

Current vogue in classics has its attention on the characters of comics, especially heroes, either ancient heroes presented in comics (*World War Hercules*), or comics about the ancient world (*300*). There is yet another way that classicists can use comics, however: Scott McCloud's classic *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* and similar handbooks reveal surprising ways in which the stories of Homeric epic can be made visible, as it were, through the narrative methods of comic graphics.

As scholars grasped the workings of oral poetry, they have come to appreciate the particular way that Homer captures action. Unlike a modern narrator, the oral poet "paints" one scene after another, but does not link them except by juxtaposition, a quality Michael Lynn-George describes as "now is all." The same is true of comics, but as McCloud says, modern minds used to comics barely realize the space between panels that isn't there. He contrasts Japanese comics to show that there are many ways a mind might put pictures together, but Western minds tend to see them linearly. If Lynn-George and others are right, Homer also does not think of his events leading to each other chronologically. As we know, devices like ring-composition instead brings the past into the present. The device whereby the narrator says that a prophecy will not be fulfilled even brings in the future. While they are not chronological, however, unlike McCloud's examples of the Japanese style, Homer's stories do have the Western quality of occurring in a deliberate order. Yet if one pictures comic frames, one can see that what is presented serially is not necessarily a sequence of time.

In Chapter 3, McCloud talks about frames and time in five patterns: at one extreme, a single action is drawn in panels second by second; at the other, the panels have no temporal connection at all (more frequent in Asia). In the middle are the patterns primarily used by Western comic writers. First in order of number of uses, McCloud says (71), the events in the panels are close enough in time that the intervening action can be easily determined but are not second-by-second (action-to-action). In the second, a single "scene or idea" is described in several frames set in different places (subject-to-subject). The fourth combines panels with different times and places which can be connected if one exerts some "deductive reasoning" (scene-to-scene). Homeric uses all these narrative functions, but I believe his stories are best viewed as examples of the second option, perhaps even the third, because they bring together in time things in different places, even time, unlike American comics.

Take for example the meeting of Glaucus and Diomedes in *Iliad* Book 6. A modern reader looking at that sequence might suppose it occurs between when Hector gets to Troy and when he speaks with Hecuba, Paris and Andromache, for it is preceded and followed by those actions. But is also possible to see them as simultaneous "split action," McCloud's "scene to scene," where time and place are less important than their subject. When Glaucus and Diomedes meet, their conversation about "like the generations of leaves, the lives of mortal men" (Fagels) occurs as Hector tells his men to "be men" while he is gone and then berates Paris for his weakness. Glaucus and Diomedes' declaration of *xenia* might occur as Hector tells Andromache both that he knows he will die, and that one can hope it will not be today, while Andromache tells of her past bereavement and her fears for the future. In Glaucus and Diomedes' exchange, still other pasts and futures enter the picture: the meeting of their ancestors, the story of Bellerophon, and eventually the isolation of that hero. If we imagine each of these as a single panel on a single page of a comic—and Homer's audience was probably more used to translating words into mental pictures than we are. Viewed this way, the story of men and women and their lives is backgrounded and their common subject becomes central as the ear packs the scenes of past, present and future together into one time: what do honorable warriors fight for?

For a different example, many books of the *Iliad* are very long series of warrior confrontations, yet these occur in only two days. It would be hard to believe they all happen one after each other, and the scenes of the *Iliad*, like scene-to-scene panels, never clarify the time between them, if there even is any. When the imagination puts varied actions together, McCloud calls it closure (63). Modern minds achieve closure by setting Homeric events in a chronological order as they are presented, but in fact, more likely they happen at the same time. Closure comes as one sees in a single thought about the reasons that warriors fight.

In another case, when Homer tells the actions of the gods, he cuts away to them and returns to the mortal action with no stop in the action at all. It is as if the gods are not "in" the story: one might say humans act in the present and imperfect, while the gods act in the aorist, "without limit." A comic might have them in a different style of frame, using visuals to create another world.

In short, this paper will illustrate these common methodologies between comics and Homer.

Related sources include:

Eisner, Will. *Comics and Sequential Art: Principles and Practices from the Legendary Cartoonist*. New York: Norton, 2008 and other works by Eisner.

Lynn-George, Michael. *Epos: Word, Narrative, and the Iliad*. Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, Inc., 1988.

McCloud, Scott. *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*. 1994 and other works by McCloud.