



Centrality of Mimesis, both at the Origins and Evolution of Comics

KEYWORDS

Peter Conisious Prabhu A

Assistant Professor, Department of English, Sacred Heart College, Tirupattur, Vellore-Dt 635 601

ABSTRACT *Comics attract almost all the age groups. People are curious to know what makes comics so attractive and trace its origins. It is 'Mimesis' (imitation), which is at centre of comics. From its origin and all through its evolution, the only unchangeable element in comics is Mimesis. In the beginning, comics just imitated what was there in the sculptures, engravings and cave painting which were been done centuries back. So, the comics of this period was a mere imitation or reflection of the above mentioned antiques. In the modern scenario, due to the scientific inventions, the field of comics has grown a lot from the print media to the multimedia presentation of comics. Even though there is a change in the medium of presentation, there is no change in the intrinsic factor that is 'Mimesis'. This paper aims to show that Mimesis is at the origins and the evolution of Comics.*

Introduction

The present tech-world is something rapid in its nature to enlighten and entertain as fast as possible. Every parent in this world is starving to explore new ideas and thoughts to educate his or her offspring. There are various means to enlighten the children and that the mode is so obvious, that is comics, which is very catchy. People take comics as a mode of educating their children in a rapid manner. Comics attract not only children but also the adults. However, the rapidity of the evolution of comics in the 19th and the following centuries followed the same footsteps of their own predecessors, even from the ancient times, that is 'imitation'. This study indents to establish that Mimesis is an act or reason behind of the evolution of comics.

Comics is the amalgamation of language and picture. Comics in the later part of 18th century and the beginning of the 19th and later on become prominent because of the evolution of the printing technology and the comics books writers very much in demand.

Adaptability is at the root of survival

This world has evolved and some of its characteristics have been changed due to its own peculiarity to adapt. As Darwin says in his concept of the Survival of the fittest, every living being has its own existence because of the adaptability. All the species in this world are changing their own characteristics according to the changing environment in order to sustain their life in this world; if not they have to face the doomsday. It is not only for its own existence but also to protect their offspring, their own species. It is very peculiar in the case of human being. Unlike other creatures, human beings are more conscious about their life and their own family. They are very conscious of protecting their creed, race and ethnicity. A particular ethnic group makes enormous efforts to safeguard their own values and traditions that have been passed on from their own ancestors. Every peculiar characteristic of an ethnic group is the outcome of the imitation of their own ancestors.

Imitation as the mechanism of transfer of knowledge

Human knowledge has been built upon their predecessors' knowledge. Every human production is based on the previously existing one. We tend to learn from our parents and our parents from their parents, etc. From Stone Age and to the modern humans there are many elements which

were handed down and gradually modified. Though a vast difference has been identified in the courses of time, the ultimate basics are still common to all. Some of the basic characters of the ancient times are still in its wing and influencing the people in many ways. Human beings are the transport in which all the arts have been carried out from time to time. Beginning with the genesis of the language and the contemporary modern gadgets are the outcome of imitation from the previous one. At the beginning, people used to communicate with sign language, and later used sounds followed by speaking. In courses of time, people imitated its practices. People saw the sign language from the other one or even they learnt it from the animals. Even though they learnt it from the nature that was all by imitation. Even civilization had taken place by imitation. Even in today's modern world, the life styles of people are being imitated by other people, from one country to another. The food we eat, the dresses we wear, the technology we use are all the being imitated by others. Moreover, the governments that we form, the judiciary system we have are all being imitated by looking at other countries.

Imitation in Arts

Apart from generalizing the word 'Mimesis' and its meaning, we need to know the important aspects of imitation in the field of Arts. When it comes to the arts, there are number of segments which have imitated art namely literature, music, painting, drawing, pictograms, ideograms and logograms, acting, oration, engravings, architectures, sculptures, etc. Every art form existing now, has not originated in vacuum rather it is all about the predecessors, who had imparted the nuances of the particular art to their followers.

It is often maintained that the theory of mimesis is concerned with the relation between the thing mimema and the outside world, i.e. between the mimema and individual model or models in the outside world. But what is the model of a mimema or, which is the same thing, what is represented in the mimema according to the theory of mimesis? It can be an individual thing or person. (Art theory, 23)

Imitation in Literature

In the case of literature, art of writing story, drama, fiction,

etc., are not given by a person all of a sudden. He or she got that idea or the concept or even the techniques by reading someone else books. Sometimes a person might have been influenced directly or indirectly from the various sources. Intentional or unintentionally the writer has incorporated some the elements from some other sources, which he or she read or heard already, this is known as Intertextuality.

Coming of Age of Comics

Likewise, Comics and its evolution lie in the hand of Mimesis (imitation). Comics in the later part of 18th century and in 19th century had a great impact on people's mind. They started using comics as a device to educate and more to criticize the people's behavior and mainly to criticize the politics and societal problem. When writers or the comics book composers had a great influence on succeeding art form, that is the cartoons, tend to utilize the art of carving pictures and its nuances to attract the audience. But certainly, they got the idea from various other resources. Beginning with cave painting or drawing, pictorial representation of Gods in ancient painting and the description of people's life style and their own culture through painting in the cave or in the rocks. These cave drawings, sculptures and engravings led to different forms in medieval art especially in paintings and engravings, etc. Therefore there is a shift in a physical structure of Comics when it is adapted by the modern Comics book writers but the basics ideas are still being borrowed from the previous era. So, there is imitation in the process of composing the comics or Comics books. Consciously or unconsciously people have been imitating in their life from cave art, wall picture, sculpture, to the present calligraphy, cartoons and comics. There is a great influence of ancient art and its culture on the life of the contemporary arts especially in the mind of the comics writers.

All these brain activities are fired up, unbeknownst to us, in an UNCONSCIOUS collaboration between comic artist and audience! According to Gallese and others the MNS wires us for MIMESIS. From the moment of birth, the human brain, through the observation, interpretation, and imitation of others' actions, is ever grasping for opportunities to learn the skills necessary for life. (Art Theory, 125)

Imitation and individual contribution to Comics

Even though comics writers were influenced by and imitated various ancient and medieval or even later time's pictures, drawings, architectures and arts, their uniqueness played a vital role. Their individuality contributes to the art. The ultimate aim is to entertain the people and to educate the modernized people. So comics book writers knowing the expectations of the people are changing the old methodologies in the composition of comics books.

Imitations, Aristotle goes on to argue, may then "differ from one another in three ways, by using for the representation (i) different media, (ii) different objects [subject matter], or (iii) a manner [point of view] that is different and not the same."³ Of these three differences, the third is important but has received little notice in the critical literature. (An Introduction to the philosophy of Arts, 27)

Evolution of Comics

Comics is named in another way as Visual Communication. The evolution of Visual communication starts from the ancient art like caves and rocks and later on it has taken another form that is Pictograms, Ideograms and logograms. People living in 5000 BC and even earlier used these art

forms. There was a shift in the previous form of painting and drawings in the caves and rocks.

A pictogram or pictograph is a symbol representing a concept, object, activity, place or event by illustration. Pictography is a form of writing whereby ideas are transmitted through drawing. It is the basis of cuneiform and hieroglyphs. Early written symbols were based on pictograms (pictures which resemble what they signify) and ideograms (pictures which represent ideas). Pictograms are still in use as the main medium of written communication in some non-literate cultures in Africa, The Americas, and Oceania, and are often used as simple symbols by most contemporary cultures. (Elif Ayiter, The History of Visual Communication)

An ideogram or ideograph is a graphical symbol that represents an idea, rather than a group of letters arranged according to the phonemes of a spoken language, as is done in alphabetic languages. The term "ideogram" is commonly used to describe logographic writing systems such as Egyptian hieroglyphs and Chinese characters. However, symbols in logographic systems generally represent words or morphemes rather than pure ideas.

After the origin of the letters or alphabets, the next form is the evolution of comics. The first pure alphabets (properly, "abjads", mapping single symbols to single phonemes, but not necessarily each phoneme to a symbol) emerged around 2000 BC in Ancient Egypt. (web). The formation of alphabets is different all around the world. It has different features and unique signs, small diagonal line, etc.

Then comes the illuminated manuscripts in Medieval Europe during the great plague. People were confined within the four walls and that led them to come out with great writings. During this period, some of the beautiful works came out.

An illuminated manuscript is a manuscript in which the text is supplemented by the addition of decoration or illustration, such as decorated initials, borders and miniatures. In the strictest definition of the term, an illuminated manuscript only refers to manuscripts decorated with gold or silver. However, in both common usage and modern scholarship, the term is now used to refer to any decorated manuscript. (Elif Ayiter, The History of Visual Communication)

Age of Printing and Comics

The evolution of printing press played a significant role all over the world especially in Europe. During the 15th century due to the evolution of printing press or before those movable books, many writers came up with their own work of art. Exposition of literary knowledge rooted up in the individual mind. Now when we say comics or comics books, it's all from the changes and the imitations of the previously existing one. An incunabulum is a book, single sheet, or image that was printed not handwritten before the year 1501 in Europe. There are two types of incunabula: the xylographic (made from a single carved or sculpted block for each page) and the typographic.

The first recorded use of incunabula as a printing term is in a Latin pamphlet by Bernhard von Mallinckrodt, *De ortu et progressu artis typographicae* ("Of the rise and progress of the typographic art", Cologne, 1639), which includes the phrase *prima typographicae incunabula*, "the first infancy of printing", a term to which he arbitrarily set an end,

1500, which still stands as a convention. (Elif Ayiter, The History of Visual Communication)

Contribution of Renaissance to Arts

Later, during the time of Renaissance, Western civilization started to develop and led to growth of modernism in the world. This transition also led to have great impact in reviving the classics in the European countries. While they were reviving the classics, they revived the classical arts too. It brought the significant shift in the mind of the artists. The Renaissance artists and also writers started to keep their eyes on the antics of the ancient and medieval times arts. This makes it clear that there is continuity in imbibing the arts. Without any doubt, the present unique form in the arts, that is comics, has been influenced by the renaissance arts and culture.

Influence of Industrial Revolution and Printing on Comics

Industrial revolution has played another significant role in bringing about the modern Art into the world to be tasted by the modern society. Because of the Industrial Revolution, many inventions took place. Particularly printing technology had given birth to Lithography and Photography. Within a few years of its invention, the lithographic process was used to create multi-color printed images that held all manner of cropped, embedded and bordered images as well as free running type, a process known by the middle of the 19th century as Chromolithography. In the Modern times, there is a significant growth in all disciplines, especially when we talk about print and movies. Computer is a gifted mechanism through which Graphics is being made today. Cartoonists bring a different kind of picture to criticize the people and in the movies, there are commendable comical elements used to make the audience to enjoy and to think. Pictures in the books especially in the comics books have a great impact because of the computer, through which differ kinds of characters and symbols, signs and the usage of balloons have been designed. All these shift in nature is because of the mimesis.

Conclusion Comics in the modern world is considered as a form of visual communication. In spite of its rapid growth and its fame, the time it has taken to reach its present status is very significant. Thus, it is justified that the origin of Comics could be seen in the ancient time itself. Therefore, it is all about Mimesis (imitation). Comics grew and was influenced by various sources at different times in its long tedious journey. We conclude that Mimesis is at the beginning of Comics.

Bibliography

1. Smith and Carolyn Wilde, Eds. A Companion to Art Theory. Hong Kong: Blackwell, 2002. Print
2. Conrad, Rudolph. A Companion to Medieval Art. Australia: Blackwell, 2006. Print
3. Smolderen, Thierry. The Origins of Comics. Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2014. Press
4. Duncan and Matthew j. Smith. The Power of Comics. New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc, 2009. Press
5. Web Sources
6. http://www.citrinitas.com/history_of_viscom/index.html>
7. <<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comics>>