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# Medium-conscious, self-standing literariness for diverse audiences in graphic novel adaptations of Alki Zei's young adult novels

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## CITATION

Moula E, Malafantis K. Medium-conscious, self-standing literariness for diverse audiences in graphic novel adaptations of Alki Zei's young adult novels. *Literature Forum*. 2024; 1(1): 243.  
<https://doi.org/10.59400/lf.v1i1.243>

## ARTICLE INFO

Received: 22 August 2024

Accepted: 30 September 2024

Available online: 19 October 2024

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**Abstract:** This paper aims to critically comment on two adaptations of literary works by the internationally recognized Greek author, Alki Zei, in graphic novels. The works under discussion are *Peter's Great Walk* and *Wildcat Under Glass*. At first and as a prerequisite for understanding the proposed approach, the role of storytelling in today's media-dependent world is discussed. This is followed by a brief reference to the relationship of literature to the graphic novel genre, and to the notion of cognitive complexity as central to the "literariness" of a graphic adaptation. The interpretative toolkit to be used for the analysis of the texts is then delivered and the works under consideration are briefly presented. In the main part of the analysis, more criteria of graphic novels' literariness are introduced. A key criterion of the self-contained literary quality of the adaptations is graphitization, as it fruitfully intersects and cross-fertilizes the visual style with the heroes' characterization and the prevailing mood of the story. "Iconic solidarity" and focalization are used in the same direction. Graphic counterparts of literary expressions or Figurative language are also sought and the "authentication" index of adaptations is examined as an indication of the intended readership. In conclusion, it is perceived that both adaptations, although staying true to their sources, meet the conditions of a genre-specific literariness, but also differ in the degree of cognitive complexity, to the point of addressing different reading audiences.

**Keywords:** children's literature; graphic novels; genre-specific literariness; adaptation; implied readership

## 1. Introduction

Storytelling, having in our era penetrated almost every possible -private and public- field, has become a cultural attitude. The conventionally perceived concept of narrative gives place to the more complicated concept of transmedia practice, as a "creative practice that involves the employment of multiple distinct media and environments for expression" [1]. Thus, a new transmedia narrative theory [2,3] examines the functionality of narrative in every cultural expression, without any privileged treatment of any medium, genre, or communicative frame.

The materiality of any medium, its embodied qualities and cultural role, inevitably become determinants in the encoding and final presentation of content. From the coining of the term "remediation" [4] as an attempt to explain the phenomenon of media competition and succession, to more recent attempts to conceive comics from a medial-material perspective [5] it has become clear that we need to look for broader concepts that materialize narrative in the various media and

try to understand the strategies associated with each medium and even more, the conventions of each medium's genres.

Therefore, what is required is not the entrenchment of the media or a fragmented theoretical terminology, but an interdisciplinary, functional analytical framework.

The theoretical studies of adaptation address the problem of inter-media exchanges and they have long gone beyond the polar pseudo-dilemma: fidelity or betrayal, which had emanated from an obsolete structuralist starting point. Linda Hutcheon, defines an adaptation as "an extended, deliberate, announced revisitation of a particular work of art" [6]. A general, rough categorization of adaptations in a three-level scheme, in terms of their degree of proximity or distance from the original text, was proposed by Wagner [7] in the field of film studies: transpositions, comments, and distant analogies. To the extent that the above categorization does not constitute an evaluative characterization, it can still be considered functional to this day.

As a form of translation, the adaptation of a novel into a graphic narrative is an aesthetic challenge that involves moving between two different, and conflicting, codes. In other words, it is an intersemiotic translation [8] or a transcoding.

From any such adaptation emerges a new discursive event that conjures up an antecedent that is re-contextualized [9] in a new communicative condition, offering a second 'life' for the original text and its reception. Thus, the communication contract with the audience is reformulated, in the new reception environment, creating conditions for re-interpretations and re-appropriations.

## **2. From literature to graphic novels**

### **2.1. Cognitive complexity as a literariness index**

The tradition of transcoding literary texts into graphic novels dates back to the 1940s and the Classics Illustrated, while in our time it is experiencing enormous growth in Greece and worldwide [10]. The aesthetic choices of the source's handling are so varied that they reprogram the history of the reception of the source text. By comparing two different graphic versions of *Wuthering Heights* (by Classics Illustrated and by Masterpiece Comics), Kukkonen [11], through identifying the differences in the dynamic center of the presentation of two compared scenes, underlines how differences in focus and overall composition lead to a different interpretation of the original text.

Another typical case is an adaptation of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* by Nancy Butler and Hugo Petrus, which Zunshine [12] classifies as a typical "study guide", a role previously owned by Classics Illustrated. As she notes in the graphic retelling there is a noticeable degradation of the socio-cognitive complexity of the original.

Transforming a novel into a graphic narrative requires translating the written narrative and its strategies into images, words, and sequences. At the same time, a series of choices are activated [11] regarding which elements of the narrative will be highlighted, which will be ignored, in which ways will they be transferred, which sequence, which rhythm, how will they be included in the structural scheme of the

panels and the layout of the page, within the limited space of the graphic novel, etc. Schüwer [13] calls for the modification of the existing narratological concepts to better suit the study of comics.

In short, the question of the “literariness” of an adaptation is not tested by criteria of fidelity to the original text or its linguistic utterance but in relation to the activation of the reader in a participatory experience [14], where multimodal expressive mode will bring forth specific mental processes to decode not only the flow of the story’s events but also mental and emotional states, thoughts and feelings of the heroes.

Besides, graphic narratives’ literariness has already been commented on by researchers, who propose various criteria. Some of these are: detailed backgrounds, the use of shading, the presence of silent frames or repeated frames, text that looks authentic, allusions, metaphors or any other literary device, alternate perspectives, overlapping bubbles, the disclosure of the time period, the natural flow of events or the struggling for meaning, the mood, distinct or evocative, and the existence of productive panels or memorable ones [15].

## 2.2. Methodological toolkit

The mediality of comics, as a distinct medium, and of graphic novels, as a derivative genre, consists of “at least a communicative-semiotic, a material-technological, and a conventional-institutional dimension” [5].

In this article, we will focus on the communicative-semiotic dimension of the graphic novels under discussion. In other words, we will examine how the multimodal expression of the medium produces meaning and how that meaning is re-contextualized in the context of the socio-cultural environment of the story and even more so of today’s receptive reader.

The graphic narratives have a huge range of mechanisms to display it [16]. Matt Maden’s *99 ways to tell a story*, in the footsteps of Reymond Queno’s *Exercises in Style*, explores the inexhaustible ways comics may tell the same story through different focalizing characters in a variety of perspectives, confirming the medium’s flexibility, malleability, and first and foremost its ability to control and influence the reader’s reception.

The power of the image either underpins and enhances the focaliation in the literary text, or it undermines it. To identify the way visual focalization is achieved, we will consider all kinds of processes illustrated [17]: from the simplest verbal processes, usually indicated through a mouth-talk and the existence of a participant, listener, or interlocutor appearing or at least implied, to the more complex, mental ones, such as facial expressions and gestures, which can be supported by whole-body posture body. In addition, material processes of physical interaction with objects, as well as behavioral processes of non-transitive physical action, will be explored. But above all, the emphasis will be on relational processes within the same or between different panels, which attribute properties, identities, and characteristics to participants, placing a participant in relation to others or to objects as points of reference, as well as on the existential processes, which do not promote action and

are characterized by timelessness. The latter two categories delve into character and do not advance the story as much [18].

Some other focalization techniques [16] that we will turn to, are: the point of view shot, in other words the impression that the reader is sharing the field of view of a certain character, the gaze shot, where the panel includes the character along with the point he looks, the eye-line image/exact match (eye-line or cut match), which is the combination of a gaze image, which precedes or follows, together with the image of the field of vision, the image over the hero's shoulder and the image of a character's reaction to something he sees. Equally, subjective shots, such as an out-of-focus image related to one's mental state, can be used to suggest a certain sense of perception, as well as visual effects or signs of the observer's physical presence, such as a shadow or body parts implying the subjective point of view. Most of these are considered in the larger context of the panel sequence and page layout rather than in individual panels.

Groensteen's systemic theory will also be taken into account. In particular we will consider: (1) the coding of time in space, or otherwise what Groensteen calls "spatiotopia" of the semiotic system of the graphic narrative [19]; (2) the structure of spatiotemporal encoding through the panels and the gutters' indeterminacy; and (3) the "braiding" of the graphic narrative or otherwise the iconic solidarity which places all the panels in a possible, if not actual, relationship between them. The syntagmatic visual cohesion is a major analysis axis.

Another key concept in our analysis is graphiation. Marion's notion of 'graphiation' as "a set of graphic markers evoking the presence of a drawing instance" [20] may help us get a clearer idea of the medium-specific ways in which graphic novels narrate and achieve the harmonization and compatibility of the focalization with the visual style.

Some concepts from film studies will also be used, respecting the restrictions of each medium. Comics and film as the first two new narrative media of the twentieth century, developed their conventions by borrowing heavily from each other even as they also explored their own unique affordances [21]. The salience of framing in comics and the frames' transitions are associated with the analysis of cinema shots, although we should always bear in mind the pertinent distinctions between them. Graphic novels' static nature yields narratives broken down into a distinct sequence of key representations, experienced differently to film's mimetic flow of action.

### **3. The graphic novels under discussion**

Graphic novels' institutional status has been recently upgraded as they have developed and established their own, independent scientific field and are even included in curricula. In Greece, the tendency to study graphic novels within curriculum has gained a dynamic impetus too. The graphic novels under discussion are adaptations of two significant novels of AlkiZeï. Angeliki "Alki" Zeï (born in Athens in 1923 and died in Athens in 2020) was a Greek-mainly-children's literature writer, and is considered one of the greatest, with more than fifty books published outside Greece, in more than twenty languages [22]. She introduced "political, social, and historical elements into the Greek youth novel and help establish a new

outlook” [23]. Multi-awarded for her work in Greece and abroad, she was honored, among others, by the Academy of Athens. Her books have been translated into 20 languages. In this study, we are concerned with two adaptations of her young adult novels into graphic novels (*Peter’s Great Walk* and *Wildcat Under Glass*). The former was released in 2020 by the publishing house Metaichmio and the latter in 2021 by the same publisher.

*Peter’s Great Walk* follows Peter’s maturation during World War II in occupied by the German Army Athens. He experiences the hardships as well as the war’s brutality.

In *Wildcat Under Glass* the central heroines are two little sisters, Myrto and Melia (Melissa) growing up in Samos in 1936. Their grandfather brings them up with stories from Greek mythology and nurtures them with the values of the ancient Greeks until the dictatorship of Metaxas is imposed. Nikos, their favorite cousin, as a democrat and a leftist is persecuted. The plot takes place between two summers.

The adaptations adopt a respectful stance toward the original work and its spirit. They are therefore graphic adaptations that constitute the visible body through which the written language of the novels is realized. In other words, they constitute an embodiment of their literary sub-texts [24].

Both adaptations aptly convey the atmosphere of the books on which they are based, retaining and even amplifying the author’s narrative focalization choices, while making certain modifications—structural rearrangements or omissions of minor details—to the original text. Their differences in style (visual language) and their use of graphic code to produce meaning form varying degrees of cognitive complexity, which place the adaptations in different communicative contexts, with distinct authorial intent and appeal to different age ranges of their reading audiences.

### **3.1. From stylization to Graphiation: A movement towards literariness**

Comics support their literariness through a wide range of their own means. The visual code, design, color palette, and style, as well as the panels, their shape and placement, the use or lack of narrative text boxes are decisive factors in shaping the story world and endowing it a specific perspective [25]. The style contributes to the unique, productive way in which a graphic narrative draws its readers into the story world.

Each graphic narrative evokes not only a storyline but an integrated narrative universe with a highly distinctive style. As Pascal Lefèvre argues, “a graphic style creates the fictive world, giving a certain perspective on the diegesis” [25].

The choices of stylization serve to highlight the discursive qualities of the narrative representation, and the variety of different drawing styles becomes a meaning-making factor in a potentially multi-level interpretation. This process of course takes into account the multiple schemas, assumptions, and inferences that readers draw on to assign meanings to a sequence of images.

It is worth noting that the graphic novels under discussion barely take advantage of the visual code of comics (emanata, pictograms, sound symbols) [26] although they exploit adequate potential of lettering and movement lines to make the depiction more persuasive and vivid. In this way, a certain “literary” style is established, which

recreates the atmosphere of the works more convincingly, through more nuanced aesthetic choices.

A key term that justifies the graphic narratives' claim for literariness is graphiation. Graphic style, including graphic line, lettering, color palette, or the spatial organization of the page is supposed to stand for a kind of signature of the story's creation and of the illustrator's subjectivity.

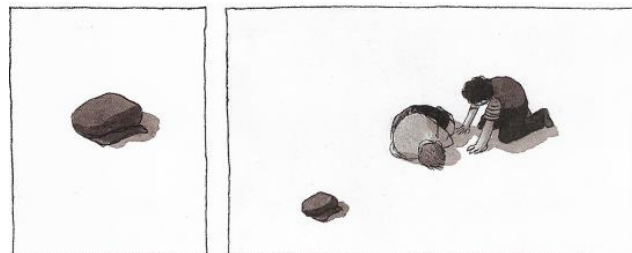
Although Marion [27] and Surdiacourt [20] seem to understand the 'graphiator' of a graphic narrative as being closer to some kind of author function, than to a narrator-as-narrating-character, Groensteen assumes the existence of a 'narrator' as "the ultimate authority that is responsible for the selection and organization of all the information that makes up the storytelling" [28]. By taking a middle stance, we contend that in the adaptations under consideration, the distinct graphic style seems to flow directly from the character-narrator, who takes over the visual narrative from his/her own point of view and through his/her eyes. Besides, graphic style becomes a tangible element of his/her characterization, defining graphiation as the identification of graphic style with the characters' mental and emotional state.

In *Peter's Great Walk* graphic adaptation, the color gray dominates. The black-and-white choice of illustration is evocative of something ominous. It fits perfectly with the atmosphere of the work, that of the German occupation of Greece, as well as with the troubled-bewildered look of Peter in most of the shots. The pictorial code intentionally oscillates between the cartoonish and the realistic, each choice having a semantic charge. To be more specific, the cartoonish heroes as a more symbolically abstract representation of the concept of human nature help readers to identify more easily with them [29], while the realistic background reminds the readers of the real setting of the story. In addition, the whole formal composition, as much as the aesthetic impact of particular panels, plays its part in affecting the reader's experience of the text.

The panel frames vary in size, shape, and placement on the page (layout), creating a diverse outcome (braiding) that contributes to meaning-making and activates demanding processes of understanding. Even more, various insets (pp. 124, 125, 157) isolate significant or meaningful details breaking the image boundaries and its plausibility. The axes of shooting the depicted scenes work as levers of meaning production indicating the psychological state of the heroes (threat, anguish, detachment, and impasse), and sometimes (as in the final scene) the optimistic belief in the collective vision. Words-sounds often defy the context of the panels and disperse in a sequence, thus unifying the depicted scenes into a single moment (pp. 148, 156). Panel frames are very often incomplete or fluid, as bubbles are superimposed and distort or replace them.

There are also cases where the panel frames are completely absent (pp. 73, 93, 145). Striking examples are the cases of the deaths of Drossula and Sotiris (two friends and important persons in Peter's life). These events, which Peter witnessed, paralyze him with pain and anger. On pages 122–127, the demonstration against the occupying army forces a change in the pace of the narrative. The panels on page 123 no longer obey the grid and seem to jump off the page, conveying the intensity of the moment, while in the next 2 pages, the loss of sense of time and the shock experienced by Peter are rendered by the blank background and inserts of the

German soldier shooting and Drossula collapsing (p. 124), from the ambiguous insert with the bloodstain that may also be a detail of her hair (p. 125) and from the seamless temporal and ontological transitions that follow (pp. 126–127). Likewise in the scene of the murder of Sotiris (pp. 153, 154), the absence of a background, the focus on fragmentary details, and the outline of Peter’s featureless face as well as the isolation of his kneeling Figure next to the dead body of Sotiris (**Figure 1**)<sup>1</sup>, convey the sense of the immobility of time and Peter’s unbearable crush.



**Figure 1.** Peter mourning.

Even more so in *Peter’s Great Walk*, thoughts, memories, dreams, or other states of mind are suggested by visual choices that act as transitions, such as the blurring or fluidity of frames. These changes in visual style indicate that a particular image is a subjective mental image [30]. Sometimes Peter and his thoughts coexist in the same panel (p. 62), as in the heroic figure of Athanasios Diakos (a hero of Greek revolution) who rises emphatically above his head and occupies 4/5 of the image and at other times this is expressed less conventionally, as with the exaggerated cartoon faces (p. 62).

On the other hand, in *Wildcat Under Glass*, the illustration is a prominent resource that serves both representation and modalization. The latter may be characterized in the image, by resources such as intensity, attenuation, color saturation, stylization or amount of detail [31]. The illustration is deliberately colorful, a choice which emphatically conveys the optimism, lightness, and innocence of the young heroines’ gaze, as well as the chronotope of the story, which is the Greek island of Samos and the summer of 1936. Saturated warm colors without shading often efface the background details and the action focuses on the actors and individual events, thus giving the story universality. In general, the style is reminiscent of the Ligne Claire style of the Franco-Belgian school of design, characterized by clean, precise lines, simplified forms, and a lack of shading or cross-hatching. These choices emphasize clarity, simplicity, and realistic representation of characters and objects. The panels’ frames of more or less equal in size and orderly placed on the page aim for a more easily digestible reading experience. Margins are almost never violated, gutters remain clear-cut and the pictorial code homogeneous and schematic, with rare touches of realism. The transitions from scene to scene are clear, almost abrupt, without overlays. The weaving together of the panels on the page (iconic solidarity) does not require any increased ability of concentration and attention. All these elements form an

<sup>1</sup>All the images from the graphic novels under discussion have been used with the courtesy of the publisher, Metaixmio (Athens, Gr).

environment of stability and comfort during reading, appropriate even for novice readers too. However, there are some rare cases where frames disappear (**Figure 2**) to express a relatively rare and extreme emotion (p. 130).



**Figure 2.** The girls are stunned by the destruction of the *Wild Cat*.

The absence of rhetorical or productive relations between frames and content or of gimmicks to define spatiotemporal or ontological transitions, however, does not count as a disadvantage. The choice is deliberate, so as to appeal to the implied readership of younger ages.

Sometimes a deliberate slowing down of the reading pace occurs when a single image is broken up and rendered into continuous fragmentary frames (pp. 39, 40, 127).

Although in the case of *The Wildcat Under Glass*, the backgrounds are not as detailed as in *Bandes Desinees*, the facial expressions and body language of the characters play an important role in conveying feelings and actions.

The embedded stories, - the myth of Icarus, the Spanish civil war, the Asia Minor disaster, the sad stories of the children of Malagari, the story about the Kaplani and the comet, the story of King Midas-, are presented on the same diegetic level as part of the story. There is no sign of an ontological transition anywhere, neither through the shape of the panels, nor through a change in the color palette, or by layers' superimposition. For instance, on page 11, when Grandpa narrates the myth of Icarus, little Melia seems to be standing on the beach and watching his flight. The lack of transitional techniques can be explained through the way children's imaginations work. Children move from reality to fantasy worlds with comfort and ease without following conventions.

The implied readership is also defined by some thematic interventions of the adaptation. On p. 143, to emphasize Myrto's remorse and restore her to the readers' consciousness, the creators change slightly the original text and attribute to her the kind initiative to use her pocket money to buy gifts for their friends from Malagari. Also missing is the reference to the questioning of the mother's maternal status due to her delicate profile and youthful appearance, as it might have shaken the certainties of the younger readership.

Of course, there are moments that require more demanding processes of understanding, which confirm the literary quality of the adaptation, but these moments are not of major importance for the progress of the story and will be discussed in detail later on.

In spite of their differences in graphic style, the adaptations seem to have a convergence point. This has to do with the shots that do not advance the action or

serve the sequential motion but emphasize the existential situation of a person. The various blank panels (without specified background) deny the standard reference points of space in the narrative: the absence of setting or real-world experience against which we can model what we see allows for a distancing, contemplative, or conceptual reception of the scenes. The axiom of spatial continuity explains how scenic backgrounds can recede or disappear without confusing the reader, who automatically recalls perceptual patterns from memory [32] which he/she fills, through deductions by noticing the composition, the difference, the abstract line or the verb supply [17]. The process of cognitive addition covers absent resources as present. One could argue that the choice to exclude certain resources is itself a way of conveying information, since the emphasis should be on the depicted emotion and mental processes rather than on the spatial elements. The application of the functional principle of emphasizing and excluding the elements that make up an image, gives the graphic narrative a strongly perceptual and subjective view, empowering its literariness, by additional, latent meanings. This choice is a strong indication of the adaptations' intention to pursue an autonomous literariness defined by the affordances of the genre.

### 3.2. Iconic solidarity and braiding as indicators of cognitive complexity and literary quality

Each panel addresses the reader on two complementary and sometimes contradictory levels (function tableau—function receipt) 27] to which we must add a third function, which refers to the relationship of the panel to the whole narrative structure, thus increasing the possibility of a non-linear reading pattern [32].

At some points, understanding requires an adequate reader with a keen sense of the conventions of the genre, able to activate the meaning-making mechanism of a sequence, through the theory of braiding [19] the hyperframe of the entire page and the multiframe or multistage multiframe [26].

Typical examples of this, in Peter's Great Walk are the following: When Peter first met Drossula he noticed (p. 64) a clay statue with outstretched arms in a posture of defense or surprise, that looked very much like her (**Figure 3**). When Drossula was shot dead at the demonstration (p. 124) we see her back down and lose her balance, making the same move with the statue, superimposed in the center of the panels (**Figure 4**). It is obvious that at this point a "multi-stage multi-frame" function is activated since to interpret the scene one must return to the original image of the statue.



**Figure 3.** Peter's reaction to the statue.



**Figure 4.** The co-existence of memory and reality.

Something similar is also observed in the incident where Peter and Antigone decide to advise their mother not to greet Ms. Leventis. They enter the kitchen and find her trying to heat a cauldron of water. The subtle change in the design code and clothing of the heroes from panel to panel (the mother appears with two completely different dresses and a changed appearance), testifies that some ontological transition is implied (**Figure 5**). On the other hand, the simple assumption of this possibility does not immediately give meaning to the sequence of panels. To understand what's going on, the narrative must be read in its entirety and retrospectively a second time, to the end of the next page (pp. 87, 88). This is because reality is intertwined with memory and the tragic poverty of the moment is exorcised with the sweet memory of earlier times when abundance made family relationships sweeter and more tender. The last panel of p. 88 transports us to the happy old days when no water was boiled in the cauldron, but sweet-smelling delicacies, and the mother was not depressed and cold, but cheerful and optimistic, reminding us of her youth.



**Figure 5.** Ontological transition and breakdown of the time continuum.

In *Wildcat Under Glass*, the ostensible simplicity and childishness of the graphic narrative at first level is anything but transparent. In many places, significant details and relationships lurk, which, although the overall perception of the plot does not depend on them, add layers of interpretation and extend thematically the source text. Some typical examples are the following:

On p. 18 the guests are depicted in the living room of the house sitting around the table. The 4 consecutive panels capturing the moment-by-moment movements of

the priest's rings-laden fingers shuffling the cards emit a strong negative charge, showing the incongruity of his supposed spiritual quality with the activity he is engaged in (**Figure 6**).



**Figure 6.** Shuffling the deck by the priest.

On p. 23 little Melia gazes from the window of her home on the quay of Samos Island and spots the figure of her father rushing towards the house, a fact we perceive by his trying to hold his hat from the wind. Right afterward in the vestibule of the house, at the back of the main stage, the father is seen greeting Melia and putting his hat on her head, a fact shown clearly in the ensuing panel. This playful movement of his betrays a tender relationship with his daughter, which is not explicitly expressed otherwise.

Some other fleeting references are perceived only in the context of the multistage multi-frame, such as the information of Melia's desire to become a writer in order to write the stories of the children from Malagari (p. 39) and Myrto's objection that one is born a writer and does not simply become one. Later on, during another dialogue between the two girls, on page 93, Myrto claims that anyone can be born a leader, making a hint at the previous conversation.

Sometimes the visual narrative requires a highly skilled reader who can understand and combine the subtle comments it contains, as in the discussion between Alexis and Melia on Homer's Iliad and the dilemma between Achilles and Hector.

Alexis's preference for Hector, although a Trojan, as a defender of his homeland and an averter of bloodshed (p. 125) is morally supported by the image on p. 126 which shows Hector with his family, within the book's illustration the two kids are reading. This image sheds an interpretative light on the previous conversation.

Cinematic cutting techniques are also often used, such as the "match-cut" on p. 33 where the image of Arion with the dolphin changes to that of Noli with the dead dolphin on the beach. Also interesting is the parallel action on pp. 145-146 where it looks like an L-cut, as we hear the voice of Nikos – having written the farewell letter – while key moments that happened during the summer are presented as a flashback.

Also noteworthy is the jump-cut technique we see on page 89, where in the last 6 equal-sized panels of the page, the dining room area with the display case with *Wildcat Under Glass* is seen from above. Although it is a single space, the dividing gutters present it in consecutive shots. In these shots the camera position does not change, but the subject (Myrto) moves giving the appearance of jumping around the frame (**Figure 7**).

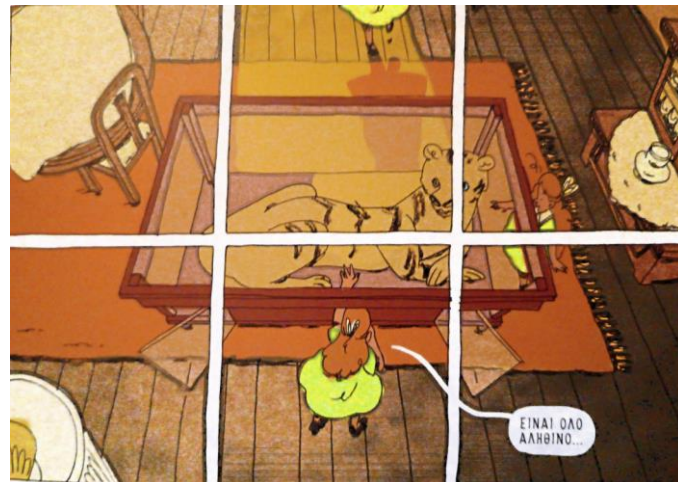


Figure7. Jump-Cut technique.

### 3.3. Focalization as fidelity marker

Focalization is a category that almost always activates the reasoning skills of the reader and may lead to a variety of conclusions. Despite the differences regarding the technical aspects of conventionally distinct media and their resources, the subjective representation of consciousness can be considered a fully mediated phenomenon, realized in a wide range of media, each with its own specific restrictions and possibilities [16].

The graphic narrative has a unique ability to depict equally the illusion of the 'real' with the inner world and to offer equivalents of the written narrative mechanisms in its own aesthetic and communicative conventions [26]. Moreover, any kind of mental functioning of the characters, including their perception and feelings, but also their ideological and moral orientation are advantageous points of entry into the story which might influence the focalization window.

Both adaptations respect the author's focalization choices, although they do not step on the exact traces of her. *Peter's Great Walk* violates the sub-text's third-person narrative voice, as this is followed in just one panel on page 8, where Peter is named by an omniscient narrator. Throughout the rest of the text, the narrative turns into dialogue and the perspective is fundamentally subjective. The narration takes place through Peter's perceptual-subjective view and his mental filtering [11]. The world in which the story unfolds is the mental model of Peter's worldview.

The strongest proof of Peter's role as the exclusive focalizer is the way he manipulates the narrative through his own perspective. His constant, evident, or allusive presence sustains the narrative flow [33].

An average of 3 scenes are counted per page where either a gaze sequence occurs (Peter looks in a direction and the recipient of his gaze is also revealed), or his gaze is aligned (eye line) with the object of his observation in different panels. There are also panels that focus on the field of his view, through a POV (Point of View Shot).

The camera angles highlight Peter as the exclusively privileged perceptual consciousness of the visual narrative. Even in scenes where his presence could be avoided and the extra-diegetic omniscient narrator could take over the narration,

such as in the description of the interior of the bakery where the conceited “daughters of the tsar” enjoy the new toys and gifts, they got from their father, the shadows of Peter and his girlfriend Alexia (p. 55) behind the window remind us once again who the receptive consciousness of the storyworld is (**Figure 8**).



**Figure 8.** Peter’s dominant interpretative gaze.

In *Wildcat Under Glass*, the two sisters share the responsibility of viewing and participating in the events through their transactional, quasi-conspiratorial perspective. The panels that contain the two girls secretly communicating through the exchange of glances define the curve of the story. In particular, Melia’s gaze is systematically directed toward her sister, looking for signs of her reactions or her approval in various situations and expecting a secret understanding between them (**Figure 9**). This happens in several panels, which do not advance the action (movement images), but serve to capture the girls’ existential situation (time images) [13]. These images bring out the depicted person’s essential singularity and establish a contemplative mode of reading.



**Figure 9.** Melia’s gaze systematically directed towards her sister.

When in the second part of the story their relationship goes through a crisis, due to Myrto's enthusiasm for her participation in the fascist youth phalanx (an organization of young supporters of the regime), we notice that the girls' eyes stop crossing and move away one from the other. Melia in her reverie upon hearing of her father's possible dismissal from work imagines them living as a family as gypsies and there the relationship appears harmonious again as the two sisters laugh out loud at the same time (p. 124). On the penultimate page, when the sisterly relationship has been restored, Melia in the happy, friendly company turns her gaze to her sister, sensing her mood and seeking her approval.

### 3.4. Literary counterparts: allusions, metaphors, synecdoches

In *Peter's Great Walk*, the graphic code suggests the existence of an adequate, alert reader, as it is often used in the direction of creating graphic counterparts of literary forms. For example, in the ambush of the Germans (p. 144), when Peter thinks he will be executed and will not grow up, he is shown tiny almost wrapped in a leaflet with the slogan "Freedom or Death". The transition from the scene of the event to the symbolic capture of Peter's pessimistic thoughts creates a non-sequential relationship between the panels, emphasizing his existential situation that emotionally charges the moment.

Even more, the synecdoche dominates as an expressive form. 24 panels focusing on the feet (see indicatively the **Figure 10**), 25 on the hands, and many more focusing on details from various elements of the environment (the grasshopper, the blank page of Peter's notebook, the journal on the wall, the lamp, the soup plate, the wedding rings, Theodore the turtle, the tied gold flies, etc.), revealing the part instead of the whole, acquire additional semantic weight. By drawing our attention, even momentarily, to the point where Peter's gaze falls, they force us to consider the content of his thoughts and feelings.



**Figure 10.** Focus on body parts (*Peter's Great Walk*).

In *Wildcat Under Glass*, although the style is mostly homogenous and childish, on pages 37 and 50, the figures of people are sketchy and their facial features are indistinct. The absence of features on the one hand of the persecuted refugees (**Figure 11**) and on the other of the fascist army is a stylistic choice, equivalent to a metaphor, to emphasize the reduction of both to a non-human state of existence.



**Figure 11.** Faceless people as a metaphor for a nameless mass being persecuted.

Similar to *Peter's Great Walk*, in *Wildcat Under Glass* there are 19 panels exclusively of close-ups of feet (see indicatively the **Figure 12**) and about 35 of hands, as well as various panels of objects scattered throughout the narrative space, such as some picture frames, a note, a plate of stuffed tomatoes, or a bug, that hold up the pace of reading to allow immersion in the story and provide synecdochic moments.



**Figure 12.** Focus on body parts (*Wild Cat Under Glass*).

Remarkable is the visual performance of the grandfather's comprehensive description of the evolution of politics, through three Figurative panels, which are rendered with minimal visual means (the movement of the hand). The differences

between democracy, monarchy and dictatorship emerge through three different hand movements (Figure 13).



Figure 13. Figurative depiction of the regimes.

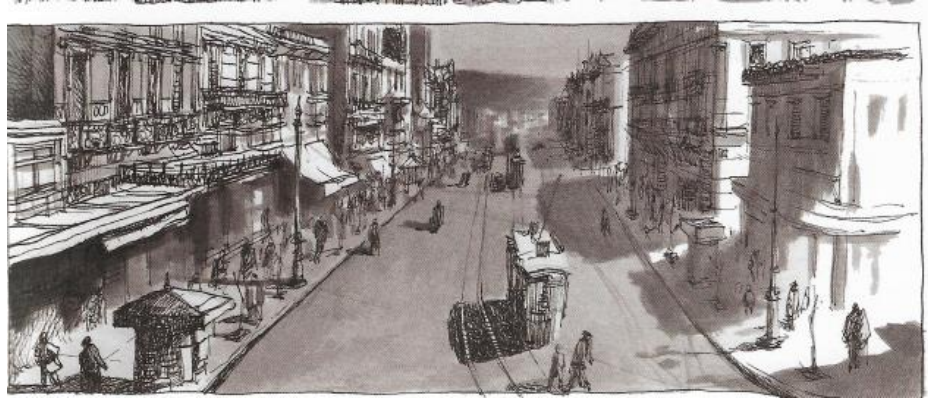
It is also worth noting the symbolic-metaphorical power of the images, such as the clenched fist of the father that betrays his anger (p. 19), the spontaneous knitting of the brothers' hands that shows their attempt to draw courage from each other (p. 26) or the close-up of the grandfather's handshake with Alexis' father, which underlines the mutual acceptance and latent recognition of an ideological kinship between them (p. 117).

### 3.5. Indicators of narrative authenticity and implications on the age reading group

In *Peter's Great Walk* the settings (time and space) are conveyed variously.

Throughout the graphic novel (160 pages with an average of 10 panels in each) there are approximately 25 outdoor images, with direct reference to recognizable spots in Athens, but also an evocative gravity. These space images act as “referential breaks” in the text's continuity. Referential breaks come in two forms: either “the camera goes offline” and shifts to a different location, or the “narrative clock is reset, either forward or backward” [34].

Monastiraki (Figure 14), the Polytechnic School, the Propylaea, streets with tram cars and buildings, St. George's square in Kypseli district, the camp of Kaisariani, the Acropolis, the neighborhood with its alleys and church, fleeting facades of vintage shops, but also panoramic night views over the city, constitute the surrounding area of history.



**Figure 14.** Monastiraki (flea market in Athens).

Added details faithfully revive the era, although not mentioned in the literary text, such as the initials ELAS (Greek People's Liberation Army) and EPON (Single Panhellenic Youth Organization) on the walls, EAM (National Liberation Front) on the banners, the Hestia bookstore, etc. which convey greater plausibility. However, some interior shots are also presented, mainly in the family's living room, where here again some additional visual details, such as Karelia cigarettes and Metaxa brandy on the family table or the anti-fascist newspaper Peter is reading, support the authenticity of the narrative (**Figure 15**).



**Figure 15.** Eloquent details revealing the time period.

On the other hand, in *Wildcat Under Glass*, the elements referring to the chronotope of the story are few: the information “Winter 1936” in the caption on the front page, the single image of a newspaper sheet of *Acropolis* (p. 61), a single reference to Venizelos (Greek Prime Minister), the fact of the establishment of a youth phalanx during a dictatorship and the indiscernible Figureures of the Kings (p. 92) hanging on the walls of the Principal at the school. Apart from these temporal markers, the narrative transcends time. The oil lamps (pp. 16, 70) that appear in some panels or the fact that the girls wash their hands with a jug and bowl (p. 45) are to an observant reader clue to the period, not obvious enough to identify. Nor is the space rendered in more detail. A few establishing shots of the waterfront of the island of Samos with the neoclassical buildings on its facade and the boats in the harbor act as story windows when the story moves to another place or time. In this way, the graphic text seems to retreat from the goals of authenticity, it lowers the standards of cognitive complexity but at the same time, freed from the interpretative

bonds of time, it denounces the dictatorship regardless of time and place. With this choice, the adaptation is aimed at younger ages, turning the story more into a didactic “fairy tale”.

#### 4. Conclusions

Having thoroughly examined the two graphic novel adaptations of Alki Zei’s works, it has been argued that both works stay true to their literary sources, respecting the author’s focal preference and staying close to the story (if not literally to the plot). Their literariness was demonstrated in specific terms of the genre, that is, with criteria derived from the expressive means of the graphic novel genre, regardless of their fidelity to the original works. Using analytical tools related to the code and conventions of graphic novels, it has been argued that adaptations, while respecting their sources, support with their own original way, their literary quality. The issue of the “literariness” of the graphic adaptations was not tested by criteria of fidelity to the original text or linguistic utterance but in relation to the activation of the reader in a participatory, interpretative reading experience.

In terms of graphiation, e.g. graphic style, including graphic line, lettering, color palette, or the spatial organization of the page, it was proved that *Wildcat Under Glass* addresses younger audiences than *Peter’s Great Walk* with its more demanding features of visual representation. The same applies to visual authentication indicators. In *Peter’s Great Walk* the degree of rendering of reality through details is clearly higher than in *Wildcat Under Glass*, a choice that implies the age difference of their readership.

On the other hand, iconic solidarity and braiding are strong indicators of cognitive complexity and literary quality of both graphic novels, though specifically adapted to their implied audience too. Focalization, the subjective representation of consciousness on the graphic adaptations, aligns with that of novels and is emphatically rendered with the medium’s varied technical conventions. Even more, the abundance of visual literary counterparts supports the argument of the literariness of the adaptations.

In short, although they seem to have much in common, a careful reading of the graphic devices they use reveals differences that imply different reading expectations. Their specific graphic design choices, different types of cognitive complexity, and authentication index affect their readership. Thus, *Peter’s Great Walk*, which activates more demanding interpretive processes and is mostly suggestive rather than explicit, has a potentially wider age range, even for adult readers, while *Wildcat Under Glass*, with its intense warm colors, the fairly homogenous style and more natural flow of meaning, appeals mainly to a younger audience.

**Author contributions:** Conceptualization, EM; methodology, EM; formal analysis, EM; investigation, EM; resources, EM; writing—original draft preparation, EM; writing—review and editing, EM and KM; supervision, EM and KM. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

**Conflict of interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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