

SWAMP THING CASE STUDY AS A FICTIONAL CHARACTER DESIGN IN POPULAR CULTURE FOR ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION EFFORTS



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INTRODUCTION

The problem of nature and environmental conservation is a serious matter, so it requires cooperation from various levels of society to participate. However, not all people are able to understand this easily, different media and approaches are needed. Comics are an opportunity to communicate scientific information to people with low literacy. One of the comics published by DC Comics is Swamp Thing, written by Len Wein and illustrated by Bernie Wrightson, the first appearance in the 1971 edition of the comic House of Secrets 92. It raises the background on environmental conservation by creating a fictional character by an idealist named Alec Holland, who turned into a monster form due to the laboratory explosion, where his body merged with the swamp vegetation. There are many studies on environmental conservation and new media nowadays, but there are very few studies on how comics and fictional characters carry messages about conservation. It is hoped that this study of fictional characters that contribute to environmental preservation will provide insight and discourse on the use of new media, especially comics and fictional character designs.



Figure Swamp Thing character and first appearance comic

METHOD

This qualitative research uses a case study method with a semiotic approach regarding the design of the main character of the Swamp Thing comic. This research uses the case study method which is an investigative strategy in which the researcher explores an event, activity, program, process, or person by combining various sources of evidence, which may include documents, artifacts, interviews, and observations.

The analysis in this case study is visual semiotics by examining the denotation and connotations of the Swamp Thing character design, so that the meaning contained in the character design can be seen. The semiotic analysis used is connotative semiotics which tries to define the second meaning, or the meaning behind the expressive (denotative) explanation so that it tries to reveal the ideological side that is not visible or implicit.

DISCUSS

I. visual images and connotative messages

The Swamp Thing character is shown in the form of a red-eyed monster with a body of all kinds of elements from swamp vegetation. The comic genre was originally included in the category of revenge-motivated horror, but later because the character had a duty to "protect", it changed the narrative context to the superhero genre.

The reader is given a spooky impression at first because of his unusual figure, which consists of parts of swamp plants, tendrils, and growing shoots. When the Swamp Thing character turns into a part of the superhero genre, the reader is diverted to a different impression, namely enthusiasm, respect, and trying to become a fan favorite.

From the changes in the genre of the characters and the impressions generated by the readers, interpretations of the Swamp Thing fictional character design emerge, namely:

I. The characters are designed based on something scary who then plans to take revenge with all his might. At this point the power of fear becomes the highlight and dominates the character design. So it can be said that how to create a spooky and scary impression through the monster character design

2. The strength of the character that is able to personify similar to the power of nature it has, brings the interpretation that the reader is sought to realize that nature has a more power, so that humans should appreciate the power of nature more, rather than be afraid of that power.

3. The character who is told that before becoming a monster is a scientist and carries his human nature after changing, bringing the reader's approach to a more humane response. The figure of a monster who becomes a protector is considered a protagonist entity, this invites readers' sympathy to see other living creatures along with themselves as part of the natural ecosystem and tries to ward off human domination over other entities.

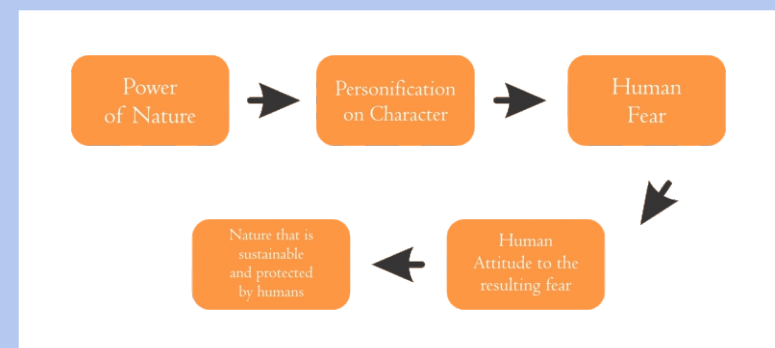


Diagram The relation of human fear towards the personification of the forces of nature with nature conservation

2. Media popularity and conservation efforts

Swamp Thing is a character whose first appearance in comics media and then adopted in other media, such as films, television series, graphic novels, games, and merchandise. The level of popularity of these characters can be used to support the spirit and movement for environmental care and nature conservation globally. The function of the media other than to fulfill the entertainment needs of the audience, the main function is to share information. Information regarding the preservation and conservation of the environment needs to be disseminated, because the natural environment is the space in which various living things, including humans, live.

The popularity of fictional characters has an opportunity to spread that message, at least to the fans. So that fans, whether consciously or not, will help spread the message.

The advantage of using fictional characters is the flexibility of the context that can be adapted from one scenario to another. This flexibility certainly has the opportunity to be utilized not only by one message, but also flexible to be used as a forum for other messages.

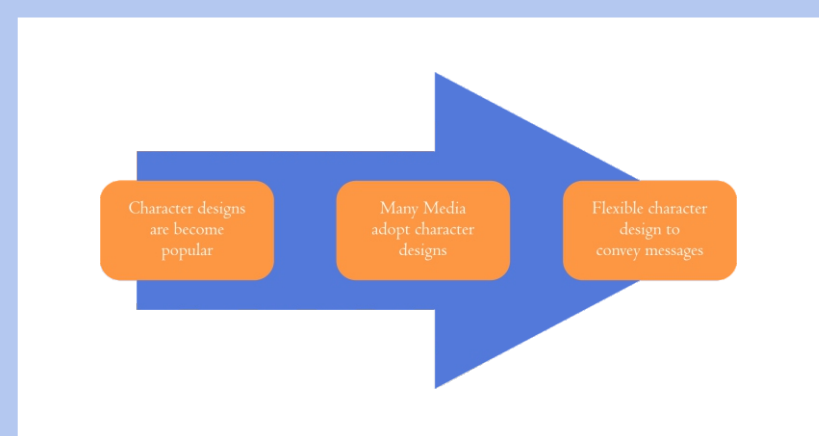


Diagram The relationship between the popularity of the character design and the flexibility of the content of the message conveyed

CONCLUSION

The result of this study is that the superhero character approach as the personification of natural forces that are considered scary by humans can be used as an effort to preserve the environment and nature. So that humans with their fears are forced to obey what nature does. The parameters of the effectiveness of character design are seen from the sustainability and development of media that elevate the character's content, so that in fact almost all popular fictional characters are able to convey special messages, such as nature and environmental conservation.

