



Stockholm
University

Department of English

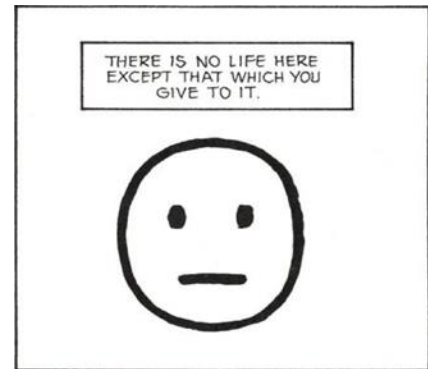
Narrative Perspective in a Wordless Graphic Novel: Shaun
Tan's *The Arrival*

Hanna Johnson
Bachelor Degree Project
Literature
HT18
Supervisor: Adnan Mahmutović

Abstract

In a narrative the narrator tells the story, and the focalizer is a character through whose eyes the story is seen. The narrator is thus the one who speaks, whilst the focalizer is silent. The identification of these two narratological features is made with the help of verbal cues such as personal pronouns for instance. Determining the narrator and the focalizer can sometimes be challenging due to ambiguous cues in the analyzed text, as well as narratological aspects which at times can be difficult to distinguish from each other. Determining the narrator and the focalizer in graphic narratives (comics) with no narrative voice, or which completely lack words, must be done with the help of pictorial cues instead. In this thesis, Shaun Tan's wordless graphic narrative *The Arrival* is used in order to show how the narrator and the focalizer can be determined by combining pictorial cues with the reader's general knowledge of storytelling as well as his or her experiences from real life scenarios. To analyze narratological features in *The Arrival*, I employ terminology from comics studies, literary and film narratology. My analysis shows that determining the narrator and the focalizer in narratives lacking explicit narrative voice is possible by using only pictorial cues.

Keywords: narrator; focalizer; graphic novel; Mieke Bal; Gérard Genette; Scott McCloud; Shaun Tan; *The Arrival*



- Scott McCloud

In this thesis, I conduct a narratological analysis of the functions of the “narrator” and “focalization” in Shaun Tan’s wordless graphic novel *The Arrival*, in order to show that verbal cues for determining these are not necessary, and that medium-specific (comics) iconography is equally useful. *The Arrival* is a graphic novel in which the narrative is conveyed exclusively with illustrations. In a narrative text¹, the story is told by a narrative agent, a “narrator” (Bal 16). In some texts, such as wordless graphic narratives like *The Arrival*, or comics without an explicit narrative voice, the narrator might appear to be missing due to the lack of words indicating the narrator.² Furthermore, the narrating can, for instance, be done from different characters’ points of view. This

¹ For a further discussion on what is considered a text, see for instance Mieke Bal, W.F. Hanks, and Karin Barber. Bal (1985) states that text is a narrative artefact “composed of language signs” including all narratives which have an identifiable beginning and end (5). Hanks (1989) defines a text as “any configuration of signs that is coherently interpretable by some community of users” (95), therefore clarifying that a text does not necessarily need to include written text. Barber (2005) expands the definition by considering a text as a permanent artefact in relation to performance, which is the meaning-making process of the text. She includes oral traditions in the definition of a text (264-66).

² For discussions on a more inclusive view regarding the genre of graphic narratives, see Daniel Stein and Jan-Noël Thon 4-7; Barbara Kiefer 7-8; Scott McCloud 18-22; for a discussion on a more excluding view, see Douglas Wolk 61-4. For the purpose of this text the terms “graphic narrative”, “comics”, and “graphic novel”, are used synonymously. Whenever it is important to emphasize that the graphic narrative is either purely pictorial, or lacking a narrative voice, the word “wordless” is added to the term.

means that the focus of a specific part of a narrative is set from a point of view of a certain, identifiable character (Genette 189). The narration is then “focalized” through these characters, and the character in question is the “focalizer” (Genette 189; Bal 19). The terms narrator and focalizer are thus closely related, but not interchangeable, as the narrator narrates, and the focalizer is silent.

A narrator is defined as “the inner-textual (textually encoded) highest-level speech position from which the current narrative discourse as a whole originates” (Margolin, par. 1). According to this definition, written text is thus required in order to have a narrator. “Voice”, in turn, defines the aspects of who is telling the story (Genette 32), and is therefore essential in determining the narrating agent, the narrator. Finding a narrative agent and a focalizer in a text can be challenging. This applies to both verbal and graphic narratives. In verbal narratives the reader receives information about the narrator and the focalizer in different ways with verbal cues in the text, for instance, through the use of the personal pronouns “I”, “s/he” and rarely “you” (Bal 21). The personal pronouns used indicate the narrator’s relation to the story told in terms of the narrator’s “involvement and noninvolvement in the story” (Walsh 497). A narrator can narrate the story in a first-person form, as in a diary novel, or in a third-person form, telling a story from some distance. Personal pronouns can also be used to determine the focalizer as they can indicate which character sees the story at a given moment (Genette 191-94).

Another dimension is related to the narrator’s involvement in the narrative “diegesis”, that is, the “imagined storyworld” (Halliwell, par. 16). When the narrator is involved in the story, it is a matter of a “homodiegetic narrator”, whereas a “heterodiegetic narrator” is not involved in the story told (Genette 244-45). Further, the act of narrating can be done from different levels in relation to the diegesis. There are multiple levels for narration, for instance, the narrator can be an active part of the diegesis as it happens, thus being on the same level as the diegesis, and the narration can be done in retrospect, when the narrator’s act of narrating is done on another level in relation to the diegesis. When the story is narrated on the same level as the diegesis, the narrator is “intradiegetic”, and when the narration is done from another level of story, such as a story within a story, the narrator is “extradiegetic” (Walsh 497). Same temporal aspects can also give cues about the focalizer, as not all characters are present at all times in the narrative.

When verbal cues for the narrator and the focalizer are lacking completely, like in *The Arrival*, the task of determining them is even more difficult. Some critics even claim that verbal cues are necessary in order to have a narrator at all (Thon 70). The reader of any text, due to general knowledge of how narrative works, expects that the narrative is told by someone, and that the point of view in the narration can shift between different focalizers. In *The Arrival*, however, without typical textual cues, the reader needs to use different strategies to determine the narrator and the focalizer as seen in figure 1. The same applies for comics that use text in speech balloons, but lack narrative voice altogether.



Figure 1. The protagonist saying goodbye to his family upon his departure.

What makes the act of reading graphic narratives different from reading a verbal novel, thus making a different reading strategy a necessity, is the fact that the panels and page layouts require multilevel reading. This means that the reader has to pay attention to

many levels of reading simultaneously both zooming in to a panel, reading it individually; and also zooming out to viewing/reading the whole page as an entity (Horstkotte 41). For instance, in figure 1, the reader might focus on the panel in which three hands are holding each other. In order to understand what this panel brings to the whole story, the reader needs to zoom out to see the surrounding panels, and thus read them all simultaneously, as parts of an entity (the page layout). What is more, the page layout is always fixed and does not depend on the way the book is printed (size of the page, font sizes et cetera). This interplay between the panels might encumber the determining of a narrator and a focalizer, as the panels can be interpreted both as a part of a sequence, and also as individual panels. However, there are cues to be found in the illustrations helping the reader to find a narrator and a focalizer even in narratives without an explicit narrative voice. These cues could be presented, for example, in the form of applying changes of perspective in the illustrations, or alternating colors indicating different places and times (Horstkotte 45).

While narratology can, for instance, aid in analyzing the choice of the narrative agent, and the ways in which this choice makes an impact on the narrative as well as on the reader's understanding and interpretation of it (Bal 4), a more specific terminology is necessary for graphic narratives without a narrative voice. Some comics-specific tools for analyzing narratological aspects are therefore required, but also, given that *The Arrival* uses an illustration technique which resembles filmic sequences, even narratology concerning moving pictures is called for.

Before addressing aspects regarding the narrator in *The Arrival*, it is of importance to understand some characteristics of graphic narratives (the medium of comics) in general. Comics is described by Scott McCloud as "juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer" (McCloud 9). In comics, the images are called "icons". These icons can be both non-pictorial, such as letters, as well as pictorial, such as symbols and illustrations. Non-pictorial icons have a fixed meaning and thus give little room for different interpretations (McCloud 27-8). For instance, the icon for number five "5" always gives the same connotation regardless the style it is written or drawn in. The meaning of pictorial icons, on the other hand, can be interpreted more freely albeit being dependent on how they are represented by the artist (McCloud 27-8). For example, connotations of a drawn face differ greatly depending on the style it

is drawn in, and thus require different types of interpretation from the reader (McCloud 59).

Furthermore, Evelyn Arizpe's (2013) observations from existing studies on research in the field of meaning-making from wordless picturebooks conclude that active reader-participation is essential for enabling "the reader to co-construct meaning" (Arizpe 166). The very nature of comics prevents the reader from seeing every detail of the story as the icons are arranged in juxtaposed, snapshot-like panels. In between these panels there is an empty space called "the gutter" (McCloud 66). The filling of these "gutters," and thus completing the narrative sequence, is an active meaning-making process done by the reader. McCloud calls this process "committing closure" (McCloud 63). Readers need to be able to recognize the juxtaposed panels as a meaningful sequence (Arizpe 165). The process of meaning-making here depends on the reciprocal and mutually dependent relationship between the illustrations and the reader. This entails that wordless graphic novels require a higher level of reader participation, and that the reader co-narrates the story as the narrator seems to be silent, or is practically invisible in that the typical narratological cues are missing.

Describing the setting and the characters in texts helps the reader gain a larger understanding of the narrative as these descriptions allow the reader to "see" the story. This is called "imagery", and is defined as "the use of figurative language to evoke a feeling, to call to mind an idea, or to describe an object" (Mays, appendix). In other words, imagery in texts is used to create mental pictures in the reader's mind, helping the reader visualize the text. Rosemary Ross Johnston (2012) refers to this use of imagery as "pictures-in-words". Johnston further argues that the pictures-in-words logic in reverse can be applied to wordless graphic narratives with the help of the term "reversed imagery". Instead of words creating mental pictures and visualizing of the text, the pictures in graphic narratives create a mental text in the reader's mind, referred to as "words-in-pictures" (Johnston 422). The reader of a wordless graphic novel can thus "read" the imagery. In other words, the imagery depicted visually in the pictures has the same function as the imagery depicted textually, both of them aiming to assist the reader in grasping the narrative. The difference is, of course, that these two uses of imagery are the results of two different techniques, one using words and the other using pictures. Nevertheless, the two techniques are mirror images of each other. In wordless graphic novels, this could be seen as a way of "hearing the narrator" as a part of the reader's meaning-making process of the wordless narrative. Images can thus give the

reader vital cues on the characteristics of the narrator. As this thesis concerns determining the narrator without any verbal cues, the concept of hearing the narrator is essential.

Jan-Noël Thon (2015) discusses the matter of a narrator in graphic narratives, and states that a narrative character is constructed by the reader based on cues detected in the narration (70). This concurs with Margolin's (2014) view, as he claims that the narrator is "constructed in readers' minds at the point of intersection of individual textual data and general cognitive categories possessed by these readers" (par. 4). Thon claims, that in order to be able to have a narrator, a narrative must in the majority of cases include "verbal narration that we can ascribe to a 'speaker'" (70). Margolin expands this claim by arguing that the reader constructs the narrator both with the help of "textual signals" as well as previous knowledge of "storytelling scenarios" and experiences from reality (par. 4). This suggests that in order to identify the narrator, the reader must have verbal cues. However, Thon admits that it is possible to recognize the speaker with the help of some pictorial cues (86).

In the case of wordless graphic narratives, I argue that the reader's strategy of constructing the narrator is a mixture of Thon and Margolin's claims, as the strategy would have to rely on previous knowledge of storytelling in general and pictorial cues. By previous knowledge of storytelling, I mean that readers learn how to pick up on narrative cues (whether or not they are familiar with narratological terminology). That is, readers expect there to be a narrator, and if most typical cues like pronouns are missing, readers will nevertheless try and find a way to determine who is telling the story. For instance, in *The Arrival*, as seen in figure 2, despite the lack of words, the reader is given cues. The man in the first panel is the protagonist in the story. The reader sees cues that the protagonist is communicating with someone. This is recognizable from communication in real life as well as the dialogue technique in stories.



Figure 2. The protagonist having a conversation with a woman.

In the first panel we see that the protagonist is looking at the person next to him, seen in the second panel. The protagonist holds up a paper, which the reader recognizes as his identification paper from previous panels in *The Arrival*, while communicating with the woman. His eyes are directed to the woman, and his mouth is slightly open, indicating that he is speaking to her. The fact that he is holding the paper with the print side towards the woman, indicates that he is talking about the paper while showing his paper to the woman. The woman responds to the communication by showing with her body language that she has something to add to the conversation. Her hand is on her chest, which could mean that she is either emotionally affected by the protagonist's words, or that she is saying something about herself. It is clear that the two are communicating, as most of us have participated in situations where we communicate with each other, and in which body language is a part of the act of communicating. Despite the lack of speech balloons, it is clear from the juxtaposed panels and the gutter in between that the characters are having a dialogue. Now, regarding the narrator, although the protagonist is talking in the first panel, and the woman in the second, they are not the ones narrating the narrative. Instead, the narrator is observing the protagonist and the woman as they talk to each other. As the protagonist and the woman cannot observe themselves from such a distance, this indicates that the story is told from a third-person point of view. The narrator's voice is thus present and detectable, consequently being inner-textual despite the lack of words. The reader comes to this conclusion with the help of previous knowledge from real life scenarios and storytelling in combination with pictorial cues.

In *The Arrival*, as seen in figure 1, the narrator is not explicitly referred to as a character, therefore suggesting that the narrator is external/heterodiegetic. As mentioned before, a heterodiegetic narrator is an external narrator, who is not a part of

the story himself, but merely an outside voice telling a story of some characters (Genette 244). An external narrator “never refers explicitly to himself as a character” (Bal 22). An external narrator can therefore not be identified as being an active participator in the story.

However, a narrator can alter throughout a text, and further analysis is required in order to offer a more comprehensive conclusion on the narrator’s position in the story. In a narrative, the narrator, as well as the narrator’s/narrators’ participatory position in the diegesis may vary during the course of the story. This is the case with *The Arrival*. In figures 3 and 4, positioned in sequence on subsequent pages in the novel, a shift from a heterodiegetic narrator into a homodiegetic narrator can be seen. A homodiegetic narrator addresses an internal narrator who is telling a story as one of the characters in the diegesis, and who therefore is a part of the diegesis (Genette 244-45; Schmid 68-9). When the narrator can be identified as a character in the story, the internal narrator is a character-bound narrator (Bal 22).



Figure 3. The woman showing her identification papers.

In figure 3, the reader sees that it is now the woman who is talking. As stated earlier, this is narrated by an external/heterodiegetic narrator. However, in the last two panels in figure 3, the illustrations zoom in on the photo of the girl on the woman’s identification paper. In figure 4, the same girl appears, now in a sequence of pictures, indicating a story in progress. This subtle change from the static zoomed-in photo in figure 3 to the illustrations depicting events in figure 4 below, indicates a change of the narrator. In figure 3, the story is told by the external/heterodiegetic narrator. In figure 4, the woman tells her own story in retrospect. Therefore, the narrator changes into an internal/homodiegetic and a character-bound narrator.



Figure 4. The woman's background story.

The narrator's position can further be analyzed in terms of the level of the act of narrating in relation to the diegesis. These narrative levels aim to "describe the relations between an act of narration and the diegesis" (Pier, par. 1). This can be done with the help of the concepts of "intradiegetic" and "extradiegetic" narrators. A character who is actively participating in the diegesis telling the story as the events take place, is an intradiegetic narrator (Genette 248). This character is therefore both a narrative agent and an acting agent in the story. A narrator who is not a part of the diegesis, in other words a narrator who tells a story without participating in the diegesis himself at the moment of the narration, is called an "extradiegetic" narrator (Genette 248; Pier, par. 1). This character is only a narrative agent, and does not have a part as an acting agent in the diegesis at that very moment. An extradiegetic narrator can be a part of the storyworld on another level than where the diegesis takes place, for instance a character telling a story in retrospect; or be external to the storyworld (Genette 228-29, 248).

Similar to the difficulties with determining the narrator as homodiegetic or heterodiegetic, determining whether the narration is done by an intradiegetic or an extradiegetic narrator in graphic narratives can be equally challenging due to the lack of verbal cues (Thon 73). Usually, heterodiegetic narrators in graphic narratives are extradiegetic, and recognized as the speaker conveying spatiotemporal information to the reader (Thon 74). They could for instance give information such as where and when

the panel is situated, and thus require use of words (and numbers). Homodiegetic narrators are usually recognized with the help of verbal cues, such as using the pronoun “I”. Whether the homodiegetic narrator is extradiegetic or intradiegetic can be detected with the combined verbal and pictorial cues (Thon 76). Although verbal cues make the determining of the extradiegetic and intradiegetic narrators easier, cues can be detected also in purely pictorial narratives. For instance, as seen in figure 5, pictorial cues indicating an extradiegetic-heterodiegetic narrator can be detected.



Figure 5. The protagonist’s first encounters with his new home town.

The narrator tells the protagonist’s story from an external point of view. Whether the observer is a part of the storyworld, or perceives the storyworld from outside, can be challenging to determine. However, as already stated, the narrator is not participating in the diegesis, and as he “never refers explicitly to himself as a character” (Bal 22), it can be established that the narrator is external/heterodiegetic. Furthermore, as the narration is done with the help of a series of illustrations which resemble snapshots, it is indicated that the narration is not done as the diegesis happens. This is an indication of an extradiegetic narrator. The narrator is thus extradiegetic-heterodiegetic. It could, potentially, be argued that the narrator is extradiegetic-homodiegetic, and that the story is told by the protagonist with the help of the snapshots in retrospect. He would therefore be telling his own story in the story. However, there are some other

extradiegetic-homodiegetic narrators in the novel which are presented with explicit cues. As these cues are missing in the case of the protagonist, I argue that the protagonist is not a narrator anywhere in the novel. A discussion on the extradiegetic-homodiegetic narrators and the cues presented in the novel follows next.

As shown earlier with the help of figures 3 and 4, the narrator shifts from heterodiegetic to homodiegetic. This happens on three occasions in total, and I will discuss all of them in this paper, each of which follow the same pattern in terms of pictorial cues. These cues can facilitate both the determining of an internal/homodiegetic and an external/heterodiegetic narrator, as well as whether the narrator is intradiegetic or extradiegetic. In *The Arrival*, many of these cues have to do with temporal aspects: order, frequency, and duration. I will deal with duration later on, and focus now on order and frequency. Order deals with the matter of “temporal duality”, which is the time of the narrative itself in contrast to the time of the events in the diegesis (Genette 35). One term used for analyzing order in narratives is “analepsis”. It describes all events which are told after-the-fact, that is, events which took place in the past of the diegesis, and which therefore disrupt the chronological order of the narrative (Genette 40). In wordless graphic narratives, however, it is often challenging to determine the temporal duality, as there are no words with tempus to guide the reader. The order can instead be implicated with different kinds of strategies which include using color, shape, position, and framing that deviate from their normal use in that specific graphic narrative (Horstkotte 45). Changing the background color on the pages on which the panels are placed could for instance “indicate a sudden change of atmosphere or a shift in the ontological order (reality vs. dreamworld)” (Horstkotte 34). Some of the pictorial cues implicating order and a shift in the narrative voice can be found in *The Arrival*. These cues will be addressed below, when figures 6, 7 and 8 are discussed.

“Frequency” denotes the repetitive character of the narrative concerning the temporal duality (Genette 35). In verbal texts this repetition is done with repeating words and phrases. In pictorial texts, the repetition has to be done in different ways. Panels in comics require multilevel reading as the reader has to pay attention to at least three levels of reading simultaneously. This interplay between the panels is called “braiding” (Horstkotte 41). There are two dimensions in the panel which contradict each other. The first level concerns the level of the story, meaning that the reader registers the panel as one of many building blocks in the sequential story (Horstkotte

41). In other words, the reader zooms out in order to grasp the entire narrative. The second level deals with the level of the panel, which enables the reader to focus on the details of that specific snap shot in the story (Horstkotte 41). On this level, the reader zooms in instead. The third level refers to the importance of the panel for the narrative structure, for instance in the form of “memorable” panels due to their deviating forms, styles, or repetition in the narrative (Horstkotte 41). Repetition could be performed on either of these levels, for instance with repeating color scheme to indicate a reoccurring concept covering a large part of the story, a page, or a single panel. Frequency can also be detected when similar kinds of illustrations are used repeatedly throughout the story, thus creating a pattern which conveys an important cue to the reader. As will be discussed below, Tan’s use of repetition gives the reader pictorial cues about the narrative structures in *The Arrival*.

The shift of the narrator is clearly shown in figures 6, 7 and 8, which are on consecutive pages in the novel. The pattern is similar to the one in the case of the woman telling her story in figures 2, 3 and 4. In both these sequences, cues concerning temporal aspects help us to determine aspects of the narrator. In figure 6, the upcoming shift of the change of the narrator is clearly indicated. In the first panel in figure 6, the protagonist finishes his emigration story. This is repetition from figure 2, where the change of the narrator was indicated in the same manner. The following four panels in figure 6 indicate the change of the narrative voice into the voice of the man with the glasses. The body language of the man with the glasses is similar to the body language of the woman the protagonist talked to earlier in figure 2. Both these similarities are repeated a third time in the story, as the narrator is once again changed from extradiegetic-heterodiegetic to extradiegetic-homodiegetic. The third sequence is discussed towards the end of this paper. The temporal aspect of frequency is hence applied here in the form of repetition in the narrative. After this, the process of changing the narrator continues in figure 6 by slowly zooming into the eye of the man with the glasses, in which the reader can see flames. As human eyes do not typically reflect flames when no flames are not in the vicinity, the meaning of the image is to show and emphasize a shift in the narration.



Figure 6. The man with the glasses tells about himself.

From the eye the reader is then transported into the story of the man with the glasses, as seen in figure 7, illustrating the horrors he escaped from.



Figure 7. The inferno the man with the glasses experienced.

The flames in figure 7 show a clear connection to the flames in the man's eye. The effect of the gradual zooming-in of the eye is that the distance between the eye and the

image in the next panel is very short and intimate, indicating that the story in figure 7 belongs to the man with the glasses, and that he is the narrator of his own story, which is told in retrospect.

In figure 8, it becomes even more evident that the story is told by the man with the glasses, who has experienced the inferno himself. Therefore, the narrator in figures 7 and 8 is an extradiegetic-homodiegetic narrator. Since the pattern is the same as previously with the woman telling her story as seen in figures 3 and 4, she too is an extradiegetic-homodiegetic narrator. Thon claims that figures 3 and 4 suggest an intradiegetic narrator (86). I disagree because the pictorial cues clearly indicate a narrative which happened in the past. This means that the narrator could not possibly be telling the story as it happens, not the least due to the fact that the narrator is considerably older when the narrative is told in comparison to when the events in the story took place.



Figure 8. The man with the glasses escapes the inferno with his wife.

In addition, it is important to mention one difficulty in using these narratological terms in the medium of comics with no narrative voice, namely the difficulty of expressing a first-person narrator. If the first-person point of view were to be illustrated realistically, the narrator could never literally appear (in a drawing), but rather only the events and items s/he sees. When the narrator is homodiegetic, the narration could therefore only

consist of characters, events and items surrounding the homodiegetic narrator, which is not the case in figure 8 for example. This would suggest that the narrating is done from a third-person view regardless of who the narrator is, meaning that the narrator is always heterodiegetic. In film, the camera can be used as a narrator (Kuhn and Schmidt, par. 23). Applying the same logic in *The Arrival*, the camera taking the snapshot-like photos could thus also be used as a narrator. In *The Arrival*, however, all the occasions when the narration is done by extradiegetic-homodiegetic narrators concern memories. As memories, akin dreams, can defy logic for instance by including details and people one has not observed oneself, I still argue that the narration on these occasions in *The Arrival* is indeed done by extradiegetic-homodiegetic narrators. The details these narrators could not have seen themselves, as well as the images of themselves, are necessary reconstructions made of the events in retrospect by the narrators, in order to be conveyed in the medium of graphic narratives.

The cues for a change of the narrator are explicit in the illustrations. The change of the narrator is shown both with repetition, the zooming action as well as the background color on the pages, against which the panels are printed. In figure 6, when the narrator is extradiegetic-heterodiegetic, the color of the background is white. This is consistent throughout the novel, and the same, for instance, in figure 3 in the case of the woman starting to tell her story. As the narrator changes into the man with the glasses, into an extradiegetic-homodiegetic narrator, the background color shifts into black, as seen in figure 8. The same use of color shift can be detected in figure 4, in the case of the woman telling her story. This, then, suggests that the background color indicates a different narrator, therefore being an explicit, purely pictorial cue for the reader.

However, the change of the background color does not only refer to a change of the narrator, it also indicates a change in the temporal order. Revisiting figures 7 and 8, in which the man with the glasses tells his story, the reader notices a change in the narrative, which disrupts the chronological order of the events in the diegesis. Horstkotte suggests that such strategies are indications which imply a change in the temporal order in graphic narratives (34). In Tan's narrative, altered background color signals a significant change. In figures 7 and 8, the extradiegetic-homodiegetic narrator reminisces a memory, a series of events which took place prior to the diegesis, thus proving this section of the story analeptic of nature. The panels printed on the pages with the black background color are all narrations of events that took place in the past

(analeptic narrative). The narrators are telling their stories in retrospect both in the case of the woman in figure 4 and in the case with man with the glasses in figures 7 and 8, and this is pictorially implied by changing the background color from white to black. The changing of background color is thus yet another pictorial cue which helps the reader to determine the narrator in *The Arrival*.

So far, I have discussed the voice in *The Arrival*, the narrator telling the story. Now I will shift focus to discussing the focalizer, that is, the eyes through which the reader sees sequences of events. In order to determine who sees the story in *The Arrival*, the discussion has to start with a comparison between the narrative medium of graphic novel and the narrative medium of film. There are some important similarities between these two media which are relevant here. One of the most significant similarities is the fact that they both use visual representation. This similarity in turn leads to another common denominator: the utilization of sequentiality, which gives the possibility to “confront two (or more) comparable states through the combination of shots into sequences” (Kuhn and Schmidt, par. 1). In comics, according to McCloud’s definition stated earlier, it is the sequentiality that gives the illustrations the means to construct a narrative (9). The significance of the sequentiality brings us to the third temporal aspect in a narrative: duration (the extent of the events and the diegesis) (Genette 35). A term related to duration is “rhythm”, that is, the variations in the speed of a narrative (Genette 88). The sequentiality also allows for quick changes regarding the focalization in a narrative, since a story can be presented from different points of views, and there can be many different points of views in one text (Genette 191). The very turning of the pages when reading a graphic novel gives the reader a “sense of the moving image, as in filmic sequence” (Johnston 430-31). The illustrations in *The Arrival* resemble moving pictures in the sense that they at times create an illusion of a continuous sequence, as the rhythm of the sequences sometimes creates the sense of the moving image on one page (figure 9).

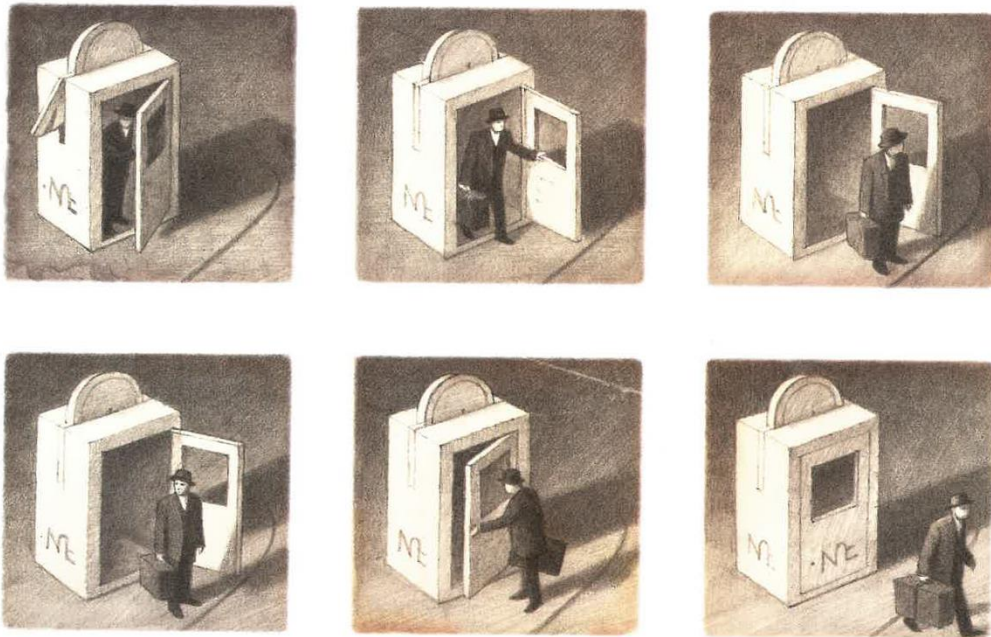


Figure 9. The protagonist arrives to the new country.

Figure 9 is an example of a moment-to-moment panel transition (McCloud 70). In these six panels we see the protagonist exiting a booth. The six panels give the reader a detailed breakdown of the event one significant moment at a time. Although the sequence might at first glance seem unimportant, the two panels of the protagonist looking first to his left, and then to his right, show that the protagonist is unfamiliar with his surroundings. This is essential, as it gives cues on the protagonist's thoughts and mindset on the arrival to the new country. The sequentiality thus facilitates the reader/viewer's understanding.

Focalization can be understood as defining the aspects of which character is "the holder of the 'point of view'" (Bal 19) at a given time in the narrative (through whose eyes the story is seen). Similar to the medium of film, where "everything ... consists of 'looks'" (Kuhn and Schmidt, par. 28), the focal point in which the reader's eyes are directed to is fundamental to wordless graphic narratives. Although it might seem straight forward, it can be difficult to determine where the reader's gaze is focused at any given moment, as the reader, in accordance with the earlier mentioned multilevel reading strategy of braiding, has to register the interplay of the panels on multiple levels simultaneously (Horstkotte 41). Focalization can take place on three levels: "zero focalization", in which the narrator is omniscient, knowing and seeing more than the characters do; "internal focalization" in which the story is seen from one character's

point of view; and “external focalization” according to which the story is seen as an observer without access to the minds of the characters (Genette 189-90; Schmid 92). While figure 9 had an external focalizer, there are many different focalizers in *The Arrival* (figure 10).

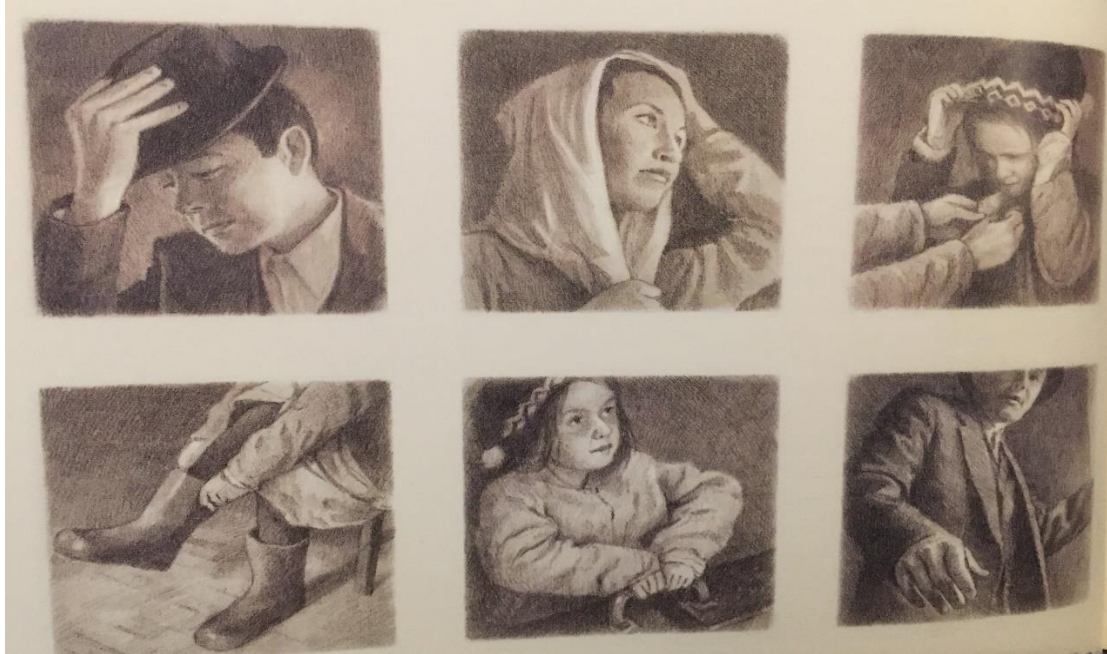


Figure 10. The protagonist and his family preparing for his departure.

There are three focalizers in figure 10. In the first and the second panels the focalizers see each other on the same level, indicating that they are approximately the same height. This suggests that the focalizer in the first panel is the protagonist’s wife. In the second panel the focalizer is the protagonist. In the last panel the angle of the focalizer’s gaze suggests a shorter person as the focalizer, thus indicating that the girl is the one who sees the story at that moment. The very sequentiality of the medium thus allows for swift alterations of the focalizer akin focalizers in films. All three focalizers in figure 10 are internal, telling the story from these characters’ point of view. In figure 11, the story is yet again seen through an external focalizer’s eyes.

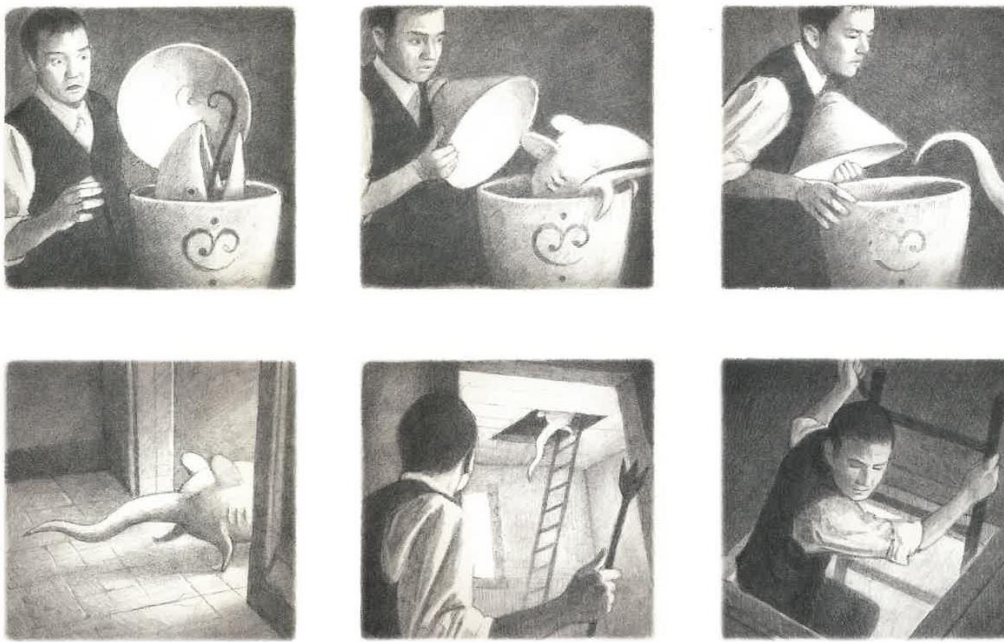


Figure 11. The protagonist discovers a houseguest in his apartment.

Whether the focalizer has access to a character's mind or not can be difficult to determine when we lack conventional thought balloons. In the first panel the reader recognizes a sense of surprise in the protagonist's facial expression. This recognition does not automatically mean that the focalizer has full access to the protagonist's mind. On the contrary, the narrator in figure 11 is not all-knowing, as there are no indications that the narrator can read the protagonist's mind, and the reader appears to know the same amount of information as the narrator does. Although it is evident that the protagonist is in a perplexed state of mind as he discovers the alien creature in his apartment, the reader does not get to know what he is thinking beyond his facial expressions and body language.

I have now discussed the terminology and concepts required to determine a narrator and a focalizer in *The Arrival* individually. In order to further demonstrate that verbal cues are not necessary to identify a narrator and a focalizer in a text, I will now conduct a final narratological analysis in *The Arrival* using the concepts together (see figures 12-14).



Figure 12. The protagonist has a conversation with the old man.

In figure 12, the protagonist gets acquainted with an old man, and they strike a conversation over a drink. The reader understands from real life scenarios that the old man is speaking as his mouth is open, he uses his hands when explaining, and changes his facial expressions as people tend to do when speaking. The pictorial cues reveal that the man is also listening, as he clearly shows with his body language in the third panel that he wants to hear the other speaker better. In the fifth panel the old man holds his hand on his chest indicating that he is saying something about himself. In the last three panels the old man falls silent and seems to be preoccupied with his thoughts. Especially in the second panel it is evident that the narration cannot be done by either of the characters, since they cannot observe themselves from such an angle and distance. The narration is therefore done from a third-person point-of-view (POV). As the protagonist and the old man are the only characters, this suggests, that the story is

told by a heterodiegetic narrator. Furthermore, as the story is conveyed in the form of illustrations resembling snapshots, this indicates that it cannot be told when the events are actually happening. This implies that the narrator is thus not taking part in the diegesis at the time the narration takes place, suggesting that the narrator is extradiegetic (Genette 248; Pier, par. 1). With the help of pictorial cues, the reader can therefore identify the narrator as heterodiegetic-extradiegetic in figure 12. The reader thus needs both pictorial cues as well as real-life experience and knowledge from “storytelling scenarios” (Margolin, par. 4) in order to understand who the narrator is.

The story is told from a third-person POV, but it is not only focalized through the narrator. The sequentiality in figure 12 demonstrates the similarity of graphic novels to the medium of film, and highlights how the sequentiality is utilized to “confront two (or more) comparable states through the combination of shots into sequences” (Kuhn and Schmidt, par. 1). In the first panel in figure 12, the old man looks directly at someone. As the protagonist is sitting across from him, it is clearly indicated that the old man is looking directly at the protagonist. This makes the protagonist the focalizer in the first panel, as the story is temporarily focalized from his point of view. The protagonist is thus an internal focalizer, as the story is seen through the eyes of a character in the story (Genette 189; Schmid 92). In the rest of the panels in figure 12, the focalizer coincides with the external narrator. This can be detected with pictorial cues, as the old man is seen from a different angle although he still keeps looking at someone placed directly opposite to him. In these panels the focalizer does not have any more access to the characters’ minds than the reader does, making the matter of focalization external (Genette 190; Schmid 92).

In figure 12, the last four panels are illustrations showing repetition from the previous sections of the novel. As in figure 2 with the woman, and in figure 6 with the man with the glasses, the old man indicates that he is talking about himself by holding his hand on his chest. This repeated gesture has so far indicated a shift in the narrative from a heterodiegetic-extradiegetic narrator into a homodiegetic-extradiegetic narrator. In both cases with the woman in figure 3, and the man with the glasses in figure 6, this shift has been emphasized by zooming-in on the new narrator. In figure 12 the same is done with a slight difference as the zooming-in is not as explicit. Nevertheless, the focus of both the old man and the viewer is set on the item in the old man’s hand in the last panel in figure 12, replicating the zooming-in with a different kind of technique. As with the woman in figure 3 and the man with the glasses in figure 6, the narrator

shifts after the zooming-in (see figure 13). This gradual zooming-in also emphasizes the uniqueness of the medium of graphic narratives, as multilevel reading is required. The reader is able to both focus on one specific panel, as well as the page as a whole. Simultaneous use of both of these reading perspectives is necessary in order to understand the narrative as a whole (Horstkotte 41).



Figure 13. The old man's memories of him leaving for war.

In the first three panels in figure 13, the illustrations are gradually zoomed out. The young man depicted in the panels looks at a flower in his hand, his pose being a mirror-image of the pose of the old man in the last panel in figure 12. Both the old man and

the young man wear a similar kind of hat. Furthermore, the color of the pictures is different from the color in figure 12, the panels in figure 13 having a color of faded, old photographs. All these cues together indicate that the young man depicted in figure 13 is the old man when he was young. In figure 14, the shift of the color is even more prominent, resembling the background color in the woman's memories in figure 4 and the memories of the man with the glasses in figures 7 and 8. In figure 14 the old man's memories from the battlefield are described.

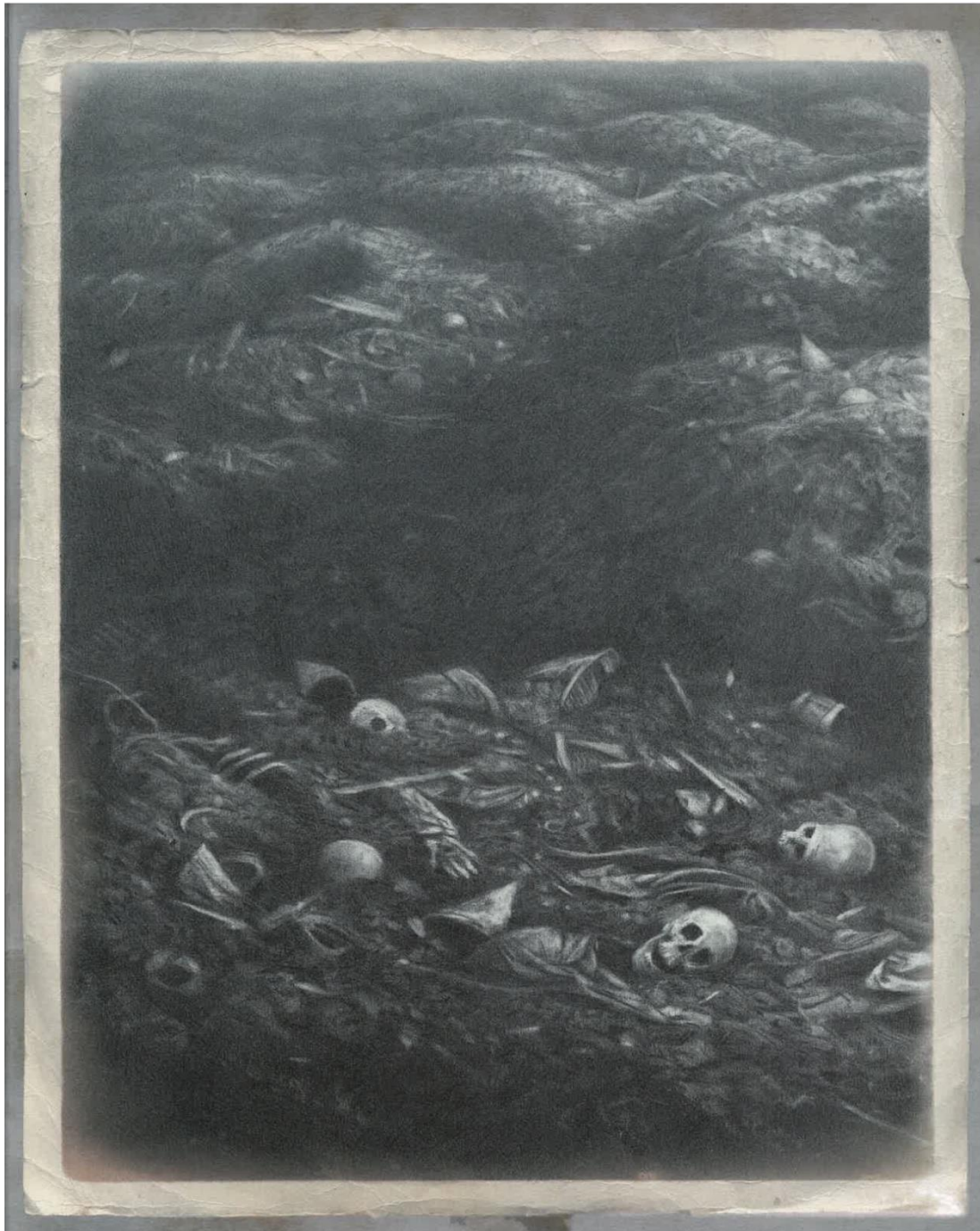


Figure 14. The old man's memories of casualties of war.

These pictorial cues together with the cues from figures 4 and 8, in which the shift of the background color indicates a shift of the narrator as well as a temporal shift (Horstkotte 34), indicate that the illustrations in figures 13 and 14 are the old man's memories told to the protagonist by the old man himself. The narrator is thereby shifted from extradiegetic-heterodiegetic into extradiegetic-homodiegetic, repeating the pattern with the woman (figure 4) and the man with the glasses (figure 8).

To conclude, in this paper I have shown that determining the narrator and the focalizer in graphic narratives which lack a narrative voice (or any words) is challenging, but nonetheless possible. These two narratological terms are closely related and detectable but require tools which help us identify them. In order to determine these narratological aspects in Shaun Tan's wordless graphic narrative, in addition to using literary narratology, I have also utilized some narratology of film, as well as comics-specific concepts. I have shown that some of the cues used in *The Arrival* include changes of background color, zooming in and zooming out, repetition of techniques, uses of panels and gutters, sequentiality and temporality (rhythm, duration, order), and interpreting characters' body language. Reader-participation in the determining of the narrator and the focalizer is thus required. I demonstrated that it is possible to determine the narrator and the focalizer using purely pictorial cues in combination with general knowledge of storytelling and real-life scenarios. Narratology as such offers a great deal more than I have discussed in this thesis, and further studies on wordless graphic novels seem necessary for the field as such.

Works Cited

- Arizpe, Evelyn. "Meaning-making from Wordless (or Nearly Wordless) Picturebooks: What Educational Research Expects and What Readers Have to Say." *Cambridge Journal of Education*, vol. 43, issue 2, 2013, pp. 163-176.
- Bal, Mieke. *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*. University of Toronto Press, 1985.
- Barber, Karin. "Text and Performance in Africa." *Oral Tradition*, vol. 20, no. 2, 2005, pp. 264-77.
- Genette, Gérard. *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*. Cornell UP, 1980.
- Halliwell, Stephen. "Diegesis – Mimesis." *The Living Handbook of Narratology*. Hühn, Peter et al., editors. Hamburg University. URL = www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/article/diegesis---mimesis. Created 17 Oct. 2012. Accessed 15 Dec. 2018.
- Hanks, W. F. "Text and Textuality." *Annual Review of Anthropology*, vol. 18, 1989, pp. 95–127.
- Horstkotte, Silke. "Zooming In and Out: Panels, Panels, Sequences, and the Building of Graphic Storyworlds." *From Comic Strips to Graphic Novels: Contributions to the Theory and History of Graphic Narrative*, edited by Daniel Stein and Jan-Noël Thon, De Gruyter, 2015, pp. 27-48.
- Johnston, Rosemary Ross. "Graphic Trinities: Languages, literature, and Words-in-pictures in Shaun Tan's *The Arrival*." *Visual Communication*, vol. 11, no 4, Nov. 2012, pp. 421-441.
- Kiefer, Barbara. "What Is a Picturebook? Across the Borders of History." *Picturebooks: Beyond the Borders of Art, Narrative and Culture*, edited by Evelyn Arizpe, Maureen Farrell and Julie McAdam, Routledge, 2013, pp. 6-22.
- Kuhn, Markus and Johann N. Schmidt. "Narration in Film (Revised Version; Uploaded 22 April 2014)." *The Living Handbook of Narratology*. Hühn, Peter et al., editors. Hamburg University. URL = www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/article/narration-film-revised-version-uploaded-22-april-2014. Created 22 Jan. 2013. Accessed 23 Nov. 2018.
- Margolin, Uri. "Narrator." *The Living Handbook of Narratology*. Hühn, Peter et al., editors. Hamburg University. URL = www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/article/narrator. Created 23 May, 2012. Accessed 23 Nov. 2018.

- Mays, Kelly J., editor. *The Norton Introduction to Literature*. W.W. Norton & Company, 2017.
- McCloud, Scott. *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*. HarperCollins, 1994.
- Pier, John. "Narrative Levels (Revised Version; Uploaded 23 April 2014)." *The Living Handbook of Narratology*. Hühn, Peter et al., editors. Hamburg University. URL = www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/article/narrative-levels-revised-version-uploaded-23-april-201410. Created 4 Aug. 2011. Accessed 23 Nov. 2018.
- Schmid, Wolf. *Narratology: An Introduction*. De Gruyter, 2010.
- Stein, Daniel, and Jan-Noël Thon. "Introduction: From Comic Strips to Graphic Novels." *From Comic Strips to Graphic Novels: Contributions to the Theory and History of Graphic Narrative*, edited by Daniel Stein and Jan-Noël Thon, De Gruyter, 2015, pp. 1-23.
- Tan, Shaun. *The Arrival*. Arthur A. Levine Books, 2007.
- Thon, Jan-Noël. "Who's Telling the Tale? Authors and Narrators in Graphic Narrative." *From Comic Strips to Graphic Novels: Contributions to the Theory and History of Graphic Narrative*, edited by Daniel Stein and Jan-Noël Thon, De Gruyter, 2015, pp. 67-99.
- Walsh, Richard. "Who is the Narrator?" *Poetics Today*, vol. 18, issue 4, 1997, pp. 495-513.
- Wolk, Douglas. *Reading Comics: How Graphic Novels Work and What They Mean*. Da Capo Press, 2007.