

Violence in Graphic Novels

Smita Mohanty

Research Scholar, Department of English

KIIT Deemed to be University

Received 2022 March 15; **Revised** 2022 April 20; **Accepted** 2022 May 10.

ABSTRACT

It is not a genre to write a "graphic novel." Fiction, nonfiction, historical fiction, fantasy and anything in between can all be found in graphic books. Sequential art is used to tell a story in graphic novels, just like in comic books. While comic books tend to be one-off stories, graphic novels tend to be stand-alone with more complicated plots. This study is a critical analysis of the graphic Novels regarding violence. The research on social information processing in aggressive youngsters provides an explanation for the connection between reading violent comic books and violence. The aim of this study is to provide an overview of the many uses of violence in graphic novels. A larger focus could include comparisons with other media, such as film, literature, and the fine arts. Particular approaches of violence, such as a closer examination of violent language or imagery, or their omission from several perspectives, could be the subject of more in-depth research. The violence in graphic novels is a valuable source for research and is far more nuanced than in Boom, Zack, Pow.

Keywords: Comic, Graphic, Book, Violence, Anger, Aggressive, Art, etc.

1. INTRODUCTION

Most research has consistently revealed that exposure to violent media appears to enhance aggressive behavior, thoughts, and feelings in children, adolescents, and young adults, despite underreporting of the impact of media violence by news services. The vast majority of this research has been devoted to depictions of violence in television, film, and, more lately, video games. However, comic books are an understudied source of violent content to which children and adolescents are exposed. In the 1950s, academics and politicians began to examine the negative impacts of violent comic books on children. Currently, scholars and politicians are examining the negative consequences of violent computer games. However, the vast majority of comic books currently on the market are filled with graphic representations of violence. For example, comic books like Homicide, Spawn, and Evil Ernie depict terrible acts of aggression repeatedly. These atrocities are illustrated with gruesome depictions of bloody beheadings, realistic eviscerations, and limb amputations. The weapons used to commit these horrible actions include machine guns, machetes, and a variety of body parts, such as fingernails and toenails. In the 1950s, the formation of a

Comics Code Authority, a self-censoring body for comic book content created and enforced by the comic book publishers, was prompted by concerns that violence in comic books would foster aggression in youngsters. However, the vast majority of accessible comic books still feature violent themes, and many are replete with graphic gore and sexual themes. In reality, it is practically hard to locate a comic book devoid of violent content. Even humorous comic books (such as *The Simpsons* and *Rug Rat Adventures*) depict aggressive behaviour.

Formally, a comic and a graphic novel are identical; both are literary works in picture and visual form. However, comics and graphic novels are distinct for a number of reasons. A graphic novel is a movement of comics in a larger format and shape, or a long comic or picture novel.

The term "graphic novel" is frequently used in marketing and packaging for the production of comics, such as the trade paperback collection, anthology of short tales, and annual non-narrative and non-fiction comics. Adam D. cites Eddie Campbell's explanation from his journal *Graphic novel manifesto* that a basic graphic novel is a form of comic narrative, i.e., it is a tool for telling or narrating a story. The word graphic book does not imply a commercial format (such as "trade paperback" or "hardcover" or "prestige format"). It can be in the form of an unpublished manuscript or a serial publication.

2. VIOLENCE IN GRAPHIC NOVELS

Violence is as integral to comics and graphic novels as its paper, ink, colors, panels, characters, dialogue, word balloons, and superheroes. It is nearly impossible to find a comic or graphic novel without violent content. However, the function of violence and the manner in which it is expressed or indicated vary considerably. This chapter will demonstrate that violence is an inherent component of graphic novels and discuss the various ways in which it is shown. This chapter will focus on the different means of communicating violence in the medium, including violent pictures, language, panel arrangement and borders, the use of colors, and sound effects. The causes of violence in graphic novels will also be examined.

2.1 Violent Images

In literature and movies, as well as in popular culture and culture as a whole, there is a great deal of violence. It appears to be one of the most important components of a good work of art, the spice that makes it more intriguing, exhilarating, and engaging. There are numerous methods to depict, describe, or imply violence in comics, and it is up to the artist to use them. The most obvious technique is to sketch violent pictures, which we are already familiar with due to our overexposure to this type of stuff. But what really constitutes a violent image? To answer this topic, it is best to examine some examples of comic panels and pages, identifying the characteristics in the visuals that lead the reader-viewer to interpret the images as violent.

The example (figure 1) is a panel from the 1997 graphic novel *A History of Violence* by John Wagner and Vince Locke, depicting a young hitchhiker conversing with an unidentified man seated in a car with a smile on his face and a revolver conspicuously displayed in his hand (12).



Figure 1: A History of Violence opens with the introduction of a weapon



Figure 2: Explicit violence is featured in the image from Kick-Ass

The fifth panel of the tale introduces a violent image: Since violence is the objective of a weapon, a gun, or any other weapon, will always constitute violence. The first category of violent images is characterized by a picture of a weapon or equipment used for violent purposes. The second category of a violent image depicts a blatantly violent act, as in the second example. As depicted in the picture from *Kick-Ass* (2010) by Mark Millar and John Romita Jr., a gun is fired, a bullet strikes a target, a bomb detonates, a victim is strangled with a cord, a razor shaves skin, or a fist strikes a face.

2.2 Violent Language

It has previously been established that language is unnecessary in comics and graphic novels. If language is included, however, graphic novels typically contain violent language. This subchapter will describe the various ways in which words can be used to constitute violence. These are violent incident descriptions provided through the narration, harsh speech, profanity, and sound effects. Language may be a highly nuanced and deceptive instrument, making it difficult for the reader or spectator to identify violent language as such. For illustrative purposes, examples shall be as straightforward and obvious as feasible. The example is from Art Spiegelman's novel *Maus*. In this panel (Figure 3), the narrator, Spiegelman's father Vladek, discusses the Auschwitz death of a fellow prisoner.



Figure 3: Verbal aggression in *Maus*

His recounting of an extraordinarily violent occurrence is dry and nearly emotionless. Vladek explains to his kid and the reader-viewer that a guard dragged the prisoner away and jumped heavily on his neck, which is also implied by the image in the panel. The second caption, however, depicts Vladek's casual admission that he does not truly know what happened and that the prisoner may have been executed in the gas chambers. He is only convinced that "they put him to death, and he never complained again. As violent activities are detailed, it is evident that the language in this scenario represents "verbal" violence. The fact that just one of these descriptions is supported with an image, which merely hints at what occurred, makes the violence in the phrase – and the panel as a whole – all the more potent, unsettling, uncomfortable, and unpleasant.

As previously stated, the second instance of violent language is the use of profanity. Almost all graphic novels in the Western comics genre include profanity, which is typically, but not always, present in conversation. Swearing is usually violent because it represents a violent emotional outburst. The spectrum ranges from relatively harmless colloquialisms like "damn" and "Darn!" to loaded, explicit swear words such as "crap," "asshole," "motherfucker," and "cunt." Additionally, some swear words are also employed as adjectives. The most prevalent of these is "fucked" (see Figure 4).

Despite the fact that the graphic book is slow paced and limited in action and emotions, Enid Coleslaw, one of the protagonists of Daniel Clowes' *Ghost World* (2009), uses the word 'fuck' in its adjective form on the opening page of the story, saying, "I detest this fucking magazine!" (9). Even if there isn't much going on the surface of the plot and there aren't any actual violent outbreaks or encounters, the graphic novel contains violent words, demonstrating that even the least violent graphic novels in context or story can have some type of it.



Figure 4: *Ghost World*, one of the least violent graphic books contains violent language

3. CAUSES FOR VIOLENCE IN GRAPHIC NOVELS

Violence is an inherent aspect of comics and graphic novels, although the value these texts place on violence varies

depending on the authors, the artists, and, to some extent, the reader-viewers' interpretations. Especially super-hero comics involve extreme violence because it is thrilling and exciting, which appeals to a young and adolescent readership while in no way diminishing their attractiveness to an older audience. The preceding subsections addressed how graphic novels include and depict violence, but the question of why it is such a key theme remains.

First and foremost, conflict is engaging: It adds drama and suspense to a story. The conflict between good and evil, the moral and the immoral, has long been prevalent in fiction. A confrontation between two opposites is virtually always violent in some way. Comics and graphic novels are story-telling media that are uniquely capable of conveying these tales due to their graphic nature. While a writer of prose often requires hundreds of pages and a profound command of language, a skilled artist may evoke the most intense, violent, or otherwise heartfelt feelings in the reader-viewer with a series of a few images. The idiom "A picture is worth a thousand words" is applicable, and a series of images,

such as in comics and graphic novels, boosts effect tremendously. The only limitations for fictional graphic novels are the authors and artist's imagination and competence.

Not only is violence prevalent in fiction, but it also frequently plays an essential role in nonfiction. Sadly, there is a great deal of violence in the world, which makes it difficult for authors of real-life narratives to avoid depicting it. As seen in *Maus* with the Second World War, *Persepolis* with the Islamic revolution in Iran, *Safe Area Gora* and the Bosnian War, *Palestine* and *Footnotes in Gaza* that focus on the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians residing in the Gaza Strip, and *Pyongyang* that describes life Reality is violent, so texts about it, regardless of their medium or genre, are violent as well.

Thirdly, the significance of violence in graphic novels is not limited to the stories, regardless of whether they are fictional or nonfictional. Because of their personal style and reputation, the author's or artist's name is sometimes a giveaway for a violent work of art. Adapted from the auteur idea of film studies, some comics and graphic book authors have a distinct and distinctive voice, style, or vocabulary that distinguishes them from the rest, making them more than merely writers or artists. Some of these unique abilities are also distinguished by their use of violence. Frank Miller, who developed such excessively violent works as *300* (1998), *Sin City* (1991-2000), *Holy Terror* (2011), *Ronin* (1983-1984), and *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* (1992), is one of the best instances of this expertise. The author is recognized for his exaggerated and brutally vivid representations of violence, which have become his signature throughout the years. These three explanations converge into a single overarching explanation for why violence is such a vital and central element of graphic novels. The quickness and simplicity with which graphic novels convey violent tales, both fictional and nonfictional, makes them a popular choice among writers and artists who specialize in violence, thereby promoting this theme. Without conflict or struggle, it is nearly impossible to build a complicated or original story. As a result of their sophistication and visual nature, graphic novels are particularly excellent at presenting violence.

4. VIOLENCE IN GRAPHIC NOVELS - AN ANALYTICAL STANDPOINT

Several well-known and critically acclaimed works will be examined and compared in terms of their use and representation of violence for this goal. Rather than focusing on the impact of violence on a specific group of reader-viewers, the analysis will examine the graphic novels' implementation and use of the previously described techniques to show, depict, convey, instill, or hint at violence, without evaluating the effect these techniques have on the audience. In other words, the focus will be on how the media mechanically encodes violence, ignoring the repercussions of this violence on readers and viewers.

The evaluated works were made by well-known, popular, and established comic's authors and artists. These works are Frank Miller's very controversial version of Greek history *300* (1998) with John Romita Jr. and John Wagner and Vince Locke's black-and-white gangster story *A History of Violence* (1997). These works were chosen for analysis because their plots, styles, and depictions of violence are all distinctive. The sequence in which the analyses are given is inconsequential and in no way represents a value judgement. Several further outstanding works would provide light on the medium's use of violence.

4.1 Frank Miller's 300 (2006)

Frank Miller was accused of homophobia following the 1998 publication of *300*, which was condemned for its

historical inaccuracies. This, however, did not decrease the success of the graphic novel, which received three Eisner awards in 1999 and sold over 120,000 copies. It focuses on the Battle of Thermopylae in Greek history (and mythology) from approximately 480 B.C. There, 300 Spartans and a small army of other Greeks are said to have repelled an overwhelming Persian force, ultimately sacrificing them so that the rest of Greece might prepare for war. One of the Spartans, Ephialtes of Trachis, is reported to have shown the self-proclaimed Persian god-king Xerxes a concealed way from which the Persians might outflank the Greeks, so allowing him to win the war.

Frank Miller's comics and graphic novels are infamous for their very explicit representations of violence. 300 is an excellent example. Almost nothing is concealed, regardless of how terrible, and little is left to the imagination. One cause for this is the narration's point of view. Dilios, one of the 300 Spartans who march with the Spartan king and army leader Leonidas to the pass at Thermopylae, the 'Hot Gates,' to fight the invading Persian army, narrates the majority of the story. Violence is a defining trait of the Spartans, and for them, the horrors of war are nothing new or unique. In order to increase Dilios' credibility in front of the Spartan troops, the depictions of violence must be as realistic as possible. Dilios attempts to persuade them that the odds favour their army, with three Persians for every Greek fighter, and that they will easily vanquish the Persian menace. The violent sights he depicts are nothing out of the norm for Spartans; violence is engrained in their culture; it is what they do. If Dilios is to be believed, after the first morning of huge bloodshed and terrible battle, Leonidas teases and amuses Xerxes during discussions by saying, "We've been sharing our culture with you all morning" (5112).

In addition, Sparta is a military city-state, which means that its men are bred and schooled to a particular standard and taught to be warriors. They are professional soldiers. In the graphic novel, the Arcadians whom the 300 see on their route to the battlefield are mocked and teased for being feminine because they are bakers, blacksmiths, potters, and sculptors, whereas the Spartans consider themselves as soldiers. Despite the greater number of Arcadians, in their opinion, the 300 had more soldiers. As a result of their upbringing and lack of experience, the Spartans believe that violence is the only solution to every disagreement. This is established from the opening of the novel, when Stelios slips and collapses from tiredness and is punished with a beating. After the captain fails to respond to the order to cease the beating, Leonidas knocks him unconscious. Dilios narrates all of this in a dry, unemotional, matter-of-fact (maybe even adoring) manner because, as previously stated, it is nothing out of the norm for Spartans. The greatest honor a Spartan man can acquire is to die in battle. In the final chapter, Victory, the 300 are betrayed and slain, reinforcing this concept. This blatant praise of violence is one of the primary distinguishing characteristics of 300.

Even when he leads three hundred of his most prized soldiers to their deaths, his only sorrow is that he has so few to sacrifice. Each and every Spartan, male or female, must partake in this grandeur. And in the victory that would have been assured had King Leonidas not been so comprehensively defeated. However, Dilios' account cannot be accepted at face value for a variety of reasons. First, he is not present for many of the story's events or discussions, such as Ephialtes' interview with Leonidas or meeting with Xerxes, the negotiations between the Spartan king and Persian leader, or the Spartans' last stand after being betrayed.

Second, the reader-viewer cannot always be certain of the narrative voice. For instance, the story's captions frequently refer to "Dilios" in the third person, indicating another narrator. Of fact, one could argue that these captions are not part of Dilios' story at all, but rather represent a change in perspective. They may represent a meta-narrator or, in certain instances, the thoughts of other characters. The near closeness of the narrative boxes to Leonidas on page 63 may indicate that they convey his ideas to the reader-viewer. On page 65, however, it is unclear whose voice the captions reflect, and it can be claimed that a meta-narrator is 'heard' here. Via addition, some narration is not given in captions, but is instead written directly on the page without a border, creating a visual separation between narrative voices.



Figure 5: The narrative voice in 300 is not always distinct

The third objective of Dilios' storytelling, his story, is to rally the Greek soldiers. Frank Miller even alludes to the disparities by allowing one of the Spartan troops listening to Dilios to reflect: "Captain Dilios weaves his yarns / His best narrative / the one about the hot gates" The language acknowledges to the reader-viewer that it is merely a story and that there is a rationale for the way the story is conveyed. Even the characters in the book do not appear to totally believe what Dilios is telling them. However, his exaggerations are intended to instill pride and courage in his warriors, and judging by the very last page, which contains a single panel depicting the Spartans' charge, they succeed.

However, the narration is not the only method in which the book emphasizes violence. The color palette of 300 is highly different. The colorist, Lynn Varley, employs quiet, sombre, dark tones for the backgrounds, which are contrasted with vibrant reds and yellows for capes, blood, shields, and armor. Particularly, the capes, which apparently attempt to place the Spartans on par with superheroes, stand out in dark red and appear on nearly every page of the graphic novel. In addition, the only red things in the color palette are the capes and blood. The sometimes-completely-black backdrops make this juxtaposition even more evident and help to underline the terrible images. All other characters, including Persian warriors and other Greeks, are uniformly dressed in brown, grey, or dark yellow hues, which are broken up by the Spartan capes and bloody spears. Even the colour appears to be destroying hostile forces. The artistic talent of Frank Miller is evident on every page, not only because of the incredible degree of detail in the images, but also because of the way he divides a page. Two pages stand out for their inventive and distinctive panel layout and borders. Pages 69 and 70 depict the occasion before the climax of the story, The Spartans are besieged by Persian forces just before the storm.

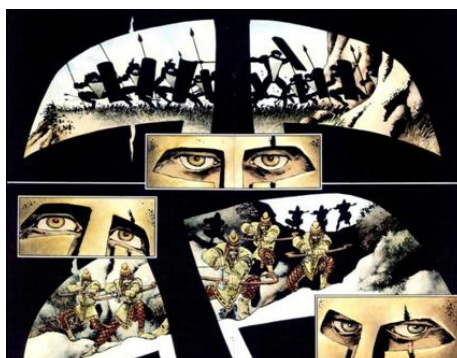


Figure 6: Miller's clever use of panel layout and borders to keep people interested

The fascinating and amazing aspect of these pages is that the reader-viewer sees the world via Leonidas' eyes. This is accomplished by contouring hostile forces with thick, black panel borders in the shape of his helmet. In addition, to make it more tangible for the audience, these half-page-sized panels are interspersed with rectangular panels depicting simply Leonidas' eyes and helmet. This design has the effect of increasing the audience's identification with the inevitability and misery of the Spartans' position. The Greeks are besieged by adversaries who brandish their weapons, symbolizing their inevitable destruction. This layout results in a stronger emotional connection between the reader and the characters. The audience is engrossed in the story. This phrase is frequently used in Game Studies and refers to "the impression of being in another place and participating in its action". As a result of the audience's inclusion and absorption, the next violence has a greater effect on them.

It is nearly impossible to avoid depicting weaponry in a comic book about violence and conflict, which, as said previously, results in violent visuals. Frank Miller goes to extraordinary lengths. Only nine pages out of 81 do not depict weaponry, and two of those are chapter titles. Even in crime, horror, or superhero comics, such a high proportion of violent images are exceptional. Leonidas' four-page journey to the Ephors, Spartan "priests of the old gods", and their oracle is the sole sequence that does not feature weaponry in its pictures. Especially in the final chapter, where the reader-viewer is confronted with the killing of the 300, many of the images that depict weapons are dominated by them. Figure is a particularly striking illustration. We observe King Leonidas being stabbed by arrows, still grasping his sword, and collapsing among his fellow Spartans clad in armour and with shields. The arrows dominate the panel and even violate the fourth wall, denoted by white streaks across the page, shredding not only the flesh of the characters represented within, but also the paper these figures are depicted on.

Aside from the sound effects, which will be discussed later, the language in 300 is not very violent. In addition to terms of warfare, such as 'war,' 'spear,' and 'battle,' and occasionally general harsh vocabulary, such as 'death,' and 'sacrifice,' the graphic novel contains only minimal profanities, insults, and curses. The strongest is "boy-lovers," which Leonidas used to describe the Athenians¹³. In contrast to the terrible visuals of spears penetrating flesh and limbs being severed, the wording is somewhat mild. The closest example of a verbally aggressive outburst is Ephialtes' tirade, in which he curses his horrible fate after escaping a suicide attempt: "Damn you. Damn you, gods! Damn you, father! Hellfire, mother! You're all damned to hell!"

In the graphic novel, there are a few references to "hell." The most notable part of Leonidas' speech before the last stand of the Spartans is when he says, "Spartans. Prepare breakfast. And eat heartily, / for tonight we are dining in hell!" Additionally, certain graphic representations of religious topics have been included. For instance, the splash page at the end of the story, which depicts Leonidas lying on the ground with his arms extended and stabbed by arrows, is a striking allusion to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. These religious commentaries are not at all factual and were likely picked intentionally to appeal to Christian readers and viewers. Because ancient Greeks did not believe in the concept of a Christian "Hell," it is evident from the examples that Frank Miller aims to make the Spartans more likeable for such an audience. They assumed that most mortals would go to Hades, the Greek Underworld, upon death, regardless of their behavior in life. The utilization of these religious overtones in the pictures and language is a justification for the 300's extreme aggression against their enemies. In their view, they are merely defending themselves (and the rest of Greece) against persecution by foreign invaders and a foreign way of life that threatens their traditional values. The author demands of the reader-viewers, on the one hand, that they reject and denounce violence against free Greeks with Christian implications, and, on the other hand, that they embrace the severe violence of the Spartans. Miller attempts to lure the audience into identifying with the Spartans despite their terrible actions. In this regard, the passage can be viewed as propaganda favouring Christianity over other religions.

4.2 John Wagner and Vince Locke's A History of Violence (1997)

This graphic comic depicts the tale of a guy who, after assuming a new name and relocating to a small village, is plagued by his involvement in the Italian mafia in New York. When he foils a heist by two criminals, he catches the attention of the crime leader whose organization he and a friend assaulted and stole money from twenty years before. In order to protect his family, he chooses to return to New York and complete his mission against the Mafia.

A History of Violence is, with the exception of the nonfictional Maus, the most realistic of the four books covered in this article. As in Kick-Ass, none of the characters possess magical abilities, and the plot centres on the protagonist's struggle against a criminal organization. Tom McKenna alias Joey Muni, the protagonist of A History of Violence, is pushed into his circumstance and motivated by vengeance and the dread of losing his family, whereas Dave Lizeswki is motivated by boredom and loneliness. In contrast to the characters in Kick-Ass, who are all overly excited and eager to use violence, the protagonist in Wagner and Locke's comic novel is initially frightened and reluctant, and only resorts to violence when he sees no other option. Then, though, he is equally cruel in his punishment, although he does not experience any pleasure or satisfaction.

Even though this is not a superhero narrative, the traditional "hero vs villain" trope found in many superhero comics is there. In contrast to the heroes and heroines of Kick-Ass, who feel obligated to choose an enemy as part of their (self-proclaimed) status, the hero created his own vengeful antagonist by his own acts in the past. This makes Tom considerably more likeable to the spectator, and it also serves as a means of subduing or justifying the extreme measures he takes to defeat his foes.

As with the rest of the plot, the graphic novel's violence is quite realistic. Although it is uncommon for one individual to take on and eliminate an entire mafia cartel, the protagonists do not possess superpowers, and the location is likewise quite typical. This reality is the primary reason why A History of Violence has a greater emotional impact on the reader-viewer than 300 or Kick-Ass, both of which include violence that is so ludicrously exaggerated that it almost feels silly and implausible. The sole exception is the police's ignorance and even indifference to the protagonists' self-administered justice.

Tom takes on a whole mafia organization in New York and murders the boss and three of his subordinates without apparent repercussions. The cops forgot to tell him his Miranda rights during his arrest at the start of the novel, leaving

him untouched and unpunished by the law. The only consequence of his and his partner's attack on the Mafia cartel twenty years ago is that he cannot see or communicate with his terminally ill grandmother and must assume a new identity. When neither the criminal boss nor the police are able to locate him, he begins a new life with a wife, son, and daughter. The conclusion of the novel also suggests that his activities have no negative consequences for him. The villain is dead, the police are pleased to be rid of a major crime boss, and everything appears to have returned to normal.

Similar to 300, the story's narrator, Tom McKenna, cannot be believed readily. In the second chapter, which describes his participation in an attack and heist of a Mafia enterprise, he portrays himself as averse to violence and constantly seeking peaceful solutions to issues. His role in the invasion of a restaurant used by the crooks as a hideout is minimized and only serves to demonstrate that his friend Richie is too violent. One may argue that his actions in the first and third sections of the story are merely a response to threats and that he always acts in self-defense. However, his use of severe force reveals his violent past. In addition, his determinations to take matters into his own hands, return to New York, and eliminate his adversary once and for all, as well as his skill in eliminating many armed men on his own, are all clues that he may not have revealed the whole truth about his background. The second is a confession to his wife and children about his background, which may explain why he attempts to downplay his aggressive nature. Although he begins one of the memories by stating, "Richie and I were not angels," we were not angels. According to his observations, Richie is invariably the initiator of violent situations, whereas Tom merely reacts to threats.

In addition, Richie and Tom's motivations for carrying out the mob attack are fundamentally different. Richie harbours a vendetta against them because they murdered his brother, whilst Tom allegedly intends to take their money in order to pay for the surgery of his grandma. Despite the fact that he seems genuinely worried about her health as a teenager, his interest in what happened to her after he went into hiding is minimal. His last remark about her after he vanishes is: "I never saw my gran again. I could not return, nor could I write. It was far too hazardous ". The fact that he resumes his life tale without hesitation in the next panel indicates that in the quote he is referring to the danger he was in and not his grandma. As a result, his noble motive for attacking her, which was to assist her, is questionable. Although he does leave some money on her dresser before fleeing, it appears that obtaining funding for her operation was not his main purpose.

The novel contains violent and detailed portrayals of violence, but they are not as horrific or sickening as those in Kick-Ass. The primary cause is the lack of color. Wagner and Locke conceal a portion of the extreme brutality by using dark backgrounds, black lines as rain or speed lines, or by placing it in the gutter, whilst Millar and Romita Jr. emphasize the savagery through the use of bright, flamboyant colors. Since the majority of the graphic novel takes place at night, many panels depict persons and significant objects in white against a completely black background. Even during the day, large, black shadows frequently obscure portions of the panels. Thus, the awful acts lose part of their repugnance. However, similar to Maus, the worst images are left blank for the reader-viewer to imagine. Especially Richie's fate once the mob finally discovers him is left to the audience's imagination, which is a terrible ploy done by the designers, as they display a page-filling panel of him after years of suffering. It is difficult to comprehend the cruelty and malice, as well as the years of terrible torment that he endured. After Tom kills his adversary, ostensibly in self-defense, Richie requests to be murdered. Tom kneels over Richie's body when the police come, but the officer's dismissive remark; "[t]oo late for this poor guy" without further examination demonstrates their ignorance of Tom's self-administered justice. However, since it is not depicted in any panel, the audience does not know if Tom actually put Richie out of his agony, or if he simply observes his friend finally succumbing to the scars from years of torture, potentially comforting him in his final moments.



Figure 7: The end outcome is shown, but the torture has to be imagined by the reader or viewer

While *300* and *Kick-Ass* portray violence as a revered, noble occupation and as an engaging, enjoyable activity, *A History of Violence* takes a different stance. It is significantly more ambiguous, and the characters' actions are morally ambiguous. It is depicted, on the one hand, as an abhorrent concept that criminals employ carelessly and without remorse, and, on the other hand, as a necessary instrument that is useful in life-threatening or otherwise perilous situations. However, this divide is dispersed quite unevenly throughout the characters. The violence perpetrated by 'bad' characters (criminals, the mafia, and Richie as a child) is purposely shown as horrific, gory, and cruel, whereas violent acts performed by 'good' characters (Tom and his wife) are self-defense, answers to threats, or last option survival strategies. Nonetheless, the two aspects intersect in the protagonist's adolescence, during the assault on the mob restaurant. Although it might be claimed that Tom was drawn into this violent environment by a series of fortuitous events, the fact that he and his accomplice painstakingly planned their attack for months casts doubt on his character. However, his narrative voice emphasizes that despite their planning; he is constantly apprehensive and cautious to carry out their scheme. This is ostensibly an attempt to justify or redeem his brutal behavior and the gravity of his deeds, and therefore to make the character likeable, to label him as one of the "good guys."

Although fictitious, *A History of Violence* is extremely realistic, making it easy for the reader or spectator to become immersed in the plot. The effective use of sound effects contributes to the realism of the narrative. The extensive use of sound effects throughout the text heightens the tension during action sequences involving gunfire and makes routine events more tangible, such as the ringing of a telephone or doorbell, the buzzing of a life-support machine, or a drop of blood striking the floor. In other words, the manufactured environment is more convincing because the story becomes more genuine and true in the mind of the reader or viewer. However, it is not just the usage of sound effects that helps the reader interact more fully with the text; it is also the novel sounds for specific acts and the book's unique noise traditions. Most comics, superhero comics in particular, emphasize on the sound a knife makes when it stabs something or someone, using effects like as "CHK", "THUCK", "SHKK", or "SLLTT". *A History of Violence* uses a different method, focusing on the victim's cry by writing "GLUAR" to symbolize the man's scream rather than the sound of the knife. This adds an element of harshness to the action, making it more fascinating. In contrast to the use of sound effects in *Maus*, where they were employed to de-emphasize violence, this graphic novel employs sound effects to enhance their impact. Other interesting sound effects in Wagner and Locke's book include "POOSH" for an igniting Bunsen burner and "ZZRREEE" for a power drill penetrating a thigh.



Figure 8: The violence is brought out by the sounds effects in a *History of Violence*

In addition, the creators occasionally used multiple sounds for the same action, most notably the sound of firearms firing. When different types of firearms are shot, various sound effects are utilized. Among them are "BDAM," "CRACK," "BAM," "POOMPH," "FUMP," "TUMP," "KACHOW," "BLAM," "BRAPPAPPAPPAP," and "BRAKKAKKAK." The last two are particularly intriguing because they are ostensibly the same gun model, but make distinct sounds. This assortment of sounds contributes to the story's realism and the audience's interest, which in turn makes the violence more vivid. This, in my opinion, establishes an intriguing balance between two characteristics of the graphic book that have a direct impact on how violence is portrayed. On the one hand, the absence of color, the black-and-white presentation, downplays part of the gruesomeness of the violence, while on the other, the sound effects increase its 'tactility' and make it more revolting.

This correspondence is also the primary reason why this graphic novel's depiction of violence feels more adult and less humorous than *300* and *Kick-Ass*. All three examples depict the horrifying deeds committed by the characters on the page and do not typically conceal them in the gutter. In *A History of Violence*, however, the balance between black-and-white images and interesting, unusual sound effects creates a sophisticated, gripping sensation for the audience,

whereas in the other two texts the depictions of violence are detailed and amplified by color to the point where it occasionally feels excessive.

5. CONCLUSION

A "graphic novel" is not a genre. Graphic novels include a wide range of topics, including fiction, nonfiction, history, fantasy, and everything in between. In graphic novels, as in comic books, sequential art is employed to tell the tale. Graphic novels, on the other hand, tend to have more complex tales than comic books. Comic books and graphic novels are nearly always violent in some way. Conflict is thrilling, adds flavor to a story, and frequently makes it more compelling and interesting. Graphic novels are essentially comics with one or more of the following extra characteristics: a critical engagement of the text with a subject, concept, or genre; a unique or inventive presentation or style; and a predetermined, finite plot. In other words, a graphic novel is a comic that engages the reader-viewer on a deeper level than mere enjoyment and is designed and presented as a single, complete work.

While *Kick-Ass* and *A History of Violence* offer their panels strictly as adjacent rectangles with no overlapping graphics, *Maus* and *300* display a bit more ingenuity in this regard. However, the inventive ways in which the images are arranged on the pages of the last two texts serve two distinct functions. Art Spiegelman employs multiple overlapping panels primarily to direct the reader-gaze viewer's across the page, to clarify the recommended reading order or how the panels are interwoven. Although the remainder of the work also consists of overlapping rectangular shapes, *300* uses its creative panel borders or shapes to increase the audience's emotional connection (immersion). The example presented in Figure enables the reader-viewer to place themselves in the protagonist's shoes and engage with the material on a deeper level than just amusement.

The assessment of these works about violence validated my hypothesis that violence is an inherent component of graphic novels. Obviously, it is only one facet of the medium, but it is frequently the most important. In fact, violence plays such an essential role in the majority of graphic novels that examinations of works that do not contain any kind of it must consider why it is absent. In addition, the rationale for including violence in graphic novels can be examined from a variety of viewpoints, including psychology, Cultural Studies, economics, etc. Language and violence are not required for a graphic novel to be an example of the medium, but it is exceptional if they are not present and hence significant. Because it is a central element, future study should contain observations of violence in graphic novels regardless of the field and focus of inquiry. Even the absence of violence is pertinent to investigations since it is unusual.

REFERENCES

1. *A History of Violence*. Dir. David Cronenberg. Perf. Viggo Mortensen, Mari Bello, Ed Harris. Screenwriter by Josh Olson. New Line Cinema, 2005. Film.
2. Abel, Marco. *Violence affect (Literature, Cinema, and Critique after representation)*. the Board of Regents of the University of Nebraska, 2007. Print.
3. Bryant, Tim. 2010. "Ages of Comics." In: M. Keith Booker (ed.). 2010. *Encyclopedia of Comic Books and Graphic Novels*. Santa Barbara/ CA: Greenwood. 12-14.
4. Carroll, Joseph. (2013). *Violence in Literature: An Evolutionary Perspective*. 10.1007/978-1-4614-9314-3_3.
5. Chute, Hillary. 2010. [2008] "Graphic Narrative." In: Michael Payne and Jessica R. Barbera (eds.). 2010. [1996] *A Dictionary of Cultural and Critical Theory*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell. 310-314.
6. Clowes, Daniel. 2009. [1993] *Ghost World*. Seattle/ WA: Fantagraphics.
7. Colaguori, Claudio. *Symbolic Violence and the Violation of Human Rights: Continuing the Sociological Critique of Domination*. *International Journal of Criminology and Sociological Theory*, York University Department of Social Science. 2010. Print
8. Coyne, Sarah & Callister, Mark & Stockdale, Laura & Coutts, Holly & Collier, Kevin. (2015). "Just How Graphic Are Graphic Novels?" *An Examination of Aggression Portrayals in Manga and Associations With Aggressive Behavior in Adolescents*. *Violence and Victims*. 30.
9. Eisner, Will. 2008. *Graphic Storytelling and Visual Narrative: Principles and Practices from the Legendary Cartoonist*. New York/ NY: Norton.
10. Fetter-Vorm, Jonathan and Michael Gallagher. 2012. *Trinity: A Graphic History of the First Atomic Bomb*. New

JOURNAL OF ALGEBRAIC STATISTICS

Volume 13, No. 3, 2022, p. 3181-3191

<https://publishoa.com>

ISSN: 1309-3452

York/ NY: Hill and Wang.

11. Labrador, and Governor of newfoundland, Type of Violence and Abuse. Gov.nl.ca. 2013.web
12. Miller, Frank. 2010b. [2000] Sin City: Hell and Back. Milwaukie/ OR: Dark Horse.
13. Miller, Frank. 2011. Holy Terror. Burbank/ CA: Legendary Comics
14. Monnin, Katie. 2010. Teaching Graphic Novels: Practical Strategies for the Secondary ELA Classroom. Gainesville/ FL: Maupin House.
15. Spiegelman, Art. 2003. [1986/1992] The Complete Maus. London: Penguin.