

which seems relatively arbitrarily delineated; the three genres overlap in time but dominate according to the political and social conditions of society.

An annoying tendency in cultural criticism has been to conflate all postwar activity, at least that of the last 20 years, as “postmodern.” Buxton’s contribution to critique is to explore with interpretative creativity and credibility the possibility that particular historical configurations lead to particular ideological resolutions in television series, giving rise to different genres. The issue Buxton develops, more or less in the interstices of his argument rather than as a clear center, is that of historical particularity: How can we understand television as the attempted imagined resolution of social contradiction unique to specific social conditions?

In the end, Buxton offers no theoretical closure; we are left with one paragraph concluding that packaging may overcome television fiction’s autonomy as a cultural form—a startling conclusion for a monograph that begins by showing the fiction’s development within material production, which is hardly “autonomous.” If the critic’s job is, as Buxton says, to point out ideological structuring absences, there should be a specific political point to criticism; otherwise, theory deteriorates into methodology, with no more justification for its existence than for other types of research of which he speaks so slightly. Buxton is, I think, correct to suggest that the new audience theory should not abandon text. To retreat into a new sort of structuralism, however, does not seem to push the cause of critical studies any farther toward the

political critique that was the original goal of the theory of ideology on which he bases his work.

### **The Many Lives of the Batman**

Edited by Roberta E. Pearson and William Uricchio. New York: Routledge, 1991. ix + 213 pages. \$39.50 (hard), \$13.95 (soft).

A review by Matthew P. McAllister  
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and  
State University

This book’s title, *The Many Lives of the Batman*, has a dynamic dual meaning. First, the “many lives” refers to the elastic nature of the Caped Crusader as a character—the Batman is, to apply a term used in the book, a “floating signifier” in comic books and different media. There are many different Batmen: the grim Batman of the 1940s comic book, the amateurish and overly patriotic Batman of the 1940s movie serials, the campy Batman of 1960s television, the postmodern Batman of 1980s comic art miniseries *The Dark Knight*, and the Michael Keaton Batman of the 1989 blockbuster movie, among others.

But also there is another meaning associated with the Batman’s “many lives.” In large part because of the character’s flexibility of meaning, it offers a unique showcase for the applicability of different scholarly approaches to mass communication and popular culture. The two editors of *The Many Lives of the Batman*, Roberta E. Pearson and William Uricchio, take great advantage of this opportunity by offering an eclectic

selection of interpretive and critical perspectives on Batman as a commodity, a cultural icon, and a source of popular appeal. Despite claims of "blurred genres" and "paradigm dialogues," different intellectual approaches toward popular culture and mass communication do not talk to one another often enough. This stagnating separatism closes off avenues of growth, and it is thus refreshing to see within one book many different approaches being applied to one cultural phenomenon.

The book is organized according to issues of production, audience, and content. It begins with one perspective that is often missing from scholarly tomes, that of the media practitioner. The first chapter is an insightful (although not comprehensively referenced) history of the Batman character—and by extension a history of the comic book medium—by Bill Boichel, the owner of a comics-related business. The next two chapters are interviews with two comic book creators recently associated with the Batman character, Dennis O'Neil and Frank Miller. The interview with O'Neil, the current editor of two Batman comic books, provides a good overview of what the comic book industry looks like from a practitioner's perspective, including how a comic book is produced. The interview with Frank Miller, the comic book "auteur" of the much publicized and high-selling miniseries *The Dark Knight*, deals with the revisionist image of the superhero that recent comics creators have attempted, and Miller's subsequent disillusionment when this trend was either ignored or co-opted by the larger comic book companies. Eileen

Meehan next takes a more critical political economic perspective, specifically focusing on how the economic strategy that accompanied *Batman: The Movie* (including promotion, licensing, and merchandising decisions) fits in with the synergistic philosophy of the mega-media corporation that produced it (at the time Warner Communications, Inc., now Time-Warner).

The book then shifts focus and begins to deal with issues of the audience, a topic that is currently drawing much academic interest. Patrick Parsons presents a history of the comic book audience, providing much valuable and otherwise difficult-to-find quantitative data about the changing nature of the comic book audience. Camille Bacon-Smith with Tyrone Yarborough draws on folklore scholarship to attempt an inductive study of how different audiences interpreted *Batman: The Movie*. Lynn Spigel and Henry Jenkins argue that how people remember mediated phenomena is strongly influenced by current cultural contexts, and provide evidence for this argument by contrasting 1960s press musings about the "pop art" controversy of the Batman television series with recent interviews of people who grew up watching the program. One could argue, however, that comparing the columns of television critics with the remembrances of then-child viewers is comparing discursive apples and oranges. Finally, in the wittiest writing of the book (and an essay that must have irked if not shocked those at DC Comics), Andy Medhurst interprets Batmen of different eras from a subcultural gay-studies perspective, arguing that the Bat-

man of the 1940s and the television "camp" Batman may offer unique meaning to many members of the gay male community.

The last two essays deal with Batman as text. In an article applying one version of postmodern theory, Jim Collins shows how comic books and the movie version of Batman are explicitly intertextual, referring constantly to previous cultural forms and thus increasing the possibilities of multiple readings. The last essay, "I'm Not Fooled by that Cheap Disguise," written by the two editors of the book, is reminiscent at times of the approach taken at the Center for the Study of Popular Culture at Bowling Green State University. Looking at the values communicated by Bat-discourse, the article focuses on the changing nature of the character, the relationship between Batman and both the Joker and Robin, and the subtle ways through which Batman as a cultural text legitimates the status quo.

Aside from a few minor misspellings (Spiderman should be Spider-Man; Comic Buyers' Guide should be Comic Buyer's Guide—comic book people are touchy about this sort of thing), one problem with the book, and maybe an inherent problem given the book's goals, is fragmentation. At times it was a bit difficult to get a handle on the book as a cohesive work. The book would have benefited from a concluding essay that attempted to tie together the many perspectives into some sort of coherent package, showing how analyses of production, audience, and text relate to each other and help us to understand cultural phenomena as a whole. Of course, such an essay

would stress not only the commonalities: pointing out the fundamental differences in the perspectives would also help the reader understand the intellectual value and location of the book's contents.

But despite this, overall the book has many strengths. It focuses attention on a cultural form that often is ignored in communication scholarship. Nearly all of the essays successfully integrate historical context in their contributions to the Bat-culture. This is refreshing in that much scholarship on comic books completely discards the history of the medium and of past academic work, or presents a nonreflexive history, ignoring interactions between comics and other media, for example, or all previous scholarship except that of Frederick Wertham, when in fact around 200 scholarly works about comic books were published *before* Wertham's 1954 *Seduction of the Innocent*. And lastly, the book nobly illustrates how a variety of analytic frameworks may be applied to one popular character, highlighting that the multidisciplinary nature of communication studies is one of its most vibrant attributes.

### **Pray TV: Televangelism in America**

By Steve Bruce. New York: Routledge, 1990. xii + 272 pages. \$59.50 (hard), \$16.95 (soft).

A review by Stephen J. Pullum  
University of North Carolina at  
Wilmington

Although media attention to televangelism has diminished within the last

Batman is one of the few original comic-book characters to have generated more popular interest and revenue from exposure in media other than comic books. But Batman is first and foremost a product of comic books, and it is in this medium where he has been most influential. The whole multitude of costumed avengers driven to strike fear into the hearts of evil-doers owe much to Bob Kane and Bill Finger's Batman—the original comic-book caped crusader. *The Many Lives of the Batman: Critical Approaches to a Superhero and His Media*. New York, Routledge, 1991. Vaz, Mark Cotta. When Batman gets word of this, he decides to get on the Batplane and stop Strange's henchmen from transporting one of the monsters to Gotham City. Batman, who loves guns in his early days, uses a machine gun to shred through the henchmen's truck causing them to crash. Then he captures the Monster Man by tying a rope around his neck and hanging him from the Batplane. So yeah, Batman flies his fancy plane around with the corpse of his enemy suspended a few feet below. 742. 249. *Celebrities Who Live in Texas The Best 'Us' Movie Quotes The Most Beautiful Redhead Actresses The 25+ Best Anime Based On Otome Games List of Famous Bands from Detroit 11 Historically Inaccurate Details From History Channel's 'Vikings'*. *Many More Lives of the Batman*. Roberta Pearson. 4.0 out of 5 stars 1. Paperback. \$24.85. Since his 1939 debut Batman has appeared in a stream of guises—the original Dark Knight of the '40s, the "bright, sunny fellow" of the '50s, the campy clown of the '60s and the current complex character that incorporates both "obsessed loner" and comedic traits. In this intriguing collection of essays, editors Pearson and Uricchio, who teach mass communications at Penn State University, join contributors to examine the reasons for this frequent overhaul in the nature of the Caped Crusader. They point to the comic-book industry's Batman's first big-budget lives-action movies were going to be cause for excitement no matter what, but that doesn't mean they were the most accurate depiction of the hero. As much as people made of how Batman was portrayed in *Dawn of Justice*, neglecting Bruce Wayne's philosophy against killing was something that happened right from his movie appearances in the '80s. Batman kills so often in Tim Burton's movies that we could probably devote about half of these entries to such incidents, but we'll consolidate them for the sake of covering more ground. In *Batman Ret* In this hardcover edition, the characters of Batman (Bruce Wayne), Robin (Richard Grayson), and Catwoman (Selina Kyle) are imaginatively reinvented so that their lives and relationships are intertwined with both familiar and foreign facets. Investigating reports of a giant alligator living in the Gotham reservoir, the vigilante known as the Bat-Man discovers the dead body of his ex-girlfriend, Selina Kyle. Now he and Detective Richard Grayson must uncover how Selina died before another victim is claimed. This gripping tale is told in a sideways "landscape" format to better showcase t