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Book Review: Dave Sim

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David Sim: Conversations, edited by Eric Hoffman and Dominick Grace, Jackson, University Press of Mississippi, 2013, 256 pp., US\$40.00 (hardcover), ISBN: 978-1-61703-781-8

Dave Sim, author of *Cerebus*, is nearly all things to all people—at least all people who have heard of him. To some, he is a steely-eyed self-publishing pioneer. To others, he is a formal virtuoso with borderline schizophrenia. Some might call him a brilliant satirist with a politically conservative bent, while others might say he is a misogynist and a fascist, and on and on the descriptions go. In many ways, Sim’s public persona mirrors *Cerebus*, the titular character of his life’s work: “*Cerebus* . . . has been mercenary warrior, a politician, a religious leader and scholar, a revolutionary, a professional sports player, a bartender, and a comic-book fanboy, among other roles” (Robinson 2004, 205). One of the great strengths of *Dave Sim: Conversations*, a collection of Dave Sim interviews edited by Eric Hoffman and Dominick Grace, is that its wide breadth of interviews expresses the progression in Sim’s thinking and the complex set of relations between Sim and his fan base, Sim and his art, and Sim and himself. Appropriately, just as *Cerebus*, *Cerebus* the character, and Sim take on a wide variety of meanings for different people, so too will *Dave Sim: Conversations* have diverse meanings for different sets of readers.

For long-time fans of *Cerebus*, these interviews provide insight into Sim and Gerhard’s creative process, as well as a wealth of knowledge about the comic book industry. One of the uniquely beneficial features of this book is the attention to detail on the part of the editors, which primarily manifests itself in the form of bracketed information. In his lengthy discussions of the comic book industry, Sim often refers to other artists, editors, and comics. These references are numerous, occasionally vague, and often obscure. If Hoffman and Grace did not explain that Mort Weisinger was the “famed *Superman* editor at DC comics,” (Skidmore 1989, 9) or that FA stands for *Fantasy Advertiser*, the reader would either continue on without relevant knowledge or stop reading to look up that relevant information, which would make for a choppy reading experience. *Dave Sim: Conversations* does not merely collect and present these interviews, but rather illuminates them and facilitates a smooth reading experience.

For readers who have come to Sim’s work in the last decade, this collection presents a history of *Cerebus*, both straightforwardly—in the form of the editors’ introduction—and as embedded history in the form of the interviews themselves. The introduction for this work could have easily become plodding and overlong, considering the large and occasionally unwieldy nature of their subject. Yet in a mere thirteen pages, Hoffman and Grace manage to concisely convey the essential information for understanding the subject of Dave Sim. The editors also include a helpful chronology that begins in 1956 with Sim’s birth in Hamilton, Ontario and ends in 2012 with the announcement of new projects (digital *High Society*, *glamourpuss Volume 1*, *The Strange Death of Alex Raymond*). Relative newcomers to *Cerebus* will learn background information that makes greater sense of *Cerebus* as a whole. For instance, they will learn that *Cerebus* started out as parodic episodes and later graduated to long-form, novelistic storytelling. Perhaps more crucially, however, new readers of Sim’s work will learn of issue #186, in which Sim published his “Tangent” essay and kicked off the controversy surrounding his views on gender.

For critics of Sim, the collection offers a chance for a more nuanced look at Sim, as an artist and as a reader of his own work. Critics of Sim have often assumed a 1:1 correspondence between his views and his characters’ views. As Hoffman and Grace note in their introduction, “Though current trends in literary criticism dictate that art and the artist are wholly distinct, Sim does not generally benefit from this differentiation” (vii). Yet, Sim notes the problem of equating

artist with art (or characters in that art) in his 1996 interview with Tom Spurgeon: “I have as much in common with Victor Reid—speaking here as Dave Sim, human being—as I have in common with Tarim. I mean, I couldn’t put myself in the book. It would be too difficult to ship, for one thing” (135). Further, various moments throughout the interviews poke holes in the simplistic label, “misogynist,” that many critics have given Sim, as when Sim speaks admiringly of the female character, Astoria (Spurgeon 1996, 133), or when Sim notes the similarity between daughters and *Cerebus*: “the daughter view[s] herself not as a raw material but as a finished product” (131). *Dave Sim: Conversations* presents a picture of Sim that is not quite comprehensive, but still adequate, accurate, and enriching—whether the reader is a long-time fan, a newcomer, or a Sim naysayer.

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