

- Leppihalme, R. 1997. *Culture Bumps. An Empirical Approach to the Translation of Allusions*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Lluch, G. 2001. *El joc.com*. Alzira: Bromera.
- Lluch, G. 2004. *El juego.com*. Alzira: Algar editorial.
- McDonough J. & McDonough, S. 1997. *Research Methods for English Language Teachers*. London: Arnold.
- Marco, J. 2002. *El fil d'Ariadna. Anàlisi estilística i traducció literària*. Vic: Eumo.
- Mayoral, R. 2003. "Theoretical detachment from reality: Academic versus professional views on translation", en Pérez González, L. (ed.). *Speaking in Tongues: Languages across Contexts and Users*. Valencia: Universitat de València.
- Monzó, E. 2002. *La professió del traductor jurídic i jurat. Descripció sociològica de la professió i anàlisi discursiva del transgènere*, [tesi doctoral]. Castelló de la Plana, Departament de Traducció i Comunicació, Universitat Jaume I.
- Monzó, E. 2003. "Un marc per a la visibilització del traductor: reflexions des de la traducció jurídica i jurada", *Traducció & Comunicació*, 4, 55-84.
- Mestres, J. M. et al. 1995. *Manual d'estil: la redacció i l'edició de textos*. Barcelona: Eumo.
- Metcalfe, E. 2003. "Exploring Cultural Difference Through Translating Children's Literature", *Meta*, XLVIII, 1-2, 322-327.
- Ruzicka, V., Vázquez, C. & Lorenzo, L. (eds.). 2000. *Literatura infantil y juvenil. Tendencias actuales en investigación*. Vigo: Universidade de Vigo.
- Shavit, Z. 2003. "Cheshire puss,... would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from there? Research of Children Literature –The State of Art. How Did We Get There – How should we proceed", en Fernández Vázquez, J.S., Labra, A.I. & Laso, E., 30-41.
- Willis, J. 1996. *A Framework for Task-Based Learning*. Oxford: Longman.

LOVE ON MARS: AN ANALYSIS OF SEXISM IN A 1950S EC COMICS STORY

Alicia Gil
 Universidad de Vigo
patchwork@telefonica.net

Resumen

En este trabajo se analiza el cómic "The Silent Towns", aparecido a fines de 1953 en la línea de ciencia ficción *Weird Fantasy* que publicaba en Estados Unidos la famosa compañía editorial de cómics de los años cincuenta EC (Entertaining Comics). "The Silent Towns" es una adaptación a cómic de la historia publicada previamente en el libro *The Martian Chronicles* del conocido autor norteamericano de ciencia ficción Ray Bradbury. El objetivo de este trabajo es analizar el sexismo que se manifestaba en los años cincuenta en este tipo de material gráfico al que tenían amplio acceso los adolescentes de la época. Pero como exposición preliminar antes de analizar el cómic propiamente dicho, se detalla el contexto histórico y el desarrollo de EC, y se estudia la historia de Bradbury que dio origen a la adaptación para comprobar si el sexismo se origina allí y cómo lo refleja el cómic. Por último, también antes del análisis del cómic, se incluyen los parámetros teóricos que se utilizan para examinar cómics en general.

Palabras claves: cómics, sexismo, ciencia ficción, macartismo

Abstract

This paper analyzes "The Silent Towns", comics story appearing towards the end of 1953 in the science-fiction line *Weird Fantasy*, which the famous comics publishing company EC (Entertaining Comics) used to publish in the 1950s in the United. "The Silent Towns" is a comics adaptation of the short story previously published in the book *The Martian Chronicles* by well-known American science-fiction writer Ray Bradbury. The objective of this study is analyzing the 1950s sexism in this kind of graphic material widely available to adolescents of the period. But as a preliminary statement before analyzing the comics story proper, the historical context and development of EC are detailed, and Bradbury's short story source of the comics adaptation is studied in order to determine if the sexism is originated there and how the comics story reflects it. Finally, the theoretical framework used to examine comics in general is included.

Key words: comics, sexism, science fiction, McCarthyism

1. Introduction

During the 1950s Entertaining Comics (EC) was an American leading company in the comics field in terms of popularity, profit and comics art. While they lasted, its horror and science-fiction lines were the most successful of the period with adolescents. From the latter, we have selected "The Silent Towns," a comics story adaptation from famous American science-fiction writer Ray Bradbury's *The Martian Chronicles*, for an analysis of material widely available to adolescents, which reflects the pervading sexism of 1950s American society. But before analyzing the comics story proper, we deem necessary first to discuss some aspects of the historical background and development of EC, and then, to examine Bradbury's original short story in order to determine if the sexism in the comics story adaptation is a faithful reflection of the original story.

2. EC and its Time

2.1. The Origin of Comic Books

In the 1930s the success of newspaper adventure comics spawned a new and highly lucrative vehicle for the comic strip: the cheap, staple-bound comic book (Gubern, 1979: 48; Kunzle, 2000). Its content origin, however, followed the same pattern as comic strips, since at first comic book content was the humorous reprints of comic strips already published in newspapers, which were given away as premiums to buyers of certain products (Gubern, 1979: 49; Kunzle, 2000). Therefore, in 1929, Dell Publishing Company launched a tabloid collection of color comics called *The Funnies*, and in 1933, *Funnies on Parade* appeared in the present format of the comic book (Gaines, 2002: 256; Gubern, 1979: 48-49).

American entrepreneur, comics pioneer, and EC founder Max Charles Gaines was present in almost all the stages of the comic book launching, so much so that he deserved an article in the influential American business journal *Forbes* in 1943 (Coma, 1979: 115; Von Bernewitz & Grant, 2002: 32). With the monthly magazine *Famous Funnies* published in 1934, Gaines employed the same formula of reprinting newspaper comic strips, but this time with the intention of putting them on sale to the general public, instead of using them as advertising give-away premiums (Gaines, 2002: 256; Gubern, 1979: 49; Von Bernewitz & Grant, 2002: 32). The success achieved soon made appear the first original art work in the comic book *New Fun* in 1935 (Gaines, 2002: 256; Gubern, 1979: 49).

But the real popularity of the format came in the second half of the thirties with continuous-action adventure comics, such as *Detective Comics* (1937), *Action Comics* (1938), and *All Star Comics* (1940) (Gubern, 1979: 49). When in 1937 several of Gaines' friends formed a corporation to publish *Detective Comics* (later DC Comics), they established the basic characteristics of comic books as follows: "We've got a real editorial policy. All new material—fast-moving adventure stories, 6 to 13

pages long—no serials, but the same strong characters continuing from issue to issue" (qtd. in Von Bernewitz & Grant, 2002: 32, emphasis in the original).

Superman, created by American writer Jerry Siegel and artist Joe Shuster, was first unsuccessfully intended to be sold to syndicates, until Gaines brought it to the attention of *Action Comics* in 1938 (Gaines, 2002: 256). It was an immediate success that consolidated the comic book format, and the formula of the superhero, who transcends all physical and social laws to punish the wicked, was launched to be widely imitated (Frattini & Palmer, 1999: 182; Kunzle, 2000). With the backing of *Detective Comics*, Gaines began publishing *All-American Comics*, and he developed his second superhero—*Wonder Woman* (Von Bernewitz & Grant, 2002: 32). Convinced of the potential of comic books as educational tools, Gaines also decided to adapt the Bible in comic format to be published as *Picture Stories from the Bible* (von Bernewitz & Grant, 2002: 10, 32).

When he noticed that comics began to be considered a "problem" by parents, Gaines daringly created an editorial Advisory Board composed of prominent educators (Von Bernewitz & Grant, 2002: 32). In order to support his view of comic books as beneficial for children, Gaines looked for the opinion of specialists, and in his 1942 article "Narrative Illustration," he quoted them as they had written in the *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*:

Normal, well-adjusted children with active minds, given insufficient outlets or in whom natural drives for adventure are curbed, will demand satisfaction in the form of some excitement. Their desire for blood and thunder is a desire to solve the problems of the threats of blood and thunder against themselves or those they love, as well as the problem of their own impulses to retaliate and punish in like form. The comics may be said to offer the same type of mental catharsis to its readers that Aristotle claimed was an attribute of the drama. This effect of the comic book in normal children is comparable to the therapeutic effect in the emotionally disturbed child. Well-balanced children are not upset by even the more horrible scenes in the comics as long as the reason for the threat of torture is clear and the issues are well stated. (qtd. in Von Bernewitz & Grant, 2002: 257).

Thus, Gaines developed a comic-book business with the conviction that he was giving society a much needed cultural product that far from being pernicious for children was highly beneficial, not only to entertain them, but also to help them develop their reading ability and stimulate their intellectual demand for knowledge in a way that could be very appealing.

2.2. EC Comics

When Max Gaines was bought out of his share of the *All-American Comics-Detective Comics* partnership in 1945, he founded EC (abbreviation of Educational Comics, reflecting his firm belief in the educational value of comic books), taking with him the rights to his *Picture Stories from the Bible* series (Von Bernewitz & Grant, 2002: 10). Therefore, Max Gaines' intervention in the development of comic

books resulted providential for the establishment of EC comics as a high-minded publishing company, specializing in history, science, and Bible comics, with titles such as *Picture Stories from American History* and *Picture Stories from Science*. In the history of EC, this is called the Pre-Trend period, which lasted until 1950 when the first horror, thriller, and science-fiction comics were published, starting a trend that was going to be extensively imitated in the American comic-book market, reaching at the time, for instance, 700 horror titles on newsstands (Von Bernewitz & Grant, 2002: 178).

After Max Gaines' untimely death in a boating accident in 1947, his son Bill Gaines inherited the company (Coma, 1984: 19; Tumey, 2000). At first reluctant to step into his father's shoes because he was studying to be a science teacher, Bill Gaines, finally, accepted his fate (Coma, 1984: 19). However, by this time his father's company was barely alive, because there had been an avalanche of more popular superhero comics (Tumey, 2000). Trying to change the didactic line of the company, Bill Gaines experimented with new contents following the lead of other comic book companies; thus, he unsuccessfully published several different genres, including romance, western, and funny animal comics (Tumey, 2000). Gaines eventually structured his classical definite line of comics which gave rise to a new period of the company, the so-called New Trend (Coma, 1984: 19, 21).

2.3. *EC's New Trend Comics*

As we have seen, when the comic book industry started for the juvenile market, it was decided that the new publications (at first dependent on already published newspaper comics) should have a fixed, Superman-style protagonist (Coma, 1984: 18). But almost at the same time and parallel to this conventional universe of permanent superheroes, a different tendency developed without a standing protagonist and specializing in different genres, just like pulp-fiction, which in many senses seemed the written equivalent of this graphic literature (Coma, 1984: 18). Following this path, the substitution of the genre for the continuing character led to the much later replacement of the mythical hero-cult with the author-cult, analogous to the Hollywood development of replacing the actor-cult by the director-cult (Coma, 1984: 18). EC was a pioneer in this tendency, which is shown by the high regard in which it held its artists. Unlike other comic book companies that kept artists anonymous, EC not only allowed artists to sign their work, but also promoted them with their biographies published in the comic books (Coma, 1984: 18-19).

The first thematic line that was consolidated by EC was the horror genre (Coma, 1984: 19). In 1950 the first issue of *The Vault of Terror* was published, and in the same year two more titles appeared, *The Crypt of Terror* (later *Tales from the Crypt*) and *The Haunt of Fear* (Coma, 1984: 19). Also in 1950, the second thematic line devoted to thrillers appeared with *Crime SuspensStories* (Coma, 1984: 20). And the third line was science fiction with *Weird Fantasy* and *Weird Science* also published in 1950 (Coma, 1984: 20). To these three lines of horror, thrillers, and

science fiction, a satirical comic book *Panic* was added in 1954, and all of them were conceived by American artist, writer, and editor Al Feldstein (Coma, 1984: 21). Famous *Mad* (first published in 1952), which, turned into a black-and-white magazine, was going to survive the demise of the other lines until the present, was created, directed, written, and mostly drawn by American artist, writer, and editor Harvey Kurtzman, who also was in charge of the war line with *Two-Fisted Tales* (first published in 1950) and *Frontline Combat* (first published in 1951) (Coma, 1984: 21).

Therefore, EC comics can be classified in different ways, as follows: according to the genre, horror, thrillers, science fiction, war, and satirical humor; according to the expressive style, realistic (the first four genres of the previous categories), and satirical (the last genre of the previous categories); and according to the editors-script writers, there were two departments: Feldstein was in charge of the first three genres and *Panic* of the last one, while Kurtzman was in charge of the fourth genre and *Mad* of the last one (Coma, 1984: 22). As Kurtzman and Feldstein were not only editors and script writers, but also artists, they had the advantage of visualizing detailed scripts with panel montage and text position, and also selecting the best artist for the job (Coma, 1984: 22).

At that time, EC's list of artists read like a "who's who" of comics in the mid-twentieth century: John Craig, Graham Ingels, and Al Williamson, the three working mostly for Feldstein; John Severin, and Bill Elder, both working mostly for Kurtzman; and finally, Jack Davis and Wallace Wood, who worked indistinctly for both (Coma, 1984: 22; Von Bernewitz & Grant, 2002: 10). Bill Gaines, in turn, actively participated in the topics and plots developed by Feldstein (Coma, 1984: 22). All this contributed to an image of EC comics, between 1950 and 1955, as an innovative collective work, and thus, the company had completed the transformation from Educational Comics to Entertaining Comics, the words Bill Gaines wanted to stand for EC (Coma, 1984: 22, 23).

2.4. *EC's Artwork and Scripts*

Creation methods for the scripts varied between Feldstein and Kurtzman, but both coincided in designing the staging by means of a previous panel montage (Coma, 1984: 25). Feldstein, who preferred to print the texts before the drawings with a semi-mechanical system called Leroy Lettering, attributed more importance to voice-over captions than Kurtzman, who did not use text to such an extent (Coma, 1984: 25). With this relative emphasis on the word, Feldstein was laying the bases for the future graphic novel, and also for the literary input that was going to characterize the next comics path that would allow to simultaneously appreciate the contributions of iconography to the literary text (Coma 1984: 25).

Unlike Kurtzman, Feldstein let artists in his charge freedom to develop all their visual ideas for the story (angle shots, framing, perspective, bodily and facial expressions, lighting, and setting) (Coma, 1984: 25). Kurtzman, on the other hand,

took more visual responsibilities, designing panel contents as guides for the artists (Coma, 1984: 25; Weist, 2002: 112). As Feldstein put it in an interview,

Harvey and I had different philosophy on artwork. Karvey's creative urge was to control the creative product overall. My urge was, okay, I made this cake, let's give it to a good icer and let him turn into something really neat looking and delicious. And that's what I wanted to do with the artists. (qtd. in Von Bernewitz & Grant, 2002: 85).

Kurtzman's meticulous nature for realism made the artists in his charge thoroughly research the topics they had to deal with, especially to give historical accuracy to war stories (Coma, 1984: 26; Von Bernewitz & Grant, 2002: 83). But Feldstein and Kurtzman's literary tasks could not totally cover their departments needs (Coma, 1984: 26). Bill Gaines kept providing Feldstein with multiple springboard ideas for stories; occasionally, script writers were hired; and also materials from other classical and contemporary writers were borrowed and adapted (Coma, 1984: 26; Von Bernewitz & Grant, 2002: 77-78). One of the last ones was famous American science-fiction writer Ray Bradbury, as in the case of the comics story we are going to analyze.

But apart from the high artistic quality of many of the episodes, from the point of view of content, there was a break with the prevailing social attitudes of the period in the United States; this is why American adolescents used EC comics as a rebellious icon, which was identified with their own generational crisis (Coma, 1984: 23). Public impact was high because EC not only openly attacked the old American Way of Life, but also waged an authentic ideological war against the reactionary wave that dominated the United States in the 1950s, which originated in the well-known historical circumstances of the Cold War, the Red Scare, and the fear of nuclear war (Coma, 1984: 23).

But the real strength and corrosion of EC Comics lay on emphasizing creative aspects and avoiding the "message" trap (Coma, 1984: 40). EC's episodes usually excel because of their own graphic-narrative progression, and only at the end of the story when suddenly and with a bold twist (the famous EC's snap ending) all the reader's predictions were shattered, the testimonial, critical, or satirical purpose could be perceived (Coma, 1984: 40). Without glorifying or romanticizing war, for instance, Kurtzman fearlessly treated the Korean war and the futility of the accumulated deaths of American soldiers in that Asian country, with stories that harshly criticized jingoism, and the manipulated notion of heroism (Coma, 1984: 40, 45; Tumey, 2000). Parallel to this, the rest of the lines specially denounced hypocrisy, intransigence, and intolerance (Coma, 1984: 45). And even in 1954, at the hype of the anti-comics campaign, anti-McCarthyism stories were published by EC with a caricature of Wisconsin Senator Joseph McCarthy, as Joe McCartaway, presenting false evidence at a hearing (Coma, 1984: 46).

2.5. *McCarthyism and EC*

We should not forget that the 1950s is the time of that amazing period in American history of the "witch hunt," when the United States became "obsessed with the idea of communist infiltration, espionage and betrayal" (Hodgson, 1998: 257). The obsession originally started in the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) in 1947, but became fanaticized to extreme levels since 1950 by notorious Wisconsin Senator Joseph McCarthy (Coma, 1984: 17). Films, newspapers, and magazines caught the spirit, warning of "a red under every bed" (*Our Times*, 1995: 377). The persecutions are well known and documented, both popularly and academically, especially in connection with Hollywood and the film industry, but have been relegated almost to oblivion in connection with the comic-book industry, without realizing that they also determined the evolution of comics with the fall of EC (Coma, 1984: 17; *Our Times*, 1995: 349).

It is important to remember that, unfortunately, McCarthyism was not the result of a few zealots in the American government; on the contrary, it was indeed supported extensively by public opinion that had succumbed to a kind of collective paranoia, as we have already stated, by the conditions involving this early period of the Cold War (Coma, 1984: 48). In cases such as EC, then, it was not McCarthy himself who started the vindictive crusade, but it was initiated concurrently with his own actions, by collaborators who shared his reactionary ideas against individual liberties and freedom of expression (Coma, 1984: 48). McCarthyism's classical "tools were innuendo, hysteria, and ad hominem attacks" (*Our Times*, 1995: 405). And in order to eradicate EC's activities, it put them to use with the help of the opportunistic book *The Seduction of the Innocent* by American psychiatrist Fredric Wertham, which linked horror comics to juvenile delinquency, a connection that was never scientifically proven, but nevertheless, profoundly affected American public opinion (Coma, 1984: 49-50; Gubern, 1979: 78; Von Bernewitz & Grant, 2002: 10).

Actually, the heart of the matter was that comic books had never had the conservative control of newspapers and syndicates, a circumstance that allowed for more boldness in topics and situations, also stimulated by the absence of advertising and the need to compete in the market to pay for costs (Gubern, 1979: 78-79). As a consequence, in 1955 a Newspaper Comics Council was instituted with the objective of separating newspaper production from comic books (Gubern, 1979: 79). Meanwhile, in the midst of a very polemical climate, the Comics Magazine Association of America, founded in 1953, created a moral code in 1954, which was basically some obligatory self-censorship rules for the members, just as the Hays Code in 1930 had been for the Hollywood industry (Gubern, 1979: 79). Examples of the rules of this comics code are "No comic shall use the word horror or terror in its title" and "Policemen, judges, government officials and respected institutions shall never be presented in such a way as to create disrespect for established authority" (qtd. in Von Bernewitz & Grant, 2002: 95).

EC's defeat seemed to be imminent in 1954 when the censor agency Comics Code Authority was established to impose the code (Coma, 1984: 51). But to make matters worse, a series of initiatives were taken in order to consolidate the effective elimination of EC: hearings held in 1954 by the Senate Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency, which utterly damaged EC's reputation; distribution boycotts and non-exhibition of EC's material on newsstands; and encouragement of the press to sensationalize protests against EC (Coma, 1984: 16-17). Obviously, the comic-book industry took advantage of all this, in order to take over EC's business and eliminate this dangerous competitor (Coma, 1984: 50). As Feldstein summed it up in an interview, "The publishers group that wanted us out of business had succeeded" (qtd. in Von Bernewitz & Grant, 2002: 88).

2.6. *EC's New Direction Comics*

With so much against his company and after the harassment at the Senate Subcommittee hearings, Gaines dropped most of his comics titles, and in 1955 decided to start a new publishing stage called New Direction, but to no avail (Coma, 1984: 51-53; Von Bernewitz & Grant, 2002: 10, 179). Out of the notoriety surrounding the company, the new comic books also ran into retailer and distributor resistance and were a money-losing venture (Von Bernewitz & Grant, 2002: 10). In desperation to save what remained of the company, Feldstein tried a magazine-sized experiment called "Picto-Fiction," with illustration and text on opposite pages, but this too was unsuccessful (Von Bernewitz & Grant, 2002: 10-11). As already noted, the only EC publication that survived to the present was *Mad*, which re-formatted into a black-and-white magazine, did not have to follow the code (Tumey, 2000).

2.7. *Epilogue of EC*

"Gone but not forgotten, EC's flame has been kept burning over the years by its most ardent fans through a series of high-quality reprints and high profile spin-offs (like HBO's *Tales from the Crypt*)" (Von Bernewitz & Grant, 2002: 11). Three decades after the extinction of EC comics, for instance, Russ Cochran published *The Complete EC Library*, a series of hardcover volumes that include reprints of the whole EC's New Trend and New Direction output, and selections of its Pre-Trend output (Coma, 1984: 54; Tumey, 2000; Von Bernewitz & Grant, 2002: 212). Cochran was a diehard EC fan who started collecting EC comics while in his teens and with some of his friends created a Chapter of the EC Fan-Addict Club (Von Bernewitz & Grant, 2002: 277). After getting his PhD and a teaching position at the physics department of Drake University in Des Moines, United States, he decided to contact Bill Gaines in order to tell him that the influence of the EC comic books had not been detrimental for them (Von Bernewitz & Grant, 2002: 277). As he put it in an interview, "My letter said something to the effect that the members of our chapter, of EC Fan-Addict Club number three, one of us is a teacher, one is a minister, one is a

doctor, one is a lawyer, and not an axe murderer in the bunch" (qtd. in Von Bernewitz & Grant, 2002: 277).

3. Analysis of Bradbury's "December 2005 – The Silent Towns"

The boy-meets-girl pattern of many romantic stories is sarcastically distorted in Bradbury's short story "December 2005 – The Silent Towns," which is "probably the most stereotypically sexist [story] in the book" *The Martian Chronicles* (Brians, 1995), and which makes use of "marginally, unkind, fat-lady humor" (Hladik, 1997). The problem of loneliness is unsuccessfully tried to be solved by the only two people left on Mars, when everybody unexpectedly returns to Earth due to the nuclear war that is waged on their native planet (Bradbury, 1963: 222).

The narration has the restricted point of view of the male character, who hears a telephone ringing in a Martian town house and after several attempts at answering it in different houses (Bradbury, 1963: 224), he finally finds out that there is a girl left on Mars, who is trying to find another living person on the planet (Bradbury, 1963: 226). But even before discovering this, out of sheer sexism, he advances the theory that the one telephoning is a girl: "It must be a woman. Why? Only a woman would call and call. A man wouldn't. A man's independent. Did I phone anyone? No! Never thought of it. It must be a woman. It has to be, by God!" (Bradbury, 1963: 225-226). Ironically, what these comments show is the woman's resourcefulness, and his own incapacity to act, even though he evinces true desperation to find somebody at the beginning of the story.

Another sample of sexism is given when he reasons out where she may be telephoning from: "If ever there was a place where a woman would putter around, patting mud packs on her face and sitting under a drier, it would be a velvet-soft, diamond-gem beauty parlor!" (Bradbury, 1963: 227). And his sexist speculation turns out to be correct! Thus, they finally learn where each of them is, but at that point the communication is cut off, and they both travel to the other's place, a decision that obviously makes them miss each other (Bradbury, 1963: 228-230). From these actions, we can infer that she is as decisive as he is; however, his sexist reasoning is that "she was so afraid when the phone died that she rushed to Marlin Village to find me!" (Bradbury, 1963: 230). It is evident that the man's sexist manifestations show what 1950s society expected of a woman.

When they finally meet, the female character portrayal is utterly unsympathetic, and even ill-intentioned and caustic, not only from the point of view of her physical appearance, but also from the point of view of her displayed behavior. The first physical description is heartless in its corrosive humor:

Genevieve Selsor stood in the open door of the salon as he ran across the street. A box of chocolates lay open in her arms. Her fingers, cuddling it, were plump and pallid. Her face, as she stepped into the light, was round and thick, and her eyes were like two immense eggs stuck into a white mess of bread dough. Her legs were as big around as the stumps of trees, and she moved with an ungainly shuffle. Her hair was an indiscriminate shade of brown that had been

made and remade, it appeared, as a nest for birds. She had no lips at all and compensated this by stenciling on a large red, greasy mouth that now popped open in delight, now shut in sudden alarm. She had plucked her brows to thin antenna lines. (Bradbury, 1963: 230-231).

The contrast of this description with conventional beauty is even more intense when we compare it with what the man had imagined her appearance was: "Long dark hair shaking in the wind; beautiful, it was. And her lips like red peppermints. And her cheeks like fresh-cut wet roses. And her body like a clear vaporous mist" (Bradbury, 1963: 229).

But to make matters worse for this unfortunate female character, she is also portrayed as selfish, and self-centered: "She broke a window and put on the brightest dress she could find. Dumping a perfume bottle on her hair, she resembled a drowned ship dog" (Bradbury, 1963: 231-232). Furthermore, everything is emphasized to make her disagreeable: "I never liked my folks, they were fools. They left for Earth two months ago. I were supposed to follow on the last rocket, but I stayed on" (Bradbury, 1963: 232). With the explanation of her reason to stay on and not following her family and friends, she makes herself even more dislikable: "Because everyone picked on me. So I stayed where I could throw perfume on myself all day and drink ten thousand malts and eat candy" (Bradbury, 1963: 232).

The final separation of the two characters with the man escaping to live alone can be metaphorically associated to the traditional male-realm of science fiction. It is a well-known fact that most of the people surrounding science fiction during the 1950s were predominantly men (Parrinder, 1980: 34). Even Bradbury himself acknowledged science fiction as a male genre, when in an interview he was asked why most science fiction was relative sexless, and he answered: "There are certain kinds of people who write science fiction. I think a lot of us married late. A lot of us are mama's boys" (qtd. in Kelley, 2001). Thus, the male character may well fit the bill as a representative member of a literature readership that wants to remain male-alone.

For a concluding analysis of Bradbury's original short story, we can here introduce the notion of Janiformity, i.e. the idea that a surface narrative or overt plot can conceal an intentional or unintentional hidden narrative or covert plot (Stotesbury, 1991: 132; Watts, 1984: 15). If we consider what American science-fiction scholar Keith Booker (2001) said as regards science fiction in the 1950s, we will have a useful insight about the ideas science fiction reflected during that period that can be applied to discover the covert plot. Booker states that, in general, the science fiction of the 1950s primarily reflects the threat of nuclear holocaust in a particularly direct and obvious way, but there were other fears which affected American life in the decade, and which found their way into science fiction (2001: 4). Two of those were the fear of communism (increased by the Soviets' eventual development of nuclear power) and the concomitant terrorization of the American public by the witch-hunting forces of anticommunist repression (Booker, 2001: 5). But both these fears were related to a more basic 1950s American fear of the Other

(Booker, 2001: 9; Gattégno, 1985: 98). In this intense political climate, then, the themes of nuclear destruction and alien invasion tended to dominate science fiction (Booker, 2001: 4).

Moreover, the issues that Booker calls "alienation and routinization," typically appearing in the limelight of social criticism during the 1950s, are also essentially involved in the complex American attitude towards the Other (2001: 16, 19). Booker summarized the definitions of these two terms as "the fear of being different from everyone else and the fear of being the same as everyone else" (2001: 19). Therefore, the form of alienation that Americans suffered in the 1950s can be described as a fear of "being identified as different, as being, in fact, the Other" (Booker, 2001: 19). In contrast, routinization in the 1950s implied being pressured to conform and to lose one's individual identity (Booker, 2001: 19). Given the complicated connection of these two apparently opposed fears, it comes as no surprise the complexity and ambivalence of American attitude toward the Other (Booker, 2001: 19). Indeed, as Booker puts it, "even within the context of Cold War Manicheanism, it became extremely difficult to determine with any certainty just who was Us and who was Them" (2001: 19). The co-existence of all these various fears might account for the otherwise apparently inexplicable level of Cold War hysteria during this period, and for the predisposition of the American people to be manipulated by opportunistic demagogues such as Senator Joseph McCarthy (Booker, 2001: 4).

Taking all this theoretical explanation of the 1950s science fiction into account and the idea of Janiformity mentioned above, we can draw some conclusions. The surface texture of the story may give rise to a straightforward message from the male character's viewpoint that could be summarized by saying that it is better to be on one's own than with people one does not like. However, there is another kind of reading that may emerge once we get rid of the all too evident emphasis on the negative aspects of the female character. Everything in the story makes the female character be placed in the position of the Other, and the relationship between male Self and this non-male Other is a highly problematic one. As the title of the short story suggests, there is no possibility of dialogue between male and female, especially when the female character does not coincide with the physical and behavioral ideals of 1950s society, or our own, for that matter. In fact, she does not reflect the fear of being different; in spite of his escape and her protests on this decision, as we have shown with our comments above, she is a strong character that from the very beginning of the story has displayed resourcefulness, determination and bravery to live by herself in a world where she can do what she wants. And this, maybe even more than her looks, is what seems to be condemned in this sexist story.

4. Analysis of "The Silent Towns" Comics Story

4.1. Analytical Framework for Comics

For the analysis of the comics story adaptation of "The Silent Towns," it is necessary to introduce certain semiotic tools developed by Spanish mass-media scholar Román Gubern (1979) and Italian semiotician Umberto Eco (1999), which we are going to follow in our analysis. Gubern proposes to divide comics into meaningful units, with the panel as the basic one (1979: 109-110). Taking Gubern's concepts into account, three kinds of possible analysis can be distinguished: first, at the level of the panel or frame (meaningful unit), and then, above and below that level (meaningful macrounits and meaningful microunits) (1979: 110). Thus, the macrounits are the global elements, which include, for instance, not only aspects of the structure of the publication (comics page, comic strip, story in the comic book or graphic novel), but also the drawing style of the comics artist, and the color scheme (Gubern, 1979: 110). The meaningful microunits, in turn, are all the elements that define, constitute, and are integrated in the panel: framing (including composition, setting and scenery, costumes, and character typology), qualification (camera angle and lighting), and certain specific comics conventions, such as word balloons (which can contain dialogues, inarticulate sounds, thoughts, and visual metaphors), onomatopoeias or sound effects, and kinetic figures (Gubern, 1979: 110-111).

But the previous elements are only the repertoire of comics vocabulary that can be combined in the paradigmatic axis. The juxtaposition of meaningful units brings about montage, i.e. the syntagmatic discourse or sequential structure (Gubern, 1979: 111, 161). Montage macrounits can be classified according to graphic or formal criteria (comics page), and according to narrative criteria (comics sequence) (Gubern, 1979: 111). In the latter category, the narrative techniques can be linear narrative and parallel narrative (Gubern, 1979: 111). The scene is the montage meaningful unit, and scene montage can be analyzed from the point of view of raccords or unions (through cuts, consecutive spaces, fusions, captions, or voice-over), spatial structures (amplification, concentration, and analytical montage), temporal structures (slow-down, flash-back, and flash-forward), and psychological structures (dreams, subjective perceptions, and psychological flash-back and flash-forward) (Gubern, 1979: 111).

Eco also proposes certain key elements to be considered when analyzing comics that can be integrated with Gubern's description of the language of comics we have just given. Those elements may be categorized into three main levels — illustration, concepts, and sounds — which may be related to the traditional linguistic categories of semantics and syntax generally used by semiotic analysis (Eco, 1999: 151). Thus, within the semantics of comics, we can include the repertoire of iconography, the visual metaphor (bright idea, seeing stars, sleeping like a log, etc.), the graphic sign used as an extension of onomatopoeic resources or sound effects, and the balloon, which might be considered a metalanguage element, a kind of

preliminary signal that imposes a reference to a certain code for the decodification of the signs inside its shape (Eco, 1999: 155-156; Fresnault-Dereulle, 1982: 184). It is evident that Eco's semantics can be related to Gubern's repertoire of meaningful microunits. But Eco's syntax takes into account not only the level of the relationship between panels (Gubern's montage units and macrounits), but also the level of the relationship between the elements within the panel (Gubern's meaningful microunits) (1999: 157-158).

Therefore, panel syntax can account for the relationships between word and image (Eco, 1999: 157). These relationships can be additive combination, words expressing what pictures cannot explain in all its implications; redundancy, words expressing what in fact is already explicit in the image; ironical independence, words detaching themselves from the image and telling the opposite story only related to the pictures in an ironical way; plain independence or parallel combination, that is to say, words and pictures that seem to follow different courses without intersecting; and finally, inter-dependent combination, where words and pictures go hand in hand to convey an idea that neither could convey alone (Barbieri, 1993: 198-199; Eco, 1999: 157; Fresnault-Dereulle, 1982: 198; McCloud, 1995: 153-155; Zabel, 2003). Montage syntax of comics is different from that of film, because it does not tend to resolve a series of still frames in a continuous flow, as in film; instead, there is a kind of virtual continuity through real discontinuity (Eco, 1999: 157-158). Comics fragment the continuum in terms of a few essential elements, and then, readers merge these elements in their imagination, and see them as a continuum (Eco, 1999: 158). To semantics and syntax Eco adds narration, and within this category, he includes the formal elements of narration (framing, montage, etc.), the nature of plot, and character typology (1999: 159). The final aspect of Eco's analysis is the ideological statement of the story, which is related to the universe of values (1999: 160), and this is obviously a relevant aspect for this study of sexism.

4.2. Analysis of the Comics Story

Having discussed the theoretical framework of semiotic analysis, we can now count on useful tools to apply to the examination of "The Silent Towns" comics story. The splash page introduces the story situation in three panels. The first panel presents the protagonist with a complete picture of his appearance from a low angle, which implicitly gives him a powerful, though lonely, look, due to the deserted surroundings (Bradbury & Crandall, 1953: 1/1). The second panel, in turn, is very interesting, because it foreshadows the development of the story. Here we have a close-up of the face of the protagonist looking at the perfect female dummies in a shop window (Bradbury & Crandall, 1953: 1/2). In the context of this story, the dummies become symbols of the kind of beautiful women he was looking for, although syntactically in counterpoint, an ironical caption states that he always wanted to "marry a quiet and intelligent woman", not a word about her looks. The last panel on the page introduces

the element that is going to forward the story: the telephone ringing (Bradbury & Crandall, 1953: 1/3).

On the second and third pages, we have all the telephonic communication problems that the protagonist encounters when he tries to answer the telephone, creating the necessary suspense for the later introduction of the female character. The macrounits of color scheme in "The Silent Towns" are characterized by strong and strident colors, with striking contrasts between block colors (e.g. Bradbury & Crandall, 1953: 2/7-8). These harmonize with the exaggerated gesticulation and the intense jerky movements of the male protagonist, which are obviously adequate for this parody of romantic love. Being a medium specifically addressing a juvenile readership and given the repressive atmosphere of the 1950s, the comics story includes a few instances of self-censorship in expressions that are less strong than the original ones in Bradbury's story: "Blast it!" (Bradbury & Crandall, 1953: 3/13) instead of "Damn you!" (Bradbury, 1963: 226), and "drop dead!" (Bradbury & Crandall, 1953: 4/19, emphasis in the original) instead of "go to hell" (Bradbury, 1963: 227).

On the fourth page, telephonic communication is at last engaged with the only woman on Mars, but it is suddenly cut off just in the last panel of the page (Bradbury & Crandall, 1953: 4/26). The following odd page is important because the protagonist travels towards his first meeting with the woman on the telephone, and when he stops to rest in the middle of the journey, he dreams about her. The panel depicting the dream is just in the middle of the page on the right margin (Bradbury & Crandall, 1953: 5/31). It is interesting to note that EC artist Reed Crandall did not use the dream balloon convention (Gasca & Gubern, 1994: 452-457). He directly included the image of the woman even with a "real" speech balloon talking to the protagonist. The only graphic elements that tell the reader that it is a dream are the sleeping expression with closed eyes on the close-up face of the protagonist in the foreground, the "floating" attitude of the woman, and the uniform blue color in which she was portrayed (Bradbury & Crandall, 1953: 5/31).

In contrast with the dream and with the dummies of the first page, the following page introduces the real woman of the story. The two panels that depict the meeting are as telling as Bradbury's description in the original story, which is almost reproduced in whole in the captions (Bradbury & Crandall, 1953: 6/37-38). First, the complete female figure in a long shot from the point of view of the protagonist, who is seen in the bottom-left-hand corner of the panel, as if frozen in the middle of a movement (Bradbury & Crandall, 1953: 6/37). This is a remarkable sensation, since all images in panels are fixed. But, as we have already mentioned, while reading comics, it is the reader who fills in the details needed to understand the images and sees them as a continuum (Eco, 1999: 158), and the continuum here was abruptly interrupted. The second panel of the first meeting focuses on the two characters with a close-up of the stupefying expression on the male protagonist's face, and also the grotesque portrayal of the woman's face (Bradbury & Crandall, 1953: 6/38). Again, Crandall's depiction seems to be highly suitable for this sarcastic story.

The following page develops the two characters' parallel aims. The woman even in a less appealing view explains why she stayed on Mars (Bradbury & Crandall, 1953: 7/43). And the man less and less convinced of his role continues with his exaggerated expressions until the last panel of the page, when he is directly confronted with the woman's plans for marriage, which have concretely taken shape in the form of a wedding dress (Bradbury & Crandall, 1953: 7/48). The last page shows his escape and her impotent anger. In the final panel, there is an image of the man with a book in his hands and a cigar in his mouth, lying next to a telephone that he never answers (Bradbury & Crandall, 1953: 8/55). As we have seen, the comics story faithfully achieves the reproduction of Bradbury's original farce in all its tasteless, gaudy details, retaining even its sexism towards the non-male Other.

5. Conclusion

As we have stated in the introduction, we have analyzed the comics story "The Silent Town" and have found that it reflects the pervading sexism of 1950s American society. To reach this conclusion, we have examined the source story written by Bradbury, which was the object of the comics adaptation by EC, with the help of Booker's key concepts of alienation and routinization, related to the relevant idea of fear of the Other that was one of the most typical anxieties of 1950s American life. Finally, we have analyzed the comics story using the semiotic framework developed by Gubern and Eco. Therefore, we can conclude that in "The Silent Towns," the sexist parody and satire implicit in the original story were conveyed with the exaggerated gesticulation and the strident colors, relegating the non-male Other to the grotesque fat-lady image.

Bibliographical References

- Barbieri, Daniele. 1993. *Los lenguajes del cómic*. Trans. Juan Carlos Gentile Vitale. Instrumentos Paidós 10. Barcelona: Paidós.
- Booker, Keith M. 2001. *Monsters, Mushroom Clouds, and the Cold War: American Science Fiction and the Roots of Postmodernism, 1946-1964*. Contributions to the Study of Science Fiction and Fantasy. 95. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.
- Bradbury, Ray. 1963. *The Martian Chronicles*. Ed. Norman P. Ross and Max Gissen. Time Reading Program Special Edition. New York: Time.
- Bradbury, Ray (w), [Al Feldstein (s-w)], and Reed Crandall (a). 1953, Nov.-Dec. "The Silent Towns." *Weird Fantasy* #22, [EC Comics]. Rpt. in *Weird Fantasy* v1 #22 (Jan. 1998), Gemstone Publishing: 1-8.
- Brians, Paul. 1995, June 6. "Study Guide for Ray Bradbury's *The Martian Chronicles* (1950)." (last rev. 27 Mar. 2003). *Washington State University*. 27 Ago. 2003. www.wsu.edu:8080/~brians/science_fiction/martian_chronicles.html#rocket.

- Coma, Javier. 1979. *Del gato Félix al gato Fritz: Historia de los comics*. Col. Punto y Línea. Barcelona: Gustavo Gili.
- _____. 1984. *El ocaso de los héroes en los comics de autor*. Barcelona: Península.
- Eco, Umberto. 1999. *Apocalípticos e integrados*. Trans. Andrés Boglear. 12th ed. Palabra en el Tiempo. 39. Barcelona: Lumen.
- Frattini, Eric, and Óscar Palmer. 1999. *Guía básica del comic*. Madrid: Nuer.
- Fresnault-Deruelle, Pierre. 1982. "Lo verbal en las historietas." *Análisis de las imágenes*. Christian Metz et al. Trans. Marie Thérèse Cevasco. Serie Comunicaciones. Barcelona: Ediciones Buenos Aires.
- Gaines, Max Charles. 2002. "Narrative Illustration: The Story of the Comics." 1942. 1-14. Rpt. in *Tales of Terror! The EC Companion*. By Fred von Bernewitz & Grant Geissman. Seattle: Fantagraphics; West Plains, MO: Gemstone. 243-258.
- Gasca, Luis, and Román Gubern. 1994. *El discurso del cómic*. 3rd ed. Signo e Imagen 10. Madrid: Cátedra.
- Gattégno, Jean. 1985. *La ciencia ficción*. Trans. Diana Luz Sánchez. Colección Popular. 292. México: Fondo de Cultura Económica.
- Gubern, Román. 1979. *El lenguaje de los comics*. 4th ed. Barcelona: Península.
- Hladik, Tamara. 1997, Feb. 24. "Classic Sci Fi." Rev. of *The Martina Chronicles*." *Science Fiction Weekly*. Vol. 3. No. 4. Issue 40. Internet. Online. 21 Dec. 2003. Available www.scifi.com/sfw/issue40/classic.html.
- Hodgson, Godfrey. 1998. *People's 20th Century: From the Dawn of the Century to the Eve of the Millennium*. New York: Times Books-Random House.
- Kelley, Ken. 2001. "Playboy Interview: Ray Bradbury." *Playboy*. 1996. Rpt. in "About Ray Bradbury: Articles & Press." *Ray Bradbury*. HarperCollins. Internet. Online. 21 Dec. 2003. Available www.raybradbury.com/articles_playboy.html.
- Kunzle, David M. 2000. "The Comic Strip." *Encyclopaedia Britannica CD*. Deluxe ed. CD ROM.
- McCloud, Scott. 1995. *Cómo se hace un cómic: El arte invisible*. Trans. Enrique Abulí. Barcelona: B.
- Our Times: The Illustrated History of the 20th Century*. 1995. Ed. Lorraine Glennon. Atlanta: Turner.
- Parrinder, Patrick. 1980. *Science Fiction: Its Criticism and Teaching*. New Accents. London: Methuen.
- Stotesbury, John A. 1991. "The Intransigent Internal Colony: Narrative Strategies in Modern South African Popular Fiction." *Literature and Imperialism*. Robert Giddins, ed. London: Macmillan. 128-149.
- Tumey, Paul. 2000. "E.C. Publications." *All about Comix*. Online. Internet. 17 Nov. 2003. Available www.allaboutcomix.com/publisher-ec.html.
- Von Bernewitz, Fred, and Grant Geissman. 2002. *Tales of Terror! The EC Companion*. Seattle: Fantagraphics; West Plains, MO: Gemstone.

- Watts, Cedric. 1984. "Janiform Novels." *The Deceptive Text: An Introduction to Covert Plots*. Sussex: Harvester; Totowa, NJ: Barnes & Noble. 13-29.
- Weist, Jerry. 2002. *Bradbury, An Illustrated Life: A Journey to Far Metaphor*. New York: William Morrow-HarperCollins.
- Zabel, Joe. 2003. "Comics Analysis." *Amazing Montage*. Online. Internet. 17 Nov. 2003. Available <http://amazingmontage.tripod.com>.