

Taina Syrjämaa

## COMICS AND THE WARTIME AMERICA - THE HOMEFRONT WORLD IN DONALD DUCK DAILY STRIPS 1941-1945

The present article discusses the history of everyday, represented in comics. The main issues are the relation of Donald Duck strips to the contemporary American way of living and the representation of the American homefront everyday in the comics. The analysis is based on the short Donald Duck strips between 1941-1945, published in over 300 papers in the USA six days a week.

The paper focuses especially on the issue of consuming society during the war years. On the one hand the wartime was a period of rising economy in America, on the other hand the efforts of war industry implied regulation, scantiness and the use of substitute materials in the production of consumer goods. In comic strips a special attention was paid to restrictions in car-driving and regulation of foodstuffs, especially meat. However, in many other fields consumerism flourished despite the war. The American home, having got electricity as early as in the 1930s, represented modern convenience; outside home money and time were spent in hobbies and entertainment, the role of the movies being prominent.

In Donald Duck the big problems of life are mostly evaded. The task of the Disney comics is, above all, entertaining as many readers as possible; consequently, the most tender issues are excluded from their world. The various phenomena of life are not, however, easily treated as separate blocks, e.g. discerning "superficial" issues from the more profound ones at their base. Therefore the many elements of American middle-class life are represented also in the Donald Duck frames. Besides entertaining Donald Duck also demonstrated strategies of dealing with everyday problems, delivered homefront propaganda and even sometimes made comments on the dark sides of consuming society. Occasionally the Donald Duck strips may even reveal images of homefront fears and imaginary dangers.

Päivi Arffman

## UNDERGROUND COMICS: SEX, OBSCENITY AND SATIRE

The golden age of underground comics in the 1960s and 1970s radically revolutionized the world of comics with respect to subjects, expression and modes of production. The present paper discusses the origins and specific features of this rebel of comics, its relation to mainstream comics industry and its representation of contemporary world.

Underground comics originated in connection of the rest 1960s counter-culture movement as a forum of self-expression, free from commercial restrictions and censorship. They were characterized by totally uninhibited display of sex, violence and other subjects labelled obscene. A single conspicuous feature in U-comics is their spontaneous spirit of protest practically against all the dominant values and institutions of society. Humour, satire and parody were their main tools of critique.

The uninhibited "immorality" of U-comics, however, tended to raise opposition even inside counter-culture itself. For instance, inside women's liberation movement their lasciviousness was often considered chauvinist. Female cartoonists countered by founding magazines of their own and by producing comics which

depicted woman's life from the female perspective on the one hand and criticized the male world with its traditional sexist gender roles on the other.

Often, however, the sexuality of the male comics can be seen as double-edged satire of both masculine and feminine gender roles, and this double-edgedness in general applies to other "obscenities", too. With the help of wild exaggeration and comical context they often turn into parodying themselves. Simultaneously they tend to connect to wider socially critical or satirical contexts.

Despite commercializing pressures U-comics managed to retain their radicalism and independence, thus bringing innovations into comics industry on many levels. With their many developments in contents, expression and production U-comics can be regarded as an important forerunner of the adult comics of today.

Kimmo Ahonen

### THE SCIENCE FICTION OF ENTERTAINMENT COMICS AND THE FEAR OF INVASION IN THE 1950s AMERICA

The present paper discusses the science fiction of Entertainment Comics from the early 1950s, *Weird Science*, *Weird Fantasy* and *Weird Science-Fantasy*, and their representation strategies of dealing with contemporary fears and imaginary threats.

The circulation of both comic books and magazines containing sci-fi stories increased rapidly after the second World War. In their selection of topics the EC publications resembled rather sci-fi stories than earlier sci-fi comics, thus transgressing the conventional comic narrative.

The EC publications dealt with topical issues which were well-known in public. They adopted the alienating method, typical of science fiction, by removing familiar problems to strange surroundings or these are presented in a modified form. Disguised commentary, through metaphors and insinuations, characterized also the contemporary sci-fi movies. Presenting topics straight was of course difficult in the age of the widely-felt witch-hunt of communists in American society.

The sci-fi comics took strong position on the spy scandals of the time, and

dealt with core issues of national security. Encountering the aliens can be eventually regarded as their central theme, characteristic also of the contemporary sci-fi movies. When defining the otherness of the alien form of life the EC cartoonists, however, avoided the evil aliens vs. invincible heroes constructions, typical of the mainstream cinema. On the contrary, the encounter itself might be represented as a positive alternative to mankind, now entangled in the rearmament race. On the other hand many comics end up in a situation where people lose the battle against aliens or where nuclear war or some other man-made catastrophe destroys the earth. By presenting these pessimistic visions of the future the cartoonists simultaneously took a clear oppositional position against dominant political climate.

### H.K. Riikonen "ARE THERE FLAWS IN YOUR EDUCATION?" CLASSICS AS COMICS

Albert L. Kanter, a Polish immigrant to America and the father of *Classics Illustrated*, hoped that the comics versions might guide readers to the original works. The Finnish editions (since 1957) of *Classics Illustrated* endorsed this approach, too. Also their suitability for schools was promoted. "Are there flaws in your education? Make them up by reading *Classics Illustrated*," as the Finnish editor of the series Kai Brunila put it. To what kind of literary works did *Classics Illustrated* want to guide their readers? What were the comics versions like?

Here the classics implied mainly well-known 19th century historical novels, and usually the basic idea was a simple illustration of the main plot. Novels depicting, besides ancient Greece and Rome, the era of the French Revolution had a prominent place in these classics. Also the western tales of American authors were favoured as well as works dealing with animals and nature. In addition, sea adventures were quite popular.

Thus, the 19th century literature clearly dominated *Classics Illustrated*, especially the novels of the Victorian era. However, older classics, too, ever since Homer's *Odyssey* were represented. Besides

the comics as such, the publications delivered other information, which, however, often seemed randomly selected and did not necessarily have any factual connection to the background text.

The present paper discusses the *Illustrated Classics* versions of Homer's *Odyssey* and Charles Kingsley's novel *Westward Ho!*

Translations: Veikko  
Hietala