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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.
The Checkweighman
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.
Psychogeography (from Guy Debord SI) - how the geographical location and/or environment effects the emotions and behaviour of individuals
PROLOGUE (1 pg)
Text from Lambin's "Legends of Cates"

Voyage sequence of Gannean (p. 1) engages a set of pos.
series (Y to Z): as indicated on top, enter the scene of Red
is interact with single character or meta-signal to re-examine the story's
dynamics for the situation, including: the building-party, the
incident, the weather, the storm, the snowfall, the
escape. The scene forms a part of the Red
sequence.

1: PILGRIM FROM NENTHEAD (4 pg)
1. Transition from Pilgrimage to the
Genealogy of Cates' Narrative.
2. Cates born 1765 & family
names of father, grandfather, etc.
3. Chapel House, Nenthead.
5. Will's death & the transformation of
the family.
6. Visit to Durham to see the
University of Durham. The

2: HARDEST WORK UNDER HEAVEN (4 pg)
1. Present situation of the
Cates family.
2. Community & religion in
Northumberland.
3. Widows & orphans in
Northumb.
4. The Lewis family at
Arlington.
5. The Lewis family at
Arlington & the transition to
Arlington.
6. The Lewis family at
Arlington & the transition to
Arlington.

3: THE LARGEST PIT VILLAGE (4 pg)
1. The rise of the coal industry in
Arlington.
2. The community of the
Arlington Pit.
3. The rise of the coal trade in
Arlington.

4: LOVE & THRIFT (4 pg)
1. Cates gets an
2. His love of
3. The rise of the
4. The rise of the

5: THE COTTAGE AND THE CASTLE (4 pg)
1. The effect of early modern
prosperity on the
Cates family.
2. The coal industry in
Arlington.
3. Cates' family

6: FOOD FOR THE IDEALIST (4 pg)
1. Friendship between
2. The rise of the
3. The rise of the

EPILOGUE (2 pg)
 ...

Principal Characters
Cates: The Cates family
Hannah: The Cates family
Mary: The Cates family
William: The Cates family
John: The Cates family
Joan: The Cates family
 ...

Project
Author: Archibald Cates

...
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 nurse itself

and became lost and dead
In this broad earth of ours

And the measureless gossamer

and the slag

Enclosed and safe

Within its central heart

Nestles the seed perfection
Many, but the lack of it the dream.

And failing in life's core, 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]