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Reframing the Graphic Memoir: How does the comic-strip artist negotiate modality and fidelity in the depiction of personal and historical narratives?
This thesis investigates the potency of the comic strip as a medium to address real-life narratives, which are “fabricated in and through drawing and design” (Whitlock & Poletti:v).
Defining the Graphic Memoir*

The term ‘memoir’ is preferred over ‘autobiography’ as it refers to selected memories or episodes taken from life, rather than the story of a life . . .

. . . and best describes what will be the outcome of practice-led research.

*also referred to in comic-book scholarship as autobiographix, autography, autographics, autobiocomics, graphic life writing etc . . .
Practice-led research - themes

- Modality
- Temporality (& memory)
- Authenticity

(The Graphic Memoir)
Modality

The formal & structural properties of the comic strip and their application within the graphic memoir genre;

- page multi-frame & readership control
- the comics graphic-code
- anchorage > the relay between text & image
- representational style
Temporality (& memory)

Chronology, tempo and issues concerning the depiction of time and memory within the memoir;

- clock time/subjective time/psychic time in comic book narratives
- the panel as time controller
- the transitional influence of negative space
Authenticity

How does the stylized and iconographic content of the graphic work complicate perceptions of fidelity?

- the authorial ‘pact’ and/or ‘performed integrity’ of the artist (Refaie:171)
- historical accuracy and/or ‘memory retrieval’.
- relation of the graphic text to other memoir texts or ‘truth’ discourses.
- the drawn image v other visual means of capturing real life people and events.
Pilgrimage from Nenthead  (Chester Armstrong)

working class memoir (1928)

Key themes from PFN
- mining community
- growing politicalization
- autodidactism
- rationalisation & enlightenment

Project in hand
Graphic adaptation of Pilgrimage text - a work that intertwines familial & sociopolitical storylines.
In 1898, aged 30, Chester co-founded the *Ashington Debating and Literary Improvement Society* (ADLIS) with John Moffett Gillians, with a modus-operandi to debate social and philosophical issues, and dissect the keynote modernist works of the day (Armstrong:121-173).

The *Morpeth Herald* archive.
textual & pictorial resources for time period
Psychogeography (from Guy Debord SI) - how the geographical location and/or environment effects the emotions and behaviour of individuals
PROLOGUE

Text from Weatherhorne's Leaves of Grass

Wentworth sequence of Jumhe's (prison building 1838) set of poetry 1838: an indication of the role of single images and details of visionary ideas for the poem. (indicating the poem's sequence in the narrative sequence, including the sequence's historical background, the sequence's ideological vision, and the的意义 of the poem's sequence.) Woven through the sequence is the transformative power of words. A text to Wellington to the noblemam-madness-themed thinking of Jumhe (Jumhe aged 21).

1: PILGRIMAGE FROM NENTHEAD

1. Transition from pilgrimage into the internal world of the characters' creation.
2. Character analysis: the rise and fall of the characters.
3. Community and religion: North's (the world of today).
5. The setting: Wellington's vision of today's setting.
6. The process of Wellington's thought.

2: HARDEST WORK UNDER HEAVEN

1. Present-day events: the domestic scene: dynamic between Author & Wife.
2. Characters' journey to the pracy: the characters' journey to the pracy.
3. The setting: Wellington's vision of today's setting.
4. The process: Wellington's thought process.

3: THE LARGEST PIT VILLAGE

Present-day events: Wellington's vision: the characters' journey to the pracy.

4: LOVE & THRIFT

1. Character analysis: Wellington's vision of today's setting.
2. Community and religion: Wellington's vision of today's setting.
3. The setting: Wellington's vision of today's setting.
4. The process: Wellington's thought process.

5: THE COTTAGE AND THE CASTLE

1. The effect of modernism and the present: Wellington's vision of today's setting.
2. The setting: Wellington's vision of today's setting.
3. The process: Wellington's thought process.

6: FOOD FOR THE IDEALIST

1. The process: Wellington's thought process.
2. Community and religion: Wellington's vision of today's setting.
3. The setting: Wellington's vision of today's setting.

7: IMPERIAL VISIONS

1. The effect of modernism and the present: Wellington's vision of today's setting.
2. The setting: Wellington's vision of today's setting.
3. The process: Wellington's thought process.

EPILOGUE

Sequencing events: Wellington's vision of today's setting. Wellington's vision of today's setting. Wellington's vision of today's setting.
Roaming in thought over the universe

I saw the little that is good

steadily hastening towards mortality

And the vast all that is called evil

I saw hastening to merge itself

and became lost and dead
In this broad earth of ours

And the measureless grossness

Enclosed and safe

Within its central heart

And the slag

Nestles the seed perfection
"O the black eyes, the happy hearts,
That see, that know, the guiding thread so fine.
Along the mirth, the labyrinth.
Belief in plan of ease, enclosed in time and space.
Health, peace, salvation, universal."
Nay, but the lack of it the dream.

And failure in life's love and wealth a dream.

And all the world a dream.
The mediating role of the artist . . .

'It's about choices being made, of finding what one can tell . . . and what one can reveal beyond what one knows one is revealing" (Spiegelman:2011:73)
References

- Armstrong, C. 1938. *Pilgrimage to Nenthead* [Methuen]
- Bechdel, A. 2006. *Fun Home* [Jonathan Cape]