

Comics and Animated Cartoons

The May 2017 issue of JRFM deals with a topic rarely discussed in the study of religion, theology and media studies: comics and animated cartoons.

The complex history of comics dates back to figural book illuminations, such as in the *Biblia Pauperum* and the *Dances of Death* in the High Middle Ages. However, when school education became compulsory and reading an outward sign of education, the reputation of sequentially arranged illustrations, partially annotated with speech bubbles (banners), declined. Accordingly, a person who relied on the narrative expression of figural sequences was considered to be illiterate. In the 19th century, Rodolphe Töpfer and Wilhelm Busch paved the way for a renewal of autonomous picture sequences, with the picture being the essential component and the text the explanatory feature. By the end of the 19th century, comic strips had begun to establish themselves in the daily press, and from the 1920s onward, comic culture experienced its first remarkable upswing. Many contemporary popular comic characters can be traced back to this time, most of whom have had a surprising cultural impact. Today, comics are a mass phenomenon.

In theology and in the study of religion, an analysis of the use of religious motifs in comics is far from being complete. Many comics utilize traditional religious motifs and symbols (e.g. Thor as deity, the pentangle as symbol). Protagonists in comics often take on – in their own (and sometimes twisted) way – a savior-like figure who brings salvation (for whatever reason) into an evil (hostile) world. Many narratives also address fundamental and existential human questions. They do not necessarily offer answers to such questions but can provide these questions with a context of hope. Narratives also open up a space to allow for the audience to identify with the characters leaving traces – or imprints – in the audience’s everyday lives. As such, comics can have an impact on and become important in a range of socio-cultural contexts and questions: questions of violence, radicalization, a means of empowerment, or a way of uncovering hidden meanings.

So far, the difference between comics and comic book movie adaptations has received insufficient attention. It is also necessary to differentiate between animated and live-action movies based on comic books. Both use the original literary source in different ways to achieve a desired effect for the audience. In a narrower sense, one

of the most important questions is how “encodings of religious presences” (Armin Nassehi) are formally performed in comics and comic book movie adaptations. In keeping with the traditional theoretical problem of the translation of absence and presence and the staging of the indirect, this aspect holds religious potential.

We invite articles that focus on:

- theoretical reflections on the history of comics in the context of religious systems;
- comics and their movie adaptations as a means of expressing existential questions such as ethical categories, suffering, and tribulations as well as love, mercy and hope;
- issues of style, filmic language and narrative in comic book adaptations, especially the differences between animated and staged picturization;
- the comparison between the stylistic and narrative approach of selected comics, especially of Western and Eastern provenance (e.g. Mattel vs. Manga/Anime tradition);
- other topics related to the overall theme of this issue.

Articles of 25.000-30.000 characters incl. spaces should be posted online for peer review by August 31th, 2016 on the journal homepage www.jrfm.eu. We kindly ask authors to register. Publication is scheduled for May 2017. For any questions regarding the call for papers or the submission and publication process, please contact Christian Wessely (christian.wessely@uni-graz.at).