**University of Pardubice**
**Faculty of Arts and Philosophy**

**Expressing Emotions in American Comic Books**

**Pavel Švanda**

**Bachelor Paper**
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# ZADÁNÍ BAKALÁŘSKÉ PRÁCE
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Zadávající katedra:    **Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky**

## Zásady pro vypracování:

Student se zaměří na použití anglického jazyka tzv. grafických románů s důrazem na prostředky, jež autoři používají k vyjádření emocí. Student nejprve prostuduje literaturu týkající se jazyka "komiksů" a charakterizuje jej z pohledu formálního a lexikálního. Dále student popíše anglický systém citoslovcí. Praktická část potom bude obsahovat analýzu konkrétních grafických románů na základě principů definovaných v teoretické části se zaměřením na vizuální konsistenci textu a kresby.

Rozsah grafických prací:

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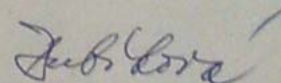Termín odevzdání bakalářské práce: **31. března 2011**

L.S.

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děkan

Mgr. Šárka Bubíková, Ph.D.

vedoucí katedry

V Pardubicích dne 30. listopadu 2010

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Pavel Švanda

**ABSTRACT**

This work focuses on the development of comic book medium with the emphasis on comics techniques used to express emotions. The first theoretical part includes a familiarisation with basic and advanced comic book terms and the denotation of forms and techniques used in comics. In second part, three comic books from different time periods are analysed, using the terms described in the first part. Due their comparison, different devices and approaches are revealed and thus the image of the development of comics media itself is provided.

**KEY WORDS**

Comics; graphic novel; Flash Gordon; Fantastic Four; Animal Man

**SOUHRN**

Tato práce se zabývá rozvojem komiksového média se zaměřením na komiksové techniky využívané pro vyjadřování emocí. První teoretická část zahrnuje obeznámení se základními a pokročilými komiksovými termíny a rozdělení forem a technik užitých v komiksu. Ve druhé části jsou s využitím termínů popsaných v první části analyzovány tři komiksy z různých časových období. Díky jejich srovnání jsou odhaleny různé nástroje a přístupy, čímž je poskytnut obraz vývoje komiksového média.

**KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA**

Komiks; grafický román; Flash Gordon; Fantastic Four; Animal Man

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## 1. Introduction

Comics is a specific medium, which is, comparing to another forms of art like theatre, written novels or even movies, a very new one. The reception of comic books all around the world is various. It could be said that the countries differ in how much they perceive comics as children stories or as an art of its own. However, the goal of this work is not to convince about the age suitability of the comics reader but to show possibilities of the comic book genre.

For comics have its own devices for telling the story, amusing the reader and expressing emotions in its very special way. The most recognisable devices like speech balloons or sound effects (big words like 'BANG' or 'CRASH') became symbols of comics and may be viewed as its simple approach to the reader. In this work, there will be shown that the comic book tools are much more complex. Speech balloons have different shapes with different meaning, text within them could be formatted in various ways and something as ordinary as a caption (a small 'box' with text) is actually a very powerful tool for comics authors.

As the approach of the comics authors were changing from a focus on children to wider and more adult audience, so the new and more sophisticated methods of conveying the story were developed. For many years, comics has been associated with United States of America because of the enormous success of the medium in comparison with the rest of the world (except Japan, whose popularity of their comics called 'manga' can be comparable). Due to the popularity, the American comics has been rapidly evolving for almost last 100 years and it has been still a very successful medium commercially. There are still more and more talented authors who are amazed with unique possibilities of comics and who are creating more and more sophisticated, original and exciting stories that fully make use of the comic book format.

However, this work is mainly focused on earlier successful comics that could be, from a modern point of view, perceived as simple stories mainly for children - analysed comics *Flash Gordon* and *Fantastic Four* amazed younger audience decades ago. The

exception is *Animal Man* from 1980s that, despite of its name and superhero genre, can be found as a very elaborate comics even nowadays. On the other hand, these three 'old comics' were published when the medium was changing and developing the most. The new methods were invented - some of them were gradually rejected, some of them became a classic comic book method widely used in modern comics.

In this work, the chapters of the theoretical part involve the description and denomination of comic book terms that are vital for understanding the further analysis. Furthermore, some of the comics techniques will be described and illustrated on concrete examples from various comic books.

The practical part is focused on the analysis of three successful comics from different time periods (1930s, 1960s and 1980s), so the comics methods can be closely described and subsequently compared.

## 2. Comics language

This work uses certain comic book terms that should be explained so the thesis will be fully comprehensive, and to avoid any confusions.

First of all, there are several words, which may denote the medium that this work is focused on – *comics, comic book, graphic novel*.

There are many definitions of the word 'comics' and they are often found unsatisfactory (Groensteen, Beaty, Nguyen, 2009, p.12). However, the question of what exactly *is* or what *is not* comics is not a goal of this work. In this paper, comics is considered either a form of art that combines visual and textual methods to convey a story *or* a piece of work that uses the comics form. The word 'comics' is often used as a plural to avoid confusion with the word 'comic' (funny) (Lyga and Lyga, 2004, p.162)

A *comic book* is an actual work that uses a comics form and is or was published periodically.

*Graphic novel* is a modern word for *comics* work that does not necessarily have to have periodical form. As Lyga and Lyga noted, "all graphic novels are comic books, but not all comic books are graphic novels." (p. 162)

Additionally, these detonations for comics may be interchangeable. For example Flash Gordon is *comics, comic book* and *graphic novel.*

Another important term is that of comics panels. These are limited parts of a comic book page, mostly in a shape of a rectangle or a square, in which one part of the story is told. Usually, there is a white space that divides panels from each other.

Within panels, *captions, speech balloons* and *sound effects* appear.

## 2.1 Captions

The term "caption" represents a source of information for the reader in form of a text, which usually appears inside the rectangle "box."



Pic.1: Batman: Legends of the Dark Knight #120, p.6          Pic. 2: District X #1, p.1

Nate Piekos is a top-letterer[1] in comic book business. In his article, *Comic Book Grammar & Tradition*, distinguishes four types of captions present in graphic novels. First of them is *Location & Time,* which informs the reader about time and place if the author decides to do so. Aside from any standard captions (text in a box - this can be seen in the picture #1), this type of captions is sometimes portrayed as a big highlighted text within the panel without any boxes (picture #2)

*Internal monologue* caption serves exactly the same purpose as the *thought balloon* (see chapter 2.2) – readers can find out what the character is thinking about or saying to himself if that is an author's intention. A caption with *internal monologue* looks like an ordinary text inside the caption box as it can be viewed on the example in the picture #3.



Pic. 3: Amazing Spider-man #556, p.11

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[1] Letterer is someone who usually fills comics panels with speech balloons, captions and sound effects. (Lyga and Lyga, 2004, p.163)

*Spoken monologue* caption is very similar to the *internal monologue* one. However, the text inside the caption is bordered with quotation marks. This suggests that text is actually uttered but the speaker is not present in a panel where the caption was placed. Such method is often used for artistic purposes (e.g. to illustrate character's storytelling with events that he or she is talking about in the picture #4).



Pic. 4: Superman: Whatever Happened to the Man of Tomorrow, p.16

The last type of caption is so-called *narrative caption*, which represents - according to Piekos - "the voice of the writer or editor." (Comic Book Grammar & Tradition, 2010) In his view, it is a caption with a piece of information, which would be usually placed to a footnote in written literature (see *Asterisk* in chapter 2.2).

However, in his article, Piekos does not mention captions with a real narrator, as it is known from 'normal' literature. As will be shown, the role of the narrator has been very important in graphic novels. For purposes of this work, the term *narrative caption* will be used for a caption with text said by a narrator. Examples and more information about a text in *narrative captions* can be found in the next chapter.

The caption Piekos is speaking about when describing the term 'narrative caption', is in most cases used by an editor. Due to the lack of proper terminology, this work will denote this type of caption as *editorial caption*. The text inside the caption in the picture #5 is a shortcut for 'Web of Spider-Man #18' and 'Jim' is Jim Salicrup, the editor of the issue.



Pic. 5: Amazing Spider-man #284, p.6

## 2.1.1 Narrator in captions

The role of narrator as it is known from classic literature can be found in graphic novels' *narrative captions*. The written narration (telling the story via text, not pictures) in graphic novels uses the same techniques as the narration in written novels.

For illustration, the main two types of narration will be described both on the classic and graphic novels and compared.

**First person view**

First person narrative means that the story is told from the "I" point of view. In his article, David Goldknopf describes the I-narrator as a "character in a work of fiction who tells its story in his own voice." (1968, p.13) Furthermore, he is amazed by the possibilities of such method: "Someone *inside* the novel is talking to someone *outside* the novel. This strikes me as a remarkable, almost hair-raising phenomenon." (p. 21)

F. K. Stanzel in *A Theory of Narrative* shows the unique possibility of story-telling on the example of a famous novel by J. D. Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye*. Firstly, he presents this short extract of the book:

> If you really want to hear about it, the first thing you'll probably want to know is where I was born, and what my lousy childhood was like, and how my parents were occupied and all before they had me, and all that David Copperfield kind of crap, but I don't feel like going into it, if you want to know the truth. In the first place, that stuff bores me, and in the second place, my parents would have about two hemorrhages apiece if I told anything pretty personal about them. They're quite touchy about anything like that, especially my father. They're nice and alló I'm not saying that-but they're also touchy as hell. Besides, I'm not going to tell you my whole goddam autobiography or anything. I'll just tell you about this madman stuff that happened to me around last Christmas just before I got pretty run-down and had to come out here and take it easy. (1958, p. 1)

Stanzel then states that it is clear from this example that it would be very difficult to transform the first-person narrative into a third-person narrative without breaking the personal bond between the character and narrator. (1986, p. 57)

As the I-narrator method is highly used in graphic novels too, the method can be compared between the example Stanzel picked and an example from graphic novels.

The example of I-narrator chosen for this purpose is from the first issue of *Ultimate Comics: Spider-man.* On the very first page, the reader is introduced to the story by one full-page picture with just a face of the main character (see the text within captions on a whole comics page in Appendix #1), which is accompanied by the following narration:

> My name is Peter Parker. I am Spider-man. I was bit by a one-of-a-kind spider and now I have one-of-a-kind spider-powers. I've saved the world. Or at least helped save it. I almost died doing it. A couple of times. For real. But I didn't. I've fought bad guys of every shape and size. True bad guys. World-class villains. Bad **bad** guys. I've met superheroes, icons. Captain America. Yep. You're talking to a sixteen-year-old who can swing across the city on a web line he actually invented. A guy who can lift a city bus over his head. A guy who has fought the Hulk and walked away from it. We're talkin' vampires, mutants, Doctor Doom, Sandman, Green Goblin, Doctor Octopus... I have already seen and done more than most people will ever get to do in their whole lives. (Bendis, Lafuente 2010, p.1)

First of all, the main character clearly *is* in a work of a fiction and he tells his story in his own specific voice (using characteristic phrases such as "For real" or "Yep"), which is in the accordance with Goldknopf's description of narration.

If the previous text was re-written to third-person narrative, it would cause the lost of the character-narrator link and the work itself would not have the same tone – similarly the change would influence Salinger's novel. In this case, if the sample from *Ultimate Comics: Spider-man* was converted to third-person narrative, the reader would not feel character's boasting and he would not even suspect him of being self-congratulatory because it would be someone else who would praise him.

For the thesis, it is important to highlight the fact that graphic novels – in spite of having other devices like the ones connected with illustrations – also fully use the possibility of having I-narration, as it can be viewed in comparison of classic and graphic novels above.

**Third person view**

Third person narration mode tells the story from viewpoint of some entity not involved in the story. Using 'he/she form', the author can describe situations and characters more objectively and without any prejudices. And more importantly, the narrator can share with the reader information that main character or other characters do not know, or even cannot possibly know. (Harper, 2004)

Graphic novels sometimes use third-person narration in narration boxes. If such narration is used in a comic book, there are usually no differences between 'written' and graphic novels.

The only significant difference is that, due to the use of visual narration (telling the story via pictures), the third person narrator in comics has to describe fewer things than an author of the written work. This is because he or she has pictures in his or her disposal.

Here is a short example of narrative boxes' text from Ed Brubaker's graphic novel *The Fall*:

"He figured the card would be reported missing the next day, so that night after work he did a little shopping. It was just one more thing meant to keep his mind off of his ex-girlfriend." (p. 5)
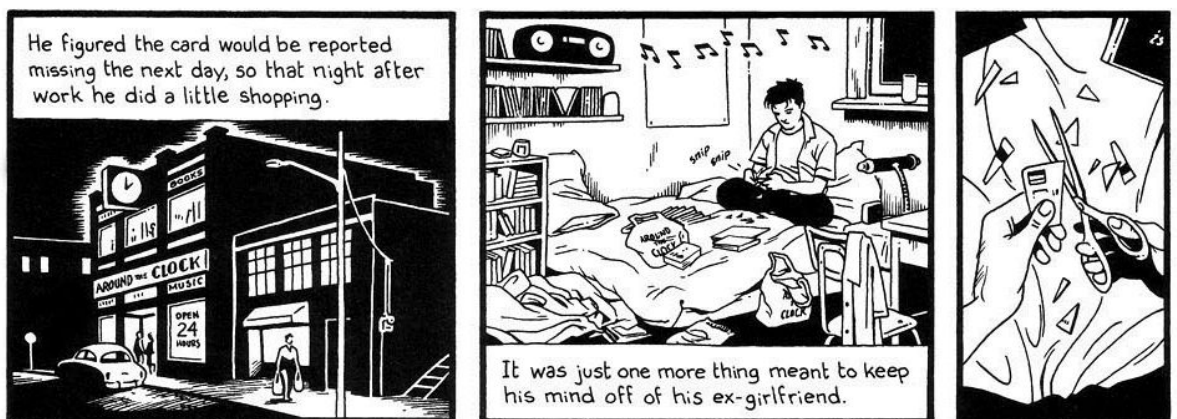


From the pictures on the page, the reader can learn more details. For example the reader can notice that the character bought things from 'Around the Clock' shop and the reader can also see that the main hero cut the card into pieces with scissors.

Those pieces of information would have to be added by the narrator in written novels.

Third person narration is one of the methods the graphic novels use for telling the story. It is not so widely used as it is in written novels but the principle of the method remains the same.

## 2.2 Speech balloons

Speech balloons is well known and the most recognisable device of comic books. Their use and form has been changing during the history, as it will be shown further in the second part of this paper. But the speech balloon is mainly a tool for comics authors for effective showing to reader what is the character saying. If there is a speech balloon (in any shape) in a comic book panel, the reader immediately knows that someone is talking or at least making a noise through his mouth.

The most of the speech balloons has an appearance of a white oval bordered by black line with a 'balloon tail' (which is a sort of an arrow) with a text in it.

Nate Piekos denotes all modern types of bubbles in his article *Comic Book Grammar & Tradition*. Using the terminology of Piekos' article, there will be introduced several types of speech balloons and the methods used within them, along with examples specifically picked for this paper.

### 2.2.1 Forms of speech balloons

**Ordinary speech balloon**

For illustration, the ordinary speech balloon whose only function is to show that the character is saying something can be viewed in the picture #1. Balloon tail is aiming to a character that says the text in a balloon, approximately to his mouth.



Pic. 1: Ultimate Comics: Spider-man #1, p.4

**Burst balloons**

Burst balloons are used when the talking character is screaming. The shape of the balloon is slightly deformed to have edgy points and it often can be combined with highlighted text within. That makes the balloon more distinctive and the text more dramatic (see the picture #2).



Pic. 2: Superman: Whatever Happened to the Man of Tomorrow, p.39

**Joined balloon to balloon**

There are two ways how the balloons that belong to the same speaker are connected to each other. According to Piekos (2010), the speech balloons that are directly joined together represent the same thought process. But the rule is often broken because of the layout of the space in comic book panel. The correct use can be viewed in the picture #3.

**Joined balloons with connectors**

The "connectors" are little white stripes bordered with black (same colour as speech balloons) that are connected to two balloons belonging to the same speaker. They are used either when the two thoughts are to be separated (see picture #4) or when there is a more complicated dialogue on one page (the conversation goes back and forth between them, see picture #5) (Piekos, 2010).



Pic. 3: Amazing Spider-man #557, p.13

Pic. 4: Superman: Whatever Happened to the Man of Tomorrow, p.37

Pic. 5: Ultimate Comics: Spider-man #1, p.3

### Radio balloon

Radio balloons or "electric balloons" are used when the speech inside them is coming from electric device like a radio, television, communicator etc. They are rather similar to *burst balloons* but radio ones tend to be more regular and less chaotic. (Piekos, 2010) An example of use can be viewed in the picture #6, where a transmitter interrupts the police commissioner.



Pic. 6: Batman #465, p.9

### Thought balloons

Thought balloons are used when author decided to show the reader what is the character thinking about. They are similar to ordinary speech balloon but the balloon is more bloaty and puckery (it reminds a cloud) and the tail is consisted of a number of small bubbles (generally there are three). Also, the tail should not point to the character's mouth as usual but



Pic. 7: Batman #465, p.8

to a character's top of head. (Piekos, 2010) An example can be viewed in the picture #7. Instead of this method, the character's thoughts are often put into *narrative captions*.

### Whispering balloon

Generally there are several versions how to illustrate the character is whispering. One of the most common ones looks like an ordinary speech balloon but it is bordered with a dashed stroke (see picture #8). Another way how to illustrate whispering is by using *small text in a big balloon* technique (described further in chapter 2.2.2).



Pic. 8: Superman: Whatever Happened to the Man of Tomorrow, p.22

**Wavy balloon**

Wavy balloons are also called 'weak balloons' and Nate Piekos (2010) noted that they are used, "when a character is in physical distress. Dialogue is usually stilted and broken by ellipses and the balloon and tail are shaky." An example of use can be viewed in the picture #9.

Pic. 9: Batman #465, p.6

## 2.2.2 Methods in Speech balloons

**Asterisk**

Asterisk is a symbol that looks like a small star and is outside of the comic medium widely used to call out a footnote in written text. (Cuddon, Preston, 1998, p.256)

In graphic novels, the usage is similar but there are no footnotes - the note for the reader is written in a caption.

The symbol have been used mainly in superhero comics to inform the reader in what other comics



Pic. 10: Amazing Spider-man #284, p.6

he can find more of certain character like his origin, first appearance, his team-up with another character etc. and to define acronyms. (Comic Vine)

The asterisk in a speech balloon in the picture #10 is calling out the caption that can be seen in the picture #5 of chapter 2.1.

**Bold text**

Bold and italic are the type of the formatting text that serves for emphasising certain word or a group



Pic. 11: District X #1, p.6

of words. Karl Busiek, a notable American comic book writer, noted about bold text in his tutorial *On Writing for Comics* that it is "generally used to indicate speech rhythms; which words are stressed in speech or narration." (1996) The picture #11 provides the example of the use – the woman emphasises the word 'pills' to stress out its importance.



**Breath marks**

Piekos describes 'breath marks' as "three little dashes stacked vertically that come before and after some sort of cough or sputter"(2010). This device is unique in graphically emphasising interjections within the text in comic books as it can be viewed on the example in the picture #12.

Pic. 12: Superman: Whatever Happened to
the Man of Tomorrow, p.20



Pic. 13: Ultimate Comics: Spider-man #1, p.14



Pic. 14: Ultimate Comics: Spider-man #1, p.2

**Double dash**

There are no Em or En dashes[2] in American comics. Instead, the comic book authors use double dash. It is either used when the character's speech is interrupted (picture #13) or if there is a pause in his talk (picture #14). When using the method, there should be only two dashes, not more. (Piekos, 2010)

Todd Klein, award winning comic book letterer, described why the double dash became a tradition in comics on his blog. According to him, the "double dash" had a similar meaning as "em dash" (—), which was used in comic books too:

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[2] „en dash" (–) is a symbol longer than a common hyphen (-), „em dash" is even longer (—)

But when comics got to the point where scripts were typed out on a typewriter for someone to copy when lettering, the usual way to indicate an em-dash was a double dash, since there was no em-dash symbol on a typewriter. Typesetters and printers knew to convert the double dash to an em-dash when a typewritten script was copied into set type, but letterers probably didn't know or follow that convention, and the double dash gradually became the common form.

(Klein, 2008).

**Ellipsis**

Symbol of ellipsis (looking like three dots) has a similar usage in comics balloons as in the written literature. According to *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* it is "a rhetorical figure in which one or more words are omitted," (Cuddon, Preston, 1998, p.256) but that it is not the only use in graphic novels. The ellipsis also signifies the trail off of a character's speech and it does not have to omit any words. (Piekos, 2010) The omitted words by ellipsis can be viewed in the picture #15 (where a reporter nearly mistakes the surname of Lois Elliot for her née name 'Lane') and the 'trail off' can be seen in the picture #16.



Pic. 15: Superman: Whatever Happened to the Man of Tomorrow, p.2



Pic. 16: Amazing Spider-man #284, p.7

**Music notes**



Pic. 17: Bruce Wayne: The Road Home - Oracle #1, p. 17

If there is a one music note in a speech bubble (and nothing else) it usually means the character is whistling while if there are music notes around the text in a speech bubble, the character is singing the text. (Piekos, 2010)

An example of the second case can be viewed in the picture #17.

**Small text in big balloon**

When there is a text, which is clearly smaller so that there remains a lot of space left around, it usually means the character mutters or says something to himself or herself as it can be seen in the picture #18.



Pic. 18: Amazing Spider-man #557, p.12

### 2.2.3 Interjections

Interjection is a word usually indicating strong emotions (Leech, 1991, p.139). A word in a sentence that is an interjection is not connected to another words in a sentence. James Nesfield in *Manual of English Grammar and Composition* noted that: "It scarcely deserves to be called a part of speech; for it lies on the borderland of language, halfway between articulate speech and the inarticulate cries of animals. (2010, p. 12)" Examples of interjections are: um, er, ssh, huh, ugh, oh, whew, wow.

As speech balloons reflect the speech form with its inadequacies, the interjections are widely used as it can be viewed on examples below (pictures #19 - #21).



Pic. 19: Ultimate Comics: Spider-man #1, p.14

Pic. 20: Batman: Legends of the Dark Knight #120, p.6

Pic. 21: Amazing Spider-man #284, p.11

## 2.3 Sound effects

Third main comic book method how to convey story with text is called 'sound effects'. They do not appear in graphic novels witch such a frequency as speech bubbles or captions but they became one of the most recognisable comic books device.

One sound effect is usually consisted of one word and appears as a somehow highlighted text within the panel and outside the caption or speech balloon. This method helps to bring to the reader information about sounds like explosions, gunfire, knocking and other noises that happened in the moment presented in the panel. Catherine Khordoc noted that comics would seem to be much more silent and less realistic without sound effects (2001, p.169).



Pic. 1: District #1, p.14

Sound effects often use so-called "onomatopoeic words". Such words closely illustrate the sound by using a combination of letters that can closely remind the actual noise when read. These words were originally very frequent in poetry. (Nesfield, 2010, p.251)

Suzanne Covey pointed out that sound effects also use "descriptive sounds", which are words, most often verbs, that are not trying to copy the sounds they represent but they are consisted of words explaining the action. In her work she analysed a comic book where she found examples of this feature as "shake", "toss" "shovel" (for shaking, tossing and using a shovel) (2006).

Sound effects are usually placed to a location from which the sound is 'heard' as it can be seen on examples in pictures #1 - #3.





Pic. 2: Amazing Spider-man #556, p.20      16      Pic. 3: Amazing Spider-man #284, p.3

## 3. Flash Gordon

The first analysed comic book is Flash Gordon, which is a comics that was originally published in a form of newspaper strips. The first issue was published in 1934 and the comics rapidly became so successful that it inspired several TV shows and movies (Hamilton, 2007, p.18). Flash Gordon is recognised as a comics that experimented with the formal methods of the medium. (Booker, 2010, p.552) Therefore the analysis of Flash Gordon can show the development of comics techniques at such early years of comic books. The analysis is focused on first 46 issues (each of them has only one page) that were published between January and November 1934.

### Captions

The captions in Flash Gordon comics were used strictly for the narration, which was conducted via third person view. According to the terminology in this work, they are all *narrative captions.*

The first narration is in the second panel and describes the picture within: "In African jungles tom-tom roll and thunder incessantly as the howling blacks await their doom!" At first issues the narrative text is floating inside of the panel, seemingly put in a manner so it does not interfere with important aspects of the picture (see picture #1). In several panels, a narrative text is inside of a "white stain", which resembles standard narrative caption. That was mainly used so the black text would be visible in darker pictures.
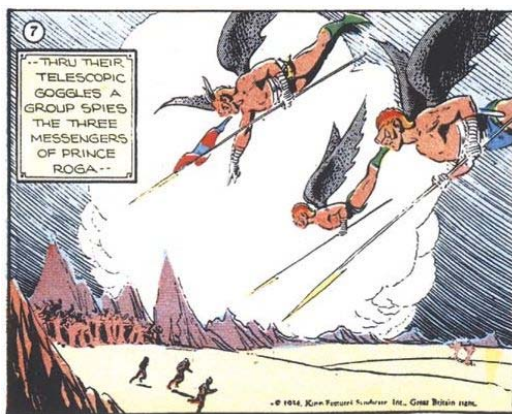


Pic.1: Flash Gordon #1

Gradually, the narrative text started to appear more in 'boxes'. They did not have a perfect rectangle shape from the beginning but they were more flat and they had their own white background so the text was readable – unlike the floating text in colourful pictures before.

The captions shaped in a perfect rectangle firstly appeared in Flash Gordon #10 (see picutre #2). The lines are entirely firm and the narrator text is no longer used as a floating text around the pictures.



Pic. 2: Flash Gordon #10

In a few issues of Flash Gordon (#27 - #30), the authors tried to use more polished captions. Some have a specially painted border, another are stylised as a scroll or they are highlighted in another way. The authors may wanted to do 'something special' in these four issues or they just came up with the idea that looked good at first but they had not patience or time to keep doing it in further issues. On the other hand, it is important to note that different styles of captions within one story can be little confusing for the reader. The content (narration) is same but the receiver can – even subconsciously – look for the difference and thus the story can lose the natural flow (see pictures #3 and #4).



Pic. 3: Flash Gordon #29

Pic. 4: Flash Gordon #29

However, the captions in Flash Gordon gradually lost their shapes and along with speech balloons became again a text floating around the drawings.

Many dashes are used in captions for either emphasising the pause or for the interruption of the speech or its re-establishing. The graphic novel uses common *double dash*, but in some cases there are actually more than two dashes – there are three, four or even more dashes.

In the first issue, one caption says: "The scientist, Dr. Hans Zarkov works day and night, perfecting a device with which he hopes to save the world---his great brain is weakening under the strain!" (see picture #5) The 'triple-dash' has obviously similar use as the classic *double dash*.
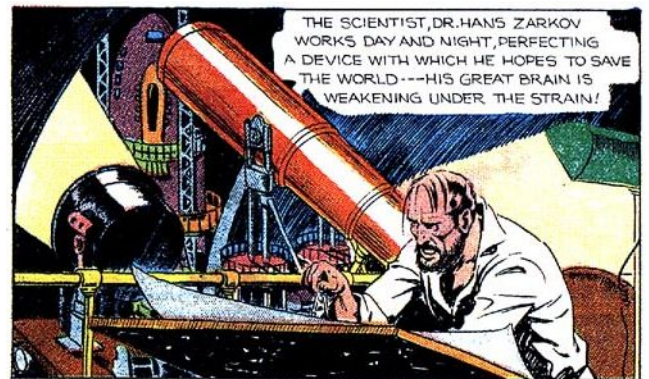


Pic. 5: Flash Gordon #1

The reason behind the number of dashes is unknown but the most possible explanation is that the author wanted to prolong the pause when using more dashes.

Many dashes are often used at the end of Gordon's stories. In the second issue, the final text that is tempting the readers to buy next issue says: "Flash staggers toward the distant city with his precious burden --- Suddenly out of the darkness, looms a horrible figure! --- It moves slowly forward -----" (see picture #6) With more dashes, a reader can feel longer pause that signifies dramatic tone.
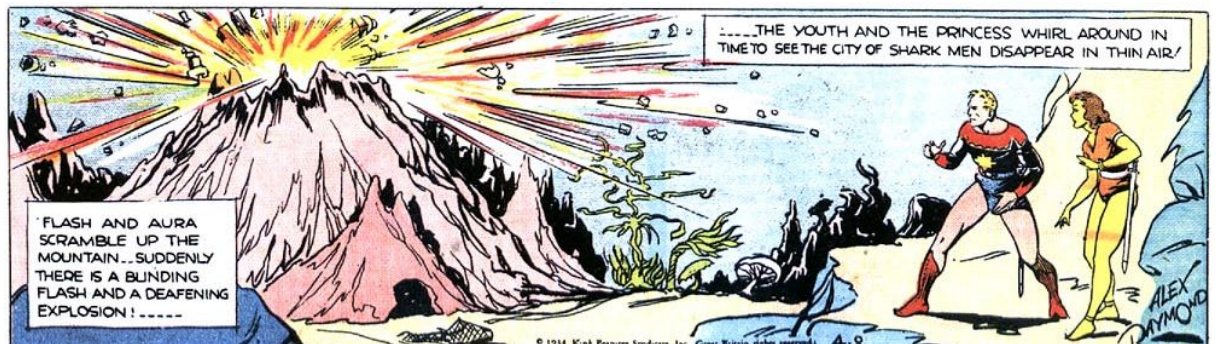


Pic. 6: Flash Gordon #2

Besides the final texts of the chapters, there can be found another great number of dashes in the middle of a story. For example in Flash Gordon #4 (picture #7): "---Flash pinions him with a deadly grip! --- The muscles writhe and ripple under his glistening skin as the youth exerts pressure ------"


Pic. 7: Flash Gordon #4

Once, there are exactly six dashes in a row. The author clearly wanted to *strongly* emphasise the pause, the dramatic moment.


Pic. 8: Flash Gordon #13

In Flash Gordon #11, ellipses instead of dashes started to appear. They seemingly had same purpose as dashes but dashes remains in use and both methods are used in same issues without any difference in meaning. Since the 13rd issue, both techniques were combined together and the authors started to use underscores (see picture #8). Subsequently, the three methods (dashes, underscores, and ellipses) were used together with varying frequency.


**Speech balloons**

Similarly to the first narration boxes in Flash Gordon, speech balloons also have irregular form. From the perspective of a modern comic book reader, speech balloons can give the impression that a speaker has somehow modulated voice. When the balloon is not round it can suggest anger (*burst balloon*) or electronic device (*radio balloon*) so

it would be logical to assume the voice of the speaker is changed. But it is clear that the text in speech balloons (even though they are not really looking like 'balloons') in Flash Gordon should be considered as a normal speech.

The shape of the irregular "balloons" had a very easy purpose. This early comics was originally published in a newspaper with only one page to tell a part of the story. Authors needed to intrigue and entertain readers as much as it was possible so they had to utilise all the space for their story they had. The pictures are relatively small but they are essential for telling the story (what happened, where it happened, how it happened) and of course important for dragging the reader into the story.
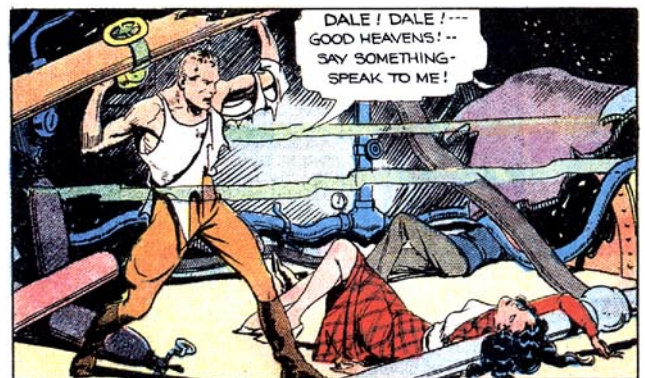

Pic. 9: Flash Gordon #1

The reason for irregular speech balloons can be viewed in the panel from the first issue of Flash Gordon comics (see picture #9). The scientist has a long speech that requires a lot of space (almost one quarter of the whole panel) and the main hero, Flash Gordon, has also something to say. If there were round balloons, they would have occupy much more space (even if the method of *joined balloons* was used) causing the reader not having a clear view on the picture behind balloons.

Furthermore, the two balloons (scientist's and Gordon's) are mixed together as their shapes provide so they can spare more space. The Gordon's speech balloon, for example, could have been placed between his and girl's head but the picture is much clearer the way it was originally arranged.

However, in later issues, the authors of Flash Gordon were experimenting with forms of speech balloons too. In Flash Gordon #42 the balloons lost their usual shape and became just an ordinary text with a black line pointing to a speaker. At that time, the comics was more focused on visual aspects. Panels were bigger and appeared in many different shapes – even a panel shaped in oval appeared in Flash Gordon #46.

The dashes, dots and underscores were used in speech balloons in the same manner as they were used in captions.

An example of use can be viewed in Flash Gordon #2 (see picture #10): "Dale! Dale! --- Good heavens! -- Say something - speak to me!" The reader can see that the number of dashes is increasing as the main character is shouting. That could illustrate the pause between sentences shortens too, and based on that fact, the reader can imagine Flash Gordon speaking increasingly *faster* in his distress.



Pic. 10: Flash Gordon #2

In this old graphic novel, there is a very little use of devices for emphasising or distinguishing words or sentences in speech balloons. The scientist's speech can be imagined by the reader to be angry and loud in a panel #11 of first issue (see picture #9). It is very possible that a similar talk would be nowadays highlighted using modern comic book methods (*bold text, burst balloon...*).
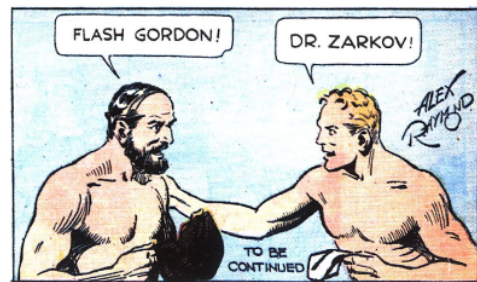
In Flash Gordon #7, the authors came up with the emphasising word within the speech balloon using the underlined text: "By the great god, Tao! A mere youth -- and white!" (see picture #11) In this case, the emphasised word shows what is the biggest source of surprise for the alien.

This method of emphasising was later rarely used in narrative captions too (starting in Flash Gordon #12)

First emphasised words by enlarging the text within the speech balloon can be viewed in Flash Gordon #17 (see picture #12) when the main hero meets his old acquaintance. By using the bigger text, the surprise and excitement of both characters are pointed out.



Pic. 11: Flash Gordon #7        Pic. 12: Flash Gordon #17

However, the first real emphasis of the text within speech balloon can be seen in Flash Gordon #20, where the main hero's lover calls out his name (see picture #13). The text in the balloon is bigger than was the standard size and it is bolder and somehow curved.



Pic. 13: Flash Gordon #20

An interesting use of the emphasising word via underlined text can be viewed in Flash Gordon #28 (see picture #14). The man hero welcomes his acquaintance with saying: "Well, Princess Aura, this is a surprise!" By underlining the word, the reader is immediately aware that this particular word was stressed out when Flash Gordon said it. As a result, the reader can sense an irony or a patronised tone.
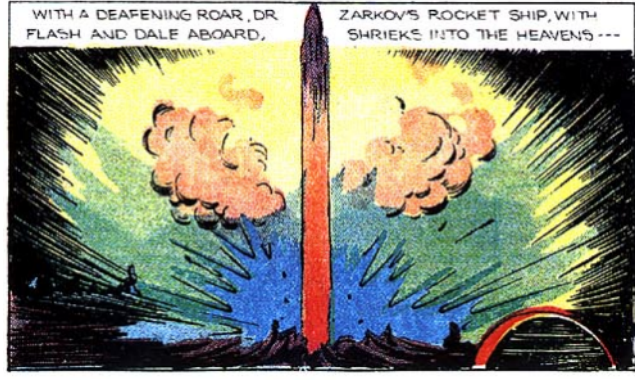


Pic. 14: Flash Gordon #28

First actual screaming in Flash Gordon comics can be viewed in Flash Gordon #23 (see picture #15). The villain stabs a minor character and the character reacts with yelling in speech balloon: "Ya-a-a-aa", which represents an indistinct scream that a person do when he is in pain. Dashes in the middle should emphasise the longer time period of the scream.


Pic. 15: Flash Gordon #23

**Sound Effects**

The sound effects are not used in Flash Gordon's comics from 1934. The author simply describes the sounds via narrator, as it is usual in written novels. On the second panel of the first issue (see picture #1), there are no sound effects illustrating the sound of the drums, only the narrator is mentioning it. Another example can be a narrator in panel #12: "With a deafening roar, Dr. Zarkov's rocket..." (see picture #16) In modern comics, such panel would be in most cases filled with a sound effect to emphasise the loud noise.


Pic. 16: Flash Gordon #1

**Summary**

As one of the most successful comic book in its time, it influenced many future and down-to-date authors of graphic novels. The authors experimented with form of a comic book and many of their used techniques were imitated and improved.

Flash Gordon in his first two years of existence used a narrator (third-person view) in form of a floating text and text inside of an irregular or a regular box.

Within the narration and speech balloons, the authors used dashes, ellipses and underscores (all of them with the same use) to create a pause in a speech or even to speed up the talk, mainly for dramatic purposes.

Speech balloons in Flash Gordon had an irregular form. They were very similar to a present speech balloon (use, colours, balloon tail) but the shape was not a perfect oval. Later on, the speech balloons completely lost their shape completely.

Emphasising text within a speech balloon was used but only very rarely. In a few occasions, a word inside of a speech balloon was underlined to emphasise the word. Also, the bigger text was used few times for the emphasising.

Sound Effects were not used in any occasions.

## 4. Fantastic Four

The other analysed graphic novels are first issues of long-term published comic book series, Fantastic Four. This comic book series became immediately successful from the very first issue and influenced many other comics. (Fein, 2006, p.6) These analysed issues were published in 1961 and 1962, nearly thirty years after Flash Gordon comics. The analysis will show what changed and what remained similar in terms of storytelling techniques in comic book medium.

**Captions**

Captions in Fantastic Four comics have usually a firm rectangle shape with a yellow colour as a background.

Most captions are *narrative* ones with third-person view (see 2.1. Captions)

The caption boxes are placed in such manner that the caption touches the border of a panel and thus became attached to it; captions in FF comics never 'float' inside of the panel. As became standard, the caption is often located at the top of a panel. In a few occasions, the panel is on the side as it can be viewed in the picture #1.



Pic. 1: Fantastic Four #1, p.9

The reason behind the decision of changing the usual caption position is obvious in this particular case. The artist wanted to show all four characters from the waist up so he could express their emotions on his limited space. First character on the left is holding his pipe calmly and the pipe can indicate the smoking habit often reserved for older and rather distinguished men. Second character is threatening with his arm and from his

stance, the reader can imagine the character stepping forward in his anger. Third character looks worried, which is emphasised by her arm akimbo. Fourth character seems to be displeased and he expresses it with crossed arms. With the speech balloons added, the artist decided not to give up any of these characters' details and placed the caption on the left where it does not interfere with the picture.

Captions in Lee's and Kirby's design includes a bolded first letter. That method can remind written work of fiction, often in children books. But in case of the non-graphic novels, the first emphasised letter is usually used at the beginning of a chapter while the bolded letters are in every caption of Fantastic Four comics. It most probably does not have any actual meaning - the method is used only for aesthetic purposes.

The shape of a caption is not always prefect rectangle. As the authors were experimenting with possibilities of a comic book medium and the caption was a firm part of a panel border, the shape is sometimes transformed. One of the examples can be seen in the picture #2. The upper three panels are splitted like a saw cut them. Both panels and captions had lines with "jags".
This unusual layout was used in order to stress out the radar communication. That method is probably based on classic *radio balloon*, which is actually used too in the middle panel.


Pic. 2: Fantastic Four #1, p.7

In Fantastic Four comics, double-dash and ellipses are widely used. Apart from Flash Gordon comics, double-dash is in fact consisted of only two dashes, never three or more. Underscores are not used at all.

First example of the use can be viewed in the picture #3: "One strange man who is somehow **more** than just a man--for he is the leader of... the Fantastic Four!" The sentence has both ellipses and double-dash. Both methods have practically the same purpose – to emphasise a pause.

Ellipses are used frequently in Fantastic Four comics. In the picture #3, the pause in form of ellipses was applied to set up a dramatic tone or to put a stress on the name of the main team.

Pic. 3: Fantastic Four #1, p.1

The second use of an ellipsis is in ending the caption. Last sentences in all captions end with ellipsis or exclamation/question mark in order to dramatise the story. Ellipsis suggests that a caption only introduces the reader to a panel and when this feeling of unfinished information is implemented (the reader was only introduced), it helps to convey the natural flow of the story and to intensify the connection between the caption and the panel.

An exclamation mark could be easily replaced with a full-stop but the authors decided to use a sign of exclamation to dramatise the story even more. Basically, if Stan Lee or Jack Kirby wanted to emphasise the caption, they placed an exclamation mark (or two). If not, they used an ellipsis.

A caption ending with a question mark was used to raise a rhetorical question (as it can be viewed in the picture #4). Such method even more increases the personal appeal to the reader – it may even challenge him or her to find the answer (by keep reading). But mainly, it is the part of the narrative style the Fantastic Four comics used.

It is also important to notice the information inside of a
caption often concerns location and time, which reminds
*location & time captions.*



Pic. 4: Fantastic Four #1, p.8

However, information about location and time is presented in
more personal attitude in this case. For example, the third
page of the Fantastic Four #1 has a caption saying: "But let
us leave the amazing Invisible Girl and turn our attention to a
men's clothing store, in another part of town..." The pronoun
'us' suggests the reader is a part of a bigger group of people
and with this type of narration, the reader can feel more
personal attitude towards him. The standard *location &
time* captions would be shorter and impersonal as it can be
viewed on examples in this work in chapter 2.1 Captions. In this particular situation, the
*location & time* caption's text would have been "Meanwhile in a men's clothing store"
or only "Men's clothing store".



Pic. 5: Fantastic Four #5, p.4

*Spoken monologue* captions are another method used in the Lee's and Kirby's work. In
the picture #5, Reed Richards is telling the story how he met Doctor Doom. When he
starts with his speech, the reader is immediately shifted away to the moments when the
content of the story actually happened. That means the pictures somehow illustrate the

story as it is subsequently told. These captions can be found to be very similar to usual *narrative captions* with first person view. As it was described in chapter 2.1.1 Narrator in captions, such narrator tells the story in his own way. (Goldknopf, 1968, p.13). However, this situation does not agree with another Goldknopf's statement about the narrator talking to someone outside the novel (p. 21). The character from the example in the picture #5 apparently talks to someone *inside* the graphic novel, he is telling his story to the rest of his team.

That is the reason why *spoken monologue* captions should be distinguished from *narrative captions*.

In Fantastic Four comics, the shape of a panel is changed to have slightly 'bubbled' appearance and the first caption contains a face of the speaker when the method of *spoken monologue* is used as it can be seen from example above. On the other hand, the text within captions does not include quotation marks.



Pic. 6: Fantastic Four #5, p.20



Pic. 7: Fantastic Four #5, p.20

*Editorial caption*, which was very popular in superhero comics at that time, can be found in *Fantastic Four #5* (see pictures #6 and #7). An editor, which is not signed at this case (so it could be the authors themselves), is letting the reader know that the character in question appeared in 4th issue. The *asterisk* from speech balloon refers to the *editorial caption,* as it is usual when this method is used.

**Speech balloons**

Similar to captions, the shape of speech balloons in Fantastic Four is also firmer. But as it can be viewed on the second panel in the picture #8, the 'balloons' are sometimes not drawn as a perfect oval. Instead, a speech balloon is often roundly extended with something that looks like a new oval within the balloon placed near the balloon tail. This round extension may have been used for having enough space for a picture around

speech balloons (Again, an artist needs enough space to convey a story) but it also adds a "bubbly" appearance to a speech balloon. The shape of non-oval speech balloon has most likely an aesthetic reason because there is a sufficiency of space for a perfect oval speech balloon in many occasions but a "extended speech balloon" is still used. For example in the picture #9, the speech of the frightened driver could be easily placed in a perfect oval speech balloon without blocking any significant place for art.



Pic. 8: Fantastic Four #1, p.1



Pic. 9: Fantastic Four #1, p.3

On the same picture, the speech balloon could use the form of the *burst balloons*, but authors of Fantastic Four did not use this method to emphasise the shouting. On the other hand, they widely use bold text to emphasise various words. The reader can imagine these words were stressed out when spoken by comic book characters.



Pic. 10: Fantastic Four #1, p. 10

With this illustrative help, the authors often provide approximate melody of voice.

Apart from the highlighting with bold text, the bigger bolded text is sometimes used (see picture #10) and rarely a colourful text appears. The colourful text is by appearance very similar to sound effects and titles of chapters in Fantastic Four comics. See the comparison below in pictures #11 and #12.

Pic. 12: Fantastic Four #1, p.20



Pic. 11: Fantastic Four #1, p.16

Fantastic Four comics also include the *breath marks*. In the picture #13, there is a speech balloon where the whole text is bordered by breath marks. Another example can be viewed in the picture #14, where the interjection ('gulp') alone is bordered by *breath marks* to emphasise the interjection within the speech balloon.



Pic. 13: Fantastic Four #1, p.3



Pic. 14: Fantastic Four #1, p.18

The method of *joined balloons* (without connectors) is sometimes used. An example can be viewed in the picture #15, in which Human Torch is warning pilots in planes. As Piekos noted, balloons joined with this method should share the same thought process. The first balloon contains a warning shouting and the second one is based on a character's complaining. Both speech balloons are concerning the same situation but the division was made



Pic. 15: Fantastic Four #1, p. 7

to emphasise different tones in speech (yelling at others / talking to himself). Also, there is a possibility the authors wanted to emphasise a short pause between each balloon.

**Sound effects**

Unlike the Flash Gordon comics examined above, graphic novels with Fantastic Four widely use sound effects for illustrating sounds.

First sound effect in FF comics can be found on page 10 (see picture #16). Main characters are floating in a spaceship where they hear strange noises coming from a cosmic storm. Authors could decide to let know the reader about the sounds via caption, as it was usual in older comic books (like the analysed Flash Gordon). The caption text would have been for example: "...When suddenly the crew starts to hear strange noises." If this method was used, it would be much less efficient for two reasons: 1) In this particular case, the text could feel little bit repetitive for the reader. He or she would read twice about hearing something (once from a speech balloon belonging to a member of the crew, once from a caption) and that could cause breaking a natural flow of the story. 2) The reader would not exactly know the nature of the sound (how does it sound). Description of the sound may not be sufficient to familiarise the reader with the noise. In written novels, the author can



Pic. 16: Fantastic Four #1, p. 10

rewrite the sound within the narration (as it is written in a sound effect), but in graphic novel narrative captions, the use of interjection is absolutely unusual.

Another good example can be viewed in the picture #17, in which a soldier encounters a strange earthquake. At first, the reader is via speech balloon familiarised with fact that the soldier feels unusual throbbing. Then he hears rumbling, and at the end, even a roar. First sound effects of rumbling (using *descriptive sounds*, see chapter 2.3) are placed at the bottom of the panel, which is showing the direction of the sound source. At the second panel, the sound effect is moved in the middle and the size of the text is

significantly larger. It is clear that this change of
position and size is showing the reader that the
sounds became louder. The enlargement has also
been used in speech balloons to show a louder voice
while the position change is clearly based on the
general fact that what tends to be more in the middle
is more noticeable. On the other hand, the position
may have been chosen on the basis of artistic needs
too (the falling soldier is leaving the place for a
sound effect in the middle).



Pic. 17: Fantastic Four #1, p.15

**Summary**

The analysed Fantastic Four comics have firmer rules on using the comic books
method. Comparing to Flash Gordon comics, the FF comic books use many new
methods to convey the story.

Captions are almost always in a rectangle-shaped box with yellow background and they
are often used as *narrative captions*. The captions are attached to a panel and include a
first bolded letter. Other captions are *editorial* ones, which were not signed in the
analysed comic books, and *spoken monologue*, which appear in a 'bubbly' panel and
with a face of the speaker in the first caption.

Both captions and speech balloons are using ellipses or double-dash to prolong the
pause in a speech. Captions always end with ellipsis or question/exclamation mark for
adding a dramatic tone.

Speech balloons have firmer shape too. They either have a perfect oval shape or an oval
with specific 'bubbly extension' near the balloon tail. Speech balloons include bolded or
in another way highlighted text and *breath marks* for emphasising interjections. *Joined
balloons* method is also occasionally used in FF comics.

Fantastic Four comics frequently use sound effects. Using the method, a sound can be more comprehensive for the reader and the locating of sound effects can be interestingly used for artistic purposes.
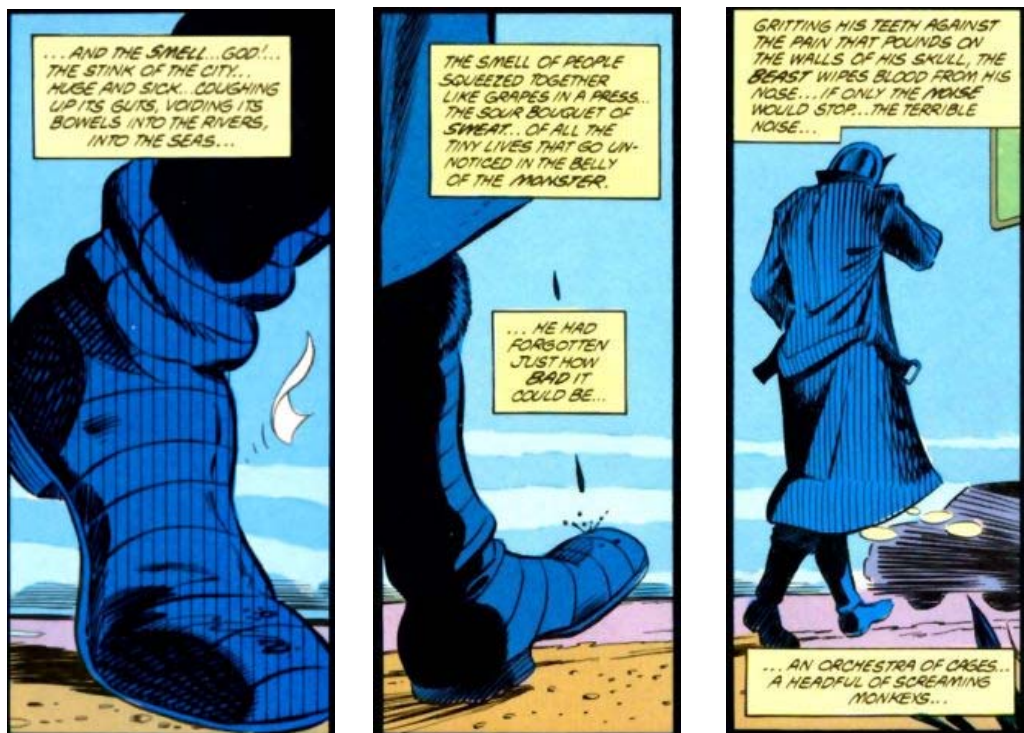
## 5. Animal Man

The final analysed graphic novels of this paper are first issues of Animal Man series, which was published in 1988-1989. The comics was written by Grant Morrison, an acclaimed comic book author, and is referred to as a post-modern work with daring and complex stories (Pustz, 1999, p.126). Such tales require a variety of comic book techniques the analysis may uncover and describe.

**Captions**

Captions in Animal Man series have a perfect rectangle shape with an italicised text. Unlike Fantastic Four comics, captions in Morrison's comics very often 'float' in a panel, a caption is rarely touching the border of a panel.

As the comics was experimenting with comic book form, many types of captions can be found here.

In the first issue, captions with *location & time* and *narrative captions* can be found.



Pic. 1: Animal Man #1, p.1

*Narrative captions* are very different from the ones in Flash Gordon and Fantastic Four. They are still using third-person narrator but the content is much more sophisticated. On the first page, the reader can see a walk of a mysterious man with many captions, in which most of the text is about his feelings (see picture #1). Their interpretation is very direct and precise, almost as the narrator was in fact the character himself – but from the use of the pronoun 'he', it is clear that it is a third-person narrator.

Morrison is using this type of narration to build up tension and most importantly, to give reader information in small pieces, which is a big difference from earlier captions that served mainly to explain the whole situation. Here, the reader can for example learn that the mysterious character somehow hears the pain of caged animals but momentarily the reader does not know who he is and what he is going to do.

Morrion's narrative also has strong literary purpose. That means he wants to thoroughly express the situation and emotions. He uses methods like simile ("The smell of people squeezed together like grapes in a press"), metaphor ("an orchestra of cages") and personification ("[city is] coughing up its guts, voiding its bowels into the rivers"). These methods could be found in Fantastic Four or Flash Gordon comics too but never with such frequency and complexity (whole first page of Animal Man #1 can be found in Appendix #2).



Pic. 2: Animal Man #1, p.9

On the other hand, Morrison's *narrative caption*s also use the possibility of direct explanation of a present situation, where the pictures are for some reason not sufficient. For example in the picture #2, the captions are telling the reader what the character is doing and what is happening to him. Without them, the reader would see only a strange man with shining eyes who may be in some sort of pain. The informative part (the character calls for 'guidance' and then starts to see an image) could be only told by *internal monologue* or *thought balloons* but Morrison chose a more abstract approach.

*Location & time* captions can rarely be found in Animal Man comics. In the first issue, this method is used to distinguish the days of Animal Man's training by captions with text "Day 1", "Day 2"...  (See picture #3 and #4.)



Pic. 3: Animal Man #1, p.13



Pic. 4: Animal Man #1, p.14

Since the second issue, *internal monologue* captions has been common part of Animal Man comics. First *internal monologue* captions appear on the 9th page (see picture #5), where the main character is commenting his feelings about his special powers.
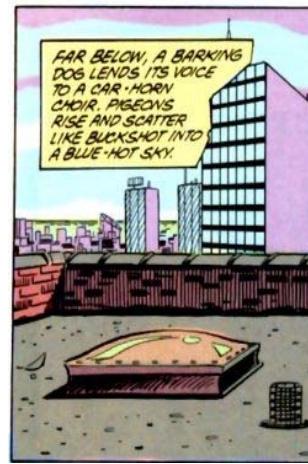
Both *internal monologue* captions and *narrative captions* look exactly the same. The difference can be only told by context. Slightly altered shape of captions can be found across the series for aesthetic purposes – caption boxes are sometimes narrowed so the picture in a panel would be clear as it can be in the picture #6 and #7.



Pic. 5: Animal Man #2, p.9

Pic. 6: Animal Man #2, p.5
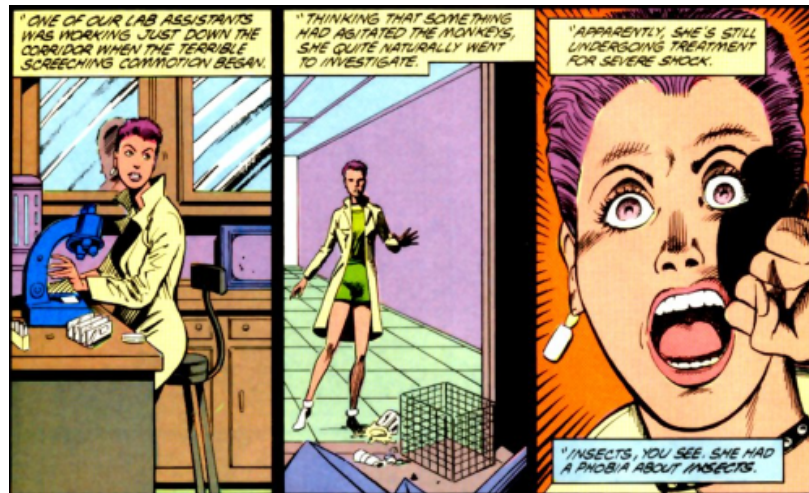


Pic. 7: Animal Man #2, p.6

An interesting use of *internal monologue* captions can be viewed in Animal Man #11 on page 12. All captions are thoughts of the Animal Man as he is feeling little bit dizzy and distracted. Text is somehow interrupted and confused. Most of the text within captions is without full stops and even without double-dashes or ellipses. Along with detailed shots in panels, the author can truly emphasise and illustrate the character's feelings and state of mind (whole page can be viewed in Appendix #3).



Pic. 8: Animal Man #11, p.12

*Spoken monologue* captions are also used in Animal Man comics. In the second issue, a scientist is telling the main hero what happened earlier that day (see picture #9). There is no face appearing on captions like in Fantastic Four comics but the text is bordered with quotation marks.

Grant Morrison is using ellipses in captions to emphasise a pause during internal monologues and third-person narrative (mainly for the dramatic purposes – as it was shown above). There are no double-dashes or underscores in the graphic novel. The bolded text for an emphasis of words can be also found.



Pic. 9: Animal Man #2, p.4

The author frequently changes types of captions (*internal monologue, spoken monologue, narrative caption*) even though they look very similar. *Spoken monologue* captions have text with quotation marks but the appearance of narrative and internal monologue caption is the same. It is not quite difficult to distinguish them and understand the information but it does require certain knowledge of the comic book medium.

That can be understood as one of proofs of comic books growing up.

**Speech balloons**
All speech balloons in Animal Man have a shape of perfect oval. Text within the balloons is often bolded and italicised (at the same time) to emphasise words.

*Joined balloons* method is used, both with and without connectors. An interesting use of the combination of those two methods can be viewed in the picture #10. The balloons in the first panel are joined without connectors just to distinguish two separate thoughts on the same subject. On the contrary, the balloons in the panel on the right have a

connector even though the same character speaks them both. The sudden use of the connector was deliberately chosen to point out a small pause between the last two speech balloons.



Pic. 10: Animal Man #2, p.5

*Music notes* in the picture #11 looks slightly different from a modern look (see Music notes in 2.1.2 Methods in Speech balloons). The shape of a speech balloon with *music notes* is little bit deformed and highlighted with purple colour (which reminds a *waving balloon)*. The text inside belonging to a song has different font and it appears to be italicised. With this method, the speech seems to be modulated – sang, in this case.



Pic. 11: Animal Man #1, p.5



Pic. 12: Animal Man #5, p.2

Another *music notes* balloon can be seen in the picture #12, where there is a same font (only slightly italicised) and no border whatsoever – which is very similar to modern look. Clearly, the authors were not strictly follow rules how to draw up the method.

One *music note* alone in a speech balloon as Piekos described (Comic Book Grammar & Tradition, 2010) can be seen in the picture #13, where a scientist is whistling.

Pic. 13: Animal Man #2, p.7

A *whispering balloon* can be viewed on page 8 of Animal Man #1. It has the common look of the balloon bordered with dash-stroke. Another method of expressing silent voice, *small text in big balloon,* is used in Animal Man #3 (see picture #15). At the top of the panel, there is a method of bigger bolded words used to emphasise louder voice, yelling or screaming, which strongly contrasts with a silent word spoken by a frightened soldier. That word is written with significantly smaller font to suggest the reader its quietness.

Pic. 14: Animal Man #1, p.8

Pic. 15: Animal Man #3, p.11

While *breath marks* were used for all interjections in Fantastic Four comics, Animal Man uses another method too. Two interjections can be viewed in the picture #16 where there is a cat feeding small kittens with a dead rat. The cats do animal noises with interjections widely used in

Pic. 16: Animal Man #2, p.8

English language. Animal Man comics use bolded and italicised font for highlighting interjections. Same method can be found in the most of cases of using an exclamation.

However, in the 6<sup>th</sup> issue of Animal Man, *breath marks* do appear. On the second page, a member of extra-terrestrial race says "hmmf", which signalises her disdain (see picture #17). It is possible the author wanted to emphasise only this kind of interjection with *breath marks* but later on, the character uses the same interjection without them (see picture #18). Moreover, *breath marks* are also used on page 14 (see picture #19), where the character does animal voices, while they were *not* used in the first issue in a similar situation (see picture #16). That could mean the choice between using the *breath marks* or bolded and italicised text when interjections used were more or less randomly. Nevertheless, the reader can see both methods used in the graphic novel.



Pic. 17: Animal Man #6, p.2          Pic. 18: Animal Man #6, p.9          Pic. 19: Animal Man #6, p.14

Bolding words within speech balloons can be used in different scales. A good example of such method can be viewed in the picture #20.

A frightened mother is yelling at her daughter with raising frequency in *joined balloons*. The balloons were divided to separate three different 'statements' and to emphasise a short pause between them. In the first balloon, most of the text is written in ordinary font, only one word ('daughter') is emphasised by bolding. The stressed out word is clearly the one



Pic. 20: Animal Man #3, p. 8

the mother most care about and what is the most important part of the speech in the speech balloon for her to let hostile hunters know (and with that, to the reader). In the second balloon, the whole text is written in bold and italicised text. As the text is bigger and more highlighted, the reader can imagine a raising voice. The last speech balloon with only one word is even bigger, which emphasises the loudest word in the moment captured in the panel.

It is interesting to notice the method of *bursting balloon* is not used here, even though it is exactly the situation where it could be placed. The reason may very much be certain inadequacy of *bursting balloon*. The situation in Animal Man comics is very dramatic and serious and the author could possibly feel the *bursting balloon* suggests a style and tone of more cartoon and childish stories. Moreover, when an ordinary shape of balloons used, the transform of speech from almost ordinary voice to terrified screaming can be better illustrated.



Pic. 21: Animal Man #3, p.22

An example of *waving balloon* can be viewed on page 22 of Animal Man #3, where a gorilla is slowly dying. The method with emphasised interjections can better suggest the indistinct noises of a seriously injured animal to the reader.

**Sound Effects**

Animal Man comics use sound effects as a one of the methods to express a sound. Often, the author describes the sound in captions or let the reader to presume it from the picture.

One of examples where the sound effect is used can be viewed in the picture #22, where a character was thrown out from an alley and he falls to a pavement with a sound effect 'THUD'. This *onomatopoeic* word can emphasise the impact with which a boy hit the ground. While sound effects can be sometimes



Pic. 22: Animal Man #1, p.11

generally conceived as something that resembles cartoons with their childish display of violence, here is an example of using the method to stress out the pain the character received.


Pic. 23: Animal Man #1, p.21

An informative purpose of sound effects can be viewed in the picture #23. Without a sound effect, the reader would see only strangely highlighted moving shotgun. The sound effect 'KLICK-RATCH' can via its *onomatopoeic* qualities illustrate the sound and help the reader to understand the meaning of the panel. It is possible that many readers would understand the panel just from the picture inside but with sound effect, such telling the information is more effective.

Basically, a picture itself can sometimes be not enough to convey the story. Another method to 'explain the situation' is via narrator in captions (for example: 'A hunter loaded his shotgun...') but this method could be less effective in many situations (the story would feel too descriptive).

Sound effects are interestingly located in the picture #24. The reader can see a similar 'amplifying' of noise via enlarging letters of a sound effect. To illustrate as loud voice as possible without great reducing of the picture, authors (probably the artist, Chas Truog) decided to place sound effects 'behind' the characters and parts of the setting. Due to that, the idea of overwhelming sound is illustrated, and at the same time, the characters' emotions and even the speech in balloons are clearly visible.


Pic. 24: Animal Man #6, p.5

**Summary**

Animal Man series, as a comic book experimenting with both form and content, was another graphic novel chosen for analysis.

Captions in Animal Man comics had almost always a perfect rectangle shape. The only exception is when a rectangle box is 'cut off' for aesthetic purposes. There can be found various types of captions in Animal Man series: *narrative captions, location & time* captions, *spoken monologue* and *internal monologue*. All types of captions are very similar to each other so it is very important for the reader to notice the context.

Various kinds of speech balloons can be found in Animal Man too. Concerning the form of a balloon, the analysis above described *music notes* balloons, *whispering balloons* and *wavy balloons*. Furthermore, the authors intentionally alternate *joined balloons* with and without connectors. The method of *breath marks* is sometimes used, however it appears that the authors use it at random. Instead, the text with interjection is more often bolded and italicised (at the same time in most cases). An enlargement and shrinking a text for artistic purposes are also common.

Sound effects are widely used in Animal Man comics. They often have either informative character (to effectively explain what is happening within a panel) or they are used to emphasise the action.

**6. Conclusion**

The comics has been popular medium for last hundred years and during that time, it was constantly changing and developing. This paper is focusing on methods with which the authors of comic books are expressing emotions and telling the story.

These methods can resemble films by its showing the situation with pictures but this work is focused on unique methods loosely connected to literary forms.

One of the connections can be seen in chapter 2.1.1 in theoretical part where the use of *narrative captions* is described. The caption uses a first person and third person narrative very similarly to the use in 'classic' literature. Basically, it can be said the *narrative captions* 'borrowed' this technique from ordinary written literature. On the other hand, the use differs when for example the pictures can replace some parts of the narrative (and thus reduce it) in third person narrative.

While captions can be perceived as a device closely familiar to written literature, the *speech balloons* with its many forms are in many ways unique and irreplaceable. The forms of balloons can via its visual appearance suggest the modulation of voice, the mood in which the text was spoken. Due to using of emphasised words, it can even indicate an approximate melody of voice as it can be viewed on examples in analyses.

The third main device and considerable part of 'comic book language' are sound effects. With this method, the authors of comics illustrate the sounds in a manner the reader immediately knows an approximate nature of sound, noisiness and source location in the picture.

The analyses of three different comic books from different time periods uncovered the use of such methods. As it was presumed, the comics techniques were changing during the time. *Flash Gordon,* in his first adventures, widely used captions for narrating the story. The visual and textual parts were effectively combined to convey the story – however, when compared to more recent comic books, there was a lack of comic book

methods like modulating voice (via *burst balloon, wavy balloon, small text in big balloon...*) or using sound effects.

*Fantastic Four,* on the other hand, brought up many new techniques and effectively used them. Captions were no longer only *narrative* ones but they also served as a *spoken monologue* or *editorial captions*. Furthermore, the captions with its rhetorical questions and exclamation marks set up its own "adventurous" mood. Speech balloons had a few interesting techniques (*joined balloons,* emphasising words...) and sound effects were used too.

On the other hand, *Animal Man* with its more adult stories used also even more comics devices and in much more complex way. The complexity can be viewed in truly 'literary' narration where the captions does not served as a fun explanation of situation anymore but it slowly uncover the story and characters via mysterious moments using describing methods like metaphors or personifications.

Along with the complexity, *Animal Man* also fully uses a *variety* of comic book techniques. The amount of forms and techniques in captions, speech balloons and sound effects easily exceeds both *Fantastic Four* and *Flash Gordon* comics.

When the quantity and quality of comics methods increased during the time, it is logical to presume that the comics was evolving in the examined time period. And with more devices the reader has to be familiarised with, the comics is becoming more difficult to read. It suggests the reader has to 'try harder' to comprehend the stories.

With these observations in analysed mainstream comic books, it can be said the comics were due its developing and elaborating *growing up*.

7. **Resumé**

Cílem této práce je představit komiksové médium jako formu umění se svou specifickou metodologií vyprávění, skrz kterou vyvolává u čtenáře pocity, podobně jako je tomu například u psaných románů či filmu.

Komiks se stal široce známým takřka po celém světě, ale jen v málo zemích dosáhl takové popularity a rozmachu jako ve Spojených státech. V této zemi se komiks již téměř sto let úspěšně prodává, díky čemuž zde tvořící autoři znatelně rozvíjejí a mění formu komiksu. Z tohoto důvodu je tato práce zaměřená pouze na americké komiksy, z jejichž metod vyprávění vychází a jejichž konkrétní díla v analytické části zkoumá.

V druhé kapitole se popisuje komiksový jazyk se svými prostředky a terminologií. V úvodu lze říci, že výrazy *comics, comic book* a *graphic novel* (grafický román) jsou zaměnitelné, pouze *comic book* je termín vyhrazený pro komiks, který byl postupně vydáván například v sešitové podobě. Dále *comics panels* (komiksové panely) označují ohraničenou část stránky, ve které se odehrává příběh. V těchto panelech se objevují *captions* (rámečky), *speech balloons* (řečové bubliny) a *sound effects* (zvukové efekty).

V podkapitole o *captions* jsou jednotlivé rámečky popsány a rozděleny do pěti hlavních kategorií − *Location & Time* (Místo a čas), *Internal monologue* (Vnitřní monolog), *Spoken monologue* (Mluvený monolog), *Narrative caption* (Rámeček vypravěče) a *Editorial caption* (Rámeček redaktora). Názvy kategorií a rozdělení vychází z článku Natea Piekose o „komiksové gramatice“. Výjimkou jsou poslední dvě kategorie, kde Piekos nazývá *narrative caption* rámeček, pro který je vhodný spíš název, pro účely této práce zavedený, *editorial caption*. Termín *narrative caption* se v této práci používá pro kategorii rámečků, ve které text patří vypravěči v takové podobě, v jaké je znám z klasické literatury.

Stejně jako v ní se v *narrative caption* vyskytuje vypravěč, který sděluje příběh ve *first person view* (ich-forma) nebo *third person view* (er-forma). V práci je dále na příkladech z klasické a komiksové literatury srovnáním ukázáno, že tyto vypravěčské

techniky se od sebe v obou formách umění neliší. Pouze u *third person view* je zjevný fakt, že vypravěč v komiksu nemusí popisovat tolik skutečností jako vypravěč u klasické literatury, neboť komiks zároveň s vypravěčem využívá svou obrazovou část k sdělování informací.

V podkapitole o *speech balloons* jsou popsány jednotlivé formy „řečových bublin" a některé prostředky, které se v „bublinách" využívají. Opět se vychází z článku Natea Piekose, ze kterého je použitá terminologie a některé definice. Formy a prostředky v *speech balloon* jsou názorně předvedeny na ukázkách z vybraných komiksů.

Základní formy *speech balloons* popsané v práci jsou *ordinary speech balloon* (obyčejná řečová bublina), *burst balloon* (křičící bublina), *joined balloon to balloon* (spojené bubliny), *joined balloons with connectors* (spojené bubliny s konektorem), *radio balloon* (rádiová bublina), *thought balloon* (myšlenková bublina), *whispering balloon* (šeptací bublina) a *wavy balloon* (zvlněná bublina).

Časté metody použité v *speech balloons* jsou *asterisk* (hvězdička), *bold text* (tučný text), *breath marks* (dechové značky), *double dash* (dvojitá pomlčka), *ellipsis* (tři tečky), *music notes* (noty) a *small text in big balloon* (malý text ve velké bublině).

Dále jsou popsány citoslovce a jejich využití v komiksu s názornými příklady z komiksu.

V části o *sound effects* je tato metoda definována a opět ilustrována na příkladech. „Zvukové efekty" často využívají jedno tzv. zvukomalebné slovo a jsou umístěny v panelu tam, odkud má zvuk přibližně vycházet.

V analytické části se postupně rozebírají tři různé komiksy. Prvním z nich jsou první komiksy *Flash Gordon*, jež vycházely v roce 1934. Tento komiks byl vysoce populární, experimentoval s daným médiem a ovlivnil mnoho pozdějších komiksových autorů.

*Captions* ve *Flashi Gordonovi* se objevovaly v podobě obdélníků či pouze textu, který se „vznášel" v komiksovém panelu. Všechny rámečky využívaly pouze jednu metodu, *narrative captions* s er-formou. V rámečcích i řečových bublinách se často objevovaly pomlčky, několik teček za sebou i podtržítka k vytváření pauzy v textu či dokonce k jeho zdánlivému postupnému zrychlování.

Řečové bubliny byly velmi podobné moderním *speech balloons*, ale jejich tvar byl nepravidelný. Přesto měl základní charakteristiky „bubliny" jako barva, bublinový „ocásek" a využití. V pozdějších číslech tvar „bubliny" vymizel úplně a postavy u sebe měly *speech balloons* pouze v podobě textu a čáry směřující k tomu, kdo hovoří.

Výjimečně bylo v řečových bublinách zvýrazňování slov tučným nebo větším písmem. V několika případech bylo i slovo nebo kombinace slov zvýrazněna podtržením.

*Sound effects* v komiksu *Flash Gordon* použity nebyly.

V druhé části analytické části byl zkoumány komiksy *Fantastic Four* z počátku 60. let. V porovnání s *Flashem Gordonem* měl tento komiks pevněji vytyčené pravidla užití metod a zároveň začal využívat mnohé nové techniky.

Rámečky byly ve tvaru obdélníkových panelů se žlutým pozadím a s prvním zvýrazněným písmem v textu (podobně jako u začátku kapitol v některých knihách). Většina *captions* byla vypravěčská (*narrative*) s er-formou, ale objevovaly se zde i rámečky redaktora (*editorial captions*) a rámečky s mluveným monologem (*spoken monologue*).

V řečových bublinách i rámečcích se často objevovaly tři tečky a pomlčky k zdůrazňování pauz. Všechny texty v rámečcích končí třemi tečkami nebo otazníkem či vykřičníkem, díky čemuž komiks působí více dramaticky.

Řečové bubliny mají také pevnější tvar. Buď mají tvar elipsy nebo elipsy s určitým „rozšířením" u *balloon tail*. V *speech baloons* je text tučně či jinak zvýrazňován a

vyskytují se v nich *breath marks* pro přidání důrazu na citoslovce. Taktéž se občas v komiksu objevuje metoda spojených bublin (*joined balloons).*

Komiks *Fantastic Four* často využíval zvukové efekty. Díky této metodě mohl být daný zvuk pro čtenáře mnohem „srozumitelnější" a samotné umístění zvukového efektu bylo zajímavě využíváno pro umělecké účely.

Série *Animal Man* experimentovala s formou i obsahem. *Captions* měly pevný obdélníkový tvar (pokud nebyly nějak „deformovány" pro umělecké účely) a jejich obsahem byla celá řada metod. V analyzovaných číslech byly nalezeny *narrative captions, location & time captions, spoken monologue* a *internal monologue*. Druhy rámečků si byly navzájem na první pohled velmi podobné, a proto bylo vyžadováno větší soustředění na jejich obsah a na celkový děj.

Mnoho metod bylo nalezeno i u *speech baloons*. V analytické části jsou popsány a ilustrovány tři podoby bublin: *music notes balloons* (hudební bubliny), *whispering balloons* (šeptací bubliny) a *wavy balloons* (zvlněné bubliny). Dále se u řečových bublin používala metoda spojených bublin s i bez konektoru, z nichž každá plnila svůj specifický účel popsaný v analýze. Náhodně autoři komiksu užívali metodu *breath marks* pro zvýraznění citoslovců. Velmi často se v komiksu objevuje zvýrazňování, zvětšování či zmenšování písma v bublinách pro různé umělecké účely.

V komiksu *Animal Man* se také často používají *sound effects*, které mají většinou buď informativní charakter (efektivně vysvětlují čtenáři, co se děje v komiksovém panelu) nebo jsou užity pro zdůraznění akce.

Při analýze jednotlivých komiksů se ukázalo, jak se jednotlivé metody měnily a především, jak jich postupem času znatelně přibývalo. Tyto techniky se taky čím dál víc zaměřovaly na různé umělecké vyjádření, než jen na určité dovysvětlování obrázků, jak tomu často bylo - např. v komiksu *Flash Gordon*, kde vypravěč i sděloval čtenáři zvuky, neboť metoda *sound effects* ještě nebyla využívána. Metody bylo víc a byly čím dál sofistikovanější. U *Fantastic Four* je například vidět kombinování různých technik

*captions* (*narrative captions, spoken monologue, editorial captions*) pro co nejefektivnější a nejsrozumitelnější sdělení příběhu. Zvukové efekty rovněž nebyly využívány jen pro svou „dovysvětlovací" povahu, ale byly rovněž kresleny a umísťovány tak, aby příběh získal svou specifickou dynamiku (např. „zesilování" zvuků u blížícího se zemětřesení díky zvětšování *sound effects*).

*Animal Man* ukázal, že metody se mohou využívat ve velkém množství bez zásadní změny jejich podoby (většina *captions* vypadá úplně nebo téměř stejně, i když je použito mnoho druhů) a ne pouze pro vysvětlování či efektivnost, ale například pro postupné odkrývání příběhu či pro intenzivnější převedení emotivních scén (postupné zvětšování písma, zmenšování písma, „zmatené" rámečky...)

Z tohoto srovnání mainstreamových komiksů lze usoudit, že pro své zvyšování počtu a propracování metod se komiksové médium rozvíjelo takovým způsobem, že čtenář musel být pozornější a více uvědomělý o technikách komiksu. Z toho zle rovněž předpokládat, že komiks jako takový „dospíval".

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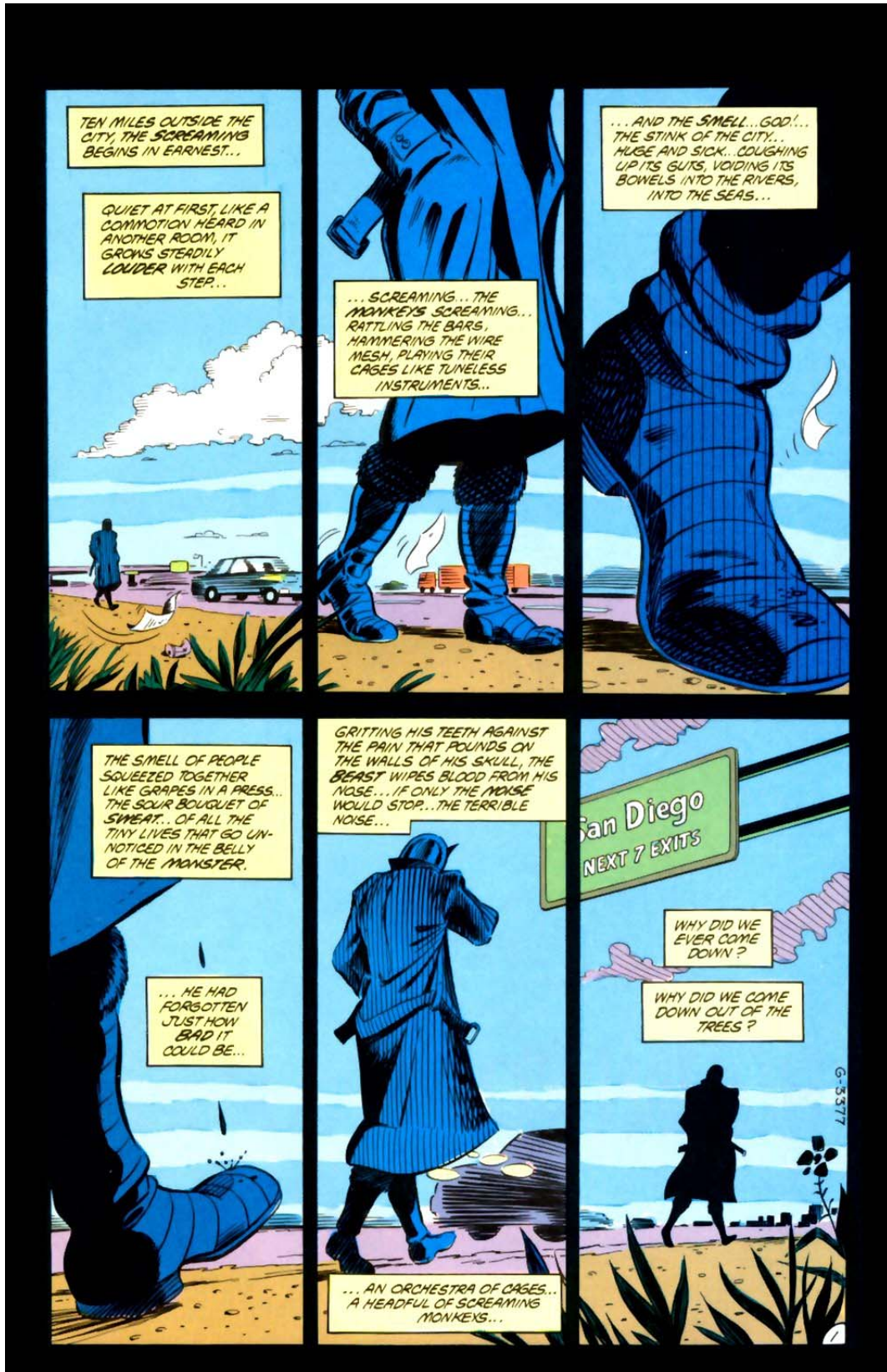
## 9. Appendices

## Appendix #1



Ultimate Comics: Spider-man #1, p.1

**Appendix #2**



Animal Man #1, p.1

**Appendix #3**



Animal Man #11, p.12