CULTURAL POLITICS IN GRAPHIC NARRATIVE: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF

THE ADVENTURES OF TINTIN

SUMMARY

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This thesis, titled ‘Cultural Politics in Graphic Narrative: A Critical Analysis of The Adventures of Tintin’, has attempted to critically analyze The Adventures of Tintin, a series of graphic novels, created by Belgian artist Hergé, the nom de plume of Georges Remi (1907–1983). It traces the origin of the graphic novel and its place in popular culture today with special reference to The Adventures of Tintin. This thesis finds that the graphic novel has come a long way from being a tool of amusement, to becoming a relatively ‘safe’ outlet for veiled political commentary, to finally developing into a sophisticated medium for the dissemination of postmodern philosophy.

The graphic narrative originated in the early part of the twentieth century. It used text, ambiguity, symbolism, design, iconography, literary technique, mixed media and stylistic elements of art help build a subtext of meanings. Although the graphic novel, popularly known as ‘comic’, comprises non-linear structures, it is usually simply presented. However, it depends of the reader's ‘frame of mind’ to read and understand the narrative.

Graphic culture today not only presents a trans-cultural aesthetic, but also illustrates the internal human struggles and playfulness of the postmodern conditions. The significance of this lies in the attempt of this modest medium to explode limiting labels and explore the endless possibilities of appreciating literary theory through its representations in comics’ philosophy.

The Adventures of Tintin is a graphic novel or ‘comic book’ series which chronicles the adventures of Tintin, a young Belgian reporter who becomes involved in dangerous cases across four continents (excepting only Australia), in which he takes heroic and just action to save the day from criminals, politicians and terrorists. Almost every adventure features Tintin hard at work in his investigative journalism, but he is seldom seen actually turning in a story without first getting caught up in some misadventure of epic proportion. He is an ‘everyman’ of more or less neutral attitudes. On the surface, Tintin’s character is under-developed and ‘boringly straight’. But a closer look at The Adventures of Tintin series reveals the importance of the central character’s colorlessness. It is this very colorlessness of Tintin that enables him to be the common factor or mixing ground for different cultures, issues, peoples and personalities. Indeed, Tintin is the bland catalyst whose presence facilitates the fullest expression of the different flavors of different cultures, issues, peoples, places and times.
This research explores the unique narrative structure of *The Adventures of Tintin* with special reference to the codes of mystery and meaning embedded in these works. It finds that multiple significances exist at various levels in both the visual and verbal aspects of the structure and content of *The Adventures of Tintin* graphic novels. The thesis then examines the controversies such as accusations of colonial prejudice attached to the cultural representations in these graphic novels. It concludes that these graphic novels represent the cultures of their times in the metaphor of their times with little thought for political ‘correctness’ in the early phase of their author’s career. However, as the author became more informed and educated about the world around him; and more aware of the impact of his writings on the impressionable reading public, he began taking conscious efforts to project things not only ‘as they are’ but more significantly, ‘as they should be’, thereby transforming his creativity into a powerful instrument for intellectual expression and social change. This research proceeds to discuss the symbolic, historic and cultural significance of the iconic characters of *The Adventures of Tintin*. It probes the motivations and labors of the author in creating foresighted pieces, meticulously researched from anthropological, cultural, geographic, linguistic, political, scientific and ethical perspectives. Finally, the thesis delves into the transcultural legacy of *The Adventures of Tintin* as evident in Twentieth and Twenty-first century academic and popular culture.