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From Page to Panel – Comic Book
Adaptations of William Shakespeare's
Plays

Od strony do panelu – komiksowe
adaptacje sztuk Williama Shakespeare'a

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OŚWIADCZENIE

Ja, niżej podpisana

Anna Wołosz-Sosnowska

przedkładam rozprawę doktorską

pt. **From Page to Panel – Comic Book Adaptations of William Shakespeare’s
Plays**

**(Od strony do panelu – komiksowe adaptacje sztuk Williama
Shakespeare’a)**

**na Uniwersytecie im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu i oświadczam, że
napisałam ją samodzielnie.**

Oznacza to, że przy pisaniu pracy, poza niezbędnymi konsultacjami, nie korzystałam z pomocy innych osób, a w szczególności nie zlecałam opracowania rozprawy lub jej istotnych części innym osobom, ani nie odpisywałam tej rozprawy lub jej istotnych części od innych osób.

Jednocześnie przyjmuję do wiadomości, że gdyby powyższe oświadczenie okazało się nieprawdziwe, decyzja o wydaniu mi dyplomu zostanie cofnięta.

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Introduction

In the Golden Age of comic (1940s-50s) comic books were on the rise both among readers and publishers in the United States. After the publication of Fredric Wertham's book *Seduction of the Innocent* (1954) and the establishment of the Comics Code of Authority as a result of Senate Committee hearings that took place in the same year, comics experienced a slump in sales and readership. Then, the glorious year of 1986 marked the beginning of a new era of comics: a change in the reception with an increasing number of works aimed at a mature reader; a change in quality both in terms of drawings and the paper on which they were printed; a change in distribution with the appearance of graphic novels (graphic narratives) entering bookshops and wider retailer channels; and also a change in popularity. Currently, in the 21st century comics is an established medium which is particularly true due to the widespread emergence of films and series based on comics. Surprisingly, profits from comics sales are on the increase¹, but readership fluctuates²; however, in post-pandemic times they appear to increase once more.

All these factors have contributed to the emergence of comics studies, which analyse comics from a variety of facets and angles, historically, semiotically, culturally, aesthetically, and many other. A steady rise in academic research, articles, monographs, and specialised journals (*Comics&Narration*, *ImageText*, and *Studies in Comics*) has been observed. Comics has entered the academia with courses devoted to the history of comics as well as its social and cultural aspects. The most notable works have been

¹ Curcic (2023), Krasnolutska (2023).

² See Gardner (2014: 203). The conundrum of rising sales, unstable readership, disappearance of local comics book shops touches only comics sold in the US and does not reflect the situation of the Japanese manga.

incorporated into contemporary literature courses or have been taught separately. Comics is now a mature and serious medium and a cultural phenomenon that deserves serious scrutiny.

Comics is often paired with another element, hence there are articles, presentations, and books titled “comics and...”, such as: comics and film, comics and literature, comics and superheroes, comics and narrative and this work is no exception. Such a pairing needs not to be perceived negatively, but, to some extent, it might suggest a sense of inadequacy of the medium itself and the necessity to borrow a theoretical background from other fields rather than develop its own. Szyłak (2011: 10) quite honestly observes that if something possesses differentiating characteristics, it is possible to provide it with its own name; in the case of comics, it means that the phenomenon is perceived as a separate entity and scholars, together with critics should contribute to developing specific nomenclature. On the other hand, comics as a hybrid medium is prone to absorbing, adopting, and adapting intricacies and elements from other media and art forms. This enables the incorporation of comics into interdisciplinary studies.

This raises another question regarding the categorisation of comics. Leaving definition(s) aside, scholars have deliberated on what it is, and they have suggested the following: comics is a medium, a language, a mode of communication, a technology, or an artistic genre. Each of these concepts has its own advocates and opponents. Marie-Laurie Ryan (2003) proposed a definition of a “form of expression” which can be understood as a medium based on two criteria: “it must make a difference as to what kind of narrative messages can be transmitted, how these messages are presented, or how they are experienced” (Ryan 2003) and it possess a unique set of features. Defining each medium is based on its formal elements, elements which are specific and characteristic; a medium is often able to interact with other established media (La Cour 2022: 193). Furthermore, Marshall McLuhan (2001, 2005) believed that each type of a medium is unique with a unique set of features; no medium works in isolation and is extended and complemented by other media and a set of features. McLuhan’s two ideas concerning the idea of ‘medium’ have impacted the perception of media in general, but also comics. First is his idea of ‘the medium is the message’ “because it is the medium that shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action. The content and uses of such media are as diverse as they are ineffective in shaping the form

of human association. Indeed, it is only too typical that the “content” of any medium blinds us to the character of the medium.” (McLuhan 2005: 9). Another of McLuhan’s ideas is the division into a hot and a cold medium, and he classified comics as a cold medium as it requires high involvement and participation on the part of the reader, and also cold media provide the audience with only few data (McLuhan 2005: 24-35). McLuhan was an ardent supporter of viewing comics as a medium.

Researchers who predominantly embrace linguistic theories in the most extensive sense frequently advocate for the notion of considering comics as a form of language. Neil Cohn in his work perceives comics as a visual (narrative) language and audience needs to acquire visual language fluency in order to understand it. Moreover, for Cohn, the organisation of the images is similar to linguistic structures. By adopting this approach, Cohn is able to conduct research into comics by using cognitive and neurocognitive theories, as well as syntactic theories. Another advocate supporting the idea of comics as a language is Groensteen who states, “what makes comics a language that cannot be confused with any other is, on the one hand, the *simultaneous* mobilisation of the entirety of codes (visual and discursive) that constitute it, and, at the same time, the fact that none of these codes probably belongs purely to it, consequently specifying themselves when they apply to particular ‘subject of expression’, which is the drawing” (Groensteen 2007: 6). This is a somewhat confusing statement because comics combines two sets of codes which appear in comics, but they are ‘borrowed’, either or both coded (verbal and visual) manifests itself in a ‘subject of expression’. He then simply jumps to the conclusion that if comics is a language and a combination of codes, then it is a system. Groensteen did not explain his perception of the code, whether it is verbal, linguistic, or semiotic. He appears to be inconsistent with his ideas.

An interesting, though confusing classification comes from Roger Sabin (2003: 9) who states “they [comics] are a language, with their own grammar, syntax and punctuation. They are not some hybrid form halfway between ‘literature’ and ‘art’ (whatever the words might mean), but a medium in their own right”. In Sabin’s eyes, this sentence is conclusive as far as what comics is, but instead of providing a clear explanation, it views comics as a language, and consequently, it is a medium. The statement is confusing; it seems that Sabin perceived comics as a medium which has been constructed and operated using its own methods of communication, i.e. a language

of comics with both verbal and visual elements. Moreover, Sabin opposed the idea of hybridity and interaction with other media.

Another approach treats comics as a means or a mode of communication; in other words, comics fulfils the communication (or speech) act. This idea is proposed by Duncan and Smith who claim that “there is no distinct medium known as comics. Comics is a useful general term for designating the phenomenon of juxtaposing images in a sequence” (Duncan and Smith 2009: 3). In other words, comics is a juxtaposition of sequenced images for communication. Hence, comics, in a very broad sense, consists of the source, coded messages (channel), and the receiver (Duncan and Smith 2009: 7). Although, as interesting as it might be, Duncan and Smith do not explain why only comics fulfils the conditions to be classified as a mode of communication (i.e. language) and whether other instances (films, books, music) fall into the same category. Naturally, any human expression which aims to share information with others falls under the category of an act of communication. Nevertheless, characterising comics as a singular mode of communication without providing additional context is incomprehensible.

Finally, comics is also perceived as a genre. Immediately, two questions arise ‘What is it a genre of?’ and ‘What types of genre are there to categorise comics as such?’. There are two viewpoints concerning the classification of comics as a genre. The first one is proposed by Toeplitz (1985), for whom comics is an example of an artistic genre, but he does not explain why it is a genre; it just seems like a handy comparison. Later on he tried to position comics within the domain of collectable artforms which for Toeplitz constitutes a separate genre. Chute (2008) and Meskin (2009) quite provocatively asked whether comics can be viewed as a literary genre, as there are so many similarities between the two; however, both rejected this notion. They acknowledged that comics may possess literary qualities. Comics have been widely recognised for their ability to combine both high-quality and low-quality works in terms of both narrative and aesthetics. As a result, two distinct terms emerged: comics and graphic novels (narrative); and one again, neither can be identified as a separate genre. Wolk directly addressed this idea.

As cartoonists and their longtime admirers are getting a little tired of explaining, comics are not a genre; they're a *medium*. Westerns, Regency romances, film noir: those are genres - kind of stories with specific categories of subjects and conventions for their content and presentation. (Stories about superheroes are a genre, too). Prose fiction, sculpture, video: those, like comics, are media – forms of expression that have few or no

rules regarding their content other than the very broad ones imposed on them by their form. ... The genre/medium confusion is an error of ignorance. (Wolk 2007: 11-12)

Therefore, in this study, comics will be considered as a medium and will be referred to as such.

A hybrid medium such as comics is able to combine a variety of aspects from various media, but comics adaptations and adaptations of Shakespeare's text for that matter, bring together all these three aspects together; in the process of analysis, these elements need to be taken into account. Apart from the three obvious areas—comics studies, Shakespeare studies, and adaptation studies—some of the ideas, observations, and theories will come from other areas, such as theatre studies, cultural studies, literary studies, film studies, and others. Comics and comics adaptations/appropriations embrace an interdisciplinary approach.

Why study adaptations, particularly comics adaptations of Shakespeare's plays at all? The answer to this question is complex and multifaceted. Adaptations are another form of human artistic expression which deserve attention, and the entirety of adaptation studies has been developed around that issue. Adaptations are a reaction to the source text, and comic adaptations are no exception. Regardless of the source material, adaptations are a response to it. As Saltzman (2017: 144) stated,

the transcoding of textual components into the comics medium adds the voice of the adapter and/or artist to the transmission of narrative; this can encourage scholars and students to investigate detailed aspects of a source text, explore implications of alternative readings, and question the adapter/artist's verbal, artistic, and technical choices. This in turn encourages a re-examination, or possible re-evaluation, of the adapted text through close reading, facilitating analytical engagement and thereby enhancing literary studies.

Comics adaptations of Shakespeare's plays have only recently been gaining greater attention, starting with the history, aesthetics, or the language. The challenges these reworkings face often are concerned with Shakespearean text (dialogues, monologues and soliloquies) and as Cwilik observes "comics is not a very good medium for portraying extended dialogue. Because of its exaggerated quality, a more cartoony style of drawing is much better than a realistic one for clearly and broadly conveying facial expression and body language, but neither style is very good at capturing subtle nuances and shifts of facial expressions" (Cwilik 1999: 64). Nevertheless, the number of adaptations which have appeared on the market and their improved quality indicate that

the obstacle of depicting the ‘undepictable’ dialogues and monologues has been overcome. The long and extended dialogue in comics does actually work, but the adapter has to find an interpretative key and naturally, in many cases, they make use of their right to re-write the text. Moreover, comics can embrace various styles of drawing, from cartoony to realistic, and there is no straightforward correlation that the less realistic imagery is unable to depict deeper thoughts and emotions.

Comics adaptation of Shakespeare plays are just another method or medium (or in this case it would be appropriate to say ‘genre’) allowing artists to adapt Shakespeare on par with the film, the animated film, the novel, the short story or graphic representations such as paintings. Jonathan Bate (1997: 251) coined a term of “Shakespeare’s visual memorability” which indicates the significance of the visual imagery typically connected with Elizabethan plays, it also includes the visual relics of the past, but it also opens up to the newest additions in visual tradition. Bate’s visual memorability inscribes into Taylor’s idea of Shakespeare as a collection of texts (Shakespearean discourse). The modern-day audience is familiar with Shakespeare through a variety of sources, including biographical records, documents, and source books (Taylor 1990: 253), and our contemporary understanding is complemented with adaptations of various nature. Creating and experiencing adaptations, including comics adaptations, is a way of processing and comprehending the works of the poet. The need for new terminology to describe and discuss these adaptations is crucial for further advancement in the field. The proposed terms are comics adaptations, Shakespeare comics adaptations, and Shakespeare comics appropriations, which are discussed in Chapter 1.

One concern that is often voiced by those unfamiliar with comics is how to read them. Also, as to paraphrase Zunshine’s (2011) article on what kind of expectations readers have, what makes them want to read comics altogether, and how readers understand and react to them. Many of the answers are provided by reader-response criticism, but also by the theory of mind (as proposed by Zunshine) or the theory of mindsets (as proposed by Dweck 2017) which involve the expectations, beliefs, desires, and opinions of the reader who transfers them onto the reading material and naturally it can have either a positive or negative impact. In addition, one of the first questions that appears is what to read in comics first: the text or the image; “we process visual information about people’s mental states in a fast, messy, and intuitive way, which we

then inevitably misrepresent in our straightened out and ossified verbal accounts” (Zunshine 2011: 129). In other words, it is usually the image (or an element within the image) that draws the attention of the reader and is read first. However, the reader possess free will to follow their own intuition, and initiate the reading process differently. It does not need to be an either-or process, but a recursive one, with the reader consciously selecting what to read first and later on pondering over the panel or the page to create a whole. Reading comics “requires a different type literacy because on the comic page the drawn word and the drawn picture are both images to be read as a single integrated text” (Duncan and Smith 2009: 14). Developing comics literacy skills requires time and practice, as well as some background knowledge that this work provides.

The subject matter, comics adaptations and appropriations of Shakespeare’s plays, is a broad field with a great number of adaptations, appropriations, inspirations, works that adapt the entire play-text or just a scene or a fragment. There are comic strips or cartoons parodying Shakespeare, his plays, or characters, and there are serious works directed at the mature reader, as well as works toned down and simplified for younger audiences. There are works created in various aesthetic (artistic) styles using different techniques. Hence, it was a challenge to select the works for the analysis. The selection encompassed 15 reworkings of Shakespeare’s plays representing all genres: tragedies, comedies, tragicomedies, and historical plays, all of which were published after year 2000. The works were divided into two categories: adaptations and appropriations. None of the adaptations belong to a series of adaptations planned by a single publishing house and all are creations of auteur creators, and thus are not as well-known as other works. The adaptations demonstrate the range of potential comics adaptations that Shakespeare’s plays can offer in respect to creativity and interpretation. The only noticeable exclusion from the set are Manga adaptations which not only come from different cultural background, but also use other aesthetics and poetics, unlike the European or Anglo-American style of comics. Moreover, all the comics were published in English, with the exception of wordless comics. Another criterion is the exclusion of digital or Internet comics, as they may require different reading skills and analytical tools.

The thesis attempts to address a number of issues and answer several research questions some of which have already been voiced by Postema (2013) in her work. Her

questions referred to comics in general, rather than comics adaptations, not to mention Shakespeare comics adaptations and appropriations, but the issues are still valid and constitute a vantage point for the discussion. Postema states bluntly that

“[t]his study also seeks to answer questions relating to how comics create their narratives: What types of signification are evoked in comics discourse? How does the material form in which a comic exists – be it a newspaper strip, comic book, or hardcover graphic novel – affect its signification? How do text-image relations alter perceptions of comics as a visual form – in fact, can comics be better conceived of as a visual form or as a textual-pictorial blend? And by what means do comics engage their readers?” (2013: xii-xiii)

Postema’s questions could be paraphrased ‘How do Shakespeare comics adaptations and Shakespeare appropriations create meaning?’ or ‘How does the reader decode Shakespeare comics adaptations and Shakespeare comics appropriations?’. The work will help readers who may have little or no experience reading comics, or those who possess only the basic tools helpful in the reading process, which might stem from the fears and misunderstandings concerning reading comics, particularly for readers/scholars who come from the background in literature. The questions that are asked repeatedly are ‘How should I read comics?’ or ‘Should I read the balloon first or look at the image?’, ‘Is everything meaningful in comics?’. In addition, the issue of how to interpret comics arises, and in this case, the semiotic approach is helpful, because all comics-sign, similar to theatrical-signs, are meaningful, which means that every comics element is semantically charged and should be interpreted. Furthermore, the analysis focuses on the adaptations and appropriations of Shakespeare's plays in comics, with adaptation studies forming one of the theoretical foundations for the analysis. Another theoretical methodology comes from semiotics of comics, which delves into the details of each comics elements. One of the aims was to collect the theories concerning the most recognisable semiotic elements and apply them to the analysis of adaptations and appropriations. Semiotics of comics provides an analytical arch from general to specific to a minute detail, from macro-semiotics to micro-semiotics.

This dissertation attempts to address several research questions and aims. Shakespeare and Shakespeare’s plays, together with their adaptations and appropriations, possess a ‘special status’ (Lanier 2001: 21) in literature and culture. This thesis attempts to answer the question of how comics adapt Shakespeare’s plays and whether such comics adaptations develop their own semiotic signs for the purpose of

adaptation, as well as the manner in which the semiotic and formal elements of comics impact the interpretation and understanding of the play. These basic concepts further impact the reception and reading process. Moreover, the aims of the dissertations are to trace the history of Shakespeare comics and position them within the greater discourse of Shakespeare studies, comics studies, and adaptation studies. The plethora of published titles is a rich research material. In addition, the confusion concerning terminology has been addressed and new terms and definitions have been proposed. The motivation, inspiration, and guidance for the research and writing process were the questions of how and why to study Shakespeare comics, and whether these publications are engaging for general readers, Shakespeare scholars, and comics scholars. Although these might seem simple questions, Shakespeare comics have never been subjected to such an extensive scrutiny and analysis; hence, these are still valid issues.

The methodology was partially inspired by adaptation studies and comics studies which have succoured the development of the new terminology that will be employed as an analytical tool for identifying and classifying works as Shakespeare comics adaptations and Shakespeare comics appropriations. The second methodological framework is derived solely from semiotics of comics: macro-semiotic elements and micro-semiotic elements. Although the framework was constructed to analyse Shakespeare comics, it is versatile and may be applied to other comics works.

The dissertation comprises of five chapters, with the initial three chapters primarily concerned with theoretical, historical, and methodological aspects. In contrast, Chapters 4 and 5 are dedicated to the analysis of the research material based on theoretical methodology. The more detailed description of each chapter will facilitate orientation.

Chapter 1 aimed to establish basic terms and definitions that are adopted throughout the entire study. The question that is answered focuses on defining the phenomenon of comics and positioning it within a broader cultural perspective, which is accomplished through a short overview of the history of comics. For the analytical purpose a definition of comics has been formulated which then constituted a foundation for coining three new terms: Shakespeare comics, Shakespeare comics adaptations and Shakespeare comics appropriations, all of which have been defined. With the formulated definitions, it was significant to position comics in relation to other media; hence, the notion of hybridity was introduced, particularly the perception of comics as a

hybrid of different media and not just as a combination of verbal and visual elements. These observations support the position of Shakespeare comics in a broader cultural context.

The proposition of new notions of Shakespeare comics adaptations and Shakespeare comics appropriations required turning to adaptation theories to examine how these ideas and comics inscribe into adaptations studies. Hence, Chapter 2 focuses on defining the notion of adaptation based on Hutcheon's ideas (2012) of adaptation as a product, process, and reception, as well as modes of engagement; another scholar who had a great impact on the comprehension of adaptation and appropriation is Sanders (2006). Moreover, issues of fidelity and textual fluidity were discussed. Theoretical ponderings refer to comics, comics adaptations, and film adaptations of comics. Chapter 2 also provides an overview of scholarship devoted to Shakespeare comics and Shakespeare in comics and presents general themes and approaches that occur in academic articles and book chapters. The overview reveals a niche in the research as there is no monograph dealing with the subject matter³. In addition, a review of the literature shows that the research is spread over numerous academic fields: Shakespeare studies, comics studies, adaptation studies, film studies, literary studies, and others. This shows that Shakespeare comics are not fully researched; focusing particularly on the issue would prove beneficial to Shakespeare studies, comics studies, and adaptation studies, which is a niche which this dissertation attempts to address. Chapter 2 also includes a subchapter which traces the history of the adaptations of Shakespeare's plays in comics. The adaptations have been grouped into two general categories: series and auteur works. The historical overview provides a wider context, revealing that these comics adaptations are not one-time novelty, but works of art with their own traditions. Chapter 3 is purely theoretical and introduces the notions and ideas that will be applied in Chapters 4 and 5. The analyses of Shakespeare comics adaptations and Shakespeare comics appropriations focus on verbal and visual elements in comics which possess narrative potential (they are also referred to as the visual and verbal language of comics). The starting point is Groensteen's concept of macro-semiotics and micro-semiotics, each of which is further divided into smaller semiotic elements, such as panel layout, the panel and the panel frame, the speech balloon, gutter, closure, and panel

³ As at June 2024.

transition, as well as the meaning of colour and presentation of sound and music. Narration in comics is created on two levels, visual and verbal, and it would not be appropriate to omit this layer. The discussion of verbal narration revolves around the treatment of the Shakespearean language by comics artists and the manner in which it is used in comics.

An analysis of Shakespeare comics adaptations is conducted in Chapter 4. A total of 9 adaptations were selected: *The Merchant of Venice* (2008), *King Lear* (2009), *Romeo and Juliet* (2013), *Macbeth* (2015) by Gareth Hinds; *The Tempest Illustrated* (2009) by John Allison; *Hamlet* (2010) by Nicky Greenberg; *Romeo and Juliet: The War* (2011) by Stan Lee, Terry Dougas, Mark Work and Skan Srisuwan; *The Tragedie of Macbeth* (2016) by Kenneth Steward Moore; and *Macbeth* (2019) by Petri Hänninen and Petri Hiltunen. Each comic represents a different artistic and aesthetic style, but the style is not the subject of analysis. Due to the fact that some of the authors, as well as their adaptations, are not well known, a biographical note and synopsis of the comics are provided. The second part follows the order of semiotic elements from Chapter 3. The analysis is as detailed as possible; however, in the case of panel transition, closure, and verbal narration, a meaningful fragment of each comic was chosen in order to illustrate the phenomenon. Analysing a fragment of a comic, rather than the entire work allowed avoiding repetitions and pabulums.

Shakespeare comic appropriations are a subject of analysis in Chapter 5. Appropriations are not as popular as adaptations; hence, there are fewer of such publications. Six comic appropriations were chosen for the analysis: *Prince of Cats* (2016) by Ron Wimberly; *Shakespeare Ohne Worte* (2016) Frank Flöthmann, which consists of five short story comics *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Tempest* and *Othello*; and also four comics *Findlay Macbeth* (2020), *The Prince of Denmark Street* (2022), *The Midsummer Night's Dream Team* (2023a), *Richard the Third* (2023b) by Kev F. Sutherland. Appropriations by definition are allowed greater freedom to alter the plot, characters, and even rewrite the story from a new perspective. In order to make the reader more familiar with the titles and their creators, biographical notes, and descriptions of the appropriations. The analysis also follows the theoretical framework of macro-semiotics and micro-semiotics that was presented in Chapter 3. Based on these findings, comparisons are made between appropriations and adaptations.

Finally, conclusions, thoughts, and observations, together with the findings, will be presented in conclusions, together with their potential use in future studies and analyses. Naturally, the findings are beneficial for a number of academic fields, i.e. comics studies, Shakespeare studies and adaptation studies. One obvious drawback of this dissertation is the lack of visual aids added in the thesis for illustrative purposes, which would facilitate the comprehension of the discussed issues, examples, and comparisons. Comics studies have been struggling with the difficulties concerning the use of visuals in academic work, such as title pages, pages and panels, as it would fall under the category of copyright infringement. Including images in an academic work requires obtaining an agreement for each image which might be connected with issuing a fee. In some cases the images fall under the category of fair use; however, the issue is not entirely regulated, particularly in Europe. The inclusion of comics images and the copyright laws also vary between continents and countries.

Appendix 1 lists all comics adaptations of Shakespeare's plays, mainly in English, which I were able to trace. I am well aware that the list may quickly become outdated, with new publications, adaptations, and appropriations appearing every year. Nevertheless, it is a useful tool for anybody who is interested in the subject and may desire to continue studying Shakespeare comics. On one hand it exemplifies the plethora of the titles, that the analysed works constitute a sample of a much richer and diversified collected. This also reveals potential research material for further studies. In addition, the appendix provides bibliographical data on the titles mentioned in the historical overview of Shakespeare comics from Chapter 2.

Chapter 1: Defining Comics: An Analytical and Historical Approach

“Sequential art is the new literacy.”
(Will Eisner)⁴

“Comics is about creating pictures that actually talk.”
(Art Spiegelman)⁵

1.1. Introduction

In the introduction to his book *The System of Comics*, Thierry Groensteen claims “[t]he definition of comics that can be found in dictionaries and encyclopedias, and also in the more specialized literature, are, as a general rule, unsatisfactory” (2007: 12). He states that any definition of comics would be either too concise or too general which, in the end, leads to the idea of an “impossible definition” (Groensteen 2007: 12). Consequently, any concocted definition would be exposed to criticism and can be easily refuted or dubbed invalid, and, any examination of comics, and at times even individual scholars, offers a fresh perspective on the concept⁶. Furthermore, the validity of the concept itself is consistently undermined and subject to scrutiny. According to

⁴ Priego, Ernesto. 1999. “The technology of Storytelling. Interview with Will Eisner”. <https://ernestopriego.com/2014/12/03/the-technology-of-storytelling-audio-of-my-1999-interview-with-will-eisner-now-online/>

⁵ Callahan, Bob. 1998. “ZapSplits!”.

https://web.archive.org/web/19991013024340/http://salon.com/feature/1998/09/cov_03feature2.html

⁶ Although disputes are part and parcel of academic discourse scholars analysing comic are in a quagmire establishing and agreeing to the basic notions that constitute comics.

Groensteen (2007: 13), definitions are “normative and self-interested, each made to measure in order to support an arbitrary slice of history⁷”, which would circumscribe the perception of the term to a particular time frame. Groensteen is not isolated in his deliberations. Chute (2006: 1020) observed the compulsion to introduce and constantly modify the existing definitions of comics:

One problem in comics scholarship is the need to delimit the object of study, the medium of comics. This leads to debates that sometimes feel as if they are going nowhere: it is not so important to define comics, to construct and excluding box around the medium (this is comics and this is not comics) as to write well about what we consider comics can do, and what work they are accomplishing through various properties peculiar to the form.

Significant efforts have focused on constructing and providing a working definition, or definitions, of comics, as if they were an inalienable element and a prerogative for the entire scholarship. Nevertheless, the role of the definition is to facilitate the study and understanding of comics. Aaron Meskin (2007) whose article functions as a review of various, often popular, definitions substantiated Groensteen’s view by claiming that “[t]he art of comic, which began in the middle of the nineteenth century and developed largely out of eighteenth- and nineteenth century British humour magazines such as *Punch*, can and should be understood in its own terms and by reference to its own history” (Meskin 2007: 376). He discerns that definitions are created at a particular moment in time by a particular scholar and for a particular reason. The definition proposed herein addresses this particular requirement.

It is extremely laborious, if not impossible, to create an explanation of the term that will be widely satisfactory and acceptable, especially when, instead of reaching a consensus, the number of terms mushrooms. Despite these restrictions and obstacles, any book focusing on the theory and analysis of comics attempts to answer the question of what constitutes comics. Hence, the first part of the chapter will focus on the issues concerning definitions and terminologies viewed from historical perspective, but which are also linked with a formalist⁸ understanding of the term necessary for the analysis.

⁷ In *The System of Comics* Groensteen adduces, among others, two definitions; first, by David Kunzle and then by Bill Blackbird. He rejects them instantly, claiming they function only in a specific time frame, and nowadays would be outdated and obsolete. Groensteen (2007: 14) also rejects timelessness of definition of comics by quoting Antoine Roux “In ten years, none of these criteria, although a priori serious, has withstood history”.

⁸ Meskin (2017: 223) distinguishes four strategies for defining comics: formalist, anti-formalist narrative, institutional, and historical definitions. “[F]ormalist approaches to defining comics eschew reference to

The re-examination of the extant definitions will facilitate the process of identifying the most useful components and elements to denominate comics in the context of comic book adaptation of literature. An overview of the multitude of definitions will lay the foundations for the understanding of the term ‘comics’ and the introduction of the term ‘adaption comics’ necessary for the analysis of selected comics adaptations of Shakespeare’s plays.

Although this dissertation does not solely focus on the historical development of comics and the diachronic changes, the study of comics is inextricably connected with notions such as the comic strip, the cartoon, the comix, or the graphic novel which are culturally and historically specific; hence, clarifications are required to avoid confusion. An overview of the historical developments of comics, that is, what Meskin (2009) views as a historical definition, indicates the elements on which the understanding of comics is based, but also the element which differentiates all of these terms.

Among the various forms of comics, ‘the graphic novel’ is an interesting term which requires more pondering as it raises a number of controversies and issues due to its hybrid nature which is often emphasised. The term is viewed as an embodiment of hybridity, by combining the pictorial (visual i.e. ‘graphic’) and the narrative (verbal; i.e. ‘novel’) elements. However, viewing the graphic novel as the only hybrid medium, or paying extensive attention to its hybrid nature, is misleading and simplistic, because comics in general are hybrids. The question is of what it is a hybrid⁹. Combining these two notions in order to form a new entity also requires further consideration. Although the aim is not to immerse into the postcolonial theories of hybridity, as suggested by Homi Bhabha’s *The Location of Culture* (1994), but to view comics, and by proxy graphic novels, as a hybrid art form, as proposed by Meskin (2009). Immediately, a question arises regarding the elements which are combined in order to provide comics with a hybrid nature. Meskin (2009) begins by elevating comics to be recognised as art and then moves on to tracing common features which link comics and literature. Roeder accentuates that “[t]he juxtaposition of word and image result in a hybrid medium that is rarely treated in its entirety by scholars embedded in their respective fields of literature or art. Thoughtful analysis of comics art requires attentiveness to both its

any specific representational or semantic features and focus on significant relationships between the elements of the medium. The most common formalist approach to comics locates their essence in sequentiality” (Meskin 2017: 223).

⁹ See subchapter 1.2.1.4

visual and verbal modes of address, two distinct languages that may at times work against one another” (2008: 5). She perceives hybridity in graphic novels not as a combination of literature and comics, or comics as part of literature, but as a medium which combines the verbal and the visual.

The perception of hybridity as a combination of the verbal and the visual, particularly in reference to comics, is limiting and narrow. Comics adaptations of Shakespeare plays bring together a number of various elements which alter the idea of hybridity in reference to these works. The discussion of the hybrid nature of comics is often limited to a combination of literature and art, but hybridity of comics opens up to other artistic forms, such as film or theatre, which have also impacted the development of comics. It is worth noting the interrelationships between the media. First, Shakespeare’s plays, perceived as written text, are categorised as belonging to the domain of literature and can be subjected to literary theory and analysis. Second, the plays were originally intended to be performed on a theatrical stage; hence, the text included theatrical conventions which could have been used in comics. The dramatic and theatrical conventions found in the source text do not have to be lost in the process of adapting the plays into comics. Although it may come as a surprise, there are common denominators between comics and theatre. Third, comics and films are perceived as close artistic media with similar poetics. The language of film has been adopted by the language and the scholarship of comics¹⁰. The relationship between films and comics is strong as far as the tradition of adapting superhero comics to films is concerned. The number of film adaptations is on the rise, as well as their popularity, quality, and financial performance, all of which tighten their bonds. Finally, film adaptations of Shakespeare’s plays are a well-established tradition acknowledged by academia, and there is no obstacle for the film to function as an inspiration for theatrical performances and other adaptations, including comic books. The subchapter dedicated to the hybrid treatment of comics will attempt to extricate the elements from literature, especially novels, films, and theatres which are pivotal for the analysis.

¹⁰ An example of the impact of the language of film on comics can be found in Polish scholarship about comics. For example, Polish articles and writings about comics have adopted the term ‘kadr’ (borrowed from film studies) which can be literally translated as a film frame or film still. There have been attempts to introduce a term that would definitely separate film and comics studies, however, at present two (sometimes more) function interchangeably.

1.2. Towards a Definition of Comics

1.2.1. Historical Approach Towards the Definition of Comics

In 1984, a panel of experts at Lucca Comics Festival decided that 1896¹¹ would mark the beginning of the comic book as it is known nowadays. The date was chosen consciously to coincide with the publication of a comic strip *The Yellow Kid* by Richard Fenton Outcault for the first time (Gravett 2013: 22)¹². The decision made by the panellists advocated, what is known as the “Yellow Kid thesis”, which initiated a discussion on the development of comics beginning from the publication of Outcault’s comic strip and neglecting the previous developments leading to the crystallisation of the medium. “The Yellow Kid hypothesis” has one crucial drawback, it initiates the acknowledgement of the medium as if in the middle, neglecting its great predecessors and the ‘fathers’ of the comic book. Furthermore, the approach privileges American perception of comics, circumscribing them as North American cultural development whereas the roots of comics are set in European culture, German and French to be precise¹³. “The Yellow Kid” appeared in *The New York Journal* which belonged to William Randolph Hearst and it was among the first cartoons to have appeared in American press. However, it is often overlooked that the English press publications had had pictorial elements in their broadsheets and magazines beforehand (Sabin 1996: 14-19). Looking at comics chiefly from an American perspective simplifies and impoverishes the comprehension of the medium’s shaping process. Had it not been for Outcault’s great precursors, such as William Hogarth, Rodolphe Töpffer, Gustave Doré

¹¹According to Gravett (2013: 22), 1896 was chosen in order to have enough time to prepare centenary anniversary celebrations of comics. The decision made by panellists at Lucca Festival did not end the dispute concerning the beginning of comics, and the discussion still continues. A different approach to the dating is represented by Heer and Worcester (2009: xi) who believe that Rodolphe Töpffer’s work in the 1830s and 1840s marks the beginning of comics. Moreover Töpffer’s “Essay on physiognomy” (1845) is treated as the first academic article on comics and the beginning of studying comics.

¹² Naturally, *The Yellow Kid* series did not appear unexpectedly in the Pulitzer’s (and later Hearst’s) newspapers but it is an artistic and narrative creation, which distinguishes itself from others. The appearance of *The Yellow Kid* was preceded by numerous other works which adopted verbal and visual elements in order to produce a narrative. What is significant about Outcault’s work is that it was published in a newspaper fulfilling the mass medium condition (Kunzle 1973). For details see: Duncan and Smith (eds.) (2009), McCloud (1993), Sabin (1996), Smolderen (2014), Szyłak (2009).

¹³ Interestingly enough, the view that comics, and graphic novels, dominantly belong to American popular culture has prevailed and contributed to their notoriety, which comics had to overcome.

and Wilhelm Busch, the creation of the comic strip might have taken considerably longer. Gravett (2013: 22) acknowledges that “the expressive contributions provided previously by creators from various countries, launched those special linguistic characteristics which would transform it into a new medium”. Gravett significantly noticed two elements: first, comics originated in many countries. The United States is erroneously believed to be the origin country of the medium, chiefly with the development of the press and the creation of characters most typically associated with comics, such as *Superman* and *Batman* in 1938. However, the ‘fathers’¹⁴ of comic books came from different European countries¹⁵ and their poetical and aesthetical solutions were later adopted by American creators. Secondly, comics are widely used, what Gravett calls, but does not specify, “special linguistic characteristics” (Gravett 2013: 22), which signifies that comics has developed its own distinctive set of features that combine the verbal and the visual in order to tell the narrative. Gravett prioritises the narrative function of comics, and for him, both verbal and visual elements cooperate to achieve the goal, something which is constantly questioned and challenged. From the very beginning, the ‘fathers’ of comics emphasised the narrative potential of the medium, by indicating the elements which facilitate the storytelling.

This short overview draws the attention to the complex and long-lasting issues of developing definitions, which are partially linked with the historical development of the medium. The agreement on the provisional date was to introduce an order in comic book studies. Unfortunately, it did not resolve the confusion with numerous definitions that have appeared and have been appearing in comics scholarship. The panellists of the Lucca Festival conceded the beginning of comics; however, the term itself remained unexplained. Nevertheless, it seems a bit amusing that there was a general need to officially establish the date from which the medium could be classified as comics and to adopt the term as well.

¹⁴ Sabin (1996: 19-24) indicates other artists as the ‘fathers’ of the comic strip (although pioneers is a more suitable term); apart from Richard Outcault, Winsor McCay, Lyonel Feiniger and George Herriman. All of them already worked on what is contemporarily known as comics or comic strips. They contributed to the development and popularisation of the medium but they all created in the post ‘the Yellow Kid’ era.

¹⁵ William Hogarth (1697-1764) was English, Rodolphe Töpffer (1799-1846) was born in Geneva in Switzerland, Gustave Doré (1832-1883) was French, and Wilhelm Busch (1832-1908) born in Germany. For general information see Sabin (1996), Smolderen (2014), Szyłak (2009); and biographies by Kunzle (2007), Uglow (2002).

Another issue raised at the time was the difficulty to define the term ‘comics’¹⁶ which stems not only from its historical complexity but also from the multitude of names, which might be confounding. Comics studies is still tackling definitions which are often treated as synonyms and used interchangeably, although they might refer to different artistic phenomena. It is possible that the variety and plethora of works reaching a unanimous definition will remain an unobtainable goal. The terms such as comics¹⁷, the comic strip, cartoon, comix or the graphic novel should be considered diachronically taking historical changes into account¹⁸ as well as formal and contextual elements. A different set of terms also linked with the studies of comics such as ‘sequential art’ and ‘the graphic narrative’ were introduced despite historical developments, but they are often treated as overarching terms in order to provide systematisation.

The purpose here is neither to write the history of comics anew, nor to conduct a deep analysis of the proto-comics¹⁹ and the predecessors that had led to the creation of contemporary comics, but to focus on the elements that constitute comics, despite the elusiveness of the definition itself. However, over the decades, comics has been developing and changing to best suit artists’ intentions; hence, various instances and types of what generally can be called comics has appeared. Cartoons, comic strips, comix, and graphic novels/narratives are examples that occurred in specific historical contexts and still play a significant role in comics studies. The analysis would not be

¹⁶ Chute and DeKoven (2012: 175) have suggested using the term ‘comics’ to be used with the singular verb in order to gain acknowledgment and become perceived as an artistic and academic term: “As for any medium, such as film, it is now standard to treat comics as singular”. A similar view has been expressed in McCloud (1993: 9), Chute (2008), and Gibbons and Varnum (2002: xiii).

¹⁷ Not all countries have adopted the English terminology; ‘bande dessinées’ for Franco-Belgian comics (the term comes from ‘a ribbon’ which on which speech was placed in early comics), the Italian call comics ‘fumetti’ (this term is associated with speech balloon, when speech appears in a puff of smoke), ‘manga’ is for Japanese comics, but it is often treated separately. In Polish, however, the term ‘komiks’ has been adopted. Labio (2011) wrote an article focusing on and analyzing the plethora of terms regardless of the country of origin.

¹⁸ There are many other terms that were suggested in order to supersede already known terms. Duncan and Smith (2009:18) provide examples: comix, commix, drawn books, drawn stories, dual-writing, encapsulated narrative, graphic literature, pictorial literature, picto-fiction, picture-stories, rendered writing. Naturally, the list is by no means exhaustible.

¹⁹ The term ‘proto-comics’ appears in the scholarship to denote human artistic expression with narrative purpose. Examples of proto-comics include, among other, Bayeux Tapestry, Trajan’s Column, painted monasteries in Bukovina (Voronet Monasty), or Codex Zuche-Nuttall. Some scholars (McCloud) treat them as early instances of comics; however, most typical approach is by treating them as part of ‘sequential art’. Other scholars do not reach that far in human history to find instances of ‘proto-comics’ or ‘pre-comics’; some prefer to start with wordless novels or woodcut novels by Lynd Ward, Frans Masereel or Otto Nuckel of 1920s (Chute and DeKoven 2012: 182)

complete without a short overview and clarification of these terms, particularly because of their unique features. Some are closely related to a particular historical development, while others have been coined to name a new artistic expression; hence, they cannot be treated as synonyms because of their formalistic differences.

1.2.1.1. The Comic Strip

The 19th century witnessed the appearance of humorous pictures accompanying newspaper texts. Their exponential popularity has led to the development of satirical periodicals published in both the United Kingdom and the United States. Among the most popular ones were *Punch and Fun* in the UK, in the USA, and *Puck, Judge*, and *The Yale Record*, which are still published today²⁰. The magazines contained comical drawings, caricatures, and political satires; the contemporary comic strip descends from those satirical 19th century magazines and can still be found in newspapers and magazines ridiculing the surrounding reality.

Harvey (1979) and Duncan and Smith (2009) attempted to differentiate comic strips from comic books. According to Harvey (1979: 641) “a comic strip consists of the following elements: 1) a narrative (humorous or serious) told by a sequence of pictures (called “panels”), 2) a continuing character or cast of characters, and 3) text or dialogue included *within* the pictures (customarily in the form of “speech balloons” issuing from the characters’ mouths)”. Harvey’s definition is very straightforward and is similar to that of comics. Duncan and Smith (2009: 5-7) differentiate the comic strip from the comic book by employing four perspectives: production, distribution, art form, and cultural perspective. As far as the first one is concerned there is little difference, both entities are examples of a mass medium published on paper, and nowadays also in the electronic form on the Internet. The comic strip was published in newspapers or periodicals, and as it became longer and gained popularity, newspapers began to collect and publish comic strips in separate magazines which gave rise to comics (comic books), as known today, which are published in separate issues or magazines. The art

²⁰ After the terrorist attack on 7th January 2015 the French *Charlie Hebdo* is probably the best-known satirical magazine nowadays despite the controversies. It is also an example of a satirical magazine being attacked because of its contents.

form and cultural perspectives are the most revealing elements. The comic strip requires few panels (the most typical ones are comic strips with three panels), their number is usually limited up to one page; the panels are “the only unit of encapsulation” (Duncan and Smith 2009: 6) as there are no whole page panels or spreads, finally, the layout of the panels is simple and rigid, their size is usually similar (or the same). In addition, the cultural perspective reveals that the strips were, and still are, used in order to increase the circulation of newspapers. Although typically it is believed that comic strips and cartoons, such as *The Yellow Kid* and *The Katzenjammer Kids*, have contributed to the popularisation of American periodicals, they were not the earliest titles. Smolderen (2014: 75) noticed that Töpffer had published his *Histoire de Monsieur Cryptogame* in *L’Illustration* much earlier in 1845, and this marks a change in the grid of panels that still used today, the illustrated stories drawn by Töpffer inspired other artists and became a significant part of newspapers. The largest American publishers at the beginning of the 20th century, William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer, understood the marketing potential hidden in comic strips which led to intense competition between them.

Owing to their supplementary nature, comic strips may have a greater readership than comics; comic strips aim at any reader who purchases a newspaper or magazine, which could be an accidental reader. Moreover, Harvey (1979: 643-644) notices that comic strips can either be recurring in regular intervals or gag strips which may be single occurrences. Among the most well-known comic strips are *Krazy Kat* by George Herriman (1913-1944), *Peanuts* by Charles Schultz (1950-2000), *Hägar the Horrible* by Dik Browne and Chris Browne (1973 – present), *Garfield* by Jim Davies (1978-present), *Dilbert* by Scott Adams (1985- present), *Calvin and Hobbs* by Bill Watters (1989-1995), and in Poland *Professor Filutek and his Dog* (*Profesor Filutek i Jego Pies*) by Zbigniew Lengren (1944-2003).

1.2.1.2. The Cartoon

The cartoon²¹ proves to be problematic for the comics scholars, some (Witek 2012; Harvey 2001) perceive it as a natural part of comics, others (McCloud 1993), treat it as a separate entity, which lacks the sequential nature. The cartoon is understood as a humorous single-panel (most often) work, which depicts a single, closed plot and often uses visual vocabulary similar to that of comic strips and comics. The characters are often one-off and never reappear. What distinguishes a cartoon from a painting is its narrative potential²² as well as a close blend between the visual and the verbal element, because only the combination of the two is able to evoke the intended effect, which is usually humoristic. According to Harvey (2001: 76), the blending of words and images is a decisive factor in including the cartoon as part of the comics domain. The combination is not crucial, because as Miodrag (2013: 89) points out, “the caption and picture make perfect sense alone, but take on a very different meaning when read in light of the other”.

Nevertheless, for McCloud, sequentiality and juxtaposition are pivotal and dominant elements for a work to be classified as comics. As cartoons are usually single-panelled and lack both (sequentiality and juxtaposition), they cannot be included in the domain of comics. Both the comic strip and the cartoon share not only formal elements, such as the panel, speech balloons, or captions, but also content-wise. Moreover, both are inseparably connected to newspapers and magazines. The first cartoons appeared in *Punch* in the 1830s and were often called ‘pencilings’. The term, was later renamed into ‘the cartoon’, denoted “any full-page politically satirical drawing” (Harvey 2001: 78). According to Szyłak (2009:22-23), newspapers and magazines obtruded the form of cartoons and comic strips; cartoonists had to adjust their works to the space they were provided. Pencilings contributed to the magazine’s sales; hence, it encouraged others to include humorous pictures. Owing to the fact that cartoons were published in newspapers many of the readers were coincidental, similarly to the comic strip readership, and even today it is difficult to estimate. Among the magazines which

²¹ The cartoon is also known as editorial or newspaper cartoon. Moreover, it is significant not to confuse the term with animated film. Harvey (2001: 76) names it “gag cartoon”, which can have numerous themes; marital disputes, kids’ pranks, etc. It can also adopt human as well as anthropomorphic characters.

²² Claude Materni (1972) introduced the notion of a ‘narrative image’, which is supposed distinguish a cartoon from an artistic painting, the term has been supported by Przybylski (1980). Szyłak (2016: 13-16) draws the elusive borderline between a narrative image and an artistic one, and notices that a comic panel can also function as a painting, the best example being the works of Roy Lichtenstein.

gained most from publishing cartoons was Harold Ross's *The New Yorker*, whose cartoonists, such as Peter Arno, became iconic figures. Although political cartoons are commonplace, the genre is by no means limited to a particular topic. Harvey also draws attention to the mechanism behind the cartoon; separately, neither the picture nor the text needs to be humorous; only when combined together do they acquire a jocular mood and tone. "[C]artoonists began to realize that the comedic impact of their work would be much enhanced if the meaning or significance of the words under their pictures could be understood only by comprehending the role of the picture. And vice versa" (Harvey 2001: 81). Moreover, out of single panel cartoons, the comic strip developed, usually due to the popularity of a distinctive and recognisable character.

Almost any magazine nowadays publishes cartoons; the best know cartoonists today are George Cruikshank (1792-1878), James Gillray (1756-1815), Honor Daumier (1808-1879), Robert Crumb (b.1943), Art Spiegelman (b.1948), Andrzej Mleczko (b.1949), Jonathan Shapiro (nicknamed Zapiro, b.1958) or Nick Hayes (b.1983). Whilst neither the comic strip nor the cartoon is the scope of the thesis, it should be noted that Shakespeare and his works have long been the subject of cartoons, ridiculing the approach of the highbrow culture²³.

1.2.1.3. Comix (Underground Comics)

The events of 1956 had long-term consequences that have altered the whole medium of comics and resulted in the formation of what is now known as comix, which can be defined as underground, that is, non-mainstream comics. Extensive historical studies of comix not only reveal the formation and maturation of the trend, but also indicate the significant ramifications comix has had on other comic book genres²⁴.

In the 1950s, horror stories were filled with violence, gore and blood, though depicted with a dose of tact, were among the most popular comic stories²⁵ (Sabin 1996:

²³ One of the web pages that collect cartoons and comic strips is www.cartoonstock.com. Shakespeare rarely is used in political cartoons, rather it is a subject of gag cartoons.

²⁴ For an insight into the studies of comix see: Estren (1987), Rosenkranz (2008), Sabin (1996), or Skinn (2004).

²⁵ EC Comics, who specialised in such comics and struggled to create more elaborate work, aimed its publications at mature adults. At the time comics were stereotypically perceived as an infantile medium for young readership, hence adversaries wrongly assumed the intended audience for the horror works.

66-67). In 1954, a psychoanalyst, Frederic Wertham, convinced of the malevolent and corrupting influence of comics on children's psychological development wrote a dissertation deprecating them. *Seduction of the Innocent* (1954) attempted to link reading comics with juvenile delinquency, proving their harmful influence on children's psychological development²⁶. Wertham (2009: 54) provided numerous examples which were to support his theories; he, for instance, claimed that Superman, who defies the laws of gravity provided children with a misleading perception of physics, and Wonder Woman was a 'phallic' woman, who frightened boys and confound young girls about womanhood (Wertham 2009: 54). Although Wertham's book was primarily based on individual observations²⁷, it had a crucial influence on parents, teachers, and educators. Wertham²⁸ accused comics not only of juvenile delinquency, but also popularising violence, homosexuality, and eroticism (Szyłak 2009: 46). The popularity of the book and its theses led to the hearings at the Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency in 1956²⁹. As a result of these hearings, The Comics Code of Authority was established by a body called the Comics Magazine Association of America, which functioned as a self-imposed censorship; a failure to acquire the Seal of Approval equalled the refusal of general distribution. Sabin (1996: 68) called the events "the turning point for the American [comics] industry"; it influenced sales, genres and creators. Sabin's remark supports the perception of the Comics Code as one of the decisive factors leading to a change on the comic book market and readership.

Initially, the term underground comics (or comix) referred to works which were not granted or did not apply for the Seal of Approval. Later, the comix reacted to the events of the 1960s, the hippie movement, and the Vietnam War. Comix was "a new wave of humorous, hippie inspired comic books that were as politically radical as they

²⁶ There were double standards in the criticism of comics "[w]hen anti-mass culture critics like Wertham condemned comics, most often they were concerned exclusively with comic books, while comic strips, appearing in daily newspapers that were read by the entire family, were widely regarded to be a healthy form of family entertainment and a key aspect in the development of print journalism" (Beatty 2012: 26).

²⁷ Tilley (2012) in her article proved that Wertham's research was based on manipulated and falsified evidence. She "documents specific examples of how Wertham manipulated, overstated, compromised, and fabricated evidence—especially that evidence he attributed to personal clinical research with young people—for rhetorical gain" (Tilley 2012: 386).

²⁸ Although Fredric Wertham is typically blamed for the crusade against comics, he had numerous supporters, another pertinacious adversary of comics was a literary critic Sterling North who worked for Chicago Daily News (Tilley 2012: 387-388).

²⁹ William Gaines, EC Comics' publisher, was questioned by the committee, and he provided a memorable vindication of comics which is still quoted today. For a full recollection of the hearing see Nyberg (2009: 58-68)

were artistically innovative” (Sabin 1996: 93); it centred around American campuses and magazines such as *Mad*, *Zap Comix*, *Help!* or *Raw*. The discussion of comix is salient here for two reasons. First, artists who are now highly praised and have gained recognition for creating canonical comic books began their work with underground publications; Art Spiegelman, Robert Crumb, Alan Moore, Melinda Gebbie, Aline Kominsky, Harvey Kurtzman, Gilbert and Jaime Hernandez all began their careers with underground publications only later to be widely recognised by the mainstream. Second, the comix is characterised by a departure from conventions such as page layout, panel grid, storytelling, and paving the way to a more innovative and artistic approach that could be later observed in mainstream comics. Underground publications were viewed as rebellious in terms of form, style, and topics which has had a significant influence on the formation of independent works. Moreover, the development of comix facilitated the formation of what is known today as the graphic novel (or graphic narrative) as well as auteur comics³⁰, eluding the constraints of the mainstream. Adaptations of literature (especially those from the 1990s onwards), including William Shakespeare’s works, have benefited from the process as the comics published nowadays, including adaptations, are more elaborate, innovative, and sophisticated, which can be ascribed to the formation and popularity of comix.

1.2.1.4. The Graphic Novel or the Graphic Narrative?

No other term derived from comics studies has contributed more to the popularisation of comics among journalists and scholars as ‘the graphic novel’. In addition, no other term from the domain of comics studies had gained such popularity or recognition. Since its inception, the concept has had as many supporters as opponents; since then, it has been accused of numerous misdemeanours. Paradoxically, among the adversaries of graphic novels there are creators whose works are most often recognized as the best examples of

³⁰ Gregory Steirer (2011) discussed the idea of an auteur approach to comics which “assigns single writers or – ideally – writer-artists a position of semiotic importance analogous to that of the literary author or playwright” (Steirer 2011: 272) as opposed to industrial approach. Most scholarly approach is focused on recognised authors which are almost synonymous to the comics high-quality either mainstream or non-mainstream comics.

the genre³¹; both Art Spiegelman and Alan Moore have openly expressed their dissatisfaction with the term (Baetens and Frey 2015: 1-2). According to the artists, the term graphic novel is superfluous, functions purely as a synonym to comics (comic books), and has been artificially created for commercial purposes as it allows comics to be sold in bookshops and has its own shelf. Baetens and Frey (2015: 1) define the graphic novel as a “longer-length and adult-themed comics”. It is significant to notice that they do not disaffiliate the graphic novel from comics, but perceive it as its part. The graphic novel is derived from comics; it uses the same conventions and devices such as panels, speech balloons, or gutter. Furthermore, many scholars indicate that the length of the work is one of the defining elements which separates the two entities; the graphic novel is supposed to be longer, but this factor is not objective and quantifiable.

Historically, the introduction of the term ‘graphic novel’ is inherently linked with Will Eisner and the publication of his book *A Contract with God* in 1978. It is generally, and erroneously, believed that Eisner was the author of the neologism, but he was only responsible for the popularisation of the term. In November 1964, Richard Kyle, a comic book reviewer, sent a letter to a fanzine *Capa-Alpha* and to the members of Comic Amateur Press Alliance proposing a new term, ‘graphic novel’ or ‘graphic story’, which would refer to artistically serious comic strips (Duncan and Smith 2009: 70; Gravett 2005: 38). Kyle noticed the changing comic book market and attempted to introduce order into the nomenclature. However, Will Eisner’s adoption of the term drew wide attention to the graphic novel and its representation (Chute 2008: 453). Graphic novels denote works that are ‘serious’³² in tone, published in a single volume on a better-quality paper and directed at adults. In the book devoted to graphic novels Baetens and Frey (2015: 3) claim that it is a “useful shorthand for either adult readership comic books or single volume comics the qualities (content or artwork) of which distinguish them as exceptional when compared to regularly serialized titles or

³¹ Among the problems that scholars encounter is the nomenclature concerning the term ‘graphic novel’, whether the graphic novels should be treated as a genre of comics or a separate medium which rejects any relationships with comics. One of the aims of the subchapter is to resolve doubts and inexactitudes concerning the particular issue.

³² The adjective ‘serious’ occurs to describe the graphic novel by many scholars of comics and graphic novels, e.g. Baetens and Frey (2015), Chute and DeKoven (2012) or Eisner (2008). They, and many others, use the word to describe the content of graphic novels and to separate them from comics. None of them, however, attempts to define the word and how it is understood. What comes to mind is to juxtapose the words ‘serious’ against ‘superhero’, which naturally could lead to the conclusion that superhero comics such as Superman or Captain America may not be serious in tone and cannot be considered as graphic novels.

more generic material”. Two of the mentioned features occur repeatedly in the scholarship, namely ‘adult readership’ and ‘single volume’, and are often identified as constitutive elements. The notion of ‘the graphic novel’ has been introduced in order to separate it from works aimed at a younger reader, as Gordon (2012: 159) puts it, “comic books equal childish simplicity and graphic novels equal adult sophistication and refinement”. Consequently, it may exacerbate the perception of comics as low-brow associated with children and adolescents and graphic novels as highbrow linked with adults. Roeder (2008: 6), who looks at comics from the perspective of an art historian, discerns that “[t]he term ‘graphic novel’ is used most often as a means of distinguishing work from comic books and their mass-culture associations. This unfortunately fosters a high-low dynamic within a field that is already marginalized and fighting for aesthetic approval”. Such classification based on generic division cannot be treated seriously, and a simple link with a particular genre does not immediately improve quality.

Baetens and Frey notice one more important feature, namely, the printing format. They claim that the graphic novel has to be printed in a single volume in a codex form as opposed to comic books which are printed in regular instalments, in 36-page issues, or booklets. In other words, the length condition important for defining graphic novels has been altered or understood as a work printed in a single volume. Unfortunately, this approach still appears inaccurate and misleading.

The watershed year of 1986 came to witness the publication of three pivotal works in the history of comics and graphic novels; Frank Miller’s *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, Alan Moore and Dave Gibbon’s *Watchmen*, and first episodes of Art Spiegelman’s *Maus*³³. All the canonical works belonging to the “The Era of Ambition”³⁴, to follow Duncan and Smith’s division (2009: 71), and the history of comics in general, were initially printed in instalments, only later to be collected in a single

³³ Although Art Spiegelman’s *Maus* was not published in 1986, it is included in what is known as “the Greatest Year” period. Spiegelman had begun writing first episodes in underground comix *Funny Aimals* (sic!) in 1972. From 1980 to 1991 he serialised his work in a magazine *Raw*. In 1991, the first volume of *Maus* was published; later, in 1992, Spiegelman received Pulitzer Prize Special Award for his comics. It is still considered the flashpoint of the ‘Era of Ambition’ (Duncan and Smith 2009: 71).

³⁴ Duncan and Smith (2009: 22-24) in their book propose division of the history of the comic book into periods: “Era of Invention”, “Era of Proliferation”, “Era of Diversification”, “Era of Retrenchment”, “Era of Connection”, “Era of Independence”, “Era of Ambition”, “Era of Reiteration”; each of which has its flashpoint and a lasting effect on the development of comics. Rhoades proposed an alternative division of the history of comics, the division into ‘ages’ focuses only on American comics: “Proto- or the Platinum Age” (1883-1938), “The Golden Age” (late 1930s and 40s), “The Silver Age” (1950s to 60s), “The Bronze Age” (1970s until 1985) and “the Modern Age” (1986 until today), (Rhoades 2008).

volume. Hence, it seems that neither the length nor the single volume condition is strong enough to be a detrimental or defining factor. Nowadays, titles (e.g. *The Sandman: Overture* (2015) by Neil Gaiman) can be published in instalments only later, to be printed again in a single volume, which is normally done for financial and commercial purposes. However, altering the perception of the length/printing prerequisite could add to this discussion. Instead of arguing for an imposed length or a number of volumes defining the graphic novel, viewing the story as a closed entity would be a feature that is easier to defend. Eco (1979: 114) analysed the mythopoeic potential of comics superheroes, Superman in particular, the seriality of comics, and its open-endedness which was vital for his understanding of comics. The characters in comics live in “vegetative cycle” (Eco 1979: 111). “In the sphere of a story, Superman accomplishes a given job; at this point the story ends. In the same comic book, or in the edition of the following week, a new story begins. If it took Superman up again at the point where he left off, he would have taken a step toward death” (Eco 1979: 114). Many of the characters are trapped in a loop, they do not get old, their life does not change, and the readers expect, or at least expect, to be told the same story. Graphic novels often break with the cyclicity and repetitiveness of the plot, the characters in the graphic novel, and the characters are able to ‘move on’ with their lives.

However, what is significant for all those works is the rupture of conventions and the rejection of the status quo and restraints, all of which became characteristic features of the comix, which later expanded onto graphic novels. Another detrimental component constituting the graphic novel is the auteur creative process, in which a single author is responsible for the entire story, hence providing a personal and subjective approach to the work of art (Baetens and Frey 2015: 17-18). In contrast, comics is perceived as collaborative works of artists, writers, letterers, and others, which would be a vital argument if only graphic novels were created by single artists (often working under pressure to deliver a new issue in a given time; for example, Marvel Comics is quite famous for its bullpen office). Naturally, graphic novels created by an auteur artist can also be a result of collaboration with more gifted artists, but this cooperation does not discredit the works as graphic novels. A fair example would be Alan Moore or Neil Gaiman who write stories, script and plan the panels, but they require the help of artists to draw the stories, for *Watchmen* Alan Moore worked with Dave Gibbons, or Neil Gaiman cooperated with Dave McKean, Malcolm Jones III or

Sam Kieth³⁵ to create *The Sandman*, all of them worked on the visual elements for the comic books. The two approaches – the auteur and the collaborative – cannot be treated as decisive features to classify a work of art as either a comic book or a graphic novel because of its elusiveness.

The supporters of the label ‘graphic novel’ attempt to prove its distinctiveness and uniqueness by separating the notion from comics and by pointing to their different origins. Beronä (2008), supported by Tuszyńska (2015: 36-37), claims that the wordless or woodcut novels from 1920s by artists such as Lynd Ward, Frans Masereel, and Otto Nückel are the main predecessors of contemporary graphic novel. They want to sever any ties with other instances of sequential art, particularly comics; in other words, graphic novels have nothing in common with the newspaper tradition of cartoons and comics strips. Scott McCloud called the silent woodcut novels “the missing link” (1993: 18) in the development of comics, he indicates them as works contributing to the popularisation and formation of the medium, but not as the sole predecessor. It is important to commend the woodcut novels for their ability to tell complex stories without the verbal element, as well as for the aesthetic sophistication of the images; a similar ability is demonstrated by silent comics. According to Chute (2008: 456), silent novels contributed to the popularisation of stories told by means of pictures as well as bringing the books to the mass audience; woodcut novels paved the way for comics to become a mass medium.

While they have not always been analysed as part of the history of comics, including them in the development of graphic narrative, as some have begun to do, allows scholars to demonstrate how graphic narrative early in its modern history combined formal experimentation with an appeal to mass readership – a development crucial to the impact of the form today. (Chute 2008: 456)

Linking graphic novels with woodcut novels aims to improve the public image of the latter and emphasise their literary dimension. “Ward’s wordless woodcut novels (like *Prince Valiant*, come to think of it) were easier for Western culture to embrace than comics in all their raffish splendour” (Spiegelman 2010). In addition, Spiegelman (2010) noticed that naming the works allowed Lynd to avoid prejudices against the medium, and the same prejudices can be transferred nowadays. Interestingly enough,

³⁵ Paradoxically, despite requiring help of visual artists in their works, both Alan Moore and Neil Gaiman are generally treated as true “comic book auteurs” by comics scholars (Ndalianis 2011: 114).

the advocates of the theory do not explain the gap between the novels of the 1920s and the first graphic novels that occurred in the 1960s and 70s³⁶ naming these works as graphic novel would be retroactive and overlook the historical context in which these works were created. Woodcut novels have contributed to the development of comics and graphic narratives, but as they have already been classified as separate works of art, it would not be inappropriate to classify them as comics.

Richard Kyle's intention behind proposing the term graphic novel was to introduce structure and categorisation in the discussion concerning comics; the catchphrase, however, once the initial applause died down became criticised. Labio (2011: 123), who expressed her dissatisfaction with the term because "'graphic novel', an idiom that has been adopted by publishers, translated into many languages, and ... eagerly embraced by anglophone scholars ... threatens the complex ecosystem" (Labio 2011:123) i.e., comics studies. Naturally, 'comics' is not a satisfactory term either, but "the adoption of the label "graphic novel" to denote an entire genre (as opposed to the subset of comics) reflects a sad narrowing of the field to a very small and unrepresentative canon" (Labio 2011: 124), in other words, it highlights the divisions rather than reconcile them. Beaty supports Labio's views and adds that "they [comics] seem to privilege the blend between text and image, it is clear that the textual or literate qualities of comics tend to predominate. This can be seen in the widespread adoption of the term 'graphic novel' as a gentrifying replacement for 'comics'" (Beaty 2012: 34). The emphasis on the literary (textual and narrative) quality of graphic novels often leads to the adoption of literary theories for analyses and omitting methodologies and theories focused on the more graphic aspect of the work.

Furthermore, Chute (2008: 453) questions the term and notes its inadequacy from a different perspective. The graphic novel cannot function as an overarching term for any single volume of comics, also because not every work can generically be classified as a novel or even a piece of fiction. The best-known works: Spiegelman's *Maus*, Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home* or Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* are all non-fictional autobiographies (at times referred to as graphic memoirs), the same could be stated about Joe Sacco's or Guy Delisle's journalistic comics; hence none of them can be

³⁶ Actually, it is believed that the first 'graphic novels' were: *Beyond time and again* by George Metzger (1967), *Bloodstar* by Richard Corben (1976) and *Chandler. Red tide* by Jim Steranko (1976) rather than the publications of 1986.

perceived as a novel or a graphic novel. Moreover, considering the adaptations of Shakespeare's plays in comics, it would also be problematic to view the works as (graphic) novels, as the initial source text is a theatrical play, and inscribing the text into comics narrative convention does not immediately transform it into a novel or a graphic novel. Chute discerns these difficulties and proposes a broader term of 'graphic narrative' which could embrace a greater scope of work.

Graphic narrative has echoed and expanded on the formal inventions of fiction, from modernist social and aesthetic attitudes and practices to the postmodern shift toward the democracy of popular forms. In the graphic narrative, we see an embrace of reproducibility and mass circulation as well as a rigorous, experimental attention to form as a mode of political intervention. Critical approaches to literature, as they are starting to do, need to direct more sustained attention to this developing form – a form that demands a rethinking of narrative, genre. (Chute 2008: 462)

On the one hand, the proposed notion appears to be a risky endeavour, considering the variety and a vast number of terms that are already in use. However, Chute is aware that it is necessary to redress and alter comics analytical tools in order to appropriately address the needs of scholars and critics. By proposing, and adopting, the new term 'graphic narrative' comics studies proceed in the direction of theoretically ordered field of study, at which Richard Kyle had aimed. Another advantage of Chute's term is the deliberate avoidance to relate to generic associations, which focuses on the basic elements which constitute the works, namely the visual and storytelling elements. Regardless of their fictive or non-fictive nature, the narrative element has to be present. Finally, one more observation has to be mentioned "[a] graphic narrative is a book-length work in the medium of comics" (Chute 2008: 453). Chute at no point severs graphic narratives from the domain of comics, unlike others, she thinks that their place is within the domain of comics studies and it adopts comics conventions. As a result, the term graphic novel is not used here, but is replaced with the graphic narrative.

1.3. What is Comics? - An Overview of Most Popular Definitions

So far, the focus has been on cartoons, comic strip, comix, and graphic narratives, which raises the question of how comics fit into this discussion and what is the

relationship between these terms. The nascent comics studies, and comics scholars, have been struggling with the definition of comics³⁷ in order to avoid misunderstandings and misuses of the term. Initially, comics referred to instances of storytelling as a combination of pictures only later to gain additional meanings. The word ‘comics’ can be used (1) with a singular verb to refer to the field of study or medium and (2) with a plural verb to refer to a particular title or comic strip, an object of work of art often synonymous with comic books. For decades, comics has struggled to overcome numerous obstacles and criticisms. Among the most common ones are the formal issues concerning what constitutes comics, or which characteristics it should possess in order to be classified as such. Naturally, these questions have been addressed by scholars from numerous perspectives, some of which are discussed here. Apart from formal concerns, there are other factors such as readership, themes, and distribution, which are used in the definition process. In addition, the primary emphasis in this context lies in adaptations, particularly of literary works. Consequently, this gives rise to queries regarding the suitability of the medium in question. Although the approach towards comics has been altering, the term still raises questions concerning their status as art, doubting whether comics can be viewed as art. Bart Beaty (2012) dedicated a book to the comics-as-art optics, he “interrogates the specific historical and social processes that have led to the devaluation of comics as a cultural form and takes note of the recent rise to art world prominence of (certain kinds of) comics” (Beaty 2012: 7). Negating the status of comics as art is not the only attack launched against it; another accusation refers to its dependency on other art forms and media, as they are always compared either to literature or visual arts such as paintings or drawings. The discussion concerning the treatment of comics as art was initiated by Seldes in his book (1924) which cast light on new instances of popular culture; he claimed that comics and other forms he referred to should never be compared with other media, but the appreciation

³⁷ Initially, at the end of 19th century, the humorous pictorial stories printed in newspapers and pulp magazines were called comic strips. As the name suggest apart from the comical effect, they were created by means of a sequence of pictures in order to tell a story. Due to their jocular nature and content they were, and sometimes are, called the funnies. Their increasing popularity led to a shift from a newspaper supplement to separate booklet with longer comic strips, hence the term comic book. Comics is a derivation and, to some extent, a simplification of the comic book; however, later its understanding has been altered and expanded (Duncan and Smith 2009: 26-31, Sabin 1996: 27-43). In the contemporary scholarship the terms: comics, the comic strip, the comic book, and overlooked here, cartoon came to denote various artistic entities.

for them should stem from their own merits and principles. Gravett supports Seldes' view by noticing that:

despite the term [comics] being derived from the comical, the medium of comics is not confined to humour. Nor is it restricted to genre, such as the superhero stories. It is a medium open to covering almost every subject using visual and often verbal language. The comics artform is not subliterate, kitsch or Pop art, nor simply a collection of storyboards for a film on paper, but an autonomous art with particular systems and cultures (Gravett 2013: 9)

Comics cannot be compared to any other form of art, as such comparisons would always work to its disadvantage. Although literature and visual arts have undoubtedly had a detrimental influence on their development, some theoretical aspects may be used in the analysis of comics.

Among the notions that seem inseparable from comics studies is 'sequential art' proposed by Will Eisner in 1985 in his book *Comics and Sequential Art* which still functions as one of the basic publications on the subject of comics. Eisner (2008: xi) explicated the uniqueness of sequential art "as a means of creative expression, a distinct discipline, an art and literary form that deals with the arrangement of pictures or images and words to narrate a story or dramatize an idea". The ultimate predicament of sequential art and comics is to tell a story by means of pictures and words, regardless of any medium or era; in other words, sequential art works retroactively to instances of works of art which might resemble comics but cannot be deemed as such because of the period in which they were created. Eisner (2017: 3) also attempts to position comics within the domain of sequential art by stating that "[t]he term *comics* refers to sequential graphic narrative such as is usually found in comic books or graphic novels". He positions comics within the greater scope of sequential arts which by no means is limited to instances of works on conveyed on paper Duncan and Smith (2009: 3) notice that comics is "a particular kind of sequential art. Unlike static or stand-alone pieces of art which are quite often focused on capturing a moment or invoking an emotional response ...", comics is much more dynamic, changeable, and elusive. Sequential art and comics are not synonymous, and should not be used interchangeably. Eisner states that:

[t]he format of comics presents a montage of both words and image, and the reader is thus required to exercise both visual and verbal interpretative skills. The regimens of art (e.g. perspective, symmetry, line) and the regiments of literature (e.g. grammar, plot, syntax)

become superimposed upon each other. The reading of a graphic novel is an act of both aesthetic perception and intellectual pursuit. (Eisner 2008: 2)

The attention is drawn to images and words as pivotal carriers of storytelling and the narrative, but it also encumbers the reader, who has to be equipped with the necessary tools, with the responsibility to interpret the visual and verbal input. Comics combines art and literature, including all of their constitutive elements, which the reader is obliged to trace and interpret.

Another prominent theoretician of comics is Scott McCloud, who is believed to be the continuator of Eisner's approach. His spiffy definition presented in *Understanding Comics* (1993) responded to the need for a straightforward explanation that would please most. Simultaneously, it has also kindled criticism of the term and its definitions. "Juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or produce an aesthetic response to viewer" (McCloud 1993: 9), proposes an ahistorical and formalist approach which has spurred as much criticism as gained popularity; the definition has been supported by Duncan and Smith (2009: 3). What is more, Jenkins (2012: 3) notices that "McCloud expanded the historic and cultural context for reading comics, incorporating examples from Asian, European, and American independent and underground traditions, and linking comics to earlier expressive forms".

The approach proposed by McCloud appears to be controversial, his broad definition allows the classification of any object which combines a sequenced image which possesses a verbal and a visual element for narrative purpose as comics, even if they belong to times before comics were developed. McCloud's definition is much broader than Eisner's, who with his sequential art explored the narrative potential in other works of art. However, he did not go so far to classify Bayeux Tapestry or the Nuttall Codex as comics or proto-comics³⁸, as McCloud does. The term should not work retroactively hence these instances are often termed as proto-comics, or to use Eisner's terminology. Although these cases were crucial for the development of what is currently known as comics, they cannot be categorised as such. Interestingly enough, McCloud

³⁸ The main interest of sequential art is the narrative potential created by the combination of the verbal and the visual, hence Bayeux Tapestry, Trajan's Column, painted monasteries in Bukovina (Voronet Monastery), or Codex Zuche-Nuttall can be classified as examples of sequential art rather than 'proto-comics' or comics as McCloud wants to see them.

has also found an exception to the definition, he eliminated single panel³⁹ cartoons out of the domain of comics due to their alleged lack of sequential quality or picture juxtaposition. Simultaneously, McCloud overlooks the fact that both these elements can occur within one image, as the narrative develops over time, and they have to be read in an order (within the panel) to be comprehensible. McCloud notices that comics requires ‘deliberate sequence’ (1993: 8), which would indicate that a narrative requires an intention on the side of the author and juxtaposing random pictures does not evoke narrative effect. In this definition, McCloud stresses deliberate intention on the part of the author; however, the reader is sometimes able to connect random images to create a narrative whole. McCloud (1993: 67) calls this ability ‘closure’ and it “allows us to connect these moments and mentally construct a continuous, unified reality”. In other words, even accidental juxtaposition may carry narrative potential. Neil Cohn in his overview of definitions noticed that for “McCloud, the sequential nature of comics’ images defines their being, thus exiling single panel and text dominated works from the realm of comics” (Cohn 2005). Such a strict definition might exclude experimental comics from the domain.

Another significant, and popular, definition of comics that has had an impact on comics studies was provided by David Kunzle who actually preceded McCloud’s. He formulated four conditions that were to appraise whether a particular work could be treated as comics. Kunzle

Propose[s] a definition in which a ‘comic strip’ of any period, in any country, fulfils the following conditions: 1/ There must be a sequence of separate images; 2/ There must be a preponderance of image over text; 3/ The medium in which the strip appears and for which it was originally intended must be reproductive, that is, in printed form, a mass medium; 4/ The sequence must tell a story which is both moral and topical. (Kunzle 1973: 2)

This working definition dominated thinking about comics throughout the 1970s, but has also been criticised by scholars since. Considering these conditions individually will facilitate the identification of both their strengths and weaknesses.

As far as the first condition is concerned, the sequentiality of images in telling a story is a part and parcel of comics. Groensteen (2007: 167), for example, notices similarity of the

³⁹ Hayman and Pratt (2005) support McCloud’s view that comics needs juxtaposition, but although generally they support rejection of single panels from the domain of comics, they are not entirely sure about it.

condition with his own notion of “iconic solidarity” by which he understands “interdependent images that, participating in a series, present the double characteristic of being separated - this specification dismisses unique enclosed images within the profusion of patterns or anecdotes - and which are plastically and semantically over-determined by the fact of their coexistence *in praesentia*” (Groensteen 2007: 18). Kunzle’s first condition and Groensteen’s iconic solidarity support McCloud’s perceptions of comics as juxtaposed images and reject the idea that a single image is able to narrate a story. Whether a single panel or image can narrate a story or convey a narrative possibility is still debatable and sparks dispute.

The second condition focuses on the domination (preponderance) of image over text, burdening the picture with responsibility for the narrative (Meskin 2007: 369). This indicates that comics does not require the verbal element to realise that the narrative purpose impoverishes the notion of comics, but it also requires greater skill and sophistication on the part of the creator and reader (Eisner 2008: 20). Furthermore, Meskin (2007: 369) notices that if the visual dominates the verbal, then “comic book versions of classic literature appear to be counterexamples”, which automatically suggests that literature can only be adapted by means of verbal signs. Kunzle did not elaborate on this notion of preponderance or the reasons behind making it a separate condition. The extreme version of this condition would lead to discarding works that preserve overt verbal presence; thus, silent comic would become an ideal embodiment of the medium⁴⁰.

The third condition, perceiving comics as a printed mass medium, initially appears straightforward and does not pose any issues. Kunzle posited that comics must be produced and channelled by means of paper which has become an outdated condition in the digital era. The distribution of comics has long ceased to be circumscribed only to paper issues; with the inception of the Internet and tablets, reading habits have been irreversibly altered. An increasing number of comic book readers consume comics content online in a digital form on the computer or a tablet screen, gaining access to

⁴⁰ Among the best examples of silent comics, works without word balloons, or speech uttered by the characters but with onomatopoeia and written signs, are Shaun Tan’s (2006) *The Arrival* and Nick Hayes’ (2017) *Cormorance*. The opposite of the silent comics would be comics without images, which naturally would be a novel or a play. However, in Alan Moore’s *Watchmen* there are instances of page-long prose lacking pictorial elements. It would be an implausible assumption to treat this as a novel within a comic book as it would be incomprehensible without the preceding story. Naturally, a question whether comics without pictures can exist is still asked by comics scholars; the deletion of the visual element in comics would turn it into some new entity (it does not need to be a novel or a play) (Pratt 2009: 107). The question concerning the treatment of such examples continues.

unobtainable and out-of-print issues⁴¹. Furthermore, the prerequisite also refutes McCloud's broad definition of comics, which bars the discerning of comics in cave paintings, tapestries, and other works of art. Kunzle perceived comic books as allographic, using Goodman's terminology⁴². At the same time, they are stripped and denied the possibility of becoming autographic and original art that can be exhibited. The condition of the mass medium can also be understood as both an asset and a liability. Banach, a Polish scholar, noted the following:

[k]siążka mająca milion nakładu jest światowym sukcesem – i słusznie. Lecz komiksy odbijane są w dziesiątkach milionów. Seria obrazkowa angielska może być oglądana przez setki milionów. Bohaterzy ich są znani wszędzie; treść plastyczna jest tak skomplikowana, że przemawia do każdego, w każdej szerokości geograficznej (Banach 1966: 156).

[a book printed in a million copies becomes an international bestseller, and rightly, so. But comics are printed in dozens of millions. A pictured series [i.e. comics series, addition mine AWS] in English can be read by hundreds of millions. The comic book characters are known everywhere; the graphic content is complicated enough to appeal to anybody in any geographical latitude] (Banach 1966: 156).⁴³

The double entendre between comics and novels is unjust towards the former. On the one hand, being a mass medium is a positive aspect for comics as far as popularising content is concerned, but on the other hand, there appears to be an oversimplification that the mass medium is of poor quality. By making this remark, Banach involuntarily returned to the highbrow/lowbrow discussions regarding comics. Moreover, an exponential number of graphic novels and comic books, which could be classified as highbrow, are not distributed on a massive scale, indicating that they could not be classified as comics. Finally, the last of Kunzle's conditions possesses strong narrative implications, stating that comics stories must be moral and topical. It is likely that the kernel of this stipulation lies in the social perception of comics and is inseparable from Fredric Wertham's silhouette, whose work led to the establishment of

⁴¹ The dissertation does not analyse the challenges that reading comics on tablet screen may pose. However, webcomics or the experience of reading it on a computer screen has attracted interest of comic studies.

⁴² The issue of treating comics (and comics art.) as allographic and autographic is a bit more complicated. Comic book, printed in thousands of copies are an example of allographic perception, the value of each is the same. However, before comics are published the author creates panels (storyboard), which can either be a work-in-process or finished ones. The panels become desired by collectors, they are auctioned and exhibited, hence these one-of-a-kind comics should be treated as autographic.

⁴³ All translations from Polish sources are mine, AWS.

the Comics Code Authority in 1954. However, despite these restrictions, comics of questionable morality continued to be published. “Kunzle does not mean that comics are essentially morally good (a view called into question, albeit in very different ways, by certain forms of aestheticism, by some of the horror comics of the 1950s, and by Tijuana Bibles), he seems only to mean that comics have ‘moral content’ in some broad sense” (Meskin 2007: 370). A general definition of a medium should avoid limiting artistic freedom by foisting themes and plots.

Kunzle’s definition has found an adversary in Carrier (2000: 4) who stated that “[w]hat Kunzle presents mostly are image sequences accompanied with words; the full integration of words into pictures in the speech balloon creates a new art, which raises novel aesthetic problems”. Carrier skilfully summarises Kunzle’s perception of comics and builds on its own definition by adding additional meaningful elements. “The three essential qualities of comics [are] the speech balloon, a closely linked narrative, and the book-size scale” (Carrier 2000: 74). Carrier’s perception of the speech balloon as an essential element of comics is philosophical rather than semiotic. He perceives the speech balloon as a device strictly connected to comics, by which it cannot be comprehended as purely verbal or visual (Carrier 2002: 4). Although the speech balloon is a convention most often associated with the domain of comics, it cannot function as a decisive factor; otherwise, it would eliminate silent or experimental works. Hayman and Pratt criticise Carrier’s affinity towards the speech balloon “[c]onventional features like word balloons are tools that can be used within a medium to facilitate and artist’s goals. Word balloons are inessential to comics in part because other conventions can be used in comics to fulfil their function of unifying text and image” (2005: 421). Defining the entire medium based on a single convention is limited by the exclusion of numerous examples of comics. The book size can also be easily discarded; it brings comics down to the printing format, rather than indicating their semantic or narrative quality. Simultaneously, it would signify rejecting works in other formats, such as comic strips, cartoons, single-panel comics, or magazines, to which enough objections are raised, not to mention the instances of comics distributed online or experimental comics exhibited in art galleries. Finally, the condition focused on the narrative, like with the other definitions, seems to be clear - comics and comic books have to tell a story; this element does not raise any objections because most works do just that.

The emphasis on the narrative notion of comics conveyed by means of images is the recurring and chief element in the above understanding of the term. This view is substantiated by other scholars who also centre on the idea of narrative and storytelling. Szyłak, a Polish scholar, states:

[d]ziś za komiks może zostać uznany każdy niemal ciąg obrazków powstałych jako rezultat pracy rysownika, malarza lub grafika, na różne sposoby łączony z przytoczeniami wypowiedzi postaci i ze słownym tekstem narracyjnym. Komiks to także szereg obrazków pozbawionych komentarza, lecz tworzących spójny przekaz o charakterze fabularnym. (Szyłak 1999: 11)

[nowadays, almost any sequence of images which is a result of a draftsman's, a painter's or a graphic artist's work may be regarded as comics, which is combined in various ways with cited utterances of a character as well as verbal narrated text. Comics is also a series of images deprived of any commentary, but creating a coherent fictive⁴⁴ message] (Szyłak 1999: 11)

Szyłak, similarly to others, provides a broad definition of comics; for him, the sequence is the central element in defining the medium; however, the presence of the verbal input is possible but not crucial. The narrative function and storytelling are the two most significant features of comics. Similar in tone, but even more focused on the idea of storytelling, is the definition provided by Hayman and Pratt, who call it the pictorial-narrative definition and emphasise the narrative dimension of comics. Scholars state that “x is a comic if and only if x is a sequence of discrete, juxtaposed pictures that comprise a narrative, either in their own right or when combined with text” (Hayman-Pratt 2005: 423). For Szyłak as well as Hayman and Pratt the pivotal feature of comics is its potential for storytelling by means of juxtaposed or sequential images. The two elements naturally link this definition with Eisner and McCloud; however, unlike them, they try to avoid limitations. Meskin's (2007: 369) main reproach towards the Hayman and Pratt definition, and indirectly Szyłak's, is its ahistoricity and the lack of context for the definition. However, “[t]he definition does not limit itself to a narrow conception of comics – it is designed to make sense of the wide range of comics and the whole gamut of conventions, purposes, and ontological categories that they exhibit” (Meskin 2007: 371), which makes it the one of the broadest definitions Hayman and Pratt centre

⁴⁴ The Polish word ‘fabularny’ may be understood twofold; either as based on fictive plot, which would eliminate non-fictive comics, or as a work pertaining narrative structure; hence it may pose problems for translation and misconception.

around the formal features that form comics, however, neither foists any historical and cultural restrictions.

1.4. Comics and Adaptation Comics as Analytical Tools – Proposing New Terminology

The profusion of definitions, as previously shown, demonstrates how diversified and challenging the study of comics has become. Apart from the broad category of comics, several subtypes or genres have already been discussed, including graphic novels/narratives, cartoons, and comic strips. Additionally, other terms refer to the country of origin, such as fumetti (Italy), bande dessinée (France), and Manga (Japan). Regional differences are based on stylistic and aesthetic features (drawmanship) as well as the poetics of comics. As a result, three circles of comics have crystallised: the American circle (American comics, also known as Anglo-American comics), Franco-Belgian comics (bande dessinée), and Japanese manga. The division is not only based on cultural differences, but also forms three global industries.

As Cohn (2005) observed, the issue of definition is one of the most widely discussed elements; it lies at the very core of comics scholarship. According to Groensteen (2007), the process of formulating a definition is futile, and the outcome will never be completely satisfactory. Nevertheless, each study and analysis require a definition that can be formulated to function as an analytical tool. For the purpose of the analysis, introducing and exploring the terms 'comics' and 'adaptation comics' is crucial. Although the term 'adaptation comics' exhibits certain similarities with comics in general and shares a number of features with it, it possesses another code system. Additional code is the source text which inspires the transformation or transposition from the source code system to another code system. What is more, the significance of the code depends on the cultural position and recognition of the source text, and in the case of this analysis a Shakespearean text. Adaptation comics, including comic book adaptations of Shakespeare's plays, also have their own traditions; hence, the definition positions itself within a greater historical context. The growth of adaptations since the 1950s has also presented a challenge in terms of terminology and generic classifications. Adaptation comics can be perceived as another broad term which will be

further diversified and subdivided into categories; however, it is still the first step in observing the existence of this broad group.

It is possible to examine comics and define it from semiotic, cultural, and semantic perspectives. Looking at the overview of the definitions proposed by various scholars, the definitions which attempt to address all these restrictions are the most limiting, as the number of conditions to be met increases and greater confusion and disorder occur. The proposed definition will not focus solely on particular instances and examples, but will be quite broad and inclusive.

Comics is a medium which expresses its narrative potential through images and as Hayman and Pratt (2005: 422) explained, comics is a pictorial narrative with a special kind of visual narrative. By combining the visual and the verbal comics constructs narratives. Most definitions centre on the notion of verbal-visual cooperation, but the verbal element is not a predominant condition, as dialogues encapsulated in speech balloons or captions are a welcome addition but not a prerequisite. For example, silent comics that do not have any diegetic and/or non-diegetic language (in speech balloons or captions) are not excluded and can be viewed as belonging to the domain of comics. Verbal language is not a crucial element for the narrative to unfold and become comprehensible, which has been proven by numerous instances of silent comics that have already proven the possibility of telling a story without the presence of words. Kunzle and Carrier emphasise the significance of the presence of language in comics; the lack of verbal input, in any written form in speech balloons or captions, does not hinder the potential to tell a story. Naturally, the verbal element helps develop the narrative and convey the thoughts and emotions of the characters, but it is not essential. Neither comics nor adaptation comics require linguistic elements to be defined as comics.

Due to the special position Shakespearean language is ascribed to, it would seem that any instance of comic book adaptation of Shakespeare's plays focused on the language and its presence would be taken for granted. However, comics adaptors approach Shakespearean language freely, re-writing, adding and deleting fragments, the preservation of the original text is not crucial or even a defining element. The presence of comics without overt verbal input proves that comics can convey a narrative without it. By omitting language, semiotic elements, which are important for Carrier (2000),

also lose their defining role. Verbal language is not necessary for adaptation comics, even in Shakespearean comics.

McCloud (1993) emphasised the significance of juxtaposed images in order to define them as comics. A sequence of images enriches the narrative, making it more engaging and interesting. However, a sequence can also occur within a single image. Single-panel cartoons should be credited as comics because of their inner juxtaposition and sequential nature within the panel; both panel sequences and single panels can be categorised as an example of sequential art. Sequentiality may occur within the panel owing to the types of closure and transitions, some of which occur inside the panel, and the reader is responsible for decoding it. As a result, there is no need to discharge single-panel narratives from the domain of comics. As far as sequentiality between the images is concerned, the number of panels, whether a single panel such as cartoons, three (comic strips), or more (comics and graphic novels), does not define the medium itself; it is the presence of possible inner juxtaposition and the narrative elements that define comics rather than the number of panels in which it can be found.

Comics, due to their sequential nature, belong to a wide category of sequential art, which encompasses various media which share the sequential nature and carry the potential for graphic storytelling. Eisner's term should not, however, be overused and extended, as has been done by McCloud, who views comics ahistorically. The medium of comics occurred in a specific historical and cultural context; it was influenced by other examples of visual storytelling, even those set in the distant past. However, this term cannot function retroactively and classify previous studies as comics. Only the works which have occurred and developed within the specific context of the developing mass media and newspaper culture and were distributed and popularised through those channels have the basis to be recognised as comics. Hence, the instances of graphic storytelling in medieval manuscripts on columns and walls, despite bearing some resemblance, and it may be tempting, should not be viewed as comics eluding the notion. The visual tradition of Shakespeare's plays, such as sketches or paintings, may possess elements of sequentiality, but as they were created in a specific historical context, they cannot be re-classified as comics. "The art of comics, which began in the middle of the nineteenth century and developed largely out of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century caricature and mid-nineteenth-century British humour magazines such as *Punch*, can and should be understood in its own terms and by reference to its

own history” (Meskin 2007: 376). Despite the initial link with mass media, particularly newspapers, comics, and comic culture have departed from it and have been developing through other channels of distribution such as comics bookstores and the Internet. The historical contexts which initiated the development of comics have also evolved and lost their significance.

Despite the attempt to perceive graphic novels/graphic narratives as a medium separate from comics, they are actually based on the same semiotic choices and narrative devices used for narrative purposes. The graphic novel can be used as a reference to a genre of comics, but not as a separate medium based on different rationales. Comics is by no means limited to genres and forms and “like other media, comics has given rise to a variety of different formats – including comic strips, comic books and graphic novels – and also a profusion of genres, from superhero and war stories to teen romances” (Chute and DeKoven 2012: 175). Due to the visual language adopted for storytelling, both graphic narratives and comics belong to the category of sequential art, and in numerous instances can be used interchangeably. In reference to comics adaptations of Shakespeare’s works, both terms are applicable in most cases.

The majority of comics scholars and journalists attempt to differentiate between comics and graphic novels or graphic narratives, which adds to the already existing confusion and the hierarchy or position, or the relationship between the terms is not clear. The coinage of the term has also introduced a division based on unmeasurable factors, such as the quality of work. Figure 1 presents the hierarchy of the terminologies used in this study. The two basic concepts used throughout the analysis, comics and adaptation comics, have been highlighted for easier identification. The chart classifies comics as an example of sequential art on the same tier as moralistic engravings (e.g. Hogarth’s), the manga (I view it as a separate entity with its own characteristics, which cannot be straightforwardly classified as comics), and woodcut novels are separate entities despite some similarities with the graphic narrative. Comics function as generic and general terms of storytelling that combine verbal and visual elements. Storytelling is conveyed through sequentiality, either within a single panel, or between two or more panels. The second tier in the chart lists several instances that would fall under the umbrella term of comics, such as comic strip, cartoon, comix, and comic book. The last instance, the comic book, has not been discussed separately but refers to works which are published in regular issues in the form of booklets. Comic books are most often

associated with superhero comics, and because of their contribution to the development and popularisation of the medium, they deserve to be mentioned separately.

At the same level as the comic strip, the cartoon, comix, and the comic book, there is the graphic narrative that has been previously discussed and embraces genres such as the graphic novel, graphic memoir, non-fiction comics, and adaptation comics. Adaptation comics is a genre of graphic narrative which tells the narrative through a combination of the verbal and the visual, but the narrative is based on a previously published source text, which can be a literary text, but also a film, a series, a video game, or any other source. In other words, comics and adaptation comics are both instances of sequential art. Comics is a broader term that focuses on the mechanisms of storytelling, whereas adaptation comics is a genre which puts the theory into practice by transforming the source text into a new one. Adaptations of Shakespeare's plays in comics constitute a subgenre/subcategory of adaptation comics, the same applies to adaptations of Shakespeare's sonnets (which are not the subject of the study), the category includes both adaptations and appropriations⁴⁵.

The chart is by no means exhaustive, as it can be subdivided and subcategorised; the comic book also has its own genres and can be further elaborated and divided. Moreover, the same genres may reappear in other instances. For example, cartoons, graphic narratives, and comic books may share the same themes, but there are semiotic differences between them which allow them to be treated separately. The chart represents only a necessary fragment to facilitate the understanding of the mutual correlations and relationships between the terms for the purpose of the study.

⁴⁵ Both terms will be explained in Chapter 2.

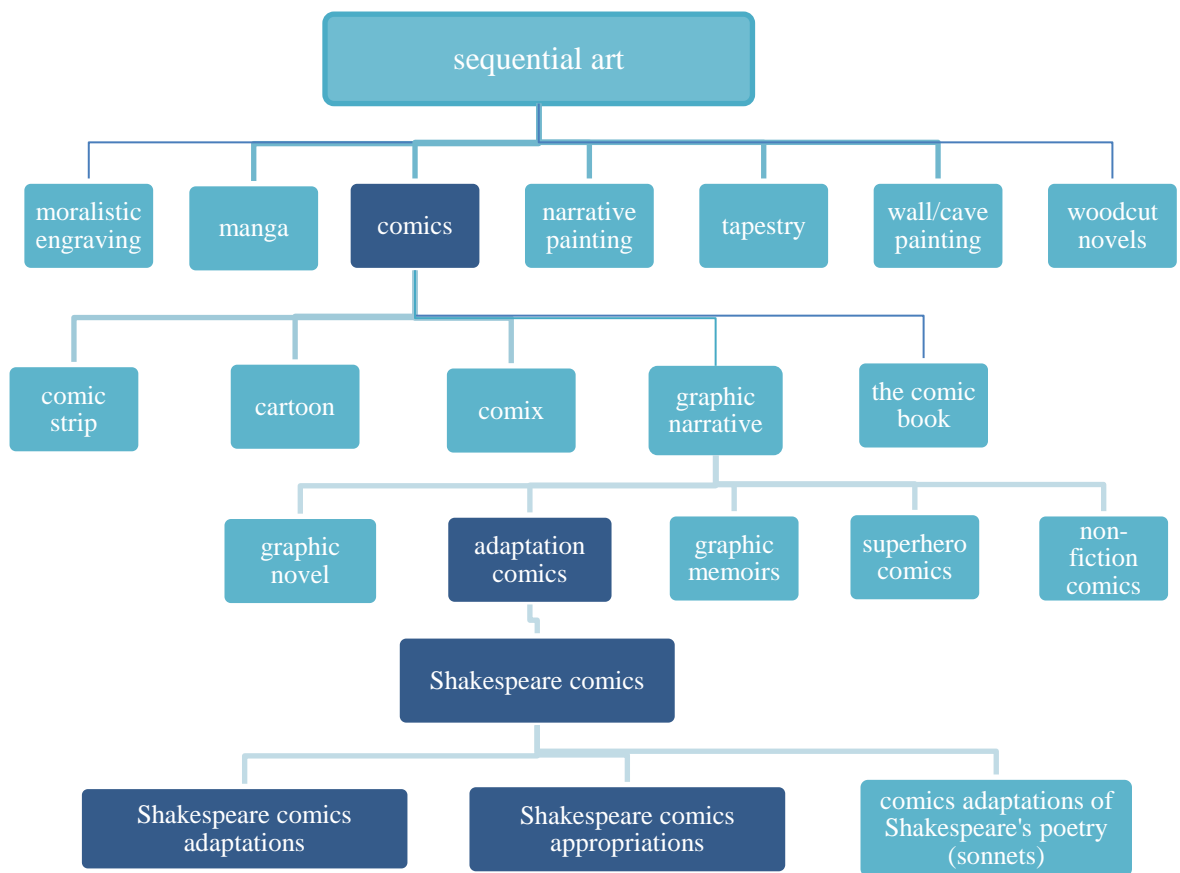


Figure 1. Hierarchy and relationships of the terminologies

Based on the long overview, it is possible to reach certain recurring and general elements which facilitate the definition of comics without being too broad, vague, or recursive. Comics is a work of art which possesses narrative qualities aimed at telling stories through a sequence of images (either juxtaposed images or within a single image). Stories are told through a combination of visual and verbal elements; verbal ones are helpful but not necessary. Comics is classified as sequential art which was formatted within a specific historical and cultural context; hence, it cannot work retroactively before Töpffer's first attempts. Comics is heavily linked to and rooted in mass media, popular culture, and newspapers. All definitions are a mixture of features taken from Eisner, Kunzle, and Heyman and Pratt, but it is not possible to agree with every part of their definitions. This general definition is a basis for other subtypes and subgenres as presented in the chart including adaptation comics with the only difference of a source text which functions as an inspiration for the comics. The definition of adaptation comics does not need to delve into the intricacies of adaptation theories

because they will not be helpful in identifying examples of adaptation comics. A subgenre or a subcategory of adaptation comics are comics adaptation of Shakespeare's plays (also referred to as Shakespeare comics for shortcut) which adapt and appropriate Shakespeare's plays, but preserving all the features of comics mentioned above. The decision to carve out and separate Shakespeare comics out of adaptation comics has not only been dictated by the matter of convenience but also due to the growing number of adaptations, the variety of styles, and historical development which enable to observe differences between the works.

Another reason supporting the need for the new term focuses on the adaptive processes of Shakespeare's play, which complicate as they not only deal with the textual dimension of the play, but also previous adaptations and reworkings, which inspire comics such as film adaptations or theatrical performances. Although the source texts lack narrative elements, they have been reworked into a narrative in the adaptation process, and the final result is akin to a novel; in this case, a graphic novel is not completely inappropriate but still remains imprecise. Moreover, as it has been advocated before, the term 'graphic novel' cannot be used retrospectively, as a result the works from 1950, the early publications belonging to *Classical Comics* series (*Romeo and Juliet*, *Julius Caesar*, *Hamlet* etc) from 1951 as well as *Stories by Famous Authors Illustrated* (*Macbeth*, *Hamlet*) from 1950 should be classified as comics or comic books also due to their length, only 36 page long, and poor quality paper and printing, but with the story closed in a single issue. From a contemporary point of view, it is the safest to classify these works as comics rather than graphic novels because of their strong link with comic book conventions and their position within the comics book market of the time.

In the 1980s, new works appeared which eluded the straightforward classification as the comic book: *Macbeth* by Von (1982), Zarate's *Othello* (1983), and Pollack's *King Lear* (1984) were longer, with more attention paid to details, the visual side, and language. Since the comics published by Oval Projects Limited bore traces which brought them closer to graphic novels/narratives, the artists (known by name) made narrative decisions which influenced the understanding and interpretation of the comics or the play itself. However, the time mark cannot be treated as the sole determinative criterion, and it is advisable to reject the temporal division, especially when considering the multitude of works appearing on the market.

Among the works which have had a significant influence on the comics industry, Neil Gaiman's *The Sandman* drew the attention of Shakespeare scholars to comics adaptations. Gaiman's works proved to be a new type of adaptation of Shakespeare but also raised issues concerning generic division and terminology. Neil Gaiman's *The Sandman* published initially in the form of 32-page long comic books, only later to be published anew as a single volume, became of vital significance to Shakespeare's presence in comics studies. Gaiman showed an innovative manner of dealing with source texts; he altered the story and texts with Shakespeare's play, functioning more as an inspiration in order to present a new story. Nowadays, scholars view *The Sandman* as a graphic novel/narrative, but its length (over 10 volumes and 75 issues) prevents its analysis as a whole, which Shakespeare's scholars rarely do, but focus only on two 24-page long stories. Viewing the two issues in terms of graphic novel/narrative would be imprecise and would evoke dichotomy, as the term would apply to all ten volumes as well as just one issue; hence, the particular issues shall be referred to as comics or comic books.

The above examples focused on adaptations which elude clear classification (varieties of printing formats) but sustain the literary link with the original text. This feature is not a categorical or constitutive feature but rather a generic or topical feature. Hence, those works are comics (comic books) and at the same time adaptations of Shakespeare plays in comics. Interestingly, comics book adaptations of Shakespeare's plays tend to emphasise the theatrical link by including theatrical elements. Flötmann's (2016) *Hamlet* is a silent comic which only in the last panel reveals to be a rehearsal go wrong with the illusion broken. Both *Kill Shakespeare* by McCreery and Anthony Del Col (2011) and Nicky Greenberg's *Hamlet* (2010) also sustain the theatrical link by including theatrical signs. Norris Burrough's *VooDoo Macbeth* (2006) is actually an adaptation of Orson Welles' performance from 1936 created by a son of one of the actors who starred in the original play; whereas *Pibgorn Rep: A Midsummer Night's Dream* by Brooke McEldowney (2008) tells a story about staging the play as a musical. The diversity of comics based on Shakespeare's play, the influence and link with film, and theatre prove that categorising them as graphic novels/narratives would be insufficient to encompass the entirety of works. A more general term of comics, and to be more precise the genre of adaptation comics, would function more inclusively for the works which share the common element of Shakespearean text, plot and characters.

Moreover, these relationships with literature, theatre, and film will be discussed later as a hybrid nature of comics.

Comics is a broad medium encompassing various instances of storytelling based on the sequential nature of images and combining verbal and visual elements. Despite the inclusive nature of the term, it does not apply to instances of sequential storytelling in the past, because comics is deeply rooted in the historical context in which it was created. Other proposed terms are adaptation comics and comics adaptations of Shakespeare's plays (Shakespeare comics) which constitute group comics based on previously written literary works. Introducing the new term adaptation comics and Shakespeare comics helps separate the group of work based on Shakespeare comics, which are so diverse that it is possible to separate them out of a greater whole. The variety of these adaptations will be later reflected in the analytical section.

1.5. Hybridity and Comics Studies - Comics as a Hybrid Art Form

The concept of hybridity proposed by Bhabha (1994), which initially referred to postcolonial studies, has spread to other fields. Yazdiha (2010: 31) observed that “[t]he contemporary cultural landscape is an amalgam of cross-cultural influences, blended, patch-worked, and layered upon one another. Unbound and fluid, cultural hybrid and interstitial, moving between spaces of meaning”. The concept of hybridity has influenced cultural studies and it has also reached comics studies and raised ontological questions concerning the hybrid nature of comics. There is a general consensus as far as the perception of comics as hybrids is concerned, but what provokes disputes is the understanding of the concept in reference to comics and which components are blended to create one.

Most definitions emphasise the narrative potential of comics which stems from the cooperation between the verbal and the visual; hence, comics are perceived as hybrids, a combination of two sets of codes which together achieve narrative potential. This viewpoint has been welcomed by scholars who have used it in their definitions. Baetens and Frey (2015: 143) believe,

[t]he hybrid quality of the graphic novel introduces a split at the level of the dispatching of information, which is presented through the visual as well as the verbal channel. What one needs to understand is that the story is provided not just by the images but also by the text (...).

Their study of graphic novels underpins the relationship between the verbal and the visual; only the combination of the two is able to fully present and express the potential of the medium. Baetens and Frey are supported by Harvey (1996: 3) who quite straightforwardly states “[c]omics are understood as narratives told by a sequence of pictures, with the dialogue of the characters incorporated into the pictures in the form of speech balloon. Comics are a hybrid form: words and pictures”. Comics are hybrids because they both reveal literary and pictorial narrative dimensions, but as Pratt (2009: 107-109) suggests, comics share more features with literature as more attention is paid to the verbal input. Pratt unwillingly has brought comics closer to literature and has overlooked the necessity of both elements for the narrative to occur⁴⁶.

All of the above view comics as a combination of the verbal (words or texts) and the visual (pictures and images), claiming that both entities are required in order to be categorised as comics. Some exclude works which lack overt verbal elements, that is, silent comics. It would be simplistic to claim that the hybrid nature of comics stems only from the verbal-visual dynamics. This initial perception of comics-hybrids started to change over time. Gibbons and Varnum (2001: xi) stated “[i]t is possible to think of comics either as a single, integral system of signification or as a hybrid made up of the separate elements painting and writing”. In their perception of hybrids, they adopted the notions of ‘painting’ and ‘writing’ which indicates a change in the course of thinking. Hybridity in comics is no longer a combination of two separate codes, i.e. the verbal and the visual, but a combination of two and more media. Although such a modification may seem minute, it allowed for an altered perception of comics as hybrids in general. For example, McCloud (1993: 92) states that “it’s a mistake to see comics as a *mere*⁴⁷ hybrid of the graphic arts and prose fiction”. Comics is perceived as a unique medium and treated as a combination of two media, but at the same time McCloud observed and rejected hybridity in comics as a simple (‘mere’) blend and acknowledges it as a more

⁴⁶ Other scholars who also concur with such attitude are Chute (2008: 99) and Miodrag (2013: 99)

⁴⁷ Italics mine [AWS]

complex phenomenon. The new perception of comics as hybrids replaces the paradigm of verbal-visual hybrids with a combination of media.

Already in 1984, Levinson in his article expressed new ideas concerning hybrid art forms, which were later used in comics studies. Levinson adopts an intuitive approach towards the term but also believes that most of the works of art are a mixture of other ones hence having hybrid elements (Levinson 1984: 5), but also later he states that “that we think of art forms as hybrid when they can be decomposed, conceptually, into two or more distinct artistic activities or ostensible media. This is not right, however, because with ingenuity, almost any form can be conceived so as to appear the combination of simple artistic strands.” (Levinson 1984: 5-6). Any work of art can bear traces of or be influenced by other works regardless of the medium in which they were created⁴⁸. Later on, he continues, “hybrid art forms are art forms arising from the actual combination or interpenetration of earlier art forms” (Levinson 1984: 6). This line of thinking inspired comics scholars to change their perception of hybridity in comics. Neil Cohn (2005) in a similar tone altered the perception of comics as hybrids, they no longer are perceived as verbal-visual combinations but blend of two media, and the blend itself is more cultural and structural in nature. Cohn’s idea is innovative, but, surprisingly, he limits the possible combinations to two media, whereas it is possible that comics blend more elements from numerous media. A similar viewpoint was expressed in publications by Meskin (2009), Meskin and Cook (2012), and Chute and DeKoven (2006). Meskin (2009: 219) expressed a similar view to McCloud, “... comics are a hybrid art form that evolved from literature and a number of other art forms and media. The hybrid nature of comics helps explain a wide range of relevant phenomena, and underwrites the very impasse about comics’ literary status”. He departed from perceiving comics as verbal-visual hybrids and focused more on a blend of elements derived from other media, genres, and art forms. Later this idea was developed by Meskin and Cook who emphasised that comics are hybrids as a result of previous artistic developments

it arose from a combination of technologies and techniques associated with drawing and caricature, prose storytelling, and printmaking. Hybrid art forms raise questions about standard approaches to art evaluation and ontology which often seem to implicitly assume

⁴⁸ Levinson (1984: 6) provides simple examples; traditional painting, for instance, can have its beginning in drawing and colouring, and any painting can be decomposed and deconstructed in such a manner.

that art forms are pure (i.e., that they are not hybrid). The study of comics and their hybridity promises to shed new light onto these debates and issues. Finally, comics are a particularly interesting instance of hybridity, since the result of so combining these pre-existing art forms amounted, in the end, to something that is much more than merely the sum of its parts. In particular, as the comics art form evolved from its heterogeneous origins, a wealth of conventions evolved (...). (Meskin and Cook 2012: 21)

Meskin and Cook accentuate the presence and the influence of previous forms, and indicate that comics have been adopting and changing the elements they need. The perception of comics as hybrids of various media initiates the discussion and welcomes the adoption of analytical tools characteristic of other media. Moreover, Chute and DeKoven further expand the understanding of hybridity; they consider not only elements ‘borrowed’ from other media but also cultural theories. “Graphic narrative as hybrid in the following sense: comics is a mass cultural art form drawing on both high and low art indexes and references; comics is multigeneric, composed, often ingeniously, from widely different genres and subgenres; and most importantly, comics is constituted in verbal and visual narratives that do not merely synthesise.” (Chute and DeKoven 2006: 769).

The perception of hybridity in the context of comics as a binary verbal-visual blend seems simplistic. Comics are hybrids, but owing to the combination of historical and technological developments, as well as the possibility of incorporating elements of other works and media. In other words, comics should be viewed as hybrids not because of the verbal-visual nature but as a medium which is able to include elements characteristic for other media and cultural elements. Comics has derived and appropriated elements from non-performative media (literature and visual arts) as well as performative arts (film, theatre); such as perception brings comics closer to a mixture rather than a blend. However, in order to comprehend the hybrid nature of comic better it is significant to discuss the particular influences.

1.5.1. Comics and/as Literature – Establishing a Relationship

The emergence of comics has immediately been dubbed as posing a threat to the novel and literature in general, due to being anti-literary. It was believed that comics diverted people, specifically young boys, from books; it was viewed as a dangerous phenomenon

in which personal crusades against comics were initiated, the most infamous example being Frederic Wertham's. However, once the turmoil died, scholars were able to conduct research on the relationship between comics and literature and establish common denominators as well as discrepancies. Among the issues with comics-as-literature treatment is the double treatment, on one hand comics have been viewed as a threat to literature and literacy but at the same time comics are most often compared to it⁴⁹.

Bulson (2018: 9) in his article noticed that “[b]efore comics existed as a long-form medium, artists regularly contributed illustrations to works of literature. These images were not intended as the main event, and yet, at times illustrators could reimagine in original ways what was being said in the text”. The link between comics (or the proto-comics) and literature had been established long before the 20th century, once illustrations and ornaments to the literary text were used. However, once the graphic depictions became more refined, they no longer functioned as mere illustrations, but as Bulson observed, interpretation and enrichment of the text. For instance, the works of Gustave Doré, whose wood engravings and illustrations accompanied the text enriched the experience of reading and added meanings to great literary masterpieces Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Dante's *The Divine Comedy*, Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* among others. Although Doré is not, and has never been, a comic book artist, his pictorial works are often over-simplistically used as examples for establishing a link between comics and literature, which should be treated as a basis for the presence of the graphic in the literary domain. The emergence of comics, and comparing comics and literature has “radically redefined what literature itself can do – in part, by showing how sequences of images can be used to access some of the most complex thoughts, feelings, ideas and processes” (Bulson 2018: 9).

Comics has already been classified as a hybrid art form ‘incorporating’ elements from other forms of art. The relationship or the dynamics between comics and literature has become an issue which many scholars (Versaci 2007; Meskin 2009; or Miodrag 2017) have attempted to contemplate and comprehend. Throughout the years, the investigation of the interrelation has taken various routes, and attention has been paid to technicalities bringing the two media closer. On the other hand, there are more elusive

⁴⁹ For example, scholars have been trying to indicate the proximity of the graphic novel to novels and literature.

features which should be considered to examine the correlation between the two. The scrutiny of the relationship between literature, especially the novel, and comics should deal with both of these aspects: technology and literary. First, the similarities between comics and literature are simplified to the technical notions, namely, both are printed on paper in a book, or codex, format⁵⁰. Furthermore, the book, either literature or comics, can be distributed in bookshops (this argument mainly refers to graphic novel/narrative), but with the development of technology and the Internet, this perception has lost its significance. Books as well as comics may nowadays be distributed in an electronic format, and the appearance of electronic devices used for reading the argument has lost its significance. Although it is true that some graphic novels may be purchased in a bookshop, they simply cannot function as an argument for ascribing literary characteristics⁵¹ to comics. Another argument for the proximity of comics and literature is the graphic novel which is believed to be derive from the novel, naturally the generic similarities are insufficient to function as an argument⁵². Meskin (2009: 219) ironically notices those similarities,

“They [comics] are, after all, typically full of text, commonly found in bookshops where they are often sold in book form under the ‘Graphic Novel’ heading, appreciated (at least in part) by means of reading, taught in literature classes, occasionally discussed in academic journals devoted to literature, and often reviewed in the book review sections of newspapers and magazines. For these reasons — as well as some others that I shall discuss below — it is tempting to think that at least some comics are literature”.

However, it very quickly discards and dismisses such a simplistic way of thinking. Still, in order to treat “particular comics to be literary must necessarily be based on the qualities of their writing, and not on general artistic values of creativity and unity, or narrative criteria such as development of characterization and theme” (Miodrag 2011: 267). The focus on the textual aspect of comics immediately draws attention away from the image, the second narrative component in comics. Focusing on the literary dimension of comics also works against the notion of comics as a visual

⁵⁰ In a panel moderated by Chute (Burns, Clowes, Seth and Ware 2012) the physicality of the book as an object was discussed as an important element. Comics in a book format controls the story better, create suspense, lead the reader, and although the format contributes to the experience it cannot function as a definition. The book is a carrier of text and, in case of comics, pictures.

⁵¹ From cultural-historical viewpoint comics initially were distributed at newsagent’s and later, with the development of the medium and with the greater number of titles, an institution of a specialist comics bookshop was introduced.

⁵² For further details on the subject go to the subchapter 1.2.1.4 The Graphic Novel.

narrative. The issue concerning comics as literature is more serious because “a positive answer would legitimate the application of the philosophy of literature, literary theory, and literary criticism to works in that medium” (Meskin 2009: 220). Although comics cannot be viewed as literature, literature and narrative techniques have had a significant influence on comics, and more gravitas should be paid to those relationships. Tempting as it may be to view comics as a derivation of literature, it is crucial to acknowledge it as a unique and separate work of art/medium, then it would be possible to trace literary quality and literary elements⁵³ that can be found in comics. The proximity between the two media is based on the notion of literariness, belonging to the tradition of Russian Formalism which focuses on the idea that literary quality is hidden in form and the language itself. However, since the initial formulation, the perception of literariness as a linguistic quality has changed. Widdowson (1999: 97) adds that “while we accept that there is no such thing as a specifically ‘literary’, or ‘peculiar’, language, we nevertheless regard the language of the text as ‘literary’, rather than as an ordinary act of communication, because we read it as a ‘literary’ work”. It would seem that the language is still pivotal, or at least among the essential elements in the discussion of literature and the literariness, because on the basis of language, the reader is able to categorise a given text as literary or non-literary⁵⁴. Another feature, which proves beneficial in distinguishing the literary, is the internal organisation of the text recognised by the external competence of the reader. “[I]t seems that a well-organised text on the one hand presupposes a model of competence coming, so to speak, from outside the text, but on the other hand works to build up, by merely textual means, such a competence” (Eco 1979: 8). The text itself can, by the choice of vocabulary and subject, define who the most suitable reader would be, and that is what Eco refers to as a Model Reader. Reading a literary text “involves us in a surprising amount of complex, largely unconscious labour: although we rarely notice it, we are all the time engaged in constructing a hypothesis about the meaning of the text. The reader makes implicit

⁵³ As Roman Jakobson phrased it “[t]he subject of literary science is not literature, but literariness, i.e. that which makes a given work a literary work” (Jakobson as quoted in Eichenbaum 1971). Jakobson represented structuralist approach towards literature, in which the language is treated as a decisive element whether a text is literary. Jakobson’s perception on literariness had been shaped by Shklovsky’s idea of defamiliarisation which through the study of language distinguishes between literary and non-literary texts.

⁵⁴ Naturally, at certain occasions the reader can be intentionally fooled by the author, and by manipulating the language and using a particular style for an aesthetic purpose.

connections, fills in gaps, draw inferences and tests out hunches” (Eagleton 1983: 76). The reader is charged with the task of creating the story by “concretising” the literary text (Eagleton 1983: 76). The reading process presented by Eagleton appears to be similar to reading comics where the reader also has to fill the gaps and connect pieces of information but not only on textual level but on visual as well.

Culler took a step further and stated that the notion of a model reader is purely theoretical and suggested the notion of literary competence.

The work has structure and meaning because it is read in a particular way, because these potential properties, latent in the object itself, are actualized by the theory of discourse applied to the act of reading. ... To read a text as literature is not to make one’s mind a *tabula rasa* and approach it without preconceptions; one must bring to it an implicit understanding of the operations of literary discourse which tell one what to look for” (Culler 1975: 113-114)

Literary competence is a set of literary conventions which the reader and writer notice and establish a platform of mutual understanding. Assuming the reader acquires literary competence, which helps the differentiation and comprehension of a text as a literary one than by understanding the code hidden behind the verbal-visual storytelling the reader presents comics competence. The reader is able to understand and draw a message hidden in symbolically charged images, from the words (also onomatopoeic) and from a sequence as well as from the cognitive background of the reader (Kukkonen 2013b: 21).

While focusing on the reader it is impossible to overlook the effect literature, and comics, may have on the reader (not viewer)⁵⁵. Versaci (2007: 10) in his book pays attention to the issue and at one point observes that “[i]f one characteristic of good literature is that it challenges our way of thinking, then comics’ cultural position is such that they are able to mount these challenges in unique ways”. Comics is a work of art and, similarly to any example of human artistic activity, may evoke emotions, thoughts, and ideas in the audience, just like literature, films, paintings, and theatrical performances.

The primary role of comics, as well as literature, is storytelling. However, both achieve the intended effects differently. According to Hutcheon (2012) audience is able to experience and comprehend stories through modes of engagement⁵⁶. Although she

⁵⁵ In comics scholarship the audience is still referred to as readers rather than viewers of comics, even in case of silent comics.

⁵⁶ The modes of engagement are showing, telling and interacting with stories (Hutcheon 2012: 22)

used this division in reference to adaptation studies, it also fits a more general discussion about telling and showing stories. Narrative literature is “controlled by the selected, directing words of the text and liberated – that is, unconstrained by the limits of the visual and aural” (Hutcheon 2012: 23) The reader controls the pace of experiencing the story, can pause willingly and return to chosen fragments, the literary text works on the imagination level. Comics, however, appears to be a bit more complicated instance due to its verbal-visual nature; hence, it could be stated that comics engages through both the telling and showing mode but each function with a different level. As far as the textual element is concerned, the act of reading the text, controlling the pace would refer to the telling mode, but the visual element involves the showing mode. Following the story, though means of stative images means moving away from “imagination to the realm of direct perception – with its mix of both detail and broad focus” (Hutcheon 2012: 23). Images play a significant role in comics narrative

The overstatement of the essential importance of pictures arises from the habitual and defensive comparison with literature: the logical implication is that if the pictures are not involved in conveying the story, then comics are “merely” prose narratives with some embellishing visual decoration, which leads critics into overstating or circumscribing their informational value as a way of carving out an appealing identity for the form. (Miodrag 2013: 94)

Comics seems to be a unique medium in which the mode of telling and showing take place simultaneously, but the audience (reader/viewer) shifts between the two depending whether the focus is on the verbal or the visual.

Literature tells stories by means of language and narration; comics, however, also adopt language (although it is a specific language created from a mixture of the verbal and the visual), narrative techniques, and the sequence. “The words in comics suggest a *literary* narrative dimension: the narrative features of comics are constructed (at least in part) in the same way as works of literature” (Pratt 2009: 107). The presence of language presupposes the act of reading on the side of the reader, but the process of familiarising oneself with a comic book is more subtle and complex; it is not a simple act of reading, but an act of looking, decoding, analysing, and noticing the sequence. The reader is obliged to make conscious choices concerning the pace of reading or the point of looking at the picture. “If we want to consider comics-as-literature, we need to address the ways that the form employs language, and the particular features, both medium-specific and shared with other literary forms, that make that language literary”

(Miodrag 2011: 265). In comics everything is meaningful and significant, and the characteristic poetic of comics contributes to the process of deriving meaning and experiencing a story. Hence the ‘process of reading/seeing’ a comics is different from the process of reading of literature, and there more elements which are significant to the narrative creation. Although some scholars (Hatfield 2005, Versaci 2007) view comic as a literary form belonging to the literary tradition, and literary terms should be adopted in their study, there still a strong opposition (Groensteen 2007, Beaty and Hatfield 2005) who call for treatment of comics as a narrative form, which would lead to the formation of its own terminology.

Until now, the treatment of the comics-literature relationship centred around formal elements; however, the literary turn in comics studies has had an effect on the medium of comics. The turn not only encouraged the use of literary terms and literary approach to the study of comics, but also the influence of a literary text has become more significant. The potential of comics as a medium for adaptation⁵⁷ of literature has been quickly acknowledged but which was not necessarily positive. From the very beginning, these adaptations were blamed for their poor quality, both in terms of the visual and simplification of the plot. Still, with the development of the medium itself, the adaptations began to evolve as well. As Versaci (2007: 165) commented that:

[f]rom my perspective as a staunch advocate for the sophistication of comics, these literary adaptations have gone through a distinct evolution, ranging from paradoxical self-effacement of the comics medium, to embracing the unique formal and stylistic elements that comics have to offer, to asserting comics’ own status as important literature that challenges popular conceptions of what it means to be ‘literary’.

The process of page-to-page transformation may take various routes, depending on the literary source. Adaptation of a narrative prose text requires different approaches than a dramatic text. The former requires considerable alternations done to the text, e.g. descriptions need to be eliminated, but they prove helpful in the process of creating the image, the verbal element is transformed into the visual. However, the caption, which is a characteristic comics device, often functions as a narrator’s commentary, informing the reader on the setting and temporality. Adaptations of literature from the 1950s, such as *Classics Illustrated* provide a good example; typically, the comics would quote the dialogues from the source text (at times dialogues were simplified for the benefit of the

⁵⁷ For more in-depth approach to theory of adaptation see 2.5

young reader) and the descriptions constituted an inspiration for the visual. Still, there are also adaptations which overlook the language, the text of the original. Posy Simmonds's *Gemma Boverly* (2000) (sic!) and *Tamara Drew* (2009) are both adaptations, or more precise appropriations, because the author presents a very relaxed treatment of the text. Simmonds's approach focuses mainly on the plot and the story, rather than the text. Dramatic texts, or theatrical plays, are treated differently in the process of adaptation. Adaptors welcome the given dialogues and incorporate them sometimes verbatim or only slightly cut the text; however, the adaptor is often faced with the challenge of creating the setting from scratch. Looking at comic adaptations of Shakespeare's plays, it appears that the text functions not as the ultimate goal but as inspiration, as the adaptors take liberties concerning the setting; hence, genre changes are encountered. A fair example of this phenomenon is *Romeo and Juliet* as a postapocalyptic adaptation (Enki Bilal *Julia & Roem*, 2011) or science fiction (Lee et al. *Romeo and Juliet*, 2011).

Comics, with all its devices and conventions, is a medium which easily adapts literature. It is also constantly inspired and draws attention away from literature, both as far as production and receptions are concerned. As Wolk puts it:

They [comics] bear a strong resemblance to literature – they use words, they're printed in books, they have narrative content – but they are no more literary form than movies or opera are literary forms. Scripts for comics are arguably a literary form in exactly the same way that film and theatre scripts are literary forms, but a script is not the same thing as the finished work of art. (2007: 14).

It is unavoidable to acknowledge the similarities between the two media, but it does not signify that comics can be perceived as part of literary studies.

1.5.2. Comics and Film

Film⁵⁸ and comics are perceived as closely related media due to their multimodality (Miodrag 2013: 99) and the relationship with film is stronger than it is with literature. Both media emerged in more or less similar period of time but their paths of development took various routes. Film is nowadays a highly respected and valued art

⁵⁸ It should be remembered that in the subchapter the notion of film shall understood both as a live-action film as well as an animated one.

form that has been studied and discussed, whereas comics has only recently received academic attention and acknowledgement. Interestingly enough film, but also to a certain extent, comics has adopted solutions from other media. A case in point can be a plethora of adaptations of Shakespeare's plays on screen which influence and inspire other adaptations including comics adaptations of the plays. However, it is important to notice the similarities and differences between the two in order to trace the filmic elements in comics. Pratt (2012) indicates that the similarities between the two media stem from their "parallel histories" (Pratt 2012: 149) and emphasises "[t]hey became popular at about the same time; both faced censorship pressures (leading, respectively, to the Comics Code Authority and the Hays Code) as well as a lowbrow reputation and a prevailing sentiment that they are not art. Both are considered mass media, technologically reproducible at a great scale and designed for popular audiences" (Pratt 2012: 149). However, indicating the similarities in the initial stage of development and their cultural position does not provide a basis for presenting and scrutinising the relationship between comics and film.

McCloud in *Understanding Comics* provocatively stated that "before it's projected, a film is just a very, very, very, very slow comic!" (McCloud 1993: 8), but immediately the statement can be undermined and questioned as to whether the same narrative techniques are used. Altering the medium from film reel to paper simplifies the understanding of comics, as it is not only the juxtaposition of images that defines it. Although it is a fact that both film and comics adopt a combination of the verbal and the visual for narrative purposes (Pratt 2009: 108) but they employ various narrative techniques and strategies. First of all, both McCloud (1993) and Pratt (2012) noticed the main difference between film and comics, the former is a medium of time whereas the latter is a medium of space. McCloud states that "[e]ach successive frame of a movie is projected on exactly the same space – the screen – while each frame of comics must occupy a different space. Space does to comics what time does to film (McCloud 1993: 7). Pratt supports and develops McCloud's ideas.

Films are (partially) constituted by images that succeed each other in actual time but appear to the viewer in the same actual space. Comics are (partially) constituted by images that succeed each other in actual space but appear to the reader at the same actual time. While this means that the processes of reading comics and viewing films involve different skills, it is also notable that each medium requires us to make sense of a sequence of images. (Pratt 2012: 150)

Pratt indicates, however, that experiencing comics and film requires a different set of skills, which could signify they are not as similar as it is believed. Szyłak (2000:19) much earlier had noticed that the relationship between comics and film is ostensible, and they share only the ability to tell stories through images⁵⁹. Both media have adopted different narrative techniques which the audiences are required to adopt. Naturally, watching a film requires a unique set of skill to comprehend characteristic conventions such as the focusing only on one image⁶⁰ presented on screen, no matter how quickly they can change. What is more, the audience is usually unable to manipulate the pace of the film and the intended flow on the screen is uninterrupted. Comics in this domain is a bit more elaborate, as it can possess multiple meaningful layers that the reader can explore. Although it might seem self-explanatory, it should be remembered that watching a film is a passive activity, and the role of the audience is limited. The story will unfold regardless of the viewer with comics; however, the audience is actively involved in the activity of reading; a story has to be read in order to be experienced. First, the panels, with its shape, size and frame are narratively charged and are required to be semiotically decoded. The second layer constitutes the page, together with the layout and the grid of the panels, as they may be ordered linearly or non-linearly. It becomes the responsibility of the reader to 're-arrange' them to create a meaningful whole, and in order to achieve the goal, the pace of reading may vary, the panels might be reread or pondered over. The reader has a greater freedom to experience the narrative. Coming back to McCloud's idea of a film being a slow comic, apart from lacking the layered narrativity, reveals an additional issue. If each film frame presents a single moment in time and a separate event this would mean that each panel is equally significant. In comics, the artist makes conscious choices of what to insert into each panel. In this process, writers and artists follow Lessing's perception of

⁵⁹ "Filmowanie komiksu nie jest przedsięwzięciem, które można zrealizować wedle jednej recepty. I komiks, i kino istnieją zawsze na arenie kultury w szerszym kontekście współczesnych im zjawisk. I każda z tych sztuk wykorzystuje je i interpretuje na swój własny sposób. Pozorna bliskość polegająca na tym, że obie opowiadają obrazami, sprawia, iż trudno dostrzec odmienność celów, ku którym dążą." (Szyłak 2000: 19)

"Filming comics is not an easy enterprise, which can be done following one method. Comics as well as film have always existed on the cultural arena in a broader context of their contemporary phenomena. And each of these arts uses and interprets them in their own manner. The ostensible proximity which stems from telling through images makes it difficult to notice the dissimilarity of aims they want to reach." (Szyłak 2000:19)

⁶⁰ The convention of a split screen is sometimes used to present a telephone conversation but for an unskilled viewer this can be confusing.

paintings. “Painting can use only a single moment of an action in its coexisting compositions and must therefore choose the one which is most suggestive and from which the preceding and succeeding actions are most easily comprehensible” (Lessing 1984: 78). The notion of a ‘pregnant moment’ inclines the writer to choose and the reader to work out what happened between the panels, in the ‘slow comics’ made from film strip would signify that every picture is charged in a similar manner. Lessing’s idea of the ‘pregnant moment’ paved the way for the notion of closure, so crucial in McCloud’s theory of comics, but it should be remembered that closure also appears in film, but it is not as prominent.

Another formal element concerning comics and film is the language used by both media. However, the main difference is between the static visual image/panel in comics and the moving image used in film; in both media, verbal language is not essential for the story, as proven by the existence of silent film and silent comics. What is pivotal in experiencing the story is its sequential nature: the reader/viewer is able to understand the actions and events, mainly by deducing them from the juxtaposed images (McCloud 1993, the already mentioned ‘closure’). Furthermore, the visual language of both media is dictated by the camera work. Panels, similarly to film frame, use camera movement characteristic for film, hence any description and analysis of panels refers to angles and shots. Although the terminology is extensively used to describe and analyse panels, Fischer (2017: 341) calls for abandoning the film terminology and proposing a new one which would underpin the uniqueness of comics studies. Naturally, on one hand, the scholarship struggles to recognise comics as a medium of its own; thus, Fischer’s proposal would be valid, but also comic is widely understood as a hybrid medium, which is why adopting film terminology should not be viewed negatively, especially considering their relationship.

The 21st century has witnessed an increase in the total number of film adaptations of comics, particularly due to the commercial approach and the creation of Marvel and DC Universes, the socio-culture impact needs to be acknowledged in the discussion. Film adaptations of comics, and superheroes in particular, are among the most popular topics taken on by scholars which results in the emergence of publications on the subject⁶¹ especially over the last 10 years. Consequently, the increase in the

⁶¹ For example, Brown (2016), Burk (2015), Denison and Mizsei-Ward (2016), DiPaolo (2001), Davis (2017).

popularity of superhero comics film adaptations has led to common misconceptions that only such comics are adapted⁶². Apart from the commercial success and treatment of comics as commodities, the ease with which comics are made into films is simply explained by Pratt (2012: 147) who states that “comics is more suited than any other medium for adaptation into film” and later adds that “[c]omics are highly adaptable to film, then, because the media are both visual, and it is advantageous to adapt from one visual art form into another” (Pratt 2012: 151). It is generally believed that adapting comics to films is a relatively easy task; as the adaptation process was simplified, there would have been a plethora of high-quality and aesthetically praised adaptations of comics. Unfortunately, such films are still exceptions. Szyłak has addressed the issue of unsatisfactory quality of film adaptations of comics,

Nie znaczy to wcale, że komiksy są mało atrakcyjne. Owszem oferują one swym czytelnikom całą gamę rozmaitych propozycji, tyle, że komiks nie jest – wbrew pozorom – prostym przełożeniem fabuły na ciąg obrazów i nie da się w zwykły sposób zastąpić obrazami na taśmie filmowej. W kinie nieuchronnie ginie cała stylistyka rysunków komiksowych, zastąpionych fotografiami. Nie daje też się przełożyć na język filmu gra kompozycyjnych napięć, dysonansów i asonansów, rozgrywających się na kartach obrazkowej opowieści. Wreszcie, przyobleczone w ciała aktorów rysunkowe postacie przestają być tym, czym były: ze świata konwencjonalnej umowy, zawieszzonego pomiędzy fantazją i satyrą, przenoszą się wymiar stereotypowego banału. (Szyłak 2000: 13)

It does not mean that comics are unattractive. Indeed, they provide their readers with a whole variety of different offers, but comics is not – contrary to what is believed – a simple transference of the plot into a sequence of images and it cannot simply be substituted with pictures on a film roll. In cinema, the entire style of hand-drawn comics disappears which are replaced with photos. It is impossible to transmit the characteristic compositional tensions, disharmonies, and assonances that take place on the page of the graphic novel. Finally, the drawn characters transformed into live actors cease to be what they were: from the world of conventionalised agreement, suspended between fantasy and satire, they arrive in the dimension of stereotypical banality. (Szyłak 2000:13)

In this lengthy quote, Szyłak attempts to explain where cinema fails with comic book adaptations; he simply notices that conventions characteristics welcomed in by readers do not work in films and may be viewed as incomprehensible among cinema audiences. Wolk, in a similar tone, attempted to clarify the special relationship between the two media and noticed that comics are still being viewed and assessed by adopting the characteristics typical of film.

The most thoroughly ingrained error in the language used to discuss comics is treating them as if they were particularly weird, or failed examples of an entirely different

⁶² Among the films based on comics, but superhero comics, are *300* (2006), *Persepolis* (2007), *The Adventures of Tintin* (2011), *Tamara Drew* (2010) or *Ghost World* (2001).

medium altogether. Good comics are sometimes described as being ‘cinematic’ (if they have some kind of broad visual scope or imitate a familiar kind of movie) or ‘novelistic’ (if they have keenly observed details, or simply take a long time to read). Those can be descriptive words when they’re applied to comics. It’s almost an insult, though, to treat them as compliments. Using them as praise implies that comics as a form aspire (more or less successfully) to being movies or novels” (Wolk 2007: 13)

Both Szyłak and Wolk noticed the discriminatory approach towards comics, that is, judging and assessing them through categories designed for a different medium, i.e. film and novel. Using the terms cinematic or novelistic in reference to comics (whether positively or negatively) seems to be missing the point of what comics is. Fortunately, with the popularisation of adaptations, pressure for better quality has followed, which refers to both superhero and non-superhero adaptations. The explanation of the matter is the visual resemblance between the two media, especially when not the actions and characters are adapted but the whole panels are transported on the screen; the best examples would be *300* (2006), in which comics panels, almost without any changes, become film frames. Comics and films have always borrowed and exchanged aesthetics. The influence of films on comics extends to their generic classification and visual style, including the use of film noir and noteworthy camera techniques. On the other hand, the process of creating and shooting a film begins with storyboards, which are frames drawn as if they were comics, in order to plan a logical sequence and visualise the scene to be shot. The adoption of storyboards in the process of creating a film emphasises the possible cooperation between the two media. Comics, as a medium, is a helpful tool for composing a shot and visualising the scene before shooting the film begins.

These general observations shall prove beneficial in the analysis of Shakespearean comics and tracing the potential influence of previous film adaptations and film language on the comics itself.

1.5.3. Comics and/in Theatre

Theatre and comics are two artistic expressions which, at first glance, have nothing in common. Theatre is perceived as a performative highbrow art form that is highly respected and widely studied, whereas comics is viewed as an embodiment of the lowbrow, still being (re)discovered by the mainstream media. However, taking a more inquisitive look might reveal a deeper connection between the two artistic forms. The

relationship between comics and theatre needs to be explored due to the nature of the analytical material which focuses on adaptations of drama in the form of comics. The adaptation process, the intricacies of which will be discussed later, faces different challenges when dealing with various forms of writing, such as prose, drama, or poetry. Consequently, the outcome of the process may impact the reception of adaptation itself. Smolderen (2014: 137) in his book also attempted to link the comics with other art forms by dubbing comics as “audiovisual stage on paper” which links the immovable comic panel/stage to a dynamic theatrical stage. Shakespeare’s plays predominantly belong to the domain of the theatre, and the plays are best received when performed on stage; hence, it only seems natural to attempt at tracing any links between theatre (the intended medium for Shakespeare’s plays) and comics (the analysed medium which adapted Shakespeare’s plays).

The most obvious link between theatre and comics is their function as human artistic expressions that deal with emotions and imagination. Human cognitive perception in order to express ideas, events, feelings, and emotions can take various forms, it can be written down, using verbal language; it can be acted out, it can be drawn, or filmed. One of the basic human needs is to communicate with others, and the expression may take various forms. Although this may be viewed as a simplistic approach, it also signifies that all artistic expressions share this characteristic feature.

A theatrical performance approaches a text to be performed, i.e. a drama, tragedy, or comedy, in a similar manner that comics approaches a play to be adapted. Staging or adapting a play is not based on simple deliverance or reading-out the text, as interpretative and staging choices on numerous levels (filling in the gaps in the text) must be taken into consideration. Thus, the staging and adaptation processes appear to be founded on a similar notion. Furthermore, a question arises concerning the correlation between the source text that inspires a performance and the performance itself, which can also be extended into the study of comics. A useful differentiation was introduced by Zich (2016) in his article, who distinguished a ‘dramatic text’ and ‘dramatic work’. A dramatic text functions as an inspiration, as a source text based on which a theatrical performance can be prepared, and which has more literary quality than theatrical text; it can also be viewed as an ideal vision for performance. This notion bears similarities to the source text used in the adaptations. According to Zich (2016: 37), ‘[d]ramatic works’ are not manuscripts or printed texts but works that are performed. A dramatic

work is created by all the elements necessary for staging a performance, it encompasses directing, acting work, lighting, costumes, and scenography. “Even superficial observation tells us that some components of the dramatic work point to specific disciplines in the arts. The dramatic text may be assigned to literature, opera music to music; stage set to the visual arts” (Zich 2016: 35). It would seem that both theatre and comics share their treatment of source text, i.e. ‘dramatic text’ inspiring the artistic expression.

The theatre-comics relationship is not unilateral, as traces of theatre influence comics and vice versa can be pinpointed. The most obvious and straightforward impact of comics on theatre is adapting comics onto the theatrical stage. Kołsut (2015) in his entry traced one of best well-known examples of such performances in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries both in Poland and abroad. *It's a Bird... It's a Plane... It's Superman* (1966) by Charles Strouse is one of the first instances of comics adaptation in theatre; the Broadway musical was based on characters from *Superman* comics written by Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster. Another musical, created by Lisa Kron and Jenine Tesori, was based on a well-known graphic narrative *Fun Home* written by Alison Bechdel; it was premiered in 2015 at Circle in the Square Theatre. Billington (2018), in his review, praised the performance as “a mixture of memory-play and strip-cartoon”, and the link ceased to be viewed in negative terms. Polish theatres also tackled with comics works, however, they still focus on works especially intended for children such as *Tytus Romek i A'Tomek: Jak zostać artystą*⁶³ adapted by Teatr Kamienica (2014) in Warsaw and directed by Katarzyna Taracińska-Badura; or *Łauma* (written by Karol KRL Kalinowski) was adapted twice; first, in 2013 by Teatr Studio in Warsaw (directed by Rafał Samborski) and in 2017 by Teatr Dramatyczny in Wałbrzych by Magdalena Mikasz. In the Czech Republic theatres staged *Titus, Romko a A'Tomko* in 1988 in a theatre in Presov and directed by J. Šilan. All of these examples were direct adaptations of comics on stage, but comics can also have an impact on theatre in a different way. In 1991, Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie in Brussels staged the ballet *The Hard Nut* which in itself is a staging of *The Nutcracker*; however, the scenography and stage design were influenced by the works of the comics artist Charles Burns. The scenography was inspired by Burns’ art, style, and panel design which

⁶³ *Romek, Tomek i A'Tomek* was written by Henryk Jerzy Chmielewski (better known as Papić Chmiel) and was published 1957-2009.

imitated his personal works that were deeply instilled with archetypal concepts of guilt, childhood, adolescent sexuality, and poignant, nostalgic portrayals of post-war America. The ballet was set in the 1950s in America, and in order to achieve this, the scenographers worked with comic book clichés to rearrange them into disturbing yet funny outcomes. It appears that comics and comics art can not only function as an inspiration for theatrical adaptations but also as a visual one for scenographers. The comics-theatre relationship extends beyond mere adaptation processes, but such an influence requires further insight and explanation. In addition, it should be borne in mind that the impact is not unilateral: comics can influence theatre as well as theatre comics.

Adaptations are not the only comics that can affect the theatre; comics and the comics creative process can affect and assist a performance's creative process. In the course of preparing a theatrical performance, the visual arts reveal their usefulness; directors, costume designers, and scenographers prepare drawings and visuals necessary in order to realise their vision. A fair case in point is Pamela Howard's book (2009), in which not only does she present typical approaches and techniques for preparing stage design but also her own original approach. Preparing scenography is usually based on preparing a maquette, which is a small-scale model in which the movement of actors and lighting can be tested. Apart from preparing maquettes, Howard (2009) also makes hand drawn sketches and drawings which might be compared to a storyboard, she names those sketches 'thinking drawings' (Howard 2019: 37-38). While preparing the performance of her own play, *The New Jerusalem* Howard (2018) made detailed drawings which represented the potential movement of actors and the lines they uttered. Interestingly, she adopts comics conventions such as speech balloons, captions, or gutter, and although these panels cannot be categorised purely as comics (Howard never uses the notion), they bear a strong resemblance to it, but their functions are different. These thinking drawings work similarly to maquettes; they should help the director realise the vision for the performance, as well as help orientation around the stage. Howard's thinking drawing bear resemblance to storyboards that are used in film. This shows how the three media

In addition to the comics functioning as help for the preparation process of a performance, the relationship is also based on adaptations and influence of theatrical signs in comics, especially in reference to adaptations of Shakespeare's plays; the

theatrical signs and relationships are sustained, reminded, and even explored. Interestingly, comics adaptations of Shakespeare's plays often attempt to sustain the bond with the theatre sometimes by staging the play in theatre (Frank Flötmann's *Hamlet* from *Shakespeare Ohne Worte* collection, 2016) or by referring to theatrical staging and tradition by adopting characteristic signs (Nicky Greenberg's *Hamlet* (2010) and *Kill Shakespeare* by Conor McCreery, Anthony Del Col, and Andy Belanger (2010-2017)).

The relationship between comics and theatre is not obvious, at least not as much as the relationship with literature or film. However, it is possible to establish relationships between comics, literature, films, and theatre, not only as an adaptation. The element of comics storytelling may be beneficial in the creative process of film making or theatrical performance.

1.6. Summary

The aim of this chapter was to find answers to the basic question of what comics is and how it can be defined. The understanding of the term is inseparable from the historical context in which it was coined, that is, what the reader is provided with a general overview of the history of comics as well as a variety of terms which occur in comics scholarship. In addition to the explanation of the basic term, I have proposed two new terms: adaptation comics and comics adaptations of Shakespeare's plays (Shakespearean comics) to refer to the instance of works which adapt literary works, but not only; and for the purpose of this study adaptations of Shakespeare's work in comics out of the greater whole.

The second part of the chapter focused on the notion of hybridity which is often used in comics. Instead of repeating the popular view that comics is a hybrid of the verbal and the visual, comics is viewed as a hybrid of various media, such as literature, film, and theatre. Such perception positions comics within a greater scope of works of art and shows how many similarities comics have with these media, as well as how much has been borrowed during the maturation process. These theoretical ponderings will be significant in future chapters.

Chapter 2: Shakespearean Adaptations in Comics: A Theoretical and Historical Overview

“Adaptation is repetition, but repetition without replication”
(Hutcheon 2012: 7)

2.1. Introduction

Over the decades, comic books have been attracting more scholarly attention. Initially, academic books written on the subject focused on their history, definitions, manner of reading comics, or the way of coding information into the comic book format. In 2012, Matthew J. Smith and Randy Duncan edited a collection of essays *Critical Approaches to Comics: Theories and Methods*, which explored the possibilities of analysing comics from various theoretical perspectives, such as feminist, ethnographic, political economy or history. Jenkins, who wrote an introduction to the collection, observed that comics studies “emerged from a range of existing disciplines (Art History, Literature, Media and Cultural Studies, Gender and Ethnic Studies, Sociology, Anthropology, Economics, Philosophy), that are being mobilized to shed some light on what are variously called comics or comix, Bande Dessinée, sequential art, or graphic novel” (Jenkins 2012: 1). The medium of comics welcomes various methodologies and approaches, making it an intertextual, open, and inclusive discipline. However, adaptation theories were not included in the volume. The publication was so popular and helpful that soon the second part of the book titled *More Critical Approaches to Comics: Theories and Methods* was published in 2019. The theories adopted in the analysis in particular articles focused on

postcolonial, race, queer, New Criticism, and psychoanalyst theories. Once more, adaptation theories were absent. The two publications were to validate the maturation of the medium of comics and to prove its inclusivity and applicability regarding a variety of methodologies which can be adapted. The authors' intended purposes were fulfilled, but they still revealed areas to be addressed and covered in reference to comics studies.

Adaptations of literature in comics are not a new concept, as they have been on the market since the 1940s. Naturally, these publications have only received more scholarly attention since the turn of the 20th and 21st century. Shakespeare's plays, however, were not such popular subject matter for either comics creators or academics, but with their popularity and improved quality they have been drawing more attention. As Shaeffer and Burt (2013) stated "Shakespeare's plays of all his works, are uniquely suited to comics adaptations, as comics, graphic novels and manga tend to have the same components as do dramas, including: spoken dialogue, visible setting and props, visually foregrounded characters and action". All of these visible elements are important for the study of a comics, but the ability to categorise them through theoretical terminology is crucial. This chapter aims to fill the lacunae in the study of Shakespeare's comics from the perspective of adaptation studies.

The analytical part of the thesis centres around the phenomenon of adapting Shakespeare's plays into comics. The previous chapter defined the terms comics and adaptation comics (also a term Shakespeare comics was proposed), here the focus shifts from the comics to the phenomenon of adaptation theories in order to comprehend the process behind the adaptations better. In addition, looking back at the term adaptation comics, it is beneficial to understand the intricacies and uniqueness of the term. The process of adaptation is complex; hence, numerous aspects and definitions must be considered and discussed. This chapter focuses on three notions: Shakespeare, comics, and adaptations, trying to establish the links between the three entities, almost like a network, and provides a theoretical framework and historical background that facilitates further analysis. Hutcheon (2012:3) observes that "[i]f adaptation is perceived as 'lowering' a story (according to some imagined hierarchy of medium or genre), response is likely to be negative". The closer look at adaptation proves that the story is not 'lowered', and the quality of an adaptation (if it is even possible to discuss it in such terms) does not depend on the medium. The quote can be viewed as a reason not only for the chapter, but for the entire work, to provide a theoretical foundation and historical

background for the discussion of Shakespeare comics, and not to assess them according to stereotypes and emotions. Providing the theoretical will allow us to view adaptation comics and Shakespearean comics as an established entity within its own medium and adaptation context.

The first part of the chapter provides an overview of academic studies that have already been published on the subject of Shakespeare and comics. Publications have been divided into two categories: those which are part of essay collections (either as part of Shakespeare studies or comics studies) or articles published in academic journals. Another briefly discussed element is the presence of comics book adaptations at conferences. The short report also pinpoints common themes touched on in the publications on the subject, as well as trends and shortcomings in the works on these adaptations. It also reveals gaps in the literature that need to be amended.

This chapter discusses the adaptations of Shakespeare's plays in comics from two perspectives: theoretical, especially when discussing adaptations, and historical when discussing Shakespeare adaptations in comics. It is impossible to understand certain intricacies and changes in such adaptations without a broader context. Moreover, the analysis focuses on adaptations from the year 2000, but it is beneficial to understand the differences between older and newer ones.

The second part of the chapter is centred on the notion of adapting Shakespearean plays to the medium of comics; hence, it appears necessary to provide a theoretical background concerning the process of adaptation in general and comics and Shakespeare in particular. The theories of adaptation proposed by Hutcheon (2006) and Sanders (2006) provide a well-founded basis and a vantage point from which comic book adaptations of the literature are to be understood and scrutinised. The discussion of theories of adaptation leads to the differentiation between the notions of adaptation and appropriation and their usefulness for discussing comics adaptations. Naturally, it is impossible to address the entirety of all theories; hence, three elements that will prove pivotal in further analysis were chosen. Hutcheon's approach to adaptation as process, product and reception, modes of engagement, and also the issue of fidelity. However, the last element remains a challenging issue. On the one hand, it has been rejected as a valid reference point in adaptation studies, but it is still being used while analysing comics. Each aspect has been illustrated with examples of Shakespearean adaptations, in both film and comics.

Finally, the last part attempts to establish the relationship between comics and Shakespeare which appears to be a result of a century-long tradition of Shakespeare in visual arts, such as sketches, playbills, and posters. Before shifting attention to individual publications and series and revealing the abundance of these adaptations, there is an attempt to address and explain Shakespeare's popularity in adaptations, either film or comics. This subchapter traces the history of adaptations of Shakespeare's plays in comics, with a short description and division into adaptation or appropriation based on theories from the previous part. Since there has been no fairly complete⁶⁴ history of such works, either as part of a series or as auteur works, this subchapter attempts to fill that gap. Historical perception helps to understand the changes in the Shakespeare comics adaptation from the 1950s until today.

2.2. Shakespeare and Comics – Scholarship and Research Overview⁶⁵

Shakespeare studies, either historical studies, Shakespeare in performance, Shakespeare on screen or popular culture are established with the academia, with numerous publications – monographs, journals, articles – and conferences. However, “comics studies has no disciplinary status in the traditional sense, that is, no clear, cohesive, and self-contained disciplinary identity” (Hatfield 2010: 1)⁶⁶. Naturally, a lot has changed since 2010 and Hatfield's publication, and comics studies is becoming an established discipline with an increasing number of university courses, conferences, publications, and scholars looking at the medium from various perspectives - cognitive, semiotic, cultural, narrative, historic, and media studies. The interdisciplinary nature of this work brings together Shakespeare studies, comics studies and adaptation studies, and each subject is widely written about. However, the theoretical aspects of comics adaptations of Shakespeare's plays which are a combination of these three, are still lacking. Hence,

⁶⁴It has to be remembered that new comics appear on the market every year and in different languages, which impedes the process.

⁶⁵One of the technical issues connected with a search focusing on the Shakespeare and comics is the plethora of publications on the comic (humoristic) elements in Shakespeare which can make it more difficult to find the publications.

⁶⁶ Hatfield, actually, rejects the formation of a separate discipline of comics studies for a few reasons. Instead, he calls for an interdisciplinary, or multidisciplinary, approach so that comics studies will not be “self-contained”.

an overview of academic publications dealing with the subject will reveal the perspective from which Shakespeare adaptations in comics are approached together with niches that need to be addressed in the future.

The appearance of comic book adaptations of Shakespeare's plays has sparked the interest of librarians, educators, artists, as well as scholars from various areas and fields. As Shaeffer and Burt (2013) put it

[t]he study of Shakespeare as literature and as film needs no defence. The study of Shakespeare-related comics, on the other hand, perhaps still needs to be defended in some academic quarters. In any case, criticism of Shakespeare on film still outweighs criticism of Shakespeare in comics despite the documentation of numerous citations, allusions, and adaptations of Shakespeare in comics.

Fortunately, Shakespeare in comics or adaptations of Shakespeare plays are gaining more attention and recognition, which manifests itself through a number of researches from various theoretical perspectives carried out into the comics. Wetmore also called for more scholarly attention to comics.

I suspect the comics book, or graphic novel to use the 'serious' name for the medium, must now fill the category of newly respectable and recently serious subject of study by Shakespeareans. ... It would seem the scholarly community has finally recognised the significance of comics and especially Shakespeare in the comics, a presence that has been maintained steadily since 1950s, in ways other than negative, dismissive, or condescending. (Wetmore 2006: 171)

Wetmore calls for Shakespeare comics adaptations to be recognised and receive greater attention. The subchapter is to present the state of studies on Shakespeare and comics, the trends and potential future developments, which will allow positioning this work within a broader context, which somewhat fulfils Shaeffer and Burt's as well as Wetmore's condition. Initially, the adaptations of literature did not draw a lot of attention on the part of the academia and reviewers, and once it did, the attitude was generally negative, as stated by Schwartz (2004: 52) "[t]he bottom of the pit has been reached, I think, in the cartoon books which are called *Classics Illustrated*" (Schwartz 2004: 52). The approach started to change with the publication of *The Sandman* in 1989 with numerous references to Shakespeare, and it was even strengthened in 1991 when the story "Midsummer Night's Dream" appeared. Since then, there has been an increase in scholarly publications that focus on the links between comics and Shakespeare. The published articles and chapters in monographs are scattered across journals and books,

both from the domain of comics studies and Shakespeare studies. Comics scholars from University of Bonn have developed “Bonn Online Bibliography of Comics Research” database which facilitates searches on particular subject in comics studies. When searching the keyword “Shakespeare” 65 entries were listed⁶⁷, indicating interest in comics. However, the search is imperfect, as it includes articles where Shakespeare is used in a footnote or as an example, rather than the main subject of the article.

The overview of articles and chapters categorises them in terms of themes, motifs, and functions. Four publications could be categorised as encyclopaedic and treated as introductory works on the topic. Looking at these works chronologically, the first one is Jensen (2006) in Richard Burt’s *Shakespeares after Shakespeare: An Encyclopaedia of the Bard in Mass Media and Popular Culture* (2006) which list comic book adaptations, appropriations, references and quotations of Shakespeare in comics and are categorised according to play. In the introduction to the chapter Burt (2006: 13) stated, “Shakespeare’s comic can be assimilated to work on film and television adaptations (all are interpretations); however, I think they offer new, less text-centered ways of thinking about Shakespeare’s remediation, since they cross over into “novels” and since comics have been increasingly cinematic”, thus emphasising their hybrid nature and positioning them within greater study domain of adaptations. Unfortunately, this list has not been updated since. Another article written by Jensen (2011) is a chapter for a monograph which looks first at “Shakespeare comic book adaptations, next at some of the ways in which non-adapted stories use Shakespeare, then at a few creators who quote, paraphrase, and allude to the plays, and then finally I will examine how Shakespeare has been used as a character in comic books” (Jensen 2011: 388). Here, unlike in the previous article, Jensen aims at a somewhat analytical approach to the comics instead of a list, which is telling as far as creators, artwork, and intentions of the work are concerned. However, the scope of the analysed data is so vast that it is difficult to imagine otherwise than an introductory work. Unfortunately, this article focuses on well-known series and titles which most often attract attention.

Another article of this type which attempts to sketch a short history of Shakespeare comic book adaptations is Myklebost (2016), but once more the main focus is on the most significant works and series such as *The Sandman*, *Manga*

⁶⁷ The search was conducted on 16th August 2020.

Shakespeare series or *Pocket Classics* series. These three chapters are part books (encyclopaedia, companion, and guide) extensive in length and detail, aimed at Shakespeare scholars to popularise the topic and acknowledge their existence. The last article, Ciraulo (2021), although not a typical encyclopaedic publication, has been placed here as it discusses the covers from the first adaptations of Shakespeare's plays from *Classics Illustrated* and *Stories by Famous Authors Illustrated* and focuses on the depiction of characters, predominantly male ones. The author notices that the male characters are presented almost in a superhero fashion, with capes and muscular built, bringing the characters closer to the superheroes of Golden Age of Comics rather than flawed Shakespearean ones. She also observes that some characters shift from the superhero to the posthuman domain.

An extensive group of publications on Shakespeare and comics focus on the study and analysis of *The Sandman* by Neil Gaiman, and on two issues in particular #19 "Midsummer Night's Dream" (1991) and #75 "The Tempest" (1997). William Shakespeare, as a character, appeared in the comic book only three times, nevertheless, *The Sandman* has achieved a wide scholarly interest and the constant growth of the publications contributes to the popularity and thus attention paid to the comics. Lancaster (2000), Castaldo (2004), Pendergast (2008), Luco (2009), Brown (2009), Round (2010) all analyse Gaiman's work from various perspectives such as textuality and reality/illusion debate (Round 2010), Shakespeare within American culture (Lancaster 2000; Castaldo 2004), or mythopoeic aspect of *The Sandman*, the act or creation, author/creator debate (Lanier 2010; Grande 2008; Lancaster 2000). Naturally the attention paid to the comics is not unfounded, the highly acclaimed work has been extensively discussed and used as an example not only by Shakespeare scholars⁶⁸.

Naturally, *The Sandman* is not the only comics that has achieved scholarly attention, but it has received most of it. With the publication of numerous series, either manga or Western type of comics, which adapted Shakespeare's plays, analytical articles in journals also began to appear. Gravett (2008) wrote a paper overviewing works of an Italian artist Gianni de Luca, who adapted *Hamlet* in 1975 (he also did *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Tempest*). De Luca's style and drawmanship is inspired by theatre and Renaissance art, he developed the technique of overlapping images (in

⁶⁸ Due to Netflix 2022 series *The Sandman*, the interest in Shakespearean influences in the comics can rekindle.

Chapter 3, this technique is named embedded closure) to signify movement and thoughts it was later adopted by other artists. McConnell (2019) in his article analysed Marcia William's comics aimed at younger audience which, he observes, functions in a similar manner to Charles and Mary Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare* familiarising Shakespeare to children. McConnell is positive about comics as a medium which is productive and provides "fascinating contributions to the world of Shakespearean adaptation, and has tended to pursue innovative and interventional re-envisioning of the literature that it adapts" (McConnell 2019). He also focused on the issues of adaptations when it comes to Shakespeare and he noticed that

[t]he ability of comics medium to rise to the challenge of adapting Shakespeare has started to receive serious notice from scholars, and a small but growing subfield of Shakespearean comic book studies is underway. The dominant line of discussion in this area shares the forward-looking emphasis of Shakespearean adaptation studies, in its emphasis on the ability to transform Shakespeare's work into new formats, and subject it to new perspectives. (McConnell 2019)

Perret's article (2004) emphasises the interpretative nature of adaptations, "every comic book version of a Shakespeare play offers interpretation by the artist and the adapter. Though their aim is to introduce readers to the stories and characters entertainingly, comic book versions of Shakespeare's plays are not just illustrated digests of plots and sketches of character: inescapably, they interpret as well as inform" (Perret 2004: 73). Her work discusses a variety of publications ranging from 1950s *Classics Illustrated*, *Famous Authors Illustrated*, *Pendulum* series, or comics by Oscar Zarate; unlike the chapters by Jensen (2006), Jensen (2011), Myklebost (2016) and Ciraulo (2021) whose predominant function is to list adaptations and indicate trends, Perret attempts at analysing the comics by indicating their strengths and weaknesses and at the same time outlining the most notable comic book adaptations.

A considerable number of articles on adaptations of Shakespeare's plays have appeared in journals connected with both Shakespeare studies and comic book studies. Articles and chapters which constitute a part of a monograph are still a minority. The most notable works published in monographs are Perrett (2002), Heuman and Burt (2002), Wetmore (2006), Berninger (2010), Finlayson (2009; 2015) Christopher (2017). All of these chapters address a variety of topics. Perrett (2001) analyses textual changes in Hamlet's soliloquy "To be or not to be" and the interpretative choices of adaptors.

Heuman and Burt (2002) deconstructed the influence of Shakespeare on/in comics, both in the mainstream superhero genre as well as in adaptation comics. Berninger's (2010) article rather than an analytical work is a plan based on a workshop about teaching Gaiman's "Midsummer Night's Dream". Wetmore (2006) also overviews various series from a historical perspective but acknowledges the link between comics and other media, especially theatre. Christopher (2017) analyses *Kill Shakespeare* series adopting Genette's theory of paratexts, whereas Finlayson (2009) tackles with adaptation of *Julius Caesar* by Anthony Johnston and Brett Weldele from 2004. In a chapter from 2015, Finlayson scrutinised the sexual depiction of Desdemona in comic book adaptations. It also seems significant to mention two publications which focused on adaptation comics: Boschenhoff's monograph (2013) and Tabachnick's collection of articles (2015), but none solely focus on Shakespeare in comics, the plays most often function as one of the examples among other adaptations. To date, there has been no publication on the adaptations of Shakespeare plays.

A watershed moment for Shakespeare in comics came to being in 2013 with a publication of a special issue of *ImageText* journal "Shakespeare and Visual Rhetoric" edited by Richard Burt and Katherine Shaeffer. The issue was a collection of six articles written by various authors with different academic backgrounds. In the introduction to the special issue the editors acknowledged that

the aesthetic value of the Shakespeare-related comic book stems largely (and ironically) from what it can provide that is *not* Shakespeare... Shakespeare's plays of all his works, are uniquely suited to comic adaptations, as comics, graphic novels and manga tend to have the same components as do dramas, including: spoken dialogue, visible setting and props, visually foregrounded characters and action. (Shaeffer and Burt 2013)

Shaeffer and Burt present a positive approach towards adaptations, perceiving it as an opportunity for both comics and Shakespeare's text to reach a broader audience. Hence, the issue attempts to be as inclusive as possible by presenting books from various perspectives. Byrne (2013) positions comics within illustrated books for children, she observes adaptors and illustrators make 'visual statements' with their work and draw attention to the significance of visual rhetoric of those works. Christopher (2013) tracks and traces allusions to the plays and quotations in Grant Morrison's comics which belong to a mainstream of DC Comics. Christopher also questions the status of the text in comics and authorship. Next, Myklebost (2013) analyses *Manga Shakespeare* series

published by SelfMadeHero from two perspectives: early modern (adopting the concepts of *imitatio* and *copia*, as well as Horace's "ut pictura poesis" to discuss the role of image and text in comics) and postmodern (with the perception of notion of multimodality and "intertextual reconfiguration"). Furthermore, Neill (2013) proposed a new approach for adaptation and comics. "The use of Shakespeare in comics is more than mere adaptation. It is an attempt to stage a production of a Shakespeare play without depending on theatrical apparatus. It is putting a new face on extant material in order to transform that material to a new end" (Neill 2013). Neill seeks the analytical tools in visual rhetoric by introducing the notion of interface. The proposed tools are used in the analysis of two editions of *King Lear* (by Pollock and by Hinds), *The Tempest* (by Gaiman and from *Classical Comics* series), and *The Merchant of Venice* by Hinds. Roper (2013) also focuses on *The Tempest* but looks at two examples from *Classical Comics* and *Manga Shakespeare*, either as a pastoral romance or as colonial text.

Finally, Tondro (2013) looks at metatextuality in *Kill Shakespeare* series as far as the characters and the figure of William Shakespeare are concerned. Initially, the creators of *Kill Shakespeare*⁶⁹ were accused of laziness and of a cavalier approach towards the text; interestingly enough other writers and creators of comics based on the plays had to face similar objections. Tondro in his articles took a firm stand by stating that "[t]hese alterations to the plot, characters, and themes of Shakespeare's plays are not the work of lazy writers who need to be admonished to 'do their research'. They are, rather, revisions that create new tensions in characters divorced from their original settings" (Tondro 2013). This explanation can be extended to other authors who exercise their artistic freedom. Around the time of releasing *Kill Shakespeare* series, comics inspired a number of articles and showed a new manner of adapting (appropriating) Shakespeare's work.

Not only have comics adaptations of Shakespeare's plays become a subject of academic articles, but increasing attention is paid at conferences. Over the last few years, adaptations of the plays have been a subject of papers, e.g., Fiammetta Dionisio's paper on comics versions of sonnets "Turning Shakespeare's Sonnets into Art: An Impossible Challenge?" during European Shakespeare Research Association Congress

⁶⁹<https://bleedingcool.com/comics/recent-updates/shakespearan-scholar-and-frank-millers-girlfriend-blasts-kill-shakespeare/>

in Gdańsk (2017), Delilah Bermudez Brataas presented “Gods and Monsters: The Shifting Presence of Shakespeare and his World in Graphic Novels” at ESRA 2019 in Rome. These are just a few examples, but they indicate interest in comics outside the domain of comics studies and an interest in Shakespeare studies.

Undoubtedly, comics adaptations of Shakespeare’s plays have attracted scholarly attention from various areas, starting with educators and librarians and ending with literature scholars, Shakespeare scholars, and comics scholars. Their interest has contributed to the rise of publications concerning either the issues connected with adaptations in general, tracing the history of Shakespeare adaptations and analyses of particular titles. However, the scholarship of the subject appears to be scattered, and terminology used to describe the medium is heterogeneous at times which may be confusing. Although the special issue of *ImageText* was a significant event in the domain of Shakespeare comics which outlined the history and trends, it did not address or discuss multiple other issues and works. Until now, no monograph has studied either a single series of comics or a single play in various adaptations. It can be assumed that comics will continue to attract the attention of scholars and with them, adaptations of the plays; however, the analysis of the already published works is necessary not only to organise the current ones, but to lay the foundations and basis for future studies as well. The reason for this short overview of research on Shakespeare in comics is twofold, it indicates the lacunae in the research to be filled in the future as well as the needs for a more comprehensive publication, one which bring together and explain comics terminology, theories of adaptation, and knowledge concerning Shakespearean adaptations. This study attempts to provide comprehensive work which addresses these needs. Moreover, most of the publications which have been analysed are well-known titles, whereas this dissertation analyses less-known publications which have not been previously subjected to an analysis. Shakespeare in comics and comics adaptations of Shakespeare’s plays are dynamic topics which are attracting attention hence a number of publications is increasing. As a result, this short overview is by no means exhaustive but tries to show trends and main areas of interest, and also positions this work within a greater scope of publications.

2.3. Comics within the Domain of Adaptation Studies

A work which analyses the presence of Shakespeare in comics, or is heavily inspired by his works, is bound, sooner or later, to be examined through the perspective of adaptation theories as an analytical tool. Adaptations used to be perceived as limited only to a transposition⁷⁰ of a literary work to film, but following adaptation studies and theories helps avoid this fallacy. Fortunately, adaptation studies favour a much broader perception and approach towards the phenomena, as they are not limited solely to film adaptation. Bickley and Stevens (2021: 2) have observed that sooner or later any medium that is involved in the adaptation process reaches out for Shakespeare, thus it was a matter of time before Shakespeare comics appeared. As Linda Hutcheon has observed, numerous media, including electronic media, can become part of the adaptive process and the direction does not need to be unidirectional, because any source text can be transposed into another medium in postmodern times (2012: xiii). Hutcheon calls for stepping off the beaten track and welcomes adaptations across different media: a film can be turned into a novel, a computer game can become a film or a book, or even a theme park, a painting, or a poem can constitute a basis for other works - human creativity is the limit. Hence, comics and graphic narratives often play an active role in the process of adaptation, either as a source text or an adaptive medium. The cinema quickly reached out for popular superhero stories and characters from Marvel and DC Comics universes and turned them into blockbuster popular culture idols (the highest grossing franchises are film adaptations of superhero comics).

Television was not far behind, and streaming services started to create a series which supplemented the pantheon of superheroes from both MCU and DCU. However, the superhero genre is not the only one of interest in cinema and television, as many

⁷⁰ Sanders (2006) in her book on adaptations draws attention to the multiplicity of vocabulary that is used in reference to adaptations and adaptation studies, she mentions “version, variation, interpretation, continuation, transformation, imitation, pastiche, parody, forgery, travesty, transposition, revaluation, revision, rewriting, echo” (2016: 18) and also “proximation, supplement, increment, improvisation, prequel, sequel, ..., addition, paratext, hypertext, palimpsest, graft,... reworking, re-fashioning, re-vision, re-evaluation” (2016: 3). Bickley and Stevens (2021: 1) add to the plethora of terms and increase “afterlife, augmentation, amplification; or translation, transformation, transmutation; or reimagining, reinvention, revision, recontextualization, re-envisioning; or meme, mashup, offshoot, remix, remediation?”. The terms just seem to mushroom without adding much to the discussion. Later, Elliott (2020: 182-183) made an overview and a list of notions which are used in publications about adaptations; not only was the list long but most of the terms and synonyms seem to have negative connotations. Despite extensive taxonomy the term ‘adaptation’ is the most approved of and widely used.

graphic narratives have been transformed into successful films and series⁷¹. Film adaptations and now also TV series adaptations of comics are a significant part of comics studies⁷² (Brown 2016; Burke 2015; Fisher 2017; Szyłak 2000). Comics is a medium which readily adapts films and novels, but it also responds to the popularity of films, TV series, and novels becomes a commercial and financial opportunity for the comics to adapt them. Thus, in the case of comics, the direction of adaptation functions in both ways. The success of *Game of Thrones* resulted in comics adaptations which were often redrawn film stills with limited artistic input on the part of the author and/or artist. Another example is *The Witcher* which was quite quickly adapted to comics (2014) and then again later to a TV series (2019–ongoing), not to mention the Polish film adaptation (2001) and video games. With renewed interest in the series, the comics have sparked interest among fans.

The relationships between comics and other media, such as literature, film, and theatre, have already been explored; the hybrid nature of comics appears to be a contributory factor which only inspires and facilitates the creation of adaptations. Bolton has noticed that “hybrid narration provides an opportunity for comics artists to be faithful to the source material they adapt, while at the same time bringing their own innovations to their adaptation” (Bolton 2011). His statement may raise some issues concerning fidelity, which are often discussed within the domain of adaptation studies; however, he does notice the possibilities that comics medium can provide. Comics adaptations of Shakespeare’s plays are the subject matter of this dissertation; hence, it is pivotal to refer to adaptation theories as well as to discuss the basic terms related to the topic in order to make the analysis more extensive and comprehensive.

⁷¹ Examples not of the mainstream, but still well-known graphic narrative which were adapted to film or TV series are *Ghost World* by Daniel Clowes, *Persepolis* by Marjane Satrapi, *V for Vendetta* by Alan Moore, Frank Miller’s *Sin City*, *Tamara Drew* by Posy Simmonds, or *The Walking Dead* by Robert Kirkman and many more.

⁷² Among the most popular TV series from DC are *Arrow* (2012-2020; *Gotham* (2014-2019), *The Flash* (2014-2023), *Supergirl* (2015-2021), *Titans* (2018-2023) just to name few. The series are popular for cross-overs, with characters from one series appearing in another, and also they create its own smaller universes like for example *Arrowverse*. Marvel Comics began their adaptations in 20th century with film and the decision to create series was later and on a smaller scale and spread across various TV platforms: *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D* (2013-2020), *Agent Carter* (2015-2016), *Inhumans* (2017) appeared on ABC Television, then later *Daredevil* (2015-2018), *Jessica Jones* (2015-2019) and *Luke Cage* (2016-2018) and *Iron Fist* (2017-2018) on Netflix only later to be consolidated and shift to Disney with *WandaVision* (2021), *Loki* (2021- ongoing) *The Falcon and the Winter Soldier* (2021) and other were added. In the case of Marvel Universe both films and TV series constitute one huge world.

Despite the popularity and widespread presence of adaptations, most publications dealing with the subject attempt to formulate a definition; however, it appears that the term remains elusive and complex, regardless of the attention it has received. Most scholars who focus on adaptations suggest their own definitions and understanding of the term, draw attention to its theoretical background (such as intertextuality, intersemiotics, and translation theories), attempt to understand the processes that take as well as present case studies⁷³. Moreover, Myklebost (2014) highlights the relationship between adaptation and postmodernism, hence “recycling, sampling, fragmentation and recombination” are tools characteristic of contemporary adaptations. Intertextuality is the predominant theoretical influence on adaptation, but not the only one, Myklebost (2014) mentions closeness to intermediality, genetic criticism, and meme theory. The abundance and variety of existing definitions permit the choice of one which best reflects the necessary adaptive situation; hence, the definition adopted here is based on a variety of others. However, as the analysis deals with comics which adapt Shakespeare’s plays, the nomenclature related to adaptations, especially the one that will be significant from the standpoint of comics, should be introduced and discussed more thoroughly.

The term itself poses difficulty in formulating a definition; hence, numerous scholars have been struggling with it, attempting to find a substitute for the notion and create their own. Kamilla Elliot (2020: 179) observed that “adaptation resists theoretical definition, [and] definition is akin to adaptation: both [issues] establish relations by navigating similarities and differences between entities and related others and by relations of entities to their contexts”. Elliot also notices the difficulty in constructing a functioning definition, but for her the key element of adaptation is the relationships between texts and contexts. Despite her reluctance to formulate a definition, Elliot cuts and adapts definitions proposed by various scholars to construct a single working understanding of the term (Elliot 2020: 198-199), but without a deep explanation. Thomas Leitch also observes that it is easier to state what is not an adaptation than what it constitutes. “After reviewing the problems involved in organizing the discipline more rigorously, adaptation scholars may well decide to defer the question of what isn’t an

⁷³ A historical overview of theories and approaches towards adaptation was presented in Leitch (2017:1-20) where he presented an evolution of adaptation as an academic discipline, together with the stages of development and main issues adaptation studies were and have been preoccupied. Leitch’s article functions as an introduction to the field, hence it is unnecessary to repeat and summarise it here.

adaptation indefinitely. After all, no matter how they answer that question, they will be imposing new disciplinary constraints on a field that may well flourish more successfully when a thousand flowers bloom” (Leitch 2012: 103). The redefined definition works more as a summary or compilation of various approaches which can be explored further rather than a single and quotable statement. Leitch also seems to delegate responsibility to the audience in order to decide whether a work is an adaptation, particularly one that is not overtly acknowledged by the creator. However, the definition is too long to be fully recalled in certain elements that are to be discussed and used in reference to Shakespeare, and comics require some degree of explanation.

Adaptation studies focus on processes, ideologies, and methodologies that are often specifically tuned to film adaptations. Due to the close relationship between comics and film, the observations concerning film adaptations are repurposed to discuss comics adaptations. Although observations and theories concerning film adaptations are helpful in the discussion of comics adaptations, there is a need not only to include comics in a discussion of adaptations, but also to consider the elements which are unique to them. Comics operate on two sets of sign systems, the verbal and the visual; regarding the sign system of the source text, it impacts the adaptive process. The verbal element of Shakespeare’s play is transformed and included in the visual element of the comics panel (the image). In other words, the word becomes an image as it is composed of and may become an inalienable element. Comics adaptations use more than one sign system, and create their own medium-specific mode of storytelling⁷⁴. Comics adaptations, including Shakespeare comics adaptations, deserved their own theoretical framework, which is not a copy-paste form film adaptation theory⁷⁵. “The inter-artistic operations of transforming one signifying system into another (Shakespeare’s dramatic imagery into a musical score, for example) can produce invigorating new perspectives, contributing to an ever-evolving process of reception and reactivity” (Bickley and Stevens 2021: 6). This observation also refers to the Shakespeare comics.

⁷⁴ See more in 2.3.3 Modes of engagement subchapter.

⁷⁵ Bickle and Stevens (2021: 7-8) refer in their book to André Bazin who “was developing cinema’s own theoretical frameworks and terminologies, insisting that screen adaptations should not attempt to replicate the form and style of the literary text but, instead, should apply film’s own signifying codes to capture equivalences”. The same applies to comics adaptations and the formation of adaptation comics framework.

Bruhn et. Al. (2013: 1-16) indicated five issues⁷⁶ which they believe should be explained and which will prove useful in further discussions of adaptations. Not all of them are significant for the discussion of Shakespeare comics; hence, the following subchapters will focus on defining and discussing the notions of adaptation and appropriation, and will also refer to issues concerning perceiving adaptation as a process and product, modes of engagement, fidelity issue, and dialogic processes. These elements will constitute a basis for the discussion concerning adaptation and appropriation, and Shakespeare's place in adaptation studies.

2.3.1. Adaptation vs Appropriation

Adaptation studies have been struggling with terminology and definitions. Throughout the years, there have been attempts to introduce terms such as variation, version, interpretation, imitation, continuation, addition, reworking, refashioning, or re-vision - all of which refer to, or function synonymously to adaptation⁷⁷. To discuss adaptation and the already complex terminology, Sanders proposed the notion of appropriation (2006: 3), and tried to clearly differentiate it from adaptation. However, appropriation can never fully function separately from its sister term, to which it is compared and contrasted. Iyengar (2023: 47) observes that adaptations and appropriations “rely upon or derive from previously copyrighted works, but to different degrees”, to what degree she means remains unclear. The degree of the relationship seems to depend on the adaptor, as well as the audience. Sanders also provides the most straightforward understanding of the term by confronting it with adaptation.

An adaptation signals the relationship with an informing source text or original. ... On the other hand, appropriation frequently affects a more decisive journey away from the informing source into a wholly new cultural product and domain. ... But the appropriated text or texts are not always as clearly signalled or acknowledged as in the adaptive

⁷⁶ The five areas are: question of fidelity, broader variety of media relations, adaptation as a multilevel relationship, adaptation is a two-way dialogic process, global theoretical frameworks used in adaptations studies (Bruhn et.al. 2013: 1-16)

⁷⁷ The discussion and a list of alternative definitions used in adaption studies was discussed in chapter 2.3.

process. They may occur in far less straightforward context than is evident in making a film version of a canonical play. (Sanders 2006: 26)⁷⁸

For Sanders, the crucial and decisive element, whether a work is an adaptation or an appropriation, is a clear recognition of the relationship to the source text. Later, she notices that “appropriation is frequently involved in a process of reading between the lines, offering analogues or supplements to what is available in a source text, and drawing attention to its gaps and absences” (Sanders 2006: 60). However, the simple acknowledgement of the link to the source text, usually in the form of preserving the title or names of the characters, may be an unreliable and insufficient factor. Although it may work better in the film industry (for example *My Private Idaho*, *Kiss Me Kate*, *West Side Story* or *10 Things I Hate About You*) with films (re)working on the plot of the play, but again not acknowledging the link with a Shakespearean play. In comics, appropriations of Shakespeare’s plays tend to preserve the link to the titles and characters’ names. Hence, comics appropriations rework Shakespearean plots and characters but do not sever the link with the source. A quick overview of some comics appropriations, for example, *Kill Shakespeare* by Conor McCreery and Anthony Del Col, *Julius* by Anthony Johnson and Brett Weldele, *No Hold Bard* by Eric Gladstone to name just few, reveals that the titles sustain the relationship with a Shakespearean text or to the figure of Shakespeare himself, but they are not direct references to the play titles. *Prince of Cats* by Ronald Wimberly is also a title which operates on associations with the direct references from *Romeo and Juliet* (2.4, 18), Mercutio calls Tybalt “Prince of Cats”. Surprisingly, comics appropriations are able to play with the text on many levels, bringing together characters from various plays in order to use them to create a new story. Comics appropriations approach the text freely, altering and promoting the artistic freedom of auteur artists. *Kill Shakespeare* is a fair example of an amalgam of the text, the plots, the characters and Shakespeare. The main protagonist, Hamlet, is charged with a quest from Richard III to find and kill the bard, on his way he meets other characters and falls in love with Juliet. At first, it might seem that McCreery and Del Col just used the Shakespearean characters without any aim of thought, but they acknowledge the characters’ background and backstory, the choices they have or

⁷⁸ At another time Sanders sustains her perception that “appropriation does not always make its founding relationships and interrelationships as clear as these plays with named, embedded texts” (Sanders 2006: 32).

have not made, and they reevaluate them. *Kill Shakespeare* is a true example of an appropriation which bases its premise on speculation, on the ‘what if’. Speculation concerning the characters’ past choices as well as future choices *Kill Shakespeare* follows Sanders’ idea of appropriation; it preserves a loose connection with the text, and although, in this case, the title and the characters’ names, it creates a new story and only sometimes echoes the source text.

Another definition of appropriation was delivered by Corrigan who believed that “[a]ppropriations are transformative adaptations that remove part of one form or text (or even a whole) from their original context and insert them in a different context that dramatically reshape the meaning” (Corrigan 2017: 26). As with the discussion focused around Hutcheon’s (2012) modes of engagement and the three processes of adaptation, appropriation also burdens the audience with the responsibility to trace the intricacies of adaptations and appropriations in order to experience and derive pleasure from the work. Comparing the two definitions of appropriation, Sander’s and Corrigan’s, they are not very different; they both stress the aspect of reworking and reshaping the story, but Corrigan does not mention the need to sever ties to the original source. Hence, it seems that both view appropriations in a similar manner as a more liberal approach to the understanding of the text. An appropriation which would fill Corrigan’s idea of a new context is *Julius* by Anthony Johnson and Brett Weldele, which retells the story of Julius Ceaser, or rather a murder of a gang boss of the contemporary East End in London. The names of most characters have been changed and the link, a rather weak one, is the title and a quotation from the original text at the beginning of each chapter/act. Again, the story works on its own without previous knowledge of Shakespeare’s play. It is through the auteur’s acknowledgement that this link becomes clear.

Desmet and Iyengar (2015) took on themselves to clarify and polish the definitions of adaptation and appropriation. They suggested looking at the terms from a broader historical perspective.

To some extent, the distinction between these terms depends on a historical contingency: adaptation became prominent because of its use in film studies, appropriation because of its association not only with cultural materialist Shakespeare studies of the 1980s but also with ongoing studies of art, collecting, and the internet in a global context. The terms originate within different cultural spheres and are influenced by the praxis and attendant discourse from these spheres. (Desmet and Iyengar 2015: 11)

According to Desmet and Iyengar, appropriations are later developments, and their observations seem to accord with the comics appropriations of Shakespeare. Again, the first example of appropriation is Gaiman's work which has already been discussed. A suitable environment inspired the creation of appropriation, which was a minority in comparison to adaptations.

The discussion concerning the theories of adaptation and appropriation has its source in intertextuality or dialogic relations among texts, as indicated by Hutcheon (2012: xvi), which have already been touched upon. Both adaptation and appropriation welcome allusion, pastiche, quotation, parody, or translation of previous works⁷⁹; however, the latter term in some extent embraces such genre changes, merging texts and introducing greater alterations and deviations from the source text. Comics is a prolific and absorptive medium; hence, adaptations in this particular medium constitute an interesting phenomenon to be researched from the perspective of the adaptation/appropriation theory. Moreover, comics seems to welcome intertextuality and can be used at both verbal and visual levels. Due to the specific way in which comics are read, the reader is able to trace the intertextual references, both the verbal and the visual, much easier than in other media such as film. Comics can embed an image or refer to other images such as paintings or pictures. For example, an oil painting of Lady Macbeth by John Singer Sargent (1889) titled *Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth* can be found in *Campfire Classics: Macbeth* by Bhansal and Kumar (2011: 15). In the original painting, Lady Macbeth puts a crown onto her head, in this intertextual reference she is lifting her hands in a triumphant gesture while reading the letter from her husband; the crown is missing from the image. Interestingly, the intertextual reference is not acknowledged.

Moreover, the process of appropriation welcomes a greater degree of artistic freedom towards the text. As Bickley and Stevens (2021: 2) observed “[a]ppropriative

⁷⁹ Julia Kristeva's notion of intertextuality is influenced by de Saussure's semiology and Bakhtin's dialogism. “Kristeva is concerned with the manner in which is constructed out of already existent discourse. Authors do not create their texts from their own minds, but rather compile them from pre-existent texts” (Allen 2000: 35), and in Kristeva's (1980: 36) own words a text is “a permutation of texts, an intertextuality: in the space of a given text several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and neutralize one another.” No text fully exists in void, initially it is inspired by previous text in order to become a part of the discourse and inspire future texts. Shakespeare, for example, is said to have been inspired by texts he had read and re-wrote them, most of his plays are based on other plays, chronicles and Greek mythology; nowadays Shakespeare's works function themselves as an inspiration for new works and adaptations. The contemporary adaptations, regardless of the medium in which they were made have been inspired by at least one text and may become an inspiration for the future ones.

activity has also long been transcultural, so the great auteurs of twentieth century film – Kozintsev, Kurosawa, Welles – have also followed in this tradition”. It seems that comics embraces the auteur and transcultural approaches. Comics adaptations, or rather appropriations, represent the more auteur approach, such as Enki Bilal’s *Julia & Roem* (2011) or Ronald Wimberly’s *Prince of Cats* (2012) rework the story of Romeo and Juliet in two distinct geopolitical and historical setting. Bilal creates a post-apocalyptic dystopian future where people are trying to survive, and the two young lover re-enact the story of the star-crossed lovers as written by Shakespeare, actually Father Lawrence is the only characters who notices it because he had acted at school in *Romeo and Juliet*. Wimberly takes on a different setting, the one of New York of the 1980s and gangs who fight using samurai swords. The story focuses more on the relationship between Tybalt and Rosalyn instead of Romeo and Juliet, but whose actions impact the life of the first couple. There is a tradition of adapting and appropriating Shakespeare to manga which also requires cultural change. Although manga is not the subject of this analysis, it is worth mentioning the *Manga Shakespeare* series. Each instance of the series reworks the original plot, setting it in various cultural, geographical, and historical contexts; for example, *King Lear* is set among the First Nations in America, or Macbeth in post-apocalyptic Tokyo. Appropriations welcome the auteur approach towards the text, often update it, show it in a new light, or suggest a new interpretation.

The two terms, adaptation and appropriation, should not be perceived as binary oppositions but as notions complementing each other and hinting at their relationship to the text. A creator cannot and should not be limited by the text which has functioned as an inspiration; hence, a text can be both adapted and appropriated at the same time within the same work, but the changes will naturally occur on various levels. A fair example provided by Sanders (2006: 28) herself, illustrating the adaptation-appropriation dynamics, is *Kiss me Kate*, a musical in which theatrical actors attempt to perform *The Taming of the Shrew* on stage (adaptation), but off-stage they unwarily and subconsciously re-enact the plot of the play (appropriation), the musical was made into a film in 1953, which is another medium change.

In comics, similar adaptation-appropriation dynamics is reflected in Gaiman’s *The Sandman* series in the short story “Midsummer Night’s Dream #19” (1990). The adaptation process takes place on two levels; the first one is an open-air performance of *Midsummer Night’s Dream* with historical figures such as William Kemp, Richard

Burbage, Henry Condell and William Shakespeare himself as actors, but they perform the play in front of an audience composed of mythical fairies. The events of the play are reflected in the relationships between the fairies; they comment on an imprecise depiction of themselves. *Midsummer Night's Dream* is appropriated and adapted to show a juncture between fairies and humans, with Dream, the main protagonist of the entire series between them. What takes place on stage is reflected among the audience members, they reflect each other. The story unfolds in front of the audience, with the performance of the play, and 'backstage', as the actors prepare and experience their own dramas and tragedies. Shakespeare struggles with the financial side of running a theatre as well as the acting skills of his fellow actors. Shakespeare fails to bond with his son Hamnet, to whom real Titania has taken a liking and desires to take him to the land of fairies. This particular moment is crucial in terms of adaptation; on the one hand, it is a reference to an Indian boy from the play, the source of conflict between Oberon and Titania, as well as real Hamnet who died in 1596. The adaptation brings together stories of a number of levels, the fictive biography of Shakespeare – the playwright and the actor—the story of *Midsummer Night's Dream*, the story of the fairies who cross the borders between their world and the human world, and the story of Dream for whom the play has been written and who gave Shakespeare his talent. Gaiman's short story has proven to play a more significant role in popularising adaptations of Shakespeare's plays, not only into comics, but it still remains one of the most significant works exploring the nodes between comics, literature, and mythology. *The Sandman* sparked wider interest and opened the discussion concerning the unique potential of comics to adapt literature.

Adaptation scholars and their definitions of adaptation and appropriation have become foundations for discussing particular examples of films or comics. It also shows that adaptation comics would benefit from its own separate framework and terminology.

2.3.1.1. Adaptation and appropriation in Shakespeare comics

Adaptations and appropriations are, to some extent, dependent on the literary canon or the temporary popularity of a work, regardless of its form, either a film, a novel, or comic book. Shakespeare's work, which is naturally a part of the literary canon, studies

has gained a notable position within adaptation studies and “has provided a crucial touchstone for the scholarship of appropriation as a literary practice and form” (Sanders 2006: 45-46). Sanders was not the first one to notice the manner in which adaptation studies treated Shakespeare. Before her Lanier (2002: 21) claimed that “Shakespeare’s special status in the literary canon springs from a complex history of appropriation and reappropriation, through which his image and works have been repeatedly recast to speak to the purposes, fantasies, and anxieties of various historical moments”. A couple of years later in an article Lanier (2007) discussed the commercial and advertisable power of Shakespeare and Shakespeare’s likeness, but his observations can be extended not only to products, he states that “adding Shakespeare’s face to a product has become a means for adding value, both of certain connotations and, consequently, of commodity value, but in the process of adding value (and values) of the Shakespeare brand have been preserved, extended, and transformed” (Lanier 2007: 94). Although Lanier talks about adding value to products and commodities, his observations extend to other/new media, in this case comics. Over the course of years, film or comics have reached out for Shakespeare to improve its status, which only adds to the already mentioned ‘special status’. Neill also notices Shakespeare special status: “[t]he use of Shakespeare in comics is more than mere adaptation. It is an attempt to stage a production of a Shakespeare play without depending on theatrical apparatus. It is putting a new face on extant material in order to transform that material to a new end” (Neill 2013). Neill actually makes a valid point concerning adaptations and appropriations of Shakespeare’s plays in comics as most of the reworking attempt to preserve the link with the theatrical roots of the play or suggest that the page works as a stage. The sign that reappears in many adaptations and appropriations is the curtain (*Hamlet* Nicky Greenberg, *Hamlet* Frank Flöthmann, *Richard the Third* Kev F. Sutherland, *Kill Shakespeare* Conor McCreery, *The Stratford Zoo: Macbeth* Zack Giallongo and Ian Lender), or in most cases there is a *dramatis personae* (which is a publishing element, but often connected with theatrical plays). For comics, the link with the theatre and theatrical productions is important for validation reasons. Moreover, Neill continues, Shakespeare and his plays are the stable elements which allow comparisons within and among the (unstable/fluid) adaptations, and the way they adaptations/appropriations are able to contribute to the interpretative discussions.

Bickley and Stevens (2021) ask in a similar tone to Lanier and Neill about the popularity of Shakespeare as a source of reworkings. “Why Shakespeare? Is it simply because of cultural capital or because the plays possess a certain ‘palimpsestuous’ quality that invites further exploration? It could be argued, as Linda Hutcheon does, that adaptation prolongs the life of the original: reinvention creates renewal.” (Bickley and Stevens 2021: 2). They believe that Shakespeare is a cultural phenomenon which is perceived and understood differently by each generation, time period, or even political system. They seem to echo Jan Kott’s concept of perceiving Shakespeare as our contemporary, still able to comment on problems of the modern human and the modern world, and for them, the adaption of an Early Modern English text is an expression of it. Transferring this observation to the history of Shakespeare comics reveals that over the years, adaptations and appropriations have been fulfilling the imposed roles. For example, the adaptation series *Classics Illustrated*, *Stories by Famous Authors Illustrated*, and the more contemporary ones, *Classical Comics*, all have didactic purposes and are used in the classroom. As a result, the depiction of the plot is not violent or drastic, but one that will not offend the reader. Newer adaptations, particularly those which are auteur work, do not avoid depicting brutality, murder, or rape, which are present in the plays. *Macbeth* is a fair example; although the plot and the language remain unchanged, the more contemporary adaptations depict the storyworld in a more literal way, leaving less and less to the imagination of the reader.

Shakespeare has had a long tradition of being re-written ever since 16th century, of which Taylor (1990) writes quite extensively and traces the whole history of adapting Shakespeare’s plays ever since 1642. Nowadays, Shakespeare is hailed as one of the greatest writers, but the originality ascribed to his works should be questioned. Shakespeare was a great adapter himself, what he had read and had seen on stage, as well as myths, historical chronicles and other plays, found their way into his own work. Interestingly enough, out of the number of Early Modern English dramas, only Shakespeare has gained exponential popularity in postmodern times and has been granted the ‘special status’. Sanders (2006: 45-62) attempts to find and refer to Shakespeare’s uniqueness, the plays have proved themselves to be susceptible to cultural, topical and temporal changes, the motifs, characters and plots make the works of Shakespeare “fit for new cultural contexts and different political ideologies” (Sanders 2006: 46); films such as Kurosawa’s *Throne of Blood* (1957) set in feudal Japan,

Richard III (1995) by Richard Loncraine with Nazi and totalitarian undertones, *Romeo + Juliet* (1996) by Baz Luhrmann – a modernised version with gangs, drugs and guns in the background, Almereyda's *Hamlet* (2000) set in New York with Denmark not as a country, but a corporation, Abela's *Makibefo* (2001) set in Madagascar and acted by indigenous people and finally Ralph Fiennes's *Coriolanus* (2011) transposing the plot to a modern warfare with references to the Yugoslav Wars, these are just few examples of films which made Shakespeare's plays topical and modernised for the contemporary viewer. They represent chosen instances of transposing and modernising Shakespeare's plays for the contemporary viewer. Naturally, the discussion focusing on the perpetuity of the plays mostly centres around film and cinematography, which are most widely used as examples. According to Burt (2006: 10)

comic book adaptations tend to be among the most conservative in any medium; characters from Shakespeare, for example, are almost always in period dress. The conservatism is only partly explicable in terms of comic books' censorship and the low regard in which comics were held in the 1950s when Dr Frederic Wertham's *Seduction of the Innocent* had wide currency and led to the introduction of the Comics Code Authority.

Since the 1980s and Gaiman's work, comic book adaptations have started to avert conservatism. Creators have turned to greater innovative approaches and artistic freedom, experimentation with the medium, and mise-en-scene which revealed the potential to reflect and respond to socio-political situations and contexts. Adapters have started to pay more attention to the potential of literature and dramatic texts in particular, and they have become a test ground for experimentation. Moreover, plays have proven to be flexible enough to adopt various modes, genres, and styles, and they stand the test of time in the manner in which modern audiences transpose them and remake them into genres which are closer to the contemporary viewer/reader. *Macbeth*, for example, can be made into a realistic film, like Polanski's *Macbeth* from 1971, theatrical one like Nunn's (1979)⁸⁰, or remade into a new genre i.e., Wright's *Macbeth* from 2006, set as gang wars in Australia or the retold version from 2005 directed by Brozel, which depicted Macbeth as a sous chef. These examples corroborate the

⁸⁰ Initially, it was a theatrical performance only later developed for television. The theatrical conventions that can be seen in the screen are the direct result of it. The television version was directed by Philip Casson.

flexibility and possibility of depicting the same play in various genres and styles, but at the same time preserve the plot, focusing on characters' choices and emotions.

Naturally, the approach is not solely unique to film as a similar tendency can be observed in comics. It has already been mentioned that appropriations in comics are among the more creative works, introducing alterations to the setting and the plot, a work of an auteur creative mind. Among the works most often altered, updated and modernised in comics is *Romeo and Juliet*; among the most distinguishable works is Enki Bilal's (2011) *Julia&Roem*, in which the story of the star-crossed lovers is set in post-apocalyptic circumstances. Similarly, science-fictional and post-humanistic is *Romeo and Juliet: the War* (2011) by Stan Lee et al. in which Verona is a name of a planet where two clans rival with each other, in a more cyberpunk trend. The two families represent two ideologies: the Montagues, who allow mechanical alteration in the human body, and the Capulets, who avoid them. Another example, but of a different play, is provided by Johnson and Weldele's *Julius* (2004), which retold *Julius Caesar* as a mafia king of the East End, not only changing the setting, but also introducing racial diversification and questioning the norms concerning colour-blind casting. *Manga Shakespeare* series edited by Richard Appignanesi provided the greatest number of appropriations which altered and modernised the plot; most of the 14 plays have been rewritten into a style of Japanese manga, but preserved an iota of independence regardless the conventions of the medium. The authors of each manga have put in a great deal of thought and creativity to make the plays enticing for contemporary readers, and what is more, to prove that the stories and characters are still reliable and thought provoking. Another example is a 2020 adaptation of *Hamlet* by Sutherland titled *Prince of Denmark Street* and in the setting of musicians (Kev F. Sutherland has appropriated four plays so far) and a recording studio and music shop substitute a kingdom. This adaptation allowed itself a certain degree of freedom in reference to the ending; nevertheless, the author respects the source text, the plot and the language. Shakespeare and his works have passed the test of time - the film adaptations, comic books, and not discussed here novelisations, memes, internet clips, all these instances extend the creativity and perception of adaptations. The role of Shakespeare in popular culture is undeniable of which Lanier said that

It's obvious that Shakespeare is everywhere in popular culture. Movies, television, radio, pulp fiction, musical, pop music, children's books, advertisements, comic books, toys,

computer games, pornography: nearly every imaginable category of contemporary pop culture features examples of Shakespearean allusion or adaptations. And yet for most observers Shakespeare, as *the* icon of high or 'proper' culture, seems to stand apart from popular culture (Lanier 2002: 3).

Adaptation studies is a vast topic with numerous approaches, methodologies, and case studies of single authors or titles, as well as various media and genres. Shakespeare is widely studied within adaptations, particularly in film (which actually constitutes a separate domain of Shakespeare on film). The number and popularity of adaptations of Shakespeare in comics is on the rise; hence, the discussion lays the foundation for further discussion and analysis which will adopt and refer to terminology explained here.

The discussion concerning Shakespeare comics raises another issue concerning which texts and which plays are adapted and appropriated. Sanders (2006) tried to identify the canon which is most often adapted and appropriated in films and novels, mentioning *The Tempest*, *Othello*, and *Hamlet* as three texts which leave most space and leeway for interpretation and reworking. However, it seems that the notion of the canon functions differently in comics. The plays that are transformed into comics most often are *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, and *Romeo and Juliet*, closely followed by *The Tempest*⁸¹. Comics adaptors have a tendency to turn to more recognisable plays, which are a part of the curriculum (the didactic perception of comics adaptations is still strong). The most popular comedy is *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, probably due to its status as the most recognisable Shakespeare's comedy. There are plays, regardless of a genre, which have never been turned into a comics, for example histories (Richard II or Henry VI 1,2,3) are among the least adapted works; Pericles, Troilus and Cressida or Coriolanus have never been adapted; from among the comedies *Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Measure for Measure*, or *All's Well that End Well* have also been overlooked. The comics canon seems to be based more on the general recognisability and popularity of the plays. Interestingly, auteur creators reach out more for popular titles, whereas the series are more inclusive and open for the other ones. Manga Shakespeare series made an interesting decision of adapting *Henry VIII* and re-introduced the text into the canon, which might not have been viewed in the same way if done by an auteur creator.

⁸¹ See subchapter 2.4 on the history of Shakespeare comics and Appendix 1 listing the adaptations.

The history and tradition of Shakespeare comics have been long, varied, and rich, and scholars from multiple angles and fields have been attempting to position those works within a broader academic and aesthetic perspective or context as well as study them adopting methodological tools derived or borrowed from philosophy, literary studies, film studies, and others. The overview of the theories of adaptation and appropriation was to provide a theoretical background for the analysis of comics but also to function as one of the limiting factors for selecting the research materials for the analysis. Based on the overview provided in chapter 2.2 which looked at the state of the research in comics and Shakespeare, it is possible to conclude that comics which are most often studied and analysed are those which are part of series either *Classical Comics*, *Classics Illustrated* (both series known as adaptations in which the image functions more as an illustration of the text which does not work well in comics), or Neil Gaiman's stories from *The Sandman*. However, observing the multitude of adaptations, both as part of a series or auteur, presenting different approaches towards the source text, the works published in the 21st century deserve greater attention than they receive, and this work attempts to fill the lacunae.

2.3.2. Adaptations as Process and Product

One of the first issues connected with adaptation is its perception as “a product and a process of creation and reception” (Hutcheon 2012: xvi)⁸², which allows viewing the phenomenon from a broader sense by dividing adaptation into three stages. First, the process – the manner in which adaptation is created – leads to a product which is subsequently received by the audience. Corrigan (2017) attempts to understand these notions more deeply. Adaptation as a process signifies how “one or more entities are reconfigured or adjusted through their engagement with or relationship to one or more other texts or objects” (Corrigan 2017: 23). In other words, it would draw more attention to the creation process on the part of the adaptor who consciously chooses both the text, or texts, to be adapted, as well as the medium and genre. Adaptors who choose a Shakespearean text to be adapted and comics as their medium should make it

⁸² Similar approach can be seen in Cardwell (2002).

consciously and be able to justify their choice. Adaptation as a product scrutinises the changes, insertions, and omissions within the plot, as well as a blend of various genres. Finally, “adaptation as an act of reception in which the reading or viewing of that work is actively adapted as a specific form of enjoyment and understanding. From this angle, readers may understand that different works operate differently for different readers depending on their background, while a community may assimilate or not assimilate a new member of that culture in different ways” (Corrigan 2017: 23). Furthermore, adaptation as a product also burdens the audience to notice, acknowledge, and interpret it. Myklebost (2014) also discusses the idea of adaptation as an interpretation but also adds to it the inevitability of change.

The notion of change is born out of the fact that as a result of adaptation having taken place, two art works have come to exist where there was previously only one. The mere existence of the new work, which has been produced under different temporal, geographical, political, philosophical, intellectual and material circumstances, naturally sheds a new light upon what we, for simplicity’s sake might call the original work, but – unavoidably functioning as interpretation and commentary – it does not alter the old work as much as influence our perception of it. (Myklebost 2014)

Surprising as it may seem, the recipient is burdened with the responsibility to decide whether a work can be viewed as an adaptation, instead of leaving the decision solely to the figure of an author/adaptor.

Perceiving adaptations as a product may also have another ramification characteristic of comics: the collectable aspect. Comics art is known to be collected by art collectors, whether it is to promote the artistic value or collect the works of a particular artist or a publishing house, which is often done to increase their value. These works possess an autographic element, particularly unless they are printed in a large number of copies.

Another issue that can be raised here is the necessity of recognising a work as an adaptation and whether the knowledge of the source text is essential to comprehend the work. Shakespeare comics indicate a diversified approach towards the language of source text and the plot. As Hutcheon discussed in her book, any adaptation is a reworking or retelling of the text, but the strength of any adaptation lies in its self-sufficiency. In the process of reception, the audience does not require knowledge of a source text to follow, experience, comprehend, and enjoy it. This could be understood as a well-functioning adaptation. In other words, knowledge of the source text is not

required in order to understand comics adaptations, as they are able to function separately from the source text or even other adaptations. Any Shakespeare comics can function separately without the need for familiarity with the original text on the part of the reader. However, the previous knowledge of the source text enriches the experience of appropriations, as it is a more nuanced piece of work which brings together more than one text or capitalises on references, similarities, and jokes. Naturally, as with the case of adaptations, an appropriation is able to convey the story without being familiar with the source, but it may not be able to fully enjoy and explore the intricacies.

Hutcheon's process-product approach in reference to Shakespeare and comics draws attention to the reasoning behind choosing a particular play as well as the choice of aesthetics and genre changes. A quick overview of comics adaptations reveals that the medium allows a play to be adapted into a science-fiction genre (*Romeo and Julia: The War* by Stan Lee, Terry Douglas, Mark Work and Skan Srisuwan), post-apocalyptic dystopia (Enki Bilal's *Julia&Roem*), or history comics within Native American context (*Manga Shakespeare: King Lear* by Ilya), crime or mobster story (*Julius* by Antony Johnston and Brett Weldele), or even experimental comics such as *Hamlet* by Nicky Greenberg or silent *Shakespeare ohne Worte* by Frank Flöthmann. Moreover, stylistic and aesthetic choices, whether drawn in American style or Manga, can also be the subject of interpretation and discussion both on the part of the creator-adaptor as well as the reader. Another example of a comics appropriation that does not require the knowledge of the source text(s) is Gaiman's story "The Tempest", which is a story about the creative process of writing. Shakespeare is writing his final play in Stratford-upon-Avon, but it is also a story about his domestic issues, his relationships with his daughter Susan and wife Anne, the local community and Ben Jonson. It is a story about Shakespeare's intimate dreams and memories of the past and preparation for the final years. The Tempest is only the starting point; it is referred to and discussed, but the main subject is the writer, his life, and his work. Knowledge of the source text is not necessary for fully comprehending Gaiman's appropriation.

However, in the case of Flöthmann's adaptation is somewhat more challenging. The decoding process is based only on visual language, which may pose difficulties owing to significant changes. The information provided by the author may result in experiencing a story rather than the story, that is, the appropriation of Shakespeare's play. Flöthmann provides the reader with a hint, i.e. the title, and on that basis they may

attempt to find traces of the original story, on condition the original story is known. Nevertheless, the reader may still disregard the source text hinted at by title and experience only the story revealed in silent comics. In the case of appropriations deprived of the verbal level and with significant changes, the source text may be necessary to decode the story; otherwise, there is a possibility of experiencing the comics without realising its source.

The process or adaptation/appropriation and the perception of the adaptation as a product in reference to comics adaptation and Shakespearean comics is comparable to other media. In most cases, the question of knowing the source text is brought down to an enriching factor rather than a necessity, but it does provide a hint or link for the reader to identify and treat it as a starting point for interpretation.

2.3.3. Modes of Engagement

Another tool proposed by Hutcheon (2012: xvi) is the perception of adaptations through the modes of engagement: telling, showing, and interacting. It seems rational to assume that all media and genres are ‘immersive’, but some are “used to tell stories (for example, novels, short stories); other show them (for instance, all performance media), other allow to interact with them physically and kinaesthetically with them (as in videogames or theme parks)” (Hutcheon 2012: xvi). The process of adaptation, apart from changing the medium and genres, can also involve a shift between engagement modes. For instance, “[in] the move from telling to showing, a performance adaptation must dramatize: description, narration, and represented thoughts must be transcoded into speech, actions, sounds, and visual images” (Hutcheon 2012: 40). It also involves changes in the code system, which are appropriate for an adaptive medium. Immediately, a question arises concerning the classification of comics through the mode of engagement, whether it is possible to perceive comics only as one mode, and the potential changes that comics adaptation requires.

The previous discussions concerning the hybrid nature of comics, their relationships with literature or cinema, and historical overview do not facilitate the classification. It has already been established that comics tell stories on various levels (i.e. modes) instead of just one. Assuming that the telling mode is mostly based on the

verbal element, which is often understood as a literary input, it would lead to the conclusion that comics belong to this mode. The verbal element in comics takes the form of dialogues encapsulated in speech balloons, at times there is also a narrative element that can be found underneath a panel (in captions) which is used to explain, comment, and provide information about the setting. However, silent comics which are deprived of overt verbal elements become elusive to the telling mode as the audience is engaged through the visual element, that is, panels. Adaptations of Shakespeare in comics are rarely silent due to the cultural status of the language of the plays, which suggests that such works are drawn more to the telling mode rather than showing. In comics, the pictorial element is particularly significant for a story to develop and possess narrative potential to slow down or accelerate the pace of the story. The reader explores the story through careful scrutiny of the pictures; hence, the showing mode dominates. In the adaptations of Shakespeare's plays, the visual language attempts to visually present the elements that are found in the text but also fill the possible gaps left in the play as far as depictions of characters or settings, as well as action – duels or murder—are concerned, which naturally draws more to the showing mode. Instead of opting for either the telling or showing mode, it would be safer to assume that comics bring the two together into a showing-telling mode, in cases when both the verbal and visual elements appear. The change from the telling mode of the Shakespearean text to the telling-showing mode of comics, including Shakespearean comics, is radical. The word becomes a visual sign; it is included in the visual world of the story and acquires additional meaning through encapsulation. The word-sign takes the physical space of the images, but it most often remains invisible to the characters of the story; in comics, the speech balloon is the sign for the reader. The manner in which speech encapsulates speech may result in uncommon compositions. Naturally, it would be possible for one of the modes to dominate, as either verbal or visual elements predominate.

The last mode of engagement, interacting, is reserved for stories in which the audience interacts physically or kinaesthetically, as in the case of theme parks or games, and it would be impossible to assume that comics can aspire to it. However, comics evoke an element of interactivity when two issues are considered. First, the comics page is a precisely planned vehicle, and an artist meticulously designs the size, shape, and order of the panels to achieve the desired effect. The audience is charged with the task of deriving the story and pleasure from the pictures through closure. The panel does not

need to be linear, leaving the audience with a greater challenge to comprehend the story, but also with greater freedom so as to the pace of reading and watching; the audience can ponder over one panel but overlook others. Reading comics is an engaging activity that may require turning a book upside down or tilting it for a drawing to be decoded and understood. Second, comics and page divisions are carefully planned, and the break of panels between pages is used by artists to control and keep the audience's attention. The physical act of page-turning gains significance as it becomes a more conscious act of exploring and experiencing stories. Although categorising comics as an interacting mode is far-fetched, there is a possibility of their interactive elements.

Hutcheon's division into showing, telling, and interactive does not consider media that attempt to share stories by means of various plateaus. The modes of engagement also help answer the ongoing question of whether comics are read or watched and whether they tell or show stories. As far as comics are concerned, it is not an issue of either-or but a realisation that comics engage both entities in experiencing a story with a certain degree of interaction.

2.3.4. (Textual) Fidelity and Fluid Text

The issue of fidelity is often viewed as indispensable that needs to be referred to and treated as a measurable element to assess the success of an adaptation; namely, the more faithful the adaptation, the better. Moreover, fidelity and adaptation seem inseparable because, despite general aversion towards it, adaptation simply does not exist without a source text which raises questions concerning fidelity. Naturally, questions concerning the meaning and understanding of fidelity immediately arise: how, to what, and why an adaptation should be faithful. It seems that the concept is subjective for each viewer, and it is based on the assumption that an adaptation may have "a single, correct 'meaning' which the filmmaker has either adhered to or in some sense violated or tampered with" (McFarlane 1996: 8). Adaptation is most often compared to and evaluated on the basis of faithfulness towards the text which had inspired it. However, in the case of Shakespeare adaptation the question is what is adapted, which version of the play adapted, and whether it is the text that is transformed and not a previous adaptation (Iyengar 2023: 67-86). The contemporary popularity of Shakespeare's plays

depends more on the familiarity with the plots and characters rather than the text, particularly that there is a number of different versions of the play, there is the folio versions as well as quartos. Even today, those who adapt Shakespeare's text reach out to a contemporary edited version, which in itself could be viewed as an adaptation. Stam noticed that adaptations increase hostility.

The traditional language of criticism of filmic adaptations of novels ... has often been extremely judgmental, proliferating in terms that imply that film has performed a disservice to literature. Terms such as 'infidelity', 'betrayal', 'deformation', 'violation', 'vulgarization', 'bastardisation' and 'desecration' proliferate, with each word carrying its specific charge of opprobrium. Despite the variety of the accusations, their drift seems always to be the same – the book was better" (Stam 2005: 3)

The potential negativity towards an adaptation is dictated by failing to "capture what we see as the fundamental narrative, thematic, and aesthetic features of its literary source" (Stam 2005: 3). Immediately, a question concerning the possibility of faithful adaptation should be considered, as well as the plausibility of capturing the essence of the source text. Interestingly, the language used while discussing fidelity is often elusive and based on audiences' feelings and emotions, neither of which is measurable. Although discussing fidelity in adaptation studies is redundant, nevertheless it is still being treated as a starting point for comics adaptations⁸³. The fidelity discourse, notably in reference to comics, introduces double standards; on the one hand, it calls for closeness to the source text but also limits itself to media that are suitable for adaptation, that is, film. Comics, on the other hand, most often those that are used for educational purposes, i.e., *Classics Illustrated* or *Classical Comics* series, are considered among the most 'faithful' to the source text as far as setting, character depiction, language is concerned; however, these adaptations are most often criticized for being unimaginative and conservative⁸⁴, while comics itself is a medium which calls for innovative approach. Wolk (2007: 13) says that "comics adaptations of prose books are almost uniformly terrible"; other critics usually express resentment towards the way the series is executed, the aesthetics, division into panels, or the use of speech balloons, rather than the idea itself. Interestingly, there are series which attempt to adapt Shakespeare's plays, revealing the

⁸³ See Bartosch and Stuhlmann (2013), Blin-Rolland (2013), Bolton (2011), Versaci (2007)

⁸⁴ Kukkonen (2013a: 84) "They [Classics Illustrated] prized fidelity to the original by keeping the narrative in as complete a form as possible and by including salient lines from the novels into the dialogue."

creative potential of pedagogical comics such as *Manga Shakespeare* series or *No Fear Shakespeare* series.

Most, if not all, adaptations involve a change or transition of the medium (and/or genre), which means that the language needs to be altered. In the case of comics adaptations, the language of a novel or a play is enriched by the visual language of images. An interesting, and at the same time an extreme case in point, would be the already mentioned adaptation by Flötmann *Shakespeare ohne Worte* (2016), which erased the Shakespearean text entirely, characters have been drawn simplistically by means of no more than five colours, whereas the characters' emotional states are expressed by emoticons and symbols, leaving the reader with guesswork about their meaning. Naturally, for many, such an adaptation would be unsuccessful due to the treatment of the source text and character depiction, although no severe violation of the original plot had occurred. Hence, faithful adaptations, although theoretically plausible, are rarely achieved. Adaptors, due to their position within the adaptation process, are allowed to introduce changes in order to fulfil their artistic and aesthetic vision; as a result, any adaptation can function as an interpretation of a source material. Leitch straightforwardly states that fidelity to the source text is "a hopelessly fallacious measure of a given adaptation's value because it is unattainable, undesirable, and theoretically possible only in a trivial sense" (Leitch 2003: 161)⁸⁵. Moreover, the deviation from following the source text can be beneficial, and as Sanders (2006: 20) observed that infidelity can spark greater creativity and inspire fresh interpretation. Fidelity has ceased to be the factor which determines the success of an adaptation, at times it is even provocatively stated that the notion is irrelevant for the evaluation and success of an adaptation (Bartoletti and Hutcheon 2007: 444-445). In addition, Bryant also links fidelity with the role of the reader and adaptor:

[an] adaptation takes us into a specialised arena in which reading and interpretation are themselves embodies in a revision of the originating text. Adaptors are 'revising readers' who enact their interpretations, not through criticism, but by altering the material text itself through quotation, allusion and plagiarism, in what might be called 'partial adaptation' or 'adaptive revision', and in larger more comprehensive projects through announced adaptation (2013: 50).

⁸⁵ Stam (2000: 58) goes even further and discusses the fallacy connected with fidelity in depth. Among the notions he introduces is intentional fallacy and the attachment to fidelity issue is connected with the assumed superiority of literary art. There are three superimposed prejudices: seniority (older is always better), iconophobia (visual art is inferior to verbal art), logophilia (a book as a sacred object, hence superior).

The emphasis is on the role and responsibility of the audience, who is required to interpret a given text. However, in the process of adaptation, the process of interpretation takes place not only at the reception end, but also as Hutcheon notices, during the creative process and that “adapters are first interpreters and then creators” (Hutcheon 2012: 18). The adaptor can freely change, cut, shuffle and mix the text only to fulfil their artistic vision, it is the process of “creating something anew” and to “make the material one’s own” (Hutcheon 2012: 20) hence the position of the adapter is unstable. A similar view is expressed by Alicja Helman, for her adaptation functions as an interpretation of the literary source (either controversial or polemical), a replica, or an extension (either positive or negative) of the original (Helman 1998: 20). The process of adapting literature to comics requires numerous changes, rethinking of the source text, and setting and depiction of characters. In addition, comics adaptors must transform the story from the telling mode of a novel or play into the showing/telling mode of comics (or the elements of interactive mode). Although the transition might seem to be facilitated in the case of plays, the adaptor still faces the issue of selecting and sometimes altering/revising the fragments to be included in the adaptation. Furthermore, in the case of comics, similarly to film, the visual element needs to be designed, that is, the setting and movement of the protagonist, but what distinguishes comics is the task of incorporating the text (in speech balloon) into the panel. Both verbal and visual elements in comics coexist and complement each other in order to create a whole.

Studying adaptations, including ideas on fidelity, may require referring to and seeking answers to issues of authorship, originality, and audience response. These notions also become significant in the discussions focused on comics, comics adaptations, and Shakespeare, where the ideas permutate and become blurred. Lanier (2002: 52) looks at ‘institutionalising of Shakespeare’, in which the role of an author is limited by the adaptors’ approach, who are unrestrained in the way the text is treated. When discussing the treatment of Shakespeare’s language, Lanier compares them to textual poachers, a concept introduced by de Certeau (1984: 165-176), which refers to the use of fragments of plays that are reshuffled and reused selectively within a new context. The concept “how popular culture fastens on Shakespearean passages immediately relevant or useful to its purposes without regard for fidelity or authenticity” (Lanier 2002: 52). Lanier’s perception of textual poaching in reference to

Shakespeare extends to a treatment of art (novels, films, visual works of art, etc.) by popular culture which then segues to and turns into Hinds' holistic approach to popular culture where "that readers 'poach' texts, that is, they skilfully make whatever meanings and pleasures they want of need from texts" (Hinds 2006: 171). Textual poaching is a convenient tool for both adaptors and the audience. A case in point supporting textual poaching is a comic book series *Kill Shakespeare* (2010-2017) by Conor McCreery, Anthony Del Col and Andy Belanger which selectively brings together characters, quotes, references as well as the playwright himself in order to create a new story. Initially, the storyline begins with Hamlet travelling to England (as in the play); but then the plot deviates and the prince encounters other Shakespearean characters, who together set off to find mythical and god-like Shakespeare, who will reinstall order. The creators repurposed Shakespeare's creation, but they also charged the reader with the task of decoding and tracking references. Although a reader who is unfamiliar with Shakespeare's work in detail will still derive pleasure from the story, an informed reader, who is able to recognise the hints and references, will understand the text better in the reception process and derive even greater pleasure.

Assuming that the position of the author is unstable, the same can be stated regarding the source text. It has been already claimed that an adaptation can be expanded, cut or altered; adaptation is often misleadingly perceived as a process which focuses on a single text, as an adaptation (a film or a comic book) can adapt numerous texts at the same time⁸⁶, and it can use sources in other media: music and film as well. This can also be referred to in previous versions and adaptations. The fluid-text approach perceives an adaptation as "the sum of its versions; creativity extends beyond the solitary writer, and writing is a cultural event transcending media" (Bryant 2013: 47). This approach goes beyond just a single text or the relationship between the adaptation and the source text.

A fluid text is any work that exists in multiple versions in which the primary cause of those versions is some form of revision. Revisions may be performed by originating writers, by their editors and publishers, or by readers and audiences, who reshape the originating work to reflect their own desires for the text, themselves, their culture. (Bryant 2013: 48)

⁸⁶ Again, *Kill Shakespeare* makes a good example of adapting numerous texts and characters coming from various texts.

Shakespeare, and the entire history of Shakespeare on screen, *Hamlet* in particular, is a fair example. The adaptations of *Hamlet*, regardless of the medium, refer not only to the Early Modern play itself, but also to the cultural phenomena, with all the contexts, interpretations, and the cornucopia of stage performances, films, visual depictions, and rewritings anything that nowadays is called an adaptation, appropriation, or any other terms which are used. Owing to fluidity, *Hamlet* is characterised by references to previous adaptations, and creators often admit to being influenced by them. For instance, Grant and Mandrake's (1990) comic book version of *Hamlet* sets Elsinore on a coastal rocky cliff which reminds of Kozintsev's film from 1964. Other Shakespearean plays and comic book adaptations will be approached in a similar manner. Fluidity signifies that "texts evolve through adaptation just as people adapt and evolve between and within cultures" (Bryant 2013: 55). Moreover, the approach forces a more collective and holistic perception of adaptations, rather than a binary one, because no one play signifies only the text of the play but is a collective history of performance, adaptations, and interpretations, which is open-ended as long as new reworkings appear. The plethora of *Macbeth* comics adaptations are not just repetitions of the same text, but also revisions and reinterpretations, which together constitute a collection of texts, revealing the universality of the story.

Finally, the notion of a fluid text and the perception of a text as a collective turn more attention to the Bakhtinian notion of dialogism in adaptation studies which links all instances of adaptation into a network impacting interpretation. Bahktin stated that

The living utterance, having taken meaning and shape at a particular historical moment in a socially specific environment, cannot fail to brush up against thousands of living dialogic threads, woven by socio-ideological consciousness and around the given object of an utterance; it cannot fail to become an active participant in social dialogue. After all, the utterance arises out of this dialogue as a continuation of it and as a rejoinder to it – it does not approach the object from the sidelines (1981: 276-277)

Remembering that an adaptation is created within a particular moment of time and within a specific environment, Bahktin's dialogism could be adopted to the notion of adaptation and adaptation studies. Bahktin's dialogism views the texts as a 'discussion' or 'conversation' with the previous adaptations as well as the source text. Dialogism, hence, leads to the idea of adaptation as a two-way dialogic process, supported by Bruhn (2013), in which not only the source text influences adaptation, but also

adaptation influences the source text. “Any rewriting or adaptation of a text is always influencing the original work and even the most ‘loyal’ or repetitive adaptation imaginable is bound to be unsuccessful in terms of copying the original” (Bruhn 2013: 70). The influence on the source text is naturally more metaphorical and impacts the audience’s reception and understanding of the source, such as the psychoanalytical adaptation of *Hamlet* by Olivier (1948), popularised Freudian and Lacanian interpretation of the play, but also has impacted future adaptations. Cutchins (2017: 75) also acknowledges the significance of the relationship between texts, but he acknowledges the potential inequality of the influence, as some texts may have a greater or stronger impact, which could be understood in terms of hegemony. In the case of Shakespeare adaptation studies, the interpretation of the original text may change under the influence of film or comics adaptation, and new interpretations of the source text might reflect themselves in the new texts. However, as Cutchins mentions, not all texts are of the same importance, and will have the same impact. Transferring these ideas to the field of Shakespeare comics shows that some adaptations, again more stance (*Manga Shakespeare, Classics Illustrated or Classical Comics*) and may carry greater impact on when it comes to the perception of Shakespeare adaptation and their contribution to the interpretative process.

2.4. Shakespeare, Visual Traditions and the History of Comics Adaptations⁸⁷

Thus far, a number of Shakespeare adaptations have been mentioned, including examples from a span of almost 100 years that possess their own narrative and aesthetic characteristics and intricacies typical for the moment of history in which they were created. “To study transmedial Shakespeare, then, calls for engagement with the historical, social and aesthetic issues surrounding the perception of discrete media, along with knowledge and understanding of their semiotic systems and the academic domains in which they operate” (Bickley and Stevens 2021: 7). The same seems true for Shakespeare comics; hence, this historical overview of these adaptations is intended to

⁸⁷ The subchapter traces the history of comic book adaptations of Shakespeare’s plays up to 2020. Appendix 1 will provide bibliographical references to all instances of comics that were traced. Here, the main stress is put on adaptations of plays; however, the existence of comics adaptations of sonnets and poems should be noticed.

enhance the comprehension of the discussed issues and how they changed over the course of years.

The relationship between Shakespeare's plays and their pictorial tradition has had a long history⁸⁸. Orgel (2007) traced and recorded the history of Shakespeare and illustrations, or more precisely, visual depictions, with numerous examples. He begins with the first instances of performance sketches and drawings such as Henry Peacham's picture from the end of 16th century depicting a scene from *Titus Andronicus* in which Queen Tamora begs Titus for the lives of her sons; next, is the droll from *The Wits* (1662) attributed to Francis Kirkman presenting Falstaff and Mistress Quickly⁸⁹; and frontispiece to Nicholas Rowe's *Works of Mr. William Shakespeare* (1709). These early examples establish what can be called the tradition of Shakespeare's presence in the visual arts; the simple instances soon evolved into more elaborate and nuanced ones. Hence, soon paintings inspired by Shakespeare's play and characters started to appear such as actors in role (e.g., *Mr. Garrick in the character of Richard the 3rd* (1748) by William Hogarth), scenes from plays, or costumes designs (a good example here are Planché's designs from 1830s), all these visuals are functional in nature as they record the tradition and the presence of Shakespeare in theatre. Since the 18th century, a change can be observed; the visual arts have loosened the binds with the theatre and started to treat Shakespeare's works and characters as an inspiration in itself, especially the Victorians who drew inspiration for the paintings from literature. Among the best examples would be the painting *Ophelia* (1851/2) by John Everett Millais, which belongs to the Pre-Raphaelite movement⁹⁰, also an oil painting by William Holman Hunt *Valentine Rescuing Sylvia from Proteus* (1851), or a bit later painting *Miranda* (1875) by Edward Robert Hughes. Naturally, other instances can also be found, such as John Boydell's project of creating a Shakespeare Gallery (1786), who attempted to bring together different artists: Henry Fuseli, William Hamilton, James Northcote,

⁸⁸ Folger Shakespeare Library has created *Picturing Shakespeare* project, which collects images connected with Shakespeare, his plays and performances from the 18th, 19th and 20th c, naturally the collection constantly expands.

⁸⁹ Interestingly, this pictorial depiction follows some of the medieval traditions, such as speech presented in a speech ribbon which is perceived as a predecessor of the speech balloon characteristic of comics, or a simple version of a caption, which here helps to identify the individual characters in the image. The frontispiece could be treated as a link between the first instances of visual Shakespeare and comics.

⁹⁰ In order to trace and explore the subject of Shakespeare and his relationship with the visual arts thoroughly it is advisable to consult works devoted to the topic such as: Martineau (2003), Orgel and Keilan (1999), Sillars (2005). Although the thesis does not primarily focus on studying the early visual examples, mentioning them only is to establish a link between the written works and the pictorial.

Joshua Reynolds, and many more. Despite the fiasco of Boydell's project, he did manage to emphasise and pay heed to Shakespeare's cultural significance (Taylor 1990: 124-125). Interestingly enough, the links between the visual arts and the theatre were not severed completely, as Schoch noticed

the theatre's steadfast devotion to a pictorial aesthetic need hardly surprise us, since this was precisely the aesthetic of its audience. Victorian theatre-goers were heirs to a century long tradition of reading illustrated editions of Shakespeare's plays and looking at painting, prints and engravings in which the playwright's characters were depicted sometimes as real people and sometimes as 'roles' impersonated by famous actors and actresses (Schoch 2002: 59).

The influence of the visual arts on the audience was strong enough to shape and create expectations about stage performance. In 1807, Charles and Mary Lamb published *Tales from Shakespeare* which was a collection of twenty plays rewritten as a short story and illustrated by William Mulready, other artists were involved in illustrating later editions. Lambs' book began the tradition of Shakespeare for children with visual elements as their crucial part (Byrne 2013). Schoch (2002) alluded to the role of illustrated versions of plays that were as significant as paintings in the audience's taste-shaping process. Illustrations, like Charles Knight's *Pictorial Editions of the Works of Shakespeare* (1838-1843), Eugène Delacroix's or Gustav Doré's, paved the way for more innovative and experimental illustrations which started to appear at the beginning of 20th century when cheaper and smaller editions of plays were gaining popularity and brought together the visual art with the printing medium⁹¹. Among the appreciable works were Edmund Dulac's *Tempest* (1908), Arthur Rackham's *Midsummer Night's Dream* (1908), W. Heath Robinson's *Midsummer Night's Dream* (1914) or Harry Kessler and Cranach Press's project focusing on publishing *Hamlet* (1928). According to Orgel (2007: 85) "the illustrations did not realize the dramatic action, but retold the story or imaginatively refigured the poetry", they started to abandon their initial function of duplicating and reinforcing, and were beginning to assume the function of addition or omission⁹². Furthermore, as Blake observes, Shakespeare book illustrations are

⁹¹ Orgel (2007: 84) used the name "Shakespearean art book".

⁹² Eisner (2008 [1985]: 132) distinguishes two functions of an image: visual and illustration. The former is a sequence of images that can tell the story by itself, it replaces the verbal element. The latter, however, reinforces and repeats the text, it does not possess narrative ability without the text, usually it is not a sequence but a single image.

not only a story about changes in printing technology and artistic style in different times and places but also a story about appropriateness of particular illustration programs for particular types of works. From no illustrations at all to illustrations on every page, from the straightforward depiction of a key moment in a scene to the semiabstract evocation of overall mood, from modern stage sets and costumes to representations of objects from Shakespeare's time... (Blake 2016: 1873)

These innovative publications could be viewed as stepping stones in the process of forging a new artistic expression, that is, Shakespeare comics. Orgel ends his article at this point; however, he acknowledges that

[t]he most innovative of the subsequent developments [i.e. Cranach Press Hamlet with beautiful woodcuts] in Shakespearean book illustration are probably recent comic book versions, the most striking aspect of which is their presentation of a complete text to accompany the cartoon panel, the most striking aspect of which is their presentation of a complete text to accompany the cartoon panels. (Orgel 2007: 89)

Blake (2016: 1879) in a similar tone to Orgel acknowledges that comic book adaptations and manga editions constitute the next step in the tradition of Shakespeare and illustration.

However, there seems to be a missing link between the illustrated versions of plays, or children's versions, and comics, namely satirical cartoons which adopt Shakespeare's plays, characters, or motifs to evoke humorous social and political commentaries. Satirical cartoons have long been viewed as part of the comics tradition which skilfully brought together the verbal and the visual. Haynes (2016) scrutinised satirical cartoons referring to Shakespeare or adopting characters which have been printed since the 18th century until today. The early examples are *Spanish Messenger* (1790) by William Dent, *Weird Sisters; Ministers of Darkness, Minions of the Moon* (1791) by James Gillray, *The Rival Richards or, Shakespeare in Danger* (1814) by William Heath or *Coriolanus Addressing the Plebeians* (1820) by George Cruikshank. The tradition of political cartoons with Shakespearean references is popular even today as an exhibition *Draw New Mischief* organised by Royal Shakespeare Company in 2017 can prove⁹³.

Considering the tradition of Shakespeare in the visual arts, sketches, paintings, book illustrations, and satirical cartoons, comics adaptations appear to be a natural next

⁹³ A few examples from the exhibition can be found at *The Guardian* website, <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/gallery/2017/mar/08/trump-as-brutus-political-cartoons-inspired-by-shakespeare-draw-new-mischief>

step, and may also be an encouraging and inspirational factor for comic book creators. Orgel's and Blake's remark allows to treat comic book adaptations of Shakespeare's plays as a natural development of the visual tradition⁹⁴ and incorporate them into the corpus of Shakespeare studies. Nevertheless, it is difficult to avoid simplifications and misconceptions. Unfortunately, Orgel's perception of comics is limited to works which use the whole Shakespearean text and are accompanied by visual elements; only those works would deserve appreciation and attention. For Orgel, it would seem that the preservation of the whole text becomes a decisive condition on the basis of which a work can be appreciated and scrutinised. Such an approach stands in contradiction to film adaptations which treat Shakespeare text with artistic freedom, such as: Laurence Olivier's heavily cut *Hamlet* (1948), Roman Polanski's *Macbeth* (1971) with additional scene at the end, or Derek Jarman's *The Tempest* (1979); following Orgel's condition could exclude the films from Shakespeare studies. Unconsciously, he sets contradictory principles as far as comics and other media are concerned; comics as any medium may inspire adaptations posing a challenge or inspiring a new interpretation, as has already been stated. The fidelity conditions concerning the language, that is, using the whole text in adaptations, becomes pivotal, based on which aesthetic and poetic values can be judged. Although, Orgel acknowledges the existence and significance of comics but the example provided comes from 1984 Ian Pollack's *King Lear* and overlooks the previous instances of works adapting Shakespeare as they did not appear unexpectedly and circumstantially, with any predecessors. Hence, tracing the history of Shakespearean comic book publications aims to establish the traditions and history of such works.

Another issue which needs to be addressed is the motivation behind taking Shakespeare and his plays as a subject of the adaptation process⁹⁵. Shakespeare has often been indicated as a factor improving the status of a new medium, hence films adapted Shakespeare as early as 1899 with *King John* directed by William Kennedy-Laurie Dickson (Rothwell 1999: 1), other media followed the example of film and used Shakespeare for that purpose. According to Lanier (2002: 43) "Shakespeare has become a reliable source of ready-made cultural prestige, a way of lifting virtually any pop

⁹⁴ The brief acknowledgement and esteem for comics has been quickly replaced when Orgel denies comics the possibility to supplement to the visual history of Shakespeare; "the most significant and far-reaching modern developments in Shakespearean illustration have surely been in cinema" (Orgel 2007: 91).

⁹⁵ Theoretical aspects of adaptation have been discussed in the chapter.

product out of its trivial status” and also “new media often embrace Shakespeare as a royalty-free way of suggesting their cultural utility, importance, and continuity with tradition, only later to distance themselves once they gain a popular audience”.

A culturally established entity, such as Shakespeare and his works, which are recognised as a sign of highbrow culture, was, and still is, to aid the nascent medium to gain support by proving their adapting abilities and creative potential. As Castaldo also observes, Shakespeare and his works are used because they are “easily identifiable that his cultural value is extremely high. Both in institutional and popular culture, he is recognizable precisely because so many other aspects of culture have proven unstable” (Castaldo 2004: 95). Furthermore, quotations and citation of Shakespeare in the works of popular culture, and comics, either knowingly or unreferenced, leads to establishing “uncanny literariness in ... comics” (Christopher 2013), hence, arguing for literary and cultural value of comics and adaptation comics in particular. Interestingly, comics did not require such assistance; by the time the first adaptations appeared, comics had already been an established cultural phenomenon, but not much appreciated. Shakespeare did contribute to the popularisation of comic book adaptations of literature⁹⁶, despite the fact his works were not among the first ones to be adapted, and by the time they appeared in 1940s comics had already entered its Golden Age. The 20th century created favourable conditions for a variety of adaptations or appropriations of Shakespeare to appear across numerous media, and the source material proved to be flexible for manipulations and alterations such as topicality and localisation. Lanier (2002: 48) also noticed this potential by stating that “[h]ybridised styles in Shakespearian production - across different cultures and across different cultural registers – have been a hallmark of the twentieth century Shakespeare”; the confluence of cultures regardless of their origin, status, and geographical setting only corroborates the dominant position of the playwright in Western culture. Shakespeare and comics create an interesting amalgam, they were brought together not to dignify the latter but

⁹⁶ It is generally believed that first adaptations appeared in the 1940s, and Shakespeare was not the first text to be adapted. Stories by *Famous Authors Illustrated* series released *The Scarlet Pimpernel* as their first book, whereas *Classics Illustrated* series *The Three Musketeers* (1941). The first Shakespearean comic book was 1950 *Julius Caesar* by *Classics Illustrated*, issue #68. The two series adapting literary text are not, however, first instances of comics adaptations of Shakespeare’s plays, there are few, hard to obtain, copies of short and small books, or rather booklets, adapting the plays already in the 19th century. What is even more interesting is there are even earlier adaptations of the plays in Spanish and published in South America (conversation with Ronan Peterson 6 March 2023).

for commercial and financial reasons, and once the origins and conditions that had led to the emergence of comic book adaptations of Shakespeare's work were established it is possible to map the history of comics and Shakespeare.

In the following overview a concept of 'Shakespearean comics' may appear and it seems necessary to provide an explanation of its understanding. The concept might have a broader meaning than indicated. "Shakespeare has received full-length comic book and graphic novel adaptations, and scene and lines, some famous and some not, appear as well in cartoons, comic strips, and comic books for children and adults" (Burt 2006: 10). Burt's (2006) encyclopaedia essays to list as many references, cartoons, comic strips, and graphic novels as possible, whereas the thesis focuses on adaptations of Shakespeare's plays and omits cartoons, comic strips, and references in other comics as they are great in number and are not the subject of scrutiny.

Among the numerous ways in which comics can be classified, the overview of the publications indicated two broad types of Shakespeare comics: (1) a collection of works which together form a series, and (2) the auteur, one-time works. Rarely do the comic book series adapt only Shakespeare's work; the plays usually constitute only a part of a greater project adapting literary works, both prose and dramatic. Only the 21st century witnessed the first series fully devoted to the reworking of Shakespeare. It is easier to trace the history of series, although they also have a more complicated publishing history, as opposed to the one-time publications.

The most recognisable and the longest running series which adapted literature into the medium of comics was *Classics Illustrated* (1941-1971)⁹⁷ initiated by Albert Kanter as part of Gilberton Publishing⁹⁸. Throughout the 30 years, 169 issues were published, and the series gained an almost canonical status. The series was mainly aimed at a young male audience, which manifested itself in comics based on adventure novels. During the publication there were only five plays adapted: *Julius Caesar* #68 (1950), *A Midsummer Night's Dream* #87 (1951), *Hamlet* #99 (1952), *Macbeth* #128 (1955) and *Romeo and Juliet* #134 (1956). Each comics was accompanied by a short essay and a biographical note encouraging the reading of the original version and

⁹⁷ The first five titles were released under *Classic Comics* heading, which was later changed to *Classics Illustrated*. From the very beginning, *Classics Illustrated* comics were marketed as book. As a result, they could be back ordered and sold continuously, after the month they were published they were stored in warehouses, they could also be reprinted if they were out of print. (Jensen 2011: 389)

strengthening the pedagogical purpose of the enterprise. According to Jones (2002: 89), “the inclusion of Shakespeare in the line offered incontrovertible evidence of the seriousness of his [Kanter’s] publication’s purpose”. Shakespeare may not have worked as the factor to improve the position of comics but it eventually contributed to the position of the entire series. Despite the merits of the endeavour, it was overtly criticised and attacked by Fredric Wertham who claimed they “emasculate the classics, condense them (leaving out everything that makes the book great), are just as badly printed and inartistically drawn as other comic books and, as I [Wertham] have often found, do not reveal to children the world of good literature which has at all times been the mainstay of liberal and humanistic education” (Wertham 2009: 55). Despite criticisms and attacks, the popularity of the series did not diminish. In 1990, the idea of reviving the *Classics Illustrated* series was realised; not only were the old issues reprinted, but new ones were also introduced. The revived series was published by First Publishing⁹⁹, and only one Shakespearean play appeared. *Hamlet #5* by Steven Grant and Tom Mandrake was based on the old version of the script, but it adopted various panel shapes and colour coding.

The increased popularity of *Classics Illustrated* led to imitations and competition; the best known at the time was *Stories by Famous Authors Illustrated* (1949-1951) also known as *Fast Fiction*, which changed its name after five issues, printed by Seaboard Publishing. Famous Authors preceded the competition in releasing comics of Shakespeare’s plays and within the three years there were three such adaptations: *Macbeth #6* (1950), *Hamlet #8* (1950) and *Romeo and Juliet #10* (1950). The visual side of the comics was very similar to *Classics Illustrated* but the verbal input of the analysed text was heavily altered and abbreviated. Albert Kanter from *Classics Illustrated* saw this series as a competition and bought it in 1951, he published comics which had been already ready for publication but basically did not do much with any other comics (Jones 2002: 91).

Between 1962 and 1982, a British publisher, Fleetway, published an illustrated magazine for children, *Look and Learn*, which included articles on numerous topics such as art, history, science, travel, geography, and literature. The articles were often

⁹⁹ After First Comics went bankrupt, the rights went to Acclaim Comics which then were acquired by Papercutz in 2008. Nowadays the rights to the revived series are in Papercutz Publishing, which has released around 20 issues and reprints but stopped producing any new one after 2014.

accompanied by illustrations and comics strips, it is said that some included adaptations of Shakespeare's plays, but little is known about them and would require further research¹⁰⁰.

In 1971, Gilberton Publishing ceased to print the adaptations which created a niche on the market. The lacuna was quickly filled by Pendulum Press and *Pendulum Illustrated Classics*¹⁰¹ series which was publishing comic book adaptations between 1973 and 1980. It followed the path of its predecessors by releasing adaptations of adventure novels and later adding classics by Jane Austen and Bronte sisters. Shakespeare's adaptations appeared only in the final year and ten plays were reworked; *Romeo and Juliet* (1979), *As You Like It* (1980), *Julius Caesar* (1980), *King Lear* (1980), *Macbeth* (1980), *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1980), *Othello* (1980), *The Tempest* (1980), *Twelfth Night* (1980), *The Merchant of Venice* (1981)¹⁰². All comics were black and white with a simplified version of the text. Pendulum Press publications were reprinted numerous times by many different publishers; for example, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was colourised and reprinted in 1991, other were purchased and released as Marvel Classics Comics. In 2006, Saddleback Educational Publishing gained the rights to the comics, and it issued all Shakespeare comics in colourised versions, adding *Hamlet* (2006) and *The Taming of the Shrew* (2007). The advantage of both Pendulum Illustrated Classics and Saddleback series is their didactic dimension, aimed at familiarising children with Shakespeare and other writers – by including synopsis and biographical notes – as well as teaching them to read, in a fashion similar to *Classics Illustrated* and *Stories by Famous Authors Illustrated*.

Another project devoted solely to Shakespeare adaptations was Oval Projects¹⁰³ in the 1980s which printed six Shakespearean plays. The series is characteristic due to the use of fairly well-known artists; *Romeo and Juliet* (1983), *Macbeth* (1984), *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1985) were drawn by an artist under the pseudonym Von, Oscar Zarate wrote *Othello* (1983), Ian Pollock made *King Lear* (1984) and John

¹⁰⁰ I would like to thank Ronan Paterson for drawing my attention to this publication in our email exchange which took place in May 2022.

¹⁰¹ Another name of *Pendulum Illustrated Classics* was *Pocket Classics*, the publishing house functioned 1970-1994.

¹⁰² *The Merchant of Venice* was published as *New Matter Sound* pocket series.

¹⁰³ Later it was taken over by Workman Publishing, it also became part of *Graphic Shakespeare* series by Black Dog & Leventhal Publishers in 2006 and, in 2011, *Cartoon Shakespeare* (also known as *Graphic Shakespeare*) by Can of Worms Enterprises. The Can of Worms series included 3 plays from previous series (Zarate's *Othello*, Pollock's *King Lear*, Von's *Macbeth*) and added Oscar Grillo's *The Tempest*.

Howard worked on *Twelfth Night* (1985). These adaptations did not alter the text much; however, the visual elements, artistic decisions, style, and colours became more sophisticated and elaborate. The project lasted only a year but it is still reprinted nowadays under different series titles and by different publishers. However, according to Lanier (2010: 109) “these [adaptations] pale in comparison with the scope of recent graphic novelizations of Shakespeare. In addition to reprints of the *Classics Illustrated* series in the late nineties and the Oval series in 2005, the last decade has seen a proliferation of educational series that convert Shakespeare to comic book form”, only the 21st century enabled the works to reach a broader audience and greater attention.

Another publishing house specialising in comics or graphic novel adaptations of literature is Indian Campfire Publishing, which among various retold novels has also Shakespeare’s plays; *Macbeth* (2011) by Jyoti Bhansali, *Romeo and Juliet* (2011) by John F. McDonald, *The Merchant of Venice* (2011) also by John F. McDonald, *The Tempest* (2012) by Max Popov and *Julius Caesar* (2013) by Dan Whitehead. Despite their relatively limited length, the graphic novels attempt to leave out as little of the original text as possible. The series is by no means completed, and new adaptations might appear in the future.

Among the best-known series that adapt literature nowadays is *the Classical Comics* series managed by Gary Bryant. There are fifteen titles in total with five belonging to Shakespeare, these are *Macbeth* (2008), *Henry V* (2008), *Romeo and Juliet* (2009), *The Tempest* (2009), *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (2011)¹⁰⁴. A characteristic feature of *Classical Comics* is that each title is released in three language versions: quick text, plain text, and original text. Each of which is aimed at a different audience, ranging from young students, who have difficulty understanding Early Modern English, to advanced students. The versions underpin the rationale behind the enterprise to function as an educational tool for pupils and students; hence, the series is supplemented by additional materials and resource packs for teachers to facilitate the use of comics in the classroom.

Apart from *Classical Comics*, *Manga Shakespeare* series by SelfMadeHero publishing has gained the most media and scholarly attention. Not only does the publishing house focus on adapting Shakespeare, but it also attempts to create

¹⁰⁴ *Hamlet* is still in the making and it remains to be seen if and when it will be published (Jo Wheeler p.c. 13 March 2014)

aesthetically innovative adaptations of literature. Interestingly, in contrast to other series, SelfMadeHero is known to opt for Japanese manga aesthetics in its books. *Manga Shakespeare* (2007-2009) was coordinated by Richard Appignanesi and each issue had a different artistic curator. Throughout the two years fourteen plays were released: *Hamlet* by Emma Vieceli (2007), *Romeo and Juliet* by Sonia Leong (2007), *The Tempest* by Paul Duffield (2007), *Richard III* by Patrick Warren (2007), *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by Kate Brown (2008), *Julius Caesar* by Mustashrik (2008), *Macbeth* by Robert Deas (2008), *As You Like It* by Chie Kutsuwada (2009), *Othello* by Ryuta Osada (2009), *Henry VIII* by Patrick Warren (2009), *King Lear* art ILYA (2009), *Much Ado About Nothing* by Emma Vieceli (2009), *The Merchant of Venice* by Faye Yong (2009), *Twelfth Night* by Nana Li (2009). Although the series does not preserve full Shakespearean language, in fact the text is heavily cut and adapted, the greatest value is in the changes as far as the settings and characters are concerned. Most of the adaptations are modernised (e.g. *Hamlet* or *Macbeth*) or set in an unusual context, both geographical and historical, like *King Lear* set among indigenous nations. All of these changes may pose interpretive challenges for readers.

Manga Shakespeare by SelfMadeHero is not the only series adapting Shakespeare using Japanese manga aesthetics. *Shakespeare: The Manga Edition* edited by Adam Sexton released four volumes of play adaptations: *Macbeth* (2008), *Julius Caesar* (2008), *Hamlet* (2008) and *Romeo and Juliet* (2009). Sexton skilfully adapted the plays in black and white panels, typical for manga. However, these works are not as semiotically and culturally charged as *Manga Shakespeare*, which makes them easier to understand.

In the same year another series adapting Shakespeare appeared on the market, *Graphic Shakespeare* by Magic Wagon Publishing offers sixteen adaptations, all intended for educational purposes in order to teach children to read or familiarise them with the works of Shakespeare. The series belongs to the Graphic Planet series and is characterised by a cartoonish depiction of the main characters. The entire series was created in 2008 with Vincent Goodwin as the main adapter for the series and illustrators varied on each comics, *As You Like It* (illustrated by Rod Espinosa), *Comedy Of Errors* (Rod Espinosa), *Cymbeline* (Fred Perry), *Hamlet* (Ben Dunn), *Henry VIII* (Chris Allen), *Julius Caesar* (Allen Perry), *King Lear* (Ben Dunn), *Macbeth* (David Hutchison), *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Rod Espinosa), *Much Ado About Nothing*

(*Rod Espinosa*), *Othello* (*Chris Allen*), *Romeo and Juliet* (*Rod Espinosa*), *The Taming of the Shrew* (*Chris Allen*), *The Tempest* (*Cynthia Martin*), *Twelfth Night* (*Cynthia Martin*), *Winter's Tale* (*Rod Espinosa*).

At the same time as Graphic Shakespeare, *The Graffex* series by the Salariya Book Company was published. Between 2008 and 2010, six plays were adapted, some by fairly well-known artists; *Macbeth* (2008) by Stephen Hayes and Nick Spander, *Hamlet* (2009) by Penko Gelev and Kathy McEvoy, *Julius Caesar* (2009) by Li Sidong and Michael Ford, *Romeo and Juliet* (2009) by Penko Gelev and Fiona Macdonald, *The Merchant of Venice* (2010) by Penko Gelev and Fiona Macdonald, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (2010) by Penko Gelev and Ian Graham. In 2012, an anthology brought together five of the plays, excluding *The Merchant of Venice*, appeared on the market.

Finally, the last series¹⁰⁵ is a collection of four plays known as *Shakespeare Graphics*, were published by Stone Arch Books. The four plays include: *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (2012) adapted by Nel Yomtov and Berenice Muniz, *Macbeth* (2011) by Martin Powell and Daniel Ferran, *Julius Caesar* (2011) by Carl Bowen and Eduardo Garcia, *Romeo and Juliet* (2012) by Martin Powell and Eva Cabrera. Similarly, to most previous series, the comics were published purely for educational purposes.

In 2019, a new series adapting literature was released with Cristal S. Chan and M. Chandler as the main editors. *Manga Classics* series adapted both classical novels as well as Shakespeare's plays. The series preserved the original text with black and white images and, as the name of the series suggests, follows the style of Japanese Manga. All the Shakespeare plays were adapted by Crystal S. Chan and illustrated by Julien Choi, the list of the plays includes: *Hamlet*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Romeo and Juliet* and *Macbeth*. The editors explain the rationale behind the series by stating that “[n]ot only does the manga format create a greater appeal of classic literature for a new generation but it also provides context making the story even more accessible. By bringing a manga approach to these iconic stories, Manga Classics is introducing a whole new generation to the joys of classic literature!” (mangaclassics.com/about). The comic book series devoted to Shakespeare's adaptations, although problematic to find and purchase, are still easier to trace than single auteur works. Tracing and compiling the list of all series and plays has proven to be a challenging task due to their convoluted

¹⁰⁵ The marking line for the review is the end of 2015. Naturally, there can always appear new series, or new titles for the existing series, which adapt Shakespeare in the form of a graphic novel.

publication history; hence, only the series which have appeared in English, either in Europe or the United States, were considered. It appears that manga is dominating in publishing comics as a series due to its growing popularity in America and Europe. Surprisingly, most of the series were not originally published in Japan, but the style was adopted by Western publishers. Series adapting literature and preserving the Western style of comics is in minority.

In 2022, a new series ‘Classics in Graphics’ from Franklin Watts publishing appeared on the market. It was the brainchild of two comedians, Steve Barlow and Steve Skidmore, who invited illustrators to participate in the project. The series adapted six plays: *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *The Tempest*. The adaptations are aimed at young readers hence the authors provide extra teaching resources and dyslexic-friendly design¹⁰⁶

Shakespeare, however, is not only published as part of a series but there is an increasing number of auteur comics which take the plays as the subject matter. In this case, the authors take greater liberty with the setting, characters, and language, leading to interesting examples. Probably the best-known and acclaimed appearance of Shakespeare and the adaptation of plays is in Neil Gaiman’s *The Sandman* series. Shakespeare is mentioned on three occasions, in #13 “Men of Good Fortune” Shakespeare makes a Faustian pact for a talent to write plays and the next two #19 “A Midsummer Night’s Dream” and #75 “The Tempest” are realisations of those hopes and dreams. Gaiman’s adaptation not only focuses on the play but also on the creative process of both the playwright and the comic book writer, thus challenging the authority and position of the author in a manner similar to Barthes and Foucault. Furthermore, Lanier (2002: 120-123) Gaiman’s *The Sandman* can be classified into the tradition of mythical and fictionalised biography of William Shakespeare. Despite the plethora of adaptations, the figure of Shakespeare has not drawn much attention of comic creators. Apart from Gaiman, only Craine (2007) wrote a short biography in the form of comics focusing on Shakespeare as a writer (and his creative process).

Gareth Hinds is another prolific comic book creator who transforms literary works to visual narrative. Hinds has gained popularity by adapting epic poems, *The*

¹⁰⁶<https://the2steves.net/classics-in-graphics/> and <https://www.hachette.co.uk/titles/steve-skidmore/classics-in-graphics-shakespeares-macbeth/9781445180007/>

Odyssey and *Beowulf*. However, shifting his focus to Shakespeare's plays has resulted in graphic novels which open up for interpretation. Hitherto, Hinds has created four comics based on plays: modernised version of *The Merchant of Venice* (2008), *King Lear* (2009), *Romeo and Juliet* (2013) touching upon interracial issues, or gory *Macbeth* (2015). In his works, Hinds experiments with colour and motifs, as well as with idiosyncratic symbolism and semiotics.

Hamlet, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Macbeth* are among the most often adapted plays. They also allow creators to shed new light on the possibilities of the medium as well as new perspectives and reading of the plays. Nicki Greenberg created her *Hamlet* (2010) by means of anthropomorphic inkblots, she mixes artistic techniques to achieve her goal; it is a combination of collage and drawing, with a strong relationship to theatrical and performative tradition allowing the audience look on the stage as well as behind the scene. In this way, she is able to accurately depict the feeling and state of the character's mind or manipulates time and space. Another two works are versions of *Romeo and Juliet*; Enki Bilal's *Julia & Roem* (2011), which appropriates motif of the "star crossed lovers" in post-apocalyptic work, another is *Romeo and Juliet: The War* (2011) by Max Work, Stan Lee and Terry Douglas. Similarly to Bilal's, *Romeo and Juliet: The War* is set in a distant future in which the eponymous characters belong to altered humanoid species. *Romeo and Juliet* is a play which is not only modernised but also often set in the postapocalyptic future, proving that basic human emotions will not disappear in the future.

All of the above examples centred on the adaptations of plays. Authors of *Kill Shakespeare*, Anthony Del Col and Conor McCreery, combined characters of plays as well as the figure of William Shakespeare to create a new story with new dynamics. Hamlet and Juliet are leaders of the resistance against Richard III and Lady Macbeth and attempt to find Shakespeare, a mythical deity, and his quill. The graphic novel is filled with numerous references to minor characters, titles, and phrases, constructing a complex collage. Despite the initial criticism, the series gained acknowledgement and popularity, which allowed comics to be turned into a board game and a theatrical performance. *Kill Shakespeare* requires, on the part of the reader, detailed knowledge of the plays.

Among the auteur Shakespeare comic creators, Gianni de Luca is the most enigmatic. He created three adaptations, *The Tempest*, *Hamlet*, and *Romeo and Juliet* in

between 1975-76 and published them in a catholic magazine *Il Giornalino*, only a few pages circulated on the internet drawing the attention of both Shakespeare and comics scholars. In 2012, the Spanish version of *Hamlet* was released. Finally, Paul Gravett and Ronan Paterson managed to collect and prepare the English version of the ‘trilogy’ which was published in June 2023¹⁰⁷.

Although the predominant interest of the dissertation are complete adaptations of Shakespeare’s plays, adaptations of sonnets are worth mentioning in the short history of Shakespeare and comics. Among the issues and difficulties, one encounters while researching sonnets in the graphic form (excluding illustrations) is their rare appearance in published format, but rather on the Internet. Sonnets, as comics or in a graphic narrative format, constitute an example of the discussed notions of fluidity and textual poaching. Adapting sonnets is a democratic and an individualistic act of an artist, almost to the extent of an artistic installation. A software developer, Adam Fisher, writing under the pseudonym ‘fisher king’, collaborating with Gabriel W. Metcalfe, started a project of turning all of Shakespeare’s sonnets into a graphic novel in 2018. The artist set up a webpage www.sonnetcomix.com for people to follow the project and support it financially through a crowd-funding and relationship building internet platform. Fisher publishes pages at regular intervals and wants to have symbols and references to each sonnet, which had been used in the graphic novel, tattooed on his body. In 2020, Fisher managed to publish the first volume of the graphic novel based on the first 25 sonnets. The project is still a work in progress¹⁰⁸.

Another instance of an artistic project, the “Graphic Sonnet Exchange”, took place in 2016 as part of the International Festival of Authors, when two artists, John Martz and Jonathan McNaught, were asked to turn Sonnet 12 into a graphic format. This project commemorated the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare’s death. The idea behind it was to popularise sonnets and reveal their graphic potential (Dionisio 2017, Patch 2016). A similar project took place in the same year (29th May 2016) called “The Sonnet Exchange” during Alchemy Festival. Alchemy Festival is a UK festival of South Asian Culture and the project is nor generally focused on sonnets and Shakespeare. However, one of the participants, Nuhash Humayun, adapted Sonnet 130 into a graphic

¹⁰⁷ <https://bleedingcool.com/comics/gianni-de-lucas-shakespeare-in-comics-finally-back-in-english/>

¹⁰⁸ All the information has been taken from www.sonnetcomix.com.

format. Neither of the projects went beyond the limitations or restrictions of the festivals, and the results (i.e. comics) can sometimes be found on the Internet.

The only book publication of Shakespeare's sonnets can be found in Russ Kick's *The Graphic Canon* Vol. 1 (2012) with two instances: Sonnet 18 adapted by Robert Berry and Josh Levitas, and Sonnet 20 by Aidan Koch. Unfortunately, Kick does not inform the reader whether the two adaptations were commissioned for the publication or had been done previously. Sonnet 18 by Berry and Levitas shows "another meaning, a different type of love" (Kick 2012: 406) using two types of colours, yellow for the happy past and black and white for sad, gloomy and lonely present after the death of the beloved one. Koch "brings checkerboard layout filled with hand-lettering and drawings to the sonnet, combining the masculine and feminine imagery" (Kick 2012: 417) in order to graphically depict Sonnet 20. There is only a limited number of adaptations of sonnets and they are usually done independently to express artistic ingenuity and resilience; however, it can be predicted that more such publications and projects will occur in the future with the increasing popularity of the comics adaptations.

Apart from adaptations of plays and sonnets the final type of comics which should be mentioned is the depiction of William Shakespeare in comics, either as a character of a fictive story or as a subject matter of a biography. Two such works have already been mentioned and discussed, i.e. the three issued from Neil Gaiman's *The Sandman* and *Kill Shakespeare* series by Conor McCreery, Anthony Del Col and Andy Belanger. David Livingstone (2019) conducted an analysis of these works with a focus on Shakespeare as a character¹⁰⁹. Another work which fictitiously approaches the depiction of Shakespeare is *No Holds Bard* by Eric Gladstone and Gabrielle Kari (2022). This is a superhero comics of William Shakespeare and William Page, who assume secret identities of The Bard & Page. The duo's mission is to rescue kidnapped Queen Elizabeth. The other two works are typical biography comics. The first one, *Parchment of Light. The Life and Death of William Shakespeare* (2007) by Nick Craine was premiered at "Shakespeare: Made in Canada Festival" by which it was probably commissioned. The second publication *Much Ado about Shakespeare* (2016) by Donovan Bixley tells Shakespeare biography by means of comics panels and quotes

¹⁰⁹ Livingstone *In Our Own Image: Fictional Representations of William Shakespeare* (2019), see Chapter 7 especially pages 294-309. See also Lanier (2007) who also discusses Shakespeare fictitious biographies in his article.

taken from his plays. The reason behind the limited number of biographical comics on Shakespeare could be the biographical data included in a number of comics, particularly those aimed at the younger audience and for educational purposes. However, it is interesting that the playwright works on the imagination of comics writers who are not only inspired by the works of Shakespeare but also by the man himself. Comics, both biographical and fictive, are also intriguing from the viewpoint of adaptation and appropriation as they blur the two notions and what constitutes the source text.

This short, and incomplete, history of comics book adaptations of Shakespeare's plays lead to the conclusion that Shakespeare comics can be divided into two categories. First type is series which adapt literature mainly for pedagogical purposes, and second more subtle, creative, and auteur work. It would seem natural to assume that more series and single comics are, and will be created in the future, making it a continuous effort to trace them¹¹⁰. Here, only full comics were mentioned and briefly discussed; however, there is still an abundance of cartoons and comic strips which should also be collected, as Jensen (2006) did, but which need updating. The history of Shakespeare adaptation can also extend beyond cartoons, comic strips, and comics, as these works function as an inspiration for the younger generation of artists. Since 2016, Yukari Yoshihara has been organising "Graphic Shakespeare Competition" which encourages professional and non-professional artists of all ages to participate. The works are not full comics or graphic novels but an interpretation of a scene or characters, but it is enough to reveal that comics can still play a significant role in interpreting Shakespeare's plays¹¹¹.

2.5. Summary

This chapter combines the historical overview of comics adaptations of Shakespeare plays with the theoretical aspects of adaptations and appropriations. By combining these areas, the foundations for the theoretical background can be used in the analysis of

¹¹⁰ All of the comics were published in English. The scrutiny lacks listing non-English versions due to the main focus on the original Shakespearean text and it reworking rather than translations.

¹¹¹ During a Shakespearean conference 22-24 April 2016 in Elsinore, the works of the 1st Graphic Shakespeare Competition were exhibited. Moreover, 29.06-2.07.2015 during ESRA conference in Worcester students of graphic design exhibited works created especially for the event, all works circled around the subject of Shakespeare. Comics and Shakespeare do not have to be perceived only as comics in a book format but also as a part of graphic art that can be exhibited.

selected titles. Naturally, the theory can be used in future studies and expanded further. In addition, an entire subchapter has been devoted to the overview of the publications, chapters and articles, on the topic of Shakespearean comics in order to identify the gaps in the research and position this work within a greater scope. The overview also revealed the need for a comprehensive monograph on the subject of comics adaptations of Shakespeare's plays.

Chapter 3: Verbal and Visual Elements of Comics

“Human beings need stories, and we're looking for them in all kinds of places; whether it's television, whether it's comic books or movies, radio plays, whatever form, people are hungry for stories.”
(Paul Auster)¹¹²

3.1. Introduction

Previous chapters have focused on answering the basic questions of what constitutes comics, or the relationships between comics and other media, as well as adaptation theories. Studying comics may take on various facets and aspects; it can take a reader and a scholar onto more popular paths of mainstream comics as well as those less popular by the auteur. This work combines three areas: comics books, adaptation, and Shakespeare plays, and leads through a surprising path of comic book adaptations of Shakespeare plays, their theories, and history. As a result of these observations and analyses, the terms adaptation comics and Shakespeare comics were coined to refer to a collection of comics which adapt Shakespeare's work in any shape or form.

Despite their long, over eighty-year-old, history only a limited number of titles (*Classical Comics*, *Manga Shakespeare series*, *Kill Shakespeare* or Gaiman's story “Midsummer Night's Dream”) have attract greater scholarly interest. Hence, the works that will be analysed are less known to the general public; they are not part of an

¹¹² Allen, Austen. “Big Think Interview With Paul Auster” <https://bigthink.com/videos/big-think-interview-with-paul-auster/> (5th Nov. 2009)

educational series and were published in the 21st century. Another two significant criteria which exclude comics from this analysis are the Japanese manga (both as a work originating in Japan and as an aesthetic choice) and the ‘computer comics’ that comics has not been released in a paper format (the reading and reception processes are different than the paper comics). The analysis is divided into three chapters. Chapter 3 establishes the theoretical aspects of analysing comics from a semiotic perspective to discuss Shakespeare comics. Chapter 4 adopts this framework to analyse the selection of adaptations, whereas Chapter 5 focuses on appropriations. Such a comparison will allow us to reach conclusions regarding the creative decisions that auteurs make in adaptations and appropriations.

The starting point for the discussion is the term ‘visual language’ proposed by Neil Cohn (for him, visual language is linked with Visual Language Grammar) which stems from the formalist and semiotic approach; since the term has been coined, there have been numerous understandings and interpretations of the term. Cohn’s publications on Visual Language Grammar delve into minute elements; however, as interesting and necessary as it might be, it is also too detailed for the analysis. Hence, the perception of visual language is slightly simplified for the sake of clarity. It has been stated numerous times that comics is a combination of images and text, mixing both visual and linguistic codes.

Following Groensteen (2007: 3), in the primacy of visual codes over verbal codes in comic and comics studies, the main focus will be on the visual elements of Shakespeare comics. The analysis then takes place on two levels, the macro- and micro-semiotic, following the path from the general and greater (entire page) to the smaller and more detailed (inside the page). The macro-semiotic elements deal with the page layout and its narrative potential; then, they enter the domain within the panel (micro-semiotics), where the focus is on smaller elements such as panel, gutter, panel transition, speech balloon, and other elements such as sound and colour. In comics, similarly to a theatrical performance, everything is meaningful and as McCloud has observed a comics is constructed out of “constitutive elementary units” which are the smallest elements which have meaning (McCloud 2009). However, each comics scholar needs to decide how deep to conduct the analysis and how small the elementary unit reaches. Naturally, there are other visual elements which could be discussed and

analysed, but the analysis of minute elements might prove confusing, unnecessary, and unsatisfactory for comparisons.

The analysis attempts to answer questions of how to understand and interpret the visual and verbal signs in Shakespeare comics, the functionality of the tools in interpreting the adaptations, and their usefulness in the reading process. Cara Byrne (2013) in her article on illustrated *Romeo and Juliet* for children discusses how close reading and interpretation of images influences the interpretation of the original work. The same can be done for comics, but the extent of analytical images becomes greater and thus more challenging.

It should be remembered that it is impossible to discuss only one aspect or one element of a comics, the levels or layers which are analysed permeate; for example, ideas expressed while discussing page layout may resurface and repeat while discussing panel transition, and the ideas of silence are linked with the speech balloon. Such permutations prove that reading comics is a nonlinear experience.

3.2. Comics and Visual Language

‘What is comics?’- is a question which re-emerges in almost any publication and has been asked here as well. Surprisingly, the answers that are given often lead to the formulation of a statement that comics is, or needs to be, something¹¹³. Popular answers explain, or that comics is a medium, comics is a genre or comics is a language; hence, it has to be viewed from that imposed perspective. The question should rather be reformulated as ‘What constitutes a comics?’, ‘How does a comics work?’ or ‘How does a reader understand and interpret a comics?’, and there has been an attempt to answer this question to at least some degree. Naturally, comics as a hybrid borrows elements from various media, but also possesses its own inherent qualities. Equalling comics as something often leads to adopting a presupposed view and approach to the study of comics. The aim of the theoretical chapter and the following two analytical chapters is to focus on the characteristics and intricacies of comics.

¹¹³ My definition of comics from a more socio-historical perspective with greater emphasis on the elements which constitute comics in in Chapter 1, 1.3.

The view which has gained widespread acclaim is the perception of comics as a language and to be more precise a visual language. This term has been generally accepted, but can be understood in many ways. An ardent advocate for the perception of comics as a language system is Neil Cohn, who has adopted linguistic theories to construct the theory of visual language grammar (Cohn 2013a; Cohn 2016) and the visual lexicon (Cohn 2007). “Visual Language is no different from verbal language – everyone has the capacity to make pictures; it’s just a matter of acquiring the grammar of putting them in sequence coherently, both for the ability to read and to produce them” (Cohn 2005). It seems that for Cohn anyone could create a comics successfully, he does not consider other necessary elements, for him the ‘coherent sequence’ is key. Viewing comics as a language system allows us to build a theory of visual language on the basis of syntactic theories; he devises a hierarchical constituent structure for sequential images in order to assess whether they are successful in fulfilling the act of communication.

Humans use only three modalities to express concepts: creating sounds, moving bodies, and creating graphic representations. I propose further that when any of these modalities takes on a structured sequence governed by rules that constrain the output—i.e. a grammar—it yields a type of language. Thus, structured sequential sounds become spoken languages of the world, structured sequential body motions become sign languages, and structured sequential images literally become *visual languages*. (Cohn 2013a: 3)

Cohn aims to provide graphic expressions with structure and claims that visual language functions in the same way as verbal language¹¹⁴ does. Similarly to verbal language, bringing two random images does not necessarily imply a successful act of communication. Another scholar who also supports the idea of comics as language is Groensteen (2007: 2) who states that “[c]omics will be considered here as a language, that is to say, not as a historical, sociological, economic phenomena, which it is also, but as an original ensemble of productive mechanisms of meaning. This language will not be passed through the sieve of a grand constituted theory, such as structural analysis or narrative semiotics”. This perception, however, strips the comics out of other essential elements (e.g. colour or sound, but also the speech balloon), which will also be discussed here, to understand the way comics function and are understood.

¹¹⁴ He even claims that varieties of visual language such as Japanese Visual Language and American Visual Language with their own peculiarities and intricacies (Cohn 2013a: 4)

One advantage of treating comics as a language is the broadened scope of academic studies on comics. Owing to the treatment of comics as language, it is possible to use cognitive, neurocognitive, multimodal, discourse, or semantic perspectives for the study of comics. Hence, comics has become a subject of academic research in new fields, opening up to interdisciplinary perspectives and new approaches. Naturally, this list is by no means exhaustive and includes cooperation between scholars from various, sometimes distant, academic fields. Perceiving comics only as a language may be limiting and overlooking the historical and cultural contexts.

However, the term visual language of comics can be understood in a broader sense and not only by equalling comics as a language system. The predominant perspective adopted here is that of comics is an example of human creativity or an artistic medium which, similar to other artistic and narrative sequential art, possesses narrative elements and qualities of a language (but possessing the qualities of language does not mean it can immediately be substituted for it). The characteristic elements of comics such as the gutter, panels, closure, and others are complex entities which require interpretation during the process of reading, and considering the previously mentioned authorial creativity, the linguistic rules may not always apply. Hence, the term visual language of comics will be understood as a general term referring to the components which make the comics meaningful and comprehended by the reader, but which do not necessarily have the quality of a linguistic system in itself. These are components which may possess easily observable features (i.e. easy to categorise), as well as those that would require greater skill and experience on the part of the reader. The comics is created out of various, very carefully selected narrative items, which means that everything on the page is meaningful and can be interpreted, thus allowing the treatment of comics as a composition of signs¹¹⁵.

¹¹⁵ Actually, the treatment of comics as sign and adopting semiotic analysis has its basis in de Saussure's theory of *langue* and *parole*. De Saussure's structuralism serves as a starting point from which various perspectives concerning comics began.

3.3. Elements of Visual Language of Comics

The treatment of comics as a collection of signs requires them to be classified and structured into layers. The comics elements will be discussed in three layers: macro-semiotic (panel layout), micro-semiotic (panels and frames, speech balloons, gutter, and closure), and other elements (features dealing with the representation of sound, music, movement, time and space, and colour). The last category is elusive, as it may be found at either the macro- or micro-semiotic level. Moreover, both these layers of visual language can permeate, and it is the personal decision of the reader to focus on either one or the other.

3.4. Macro-Semiotics in Comics

The notion of micro- and macro-semiotics, in reference to the study of comics, was borrowed from Groensteen (2007: 5) and comes from a group of Franco-Belgian semioticians of The Groupe Mu. The two notions are used as umbrella terms, according to which comics are to be viewed and analysed. The analytical path follows from general to specific. Macro-semiotics refers to page layout or panel composition and its narrative potential, in other words, more prominent signs (usually taking up the entire page or more); this is also the inalienable layer of any comics.

3.4.1. Mise-en-page/Panel Composition/Layout

It has already been stated numerous times that graphic narratives tell stories through a series (sequence) of panels, following the principles of sequential art, the panels need to be arranged in a specific order to be meaningful and as Baetens and Fray state “three fields of interest that are necessary and an inevitable part of any graphic novel: the organisation of the drawings in multipanel pages, issue of word-image combination, and questions of style” (2015: 103). The concept of multipanel pages refers to the meticulous composition of panels on a page that is controlled and organised by the artist. Hence, page composition has attracted considerable scholarly attention, leading to

a deeper comprehension of how the layout impacts the narrative and is understood by the reader. Again, following Baetens and Fray's (2015: 105) line of thought on page layout, comics are organised on three levels (layers): (1) the strip or tier which can be organised horizontally, vertically, or combined; (2) the page, which includes panel sizes and formats; and (3) the entire comic book¹¹⁶. Although only the first two layers will be discussed and analysed here, the tools can be extended and overlapped with the entire book. As the layout can change constantly, it is the responsibility on the reader's part to identify, as well as adjust and adapt to the compositional changes as well in the process of reading

It may seem that notions of page composition, page layout, or *mise-en-page* are self-explanatory and require no definition or explanation. Nevertheless, comics scholars have paid a significant amount of attention to the theory of panel composition, types, and possible impact on readers' enjoyment and interpretation of comics. Any comics consists of images or panels which require to constitute a coherent order to be comprehensible and for the reader to follow and understand it. Basically, the terms refer to the manner in which the panels are arranged on a page to tell a story. As Witek (2009: 153) stated "...panels on the page always create a narrative meaning both as sequences and as spatial arrangements; this double-text is implicit in all comics forms, but it comes to the fore most fully in comic books"¹¹⁷. Lefevre spoke in a similar tone about the importance of careful composition.

Given that drawn representations of a fictive world need to be arranged on a page or succession of pages, the development of graphic narratives is partly the story of how flat surfaces are occupied and shaped. In contrast to a film projection on a screen, all the scenes on a page are simultaneously present, so chronological order has to be suggested, otherwise the process of narration cannot begin. (Lefevre 2009: 227)

Generally, there are no differences between the notions of *mise-en-page*, page layout and page or panel composition, nevertheless scholars have been trying to distinguish

¹¹⁶ Baetens and Fray's division of layout to the three layers seems to be derived and inspired by Eisner's (2008: 41) who stated that "In comics, there are actually two 'frames': the total page (or screen, in digital comics), on which there are any number of panels, and the panel itself, within which the narrative action unfolds. They are the controlling devices in sequential art". Eisner focuses only on the single panel (which is also carefully composed) and the composition of panels. Baetens and Fray omit the single panel as a separate notion.

¹¹⁷ The idea of panels taking up space of a blank canvass was the main focus of Groensteen's (2007) ideas of *spatio-topia*, *arthology* and *braiding* to discuss juxtapositions and connections between panels, but his ideas, although are held in wide esteem are not popular Anglo-Saxon comics scholars. Nevertheless, it seems necessary to acknowledge his contribution to the subject matter.

them and use them in various contexts (Chavanne 2015; Grennan 2022; Moura 2022). It seems fruitless to enter the discussion; hence, the terms will be used synonymously here.

The primary function of panel composition is to arrange panels in order to tell a story. “[I]f comics involves the use of a number of images, then they must be arranged. They must be composed, that is to say, placed next to each other, or, in other words configured” (Chavanne 2015: 113). Chavanne emphasises the author’s conscious decisions during the creation of a graphic narrative as far as the order and composition of the panel are concerned. Lefevre goes even further in this line of thinking, stating that form might be meaningful as well. “Form is anything but a neutral container of content in the comics medium; form shapes content, form suggests interpretations and feelings. Without considering formal aspects (such as graphic style, mise en scène, page layout, plot composition), any discussion of the content or the themes of a work is, in fact, pointless” (Lefevre 2012: 71). Another significant point made by Chavanne acknowledges the role of the reader and the reader’s attention, who decodes the composition more or less consciously to work out the meaning. Eisner’s was very attentive to the role of panel composition because the artist has to “control the reader’s attention and dictate the sequence in which the reader will follow the narrative” (Eisner 2008: 40), which is done by means of layout and the artist fails if the reader is unable to focus on the panels and the eye wanders around. Witek (2009: 155) advocated Eisner’s concepts by saying that his “conception of the comics page, therefore, makes the control of the reader’s gaze in navigating the comics page a fundamental aspect of the creative art of the medium...”. In other words, all the decisions concerning the layout are carried out for both narrative reasons and for the reader’s benefit.

From a theoretical point of view, several approaches and notions will prove significant in the analytical part of comics adapting Shakespeare’s plays. Groensteen (2007: 92) devised three principles of page layout; (1) the panels “respond to compatible options” meaning that panel occupy a given width and height of the page and the same configuration may not work for other dimensions; (2) the layout “deliver to the reader the route devoid of ambiguity” which reiterates Chavanne; (3) the layout “obeys a principle of global composition”, global meaning both the page and the entire work (regardless of the printing format). These three principles were derived from and

capitalized on Peeters’ (2007)¹¹⁸ theory of panel composition. He divided page layout into four categories and called them ‘uses’: conventional use, rhetorical use, decorative use, and productive use. The types were further subdivided according to their roles in the narratives.

	Narrative-Composition Autonomy	Narrative-Composition Interdependence
Narrative dominant	Conventional Use	Rhetorical Use
Composition dominant	Decorative Use	Productive Use

Table 1. Peeters’ four general modes of page and panel utilization (after Peeters 2007)

Peeters introduced two dominants: narrative and composition, and other term narrative-compositions: autonomous and interdependent. Based on these dominants and modes, Peeters categorises their layout types and discusses them.

The first mode of panel composition is conventional use (1) which is neutral with reference to the narrative, that is, the grid does not impose the meaning and the narrative as the grid does not draw attention to itself. The conventional mode is also known as the ‘waffle iron’ grid (or 3 × 3 panel grid) and is not limited by or to any historical comics period. What is important concerning the conventional mode is the unchanged pattern of panels, which does not focus on the format. The second utilisation, which is in extreme opposition to the conventional use, is the decorative grid (2). The decorative mode treats “the page is considered as an independent unit, whose aesthetic organization trumps any other concern” (Peeters 2007), and by drawing the reader’s attention to itself pushes the narrative forward and the decorative mode also dictates the path the narrative takes. Aesthetic elements play a dominant role. The third mode is rhetoric mode (3) which signifies that the panel and the page are no longer autonomous elements – they are subordinated to a narrative whose primary function is to serve. The size of the images, their distribution, the general pace of the page, all must

¹¹⁸ The articles was originally written in French and published in *Case, Planche, Récit: Lire la Bande Dessinée* in 1991, and it has made a significant impact on the Franco-Belgian comics scholars. The article was finally translated into English in 2007 by Jesse Cohn.

come to support the narration” (Peeters 2007). According to Peeters, the rhetorical mode is the most widespread narrative technique; however, it seems to be closely followed by the conventional mode. It seems that rhetoric and decorative utilisations are similar; however, it is the direction in which the narrative is impacted that matters; that is, if the grid influences the narrative and accentuates itself, then it leans towards decorative mode, whereas if the grid is adjusted more to the needs of the narrative (i.e. the size of the panels is modified slightly to fit the story better), then it is in rhetoric mode. The final type of layout is the productive use (4) which also controls the narrative, and this arrangement goes even further as it generates it (Peeters 2007). This particular mode functions of the pre-arranged panels and panel sequences to which the narrative has to adjust. Peeters’ theory of page layout is heavily narrative-oriented; for him, this is its ultimate function. At times, Peeters is not always clear in explaining his understanding of his division, but the provided examples help to clarify the situation. Nevertheless, his approach was the first and most influential¹¹⁹. Returning to Groensteen proves helpful in understanding Peeters’ division, he advocates for and defends the regular layout (conventional) as the one which is easiest to follow, and also easiest for writers and creators to use. Groensteen (2007: 93) also dives deep into the understanding of Peeters’ ideas, but also finds it imperfect, imprecise, confusing, and inconclusive. Next, he reduces it to two questions: whether the grid is regular or irregular, and whether the grid is discrete or ostentatious. Hence, a conventional grid is regular and discrete, productive is regular and ostentatious, rhetorical is irregular and discrete, and decorative is both irregular and ostentatious (Groensteen 2007: 98). Nevertheless, these ideas constitute the starting point for discussing the mise-en-page.

Another scholar who focused his efforts on understanding how the page composition functions is Neil Cohn, he even coined an alternative term (external compositional structure – ECS) to discuss the issue, and it is a subject of many of his articles. His approach is more deconstructive and focuses on the micro-level rather than the macro-level. Pederson and Cohn (2016) in their article collected technical terminology that was scattered among the scholarship concerning page composition. Terms such as pure grid, horizontal staggering, overlap, separation, vertical staggering,

¹¹⁹ For example, Chavanne (2015) capitalises on Peeters ideas and suggests his own terminology, regular composition refers to conventional use, semi-regular refers to decorative and rhetorical composition refers to both Peeters’ rhetorical and productive. Chavanne also adds fragmented layout.

bleed, whole row, inset, and blockage seem self-explanatory, but they have been collected and are presented in Figure 1.

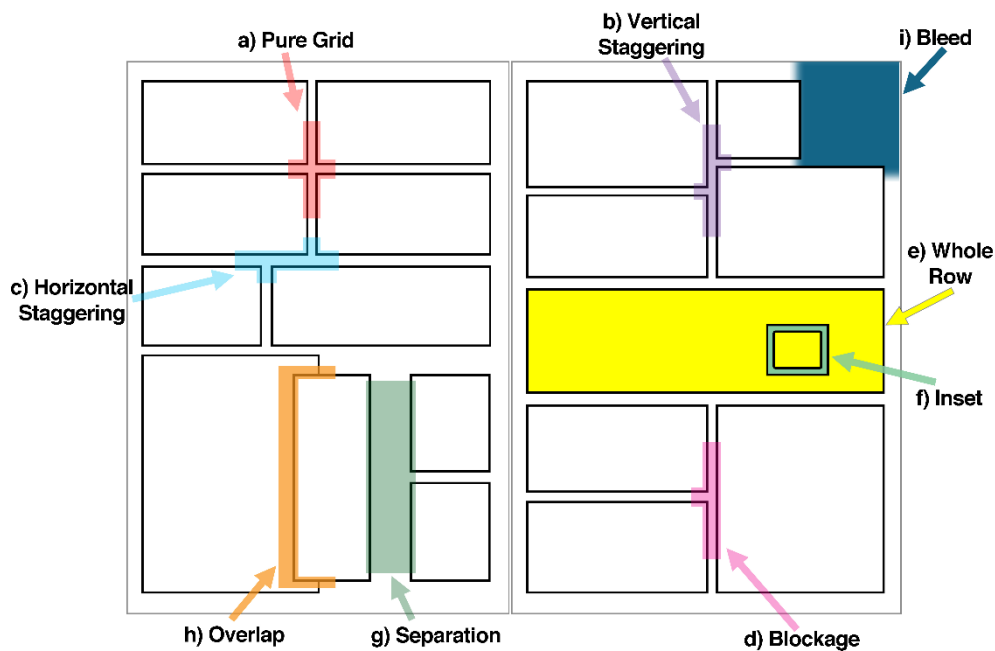


Figure 2. Schematised features of panels in page layouts (after Pederson and Cohn 2016: 10)

The technical terms facilitate the discussion concerning the layout and may influence the reception and understanding of the comics narrative. The reason behind Pederson and Cohn's (2016) collection of these terms was also intended to initiate and draw attention to the reader's reading process and the manner in which the reader's eyes move across the comics page¹²⁰. In addition, these features are by no means exhaustive, and it is up to authors', writers' and creators' creativity to develop new types. For example, the decorative utilisation of page composition, following Peeters' categorisations, would elude the straightforward adoption of these terms and would pose difficulty in reading using the Z-path.

The final elements that impact the comprehension of page layout concern the positioning of particular panels on the page at the micro-level. Gavaler (2018: 1) calls layout undemocratic particularly in the case when the panels are of the same size, they bear the same narrative weight and value. Each panel cannot be of the same significance

¹²⁰ The reader's eye movement in reading comics is not the subject matter in this dissertation, however it might be an interesting follow-up study. Nevertheless, it is worth remembering that the majority of readers follow the Z-path while reading regardless of the technical features.

as it would result in a lower attention span on the part of the reader; hence, artists accentuate various panels in order to control the narrative. Gavalier (2018) proposes eight techniques for accentuating panels in a layout: size, tilt, shape, spacing, overlap, frame, style, and position. Each of these techniques draws readers' attention to the image in the panel and emphasises its importance in comparison to panels that can also be found in the sequence.

Naturally, all these elements, as proposed by Peeters, Pederson and Cohn, and Gavalier¹²¹ can complement one another in the narrative. Hence, the study of page layouts requires addressing all these characteristics and establishing their functions and meanings. The theoretical discussion of panel composition, similar to other semiotic elements found in comics, has never been fully exhausted. As comics writers become more creative in terms of panel composition, comics scholars must address these developments and propose new theoretical approaches. It has already been stated that the theory of *mise-en-page* occurs at three levels. Unfortunately, with the amount of analytical material, it is impossible to conduct whole-book scrutiny. Hence, the analysis of page layout in comics adaptation of Shakespeare plays will begin with a general overview of the layout and only then focus on a chosen fragment in order to explain the possible functions and meanings that impact the narrative.

3.5. Micro-Semiotics in Comics

The previous subchapter discussed the term macro-semiotics, which is used in comics studies, and focused on the semiotics of the entire page (and beyond) and its narrative potential. However, micro-semiotics focuses on smaller elements such as the panel and the frame, the gutter, and the transition which occurs between the panels and the speech balloon which is a sign found within the panel. The 'from general to specific' approach, to a certain extent, follows the reading process in comics: from briefly scanning the entire page, to lingering over each panel to examine it in detail, and sometime even

¹²¹ Postema (2013: 30-45) has also devised her own types or formats of the layout, but for her it is the cooperation between gutter and frame that create the *mise-en-page*; she proposed six types of layout: (1) Panels frames by frames, separated by blank space; (2) One panel per page (with or without a frame); (3) Several panels per page; (4) Frameless panels; (5) Grids; (6) Inserts/Insets. Postema's division is quite general to be helpful in the analysis, nevertheless it shows how diversified the theory is.

returning to previous panel and pages for confirmation. It is also worth observing that as long as the panel, frame, and transition are necessary elements and occur in any comics, while speech balloons are optional.

3.5.1. Panel and (Narrative) Frame

The panel together with its frame is a basic unit of comics storytelling, but unfortunately, it does not achieve enough scholarly attention, and even finding a definition of a panel may be problematic. McCloud (1993: 8-9) talks about images conveying information and links them to film frames, even later when discusses types of panel he does not define the panel itself. The most straightforward definition of a comics panel was delivered by Duncan and Smith who stated “a unit of comic book communication that is called panel, irrespective of whether or not there are actual panel borders... Not all comic book panels are enclosed by a border, and not all pictures enclosed by a border function as a panel” (2009: 131-132). For Duncan and Smith, a panel is any image used to communicate in comics, and they also introduced the notion of a frame as a border for a panel which is not a defining element. Their definition is quite broad and general, but at the same time quite inclusive and does not require a detailed description because such an approach would simply be limiting; on the other hand, it would not introduce anything new to the discussion.

Another scholar who focused on the panel was Eisner, who devoted the entire chapter to the subject matter. However, he avoided providing a definition, but discussed the challenges the creators faced when dealing with the panel. His ideas complement Duncan and Smith’s (2009) broad definition. Eisner began his reasoning on the function of comics which is to communicate and tell stories using a combination of images and words. “To deal with the capture or encapsulation of these events in the flow of the narrative, they must be broken up into sequenced segments. These segments are called panels or frames. They do not correspond exactly to cinematic frames. They are part of a creative process, rather than a result of the technology” (Eisner 2008: 39). The process of encapsulation poses challenges to the artist in the creation process and later in the reading process to the reader.

Comics panels depict characters, their actions, and dialogue, but also contain thoughts, ideas, location, and background, which raises the issue of choice, that is, what to choose and how to present it in order for the plot to go forward, to be understandable and logical. The creation process of the panel is a conscious selection and an attempt to freeze a single segment of action which should not be confused with a single moment of time; Duncan and Smith (2009: 131) support such a view stating “[a] comics book does not present each moment of action in the narrative; the writer and/or artist must decide which images (pictures and words) to show in order to tell the story”. The image that is encapsulated in the panel is usually important for the plot and follows Lessing’s idea of a pregnant moment (discussed in 1.4.2); the creator is not always able to depict the entirety of the sequence of action; hence, the image in the panel presents the action clearly for the reader who fills the gaps of what is, or was, happening before and will happen later. Panels are synecdochical in nature with a fragment or detail representing the entirety of the fictive world; in other words, a small part represents a whole. As a result “comics are reductive in creation and additive in reading” (Duncan and Smith 2009: 132), the reader’s role is to expand the reduced fragment from the panel and through imagination and, in the case of adaptation, external knowledge¹²². Additionally, Fisher Davis (2019) discussed in greater detail the process of encapsulation and the particular principles and maxims which facilitate the composition process and the starting point for him is the principle of synecdoche (which echoes Duncan and Smith’s (2009) observations). Other guidelines include the maxim of identity (traces allowing the reader identify the same character), the maxim of continuity of time, the maxim of continuity of space, and the maxim of causality (Fischer Davis 2019: 74-75). Naturally, these doctrines do not operate only in graphic narratives but refer to most narrative media. It seems redundant to delve into the intricacies of each maxim at this point, but it is helpful to bear them in mind and look for traces across panels which allow the reader to link the panel content.

¹²² The creative process of encapsulation is based on the syntagmatic and paradigmatic choices done by the creator. The syntagmatic choice is “the process of selecting which panels to present from the possible progression of story images that could occur . This process is analogous to selecting the word order to create a sentence” (Duncan and Smith 2009: 132). The paradigmatic choice are “the chosen images that could have sense or communicated nearly the same meaning at the same point in the panel” (Duncan and Smith 2009: 133). Effective encapsulation requires maneuvering between the two.

The discussion focused only on the panels may pose an analytical difficulty because many of the issues touched here will be of significance in other parts such as layout, closure, and transitions, as well as the speech balloon. Moreover, it is impossible to conduct theoretical deliberations exclusively on one aspect; the maxims mentioned in the panel composition will also prove useful in closure and transition. This only proves that it is difficult to analyse only one aspect of comics and neglect another; in comics, the elements crucial in the narrative process intertwine and complement one another, and the reader is able to understand their functions subconsciously.

The creativity of comics creators is unlimited; hence, it is possible to risk a statement that no two panels are the same, particularly if personal drawmanship and the style of an author are taken into account. Consequently, proposing categorisations concerning panels may be a daunting task. Nevertheless, McCloud (1993, 2006) was among the first to suggest categories of panels based on their contents, mainly the combination of the verbal and the visual. He introduces seven panel types, and his approach towards panels has become the most recognised.

- (1) Word-specific combination is a combinations in which “[w]ords [are] providing all you need to know, while the pictures illustrate aspects of the scene being described” (McCloud 2006: 130). The panel functions more like an illustration to the text; these panels usually include a caption informing about a character’s state of mind, location, or provide background information.
- (2) Picture-specific combination is the opposite of the word-specific one as the picture provides the reader with “all [they] need to know, while the words accentuate aspects to the scene being shown” (McCloud 2006: 130). These panels have very few or no verbal elements, and those that do appear usually function as a soundtrack to the image (McCloud 1993: 153).
- (3) Duo-specific panels combine both words and pictures, but the message is duplicated, they “send essentially the same message” (McCloud 1993 :153). Similar to word-specific combinations, these panels possess narrative potential because the message included in the caption often comes from the narrator.
- (4) Additive or Intersecting¹²³ combination occurs when the verbal and the visual message “amplify or elaborate” one another (McCloud 1993: 154), once the name

¹²³ McCloud changed the name to intersecting in the book *Making Comics: Storytelling Secrets of Comics, Manga and Graphic Novels* (2006).

was altered McCloud (2006: 130) explained this category as “[w]ords and pictures working together in some respects while also contributing information independently”.

- (5) Parallel combination is when “words and pictures follow very different courses – without intersecting” (McCloud 1993: 154), both the verbal and the visual focus on different message.
- (6) Montage treats words “as integral parts of the picture” (McCloud 1993: 154), the verbal element is incorporated into the panel, it can be either diegetic or non-diegetic, the words can be used symbolically, and quite often are not encapsulated in the speech balloon.
- (7) Interdependent combination occurs when “words and pictures go hand in hand to convey an idea that neither could convey alone” (McCloud 1993: 155). This is the most common type of panel in comics, and it includes diegetic, non-diegetic, and narrative elements.

McCloud assumed the degree of image-word combination as the element on the basis of which his typology is constructed. However, it does not enrich the reader’s knowledge concerning the functionality of the panels (the reader identifies the types subconsciously anyway); adopting McCloud’s classification may shed light on the role of the narrator in comics. Naturally, McCloud’s typology is not ideal, but the panel has not been widely studied, and the proposed classification may constitute a starting point for further discussion and development of a new typology¹²⁴.

Another element that needs to be mentioned in the context of a panel is its border or frame. At this point, the disambiguation of the meaning behind ‘frame’ seems necessary¹²⁵. Some scholars equal the notion of the frame to panel (Eisner 2008; Cohn

¹²⁴ McCloud’s is not the only panel classification, but his seems to be easier to adopt in the analytical process. Cohn (2013a) studies panels as part of a sequence rather than a separate units, in this approach he divides the panels into three categories: suppletive panels, panel-level templates and panels as attention units (these are further categorized into: macro, mono, micro and amorphic (inactive) depiction). This categorization does not seem to be much helpful because they do not focus on the panel itself, but on its position within a sequence.

¹²⁵ Many art scholars and film scholars study the frame and its narrative potential (Wolf 2006; Crowther 2009). Interestingly, Smith traces philosophical basis for the study of frames and windows: “Most scholars examining how windows and frames become narrativized—most directly Anne Friedberg (2006), Mary Ann Doane (2002), André Bazin (1967), and Stephen Kern (2003), but also two of the humanities’ most influential thinkers, Walter Benjamin (1968) and Gilles Deleuze (1986, 1989) 1989—leave out comics, and so their depiction of the age of mechanical reproduction or the nature of consciousness or the story of modern time and space has a particularly cinematic bias.” (Smith 2013:

2007), the frame is also understood as a film frame or film angle (McCloud 1993), frame is also border of a panel (Eisner 2008), frame is also used to refer to page layout (Eisner 2008; he uses in notions of meta-frame, page-frame, or two ‘frames’¹²⁶), hence the disambiguation is necessary. For the clarification purpose, the frame here will be understood as a panel border which “can be used as a part of non-verbal ‘language’ of sequential art” (Eisner 2008: 44). The frame (or lack thereof) may add significant narrative value to the content inside the panel, similar to the way speech balloons work. Most panels are straight-edged rectangles¹²⁷ which means that the events take place in the present tense and it is narratively most neutral. Another type is a wavy-edged (scalloped) frame that may indicate flashbacks, reminiscences, or past events. Next, the scalloped (or cloudy) frame refers to thoughts and dreams, whereas the spiky-edged frame indicates great emotions or loud sounds and shouting (often mechanical sounds). As previously stated, the frame (border) is not an inalienable element of the panel. The lack of a frame refers to the idea of non-space, open space, or a sense of unlimitedness; in such a case, the background draws less attention (it is either blurred or just a blank background) than the events (Eisner 2008: 44). Comics creators can be innovative and creative towards the panel frame, which may constitute an artist’s personal style. As a result, comics readers need to be open-minded and present a growing mindset regarding the possible fluidity of the comics frame.

The final aspect of the panel frame refers to the idea of the frame in terms of film shots (framing), as discussed by McCloud (2006: 19). The composition of the panel content undergoes a conscious and careful process, and another aspect that is helpful in analysing comics is the proximity and angle of the picture. Comics studies borrowed the terminology from film studies; the most popular angles that are used in comics are pull back, close-up, cropping balance (tilt), eye-level, worm’s eye view, eagle’s eye view, wide view, and establishing shot. These terms are adopted when discussing particular angle shots or frames of the panels.

219). The study of comics, and the study of the comics frame in particular, could become a part of art studies in this particular context.

¹²⁶ “In comics, there are actually two ‘frames’: the total page (or screen, in digital comics), on which there are any number of panels, and the panel itself, within which the narrative action unfolds. They are the controlling devices in sequential art” (Eisner 2008: 41)

¹²⁷ Naturally, other shapes occur as well, which was discussed in subchapter 3.5.1. on page layout. A non-rectangular shapes of a panel was treated as an accentuating technique of the page layout.

3.5.2. Speech Balloons/ Captions

The speech balloon¹²⁸ is one of the most recognisable devices used in comics, to the extent that it became synonymous to comics, and as Smolderen (2016) traced the roots of the modern speech balloon to 19th century broadsheet satirical cartoons and caricatures, and prints, he also provided examples of similar devices used even as early as the Medieval times. Surprisingly, the function of the speech balloon has remained relatively unchanged since that time, i.e. to signify a character's utterance either in the form of a verbal language or another. Its significance has been emphasised by Carrier (2000) who viewed the speech balloon as one of the "essential qualities of comics" (2000: 74)¹²⁹. Although such a definitive perception of the speech balloon might be surprising, other scholars have expressed a complicated relationship with the speech balloon. Eisner (2008: 24) stated that "[s]peech balloon is a desperation device. It attempts to capture and make visible an ethereal element: sound. The arrangement of balloons which surround speech – their position in relation to each other, or to the action, or to the position with respect to the speaker – contribute to the measurement of time". The predominant function of the speech balloon is to convey speech and other sounds; sound effects need not be encapsulated in a balloon, and very often, they are not¹³⁰. Despite Eisner's initial negativity towards the speech balloon, he later observed that it brought together time and space; speech unveils over time, but comics captures it in the spatial dimension of the page unfolded simultaneously. For Smolderen (2014: 137) "the balloon seems to be the most natural way to attribute the gift of speech to a drawing in a sequential narrative. It is a convention, of course, but insofar as it perfectly performs its role, we do not see how it connects to the historical period in which it began to take on this role"; and to that McCloud (1993: 134) adds that "[b]y far, the most widely-used, most complex and most versatile of comics' many synaesthetic icons is the ever-present, ever-popular word balloon!".

Among the scholars who devoted more thought to the speech balloon was David Carrier (2000), who approached it from an art historian's viewpoint; for him, the speech

¹²⁸ The appearance and incorporation of the speech balloon in Anglo-Saxon circle of comics is connected with the development of the medium itself; the appearance of writing on ribbons in medieval art, and later in 19th c. on other elements such as the shirt of the Yellow Kid, which initially signified the uttered words by the character. See also Eisner (2008: 24-26), and Smolderen (2014) Chapter 7, McCloud (1993)

¹²⁹ See 1.2.1.

¹³⁰ More on the subject of sound in comics see subchapter 3.7.2.

balloon is to be treated as a constitutive and defining element of comics, which is a notion which has already been refuted. Having paid attention to the device and its analysis, Carrier sheds light on the manner and role of speech representation in visual media, and comics in particular. The speech balloon is a link between the verbal and the visual; it can be viewed not only as a container of words but also as a device charged with other semiotic meanings. Carrier (2000: 28) recalls Pierre Fresnault-Druelle's semiotic view on the speech balloon which is "neither purely verbal not just pictorial, but both one and the other at once, bridge the word/image gap". Furthermore, the speech balloon can be viewed as a device transcending the temporal dimension, similar to Eisner's observation. Again McCloud (2006: 142), in his handbook for comic book writer, observed that "[b]alloons don't exist in the same plane of reality as these pictures, yet here they are, floating about like flying objects". Despite sharing the same spatial dimension as a picture, the verbal dimension which is represented by words, belongs to a different time. Narrative stories are treated as a medium which tells past stories, but the speech balloon brings past utterances into the space of present time. The transcendental of the speech balloon complicates in the case of adaptations, when words uttered by the characters had been written before by a different author, and the words functioned as an inspiration for a visual representation. All these scholars approach the convention of the speech balloon differently; they recognise its value, popularity, and versatility, but in addition do not devote much analytical thought to the concept; they notice its existence and function but overlook the intricacies and semiotics aspect of the device. Carrier again stated that "words in speech balloons are intended to be heard by readers who know the language in which they are written. The speech balloon therefore must be purely conventional" (Carrier 2000: 29). Carrier follows Eisner's footsteps and notices certain regularities in the device.

Speech appears in normal balloons; a balloon attached with bubbles is private, known only to that character and also the viewer. Speech or thought is thus translated into visible language. Set within a picture space, the words are not elements in it; we would not see them if we could stand there in the picture; and usually the characters, who are standing there, cannot see them. (Carrier 2000: 36)

What Carrier seems to overlook is the potential of the device to break conventions, as well as to acquire (adopt) additional meanings unique to a particular work, such as changing the colour of the speech balloon. For example, numerous characters have

unique balloons denoting their speech, the main character Dream from Neil Gaiman's *The Sandman* series always have a black speech balloon; Dr Manhattan's balloon, from Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons's *Watchmen*, is blue; and Deadpool from Marvel Universe has always yellow ones. However, it is not only the words in the speech balloon to be considered, but also the font in which they are printed, possible signs as well as the shape, size, and positioning of the speech balloon itself. All of these elements are meaningful in comics.

The speech balloon carries a certain degree of traps and hindrances when it comes to their comprehension and interpretation. First of all, the speech balloon draws attention to its self-presentation function, which can be naively understood as a character who speaks is a character worth noticing (Smolderen 2014: 139). Moreover, the speech balloon and comics are generally known to be highly conventional which allows comics creators to toy with conventions and break them; for example, a character may notice the speech balloon and the words that are being uttered. In comics *Agent X (2004) #15* Deadpool notices the presence of the "small yellow boxes" (2004: 21) which present his thoughts. In most cases, the speech balloon does not belong to the diegetic world of the comics; despite the fact that it is included within the panel itself, it may indicate a character's movement or the time span of the narrative. This raises an issue of how to treat the speech balloon, whether it is a void or gap in the panel, or as an invisible container. In a situation where there are a number of speech balloons within a panel, the reader is burdened with the responsibility to decode the order of the dialogue. It is a fallacy to assume that the words in many speech balloons are all uttered simultaneously. In addition, the content of the speech balloon (or a thought balloon/bubble) does not need to be limited to speech (words), as it may also contain signs, symbols, or pictures, and a speech balloon may remain empty.

Neil Cohn's cognitive and linguistic approach to comics has resulted in a more in-depth "structural approach" (Cohn 2013b: 35) towards the speech balloon. First of all, Cohn defined the speech balloon as a "graphic container" and focused on the relationship between the text and the image. He identified four types of this relationship: (1) inherent (text and image are in each other's structures, often text can substitute an image, the text may also be diegetic text of the story), (2) emergent (text is encapsulated in a device which itself is invisible to others, i.e. speech balloon), (3) adjoined (the text is in the image but it is not interfaced with it), and (4) independent

relationship (complete separation of text and image). The emergent and adjoined text-image relationship is crucial in the discussion of speech balloons and thought bubbles.

The speech balloon used in comics which fulfils the emergent function is composed of three elements: the carrier, the tail and the root (Cohn 2013b: 38). The carrier is the container itself which either encapsulates text, image or remains empty, it can take on various shapes, sizes, and even colours. The device was subjected to interpretation each time during the reading process. In addition, the reader is required to be tuned to any changes which might occur, thereby altering their interpretation and understanding. “Carriers are familiar in the conventionalised signs of speech balloons, thought bubbles, diagrammatic boxes, and sound effects, and play a variety of functional roles in representation” (Cohn 2013b: 39). It has already been mentioned that the carrier, i.e., the speech balloon, is conventional and exists most often outside the diegetic world and that the root is rarely unaware of the existence of carriers (and their contents). However, in cases where the carrier is noted and acknowledged by the root, as in the example with Deadpool, Cohn (2023:40-41) introduced the notion of awareness violation. There are two types of awareness: (1) root awareness [\pm RA] (relationship with the carriers with the root) and (2) adjacent awareness [\pm AA] (relationship with the carrier without the root). Based on this condition Cohn (2013: 42) introduced 4 types of carriers: non-sentient [-RA, +AA] (sound effects); private [+RA, -AA] (thought bubbles); public [+RA, +AA] (speech balloon); satellite [-RA, -AA] (diagrammatic boxes). The tail is the uniting element between the carrier and the root; in other words, it is the pointy end of the balloon which indicates the source of language, i.e. the potential speaker, which is called the root. The tail most often points to the origin of the sound, such as the character’s mouth. An inadequately directed tail is considered a failure. Furthermore, the three elements: the carrier, the tail, and the root might not exist and then they are called ‘null’, i.e. null carrier, null tail, null root (Cohn 2013b: 53).

Among other notions which are important for the discussion of Shakespeare comics are bundled (the speech balloon usually without the tail is bundled within the panel; thus, it is easier to comprehend who is the root) and non-bundled carriers (carriers which may cross the gutter), carriers which overlay or cross the gutter, or shared captions with more than one tail (Cohn 2013b: 57-59). Cohn’s article constitutes a comprehensive guide for the study of the speech balloon. However, comics scholars are required to follow and trace the artistic creativity expressed in comics and then

amend the theory, if necessary. The following analysis of the speech balloons in comics adaptation of Shakespeare's plays might shed some light on the aesthetic and semiotic choices the adaptors make and whether their choices are either orthodox or allow greater aesthetic freedom.

Another characteristic element which appears in comics, but also in cartoons and animated films, is the emanata, unrealistic symbols which emanate from a character to indicate the physical or psychological state. These symbols, a part of the visual lexicon, may be free-floating and surround the character or encapsulated within the speech balloon, but they are part of the internal panel composition. Mort Walker (1980) in his somewhat satirical book created a collection of the emanata and even made up names for them such as agitrons, lucafect, briffits, plewds, solrads and many more. Neil Cohn in his attempts to formulate a comics lexicon started to collect and categorise them in manga which resulted in an article written by Cohn and Ehly (2016). Cohn has also attempted to create a similar lexicon for Western comics (Franco-Belgian and Anglo-Saxon)¹³¹. Because the emanata are not as systematised as other elements, and they may depend more on the individual creativity of the artist, the issue is just mentioned, but it will not be particularly referred to, unless they appear in the encapsulated form, i.e. in the speech balloon.

It seems that the discussion of the speech balloon is incomplete, without mentioning one more device. Another subcategory of the speech balloon, one without a root or a tail, is the caption, which is a narrative container with information about the time, setting, and characters' emotional state. The caption most often occurs underneath the panel, but it might also be placed on top, within the panel frame or outside. Nevertheless, the caption is always space for the narrator. The caption does not attract as much attention as the speech balloon; however, it is worth acknowledging the device.

3.5.3. Gutter, Closure and Transition(s)

Thus far, the analytical approach towards comics has focused on single elements such as the panel and frame, as well as on semantically charged devices with the panel, i.e.,

¹³¹ Fisher Davis (2019) discusses the emanata in his book and views term in term of both grammatical (syntactical) and aesthetic categories.

the speech balloon or the caption. All of these elements are characteristic and defining elements of comics. The definition of comics presented in Chapter 1 also emphasised the role of juxtaposed images and the sequence of panels for the narration in comics to occur. In order to comprehend the processes, and the narrative, happening between juxtaposed images, three elements: gutter, closure and panel transition, require explanation. These notions seem to be an inalienable part of comics and visual language; these features have been a part of academic discussions from the very beginning. The theoretical discussion of gutter, closure, and transition is adopted in the analysis of the comics adaptation of Shakespeare's plays.

The simplest explanation of the gutter is that it is the empty space between two panels; however, as it is a no-space, it is even more semiotically and semantically charged. McCloud's definition of the gutter focused on what happens between the two panels. "Here in the limbo of the gutter, human imagination takes two separate images and transforms them into a single idea. Nothing is seen between the two panels, but experience tell you something must be there... Closure allows us to connect [otherwise unconnected] moments and construct a continuous, unified reality" (McCloud 1993: 66-67). He noted that the idea of closure is inherently linked to gutter. Another definition of the gutter comes from Carlson who states that

"in comics some of the most complicated manipulations involve what is not shown, in that empty space full of meaning: the gutter. This tool [gutter] is unavailable to rhetors in any other medium: the ability to use 'nothing' to direct the timing and interpretation of the narrative. The blank canvas of a work of art, or the moment of stasis in a film can allow or encourage an audience response, but the creator can consciously arrange the empty space on the comics page in an attempt to dictate what the audience thinks about, shape what the audience thought about, and set the amount of time the audience spends thinking it" (Carlson 2018, unpaginated)

Carlson pays special attention to the unique role of the gutter in comics and its importance for the reading experience and the role of the reader in filling the gaps. Postema perceived gutter in a similar tone that gutter "has become ingrained in the reader's consciousness to such an extent that it works even when the gutter is absent. ... even when the gutter is literally invisible, when it is absent, its function still operates on the sequence" (Postema 2013: 49). In other words, the gutter becomes a more abstract and mental concept rather than a marker of the physical space between panels. For Berlatsky (2009: 162) the gutter is the liminal space between the panels which can be

perceived through the notions of lacks, in the gutter the reader needs to fill these lacks (the lack of action, lack of characters, lack of time)¹³². Duncan and Smith (2009: 166) also acknowledge the role of the reader when it comes to deducing the ‘events’ in the gutter “[t]he reader performs an ongoing construction of meaning by considering each panel in direct relationship to the immediately previous panel and in the context of all previous panels”. They also observed that the cognitive response of the reader when the gutter is concerned can be reductive, reductive, organising, and interpretative (Duncan and Smith 2009: 154). The reader is charged with the responsibility of actively participating in the production of meaning, and the gutter functions as the space where the process takes place.

All these definitions echo what Groensteen stated about the gutter that “meaning is produced by the intericonic gutter at least as much as is produced by the images themselves...” (Groensteen 2007: 112), but then he also adds that the act of filling the blanks in the literary text comes from Wolfgang Iser’s hermeneutic criticism and his idea of ‘gap’ or ‘blank’. “The situations and conventions regulate the manner in which gaps are filled, but the gaps in turn arise out of the inexperienceability and, consequently, function as a basic inducement to communication. Similarly, it is the gaps, the fundamental asymmetry between text and reader, that give rise to communication in the reading process...” (Iser 1980a: 109). For Iser, finding the link between gaps marks the moment communication is established, and the interaction can be either explicit or implicit (Iser 1980a: 111). Berlatsky (2009) also referred to Iser for the gutter. “Iser’s focus on the “transaction” between text and reader speaks eloquently to the ways in which frames direct readers in certain ways, but also how the reader must inevitably fill the gaps between them and participate in the construction of meaning” (Berlatsky 2009: 177). Iser’s idea of gaps and transactions is known as gutter and closure in comics. It seems that the notion of gutter, despite being extensively discussed by comics scholars and providing some intriguing philosophical observations, functions only as a starting point from which other terms are introduced.

¹³² “The gutter is simply the symbolic site of this absence. ... I certainly do not believe that the comics reader has to mentally construct “ghost panels” (*cases fantôme*; the expression is from Peeters), except maybe in extremely rare examples identified by theorists to prove a point.” (Groensteen 2007: 113)

The notion of closure which is extensively used in comics criticism, but at the same time it is ambiguous, extensively discussed¹³³ and criticised. Initially closure was believed to occur exclusively in comics, but it was quite quickly corrected that it takes place in almost any human artistic activity such as film, theatre and other¹³⁴. According to Kukkonen (2013b: 31) “‘Closure’ is perhaps not the most felicitous term here: on the one hand, because it is a term also used to refer to the conclusion of the plot, and on the other hand, because readers do not actually “close the gap” but merely infer connections on the level of the mental model”. The process of closure while reading comics might mean that “that people’s minds are creating segments of sequential images that are not physically manifested as part of a book, page, or layout, suggesting that comprehension does not rely on non-stop continuous linear transition” (Cohn 2010: 138). For Cohn (2010) the non-linear closure is of particular importance; he appropriated the idea from Groensteen’s theory of arthrology. “General arthrology demonstrates that the panel can also be the object of distant semantic determinations, which overtake the frame of the sequence and proceed to a networked operation” (Groensteen 2007: 111). Closure does not occur only between immediate panels; it can extend beyond just two panels and spread across panels and pages. Again, the reader is charged with responsibility to ‘read’ the panels and link them; hence, the process of re-reading and re-watching appears key in order to experience comics (Groensteen 2007: 113). The process of reading comics is non-linear and recursive, and requires careful (re)interpretation of already seen panels.

It is worth noting that psychology, particularly Gestalt psychology, constitutes the theoretical background for closure. In simple terms, Gestalt describes a phenomenon of incomplete forms, shapes, and dotted lines are perceived by the brain as complete

¹³³ *The Comics Journal* 211 (1999) edited by Bart Beaty was an issue entirely devoted to the criticism of McCloud’s *Understanding Comics*. Many comics scholars wrote responses to the publications pinpointing inaccuracies, lack of theoretical background at the same time not denying the significance of the publication itself.

¹³⁴ Abbott (2002) devoted the entirety of Chapter 5 of his book to the concept of closure in narratives and its role. Comics studies treat closure in slightly different. “The term “closure” can refer to more than the resolution of a story’s central conflict. It has to do with a broad range of expectations and uncertainties that arise during the course of a narrative and that part of us, at least, hopes to resolve, or close. Closure is therefore best understood as something we look for in narrative, a desire that authors understand and often expend considerable art to satisfy or to frustrate” (Abbott 2002: 53). Thus, Abbott views closure a broad narrative device.

images and wholes. However, as Gavalier and Beavers (2018: 2) notice Gestalt focuses on the spatial dimension rather than the temporal dimension, and the gutter, although it is spatially depicted, can include temporal changes. Gutter and closure draw attention to what happens or what could happen spatially and temporally between the panels, which is based on a dose of speculation, but an action does occur in the gutter. In Gestalt psychology, there is nothing between the elements, and it is only the mind that perceives the elements as a whole. However, the term is not universally embraced, the most vocal critic is Pratt (2009) with his idea of soldering or bridging¹³⁵, French theorists prefer to use the notion of ‘metonymic machine’ (Miller 2007) or like Duncan and Smith (2015) view panel framing as synecdoche. These suggestions hint that comics studies are still open to new ideas. Nevertheless, as closure is a broadly recognised term, it will be favoured in the analytical part of the work, the Gestalt-inspired closure which requires Gestalt visualising (e.g., divided panels which mentally constitute a coherent narrative whole) and the closure process involves mental modelling (called internal mental process). Gavalier and Beavers (2018) greatly influenced the perception of closure and transition, as they provided an in-depth understanding of the term.

First of all, Gavalier and Beavers (2018) separate and differentiate closure and transition, which to some extent were used interchangeably, and owing to this division they are able to provide a more detailed categorisation of both. “Closure types and transition types are separate classifications. Closure defines the inferences a viewer experiences when processing a transition. Since juxtaposed images can produce a range of inferences, closure should not be understood as individual transitional types, but a multi-faceted combinations triggered by juxtapositions” (Gavalier and Beavers 2018: 4). Closure is based on juxtaposition of panels hence the basic type is juxtapositional closure which focuses on “inferences produced by the juxtaposition of still images”

¹³⁵ Pratt (2009) criticizes and rejects the term closure as it refers “to the mental process whereby readers of comics bridge the temporal and spatial incompleteness of the diegesis that occurs in the gutters between panels, thereby participating in the creation of narrative” (Pratt 2009: 111). Pratt does not like the fact that closure is derived from psychology and psychoanalysis with all its baggage, he turns to a term from film studies, i.e. suture to denote “wherein the viewer brings order and unity to perception through an unconscious process of mentally “sewing” the film together from disparate elements” (Pratt 2009: 111), which he also notices is insufficient because it focuses primarily on spatial elements whereas in comics temporal ones are important as well, thus Pratt suggests terms of ‘soldering’ or ‘bridging’, their potential have never been fully discussed hence closure has been generally accepted as a comics term also in this work.

(Gavaler and Beavers 2018: 5), juxtaposition may occur across time (in film when an image is substituted with another one, or in case of webcomics when only single panels are presented) or space (many panels occupy the same space at the same time), and may include two or more panels. Another important aspect of closure is its retroactive nature, closure can only occur with a panel which has already been seen which also charges the reader with the responsibility to closely observe the panels and the changes that are happening between them (Gavaler and Beavers 2018: 25-26).

Juxtapositional closure may be either discursive or diegetic; discursive closure is concerned with the physical elements of the work, technique in which it was created, personal and characteristic elements of the artist, whereas diegetic closure describes the story-world and focuses on the elements which create it. Abstract panels and abstract images only create discursive closures. The discursive and diegetic closure may be divided further into ten subcategories: (1) recurrent, (2) spatial, (3) temporal, (4) causal, (5) embedded, (6) non-sensory, (7) associative, (8) Gestalt, (9) pseudo-Gestalt, (10) linguistic¹³⁶. Naturally, these subcategories of juxtapositional closure can be subdivided even further; moreover, it rarely happens that only one type of closure occurs. Increasing the number of closure types and attempting to spot all possible combinations would make the analysis unnecessarily complicated, convoluted, and would reach epic proportions; hence, the basic types will be used for the analysis, and only the most overt types of closure will be discussed. However, to use the terminology appropriately, each subcategory is briefly described.

Recurrent closure (1) is a type of diegetic closure in which two (or more) panels refer to the same element (it is also possible to repeat the entire panel), and the role of the reader is to recognise that the images refer to the same element and not to a new one. Partial recurrence may occur, which is sometimes even more common. Spatial (2) and temporal (3) closures consist of elements which draw attention to the flow of time and the space where the plot is taking place (it can be a change of space/place or its depiction from a different perspective). Causal closure (4) is often linked with temporal closure and focuses on the causality of events which most probably happened ‘in the gutter’, the action that occurred between the images. Embedded closure (5) is

¹³⁶ Recurrent, spatial, temporal, causal, embedded, non-sensory and associative are types of diegetic closure, while Gestalt, pseudo-Gestalt and linguistic are considered to be discursive.

characteristic only for comics; a single panel is perceived as constituted out of multiple images (often, the background of the panel remains the same as the predominant element, e.g. a character, being repeated). Embedded closure may have temporal, spatial, and recurrent qualities. Next, non-sensory closure (6) is a complex type of closure, but it may be defined as one “representing internal experience” of a character. The images depicting emotional and psychological states may be abstract or realistic. In addition, this type of closure focuses on the non-spatiotemporal differences between panels. Associative closure (7) is concerned with “dissimilar images which represent a shared object”, in other words the panels may at first be deemed as having nothing in common, a closer inspection may hint at an element which is repeated, again it is the reader’s responsibility to make the association. Gestalt closure (8) is concerned with “images perceived as a single image interrupted by a visual ellipsis”, it is the perception of many images as a single one. Most usually, Gestalt closure occurs in the background rather than the main focal point. Pseudo-Gestalt closure (9) takes place when the elements across two panels allegedly create a whole, but the image is “non-continuous”. Finally, linguistic (10) is a closure which takes place at the level of language, and the text might be a part of a diegetic world, a caption, or onomatopoeia (Gavaler and Beavers 2018).

So far, the discussion has revolved around gutter and closure and the manner in which the reader is charged with interpreting panels (juxtaposed, regardless of whether they are adjacent or not). Closure is based on the inferred elements that can be found (or are subjected to a change) between panels; hence, panel transitions might initially prove problematic and redundant. Naturally, panel transition is closely related to closure, and it is sometimes not distinguished as a separate notion. Transition focuses on the events that occur between two adjacent panels in the gutter, and the reader is not responsible so much with recognising and interpreting them. The most prolific advocate of panel transitions is Scott McCloud (1993) who characterised it by the events and concepts taking place in the panels, in the gutter (Davis 2022: 328-329). McCloud identifies 6 types of transition: moment-to-moment, action-to-action, subject-to-subject, scene-to-scene, aspect-to-aspect, and non-sequitur (McCloud 1993: 70-72). Moment-to-moment requires little closure and involves simple movement that occurs in the panels (it is often recurrent, spatial, and temporal). Action-to-action focuses on the progression of action for one subject (often causal or temporal). Subject-to-subject (spatial, temporal,

non-sensory) requires more closure on the part of the reader, and the transition occurs within a specific scene, such as a change in perspective. Scene-to-scene (temporal, spatial, associative closure) changes occur across different times and different spaces and might require an overt mark for the passage of time, for example, a caption. Aspect-to-aspect (recurrent, spatial, embedded, associative) focuses on different aspects of the same situation with the panels hinting that actions are happening simultaneously. Finally, non-sequitur transition, there is no logical or reasonable connection between the panels. McCloud explains that these transition types come from his observations and not all of them have to appear in each comics. The vast majority of transitions to be found in comics are scene-to-scene and action-to-action (McCloud 1993: 75-76).

The proposed taxonomy of transitions quickly sparked discussion about their suitability and applicability. Paradoxically, McCloud, who proposed the terms gutter, closure, and panel transition, did not go into an in-depth analysis; he simply focused on the six types of transition, overlooking the closure itself (Gavaler and Beavers 2018: 3). Hence, it appears that closure and transition are almost synonymous to some extent. Beaty (1999: 69) tried to understand the categories more deeply, and he picked up where McCloud left off. For Beaty, the first five categories of the transition are a visual narrative technique, the non-sequitur is “something of a hodge-podge category where non-sensical transitions are dumped” (Beaty 1999: 69); in other words, any problematic transition, one in which the reader has difficulty decoding, could be categorised as such. Moreover, panel transition “seems to privilege narrative story-telling it does so by focusing exclusively on the internal working of individual scenes” (Beaty 1999: 69), and it might sometimes fix on minute changes like blinking. Beaty suggests that at least two transitions are ‘superfluous’ it would be better if it focused on “a core group of transitions and then enumerated sub-categories, exceptions and specificities” (Beaty 1999: 70). McCloud’s transitions do not distinguish the changes clearly, particularly in reference to temporal changes (Gavaler and Beavers 2018: 4). Moreover, Cohn (2010: 131) observed that McCloud bases his types of panel transition on the notion that one panel represents one moment. He also ignored the fact that panels might consist of many elements and subjects, and numerous elements might occur simultaneously within it. McCloud in his theory seems quite definitive and, judging by the examples that he provides in his publication, easy to distinguish and assess. However, he does not acknowledge the possibility that more than one panel transition occurs between the

panels. Moreover, the idea of juxtaposed and adjacent panels may also be problematic when a non-typical panel grid is considered. The more complex the panel grid, the more unclear the transition becomes. It should be borne in mind that following the narrative grid of the panels on the page is not always clear; in the case where the reader makes mistakes and follows the grid incorrectly, the attempt to notice the transition (and closure for that matter) will become futile until the right path is found. Nevertheless, McCloud's categorisation is still a starting point when discussing panel transition (but also gutter and closure), which would be beneficial if supplemented.

The discussed issues constitute a basis for the analysis of the closure, gutter, and transitions in Shakespeare comics adaptations and Shakespeare comics appropriations. The analysis of closure requires a close study of particular closures between panels hence particular fragments and scenes from each work will be selected.

3.6. Other (Narrative) Elements

3.6.1. Sound/Music/Silence in Comics

In addition to speech balloons, onomatopoeias have become among the most often associated features of comics, as big sound words spread across the page. Despite the popular belief that onomatopoeias are the predominant way of conveying sound in comics, the depiction of sound in comics is more complex and nuanced than it might initially be believed with numerous aspects of the phenomenon. The elements to be discussed here will encompass diegetic sounds, such as various noises and music, as well as silence (including whether silence ever exists in comics), but with the exclusion of dialogue and human speech which has already been discussed. Although at times it may be inevitable, the subchapter will focus on the instances of sound that occur mainly outside the speech balloon.

The starting point for the discussion is whether comics is a silent medium or whether it is able to convey sound and noise. These seem to be two contrasting views, the first one views comics as a typically silent medium (or a non-auditory printed medium) unable to generate sound; the contrasting view is that comics is a medium

which is able to ‘produces’ sounds and silence quite skilfully. It might come as a surprise that both of these views are acceptable and valid. Hague (2014: 63) and McCloud (1993: 26) perceive comics as silent meaning that it is unable to produce any sounds, and the reader never actually hears anything¹³⁷. Postema (2019) is of a similar view, but she also states “[c]omics never directly create sound, but they can convey it in myriad visual ways if readers have the eyes to listen” (Postema 2019)¹³⁸. Naturally, comics cannot produce sounds in the same manner as film; however, the medium has developed its own conventions and unique creative approach to visualise sound in comics (both Warner (2008: 108) and Postema (2019) emphasise this in their work). Interestingly, all of the mentioned scholars draw attention to the role of the reader, who needs to ‘listen with their eyes’ and be armed with the tools that allow them to decode, deconstruct and understand the sound words (Sanyal 2019: 216). Contemporary comics creators have a plethora of means at their disposal to depict sound effects. The mentioned conventionality may at times hinder the process of collecting, classifying, and interpreting the material owing to its changeable and elusive nature. The mentioned conventionality appeared also in Petersen’s article (2009: 163) who state “[s]ound in comics is not a stylistic trait or a feature of a particular genre of comics, but is endemic to all comics due to the multimodal way words and pictures are formed and combined” and once again corroborated the significance and the uniqueness of the word-image relationship also in reference to the depiction of sound in comics. It has already been mentioned that the reader’s role in the process of experiencing comics is vital. Petersen

¹³⁷ The issue of sound in comics has numerous aspects and facets. It has already been stated that comics are silent (i.e. they do not produce sound); however comics is a flexible medium which welcomes innovation. Comics creators have always been open to incorporate the sense of music into comics, for example Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons’ *Watchmen* used song lyrics in their comics which had to be acknowledged under the copyright law which could function as a soundtrack to the comics. They also included a list of the songs that are used and referred to so that the reader can listen to them while reading. Another example is #3 “Dream a Little Dream of Me” from Neil Gaiman’s *The Sandman* with a number of songs with include the word ‘dream’ function as a background for the story and as a soundtrack for the reader. Another step is including a playlist (or a CD) with music and songs to accompany the comics, e.g. *Murder Ballads* (2017) by Gabe Soria and Paul Reinwand with especially composed music for the graphic narrative. The greatest advancement is to be found in digital comics which are able to incorporate music, songs and sound effect by clicking at an icon or an element within a panel (Goodbrey 2022: 300). With an increasing number of comics adapted to film and TV series, the soundtrack composed for them may be identified as the music to accompany the comics as well.

¹³⁸ Postema (2019) in her entry on sounds in comics discusses also wordless comics, and whether they are also silent. “[W]ordless or silent comics are not actually silent, of course. They are silent in the way silent movies are silent: they are wordless. You don’t hear the dialogue (or in this case, you don’t read it), but you could still see people shouting at each other or glass breaking.” (Postema 2019). The comparison between silent comics and silent film is quite apt, and they function on similar basis and it is up to the reader to imagine that the experienced narrative is filled with sounds, music, and dialogues.

takes a step further by acknowledging the reader as an external factor which may introduce sound while reading out loud or even mouthing the dialogues and onomatopoeias in the process of subvocalization (Petersen 2009: 164). The extent of conventionality when it comes to sound words was illustrated well by Joshua Kopin (2019a, 2019b, 2019c, 2019d), who co-organised a four-part roundtable on the topic of sound and comics, and sound in comics which collected views of various comics scholars. In the introduction Kopin (2019a) poses questions about the manner in which sound is, and can be, depicted in comics and

“how comics can make noise outside of the strictures of sound effects and the word balloon, about how the word balloon might itself be flexible, and about how all of these questions can be translated across culture and language. They find that these questions are not only formal but also political, that comics are cacophonous, that they have rhythm and harmony, that they make noise that demands our attention.” (Kopin 2019a)

It is true that comics draw the reader’s attention through splashed sound words across the page, but, as Kopin mentions, they are meticulously planned. Leshinsky (2005) observed that no other medium needs to add sound effects (or be required to design an adequate sign system for it), films add sound and music, novels describe sound through synonyms and metaphors, and visual media (i.e. paintings) do not focus on the sound at all. A brief overview of publications focusing on sound words in comics reveals the profusion of terms with overlapping meanings. Hence, based on the articles written by Covey (2006) and Warner (2008), it is possible to formulate a harmonious theory of sound words in comics. The common term which encompasses the entirety of sound words is onomatopoeia. Covey suggested division of sound effect into ‘descriptive’ which are “words, usually verbs, that don’t attempt to reproduce the sounds they depict” (Covey 2006) and ‘onomatopoeic’ which are “words that approximate the sounds to some extent” (Covey 2006). These two types of onomatopoeias seem straightforward and ready for use in the analysis. Another suggested term is acoustigrams proposed by Warner (2008), who acknowledges Covey’s views. Acoustigrams is analogous to pictograms and refers to “noises that are patently nonsense, but possess potent expressiveness” (Warner 2008: 108), such as POW!, AUCH! etc. Although Warner clearly acknowledges her inspiration from Covey’s work, she does not take a stance on her categorisation, e.g. there is a similarity between acoustigrams and descriptive onomatopoeias, but unfortunately, it is not further explained. Simultaneously,

acoustigrams is a productive term as its meaning can be extended, and refer not only to verbal signs (sounds, words, and non-words), but also to other visual signs, which extends the initial meaning proposed by Warner (2008). The combination of these pictorial elements expressing the aural dimension together with a verbal one, that is, onomatopoeia, constitutes the basis for the sounds presented in comics.

Ian Hague (2014) devoted his entire book to the notion of multisensory approach towards comics and opening up the discussion how comics are perceived and received by the reader, together with the role of reader (previously mentioned Petersen (2009)). Moreover, Hague invokes a notion proposed by Don Ihde “auditory imagination” (Hague 2014: 65)¹³⁹, which emphasises the role of experience and imagination when it comes to the process of decoding the onomatopoeias and acoustigrams. A reader has to possess a previous experience of a particular, or similar, sound in order to be able to imagine it while reading a comics, with the auditory imagination any onomatopoeic device will remain a meaningless word, thus leading to the failure of the reading experience. Moreover, Hague observed that gathering such experiences does not need to be linked with distant events. On this basis, Hague also proposes three categories as far as comics and sound are concerned: sounds of comics, sounds in comics, and sounds with comics (Hague 2014: 68). The first category, ‘sounds of comics’, refers to the sounds created by the comics as a physical object, e.g. the rustling sound of paper while turning a page. The second category, i.e. ‘sounds in comics’, refers to the “sounds that are integrated into the narrative of a comic and are produced by a component of the object that was installed for that specific purpose” (Hague 2014: 68), and this is of the main interest here. The last category is ‘sounds with comics’ are sounds included with the comics on a separate, external carrier or a device and are to accompany the reader while enjoying the text.

Depicting sounds and noises in comics, as already mentioned, is heavily based on conventionality, but also artists’ creativity. However, as McCloud (2006: 147) noticed there are variables (loudness, timbre, association, graphic integration) that need

¹³⁹ Don Ihde’s concept of ‘auditory imagination’ is based on phenomenological concepts and auditory experience. The exploration of auditory dimension can be done either perceptual or imaginative mode (Ihde 1970: 203). His observations can be used when discussing sounds in comics as the reader refers to the previous experienced on the basis of which is able to imagine how the sound depicted by a sound word might sound.

to be considered and are fairly easy to interpret during the reading process. Loudness is often indicated by the size and boldness of the font and presence (or lack) of exclamation marks. Timbre represents the quality of the sound, and it is often represented by roughness, waviness or sharpness of the sound word, e.g. onomatopoeia designed with rough edges (or fonts) might indicate screeching sound whereas softer and rounded more mellow or muffled sounds. Association is the link between the sound word and its source which might be represented by a font style (or sometimes even a speech balloon); the sound word can also mimic the source of the sound. The last variable is graphic integration which considers the shapes, lines, and colours of sound words, as well as any other signs representing sounds.

In *The Tempest* (3.2) Caliban famously states “The isle is full of noises,/ Sounds and sweet airs that give delight and hurt not/ Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments/ Will hum about mine ears” (3.2 135-138), pointing to the abundance of sounds that are noticeable only if one listens carefully is open to the experience. The same can be said of comics; on the one hand, most readers do not pay much attention to the sounds, and on the other, the only signs that are noticed are the splashed and colourful sound words. Sounds in comics are always present, regardless of whether there is a sound word or not, but one noticed they will “give delight” and enrich the comics’ reading experience.

3.6.2. The Meaning of Colour in Comics

The ubiquity of colour has inspired people from various backgrounds to study it, it has been of interest to artists, psychologists, physicists, writers, linguists and many more¹⁴⁰. Surprisingly, the issue of colour in comics, its function and its meaning is undertheorised and neglected (Prytz and Palmer 2020: 25) and “a global theory of color in the comics field is still missing” (Baetens 2011a: 111)¹⁴¹. Baetens indicated two reasons for this lack of interest: methodological and ideological. First, scholars focusing

¹⁴⁰ The various aspects of colour have been discussed in Goethe (1970); Birren (1961); St Clair (2017); Kastan and Farthing (2018); Elliot (2019); Haller (2019); Vartanian (2022).

¹⁴¹ Colour has been a subject of discussion in film and history of film, remembering the semiotic implications the technical change from black and white to colour it comes as a surprise that similar attention has not been paid to colour in comics,

on comics studies often lack methodologies and tools to discuss colour. Comics studies welcome an interdisciplinary approach, but in this aspect, it has yet to attract sufficient attention. Secondly, Baetens observes that whether a comic book is monochromatic (black and white) or polychromatic (colours) may indicate the 'seriousness' of the publication.

“As we have seen above, a possible starting point here might be the elementary observation that today most comics are in color, while many graphic novels are in black and white. As argued before, it is clear that the policy of “distinction” seems to play a crucial role in this opposition: in the field of graphic storytelling, color is associated with mass culture, hence the prevalence of its use in comics, whereas the discrete values of black and white are claimed to denote high-brow production. Such an approach, however, does not work, and it is not difficult to list a number of reasons that jeopardize this crude sociological reading of the color issue in graphic storytelling.” (Baetens 2011a: 114)

Baetens makes a clear distinction between high quality, monochromatic, graphic narratives (Satrapi's *Persepolis*, Spiegelman's *Maus*, Sacco's *Palestine*, Delisle *Burma Chronicles* are all drawn in black and white) and polychromatic, popular, low-quality comics (most superhero comics)¹⁴². McCloud (1993: 192) expresses a similar view “[t]he differences between black-and-white and color comics are vast and profound, affecting every level of the reading experience. In black and white, the ideas behind the art are communicated more directly, the meaning transcends the form. Art approaches language”. McCloud also add how these two types of publication impact reception process and its interpretation¹⁴³. Troubling is the fact that all these observations are taken for granted, and that this particular division has not been challenged. Although, the division might have initially functioned as a quality indicator, it should be borne in mind that there are numerous titles of high quality which have adopted colour, for example Alan Moore's work (*Watchmen*, *From Hell*, *V for Vendetta*), Neil Gaiman's *The Sandman*, Daniel Clows' *Ghost World*, David Mazzuchelli's *Asterios Polyp*, Chris Ware's *Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth*. The discussion concerning mass/

¹⁴² Superheroes are often identified with and through the colour scheme in which they have been created, for example Batman is depicted in various shades of black, grey, but also yellow (his utility belt), and Superman is always linked with red, blue and white. Furthermore, many of superheroes and villains include colour as part of their name, for example: Green Goblin, Black Adam, Scarlet Witch, Green Arrow, Green Lantern, Blue Beetle, Black Widow, this was done not only for production reasons (i.e. to avoid confusion in a collaborative environment) and for a reader to identify a character more easily.

¹⁴³ The exact same idea is found in Duncan and Smith (2009: 142): “Using black and white instead of color can also affect the meaning of a story. Because many of the most ambitious and critically acclaimed comics works have told their stories without using primary colors, black and white, or at least subtle colors, has become emblematic or serious comics books”.

popular culture and high culture echoes what was previously stated while defining comics and positioning adaptations of Shakespeare's plays in comics within the domain of popular culture. Adaptors who take on the challenge of transforming the text into a comics page embrace a variety of techniques, styles, and colours. There are both mono- and polychromatic adaptations and as far as Shakespeare's adaptations are concerned the presence of colour signifies their mass medium quality.

Another aspect in the discussion of colour in comics was observed by McCloud (1993), for whom the historical, economic, and technological aspects of printing comics (both as comic strips in newspapers and as separate issues) shed some light on the adoption of colours in comics. "All aspect of comics history have been affected by commerce. Money has a tremendous effect on what is and isn't seen. But color has always been unusually sensitive to the shifting tides of technology." (McCloud 1993: 186). Publishing cartoon strips and comics in newspapers (in CMYK – cyan, magenta, yellow, black) contributed not only to the popularity of the titles, but to the increase in newspaper sales in general, but colour printing also meant rise of costs. Once the popularity of comics increased and they were published as separate issues, aesthetic value did not change instantaneously. However, the quality of print improved and publications once the so-called flat-colour (popular in European comics such as Herge's *Tintin*) appeared which contributed to recognising the meaning that colour can carry.

From the perspective of colour psychology colour always carries meaning, but also "create[s] and amplif[ies] the emotion in a story" (Duncan and Smith 2009: 142). Jung (2017 [1921]) in his book *Psychological Types* capitalised on Hippocrates's division into four human humours and divided personality into four categories: cool blue, fiery red, earth green, sunshine yellow, and with that division came insight into how colours affect the mood and the emotions. Regardless of whether there is any merit in performing psychological tests, this inspired further insight into the role and meaning of psychological primaries. These four primary colours can evoke various human reactions. Haller (2019: 68) collected basic observations concerning the primary colours and psychological responses at a subconscious level.

(1) Red affects people physically, it increases their heart rate and pulse rate. Red can active the sympathetic nervous system as a reaction to threats. It is often used to mark danger, but it also represents strength, passion, lust, and aggression. (Haller 2019: 68, 72)

- (2) Yellow affects human emotions. “It has an impact on the nervous system – a system that transmits signals to and from the brain to the rest of the body – making yellow the strongest colour in psychological terms” (Haller 2019: 68). Yellow evokes irritation, anxiety, depression, but it also stimulative and optimistic (Haller 2019: 78-79)
- (3) Blue affects intellect and cognition. It is the colour of sea and sky, it evokes clear thinking, serenity, calmness, but also aloofness, coldness (Haller 2019: 83-84)
- (4) Green evokes feelings of balance, harmony, and quietness. It introduces a balance between the mind, body, and emotional senses. Thus, it affects the parasympathetic nervous system. It is also a colour of stagnation, boredom, rejuvenation (Haller 2019: 87-88)

Here, the main focus is on primary colour, but these considerations can be capitalised on and developed concerning other colours and hues such as pink, orange, browns, and others. The analysis of colour in Shakespeare adaptations will not go into details concerning the entire gamut of colours, as it is just another aspect of these works which contributes to their meaning and understanding. As Baetens notices “[c]olor must help the reader better understand a fictional world whose coherence and continuity can never be taken for granted in a medium whose basic publishing structure is the instalment unit. For readers entering a fictional world during one or two pages every week, the story must be instantly clear, if not they may drop out” (Baetens 2011a: 117). Colour is one of the factors which is able to contribute to sustaining a reader’s interest and focus.

3.7. Verbal Narration of Comics – Shakespearean Language in Comics Adaptations

Comics tell (or should it be ‘show’?) stories, using a combination of images and words. Such a statement can be found almost any work devoted to the medium of comics, whether it be a scientific article, a monograph or a journalistic essay¹⁴⁴. This is treated as the revealed truth without further pondering on its implications; that is, comics are narratives which deserve analysis adopting narrative theories. The subchapter will not

¹⁴⁴ This work included; I have referred to the word/image combination numerous times.

provide an in-depth overview of narrative theories concerning comics, but it will attempt to establish the basic ideas and the manner in which they align with Shakespeare adaptations in comics.

Treating comics is a narrative text that allows two approaches. Many definitions view the narrative aspect of comics as one of the constituting features of comics, which was also recalled in Chapter 1. A quick re-examination of the definitions of comics (Kunzle 1973: 2; Harvey 1996: 3; Carrier 2000: 74; Hayman and Pratt 2005: 423) indicates that for comics scholars its narrative nature is unquestionable and requires no further discussion. Unfortunately, owing to such an approach, comics scholars have a tendency to avoid the question of how comics create the narrative and what the narrative elements are. On the other end of the spectrum, there are non-comics scholars, usually with background in literature, culture, or narration, who seem to be somewhat surprised that comics are narratives and include comics in their theoretical works.

An interesting perception of the narrative and narration comes from Wolfgang Iser, who positioned the idea of a gap in the centre of the narrative process; it is the holes and lack of clarity that keeps the reader involved in the story. “[I]t is the gaps, the fundamental asymmetry between text and reader, that give rise to communication in the reading process” (Iser 1980b: 167). While experiencing the narrative, the reader is constantly involved in creating assumptions about the missing elements of the story, and based on the information given in the text, the reader is able to deduce the sequence of events – in the case of comics, the sequence of events, and images. Another term that Iser adopts is a blank, meaning the lack of knowledge or information, which “is responsible for a sequence of colliding images which condition each other in the time-flow of reading. The discarded image imprints itself on its successor, even though the latter is meant to resolve the deficiencies of the former. In this respect, the images hang together in a sequence, and it is by this sequence that the meaning of the text comes alive in the reader’s imagination” (Iser 1980b: 203). Iser stresses the role of the reader who is charged with the task of finding the gaps and blanks of and in the narrative to metaphorically fill them with plots and stories by creating a sequence of events. The notion of a gap or a sequence immediately triggers a link with comics, whose narrative is constructed on these two elements. It is particularly significant considering that comics gutter functions as a peculiar gap, which needs to be filled. The gap as an inspiration for an act of communication functions in comics as well.

Mieke Bal (2017) discusses the nature and elements of narratology, at the beginning she defines a narrative text as “a text in which an agent or subject conveys to an addressee (“tells” the reader, viewer, or listener) a story in a medium, such as language, imagery, sound, buildings, or a combination thereof” (Bal 2017: 5)¹⁴⁵. However, the term text possesses a broader meaning than just a written and printed work, “a text is a finite, structured whole composed of signs” (Bal 2017: 5); comics are composed out of numerous signs which fit the definition. Furthermore, Bal makes things easier by listing examples that fit the definition of a narrative texts “Of what does this corpus of narrative texts consist? At first glance, the answer seems obvious: novels, novellas, short stories, fairy tales, newspaper articles, and more. But, intentionally or not, we are establishing, boundaries – boundaries with which not everyone would agree. Some people, for example, argue that *comic strips* (emphasis added) belong to the corpus of narrative texts, but others disagree” (Bal 2017: 4). Comic strips, and by proxy comics, are listed as narratives, but are viewed to be contentious.

Another vote of confidence comes from Roland Barthes who expressed interest in popular culture, including comics. In his essay “Introduction to Structural Analysis of Narrative” he states that

The narratives of the world are numberless. Narrative is first and foremost a prodigious variety of genres, themselves distributed amongst different substances – as though any material were fit to receive man’s stories. Able to be carried by articulated language, spoken or written, fixed or moving images, gestures, and the ordered mixture of all these substances; narrative is present in myth, legend, fable, tale, novella, epic, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, mime, painting (think of Carpaccio’s *Saint Ursula*), stained glass windows, cinema, *comics*, news item, conversation. Moreover, under this almost infinite diversity of forms, narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of mankind and there nowhere is nor has been a people without narrative. All classes, all human groups, have their narratives, enjoyment of which is very often shared by men with different, even opposing, cultural backgrounds. Caring nothing for the division between good and bad literature, narrative is international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself. (Barthes 1977: 79)¹⁴⁶ [emphasis added]

Barthes emphasises the omnipresence and universality of narratives, as well as their role in human development and culture. He openly includes comics into the corpus of

¹⁴⁵ The other two elements crucial for her understanding of the narrative are the story and the fabula which she defines “. A story is the content of that text and produces a particular manifestation, inflection, and “colouring” of a fabula. A fabula is a series of logically and chronologically related events that are caused or experienced by actors.” (Bal 2017: 5)

¹⁴⁶ Abbott (2002: 1-2) draws the attention to the quote at the very beginning of his books and emphasizes its significance. Reading Abbot inspired me to refer to Barthes as well.

narratives which means they can be subjected to an analysis based on various theoretical frameworks (for Barthes it is structuralism, but it allows other as well). Another thing to which Barthes draws attention is to eradicate any divisions; he does not divide them based on quality or type; he equals comics with other narrative expressions such as novels, paintings, epic, and others; they have the same potential to evoke an emotional or emphatical reaction as any other medium. Finally, comics like any other narrative is “international, transhistorical, transcultural”, meaning it could and can appear at any moment or time, history, and culture which, in the case of manga, actually happened.

Another supporting voice comes from Seymour Chatman (1980), who, in his work *Story and Discourse*, also devoted thoughts and space to the study of comics as narratives by predominantly focusing on its pictorial (visual) narration. Chatman observes that characteristic features of the comic strip such as frames (panels), captions, balloons are elements of visual narration which constitute “the narrative situation” (Chatman 1980: 37). Chatman then moves on to closely discuss and analyse a comic strip from San Francisco *Chronicle*, *Short Ribs* by Frank O’Neal from 1970 (Chatman 1980: 37-41). Chatman interprets the comics strips by adopting terminology derived from narrative theories. He also states that “a narrative, as the product of a fixed number of statements, can never be totally “complete,” in the way that a photographic reproduction is, since the number of plausible intermediate actions or properties is virtually infinite” Chatman 1980: 29). Open-endedness is such a crucial element, particularly in the superhero genre, as it may place themes and characters in a stasis (the characters may not age or fight the same villains repeatedly), echoing Eco’s (1979) ideas concerning comics. Both Eco and Chatman stress the reader’s role in creating the meaning of comics on the basis of separate but sequenced images, as well as bridging the gaps (metaphorical and literal ones) that occur in the narrative. Moreover, “readers use their knowledge of actions, of causality, to fill in gaps temporarily, hermeneutically, where necessary adapting them as new information becomes available in the narrative” (Postema 2013: 107) and Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan (1983: 118) calls it a competence in reconstructing the story from fragments¹⁴⁷.

Despite the validation provided by these established theoreticians, their observations omitted the inclusion of elements typical of comics. Bal, Barthes, and Chatman introduce cultural and literary perspective to the study of comics narratives,

¹⁴⁷ Postema’s book (2013) drew my attention to this idea of reader’s competence.

but a number of comics scholars express the inadequacy of such an approach and call for formulation and adoption of “graphic narrative theory” which should be a “hybridised field of study” (Gardner and Herman 2011: 3). Baetens observes that the “study of narrative in comics has often been a mere copy of the study of narrative in other fields (mainly literature, but sometimes also film)” (Baetens 2011b: 94). Treating comics as a separate medium, on the one hand, but also using theories from other sources without acknowledging its differences and intricacies, explains the necessity to formulate a separate theoretical basis. Barbara Postema (2013) and Thierry Groensteen (2013) wrote on the subject of narration in comics from the perspective of semiotics, for Groensteen it was a continuation of his monograph *The System of Comics* (2007); Neil Cohn (2014) and (2016) approached narration from the perspective of syntax and cognitive studies, Lefèvre (2000) also approached narration cognitively. Horstkotte and Pedri (2011) as well as Mikkonen (2012) analysed comics using Genette’s term - focalisation, which is linked with literature and film narration and supports Baetens’s observation of the close relationship between literature, film, and comics studies. Naturally, this is only a small section of works regarding comics and narration; and there is still space for new approaches and new theories.

Despite everything that has been presented, the basic question of how narrative (and narration) works in comics has not been answered, and the term narration also raises other concerns. According to Lefèvre (2000) defines the narrative as a “formal system that the reader interprets as an interesting representation of a series of logically and chronologically related events, caused or experienced by actors” (Lefèvre 2000)¹⁴⁸, he goes on to explain the elements constituting his definition, the elements of the narrative “depend on and affect one another” (Lefèvre 2000) other words one event impacts another resulting in a reaction or a change. “The reader has access to the formal system of the comic through his visual sense” (Lefèvre 2000), the active manner of reading and looking, and it is the reader who interprets the story and plot conveyed in the narrative. “An event can we define as something which happens or develops over a period of time. Usually, the narrative includes beginning and end of this development, but they are in any case implicitly contained” (Lefèvre 2000), which means that the reader always aims to recreate the chronology of the events and also unifies the

¹⁴⁸ Lefèvre’s definition of the narration is heavily influenced by Bal (2017) who created a definition suitable for any medium, she based her definition on three elements: a text, a story and a fabula which are viewed as three permeating layers.

fragmented text and story into a fabula. Finally, the narrative requires actors who perform actions (Bal 2017: 5) which need not be human. Two of the elements listed above might prove problematic in the discussion of narration in comics: the issue of time, what is being read, and how it is interpreted.

The narrative, particularly the novel and the film, is understood as a medium of time, meaning that the plot unfolds over time. Thus, the reader experiences a story over a period of time, regardless of whether it is in written or oral format. Moreover, Abbott states that “narrative is the principal way in which our species organizes its understanding of time” (2002: 4) and also Bal observes that “[a]n event, no matter how insignificant, always takes up time. This time is often important for the continuation of the fabula and deserves, consequently, to be considered” (2017: 7). Comics, however, is typically perceived as a medium of space, the panels and the images require the space of a page (or a computer screen) for the story to take place¹⁴⁹ (McCloud 1993:7; Pratt 2012: 150). Still, such a definitive distinction as either-or seems a bit too simplistic and simplified. In comics, the story does require a space for the panels to be depicted against (without the pictorial element, comics does not exist), but as it has already been established that a story also requires a reader to experience the story encoded in the panels. The reader requires time to consume a story, pondering over both the text and the image. Hence, it would be more precise to claim that the medium of comics combines the dimensions of time (in reference to the story presented through verbal level) and space (when it comes to the panels, visual level), and both dimensions are necessary for the comics narrative to be read.

Garner and Hermann (2011: 3) call for a “graphic narrative theory”, together with Pratt (2009: 108) also states that “comics ultimately uses its own type of narration: a distinctively comic narrative form”, and Horstkotte and Pedri (2011: 336) for whom “[a] narratology geared towards graphic narrative necessarily has to account for a number of semiotic features that distinguish comics from still or moving images on the one hand and verbal narrative on the other”. Of all these observations, two things crystallise: the first is the perception of comics as a complex sign system which requires decoding; second, a graphic narrative is usually understood as two levels of narration co-operating simultaneously, namely, the visual level of narration and verbal level

¹⁴⁹ The issue was also discussed in Chapter 1 (1.4.2). Actually, the issue of space and time in narratives was initiated by Lessing (1984) who stated that poetry is an art requiring time and art (i.e. paintings and sculptures) requires space, see Mitchell (1984) for further discussion of Lessing’s ideas on the subject.

narration. A simple observation of the fact that comics stories are built by means of images and words does not address the issue of “how is the action parceled out between the image track and the verbal track, and how does this allocation of information bear on the process of building a narrative world?” (Gardner and Herman 2011: 5). Comics readers are able to skilfully juggle between the visual and the verbal narration, it does not work as an either-or dichotomy, but the two layers permeate and complement each other. It was Postema who observed that the two narrations constitute a type of a hybrid.

Comics, as an art form and as a narrative form, is a system in which a number of disparate elements or fragments work together to create a complex whole. The elements of comics are partly pictorial, partly textual, and sometimes a hybrid of the two. These elements include the comics images or cartoons; the frames or panels that contain the images – of which the page layout (including the book design) is an important part; and the captions, word balloons, and the words themselves, whether inserted in balloons and captions or integrated into the image. (Postema 2013: xii)

The visual elements of comics, which can be categorized as macro- and micro-semiotics, collectively form the foundation of what is referred to as visual narrativity. In other words, the visual signs which have been previously discussed with all their intricacies possess narrative potential hence contributing to the visual narration in comics. An interesting observation was made by Wolf about the narrativity of pictures “[w]hat most scholars have in mind when using the terms ‘narrative’ or ‘narrativity’ in discussions of pictures is still either the reference by means of a visual representation to some literary narrative, or the representation of any kind of action in a picture, as opposed to static, descriptive images, but hardly ever the *representation of a story proper*” (Wolf 2003: 180)¹⁵⁰. In comics, the image is the basis for the visual narration and takes on the prominent position in the storytelling process¹⁵¹. The reader continuously interprets the visual input to work out the story, which Postema (2013: 50) calls “a process of retroactive resignification, where one must continually loop back to reconsider meanings and make new meanings as one goes forward in the text”. Postema

¹⁵⁰ Postema (2013) refers to Wolf’s work in her book, and it is there that I found reference to the article by Wolf (2003).

¹⁵¹ Although Wolf’s main interests lies with the narrative dimension in pictures (paintings to be precise) and may not directly refer to comics, nevertheless his observations may also be referred to comics. He divided narrativity in pictures into three levels: first level is about ‘narrative reference’ focusing on actions; second level is composed of ‘monophase’ pictures showing one single moment in time; the third level is about ‘multiphase pictures’ when a single picture possesses several scenes from one story. In other words, visual arts, paintings, are able to convey action, time, and space – all these elements which are important in comics as well.

observes that just a quick look is insufficient to build a whole story, the reading process of comics is recursive which means returning to previous panels and images, as well as developing a skill to decode the meaning from the visual signs used in the text.

Gutters, frames, and panels are formal signs on the comics page, providing structure and order on the page in the form of the layout. Consequently, the gutters are closely related to the margins, with which they share the quality of being empty. Both gutters and margins are paratextual elements of comics, creating the material conditions for the comics text, but at the same time also signifying in their own right. (Postema 2013: 49)

In other words, all of the visual elements which have been discussed possess a narrative potential from which a reader might derive additional information concerning the story, the mood, and the characters which have not been verbalised. Visual narrativity is based on a number of elements which occur in the comics and their meaning may vary and alter depending on the narrative. A significant majority of the visual elements such as the gutter, the layout, the speech balloon and others, have already been discussed and it is not necessary to repeat them. The visual narrativity is interesting also due to its greater universality, audience from various background and speaking various languages are able to decode the meaning behind the visual input.

On the other end of the spectrum, there is verbal narrativity which most often signifies any example of linguistic expression found in a comics. The language often embodies the literary dimension of comics, one which invites adopting literary approach and literary theory. Moreover, the presence of language, in any form, is the element which needs to be read and not only seen. The reader has to understand the language in order to understand the characters' utterances, which may not be as universally understood and decoded as a picture. Verbal language in comics may be used in four different forms: in speech balloon (words are inside the panel, indicating a dialogue between characters as well as their inner thoughts); in captions (they are often found outside of the panel and indicate the presence of a narrator); as sound effects (the issue of sounds has been previously discussed); and words which appear within the panel and are understandable for other characters (the only example of diegesis¹⁵²) (Pratt 2009:

¹⁵² In most cases, "the literary dimension of comics is visually nondiegetic, so it determines not what the character of the story see, but what they hear" (Pratt 2009: 108). The words, dialogues, that appear in speech balloons, together with the device itself, are nondiegetic, they are not seen by the characters, but these instances when the characters break the fourth wall and are conscious of the words, the character of Deadpool is a good example.

108). In other words, there may be more examples of the verbal element than it is initially assumed. However, it is the language of dialogue, which is encapsulated in a speech balloon that draws the most attention. Pratt even states that “dialogue drives a story, which is often considerable given the limitations of using static pictures for exposition, words are indispensable in the construction of narrative in comics” (Pratt 2009: 108-109). This is a surprising statement considering the significance and the narrative potential of comics panels, not to mention the existence of wordless comics and even adaptations of literary work discussed here as well, preponderating the verbal narrative. However, Pratt (2009: 108) is right that “[t]he presence of words in comics allows us to follow narratives that might otherwise be inaccessible” such as characters’ inner thoughts, emotions and feelings; these are typically represented by means of words rather than images. Characters, whether they are literary, film, or comics characters, most often use language to express themselves privately, in writing or speaking, and in comics, this is still depicted in a written form of balloons. “Thought balloons and narrative text, in effect, allow for a degree of narrative omniscience that is common in literature but nearly impossible using pictures alone” (Pratt 2009: 109), this means that on the level of language comics is more related to literature.

The discussion becomes even more interesting about the role of language and verbal narrative when it comes to comics adaptations of Shakespeare’s play, whose language is so crucial and so cherished. Bickley and Stevens (2021: 60) believe that the verbal layer, i.e. written word, is in the privileged position in comics, which stands in opposition to what the majority of comics scholars claim. Their standpoint is that of Shakespeare scholars rather than comics scholars, for whom the language or the text of the play is the thing of worship. Furthermore, Bickley and Stevens make this observation particularly in reference to comics adaptations, such a principle appears not to apply to other visual media, such as film. It seems that simply because comics is a printing medium it is burdened with the responsibility to care more for the text than other media which adapt Shakespeare. The language of Shakespeare’s plays in comics undergoes the process of transformation and transmutation in order to fit the conventions of the speech balloon. Shakespeare comics ‘respect’ the text, but it does not mean it takes a privileged position. Historically, the changes which Shakespeare comics has undergone; the adaptations were searching for their own manner of approaching the text. A Shakespeare comics, *Hamlet* by Blum and Willinsky (1952) from *Classics*

Illustrated treated the source text of the play almost like ‘ready-made’ or ‘copy-and-paste’ dialogues. The text of the fourth soliloquy is preserved in its entirety and encapsulated in one speech balloon, the size of which is almost a quarter of the full-page panel. As a result, the panel is turned into an illustration and an ornament of the text and becomes a challenge to read; the comics convention is not met. Although, comics creators respect the text, but is still uncommon for the comics adaptations simply to take Shakespearean text and use it in the adaptations without any changes. Most adaptors simplify the language to push the story forward and make it more accessible to the contemporary reader. Flöthmann’s comics which is an example of a wordless comics and omits the language of the plays entirely, it still proves that it is possible to tell the story of the play by only establishing a link with the text, the characters and the plot at least to some degree with the source text; in the same way silent film adaptations of Shakespeare did. The verbal layer is important; it enriches the visual layer of comics, but even as respect text, as Shakespeare’s does not take a privileged position over the visual, each and every adaptation acknowledges the link and respects the source text.

3.8. Summary

This theoretical chapter focuses on the semiotic and narrative elements characteristic of comics, which are significant in the analysis of Shakespeare comics. These elements will help understand how meaning is created in comics and how it can be understood and interpreted by a reader. It is particularly interesting concerning adaptations and Shakespeare adaptations.

Chapter 4: A Semiotic Analysis of Shakespeare Comics Adaptations

“If Shakespeare and Michelangelo were alive today,
and if they decided to collaborate on a comic,
Shakespeare would write the script and
Michelangelo would draw it. How could anybody
say that this wouldn’t be as worthwhile an artform as
anything on earth?”
(Stan Lee 1985)¹⁵³

4.1. Introduction

The following two chapters: Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 focus on bringing all the historical and theoretical aspects together and adopting them as a basis for the analysis of the selected titles. Analysing each title following the theory (and the order of the theoretical elements), as presented in Chapter 3, enables a greater understanding of the visual and the verbal layers, as discussed previously.

Chapter 4 analyses adaptations of Shakespeare’s plays in comics, which has been defined as Shakespeare comics. Each of the titles was published in 2000 onwards; they do not create a series (with an editor), they are auteur creations, and have been created in the Western style of comics (i.e. Anglo-Saxon, also known as American and Franco-Belgian), all of which have been discussed previously. The discussion is not concerned with the graphic style but with an entirely new system of signs created specifically for a particular adaptation. All the selected examples represent a full

¹⁵³ Inge, Thomas M. 2007. “Comments by Stan Lee and Jenette Kahn, 1985” in: McLaughlin, Jeff (ed.). *Stan Lee Conversations*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi. 101-107, see page 105.

spectrum of adaptations, revealing the potential comics possessed in approaching Shakespeare, both the works (plot) and the text. Sanders (2006) in the chapter discussing Shakespeare in adaptations mentioned a canon of plays which are most often adapted (*The Tempest*, *Othello* and *Hamlet*), in comics the trend is different, *Hamlet* and *The Tempest* as still text which inspire artists, but there are other popular titles, such as *Macbeth* or *Romeo and Juliet*. The choice of the plays is to be as broad as possible, adapting both tragedies, comedies, and tragicomedies. It is worth emphasising that the analysis is not based on the aesthetics and individual styles of each artist. The question I aim to answer is not about determining what is good or bad but rather about understanding how comics function, how they narrate stories, and how readers can examine specific semiotic and non-semiotic aspects unique to comics.

In order to increase and enhance the reading experience and understanding, the chapter begins with a short presentation of each author and their works. The inspirations and influences they admit, the difficulties they encounter while adapting the plays, and the reasoning for creating Shakespeare comics. The section also provides a short biographical note and a description of each adaptation: the setting, narrative choices, and changes to their depiction, as well as to the plot. Due to the fact that some of these authors are either not widely known or have not publicly discussed their work in some cases, the obtainable information is scarce. The chosen titles are: Gareth Hinds: *The Merchant of Venice*, *King Lear*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Macbeth*; John Allison's *The Tempest*; Nicky Greenberg *Hamlet*; Stan Lee et al. *Romeo and Juliet: the War*; Kenneth Steward Moore *The Tragedie of Macbeth*; Petri Hänninen and Petri Hiltunen *Macbeth*. In total, nine Shakespeare comics adaptations were analysed.

The following subchapter focuses on comics signs, macro-semiotics (mise-en-page/layout), micro-semiotics (panel, frame, gutter, closure), other elements (sound, music, silence, and colour), all of which constitute the visual layer (language) and the verbal layer focusing on language. The chapter ends with a brief summary of the study's findings.

4.2. Authors and Titles – Examples Shakespeare comics adaptations

Chapter 2 addressed the questions concerning the issue and meaning of ‘adaptation’ as well as traced the history of Shakespeare comics. The analytical part focuses only on carefully selected works which meet the set of prerequisites described below. The chosen titles aimed to show the greatest range of examples of verbal and visual language used in comics. Naturally, there are titles, series, and publications which have drawn much scholarly attention and have been extensively written about, making it difficult to add new observations to the discourse. Hence, the chosen comics are lesser-known publications, about which little academic or journalistic material can be found. Another defining criterion is a prejudice in favour of auteur works over comics belonging to a series. The chosen publications follow the artistic vision of the author, rather than that of a general editor. Auteur publications are characterised by greater artistic freedom, which might lead to interesting experimentations and interpretations. Although Gareth Hinds has adapted more than one play by Shakespeare, it is still an auteur work of a single creator; hence, his works cannot be viewed as a series. Hinds’ works do not have a general editor who superimposes ideas; Hinds is genuinely inspired by literature itself and not by commercial endeavours.

In the subchapter on adaptations as a process and product (2.3.1) Myklebost (2014) stated that adaptations are products of the “temporal, geographical, political, philosophical intellectual and material circumstances” and these words were one of the guiding stars behind the choice of graphic narratives for the analysis. Hence, all the comics selected for the analysis were published in the 21st century, which will facilitate tracing common elements as well as comparing and contrasting their approach to the visual language of comics. All of the comics had to be published in English and preserved, to some extent, their link with the language of Shakespeare’s plays, for example a title or character names.

The discussion focusing on the definition of adaptation reveals the elusiveness of the term. The following comics are adaptations of the plays, representing various genres: tragedies, comedies, and tragicomedies¹⁵⁴. All of the chosen publications were created in the Western (Anglo-American) style of comics. Despite the increasing

¹⁵⁴ There is only a handful of adaptations of histories and they are most often part of series.

popularity of manga (meaning both the Japanese manga as well as the aesthetic style of drawing), it has been excluded from the analysis as it would require a separate set of terms to describe such works. Analysing manga-style comics would introduce greater confusion rather than a sense of organisation, despite the fact that manga presents a very interesting take on Shakespeare, and the discourse on Shakespeare in graphic narrative would gain from a separate publication on the subject. All of the examples presented, discussed, and analysed in the chapter following into the category of Shakespeare comics and to be more precise Shakespeare comics adaptations.

These works have been created in various styles and artistic techniques that reveal the plethora and richness of Shakespeare comics adaptations. Moreover, some comics update and alter the setting (both in terms of time and space) of the original play, while others embrace Shakespeare's intentions and preserve the setting. Similar to film adaptations, comic adaptations can present numerous interpretations of the plays, proving their universality and topicality.

Although the analysis focuses only on a handful of graphic narratives, there are more works which would also meet the set of requirements; however, including all of them would make the work unnecessarily long. Focusing on more traditional comics (in terms of semiotic choices) would not add much new to the discussion.

As stated before, the comics selected for the analysis are lesser-known; therefore, it seems necessary to provide a general introduction to the works to make it more interesting while analysing them from a semiotic point of view.

4.2.1. Gareth Hinds – *The Merchant of Venice* (2008); *King Lear* (2009); *Romeo and Juliet* (2013); *Macbeth* (2015)

Gareth Hinds (b. 1971). is known to be the most popular and prolific auteur comic book adaptor of the literature today, whose works are not part of any published series. He started as a self-published author who was only later picked up by a publishing house, Candlewick Press, which saw potential and the market for Hinds' works, particularly in the classroom as an educational aid. It is true that “[s]uperheroes sell books. But Hinds doesn't consider himself a writer and wanted to work with a classic adaptation. By

sticking with a proven story, he could concentrate on the best way to tell it visually.” (Krcmar 2004: 12). For Hinds, comics uniquely captures the essence of the story.

It’s more engaging to any reader, especially a reluctant reader. It can make some of the symbolism clearer. I like to think it encourages multiple readings a bit more. It also ties in to the theory of multi-modal learning, and there is a growing body of research indicating that information delivered by images and text working together – each “channel” presenting different but complimentary information – is easier to learn and retain than almost any other format. (Manno and Kellenborn 2014)

Due to their engaging nature, comics can encourage young readers to reach out for the source text after reading comic adaptation. Moreover, because comics work on various levels of perception and reception, it is easier for young students to retain information. It could be stated that Hinds fulfils Kanter’s will to encourage readership through comics, similar to the encouragement which was printed on the last page of *Classics Illustrated*.

Hinds openly talks about his inspirations, other comics and comics creators (Bill Sienkiewicz, Herge, Eric Shanower, Milo Manara, Enki Bilal) and classical literature of which Hinds is avid admirer (Anderson 2011). In an interview, Hinds stated, “I was initially drawn to the classics because I had a background in illustration and wanted to tell these visual stories, but I felt like my writing was a weakness. I figured I would try the classics because they were tried and true and time-tested: the greatest stories of all time” (Grochowski 2019). The combination of admiration for literature, comics, and mythology has led to the creation of several works. Hinds’ non-Shakespeare publications include *Beowulf* (2007), *The Odyssey* (2010), *Poe: Stories and Poems* (2017), and *The Iliad* (2019)¹⁵⁵. Thus far, Hinds has created four adaptations of Shakespeare’s plays: *The Merchant of Venice* (2008), *King Lear* (2009), *Romeo and Juliet* (2013), *Macbeth* (2015), and each was drawn in an unmistakable style but with an interpretative twist. Although, Hinds had previous experience in adapting poetry and narrative poems to comics, still Shakespeare’s language proved to be a challenge because it is only dialogue which is more difficult to cut and edit (Grochowski 2019)

¹⁵⁵ There are also publications for which Hinds worked only as an illustrator and not as an adaptor, hence they were excluded from here.

The Merchant of Venice (2008) is set up in modern Venice which was drawn on location. The comics was created using ink, white charcoal, and digital colouring,¹⁵⁶ but very scarcely, as it was limited to only few shades of gray and dull blue. Although the graphic narrative follows the main plot of the play, the adaptor allowed himself to introduce some changes for clarity and modernise some of the language. The author admits that compared to his previous works, language was altered the most.

A large amount of Shakespeare's material has been cut, including whole scene and characters (such as Launcelot Gobbo and his aged father), and many passages have been changed from verse to modern prose. However, when altering the sections that are still in verse, I made a strong effort to preserve the iambic pentameter and the feel of the language. (Hinds 2008: 69)

Hinds acknowledges the difficulty and controversial nature of play today due to the themes of racism, antisemitism, and homosexual overtones; hence, placing the play in the modern setting, the author urges the reader to "consider that today we are still struggling with the same basic issue: man's inhumanity toward his fellow man" (Hinds 2008: 69). The main interest of the author in this adaptation is interpersonal relationships, and the main focus is on dialogues and character depictions rather than a detail-oriented focus on the interior; thus, the characters are often shown against a monochromatic background.

The second adapted play was *King Lear* (2009) which adopted a number of styles and materials but mainly with a technical pen and watercolour. Unlike *The Merchant of Vernice*, *King Lear* is very colourful and colours are significant in understanding characters' emotional well-being and emotional state. The time and setting appear somewhat problematic. In the competition scene of Act I, when Lear divides his kingdom, there is a map of America, and the way the daughters have been depicted resembles three political forces: English, French, and Native Americans. Nevertheless, time is still difficult to determine, and the attire does not help in identification. Interestingly, the idea of dividing America among the daughters was also used in another adaptation, *Manga Shakespeare: King Lear* by Ilya (2009). Hinds in an interview discussed his work on this adaptation, saying, "I'm always experimenting with the layouts, but *King Lear* was my most experimental book by far, and some of the

¹⁵⁶ All the technical details about materials and drawing styles come from Hinds' official webpage <https://garethhinds.com/wp/>

things I did in the book I'm very proud of, while other things didn't quite work. There were a number of pages near the beginning that I had to re-draw because they were confusing" (Anderson 2011). For Hinds, the process of adaptation is an act of re-writing and re-drawing that requires deep consideration and understanding of the text.

In 2013, *Romeo and Juliet* (drawn in watercolour with digital inking) became the third Shakespeare adaptation done by Hinds, and although it may not be as experimental as *King Lear* it still conveys a powerful interpretation. The setting of the comic is 16th century Verona, drawn on location, but the author took some liberties, as not all buildings have been preserved. As far as the character depiction is concerned, Hinds presented the residents of Verona with various ethnic backgrounds; the Montagues are Afro-American, whereas the Capulets are Hindi, and others are Caucasians. Moreover, the costumes are significant as younger generation wears different costumes than the older one to emphasise the rift and lack of understanding, Hinds stated that

[t]he old folks wear their costumes in a historically correct manner, except for some cultural touches I added, like Capulet's Sikh turban or the Friar's *rakusu* (a ceremonial Buddhist garment). Since I cast the Capulets as an Indian family, I couldn't help making a *Bend It Like Beckham* reference by placing a portrait of "Babaji" (Guru Nanak Dev Ji, founder of the Sikh religion) prominently in the Capulet mansion. (Hinds 2013: 131)

The author makes very interesting adaptive choices by strengthening the family dispute by adding the racial one as well, thus making it relevant today, similar to *The Merchant of Venice*.

Finally, the last adaption is *Macbeth* (2015), which is set in 11th century Scotland, Hinds drew it in pencil and used "digital colour with ink wash textures" (Hinds 2018). Similar to *The Merchant of Venice*, the author used a limited number of colours, usually dull, to emphasise the main character's mental state. Hinds

condensed the action of *Macbeth* a bit and in many places manoeuvred Shakespeare's iambic pentameter into prose that fits seamlessly into speech bubbles. Little seems to be lost in translation. The major soliloquies are intact and include the original line breaks ..., while the lines that serve more expositional functions are sometimes reworked so that they still have an iambic feel, but flow naturally to the modern ear ... Hinds has gone for a broad but not stickler-ish historical verisimilitude. (Russo 2015)

Russo adeptly captures Hinds' process of adaptation, the changes that he makes or does not make, which reveals how meticulous and deliberate his process is. The only deliberate alternation introduced by the author is the shift from poetry to prose, he

justified this by stating “the lines seem to read better as prose, so I took out the line breaks for most passages. There is still iambic rhythm driving the lines, but I think flow better without the line breaks to trip over” (Hinds 2015: 137). Hinds did not interfere with the original plot of the play; nevertheless, he proposed an intriguing account of the relationships between the characters. The Macbeths are a loving couple, ambitious, and supportive, and Hinds adds panels to support this view. For example, in the sleepwalking scene Lady Macbeth returns to her marital bed in which Macbeth is sleeping (Hinds 2015: 105). The author views them as a supportive couple, being for each other until the very end, and they are depicted together more often than in the source text. After Lady Macbeth’s suicide, her husband is shown grieving deeply and his “Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow” speech is depicted almost like a eulogy for his beloved wife, in a quiet and contemplative moment before a decisive battle (Hinds 2015: 114-115). Moreover, Hinds plays with the notion of cyclicity of evil and The Weird Sisters’ impact on the events; in the final panel, the sisters watch everything, hinting that history may repeat itself (Hinds 2015: 135). Both of these artistic choices echo Polanski’s *Macbeth* with his similar depiction of the Macbeths and the role of the sisters.

The four plays do not form a single cohesive series; each title is different in terms of setting, approach to language, and style, but these are the works of a single artist who wanted to adapt Shakespeare’s plays to encourage new readership. Furthermore, studying the four works chronologically reveals the manner in which Hinds approached the process of adaptation and how much his own artistic and aesthetic choices have been developing and maturing.

4.2.2. John Allison – *The Tempest Illustrated* (2009)

Another analysed adaptation is *The Tempest Illustrated* (2009) by John Allison from Warwick Comics, despite the misleading subtitle, it is not an illustrated version of the play, but an example of a Shakespeare comics. The previous author, Gareth Hinds, is a well-established author with numerous titles, and there are articles about him and his

work, as well as reviews and interviews. In the case of John Allison¹⁵⁷ not much is known about him, it is unclear whether it is a pen name or a real one and there are no reviews, interviews or articles about the adaptation. In addition, the publishing house “Warwick Comics” also ceased to exist, and no information can be found about the author or the title, and nobody can be contacted to obtain any information.

The Tempest Illustrated (2009) is a publication with its own characteristic style. The comics follows the plot of the play without introducing changes to the setting, character depictions, or the language. Similarly to other examples, the comics strives to preserve a link to dramatic and literary nature of the source text by including dramatis persona (sic!) and chapter divisions, the amalgamation of various conventions is surprising and troubling. Allison’s work possesses some didactic and educational elements which manifest in a glossary of lesser-known words, however, unlike other publications it does not provide any additional biographical material on Shakespeare, an interpretative guidelines or an essay. The comics adopts some interesting semiotic choices concerning speech balloons, onomatopoeia, and the depiction of characters (Caliban and Ariel) which will be discussed and analysed later.

4.2.3. Nicki Greenberg – *Hamlet* (2010)

Nicky Greenberg (b. 1974) is an Australian artist who has been writing and drawing since her teens, she writes and illustrates fiction books for children and teenagers (*The Naughtiest Reindeer*, *Monkey Red*, *Monkey Blue* and *BOM! Went the Bear*, *The Detective’s Guide to New York City*). She also works as a lawyer in Melbourne, Australia. Among her more critically acclaimed works are two adaptations in the form of graphic narrative: F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* (2007) and William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* (2010).

Greenberg’s approach towards adaptations is innovative and creative; in the case of *The Great Gatsby*, she stylised the book (and the story) as a family photo album and

¹⁵⁷ There is a comics writer John Allison (born in 1976) who has been creating webcomics: *Bobbins*, *Scary Go Round*, or *Giant Days* and he has been awarded Eisner Award numerous times for his work. However, no information was found whether he ever worked on a Shakespeare comics, however, his drawmanship and style are clearly different from that of *The Tempest Illustrated*. I was unable to find any further information about the author and the comics.

Nick Carraway (together with the reader) re-inspected the story and went through past events once more during the process of rearranging the photos (Scott 2017: 144). With *Hamlet*, Greenberg turns to theatre for inspiration and subtitles the work as “staged on the page” (Greenberg 2010), the graphic narrative evokes the feeling of a theatrical performance with the reader/viewer experiencing the events happening on stage and backstage.

[T]he action of the play takes place in three different dimensions: on the stage, where the drama is performed; outside the frames in the imaginative realm of the mind; and backstage, where the characters are seen as actors outside of their on-stage roles. These three dimensions are not discrete but overlapping, with the interplay between them drawing out the central themes and dynamics of the text. (Jordan 2011: 3)

Greenberg’s main focus in the adaptation is using narrative devices unique to the medium of comics (Jordan 2011: 5), i.e. composition, speech balloons, gutter, colour, size and shape of the panel, all these are to help the reader enjoy the reading experience. The graphic element does not function as an illustration or storyboard. As Greenberg emphasises herself in a commentary to the graphic narrative,

I wanted the sets to be quite surreal rather than resembling realistic halls, rooms etc. The challenge here was to construct them in such a way that perspective, while not strictly correct, would appear natural when small sections of the set appeared in individual frames on the stage. Because the stage is always seen from the point of view of a person sitting in the audience, I had to give the impression of the action taking place against a fixed, unmoving backdrop, while still keeping plenty of interest and variety by allowing the characters to move about and use the space very extensively. (Jordan 2011: 6)

Apart from the theatrical dimension of adaptation, Shakespeare’s language of the play is highly regarded as she does not change, update, or cut the lines. Characteristically, for an auteur work, the author does not ‘hurry’ the plot by putting the lines into large speech balloons and paces the plot in such a way as to meet her artistic vision and not the requirement of a publishing house. Moreover, Greenberg’s artistic freedom does not limit her regarding character depiction, she creates “a cast of impish black figures reminiscent of Rorschach inkblots” (Jordan 2011: 3) who become actors staging *Hamlet*. Despite a critical acclaim and popularity, Greenberg’s *Hamlet* (as well as her *The Great Gatsby*), unfortunately not many articles have been published about her work.

4.2.4. Stan Lee, Terry Dougas, Mark Work and Skan Srisuwan – *Romeo and Juliet: The War* (2011)

If one were to name just one person, who changed the whole industry or was synonymous with comics, it would be Stan Lee. His is a household name responsible for creating a whole range of superhero characters, Marvel Comics and Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU). It naturally came as a surprise that mainstream authors and editors decided to take on the challenge of adapting a Shakespeare's play into comics. In 2011, *Romeo and Juliet: The War* was published as a joint effort of Stan Lee, Terry Dougas, Mark Work and Skan Srisuwan. Shakespearean story of star-crossed lovers was set 200 years in the future and turned into a science fiction comics where the two fighting families possess not only political and financial influence, but also superpowers. The conflict has expanded and covered the entire planet, called Verona.

Although this is not the only adaptation setting the plot into the future, it is a work where a lot of attention was paid to the details and preserving a high quality of drawings, which is very characteristic for auteur works. Apart from changes in the setting and character depiction, Lee did not alter the main points of the plot. The authors adopted clear narrative devices, the characteristics of mainstream comics, and colour schemes for the reader to understand the story. Despite Stan Lee's praise for Shakespeare and his language¹⁵⁸, the graphic narrative freely preserves only the best-known lines. It seems that for the authors, this plot is more important than the Shakespearean language.

Romeo and Juliet: The War is a work which brings the auteur artists, who desire to do an adaptation, to mainstream attention. It also reveals Lee's openness, particularly to familiarise his reader with other stories, but delivers them in a more digestible format. This work has not received much scholarly attention, and there are almost no reviews or articles about it. Interestingly, most of the articles concerning the graphic narrative are reports, or rumours, that *Romeo and Juliet: The War* is going to be adapted into a film¹⁵⁹.

¹⁵⁸ In the clip-interview Stan Lee talks about reading Shakespeare in his teenage years and how language, particularly the best known lines, inspired him. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SIHF-ViWzDQ>

¹⁵⁹ Articles suggesting that the graphic narrative is going to be turned into a film: <https://playbill.com/article/romeo-and-juliet-the-war-is-being-adapted-as-a-movie-com-375062>; <https://variety.com/2015/film/news/romeo-and-juliet-the-war-movie-lionsgate-1201657971/>;

4.2.5. Kenneth Stewart Moore - *The Tragedie of Macbeth* (2016)

Comics as a hybrid medium draws inspiration from various other media (the issues were discussed extensively), including the theatre and comics book adaptations of Shakespeare, particularly those from the 21st century, emphasise the link with the theatre quite clearly (see Nicky Greenberg's *Hamlet*). Stewart Kenneth Moore (also known under pseudonyms S.K. Moore, Booda Moore) positions his adaptation of *Macbeth* deeper in a theatrical and performative context.

Stewart Kenneth Moore (b. 1968) is a visual artist, a comic book writer and an actor who was born in Los Angeles, but was raised in Scotland and nowadays lives mainly in Prague in the Czech Republic. He is best known for his *Project MKUltra: Sex, Drugs & the CIA* (2012) and *2000AD* (2019), with a story titled *Defoe, The Divisor*, and Judge Dredd cover art. In 2015, Guy Roberts from Prague Shakespeare Company turned to Moore to participate in a project of staging *Macbeth* to commemorate 400th anniversary of Shakespeare death (Moore 2016: 80). The black and white comics began as a month-long challenge (under hashtag #28DayGraphicNovel on Twitter) and also functioned as a storyboard of ideas for the PSC production of *Macbeth*. The adaptation is directly linked to the performance; some of the ideas and symbolism found their way into the performance, but the final version of the comics was released after the premier, which made the link between the two clear.

Unlike other examples, *The Tragedie of Macbeth* might pose a challenge to follow the plot; the adaptation predominantly focuses on the characters' thoughts and state of mind, as well as the exchange between the characters. The comics does not depict the movement of the characters, there is very little physical interaction between them, and almost nothing is said about the setting and time of the play/comics. In most cases the characters are presented against a black background in order not to draw the attention away from them and the words that are 'spoken'. The artist's conscious decision to use only black and white¹⁶⁰ allows to use the chiaroscuro effect to evoke feelings of uneasiness, danger, evil and constant presence of death in the reader.

<https://ew.com/article/2015/12/10/lionsgate-developing-romeo-and-juliet-war-film/>;

<https://finance.yahoo.com/news/romeo-juliet-war-movie-works-lionsgate-exclusive-011819165.html>;

¹⁶⁰ For simplicity reasons the term black and white will be used here for general reference and distinction. More detailed description on colour see subchapter 3.7.3 on Colour in comics

4.2.6. Petri Hänninen and Petri Hiltunen – *Macbeth* (2019)

The final instance to be analysed is a realistic, black, and white adaptation of *Macbeth* by Finnish duo Petri Hänninen (b. 1973) and Petri Hiltunen (b. 1967), who published the dark version of the play in English. The adaptation was the brainchild of Petri Hänninen who has appreciated the play and its film adaptations, in an interview he states “In the comic, my basic idea was to bring the story in the front behind the Shakespearean language. I took a word from here and word from there, and created a modern spoken language” (Vasseur 2019). Hänninen and Hiltunen’s adaptation is akin to comics adaptations from the 1950s with Classical Comics, their comics a quite short but at the same time gripping, detailed and graphic (both in terms of violence and sexual abuse). The authors did not change the time and setting; the plot takes place in medieval Scotland, depicting the power struggle between clans. The comics, similar to previous instances, begin with a dramatic personae diagram sustaining the link with the plays in their printing format. Moreover, the story is divided into sections headed only by numbers, but whether they treat them as acts or chapters is not certain. From among all the adaptations, *Macbeth* evokes the notion of being a very old comics, as if belonging to the older generation of comics from the 1950s or 60s.

4.3. Analysis of Comics Signs in Shakespeare Comics Adaptations

4.3.1. Mise-en-page/Panel Composition/Layout

The direction of the analysis was from general to specific; hence, a mise-en-page was the starting point. Each of the auteur authors has developed their own style of panel composition.

Analysing Gareth Hinds’ adaptations allows tracing the changes in artistic style and aesthetic choices in the comics’ creative process. Hinds’ first adaptation *The Merchant of Venice* (2008) operates using just few simple layout techniques and he does not experiment with it in order to make the reading easy to follow and clear. The layout is often conventional and rhetorical; there are no decorative layouts, suggesting that the

author attempts to present the narrative as realistically as possible. The choice of layout is to help the reader follow the plot, and manipulating the layout, for example with decorative utilisation, might be confusing. The panel composition is based on horizontal and vertical staggerings, whole rows, and blockages, facilitating the reading process and indicating the reader with a clear order of reading the panels. There are no overlaps and separations to avoid overwhelming and confusing the reader, as comics is heavily based on language and the use of speech balloons. In addition, Hinds limits himself in accentuating the panels in the composition only to the size and position (the accentuation techniques are still limited to rectangles and their sizes do not vary much), and other techniques are not used. As an early work by Hinds, *The Merchant of Venice* does not experiment with the layout for the benefit of the reader; one of the reasons for this might be the antisemitic themes that are found in the play, which also resonate in the comics. The change in temporal setting (i.e. the contemporary times, 20th/21st century) draws attention to the antisemitic tones of the plays, and that they can occur today as well. The traditional depiction of a mise-en-page does not draw attention to the plot.

A total contrast to *The Merchant of Venice* is Hinds' second Shakespeare comics *King Lear* (2009), and at times, it is difficult to believe that only one year separates the publication of both works. The challenge in analysing Hinds' *King Lear* lies in the unorthodox approach to layout, the author uses a wide range of techniques: from typical rectangular panels, through various panel shapes, up to the abandonment of panels altogether¹⁶¹. Hinds often adopts a one-page panel technique and within it comprises a series of events which typically divided into separate panels; thus, it is difficult to discuss the layout or panel composition when there is only one panel. *King Lear* embraces all types of Peeters' utilisations: conventional use is adopted in the scene when Edgar leads blind Gloucester through a field (Hinds 2009: 78-79), the waffle iron grid is to introduce a degree of tranquillity in the world full of chaos and it is also to emphasize the tragedy the characters experience. Decorative use was also included in the adaptation; Hinds used the pattern of shattered glass to encapsulate the moment Lear realises Goneril's and Regan's wickedness, and his image and perception of them is shattered similarly to his mental composure. The chaotic layout confuses the reader and

¹⁶¹ See the subchapters analysing Hinds' *King Lear* on panel and frame, as well as gutter and transition.

convinces about Lear's madness (Hinds 2009: 42-43). This is just one example of decorative utilisation. Another example is Lear's monologue during a thunderstorm (Hinds 2009: 49), in which the layout is composed of panels divided by a lightning which sets both the mood and the setting for the reader, and again it also reflects Lear's state of mind. The rhetorical layout is found to be most sequences of the comics because this particular adaptation readjusts the panel in order to encapsulate the author's ideas. For example, in the sequence of reconciliation between Cordelia and Lear (Hinds 2009:87-90) the size of each panel suits the image inside the panel, regardless of whether it is an establishing shot or a close-up, he does not allow any unnecessary elements to enter the panel and disturb not only the composition, but also the reader's reception. Hinds skilfully manipulates the reader's emotional reception through the page composition. As far as productive use is concerned, it can be found in a battle scene (Hinds 2009: 94-96) which in the final panel is depicted as a cloud of dust. The choice of abandoning typical panel use in the layout resulted in a limited use of accentuating techniques (shape is used quite extensively), and only in moments when a conventional grid appears, it is possible to spot pure grid, blockages, overlaps, and other compositional techniques. The adaptation poses a challenge for the reader to follow the reading path which has to question almost every page, the Z-path thus functions as a break and moment of respite. As far as mise-en-page is concerned, it is a very creative example of adaptation; choosing various utilisation techniques reflects the changes in the mental state of the main character.

Hinds' third adaptation, *Romeo and Juliet* (2013), returns to a more linear and conventional layout to drive the narrative forward. The comics is constructed mostly from conventional and rhetorical patterns which can be found throughout the entire comic book. For example, rhetorical use appears, when Juliet learns about Romeo's banishment (Hinds 2013: 85), the panels are adjusted to encompass Juliet, a small panel to focus on her face and tears, or a long and vertical panel to present her in a tragic pose. There is only one instance of decorative utilisation in the entire comics. In the banquet scene, Romeo comes to the Capulet mansion to find Rosalind, but the moment he sees Juliet the image of his previous love object becomes shattered like a mirror. Unlike in *King Lear*, here the shattered mirror does not reflect Romeo's decline into madness and lost hope, but a sudden abandonment of a previous lover. Hinds returned to a traditional division into panels in these comics; hence, a number of layout features and

accentuations occurred. Following Pederson and Cohn's (2016) list, all features except separation are found in the book, and they enhance the reading experience. The layout is not repetitive or boring for the reader, and following the reading path does not pose a challenge. Of all Gavaler's (2018) accentuating techniques, most are used as well; the author uses a limited variety of shapes, none of which are radical or shocking, and do not pose interpretative difficulty. Although accentuating techniques can be found in the comics, they appear moderately and draw attention to the more significant elements which drive the plot forward. It seems that Hinds wanted to depict the well-known play using conventional and uninventive layouts in order to draw more attention to the changes he proposed.

The analytical tools and observations concerning *Romeo and Juliet* could also apply to *Macbeth* (2015), Hinds decided not to adopt a new layout for that title. The mise-en-page in his last Shakespeare adaptation does not change much in comparison; the most extensive utilisation layout is conventional and rhetorical, including Pederson and Cohn's features of blockages and staggerings. The most intriguing use of decorative elements refers to the scene, which is referred to in the play itself, of poisoning wine for guards in front of Duncan's chamber (Hinds 2015: 35). The panel composition is intriguing, and it occurs at two levels. The background depicts the hand of Lady Macbeth poisoning the wine, and the foreground depicts Macbeth and Banquo talking. The composition of the foreground panels takes the shape of a wine jug. This decorative layout emphasises the role of Lady Macbeth in murderous endeavours. Thus far, the only feature/accenuation which has not been used (and hence mentioned) in the adaptations is the separation of panels in the composition. In *Macbeth*, there is only one such instance: in the scene after Duncan's murder and the discovery of the body (Hinds 2015: 52), there are two columns (2x2) separated vertically. The two panels on the left show the discovery of the king's body and the confusion of his guards, whereas the two panels on the right (separated by a greater gutter) show informing Lady Macbeth of the murder. The separation feature used here suggests that the action occurred simultaneously. Looking at Hinds' adaptations allows the reader to notice the maturation process of the author and choose the style that suits him best. The only title that stands out, as far as layout is concerned, is *King Lear* which is the most experimental of the analysed comics, but the choices reflect the complexity of the main

character's state of mind. The complexity of the layout in *King Lear*, although intriguing, might discourage less skilled and trained readers of comics.

For a play filled with magic and magical characters, *The Tempest* seemed to be the text which would embrace the varied page composition and would propose new approaches to construct the narrative. However, Allison's *The Tempest* (2009) follows an orthodox layout throughout the comics. The graphic narrative was constructed from conventional and rhetorical utilisations. There is not a single instance of decorative utilisation, and there is a contentious matter of using a productive one because in this adaptation, the differentiation between rhetoric and productive may be difficult to observe. In addition, Allison adopts a limited range of features, that is, pure grid, staggerings (vertical and horizontal), and blockages, to help the reader with the reading process. Allison does not experiment with accentuations; all the panels are similar in size and shape (rectangular), which enhances the conventional utilisation of the layout. It could be speculated that such an orthodox approach towards layout might be explained by the complexity of the image composition within particular panels. The more elaborate the images, the less imaginative the layout becomes.

So far, the discussion circled around comics composed of typical panels (even if Hinds' *King Lear* poses a greater analytical challenge), Nicki Greenberg's *Hamlet* (2010), may not be as accessible as far as panel layout is concerned. The layout found in Greenberg's *Hamlet* almost eludes any classifications; there are pages with conventional layout (Greenberg 2010: 16-17) which can shift suddenly into a decorative (Greenberg 2010: 57, 196) or productive utilisation. The conventional layout uses pure grid, staggerings and blockages to push the plot, but also the graphic narrative is filled with full-page bleedings, which should function as an undivided image. However, even these full-page panels, at a closer look, appear to be unconventionally divided. As stated before, the adaptation is heavily impacted by theatre and includes the insight backstage, which is usually presented in the shape of these full-page panels. The mentioned panel division is a fragment of a curtain or multiple mirrors in which Ophelia looks into (Greenberg 2020: 50-51). Moreover, Greenberg experiments with panel shapes and tilts to accentuate their position within the layout (2010: 60-61) and size. Everything about this work is unconventional, and the author questions the typical perception of comics layouts. The reader equipped only with the basic reading comics tool (Z-path) may be at times at a loss, as each page might require a new approach, and the reader would need

to work out innovative reading methods. The complex and confusing layout is deliberate in order to evoke the feeling of anxiety in the reader and to show Elsinore as a place in which to expect everything. A place where ‘normal’ rules and laws do not apply. Greenberg’s *Hamlet* might pose a challenge for an inexperienced reader, but the inclusions of the conventional or rhetorical have an anchoring factor, due to which the reader returns to better known compositions. Greenberg made *Hamlet* an even more intriguing text by adopting this plethora of mise-en-page.

It does not come as a surprise that when Stan Lee is engaged with a project, he reaches out for the methods he is most skilled in using. Lee’s et al. *Romeo and Juliet* (2011)¹⁶² follows the layout that is characteristic for the aesthetics of mainstream comics of Marvel Comics. Conventional and rhetorical utilisations dominate the composition, and decorative utilisations are used in fight scenes to emphasise their dynamics and fast pace. Moreover, Lee et al. included all the features codified by Pederson and Cohn, including not only pure grids, blockages, and staggerings, but also separation, inlays, and whole rows with insets. Following Postema’s (2013: 45) observation about the instability of insets in reference to time, they evoke a sense of temporal loss. Despite such a variety, there is no sense of being overwhelmed or difficulty following the layout (the Z-path is still a reading indicator here). The book itself has been printed in a horizontal format; hence, the layout is mostly composed of narrow panels (both vertical and horizontal). In such cases, the appearance of a more conventional rectangular panel draws more attention from the reader. Interestingly, Lee et al. used separation on numerous occasions in order to change the perspective of the same scene or change it altogether rather than hint at the distance (both physical and emotional) between the characters, which was used in the wedding scene between the young lovers. Lee’s background of mainstream comics and the familiarity with the mainstream layout composition is reflected here, it is similar to composition used in contemporary superhero comics.

Moore’s *The Tragedie of Macbeth* (2016) embraces a variety of layout utilisations, features, and accentuations. The layout seems to harmonise well with the author’s aesthetic choices (black and white, unclear images) to emphasise the feeling of Macbeth’s chaotic world. The first striking element is the dominance of conventional

¹⁶² Unfortunately, the Lee’s adaptation is unpaginated.

utilisation (3×3 grid, but also 1×7 constructed out of whole row panels) with pure grids, staggerings, and blockages, all of which are commonplace in comics. Moore also uses rhetoric utilisations (2016: 8) with layout composed of various sizes so that the intended images fits (panel accentuation). For example, the famous opening scene with the three Weird Sisters adopts rhetorical utilisation, with each row of panels becoming bigger in order to encapsulate the three characters in one panel at the end. A similar idea is used in the knocking scene (Moore 2016: 36), when the panels are of various sizes to include the image of the gate in the last one which is again a whole row, but bigger than the previous ones. There is even an example of productive utilisation during an exchange between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth after Duncan's murder (Moore 2016: 33), their conversation is presented as a composition of six narrow and vertical panels focusing only on the fragment of their faces which is to evoke the feeling of haste, danger and uneasiness. Composition imposed on the content of the panels. Moreover, an instance of decorative utilisation occurs in the scene when Weird Sisters predict Macbeth's fate (Moore 2016: 28), it is composed out of triangular panels which fit together like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle (naturally the choice of the panel shape also accentuates the panels in the composition) or also in the dagger scene (Moore 2016: 31) the mise-en-page look similar to pieces of broken glass or a mirror to show Macbeth as being a broken or indecisive. In many cases, there are also accentuating features such as size, shape, and position; however, these elements might remain unnoticed with so many other compositional elements used in comics that the reader might feel overwhelmed by them.

The final analysed example is Hänninen and Hiltunen's *Macbeth* (2019), and this black and white comics, similar to most previous comics, uses rhetorical and conventional (often 2×3 panels) utilisation with pure grid, blockages, and staggerings. The layout does not draw attention to itself or hinder the reading process (Z-path). It is surprising that the authors did not dare to experiment with the panel composition, particularly because they did not evade depicting the plot in a literal and crude way. Murder, rape, nakedness, and blood are openly shown in a comics, but the layout remains rigid and orthodox. In addition, none of the accentuating techniques was used to draw attention to particular panels and instances. It appears that the layout was not a distracting factor, taking attention away from the events happening within the panels.

Apart from the panels themselves, a *mise-en-page* is an element which draws the reader's attention as the reader often scans or takes on the entire page at an instance when turning a page in a comics. The more complicated the layout, the more strenuous the reading process. Shakespeare's plays today welcome experimentation and new approaches, performative and technical. It is surprising, however, that comics adaptations of Shakespeare's play do not encourage creators and authors to be more radical, open and willing to experiment as far as the layout is concerned. The majority of titles follow quite a straightforward grid (conventional and rhetoric), with only Hinds' *King Lear* embracing variety and decorative panel utilisation, and Greenberg's *Hamlet* attempting to mix utilisation and compositions. Shakespeare comics adaptations adopt various layout utilisations, but it seems that the main focus lies on understanding the plot, and the layout is help with it rather than hinder or introduce another interpretative element.

4.3.2. Panel and (Narrative) Frame

All these elements, types of panel, the frame, the angle, will constitute the theoretical basis for the analysis of the panels that have been used in Shakespeare comics adaptations and test the type of panels that occur in them (whether they are more mainstream, i.e. popular devises, or maybe are less orthodox) and the manner in which the types of panels and frame impact narratively.

Gareth Hinds in his adaptations adopted a variety of panel types. The adaptation of *The Merchant of Venice* (2008) is based on rectangular straight-edged panels to emphasise the feeling of the present and the contemporary, even more so as the story is set in the modern setting. The plot of the story is also quite grim and down to earth; hence, the lack of finesse in reference to the panel frame is not surprising; it does not draw attention away from the plot and characters. Most panels are interdependent or picture specific, and the words and images in the panels complement each other to achieve the narrative goal.

Another example of an adaptation by Hinds is *King Lear* (2009), and, similar to the layout, the use and types of panels are more varied. It seems that Hinds tests the possibilities of comics panel and the limit of the reader's understanding; he also adopts

various new types of panels (one he has not used in his work at all) and manipulates the types that are already known. Hinds rarely adopts rectangular straight-edged panels in this adaptation, for example when Edgar leads his blind father through the fields (Hinds 2008: 78-79), coincidentally this is also the same fragment when the waffle-grid is used as well (it was discussed in a subchapter on layout). In the majority of cases the panels are borderless and there are no separate panels to mark the change of space. The reader has to follow the plot carefully in order to comprehend what constitutes a 'panel' here, and be conscious of the fluid nature of the panels. An interesting example concerning the panel revealing Hinds' creative approach is putting Kent in stocks by Cornwall and Regan (2.2), Edgar witnesses the whole scene from a distance hiding in a tree trunk. From the whole page panel, the reader may not be certain of the event or may even overlook it; hence, Hinds adopts a circular panel with a red frame which functions as a close-up on a detail (the circle is also an accentuation technique). The round panel also reminds the reader of a spyglass, and it seems that the red frame is a sign that the contents of the round panel are a close-up of an image in a distance (Hinds 2009: 32), the events of both panels are happening simultaneously and refer to the same object. Hinds also uses extensive borderless panels, and in this case, the borderless has two meanings: first, an image is the only element that is seen and the potential frame is difficult to deduce (these panels could be identified as both borderless and frameless). The second idea behind borderless panels is that suggested by Eisner: the panel simply does not possess a visible border, but it still has a frame. Hinds uses both, and his frameless and borderless panels are particularly interesting. The reuniting scene between Lear and Cordelia adopts such panel styles (Hinds 2009: 97); the focus lies on the exchange between the characters and their emotional state, and the reader is not distracted by the background it is set in a non-space. The full-panel panel shows Cordelia and Lear as if approaching the reader; they face the reader. The focus on the detail is that their facial expressions are encapsulated in a small rectangular panel, and finally, the last element shows the character's back walking away from the reader. This particular full-page panel places the reader as the only constant and unmovable entity; it is the characters that are in motion; they react to the story in front of the reader. Such a depiction is also in lieu of the source text of the play which is deprived of background information. *King Lear* is composed of many such instances of creative approach towards the panel.

It was stated previously, in reference to page composition, that *King Lear* is Hinds' more experimental work and with *Romeo and Juliet* (2013) he returned to a more orthodox approach toward storytelling, the same applies to panels and frames which are mainly rectangular straight-edged frames. There were only a few deviations from this narrative manner. The scene from 5.1 in which Romeo receives information about Juliet's death, there is a full-page bleeding panel depicting Romeo on horseback (Hinds 2013: 109). In the corner, there is a smaller embedded panel without a border but with a clear frame depicting Romeo meeting the apothecary, and according to Eisner the lack of a border may question the temporal setting. It is unclear whether Romeo is riding towards Verona to see Juliet or towards the apothecary. A possible interpretation of the panel could be that of a past event, one that is not shown to the reader in the present but in the form of a flashback, and Romeo brings back the event in his thoughts on the journey back to Verona. The way the two panels were presented is somewhat ambiguous, but they did not impact the final outcome and the understanding of the plot.

The final example of Hinds' adaptation is *Macbeth* (2015), which proves that the author feels 'safer' using less experimental means for adaptations. The comics is mainly based on straight-edged rectangular panels, but there are exceptions. The first one is Duncan's murder (Hinds 2015: 41), Lady Macbeth's thinks about the murder in her chamber waiting for Macbeth's return; two panels are then shown wavy-edged, which can be interpreted as remembering the events and seeing them through Lady Macbeth's eyes. These panels typically refer to events that occurred in the not-too-distant past. Another surprising change concerning panels occurs in the scene with the porter (Hinds 2015: 48); in one instance, the round panel is used to indicate the shift of perspective and the camera angle changes with every panel. The change in perspective allows us to see the spilled drinks as proof of carousing. There appears to be no other explanation for this change. Finally, the last example comes from 4.1 as Macbeth is looking for the Weird Sisters, the panel reminds of the one from *Romeo and Juliet*, and the panel with the apothecary. In this case, there is again a full-page panel with two smaller and borderless panels, and once more it is unclear whether the events in the panels are present and magically seen by the Weird Sisters or a recollection of the past and past events which function like a flashback. The adaptations of Shakespeare plays by Gareth Hinds allow us to trace the shaping and maturation of his style (in order to make a more comprehensive picture, a study of other adaptations would need to be included). Hinds

in all his adaptations used various types of panels; he used those generally adopted and understood, but also created and proposed his own ones to fill his intended narrative purpose.

The Tempest (2009) by John Allison seems at first glance quite experimental, most probably due to the number of panels, colours, and personal artistic style that are used in the adaptation. However, at a closer inspection, the entire comics is composed of rectangular panels with frames and borders. A substantial majority of the panels are straight-edged, similar to other examples, to indicate the present time of the narrative. However, Allison adopted a wavy panel border as a marker of past and past events. Prospero's entire narrative to Miranda about their life in Milan before the coup is encapsulated in panels with wavy frames (Allison 2009: 14-17), with the border also indicating the shift between the present and the past. The panel depicting Miranda falling asleep and not listening to her father is a case in point; the left-hand edge of the frame links the panel with the previous one which is clearly about the past, whereas the right-hand edge of the frame is straight, bringing it closer to the present time of the narrative. This particular panel possesses liminal qualities: it is a panel in-between, between the past and the present, and although the panel is just a close-up on Miranda's sleepy face and not much is happening in it (in terms of actions and events), the author proposed a new way of marking time by means of a simple change in the border frame. Allison uses flashbacks extensively throughout the entire comics, e.g. Ferdinand recalls losing his father, or the sailors try to remember how they survived the storm and found themselves safe on the ship. Interestingly, the author did not adopt other types of panels, all of which are examples of an interdependent combination.

The analysis of panel composition in Nicky Greenberg's *Hamlet* (2010) showed that the comics breaks most standards and conventions; the same can be said about her use of panels and frames. Naturally there are moments in which the author reaches for rectangular panels (with few instances of rounds ones as well probably for accentuating reasons), for example when Hamlet is reported about the sighting of his father's ghost (Greenberg 2010: 40-47). It is difficult to assess the frame that she uses in her panels as they are always juxtaposed against a black background; hence, the panel may be viewed as a black straight-edge border that becomes invisible due to the background or that the panel is frameless. Greenberg also uses full-page panels throughout the comics, for example the beginning of the fourth soliloquy adopts big full-page panels which slow

down the reading pace (Greenberg 2010: 166-169). Ophelia's madness is another example of breaking the comics conventions, the scene is presented focusing only on the characters the division into panels is dropped, naturally each depiction of a character may be viewed as a separate frameless panels, or again as full-page panel with repeated (reduplicated) element¹⁶³. Greenberg's creative approach would require a careful page-by-page explanation concerning the adoption and use of the panel, but such an approach would prove counter-effective here. *Hamlet* demonstrates two key aspects that are essential for comics readers. Firstly, readers must be adaptable and open to embracing the author's suggested innovations. Secondly, they must consistently evaluate the effectiveness of these creative choices in achieving the narrative's intended goals. Moreover, the technical choices, that is, the panels, hint at the interpretation of the comics and by proxy the play itself. The panels evoke chaos and a sense of loss and confusion, similar to the situation in Elsinore and the characters' emotional well-being. The panels in this case may be viewed as metaphors and possible interpretative keys.

Reinventing *Romeo and Juliet* into an action-packed sci-fi comics and placing it among mainstream comics required using characteristic rectangular straight-edged panel, and this exactly what Stan Lee (et.al 2011) did. His adaptation may be viewed as uninventive in terms of panel use, but the limited means do not draw attention from the plot. All the panels possess a border; they can be embedded into another (often full-page panel), and the border is preserved. *Romeo and Juliet* can be said to adopt the narrative methods of comics similar to Marvel Comics and DC Comics.

The black-and-white *The Tragedie of Macbeth* (2016), created by Moore, is mostly based on rectangular panels with a visible frame, and mainly uses either smaller panels or full-page panel rectangles. There are naturally some exceptions, such as triangular panels as Macbeth meets the Weird Sisters (actually this is a flashback of the encounter as Macbeth is about to stab Duncan, but neither the shape nor the frame hints at it) (Moore 2016: 28). The way borders work in this comics is also interesting, particularly due to the aesthetic choices it is impossible to separate the border from the panel. However, at the moment the murder is revealed, there is one panel which is similar to a photographic negative; hence, it stands out from the rest (Moore 2016: 41). This 'negative' panel is frameless, which is emphasised against the white background.

¹⁶³ See subchapter 3.6.3. on closure and panel transitions.

Any deviation or disruption of the norm draws the reader's attention, and in the case of this adaptation, it also implies changes in the panels.

The discussed Shakespeare comics adaptations are generally quite insipid and monotonous with regard to the use of panels, with the exceptions of Greenberg's *Hamlet* (2010) and Hinds' *King Lear* (2009). Greenberg poses a challenge for the reader to follow the story and makes them question the reasoning behind particular narrative decisions. Hinds, however, experiments with the panels and their narrative potential. All of the other adaptations are not as creative and extravagant, which makes them more accessible to a reader. Although the types of frames were not discussed in depth here, all examples used various angles and shots, and tracing all of them would lead to a quantitative study which was not the aim of this study.

4.3.3. Speech Balloons/ Captions

The speech balloon is viewed as a typical comics symbol. It is also the first comics sign that draws attention and welcomes analysis. Each author adopted their own set of speech balloons. Allison (2009), in his adaptation of *The Tempest*, uses a wide range of public speech balloons (clear line and straight) and private ones for thought (line is clear but it is wavy with bubbly quality charlataneously used for thought). Most balloons are white, indicating an exchange between the characters in the present. However, in situations where Prospero narrates past events, colour coding of the speech balloon is adopted. When Prospero talks to Miranda about their life in Milan the author uses a bluish and greenish speech balloon (Allison 2009: 16-17), and their escape from Milan, dark yellow (Allison 2009: 21-23), or when he talks Ariel, about the fairies imprisonment by Sycorax, a purple speech balloons is used (Allison 2009: 31). These instances can also be classified as captions rather than typical speech balloons. The colours indicate that the past is narrated, the speech balloon loses its elliptical shape and becomes square, and it becomes a satellite speech balloon without a tail. The speech balloons lose the tail and the root, which is the immediate source from which sound comes. The reader has to retain the memory of who is speaking, and the root of the speech balloon is implied based on the previous instances; Prospero becomes the narrator; hence, the speech balloon may turn into a type of caption.

The character that seems to have its own distinct speech balloon is Ariel, which reminds of torn strips of paper with yellowish hew, it is mainly used when talking about the storm and the shipwrecks (Allison 2009: 28-29). The colour yellow becomes a characteristic trait for Ariel, thanks to which the reader is not lost when seeing the speech balloon without the root when the fairy is invisible. Yellow is also the colour when other fairies appear in the masque scene.

Another element is singing and music which are marked by musical notes surrounding the speech balloon. *The Tempest* is a play with a lot of music and singing, Stephano sings, and Caliban sings (Allison 2009: 78, 90). In both cases, it is made notable by musical notes surrounding the speech balloon, making it clear for the reader. The author chose a distinctive set of signs concerning the speech and thought containers which are easy and intuitive to decode and understand¹⁶⁴.

In most cases, speech balloons and thought bubbles contain written words or onomatopoeias constructed with letters and hints at what types of sounds are made. However, in the scene of tempting Caliban by Stephano and Trinculo when they plot to take over the island, Caliban is shown saying one thing (in a speech balloon), but there is also a private thought bubble containing images (Prospero's books, the utensils and Miranda) (Allison 2009: 106). There is only one instance when a speech balloon has more than one tail and more roots, indicating that the characters say the same. When Stephano, Trinculo, and Caliban are attacked by apparitions, they share a speech balloon with an onomatopoeia indicating a scream which is done in unison. Interestingly enough in the panel on the next page when the image of the screaming Trinculo, Stephano and Caliban is repeated the author decides to separate the speech balloon with every character receiving their own balloon (Allison 2009: 148). The reasoning behind this might simply be that after the initial shock, the characters run at various paces and in different directions, which is easier for the reader to imagine. Also, Allison throughout the adaptations links the speech balloon to its source, i.e. the root (the speaker or source of the sound) is always present with the exception of the final panel, when Prospero leaves the island he disappears (Allison 2009: 186), there is no figure in the panel, but the balloon remains. This raises interesting interpretative issues, whether Prospero really leaves the island or just becomes invisible, what is more it

¹⁶⁴ Music, sounds and their characteristic signs is discussed in 4.3.5

remains unclear whether the sound of the spoken words can be heard after the character's disappearance, or whether the sound dies down gradually.

Allison's Shakespeare comics adaptation is a work with the most varied set of devices concerning depicting the speech and thought of the characters. On the one hand, he uses an orthodox speech balloon in terms of shape, but on the other, he adopts his own variety of signs concerning colour in order to project what is necessary for the story to unravel. Other adaptations do not present such a variety of devices and alter basic containers to achieve the aesthetic goals. Hinds in his adaptations does not waver from the characteristic set of speech balloons; the only distinctive element is the dotted line for the public speech balloon with a tail and root indicating whispers. Only once in Hinds' *Romeo and Juliet* (Hinds 2013: 102), the change of colour for the balloon is used as Juliet takes the potion which she received from Friar Lawrence: when Juliet ponders the uncertainty of the future, the balloons become black ellipses without a tail. In this case the reader is uncertain whether Juliet says the words out loud to herself or only thinks them. A similar device was used in *King Lear* (Hinds 2009): Lear's speech balloon turns black in certain situations, for example, Lear delivers his powerful lines during the storm (Hinds 2009: 48-50). *King Lear* is Hinds' most varied in terms of the speech balloon, in most cases he uses a balloon which is transparent rather than white, and merges with the background. In the beginning, during the love contest, the speech balloon is also different; the speech balloon is of an unidentified shape, it is one big balloon with a tail (a short clear line coming from the text rather than the balloon's frame) (Hinds 2009: 5). Moreover, he uses balloons with null carrier, and the text hangs mid-air (Hinds 2009: 7, 13). In this case, the reader has a limited number of hints to decode the situation of who is speaking and to whom.

It seems that over time, Hinds became more aware of the speech balloons' potential in the Shakespeare comics adaptations. *Macbeth* (2015) is a case in point, in the graphic narrative a white speech balloon with a clear line with a carrier, root, and tail dominate which are used for public speech balloon type. The private speech balloon presented as a characteristic thought balloon or a bubble has not been adopted in the work; instead, thoughts and whispered words have been encapsulated in a speech balloon with a dotted line. Hinds also consciously uses two colours, black and white, for semiotic purposes; a white speech balloon functions as a default colour while black is used by the Weird Sisters, Hecate as well as Macbeth and Lady Macbeth when they plot

to kill Duncan, and only in very particular and decisive moments. The black speech balloon serves as a notable marker for the reader, indicating that an important decision regarding the plot has been made.

Moore's *Macbeth* also adopts a fairly wide range of speech balloons and toys with black and white balloons, but they are used more as an aesthetic choice than a semiotic meaning. Any of the characters, despite the situation they find themselves in the balloon, can be black or white, and there seems to be no pattern. At the beginning, The Weird Sisters adopted a white speech balloon only to change it to a black one on the next page. The Weird Sisters at the beginning of the graphic narrative are shown to be singing; the lyrics are a Gaelic song ("Chaidh mo Dhonnachadh dhan bheinn") (Moore 2016: 3); the words are in a null carrier, there is no tail or root, and the reader is able to deduce the source of the song from the context. One of the defining features of the comics is the use of a speech balloon to encapsulate the scream, which is reminiscent of the sound effects of speech bubbles with a spiky frame, but it also has a tail. *Macbeth*, which is a play about warfare required a speech balloon to express strong emotions and sounds during battles, e.g. the final duel between Macbeth and Macduff (Moore 2016: 72). However, it is also a play about ambition and pricks of consciousness which is also depicted by the speech balloon with a shaky line rather than straight to hint at the characters' uncertainty. In addition, there are no empty speech balloons in Shakespeare comics adaptations, and actually none of the authors tried this device¹⁶⁵.

Macbeth by Hänninen and Hiltunen, Greenberg's *Hamlet* or Stan Lee's *Romeo and Juliet* do not adopt a varied range of speech balloons, but they limit themselves to the most basic ones, with white balloon (carrier), as well as the root and the tail. The authors did not add any additional meaning to the speech balloons. The same speech balloon is used throughout the entire comics.

In some of the adaptations the caption is used as a narrative device. It is usually a rectangular box on the top left-hand corner; however, the authors adopt different colours to distinguish it from other devices. For example, in Allison (2009), there are moments when Prospero narrates the past, and his words are encapsulated in captions of various colours, such as blue and purple.; Lee et al. (2011) also adopts the caption to

¹⁶⁵ For the importance of an empty speech balloon see Chivington (2021).

narrate the story and provide the reader with additional information and in such cases the caption is also coloured. Surprisingly, none of the other adaptations reached out for captions, abandoning one of the very characteristic comics book devices.

Shakespeare comics adaptations are quite orthodox regarding the speech balloon, apart from Allison's adaptation, the works use limited type of carriers. It appears that when the speech balloon in an adaptation is less diverse, it tends to draw less attention to its semiotic potential, resulting in a shift of focus towards the panel, its composition, and the content within the panel, which essentially refers to the plot itself.

4.3.4. Gutter, Closure and Transition(s)

Gutter, closure, and panel transitions are among the most intriguing concepts in comics studies, and no analysis of comics can omit them. For the sake of the analysis (and to some extent simplicity) regarding Shakespeare comics adaptations, I shall focus on the analysis of closure adopting the 10 closure types as proposed by Gavalier and Beavers (2018). It is demanding, time-consuming, and, for this particular study, it may be counterproductive to discuss all the gutters and closures that occur in each graphic narrative, as the aim is to conduct qualitative rather than quantitative study. First, such an approach would not enrich the understanding of how the closure and gutters work in the examples. Second, the amount of data and information would swell so much that it would dominate this study; however, it would also be extremely interesting to conduct a quantitative study on the subject of closure. Hence, the analytical part will focus on selected fragments, a particular scene from the comics *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, and *Romeo and Juliet*, to scrutinise both closure and gutter. Choosing one scene from each play facilitates comparisons.

4.3.4.1. *Hamlet*

The scene chosen for the analysis from *Hamlet* is the Closet Scene (3.4). The reason for choosing this particular method is its crucial role in plot development. It was also important to select a fragment that occurred in all selected adaptations.

The manner in which Greenberg uses and fills the gutter in the adaptation is also interesting. On one hand, she leaves the empty space (black!) for the reader to fill it, but there are moments when overt gutter is not used, only a character, most often Hamlet, who is delivering a soliloquy, is duplicated against a background. For example, in the soliloquy “This too too solid flesh” (1.2) is depicted against a background of with clock clogs and Musk Thistle to comment on Gertrude’s fickleness (Greenberg 2010: 35-37), another example would be “To be or not to be” soliloquy (Greenberg 2010: 166-175) is also presented against clogs of changing hue and colour saturation in order to show Hamlet’s emotional wellbeing. However, in the case of soliloquy, the author preserves a frame around the panels as a gutter, which is important because most panels in the soliloquy are full-page ones but not bleeding. The reason behind preserving the visible gutter is the author’s choice to use it; Greenberg often places characters in the gutter in order to remind the reader about constant spying and eavesdropping omnipresent in Elsinore. In the Closet Scene which is quite lengthy as it consists of 18 pages (Greenberg 2010: 244-262), Greenberg places Polonius in the gutter, his white eyes drawing the reader’s attention, and in the moment when Hamlet stabs Polonius he punctures the gutter, the gutter becomes a part of the diegetic world. Polonius’ words “I am slain...” encapsulated in a rootless speech balloon points to the gutter. In the same scene when Hamlet tells Gertrude about Old Hamlet’s ghost the gutter is used to as flower stand, in this particular case the flower is the Common Morning Glory also known as “Love in Vain” whose seeds are hallucinogenic (Greenberg 2010: 426). The flower implies that both characters may have vision. Another flower that appears in the gutter is Safflower, also known as “False Saffron” which may be a symbol of adultery, as it used as a cheaper replacement for saffron. Greenberg embraces the gutter and adds to its role; she does not leave it only as ‘empty space’ for the reader to close.

Greenberg adopts several different closures in her graphic narrative. The first two panels in the opening scene are full-page spreads; the closure functions here on two separate levels, and the reader is charged with the responsibility to notice and interpret those layers as separate panels. The two levels are the curtains (red and green) in both the background and the stage curtain, and the level concerns the characters. As far as the level of the background and the curtain is concerned, there is a Gestalt, spatial, and temporal closure, which attempt to present the reader with the diegesis and the setting of the Queen’s chamber. The curtains are spread over two full-page panels, which are the

bleeding types of the panels, and the gutter is not visible. The reader notices that the two pages are actually two panels due to recurrent, spatial, temporal, and associative closure of the characters; the first two panels show Gertrude and Polonius before Hamlet arrives (both Gertrude and Polonius are recurrent elements). Polonius changes his position in the second panel (he hides to eavesdrop), which is why causal or associative closure can be observed in order to explain the alteration in his position. It could also be interpreted that he is a more dynamic character constantly moving, whereas Gertrude is a more stative one.

Over the course of the next seven pages, Greenberg makes an interesting choice: she divides the panels into equal sizes, with each page having three rectangular and horizontal panels placed evenly. The sequence of panels that occurs immediately after the initial two depicts juxtaposed panels with recurrent elements, Gertrude and the mirror which is part of the décor of her chamber. The recurrent element (mirror) functions as a reminder of where the scene is taking place, which is significant in this particular publishing, and quite freely approaches the presentation of time and space. The mirror is the spatial element; there is little or no indication of temporal inference apart from the movement and speech balloon of the characters which are supposed to be read over time, but the presence of speech does not infer closure. At one point, when Hamlet attacks his mother, apart from recurrent, spatial, and temporal closure, there is a surprising embedded closure, depicted as a duplicated image of Hamlet (Greenberg 2010: 247). This could be interpreted as an emphasis on rapid, swift, and violent actions. Greenberg adopts embedded and recurrent closure as far as the figure of Hamlet is concerned, particularly when she attempts to show moments of emotional rifts, when he starts a monologue or a soliloquy. Hence, it could be assumed that for this particular adaptation, recurrent, spatial, and temporal closure is used predominantly for developing the plot, but in order to present the more subtle and challenging fragments of the text, that is, soliloquy, she adopts embedded closure.

4.3.4.2. *Macbeth*

The scene selected for the analysis from *Macbeth* is the Sleep Walking scene (5.1), again this fragment occurs in the majority of adaptations and it is a crucial moment

sealing Lady Macbeth's fate. It is also quite a short scene which will allow for a closer reading.

Hinds' adaptation takes three pages to present the Sleep Walking scene (2015: 103-105). The author intends to demonstrate the confusing and mystical nature of this scene and adopt a large number of panels, varied in size, with a confusing grid. The increased number of panels, which are mostly close-ups and extreme close-ups on Lady Macbeth's hands, evokes feelings of fear, anxiety, urgency, guilt, and haste. Moreover, the reader may feel a loss while following this particular sequence, and the gutter together with panel transitions (mostly recurrent) does not help to follow the grid. The first page (Hinds 2015: 103) consists of five panels, beginning with the Gentlewoman and the Doctor conversing; hence, the recurrent, spatial, and temporal closure occurs, and the stress is on the spatial closure as there is a change of perspective showing the two characters closer in the second panel. The third panel is also recurrent, as a part of the Gentlewoman's face is visible, but associative closure is here as well when Lady Macbeth enters. The next two panels are recurrent (Lady Macbeth is the repeated element) and spatio-temporal. The second page (Hinds 2015: 104) with ten panels are examples of embedded (repeated image of the hand in the last panel), non-sensory, causal, and associative closures, as well as recurrent. By adopting different types of closure, those that are not so often used, Hinds wanted to reflect the chaotic nature of washing hands and Lady Macbeth's state of mind. The final page (Hinds 2015: 105) consists of eight panels with recurrent, spatial, temporal, causative, and associative closures, with a constant shift of attention between the Doctor and Lady Macbeth, which reflects the play when the Doctor realises the source of Lady Macbeth's distress. An interesting addition is made in the final panel: Lady Macbeth is shown to return to her marital bed in which Macbeth is sleeping, hinting that the Macbeths are together until the end. The shift between the chamber where the Doctor and the Gentlewoman watched the Lady and the bed chamber is an associative and causal closure, apart from recurrent. Hinds does not use Gestalt or pseudo-Gestalt closures in the scene.

In Moore's adaptation (2016), the Sleep Walking scene takes only one page of a characteristic 3x3 panel grid with evenly distributed panels and white gutters. Moore (2016: 62) made a brave interpretative change to the plot. The scene does not begin with a Doctor and a Gentlewoman watching Lady Macbeth sleepwalking, but the Weird

Sisters lurking from the corner, suggesting they instigated her insanity. Ultimately, the sisters ‘consume’ Lady Macbeth with their hellish flames.

The first panel depicts the Weird Sisters hiding in the flames (whether these are apparitions is uncertain); the second panel shows them again, but smaller as Lady Macbeth walks in. Here, there is recurrent, spatial (the outline of wall bricks hardly visible makes this closure possible), temporal (but there is no visible element signifying the passage of time); then, the next four panels show examples of recurrent closure as there is only the silhouette of Lady Macbeth visible, and again spatio-temporal is conjectural. The last three panels depict the Sisters’ re-emergence to consume Lady Macbeth with their flames; here, both the characters and the flames are recurrent closures. Moore limited his range of closure in this particular scene and perhaps drew attention to the power of the uttered words.

The last example comes from Hänninen and Hiltunen (2019), who encapsulated the Sleepwalking Scene over two pages (Hänninen and Hiltunen 2019: 38-39), with an equal number of panels on each page. As far as the gutter is concerned, the authors decided on an interesting choice: the background in the entire comics was black, and the gutter had a ribbony quality, which expanded beyond the edge of the panels. The gutter not only functions in this comics as a no-space, but it is also ornamental. It resembles the mastic or lead between glass in stained glass, and hence, the panels’ small windows. This idea is even strengthened when the gutter rounds the edges of the panels in this scene, leaving a space for a decorative black rhombus in the middle. Interestingly, this choice can be found in only two instances in the graphic narrative: first in the scene with the Weird Sisters meeting Macbeth and second in the Sleep Walking scene. Although it is tempting to draw semiotic conclusions, it seems that a decorative rhombus occurs when only four evenly aligned panels are used¹⁶⁶.

The closure adopted by the authors resembled the choices made by other authors. The first four panels (Hänninen and Hiltunen 2019: 38) focus on the Gentlewoman and the Doctors who discuss Lady Macbeth’s heath, here there is recurrent, spatial, temporal closure; in the fourth one causal is used as well to mark Lady Macbeth’s appearance. No new types of closures are used over the remaining

¹⁶⁶ Comics usually are constructed out of evenly aligned and distributed panels, however, Hänninen and Hiltunen (2019) play with this convention, so a majority of the panels in their comics is misaligned or tilted. See the subchapter 3.5.1. *Mise-en-page*, panel composition and layout.

sequence of panels. Again, Hänninen and Hiltunen (2019) avoided using Gestalt, pseudo-Gestalt, linguistic, and embedded closure; hence, the plot unfolds less chaotically. Both closure types and the aesthetic choices of black and white panels evoke feelings of anxiety in readers.

4.3.4.3. *Romeo and Juliet*

The Banquet scene (1.5), when the young lovers meet for the first time, has been chosen for the analysis as it is the only scene that appears in the adaptations and the appropriation (see 5.3.4.2).

In Lee et al.'s *Romeo and Juliet* (2011) the moment Romeo sees Juliet for the first time takes two pages (Lee et al. *Romeo and Juliet* 2011: 32-33) with thirteen panels total, in this work Juliet is the one who spots Romeo first. In the graphic narrative, the gutter is not marked by a characteristic white space, but a majority of panels have a black rim or frame, and because the aesthetic choice was to juxtapose and embed panels within panels, the gutter becomes not an overt non-space, but merely a conventional idea as the bottom panel is 'seen' in the gutter. Omitting a typical gutter as a white space between panels gives a feeling of immediacy. The authors made an interesting semiotic decision which may complicate the reception and charge the reader with the slightly more difficult task of decoding the gutter.

Unlike the gutter, the types of closures used in the comics is less unpredictable. All the panels focus on the faces of the two young lovers with recurrent, spatial, and temporal closure. These choices of closure seem to slow down the reading pace, drawing more attention to the words spoken rather than actions. The entire scene seems to be a bit artificial; the banquet resembles a techno party with flashing light and loud music; hence, it is less likely that the young lovers would spot each other in such a surrounding, and the panel transitions attempt to make the moment believable.

Hinds' *Romeo and Juliet* (2013) adopted more orthodox elements of comics storytelling. The Banquet Scene takes six pages (Hinds 2013: 32-37), but the first exchange between Romeo and Juliet is only three pages long (Hinds 2013: 35-37), and there are fourteen panels over these pages. Unlike in the previous adaptation, Romeo first sees Juliet and then pursues her. The author preserved the typical division into

panels; hence, the gutter that appears in the comic is a white space between the images. Hinds did not attempt to experiment with this title. He charges the reader with the task of decoding the events in the gutter; Hinds' approach to the gutter is different from that of Lee et al. (2011) on the aesthetic level.

The closure used in the adaptation is also not experimental. It seems that, through the choice of closure, the author is able to manipulate the reception of the event. On the one hand, there is a sense of astonishment and excitement, but also a slowed-down time. It is achieved by recurrent, temporal, spatial, and non-sensory closure over the first eight panels, and between panel four and five when they touch hands for the first time, the close-up is on their hand. In this case, there is also associative closure. The last panel on the page (Hinds 2016: 36) also adds an embedded closure to the recurrent, spatial, and temporal ones, while the young couple dances, their silhouettes are triplicated to indicate their movement, as well as their discreet exit from the room for more privacy. Hinds, similarly to the previous examples, does not use Gestalt, pseudo-Gestalt, or linguistic closure.

4.3.4.4. Other notable examples

In this section, it is crucial to compare the use of gutter and types of closures with the same play. Three comics which were selected to be the study material here do are just single of examples, these are Gareth Hinds' *The Merchant of Venice* (2008) and *King Lear* (2009)¹⁶⁷ and John Allison's *The Tempest* (2009). It would be unreasonable to omit them and not look at the way the authors approach the issue of gutter and closure, even if there are no other examples to compare them with. However, in this case, the observations are general and do not focus on a particular fragment or scene. Hinds' *The Merchant of Venice* possesses an interesting trait concerning the gutter. The author abandoned the typical white area between the panels to mark the gutter, but Hinds brought together the panels dividing them with just a black line, making it harder for the reader to notice it and ponder over it, particularly that the whole comics has been drawn

¹⁶⁷ Although it would be possible to conduct a comparative study focusing on all adaptations by Hinds, but it would rather revolve around the development of personal style of a single author over the course of years which would not be possible in the case of other titles and authors.

in the range of grey colours. As far as closure is concerned, this comics adopts mainly the three main closures that are recurrent, temporal, and spatial, which is understandable as the language is the element which pushed the plot forward.

The second work by Hinds which could not have been compared to another example, was *King Lear*. This study provides an innovative approach to gutter and closure. Hinds quite freely deal with gutter; there are gutters with white spaces between panels (Hinds 2009: 78-79) when Edgar leads Gloucester to the cliffs, so he can commit suicide. There are many pages without panels and without any distinct and overt signs of the gutter, and a good example would be the first exchange between Lear and the Fool (Hinds 2009: 19) when recurrent closure takes place, but it is difficult to distinguish separate panels. Another interesting gutter occurs when Lear leaves Goneril's castle (Hinds 2009: 21); the shape and the frame of the panel resemble stones with uneven edges organised randomly, and in this case the gutter is also random and uneven; at times, the stone panels are closer to one another and sometimes the distance is greater, which makes the gutter a challenge to decode. Another example is the gutter marked only by a black line, similarly to the technique used in *The Merchant of Venice*, but it is often juxtaposed against another panel in the background, in the scene when Edmund tells his step-brother, Edgar, to escape (Hinds 2009:24-27) this style is used. Hinds' *King Lear* is an example of the greatest variety of different types of gutter, and it seems that almost every page, if not scene, adopts a new one and does not allow the reader to adapt to a single style. The reader should expect to be surprised at every stage, which also requires advanced reading skills for comics on the part of the reader. Similar to the gutter, the closure is also more varied. Hinds uses extensively embedded closures, and most panels and closures are based on recurrent and embedded closures. However, there are no Gestalt, pseudo-Gestalt, or linguistic closures. Comparing all of Hinds' work, *King Lear* is the most unorthodox as far as gutter and panel transition are concerned; in many cases, he omits the physical space of the gutter altogether. However, Hinds' probably felt that such changes confused the reader rather than add anything to the story, hence *King Lear* is one time experiment and in the further adaptations, *Romeo and Juliet* and *Macbeth*, he returned to a more traditional way of utilising gutter and panel transition.

The final example is John Allison's *The Tempest* (2009). This particular adaptation adopts a typical white-spaced gutter between the panels, which the author

does not manipulate. Closure is also quite stereotypical, with mainly temporal, spatial, and recurrent closure, and there are no examples of embedded, Gestalt, pseudo-Gestalt, and linguistic closure. Allison's strength seems to lie not in the manipulation and creativity of the basic structures but in the panel composition. For example, one of the first scenes in the play when Prospero tells Miranda the truth about her heritage, the closure used is predominantly temporal, spatial, and recurrent. Interestingly, temporal closure also occurs during a flashback when Prospero talks about their life in Milan. The reader is informed about it via the panel frame. Allison is traditional when it comes to gutter and closure methods, but he achieves a linear and understandable narrative.

Shakespeare comics adaptations represent various approaches, on one hand the adaptations can be creative with their use of gutter and closure (Hinds' *King Lear*, Greenberg's *Hamlet*), but on the other hand they can also be very conservative. It seems that the author decides which way to follow and what means to adopt to tell the story. The source text of the play plays little or no role in the decision-making process concerning the techniques. What is surprising is the lack of linguistic close particular that Shakespearean text is of such importance and the limited use of Gestalt and pseudo-Gestalt closure.

4.3.5. Sound/Music/Silence in Shakespeare Comics Adaptations

Shakespeare comics adaptations in most cases follow the established system concerning the depiction of sound. The onomatopoeias and acoustigrams that appear in the adaptations are more descriptive in nature, signify the sounds made by inanimate objects, and are not encapsulated by the speech balloon; they are usually incorporated within the panel (sometimes indicating movement as in Lee et al. *Romeo and Juliet: The War* (2011), or are very small and barely visible, for example, "POP" in Hinds' *Romeo and Juliet* (2013)). It is impossible here to trace all of the sound words that appear in the analysed examples; hence, the focus will be on the more noticeable ones.

The adaptations of *Macbeth*, *Romeo and Juliet* and *King Lear* are among the most prolific examples when it comes to the onomatopoeia for battles and duels. The onomatopoeias are quite recognisable and generally understandable: Hinds' *King Lear* uses "WHOCK" (Hinds 2009: 85) but also "SNIP", "NICK", "KLINK", "KLASH",

WHISS (2009: 105-107) for the moment when weapons, usually swords, come to contact; similar devices were used in *Romeo and Juliet* (Hinds 2013), “CLASH”, “SWASH” (Hinds 2013: 6-7, 70-71, 76-77) and also an acoustigram “SHHINNNG”, “SHLIP”, “KSHINK” (Hinds 2013: 76-77) mainly for swords fighting. Similar onomatopoeias and acoustigrams appear in *Macbeth* (Hinds 2015) such as “SHINK” and “TINNNGGG”, “TANK”, “CHACK” and “KLANG”. Other adaptations which also have fight scenes which produce and require more sound words also adopt recognisable devices such as “BOOM”, “CRASH”, “BAM”, “BLAM”, “KPOW”, “KRAAAASSHHHH” (Lee et al. 2011). Remembering the genre to which Lee et al. adapted *Romeo and Juliet* with lasers, machine guns, and explosives instead of swords and daggers, the change in onomatopoeias and acoustigrams was a natural necessity. Another example of sword fight and battle is in Moore’s *The Tragedie of Macbeth* (2016) which does not abundantly rely on onomatopoeic devices, however in the battle scenes are filled with ”SHING”, “SLASH”, “SNAP” “CLANG”, “SWIPE” and “SWIFF” (Moore 2016: 71, 73, 76). The manner in which Moore incorporates onomatopoeias into his graphic narrative serves one more purpose, which has not been used previously, namely, to evoke feelings of chaos and deafening during a battle. Another battle scene is found in Hänninen and Hiltunen’s *Macbeth* (2019), who used a limited range of sound words. Their fight scene, particularly the final duel between Macbeth and Macduff, is completely deprived of any onomatopoeias, but it is reasonable to assume that the scene is filled with noise, sounds of metal, and swords. It is remarkable that in a noteworthy and distinctive event such as a battle, the authors have decided to leave out any acoustigrams or onomatopoeia to indicate it. A possible explanation is the common association and perception that sound words belong to the mainstream comics, particularly the superhero genre. Another adaptation which uses sound words for battles, fights and duels is Greenberg’s adaptation of *Hamlet* (2010), it is deprived of devices indicating sounds and noises in duels, it lacks both onomatopoeias and acoustigrams. Any sounds that may ‘appear’ in the graphic narrative need to be completely imagined and created by the reader, and as Greenberg’s *Hamlet* is not set in any easily identified setting, the challenge may be daunting and inspiring.

Naturally, the sounds of battle and fighting are not the only sounds that appear in comics; however, they are quite dominant and noticeable. Another group of sounds of interest are so-called natural sounds, which will be understood here as sounds of nature,

but also sounds accompanying magic. The repeating motifs are storms and lightning. Hinds in *King Lear* (2009) shocks with his use of the onomatopoeia in the storm scene, he devotes the entire page with a full-page panel and with “KRAKOOOM” splashed across the page in huge font (Hinds 2009: 47). This is to shock the reader as well as inform them about the transition that is going to take in the storyline, and the sound word itself might function as a harbinger of the following scene. Another storm that occurs is Allison’s *The Tempest* (2009), with the entire opening sequence (10 pages) filled with acoustigrams and onomatopoeias to denote thunder, lightning, wind, and waves. The author uses a whole range of such words: sounds of waves - “VRRRRR” and “VRRRVOOMP” (Allison 2009: 5); sounds of wind “WOOOO” (Allison 2009: 2); and lightening “KKRREEEAK” and “KRABAM” (Allison 2009: 8-9). The acoustigrams are not necessarily easy to identify to represent these phenomena, but the accompanying panel facilitates the identification. The sounds used in Allison’s opening scene are also permuted with the sounds of magic, bearing in mind that Ariel is the one to conjure the storm his presence among the sailors is understandable. Ariel’s magic is depicted as a natural one hence the sounds mimic nature “KZZNG” (2009: 9), “KEERAK!” (2009: 26) and music (see below). Ariels’ magic is contrasted to Prospero’s magic, whose abilities are akin to electricity and the sound words that appear have this quality, e.g. “ZZZZAP!” (2009: 32, 38) which was shown in a flashback when freeing Ariel and disciplining Caliban. Interestingly, neither of the authors used the onomatopoeias which are generally recognised by the readers, but created their own, which at times might have been challenging.

The last element in this section focuses on the sounds made by humans, both by using their bodies and objects with which humans interact. In this domain, most of the authors reached for well-known and recognised onomatopoeias; however, it cannot be stated that this system is homogenous. Notably, the use of acoustigrams has been limited here. In *Macbeth* the porter scene requires the sound of knocking, in Hinds (2015: 46-47) there is a typical “KNOCK KNOCK” repeated constantly¹⁶⁸ and in Moore (2016: 36) is it also “KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK”, but in Hänninen and Hiltunen (2019: 15) the onomatopoeia is a less recognisable “BOM BOM BOM”. Other sounds that are less controversial and not so changed are definitely “HA HA HA” for laughter

¹⁶⁸ Hinds remains actually quite faithful in this domain, he uses the same onomatopoeic devise “KNOCK KNOCK” in his *Romeo and Juliet* (2013: 93, 99)

in Hänninen and Hiltunen (2019: 3) and in Moore (2016: 1), in both adaptations of *Macbeth* the laughter comes from either soldier and the Weird Sisters. There are also other examples, like “GLUG GLUG GLUG” for drinking and “MHWAH” for hiccup in *The Tempest* (Allison 2009: 77), for spitting there are “PTHOY” and “PTHOY” in *Macbeth* (Hänninen and Hiltunen 2019: 4). The following examples illustrate a few instances of such words that conform to the typical notion of how these actions might sound. Despite their prevalence, the reader should be able to understand them without difficulty. Some are easier to identify, while others pose difficulties for the reader in recognising their meaning. Moreover, there is no unified set of onomatopoeias and acoustigrams that the creators can use in their work; hence, in most cases, they are their own creations.

Another element that needs to be discussed is the depiction of music in Shakespeare comics adaptations. Unlike sounds and noises, music does not often appear in comics. Music sounds that appear in comics rarely hint at the type of diegetic music that appears. In such a case, the reader is left to imagine any kind of music, look for clues within the panels (i.e. musical instruments), or reach conclusions based on the story’s setting. The discussion of music in the adaptations will also include singing, because they are often presented together. In all of the provided examples, music and singing played a vital role in either plot development or setting. In the majority of cases, music is presented with musical notes, music staves, and treble clefs either surrounding the characters in the air or the speech balloon; in both instances, the signs are invisible to the characters and are only for the benefit of the reader.

Gareth Hinds used references to music, song and singing in only three occasions. In *The Merchant of Venice* (2008), music appears when Bassanio chooses the right casket and betroths Portia in order to celebrate the significance of the occasion a musical troupe sings – the music is depicted as an onomatopoeia with the words presented against musical staves and notes (Hinds 2008:28). In the second instance, *King Lear* (2009), the Fool in the play sings when it first appears (Act 1.4 158-69), and although these are not the same lines, the Fool in the comics also sings a few lines. The music is marked with musical notes surrounding both the text and the balloon. The Fool sings “For you know nuncle, the hedge-sparrow feed the cuckoo so long that it has its head bit off by its young. Whoop, jug, I love thee!” (Hinds 2009: 20), in the plays similar proverbial lines were simply delivered, whereas here they are turned into a tune.

Finally, *Romeo and Juliet* (2013) is a play which requires music as a vital element of the ball. Hinds is not creative in this example and surrounds the characters with musical notes indicating music being played in the background (Hinds 2013: 33); however, the particular genre of music remains unknown. Furthermore, this adaptation presents a challenge for the reader to visualise it, given the adaptive choices made. The Capulets are depicted as a Hindu family; hence, the music at the ball might come from the culture or there is a possibility that it is a kind of Italian Renaissance music, as the story is still set in Verona. Nevertheless, the author did not provide any hints about the music.

Another example of music comes from Allison's *The Tempest* (2009) which is a play filled with songs, references to music, and masque. The author attempted to preserve this dimension of the play but adopted simple devices, that is, musical notes. In numerous cases, Ariel sings while performing his magic (Allison 2009: 39-41) the colourful speech balloon with musical notes on the carrier, Stephano sings as well when encountering Caliban (Allison 2009: 78, 90), the same technique was used. Allison makes an interesting interpretative stance concerning Ariel's magic (as opposed to Prospero's magic) which is innate and natural, each time Ariel performs magic not only a colourful energy appears, but music accompanies it, thus music with its potential to evoke various emotions possess magical quality (Allison 2009: 134-135).

The previously mentioned Fool in Hinds' *King Lear*, but Polonius in Nicki Greenberg's *Hamlet* sings as well. In Greenberg, Polonius turns to signing while talking and cautioning Laertes before his departure (Greenberg 2010: 60-61), although it might seem inappropriate, it reminds the reader that Polonius is a cunning charmer, a performer who had acting experience in the past ("That did I, my lord, and was accounted a good actor" 3.2. 96). Greenberg also used a simple technique of musical notes in the background.

All of the other examples: Hinds' *Macbeth* (2015), Moore's *The Tragedie of Macbeth* (2016), Hänninen and Hiltunen's *Macbeth* (2019) and Lee's et. al *Romeo and Juliet* (2011) do not possess any musical elements. Although it is not so surprising when it comes to *Macbeth*, it baffles that the adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* with its banquet scene was deprived of such signs.

Finally, the last element discussed here is the depiction of silence in Shakespeare adaptations. As it has been stated previously, it is difficult to find a fragment or a single panel that would be completely deprived of sound. Going through the comics, one

might encounter panels which do not have either sound words, signs, or speech balloons, hinting that it might be silent; however, the reader is conscious that where there is action and activity, there is sound and noise (common knowledge about the world is used to fill that). However, there is one example among the adaptations that is closest to a silent panel. In the opening scene of *Hamlet* (Greenberg 2010: 1-8) the first three pages are just black pages, and at the very beginning, there is a small onomatopoeia “SHHH...” as a sign for the audience/reader to quieten before a performance. This reminds us of a theatrical experience in which the audience goes silent before the play can commence. The three black pages function in a similar way to silence the thoughts of the reader before they turn the page and read.

The initial thoughts about sounds in comics are those of huge onomatopoeias (“BAM!” “BOOM!” “POW”), but the analysis of the Shakespeare adaptations has revealed the richness of the phenomenon. It is true that some adaptations (Lee’s et. al *Romeo and Juliet: The War*; or Hänninen and Hiltunen’s *Macbeth*) follow the mainstream in terms of presenting sounds with easier to decode acoustigrams and onomatopoeias. However, the majority of the analysed examples have shown a new and unique manner of presenting sounds, and the authors compiled their own sets and lists of words and signs. At times, they demonstrated exceptional creativity, which showcased the potential of the subject matter.

4.3.6. Colour in Shakespeare comics adaptations

Out of the nine analysed Shakespeare adaptations in comics only two titles are monochromatic black and white, and the interesting fact is that these are adaptations of *Macbeth*: Moore’s *The Tragedie of Macbeth* (2016), and Hänninen and Hiltunen’s *Macbeth* (2019). The world of *Macbeth* in both of these adaptations is filled with violence, death, evil, and the supernatural, and the colours of black and white reflect these notions. Black is typically associated with death and the unknown, which may result in a sense of anxiety in the reader upon encountering murderous acts, rather than shock. The two colours also clearly emphasise the dichotomy between good and evil, and the characters fall into either of these categories; there is nothing in between. Supernatural elements (i.e. The Weird Sisters) and the unknown or the unexplained are

hidden in the dark (literarily), hindering interpretation. Although both works were drawn in black and white, the intensity of the colour (saturation) differs. Moore (2016) used a very dark shade of black, there is no hint of grey, the lines are thick and have a heavy feeling; at times, there is a sense of black dominating over white, and it almost as if tar was used to create it. Moore also explores the potential of the monochrome, in order to draw attention to character or their inner thoughts he uses a panel which looks like a photographic negative (Moore 2016: 41). In contrast, Hänninen and Hiltunen's work (2019) features lighter, thinner, and more delicate lines, which some might perceive as being grey rather than black.

Hence, their use of lines allows greater attention to detail in terms of attire and also facial expressions and gestures of the characters. There is also the feeling that the panels were drawn by hand, and there was a sense of nervousness. Baetens (2011a) mentioned that works in black and white are considered of higher quality; however, it seems that in this case, it is an overinterpretation.

Hinds' style and approach towards adaptation, particularly towards the use of colour, can be said to have matured and developed over the course of years. His first adaptation, *The Merchant of Venice* (2008), is at times rough and simplistic, as far as colour is concerned, but it can be viewed as an intermediary work between monochromatic works of Moore (2016) or Hänninen and Hiltunen (2019). Moreover, Hinds does not combine the two techniques without a purpose, but actually adopts a particular one for precise fragments of the plot, thus potentially impacting interpretation. The events taking place on the island of Belmont, with the main focus on Portia (Hinds 2008: 4-6; 16-18; 20-22; 26-35; 60-68) are in a greyscale (which might sometimes be viewed as a derivative of black and white images). The panels are composed using various intensities of grey, black, and white; the lines are softer (especially, the grey colour functions as the background for the entire page, not just the panels), and the colouring allows greater attention to detail. This aesthetic choice suggests a more idyllic life on the island with greater freedom (Jessica and Lorenzo find refuge there) for its inhabitants, in contrast to life in Venice. The plot which takes place in Venice with the predominant focus on the conflict between Shylock and Antonio has been drawn using a limited palette of white, greyish (with a bit of blueish tone) and black, also the more definite and sharper lines (Hinds 2008: 1-3; 7-9; 12-16; 19; 23-25; 36-37; 39-59). The selected style highlights the gravity of the legal dispute between the

characters while also emphasising that the law is open to interpretation. Despite the common belief that the law should be equal and clear, the play indicated that there is a grey area in this domain; hence, the use of these colours draws attention to that aspect.

Other works by Hinds (*King Lear* (2009); *Romeo and Juliet* (2013); *Macbeth* (2015)) are differentiated in terms of colour and the colour does not seem crucial for interpretation, but reflect the nature of the original Shakespearean play as well as the characters' emotional state. Nevertheless, Hinds is skilled at operating with colours in his work. In *King Lear* there is a variety of styles and colour schemes, starting with pastels (pastel green, yellow, blue etc.) at the opening the comics signifying the relative peace in the kingdom (Hinds 2009: 2-5). With Lear's anger directed at Cordelia the colours become more definite and clear, and also they turn first to more dull shades of brown with the appearance of the Fool and the conflict with Goneril (Hinds 2009: 18-20). The conflict between Edmund and Edgar are presented in navy blue, blue and purple tones (which look a bit pastel-like), this could hint at potential reconciliation in this sub-plot (Hinds 2009: 23-27). Lear's final collapse into madness (and the storm) is represented with dark colours: grey, black, very dark blue, and a bit of white, this is to reflect the lowest point of the character (Hinds 2009: 47-51). The moment of regaining control and Lear's decisiveness are represented with warm colours of red, yellow and orange (this functions as contrast between cold outside and warm inside) (Hinds 2009: 58-61). The conclusion of the play is presented using many different colours, but they are toned down rather than bright. The author returns to dark and dull colours with Lear's and Cordelia's death (Hinds 2009: 113). *Romeo and Juliet* assumed a different approach to the colours. The adaptation is consistent with its colours throughout the entire work; they are vibrant, but not bright (especially when it comes to the colours of clothes). It looks like the colours reflect the hot Italian summer as well as the orange and the red of Italian architecture. Finally, in *Macbeth*, grey, brown, and red dominate, reflecting the tone of the play. Red often surrounds Macbeth in many panels to remind reader of committed crimes.

Allison's *The Tempest* (2009) uses vibrant and bright colours. The author, from the very beginning, has a careful plan of which colours to use. Shakespeare's play touches upon a variety of themes and motifs, but it seems that the world of the island and the presence of magic dictate the colour choices in particular. The opening storm and the shipwreck are filled dark colours of grey and navy blue, however, there are also

bright yellow spots where Ariel appears does his magic, it also represents the ignited fire and burning of the ship (Allison 2009: 5-6; 9). The island is represented by means of bright and vibrant colours, both in terms of the background and the character's depiction (Allison 2009: 30). What is particularly interesting is the manner Ariel's magic and other fairies is presented, the appearance of the supernatural is accompanied by a gamut of very bright rainbow colours, which is to evoke positive emotions and feeling (it almost resembles the hues of the pride flag for the LGBTQ social movements) (Allison 2009: 40-41).

The adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* by Lee's (2011) carefully chooses the colour schemes to identify the rift between the houses of the Capulets and the Montagues. Lee et al. (2011) set the graphic narrative in the distant future with traces of sci-fi genre, hence the action taking place outside is very dark with dark navy blue and black whereas the events inside the buildings are extremely bright with a dominance of white. This choice resembles the cold fluorescent light which can be found in laboratories. This highlights not only the contrast between the outside and inside, but also the conflict between the families; the Montagues are represented by darker tones and Capulets by brighter ones. When Romeo comes to see Juliet in her grave, the battle that breaks out afterwards is depicted using red, yellow, and orange to symbolise the burning world and the explosives that are used to destroy everything and everybody. However, these are also the colours of a sunrise which is often linked with new hope and appears in the very last panels of the graphic narrative.

The final element of the discussion concerning colours revolves around Greenberg's *Hamlet* (2010) which is quite elusive. The cover of the with its title in bright red, the blue and purple background, and the silhouette of the main character (the already discussed anthropomorphised lion/inkblot) in deep black might seem discouraging, if not off-putting, at first. However, since the graphic narrative is not entirely drawn by hand, it uses various techniques and materials (heavy, silk green curtains, and ivory-white crochet lace tablecloths). The colour scheme ranges from bright to dull, but there is also an interpretative key. It has already been stated that Greenberg established links with theatre and a theatrical performance; thus, the bright colours (blue, pink, orange, etc.) constitute the background against which the plot is being enacted. The opening scene from Act 1.1 with "Who's there?" corroborates this (Greenberg 2010: 2-3), the dull green curtains are drawn back to reveal a bright blue

scenery with Bernardo in the middle. Henceforth, bright colour is a sign of events which take place on stage. The graphic narrative is set in an unidentified space and time, and the background is of various shapes, sizes, and colours; most of Hamlet's soliloquies are delivered against a background of colourful clogs (green and yellow) (Greenberg 2010: 166). Other colours are also ascribed to characters and events, praying Claudius is depicted against the green to show his outward composure, but inner chaos and train of thoughts (Greenberg 2010: 233-239). Every encounter with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern is set against a beige background not to further confuse and diverts the reader's attention from the scheming characters (Greenberg 2010: 216-225). In the moment of final decision making to kill Claudius, Hamlet is shown against blood red (Greenberg 2010: 226-227). The Closet Scene (i.e. Gertrude chamber) is shown in dark pink, red and violet (Greenberg 2010: 246-247) which almost resembles a womb. The backstage events, which are not as glamorous and attention-grabbing, are composed of rather duller colours and hues, the background is made out of paper, a box of pen nibs, crochet and sequins (Greenberg 2010: 108-109). Naturally, the dominant colours reappearing throughout the comics are black and ink-black. All the anthropomorphised characters were drawn in black to sustain the inky quality of the work; the only exceptions are the Players who arrive at Elsinore, who are of deep red colour (Greenberg 2010: 146). Adopting a different colour for the Players allows them to separate and differentiate themselves from the residents of Elsinore. The actor assumes new roles and enters new characters; red, as the primary colour, can morph into a new colour which would indicate a new character. It also suggests that the Players come from the outside world; they are not a part of Elsinore; they can willingly come and go.

The short discussion of colour in Shakespeare comics adaptation proves the complexity of the issue and the need for further exploration. Moreover, the division suggested by Baetens (2011a) concerning colours (monochromatic works being of better quality than polychromatic ones) has proven insufficient in this case. The authors adapting Shakespeare make very conscious decisions concerning colour, which must be interpreted by the reader.

4.3.7. Verbal Narration of Comics – Shakespearean Language in Comics Adaptations

It is impossible to compare the entirety of the language of each play and each adaptation, which is why the observations and comparisons will be conducted on selected fragments, such as opening scenes or well-known soliloquies, monologues, and exchanges.

Gareth Hinds' adaptations most strive to be clear and comprehensible, not only in visual element, but verbal as well. *The Merchant of Venice* (2008), with its difficult tone, heavily cuts and alters the language. The opening line "In sooth I know not why I am so sad..." (1.1, 1)¹⁶⁹ and the following lines is cut and simplified to "I know not why I am sad", the "In sooth" has been abandoned and the reader clearly learns about his mental state. The intricacies and complexity of the Shakespearean language, together with metaphors and similes, have been lost. Hinds sets his *The Merchant of Venice* in a contemporary setting among calculating businessmen in tailor-made suits and adjusting their language to fit them. Their speech becomes clear focused on money and business. The entirety of Act 1.1 is shortened to quick exchange between the men which has been squeezed into just three pages. Another example of such simplification is Portia's first words, which are even more changed than those spoken by Antonio. Portia says to Nerissa "By my troth, Nerissa, my little body is awearied of this great world" (1.2, 1-2) which in Hinds' version becomes "Oh, Nerissa, I am so tired" which loses the existential ponderings whether they concern the life of a woman in the Early Modern or today's world. Finally, one of the best-known fragments from *The Merchant of Venice* is Shylock's monologue, expressing his anger about antisemitism, he says:

"To bait fish withal; if it will feed nothing else, it will feed my revenge. He hath disgraced me and hindered me half a million, laughed at my losses, mocked at my gains, scorned my nation, thwarted my bargains, cooled my friends, heated mine enemies, and what's his reason? *I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions?* Fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer as

¹⁶⁹ All of the quotes come from *The Ardent Shakespeare: The Merchant of Venice* edited by John Drakakis.

a Christian is? If you prick us do we not bleed? If you tickle us do we not laugh? If you poison us do we not die? And if you wrong us shall we not revenge? If we are like you in the rest, we will resemble you in that. If a Jew wrong a Christian, what is his humility? Revenge! If a Christian wrong a Jew, what should his sufferance be by Christian example? Why, revenge! The villainy you teach me I will execute, and it shall go hard but I will better the instruction.” (*The Merchant of Venice* 3.1, 48-66, emphasis mine)

The monologue becomes a typical prose monologue, divided into five speech balloons with clear pausing moments.

“Antonio has disgraced me, cheated me, laughed at my losses, mocked at my gains, scorned my nation, spurned my friends, aided my enemies - and what's his reason? *I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? Fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer as a Christian is?*

If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die?

And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge?

If you are like in the rest, we will resemble you in that. If a Jew wrong a Christian, what is the response? Revenge. If a Christian wrong a Jew, what should his sufferance be by Christian example?

Why, revenge. The villainy you teach me, I will execute, and it shall go hard for Antonio.” (Hinds 3.1 p. 24 emphasis mine)

The general meaning of the monologue is the same but with more direct references to Antonio. Shakespeare’s strongest lines, the ones that are most memorable, remain unchanged, probably due to respect for the source as well inability to make the lines even stronger. Hinds even presented the “hath” form which does not fit in the contemporary setting of the adaptation. The division of the monologue imposes on the reader the way it should be read and where to make pauses, which makes it easier to follow the lines and to understand them. The way the monologue is presented is comparable to the way an actor delivers it on stage. The biggest change made by Hinds is the change from verse and prose to only prose, which again seems more fitting for comics in this case.

Another adaptation by Gareth Hinds is *King Lear* (2009) which is also filled with strong language and metaphors. Frank Kermode (2001: 184) provided a nice summary of the topics of *King Lear* and the reason why its language is so important.

It is curious that this play, which is surely impossible for anybody who cares about poetry to write on without some expression of awe, should offer few of the local excitements to be found, The explanation must be that the subjects of *King Lear* reflect a much more

general, indeed a universal tragedy. In *King Lear* we are no longer concerned with an ethical problem that, however agonising, can be reduced to an issue of law or equity and discussed forensically. For *King Lear* is about suffering represented as a condition of the world as we inherit it or make it for ourselves.

In Kermode's eye *King Lear* possesses its "own dialect" (2001: 200) which makes the play so powerful, Hinds understood it and respected the source text. Hinds respects that by not altering and improving the original text, what he does is cut the fragments to make them more accessible and understandable for a younger audience. For example, the first time Lear speaks in the play and initiates the love contest he states,

"Meantime we shall express our darker purpose.
Give me the map there. Know that we have divided
In three our kingdom; and 'tis our fast intent
To shake all cares and business from our age,
Conferring them on younger strengths, while we
Unburdened crawl toward death. Our son of Cornwall
And you, our no less loving son of Albany,
We have this hour a constant will to publish
Our daughters' several dowers, that future strife
May be prevented now.
The two great princes, France and Burgundy,
Great rivals in our youngest daughter's love,
Long in our court have made their amorous sojourn
And here are to be answered. Tell me, my daughters—
Since now we will divest us both of rule,
Interest of territory, cares of state—
Which of you shall we say doth love us most,
That we our largest bounty may extend
Where nature doth with merit challenge. - Goneril,
Our eldest born, speak first." (*King Lear* 1.1. 35-54)

In the comics, the monologue is almost verbatim, and the delicate changes are just for the benefit of understanding and clarity in the comics medium. Again, like any other Shakespearian language or monologue, it is divided into two speech balloons for a pausing effect.

"Meantime we shall express our darker purpose.
The map there. Know that we have divided
In three our kingdom, and 'tis our fast intent
To shake all cares and business from our age,
Conferring them on younger strengths while we
Unburdened crawl toward death.
Which of you shall we say doth love us most,
That we our largest bounty may extend
Where nature doth with merit challenge? Goneril,
Our eldest born, speak first." (Hinds 2009: 2-3)

The changes that were introduced concern only punctuation for the sake of clarity. Hinds is actually quite conscious of what he is doing in the text. "I was able to preserve the original verse line breaks, more often I had to remove them and set the text as prose to maintain the flow of the dialogue. Sometimes, too, I split lines or changed a particularly archaic word. In each of these cases I carefully considered the meter and broke it only if I felt the impact was minimal" (Hinds 2009: 121). In other words, Hinds did not write new lines; he just cut the ones he felt were not necessary; this is the same adapting technique used by any other adapter. This also shows the change that the author has gone through concerning the language of the play; at this point, there is no need to re-write the lines to simplify them by making them more concise.

The following play, *The Tempest*, is also noteworthy for its unforgettable lines and familiar language. John Allison's (2009) version of the play preserves the original language, does not introduce simplifications or alternations, but the more difficult or archaic pieces of vocabulary are explained in the footnote. Miranda's first words are as follows:

"If by your art, my dearest father, you have
Put the wild waters in this roar, allay them.
The sky, it seems, would pour down stinking pitch
But that the sea, mounting to th' welkin's cheek,
Dashes the fire out. O, I have suffered
With those that I saw suffer: a brave vessel,
(Who had no doubt some noble creature in her)
Dashed all to pieces. O, the cry did knock
Against my very heart! Poor souls, they perished.
Had I been any god of power, I would
Have sunk the sea within the earth or ere
It should the good ship so have swallowed and
The fraughting souls within her." (*The Tempest* 1.2 1-12.)

The entire monologue has been preserved, including punctuation, and the phrase 'welkin's cheek' has been accompanied with an explanation as 'sky's face'. Naturally, speech had to be divided into speech balloons to make it more suitable for a comics reader; hence, the speech takes a page and a half in comics. Another example of a well-known fragment comes from Caliban, who states:

"You taught me language; and my profit on't
Is I know how to curse. The red plague rid you
For learning me your language!" (*The Tempest*, 1.2 363-365)

These words appear exactly the same in Allison's adaptation. It would seem that the author highly respects Shakespeare's original and does not feel inclined to alter it; he rather works around it by creating the images and panels that would accompany and illustrate the text. In this example, the text takes predominance over the image, and without the language, and sometimes with previous knowledge of the play, the plot would definitely be less understandable. For example, the drinking scene between Caliban, Trinculo, and Stephano (3.2) is filled with a number of speech balloons, as the characters mostly sit and intoxicate themselves. The power of the scene lies in the language and the exchange between the characters; without it, the visual narrative based on the panels is not only incomprehensible but also boring. Moreover, in comics, the verbal should not dominate the image because the image then turns into an illustration, which is what happens in this instance.

Another example of an adaptation which preserves the entire language of the play is Nicky Greenberg's *Hamlet* (2010), and as it is Shakespeare's longest text, it also poses a challenge for the adaptor. Greenberg neither cuts, nor alters the language used in the play, and for her, similarly to Allison, the text of the play possesses a special function. Hamlet's 4th soliloquy is a good example for comparison. The lines of the soliloquy are well known, and it seems redundant to quote it fully. The text of the whole soliloquy has been preserved in the graphic narrative; the only small change is the repetition of "To be, to be, to be..." to emphasise the character's hesitation and to pace the panels. The author unfolds the soliloquy slowly over ten pages and weighs on every word, dividing them over a number of speech balloons to facilitate the reading process. Another issue that arises in terms of soliloquy is their depiction on the page: how to present a character deep in thought without making it unnatural and visually unappealing. Greenberg focused on Hamlet's state of mind, and his actions mimic the spoken words, in the same way the images attempt to do so as well. The visual and verbal narratives in this scene complement each other; the visual narrative may not be completely clear without the verbal aspect, but it does reflect Hamlet's feelings and emotions, but the language enriches the adaptations.

So far, each of the plays, *King Lear*, *Hamlet*, *The Tempest*, and *The Merchant of Venice*, have been represented by just one adaptation which did not allow any comparisons. The next two, *Romeo and Juliet*, as well as *Macbeth*, are represented by

more than one comics which might shed some light on how adaptors approach the language differently.

Romeo and Juliet skilfully use the language for the needs of the events; it is filled with innuendos, puns, and jokes as if it were a comedy, only to change the tone suddenly and become a tragedy. The play begins with the prologue, which betrays the entire plot of the play, from among the plays (and comics) chosen for the analysis, and *Romeo and Juliet* are the only ones with the prologue; hence, it is interesting to examine what comics adaptations have done with this device. Interestingly, the original text of the prologue has been preserved in Hinds' (2013: viii-1) and Lee's et al. (2011) adaptations without any changes, which presents respect towards Shakespeare's text, but on the other hand, it may evoke the feeling of artificiality and unsuitability for the medium of comics. The unchanged prologue in these two adaptations of *Romeo and Juliet* will be used as a reference point in an analysis of the prologue in the comics appropriation.

Another instance in which language plays a significant role is the first exchange between Romeo and Juliet. The young lovers fall in love by speaking through sonnets, surprisingly it is not only Romeo who uses the sonnet for seduction, but Juliet responds in the same way (she is not just a passive recipient), she proves herself to be intellectually equal to Romeo. The scene in which the two lovers meet for the first time serves as a good example.

“ROMEO
If I profane with my unworhiest hand
This holy shrine, the gentle fine is this:
My lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready stand
To smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss.
JULIET
Good pilgrim, you do wrong your hand too much,
Which mannerly devotion shows in this;
For saints have hands that pilgrims' hands do touch,
And palm to palm is holy palmers' kiss.” (*Romeo and Juliet*, 1.5. 92-99)

Both characters are already attuned to one another; they speak the same language, they play on the same imagery, and respond similarly. Similarly, Hinds (2013) approached the prologue, kept the fragment intact, and did not divide it further into smaller speech balloons. Actually, Hinds (2013: vi) comments on his approach towards the language in a note to the reader “I've tried to keep almost all of the lines intact”. A completely different approach is presented by Lee's et al. (2011) adaptation, which seems to have

felt obligated to preserve the text of the prologue, but as far as the rest of the text is concerned, the authors embraced creative freedom and wrote the text anew. The poetic scene becomes plainspoken, which fits the setting of the graphic narrative of a distant and hostile future. The first words spoken by young lovers are as follows.

“JULIET: You are a Montague, aren’t you?
ROMEO: Not if you are a Capulet. Given what Capulets think of Montagues.
JULIET: Then let’s just say... I’m a Capulet who likes Montagues.
ROMEO: A Capulet who likes Montagues? Then you must be dressed as ... a mythical creature which does not exist.
JULIET: In this place – tonight – such a Capulet exists. But only if you are a Montague who likes Capulets.
ROMEO: Well then. In this place, tonight. Such a Montague exists.” (Lee et al. 2011, unpaginated)

The language is much simplified, and the nuances, the sonnet form, and the kiss disappear, including the imagery of the pilgrim and religious undertones. What is highlighted is the feud between the Capulets and the Montagues as well as their affiliation with either family. The poetical language becomes an exchange in prose. These examples of *Romeo and Juliet* in graphic narratives reveal different approaches towards the language of the source text, starting with Hinds’ (2013) unchanged text, and Lee et al. (2011) completely modernised and rewritten the language of the play. Comics, like any other medium, can embrace such attitudes. These observations will also be supplemented with a discussion of language in comics appropriation, Ron Wimberly’s *Prince of Cats* (2016) in the next chapter.

Finally, the last adaptations which allow comparison of the treatment of language are comics adapting *Macbeth*, Hinds’ *Macbeth* (2015), Moore’s *The Tragedie of Macbeth* (2016) and Hänninen and Hiltunen’s *Macbeth* (2019), the fragment which will be analysed is Macbeth’s monologue, the so-called dagger scene, before Duncan’s murder (Act 2.1). Kermode observes that the “dagger of the mind” scene embraces the imagery of night, decision making, and increases the horror and tension just before the murder (Kermode 2001: 211). This important moment defines the events of the play and seals Macbeth’s and Lady Macbeth’s fate. The monologue begins:

“Is this a dagger which I see before me,
The handle toward my hand? Come, let me clutch thee.
I have thee not, and yet I see thee still.
Art thou not, fatal vision, sensible
To feeling as to sight? or art thou but
A dagger of the mind, a false creation,

Comparing, all of Hinds' adaptations allows us to observe the differences in the way the text is treated; previously, particularly in the case of *King Lear* and *Romeo and Juliet*, he did not dare to manipulate the text, cut, and alter it. However, *Macbeth* seems to be in the same line of thought as *The Merchant of Venice*, in which the author allowed greater freedom as far as the text was concerned. Macbeth's soliloquy has been shortened by approximately eight lines, and the deletion has been done for precision and concision. Moreover, some words have been simplified for the sake of the reader; thus, "Or else worth all the rest" is simplified to "else the rest are blind", "dudgeon" becomes "handle", and "prate of my whereabouts" is changed to "betray me". Unlike Allison's *The Tempest* (2009), Hinds does not provide an explanation of the more difficult expressions in the footnote, one possible explanation is for the comics not to be classified simply a work for education purposes and the adaptor has a right to do so.

In other sections of the adaptation, Hinds tried to be faithful to the original language and tried to preserve the original text as much as possible, but he made minute changes to make certain words more understandable. For example, in 1.2 after the battle Duncan talks to his soldiers and says "What bloody man is that? He can report, /As seemeth by his plight, of the revolt/ The newest state." (1.2, 1-3), is turned into "What bloody man is that? He can report, as seemeth by his plight, of how the battle goes" (Hinds 2015: 3), the change is not extensive and it does affect every word in the line, but only the ones which might be problematic for the reader. In the response to the question that Malcolm answers "Father, this is the sergeant who, like a good and hardy soldier, fought against my capture. Hail brave friend! Say to the King how stood the battlefield as thou didst leave it" (Hinds 2015: 3). Probably the most shocking change is adding the direct term of address "father" to establish the familial relationship between the two. Also, the word 'capture' substituted 'captivity' and 'knowledge' becomes 'stood'. These types of changes dominate the adaptations.

The monochromatic adaptation by Moore (2016) also includes this particular scene, which takes up two pages and a number of speech balloons, composed chaotically to reflect Macbeth's emotional state just before the murder. Moore fragmented the soliloquy into short lines and added suspension points to indicate Macbeth's indecisiveness.

"Is this ... a dagger ... which I see before me ... The handle toward my hand?"

... Come, let me clutch thee.

I have thee not, and yet I see thee still.
Art thou not, fatal vision, sensible to feeling as to sight?
Or art thou but a dagger of the mind, a false creation, proceeding from the heat-oppressed
brain?

Thou marshall'st me the way that I was going, and such an instrument I was to use. Mine
eyes are made the fools o' the other senses, or else worth all the rest.

I see thee still, and on thy blade and dudgeon gouts of blood, which was not so before.
There's no such thing, It is the bloody business which informs Thus to mine eyes. Now
o'er the one halfworld nature seems dead, and wicked dreams abuse the curtained sleep.

Witchcraft celebrates Pale Hecate's offerings ... and withered murder, alarum'd by his
sentinel, the wolf, whose howl's his watch, thus with his stealthy pace. With Tarquin's
ravishing strides, towards his design moves like a ghost. Thou sure and firm-set earth,
hear not my steps ...which way they walk, for fear thy very stones prate of my where
about, and take the present horror from the time, which now suits with it. Whiles I threat,
he lives. I go, and it is done. The bell invites me.

Hear it not, Duncan; for it is a knell that summons thee ... to Heaven, or to Hell.” (Moore
2016: 31-32, each paragraph indicated a separate speech balloon)

There are no changes as far as the text of the soliloquy is concerned, but he did delete
just a couple of lines “I see thee yet, in form as palpable/ As this which now I draw.”
(2.1, 41-42) and “Words to the heat of deeds too cold breath gives.” (2.1, 62). It seems
strange that just these lines were cut while the entirety of the soliloquy has been
preserved; it was not done either for clarity or to improve the flow of the text. Moore
respects the original text, particularly its better-known or important fragments. For
example, he preserves the beginning and exchange between the Weird Sisters, but
Duncan discusses the post-battle situation (1.2), in which the lines are cut:

DUNCAN: What bloody man is this?
MALCOLM: This is the thane of Fife, loyal Macduff.
DUNCAN: Hail, brave Thane.
MACDUFF: God save the King!
MALCOLM: Say to the King the knowledge of the broil... as thou didst leave it.
MACDUFF: God save the King! Doubtful it stood as two spent swimmers that do cling
together and choke their art. The merciless Macdonald assisted by that most disloyal
traitor the Thane of Cawdor ... began a dismal conflict ... and fortune of his damned
quarrelsmiling ... showed like rebel's whore (...)” (Moore: 2016: 11)

It is interesting to note that Moore eliminated the figure of the captain who delivers
news from the battlefield and gave his lines to Macduff. Another interesting verbal
element, which emphasises the Scottish background of the play, is inclusion of,
probably Gaelic, words and phrases in the *Dramatis Personae* section, for example,
“...dob-yell dee ended... anul nathrach... oofos befaouta... babtha mar ghaell ar an
choire-dul... sna ionathar poson'd caith olannar sciatháin ... sruthán dóiteáin agus

mbolgeog...” (Moore 2016: 6-7). This might also be interpreted as Weird Sisters’ magical incantation which manipulated the fate of the characters.

The final adaptation of *Macbeth* was made by Hänninen and Hiltunen (2019). The authors have re-written the entire language of the play to make it more accessible to modern readers, but also the simple language is to reflect the horrific storyworld and also matches the fast-paced storytelling. For example, Macbeth’s moral dilemma expressed in ‘the dagger of the mind’ soliloquy has been completely deleted, and there is not even a hint of any hesitation on the part of the character. Another example includes the beginning of the play, and the first lines are:

“SOLDIER: A messenger your Highness.

DUNCAN: The man is exhausted. Help him. Speak lad. How goes the battle?

CAPTAIN: Your Grace... Godless Macdonwald got fresh reserve troops from the Western Isles. Lady Fortuna smiled on the rebel for a while. But then Macbeth laughed and lifted his sword, steaming with the blood of our enemies.” (Hänninen and Hiltunen 2019: 2)

This adaptation is only inspired by the plot of Shakespeare’s play rather than the language, but it still might facilitate the understanding of the play to those who have difficulty with the language.

There is a wide range of adaptors, each with their unique views and approaches to the language used in the adaptations. This section provides a general overview of how each of the discussed comics adaptations treated the source language and how it impacted the adaptations. Naturally, in order to reach more insightful conclusions, it is necessary to conduct a more detailed comparison and focus on a greater number of fragments and examples of comics adaptations. Nevertheless, in the majority of cases the adaptations make use of both visual and verbal narration. Hamlet said to “suit the action to the word, the word to the action” (3.2 17-18), and it seems that comics adaptors have taken his advice to heart and suit the word they use in their adaptation to match their vision for the comics. It is more precise to say that the word suits the image.

4.4. Summary

The chapter focused on analysing nine Shakespeare comics adaptations. Three were created by the same author Gareth Hinds (*The Merchant of Venice*, *King Lear*, *Romeo*

and *Juliet, Macbeth*), there was also John Allison's *The Tempest*, Nicki Greenberg's *Hamlet*, Stan Lee together with Terry Dougas, Mark Work and Skan Srisuwan created *Romeo and Juliet: The War*, Kenneth Steward Moore's *The Tragedie of Macbeth* and Petri Hänninen and Petri Hiltunen's *Macbeth*. The silhouettes of the authors and a short summary of each adaptation have been provided.

The analysis was divided into three general parts: first, macro-semiotics focusing on the mise-en-page and the layout; second, micro-semiotic elements consisting of panel and frame, speech balloon, gutter closure and transition, sound, music, and colour. The final part was the analysis of the language used in the adaptations, and comparisons were made between the adaptations (where possible) and the original text of the play. The analysis of these elements was to answer the question of how a comics narrative is created and how the reader is able to decode and understand it. In addition, there is a question of whether adaptations develop their own comics signs. The analysis in certain areas would benefit from quantitative studies; however, with the amount of analytical material, the work would expand unnecessarily. Comparing a greater number of Shakespeare comics adaptations provided the reader with a more precise perception of the works available today.

Chapter 5: A Semiotic Analysis of Shakespeare Comics Appropriations

“Some people will say,
"Why read a comic book? It stifles the imagination.
If you read a novel you imagine what people are
like. If you read a comic, it's showing you."
The only answer I can give is, "You can read a
Shakespeare play, but does that mean you wouldn't
want to see it on the stage?"
(Stan Lee)¹⁷⁰

5.1. Introduction

The final part of the dissertation focuses on the analysis of Shakespeare comics appropriations. These selected comics were identified as appropriations based on the definitions and terminologies described in Chapter 2. All of the titles alter the plot of the play, toy with genres and limit the link with the source text. Among the plays that were transformed into comics appropriations are tragedies (*Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Othello*), comedies (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*), tragicomedy (*The Tempest*) and a historical play (*Richard III*).

The number of Shakespeare comics appropriations is lower than Shakespeare comics adaptations. As a result, the analysis is accordingly shorter, but it still enables comparisons and contrasts among appropriations and adaptations. The works selected

¹⁷⁰ Martin Belam “The greatest superpower is luck!: Stan Lee in quotes” , <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/nov/13/superpower-luck-stan-lee-quotes-comic-characters> (13 November 2018), although the quote is said to come from *Denver Post Online* (23 May 2013) I was unable to confirm it.

for the analysis are Ron Wimberly *Prince of Cats* (2016), Flank Flöthmann *Shakespeare Ohne Worte* (2016) and works by Kev F. Sutherland: *Findlay Macbeth* (2020), *The Prince of Danmark Street* (2020), *The Midsummer Night's Dream Team* (2020) and *Richard the Third* (2023). All of these appropriations are examples of auteur comics.

This chapter follows the same construction as that in Chapter 4. The first part familiarises the reader with the creators and the titles that are presented. The analysis focuses on the visual elements: macro-semiotic (layout) and micro-semiotic (panels, frames, speech balloons, gutter, closure, transition, sound, music, and colour), as well as the verbal layer and narration in comics. This chapter concludes with a brief summary of the findings.

5.2. Authors and Titles – Examples of Shakespeare Comics Appropriations

When discussed by comics scholars, the general term Shakespeare comics rarely differentiates between adaptations and appropriations. Moreover, the adaptation and appropriation theories are not applied to distinguish them; thus, this is the first time that such a division has been introduced in the study of Shakespeare comics. Based on Sanders (2006) concepts regarding appropriations, such works do not maintain a strong relationship with the source text, the plot, or even the characters. In addition, appropriations characteristically rework more than one text (combining two or more texts), freely alter the characters or the plot, and the appropriation might only acknowledge the link with the source (the title or the character names). Some of the titles are a little more loosely inspired by the original text and could be dubbed more as appropriations (especially *Prince of Cats* by Ron Wimberly).

Appropriation welcomes alternative endings and a new perspective from a true postmodern perspective. The selected titles represent a wide range of appropriations and degrees of appropriation. From silent short stories, sometimes barely establishing a link with the source text (Flöthmann) through appropriations which change the ending and provide new spatio-temporal settings (Sutherland), ending with a story told through the eyes of minor characters or characters only mentioned in the play (Wimberly). Each of the appropriations is a realisation of an auteur vision of the author, even experimental, each with its own distinct artistic style, and each is an example of an innovative

approach towards Shakespeare adaptations and appropriations as well as the potential of comics in the process. Nevertheless, these are interesting titles which add much to the discussion of verbal and visual language, with the exception of Wimberly, who has gained general acclaim. The appropriations are niche and self-published works that reveal the struggles that authors encounter in making their work available.

5.2.1. Ron Wimberly – *Prince of Cats* (2016)

Ron Wimberly (b. 1979) is an American cartoonist and filmmaker who has worked for *The New Yorker*, DC/Vertigo (*Sentences: The Life of MF Grimm*, 2007), Marvel Comics, Dark Horse Comics (*Strip Search*, 2004), and Image Comics (*Slave Punk*, 2016; *Sunset Park*, 2015). He was nominated for the Eisner Award (2008, 2016, 2019, 2020, 2024) and Glyph Award (2008), and was honoured Angoulême Maison Des Auteurs Cartoonist In Residence (2015 and 2016).

Wimberly has adapted only one Shakespeare's play, *Romeo and Juliet* so far. Many adaptations and appropriations of Shakespeare are topical, and the authors change the time and setting of the play to attract new readership and also for interpretative reasons. Wimberly's approach to the play was to view it through a more contemporary lens by situating the story in 1980s New York. Wimberly titled his work *Prince of Cats* (2016). The title is quite telling, as it shifts the perspective from the young lovers to other characters from the play. The story is told through Tybalt's perspective in a true postmodern nature, and he is provided with a backstory and a love interest, Rosalyn, who is Juliet's friend (in the play, she was Capulet's niece). Hennem and Sava (2016) in their article observed that by

resetting it [the play] in early '80s New York makes it fresh again. It's hard to pin *Prince of Cats* down into a genre or even a pastiche. Fans of *The Get Down* and *Samurai Champloo* will find familiarity and things they'll enjoy in the book; there's tinges of pop punk and disco on the edges. Wimberly reframes the familial conflict between the Capulets and Montagues as a sort of gang war, fuelled by undercurrents of personal conflict that are mostly missing from nearly every traditional staging of *Romeo and Juliet*, the nuance lost under unfamiliar, dense language.

The narrative focuses on the rivalry between two gangs vying for control over Brooklyn, with racial undertones as the Capulets are African-Americans. Wimberly

uses a very idiosyncratic colour scheme for the comics: he uses dark colours (black and brown) and contrasts them with very bright pink and blue colours. The colour scheme evokes the aesthetics of the 1980s, bringing together, or even clashing, colours that do not normally match. This emphasises the kitsch and kink and the disco culture of the 1980s.

Wimberly created an appropriation with the new time and setting and by placing other characters in the spotlight, the start-crossed lovers are hardly in the story, but is it the Tybalt and Rosalyn who assume that role. *Prince of Cats* is an interesting amalgam of various media, in its true hybrid form. The appropriation conveys the narrative through comics panels, but also through newspaper clippings and pamphlets which function as media coverage. The author also sustains the link with the theatre and with the dramatic text by preserving the dramatis personae and the division into acts. Wimberly mentioned important events which inspired, or rather pushed him into creating *Prince of Cats*: seeing Kurosawa's *Ran* as his first contact with Shakespeare, a tape Enter Wu-Tang, and murder of a rapper Christopher Wallace in 1996, Wimberly also mentioned "a strong NY wind stripped me of my youth" (Wimberly 2016: 141) in winter of 2005, by which he probably meant the North American Blizzard of 2005.

The author is constantly aware of the original play-text. The adaptation bears similarities with Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo and Juliet* film such as modernised and changed location, and setting it in gang culture, but also developing a characteristic language that the characters used. However, what Wimberly did not do was to preserve the text of the play so that it could assume new meaning in the context, for example, gang slang. *Prince of Cats* is an example of a new way to approach Shakespeare in comics. This Shakespearean comic adaptation has garnered significant attention from comics scholars, and the author believes that it will serve as a gateway for a larger number of students to become familiar with Shakespeare.

5.2.2. Frank Flöthmann - *Shakespeare Ohne Worte* (2016)

It is widely accepted that the strength and allure of Shakespeare's plays lie in their language, and any attempt to adapt them without it would be practically unfeasible. However, there is a significant number of silent films that adapted Shakespeare, e.g.

Herbert Beerbohm Tree's *King John* (1899) *Cymbeline* (1913) by Lucius Henderson, or Sven Gade's *Hamlet* (1920)¹⁷¹, so it should not come as a surprise that there are comics adaptations and appropriation which are visually oriented and completely deprived of the verbal input. Frank Flöthmann (b. 1967) is a German illustrator "best known for his books without words ... , but also draws and writes comics that are often bursting with subtle wordplay and are therefore usually untranslatable"¹⁷² (official webpage). So far, Flöthmann has created books *Silent Night* (2018), *Men Without Words* (2014), *Shakespeare Without Words* (2016), *Grimm's Fairy Tales Without Words* (2019), *Heroes Without Words* (2022), all of the publications could be collected as "Without Words" ("Ohne Worte" in the original German) series which follow very similar idea of telling stories by using pictograms and characteristic artistic style. Flöthmann plays with the form and comics conventions, he skilfully conveys "the complexity of Shakespeare without words isn't possible, and some would say pointless, so we're given the bare bones plots of five tragedies, but Flöthmann grows ever more playful and confident as the book continues" (Plowright 2016). *Shakespeare Ohne Worte* is a collection of five comics/plays: *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Tempest* and *Othello*; each being about 20-25 pages long is a pastiche of the play, toying with conventions and expectations. Although Flöthmann always begins his stories with a family tree diagram akin to *dramatis personae* and shows relationships between the characters, the names are never mentioned; hence, the reader is put in the position of deducing or guessing characters' identities based on the title. It is a valid point to believe, that without clearly stating the title it would be difficult, if not impossible, to establish the link with the original Shakespearean play. The stories are often unintelligible without the title, which serves as a signpost guiding the reader towards comprehension of the comics narrative as a Shakespearean reworking.

Flöthmann has developed his own unique and characteristic style, he always uses a limited colour scheme throughout the entire book (in *Shakespeare Ohne Worte* it is black, white, green, and gold) and as Plowright (2016) puts it "there is a difference as the colour is incorporated into the storytelling. We sometimes follow two simultaneous narratives, one indicated in green, the other in gold". Colour, similar to pictograms, is

¹⁷¹ See a chapter in Hindle (2007: 19-25) on Silent Shakespeare and Kermode (2001) on the beauty of Shakespeare's language.

¹⁷² <https://frankflothmann.com/Info>

semiotically charged and requires interpretation by the reader. Flöthmann has created an appropriation without words and attenuated Shakespeare's plots, stories and characters to the core and basics, but at the same time introduced playfulness in the way the stories are told.

5.2.3. Kev F. Sutherland – *Findlay Macbeth* (2020); *The Prince of Denmark Street* (2022); *The Midsummer Night's Dream Team* (2023a); *Richard the Third* (2023b)

In the previous chapter, Gareth Hinds was an auteur creator who adapted more than one play out of sheer inspiration; it is rare for an artist to create a number of Shakespeare comics adaptations without the support of an outside editor. Kev F. Sutherland¹⁷³ is another creator who was inspired by Shakespeare and his work in order to create a comics based on a source play. Sutherland was born in 1971 in Aberdeen, Scotland, and he has had a successful career in the comics industry, television, puppet theatre, and as a comedian. His comics career started in the early 1980s with the comics fanzines *BEM* and *Fantasy Adviser* and comics for kinds *Oink!* and comic strips in *Viz*. He worked for Marvel Comics and was an artist on *Doctor Strange*, *Star Trek*, *Ghost Rider 2099*, and *Apocalypse 2099*, and wrote *Werewolf by Night*. He was the producer of the Comic Festival in Bristol (1999-2004) and has been working for Beano Comics since 2003. He has adapted biblical stories for Bible Society. At the same time, he initiated his Comic Art Masterclass at schools, colleges, and festivals to popularise “the art of the comic strip” among children, teenagers, and adults. Between 1994-2004 he was a regular at Bristol's Comedy Box and participated in the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. In 2005, he began *The Scottish Falsetto Sock Puppet Theatre*. In 2020, he published his graphic narrative (graphic novel) *Findley Macbeth*, a self-published work (funds were collected through a crowdfunding platform). Since then, three other plays by Shakespeare have been transformed into comics appropriation: *The Prince of Denmark Street* (2022), *The Midsummer Night's Dream Team* (2023), and *Richard the Third* (2023). Among the inspirations that impact Sutherlands works are comics, comedy TV, his work was influenced by Alan Moore, Giles (Ronald “Carl” Giles), PG Wodehouse, Steve Gerber,

¹⁷³ The biographical information come from his webpage <https://www.kevfcomicartist.com/>

Will Eisner, Asterix comics, *Fawlty Towers*, *The Goodies*, *Whatever Happened to the Likely Lads*, *Blackadder* and a number of other sitcoms and comic books¹⁷⁴.

Kev F. Sutherland's appropriations are aesthetically characteristic with their simple drawmanship and black and white panels. All of the comics are set in a contemporary setting and within a new historical context. Their popularity is increasing, particularly after *Richard the Third*, Sutherland admitted that he is working on a number of adaptations and appropriations (*Romeo and Juliet*, *King Lear*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *Twelfth Night*), all in a style similar to the last comics. Another interesting idea that may take time to be realised is *The Merchants of Leicester* with Shylock being depicted as Indian, the work would tackle the issues of racism in 1970s in Leicester (private correspondence 18th July 2024)

The first Sutherland's comics appropriation was *Findley Macbeth* (2020) which was a self-published book. *Findley Macbeth* is set in an office of Alba Industries (a company that seems to produce everything), the Weird Sisters are all-knowing and controlling secretaries, and Findley Macbeth is a head of sales at one of the divisions. His wife, Linda, is the ambitious the one manipulating and pushing Macbeth into murdering Duncan the Managing Director of the company. Sutherland follows the plot of Shakespeare's plays, but he also updates and adds certain elements. The Weird Sisters is just a nickname for the secretaries who carry out their revenge of Macbeth, the first secretary is Moira McDonald sister to Alan MacDonald head of the Cawdor account (who betrayed Duncan at the beginning comics/play), then there is Shona Ritche nee McCrinnon Duncan's sister, as well as Jeanne Steward nee MacDuff, MacDuff's sister. The comics is a revenge story. In the end, Macbeth is punished, he is run over by MacDuff, Linda Macbeth goes mad and is taken to an asylum where she dies. Malcom becomes the new director of Alba Industries, much to the displeasure of the secretaries, and their revenge plan is once more set in motion.

Sutherland tells his *Macbeth* using simple means: he alters the language and keeps only the most memorable lines. The strength of the adaptation rests in its swift narrative pace, as well as its incorporation of humour, cameos, and hidden references (the author frequently includes allusions to his name or initials within the comics). For example, in the play, Porter is typically seen as a source of comic relief; in this

¹⁷⁴ The source of the information is my private correspondence with Kev F. Sutherland from 16th July 2024.

particular production, the character has been portrayed with the face of Billy Connolly, a Scottish comedian, actor, artist, and musician, who is widely known as the "Big Yin." For those who may not recognise the face of Billy Connolly, the Porter is wearing a t-shirt with the "Big Yin" logo on it. The knocking scene is presented as a stand-up comedy with knock-knock jokes (Sutherland 2020: 48-50). Sutherland also plays with intertextuality. The exchange between Malcom and MacDuff (4.3) is recreated using 22 types of panels from a work "Wally Wood's 22 Panels That Always Work"¹⁷⁵ (Sutherland 2020: 45-46), the sequence ends with the authors observation that the panels do not always work. Finally, the last example is also an example of visual intertextuality, the conversation between Menteith, Caithness, Angus, and the soldiers form 5.2 is inspired by Norman Rockwell's 1948 painting *The Gossips*. The painting reflects the manner in which information and gossip are spread in corporations.

Sutherland admitted to various inspirations during the creative process. The Macbeths are based on the characters Lawrence and Beverley from Mike Leigh's play *Abigail's Party* (1977). Another inspiration is the author's Scottish background; Findlay is an old family name (and Sutherland's middle name), which is also a different spelling of Findláech, a clan from which the historical figure of Macbeth came (private correspondence 16th July 2024).

The second appropriation written by Sutherland is *The Prince of Danmark Street* (2022) which is presented as a musical and heavily inspired by the London music stage of the 1970s (both pop and punk), the BBC series *Pennies from Heaven*, and musicals in general. The comics is set in Denmark Street in London where the Sex Pistols used to live. Joe Hamlet, known as Prince, is a rebellious teenager inspired by Johnny Rotten and Billy Idol, he is a lead singer in the punk rock band The Danes (the band members are Horatio Starr, Steve Rosencrantz, Paul Guildenstern and Hamlet). Old Hamlet was inspired by rock stars of the 1950s and he compared to Elvis Presley, he is actually referred to as The King, Ophelia Monk is a folk singer and Polonius Monk is a progressive rocker (private correspondence 16th July 2024). The Danmark Street seems to be full of noises to paraphrase *The Tempest*.

The kingdom of Denmark in the comics is substituted with a chain of guitar shops and a recording studio owned by Claud Rich. Joe Hamlet mourns the death of his

¹⁷⁵ See <https://archive.org/details/wally-woods-22-panels-that-always-work-1600>; Wood created a set of panels that he believed would work for depicting a long and boring conversation between two characters.

father and his mother's quick marriage, just like in *Hamlet*. Rich is depicted as a sleezy and ruthless businessman and mob boss ruling Denmark Street and everything that happens there. Joe Hamlet sees his father in a music video on TV and in this way learns about the murder. The ghost is also seen by Horatio, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern, which slightly changes the dynamics between Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, and Hamlet. However, true to the original play they betray Hamlet and side with Claud Rich. Sutherland makes one important change, he shows their death in a bus accident. One interesting change occurs in the treatment of Shakespeare's original language, particularly soliloquies, as song lyrics. Most of Hamlet's soliloquies are sung, and the "To be or not to be" is being recorded in a studio in front of Ophelia. Similar to *Findlay Macbeth*, *The Prince of Denmark Street* is intertextual, the players who are to help Hamlet with making a music video are the 'actors who staged' *Findley Macbeth*, the Player-Macbeth even gives Hamlet Stanley knife (the same one with which he murdered Duncan). Moreover, the gravediggers are a pair of comedians known as The Two Ronnies (Ronnie Barker and Ronnie Corbett) who install blue plaques of famous people, Gerard Wiley (a pseudonym used by Ronnie Barker), Rev Spooner (William Archibald Spooner), Augustus Siebe, Richard Dadd, and a fictitious musician Yorick with whom Hamlet had toured. The final duel is solved not with swords but with guitars in a "Battle of the Bands" and Rich poisons the guitar strings. However, the biggest change is the ending. Sutherland does not interfere with the death of the main characters (although the character of Fortinbras has been removed), but it turns out that Ophelia staged her own death and together with Horatio, plotted to take over the company. Ophelia admits to planning everybody's death and drugging Hamlet to induce visions of his late father and to controlling the events in the narrative. She takes over the company to control Denmark Street to make profit, and she admits to being open to sell the buildings to developers once they become unprofitable. Sutherland has effectively delivered a comics appropriation with a revised conclusion and a more prominent role for Ophelia.

The third appropriation is a reworking of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with a reworked title *The Midsummer Night's Dream Team* (2023a). Sutherland admits to preserving as much of the comedic aspect of the play as possible, but the comics is inspired by the genre of "movie heists" and the author decided to "add a layer of crime" to the original (private correspondence 16th July 2024). Sutherland "was also able to

cast a raft of LGBTQI characters, which the other plays hadn't lent themselves to" (private correspondence 16th July 2024). The comics appropriation was inspired by *Knives Out* by Rian Johnson, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* musical directed by Jim Sharman, *It's A Sin* series, *Reservoir Dogs* by Quentin Tarantino, and Russell T Davies's BBC *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (2016).

The plot is set in one large building, half of which is a Greek restaurant "Athens" and the other is a nightclub "Woods". The plot unravels within the closed space of the building. The story is told in retrospect during witness interviews at the police station on the 25th June 1977¹⁷⁶, the interviews are conducted by a police inspector Philostrate and a police constable Bill, both of whom are women. Theo is the owner of a restaurant and he is getting married to Hippolyta. During the wedding reception, valuable jewels from the safe are stolen. The young lovers Hermia, Dmitri, Helena, and Lysander and like in the play Hermia and Dmitri decide to elope through the backdoor and through the night club "Woods". The moment of their escape is planned during the performance of the band, which is to play the whole concert album *Pyramus & Thisbe*. The band players are actually thieves; the names Bottom, Snout, Flute, and Snug are just cover-up nicknames, particularly chosen for the heist. The mastermind of the operation is Peter Quick, whom the reader never sees. Titania and Oberon are co-owners of the nightclub "Woods", Puck is a magician, hypnotist and Oberon's right hand, he is the only person who goes between "Athens" and "Woods" unnoticed through the vents. Puck h resembles the actor, Peter Lorre. The events in the nightclub are induced by Puck's hypnosis, and later on he blamed for stealing the jewels from "Athens" and killed by Oberon, the police accuse him of committing the crime. Only later does the reader learn that Philostrate is the inspector's name by marriage, and her real name is Petra Quince, and she is the mastermind behind the heist. In addition, the young constable who has just started working for the police is actually called Wilhelmina Shakespeare, and her role is to write everything down. The appropriation ends with Quince, Titania, and Bottom, setting off to Venice. Although the plot might seem complicated, it is intended to be so, as it follows the conventions of movie heist in which the audience is never completely certain of the outcome until the very end. Once again, Sutherland refers to the two previous works; the band performing *Pyramus &*

¹⁷⁶ The year of 1977 appears in most of Sutherland's comics.

Thisbe has a poster of Hamlet's band The Danes, at the police station there is a picture of Findley Macbeth as a salesman of the year. Macbeth appears once more as a bartender in "Woods", serving Dmitri a drink. Finally, Oberon kills Puck with a Stanley knife; the same one which was used to kill Duncan and Hamlet tried to kill Claud while he was praying.

After the first three comics appropriations which were quite similar in terms of aesthetics and drawings, *Richard the Third* was created with children between 7 and 12 as the main audience. The meetings with schoolchildren made Sutherland realise that his books were too mature for young readers; hence, the decision to write something for that age group. The author admits that he has always been aware of the comedic elements in the play and that is why he decided to adapt *Richard III* into comics (private correspondence 16th June 2024). Sutherland also admits that his Richard resembles Boris Johnson; the link occurred to him during "a conversation at a comic event about which Shakespeare character was most like Boris Johnsons" (private correspondence 16th June 2024), hence the inspiration. *Richard the Third* is Sutherland most popular and successful book to date.

The story closely follows the plot of Shakespeare's play without introducing changes, probably because it is based on historical facts. Nevertheless, Sutherland managed to incorporate a degree of lightness and humour to the story, and this manifests itself through the characters depiction, most of which are caricaturistic, for example Old Queen Margaret is depicted as an old had, floating mid-air without legs, Henry Tudor is a square-jawed superhero (at one point there the is well-known line from Superman comics "Is it a bird? Is it a plane?" to announce Henry), and duke of Buckingham (Richard's "best mate" Sutherland 2023b: vi) is a unicorn. Richard almost constantly breaks the fourth wall and addresses the reader directly similarly to the opening scene in *Richard III*, the entire story meta-theatrical and meta-narrative. For example, a theatre curtain is a recurrent sign it appears both at the beginning and at the end, or when Richard orders Buckingham-unicorn to kill Catesby and Hastings he checks the cast list to know who they are. Moreover, in Richard's opening monologue he is aware that the words that he is uttering were written by Shakespeare, he says "You're allowed to say rude things & they can't tell you off – cos it's Shakespeare" (Sutherland 2023b: 7). Richard and Buckingham are the only characters who are aware of the roles they have to play and that they are a part of a theatrical performance;

however, they both seem oblivious about their fate. At the end of chapter 1 (the book is divided into chapters which corresponds to scene 1, Richard turns directly once again to the reader saying “Listen up folks – here’s the plan: ...” (Sutherland 2023b: 22). The image illustrating the plan is a representation of a snake-and-ladder board game, serving as a reminder to the reader that politics can be viewed as a game. Just as in the game, a politician may sometimes have an advantage, but they can also lose everything. This visual metaphor emphasises the unpredictable nature of politics and the importance of being prepared for both success and failure.

The plot remains unaltered and follows the narrative of Shakespeare's play, serving as a didactic aid for a younger audience. The only addition comes at the end of the comics, after Richard's death, and comments on his own death together with Buckingham who tells Richards he will be given a “smashing funeral” (Sutherland 2023b: 129) and a big tomb in Westminster Abbey. The concluding panel presents a car park in Leicester, which serves as a reference to the location where the remains of Richard III were discovered in 2012. In a similar fashion to previous comics appropriation, Sutherland incorporates elements from his previous works, in *Richard the Third* Clarence's murders look like Findlay and Linda Macbeth and the murder weapon is once more a Stanley knife (they also do a knock-knock joke, a nod to the Porter scene in *Macbeth*).

Sutherland's appropriations aim to revisit well-known texts and stories to find an interpretative key to them; by setting them in more contemporary settings, they become more interesting to the reader. The author has developed his own style of storytelling, focusing mainly on the characters rather than the detailed backgrounds, and with it, the language has become more significant as well. It will be interesting to see how Sutherland's style develops, and what new ideas he will have for other plays.

5.3. Analysis of Comics Signs in Shakespeare Comics Appropriations

5.3.1. Mise-en-page/Panel Composition/Layout

The analysis of the mise-en-page follows the same procedure as in Chapter 4, focusing on adaptation, which allows us to compare and contrast the manner in which this element is used in adaptations and appropriations. Although appropriations in general are often misleadingly viewed as more experimental in terms of plot and character, it might be viewed that the experimental approach may refer to layout as well as comics appropriations. Interestingly, none of the analysed appropriations experiment with the mise-en-page, but rather follow a more traditional layout.

Wimberly wanted to reflect the atmosphere of the 1980s in New York in his *Prince of Cats* (2016) and to some extent the layout that is used reflects it. At first glance, the layout follows a typical division into square and rectangular panels of different sizes; however, Wimberly does not allow the reader to be comfortable and become accustomed to one type of panel layout. Each page has a new layout, which is irregular.

Conventional and rhetorical utilisations dominate this graphic narrative and include features such as blockages, staggering, and pure grids. There are few instances of conventional utilisation, as well as a typical grid of 3×3 panels. Interestingly, there are no decorative or productive uses, even in the moments when Rosalyn uses drugs (Wimberly 2016: 62) and which seems to be a suitable episode to experiment with the layout. The accentuations proposed by Gavalier are rare or even non-existent. The author does not use shape or tilt that would draw the reader's attention to particular panels. One aspect of the layout that was absent in past examples is the inclusion of newspaper and magazine fragments, which are transformed into full-page comics panels. Wimberly avoids experimentations in his panel compositions to avoid overwhelming and confusing the reader because the plot seems sufficiently confusing. The mise-en-page of *Prince of Cats* is composed of a greater number of panels (per page) than other Shakespeare adaptations and appropriation which at first might cause difficulty in understanding and reading the graphic narrative; however, the layout follows the Z-path. A greater number of panels per page in many instances indicates fast-paced

events, most often fights, and a good example is a fight at a night club (Wimberly 2016: 63-69), the greater number of panels reflects the chaos that occurs during a fight.

In the absence of language, the importance of layout gains even greater significance to be comprehensible; hence, it is interesting to scrutinise Frank Flöthmann's (2016) appropriations from that point of view. Flöthmann mainly adopts, similarly to Wimberly's *Prince of Cats*, rhetoric and conventional utilisations for the sake of the plot. Flöthmann composes the layout by skilfully using pure grids, blockages, vertical and horizontal staggerings, and whole rows; he avoids bleeds, insets, overlap, and separation. These panel features in panel composition evoke the image of control, clarity, and order, despite a greater number of panels per page. Moreover, the number of accentuations is also limited to the size and shape; all are square or rectangular in a range of sizes. Similar to Wimberly, the layout is composed of a greater number of panels which would be difficult to follow if the composition was less rigid. It seems that the author feared exactly this and included arrows (they are part of a panel) to indicate the reader which path to take. Consequently, Flöthmann could become more creative with the reading path and not always adhere to the Z-path of reading. Not many comics scholars mention or discuss such a solution and Witek (2009: 152) actually states "[d]irectional arrows seem at first glance to highlight a problem or artistic misstep in the overall construction of the page, functioning as emergency signs which lead readers onto a detour off the high road of the standard reading path". However, in Flöthmann's case, the use of arrows adds to the humoristic and comical nature of the comics. It opens up for new possibilities, for example in *The Tempest* (Flöthmann 2016: 68) on a single page two plots are taking place simultaneously, requiring the reader to re-read the page, one plot line focuses on Miranda and Prospero, whereas the second on Ferdinand and Alonso as they are shipwrecked. Another example is *Romeo and Juliet*, when the page is divided into two possible paths which the story might follow, although it is colour-coded (which will be discussed in 5.3.6), the arrows are of great help.

The benefit of examining the four adaptations created by Kev F. Sutherland is the opportunity to witness the changes in his storytelling approach when it comes to Shakespeare comic adaptations and appropriations, much like Hinds' work was handled in the same manner. Sutherland does not experiment with the layout, and his works in this manner are very similar to those of Wimberly and Flöthmann. There is no point in discussing Sutherland's appropriations separately, as all have adopted the same

techniques. The predominant utilisations are conventional and rhetorical. *Findlay Macbeth* also adopted blockages, vertical and horizontal staggerings, pure grid, and full-page panel, there are no full-page bleeding panels. The most typical layout is a 2x3 panel grid with square panels, which is manipulated by combining squares into rectangles either horizontally or vertically. Regarding Gavalier's accentuations, only shapes are adopted because each square or rectangular panel is the same size on the page. It has already been mentioned that Sutherland experiments in *Macbeth* in two instances, both are intertextual. The first one is adopting Wally Wood's technique of 22 panels that always work, and in this it does not only refer to the contents of each panel, but also the layout. Hence, there are panels of various sizes (rectangles and squares) with and without frames, which are instances of productive utilisation as well. However, Sutherland ends the sequence, stating that the panels do not always work (Sutherland 2020: 46). The second mentioned intertextual sequence is Rockwell's painting, which is a full-page panel, and it is difficult to categorise it as bleeding because it does not have any background; therefore, it can be identified as a frameless full-page panel. Both are examples of intertextuality and layout experimentation, but they also preserve the reader's attention. The exact same mise-en-page was used in *The Prince of Denmark Street*, but in this case, there are no experiments or intertextual elements concerning the layout.

A greater variety of panel compositions can be found in *The Midsummer Night's Dream Team* (2023a), although there are still many 2x3 panel grids with conventional and rhetorical utilisations, with pure grids, staggerings, blockages, and full-page panels. However, in order to reflect the confusing plot with heist and hypnosis, Sutherland decided to adopt other utilisations and accentuations; for the first time, there are productive utilisations with narrow vertical panels showing only a fragment of characters' faces during cross-examinations. In addition, Sutherland experiments with other shapes: there is a circle insert panel when Titania is hypnotised and falls in love with a donkey-headed Bottom. Apart from these two instances, his comics appropriation is similar to *that of Findley Macbeth* and *The Prince of Denmark Street*.

The last appropriation is *Richard the Third, and*, as mentioned previously, it is a work directed at young readers; hence, it seems that the choice of panel layout had to be suitably adjusted. The mise-en-page mainly follows a conventional 2x3 panel grid, squares, and rectangles, to a lesser degree. Only in the scene just before the battle of

Bosworth, when the ghosts haunt the battlefield, the layout turns into 1x3 with horizontal rectangles, and the sequence follows the rhetorical use. The horizontal rectangles show both camps (Richard's and Henry's) on opposite hills (Sutherland 2023b: 111-117). The features adopted were the same as in the previous appropriations with blockages, staggerings, pure grids, and full-page panels. This is only one instance of a panel sequence which could be identified as decorative utilisation; it is the panel sequence with the snakes and ladders game board, although it might be claimed to be just one panel and it cannot be subject to layout analysis. However, at a closer look it seems that the board is composed of smaller frameless panels.

Surprisingly, Shakespeare comics appropriations do not experiment with the mise-en-page but rather follow a more conventional layout. The experimentations seem to have occurred with the panel itself.

5.3.2. Panel and (Narrative) Frame

The panel layout in the discussed Shakespeare comics appropriations appeared to be quite conventional, yet the discussion of panels and frames revealed more concerning the particulars of appropriation comics' narrative and storytelling.

Wimberly's *Prince of Cats* (2016) is quite orthodox and rigid as far as the panels are concerned. The comics, as noted before, are strongly linked to the climate of the 1980s in New York and the choice of panels, again rectangular with frame, reminds of the comics published at the time. Wimberly mimics the style of those comics enhancing the atmosphere of the past. There is only one inconsistency in *Prince of Cats* in reference to the panels. The family gang of which Romeo is a member often 'patrols' their part of the city at night from the rooftops. At one point, Romeo removes a pair of binoculars (Wimberly 2016: 59), and a single panel turns from a rectangle to two round ones, similar to the view through binoculars. The reader is given a feeling of greater immersion and participation in the story as if they are also on the rooftop. Although this particular change may not be of great significance to the plot, it is undoubtedly memorable. The 'binocular' panel can be categorised as accentuation technique when changing the shape of the panel from squares and rectangles to circles. Most of the panels in the graphic narrative are picture-specific and duo-specific, and *Prince of Cats*

is an action-packed and action-oriented work; hence, the action is based on picture-specific images. Another interesting type of panel which appears in the appropriation is a full-page panel showing a newspaper or magazine clipping (Wimberly 2016: 21, 30, 106) which can be classified as a montage combination, the newspaper and the words which are printed on it share the diegetic space with the characters; they see the exact same thing as the reader. Another type of panels that appear are word-specific with the entire panel encapsulating a sound word “Crack” and “Kshhhh” (Wimberly 2016: 108-109). These panels are interesting because they are deprived of pictorial elements, function as a panel focusing only on sound, and do not enrich or add anything to the narrative (the sound words refer to cracking an egg and sizzling bacon, sounds which are easy to imagine and do not need to be clarified). The reason that such panels appear is to slow down the narrative and emphasise mundane everyday activities. Wimberly mentions that one of his inspirations for the graphic narrative are Spike Lee film, which is reflected in the angles that he adopts, all of the shots are used: bird-eye view, extreme-close up, or close up. Wimberly often suddenly changes the shots making it difficult to follow the narrative, but it resembles the style of music videos.

A complete opposite to Wimberly in the use of panels is Flöthmann’s *Shakespeare Ohne Worte* (2016), who uses rectangular panels with frames throughout the entire narrative. The shots are always from the same angle, there is no variety, and there are no close-ups of the bird-eye view. Naturally, the panels are only picture-specific combinations because there is no verbal element. At first, it might seem that the panels and their composition are uninventive, and thus unable to shock, surprise, and sustain the reader’s attention. However, this repetition of the familiar, unchangeable style and combination makes *Shakespeare Ohne Worte* intriguing. The unstable ‘camera work’ of the panel draws more attention to moveable characters.

The four appropriations by Sutherland are consistent in their use of panels and frames. All of them are mostly based on black frames and a few frameless panels, usually for the change of perspective of the same moment. The author adopted the entire range of angle shots from a bird-eye view to a low shot. Naturally, duo-specific combinations were found. The same approach to panels and frames is found in *Findley Macbeth* and *The Prince in Denmark Street*, but *The Midsummer Night’s Dream Team* is told through flashbacks from suspects and witnesses. Without adopting a manner or differentiating between the past and the present, the narrative would be

incomprehensible and confusing; hence, the author used the technique of adopting two different frames: a straight-lined frame is used for the present events, while a wavy-lined frame is used for the past. A similar technique was used in Allison's *The Tempest* (2009), but that adaptation also used a colour scheme to enhance the sign signifying past events. *Richard the Third* follows the convention of comedy with the punchlines, jokes and caricaturistic depiction of the characters. The use of panels and frames supports this narrative angle; the frames are not perfect straight lines, but hand-drawn, evoking the feeling of being drawn in a hurry. Moreover, the comics appropriation is directed at a younger readership; hence, the frames had to be clearer. In the discussion of *Prince of Cats* the attention was drawn to word-specific panels with sound words which do not add much to the narrative, but were probably used for slowing down the reading process or maybe even an ornamental reason. In *Richard the Third*, there are two panels which are similar to those in *Prince of Cats*, but in this case, the word-specific panel substitutes the image, killing the Duke of Clarence and bearing in mind the young audience, the images of murder might be disturbing. There are two panels with wavy 'liquidy' frame (similar to the edges of a drop of a liquid), which is to substitute the image of blood and wine. The two panels are filled with words "Stabby Stabby Death Death!" and "And also drowny in a vat of Malmsey" (Sutherland 2023b: 45). In this way, the author attempts to cover murder with humour.

The Shakespeare comics appropriations are not much experimental regarding panels and frames; they follow standard signs that are also found in adaptation. However, unconventional frames and panels are rarely adopted. It appears that appropriations do not experiment with frames.

5.3.3. Speech Balloons/ Captions

The speech balloon is one of the comics signs that are instantly recognisable while reading comics, but it is not often given much thought regarding its role and meaning. The interpretative process is quick, and once the reading process begins, the audience becomes accustomed to the adopted style of the speech balloon in the graphic narrative. The following subchapter takes a closer look at the speech balloons used in Shakespeare comics appropriations.

Prince of Cats by Wimberly does not adopt a varied range of speech balloons, but limits themselves to the most basic ones. The author made an interesting choice of adopting a rectangular speech balloon for all the characters instead of the default oval ones. One possible interpretation is that the character uses a peculiar language or slang, yet there is nothing to contrast it against. The content of the speech balloon is always verbal language uttered out loud. It is surprising that there are no thought balloons, suggesting that there is no place or need for private thoughts of Tybalt's Brooklyn, everything has to be spoken out loud, and there is no privacy or secrets. As a result of using only one type of speech balloon, the reader might encounter issues in decoding the manner in which the words are spoken, and there are no indicators for whispers or shouting. Wimberly preserves some degree of reality, when Japanese assassins are summoned to kill Tybalt they speak Japanese, and so Japanese kanji is encapsulated in the speech balloon, but no translation is provided either to the characters or to the reader (Wimberly 2016: 73). At one point, the Japanese characters are pink, but the explanation for that is not provided; it could be a joke because the background is filled with "HA HA HA". There are no captions in this graphic narrative, with the exception of the prologue and a name for a new character appearing in the comics, but the name appears underneath the characters and not in a speech balloon or a caption.

Another intriguing approach to speech balloon is Flöthmann's appropriations. Flöthmann uses typical speech balloons that should indicate speech, but also bubbly thought balloons and spiky speech balloons indicating shouts. All the balloons are composed of the root, the tail, and the carrier; the carrier is mainly oval, but there are also instances of round or rectangular, but the change of the shape does not seem to impact the interpretation of the speech balloon, but is just a bigger carrier to fit the contents. The content of the speech balloon in Flöthmann's appropriations is an innovative element, as he fills it with images, icons, and signs rather than words. Filling the speech balloon does not immediately signify speech but also thoughts and explanations of what is happening for the benefit of the reader. Questions arise concerning the treatment and categorisation of such speech balloons. It seems that the majority of speech balloons in the comics represent speech or thought (expressed in words) (Flöthmann 2016: 12). In a scene from *Macbeth*, when Duncan arrives at Macbeth's castle – Inverness, the arrival is announced by a spiky speech balloon, indicating shouting with images of a door opening, the king and three exclamation

marks. The public speech balloon indicates loud speech/shouting. On the same page, there is also a panel with Duncan sleeping, the speech balloon filled with the image of a log and a saw, meaning that Duncan is sleeping like a log and is snoring; the images do not hint at speech, but sound. Although the title of the collection is *Shakespeare Ohne Worte*, it does not refer to lack, language, or sound, and there are no silent speech balloons without content. *Shakespeare Ohne Worte* plays conventions, because the content of the speech balloon is often a rebus or a word puzzle challenging the reader to decode them. The comics appropriation is deprived of any captions which would suggest the presence of an omniscient narrator.

Sutherland uses a limited number of speech balloons in his work. Findley *Macbeth* is based on four types of speech balloons. The utilisation of the public speech balloon is for speaking out loud and for interactions between characters. The thought balloon is used scarcely the most notable moment is Banquo pondering over Macbeth's sudden promotion, he is depicted looking at his friend from a distance and contemplating, all the thoughts are encapsulated in a characteristic thought balloon (Sutherland 2020: 59-60). Another type of a speech balloon in Sutherland's *Macbeth* is a public speech balloon with a zig-zaggy tail to indicate static and source of sound from a telephone or an answering machine. Such a type of the speech balloon is used twice in the appropriation, at the beginning of the comics Duncan is being reported on negotiations with the Norwegians and Cawdor's betrayal, to indicate that the language comes through the telephone is indicated by the special tail. Choosing such a conventions is in accord with Eisner's examples (2008: 24-25). At times it might seem that *Findlay Macbeth* uses a fair number of captions for narrative purposes, however, the captions are actually speech balloons without tails, and they are used to continue the characters utterance but the setting of the next panel changes, and the null tail balloon (always rectangular) is continuation of the previous speech and it becomes a voice-over. For example, when one of the Weird Sisters, Moira, calls Macbeth to inform him about the arrival of the English office, the second part of the message "Meet we the medicine of the sickly weal, and with him pour we in our country's purge" is continues on the next panel showing Macduff in the car (Sutherland 2020: 101). The message in the second panel looks like a caption, but it is a speech balloon without a tail. All the speech balloons in the appropriation are filled with language, there are no symbols and no balloons are empty.

The Prince of Denmark Street utilises the same types of speech balloons as the previous appropriation, that is, the speech balloon, the thought balloon, and the balloon with a zig-zaggy tail for the sound coming from the radio, but a speech balloon without a tail is not used. The thought balloon is used in only one scene in the comics, Hamlet contemplating murdering Claud while he was praying (Sutherland 2022: 70-71). In this scene, Hamlet's words are thought and private, whereas Claud's are public, as denoted by the public speech balloon. The volume of his speech is unknown, but it is inaudible to Hamlet. There are two types of speech balloons which have not been previously used. *The Prince of Denmark Street* is a musical and a considerable number of dialogues and soliloquies are transformed into songs. Sutherland adopted a simple technique that indicates it, the edge of the typical speech balloon is ornamented with musical notes, which is a clear symbol of a song in comics. For example, Hamlet turns his "To be or not to be" soliloquy into a song and records it for other to hear (Sutherland 2022: 48-51), this also changes the dynamic, function and meaning, it is not a soliloquy any more. Private thoughts become a public and reproducible message, a song which marked by the symbol of the music note¹⁷⁷. There is also one instance of a spiky speech balloon. While on a tour around England with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Hamlet finds a hidden tape recorder and shouts "Pirates!" (Sutherland 2022: 90), meaning the theft of intellectual property.

Analysing Sutherland's appropriations chronologically allows us to trace the development of style regarding adapting and appropriating Shakespeare's plays and the maturation of the style and devices that work. *The Midsummer Night's Dream Team* has adopted all previous types of speech balloons, including those introduced in *The Prince of Denmark Street*. The appropriation has a number of scenes with music and songs ("Athens" is holding a wedding and "Woods" is a nightclub). As stated previously, *The Midsummer Night's Dream Team* is told through flashbacks and reports, which is marked by a special panel frame, but nothing similar was introduced for speech.

Finally, the last appropriation, *Richard the Third*, is aimed at younger readership, and Sutherland adopted a new style for this comics. Throughout the graphic narrative, only one type of speech balloon is used (with one exception); there are no thought balloons, or music and song balloons. The author decided to use a simple

¹⁷⁷ More on the treatment of music and sound in appropriations see 5.3,5

balloon which is characteristically positioned either above or below the character, the balloon takes up a considerable amount of space, even up to a third of the panel, and simultaneously draws attention to it and the language itself. However, the speech balloon does not provide other information concerning the volume of speech, which is performed by means of the size of the font (when shouting the letters are in bold). There is one exception in the opening scene when Richards is irritated and shouts “I tell you it’s TOTALLY PANTS!” (Sutherland 2023b: 8), the phrase is encapsulated in a spiky speech balloon to reflect the characters’ mental states. There are no narrative captions because Richard is the narrator, and he explains the reader’s places and events. The simplified style concerning the speech balloon Sutherland, in his appropriations, does not experiment with the speech balloon, which is a device to convey speech.

Unlike Shakespeare comics adaptations the appropriations adopt tried and tested speech balloons, they do not experiment with colour of the balloons (apart from *Prince of Cats* the colour scheme is quite rigid). It might come as surprise that appropriations which are viewed as more experimental do not experiment with narrative devices.

5.3.4. Gutter, Closure and Transition(s)

This discussion concerning gutter, closure, and panel transition is a continuation of the analysis of Shakespeare comics adaptation in Chapter 4, based on the theory from Chapter 3. The analysis follows the same premise; the appropriations of *Hamlet* analyse the Closet Scene, *Macbeth* the Sleepwalking scene and *Romeo and Juliet* the banquet scene. In the case of other appropriations, the opening scene is to be discussed. This approach facilitates comparisons and conclusions.

5.3.4.1. *Hamlet*

From the appropriations selected for the analysis, there are only two instances of *Hamlet*, both of which include the Closet Scene, which is significant for plot development.

Flöthmann's (2016) appropriation, as it is already known, as an intriguing and surprising work. It is much simpler, particularly due to the lack of a linguistic element, and relies heavily on iconography and sign. The author does not play with the gutter which is just a white space between the panels. However, as the panel grid might be complex, at times there are arrows aiding the reader to follow the reading path. Intriguingly, the arrows appear to originate from the gutter and enter the space of the panel, yet they fail to integrate into the diegetic world. The Closet Scene is three pages long (Flöthmann 2016: 38-40), and like all Flöthmann's appropriations, it is light in tone. The sequence of the first two panels leads to a Gestalt closure (visual ellipsis) without a recurrent element. Polonius who is hiding behind the curtain is looking at Gertrude and Hamlet, and so Gestalt closure is also hinted by the arrow coming from Polonius' eyes; assuming Polonius is not looking at some other characters, then he would have to look at something hidden from behind the reader (Flöthmann 2016: 39). Continuing with the two panels below, the closures that can be experienced here are recurrent, spatial, temporal, and causal. However, it is also partially a Gestalt closure (or pseudo-Gestalt) if the focus is fixed on the curtain. If the curtains indeed indicate Gestalt rather than recurrent juxtaposition, it could remind the reader of long arras often associated with castles, Gestalt closure would also make the reader forget about Polonius who is hiding behind it. The following four panels are quite repetitive and they represent recurrent, spatial, and causal closures indicating the course of unfolding events (Flöthmann 2016: 40). The author does not adopt any visible elements which would draw attention to the passage of time; hence, it could be assumed by the physical aspect of the reading process and the time it takes to decode the speech balloon that time indeed passes. Thus, it could be suggested that temporal closure occurs without any symbols, and it happens anyway. The full-page spread that focuses on Polonius requires the reader to recognize closure not through a directly adjacent panel, but through one that is stored in memory, as Gavalier and Beavers (2018) observed could occur. The spatial, temporal, casual and recurrent closure takes place in reference to the first panel in the sequence, whereas the juxtaposition with the previous one would be associative. In this scene, Flöthmann (2016: 40) relies heavily on Gestalt/pseudo-Gestalt closure because he returns to it in the final three panels, when Hamlet stabs the arras and kills Polonius, the curtain is drawn back (with the preservation of the pseudo-Gestalt closure) to reveal a dead body. The final closure is only recursive, temporal and

spatial, showing Gertrude and Hamlet breaking character: Hamlet starts laughing. Flöthmann appropriation experiments with closure types and the gutter that he uses. All of the panels indicate the use of action-to-action transition, as each panel focuses on one action at a time.

The Closet scene in Sutherland's *The Prince of Denmark Street* is longer than Flöthmann's, it takes seven pages (Sutherland 2022: 72-78). The gutter is just a white space that is equally distributed between the panels and does not require attention. The scene takes place in Gert's bedroom, with Polonius hiding behind the cut-out of Hamlet's band, The Danes (the room does not have curtains). The scene begins with a bird-eye view of the room showing Polonius and Gert, while the second panel changes the perspective but preserves both characters, allowing for the recurrent, spatio-temporal closure to occur. Through the sequence of the following eight panels, the aforementioned closures are repeated. The final two panels on the second page of the scene (Sutherland 2022: 73) are interesting examples of closure. The first panel shows scared Gert(rude) looking at Hamlet's hand holding Staley's knife (only the hand is visible), the next panel shows a close-up of Polonius' face from a profile hidden behind the cut-out. The closure between the two panels is associative and is based on the previous spatio-temporal knowledge. The same configuration of closure is used in the following two panels (extreme close-up on Hamlet and a wobbly cut-out). The dominating closures are recurrent, spatio-topical, causal, and associative, Sutherland does not experiment with Gestalt, pseudo-Gestalt, embedded, non-sensory, or linguistic. At the beginning of the scene, the transitions are moment-to-moment and action-to-action, because at first, it is just a conversation and the characters are relatively calm. As the scene escalates, other transitions occur: subject-to-subject (the Stanley knife panel) and aspect-to-aspect, the moment Hamlet murders Polonius. The strength of this scene lies in its simplicity.

5.3.4.2. *Macbeth*

Of the two appropriations of *Macbeth*, only Sutherland's *Findlay Macbeth* (2020) preserved the Sleepwalking scene. Flöthmann alters the plot, Lady Macbeth does not

have remorse and does not suffer from a mental breakdown, she dies accidentally together with Macbeth during the siege of the castle.

The sleepwalking scene in Sutherland (2020: 97-99), turns into a shower scene as she is trying to wash off the guilt, and imaginary blood, not only from her hand but also from her whole body. The three-page long sequence begins with a panel showing Lady Macbeth already in the shower (it is uncertain how long she has been there). The following panels depict Lady Macbeth from various angles and focus on the different parts of her body that are washed. She is trying so hard that the scratching leaves bruises all over her body and face. The closure between all of the panels is recurrent, spatio-topical (the space remains the same throughout the sequence and the time it takes can also be determined based on the spoken language), causals (particularly concerning the scratches), and associative (the fifth panel shows only Lady Macbeth's hand on the shower tap turning the water off, based on the assumption that it is Lady Macbeth's hand, not somebody else's, and she is turning the water off and not on, Sutherland 2020: 98). The eighth panel at first seems to be an example of embedded closure when the same element is repeated within the same panel. However, a closer inspection shows that it is not an embedded closure but a mirror reflection of Lady Macbeth; she looks herself in the mirror. Only the following panel presents the moment from a different perspective, thus confirming this suspicion. Once again, Sutherland does not experiment with closures or transitions.

5.3.4.3. *Romeo and Juliet*

Romeo and Juliet is a play which is favoured among adaptors to make significant plot changes, and the chosen comics appropriations are not exceptions. Both instances propose changes in the plot and the ending. In the previous chapter, the focus was on the ball scene; however, in both appropriations, the moment when the lovers meet does not occur at a festival ball, the authors have decided on other surroundings.

It has already been stated that Wimberly's *Prince of Cats* (2016) does not follow Shakespeare's storyline. Although Ron Wimberly's *Prince of Cats* (2016) retells the story from Tybalt's perspective, the scene when the young lovers meet had to be included to seal Tybalt's fate. The scene takes four pages (Wimberly 2016: 121-124),

but the moment Romeo approaches Juliet is one-page long (Wimberly 2016: 124). In this adaptation, the banquet is a New York street party or a fair. When it comes to the gutter, Wimberly does not experiment; however, he uses two background colours against which the panels are depicted: black background denotes night and Tybalt's story, and white background signifies daytime and other characters. As a result, there are two colours of the gutter, but the author does not utilise the space for anything else. The choices of closure in *Prince of Cats* are also limited to only a few: recurrent, temporal, and spatial. On the last page of this sequence (Wimberly 2016: 124), there are only four panels; over all four, the same set of closures is used. Interestingly, the closure between the first and second panel is recurrent, but this quality is difficult to notice. Romeo and Juliet appear the first panel but not very clearly, they are hidden in the corner of the panel, but still detectable. The closure between the last two panels is also non-sensory and associative, with the extreme close-up of the lips between the young lovers' kiss. The reader needs to infer what is about to happen, and because the story abruptly stops, the inference needs to proceed further. Despite flowery iconography and imagination, the author is orthodox when it comes to the use of closure.

Another example of *Romeo and Juliet* comes from Flöthmann (2016) and his short, humoristic comics. The moment of the meeting of the young lovers takes only one page (Flöthmann 2016: 50), and in the comics is not a banquet, but a street fight between the two families and consists of five panels. In the midst of the chaotic fight Romeo and Juliet see each other, and at that point Flöthmann plays a little with the plot of the story. First of all, the same gutter that was used in other examples in the book is adopted here as well, with a white space between the panels with the characteristic arrows stemming from the gutter and entering (non-dietetically) the spatial domain of the panel. Second, there seems to be no confusion when it comes to the layout of the panels on the page; however, the first panel of the page possesses two arrows (one to the left and the other down) indicating two paths that the reader can follow. Following the left path, Juliet beats up Romeo, and with no romance and affair, the story suddenly ends (the word "End" appears in the bottom right-hand corner), but following the down path, the youngsters fall in love and hold hands with heart symbols surrounding them. The author helps the reader to comprehend the two paths by means of the arrows, but the reader is still required to fill the gaps to some extent.

In the case of closure in the fight scene, Flöthmann uses a limited number of recurrent, temporal, causal, and non-sensory closure, as the panels basically show only the two characters. It seems that Flöthmann abandons a more complex closure in order not to confuse the reader further regarding the two paths of the story. Nevertheless, Flöthmann uses the greatest variety of closures and gutter to facilitate storytelling and the story-reading process.

5.3.4.4. Other notable examples

The two comics appropriations that deserve to be analysed in terms of gutter and closure, but which cannot be grouped for comparisons are the remaining works by Kev F. Sutherland *The Midsummer Night's Dream Team* (2023a) and *Richard the Third* (2023b). The analysis focuses on the opening scene for both appropriations.

The Midsummer Night's Dream Team does not have a clear and separate opening, and the comics does not follow the line of the play. The comics opens immediately with the wedding party at 'Athens' restaurant. The first panel is an establishing shot, showing the setting for the events, the next panel shows the reception, Theseus and Hippolyta with their guests, and a partial name of the restaurant is preserved, hence the spatial closure occurs. The third panel continues to show the party, and thus, recurrent, spatial, and temporal closure is observed. However, the next two pages later show the dynamic. Each page consists of four horizontal panels, which introduce a greater variety of closures: associative, spatio-topical, causal, and recurrent. Each of the panels on the page shows a distinct image, such as champagne, balloons, fireworks, close-up on Theseus, the entrance to the Athens, the band, Theseus hurrying to the basement, and the open safe; the reader is charged with the task of finding the logical relationship between the panels. Closure occurs not only between immediate panels, but the previous panels may also assist in establishing the link between panels, particularly those which pose initial difficulty.

Finally, the opening sequence in *Richard the Third* which corresponds to Richard's monologue in the play. The monologue takes twenty pages, with six panels per page; the number of panels may be overwhelming, but most of the panels are very similar, and Richard is depicted in each panel with a big speech balloon. The repetitive

panels indicate that the closure which occurs is the same. The closure that occurs most often is recursive, patio-temporal (the reader is aware of the passage of time due to the language, but it is only assumed because the author does not provide details about the space; the background often remains blank), associative, and causal. A long sequence focusing on longer speech is often monotonous, and the closure is repetitive as well.

The closure and the gutter do not vary much and do not pose difficulty for the reader to decode; once again, the inventiveness of appropriations does not concern the technical features of comics.

5.3.5. Sound/Music/Silence in Shakespeare comics appropriations

Shakespeare comics appropriations, similarly to adaptations, follows the traditions of depicting sound and music in speech balloon and free floating onomatopoeias, acoustigrams and sound words. However, appropriations appear to approach the subject of sound, music, and silence more freely than adaptations do. The analysis of the sound follows the same order as in the previous chapter; the sounds have been divided into categories: battles and duels (fight scenes), sounds of nature and magic, sounds made by humans, music and song, and silence.

Each of the discussed appropriations approaches the issue of sound differently. Wimberly's *Prince of Cats* (2016) follows the comics traditions of using acoustigrams in the form of big letters or words spread across the panel, often indicating the source of the sound or the path it takes. Flöthmann's *Shakespeare's Ohne Worte* (2016) does not possess any verbal elements, i.e. text, and it also lacks onomatopoeias, acoustigrams and other sound words, which might be wrongly interpreted that the appropriation is deprived of sounds altogether. However, the author added signs and symbols which indicate the presence of sound; one such example comes from *Hamlet* when Old Hamlet is sleeping, the sound of snoring is indicated by a wooden log and a saw encapsulated in the speech balloon, instead of a characteristic "ZZZ" recognised for sleeping and snoring as it was used in *Prince of Cats* (Wimberly 2016: 83). Sutherland's appropriations: *Findlay Macbeth* (2020), *The Prince of Denmark Street* (2022), *The Midsummer Night's Dream Team* (2023a), and *Richard the Third* (2023b), due to their cartoony nature, are examples of comics which adopt the characteristic sound words and

acoustigrams splashed across the entire panel which is typical of mainstream and superhero comics. Sutherland uses several signs of sound in comics. This approach seems to fit the author's aesthetics.

In Wimberly's *Prince of Cats* (2016) the author adopted just one onomatopoeic device "CHAKA CHAKA" for the sword fighting, but it is also not used very often. This reflects the cling sound of the steel. The onomatopoeia used by Wimberly in this case is surprising, as there are other more familiar and recognisable sound words and acoustigrams, and the choice for the fights might pose an interpretative challenge. Another instance is the an acoustigram "WIFF!" to denote the sound of a baseball bat swinging. Generally, Wimberly is quite frugal in the number of sigs referring to sounds, which is surprising considering the setting of the play in New York in the 1980s.

An example of fighting in Flöthmann is *Romeo and Juliet*, and the initial brawl takes place and the young lovers meet (Flöthmann 2016: 47), the fight does not have any sound signs, acoustigrams, and it is presented by means of the emanate: the fighting characters are covered in a cloud of dust. Although there are no signs depicting sounds of fighting, but for sure it cannot be silent. Based on previous experience, the reader deduces the most characteristic sounds that may occur.

The fighting scenes in Sutherland's *Findlay Macbeth* (2020) are found in the murder of Lady Macduff and her children. The sounds marking the murder (the murderers use baseball bats) are characteristic onomatopoeias "THWACK!" and "CHUNCK!" spread in capital letters over the whole panels (Sutherland 2020: 93-94). The onomatopoeias inform the reader of the type of sound and its volume. Another example is the moment of Macbeth's death, which is not a duel or a battle, but he is hit by a car driven by Macduff. The onomatopoeia that occurs is "BEEEP" imitating the sounds of a car approaching. In *The Prince of Denmark Street* (2022) the final conclusion is a battle of the bands between Joe Hamlet and Laertes, however, the onomatopoeias and acoustigrams that are used reflect a bit those of swords clinks: "TWOING TWAING" and "KERRANGGG!!!" (Sutherland 2022: 104). Although this is not typical sound of fighting or duel, but the acoustigram that appears for stabbing Polonius "CHNK!" is an interesting one, because it is not clear of what it is the sound, of the knife or a broken cardboard cut-out. Interestingly, *The Midsummer Night's Dream Team* (2023a) is deprived of clear fight scenes, battles or duels. The potential fight moment between the young lovers turns into a quarrel and verbal exchange, rather

than fisticuffs. The final example by Sutherland is *Richard the Third* (2023b), which naturally ends with a battle of Bosworth, but its physical aspect is quite limited; the only onomatopoeias and sound words are “STAB CHOP SLICE THUMP”, then “NEIGH” for the horse and Richards falling off the horse (“ARGH” encapsulated in the speech balloon) and “PLOP” when he lands in a puddle of mud (Sutherland 2023a: 124). Sutherland uses a wide range of onomatopoeias, sound words, and acoustigrams to reflect the sounds accompanying a fight scene.

Another group of sounds that can be identified in Shakespeare comics appropriations are sounds of nature and sounds of magic. It is important to note that none of the appropriations incorporate magic in the plot, even in Flöthmann’s *The Tempest* (2016), magic has been substituted with book knowledge. Neither Wimberly nor Sutherland include magic or anything reminiscent of magic and supernatural elements in their appropriations. As far as sounds of nature are concerned, Flöthmann does not include any onomatopoeia or acoustigrams, and the sounds of waves in *The Tempest* are not acknowledged in any way. Wimberly’s (2016) appropriation is set in New York; hence, the sound of nature, or to be more precise in the case of natural sounds, refers to instances that occur in the city or animals that live there. For example, the sounds of a dog barking are marked by a very characteristic onomatopoeia “WOOF! WOOF! WOOOF!” (Wimberly 2016: 15), and it is probably used to strengthen the feeling of urgency and danger. Other sounds refer to passing trains and, in this case, both onomatopoeias and acoustigrams are used: “HOOONK!” and “KLA-CHAK KLA-CHANK” to reflect both the sounds of an approaching train and the horn. Wimberly uses the sound words in numerous occasions even when they are not particularly necessary and do not add any new information to the story or facilitate the process of reading and understanding. Wimberly might be said to overuse the number acoustigrams and onomatopoeias, but Sutherland is frugal with them. His *Findley Macbeth* (2020) is a good example. Macbeth is set in an office; hence, the presence of nature is limited. The dominant sounds of machines “BEEP BEEP” for opening the car (Sutherland 2020: 17) or “CLICK WHIRR” (Sutherland 2020: 103). When opening a storage unit door, the sound words do not vary, but are adequate for the situation. The same approach is found in *The Prince of Denmark Street* (2022), the sound words, onomatopoeias, and acoustigrams that occur are ”SCRUNCH” (2022: 31), “CLAP” (2022: 43), “FLIK FLAK FLIK FLAK” (2022: 64), “WOBBLE” (2022: 74), these are

easily deducible from the image and plot, and do not pose much difficulty. In *The Midsummer Night's Dream Team* (2023a) the sound words are also limited in number, the most interesting sounds appear when Bottom is turned into an ass reflect the physical changes “STRETCH”, “SCRUNGE” (Sutherland 2023a: 65), “GRRRRRRRRINNNND!”, “NEIGH BRAY”, “SCRUNTCH”, “EE-AW!” (Sutherland 2023a: 66). These sounds are made by Bottom, who is being turned into an ass, and the sounds reflect the pain and suffering due to that transformation. Finally, *Richard the Third* (2023b) is a funny comics that is why the selection of the devices needs to reflect the humoristic nature of the comics. The onomatopoeias and acoustigrams enhance such a perception, but are not innovative, the examples that occur are “CRACK” (Sutherland 2023b: 11), “WOOF! WOOF! BARK! BARK!” (Sutherland 2023b: 13), “PING” (Sutherland 2023b: 18), “CLUNK CLICK!” (Sutherland 2023b: 56), the strength of these devices is their surprising adoption, particularly when a particular reference is used metaphorically and suddenly the imagery is realised, for example when Richards reads a review of the play “Deformed, unfinished, sent before my time into this breathing world scarce half made up and that so lamely and unfashionable that dogs bark at me as halt by them?” to which Buckingham responds “Exactly. Nonsense! I mean when was the last time a dog - ?” (Sutherland 2023b: 13), and barking dogs appear in the next panel. The humour may not be sophisticated, but sound words help to achieve it.

The next group of onomatopoeias and acoustigrams focuses on sounds produced by humans. In Flöthmann's appropriation the only clear sign indicating a human-made sound is snoring in *Macbeth* (Flöthmann 2016: 12) and *Hamlet* (Flöthmann 2016: 29), i.e. a log with a saw. This example has been previously discussed. It is surprising that so few signs hint at sounds that might have enhanced the experience. In Wimberly's *Prince of Cats* there are also fewer onomatopoeias focusing on sounds of the human body, the more notable ones are “SLURP” for eating a popsicle in (Wimberly 2016: 47), and drinking “SLRRRRRRRRRRRR” (Wimberly 2016: 39), also strangely “PUNT!” for blood spitting after a punch on the face in *Prince of Cats* (Wimberly 2016: 56). There are also indicators for laughter “HA HA HA!” (Wimberly 2016: 18) and more vicious “HE HE HE” (Wimberly 2016: 13). Also, sounds of sighing “AAAAH!” (Wimberly 2016: 25) and gasping “GASP” (Wimberly 2016: 65) and sleeping or snoring with a very characteristic “ZZZZZ” (Wimberly 2016: 83). The choice of the

acoustigrams and onomatopoeias is at times surprising and superfluous, for example, the slurping sound. The onomatopoeias seem at times to have only an ornamental function.

The sound words and other devices in Sutherland's works are quite scarce. In *Findlay Macbeth* (2020) the two most noticeable onomatopoeia is the ominous "KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK" appearing repeatedly over four pages (Sutherland 2020: 45-49). Naturally, the knocking sound occurs in the Porter scene and marks a change in the tone of the comics. The second instance is the acoustigram "EEEEK!!" (Sutherland 2020: 41) from an unknown source, but which occurred during murdering Duncan; although in the play it is announced as an owl¹⁷⁸, but the acoustigram does not resemble a sound typical for animal, but for a human, Lady Macbeth identifies this sound as made by Duncan's guards. Sutherland himself stated that *The Prince of Denmark Street* (2022) should be perceived as a musical or a comics which possesses the characteristics of a musical, which is why the onomatopoeias and acoustigrams will shed more light on the part discussing music. However, there are few examples of human sounds, such as the clapping indicated by "CLAP CLAP CLAP CLAP" (Sutherland 2022: 17), the applause is an inalienable element of performing in front of an audience, and this occurs after Ophelia's musical performance. Another example is when Hamlet kills Claud with a broken bottle, in this case the last sound that Claud gives are encapsulated in a speech balloon with the sounds "NO – AAAARRRRGH!!!" (Sutherland 2022: 112) which mirrors choking guttural sounds. The same applies to *The Midsummer Night's Dream Team* (2023a) which is heavily based on music and musical elements, but a sound word which particularly important for the plot is "CLICK" which appears four times in the comics (Sutherland 2023a: 61, 81, 86, 107), and it moment of snapping the fingers by Puck who hypnotises other with this gesture. Finally, *Richard the Third* (2023b) uses a fair number of sound devices, most of which are used to evoke the effect of unsophisticated comedy. The first such example is the onomatopoeia "FLOB!" (Sutherland 2023b: 28) for spitting in the face, Lady Anne spits in Richard's face during his proposal, naturally the way it is presented reflects Anne's resentment, but it may also evoke laughter particularly that Richards is half of Anne's height. Another instance is "FLIP FLAP FLIP FLAP FLOP" (Sutherland 2023b: 66) when Richard slaps the

¹⁷⁸ "I heard and owl scream, and the crickets cry" (*Macbeth* II.2, 16)

Mayor of London, this is not classified as fighting, because in that moment Richard wants to show his weakness due to Queen Elizabeth Woodville's witchcraft, he even says "Look at my arm! It's floppy as a floppy thing" and with the floppy arm he hits the mayor, which is almost like a child's play or game. In the comics there is also knocking "KNOCK KNOCK" (Sutherland 2023b: 82) when Queen Elizabeth knocks on The Tower's door to enquire about her sons, the comic effect is that she does it herself without any entourage. Naturally, these are not all instances of human-made sounds; there are slaps, sounds of blowing kisses, booting, or chopping, and all of these functions are similar to interrupting an event or strengthening the power of words from dialogue.

The next instance of sound words is related to music, songs, and singing. Both Flöthmann and Wimberly include such signs but in a limited manner, Sutherland, however, explores the topics and uses a very broad spectrum of devices. Flöthmann's *Othello* is a strange appropriation which transforms Othello into Batman-like vigilante with Iago (probably) as his side-kick. In the opening scene, Othello is disguised as a woman to be a proverbial bait for criminals; his dallying is marked by humming, singing, or whistling – a speech balloon with a treble cleft inside (Flöthmann 2016: 79), to indicate the musical element in the comics. Unfortunately, this is the only clear sign that denotes music or singing. However, the choice of a treble cleft is simple, yet clear and understandable for any reader. In Wimberly's *Prince of Cats*, the music that appears almost throughout the story functions similarly to background music, remembering that the story is set in New York in the 1980s the diegetic music comes from boomboxes and is marked by onomatopoeias "B-DOOM B-DOOM DAP" (Wimberly 2016: 91) surrounding the device and the speakers as the source of music which most probably is contemporary music, but there is no suggestion concerning its type, which is surprising considering the number of scenes taking place at a disco. However, Sutherland explores the potential of denoting music in comics, and each of his appropriations possesses such an element. In *Findlay Macbeth* the Weird Sisters (secretaries) meet at a disco called 'The Heath', the loud and constant music is marked by the staff with notes and treble cleft (Sutherland 2020: 78-79) which is incorporated in the panel either above the characters or below, but it is a clear sign of music, but without informing the reader or its type or genre. The work that adopts the most varied type of devices to mark music and songs is *The Prince of Denmark Street* (2022). The title itself establishes the link

between music, the music scene and the premise for the plot. Denmark Street in London is where Sex Pistols used to live, and all the characters are musicians or connected to the music scene. Songs and singing are marked by musical notes surrounding the speech balloon for the lyrics. Most of the monologues, Hamlet soliloquies (including “To be or not to be”), and all the words of the Ghost which is a recording, are sang. Sutherland decided to change the most private thoughts and emotions of the characters into a public form—that is, a song. Another issue are the musical instruments which accompany the musicians, all of them adopt various onomatopoeias and acoustigrams; the electric guitar makes the sound “K-CHYYYYNNNNG!” (Sutherland 2022: 7), “TWADDLE DIDDLE TWADDLE DIDDLE TWOING” (Sutherland 2022: 50), “STRUM KA-CLING-CLING STRUM KA-CLING-CLUNG STROING” (Sutherland 2022: 53), “TWOING TWAING” and “KERRANGGG!!!” (Sutherland 2022: 109); the bongos “BIPPA BOPPA” (Sutherland 2022: 19); the sitar “NOODLE DOODLE” (Sutherland 2022: 19); the tubular bells “TINKLE TONKLE” (Sutherland 2022: 19); the percussion “PADDA-DIDDA PODDA-DIDDA BOM” (Sutherland 2022: 50); the piano “CHUNK CHUNK CHUNK CHUNK” (Sutherland 2022: 50). Sutherland is creative in terms of the sound of instruments, and he does not provide any suggestions about the sound of music. Although onomatopoeias and acoustigrams are informative, they are not beneficial to the experience. The third appropriation, *The Midsummer Night’s Dream Team* (2023a), is also filled with musical elements, considering that a wedding reception is taking place, Woods is a nightclub, and the Mechanics guise as a music band. In one of the opening scenes (it is a dynamic collage of panels from Athens, Woods, and the police precinct) in Woods, there is a party and a concert, the music and singing is noted by the already used device of a speech balloon with music notes on the frame (Sutherland 2023a: 9), and the same sign is repeated in the retrospect scene when Quince plots with the others, Botton suddenly bursts into singing (Sutherland 2023a: 31), or the fairies do Titania’s biddings (Sutherland 2023a: 44, 57, 76). Despite the presence of instruments, there is no single onomatopoeic or acoustigram device connected with music that is used in this appropriation. The final title by Sutherland, *Richard the Third* (2023b), is not particularly associated with music and singing; nevertheless, the author included them in the comics. The sign for singing appears for the first time, an already familiar musical note within the speech balloon, when the Mayor of London approached Richard to offer him the crown. Richard is praying in

Latin and burst into the characteristic tune of a Catholic prayer (Sutherland 2023b: 77). Another instance is when Richard become the king, it is announced by fanfare of the trumpet and the drums, the onomatopoeia and acoustigrams the occur are “TAN TA RA” and “DRUM DRUMMY DRUM DRUM” with musical notes surrounding all the characters encapsulated in the panel (Sutherland 2023b: 95). The presence of these devices also appears during the exchange between Richard and Queen Elizabeth and later Old Queen Margaret (Sutherland 2023b: 96), the devices are “DRUMMITY DRUMMITY DROWNITY DRUM” and “BASH DRUM DRUM TRUMP TRUMPETY TRUMP” and “BANG CRASH THUMP TOOT HONK PARP”. The presence of the drums and trumpets deafens, intimidates, and humiliates both queens. The final example does not exceed the number of devices, and they are used to achieve the comic effect.

Silence is an inseparable element of sound and music, and it is important to acknowledge its existence. Comics, including comics appropriations, rarely create completely silent panels (if it is even possible). The closest example is Flöthmann, as he does not include any verbal language in the appropriation, but it is still difficult to pinpoint which panel or which speech balloon, or any other device, is a sign of silence.

Appropriations by Sutherland explore the potential of signs to the fullest extent as far as sound and music are concerned, but both Wimberly and Flöthmann also propose their own style. It might seem that the creators are limited to acoustigrams, onomatopoeias, and signs, such as musical notes, treble clefs, or music staff, but the basic ideas are just the outset on which the authors capitalise and develop.

5.3.6. Colour in Shakespeare Comics Appropriation

Another feature discussed in comics appropriation is colour and the meaning this element carries. The analysis is based on general observations in each appropriation and how the semiotic choice of the colour scheme impacts interpretation.

Prince of Cats is composed of dull colours of grey and blue, with bright pink appearing (repeatedly) in crucial moments, e.g. Tybalt meeting Rosalyn for the first time in a night club (Wimberly 2016: 29). Pink is a reappearing theme in the work which reminds us of nostalgia for the 1980s. The colour scheme reflects the aesthetics

of the period. The conflict in *The Prince of Cats* is not based on familial undertones but rather on sub-cultural affiliations which are a source of conflicts and tensions in the work. Having said that the author, unlike in other *Romeo and Juliet* adaptations, opted against presenting the two groups with two distinct and inconspicuous sets of garments and symbols for the reader to recognise them. This work is highly concerned with the meaning of the colour scheme when compared with other appropriations and adaptations. However, despite the pleasing effect of the colour scheme, it does not provide an additional interpretative angle.

Flöthmann, however, consciously bends the colour scheme to his needs and purposes in *Shakespeare Ohne Worte* (2016). The stories are presented through polychrome and flat-colour, and only four colours are used: white, black, green, and gold; Flöthmann is able to operate the colours on various levels of meaning; they are not only decorative but also symbolic. A limited number of colours required creativity on the part of the author. Green is predominantly used for the background; however, in certain situations, gold is also used for the background, particularly to mark a split of the plot presented on the same page in such instances. The background colour of the panel informs the line of the plot followed by the reader (the reading process is facilitated by arrows directing the reading path). The split green-gold page appears in *Romeo and Juliet* (Flöthmann 2016: 47) when two potential paths of how the love story might develop are presented. Another instance can be found in *The Tempest* (Flöthmann 2016: 68-69) when the events taking place at sea with Ferdinand and Alonso are shown (in green) and those with Prospero and Miranda on the island (in gold). A mosaic of green and gold panels divides the page and story, allowing the reader to follow the plots simultaneously. Another function of gold colour is for masks (in *Othello* the titular character is a Batman-like masked vigilante; Flöthmann 2016: 86-87) and for symbols of power such as crowns in *Hamlet* (Flöthmann 2016: 37) and *Macbeth* (Flöthmann 2016: 26). Initially, it seemed that the four-colour scheme might be limiting for the author, but it actually enhances the creativity and humoristic nature of the work.

All Sutherland's appropriations are black and white, similarly to the adaptations by Hinds (2009), Moore (2016) and Hänninen and Hiltunen (2019). The limited number of colours does not draw the attention away from the plot. The monochromatic works match the tradition of simple cartoons and comic strips, enhancing the humour and the comic experience. Abandoning the use of colour and focusing only on black and white

does not distract the reader, but also requires the characters to be more distinctly designed, enabling recognition, all of which are caricaturistic and more easily recognisable. Another reason for abandoning colour in these appropriations might also be a more prosaic; colouring takes time and precision, and Sutherland might have opted against such a decision.

Shakespeare comics appropriations adopted various approaches to the use of colour, there works which use colour purely for aesthetic purposes (Wimberly), consciously uses the potential of colour in the narrative (Flöthmann) or abandons colour altogether for the sake of monochrome (Sutherland) for the purpose of storytelling and to achieve the cartoony effect.

5.3.7. Verbal Narration in Comics – Shakespearean Language in Comics Appropriations

Appropriations, as understood by Sanders (2006), allow greater freedom as far as plot, setting, and character depiction are concerned. Language is also another element which is treated with greater artistic (auteur) freedom. The authors freely experiment with the source text, change it, cut it, or delete it altogether. Each appropriation discussed here represents a different approach to the language of the source text. Most of the authors who discuss the process of dealing with Shakespearean language and its cultural position try to approach the issue respectively, but prioritise the comics medium and adjust the language appropriately. The most typical approach is to preserve the most recognisable lines and phrases from the plays and re-write the ones which may not function in the comics medium. Although it might be tempting to treat plays as ready-made scripts for comics monologues, soliloquies and longer dialogues do not work in comics because the images lose their narrative potential and become illustrations or ornaments.

The analysis of the language in Shakespeare comics appropriations supplements the discussion initiated in the previous chapter. Consequently, if possible, the same fragments are analysed here, which will facilitate comparison and reach conclusions. In the case of appropriations of *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* the same scenes

will be compared, while *The Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Richard III* the opening scene will be considered.

Wimberly (2016) presenting quite creative approach towards Shakespearean language. The prologue is an interesting starting point for comparison, particularly that preserved by Wimberly. Here, both Shakespearean text and Wimberly's versions are included.

Two households, both alike in dignity,
**In fair Verona (where we lay our scene),
From ancient grudge break to new mutiny,
Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean.**
From forth the fatal loins of these two foes
A pair of star-crossed lovers take their life;
Whose misadventured piteous overthrows
Doth with their death bury their parents' strife.
The fearful passage of their death-marked love,
And the continuance of their parents' rage,
Which but their children's end nought could
remove,
Is now the two hours' traffic of our stage;
The which if you with patient ears attend,
What here shall miss, our toil shall strive to
mend.
(*Romeo and Juliet*, Prologue 1-14, emphasis
mine)

Remember back in the day,
niggas wore waves,
Gazell-e shades, corn braids, dueled aplenty
But never ended deadly, they wore dull
blades
And kept it friendly, even though enemy.
Fast forward from nineteen hundred eighty-
three
To what steel corners, **with new mutiny.**
**In Brooklyn Babel, where we lay our
scene,**
Here hood born youth, adolescence addled,
**Spill civil blood, make civil hands
unclean;**
Traded rattles for father's swords and
battled.
Saddled with their parents spiteful legacy
Love, it's collateral casualty.
A thin line is blurred, a child interred
To redeem American dreams deferred ...
(Wimberly 2016: 7, emphasis mine)

Wimberly composed his own prologue which resembles lyrics from a hip-hop song rather than a poem and thus it inscribes into the setting of the 1980s New York. Through the language, the reader is able to determine the tone *Prince of Cats* assumes that it is not heavily influenced by the source text but still respects it. Nevertheless, he tells the story anew, from a different perspective, and adopts a new language which is more suitable to the story. Comparing the prologues reveals that Wimberly did not discard Shakespeare's language entirely but incorporated certain phrases, words, and imagery. Surprisingly Wimberly omits the phrase star-crossed lovers, hinting that Romeo and Juliet are not the main characters and the plot does not focus on them. Moreover, Wimberly omits the meta-theatrical (or in this case meta-comics) reference entirely "two hours' traffic of our stage", which would be challenging to preserve in a graphic narrative.

As far as the moment when Romeo and Juliet meet Wimberly's *Prince of Cats* (2016) deprives the reader of that conversation, although it is depicted visually, Romeo is seen to approach Juliet during the street fair, but no words are encapsulated in the speech balloons and the panels become inaudible. Nevertheless, the reader must suspect what the characters are speaking in order for them to fall in love. Wimberly's adaptation can be compared to Baz Luhrman's film adaptation in terms of the language, and although *Prince of Cats* recycles the original text, modifies and capitalises on it while Luhrman preserved the text almost entirely. He treats the lines taken from the play as a type of subculture slang; for example, when Tybalt talks to Capulet during the party (1.5), he talks to him using fragments from the play:

“TYBALT: Uncle, this is a Montague, our foe, a villain that is hither come in spite
to scorn at our solemnity this night.

CAPULET: Content thee, gentle coz, let him alone. He bears him like a portly gentleman;
it is my will, the which if thou respect, show a fair presence and put off these frowns, an
ill-beseeming semblance for a feast.” (Wimberly 2016: 123)

Wimberly treats the texts freely, he cuts it and adds to it, in a way he embraces the role of the adaptor in the true spirit of Hutcheon's theory, while Hinds displays respect towards the text without changing it. Wimberly as adaptor draws from Shakespearean plot and characters, but language in a lesser extent, but Wimberly has told a completely new story.

The two scenes from *Macbeth* that undergo scrutiny are the opening scene and the dagger scene. *Findlay Macbeth* (2020) opens with the Weird Sisters with the recognisable phrases preserved but some added.

“Sister 1: Moira
Sister 2: Jeanne. Shona.
Sister 1: When shall we three meet again?
Sister 2: Well, hopefully sometime when it's not pishing it doon!
Sister 1: I'm not free again till the hurly-burly's done.
Sister 3: Hurley-burly?
Sister 1: The takeover negotiations. Have you not heard them? It's murder in there!
Sister 2: Aye well, it'll be lost or won soon.
Sister 3: Yup. I'm expecting a call about the result before five.
Sister 1: See you back in receptions just after five then.
Sister 2: Oh definitely. That when the big man'll be checking in!
Sister 3: The big man?
Sister 2: Oh yes. The hero of the hour, the man of the moment – Findlay Macbeth!
Sister 1: That's me! I've got a call from Mrs Graymalkin in accounts.
Sister 3: And that'll be Mr Paddock in marketing.

Sister 2: Hello, Alba Industries – ‘Where fair is foul & foul is fair’. How may I direct your call?’ (Sutherland 2020: 2-4)

The short exchange between the secretaries during a cigarette break sets the tone for the comics, even without the visual element it is understandable. The Weird Sisters are given names, takeover negotiations are taking place, and Macbeth saves the company. Sutherland has preserved the most memorable and recognisable phrases from the source text, the author explained his approach by stating that

“I rewrite an awful lot, keeping just the "buzz" phrases and top quotes. So a reader who's seeing my book as their first experience of that play will feel like they've seen Shakespeare's story, and maybe recognise a few quotes when they see another version of it, but they'll have been spared most of the actual text.” (private correspondence 16 July 2024)

That is why phrases such as “When shall we three meet again?” or hurly-burly which are inalienable elements of the witches’ language. Although Sutherland admits to conducting extensive alterations in the text, he preserves the rhythm and style of these lines, which are snappy, quick, and intriguing for the reader.

The dagger scene functions differently when compared to the previous adaptations, particularly due to the language. It is no longer a contemplative and philosophical pondering before coming murder and treason but turns into a mockery.

“Is this the dagger that I see before me? No, wait, it was in the other pocket, wasn’t it... Is this a - ... Ah, the microwave. That’ll be my ovaltine, I hope Duncan didnae hear that for it is a knell that summons thee to heaven or to hell!” (Sutherland 2020: 39-40)

Although it seems that Macbeth starts his soliloquy following the line of the play, the serious tone quickly changes, and Macbeth quickly shifts his thoughts to more mundane and down-to-earth. This is in contrast to previous adaptations by Hinds (2015), Moore (2016), and Hänninen and Hiltunen (2019), all of which are very serious in tone and do not deviate from the initial plot. *Macbeth* is known as Scottish play with a number of references to Scotland, in Moore (2016) the link is emphasised by including Gaelic words, Sutherland included words that are characteristic for Scotland “didnae” meaning ‘didn’t’ and “pishing it doon” stands for ‘raining’. The linguistic alterations, abbreviations, and inclusions enable Sutherland to achieve the goal of creating a new modernised version of the play.

The appropriation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is a heist story, and by changing the genre, certain plot elements are either deleted or their significance diminished; for example, the attraction of Oberon and Titania towards Hippolyta and Theseus has been eliminated, and the story of young loves is not as important as in the play. *The Midsummer Night's Dream Team* (2023a) is told from a retrospective, and the Shakespearean language is used in the police report of what the witnesses and suspects had seen. Sutherland combines and interweaves his own lines and words with the play's source text. The opening sequence is a good example. The words come from the play, but from different characters and from different moments in the play.

Go stir up the Athenian youth to merriments!
 Awake the pert & nimble spirit of mirth
 Hippolyta I woo'd thee with my sword –
 And won thy love doing thee injuries.
 But I will wed thee in another key”
 Happy be Theo –
 Our renowned Duke
 How long within this wood intend you stay?
 If you will patiently dance in our round
 And see our moonlight revels, go with us.
 If not, shun me, and I will spare your haunts.
 Why should Titania cross her Oberon?
 Come now, what masques, what dances shall we have
 Where is our usual manager of mirth?
 Is there no play To ease the anguish of a torturing hour?
 I've had a Dream.
 The eye of man hath not heard,
 The ear of man hath not seen,
 Man's hand is not able to taste,
 His tongue to conceive,
 Not his heart to report
 What my dream was” (Sutherland 2023a: 4-15)

The first lines come from (1.1) which are uttered by Theseus, followed by a fragment from a conversation between Oberon and Titania (2.1), Theseus' lines from (5.1), and Bottom from (4.1). It remains unknown who speaks these words, but they suggest that the author skilfully manoeuvres the text. When the comics jumps to the present time, it is shown that a constable is reading the lines, she even continues them “Now fair Hippolyta, our nuptial hour draws on apace. Four happy days bring in another moon. But oh methinks how slow the old moon wanes...” (Sutherland 2023a: 16) to which the detective reacts “One moment constable... Have you written down every single word they've said” (Sutherland 2023a: 16-17) which is Sutherland's own addition. *The Midsummer Night's Dream Team* is an example of an appropriation working on various

levels, and the comics tells two stories which merge into one and the language that is used gains additional meaning. Particularly, the ending explains the flowery language and poetic tendencies of the police constable whose name is Wilhelmina Shakespeare, supposedly Shakespeare-playwright's alter ego. Sutherland blends the two types of text/language, and enters into a kind of a game with the reader, who is charged with identifying and sorting these two texts. The author explores the potential of Shakespeare comics appropriation in this work.

Richard III opens with a powerful and memorable soliloquy-prologue with the titular character immediately taking the space of stage and the audience attention (Clemen 1968: 2; Clemen 1987: 16). The long soliloquy is described as possessing “a wicked energy” and is considered as “the best opening passage in the canon” (Kermode 2001: 31). Clemen (1968:2) divided the soliloquy into three parts: (1) presenting the current political situation, (2) self-introduction of the character, and (3) planning a monologue to inform future events. However, at the same time, “Richard seems to have an awareness of us, and seems to ask for our help in accomplishing his goals” (Lemon 2018: 53). The character establishes a type of rapport with the audience and attempts to gain support. Moreover, Hopkins (2024) observed that Richard in his self-centred and drawing the attention to himself by using a number of pronouns such as ‘I’ and ‘me, my’ together with ‘our’ and ‘us’. All these elements are significant in the discussion of the soliloquy-prologue in the context of Sutherland's comics appropriation. The opening sequence in *Richard the Third* achieves all of the mentioned goals, but there are also alternations to make the soliloquy work in the medium of comics with its visual aspect. “Because soliloquies must be understood as performed rather than thought, the sound of the speech might thus be important as well as its content; it is not out of the question that Richard might be deceiving himself or trying to persuade himself rather than simply declaring what he knows or thinks to be true; and any puns have to work aurally as well as on the page, as sun/son does” (Hopkins 2024, unpaginated). Moreover, longer utterances, such as monologues and soliloquies, are visually unappealing and challenging for adaptors. This issue was also mentioned when discussing other soliloquies in comics, for example Hamlet's “To be or not to be”. In order to discuss the speech better it will be quoted in full, and similarly to the original Shakespearean text it is also long.

Richard: Now Now Now is the winter of our discontent
 Made glorious summer by this son of York
 And it's rubbish, I hate it.
 Hi, let me introduce myself
 The name's Richard Duke of Gloucester
 (*That's pronounced Gloucester, obviously
 not Gloucester which is how you were saying it).
 And I'm totally brilliant!
 Trust me, I'm a legend! A laugh a minute Prankster
 And my brother Edward is a total yawn!
 So, what I'm going to do is
 Wait, let me put it into brilliant poetic words
 cos I'm best at that too.
 Now is the winter of our discontent
 Made glorious summer by this son of York.

Buckingham: er...

Richard: Yes?

Buckingham: What's that mean?

Richard: It means my brother Edwards – yawn yawn -
 Has made everything all boring and peaceful by being King
 May I continue?

Buckingham: Yes, thanks. That was helpful.

Richard: As I was saying – cough cough –
 Now is the - etc etc of our etc etc
 Made etc etc
 And all the clouds that lowered upon our house
 In the deep bosom of the ocean buried.

Buckingham: Tee hee!
 You said bosom!

Richard: I know Hee Hee
 You're allowed to say rude things & they can't tell you off –
 Cos it's Shakespeare!
 Now are our brows bound with victorious wreaths
 Our bruised arms hung up for monuments
 Our stern alarums changed to merry meetings
 Our delightful marches to delightful measure
 I tell you it's totally pants!
 I loved stern alarums!
 Stern Alarums & dread marches were my favourites!
 Stabby Stabby Death Death!
 That's my best thing!
 But now... Grim-visaged war hath
 Smoothed his wrinkled front
 And now, instead of mounting barbed steeds
 To fright the souls of fearful adversaries

Buckingham: Look at me! I am also barbed!

Richard: He capers nimbly in a Ladies Chamber
 To the lascivious pleasing of a lute!
 The god of war? Playing with girls?

Devil(!): Let it go Richard! The fighting's over...

Richard: No! It's 15th century!
 I like war!
 But I, that am not shaped for sportive tricks –
 (I'm a martyr to this back of mine)
 Nor made to curry an amorous looking glass
[a mirror cracks] (addition mine)
 Okay, that was unnecessary
 I that am rudely stamped
 And want love's majesty to strut
 before a wanton ambling nymph

I that ma curtailed of this fair proportion –
 Cheated of feature by dissembling nature –
 Deformed
 Unfinished

Buckingham: Richie, mate!
 You're being a bit harsh on yourself

Richard: There are the names they call me!

Buckingham: That's rotten Richie, mate!
 You want to ignore them.
 You're not –

Richards: "Deformed, unfinished sent before my time
 Into this breathing world.
 Scarce half made up
 And that so lamely
 And unfashionable
 That dogs bark at me as I halt by them"?

Buckingham: Exactly. Nonsense!
 I mean when was the last time a dog -?
 ... [*dogs start barking*] Not helping, lands.

Richard: Why I, in this weak piping time of peace
 Have no delight to pass away the time

Buckingham: Scrabble? Monopoly? Playstation?

Richard: Not invented yet
 I have no delight unless to see my shadow in the sun
 And descant upon mine own deformity
 Yes, well, apart from 'shadow delighting'
 Since I cannot prove a lover
 To entertain these fair well-spoken days
 I am determined to prove a villain

Buckingham: A v-v-v-villain?

Richard: Y-y-y-yes!
 And hate the idle pleasures of these days
 Sorry Bucky mate, I haven't introduced you!
 This is Bucky

Buckingham: Hi, I'm the –

Richard: He's the Duke of Buckingham

Buckingham: Yes, I am

Richard: And also...?

Buckingham: And also the cousin of...

Richard: No. And also..

Buckingham: And also the father of...

Richard: No! And also...?

Buckingham: And also...?

Richard: My bezzie mate!

Buckingham: Oh yes, I am that

Richard: Tee hee, my brothers haven't a clue!
 Plots have I laid...
 Inductions dangerous by drunken prophesies,
 Libels & dreams –
 To set my brother Clarence & King Edward in deadly hate
 The one against the other!
 And if King Edward is as true & just
 As I am subtle, false & treacherous
 (And I am totally all of those things)
 I am about to frame Clarence for murder & treason!...
 (Sutherland 2023b: 1-19)

Sutherland (2023b) rewrote Richard's speech, preserving the most recognisable elements (the image of winter, the decision to become a villain) and the contrast (winter-summer, lover-villain, true and just vs. false and treacherous). Most importantly, Sutherland changed it into a dialogue with the Duke of Buckingham to make it more believable and add dynamism to the words and humour. At times, certain words are treated literally; for example, regarding barking dogs or 'passing the time', metaphorical imagery is visually depicted. Richard is also aware of the reader or of the 'pseudo-theatrical context' in which he has found himself, as well as the words that he is saying, he even clearly states that "You're allowed to say rude things & they can't tell you off – Cos it's Shakespeare!" (Sutherland 2023b: 7) which makes the reader question Richard whether he is an actor or a character. Sutherland also made the opening sequence longer, adding scenes and comments that were not in the source text, and capitalised on it to adjust it to the requirements of the comics medium. Richard is the dominating figure in every panel of the sequence, and not much of the background is provided, however the verbal and the visual aspects complement each other, and would not achieve the intended outcome if one of the elements were deleted.

Finally, it is also necessary to mention that there are adaptations which overlook and ignore Shakespeare's language entirely; these adaptations are wordless comics. Flöthmann (2016) adapted five plays without a single word (also non-diegetic ones) and naturally these comics lose the emotional depth and focus on the events of the play, and can be perceived as an experiment. This proves that adapting Shakespeare's plays to comics without language is possible, and its reception depends on the reader's attitude and expectations.

The analysis of these Shakespeare comics appropriations has revealed the plethora and abundance of approaches and potential of the medium as well as the creativity of the authors, who never take the text for granted. The advantage of these appropriations is their unapologetic attitude towards the sanctity of the Shakespearean text.

5.4. Summary

The analytical chapter of Shakespeare comics appropriations focused on deconstructing visual and verbal elements in Ron Wimberly's *Prince of Cats* (2016), Frank Flöthmann's *Shakespeare Ohne Worte* (2016) and four comics by Kev F. Sutherland: *Findlay Macbeth* (2020), *The Prince of Denmark Street* (2022), *The Midsummer Night's Dream Team* (2023a), and *Richard the Third* (2023b). Each of these comics appropriations 'tampered' with the original source by altering perspectives, characters, settings and language. However, they also adopted devices which are not experimental, but easily understandable in order to achieve, at times, an experimental story. Comparing the number of Shakespeare comics adaptations with Shakespeare comics appropriations on the market, it seems that appropriations are not a tool of choice for comics creators. Such work might be overlooked as a didactic help, but it should be treated as fluid text adding to the general understanding and interpretations of the plays.

Conclusions

The process of writing this work took many turns, surmounted a number of obstacles, and in the end took a different shape than it had been initially planned. A quote from Goethe's *Theory of Colours* reflects somewhat my creative and writing process: "The desire of knowledge is first stimulated in us when remarkable phenomena attract our attention. In order that this attention be continued, it is necessary that we should feel some interest in exercising it, and thus by degrees we become better acquainted with the object of our curiosity" (1970: xxxvii). The initial interest and attraction to the subject of Shakespeare comics transformed into a desire to know and understand as much as possible about comics, its semiotics, the reading process, and Shakespeare visual history.

This work brought together three broad subjects and research areas: Shakespeare's plays, theory of adaptation, and comics studies. Shakespeare's plays, with their special status in cultural and literary studies, and the tradition of adapting the plays were bound to be transposed into a medium of comics. The discussion and analysis of the graphic narratives requires knowledge from the domain of Shakespeare studies (textual approach to plays; Early Modern Theatre – history and its practices; Shakespeare in adaptations – particularly film adaptations; Shakespeare and popular culture), theories of adaptation (practices and process not only about film adaptations), and finally comics studies (history, definitions, and theories), and a few others as well. Of the three main research areas the last one, i.e. comics studies, has recently gained greater recognition and has entered the academia, whereas the other two are well-established and occupy a firm position within the humanities. The overlap between the research areas concerning Shakespeare comics became a central subject matter for

analysis, and each of them has gained new insights, examples, and inspiration for further research.

This dissertation raised several research questions and established a number of research objectives, with each chapter and subchapter attempting to provide answers. The primary goal of this study was to undertake a comparative analysis of selected adaptations and appropriations of Shakespeare's plays, examining how they transform the literary text into a visual-verbal narrative medium and the manner in which a reader might follow the comics' signs to derive meaning. Another intriguing issue was whether such adaptations developed their own semiotic sign system or adopted those generally used in comics. Following the suit of adaptation studies, it seemed crucial to ponder the position of the source text in the comics and whether it is necessary to know the text in order to understand and enjoy the adaptation.

The investigation into the comics adaptations of Shakespeare plays has revealed an abundance of examples (see Appendix 1), especially that the publications have been on the market since the 1940s. Some works have attracted a lot of attention from journalists, teachers, and historians (such as *Classics Illustrated*, Gaiman's *The Sandman*, and *Manga Shakespeare* series), while others have been completely overlooked and fell into oblivion. Hence, the adaptations that were selected for the analysis were less known and not much was written about them, with the exception of works by Gareth Hinds; however, despite their popularity, the adaptations did not attract scholarly attention. Moreover, all of the chosen adaptations were published past year 2000 when comics was already an established medium. The total number of analysed adaptations seems to be representative (15 adaptations and appropriations in total), as they represent different styles and genres. The analysis is also very inclusive, the adaptations and appropriations are examples of tragedies (*Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Romeo and Juliet*), comedies (*The Merchant of Venice*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*), a tragicomedy (*The Tempest*) and a historical play (*Richard III*) which shows the versatility of comics in adapting Shakespeare's plays. This work may function as a starting point for further studies encompassing a greater number of publications (analysing works prior to 2000) or focusing on just one Shakespeare's play or one genre. The reasoning behind selecting these particular comics was to familiarise the readers with these less-known publications which are yet to draw enough scholarly attention and a greater audience.

A general conclusion that can be reached is the complexity of Shakespeare comics, their history, themes, aesthetics are an intriguing field for further exploration. An overview of the definitions of comics and the history of comics adapting Shakespeare revealed a gap in the terminology which turned out to be important for the analysis and general discussion concerning the topic. I have proposed three terms: Shakespeare comics, which is a general term encompassing all instances which include Shakespeare in the comics - these could be fragments from a play (participants of Graphic Shakespeare Competition adapt a chosen fragment); Shakespeare comics adaptations which constitute a closed work and adapt the whole play; and Shakespeare comics appropriations which approach Shakespeare plays with greater freedom. The terms are introduced in order in the discussion. Regardless of whether the work is labelled as an appropriation or an adaptation, the creators strive to maintain some connection with the source text, even if it is only a few of the most well-known lines. Moreover, all of the analysed comics sustain the relationship with the dramatic text; for example, *dramatis personae* or a division into acts and scenes are preserved. Theatrical tradition is also significant, and adaptations view themselves as ‘theatrical adaptations’ (Nicky Greenberg’s *Hamlet*, Flöthmann’s *Hamlet*, Sutherland’s *Richard the Third*).

A typical perception of comics is that it is a hybrid of verbal and visual elements or language, or in the past, it used to be viewed as a combination of literature and painting. Although I do not negate that comics combination of verbal and visual signs, I propose a new perception of comics as a hybrid medium, one that derives and is inspired by other media, such as literature, film, visual arts, and theatre. Comics extracts those features and techniques which are helpful in creating a narration, but also comics might prove inspiring and helpful in creating film or theatrical productions. The hybrid nature of comics is also beneficial for other media.

Another goal that was achieved and might function as a framework for further analysis, not only of Shakespeare comics, but also of comics in general, is creating a comics semiotics methodology which dissects the macro-semiotic and micro-semiotic elements in comics. The dissertation collects various approaches concerning these elements which possess (visual) narrative potential. This framework has the potential to be developed and explored further, and it can be a foundation for creating other semiotic approaches. The theory of comics semiotics may also assist those readers who have

difficulty understanding and decoding semiotic signs in comics. Naturally, my observations might be supplemented in the future.

The obvious conclusion that is reached after analysing the Shakespeare comics adaptations and Shakespeare comics appropriations do not experiment with the formal semiotic elements; it is the aesthetic choices in the depiction of characters, settings, and plots that are most experimental. Hinds' *King Lear* is the most experimental and varied adaptation in terms of the formal element, but the author does not interfere with the plot. *King Lear* is the most formally complex works for the reader, with a number of various panel shapes, a range of speech balloons and varied closure types, but at the same time it does not change the plot. I assumed that Shakespeare comics appropriations would experiment with the semiotic sign the most in order to match the formal aspect of the comics to the experimental and altered plots. However, it proved not to be so appropriations do not experiment with the semiotic signs; they do not introduce new signs, whether it is a new speech balloon, an ornamental layout, or less popular closure; they are actually quite rigid when it comes to formal elements. Even Flöthmann's wordless comics, although at first glance seems experimental, does everything possible for the reader to make it comprehensible as it can; it included arrows to follow the panel layout more efficiently. Nicky Greenberg's *Hamlet* might be challenged as an appropriation due the aesthetic choices, the anthropomorphic, ink blot characters, however, Greenberg does not change the plot at all, she does not change the language of the play. She strongly links her comics with theatre, but adds a layer of theatricality, that is, the characters are actors on stage and the reader is allowed a peek backstage. Semiotic signs do not pose a great deal of interpretative challenges, but they are definitely intriguing. Surprisingly, Wimberly's appropriation *Prince of Cats* adopts a limited scope of signs for his appropriations, and the reason might be not to distract the reader with it, as the plot itself is quite complex and does not follow Shakespeare's chain of events. Overall, it seems that the adaptations are more experimental regarding macro-semiotics and micro-semiotic elements.

Based on this scrutiny, there is no preference for which Shakespearean play would function better as an adaptation or appropriation. However, to some extent, *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* are two plays which seem to evoke respect in the authors, perhaps due to their position in the canon, but they experience the least number of changes in the plot, regardless of their classifications. I would assume that the authors who decide to

transpose the work into comics always hope to be read by students and teachers who would use them for educational purposes.

Apart from the elements which are broadly categorised as macro-semiotic and micro-semiotics, these three areas which had not attracted much attention, which is reflected in the number of academic articles on it, were also analysed. These include colour, sound, music, and verbal narration. Both categories, adaptations and appropriation, embrace colour and its meaning. The choice of whether to create monochromatic or multicolour words does not depend on the type of comics, but on the author's creative intention. Naturally, the majority of works are in colour; 9 out of 15 titles adopted colour, and the palettes and colour schemes were always significant and meaningful. For example, in works based on *Macbeth*, three are black-and-white (Moore, Sutherland, Hänninen and Hiltunen), while Hinds' uses only dark colours of brown, black, and red, all of which contribute to the depressing perception of the play. Flöthamman's *Macbeth* uses vivid colours (white, green, golden, and black), but these were the colours used for all the plays, not just *Macbeth*. Although it is one of the last features discussed, it is actually one the first that is noticed, and on this basis, the reader predicts the tone for the work. Colours are used consciously by the author, and the colour scheme does not vary within one comics. Hinds' *King Lear* might be somewhat of an exception because it uses a wide range of colours, but similar in tone, and they reflect the mental state of the characters, which is why there are pastels at the beginning when there is order, and dark blue and black when Lear goes through his mental breakdown.

How can comics depict sound? The usual answer that come to mind are onomatopoeias that are associated with superhero. However, this is not the only way to signal sounds; the analysis divided sound into the depiction of sound and noise, music and song, and silence. Each author created their set of signs (speech balloons or signs within panels), acoustragms, onomatopoeias, and sound words. Naturally, some onomatopoeias (BUM, POW) are easily decoded, but others seem to be unique creations (Wimberly), such as CHAKA CHAKA. I believe that one of the reasons for such a creation concerning the depiction of sound is the lack of universal signs, as in the case of speech balloons, which is why authors have to be creative in that domain.

Most articles analysing comics chiefly focus on visual narrative or semiotic signs, overlooking the verbal narrative signs. Shakespeare's language is given a

privileged position and it would be a great oversight and loss if that area were not discussed in a work analysing Shakespeare adaptations. The study of the language used in comics is based on comparisons with the source text and noticing the changes and deletions made by the authors. The adaptors embrace the whole range of tools that are able to use to create their vision of the play; some do not change or cut the text at all (Greenberg), the most popular approach is to preserve quite a lot of the original play, but simplifying certain words and phrases and shortening the text (Hinds, Moore, Allison), there are some who adopt a more individualistic approach and write the text anew, but preserve the most recognisable phrases (Wimberly, Lee et al, Sutherland). The most experimental approach was Flöthmann, who created an appropriation with any verbal element (not a single word is used) and proved that it is possible to enjoy a Shakespearean story without Shakespearean language. However, the understanding of comics is heavily dependent on the title, which helps identify characters and plots, as well as the reader's previous knowledge.

Unfortunately, not all goals were satisfactorily achieved. During the course of writing, it occurred that the thesis would benefit from a quantitative study of speech balloons, panels, and transitions. Providing static data may shed more light on the extent of the techniques adopted. Because of the number of selected adaptations and appropriations, it was not possible to conduct more in-depth studies in certain areas, such as verbal narration or panel transitions, but this would cause the work to swell in size and at the same time might prove the reader with additional information. Although the number of selected works (15) seemed representative, there was a threat that the analysis would be superficial; however, omitting certain titles would impoverish the work. The greatest drawback is the lack of visual aids that would illustrate the discussed element, but using visual aids requires acquiring written agreements from publishers and is often connected with paying a fee. Hence, as hard as it is a decision was made not to include any.

The framework created here can be adopted in the future studies of Shakespeare comics, Shakespeare comics adaptations and Shakespeare comics appropriations for comics series, a study of a single author, or other adaptations, particularly that there is an increasing number of such adaptations that are created for purely for didactic purposes. This work also aimed to draw attention to Shakespeare in comics and to hope

that this field will soon be recognised by Shakespeare studies and not treated in terms of curious fun facts.

The dissertation combined three areas of research: comics studies, adaptation studies and Shakespeare studies. The analysis of the Shakespeare adaptation comics and Shakespeare appropriation comics and the finding may contribute each of these areas. The contribution to comics studies is of theoretical nature, this thesis collects and discusses a number of theories, definitions and issues concerned with theory of comics which is spread across a number of monographs and articles. It can constitute a vantage point for further discussions and extension of macro and micro-semiotic elements which can be added to the verbal and visual language of comics. Moreover the findings of the thesis will benefit adaptation studies by drawing the attention to comics as a medium of adaptation. In the majority of cases, adaptation studies focus on relationships between literature and film, this work brings to the foreground comics, which previously had been used as anecdotes or fun facts. This thesis views comics as a mature medium which deserves greater attention which might invite other adaptation scholar to investigate the matter further. Finally, Shakespeare studies will be familiarised with a new manner of adapting and interpreting Shakespeare and his works. The work reveals the abundance of comics adaptations and potential areas of interest for further research. The analytical model may be adopted for analysing other comics created by the same author or for another collection of adaptations. This dissertation also attempted to familiarise readers and scholars with the history and tradition of Shakespeare comics, taking into account that the first instances of comics reach the beginning of 20th century there is a danger that these cultural artifacts will fall into oblivion, and by igniting wider interest with the phenomenon it will not be lost.

I would like to finish with a quote from Postema which resonated with me in the final stages of my writing. “Comics call for a process of retroactive resignification, where one must continually loop back to reconsider meanings and make new meanings as one goes forward in the text” (Postema 2013: 50). The act of reading comics is retroactive; some of the findings and conclusions might change and become outdated over time, especially if comics studies is to develop as dynamically as they do now. The amount of information and observations included here also encourage this retroactive reading process of comics theories to challenge them and to ask further question, but it

also encourages the reader to return to the comics themselves, and explore further interpretative possibilities.

Abstract

The dissertation analyses 15 adaptations of Shakespeare plays in comics which were published in the 21st century. They were created in the Anglo-American or Franco-Belgian (European) style and are examples of auteur comics, i.e. not belonging to a series. The thesis oscillates between and combines three areas: Shakespeare studies, comics studies and adaptation studies. The aim is to analyse the comics and attempt to answer the question of the manner in which meaning in Shakespeare comics is created. The dissertation comprises five chapters, three of which establish theoretical aspects and definitions, which are adopted in the analytical part.

Chapter 1 titled “Defining Comics: An Analytical and Historical Approach” provides an introduction to the definitions that are used throughout the dissertation. The issue of definition in comics studies is a complex one, hence it was significant to present a clear understanding of the term ‘comics’, which appeared to be too broad for the analytical purpose of this work; for this reason, the terms Shakespeare comics, Shakespeare comics adaptations and Shakespeare comics appropriations were introduced. The second part of the chapter centres around the notion of the hybridity of comics, and shifts the perspective from comics as verbal-visual hybrid to comics as a hybrid of various media.

The second chapter “Shakespearean Adaptations in Comics: A Theoretical and Historical Overview” is historical and theoretical in nature. It commences with an overview of the research concerning the study of Shakespeare comics, in order to identify the gaps and position the thesis within a greater scope of research. The second part of the chapter discusses theories of adaptation, the differentiation between adaptation and appropriation, and the notions of adaptation as a process and a product,

modes of engagement, fluid text, fidelity. The chapter is concluded with an overview of the history of Shakespeare comics and their sources. The subchapter also divides the Shakespeare comics into two broad groups, series and auteur comics.

Chapter 3 titled “Verbal and Visual Elements of Comics” is a theoretical chapter dissecting the notion of visual language or comics, and the semiotic elements the visual language of comics possess. The theory adopts the division into macro-semiotic elements, which encompass page layout and composition, and micro-semiotic elements which include panel and narrative frame, gutter, panel transition, speech balloon and caption. Other visual elements are colour and the depiction of sound, music and silence in comics. The second part focuses on the verbal language of comics, and the way comics include language; this subchapter refers to Shakespearean language and its position within comics. All of the elements and definitions are adopted in the analysis of the selected titles.

The remaining two chapters are purely analytical. Chapter 4 “A Semiotic Analysis of Shakespeare Comics Adaptations” scrutinises 9 instances of Shakespeare comics adaptations: *The Merchant of Venice* (2008), *King Lear* (2009), *Romeo and Juliet* (2013), *Macbeth* (2015) by Gareth Hinds; *The Tempest Illustrated* (2009) by John Allison; *Hamlet* (2010) by Nicky Greenberg; *Romeo and Juliet: The War* (2011) by Stan Lee, Terry Douglas, Mark Work and Skan Srisuwan; *The Tragedie of Macbeth* (2016) by Kenneth Steward Moore; *Macbeth* (2019) by Petri Hänninen and Petri Hiltunen. For a clearer comprehension of the discussed examples, each author and each titles is presented in a short description. The analysis follows the pattern (from macro-semiotics to micro-semiotics) as adopted in chapter 3.

Chapter 5 “A Semiotic Analysis of Shakespeare Comics Appropriations” follows the same structure and pattern which was adopted in chapter 4. It analyses 6 instances of Shakespeare comics appropriations: *Prince of Cats* (2016) by Ron Wimberly; *Shakespeare Ohne Worte* (2016) by Frank Flöthmann, which includes five short stories: *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Tempest* and *Othello*; *Findlay Macbeth* (2020), *The Prince of Denmark Street* (2022), *The Midsummer Night’s Dream Team* (2023a), *Richard the Third* (2023b) by Kev F. Sutherland. Each author is provided with a biographical note and the comics are given a summary of the setting and character changes. The analysis follows the pattern from macro-semiotics to micro-

semiotics, with each of the elements discussed separately, as well as comparing and contrasting them with Shakespeare comics adaptation where possible.

The dissertation finishes with conclusions of the findings and possible adoption of the theoretical framework in the future and the impact the thesis might have on Shakespeare studies, comics studies, and adaptation studies. The analysis of the selected adaptations and appropriations allows to reach a general conclusion of the complexity of Shakespeare comics, their history, themes, aesthetics. However, comics creators adopt only a limited number of semiotics elements, they neither experiment with the formal semiotic elements, nor introduce new ones to meet their artistic purpose. Shakespeare comics, in majority of cases, adopt the same semiotic element as other comics. However, as the medium matures the authors are more open to experiment with the form. A surprising conclusion is sustaining the link with the source text in every example, the link can be a single line from the text or the title, but the authors preserve the link. This is particularly surprising in case of appropriations which are known for altering the plot, the characters and the language.

The thesis also includes Appendix 1 which lists all the instances of Shakespeare comics, Shakespeare comics adaptations and Shakespeare appropriations that the author was able to find and trace. Each title is provided with bibliographical data. Appendix 1 is to facilitate the reader with the topic, indicating the diversity and plethora of Shakespeare comics.

Streszczenie

Niniejsza rozprawa analizuje wybrane komiksowe adaptacje sztuk Shakespeare'a wydane po roku 2000 w amerykańsko-europejskim obszarze kulturowym, które są pracami autorskimi, niebędącymi częścią serii. Praca obejmuje i łączy trzy duże dziedziny: badania nad Shakespeare'em, badania nad adaptacją, oraz badania komiksowe. Celem pracy było odpowiedzenie na pytania badawcze, w jaki sposób adaptacje komiksowe sztuk Shakespeare'a tworzą narrację i znaczenie; czy adaptacje komiksowe sztuk Shakespeare'a wykorzystują wachlarz narzędzi komiksowych już dostępnych, czy może autorzy próbowali stworzyć nowe elementy narracyjne, by snuć narrację; w jaki sposób czytelnik odkodowuje i interpretuje elementy komiksowe w adaptacjach i zawłaszczaniach sztuk Shakespeare'a; czy dobór tych elementów wpływa na interpretację dzieła; czy i w jaki sposób wcześniejsza znajomość treści sztuki przyczynia się do zrozumienia komiksu; w jaki sposób czytać komiks. Próba odpowiedzi na pytania badawcze wymagała także pytania dodatkowe dotyczące ogólnego zagadnienia definicji komiksu.

Analiza skupia się na 15 komiksach będących adaptacjami sztuk Shakespeare'a; są to *The Merchant of Venice* (2008), *King Lear* (2009), *Romeo and Juliet* (2013), *Macbeth* (2015) (Gareth Hinds); *The Tempest Illustrated* (2009; John Allison); *Hamlet* (2010; Nicky Greenberg); *Romeo and Juliet: The War* (2011; Stan Lee, Terry Douglas, Mark Work i Skan Srisuwan); *The Tragedie of Macbeth* (2016; Kenneth Steward Moore); *Macbeth* (2019; Petri Hänninen i Petri Hiltunen); *Prince of Cats* (2016; Ron Wimberly); *Shakespeare Ohne Worte* (2016; Frank Flöthmann; komiks zawiera pięć krótkich historyjek: *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Tempest* oraz *Othello*); *Findlay Macbeth* (2020), *The Prince of Denmark Street* (2022), *The Midsummer Night's*

Dream Team (2023a), *Richard the Third* (2023b) (Kev F. Sutherland) W analizie wykorzystano teorię semiotyki komiksu (podstawa zaczerpnięta od makro-semiotyki i mikro-semiotyki Groensteena), teorię adaptacji (głównie Hutcheon i Sanders), teorię reader-response criticism. Schemat teorii wizualnej narracji, która została stworzona, by analizować komiksy adaptacyjne, może być także wykorzystany przy analizowaniu innych publikacji.

Początkiem rozważań jest sformułowanie definicji komiksu, która będzie wykorzystana jako narzędzie badawcze umożliwiający dobór materiału badawczego do analizy. Próba definicji zjawiska komiksu jest skomplikowanym procesem z powodu zawłości historycznych oraz zróżnicowania definicji i zjawisk, czego przykładem jest pasek komiksowy (*comic strip*), rysunek humorystyczny (*cartoon*), komiks alternatywny (*comix*), czy też powieść graficzna (*graphic novel*). Chociaż to ostatnie zjawisko jest niezwykle rozpowszechnionym terminem, wydaje się ono także nieadekwatne i nieprecyzyjne, dlatego też przyjęto bardziej ogólny termin narracji graficznej (*graphic narrative*) zaproponowany przez Hillary Chute.

Rozważania te stanowią podstawę do wyciągnięcia wniosków i sformułowania definicji komiksu jako medium, które wyraża swój potencjał narracyjny poprzez połączenie werbalno-wizualne, chociaż element werbalny w postaci słów umieszczonych w panelach komiksowych jest elementem konstytutywnym, lecz pomocniczym. Komiks jest przykładem sztuki sekwencyjnej, dlatego sekwencja, zarówno w obrębie jednego obrazu lub pomiędzy dwoma i więcej panelami jest kluczem do tworzenia spójnej narracji. Jest to medium masowe, drukowane, wydawane w formie zeszytów lub kodeksu (choć nie wyklucza się istnienia komiksu elektronicznego lub komputerowego, które jednak mogą wymagać innych narzędzi interpretacyjnych). Komiks dzieli się na dwie podstawowe kategorie: komiks anglo-amerykański oraz franko-belgijski (europejski), wykluczę się z tej domeny podobne zjawiska pochodzące z Azji takie jak japońska manga czy też koreańska manhwa. Zjawisko komiksu odnosi się do przykładów sztuki sekwencyjnej zapoczątkowanej pod koniec XIX w.; na wytworzenie się form, które współcześnie identyfikowane są jako komiks, mieli wpływ tzw. ojcowie komiksu William Hogarth, Rodolphe Töpffer, Gustave Doré, Wilhelm Busch i chociaż nie można skategoryzować ich twórczości jako komiksu, stworzyli oni podwaliny dla tej formy sztuki. Oznacza to także, że przykłady

sztuki sekwencyjnej stworzonej wcześniej nie można sklasyfikować jako komiks (lub proto-komiks), gdyż termin ten nie działa retroaktywnie.

Komiks jest ogólnym terminem zjawiska opowiadania za pomocą sekwencji obrazów i połączenie werbalno-wizualnego, najbardziej rozpowszechnionym gatunkiem komiksowym jest komiks superbohaterski, jednakże błędne jest identyfikowanie komiksu tylko z tym gatunkiem. Niszowym gatunkiem komiksowym są adaptacje literatury, które zaczęły pojawiać się na początku XX wieku i ustabilizowały swoją pozycję na rynku wydawniczym w latach 40tych XX w., głównie poprzez serię *Classics Illustrated* Alberta Kantera. Badacze komiksu adaptującego literaturę (np. William B. Jones Jr.; Boschenhoff) nie skupiają się na cechach charakterystycznych publikacji ani na ich zróżnicowaniu, natomiast badacze adaptacji nie poświęcają komiksowi wystarczającej uwagi i rzadziej traktują go jako poważny i obszerny materiał badawczy. Dlatego też zaproponowano definicję komiksu adaptacyjnego, aby zwrócić uwagę na ten typ komiksu, definicja obejmuje nie tylko przełożenie literatury na komiks, ale także wykorzystanie tego medium, by adaptować filmy czy też seriale najczęściej w celach komercyjnych.

Definicja komiksu adaptacyjnego jest bardzo szeroka, przegląd samych komiksów adaptujących Shakespeare'a ujawnia ich zróżnicowane pod względem tematyki i źródeł. Aby lepiej zidentyfikować i sklasyfikować publikacje wykorzystujące Shakespeare'a zaproponowano termin komiksy szekspirowskie (na podobieństwo filmu szekspirowskiego), który obejmuje zarówno pełne adaptacje sztuk, jak i tylko fragmenty, transpozycje sonetów, obrazki humorystyczne pojawiające się w gazetach i czasopismach, komiksowe biografie, a także wykorzystanie postaci Shakespeare'a i jego sztuk jako inspiracji do kolejnych adaptacji (np. *The Sandman* Neila Gaimana, czy też seria *Kill Shakespeare*). Ten pojemny termin, mimo że przydatny, okazuje się jednak zbyt szeroki i niewystarczający dla celów analitycznych, dlatego też zaproponowano dwa kolejne terminy: komiksowe adaptacje Shakespeare'a (*Shakespeare comics adaptations*) oraz komiksowe zawłaszczenia Shakespeare's (*Shakespeare comics appropriations*). Terminy te skupiają się na przełożeniu tekstu sztuki Shakespeare'a na język komiksu, a podział na adaptacje i zawłaszczenia (*adaptation* i *appropriation* zapożyczone od Sanders) odnoszą się do podejścia autora względem tekstu oraz całego procesu adaptacyjnego.

Zjawisko komiksu często definiuje się jako hybrydę, gdyż łączy w sobie elementy werbalno-wizualne, wcześniej interpretowane także jako połączenie literatury i sztuk plastycznych (obrazu). Dysertacja nadal postrzega komiks jako hybrydę, ale jako hybrydę inspirującą się różnymi mediami i mającą potencjał, by wpływać na inne media. Praca postrzega komiks jako hybrydę czerpiącą z literatury, filmu, teatru i sztuk wizualnych. Co więcej, komiks może oddziaływać także na te media. Pojęcie hybrydy jest tutaj dodatkowo ważne, gdyż komiksy szekspirowskie, jak i komiksowe adaptacje i zawłaszczenia Shakespeare'a są inspirowane nie tylko przez sam tekst, ale także wcześniejsze adaptacje filmowe, przedstawienia teatralne czy też obrazy, a tym samym mogą wpływać na adaptację.

Pojęcia komiksowe adaptacje Shakespeare'a oraz komiksowe zawłaszczenia Shakespeare'a łączą w sobie trzy zasadnicze elementy: wiedzę o Szekspirze i jego sztukach, wiedzę komiksową i wiedzę z teorii adaptacji. Dogłębne rozumienie tych terminów wymaga sięgnięcia po teorie adaptacji, by rozróżnić między adaptacją a zawłaszczeniem, a także jakie procesy wpływają na ich kształt. Dyskusja o teorii adaptacji obejmuje takie zagadnienia jak adaptacja jako proces i produkt, tryby zaangażowania (*modes of engagement*), kwestie wierności tekstu oraz płynność tekstu.

Komiks nie pojawił się nagle w XX wieku, a jego powstanie poprzedzone jest wieloma przykładami sztuki sekwencyjnej; komiks szekspirowski także nie pojawił się nagle, a jego powstanie wiąże się z historią wizualnej prezentacji sztuk Shakespeare'a w malarstwie czy też ilustracjach książkowych. Współczesne adaptacje można podzielić na dwie obszerne grupy: serie wydawnicze mające jednego edytora, które tworzone są dla celów edukacyjnych oraz komiks autorski (*auteur*), którego powstanie wiąże się głównie z artystyczną potrzebą ekspresji. W obu grupach można znaleźć przykłady adaptacji, jak i zawłaszczenia, jednakże zawłaszczenie nie jest popularną formą wśród twórców komiksów szekspirowskich. Wydaje się, że szanują oni na tyle tekst i pozycję Shakespeare'a w kulturze, że nie ingerują w fabułę i przedstawienie bohaterów. Ta tendencja zaczyna się jednak zmieniać, niemniej liczba zawłaszczeń jest zdecydowanie mniejsza niż adaptacji.

Medium komiksowe wykorzystuje język wizualny i język werbalny do prowadzenia narracji. Język wizualny komiksu składa się z elementów makro-semiotycznych takich jak kompozycja paneli na stronie (*mise-en-page*) oraz mikro-semiotycznych takich jak: panel i rama narracyjna, chmurki komiksowe, przepaść

(*gutter*), tranzycja czy domknięcie (*closure*). Inne elementy które, można by sklasyfikować jako mikro-semiotyczne, jednak niepodlegające tak sztywnym regułom semantycznym, to użycie koloru, oraz przestawienie dźwięku, muzyki i ciszy w komiksie. Analiza języka werbalnego skupia się na indywidualnym podejściu każdego autora do pierwotnego tekstu i sposobu, w jaki jest on przekładany na język komiksu. Razem wszystkie te elementy tworzą język komiksu, a czytelnik w procesie czytania interpretuje każdy z tych elementów osobno, następnie tworzy całość w swoim umyśle poprzez połączenie poszczególnych elementów. Przy lekturze adaptacji wpływ potencjalnie może mieć także wcześniejsza znajomość tekstu adaptowanego.

Wstępnie zakładano, że wyjątkowy status tekstu szekspirowskiego oraz artystyczna wolność i kreatywność podczas tworzenia zawłasczeń będzie wymagać nowych środków makro- i mikro-semiotycznych, by wyrazić innowacyjne podejście do interpretacji tekstu, to jest w przełożeniu języka tekstu na język komiksu. Jednakże okazuje się, że twórcy komiksów szekspirowskich wykorzystują semantyczne elementy w dość ograniczonym stopniu, co jednak nie rzutuje na innowacyjność artystyczną każdego autora. Autorzy komiksów nie eksperymentują z elementami semiotycznymi komiksu, lecz raczej ze środkami estetyczno-artystycznymi.

Niniejsza dysertacja łączy w sobie trzy dziedziny: badania komiksowe, badania nad adaptacją i badania szekspirowskie. Analiza, dyskusje i wnioski mogą być korzystne dla każdej z nich. Studia komiksowe otrzymują zebraną podstawową teorię i terminologię dotyczącą komiksu, które dotychczas były rozproszone między monografiami i artykułami naukowymi. Badania nad adaptacją otrzymują pozycję, która skupia się na medium adaptacyjnym — komiksie, który wcześniej nie był analizowany pod tym względem, zwłaszcza że studia adaptacyjne skupiają się głównie na relacji film-literatura. Komiks jako medium adaptacyjne zwraca uwagę na potencjał, który ze sobą niesie. Dotychczas komiks był sprowadzany do anegdoty lub przypisu, że takie adaptacje istnieją, większą uwagę poświęcano adaptacją komiksu w filmie, praca ta zaś zwraca uwagę na nową perspektywę. Ostatnim obszarem są studia szekspirowskie, które będzie można poszerzyć o zagadnienia dotyczące komiksu szekspirowskiego.

Analiza wybranych komiksów wykazała zróżnicowanie w stylach adaptacji sztuk Shakespeare'a, jednakże co zaskakuje to ortodoksyjny sposób prowadzenia narracji. Twórcy adaptacji i zawłasczeń szekspirowskich nie eksperymentują z formą,

kompozycją paneli, ramą narracyjną i chmurką. Wyrazistość tych adaptacji leży w warstwie estetyczno-artystycznej, a nie semiotycznej. Zaskakuje podtrzymywanie związku adaptacji i zawłasczeń komiksowych z tekstem Shakespeare'a, nawet jeśli jest to jedna linijka tekstu czy też tytuł (jest to akurat bardzo ważny element dla komiksu niemego); naturalnie nazwisko słynnego dramatopisarza może nobilitować komiks oraz przyciągać czytelników. Mimo, że komiksy najczęściej przekładają tekst sztuki na obraz komiksowy, to wiele z nich podtrzymuje związek z teatrem, osadzają narrację na scenie teatralnej bądź używają znaków sugerujących taki związek.

Dysertacja pokazuje zróżnicowanie komiksów szekspirowskich, a które dotychczas wzbudzały zainteresowanie szekspirologów w dość ograniczonym stopniu. Mając na uwadze tradycję i historię komiksów szekspirowskich istnieje niebezpieczeństwo, że te publikacje popadną w zapomnienie, zwłaszcza te z początku XX wieku, dlatego też praca ta przybliży badaczom to zjawisko kultury, co może przyczynić się do większego zainteresowania komiksem szekspirowskim.

Praca ta ma także stanowić inspirację i przyczynek do dalszej dyskusji nad zagadnieniami związanymi z komiksem, adaptacją i Shakespeare'em.

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Appendix 1

The subject of the dissertation are examples of selected adaptations of Shakespeare in comics. Naturally, the analysed instances of comics are not the only publications that can be found on the market, in order to display the richness, variety and the bulk of such work. This appendix lists adaptations of Shakespeare's plays in the form of comics from 1940s onwards, most of them have been written in English. However, there are comics which have been written in other languages and have not been translated into English, these can also be found here. Although there are numerous instances of plays adapted into comics, there are comics which have not been rewritten, such as: *All's Well that Ends Well*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, *Measure for Measure*, *Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Coriolanus*, *Timon of Athens*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *Henry IV part II*, *Henry VI parts I, II, III*, *King John*, *Pericles*, and *Richard II*.

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