**Captain America: Winter Soldier Volume 5 Analysis**

Throughout the semester we have covered numerous themes in the realm of comic book reading and interpretation. These themes help explain the captivating tendencies that these graphic novels have on the readers. In addition to this, we also learned to analyze the different components of a comic book and explore how it plays a role in creating the “reading experience”. These experiences are built off of a combination of many different stylistic and written messages. By analyzing the recently released Captain America, Volume 5 series, it will be possible to not only look into these themes, but also explore the world of a comic book writer through the message and styles of his work. This series, written in 2007 by Ed Brubaker, makes use of nearly all of the themes we covered during this course, but focusing on perspective and color one can grasp the message of the series in a more useful manner. Given the boom of comic related movies released recently, this superhero should be well known, though the comic is a completely separate entity.

In order to analyze the latest rendition of the Captain America comic series, it is important to look at its history. In 1941, Captain America first appeared, featured in Captain America Comics #1 (Database) starring in his own publication. Although this character may be known as a strong superhero fighting to better the lives of others, this was not always the case. This superhero’s story begins while he is younger and like every other person around him. His birth name is Steve Rogers and his story begins with him describes as a “scrawny fine arts student growing up during the Great Depression” (Database). This is a far fetch from what most people see when looking at his pictorial representation as a hero. He grew up with an alcoholic father who passed away during his youth. The loss of his father was then met with his mother contracting and later dying of pneumonia, both before he even graduated high school. Like many other superheroes in both the Marvel and DC universes, the early days of this superhero were met with death of those closest to him. This obviously left a mark on his character. During his time in college, he saw the atrocities being committed overseas by the Axis powers, marking what I would consider to be the biggest defining factor of his life thus far.

After seeing the horrific acts against humanity performed by the Nazis, Steve decided it was time to step up and try to enact change in the right direction. This led him to sign up for the military, which is where this story takes a surprising turn. Due to his weak figure, he failed the physical endurance tests and was denied entry into the US army. All was not lost as an offer was made allowing him entry into a special research program called “Operation Rebirth” (Wikia). During this secret program, he was injected with a special serum that would transform his body into a figure of human perfection with regard to strength, stamina, and sheer power. The serum was successful, his transformation went exactly to plan, and the doctor who created the performance enhancer was murdered by Nazi assassins leaving Steve the only super soldier.

From this point on, the military used Steve for two distinct purposes. His primary military objective used him as counter propaganda. As the Nazis spread their objectives through propaganda, the military gave Steve the name Captain America and used him as propaganda to raise support for the effort that would defeat the Nazis. His other purpose was to act as a high level spy, breaching Nazi camps and sabotaging their efforts. While all of this was going on, he befriended a kid at his base camp that went by the name “Bucky Barnes”, who would later become a close friend, and his sidekick.

The story of Captain America went through several iterations between its original release in the 1940s and today. The most notable change from the original storyline came in the 1950s during an attempt at revitalizing the captain America franchise after it lost popularity following the end of World War II. During this series of books, Captain America’s sidekick isn’t seen in any role, and the Captain’s origins have changed. He is introduced as an MIA soldier following WWII who is found in an iceberg by a group of superheroes called the Avengers. Upon locating the missing soldier in an iceberg, they free him allowing him to continue down his path of justice. After deciding to join their efforts, he is accepted as a member and begins his story as a member of the Avengers. This series of comics continues through the 1950s before, again, being cancelled

The present day Captain America was revitalized in the 1960s restoring the original story line and bringing back his sidekick Bucky Barnes. In 2007, Volume 5 of Captain America was released and titled the Winter Soldier. This release contains many distinct themes that really help push the message behind the comic. Brubaker, the author, does not use the gutter in a traditional manner, with some frames running completely off the page allowing for better flow between related content. In addition, there are a limited number of consistent frames, most changing size as the story progresses. His use of color to emphasize emotion and express the significance of certain periods in time throughout the novel really grasped my attention. This is usually used in combination with the gutter and frame modifications to really grab the eye. In addition to this, the perspectives used go hand in hand with the use of coloring that can be seen in Captain America, Volume 5 Part 1 (Brubaker and Epting). The combination of these design features really captivated me and pulled my being into the universe as I worked through the novels.

These topics have a significant impact on the reader, providing a sense of emotion that points the reader in the direction in the intended direction yet lets them imagine their own scenarios. Brubaker uses color to really emphasize the emotion of a specific scene while setting the mood of the accompanying text. On page 10 of Volume 5, Issue 1 Captain America is asked how he really is. This sparks a flashback to his past of fighting the Nazis and seeing his parents and friends die. Typically flashbacks have some defining feature, either text stating “Years earlier” or a different frame style showing the reader a change in time. Brubaker does this through ingenious use of color. The book transforms from a full color, vibrant full page spread to a sepia toned, dark and intense feeling. The user does not need to imagine the flashback, but can instead focus on the content and be provided the visual reminder of a change in time.

In addition to time, Scott also uses color to give context to conversations. When Captain America is the primary focus, the colors are highly vibrant and bright. Even without reading the text or analyzing the characters in frame, the reader gets an upbeat feeling, pointing to the main character subconsciously. On the same note, the writer uses dark colors and a lack of crisp detail to portray the heaviness of a bad guy being a center of attention. On page 4 of the comic book, the Red Skull is conversing with one of his fellow bad guys; the page is drawn with a significant usage of blacks and reds with a complete lack of any vibrant colors. The surroundings are also dark to give a feeling of uneasiness to the reader. Throughout this entire series the use of color allows the reader to become engrossed in the situation even more than if they had to imagine the gravity of a situation.

Another aspect of the comic book’s design that helps mould the reading experience is the use of perspective. This doesn’t necessarily refer to the image in particular, either zooming in on a specific feature or showing a broad expanse of space, but it also includes the actual frames and surrounding gutters. Brubaker likes to use a massive variance in frame and gutter throughout Volume 5 to set a specific feeling into play. Very rarely are there consistent frame sizes in the series, which can be used to break up a story or create an event without text where text would typically be used. For example, on page 15 of the first book of the series Captain America is fighting a criminal. Instead of including text that gives context of the conflict, the frames zoom in and out from a wide angle view of the battle to a close up of Captain America straining to fight the perpetrator or a close-up of the bad guy struggling to fight back.

Finally, when Brubaker really wants to place importance on a specific scene either for foreshadowing, dramatic passing of time, or a really intense scene containing a message or important event, the style changes completely. If coloring is dull, it will suddenly become bright, and if it is bright, it will darken to attract attention. In addition to the color change, the gutter is often times eliminated allowing the frame to fill the entire width of that page. These frames in particular really draw in the reader and allow them to analyze details remembering them for later use.

Overall, in Captain America Volume 5, Brubaker utilizes color and perspective changes in many unique and useful ways. From differentiating the passing of time and conversations between the protagonist and antagonists with colors, it truly sets a particular mood. Importance of certain events is also very well articulated through the use of perspective change and alteration of frame sizes and shapes and gutter changes. Overall, as stated in an interview upon the closing of the fifth volume, Brubaker says that he felt that although the superhero gets his glory, it is wrought with problems (Brothers). I feel that this series portrays the benefits and the determents of being a superhero perfectly. This is shown in a fantastic manner through the use of the perspective and coloring analyzed throughout the first issue.

# Bibliography

Brothers, David. "The Ed Brubaker ‘Captain America’ Exit Interview." *Comics Alliance* (2012). Web.

Brubaker, Ed and Steve Epting. *Captain America: Out of Time*. Vol. 5. New Yoork City: Marvel, 2005. Print.

Comics, Marvel. *Captain America (Steve Rogers)*. Jan 2013. Web. May 2014.

—. *Captain America Comics*. New York: Marvel Comics, 1941. Comic.

Craig, Shutt. *Bad is Good*. Wizard, 1997. Print.

Database, Marvel Cinematic. *Captain America*. 2012. Web. 30 March 2014.

Wiki, Marvel. *Appearing in "Out of Time (Part I of VI)"Edit*. January 2005. 4/4/14 April 2014.

Wikia. *Marvel Cinematic Universe Timeline*. 2010. Web. 1 April 2014.