

Begone “Pow!”, “Zap!” and “SHAZAM!”

The Consecration of the Graphic Novel

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Table of contents

Abstract	4
Introduction	5
Researching the Graphic Novel	8
Definitions of Terms	10
Methodology	11
Chapter 1: The History and Reception of Graphic Novels Before the 2000s	16
1.1 Before the “Big Three”	16
1.2 The “Big Three”	21
1.3 After the “Big Three”	27
Chapter 2: Research Method	33
2.1 Selecting Research Materials	33
2.2 Linders and Op de Beek’s Model	40
2.3 Adapting Linders and Op de Beek’s Model	43
2.4 Research Process	46
Chapter 3: Discussion of Research Results	50
3.1 Discussion of the Critics’ Backgrounds	50
3.2 Discussion of Critics’ Comments on the Graphic Novel Medium	54
3.3 Discussion of the Number of Words Per Review	57
3.4 Discussion of Results Found With Linders and Op de Beek’s Model	60
Conclusion	71
Bibliography	77
Appendices	82
Appendix A: Bourdieu’s Diagram of the Literary Field	82
Appendix B: Adapted Version of Linders and Op de Beek’s Model	83
Appendix C: List of the Researched Graphic Novels and Reviews	84

Abstract

De term “graphic novel” werd in de jaren '80 van de vorige eeuw gepopulariseerd toen drie Amerikaanse stripboeken die met deze term gepromoot werden uitzonderlijk succesvol waren: *Maus*, *Watchmen* en *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*. Vanaf dat moment gingen journalisten, critici en academici zich in grotere mate met stripboeken bezighouden, maar vooral met “graphic novels”: stripboeken die zijn uitgegeven als boek met een op zichzelf staand verhaal. Het stripboek, en de graphic novel specifiek, is een relatief nieuwe speler in het literaire veld, naar de veldtheorie van Bourdieu. Voor de jaren '80 had het medium nog nauwelijks symbolisch kapitaal vergaard en bevond het zich dus in een positie in het veld die een zeer lage mate van consecratie aangeeft. Het doel van deze scriptie was om erachter te komen of de graphic novel zich inmiddels verplaatst heeft of aan het verplaatsen is richting een hogere mate van consecratie in het literaire veld. Deze scriptie maakt gebruik van het model van Linders en Op de Beek om te onderzoeken welke beoordelingscriteria critici hanteerden in achtentwintig Engelstalige krantenrecensies van graphic novels in 2000 tot en met 2019. Ter aanvulling hierop zijn een aantal andere elementen van deze recensies onderzocht, namelijk het aantal woorden, de achtergrond van de critici, en uitspraken die critici in hun recensies doen over de graphic novel als medium. De resultaten wijzen uit dat de graphic novel inderdaad sinds de jaren '80 is verplaatst richting een positie die een hogere mate van consecratie aangeeft, wat vooral te zien is aan het gestegen aantal recensies in kranten. Het blijkt ook dat bepaalde individuele graphic novel-schrijvers zich een stuk sneller in die richting verplaatsen, omdat het stripboek als medium in het algemeen de negatieve connotaties die in de jaren '80 en daarvoor zijn ontstaan nog niet volledig kwijt heeft kunnen raken.

Introduction

In 2004 former editor of the *New York Times Book Review* Charles McGrath wrote a nearly 7000-word article for *The New York Times* in which he eulogizes the graphic novel. He begins his article with a prophecy that one day the comic book will take over from the novel as the most popular literary form. He explains that though this might seem unlikely, a similar change happened in the nineteenth century when reading novels became popular at the expense of reading poetry. This too had seemed unlikely at the time. Just a few decades earlier the novel had been considered “entertainment suitable only for idle ladies of uncertain morals”.¹ Comic books used to have a similarly bad reputation, but instead of being read by “idle ladies”, they were allegedly read by troubled and violent teenagers.²

McGrath argues that “comic books are what novels used to be – an accessible, vernacular form with mass appeal” and that the quality of the graphic novels that were being published in the 2000s made them deserving of the “newfound respectability” they were enjoying.³ By that time, graphic novels had even begun to win prizes that were normally awarded to text-only novels. A graphic novel that was very successful in the 2000s is Chris Ware’s *Jimmy Corrigan, the Smartest Kid on Earth* (2000), which won the Guardian First Book Award in 2001, among other awards. It was the first time a graphic novel had won a major U.K. book award, according to *The Guardian*.⁴

McGrath was not the first person to predict increased popularity of the graphic novel; the same happened in the 1980s, when the comic book industry thought that comic books would finally find new and larger audiences.⁵ The cause for this was the commercial and critical success of three graphic novels that were published around the same time: Art Spiegelman’s *Maus* (volume 1 published in 1986, volume 2 in 1991), Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons’ *Watchmen* (1987) and Frank Miller’s *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* (1986). These novels have since been named the “big three” by academics.⁶ All three of these novels were in some way different from the comic books that had been published until then and wrote about serious subjects.

¹ McGrath, “Not Funnies”.

² Weiner, *Faster Than a Speeding Bullet: The Rise of the Graphic Novel*, p. 21.

³ McGrath, “Not Funnies”.

⁴ “Graphic novel wins First Book Award”.

⁵ Williams and Lyons, “Introduction: In the Year 3794” in *The Rise of the American Comics Artist*, p. xii; Sabin, *Adult Comics: An Introduction*, p. 93.

⁶ Williams and Lyons, “How the Graphic Novel Changed American Comics” in *The Rise of the American Comics Artist*, p. 7.

Spiegelman's *Maus* has sold the most copies and received the most media attention of the three and this success has not been repeated by any other graphic novel since. *Maus* is based on Spiegelman's father's experiences as a Jew during World War II. All characters in the book are portrayed as animals: Jews are mice, for example, and Germans are cats.⁷ The media and the public loved *Maus* and were astonished that a comic book could be of such high quality. They had seemingly not expected that the comic book form could be utilized to tell stories about subjects such as the Holocaust, since they were used to the superhero stories that the comic book medium was known for.⁸ The second volume of *Maus* was even awarded a Pulitzer Prize in 1992, in the "Special Awards and Citations – Letters" category,⁹ which was unprecedented for a graphic novel.

The success of the "big three" was seen as promising by the comic book industry, but McGrath's *New Yorker* article from 2004 shows that by that time the graphic novel had not received the large increase in critical attention and sales that had been predicted in the 1990s. It is unclear where the comic book stands right now with critics and with the public, as no studies have been published about the general reception of graphic novels in recent years. In order to understand the graphic novel's current position it will be helpful to place it within the literary field as explained by Bourdieu's field theory.¹⁰ This will make it possible to see how its position has changed through the years and how this might differ from the position of text-only literary novels.

According to Bourdieu's field theory, each society consists of many interconnected social fields. The literary field is one of these fields (which exists within a larger cultural field) and is filled with agents who are competing for power. Agents in the literary field include book publishers, writers, critics and readers, among others. They can move through the field by gaining or losing different kinds of capital, such as economic capital. Bourdieu explains that the acquisition of symbolic capital is especially important to become successful in the literary field, which means that recognition and prestige are important. A writer, for example, can gain symbolic capital by winning an important literary prize. It is possible to place different mediums and genres of literature within the field as well. The following is

⁷ Williams and Lyons, "How the Graphic Novel Changed American Comics" in *The Rise of the American Comics Artist*, p. 49.

⁸ Loman, "'That Mouse's Shadow': The Canonization of Spiegelman's *Maus*" in *The Rise of the American Comics Artist*, p. 211.

⁹ Weiner, *Faster Than a Speeding Bullet: The Rise of the Graphic Novel*, p. 52.

¹⁰ Bourdieu, "The Field of Cultural Production, or: The Economic World Reversed".

Bourdieu's schematic representation of the literary field in France in the late nineteenth century:¹¹

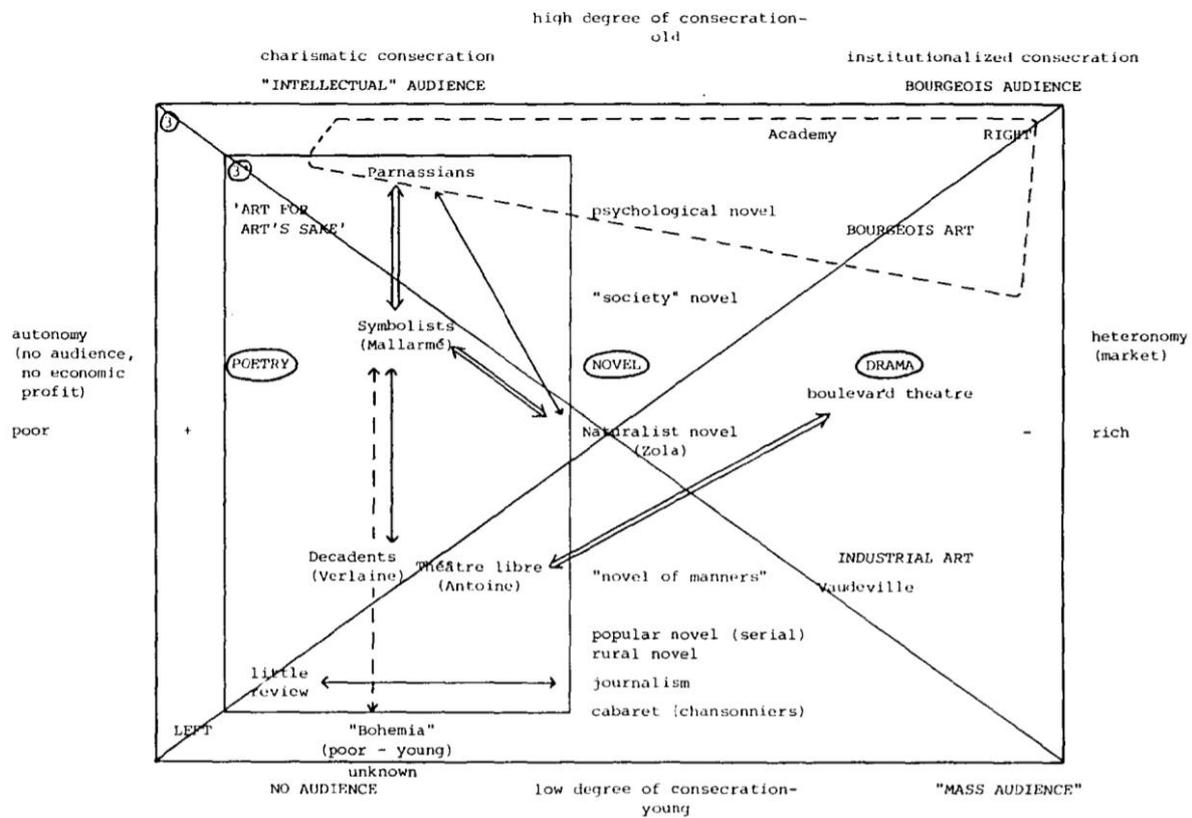


Figure 1: Bourdieu's diagram of the French literary field in the late 19th century¹²

The graphic novels that will be researched for this thesis exist within a field that does not look exactly the same as Bourdieu's field, since they were not published in nineteenth-century France, but even if the agents within the field have changed, the way agents interact and influence each other is still similar. If Charles McGrath's prophesy came true, the comic book should be moving towards the right side of Bourdieu's diagram: towards a large audience. The success of the "big three" and the amount of symbolic capital several graphic novels have acquired by winning important literary prizes would suggest that the graphic novel is also moving towards the top of Bourdieu's diagram: towards a higher degree of consecration. This thesis will focus on this second (possible) movement of the graphic novel and will answer the following question: does the professional reception of graphic novels in

¹¹ Bourdieu, "The Field of Cultural Production, or: The Economic World Reversed", p. 329.

¹² This figure can also be referenced in Appendix A.

newspapers from the 2000s and 2010s suggest that the graphic novel has moved or is moving towards a position of high consecration within the literary field?

Researching the Graphic Novel

The field of comic book research grew rapidly after the success of the “big three” in the 1980s. The first academics to study comic books in the 1960s and ’70s came from different academic fields and studied comic books on the side as a personal interest. There was John Lent, for example, who was a communications professor, and M. Thomas Inge, who specialized in William Faulkner.¹³ But after the “big three”, graphic novels were taken more seriously by critics and scholars, and comic book research was seen as a legitimate field. Academics were now able to make a career out of studying comic books and teach classes about them to their literature students.¹⁴

This thesis is not the first study to look at the reception of graphic novels, but it is the first to do so in a structured and comparative manner, with the use of a model that makes it possible to categorise the opinions of critics. Many earlier studies are written from a historical perspective as part of the history of the graphic novel as a whole. These studies often appear as chapters in histories of the graphic novel and describe the general reception of graphic novels or of one novel in particular, without going into detail on specific reviews. *The Rise of the American Comics Artist*, for example, contains the chapter ““That Mouse’s Shadow’: The Canonization of Spiegelman’s *Maus*”, which discusses how *Maus* was generally received by critics at the time it was published and how this eventually led to the canonization of the novel.¹⁵

There was not much to research after the media attention for the “big three” ceased, since graphic novels published in the 1990s hardly received any reviews. Histories of the graphic novel that were published at the time, such as Sabin’s *Adult Comics: An Introduction* (1993), were pessimistic about the future of the graphic novel and described the success of the “big three” as an exception instead of a permanent change in the comic book industry. This will be discussed in further detail in section 1.3 of the first chapter. Some recent histories, such as Weiner’s *Faster Than a Speeding Bullet* (second edition published in 2012), are more optimistic, as graphic novels have started to receive more attention from critics again in the

¹³ Weiner, *Faster Than a Speeding Bullet: The Rise of the Graphic Novel*, p. 190.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Gordon, “Making Comics Respectable: How *Maus* Helped Redefine a Medium in *The Rise of the American Comics Artist*.”

2000s and 2010s. This has also led to some studies on the reception of graphic novels that were published after the “big three”. *Participations*, a journal for audience- and reception studies, devoted a section of a 2012 volume to comic book audiences, which included eight articles on the reception of comic books.

One of these articles is Barker’s “The Reception of Joe Sacco’s *Palestine*”.¹⁶ He is one of few people who tried to study the reception of a graphic novel by reading and comparing individual reviews. There is no model or method, however, that is widely used for studying the reception of graphic novels. Barker’s method consisted of collecting press references for *Palestine*, reading some of them and trying to find patterns in the opinions of critics. This unstructured way of conducting research makes it difficult to know how thorough he was and makes it impossible to compare his findings to studies on other graphic novels.

The graphic novel has also made its way into high school classrooms. A Google Scholar search of the term “graphic novel” reveals that this topic is a favourite among academics, who are researching how graphic novels can be used as a tool to get teenagers to read.¹⁷ These researchers urge teachers and other professionals who want to promote reading to use graphic novels, because teenagers might find them more fun and less overwhelming. Excerpts from Spiegelman’s *Maus* are now part of several anthologies published by W.W. Norton, such as *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, which are subsequently used in the classroom.

The fact that graphic novels have started to receive attention from academics and are being used in classrooms shows that they are starting to gain a more prominent position in the literary field. The inclusion of *Maus* in W.W. Norton anthologies, for example, has gained *Maus* (and Spiegelman) more symbolic capital, but it might also have gained the graphic novel medium as a whole symbolic capital. Loman argues in his article about the canonization of *Maus* that the novel is in these anthologies because academics started writing about the novel, which happened in part because newspaper critics were reviewing it.¹⁸ This is supported by Bourdieu’s field theory, which states that the different agents within the literary field are connected and constantly influence each other: in this case critics, academics, publishers (W.W. Norton), teachers and readers are all connected.¹⁹ This shows that book

¹⁶ Barker, “The Reception of Joe Sacco’s *Palestine*”.

¹⁷ E.g. Tabacknick, *Teaching the Graphic Novel*; Short & Reeves, “The Graphic Novel: A ‘Cool’ Format for Communicating to Generation Y”; Schwarz, “Graphic Novels for Multiple Literacies”.

¹⁸ Loman, “‘That Mouse’s Shadow’: The Canonization of Spiegelman’s *Maus*” in *The Rise of the American Comics Artist*, p. 211.

¹⁹ Bourdieu, “The Field of Cultural Production, or: The Economic World Reversed”.

critics might play an important role in the consecration process of the graphic novel within the field.

Book critics are important actors within the literary field, because they stand between the reader on one side and the writer and publisher on the other, and this part of the literary field is researched by reception studies. As the previous example shows, attention from newspaper critics can lead to academics noticing a certain work, which could then lead to the work being taught to children and teenagers at school. This means a critic can indirectly have a large amount of influence. Critics also have a more direct impact by influencing the reading decisions of people who read their reviews, and potentially steer their opinions a certain way. Furthermore, critics are readers themselves, so professional book reviews might even be a reflection of the general public's opinions on a book. Especially research done on a large corpus of reviews could show trends in book reception over the years, which can be a reflection of the position of a certain medium or genre within the literary field. Finally, by simply writing about graphic novels, critics are distributing symbolic capital to these novels. All of these factors combined prove that critics have a large influence in the consecration process, so this thesis will mostly focus on critics to find out where the graphic novel is positioned in the literary field and what degree of consecration the medium has attained.

Definitions of Terms

Both the terms “graphic novel” and “comic book” will be used in this thesis, but they do not have exactly the same meaning. Stephen Weiner, in the preface to his book about the rise of the graphic novel, defines graphic novels as:

(...) book-length comic books that are meant to be read as one story. This broad term includes collections of stories in genres such as mystery, superhero, or supernatural, that are meant to be read apart from their corresponding ongoing comic book storyline; heart-rending works such as Art Spiegelman's *Maus*; and nonfiction pieces such as Joe Sacco's journalistic work, *Palestine*.²⁰

This definition shows that all graphic novels are comic books, but not all comic books are graphic novels, and they can be published in any genre. The term “graphic novel” is overused, however, since often comic books are called graphic novels even if they do not fit within the

²⁰ Weiner, *Faster than a Speeding Bullet: The Rise of the Graphic Novel*, p. 10-11.

definition. Chapter 1.3 explains that this is done by comic book publishers because there are fewer negative connotations attached to graphic novels than to the word “comic book”. Using Weiner’s definition of the graphic novel, the term “graphic novel” will be used in this thesis when appropriate, for example in parts about the graphic novels that will be researched, since these fit the term. The broader term “comic books” will mostly be used in sections about the history of the genre.

Methodology

Since so much research has been done on the “big three” graphic novels and the history of the graphic novel, this thesis will rely on those sources for the first chapter, which is an overview of the reception of graphic novels in the 1980s and 1990s. The starting point for the chapter is Weiner’s *Faster Than a Speeding Bullet: The Rise of the Graphic Novel* (2012). This book explains how the graphic novel came into being and describes all the major developments it has gone through since then. Another book that is important for the first chapter is *The Rise of the American Comics Artist: Creators and Contexts* (2010), edited by Williams and Lyons. It discusses the history of the graphic novel in more detail and includes chapters on some graphic novels important to this thesis, such as Spiegelman’s *Maus* and Ware’s *Jimmy Corrigan, the Smartest Kid on Earth*. Most of its chapters also contain information about the reception of graphic novels at the time.

Chapters two and three discuss the research that will be conducted for this thesis on the newspaper reception of graphic novels in the 2000s and 2010s. A large part of this research relies on the model created by Dutch academics Yvette Linders and Esther Op de Beek.²¹ Linders and Op de Beek’s model was chosen for this thesis because it can be applied to a large corpus and because it is very flexible. The model was created to study which evaluation criteria critics used at a certain point in time and how these criteria developed over time. According to Linders and Op de Beek, these criteria give an impression of the literary criticism at that time.²² Since critics are important agents in the literary field that are able to distribute symbolic capital, the evaluation criteria they use can reflect the graphic novel’s position in the field. Linders and Op de Beek applied the model to reviews of literary novels in Dutch newspapers from 1955 and 1995, but because it is a flexible model that consists of

²¹ Linders and Op de Beek, “Evaluatiedomeinen in de Nederlandse literatuurkritiek”.

²² Ibid.

many categories that can be combined, the model can easily be applied to graphic novels. Chapter 2.2 will explain the model in more detail.

Before Linders and Op de Beek's model can be used to analyse graphic novels, however, a few adjustments will have to be made to better fit the research question. The article that explains the model is written in Dutch and the corpus the model is applied to is very different from the one in this thesis, so the model will have to be translated and adjusted. It is important for this thesis, for example, whether critics comment on the text of the graphic novel as well as on its illustrations, so a category that can describe this will be added. Chapter 2.3 will discuss the changes that were made. Chapter 2.4 will explain to what extent the model was successfully applied to the corpus of graphic novel reviews. Finally, the results that are found with the use of Linders and Op de Beek's model will be discussed in chapter 3.4.

The scope of this thesis does not allow for all graphic novels that were published in the 2000s and 2010s to be researched. A selection of ten graphic novels and twenty-eight newspaper reviews was made. The graphic novels are all American and are as similar as possible to the "big three" in perceived quality and renown.²³ This thesis will only research reviews of graphic novels from America because most research that has been done on the history of the graphic novel focuses on the United States. In the introduction to *The Rise of the American Comics Artist* Williams and Lyons argue that research on American comic books is also international, because:

American comics have a global audience, the field of production is driven by many creators from outside North America, and the financial decisions influencing the majority of comics production are made by multinational corporations. There are good reasons to understand North American comics in a transnational context: the institutional transaction of texts, creators, and capital across national borders has contributed to observable productive tensions in the comic texts themselves.²⁴

This means that research results about the reception of American graphic novels can also be used to draw conclusions about the general reception of graphic novels. The novels that will be discussed in this thesis show the international significance of American graphic novels as

²³ Indicators of perceived quality and renown include awards the novel has won and the amount of reviews that were published in mainstream newspapers. Chapter 2.1 explains this in further detail.

²⁴ Williams and Lyons, "Introduction: In the Year 3794" in *The Rise of the American Comics Artist*, p. xiii.

well, as most of them were not only reviewed in the United States, but also received reviews in English and Canadian newspapers. This shows their impact in at least other English-speaking countries. Literary prizes, too, were awarded to these novels in multiple countries.

Chapter 2.1 discusses which graphic novels and reviews were selected and for which reasons. The selected reviews appeared in American, English and Canadian newspapers. The following is a list of the ten graphic novels and twenty-eight reviews that will be researched with the use of Linders and Op de Beek's model:²⁵

1. *Palestine* (1996 in two volumes, 2001 in one volume) – Joe Sacco
 - *The Independent*, 4-2-2003 (U.K.)²⁶
 - *Times Colonist*, 13-6-2004 (Canada)²⁷
2. *Safe Area Gorazde* (2000) – Joe Sacco
 - *The San Diego Union-Tribune*, 20-8-2000 (U.S.)²⁸
 - *The Guardian*, 11-8-2007 (U.K.)²⁹
3. *Jimmy Corrigan, the Smartest Kid on Earth* (2000) – Chris Ware
 - *The Record*, 2-12-2000 (Canada)³⁰
 - *The Independent*, 5-6-2001 (U.K.)³¹
 - *The Independent*, 16-6-2001 (U.K.)³²
 - *The Guardian*, 26-12-2001 (U.K.)³³
4. *Black Hole* (2005) – Charles Burns
 - *The Washington Post*, 30-10-2005 (U.S.)³⁴
 - *The Toronto Star*, 13-11-2005 (Canada)³⁵
 - *The Independent*, 20-11-2005 (U.K.)³⁶
5. *American Born Chinese* (2006) – Gene Luen Yang
 - *The New York Times*, 13-5-2007 (U.S.)³⁷

²⁵ This list can also be referenced in Appendix C.

²⁶ Shaar Murray, "The Tuesday Book: The Graphic Truth About Palestinian Existence".

²⁷ Bloom, "A Comic Book to Read With Caution".

²⁸ Kendricks, "Hell, In Line Drawings; The horrors are graphic, in moving 'Safe Area Gorazde'".

²⁹ Horwell, "A Rough Guide to Conflict".

³⁰ Good, "Adult Entertainment; 'Brilliant' Comic Book for Grownups is Dark and Quirky".

³¹ Thompson, "Life, Jim, But Not As We Know It".

³² Shaar Murray, "Comic Tragedy for the Last of a Line".

³³ Briggs, "Strip Show Genius".

³⁴ Schwartz, "Gross Anatomy; A Sexually Transmitted Plague Turns Teens Into Monsters".

³⁵ Weiler, "Teen Years Weirder Than we Dreamed".

³⁶ Martin, "It Isn't Rocket Semiotics, But It Works".

³⁷ Vizzini, "High Anxiety".

- *Intelligencer Journal*, 8-9-2007 (U.S.)³⁸
- 6. *Asterios Polyp* (2009) – David Mazzucchelli
 - *Austin Chronicle*, 17-7-2009 (U.S.)³⁹
 - *The New York Times*, 26-7-2009 (U.S.)⁴⁰
 - *The Globe and Mail*, 28-8-2009 (Canada)⁴¹
- 7. *Wilson* (2010) – Daniel Clowes
 - *The Guardian*, 26-6-2010 (U.K.)⁴²
 - *The New York Times*, 4-7-2010 (U.S.)⁴³
- 8. *Building Stories* (2012) – Chris Ware
 - *The Guardian*, 22-9-2012 (U.K.)⁴⁴
 - *The Daily Telegraph*, 29-9-2012 (U.K.)⁴⁵
 - *The Observer*, 21-10-2012 (U.K.)⁴⁶
 - *The New York Times*, 21-10-2012 (U.S.)⁴⁷
 - *The Toronto Star*, 28-10-2012 (Canada)⁴⁸
- 9. *Nimona* (2015) – Noelle Stevenson
 - *The New York Times*, 12-7-2015 (U.S.)⁴⁹
 - *The Independent*, 12-7-2015 (U.K.)⁵⁰
- 10. *Rusty Brown* (2019) – Chris Ware
 - *The Telegraph*, 17-9-2019 (U.K.)⁵¹
 - *The New York Times*, 14-10-2019 (U.S.)⁵²
 - *The Guardian*, 11-10-2019 (U.K.)⁵³

Other than applying Linders and Op de Beek's model to these reviews, additional research will be done so the research question can be answered more thoroughly. Firstly, the

³⁸ Kennedy, "Realization 'Born' From Gene Luen Yang's Award-Winning Graphic Novel".

³⁹ Jones, "Asterios Polyp".

⁴⁰ Wolk, "Shades of Meaning".

⁴¹ Mackay, "Review: Asterios Polyp, by David Mazzucchelli".

⁴² Faber, "Drawn to the Sad Side".

⁴³ Lipsyte, "Dyspeptic Living".

⁴⁴ Sam Leith, "Outside the Box".

⁴⁵ Wallis-Simons, "Drawing the World".

⁴⁶ Cooke, "Fear and Loathing in Chicago's House of Pain".

⁴⁷ Wolk, "Inside the Box."

⁴⁸ Beerman, "Through the Peep Hole".

⁴⁹ Hicks, "Drawn That Way".

⁵⁰ Sneddon, "Brace Your Goldenloins For Subtle Subversion".

⁵¹ Leith, "Rusty Brown by Chris Ware, Review: This Bleak Graphic Novel Is a Work of Genius".

⁵² Park, "It All Started in Omaha; Graphic Content".

⁵³ Robson, "Rusty Brown by Chris Ware Review – A Treasure Trove of Invention".

backgrounds of the authors of the reviews will be studied in order to see whether they are full-time graphic novel critics. If a dedicated group of graphic novel critics does not exist, that could indicate that the graphic novel does not have a strong position within the literary field yet. These results are discussed in chapter 3.1. Secondly, close reading will be applied to the researched graphic novels to find out critics' opinions on the comic book medium as a whole, which will be discussed in chapter 3.2. Finally, the number of words that was used in each review will be compared, which might show whether graphic novel reviews are becoming longer or shorter. This could prove insight into the importance newspapers ascribe to graphic novels, which also reflects their position in the field. The results will be discussed in chapter 3.3. The data that was collected by analysing graphic novel reviews with the use of Linders and Op de Beek's model, added to the previously discussed additional research and compared to findings about the reception of graphic novels before the 2000s from earlier research, should answer the research question of this thesis: does the professional reception of graphic novels in newspapers from the 2000s and 2010s suggest that the graphic novel has moved or is moving towards a position of high consecration within the literary field?

Chapter 1

The History and Reception of Graphic Novels Before the 2000s

This chapter will outline the reception of comic books before the 2000s. Knowledge about how the reception of comic books and graphic novels changed through the years will show how the comic book moved through the literary field in the past. This is necessary to understand the medium's place in the literary field today. This chapter shows that negative attitudes towards the comic book medium have a long history, which negative articles about comic books in newspapers contributed to. The reception in the 2000s and 2010s will be discussed in the next chapters through the research of reviews from those decades that was done for this thesis. The third chapter will draw more links between the reception of graphic novels after the year 2000 and information from this chapter about the reception of comic books before that time.

The first section of this chapter will describe the situation before the 1980s, so before the “big three” graphic novels got the public and critics to pay attention to comic books. It starts with a short history of the graphic novel, which also shows the way perceptions of the comic book developed over time. After this short history, the press that comic books received before the 1980s will be discussed, although actual reviews of comic books did not appear in the mainstream press during that time. The second section will discuss the comic book's rise in popularity and its consequent move through the literary field in the 1980s. It explains the impact of the “big three” graphic novels, how critics reacted to these novels and how this affected the comic book industry. The final section of this chapter will describe the decline in attention graphic novels received in the 1990s, both from the public and from critics. The section explores what led to this decline, which graphic novels did manage to achieve success, and how some newspapers even published negative articles about the graphic novel.

1.1 Before the “Big Three”

This chapter will focus on the American history of the comic book, since the “big three” are American novels and the graphic novels that will be researched in later chapters are also American. Williams and Lyons, editors of *The Rise of the American Comics Artist*, furthermore argue that the large impact of American comic books outside the United States

means that research on them can also be considered international,⁵⁴ as was discussed in the introduction to this thesis. When it is not specified in this chapter which country a statement refers to, it may be assumed that it describes the situation in the United States.

The term “graphic novel” only became popular with the general public and with the media in the 1980s, but the comic book already had a long history before then. It would be difficult to pinpoint one definitive history of the “regular” novel; similarly, the comic book does not seem to have been invented in one specific place and time and has different histories around the world. The first British comics, for example, originated from satirical illustrated publications in the late nineteenth century.⁵⁵ The American comic has its origins in the comic strips that started appearing in newspapers in the late nineteenth century.⁵⁶ These strips, also called “funnies”, were aimed at readers of the newspaper and their families, including children.⁵⁷ By the 1890s the comic strips had started to help sell the newspapers they appeared in.⁵⁸

The first American comic books were published in the 1930s; these were magazines containing comic stories reprinted from newspapers.⁵⁹ Since these sold well, publishers started publishing magazines with new material. Some of those early comic book publishers are still successful today, such as DC Comics and Marvel (then called Timely).⁶⁰ One difference between the newspaper comics and original comic books was that newspaper strips were read by a wide audience, but comic books were perceived as children’s books.⁶¹ This happened in a more extreme form in Great Britain as well, where hardly any comic books for adults were published until the late 1960s, even though the first comic strips had been aimed at everybody.⁶²

Writer Jerry Siegel and artist Joe Shuster created the character Superman in the late 1930s, after which the superhero story quickly became one of the most popular comic book genres. This continued into the 1940s, when many comic books were about patriotic war heroes.⁶³ Comic book scholar Roger Sabin calls this period “the first major boom in American

⁵⁴ Williams and Lyons, “Introduction: In the Year 3794” in *The Rise of the American Comics Artist*, p. xiii.

⁵⁵ Sabin, *Adult Comics*, p. 13.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

⁵⁸ Weiner, *Faster Than a Speeding Bullet: The Rise of the Graphic Novel*, p. 14.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Sabin, *Adult Comics*, p. 23.

⁶³ Weiner, *Faster Than a Speeding Bullet: The Rise of the Graphic Novel*, p. 14-15.

comics history”.⁶⁴ The comic book stayed popular throughout the early 1950s, when the popularity of superheroes decreased and stories about more varying subjects were published. This brought in more adult readers again,⁶⁵ but the comic book also had a new demographic: the teenagers who had grown up reading children’s comic books.⁶⁶

The comic book industry was dealt a blow when psychiatrist Fredric Wertham published his book *Seduction of the Innocent* in 1954. He claimed that reading comic books turned teenagers into delinquents. Comic books were frequently found in the bedrooms of teenagers who had become delinquents or committed suicide, so he reasoned that there must be a correlation. Comic books would furthermore ruin teenagers’ literary tastes so they could not appreciate highbrow literature anymore, according to Wertham. This led to U.S. Senate hearings on the connection between comic books and juvenile crime, for which Wertham also gave his testimony.⁶⁷

Although the hearings did not lead to any direct consequences, the comic book industry feared censorship from the government. To prevent this, publishers formed the Comic Magazine Association of America, a trade group which then created the Comics Code and checked whether it was applied to each comic book. The Comics Code consisted of guidelines for publishing comic books that should make them more acceptable to the general public. Violence had to be toned down and authority figures should be respected, for example. Comic books that did not receive the Comics Code seal of approval ran the risk of not being accepted by retailers and thus could not be sold.⁶⁸

Many publishers adjusted their comic books to adhere to the Comics Code, but an underground movement also developed during the 1960s that went against the Code. Another term for these underground comic books was “comix”. The comix “questioned social mores, encouraged opposition to the Vietnam War, told the story of the sexual revolution, and presented autobiographical tales”.⁶⁹ They were not sold in stores and on newsstands with the Code-approved comic books, but were distributed on the street and in head shops that sold cannabis- and tobacco related products. Despite these selling restrictions, some comix could sell 30,000 to 50,000 copies per issue.⁷⁰ Eventually the comix mostly disappeared, caused by

⁶⁴ Sabin, *Adult Comics*, p. 144.

⁶⁵ Sabin, *Adult Comics*, p. 144.

⁶⁶ Weiner, *Faster Than a Speeding Bullet: The Rise of the Graphic Novel*, p. 16.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 21-22.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

high paper costs in the 1970s and new laws that led to the closing of most head shops, where the comix were sold.⁷¹

There was also a more positive reason for the decline of underground comix. During the 1970s and '80s comic book specialty shops started to appear, and part of the comic book audience grew into a fandom that organised comic conventions and started its own fan magazines. There was now a comic book culture for adults and the specialty shops provided a space for them to come together.⁷² Many of them did not have a need for the underground movement anymore. This was in part because comic book publishers now realised they had a large adult audience, so the comics that were published during this time built on the comix and were often of better quality.⁷³ Additionally, publishers had a better idea of what their audience liked because of new sales arrangements with shops that allowed publishers to predict how many copies should be printed.⁷⁴ Publishers were encouraged to publish works for this adult audience because the fans liked to collect comic books and would pay a lot of money for special issues, especially in the superhero genre.⁷⁵

These changes led to “a boom in America which was unprecedented since the early 1950s”, according to Roger Sabin.⁷⁶ Not only were more comic books published, but because there was now a dedicated group of adult comic book readers publishers tried to seek out the best writers and artists to ensure their comic books sold the most copies. Comic book artists were given much more creative freedom and room to experiment instead of having to make similar superhero stories repeatedly. If publishers did not offer them this freedom, they would lose them to other publishers. This produced new comic books in different artistic styles on a wide variety of subjects.⁷⁷ It was possible to use more adult themes because the Comics Code was not as important in the 1980s as it had been when it was instated. Many comic books were now published that did not adhere to it. Superhero comics were still popular, but the new superhero stories were often darker and focused on issues that were going on in the real world.⁷⁸

The fandom that came into existence in the 1970s also led to the first reviews of comic books, which appeared in fan magazines. There were so many adult comic books available

⁷¹ Sabin, *Adult Comics*, p. 174.

⁷² Sabin, *Adult Comics*, p. 62.

⁷³ Weiner, *Faster Than a Speeding Bullet: The Rise of the Graphic Novel*, p. 29.

⁷⁴ Sabin, *Adult Comics*, p. 67.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 174.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 67-68.

⁷⁸ Weiner, *Faster Than a Speeding Bullet: The Rise of the Graphic Novel*, p. 43.

that these magazines now had enough material to only discuss high quality comics.⁷⁹ One of the first was *The Comics Journal*, which was founded by publisher Fantagraphics Books in 1976 and still exists today. *The Comics Journal* focused on studying comic books as an art form and published critical reviews.⁸⁰ By the mid-1980s, comic book journals and fan magazines were still the only place where comic books were reviewed. There is a lack of academic writing about press coverage of comic books before the “big three” received a large amount of media attention, because there is simply not much to discuss. A *Nexis* search of English-language newspaper articles from the 1970s and early 1980s containing the word “comic book” only yields a handful of results for each year, all from American newspapers. These news articles started appearing in the late 1970s when comic book fandom had come into existence and were either about this fan culture or about comic books that deserved attention for reasons other than artistic merit.

There is a 1978 *Washington Post* article, for example, about a comic book featuring boxer Muhammad Ali fighting against Superman. The article was published in the sports section and does not review the title, but only mentions that Ali promoted the book.⁸¹ Another *Washington Post* article from the same year reports a robbery where someone’s comic book collection was stolen and tells its readers about the business of comic book collecting.⁸² In 1983 DC Comics created a comic book as part of US first lady Nancy Reagan’s campaign against drug use, which received some media attention. These articles are not reviews either, however, and are mainly reports of Reagan’s anti-drug campaign.⁸³ The only newspaper article from this time that could be called a comic book review is a 1980 *New York Times* article about the trend in children’s publishing to make books about pigs, which appeared in the book review section. The paragraph that discusses the comic book is only ninety-four words long and concludes that it is “a good comic book but a comic book nonetheless”.⁸⁴

The fact that this is all the comic book criticism from before the “big three” that was available to a mainstream audience shows that the comic book was still a niche medium that had not established an important place within the literary field. Comic books might have had a fairly large audience since the beginning, but for a long time this did not lead to any symbolic

⁷⁹ Sabin, *Adult Comics*, p. 85.

⁸⁰ Weiner, *Faster Than a Speeding Bullet: The Rise of the Graphic Novel*, p. 38.

⁸¹ Rosen, “Comic Book, Suit Keep Ali Resolute”.

⁸² Harris, “The Great Comic Caper; Call the Cops! And The Green Hornet!”.

⁸³ “Comic Book Against Drugs”; Radcliffe, “Pow to Drugs! Teen Titans To the Rescue!; First Lady’s Crusade Hits the Comic Books And the Classrooms”.

⁸⁴ Woods, “These Little Piggies Went to Market”.

capital, since critics were not reviewing them, academics were not researching them and they received no prestigious prizes. If comic books were to be placed within the literary field that existed before the 1980s, they would have been in a place that denotes a very low degree of consecration. Furthermore, the general public outside the comic book fandom probably did not realize new comic books with more serious themes were being published. As long as newspapers did not write about them, the graphic novel's position in the literary field was unlikely to change.

1.2 The "Big Three"

One of the reasons that mainstream newspapers did not review comic books until the mid-1980s is that the medium was not taken very seriously. A *Washington Post* article about the anti-drug comic book that was mentioned in the previous section, for example, has the headline "Pow to Drugs! Teen Titans To the Rescue!". Headlines like these could be a reflection of the view many people had of comic books as superhero stories, instead of an art form that might be used to tell literary narratives. Another problem was that many people still viewed comic books as children's books, even though comic book publishers geared many of their books toward adults by now. Later articles that claimed the comic book had "grown up" into the graphic novel also described the negative view people had of comic books.⁸⁵ The conclusion in the newspaper article mentioned in the previous section that the reviewed title was "a good comic book but a comic book nonetheless" might reflect the sentiment that other critics had at the time: a comic book would always be of lower quality than a regular, text-only novel.

The solution turned out to be simple: comic books were rebranded as "graphic novels", which sounded as if they were novels with graphics, instead of superhero magazines for children. To the general public, the word "comic book" still had negative connotations. In 1954 psychiatrist Fredric Wertham had claimed comic books turned teenagers into delinquents and while this might not have been a widely held belief anymore in the 1980s, the reputation of comic books was far from that of literary novels. More adults had started reading comic books in the 1970s and 1980s, but these adults were mostly collectors that were part of the comic book fandom. The newspaper articles that appeared about these comic book

⁸⁵ See section 1.3.

readers portrayed them as a niche group of people who would pay hundreds of dollars for a superhero magazine. The new word “graphic novel” did not have any of these connotations.⁸⁶

The mainstream press discovered the graphic novel in 1986 and 1987, when three comic books that were marketed as “graphic novels” were published within a short span of time: *Watchmen* (1987) by Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons, *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* (1986) by Frank Miller and the first volume of *Maus* (1986) by Art Spiegelman.⁸⁷ All three of these novels were considered to be of high quality and were perceived to be different from earlier comic books. In the following years this led to many newspaper articles that claimed the comic book had “grown up”. Some examples are a 1986 *San Diego Union-Tribune* article titled ‘SHAZAM!; Comic books have grown up, with readers’,⁸⁸ a 1988 *New York Times* article titled “What’s New in the Comic Book Business; Growing Up Into “Graphic Novels””,⁸⁹ and a 1988 *Christian Science Monitor* article titled “The Comic Book Grows Up”.⁹⁰ This last article explains that the previous comic books were assumed to be “for kids” and had “trite plots, with page after page of violence”, but they had grown into graphic novels, which were “lavishly illustrated” and were concluded by the article to be “literature” and “art”.⁹¹

Comic book scholar Roger Sabin points out that the “growing up” of comic books was an inaccurate interpretation: high-quality comic books with diverse themes had been published for a long time and they had been read by adults from the start.⁹² However, the news articles gave visibility to these “grown-up” comic books to a wide audience, which led to high sales of the “big three” and comic books in general, so the comic book industry did not complain about this misrepresentation. DC Comics even ran a magazine advertisement that read “You outgrew comics – now they’ve caught up with you!”.⁹³ The “big three” had an impact outside the United States as well. In England, for example, the “growing up” of comic books also received attention from the press and publishers used the opportunity to advertise to mainstream audiences and tell them comic books were now serious novels for adults.⁹⁴

⁸⁶ Sabin, *Adult Comics*, p. 92-93.

⁸⁷ Sabin, *Adult Comics*, p. 92.

⁸⁸ Stein, ‘SHAZAM!; Comic books have grown up, with readers’.

⁸⁹ Towle, “What’s New in the Comic Book Business; Growing Up Into ‘Graphic Novels’”.

⁹⁰ Du Mars, “The comic book grows up”.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² Sabin, *Adult Comics*, p. 87.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

As Roger Sabin has observed, the “big three” did not come out of nowhere. Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons’ *Watchmen* and Frank Miller’s *The Dark Knight Returns* both built on the superhero tradition. By then, the Comics Code was not followed rigidly anymore by most publishers, and some superhero comics had been published that explored darker themes and offered criticism on real-world issues.⁹⁵ Moore and Miller had both turned longstanding comic book series into a success when they took control of them, namely the *Swamp Thing* series (Moore) and the *Daredevil* series (Miller). Both of those series were superhero comics, so the two writers knew the genre well. Publishers were therefore able to trust them and DC Comics gave them a lot of freedom for *Watchmen* and *The Dark Knight Returns*.⁹⁶

Although *Watchmen* and *The Dark Knight Returns* were the result of a long tradition, both were able to surprise critics and the mainstream public. From the outset, *Watchmen* seems to be a typical story about a group of vigilantes, but the novel does not glorify the actions of its superheroes and instead uses the genre to explore “whether or not absolute power corrupts”.⁹⁷ The novel also contains many references to poets and philosophers that are considered highbrow. The protagonist in *The Dark Knight Returns* comes out of retirement to save the world and is portrayed “as a brooding psychopath, 50 years old and still traumatised by the death of his parents”.⁹⁸ The novel explores his traumas and comments on several real-life issues. One of Batman’s enemies, for example, is the US government.

Watchmen is seen as an important novel that helped popularise the graphic novel, but it did not receive much recognition from critics at the time. *Watchmen* is mentioned in some of the articles from the late 1980s about the “grown up” graphic novel⁹⁹ and interviews with writer Alan Moore appeared in magazines such as *Time* and *Rolling Stone*.¹⁰⁰ The novel was also awarded the 1988 Hugo Award (an important award for science fiction and fantasy stories) in the Other Forms category, in addition to winning several comic book awards.¹⁰¹ This shows it was recognised as an important work at the time, but those same newspapers that wrote about its importance did not publish reviews of the novel. Comic book scholar Stephen Weiner notes that *Watchmen* was not as accessible to mainstream readers as the other two members of the “big three”, because readers needed to be familiar with superhero comics

⁹⁵ Weiner, *Faster Than a Speeding Bullet: The Rise of the Graphic Novel*, p. 43.

⁹⁶ Weiner, *Faster Than a Speeding Bullet: The Rise of the Graphic Novel*, p. 47.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Sabin, *Adult Comics*, p. 87.

⁹⁹ E.g. Du Mars, “The comic book grows up”; Green, “Today’s comic books just aren’t kids’ stuff; Readers, storylines, artwork all mature”.

¹⁰⁰ Dallas, *American Comic Book Chronicles: The 1980s*, p. 175.

¹⁰¹ Weiner, *Faster Than a Speeding Bullet: The Rise of the Graphic Novel*, p. 47.

in order to understand how the novel subverted and criticised the genre. This meant *Watchmen* received the least amount of sales and media attention of the three. *The Dark Knight Returns* also built on the superhero genre, but many people knew *Batman* from the many films and TV series the character had appeared in.¹⁰²

Unlike *Watchmen*, *The Dark Knight Returns* did not win any prizes, but commercially it was very successful: by 2001, over a million copies in print had been issued.¹⁰³ The novel also received a substantial amount of press coverage, although a lot of this coverage appeared some years after the novel had been published, when its success had already been established and the *Batman* franchise had grown even further.¹⁰⁴ *The Dark Knight Returns* even received a few reviews in the mainstream press. The *St. Petersburg Times* in Florida (now *Tampa Bay Times*) published an article in 1987 about how comic books had “grown up”, which includes a favourable 300-word review on *The Dark Knight Returns* that emphasises the novel’s characterisations.¹⁰⁵ A 1987 *New York Times* article in which multiple comic books are reviewed also includes a 300-word review of *The Dark Knight Returns*, but this one is negative. The reviewer’s conclusion about Miller’s writing is that it is “convoluted” and “difficult to follow” and the art shows “a grotesquely muscle-bound Batman and Superman, not the lovable champions of old”.¹⁰⁶ The other reviews that are included in the article show that this reviewer did not appreciate the new direction the superhero genre was taking.

Art Spiegelman’s *Maus* has been the most successful out of the “big three” both commercially and critically, and even now its success has not been surpassed by any graphic novel. According to one of Spiegelman’s publishers, the book has sold more than 3.1 million copies worldwide.¹⁰⁷ *Maus* is a biographical novel that tells the story of Spiegelman’s father Vladek, a Jewish Holocaust survivor. It is told through two timelines: one shows Vladek’s experiences during World War II and the other shows Art Spiegelman interviewing his father for his book. This second timeline also explores how his father’s experiences have shaped their father-son relationship. The people in *Maus* are portrayed as animals: Jews are mice, for example, and Germans are cats. Where *Watchmen* and *The Dark Knight Returns* clearly built

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 47-48.

¹⁰³ “DC Comics Publishes Frank Miller’s Batman Sequel To The Legendary Dark Knight Returns”.

¹⁰⁴ E.g. Allen, “Vigilante Bat; The Serio-Comic Hero, Caped & On the Case” (1989); Siegal, “Dark Knight forces comics into maturity” (1989).

¹⁰⁵ Smith, “Novel comics: The American comic book is growing up”.

¹⁰⁶ Richler, “Paperbacks; Batman at Midlife: Or the Funnies Grow Up”.

¹⁰⁷ <http://knopfdoubleday.com/2011/09/20/metamaus-by-art-spiegelman/>

on the superhero tradition, which was already associated with comic books, for many people Spiegelman's novel seemed to come out of nowhere.

Spiegelman, however, had already had a long career before he started publishing *Maus* and he was well-known in the underground scene. He had become a professional cartoonist at age sixteen and produced mainly underground comix. In the 1980s he and his wife Françoise Mouly also founded a comics anthology magazine named *Raw*, which showcased underground comix and was acclaimed by comic book critics. *Raw* is also the place where *Maus* was first published in instalments, before it was published in two volumes by Pantheon (1986 and 1991).¹⁰⁸ The magazine helped pave the way for the reception the “big three” received by hiring prominent artists for its stories, thus trying to elevate the reputation of comic books.¹⁰⁹ This led some people to criticise the magazine for being too highbrow and elitist.¹¹⁰

The reputation Spiegelman already had because of *Raw* and the fact that *Maus* was not a superhero story, but a story about serious subject matter, perhaps made it easier for critics to accept the work as worthy of literary criticism. *Maus* received a 1500-word article in *The New York Times* in 1985, before the first volume had even been published and the only place it was available was in *Raw* magazine. The article was written by Ken Tucker, who was known as a popular-music critic that did not usually write about comic books. Tucker called the novel “a remarkable feat of documentary detail and novelistic vividness” and claimed *Maus* represented an “unfolding literary event”. It also established the novel as a highbrow work of art by emphasising its literary qualities.¹¹¹ According to comic book scholars, this early review contributed to the critical success *Maus* received once its first volume was published.¹¹² Another important factor in its success is that, unlike *Watchmen* and *The Dark Knight Returns*, which were published by DC Comics, both volumes of *Maus* were published by mainstream literary publishers, namely Pantheon in the United States and Penguin in England.¹¹³

¹⁰⁸ Sabin, *Adult Comics*, p. 90-91.

¹⁰⁹ Weiner, *Faster Than a Speeding Bullet: The Rise of the Graphic Novel*, p. 49.

¹¹⁰ Heer, *In Love with Art: Françoise Mouly's Adventures in Comics with Art Spiegelman*, p. 71-72.

¹¹¹ Tucker, “Cats, Mice and History – the Avant-Garde of the Comic Strip”.

¹¹² E.g. Loman, “‘That Mouse's Shadow’: The Canonization of Spiegelman's *Maus*” in *The Rise of the American Comics Artist*, p. 210.

¹¹³ Sabin, *Adult Comics*, p. 91.

The first volume of *Maus* received (mostly favourable) articles in newspapers such as *The Washington Post* (U.S.), *The Guardian* (U.K.)¹¹⁴ and *The Toronto Star* (Canada),¹¹⁵ although not all of them were strictly reviews. The *Guardian* article, for example, includes a section that criticises the phenomenon that *Maus* had already become in the United States: “after reading *Maus* people seem to end up discussing what comics can do, not what Hitler did”. However, comic book scholars have noted in recent years that *Maus* did not immediately change opinions of critics and the public on comic books.¹¹⁶ Most comic books were still seen as crude superhero stories and *Maus* was thought to be an exception to the rule.¹¹⁷ For many people *Maus* was the only graphic novel they had ever read.¹¹⁸ Comic book scholar Stephen Weiner has criticised the reviewers at the time for putting so much emphasis on *Maus*’s literary qualities and not understanding that the illustrations were just as important for Spiegelman to tell his story as the text.¹¹⁹

The success of *Maus* became apparent in the years following its publication. The novel won numerous prizes and its second volume, published in 1991, was even awarded a Pulitzer Prize in the ‘Special Awards and Citations – Letters’ category. Such critical success had never been achieved by a comic book artist.¹²⁰ Academics discovered *Maus* around the same time. In 1989 comic book scholar Joseph Witek predicted that *Maus* had forever changed “the cultural perception of what a comic book can be and what can be accomplished by creators who take seriously the sequential art medium”.¹²¹ After the publication of *Maus*’s second volume, more articles started appearing about the novel (and are still being published in 2020) about varying subjects such as the novel’s use of animal allegory, its representation of the Holocaust¹²² and its use of foreign vocabulary.¹²³ *Maus* has been the only comic book to be the subject of such a large volume of academic articles. Another unprecedented achievement

¹¹⁴ Christy, “Weekend Arts: Caught in the Maus trap – Art Spiegelman is using a comic book to tell how six million Jews were murdered”.

¹¹⁵ Mietkiewicz, “The Maus that roared”.

¹¹⁶ Williams and Lyons, “Making Comics Respectable: How *Maus* Helped Redefine a Medium” in *The Rise of the American Comics Artist*, p. 186

¹¹⁷ E.g. Scalzi in “Adult comics need to rank talk ahead of trite action” (*The San Diego Union-Tribune*, 1990): “The exception that proves the rule, by the way: Art Spiegelman’s ‘Maus’”.

¹¹⁸ Weiner, *Faster Than a Speeding Bullet: The Rise of the Graphic Novel*, p. 52.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

¹²¹ Witek, *Comic Books as History: The Narrative Art of Jack Jackson, Art Spiegelman, and Harvey Pekar*, p. 97.

¹²² Loman, “‘That Mouse’s Shadow’: The Canonization of Spiegelman’s *Maus*” in *The Rise of the American Comics Artist*, p. 217.

¹²³ Urdiales-Shaw, “Between Transmission and Translation: The Rearticulation of Vladek Spiegelman’s Languages in *Maus*”.

was that *Maus* began appearing in the W.W. Norton anthologies, which showcase important literary works. These anthologies are often used in university courses and high school classes and play an important role in the creation of reading lists, so *Maus* was subsequently introduced into these environments.¹²⁴

After the rebranding of comic books as “graphic novels” critics and journalists started writing about the “big three”, *Maus* was awarded a Pulitzer Prize (although this did not happen until 1992) and *Maus* was included in W.W. Norton Anthologies, so it would be expected that these “new” graphic novels gained a relatively large amount of symbolic capital and thus had a different position in the literary field than the previous comic books. Some journalists even called the new graphic novels “literature” and “art”.¹²⁵ It is uncertain, however, whether all graphic novels were now in a position that indicates a higher degree of consecration, or whether this was only true for the “big three”. This section explained that some critics saw *Maus* as the only high-quality comic book; the exception to the rule. This suggests *Maus* had a much higher degree of consecration than the comic book in general. The section also discussed that, according to Weiner, critics at the time did not pay as much attention to the illustrations of *Maus* as to its textual qualities, as they did not realise their importance. This shows how new the graphic novel was in the literary field. It is likely that these graphic novel critics came from different places in the field, as there were no dedicated graphic novel critics yet. Chapter 3.1 explores whether this changed after the 2000s.

1.3 After the “Big Three”

After the “big three” had been accepted by the general public, critics and academics, the comic book industry had high hopes for the future of graphic novels and comic books in general. The comic book might finally be seen as a valid art form and people would not be embarrassed to read one in public anymore.¹²⁶ For the first few years in the late 1980s, this indeed seemed to be the direction the comic book was taking. The success of the “big three” led to a large audience that was now familiar with graphic novels and the graphic novel had a better reputation than comic books in general.¹²⁷ In turn, mainstream bookshops started to sell graphic novels, libraries included them in their collections, and a large number of comic book

¹²⁴ Loman, “‘That Mouse’s Shadow’: The Canonization of Spiegelman’s *Maus*” in *The Rise of the American Comics Artist*, p. 211.

¹²⁵ Du Mars, “The comic book grows up”.

¹²⁶ Sabin, *Adult Comics*, p. 93.

¹²⁷ Williams and Lyons, “Introduction: In the Year 3794” in *The Rise of the American Comics Artist*, p. xv.

shops appeared.¹²⁸ This was embraced by comic book publishers as an opportunity to publish new types of comic books for an audience that did not have the kinds of expectations the year-long fans of a comic book series had. Publishers now knew that there was an audience for sophisticated graphic novels, so their focus was not only on comic book collectors anymore.¹²⁹ In addition, many mainstream publishers started a graphic novel imprint.¹³⁰

The comic book industry was soon disappointed, however, as new commercial and critical successes failed to appear in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Bookshops reduced the shelf space allocated to graphic novels and mainstream publishers scaled down their graphic novel imprints.¹³¹ This was partly to blame on the comic book industry itself, according to Roger Sabin. Because the term “graphic novel” had been so readily accepted by the public and by critics, comic book publishers had started marketing all of their comic books as “graphic novels”,¹³² even though the term only applies to a certain category of comic books.¹³³ This led to a large volume of new comics marketed as graphic novels and most of them did not live up to the expectations that people had. Another issue was that many comic book publishers started marketing all of their graphic novels towards a mainstream audience, even though there was a large and still growing group of comic book fans that enjoyed reading and collecting the “old” superhero stories.¹³⁴

Roger Sabin also notes that perhaps the amount of media attention the graphic novel received in the late 1980s created a false image of public perceptions. Most people were actually still not reading comic books and while they might have read about the “big three” in a newspaper article, they had not read the novels themselves. *Maus* was seen as an exception to the rule and many people still saw other comic books as children’s stories. For most people this view was not altered as much as the newspaper articles made it seem.¹³⁵ The comic book industry also failed to retain the attention of new readers who had enjoyed the “big three”. The high number of newspaper articles had made it clear that the “big three” were important works, but readers who had finished them did not know where to go from there.¹³⁶

¹²⁸ Sabin, *Adult Comics*, p. 93-94/177.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

¹³¹ Sabin, *Adult Comics*, p. 111.

¹³² *Ibid.*, p. 93-94.

¹³³ It was explained in the introduction to this thesis that graphic novels are book-length comic books that are meant to be read as one story, according to Weiner’s definition in *Faster Than a Speeding Bullet: The Rise of the Graphic Novel*.

¹³⁴ Sabin, *Adult Comics*, p. 97.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

During this time, in which most of the public seemed ambivalent about comic books, newspaper articles started to appear in opposition to comic books.¹³⁷ A *New York Times* article of nearly 4000 words that was headlined “Drawing on the Dark Side” (1989) criticised the newspaper articles that had appeared in support of the graphic novel and the “big three”. According to its author, these articles failed to mention that “over the last decade, comics have forsaken campy repartee and outlandishly byzantine plots for a steady diet of remorseless violence”. The “big three” were not above this either, as he claimed that “the vindictive, sadistic tone of comics of the 1980s is best exemplified by the work of Alan Moore, author of ‘Watchmen’”.¹³⁸ A *San Diego Union-Tribune* article from 1990 criticised graphic novels for not doing enough to supersede the superhero genre and called *Maus* “the exception that proves the rule”.¹³⁹

There was also criticism of the graphic novel in the United Kingdom. A 1989 article in the *Independent* was headlined “Traditional novel ‘in danger’ as teenagers turn to comics”, written by the Art Correspondent of the newspaper. The article claimed that the popularity of comic books for adults could lead to “the death of the novel”, which was corroborated by a member of the National Union of Teachers who was quoted as saying “comics are part of the three-minute culture and act as a disincentive to reading”.¹⁴⁰ Such articles did not improve the comic book’s reputation.

At the beginning of the 1990s it thus seemed as if the “big three” had hardly had any effect on people’s perceptions of the comic book. The discussion about comic books as a negative influence that had been going on for decades had been newly rekindled and in the United Kingdom this even led to police raids on comic book shops and customs’ confiscations on comic books that came from the United States. This led to self-censorship from publishers, which had also happened in the United States in the 1950s when the comic book industry had instated the Comics Code.¹⁴¹ The final blow for the comic book industry was the economic recession that took place in the first half of the 1990s in both the U.K. and the U.S., which also affected the publishing trade in general.¹⁴²

It is important to note that most available information about the comic book industry in the 1990s comes from comic book scholar Roger Sabin, who was publishing about comic

¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 112.

¹³⁸ Queenan, “Drawing on the Dark Side”.

¹³⁹ Scalzi, “Adult comics need to rank talk ahead of trite action”.

¹⁴⁰ Lister, “Traditional novel ‘in danger’ as teenagers turn to comics”.

¹⁴¹ Sabin, *Adult Comics*, p. 112.

¹⁴² Ibid., p. 113.

books during this time. Although the future of the comic book might have seemed bleak at the time, more recent works written by comic book scholars put much less emphasis on the adversity comic books faced in the 1990s than Sabin did while it was happening. Weiner, for example, only mentions the successful comic books of the 1990s in his history of the graphic novel.¹⁴³ *The Rise of the American Comics Artist* also notes several positive developments during the 1990s: filmmakers adapted comic books and used the comic book industry as a subject for their films, graphic novels were available in public libraries, some newspapers published articles about comic books in their arts section, and universities offered courses on the comic book.¹⁴⁴

There were also some successful comics that were published in the 1990s, but most of these were comic book series, not graphic novels. They built on the success of the “big three” and covered serious subjects for an adult audience. Neil Gaiman’s *The Sandman* series, for example, is a fantasy series that includes many references to well-known mythic and historical figures, such as Lucifer and William Shakespeare. The series sold well and received some attention from the press, for example in *The Nation* magazine, where a critic compared *The Sandman* to James Joyce’s *Ulysses*.¹⁴⁵ Gaiman is credited with elevating perceptions of the comic book medium in a similar way that the “big three” did and with bringing in a new comic book audience.¹⁴⁶

There were a few successful graphic novels as well during this time. One of them is Scott McCloud’s *Understanding Comics* (1993), which explains the history of the comic book and tells the reader how comic books work, all in comic strip form. The book received attention from newspapers such as *The New York Times* and *The Chicago Sun-Times* and the author was frequently interviewed about the new, “grown-up” comic book field, since the subject matter of his book made him an expert on the subject. After the 1990s he continued to publish non-fiction graphic novels about the comic book industry and his books are frequently used in university courses about comic books.¹⁴⁷ Another success from the 1990s is volume two of Art Spiegelman’s *Maus* (1991), which was awarded a Pulitzer Prize in 1992.¹⁴⁸ Daniel Clowes’ *Ghost World* (1997), a story about two cynical teenage girls, did not receive much

¹⁴³ Weiner, *Faster Than a Speeding Bullet: The Rise of the Graphic Novel*, p. 53-71.

¹⁴⁴ Williams and Lyons, “How the Graphic Novel Changed American Comics” in *The Rise of the American Comics Artist*, p. 11.

¹⁴⁵ Weiner, *Faster Than a Speeding Bullet: The Rise of the Graphic Novel*, p. 54.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p 61-63.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

attention from critics when it was published, but brought in a large new audience when it was adapted to film in 2001.¹⁴⁹ Finally, Joe Sacco's *Palestine* was a surprise to the public and critics. Sacco described himself as a comics journalist and *Palestine* showed people new potential of the comic book. The non-fiction work describes the author's time as a journalist in the Gaza Strip in 1991 and 1992.¹⁵⁰ *Palestine* will be discussed in later chapters of this thesis, as it was not reviewed by critics until it was published in one volume in 2001.

So although the comic book industry suffered many setbacks in the 1990s, there were still graphic novels that managed to achieve success. Bookshops had also started to include graphic novel sections again after a setback in the early 1990s. Some magazines that were aimed at the publishing industry, such as *Publishers Weekly* and *Booklist*, now often included graphic novel reviews.¹⁵¹ By the mid-1990s the hostile articles about graphic novels had also stopped, and Art Spiegelman was able to work as a cover artist and occasional writer for *The New Yorker*.¹⁵²

The fact that in the late 1990s newspapers were not publishing negative articles about comic books anymore meant that there was an opportunity for the reputation of graphic novels to improve again, but mainstream newspapers were still not reviewing graphic novels frequently. This is shown by the fact that too few graphic novel reviews were published in the 1990s to be able to include them in the research for this thesis, as will be discussed in the first section of the next chapter. This section explained that according to Sabin, the amount of media attention the "big three" received perhaps made the comic book industry overly optimistic. In reality most people were still not reading comic books. Sabin claims the "big three" did not improve the comic book's reputation as much as some articles had made it seem, either.¹⁵³ This shows that the conclusion from the previous section that perhaps only the "big three" had a significantly higher degree of consecration in the 1980s and '90s than the "old" comic books could be true. There were, however, some developments that point towards a more modest upward movement of the graphic novel medium as a whole as well: universities started offering courses on comic books, graphic novels became available in public libraries and some newspapers started publishing comic book articles in the arts section. Since comic books had hardly any symbolic capital at all before the 1980s, these developments (which all indicate an increase in symbolic capital) suggest that they did move

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 69.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 66.

¹⁵¹ Weiner, *Faster Than a Speeding Bullet: The Rise of the Graphic Novel*, p. 67-68.

¹⁵² Ibid., p. 69.

¹⁵³ Sabin, *Adult Comics*, p. 178.

within the literary field towards a higher degree of consecration after the “big three” had been published.

The next two chapters will discuss how newspaper critics reviewed graphic novels in the 2000s and 2010s. This will make it possible to draw conclusions about what critics found important when evaluating graphic novels in the 2000s and 2010s, which reflects the graphic novel’s position within the field at that time. The chapters will research whether graphic novels have climbed towards a position in the literary field that indicates a high degree of consecration. Chapter 2 explains the methodology that was used to research this and chapter 3 discusses the research results.

Chapter 2

Research Method

A total of twenty-eight newspaper reviews of ten graphic novels that were published in the 2000s and 2010s will be analysed using Yvette Linders and Esther op de Beek's model to determine which evaluation criteria were used by critics of graphic novels during that time. The data collected with this research, combined with the results from additional research, will be used to find out whether the graphic novel is moving or has moved towards a position of high consecration within the literary field. This chapter discusses first how these ten graphic novels and twenty-eight newspapers were selected, which difficulties arose during the process and how I solved them. The next section explains how Linders and Op de Beek's model works, why I chose to use this model to analyse graphic novel reviews, and how it can be used to research the position of graphic novels within the literary field. It is then discussed how the model was translated from Dutch to English and which changes were made to accommodate the study of graphic novel reviews, as opposed to reviews of literary novels. The final section of this chapter lists the research steps that were taken for this thesis and examines the issues that came up during the research process. The section will also discuss which additional research I will do on the graphic novel reviews to answer the research question in the most comprehensive manner. The chapter after this one will comprise a discussion of the research results.

2.1 Selecting Research Materials

This thesis researches the position of the graphic novel in the literary field by analysing how graphic novels have been reviewed in mainstream newspapers since the 1980s. Since the scope of the thesis does not allow me to research all graphic novel reviews that have been published since then, several choices had to be made. Firstly, I decided to only research graphic novels written by authors from the United States.¹⁵⁴ The introduction to this thesis explains that American comic books such as the "big three" have had such an impact on the comic book industry outside the United States that research on American comic books can also be considered international.¹⁵⁵ The fact that for some of the selected graphic novels more

¹⁵⁴ Joe Sacco, author of *Palestine* and *Safe Area Goražde*, was born in Malta, but has lived in the United States since he was a teenager. His graphic novels have won several Eisner Awards, which are awarded to American comic books.

¹⁵⁵ Williams and Lyons, "Introduction: In the Year 3794" in *The Rise of the American Comics Artist*, p. xiii.

international reviews were published than American reviews attests to the international popularity of American graphic novels.

Secondly, all of the selected graphic novels were published in the 2000s and 2010s. I considered to also research reviews of comic books that were published before the 1980s in order to better map the movement of the graphic novel through the literary field, but no comic book reviews were published in mainstream newspapers before the “big three” caught critics’ attention, as was discussed in chapter 1.1. Another option was to include graphic novels from the 1980s, with the same purpose. However, most of the graphic novel reviews that were written in the 1980s were for the “big three” and the reception of these novels has already been researched extensively.¹⁵⁶ Due to limits in scope, I decided that it would be more useful to study graphic novels that have not received as much academic attention. The information from studies about the reception of the “big three” has been used in the first chapter as context for the rest of this study.

I did not research graphic novel reviews that were published in the 1990s for this thesis either, since there were not enough reviews to be able to form conclusions by analysing them. Chapter one explained that graphic novels were not as successful in the 1990s as the comic book industry had hoped and newspapers even published some negative articles about comic books. The first chapter names some graphic novels that still managed to be successful with the public and that were later seen as important by authors of graphic novel histories, but even these did not receive reviews in the mainstream newspapers. An example of a graphic novel that did not receive recognition until later is Daniel Clowes’ *Ghost World* (1997),¹⁵⁷ which was only reviewed in *The Washington Post* in an article that also reviewed three other comic books.¹⁵⁸ Some other graphic novels received media attention, but not in the form of reviews. Scott McCloud’s *Understanding Comics* (1993), for example, explains to readers how comic books work, so McCloud was seen as a comic book expert and was subsequently interviewed in newspapers to talk about comic books.¹⁵⁹ Other successes from the 1990s, such as Neil Gaiman’s *The Sandman*, appeared as comic book series instead of single-volume graphic novels, so these fall outside the scope of this thesis (and were mostly reviewed in specialized comic book publications).

¹⁵⁶ E.g. in histories of the comic book such as Weiner’s *Faster Than a Speeding Bullet: The Rise of the Graphic Novels* and more specialized studies such as Loman’s “‘That Mouse’s Shadow’: The Canonization of Spiegelman’s *Maus*” in *The Rise of the American Comics Artist*.

¹⁵⁷ Weiner, *Faster Than a Speeding Bullet: The Rise of the Graphic Novel*, p. 69.

¹⁵⁸ Musgrove, “It’s So Graphic!”.

¹⁵⁹ E.g. Considine, “Artist draws on images to fathom comics”.

After limiting the graphic novels that would be researched to American graphic novels from the 2000s and 2010s, I had to make a selection. My initial plan was to find graphic novels that are similar to the “big three” in genre, since this would make it easier to compare the reception of these novels to the reception in the 1980s and see whether there had been a shift in the graphic novel’s position in the literary field, but this proved to be impossible. Spiegelman’s *Maus* is an autobiographical non-fiction book, and since its publication several graphic novels have been written in this category that were received well by the public and that are deemed important by academics, such as *Blankets* (2003)¹⁶⁰ by Craig Thompson and *Fun Home* (2006)¹⁶¹ by Alison Bechdel, but the *Nexis* database only shows one newspaper review for each of the novels, both in *The Guardian*. It is even more difficult to find reviews for graphic novels that are similar to *Watchmen* and *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, as these are superhero stories. Most superhero comic books are not published in graphic novel form, but instead are released in multiple issues and volumes that often run for years, and these are rarely reviewed in newspapers.

Since limiting the research to books in the same genre as the “big three” was not possible, my next plan was to choose graphic novels that are comparable to the “big three” in renown and perceived quality, which proved to be more workable. The first point of reference for this were the Eisner Awards, which are considered to be the most important American comic book awards. Winning an Eisner Award indicates that the graphic novel is of high quality (at least according to the judges) and is therefore similar to the “big three”.¹⁶² The Eisner Awards include more than twenty categories, but the most relevant to this thesis are the “Graphic Album: New” category for newly published graphic novels and the “Graphic Album: Reprint” category for reprints of graphic novels. Nearly all of the graphic novels that are studied in this thesis have won an award in one of these categories, with the exception of Sacco’s *Palestine* and Ware’s *Rusty Brown*. Sacco, however, did win an Eisner Award for his later work *Safe Area Goražde* and academics recognise *Palestine* as an important graphic novel.¹⁶³ *Rusty Brown* was written by Chris Ware, whose previous works have received many awards.

The selection criterion that ended up being the most guiding was that the selected graphic novels need to have been reviewed in more than one newspaper. I decided that a

¹⁶⁰ Weiner, *Faster Than a Speeding Bullet: The Rise of the Graphic Novel*, p. 75.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² <https://www.comic-con.org/awards/history>

¹⁶³ E.g. Weiner, *Faster Than a Speeding Bullet: The Rise of the Graphic Novel*, p. 66.

minimum of two published reviews per graphic novel would ensure that all of the selected graphic novels have an amount of renown among critics that is somewhat similar to that of the “big three”. Some of the Eisner Award winners were not reviewed at all and some only once, however, so the minimum of two reviews quickly shortened the list of possible research subjects. This means that perhaps there is not much to research for this thesis, since apparently newspaper critics are still not paying much attention to graphic novels. Still, there have never been more newspaper reviews of graphic novels than in the last twenty years, so research on the subject could still lead to interesting results. Another limit to this thesis is that newspaper reviews have only been written about graphic novels that are deemed popular, of high quality or otherwise important, so researching them will only cover a small part of the comic book world. This is perhaps true for most reception studies and will be taken into consideration when drawing conclusions about the collected data.

Finally, after I had compiled a list of ten graphic novels, I had to decide which of its reviews to research. It would make sense to study only the American reception of the selected graphic novels, since the selected novels are all American and the first chapter of this thesis mostly covers the American history of the graphic novel, but this proved too limiting. Some graphic novels, such as Ware’s *Jimmy Corrigan*, only received reviews in newspapers from other countries, and many of the graphic novels only received one review in an American newspaper. I decided to expand the scope of the research to the reception of these graphic novels in newspapers from English-speaking countries in general, instead of only the American reception. This did not pose any problems, since the research question of this thesis is not focused on issues of national identity. The selected newspaper reviews are from the United States, England and Canada.

Two of Chris Ware’s graphic novels also received reviews in Australian newspapers, but these are not part of the selected reviews, as they were both published months after the reviews in other newspapers had been published.¹⁶⁴ Since Ware’s novels received enough other reviews to research, this was sufficient reason to exclude the Australian reviews. Additionally, Ware’s *Building Stories* received so many reviews that some other reviews were also excluded from the research, otherwise nearly a third of the researched reviews would be about this one novel. The excluded reviews are the ones that were published last, about three months later than the first reviews of the novel. Some of the other novels, such as Sacco’s

¹⁶⁴ Ware’s *Rusty Brown*, for example, was reviewed in *The Australian* on the 25th of January 2020, while its reviews in the United States and England were published in September and October of the previous year.

Palestine and Clowes' *Wilson*, only received two newspaper reviews, so not many cuts had to be made.

The following is a list of the selected graphic novels and reviews, sorted by publication date of the graphic novel and then by publication date of its reviews. The deciding factor for choosing these graphic novels is that they all received at least two reviews in English-language newspapers, but the list also explains the other factors that make these graphic novels similar to the “big three” in renown and perceived quality. The list includes twenty-eight reviews of ten graphic novels. Ten reviews are from American newspapers, thirteen from English newspapers and five from Canadian newspapers.

1. *Palestine* (1996 in two volumes, 2001 in one volume) – Joe Sacco

This non-fiction book is mentioned by academics as an important work in the history of the graphic novel, since Sacco's “comics journalism” showed the public a new, “serious” way the graphic novel form could be used.¹⁶⁵ It was not reviewed in mainstream newspapers until a few years after its publication, perhaps because by then more reviews of graphic novels started to be published.

- *The Independent*, 4-2-2003 (U.K.)¹⁶⁶
- *Times Colonist*, 13-6-2004 (Canada)¹⁶⁷

2. *Safe Area Gorazde* (2000) – Joe Sacco

This non-fiction work won a “Best Graphic Album: New” Eisner Award. It was also written by Sacco, who, again, is seen as an important graphic novel author by academics. The review in *The Guardian*, like the reviews for *Palestine*, was published relatively late.

- *The San Diego Union-Tribune*, 20-8-2000 (U.S.)¹⁶⁸
- *The Guardian*, 11-8-2007 (U.K.)¹⁶⁹

3. *Jimmy Corrigan, the Smartest Kid on Earth* (2000) – Chris Ware

This novel is mentioned by academics as an important work that helped elevate critics' perception of the graphic novel form in a way similar to the “big three”, because of its high

¹⁶⁵ Rosenblatt & Lunsford, “Critique, Caricature, and Compulsion in Joe Sacco's Comics Journalism” in *The Rise of the American Comics Artist*; Weiner, *Faster Than a Speeding Bullet: The Rise of the Graphic Novel*, p. 66.

¹⁶⁶ Shaar Murray, “The Tuesday Book: The Graphic Truth About Palestinian Existence”.

¹⁶⁷ Bloom, “A Comic Book to Read With Caution”.

¹⁶⁸ Kendricks, “Hell, In Line Drawings; The horrors are graphic, in moving ‘Safe Area Gorazde’”.

¹⁶⁹ Horwell, “A Rough Guide to Conflict”.

quality.¹⁷⁰ It won the “Best Graphic Album: Reprint” Eisner Award and won several literary awards, such as the American Book Award (U.S.) and the Guardian First Book Award (U.K.).

- *The Record*, 2-12-2000 (Canada)¹⁷¹
- *The Independent*, 5-6-2001 (U.K.) (written before the novel was published in the U.K.)¹⁷²
- *The Independent*, 16-6-2001 (U.K.) (written after the novel was published in the U.K., by a different critic)¹⁷³
- *The Guardian*, 26-12-2001 (U.K.)¹⁷⁴

4. *Black Hole* (2005) – Charles Burns

This novel is recognised by academics as an important graphic novel¹⁷⁵ and won the “Best Graphic Album: Reprint” Eisner Award.

- *The Washington Post*, 30-10-2005 (U.S.)¹⁷⁶
- *The Toronto Star*, 13-11-2005 (Canada)¹⁷⁷
- *The Independent*, 20-11-2005 (U.K.)¹⁷⁸

5. *American Born Chinese* (2006) – Gene Luen Yang

This is a “Best Graphic Album: New” Eisner Award winner and the winner of several “best book of the year” awards, for example the *San Francisco Chronicle* Best Book of the Year award. The novel was written for young adults. That makes it very different in genre from the “big three”, but also shows that the graphic novel has evolved to include more types of books since the 1990s, which makes it an interesting research subject.

- *The New York Times*, 13-5-2007 (U.S.)¹⁷⁹ (There are two graphic novels in this review, but the 752-word part about *American Born Chinese* comes first and does not mention the other graphic novel.)
- *Intelligencer Journal*, 8-9-2007 (U.S.)¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁰ Ball, “Comics Against Themselves: Chris Ware’s Graphic Narratives as Literature” in *The Rise of the American Comics Artist*; Weiner, *Faster Than a Speeding Bullet: The Rise of the Graphic Novel*, p. 70.

¹⁷¹ Good, “Adult Entertainment; ‘Brilliant’ Comic Book for Grownups is Dark and Quirky”.

¹⁷² Thompson, “Life, Jim, But Not As We Know It”.

¹⁷³ Shaar Murray, “Comic Tragedy for the Last of a Line”.

¹⁷⁴ Briggs, “Strip Show Genius”.

¹⁷⁵ Weiner, *Faster Than a Speeding Bullet: The Rise of the Graphic Novel*, p. 75.

¹⁷⁶ Schwartz, “Gross Anatomy; A Sexually Transmitted Plague Turns Teens Into Monsters”.

¹⁷⁷ Weiler, “Teen Years Weirder Than we Dreamed”.

¹⁷⁸ Martin, “It Isn’t Rocket Semiotics, But It Works”.

¹⁷⁹ Vizzini, “High Anxiety”.

¹⁸⁰ Kennedy, “Realization ‘Born’ From Gene Luen Yang’s Award-Winning Graphic Novel”.

6. *Asterios Polyp* (2009) – David Mazzucchelli

This is a “Best Graphic Album: New” Eisner Award winner.

- *Austin Chronicle*, 17-7-2009 (U.S.)¹⁸¹
- *The New York Times*, 26-7-2009 (U.S.)¹⁸²
- *The Globe and Mail*, 28-8-2009 (Canada)¹⁸³

7. *Wilson* (2010) – Daniel Clowes

This novel is a “Best Graphic Album: New” Eisner Award winner. According to academics, Clowes’ works have boosted the recognition for comic books in the same way Chris Ware’s work has.¹⁸⁴ *Ghost World* (1997) and *David Boring* (2000) are his most famous works, but these did not receive more than one newspaper review, although they received some media attention in the form of interviews with the author.

- *The Guardian*, 26-6-2010 (U.K.)¹⁸⁵
- *The New York Times*, 4-7-2010 (U.S.)¹⁸⁶

8. *Building Stories* (2012) – Chris Ware

This is a “Best Graphic Album: New” Eisner Award winner. Academics mostly name *Jimmy Corrigan* as Ware’s important work that helped change critics’ perception of comic books, but it was not until *Building Stories* that this change could be seen in the amount of critical attention the author received in the mainstream press. This novel received at least ten reviews in mainstream newspapers.

- *The Guardian*, 22-9-2012 (U.K.)¹⁸⁷
- *The Daily Telegraph*, 29-9-2012 (U.K.)¹⁸⁸
- *The Observer*, 21-10-2012 (U.K.)¹⁸⁹
- *The New York Times*, 21-10-2012 (U.S.)¹⁹⁰
- *The Toronto Star*, 28-10-2012 (Canada)¹⁹¹

¹⁸¹ Jones, “Asterios Polyp”.

¹⁸² Wolk, “Shades of Meaning”.

¹⁸³ Mackay, “Review: Asterios Polyp, by David Mazzucchelli”.

¹⁸⁴ Weiner, *Faster Than a Speeding Bullet: The Rise of the Graphic Novel*, p. 70.

¹⁸⁵ Faber, “Drawn to the Sad Side”.

¹⁸⁶ Lipsyte, “Dyspeptic Living”.

¹⁸⁷ Sam Leith, “Outside the Box”.

¹⁸⁸ Wallis-Simons, “Drawing the World”.

¹⁸⁹ Cooke, “Fear and Loathing in Chicago’s House of Pain”.

¹⁹⁰ Wolk, “Inside the Box.”

¹⁹¹ Beerman, “Through the Peep Hole”.

9. *Nimona* (2015) – Noelle Stevenson

The novel is a winner of the “Best Graphic Album: Reprint” Eisner Award. It is aimed at young adults, like *American Born Chinese*. Its author is a woman, which has become more common for graphic novels in recent years. Many of the recent “Best Graphic Novel Album: New/Reprint” Eisner Award winners have been women, but this is not yet reflected in the number of newspaper reviews female graphic novelists receive.

- *The New York Times*, 12-7-2015 (U.S.)¹⁹²
- *The Independent*, 12-7-2015 (U.K.)¹⁹³

10. *Rusty Brown* (2019) – Chris Ware

This novel is written by Chris Ware again, whose impact was described earlier in this list.

- *The Telegraph*, 17-9-2019 (U.K.)¹⁹⁴
- *The New York Times*, 14-10-2019 (U.S.)¹⁹⁵
- *The Guardian*, 11-10-2019 (U.K.)¹⁹⁶

2.2 Linders and Op de Beek’s Model

The twenty-eight graphic novel reviews in the above list will be analysed by using Yvette Linders and Esther Op de Beek’s model¹⁹⁷ which aims to determine the evaluation criteria that are used by critics at a certain point in time. These criteria will give an impression of what those critics deemed important at the time and which factors they considered when making a judgement about the quality of a graphic novel. These results will be combined with additional research I did on the reviews that will be explained in section 2.4. Together, the results can be used to give an impression of the position of the graphic novel in the literary field in the 2000s and 2010s.

Linders and Op de Beek explain the model in their Dutch 2009 paper “Evaluatiedomeinen in de Nederlandse literatuurkritiek” (Evaluation Domains in Dutch Literary Criticism). In this article Linders and Op de Beek use the model to map the development of literary criticism in the Netherlands in 1955 and 1995, as a first trial to test the model. Esther op de Beek spoke about the model in English during a conference in

¹⁹² Hicks, “Drawn That Way”.

¹⁹³ Sneddon, “Brace Your Goldenloins For Subtle Subversion”.

¹⁹⁴ Leith, “Rusty Brown by Chris Ware, Review: This Bleak Graphic Novel Is a Work of Genius”.

¹⁹⁵ Park, “It All Started in Omaha; Graphic Content”.

¹⁹⁶ Robson, “Rusty Brown by Chris Ware Review – A Treasure Trove of Invention”.

¹⁹⁷ Linders & Op de Beek, “Evaluatiedomeinen in de Nederlandse literatuurkritiek”.

2010.¹⁹⁸ This thesis uses English translations from Op de Beek's conference paper for the important terms from Linders and Op de Beek's 2009 paper.

The model was created to allow researchers to analyse a large corpus of reviews in order to come to generalizable conclusions about literary criticism at certain points in time, since it is not possible to compare a large number of reviews without the use of a model and no such model existed yet. It builds on some earlier Dutch models that aimed to categorise evaluation criteria, such as Mooij's (1973),¹⁹⁹ Boonstra's (1979)²⁰⁰ and Praamstra's (1984).²⁰¹ Linders and Op de Beek improved on them by developing a coding system that allows for a large number of combinations of codes from different categories, so that every evaluative expression of a critic can be categorised.²⁰² Linders and Op de Beek's model is very suitable for the research purposes of this thesis, since it makes it possible to analyse a large number of graphic novel reviews and draw conclusions about the reception of graphic novels in the 2000s and 2010s. Finding out which evaluation criteria critics use when reviewing graphic novels is useful because critics are able to distribute symbolic capital and thus play an important role in the consecration process within the literary field. The opinions of critics could therefore reflect the position of graphic novels in the field.

When analysing a review with Linders and Op de Beek's model, each evaluative expression (a sentence or part of a sentence that expresses an opinion) of the critic is coded with a letter that indicates which aspect of the work is evaluated and with a number that indicates which quality the critic attributes to this aspect of the work. Figure 2 shows the Dutch coding system Linders and Op de Beek used in their article.²⁰³

¹⁹⁸ Op de Beek, "Everyday Evaluation".

¹⁹⁹ Mooij, "Problemen rondom literaire waardeoordelen".

²⁰⁰ Boonstra, "Van waardeoordeel tot literatuuropvatting".

²⁰¹ Praamstra, "De analyse van kritieken".

²⁰² Linders & Op de Beek, "Evaluatiedomeinen in de Nederlandse literatuurkritiek", p. 248.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 249.

Aspect	Eigenschap	Kader
A) Stijl (taal/ toon)	1) Efficiëntie	I) Teksten van andere auteurs
B) Structuur	2) Samenhang/ stabiliteit	
C) Setting	3) Grootte/ kracht	
D) Plot	4) Vitaliteit	II) Lezer
E) Dialogen	5) Intellect	III) Auteur
F) Personages	6) Humor	
G) Thema (idee)	7) Helderheid	
H) Symboliek	8) Realiteit	
I) Uiterlijk	9) Identificatie	
J) Titel	10) Emotionaliteit	
K) Auteur (incl. intentie)	11) Didactisch vermogen	
L) Overig (geheel)	12) Religieus gehalte	
	13) Politiek gehalte	
	14) Moraliteit overig	
	15) Originaliteit	
	16) Overig	

Figuur 1 Analyse-instrument voor evaluatiedomeinen in de literatuurkritiek. (Een evaluatiedomein bestaat uit een of meer aspecten en een of meer eigenschappen. Aan de domeincode kan, indien nodig, een Romeins cijfer uit de derde kolom worden toegevoegd om de uitspraak in een kader te plaatsen.)

Figure 2: The original (Dutch) version of Linders and Op de Beek's model

The code D6, for example, would be used when the critic mentions that the work has a funny plot (D for plot, 6 for humour). The I, II or III from the third column is only added when an evaluative expression needs to be interpreted relatively. For example, if the critic claims that the reviewed novel's plot is more funny than the plot in another work of a different author, the code would be D6I (I is added for a reference to a text from a different author).²⁰⁴ In some cases it is necessary to use multiple codes from the same column for one evaluative expression, for instance when the critic finds the style of the dialogues funny (A/E6: style – dialogues – humour).²⁰⁵ Linders and Op de Beek call the combination of letters and numbers, and optionally a Roman numeral, an evaluation domain, which is what the title of Linders and Op de Beek's article refers to. Chapter 2.3 will discuss the changes that I made to the model to accommodate the research of graphic novels and presents the final and translated model that I used to research the graphic novels.

The research for this thesis differs in some aspects from the research that Linders and Op de Beek conducted with their model. The first difference is the corpus: Linders and Op de Beek researched the reviews of Dutch novels, while I will research the reviews of American graphic novels. The model, however, is mostly flexible enough to accommodate this. Another difference is that the graphic novel reviews will only be coded by one person, instead of two. The coding of evaluative expressions is subjective, since the categories could be interpreted in

²⁰⁴ Linders & Op de Beek, "Evaluatiedomeinen in de Nederlandse literatuurkritiek", p. 248-250.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 248.

different ways and some expressions could fit within multiple categories. Linders and Op de Beek's article also shows that they initially disagreed on many codes.²⁰⁶ A coding by one person is even more subjective than when it is done by two people, so this will be taken into consideration when drawing conclusions.

Additionally, Linders and Op de Beek used their coding system to research which evaluation criteria were used in literary reviews in both 1955 and 1995, after which they analysed the differences between these two years in order to identify any developments. As was explained in the previous section, the amount of graphic novel reviews that were published in newspapers is limited, so it was not possible to choose two reference years. I will therefore only perform Linders and Op de Beek's first research step and paint a general picture of the evaluation criteria that were used in graphic novel reviews in the 2000s and 2010s.

Finally, Linders and Op de Beek realised that online copies of reviews did not contain all the information they needed, so they sought out the print versions of the reviews.²⁰⁷ This is not possible for the research in this thesis, since the reviews are international and seeking out hardcopies of these newspapers does not fit within the scope of this thesis. Therefore, factors that could provide additional information about the reputation of graphic novels, such as the placing of the reviews, have not been taken into account for this research.

2.3 Adapting Linders and Op de Beek's Model

The previous section explained that Linders and Op de Beek used their model to research the reviews of Dutch novels, which differ in some ways from reviews of graphic novels, so it was necessary to make adaptations to the model. The final version of the model can be seen in table 1:

²⁰⁶ Linders & Op de Beek, "Evaluatiedomeinen in de Nederlandse literatuurkritiek", p. 256-257.

²⁰⁷ Op de Beek, "Everyday Evaluation", p. 273.

Aspect	Quality	Context
A) Style (language/tone)	1) Efficiency	I) Texts by other authors
B) Structure	2) Cohesion/stability	II) Reader
C) Setting	3) Scope/power (incl. detail)	III) Texts by same author
D) Plot	4) Vitality	X) Text
E) Dialogues	5) Intellect	Y) Images
F) Characters	6) Humour	
G) Theme (idea)	7) Clarity	
H) Symbolism	8) Realism	
I) Book cover	9) Identification	
J) Title	10) Emotional content	
K) Author (incl. intention)	11) Didactic content	
L) Use of graphic medium (effectiveness/innovation)	12) Religious content	
M) Whole	13) Political content	
N) Other	14) Moral content (other)	
	15) Originality	
	16) Creative skill/craftsmanship	
	17) Other	

Table 1: The translated and adapted version of Linders and Op de Beek's model²⁰⁸

The model was first translated from Dutch to English. Some categories of the model were translated by Op de Beek in her 2010 conference paper²⁰⁹ and some other translations are straightforward (“plot”, for example, was translated to “plot”). A few categories could be interpreted in different ways, such as the quality “helderheid”, which could be translated to “clarity”, “lucidity” or “intelligibility”, among others. The most suitable translations for these categories were chosen after the graphic novel reviews had been coded (with the Dutch categories in mind), when it had become clear which versions actually occurred in the reviews.

The next change I made is one that Linders and Op de Beek themselves recommend in the conclusion to their 2009 article. One category of aspects in their model is “overig (geheel)”, which translates to “other (whole)”. This means that an evaluative expression that does not fit within any of the other aspect categories would receive this code, but an evaluative expression that refers to the whole novel also receives this code. Linders and Op de Beek recommend to split this into two smaller categories: “whole” and “other”.²¹⁰ They encountered enough cases of evaluative expressions that related to the entirety of the novel to

²⁰⁸ This table can also be referenced in Appendix B.

²⁰⁹ Op de Beek, “Everyday Evaluation”.

²¹⁰ Linders & Op de Beek, “Evaluatiedomeinen in de Nederlandse literatuurkritiek”, p. 257.

warrant this new category, since this could lead to better conclusions, and the same is true in the reviews studied for this thesis.

Another obvious adjustment to the model was the addition of some categories that refer to the “graphic” part of graphic novels. I added these after coding the first eight reviews in order to see which categories were missing. One of the aims of this research is to find out whether graphic novel reviewers focus more on the text or the images of the novel, so two categories were added to the third column: “text” and “images”. A code from the third column, as was explained in the previous section, is added when the evaluative expression of the reviewer needs to be interpreted relatively. In this case the addition of the “text” or “images” code would mean that the opinion of the reviewer only refers to either the textual part or the graphic part of the novel. This is only added when the text or images are explicitly mentioned by the critic, since a remark about “realistic characters”, for example, could point to a combination of the way the characters are written and the way they are illustrated. The addition of a code from the third column would be too subjective in this case.

The first and second column also received additions in order to categorise the evaluative expressions that refer to the illustrations of a novel. The category “use of graphic medium” was added to the first column, which can be used to categorise an opinion that is about the effectiveness or innovation in using the graphic medium. An example can be seen in the following paragraph from a review of Ware’s *Building Stories*:

It is a cliché - and a slight inanity, come to that - to say of a comics writer that he extends the possibilities of the medium. But you find yourself wanting to say something close to it about Ware: he is so attuned to the possibilities of the medium, so completely in control of what he’s doing, that he finds expressive potential in it that you simply couldn’t have anticipated.²¹¹

However, as it would also be superfluous to code realistically written characters with “use of textual medium”, the category is not used every time the critic mentions the images in the novel. When the critic states, for example, that the characters are realistically drawn, the point is that the characters are realistic, so it is enough in this case to add the code “images” from the third column. At least, this was my reasoning when implementing the code. Section 3.4 in

²¹¹ Leith, “Outside the Box”.

the next chapter explains that this particular category was not outlined clearly enough before coding the reviews, which led to inconsistencies.

I added the category “creative skill/craftsmanship” to the second column since this quality was mentioned in many of the graphic novel reviews, while it did not fit well within any of the existing categories. Examples are the mention of “Ware’s devotional, almost obsessive, craftsmanship”²¹² and Clowes’ skills as “a gifted caricaturist”²¹³. This category does not strictly refer to the graphic aspect of the novels, so it is possible that remarks about craftsmanship were also present in the reviews that Linders and Op de Beek studied and that they categorised these in a different way. Another possibility is that the reviewers of these graphic novels were particularly impressed by the authors’ creative skills, which might be more visible in a graphic medium.

Finally, one of Linders and Op de Beek’s categories is “uiterlijk”, which points to the cover of the book or of the pages within the book. This was changed to the category “book cover”, since Linders and Op de Beek’s category would be too confusing in the context of graphic novels. After this change there is a clear separation between critics’ mentions of the book cover and mentions of the images within the novel.

2.4 Research Process

In order to apply Linders and Op de Beek’s model to the twenty-eight selected graphic novel reviews, I took the following steps. First, I downloaded the reviews from the *Nexis* database onto Microsoft Word. Linders and Op de Beek recommend coding reviews in a random order, to prevent learning effects and negative effects from exhaustion.²¹⁴ This was done by numbering the twenty-eight reviews and putting these numbers into a random sequence generator to decide the order in which I would code them. Next, I highlighted all the evaluative expressions in the reviews. When this was done I coded these expressions within their Word documents. Because the codes were written in the same documents as the reviews, I could check whether categories had been assigned consistently after the coding was done. I decided on the definitive categories for the model after coding the first eight reviews and made the additions that were discussed in the previous section. When all reviews had been coded, I copied the codes into one Word document so that they could be ordered, counted and compared.

²¹² Thompson, “Life, Jim, But Not As We Know It”.

²¹³ Faber, “Drawn to the Sad Side”.

²¹⁴ Linders & Op de Beek, “Evaluatiedomeinen in de Nederlandse literatuurkritiek”, p. 250.

The codes were counted in several ways. First I counted the number of times each aspect, quality and context code was used, put this information into an Excel sheet and had them ranked from most used to least used. Then the combinations of aspect and quality codes were counted and ranked, and finally I counted and ranked how often each context code from the third column of the model was added to each code combination. The analysis process of this data will be discussed in chapter 3.4.

Linders and Op de Beek claim in their 2009 article that their model improves on earlier models by other researchers, because the combination of categories from different columns makes it possible to better categorise evaluative expressions.²¹⁵ However, using the model still led to some difficulties. I encountered the first of these problems while highlighting evaluative expressions in the twenty-eight reviews, as it is not always clear whether a sentence should be considered an evaluative expression or not. One reviewer, for example, mentions “the book’s more realistic sections”.²¹⁶ The reviewer does not directly say that the book is realistic, but this is implied by the statement that the book has sections that are more realistic. Another example is the use of subjective adjectives and adverbs, for example in a review of *Rusty Brown*: “(...) the section about Jordan Lint, which moves wrenchingly from cradle to grave”²¹⁷. The word “wrenchingly” seems to be the subjective addition of the critic. Linders and Op de Beek do not state whether they consider these additions of subjective adjectives and adverbs to be evaluative expressions, but for this research I decided that these do portray the opinion of the critic, so I coded both of these examples.

In some other cases it is unclear whether a sentence expresses the critic’s opinion about the novel itself, or about graphic novels in general. An example is the following statement in a review of *Rusty Brown* about its author: “It’s as if he sees the essential challenge of graphic novels as being to invest the page with as much meaning and detail as humanly possible - and to prove his own contention, expressed in the issue of McSweeney’s Quarterly he edited, that the possible vocabulary of comics is ‘unlimited’”.²¹⁸ The critic writes about the author’s views on graphic novels, but it could be that he means this particular graphic novel is also infused with much meaning and detail. In this case I decided not to code the statement, since the rest of the paragraph also discusses other works of Ware, so it is unclear whether this statement refers to *Rusty Brown*.

²¹⁵ Linders & Op de Beek, “Evaluatiedomeinen in de Nederlandse literatuurkritiek”, p. 247.

²¹⁶ Vizzini, “High Anxiety”.

²¹⁷ Robson, “Rusty Brown by Chris Ware Review – A Treasure Trove of Invention”.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

There were some additional difficulties after the evaluative expressions had been highlighted, during the coding process. Since Linders and Op de Beek's model has a limited number of categories, it is difficult to fit some evaluative expressions into them. A statement that occurs in many of the reviews is that a novel is "brilliant" or "a masterpiece". I decided to code these statements with the aspect "whole" and the quality "other", since they are not specific enough to fit into any other category. Another component of a novel that was often mentioned is attention to detail. I let this fall under the quality "scope", since the creation of a new category would make the model more cluttered.

A specific issue that occurred during the coding of the reviews for Sacco's *Palestine* and *Safe Area Goražde* is that these are non-fiction books, so some evaluative expressions do not fit within the model. Multiple reviewers discuss to which extent these books are accurate to the real-life events they portray, for example. In future research, it might be better not to mix reviews for fiction and non-fiction books, or some categories could be added to reflect the characteristics of non-fiction books.

Finally, the largest issue I encountered is that the research results might not completely portray which criteria critics use when reviewing graphic novels, which is what this research is trying to study by using Linders and Op de Beek's model. The model shows which aspects of a novel critics give their opinions on in their reviews, but this is not necessarily all that they find important. Only evaluative expressions can be coded with the model, but in many of the reviews I studied whole paragraphs can be found without a single evaluative expression. It is logical that this would be the case for paragraphs that describe the plot of the novel, but some reviewers elaborately analyse a particular aspect of a novel without giving their opinion on it. An example is the following paragraph in a review of David Mazzucchelli's *Asterios Polyp*:

That cyan ink doubles as a recurring motif of Asterios's intellectual and aesthetic rigidity. Every character in the book, in fact, gets his or her own illustrative technique, lettering style and dominant color scheme. Hana's color is red; a scene where Asterios is in her studio, admiring her work, is pinkish-purple until it becomes clear that he's talking to hear his own eloquence, whereupon the panels are suffused with cyan and a spotlight moves from her to him as she recedes into the background. There's scarcely a concept or object in the book that appears only once, even in passing.²¹⁹

²¹⁹ Wolk, "Shades of Meaning".

The fact that the critic explains this feature of the novel in so much detail seems to suggest that he finds it important, but because he gives no opinion on it, this is not represented in the research results.

Since the analysis of reviews with the use of Linders and Op de Beek's model does not fully answer the research question of this thesis, I did some additional research to fill the gaps. Firstly, I researched the critics who wrote the analysed reviews to see whether patterns could be found in their backgrounds. If graphic novels are consistently reviewed by professional comic book reviewers, for example, that would point to a strong position of the graphic novel in the literary field, since there is a group of people who can make a living solely off reviewing graphic novels. Secondly, I noticed that many critics remark on the comic book medium as a whole in their reviews. I applied close reading to the reviews to research these remarks, as they reveal the critics' attitudes towards the medium. Finally, I compared the number of words that was used for each review to find out whether an upwards or downwards trend could be found through the years. The space that newspapers allocate for each graphic novel review could indicate the importance they ascribe to graphic novels. The additional research that was done for this thesis was relatively straightforward and did not pose any significant problems. The next chapter will first discuss the results of the additional research, and its final section will examine the results that were found by applying Linders and Op de Beek's model to the twenty-eight graphic novel reviews. Any difficulties that arose while analysing the results will also be discussed in the next chapter, since some of those difficulties influence the way the results discussed in the chapter should be interpreted.

Chapter 3

Discussion of Research Results

This chapter will discuss the results that were found by researching the twenty-eight selected graphic novel reviews from different perspectives.²²⁰ These results will be compared and combined to give a comprehensive impression of the graphic novel's current position in the literary field. The first section discusses what backgrounds the critics who reviewed these novels have and what this says about the graphic novel's position in the field. The second section of this chapter outlines the attitudes towards the comic book medium critics (inadvertently) show in their reviews, as these attitudes can also be a reflection of the graphic novel's position in the field. The third section analyses the number of words that was used for each review, in order to find out whether trends can be found over the years. The amount of space newspapers are willing to allocate for graphic novel reviews shows the importance they ascribe to them, or the importance they think their readers ascribe to them. This, again, reflects the graphic novel's position in the literary field. The final section of this chapter discusses the results that were found by applying Linders and Op de Beek's model to the graphic novel reviews. First the aspect and quality codes that were found are discussed separately, and then the combinations of these aspects and qualities. The section also explores how some changes to the research method might lead to better results in the future. The results from using Linders and Op de Beek's model show which evaluation criteria critics use to review graphic novels. Since critics are important distributors of symbolic capital in the literary field, the evaluation criteria they use in their reviews can reflect whether the graphic novel is situated in a position of high consecration in the literary field.

3.1 Discussion of the Critics' Backgrounds

Linders and Op de Beek's model alone cannot completely answer the research question. The evaluation criteria that critics use partly reflect the position of the graphic novel in the literary field, but this is difficult to interpret without context. The fact that eight evaluative expressions referred to the book cover, for example, does not clarify much on its own about the graphic novel's position in the field. I therefore chose to do additional research, the first step of which was to study the backgrounds of the critics who wrote the reviews that were coded for this thesis. I aimed to find out which different positions in the field these critics

²²⁰ See Appendix C for a list of the researched graphic novels and reviews.

occupy and write their graphic novel reviews from, and what their backgrounds say about the position of the graphic novel in the literary field.

The research done on the critics of the researched graphic novels shows that many of the reviewers are not regular comic book critics, or even regular critics, although most of them do have a background that is in some way connected with the novel they reviewed. Some critics who do regularly review graphic novels are Ben Schwartz, who reviewed *Black Hole* in *The Washington Post*,²²¹ and Rachel Cooke, who reviewed *Building Stories* in *The Observer*.²²² Schwartz's review lists some of his credentials at the end of the review; his graphic novel reviews have been published in *The Comics Journal*, among others. Rachel Cooke has been the reviewer of the "Graphic novel of the month" section of *The Observer* since 2010,²²³ so she had been doing that for about two years before she reviewed *Building Stories*. The fact that there are some reviewers who regularly review graphic novels means that a relatively large number of graphic novel reviews is being published, compared to before the 2000s. This increased attention from critics suggests that the graphic novel has been gaining a stronger position in the literary field in recent years. However, graphic novel reviewer is probably still not a feasible profession. Rachel Cooke, for example, is the reviewer for the "Graphic novel of the month" section in *The Observer*, but it would be impossible to make a living off those monthly reviews alone. This means that even critics who do regularly review graphic novels also have to make their living in other ways, for instance by reviewing literary novels, so even these critics occupy various positions in the literary field.

Some of the reviews were written by people who are not (primarily) book critics, but whose backgrounds do show they have some kind of expertise on the novel they reviewed. Faith Erin Hicks reviewed *Nimona* for *The New York Times*.²²⁴ She is a graphic novelist whose novels are often geared towards a teenage- and young adult audience.²²⁵ *Nimona* has the same demographic. Illustrator Raymond Briggs reviewed *Jimmy Corrigan* in *The Guardian*.²²⁶ He is well-known in England for his picture books for children, such as *The Snowman* (1978). Although most of his works are children's books, his graphic biography *Ethel & Ernest* (1998), about the life of his parents, comes much closer to the mature and

²²¹ Schwartz, "Gross Anatomy; A Sexually Transmitted Plague Turns Teens Into Monsters".

²²² Cooke, "Fear and Loathing in Chicago's House of Pain".

²²³ <https://www.theguardian.com/books/series/graphic-novel-of-the-month>

²²⁴ Hicks, "Drawn That Way".

²²⁵ <http://www.fatherinhicks.com/about/>

²²⁶ Briggs, "Strip Show Genius".

emotionally dark subject matter of *Jimmy Corrigan*.²²⁷ Another reviewer who has written works that are closely related to the title he reviewed is Ned Vizzini. He reviewed *American Born Chinese*, a graphic novel for young adults, in *The New York Times*.²²⁸ Vizzini was a writer of young adult novels whose most successful work is *It's Kind of a Funny Story* (2006).²²⁹ These examples show that some writers of the researched graphic novel reviews come from a different position in the literary field than book critics do. They are primarily writers and in this instance take on the role of critic. This is a remarkable position to be in, especially for graphic novel authors. In the role of the critic they are able to distribute symbolic capital to a graphic novel (and indirectly to the medium as a whole) by reviewing it, thus strengthening the position of the medium in the literary field. They in turn benefit from this strengthened position as a graphic novel author.

Another review of *American Born Chinese* was written by a member of its young adult audience. Sixteen-year-old Amanda Kennedy reviewed the novel for *The Intelligencer Journal* in the Freestyle section, which is geared towards teenagers.²³⁰ No information could be found that suggests she regularly wrote book reviews or articles at the time, so her role in the literary field was usually that of a reader. Critics, of course, often occupy the role of a reader as well, but it is rare that a review is written by someone who writes primarily from that position. Finally, some of the graphic novels were reviewed by people who have written academically about graphic novels in the past. Brad Mackay reviewed *Asterios Polyp* in *The Globe and Mail*.²³¹ He was co-editor and contributor of the book *The Collected Doug Wright: Canada's Master Cartoonist* (2009).²³² Douglas Wolk reviewed *Wilson* and *Building Stories* in *The New York Times*.²³³ He has written *Reading Comics: How Graphic Novels Work and What They Mean* (2007).²³⁴ Besides critics, academics are also agents in the literary field that can distribute symbolic capital by writing about certain works. It is not such a stretch, therefore, for an academic to take on the role of critic. One of the main differences is that, as a newspaper critic, their writing is read by (and might influence) the newspaper's audience instead of an academic audience.

²²⁷ <https://literature.britishcouncil.org/writer/raymond-briggs>

²²⁸ Vizzini, "High Anxiety".

²²⁹ <http://www.nedvizzini.com/>

²³⁰ Kennedy, "Realization 'Born' From Gene Luen Yang's Award-Winning Graphic Novel".

²³¹ Mackay, "Review: Asterios Polyp, by David Mazzucchelli".

²³² <http://bradmackay.com/>

²³³ Wolk, "Shades of Meaning"; "Inside the Box".

²³⁴ <https://pitchfork.com/staff/douglas-wolk/>

These previous examples all show that newspapers seem to put some effort into finding a logical match for each graphic novel, but a few graphic novels were reviewed by journalists who normally write about vastly different subjects than graphic novels. *Safe Area Gorazde*, for example, was reviewed by Veronica Horwell in *The Guardian*.²³⁵ Her publishing history in *The Guardian*, which goes back to the late 1990s, shows that she usually writes about the fashion industry.²³⁶ *Safe Area Gorazde* is a non-fiction book about the Bosnian War, so it would be difficult to establish a link with her other work. *Jimmy Corrigan* and *Palestine* were reviewed by Charles Shaar Murray in *The Independent*,²³⁷ which is also surprising. He is a music journalist who has interviewed many famous musicians,²³⁸ although his website also lists several graphic novel reviews he has written since.²³⁹ Journalists such as these normally operate completely outside the literary field. If they take on the role of graphic novel critic, they are able to distribute symbolic capital in the literary field, without having had to build a reputation for themselves in that field.

In conclusion, most of the graphic novels that were researched for this thesis were not reviewed by people who regularly review graphic novels, although most critics had at least some link to the material they reviewed. This means that graphic novels are reviewed from many different positions in the literary field and sometimes by people who normally only operate outside the literary field (except perhaps as readers). Even critics who regularly review graphic novels occupy various positions in the field, since graphic novel critic is not their full-time occupation. This means that different agents take on the role of graphic novel critic and distribute symbolic capital to these novels and to the medium as a whole. Text-only literary novels are reviewed by a relatively homogeneous group of critics who operate from similar positions within the field.²⁴⁰ The fact that a similar group of graphic novel critics does not exist indicates that the graphic novel does not have a very strong position within the literary field, since apparently not enough graphic novels are reviewed in newspapers for such a group to have come into existence.

²³⁵ Horwell, "A Rough Guide to Conflict".

²³⁶ <https://www.theguardian.com/profile/veronicahorwell>

²³⁷ Shaar Murray, "Comic Tragedy for the Last of a Line"; "The Tuesday Book: The Graphic Truth About Palestinian Existence"

²³⁸ <http://charlesshaarmurray.com/about/>

²³⁹ <http://charlesshaarmurray.com/comics/>

²⁴⁰ This is not always the case, as many reviews are written by people with different backgrounds, such as novel writers. Regardless, there are many people around the world whose sole occupation is novel critic.

3.2 Discussion of Critics' Comments on the Graphic Novel Medium

A recurring subject in the researched graphic novel reviews is the graphic novel medium in general. I noticed this when I started coding the reviews with the use of Linders and Op de Beek's model, so I applied close reading to the reviews to research which attitudes towards the graphic novel medium they revealed. Some critics, for example, provide background information about graphic novels at the beginning of their review. This is notable, since it is not usually done for text-only novels. It can be assumed that readers of the literary section in the newspaper already know what a novel is, so this is not explained in the review, but apparently the average newspaper reader does not have the same knowledge of graphic novels, or at least critics do not think they do. Book critic Tim Martin points out how remarkable this is in his 2005 review of *Black Hole* in *The Independent*, where he quotes Charles Burns, author of the reviewed novel. He writes:

Comics writers have long bewailed public ignorance of the maturity of the genre. "Nobody explains to you what movies are," Burns complained in a recent interview. "Like: 'This is a moving picture, a motion picture that people enjoy watching. And it's got sound!'"²⁴¹

The fact that readers still need an explanation of what a graphic novel is (or that critics think they do) is a clear indication of how new the graphic novel still is in the literary field.

A few of these critics' explanations of what a graphic novel is are reminiscent of the newspaper articles that appeared when the "big three" started receiving media attention in the 1980s. Chapter 1 explained that during this time newspaper articles told the general public that the superhero comic books they knew had "grown up" into serious graphic novels for adults. The most striking example of one of these critics' explanations occurs in the 2003 review for *Palestine* that appeared in *The Independent*. Critic Charles Shaar Murray writes: "The success of Chris Ware's *Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid On Earth* has focused attention on the 'graphic novel'. These extended narratives eschew fights in tights to use the techniques of comics to tell stories far removed from run-of-the-mill stuff."²⁴² As was explained in chapter 1, this juxtaposition between the "old" comic books and the "new" graphic novels was mostly invented in the 1980s, as extended narratives about serious

²⁴¹ Martin, "It Isn't Rocket Semiotics, But It Works".

²⁴² Shaar Murray, "The Tuesday Book: The Graphic Truth About Palestinian Existence".

subjects had existed before then.²⁴³ If contemporary critics hold on to this distinction, that could mean that only certain graphic novels are able to move towards a position in the literary field that denotes a high degree of consecration, while the comic book medium as a whole lags behind. This likely happened to the “big three” in the 1980s (and Spiegelman’s *Maus* in particular), as was discussed in chapter 1.2.

This perceived distinction between serious graphic novels and the rest of the comic book medium might be especially prevalent in England. Raymond Briggs reported in his 2001 review of *Jimmy Corrigan* in *The Guardian* that the novel was the first comic book to have won the Guardian First Book award, which he hoped would give the comic book medium a better reputation. He claims that “on the continent [mainland Europe] it is very different. Bookshops give as much space to *bandes dessinees* as to theatre or film. Learned conventions are held, with lectures, debates, presentations or awards and all the brouhaha of a film festival.”²⁴⁴ Eleven years later, Jake Wallis-Simons notes in his review of *Building Stories* in *The Daily Telegraph*: “In Britain, the genre - which is greatly respected in America - remains perceived as juvenile or lowbrow.”²⁴⁵ These examples show that some critics are advocating for a better reputation of the graphic novel by telling readers that graphic novels are greatly respected in other countries. This could indirectly influence the position of graphic novels in the literary field by improving the public opinion on them.

I also found some instances of opinions that might be detrimental to the comic book medium, however. All of the researched reviews are generally positive about the graphic novel they review, but some critics seem to think higher of the novel they are reviewing than of the comic book medium in general. Chapter 1 explained that *Maus* was accorded a similar status by the critics that reviewed it. Critics in the 1980s saw *Maus* as the only high-quality graphic novel, while all other comic books were still seen as crude magazines for teenagers. Even in 1990 *Maus* was called “the exception that proves the rule” in a newspaper article that wrote negatively about comic books.²⁴⁶ A milder version of this sentiment can be found in some of the researched reviews. Brian Bloom’s 2004 review of *Palestine* in the *Times Colonist*, for example, begins with: “It’s a reversal of the usual comic book formula: a down-

²⁴³ Charles Shaar Murray is mainly a music journalist, so he usually operates within a different field. His unfamiliarity with the graphic novel medium and the literary field in general could play a role here.

²⁴⁴ Briggs, “Strip Show Genius”.

²⁴⁵ Wallis-Simons, “Drawing the World”.

²⁴⁶ Scalzi, “Adult comics need to rank talk ahead of trite action”.

to-earth hero with no power, and a villain who might as well be from the Planet Krypton.”²⁴⁷ This view of the “usual comic book formula” seems to come straight from the newspaper articles in the 1980s. The connection between the reviewed novel and superhero comics is not logical, since *Palestine* is a non-fiction book about Sacco’s time spent as a journalist in the Gaza Strip.²⁴⁸ If these stereotypes about comic books are emphasised by critics, they could be withholding symbolic capital from the comic book medium while simultaneously distributing it to the graphic novel they are reviewing.

A few other critics also write about comic books unfavourably in comparison to the graphic novel they are reviewing, most notably in the reviews of Chris Ware’s works. His graphic novels are often seen as high-brow and of very high quality, so according to some critics, Ware has risen above what any other comic book artist has done. The following are some examples of praise for his work: “Ware’s latest offering has elevated the graphic novel form to new heights”,²⁴⁹ “*Building Stories* does things no traditional novel can, or not without much lumbering effort; and it does other things no comic has hitherto pulled off”,²⁵⁰ and “There’s nobody else doing anything in this medium that remotely approaches Ware for originality, plangency, complexity and exactitude.”²⁵¹ An opinion such as the last example would be out of place in a review for a text-only novel, because it would seem silly to compare a novel to all novels that have been written before and dismiss them all. It is possible that critics think the general reader has a low opinion on comic books, so this is their way of convincing them that Ware’s work is worth their time. It might also be the case that the graphic novel medium is so young that critics feel that they actually can compare one graphic novel to all that came before, and that the best graphic novel might not have been written yet. It seems that Chris Ware and his works have a different place within the literary field than the graphic novel in general: critics’ opinions imply that they have gained a higher degree of consecration.

²⁴⁷ Bloom, “A Comic Book to Read With Caution”.

²⁴⁸ The critic’s credentials are noted at the end of the review: “Brian Bloom is an Ottawa university student who has visited Israel and the Palestinian territories several times”. His use of stereotypes might be a result of his unfamiliarity with the graphic novel medium and the literary field.

²⁴⁹ Wallis-Simons, “Drawing the World”.

²⁵⁰ Cooke, “Fear and Loathing in Chicago’s House of Pain”.

²⁵¹ Leith, “Outside the Box”.

3.3 Discussion of the Number of Words Per Review

In addition to doing research on the background of the critics and the opinions they expressed about the comic book medium, I compared the number of words the researched reviews consist of to find out whether an ascending or descending trend could be found from 2000 to 2019. The space that is allocated to graphic novel reviews indicates how important newspapers find them, or how important newspapers think their readers find them. This reflects the importance of the graphic novel within the literary field. For consistency's sake, the number of words that was used for this research only consists of the body of the text, excluding elements such as title and credentials of the critic. Figures 3 and 4 show the results of this research. Figure 3 illustrates the number of words for each review and figure 4 illustrates the average number of words used per year:

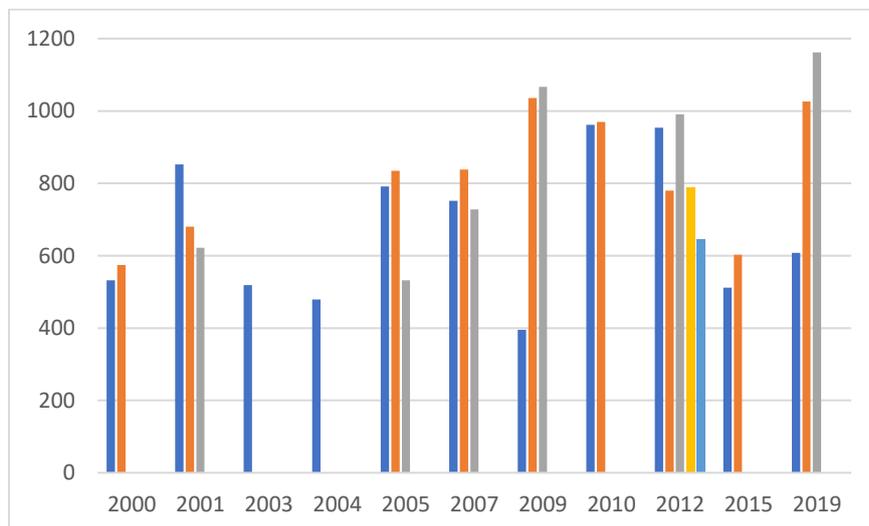


Figure 3: Word count per review

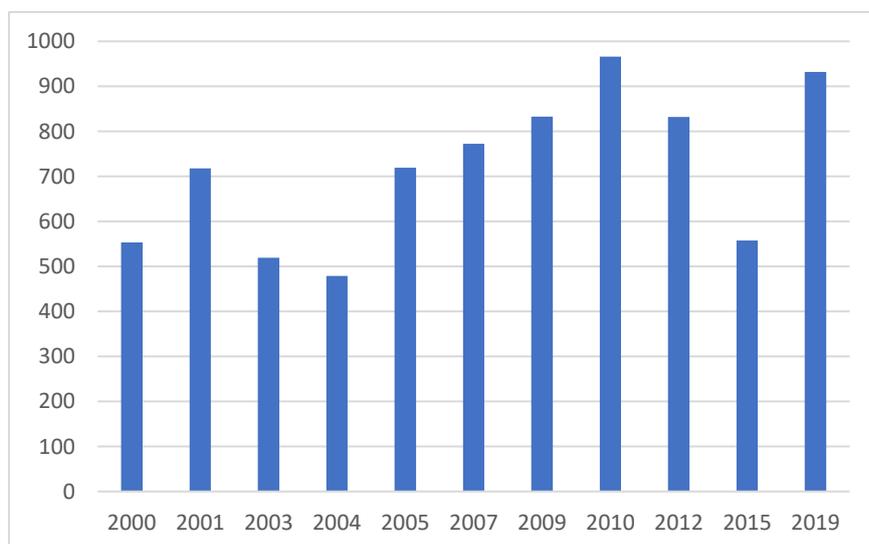


Figure 4: Average word count per year

A comparison of the first and last year that were researched (2000 and 2019) would suggest that graphic novel reviews have become much longer over time, and that consequently the graphic novel has gained a more prominent place within the literary field. The average length of the graphic novel reviews from 2019 nearly doubled compared to the average length in 2000: it went from 553 words to 932 words. However, this probably says more about the specific reviews that were researched for this thesis than about graphic novel reviews in general, as figure 3 shows that these years only represent two reviews in 2000 and three reviews in 2019. The years 2003 and 2004 represent even fewer reviews: just one each. This means the collected data might not reliably show an upwards or downwards trend in the number of words that are allocated to graphic novel reviews in general, but the rest of this section will discuss other trends that were found.

The years 2003 and 2004 average the lowest number of words per review, and both consist only of one review of Sacco's *Palestine*. The reviews in 2000 also have a low average number of words, and one of the two reviews is of *Safe Area Goražde*, also by Sacco. One cause could be that these books are non-fiction graphic novels, which are even more niche than the average graphic novel. The year 2015 shows a very low average number of words again. This time it concerns two reviews of Stevenson's *Nimona*, which is a graphic novel for young adults. This is a genre with a similarly niche audience. It is likely that the newspapers in which these reviews were published allocated less space for these reviews because only a certain portion of their readers would be interested in them.

The highest average number of words, contrastingly, was found in the year 2010. This average consists of two reviews of Clowes' *Wilson*. Daniel Clowes is a well-known graphic novelist who might even be recognised by people who do not read graphic novels. Besides having written successful graphic novels, his graphic novel *Ghost World* (1997) was also adapted to film in 2001. It stars a young Scarlett Johansson, among others, and became a cult film in the years following its release.²⁵² Because he is a relatively famous graphic novelist more readers might be interested in this review than in other graphic novel reviews, so it is logical that newspapers would allocate more space to reviews of *Wilson*. Both of *Wilson*'s reviews were written by novelists, who might also be known by the average newspaper reader. Michel Faber, for example, wrote the review for *The Guardian*. He is best known for his novels *The Crimson Petal and the White* (2002) and *Under the Skin* (2000). The long

²⁵² <https://www.dazeddigital.com/artsandculture/article/25549/1/ghost-world-the-ultimate-teen-girl-outsider-film>

length of the reviews and the choice of critic show the importance the newspapers attach to Daniel Clowes' work, which indicates the writer might have gained a higher degree of consecration than the average graphic novelist.

While it is difficult to show either an ascending or declining trend in the number of words that was used for graphic novels in general, a trend can be seen when focusing on reviews of Chris Ware's graphic novels. Three of Ware's graphic novels have been researched for this thesis, namely *Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth*, *Building Stories* and *Rusty Brown*, all of which were reviewed relatively often. The average number of words used in reviews of these novels clearly shows Ware's growing success and fame, as can be seen in figure 5:

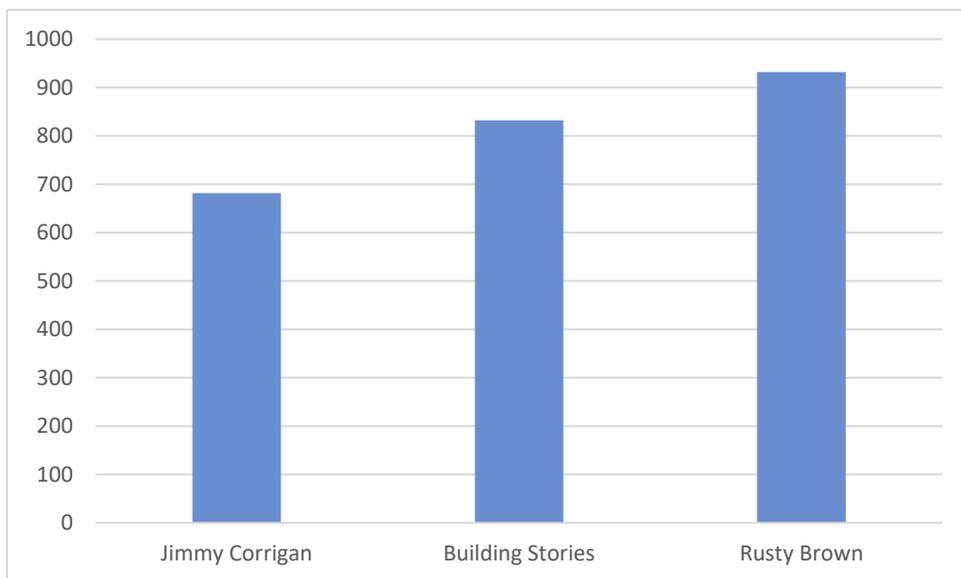


Figure 5: Average word count per Chris Ware review

The average number of words for reviews of *Jimmy Corrigan* is 682, for *Building Stories* it is 832 and for *Rusty Brown* it is 932. The two longest reviews of *Rusty Brown* count 1026 and 1162 words, the latter of which is the largest number of words out of any review researched for this thesis. Ware is said by some newspaper critics to be the very best graphic novelist, as was discussed in section 3.2, and these results show that the number of words newspapers have started to allocate to reviews of his novels reflect this sentiment. This suggests that newspapers recognise Ware's prominent position in the literary field. These long reviews could in turn allow Ware to move even further in the field towards a high degree of consecration, because he gains symbolic capital by being recognized by critics and newspapers.

There is one more noteworthy result that is not related to the length of the reviews, but to another way newspapers show their attitude towards graphic novels: the headlines of the reviews have changed since the 1980s. Chapter 1 explained that newspaper articles about comic books used to have headlines such as “Pow to Drugs! Teen Titans To the Rescue!”²⁵³ and “SHAZAM!; Comic books have grown up, with readers”²⁵⁴ in the 1980s and before. These titles reference (superhero) comic book tropes, even if the article is about stories with more serious subjects that do not use these phrases. The titles of the reviews that were researched for this thesis show that this is not the case anymore, as none of them reference these tropes.²⁵⁵ Some do reference pop culture, such as “Life, Jim, But Not As We Know It”, which headlines a review of *Jimmy Corrigan* and references a song about Star Trek. However, puns and references are not the same as stereotypes and are used in the titles of reviews for literary novels as well. Perhaps this change in headlines is logical, since the articles from the 2000s and 2010s are all reviews and it might be expected that newspapers want their readers to take the reviews they publish seriously, but it also implies that the newspapers now take graphic novels more seriously than they used to.

3.4 Discussion of Results Found With Linders and Op de Beek’s Model

This final section of the chapter will discuss the results that were generated by analysing the twenty-eight graphic novel reviews with the use of Linders and Op de Beek’s model in an adapted form.²⁵⁶ These results will demonstrate the evaluation criteria critics used to review graphic novels in the 2000s and 2010s. This impression of graphic novel criticism at the time will reflect the position of the graphic novel in the literary field from the perspective of the critics. The discussion will start with the aspect codes from the first column of the model, continue on to the quality codes in the second column, the optional context codes in the third column, and finish with the combinations of these codes. A total of 228 evaluative expressions were coded, but the sum of all aspects and qualities that were used is higher than that, since some expressions received multiple aspect or quality codes. (If a critic would say “The style of the dialogues was humorous”, for example, that evaluative expression would receive the code A/E6.) These double codes were separated before the data was analysed in

²⁵³ Radcliffe, “Pow to Drugs! Teen Titans To the Rescue”.

²⁵⁴ Stein, ‘SHAZAM!; Comic books have grown up, with readers’.

²⁵⁵ See Appendix C for a list of the researched graphic novels and their reviews.

²⁵⁶ See Appendix B for the translated and adapted version of Linders and Op de Beek’s model.

order to have a workable amount of combinations to compare. The code A/E6, for example, would be separated into A6 and E6.

A total of 257 aspects were coded, with codes from the first column of the model.

Table 2 shows how often each code from this column occurred:

M (whole)	61	N (other)	10
D (plot)	42	I (book cover)	8
L (use of graphic medium)	38	G (theme)	7
F (characters)	35	C (setting)	6
B (structure)	16	H (symbolism)	6
K (author)	14	E (dialogues)	3
A (style)	11	J (title)	0

Table 2: Frequency of aspect codes

As can be seen in the table, the aspect “whole” was found most frequently: a total of sixty-one times. This can be explained by the fact that many reviews begin and end with general opinions about the whole novel. An example can be found in the following lines from a closing paragraph: “‘Asterios Polyp’ is a dazzling, expertly constructed entertainment, even as it’s maddening and even suffocating at times. It demands that its audience wrestle with it, argue with it, reread and re-examine it.”²⁵⁷ The opinions of the critic in these sentences apply to the whole novel.

Other codes that were found significantly more often than the others are those for “plot”, “use of graphic medium” and “characters”. The aspect “plot” was found forty-two times. The plot or absence of a plot can be expected to be written about in every novel review, since most newspaper readers rely on this part to give them a general impression of the story. This result is therefore not surprising, but it does show that novel reviews and graphic novel reviews have this in common. The aspect “characters” was found in thirty-five evaluative expressions. This also makes sense, since some reviews described both the way the characters were written and the way they were represented in the illustrations. “Use of graphic medium” is a new category that was added to Linders and Op de Beek’s model for this research. It was found thirty-eight times in the researched reviews. The fact that so many evaluative expressions were coded with it shows that most reviewers do not simply ignore the graphic aspects of the novel. Since twenty-eight reviews were coded, the average graphic novel review discusses successful or unsuccessful use of the graphic medium at least once.

²⁵⁷ Wolk, “Shades of Meaning”.

However, after re-examining how this particular code was applied to the reviews, I found that this was done slightly inconsistently. In some cases the code was applied to an evaluative expression that literally commended the graphic novel author for making good use of the graphic novel medium, such as in the following example: “It is a cliché - and a slight inanity, come to that - to say of a comics writer that he extends the possibilities of the medium. But you find yourself wanting to say something close to it about Ware: he is so attuned to the possibilities of the medium, so completely in control of what he's doing, that he finds expressive potential in it that you simply couldn't have anticipated.”²⁵⁸ It is because such examples can be found in multiple reviews (mostly of Chris Ware's novels) that the “use of graphic medium” category was added to the model. The use of this code became inconsistent when I started to apply it in a more free manner: when an evaluative expression only discussed a graphic element of the novel. The code was applied, for example, to the following evaluative expression: “And atop everything else, there's Mazzucchelli's scrupulously controlled, composed and gestural artwork.”²⁵⁹ But another evaluative expression that might have also received this code if the same logic was used, received a different one (F9Y: characters – identification – images): “The faces of secondary characters remain hidden, turned away or concealed behind body parts, thus increasing our sense of isolation.”²⁶⁰ If the example about Mazzucchelli fits within the “graphic use of medium” code, the last example should probably have been coded F/L9Y (characters/use of graphic medium – identification – images). For possible further research, it would be useful to better outline the “use of graphic medium” category.

There are some categories that stand out because they were found only a small number of times. “Title” was used zero times, but according to Linders and Op de Beek's article in which they explain their model, they only applied this code three times in the fifty reviews they researched,²⁶¹ so perhaps this category could be removed in the future. “Dialogues” was used only three times. This could be due to the medium. Since the text in graphic novels mostly consists of dialogues (often in speech bubbles), it would be superfluous for a review to specifically mention the dialogues.

Some other aspect categories were found more often, but might be expected to have been used even more frequently. “Other”, for example, was only found ten times. This shows

²⁵⁸ Leith, “Outside the Box”.

²⁵⁹ Wolk, “Shades of Meaning”.

²⁶⁰ Good, “Adult Entertainment; ‘Brilliant’ Comic Book for Grownups is Dark and Quirky”.

²⁶¹ Linders & Op de Beek, “Evaluatiedomeinen in de Nederlandse literatuurkritiek”, p. 252.

that Linders and Op de Beek's model can be easily used to categorise aspects of evaluative expressions, since nearly every aspect could be placed within an existing category. The "style" code was applied to eleven evaluative expressions. A large discrepancy can be found when this number is compared to Linders and Op de Beek's use of "style" on the reviews they coded. Their corpus was, of course, a very different one, since they researched reviews of Dutch novels from 1955 and 1995, but the difference is still remarkable. For Linders and Op de Beek "style" was the second most used aspect in both reference years, while in the graphic novel reviews it was only the seventh most used. This result is unexpected, since in a graphic novel there are more types of style to discuss: the style of the text and the style of the illustrations. One possible explanation is that the critics of the researched graphic novels did not have enough knowledge of visual arts to comment on the style of the illustrations, since chapter 3.1 discussed that many of these critics have a background in writing or reviewing text-only novels. This example shows that it might be useful for future research to compare findings about graphic novel reviews to a corpus of reviews of text-only novels. If the "style" category had not been compared to Linders and Op de Beek's findings, eleven uses of the category would not have seemed such a small number. In the future, a group of graphic novel reviews could be compared to a group of text-only novels from the same years and the same newspapers, for example. These results could show the differences between how literary novels and graphic novels are reviewed, which would indicate their different positions in the literary field.

Finally, it is surprising that the "book cover" code was only found in eight evaluative expressions. The book cover formed such a large part of some of the researched reviews that I expected this to be more visible in the results. Twelve of the researched reviews are of novels by Chris Ware, who is known for his elaborate book covers. *Building Stories* consists of a box containing several books and booklets, and both *Jimmy Corrigan* and *Rusty Brown* have a dustjacket that can be folded out like a large poster with background information about characters and humorous reading instructions for the novel. Because these book covers are such an integral part of his works, most reviewers write about them. All five of the researched reviews of *Building Stories* mention the "cover" (or the box it comes in), three out of four of the reviews of *Jimmy Corrigan* do and one of the reviews of *Rusty Brown* does. Additionally, there are two instances in which the "book cover" code was used for reviews of other novels. Concludingly, it would be expected that the "book cover" code would have been found in at least eleven evaluative expressions, and perhaps even more, since many of the reviewers spend long paragraphs on these covers. This is not the case, however. It turns out that some of

these long paragraphs do not contain any evaluative expressions, so those parts of the reviews cannot be coded and in turn are not visible in the research results. If a critic gives so much attention to the cover, that implies that they see it as an important part of the novel that is deserving of attention. This means that some aspects and qualities that critics find important about the novels they review are not visible in the data that is collected with Linders and Op de Beek's coding system.

A total of 282 qualities were coded, with codes from the second column of the model.

Table 3 shows how many times each code was applied:

17 (other)	92	4 (vitality)	8
10 (emotional content)	33	7 (clarity)	8
16 (creative skill/craftsmanship)	30	8 (realism)	7
3 (scope/power)	27	11 (didactic content)	5
15 (originality)	21	5 (intellect)	4
6 (humour)	14	14 (moral content)	1
2 (cohesion/stability)	12	12 (religious content)	0
9 (identification)	11	13 (political content)	0
1 (efficiency)	9		

Table 3: Frequency of quality codes

While the aspect “other” from the first column was only found ten times, the quality “other” from the second column was applied ninety-two times, which means it was found much more often than any of the other quality codes. This could be due to several reasons. Firstly, it could point to a problem with Linders and Op de Beek's model. They aimed to improve on previous models that made it difficult to categorise certain expressions by creating a model which can combine a workable amount of clearly bordered categories in different columns.²⁶² Still, a third of the qualities that were found in the graphic novel reviews had to be coded under “other”. Linders and Op de Beek themselves also coded 18,2% of evaluative expressions used in 1955 with “other” and 12,5% in 1995. This is a much smaller portion of the codes that were used, but still in the reviews from 1955 the code “other” is the most frequently found quality. This could mean Linders and Op de Beek did not fully achieve what they set out to do with the creation of their model. It is also possible, however, that it is simply not achievable to make a more effective group of categories for the qualities of evaluative expressions, as critics can have vastly diverging opinions, which creates too many options. Another possibility is that the quality code “other” would not have been found in the graphic novel reviews so often

²⁶² Linders & Op de Beek, “Evaluatiedomeinen in de Nederlandse literatuurkritiek”, p. 248.

if they had been coded by two people instead of one. Two people might have found suitable codes for more evaluative expressions than one person, if they interpreted the categories more broadly or in different ways.

Some other qualities that appeared frequently in the graphic novel reviews are “emotional content”, “creative skill/craftsmanship” and “scope/power”. The “emotional content” category was found thirty-three times. This category is fairly straightforward and was popular in the reviews Linders and Op de Beek researched as well.²⁶³ The extent to which a novel is able to portray emotions is apparently important for reviewers of both text-only and graphic novels. “Creative skill/craftsmanship” was a new addition to the model and was found thirty times, in many cases quite literally: “These incidental features perhaps best illuminate Ware's devotional, almost obsessive, craftsmanship.”²⁶⁴ Since this code was found so often, it begs the question whether “creative skill” or “craftsmanship” is not mentioned as often in reviews for text-only novels or whether Linders and Op de Beek categorised these cases under “other”, as these are qualities that can also be important for reviewers of text-only novels. “Scope/power” was applied to twenty-seven evaluative expressions. It is unclear what Linders and Op de Beek’s exact intention for the category was, but for this research the category was expanded to include comments about attention to detail, which might explain the large amount of times it was used. An example can be found in the following sentence: “The book is also dense in nuance and detail, from painstaking architectural renderings and intricate causal diagrams to subtle, shifting colour schemes of sepias and greys.”²⁶⁵ Attention to detail could have been a separate category, since it occurred quite frequently, but then each category could have been subdivided into more categories. Another application for this code was when critics praised a novel for being large in scope, for example.

There are some categories from the second column that only appeared a few times in the reviews, or not at all. “Intellect” was only found four times, which contrasts with Linders and Op de Beek’s findings. It was the second most used quality code for the reviews from 1995 that they researched, but for this thesis it was ranked number fourteen. It is possible that the reviewers of the researched graphic novels did not find those particular novels intellectual, or that they do not relate graphic novels in general with intellectualism. It is also possible that the critics did not think an audience that is interested in intellectualism is also interested in

²⁶³ Linders & Op de Beek, “Evaluatiedomeinen in de Nederlandse literatuurkritiek”, p. 252.

²⁶⁴ Thompson, “Life, Jim, But Not As We Know It”.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

graphic novels. In Bourdieu’s diagram of the French literary field in the 19th century²⁶⁶ an intellectual audience can be found on the same side of the literary field as a high degree of consecration. The fact that critics apparently do not relate intellect with graphic novels means that perhaps graphic novels do not generally have an intellectual audience. This would mean that the graphic novel’s position in the field is closer to the side that denotes a low degree of consecration. Three out of four evaluative expressions that were coded with “intellect” are from reviews for *Asterios Polyp*. The novel is explained to be modernist by one reviewer,²⁶⁷ and another mentions the classical allusions in the novel.²⁶⁸ These features might attract an audience that is more intellectual, so for potential readers of the novel “intellect” would be more relevant than for readers of the average graphic novel. *Asterios Polyp*’s position in the field might be more influenced by its modernist background than by the medium it was written in.

Finally, “religious content” and “political content” were found zero times, and “moral content” once. Linders and Op de Beek discovered that “moral content” was used quite often in reviews from 1955, but there was a sharp decline in the use of this code in their reviews from 1995,²⁶⁹ so “moral content” became less important for Dutch novel reviewers or for the writers of the novels they reviewed. It is possible that this is the case for English-speaking reviewers and writers as well, so then it would be logical that this category would not be found much in the reviews from the 2000s and 2010s that were researched for this thesis. The codes for “religious content” and “political content” were not found often by Linders and Op de Beek either.

A context code from the third column was added a total of seventy-one times, to indicate that the evaluative expression that was coded is not an absolute verdict about the novel, but only applies in a certain context. These results can be found in table 3:

Y (images)	53
X (text)	11
II (reader)	6
III (texts by same author)	1
I (texts by other authors)	0

Table 4: Frequency of context codes

²⁶⁶ See Appendix A for Bourdieu’s diagram.

²⁶⁷ Wolk, “Shades of Meaning”.

²⁶⁸ Jones, “Asterios Polyp”.

²⁶⁹ Linders & Op de Beek, “Evaluatiedomeinen in de Nederlandse literatuurkritiek”, p. 252.

The code “image” was added to fifty-three codes, which means the opinions expressed in fifty-three evaluative expressions were explicitly about the images of the novel. Since twenty-eight reviews were researched, this means the average review specifically mentions a graphic aspect of the novel nearly two times. “Text” was added to only eleven codes. This does not mean, however, that all other evaluative expressions only applied to the illustrations. It was often implicit that an opinion mostly applied to the text of the novel, for example when a critic wrote about the plot, but since the images are also used to represent the plot I decided not to apply the “text” code in these cases. This would have become too subjective. The following is an example of an evaluative expression that *is* explicitly about the text, so in this case the “text” code was applied: “Not to be overlooked, though, is Ware’s skill with words. As stunning as the visuals are in *Building Stories*, it is Ware’s writing that carries the story forward from frame to frame in bouts of existential prose.”²⁷⁰ Most evaluative expressions, however, did not receive either of these codes from the third column, since they are neither specifically about the text or the images. Some examples of evaluative expressions that might relate to both include “Nimona herself is a fantastic character”²⁷¹ and “‘Rusty Brown’ is at least four books in one, with a sum much greater than all the parts, expanding not just the possibilities of the form but also the mental space of his reader”.²⁷² In six cases the code “reader” was added, in which case the critic recommended a certain aspect of the novel (or the whole novel) only to a specific type of reader.

Chapter 1.2 brought to light that comic book scholar Stephen Weiner claims critics who reviewed Spiegelman’s *Maus* focused too much on the novel’s literary qualities and did not understand that its illustrations were just as important to the story as the text. It is uncertain if this was a more general trend in graphic novel reviews before the 2000s, but it does not seem to be the case for the graphic novel reviews that were studied for this thesis. The code “images” was attached to many more evaluative expressions than the code “text”, and in most cases the evaluative expression applied to both. This indicates that graphic novels have gained a stronger position within the literary field since then and critics are not just reviewing them in the same manner that they would review a text-only novel.

Table 4 shows the most common combinations of aspects and qualities from the first and second columns in the researched reviews:

²⁷⁰ Beerman, “Through the Peep Hole”.

²⁷¹ Hicks, “Drawn That Way”.

²⁷² Park, “It All Started in Omaha; Graphic Content”.

M17	whole - other	26	B2	structure - cohesion	8
L17	graphic - other	17	D3	plot - scope	7
D17	plot - other	15	K17	author - other	7
D10	plot - emotional	13	F9	characters - identification	6
F17	characters - other	11	F10	characters - emotional	6
M3	whole - scope	11	M6	whole - humour	6
L16	graphic - creative skill	10	M16	whole - creative skill	6
M10	whole - emotional	10	N17	other - other	6

Table 5: Frequency of code combinations

As can be seen in the table, these results lack in cohesion. There are hardly any combinations that were found in a significant amount of evaluative expressions. Counting the number of times certain context codes from the third column of the model were added to each combination did not lead to any significant results either, other than the fact that the “images” code was applied most often to evaluative expressions that concern graphic aspects of the novel, as would be expected.

The combination that was most frequently found is “whole” – “other”. It was explained earlier in this section that many critics begin and end their reviews with general statements about the whole novel. The qualities these statements describe could often not be categorised with a code from the second column, because they were too general. One such example is the following sentence: “His new book, if one can call it that without being reductionist, is a work of such startling genius that it is difficult to know where to begin.”²⁷³ Another combination that was found often is “use of graphic medium” – “creative skill/craftsmanship”. This means that in many cases a comment about the creative skills of the author related to a graphic aspect of the novel. An example is: “This artfully depicted graphic novel (...)”.²⁷⁴

Most of the other combinations that were frequently applied contain the quality code “other” from the second column. It was discussed earlier in this section why it might be the case that this code was applied so often. This frequent use makes it difficult to compare results, since the same combination was sometimes used in various ways. The following are two examples of evaluative expressions that were both coded “plot” – “other”: “The more ludicrous turns in the plot are beautifully underplayed”²⁷⁵ and “As the story advances, it

²⁷³ Wallis-Simons, “Drawing the World”.

²⁷⁴ Kennedy, “Realization ‘Born’ From Gene Luen Yang’s Award-Winning Graphic Novel”.

²⁷⁵ Lipsyte, “Dyspeptic Living”.

decompresses beautifully”.²⁷⁶ Both expressions concern a different quality of the plot, so in order to come to useful conclusions about the evaluative expressions containing the “other” code they would have to be compared individually to see what they are about. That defeats the purpose of using Linders and Op de Beek’s model, which was created to allow researchers to compare the evaluative expressions of a large corpus.

As was discussed earlier in this chapter, I did find significant results when I researched the aspect and quality codes individually, and trends could be found when these results were compared to the codes Linders and Op de Beek applied to their corpus. These results show that there are some differences in the way critics review graphic novels and text-only novels. It would, however, have been useful to be able to compare the results about the graphic novel reviews to a more similar corpus. A comparison between reviews of graphic novels and literary novels, for example, could indicate the different positions the two occupy in the literary field. The combinations of codes from the different columns proved to be difficult to analyse, because there were too few combinations that were found significantly more often than the others. Perhaps this could be solved by analysing a larger corpus. Another issue was that the quality code “other” was applied very frequently, which made it difficult to draw conclusions, so in the future it might be useful to define the different categories more clearly so more evaluative expressions can be successfully categorised.

Some of the data that was gathered with the use of Linders and Op de Beek’s model is difficult to interpret because of the aforementioned issues, but when it is combined with the additional research that was done on the reviews conclusions can still be drawn. The research into the background of critics that was discussed in chapter 3.1 shows that while more graphic novel reviews are being published, there is no dedicated group of graphic novel critics yet. This indicates that the graphic novel is still relatively new within the literary field and has not gained a prominent position yet. The number of words that was allocated to each review by the newspapers does suggest a positive development, but perhaps only for graphic novelists who are already successful. The data shows that especially Daniel Clowes’ *Wilson* and Chris Ware’s more recent works received reviews with a substantial amount of words. This means that perhaps only reviews of novels by graphic novelists who have already achieved a high degree of consecration by themselves are allocated so much space in newspapers. As a result, newspapers distribute even more symbolic capital to these authors, and possibly give them a larger audience. The effect on the graphic novel medium as a whole, however, might be

²⁷⁶ Hicks, “Drawn That Way”.

minimal. The results from section 3.2 show that some critics who are positive about the novel they review (indirectly) criticise the comic book medium, which might have the same effect: some graphic novels gain symbolic capital, but the graphic novel or comic book medium as a whole does not profit from this. The conclusion to this thesis will combine the results from this chapter with the information from the first chapter about the position of the graphic novel in the literary field before the 2000s to answer the question whether the graphic novel has since moved or is moving towards a position of high consecration within the literary field.

Conclusion

The introduction to this thesis opened with the prophecy of former *New York Times Book Review* editor Charles McGrath that one day the comic book will take over from the novel as the most popular literary form.²⁷⁷ The first chapter then discussed that this was not the first time a large increase in popularity of the comic book medium had been predicted. After comic books were rebranded as “graphic novels” in the 1980s the graphic novels *Maus*, *Watchmen* and *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, later named the “big three”, were critically and commercially so successful that the comic book industry hoped comic books would finally be taken seriously by both the public and critics. The aim of this thesis was to study whether these hopes about critical success have come true by using Bourdieu’s field theory and answering the following research question: does the professional reception of graphic novels in newspapers from the 2000s and 2010s suggest that the graphic novel has moved or is moving towards a position of high consecration within the literary field?

Chapter 1 of this thesis outlined the history of the graphic novel, which demonstrated that comic books made their entrance in the literary field in the 1930s²⁷⁸ in a position that denotes a very low degree of consecration. Critics and academics did not write about comic books for a long time, comic books were not considered to be “literature”, and the general opinion of the comic book was low. This was influenced by psychiatrist Fredric Wertham’s publication in 1954 which claimed comic books had a dangerous effect on teenagers and by newspaper articles that did not take comic books seriously. In the 1980s the term “graphic novel” was popularized by the media after the “big three” had been published. Newspaper articles emphasised the difference between the “old” comic books for teenagers and the “new” graphic novels, which were illustrated novels of high quality that were worthy of the terms “art” and “literature”.²⁷⁹

Especially *Maus* received attention from critics, journalists and academics, and the novel won a Pulitzer Prize and was included in W.W. Norton anthologies, which all suggests the novel (and author Art Spiegelman) acquired a large amount of symbolic capital. It is doubtful whether the graphic novel medium as a whole profited much from this, however, as many critics saw *Maus* and the other two “big three” titles as exceptions that were of much

²⁷⁷ McGrath, “Not Funnies”.

²⁷⁸ This is when the first American comic book was published. It would be difficult to place the comics that were published in newspapers since the late nineteenth century in the literary field, since they were not published as autonomous works. There is also no evidence that these newspaper comics had achieved a higher degree of consecration than the comic books that were published since the 1930s.

²⁷⁹ E.g. in Du Mars, “The Comic Book Grows Up”.

higher quality than the average comic book. At the end of the 1980s newspapers even published negative articles about the medium. The 1990s showed that expectations had perhaps been too high after the success of the “big three”, because the graphic novels published after these three did not receive the same success and recognition. Some distribution of symbolic capital to the graphic novel medium did take place in the 1990s, however: the negative articles about comic books stopped and some newspapers started to publish positive articles, graphic novels became available in libraries, and some universities now offered courses on comic books.

Chapters 2 and 3 discussed the research I did for this thesis by analysing twenty-eight reviews of ten graphic novels, which led to more insights. The first chapter explained that no comic book reviews were published in mainstream newspapers before the 1980s, and in 1980 and 1990 there were still not enough graphic novel reviews to be able to include them in the research for this thesis. The fact that it was possible to find a workable amount of graphic novel reviews from the 2000s and 2010s shows that there was an increase of graphic novel reviews in mainstream newspapers after the 1990s. Some newspapers have even started to write regularly about graphic novels. *The Observer*, for example, has had a “graphic novel of the month” section since 2010.²⁸⁰ The headlines that are given to graphic novel reviews also reflect the importance that newspapers have started to ascribe to graphic novels, as they are not filled with stereotypical comic book exclamations such as “pow!” and “shazam!” anymore, but are more similar to the headlines of other book reviews. The reviews that were selected for this thesis also show that newspapers publish graphic novel reviews of a wide array of genres. Chris Ware’s novels are often called literary by critics, but multiple reviews could also be found for *Nimona* and *American Born Chinese* (both geared towards young adults) and *Black Hole* (a gory horror novel about teenagers). The research for this thesis also discovered that there is no group of dedicated graphic novel critics yet, which reflects how new the graphic novel is in the literary field. Currently graphic novels are reviewed by critics and journalists with various backgrounds. This means the distribution of symbolic capital from critics to the graphic novel medium originates from various positions within the field. I also discovered that some critics still feel the need to explain how graphic novels work to their readers, which also indicates how new graphic novel reviews are in newspapers and how new the medium is in the literary field.

²⁸⁰ <https://www.theguardian.com/books/series/graphic-novel-of-the-month>

Additionally, some critics still make the distinction between the “old” comic books and the “new” graphic novels which was first emphasised by newspaper articles in the 1980s. Similarly, while most critics were very positive about the graphic novel they reviewed, a close reading of some of the reviews revealed a negative attitude towards the comic book medium in general. These trends could have the effect that these “new” graphic novels with more serious subjects, and especially the ones that are being reviewed in newspapers, gain more symbolic capital than the comic book medium as a whole. Chris Ware, especially, seems to have reached a higher degree of consecration within the literary field than the graphic novel or comic book medium. Reviewers of his works²⁸¹ claim that he is the best graphic novelist and some reviews of other novels name his works as evidence that the graphic novel medium has matured.²⁸² His works have also won several literary prizes and the reviews of his graphic novels include an increasing number of words through the years. This large amount of attention in turn allows Ware to become even more successful and introduces him to new readers, leading to more symbolic and economic capital. This means Ware (and perhaps some other graphic novelists²⁸³) is probably moving much faster in the literary field towards a position of high consecration than the medium as a whole.

One of the main research methods for this thesis was the analysis of graphic novel reviews by using Linders and Op de Beek’s model to discover the evaluation criteria that critics used to review graphic novels in the 2000s and 2010s. One notable result from this research is that the quality code for “intellect” was only applied to four evaluative expressions, while it was very frequently applied to the reviews from Linders and Op de Beek’s corpus of text-only novel reviews. Either no intellectual aspects could be found in the graphic novels for critics to discuss, or critics do not think a graphic novel audience and an intellectual audience intersect. Bourdieu’s field theory relates an intellectual audience to a high degree of consecration, so this would suggest the graphic novel has not reached a high degree of consecration yet, at least according to critics. Another finding from coding the reviews is that the code “images” from the third column of the model²⁸⁴ was found in more

²⁸¹ Three of his works were researched for this thesis: *Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth* (2001), *Building Stories* (2012) and *Rusty Brown* (2019), which accounted for twelve out of the twenty-eight reviews.

²⁸² E.g. Shaar Murray, “The Tuesday Book: The Graphic Truth About Palestinian Existence”.

²⁸³ The reviews of Daniel Clowes’ *Wilson*, for example, also contained a large number of words.

²⁸⁴ Codes from the third column of Linders and Op de Beek’s model can be attached to a combination of an aspect and quality code to express that the evaluative expression needs to be understood relatively. In this case the addition of the code “images” means that the evaluative expression only refers to the images of the graphic novel, not to the text.

evaluative expressions than the code “text”. This means there were more evaluative expressions that only referred to the images of the novel than ones that only referred to the text. Chapter 1 discussed Weiner’s claim that critics who wrote about Spiegelman’s *Maus* in the 1980s did not pay as much attention to the illustrations as to the text, since they did not understand their importance to the work. This result shows that this is not the case anymore: in these reviews the critics write more frequently about the images only than about the text only.

I encountered a few difficulties when I was working with Linders and Op de Beek’s model, which indicate problems with the model itself or with the execution of the model in this thesis. Firstly, one of the new category codes that were added to better accommodate the corpus of this research was the aspect “use of graphic medium”, but the results from this category are not entirely reliable, since there were issues with inconsistency when I applied the code to the reviews. Secondly, the quality code “other” was the most frequently used quality code. This makes it difficult to interpret the results, as the evaluative expressions that were placed in this category often do not have much in common. It was Linders and Op de Beek’s objective to create a flexible model that would allow most evaluative expressions to be placed within categories,²⁸⁵ but the frequent application of the “other” code shows that I was not able to do this. Linders and Op de Beek frequently used this code when they applied it to their corpus as well, so this could point to an issue with the model, but they did not have to resort to this code as often as I did. One difference between their research and the research done for this thesis is that Linders and Op de Beek both coded each review, while I did it by myself. A collaboration with another person might have led to more usable results. Another logical addition to this research would have been to compare the analysis of graphic novel reviews to an analysis of another corpus. I did compare the results to the data Linders and Op de Beek gathered from their corpus, but since their corpus comprises Dutch reviews of literary novels from 1955 and 1995 a more similar corpus would have been more useful. Comparison to a corpus of reviews of literary novels from the 2000s and 2010s, for example, would have made it more apparent how critics’ evaluations of these mediums differ and how this reflects their different positions in the field.

A final issue with Linders and Op de Beek’s model is that the collected data does not completely show what critics find important when evaluating a novel, which is the objective when working with the model, but this was partially solved by the addition of the other forms

²⁸⁵ Linders & Op de Beek, “Evaluatiedomeinen in de Nederlandse literatuurkritiek”, p. 248.

of research I conducted, such as close reading the reviews to gauge the critics' opinions on the graphic novel medium. Chapter 3.4 explained, for example, that the aspect code "book cover" was not found in as many evaluative expressions as I expected. This happened because some critics extensively described certain book covers, implying it was an important aspect of the novel to them, without giving their opinion on it. Since only evaluative expressions are coded, these implicit seals of approval are not represented in the data.

The data that was gathered by analysing graphic novel reviews from the 2000s and 2010s with the use of Linders and Op de Beek's model combined with the additional results gathered by examining other aspects of the reviews and their critics can be used to tentatively decide where the graphic novel is currently positioned in the literary field. The results largely form a reflection of critics' (implicit) views on the graphic novel's position in the field,²⁸⁶ but the additional research I conducted and the information in chapter 1 also reflect the distribution of symbolic capital by newspapers and academics. All these results combined suggest that the graphic novel has indeed moved in the direction of a higher degree of consecration in the literary field since the 1980s. This is demonstrated by the fact that enough graphic novel reviews were published in newspapers in the 2000s and 2010s to be able to analyse them, which was not the case before that time. Whether the graphic novel is still moving further towards a high degree of consecration in the literary field is unclear. The data shows that there is one particular graphic novelist who is clearly still moving towards a position of a higher degree of consecration and who seems to be ahead of the graphic novel medium as a whole: Chris Ware. Spiegelman's *Maus* had a more prominent position in the literary field than other graphic novels in the 1980s and the same is now true for Ware and his works. Critics praise him as being the best artist working in the graphic medium, he has been awarded several prestigious prizes, academics write about his works, and newspapers recognise his success by allocating increasingly more space to reviews of his novels. This large amount of attention in turn leads to Ware becoming even more successful (as it allows him to acquire symbolic capital and a larger potential audience), which further accelerates his movement in the literary field.

The results also reflect the fact that the graphic novel is still very new in the literary field. "Graphic novel critic" is not a feasible profession yet, so currently various kinds of book critics and journalists are reviewing graphic novels. Their reviews also reveal some judgments

²⁸⁶ The introduction to this thesis discussed the importance of critics as agents in the literary field that distribute symbolic capital, which is needed to gain a higher degree of consecration.

about the graphic novel medium that are based on stereotypical views of the comic book from the 1980s and before, and some critics still think they need to educate readers about what a graphic novel is. It is not surprising, then, that graphic novels have not acquired enough symbolic capital to have reached a degree of consecration similar to some other art forms yet (such as the literary novel), as the medium's movement towards that side of the literary field only started in the 1980s. Future research might discover whether the graphic novel medium has remained in a similar position in the literary field in the 2020s and after, slowed down by outdated stereotypes about comic books, or whether graphic novel visionaries such as Chris Ware have pulled the medium towards an even higher degree of consecration.

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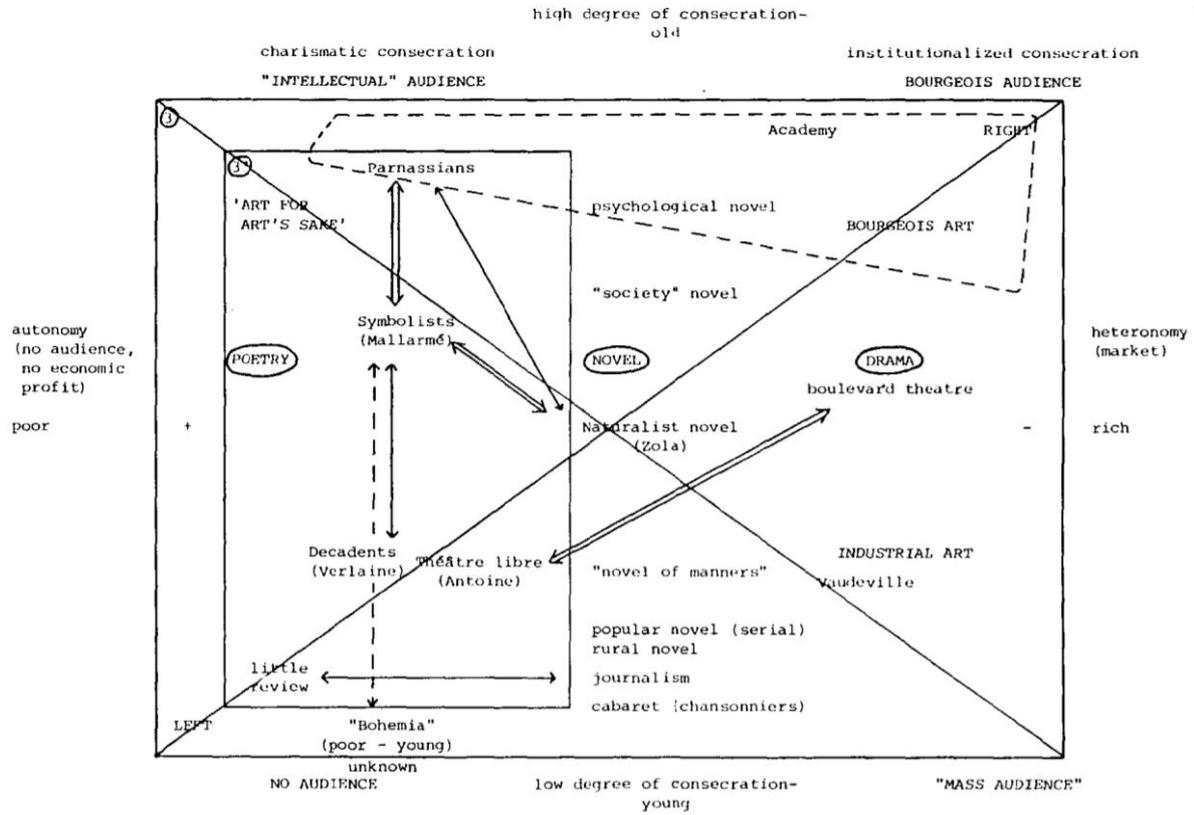
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Appendices

Appendix A: Bourdieu's Diagram of the Literary Field²⁸⁷



²⁸⁷ Bourdieu, "The Field of Cultural Production, or: The Economic World Reversed", p. 329.

Appendix B: Adapted Version of Linders and Op de Beek's Model

Aspect	Quality	Context
A) Style (language/tone)	1) Efficiency	I) Texts by other authors
B) Structure	2) Cohesion/stability	II) Reader
C) Setting	3) Scope/power (incl. detail)	III) Texts by same author
D) Plot	4) Vitality	X) Text
E) Dialogues	5) Intellect	Y) Images
F) Characters	6) Humour	
G) Theme (idea)	7) Clarity	
H) Symbolism	8) Realism	
I) Book cover	9) Identification	
J) Title	10) Emotional content	
K) Author (incl. intention)	11) Didactic content	
L) Use of graphic medium (effectiveness/innovation)	12) Religious content	
M) Whole	13) Political content	
N) Other	14) Moral content (other)	
	15) Originality	
	16) Creative skill/craftsmanship	
	17) Other	

Appendix C: List of the Researched Graphic Novels and Reviews

1. *Palestine* (1996 in two volumes, 2001 in one volume) – Joe Sacco
 - *The Independent*, 4-2-2003 (U.K.)
 - *Times Colonist*, 13-6-2004 (Canada)
2. *Safe Area Goražde* (2000) – Joe Sacco
 - *The San Diego Union-Tribune*, 20-8-2000 (U.S.)
 - *The Guardian*, 11-8-2007 (U.K.)
3. *Jimmy Corrigan, the Smartest Kid on Earth* (2000) – Chris Ware
 - *The Record*, 2-12-2000 (Canada)
 - *The Independent*, 5-6-2001 (U.K.)
 - *The Independent*, 16-6-2001 (U.K.)
 - *The Guardian*, 26-12-2001 (U.K.)
4. *Black Hole* (2005) – Charles Burns
 - *The Washington Post*, 30-10-2005 (U.S.)
 - *The Toronto Star*, 13-11-2005 (Canada)
 - *The Independent*, 20-11-2005 (U.K.)
5. *American Born Chinese* (2006) – Gene Luen Yang
 - *The New York Times*, 13-5-2007 (U.S.)
 - *Intelligencer Journal*, 8-9-2007 (U.S.)
6. *Asterios Polyp* (2009) – David Mazzucchelli
 - *Austin Chronicle*, 17-7-2009 (U.S.)
 - *The New York Times*, 26-7-2009 (U.S.)
 - *The Globe and Mail*, 28-8-2009 (Canada)
7. *Wilson* (2010) – Daniel Clowes
 - *The Guardian*, 26-6-2010 (U.K.)
 - *The New York Times*, 4-7-2010 (U.S.)
8. *Building Stories* (2012) – Chris Ware
 - *The Guardian*, 22-9-2012 (U.K.)
 - *The Daily Telegraph*, 29-9-2012 (U.K.)
 - *The Observer*, 21-10-2012 (U.K.)
 - *The New York Times*, 21-10-2012 (U.S.)
 - *The Toronto Star*, 28-10-2012 (Canada)

9. *Nimona* (2015) – Noelle Stevenson

- *The New York Times*, 12-7-2015 (U.S.)
- *The Independent*, 12-7-2015 (U.K.)

10. *Rusty Brown* (2019) – Chris Ware

- *The Telegraph*, 17-9-2019 (U.K.)
- *The New York Times*, 14-10-2019 (U.S.)
- *The Guardian*, 11-10-2019 (U.K.)