

Seduction of the innocence: comics fandom and nostalgia

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A nostalgic discourse seems consubstantial to comics culture, and a particularly prominent form nostalgia has adopted is longing for the innocence of older comics. But what exactly are comics fans lamenting? This contribution will discuss comic fans' nostalgia following four axes.

First of all, this sense of innocence lost has become stronger since comics 'adult' phase exposed in the 1980s the capacity of the medium to convey more mature and compelling stories. Indeed, the simpler works of a bygone era allowed for a greater palimpsestuous freedom, hence a stronger reader involvement. As Gardner asserts, "it is often the flattest of characters in serial literature that produced the greatest emotional response on the part of readers" (2012: 57).

Secondly, one must consider that fans "superimpose attributes of the self, their beliefs and values systems [...] on the object of fandom" (Sandvoss 2005: 104). If memories are central to a person's identity, the object of fandom and the practices tied to it become the material incarnation (the 'transitional object': Hills 2002: 108) of that memories; in this sense, Gibson speaks of 'treasured memories' of the comics read as a child (2015: 189).

Similarly, Proctor identifies what he calls 'totemic nostalgia' as "a type of fan protectionism [...] centred on an affective relationship with a fan-object, usually forged in childhood" (2017: 1122). In his view, totemic texts are "a resource of meaning-making, of self-identity, self-narrative and self-continuity" (2017: 1122). This entails the role of nostalgic narratives in counteracting symbolic threats that may emerge to menace the totemic relationship between self and object.

This also implies that when fans act as gatekeepers (a practice Hills identifies as "boundary-maintenance": 2012: 115), longing for what they believe to be the innocence and marginality of old comics, they are in fact defending their own distinction (Bourdieu 1984).

Biography:

Giorgio Busi Rizzi holds a BA in Foreign Languages, an MA in Comparative Literatures and one in Italian Language and Culture, all from the University of Bologna. He has recently concluded a PhD program in Literary and Cultural Studies with a joint supervision by the Universities of Bologna and Leuven, working on a research project about nostalgia in graphic novels.

He is interested in comics studies, magical realism, characterization, humour theory and translation, and TV series.