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BA Illustration – Second Year

Research in Context – ADAD5003C

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Number of words – 2,541

Question 2: Analyse the work of illustrators and, particularly, author illustrators who tackle difficult, sensitive, and sometimes shocking themes.

Comic illustrators in newspaper have had major influence over media and public viewership. Newspapers are a reliable source of content for consumers as during their time of their popularity there were fewer options in sources of media (Nasi, M. and Rasanen, P. 2013) whilst also tackling difficult, sensitive, and sometimes shocking themes. Newspapers have the importance of being major news sources that the public was reliant on to deliver news quickly. As a result, they became hotspots for advertisement and illustrators due to the widespread reach to the public. Newspapers were deemed as easily accessible to majority of the public. Comic illustrators became incredibly popular during the second half on the 19th century when newspapers were also increasingly well received by the public. This led to the growth in newspaper artists due to “increase substantially their production and circulation” (Unwin, P. and Unwin, G. (no date). Many newspaper comic illustrators had furthered their influence within media and still have major influence on current day media, such as Jim Davis (Garfield), Charles M. Schulz (Peanuts), and Bill Waterson (Calvin and Hobbes). Furthermore, the influence of newspapers and the

media that was published before the rise of the classic comic has influenced the publishing of illustration. The purpose of this essay is to explore the topic of newspaper illustrators and how they have affected, and been affected themselves by media, popular culture, and other vital influences of illustration.

One of the first published newspaper illustrations was produced in 1806 for 'The Times' newspaper. It included a woodcut which displayed the coffin of Horatio Nelson, which can be seen in Figure 1. (History of Information, 2023). Despite the illustrator being unknown, this began the change in how news and information was displayed in newspapers. Major influences came from the social structure at that time, since the first illustration was related to a well-known individual at the time the paper was published (White, C. 2017). It exhibits the start of illustration becoming influential in society. Furthermore, this subject is quite dark and shocking due to its themes of the death of a commonly known individual.



Figure 1: *The First Illustration is Printed in ‘The Times’ of London (1806). London, England: The Times.*

This furthered the importance of illustration in early newspapers as they developed through “multiculturalism, globalization, political and environmental change to bring about adjustments in the way illustrators think and approach their work. This in turn may have an adverse effect on the way illustration exerts its potential for power and influence” (Male. A, 2019). This furthered the use and influence of illustration in newspapers in the 1800s with political works such as The Penny Illustrated Paper (1861), The Illustrated Police News (1864), and The Graphic (1869). These

illustrations used the woodblock technique, which was heavily expanded by Thomas Bewick (NC State, ND). Bewick developed the technique of using a sharp instrument called a burin, and invented the method of carving a design into hardwood that is cut against the grain instead of with it. Bewick began an apprenticeship with Newcastle engraver Ralph Beilby at the age of fourteen. He dedicated his life to engraving on wood, and is known for having revived this technique, and making it a significant aspect of printmaking. The Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce in 1775 paid him for a wood engraving of the Huntsman and the Old Hound. The images in publications like *A History of British Birds* (1797 and 1804) and *A General History of Quadrupeds* (1790) are among Bewick's most significant creations (Thomas Bewick - National portrait gallery (no date)). Overall, the history of newspaper illustrations is crucially important to art and visual work both due to the lack of other visual outlets in media and the popularity of the work within the news.

These early newspaper illustrations influenced other illustrators to create work specifically for this type of media. An example of this can be seen in early World War one and two propaganda works which was published and distributed by newspaper companies. The basis of propaganda and strategic information manipulation criteria to mould, predict, and control the public behaviour of the middle classes and popular sectors towards an imperialist logic (Pedro-Carañana, J., Broudy, D. and Klaehn, J. (2018)). Anne Mergen was the only female cartoon illustrators in America during WW2, who worked on propaganda for the war. Mergen's work was a satirical take on incredibly serious subjects such as bombings and other issues regarding the war. She first began developing a distinct style of art during the mid-1920 which led to

further work in the Miami Daily News, where she worked for decades after. Her first editorial cartoon was published by the newspaper in April 1933 after it was impressed with her work. Anne became the sole female political cartoonist in the United States in 1936 when she was hired full-time by the newspaper to create editorial cartoons. She maintained this position until her retirement in the late 1950s (Malloryk, 2020). Her work made commentary on serious subjects with comedic intent. This kind of comedic use of propaganda provoked “an acceleration of social dynamics” in a comedic format which led to “the formation of a new generational identity” (Glaude, B. (2015). This highlights the power that illustration has over public viewpoint depending on what the propaganda is targeted at. Referring to Mergen’s work, one of her most famous pieces titled “The Master of Jet Propulsion,” which can be seen in Figure 2, highlights her specific style of both comedy and technique. The work itself is of mocking Goebbels, displaying him as shouting ‘hot air,’ making him appear foolish and ignorant (Malloryk, 2020). The use of character in this piece displays the connection that illustration can have towards politics, as Goebbels at the time was an incredibly influential person. His connection to the war was seen as incredibly impactful as he was Hitler’s propaganda minister (Lemmons, R. (2015).



Figure 2: Mergen, A. (1940) *The Master of Jet Propulsion*. Columbus, Ohio: Billy Ireland Cartoon Library & Museum.

Mergen's work displays the connection of illustration and political environments during the war, which furthered the development of illustration within newspapers by divulging the idea of using illustration to manipulate public perceptions and views on specific subjects within newspapers. Mergen's work also had a heavy impact on the public due to the comedic nature of her work contrasting the depressing time, displaying the use of illustration in lifting spirits and emotions with sensitive issues.

The popularity of these illustrations continued and grew as newspapers remain to be a major source of news and one of the very few sources of media in the late 1900s

(Nasi, M. and Rasanen, P. 2013). One major example of this development can be seen in the earlier releases of comics, such as 'Popeye,' created by Elzie Crisler Segar. The Popeye comics were first published on the 17th of January 1929, and was increasingly popular due to the unique characters and playful style. Popeye was characterized as a strong sailor who gains superhuman strength by eating a can of spinach. This solidified his distinctive character, causing him to grow in the media as he became increasingly marketable due to his uniqueness (Cartoon (no date)).

Popeye was released by 'Thimble Theatre,' which remains a popular studio to this day, as they made a name for themselves in the world of art (Frank. M Young (2018)).

Popeye was extremely influential during his release due to his peppy and joyful atmosphere in his strips, which was a stark contrast to the societal issues that were happening at the time of his first release. During 1929, the great depression began which led to many people idolising Popeye as he was seen as "a hero because of his self-confidence, take-charge personality, and his strict mind of morals and ethics.

Some reasons that Popeye become famous during the Great Depression was the idea of a man fighting and always winning" (Popeye the sailor man (no date) The Great Depression). This displays the effect of illustration on public issues, as the "lost income translated into human suffering" (Taylor, K.W. (ed.) (2018), yet 'Popeye' was well known as a joyful comic during a bleak period in history. The comic continued to grow in popularity and became a well-known character throughout the great depression, displaying the power of illustration through difficult matters. Furthermore, the comic had several television series,' movies, and many other forms of new media. Popeye maintaining its popularity to current day is an example of how illustration holds power over media, as it is often told that illustrators and newspaper

writers have a “duty” (Vandeputte, T. (2020) to their audience, which could relate to the standards that are held up through the characterization of Popeye. This is specifically important in reference to the great depression, as he was seen as a form of joy in an otherwise bleak situation, much like Merger’s work which also brought comedy and light in a particularly difficult environment for the public. In fact, the Popeye comic is still updating till this very day in a digital format, as they developed their work for a modern audience, due to the accessibility of the internet. However, the older Popeye comics shows a connection to the stylistic choices that are often seen in newspaper works, such as the comic titled “Popeye gives it till it hurts,” which was published on June 11, 1929. The comic can be seen in Figure 3. This comic highlights the ideals of Popeye due to the display of his strength and power against a perceived ‘villain.’ Referring to the idea of Popeye being a type of ‘hero’ during the harsh times of the great depression, this is a prime example of the ideals that would be held up for his type of character.



Figure 3: Segar, E.C. (2015) *Popeye Gives till It Hurts, Popeye (comics)*. Chester: First Versions. Available at: <https://www.firstversions.com/2015/06/popeye-comics.html> (Accessed: 2023).

America's depiction of media in this time was heavily influenced by the challenging period, especially the political aspects of the social environment, which was heavily described as "Americanization of American cinema" (Bertellini, G. (2019). This is evident in the inspiration of Popeye and was directly aimed at the American public through the most accessible form of media, which at the time, was newspapers. Much like the propaganda previously mentioned in previous paragraphs, this was a deliberate tactic in marketing as to reach the wide audience that newspapers reach due to them being easily accessible by the public. This was incredibly apparent

during the release of Popeye as “American newspapers of the nineteenth century is rooted in the commerce of ideas that was part of the fabric of the new nation. The earliest Congresses showed their awareness of the importance of enhancing this trade” (Jamison. D (no date). Furthermore, there is quite a stylistic connection between Popeye and the previously shown propaganda artwork. For example, the overexaggerated features and the similar linework done for both pieces. This connection displays the influence the previous illustrators had on newspaper pieces, as this similar style is also evident in many other illustrations (such as ‘Dennis the Menace’ or ‘Calvin and Hobbes’).

In the later years of the 1900, comic illustrations began to reach their peak popularity, as that was also an incredibly popular time-period for newspapers (Lambert, T. (2023). Some of the more famous examples ‘Peanuts’ by Charles M. Schulz and ‘Dennis the Menace’ by Hank Ketcham, both released in the early 1950s (Gabriella. C (2023). Both comics became incredibly well-known and, much like Popeye, still maintain that same popularity despite the decline in the purchases of newspapers (Steve Paulussen & Raymond A. Harder (2014). These comics relied on comedy in their works and became well known for the gimmicks used to create unique light entertainment whilst also keeping a similar format. Comic illustrators “developed a pervasive desire to discuss, explain, and control their work through their own words” (Siegel. J (1992), which is evident in these specific illustrators. Hank Ketcham, the creator of ‘Dennis the Menace,’ was an incredibly successful illustrator and was published more than 1,000 times within various newspapers in 48 different countries (Comics Kingdom (no date). Much like ‘Popeye,’ Ketcham’s work was published during a time where there was heavy influence on art from WW2.

However, 'Dennis the Menace' was published after the war, where art was developing and having large "influences on the 1950s art were made by 1920s avant-garde movements, modernism, surrealism and abstract painting" (Maria. R (2016). The comic 'Peanuts' by Charles M. Schulz also has this similar connection to post-war life, however both comics display this idea of joy in the mundane life, due to the 1950 being referred to as a "witness to the intensification of the meeting between spatiality and visuality in literature" (Ferris, N. (2022). Both comics have a focus on methodical lifestyle Comic strips are a simplified summary of the cartoonist's ideas about what, ideally, makes life worthwhile and hilarious. This creative endeavour needs to be made every day, not only during a lifetime interspersed with a few great works of art (Ware. C (2019). One example of a 'Peanuts' mundane joyful strip can be seen below in figure 4, which was left untitled. The strip was made on November 8th, 1969. The strip shows a small interaction between two characters, with a normal conversation. It displays the typical uneventful situation, allowing the reader to take joy in the small laughs from life, which is often said is the main message of the small comic (Ware. C (2019).



Figure 4: Schulz, C.M. (2023) *Peanuts, 70 Years of Peanuts*. Santa Rosa: Charles M. Schulz Museum. Available at: <https://schulzmuseum.org/70-years-of-peanuts-online/> (Accessed: 29 November 2023).

This type of comic style is continued into the later part of the 1900, for example the illustrator Jim Davis (Garfield) and Bill Waterson (Calvin and Hobbes). 'Garfield' was first published in 1978 and began becoming increasingly popular over time, which eventually lead to it being published in over 40 different newspapers (Barnett. D (2018). 'Calvin and Hobbes' were published, slightly later than 'Garfield,' in 1985 (Cantor. M (2023). Both have a similar format to each other, and the previous comics mentioned, which visualises the connection between each comic and how they have influenced the style. Furthermore, the popularity of newspapers has decreased in modern day, due to the easy accessibility of the internet. However, many of these comics have adapted to modern forms of media. For instance, many of these comics have publish new comics online. Additionally, Jim Davis's work has had several movie adaptations, as well as 'Peanuts' also having its own animated movie.

In summary, newspaper illustrators have been tremendously popular in visualising and communicating within media. The purpose of this essay is to exhibit the connections between the distinct types of artworks that was displayed through the years of newspaper illustrations, such as the similarity in style and technique. A prominent theme in each of these illustrations is the aspect of comedy, especially in situation could be deemed as bleak or distressing. The aspect of comedy in quick short forms of comics is a consistent aspect of 1900 artwork, due to the upsetting period of these comics being released and the public needing more jovial media to create a sort of optimism in media.

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