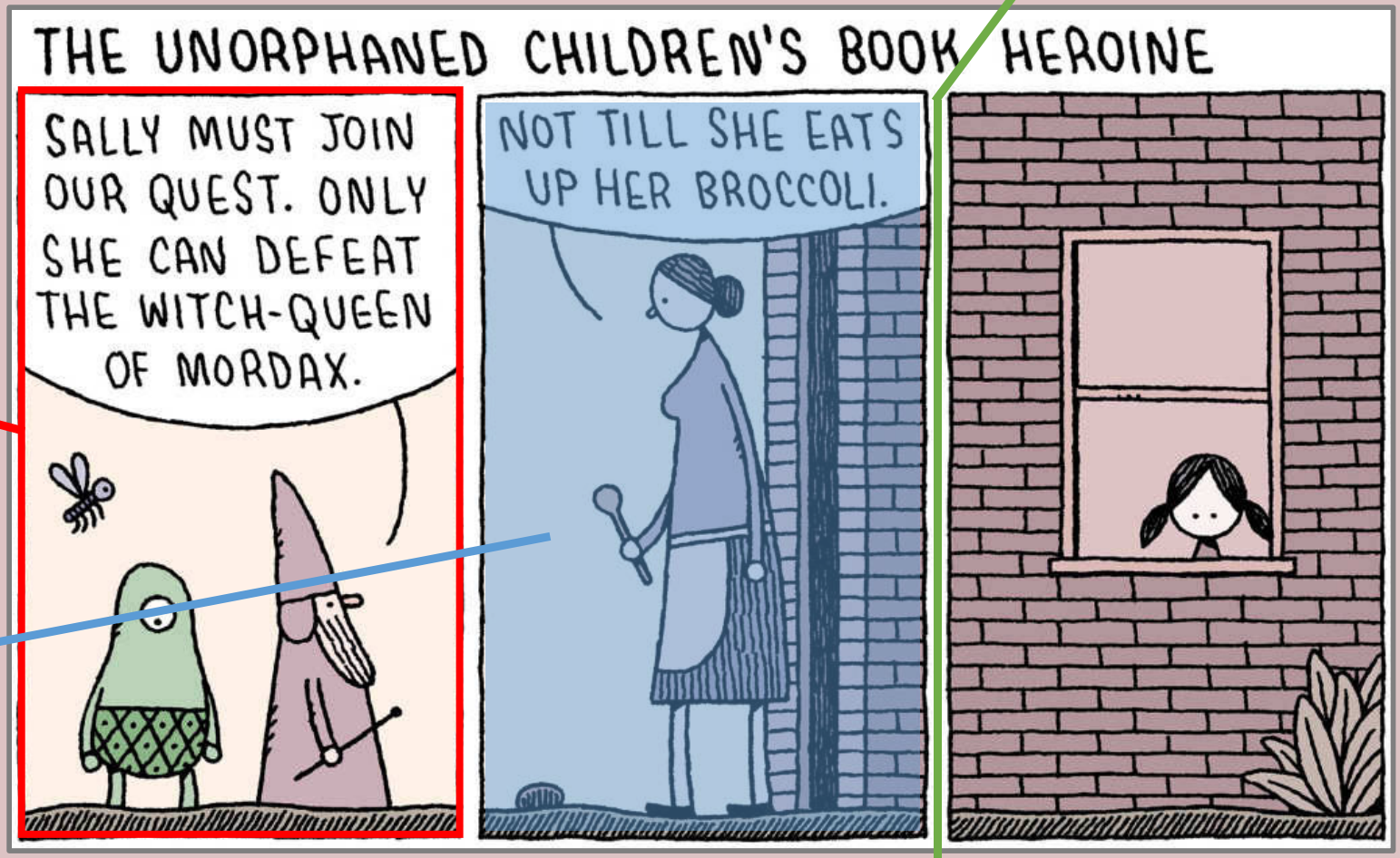
University of Zurich[UZH]

Analyzing Comics & Graphic Novels: A Crash Course

gutter

frame

panel



Cartoon by Tom Gauld

(https://i.pinimg.com/736x/8d/d5/96/8dd5968a5f56f18d21ee9493fe909c40--young-adult-books-childrens-literature.jpg, 08.01.2018)

Why is one single **image** split into three **panels?**

Cartoon by Tom Gauld

(https://i.pinimg.com/736x/8d/d5/96/8dd5968a5f56f18d21ee9493fe909c40--young-adult-books-childrens-literature.jpg, 08.01.2018)

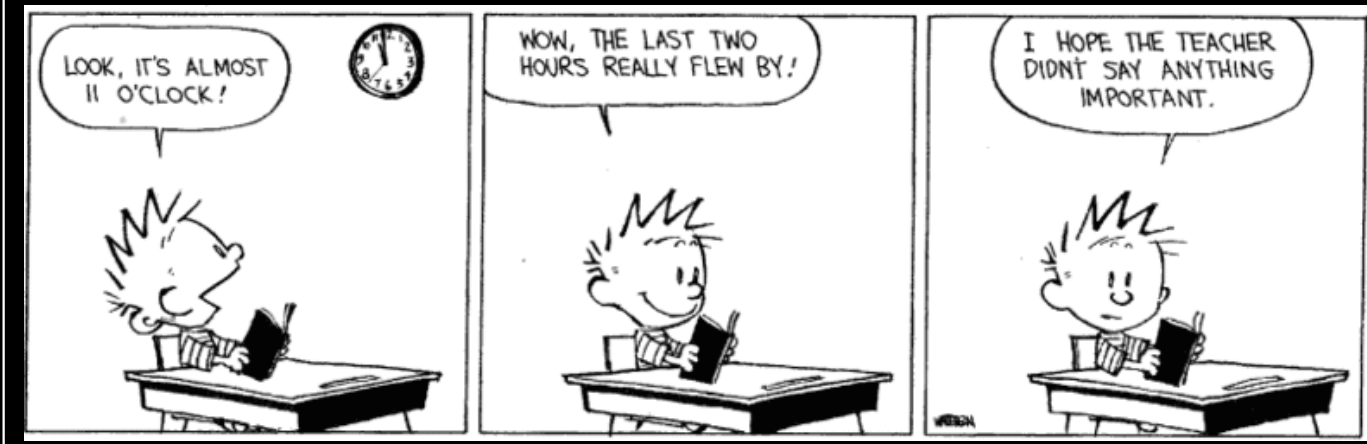
Three Aims for Today

1. Provide useful terminology

2. Give examples for how one can apply and use this terminology

3. Recommend some primary and secondary texts

Cartoon (by Gary Larson)



Comic strip (by Bill Watterson)

Comic or **graphic novel?**

(***The Picture of Dorian Gray***, by Ian Edginton & I. N. J. Culbard)

(1)
"Hello bunny!"

(3)
"What have you broken this time?"

(4)
Okay, that's it, he truly knows me.

(2)
"Bonsoir kitten! – Come, sit down, I've prepared your favorite yummy. "

speech bubbles
- sequence?
- placement?

Jeromeuh. "ZUT et REZUT." *Les petites histoires viriles*. Paris: Delcourt, 2011. 14.
Also available at www.jeromeuh.net/2010/10/zut-et-rezut (7 September 2017)

"IF I THINK ABOUT IT LOGICALLY

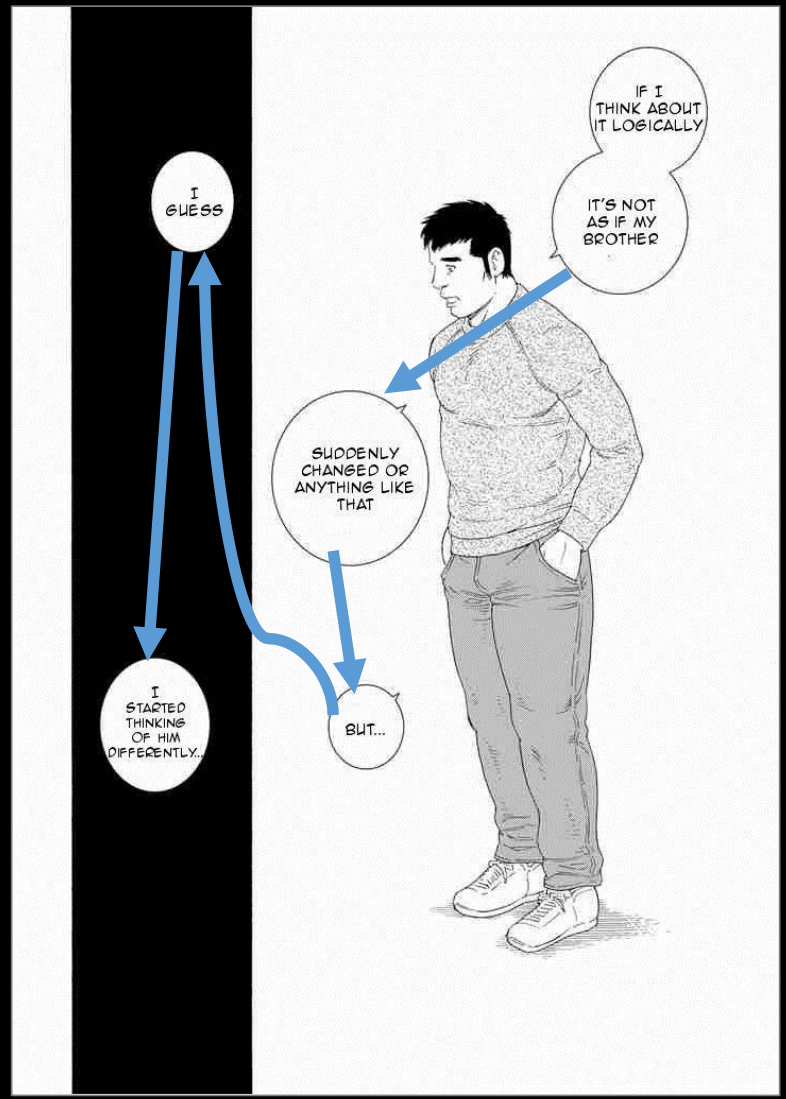
IT'S NOT AS IF MY BROTHER

SUDDENLY CHANGED OR ANYTHING LIKE THAT

BUT…

I GUESS

I STARTED THINKING OF HIM DIFFERENTLY."



speech bubbles
- rhythm?

space
- realistic?
- conceptual?

Gengoroh Tagame. *My Brother's Husband.* 2014–2017. Vol. 1. Trans. Anne Ishii. New York: Pantheon Books, 2017.

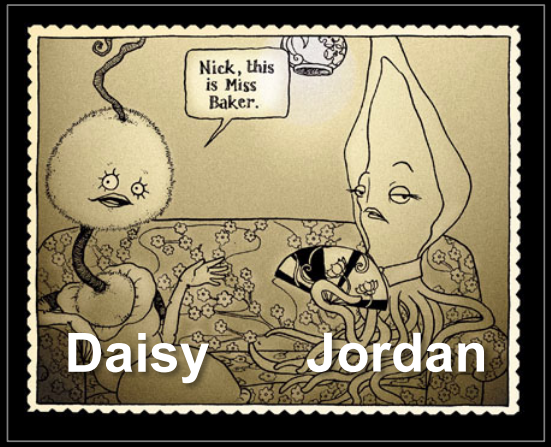
(1)
At night, two strangers on the St Martin canal bridge.

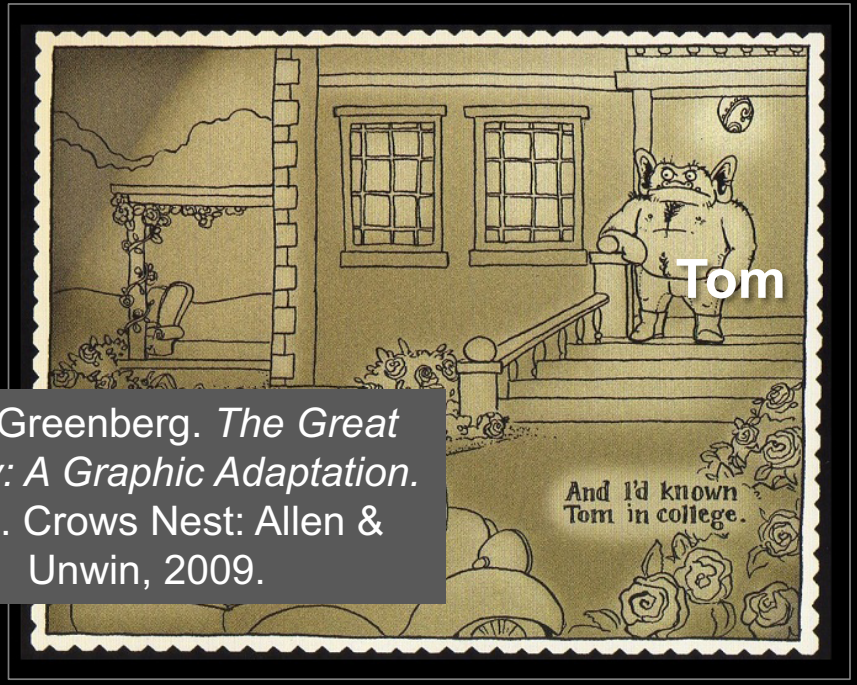
distance
- zooming in/out
drawing style
- e.g. silhouettes
color
- light/dark/...

(3)
“No, Sir. Me, I’m homeless.”

(2)
“Do you, too, love to escape the madness of Parisian parties to admire the stars?”

Jeromeuh. “Strangers in the Night.” *Les petites histoires viriles*. Paris: Delcourt, 2011. 14.
Also available at www.jeromeuh.net/2010/03/strangers-in-the-night (7 September 2017)





Nicki Greenberg. *The Great Gatsby: A Graphic Adaptation.* 2007. Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2009.

types of characters
- human? realistic? individualized?

(inter)textuality/-mediality
- newspapers, photos, letters ...

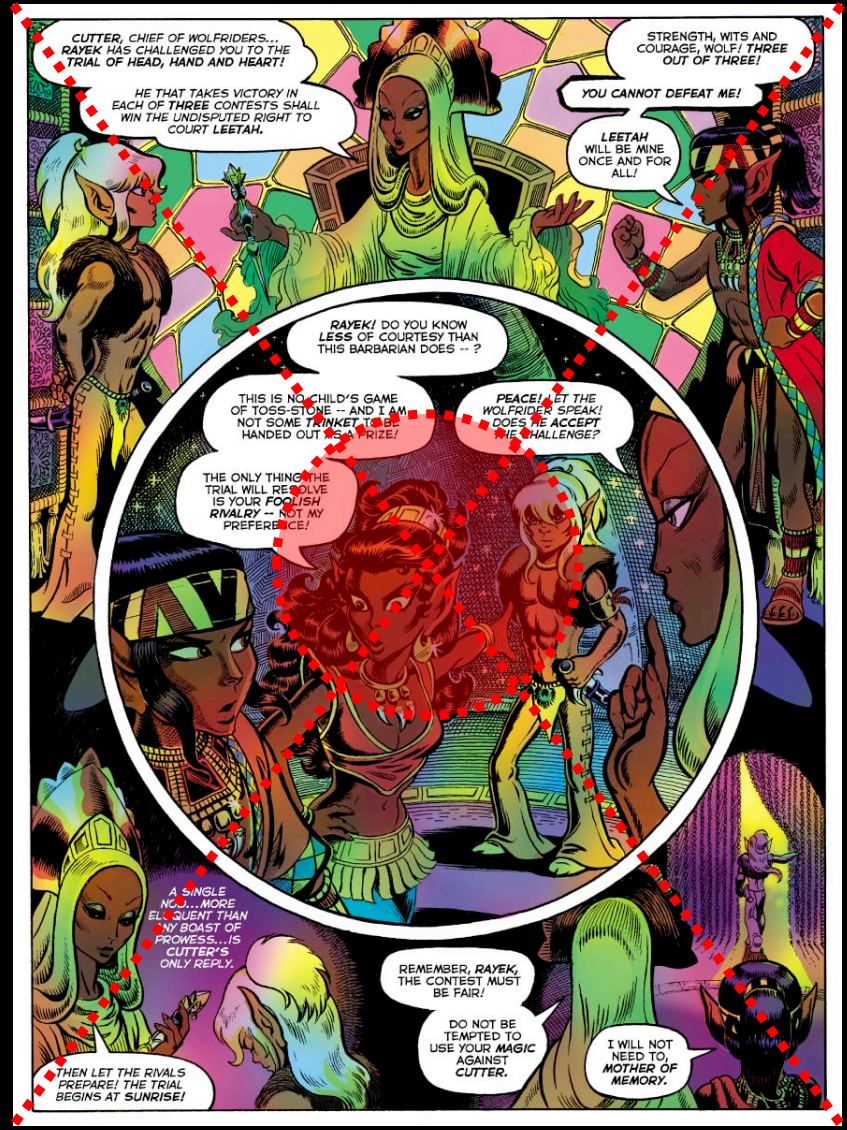
grid
- regular? varied?

Wendy & Richard Pini. *Elfquest: Archives.* 1979–1984. 4 vols. New York: DC Comics, 2003–2007.
Also available at http://elfquest.com/read/digitalEQ.html (09.01.2018)

color palette

- locally (e.g. to separate sequences)

- throughout: bleak colors? bright? varied?



page architecture

- meaning / function (e.g. emphasis?

- visual echoes?

- on the whole: varied or regular?

"I SEE WHITE ROCKS AND BUSHES..."
"...AND A SCAVENGER BIRD..."
"...AND ...DUST!"

NOK NOK
YES...

frames

- e.g. wavy lines to mark memory / past

color

- 'tone' of speech & thoughts

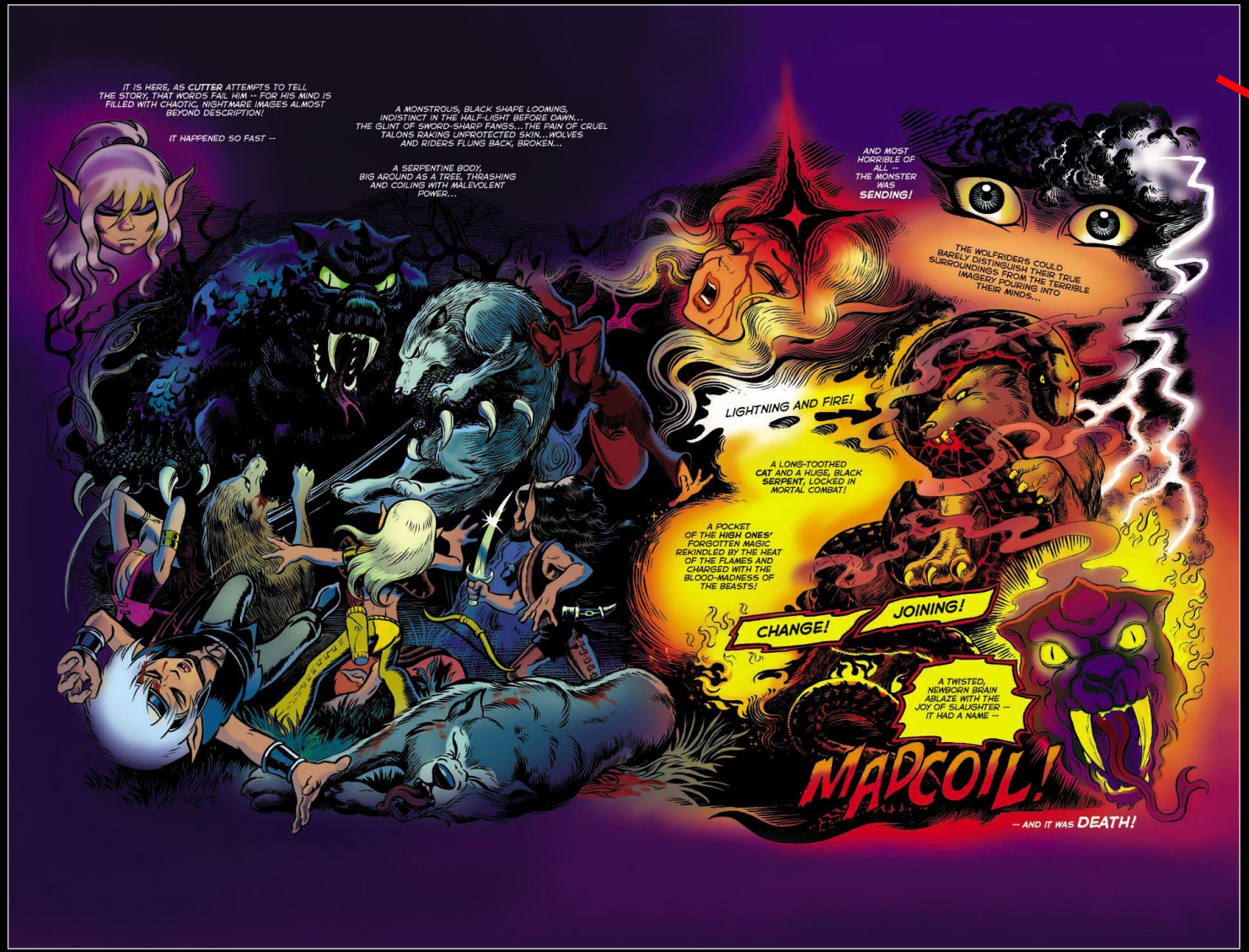
frames

- absent frames?

panel

- shape?
- size?

splash page

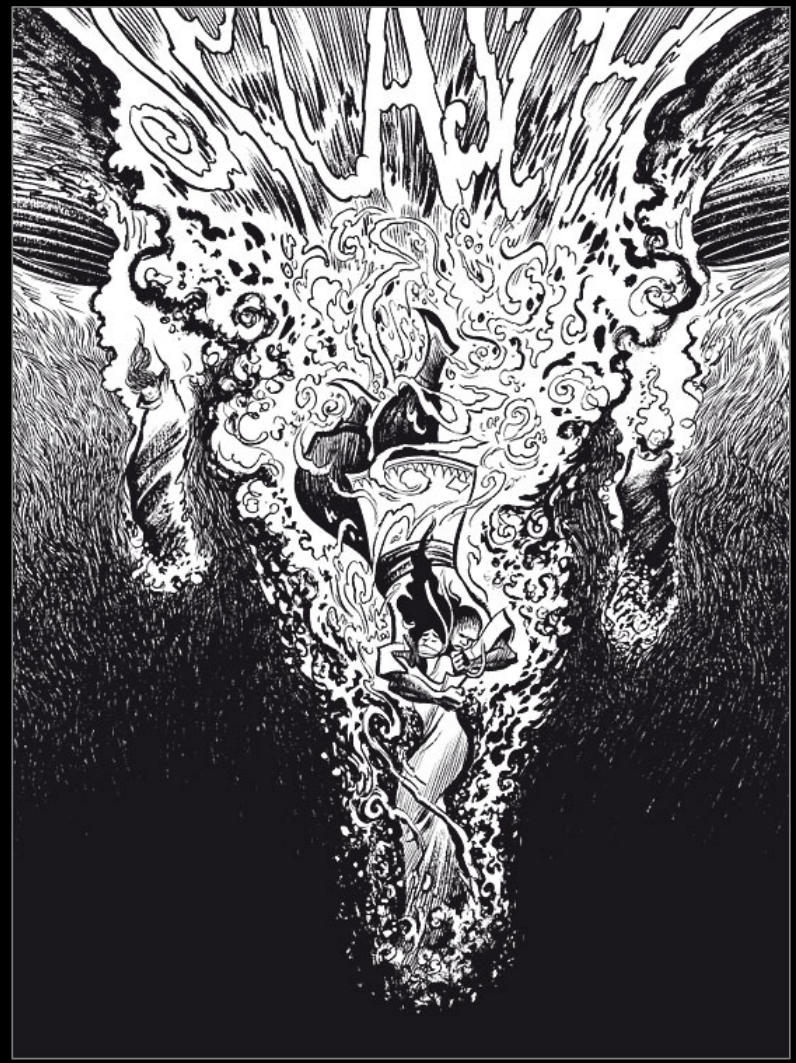


two-page spread

functional
- What narrative or communicative function do the visual codes serve?

vs.

aesthetic
- Do the images 'take on a life of their own,' beyond mere narrative function?



Chris Thompson. *Habibi.* London: Faber and Faber, 2011. (not necessarily suitable for teaching)

Other Teachable Primary Texts

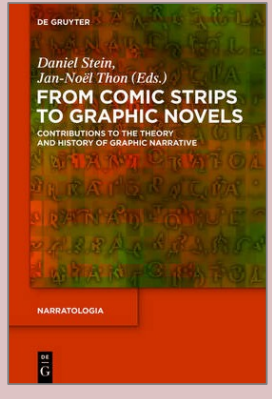
- de Seve, Mike & Daniel Burwen – *Operation Ajax* (2011) historical (coup in Iran, Cold War)
- Evans, Kate – *Threads: From the Refugee Crisis* (2017) reportage
- Greenberg, Nicki – *The Great Gatsby* (2007) & *Hamlet* (2010) adaptations
- **Hamilton, Tim – *Fahrenheit 451* (2009) adaptation, dystopia**
- Lewis, John et al. – *The March* (3 vols., 2013–2016) historical (racism, Civil Rights Movement)
- Millar, Mark et al. – *Superman: Red Son* (2003) rewriting, dystopia, alternate history (Cold War)
- **Moon, Fábio and Gabriel Bá – *Daytripper* (2010) philosophical ('meaning of life')**
- McGuire, Richard – *Here* (2014) philosophical (historical change)
- Rapp, Adam & Mike Cavallaro, *Decelerate Blue* (2017) dystopia, LGBTQ, coming of age
- Rowntree, Winston – *Waiting* (2016) illness, time travel, philosophical ('meaning of life')
- Spiegelman, Art – *Maus* (1980–1991) Holocaust, trauma, autobiography/memoir

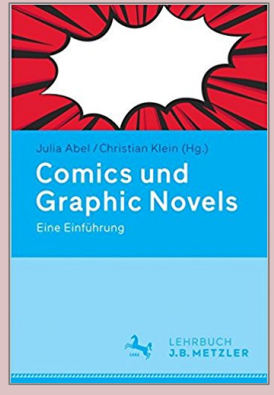
Recommended Secondary Sources

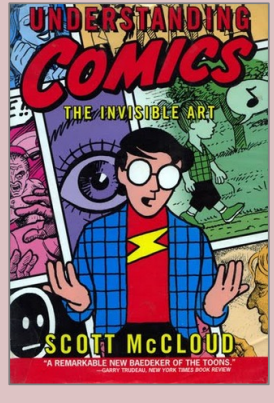
- Abel, Julia & Christian Klein. *Comics und Graphic Novels: Eine Einführung.* Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 2016. [esp. chapter 4: “Leitfaden zur Comicanalyse.”]

- Horstkotte, Silke. “Zooming In and Out: Panels, Frames, Sequences, and the Building of Graphic Storyworlds.” *From Comic Strips to Graphic Novels: Contributions to the Theory of Graphic Narrative.* Ed. Daniel Stein and Jan-Noël Thon. Narratologia 37. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2013. 27–48.

- McCloud, Scot. *Understanding Comics.* 1993. New York: Harper Perennial, 1994.







Vocabulary from Film Studies: Also Useful

"Film and Adaptation: A Toolbox" (Wednesday, April 18, 2018)

- How to analyze films: key concepts, with examples
- Adapting classics: comparing different versions
- Reading screenplays, watching films
- Non-fiction: documentaries in the classroom
- The problem of sound

→ enrol by March 18, 2018

www.weiterbildung.uzh.ch/programme/wbmat_detail.php?angebnr=1193

Image: *The Peanuts Movie* (USA 2015)
(http://foxdigmarketing-a.akamaihd.net/thumbnails/51/55/51558ce9-4667-46f6-b859-4b7eb31c0eed/ThePeanutsMovie_FromSketchToScreen_1080p_ProRes_1920x1080_00h.00m.04s.jpg, 08.01.2018)