

UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE SANTA CATARINA

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**DEATH IN MODERN LITERATURE: HOW THE GRAPHIC NOVELS *FUN HOME*
AND *DAYTRIPPER* TRANSCEND THE LIMITATIONS PROPOSED BY LESSING
IN *LAOCOÖN***

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Trabalho de Conclusão de Curso, apresentado ao
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Orientador: Markus Johannes Weiniger

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“To speculate subtly on art merely on the basis of general ideas might lead us to fanciful conclusions, which sooner or later and to our shame we should find refuted in the works of art.”

Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (138)

“...we die so we can prove that we lived.”

João Guimarães Rosa (my translation)

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Abstract

Graphic novels, despite having gained more literary recognition in the last decades, are still stigmatized for being comprised of both words and pictures (McCloud 150). The first writer to fully approach the limitations and potentials of different media was the author Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, with his essay *Laocoön*. Despite being the source of such stigma, *Laocoön* provides a good theoretical framework with which to measure graphic novels' capabilities. This paper attempts to demonstrate that graphic novels can transcend the aesthetic limitations of the media of painting and poetry, as proposed by Lessing, by analyzing how the themes of death and mortality are approached in the graphic novels *Fun Home* (2006) and *Daytripper* (2010). By focusing on matters such as intertextuality, visual iconography, panel transition, word-image relation, composition, and color this research analyzed how these graphic novels used the tools of comics in order to express their ideas about death and mortality, thus suggesting that they are not prone to the limitations of more traditional media.

Keywords: Graphic Novel, Literary Theory, Lessing's *Laocoön*, Death in Literature

Resumo

Graphic novels, apesar de terem recebido mais reconhecimento literário nas últimas décadas, ainda são estigmatizadas por serem compostas por palavras e imagens (McCloud 150). O primeiro autor a tratar das limitações e capacidades de diferentes mídias foi Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, com seu ensaio *Laocoön*. Apesar de ser a base desse julgamento, *Laocoön* pode beneficiar graphic novels por se tratar de um bom texto teórico para medir seus atributos. Este trabalho procura confirmar que graphic novels podem transcender as limitações estéticas das mídias de pintura e de poesia, através de uma análise de como os temas de morte e mortalidade são trabalhados nas graphic novels *Fun Home* (2006) e *Daytripper* (2010). Focando em questões como intertextualidade, iconografia visual, transição entre quadros, relação entre palavras e imagens, composição, e cor, esta pesquisa verificou como estas graphic novels utilizam das ferramentas de quadrinhos para expressar suas ideias sobre morte e mortalidade, sugerindo então que elas podem ultrapassar as limitações impostas por mídias tradicionais.

Palavras-chave: Graphic Novel, Teoria Literária, Laocoön de Lessing, Morte na Literatura

List of figures

Fig.1 the Laocoön Group. Marble, Copy after an Hellenistic Original from Ca. 200 BC.

Found at the Esquilin in Rome 1506.” *Wikimedia Commons*, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Laocoon_and_His_Sons_black.jpg.

Fig. 2 McCloud, Scott. *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*, 1st ed., William Morrow, 1993, pp. 52–53.

Fig. 3. Ogden, C. K., and I. A. Richards. “Wikimedia Commons.” *Wikimedia Commons*, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ogden_semiotic_triangle.png.

Fig. 4. Bechdel, Alison. *Fun Home*, Jonathan Cape, 2006, p. 35.

Fig. 5. Bechdel, Alison. *Fun Home*, Jonathan Cape, 2006, p. 27.

Fig. 6. Bechdel, Alison. *Fun Home*, Jonathan Cape, 2006, p. 28.

Fig. 7. Bechdel, Alison. *Fun Home*, Jonathan Cape, 2006, p. 27.

Fig. 8. Bechdel, Alison. *Fun Home*, Jonathan Cape, 2006, p. 51.

Fig 9. Bechdel, Alison. *Fun Home*, Jonathan Cape, 2006, p. 50.

Fig 10. Bechdel, Alison. *Fun Home*, Jonathan Cape, 2006, p. 54.

Fig. 11. Bechdel, Alison. *Fun Home*, Jonathan Cape, 2006, p. 195.

Fig. 12. Bechdel, Alison. *Fun Home*, Jonathan Cape, 2006, p. 196.

Fig. 13. Bá, Gabriel, and Fábio Moon. *Daytripper*, Vertigo, 2011, p. 22.

Fig. 14. Bá, Gabriel, and Fábio Moon. *Daytripper*, Vertigo, 2011, p. 11

Fig. 15. Bá, Gabriel, and Fábio Moon. *Daytripper*, Vertigo, 2011, p. 89.

Fig. 16. Bá, Gabriel, and Fábio Moon. *Daytripper*, Vertigo, 2011, p. 198-199

Fig. 17. Bá, Gabriel, and Fábio Moon. *Daytripper*, Vertigo, 2011, p. 217

Fig. 18. Bá, Gabriel, and Fábio Moon. *Daytripper*, Vertigo, 2011, p. 218

Fig. 19. Kucker Triana, Nicholas. *Fun Home and Daytripper Visual Iconography Chart*

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	7
2. Review of Literature	8
2.1 <i>Lessing and the Laocoön</i>	9
2.2 <i>Comics and the graphic novel</i>	13
2.3 <i>Signs and expression</i>	18
2.4 <i>Representations of death in literature</i>	20
3. Method	24
3.1 <i>Data collection</i>	25
3.2 <i>Data analysis</i>	25
4. Results and Discussion	26
4.1 <i>Lessing's Laocoön</i>	27
4.1.1 <i>Aesthetics and effects on the Laocoön</i>	27
4.1.2 <i>The realms of painting and poetry</i>	29
4.1.3 <i>The Laocoön's affair with comics</i>	31
4.2 <i>Death and Mortality in Fun Home and Daytripper</i>	34
4.2.1 <i>Fun Home's analysis</i>	34
4.2.1.1 <i>Fun Home's general relationship with death and mortality</i>	34
4.2.1.2 <i>The approach of death and mortality in particular scenes of Fun Home</i>	35
4.2.1.2.1 <i>Extract 1 - pages 27 to 29</i>	35
4.2.1.2.2 <i>Extract 2 - pages 50 to 54</i>	38
4.2.1.2.3 <i>Extract 3 - pages 195 and 196</i>	41
4.2.2 <i>Daytripper's analysis</i>	43
4.2.2.1 <i>Daytripper's general relationship with death and mortality</i>	43
4.2.2.2 <i>The approach of death and mortality in particular scenes of Daytripper</i>	44
4.2.2.2.1 <i>Extract 1 - pages 11 and 12</i>	44
4.2.2.2.2 <i>Extract 2 - pages 88 and 89</i>	46
4.2.2.2.3 <i>Extract 3 - pages 196 to 199</i>	48
4.2.2.2.4 <i>Extract 4 - pages 217 and 218</i>	49
4.3 <i>Framing it all together</i>	51
Conclusion	56
Works Cited	59
Appendix	61

1. Introduction

Graphic novels have proven to be a versatile and concurrent genre of the medium of comics in the contemporary era. As new titles are published weekly all around the globe and comics in general account for a considerable portion of the reading market, it has long been disregarded as a medium aimed solely at children and teenagers (Roeder 6). The rise of the graphic novel has seen meaningful publications around all spectra of the fictional and non-fictional genres. And yet, to this day, only two graphic novels have been awarded the Pulitzer prize, namely *Maus* by Art Spiegelman and *Welcome to the New World* by Jake Halpern and Michael Sloan. Graphic novels can be as political as they can be emotional, as comedic as they can be educational; they captivate readers not only in the way other media have been doing for longer, but they reach further by engaging the audience with a different conception of art. Unfortunately, they are still heavily stigmatized. Because they are comprised of both words and pictures, the general public has long surmised graphic novels as being a lesser version of any of the two; either the writing is so weak that it requires images to follow, or the pictures are so poor that they demand a written explanation. “Traditional thinking has long held that truly great works of art and literature are only possible when the two are kept at arm’s length” (McCloud 140).

Both literature and visual art possess their own traits and fields of actions. One of the first authors to approach this distinction was the German author Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, in his essay *Laocoön or The Limits of Painting and Poetry* published in 1766. Lessing’s work sets to create a model to what constitutes visual art (e.g. sculpture and painting) and written art (e.g. poetry and prose), and how they ought to be criticized. Through analyzing Greek pieces of both art spectra that deal with the same subject matter, such as the story of Laocoön, he expresses that each is guided by its own set of rules, each prone to its specific limitations in order to be more effective as a piece of work. His examples and ideas might stem from the Greek culture and 18th century aesthetics but they are no less relevant to this day. The roots of what constitutes the general public’s perception of great art have not developed exceptionally over the last couple hundred years (McCloud 150). Bryan Tucker, in his essay *Gotthold Ephraim Lessing’s Laocoön and the Lessons of Comics*, argues that literature students working with comics can analyze Lessing’s take on these different art forms and question “which limitations are different in comics? [...] To what extent do they transcend aesthetic

limitations by combining word and image?” (31). Additionally, the comic book artist and theoretician Scott McCloud concludes in his book *Understanding Comics* that all new media are judged by the standards of the old (151), which leads us to think that for graphic novels to reach the status of art alongside of genres such as drama, prose or poetry it should prove practically that it can surpass the more traditional standards that still guide them to the present day.

Although humans are social individuals, we can never be truly aware of what crosses the minds of the others, or convey what we are truly thinking (McCloud 194). As a consequence, we turn to art in order to convey our thoughts, our loves, and fears to others. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that we attempt to communicate that which we contemplate the most — our own existence. By “distilling life to its most mundane” (Thompson in Bá and Moon 7) we obsess over how we came to be, what our purpose is and most importantly: when we will leave. Mankind has always turned to art to ponder about mortality (Skelton 213). Alison Bechdel’s biographic story of the convoluted relationship between her father and her, in the graphic novel *Fun Home* and Fábio Moon’s and Gabriel Bá’s blazing fictional tale of a Brazilian writer, *Daytripper*, are great contemporary examples of acclaimed graphic novels that dwell, among many others¹, on the subject of mortality in a Western perspective. Since this has been a recurrent theme on both visual and written art, it was due that this contemporary media comprised of pictures and images had a take on it.

Based on the discussion above, this paper aims to investigate, in a practical manner, how the tools that these graphic novels have at their disposal work collectively to approach the theme of death. Thus, it intends to demonstrate that its medium possesses the potential to surpass the limitations of written and visual art proposed by Lessing in *Laocoön*. The intention is not to lessen Lessing's work in any way, but rather to elevate that of the graphic novel, by following his critical footsteps.

2. Review of Literature

The relevant publications are divided into four subsections: Lessing and the *Laocoön*, Comics and the graphic novel, Signs and expression, and Representations of death in literature. The first intends to cover Lessing’s critical role in the age of Enlightenment,

¹ Other aspects common to both texts include: family relations and intertextuality.

accompanied by his complexity in relation to the movement, and his remarks on writing the essay *Laocoön*. The second sets itself to clarify the area of comics studies, its history, stigmas, definitions, as well as its most prominent vessel: the graphic novel. The third subsection offers a glance at the area of semiotics and its relation to comics, offering tools for the analysis of aesthetic experience in comics. Finally, the last part is a revision of the relationship between literature and its highly acquainted subject of death in Western culture, with the different interpretations it is capable of expressing.

2.1 Lessing and the *Laocoön*

Although much of our perception of media, its specific traits and capabilities, were prominent throughout modernism (Gunning 36), the ideas that comprise it stem back to the 18th century with the introduction of critical thinking in the Age of Enlightenment. Scott McCloud argues on the sixth chapter of his book *Understanding Comics* that the general public's standard for "great" art has not changed significantly over the two and a half centuries (150). It is set to have originated, in the case of writing and painting, at the moment in time in which both media were the furthest from each other, the former being more symbolical whilst the latter was more representational.

It was at that time, during the Enlightenment period, that critics, artists, and philosophers started to reflect on their roles within society, revisiting and translating ideas from classical texts. Being influenced by Aristotle's *Poetics*, many of these thinkers believed their aim was to "educate the public, to make them conscious of the need for social and political reform, and their rights and duties with regard to the government" (Beiser *Enlightenment* 76). The age of Enlightenment, known in France as *les Lumières*, and as *Aufklärung* in Germany, proposed a revolution on the level of ideals. Dogmatism would no longer be tolerated, as reasoning became the fundamental path to follow. Enlightenment thinkers around Europe advocated for liberty of conscious, religious toleration and equality before the law (Beiser *Enlightenment* 139).

The American philosopher Frederick Beiser describes that the emergence of rational criticism at the time was valuable as it led to self-conscious and freedom of the individual — giving people autonomy through questioning authority (230). This sense of being able to understand the world around oneself and thus not being at the mercy of nature and the unknown is at the core of the German idea of *Bildung*, which sees the search for knowledge

as a form of social maturation. Therefore, it is not by coincidence that the “greatest *Aufklärer* of all” (148) and the father to our modern conception of media (Fried in Lessing viii) came from this context.

Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, was a German writer, philosopher, dramatist, and critic of the 18th century and it is considered by many, including Beiser, as “the last great thinker in the rationalist tradition of aesthetics (Beiser *Diotima’s Children* 244). Lessing, differently from the other aestheticians of the time, such as Mendelssohn or Winckelmann, managed effectively to combine both theory and practice of the arts, as he carried a sensitivity stemming from being a well-established poet and playwright. However, as the translator to the English version of Lessing’s *Laocoön*, Edward McCormick, mentions - Lessing’s poems and plays have not sustained themselves throughout the years as “outstanding examples of artistic creation.”² So, if we are to claim that something has achieved true worldwide permanence it must be “his immense critical gift of reasoning” (in Lessing xxiv).

With time, Lessing became not only a critic within the Enlightenment, but also a self-critic to the movement, as he would “refuse to identify any proposition as true,” defending any belief for the sake of debate (Beiser *Diotima’s Children* 244), pushing reason to its limits, regardless of any consequence on the social, political, religious spheres (Beiser *Enlightenment* 254). Additionally, it is this kind of criticism that led him to write *Laocoön, An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry*, published in 1766. The essay is named after the sculpture of the Trojan priest, who in Greek and Roman mythology tried to warn the Trojans against accepting the wooden horse from the Greeks and as such was punished by Athena, who sent two large snakes to strangle him and his two sons. These events have been depicted by numerous artists in ancient and modern times, such as Homer, Virgil, and Blake. The sculpture in question, which establishes Lessing’s train of thought is called *Laocoön and His Sons*, or the *Laocoön Group*. The sculptor and date of completion are unknown, although it is believed to date from the first decades of the Roman Empire.

² McCormick has a parochial anglophone perspective of Lessing’s work, as to this day Lessing’s plays still remain widely popular in German language theaters.



Fig.1 the Laocoön Group. Marble, Copy after an Hellenistic Original from approximately. 200 BC. Found at the Esquilin in Rome 1506.” *Wikimedia Commons*, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Laocoon_and_His_Sons_black.jpg.

Lessing’s discussion on the piece, which introduces the first chapters of the *Laocoön*, was written as a counterargument to another thinker’s impression on the composition of the sculpture and its stylistic choices of representation. Johann Winckelmann, a contemporary of Lessing, argued that the sculpture did not represent Laocoön and his sons with horrible expressions at the moment of their death for the Greek followed the ethos of simplistic dignity (Beiser *Diotima’s Children* 192). Lessing’s main counterargument relies on the medium of the piece for justifying its depiction. The Laocoön Group is a sculpture and as such, for Lessing, it cannot bear to sustain the greatest moment of pain for it would quickly become unbearable to look at (Lessing 24). Winckelmann, in Lessing’s view, dismisses that Homer describes the same scene as a gruesome death, whilst still following the same Greek ethos (Beiser *Diotima’s Children* 271).

Lessing had in time become more interested in the underlying principles that directed each medium of art and intended to set a guidance to critics on how a piece of art could effectively achieve its intended aim. Far from being the only writer to tackle the debate on the difference of the arts, he was the one that went the furthest with it (McCormick in Lessing xiii). Following Winckelmann’s discussion, Lessing composed the 29 chapter essay, contrasting painting (accounting for all visual art) and poetry (accounting for written and

spoken art) challenging the old *ut pictura poesis*³, attributed to Horace, which considered painting and poetry as equal paths to represent art (Fisher 112).

In the *Laocoön*, Lessing aimed at establishing a foundation for criticism, advocating that “each art has a characteristic purpose and medium, and that it should be judged by them alone. We should not expect one art to do the work of another, but judge each by what it aims to do and the instruments it has at its disposal to achieve them.” (Beiser *Diotima’s Children* 266). To Lessing, whilst painting illustrates bodies in space, in a single moment in time, poetry describes action through time —and the effect produced in the viewer will vary accordingly.

Unsurprisingly, he is not without controversy. The *Laocoön* is a “complex essay contain[ing] nuances and contradictions” (Gunning 37). There is a sensible train of thought, but even Lessing admits to wander off throughout the course of his writing — “I shall return now to my old path, if indeed a man who takes a stroll can be said to have one” (Lessing 104). He provides a myriad of examples and references of works throughout ancient history, that such as the Laocoön Group, he never experienced in person (Sjöholm 23). Sometimes subjectivity is formalized into truth as “without argument or explanation, Lessing makes it a fundamental principle that the chief end of the fine arts is to create pleasure in the spectator” (Beiser *Diotima’s Children* 269). Schlegel was also one to question his utmost reverence towards the ancients — “Was not neoclassicism another form of dogmatism” which the *Aufklärer* so vigorously opposed? (in Beiser *Enlightenment* 258).

He approaches subjective matters, such as beauty, purpose, and genius, in very objective manners, by establishing rules and arguing in the name of reason. Lessing’s praise of the role of genius is regarded as one of such incoherences, since he claims that a work of art can be mindful of the medium it belongs to, complying with the intended structure and principles of beauty, truth, and goodness, while still being devoid of a soul if it is not crafted by a genius (Beiser *Diotima’s Children* 252). Lessing’s work as a writer made him aware of the fact that artists need inspiration, and as such, are not entirely led by the proposed rules of success in any of the media. The rules should serve more as a guide for critics to understand the application of the artist’s genius, instead of a guide for composition (Beiser *Diotima’s Children* 245).

³ “as is painting, so is poetry”.

Because of such views, Lessing shared many similarities with the aesthetic position of Romanticism, that would develop after the French Revolution. He constantly praised a higher figure, such as the genius artist, who is normally seen as an emotional figure that can work as a guide towards eliciting new ideals through art. Romantic writers were, as the preceding *Aufklärers*, in search of higher understanding through an autonomous development of the self (Mellor 127). Lessing's justification on this side is that he considers the "genius, rules, inspiration, and reason complements rather than opposites" (Beiser *Diotima's Children* 253). He considers the genius capable of establishing connections between structure and purpose of a masterpiece, following the rules of the medium unconsciously. In that sense, the poet, according to Lessing, is treated more as a "hyper-rational" figure than an emotional one (Wolf in Beiser *Diotima's Children* 256).

Trying to fit Lessing and his *Laocoön* into one category can be ludicrous. The essay was and still remains a pivotal work on the birth of modern aesthetics, even if its reading is complicated due to the number of topics he tries to integrate without pursuing "a single line of exposition" (Wellbery on Morton 312). As Fisher rightfully says: More than "fitting [him] into one or another category, we should focus on his 'open-minded approach to truth'" (49), and understand his ultimate goal, which was to enlighten us that there are boundaries to art and, that to neglect that, is to be willing to misjudge a piece entirely.

2.2 Comics and the graphic novel

To define comics and the graphic novel is an arduous task, and the reasons for this are manifold. Firstly, there are a great number of contrasting interpretations and biases on the matter (e.g. Chute's, Tabachnick's, and Moore's). Additionally, the fact is that many of the artists working in the industry fail to find a common ground for how to define their work, and do not engage in the scholastic debate over its terminology and substance. However, there are some welcoming exceptions of artists that not only strived toward defining their own work, but instead engaged in debates and coined definitions that could guide both old and emerging professionals of the area, as is the case of artists like Will Eisner⁴ and Art Spiegelman (Chute 460). However, the greatest example of converging practice and theory — much like Lessing during the Enlightenment — was Scott McCloud. Although a veteran comic book artist with

⁴ Will Eisner, one of the first authors in the industry to approach the theory of the media, defined comics as "sequential art" (McCloud 5).

various works of fiction published (e.g. *Zot!*, *The Sculptor*), McCloud is most famously known by his theoretical book *Understanding Comics* (1993), written in comic book form.

McCloud’s text is a deconstruction of the hidden workings of comics as an art form and as a means of communication. It establishes definitions, basic elements, processes and theories that surround this specific form of art. He defines comics as “Juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or produce an aesthetic response in the viewers” (9), vaguely enough so that it could be seen as a media — comprising all different styles, genres, themes, and messages (6) — in platforms such as comic books, comic strips, graphic novels and more. Additionally, he is also breaking the notion of comics being depicted as cheaply printed frivolous stories of super heroes (2 McCloud).

McCloud clarifies that the essence of comics is to substitute space for time. While a scene moves from one space to the next, it also moves from one moment to the next (5). It functions, as any of the narrative medium, by choosing specific moments in order to convey information. To sustain his argument of seeing comics as a media, he elaborates on the different aspects that compose it. Firstly, he establishes a vocabulary to the medium through his graph of visual iconography. Between the three vertices (i.e. the picture plane, reality, and meaning) would be the “total pictorial vocabulary of comics or of any of the visual arts” (McCloud 51).

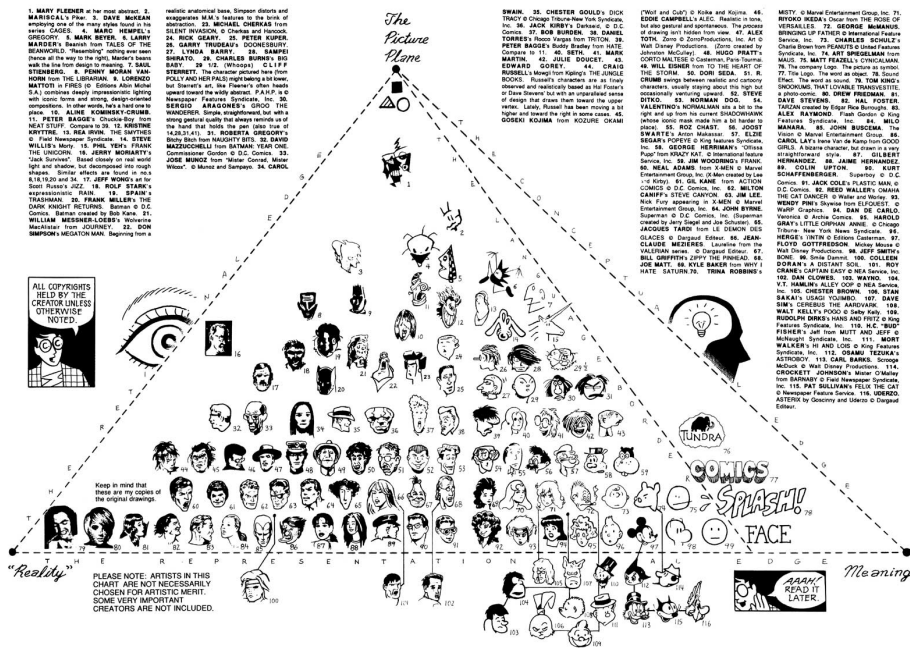


Fig. 2 McCloud, Scott. *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*, 1st ed., William Morrow, 1993, pp. 52–53.

The pyramid⁵ (see appendix A for a higher resolution) is filled with examples of popular comic book characters in their supposed placement within the various edges that compose it. The bottom line accounts for the representational edge and varies between photo-realistic depictions on the left, and simple cartoon-like depictions on the right, until the line of the “language border”. The line on the top left is the “retinal edge” as pictures can vary from iconic representations (laying at the bottom) to abstractions (towards the top), until arriving at the picture plane, a place “where shapes, lines and colors can be themselves, and not pretend otherwise” (McCloud 51). The right side of the pyramid accounts for the use of language, varying in representation from more direct language (e.g. simple detached words) on the left, to more meaningful and abstract language such (e.g. naturalist poetry) on the right. Equally, the visual representation of words can also convey meaning, depending on the way the letters are drawn, thus pushing them towards the top of the graph, at the picture plane.

After dealing with the vocabulary of comics, McCloud sets to describe its “grammar,” through a concept of closure⁶. Closure allows for the reader to connect the different and sequential panels into one meaningful and narrative progression. And it is only through actual engagement and use of imagination that the stories in a page can unfold, making comics a participative media. On his third chapter McCloud categorizes different types of panel transition, all divided into the amount of closure (or reader involvement) they require in order to relate different panels (70-72). These types are: moment-to-moment (requiring very little closure), action-to-action (portraying different actions by the same subject), subject-to-subject (depicting different parts of a same scene), scene-to-scene (transitioning between significant portions of time and space), aspect-to-aspect (exploring different aspects of a mood or a place), and finally non-sequitur (which account for panels that have no logical relation). McCloud also presents that closure is also one of the aspects that allows comics the interaction with time, as the transitions between panels will always render some progression, however small. The other aspects, as he elaborates on his fourth chapter, are the use of dialogue in speech bubbles (as they imply sound, which can only exist in time), the use of

⁵ The graph is contextualized under the branch of semiotics on the section Signs and expression of the Literature review.

⁶ Perceiving, or visualizing, the whole, while only observing parts (McCloud 63).

motion lines (that imply movement), and the different shapes of a panel (e.g. extending them to imply they last longer).

Despite comics dealing with both “visual and verbal modes of address” (Roeder 5), they are more than the convergence of both forms. Comics do not need to have any words at all to imply narrative and progression. Similarly, no single isolated panel is a comic. McCloud argues that although words and pictures are seen as partners, one of the forms will always be leading the other, since the truth of the media lies in the balance between the two forms and their innate properties of progression. McCloud also divides between different possibilities of relation between words and pictures (153). They are: word specific (illustrations do not add significant meaning), pictures specific (words do no more than provide a soundtrack), duo-specific (both convey the same message), additive (where one amplifies the other), in parallel (combinations that do not intersect), montage (treating words as part of the pictures, and interdependent (conveying an idea that neither could convey alone).

Although we can consider Pre-Columbian “picture manuscripts” as an early example of progressive visual narrative (McCloud 10), it was with the works of artists such as William Hogarth and Rodolphe Töppfer on the 18th and 19th centuries that our understanding of modern comics came into fruition (Weiner 28). Töppfer’s work was intended as comical and had no intention of being seen as high art. Goethe had come to praise the potential of his “picture novels” (Chute 455), but was disappointed in his pursuit of frivolous subject (McCloud 17). The European approach to illustration started then to create branches, from realistically depicted and praised works of Max Ernst (McCloud 19), to the cheaply reproduced satirical illustrations of magazines such as the French *le Charivari*, and the English *Punch* (Tabachnick *Cambridge Companion* 28). Popular works such as Wilhelm Busch’s *Max und Moritz* also cemented the relationship between these early comics and children, as they were the target readership.

In the United States, artists favored the comical and mass-produced approach of comics, as they proved to be popular among children and immigrants due to their simple style and use of language (Chute 455). This remained true with the emergence of Joe Shuster’s Superman in the 1930s, which gave birth to a whole era of super hero’s comics, printing low-price weekly and monthly issues. Despite the superhero’s popularity, their marketability and mass-production led non-comic book readers to perpetuate their association with low art. It

was not until the late 60's and 70's that underground comic book artists started to appear, experiencing with new formats of self-publishing, influenced by general non-conformity and dissatisfaction of the political and economical climate (Chute 456). As the early readers of comics had matured, they responded well to different and more adult stories and displays, along with its embrace of reportages, autobiographies and historical fiction as narrative outlets of anti-establishment (Hatfield x).

Although Will Eisner was one of the first to embrace the term “graphic novel” within one of his works⁷ (Weiner 42), it was only later, with the publication of works such as *Maus: A Survivor's Tale*, *Watchmen*, and *The Dark Knight Returns*, in 1986 that the term became notably known. These were the first works to receive recognition outside the traditional comic book readership (Weiner 43), as they had grittier, more intense characters and storylines as well as being book-bound publications instead of individual magazines. Soon publishing companies and investors saw the financial potential resultant from the term's popularity and started exploiting it by attaching it to various publications, regardless of their general narrative approach, much to the distaste of various artists and readers (Roeder 4).

The scholar Stephen Tabachnick describes the graphic novel as “an extended comic book freed of commercial constrictions, written by adults for adults, and able to tackle complex and sophisticated issues using all of the tools available to the best artists and writers [today]” (i *Cambridge Companion*). However, as mentioned above, the term is not devoid of criticism. Roeder argues that to use the term as a means of distinguishing from other works of comics fosters a certain “high-low dynamic in a field that is already marginalized and fighting for aesthetic approval” (6). Graphic novels have come to mean, to the general public, a “serious comic book,” more ambitious and certainly more expensive. Other scholars, such as Hillary Chute, believe that the term graphic novel is too narrow as it leaves out all of the powerful biographical work that has been done in comics for the last thirty years, and thus vouches for the term “graphic narrative,” as it encompasses graphic memoirs such as *Maus* and *Fun Home*. Despite the controversies that are attached to the term, one cannot deny what it has done in favor of the recognition of the medium as a literary and artistic form (Hatfield xi). Due to its widespread popularity, as well as dealing with both works of fiction and non-

⁷ *A Contract With God*, published in 1978.

fiction, this paper uses Tabachnick's definition of the graphic novel to describe its study sample.

2.3 Signs and expression

As aforementioned, it is strenuous to express exactly what we think to others as there is no connection between our minds and the minds of those around us (McCloud 194). As a result, we cannot know how others feel or perceive things. "In the most general sense, a medium is a means of transmitting some matter of content from a source to a site of reception" (Davies 181) as any medium provides us with a bridge of communication. However, ensuring that the information from the world reaches us is only half of the job. We need certain tools to decode and interpret information we receive, in order to understand what it really means.

Meanings, to Kress and van Leeuwen, are culturally and historically specific (2). The way something is perceived by a given group of society does not suggest that another group, even coexisting spatially and temporally, will identify it the same way. Pierce implies that this is true because nothing exists or is described if not relative to something already existing and known (8), and thus different societies will be aware and have references that are exclusive to their group. Furthermore, he states that "we think only in signs" (10), and it is with these signs that we are able to represent the world around us. Semiotics is the study of the signs of the world and their meanings, and it provides us with the tools to decode them.

Texts of all kinds are a grouping of signs, working to represent and convey an idea. Some signs are more easily decoded than others (McCloud 27), images are received information, as we need no formal education to decode them, whilst words are perceived information, because they require time and specialized knowledge. Comics work with both these types of information (49), and use, as any medium, all of the objective elements of its pictorial and linguistic vocabulary in order to convey subjective elements, such as death and mortality.

Despite making no mention of it, McCloud's visual iconography pyramid (see appendix A) is a clear reference to Ogden's and Richards' semiotic triangle. The triangle is a map to the understanding of how linguistic symbols relate to the objects they represent and the meanings they are ascribed. Additionally, it is used by Pierce in his studies of visual semiotics by determining the relationship between signs (mind), objects (world), and their

interpretants (culture) on the optical spectrum (i.e. icon, index, symbol). McCloud's graph is a clockwise 90 degree rotation of this triangle with a linguistic edge attached on the right side, which makes McClouds' vertices of reality, meaning, and the picture plane, become equivalent to Ogden's and Richards' referent, thought or reference, and symbol vertices, respectively.

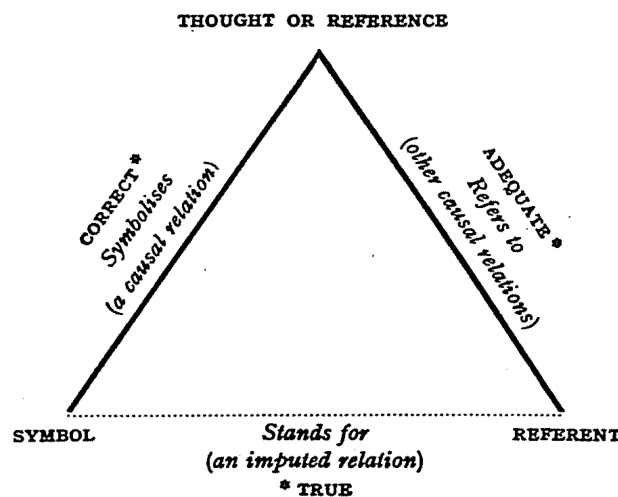


Fig. 3. Ogden, C. K., and I. A. Richards. *Wikimedia Commons*, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ogden_semiotic_triangle.png.

Although linguistic signs are arbitrary (Sjöholm 23), visual signs will always relate to some meaning in the minds of readers due to their form, even if the context is not clear. Thus, graphic novels impose on the viewer a myriad of visual stimuli that requires decoding. These types of decoding lie at the heart of the aesthetic experience, by observing with “close attention to the sensuous features of an object or the imaginary world it projects” (Stecker 142). Although comics are what Kress and van Leeuwen regard as a “linear text” (208), its “past [present] and future are real and visible [at] all” times (McCloud 104), thus allowing for greater interaction between the components of the page. Not only the composition within a panel, but the display and relation between the panels on the page convey meaning that is subconsciously directed towards the reader.

In order to decode such visual elements one must look at the relationship between the composing signs and how they affect one another. Kress and van Leeuwen propose in their chapter, “The meaning of composition,” that the representational and interactive meanings of an image can be expressed and read through three interrelated systems: information value, salience, and framing (177). Information value concerns the placement of the elements in the

whole of the image and the relationship between them. They can be broken into zones such as left, right, centre, top, and bottom. Saliency speaks of the ways with which the elements attract the viewer more, by matters of size, color, sharpness. Framing involves the appearance or absence of framing devices, connecting or disconnecting elements.

2.4 Representations of death in literature

Literature, as a form of expression, will transmit patterns and ideologies from the era in which it is produced. Even if unconsciously, aspects of a group and their way of thinking will slip through the cracks of narrative and composition, consequently turning literary work into a representative sample to the inner voices of distinctive groups of society, at certain times. This comes through because “literature as a discipline aims just as certainly as science does to understand the world in which we live and to interpret our role as participants in the human condition” (Skelton 213). Scholars such as Adriana Teodorescu, editor of *Death Representations in Literature*, believe that equal to literature’s potential for representation, is its capacity for influence; as it possesses the “power of transforming, [...] intervening [...] and re-creating” the world (69), directly influencing people by reaching within their emotions (Skelton 212).

Furthermore, Teodorescu argues that as literature exists in a different dimension than reality — one not prone to the passage of time as we normally experience it — therefore, transporting both creator and reader to this realm, when in contact with a literary text (59). Her idea of literary escapism is supported by Thomas, who adds the belief that society has a need for such an environment, where people are capable of voicing concerns, dreams, and aspirations essential to their lives (297). Teodorescu believes that death is one such condition that literature attempts to respond to, and that it is a highly privileged medium in addressing it (65). One possible reason for such an advantage may come from literature and death’s lack of a unique framework of representation, which allows for a versatile approach. Picard asserts that if literature does exist in its own realm, and it is not constrained by a limited formula of describing the world, then it may use its power of producing an aesthetic effect to serve as a vessel for different literary theories to express their ideas (in Teodorescu 69).

The combination between death and literature should come then as no surprise, considering death’s need for a flexible outlet, once its meaning is very dependent on context and theory. John Skelton’s work on the *Death and Dying in Literature*, reviewed various

literary works, from different cultures and time periods, in order to demonstrate that “death means different things at different times” (211). The depiction of death may remark issues of injustice and tragedy or a positive passage to a better plane, given that literary narrative is not factual, as it does not deal with conditions that are true at all times for every reader (213). Skelton further emphasizes the importance of “cultural familiarity,” as readers do not need to “share the belief system” of a literary piece to understand the imagery or the weight of a death scene, as long as they are aware of the customs and perceptions that guide the choices of representation (214).

The Western cultural view of death has mostly been influenced by Christianity. We have been conditioned to understand the idea of bereavement and mortality in the context of eternity (Skelton 214). Although the interpretation that death is but a transition to another world was one of the views proposed by Socrates⁸, it was with the establishment of the Church that society was given a parameter with which to value both life and death. Despite death eventually coming to everyone, the epitome of greatness is the death of Christ, as it is essentially a death most noble; one final selfless act that concludes a journey in order to save the souls of humanity. The pain and the suffering endured by his character and the ones around him are comforted by the thought of reaching eternal peace and having taught a lesson of kindness. More than life, his is a death filled with purpose. Russel (in Hakola and Kivistö x) recognizes that Western literature has culturally attached itself to the representation of meaningful deaths. Despite it being able to advance a plot, it is most often used as a way to “emphasize its meaning and importance”. Death, in Western literature, thus became a literary device aimed at providing closure.

However, seeing death as a means of providing closure seems to imply that it is only present at the end of a life, and that it has no other affect in the life itself, except in being a final chapter. Parkes goes against this idea, as he argues that death does not reside in the future, but that it is an “ever-present possibility” that is always included in our state of being (in Thomas 295). Thus, life and death walk hand in hand, from the moment we are born, and its thought remains present at every moment before the act of dying itself. Heidegger acknowledges how death overcomes transience: “as soon as man begins to live, he is old enough to die” (in Wilder 14). This indicates that society is constantly accompanied by the

⁸ Another view treats death as “a state of nothingness and utter unconsciousness” (in Kundu 11).

knowledge that their existence is finite, whether or not they are prepared to cope with this understanding.

Freud claims that it is practically impossible to imagine our own nonexistence, for we are bound to picture ourselves from the perspective of a spectator; and it is this inability to imagine an afterlife that fuels most of our fear of death (in Kundu 11). In response to this fear, we tend to stigmatize death to its very core. Bauman argues that society finds “death abnormal and dangerous” (in Hakola and Kivistö xii). We portray it as an evil enemy that must be repressed (Kundu 10), and in spite of all the abjection, society is fascinated by its depiction. As already remarked by Aristotle in his *Poetics*, people have a tendency to be allured to graphic and gory representations of death, despite taking no pleasure from actually witnessing it in real life (in Hakola and Kivistö xiv).

The Internet, whilst being able to satisfy this general curiosity and need for emotional climax on the fictional depiction of death (e.g. through movies), has also allowed for the proliferation of images of true eschatological experiences (e.g. accidents, terrorist attacks). Hakola and Kivistö argue for the importance of literature in addressing trauma and mourning in such events, as death — although a private experience — still affects and “resonates in the surrounding society in many ways” (xv). Consequently, the scholars raise awareness for a resultant, “psychological type of death”(viii), which takes place in the mind of the bereaved survivor and can be an “even more painful form of death”. Literature can serve as consolation to those suffering from impending death by using the elements of closure or catharsis, or even by approaching different perspectives and literary genres (e.g. elegies, lamentations), argue Hakola and Kivistö (vii). As mentioned by Skelton (213), we do not read accounts of others that have passed through death-related and grieving experiences for the quality of thought or feeling, but for the authenticity that “shines through”. To be able to connect with the experience of another human being is the true achievement.

Wilder’s work on Mortality in Contemporary Literature departs from the fact that the “meaninglessness, vacancy, [and] non-being” that was considered to arrive from death is already present in modern life, and as such, it is a recurrent theme in literature (5). He claims that society searches for meaning in literature because the social aspects of our life can no longer sustain us; “The public, social, cultural life of our time has become impersonal, unauthentic, authoritarian. Even its loyalties are ideological and manufactured or

sentimental” (18). Walter Benjamin corroborates this idea of narrative fiction being the place where society goes to in search of the knowledge and meaning that is denied to us in real life (in Hakola and Kivistö vii). Literature can then be seen as a catalogue of social ideas, and a sandbox of social expression and self-reflexion. Readers and writers are able to take advantage of literature’s capacity of disregarding facts in order to give shape and voice to their dreams and concerns about death and mortality (Skelton 211), in a way they could not express in real life. Consequently, it is understandable that death, as treated in narrative, “makes more sense” than the banality we are provided with in reality (Hakola and Kivistö viii).

In order to escape from existence’s lack of sense, society innately strives to appropriate literature’s potential for immortality. The British philosopher Stephen Cave declares that humans have a cultural desire to shape the world, even after their death, in order to be considered meaningful (in Hakola and Kivistö xiii). This would motivate artists to compose and write, in order to produce pieces in the hopes that their influence will permeate through time. And although it is true that authors from centuries ago are still “kept alive” by their works and influence our society to this day, a myriad of works once considered canonicals have become forgotten, unsure if they will ever be rediscovered. Bauman (in Hakola and Kivistö xiii) argues that the immortality achieved by the author is only meaningful and true “for as long as [their] texts are read and recognized,” leading to the idea that death may also affect the literary realm, even if the relationship between death and literature, and death and society work by different standards.

A more pessimistic view is given by Blanchot, as the author argues that death is a phenomenon that belongs more to the text than to the individual. “As long as I live, I am a mortal being, but, when I die, I cease to be a being, I cease also to be mortal, I am no longer capable of dying, and the death that lies ahead horrifies me, as I see it the way it is: ceasing to be death, it is the impossibility of dying” (in Teodorescu 61). The death of a literary work remains in a limbo, as it can be rediscovered; while our death is a permanent state of non-being, thus becoming devoid of the meaning and purpose we fight so fiercely to sustain. Skelton concludes that we consider the representation of death to be a serious matter, because we fear that our own deaths will not be taken seriously if we do not (215).

Nevertheless, it is literature's objective — when approaching the theme of death and mortality — to appease the reader from the turbulent unknown reality of death. Kundu, on discussing society's reconciliation with death, praises literature's effort of embracing the “human physical frailties” (10). Heidegger agrees with this idea, as he proposes — much like Lessing when discussing painting and poetry — that “our authentic humanity appears only when we resolutely accept and absorb the darkness and shock of our limits” (in Wilder 15). It is the constant thought of death, of finitude, that gives life value (Thomas 295). Death, therefore, can give life meaning.

3. Method

Comics are constantly stigmatized for being mistakenly considered crude and childish fictional depictions of reality. Even graphic novels, which are marketed as a more serious and adult-inclined category of comics, suffer from the negative connotations that are perpetuated by the general public; comics are accustomed to being considered the “bastard child of words and pictures” (McCloud 47). This traditional idea which considers that great art, be it visual or written, is diminished when blended with other mediums stems from the 18th century when both mediums “had drifted [as] apart as possible” (McCloud 145).

As mentioned above, Lessing's research on the conception of aesthetics is a pivotal example of how each art (i.e. painting and poetry) works by a different set of standards. The intended premise is that graphic novels surpass the artistic and aesthetic limitations proposed by Lessing in *Laocoön*, accounting for more than the sum of its parts.

This idea that Graphic Novels are an art form that counters Lessing's descriptions on the limitations of visual and written art is mentioned by some academics in order to foment discussions and raise questions on the nature of the medium (Tucker 31), but it has not been recurrently tested in a practical manner. On the other hand, this type of statement encompasses a sizable sample and far too general an idea in order to be tested practically. For this reason, a way of countering this aspect will be presented in the data collection area of this study.

Due to the characteristics of this question, this research bases itself on the Popper's hypothetico-deductive method (Gil 12), which is characterized by a gap in research that is intended to be filled by testing a hypothesis based on deduction on relevant encompassed data.

3.1 Data collection

Being virtually impossible to make this claim valid to all graphic novels, due to the amount of published material, this paper focuses on a case study of two acclaimed graphic novels, following Perry's Information-Rich Paradigm (57). This intends to "provide a good example" in order to contribute with future research on the area by collecting and interpreting data in a way that it can be transferable to other scenarios (Perry 58). In order to limit the scope of this study, a theme present on both graphic novels had to be appointed and analyzed in isolation. The themes of death and mortality were chosen considering their relevance and presence on more canonical art forms (e.g. literature, painting, drama) and due to literature's underlying privilege in tackling the issue of death (Teodorescu 65).

The two chosen graphic novels were *Fun Home* (2006) and *Daytripper* (2010), best-selling works of non-fiction and fiction, respectively, because both deal (although not exclusively) with the theme of death and mortality. *Fun Home* has won the Stonewall Book Award for Non-Fiction in 2007 and was adapted into a Broadway musical in 2015. The narrative discourses on the author's relationship with her megalomaniacal, sexually repressed father during her childhood years and early twenties, until her father's supposed suicide, as well as her own embrace of her homosexuality. *Daytripper* won the Eisner Award for Best Limited Series in 2011. It tells the story of an aspiring obituary writer through multiple moments of his life, altering between his adult and early years, in no chronological order. Additionally, both graphic novels⁹ were published in the 21st century in the United States, at first, so they are up-to-date examples of publications aimed at an English-speaking public. The aim of this paper is, more specifically, to analyze how words and pictures work together in order to approach the theme of death in these two graphic novels, thus proving they transcend the aesthetic limitations proposed in Lessing's *Laocoön*. The *Laocoön* also provides this research with samples that represent the ideas that guideline the general thoughts on art and media to this day.

3.2 Data analysis

In order to understand the approach of the themes of death and mortality in the two graphic novels, as well as relate them to Lessing's propositions, certain divisions were created to analyze and connect this extensive body of work. Firstly, a comprehensive analysis

⁹ *Fun Home* is published under the title of Graphic memoir

of Lessing's *Laocoön* was conducted, identifying the main aspects that Lessing considers inherent to each medium, and defining what he regards as the advantages and limitations of both painting and poetry. Additionally, connections were made between the findings of Lessing's work and general aspects in which comics collide with it. Furthermore, the two graphic novels were analyzed in order to find all scenes that dwell thematically on death, either by means of plot (e.g. a character's death), dialogue, or intertextuality (i.e. another work on the subject being referenced).

Considering this acquired corpus, 10 pages of each graphic novel were chosen for being representative examples of the graphic novel's thematic approach of death and mortality. The 10 pages accounted for 3 to 4 extracts of 2 to 5 consecutive pages each. These extracts were analyzed having McCloud's theoretical framework of visual iconography, panel transition, intertextuality, time progression, word and picture combination, color, as well as Kress' and van Leeuwen's aspects of composition (i.e. information value, salience, framing) in mind. The results of the analysis of each graphic novel were presented individually, and later compared in order to contrast the different approaches of the theme of death and mortality by graphic novels of non-fiction and fiction. Finally these results were compared to Lessing's remarks, where practical evidence was provided to support the claim that graphic novels surpass the respective limitations of working with the previous existent media of painting and poetry by which they are so commonly judged.

4. Results and Discussion

The first section of the analysis is comprised of three segments that dwell upon the reading of Lessing's *Laocoön* and the highlights of his study on the limitations of visual and written arts along with its influence on the area of aesthetics. The first segment focuses on the introduction of the essay, paralleled with a study on aesthetic, affect and embodiment in the *Laocoön*, by Cecilia Sjöholm. The second segment discusses the major differences between the realms of painting and poetry, as proposed by Lessing throughout his work. The third and final segment takes a closer look at the aspects in the *Laocoön* that relate almost directly to the principles of comics, with remarks on McCloud's study of the media.

The second section, titled "Death and mortality in *Fun Home* and *Daytripper*" deals with the results of the analysis of the two graphic novels, first individually, by elaborating on

general aspects of the text, followed by a central analysis of the chosen extracts of each graphic novel.

The last section, titled “Framing it all together” compares the approaches of both texts and relates them to Lessing’s limitations on the media of painting and poetry.

4.1 *Lessing’s Laocoön*

4.1.1 Aesthetics and effects on the *Laocoön*

At the beginning of the *Laocoön*, Lessing uses his divergence with Winckelmann’s reading of the sculpture (see fig. 1) to kickstart his theory of aesthetic experience and media. Although both agree that the artist had spared Laocoön of an expression of pain, which “its violence would lead us to expect” (Lessing 9), Winckelmann justifies this decision on the model of “noble simplicity and quiet grandeur” (in Lessing 9) that guided Greek artists at the time. Lessing, on the other hand, believes that Winckelmann disregards the physical properties and impact produced by the piece on the viewers. Lessing indicates that the Greek “felt and feared” greatly, not being “afraid of showing human weakness (9); and exemplified that Virgil, despite being under the influence of the same morals as the artist, did not prevent his Laocoön from “rais[ing] his voice in a terrible scream” (7) when narrating the same episode in the *Aeneid*. By doing this, Lessing is shifting the discussion away from morality and moving it towards aesthetics, elevating the notion that these aesthetic decisions can indeed be studied in regard to the affect they play on the spectator’s senses (Sjöholm 24).

Robert Stecker, on his chapter — the Definition of Art — in *The Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics*, illustrates that the aesthetic “refers in the first instance to intrinsically valuable experience that results from close attention to the sensuous features of an object or to an imaginary world it projects” (142). This corroborates with Lessing’s main quest; whereas Winckelmann tries to discourse on how to portray a body in pain, he asks “how do we, as embodied beings respond to the depiction of a body in pain?” (Sjöholm 20). Furthermore, since this is a matter of conscious aesthetic experience, Lessing is interested in what guidelines can illustrate the workings of affects throughout different media.

Through initiating his pursuit for higher understanding, Lessing empirically deduces that the “ultimate goal of the arts” to the ancient Greek was pleasure, and establishes — since pleasure derives from beauty — that beauty was “the supreme law of the visual arts” (14-15). Accordingly, in the *Laocoön Group*, the protagonist is restrained from a soulful cry,

preventing him from visually disturbing the viewers of the piece. In situations such as this, artists become obliged to balance and lessen intense emotions with the portrayal of beauty (15) — since beauty, according to Lessing, arrives at art through the imitation of beautiful bodies.

However, Lessing also advocates for an understanding that the beauty of an object does not rest solely on that object, “for that which we find beautiful in a work of art is not beautiful to our eyes but to our imagination through our eyes” (41). The aesthetic experience is not just a matter of absorbing what a piece of art has to offer, but the conscious endeavor of reflecting and creating a mental image of it. Sjöholm acknowledges that, when studying Lessing, one does not study a work of art, but rather one reflects on themselves (30), for the relationship between art and viewer, along with how art affects the sensibility of the mind, are the essential results of imitating beauty. “We feel the terror of Laocoön because we can imagine the scream we never hear” (Sjöholm 25). Moreover, the author declares that by understanding how the starting point of aesthetic studies relates to the observation of body, emotions, and affects, we can conclude that Lessing’s conception of affect “is an affliction that acts on a body as well as the mind” (29).

The imitation of material beauty, as presented in the visual arts, is not the only path towards conveying beauty; therefore, artists are provided with other ways to spark pleasure. One path that visual art cannot pursue, but it is entirely within the realm of poetry, is the portrayal of charm. Lessing defines charm as “beauty in motion” and, as such, it could not be represented in a static medium (e.g. painting, sculpture) (112). The movements of a character can be described as slow and graceful — reappearing with the progression of a poem, so that its effect can be intensified with time. The moment of transition could not be represented in a painting or sculpture, for it would be too unnatural and fail to capture a lasting impression of beauty (Lessing 20). Another way of arriving at pleasure through art is not so much dismissive of beauty, as it goes inversely against it, which is the representation of ugliness (121). Lessing understood that, although beauty was the aim of the visual arts in Ancient Greece, modern art valued a more truthful and expressive side of nature, “of which the beautiful is but a small part” (19).

Ugliness, rather than being a failed attempt at beauty, is a conscious effort of creating an illusion of something terrible. It is the conscious understanding that what is presented to

the reader or spectator is indeed false, which sparks pleasure (Lessing 126). Although our empathy towards acts of violence and suffering in art is real, there is always a conscious veil that implies illusion; and to be “fooled” by something that was crafted results in pleasure. However, it is more suited to poetry than to painting, for in poetry we only have to bear the aversion on the mind momentarily (Lessing 127). In painting, we have the constant visual reminder of the horrible and the ugly, so the veil of illusion falls with each view, until it becomes unbearable. Lessing justifies this complex relationship of mixed feelings with a quotation from German philologist Christian Klotz: “The soul has the liberty of dwelling now on the pleasing, now on the disagreeable part of a passion, and creating for itself a mixture of pleasure and displeasure which is more enticing than the purest enjoyment” (130).

4.1.2 The realms of painting and poetry

Since it was established that what affects a work of art is not its morals or facticity, but rather the media in which it is being presented, Lessing intended to recognize the assets of both painting and poetry. His intention was to present to critics the essence of each media, by dissecting pieces and excerpts of ancient masterpieces and seeking the intention and limitation behind the artists and their works. Lessing’s aim was to provide guidance, as a true Aufklärer, and arrive at the underlying rules that accompanied each media; ones that, if followed accordingly, would allow for a work of art to be the most effective in its field.

Regardless of the aim of the artist, be it beauty, or truth and expression, the visual media will always be limited to presenting a “single moment of time” (Lessing 19). The painter, therefore, is obliged to choose the most representative moment for what he intends to convey. Additionally, because Lessing places such great importance on the imaginative stimulation that an art work plays on the viewer, the moment chosen must be one that entices their imagination. For this reason, he informs that no moment is “less suitable for this than the climax” (19), as the height of the action is all there and the mind has no more room left to wander. “If Laocoön sighs, the imagination can hear him cry out; but if he cries out, it can neither go one step higher nor one step lower [...] without seeing him in a [...] less interesting condition” (20). Similarly, the moment cannot be transitory, because it would lengthen a moment that in nature occurs only briefly, thus weakening it to bizarre proportions (Lessing 20). Because of the essence of their media, Lessing argues that the artist is bound to

a single moment and “must renounce the element of time entirely” (77). “What he might not paint, he left to conjure” (Lessing 16).

Poetry, on the other hand, does not have to abide by the same rules. A dramatic poem, following Lessing’s ideal, is expressed by sounds that permeate through time; and, although it also adopts the use of representative portions of language, by adopting a maxim of economy of description, poetry deals with progression (78) so it is not limited by one “moment” of expression. Additionally, Lessing considers that there is no “visual” disturbance by depicting a transitory moment or representation of ugliness from which the spectator can suffer (23). He acknowledges that the actions “illustrated” in a poem do not exist by themselves, but rather in context, having both a background and a direction to follow (24) — in such a way that, to each individual visual painting a poem can present a “whole gallery,” (Lessing 72).

Since a painting is not normally considered to be accompanied by other paintings that compose a larger retelling of events, painters had to develop different ways to compress more meaning and information into their limited canvases. Lessing exemplifies the use of symbols and icons with which Greek painters would imply the depiction of deities (e.g. special clothes, held objects), since their names were not elicited as they would be in a poem (60), or the painting of a thin cloud surrounding an object to imply that it could not be seen by the characters in the scene (68). These abstractions managed to convey meaning efficiently and worked as unspoken agreements between painters and viewers. Painting has a limited, demarcated space, in which to accommodate all of the various elements that compose a scene; and, although all components are intended to work as a whole, our mind identifies them individually and with such rapidity that this process appears to us as “one single operation” (Lessing 86).

Because it is capable of presenting harmoniously the “various parts, which the eye can take all at once,” painting is the ideal form to characterize material beauty (Lessing 104). To Lessing, no poetic description, as mastered as it were could produce the same effect of the “whole” through consecutive details. That is why poetry should abide to represent charm — beauty in motion (112) — and to evoke feelings, in such a way that we become less aware of the words it uses, thus engaging more closely with its subject. Lessing takes this concept of “poetic picture” (73) as his standard for beautiful poetry, as it presents the poet taking the

spectator so deeply into the illusion, that they become capable of reaching beauty simply through the effect of the arbitrary sounds, echoing through time (115).

Lessing is quite subjective when averting that painting and poetry are already judged by different standards. He claims that whilst in painting we value craftsmanship, in poetry we value originality (62). The standard comes from a belief that creation to the poet, as well as reproduction to the painter, takes significantly more effort than the opposite, thus requiring more of their skills. To execute a poem well should spark no more surprise, according to Lessing, than to envision a painting well.

Occasionally artists and poets will have to base their work on the same narrative, as is the case with Virgil's extract from the *Aeneid* and the sculpture of the *Laocoön Group*. Although both are working to represent the myth of Laocoön, they would be amiss to follow each other's description (Lessing 37). If the sculptor were to cling to Virgil's retelling, the characters' position would change, thus breaking the pyramidal effect of the sculpture that is deemed "so powerful" (37). Lessing advises that, although there are moments when the boundaries of the media do cross, there will always be a loss of effect (91). The mutual intrusion between aesthetic realms does not go unnoticed. He further states that it is ineffective to list characteristics of beauty in poetry, as each consecutive component would lessen the effect of the previous one. It is equally inadequate to simultaneously present actions that happen at different times through painting (100). The painter should be "as suggestive as possible with his description" of beauty in a single moment in time, whereas the poet should embrace his advantage and present not only the moment in question, but that which came before and after as well (99). Lessing proposes that instead of trying to compete and work with the same base, the different media should embrace their qualities and limitations. Once they accept that, they will be free to explore their advantages to their maximum; creating masterpieces that "will appear most alike when their effect is equally vivid" (99).

4.1.3 The *Laocoön's* affair with comics

Although Lessing could not have predicted the creation and rise of comics, his *Laocoön* touches on primal aspects in relation to aesthetics that simultaneously comply and contradict the very nature of what we understand as comics today in the 21st century. Comics are undoubtedly a visual medium (McCloud 9) and, for that reason it seems as it would have

to fit Lessing's standards for painting, which he accounts for all visual arts (Lessing 6). However, the possession of a narrative that unfolds through time, also allows for comics to be included in Lessing's category of poetry; meaning that comics are competing with the standards of not only one, but both well-established media, as referred to by McCloud (150).

The first aspect that blatantly diverges in comics is that, according to Lessing, the visual arts should "renounce the element of time entirely" (77) and that "events which follow one another [...] cannot exist side by side" (100). Despite comic book artists still having to determine a single representative moment to depict in each panel, the very essence of comics is its strength of progression, as images are put in "deliberate sequence" (McCloud 9).

Through the process McCloud describes as closure (63), readers unfold a mental narrative based on the sequence of pictures that were chosen to be presented on a page; producing a natural display of actions, unfolding through time. Apart from closure, the passing of time in comics can be achieved through the illusion of both sound and motion (lines), as the utterance of words and sound effects can only exist passing through time (McCloud 116).

Therefore, comics adopt poetry's potential of presenting "a whole gallery" (Lessing 72) of material pictures.

One of the aspects that does converge between Lessing's remarks and comic artists is its use of symbols and images in order to convey meaning. McCloud describes icons as "images that represent a person, place, thing or idea" (27). Artists are bound to use images to convey what they intend, regardless of using words. The laurels or staffs used by the Greeks to represent gods (Lessing 52) are in line with comic book artists' use of capes and gadgets to represent superheroes, as an example.

There are two segments in the *Laocoön* in which painting and poetry are said to work simultaneously, characterizing an early "experiment" into the realms of comics. The first mention is of French scholar Jean Boivin de Villeneuve, which argued that an image in Achilles shield, mentioned in Homer's *Iliad* could be broken into three sections instead of one. Lessing considers Boivin's choice to be needless and a failure to understand the principles that guide visual art (98), for it makes the artist trespass position to trespass the poet's realm of time. The second mention is of Greek artist Zeuxis, who painted a scene of Helen of Troy and wrote the lines of Homer depicting the same moment in the *Iliad* (115). In

this case Lessing praised the effort for having both media achieving their best effect, without crossing their boundaries.

Although he argues for a fairer judgment of the arts — vouching for the rules of one not being applied to the other — it seems as if any connection between the two is either dismissed or highly criticized. One of the ways in which the world of comics breaks with this distinction is, by not only having artists and writers work from the same idea (as in story) and aim towards the same feeling and narrative, but by having the same person produce both the art and the writing of a comic — as is the case with the graphic novels *Fun Home* and *Daytripper*.

Another point in which comics clash with the proposals in the *Laocoön* are in its appraisal for beauty. Lessing asserts that truth and expression are modern “art’s first law” (19), but that the Greek aimed only at beauty. In this regard, comics would agree more with modern art’s take by subverting the search for classical harmonious beauty, in exchange for realistic beauty or an embrace of the grotesque. If we take a diachronic view of comics, since their “modern” birth in the 19th century comics have been split between portraying comedy in low-quality reproductions (Gunning 44) and artistically recognized works (though never under the name of comics). Only in the last couple of decades are comics pursuing the “higher” aims of beauty, truth and expression.

Another questionable aspect appears when Lessing makes a point that if the works of painters and poets are to be compared, one must know whether both enjoyed “artistic freedom”. He defines artistic freedom as the freedom from any external constraint that could hinder a work towards achieving its greatest effect (55), and uses religious motivation as an example of such constraints. If an artist is required to compose a piece that aims at something other than beauty (e.g. worship), it could hardly be named art at all (Lessing 55). The problem that arises when taking such a harsh measure is to know its implications. Which medium is truly free of any external constraint to the artist’s mind? One may trade religion for economy and find that hardly any piece of art in our capitalist society is produced without going through financial and subjective decisions that do not praise neither beauty nor expression. There is a matter of purity of the arts at play that is problematic to conform to. If we are to follow Lessing’s belief, we would eventually fall so far from the reality of the art produced, that it would be as if we had returned to the Greek mindset of dialoguing plainly

on ideals. One should look at the aim of the artist at hand, but understand, as Lessing also proposed, that art can be judged by its effect on the viewer.

4.2 *Death and Mortality in Fun Home and Daytripper*

4.2.1 *Fun Home's analysis*

4.2.1.1 *Fun Home's general relationship with death and mortality*

There are a number of aspects related to the subject of death and mortality that permeate Alison Bechdel's graphic memoir. Although the suicide of her father stands at the center of this relationship, the text is sustained by various other subjects and aesthetic choices (e.g. intertextuality, color), which ultimately turn death into an evident character and motif in the narrative. The first aspect established is the matter that lends its name to the graphic novel. *Fun Home* — although also a powerful play on words by describing a problematic family environment as “fun” — refers to the family-owned funeral home in which Alison's father, Bruce, worked on as a mortician. Helping their father and playing around the place during their upbringing, ensured that Alison and her brothers fostered a bland and unceremonious view of death, as opposed to the shocking and emotional perspective that is usually attached to such an encounter (Skelton 214). Bechdel exemplifies this detachment from the normative, more respectful view of death on the last two panels of page 35.



Fig. 4. Bechdel, Alison. *Fun Home*, Jonathan Cape, 2006, p. 35.

The coloring of the graphic novel is also an aspect that adds to the general portrayal of death. The steel color is the only other presence in the otherwise black and white drawings. Despite not serving as a tool that cherishes representation and factual imitation — since the colors and shades of the characters and objects vary between panels of the same scene —

Bechdel uses color in order to highlight a certain object or character in particular frames. The blurriness and unevenness of the coloring reinforce the unreliability of memory, whilst the blueness of the steel, along with invariability of shades imply detachment and sterility, sustaining an affect of coolness on the reader, from the first to the very last panel.

A major part of *Fun Home*'s thematic approach is given through intertextuality. Bechdel's work alludes, not only on the narrative captions, but also on the drawn covers and extracts, to books, plays, and photographs that resonate and compare to addressed issues such as: family relations, sexuality, and most importantly, death. The works of Albert Camus, Marcel Proust, James Joyce and various retellings of ancient Greek myths, are but a few of the works that are displayed on the household of her literature-enthusiast father, and serve as a parallel to the issues represented on Alison's retelling of the events of her youth. Additionally, many traits related to Bruce Bechdel's death are acknowledged in regard to the death of his most cherished authors. Camus' death, for instance, also involved an automobile, while Fitzgerald's lifespan was only three days longer than Bruce's.

Other aspects that bear less prominence, but still add to the general association of the narrative with the theme of death are the drawn photographs (see appendix B for pages 100 and 101)— some of which are present at the title page of each of the seven chapters — and the restored Victorian house in which the family lived. Although Bechdel's drawing style qualifies as more iconic than realist, judging by McClouds standards (55), the drawn photographs (most of which include her father) are realistic reproductions of real pictures. Marianne Hirsch explains that photos can be seen as a "deathlike fixing of one moment in time" (24); both validating Alison's memories of her father prior to his death, while simultaneously serving as a reminder that he is no longer there. The Victorian House, much like the photographs, represent "that which no longer exists" (Hirsch 20), by reflecting her father's "striking anachronism" (Bechdel 29) as he battled to restore it, as well as the "brief moment of wealth" (Bechdel 8) in which the residence was constructed.

4.2.1.2 The approach of death and mortality in particular scenes of Fun Home

4.2.1.2.1 Extract 1 - pages 27 to 29

Pages 27 to 29 open *Fun Home*'s second chapter, titled "A Happy Death". These pages (see appendix C) are the first in which Alison comments on her father's death, since it is only on the last page of the first chapter that she mentions he committed suicide (23).

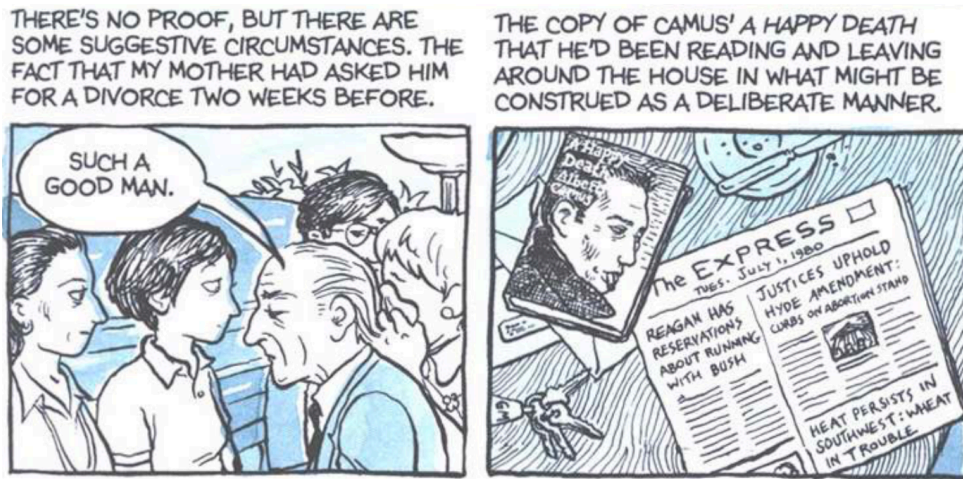


Fig. 5. Bechdel, Alison. *Fun Home*, Jonathan Cape, 2006, p. 27.

There are thirteen panels in this extract and two-thirds of the transitions between the panels are scene-to-scene. The narration present on the panels' caption sustain most of the continuity as we are presented scattered images relating to moments shortly before and after the death of Alison's father. This lack of straightforward linearity in images conforms with the narrative's dependence on memory, which is most commonly fragmented and disorderly (Hirsch 34). We see how Bechdel shows a brief scene of Bruce's funeral on page 27, followed by a framing of the book he was perusing at the days prior to his death.

All panels of page 28 present the same unclear progression as they depict elements and events that happened sometimes way before or shortly after his death. Bechdel chooses her frames as evidence to support her reading of his death (e.g. the last two panels of page 27), but always manages to end her arguments by reminding the reader of her bias and uncertainty, "But these are just quibbles [...] It's possible that we chose to believe this because it was less painful" (Bechdel 28-29).

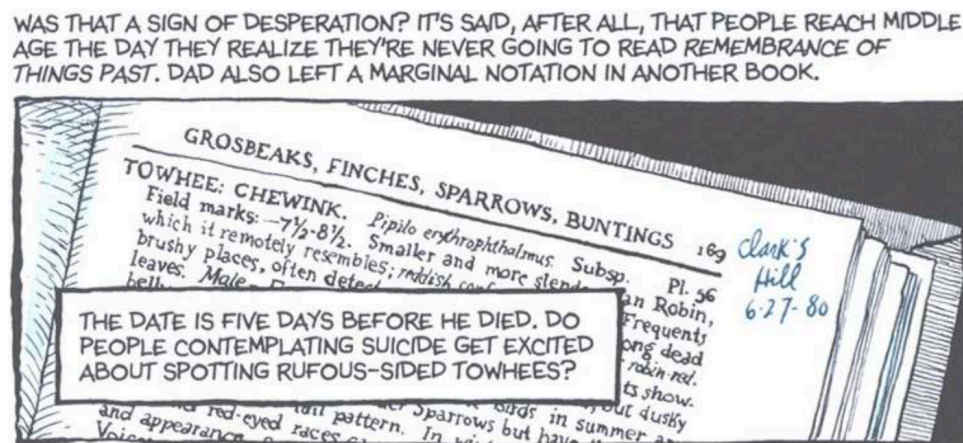


Fig 6. Bechdel, Alison. *Fun Home*, Jonathan Cape, 2006, p. 28.

The use of intertextuality and reliability on the titles, notes, and newspapers presented in these pages provides validity to her claims. Panels 1 and 2 on page 27, as well as panels 1, 3, and 5 on page 28 all show accurate reproductions of objects that happen to carry the only information she can acknowledge with certainty; it was an “accident” (27), she was called for an “emergency” (28). All these panels highlight dates, as if attempting to reconstruct his last days.

The relationship between words and images on the panels are mostly interdependent, followed by additive and word-specific interactions as the narration on the captions proves to be the leading narrative aspect, allowing for the images either to support what is stated (additive), or to represent irony by contrasting the messages conveyed by both words and pictures (interdependent), as seen in the first two panels of page 27.



Fig. 7. Bechdel, Alison. *Fun Home*, Jonathan Cape, 2006, p. 27.

The headline “Local man dies after being hit by a truck” (Bechdel 27) in the newspaper framed on the panel dialogues with the caption’s point of having “no proof” of her father’s suicide, as it argues that the only thing to which there is actual proof is the fact that he is dead. Furthermore, on the second panel, the depiction of Alison’s face as the most salient object in the frame contrasts with the captioned phrase “No one knew it wasn’t an accident” (Bechdel 27), stressing that no one but “her” (along with her mother and brothers), knew about the reality of the incident.

Panel 1 on page 29 provides an honest insight on the relationship between Alison and her mother, as well as how unceremoniously the topic of death is treated in the household. Although the caption mentions the strive for consolation, the framing of this large panel

shows the characters in a distance, barely recognizable and undramatically discussing the event, not their loss.

In terms of composition, the objects mentioned above are always presented in a POV (point of view) perspective and tilted in a manner that implies naturality and realism. Rather than being depicted as actual evidence in a blank and sterile panel, they appear as one would find them displayed in real context. Bruce is depicted as constantly reading, as this extract highlights Proust's and Camus' texts. His detachment from the social aspects of his family life and embrace of literature supports the belief that literature is a source to provide meaning to life (Wilder 18).

Furthermore, Alison is almost always the most salient character in the panels she appears in (with the exception of panel 4 on page 27), as she is in closer proximity to the reader and in a central position. The two panels in which she appears next to her father (dead or alive), are split, each taking one half of the panel. Panel 2 on page 26 shows her face next to his casket, which stands prominently on the background. Panel 3 on page 28 shows him standing next to a door while she crouches in front of him. The framing of these panels seems to imply their need to coexist in the narrative, although never in real contact as each occupies an opposite side in relation to the other. It also goes to show that although this tells the story of Bruce's death, Alison takes a stand as the story's narrator and central figure due to having been affected by him during her upbringing. Instead of presenting their story, the narrative shows separately his story and her story, focusing later on how their split narratives entwine.

4.2.1.2.2 Extract 2 - pages 50 to 54

Pages 50 to 54 conclude *Fun Home's* second chapter, titled "A Happy Death". These pages (see appendix D) provide the largest analyzed extract and depict Alison's account of her father's funeral.

From the last panel of page 50 to the first on page 53 we follow Alison as she enters the funeral home and sees her father's embalmed body for the first time. Two-thirds of the transitions belong to subject-to-subject and action-to-action. Although the retelling of events is still a reproduction of the author's memory, this scene in particular is less fragmented and allows for the establishment of a somber atmosphere usually attached to such a ceremony (Wilder 7), which is ceased only by the time jump on the last five panels.



Fig. 8. Bechdel, Alison. *Fun Home*, Jonathan Cape, 2006, p. 51.

However, there is still a presence of non-linearity and free association in the narrative, despite it only appearing in the panels' captions. The parallel with Russell's Paradox (51), highlights the irony of attending the funeral of the community's undertaker, whilst not breaking from the visual progression of the offspring's entrance.

There is great contradiction between the austerity, provided by the ceremony and visual elements, and the informality with which the characters are depicted in the rest of the narrative. The depiction of the formal clothing (specially the long skirt) worn by Alison and her brothers does not match the common summer clothes and attitude which they sport throughout most of the graphic novel, as seen in the second panel of page 50. The first two panels of page 50 imply affinity with the subject of death, due to the childhood and teenage years working at the funeral home, but what we see in turn is the resultant detachment from the normative representation of grief.

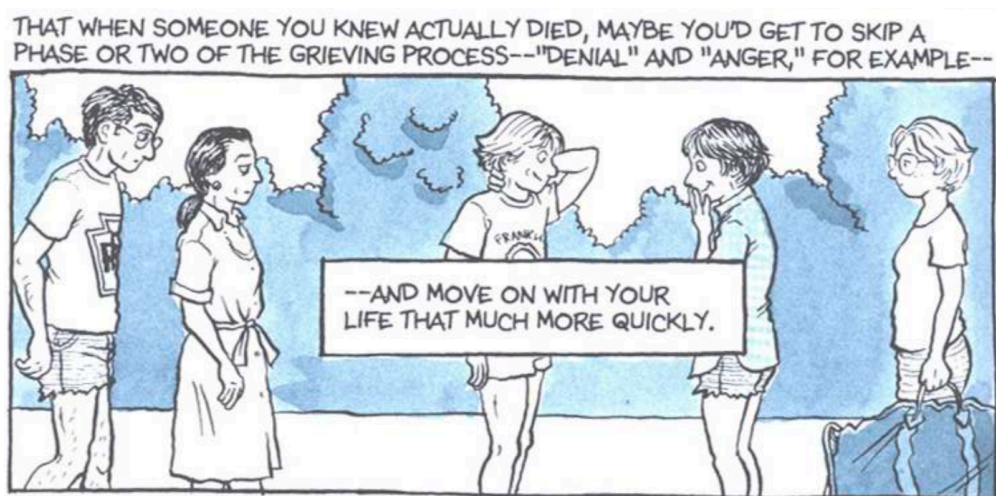


Fig 9. Bechdel, Alison. *Fun Home*, Jonathan Cape, 2006, p. 50.

On the panel above, we see that Alison's first reaction upon arriving at her home town before the funeral is to greet her younger brother with "ghastly uncontrollable grins" (Bechdel 46), as expressed in the almost identical panel on page 46. Alison is depicted, in the great majority of the panels of these scene, as looking away at something out of frame. Similarly, her brothers and she are said to have looked at the body for "as long as [they] sensed it was appropriate" (Bechdel 52), hinting at a sense of obligation on their behalf.

Their general uneasiness and discomfort when dealing with gestures and objects that symbolize the Western authority and formality of death becomes more apparent when Alison is consoled by the funeral director, and later on, as she encounters an armed service flag honoring her father's headstone (on pages 53 and 54). Both encounters are met with opposition, which is depicted both visually and in writing. The images display a violent reaction, enhanced by the illustration of motion lines on the panel; while the narration degrades the subjects, through the usage of the terms "pinch-funeral director" (52) and "desecrated by a cheesy flag" (53). The violent opposition to the normative, but impersonal, gestures and symbols of consolation can be seen as an act of empowerment, more capable of soothing Alison's character. Her family's proximity with the reality of death has not made them free from being affected by it, but instead, it has steered them towards the awareness of the absurdity and lack of meaning, which the plain and normative view of mortality does not address. Hence the opposition and discomfort when having to abide by it.

The caption on the top of the first panel on page 54 is a reference to a concept by Camus, present on page 48. Added to Alison's expression of surrender, it shows that no matter how much meaning and evidence she ascribes to his death, it will always remain a frivolous act. The narrative seems to imply that one should embrace the meaninglessness and absurdity of life and death, since any attempt to disguise reality will have been in vain. Bruce's effort in grooming himself in order to sustain the image of an elegant family man proves pointless as he was barely recognizable (Bechdel 52) once his embalmed body lied in the casket. No matter how hard he tried to control multiple aspects of their family life, in death he is described the same as the one time he got stuck in the mud as a child (40), helpless and paralyzed.

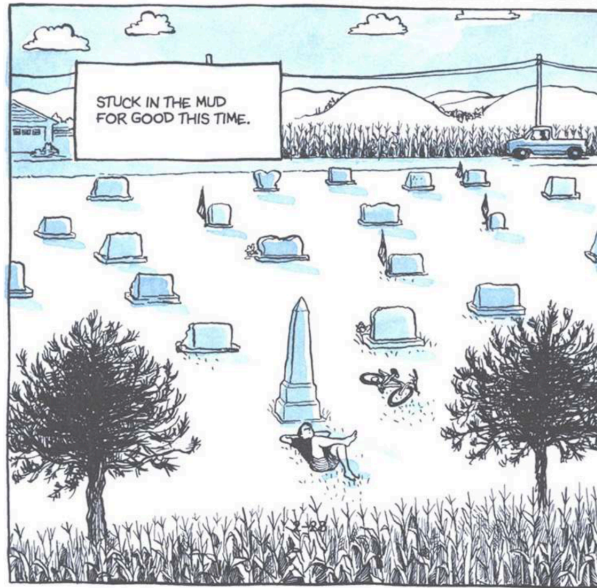


Fig 10. Bechdel, Alison. *Fun Home*, Jonathan Cape, 2006, p. 54.

The time jump between the scenes at the funeral and Alison's visit to her father's headstone depicts the most striking point, in terms of composition, as it depicts a shift in her framing and relation with the rest of the images. During scenes at Bruce's funeral Alison is seldom present at the central, front, or entirely inside the frame. Additionally, she is looking out of frame, not establishing any relation to the other characters or figures illustrated. However, on the second panel on page 53, we see her connecting by staring at her father's headstone, and later taking the same central space with it on the following panel. This progression, that is concluded with her laying next to the headstone, demonstrates connection and coexistence; an acceptance not necessarily of her father, but of his condition, provided by an underlying tenderness scarcely seen in the graphic novel.

4.2.1.2.3 Extract 3 - pages 195 and 196

Pages 195 to 196¹⁰ are in the beginning of *Fun Home's* seventh and final chapter, titled "The Antihero's Journey". The chapter opens with a photograph of Alison and Bruce playing together in a pool. These pages (see appendix E) provide an insight into Alison's projection of her father's life, years after he committed suicide.

There are 7 panels in the extract and two-thirds of the transitions are subject-to-subject. Without providing a specific course of action, this scene allows the reader to catch a glimpse of Alison's life, five years after her father's death, and the effect the aforementioned events have in her mind.

¹⁰ A panel of the following page (197) is added to the analysis for continuity purposes.



Fig. 11. Bechdel, Alison. *Fun Home*, Jonathan Cape, 2006, p. 195.

Most of the relation between the words and images is in parallel, as the captions' narration has no straightforward relation to the images on the panel. The effect, however, is that the image of her father (although missing from her life all these years later) is still very present. While Alison fantasizes on this fictional continuation, trying to render it more meaningful by attaching a structured narrative to it (Hakola and Kivistö viii), the images of the newspapers, posters, the New York City skyline, and the pride parade provide a glance at her reality. Equally, we see the life that her father could never experience, as she was free to move to New York and be open about her sexuality. This includes a moral dilemma, as Bechdel approaches it, to both Alison's character and the reader. To feel sorry for her father not being able to live the life that she has would shift him from being a culprit to a victim, and somehow excuse him for the years of negligence and austerity.



Fig. 12. Bechdel, Alison. *Fun Home*, Jonathan Cape, 2006, p. 196.

The wide panels and the framing of the scenery set the calm and introspective mood of the passage. Alison occupies only one half of the panels (with the exception of two) and is

framed at a distance, looking away. As paradoxical as it is, her father's absence stands at the opposite half of the panels, showing that the absence caused by his death is present not only in writing, but also visually. As argued by Hakola and Kivistö (viii), literature exemplifies that the grief sustained by the survivors can sometimes be more intense than death itself, reverberating through time.

4.2.2 *Daytripper's* analysis

4.2.2.1 *Daytripper's* general relationship with death and mortality

Daytripper's obsession with the matters death and mortality becomes apparent on the first page as we are introduced to the protagonist, Brás de Oliva Domingos, a Brazilian obituary-writer at a São Paulo newspaper. His job is both a source and main player on his internal struggle between life and death in the graphic novel, as Brás must balance his fixation on living his "life to the fullest" (Moon Bá 22), whilst having an occupation that requires him to focus solely on the death of others. Although most realizations of the relationship between life and death come to Brás through dialoguing with secondary characters, such as his best friend and his father, he is confronted constantly with the presence of death, as depicted in the last two panels of page 22.



Fig. 13. Bá, Gabriel, and Fábio Moon. *Daytripper*, Vertigo, 2011, p. 22.

Perhaps the fact and narrative ploy that draws the most attention is that each of *Daytripper's* ten chapters ends in the eventual death of the protagonist. Instead of qualifying it as a dab at magical realism, in which the character literally dies and is reborn, Brás'

eventual deaths, although graphically represented at times, serve more as a metaphor and a supposition that bears the question “What if the protagonist died in this moment of his life? How would that define his journey, his final moments?”. With no chronological order and without the consequences of his “previous” deaths we follow Brás through pivotal moments of his life, such as his graduation trip beside his best friend, his first kiss, and the birth of his son, only to see them end in what feels sometimes as an undeserved tragedy, until his final death at the age of 76 in chapter ten.

The story of *Daytripper* is also accompanied by cultural references. Brás itself, far from being a common Brazilian name, is a reference to one of the most revered books in Brazilian literature: *Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas* (*The Posthumous Memoirs of Bras Cubas*). The book, a fictional biography written by Machado de Assis and published in 1881, follows Brás Cubas whilst he writes his memoirs, starting from retelling his death. This canonical literary work is acclaimed for its ironic and honest take on life, purpose, and mortality as we follow all aspects of the life of an aristocrat with no distinguishable features, which asserts that his greatest success was not having disseminated the human legacy of misery as he did not have any children (Assis 225). *Daytripper*'s Brás does not share the irony of his namesake, but rather his general sense of misplace in life and the strong relationship with death. The book is referenced further as a character resembling Machado de Assis is seen leaving from the funeral of Brás' father, on chapter four; and again on chapter nine, as Brás' father is seen reading a passage of the book to his grandson, Miguel.

4.2.2.2 *The approach of death and mortality in particular scenes of Daytripper*

4.2.2.2.1 *Extract 1 - pages 11 and 12*

Pages 11 and 12¹¹ open *Daytripper*'s first chapter, titled “32”. These pages (see appendix F) open the story *in medias res*, or with a “cold open”¹², followed by an entirely different scene.

The panel transitions divide themselves neatly into two groups, the first being aspect-to-aspect, while the second is moment-to-moment. The first 4 panels show frames of people captioned by their obituaries while the remaining ones depict the protagonist standing still, altering only in matters of framing and size. The captions on the last panel of page 11

¹¹ A panel of the following page (13) is added to the analysis for continuity purposes.

¹² A narrative tactic used in films and television to jump directly at a story before the title appears.

show us that the obituaries refer to his thoughts upon having an encounter with death, which becomes apparent as we see him covered in blood on the first panel of page 12. It is the death and the lives of others that occupies his mind in such a delicate moment.

The relation between words and images during the obituary scenes are word-specific, as the images add little context to what is described within the captions. The following panels dwell on interdependent and in parallel relations, because although the captions present what Brás is thinking, the images do not reference his line of thought.



Fig. 14 Bá, Gabriel, and Fábio Moon. *Daytripper*, Vertigo, 2011, p. 11

The panels depicting the obituaries stand out from the others on the pages as they possess their own structure and formulation. The framing around the captions resembles paper cutouts and the font with which they are written is more condensed and neither slanted nor fully capitalized, and validate McClouds claim that different style of lettering can convey different messages (134). The coloring on the panel is faded and with yellow tones, adding to the idea that it comes from a printed newspaper. The appearance of the obituary ensures validity to both the life and the death of these individuals, sustaining the idea that it is a symbol for closure.

The coloring and strokes that illustrate the bar in which the scene is set is dark and blunt, reflecting the violence of the act which we do not see, but is hinted at by the blood and the stranger's hand lying on the floor. The darkness of the environment envelops Brás, as does the bright obfuscating blood that covers his tuxedo. Although he is the only character we see in the scene, making him salient, he stands in the background of the frame, being obscured by the presence of death. The scene, despite progressing through 5 panels, lasts only

a few seconds, as he stands still, looking away and wondering about death for a moment, frozen in time.

4.2.2.2.2 Extract 2 - pages 88 and 89

Pages 88 and 89 belong to the first half of *Daytripper*'s fourth chapter, titled "41". These pages (see appendix G) present the funeral of Brás' father, Domingos. As Brás' wife, Ana, goes in labour, he learns of his father's death and rushes towards his funeral where he meets his mother and sister, leaving Ana alone at the hospital.

There are 8 panel transitions on this extract and, with the exception of 2, they are all action-to-action, as this is an encapsulated scene without deviations. There is a state of presence derived from the consistency of the panels as they begin the ceremony. Although we understand that his mind wanders away for some moments, no parallel is created visually, as it is not a memory that is accessed, but rather that is an event happening as it is shown and there is no escaping from it. For this reason, the relation between the captions and the framing is interdependent, as the different aspects that are brought in the captions serve as an intensifier to the moment of grief that Brás is experiencing. The thoughts conveyed through the caption on the panels 2 to 4 of page 89 are the same ones from the first two pages of the graphic novel, but with a much more personal interpretation now, as the death that sparks these thoughts is his father's. Another point that conveys the feeling of bereavement is the predominance of grey in the color composition.



Fig. 15. Bá, Gabriel, and Fábio Moon. *Daytripper*, Vertigo, 2011, p. 89.

The darkness and blandness of the color dialogue with the feeling expressed on the last panel of page 88 as “the void in his chest was a pain he’d never felt before” (Bá and Moon 88). The red inside of the coffin is one of the aspects that make it stand out on the page, while another its centrality on the panels. The framing of panel 1 on page 88 and panels 3 to 5 on page 89 are almost the same, highlighting in its center both Brás and the coffin as the most salient things. However, on these long panels depicting the prayer, Brás stands above his father, which suggests that although this is a moment to acknowledge his death, Brás’ grief is more prominent.

The narrative makes a visual link between grief and physical interpersonal connections. Brás is shown to be surrounded not only by his family but many other acquaintances, and perhaps fans of his father. Panels 2 and 5 on page 88 focus entirely on Brás’ hand, either holding his phone whilst thinking of his wife, or holding the coffin, as he thinks of his best friend and his father. Page 89 shows all of those attending holding hands, physically supporting each other through that moment, as depicted on the frame.

Although this fragment depicts the only death scene in the graphic novel that is not accompanied by an obituary, there still is the presence of the press. Its attendance seems to serve as public validation and a symbol of closure. Its importance is highlighted on the fourth panel of page 88, as it is the only break into the funeral’s development. Brás is described to be annoyed at the presence of the journalists, and as “the irony [...] wasn’t lost on him” (Bá and Moon 88) this can also serve as a reminder of his aversion against the thought of death, his inability to cope with it even after years working on a newspaper covering the same type of moments.

The panel presented above also implies the presence of Christianity — although never explicit in the novel — exemplified by the cross on the wall that stands right above Brás and the coffin, and on the prayer Brás is leading. As it is customary in Brazil, it is unnecessary to be a firm believer in order to fit in such a situation, or to understand its meaning, as acknowledged by Skelton (214). Christianity, similar to the press, offers validation to the scene and contextualizes the narrative on the time and geographical region it is set in. It provides standardized guides on how to behave, how to dress, what to say, and even how to feel, as it is a view that is very widespread in that given society (Skelton 214).

4.2.2.2.3 Extract 3 - pages 196 to 199

Pages 196 to 199 are among the final pages of *Daytripper*'s eighth chapter, titled "47". These pages (see appendix H) present Ana, Brás' wife, and her son Miguel as they try to cope with Brás' death. The chapter revolves entirely around the two of them, as Brás is said to be traveling. Additionally, he has no active interaction with any of the two, as his only words are messages and letters sent prior to these events.

There are 15 panel transitions and they all belong to one of three types: Action-to-action, subject-to-subject, or scene-to-scene. Although the transitions are straightforward, there are 4 main scenes occurring, roughly one at each page, and the time gap between them is not explicit, and could vary from a couple of days to a couple of months. It all leads to the notion of grief and progression, be it silent (as there is no presence of captions) or slow. The only words present belong to Brás, either in a letter that Miguel reads to his class, or a voicemail that Ana keeps listening to on the two last scenes.

Furthermore, his absence is made clear until page 198 as the objects that belong to him are always present, such as his cigarettes inside the car, or his clothes both in bed and around Ana as she lies on the couch listening to the recording of his voice. Additionally, Ana only occupies half of the panels in which she appears, serving as a visual representation of her grief and pain that accompanies her (Hakola and Kivistö viii). It is not until page 199 that she is shown sharing the frame with her son and we are not pointed at anything that explicitly belonged to Brás.



Fig. 16 Bá, Gabriel, and Fábio Moon. *Daytripper*, Vertigo, 2011, p. 198-199

The coloring also changes progressively throughout these pages. Although the colors are faded, there is a prominence of more feminine and tender colors when compared to the way grief is portrayed at Domingo's funeral. On the final page, both Ana and Miguel, as well as the room in which they stand is depicted with more vivid and brighter colors. It seems to imply that just as grief reverberates through time, it can lose its strength and fade away as time passes and connections are reestablished.

4.2.2.2.4 Extract 4 - pages 217 and 218

Pages 217 and 218 belong to the second half of *Daytripper's* ninth chapter, titled "Dream". These pages (see appendix I) follow Brás as he is dreaming of meeting his son Miguel as a child and his father at old age, although the two of them did not have a chance to meet in real life.

All panel transitions of this extract fall under the action-to-action and subject-to-subject categories, as they depict a main course of action in a particular scene. Although it is a dream sequence, there is little abstraction apart from Brás' change from childhood into adulthood on panels 1 and 2 of page 217. However, the dream and delirium relationship is emphasized as Brás' father, Domingos, is reading a book to his grandson Miguel by the tree that used to be his favorite spot at their family's country house. The book Domingo is reading from is *The Posthumous Memoirs of Bras Cubas*, and the particular passage belongs to its eighth chapter and it describes the protagonist's hallucination as he is dying. It depicts an argument between reason and madness happening inside his head, alluding to Brás' own subconscious taking charge of him.

The relation between words and images are interdependent, although the extract does not possess any captions. The conversation about life and death and the literature analogies are enhanced by certain visual aspects that come into play. One such aspect is the use of panel bleeds¹³ on both pages, elongating aspects of mood and the fruition needed in order to absorb the image. The emotions echo through the page, into the following panels. Another of such aspects is the coloring of the scene, displaying vibrant natural colors with the predominance of green and yellow, suggesting liveliness, tranquility, and positivity.

¹³ An unframed panel

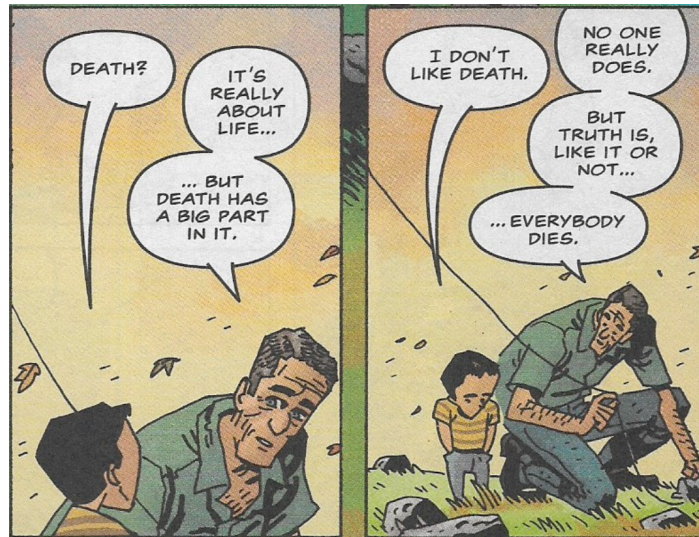


Fig. 17. Bá, Gabriel, and Fábio Moon. *Daytripper*, Vertigo, 2011, p. 217

The visual disposition adds to the interpretation presented in Brás' conversation with his son — that death is not to be treated as a pessimistic transition, as it is customary. “Only when you read the last words will you see how good the book is” (Bá and Moon 218). Following the literary analogy, death is presented as a pivotal portion of life, as it provides closure and reflection to the events one has experienced. It is not to be seen as an eventful tragedy or an act of mischance, as commonly regarded (Kundu 10), but rather it is welcomed and deemed necessary, as it renders life meaningful (Thomas 295).

The aspect of connection is also apparent in terms of composition. When Brás is dialoguing with his son there is barely any visual hierarchy in play as they both stand on the same level, despite Miguel being much smaller. They are shown connected and sharing the central and bottom areas of the panel, interacting by exchanging looks and their shared relationship with the kite that Brás gives his son by the end of page 218. Brás is still more salient as he is the largest character in the panel and there are more strokes to his composition, as well as having more lines of dialogue.

There is a great emphasis given to the act of telling stories. All reflections and ideas that compose Brás' view on death are a collection of all interactions he has made through life, most importantly with his father. Here we see Domingos reprising, even after death, his role as a storyteller to Miguel and passing on his knowledge. Brás does the same through the dialogue with his son. The first panel of page 218 plays with this idea by splitting the speech bubbles and arranging them with the tree's trunk, as if speech was somehow branching out, spreading its roots. The tree itself is a powerful symbol of growth and evolution. It starts,

small and fragile, and given time and nourishment it evolves, strong and connected to its environment, until it eventually recedes and dies, returning to the soil and providing nutrients to the next seeds that will come to grow. That is how the characters depicted in the graphic novel interact: they grow, live, and prepare the soil for the others through the act of telling stories which become apparent as they approach death. Brás' subconscious sees his father next to the tree, as he is the one that gave him the inheritance of storytelling, and he honors that legacy by passing it on to his son.



Fig. 18. Bá, Gabriel, and Fábio Moon. *Daytripper*, Vertigo, 2011, p. 218

4.3 Framing it all together

Both *Fun Home* and *Daytripper* harvest the potential of comics to work as a vessel for expressing their ideas about death, as Picard suggests it is done in literature (in Teodorescu 69). Although both texts employ very different manners of execution — the former being biographical and the latter fictional — they all aim at conveying emotion and giving shape to their beliefs and interpretations of the highly abstract concepts that are death and mortality (Skelton 213).

Fun Home sees a constant conflict between reality and the imagination. Throughout the narrative we follow Alison's retelling of events and readings about her childhood and early twenties in a vague attempt to make sense of her feelings towards her deceased father and his motivation for committing suicide. Bechdel displays her interpretation with uncertainty, constantly second-guessing herself on her opinions, and being open about her bias. Without the reliability of memories and emotions, the text is sustained by the display

and embrace of literary references, notes, newspaper articles, and photos that aim at providing real physical evidence from the time the story is told. She raises the question “what is the validity of feelings and opinions against facts?” This is due to the fact that death, although a certain conclusion, still remains as one of life’s true mysteries (Bauman in Hakola and Kivistö vii). Similarly, *Daytripper* pursues the constant validation of death through text, most specifically through depictions of the press, and the obituaries written for and by Brás.

The visual approach of the themes of death and mortality also differs greatly in both texts. Based on McCloud’s graph (52-53) (see fig. 2), we can recognize the different pictorial decisions made by the artists in order to express the messages they intended, focusing on the differences and similarities between both approaches. The result is present bellow (fig. 19).

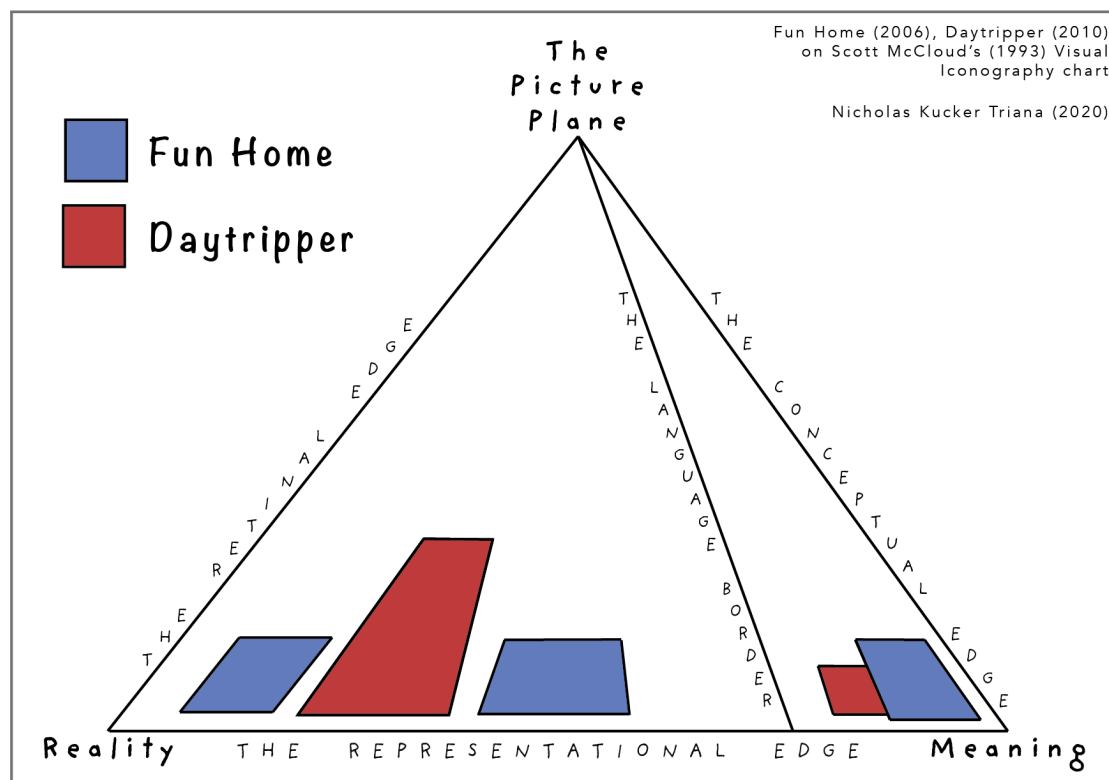


Fig. 19. Kucker Triana, Nicholas. *Fun Home and Daytripper Visual Iconography Chart*

Fun Home’s story, despite consisting of a memoir, is depicted through simpler, more cartoon-like illustrations and it is inked with only three colors¹⁴, which sustains its presence at the bottom and center of the pyramid. The split segment to the left, almost approaching the reality vertice accounts for Bechdel’s rendering of the photographs present at the beginning of the chapters and at some points of the narrative, as well as the more realistic depiction of

¹⁴ Although possessing a number of different shades.

the books and letters that appear during the graphic novel. The pictures themselves (see fig. 4 and appendix B) produce a sharp contrast to the rest of the drawings and demonstrate Lessing's misjudgment when stating that all forms of visual expression should fall under the same category. The photographs validate Bechdel's account as they provide authenticity to her speech.

Passing the language border, *Fun Home*'s section stands at the bottom and closer to the conceptual edge as Bechdel's use of language is more abstract and requires a greater level of perception, as seen in passages such as: "I suppose that a lifetime spent hiding one's erotic truth could have a cumulative renunciatory effect. Sexual shame is in itself a kind of death" (Bechdel 228). Additionally, the language box is prominently taller, closer to the "picture plane" as there are representations of different typefaces and styles of handwriting conveying meaning beyond the words' semantic or pragmatic meaning, as mentioned by McCloud (134), disproving Lessing (Beiser *Diotima's Children* 244).

Bá and Moon's drawing style is slightly more realistic than Bechdel's, despite it being a fictional story, and for that reason *Daytripper* stands more on the left side. Their constant and variable use of color to express moods and feelings, along with the abstraction of environmental setting (particularly on the Dream chapter) justifies its height on the graph, directing towards the picture plane. On the language side, *Daytripper* shares some similarities with *Fun Home* with its abstract use of language on some of the depictions of literary works, as well as conveying meaning through typefaces, as the one used in the obituary panels, but it still remains mostly an example of more direct dialogue, pulling it more towards the left side of the border.

Considering now their thematic approach, both narratives bring great emphasis to the aspect of grief. They make true to Hakola and Kivistö's assertion that grief is a "psychological death" that accompanies "physical death," usually being more painful (viii). In both graphic novels grief is expressed not only through language and descriptions of pain and loss, but also visually through the change in coloring, the emptiness arranged in composition and the size of panels, influencing the pace. The feeling of bereavement is shown to affect the surviving characters through long periods of time and makes the point that the stories of death are as much about the people who tell them, as they are about those

who die. This is seen on Alison's general approach to her father's story in *Fun Home* and in chapters 4 and 8 of *Daytripper*.

Literature is considered to give assistance to readers suffering from loss or terminal disease, as it can help them process the negative emotions by allowing closure or stimulating them through catharsis (Hakola and Kivistö x). Furthermore, it is shown to be the objective of the narratives of death to naturalize the fear of death, by leading society towards accepting their "human physical frailties" (Kundu 10).

In *Fun Home* death is seen through the lenses of the absurd. "One second a person is there, the next they're not" (Bechdel 47). It is a constant state of non-being. We may try to attach meaning or to come to terms with it, but while we reflect on it, it will remain as it always is — death. Furthermore, it works with the problematic of missing a father that was negligent, authoritarian, and that would get sexually involved with teenage boys. As we follow Alison's retelling of the multiple and interlocking stories, we see her coming to terms and learning to coexist with his figure, although now only present in thought. There is a similar, although much less problematic dynamic apparent in *Daytripper*, as Brás explains his relationship with writing and cigarettes, both things he had in common with his father: "I once thought of them as curses. Now I see them as my inheritance" (Bá and Moon 238). At a first glance, Brás' father is depicted as absent and forgetful, but through the course of the story we, just as Brás, come to accept him for his strengths and his passionate insight on life that concludes the story.

Daytripper, on the other hand has a very different take on death and mortality, to *Fun Home*, due to the fact that life and death walk hand in hand throughout the narrative. As Thomas declares, "Without death, without the awareness of an end that might arrive right at this very moment, my life would be empty of what makes its value[able]" (295). After finishing the second chapter it becomes apparent that Brás will always die at the end of each following chapter from his life, and that knowledge is what captures the reader with such attentiveness to his journey. A journey of life and death. Whereas *Fun Home* implies detachment in dealing with death and mortality, *Daytripper* suggests connection. As Brás finds solace in the words of his father, mother, wife, and best friend, he comes to the understanding that once we accept the ever-accompanying presence of death (Parkes in Thomas 295), we can finally be free to live our lives.

These two graphic novels use the relation between words and pictures in various ways when approaching the themes of death and mortality. They can provide more layers to emotions being portrayed, as Ana is shown to feel the loss of her husband (197), or they can elicit irony, as Alison describes her father's suicide as a "consummate artifice" whilst someone at the funeral says: "I can't believe it. Such a good man" (27), or even delve deep into the minds of characters, despite the contrast with the situation depicted, as seen multiple times through the extracts. The image we project in our lives is seldom the same as inside our heads, so why would comics restrain from showing how we really feel about death, in more ways than one?

Graphic novels use a combination of words and pictures, although they are not necessarily tied to the limitations of one or the other. Although it is a "mono-sensory medium" (McCloud 89), but through the elements of pictures, language, and sequentiality they can convey incorporeal concepts, such as the feelings of anger, grief, and acceptance. Lessing goes to great lengths to support his claims, as he believed it was in the medium's best interest if they did not experiment with each other, but intrusion, as seen in the graphic novels, allows for unimaginable narrative possibilities. Despite advocating that poetry lost its effect if it tried to be descriptive, page 28 of *Fun Home* (see appendix C) shows that the juxtaposition of ideas can be even more effective in conveying a sense of longing. There is no loss of effect in description since comics' "past, [present], and future are real and visible [at] all" times (McCloud 104).

Similarly, graphic novels do not abide by painting's aversion of time, since it is through the workings of color, framing, and pace that feelings of bereavement are shown to echo and transform through time, as seen in *Daytripper's* page 196-199 (see appendix H). Through the uses of sequential panels, spacial and abstract visual elements take temporal properties.

However, there is a single aspect true to all graphic novels that Lessing could agree with, and that is its encouragement of the reader's imagination. This encouragement led him to praise poetry's potential for creating mental images, and prohibit painting's representation of a climatic moment. Graphic novels as a narrative medium solely depend on the reader's involvement and their imaginative construction (Hatfield 33). Between panels, in the gutter, there is a realm where nothing is shown, but all is implied (McCloud 69). Through choosing

the right images to compose a narrative, and the power of closure ensured by the reader in order to make actions unfold through space, graphic novels sustain Lessing's axiom of choosing the most representative moment for paintings, as well as poetry's base for evoking imagination.

The graphic novel represents the maturation of a form that has evolved over the last two hundred years (Tabachnick *Cambridge Companion* 37). Through the emergence of platforms such as the internet, reading today has become a hybrid of textual and visual decoding (Gunning 44). Although the medium of comics already implies that they are more than the mere sum of words and pictures, graphic novels fit this current environment by expressing complex aesthetic and intellectual ideas (Roeder 4), as seen with *Fun Home's* and *Daytripper's* approach to the theme of death and mortality. Comics provide readers with new and engaging forms of interaction with text "producing both a modern fascination with the mobile and a deep democratization of literacy as reading becomes a means of amusement" (Gunning 37).

Lessing declared that when judging painting we value execution, while in poetry we value invention (63). Although the values of craftsmanship and originality have only gotten more subjective with time, one could argue that the graphic novel is judged by both. We read them and engage with them not only for their use of language or their composed visuals, but for the way they connect and convey real feelings — not minding if the sources of such feelings are real or not.

Conclusion

This paper attempted to confirm that graphic novels can transcend the aesthetic limitations of the media of painting and poetry, as proposed by Lessing in his essay *Laocoön*, by analyzing how the themes of death and mortality were approached in the graphic novels *Fun Home* and *Daytripper*.

To Lessing, poetry is comprised of sounds that unfold through time, while paintings are comprised of colors that occupy space (78). For these reasons he limits that poetry to be more suited to describe actions, as they happen in time, whereas painting should be restrained to depict bodies, as they exist in space (79). Lessing saw any medium's attempt into describing that which belonged to the other as an intrusion that costed the work its effectiveness on representing beauty (91). The very essence of graphic novels goes against these divisions

implied by Lessing, as through the act of closure (McCloud 67) the juxtaposed images can create the illusion of time, similarly to speech bubbles and motion lines since their presentation in the world can only unfold through time (McCloud 116). Therefore, comics adopt poetry's potential of presenting "a whole gallery" (Lessing 72) of material pictures.

Fun Home's general relationship to the theme of death and mortality is established in the narrative by the characters that were put in contact with the thought of death from a very young age, by working in their family's funeral home. Additionally, the reference to canonical texts that dive into the theme of death, such the works of Albert Camus, is constant throughout the graphic novel, as we are shown passages and realistic visual representations of the covers of this works. Similarly, *Daytripper* establishes a constant connection with death through the presence of the obituaries written for and by the protagonist as he meets his own death at the end of every chapter. The restatement of death by the press offers closure and validation to the event which fosters a reflection upon the life of the individual, characterizing death as that which gives life completion (Thomas 295).

By analyzing the graphic novels with McCloud's framework of visual iconography, panel transition, intertextuality, time progression, word and image combination, color, as well as Kress' and van Leeuwen's aspects of composition (i.e. information value, salience, framing) it could be seen that both graphic novels aim at conveying emotion and giving shape to their beliefs and interpretations of the highly abstract concepts that are death and mortality, as often is the case with literature (Teodorescu 68). Through the uses of color and framing we see that *Fun Home* implies a sense of detachment to the thought of death, which contrasts the Western view that sees it as a tragic but meaningful event (Skelton 214). Additionally, the salience and centrality of Alison's character reflect her centrality and convergence with her fathers' story, implying that the stories of death are as much about those who tell them, as they are about those who die. *Daytripper's* changes in coloring in certain scenes, varying from bland faded colors to vivid bright tones, accompanies the different stages of grief as it evolves through time. Furthermore, the framing and salience of the characters in relation to each other on scenes that follow someone's death implies the text's idea that the sense of bereavement can be dealt with through interpersonal connections.

The analysis of both graphic novels opposes some of Lessing's claims of aesthetic limitations as we are shown how graphic novels do not abide to paintings aversion of time

(19), since it is through the use of material elements such as colors and object framings, that incorporeal elements can be shown to progress and transform through time. Similarly, they do not abide to poetry's aversion of descriptive elements (111) as the consecutiveness of linguistic and visual signs can be shown to deepen ideas of loss and longing. Finally, we have seen how comics satisfy Lessing's concerns on art fostering reader's involvement and use of imagination through the act of closure.

Hopefully this paper has shed a light on the practical ways through which graphic novels can construct meaning, and convey ideas and emotions by working with both linguistic and visual signs in narrative. Lessing's theory was used with the intention of elevating the discussion of this media to a more analytical and academic standard, and it has highlighted the relevance his text still holds to this day and age (Fried in Lessing viii). Equally important is the understanding that although graphic novels, and comics in general, use of the essence of words and pictures to tell stories, they do not belong to one or another, being "a language all its own" (McCloud 17).

Scope limitations in academic research are always an issue, this paper being no exception. There is a myriad of tools of both literary and visual analysis at researchers' disposal and it would be interesting to see the employment of semiotic principles in different genres of comics. This specific research could surely benefit from a more extensive approach of this area. Another take could look at how other media approach death, though highlighting more capabilities than limitations. There is no clear path to follow, but the idea of harnessing comics to works with other areas that do not imply obvious relations seems to be a good place to start. Also, reviewing graphic novels' approach of issues that are inherent to the human condition, such as family relations, legacy, and death, can help diffuse the discussion of comics to other areas of knowledge and to reach potential readers that would not get in contact with graphic novels otherwise.

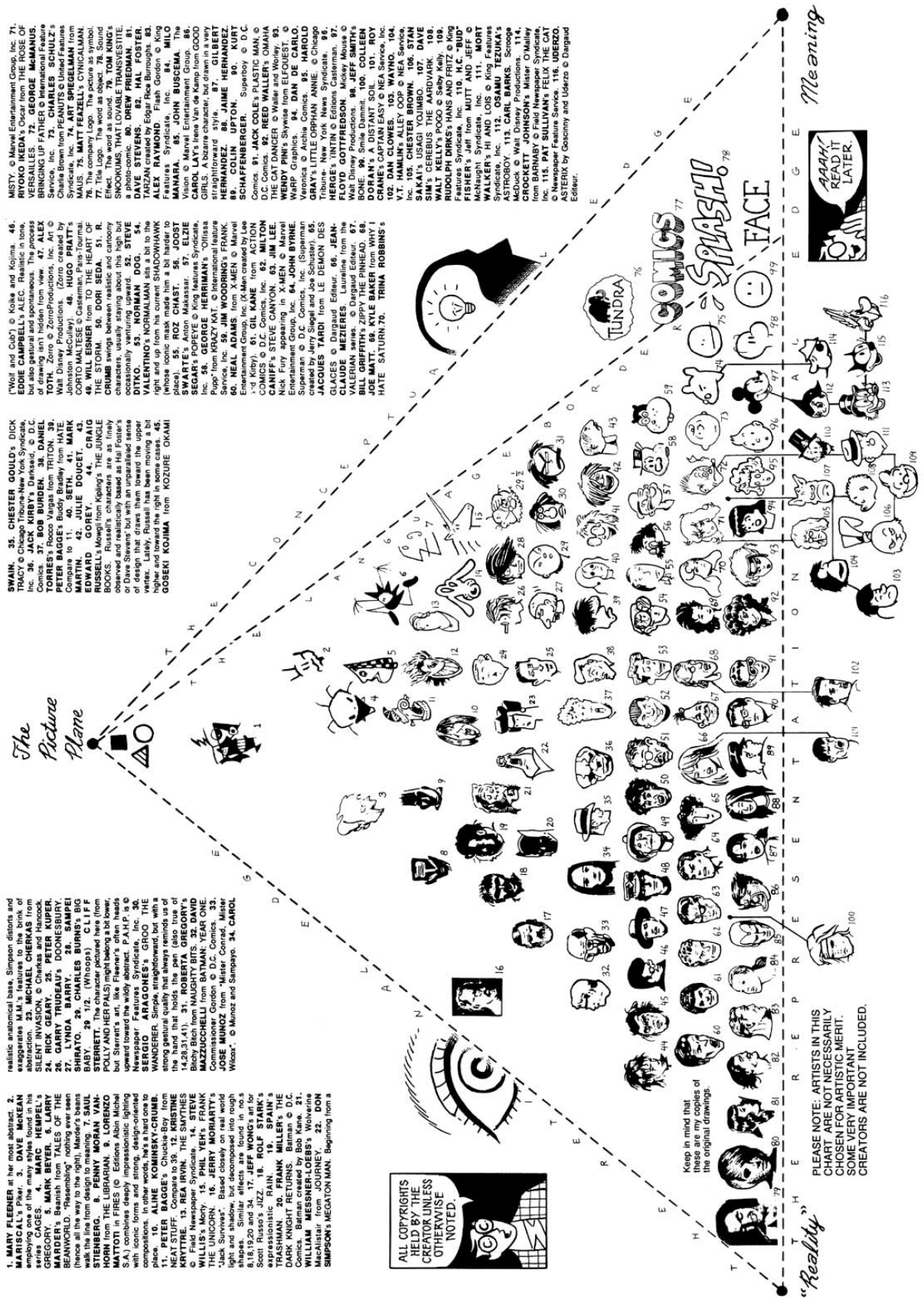
Many academic writings about comics give great focus to the medium's history and definitions, while overseeing the actual works and their possible readings. Although it is important to establish terminology and theory, perhaps by uncovering its themes and motifs we can treat it as a medium of the present, one that addresses social and political issues we face on the 21st century, instead of regarding it is a medium of the future. Graphic novels are here to stay, and it is important to see what they have to say about us and how they say it.

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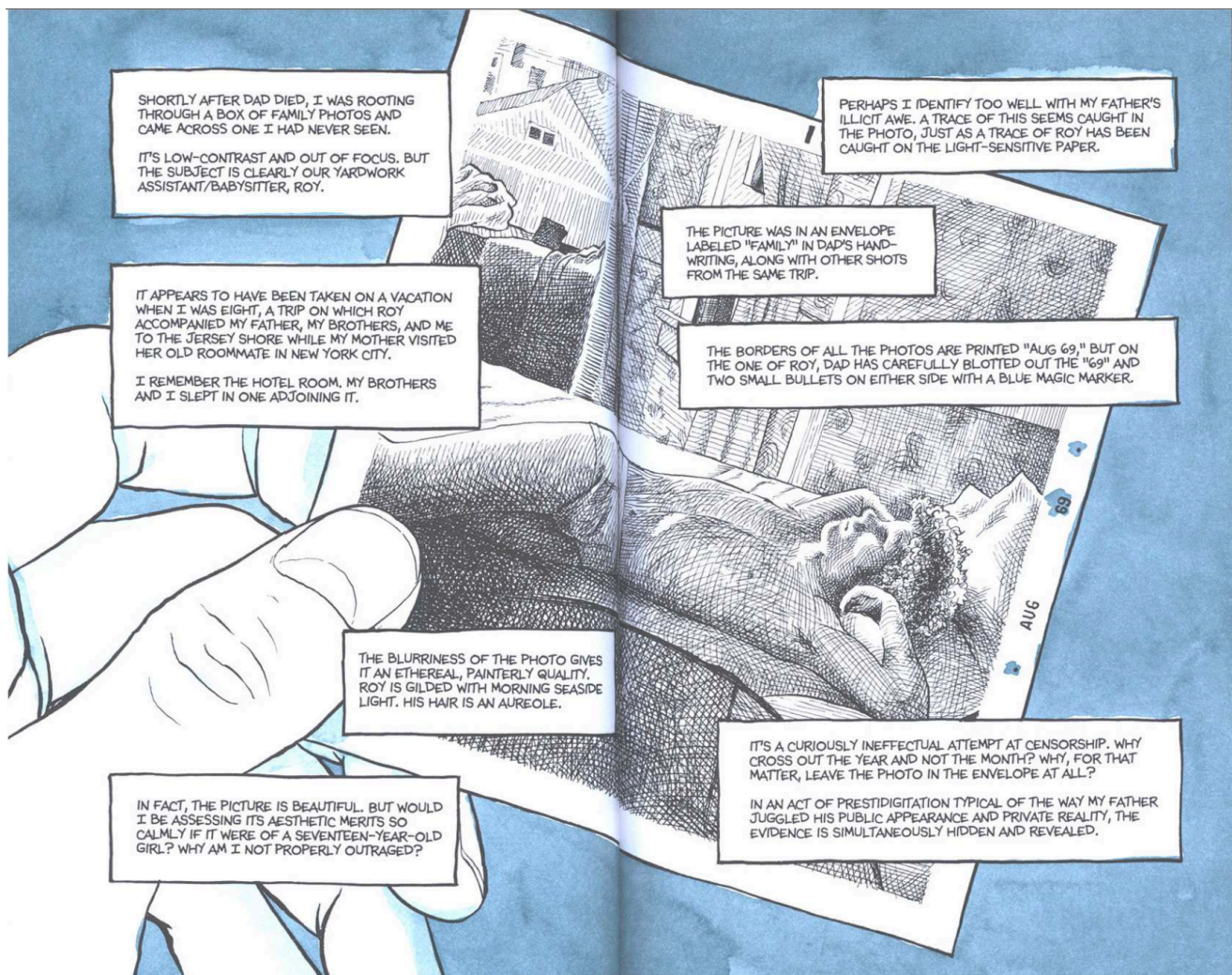
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Appendix A



McCloud, Scott. *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*. 1st ed., William Morrow, 1993, pp. 52-53

Appendix B

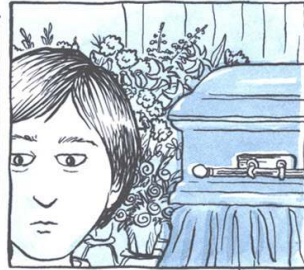


Bechdel, Alison. *Fun Home*. London, Jonathan Cape, 2006, pp. 100-101

Appendix C

THERE'S NO PROOF, ACTUALLY, THAT MY FATHER KILLED HIMSELF.

NO ONE KNEW IT WASN'T AN ACCIDENT.



HIS DEATH WAS QUITE POSSIBLY HIS CONSUMMATE ARTIFICE, HIS MASTERSTROKE.



THERE'S NO PROOF, BUT THERE ARE SOME SUGGESTIVE CIRCUMSTANCES. THE FACT THAT MY MOTHER HAD ASKED HIM FOR A DIVORCE TWO WEEKS BEFORE.

THE COPY OF CAMUS' A HAPPY DEATH THAT HE'D BEEN READING AND LEAVING AROUND THE HOUSE IN WHAT MIGHT BE CONSTRUED AS A DELIBERATE MANNER.



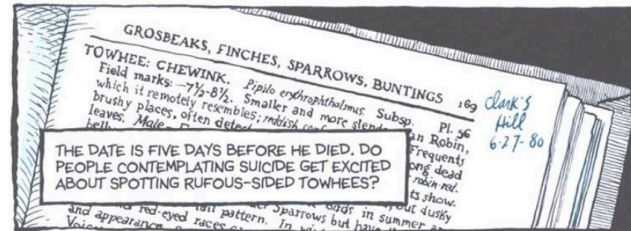
CAMUS' FIRST NOVEL, IT'S ABOUT A CONSUMPTIVE HERO WHO DOES NOT DIE A PARTICULARLY HAPPY DEATH. MY FATHER HAD HIGHLIGHTED ONE LINE.

BUT DAD WAS ALWAYS READING SOMETHING. SHOULD WE HAVE BEEN SUSPICIOUS WHEN HE STARTED PLOWING THROUGH PROUST THE YEAR BEFORE?

Spared him a great deal of fondness. He has been unfair: while his imagination and vanity had given her too much importance, his pride had given her too little. He discovered the cruel paradox by which we always deceive ourselves twice about the people we love - first to their advantage, then to their disadvantage. Today he understood that Marthe had been genuine with him - that she had been what she was, and that he owed her a good deal. It was beginning to dawn on him that he had been a fool of the street, and that he owed her a good deal. It was a burst of gratitude he could not express - in the old

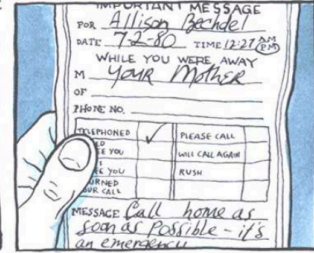


WAS THAT A SIGN OF DESPERATION? IT'S SAID, AFTER ALL, THAT PEOPLE REACH MIDDLE AGE THE DAY THEY REALIZE THEY'RE NEVER GOING TO READ REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST. DAD ALSO LEFT A MARGINAL NOTATION IN ANOTHER BOOK.

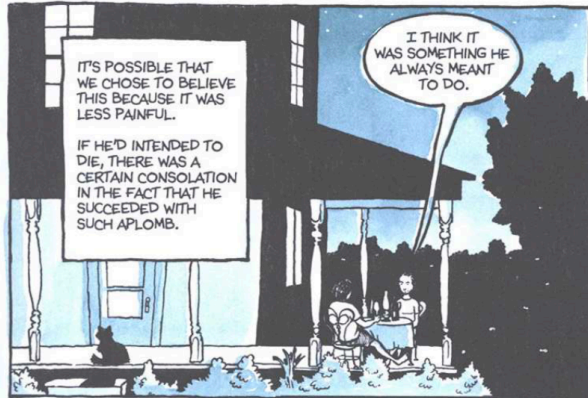


MAYBE HE DIDN'T NOTICE THE TRUCK COMING BECAUSE HE WAS PREOCCUPIED WITH THE DIVORCE. PEOPLE OFTEN HAVE ACCIDENTS WHEN THEY'RE DISTRAUGHT.

BUT THESE ARE JUST QUIBBLES. I DON'T BELIEVE IT WAS AN ACCIDENT.

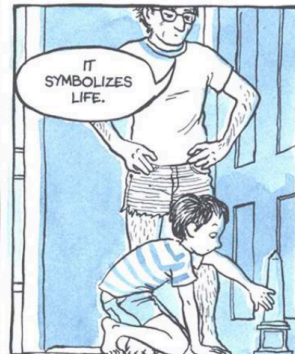


AFTER I HAD MADE THE FIVE-HOUR DRIVE HOME FROM COLLEGE AND EVERYONE ELSE HAD GONE TO BED, MOM AND I DISCUSSED IT.



HIS HEADSTONE IS AN OBELISK, A STRIKING ANACHRONISM AMONG THE UNGAINLY GRANITE SLABS IN THE NEW END OF THE CEMETERY.

HE HAD AN OBELISK COLLECTION, IN FACT, AND HIS PRIZE SPECIMEN WAS ONE IN KNEE-HIGH JADE THAT PROPPED OPEN THE DOOR TO HIS LIBRARY.



Bechdel, Alison. *Fun Home*. London, Jonathan Cape, 2006, pp. 27-29

Appendix D

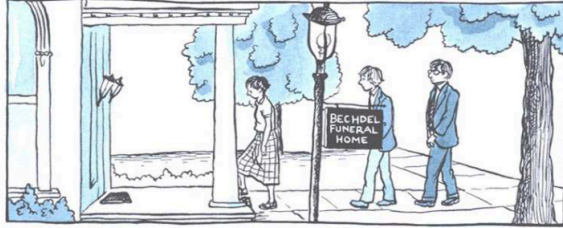
YOU WOULD ALSO THINK THAT A CHILDHOOD SPENT IN SUCH CLOSE PROXIMITY TO THE WORKDAY INCIDENTALS OF DEATH WOULD BE GOOD PREPARATION.



THAT WHEN SOMEONE YOU KNEW ACTUALLY DIED, MAYBE YOU'D GET TO SKIP A PHASE OR TWO OF THE GRIEVING PROCESS--"DENIAL" AND "ANGER," FOR EXAMPLE--



BUT IN FACT, ALL THE YEARS SPENT VISITING GRAVEDIGGERS, JOKING WITH BURIAL-Vault SALESMEN, AND TEASING MY BROTHERS WITH CRUSHED VIALS OF SMELLING SALTS ONLY MADE MY OWN FATHER'S DEATH MORE INCOMPREHENSIBLE.



HIS WIRY HAIR, WHICH HE HAD DAILY TAKEN GREAT PAINS TO STYLE, WAS BRUSHED STRAIGHT UP ON END AND REVEALED A SURPRISINGLY RECEDED HAIRLINE.



DRY-EYED AND SHEEPISH, MY BROTHERS AND I LOOKED FOR AS LONG AS WE SENSED IT WAS APPROPRIATE.



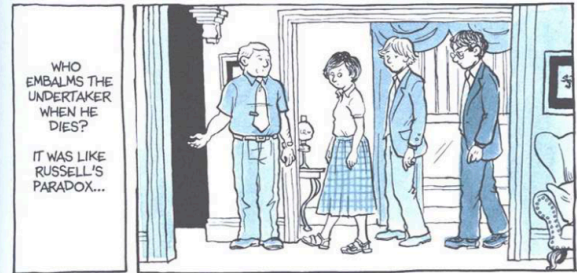
I WASN'T EVEN SURE IT WAS HIM UNTIL I FOUND THE TINY BLUE TATTOO ON HIS KNUCKLE WHERE HE'D ONCE BEEN ACCIDENTALLY STABBED WITH A PENCIL.



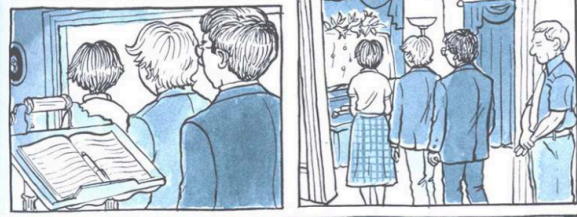
IF ONLY THEY MADE SMELLING SALTS TO INDUCE GRIEF-STROKEN SWOONS, RATHER THAN SNAP YOU OUT OF THEM.



THE SOLE EMOTION I COULD MUSTER WAS IRRITATION, WHEN THE PINCH-FUNERAL DIRECTOR LAID HIS HAND ON MY ARM CONSOLINGLY.



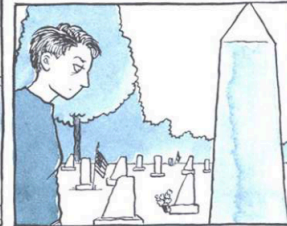
...THE FAMOUS CONUNDRUM OF THE CLEAN-SHAVEN BARBER WHOSE SIGN READS, "I SHAVE ALL THOSE MEN, AND ONLY THOSE MEN, WHO DO NOT SHAVE THEMSELVES."



I SHOOK IT OFF WITH A VIOLENCE THAT WAS, IN FACT, RATHER CONSOLING.



THIS SAME IRRITATION WOULD OVERTAKE ME FOR YEARS AFTERWARD WHEN I VISITED DAD'S GRAVE.



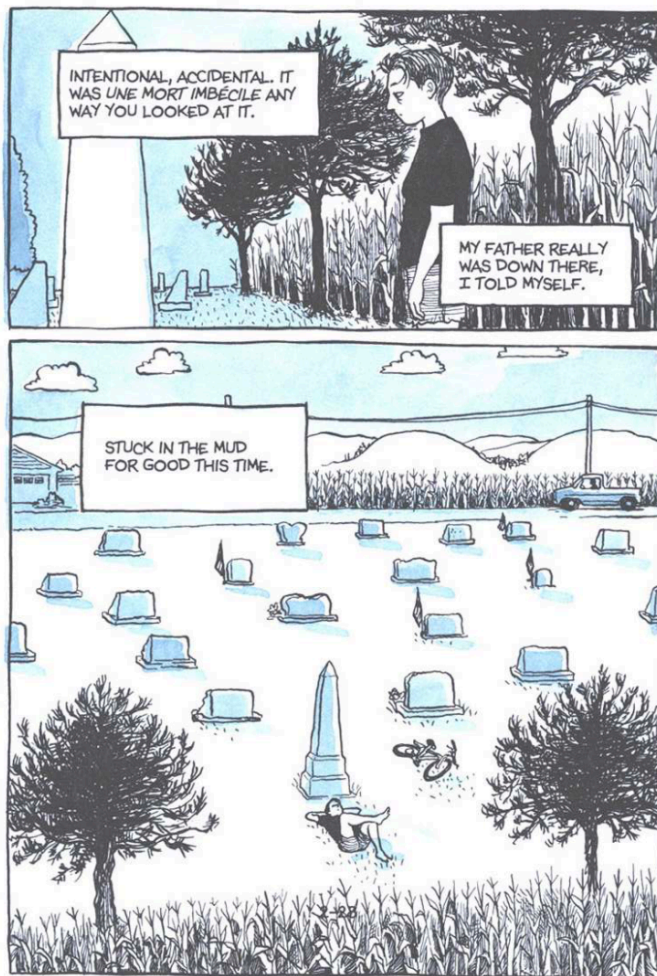
ON ONE OCCASION I FOUND IT DESECRATED WITH A CHEESY FLAG, PLACED THERE BY SOME WELL-MEANING ARMED SERVICES ORGANIZATION.



I JAVELINED THIS, UGLY BRASS HOLDER AND ALL, INTO THE CORNFIELD THAT IMMEDIATELY ADJOINS HIS PLOT AT THE EDGE OF THE CEMETERY.



AGAIN, THERE WAS SOME FLEETING CONSOLATION IN THE SHEER VIOLENCE OF MY GESTURE.



Bechdel, Alison. *Fun Home*. London, Jonathan Cape, 2006, pp. 50-54

Appendix E

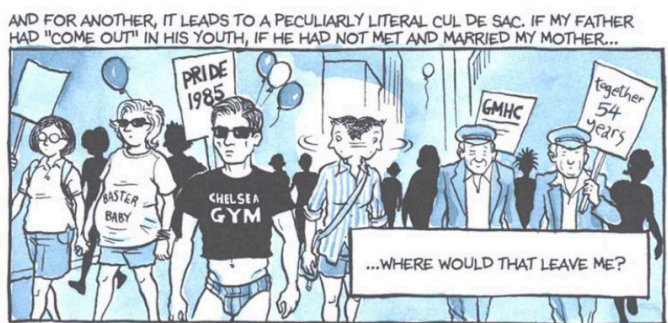


BUT IS IT SO FAR-FETCHED? AND THE BAND PLAYED ON, THAT MINUTE CHRONICLE OF THE EARLY YEARS OF THE EPIDEMIC, OPENS ORGIASITICALLY AT THE BICENTENNIAL.

July 4, 1976
NEW YORK HARBOR

Tall sails scraped the deep purple night as rockers burst, flared, and flourished red, white, and blue over the stoic Statue of Liberty. The whole world was watching; it seemed; the whole world was there. Ships from fifty-five nations had poured sailors into Manhattan to join the throngs, counted in the millions, who watched the greatest pyrotechnic extravaganza ever mounted, all for America's 200th birthday party. Deep into the morning, bars all over the city were crammed with sailors. New York City had hosted the greatest party ever known, everybody agreed later. The guests had come from all over the world.

This was the part the epidemiologists would later note, when they stayed up late at night and the conversation drifted toward where it had started and when. They would remember that glorious night in New York Harbor, all those sailors, and recall: From all over the world they came to New York.



THERE'S A CERTAIN EMOTIONAL EXPEDIENCE TO CLAIMING HIM AS A TRAGIC VICTIM OF HOMOPHOBIA. BUT THAT'S A PROBLEMATIC LINE OF THOUGHT.



Bechdel, Alison. *Fun Home*. London, Jonathan Cape, 2006, pp.195-197

Appendix F



Moon, Fábio, and Gabriel Bá. *Daytripper*. New York, Dc Comics/Vertigo, 2010, pp. 11-13



Appendix G



Moon, Fábio, and Gabriel Bá. *Daytripper*. New York, Dc Comics/Vertigo, 2010, pp. 88-89

Appendix H



196



197



198



Appendix I



Moon, Fábio, and Gabriel Bá. *Daytripper*.
New York, Dc Comics/Vertigo, 2010, pp. 217-218