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Comic books and graphic novels have a telling impact on popular culture. A quick look at the table of contents of Greenwood’s recent two-volume set, Encyclopedia of Comic Books and Graphic Novels (2010, 978-0313357466, $180) more than bears this out. Edited by M. Keith Booker, professor of English at the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville, this set attempts to show the evolving development of comic books, once seen as “mindless entertainment for kids” and the graphic novel which provides “a new and more respected outlet for the comics’ art form.”

The Encyclopedia consists of more than 330 entries by 80 contributors that cover writers, artists, themes, and specific titles and characters, as well as noted publishers like DC Comics, Marvel, and Dark Horse. Although the preponderant coverage is of American writers and artists, there is a solid tradition in both Europe and Japan which is reflected in specific entries on “European Comics” and “Manga” as well as those on artists like Jean Giraud and Osamu Tezuka.

The entries are well-written and both serious and informative for researchers, as well as fun for fans. The set has a standard list of alphabetical entries in addition to a list of entries by broad topic and a general index. While the overall tone of the articles is serious and scholarly, the individual entry bibliographies are uneven. A few have useful selected bibliographies like the articles on “Comics Scholarship,” “Ghost World,” “Religion in Comics,” and “Superheroes,” but many entries have one citation, and others have no source listed at all. Hopefully any future edition will provide more useful bibliographies.

Given its “Anglophone” emphasis, the Encyclopedia of Comic Books and Graphic Novels makes no claim to be a truly comprehensive resource. However, it highlights the most influential developments from the early Superman comics to Marvel’s cast of superheroes to Will Eisner’s A Contract with God (often seen as the first Graphic Novel) to the critical respect afforded the work of Art Spiegelman. Editor, continued on page 49