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Jeffrey Brown: The integration of reality into art

The human psyche holds many unexplainable emotions. While we can recognize sadness and joy, emotions such as envy and resentment are hard to identify. These experiences are often noticed as a vulnerability, and Jeffrey Brown blends this vulnerability with humor and emotional state to create a narrative that interacts with the child side of the reader. Jeffrey Brown uses his own vulnerable experiences throughout his life to create an emotional narrative that is meant to be felt on a deeper level.

Jeffrey Brown has been fond of *Star Wars* and *Garfield* comics ever since he was a child. He took many inspirations from these and eventually came to a point where he even wrote for the Star Wars universe. Brown’s writing style takes heavy inspiration from *Garfield* comics. The paneling style uses the three-act process that *Peanuts* uses and tries to emulate the art style as well (Star Wars Reads Day: Jeffrey Brown 00:00:26 – 00:00:59).

Before his boom in 2011, he was a freelancer, drawing illustrations for companies. During his freelancer career, he wrote a trilogy about his dating life, starting with the book *Clumsy.* The narrative in *Clumsy* is about the brief relation Jeffrey Brown had with his first girlfriend, Theresa (Jeffrey Brown Interview 00:02:47 – 00:03:38). *Clumsy* explores topics such as loneliness, love, lust and letting go. Jeffrey Brown uses the book to observe the difference between loving someone and lusting over someone. While many pages show the loving side of the relationship, such as “*Warm Spot*” on page 16 and “*Plane's Landing*” on page 17, Brown mostly emphasize the lust side of the relationship, such as on page 39 with “*The Camper*” and page 96 with “*Saugatuck*” (Brown 16-17, 39, 96). In the beginning of the book, Jeffrey Brown establishes the emptiness of the relationship. In page 3 of the book, “*My Last Night with Kristyn*”, the character Kristyn says, “How do you know it’s love and not obsession” Which displays the Issue Jeffrey Brown has and how he lets this issue continue with his next relationship with Theresa (Brown 3). “According to Stockwell, you might be experiencing lust if you don't necessarily have much in common, but when you are touching, it really doesn't matter” (Tabackman). This sign of lust mentioned by Stockwell is shown on page 13 of *Clumsy* when Theresa says, “But maybe we’re too different” (Brown 13).

The idea of loneliness is also explored in *Clumsy*. “Over the last decade, we’ve experienced a new type of loneliness—the loss of connection, trust, and capital while we are next to the person with whom we’re not supposed to be lonely” (Perel and Merel). The topic of loneliness starts in the second act of the book, when Theresa goes back to Florida, thus starting a long-distance relationship. Jeffrey Brown mostly deals with loneliness, which is first shown on page 110 when he says, “I don’t want to be alone right now” (Brown 110). Since *Clumsy* is a comic, Jeffrey Brown uses illustrations to his advantage. For example, on page 137, we can see Brown and Theresa sitting far away from each other. A conversation doesn’t start until the fourth panel of the page, when Theresa questions the sudden quietness. This showcases the current feelings Jeffry Brown has about the relationship, as he feels that they are becoming distant from each other (Brown 137).

*Clumsy* is a story about the lack of love and the loneliness it induces. Jeffrey Brown was never the protagonist of the story; rather, he was the antagonist. He never learns from his past relationships and continues to let lust alter his perception of love. He uses the book as a message to late teens and young adults about what a relationship is meant to be (Kirsten).

The success of the book leads Jeffrey Brown to continue to use his personal experiences in his creative work. The next book series that goes deeper into Jeffrey Brown’s life is *Sulk*. The first issue of the anthropology series *Sulk* is a parody of the superhero genre while also diving deep into religion and everyday life struggles.

Jeffrey Brown discusses atheism and religious anxiety about heaven or hell. The main protagonist of the book, Bighead, is a superhero with no powers who experiences the end of his career when he sacrifices himself to save the planet. His lack of powers emphasizes his lack of faith — in other words, his atheist beliefs. His religious beliefs are confirmed on page 48, where he is confronted by two Christians who try to inform Bighead of the end of the world. (Brown 48).

“Religion has played a part in a superhero's character development for decades” (Scribner). In this book, Jeffrey Brown deals with religious OCD. “Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) is characterized by unwanted, intrusive thoughts and anxiety (obsessions) about something and the behaviors (compulsions) that people who suffer from the condition use to relieve the anxiety. This particular anxiety disorder represents a very serious condition that often grips the victim’s mind with fear and, in a very real way, controls their lives…in the case of religious OCD (also known as scrupulosity), the person is fixated on obsessions that are based in religion and/or religious beliefs, or around beliefs concerning morality” (Rosen). Here, after Bighead sacrifices himself, he sees himself in hell, being judged by Satan and Jesus. Jeffrey Brown uses morality as a basis to relieve religious anxiety. “In any case, this entry will assume that morality is a set of customs and habits that shape how we think about how we should live or about what is a good human life” (John). In the judgment of Bighead, Satan internalizes the fear of being in the wrong religion, while Jesus represents the idea of having faith in a higher being and the benefits of good morality. However, Jeffrey Brown doesn’t stick to any sides, but rather introduces a Buddha statue as a form of choosing another path. Here, Jeffrey Brown does not include religious ideas or philosophy such as Christianity or Buddhism because he does not want to include the idea of idolizing one being. Bighead listening to the statue’s words and choosing another path visualizes him believing in atheism and relieving himself of religious anxiety (Brown 83-89).

Bighead’s arc of escaping religious anxiety ends with Bighead coming back to reality and continuing his superhero career. Jeffrey Brown ties religious beliefs with heroism, bravery, and good morals. While the book emphasizes atheism, it is more about the fear of punishment and the complexity of morals. Brown uses this book to address the confusion many late teens and young adults have with religion.

After he found major success writing children’s books for *Star Wars*, he finally felt comfortable including his own unique writing into the universe of *Star Wars. Jedi Academy* is the first book in a trilogy that Jeffrey Brown had full creative insight into. The book revolves around Roan, who is an aspiring pilot who is enrolled in a Jedi school and learns to become a Jedi master. After failing to get into pilot school, he enrolls in the Jedi Academy, where he learns to fit in and find interest in his current academic medium. *Jedi Academy* deals with topics such as conformity, Personal development, and friendship.

“Conformity is to respond in a socially acceptable manner. It involves behaving in a way which might not be the way you wish to portray your behaviour, but only because of the societal needs, one shows compliance to the rules, and standards towards the society” (Chakraborty). Conformity is most prevalent in an educational environment because every child must fit in. The main theme of the book is conformity, which Jeffrey Brown addresses through the idea of not being smart or competent in the group. This is shown on pages 90 and 92, where Roan fails to lift the books with the Force unlike his other classmates (Brown 90-92). “Conformity is an aspect which is also learned by a child during the schooling years. When children go to school, they make friends, they share their interests with those friends, they might be having a group of friends who are always together” (Chakraborty). The roan at the beginning of the book is different from the Roan at the end of the book. This is because of the conformity he faced with his friends. Jeffrey Brown showcases the positive side of conformity through his interactions with his friends. The positive support and environmental learning have helped Roan learn the force and become competent at the end of the book.

*Jedi Academy* is the first book in Jeffrey Brown’s career that addresses the vulnerable emotions a child feels, rather than targeting late teens and young adults like his other books. Conformity and academic growth are things every child experiences, and Brown showcases the positive side of these feelings to relieve the distress children may have.

Jeffrey Brown doesn’t shy away from the feeling of the unknown. Throughout his bibliography, Brown addresses mistakes and a lack of knowledge. While expressing such prevalent emotions, he still manages to give readers a sense of warmth through reliability and quirky humor.

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