

Západočeská univerzita v Plzni

Fakulta filozofická

Bakalářská práce

**NATIONAL STEREOTYPES AND CULTURAL
DIFFERENCES AS REVEALED IN COMICS,
GRAPHIC NOVELS AND SEQUENTIAL ART OF
BRITAIN AND THE UNITED STATES**

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Fakulta filozofická Západočeské univerzity v Plzni

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Prohlašuji, že jsem práci zpracoval(a) samostatně a použil(a) jen
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Plzeň, duben 2014

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1 INTRODUCTION

I decided to immerse myself in the study of British and American comic books in an attempt to make a comparison of both the British and the American mentality, which would then allow an illustration in greater detail of national stereotypes and cultural differences between the two nations as revealed in comics.

This thesis has two main objectives. Firstly, some of the main traits of the typical Englishman and American will be listed, and backed up with concrete examples as found in two graphic novels, *V for Vendetta* and *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*. Secondly, an attempt will be made to help establish the comic book as a legitimate medium, an entitlement overlooked more often than not.

There are two books in particular acting as guideline for this thesis. *Adult Comics* by Roger Sabin, a publication with sections dedicated to both British and American adult comics and their development, and *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America* by Bradford W. Wright, a book that closely follows not only the genesis of the American comic, but also introduces the impact of comic books on the US society thorough the last century.

As for the methodology, the research itself shall be followed closely by a detailed study of the titles mentioned above, namely *V for Vendetta* by Alan Moore and *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* by Frank Miller, with an emphasis on the comparison between the British and American psyche.

This thesis has four main parts. First of all, some of the basic comic book terms will be defined, such as *comic strip*, *comic book*, *comix*, or *graphic novel*. The second part is dedicated to American comics. Firstly, I will deal with the history of the American comic book, which will be followed by a detailed study of *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, a prime example of an American graphic novel. Finally, the national stereotypes as revealed in the title mentioned above shall be listed. The third part is to be very similar to the second one, but will deal with the British comic book industry instead. After the brief history of the British

comic book has been mentioned, Alan Moore's *V for Vendetta* will be dissected, the national stereotypes revealed being mentioned last. As for the final, fourth, part, it will touch up on Neil Gaiman's magnum opus, *The Sandman*, a work that introduces both the British and the American element into the world of graphic novels at the same time.

The main question naturally being which are the main national stereotypes and cultural differences revealed in comic books.

2 GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO COMICS TERMINOLOGY

2.1 Comic Strip

The roots of the American comic book are to be found in comic strips, or so-called *funnies*. This medium emerged as soon as the late 1880 as a result of the competition between two New York press tycoons, namely William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer. To attract sizeable non-English speaking immigrant readership, Hearst introduced the world's very first comic strip, *The Yellow Kid* by Richard Outcault, in his *New York Journal*. This satire on poverty in cities, aimed at readers of all ages, proved to be an immediate success, and the *funnies* took off. Other notable *funnies* of the era included titles such as *Katzenjammer Kids*, or *Mutt and Jeff*, and coined the word *comic* due to their humorous nature.¹

As the direct forerunners of comic books, comic strips usually featured panels, speech balloons and captions, and became firmly linked with newspaper. Since then, many of the strips have been collected and bound in the format of either comic books, or hardcover anthologies.²

2.2 Comic Book

The ancestry of comic books, or simply *comics*, is partly owed to comic strips, partly to pulp magazines, which were immensely popular in the USA at the time, often introducing themes such as adventure, fantasy, or action. In spite of more mature storylines often portrayed by comic book authors, the term *comics* stuck, and the medium has carried the stigma ever since, being usually perceived as juvenile.³

The Funnies, a Dell Publication project, became the first monthly comic book distributed through the network of newsstands in 1929.⁴

Bound into issues, which are very often episodic, and which star a recurring character, comic books rely heavily on the form of comic strips, i.e. panels

¹ SABIN, R., *Adult Comics*, pp. 133 – 134.

² SABIN, R., *Adult Comics*, pp. 140 – 143.

³ WRIGHT, B. W., *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America*, pp. 2 – 3.

⁴ WRIGHT, B. W., *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America*, pp. 2 – 3.

accompanied by a narrative taking form of speech balloons, captions and sound effects.

2.3 Comix

The underground form of the comic book, the comix, sometimes spelled as *komix*, can be seen as an often self-published alternative to mainstream comics, the prevalent themes being sex, drugs, and politics.

Yet, the conditions under which comix originated in the UK and the USA differ greatly. The British comix is simply a part of the counterculture and liberalisation of the 1960s and 1970s. Its American counterpart, however, had a stand to make.⁵

The 1950s had been particularly hard on comic books in the USA. As it is with every novelty, the sudden boom of comic books brought about a wave of public resentment, its peak being embodied by Dr Wertham's *Seduction of the Innocent* in 1954. This book identified comic books as the sole source of juvenile delinquency, since most of those publications portrayed crime and similar unsuitable themes including sex, and resulted in the *Kefauver Hearings*, a barely concealed governmental crusade against comic books. The response of the comic book industry was a self-imposed *Comic Code*, a restrictive instrument meant to save the industry as a whole. In this instance, it is safe to say that the American comix is a direct reaction to the censure brought about by the Code.⁶

2.4 Graphic Novel

The term *graphic novel* was invented in relation to a boom in the industry created by the *Big 3* — *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* by Frank Miller, *Watchmen* by Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons and *Maus* by Art Spiegelman.⁷

All of them being published in the short time span between 1986 and 1987, the Big 3 drove the media crazy, securing a large adult readership outside of the fandom for the first time since the First World War. In a reaction to this

⁵ SABIN, R., *Adult Comics*, pp. 171 – 174.

⁶ SABIN, R., *Adult Comics*, p. 174.

⁷ SABIN, R., *Adult Comics*, p 87.

unprecedented success, the companies themselves started promoting their adult comic material under the newly coined term of a *graphic novel* as a part of their PR campaign. It was a device to distance themselves from the juvenile comics of the past. At the same time, the word *novel* suggested something literary to the public. As a part of the hype, it was prophesised that the graphic novel would become the reading material of the future, a claim that could not be sustained.⁸

From the author's point of view, this medium usually stands for a longer narrative, which is often self-contained, although the possibility of a follow-up exists. A graphic novel is thematically unified, and strives towards a larger frame. This ensures a greater character development, and much more complex, often moody, storylines.⁹

3 AMERICAN COMICS

3.1 History of the American comic book

As we have already established, American comics evolved from the newspaper comic strip, a medium which gained popularity as early as the 1890s, and was aimed at a mixed-age market. Another big influence was pulp magazines, sensational stories printed on a cheap paper, and featuring genres such as adventure, fantasy, or crime.¹⁰

The first weekly-published comic book in the USA was Dell Publishing's *Funnies*, a title sold through the newsstand network. However, the *Funnies* folded about 36 issues due to the miserable state of its sales.¹¹

A real breakthrough for comics was the year 1935, when *National Allied Publishing*, a new publishing operation, was founded. Introducing brand new material created by freelance artists, National Allied Publishing was renamed in 1937 after one of its titles, assuming the name of *Detective Comics*, or *DC* for short.¹²

⁸ SABIN, R., *Adult Comics*, pp. 87 – 95.

⁹ SABIN, R., *Adult Comics*, pp. 235 – 236.

¹⁰ WRIGHT, B. W., *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America*, pp. 2 – 5.

¹¹ WRIGHT, B. W., *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America*, p. 3.

¹² WRIGHT, B. W., *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America*, pp. 5 – 6.

DC's most lucrative title at the time turned out to be *Superman*, the first comic book devoted to a single character. A creation of Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, Superman first appeared in the first issue of *Action Comics* in 1938, and became the prototype for the American type of a superhero. He soon earned not only his own comic book, but also a radio programme, a series of cartoons, and finally his first live action film.¹³

A huge parade of second-rate copy-cat costumed heroes was bound to appear, exploiting the new Superman formula. To support this boom, a number of *shops* were set up. These studios operated much like an assembly line; the creators were split to groups of pencilers, inkers, letterers, etc, who received a flat rate per page, and possessed no authorship rights whatsoever. This approach ensured the true launch of the industry, but the comics produced were often formulaic, the art generic at best.¹⁴

Another of the DC's Depression-era superheroes was *Batman*. In spite of DC's original intention to simply create another Superman clone, Batman developed a character of his own. The series became known for its novel artistic approach, and very dark atmosphere. Batman also possessed no super powers, and, most importantly, his quest was driven by a personal desire for revenge. Unlike Superman, Batman turned out to be a rather self-centred, vigilante-type kind of a hero.¹⁵

1939 marked the launch of DC's biggest competitor to be, *Marvel Comics*, by Martin Goodman. Comic books also became the receiving end of serious criticism for the time in their history, mostly due to the industry's marketing strategy which targeted the youth directly. This was the first precursor of the happenings of the late 1950s.¹⁶

The Second World War constituted the Golden Age of the American comic book. Another superhero, *Captain America*, was born, calling to arms. In fact,

¹³ WRIGHT, B. W., *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America*, pp. 4 – 14.

¹⁴ WRIGHT, B. W., *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America*, p. 6.

¹⁵ WRIGHT, B. W., *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America*, pp. 15 – 17.

¹⁶ WRIGHT, B. W., *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America*, pp. 18 – 29.

the American comic industry launched an offensive against the Axis powers long before the Government did, inserting bits of propaganda into their stories. This only intensified with the attack on Pearl Harbor. Suddenly, many of the superheroes were enlisting; comics became the reading material of American G.I.s. At the same time, the comics have not only become patriotic, but also obviously racist, mainly in their portrayal of the Japanese.¹⁷

It is plausible to say that the comic book industry, just as any other US industry of the time, greatly profited from the war. Not only had the sales risen; the pointed critique let off, lulled into complacency by the new pro-Governmental, patriotic tone the comic books seemed to have adopted.¹⁸

Another genre became popular during the war years, namely the *jungle comics*. Racist and imperialistic, they starred a white hero — or a blonde, endowed, and half-naked heroine in many cases — saving savages from themselves.¹⁹

The end of the war marked a slump in the superhero trend. With no enemy to be fought, superheroes seemingly lost their cause, and the fact that not even they knew how to deal with the reality of the atomic bomb did not help. On the other hand, jungle comics continued to thrive with titles like *Sheena, Queen of the Jungle*.²⁰

The withdrawal of superheroes from the market marked a rise of five major genres that took over in the late 1940s and 1950s, namely *crime, romance, war, horror, and satire*.²¹

As the image of the dark side of America became lucrative, *crime comic books* emerged. Instituting a glorified representation of life outside the boundaries of law, titles inspired by film noir such as *Crime Does Not Pay* offered an extent of violence, gore, and sexual subtext never seen before. Despite the caution contained in their titles, comics such as these effectively promoted a

¹⁷ WRIGHT, B. W., *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America*, pp. 30 – 55.

¹⁸ WRIGHT, B. W., *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America*, pp. 53 – 55.

¹⁹ WRIGHT, B. W., *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America*, pp. 36 – 37.

²⁰ WRIGHT, B. W., *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America*, pp. 59 – 75.

²¹ SABIN, R., *Adult Comics*, p. 149.

gangster lifestyle, and inflamed the criticism anew, long before horror comics came along.²²

In the early years of Cold War, *romance* and *anticommunism* were the two most usually exploited themes. Romance was a logical reaction to crime comic books; while the first spoke to adult male audience, the latter meant to do the same for females. The anticommunist message was often included in an attempt to turn the comic book into a socially responsible medium. However, not even romance comics could fully avoid criticism; they were often labelled as sexist, and setting a bad example.²³

As for war comic books, the ones pertaining to Korean War, the USA's 'police action', differed much from the glorious era of Second World War. Not many superheroes were still around; this conflict was all about the average soldier. The war was painted dark, and violent, the general tone of the stories being ironic more often than not.²⁴

Another trend in the industry was marked by the raise of the *horror comic book*. Launched by EC with titles such as *Tales from the Crypt*, *Vault of Horror*, and *The Haunt of Fears*, horror comics soon gained cult following, bringing violence and gore to yet another level. Despite the undeniable quality of EC authors' craftsmanship, horror comics enraged the public like no other genre before.²⁵

The last genre to emerge before the institution of the infamous Code was *satire*. Relying on light-hearted humour, satire titles like EC's *Mad* targeted the teenagers as their primary market, but managed to attract a substantial adult readership as well.²⁶

It was, once again, Dr. Fredric Wertham who, at this point, started to criticise comic books anew in his *Seduction of the Innocent*. Presented as scientific publication, although lacking the evidence to support the claim, *Seduction of the*

²² WRIGHT, B. W., *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America*, pp. 77 – 85.

²³ WRIGHT, B. W., *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America*, pp. 109 – 110.

²⁴ WRIGHT, B. W., *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America*, pp. 114 – 121.

²⁵ WRIGHT, B. W., *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America*, pp. 154 – 157.

²⁶ SABIN, R., *Adult Comics*, pp. 154 – 156.

Innocent accused comic books of being hugely responsible for juvenile delinquency. Parents, hungry for a simple answer to the problem of the generation gap, soon took up the mantle, calling for a legislation to restrict the comic book industry. This ultimately led to as much as a senate investigation.²⁷

The so-called Kefauver hearings opened in April 1954, representing a serious stain on the good name of comic books. To avoid an all-out censure, the industry finally gave in and established both Comics Magazine Association of America and Comic Code Authority, a body charged with screening comic books for dubious content. Its Comic Code meant an effective ban on topics such as crime or sex, decimating the whole genre of horror and crime comic books. However, the drop in popularity of comics in the late 1950s was at least partially caused by new phenomena, namely rock-and-roll music, and television.²⁸

It soon became clear that the genre most suitable to the medium of the comic book is — and always will be — linked to costumed superheroes. Not even Hollywood could compete with the imaginative depiction that the comic book authors could achieve. This meant a new rise in the superhero trend, innocent enough to stay under the radar of Comic Code, yet increasingly more mature, and intriguing.²⁹

The early 1960s completely redefined the youth culture. An economic, social, and political force to be reckoned with, young people were championed by the President of the United States himself, John F. Kennedy. Adolescent rebellion suddenly became a natural process in the eyes of the public, but not every comic book publisher could keep up with the change.³⁰

While DC's heroes remained as selfless and self-righteous as ever, Marvel quickly adapted, and took over as the leading force in the industry. Addressing an anxious, teenage audience required a new kind of superhero, a believable person who would agonise over their own powers — an embodiment of the Cold War

²⁷ WRIGHT, B. W., *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America*, pp. 163 – 164.

²⁸ WRIGHT, B. W., *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America*, pp. 157 – 179.

²⁹ WRIGHT, B. W., *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America*, pp. 183 – 184.

³⁰ WRIGHT, B. W., *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America*, pp. 199 – 201.

reality. This formula was first developed when creating the flawed persona of Peter Parker, otherwise known as *Spiderman*. Other Marvel comics to exploit it included *The Fantastic Four* and *Incredible Hulk*. In short, antihero became the next thing.³¹

Marvel took its sudden success one step further still, however, establishing the so-called *Marvel Universe*, a series of interwoven stories and guest appearances. In order to get a better understanding, the reader was obliged to follow a much wider berth of titles than ever before, effectively boosting up Marvel's sales.³²

Another trend in the comic book industry was the emergence of the underground comix. Seeking to express all the ideas forbidden by the Comic Code, the underground comix most usually revolved about themes such as drugs, sex, or politics, focusing on solely adult readership.³³

Even mainstream comic books were largely influenced by social upheavals of the 1960s, however. Topics such as civil rights, feminism, Vietnam War, or counterculture were often addressed by the comic book creators, ultimately leading to a liberalisation of the Comic Code. Protest and dissent became marketable commodities by the end of the decade.³⁴

The 1970s saw another boost in sales. Not only superheroes, but also youth started to question their own existence. While many of those turned to drink, drugs, or new kinds of religion, *fandom* constituted a reasonable out for the rest of them.³⁵

Fandom, a subculture of fans who are willing to spend a significant portion of both their time and money on the point of their interest, turned the industry upside down. While it is true that hardcore fans constituted only a minority of

³¹ WRIGHT, B. W., *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America*, pp. 229 – 240.

³² WRIGHT, B. W., *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America*, P. 218.

³³ SABIN, R., *Adult Comics*, pp. 171 – 174.

³⁴ WRIGHT, B. W., *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America*, p. 229.

³⁵ WRIGHT, B. W., *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America*, pp. 251 – 253.

comic book audience, they nevertheless made up a significant market due to their lasting devotion.³⁶

The *direct marketing* was born along with the fandom. Comics were no longer distributed through a network of newsstands; instead, specialist shops sold them. The books that were not sold were placed in plastic bags, and sold later on as collector items. Similarly, other merchandise including action figures, etc. was made available to the fans.³⁷ “By the 1990s, comic books had become the nation’s third largest collectible, just after coins and stamps.”³⁸

The Big 3 — *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* by Frank Miller, *Watchmen* by Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons and *Maus* by Art Spiegelman — three big titles published between 1986 and 1987, brought about a much covered ‘adult revolution’ in the field of the comic book industry. The title *graphic novel* was coined as a part of a PR campaign in order to differentiate these works from the connotation of juvenile entertainment that the word “comic” entailed. As a result of the media exposure surrounding the Big 3, several bookshops decided to carry a line of graphic novels — the self-proclaimed reading material of the future. This represented a move away from the fandom and into the mainstream. Nevertheless, many titles abused the stamp of graphic novel, despite their low quality, and the hype soon died off by itself.³⁹

It is undeniable that the comic book industry has come a long way, to the point of many titles being available in many libraries all around the world. However, the comic book audience remains rather narrow, and the competition is bigger than ever, comprising cable television, computer games, and the biggest threat ever — the Internet.⁴⁰

³⁶ WRIGHT, B. W., *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America*, pp. 251 – 253.

³⁷ SABIN, R., *Adult Comics*, pp. 174 – 175.

³⁸ WRIGHT, B. W., *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America*, p. 279.

³⁹ SABIN, R., *Adult Comics*, pp. 176 – 179.

⁴⁰ WRIGHT, B. W., *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America*, pp. 280 – 281.

3.2 Batman: The Dark Knight Returns

Batman: The Dark Knight Returns is a 1986 graphic novel starring Batman, written by Frank Miller, co-illustrated by Klaus Janson, and published by DC Comics.

Starring a retired, fifty-five year-old Batman, the story returns to its film noir roots, all the while introducing contemporary Cold War elements to the narrative. *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* grows progressively dark, introducing a Batman who is not only traumatised by the death of his parents, but who has grown almost psychotic himself, waging a never-ending, bloody retribution on Gotham's underbelly.

The best known revisionist superhero story of all time, Miller's *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* is almost solely responsible for the so-called adult comic revolution of late 1980s, being the first comic book title to be seriously — and often favourably — covered by mainstream press.⁴¹

3.3 American national stereotypes as revealed in Batman: The Dark Knight Returns

3.3.1 Predestination and Manifest Destiny



⁴¹ WRIGHT, B. W., *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America*, p. 267.



From *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* (DC Comics, 1986). Eight panels featuring a flashback that illustrates the making of Batman. Six-year-old Bruce Wayne first discovers the Cave.

Looking at the genesis of most of the USA's costumed superheroes, one cannot help but notice that the main character is hardly the one making the decision for themselves. Be it Peter Parker being bitten by a radioactive spider or the child version of Bruce Wayne, who falls down the Cave, these events are completely out of the main protagonist's jurisdiction.

It is plausible to say that predestination plays an important role here. Just as the USA believes itself to have been appointed by God as the leader of the world, the superheroes could be perceived as the chosen ones, too. And even though they may question the destiny thrust upon them, they never find themselves rejecting it, perfectly in tune with their Puritan roots.⁴²

3.3.2 Public mentions of God



⁴² TIHELKOVÁ, A., *BARI*

From *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* (DC Comics, 1986). Public mention of God is in no way a taboo in Gotham City.

Not even President Obama could avoid being seriously criticised after he made no mention of God in his weekly Thanksgiving-themed Internet address back in 2011. The media would not be appeased, not even by the fact that Obama explicitly thanked God in his written Thanksgiving proclamation earlier that week.⁴³

An interesting comparison springs to mind in relation to the situation in the UK, where God is considered a rather private thing, and an overt reference to him would equal bad taste, especially coming from a high official. The US background is strongly religious, however, and customary behaviour is to be observed even by redactors done in the comic book style.⁴⁴

3.3.3 American patriotism



From *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* (DC Comics, 1986). Although viewed as a public threat by many, Batman won't hesitate to back the police force up when necessary.

American patriotism does not come across as very surprising anymore, not even to a casual observer. However, costumed superheroes have taken this particular trait one step further at least. Often bordering on nationalistic, they

⁴³ SIEGEL, J., Obama Leaves God out of Thanksgiving Speech, Riles Critics.

⁴⁴ TIHELKOVÁ, A., BAR1.

have taken an active, pro-American role in the Second World War, and many have continued this trend in the next generation of US conflicts as well.⁴⁵

Batman: The Dark Knight Returns reinvents Gotham as a poll of public opinion. Its recurring theme is embodied by the society's inability to categorise Batman as either a hero, or a vigilante, an especially dangerous man operating outside the law. At one point, an arrest warrant for Batman is issued, and many confrontations ensue. Batman, however, never forsakes the police who are hunting him, recognising their good intentions.

3.3.4 Love of technology



From *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* (DC Comics, 1986). Batman has always belonged to the type of a superhero who favours technology over magic tricks.

According to a Harris Poll released the 8th of June 2010, “Science and technology, the U.S. Constitution and our [American] quality of life top the list of collective national “loves,” while our political system, the economy and the state of public schools lurk at the very bottom.”⁴⁶

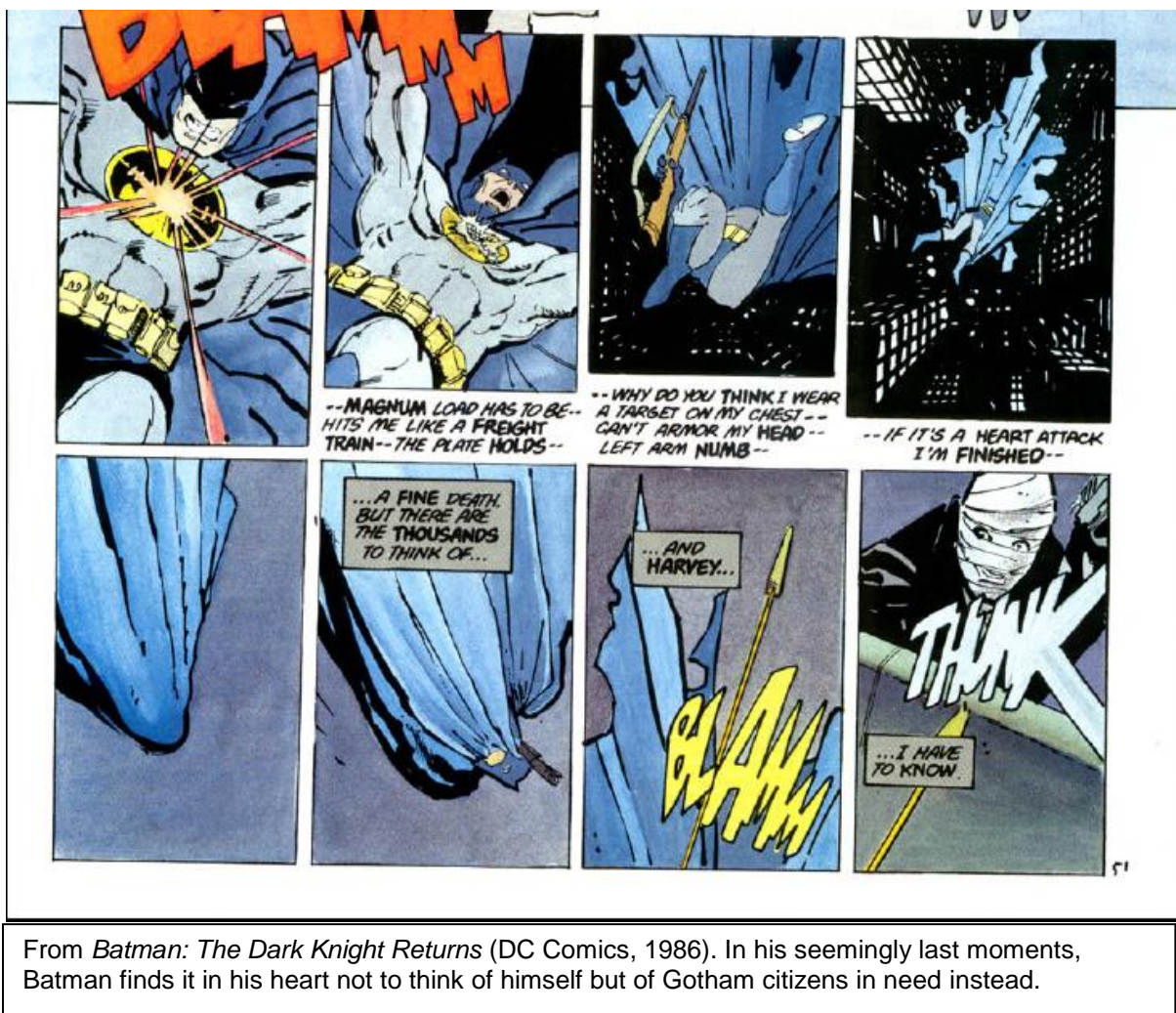
While 7 out of 10 respondents of the poll claimed to be fans of the Constitution, three quarters of them admitted they rooted for research and fancy electronics.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ WRIGHT, B. W., *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America*, pp. 30 – 55.

⁴⁶ HARPER, J., *Poll: U.S. ‘loves’ technology, Constitution*.

⁴⁷ HARPER, J., *Poll: U.S. ‘loves’ technology, Constitution*.

3.3.5 Self-righteousness in public figures



It is a firmly rooted belief that not only a superhero, but an official of any kind should be as selfless as possible, serving his or her country. I believe this to be yet another of US mores inseparably linked to the Christian mentality, as there is any number of references pertaining to selflessness in the Bible.

It is no wonder then that Batman finds it hard to shake this world view off, even as he contemplates his own encroaching death. Similarly, self-righteousness is a trait long established in the US superhero.

3.3.6 Costumed superheroes



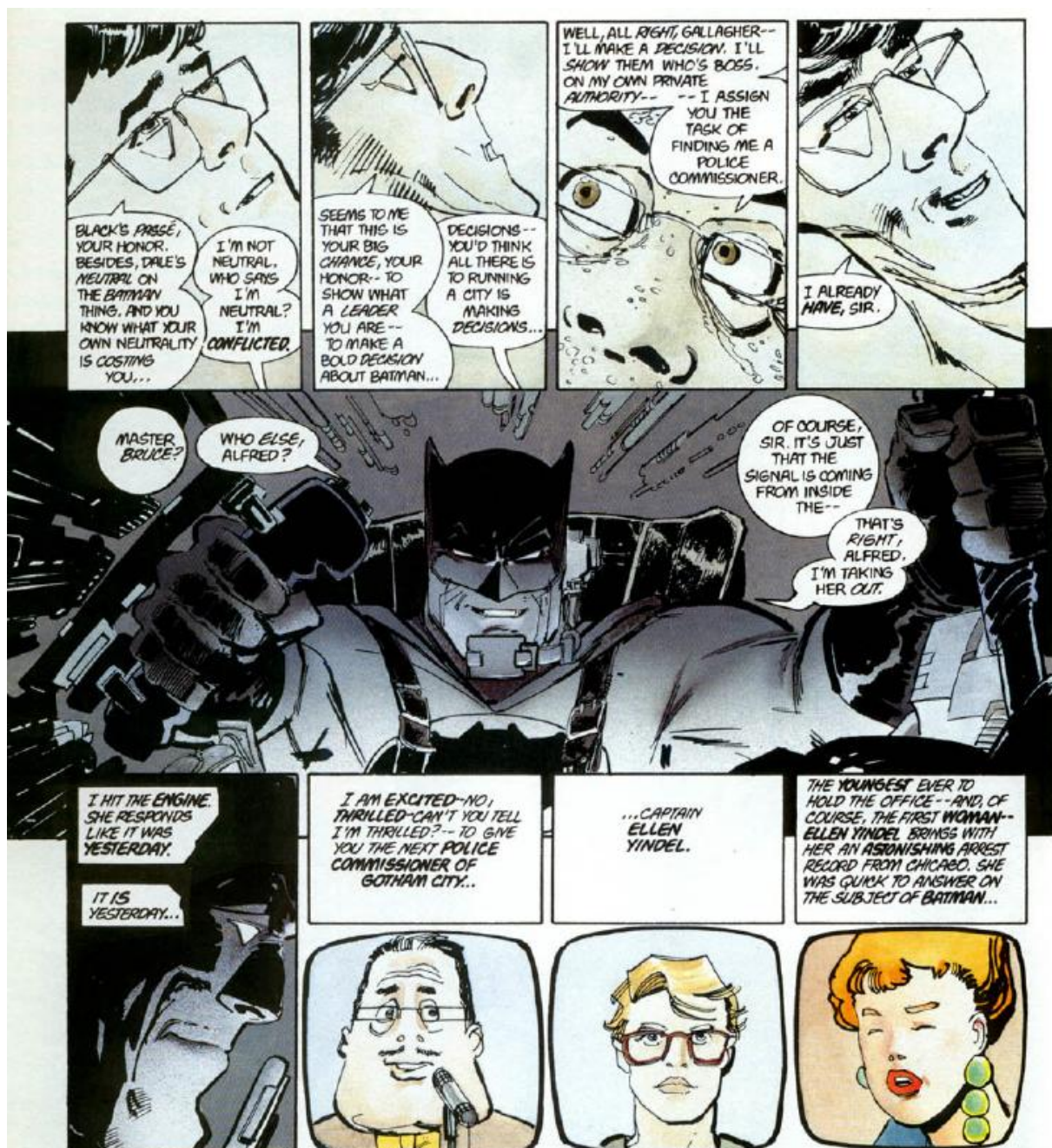
From *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* (DC Comics, 1986). All Carrie Kelley, a thirteen-year-old schoolgirl, needs in order to transform into Robin, is the trademark cape.

The vast majority of American superheroes don some sort of a costume. This trend, dating as far back as the 1920, was born along with character such as Zorro, and persists. Costumes are not only an integral part of the superhero's identity; they are closely linked with both selflessness, and the idea of predestination.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ WIKIPEDIA, Superhero.

First off, secret identity often protects the superhero's friends and family. Secondly, it is a vivid marker to distance the superhero, the chosen one, from the rest of the humanity, singling them out as something extraordinary.⁴⁹

3.3.7 Political correctness; inclusion of minorities



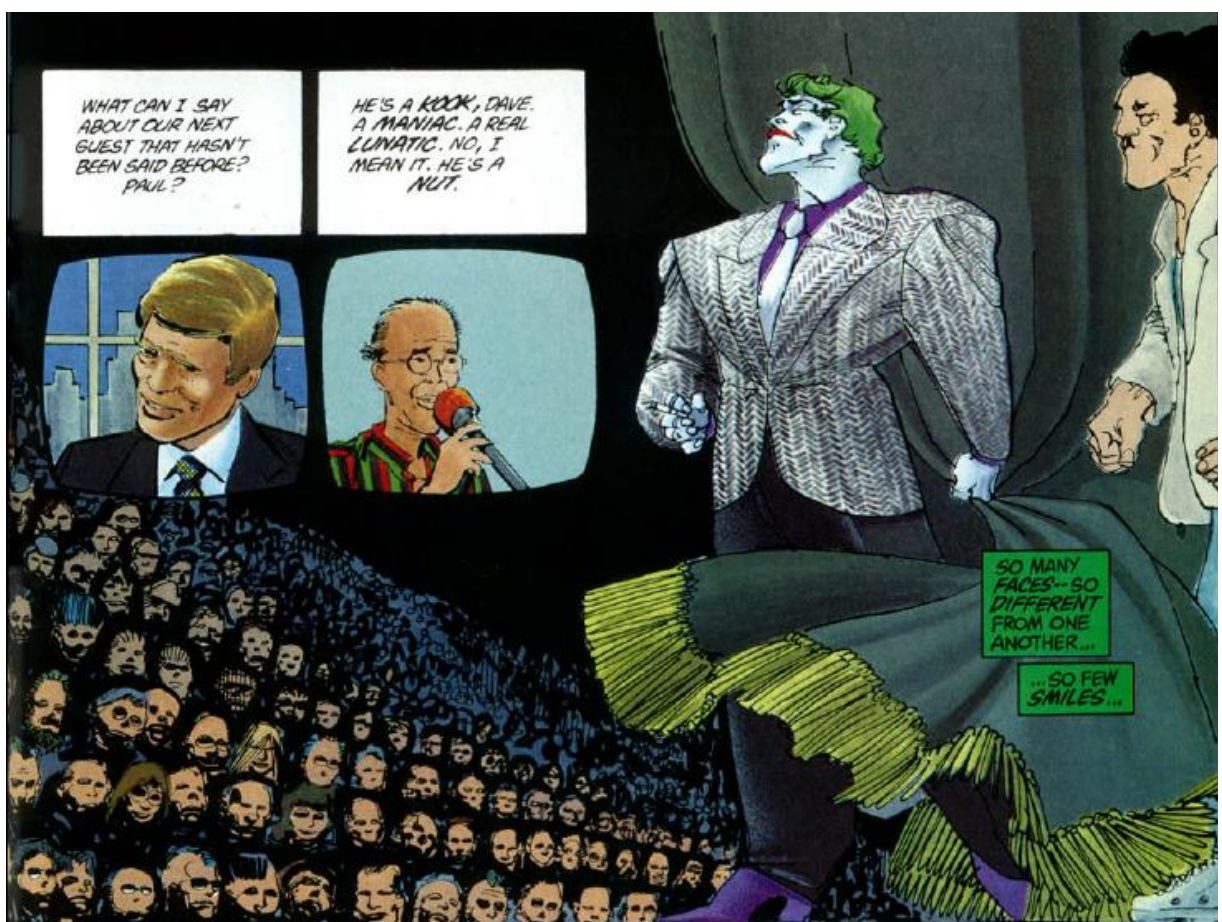
From *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* (DC Comics, 1986). Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s apparently took root, as an African American man and a white woman were the only two people proposed for the post of the new Police Commissioner of Gotham by the authorities.

⁴⁹ WIKIPEDIA, Superhero.

Both women's rights and rights of minorities were included in the worldwide movement for civil rights, a series of political movements and protests for equality before law that peaked in the 1960s.⁵⁰

These days, social inclusion plays a big part in day-to-day life of each and every American. For example, women and minorities are to be included in research including human subjects conducted by the National Institutes of Health under the National Health Service Act.⁵¹

3.3.8 Obsession with media and celebrities



From *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* (DC Comics, 1986). The USA is veritably obsessed with the media and celebrities. Even Joker, a good old-fashioned villain, is regarded as talk-show material in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*.

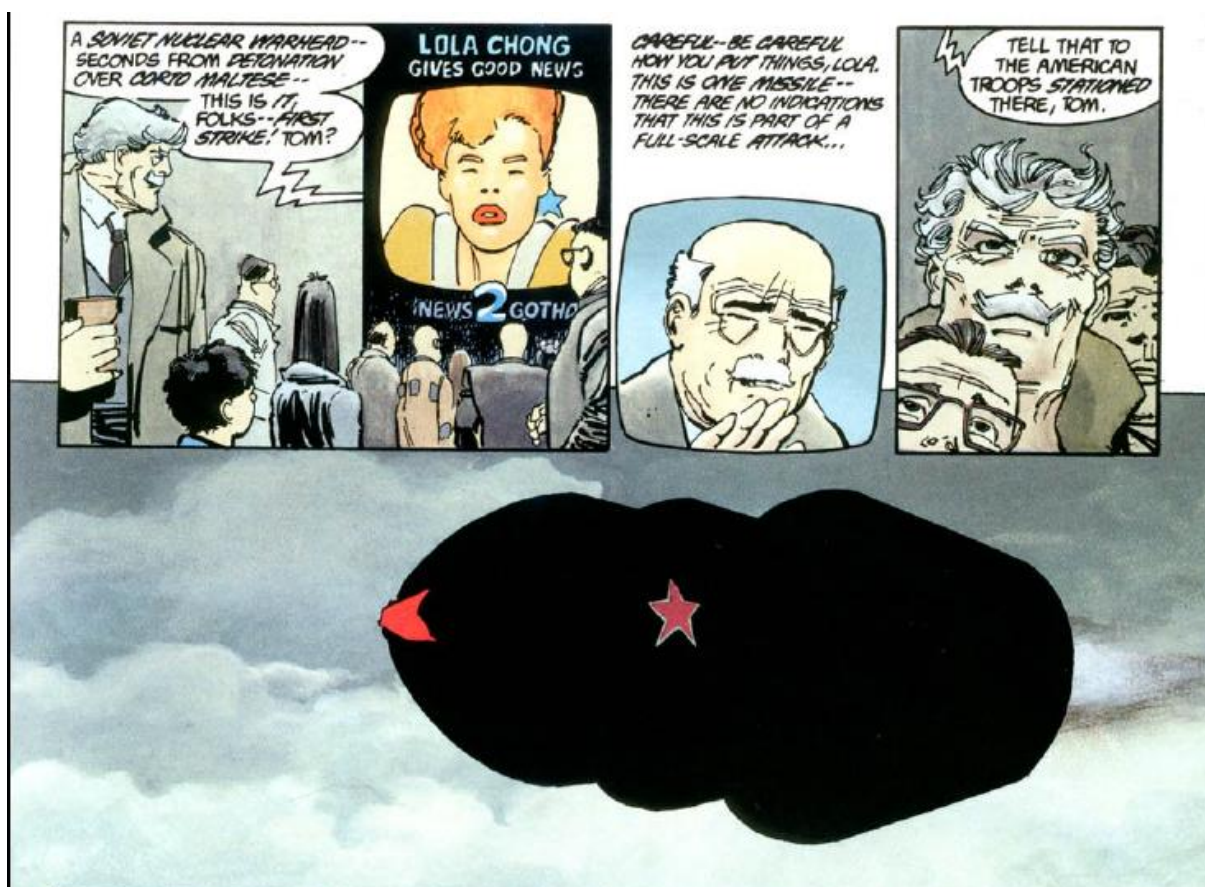
⁵⁰ WIKIPEDIA, *Movements for civil rights*.

⁵¹ NIH, Inclusion of Women and Minorities as Participants in Research Involving Human Subjects - Policy Implementation Page.

“The US has the most highly-developed mass media in the world. Its dramas, comedies, soap operas, animations, music videos and films have a global audience and are part of the staple fare of broadcasters worldwide.”⁵²

However, the USA has a large obsession not only with media, but also with celebrities. In reality, the two are interconnected. “Even Dick Clark, 73 — who has been a celebrity longer than most — points a finger at the media. He thinks celebrity obsession is mostly an outgrowth of tabloid newspapers, trash TV and the Internet.”⁵³

3.3.9 Cold War legacy



From *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* (DC Comics, 1986). Superman, being a governmental agent of sorts, tries to save the nation by modifying the trajectory of a Russian nuclear missile.

The Cold War left a huge legacy in its wake, propelling the western world towards peace. And even though the USA profited, becoming the sole

⁵² BBC, *United States of America country profile*.

⁵³ HOROVITZ, B., *The good, the bad and ugly of America's celeb obsession*.

superpower, thus rendering the world unipolar, the Cold War remains a hard lesson to forget.⁵⁴

4 BRITISH COMICS

4.1 History of the British comic book

The origins of the British comic book preceded those of the American one. As a genre, the British comic draws heavily from the modern satire, which emerged in the UK towards the end of the nineteenth century.⁵⁵

There were two completely different types of readership at the time — the well-to-do, middle class, educated and politically informed audience, and the lower-class market. The satire produced for the latter would usually keep to more humorous approach.⁵⁶

The first veritable comic strip magazine only emerged later on, however, distinguishing itself from the usual written content accompanied by illustrations. *Ally Sloper's Half Holiday*, published by Gilbert Dalziel in 1884, was the first 'modern' comic, based on a recurring character, and giving birth to all kinds of affiliated merchandise.⁵⁷

The first major publishing house to take notice of comic books was the *Amalgamated Press*, owned by Alfred Harmsworth. Introducing two new titles, namely *Comic Cuts* and *Illustrated Chips*, Amalgamated Press was notorious for reprinting all kinds of material, both British and American, without permission. However, both *Comic Cuts* and *Illustrated Chips* were a huge success, turning the comic book into a mass medium.⁵⁸

However, being a mass medium did not guarantee any degree of respectability. Comics were regarded as lower-class and childish at best, and as a threat to literacy due to their illustrated content at worst. Furthermore, the British comic book industry recognised children as a profitable target group, and to

⁵⁴ WIKIPEDIA, Effects of the Cold War.

⁵⁵ SABIN, R., *Adult Comics*, pp. 13 – 15.

⁵⁶ SABIN, R., *Adult Comics*, pp. 13 – 15.

⁵⁷ WIKIPEDIA, *British Comics*.

⁵⁸ SABIN, R., *Adult Comics*, pp. 19 – 21.

accommodate them, the content was often further simplified. By 1914, the main target group was between the ages 8 to 12, and comics were considered a purely juvenile form of entertainment.⁵⁹

DC Thompson, Amalgamated Press' first serious rival, launched in the UK in the 1930s with two revolutionary titles, namely *Beano* and *Dandy*. Introducing sharper humour, and a stable of crazy characters, both *Beano* and *Dandy* further cemented the idea of British comics being a childish form of entertainment. However, both titles gained great popularity, and are still published today.⁶⁰

In the 1950s, a new genre emerged, more specifically the British *adventure comic*. The one title that made this possible was *Eagle*, one of the more expensive publications, starring the popular figure of *Dan Dare*. *Eagle* with its moral undertones and Christian bent became an instant hit, selling over a million copies a week. A parade of similar titles soon appeared on the market. The other genres popular in the 1950s concentrated on particular topics, such as *war*, *football*, and *TV programmes*.⁶¹

However, it was *American comics* that gained the biggest popularity in the 1960s, as soon as official distribution was set up. Unlike in the USA, the British had no taste for costumed superheroes as the superhero genre had no tradition in the UK. It was crime and horror comics that became the biggest hit, more specifically EC titles *Tales from the Crypt*, *The Haunt of Fear* and *The Vault of Horror* reprinted by the *Arnold Book Company*.⁶²

The public reaction was much the same as in the USA, however. Both crime and horror comics were regarded as the ultimate proof of American tastelessness, and under the pressure of various groups the Government eventually banned the importation and spread of American crime and horror comics under The Children

⁵⁹ SABIN, R., *Adult Comics*, pp. 21 – 22.

⁶⁰ SABIN, R., *Adult Comics*, pp. 23 – 24.

⁶¹ SABIN, R., *Adult Comics*, pp. 25 – 26.

⁶² SABIN, R., *Adult Comics*, pp. 28 – 29.

and Young Person's Harmful Publication Act of 1955, an institution very similar to that of Comic Code in the USA.⁶³

The 1960s saw the rise of the revolutionary *underground comix*. Going hand in hand with the counterculture, comix introduced themes such as sex, drugs and politics, redefining what the formerly childish medium could encompass.⁶⁴

The same as crime and horror comic books, comix was also imported from the USA. The first widely available underground title was Robert Crumb's *Zap*. Originally a San Francisco creation, *Zap* appeared in the UK in 1967. Other comix often included themes such as women's and gay liberation, nuclear politics, and ecology.⁶⁵

The decline of the underground comix towards the end of the 1970s corresponded with the decline of the counterculture as a whole. Another factor were hearings at Old Bailey, when both *Oz* and *Nasty Tales*, two British underground publications, were tried under the Obscene Publications Act.⁶⁶

2000AD, the first truly adult mainstream comic, was launched in 1977 as a science-fiction counterpart to *Action*. Introducing a recurring character going by the name of *Judge Dredd*, *2000AD* managed to capture a considerable adult audience. Attracting some of the underground creators, *2000AD* closed the gap between the mainstream and the underground, adopting an artistic style not dissimilar to that of American production, thus becoming the first mainstream rock'n'roll comic in the UK.⁶⁷

The biggest competitor of *2000AD* was indisputably *Warrior*, launched by *Derek Skinn*, and containing two of *Alan Moore's* strips, *Marvelman* and *V for Vendetta*.⁶⁸

⁶³ WIKIPEDIA, *British Comics*.

⁶⁴ SABIN, R., *Adult Comics*, pp. 36 – 50.

⁶⁵ SABIN, R., *Adult Comics*, pp. 36 – 41.

⁶⁶ WIKIPEDIA, *British Comics*.

⁶⁷ SABIN, R., *Adult Comics*, pp. 52 – 58.

⁶⁸ SABIN, R., *Adult Comics*, pp. 59 – 60.

With focus on sex, violence, and witty plot, strips begun to appear in full colour, and printed on high quality paper; the average reader of the 1990s was said to be aged seventeen.⁶⁹

Fandom in the UK originated — as it did in the USA — from comics collecting. The first British convention took place in Birmingham in 1968; the first shops focusing solely on comics appeared roughly at the same time. The second phase of organised fandom, namely the direct sales method, took off only a decade later.⁷⁰

Then, between the summer of 1986 and that of 1987, a big boom in the adult comic trend was initiated, sparkled by the emergence of the Big 3 — *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* by Frank Miller, *Watchmen* by Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons and *Maus* by Art Spiegelman. The title graphic novel was coined in connection with the sudden coverage in mainstream press as a part of a PR campaign. Several of comic book creators became celebrities virtually overnight, Alan Moore in particular. Belonging to the so-called Britpack — comic book creators British by origin, but active in the USA — he was adopted as the British spokesperson for adult comics.⁷¹

Nevertheless, the media hype was premature; graphic novels were not to become the reading material of the future. A number of knock-off titles flooded the market following the boom created by the emergence of the Big 3, causing a rapid decline in the British comic book industry.⁷²

It was the *revisionist superheroes*, especially *Batman*, which kept the comic book industry going in the 1990s. Other prominent genres of the era included *horror*— namely *Sandman* by Neil Gaiman and *Hellblazer* by Jamie Delano and John Ridgeway — *war, thriller, sex, or non-fiction*.⁷³

As a result of the huge media coverage, many graphic novels made it to libraries and regular book shops, thus becoming accessible to the general public.

⁶⁹ SABIN, R., *Adult Comics*, pp. 60 – 61.

⁷⁰ SABIN, R., *Adult Comics*, pp. 62 – 67.

⁷¹ SABIN, R., *Adult Comics*, pp. 87 – 95.

⁷² SABIN, R., *Adult Comics*, p. 96.

⁷³ SABIN, R., *Adult Comics*, pp. 96 – 104.

New comic book stars were born as well, namely *Grant Morrison* and *Neil Gaiman*.⁷⁴

The one title that retained its popularity through the 1990s was *Viz*, a publication based on parody, crude language, and sexual allusion. Formerly a fanzine, *Viz* became the UK's top-selling comic in 1988, and is being published to this day.⁷⁵

The comic book has not become the foretold reading material of the future. However, the British comic book industry has gained a considerable recognition in the eyes of the public. Furthermore, the year 2000 saw the arrest of its long decline; although there has been no significant growth in the circulation of the few remaining titles.⁷⁶

4.2 V for Vendetta

V for Vendetta is a graphic novel written by Alan Moore and illustrated by David Lloyd, first published in 1990 by Vertigo, an imprint of DC Comics.

Set in dystopian UK in the 1980s through the 1990s, *V for Vendetta* follows the imagined Conservative defeat in the 1982 General election, followed by a nuclear war, and the rise of a fascist party called Norsefire, which takes over the UK and turns it into a police state. Moore's main character, the mysterious revolutionary clad in a Guy Fawkes mask, is a former concentration camp inmate on his search both for revenge and a better future, much like Miller's Batman.

When *The Comic Journal* ran a poll on The Top 100 (English-Language) Comics of the Century in February 1999, *V for Vendetta* ranked 83rd.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ SABIN, R., *Adult Comics*, pp. 96 – 106.

⁷⁵ WIKIPEDIA, *British Comics*.

⁷⁶ WIKIPEDIA, *British Comics*.

⁷⁷ WIKIPEDIA, *V for Vendetta*.

4.3 British national stereotypes as revealed in V for Vendetta

4.3.1 Immigration to the UK



From *V for Vendetta* (Vertigo, 1990). Being British himself, Alan Moore introduces both takes on immigration, which represents a thorny issue for the citizens of the UK to this day.

22nd June 1948 — the day The Windrush docked in Tilbury with 492 Jamaican men on board — is often regarded as the beginning of modern immigration to the UK. Apart from the ex-Commonwealth nations, such as Hindus, Pakistanis, people from West Indies, Sikhs from India, or Asians from

Uganda and Kenya, number of people also arrives to Britain to either seek asylum, or a better life.⁷⁸

In the year to September 2013, the immigration to the UK reached as many as 532,000 individuals.⁷⁹

Naturally, two basic view-points were formed in reaction to this phenomenon.

Especially the lower class, faced with racial differences, and worried about their jobs, have a history of being hostile, e.g. the Nothing Hill Riots in 1958. However, people belonging to the conservative middle class have not been overjoyed, either.⁸⁰

The biggest opponent to the immigration is probably the British National Party, openly wishing for the immigrants to be sent back. Another example is the anti-Muslim English Defence League. On the other hand, radical Islam is being criticised even by the Establishment led by David Cameron, who has stated that multiculturalism has failed, and strives to bring the net migration figure, which currently stands on 212,000, below 100,000 before the General Elections.⁸¹

The other side of the coin are the liberal left-wingers, comprising the student body, who enjoy the enrichment of culture the immigration has brought about — both Chinese stir-fry and chicken tikka masala have surpassed traditional British dishes such as cottage pie or fish and chips, which are now regarded by many as simply boring.⁸²

⁷⁸ TIHELKOVÁ, A., BAR2A.

⁷⁹ TRAVIS, A., *Net migration to UK jumps 30% in a year to 212,000.*

⁸⁰ TIHELKOVÁ, A., BAR2A.

⁸¹ TRAVIS, A., *Net migration to UK jumps 30% in a year to 212,000.*

⁸² DJS RESEARCH, *Study Uncovers Britains Favourite Food Choices.*

4.3.2 British patriotism



From *V for Vendetta* (Vertigo, 1990). All through the three books of *V for Vendetta*, there are numerous allusions to the character of Guy Fawkes; his Gunpowder Plot legacy provides the basic premise for Moore's dystopian story.

V himself assumes the Guy Fawkes persona, ever quoting Shakespeare, living in a quaint take on a stately home, and finally blowing the Houses of Parliament up.

The graphic novel as a whole, although overly critical, speaks of the great pride the British have in both their history, and their art. As opposed to the Americans, who endorse the current USA, the British tend to turn inwards, the UK, having lost the Empire, no longer ranking as one of the world's superpowers.⁸³

The Gunpowder Plot, a failed assassination attempt against James I of England and James VI of Scotland by a group of discontented Catholics, represents a recurring theme in *V for Vendetta*. Often mentioned is also the customary Bonfire Night, sometimes also called Fireworks Night, or Guy Fawkes Night.⁸⁴

⁸³ TIHELKOVÁ, A., *BAR2A*.

⁸⁴ WIKIPEDIA, *Gunpowder Plot*.

4.3.3 British love for the Royal Family



From *V for Vendetta* (Vertigo, 1990). Even though the country is run solely by the leader and his various henchmen, the particular British reverence of the royal family could not be entirely suppressed; the Queen is mentioned, albeit briefly, in the Party's regular broadcasts.

It is no secret the British are loyal to their monarch. However, their attitude towards the royal family is usually much more than simple respect. The royal family have become the UK's favourite celebrities, gaining coverage by media not only within the UK, but worldwide.⁸⁵

According to polling data collected by Ipsos Mori, in 2011, only 18% of the public would have preferred republic to the current system.⁸⁶

The trend was born during the Second World War days with George VI, who not only led an almost middle-class life, but also never left London, standing by his people. The adoration the British felt for him was largely inherited by the living members of the royal family — both the Diamond Jubilee and the royal wedding in April 2011 were considered to be events of great importance.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ TIHELKOVÁ, A., BAR2A.

⁸⁶ EASTON, M., *Why does the UK love the monarchy?*

⁸⁷ TIHELKOVÁ, A., BAR2A.

4.3.4 British love of gardening



From *V for Vendetta* (Vertigo, 1990). It is a widely known fact that the British have always had a penchant for gardening. Some would go as far as to claim there is a history of love for gardening in the UK. Typically enough, even the enigmatic V has a soft spot for this curious past-time.

“When it comes to gardening, we must be one of the world's most green-fingered islands. A survey by the National Trust found that more than 70 per cent of people felt it was important to spend time in gardens, and over half of those said it was the most enjoyable thing they did,” says the article published in *The Scotsman* on 12th July 2010.⁸⁸

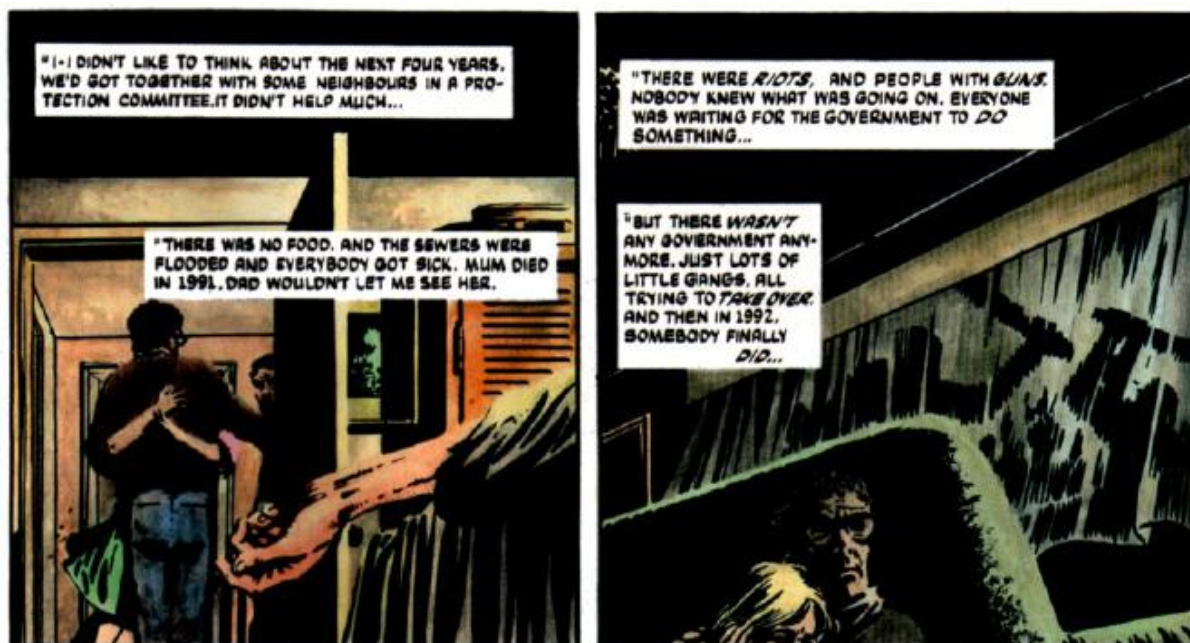
Another historic trend, the British love for the gardening is firmly linked to the Industrial Revolution, and the ensuing urbanisation. Many people felt troubled by the sudden change; the country life is the ideal most aspire to even in 2014. However, British love for gardening — just as the one for the Royal Family — was further cemented during the two World Wars, when growing vegetables became not only a necessity, but also an overt act of patriotism.⁸⁹

A concentration camp inmate and a test subject being allowed to grow roses is certainly curious, but illustrates one of the typical British traits very well.

⁸⁸ THE SCOTSMAN, *Gardens: A new book charts the British love of gardening.*

⁸⁹ THE SCOTSMAN, *Gardens: A new book charts the British love of gardening.*

4.3.5 British togetherness; charities



From *V for Vendetta* (Vertigo, 1990). Similarly, the British have a long history of contributing to various charities. This collective spirit was most obviously manifested in the general elation and togetherness of the years following the Second World War.

It is the truth that the most popular charities in Britain are the ones dealing with animals; however, the institution of charity has a long-standing history in the UK. According to the Charity Choice database, there are currently more than 160,000 charities currently operating within the UK.⁹⁰

As for togetherness, it was strongly manifested right after the end of the Second World War, the British being self-assured, regarding themselves as the sole winners of the war. From their higher moral ground, the winning of the war seemed to be everybody's achievement; this view-point ensured great social equality, extent of which never seen before, nor since.⁹¹

⁹⁰ CHARITY CHOICE, *List of Charities – Charity Database | Charity Directory | Charity Choice*.

⁹¹ TIHELKOVÁ, A., BAR2A.

4.3.6 Good manners



From *V for Vendetta* (Vertigo, 1990). Traditionally, one of the society's essential requirements seemed to be tactfulness and good manners. Both of which Shakespeare quoting *V* evinces, even when conversing with an inanimate object, the statue of Justice on top of the Old Bailey.

“In England, politeness, reserve, and restraint are admired. The English are courteous, unassuming and unabrasive and are very proud of their long and rich history.”⁹²

The British are usually considered to be reserved, polite, self-disciplined, and tactful. In this particular example, we may find several instances of this particular trait — *V* wishes to have a word with the statue of Justice, therefore he apologises for intruding on her time first before proceeding to introducing himself. Furthermore, he feels the need to bid her good evening.

In the UK, good manners have a longstanding history. For example, in *A Treatise on Good Manners and Good Breeding* written by Jonathan Swift, first published in 1754, we may read that, “[...] good sense is the principal foundation of good manners; but because the former is a gift which very few among mankind are possessed of, therefore all the civilized nations of the world have

⁹² EDIPLOMAT, *United Kingdom – Cultural Etiquette*.

agreed upon fixing some rules for common behaviour, best suited to their general customs, or fancies, as a kind of artificial good sense, to supply the defects of reason.”⁹³

4.3.7 Celtic heritage



From *V for Vendetta* (Vertigo, 1990). Not even speaking the words of Jesus Christ are the British completely free of their Celtic origin, as reflected in the flashing image of Stonehenge in the panel above.

Four out of the seven original Celtic Nations were to be found within the UK territory — Northern Ireland, Cornwall, Scotland and Wales.⁹⁴

⁹³ SWIFT, J., *A Treatise on Good Manners and Good Breeding*.

In the 18th century, the concept of modern Celtic identity emerged in Western Europe, evolving into the Celtic Revival a century later, often taking form of ethnic nationalism within the confines of the UK. After the Second World War, the focus shifted to the protection of the Celtic languages, giving birth to the Celtic League in 1961. Another purely Celtic occurrence is the Celtic music, along with various artistic styles linked to medieval Celtic Christianity.⁹⁵

Some of the more obvious links to the UK's Celtic past are for example the Arthurian myth, the statue of Boadicea on the Thames, or Stonehenge.⁹⁶

4.3.8 British private religion



From *V for Vendetta* (Vertigo, 1990). A very interesting comparison presents itself as for the British and the American take on the genesis of the human race. Unlike their American counterparts, the British claim allegiance to Darwinism.

influence over the Government. Although 88% of population belongs to one of the UK's Churches, only 15% of those people actively attend church, which makes the UK one of the least religious nations in the world.⁹⁷

This trend is furthermore enforced by a spread of other religions, particularly Islam, through immigration, and by rising fashionableness of other movements,

⁹⁴ BRONSON, M., *The Seven Celtic Nations*.

⁹⁵ WIKIPEDIA, *Celts (modern)*.

⁹⁶ WIKIPEDIA, *Celts (modern)*.

⁹⁷ TIHELKOVÁ, A., *BARI*.

such as New Age, atheism, or secular humanism, all of which are highly popular among the British.⁹⁸

In the UK, religion is mostly a private matter; public displays of faith are outright discouraged — Prime Minister, for example, should always omit mentions of God from public speeches.⁹⁹

It is no wonder, then, that V bases his metaphor on Darwinism in this case, addressing the general public as ancestors of apes without causing any sort of an outcry.

4.3.9 Homelessness in Britain



From *V for Vendetta* (Vertigo, 1990). Not only did Margaret Thatcher bring about the era of consumerism; by the suppression of mining communities in the northern England, she also introduced the age of mass homelessness to the UK.

A 1990 graphic novel, *V for Vendetta* is sure to reflect some of the changes the UK was undergoing during the era of Margaret Thatcher. In this a sharp rise in homelessness is portrayed, along with the occurrence of cardboard cities, previously seen in 1930s.

⁹⁸ TIHELKOVÁ, A., *BARI*.

⁹⁹ RAY, J., *Worlds Apart: Religion in Canada, Britain, U.S.*

As a result of closing inefficient industries, the unemployment soared from 1 to 3 million under Thatcher's supervision. Among the results of her monetarist experiment was the worst recession since the Second World War. This, combined with major cuts in public spending, generated a sharp increase in homelessness, very often affecting the young.¹⁰⁰

However, homelessness is a trend persisting even in today's UK. It has increased in three consecutive years, resulting in 185,000 people affected at present date. The biggest factors causing this are a housing shortage and further cuts to benefits.¹⁰¹

4.3.10 British humour



¹⁰⁰ TIHELKOVÁ, A., *BARI*.

¹⁰¹ MASON, R., *Number of homeless in England has risen for 3 years in a row, report says*.



From *V for Vendetta* (Vertigo, 1990). British humour is typically very dry, building on puns and witticisms more often than not, contrary to the American one.

“A strong theme of sarcasm and self-deprecation, often with deadpan delivery, runs throughout British humour.”¹⁰²

Unlike American humour, which tends to be situational, and leans towards positive, the British one is often negative, ranging from gentle teasing to racist or sexist remarks. It builds upon irony, self-depreciation, and can often incorporate insults or make fun of a wholly inappropriate subject.¹⁰³

¹⁰² WIKIPEDIA, *British humour*.

¹⁰³ BLOXHAM, A., *British humour 'dictated by genetics'*.

It is no wonder then, that police officers find it appropriate to comment on cyanide still being cyanide in the case of the bishop's murder committed by V.

5 THE SANDMAN

The Sandman is a dark fantasy comic book series written by Neil Gaiman, illustrated by several artists — most notably by Sam Kieth, Mike Dringenberg and Malcolm Jones III — and published by Vertigo, a DC Comics' imprint.¹⁰⁴

The main character, Dream, begins his journey in the same manner both Batman and V do — he has been wronged, and now seeks revenge. He escapes his captors, finds magical amulets stolen from him, and sets about rebuilding his kingdom, the domain of dreams. However, as the series evolves, the plot thickens, resulting in many storylines starring other characters as well. In many of those, Dream himself has often no more than a cameo appearance.

The Sandman, formerly commissioned to star renowned DC characters, builds upon myths both ancient and modern, and often alludes to various works of art. For this reason, the setting varies, most often between today's USA and UK, but other dimensions are mentioned as well, and so is the past.¹⁰⁵

The Sandman was declared the best Vertigo comic by the IGN. Sandman #19, called A Midsummer Night's Dream, yet another take on Shakespeare's famous work, received a World Fantasy Award for Best Short Fiction in 1991. Overall, The Sandman and its various spin-offs have won 26 Eisner Awards so far, including three for Best Continuing Series, one for Best Short Story and four for Best Writer.¹⁰⁶

From this thesis' viewpoint, the most interesting feature of this particular comic book series is the coming together of what it means to be American and British.

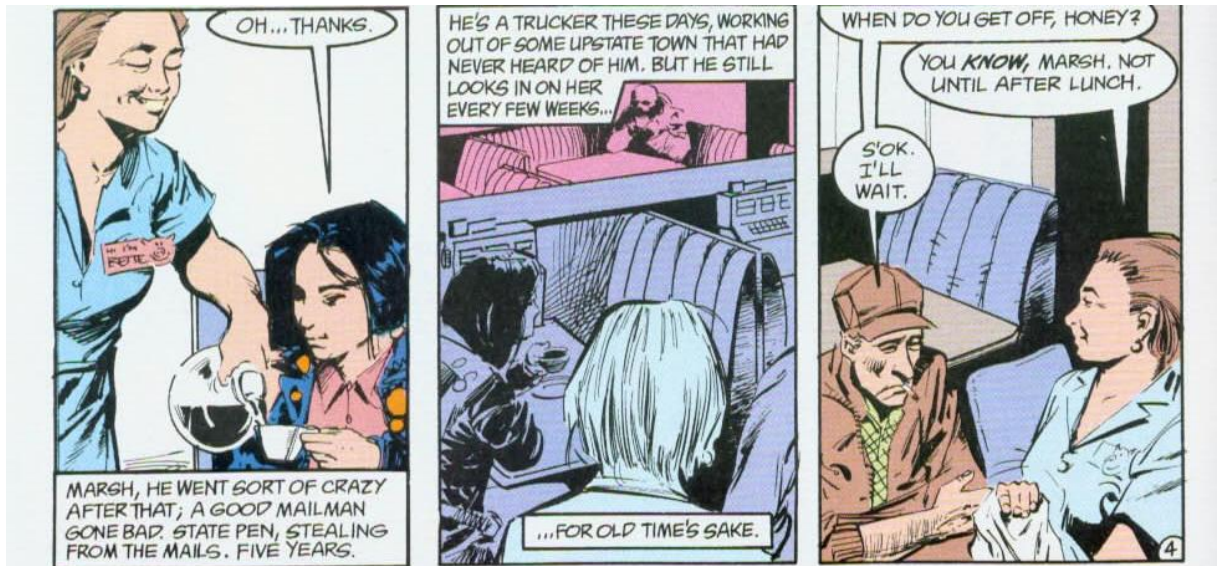
5.1 American national stereotypes as revealed in The Sandman

5.1.1 Motoring culture in the USA

¹⁰⁴ WIKIPEDIA, *The Sandman (Vertigo)*.

¹⁰⁵ WIKIPEDIA, *The Sandman (Vertigo)*.

¹⁰⁶ WIKIPEDIA, *The Sandman (Vertigo)*.



From *THE SANDMAN: Preludes & Nocturnes* (DC Comics, 1991). Sandman #6, called 24 Hours, is set solely in the interior of a non-descript “all nite” diner, and focuses on human drama that unravels among its customers within 24 hours.

The Second World War ended the Depression years in the USA, bringing about the affluence of the 1950s. One of the many after effects was a great hunger for consumer goods, and the era of suburban living, finally peaking in the development of the motoring culture. Chevrolet became both the iconic car, and the national status symbol. Overall, the 1950s were responsible for many of the things that shaped the face of the USA — be it the love for Route 66, the trend of dating in cars, or countless diners, motels and filling stations dotting all of the major motorways.¹⁰⁷

““It became a stage on which American acted out their aspirations,” says Roger White, curator of the road transportation at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of American History. Dubbed the “Main Street of America” by Avery, it inspired Bobby Troup’s song “Get Your Kicks on Route 66” (recorded by Nat King Cole and, later, the Rolling Stones), Jack Kerouac’s beatnik bible *On the Road*, the 1960s television series “Route 66” and, most recently, Pixar’s animated film *Cars*.”¹⁰⁸

5.1.2 Beat Generation

¹⁰⁷ TIHELKOVÁ, A., *BAR2A*.

¹⁰⁸ GAMBINO, M., *Endangered Site: Historic Route 66, U.S.A.*



I am a passenger.
I am moving through
your dreams. I am
riding in your dreams.

I ride on dragonback
from Manhattan; the
dragon is made of rivetted
iron and smells of cotton
• candy

I travel briefly by bus: in
the back the dreamer copulates
desperately, not noticing his
autonomous passenger. I sit
at the front and talk to the
driver.

Approaching the state of
Delaware, the dreamer is a
small dog, dreaming impatiently
of a past life, long forgotten.
When he sailed tall ships across
uncharted

The salt spray of
the ocean stings
my face.

I am moving through
dreams, pulling toward
Mayhew, feeling for
the jewel.

Through your dreams, my
sleeping children. You had
a passenger, and you
never knew.

From *THE SANDMAN: Preludes & Nocturnes* (DC Comics, 1991). The Beat Generation, as depicted in Kerouac's famous *On the Road* (1957), largely influenced the world view not only in America, but worldwide with its set of alternative ideas.

The three most notable literary works produced by the Beat Generation are undoubtedly Allen Ginsberg's *Howl* (1956), William S. Burroughs's *Naked Lunch* (1959), and Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* (1957). Incorporating then revolutionary themes, such as experimentation with drugs, promiscuity, alternative sexualities, rejection of materialism, environmentalism, or bohemianism, into their writing, the Beatniks helped to liberalise the publishing industry in the USA.¹⁰⁹

Later on, various aspects of the non-conformist Beat philosophy were adopted by numerous counterculture movements, especially the Hippies.¹¹⁰

On this particular page of *The Sandman*, we can see the main protagonist of the series, Dream, undertaking the arduous journey to reclaim his kingdom. To reach his destination, he hitchhikes through other people's dreams, taking a train, a coach, and, finally, a ship, much like the characters in *On the Road* did.

¹⁰⁹ WIKIPEDIA, Beat Generation.

¹¹⁰ WIKIPEDIA, Beat Generation.

5.2 British national stereotypes as revealed in The Sandman

5.2.1 Evolution of the British newspaper



From *THE SANDMAN: Preludes & Nocturnes* (DC Comics, 1991). From traditional broadsheets to crude tabloid press, the evolution of the British newspaper is more or less straightforward.

First British newspapers begun to appear as early as in the 17th century, the definition encompassing all the periodicals published at least once a week.¹¹¹ The British press thus has a long-standing tradition, mirrored by the two panels above, taken from the first volume of *The Sandman*.

In his work, Neil Gaiman provided us with examples of two completely different types of British newspapers — namely broadsheets, as seen in the first panel, and tabloids, particularly *The Sun*.

Broadsheets in the UK are typically comprised of quality press, featuring serious news in the form of larger, more in-depth articles. The best-known titles include *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, *The Times*, or *The Daily Telegraph*. Due to the popularity of the so-called opinion articles, the British commentariat wields great power over the general population, shaping their take on various issues.¹¹²

On the other hand, tabloid papers, smaller in size, introduce sensational news, including topics such as sensational crime stories, gossip about celebrities, astrology, or football articles. The first tabloid originating in the UK is *Daily Mail*, first published in 1896 by Lord Northcliffe. Other popular tabloids include for example *The Daily Mirror*, or Rupert Murdoch's *The Sun*, today's biggest-selling daily newspaper.¹¹³

¹¹¹ WIKIPEDIA, *History of British newspapers*.

¹¹² TIHELKOVÁ, A., *BAR2A*.

¹¹³ TIHELKOVÁ, A., *BAR2A*.

5.2.2 The British stately home



From *THE SANDMAN: Preludes & Nocturnes* (DC Comics, 1991). Intended to offer another take on the traditional British horror story, *The Sandman* #1, called *Sleep of the Just*, opens with a view of Wych Cross, a made-up mansion boasting, among other things, its own butler.

“Vividly brought to life in popular culture by television series such as *Brideshead Revisited* and *Downton Abbey*, Britain’s stately homes have long been a focus of our collective imagination. Given the glimpse that stately homes offer into a world of decadence and luxury that few of us will ever experience first-hand, it’s no surprise that National Trust memberships are more popular than ever, with millions of us each year flocking to this remarkable, nationwide collection of the country’s best houses — many of which have changed little since the days of their former glory.”¹¹⁴

The British stately home — also called mansion or manor house — binds together three things the British love — namely national history, privacy, and countryside with plenty of fresh air.¹¹⁵

However, these homes have undergone some major changes during the course of the last century, especially in connection with the changes in society induced by the First World War. Many of the stately homes were turned into hospitals or convalescent homes for injured soldiers during the war itself; some of them were demolished in its aftermath as their owners could no longer afford as high a standard of living. Many of them have been converted to museums or tourist attractions under the National Trust, however, and continue to thrive.

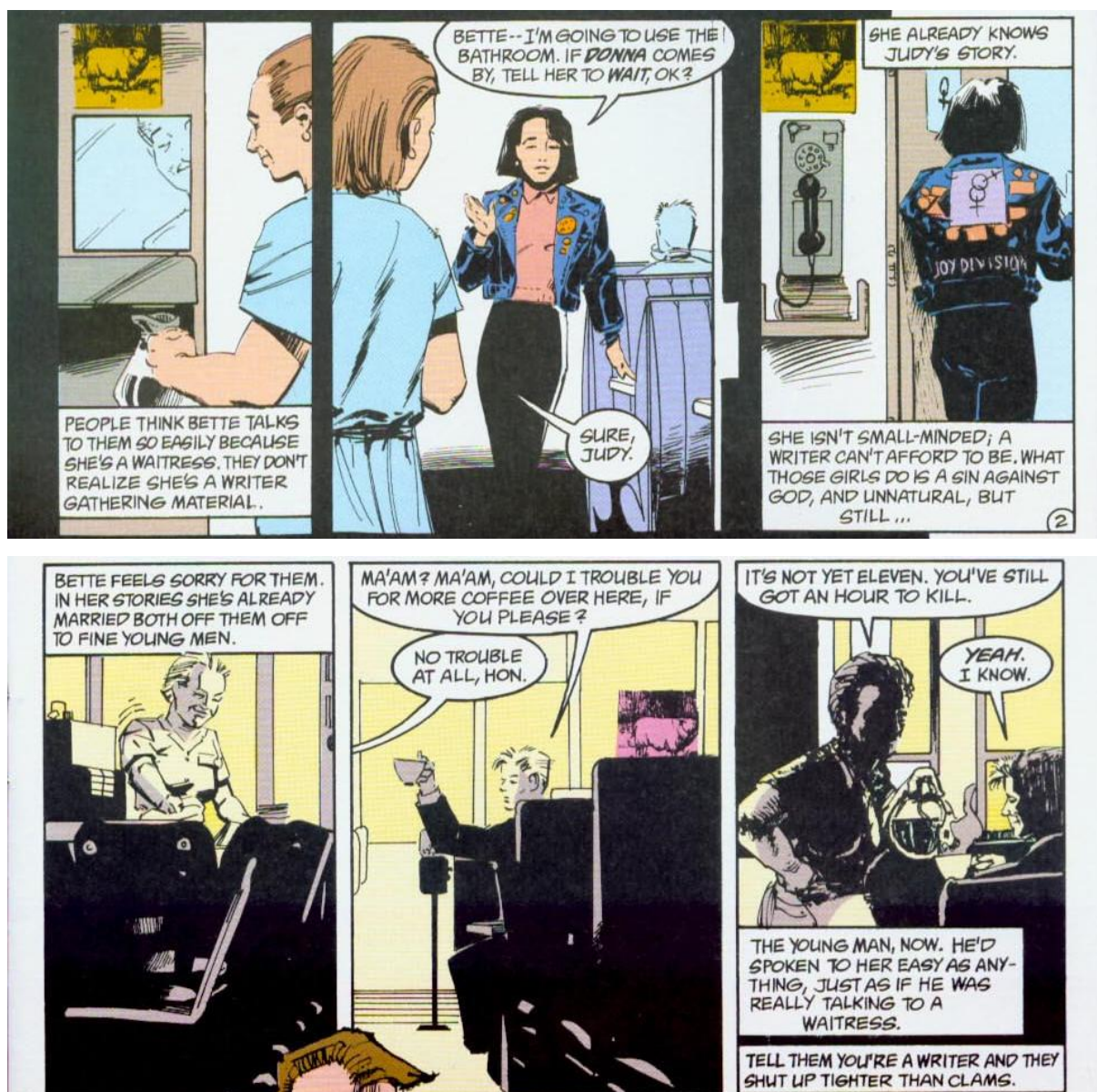
¹¹⁴ MCCOMBIE, R., *From Medieval Castles to Downton Abbey: the Enduring Appeal of the English Stately Home*.

¹¹⁵ TIHELKOVÁ, A., *BAR*.

Another trend these days is for celebrities, and the world's elite to purchase those sites to function as their personal homes.¹¹⁶

5.3 Shared characteristics of the British and the Americans as revealed in The Sandman

5.3.1 Changing opinion on homosexuality



From *THE SANDMAN: Preludes & Nocturnes* (DC Comics, 1991). Public opinion in both the UK and the USA has undergone major changes in regards to alternative sexualities.

¹¹⁶ MCCOMBIE, R., *From Medieval Castles to Downton Abbey: the Enduring Appeal of the English Stately Home*.

Both countries have a history of discriminating gay people — be it through the means of religious persecution, discrimination in employment, police brutality, or gay bashings. However, gradual change of opinion has taken place both in the USA and the UK, which finally led to both legalising homosexuality and permitting the same-sex marriage.¹¹⁷

In the USA, homosexuality has been legal nationwide since 2003, following the ruling of the US Supreme Court in *Lawrence v. Texas*. Presently, seventeen states and Washington, D.C. permit same-sex marriages, recognised by the federal government. Some of the other states offer civil unions instead. Twenty-one states, Washington, D.C. and Puerto Rico deem discrimination based on sexual identity illegal, while discrimination based on gender identity or expression is outlawed in seventeen states plus Washington, D.C. and Puerto Rico. Furthermore, some states allow adoption by same-sex couples. Job discrimination against homosexual individuals has been ruled as violating the Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, permitting gays and lesbians to join the military.¹¹⁸

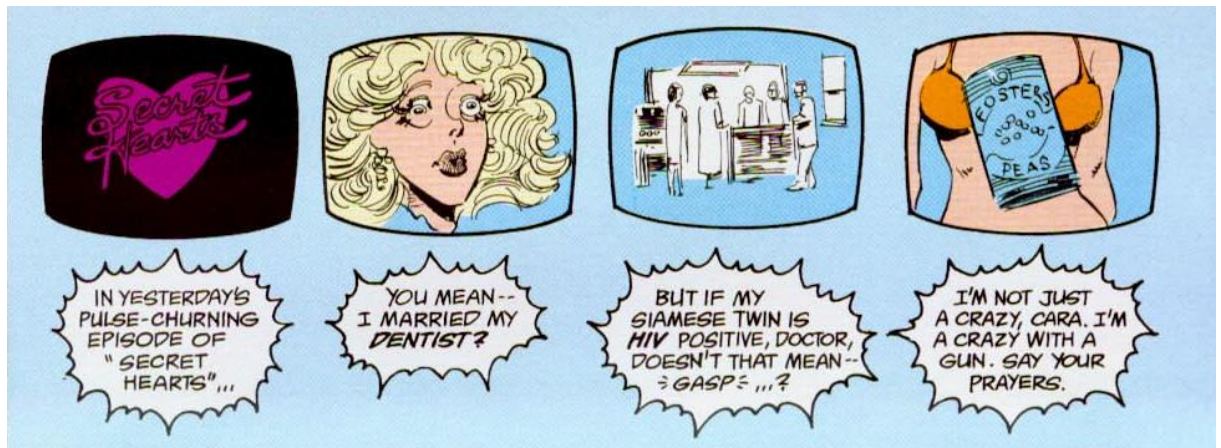
In the UK, same-sex sexual activity was outlawed under the Buggery Act 1533, and was punishable by death. It was only legalised across the UK between 1967 and 1982. In 2000, both gays and lesbians were permitted to serve in Her Majesty's Armed Forces, while in 2005 transgender people were allowed to change their legal gender. Civil partnership and adoption for same-sex couples was also established in 2005, namely in England, Wales, Scotland, and finally Northern Ireland following suit. Equality Act 2010 outlawed any kind of discrimination against LGBT people. Finally, laws permitting same-sex marriage were passed for England and Wales in June 2013 and for Scotland in March 2014; Northern Ireland, however, has no intention of adopting this measure as well.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ FORD, M., A Brief History of Homosexuality in America.

¹¹⁸ WIKIPEDIA, LGBT rights in the United States.

¹¹⁹ WIKIPEDIA, LGBT rights in the United Kingdom.

5.3.2 “Bad” television craze



From *THE SANDMAN: Preludes & Nocturnes* (DC Comics, 1991). Be it a reality show, a football transmission, or an admittedly crappy drama, both the American and the British audience will sit spell-bound in front of their TV sets, grateful for the chance to unwind.

No matter which channel one subscribes to, TV is a certified escape. A great means through which to absorb new information and avoid both stressful triggers and intellectual strain, it allows us to simply relax. As Nora Zelevansky of *Dame Magazine* proudly admits, “[...] it’s not just about unscripted television. I watch dramas with even less discretion. I adore procedurals with their unlikely outcomes, unrelenting sexual tension and unrealistic resolutions. Sitcoms are especially “shameful,” which is why *New Girl* with Zooey Deschanel confuses audiences. The writing is strong and the cast is talented, but still, people apologize for watching, as if it’s inherently without value.”¹²⁰

¹²⁰ ZELEVANSKY, N., Why Smart Women Love “Bad” TV

6 CONCLUSIONS

This thesis had two main objectives — firstly to find some British and American national stereotypes as revealed in comic books, using concrete examples taken from three important works of the comic book field, namely *V for Vendetta*, *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* and *The Sandman*, secondly to prove the comic book as a worthy medium. I believe the latter to have been achieved through the means of detailed study of the comic book industry's evolution both in the USA and the UK. It is the first objective that begs to be discussed in greater detail.

As mentioned above, three titles were chosen to demonstrate the authors' allegiance to their country of origin — *V for Vendetta* written by Alan Moore, published by DC Comics, but ultimately an altar to the British mentality, Frank Miller's *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, a tribute to the American costumed superhero tradition, and Neil Gaiman's *The Sandman*, the most versatile of the three, evincing traits now purely British, now purely American, and sometimes those that could be considered universal.

The differences are hugely due to two major factors — the main theme and setting. As *V for Vendetta* builds upon the Guy Fawkes tradition, it only makes sense for the story to take place in the UK, and, ultimately, deal with everything British. Similarly, *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* is a purely American work, operating within given boundaries, displaying the modern Pantheon — both superheroes and villains from the DC Comics stable. Needless to say, a story about Batman could never be set anywhere else but in Gotham, a great American metropolis brimming with stars and spangles. All this makes the inclusion of everything American in the book necessary. From this point of view, *The Sandman* is much more ambiguous. Set in and dealing with dreams, its main character, Dream, not only crosses the time, but his influence has no boundaries, the locations varying from both the USA and the UK to Africa, or Hell. In this way, the sheer variety of material makes the inclusion of both British and American elements compulsory.

As for the particular traits, they conform to the general stereotypes.

American superheroes are towering figures, predestined to play the part. They bear their destiny proudly, very much like the obligatory costume. Those individuals are just and righteous; they never kill, using supernatural powers or the latest technological achievements to incapacitate instead. And although their identity must remain secret, they are very often the nation's darlings, veritable celebrities. It is because they never waver; always ready to do the right thing and to help, a characteristic flaw the villains never fail to take an advantage of. The criminal master-minds tend to be old-fashioned villains, driven by no more than their innate urge to perform evil deeds. Their perspective warped, they are no more than cartoonish clowns with painted-on faces and silly aliases. As for public figures, their cue is, above all, correctness, and God bless America.

On the other hand, main characters in British comics could be very often categorised as antiheroes. The British, true to their love for the underdog, embrace deformed psyches with personal agenda. Capable of great acts of generosity, those once common men usually have a very good reason for whatever they are about to do. They are proud and quirky with a sense of humour bordering on macabre. However, common decency, good manners and respect for the Queen are still to be expected. Since nothing is clean cut here, the villains are often no more than commonly dressed people, whose interests clash with those of the main character, and possibly with those of the rest of the population. They are flawed, while possessing a number of redeeming qualities, drawing our sympathy. The authorities are portrayed as perfectly respectable, people with jobs to do. They do not inquire about one's income, and they keep their God to themselves. However, they still are people, displaying their humanity to varying degree.

However distinct British and American comics are, however, there are a number of traits the two have in common. Be it revenge, the main theme of both *V for Vendetta* and *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, scenes of mass uprising,

or some of the more universal characteristic, i.e. changing opinion on homosexuality or love of bad television, as revealed in *The Sandman*.

Ultimately, this thesis has been a success, ascertaining my standing hypotheses about the national stereotypes as revealed in comics. It has also touched up on some other interesting phenomena, albeit briefly, such as portrayal of minorities and women in comic books, although its main focus admittedly lies elsewhere.

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8 ABSTRACT

This thesis has two main objectives. Firstly, it lists some of the main traits of the typical Englishman and American; concrete examples as found in two graphic novels, *V for Vendetta* and *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* are given. Secondly, it attempts to help establish the comic book as a legitimate medium.

The theoretical part of this thesis looks into the history of both the British and the American comic book. The practical part deals with concrete examples of British and American national stereotypes as revealed in *V for Vendetta*, *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* and *The Sandman*.

My hypothesis proved to be right, as numerous examples of national stereotypes were found in the above mentioned literature. The information gained is often general, and applicable to the majority of citizens of either the UK, or the USA, a fact that nicely illustrates the connection between the author and their work.

9 RESUME

Tato bakalářská práce si kladla dva hlavní cíle. V první řadě byl uveden výčet britských a amerických národních stereotypů, které byly dokazovány na konkrétních příkladech převzatých ze dvou grafických novel, jmenovitě z *V jako Vendetta* a z *Batman: Temný rytíř se vrací*. Dále se tato práce snažila prokázat legitimitu komixu jako média.

Teoretická část této bakalářské práce se zabírala historickým pozadím jak britského, tak amerického komixu. Praktická část byla věnována konkrétním příkladům britských a amerických národních stereotypů, studovaných na základě grafických novel *V jako Vendetta*, *Batman: Temný rytíř se vrací* a *Sandman*.

Ve výše zmíněné literatuře byly nalezeny četné příklady národních stereotypů, čímž se potvrdila má hypotéza. Získané informace jsou často obecné a dají se aplikovat na většinu obyvatel jak Spojeného království, tak i Spojených států, což nadále ilustruje vztah mezi autorem a jeho dílem.