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The recent decision of the Massachusetts Independent Comics Expo to 'retire' the name of its 'Crumb room' raises issues around historical reputation and the whole issue of a 'canon' in comics studies. Many, of course, try to resist the concept of a canon for clear and cogent reasons, but in many fields a de facto canon exists. Many of the complications of a comics canon are clearly laid out in Bart Beaty and Benjamin Woo's *The Greatest Comic Book of all time: Symbolic Capital and the Field of American Comic Books*. Beaty and Woo expose the challenges faced by scholars attempting to tackle a controversial creator and the issues of censorship his work poses. Yet Crumb would feature in a comics canon for a lot of historians, and Beaty and Woo detail the intense media coverage of Crumb's work outside traditional comic book sources. The journal has previously published articles on Crumb, for example Brandon Nelson's 'Sick humor which serves no purpose: Whiteman, Angelfood and the aesthetics of obscenity in the commix of R Crumb'. which raises some of the problems that can be perceived in the content of his work.

The reasons for the change are cogently laid out by Dan Mazur on the Comics Scholars Network. Manzur, on behalf of MICE, explained, "We are very sensitive to, and opposed to, any form of censorship. We do not want this re-naming of the Crumb Room to be seen as an attempt to erase Robert Crumb from the history or current reality of independent comics." He continues, "However we also recognize the negative impact carried by some of the imagery and narratives that Crumb has produced, impact felt most acutely by those whose voices have not been historically respected or accommodated during the period in which Crumb has so effectively challenged and shattered many cultural taboos.". Other spaces at MICE, named after Doucet, Eisner and Bechdel remain, but these events perhaps underline the inherent problems in the establishment of a canon.

The debate about the comics canon was recently featured in *The Times Literary Supplement*. Eric Bulson (2018, 7) claimed that a comics canon was emerging and "the medium has become, by and large much kinder and gentler: it is used to teach visual literacy, to lure kids away from digital devices, and often to remind us that being lonely is a simple fact of life." Comics is at a point when a canon is emerging. However, does this make some comics, "more equal than others"? Hilary Chute (2018) makes the point that sex, illness, gender and, like them or loathe them superheroes, are all important parts of the comic book medium making it what it is. Texts assumed as canon are one significant, but not the sole aspect of comics, worth researching.

This issue looks at very different aspects of American comic book production, dealing with both content, ratings and production. Jeffrey A. Brown's "I'm the Goshdarn Batman!' Affect and the aesthetics of cute superheroes" looks at the rise of "cute" superheroes that have begun to appear not only in comic books, but also in animation, toys and a range of merchandising products. Brown argues that the aesthetic of cute superheroes implies an inversion of the core attributes typically associated with superheroes. He also contextualises these cute characters in the contemporary media landscape where narratives cross media and the role of the reader becomes important in making sense of the wider narrative implications.

Thomas J. Brown's "Is what you see what you get? A content analysis of the indicative nature of self-regulated comic book covers and their content" looks at the current situation with rating systems in the American comic book. Brown examines how representative comic book covers are of the content found within the inside pages of their issues from publishers

that have no formal rating system, and find a disjunction between covers and interior content.

Keith Friedlander's "The editor, the author function, and the social function: a methodological survey" looks at the neglected area of the contribution of editors to given comic book series. In particular it looks at the career of Karen Berger as a case study and argues that creative agency must be understood not just in terms of the authorial vision of creative staff, but also in terms of the significance of wider collaboration.

The potential seriousness and ambition of the graphic novel is demonstrated in Joanne Pettitt's "Memory and genocide in graphic novels: the Holocaust as paradigm". This article looks at not just the more familiar texts such as *Maus*, but also more recent challenging examples such as David Brin and Scott Hampton's *The Life Eaters* and Jean-Philippe Stassen's *Deogratias: A Tale of Rwanda*.

This issue also features book reviews that underline the breadth of material being published in the field.

The topic of Chris Gavaler's 'On the origin of superheroes: from the Big Bang to *Action Comics* No. 1' is self-evident, but it demonstrates that there are still important parts of comic book history that need to be addressed in detail. On the other hand Ryan North's *To be or not to be: a chooseable-path adventure*, and *Romeo and/or Juliet: a chooseable-path adventure* demonstrate the various formal experiments that are possible within the comic form.

References

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