

VISUAL AND VERBAL NARRATION IN THE ROMANIAN COMIC STRIPS: REWRITING CANONIC TEXTS

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Abstract:

“One of the few forms of art specific to the postmodern cultural paradigm” (Mitchievici 2014: 23), comics have become a global phenomenon and an important part of the contemporary global popular culture, already validated by intellectuals such as Umberto Eco, Roland Barthes or Alain Robbe-Grillet. Comics resort to several means of expression, namely “verbal, pictorial, and typographic signs” (Kaindl 2004: 190), and therefore, in order to be fully deciphered, a semiotic analysis on the verbal and visual components, as well as on the relation between text and image proves fruitful. A multimodal and sequential art, comics employ both visual and verbal narrative, graphic scenes co-occurring with text, materialised as dialogue, free indirect discourse or the narratorial reporting. Besides verbal utterances and image content, formal aspects of the composition, such as the layout of the page and panels, sizes, lettering, colours, shapes, etc are of vital importance in comics as they convey thoughts, emotions, actions and meanings in their own in universally recognisable codes. Hence, our paper intends to investigate the visual and verbal dimensions of the comics, in terms of their components, relations and functions, as text and image co-participate in the process of meaning making and communication. Meanings transmitted via graphics usually complement verbal message and contribute to meaning making, but they may also substitute or dissonate with the verbal content, which may result in ambiguity, irony or other effects intended by the designers. “A multimodal social-semiotic approach assumes that all modes of representation are, in principle, of equal significance in representation and communication, as all modes have potentials for meaning, though differently with different modes” (Kress 2010: 104). Due to their multimodal character and versatility in terms of formats - i.e. comic strips, graphic novels, gag and political cartoons, webtoons, webcomics, digital comics -, themes and audience, comics have emerged as an extremely popular art that allows not only aesthetic but also ideological, historical or semiological approaches. Our paper proposes a qualitative research on the way visual and verbal narratives contribute to meaning making and decoding in the iconic contemporary Romanian comic magazine Harap Alb Continuă (The White Moor Continues), as well as on the relation between the source 19th century text and its comic format adaptation.

Keywords: *Multimodality; Visual narrative; Verbal narrative; Romanian comic strips; HAC!*