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Confluence of Comic, biography and reminisce: Graphic Memoir erases the boundary of

High art and popular art

Abstract:

Graphic novels and comics were once exclusive arena of children's literature. A comic book contain sequential scenes embedded with panel of descriptions and illustrations. Conventionally graphic novels and comics are produced to cater needs of young readers. Central protagonist of comics was always a superhero with quasi magical powers which grabbed fantasy of young readers and comics with their colorful illustrations made them a sole platform of children. Memoirs on other hand catered needs of adult readers who would like to ponder on realistic and anecdotal elements. Memoir was perceived as a sub category of biography and autobiography. Memoirs are collection of memories that targets on a benchmark event in life of a person, thus memoirs are pages ripped from life with a focus on particular event or gauge, thus memoirs are a precise scanning into autobiography where some particular actions or incidents are zoomed. Graphic memoir thus juxtaposes these two unconventional genres, comics and memoir, in an exquisite way and there by permeating adults to world of children and children to world of adults. Graphic memoir is thus a smudge tool erasing the boundaries of popular culture and high art.

Graphic memoir is a new genre, a conflux of graphic novel and memoir. Here comic meets autobiography transforming itself to a higher threshold of expectation. This amusing juxtaposing exposes readers to an entirely different experience of reading. Graphic novels

which projected superheroes with half supernatural quality was too much for a reader who peeps into more subjective reality. So here real life characters are juxtaposed with brevity and dexterity of dialogues. So it appeals both traditional and modern readers through enthralling conflux of graphics and memoirs.

Graphic memoirs in its selection of characters and style of language are counter spirit of classification, it is difficult to classify this genre under conventional categories. Some critics call this genre as Non-Fiction graphic novels which in turn is an oxymoron. A non-fiction cannot be called as a novel which is a pure product of imagination. Memoirs are not a product of imagination but a genuine reflection of past memories. Graphic memoir thus needs a special place, distinct identity and scope.

Educational curriculum principally High school classes must embrace this new genre extensively. Young learners need concrete experience of abstract ideas in order to grasp the essence of concepts. Colorful illustrations and characters will definitely kindle their spirit of reading through amusement. Instead of bulky autobiographies and biographies our curriculum should reserve more space for graphic memoirs, entertaining mix of graphics and panel description will instigate young readers to read extensively on the topic. Graphic memoir will be a bosom platform for visual learners because the graphics and colorful sketches will help the readers to retain information for a longer period. Students despise autobiographies and biographies due to its bulkiness and cultural gap. Graphic memoir can remedy this cultural gap and rigidity of language using graphic illustrations because a picture can speak more than thousand words. Bezemer and Kress two scholars on multimodality and semiotics argues that students understand information differently when text is delivered in conjunction with a secondary medium such as image or sound (Kress,79)

Emergence of graphic novels can be traced back to Will Eisner and his 1978 work *A Contract with God and Other Tenement Stories*. Memoirs on other hand has been written since

the ancient times; Julius Caesar's Commentaries on Gallic War; Thoreau's Walden are some specimens. After 1990's memoirs made a paradigm shift from recollection of popular writers to reminiscence of lay man. Print technology exudation and advent of digitalization this genre radiated plenty, reaching the drawing rooms of common man. Traditional memoirs were detached description of wars, political uprisings or expeditions to new destinations. Historically the very first memoir was written by Leonor Lopez de Cordoba in Spain.

Autobiographical comics emerged as a result of the counter movement during 1970's, known as Underground Comics. Underground comics are small press or self-published comic books which are often socially relevant or satirical in nature. They differ from mainstream comics in depicting contents forbidden to mainstream publications by the comic's code authority, including explicit drug use, sexuality and violence. They were most popular in the United States between 1968 and 1975, and in the UK between 1973 and 1974. ("Underground Comix")

It was Art Spiegelman who popularized Graphic Memoir by blending autobiography and graphics. His Maus has been credited with elating comics from popular culture to the world of high art. But before Spiegelman, American Cartoonist Justin Green published Binky Brown Meets the Holy Virgin Mary in 1972. Green's experimentation with personal story told through comic medium inspired Spiegelman to try this new genre. At that time comics in America had a bad reputation as low grade children's delight and society always associated it with felony. (Gardener, 2008). Certain classics like Maus revitalized the status of comics through amalgamating graphics and memoirs.

James Joyce will keep professors busy with his monumental works for centuries, series of books and articles were built upon his works, characters, his biographies, his letters, and his wife and children etc. beyond his works most of the critics and scholars began to swiftly delve into his family through his journals and correspondences. Renewed interest in his family affairs

paved way for biographies on his wife and children. Mary Talbot and her husband Bryan Talbot published a graphic memoir *Dotter of Her Father's Eyes* based on the story of Lucia Joyce, daughter of James Joyce. Lucia Joyce was a lurking shadow in history, we glimpsed her presence through her father's works. Mary Talbot here brings a clear voice and space to Lucia who was hitherto treated as an insane muse. Thus through her work graphic memoir is glorified to the status of high art by diminishing the boundary of children's literature, popular literature and refined literature. This paper sheds light on emergence of graphic memoir and need to include graphic memoirs in curriculum. Mary Talbot's contribution to this new genre through blending graphics, memoir and biography is perceived by academicians as great leap into evolution of literature.

Lucia Joyce, the unsung muse of modernism has been a subject of inspection and myriad interpretations; Samuel Beckett's *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, Michael Hastings play *Calico*, Annabel Abbs's *The Joyce Girl*, all of these were centered on story of Lucia Joyce, daughter of James Joyce. These works are hardly scanned by readers because most of the readers find it less curious to know about daughter of a writer who is neither a writer nor a literary artist, so for readers Joyce is of prime importance than the muse behind *Finnegan's Wake*. Most of the books on her projects her as insane tragic muse who was held inside bars of asylum for quarter of her life. She died in a sanatorium in Northampton in 1982. Lucia's life was complicated with all heresies and scandals from incest to thwarted love of Samuel Beckett, so apart from all these scandals or when we remove all this hideous and dubious scandals she is of least interest to most writers. She was an amazing dancer who revolutionized stage of Ireland during 1920's, she took her best lessons from most famous masters of dance. But her career was abruptly shut down by her parents and failure of relationships pressured her to brim of insanity. Beyond the shadow of her father and all the scandals she stands as a symbol of mad

woman in the attic who is forced to bury herself in a male dominated world. Still people tend to resolve the puzzle of Lucia's case as a case on mere mental illness, most stick to the idea that whatever happened to her has nothing to do with familial pressures or relationship scars but only her worsened neurosis led to her tragic end. But it is almost impossible to believe this version because a similar case of Sylvia Plath's suicide is interpreted by people as an after effect of mental illness there by happily ignoring the roles of Ted Hughes and Assia Wevill in tragic end of Sylvia Plath. Here if we wipe out names of Joyce, Nora and Beckett it will be same case of erasing names of Ted Hughes and Assia Wevill from what happened to Sylvia Plath. Some names cannot be wiped out like, how can we express the story of Vivian Elliot without delving into Elliot and Russell? How can we rewrite Zelda's story without saying the role played by Fitzgerald? So it is impossible to blissfully avoid the role played by her parents and lovers while describing the story of Lucia Joyce. But besides all these things her name must enliven the history as a genius artist who could have become more famous than her father.

Dotter of Her Father's Eyes is the first collaboration of writer Mary Talbot and graphic artist Bryan Talbot. It is a collage of lives of two girls, Mary and Lucia, intertwined. Mary Talbot was the daughter of eminent Joycean scholar James s Atherton and Lucia the daughter of James Joyce. Bryan gave rich color to Mary's imagination through his art. It was Bryan who suggested the idea of juxtaposing life of Mary and Lucia but Mary was perplexed and hesitant because she thought no one would be interested to read about her Life. "Though she modestly thought no one would be interested in her upbringing Bryan assured her that her story was both unique and compelling. Her father has cast a long shadow upon Mary's life which naturally suggested a link to James Joyce himself" (Mary Talbot's family run...)

Dotter of Her Father's Eyes is undeniably a prime contribution to the genre graphic memoir. The book won the 2012 Costa biography award, formerly known as Whitbread Award, one of the most prestigious literary award in United Kingdom. The aspect of Rhetoric Velocity,

how a third party uses the text to recompose and readapt them into something new, needs attention here. Mary Talbot's graphic memoir is partly based on 2013 biography of Lucia Joyce, *To Dance in the Wake*, written by Carol Loeb Shloss. Along with Rhetoric velocity, Multimodality needs a special mention because comics are complex narratives that customs words, images, photographs, paintings, maps etc. to enrich the story telling by opening it to myriad experiences and responses. Graphic memoir combines cartooning and photography to depict the lives of real individuals, thus it is a collocation of intertextuality, multimodality and adaptation. Graphic memoir as a new genre is a persuasive way to transport text in conjunction with image or sound there by coercing even the most reluctant reader to enjoy the text. Mary Talbot's work is partly a memoir and biography told through the medium of comic there by transforming the work into an anti-current in the field of comics. Lucia Joyce was never a prominent or popular figure like Joyce or Beckett or Nora Barnacle. Lucia was always lurking behind the shadow of her intellectual father, like a small weed under a huge tree. Though she was much creative like her father, her talents went unrecognized and unappreciated by her parents and friends. Mary Talbot thus chose her Heroine a faint, frail blue veined child whom history conveniently forgot. She was portrayed by joycean biographers as a frail and insane girl who contributed much to agony of James Joyce but most of the critics admitted the deep intimacy between father and daughter which paved way for complexity of *Finnegan's Wake*. It was Kate Zambreno's *Heroines* and Shloss's *To Dance in the Wake* that gave a new insight into the story of Joyce girl Lucia. Mr and Mrs Talbot thus constructed a smooth puzzle of personal memoir, biography of Lucia Joyce and was able to draw parallels between comings of age narratives of both. A tragic story is thus delivered in light mood without losing the intensity of emotions. Unlike conventional comic there is nothing to laugh or giggle because humour is totally absent in that sense. Thus in selection of its character and style graphic memoir asserts its unique and powerful identity. Mary Talbot's skill and courage to replace

hitherto admired male superheroes with an unsung and botched heroine needs special applause. Bryan's and Mary's voices thus fuses together to give voice to Lucia. Bryan's colours helps the readers to place the setting and action, modern colours for day scenes, Sepia tone for Mary's childhood and blue colour for Lucia's story. Particularly effective is the page of Lucia's committal to asylum. Thus this new genre can cultivate the extensive reading culture, it can open a channel to other works. Graphic memoir is never an end but a beginning of intensive reading of other genres and areas.

It was during 1950's comic began to rise into the level of fine art, up to that moment comic was disparaged as a bulk disposable delight piece. Soon after 1950's comic began to crawl into the bookshelves of all bookstores and multiple shows of cartoons and graphic novels were held in America at that time. RAW magazine acted as a stockroom by serializing Speigelman's graphic memoir Maus, which won Pulitzer Prize in 1992. Thus 1950's was the time when border between high art and popular art became porous and permeable.

To conclude, graphic memoir as a new genre was able to smudge the boundary of high art and popular art by being a bridge between them. Graphic memoir borrowed comic style from popular culture and memoir from high art there by bridging the gap between them. This new genre is a great contribution to academic curriculum and academicians are keen to explore the possibilities it provides. It can also act as a starter to extensive reading by introducing contents and background in an amusing way so as to captivate even most reluctant reader.

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