

Casey A. Roberson. Dimensions of quality and diversity in graphic novel collections. A Master's Paper for the M.S. in L.S. degree. April, 2008. 49 pages. Advisor: Brian Sturm

Graphic novels have been enjoying higher levels of publication and popularity among readers, businesses, and libraries. Librarians are willing to include graphic novels in library collections, but are generally unfamiliar with the comics medium and must look primarily to reviews or "best of" lists for selection. There are a number of indicators of quality and demand, as well as dimensions of diversity, which librarians can use to assess whether a particular graphic novel is worthy of inclusion in a collection; these factors can increase quality at both the item and collection levels, attract diverse audiences to graphic novels, and assist in defusing censorship or patron complaints. It is also recommended that graphic novels be integrated into written collection development policies.

Headings:

Book selection

Collection development – Policy statements

Comic books, strips, etc. – Evaluation

Fiction – Evaluation

Graphic Novels

Publishers and publishing – Graphic novels

DIMENSIONS OF QUALITY AND DIVERSITY
IN GRAPHIC NOVEL COLLECTIONS

by
Casey A. Roberson

A Master's paper submitted to the faculty
of the School of Information and Library Science
of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Science in
Library Science.

Chapel Hill, North Carolina

April 2008

Approved by

Brian Sturm

Over the past decade, graphic novels have enjoyed a surge of popularity among readers, businesses, and libraries, due largely to the flood of graphic works being published. Readers, especially those who are already comics fans, have been rewarded with comics works that are increasingly lengthier, serious, and created with high levels of artistic and literary talent and thoughtfulness. Publishers have realized the potential of “graphic novel” as a marketing term, and are more willing to publish graphic works alongside their standard fare. Many authors have begun dabbling in creating graphic novels because of the current level of visibility of the medium. Librarians, ever concerned with perceived demand for particular types of books, have jumped on the graphic novel bandwagon as well. Libraries have begun to embrace a medium that has historically been considered sub-literature; some even still see it as such, hoping that by providing comics works to library patrons, they will then be more willing to read “real” books. The compliment is quite backhanded, but is a compliment nonetheless: librarians do realize that by providing graphic novels to their readers, they can increase the number of patrons willing to use a library at all. They also are willing to admit that there are graphic novels that deal with serious—often adult—issues and possess literary merit.

Historically, comics readership has been much smaller than that of standard prose fiction, consisting primarily of males from their childhood through young adult years. Thus, the avid comics reader is somewhat uncommon among librarians. Many librarians are generally unfamiliar with the comics medium and its characteristics, though familiarity is quickly growing. There is already a wealth of literature on how a library

can: start and grow a graphic novel collection, especially for school and public libraries; display and promote a library collection's graphic novels; deal with criticisms and attempts at censorship of graphic novel collections; make contacts with local comics specialty shops to gauge popularity and demand of particular titles; and find quality comics and graphic novel reviews to aid in selection. There are also innumerable lists of "best" graphic novels, or graphic novels for particular age or other groups. To this point, however, librarians have primarily been looking to the most basic information surrogates for selecting graphic novels, such as reviews or patron suggestions. As with any type of fiction, a library collection should strive to include both a selection of titles that are high quality, as well as titles that represent a variety of different reader groups and viewpoints. Graphic novels are still a relatively newer medium for many librarians, who may not yet know fully, as they do with regular prose fiction, where or how to look for quality and diversity. This paper hopes to provide librarians who select graphic novels with a number of factors and dimensions to consider when attempting to assess the quality of a particular graphic novel, or what type(s) of diversity a title can add to a graphic novel collection. It concludes with a section on integrating these factors of quality and dimensions of diversity into a written collection development policy for graphic novels.

Judging the quality of a non-fiction book is a fairly straightforward process.

According to Peggy Johnson (2004, p. 107-108), assessment of quality in book selection is ruled by a number of factors:

- content or subject;
- language;
- currency;
- veracity;
- writing style (well written, easy to read, aesthetic aspects);
- completeness and scope of treatment;

- reputation, credentials, or authoritativeness of author, publisher, editor, reviewers;
- geographic coverage;
- quality of scholarship;
- frequency the title is referenced in bibliographies or citations;
- reading or user level to which content is directed;
- comprehensiveness and breadth;
- frequency of updates and revisions;
- access points (indexes, level of detail in the table of contents);
- ease of use;
- external resources that index the publication;
- physical quality--illustrations, paper and binding, format, typography; and
- uniqueness of content, capabilities, or features

Unfortunately, most of these apply primarily to non-fiction works where accuracy and authoritativeness matter. While non-fiction evaluation criteria definitely apply to educational or historical graphic works, graphic novels are by and large fictional works. Evaluating the quality of fiction is a much more subjective practice, and definitions of "good" and "bad" are bound to vary from one selector to another. The answer to this, traditionally, is to look to reviews of fiction, where "expert" critics decide whether or not a work is quality. Even if the book is in the selector's hand, making a judgment of its quality is no easy matter. As John Dixon (1986) comments, "[t]here is very little to tell you about the book itself--no index, no table of contents, summary of argument, readership level, qualifications of the author, bibliography...none of the things that make non-fiction selection relatively simple" (p. 151). Dixon notes that because of this, the tendency exists to judge a book by its cover, as this is one of its most prominent and easy to examine features.

There are frustratingly few workable definitions of quality for fictional works in the library science literature. While most mentions of quality appear embedded within the quality versus demand debate for book selection, none gives any indication as to what

"quality" might mean. It seems to be an unspoken assumption that librarians inherently know what quality is; or, at least, have a better understanding of it than the reading public. Quality is typically assessed through the use of surrogates for the book itself, such as reviews or author/publisher reputations. Moreover, a review by Sharon L. Baker (1984) of earlier studies of both quality-oriented and demand-oriented libraries concludes that there is "no evidence to corroborate the belief that the quality of books in demand-oriented libraries is less than that of their quality-oriented counterparts" (p. 46). Baker goes on to point out that the question of quality versus demand is functionally moot until definitions of quality become more clearly defined.

Probably one of the most cited set of selection principles is that of Wallace John Bonk and Rose Mary Magrill (1979). The nearest they come to a definition of quality is when they prescribe that "Materials acquired should meet high standards of quality in content, expression, and format" (p. 7); here, at least, quality is acknowledged to take on different forms. Content in most contexts deals mainly with authoritativeness, subject, accuracy, and the like. Quality of expression, on the other hand, takes a higher priority when dealing with works of fiction. Sharon L. Baker (1994) expands the idea of quality of expression in fiction by saying that "fiction titles that are highest in quality are those that challenge a reader's attitudes and beliefs, are written in a thoughtful and insightful fashion, use language imaginatively, possess literary merit, feature complex characters; and/or have fascinating or intricate plots" (p. 67). While the idea of a quality piece of literature possessing literary merit still seems fairly circular, her definition does bring some very important points to light: namely, those aspects of fiction that reviewers would tend to look at when making their criticisms. These are the characteristics of

works which fiction insiders (authors, critics, researchers) agree combine to make a quality work.

For our purposes here, works released in graphic novel format will be treated as fiction (though there are many non-fiction graphic novels as well). I would like to focus on the two ideas of quality fiction being "written in a thoughtful...fashion" and "using language imaginatively"; the idea behind this would seem to be that works which bring something new and fresh to the table possess at least one dimension of quality. To assess how innovative and imaginative the language of a graphic novel is, one must first understand the language of the comics medium.

The question of language in the comics medium is ultimately a question of the nature of comics itself. Perhaps the most comprehensive and inclusive definition of comics yet offered is that of Scott McCloud in his groundbreaking work *Understanding Comics: the Invisible Art* (1993). Here, McCloud defines comics as "juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer" (p. 9). His definition of comics is a purely academic one, as it is meant to include such ancient works as a pre-Columbian picture manuscript, the Bayeux tapestry, and ancient Egyptian paintings. Though McCloud's definition does much to broaden the perspective of comics' history, and frees the reader's mind from images of superheroes, it is not the most complete or functional definition for librarians today. The modern comic originated in the middle of the 19th Century with the works of Rodolphe Toepffer, and began to flourish right around the turn of the 20th with the advent of the comic strip. It is unlikely that most libraries will acquire anything earlier than collected versions of the earliest comic strips for placement in their

collections alongside other graphic novels and albums. Though comics typically include text, it is the visual language of these and all successive works which defines comics for our generation, and this is the "language" where we will search for thoughtfulness, imagination, and innovation.

McCloud goes on to describe the visual language of comics in some detail. Of major importance is the icon (or cartoon); a pictorial representation of some (usually) real-life subject. In other words, comics have pictures (and sometimes photographs). McCloud's definition makes room for text, though it does not require it. Most comics today utilize some form of text counterpart to their imagery, and while "text and pictures" is, for McCloud's purposes, too restrictive, for ours it is perhaps too open. A definition of comics based solely on the idea of pictures and text juxtaposed with each other would include the entire world of children's picture books. Of course, I am not attempting a new definition of comics, rather a basic description that will allow us to look for imagination and innovation. Comics, in addition to the basic combination of text and cartoons, employs quite a few other points of visual grammar and style to which we can look. One of the fundamental aspects of comics today is the use of a series of panels. Panels are typically separated by borders around their images. McCloud makes the argument that because the reader must achieve closure by imagining what happens between panels, comics is inherently more engaging mentally (p. 61-68). The use (or lack thereof), as well as the shape of panel borders can have its own shades of meaning depending on the context; the choice of types of panel progressions used (moment-to-moment; action-to-action; etc.) can also have their own impacts. Lastly, as panels are the aspect of comics that take the reader through the "time" of the story, their size and

placement on the page can determine the pace of the story. Another highly recognizable aspect of comics is the use of word balloons and boxes to enclose dialogues, monologues, and narrations within a story. Onomatopoeic sound-effect words play a large role in many comics, which does a lot to explain the fixation with titling articles on graphic novels "Zap! Whoosh! Kerplow!" (Bruggeman, 1997). Much more common are visual metaphors, or "symbolia", as Mort Walker (1980) termed them which, in McCloud's words, "represent the invisible" (p. 129): smells, emotions, wind, motion, states of mind. For instance, "motion lines" are used liberally to convey the path of movement of objects. Hearts above a character's head can indicate love; sweat beads flying from a head convey anxiety; jagged lines emanating from a body part denote pain (also seen quite often in advertisements for pain killers). A spiraling background image (or in a character's eyes) can express hypnotism, or even madness. The possibilities are endless, but many works tend to rely on the existing set of recognizable symbols which have gained permanence in the language of comics over the years. Ultimately, some of the main (but not always necessary) features of a work which identify it as comics in our eyes are text; cartoons; panels; word balloons and text boxes; sound effects; and a wide range of symbolia which "represent the invisible".

As with all traditional literary elements, it is the effective use and placement of these features which tend to combine to make "quality works". This is where we can apply Baker's idea of a "thoughtful" fashion of writing. Comics creators must decide how to use each of the basic elements of comics in order for their stories to "produce an aesthetic response in the viewer". Deliberate variation in the use of these elements to add to the story in terms of meaning, emotion, characterization, and pacing reveals the



Fig. 2: This single-panel page from Alan Moore and Dave Gibbon's *Watchmen* (1986) works as a frozen moment in time, rather than part of continuing action.



Fig. 3: The technique used in these gag panels by Bob Clarke and Don Edwing (1973) could easily be utilized in more serious works.

The very art style used can resonate with the content of a work: dynamic line art feels right at home in superhero books, and a cartoony style of drawing meshes well with comics about funny animals (who often starred in animated cartoons as well).

Conversely, the artwork can work in a contrastive way: Jeff Smith's highly cartoonish Bone cousins provide a stark contrast to the dangerous world they wander into (fig. 4).

While most thoughtful uses of basic comics elements will use existing variations, many creators will work their own innovations into their works. Finding thoughtful new expressions of real and created worlds expands the vocabulary of the comics medium (figs. 5-8).

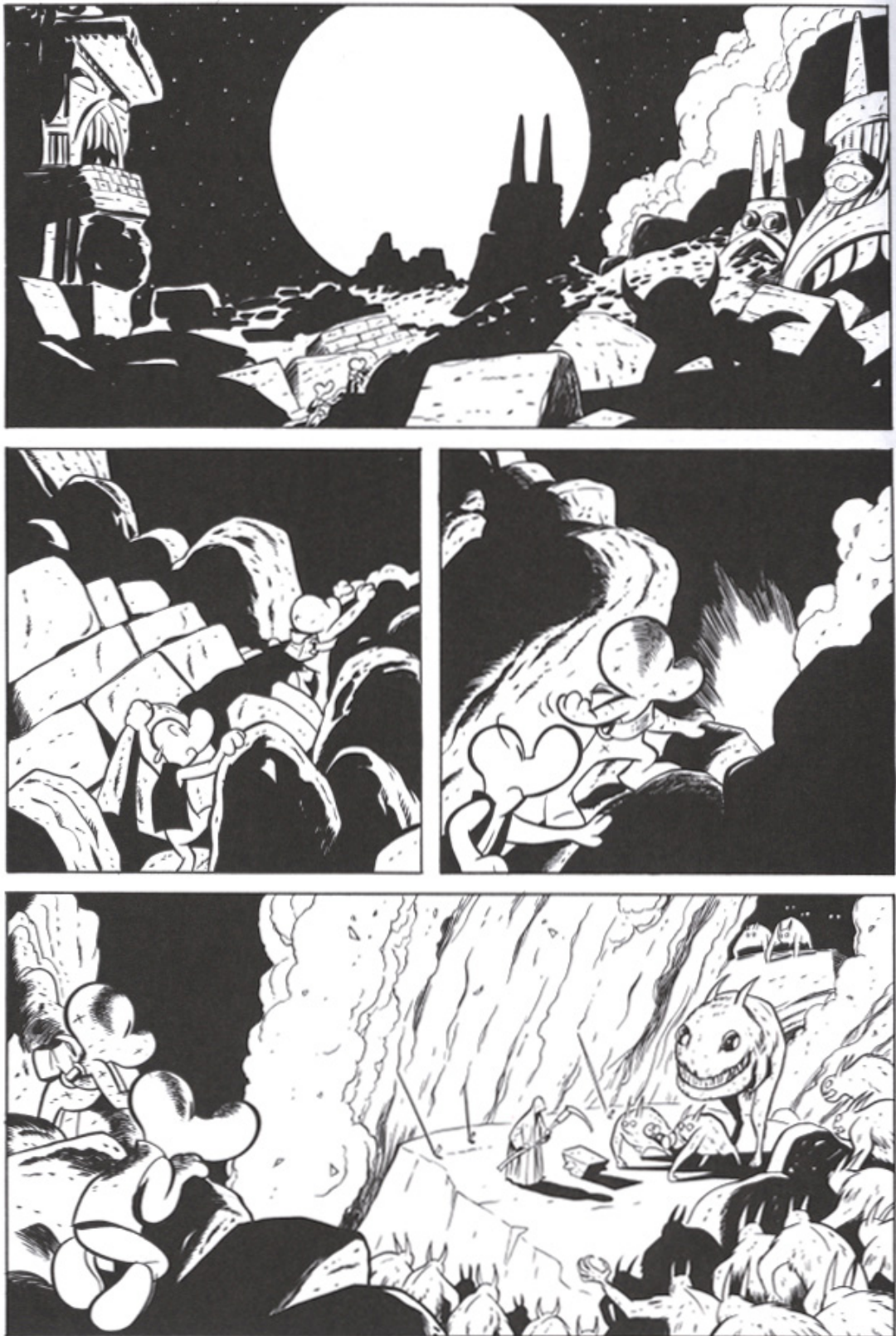


Fig. 4: The cute and friendly design of the *Bone* characters highlights the enormity of the fearsome situation they find themselves in (Jeff Smith, 1999).

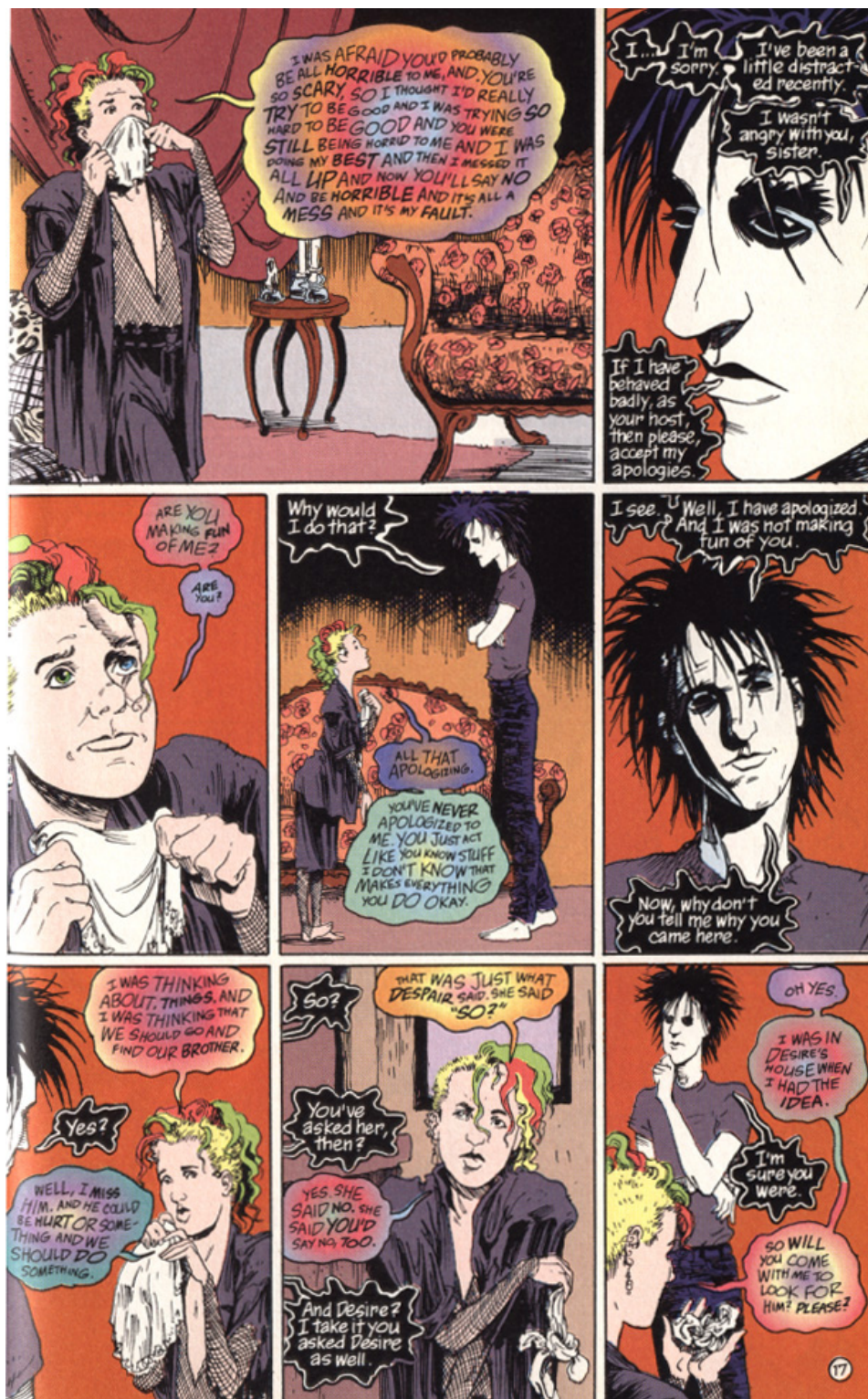


Fig. 5: Dialogue balloons add to the characterization of Dream and his sister, Delirium, in Neil Gaiman's *Sandman* (1994, art by Jill Thompson and Vince Locke). Dream's word balloons evoke feelings of nighttime, magic, and inhumanness, as well as mirror the black-and-white of his skin and hair; Delirium's rainbow balloon colors and wavering text lines indicate an altered mental state, or lack of control.

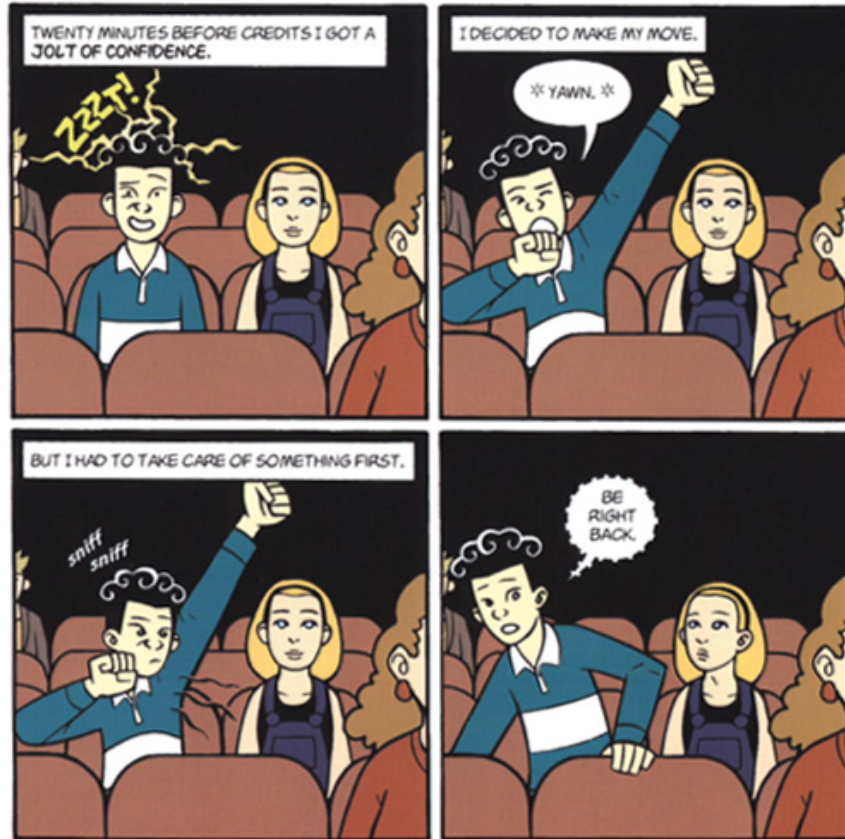


Fig. 6: Gene Luen Yang adds his own emotional symbol to the language of comics in *American Born Chinese* (2006): lightning bolts emanating from the head to indicate confidence.



Fig. 7: The extra sound of fabric being torn is added by enhancement of the “SHUNK” sound effect in this panel from Brian K. Vaughan and Pia Guerra’s *Y: The Last Man* (2006, the sound being indicated is that of a sword being thrust into the character's back).

ART d'ECCHO and the GUMP

A STRANGE INTERLUDE

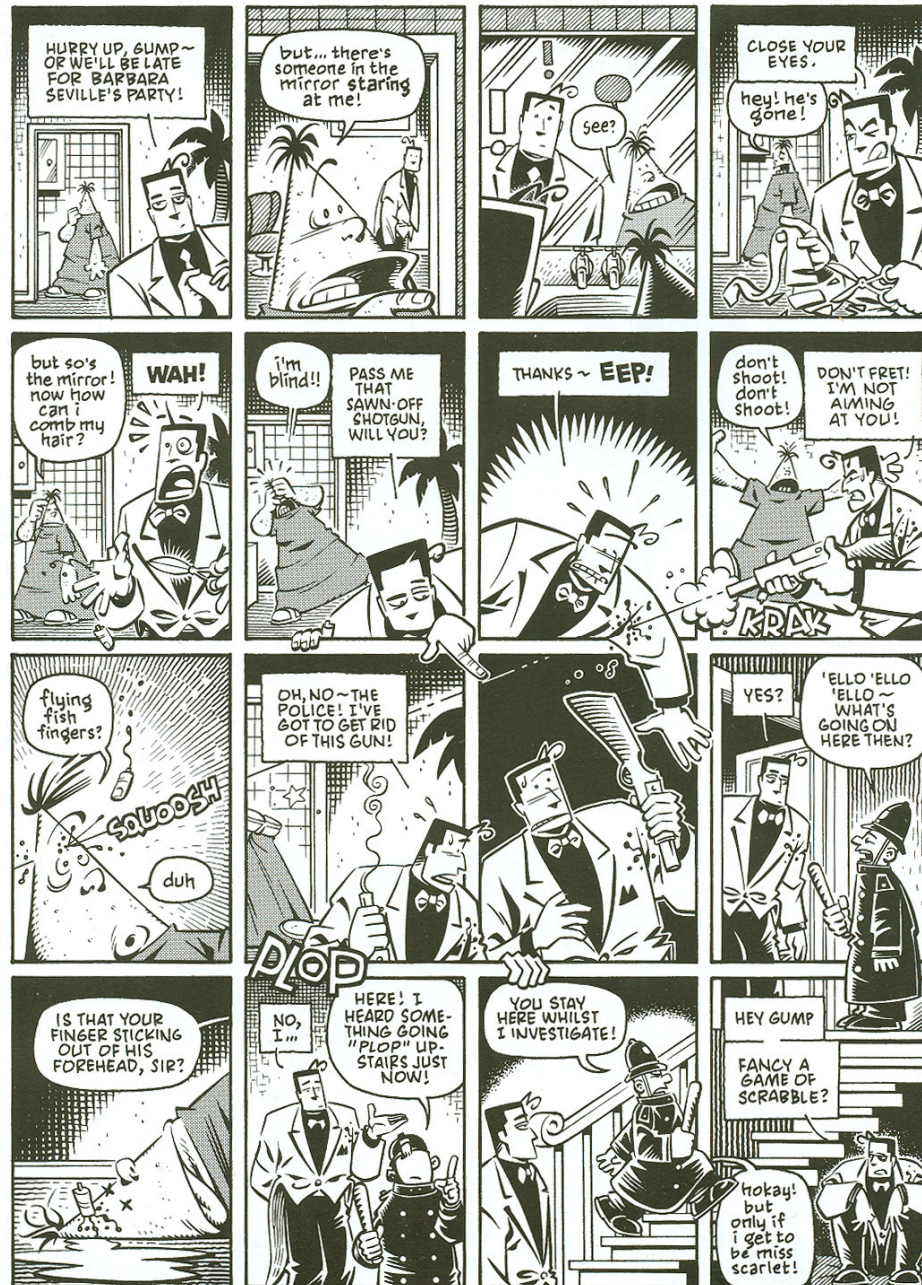


Fig. 8: Typically neutral page layouts and panel borders are used for comic effect by Andrew and Roger Langridge in *Art D'Ecco* (2006).

Above all, for comics to be quality, there must be a high level of integration among all of the elements present. Artwork, visual elements, characterizations, meanings, pacing, dialogue, and text must build upon each other and make something greater than the sum of their parts (fig. 9).

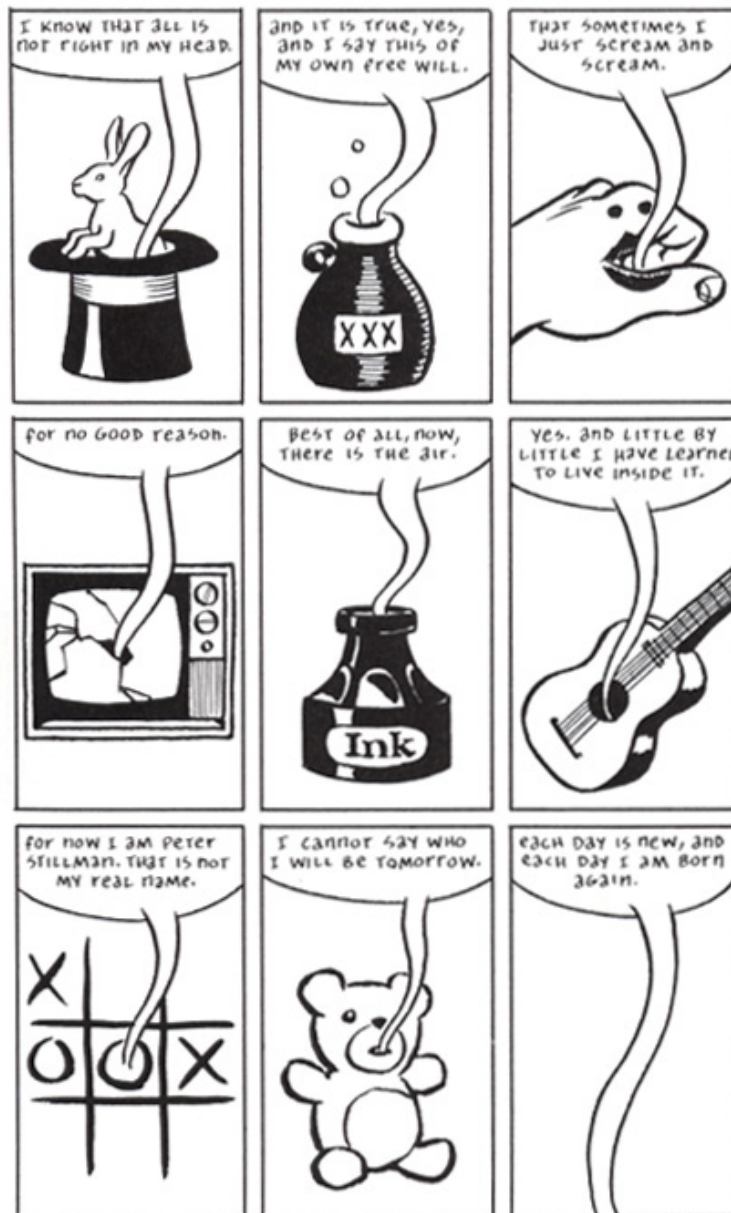


Fig. 9: Snaking word balloons, loopy dialogue, erratic capitalization, and the extended visual metaphor that the speaker's voice could just as easily have come from any hole, work together to convey the nonhumanness of the character of young Peter Stillman from the comics adaptation of Paul Auster's *City of Glass* (by Paul Karasik and David Mazzuchelli, 1994).

McCloud, in his follow-up work *Reinventing Comics* (2000), looks at how comics have been (and still are) maturing in a number of ways. Though he does not speak much of quality, he does make heavy mention of *progress*, which does deal with comics maturing

as an art and literary form and thus becoming "better". He charts twelve "revolutions" within the field of comics, two of which are relevant to us in the current discussion: Comics as Literature, and Comics as Art. The "comics as literature revolution" is just that--the trend in recent decades of exploring further possibilities of the comics medium with the addition of literary elements. McCloud initially defines "comics as literature" by describing it as the move towards comics which "yield a body of work *worthy of study* and meaningfully represent the *life, times, and world-view* of its author" (p. 10). He goes on to note the growing prevalence of depth (layers of meaning; subtext) in more recent comics works. Depth can be achieved by reiterating themes throughout a work, utilizing and repeating symbols in order to highlight those themes (fig. 10), higher narrative density, and to some extent, lengthier works which provide the room for exploring themes. The shift towards realism (as opposed to escapist genres such as superheroes) is another way in which comics is moving closer to its prose counterparts; an accurate or truthful account of the world around us can help comics become relevant to a wider audience. It also allows comics a greater potential for serious social and political commentary. Moreover, realism in comics is a way to achieve emotional resonance with readers; audiences are more likely to connect with realistic characters (or creators!). Lastly, the growing body of non-fiction work (such as Art Spiegelman's *Maus*) has helped fuel the trend towards realism, as well as proving that comics can be used for more "serious" topics (p. 26-41).

McCloud's idea of comics as art (p. 42-53) is much less straightforward, much in the same way that a definition of literature is much simpler to formulate than one of art.



Fig. 10: The lion mask worn by Thomas in Paul Hornschemeier's *Mother, Come Home* (2004) is used to symbolize the inner strength Thomas feels he must find in the face of his father's depression.

The best way to summarize the idea here is to look for comics which deliberately focus on the artistic possibilities of the medium, though not necessarily to the exclusion of textual elements. Alternately, one could say that while comics as literature deals with how visual elements enhance the writing, comics as art is concerned with what features

of the physical object contribute to the impact of a work as an art object. This can take the form of experimenting with the shape of the physical object itself (oddly-shaped books, or even larger folio editions), obvious thought behind the design or composition of the work, or even progressive or experimental artwork styles. Much of McCloud's definition of art rests on the motivation behind the work: works produced for social or financial gains are not art, while those concerned with the work itself *are*. This would seem to indicate that most monthly superhero (and the like) comics put out by the major publishers, the continued production of which is at the mercy of market forces, probably is not art. Further, it briefly brings in McCloud's third revolution, creators' rights: the more control a creator has over a work (owning copyrights, working without editorial oversight), the more chance the work has of fully realizing the creators' visions, both in terms of its literary and artistic characteristics.

We have so far looked at indicators of quality that come from inside the graphic novel itself: appropriate and creative use of basic comics elements; high integration among graphic, textual, and other aspects of the story, which combine to create a coherent work; the inclusion of literary elements such as subtext, symbols, themes, and realism; and deliberate artistic efforts such as progressive style, form, or composition. It is well worth noting that there are many surrogates which librarians may look to in order to evaluate the quality and appropriateness of a graphic novel in cases where reading the entire book itself is not a viable option. We will return to a couple of the assessment factors outlined by Peggy Johnson, namely:

- reputation, credentials, or authoritativeness of author, publisher, editor, reviewers,
- physical quality--illustrations, paper and binding, format, typography,

as well as a few relevant to graphic novels in particular. Before we can address these, however, it is worth explaining the different paths comics take to become graphic novels, as it is these processes that inform the use of surrogates for assessing their quality.

In the truest sense of the term, a graphic novel is a single, united work, released in its entirety at the first publication, essentially no different from a prose novel. It is typically greater in length and depth than a serially-published comic. There may be one story, or a number of them which combine to make a single work. Then, there are graphic albums, which are collections of previously published work. This might take the form of a run of issues from a title such as *Batman*, a couple of years of the comic strip *Peanuts*, an anthology of comics art (often arranged around a theme) such as *Raw* or *Modern Arf!*, or a collection of an artist's work which appeared originally in a number of magazines or earlier comics anthologies. The split between graphic novels and graphic albums, however, is not nearly as clean as this. In some cases, a title will be released serially, but will discontinue once its story is fully completed; after that, it will be released in collected graphic album format. This describes titles such as Charles Burns's *Black Hole*, Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons's *Watchmen*, or Frank Miller's *Batman: the Dark Knight Returns*; these books resemble the serialized novels of the 19th Century. Lastly, many graphic albums are composed of consecutive issues of an ongoing series title (like *Superman* or *Spider-Man*) which make up a *story arc*. Labelling these graphic novels would be a bit of a stretch, as they still are only a part of an ongoing story with no ultimate end in sight. It is possible that multi-issue story arcs have become more common due to the rising use of graphic novel as a marketing term; many writers, artists,

and publishers may be thinking ahead to what will make the collected version of a title more marketable.

Because many graphic albums begin their lives as single issues of comic books, this provides us with our first surrogate for assessment. The very fact that graphic novels made up of previously published material exist is a testimony, if not to their quality, then at least to the demand for them. Not every comics title receives the honor of being resold in a collected format. If a series doesn't make a profit on the stands, reselling the series in book form is not a worthwhile investment. Thus, much of the junk on comics stands is weeded out by market forces and reader purchasing habits and never makes it any farther. We will probably never see *Mort the Dead Teenager* or *Bob the Galactic Bum* released in collected form. Though McCloud argues (and rightfully so!) that graphic albums are often published as a move to increase visibility of a title or publisher (2000, p. 28), the informal review process which takes place every week in comic book stores when new issues are published, and which plays a part in whether graphic albums are compiled, makes a statement: some comics are financially *worth* reprinting, and others not, based on demand from readers. This is perhaps even truer when considering the world of webcomics (comics published initially in an online setting, typically in strip form). Here, publication of collected volumes depends almost entirely on the willingness of readers to buy them. Very often, pre-orders for a book fund the printing costs. A webcomic making its way into print is a large (and probably rare) achievement, and is a strong indicator of a committed fanbase. While I do not believe that demand is a sure sign of quality, it is arguable that they might be closer together for graphic albums. If nothing else, the existence of the graphic album itself is a handy indicator of popularity. Bonk

and Magrill do argue that "demand is the governing factor in selection" (p. 6); fortunately, higher quality comics have tended to enjoy higher demand. Of course, demand is ultimately one of many factors in selection, and should be considered within the context of all the others.

The discussion of reprints leads us directly back to one of the factors Peggy Johnson lists: physical quality. Many graphic novels and graphic albums are published in square-bound softcover formats. Some of the more high-profile titles (Charles Burns's *Black Hole*, or the *Complete Peanuts*), as well as much of the output of alternative publisher Fantagraphics, are published in hard-bound editions. For companies such as DC or Marvel, whose main output is monthly comics titles, hard-bound graphic albums are relatively rare. Despite the fact that hard-bound editions return a higher profit margin, their publication is based primarily on strong and continued demand of reprints of a particular title. Recently, DC has begun publishing an "Absolute" line of folio editions of their best-selling titles such as *Watchmen* or *Sandman*. These editions are an almost definite sign of demand. Additionally, some folio editions (such as the reprints of the entire EC line published by Russ Cochran) are made primarily to highlight the artwork, which is reduced in normal comic printing processes. Often, new coloring processes better suited to larger printing are applied to the original line art. While folio editions can often be indicative of high demand, or quality artwork, some works are released solely this way (Chris Ware's *Quimby the Mouse*) for the impact of the art object itself.

The second of Peggy Johnson's evaluation factors relevant to us here is the "reputation, credentials, or authoritativeness of author, publisher, editor, reviewers".

Authoritativeness does not mean too much to us here, but the reputation of writers and artists can be a good indicator of the quality of a graphic novel or album. Very often, a graphic novel is the creation of an individual who scripts, pencils, inks, colors and letters the entire work. The same is occasionally true of graphic albums as well, but as these are typically reprints of monthly comics, there is usually a division of labor among a larger creative team. In these cases, it is typically the writer who receives the top billing and the critical acclaim. Artists do not normally gain a reputation unless they also script the comics they illustrate. As a result, some names are strongly associated with particular works. Simple reference work (browsing the shelves in a comics specialty shop or researching online) will provide information as to how active or renowned creators are, or have been, in the world of comics. The caveat here is that many traditional authors are jumping on the graphic novel bandwagon. Popular children's author Avi released *City of Light, City of Dark* in 1993, and Toni Morrison wrote a comics version of the Aesop fable *The Ant and the Grasshopper*. When evaluating the creators of a graphic novel or album, it is important to assess their reputation within the comics field as well as without. Neil Gaiman, though famous for his novels and films, is equally well-known within the comics industry for his work on *The Sandman*, *Marvel 1608*, and others; Avi and Toni Morrison, on the other hand, are known only for their prose work.

The history of the various publishers of comics in America is well beyond the scope of this paper, but there are a few points to be made regarding their reputations. DC and Marvel have established themselves as the leaders of the comics industry in terms of popularity, high-profile characters, writers, and artists, visibility in other media, and quality of production. Their output falls mainly within the superhero genre; because of

their long history with this genre, and their standards of hiring quality writers and artists, they are arguably the best (or, at least, most successful) at it. Both of these companies have imprints under which they publish titles dealing with mature themes (MAX for Marvel and Vertigo for DC). The other two major publishers of monthly comics titles are Dark Horse Comics and Image Comics; while publishing superhero titles, the output of these companies falls under a wider array of genres. All four of these companies deal almost exclusively in graphic albums, composed of reprints of their best-selling titles. Most graphic novels and collections of comic strips are published by independent companies such as Fantagraphics or Top Shelf Productions. Both are known for the quality of titles, authors and level of production, though Fantagraphics tends towards the alternative.

Except for relatively rare cases of an already existing interest in comics, the selecting librarian is most likely an outsider to the comics community. As an outsider, it is difficult to gauge what the insiders of the community value, and how they evaluate and review each other's work. One method of insight into how insiders within a community view each other's work is by looking at award winning titles and creators. Carol Alabaster (2002) recommends looking to award winners when building core collections (p. 66-70), and fortunately, there are a number of awards given within the comics community each year. Both Francisca Goldsmith (2005) and Steve Miller (2005), in their respective books on building graphic novel collections, suggest looking to comics industry awards when attempting to locate quality titles. The practice of giving awards within the comics industry began in 1985 with the Kirby Awards. Due to an ownership dispute, the Kirby Awards split and morphed into the Eisner Awards (named for Will

Eisner) and the Harvey Awards (named for Harvey Kurtzman), both begun in 1988. While both sets of awards are managed by comics professionals, the Eisner Awards are arguably the more coveted and high-profile. These annual awards are important to look to, not only to judge what the comics industry considers its best and brightest artists, authors, and titles to be, but also to determine what aspects of comics it looks at in its evaluation process. The very obvious awards (writers, artists) aside, some of the Eisner Awards given out each year include Best Short Story, Best Digital Comic, Best Letterer, Best Archival Collection/Project, Best Editor, and many others. Another equally important set of annual awards are the Lulu Awards, given to creators and titles which promote positive images of women in comics. While looking at past and current award winners is a good way to pinpoint a few quality comics titles, it is equally important to consider the nominees which did not win--they were all contenders for the awards, and obviously have some recognized merit.

One last caveat for collecting quality graphic novels goes back to an earlier point made during the discussion of how graphic novels and albums come to be. There is an increasing number of monthly comics series which do not intend to be ongoing, and in their whole comprise an entire, single story (Jeff Smith's *Bone*, Neil Gaiman's *Sandman*, Brian K. Vaughan's *Y: the Last Man*, and many others). When these are collected and reprinted in graphic album format, the entire set of volumes can be seen as one work, released in parts and complete only if all volumes are present. By not collecting all volumes of a finished series, the selector decreases the quality of the work itself; such a practice would be tantamount to having regular prose fiction titles on the shelves with whole chapters cut out. Additionally, a collection is bound to receive complaints if a

library patron gets hooked on multivolume series such as Dave Sim's *Cerebus*, or Brian Azzarello's *100 Bullets*, but is unable to find out how the story ends. Of course, new issues for many of these series are still on the stands; it is the responsibility of the selector to be on the lookout for new graphic albums after starting to collect a particular series.

Up to this point, we have covered those factors pertaining to assessing the quality of graphic novels at the individual item level:

- creative and thoughtful use of comics elements and symbolia which achieve a high level of integration among visual, textual, character, and story aspects
- inclusion of literary elements and techniques which add depth to the work; exploration of themes; provide a stronger sense of realism in terms of characterizations and topics addressed; and have strong potential for emotional resonance with readers
- deliberate consideration or focus on the artwork, in terms of quality, or the potential of the medium itself
- the existence of the graphic novel/album itself as one measure of demand
- physical quality of the work (hardcover vs. squarebound; folio vs. same-size reprints)
- reputation of publishers
- reputation of comics creators *for their work in comics*
- inner-industry awards

Though it might be argued that collecting only quality graphic novels will result in a quality graphic novel collection, there are still a few issues to consider. While definitions of quality for fiction at least exist, and seem to echo each other to some extent, there seems to be much less consensus on the idea of balance. Many authors, such as Lester Asheim (1983), introduce the idea of balance as the appropriate counter to attempts at censorship of library holdings; if, when dealing with controversial issues, all sides can be represented, censors should have no problem. The National Coalition Against Censorship, along with the American Library Association and the Comic Book Legal Defense Fund, in their pamphlet "Graphic Novels: Suggestions for Librarians" (2006)

recommends that librarians respond to challenges over graphic novels by stating that "libraries provide ideas and information across the spectrum of social and political views" (p. 6); this suggestion is at the top of their list. The idea of balanced representation at once runs up against all sorts of problems; Asheim himself admits that "[t]he balanced collection, of course, will never completely satisfy the groups who want their own point of view more prominent" (p. 184), which is often the origin of censorship to begin with. John Vincent (1986) and Chris Atton (1996) refer to the idea of a balanced library collection as a "myth". If balance is looked at in "tit-for-tat" terms, a book dealing with one side of an issue would be balanced by a book espousing the other view. This ignores the fact that points of view are not always diametrically opposed, but often exist on a continuum. Further, what if there are more works promoting view A than view B? Would a balanced collection have equal or proportional numbers of both views? A balanced collection, even if such a thing could be quantified, would also face the problem of selection bias on the part of the librarians building the collection; Allan D. Pratt (1995) reminds us that librarians are not infallible when it comes to guarding against bias in collections. Perhaps the better way of approaching the issue is not by thinking of, or striving for, a balanced collection, but, as Stacy Simpson (2006) puts it, a "comprehensive and representative" one (p. 44).

Building a library collection which is both comprehensive and representative is a much better approach than attempting one which is "balanced"; this eschews considerations of amounts and shoots for making sure that a wide variety of perspectives, topics, and depictions is present in the collection. This is both a widely held and traditional approach to book selection. Bonk and Magrill (1979), in their second

principle of selection, ask us to "[s]ee to it that no race, nationality, profession, trade, religion, school of thought, or local custom is overlooked" (p. 5). This language is mirrored in the American Library Association's "Freedom to Read" statement (2004), where they affirm that "it is in the public interest for publisher and librarians to make available the widest diversity of views and expressions". This method of collecting ensures that all views are represented, which is the surest way possible to achieve any measure of "balance". The main dimensions of diversity librarians must look at regarding graphic novels are: genre, artwork style, representation of gender and ethnicities, language and nationality of origin, and the historical or social situation surrounding the work. It is along these lines which librarians must consider diversity of representation in the selection of graphic novels.

One of the most common misnomers applied to graphic novels is that they constitute a genre. This mistake is almost to be expected, as comics have historically been dominated by a single genre--that of the superhero. As but one medium among many others (television, prose, film, radio, etc.) comics has the ability to represent all existing genres of fiction, as well as whatever new ones the future may offer. To return to Scott McCloud, one of his comics revolutions in *Reinventing Comics* is diversity of genre. McCloud notes that this is one of the comics revolutions to have gained less ground than many of the others, though it has seen more progress in recent years. He is also wary of the potential for a diversity of genres to simply lock comics into a "number of rule-bound cages" (2000, p. 122), as opposed to one rule-bound cage of the superhero genre; thus, his ideal is comics works which follow no rules and defy any genre classifications. Unfortunately for us, there are many comics which do this; on the other

hand, the majority of titles do fall into visible (if not cleanly distinct) categories. There are a number of different categorisations of genres for graphic novels, but perhaps the most useful is the one put forth by Michael Pawuk, a former teen services librarian at the Cuyahoga County (Ohio) Public Library system. His categories are useful mainly because they are included within his reference work, *Graphic Novels: a Genre Guide to Comic Books, Manga, and More* (2007), which indexes over 2,400 titles along genre lines. Pawuk's main genres are: Superheroes, Action/Adventure, Science Fiction, Fantasy, Crime/Mysteries, Horror, Contemporary Life, Humor, and Non-Fiction. Though this seems to leave out a number of genres, many more are included as sub-genres within these nine; romance falls under Contemporary Life, and westerns under Action/Adventure. Genre guides such as these are crucial to building a diverse graphic novel collection: they remind the librarian of the existence of multiple genres within the comics medium, and facilitate identification of appropriate titles to build the desired level of genre diversity.

A similar point of diversity in comics is style of artwork chosen by the creator. As mentioned earlier, artwork often is used in conjunction with other elements of the work to further its tone and voice. Because of this, particular artwork styles can often be closely aligned with a particular genre. Similarly, major publishers such as DC and Marvel have been known to have "house" styles which new artists needed to imitate to provide a consistent look and feel to the array of titles. To a non-reader, the main distinction probably made among art styles is how "realistic" they look; or on the other hand, how "cartoony". McCloud (1993) adds another dimension to his chart of artwork styles and creates what he calls the "Big Triangle" (fig. 11). The three vertices of his

triangle are "Reality", "Meaning", and "The Picture Plane". While the path from "reality" to "meaning" takes the route of *iconic* abstraction (moving from realistic to cartoony), movement toward the "picture plane" deals with *non-iconic* abstraction. The "picture plane", in McCloud's words, "is the realm of the art object...where shapes, lines, and colors can be themselves and not pretend otherwise" (p. 51); in other words, the closer an artwork style edges towards this vertex, the less each line is meant to resemble something other than itself. While some artwork may initially look poorly done, it is usually worth a

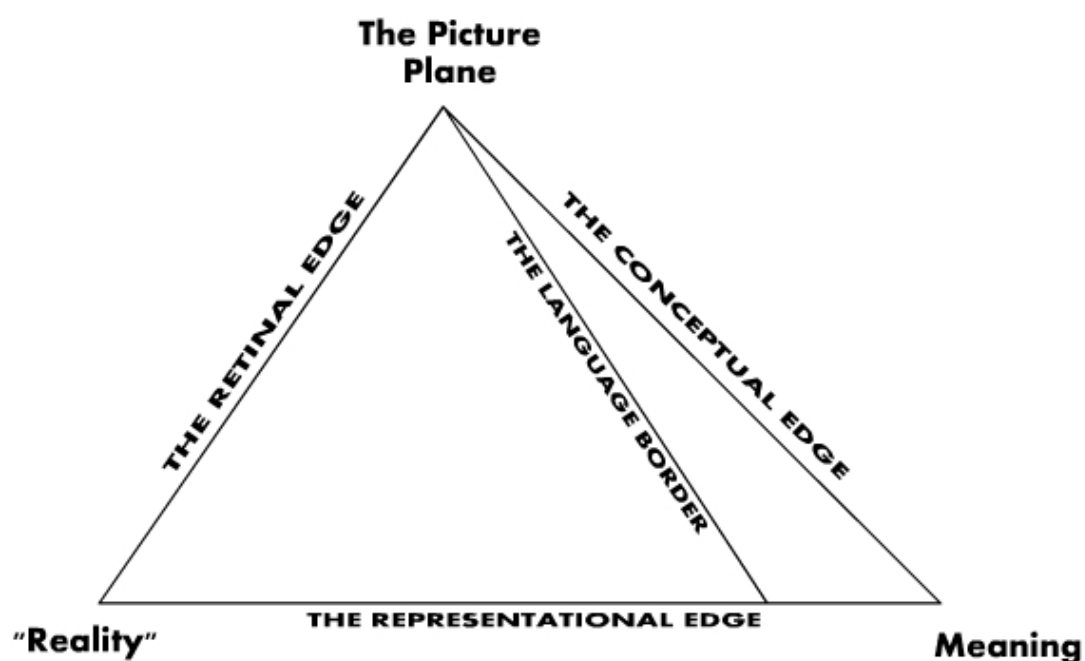


Fig. 11: Scott McCloud's "Big Triangle" (1993) aspires to be a "comprehensive map of the universe called comics" (p. 51).

second look, and will always fall somewhere on this plane. The important thing that McCloud's Big Triangle accomplishes is making the statement that all artwork styles are equal, as they can all fit on one graph, and takes away much of the subjective perspectives on one style being "better" than another (that is not to say, of course, that there is no crummy artwork out there). Douglas Wolk's *Reading Comics* is a lengthy discussion of art comics (defined loosely as creator-owned), where "style is at least as

important as the content of [the] narrative, and always a direct expression of [the] creator's idiosyncrasies and work-specific intentions" (p. 31). Much of the allure of many comics comes from the style of the artwork itself, and many artists are known primarily for their distinctive style. Further, it can be beneficial to include comics which, in Wolk's words, are "deliberately ugly":

"To look at an image you know is viscerally repulsive and find in it something pleasing...is *alienating*; you have the sense that your experience is different from most people's and that that difference sets you apart from them. And the meta-pleasure of enjoying experiences that would repel most people is, effectively, the experience of being a bohemian or counterculturalist" (p. 40).

A variety of artwork styles in a graphic novel collection will not only show off the diversity present in the medium, but also increases the chances of attracting a wider variety of patrons.

One of the most common complaints directed towards comics (at least in America) is the lack of positive and progressive images of women, both in comic strips and comic books. This is a perfectly valid complaint. Historically, comics has been a medium dominated by males, a fact which even today most comic book shop shelves will attest to, as many female characters are quite obviously marketed to address male fantasies. *Superman* is a classic case in point, where the main female character, Lois Lane, was created solely to be rescued by, and fall in love with, Superman. While this is not too different from what is often seen in films and on television, comics has an enhanced ability to depict what doesn't exist. In this case, much of the concern comes from unrealistically-proportioned superheroines, such as *Wonder Woman*, *She-Hulk*, and most others. Three previous master's papers from the School of Information and Library Science at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill deal with the poor

representations of women in comics, focussing on the portrayal of unrealistic body types, women in "damsel in distress" roles, and how women are far less likely to be protagonists. Some librarians, like Pat Scales (2007), seem unconcerned with complaints that some graphic novels and albums are demeaning to women, and suggest that librarians faced with such complaints remind their patrons that "graphic novels are selected using the same standards that apply to other library materials" (p. 30). Scales seems to miss the point that this would only serve to reflect poorly on the standards used, at least in the mind of the patron who made the complaint in the first place; this is not too surprising, as Scales is equally blind to the recurring themes of sexism in *Archie* comics. Librarians must be pro-active in terms of identifying and selecting graphic novels and albums which are positive and progressive in their depictions of female characters, addressing such complaints before they happen.

McCloud (2000) mentions gender balance as one of his comics revolutions; his discussion focusses mainly on how the lack of prominent women comics creators has had the largest impact on the presence of women in comics. McCloud's chapter on women comics creators is a good start, as it mentions many names of women artists and writers. He also points out some of the commonalities of comics created by women, such as favoring characterization and emotion over action, or "an increased awareness of the picture plane" (p. 103). Another great starting point for discovering the history of women comics creators is a book by Trina Robbins and Cat Yronwode titled *Women and the Comics* (1985). Providing a list of creators, or summarizing the history of women behind and in comics is beyond our scope here, but suffice it to say that a sizeable graphic novel/album collection that is female-friendly could be built entirely from the work of

women creators. This is not to say, of course, that only women creators make comics with positive female characterizations. The Friends of Lulu, founded in 1994, promotes comics created by women, as well as comics presenting women in a positive light. The group also presents annual awards at the San Diego Comic-Con International. While these awards are not as high-profile as the Eisners or the Harveys, they are vastly more important for achieving any level of equitable gender representation in a graphic novel collection. Lastly, while there is naturally a high level of overlap between comics created by women, and comics with positive female characters, these are still two factors which should be considered when building a diverse graphic novel collection.

The other point of creator and character diversity is the representation of minorities in a graphic novel collection, be it ethnicities, cultures, religions, sexual orientations, or (dis)abilities. For these points of representation, there is even more overlap between minority creators and depictions of minority characters, at least in terms of high-quality and well-informed depictions. Comics creators who themselves are a part of a minority group are better equipped to give voice to that group, as that voice is their own. Though some mainstream superhero titles have recently done more to incorporate minority characters (Ben Grimm of the Fantastic Four was revealed to be Jewish in 2002), it is better that librarians look to autobiographical and realistic works for true-to-life depictions of minority characters. For instance, the well-known *Love and Rockets* series, created by Jaime and Gilbert Hernandez sports a wealth of Latino characters; and Alison Bechdel's autobiographical work *Fun Home*, deals in part with Bechdel's realization of her sexual orientation. Sharon Gray and Teresa Abaid (2002) report that some cultures, such as African American and Native American, have many traditions

which are largely visual; a graphic novel might in some ways be more effective than prose or reference works in representing these cultures and their traditions.

Consequently, graphic novels can easily be used as aids for teaching multiculturalism to students. Jeff Kuhr and Shelle Rosenfeld (2005) raise two important points to consider when selecting graphic novels for their depictions of minority characters: caution needs to be taken to ensure that depictions are not biased or stereotypical, and that the depiction reaches to deeper levels of characterization than solely visual. Selecting graphic novels which give voice to minority individuals and groups can attract readers from those minorities, which have been historically underserved by library collections.

The comic book is so closely tied with the concept of Americana that the contributions of other countries to the comics world are often overlooked. Though it can be argued that the creation of the comic strip and the superhero are their own chapters in United States history, comics have played an important role in the popular culture of many other countries. Randall W. Scott, in *Comics Librarianship: a Handbook* (1990) provides a good summary of the "international comics scene" up to that point in time, highlighting the strong comics traditions of Europe, Japan, and Latin America. It is a common practice of exporting American-produced comics to European and Latin American audiences; unfortunately, the opposite is hardly true at all. Some European comics titles (Rene Goscinny and Albert Uderzo's *Asterix & Obelix*) can be found almost anywhere on the continent; likewise, many newer creators (such as Flix or Mawil, both from Berlin) remain largely unknown even in their own countries. The comics scene in Africa has been receiving greater attention recently (Cotter, 2006); many works originating there are strong on political commentary. The world of Japanese comics, or

manga, is far from unknown to American readers. Manga have enjoyed enormous popularity among American youth for a number of years now, for three main reasons (Thompson, 2002). Many manga titles came with animated cartoon counterparts, which heightened their visibility. The delayed distribution of many manga titles to the United States meant that there was often a buildup of thousands of pages which new audiences could consume all at once. This, coupled with the fact that a lengthy volume of a manga title had a lower price-per-page rate than many US graphic novels, explains why manga quickly overtook the popularity of characters like Superman or Spider-Man. Because of their widespread popularity, shelf space for any graphic novel collection could quickly and cheaply be filled by the complete runs of just a few manga titles. For manga, evaluation of titles in terms of quality becomes more important, especially for graphic novel collections which do not have the space (or funding) to grow very large. On the other hand, manga originally from Japan are potentially the easiest way to add an international aspect to any graphic novel collection, as they are readily available in English translations, which is typically not true of comics from most other countries. Graphic novels in other languages have a greater potential of not being used by library patrons, and in these cases, demand takes a higher priority in the selection process. Yet, their addition does much to increase the diversity of viewpoints and perspectives available in any collection.

The last dimension of representation applicable to graphic novels, the time in which the work was created, tends to apply more to graphic albums than self-contained novels. Graphic novels, as such, have a history dating back to the 1970s; comic books back to the 1930s; and comic strips to the late 1800s. Representation of different time

periods in the American comics history would necessitate including reprinted collections of comic strips and comic books. In the case of comic books, fans and historians have identified four general "eras"; their designation deals mainly with trends within the superhero genre, but they are still of some use here. The "Golden Age" of comics ranges from 1938 into the mid-1950s, being the time period in which the superhero genre was born; the "Silver Age", from the mid-1950s through the early 1970s, is marked by the introduction of two-dimensional superheroes who had everyday human problems, and an increase in science-fiction storylines—the establishing of the Comics Code Authority in 1954 also meant that this Age's comics no longer showcased such topics as war, violent death, sex, or other mature topics; the "Bronze Age" (mid-1970s through mid-1980s) is characterized by a stronger integration of contemporary real-world happenings into the superhero storylines; landmark series such as Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons *Watchmen* (1986) are considered to be the beginning of the "Modern Age", or the full maturation of the superhero genre, as well as including any and all comics works after this time. Most popular superhero titles are kept perpetually in print, so representation of the different eras is not a difficult task. When attempting to represent different comics eras in a graphic novel collection, publishers are a handy rule of thumb: early DC comics are typically Golden Age, and early Marvel titles, with their more human superheroes, are a hallmark of the Silver Age. Aside from general trends in the more mainstream comics titles, there are also movements within comics arising from particular social situations. The most recognized of these is Underground Comix, which was ultimately a subset of the independently-published underground literature emanating from various counterculture movements of the late 1960s. Comix are typified by their focus on sex,

drugs, and politics, and Robert Crumb is one of the most visible artists of this movement. Underground Comix influenced, and ultimately morphed into, a wider range of artists in the 1980s who self-published their own creations and often dealt with topics normally shied away from in the mainstream comics press due to CCA guidelines. Again, a collection which seeks to show off different time periods in the history of comics must be willing to include works which are not graphic novels in the truest sense, but such efforts do add an extra dimension of representation. This also opens up a graphic novel collection to wider academic use: graphic novels/albums can be looked to for evidence of how certain issues or themes (gender, politics, race, etc.) were approached in different eras, or even for the purpose of charting trends in the comics medium and industry over time.

There will naturally be tensions among the various factors of quality and representation in any graphic novel collection. Representing different time periods in comics history necessitates collecting comics of lower literary quality, comics which are created almost exclusively by males, and comics which do not represent minorities to the extent they do today. It would also limit to some smaller degree the diversity of artwork styles. Likewise, women and minority creators are often not as well known, and many of their works have historically been published by alternative presses rather than in the mainstream. Most earlier titles do not have the benefit of some of the quality surrogates mentioned above. Comics industry awards are a fairly recent trend, and most early comics creators are known primarily for the characters they invented, rather than their unique approach to storytelling. It could be argued, though, that reprints of early comics (such as an edition collecting the first few issues of *Superman*) proclaim a measure of

historical value by their existence. Even when selecting current titles, a collection which includes anywhere near equal numbers of books written or drawn by both sexes would not be representative of the current state of comics and graphic novel publishing. But by no means should each graphic novel in a collection support the ideas behind every selection factor at once; new books should add something to the collection that it *did not already have*. If a graphic novel collection is built on the factors detailed above, both of quality and diversity, the selector will always be able to point to at least one title which has literary quality or inventiveness; enjoys high demand; is created by or positive in its depiction of women, ethnicities, or minorities; can satisfy a patron's desire for material in a particular genre or art style; represents a particular era of (comics) history; has gained recognition in or outside the comics community; or is created by well-known authors or artists.

As we have seen through the course of this discussion, librarians are eager to add graphic novels to their collections, but are largely outsiders to the comics community. They are often unaware of the idiosyncrasies and language of the comics medium and can only look to information surrogates when trying to determine quality. For fiction titles, quality as a selection factor is itself a nebulous concept; it is articulated best by Sharon L. Baker (1994), who states that “fiction titles that are highest in quality are those that challenge a reader's attitudes and beliefs, are written in a thoughtful and insightful fashion, use language imaginatively, possess literary merit, feature complex characters; and/or have fascinating or intricate plots” (p. 67). The comics medium differs from prose fiction in how it approaches “imaginative language” and “literary merit”. Comics' language includes both textual and visual elements or “symbolia”, both of which follow

general conventions, but provide great potential for innovation. Comics which are well-“written” have high levels of integration among artwork, visual and textual elements, characterizations, meanings, pacing, and dialogue. Comics’ literary merit comes from their success in conveying creators’ worldviews, including layers of meaning, and repetition of themes through the use of visual symbols.

Additionally, it is worthwhile for librarians to acquaint themselves with information surrogates particular to graphic novels. Reputation of comics creators *for the comics work they have done* is an important selection consideration, as well as the reputation, history, and typical output of various comics and graphic novel publishers. There are a number of inner-industry awards given to comics and graphic novels which can help inform librarians as to the reputations of titles and creators. It is also worthwhile for librarians to understand the different processes behind the creation of graphic novels and albums. These processes reveal that the existence of the graphic novel/album itself, in conjunction with the physical quality of the item, is an indicator of demand.

Selection of quality titles, however, does not guarantee a quality graphic novel collection. Though representations of diversity in the comics medium have historically been spotty at best, there is still a wealth of appropriate titles out there. When collecting graphic novels, librarians should make efforts to include titles which include positive characterizations of women, ethnicities, and minorities; display a variety of art styles; represent periods of comics history; and originate from a number of different countries. This will not only make a graphic novel collection attractive to a wider array of library patrons, but it is also a preventive approach to complaints about titles in the collection. Ultimately, though librarians may generally not be comics readers, they should still be

able to effectively select quality and diverse graphic novel titles for library collections.

This can be done with basic knowledge of the comics medium, history, and industry, as well as the application of traditional selection factors for quality, demand, and representation of diversity.

Appendix:
Integrating graphic novels into written collection development policies

One common way of responding to complaints about items in library collections is to make the selection process more transparent through the use of written collection development policies. Librarians can point patrons to such a policy document in order to convey to them that each item in a collection is deliberately chosen based on agreed-upon guidelines. This is by no means the main purpose served by a written policy, though it can be an important one when dealing with graphic novels. In a more general sense, a collection development policy exists to inform selectors' decisions. It can include information on who is responsible for collecting certain items, the scope of particular collections, the intended audience(s) for collections, and selection tools; it helps selectors determine which items are appropriate for, and worthy of, inclusion in a collection. For graphic novels, the presence of a collection development policy can help insure that the selector need not personally be a comics reader. The following are a few suggestions on how a written collection development policy for graphic novels might incorporate the above discussions of quality and diversity.

Include graphic novels as a format in the general selection policy for fiction:

This is a method which can serve two purposes. Listing graphic novels as one of the formats in which fiction is collected can give the impression that graphic novels are considered equal to other formats. This also automatically applies all of the selection criteria for fiction (in terms of quality and diversity) to graphic novel selection. The main drawback of this approach is that it assumes all graphic novel titles to be fiction.

Include graphic novels as a separate subject area:

Likewise, giving graphic novels their own separate selection policy can be just as powerful a statement of the importance of deliberate selection; it also allows room for more criteria specific to graphic novels. In this case, the policy can explicitly state that quality and diversity are important for graphic novels; alternately, a separate policy can state that selection of graphic novels follows the same criteria for selection of fiction in general.

Do not limit graphic novels to Young Adult collections:

Many existing selection policies for graphic novels simply include them as a materials format within Young Adult collections. This may be fine if the library has determined that the demand for graphic novels comes only from their younger audiences. This is often not the case, however, and it seems to ignore the fact that many new works are created with older audiences in mind. As the Mercer County, NJ, Library mentions in their collection development policy, "The novels included in this collection span traditional age ranges - juveniles, young adults and adults may all find titles of interest." Graphic novels should be included in both young adult and general fiction selection policies. This can serve to remind both librarians and library patrons that graphic novels are not sub-literature. This can also help to inform a patron upset about nudity in a graphic novel that the item was not intended for use by children.

Include selection tools:

The written collection policy for graphic novels can point to a number of sources to aid in selection. Typically, policies point to reviews from journals, websites, or other

trade publications. Some also mention purchasing (or even focussing primarily on) books which have won comics industry or other awards (Harvey, Eisner, Lulu, etc.). Best-of lists and books such as Michael Pawuk's (2007) *Graphic Novels: a Genre Guide to Comic Books, Manga, and More* can also be looked to for selection along the lines of popularity or genre.

Mention the variance of genre within the graphic novel format:

Aside from using genre guides such as the one by Michael Pawuk mentioned above, a graphic novel selection policy can mention in general that titles are selected from a number of different genres. The knowledge that graphic novels come in a variety of genres can be important to the selector unfamiliar with the medium, who might have lingering assumptions that comics are still the domain of the superhero and the funny animal. This can also serve as a check on collecting too heavily in any one genre.

Allow room for selection based on demand:

This reminds the selector that the library patron interested in graphic novels may, as an insider to the comics world, know more about popular or high-quality titles and creators. Graphic novels are popular materials, and demand seems to be a large factor in what is considered "good" in the comics world. In general, according to Bonk and Magrill (1979), "demand [should be] the governing factor in selection" (p. 7).

Make it a point to emphasize a quality collection:

Quality will be defined differently by every library; for some, it may even take a backseat to demand. When quality is mentioned, it may take the form of a list of quality indicators such as outlined in this paper, or it may be referred to in very general terms.

The Longview, TX, Public Library includes "quality of writing, style, appeal, characterization, date of publication, literary merit" and "quality of graphics" as selection criteria. The Monterey, CA, Public Library's policy states that "selections are based on professional reviews, customer requests, and the popularity of styles, authors, characters, and series." The Newark, NJ, Public Library selects graphic novels "on the basis of the literary or artistic merit" (assessment of literary merit here is based on reviews). The James Solomon Russell Junior High School Library in Lawrenceville, Virginia, selects graphic novels which "present excellence in illustration and story". Ultimately, quality as a selection factor makes the statement that graphic novels *can* be quality, however defined.

Make it a point to emphasize a diverse collection:

The written graphic novel collection development policy would do well to include language that emphasizes selecting titles which promote, showcase, and appeal to a wide variety of viewpoints and audiences. While this should always be in the selector's mind, including language to this extent in a written policy is a handy check on selection for a medium which has tended not to have positive images of women, minorities, and other ethnic or social groups. Additionally, this can be the first thing to show a patron who complains that the graphic novel collection includes unrealistic portrayals of particular groups!

Reproduced here is the graphic novel collection development policy for Columbia University in New York City. This policy is one of the better ones in that it indicates the importance of quality works, the relevance of critical reviews and industry awards, and

diversity in terms of date and country of origin; it also makes very clear the purposes the collection is meant to serve.

A. Purpose and Program Description

The libraries seek to support research in the literary, artistic, and cinematic aspects of graphic novels and selected comics.

Graphic novels-a recent term-have been defined as "book length collections of sequential art containing a single story, or a set of interrelated stories," although many continue to refer to such compilations simply as comics, due to their panel-art format. The libraries' collection will concentrate on titles that have won awards or otherwise received critical and/or scholarly notice-with a specific focus on the role of New York City as setting or inspiration-as well as secondary scholarly literature.

Since the late 1990s, graphic novels have become an increasingly greater influence on film both in content and style. In addition, critical recognition of graphic novels has increased dramatically.

The collection supports the needs of undergraduate, MA/MS and Ph.D. students, the teaching faculty, post-docs, and researchers in the areas of literature, art, film, and cultural history.

B. General Selection Guidelines

Overall, the libraries' collection is at the study and teaching level, with selected secondary literature support at the research level.

C. Specific Delimitations

1. Formats collected: We collect bound anthologies, monographs, and periodicals. We exclude individual comic issues and newspaper syndicate printings, although some such materials may be acquired in Special Collections.
2. Imprint Dates collected: We collect current publications selectively, and earlier 20th -century publications very selectively.
3. Chronological focus: We collect graphic novels of the late 20th century and beyond; we collect selectively in comics of the early 20th century.
4. Languages collected: We collect extensively in English language, and selectively in western-European languages.
5. Place of publication: We collect materials published in North American extensively, and all other areas of the world selectively. We especially concentrate on works written in or about New York City.

Bibliography

- Alabaster, Carol (2002). *Developing an Outstanding Core Collection: a Guide for Libraries*. Chicago: American Library Association.
- American Library Association (2004). The Freedom to Read Statement. Retrieved March 31, 2008, from <http://www.ala.org/ala/oif/statementspols/ftstatement/freedomreadstatement.htm>
- Asheim, Lester (1983). Selection and censorship: a reappraisal. *Wilson Library Bulletin*, 58(3), 180-184.
- Atton, Chris (1996). *Alternative Literature: a Practical Guide for Librarians*. Brookfield, Vermont: Gower.
- Baker, S. L. (1984). Does the use of a demand-oriented selection policy reduce overall collection quality? a review of the evidence. *Public Library Quarterly*, 5(3), 29-49.
- Baker, Sharon L. (1994). Quality and demand: the basis for fiction collection assessment. *Collection Building*, 13(2-3), 65-68.
- Bonk, Wallace John & Magrill, Rose Mary (1979). *Building Library Collections* (5th ed.). Metuchen, New Jersey: The Scarecrow Press.
- Bruggeman, Lora (1997). Zap! Whoosh! Kerplow! build high-quality graphic novel collections with impact. *School Library Journal*, 43(1), 22-27.
- Clarke, Bob & Edwing, Don (1973). Tell-tale comic strip balloons. *MAD*, 160.
- Cotter, Holland (2006, November 24). African comics, far beyond the funny pages. *New York Times*, pp. B29, B38.
- Denton, Lisa (2007). *James Solomon Russell Junior High School Library Collection Development Policy*. Retrieved March 31, 2008, from <http://www.geocities.com/lisajunedenton/collection.html>
- Dixon, John (1986). *Fiction in Libraries*. London: The Library Association.
- Gaiman, Neil, Thompson, Jill, & Locke, Vince (1994). *Sandman: (the) Brief Lives*. New York: DC Comics.

- Goldsmith, Francisca (2005). *Graphic Novels Now: Building, Managing, and Marketing a Dynamic Collection*. Chicago: American Library Association.
- Gray, Sharon & Abaid, Teresa (2002). Building a multicultural media collection. *MC Journal: the Journal of Academic Media Librarianship*, 8(2).
- Green, Karen (2007). *Columbia University Libraries Collection Development: Graphic Novels*. Retrieved March 31, 2008, from http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/services/colldev/graphic_novels.html
- Hornschemeier, Paul (2004). *Mother, Come Home*. Milwaukie, Oregon: Dark Horse Books.
- Johnson, Peggy (2004). *Fundamentals of Collection Development and Management*. Chicago: American Library Association.
- Karasik, Paul & Mazzucchelli (1994). *Paul Auster's City of Glass*. New York: Avon Books.
- Kuhr, Jeff & Rosenfeld, Shelle (2005). Diversity in graphic novels. *Booklist*, 101(14), 1302-1303.
- Langridge, Andrew & Langridge, Roger (2006). *The Louche and Insalubrious Escapades of Art d'Ecco*. Seattle: Fantagraphics.
- Longview Public Library. *Longview Public Library Collection Development Policy*. Retrieved March 31, 2008, from http://www.longview.lib.tx.us/newweb/library_templates/CollDevPol/ColDevPolpg6.htm
- McCloud, Scott (1993). *Understanding Comics: the Invisible Art*. New York: HarperCollins.
- McCloud, Scott (2000). *Reinventing Comics*. New York: DC Comics.
- Mercer County Library. *MCL's Collection Development Policy in Full*. Retrieved March 31, 2008, from <http://webserver.mcl.org/lib/colldef.html>
- Miller, Steve (2005). *Developing and Promoting Graphic Novel Collections*. New York: Neal-Schuman Publishers.
- Monterey Public Library. *Monterey Public Library Collection Development Policy*. Retrieved March 31, 2008, from <http://www.monterey.org/library/cdp/cdp11.html>
- Moore, Alan & Gibbons, Dave (2005). *Absolute Watchmen*. New York: DC Comics.

- National Coalition Against Censorship, American Library Association, Comic Book Legal Defense Fund (2006). *Graphic Novels: Suggestions for Librarians*. Retrieved March 31, 2008, from <http://www.ncac.org/graphicnovels>
- Newark Public Library (2006). *The Newark Public Library Collection Development Policy*. Retrieved March 31, 2008, from <http://www.npl.org/Pages/AboutLibrary/colldevpol06.html>
- Pawuk, Michael (2007). *Graphic Novels: a Genre Guide to Comic Books, Manga, and More*. Westport, Connecticut: Libraries Unlimited.
- Pratt, Allan D. (1995). Are we really infallible at book selection? *Library Journal*, 120(18), 44.
- Robbins, Trina & yronwode, catherine (1985). *Women and the Comics*. Eclipse Books.
- Scales, Pat (2007). Ain't that a shame. *School Library Journal*, 53(9), 30.
- Scott, Randall W. (1990). *Comics Librarianship: a Handbook*. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company.
- Simpson, Stacy (2006). Why have a comprehensive & representative collection? GLBT material selection and service in the public library. *Progressive Librarian*, 27, 44-51.
- Smith, Jeff (1999). *Old Man's Cave*. Columbus, Ohio: Cartoon Books.
- Thompson, Jason & Okura, Atsuhisa (2007, October 22). How manga conquered America. *Wired*, 15(11). Retrieved March 31, 2008, from http://www.wired.com/special_multimedia/2007/1511_ff_manga.
- Vaughan, Brian K. & Guerra, Pia (2006). *Y: the Last Man--Kimono Dragons*. New York: DC Comics.
- Vincent, John (1986). Censorship and selection in public libraries. In Dixon, John (Ed.), *Fiction in Libraries* (pp. 127-134). London: The Library Association.
- Walker, Mort (1980). *The Lexicon of Comicana*. Museum of Cartoon Art: Port Chester, New York.
- Ware, Chris (2003). *Quimby the Mouse*. Seattle: Fantagraphics.
- Wolk, Douglas (2007). *Reading Comics: How Graphic Novels Work and What They Mean*. Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press.
- Yang, Gene Luen (2006). *American Born Chinese*. New York: First Second.