transferral of values developed on 2000AD to the American market. The thesis then moves on to consider how British creators influenced American comics moving forward by looking at an example that was clearly influenced by the movement in Frank Miller’s Batman: The Dark Knight Returns again using his earlier comic Ronin for comparison. Throughout the thesis these readings are used to show how these comics imagined new political configurations in response to the right-wing politics of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan and attempted to do so while engaging a more diverse readership than was previously the case in either the British or American adventure comics mainstream. The thesis as a whole advances comics studies in terms of contributing to theoretical work on how the medium communicates and by providing a detailed look at this period in the history of comics. It also contributes to a framework for future research in cultural studies to approach different aspects of the medium.