

Abstract

Boston University's English Department, though undoubtedly prestigious, is currently lacking in one important aspect of the study of literature: what brought its students and teachers to the study of English and literature in the first place. An examination of the children's books that first engendered an interest and love of this topic in today's students, teachers, readers and writers, is vital to an understanding of the works these people create and study as adults. Therefore, this research was dedicated to beginning the creation of a class on Children's Literature to be taught by Professor Henschman during the Spring 2016 semester.

Themes and Motifs

- Fear/the bizarre = green
- Independence/isolation/responsibility = red
- Magical practitioners = purple
- Fairies = blue
- Intelligent animals = black

Method

Over the course of this summer, all the materials were collected needed to put together a basic class on Children's Literature. These were found at various local public and university libraries, as well as online. One hundred short novels, poems, picture books and more, were read, annotated, compared and contrasted, while comparisons and overlaps were drawn between them. Various definitions of important terms in Children's Literature and interesting syllabi from other classes on the topic were also collected, as well as a list of relevant critical works on Children's Literature, from books to short articles. All of these materials in conjunction, as well as the connections drawn between the various works, will be the foundation of the class.



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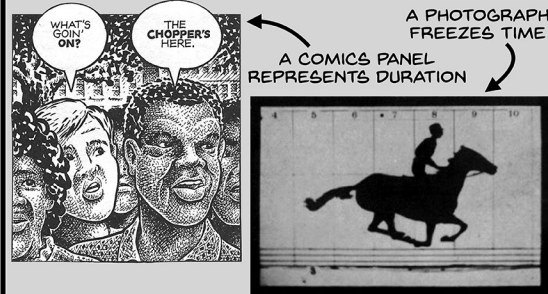
Abstract

Comics is a genre that exists at the juncture of word and image. And, unlike movies or plays, comics is a static form—it doesn't move. As a result, comics has formal properties that don't exist in novels, movies, or plays. I studied the complex and subtle signals that comics creators use to indicate the passage of time within individual panels. But how do panels represent time? Since panels are static images, they cannot represent time by showing something happen—as a movie does—or by describing time unfold—as a novel does. Instead, panels use verbal and non-verbal symbols, such as speech bubbles and sound effects, to represent the passage of time.

Superficially, individual panels often appear to be instantaneous, like a still from a movie. But close analysis shows that a comics panel can represent lengthy durations of time. I found that a series of speech bubbles can signal a linear sequence of time, an ambiguous sequence of time, or multiple co-existing timelines. I further found that sound effects' primary function is *not* to integrate sound into a comics panel, as their name might suggest. Instead, sound effects allow comics to expand or compress durations of time spatially, an effect akin to slowing down or speeding up time in a movie. By zooming in on the techniques comics use to represent time in a single panel, I have provided a framework that will deepen the current critical discussion about comics.

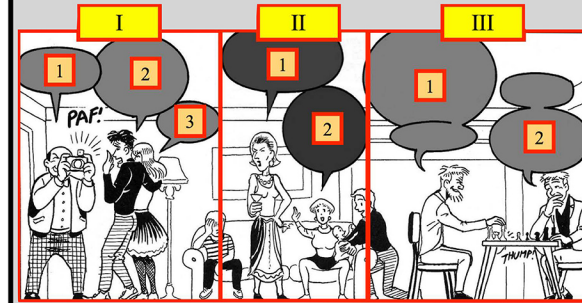
THAT'S A LOT. BUT THIS IS ACTUALLY PRETTY COOL.

WHEN WE SEE A FRAMED IMAGE WE THINK FROZEN MOMENT. BUT, WHILE A PHOTOGRAPH FREEZES TIME, A COMICS PANEL IS A SPACE THAT YOU MOVE THROUGH.

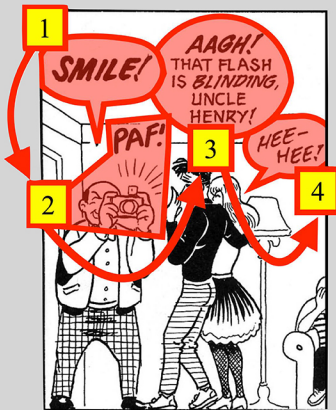


SINCE SPEECH BUBBLES REPRESENT TIME, THE ABOVE PANEL REPRESENTS THE DURATION OF A CONVERSATION, NOT AN INSTANTANEOUS MOMENT. SO, HOW DO COMICS PANELS SEQUENCE TIME?

THE ANSWER IS TWO-FOLD: POSITIONAL CUES AND CAUSE-AND-EFFECT CUES. IN AMERICA, A PAGE OF COMICS IS READ LEFT-TO-RIGHT & TOP-TO-BOTTOM. A COMICS PANEL WORKS ON THE SAME PRINCIPLE. CLUSTERS OF SPEECH BUBBLES CAN BE ORDERED BASED ON POSITIONAL CUES ALONE (I, II, III). EACH CLUSTER CAN THEN BE FURTHER ORDERED, AGAIN, SOLELY BY POSITIONAL CUES (1, 2, 3).



CAUSE-AND-EFFECT CUES ORDER THE PANEL BASED ON LOGICAL SEQUENCES OF EVENTS. USUALLY THIS INVOLVES WHAT IS SHOWN HAPPENING AND WHAT PEOPLE SAY. LOGICALLY, WE KNOW THAT "SMILE!" HAPPENS BEFORE THE CAMERA FLASH, AND "THAT FLASH IS BLINDING" HAPPENS AFTER THE FLASH. THUS, LOGICAL CAUSE AND EFFECT ALLOWS US TO ORDER THESE EVENTS.



BUT COMICS PANELS CAN ALSO BE PURPOSELY CONFUSING, LIKE THIS PANEL BY LYNDA BARRY DEPICTING THE 35 DAYS AFTER THE 2000 ELECTION WHEN NO ONE KNEW WHETHER GEORGE BUSH OR AL GORE WOULD BE PRESIDENT:



WHY IS THIS PANEL CONFUSING? LET'S START WITH POSITIONAL CUES. REMEMBER, THE LEFT AND TOP-MOST SPEECH BUBBLE COMES FIRST. HERE, HOWEVER, THE LEFT BUBBLE AND THE HIGHEST BUBBLE ARE NOT THE SAME. SO DO YOU START WITH THE LEFT BUBBLE? OR THE HIGHEST BUBBLE?

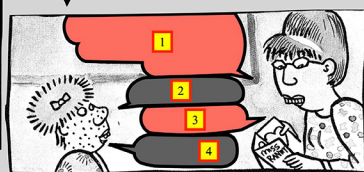


AND WHERE DO YOU GO AFTER THAT? IF LYNDA BARRY CREATED A NORMAL PANEL, THE SPEECH BUBBLES WOULD INTERLOCK—LIKE IN THE PANEL ON THE RIGHT—TO CREATE A CLEAR SEQUENCE. INSTEAD, SHE SEPARATES THE HUSBAND'S TWO SPEECH BUBBLES FROM THE WIFE'S THREE SPEECH BUBBLES SO THE POSITIONAL CUES ARE AMBIGUOUS.



AMBIGUOUS POSITIONAL CUES, AMBIGUOUS SEQUENCE

CLEAR POSITIONAL CUES, CLEAR LINEAR SEQUENCE



CAUSE-AND-EFFECT CUES ARE ALSO AMBIGUOUS. IS THE CENTRAL "SHHH!" A REACTION TO THE TV? OR A REACTION TO THE QUESTION "COFFEE?" OR DOES IT FOLLOW THE FIRST "SHHH!" BECAUSE THE MAN WON'T SHUT UP? CAUSE-AND-EFFECT CUES ARE LIKE THIS THROUGHOUT THE ENTIRE PANEL. EACH SPEECH BUBBLE HAS MULTIPLE POSSIBLE CAUSES AND MULTIPLE POSSIBLE EFFECTS.



Conclusion

So why confuse us? This panel takes sequencing cues that normally order a panel clearly (as we saw in the panel with the man taking a picture) and makes them ambiguous. In doing so, the post-election panel portrays an un-orderable group of events that captures the weird sense of time when you're stuck on the edge of your seat bombarded with information, but unable to create a coherent sequence of events for 35 days to figure out who will be the next president.

Future Directions

This exploration of how time is sequenced in a single panel has developed into an Honors Thesis exploring how comics panels represent time in general. By figuring out the logic of how comics panels represent 1) the duration of an event and 2) a sequence of events, we can figure out the underlying logic of how comics create and order narratives.

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