

Milestones in Anglo-American Comics

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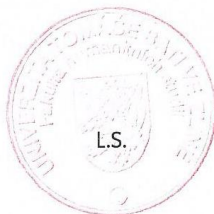
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ABSTRAKT

Tato bakalářská práce je zaměřena na historický vývoj amerického komiksu. Důležitou součástí této práce je popis hlavních a zásadních událostí, které měly vliv na tvorbu v oblasti komiksu. Další část popisuje hlavní postavy amerického komiksu. Nedílnou součástí je také krátká charakteristika nejdůležitějších tvůrců komiksu a specifikace nakladatelství DC Comics a Marvel Comics.

Klíčová slova: Komiks, autor, nakladatelství, historie, postavy

ABSTRACT

This bachelor thesis focuses on the historical development of American comics. The description of the main and principal events, which influenced the production of comics, is another important part of this thesis. The next part describes major characters of American comics. Inseparable part is the short characteristic of the most important creators of comics and the specification of publishing houses DC Comics and Marvel Comics.

Keywords: Comics, author, publishing house, history, characters

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CONTENTS

CONTENTS	8
INTRODUCTION	9
I. THEORY	10
1 FEATURES OF COMICS	11
1.1 BASIC TERMS	12
1.2 FORM OF LANGUAGE	12
1.3 READERS OF COMICS	13
2 HISTORY OF COMICS.....	15
2.1 THE PLATINUM AGE (1897-1937)	15
2.2 THE GOLDEN AGE (1938-1955)	17
2.2.1 “SEDUCTION OF THE INNOCENT” AND THE COMICS CODE.....	19
2.3 THE SILVER AGE (1956- CA 1970)	21
2.4 THE BRONZE AGE (CA 1970-1985).....	22
2.5 THE MODERN AGE (1986-PRESENT).....	24
2.6 AMERICAN INFLUENCE ON EUROPEAN COMICS	25
3 MOST INFLUENTIAL CHARACTERS	26
3.1 SUPERMAN.....	26
3.2 BATMAN.....	27
3.3 WONDER WOMAN	28
3.4 FANTASTIC FOUR.....	29
3.5 SPIDER-MAN	30
3.6 ANTI-HEROES	31
4 MAIN COMIC BOOKS AUTHORS.....	33
4.1 WILL EISNER (1917-2005)	33
4.2 JACK KIRBY (1917-1994).....	34
4.3 STAN LEE (1922).....	35
5 DC COMICS VS. MARVEL COMICS.....	37
5.1 DC COMICS	37
5.2 MARVEL COMICS.....	37
CONCLUSION	39
BIBLIOGRAPHY	41

INTRODUCTION

Comics have thousands of admirers, readers and fans in today's world. The popularity of this medium is partially caused by the presence of popular comics' characters and superhero genre in modern movies. However, not everybody knows the extensive and rich history of comics. Comic has become the part of literature and art.

This bachelor thesis describes the main features of comics, such as the form, language or readers. It also covers and divides particular historical eras and development of American comics, starting with the first comic and finishing in today's modern age. The thesis divides the history of comics into ages: the Platinum Age, the Golden Age, the Silver Age, the Bronze Age and the Modern Age. A lot of important events happened during these periods of time. Every event has significant impact on the development of comics. Various comic books were also important entertaining medium during World War II because of its patriotic themes. One of the most important affairs in the history of comics is undoubtedly the censoring of comic books, themes and characters during the 1960s.

The next part contains brief description of the most important and the most influential comics' characters.

This thesis also includes short biographies of the most important authors and producers of comic books and characters, who have influenced the development of comics and went down in history of comic with their creation.

The last part contains the characterization of evolution of the most popular and the most significant publishing houses specialized in comics, which are known as DC Comics and Marvel Comics today.

I. THEORY

1 FEATURES OF COMICS

Before describing the main events and milestones in the history of American comics, it is very important to know, what exactly comics is. In dictionaries exists a lot of definitions of comics. Simply it is a narrative of a story and usually it is not too long. Comics use the combination of pictures and text. But we can also find comics without any text at all. British writer and journalist Paul Gravett described comics very precisely: "Comics usually convey narratives through a series of images, in various media, arranged in sequence. Text may appear separately outside of but alongside the image, or there may be no text at all."¹

Well-known comic expert Scott McCloud explains the theory of comics in his book *Understanding Comics (1993)*. According to him, Comic has not a precise definition. "If people failed to understand comics, it was because they defined what comics could be too narrowly. A proper definition, if we could find one, might give lie to the stereotypes and show that the potential of comics is limitless and exciting."²

He also emphasizes the fact that there are no strict rules how to draw comics. Comic creators can choose from a lot of possibilities how to draw their comics. "Our definition says nothing about superheroes or funny animals, nothing about fantasy, science-fiction or reader age. No genres are listed in our definition, no types of subject matter, no styles of prose or poetry. Nothing is said about paper and ink. No materials are rule out by our definition. No tools are prohibited."³

The printed version of this graphic narrative is the most frequent. Comic books are very popular, but in most cases it does not have the form of book, but of a magazine. Comics can also appear in broadsheets, magazines, tabloids or in any other type of newspaper, in given part of this newspaper and in shorten version, for example only one line, usually 1 to 5 frames. However, the online and electronic form of comics is becoming very popular in today's world of internet. So it can be seen on the computers, mobile phones and other devices.⁴

¹"Encarta: A Definition of Comics," Paul Gravett, accessed July 19, 2009, <http://www.paulgravett.com/index.php/articles/article/encarta>.

² Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (New York: Kitchen Sink Press, 1993), 3.

³ McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, 22.

⁴ Gravett, "Encarta: A Definition of Comics."

1.1 Basic terms

It is usual to find set phrase *comics strip*. Comics strip is the series of two to four pictures. Plot is captured on the pictures.⁵ Today, it symbolizes the common structure of comics - consequential frames of boxes, continuing one after another in the line or column. The example of one of the first comic strips is well-known comics about lazy and cynical cat *Garfield (1978)*. Garfield was firstly published in broadsheets and journals. However, the strips reached big success among people and his stories started to be published in books.⁶

Graphic novel is another important term connected with comics. Graphic novel was originally a painted story without the features of traditional comic. Nowadays it is a comic in the form of paperback or album.⁷ Hillary Chute analyses the history and usage of graphic novel in detail. According to her, graphic novel is a marketing term, which should help to distinguish this genre from comics. One of the most important authors of graphic novels is Art Spiegelman with his masterpiece *Mause (1972)*,⁸ which is mentioned below.

Manga is a visual and verbal narrative, which was created in Japan. The cultural and historical elements can be found in this genre. Manga was slightly influenced by western genres, such as comic books and cinema, and can be also compared to comics.⁹ Unusual feature of manga is the expression of sounds.¹⁰

1.2 Form of Language

Comics are considered as a part of literature art. Also the study of comics is similar to study of literature. It deals with the understanding the general meaning, portrayed with simultaneous presence of two main elements: words and images. The form has to be enjoyable. The society often points on the lack of seriousness towards this medium as an

⁵ Milan Kruml, *Comics: Stručné dějiny* (Praha: Comics Centrum, 2007), 273.

⁶ Kruml, *Comis: Stručné dějiny*, 130.

⁷ Kruml, *Comis: Stručné dějiny*, 274.

⁸ Hillary Chute, *Contemporary Graphic Narratives: History, Aesthetics, Ethics* (New Brunswick: Rutgers the State University of New Jersey, 2006).

⁹ Jeet Heer and Kent Worcester, *A Comics Studies Reader* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2009), 236-238.

¹⁰ Heer and Worcester, *A Comics Studies Reader*, 163.

art form. Maurice Horn has described it very briefly: "(Comics is) an original form whose intrinsic values must be objectively assessed. A thorough knowledge of the field must be obtained, with the same assiduity as is required of any other discipline; the *a priori* judgment that this is an inferior form only deserving of inferior scholarship is an especially galling piece of tortuous reasoning."¹¹ The concept of comics as an art form must be accepted. If it is not accepted as an independent art form, comics will never be on the same position as other literary forms.

The language has to be comprehensible and understandable. On the one hand, the comics might seem to be an easy type of entertainment. But on the other hand it is important to focus more deeply on the language. With a closer look at comic books, it is visible that the grammar and vocabulary is on higher level, because reader has to understand the message, written only in a few words. Usage of words is very complex because of the right combination of visual and verbal elements. According to reader, semiotic process is present in the comic books. Understanding the interactions and relations between words and images is the most important fact in reading of this literature in order to achieve the story or joke.

There can also appear text-image conflict. It is quite usual to focus primarily on the visual aspect in comics since it could be more entertaining. A lot of people first perceived comics visually, they usually first concentrate on the illustrations when choosing one comic book over another. The illustrations are often more attractive than words.¹²

1.3 Readers of comics

To create comics, it is important to know the reader, his requirements and attitude. There have not been done a lot of researches about comic-readers. For a long time, only some reports about the number of read comics were available. But the beneficial effect of this information was minimal. George Pumphrey has proved, that almost every American child was reading one and more comics during the week in 1950s. As far as the associated

¹¹ Mila Bongco, *Reading Comics: Language, Culture, and the Concept of the Superhero in Comic Books* (New York: Garland Pub, 2000), 46.

¹² Bongco, *Reading Comics: Language, Culture, and the Concept of the Superhero in Comic Books*, 46.

information is concerned, children shared and interchanged their comics, so every comic could be read by up to eight other readers. Children were also asked, why they read comics. The most frequent answers were because of the excitement, adventure and entertainment. Comics also do not require much concentration. In today's world comics have no effect on children and their intelligence.¹³

The percentage of adult readers of comics is rising nowadays. Comic book stores are expanding their supply with various types of comics, such as superhero comics, manga, graphic novels, humorous comics, horror genre, science fiction and others.¹⁴

¹³ Martin Barker, *Comics: Ideology, Power, and the Critics* (New York: Martin's Press, 1989), 239-240.

¹⁴ Jean-Paul Gabilliet, *Of Comics and Men: A Cultural History of American Comic Books* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010), 209-211.

2 HISTORY OF COMICS

It is not easy to determine when the comics came into existence. Even prehistoric men were drawing comics on the walls of their caves. But most of the literature says comic books were invented in the previous two centuries. In 1842, *The Adventures of Obadiah Oldbuck* was published as a magazine-formatted newspaper enclosure in the United States. And in 1849, *Journey to the Gold Diggins* by Jeremiah Saddlebas was considered the earliest known American-created sequential comic book. These can be taken as a sequential narratives but it differs from today's comic book as they are.

American comic book creation can be classified into several distinct ages or eras in the history. Various events are set as starting points of the given age. One of the most reliable classifications of comic book ages is divided below:

TIME PERIOD	COMICS AGE
1897-1937	Platinum or Pre-Golden Age
1938-1955	Golden Age
1956- CA 1970	Silver Age
CA 1970-1985	Bronze Age
1986-present	Modern Age

Shirrel Rhoades, *A Complete History of American Comic Books* (New York, Lang Publishing, 2008), 4.

2.1 The Platinum Age (1897-1937)

In this era the first comics can be found. The crash of the Stock Market in 1929 became an important point in the history of comics – people wanted to buy something entertaining in a low price.¹⁵

Maxwell Charles Gaines's *Funnies on Parade* (1933) is considered as a beginning of the Platinum Age of comics. In 1933 he invented the format, that later become the standard for the comic book industry. His comics had all the necessities of modern comic book. It

¹⁵ Shirrel Rhoades, *A Complete History of American Comic Books* (New York, Lang Publishing, 2008), 10.

has the magazine format, four-color printing and it was sequential storytelling. But some features were still missing, for example the superhero genre or original editorial material.¹⁶ *Comic Funnies on Parade (1933)* was firstly used as an advertisement and was given for free to those, who bought given brand of soap. The load was sold out in a few weeks. In 1934, Easter Color Company started to sell another episode, *Famous Funnies (1933)* for 10 cents. It was the first comic book published monthly. In this time, there were sold about 280 000 copies per week. *Famous Funnies* were published until 1955.¹⁷

The competition on the comic books market started to grow up. And comic books attracted publisher Martin Goodman of Timely Publications (later known as Marvel Comics). In 1935, Major Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson's National Allied Publications published *New Fun: The Big Comic Magazine #1 (1935)*. It was the first time when original characters and stories were made up in a comic book format.

Harry Donenfeld and Frank Armer have appeared in the setting of the comics. These crowded the comic book market with a new Spicy line - *Spicy Tales, Spicy Adventure Stories, Spicy Mystery Stories, Spicy Westerns* and *Spicy Detective Stories*. *Spicy Detective Stories* was the first publication of Donenfeld, connected with a comic strip. His comic career was rising very well in that time.

In 1937, Major Wheeler-Nicholson was on the brink of financial collapse, so he took Harry Donenfeld on as a partner. Early that year, Detective Comics, Inc. was formed. DC comic book started its career with the first comic book *Detective Comics #1* in March, 1937.

In 1938, Donenfeld had press charges against Wheeler-Nicholson for nonpayment and led Detective Comics, Inc. into bankruptcy. Than he became the CEO of National Allied Publications and Detective Comics, Inc. Later these two companies were merged to a new one called National Comics, also known in spoken language as DC.¹⁸

¹⁶ Rhoades, *A Complete History of American Comic Books*, 10-11.

¹⁷ Kruml, *Comics: Stručné dějiny*, 101-102.

¹⁸ Rhoades, *A Complete History of American Comic Books*, 16.

2.2 The Golden Age (1938-1955)

Year 1938 was very important for the history of comics, because DC published comics named *Action comics #1 (1938)*. Two teenage boys, writer Jerry Siegel and artist Joe Shuster produced a character with superhuman powers which appeared in this comic book for the first time. Man in blue costume, holding a car above his head, was portrayed on the cover of the book. Clark Kent as a *Superman (1938)* became a superhero not only for all fans of comic books. His impact on public was huge. During this time, lot of immigrants came to United States to start a new life there and to find The American Dream. Superman, as a last survivor of destroyed planet Krypton, was believed to be also an immigrant in the eyes of real American immigrants.¹⁹ On the other hand, it was also something absolutely new for ordinary people to read about a superhero with almost endless abilities, protecting the safety, hidden under the mask of a common man.²⁰ Comics made by adult publishers, produced for adult readers. Moreover, this comic appeared in the period, when USA was receiving bad news about Hitler's occupation of Austria, and the war was on its beginning. Americans was quite concern about this situation. In addition, there were also a problem with the unemployment and bad economic situation in the USA, which resulted in Superman became national hero, representing American pride. During this period of time, comic selling about hundred thousand copies was a successful one. But Superman was unexpectedly selling more than one million. This is the reason why year 1938 and the appearance of Superman were by most historians considered as the beginning of the Golden Age of Comics.

Countless amounts of superhero characters started to rise after Superman's success. A lot of young creators could realize their dreams in their early age. It is necessary to mention Jack Kirby, Will Eisner or Bob Kane. All of these started their career no later than in age of 19.²¹

Next superhero in the comic's world was *Batman (1939)*, created by artists Bob Kane and Bill Finger. He appeared in *Detective Comics #27* just a year after Superman, in May 1939. In the contrast to Superman, Batman has no superpowers. He only uses his intelligence and

¹⁹“A Brief History of Comic Books,” John Petty, 2006. <http://comics.ha.com/images/HoC.pdf>.

²⁰ “Comics: From Platinum to Bronze Age,” Accessed May 4, 2010, <http://cwkkberlin.de/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/Facharbeit-Comics.pdf>.

²¹ Kruml, *Comis: Stručné dějiny*, 104.

expensive equipment to defeat evil enemies. His motivator was revenge. Bill Finger, inspired by gothic roman created line of Batman's enemies and villains – *Dr. Death (1939)*, *The Joker (1940)*, *The Cat-Woman (1940)*, *The Penguin (1941)* or *The Riddler (1948)*. Almost all aforementioned are psychopaths, considering crime as their main mission in life. Their weapons were also very fantastic and imaginative.²²

It is necessary to mention other superheroes created during this period, such as *Human Torch (1939)*, *the Sub-Mariner (1939)*, *the Flash (1940)* or *Wonder Woman (1942)* – who became the icon of feministic movement in 1960s.

The biggest rise of comic superheroes began when America joined World War II. Comic books started to be overfilled with war propaganda and Nazis were main comic book villains. This was the impulse to create another patriotic superhero, one of the best opportunities for publishers. Patriotic and brave *Captain Marvel (1940)* and *Captain America (1940)*, protecting the society were on the top of their fame.²³ Superheroes were the result of economic and political situation in America. They encouraged national patriotism and confidence and also made a contribution to the fight against the enemies of democracy. Up to 44% of American soldiers were regular readers of comic books and another 20% were also reading comics, even if occasionally. About 35 thousand comic books with Superman were sent on the battlefield by DC Comics. Comic books accounted for a quarter of all printed materials, exported from America to foreign countries during the war.²⁴ However, this expansion does not take a long time. After the war, superheroes were no more favorite and popular, as they were during it.

Comics faced the crisis and comic creators have to come with something different. Detective stories became favorite genre among readers. One of the most famous is *Crime Does Not Pay (1942)*, and others, such as *Crime and Punishment (1947)* or *Crime Must Pay the Penalty (1948)*. Romance and love became the next new motive of comic books. This trend started to rise with comic *Young Romance (1947)* by Kirby and Joe Simon. Another topic was western. It is important to mention *Boy's Ranch (1950)*, produced by Kirby and Simon. Also horror themes were famous in this time. *The Crypt of Terror (1950)*, later renamed on *Tales from the Crypt (1950)*, *The Vault of Horror (1950)* and *The*

²² Kruml, *Comis: Stručné dějiny*, 107-108.

²³ Kruml, *Comis: Stručné dějiny*, 110.

²⁴ Kruml, *Comis: Stručné dějiny*, 114-115.

Haunt of Fear (1950) offered terrifying and creepy stories. Terror was almost real, brutal and quite disturbing. Each episode was narrated by the same narrator – Crypt Keeper, Vault Keeper or Old Witch. This new comic books boasted with their dissimilarity and became a new trend in a short time.²⁵

2.2.1 “Seduction of the Innocent” and The Comics Code

The new style of art connected with a large mass of people also had its opponents and enemies.

In the Golden Age of comics, Dr. Fredric Wertham published book called *Seduction of the Innocent* in 1954. Born in Germany in Jewish family, Dr. Wertham was psychiatrist, concerning with human mind and interests and protector of civil liberties. He claim that “the power of human violence is very great, not only on the direct victims but in its influence on the orientation of a whole society as well. That is why the control of violence-producing factors occupies such a key position in the power structure of any society.”^{26 27} In 1920s, Wertham had immigrated to America, where he later became well-known because of his psychological books. Concerned with the situation about the violence in children’s comic books in America, he decided to establish a Hooky Club and a Comic Book Reader’s Club. Group therapy in this clubs should help him to understand the impact of violent scenarios in the comic books on young reader’s behavior.²⁸ Based on the results of his research, Wertham wrote several books dealing with this issue. The most important book for the history of American comics is *Seduction of the innocent*. He focused on the most influential topics in this book. Drug addiction is one of the themes and Wertham criticized the presence of using morphine and heroin in crime comic stories.²⁹ The next important theme is violence and brutality in crime comic books. Children in the age from twelve to sixteen were asked what they have learned from the comic books in one therapy

²⁵ Kruml, *Comis: Stručné dějiny*, 140-142.

²⁶ Fredric Wertham, *Human Violence and Society*, unpublished lecture, n.d. pp. 2-3.

²⁷ Fredric Wertham, *Seduction of the Innocent*, ed. James E. Riebman (New York: Harward University Press, 2004), ix.

²⁸ Wertham, *Seduction of the Innocent*, vii.

²⁹ Wertham, *Seduction of the Innocent*, 25.

group. One example of the answers was: “I saw how to carry a gun in a suitcase and a shopping bag. If I ever had to do it, that’s the way I’d do it.”³⁰ Another topic he was dealing with was abnormal masculinity and femininity. He emphasized wrong position of women in the comics, when female superheroes are not working and taking care of the family. Sexuality is also connected with this topic. He called Wonder Woman a lesbian, detesting all males. Relationship between muscular and mature Batman and adolescent Robin is considered homosexual and perverse in the book.³¹ Moreover, Wertham compared comic books to Hitler in one of his speech: “Comic books are definitely harmful to impressionable people, and most young people are impressionable. [...] I think Hitler was a beginner compared to the comic book industry. The time has come to legislate these books off the newsstands and out of the candy stores.”

On the one hand, people publishing and creating comic books were very skeptical about his book. On the other hand, public take a serious stand to this problematic. Churches and other community groups organized campaigns against comic industry. Schools were burning thousands of comics. Also the investigation against the comic publishers began. This twist on the comic market caused laying off hundreds of people working in the industry. Comic-publishing world was facing the real crisis.

In October 1954, Comics Magazine Association of America (CMAA) was established. This association issued so-called Comic-Code Association (CCA), which should censor the content of comic books. Many series of comics had to be canceled. Some words and hyperboles were deleted from the comic vocabulary. It also forbids monsters like werewolves, vampires or zombies.³² The homosexual topics were not forbidden entirely, but they were just regulated in the section about “Marriage and Sex”. Homosexual themes were indirectly marked as a “sex perversion.”³³ The CCA’s rules were very strict and had to be respected. However, the underground comics and smaller independent comic publishers were never touched by the Comic Code.

The Silver Age of Comics was slowly entering the scene.

³⁰ Wertham, *Seduction of the Innocent*, 169-170

³¹ Wertham, *Seduction of the Innocent*, 234

³² “Comics: From Platinum to Bronze Age,” Accessed May 4, 2010, <http://cwkkberlin.de/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/Facharbeit-Comics.pdf>.

³³ “A Brief History of Comic Books,” John Petty, 2006. <http://comics.ha.com/images/HoC.pdf>.

2.3 The Silver Age (1956- CA 1970)

The starting point of the Silver Age is ambiguous likewise the end of this age. One version of the starting point is connected with the edition of *Seduction of the Innocent*. But more historians are inclined to think that DC's editor Julius Schwartz started the Silver Age when he was trying to modernize old superheroes and bring them back.³⁴ He restored the *Flash* (1940), *Green Lantern* (1941), *the Atom* (1940) and other reborn heroes. What's more, *the Flash* (1940), *Green Lantern* (1940), *Aquaman* (1941), *Wonder Woman* (1942), and *Martial Manhunter* (1953) performed together on the pages of *The Justice League of America* (1960). Their team was later fortified by *Superman* (1938), *Batman* (1939), *Green Arrow* (1941) and *Phantom Stranger* (1952).

Goodman's Company Marvel Comics is also closely connected with this age because of its creative team, consisting of Stan Lee (Stanley Martin Lieber) and Jack Kirby. Goodman indirectly copied DC with their Justice League and tasked Lee and Kirby to create superhero team comic book. These two produced the first edition of *The Fantastic Four* in November 1961. The Fantastic Four was composed of *Mister Fantastic*, *Invisible Girl*, *Human Torch* and the super-strong *Thing*. This group had a lot of advantages: they were a family, with no secret identities. This was something completely new. In 1966 *Silver Surfer* (1966) arrives to Fantastic Four on his intergalactic surf.

Marvel also introduced other successful characters, such as *Thor* (1962), *the Hulk* (1962), *Spider-Man* (1963), *the X-Men* (1963) or *Iron Man* (1963).³⁵

Very popular comic book was *The Avengers* (1963). Marvel connected its successful characters in one book and breathed new life into another popular comic book series. Team of superheroes includes characters such as Iron Man, Hulk, Thor or Captain America. The Avengers differed from Justice League of America a lot. Members of Justice League were almost the same – good and appreciated heroes, while some members of The Avengers were often on the wrong side with tendencies to crime. The Avengers immediately became famous for the dissimilarity of the team.³⁶

³⁴ "Comics: From Platinum to Bronze Age," Accessed May 4, 2010, <http://cwkkberlin.de/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/Facharbeit-Comics.pdf.vv>

³⁵ "A Brief History of Comic Books," John Petty, 2006. <http://comics.ha.com/images/HoC.pdf>.

³⁶ Gina Misiroglu, *The Superhero Book* (Detroit: Visible Ink Press, 2004).

DC and Marvel were still struggling for the power. DC introduced new sidekicks of old superheroes, such as *Robin (1940)* – sidekick of Batman, *Wonder Girl(1958)* or *Kid Flash (1959)*. These were united into the team *Teen Titans (1964)*.

About 1964, collecting of comic books became a new hit among students. The Silver Age was rising well. Some comics were also starring in the TV shows.³⁷

Moreover, Lee and Kirby developed new storytelling technique, which forever changed American comics. They created stories with nail-biters, plots and direct continuation in the editions. Marvel Universe was on the world.

As it was already mentioned, the end of the Silver Age is not precisely defined. It is possible to say, that the cause of the end of this age is break up of very important creative duo Stan Lee and Jack Kirby in 1970. Kirby left Marvel and started to work for DC. However, for many people the Silver Age ended when Spider-Man's girlfriend Gwen Stacy was killed. This was shocking for the comics' audience.³⁸

2.4 The Bronze Age (CA 1970-1985)

This era was touched by more mature topics, such as drug abuse, racism or poverty. It is also important to mention the first contravention of strict rules set by Comics Code. Stan Lee was asked by the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare to write a completely new comic, concerning the drug abuse. This happens in 1971, when the three-part issue *The Amazing Spider-Man #96-98 "Green Goblin Reborn"* was published. Comics Code forbids any representation of drug use. Nevertheless, Stan Lee published the issue without the CCA's approval. In the same year, DC Comics also published one comic with the drug abuse storyline: *Green Lantern/Green Arrow #85-86 (1971)*, where Green Arrow's accomplice Speedy was addicted to heroin. Moreover, these series concern racial prejudice and social inequity.

Very important comic book in this period was *Maus (1972)*, created by Art Spiegelman. Life of his father Wladek is described in this comic. Firstly he was a business

³⁷ "A Brief History of Comic Books," John Petty, 2006. <http://comics.ha.com/images/HoC.pdf>.

³⁸ "Comics: From Platinum to Bronze Age," Accessed May 4, 2010, <http://cwkbberlin.de/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/Facharbeit-Comics.pdf>.

man in Poland, but the comic is based on the deportation to the Auschwitz concentration camp, which was named Mauschwitz in the comic book. Fates and stories of Poland Jews are interpreted by the animal characters. Jews are mice, Germans are cats and non-Jewish Poles are pigs. Spiegelman explained mice look almost identically, and people from concentration camps looks also almost identically. Maus is based on the stories, narrated by author's father, so it is a dialogue between two generations. Spiegelman gained a huge success with this comic and was acknowledged by the Pulitzer Prize in 1992.³⁹

The CCA was slowly loosened, what caused more freedom for publishers. Also the horror genre was returning on the stage again. Relaxed rules of the Comics Code allowed writing about vampires, werewolves and other creatures. These titles were used in comic books such as *Ghost Rider* (1972), *Swamp Thing* (1972) or *The Tomb of Dracula* (1972)⁴⁰.

As it was already mentioned in the previous chapter, Gwen Stacy passed away on the pages of *The Amazing Spider-Man* #121/122 "The Night Gwen Stacy Died" (1973). The mortality appeared in the comic world of superheroes. It was the end of innocence.

Other important event in this period is development of black and other minority superheroes. In 1970s, characters such as *Luke Cage* (1972), *Blade* (1973), *Storm* (1975), *Misty Knight* (1975) and *Cyborg* (1980) were introduced. Some of them were criticized for maintaining racial stereotypes. Other became very popular in this time. Storm has become the leader of the X-Men and Cyborg has become leader of Teen Titans.

The Bronze Age is also known for the development of a new distribution system called Direct Market. Before it was developed, people were not buying comic books directly from the publishers, but in supermarkets or newsstands. Comics were sold similarly to newspapers and the unsold copies were returned for credit. But later, Phil Seuling, a fan convention organizer, started to buy comic books directly from the publishers. The comic books were not so expensive and also nonreturnable. New comic book stores came into existence in this way.

The end of the Bronze Age is not certain in the same way as its beginning. It is connected with several trends and events. DC comics completed *Crisis on Infinite Earths*

³⁹ Kruml, *Comis: Stručné dějiny*, 252.

⁴⁰ Edited by Wikipedians, *DC Comics Encyclopedia: Superhero handbook*, http://books.google.cz/books?id=bymmUqU7_S8C&printsec=frontcover&hl=cs&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false, 58.

(1985), and started to be a challenger to Marvel again. The publication of *Watchmen* (1987) by Alan Moore or *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* (1986) by Frank Miller can be considered the last publications in the Bronze Age. On the other hand, Marvel Comics were also standing on the end of this period with their issues of *Secret Wars*, published from 1984 to 1985.⁴¹

2.5 The Modern Age (1986-present)

The Modern Age of Comics has a lot of alternative names, for example the Iron Age, the Plastic Age, the Copper age or the Dark Age. Comic book characters became darker and psychologically more complex and creators were actively trying to change the industry in this era. Publishing houses were getting larger and more common. This age was also strongly influenced by the Bronze Age. Creators like Chris Claremont, the author of *Uncanny X-Men* (1963) or Frank Miller, the author of *Daredevil* (1964), had a large impact, which is still present in this age.

As it was already mentioned in the previous chapter, horror genre was slowly recovering. In the 1980's, science fiction and fantasy genre became a new theme of comic. Some started to use the phrase "sophisticated suspense". In 1993, DC's Vertigo line was founded, with its main editor and founder Karen Berger. Vertigo focused on this new sophisticated suspense genre. Its influence continued into the 21st Century, and was strengthened by comics such as *100 Bullets* (1999) or *American Virgin* (2006).

British creators started to flood American comic market. This situation is called "The Second British Invasion." One of the most important comics is aforementioned *Watchmen* (1987) by writer Alan Moore and artist Dave Gibbons. This book was very positively evaluated by public and critics. It is also considered one of the most important baselines of comics' literature.

Today we can find various types of comics. Every genre is permissible and readers can choose whatever they want. There is also one big change in the comics industry. Readers and collectors of comic books are not only children anymore. Adult readers are no more judged to be slow or strange. This change of public opinion is caused mainly by the appearance of superheroes and comic genre in films, TV and other media. Characters as

⁴¹ Wikipedians, *DC Comics Encyclopedia: Superhero handbook*, 64.

Thor, the Hulk, Spider-Man, Batman or The X-Men are very popular and have their own feature films. Comics have reached its peak and became famous among the wide society.⁴²

2.6 American Influence on European Comics

European production of comics was quite different than the American one. Comic creators were placing text under the pictures. Comics imported from America were also changed in this way – bubbles with text were deleted and the text was removed under the picture. European creators were not so innovative and were stick to the normal boring style.

The first usage of traditional American style of placing text to the pictures appeared in *Tintin (1929)*, created by Belgian Hergé (Georges Prosper Remi). His innovative attitude changed the beaten track of creating comics in Europe. Tintin was young journalist, who traveled through the world with his loyal dog Snowy. He visited a lot of countries such as Soviet Union, Egypt, China or even America.

In 1980s and 1990s, European comics gain its own culture, similar to another countries including America.⁴³

⁴² A Brief History of Comic Books,” John Petty, 2006. <http://comics.ha.com/images/HoC.pdf>.

⁴³ Kruml, *Comis: Stručné dějiny*, 216-220.

3 MOST INFLUENTIAL CHARACTERS

This chapter describes the most influential comic books characters. Superhero is a character with extra powers and special abilities. Futuristic technology and good physical and mental skills are important factor of superhero. Different heroes has different powers, whether superhuman abilities or highly developed intelligence. The real identity of hero is hidden in the majority of comics. Heroes are also wearing a costume, adapted to their powers and often connected with their name.⁴⁴

3.1 Superman

Superman is published by DC Comics. His creators are writer Jerry Siegel and artist Joe Shustler. His first appearance was in magazine Action Comics #1 in June 1938.

Real names of Superman are Kal-El on his birth planet and Clark Kent on planet Earth. Kal-El was born to Jor-El and Lara on planet Krypton just before the planet should be destroyed. He as a baby was sent from Krypton to Earth in life support system and landed in Sutton Field near Smallville, Kansas. Jonathan and Martha Kent adopted him and named him Clark Kent. In a few years he showed his abilities, caused by the different environment on the Earth. He is said by his parents to hide his superpowers and show them only when it is urgent. Thanks to his Kryptonian origin, his tissue is more resistant than the human one. His cellular structure has to be charged with solar energy. The absorption of solar energy is very important for Superman, because his superpowers are affected by the solar power. Superhuman strength is another ability of Superman. This superhero can be considered one of the strongest in the Universe. He was moving the Earth with the help of Wonder Woman and Martial Manhunter. His longevity makes him almost immortal. He is able to fly faster than the speed of light, not only in the Earth gravity, but also in the space. His superhuman speed allows him to move very fast. The senses of Superman are really developed. He can hear for example heartbeat or cell phone signal. He can create a hurricane with his super breath. Heat and super vision is another important ability, including fire beam, microscopic and telescopic seeing, ultraviolet, infrared and X-Ray vision. His intellect is on the level of the genius. But on the other hand he can be

⁴⁴ Heer and Worcester *A Comics Studies Reader*, 77-79.

endangered with his weaknesses. One of the biggest weak points is Kryptonite. Crystalline substance of kryptonite has a specific radiation, which is fatal for Kryptonians. It can appear in various forms and affect Superman. He is not even able to see through lead.

Superman is dressed in a blue suit with a red cape. He has the icon of red letter S on a yellow background, which is placed on his chest. Clark Kent is wearing this costume under his normal clothes. His eyes are blue and hair is black. In his earth identity of Clark Kent he is working as a reporter for the Metropolis newspaper Daily Planet. His wife is Lois Lane, also a reporter for the Daily Planet

Enemies of Superman are for example *Lex Luthor (1940)* or *Doomsday (1992)*.⁴⁵ In 1941 Superman was fighting against Hitler or Mussolini, who posed threats to America during this period of time. Superman became a national icon due to his bravery and invincibility.

In 1978, first movie about Superman was performed with starring actor Christopher Reeve. The response was huge. However, Superman was becoming outdated and rather nostalgic. This is the reason why the publishers of Superman let him die in the battle with Doomsday in 1992, which were described on 160 pages in book *Death of the Superman*. People all over the America knew about Superman's death. His death brought huge number of new readers to DC Comics. About 5 million copies of this book were sold. One year later, in 1993 was Superman revived again in *The Return of the Superman*.⁴⁶

3.2 Batman

The character of Batman is published by DC Comics. He was created by Bob Kane and Bill Finger, and his first appearance was in Detective Comics #27 in May 1939. His real name is Bruce Wayne.

Bruce was born to wealthy couple from the high society of Gotham City Thomas and Martha Wayne. One day, when the whole family went home from the theatre, they were attacked by Joe Chill. He wanted to rob the jewelry, but in the end he shot Thomas and Martha. As an 8-year-old, Bruce became a witness of a brutal murder of his parents. This terrible experience affected him and so he decided to clean Gotham City from evil. He

⁴⁵ "List of all Superheroes and Villains", Superhero database, <http://www.superherodb.com/characters/>.

⁴⁶ Kruml, *Comis: Stručné dějiny*, 106.

started to train his mental and physical abilities. The bat inspired him and was used as a symbol. This is how Batman was born.

Batman wears a black-grey costume with a cape and an icon of bat on the chest. The costume is bullet-proof and can resist various attacks, such as explosions or falls. The gloves and boots protect him from the injury of punches or kicks. His mask ensures him the protection against x-ray powers and has an infrared viewer, sonar and night vision. He also wears yellow utility belt around his waist. There he has some basic equipment, such as explosives, cutting tool, nerve toxins, bataranges or breathing device. There are also buttons to call the car and to teleportation. He is a weapon master and invented some special devices, including his batmobile or batplane. His intellect is on very high level. Moreover, he masters martial art and is physically very capable. His secret seat is the Bat cave under his luxurious house.

In April 1940 Robin appeared in Detective Comics #38 as Batman's sidekick. His real name is Richard Dick Grayson and he was born to the family of circus acrobats. The name "Robin the Boy Wonder" was inspired by Robin Hood. Later he became an independent character called Nightwing.⁴⁷

3.3 Wonder Woman

DC Comics is publishing comic books with Wonder Woman. The character was created by William Moulton Marston and Harry George Peter. She first appeared in *All-Star Comics* #8 in December 1941. Her real name is Princess Diana.

Wonder Woman was created by psychologist William Moulton, and is the first female superhero. In Moulton's scenarios was shown the first steps to emancipation of women and their position in the patriarchal society. This was something absolutely different and brings a huge fame to this superhero. In 1960s she became an icon of feministic movements.⁴⁸

Wonder Woman is the princess of the women race of Amazons. She was created out of clay by her mother Hippolyta, and was given life by Greek gods. She was the only Amazon not touched by a man. Amazons teach her various skills, mainly the ability of martial art. But she was also given a message of love and peace. Gods blessed her with some powers. She is wearing red breastplate with the symbols of star. Her bracelets protect

⁴⁷ Superhero database, List of all Superheroes and Villains.

⁴⁸ Kruml, *Comis: Stručné dějiny*, 108-109.

her from the attacks of enemies. On her head she has tiara, also with magic power. Her superhuman strength is comparable with the strength of Superman. She also shows her strength when she, Superman and Martial Manhunter were moving the Earth. She is faster than a half of speed of light. Her flying abilities are also in this speed. She is very durable, for example the immunity to radiation or resistance against fire is very important for her. Athena granted her with wisdom, what makes her one of the smartest members of the Justice League of America. Her stamina is on superhuman level. Furthermore, she is unearthly beautiful. Lasso of Truth is the most valuable weapon of hers. As the name of this weapon mark, the Lasso effect people to tell the truth. Her invisible plane is very famous. It is drawn to look like a glass plane in comic books. Occasionally, she is using magical sword.

Her first trip to the Earth was in the moment when American pilot Steve Trevor was wrecked on Paradise Island of Amazons. Wonder Woman was sent to accompany Steve back to Earth and she should also be an ambassador of Amazons. When they arrived on the Earth, she was surprised by human attitude, mainly by the wars and conflicts among people.⁴⁹

3.4 Fantastic Four

Fantastic Four is published by Marvel Comics. Creators of this superhero team are Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, and the first appearance was in November 1961 in magazine *The Fantastic Four #1*. Members of the team are Mister Fantastic, Invisible Girl, Human Torch, and the Thing.

Before getting their superpowers, there were Dr. Reed Richards, his girlfriend Sue Storm, her younger brother Jonathan Lowell Spencer Storm and a pilot Benjamin Jacob Grimm. These four flew on the Moon with the spaceship constructed by Dr. Richards. They unexpectedly met the sub-space storm and were radiated with cosmic rays. On their way home the spaceship wrecked. Luckily they all survived. The cosmic rays affected them radically. Dr. Richards is able to form his body, Sue can be invisible, Johnny can change himself into a human torch and Ben turned into something similar to golem. They named themselves Mr. Fantastic, Invisible Girl, Human Torch and the Thing. And the

⁴⁹ Superhero database, List of all Superheroes and Villains.

Fantastic Four is on the world. To be more relaxed, Dr. Richards invented suits for the whole team. The suits were from unstable molecules and were able to adapt to their new superpowers. In addition, these costumes also work as a computer and GPS. It can provide their location. Scanner is also included in the costumes.⁵⁰

In comparison with other superheroes, these are more like a normal people. They are not flawless and have human feelings and attitudes, such as jealousy or doubts. In the stories of Fantastic Four they are not only fighting with the evil. Reader can meet their fates of a normal people. Dr. Richards and her girlfriend Sue get married after a long time of their relationship. Moreover, they have a baby after three years of their marriage. These stories of their lives were different from other comic heroes and that brings Fantastic Four success.⁵¹

Their main enemies are for example *Mole Man (1961)*, *Dr. Doom (1962)* or *Galactus (1966)*.

3.5 Spider-Man

Next comic character published by Marvel comics is Spider-man. Creators Stan Lee and Steve Ditko breathed life into this character, which firstly appeared on the pages of *Amazing Fantasy #15* in August, 1962.

Spider-man's real name is Peter Parker. Peter is a son of Richard and Mary Parker. His parents were killed in his young age and Peter was adopted by his uncle Ben and aunt May. As a shy and antisocial student on high school, Peter was bitten by a radioactive spider. Spider's bite provides him superhuman abilities, connected with the qualities of a spider.

The abilities forced him to sew a costume, which should hide his real identity. The costume is in red and blue color, made from Lycra, covered by web pattern. Symbol of black spider is placed on his chest and bigger red spired is on his back. His mask is very effective. Plastic lenses are important for the protection of his eyes, and shield him against sun, dust or dirt. They allow him to see out very clearly, but no one can see in, so his real identity is perfectly hidden. The mask also lowers his voice and makes it unrecognizable. Another important part of his suit is web-shooters. Since he can shoot ropes spider webs

⁵⁰ Superhero database, List of all Superheroes and Villains.

⁵¹ Kruml, *Comis: Stručné dějiny*, 150-151.

from his carpus, he needs some device to allow him this through the sleeves of his suit. Peter designed and made this equipment himself.

As it was already mentioned, Spider-man abilities are closely connected to the spider attributes. He can fly between buildings with the aid of his webs. He is also very strong and agile. His animal senses help him to intuit nearby danger. Other superpowers are wall-crawling, durability, stamina and good reflexes.

Peter firstly decided to use his superpowers to earn money in wrestling challenge. Later he became famous in show business. He started to fight criminals and protect the society after his uncle was murdered by a burglar. Peter felt guilty for this, because he met with the same burglar few days before his uncle's death and does not stop him robbing.⁵²

Comic books with Spider-man gain big success very quickly, because this was the first comic closely related to reality. The description of places in the city is very precious. Peter is also dealing with the problems of common man, especially the problems of teenagers. He is for example hopelessly in love with his neighbor.⁵³

Spiderman's main enemies are *Doctor Octopus (1963)*, *Lizard (1963)* or *Green Goblin (1964)*.

3.6 Anti-heroes

Anti-heroes are characters with non-heroic qualities. These characters are usually egocentric with extreme emotional deviations, without respect to social values. Anti-heroes kill their enemies or villains, while heroes do not kill at all. They are rebellious, scandalous and act illegally, however, they are still protecting the society and their objectives are commendable.

The first anti-hero is Marvel Comics' Sub-Mariner. He hates all the surface population because of the underwater bombing of his people. When he attacked New York, he was destroying bridges and buildings. Sub-Mariner also flooded Manhattan with a massive tidal wave in one episode in 1941. Readers cannot determine if he is a hero or enemy.

The Hulk is another Marvel's anti-hero. "Is he man or monster or... is he both?" was on the cover of *The Incredible Hulk #1* in 1962. Quiet and shy Dr. Bruce Banner was

⁵²Superhero database, List of all Superheroes and Villains.

⁵³ Kruml, *Comics: Stručné dějiny*, 152

exposed to a gamma radiation, which caused his transformations into a super-strong green monster, able to destroy the whole city. The difference between Dr. Banner and Hulk is compared to the switches between Jekyll and Hyde.

1986 became a crucial year for anti-heroes when DC Comics presented *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*. Old Batman composed from retirement and started to fight against the crime in Gotham City in an illegal and brutal way.⁵⁴

Venom is an anti-hero with two minds. He is an alien form of living, which combines itself with its host and changes the host's mind. Spider-Man was caught into Venom's trap when he wears the suit in the form of the venom symbiote. After this connection, Spider-Man became darker and evil. But he finally rejected to wear this suit and destroyed Venom.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Gina Misiroglu, *The Superhero Book* (Detroit: Visible Ink Press, 2004).

⁵⁵ Bart Beaty and Nick Nguyen, *Antiheroes: Heroes, Villains, and the Fine Line Between: A Cultural History of American Comic Books* (Dallas: BenBella Books, Inc., 2011).

4 MAIN COMIC BOOKS AUTHORS

4.1 Will Eisner (1917-2005)

Will Eisner was born to the family of Jewish immigrants in 1917 in New York. He was raised in lower-middle-class neighborhood in Brooklyn. In 1930s, he was selling newspapers to earn some money for the family, and there he met with the comic strips for the first time. His family later removed to Bronx, where Will visited DeWitt Clinton High School. Later he enrolled in the Art Students League of New York and studied under famous artist such as Robert Brachman or George Bridgeman. His interest for printing process was not negligible and so he started to work in the print shop. He changed a lot of jobs during his life. Eisner was hired at the New York Journal American, but he left this job soon and started to work as a freelance illustrator. When he shown his work to Jerry Iger, he became his “production man” and also his good friend. These two established new corporation Eisner-Iger Studio in Eisner’s 19. His name was on the first place because he sponsored the corporation with his money. They were producing mostly comic strips and placing them to newspapers. Eisner and Iger were hiring young artist such as Bob Kane or Jack Kirby. The young company was successful, mainly because of providing quality work for publishers. The first big client of them was publishing house founded by Victor Fox. Fox wanted a superhero, which is much better than Superman. They created *Wonder Man* (1939), who was later canceled because of the breaking the law and copying Superman.

Later Eisner left Eisner-Iger, sold his half of the company to Iger for \$20,000 and started to work on his crime comic *The Spirit* (1940). His work on *The Spirit* ended when he was enlisted to the Army in 1942. He was producing educative and entertaining posters, strips and illustrations during the war. After the war he was working on *The Spirit* again, and continued with this comic until 1952. *The Spirit* was written in interesting way. Eisner told the stories in songs, poetry or even in nonsense language.

Eisner is also very important for the comic industry because of the invention of the graphic novel. He wanted to express the comics in more mature form and so he created *A Contract with God* (1978), book full of moral tales from the environment of Bronx.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ “A Short Biography,” Will Eisner, <http://www.willeisner.com/biography/index.html>.

4.2 Jack Kirby (1917-1994)

Illustrator Jack Kirby was born in Manhattan to Jewish family of working class. His real name is Jacob Kurtzberg. He is considered one of the most influential people in the world of comics. Max Fleischer provided him the first opportunity to work as a professional in animation studios. Few years later, Kirby started to work for Lincoln Features Syndicate, when he could draw comic strips and political cartoon. During 1930s, he was working for Fox Features Syndicate. There he met with the editor and writer Joe Simon, with whom he moved to Timely Comics (later renamed to Atlas and finally to Marvel Comics). These two created well-known *Capitan America (1941)*, and get the profit of 15 percent from the sales of this successful comic book. But this pair was not satisfied with the salary and started to work for National Comics (later renamed to DC Comics).

In 1943, Kirby was enlisted to the U.S. Army, but he collaborated with Simon again after World War II. They were creating romance comics in this era, such as *Young Romance (1947)*. Kirby and Simons were trying to establish their own company Mainline Comics, but Kirby became a freelancer, working for Atlas Comics after the failure of the company. There he met with writer Stan Lee, and co-created another successful comic *The Fantastic Four*. Thanks to their innovative stories used in The Fantastic Four, Kirby and Lee became one of the most respected duos in the comic books world.

Kirby was continuing with his creation and illustrated characters for Marvel such as Thor, Hulk, the Avengers or the X-Men. His participation in DC includes for example the new version of Sandman.

As an artist, he is known for his detailed cinematic style. His characters were breaking panel boundaries and expressing motion and energy more than characters created by other illustrators. He innovated some drawing techniques. “Kirby Dots” are used for portraying radiation and energy. His colleague Stan Lee nicknamed him “The King of Comics” because of his respectful status in the comic universe.

Kirby passed away in 1994.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ M. Keith Booker, *Encyclopedia of Comic Books and Graphic Novels: [Two Volumes]* (Santa Barbara California: Greenwood Press, 2010), 352-353.

4.3 Stan Lee (1922)

Stan Lee was born to the family of Romanian immigrants in New York City in 1922. His full name is Stanley Martin Lieber. He has met with Will Eisner and Bob Kane on DeWitt Clinton High School in Bronx, where he has graduated in 1939. He changed a lot of jobs after the school, but no job was the one of his dreams.

His uncle Robbie Solomon worked at pulp magazine Timely Comics, which succeeded with its characters such as *Human Torch* (1939) and *Sub-Mariner* (1939). Solomon arranged an interview for Lieber with Martin Goodman, the owner of Timely Comics. Goodman hired Lieber as an assistant after the interview in 1940. He met with chief editor Joe Simon and art director Jack Kirby there, who created *Capitan America* in 1941. Lieber's writing career started with his text piece "Capitan America Foils the Traitor's Revenge" in *Capitan America Comics #3* in 1941, and used his pen name Stan Lee for the first time. He made this pseudonym his legal name 30 years later.

Lee's first superhero was Jack Frost, who appeared in *USA Comics #1* (1941). When Kirby and Simon left the Timely Publications in late 1941, Lee became the main writer of Timely in his 18.

Lee was enlisted in the U.S. Army a year later but he has never participated in fighting. His main purpose was writing Army songs and creating various manuals.

In 1945 he left the army and became an editor and chief writer in Timely again. He published an unusual book *Secrets behind the Comics* (1947) with the information about the creating of comic books.

Goodman started a new business Atlas Company in 1951 (later renamed on Marvel Comics) and Lee focused on writing humor and westerns.

As it was already mentioned in the previous chapter, the Comics Code Authority had touched the comic industry in 1950s and banned the usage of monsters such as werewolves and vampires. However, science fiction characters were still permitted and Lee in the collaboration with Kirby created successful titles such as *Tales of Suspense* (1959) or *Tales to Astonish* (1959). Nevertheless, Lee was not satisfied with creating of science fiction characters.

When DC Comics introduced their superhero team Justice League of America, Lee with Kirby created family superhero team *Fantastic Four* (1961) with the stories and problems of normal people.

Lee in collaboration with Atlas artist such as Kirby and Steve Ditko started to flood the universe of comics with superheroes such as *Hulk (1962)*, remaining the mixture of Frankenstein monster, Jekyll and Hyde, *Iron Man (1963)*, the team of mutants *X-Men (1963)* or *Spider-Man (1962)* in the co-creation with Ditko. Lee has created Peter Parker/Spider-Man's personality. He added the humor, feeling and emotions to comics, what was innovative in the comic industry in 1960s. Lee became very favorite and well-known among comic books readers. He was also rewarded well for his work in Marvel Comics.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Randy Duncan and Matthew J. Smith, *Icons of the American Comic Book: From Captain America to Wonder Woman [2 Volumes]* (Santa Barbara, California: Greenwood Press, 2013), 433-438.

5 DC COMICS VS. MARVEL COMICS

5.1 DC Comics

The National Allied Publication was the original name of today's DC Comics. The founder of this company was a pulp magazine writer Major Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson. The first title of National's which engaged the readers was *New Fun* (1935). The second title was *New Comics*, but with its low success it was later renamed *Adventure Comics*. This title was on the comic books market long period of time. In 1937, company published *Detective Comics*, whose initials later become the part of the new name of National Allied Publication. Wheeler-Nicholson got to the financial problems in this period of time. He was forced to sell his part of the company to distributor Harry Donenfeld, who established a new company Detective Comics, Inc. together with Jack Liebowitz. Detective Comics published its 4th title *Action Comics* in 1938 with Superman on its cover. The company was continuing in publishing successful titles and in 1939 introduced *Detective Comics #27* with superhero Batman.

In that time, Liebowitz was the co-owner of another comics company All-American Publications, together with Max Gaines. Characters as The Flash, Green Lantern or the Atom were created in this company, and were connected with characters from National on the pages of *All Star Comics* (1940) as the Justice Society of America.

In 1944, National Allied Publications and Detective Comics, Inc. merged and created National Comics. This company was unofficially renamed on DC Comics. The logo of DC was reflected on every National's comics and readers were familiar with this logo. Later National changes its name and officially became DC Comics. The company stayed profitable thanks to "The Big Three" – Superman, Batman and Wonder Woman, and kept the good name.⁵⁹

5.2 Marvel Comics

After the huge success of National Allied Publication, other authors started to create superhero comics. Martin Goodman was the publisher of Timely Comics and published

⁵⁹ Chris Ryall and Scott Tipton, *Comic Books 101: The History, Methods and Madness* (Cincinnati, Ohio: IMPACT, 2009).

new comic book *Marvel Comics #1* (1939). Superheroes of Timely Comics were different from other conventional heroes. Human Torch was introduced in the first issue. The Sub-Mariner was another hero. Readers were confused about these characters because it was difficult to determine whether they are heroes or villains.

Captain America, who appeared on the cover of *Captain America Comics #1* (1941) was the cornerstone for Timely Comics. Patriotic superhero fighting with the enemies of the nation became as famous as Superman or Batman. His creators Jack Kirby and Joe Simons were both from Jewish families and filled their comic book with anti-Nazi stories. Timely Comics was rising well during the war and its main comic books include pro-American propaganda.

The situation after the war was not so good for publishing houses. The book *Seduction of the Innocent* also influenced comic industry. Timely Comics changed its name on Atlas Comics in this period of time.

At the end of the 1950s, Atlas Comics was not a big company. The main members were publisher Goodman, Stan Lee, Jack Kirby and Steve Ditko. In 1960s, Atlas Comics was publishing mainly the science fiction tales, which ensures basic profits for the company. Goodman heard about DC's successful comic book *The Justice League of America* and tasked Lee and Kirby to create superhero team. *The Fantastic Four* was innovative comic book - the members of this team were not hiding their real identities.

Superheroes with realistic personal problems started to be a new sensation. Bruce Banner as the Hulk has weak personality, Matt Murdock as Daredevil was blind, Professor Xavier from the X-Men was on a wheelchair and Peter Parker as Spider-Man was shy and antisocial.

As the time goes, the company was renamed on Marvel Comics. Marvel focused on the darker characters such as Wolverine or Punisher.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Russel W. Dalton, *Marvelous Myths: Marvel Superheroes and Everyday Faith* (Saint Louis, Mo: Chalice Press, 2011), 5-11.

CONCLUSION

The first chapter of this bachelor thesis explained the main features of American comics. Various authors specialized in the field of comics define this genre in different way. I have chosen the definition of significant writer Scott McCloud after a deep research. Analysis of the language of comics shows the most important necessities for creating a good comic book. The connection between text and images is relevant in this graphic narrative because of the proper understanding of the story. Another part of this chapter is focused on the readers of comics. Comics were firstly established mainly for children. However, comics focused on mature topics such as crime or horror in the course of time, and the audience of comic books has extended. Collecting of comic books became a new hobby for teenagers.

The second chapter focused on the historical development of American comics. This development is divided in 5 ages: the Platinum Age, the Golden Age, the Silver Age, the Bronze Age and the Modern Age. The determination of particular eras is not always very clear. The main milestones are usually considered the crucial points for the beginning or for the end of given era. The Golden Age includes a number of important events in the history of comics. The creation of the first superhero Superman is one of the first cornerstones in the universe of comic books. In the chapter there is the description of Superman's success. He was also an American icon, patriotic symbol of national pride. During the war, comic books gained the popularity. Comics were even sent to American soldiers on the battlefield and became the best entertaining device for all Americans. One of the most important milestones in the history of comics is the establishment of Comics Code Association. Well-known psychologist Dr. Fredric Wertham caused the censoring of comic books with his book *Seduction of the Innocent*. Comic book industry was strongly affected by the censorship. A lot of characters, motives and even words were forbidden in comics for a long period of time. A few years later, comics were used as a tool for reduction of drug usage among children and teenagers. The popularity of comics fluctuated in every age.

The third chapter describes the most influential superheroes, their abilities and personalities. As it was already mentioned, Superman is considered the most important character in the comic book industry. The next superhero is Batman. Revolutionary superhero team Fantastic Four is also included in this chapter.

The fourth chapter gives the main information about life and creation of comic book author and writers. Short biography of Will Eisner, Jack Kirby and Stan Lee is the main point of this chapter.

The last chapter compares the establishment and development of two main publishing houses. DC Comics is the publisher of Superman, Batman and a number of other important characters. Marvel Comics can be proud on its Fantastic Four or Spider-Man. The struggling for the power between these two companies is still present and caused the creation of many significant characters.

This bachelor thesis summarizes the main and the most important points in the development of comic genre in America. My research helped me to divide the historical eras and shows the fundamental turns and radical changes in the comic book industry.

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