



ANKARA
HACI BAYRAM VELİ ÜNİVERSİTESİ
LİSANSÜSTÜ EĞİTİM ENSTİTÜSÜ

**EXPLORING LITERARY DIMENSIONS IN GRAPHIC
WORKS: SPIEGELMAN’S MAUS AND EISNER’S “A
CONTRACT WITH GOD”**

Deniz SAKA

**Thesis Advisor
Assoc. Prof. Dr. Nazli GÜNDÜZ**

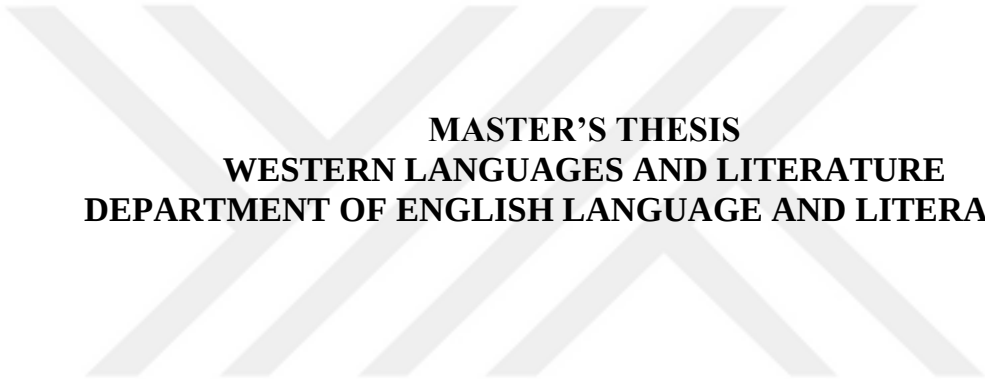
**MASTER’S THESIS
WESTERN LANGUAGES AND LITERATURE
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE**

OCTOBER 2024



**EXPLORING LITERARY DIMENSIONS IN GRAPHIC WORKS:
SPIEGELMAN’S MAUS AND EISNER’S “A CONTRACT WITH GOD”**

Deniz SAKA



**MASTER’S THESIS
WESTERN LANGUAGES AND LITERATURE
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE**

**ANKARA HACI BAYRAM VELİ UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTE OF GRADUATE PROGRAMS**

OCTOBER 2024

ETİK BEYAN

Ankara Hacı Bayram Veli Üniversitesi Tez Yazım Kurallarına uygun olarak hazırladığım bu tez çalışmada; tez içinde sunduğum verileri, bilgileri ve dokümanları akademik ve etik kurallar çerçevesinde elde ettiğimi, tüm bilgi, belge, değerlendirme ve sonuçları bilimsel etik ve ahlak kurallarına uygun olarak sunduğumu, tez çalışmada yararlandığım eserlerin tümüne uygun atıfta bulunarak kaynak gösterdiğimi, kullanılan verilerde herhangi bir değişiklik yapmadığımı, bu tezde sunduğum çalışmanın özgün olduğunu, bildirir, aksi bir durumda aleyhime doğabilecek tüm hak kayıplarını kabullendiğimi beyan ederim.

10.10.2024

Deniz SAKA

TEZ ONAY SAYFASI

Ankara Hacı Bayram Veli Üniversitesi Lisansüstü Eğitim Enstitüsü İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Anabilim Dalı Yüksek Lisans Programı 2164601011 nolu öğrencisi tarafından hazırlanan Exploring Literary Dimensions in Graphic Works: Spiegelman's *Maus* and Eisner's "A Contract with God" Başlıklı tez çalışması 10/10/ 2024 tarih ve 15:30 saatinde yapılan tez savunma sınavında aşağıdaki jüri tarafından OY BİRLİĞİ ile YÜKSEK LİSANS TEZİ olarak **KABUL** edilmiştir.

Başkan (Unvan/Ad-Soyad/Kurum):

Doç. Dr. Yavuz ÇELİK
Ankara Hacı Bayram Veli Üniversitesi

Kabul

Ret



Üye (Unvan/Ad-Soyad/Kurum):

Doç. Dr. Nazli GÜNDÜZ
Ankara Hacı Bayram Veli Üniversitesi



Üye (Unvan/Ad-Soyad/Kurum):

Doç. Dr. Dilek TÜFEKÇİ CAN
Balıkesir Üniversitesi



Exploring Literary Dimensions in Graphic Works: Spiegelman’s *Maus* and Eisner’s “A
Contract with God”
(Master’s Thesis)

Deniz SAKA

ANKARA HACI BAYRAM VELİ UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTE OF GRADUATE PROGRAMS

October 2024

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the literary value of graphic novels through the lens of New Criticism, specifically focusing on Art Spiegelman’s *Maus* (1991) and Will Eisner’s “A Contract with God” (1978). Despite their historical association with comics—often viewed as humorous and trivial—graphic novels encompass complex literary elements such as visual illustrations, metaphors, and symbolism that enrich the reading experience. The study addresses the stigma that undermines graphic novels’ legitimacy in the literary canon by employing New Criticism, which allows for an objective analysis of the texts without external biases related to authorship or historical context. By focusing on concepts of irony, tension, paradox, symbols, and metaphor, this research demonstrates how *Maus* and “A Contract with God” effectively convey themes of trauma, faith, culture, and human experience. The integration of visual and verbal narratives in these works creates a harmonious interplay that enhances their literary merit. For instance, *Maus* employs symbolism through the portrayal of characters as animals to depict the Holocaust’s horrors, while “A Contract with God” presents the paradoxical struggles of faith amidst distress. Ultimately, it is argued that the recognition of graphic novels as significant literary forms deserves a place within academic discourse. By illuminating their unique contributions through a New Critical approach, this research not only challenges existing prejudices but also enriches the understanding of graphic novels’ role in contemporary literature.

Science Code	: 31316
Key Words	: Graphic Novel, Comic, New Criticism, Art, Irony, Paradox, Unity, Symbol, Tension, Metaphor
Page Number	: 89
Supervisor	: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Nazlı GÜNDÜZ

Grafik Eserlerde Edebi Boyutları Keşfetmek: Spiegelman'den *Maus* ve Eisner'dan "A Contract with God"

(Yüksek Lisans Tezi)

Deniz SAKA

ANKARA HACI BAYRAM VELİ ÜNİVERSİTESİ
LİSANSÜSTÜ EĞİTİM ENSTİTÜSÜ

Ekkim 2024

ÖZET

Bu tez, özellikle Art Spiegelman'ın *Maus* (1991) ve Will Eisner'in "A Contract with God" (1978) eserlerine odaklanarak, Yeni Eleştiri perspektifinden grafik romanların edebi değerini inceler. Genellikle mizahi ve önemsiz olarak görülen çizgi romanlarla olan tarihsel ilişkilerine rağmen grafik romanlar, okuma deneyimini zenginleştiren görsel çizimler, metaforlar ve semboller gibi karmaşık edebi unsurları içerir. Bu çalışma, yazarlık veya tarihsel bağlamla ilgili dışsal önyargılar olmaksızın metinlerin nesnel bir analizine izin veren Yeni Eleştiri kuramını kullanarak grafik romanların edebi alandaki meşruiyetini yadsıyan damgayı ele alır. İroni, gerilim, paradoks, semboller ve metafor kavramlarına odaklanarak bu araştırma, *Maus* ve "A Contract with God" eserlerinin travma, inanç, kültür ve insan deneyimi temalarını nasıl etkili bir şekilde ilettiğini gösterir. Bu eserlerde görsel ve sözel anlatıların birlikte kullanılması edebi değerlerini artıran uyumlu bir etkileşim yaratır. Örneğin, *Maus*, Holokost'un dehşetini tasvir etmek için karakterleri hayvan olarak resmederek sembolizmi kullanırken, "A Contract with God" sıkıntının ortasında inancın paradoksal mücadelelerini sunar. Sonuç olarak, bu tez, grafik romanların akademik alanda bir yer hak eden önemli edebi biçimler olarak tanınmasını savunur. Yeni Eleştirel bir yaklaşımla grafik romanların benzersiz katkılarını aydınlatarak, bu araştırma yalnızca mevcut önyargılara meydan okumakla kalmaz, aynı zamanda grafik romanların çağdaş edebiyattaki rolüne ilişkin anlayışı da zenginleştirir.

Bilim Kodu	: 31316
Anahtar Kelimeler	: Grafik Roman, Çizgi Roman, Yeni Eleştiri, Sanat, İroni, Paradoks, Birlik, Uyum, Sembol, Gerilim, Metafor
Sayfa Numarası	: 89
Tez Danışmanı	: Doç. Dr. Nazli GÜNDÜZ

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my major thanks to my advisor Assoc. Prof. Dr. Nazli GÜNDÜZ for both guiding me through my thesis and also re-sparking my interest in graphic novels which led me to study them as my subject. From the beginning of my study to the end, she patiently directed me toward sources that helped me build this study properly which also educated me outside of my studies, motivated me to go forward in addition to helping me make valuable and rewarding connections with people who have been studying comics and graphic novels for years. My sincere gratitude goes to the jury members Assoc. Prof. Dr. Dilek TÜFEKÇİ CAN and Assoc. Prof. Dr. Yavuz ÇELİK for their constructive criticism and thoughtful comments, which greatly enhanced the quality of my research.

My gratitude continues with Assoc. Prof. Dr. Şenol BEZCİ—Ankara University American Culture and Literature—and, Levent CANTEK and Funda ŞENOL for sharing their works and many other sources with me to aid my research, while also helping me broaden my knowledge in this field of study. I also want to express my thanks to every teacher who helped me reach this far with the guidance they provided in my education.

My big thanks go to my significant other for always believing in me and motivating me, always being by my side. I want to express my gratitude by thanking my ‘celestial twin’ and artist friend, for providing me with knowledge of the field of art and its criticism, which had a major impact on making a proper analysis of graphic novels’ both visual and verbal aspects in unity. I want to thank my closest friends for always supporting me. Lastly, my thanks go to every friend and acquaintance who

showed interest in my thesis and helped me develop new thoughts thanks to our discussions thus aiding my studies.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Pages

ABSTRACT.....	iv
ÖZET.....	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vi
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	viii
LIST OF FIGURES	ix
1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. THE COMIC AND GRAPHIC NOVEL	13
3. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND TO NEW CRITICISM	25
4. THEMATIC PARALLELS IN MAUS AND “A CONTRACT WITH GOD”	33
5. ART SPIEGELMAN’S <i>MAUS</i>	37
5.1. External Sources and Limitations	56
6. WILL EISNER’S “A CONTRACT WITH GOD”	61
7. CONCLUSION	79
WORKS CITED	85
ÖZGEÇMİŞ	89

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Pages
Figure 1	40
Figure 2	41
Figure 3	43
Figure 4	45
Figure 5	46
Figure 6	48
Figure 7	48
Figure 8	49
Figure 9	50
Figure 10	51
Figure 11	52
Figure 12	53
Figure 13	55
Figure 14	56
Figure 15	56
Figure 16	57
Figure 17	57
Figure 18	65
Figure 19	66
Figure 20	67
Figure 21	69
Figure 22	69
Figure 23	71

Figure 24	72
Figure 25	73
Figure 26	75
Figure 27	76



1. INTRODUCTION

Literature has long served as a mirror reflecting the complexities of human experience, evolving through various forms from oral traditions to written texts and now to visually supported narratives. Among these, graphic novels have emerged as a significant medium that combines visual artistry with literary depth, challenging traditional notions of storytelling. Yet, graphic novels and comics still suffer from the lack of recognition in the literary field. In *Comics Culture* (2000), Thierry Groensteen points out several successful names in the field of comics including Rodolphe Töpffer, Wilhelm Busch, Art Spiegelman, and Winsor McCay to state his claim that comic art “has nothing left to prove” (29). He continues this remark by stating the absurdity of the situation, questioning why the “legitimizing authorities” (29) including the academic field regularly label comics and graphic novels as childish and insignificant regardless of their self-evident success. Regardless of the diverse forms comic art takes, genres it discovers, and messages it conveys, the criticism usually focuses on the very narrow bunch of examples within its pool.

Despite making their appearance around the 1830s¹—close in time to photography—comics did not receive a proper name until more than a hundred years later. Until they found their name as comics, they received a variety of placeholder names as well as Töpffer’s term “stories told in print” (Groensteen 30). Considering the longevity of time it took for this medium to gain a proper name to be referred to, it might be possible to assume that it was not expected to be a long-term form to be practiced.

¹ First printed examples included Rodolphe Töpffer’s works (Groensteen 30). For more recent forms of comics in England in the 21st century, see Chapter 2.

The reaction towards hybrid forms of literature has not been negative in every part of the world. Japan, for example, not only loved comic art, but also transformed it into an important part of its culture with *manga* and its TV adaptations, *anime*. In *Dreamland Japan* (2013) Scott explains his memories of accompanying American comic artists including Will Eisner to Japan to discuss comics in 1994. He points out that they were shocked to learn about the popularity of comics in Japan, compared to the struggles of establishing a positive interest in comic art in the West (21).

The positive outlook Japan has in visual forms of literature might have its roots in the artistic form of the Japanese writing system, and the overall interest they have in humorous content, which are the roots of comics in the West as well. Scott's points support this idea by pointing out how Japan had satiric line drawings of clergy and nobility back in the 12th century (22). Even though the development of modern *manga* in Japan was constructed mainly by importing Western examples, the two forms of comic and *manga* seem to be distinctive, with *manga* having a specific art style, and having no struggles being published under different genres and for different audiences that vary from kids to adults; managing to discover educative or fun content as well as elements of violence or sexual content without receiving rejection or backlash (Scott 20-22).

While Japan successfully integrated comics with its culture and history, the West still faces struggles in the legitimization of comics and graphic novels. The history and the progress of graphic novels discussed in Chapter 2 of the thesis shed light as to why the process comics have been through is responsible for the stigma stuck on graphic novels and comics. Another aspect that might need to be taken into consideration is the amount or the type of academic interaction with the comic art.

Vinklárék states that “Serious study of comics was started by Will Eisner and his book *Comics as Sequential Art* (1985)” (135). Research shows that in recent years, there has been a growing body of scholarship dedicated to the analysis of graphic novels, reflecting their increasing recognition as a significant literary form. For instance, in his thesis titled *A Sociological Study: Comics as the Sign of Popular Culture in the 20th Century* (1993), Erhan Muratoğlu explores the sociological structure of comics with a focus on superheroes and argues the significance of comics in popular culture, taking part in both dominant and marginal cultures and help eliminate the low and high cultures.

Another example is by Anastasiya Lashuk with her thesis titled *Beyond Words: The Power of Visual Storytelling in the Graphic Novel Maus* (2023). It delves into the functions of various elements in *Maus* including the analysis of imagery, text, language, icons, and panels, highlighting how these elements work together to deliver the meaning. The thesis titled *Focalization in Verbal and Graphic Narratives: Jane Austen’s Pride and Prejudice and its Graphic Novel Adaptation* (2021) by Altınay Özen Koyuncuoğlu examines the distinctions between verbal and graphic narratives and focalization by providing a comparison between the novel form and the graphic novel adaptation of the same work.

Another noteworthy thesis by Efecan Sezer titled *Interactive Graphic Novel as a Storytelling Language* (2022) traces the movement of graphic novels to American cinema and argues that literature needs to adapt to newer technologies to survive. Hasan Çağlar Başol’s thesis titled *Using Graphic Novels to Improve Reading Comprehension Skills at EFL Classrooms* (2011) argues that “...graphic novels have their own meaningful system to convey their message” which is shown by studies in

classrooms to influence literacy of students (38). While many theses and studies focus on *Maus*, the researcher of the current thesis could only detect a single study on “A Contract with God” in the YÖK Thesis Database. The thesis on Eisner’s work is written by Bülent Ayyıldız and is titled *Jewish American Graphic Narratives: Landscapes, Stereotypes and Transformation in Will Eisner, Ben Katchor, Joe Kubert and Harvey Pekar* (2015). Ayyıldız’s thesis deals with how Jewish immigrants adapt to their new environment in America. Alongside other names, it takes Eisner’s work to inspect the human experience presented in this literary work.

Alongside the variety of theses surrounding graphic novels, academic research platforms offer journal articles on the subject, most of which were written and published in the last decade. These studies collectively underscore the artistic and narrative potential of graphic novels, providing a foundation for this thesis. By building upon their insights, this thesis aims to further explain the literary qualities of *Maus* (1991) by Art Spiegelman and “A Contract with God” (1978) by Will Eisner through a New Critical lens, emphasizing the harmonious interplay between visual and verbal elements that define these works.

This thesis employs a New Critical approach to analyze *Maus* by Art Spiegelman and “A Contract with God” by Will Eisner, specifically focusing on literary elements of irony, paradox, tension, symbols, and metaphor. The principles of New Criticism are selected to best support the argument of this thesis regarding the literary merit of graphic novels. By concentrating on the distinctive qualities of these texts—how their visual and written elements harmonize to create meaning—this thesis demonstrates that graphic novels deserve recognition as a legitimate form of literature. This focused application of New Criticism allows for a refined exploration of how

these works convey complex narratives and themes, ultimately contributing to the broader discourse on the legitimacy of graphic novels in the literary field.

Chapter 2 of the thesis titled “The Comic and Graphic Novel” traces the history and development of graphic novels. The chapter dedicated to graphic novels traces the historical development and evolution of graphic novels. This exploration includes an examination of the negative stigma often associated with comics and graphic novels, which has persisted despite their artistic and narrative potential. Factors contributing to this stigma are analyzed, including societal perceptions that categorize graphic novels as mere entertainment or children’s literature. The impact of censorship, particularly during the mid-20th century with the establishment of the Comics Code Authority, is discussed as a significant moment that restricted creative expression and reinforced stereotypes about the medium.

This thesis aims to help dismantle this stigma by demonstrating the literary merit inherent in graphic novels. By engaging with *Maus* by Art Spiegelman and “A Contract with God” by Will Eisner, this research seeks to illuminate the complex themes and sophisticated narrative techniques employed within these works. Through a close examination of literary devices such as symbols, irony, paradox, tension, and metaphor, it will be argued that graphic novels possess a depth comparable to traditional literary forms. Chapter 2 of the thesis ultimately serves to contextualize the significance of graphic novels within the broader literary landscape, advocating for their recognition as serious artistic expressions that deserve critical attention and scholarly analysis. By addressing both the historical context and contemporary relevance of graphic novels, this thesis aims to contribute to a more nuanced

understanding of the medium, challenging preconceived notions and fostering appreciation for its unique contributions to literature.

Titled “Theoretical Background to New Criticism,” Chapter 3 of this thesis is dedicated to New Criticism, providing a comprehensive overview of the historical development and theoretical foundations of this literary approach, tracing its evolution from its roots in Russian Formalism. Key figures who have significantly contributed to the formulation of New Criticism, such as John Crowe Ransom, Cleanth Brooks, I. A. Richards, T. E. Hulme, and T.S. Eliot are highlighted. These scholars emphasized the importance of close reading and the internal elements of a text, advocating for an analysis that prioritizes the text itself over external influences such as authorial intent or historical context. This foundational principle aligns closely with the principles of Formalism, which also seeks to examine literature through its structural components.

In this context, essential concepts that will be utilized in the analysis of *Maus* by Art Spiegelman and “A Contract with God” by Will Eisner are explored. Key literary devices that align with the direction of this thesis such as irony, paradox, tension, symbols, and metaphors are defined. Irony serves as a critical tool in both texts, revealing deeper truths about human experience and societal conditions. Paradox is employed to illustrate the complexities of character motivations and thematic elements, while tension enhances the emotional stakes within the narratives.

Furthermore, symbolism plays a pivotal role in conveying profound meanings that resonate with readers on multiple levels; for instance, in *Maus*, animal imagery encapsulates the horrors of the Holocaust while simultaneously addressing issues of identity and survival. By explaining these concepts within the framework of New Criticism, this thesis aims to demonstrate how both graphic novels utilize these literary

devices to create a cohesive narrative experience. The interplay between visual and verbal elements not only enriches the storytelling but also reinforces the unity that New Criticism seeks to uncover. Chapter 3 of this thesis ultimately establishes a critical foundation for analyzing *Maus* and “A Contract with God,” positioning them as significant contributions to literary discourse that merit rigorous examination through this lens.

Chapter 4 of this thesis is titled “Thematic Parallels in *Maus* and ‘A Contract with God’.” In this chapter, a thorough analysis is conducted to uncover the shared themes and messages that resonate within both graphic novels. The exploration begins with a brief overview of each work, establishing their significance within the graphic novel genre and their contributions to literary discourse. Following this introduction, the chapter delves into a comparative analysis that highlights key thematic elements such as identity, trauma, and the human condition.

Both *Maus* and “A Contract with God” deal with the complexities of identity in the face of hardships. The animal symbolism in Art Spiegelman’s *Maus* serves a critical function in softening the brutality of the Holocaust while simultaneously conveying complex themes of identity, power dynamics, and human suffering. By representing different groups as various animals, Spiegelman creates a distance that allows readers to engage with the horrific realities of the Holocaust without becoming overwhelmed by its raw brutality. In “A Contract with God,” Eisner’s character navigates his identity as a religious man within an existential struggle. These elements portray how the environment and experiences that come with it shape one’s reality.

Trauma emerges as another significant theme in both works. In *Maus*, Spiegelman’s narrative captures the effects of Holocaust trauma on survivors and their

descendants which is portrayed through Vladek Spiegelman and his son Art. This portrayal emphasizes how trauma can distort one's perception of reality. In contrast, Eisner's exploration of trauma in *A Contract with God* is manifested through the everyday struggles of his characters. In the short story selected for this thesis among the four short stories in Will Eisner's compilation book, "A Contract with God," Frimme Hersch confronts loss, disappointment, and moral dilemmas. This thematic exploration underscores the universality of trauma as a human experience, bridging the gap between individual narratives and collective histories.

By analyzing these thematic parallels, Chapter 4 aims to demonstrate that *Maus* and "A Contract with God" not only share significant literary qualities but also contribute meaningfully to discussions about identity, trauma, and the human condition. This comparative approach highlights how graphic novels can effectively address complex themes through a harmonious integration of visual and verbal storytelling techniques.

Titled "Art Spiegelman's *Maus*," Chapter 5 of this thesis covers a meticulous study of *Maus*. In this chapter focusing on *Maus* by Art Spiegelman, a comprehensive examination of the graphic novel is undertaken to illuminate its literary qualities. Initially, a brief overview of the work is provided, establishing its significance within the graphic novel genre and its impact on literary discourse. Following this introduction, an in-depth analysis is conducted that specifically addresses the use of irony, paradox, tension, symbolism, and metaphor as critical literary devices employed throughout the narrative. Chapter 5 of the thesis includes a sub-section under the title "External Sources and Limitations," in which the limits of New Criticism are discussed briefly.

Irony is particularly distinct in *Maus*, where the juxtaposition of animal characters against the backdrop of historical trauma serves to underscore the absurdity of prejudice and human behavior. This ironic framework not only enriches the narrative but also invites readers to engage with complex moral questions surrounding identity and survival. Additionally, paradox is explored as a means of illustrating the multilayered nature of memory and trauma, revealing how characters navigate their experiences in contradictory ways. Tension is analyzed, particularly in how it manifests through the interplay of past and present narratives. This structural tension enhances the emotional stakes of the story, compelling readers to confront the weight of history as it unfolds in real-time. Since the metaphoric language of literature enables the author to go beyond the surface meaning, the use of symbols plays a crucial role in conveying profound meanings. For instance, the use of animals as representations of different ethnic groups encapsulates themes of victimization and resilience.

Metaphor is also examined as a powerful tool that transcends literal interpretation, allowing for a richer understanding of character motivations and thematic depth. By analyzing these literary elements within *Maus*, Chapter 5 of the thesis aims to demonstrate the argument that the graphic novel possesses significant literary qualities that deserve serious academic consideration. Through this detailed exploration, it becomes evident that *Maus* not only serves as a striking narrative about the Holocaust but also exemplifies how graphic novels can effectively engage with profound themes through a harmonious integration of visual and verbal storytelling techniques. This analysis ultimately contributes to a broader understanding of graphic novels as legitimate literary forms deserving of recognition within the literary canon.

The last analysis chapter that builds the thesis is dedicated to the short story, “A Contract with God.” Chapter 6 is titled “Will Eisner’s ‘A Contract with God’.” In Chapter 6 of this thesis Eisner’s short story from the compilation book—which shares the same name *A Contract with God*—includes four short stories total and is explored in depth to highlight the literary merits of it as a graphic novel. Chapter 6 of this thesis begins with a brief overview of the work, emphasizing its importance within the graphic novel genre and its influence on literary discussions. The analysis then delves into the narrative’s use of key literary devices such as irony, paradox, tension, symbolism, and metaphor, offering a detailed examination of how these elements shape the story.

“A Contract with God” features irony. The contrast between the character’s expectations and harsh realities serves to highlight the complexities of human experience and societal critique. For instance, the security Hersch feels in his contract with the divine is met with disappointment, reflecting broader themes of hope and despair within urban settings. Paradox is also explored as a means of illustrating the multifaceted nature of faith and morality; the character is seen grappling with his beliefs in a world that often seems indifferent to his struggles.

Tension particularly manifests through the interactions between characters and their environments. This structural tension enhances the emotional stakes of the story, confronting the realities of poverty, loss, and resilience. Furthermore, the use of symbols plays a crucial role in conveying deeper meanings; for example, Eisner’s depiction of rain serves as a powerful symbol of despair, while the reoccurring light shows the divine power and hope, representing the duality of hope and hopelessness experienced by the characters.

As a narrative device, metaphor that transcends literal interpretation is also examined. It allows for a richer understanding of character motivations and thematic depth. By analyzing these literary elements within “A Contract with God,” this chapter aims to verify the argument that the graphic novel possesses significant literary qualities that merit serious academic consideration. Through this detailed exploration, it becomes evident that “A Contract with God” not only serves as a narrative about the human condition but also exemplifies how graphic novels manage to deliver their themes through a harmonious integration of visual and verbal storytelling techniques.

Chapter 7 of the thesis concludes the thesis ultimately by wrapping up the argument and the findings of this thesis. It retraces what the thesis has done and briefly explains each step as a last remark. The works cited page states the sources that helped to build this thesis. Lastly, the “List of Figures” sections on pages V and VI show the page numbers of the figures used during the examination of *Maus* and “A Contract with God.”



2. THE COMIC AND GRAPHIC NOVEL

In *On Literature* (2004), Umberto Eco says, “There are non-material forces, which cannot be measured precisely, but which nonetheless carry *weight*” (7). Literature can be considered one of these things that cannot be defined or measured with bold lines, which does not mean it is bland. Being part of the human experience for so long in various forms, literature fulfills our needs for enjoyment, enlightenment, and education and enables us to pass the time productively (Eco 7). As it changes forms over time, from paper to electronic media, from whole text to visually supported text, literature follows us through our journey on this Earth.

Even though the name literature emerged from *littera*, a Latin word meaning “a letter of the alphabet” (“Literature”), it is possible to see this name is not inclusive of all the forms literature comes to us. Non-written forms of literature existed in the past, such as oral literature or forms of literature that came before the creation of written forms. Thus, the word literature as a letter or word does not necessarily mean “words on a page,” but rather “the craft of writing” (“Literature”). While coming up with a script for a movie, planning out an animation series to tell a story, or constructing a video game we use a certain way of writing, a planning to be able to do it. When this process exceeds pleasure, becomes a representation or a criticism of a value from our world, it leans into an artistic path and becomes literary. It is this “artistic merit” that makes literature literary, which usually comes to a writer naturally, and thus cannot be forced (“Literature”).

It is possible to approach literature from different perspectives and attribute different values to it. One explanation that might do such a vast form of art is to say that it is “consumed for its own sake” (Eco 8). By explaining literature and its purpose

in these words, Eco pays attention to warning us about not mixing it with casual activities, since it is filled with more uses other than simply being entertaining or educative. He starts by stating the ability of literature to keep language alive. Both for language and culture, literature might be seen as a time capsule, since they are alive, constantly reshaping themselves with time, literature is a good tool to go back and see the state of society, as well as influencing the evolution process of both, as well as strengthening the identity and the feeling of having a community (Eco 8).

By considering Eco's statements, we can see the impact literature has in our lives; the characters and their stories we encounter become our truth and experience. Eco words this point clearly by stating "[t]hese literary entities are here among us" (15) and adding how we learn about them, digest the stories of these characters, emotionally connect with them, and therefore make them a part of our lives. We transfer these literary entities into paintings, animation, games, movies and analyze them, and get inspired by them. This impactful nature of literature and its characters might be considered one of its memorable, effective, appealing, and strong points.

Eco points out the unchangeable nature of literary stories by stating how we cannot affect where the story goes or what will be the character's destiny. The connection between Eco's reflections on the unchangeable nature of literary narratives and the evolution of graphic novels and comics reveals an insight into storytelling's role in human experience. Eco emphasizes that, much like our lives, literary stories unfold in ways beyond our control, with inevitable events such as death serving as "repressive lessons" that mirror the unpredictability of existence (19). This thought resonates with the historical development of graphic novels and comics, using visual storytelling to capture complex human experiences.

It is possible to see graphic novels and comics filling the shelves in bookstores in the last decade; they have come a long way to reach this status. We see ancient civilization's use of images to tell stories or record something, such as the hieroglyphics of Egypt, or even languages that were built on visuals, such as the Chinese writing system. From ancient hieroglyphics to modern comics, the medium has evolved to convey narratives that often reflect the same themes of fate found in traditional literature. Even though using visuals as the text or a part of it has been a part of human life for so long, the form of comics we are familiar with today in the 21st century was not developed too long ago; it emerged in the 19th century in England, with the first regular comic protagonist being Ally Sloper (Saraceni 1), in addition to The Yellow Kid being considered the first comics character in American literature (Bezci 252). The emergence of comic characters like Ally Sloper and The Yellow Kid illustrates how this form has matured, yet it continues to grapple with the same existential questions that Eco highlights—showing that whether through text or images, storytelling remains a powerful means to explore the human condition amidst forces beyond our control.

After gaining more popularity, comics regularly appeared in newspapers, which even led to collections of them becoming popular as comic books. Around the end of 1940, the genres usually named crime and horror gained more popularity (Saraceni 2), eventually leading comics to get negative reactions due to the claims of the leading people—especially children—into emulating these behaviors. These accusations—though the claims of Doctor Fredric Wertham were never proved right—led to the publishing of the “Comics Codes,” which depicted what they could represent or not, and how should they do it (Lent 269-279), which can be found in the book *Pulp Demons* (1999). This censorship period gave birth to the Comics Code Authority to

provide an internal regulation about the subject. It should be noted here that all this censorship progress can be seen as the root of the stigma stuck on comics and any visually supported text form being for kids. This is due to getting inspected so much and carefully crafted without any possibility of serious topics emerging, eventually leaving no room for creativity.

Around the 1960s, a new name, underground comics also referred to as “comix” emerged as a reaction to the purified version of comics, thus the use of “x” in the name suggesting anything obscene (Saraceni 3). This reaction helped comics to gain their individualistic, artistic value back instead of being filtered products, eventually leading them to be published in book forms (Groensteen 30). After comics got their glory back, graphic novels started showing themselves in a form that is similar to what we have as graphic novels today, Eisner’s *A Contract with God*—which features four graphic short stories—is the first graphic novel to be published in America (Saraceni 3). Unlike comics, graphic novels deal with in-depth stories; usually not fitting in a single genre and not being too short. The stories presented in graphic novels involve a chain of events, intellectual discussions, and use of setting which are the elements of a plot structure required for a good novel. Unlike underground comics that evolved as a reaction, graphic novels leaned into literature more with their in-depth quality of carrying literary elements (Groensteen 35).

The idea of graphic novels providing a richer and more “sophisticated” (Bezci 256) approach—while comics were considered a childish one—was strengthened by the release of Spiegelman’s *Maus* between 1985 and 1992 (Saraceni 3). As for why the difference between comics and graphic novels is important, the naming of comics and graphic novels can be shown as a detail that has a big impact on their reputation.

Due to evoking a connection to being funny—which was the case for comics at the beginning for having humorous themes and images as well as being called funnies from time to time—comics were attached to the reputation of being just for fun (Groensteen 40; Kaplan 2-5). Thus, it is possible to say that the name graphic novel helped the visual form of literature to take a positive step toward being considered a part of literature. This new label is not only useful for their fate but also necessary in some cases; considering how wrong it may sound to call a work like *Maus*—which portrays the terrible effects of the Holocaust—something that invokes the meaning funny (Saraceni 4).

All these points about the relation between comics and being associated with comedy—or being childish—should not imply that comedy is bad, or something to be looked down upon. It is only an important distinction in examples like *Maus* when the aim of the work is not to entertain humorously. But it should also be kept in mind that this labeling is not necessarily a problem in every language; such as comics being called *grafik roman* in Turkish—which can be roughly translated as drawing novel—not suggesting any historical connection to being comical.

While talking about comics' relation to comical elements in the past, it should not be forgotten that both comics and graphic novels come in a variety of genres; they can both talk about different elements and are not limited to a single path. It might be because of this that there are still struggles of labeling the two properly, while people might see—as Saraceni agrees—the term graphic novel only as a marketing label to push visual including forms of literature towards academic fields, educated audiences, and adults (4). Bezci, however, highlights that even though the marketing aspect cannot be denied, graphic novels' help in taking comics to a literary step cannot be

ignored due to the new qualities they introduced to the visual form of text (256-7). All these confusions and differences in opinions might be taken as a reason to use a more objective approach to analysis; leaving the stigmas and gossip behind, and only focusing on how the work can prove itself worthy to be analyzed in detail.

It is important to take a look at how graphic novels make use of two separate modes in unity—which is a quality New Criticism searches for—by altering their default functions slightly. It is easy to notice that combining more than one way of expression can bring out a wider range of possibilities. But this might also lead to more challenges since storytelling through art and the analysis of it is a separate form and area of study on its own. Apart from this challenge, graphic novels present us with a whole new level of storytelling, by using the different abilities of visual and verbal expression.

According to Kukkonen's research, G. E. Lessing talks about the difference between visual and written art by stating that "Pictorial art unfolds through its use of space" whereas "[v]erbal art...unfolds through time" (Kukkonen 37). With this statement, Lessing explains the stationary nature of images; if there is a picture of a person fishing, it makes the audience imagine what happened before, what is happening at the moment, and what will happen next altogether, eventually making them imagine the person cast the line to be able to stay in that position, and probably reel it next to catch a fish or fail. With this, Lessing also states that they can only provide visible actions (Kukkonen 37). On the other hand, verbal expression which unfolds with time, can put forward things that are invisible to the eye; such as the character's thoughts, feelings as well as the speech word by word.

To these points, Kukkonen adds how graphic novels—she talks about comics but these qualities are shared among both due to the similar and sometimes same format—give new functions to images and words. Since the images are connected and usually positioned next to each other as panels that provide sequences—or chain of events—they gain a “temporal” and dynamic quality (Kukkonen 38). With these more detail-oriented scenes in smaller portions, images can now provide flashbacks to provide us with the character’s thoughts as they occur and make use of focalization. Words also feel a change in function and be able to use space like pictures, since they are positioned inside speech bubbles or panels. It should also be noted that since words gain an imagery quality within graphic novels, the use of fonts and even hand-written styles gain a visual, “emotional quality” (Kukkonen 38).

As another point related to the qualities presented, Kukkonen highlights the significance of a “holistic analysis” (38). With this term analyzing the work as a whole without dividing it into elements so much is the focus. Since graphic novels use both the words and the images in unity, separating them and trying to get a meaning alone might be challenging, or even pointless in some cases. This does not mean they lack meaning alone, but they provide complete meaning together in harmony. To put it in different words, “each picture tells a story, yet not all aspects or elements of a picture do so, and a literary graphic novel attempts to maintain a healthy tension between these two forces” (Baetens 80). They are carefully crafted in this way for this reason, which should not be ignored.

In *Türkiye’de Karikatür, Çizgi Roman ve Çizgi Film* (1993), Üstün Alsaç emphasizes the integral relationship between text and imagery in comics and graphic novels. He asserts that “the most important feature of comics is the relationship

between picture and text and even their unity” (Alsaç 14 translated from Turkish to English by the author of this thesis). This observation highlights how the interplay of visual and verbal elements contributes to the narrative structure of the medium. Alsaç further elaborates on this concept by asserting that comics possess a distinctive iconography and are imbued with a symbolic language. This unique visual lexicon allows for nuanced storytelling, where symbols and images convey complex meanings that may not be easily articulated through text alone. The combination of these elements not only enhances the narrative depth but also facilitates a more immersive experience for the reader, enabling them to engage with the material on multiple levels. Thus, Alsaç’s analysis underscores the significance of the symbiotic relationship between text and illustration in shaping the identity and impact of comics as a distinct art form.

This harmony created by the usage of both the visual and the verbal forms of expression, however, is not always seen as a positive aspect. Due to their quality of using a little bit of both forms, graphic novels, and comics are often criticized for not making good use of either (Kukkonen 41). To answer this point of view, Kukkonen suggests “not [to] remain tied to these assumptions” so that we can make a proper analysis (41). This thought aligns with New Criticism; focusing on the work without taking the risk of judging it due to stigma. It is also important that language, culture, and many things connected to it like literature are being shaped by time, which brings differences along. We see movies, music, animation, and even video games as storytelling devices as new forms are likely to emerge anytime.

The newer forms of storytelling mediums including graphic novels, movies, animations, and video games should not be overlooked as literary devices. Graphic

novels are one example of this subject, presenting stories and messages by using verbal and visual elements. Graphic novels are equipped with the ability to show the story unfold in pictures. The facial expressions of the characters, the environment surrounding them, and even minor details that include characters' clothes and behavior presented with illustrations enable graphic novels to cater to the sense of seeing. The feeling of witnessing the story created by the visual ability of graphic novels creates a sense of immersion that is not possible in prose.

The new generation of the 21st century shows great interest in literary elements when combined with mediums that target the many senses humans are equipped with. Alongside graphic novels, studies of video games are gaining recognition in the academic field. The “Digital Games as Cultural and Literary Narratives” conference held on May 16-17, 2024 by Hacettepe University² can be shown as an example. In this conference, participants presented and discussed the literary aspects provided in video games. Studies in the conference included the textual analysis of games; analysis of environmental storytelling; presence of irony, and representation; use of creative fiction; culture and gender studies, and so on. The presence of this study and the interest shown in it is seen to support the claims revolving around the change of interest of new generations. It might be a modern challenge to interest the new generation in consuming literature in prose form, thus, studies of literature become appealing to the new generation thanks to mediums that appeal to a variety of senses that present immersion.

² “Digital Games as Cultural and Literary Narratives.” *Announcements*, Hacettepe University American Studies Department, 2024, asdturkey.hacettepe.edu.tr/en.

In *Comics and Sequential Art: Principles and Practices* (1985), Will Eisner addresses a distinctive characteristic that sets comics and graphic novels apart from other visual literary forms, such as theater and cinema. He notes that, unlike these mediums, which inherently require the collaborative efforts of numerous specialists due to their technological demands, comics have traditionally been the product of a single creator (128). This observation underscores the similarities between graphic novels and prose writing, while simultaneously highlighting a notable distinction between graphic novels and other visual literature. Eisner's analysis suggests that the solitary authorship of graphic novels allows for a more cohesive artistic vision, similar to that found in prose literature. This individualistic approach enables creators to maintain a unified narrative voice and stylistic consistency throughout their work. Consequently, while graphic novels share certain characteristics with other visual forms of storytelling, such as the use of imagery to convey narrative, they retain a unique identity rooted in the singular vision of their authors. This aspect not only differentiates graphic novels from collaborative visual arts but also reinforces their status as a legitimate literary form in their own right.

In *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (1993), Scott McCloud states that “All the things we experience in life can be separated into two realms, the realm of the concept and the realm of the senses” (39). McCloud hypothesizes that the conceptual world encompasses identities, ideas, and emotions that cannot be directly perceived through the senses. These are abstract notions that exist in our minds, such as philosophies or identities. For example, concepts like love or justice are part of this realm because they cannot be seen or touched; they are understood intellectually and emotionally. In contrast, the sensual world refers to everything we can experience through our senses including what we can see, hear, touch, taste, and smell. This

includes physical objects and direct experiences. McCloud emphasizes that our sensory experiences shape our understanding of the world around us, allowing us to interact with it more tangibly (39-40).

McCloud illustrates how comics bridge these two realms. The images in comics serve as “received information,” providing immediate visual cues that evoke feelings or ideas without requiring extensive decoding. In contrast, words represent “perceived information,” which demands time and cognitive effort to interpret (49). This dynamic interplay allows for a richer narrative experience, as readers engage with both visual and textual elements simultaneously. Thus, comics and graphic novels can be seen as the pioneers of virtual storytelling that goes hand in hand with verbal text. The use of imagery and text juxtaposed together on pages makes the stories not only readable but also visible. This creates a brand-new way to consume literature and a variety of possibilities to use literary elements effectively and interestingly.

Scott McCloud’s examination of the conceptual and sensual worlds highlights how comics function as a unique form of communication that blends visual art and language. By understanding these realms, readers can appreciate how comics convey complex ideas through simple imagery while simultaneously engaging their sensory experiences. This duality enriches storytelling and fosters deeper connections between creators and audiences.

As a hybrid form, graphic novels use symbols and point them out in illustrations and verbal text, present new ways to create tension in the storyline with contrasting colors, and present irony and paradox in its visual and verbal layers. While making use of its visual and verbal elements homogenously, graphic novels achieve

an organic unity as a hybrid form. Images and text work together to achieve the goal of telling a story by creating harmony.



3. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND TO NEW CRITICISM

New Criticism is a literary theory that emphasizes close reading and the internal elements of a text, such as structure, imagery, symbolism, and language while minimizing the influence of external factors like authorial intent or historical context. This approach allows for a focused analysis of how various literary devices interact to create meaning within the work itself. Applying New Criticism to *Maus* by Art Spiegelman and “A Contract with God” by Will Eisner is particularly fitting, as both graphic novels employ a rich frame of visual and textual elements that enhance their narratives. In *Maus*, the use of animal illustrations for the characters not only serves as a powerful symbol of identity but also presents complex themes of trauma and memory. Similarly, Eisner’s integration of detailed illustrations with elements of dialogue creates a multi-layered exploration of the human condition. By examining these works through the lens of New Criticism, their artistic and literary qualities create harmony to convey profound messages, ultimately taking their place as significant contributions to the literary canon.

Making its appearance after World War I, New Criticism is needed when analyzing the work as it is; only looking at what the text itself puts forward, without focusing on any external information about it similar to Russian Formalism. As a difference, Formalism is more focused on the structure of a work, even though both of these criticism forms lead to a close reading of the text, searching for the meaning in the text (Thompson 7). To have a better understanding of the thought process behind these critical approaches, looking at their history briefly is needed. Though it has a broad branch of elements and history to look at, it is more relevant to this thesis to look at the roots of Russian Formalism that lie in the studies of symbolism first. Alongside

other important names, Andrei Bely mostly focused on understanding how the human mind works, and how it should be applied to critical approaches in literature, as Thompson states.

According to Thompson, Bely takes Kant as the foundation of making this thought to be able to emerge, and claims that our mind is symbol-focused; we comprehend our world through symbolic knowledge. Thus, he suggests that literary criticism should consider the impact of symbols. He also points out the meaning of the word symbol which has its roots in Greek as “to join together” (Thompson 12), which adds to his claim that human thought and perception are a combination of form and content that is shaped and joined by symbols (Thompson 12). Thompson emphasized that with his focus on form, Bely touches upon the fact that artistic creation comes in various forms and is self-sufficient in delivering a message. Thompson mainly introduces Bely to be one of the few who managed to properly execute his argument. He highlights that other names struggled to find a proper, rational argument to put forward, as well as failing to perform in works to exemplify it. Thus, he concludes that Bely was usually discredited for his works on Symbolism regardless of being the one to put well-built studies to the front.

Thompson moves forward to introduce others who influenced Formalism but rarely got recognized for it; the important names who shaped Formalism include A. A. Potebnja who was a philologist and a folklorist and Veselovkij. (17) According to Potebnja “[p]oetry is a form of thinking in images, the ‘shape’ of which is dependent on the linguistic features of a given language” (17). This thought however—similar to what Bely experienced—caused a reaction: Names like Viktor Shklovsky and Formalists in general disagreed with Potebnja due to including elements such as sound

in poetic writings, as well as pointing out that imagery not being the only way to deliver a message. It is possible to say that this negative reaction to his thoughts was mainly because of a misunderstanding of the image. To simplify his thoughts, we can say that narration is like an expression that compresses many thoughts, symbols, and meanings into a single image. Thompson explains that by making a connection between the image and verbal text, Potebnja aimed to point out the action as well; not necessarily meaning stationary images of things. It should be noted that the understanding of the word image here mainly refers to “logical concepts” in general (17-19).

The Formalists, as a whole, only achieved proper recognition with the activities of certain scholars including Sklovsky, Eikhenbaum, Jakubinsky, and Brik after they built the roots of *Opojazz* (*The Society for the Study of Poetic Language*) around 1919. Their studies continued after *Opojazz* discontinued, in addition to Zirmunsky introducing new understandings of Formalism such as the comparison of “The Classical poet” and “The Romantic poet” (23). As Thompson delivers, Zirmunsky’s depiction of “The Classical poet” is an abstract one; he manages to keep himself and the work separated from each other. “The Romantic poet,” on the other hand, puts a messier form of work forward by mixing his expression into his work, mostly focusing on himself rather than the quality of the work (25). As it can be seen from his view of the two, Zirmunsky approved the type of work that does not depend on personal or historical elements but exists as its own. Among other significant names, Thompson lists Sklovsky who introduced new terms such as “strategy,” “defamiliarization,” “defacilitation,” “retardation” and the “staircase structure”; Tynyanov who focused on the structure similar to Jakobson; Eikhenbaum who claimed that Formalism should be seen separately from other theories (26-29).

Moving forward with how the ideas presented in Formalism evolved and resulted in altered forms of criticism, we can find New Criticism. Emerging around the 1930s-40s in the United States, New Criticism is a response to the current understanding of literary criticism that failed to separate the context from literature, like the cultural, political, or biographical aspects. Within New Criticism, we have names like I. A. Richards, T. E. Hulme, T.S. Eliot, and; J. C. Ransom and the Kenyon Review who focused on the close textual analysis in the U.S. According to Thompson's evaluation of the subject, it is possible to divide New Criticism into two points—highlighting the fact that it is hard to classify New Criticism as a movement—the first point is that New Criticism is more like an “atmosphere” (35) within which close study of a literary text is made without considering external elements. This first point developed due to an appeal towards language philosophy—which showed itself in European works as well—around the late 19th and early 20th centuries as well as some Symbolists studying the poetic language. Thompson states that when this point is followed, it is possible to say that various countries had their versions of ‘new’ critics, with many American critics associated with the movement; and it is even possible to classify some of the Russian Formalists as “New Critical” (33-35).

The second point can be named the “Ransom group” (35)—whose studies built the key principles of New Criticism—due to its association with J. C. Ransom. This group and their studies were influenced by T. E. Hulme who saw poetry as an “intuitive [but] time accurate and precise description of finite things” (35); I. A. Richards who focused on the technical aspect of criticism; and T. S. Eliot who saw that the aspects of literature pass “beyond technical description and pragmatism” (35). As Thompson adds, even though this group put forward a variety of theories and practiced different methods which makes them a not-so-homogenous group, it is possible to say that the

base of their studies was united. Apart from the Ransom group, New Criticism shows itself in separate branches in North America as New Criticism, in England as “practical criticism” and in France as “French New Criticism” (Okçul translated From Turkish into English by the author of this thesis 19). Similarly to those of the Ransom group, these branches’ studies are united; they are focused on the meaning and the structure of a text. All these studies merge to form the idea that New Criticism had the aim of detecting how successful the text is in delivering its concern; and its message.

It should be noted that the already mentioned names like Richards with his studies of “practical criticism” and “meaning of meaning,” and Eliot in addition to F. R. Leavis and William Empson are the important contributors to the New Criticism’s base in England. Whereas the names follow John Crow Ransom—of the Ransom group—Allen Tate, Robert Penn Warren, and Cleanth Brooks in America, under Anglo-American criticism. While Ransom states that “the new criticism must start with Mr. Richards” in *The New Criticism* (1941 3), Okçul states Ransom’s *The New Criticism* (1941) and his essays in *The World’s Body* (1938) as the “hypothetic manifestos” that led New Criticism to its growth (translated from Turkish into English by the author of this thesis 23).

In the field of literary analysis, New Criticism offers a framework that emphasizes the text itself as a self-contained composition. The text itself refers to focusing on the text only by leaving the historical details and the author’s life outside; while it should not be forgotten that text refers to the whole work, including all the communicative elements a work uses such as the sounds, sentences, images, visuals and so on. This approach encourages close reading which enables the analysis to be focused on the text; it takes the text as a whole, mainly focusing on the literary aspect

of the work provided by the structure and the context of the text (Searle 1). Close reading enables the examination of the text's language, structure, and literary devices while dismissing the intentional and affective fallacy that can blur the meaning. Intentional fallacy refers to the fault of putting an effort into comprehending the author's intention of writing; affective fallacy refers to the fault of taking the response the text creates on the reader into consideration (Elton 10).

To put it in different words, a proper approach that uses New Criticism to a work should be done by eliminating the effect and the intention of writing; and only dealing with how the text itself can connect the dots, provide a story and meaning—in addition to the literary devices—in a harmonious way (Elton 6-7). Thus, by focusing on the text only, the deeper meanings and connections that might otherwise go unnoticed can be uncovered and understood properly. From the framework of New Criticism, several key concepts are employed to analyze and argue graphic novels' usage of literary devices in this thesis. These concepts include irony, paradox, tension, symbol, metaphor, and unity. Each element plays a crucial role in enhancing the understanding of the narrative and its themes.

Tension arises from conflicting elements within the narrative of a work, leading to character development and plot progression. It helps the work to have an element of action that can be generated as the character's conflict with the environment, society, and the inner conflict the character can experience. The visual aspects provided by graphic novels enhance this tension with the use of dynamic panel layouts and contrasting colors³ can evoke feelings of conflict and urgency. Irony is “a meaning contrary to the one it professes to give,” which eventually presents a contrast

³ The use of contrasting colors is present even in black-and-white works. See figure 24 for the use of colors to deliver tension.

between what is expected and received (Elton 6, 24). Irony becomes a powerful tool in graphic novels. The ability to include a visual representation of the contrast can enable this element to be more straightforward to notice. Often confused with irony, a paradox enriches the narrative by presenting a conflicting truth. It is a “self-contradictory...statement which on closer inspection is found to contain a truth” (Bozkurt 104).

Symbols become immersive with graphic novels. Thanks to the use of visuals, symbols in graphic novels serve as a tool for deeper meaning. As stated in the glossary of New Criticism, “[t]he symbol has various appeals, and possesses the power of a generating principle” (Elton 40). A recurring image can symbolize an idea, continuously reminding the reader of a present theme or meaning. When combined with textual elements that add to this theme, the symbolism becomes more pronounced. Thus, the visual representation reinforces the textual message, creating a richer narrative. Similar to symbols, metaphors are also equipped with illustrative functions (Brooks 232). A metaphor connects dissimilar elements, explaining one thing as another. Thus, it can convey complex ideas in shorter depictions and even suggest imagery.

Ultimately, unity functions as a connective thread among these concepts. In the analysis of graphic novels, this thesis argues that the harmonious use of text and visuals creates a cohesive narration. Among the names mentioned in this chapter, Cleanth Brooks⁴ stresses the concept of unity—unity, organic unity, or harmony—the most. Organic unity refers to the connection and unity of a work’s elements within. From the structure to the sounds of the words, and the images—in the case of graphic novels

⁴ His ideas and contribution regarding New Criticism are mainly presented in *The Well Wrought Urn* (1947).

and comics—form a harmonious unity. It suggests “that the [text] is valuable in so far as it organizes feelings and other elements into a coherent and functional whole” (Elton 6), Which can be simplified as each element being connected as well the whole text, all contributing to the value and the meaning of the work. The elements used within a work such as a plot, characters, setting, and images—a set of objects and chain of elements in short—are used to express thought (Elton 29). This concept emphasizes the usage of the harmonious elements mentioned to transfer the thought and the emotion that come with it to the work.

Each element mentioned above—tension, irony, paradox, symbol, and metaphor—works hand in hand to convey complex themes and messages. The “symbol-patterns” and the conflict-structures” that include irony and paradox are mentioned alongside tension as the connected elements of New Criticism that pursue unity. By using New Criticism as its analytical tool, this thesis argues the use of these elements in unity in *Maus* and “A Contract with God” without distraction from these two works, solely focusing on their content. This approach allows for an exploration of how graphic novels utilize language and imagery to create meaningful narratives. The next chapters are going to expand this argument by focusing on the usage of these elements in *Maus* and “A Contract with God,” and point out each of them.

4. THEMATIC PARALLELS IN *MAUS* AND “A CONTRACT WITH GOD”

Art Spiegelman's *Maus* and Will Eisner's *A Contract with God* are seminal works in the graphic novel genre, both exploring complex themes of identity, trauma, and the human experience mainly within the context of Jewish identity through innovative narrative techniques. Both works are often credited with elevating the status of comics to a serious literary form. Eisner's compilation book combining four short stories *A Contract with God*, published in 1978, is frequently recognized as one of the first graphic novels, establishing the genre and demonstrating that comics could convey profound themes and narratives beyond traditional superhero stories (D. Royal 150-2). In contrast, *Maus*, serialized from 1980 to 1991 and published in book form in 1986, further popularized the graphic novel format by addressing the Holocaust through a personal lens. Eisner's work reflects himself with Fremme Hersh's experiences as a Jewish immigrant and explores themes of faith, loss, and existential questioning through the lives of tenement residents in New York. Similarly, *Maus* recounts Spiegelman's father's experiences during the Holocaust, thus both works conjoin human experience with broader historical events.

Eisner's use of visual metaphors and panel layouts in “A Contract with God” innovatively conveys emotional depth and complexity. Spiegelman similarly utilizes a visual symbol, depicting Jews as mice and Germans as cats to illustrate the brutal realities of the Holocaust while also exploring his relationship with his father. Both *Maus* and *A Contract with God* have had significant cultural impacts. Eisner's work laid the foundational groundwork for future graphic novels, influencing not only artists but also how comics are perceived in literary circles (Weiß 74). Spiegelman's *Maus* achieved critical approval, becoming the first graphic novel to win a Pulitzer Prize in

1992, further supporting the medium's legitimacy as a form of literature ("Beyond Words"; Doherty 69).

The themes in *Maus* and "A Contract with God" deal with similar subjects. In "A Contract with God," Frimme Hersh battles with the death of his adopted daughter, Rachele, which leads him to question his faith and the very nature of his relationship with God. This theme of grief and trauma is echoed in *Maus*, where Spiegelman depicts the lasting impact of the Holocaust on his father, Vladek, and how this trauma affects their relationship. Both narratives illustrate how loss can lead to the feeling of defeat and a crisis of faith. In *Maus*, the trauma experienced by Vladek affects his son, Art, illustrating how historical trauma continues to exist through generations. Similarly, Hersh's transformation from a religious man to a bitter businessman after his loss reflects how personal tragedy can alter one's identity and relationships. Both narratives imply that trauma does not exist in isolation but rather influences future generations.

Regarding the cultural context, both *Maus* and "A Contract with God" look into Jewish identity, exploring how cultural heritage shapes personal experiences. Eisner's portrayal of immigrant life in the tenements reflects a portrayal of Jewish-American history. In "A Contract with God" the tenement is a metaphor for the struggles of immigrant life and the socio-economic challenges the characters face. It represents both community and the feeling of imprisonment, embodying the hopes and hardships of those living in its walls through the lens of Frimme Hersh in that particular short story. This exploration serves to illustrate both individual and collective struggles within their communities. At the same time, Spiegelman depicts races as different animals in *Maus* to comment on ethnic identity within historical trauma. Studies

analyzing *Maus* through the lens of ethnography emphasize this point further. For example, Rosemary Hathaway argues that *Maus* transcends traditional graphic novel classifications and serves as a postmodern ethnography. She states that *Maus* is “concerned with depicting the complex relationships among personal histories and larger ‘official’ histories” (249). This categorization stems from Spiegelman’s exploration of his father’s Holocaust experiences intertwined with his narrative, which complicates the straightforward retelling of history.





5. ART SPIEGELMAN'S *MAUS*

Born in 1948, Art Spiegelman is not only a writer, but also a cartoonist who is also considered a historian, magazine founder, and critic (Banita and Konstantinou 1). Thus, Spiegelman is also responsible for the illustrations in his book, making it fully his creation. Spiegelman drew rats for Jews which gives the novel its name, cats for Germans, pigs for Polish, and dogs for Americans in *Maus*, which raised negative reactions, especially from the Polish and the Jews, due to the pick of animals that are usually associated with negative attributes (Bezci 260). The reason why representing human characters with animals has multiple functions, will be discussed in the analysis below.

Considered a “striking work,” *Maus* consists of two books first published as part of *Raw* and *Funny Animals* magazines in 1973 and 1986 (Bezci 258). The book is constructed around the Holocaust; during his visit to his father Vladek—who is a Holocaust survivor—Art—the writer himself—expresses his wish to turn his father’s experience and story into a book. Thus, he convinces his father to tell his stories as he writes them down. This is why *Maus*’ multidimensional features and layers can be seen in different details. It shows the past and present at the same time in addition to talking about both the historical events of the Holocaust that Vladek tells and the casual chats between Art and Vladek that provide us with father-son dynamics.

Maus, a significant work in graphic literature (Banita and Konstantinou 1), weaves the Holocaust narrative through the father-son dynamic between Art and his father Vladek, who recounts his survival experiences. This multidimensional storytelling aligns with New Criticism’s focus on unity and literary devices,

emphasizing how the visual and verbal text's elements interact to convey deeper meanings without external distractions.

New Criticism highlights the importance of focusing on the work and aims to analyze it by looking at how well it can present itself. While doing that, New Criticism uses concepts like the unity of all the elements used within the work and searching for literary devices like paradox and irony. Even though its aim seems clear on paper, New Criticism acknowledges that it lacks a singular, definitive methodology for its application to literary works (Thompson 33-4); which might be the reason why, it has not been applied too often as a literary criticism method since it puts forward a challenge. This, however, should not be seen as a flaw of the theory; the ambiguity of the application method occurs mainly due to every work having its unique way of using elements, which means one method applied to a work might not work well on another. Its approach allows for a clearer assessment of works like *Maus*, which reflect the complexities of human experience and the unpredictable nature of life, similar to how graphic novels utilize both visual and verbal storytelling to explore profound themes.

The same element can convey different ideas across various works. For instance, if a piece is intended to glorify war and the necessity of victory at any cost, the violence depicted may be interpreted positively, even though it is typically regarded as a negative aspect. This illustrates why New Criticism excludes external factors that do not originate from the text itself. By doing so, New Criticism allows for a clearer assessment of the work's perspective without distractions. New Criticism also emphasizes the multiple element's connections to each other, as well as the chain of events and the layers within a work. Graphic novels bring a new level to this due to

combining visuals and words; making the study of both in unity necessary. This additional element comes with a challenge in the analysis process—mainly due to the criticism of art being a field on its own⁵—it also creates a wider platform for expression. Considering these elements, this thesis will develop the analysis of *Maus* and “A Contract with God” by pointing out the specific ways the words and images work to deliver their story. This chapter of the thesis is going to deal with the elements of irony, paradox, tension, symbol and metaphor in *Maus*, in addition to arguing the details on the cover of the book and highlighting the use of frame narrative.

The central idea leading to the creation of *Maus* is presented with a paradox. There is a tension between Spiegelman’s belief that his father Vladek’s story of surviving the Holocaust is worth telling, and Vladek’s unwillingness to share his traumatic experiences in detail. The paradox arises from the difficulty of representing the unspeakable horrors of the Holocaust. In other words, the representation of trauma has a built-in paradox; the unspeakable needs to be expressed (Omer Salahi 1867-72). This element is present throughout the book but can be seen more clearly in some sections. Throughout *Maus*, “...the concept of ‘history’ has become and is excruciating for Vladek” (Chute 203). Thus, Vladek constantly tries to distract himself with something else as he is sharing his stories of the Holocaust. At the beginning of the book when Art first asks for his father to tell his stories, Vladek tells him to do it while pedaling, explaining that it is good for his health. These details are essential elements to present the traumas and inner conflict Vladek is experiencing; even though it might be good for him, the main reason why he constantly works with something

⁵ To put forward a proper study that can analyze the visual and verbal aspects of graphic novels together, an artist’s views and findings were consulted throughout the analysis of *Maus* and “A Contract with God” in this thesis.

else while talking about the Holocaust can be taken as Vladek trying to distract himself from the pain, from the possible flashback of negative emotions he experienced, and probably still battles with. All the activities, the distractions aid him in his purpose of regulating himself emotionally due to the struggles that come with sharing trauma.



Fig. 1 (Spiegelman Maus 12)⁶

Additionally, paradoxes within culture, such as the contrast between the ideal family image and the reality of a dysfunctional family are also presented in *Maus* (Vianes). The pattern of Spiegelman's strained relationship with his father is presented in the book from the very start. As the book starts, we see a two-page-long preface before the cover of the first chapter. This section, as it is separated from the rest of the work presents a scene from 1958 during which Art was around ten years old. In this section, it is seen that he is left behind by his friends while roller skating when his skate becomes loose and falls. After being abandoned, he approaches his father who is working on something outside, sawing wood.

⁶ In this scene, we see a number on Vladek's arm. They do not talk about it; it's highlighted for the reader to see the details of how Jews were numbered during that period.



Fig. 2 (Spiegelman *Maus* 4)

Even though Art is crying, which is portrayed both by the image and the speech bubble showing an onomatopoeia “snk, snf” to represent his cry; his father asks him for help on his work. This scene is followed by him only mentioning his crying when he is not helping properly because of it, as he says “Why do you cry, Artie? Hold better on the wood” (5). Vladek’s emotional unavailability towards his son is shown in this scene.

This section continues with Art explaining the reason why he is crying, mentioning his friends, which results in his father starting a speech about friends; “[i]f you lock them together in a room with no food for a week [,] then you could see what it is, friends!” which is followed by “...” that indicates that he continues talking about the subject after the scene. This short preface serves as a summary of the two examples of paradox mentioned above: It shows a father-son dynamic in which the son seeks sympathy and attention while the father is distant and serious, and it suggests the trauma such war puts people through, which is seen in the father’s cold behavior. These two aspects are presented within the work and can be understood from the texts presented, without needing to step outside of the book.

Since this section is a scene from the past showing Art’s childhood, it serves the purpose of frame narrative. These layers and presenting a story within a story are

used throughout the book showing casual scenes between Art and his father. Their regular discussions that are happening in the present⁷, featuring both their experiences and thoughts and the past talk about Vladek's life before and during the Holocaust. With the father-son experience and the unhealthiness of it presented, Spiegelman enables us to see the effects of war through relationships. Throughout *Maus*, instead of making the point clear by using violence—which can be easier to do with a visual work since it can be striking and disturbing to picture bloodshed—Spiegelman shows how war and the traumas that come with it affect the relationships. Even as a person who did not experience the war himself, Art feels it through his father.

On *Maus*' cover, the title of the work *Maus* is capitalized and styled in a font that looks like a blood splatter on the wall when combined with the red color choice which enables us to see how words can gain a visual quality. Below that there is a Swastika symbol used by the Nazi Party⁸ with the cat Hitler placed in the middle of it. Below the symbol and the Hitler image, two rats—one big and one small, which might be a couple, or a parent and child, as well the possibility of them being the characters from the book—sit with their backs turned to the wall, staring right into the reader's eyes. Circled with a bright white frame, the Swastika symbol shines on them, which might give the impression that they are being chased and cornered by the Nazi forces, holding onto each other in fear.

⁷ Present here is the timeline that Art is spending with his father to listen to his experiences in life and Holocaust; thus, Art's present.

⁸ It should be noted that the Swastika symbol has been used by other cultures, usually representing prosperity before the Nazi Party appropriating it for their use ("Swastika").

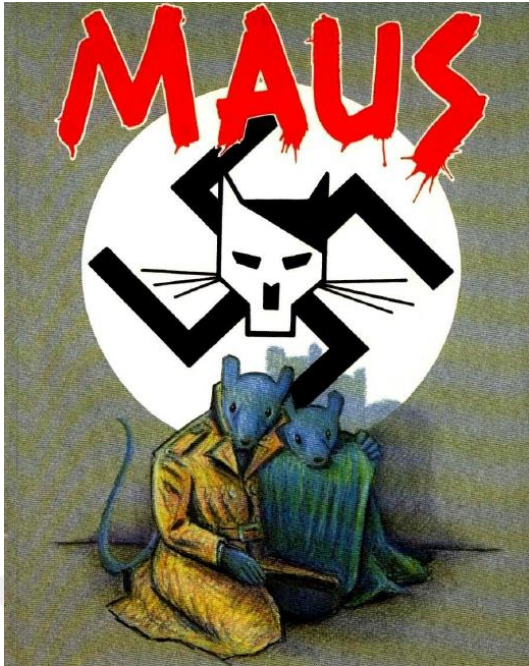


Fig. 3 (Spiegelman *Maus* 1)

This cover image combined with the title presents us an introduction to what the book is about; including a son and a father, Jews being drawn as rats and the fear they had to carry, Germans being drawn as cats, the Holocaust, and the bloodshed that came with it.

The quote by Hitler on a blank page follows the cover page; “[t]he Jews are undoubtedly a race, but they are not human” (3). Due to this work’s aim at showing the hardships Jews—and many others who stayed by their side—have been through, Spiegelman’s choice of using animals for them is a clever approach. This might be seen as a way of indicating that, even as non-humans, even as rats, what these people had to suffer was intense, and cruel. Thus, making Hitler’s statement an unsuccessful argument as he tries to reduce the Jews’ worth. This animal symbolism can also be seen as simplifying the complex human identity into animalistic traits, suggesting a loss of humanity.

The representation of characters in graphic novels plays a crucial role in shaping audience perception and identification. In Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, the choice to depict Holocaust survivors as anthropomorphic mice rather than realistic human figures serves a significant purpose. If Vladek Spiegelman were illustrated as a photo-realistic likeness, viewers might have been constrained to see him solely as Vladek Spiegelman, thereby limiting broader emotional engagement. Instead, by employing a cartoonish portrayal, Spiegelman effectively diminishes the specific identity associated with the character, allowing for a more universal connection.

Scott McCloud, in his seminal work *Understanding Comics*, expresses the distinction between realistic and iconic representations. He claims that realistic depictions tie characters to specific identities, which can inhibit readers' ability to project their own experiences onto those characters. In contrast, iconic representations—characterized by simplified forms—encourage greater identification and emotional resonance, as they provide readers with the flexibility to insert themselves into the narrative. This abstraction fosters what McCloud describes as “universal identification,” (36) enabling readers to empathize with characters on a more profound level.

Thus, Spiegelman's artistic choices not only reflect an innovative narrative strategy but also engage with broader themes of identity and memory. By transforming historical figures into animals, he invites viewers to transcend individual identities and connect with the shared human experience of trauma and survival. This approach underscores the potential of graphic novels to convey complex emotional truths through visual representation, enriching the reader's engagement with the narrative.

While engaging the reader with the story and depicting the steps of the Holocaust process from the Jews' perspective, the element of survival is always present in *Maus* and it is portrayed as a double-edged sword. Vladek is seen to be resourceful, knowing what is right to do and when to act to survive, yet it comes to him with the cost of losing his humanity in the process, damaging or completely breaking his relationships.



Fig. 4 (Spiegelman *Maus* 80)

The specific examples of this can be seen in moments where Vladek has to go on with his way, regardless of witnessing others suffer. In such a setting, Vladek's only way of avoiding being grabbed by the German soldiers is to ignore the violence happening in front of his eyes. As a result, surviving the scene becomes an ironic situation; equipping the survival process with guilt. This irony continues as an element in *Maus*, as the regular captivity and oppression of the Jews including Vladek continues

regardless of the war ending. This portrays the chaos that comes with war and shows how escaping or liberation does not result in freedom.

The element of irony in *Maus* is present in moments that are sweeter on the surface. Named “Honeymoon” with the cover showing a Nazi flag hanging over the Jews, chapter two of *Maus* greets us with irony (25). While this period of his time should have been romantic and sweet after marrying Anja, Vladek—alongside all the other people—has to go through the first hints of war, and witness how things are suddenly turning into a fearsome experience. Even though the unity of words and images is always present in such work, this is a moment where it is seen more clearly; with the Swastika symbol shining on their family instead of the bright moon with the word honeymoon placed on top of it.

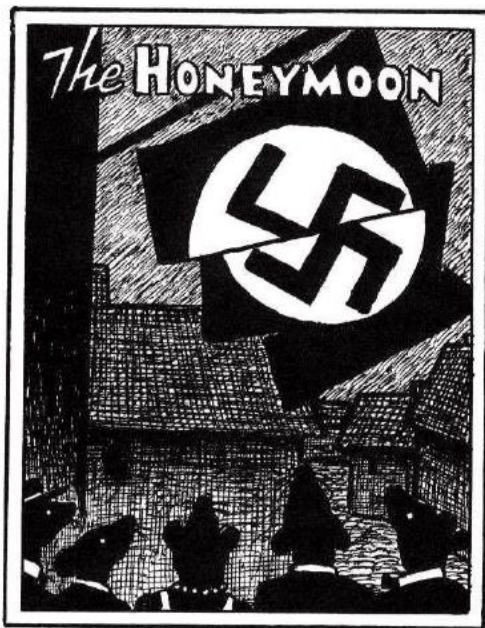


Fig. 5 (Spiegelman *Maus* 25)

Both chapters two and three in *Maus* mention Vladek’s health issues—in addition to this chapter in *Maus* featuring Anja’s mental struggles—as chapter two of *Maus* starts with him counting his many pills for various health issues while starting

his chat with Art. Even though he is an old man, it is explained later that not all of the health issues are related to old age, but a result of what he has been through. On page 39 of *Maus*, Vladek accidentally knocks his pills down the table, which leads to him explaining the problem in his eye. He explains how he had hemorrhaging—bleeding—and glaucoma in the past which caused the doctors to remove his eye and replace it with a glass one.

The health talks continue in chapter three of *Maus*, as Vladek tells Art his story of how his father starved him so that he would not be enlisted for the army. At this point, the desperation of Vladek is not only provided with his storytelling but also with images that show the effect of this diet on Vladek's health. As the doctor states that he should take care of himself for a year so that they can come back to take him, the fear Vladek carries is strikingly presented by the image. As he knows that his father will put him through the same process, Vladek resists the dieting strategy and joins the army in 1922. Then their talk continues with his experience in war in 1939; with scenes and the rectangular framed sentences reflecting his inner thoughts in the process for the reader about how he did not want to shoot anyone (45-48).



Fig. 6 (Spiegelman *Maus* 46)

Since *Maus* deals with the experiences of people during the Holocaust by focusing on Vladek, it presents a tension all the time with the conflict Jews had with the Nazis. It is possible to see inner conflicts as well. On page 105 of *Maus*, Vladek and Art go for a walk as they continue talking; Vladek states that he needs to be active for his health, highlighting that he needs to walk slowly.



Fig. 7 (Spiegelman *Maus* 105)

This remark is then followed by the book showing us that Vladek ended up walking faster and faster, eventually causing an issue for his heart and needing to take a pill with Art's help.



Fig. 8 (Spiegelman *Maus* 117)

The inner conflict Vladek has with his emotions is shown further in different scenes. Around page 84 of *Maus*, Vladek talks about how the Nazis would ‘display’ the Jews they hanged for a long time for other Jews to see, to spread more terror. As he is talking about them, Vladek cries a little, which accompanies him saying “[l]ook-even from my dead eye tears are coming out!” (84). There are several aspects and metaphors packed in this one small scene: The word **dead** styled bold to stick out provides a connection with the dead people Vladek is talking about. The dead eye can also be seen as a representation of Vladek’s seriousness and numbness in his life, which he seems to use as a coping method to ease the pain he faces. But the tears coming down

regardless of the eye being dead, can be interpreted as how his human aspect is not lost completely; he is still emotional deep inside and cares about people.



Fig. 9 (Spiegelman *Maus* 84)

It is possible to see various examples of different devices and how they are used throughout the work. As the main focus is how graphic novels can blend visuals and words smoothly, the focus on unity and harmony as New Criticism states is more prominent in this thesis. While constructing this work, Spiegelman could have chosen to use images to show the story, while using the verbal text to provide little details only or use the two contrarily. Instead, Spiegelman uses both elements together, without one dominating the other. To demonstrate; it is not necessary to give the details about his hands both with words and images, as German soldiers tease Vladek about money and work (51). The image provided about how smooth and clean Vladek's hands already shows the message. But words are added to the scene to explain the point further with Vladek's comment, "[l]ike you Artie, my hands were always very delicate" (51). This simple detail used throughout the book makes *Maus* achieve the unity between the devices it uses.

The multiple devices *Maus* makes use of are not limited to words and images. The usage of different styles of bubbles for verbal text is another example of this. As mentioned above, *Maus* uses speech bubbles for the dialogues happening, while the visuals provide us with whether we are in the present—with Vladek and Art as they

speak—or in the past—inside the stories of Vladek. The sharp-cornered, rectangular boxes provide the comments from the present on top of the imagery of the past which also include the inner thoughts and comments of Vladek. This can be seen in the example below as the German soldier says “We’ll find work for you!” which Vladek adds with “and they did” (51).

Maus successfully juxtaposes past and present in this scene (Fig. 10); “[t]he comic images of Maus, rather than clearly marking off the past from the present, contribute to a problem in which the present and the past are intimately interconnected and difficult to separate from one another...” (McGlothlin 178). The interplay between past and present in Art Spiegelman’s *Maus* is a complex narrative technique that blurs the lines between historical memory and contemporary experience. This intertwining is achieved through a unique combination of visual and textual elements that create a layered storytelling approach.



Fig. 10 (Spiegelman *Maus* 51)

Another example of different styles of bubbles and frames can be seen in figure 11. Vladek, Anja, and others attempt to hide themselves by pretending to be Polish, which is illustrated as them wearing pig masks on their faces. When they get caught by the Germans, the soldier who caught them rips Vladek's mask off, revealing their identity. The image shows Vladek's afraid and surprised face, as well as Anja hiding her face with her hands in despair. In this scene, a frame with spikes is chosen, in addition to the exclamation mark in the sentence of the soldier. Once again, the fear and shouting happening in this scene are presented both verbally and visually, in harmony.



Fig. 11 (Spiegelman *Maus* 155)

The use of masks to show the change in identity to survive in this scene serves as a metaphor. Identity is seen to be constructed in this scene easily, just by wearing an item, a mask. Since the visual elements of graphic novels enable the book to function with signs, putting “identity is a mask” as a metaphor forward becomes possible (Lawrence 8). Simply by putting on this mask, the characters embody the social status of the Polish, adapting to the external factors, when necessary, with the aim of surviving the conflict, and battling with the tension.

It is mentioned in the earlier parts of this thesis that graphic novels can be used as a tool to immortalize cultures; Umberto Eco’s points explained how literature can keep language alive and influence its direction. By introducing visuals, graphic novels open a new door for burying cultural and historical aspects in literature, thus acting as a time capsule. It is possible to see this point in practice in *Maus* as well. Several elements are in it naturally, as Spiegelman illustrates characters, their clothes, the tools and devices they use, how they sit, and how they talk. To demonstrate with examples, we can look at the phone Anja uses in figure 12. A detail like this might go unnoticed when the work is published recently, and talks about the current timeline we are in. But as it gets older, it starts serving the purpose of a historical document, enabling younger generations to see something they no longer have in their homes.



Fig. 12 (Spiegelman *Maus* 28)

The social and financial status of the people presented can also be understood thanks to this quality. Because “...culture is constituted not only by a language or languages but also by images, history, [and] art...” (Vinklársek 136). In a scene where they are having a family dinner, too many male and female characters are seen together as well as some kids. In addition to seeing the clothes, the style of that period, and the elder’s traditional clothes, we see the pearl necklace of Anja, as she sits next to their first son Richiev. Since Anja’s family’s wealth is explained previously by Vladek in chapter one, this is a small detail that approves it. The visual text here provides us with their financial status, which we could have concluded even without Vladek stating it in words in previous chapters.

As a small addition, a minor detail between Anja and Richiev on the table is seen in figure 13. As adults eat and chat, Richiev plays with his plate and spills his food on the table. Anja frowns her eyebrows and scolds him, which results in him crying on the table. Due to the irrelevance of this minor scene to the subject matter presented, there is no dialogue or element other than the image that highlights this. This is merely a detail the reader can notice themselves without breaking the flow of the book. A detail like this makes a work human, by including the casual scenes that are happening. Showing these human aspects is important to highlight the damage of war. It is not only a detail to be considered cute, but also a good way of expressing how life has to go on, even during such a crisis. Children still need to be children, they still make a mess, get scolded, and cry about it.



Fig. 13 (Spiegelman *Maus* 75)

Social examples continue with examples of jobs and status. Throughout this graphic novel, we see the Polish drawn as pigs have worker roles such as the police and nurse, which can be seen in figures 14 and 15. These people are seen as their neighbors, and friends of the family as well. This can provide us with information about the roles Polish took at that time. This might not be possible to achieve in a graphic novel with human characters drawn as humans unless there are races visibly different than each other on a noticeable level. Since Spiegelman illustrates every race

with a different animal, it is easier to spot the lines between them and know which roles they took in the book.



Fig. 14 (Spiegelman *Maus* 30)



Fig. 15 (Spiegelman *Maus* 28)

5.1. External Sources and Limitations

Chapter one of *Maus* is named after a movie; *The Sheik*. There is no information provided about the movie other than Vladek stating people would tell him that he looked like Rudolph Valentino—which suggests that he was the main actor in the movie—with a poster of the movie drawn behind him for the reader. Styled with the rats as the actor and the actress, it does not break the flow of the art of animal representation. The movie poster shares similarities with the chapter's cover.

As this first chapter of *Maus* is mainly about Vladek's romantic relationships and his girlfriend Lucia Greenberg before Art's mother Anja, a connection between a romantic movie and his experiences is made. This detail about the movie, however, is a moment for New Criticism to encounter a limitation. In moments like this when the writer is directing the reader to an outer source, he either expects the reader to already know about it or do further research about it to understand the point being made. It is not always possible to get all the details from the work if they are not presented within. Thus, it is important to notice the limitations that come with this critical approach.

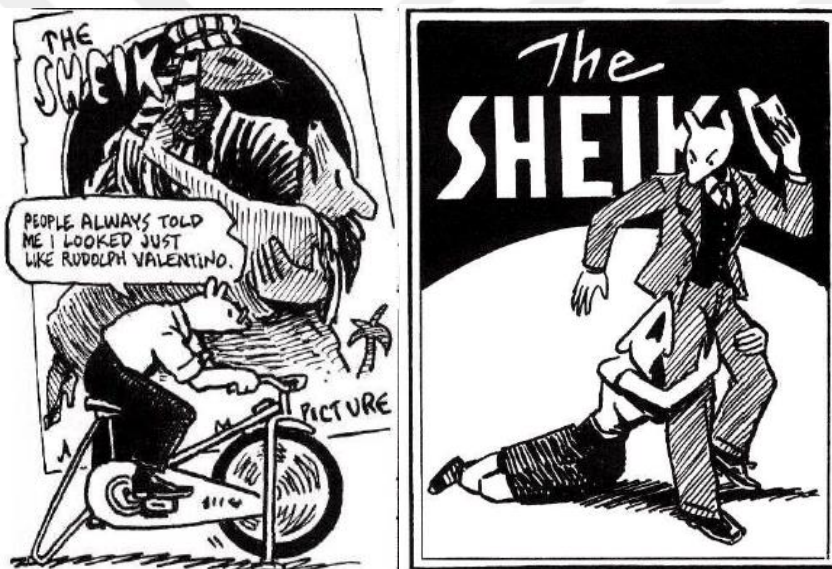


Fig 16. and Fig. 17 (Spiegelman *Maus* 13, 9)

Despite the limitation, it is still not impossible to get meaning without consulting the reference. In the movie poster drawn by Spiegelman in *Maus*, we see the male actor standing up tall with confidence as he looks at the woman, who seems enchanted by the man in his arms. On the chapter cover that features Vladek and his girlfriend Lucia, we see a woman attracted to the man once again, whereas the man seems unaffected by it. Despite the similarity between both women, Vladek's version is more exaggerated, since Lucia is crying out, hugging his legs as if she is begging

him not to leave, while Vladek is drawn already grabbing his hat which suggests his departure.

The parallelism between the two mostly aims to highlight Vladek's charm as a young man. The chapter starts with him talking about a handsome boy who has lots of women run after him, in addition to the point he makes about resembling the lead of the movie. This detail is accompanied by the scene of Vladek and Lucia dancing during their first date, socializing, and having fun. But he reveals in the upcoming scenes that he did not enjoy the closeness as much and was not planning on getting closer to her as she kept pushing towards it. After this element, this first chapter of *Maus* continues to tell how their relationship fell apart—especially highlighting how much Lucia resisted it—after Vladek met Anja, Art's mother.

In concluding this chapter of this thesis on Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, it is essential to reflect on how the interplay of irony, paradox, tension, symbol, and metaphor not only enriches the narrative but also legitimizes graphic novels as a significant component of the literary canon. Throughout this analysis, this thesis has illustrated how these elements work hand in hand with both visual and textual components to create a versatile storytelling experience that challenges traditional literary boundaries.

The irony embedded in *Maus* serves to highlight the contradictions present in human behavior during times of trauma, revealing how survival often comes at a personal cost. For instance, Vladek's survival instincts manifest in ways that include elements of prejudice, thereby complicating the narrative of victimhood. This irony is visually reinforced through Spiegelman's animal representations, where Jews are depicted as mice and Germans as cats, symbolizing a predatory relationship that is

both harsh and touching. Such visual symbols not only convey the horrors of the Holocaust but also invite readers to engage critically with the text.

Moreover, the paradoxes presented in *Maus*—such as the tension between memory and trauma—underline the complexity of recounting historical events. The dual narrative structure allows for a layered exploration of these themes, revealing how art can serve as a means of capturing painful histories. The visual and textual elements work together to create a narrative that is both easy to understand and profound, demonstrating that graphic novels can convey serious themes similar to those found in traditional literature.

By employing rich symbols and metaphors, Spiegelman deepens the understanding of identity and dehumanization. The use of animal imagery not only criticizes societal attitudes but also reflects the psychological transformations experienced by individuals under extreme conditions. This blending of visual art with narrative prose exemplifies how graphic novels can transcend traditional storytelling methods, offering new possibilities for literary expression.

Ultimately, *Maus* stands as a role model showing the power of graphic novels to address complex themes through a unique, hybrid medium. By conjoining visuals with written text, Spiegelman elevates the graphic novel form into a legitimate space within the literary canon. This chapter of the thesis has argued that such works deserve recognition not merely as entertainment but as serious literature capable of putting forward critical discourse about history, trauma, and human experience. As we continue to explore the evolving landscape of literature, it is essential to acknowledge and embrace the contributions of graphic novels like *Maus*, which challenge our understanding of narrative and enrich our cultural dialogues.



6. WILL EISNER'S "A CONTRACT WITH GOD"

Published in 1978 by Will Eisner, *A Contract with God* is a graphic novel that comprises four interconnected short stories. "A Contract with God" is a short story featured in this compilation book. The compilation book shares the same name with the first short story, *A Contract with God*. This compilation book by Will Eisner takes credit for sparking the study of comics and graphic novels from the perspective of linguistics and literature. As Eisner states how graphic novels are works of combining images and words, his works including A "Contract with God" aim to make the reader aware of the unity and make their readings accordingly (Vinklársek 135). "A Contract with God" is usually published with "Other Tenement Stories" alongside it, the four stories total in the book representing "life, death, faith, and religion" Vinklársek 137) even though they are not directly connected as episodes. The four short stories in *A Contract with God* all feature the lives of poor Jews who live in New York in a tenement, thus making them tenement stories. This thesis only analyzes "A Contract with God," which, as the name suggests, features a religious man Frimme Hersh, and his story involving a contract he made with God and how he fell apart after losing his daughter regardless of the contract.

The art style is different from *Maus* in "A Contract with God"; unlike *Maus*' frame-by-frame format with boxes placed next to each other, "A Contract with God" has a rather inconsistent style with changing fonts and bigger and smaller pictures. Some pages are dominated by words, whereas some feature a bigger illustration. Regardless of these elements, it still successfully uses images and words in harmony to deliver its message. The animal representations like in *Maus* or other symbolic character designs are not used in "A Contract with God," it features a more realistic

style of imagery with human characters drawn as humans. Similar to *Maus*, it can be considered a social realism, due to featuring a slice from the lives of people, also featuring Jews and their experiences.

Çizgili Kenar Notları (2002) by Levent Cantek sheds light on the usage of suburbs in comics and graphic novels. The lives of people in suburban areas similar to the tenement in “A Contract with God” seem to be a common element among many comics and graphic novels. He states that the stories focused on the poor young adults living in the suburbs were a common theme among comic artists in Türkiye in the fifties. He states that including urban areas and the lives of people in poor conditions in comics provides a sense of realism (Cantek 9). The tenement located at 55 Dropsie Avenue; the Bronx in Eisner’s graphic short story compilation book *A Contract with God* suggests a similar meaning to Cantek’s observation. This tenement is shown and described as a “decaying apartment” (*A Contract with God* 14). The decaying process of the tenement mirrors a symbol of moral corruption in Frimme Hersh’s life as he transforms from a devout man living in a tenement to a wealthy businessman in a penthouse. After the tragic death of his daughter, he abandons his faith and community ties, moving into a more affluent lifestyle that ultimately leaves him unfulfilled. His character arc underscores the emptiness that can accompany material success, particularly at the cost of community and spirituality.

The exploration of the sociological patterns among first-generation migrants reveals complex layers of identity, particularly when viewed through the lens of religion as a significant aspect of cultural memory. Eisner’s narratives adeptly encapsulate the profound dilemmas faced by these individuals, intertwining their religious backgrounds with their migratory experiences. In *Comics, Culture and*

Religion (2023), Christophe Monnot explains how the contract Frimme Hersh has with God carries sociological meanings in “A Contract with God”:

If we untangle the threads of the religious contract, we actually observe sociological patterns of the first generation migrant individual. One point where the sociological analysis joins those that discuss the Jewish characteristics of the narrative is that of religion as an important memory and cultural baggage in the life of the migrant. Eisner was so skilled at putting the profound dilemmas of first-generation migrants into a narrative that few have seen the sociological dimension beyond the religious dilemma of his narrative. (Monnot 233)

In this context, religion serves not merely as a belief system, but as a “cultural baggage” (233) that shapes the migrant’s identity and influences their interactions within a new society. Eisner’s storytelling transcends the surface-level religious dilemmas, inviting readers to recognize the deeper sociological dimensions at play.

Eisner’s work illustrates how the Jewish characteristics of these narratives reflect broader themes of memory and identity, emphasizing that for many migrants, their religious heritage is a crucial element of their personal and collective histories. Thus, while Eisner’s narratives may initially appear focused on religious conflict, they simultaneously unveil the complex sociological realities that define the experiences of first-generation migrants, highlighting how their cultural and religious backgrounds inform their identities in a new world.

To underline the further details presented within “A Contract with God” this chapter of the thesis conducts a detailed analysis of Will Eisner’s short story “A Contract with God” through the lens of New Criticism. The approach of New Criticism

emphasizes the text as a self-contained entity, free from external influences such as authorial intent or historical context. This approach is particularly suitable for examining Eisner's work, as it allows for an in-depth exploration of the rich symbolism embedded within both the visual and verbal narratives. Throughout "A Contract with God," symbolism serves as a crucial narrative device that enhances the thematic depth of the story, inviting readers to engage with its complex layers of meaning.

Additionally, other literary elements such as irony, paradox, tension, and metaphor, all of which contribute to the overall impact of the narrative are addressed in this chapter. The graphic novel format inherently fosters a unique unity between visual and verbal texts, aligning with New Criticism's quest for coherence. By analyzing how these elements interact harmoniously within Eisner's work, this chapter aims to demonstrate that "A Contract with God" not only exemplifies the artistic potential of graphic novels but also deserves recognition as a significant literary achievement in its own right.

On the cover page of "A Contract with God" featured in the book as seen in figure 18, the styling that features the text and the image together is present. A stone block, a tablet hovers above the protagonist of the short story, Frimme Hersh, as the title of the short story is written on it. Even though Latin letters are used for the title, the "a contract with" section is styled with a Roman font, whereas "God" is highlighted with a Romanized version of Hebrew letters (Vinklárék 137). The scene is accompanied by rain pouring on Frimme, seeming to start from the tablet. This, combined with the upcoming story details, might be seen as a symbol of the sorrow, the negative outcome Frimme has with God.

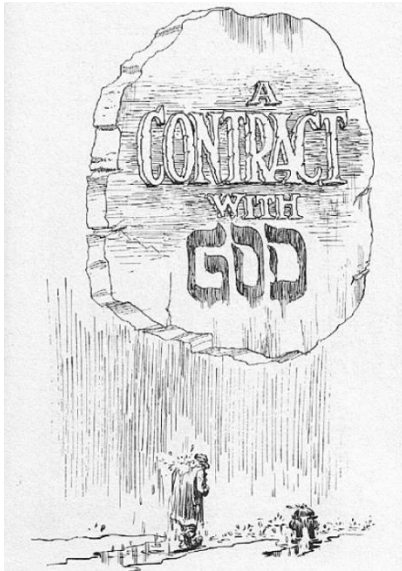


Fig. 18 (Eisner “A Contract with God” 19)

Right after the cover page of the short story, Frimme continues his walk toward his home as the rain keeps pouring over him. The text supports the image, “[a]ll day rain poured down on the Bronx without mercy” (20) stating what is shown in the image. If the rain is considered a symbol of God, and the feelings God caused on Frimme, the lines “[t]he sewers overflowed and the waters rose over the curbs of the street” can be analyzed as Frimme’s emotions filling up in his heart, reaching beyond the limits he can endure.

The usage of symbols continues as Eisner uses the words and the image in unity. The text explains this rainy day is the anniversary of the death of his daughter, “...this was the day Frimme Hersh buried Rachele...” (23). The illustration features Frimme soaking under the heavy rain as he climbs up the stairs to his home, with a street light shining behind him. In the text “Frimme Hersh *buried* Rachele” (23; emphasis added), the word ‘buried’ can be read as a metaphor to mean ‘leaving one behind’ in addition to its literal meaning. This metaphor joined with the street light shining behind Frimme, can connect to the light being a symbol of his daughter,

Rachele, and the hope she added to Frimme's life. As Frimme walks forward, passing this light thus leaving it behind him, he also needs to move forward from his pain and leave it in the past, as the rain washes over it. Another possible reading of this light as a symbol can be that it reflects God's favor, which concludes that this symbol of light has a double meaning. Just with the daughter's example, Frimme has turned his back on it. If this meaning is also taken into consideration, it can also be seen as a foreshadowing that teases Frimme's denial of God and their contract in the upcoming parts of the story.



Fig. 19 (Eisner "A Contract with God" 23)

The idea of rain representing God is seen on page 24 of the short story, where the text is placed on the opening of the door. It explains how it is a common pain for fathers to put effort into raising a child with affection, only to lose them one day. While making this statement, the text mentions the invisible quality of God stating "...only to lose her...plucked, as it were, from his arms by an unseen hand -the hand of GOD"

(24). Inspecting the illustrations, the wet footsteps entering the house can be seen. Since Frimme is seen walking under the rain to his home in previous scenes as well as this door frame being followed by him climbing up the stairs by leaving wet footprints behind him, the footprints certainly belong to him. But this does not limit the meaning to a single option; since this is a scene along many that choose not to include Frimme in the frame, we can attribute a second, symbolic quality to these footsteps. Due to the invisible force of God being presented alongside it, this scene shows how God reached Frimme's life, and took his daughter away from him, as an outside force Frimme cannot stop.

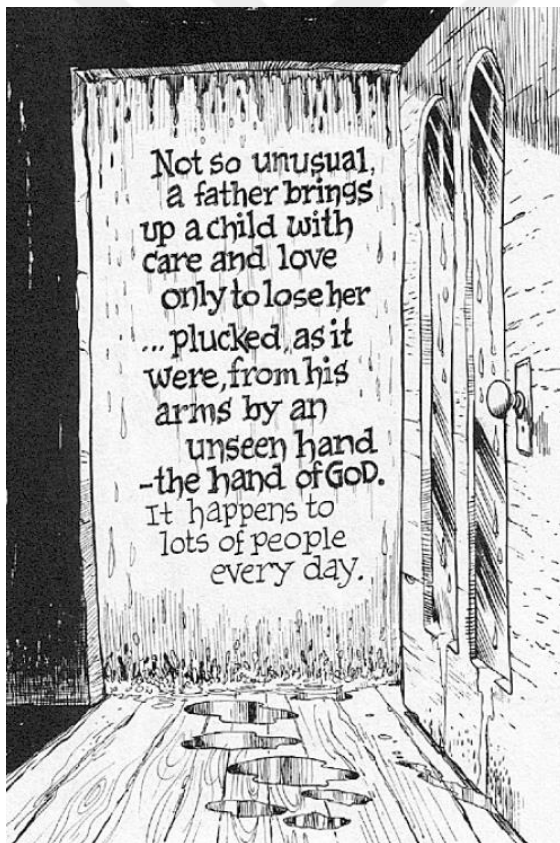


Fig. 20 (Eisner "A Contract with God" 24)

The story then goes to the past, helping us to look at Frimme's story in action. It explains and shows how, after the assassination of Alexander II in 1882, Jews were affected by pogroms. Frimme Hersch, who survived these attacks with his family was

known for doing good deeds. His kind actions result in the poor village he's living in considering him special, thus everyone constantly reminding him that "God will reward [him]" (30-1). Due to his association with the good deeds and eventually the God, the elders of the village decided to send him to America to protect him from any possible future attacks. It was the night that he was preparing to go that he made his contract with God, purely by his decision, as he wrote it on a small stone. Slowly, the story goes forward in time, after explaining how his good behaviors continued in New York and how he adopted an abandoned child, making her his daughter, only for their connection to end with her death.

As the story comes to the point of Rachele's death, Frimme yells out to God, claiming he broke their contract by taking her life. In this scene, a different approach to creating a dialogue between Frimme and "supposedly" God (Vinklár 138) is used. The reason why we can call this a dialogue is not only because it is stated in the text as one "...and the old tenement trembled under the fury of the dialogue" (Eisner 40), but also the way Frimme gets a response to his cries from the sky. As he continues crying out about the situation, his shouts are replied with thunders, which is shown by the illustrations. This back-and-forth speech-thunder dialogue continues for three pages until Frimme raises his hand towards the window and says "Enough" (43). His surrender with that word is also given by using a visual tool; the speech bubble 'flows' down as Frimme also positions himself lower, both indicating the sudden change in tension going towards calmness.



Fig. 21 (“A Contract with God” 41)



Fig. 22 (“A Contract with God” 43)

The betrayal Frimme seems to feel due to his daughter’s death and the focus on faith in this short story is equipped with a paradox. He views the death of his daughter as a betrayal by God for not fulfilling his portion of the contract, which results

in the crisis Frimme faces with his faith. The paradox stems from the function of belief; Frimme is deeply committed to his religion and God but feels abandoned and betrayed in the time of suffering he is in. Rachele's death serves as a metaphor for innocence and the unpredictability of life. Her illness and eventual death symbolize the realities that shatter Frimme's faith and the sense of security he has in the contract. The loss of his daughter not only devastates Frimme but also leads to his moral decline, portraying how personal tragedy can result in existential despair.

The paradox continues with this moral decay after his tragedy since Frimme's conflict with God results in him giving up his belief, and starting a lifestyle that is contradictory to his current state. He chooses a path that he will exploit others instead of helping them. This transformation portrays the paradox that lies within human nature, showing how grief or trauma can lead to a moral decline and strain one's values (Royal). This contrast is supported by the visuals, as his previous self and new self are drawn next to each other as shown in figure 23. He is portrayed shaving his beard, the very symbol of his religious position, he purchases the current building he's living in, raises rents, finds a mistress; and does everything that is opposed to his previous lifestyle. Though he makes lots of money by exploiting people, he does not seem to spend it, as the mistress indicates; "...What kind of life is this? – You're so rich you can buy anything you want... So, buy it!!" (Eisner 56).

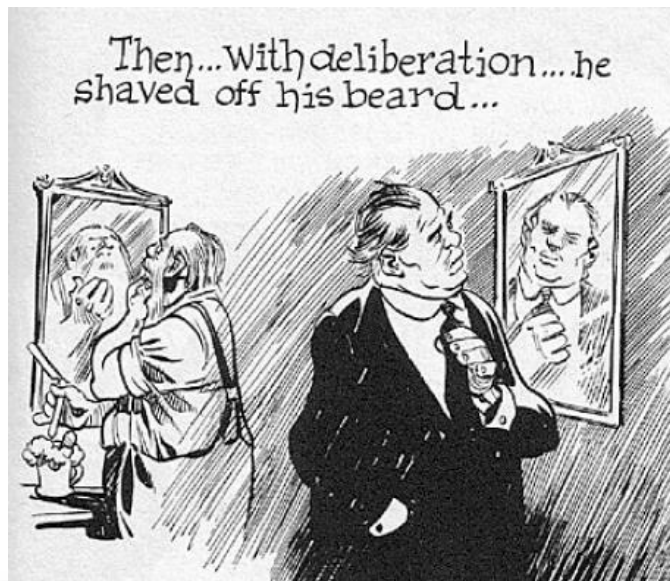


Fig. 23 (“A Contract with God” 47)

This new lifestyle Frimme picked up does not last long, and the search for a new meaning starts for him. He eventually feels a conflict within himself which leads him to visit his elders to convince them to write a new contract between him and God, since they are the closest to God in their religious position. During this process, his facial expressions show excitement, whereas there is concern on the elders’ faces since they believe a contract is a private matter between the individual and God. For a few pages, the short story shows us the discussions of the elders by using both the text and the visuals, delivering their concerns and solutions, using different perspectives, and highlighting words. After making up their minds, they provide Frimme with a new contract, which he accepts in excitement, claiming this time it should not be broken since it was written by elders who are knowledgeable in their religious practice.

As Frimme celebrates his new contract with God and how he can go back to his good, charitable behaviors, he experiences a heart attack and eventually faces death. The cuts in his speech are represented with a symbol showing the shortness of breath, as well the speech bubbles changing forms such as having cracks on them as

his heart fails. As mentioned in the theoretical background chapter of this thesis, tension can be provided with contrasting colors in graphic novels. In figure 24 black and white background is used to provide the crisis Frimme is experiencing. While the background is bright and clear during his confident dialogue indicating God “will not violate [their] contract”; it switches to a black background as Frimme starts to experience doubt and pain.



Fig. 24 (“A Contract with God” 68)

The rain and thunder return after his death; it swipes a piece of newspaper in front of the reader confirming the character’s death. The text provides a flashback about the storm, “...it reminded the tenants of that day, years ago when Frimme Hersch argued with GOD and terminated their contract” (70). This flashback indicates how this storm of God appears during a disagreement, a fury. That time, the contract was terminated by Frimme, since he claimed that his daughter’s death was against it. But

now, while Frimme was sharing his excitement about the new contract, his request was denied by God. This point once again highlights the continuous element of paradox surrounding faith in this short story. Putting forward the absurdity of trying to negotiate with the divine, raises questions about the attempts of humans to control or understand fate (Royal).

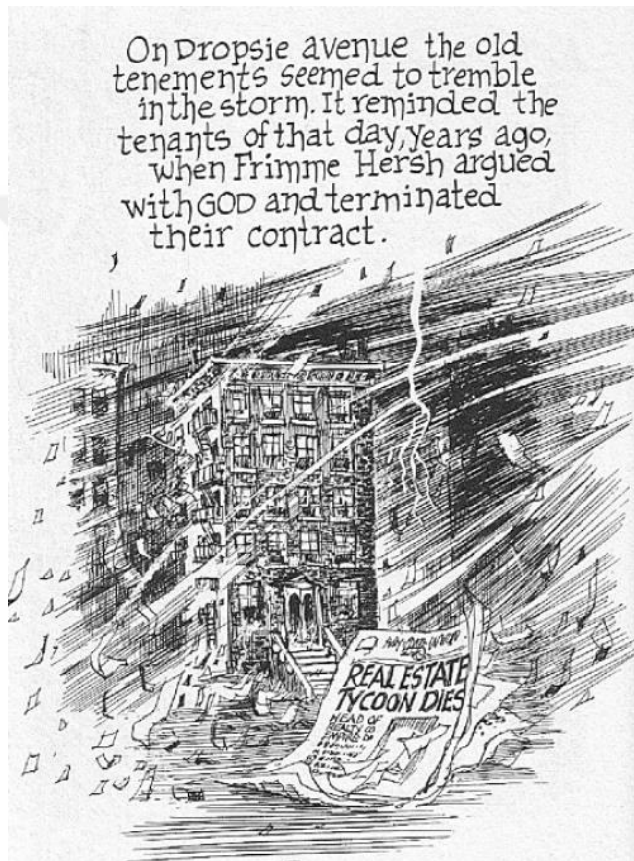


Fig. 25 (“A Contract with God” 70)

The very act of making a contract with God presents irony. It suggests a transactional relationship with God. The absurdity of trying to make a deal with the divine is seen when Rachele dies, crumbling Frimme’s belief and dependence on the contract. The ending features a young boy named Shloime finding the first contract Frimme threw out of the window after he discarded it, which indicates this cycle going on and on. This act portrays an ironic situation in which the continuity of faith and loss of faith exist at the same time, showing while Frimme abandons his faith, others may

still seek it and engage with it in ways he could not. The previously used symbol of light returns back on the last scene, as the boy sits on a set of stairs with the contract in his hands, and the streetlight shines upon him, almost like a spotlight. Taking the meaning ‘God’s favor’ for the symbolism used with the light, we can see that this boy is the new candidate that will take Frimme’s role, the new person that God will reward, as other characters also tease it on previous parts.

In previous chapters of the thesis, how verbal text gains visual quality in graphic novels was discussed. On page 22 of “A Contract with God,” as “...the tears of ten thousand weeping angels...” is mentioned, the font is styled in such a way that it looks like water is flowing from it (Fig. 26). This can be taken as a use of foregrounding⁹, which is usually crafted by using linguistic elements. Graphic novels can manipulate words in different ways since they can attribute visual qualities to them. The scene where Frimme said “enough” and the speech bubble melting down with the word on page 43 of the short story which was analyzed previously can also be considered an example. Other than the text gaining a visual aspect, we can see many moments where bold text characters are used for foregrounding. Even though this can be achieved without illustrations too, the compact nature of words being placed inside a speech bubble in a vertical shape makes it even more noticeable, thus making it stand out more.

⁹ Foregrounding is “a form of textual patterning which is motivated specifically for literary-aesthetic purposes” (Simpson 50).

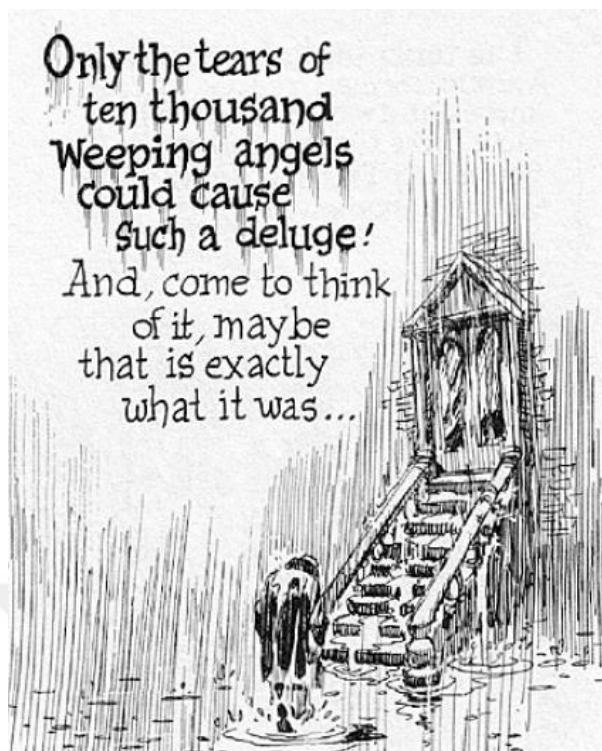


Fig. 26 (“A Contract with God” 20)

Returning to the cover page of the short story where two different fonts—with Roman and Hebrew characters—were used on the stone tablet can be considered an example. The visual details of text in that scene also include a further detail of Roman letters sticking out of the stone, whereas “God” written in Hebrew font is carved on it. The stone with letters on it appears once again on page 30 of “A Contract with God,” providing an outside, narrative voice. The tablet hovers in the air similar to its first appearance, and stays outside Frimme’s window, further indicating that this narration is an outer point of view, provided for the reader.

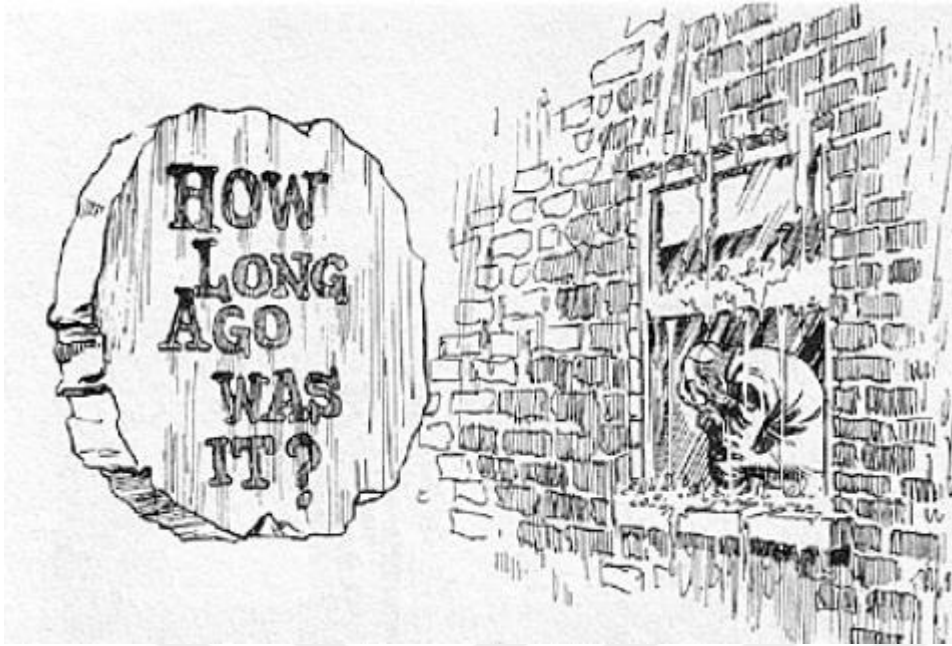


Fig. 27 (“A Contract with God” 30)

Lastly, the speech bubble on page 40 in the short story as Frimme exclaims “[y]ou violated our contract!” his speech bubble is exceptionally dark and shaped like a storm cloud. This represents how he was filled with fury while he argued with God, as God seemed to reply with thunders. This is again, a good example of the text acting in unity with the visuals to deliver tone and message.

In this chapter of the thesis on Will Eisner’s “A Contract with God,” irony, paradox, tension, symbolism, and metaphor are argued. They not only contribute to the narrative depth but also underscore the legitimacy of graphic novels within the field of literature. Throughout this analysis, this thesis has illustrated how Eisner masterfully intertwines visual and textual elements to create a harmonious storytelling experience that challenges traditional literary forms.

The use of irony in “A Contract with God” serves to reveal the complexities of human nature and the often-contradictory realities of life in a tenement community. For instance, the character’s aspirations for a better life are frequently met with harsh

realities as seen with Frimme Hersh's betrayal by God, highlighting the paradox of hope during the experiences of despair. This irony is visually reinforced through Eisner's detailed illustrations. Such visual storytelling enhances the reader's understanding of the narrative, illustrating how graphic novels can convey touching themes through a unique combination of images and text.

Additionally, the tension between personal desire and societal expectation is seen in Eisner's work. Frimme Hersh grapples with his identity and moral dilemmas, reflecting broader social issues such as poverty and faith. This tension is not only articulated through dialogue but is also vividly depicted in Eisner's artwork, where facial expressions and body language convey emotional struggles that words alone cannot capture. The unity of visual and written elements in this context emphasizes the graphic novel's capacity to explore complex themes. Eisner's use of symbolism further enriches the narrative. The tenement itself serves as a symbol of both confinement and community, representing the struggles faced by immigrants while also highlighting their resilience. This duality is visually represented through the contrasting depictions of cramped living spaces versus moments of communal warmth and support. By employing such symbols, "A Contract with God" invites readers to engage with deeper meanings that transcend mere storytelling.

In the end, "A Contract with God" exemplifies how graphic novels can serve as a legitimate form of literature capable of addressing serious themes through innovative means. Graphic novels enable a multi-sensual way of telling stories thanks to their visual and verbal form. Graphic novels use these two elements to cultivate unity. The integration of irony, paradox, tension, symbolism, and metaphor within both visual and textual narratives highlights the potential of graphic novels to

contribute meaningfully to literary discourse. As the field of literature continues growing, works like “A Contract with God” challenge ordinary boundaries and elevate the graphic novel into a respected position within the literary canon. By studying this medium, its power to reflect human experiences and provoke critical thought can be seen.



7. CONCLUSION

This thesis focused on two seminal works in the graphic novel genre: *Maus* by Art Spiegelman and “A Contract with God” by Will Eisner. Employing New Criticism as a critical framework, this thesis argued that these works deserve recognition not only for their artistic merit but also for their profound exploration of themes such as identity, trauma, and human experience through the harmonious integration of visual and verbal elements. By analyzing literary devices of irony, paradox, tension, symbols, and metaphors within these texts, this thesis demonstrated how they transcend conventional boundaries of literature and contribute meaningfully to the literary canon. The individual chapters delved into a detailed examination of each work, highlighting their unique narrative techniques and thematic richness while advocating for a broader appreciation of graphic novels as legitimate literary forms.

Chapter 2 explained the challenge of defining literature and highlighted its impact in addition to pointing out how it contributes to language and culture. It explained the development process of graphic novels and how they emerged from comics, making comics and graphic novels gain a place in literature and helping break the stigma revolving around them. Since the thesis argues graphic novels’ abilities in the literary canon, New Criticism was applied.

Chapter 3 covered the development and history of New Criticism to explain its study principles. In this thesis, employing New Criticism as a theoretical framework is particularly effective for highlighting the literary qualities of graphic novels, allowing for an analysis that remains focused on the texts themselves rather than external biases. This approach is crucial given the historical stigma associated with comics and graphic novels, often perceived as inferior or merely entertainment-

oriented. By utilizing New Criticism, this thesis managed to engage with the works of Art Spiegelman's *Maus* and Will Eisner's "A Contract with God" in a manner that emphasizes their literary significance without being distracted by preconceived notions about the genre.

Chapter 4 explained the shared themes between *Maus* and "A Contract with God" to point out why the study of them under the same lens is possible. Both *Maus* and "A Contract with God" grapple with the complexities of identity in the face of adversity. In *Maus*, Art Spiegelman uses animal metaphors to reveal how identity is multi-layered, particularly concerning cultural heritage and the weight of historical trauma. These metaphors serve as a visual language to convey how individuals navigate their cultural identity while living through and reflecting on the collective trauma of the Holocaust. Similarly, in "A Contract with God," Will Eisner's protagonist navigates his identity as a religious man, entangled in a deep existential struggle. It is seen that both works explore how personal and communal experiences shape one's reality, showing how identity is not static but deeply influenced by the environments in which individuals live and endure hardships.

Trauma stands as a central theme in both works as well. In *Maus*, Spiegelman powerfully conveys the lasting impact of Holocaust trauma on both survivors and their descendants, as seen in the relationship between the father and the son. Through their interactions, the narrative illustrates how trauma reshapes the perception of the world, affecting behavior, relationships, and one's sense of self. On the other hand, in Eisner's portrayal of trauma in "A Contract with God," the protagonist, Frimme Hersch, faces profound loss, disappointment, and moral conflicts, which push him to question his faith and the nature of his contract with God. The treatment of trauma in Eisner's work

highlights the universality of suffering as an intrinsic part of the human experience, connecting individual stories to broader, collective experiences. Both works, through their unique narrative forms and thematic depth, underscore the profound influence of trauma on shaping identity and the human condition.

Chapters 5 and 6 showed the details of the elements that include irony, paradox, tension, symbols, and metaphors. These two chapters effectively demonstrate how both *Maus* and “A Contract with God” utilize literary devices to enrich their narratives. For instance, both works present protagonists’ internal conflicts to illustrate paradoxes and tension that exist in their experiences. In “A Contract with God” the protagonist is seen attempting to control the uncontrollable, which provides the insight that struggle is a part of the human experience while *Maus* presents its paradox in sharing trauma. Spiegelman’s choice to depict humans as animals in *Maus* serves as a powerful symbol of identity and survival during the Holocaust. Similarly, Eisner’s protagonist’s contract symbolizes faith and the human condition, bridging personal belief with existential dilemmas. Both works showcased how they use visual and verbal elements hand-in-hand to create unity and deliver their message. The messages they discovered varied from trauma, faith, and human experience. They both put forward how graphic novels can use words and images interchangeably as well as juxtaposing them together.

The sub-section in Chapter 5 highlighted the limitation that appears when applying the approach of New Criticism. A reference to a movie in *Maus* requires the reader to seek external sources to comprehend the purpose it serves. In such encounters, New Criticism’s principles of focusing solely on what the text provides might limit the possibility of understanding the intention of that type of reference. To

clarify this element, another study method can be sought after. In addition to this limit, the study of comics and graphic novels is still fresh. This field still has many possibilities for research from a variety of perspectives. Thus, future studies could explore additional works or employ different critical approaches to deepen our understanding.

The new mediums of storytelling in the 21st century utilize a combination of visual and textual elements, allowing for a richer narrative experience. Films and animations combine visuals, sound, and dialogue to create immersive storytelling environments. Similarly, graphic novels integrate images and words to convey complex ideas and emotions, engaging readers through both visual literacy and traditional reading skills. As it is seen, graphic novels, in particular, exemplify this trend by combining verbal and visual elements to convey narratives.

Graphic novels effectively utilize illustrations to depict the unfolding of stories, showcasing characters' facial expressions, their surrounding environments, and intricate details like clothing and behavior. This visual storytelling fosters a sense of immersion that traditional prose often fails to achieve. In Will Eisner's short story "A Contract with God," the interplay between illustration and text effectively conveys a profound message. The artwork depicts the protagonist standing in the rain, overwhelmed by despair as he walks past a street lamp that symbolizes his daughter and the hope she represents. This visual moment is complemented by the accompanying text, which elaborates on the significance of the scene, revealing that it marks the anniversary of his daughter's death. Together, the words and images illustrate the protagonist's journey away from hope, highlighting his emotional turmoil.

The current generation exhibits a strong affinity for literature that engages multiple senses. This is evident in the academic recognition of video games as a narrative medium, highlighted by events like the “Digital Games as Cultural and Literary Narratives” conference hosted by Hacettepe University on May 16-17, 2024. At this conference, scholars explored various literary aspects within video games, including textual analysis, environmental storytelling, irony, representation, creative fiction, and cultural studies. Such academic interest underscores a shift in how literature is perceived and consumed by younger audiences, suggesting that engaging with literature through immersive mediums may be more appealing than traditional prose.

Graphic novels can be seen as pioneers in this realm of hybrid storytelling that merges visual art with written text. The interplay between imagery and text not only enhances readability but also enriches the storytelling experience. This unique format opens up new possibilities for employing literary techniques creatively. Graphic novels effectively use symbols within illustrations alongside verbal narratives to build tension through contrasting colors and to convey irony and paradox through layered visual and textual elements. By harmonizing these components, graphic novels achieve a cohesive narrative unity that elevates their storytelling potential.

Ultimately, graphic novels and similar media represent a significant evolution in literature, merging visual artistry with narrative depth to create immersive experiences that resonate with contemporary audiences. This hybrid approach not only broadens the scope of literary expression but also aligns with the interests of a generation increasingly drawn to multi-sensory storytelling experiences. For this reason, this thesis has shown that *Maus* by Art Spiegelman and “A Contract with God”

by Will Eisner exemplify the literary potential of graphic novels through their intricate use of irony, metaphors, symbols, and paradox, demonstrating that the harmony between visual and textual elements enhances their narrative depth and merits greater recognition within the literary canon. Recognizing graphic novels as legitimate literature enriches our appreciation of storytelling in all its forms.



WORKS CITED

- Alsaç, Üstün. *Türkiye’de Karikatür, Çizgi Roman ve Çizgi Film*. İletişim Yayınları, 1994.
- Ayyıldız, Bülent. “Jewish American Graphic Narratives: Landscapes, Stereotypes and Transformation in Will Eisner, Ben Katchor, Joe Kubert and Harvey Pekar.” *Hacettepe University*, 2015, Master’s Thesis.
- Baetens, Jan. *Graphic Novels: Literature without Text? - Aarhus Universitet*. https://sins.au.dk/fileadmin/sins.au.dk/Texts/Baetens_2008.pdf
- Banita, Georgiana, and Lee Konstantinou, editors. “CFP: The Comics of Art Spiegelman.” *Gesellschaft Für Comicforschung*, 2015.
- Başol, Hasan Çağlar. “Using Graphic Novels to Improve Reading Comprehension Skills at EFL Classrooms.” *Selçuk University*, 2011, Master’s Thesis.
- “Beyond Words.” *Special Collections and Archives*, library.missouri.edu/specialcollections/exhibits/show/beyondwords/graphic-novels. Accessed 2024.
- Bezci, Şenol. “Maus: Grafik Roman ve Edebiyat.” *Ankara Üniversitesi Dil Ve Tarih-Coğrafya Fakültesi Dergisi*, Jan. 2015, pp. 251–270, <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/pub/dtcfdergisi/issue/66790/1044450>.
- Bozkurt, Bülent R., editor. *Literary Terms: A Companion to the Study of Literature*. Hacettepe University, 1977.
- Brooks, Cleanth. *The Well Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry*. Dennis Dobson Ltd., 1960, *The Well Wrought Urn*, <https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.186784/page/n3/mode/2up>, Accessed 2024.
- Cantek, Levent. *Çizgili Kenar Notları*. İletişim, 2007.
- Chute, Hillary. “‘The Shadow of a Past Time’: History and Graphic Representation in *Maus*.” *Twentieth-Century Literature*, vol. 52, no. 2, 1 June 2006, pp. 199–230, <https://doi.org/10.1215/0041462x-2006-3001>.
- “Digital Games as Cultural and Literary Narratives.” *Announcements*, Hacettepe University American Studies Department, 2024, asdturkey.hacettepe.edu.tr/en
- Doherty, Thomas. “Art Spiegelman’s *Maus*: Graphic Art and the Holocaust.” *American Literature*, vol. 68, no. 1, Mar. 1996, pp. 69–84, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2927540>.
- Eco, Umberto. *On Literature*. Translated by Martin McLaughlin, Harcourt, 2004, *Internet Archive*, <https://archive.org/details/onliterature00ecou>.
- Eisner, Will. “A Contract with God”. *A Contract with God: And Other Tenement Stories*. DC Comics, 2000.
- . *Comics and Sequential Art: Principles and Practices from the Legendary Cartoonist*. W.W. Norton, 2008.
- Elton, William R. *A Glossary of the New Criticism*. Modern Poetry Association, 1949.
- Groensteen, Thierry. “Why Are Comics Still in Search of Cultural Legitimization?” *Comics Culture: Analytical and Theoretical Approaches to Comics.*, Edited by Anne Magnussen and Hans Christian Christiansen, 2000, pp. 29–41.
- Hathaway, Rosemary V. “Reading Art Spiegelman’s *Maus* as Postmodern Ethnography.” *Journal of Folklore Research*, vol. 48, no. 3, 2011, pp. 249–267, <https://doi.org/10.2979/jfolkrese.48.3.249>.
- Kaplan, Arie. *From Krakow to Krypton*. The Jewish Publication Society, 2008.

- Kukkonen, Karin. "Comics as a Test Case for Transmedial Narratology." *Graphic Narratives and Narrative Theory*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, vol. 40, no. 1, 2011, pp. 34-52.
- Lashuk, Anastasiya. "Beyond Words: The Power of Visual Storytelling in the Graphic Novel *Maus*." *Masaryk University*, 2023, Master's Thesis.
- Lawrence, Julian. *Identity Is a Mask: Art Spiegelman's Treatment of Metaphor in Maus*, 2014, https://www.academia.edu/28491641/Identity_is_a_Mask_Art_Spiegelmans_Treatment_of_Metaphor_in_Maus.
- Lent, John A., editor. "Appendix A: United States Codes." *Pulp Demons: International Dimensions of the Postwar Anti-Comics Campaign*, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, pp. 269-279.
- "Literature." *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, inc., 22 May 2024, www.britannica.com/art/literature.
- McCloud, Scott. *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*. Kitchen Sink Press, 2018.
- McGlothlin, Erin Heather. "No Time Like the Present: Narrative and Time in Art Spiegelman's *Maus*." *Narrative*, vol. 11, no. 2, May 2003, pp. 177-198, <https://doi.org/10.1353/nar.2003.0007>.
- Monnot, Christophe. "A Contract with God or a Social Contract?" *Comics, Culture and Religion*, edited by Kees De Groot, Bloomsbury Academic, London, 2023, pp. 219-235.
- Muratoğlu, Erhan. "A Sociological Study: Comics as a Sign of Popular Culture in the 20th Century." *Bilkent University*, 1993, Master's Thesis.
- Okçul, Mustafa. "Yeni Eleştiri Bağlamında Servet-i Fünûn Hikâyeciliği (1896-1901)." *Van Yüzüncü Yıl Üniversitesi*, 2021, Doctorate Thesis, pp. 18-35.
- Omer Salihi, Kanar Othman. "The Narrative of Trauma in Art Spiegelman's *Maus*." *International Journal of Social Science and Human Research*, vol. 07, no. 03, 15 Mar. 2024, <https://doi.org/10.47191/ijsshr/v7-i03-45>.
- Özen Koyuncuoğlu, Altınay. "Focalization in Verbal and Graphic Narratives: Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and Its Graphic Novel Adaptation." *Middle East Technical University*, 2021.
- Ransom, John Crowe. *The New Criticism*. Greenwood Press, 1979. Bilkent University Library, <https://eds.p.ebscohost.com/eds/detail/detail?vid=1&sid=8c08caa7-77ca-42da-903c-d096f8e49c7a%40redis&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWRzLWxpdmU%3d#AN=bilk.111560&db=cat00040a>.
- Royal, Joey. "A Contract with God: Will Eisner's Lament." *The Living Church*, 9 Mar. 2024, livingchurch.org/covenant/a-contract-with-god-will-eisners-lament/.
- Royal, Derek Parker. "Sequential Sketches of Ethnic Identity: Will Eisner's *A Contract with God* as Graphic Cycle." *College Literature*, vol. 38, no. 1, summer 2011, pp. 150-167.
- Saraceni, Mario. *The Language of Comics*, Routledge, London, 2003.
- Searle, Leroy. "New Criticism." *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 2005, pp. 1-12.
- Sezer, Efekan. "Interactive Graphic Novel as a Storytelling Language." *Hacettepe University*, 2022, Master's Thesis.
- Schodt, Frederik L. *Dreamland Japan: Writings on Modern Manga*. Stone Bridge Press, 2013.
- Spiegelman, Art. *Maus*. Penguin Books, 1992.

- “Swastika.” *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Encyclopaedia Britannica, inc., 18 June 2024, www.britannica.com/topic/swastika.
- Thompson, Ewa M. *Russian Formalism and Anglo-American New Criticism*. Mouton, 1971.
- Vianes, Jessica M. “Themes in ‘The Paradoxes of American Culture.’” *Georgetown University*, Accessed. 2024.
- Vinklárěk, Petr. “The Interplay of Text and Image in Comics: A Linguistic Interpretation of Will Eisner’s *A Contract with God*.” *From Theory to Practice 2012: Proceedings of the Fourth International Conference on Anglophone Studies*, edited by Gregory Jason Vinklárěk, Univerzita Tomáše Bati ve Zlíně, Zlín, 2013, pp. 135–142.
- Weiß, Michaela. “Will Eisner’s Contract with Comics.” *American and British Studies Annual*, vol. 4, 2011, pp. 74–83.





ÖZGEÇMİŞ

Kişisel Bilgiler

Soyadı, adı : Saka, Deniz
Uyruğu : T. C.

Eğitim

Derece	Eğitim Birimi	Mezuniyet tarihi
Yüksek lisans	Ankara Hacı Bayram Veli Üniversitesi	Devam ediyor
Lisans	Ankara Sosyal Bilimler Üniversitesi	22.07.2021
Lise	Faruk Nafiz Çamlıbel Anadolu Lisesi	2017

Yabancı Dil

İngilizce C2
Japonca A2



