



Hacettepe University Graduate School of Social Sciences  
Department of American Culture and Literature

**JEWISH AMERICAN GRAPHIC NARRATIVES:  
LANDSCAPES, STEREOTYPES AND TRANSFORMATION  
IN WILL EISNER, BEN KATCHOR, JOE KUBERT  
AND HARVEY PEKAR**

Bülent AYYILDIZ

Master's Thesis

Ankara, 2015

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## KABUL VE ONAY

Bülent Ayyıldız tarafından hazırlanan “Jewish American Graphic Narratives: Landscapes, Stereotypes and Transformation in Will Eisner, Ben Katchor, Joe Kubert and Harvey Pekar” başlıklı bu çalışma, 17 Haziran 2015 tarihinde yapılan savunma sınavı sonucunda başarılı bulunarak jürimiz tarafından yüksek lisans tezi olarak kabul edilmiştir.



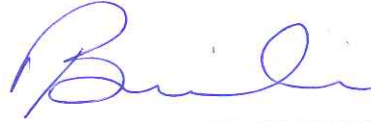
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Yukarıdaki imzaların adı geçen öğretim üyelerine ait olduğunu onaylarım.

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17.06.2015



Bülent AYYILDIZ

To my lovely wife and beloved daughter...

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## ÖZET

Ayyıldız, Bülent. “Yahudi Amerikalı Yazarların Grafik Anlatıları: Will Eisner, Ben Katchor, Joe Kubert ve Harvey Pekar’ın Eserlerinde Mekan, Basmakalıp Karakterler ve Dönüşüm.” Yüksek Lisans Tezi, Ankara, 2015.

Amerika’ya göç eden Yahudi göçmenler kendi alışkanlıklarından farklı kültürel ve sosyal bir yaşamla karşılaşır. Göçmenler yeni bir ortamda yaşamının ve toplumun bir parçası olmanın yollarını aradığından, geleneksel yaşam biçimlerinden ödün vermek zorunda kalabilirler. Diğer yandan, sosyal alanda karşılıklı bir etkileşim söz konusu olduğundan, kültürlerini ve geleneksel alışkanlıklarını da yerleştikleri bölgelerde korumaya çalışır, yayar ve yansıtırlar. Yahudi Amerikalıların kendilerine ait bir yaşam kurma çabaları, toplumun geneline uyum sağlama istekleri, Yahudi karşıtı eylem ve söylemlerle mücadeleleri çizgi romanlarda da anlatılmıştır.

Grafik anlatımlar veya çizgi romanlar görsel ve yazınsal öğeleri harmanlayarak kurguyu oluşturur. Metinlerin yanı sıra çizimlerin de anlaşılması ve yorumlanması gerektiğinden, okuyucu katılımı önemlidir. Çerçevesel, konuşma balonları, paneller, taramalar ve oluklar (gutters) gibi özgün anlatım araçları, çizgi romanları metin kurmacalardan ayırır. Melez bir tür olan çizgi romanlar sosyal, kültürel ve politik konularda etkili anlatımlar oluşturmuştur.

Yahudi Amerikalı yazar/çizerlerden Will Eisner’in *The Contract with God Trilogy* (*A Contract With God* 1978, *A Life Force* 1988, *Dropsie Avenue* 1995), Ben Katchor’un *The Jew of New York* (1999), Joe Kubert’in *Jew Gangster* (2005), Harvey Pekar’ın *The Quitter* (2005) ve *Harvey Pekar’s Cleveland* (2012) isimli eserleri mekan ve Yahudi Amerikalı kültürü arasındaki ilişkiyi basmakalıp karakterler ve imgelerle anlatır. Yazarların çizdiği basmakalıp karakterler ve değişimi simgeleyen görseller, Yahudi göçmenlerin yaşadıkları çevreye uyum sağlama sürecini yansıtmaktadır. Bu eserler göçmenlerin yerleştikleri yeni ortamda karşılaştıkları kişisel ve toplumsal sorunları ele alır. Zaman içerisinde sosyal alanların çözülmeye ve evrilmeye başlaması, karakterlerin daha iyi bir yaşam beklentisini tetikler. Yukarıda belirtilen eserlerde şehirlerin ve göçmenlerin değişimi/dönüşümü birbiriyle ilişkilidir ve bu tema çizim ve metinlerle etkili bir biçimde anlatılır.

### Anahtar Sözcükler

Yahudi Amerikalı, grafik anlatım, çizgi roman, görsellik, mekan, şehir yaşantısı, basmakalıp karakter, dönüşüm.

## ABSTRACT

Ayyıldız, Bülent. “Jewish American Graphic Narratives: Landscapes, Stereotypes and Transformation in Will Eisner, Ben Katchor, Joe Kubert and Harvey Pekar.” Master’s Thesis, Ankara, 2015.

In their new environment, Jewish American immigrants encountered cultural and social conditions different from their previous lifestyles. Since they pursued ways to adapt, integrate and survive in American society, at times, their traditions and beliefs were compromised in order to gain acceptance from the dominant culture. On the other hand, because social settings are interactive, Jewish immigrants also sustained, disseminated and reflected their culture and traditions in the areas they settled. Their efforts to build a life of their own, their wish to survive, adopt, and integrate into the dominant society, and their struggle to eliminate anti-Semitic discourse are narrated in graphic novels.

Graphic narratives or graphic novels blend visual and verbal elements into the framework of fiction. The combination of visual and textual elements requires reader participation to understand and interpret the narration. Distinctive tools such as frames, speech balloons, panels, sketching techniques and gutters distinguish graphic narratives from their textual counterparts. This hybrid genre has proved its effect in narrating social, cultural and political issues.

Jewish American artists/writers Will Eisner’s *The Contract with God Trilogy* (*A Contract With God* 1978, *A Life Force* 1988, and *Dropsie Avenue* 1995), Ben Katchor’s *The Jew of New York* (1999), Joe Kubert’s *Jew Gangster* (2005), and Harvey Pekar’s *The Quitter* (2005) and *Harvey Pekar’s Cleveland* (2012) present the connection between the landscape and Jewish American culture through stereotypes and interrelated images. The mentioned works deal with Jewish immigrants’ personal and social problems in the areas they settle. These settlements dissolve and transform in time, which triggers characters’ aspiration towards upward mobility. The transformation of the cities and characters are interrelated in the mentioned works and this theme is effectively portrayed through texts and images.

### **Keywords**

Jewish American, graphic narratives, graphic novels, visuality, space, city life, stereotype, transformation.



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## INTRODUCTION

### GRAPHIC NARRATIVES

Throughout the twentieth century, the graphic novel genre has regained its popularity as a rediscovered medium. However, combination of words with pictures has a long history and it could be traced even to ancient times such as to the first examples of carvings on cave walls. In *The Rough Guide to Graphic Novels*, Danny Fingeroth suggests, “The paintings in ancient Egyptian tombs record events through a combination of sequential drawings and hieroglyphic lettering . . . Sequential art can also be seen in medieval tapestries, the most famous of which is the Bayeux Tapestry, recording the Norman invasion of Britain in 1066” (11). In the modern sense, graphic narrative started to take shape in the nineteenth century with Rodolphe Töpffer’s works. In his words, “the picture-story, which critics disregard and scholars scarcely notice, has greater influence at all times, perhaps even more than written literature” (3).

While graphic narratives have evolved into a distinctive medium, some concerns and problems have emerged. Questions to follow regarding graphic narratives will be: Whether it is an original or a hybrid medium, what makes it different from other genres, why has it become so popular in recent decades, and what are its distinctive features are. In the twentieth century, comics employed superhero themes and functioned as young adult entertainment in America. Through the last quarter of the century, “sequential art” came into prominence with the publication of *A Contract with God*, which is often cited as the frontier graphic novel in the United States. During this period, rather than being a genre for teenage entertainment with superhero themes, the unique and distinctive power of graphic narratives was explored for serious themes. The genre has proved that it is capable of offering a powerful critique of social, cultural and political structures. In this sense, Art Spiegelmen’s *Maus: A Survival’s Tale* (1986) became a turning point not only in showing what could be achieved with the content of comic based books, but also proving that it is an independent, sophisticated medium with peculiar narrative techniques that can express social, cultural and political messages (Fig 0.1). This genre

provides a unique way of expression through frames, drawings, texts in boxes, and gutters, the space between panels.



Fig. 0.1. Art Spiegelman's innovative techniques include narrator's psychology after drawing his parents' Holocaust experience (*The Complete Maus* 201).

Graphic narratives were defined by several writers and critics in the field. Will Eisner coined the term “sequential art” and attempted to define the new genre. His work *A Contract with God* is labeled a “graphic novel.” Yet, the term “graphic novel” is claimed to be a marketing strategy and is opposed by some comics artists such as Alan Moore, while other artists coined their own terms such as sequential art, picture novella, illustrated novel, or comic-strip novel. Moore, in one of his interviews, says, “It’s a marketing term . . . that I never had any sympathy with. The term ‘comic’ does just as well for me . . . The problem is that ‘graphic novel’ just came to mean ‘expensive comic book’” (“The Alan Moore Interview”).

Hilary Chute prefers the term “graphic narrative” (which, in this thesis, will be used as a general term both covering mainstream comics and graphic novels) by saying that graphic novel, “can be a misnomer—we understand graphic narrative to encompass a range of types of narrative work in comics” (“Introduction” 767). Randy Duncan and Matthew J. Smith have a similar understanding of graphic novels and they claim that it is a method for distinguishing former works of comics from exclusive new works. For Duncan, “graphic novel is a term that helps elevate the status of their [publishers]

product and has allowed them entrée into bookstores, libraries, and the academy” (4). Charles Hatfield makes a similar comment on this “definition conflict” by saying “terms like ‘comic book’ and ‘graphic novel’ are, strictly speaking, inaccurate; worse yet, they may encourage expectations, positive or negative, that are not borne out by the material itself” (5) and he adds that it might be dangerous to erase these terms completely since it risks “obscuring the subject behind neologisms that are clumsy, counterintuitive, and ahistorical” (6). Moreover, the diversity of terms is not a sign of weakness of a recently academic-respended medium, on the contrary, it proves that such narratives are auspicious in raising different approaches and perspectives while the terms project the evolutionary track that graphic narratives are heading through.

Once full of fantastic fictional elements, such as superheroes and monsters based on human imagination, graphic narratives now cover serious issues such as race, gender, abuse, insanity, and mass murder. The academic and intellectual worlds have started to pay attention to its distinctive images and text. For instance, Scott McCloud, in *Understanding Comics*, theorized the comics medium and defined it as “juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or produce an aesthetic response in the viewer” (9). Based on its multi-faceted nature, the power of graphic narrative generated various subgenres, such as autographics, comics journalism and non-fiction comics. As Hatfield notes, “The inherent plurality of comics art makes it apt for critical study, as it promises to shed light on verbal-visual dynamics in many different kinds of hybrid texts” (xiv). These “verbal-visual” dynamics permit the genre to be examined by different disciplines and open discussions for new fields of study. For the same reason, graphic narratives produced diverse subgenres and the variety of the medium brought classification problems. The works produced in this medium confront the concept of genre. Bookstores and publishers were indecisive about how to classify these books. Art Spiegelman’s *Maus* is one of these books. As Spiegelman comments, “I know that by delineating people with animal heads I’ve raised problems of taxonomy for you. Could you consider adding a special ‘nonfiction/mice’ category to your list?” (“A Problem of Taxonomy”).

What makes graphic narratives popular and attractive? There are several reasons for explaining the rise of graphic narratives. One answer might be related to how life today

is highly exposed to visual culture. Today, people face more images than ever generated by advertisements, instructions, graffiti, video games, television, and it has been realized that the mixture of images and texts has a potential power, which could be used in several fields. Since intensive use of visual qualities is peculiar to our century, critics and readers have started to analyze the outcomes of it as well as learning and interpreting the hybridity of texts and images. The uniqueness of graphic narratives comes from its potential control and combination of words and images. In graphic narratives, even though there are various combination techniques, there is no inferior or superior relationship between words and images. For William John Thomas Mitchell, “The images we see in the world only make sense, in fact, in relation to the words that circulate through them and that we bring to them” (140). Mitchell sees literature as a “structure of words in which pictures, scenes, and images of all kinds (both optical and acoustic) are nested” and he argues that analyzing art and literature must be in such a way that the perceiver/reader or gazer can both “read and see, hear and behold, as we make sense of the world” (140).

Another reason for the popularity of graphic narratives might be related to American culture. For M. Thomas Inge, “perhaps a major reason for recognizing and studying the comics is the fact that they are one of the few native American art forms” (xv). Among the three main graphic narrative schools (Japanese Manga, Belgian/European, and American), it is Americans who “have defined the forms, expanded their aesthetic possibilities, and become the first masters of their unique visual and narrative potential” (xvii). American culture has contributed to the popularization of graphic narratives by attracting readers from all over the world since the comic book was also “the dominant element in the culture of American children” (Lupoff and Thompson 11).

The American comics industry has also influenced Hollywood. Many graphic narratives have recently been adapted to the screen, such as *A History of Violence* (2005), *Sin City* (2005), *V for Vendetta* (2005), *Persepolis* (2007), *Batman: The Dark Knight* (2008), and *X-Men: Days of Future* (2014), with high box-office earnings. Japanese manga has been effectively enrolled in the movie industry as well. For instance, *Old Boy* (2003) with an American remake in 2012, is based on a manga with the same title, which became a Korean cult movie. *Matrix* (1999) is highly influenced by Japanese manga and *Ghost in*

*the Shell* (1995) proves the strong link between movies and graphic narratives. It is highly possible that developing technology and successful movies based on comics have increased the popularity of the graphic narrative, but this would be more like the chicken or the egg causality dilemma than a one-sided influence. With the help of technological novelties, the movie industry has realized the potential power of images and imagination in graphic narratives and wanted to transmit this power through movies, while the audience was already interested in graphic narratives. As a result, an interaction appeared between film and comics industries.

Although technological developments such as printing and digital coloring are beneficial for graphic narratives, the affective reason for the revival of graphic narratives is the technique. As Moore notes, “none of these will make the slightest scrap of difference unless the fundamental assumptions upon which the art form itself rests are challenged and modified to fit times for which they were not originally designed” (*Writing for Comics* 2). It is true that technology provides a dominant visual culture and serves practicality for visual arts, but graphic narratives are more than just visuals and they require a different ability of viewing. The comics readers do not only look at the drawings but interpret them and they do not simply read the speech balloons but gaze at them to grab the conceptual framework of panels, pages and semiotics of graphic narrative because “only in the comics can the field of vision be so manipulated: the size and arrangement of images control our perception to the events depicted, contributing dramatically to the narrative effects produced” (R. Harvey 162).

In other words, visuality is just a part, a gear of the mechanism, in which other elements are needed to co-operate with each other to function fully. Graphic narratives create their own language and parole, which facilitates in a distinctive way. For instance, when a cartoonist puts an “x,” instead of eyes, on a character’s face, it may mean the character is dead, or the letters “zzz” mean the character is sleeping. The entire structure is constructed on panels, symbols, gutters, shading and colors, which together create graphic narratives. Rather than technological innovations, Alan Moore says, “to change comics, we must change the way we think about their creation,” (*Writing for Comics* 3) which defines the place of technology in graphic narratives. A narrative element, such

as a symbol or panel, gains meaning within the entire page. The former or next panel completes each narrative to create a coherent meaning.

One of the problematic approaches to graphic narratives is that is not seen as a medium but as a hybrid genre. Graphic narratives succeed in digesting other media and producing original art. It is true that graphic narratives share some features with other media such as cinema, which some technical terms are borrowed from, but “drawing styles, the mise en scène in panels, the way verbal and visual elements are combined ... the breakdown (or “découpage”) of story elements into distinct panels, and the interaction between individual panels and page layouts” (“Some Medium Specific” 14) are unique structures of the medium. Pascal Lefèvre suggests, “in contrast to the photorealistic images of live-action film that deliver a realistic impression, drawings in comics are static and strongly stylized, so that the spectator becomes aware of their handmade quality” (“Some Medium Specific” 16). For Randy Duncan and Matthew J. Smith there is a “formal similarity” of structural elements such as “perceived distance, angle of view, color, arrangement of elements, simulated lighting effects” (3), but these are the tools that “could be used in all of the forms of visual communication mentioned above” (3).

Indeed, the tools that graphic narratives utilize are very distinctive both in functional and technical ways. Panels, speech balloons, gutters, lights and colors interact for the aim of storytelling and structuring a narrative. As Roger Sabin points out, “They are a language with their own grammar, syntax and punctuation. They are not some hybrid form halfway between ‘literature’ and ‘art’ (whatever those words might mean), but a medium in their own right” (9). Edward Said explains the distinguishing quality of graphic narratives with these words:

Comics provided one with a directness of approach (the attractively and literally overstated combination of pictures and words) that seemed unassailably true on the one hand, and marvelously close, impinging, familiar on the other . . . to decode, comics in their relentless foregrounding—far more, say, than film cartoons or funnies, neither of which mattered much to me—seemed to say what couldn’t otherwise be said, perhaps what wasn’t permitted to be said or imagined, defying the ordinary processes of thought, which are policed, shaped and re-shaped by all sorts of pedagogical as well as ideological pressures.” (ii)



Today, graphic narratives have already proven that they are a distinctive medium and there is no point in discussing whether it should be considered as a hybrid medium (in the sense that it is inferior to cinema or cartoons). As Spiegelman states, “If comics have any problem now, it is that people don’t even have the patience to decode comics at this point ... I don’t know if we’re the vanguard of another culture or if we’re blacksmiths” (Interview with Gary Groth 61). Reading graphic narratives is different from reading other narratives since the reader has to participate in narrative process by focusing on panel and gutter structures. As Hatfield puts it, “comics are challenging (and highly teachable) because they offer a form of reading that resists coherence, a form at once seductively visual and radically fragmented. Comic art is a mixed form and reading comics a tension-filled experience” (xiii).

Panels and gutters are more prominent in terms of distinguishing graphic narrative, and provide a concept of time and space to further reading process:

The images that comprise a comic are juxtaposed in space but are simultaneously present in time. In this way comics are like the random access memory characteristic of a computer hard drive: Any panel, regardless of its location in the book and its relations to previous panels, can be called up for attention at any given moment. The images that comprise a film, in contrast, are juxtaposed in time but are perceived in a single space. (Pratt 160)

Panels lead to the creation of “closure,” which attach the visible elements to the external world and to what is left between panels. Basically, closure is “applying background knowledge and an understanding of the relationships between encapsulated images to synthesize (or blend) sequences of panels into events” (Duncan and Smith 316). While McCloud explains the importance of closure, he claims the active participation of the reader with these words; “every act committed to paper by the comics artist is aided and abetted by a silent accomplice. An equal partner in crime known as the reader” (68). The closure in graphic narrative, while describing what is inside, effectively delineates what is left outside the panel, which urge and force the reader to contemplate the interactions between panels. Not only the closure but also “the fractured surface of the comics page, with its patchwork of different images, shapes, and symbols, presents the reader with a surfeit of interpretive options, creating an experience that is always decentered, unstable, and unfixable” (Hatfield xiv).

“Closure” is also used in other media such as cinema but in graphic narratives the closure is constructed with panels and gutters, which create a distinguished time and pace in a unique conjuncture. In this sense, the size and order of the panels play a critical role. As Randy Duncan and Matthew J. Smith notes,

The process of encapsulating certain moments involves creative decisions that are central to comic book communication. Choosing the size of the panel can affect the emphasis given to a moment in the panel, as compared to moments in other panels. The size of the panel can also affect the amount of time of that moment, both in terms of reading time and the relative time span within the overall narrative. (10)

With these unique tools, graphic narratives provide flexibility, mobility, and interaction for both the reader and the artist/writer. They are able to reach and explore historical, traumatic, social issues with a unique language, which envisage the unseen or unexposed by other visual media. As “graphic narratives explore the conflicted boundaries of what can be said and what can be shown at the intersection of collective histories and life stories,” issues like torture and massacre are delineated “in a complex formal mode that does not turn away from or mitigate trauma” (Chute 459).

Problematics like censorship and ethical concerns cause a restrictive approach on certain issues such as war and discrimination and these issues have been pierced by graphic narratives to some extent with its “double-coded narratives or semantics” (Chute 459). As Chute puts it, “graphic narrative presents a traumatic side of history, but all these authors refuse to show it through the lens of unspeakability or invisibility, instead registering its difficulty through inventive (and various) textual practice” (459). Gillian Whitlock exemplifies the importance of graphic narratives by mentioning “the dissemination of images from the Iraq war and from the area around Ground Zero immediately after 9/11” (995), and it is obvious that there are some concerns about “the interpretation of visual images and about their power to relay affect and invoke a moral ethical responsiveness in the viewer regarding the suffering of others” (Whitlock 995). In the contemporary world, the visual media enable others’ traumatic and painful lives to be observed closely. However, there are political and ideological obstacles that prevents people from viewing the whole picture. As Edward Said conveys,

As we also live in a media saturated world in which a huge preponderance of the world’s news images are controlled and diffused by a handful of men sitting in

places like London and New York, a stream of comics book images and words, assertively etched, at times grotesquely emphatic and distended to match the extreme situations they depict, provide a remarkable antidote. (iii)

Not only does the graphic narrative display unwanted/auto-censored scenes in a convenient milieu, but it also illustrates historical and personal aspects of issues which are not possible to capture in other ways. For example, Alison Bechdel, in *Are You My Mother?*, depicts several dream sequences of her own, and creates an inner world to delineate her psychological state while visualizing some excerpts from the lives of historical figures such as Donald Winnicott and Virginia Woolf. The structure of the story imbued with her dreams entangles Bechdel in complex layers of narrative in order to explore her problems. In another example, Joe Sacco draws the unregistered war memories of the people with whom he interviewed and he creates a historical depth and a space to discover traumatic outcomes of war on the society. Of course, these depicted memories do not provide an objective perspective, but graphic narratives do add a pretense of objectivity. On the other hand, photography, as Susan Sontag has discussed, might be manipulative because it is considered to be real since “a machine was doing the record” and “a person had been there to take them” (26). However, photography has a questionable reality since the photographer has a point of view and “those who stress the evidentiary punch of image-making by cameras have to finesse the question of the subjectivity of the image-maker” (Sontag 26).

While graphic narratives do not claim to be “real,” they are capable of reflecting the real, like autographics, the autobiographical life stories in a graphic novel format. Their fictional nature—a mixture of drawn pictures and words—rather than assuring realness and taking the lead from the reader, supplies a neutral area where the reader could have a wider view and mobilization. Unlike a war photo, graphic narratives on war do not reflect a sentimental image that strictly affects the gazer. For instance, when Joe Sacco narrates the war in Bosnia, he usually does not depict violent and bloody scenes. Instead, he uses closure to be interpreted by the reader. In one of the scenes, he narrates the memories of the massacre from an eye witness’s perspective and depicts only the shoes floating in blood (Fig. 0.2)

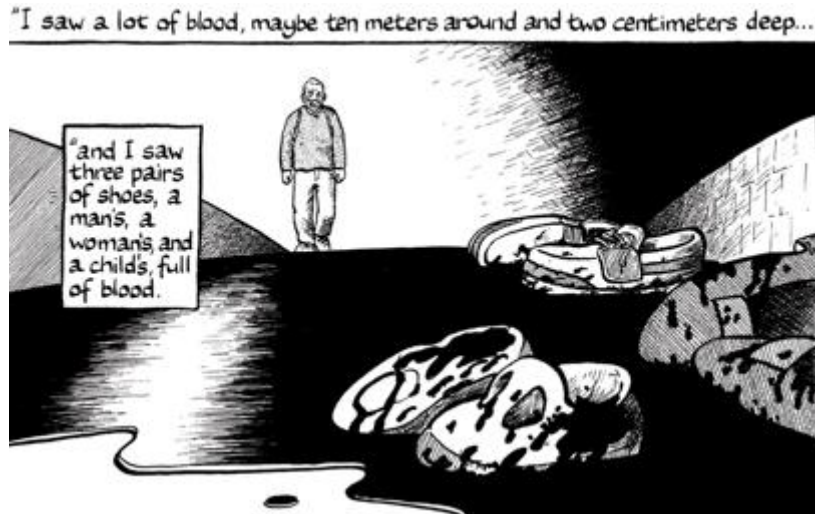


Fig. 0.2. Joe Sacco's closure about a massacre scene (*Safe Area Gorazde* 115).

Nevertheless, the nature of graphic narratives does not lead to a "dramatization." For example, as Lefèvre mentions, "violent" scenes of *Tom and Jerry* cartoons do not provoke anger or injustice but laughter. Similarly, graphic narratives have a distinctive function prompting critical thinking and a kind of alienation that enables the reader to interpret the events more objectively. In *Maus*, for example, Art Spiegelman narrates the Jewish prisoners, who are depicted as mice, in a "cartoonish" way. In Spiegelman's words: "What happened in *Maus* was the absolute shock of an oxymoron: The Holocaust is absolutely the last place one would look for something to be made in form of comics, which one associates with essentially trivial, simplified matter" ("Art for"). As Douglas Wolk puts it,

When you look at a comic book, you're not seeing either world or a direct representation of the world ... It's not just unreal, it is deliberately constructed by a specific person or people. But because comics are a narrative and visual form, when you're reading them you do believe that they are real on some level. (20)

As mentioned above, the power of graphic narratives is multifaceted; rather than just works of the imagination, graphic novels engage in diverse issues ranging from family problems such as Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home* to historical, political, and traumatic events, such as Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis*. Ethnic, religious or cultural codes have already existed in comics since the first examples of the medium. As Derek Parker Royal expresses, "given its reliance on symbols and iconography, comic art speaks in a language that is accessible to a wide audience, transcending many of the national,

cultural, and linguistic boundaries” (x). Although the first examples of comics in this area repeat negative racial stereotypes, recent graphic narratives have a more objective approach to the topic.

## **JEWISH AMERICAN EXPERIENCE**

Jewish immigration accelerated in the nineteenth century and settling in a Protestant dominated society has caused some problems concerning the immigrants’ “Jewishness.” Jewish Americans have been in an ambiguous state in terms of defining their self-identity and this challenge has been accentuated by social and political dilemmas. The following questions resulted in various answers: Should Jews integrate into the dominant culture or isolate themselves to avoid assimilation? In this new land, should Jewish Americans identify themselves as a nation or a religious group? And what would be the outcomes of their decision on Jewish identity?

Immigrating to the United States was not an entirely new experience for Jews, who have lived with Christians in Europe for centuries. Unlike the case in Europe, they did not live as a close community, which only spoke the Yiddish language and followed their own religious laws. The first Jewish immigrants came from Germany in the mid-nineteenth century and they were escaping political and religious pressures: Jewish immigrants of the first wave of immigration were not only concerned about religious issues and were not eager to identify themselves with Judaism. Their first concern was surviving in a new society and some compromises were made to integrate into the social, political and economic life. In their new homes, for this reason, nineteenth century Jewish immigrants thought a secular state that approaches all religions equally would be to the benefit of Jewish groups. A secular state would be easier “to sort out Jewish community affairs. If the Orthodox authorities had no civil power of Jews, Jews would be free to be irreligious or to define new religious practices they felt more fitting for the modern world” (E. Abrams 5). Jews did not demand a secular state at that time but asked “for treatment of Judaism no less favorable than that accorded Christianity” (E. Abrams 2).

Later, this political strategy changed and Jewish lawyers sought ways of binding constitutional laws with the Hebrew Bible. For Elliot Abrams, this new “synthesis” which “was based on the importance of law and justice in both the American and Jewish traditions” connect Judaism with Americanism. By this way, Jewish immigrants could easily adapt to Americanism while conserving their traditions. In Edward Tiryakian’s words, “because of a deep-structure affinity of Calvinist Puritanism for Judaism, it is in America that Jews have increasingly found full societal and cultural participation and acceptance, symbolized by widespread acceptance in recent years of the term ‘Judeo-Christian’” (qtd in Lipset and Raab 5).

Before this integration politics, Jewish enlightenment, Haskalah,<sup>1</sup> had already been a phenomenon, which had profound influence on Jewish traditions in Europe. For Jacob Katz this was the initial step of modernization of Jewish society and the “movement’s tendency toward secularization demonstrates its radical nature clearly” (196). Since the patterns of secularization was already in Jewish enlightenment, it proved that Jewish immigrants from Europe were seeking modernization and the Haskalah “offered the Jew the opportunity to escape the rigors and confinements of strict Jewish religious observance and the binding regulations of Jewish Law, each of which re-enforced the other” (Brown and Berk 19). Hence, it would not be wrong to say Jewish immigrants were eager to participate in American society and modernize their way of life.

On the other hand, since Jewish people lived and struggled in a different cultural environment, inevitably, their formerly strong ties to Judaism were bound to change. Jews, who were living in shtetls<sup>2</sup> for centuries, using their own language and abiding to religious laws had to experience suburban life in cities like New York and Philadelphia. A character from Abraham Cahan’s novel, *The Rise of David Levinsky*, says: “If you are

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<sup>1</sup> Haskalah is a Hebrew term used for Jewish Enlightenment, which started in 1770s and lasted until 1880s. The movement started in Europe and led Jews to embrace secularization and based on rationality. It encouraged Jews to assimilate in language, tradition, and manners. Jewish education and literature were highly influenced by this movement (“Haskalah”).

<sup>2</sup> Shtetls are small towns in which Jews lived and maintained their language, traditions, and religion in the Eastern Europe. Shtetls were not exposed to “anti-Jewish traditions” and everyday life was based on Jewish laws. Shtetls were, therefore, homogenous Jewish societies which had an impact on European Jewry (“Shtetl”).

a Jew of the type to which I belonged when I came to New York and you attempt to bend your religion to the spirit of your new surroundings, it breaks. It falls to pieces” (Cahan 110). Jewish immigrants had to take care of their families and they chose to work on the Sabbath. Instead of performing Jewish rituals, they observed Christian holidays like Christmas and Easter. Jewish Americans had to reshape their faith and redefine Judaism to create a safe haven for Jews to survive in the American society.

Jews also redefined ethnicity during the process of Americanization since they “presented a mix of qualities that was unusual among American ‘racial’ groups and proved particularly resistant to categorization within the black-white system” (Goldstein 2). The term Jewish was used ambiguously and was in a constant flux. According to Weber’s definition, ethnicity is “those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both, or because of memories of colonization and migration...” (389), which means ethnicity does not necessarily have to be about blood but a common and shared tradition, language, and culture identified with a certain group.

Most of the Jewish Americans used the term in this sense but of course, there were various digressions from this definition. While Zionism saw ethnicity in a more radical way, anti-Semitists used it as a racist weapon. In Russia and Europe, Jews were subjected to harassment and assaults as observed in pogroms and the Holocaust. This might be one of the reasons why the first settlers to America refrained from defining themselves with racial ethnicity on the basis of identity.

Controversially, in late nineteenth century America, there were Jews using “race” as a positive self-definer. The term was a double-edged sword; although Jews have suffered a lot because of racial discrimination, for Eric L. Goldstein, racial language had positive aspects on Jews as well. As he puts it, “American Jews drew comfort from a racial self-definition because it gave them a sense of stability at a time when many familiar markers of Jewish identity were eroding” (11). Moreover, the ambiguous state of Jewish immigrants was beneficial since non-Jews did not categorize them in a certain ethnicity but considered them mostly white. This situation was in favor of Jews, who were gaining upward mobility compared to the other ethnic groups. Jewish success is also attributed to their being “people of the book,” their whiteness providing an easy

transition to the middle class, and to the business world. Neil M. Cowan and Ruth Schwartz Cowan claim that “their success can be attributed to their own labor” (210), and add that it has something to do with Yiddishkeit (sense of being Jewish) which is “the unique blend of cultural traits that makes the Jews of Eastern Europe ... different both from their Christian neighbors and from their fellow Jews in other parts of the world” (211). Jewish immigrants from different parts of the world contribute to the joint heritage in the new land, America. They immigrated to America in different times and settled into different areas according to their heritage. Ashkenazic Jews, which is the majority of the Jewish societies in the United States (“Judaism: Ashkenazim”), come from France, Germany, and Eastern Europe, which have different traditions, Sephardic Jews, who come from Spain, Portugal, the Middle East, and North Africa, have different religious laws and are separated from Ashkenazic beliefs such as dietary habits and holidays. (*What is a Jew?* 24).

Jewish Americans tried hard in business and social life to assimilate. While the first Jewish immigrants were peddlers, trunk-carriers and pack carriers, they spread out to different areas of society (Lipset 14-15). They began to participate in political and social activities and became successful in the trading business. Throughout the twentieth century, philosophers and scholars emerged within the Jewish society, but it was also possible to see Jews who lived in ghettos and tenement buildings where they spoke their own language and carried on their traditions with little exposure to Anglo Saxon traditions (Lipset 15-16).

Economic, historical and social changes such as the Holocaust (1941-45), the establishment of the State of Israel (1948), and Civil Rights Act (1964) kept bringing different perspectives of “Jewish Americans.” The Holocaust “including the reception and memorialization of that historical event reshaped Jewish identity and recalibrated the place of the Jew in American Society” (Magid 187). The Holocaust has had a uniting role for the Jews all around the world. According to Pew Research Center Survey of U.S. Jews in 2013, to the question “what does it mean to be a Jew?” 73% responded “remembering the Holocaust” (“A Portrait of”). The Holocaust became a uniting power for Jews all over the world. The inequality and genocide the European Jews experienced caused a rise in Jewish nationalism, which strengthened the existing



ideology, Zionism. Jewish Americans also constructed a Jewish universalism on the ground of this awareness. The Holocaust,

may be unique in that in no other time in human history (to our knowledge) did a proximate community's allegiance to an ideology (Jews/universalism)—an ideology *that the host society itself produced*—become so inextricably, even ontologically, bound to a community (the Jews) to the extent that the community itself was considered such a threat as to warrant total eradication. (Magid 197-198)

Interrelated with the Holocaust, the foundation of a free Jewish country was another phenomenon influencing Jewish Americans, since now, a national home was available for Jews all around the world. It even influenced the understanding of secularism for the Jews. In the sixties, secularism “no longer refer[ed] to Jewish worldliness but rather, quite explicitly, to the absence of religion, with virtually all discussions of secularism now focused on Israeli and not U.S. Jewish culture” (Levitt 820). The existence of a Jewish state caused discussions among Jewish Americans. While some Jewish Americans took pride in Zionist success and admire a country to be affiliated with, some Jewish groups oppose the Israeli politics and nationalism (Petras).

In the Post-World War II era, Jewish Americans went through a social change; it was a time “when there [was] no shame in being a Jew and yet fewer Jewish Americans seem[ed] to know what being a Jew mean[t]” (Heilman 6). With programs like G.I. Bill, Jews started to move to the suburbs and left the tenements and apartments in which they lived with their grandparents and relatives. For Samuel C. Heilman, “the movement into the suburbs symbolized movement away from the Jewish cultural code” (26). Suburbanized and Americanized young generations started to live their “individual” lives unattached to Jewish traditions. In Karen Brodtkin's words:

Theories of nurture and culture replaced theories of nature and biology. Instead of dirt and dangerous races who would destroy U.S. democracy, immigrants became ethnic groups whose children had successfully assimilated into the mainstream and risen to the middle class. In this new myth Euroethnic suburbs like mine became the measure of U.S. democracy's victory over racism. (36)

Interaction between American and Jewish society resulted in some other outcomes for the Jewish community such as inter-marriages and non-religiousness. In the twentieth century. According to a survey in 2013, the rate of intermarriage among Jews reached 58%, and 34% said that accepting Jesus as the Messiah was not a problem to be a Jew

(Goodstein). While some Jews are opposed to intermarriage because of religious reasons, there are Jews who consider this opposition racist. The same survey shows that 22% of the Jews define themselves as non-religious but Jewish, since they feel attached to Jewish culture or have a Jewish parent (Goodstein).

All these concerns show that a consensus does not exist in defining Jewishness since there are various positions. As immigration waves continue, debates about assimilation and identity gain momentum. As Susan Chevlowe states: “This image of unity comes at the price of the erasure of differences, including race and class distinctions, personal histories, points of origin, and multiple ways of experiencing Jewishness” (1). In a multicultural society, Jews have found different explanations for their identity. For Chevlowe, “Jews are both the same as and different from the people among whom they live as well as the same as and different from one another” (1).

Although the definition of Jewishness is debatable, certain qualities could account for how Jewish identity has endured in the United States. According to Seymour Martin Lipset and Earl Raab, one of the aspects for an ethnic group to survive is “the need to mount group defense against disadvantage” (51). In contemporary multicultural America, “to survive as a society, a balance between individual and collective rights has to be found” (Stavans 215). Jewish identity politics registers that Jewish American identity is in a flexible state concerned with context-driven motivations of the values and principles of both Jewish American society and the integrated society. The historical accumulation of Jewish identity, especially in America, has created a unique form, which provided multiple variations and openness but no boundaries, limits and restrictions.

These various definitions for Jewish American have brought some scholars to seek new forms and definitions for Judaism. Shaul Magid argues, “a ‘post’ state—in large part because the notion of peoplehood more generally is struggling to find footing in a society where ethnicity is becoming a more liquid and thus less dependable source of identity” (2). The National Jewish Population Survey, which aims to “determine the size and key characteristics of the American Jewish population,” concludes that:

[C]ontrasting trends in Jewish involvement, the sharp differentiation between affiliated and unaffiliated Jews, and significant differences between the in-married and intermarried all suggest an increasing polarization in Jewish connections. Over time, some segments of the American Jewish population evince greater involvement in Jewish life, while other segments show signs of disengagement. (“National Jewish Population Survey 2000-01”)

Religion, ethnicity, intermarriage, assimilation and historical roots play certain roles in describing Jewish American identity. Within this study, “Jewish American” will be used as an inclusive definition to include all Jewish ethnicities in the United States, mostly Ashkenazi, Sephardic, and Mizrahi. However, the main Jewish subgroup in the analyzed works is Eastern European Jewish immigrants and their descendants. American multicultural society has offered opportunities and status for the Jewish Americans. Such a distinctively invented milieu, historical and political context influence identity. In this study, Jewish American identity, in the most generic sense, is apprehended as shared history, collective memory, language, culture, beliefs, concurring ideas and communal elements. Also, the mixed, intricate networks among the affiliated members of this group generate a sense of belonging in the community.

## **JEWISH AMERICAN GRAPHIC NOVELS**

Jewish American graphic novels may be defined as graphic narratives produced by Jews or Jewish-rooted artists/writers who are directly or indirectly concerned with Jewish experience in their works. In the introduction of *Complex Identities: Jewish Consciousness and Modern Art*, Matthew Baigell and Milly Heyd define Jewish art, as “an art created by Jewish artists in which one can find some aspect of the Jewish experience, whether religious, cultural, social, or personal” (xiv). According to them, it is not a Jewish art “if an artist happened to be Jewish and whose work offered no compelling evidence of being rooted in Jewish experience” (xv). Alternatively, an artist may be a “gentile,” but his work may be concerned with “Jewish subjects,” which classifies the work as Jewish art. Rather than the style or technique, the content and its explicit or implicit link with Jewish experience is a more decisive measure. Nevertheless, although a working definition is necessary, this study is aware that it is almost impossible to arrive at an exact definition of Jewish American identity since both

identity and Jewish American are fluid terms that perpetually redefine themselves depending on the era and ideological conjuncture.

Jewish American artists have been able to include their cultural and ethnic identities from comic books such as *Superman* to *X-Men*. According to Randy Duncan, this is because Jewish artists have been the innovators of the comics medium in the United States. As he states, “Eisner, Kirby, Simon, Kubert, and Lee, as well as Superman creators Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster and Batman creator Bob Kane, were all Jews. Many of these men were second generation Americans, poor and struggling to break into the creative fields” (111). For Danny Fingeroth, Jewish creativity and their collective memory inspired them, “there seems to be some kind of perhaps historically driven impetus for Jews to absorb, reflect, and express idiosyncratic visions of the world around them” (*Disguised as Clark Kent* 19). Since Jewish American society has experienced a lot of difficulties and has exclusive place in multicultural American society, Jewish American writers have written and drawn Jewish-themed graphic narratives in order to reflect problems of immigration, discrimination, post-war trauma and ethno-racial identity. J. T. Waldman thinks that the graphic narrative is the Jewish American’s new medium self-expression. As Waldman states,

When placed within the scope of Jewish history, comix exist as one of the latest popular modes of communication to have captured the attention of the chosen people. In a culture that once spurned the icon in favor of the letter, comix represent the flourishing of unbound Jewish imagination. So it should come as no surprise that a third generation secular American Jew exploring his roots would decode biblical text with panels and word balloons. (ix)

Similar to superhero comics, Jewish American artists/writers have recently produced countless graphic narratives which deal with issues such as the Holocaust, post-trauma,

and Jewish collective identity and these works have received critical response,<sup>3</sup> which reflect Waldman's observations about graphic narratives as an important method of exploring Jewish identity. There are also graphic novels which tell the autobiographical and fictional stories of Jewish immigrants in the United States.<sup>4</sup> However, the works analyzed in this thesis have a distinctive approach to the notion of land within the Jewish American context. The narratives create a connection between cultural and physical spaces and Jewish American characters. As a common ground, they depict Jewish Americans, who live in American cities. The authors and most of the characters they create come from Eastern Europe or are descendants of Eastern European Jewish immigrants. In addition, the Jewish characters depicted in these graphic novels reinforce stereotypes such as religious, secular, gangster and merchant Jews. Every author/artist has a different perspective on Jewish American characters and cities, and they depict various periods. *The Contract with God Trilogy* extends from the Depression through World War II; *The Jew of New York* takes place in the first half of the nineteenth century; *Jew Gangster* covers the Depression; and Harvey Pekar's stories are contemporary with historic backgrounds. Three of the graphic novels' settings are New York, in the tenements of the Bronx and the Lower East Side, which are largely populated by Jews. While these graphic novels show how the Jewish immigrants experience transformed cities and their personalities, Harvey Pekar's works reveal how another city, Cleveland, is influential in Jewish immigrants' lives.

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<sup>3</sup> Some critical studies focusing on Jewish identity in graphic novels and comics are: Arie Kaplan, *From Krakow to Krypton: Jews and Comic Books*. (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2008); Danny Fingeroth, *Disguised as Clark Kent: Jews, Comics, and the Creation of the Superhero*. (Maiden Lane: The Continuum International Publishing, 2009); Simcha Weinstein, *Up, Up, and Oy Vey: How Jewish History, Culture, and Values Shaped the Comic Book Superhero* (Fort Lee: Barricade Books, 2009); Samantha Baskind and Ranen Omer-Sherman (eds.), *The Jewish Graphic Novel: Critical Approaches* (Piscataway: Rutgers, 2010); Harry Brod, *Superman Is Jewish?: How Comic Book Superheroes Came to Serve Truth, Justice, and the Jewish-American Way* (New York: Free Press, 2012); and Stephen E. Tabachnick, *The Quest for Jewish Belief and Identity in the Graphic Novel* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2014).

<sup>4</sup> Some graphic novels which deal with the Jewish American experience are: James Strum, *The Golem's Mighty Swing* (Montreal: Drawn&Quarterly, 2003); Neil Kleid and Jake Allen, *Brownsville* (New York: NBM Publishing, 2006); Martin Lemelman, *Two Cent Plain: My Brooklyn Boyhood* (New York: Bloomsbury USA, 2010); and Leela Corman, *Unterzakhn* (New York: Schocken, 2012).

Graphic narratives have evolved in time and have ended up as a distinctive visual-verbal medium. Recent technological advancements and the rising popularity of visual culture contribute to reveal the influential power of graphic narratives. Recent graphic novels proved that graphic narratives effectively focus on various issues, from politics to personal traumas and Jewish American identity. Jewish American artists pioneer and explore innovative narrative techniques in the medium and focus on various aspects of Jewish American and related issues. Despite various definitions and a constant flux throughout the centuries, to determine an anchor point, the brief information about the evolution of Jewish American identity will be helpful to foreground the vantage point of this thesis and the intricate relations of this identity with graphic narratives.

Jewish American ethnic, social and cultural identities are represented and constructed in graphic novels through landscape, space and stereotypes. In this thesis, four different Jewish American artists' graphic novels, namely Will Eisner's *The Contract with God Trilogy* (*A Contract With God* in 1978, *A Life Force* in 1988, *Dropsie Avenue* in 1995), Ben Katchor's *The Jew of New York* (1999), Joe Kubert's *Jew Gangster* (2005), Harvey Pekar's *The Quitter* (2005) and *Harvey Pekar's Cleveland* (2012) will be analyzed to show how Jewish American identity is constructed with graphic narratives through Jewish cultural elements, environment, heritage and how these characters' lives are affected by their particular condition in the United States. These works offer different perspectives on the Jewish identity and the problems Jewish Americans face due to social, ethnic and economic constraints. They indicate that Jewish American characters possess a Jewish consciousness in various degrees, which plays a decisive role in their social lives. Therefore, the Jewish experience reflected in these works indicates to Jewish Americans' awareness of their political, ethnic and social status in the United States.

In this study, the landscape, cityscape, and characters constructed through elements of graphic narratives will be examined to decode their functions in creating and representing a Jewish consciousness and to explain the factors stimulating this creation. Housing problems of Jewish Americans, their struggles to establish their identities in a WASP (White Anglo Saxon Protestant) American culture represent the traces of assimilation. While the city, its institutions or the land stand for communal unity among

Jewish Americans, they also reflect individual struggles and problems in the context of Jewish society. Changes in settlements refer to individual and social repositionings such as an inclination from orthodoxy to secularization or a decline in communal life toward individualism.

In the cultural and social contexts, identity is shaped through constructed landscape. Landscape is linked to people living in that certain area. As Duncan and Lambert point out,

Homes and residential landscapes are primary sites in which identities are produced and performed in practical, material and repetitively reaffirming ways ... Homes and residential landscapes evoke powerful sentiments, helping to constitute family and community values and playing a central role in the performance of place-based social identities and distinction. (387)

Landscape and cityscape images are used to interpret people's cultural and social perceptions and productions. Representations in the landscape envision the characteristics of the dwellers (Giles and Middleton 124). These representations also encode the physical and symbolic images and allude to unfolding cultural, religious, ethnic and ethic elements. Judy Giles and Tim Middleton state the importance of exploration in the landscape as follows:

In conducting a cultural study of place and location one is often rereading other people's representations, in the form of maps, reflections, paintings, photographs and so on, in the hope of producing a fuller sense of the complex processes by which a given culture can be characterized; in effect, the cultural geographer makes a cognitive map of the cultural phenomenon being investigated. (125)

Cultural spaces are defined by various terms to explore the multilayered landscapes. Foucault uses the term "heteretopia" to define the spaces that are juxtaposed in the same space. Foucault's concept of the external space is approached somewhat differently by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. Deleuze uses the terms "deterritorialization" and "reterritorialization," which are again related to cultural space, for capitalist influence on a certain territory (Deleuze and Guattari 33). However, later the terms find a wide area of usage and they basically refer to the constant change in the environment. All these terms mainly focus on the transformation in the cultural space but with physical borders and icons. Jewish cultural spaces are also exposed to various social, cultural and

economic factors and experience constant transformations, which include physical reconstructions.

The city or the land represent the Jewish life style and becomes a site to investigate problems of adaptation and acculturation. The first generation is able to transmit their values in the new land to some extent, but the second and third generations find themselves in a failing domain where they have to struggle to survive and, at the same time, reconsider their identity in the face of changing values. Graphic narrative techniques are able to depict these rugged life styles because the strategical use of frames, stereotypes and gutters strengthen the narration to penetrate social dilemmas and the changes Jewish immigrants experience in America. Stereotypes are both used to present the otherness of the immigrants and they are associated with the landscape/cityscape that creates a form of unity or a network among Jewish immigrants. Moreover, frames and panels are illustrated in such a way that they enable the reader to view the double effect of the environment: A safe haven for the Jewish American society but also a place of perpetual problems for the individual and social life. Nevertheless, the relationship between the land and Jewish identity in the graphic narratives depicts the historical change Jewish Americans have experienced.

The first chapter will focus on the functionality of the images and frames. Jewish immigrants, who are known as “people of city,” settle in the same environment and prefer a communal life style. Especially, in the beginning of the twentieth century, New York City became the second shtetl for Jewish immigrants where they established their own institutes like synagogues to perpetuate their traditions. In the selected graphic narratives, the “city” gains a profound value since it becomes a fortified zone where Jewish immigrants try to maintain their rituals and culture.

In this sense, the group identity became a blessing for the immigrants. Settlers assumed that tenements provided a sense of community and production:

Coming to the Lower East Side of New York from the closed universe of the European shtetl (the small village), Jews had to face a bewildering new world. They reacted as other immigrants did—by reinforcing a group solidarity that was already part of their experience, even more so than it was for Italians or Chinese, and by trying to recreate a neighborhood of their own, to rebuild the past in the present. A deep-rooted sense of community and social responsibility and the



concept of tzedaka (charity conceived as justice), stemming both from religious tenets and from a history of past and present persecution, received new strength and meaning on the American soil, and originated a host of hevras, voluntary organizations built around the shul (the ever-present synagogue). (Maffi 121-122)

In *The Jew of New York*, Ben Katchor bases his story on a historical person, Mordecai Noah, who attempts to establish a Jewish land in New York. The novel introduces various characters and Jewish life styles. While New York stands for the nostalgic past of Jewish community, the name “The Jew of New York” comes from an anti-Semitic play within the story. Katchor provides a well detailed description of the city and images, which have symbolic meanings or direct donations with Jewish immigrants. He also creates a connection between the body of the Jew and the city since he sees the land as the basic element providing safety, unity and continuity for Jewish immigrants. However, there is no uniform life style for immigrants coming to the city. While some of them, such as Nathan Kishon, try to get used to city life and maintain Jewish traditions as much as possible, some of them, such as Mr. Marah, embrace cruel city methods and become a fraud. In addition to the city life portrayals, there is a comparison between the city and pastoral life, which is experimented by an isolated society.

In Will Eisner’s *The Contract with God Trilogy*, the protective function of the land is attributed to old tenements where Jewish immigrants have to compromise their cultural lives to survive in this new land. The inhabitants of the tenements send their children to the rabbis and help each other when the Jewish community in Europe was threatened by the Nazis. The tenements, as one of the main source of blue-collar work force, provide members for labor unions as well. However, in Joe Kubert’s *Jew Gangster*, the historical success of Jews in organized crimes during the 1920s and 1930s appear as the unifying element in the community rather than the orthodox and legal institutions. Kubert tells Ruby Kaplan’s coming-of-age story during the Depression era. Unlike his Jewish father, Ruby does not want to live a poor life and he gets involved in the crime world, but he views crime as a way of defending other Jews, which shows that his ethical ideas are shaped by his Jewish identity. As an anti-hero, he wants to possess power and idolizes masculine Jewish gangsters, which demonstrates his need to belonging to an accepting society. Despite his disaffection with his father, who is a stereotypical immigrant, he centers himself in Jewish society. However, he loosens his

Jewish roots as he adapts into the criminal world. This crime story reveals how a Jewish character finds his motivations with collective consciousness and how he develops a defensive approach for his environment.

The second part of the first chapter will focus on how frames contribute to the storylines and define physical and psychological borders. Jewish immigrants have neighborhoods but they have to struggle to survive and their cultural values often erode in the process of adaptation. Personal dilemmas derived from identity, land, and cost of living cause a skewed relationship between the characters and their environment, which is depicted with artists' graphic narrative techniques, especially through framing. Eisner uses doors, windows, and buildings as frames, which, from one aspect, strangles the characters, and confines them to these frames within the city. In *The Contract with God Trilogy*, Eisner has four interlocked stories revolving around Jewish characters. The narration of the stories shows that characters are entrapped in the tenements and constantly experience a vicious circle. In the first story, "A Contract with God," Eisner narrates the story of a poor Jew in New York who made a contract with God to live a faithful life. When he loses his adopted daughter, he blames God for violating their contract. Later, dissatisfied with his life, he wants to make a new contract with God, but his heart fails and he dies. A boy comes and signs his name under the contract, which indicates that he inherits the same legacy. Eisner depicts Jewish stereotypes and shows how life becomes a matter of survival for these immigrants. "A Contract with God" is not only a matter of faith, but also an act of sustaining Jewish religious traditions and cultural elements. Eisner uses a crude realistic portrayal in the story, which was untraditional to the comic medium at the time. His characters are anti-heroes who are powerless and disappointed with life, imprisoned in the frames, in themselves, and in the city. Similarly, incurability and despair are reflected in the other selected graphic narratives with framing, panel size and angles.

The second chapter will discuss stereotypical characters as another constraint, which limit the characters' potential abilities. Also, the functionality of stereotypes in the graphic narratives will be explored since these characters contribute to the storytelling process and help the readers to familiarize with the narrative. Like framing, stereotypes have a double function. Although they are superficial and outward, graphic narratives

use them as a tool to create an easy association. For example, in Ben Katchor's work, similar to Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, Jewish characters correspond to animals and Katchor's drawings focus on the racial otherness of the Jews. In this sense, Katchor's story provides Jewish characters that are discriminated against and othered by the society. By drawing stereotypical Jews, such as "hook-nosed, beady-eyed" and "authentic" Jews, who are "representatives" of the first immigrants, Katchor refers to collective Jewish yearnings of a new promised land.

The second chapter will also show how the changing social status of Jewish immigrants are related to a transforming environment. The more Jewish Americans integrate into the dominant culture, the more they neglect their communal life. The change of social status means that social and physical environment also change and Jewish Americans become isolated from Jewish cultural elements as they integrate and adapt themselves to the new environment. Harvey Pekar, in *American Splendor*, narrates the anecdotes of his anti-heroic Jewish life. Although he does not directly include Jewish cultural elements, his Jewish background is revealed in his daily activities of work as a file clerk or through his shopping in a market. His stories are about surviving and dealing with everyday problems. *The Quitter* and *Harvey Pekar's Cleveland* suggest a view on the interrelated change in people and the environment. His memories are derived from the life in Cleveland and the city depictions. His Jewishness is not his primary concern and he does not particularly try to observe a Jewish lifestyle. However, Pekar's Jewish background offers a certain kind of self-awareness, which is traceable in his everyday life. Growing up in a Jewish family in Cleveland, where the history of Jews dates back to the beginnings of the nineteenth century, Pekar faces his Jewish roots, including the Israel issue, and he develops a secular understanding of Jewishness. Unlike Eisner's tenements or Kubert's Bronx, he does not live in a place where the Jewish population is intensive and where you can see kosher<sup>5</sup> food stalls. In this sense, Pekar's self-identity is different and his relationship with his environment is not examined in terms of his Jewishness. All these examples present that spaces and places reveal information related

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<sup>5</sup> Kosher is a term used for food, which is prepared or regulated according to Jewish dietary laws (kashrut). In addition, it is used for objects, which are suitable for Jewish rituals ("Kosher"). Kosher food has a significance in the studied graphic novels since it indicates characters' devotion to Jewishness or assimilation in the non-Jewish society.

to the characters' social and religious affiliation. From Katchor's first Jewish immigrant stereotypes to Harvey's singularity, the community and culture are analogous with places where people experience their lives.

## CHAPTER 1

### TRANSGRESSING FRAMES, DECODING IMAGES

*Declare that something is invisible, inaccessible to visual imaging, and someone (usually an artist or scientist) will find a way to depict it. Prohibit something from being shown, hide it away from view, and its power as a concealed image outstrips anything it could have achieved by being shown. We should always say, then, this is unspeakable or unimaginable—up till now. The law against the representation of something in words or images must, in effect, always break itself, because it must name, describe, define—that is, represent—the very thing that it prohibits. That is why the law is so parsimonious and discreet in representing that which it prohibits from representation.*

*The Unspeakable and the Unimaginable: Word and Image in a*

*Time of Terror, W.J.T. Mitchell*

The cityscape and its construction are a dynamic process in fictional works and the presentation of place shapes the narrative since “[t]he city is, rather, a state of mind, a body of customs and traditions, and of the organized attitudes, and sentiments that inhere in these customs and are transmitted with this tradition” (Park 1). The landscape and cityscape have been considered as mostly metaphorical in revealing the inner feelings and thoughts of the characters. Since “the strength of landscape in literature lies in its subtle human qualities, its potential for revealing the hidden dimensions of human meaning, and not in its objectivity” (Salter and Lloyd 2), landscape does not exist only as a piece of plot, but it becomes a tool for reflecting “intimate personal involvement,

leading to an appreciation of the human qualities of the cultural landscape” (2). Many graphic novelists illustrate the landscape with such an involvement. Neil Gaiman points out that “[e]ach city has its own personality, after all. Los Angeles is not Vienna. London is not Moscow. Chicago is not Paris. Each city is a collection of lives and buildings” (18). In various graphic narratives, city carries out supplementary codes of cultures, memories and physical and psychological reflections to create an aesthetic and coherent atmosphere. For example, in *Batman*, Gotham city has become an archetype in displaying the qualities of the characters; metropolis residents and criminals reveal their disillusionment, self-destructiveness, and urban desires in the dark streets, shadowy buildings, black and white tones and huge skyscrapers.

For Christopher L. Salter and William J. Lloyd, landscape and the elements it contains are extensions of cultural or individual codes, which are revealed in the comprehensive panorama of scenes. The choices of details are meant to guide the reader into the fictional world the writer has created:

Each roof line, mailbox, outdoor vegetable stand, farm crop, used car lot, hardware store interior, is the design product of specific individual or group decisions. Preferences for texture, color, function, cost, ceremony, and countless other creative influences are manifest in landscape design. The thoughtful reader of such design develops an insight into the substance of the landscape’s parent people. The reading of the cultural landscape for its substance is an essential use of sight. Then—it is to be hoped—comes insight, as the separate components are pieced together into a cultural mosaic that is as unique for a given scene as is the fingerprint individual. (7)

Although this claim was made for literary works, landscape in graphic narratives function in a similar manner. Moreover, since the panels depicting characters mostly include visual background images, physical and psychological settings become functional elements in graphic narratives. Background images in the panels might be iconic, metaphorical or realistic depending on the desired effect, which is not necessarily synchronous with the truth claim of the narrative. Craig Thompson’s autobiographical graphic novel *Blankets* (2003) depicts panels with abstract images and a fictional graphic novel such as *Watchmen* (1986) might be drawn with realistic perspectives of a city. The strong historical connection between city and comics begin “with the emergence of comics strips in American newspapers around 1900” (Ahrens and Meteling 4).

Michel Foucault stresses the living area as a means of cultural representation and argues that “we do not live in a kind of void . . . we live inside of a set of relations that delineates sites which are irreducible to one another and absolutely not super-imposable on one another” (23). He coins the term “heterotopia,” which is a constructed space through culture and identity and “simultaneously mythic and real contestation of the space in which we live” (23). For Foucault, every society has different heterotopias and they change over the time while it may supersede various physical and social place forms. He argues,

The heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible ... [T]hey have a function in relation to all the space that remains. This function unfolds between two extreme poles. Either their role is to create a space of illusion that exposes every illusory ... or else, on the contrary, their role is to create a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled. The latter type would be the heterotopia, not of illusion, but of compensation. (25-27)

The created spaces in the graphic novels emerge in different ways. Ben Katchor creates multilayered spaces in *The Jew of New York*. “Ararat” is an alternative space to city life while “The Soda Water Company” map is emphasized as sign of Jewish existence. Although this existence is not very well known to other dwellers, Katchor’s use of intricate elements and trivial events hint to another space that exposes Jewish culture. Eisner, Kubert, and Harvey also have a tendency to explore the landscape and cities within their stories. They depict the space in the cities, which is related to ethnic realities and delusional spaces. For example, in *Jew Gangster*, the narrator’s point of view uncovers the Jewish immigrants’ life in the tenements while the ethnic gangster world emerges as another layer of the space. In this respect, these artists protrude cultural spaces to create Jewish characters. Jewish people are known as “urban people” since they gathered in and around cities after immigrating to the United States, and embraced trade and commerce over the time (Goldstein 36). Jewish people have built their lives in urban areas and have been associated with cities throughout their experience in the new world. This is especially true for Jewish Americans in New York City. The first Jewish settlers found a safe haven there and shaped the places they dwelled in New York City, thus interweaving the city with a specific Jewish presence. As Deborah Dash Moore states, “Jews did contribute to the physical forms of their

urban world as well as to the emerging spirit of the neighborhood” (“On the Fringes” 252). Moreover, this influence was not only limited to physical attribution. It also included “integrated cultural and religious resources, social organizations and networks, with class and ideology, encoded these upon the landscape” (“On the Fringes” 252).

## 1.1. LANDSCAPE IMAGES

For Jewish Americans, a metropolis like New York City was the big shtetl and they initiated several business and Jewish organizations to provide a sense of fraternity among Jewish immigrants. As a reflection of their social ties with the city, Jewish American artists use cityscape to delineate the existence of Jewish heritage in urban life. Ben Katchor shows that the integration existed even at the beginning of the nineteenth century when, “the city of New York was close to 1.000.000 souls.” In *The Jew of New York*, Katchor depicts a growing and developing city where Jewish population increases. The author’s evidence is the size of the Jewish cemetery, which is a “sizeable necropolis” (10). The Jewish settlement in New York has a long history and even during the colonial period, there were merchant Jews who assembled into “private religious services” besides the shopkeepers and peddlers (Rock 43). While Katchor narrates how New York City grows into a metropolis, he draws a parallel development of a Jewish community and their increasing efficiency in the economic and social life.

Jennifer Glaser explores the body politics and Katchor’s metafictional elements, which give coherence to the relationship between Jewish identity and the land in *The Jew of New York*. As she puts it, “Katchor’s text manages to be innovative in its exploration of Jewish identity and representation precisely because the combination of images and words allow him to create a Jewish world unto itself, an imagined community that the reader can see as well as hear” (170). Ben Katchor skillfully defines cities and remarks, “[i]t comes out through historical references, linguistic usage, but mainly through first-hand observation of what I see around me . . . As I’ve always lived in cities and building those subjects are central to my work” (“Picturing American Stories”). Katchor’s story is intermingled with religious and historical images, real places, and allusions that refer to Jewish history. The graphic novel’s title “The Jew of New York” is actually a burlesque of Mordecai Noah’s utopic attempt to establish a Jewish community called



“Ararat” in upstate New York. Nathan Kishon, who has been to this place, is a follower of Noah and the memories of his trip are visualized in the graphic novel.

Ararat symbolizes the second chance for Jewish immigrants and becomes the new home. The place also symbolizes a sense of tribalism Jewish immigrants experience. In Ararat, Jewish immigrants take a stance against American individualism since this concept is a potential threat for Jewish identity. Martin Seymour Lipset and Earl Raab characterize Jewish life in America as tribal, “a term which in its most generic meaning refers to a cohesive ancestral group with particular customs, traditions, values—religious, linguistic, and otherwise” (7). Noah’s Jewish community lives a tribal life outside the city and they perform special rituals. In this peculiar settlement, the first object that greets the eye is a Hebrew sign board, “New Afflatus,” which is the name tag for the community and means “new inspiration” (*The Jew of New York* 27). Even though they claim that their society is “founded upon the scientific principles of the great genius and discoverer of oxygen, Joseph Priestley” they use books as winter fuel (*The Jew of New York* 27). Breaking the rules of the community life leads to dismissal from the settlement as in the case of Kishon when he slaughters a turkey, which resembles the kosher way of preparing food. While the members of utopic Jewish sect living in Ararat attempt to create a society free from capitalist entrapments and industrial labor, the Jews living in the city have to cope with modern life struggles, which distinguish the two types of communal life. Ararat Jews state their aim as “[w]hen this continent is thoroughly oxygenated, there will be no need for permanent dwellings. The citizens of the United States will reassume the salutary wandering life of the Ancient Hebrews” (*The Jew of New York* 27).

Katchor inserts an absurd element to connect these two different living conditions, which is the “Lake Erie Soda Water Company.” This company intends to “carbonate Lake Erie and lay a high-pressure pipe line directly to New York City” (*The Jew of New York* 46). People in Ararat form an “architecture followed strictly the function of human respiration” (*The Jew of New York* 28). The map of Soda Water Company pipes reflects the city as human lungs. This image appears as a metafictional element in the beginning and at the very end, which indicates that the fictional world is surrounded by this organ, namely the city and its people, physically and psychologically stand as one solid torso.

This representation consists of the idea that “New York promised its Jews the ability to integrate into society and at the same time to maintain a vigorous independent existence” (Polland and Soyer 8-9). Soda water becomes a favorite Jewish beverage, known as Jewish champagne, and 90 percent of the soda-water companies are owned by Jewish firms in the United States (*Emerging Metropolis* 133). In the story, this integration is symbolized by Francis Oriole’s attempt to carbonate city water with Middle Eastern Jew Enoch Letushim’s financial support. Oriole claims that “it is an invention of genius Priestley” (*The Jew of New York* 44), which indirectly involves the society living separately in Ararat.

Ben Katchor presents different connections within characters and landscape with various techniques. As Frank L. Cioffi states,

Katchor forces the reader to question his or her tendency to seek relations between things that resist connection. His detailed, chiaroscuro, static images, filled with imaginary brand names and invented places, are given moment, movement, and explanation by the narrative, which is often complex, hypotactic, and highly improbable. (105)

Subsidiary images lead to different stories and complex narratives. In addition, characters have their own stories that coincide with other characters’ stories. Sprinkled images such as fake ads and posters push the reader to contemplate on these images and their relationship with the story. Katchor likes using trivial objects and brings a minimalistic approach. For example, the reader sees the ingredients of a pickling in the center of a page (61) but the speech balloons switch to the Emperor Charles V. The next page starts with another story, which creates an obscure storyline. Katchor intentionally breaks the story flow and focuses on the irrelevant petty objects since he wants to present a realistic background. The function of these objects is similar to the function of the pseudo-realistic posters and brochures that Katchor depicts. Drawing in details such as the ingredients of recipe provides a well-described setting.

Will Eisner, Joe Kubert and Harvey Pekar construct their setting on familiar cityscapes where they have spent a considerable period of their lives. Since Joe Kubert grew up in Brooklyn, he knows the characteristics of the area and is able to interpret the signs of his childhood in *Jew Gangster*. As a technique, he uses the background of the panels for creating a realistic perspective. He claims that “[t]he artists made sure that every

background was immaculate in terms of its credibility. That is what made the whole story believable” (“Keeping Current with Joe Kubert”). Kubert also looks for references, which, for him, “takes longer than drawing it” (“Keeping Current with Joe Kubert”). For narrating traumatic circumstances, the author has to construct a familiar representation of the scene and try to relate it to “other significant events that may be able to withstand its power” (Slade 172). All of the significant events such as the Depression, world of gangsters, and immigration are framed through the depiction of the city.

Kubert’s landscapes reflect the unique characteristics of Brooklyn, which also presents an outlook of the community living there. In this sense, New York becomes a distinctive place for Jewish Americans since “New York gave Jews visibility as individuals and as a group” (Dash Moore, Foreword xii). The Jewish identity in this environment has been so prominent that New York Jews “came to identify with the city, absorbing its ethos even as they helped to shape its urban characteristics” (Deborah Moore, Foreword xi). For Tobias Brinkmann, “New York quickly emerged as by far the largest center of Jewish life, epitomizing the Jewish immigration experience in the big city” (50); New York, as the setting of Kubert’s novel, is reproduced with a subjective view of the city and the images reinforce the thematic coherence together with the characters and background images.

Another method for linking the people with the city is drawing the city from different angles and bird’s-eye views. Kubert draws his character Ruby in crowded places as a dot, which gives the impression that the city is talking (Fig. 1.1). In one panel, Ruby is talking to his friends, but in the following panel, there are only speech balloons, which indicate their continuing conversation while their bodies are invisible (*Jew Gangster* 30). The focus is on a typical tiled building and a woman who is looking at them from a window. The same technique is also used for censoring a sex scene (Fig. 1.2). While Kubert points out the characteristics of the cityscape, he implies that “Jewish immigrants successfully turned New York into their ‘Megashetl on the Hudson,’” (Brinkmann 50) and it is possible to view the signs of Jewish identity at every corner of the city.



Fig. 1.1. Kubert's depiction of the city from a bird's eye view (*Jew Gangster* 29).

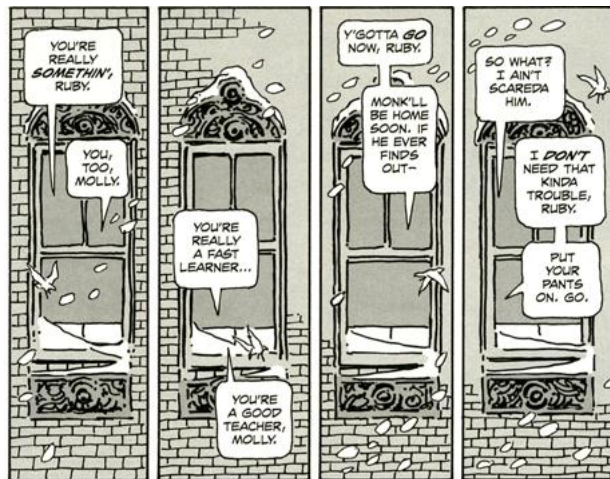


Fig. 1.2. Kubert's embodiment of a building (*Jew Gangster* 84).

Tenement buildings are one of the most significant signs of Jewish communal identity. During the immigration waves, tenement housing became the landmark for labor immigrants from different ethnicities, but especially the Jews. With their dense ethnic populations, tenements were associated with overcrowded immigrants, poverty and working-class families (Mann 129). Nevertheless, they were shared spaces where immigrants developed their own sense of community. The Lower East Side was mainly a Jewish residence and the area carried profound characteristics of Jewish life:

After much of the neighborhood's Jewish immigrant population, and especially their children, moved out of the area, the Lower East Side served as a cultural arena in which to test and shape American Jewish identity, even for those who had never lived there, and especially after the destruction of European Jewry. The

power of the Lower East Side as a site of memory, an iconic point of origins and passage in American Jewish experience, is attested in the myriad cultural forms for which it serves as a touchstone. (Mann 129)

Eisner depicts a realistic background with the intention of introducing the city he lived and observed his characters are often unsuccessful, lonely, and isolated working-class immigrants. Since Eisner states, “[r]esidency defined you as surely as did national origin and gave you a lifelong membership in a fraternity held together by memories” (*Dropsie Avenue*, Introduction), his depiction of crooked tenements in narrow and dark streets become the identifiers of the people who reside there. Therefore, every aspect of the tenements is reflected through images along with the characters. Eisner is known to be among the first artists who “bring the mood and the danger of the big city at night to the comic book page by stimulating the low-key lighting of the film noir genre” (Duncan and Smith 142). His city depictions, affected by the techniques of film noir, present the struggling survivors of the tenements with low key lighting which provides a dramatic sinister effect.

In *Cleveland*, Harvey Pekar gives information on Cleveland’s historical development and in *The Quitter*, he depicts the social changes in his life together with the changes in the environment. As Alan Moore states, “every panel celebrates the worth of being who we are, and when we are, and where we are: the value of our individual lives and times, and of the shabby, legendary places where we live” (*Harvey Pekar’s Cleveland*, Introduction). Thus, giving the historical and demographical information about the city helps the reader to understand the character in a broader sense. Similarly, Eisner narrates *Dropsie Avenue* in such a way that the reader is able to interpret the social process and construction of the city in relation to the members of its ethnic and religious groups.

Furthermore, Moore feels that Pekar’s city narrative is crucial in the personification of the characters. As he suggests,

[Pekar] treats human dramas, triumphs and turmoils as emergent properties of landscape, just as he conversely treats the streets and towns around us as extensions of ourselves. A person or a place cannot be fully understood unless each is considered in the context of the other. Cleveland is a part of Harvey Pekar, just as in his resting place amongst the like of John D. Rockefeller. (*Harvey Pekar’s Cleveland*, Introduction)

Pekar is depicted in the same panel with popular city views such as the Cleveland public library (*Harvey Pekar's Cleveland* 111). Visual construction of the story gains a different dimension with the historical narration. Pekar makes a personal connection with the library and presents the general background of the building, which allows the reader to have a visual and contextual understanding of the environment.

## 1.2. CULTURAL IMAGES

Landscape becomes one of the cultural codes to interpret the character. As Michael Ryan explains, “culture is inseparable from location. Early human communities organized themselves differently under the influence of different locations and environments” (12). Communities are separated through where they live or work. Different ethnic groups settle in certain areas of New York City. Every group tries to stick together in the new environment while creating a space of their particular preferences. In this sense, the interaction between people and the environment is interactive. The growing society in a certain place develops its culture as a response to the new place. While people reshape the environment, the social and physical conditions force the people to adapt their practices to their environment. In other words, people give meaning to the landscape:

Culture transforms the physical world. It is the tool with which we impose civility on a natural world that is inherently uncivil, violent, and meaningless. Landscape can thus be said to be a distillate of culture. Every time we modify a natural landscape by building on it or reshaping it, we invest with our intentions, our ideas, and our meanings. A landscape comes to have meaning when it ceases to be a simple physical object and is invested with our needs, designs, and imperatives. (Ryan 13)

Graphic narratives employ certain background images that reflect different aspects of urban modernity and these images are in relation with the story and the characters. Some recurring elements reflect specific qualities and are associated with the setting. For example, a repetitively used door, or a chair becomes a functional element to be interpreted in the context of the story. These elements are part of the created landscapes and they establish unique paradigms to explore representative links between the place and the characters. For humanist geographers Christopher L. Salter and William J. Lloyd,

In interpreting remotely sensed imagery, a certain landscape feature—such as an agricultural crop—may have a specific polychromatic intensity unlike the tones of other features such as urban areas, fresh water, or snow cover. This kind of uniqueness is called signature. In the cultural landscape, we can also speak of signatures as personal, unique mark that connotes a specific pattern of human expression by its author. It is also read, in the manner in which we wish to read the cultural landscape. (7)

Signatures have a particular function in making meaning of environmental images like streets, houses and regions. Since cities are not only physical constructions but also reflectors of social conditions and cultural life, signatures constructing a city reveal political, social and cultural patterns of a certain place. The characteristic images of the city are used in the background of panels in order to sustain the link between the city and its people throughout the novel. Since “[r]epetitive images and recognizable symbols are used very commonly in comics and form their pictorial vocabulary” (Saraceni 25), signatures can be classified in those “repetitive images.”

Among these signatures, the Brooklyn Bridge and the railroad are very evident from the first page of *Jew Gangster*. Joe Kubert creates a sort of language with these repeated images and the graphic novel starts with the shadow of the railroad as a dark scene in which gangsters are torturing a man and the last page shows the railroad in a brightened city covered with snow (Fig. 1.3). As the railroad image “helps to communicate the almost magical aura surrounding the railroads as they helped shape the landscape of America” (Salter and Lloyd 21), it also indicates the contribution of Jewish society in shaping the city and symbolizes Jewish immigration. The tracks also remind the readers of the freight trains carrying Jewish people to concentration camps during the Holocaust.

According to Leah Garrett, “in Yiddish literature, the train is portrayed as a vessel that brings the tides of change into and out of the shtetl” (68). New York, the modern shtetl of Jewish immigrants, becomes Ruby’s prison and he frequently repeats that he “gotta get out of here” (*Jew Gangster* 49). Similarly, the railroad is a “symbol of the breakdown of the unified natural world into fractured parts of the industrial machine. The machine is anonymous and inhuman. It lacks familial, natural, and spiritual ties” (*Jew Gangster* 73). For the same reason, Ruby’s gradual progress in the world of crime separates him from his Jewish roots.



Fig. 1.3. The railroad and its shadow (*Jew Gangster 1*).

The most symbolic event of this disengagement is Ruby's father's death. The father stands for traditional Jewish values and is the protector. His last words are "I will not have a son who is a Jew gangster" (*Jew Gangster 77*). Ruby will further be immersed into the crime world with his father's death. Evidently, his refusal to perform the religious responsibilities because he has "got business," and leaving his family to have an affair with his boss's wife right after the funeral prove that he wants to break free from the traditions that bound him. This break is also depicted in the context of the landscape. The panels depict the season's change into winter with the graveyard covered with snow (*Jew Gangster 79*). Since the graveyards are "associated with the more orthodox elements of the signature of sacred space" (Salter and Lloyd 17), it is possible to interpret the graveyard scene as Ruby's last religious commitment. He remains silent when the rabbi announces, "it is the sons's responsibility to say Kadish every day for a full year following the father's demise" (*Jew Gangster 79*).



One of the cityscape images related to the Jewish culture is the kosher restaurant in which Ruby's mother works (Fig. 1.4). Since kosher food is an indispensable dietary laws of Jewish tradition, the kosher restaurant window with the Star of David as well as butcher windows is represented from different angles throughout the novel. As Pollard and Soyer put it “[t]he preference for kosher food gave shopping religious overtones for Jews and made grocery stores and, especially, butcher shops venues for women to express their Jewish identities” (*Emerging Metropolis* 28). These images are reminders of “following the true path” and Jewish identity. Unfortunately, Ruby does not follow the right path when he helps a gangster to chop a Jewish butcher's finger off even though he prevents the gangster from killing the butcher (*Jew Gangster* 41).

Kosher butchers are signatures that refer to Jewish traditions and habits. In the *Jew of New York*, Nathan Kishon used to work in a butcher shop, and he indiscriminately tossed kosher and non-kosher organs into the same barrel until it was full (*The Jew of New York* 6). Katchor depicts this event to make a remark on religious issues. Kishon thought his action would not be discovered since people were not well educated at that time but he was questioned about non-kosher organs (*The Jew of New York* 6). Katchor comments on this event by saying, “an Israelite who has sinned ritually is still an Israelite” (*The Jew of New York* 6) and Kishon defends himself by saying, “they intend to rob me of my livelihood” (*The Jew of New York* 6).



Fig. 1.4. Kosher restaurants are repeatedly depicted in *Jew Gangster* (8).

In *Dropsie Avenue*, Eisner depicts a poultry shop window with “kosher” written in Hebrew. Even though this seems like an irrelevant detail in the panel, the image is embedded there as a cultural element. The speech on the page indicates the change in the neighborhood and the newcomers. The stores are also changed and an Italian restaurant is depicted as an indication of the new multi-ethnic face of the neighborhood. In different stories, illustrators focus on different aspects of kosher butchers and restaurants, but the depictions of these buildings aim to reveal the social and cultural construction of Jewish community.

Tenement buildings, clotheslines and fire escapes are common signatures used in Kubert’s and Eisner’s works. These images rest upon cultural codes of tenement life and they are the visual indicators for social relations. Densely constructed tenement buildings and crowded market places signify a shared zone for immigrants. In the introduction of *A Contract with God*, a typical tenement is narrated under clotheslines with these words: “55 Dropsie was typical of most tenements. Its tenants were varied. Some came and went. Many remained there for a lifetime... imprisoned by poverty or other factors. It was a sort of ‘micro-village’” (3).

Clotheslines and fire escapes cover the environment like spider webs and they are engraved in the lives of the people in the tenements. For instance, in *Jew Gangster*, Ruby offers his friends to join the gangster band and the panel they discuss the issue is depicted between the steps of fire escapes (Fig. 1.5). This depiction also creates a metaphorical image, which indicates that Ruby finds his escape in climbing the social ladder. The tenements stand as a working-class area and Ruby relies on the criminal world as an escape out of poverty. The fire escape on which Elton attempts a suicide (42), lead to the same fire escape, where Rifke protests Jacob’s decision to divorce (122). In characteristic elements of the city, fire escapes are woven through the entire region and they function as the visible ties of the tenement life. Ironically, fire escapes present a metaphorical escape, like Elton’s suicide attempt. They are one of the few places, where tenants feel free and relaxed as opposed to being confined. For example, at the end of the “Cookalein,” Willie stands on the fire escape when his mother dictates his responsibilities, but Willie seems ignorant and confident (*A Contract with God* 83). In *A Life Force*, Elton and Rebecca’s love scene and the declaration of her pregnancy is

illustrated with clotheslines covering all the panels in an unrealistic, yet iconic manner (Fig. 1.6), which reveal the harsh and poor conditions behind the tenement walls. Clotheslines, like real lines, attach these lives to the reality of tenements.



Fig. 1.5. A view from the fire escape (*Jew Gangster* 66).



Fig. 1.6. Clotheslines surround the panels (*A Life Force* 117).

The entertainment places are also “responsible for the construction of the most artificial—hence perhaps most human—environments” (Salter and Lloyd 26). Ruby’s psychological escape is embodied in entertainment landscapes. While he watches a movie in a theater, which is associated with escaping reality, he meets a gangster who wants his box. Later, the gangster escorts Ruby out of the cinema although Ruby wants to see the end of the movie and he expresses his disappointment by remarking “geez... this movie’s something, ain’t it?” (*Jew Gangster* 36). For Ruby, the theaters “function as amusements because they satisfy the occasional need we all have to feel transported

and released from real space and present time” (Salter and Lloyd 27). Unfortunately, once Ruby enters into the crime world, he cannot pursue entertainment as much as he wants. Similarly, the pool hall, a place of entertainment, is turned into a gangster’s meeting point. The gangsters escape to a lawless world where they can make easy money.

The amusement park in Coney Island is another place for Ruby to escape reality (Fig. 1.7). He goes there with his girlfriend, who is actually the gangster leader’s wife. In *Landscape in Literature*, Salter and Lloyd maintain that construction of entertainment places as settings provides a surreal getaway. They claim “[t]he decision for specific entertainments and their settings bring the reader information about the person seeking recreation” (Salter and Lloyd 27). When they are on the Ferris wheel, Ruby says “nothin’ can touch me up here” (*Jew Gangster* 106). Entering a physically different, almost unreal world helps him rebuild a safe and an imaginary environment.



Fig. 1.7. Amusement park provides as an escape from confined spaces (*Jew Gangster* 106).

In *A Life Force*, Rebecca and Elton’s ice-skating images permeate the entire page without any panels or frames. This dreamlike sequence is domineered by the whiteness of snow and ice where the couple can forget all their troubles and daily struggles. The whole page is used as one frame, but the section where the mobsters watch them is drawn apart with an indistinct frame line (Fig. 1.8). This specific panel, with its dark tones and thick lines, creates a hole in the peaceful atmosphere and functions as a

transition, as a gate to the other page where the reader is thrown back to the troublesome tenement life.



Fig. 1.8. A panel with dark colors is created within a full-page panel (*A Life Force* 47).

### 1.3. INTERPRETING IMAGES

Signatures are meaningful with regards to what is left outside the panel rather than what is inside the panel. Graphic narratives have their distinctive language that indicates the meaning through minimal use of the lines. Closure, synecdoche and metonymy are frequently used techniques to diminish images and designate the pages economically. They help the readers understand the whole picture by representing only one part of the image. The incomplete images are left to the readers to decode. Robert Duncan and Matthew J. Smith explain this in the following manner:

All images on the comic book page stand for more reality than they can depict. First, the images are, by necessity, an abstraction from the real. Comic book drawings are often highly exaggerated or simplified, but even the most detailed

drawings or paintings fall far short of reproducing reality. Second, because panels occupy a finite and often small space, the images in them usually show only a portion of objects and beings. Readers use their background knowledge to understand what is not shown. (158)

Ben Katchor's synecdoche technique relates people with land and buildings by providing visual sections. Rather than drawing frames that illustrate the city from a panoramic perspective or bird's eye view, his panels associate people with the land and history. While the foreground of a panel presents an authentic character, the background identifies this character and reminds the reader that events are taking place in a new land. For instance, the New World Theater building, which is an example of ancient Greek architecture, is used as a background decoration in the panels. While its name, "New World," implies that it is a new place, a land of opportunity, the architecture evokes a connection with ancient times. Furthermore, the illustration of the theater is similar to later synagogue drawing. Similarly, American Hotel, which actually exists, is an implication of assimilated identity since immigrants desperately tried to fit into their new environment.

For Thierry Groensteen,

When the inset is at the service of the inclusive panel, the panel most often represents a landscape, a large space, or a "background" where the characters are depicted at a reduced size. This sort of panel frequently has for a priori function the establishment of the decor in which the related action will occur. (86)

While Katchor uses a similar technique by inserting a large panel of a landscape or building at the beginning or in the center of the page, which functions as a panel, he does not always minimize characters to "magnify [their] decorative virtues" (Groensteen 86). The panels construct a specific link between the background and the characters. For example, the Sheriath Batsal building covers most of the space and the character, Isaac Azarael is also drawn noticeably large in the panel (Fig. 1.9). While Katchor gives the background details, he prefers to draw the characters in the front layer to create a connection or to reinforce the link between the land and the characters. At this point, Katchor successfully encapsulates the larger picture while he offers the meaningful "inclusive image."

As Scott McCloud states, "if visual iconography is the vocabulary of comics, closure is its grammar" (67), Katchor's closures occur through associating the character with the

land. Although a small part of the land/city is observed, the use of closure allows to “connect these moments and mentally construct a continuous, unified reality” (McCloud 67) and the city. Similarly, Eisner and Kubert depict tenements with characters in the panels and they play with the proportions of the buildings and of the characters to emphasize the link between the characters and their environments. In *Harvey Pekar’s Cleveland*, Pekar uses the same technique with a different approach. His narrative is more like a documentary rather than a fictional story. Nevertheless, the buildings associated with Cleveland are depicted with the embodiment of the narrator, Harvey Pekar himself.

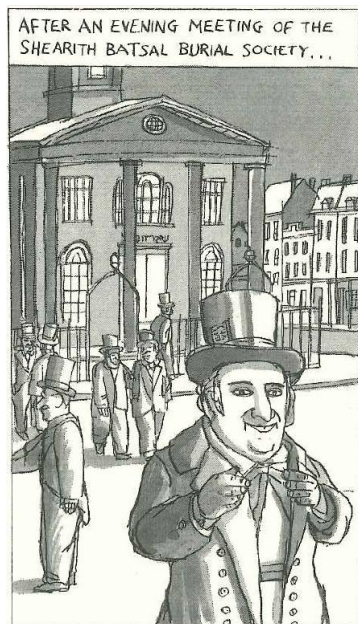


Fig. 1.9. Character in the front layer (*The Jew of New York 3*).

In *The Jew of New York*, closure connects fragmented frames and images. The reader establishes continuity in incomplete images via closure. It links the panels and produces an incessant Yiddish land. Hebrew letters in the panels give the impression the whole city is decorated with such letters, which causes an assumption that the events take place in a shtetl rather than New York City. While realistically drawn pamphlets and brochures refer to historical events in New York, the use of Hebrew in these documents shows that the Jewish presence has already marked the city. Hebrew letters and signatures are common all around the city. A butcher window or a synagogue might

carry the letters, and the speech balloons with some Hebrew letters indicate that people use Hebrew (*The Jew of New York* 72).

Ben Katchor is particularly concerned with language. One of the characters researches languages and invents new onomatopoeic words; or Native Americans are believed to use a similar language to Hebrew, at least phonetically. The Jewish society in Ararat, translates the “Declaration of Independence” into Hebrew letters and they “hope someday to see all American printing and writing done in Hebrew characters” (28). They view language as a way to resist the effects of Anglo-Saxon culture (Fig. 1.10). When Nathan Kishon says, “they were delighted to see that I was already influent in the orthography of their infant language,” another character responds, “Judeo-German, Judeo-Spanish... Why not in time a Judeo-American?” (*The Jew of New York* 28)

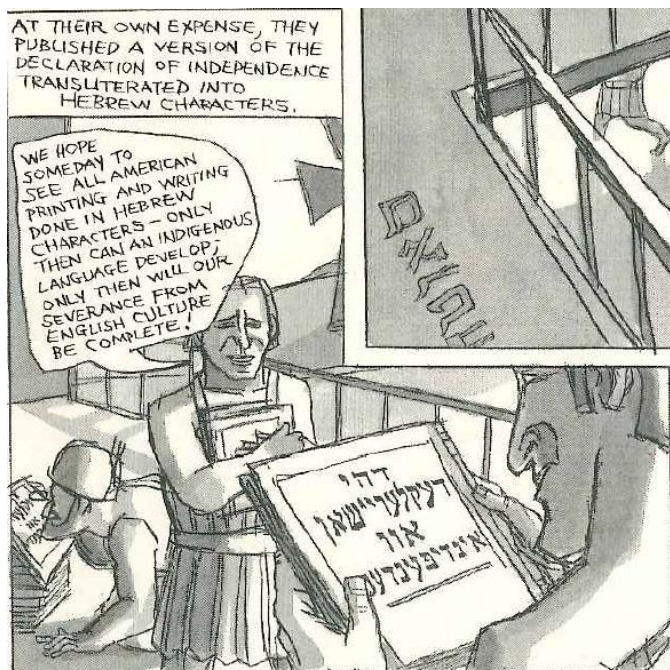


Fig. 1.10. Translation of the Declaration of Independence. (*The Jew of New York* 28).

Hermeneutic images, along with closure and metonym, are constantly used in the graphic narratives and they are also connected with landscape and characters. In *The Power of Comics*, hermeneutic images are described as follows:

Hermeneutic images, whether linguistic or pictorial, are not meant to represent sounds or objects that exist in the world of the story; instead they comment on the story itself. Words that serve a hermeneutic function are not embedded in the



story; no one in the world of the story is speaking or thinking these words. Instead, these words are commentary on the story, and are addressed directly to the reader. While these words by necessity exist on the page as images, they are bland images, lacking the expressiveness of dialogue or sound effects. They are presented in a straightforward manner so that the focus is on the linguistic content. Readers are not expected to “hear” these words. (159)

Hermeneutic images consist of “psychological images, visual metaphors, and intertextual references” (Duncan and Smith 159). A psychological image normally “represents some aspect of a character’s personality or state of mind” (160). However in the context of landscape and background, it could be said that psychological images reveal the relationship between the characters and their environment, or the background and inset of a panel is revealed to express the state of the character in the same panel. In *The Jew of New York*, there is a fur trader, Moishe Keztelbourd, who is believed to be “a baptized Jew who had lived for so many years in the wild that he no longer maintained any religious affiliations” (12). Keztelbourd appears in the panels, which depict the wilderness and natural habitats. He is a man who has animalistic attitudes exemplified by his attack on stage actors in the middle of a performance. He is illustrated as a creature or as a wild animal during his assault, which shows that Katchor depicts him as a psychological image (83).

Eisner shapes letters and lines to create an affinity between mise-en-scene and the character’s psychology. At the beginning of the sixth chapter in *A Life Force*, Eisner creates an abstract space to delineate the character’s insanity and his separation from reality (Fig. 1.11). The panel, which is an entire page, starts with tenement walls transforming into fluctuating letters, and letters are followed by oval lines. On the next page, fluctuating lines continue to suggest wind, which actually express the disillusionment of the character. Modern urban life “severs the ties between the individual and their former cultural context, forcing them away from the insulation of rural life to deal with a dizzying array of unfamiliar people and situations” (Smith 190). Aaron’s escape from reality isolates him from tenement life and leads to his schizophrenia. Because of his mental disorder, he kills a hoodlum and the following panels continue with scenes from everyday life in the tenements, as if the crime never happened.

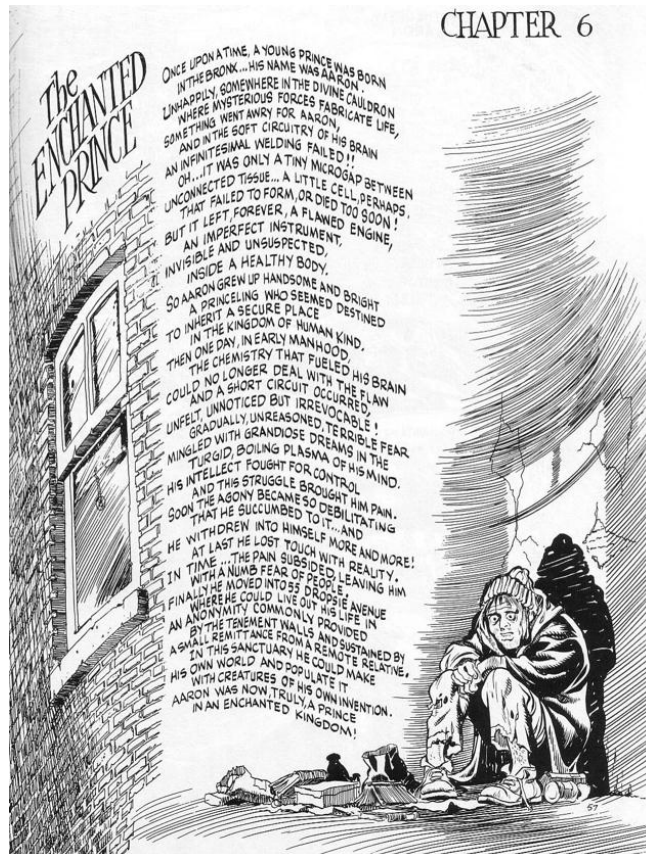


Fig. 1.11. A transition from tenements to the character's psychological state (*A Life Force* 57).

Eisner uses weather conditions as supplementary images to interpret psychological states of the characters. In *A Contract with God*, when Frimme Hersh returns from his daughter's funeral, heavy rain drawn with dark ink strokes blackens the scene. The rain is used as a lighting element and it shades the panel for creating a sentimental effect. The tenements he walks towards look like ruins and wrecks, which are a visual interpretation of Hersh's shattered life (Fig. 1.12). His rebellious and furious attitude is obvious through his exaggerated facial features (29). Panels showing lightning out of the window are drawn next to the panels showing his frantic monologues that reveal his rage. Lightning could also be interpreted as responses of an angry god since Hersh directs his questions towards the window (30).

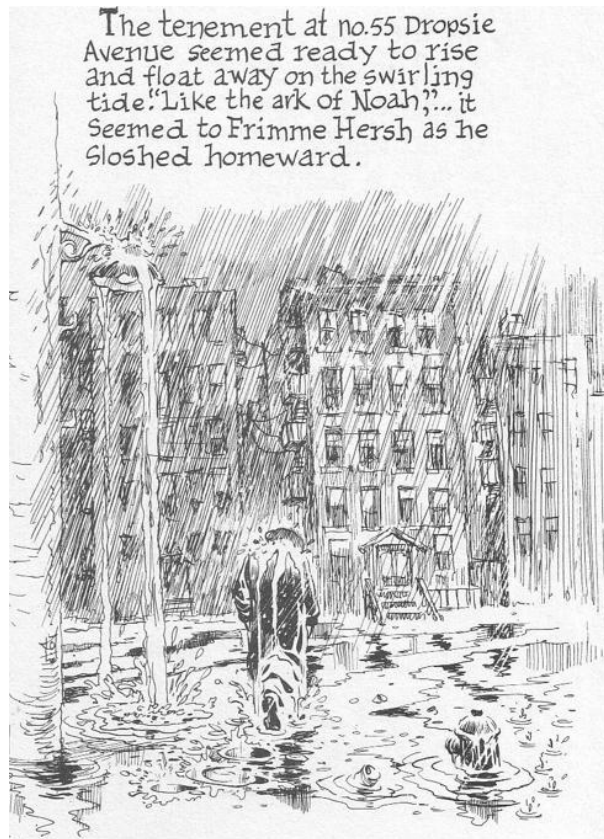


Fig. 1.12: Landscape contributes to the psychological state of Frimme Hersh (*A Contract with God* 9).

In *Jew Gangster*, psychological images revealing Ruby's alienation are marked with snow in the funeral panels. In his father's funeral scenes, the cemetery is covered with snow. In the following non-framed panel, the family and the rabbi are centered in the pure whiteness, which is a transitional image of snow (Fig. 1.13). White dominates the scene and creates a blank space, which also breaks the panel flow. When Rifke asks why nobody attended the funeral, the mother blames the snowy weather. Apart from being a physical obstacle, snow functions as a psychological image for cold-bloodedness by Ruby, who remains silent during the funeral. Actually, Kubert prefers a white background for the panels containing sentimentality, violence, and turning points, such as in the case when Ruby witnesses a beating (4), when he earns money for the first time (14), makes love (83), or is in a hospital bed after being beaten to death (126).

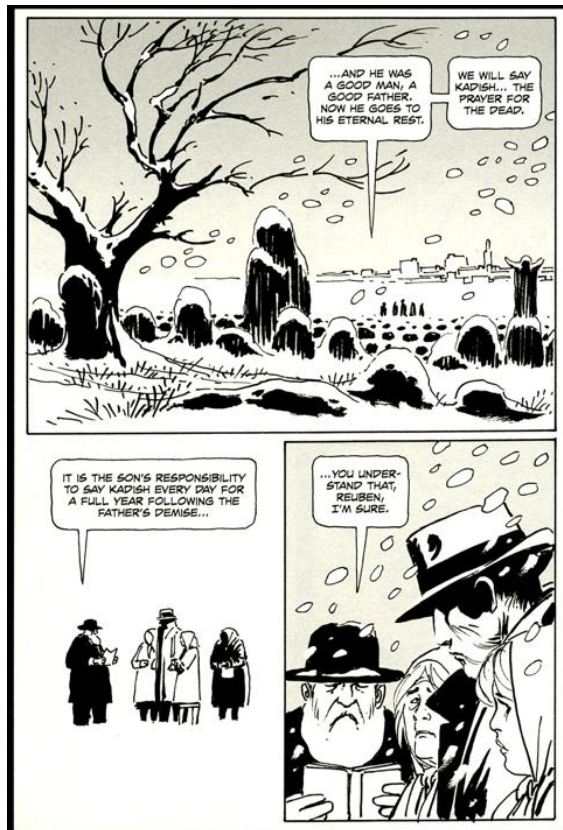


Fig. 1.13: The use of whiteness and snow as a narration tool (*Jew Gangster* 79).

In these graphic narratives, visual metaphors are significant with regard to Jewish elements and the landscape. Ben Katchor's work first appeared as comic strips in *The Forward*, and when he published it, he edited the cover pages, empowering Jewish images. The book is entitled with Latin and Hebrew letters. On the page where characters are introduced, the title is disproportioned with Hebrew letters. The beginning page of the book shows a panoramic view of the city with an empire top hat, which is a reference to the personification of the city (Fig. 1.14). The organ-like map of the water soda company is also a strong visual metaphor implying that city is a living organism, possibly identified with the human body (Fig. 1.15). Andrea Most interprets this metaphor as follows:

An observant Jew, upon waking in the morning, says two blessings, one explicitly about bodily functions and the other about the soul. Both are necessary, as in Judaism the body and all its processes are sacred ... Yet it is not only the individual body that is imagined in gastronomic terms. As we have seen in the pictures of the seltzer delivery system, the whole world is represented as a body as well, an inversion of the Jewish precept that each body is a microcosm of the world. ("You Should See Yourself" 29-30)

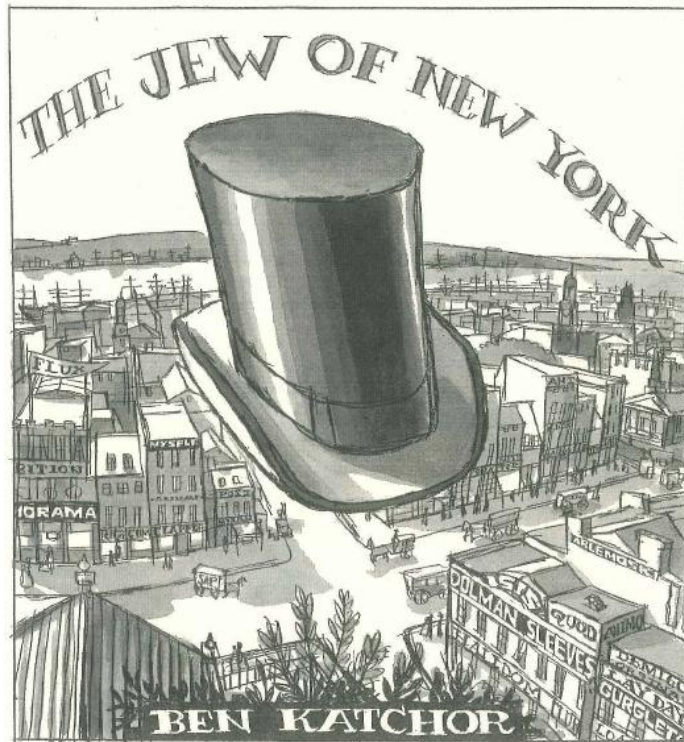


Fig. 1.14. Personification of the city (*The Jew of New York*).

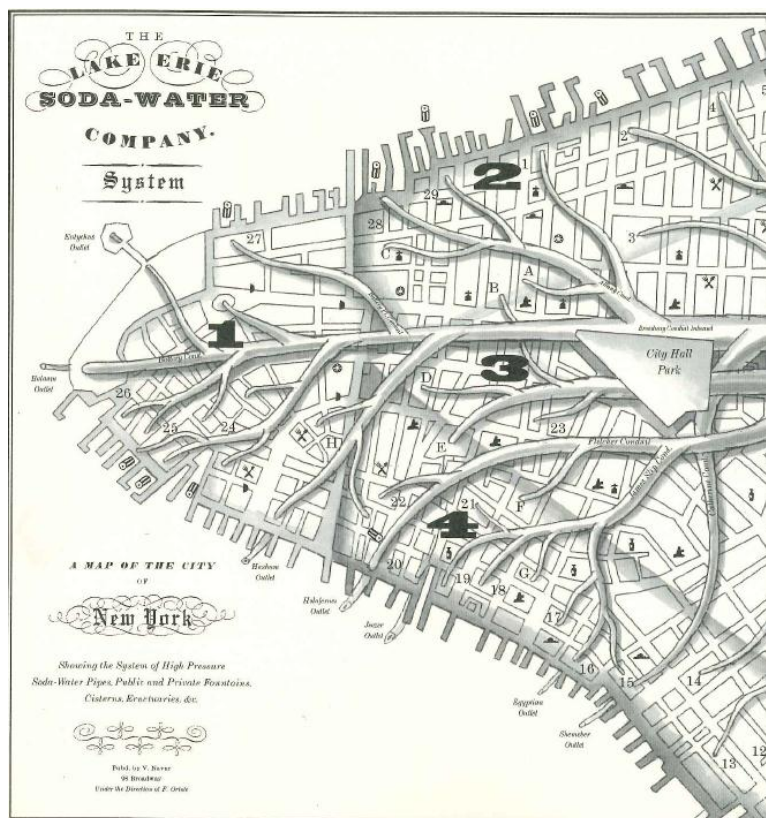


Fig. 1.15. Soda-water company map, which resembles an organ (*The Jew of New York*).

Similarly, Yosel Feinbroyt's metaphorical dream about "ascending a luminous staircase emblazoned with strangely familiar words of no earthly language" (33), which ends up with "onomatopoeic representation of the eternal sound of relief" (33), is related to the body perception of the Jews and kashrut, the Jewish dietary laws, since Feinbroyt finds the word "grepts" (burps) both in the Hebrew and the Latin characters as the "eternal sound of relief" (33). He tries to find made-up onomatopoeic words related to digestion, which are associated with a religious or sacred background. Tracking the traces of Jewish language and dietary sequences becomes his quest for identity. The interrelated stories such as the Indian actor playing the part of a Jewish character and seeking a Jewish land further the relationship between the land and identity.

After his celestial journey, Feinbroyt draws some "intricate designs and figures of an esoteric nature" (35) and he sells them to an embroidery house as handkerchief designs. These designs resemble mixtures of Kabbalistic ornamental elements and handkerchiefs reach "their height of popularity in New York City" (25). A three dimensional handkerchief is imbedded over the panels (Fig 1.16) and this page presents the significance of Judaism in the city. All elements are braided with trifling objects to reconcile the land with Jewish culture. The reader is exposed to an intricate, subtle transition between two cultures, which claim to be kindred.

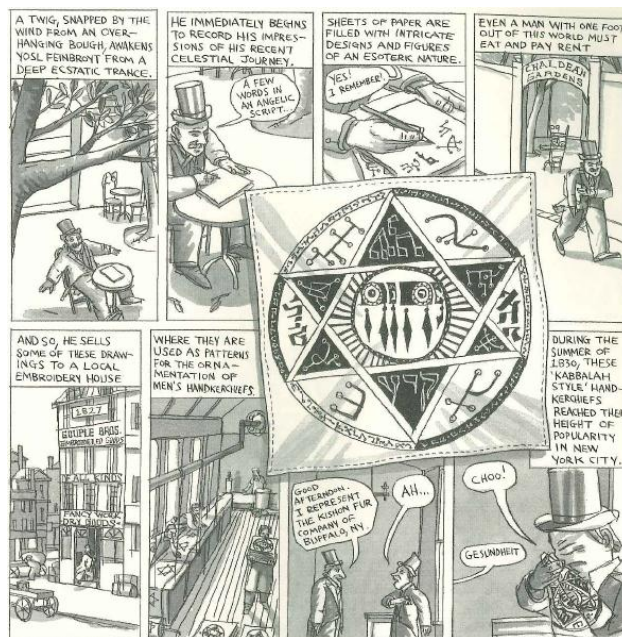


Fig. 1.16. The handkerchief as a key frame covers the panels (*The Jew of New York* 35).

Another journey starts when Enoch Lethushim “observes a stream of businessmen and women moving at a healthy pace along Broadway,” and “their eyes directed toward the future” (47). Those businessmen and women start a tour under the guidance of a man in oriental clothes. The tour begins from the streets of Jerusalem to the holy places related to Judaism like the Cave of Abdullam and the “place in which the prophet Jeremiah gave utterance to his sorrow in ‘the lamentations’” (47). During the tour, the commentary “[t]he historical and religious significance of the ground upon which they happen to be standing at that moment” (47) attributes a sacred quality to the land. Towards the end of the voyage, the authenticity of the grounds is questioned with the remarks, “even Jerusalem itself does not stand on the same spot of ground which it occupied in the time of Christ” (47). Katchor adds a footnote referring to François de Chateaubriand’s *Record of a Journey from Paris to Jerusalem and Back* (1811) where it is suggested that historically designated holy places might be manipulative. The holy tour might be imagined by Lethushim at the gate of the hotel, and his inquiry is intended to question the attribution of sacredness. After the tour, Letushim asks about the history of the place where the American Hotel currently stands, and another visual tour that depicts the history of area where the American Hotel stands.

A contrast between wilderness and city life is illustrated in a visual metaphor (*The Jew of New York* 83). Moishe Keztelbourd, the wild man acting like an animal, is killed on the theatre stage because he attacks an actor. The panel, in which he is killed, is decorated with prop buildings. Since Katchor draws attention to the difference between rural and urban living conditions throughout the graphic novel, Keztelbourd’s death among maquette buildings indicates to his lack of adaptation to urban life. Kubert portrays him as a person who adopts animalistic behaviors such as “licking himself and bathing immodestly in a reflecting pool” (*The Jew of New York* 30). For Andrea Most. Most claims that Keztelbourd’s deviation from Jewish principles caused his dehumanization and this transformation is caused by his idolization of a theater actress. As he states:

Bodies, flesh, and the material world are celebrated in Judaism because they are examples of the wonders of God’s creation. The celebration of the body in Judaism never extends, however, to the worship of the body as a divine thing unto itself, to idolatry ... Katchor explores the dangers of mistaking bodies for gods in his representation of Moishe Ketzelbourd. (31)

Eisner's visual metaphors about the landscape focus on the harshness of city life and buildings. One of Eisner's inventive technique, the splash page, occurs as metaphorical images. He inserts a title or a beginning page to his stories, especially to *The Spirit* stories, which grabs the very essence of the story. In a splash page, he embodies the title and one aspect of the story with it. The story "A Contract with God" includes the title engraved on a stone, like Ten Commandments written on a stone tablet, which stands as the concrete contract made between God and Frimme Hersh. The word "God" on the stone is written in a Talmudic style, and Hersh walks under the huge stone contract (Fig. 1.17). Crooked Hersh is exposed to heavy rain and there is the impression that the large stone above his head is about to crush him. The physical size of the contract refers to the psychological burden he undergoes and the image foreshadows the coming tragic events.



Fig. 1.17. The visual metaphor (*A Contract with God* 7).

The challenging life conditions of tenements and the Depression are constant features in *A Life Force*. Characters are often portrayed together with animal imagery, which indicate their predicament. Survival in a formidable environment is illustrated with animal figures. Jacob Shtarkah sees a cockroach falling from two flights up when he lies on the ground with a minor heart attack (15). The page, on which Shtarkah is inspired



by the struggling cockroach, is depicted with disproportionate images of Shtarkah's face and the cockroach. Despite the small size of the insect, Shtarkah is fascinated by its determination to stay alive. In *Jew Gangster*, Ruby is watching the movie, *King Kong* while waiting for the gangster to complete his mission (34). At the moment of their meeting, the gorilla seems to be looking at Ruby from the movie screen. The panel represents the animalistic world of gangsters and Ruby has just stepped into this world.

In *A Life Force*, the panel, in which the rabbi stands in front of the door with a glassy face offers another visual metaphor (Fig. 1.18). Eisner exaggerates the light coming out of the door to indicate rabbi's sacredness and his direful existence for the children who seem mesmerized by the rabbi's image. On the other hand, Rabbi is surprised since he does not expect the children to come on time. Taking care of his demented wife and children is stressful for the rabbi. Despite his distinguished position in the community, he is actually an ordinary tenement resident who is overwhelmed by the naturalistic world order around him.



Fig. 1.18. Lighting effects the metaphorical meaning of the panel (*A Life Force* 31).

Eisner sees lighting as a manipulative tool to create mood and uses available light sources, such as streetlamps and bulbs in his panel. The light coming out of the door is heightened more than the street lamp. In this sense, the light of the street lamp represents the characters' emotional state. In the panel, the terrorized child fears the rabbi since he has not recited the prayers while he holds on tightly to the dim street lamp. Later, he thinks it was a miracle since the rabbi did not have time to test him and feels relieved. At that moment, the street lamps gleam at the background (35). When the characters feel happy, the streetlights are used like the panel in which Rebecca and Elton return from a date (Fig 1.19). In another story, in the last panel of *A Contract with God*, the street light gleams again and this time it represents hope since the little child finds and reads the contract left by Frimme Hersh (65). The child's face is dark and unnoticeable, which illustrates the universality of people signing contracts with God throughout the generations.



Fig. 1.19. Streetlights supplement the sentimentality of the panel (*A Life Force* 108).

Buildings and city views are the most common images in Eisner's works. Elton Shaftsbury is depicted in a city view, which explicates his difficult situation. The Depression leaves him without money and he has to sell apples on the corner of Wall and William Streets to earn his living (*A Life Force* 37). He has to move to the

tenements from his former luxurious life, where he invested in Wall Street bonds. Shivering in the snow with a huge skyscraper behind him and the apples he has to sell to survive his present despair. When he is about to commit suicide by jumping out of a tenement window, he is offered to be a “shabbasgoy,” a gentile who works on Sabbath. He accepts the job for fifty cents per week and decides not to commit suicide (*A Life Force* 42-43). However, the panel in which he looks at the fifty cents coin in his palm represents that the hardships will continue. He has chosen livelihood over his religious beliefs and this fact creates his ambiguous feelings.

When Jacob Shtarkah and the rabbi are depicted under a structural framework of a building (84), Jacob receives a letter asking him to help Frieda Gold, who is immigrating to the United States. This physical construction shows how the social construction of the tenement community works. While the rabbi is responsible for the education of Jewish children in the tenements, Jacob’s duty involves helping a woman to receive a residence permit. In a later panel, the tenement demolition informs the reader about the changes in the region. While tenements start to turn into modern urban settlements, the people living in the tenements, like Jacob, become more cynical in their relationships since helping another person requires joint interests in the society. Jacob cares for Frieda Gold since he considers marrying her and Gold needs financial support, which leads her to tolerate Jacob.

In *The Quitter*,<sup>6</sup> Harvey Pekar’s parents are depicted with their luggage while the background is illustrated with juxtaposing maps of Ohio and Poland (Fig. 1.20). The panel depicts the immigration of his family and reveals the history of Cleveland, where many Jewish people live. Since maps could be easily associated with the people living there, Kubert uses a similar panel in his work. In the panel, Ruby’s district is depicted from a bird’s eye view and Ruby’s remarks “when the Depression ends” relates to the Depression of the entire area (Fig. 1.1).

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<sup>6</sup> Since *The Quitter* and *American Splendor* volumes were published without page numbers, in this study pagination will not be given in the references.



Fig. 1.20. Pekar's parents' immigration is illustrated with maps as if Poland and Ohio State share a border (*The Quitter*).

#### 1.4. INTERTEXTUAL IMAGES

Katchor, Kubert, Eisner and Pekar also utilize intertextual images to strengthen the comprehensive quality of the story. Intertextual images are defined as the images that:

Remind the reader of something he or she has encountered in other media (movies, books, paintings, TV shows, etc.). Some intertextual pictures refer to real-life events, but of course, most of us only see those events indirectly, as reports in newspapers or on television. A writer or artist might intend for a picture to be an intertextual reference, but whether the picture has the intended meaning for a particular reader depends on that reader's background knowledge. (Duncan and Smith 161)

According to this definition, intertextual images are directly related to the readers' background knowledge. If the reader does not possess enough knowledge about the themes, some images in the works might be hard to understand. However, in the aforementioned graphic novels dealt with in this study, intertextual images are supported by realistic images, such as newspapers, brochures and pamphlets, and these images aid readers in interpreting the panels. In *The Jew of New York*, documents and posters are situated among panels to create an organic nexus with time and space. For example, the readers understand the connection between the Jewish society and the tenth lost tribe of aborigines through a pamphlet depicted in its original format (Fig. 1.21). This pamphlet is fortified with drawn informative pamphlets in the panels. The

comics version of the same pamphlet is depicted as a background image which is also remembered by Isaac Azrael (3). He recalls the pamphlet when he sees Nathan Kishon lying over the grass and assumes to be an Indian.

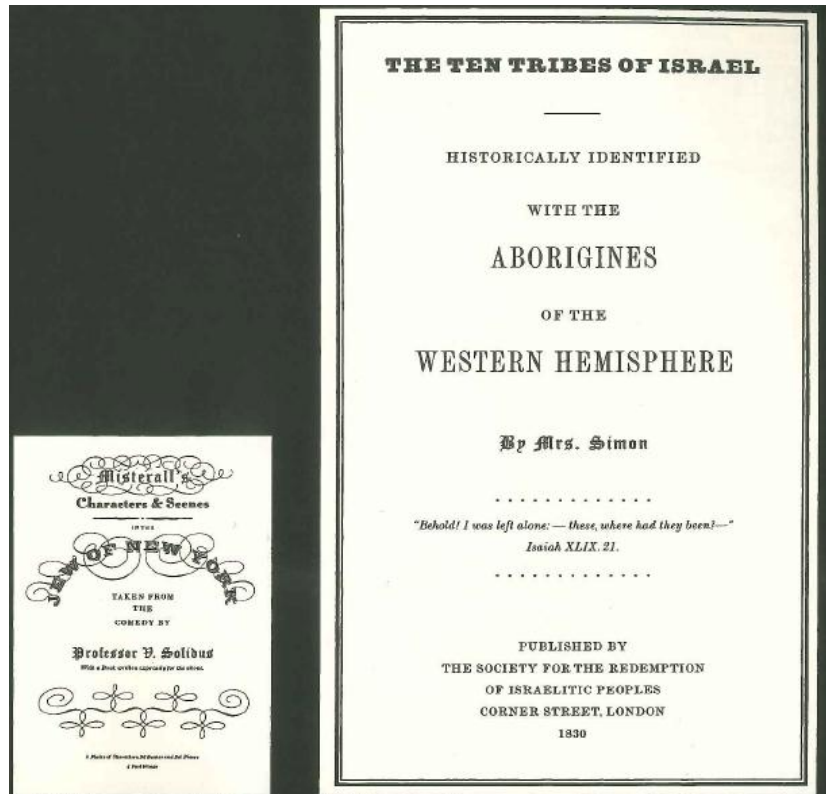


Fig. 1.21. Depiction of a realistic lecture bulletin and the play's poster (*The Jew of New York* 9).

The posters are realistic reflections of events in the graphic novel and these made-up documents give historical background information (22). For example, a realistic looking poster of the play *The Jew of New York* actually advertises the fictional play performed in the graphic novel (67). Katchor blends fictional and nonfictional images and uses real and fictional places simultaneously to create an ambiguous world for the setting of his work. On one hand, he employs historical artifacts, on the other hand, he blurs the line between reality and fiction without claiming factuality. In this manner, Katchor's technique encourages the reader to interpret the images within larger units of meaning. He opens up a space for the reader to reconsider the plural histories of Jewish existence, but at the same time, the multiplicity of the images makes it harder for the reader to participate in the exploration of Jewish history and representation. Posters, restaurant menus, the theatrical play positioned in panels give vague historical references; but

these references are also fictional elements that Katchor uses to inform the reader about the fictional history of his text.

The historical context of the given documents, posters, and banners, which look as if they have been quoted from nineteenth century New York, give the impression of a documentary work. These realistic images cause the readers to interpret the images as if they are historically valid documents. The brochure depicted in figure 1.22, which is about the treatment of psychological problems, refers to the difficulties associated with city life: “Common picturesque cityscapes of early New York paint over many of the harsh realities of urban life: streets filled with sewage and animal carcasses, the filth and disease rampant in overcrowded shacks and substandard housing” (Linden 288). These undesirable conditions are thought to be transmitted by immigrants since “diseases such as cholera and tuberculosis spread rapidly under such conditions and were often blamed on the latest immigrant group to arrive in the city” (Linden 288).

**DO YOU SUFFER FROM A DISEASE**  
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SELFISHNESS.	PERVERSITY.
DYSPEPSIA.	PASSION.
AVARICE.	HYSTERIA.
HYPOCHONDRIA.	EPILEPSY.
MANIA.	ALCOHOLISM.
SPERMATORRHOEA.	NEURASTHENIA.

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נוצן אין דרי קורס און הוימען אייגענע  
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אין ביקאמס נעסעסטיי פאר וואן פויל  
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which leads political the doctrine  
הען קאנעקטעד דרעם ווידה ענארטער.  
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סו עסיום עסאנג דרי פארעם און דרי  
the of possess the among name to  
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separation the to these

Fig. 1.22. The pamphlet combines the ad of an asylum and the Declaration of Independence in Hebrew (*The Jew of New York* 31).

Accordingly, Nathan Kishon is drawn immediately after his arrival to the new land and he is described as “a man smelling strongly of animal blood and urine disembarks” (*The Jew of New York* 2). This panel draws a connection to the treatment brochure as a fake historical document and it indicates the prejudiced approach to the new comers. Ironically, the “Declaration of Independence,” printed in Hebrew, is on the other side of the treatment brochure, which is most probably inserted there by the society in Ararat. This document validates the Ararat society and actualizes an all-embracing attitude towards new comers. Since the document is in Hebrew, it obviously targets Jewish immigrants.

At the end of the book, The New World Theater burns down, which means the play, *The Jew of New York*, will not be performed. As a consequence, those who attempted to make fun of Mr. Noah cannot reach their aim. The hostility toward Mordecai Noah stems from his position since “Noah’s activism as a political journalist and a Jew made him the first American Jew to achieve real prominence” (Linden 288). These attempted assaults present the anti-Semitic sentiments as a result of Jewish success. Like biblical Ararat, Noah sees the United States as a new home and a second chance for Jews and the burlesque play implies that Jewish community has started to gain achievements in the new land but this favorable position is faced with precedent and unwanted events. The broadside of the historical event is existent in the Collection of Library of Congress (Fig. 1.23).

This created authenticity through documents also appears in Pekar’s *The Quitter* and *Harvey Pekar’s Cleveland*, but with a different outlook. Autobiographic works tend to include photographs of the narrating subjects. Pekar’s photographs at the end of the books might “insist on something material, the *embodied* subject, the unification (to recall the autobiographical pact) of author, name, *and* body” (Haverty 13), which enhance the reliability of the narrative, since photographs are considered to be representations of the real. Unlike Katchor’s intricate and playful narrative on “real images,” Harvey’s pictures are not included in the process of story writing, but attached to the end. The inclusion of the photographs as a separate entity indicates that they are added to claim reality for the stories rather than being used as part of the narrative.

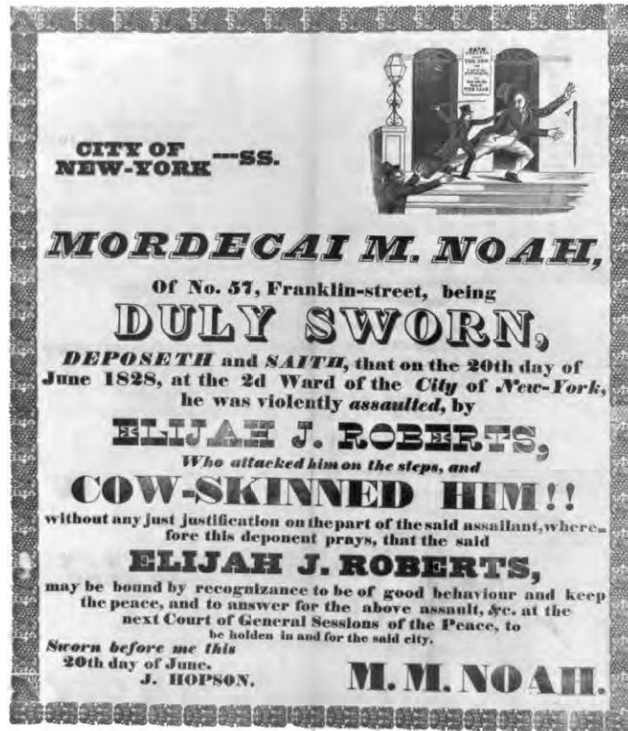
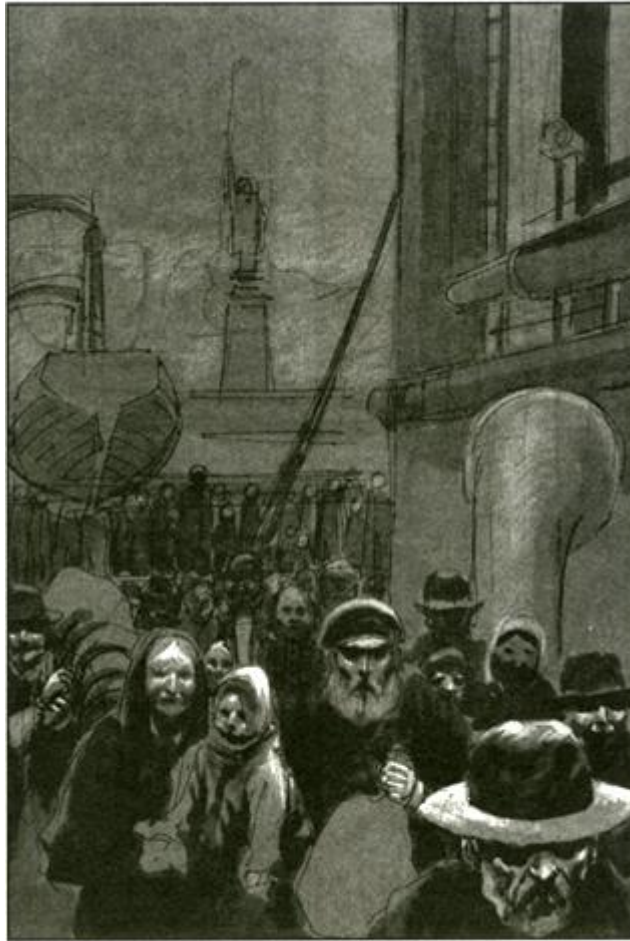


Figure 1.23. Woodcut with letter-press broadside showing the assault on Mordecai M. Noah. June 20, 1828 (Broadside Collection, Library of Congress, Washington DC).

Since *American Splendor*, a series of autobiographical comics, is drawn by various artists, it is hard to determine the authenticity of Pekar's work by analyzing the actuality of drawing styles. The artists produce "Pekar" representations in the stories and thus Pekar's autobiographical works create an authenticity on the basis of narrative. His daily life and interviews with people he meets inspire his stories. Trivial images such as comic books he reads and the jazz bands Pekar reviews are rendered in comics format.

Kubert and Eisner generally use dark tones and shadows in order to reflect the state of the characters and the environment. Especially chapter transitions, which are depicted in a more realistic manner than other panels, function as intertextual images. Every transition, covering the entire page, illustrates a scene from the Depression era in New York. For example, the first transition, in which faces are more distinctive, reflects the immigrants' first arrival at Ellis Island (Fig. 1.24). Just before this panel, Ruby is trying to sleep, sweating and asking himself "Am I gonna be like papa? Working for pennies..." (*Jew Gangster* 9). With these panels, Kubert links the young boy with the migrating masses who share a similar fear.





Arrival at Ellis Island

Fig.1.24. Kubert's transitions depict realistic views of Jewish immigration (*Jew Gangster* 10).

Eisner uses two different strategies to provide intertextuality. One of them is similar to Kubert's transitions. In *A Contract with God*, he depicts full-page transitions, which are drawn more realistically than other panels and these transitions reveal the context of time and place in relation to the narrative. They are generally depictions of the cityscape. The Brooklyn Bridge is among these realistic transitions used by Eisner and Kubert. They intend to create a mood to associate tenement dwellers with their stories. The desperate, shady, and depressing situations of the characters are reflected in these tenement images. Eisner's first transition in the book depicts the tenement buildings and skyscrapers behind them with deep color tones (6). Kubert's transitions are interrelated with identical depression portrayals of Brooklyn and with casual scenes from streets such as a "Tinware on the Hoof" from Brooklyn (43), a depiction of "Coney in Winter"

(125), the well-known amusement park and a poor man carrying a sign which reads “Please help me I will take any job” (104).

The other perspective Eisner creates with these transitions is a realistic approach to the characters he draws. At the beginning of his story “The Street Singer,” he depicts a typical tenement scene with a street singer, and on the next page he gives factual information about street singers who sing “popular songs and segments of operatic arias” to earn money during the Great Depression (Fig. 1.25). In his third story, he begins with the same method and introduces a superintendent in front of a tenement building as the captain of the tenement, who is “like a passenger ship anchored in a sea of concrete” (98).



Fig. 1.25. Eisner’s chapter transition depicting the main character (*A Contract with God* 68).

In *A Life Force*, Eisner situates newspapers in comics version at the beginning of his chapters. These newspapers inform the readers about the historical background of the place, and help them to engage in the story. For example, chapter 7, titled “The Revolutionary,” starts with newspaper cutouts, which are about news related to communist gatherings and activities obviously presented in a prejudiced manner (Fig. 1.26). After familiarizing the reader with the background, Eisner depicts the story of a

boy, who attends union meetings and ends up rebelling against his father, because his father is against his involvement in labor unions. At the beginning of chapter 10, the news is about the immigrant and refugee policies and the story is about Frieda who arrives in America and Jacob who takes her legal responsibility.



Fig. 1.26. Eisner's chapter transitions start with newspaper excerpts (*A Life Force* 65).

## 1.5. FRAMING IMAGES AND CHARACTERS

Alongside images the artists/writers use, frames and gutters serve as functional elements that shape the narrative and create a certain path to be followed. The artist's purpose determines the establishment of these dynamics. In Lefèvre's words:

The form of the drawing does influence the manner the reader will experience and interpret the image: the viewer cannot look at the object-in-picture from another point of view than the one the picture offers; he is invited to share the maker's mode of seeing, not only in the literal, but also in the figurative sense . . .

the visualized space appears within the borders of a single panel, which itself can have various sizes, dimensions, and locations on a page. (159)

The shape, size, and color of the frames create a distinctive perspective to produce the narration. In this sense, frames have two main functions; presenting the point of view and bordering the scenes. While the order of images in a panel provides coherence: The panels, like the word order in a sentence, provide a consistent narrative throughout the work. Point of view is important for continuation, and it forms sequences to structure the story from a specific perspective. For Joe Kubert, “point of view is a device used to pull the reader into the story. If you can do that then the story becomes effective . . . What the artist is trying to do, consciously or subconsciously, is create still images which will give the impression of movement and validity” (qtd in Lefèvre 31-32).

In graphic narratives, the reader has to move from one panel to another and interpret the meaning between the panels to create a meaningful storyline from the sequences. Randy Duncan and Matthew J. Smith use the term “encapsulation” to define the functional continuity of sequences. As they put it,

A comic book does not present each moment of action in the narrative; the writer and/or artist must decide which images (pictures and words) to show in order to tell the story. The process of encapsulation involves selecting certain moments of prime action from the imagined story and encapsulating, or enclosing, renderings of those moments in a discrete space. (131)

The progression of the story depends on placing frames in a certain order, which depends on the author’s choice. The order is not necessarily horizontal. There are different ordering sequences that put different emphasis on the panels. The chosen images and panels may be placed in various positions according to the artist/writer.<sup>7</sup> Accordingly, Will Eisner uses a circular frame structure, which is called “circular graphic” by Derek Parker Royal (151). Especially in *A Contract with God*, stories constitute a circular form with interconnected narratives. This cyclical narrative is an

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<sup>7</sup> Gilles Deleuze makes a similar comment on framing in cinema. In his words, “the great directors have particular affinities with particular secondary, tertiary, etc. frames. And it is by this dovetailing of frames that the parts of the set or of the closed system are separated but also converge and are reunited” (Cinema 1 14). While every unit of frame creates a meaningful unit within itself, “the frame or the screen functions as an instrument panel,” which correlates with other panels, and “the image is constantly being cut into another image, being printed through a visible mesh, sliding over other images in an ‘incessant stream of messages’” (Cinema 2 267).

indication for the vicious circle of the vicissitudes of life. The tenement life causes restricting elements for the tenants and Eisner constantly refers to this condition in his frames. Thematically, stories end up where they begin. For example, in the second story, a retired singer, diva Marta Maria, discovers the street singer and she wants to rekindle her former fame through the singer's talent. However, the street singer forgets Maria's address and, because he cannot find her again, he returns to singing in the streets. In the third story, the superintendent commits suicide at the end, but the last frame depicts the carefree girl who caused the superintendent's death while an ad for a new superintendent is placed on the window, which foreshadows the possibility of repetitive events.

The characters' cyclical entrapment is emphasized through reflections from urban scenes and the usage of natural frames such as windows and doorframes. These elements occur as physical and psychological barriers for the characters. The first image of the first story is a generic view of tenements, which stand as huge frames; while countless windows form frames within frames (Fig. 1.27). In this environment, windows are indicators of separated people living in the same territory. Windows, doors, and buildings become narrative instruments that bind and segregate people, give the feeling of being overcrowded, and reflect the stuffy, poor conditions.



Figure 1.27. Square shapes of buildings, windows, and clotheslines are used as frames to separate or relate the tenement stories (*A Contract with God* 1).

When Hersh learns that his daughter is dead, Eisner depicts him in an abstract room, with pencil strokes and in a rectangular light, which leaks out of the door. The room, the light, and the pencil strokes create a divine atmosphere in the frame for reflecting Hersh's anger and frustration (Fig. 1.28). In another composition, Eisner depicts Hersh's mourning from a windowpane with heavy rain and gives some information on the top of the window (Fig. 1.29). The window, as a frame within the frame, and tiles isolate him from the tenements and represent his helplessness, entrapment, and confinement, but they also reflect a life fragment in the tenements.



Fig. 1.28. Hersh's entrapment in the reflection of a doorframe (*A Contract with God* 27).

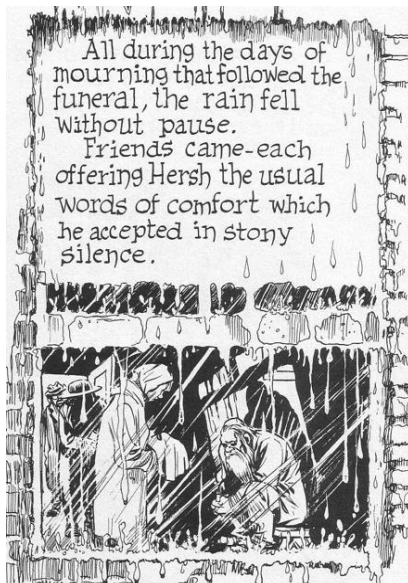


Fig. 1.29. The window stands as a natural frame and reflects the character's emotions (*A Contract with God* 33).

For Deleuze, “the physical or dynamic conception of the frame produces imprecise sets, which are now only divided into zones or bands. The frame is no longer the object of geometric divisions but of physical gradations” (*Cinema I* 14). Graphic narratives use frames as environmental and psychological spaces. Eisner’s frames create meaning as both an isolated space and a fragment of a puzzle, which makes the whole picture legible. “Physical gradations” of the frames do not only reflect a physical world but also determine character’s dreams, dilemmas, and confinements. According to Deleuze,

The powers of nature are not framed in the same way as people or things, and individuals are not framed in the same way as crowds, and sub-elements are not framed in the same way as terms, so that there are many different frames in the frame. Doors, windows, box office windows, skylights, car windows, mirrors, are all frames in frames ... it is by this dovetailing of frames that the parts of the set or of the closed system are separated, but also converge and reunited. (*Cinema I* 14)

Although Deleuze is talking about frames in cinema, his outlook could be applied to graphic narratives. As all the images are polysemous, framing helps the artist devise an intended structure for creating variations of interpretations. Deleuze verifies that cinema consists of frames, which causes reterritorialization, a simultaneous reconstruction in the deterritorialized area. In graphic narratives, frames tend to fixate themselves to other frames on the same page, but they may have relative proportions for both the reader and the character. Creating frames and balancing them with consistency are divisive since,

the cinematographic image is always dividual. This is because, in the final analysis, the screen, as the frame of frames, gives a common standard of measurement to things which do not have one—long shots of countryside and close-ups of the face, an astronomical system and a single drop of water—parts which do not have the same denominator of distance, relief or light. In all these senses the frame ensures a deterritorialisation of the image. (*Cinema I* 14-15)

Although the frames are interrelated, a single frame provides both a dependent and independent space for the artist to operate in this new space and reconstruct it in accordance with intended focus. Eisner creates levelized frames to meet the need of internal and external descriptions. A centering in a frame has its own distinguished feature and environment among other frames. The expressive function of frame accentuates the connection and separation between the characters and the landscape. Not only panel frames, but also frames within frames contribute directly to the narrative process. As Greg M. Smith states:

The city encloses people into modules as well, providing standardized domiciles (in the form of apartment buildings) and routinized work schedules in factories. The city places people in a range of compartments of different sizes and forms, and Eisner's comics explore the multiple forms of urban compartmentalization and containment. His stories present melodramatic narratives of people trapped by their circumstances, railing against the cruel injustice of these narrative impasses. (191)

Both Kubert and Eisner focus on tenement life since tenements had a significant place in the Jewish American experience. Tenements were the first places the immigrants experienced the American way of life and they provided a sense of shtetl, where immigrants try to sustain their traditions and familial relationships. As it is stated stated,

The tenement provided the stage for immigrants' first encounter with American daily life, a remarkably consistent stage over the twenty-five blocks of Manhattan's Lower East Side, where three hundred thousand Jews lived by 1893 ... By 1900, over 90 percent of Jews lived in tenement rooms. Tenements even blanketed many areas of secondary settlement, including Harlem and Brownsville, where 88 percent of the dwelling units were in tenements by 1904. (*Emerging Metropolis* 24-25)

Kubert depicts crowded places to show the intense population of the immigrants and living conditions. In Jewish immigrants' lives,

[t]enements dominated the scene. In 1901, in Manhattan alone, some 42000 of them housed approximately 1585000 persons . . . But it was precisely on the Lower East Side that their massive and menacing outline became the sad symbol of what was awaiting immigrants in the Goldenh Medina, the "Golden Land." (Maffi 69)

In a scene, Ruby sweats in his bed and desperately wishes that he will not end up like his father followed by panels depicting mass immigration and crowded places (*Jewish Gangster* 9). In this section, Ruby is obviously dreading his physical conditions and voicing his discomfort with hot weather and not being able to breathe. Tenements are overpopulated since immigrants have financial problems. According to Annie Polland and Daniel Soyer,

Overpopulation in Jewish communities compounded the economic stress, spurring migration to large cities throughout Europe and the United States ... Between 1880 and 1924, two and a half million eastern European Jews came to the United States. Close to 85 percent of them came to New York City, and approximately 75 percent of those settled initially on the Lower East Side, which by 1890 "bristled with Jews." ... America became the new home for twenty-three million immigrants. (*Emerging Metropolis* 111-113)



Kubert narrates the poor conditions during the late 1920s and 1930s in the East Side New York, but the tenements had deteriorated long ago (Fig 1.30). As Pollard and Soyer state, “In one tenement, apartments that held an average of three to four people in 1870 accommodated an average of six in 1900 and often as many as ten or twelve. This crowdedness, in tandem with a lack of regulation, created the most infamous housing stock in the nation’s history” (*Emerging Metropolis* 113-114). The unfavorable conditions in the late nineteenth century continued into the twentieth century. Although there were attempts to improve the physical conditions of tenements, the East Side New York remained, substantially, unchanged. As Raymond Bial states,

Social activists also eventually managed to have thousands of tenements demolished. Streets were widened and parks built in the empty lots. Other tenements succumbed to public works improvements... In 1929, new legislation known as the Multiple Dwellings Law required costly remodeling, including additional bathroom facilities, better ventilation, and fireproofing of existing structures. However, during the Great Depression, many landlords could not afford to make the upgrades. Instead, they evicted the tenants and closed their buildings. Thousands of flats were left vacant. (39)



Fig. 1.30. Different street scenes; one with a weak, shabby dog in front of a kosher restaurant; the other with Ruby in a filthy street (*Jew Gangster* 47-75).

The tenement community, though it provides a physical unity, cannot ensure a steady uniformity in modern life. Therefore, “Eisner’s city is a city of fragments because that is how his characters perceive the urban landscape” (Smith 196). Since modernity “places the individual in a disorienting world of speed and mobility” (Smith 190), Eisner adjusts the pace, action and consciousness of the characters with frames. For instance, in the “Street Singer” story, Eisner aligns the panels vertically and uses natural and artificial

frames on the same page to stress that the singer does not make forward movements and spends his time at the same place (*A Contract with God* 96).

Windows, doors, and buildings create natural frames, which stress the psychological states of the characters. Adversity and depression, for instance, are obvious emotions in the claustrophobic frames, which delineate the circumstances of helpless characters. In the second full-page frame of the “Street Singer,” Eisner depicts the street singer from a bird’s eye view, which is also the observing woman’s perspective (Fig. 1.31). The frame’s angle is situated in such a way that buildings, balconies, and windows squeeze the singer in a narrow area. While the page stands as the larger frame, the bricks, the window bars create frames within frames of windows and so the page is proportioned with angular lines. Along with the other intersecting elements, such as clotheslines and fire escapes, the inscription on the page says, “no one knew much about them...” (71). The bird’s eye view of the blind alley foreshadows the singer’s unfortunate social conditions as depicted in the frame where the singer is concerned by the walls of the building. The high-angle illustration of the panel looks down on the singer, making him appear small, insignificant, and powerless. The metaphorical imprisonment suggests that the singer will not be able to escape his predicament despite his efforts.



Fig. 1.31. The natural frames surround street singer (*A Contract with God* 71).

Eisner's pages are full of similar frames depicting the psychological states of the characters. When the superintendent is accused of child harassment, he is depicted among the walls of the tenements with his bulky body (*A Contract with God* 120). In another panel, he is placed in his room, where the walls are decorated with posters of naked women (Fig. 1.32). The posters as frames on the wall reveal the superintendent's inner thoughts and they foreshadow the coming inauspicious events.



Fig. 1.32. Superintendent's room with posters on the wall (*A Contract with God* 112).

All psychological, abstract, and metaphorical frames are interwoven with cityscape images in Eisner's graphic narratives. In the sixth chapter of *A Life Force*, Aaron's madness starts with a tenement wall and transcends into abstract panels (Fig. 1.11). In another panel, Jacob constructs a building when he receives a letter from an old friend's daughter (Fig. 1.33). He pops his head out of constructional frameworks with a confused facial expression. The panel reflects the building structure and the letters as frames. The construction of the building stands as the construction of the society as well, since the panel explains how immigrants create social networks to help each other and to settle in the tenements.



Fig. 1.33. Construction and letters as frames (*A Life Force* 84).

Joe Kubert's frames create visual connections with the landscape, whereas the order and portion of them directly interfere in the action and the pace. Since *Jew Gangster* is closer to the crime genre, the frames have conventional functions such as keeping the story together and creating suspense. Kubert's frames are similar to a cinematic storytelling technique. His frames stir dramatic and thrilling images together. There are usually four or six frames on a page and they are in similar proportions. Except full-page transitions, the frames follow a regular size and routine, but the image sizes change. When an important image or character appears, Kubert wants the reader to focus on it and draws a "close-shot frame" for this purpose. The black, dark colors and frame stream, like film-noir, preserve the tension and the ostentatious atmosphere of the story.

In the scene, where Ruby meets the big boss, the suspense, with the help of panel progression, slows down the time. Firstly, the big boss's mansion, and then the magnificent door with monuments at each side are depicted (132). The mysterious boss

appears as a shadow when Ruby first sees him. Gradually, the frames present him from different angles with shadows. The reader sees his hands, then his profile, while the boss keeps speaking condescendingly. Finally, with a “close-up,” the boss’s face covers half of the page. However, the image size is more crucial than the frame size, since the frame sizes are more static than image sizes.

Kubert likes to play with points of view, which naturally affects the image sizes, since he wants to reflect the action in a dynamic way. In the same scene, the big boss says “come closer my boy, my eyes are not what they used to be” (132). Then Ruby’s point of view is reflected in the panel. As he approaches the boss frame by frame, the perspective changes constantly (Fig. 1.34). With the bull’s eye technique, which Kubert uses in his other works, Ruby becomes a confused and distorted reflection in the boss’s glasses, as if he were a target. In the fight scene between Ruby and the monk (119), or between protestors and gangsters (92), panels preserve their sizes but perspectives change to give a sense of movement.



Fig. 1.34. The point of view constantly changes in frames (*Jew Gangster* 133).

Points of view and the images create an organic connection throughout the story, rather than the frames themselves. Repeated images such as railways provide a sense of limited landscape and different points of view and create an awareness of the cityscape. In *Jew Gangster*, frames function to create a sense of time, pace, and continuation of the story. Transition frames, wide panels with city views and bird's eye views emphasize the environment and the time where events take place.

In *The Jew of New York*, Ben Katchor's frames follow a fragmented order, which allow sub-stories to create a unity. Since it first appeared as a single page drawing in a weekly magazine, the panels carried separate meanings within themselves. This form required the reader's attention more than a continuous story. Interpreting the storyline from one frame to another is a challenging task. McCloud says, "the artist has a lot of control over what happens in the panels, but he or she is at the reader's mercy between the panels. Whereas in the prose, or motion pictures, or virtually any other narrative form, you don't have that rhythm..." (*Outside the Box* 25). In the book form of these weekly strips, the frames and pages are interwoven with other stories. In the plot, there is more than one story that develops through the panels. All the characters have their own stories, but every story intersects with other stories, which requires a well-designed frame order. As Katchor explains,

It's a very dense form, and I think that's why these weekly and daily newspaper strips work so well. You'd put a lot into them, and you'd ponder them for the week or the day. A picture story just doesn't run like a film. It doesn't have 24 frames per second. It doesn't deal with this illusion of movement. It's more like if you did an illuminated novel. ("Ben Katchor")

The reader has to find the correct path to understand the braided stories in relation to each other and the panels. On the other hand, the narration does not follow one designated path. Katchor designs his pages to constitute various ways to follow the panels. Generally, he centers his page on a larger panel, which epitomizes the core event. Other smaller panels on the same page revolve around the centered panel, which presents the main idea. For example, a man gives a speech with a banner, which reads "conserve our nation's manhood." His speech and the square are centered on the page in a larger size. Other smaller panels are fragments of this speech, or characters that

present in the square (Fig 1.35). While the reader can try different frame orders, he could return to the beginning of the page if he is lost in the story.

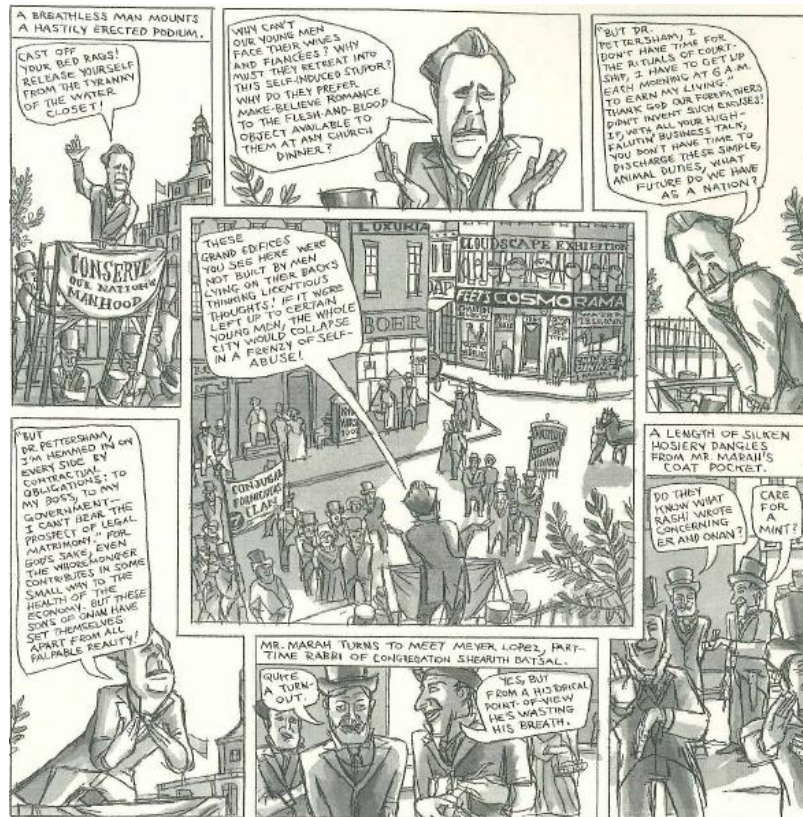


Fig. 1.35. Katchor uses central frames for his stories (*The Jew of New York 39*).

Instead of centering a panel, Katchor gives clues about the content of the story through the use of an object as the central focus. On one of the eight-panel pages, Miss Patella's photograph stands as a central frame in the middle of the page (14). This photograph belongs to one of the characters, who is interested in the actress and theater. While the object is related to the content of the page, Miss Patella's different photographs stand as if they were sprinkled on the page, which, again, are related to the same story (17).

Katchor always uses introductory lines on the pages since,

The words and images interdepend in only a slightly less disjunctive way; the words appear to be an extension and explanation of the images, but in fact offer little help at all in explaining the overall para-world that Katchor has created. The images without the words would be disembodied here, would form a confusing non-sequential series with little connectedness at all. (Cioffi 104-105)

When he does not use a central frame, one of the panels, usually the first panel, is depicted in a larger size as an alternative to the central frame. These frames and objects are indicators of stories and connect the narrative to form a sense of unity of place and content. As Cioffi states,

The reader seeks narrative that will draw together this disparate, urban netherworld of images, but the words only convey a fuller sense of a very “other” kind of interiority. And the narrative nature of the strip itself, which generally tells an entire story in just eight panels, adds another level of expectation and frustration for the reader. (105)

The reader’s frustration is often the result of the ambiguous use of the object, which looks irrelevant to the story. Katchor’s New York City is presented with metaphors, fake historical documents and intertextual references. Katchor draws trivial objects in detail in his works. Nathalie op de Beeck claims that, with these objects, “Katchor prompts readers to recognize the significance of each tiny detail, and in that brief wakefulness, to sense the overwhelming intricacy of modern life” (821). In one of the central panels, the inside of Mr Marah’s drawer is depicted with “assorted leather straps, a Haggadah in the Iroquois language, a Masonic pin, a half-dozen miniature scrolls of black parchment, a series of French boudoir prints in a phylactery bag, a wax esrog, a map of Odessa” (74). After this introduction, a deck hand makes a small conversation about “the loss by cholera to slave owner.” Then he “regrets not having had one last chance to go through his desk drawer” (74). The reader has to find the answer to the questions “what is the use of the drawer” and “why is he regretful?” The answers are not presented clearly and the reader has to figure out the meaning of the images and the texts. Similarly, different but interrelated stories following each other force the reader to go back and forth among the pages. Despite the fact these tiny details have an ambiguous function op de Beeck’s interpretation is as follows:

By looking at graphic narratives as historical/cultural material—and as part of the “burden” of cultural residue that we carry and that buries and overwhelms us—we can perhaps discern something about the lost past, the new moment, or the next development, thereby extending critical historical consciousness through graphic narrative. (827)

Harvey Pekar’s frames, like Katchor’s, include introductory lines. Since he is both the narrator and the character, these lines function like a voice-over in frames and become extensions of the frames, which tell more than what is inside the panels. Although Pekar



uses typical frames, which do not undergo dramatic changes, his frames reveal narrative experimentation. In *Harvey Pekar's Cleveland*, Pekar first appears walking in the streets of Cleveland and the frames present his feelings, ideas and historical knowledge about the city and his memories in these places. However, in the panels, where he gives some historical information about the city, Harvey is not seen since the panels are not composed of his experiences but of general knowledge. The panels, rather than historical facts, are Pekar's interpretations of the city's history. As Kai Mikkonen states,

The analysis of mind-presentation in graphic storytelling might suggest ways to loosen the grip of the “verbal norm” in narratology, while also helping us evaluate what in the speech-category approach might work across narrative media. What makes graphic narratives and comics, and their medium-specific constraints and preferences especially interesting in this respect is that the medium stimulates the viewer's engagement with the minds of characters by recourse to a wide range of verbal modes of narration in a dynamic relation with images that show minds in action. (302)

Panels appear as flashbacks and foreshadowing, and from time to time, he appears again walking in the Cleveland streets. In the frames, Pekar becomes the protagonist, the author and the narrator, which are embodied in the diegetic narrator, a voice-over. As Elisabeth El Refaie points out, “[w]hile these three roles [protagonist, author, narrator] tend to be clearly distinguishable in the case of fictional texts, the boundaries between them become more blurred when we are dealing with autobiographical works” (53). Pekar's mental actions are visualized in the frames and his comments accompany the images. He sometimes states the separation of the character and the implied author in a self-refrential manner. For instance, he appears in the middle of the street and the speech balloon reads “I come into the picture in 1939” (Fig. 1.36). The frame is followed with a title “Harvey Pekar's Cleveland” and a view from old Cleveland. In this sense, the title reveals that the city does not exist as a fact, but as a composition of what Pekar finds memorable. He “comes into the picture” as a character and appear as the embodiment of the narrative voice. Frames become instrumental tools since they are sequences of his fragmented memories connected with scenes from the city.



## Harvey Pekar & Cleveland

Fig. 1.36. Pekar as the narrator reveals his perspective about the city (*Harvey Pekar's Cleveland* 42).

Pekar fictionalizes himself and this fictionalized avatar fictionalizes Cleveland's history and his personal experiences. His multiple avatars, such as the child Pekar and young Pekar, are connected with his present avatar, who narrates the story. He deliberately intervenes in the story and changes the narrative process. Sometimes, he mentions about a gap in his memory. In *The Quitter*, for example, he does not remember whether his cousin punches him in the face. Whitlock uses the term "autographical avatars" to categorize the self-images of the author and to "engage with the conventions of comics" (971) such as the various narrative options that panels and gutters offer. The panels, for instance, provide a space in which the narrator is able to appear and disappear in the story with separate functionalities of a narrator and a character. The boundaries between the factual and fictional worlds become less distinctive and the author finds a wider space to combine and interpret his memoirs in the form of graphic narratives. Since the "splitting of self into observer and observed is redoubled in autographics," and the panels "offer multiple possibilities for interpreting experience, reworking memory, and staging self-reflection" (Watson 28), multiple avatars create an extended space. Pekar uses all these available spaces. His frames follow a certain order and the storyline is easy to follow. For example, the section where Pekar embarks on an historical journey of Cleveland, is embedded into his experiences with the visual impact of historical drawings. To create an organic connection between the city and his experiences, Harvey, the narrator, appears periodically in the frames to let the reader see the big

picture. The frames produce subjective stories, which sustain the city and his past, while offering a recognizable framework for the reader.

The artists/writers create graphic narratives with different techniques and perspectives and the narrative elements such as frames, metaphorical and visual images, colors and panels shape the understanding of a “landscape.” The representations in the frames illustrate the internal thoughts, sentiments, and dilemmas of the characters and they reveal the interaction between the characters and the environment. Additionally, physical depictions of the landscape/cityscape are synchronized with the characters’ mental and physical mood. Since identity “depends on conditions of existence which are contingent” (Laclau 21), the study of relationship between the characters and the environment reveal information about the character’s personality and motives. The frames constitute storylines with images and text and these frames are placed in a certain order to suggest the connection or the separation of the character and his/her environment. Various perspectives and frame orders nourish the particularity of space as landscapes and cityscapes while the panels in the same page may create an independent area where the artist/writer aims to preserve the physical and psychological situation. As a result, the creators seem to suggest that there are various options to interpret the panels without digressing from the storyline.

## CHAPTER 2

### RECONFIGURING STEREOTYPES IN TRANSFORMING CITIES

*[C]omics are a wandering variable, and can be approached from many perspectives. The restless, polysemiotic character of the form allows for the continual rewriting of its grammar; each succeeding page need not function in the exact same way as its predecessor. The relationship between the various elements of comics (images, words, symbols) resists easy formulation. The critical reading of comics . . . involves a tug-of-war between conflicting impulses: on the one hand, the nigh-on irresistible urge to codify the workings of the form; on the other, a continual delight in the form's ability to frustrate any airtight analytical scheme.*

Charles Hatfield, *Alternative Comics: An Emerging Literature*

In graphic narratives, city and character images are given in compact and decodable forms since reader participation is necessary. Artists use generic images to introduce a recognizable world, which gives way to stereotypes. These images, although employing prejudices, are essential in constructing an understandable narrative. Colors, clothes, and background images create a certain typology and reveal the characters' psychological and social status. Stereotypes are built upon cultural codes that the reader can interpret easily. Since graphic narratives are compact and condensed, the artists look for shortcuts to reach the reader. As Kaja Silverman describes, "all subjects, male or female, rely for their identity upon the repertoire of culturally available images" (153) existing around them.

Graphic narratives shape cultural images since the artist draws images in a recognizable format:

The particular nature of pictures in a comic needs to be stressed, because in contrast to the photorealistic images of live-action film that deliver a realistic impression, drawings in comics are static and strongly stylized, so the spectator becomes aware of their hand-made quality . . . handmade pictures will leave out

unnecessary details and pronounce telling characteristics by means of perceptual factors such as simplicity of shape, orderly grouping, clear overlapping, distinction of figure and ground and deformation. (“Mise en scène and Framing” 72)

The drawing is not simply a copy of the environment or the character, but an image related to the storyline. The artist/writer transmits his message in a contextual frame. In addition, the reader has his/her own interpretation. Thus, stereotypes occur as common images in graphic narratives. Stylized images may seem fictional in content, but they have the capacity to capture the essence of the representations and reflect them with a realistic point of view. The simplicity of the characters brings forth their recognizable quality. Conventional comics “are designed to be read quickly, which explains the preference for stereotypical elements that are easily recognized. Thus the main characters are usually dressed in a typical, familiar outfit, and are rendered with typified body and facial features” (“Some Medium Specific” 16). However, simplicity does not mean that a drawing is good or bad. It is a necessary tool to deliver the story in which the images appeal to the reader’s acknowledgment since such visible identities are recognizable in the culture.

Therefore, stereotypes and landscape/cityscape images create a certain harmony and a known visibility for the reader. As Lefèvre suggests,

A particular space is necessary to situate the action. Therefore a lot of artists use stereotypical icons (like the Statue of Liberty for New York or the pyramids for Egypt) because such famous buildings or monuments can be easily recognized by the readers. Moreover most buildings can already by their form indicate which function they have (e.g. farms, airplanes, houses...). Space can also suggest something about his personality (orderly or messy, classic or modern, etc.). (“Construction of Space” 57)

Landscape/cityscape depictions, as a part of the narrative, reveal the physical and psychological conditions along with the stereotypical images. Naturally, these stereotypical characters and cities reflect ethnic and social features. Furthermore, depiction of cities and bodies express social and economic status and every image has an invested meaning. Therefore, the city and the characters create unity, and when one of them changes or develops, the other is exposed to a similar effect.

## 2.1. BEN KATCHOR'S JEWISH STEREOTYPES AND TRANSFORMATION

Katchor draws stereotypical Jews, such as “hook-nosed, beady-eyed, authentic” Jews and his drawings remind one of the nineteenth century racist Jewish caricatures. Jeffrey S. Gurock interprets “such stereotypical images exaggerating the bodies and faces of Jews originated in the Middle Ages” as a proof to accusations that “Jews held disproportionate amounts of power and social influence” (Linden 288). Although Jewish immigrants were not seen as a threat to the American society, “schoolbooks throughout America employed stereotypical and demonical depictions of Jews to emphasize their singularity and to explain their dispersion” (Rockaway and Gutfelt 361). While Katchor’s stereotypes are indications of the racist approach that Jews faced in nineteenth century America, they also indicate the difficulties of gaining acceptance in a new land and the problem of assimilation.

Katchor’s characters face new challenges and develop new identities. Stephen Tabachnick interprets the interaction between the land and the immigrants from both angles:

Ben Katchor tells a fictional story of Jewish immigration to America during the earlier nineteenth century, making the point that the melding of the Jews and America into one unit worked both ways, as Jews were influenced by their new country and their new country was influenced by them. But it was not an easy journey, according to him. (118)

Jewish immigrants found different ways to survive during the nineteenth century. Katchor depicts several stereotypical characters who choose alternative ways to adopt to the society. Gerd Korman explains nineteenth century Jewish Americans as:

[M]ost of them conducted their lives within a fractured and splintered Talmudic tradition and Halakhic standard. They were changing, even rebelling, drawn and pulled by the force of economic and political opportunity, enlightened rationalism, and republican assimilation; some, and increasingly many more, reflected the cutting edge of that change in the direction of what would later be designated secular Jewry. (28)

Of course, all Jews did not follow the same pattern. Collective and individual identities embraced various standards of rituals and some of them were successfully assimilated.

Social and economic change in the nineteenth century transformed the people's life style and new family and community types emerged. As Jonathan Sarna expresses,

The 1820s formed a remarkable decade in American Jewish history, paralleling the Second Great Awakening and the beginning of the Jacksonian age . . . a decade when Jews began moving in a serious way to the west, a decade that saw a few extraordinary Jews emerge in American cultural and political life . . . It was also a period when American Jews became seriously alarmed about what a later generation would call "Jewish continuity." (54)

Abel Marah, an importer of religious articles, is depicted as a greedy Jewish businessman, who has assimilated into the new society and disregards his Jewish identity. In a meeting, another character refuses to shake hands with him since his hand is not "calloused from hard work" (Fig. 2.1), which implies Marah's easy-made fortune. Marah embraces "Americanization," swindles another Jew, Nathan Kishon, and flees to England. Kishon and Marah were business partners but Marah cheats Kishon to keep all the profit out of fur trading. Kishon thinks that Marah is brave since he accepts a dangerous trip for trading the furs. However, he does not go anywhere and a letter signed by the management of the Niagara Hotel of Buffalo apprises Kishon after Marah's death, which is actually fake. Marah changes his name and starts a new life. The falsified news about his death becomes a symbol for the death of his Jewishness. He says, "I effect my own resurrection every other day under the assumed name of Ludwig Hullar, I visit my banker's office and look after the health of my investments . . . then I return for a day to the tomb of a dead Jew from New York" (92).



Fig. 2.1. Marah is portrayed as a greedy Jewish businessman (*The Jew of New York* 38).

Another character, Moishe Ketzelsbourd, is supposed to be a baptized Jew, who married a “lapsed Anabaptist” woman, but his daughters “were christened into the church of the full immersion” (16). Christianization offers a possibility of assimilation for Jewish immigrants. In addition, Ketzelsbourd acts as if he is idolizing actresses in a sacred way. When Kishon describes his ritual, he says, “the man whose presence this ritual was performed each day was, I discovered, the great John Jacob Astor” (19), which indicates that Ketzelsbourd has adopted into the American way of life. His Jewish roots seem erased and he is happy with the idea of freedom in the new land. As Sara Henkin states,

Jews in nineteenth-century America had little interest in giving up the freedoms and rights—the American citizenship—they now enjoyed. As American Jews grappled with the bonds of community, religion, and tradition, the “complex dynamic of personal and collective negotiation—rejection, appropriation, refashioning—that accompanies the cultural rituals of new world adjustment” that Donald Weber defines as the Americanization process that immigrants experienced en masse in the early 1900s, is very much taking place in Katchor’s novel, despite its earlier time period. (29)

The economic revival in the city influences Jewish people positively. The Soda Water Company and kabalistic handkerchief factory are indicators of this positive improvement. Prof. Solidus mentions this advancement by saying “the telltale signs of the Jew or crypto-Jew at work are visible, to the trained eye, everywhere in this young city ... what took a thousand years to achieve in Europe has been accomplished here in a few decades!” (65). Indeed “the sound of hammering in the street inspires him” to tell these words and as he composes his sentences, the panels depict the construction of The Lake Erie Soda Water Company, which is founded by Jewish investors and spread all over the city gradually (65).

As a symbol of the conventional Jewish stereotype, Enoch Letushim, a messenger from the Jewish community in Palestine, appears in traditional clothes and brings soil from the holy land. He examines everything around him and “tries to understand the secret design of American women’s clothing” (43), since these clothes are unusual for him. He also questions whether there are still some Jews who “care to be buried along with soil from the holy land” (42). This inquiry is actually about the change of the Jewish life style in America. Letushim wants to know if immigrants follow Jewish traditions and he tries to raise funds for Palestine, but people doubt his sincerity. People are suspicious of strangers since these kind of “authentic Jews” could be imposters (Fig. 2.2).



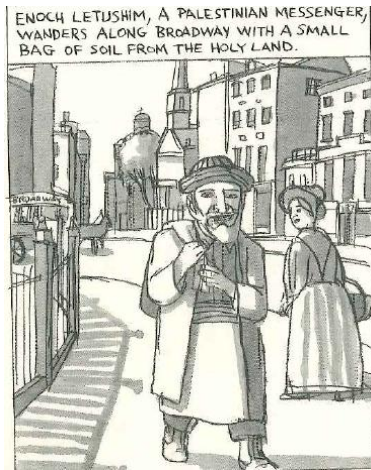


Fig. 2.2. An authentic Jew attracts attention with his outfit (*The Jew of New York* 42).

The book also refers to the resemblance between Native Americans and Jews. The prejudices against Native Americans as savages include Jews as well. Nathan Kishon is mistaken for being an Indian by Isaac Azarael. This insulting and racist attempt of categorizing Native Americans and Jews as similarly inferior groups takes a new shape when Azarael remembers a poster about the ten lost tribes of Israel in the next panel. In this poster, Native Americans are portrayed as one of the lost tribes of Israel. Connecting Native Americans with Jewish roots is a useful analogy since Native Americans were the first people of America and this idea indicates that Jews are not outsiders but first owners of America. In a sarcastic way, Katchor deals with the view of the American Indians showing them to be descendants of the lost tribes of Israel. Drawing parallels between the characteristics traits of Jewish Americans and non-white societies is an attempt to categorize Jewish Americans as a distinctive race. Goldstein sees this approach as a propaganda led by white Americans since “identifying the Jews as ‘uncivilized’ and classing them with African Americans reduced the anxieties of white Americans concerning the impact of modernity and its ability to undermine the power of whiteness” (42).

Moreover, Yosl Feinbroyt, a kabbalist, tries to discover new onomatopoeic words. The phonetic similarities between Native American languages and the Yiddish language become another source to create a racial connection between both groups. Feinbroyt’s drawings also provide an amalgam of symbols from Native Americans and Jews (35). Another stereotypical trait associated with Jews, which occurs is their “characteristic

smell,” which contributes to the negative stereotypical description. In the theatrical play, negative stereotypes appear and Maynard Daizy plans to make an emission of a smell. Prof. Solidus, an anti-Semite, says, “In act two, the air is thick with the smell of herring and garerdines” (68). The smell is ventilated at the moment of the Jews’ betrayal to create a negative atmosphere when “Major Ham feels that he has been betrayed by his own people: they did not follow him to his ‘Ararat,’ his grandiose plan is an utter failure” (68). Solidus’s strategy indicates that Jewishness is associated with unpleasant smells. Nathan Kishon is also described as a man “smelling strongly of animal blood and urine” (2). Prof. Solidus does not want to stage a successful play but wishes to create a scandal to humiliate Jews and dissatisfy the audience. He was proud of the staging in Berlin, where there were riots and the audience demanded their money back (68).

Modernization and developments in the cities also bring a change in cultural and ethnic identities. Characters expand the physical and cultural borders of the city and they use various initiatives to adapt to the city. Jews were very successful in adapting into the urban life because they were forbidden to own lands in Europe (Foxman 57), which led them to practice trade, commerce, and professions (Goldstein 36). Katchor, along with the characters, questions how people are exposed to change and how they construct their identity in the new environment. Surviving in a new land requires various compromises and characters evolve with assimilation. Prof. Solidus fears that he will not be able to find any Jews to make burlesques of them and says, “but here in America, through assimilation and intermarriage, I fear that someday all of these traits will become diffused within the general population—and in that, the real danger lies! There will be no Jews left” (*The Jew of New York* 68).

Accordingly, rural and urban conditions have distinctive influences on characters’ lives. People attempt to create a unique community in “New Afflatus,” where the settlers have special rules similar to Jewish rituals. On the other hand, people living in the city have to adjust to a modern life and its complicated cultural and economic instruments. Nathan Kishon experiences the challenges of both life styles. He lives in New Afflatus for a certain period but he cannot cope with the rules of the community. Ketzelsbord asks essential questions such as “how will the Jews adapt to an agricultural life? And

what becomes of their American citizenship?” (*The Jew of New York* 12). These questions are valid concerns for those who try to assimilate for privileges of American citizenship and for those who try to actualize the dream of the promised land as Ararat. In this sense, Nathan Kishon presents a new alternative. He is an outsider in modern society with a blanket over his shoulders but he is also determined to try different life styles.

The city is reflected as a modernized and industrial environment, with merchants, cargo boats, new building constructions, advertisements and protestors whereas pastoral life frames are depicted with trees, fur traders and Native Americans. The city, like its residents, is exposed to a change in time. Enoch Letushim is curious about this social and physical transformation of the city and asks, “Is there any history associated with this corner of Broadway? What stood here before the hotel?” The bellhop gives a short history of the evolution of the land, which dates back to Native Americans. In his narrative, he mentions places, which are prototypes of different historical periods such a ropewalk on the outskirts of the city and a Dutch feather dyer’s house (Fig. 2.3).

The different Jewish life patterns show the multidimensional traditions and ways of adaptation into the environment. As Korman states,

Jews as individuals and Jews as corporate groups had also moved from their place in time and space, from their Sitz-im-Leben in Talmudic Judaism. Across generations, and in their masses, they began as different kinds of Talmudic Jews and went through different periods to become diverse post-Talmudic Jews. This led them to quite different futures, to all sorts of religious and ethnic Jews ... But, during the nineteenth and early twentieth century, their journeys and moves through the ranks of society did not eclipse their commitments to the Talmud and the Halakha as much as it fractured and splintered it. (28)

At the end of the book, a man in rubber clothes, Vervel Kunzo, who actually comes from Berlin to compile a report on cultural manifestations unique to the Jews of New York for “the Society for Culture and Science of the Jews,” disappears in the river while he reads a pamphlet about “indisputable proof of the Hebrew origin of the newly discovered people” (*The Jew of New York* 97). Even though his report results are not exposed, it is clear that Jews from other countries are interested in the new land and there are numerous attempts to find historical or racial connections between Jews and America because, as Noah tries to establish a Jewish land in America, Jewish characters

tries to find the traces of New Jerusalem in America. Other new comers also indicate that the city attracts Jewish immigrants and various lifestyles.



Fig. 2.3. History of the landscape is narrated in one page (*The Jew of New York* 48).

## 2.2. STEREOTYPES AND MODERNIZATION IN JOE KUBERT

In *Jew Gangster*, Kubert's worn plot and stereotypical Jewish characters are intentionally chosen to provide a familiar panorama of the Depression era in Brooklyn so that the readers can easily familiarize themselves with the story and have a clear vision on the social, economic and traumatic lives of Jewish immigrants. Kubert prefers realistically portrayed landscapes and his ethnic gangsters are reshaped in the manner of "tough" Jews to create a collective identity. Joe Kubert dwells on the characters and the environment, which are familiar to him since he grew up in the same area. Kubert's concern with the Jewish immigrant society led him to choose "Jew Gangster" as the title. He insisted on it even when DC Comics refused to publish the book unless he changed the title. The book was eventually published by iBooks ("Kubert" 2012).

Kubert knew that “Jew gangster” is a crucial and complex figure in symbolizing the era and portraying the problems of Jewish Americans. Kubert says, “Murder Incorporated [organized crime groups in 1920s and 1930s] was the outfit that strangely everybody admired,” and in his childhood “Jew gangster was used as an admonition” by his parents (“Kubert” 2012).

The Jewish gangster figure has always been used in different genres from film noir to novels, and gangster themes have been popular since 1920s. In the essay “Guardians, Millionaires, and Fearless Fighters: Transforming Jewish Gangsters into a Usable Past,” Wendy H. Bergoffen claims that contemporary writers rewrite “Jewish gangster history as a way to refashion Jewish masculinity” (91). For Bergoffen, Jewish gangsters of the 1930s carried some qualities which pardoned their negative and illegal affairs and male writers established their strategies on this idea, which enabled them “to claim kinship with tough guys of the past without much, if any, social cost” (91).

Joe Kubert relies on similar strategies that are discussed by Bergoffen to create glamorized Jewish gangsters of his nostalgic childhood. However, unlike the male writers Bergoffen mentions, Kubert uses a different medium with a unique language. He uses recognizable characters, which facilitate the interpretation of images. Thierry Groensteen calls this method “typification.” For Groensteen, typification is one of the principles of narrative drawing which means simplifying the characters. As the author puts it, “[t]he abbreviation of a character to several pertinent lines assures their characterization and their immediate identification” (*the System of Comics* 162). The gangsters’ square jaw, clean-shaven face, broken or crooked nose are “exterior signs” that exemplify typification (Fig. 2.4). These physical features make the gangsters recognizable and decodable as types.



Fig. 2.4. Stereotypical gangster figures (*Jew Gangster* 59-32).

Anne Frances Wysocki argues that “words and pictures as available designs or culturally available images depend on understanding words and pictures not as having essential, formal functions but as having histories” (26). Kubert’s drawings have a historical context that enables the reader to familiarize easily with the characters. For Kubert, this is important because a graphic novel should adhere to a narration, to a story. The images and drawings in a graphic novel, which construct a story, should encourage active receptivity and be identifiable. As Kubert suggests, “the cartoonist is primarily and foremost a storyteller and if you don’t do that I don’t care how pretty the drawings are that you make” (“An Interview with Joe Kubert”).

Besides storytelling, giving a message via images and texts is a crucial element. For Kubert “if you’re not communicating with those drawings you’re not a cartoonist” (“An Interview with Joe Kubert”). The stereotypical characters in the *Jew Gangster* are used strategically to stimulate the reader within a particular discourse. Because “[t]he available designs of words and pictures, that is, come with attached discourses” (Wysocki 26), a retrospective outlook on the history of the Jewish crime world is created and reshaped according to the messages Kubert wishes to convey. In the graphic novel, the Jewish crime world is not depicted as thoroughly evil or good. There are some “good sides” of those gangsters that are attractive to young people. Robert Rockaway comments on these good qualities despite his remark at the beginning, which states: “In no way do I seek to glorify the Jewish gangster” (6). He says that Jew gangsters sometimes can be “good” and he claims, “Protecting and helping Jews was fine as long as it did not interfere with business. When the two clashed, making money superseded ethnic loyalties” (Rockaway 254). This means that gangsters were good as long as their profits were not threatened.

In this context, Bergoffen’s claim about “[r]emembering ... criminals of another era as honorary” (91) is applicable for these stereotypical characters since they have been reshaped in time. They “change because the cultural patterns on which they are based are becoming anachronistic” (Whitehead 3). Kubert’s characters are stereotypical like “the Stern Patriarch who clings to the old ways, the Prodigal/Rebellious Son, the Long-Suffering Yiddische mama (Yiddish: ‘Jewish mother’) and the Rose of the Ghetto” (N.

Abrams 3), but the re-embodiment of these characters in the graphic novel with a contemporary perspective come out as ambivalent representations.

Joe Kubert touches upon the charismatic “hoodlum heroes” by saying, “in the neighborhood where I grew up, it was not unusual to see who would be considered a crime figure today, walking around and looked at him in terms of being a kind of hero” (“Keeping Current with Joe Kubert”). Kubert also presents Ruby Kaplan’s good deeds and his respect to his mother. He emphasizes the protagonist’s function as a protector of his people, as a contributor to his family and as a driving force of society. On the other hand, these very notions also cause him to become alienated from his Jewish heritage.

Colors and landscape are used to shape and explore the dark atmosphere of the environment parallel to the underground gangster world. Kubert draws his panels on black pages and uses bold, black colors similar to black and white film noirs. Danger, violence and crime go hand in hand with crowded and desolate streets. Shadows are a common element that symbolizes the desperate and corrupted environment. The first panel depicts a dark shadowy street under the railroad bridge. In the next panel, children appear as shadows among rubbish dumps (Fig. 2.5). The city is depicted in predominantly grey, black, and white colors to portray a romanticized urban gangster atmosphere.



Fig. 2.5. Dark tones, backlit silhouettes, and shadows create a decayed city atmosphere (*Jew Gangster 2*).

Joe Kubert’s city appears as a gloomy and crowded place filled with poor people and street sellers. Crime is expected in the city where tenements are overpopulated. Kubert

draws crowded places in tenements and stresses the intensity of coming immigrants (Fig. 2.6), who are following the American Dream. Ruby's father says, "I only wanted the best... For my family... My Children should have... opportunity. More than in a shtetl in Latvia" (*Jew Gangster* 75). While Ruby's father works to earn an honest living, Ruby embraces the crime world and establishes a place among the arrogant people in Brooklyn's streets. Cars appear as a symbol of luxury and modernization and mostly belong to the gangsters. Ruby is obsessed with the power and prosperity of hoodlum life. Thus, the notion of the American Dream as well as the notion of "land" can be interpreted ideologically:

Upon the individual and family hopes was built the conception of America as a fresh start for mankind, the place on earth for "the old millennial hope" to take shape in, and like all utopias it was not fleshed out with very much concrete detail. Seizing and developing the land occupied the hands of the settlers, but their minds were exercised by the renewal of individual, family, and society in America. The land itself was almost casually assumed, for the ideal was more important than the actual place in which it was to be realized. (Lutwack 142)

People immigrate to a new place to actualize their dreams, but the preconceptions of the new land are renewed with immigrants' experiences. In this sense, the point of view is related to Ruby's ideas and emotions since the depiction of the city is relatively pessimistic and unsatisfactory. While Ruby's father sees their life in the new land as a new beginning, Ruby views the environment as a restrictive place hindering his dreams and hopes of making a quick fortune. Ruby's dystopic vision of the city includes the representation of the people living in it.



Fig. 2.6. Claustrophobic portrayal of crowds (*Jew Gangster* 67).



Like the city, its residents are in rags, trying to survive under hardship and poverty. Kubert's choice of city views reveals that children are unable to play games in the streets because, like Ruby, they feel threatened. To emphasize the social conditions of the people in Ruby's environment, Kubert sometimes draws street sellers. In the panel where Ruby is talking with his friends, Kubert places the sellers in the background, and highlights a bagel seller in the front, which reveals a cultural stereotype related to Jewish American culture (Fig. 2.7). As Linden states, "bagel baking arrived in New York City with eastern European Jewish immigrants. Bagels assumed a favored place in New Yorkers' diet" (235). This type of cultural stereotypes also appear in *American Splendor*. Harvey Pekar takes notes and interviews elderly people who know Jewish history. One of them, for instance, says "The point is in the twenties everyone recognized the Jewish rag peddler's cry—or clarion—'pa-ayper-reggs! Pa-ayper-reggs!'" (*American Splendor* vol. 12).



Fig. 2.7. Ruby with his friends among the street peddler and the bagel seller (*Jew Gangster* 31).

Although the Depression vitiated physical improvements, the modernization projects threaten Jewish existence in the novel. For example, cars and subway depictions are evidence of the changing face of the city. The subway tracks constantly appear in the panels as an indicator of modernity and a means for movement and spreading out for the immigrants. As these portrayals indicated,

In the late 1910s—early '20s, subway lines were constructed over and under the East River, bringing Brooklyn and Queens neighborhoods into close contact with Manhattan. By the same token, locales just beyond the subway's reach, such as

Forest Hills, Queens, experienced much less growth. Only when the Independent Subway line (IND) was built in the 1930s, providing fifteen-minute service to Manhattan, was the neighborhood transformed. (Rock 11)

The city took shape in accordance with subway lines since “prospective tenants — with Jews again heavily part of the mix—appreciated these houses’ location within “subway suburbs” (Rock 11). The immigrants were able to find jobs in distant areas through subway lines, but the Depression and high rental prices were obstacles to move elsewhere, and “the mass movement of New Yorkers to suburbia beyond the city’s legal limits was still a generation away” (Rock 11). The change in the neighbourhoods in relation to public transportation is also repeated in Eisner’s *Dropsie Avenue*. One of the city planners says, “The problem is train stations! They affect real estate values!” and the location of the stations become a debatable issue for construction firms.

The other novelty, cars, which appear in crime scenes, are usually owned by the gangsters. Owning a car is a sign of upward mobility, hence the realization of the American Dream. Ruby is able to give the impression that he has reached an admirable status when he drives to his district and talks to his friends from the car (Fig. 2.8). While his friends are trying to graduate, Ruby shows off with his car, outfit, and manners and talks about giving them business. He looks down upon his former friends and uses his car and clothes to indicate his superior position. In *Dropsie Avenue*, the cars are again the indicators of modern times as one resident says, “Traffic is sure growing in this neighborhood... Modern times is here” (*Dropsie Avenue* 59).

Ruby also desires the “shiksa” stereotype, an attractive, sexy and beautiful gentile woman. The gang band leader Monk’s wife is depicted as a shiksa who attempts to seduce Ruby and lure him away from religious and traditional paths of righteousness. In contrast to hard-working, dutiful Jewish mothers and sisters, she lives for pleasure and is presented as a danger since she confuses Jewish men. As part of his dream for a carefree life, Ruby tries to take Monk’s place and his wife (Fig. 2.9).



Fig. 2.8. Cars and outfits are indicators of social class (*Jew Gangster* 63).



Fig. 2.9. Attractive “shiksa” stereotype versus hardworking Jewish women (Ruby’s sister and mother in the kosher restaurant) (*Jew Gangster* 69-16).

As Maffi puts it,

Jewish crime, on the contrary, was a completely American phenomenon, the result of many factors: the scarce possibilities of economic and social advancement on the Lower East Side, the impact of the American credo of quick

success with its “self-made-man” and “rags-to-riches” myths, the feeling of being insufficiently represented and defended by existing legal institution, the loosening of family ties, the breakdown of orthodoxy, and the peculiar aspect of Ghetto economy in which stalls, stores, warehouse, and sweatshops represented as many opportunities for petty crimes. (130-131)

The kosher restaurant symbolizes Ruby’s father’s traditional life style while the shiksa figure symbolizes a life in which the American Dream is realized. Thus, Ruby’s mother and sister belong to the kosher restaurant and the gentile women of Ruby’s dreams is placed among the gangsters. Ruby’s choices also represent a loss of Jewish traditions. As a matter of fact, kosher food consumption had decreased at that time since:

Many Jews transferred their previous concern for ritual purity to an interest in high sanitary standards in processed foods. Advertisers soon recognized the implicit equation, and as early as 1912 Borden’s adopted the slogan “Pure Means Kosher—Kosher Means Pure.” By the 1920s, many Jews had abandoned kashrut altogether, embracing instead a modern preference for recognizable brands of packaged goods with reliably predictable quality. (Polland and Soyer 88)

The decrease in consuming kosher foods is accompanied by other compromises in religious traditions. Keeping Sabbath day traditions become harder for those who want to preserve their religious belief and wish to adopt to the new community. However, the immigrant community sought alternatives to accept the new conditions and sustain their traditions at the same time. For this reason, some rabbis come up with the idea of “*pikuakh nefesh*” which allow Jews to work on the Sabbath. As it is stated by Polland and Soyer:

To rationalize working on the Sabbath, some immigrant Jews applied the concept of *pikuakh nefesh*—the understanding that one could break the Sabbath to save a life—to Sabbath work for family support. One Orthodox rabbi, Jacob Bauman, even wrote a responsum that used *pikuakh nefesh* to excuse Sabbath desecration by immigrant Jews who worked to support their families. While most rabbis rejected this interpretation, the immigrant community in America accepted it. (125)

Kubert’s tenements are ragged, the streets are dirty, and the law is in the hands of ethnic hoodlums. The area presents itself as an apparent failure of restoration and urbanization. Although the United States Congress imposed a series of quotas for immigration, crowded streets and living conditions indicate that the restrictions were useless. As represented in *A Life Force*, immigrants were still able to find illegal or legal ways to come to the United States. Nevertheless,

the tenements and their neighborhoods also afforded a sense of community for friends and family who spoke the same language and had a common cultural heritage, who also shared the common experience of poverty and daily hardship. And, if they could not themselves rise above their poverty, they still worked as peddlers, grocers, and wage earners to give their children a chance for an education and a better life for themselves. Overtime, often two or three generations, immigrants overcame seemingly insurmountable obstacles. (Bial 42)

However, the second generation was not very keen on staying in the tenements or they did not have a strong sense of community. The second generation wanted to change their misfortune and start a new life, but the Depression prevents them from moving to other districts since they faced financial problems. Ruby is very eager climb up the social ladder, but,

[t]he economic catastrophe of the 1930s also transformed the way Jews lived in other neighborhoods. For most children of eastern European immigrants, the Depression ended that second generation's wanderlust. During this era of trials and "uncertain promise," they stayed where they were in the apartments that they had coveted in the 1920s. (Gurock 28)

### **2.3. WILL EISNER'S TENEMENTS AND TRANSFORMATION**

In Eisner's work, the reader views a multicultural society compared to the *Jew Gangster*. Eisner also uses stereotypical characters who transform themselves. Like Ruby, who becomes a hoodlum, Frimme Hersh, in *A Contract with God*, evolves into a cruel landlord (Fig 2.10). Hersh first appears as a kind Jewish boy who is sent to America by those saved from pogroms (*A Contract with God* 21). Years later, he is depicted as an old, bearded Jewish man wearing a kippa and performing his religious duties (*A Contract with God* 14). After his daughter's death, he shaves his beard off and wears "modern" clothes (*A Contract with God* 35). He buys a parcel on Dropsie Avenue with bonds, which actually do not belong to him, but he lies to make a deal with the bank. Both Hersh and Ruby change in appearance. In graphic narratives, representation is the main tool to transmit the message and physical appearance is a core element in interpreting the people's characteristics, social and religious backgrounds.

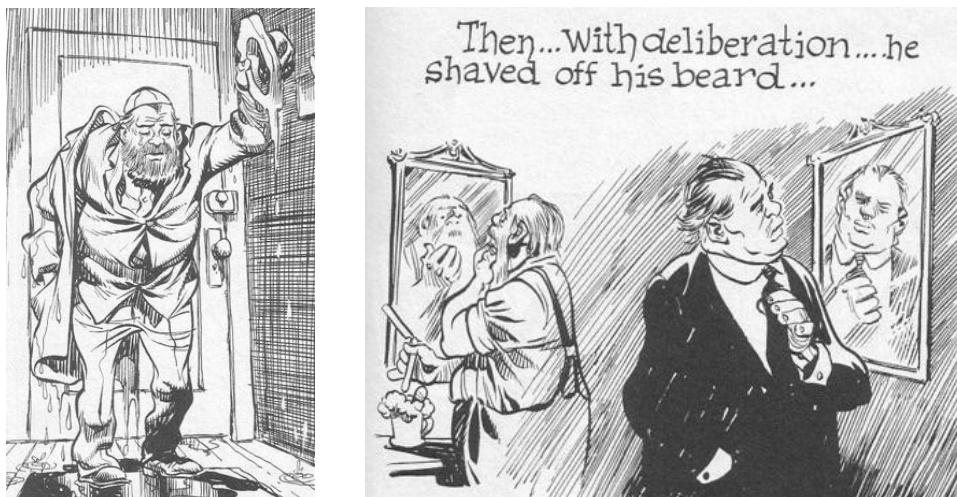


Fig. 2.10. Hersh's transformation from a conservative Jew into a landlord (*A Contract with God* 14-35).

The characters' physical change reflects the psychological transformation along with social depiction of the landscapes. The relationship between changing characters and landscapes is an interactive progress. As Jewish immigrants are influential in shaping the cultural and physical face of the city, the environment affects and changes the way Jewish immigrants live. Landscapes and characters stimulate each other's transformation, evolution and influence iconographies. As Eisner says, "life deep in a big city affects the basic sensibilities and influences the character of one's conduct in a way that affirms environment's triumph over all of us" (*City People* viii). As soon as Hersh becomes a landlord, he raises the rents ten percent and does not show any mercy for poor people like Mrs. Kelly (*A Contract with God* 39). Ruby's and Hersh's physical transformations became examples of losing values of the old world in favor of adopting to the new society. Polland and Soyer state:

Just as new clothes promised to Americanize the immigrant, they also held open the promise of upward social mobility, symbolizing America's open and apparently egalitarian class structure. New York Jews, of course, had already played, and were continuing to play, an important role in the revolution in garment production that made possible the democratization of clothing. With the advent and refinement of mass production, middle and even working class people could lay claim to apparel that previously had been within reach only of the upper class. (117)

The personal transformation directly influences the social change as Hersh's superintendent notices. He expresses his surprise in the following remarks: "These Jews... Yesterday a poor tenant, today the owner! How do they do it?" (*A Contract with*

*God* 40). Becoming a landlord is a significant social change since Jews were generally tenants and wanderers around the world. As landlords, Jewish immigrants buy tenant shares and become property owners. As Polland and Soyer put it:

Of course, the tenements did not grow on their own; landlords, many of them immigrants themselves who had accumulated some savings, bought narrow lots as investments and possible stepping-stones to prosperity. They hoped to reap as much profit as possible, and that meant creating as many rental units as feasible. (113)

Eisner also examines the relationship between self-perception and the environment. *Dropsie Avenue: The Neighborhood* delineates the detailed change in people and the tenements. In *A Contract with God*, the fourth story, “Cookalein” reveals that even temporary changes in the landscape influence the character. Working class tenement people like Goldie go there to actualize their aims. Goldie wants to find a rich husband and she feels Cookalein, a low budget vacation hotel, is a suitable place for meeting a man since three of her friends found husbands there (135). Eisner writes in his preface:

It is important to understand the times and the place in which these stories were set. Fundamentally, they were not unlike the way the world of today is for those who live in crowded proximity and in depersonalized housing. The importance of dealing with the ebb and glow of city existence and the overriding effort to escape it never seems to change for the inhabitants. (*A Contract with God*)

Since Cookalein is placed outside of the tenements in a different place, people assume that others will not be aware of their poor background. Since the hotel is a resort, they assume that the guests are most probably wealthy. Being on a holiday, thus given a chance to pretend to be a person without economic limitations, leads the character to inhabit an alternate identity (Fig. 2.11). Everybody swindles each other by creating the illusion of being someone other than themselves. Herbie, an intern, is the only one who does not try to pretend to be somebody else. When he asks Goldie for a date, she feels they are not socially equal and belittles him by saying, “lotsa nice waitresses or chambermaids would love to meet you” (*A Contract with God* 152). Although Goldie is a blue-collar worker, she wants to have a financially secure boyfriend and has a crush on Benny since he drives a luxurious car, which is actually rented. Both characters have misconceptions about each other and neither of them is wealthy. Even though Benny acts like a playboy, his rape attempt reveals that he is impotent.



Fig. 2.11. Benny and Goldie pretend to have an upper class life style (*A Contract with God* 137).

Cookalein is a place where many romantic couples find each other. Maralyn has a love affair with the fifteen-year-old Willie, Sam sends his family to Cookalein and has a relationship with a “shiksa.” Nevertheless, all of the characters reach their aims; Benny and Goldie find wealthy partners and Willie appears thoughtful in the last panel, which indicates that his initial sexual experience will probably make him come back to Cookalein (*A Contract with God* 183). All of the love affairs in Cookalein occur in the night when everybody is supposed to be sleeping. Yet, almost all are engaged in deceiving the other. This self-deception continues when the guests end their vacation and return to the tenements, claiming that they had a “good vacation” (182).

In *Dropsie Avenue*, the development of the district has certain effects on characters. Although race and ethnic tensions have caused hostility in the area, Eisner portrays a more optimistic view of the multicultural environment. The continuing immigration waves among different groups, such as Irish, Italian, Spanish, and Jewish create uneasiness. The first comers often feel superior to late comers since, according to them, their authority over the land is justified. They detest the new housing development and view it as a threat, saying, “There is a war coming... This city is growing. They’ll need houses” (*Dropsie Avenue* 16). While the district becomes more cosmopolitan, the crime rate rises and the existence of bootleggers, thieves, foreigners, and prostitutes is accentuated. Despite the negative consequences, the new tenements in the district create a fraternization:



At the same time, however, the tenements' forced promiscuity and congestion wove a veritable fabric of communal living. Regardless of geographic, cultural, linguistic differences, people from all parts of the world tended to recreate their East European shtetl, their Southern Italian paesi, their Sam Yup and Sze Yup villages. (Maffi 81)

Unlike the uniform group of Jews in *Jew Gangster*, Eisner draws and narrates the colorful ethnic variety in the city. With the cooperation of a priest and a rabbi, the first interfaith marriage is actualized (Fig 2.12). Abie Gold, for example, is a liberal, hard-working, clever Jewish ward councilman, who tries to unify ethnic groups and marry an Italian woman. In this story, a shiksa sustains a happy marriage with a successful Jewish man, even though the neighborhood is against such a union (*Dropsie Avenue 75*). In contrast to Izzy, who thinks only about how to accumulate his wealth after becoming a landowner as opposed to a second hand clothes seller, Abie Gold, a lawyer, tries to support the poor and dispossessed people of the neighborhood. Although Izzy and Abie Gold have different occupations, they somehow contribute to the changing face of the city since “Jews had also begun to transform other parts of the city, as builders, landlords, and tenants. Jewish real estate speculators and builders filled in open spaces with tenements and tore down individual houses to erect apartment blocs” (*Emerging Metropolis 129*).



Fig. 2.12. A rabbi and a priest congratulate each other after an interfaith marriage (*Dropsie Avenue 76*).

The city becomes a dynamic and lively place where various ethnic and racial groups interact. As communication between various groups increase, the negative conceptions toward the others start to change. Even though people in the neighborhood use discriminating language such as “So... The wops will be movin’ in on us... Next thing

you know we'll get Jews... Like on Cresty Street!" (*Dropsie Avenue* 62), and "I told you... Let them Jews into a neighborhood and the blacks will follow" (*Dropsie Avenue* 100), there are several hospitable neighbors. For example, a black girl is welcomed by a white family and she has lunch at the same table; but this family is warned by a neighbor who says, "You shouldn't be encouraging them" (*Dropsie Avenue* 100). However, the area is not dominated by a certain ethnic group. The power of a certain ethnic group depends on real estate ownership and visibility. As suggested by Pollard and Soyer, "Much of a district's Jewish character came from the people walking the streets, and much of this traffic was prompted by the daily business of buying and selling. To some extent, it was the style of commerce that made a street appear" (133).

Meanwhile, the increase of African Americans is an implication of a social change in the environment. For example, Harlem was an attractive place for the Jewish bourgeoisie before World War I but, in the 1920s,

tens of thousands, possessed of considerable means, escaped the uptown area's overcrowding for the Grand Concourse and for the Upper West Side of Manhattan, settling as far north as Washington Heights, as poor African Americans moved in. Left behind were aspiring African Americans, Harlemites too of long standing. The city extended its promises discriminately. They who once lived among Jews were trapped in this ever-deteriorating neighborhood either by their own lack of comparable economic mobility or by racist conventions and covenants. (Gurock 15)

A similar situation is depicted in *Dropsie Avenue*. The tenement inhabitants change as Jewish people begin to move out and less fortunate ethnicities, including Hispanics take over the deteriorated apartments. Real estate rates are directly related to the ethnic construction of the area since rent prices are determined accordingly (Fig 2.13). A multicultural environment is often associated with safety issues. Izzy does not want African Americans to rent the tenements and says, "I already got Italians, Spanish and Jews ... Do you realize what that is gonna do to my property values?" (*Dropsie Avenue* 109). However, he accepts Abie's offer to rent to African Americans because he would be paying less tax for an integrated neighborhood. On the other hand, as neighborhood connections are indispensable for finding jobs, people want to live as a community:

Jewish journeys across the city brought them to new homes in neighborhoods that combined modern living with ethnic-group competition. In the prosperous 1920s, aspiring Jews managed to acquire a piece of New York City's expanding economy, together with other ethnic and racial groups that made up the city's

diverse population. But the Great Depression strained families' economic resources, intensified competition for jobs and political influence, and provoked sporadic conflict between Jews and their neighbors. Such conflict dimmed the city's fabled promise, encouraging Jews to seek comfort among their own kind. (Rock 37)



Fig. 2.13. People move in and out depending upon the ethnicity of their neighborhoods (*Dropsie Avenue* 110-11).

Therefore, “the bonds of ethnicity supported ethnically separate construction industries catering to an ethnically distinct housing market” (*Haven of Liberty* 14). The residents are also aware of the relationship between the district and class. For example, when Danny is promoted, his wife says, “Now that you are so important we can’t live on Dropsie Avenue any more” (*Dropsie Avenue* 41). Thus, they move to Manhattan where upper class people prefer to live. The Jewish community struggles to gain upward mobility, which leads them to search for better conditions, but they also keep within close proximity to sustain interaction with friends and families. Their success leads them to find better jobs and better places to live. Jews take on new identities to adapt to the new circumstances of their new neighborhoods. As Polland and Soyer state;

Some upwardly mobile Jews remained in the Lower Manhattan neighborhood, which included wealthier sections on the streets south of East Broadway, such as Henry Street and Madison Street. But many settled immigrants and their children moved out to newer sections of Brooklyn and the Bronx, where they sought recently constructed apartment buildings, complete with elevators. (134)

Eisner focuses on the changing outlook of Dropsie Avenue, which exemplifies the rise of the ethnic population and relocation trends. There is a constant movement in Dropsie

Avenue depending on social conditions and state policies. For example, the Depression obstructs change and “many Jewish working-class families in the outer boroughs who had risen a few rungs up the economic ladder fell back down and were often unable to pay their rents in their Bronx and Brooklyn neighborhoods” (Rock 28). Estates in Dropsie Avenue are exposed to conflicts among settlers and landlords who benefit from demands and make easy money. At the same time, social status and job opportunities heavily influence the demographics of the area. According to statistics,

In the 1920s, the Lower East Side’s Jewish population declined by 160,000, leaving behind a population of 100,000. Yet the neighborhood still proved to be an anchor. In the 1920s and 1930s, 39 percent of the Lower East Side’s residents were Jewish, but 75 percent of the businesses were owned by Jews. In fact, the commercial vitality of the neighborhood actually increased with the widening of streets and better transportation connections to the rest of Manhattan and Brooklyn. (Polland and Soyer 130)

In *Dropsie Avenue*, Eisner displays the survival of the Jews as a group compared to other groups. Despite the fact that modern life conditions tended to erode the awareness of a group identity, Eisner attempts to portray a multi-ethnic society, in which various life styles develop. As Tabachnick states, “He is not, perhaps, able to glimpse an inner world of beauty in Judaism, but he fends off the outer world of harm” (120). Development in the cityscape is very eminent in Eisner’s work. There are interfaith unions, constantly negotiated real estates and building contractors who alter the district. Old tenements, which are not adequate for a comfortable life style, leave their places to new residents through demolitions. David Harvey calls these changes “creative destruction” (Fig 2.14). He interprets this transformation rather negatively:

But surplus absorption through urban transformation has an even darker aspect. It has entailed repeated bouts of urban restructuring through “creative destruction.” This nearly has a class dimension since it is usually the poor, the underprivileged and those marginalized from political power that suffer first and foremost from this process. Violence is required to achieve the new urban world on the wreckage of the old. (9)

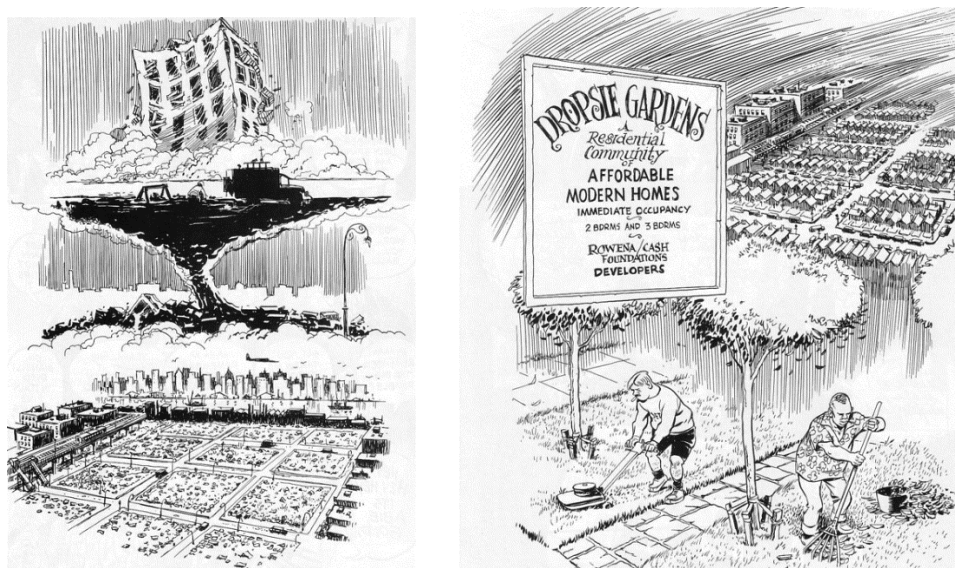


Fig. 2.14. Transformation of the city comes with transformation of its people (*Dropsie Avenue 157-168*).

At the end of the story, the tenements are collapsed through a controlled implosion and a new residential area, “Dropsie Gardens” is erected. However, similar problems start to occur in the new neighborhood. People begin to complain about foreigners, who do not “even speak their languages” (*Dropsie Avenue 168*). The new environment is also marked by social class. As Dash Moore states,

Though the apartment house ranked below the private home in the scale of American housing values, it encouraged greater ethnic density in a neighborhood. Jewish understanding of American society demanded that Jews not live in ‘ghettos,’ i.e. that they live down the block from some non-Jewish Americans. The apartment house offered them this opportunity as well as the chance to move up collectively. (*At Home in America 39*)

In this respect, moving into a new residence actually means moving into a new social status. Jews want to be accepted and want to have equal opportunities. Although the migration out of the Lower East Side is not synonymous with an advancement towards upward mobility, the Jewish population applied drastic makeovers to their new settlements. The first generation Jewish immigrants were successful in the garment industry and in blue-collar jobs. The second generation’s advancement in other professions such as law and building generated a movement towards other neighborhoods. This upward mobility and the accompanied comfort accelerated the Americanization of the Jewish community.

According to Jeffrey S. Gurock, some Jewish immigrants felt an intimate bond with the first comers and wish to rekindle neighborhood institutions. In his words, “For all of the Lower East Side’s persistent miseries amid overcrowded streets and despite the exodus of some two-thirds of its Jewish population as of the 1930s, this urban enclave preserved a measure of intimacy for longtime downtowners” (25). In *Dropsie Avenue*, Miss Rowena feels nostalgic towards her past. Although she is well-to-do and owns a big corporation, she wants to buy the old ruined estates in Dropsie Avenue because of her romanticized memories. Nevertheless, at the end, Dropsie Avenue turns out to be a thoroughly different neighborhood.

## **2.4. DOWNTOWN AND SUBURBS IN HARVEY PEKAR’S CLEVELAND**

Harvey Pekar’s graphic novels take place after World War II, and the society he describes is different from Eisner’s and Kubert’s tenement lives. Although Jewish collective identity and living together are also emphasized, Pekar’s narrative focuses on a complex city life based on social status. While Kubert and Eisner narrate the changing life style in New York, Pekar gives information about the history of Cleveland to reveal the remarkable connection between the identity and the city. Contrary to Kubert’s and Eisner’s stereotypical characters, Pekar’s stereotypes can be unpredictable. For example, the story “Standing Behind Old Jewish Ladies in Supermarket Lines” is about an elderly stubborn Jewish woman in a supermarket (Fig. 2.15). He describes these elderly Jewish women as “You have to wait an especially long time in my neighborhood to get checked out, because so many old Jewish ladies shop at the supermarket there... Man, they are really penny-wise!” (*American Splendor* vol. 3). He generalizes these types of elderly Jewish women and compares them to his Jewish relatives. He says, “I am a Yid myself, an’ the women in my family are like that...” (*American Splendor* vol. 3). On one occasion, he expects to wait for a long time since there is an elderly Jewish woman in front of him in the cashier queue. However, the lady asks him to go ahead since he has “only got two items” (*American Splendor* vol. 3). Pekar’s surprise by this behavior is evident in his remarks: “Wow! That’s the first time a Jewish lady was nice to me in a supermarket! Maybe she is the exception that

proves the rule... She is taller than most old Jewish Women... Maybe she's a mutant!" He is further surprised when "she told the cashier she'd gotten too much change!" instead of keeping the money (*American Splendor* vol. 3).



Fig. 2.15. Pekar's rendition of a stereotypical elderly Jewish lady who quarrels with cashiers (*American Splendor* vol. 3).

Pekar's stories are based on his daily life experiences and his characters tend to be less stereotypical. His narrative blends his life experiences and fictional elements. As Joseph Witek states:

Perhaps Harvey Pekar's most startling innovation in the comic-book form is not that he bases his stories on real life but that, in the search for an accurate and believable rendering of experience, he is willing to write stories that can be as drab, depressing, and tedious as life itself. Pekar's aesthetic of aggressively humdrum realism struggles against the tide of decades of comic-book fantasy and escapism. (128)

Although the unexpected behaviours of the stereotypes, such as the elderly Jewish woman, indicate a change in manners, Pekar also uses stereotypes with a prejudice. He includes anti-Semitic jokes and anecdotes in his stories such as "Rabbi's Wife" and "Miracle Rabbis." The storytellers use a Jewish accent and Pekar renders them without changing the accents. When he describes one of these storytellers, he says, "Emil Heifetz, a short VA patient, was a Jewish Alter Kocker. He thought he was the most entitled person in the world. When he came to the VA, all the Jewish doctors would hide before he'd ask them favors and 'hock a chainik' (bug them)" (*Harvey Pekar's Cleveland* 68). Most of his stereotypical Jewish characters belong to the older generation, which is another indication of the changing society. In the story "Free

Ride,” Herschel is a “cheap” person who “doesn’t offer to give Klein any money for riding him” and Klein does favors for Jews because “it has been drummed into Klein’s head since his childhood in Poland that Jews must help each other out, must stick together” (Fig. 2.16). Herschel uses his Jewish background to exploit Klein’s favors. Klein gradually realizes that a cultural difference exists between him and young Herschel, although both are Jewish. Klein criticizes Herschel for preferring shikshas instead of Jewish girls and for not being involved in Jewish organizations (*American Splendor* vol. 9). At the end of the story, Klein understands that Herschel exploits him and he stops helping him. Herschel also stops asking for favors and rides.



Fig. 2.16. For Klein, helping other Jews is a religious duty (*American Splendor* vol. 9).

Most of Pekar’s stories include self-mockery about his identity and culture. He blends fiction with irony but sustains a realistic perspective. In one of his stories, he borrows Art Spiegelman’s narrative technique and depicts himself as a mouse and his Polish friend, Dobrowolski as a pig. However, while Spiegelman portrays Jewish people with mouse faces to symbolize how Nazis viewed them and how they needed to hide, Pekar represents himself as a mouse figure who takes advantage from his unfortunate condition. In the story, Herschel, which Pekar uses as an alternative name for himself in his stories, hides in the basement of his friend due to the fear of being caught by Nazis. When the war is over, Herschel does not want to leave the basement since he is comfortable and his friend brings him food and other appliances. Time passes and in 1990 when Dobrowolski informs him about the collapse of communist regimes, Herschel just keeps watching television without any acknowledgment. Pekar makes fun



of the scrounger stereotype, who is fond of his comfort and stays forever in the basement for the sake of free food and shelter (Fig. 2.17).



Fig. 2.17. Pekar's one page story with *Maus*-like characters (*American Splendor* vol. 15).

Pekar focuses on changing society and differences in opinions since these elements prevent him from embracing his Jewish identity. Surviving factors, such as being the only white family in the area they first settled, isolates him and the generation gap between him and his parents further this alienation. However, Pekar inquires about his roots and asks questions to his elder relatives about his parents' past. He wants to communicate with his parents, but his attempts are useless, since their separation had

started when Pekar was still a young boy. Pekar's "Polish-born parents worked long hours in their mom-and-pop grocery store a few blocks away" (*Harvey Pekar's Cleveland* 43), and they did not have enough time to interact with their son. Pekar was able to speak Yiddish since everyone in their double house spoke Yiddish (*Harvey Pekar's Cleveland* 47), but he lost his ability to communicate in Yiddish because he could not practice the language after his grandfather's death.

Pekar describes his difference from his father as follows: "He was an orthodox Jew, the product of a Polish shtetl, as were other family members his age and his friends. I was born and raised in a big American city. We didn't talk about much, due to our cultural difference and his lack of spare time" (*American Splendor* vol. 17). Pekar wants to communicate with his father since he regrets their "lack of contact." He knows that his father appreciates Cantorial music and he tries to address this interest. They make some progress but the gap between father and son never disappears. In Pekar's words;

We never did get close, there was just too great a gap in values. A mutual interest in cantorial music, mine much milder than his, couldn't close it. A remote and painful relationship. That's what ours always was. Each of us thought the other had not realized his potential, and we were both saddened by this. (*American Splendor* vol. 17)

Neither Pekar's father nor his mother is able to have a healthy communication with their son (Fig. 2.18). For him the problem lies in the fact that his parents want to raise him as they were raised. Pekar says, "he wanted to bring me up like I was living in a Polish shtetl, he had no use for, or interest in, American culture. He studied Talmud in the small amount or spare time he had and listened to records by the great cantors, Kussevitsky, Rosenblatt, Sirota" (*The Quitter*). Pekar's father sends him to a Talmudic school because he wants him to have a Jewish education. Similar to Ruby in *Jew Gangster*, the environment the second generation is raised in makes them a stranger to the life style of their parents. The second generation prefers to follow the modern life style of the land their parents immigrated to but they are also reluctant to sever their traditional ties. On one hand, the children of immigrants want to communicate with their parents, on the other hand, they are uncomfortable with their presence. For example, Pekar does not want his friends to see his father since he feels ashamed of "his Jewish accent, his old-fashioned work clothes, by his old truck" (*The Quitter*).



Fig. 2.18. Pekar's lack of communication with his working parents (*The Quitter*).

A similar obstacle exists between him and his mother. Pekar enters into first fights with others for childish reasons such as losing his hat. After these small controversies, Pekar turns to his mother, but he cannot find the support he expects. He states his dissatisfaction by saying, "So, once again I go my own way, because I was born in America and my ways seem alien to her, just like hers seem alien to me" (*The Quitter*). His sense of isolation is heightened with the lack of knowledge on his family history. He only knows few family members outside his parents and does not have any idea about what happened to his Polish relatives (*Harvey Pekar's Cleveland* 44). For Pekar, the neighborhood is another alternative for socializing but he does not get along with other children. His parents are concerned with Pekar's education since he does not have a chance to go to a Jewish school in this environment. They move to another area to have more contact with other Jewish immigrants and to send Pekar to a Hebrew school.

To make the readers aware of the surroundings, Pekar depicts the long history of Cleveland, and the neighborhoods his parents moved to. Pekar gives factual information about the ethnic population and information on the remarkable buildings in Cleveland. He illustrates the social and physical changes of the city and examines the famous people identified with Cleveland such as John D. Rockefeller and Theodore Rundtz (*Harvey Pekar's Cleveland* 21). He evaluates the city in terms of its Jewish population and says,

Immigrants continued to pour into the city. In 1930, Jews made up 9% of the city's population. With a Jewish population of 75,000, Cleveland became a major Jewish center. Also from Eastern Europe came a large stream of Slavic people. Partly because of fear or distaste for the latest immigrants, many more prosperous Clevelanders fled to the suburbs, and the city's tax base shrank. (*Harvey Pekar's Cleveland* 27)

Besides demographic changes, improvement in the city is exemplified with the Arcade building, Severance Hall serving as the home of the world famous Cleveland Orchestra, and the Terminal Tower, which Pekar finds very impressive (Fig. 2.19). These buildings make up the silhouette of Cleveland. Transportation develops with the rising population; streetcars replace buses, freeways and an airport is built and the transit system is extended (*Harvey Pekar's Cleveland* 31). The urbanization and industrialization also brings crime and unemployment. As Pekar puts it,

Cleveland was now regarded by many whites as an unsatisfactory place to live. Crime-ridden and physically decaying. Its population had fallen to 573,000 in 1980. The Brookings Institute, in 1975, ranked Cleveland as the second worst big city in the nation, in terms of social and economic problems. (*Harvey Pekar's Cleveland* 35)



Fig. 2.19. While Pekar narrates the history of the city and he points out the landmarks (*Harvey Pekar's Cleveland* 55).

Race and ethnic issues spread with the rising immigrant numbers and segregated areas appear in the city. Actually Pekar thinks “as one who has lived in Cleveland for seventy years ... the main problem has been race relations” (*Harvey Pekar's Cleveland* 41). Harvey's boyhood is marked with racial fights, which occur among youngsters, especially between African Americans and Jews. These fights reflect the tension between African American and Jewish communities. Pekar has a troubled childhood

and as he puts it: “The black kids had a nickname for me, ‘white cracker’. It seemed that every day I came home from school, I had to fight through a bunch of them. I had no friends, and felt totally alienated. I started to think of myself as racially inferior” (*The Quitter*). The cause of his alienation is not only psychological but also physical. The African American population starts to expand to the areas where other immigrants lived. In Pekar’s words, “from the late 1930s to the mid 1940s my neighborhood was changing rapidly from white to black, and by 1946, I was about the only white kid my age living on my street” (*The Quitter*). Pekar’s mother advises him to understand the African Americans in the following words: “Herschel, the negro people have been treated terribly in this country. Worse than the Jews. The Jews and negroes should work together” (*The Quitter*).

Pekar also gives information about the situation of African Americans in the city starting from the early 1900s when there were efforts to “segregate blacks and keep them out of the suburbs” (*Harvey Pekar’s Cleveland* 24). As a result, Cleveland became the second most segregated city in America, which causes “a great deal of social unrest, and in the 1960s two full scale riots” (Fig. 2.20). As Pekar puts it,

Most affected by Cleveland’s difficulties was the city’s black community. The east side’s Hough area had changed from predominantly white to black. 25% of Cleveland’s welfare cases were located there by 1964. Street violence was frequent. Finally in July 1966, riots broke in Hough and went on for 4 days. (*Harvey Pekar’s Cleveland* 34)

Along with the racial issues and deteriorating conditions, people started to move to the suburbs. Despite the efforts to rebuild the downtown areas such as, the low cost housing projects of the 1950s, crime continued and “the Clevelanders maintained their flight to the suburbs, and nothing much changed” (*Harvey Pekar’s Cleveland* 32). Jewish people, including Pekar’s parents, also move to the suburbs and leave places like 105<sup>th</sup> and Euclid, where “[i]n the 30s Jews were still plentiful ... Now it was a Skid Row area, wedged between two ghetto neighborhoods” (*Harvey Pekar’s Cleveland* 62). However moving to the suburbs does not solve racial problems. Whites living in Cleveland Heights, felt uncomfortable with the increasing black population and they moved to the outlying suburbs (*Harvey Pekar’s Cleveland* 73) because “white families with

kids are afraid to send their kids to school with Black children” (*American Splendor* vol. 34).



Fig 2.20. Pekar focuses on the ethnic and racial tensions in the city (*Harvey Pekar's Cleveland* 25).

As a result, “the inner-ring suburbs like Cleveland Heights don’t have the appeal they once did” (*Harvey Pekar's Cleveland* 73). Pekar does not approve of this kind of segregation. As he puts it,

I have seen neighborhoods get segregated too, I’ve lived in some myself ... There is this political movement called regionalism that might catch on ... I guess before it does, a lot of people are going to realize that it’s futile to build suburbs farther and farther away from central cities because of racial class distinctions. (*American Splendor* vol. 34)

Karen Brodtkin claims that the government’s policies are in favor of segregated suburbs. Institutions like Federal Housing Administration (FHA) and G.I. Bill of Rights follow a racist policy. As Brodtkin puts it, “The FHA believed in racial segregation. Throughout its history, it publicly and actively promoted restrictive covenants. Before the war, these [covenants] forbade sales to Jews and Catholics as well as to African American” (94). However, the situation for Jews and other white ethnicities change for the benefit of these groups. As Brodtkin states,

Urban renewal was the other side of the process by which Jewish and other working-class Euroimmigrants became middle class. It was the push to suburbia's seductive pull. The fortunate white survivors of urban renewal headed disproportionately for suburbia, where they could partake of prosperity and the good life. (96)

Becoming middle class was easier for Jewish people compared to the African American society. Pekar mentions how the Jewish population living in Cleveland felt uncomfortable with the rising black population. While the renewal projects were useless in reviving downtown (Fig. 2.21, 2.22) where black population was prominent, the suburban boom was beneficial for Jewish people. For Brodtkin, "The GI Bill and FHA and VA mortgages were forms of affirmative action that allowed male Jews and other Euro-American men to become suburban homeowners" (Brodtkin 97).



Fig. 2.21. Changing face of the city (*Harvey Pekar's Cleveland* 32).



Fig. 2.22. Moving to suburbs leaves the downtown ragged (*Harvey Pekar's Cleveland* 62).

Pekar's parents decide to move to the suburbs since "there are not enough Jewish people living here" (*American Splendor* vol. 17). His father wants Pekar to have a Jewish education and sends him to a Hebrew school in their new home (Fig. 2.23). The school becomes an institutional space where Jewish children learn to socialize with other children and learn to conform to social norms. The Hebrew school introduces Pekar to a Jewish cultural space where he learns social performances, the religious and cultural norms of the society.



Fig. 2.23. In their new home, Pekar's contact with Jewish culture increases (*The Quitter*).

Pekar's parents choose to move to a place with a Jewish population. This upward mobility is related to ethnic and racial markers. While black people were not accepted easily in the suburbs, white ethnicities such as Jews and Italians have a larger scale of accommodation preferences. Therefore, race "fit the needs of Jews to define themselves in a changing social landscape, allowing for emotional security and a degree of communal assertiveness without threatening their standing in the larger white world" (Goldstein 12). In the suburbs, Pekar notices the solidarity of the community, which was missing in their old home. They even attend to gatherings as a family (*Harvey Pekar's Cleveland* 49). They visit parks "to look at the cultural gardens located on the hills" (*Harvey Pekar's Cleveland* 53), but in Shaker Heights, where he is exposed to a "larger Jewish population" (*Harvey Pekar's Cleveland* 47), he "never fits in with richer kids" (47). Thus, he also remains an outsider in this environment as he describes in his own words:



When summer vacation came, things got worse. I mostly stayed on my own street, and the boys that lived there wouldn't speak to me. At least the black kids who lived in Cleveland would communicate with me, but the new neighborhood acted as if I didn't exist. (*The Quitter*)

The Jewish community tries to sustain awareness of their Jewish identity by living close to each other, but their attempts seem to fail since the second generation favors other concerns over group identity. Thus the sense of community becomes weaker. As Goldstein states,

Because Jews could no longer count on clear social boundaries to set them off from non-Jews, they looked to race as a transcendent means of understanding and expressing the ties that held them together as a group. In short, racial language helped them express their ongoing attachment to the social dimension of Jewishness even as the social distinctiveness of Jews began to weaken. (*The Price of Whiteness* 19)

Job opportunities and social status start to determine the choice of settlement. For example, Pekar's wife wants a divorce because she thinks she won't have a promising career in Cleveland Heights (*Harvey Pekar's Cleveland* 65). Pekar feels disappointed and says, "I didn't realize what an upwardly mobile person she wanted to be" (*Harvey Pekar's Cleveland* 83). As John Agnew suggests,

Interwoven in the concept of place suggested here, therefore, are three major elements locale, the settings in which social relations are constituted (these can be informal or institutional); location, the effects upon locales of social and economic processes operating at wider scales; and sense of place, the local "structure of feeling" . . . Place, therefore, refers to discrete if elastic areas in which settings for the constitution of social relations are located and with which people can identify. (263)

Cultural spaces establish social and ethnic relations and class contributes to the division of cultural geographies. Pekar's father is concerned with the religious and ethnic orientation of the environment and Pekar's wife rates the place in relation to class and career opportunities. These attitudes are interdependent, since an ethnic based geography is also connected to certain class awareness, such as the suburbs where Pekar's parents decide to move. Pekar's marriage ends because his wife has similar concerns with his parents. The failure of this marriage implies that Jewish values are being compromised in favor of adopting to mainstream society and on American way of life. For instance, secular Jews like Pekar, are not opposed to inter-marriages while such a union is unthinkable for a religious, orthodox Jewish person. According to the

National Jewish Population Survey in 1992, “52 percent of Jewish American who had married in the previous five years had chosen non-Jewish spouses” (Goldstein 232). On the other hand, it is impossible to make generalized statements about Jewish Americans’ approach to intermarriages and “Jewish life” since various viewpoints and controversies exist. Pekar does not define himself as a religious or orthodox Jew. However, he is part of the Jewish community and he observes and reflects Jewish cultural interactions in his stories.

## 2.5. SURVIVAL TECHNIQUES IN A NEW ENVIRONMENT

The cities and their inhabitants are affected by social conditions, and communities are created according to these social circumstances. Although early immigrants gathered around religious institutions such as synagogues, surviving in new communities required various methods. Early immigrants in Katchor’s *The Jew of New York* claimed a Jewish land in America and a community gathered around this idea. Maintaining a collective identity continued with the foundation of social institutions and charity organizations; the real Mordecia Noah, who is mentioned in the graphic novel, attempted to establish institutions for Jewish people such as a Jewish hospital (“Four Founders”). The Jewish community established synagogues, foundations, and fraternal establishments in the areas they settled. As Howard B. Rock states,

Once immigrants acquired a foothold in the city and overcame the anxieties of subsistence, they sought deeper bonds in benevolent and fraternal organizations, adding to those of the native born and immigrants of an earlier generation. Though Jews composed less than 5 percent of the population, no less than ninety-three Jewish organizations flourished between 1843 and 1860. (159)

Charities were established even before the 1840s and Mordecai Noah became the president of the Hebrew Benevolent Society, which “originated in Shearith Israel in 1822” (*Haven of Liberty* 163). Accordingly, the Shearith Batsal society, in *The Jew of New York*, functions as a charity where Jews gather and perform rituals and other fund raising events (Fig. 2.24). With the increasing population, these social institutions gain various functions. Charities function to gather the community around similar concerns.

Working together to actualize a certain aim helps to build group awareness. As Deborah Dash Moore puts it,

Jews had not always felt free to imagine the city as their special place. Indeed, not until mass immigration from Europe piled up their numbers, from the tens of thousands to the hundreds of thousands, had Jews laid claim to New York and influenced its politics and culture. (*Haven of Liberty* xiii)

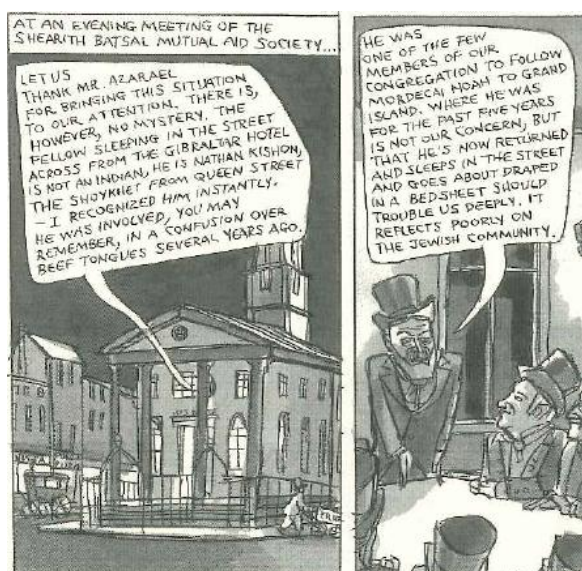


Fig. 2.24. In *The Jew of New York* Shearith Batsal members gather for tzedakah, a Jewish charity or donation (57).

In Joe Kubert's *Jew Gangster*, the first generation immigrants gather around the synagogues during the Depression. However, Ruby Kaplan refuses to follow his father's path, and what the society expects from him. He quits school and seeks to make an easy living through illegal activities as a gangster. When he accompanies his parents to the synagogue, his disinterest in the ceremony is obvious. Even the Rabbi says, "I haven't seen you since your bar mitzvah" (*Jew Gangster* 23), which indicates his reluctance to follow Jewish traditions.

Ruby becomes a gangster in order to protect his community but this decision does not bring the respect he envisions, it actually estranges him further. Michael Berkovitz has aptly noted, "The paradox for Jewish criminals was that 'success' in their careers required integration into the larger, non-jewish world" ("Crime and Redemption" 105). Ruby symbolizes the wish for assimilation: a poor young immigrant boy wants to be wealthy and powerful by adapting the life style of the dominant society. For Ruby, who

grows up in a poor neighborhood, “gangsters embodied the American ideal of limitless possibility” (Bergoffen 101).

Actually, Ruby possesses a sense of community and identity. Although they used illegal methods, gangsters “at crucial moments, protected other Jews in America and around the world” (“Jews in America”). Ruby supports his mother financially, finds jobs for his friends, and attacks those who beat up his friend. Ruby seems to have a code of conduct when dealing with those who have wronged the community. Ethnic hoodlums were believed to provide protection and Ruby behaves accordingly. As Maffi states,

Prejudice undoubtedly existed, but it rarely took the form of overt racism. Mainly, it expressed itself in the “protection of neighborhood” and in street gangs’ activity—history (the B’howery B’hoys, the Plug Uglies, the Dead Rabbits had been famous gangs in the mid-nineteenth century) and now became common to all immigrant groups, further complicating already complex urban geography of the area with innumerable territories and borderlines. (129)

The crime organization Ruby is associated with advocates heroism. The Jewish gangsters are “primarily that of an ‘organizer,’ a behind-the-scenes tactician and expert in money matters” (Gutman 105). They defend their community against anti-Semitic attacks. They bust and kill Italian gangsters because they had cut a Jewish boy’s throat (Fig 2.25). The leader of the gang band is called “Monk,” which refers to a form of religious devotion. Another religious attribution is the big boss, who controls this criminal network, is depicted in a rabbi outfit. Kubert indicates that even though these gangsters have nothing to do with religion, some of their motivations are based on their collective identity. The head of the “organization” clearly states that he is trying to create a powerful Jewish community, he says “[h]ere in Brooklyn we are building a network of power... which will be felt beyond these borders” (*Jew Gangster* 138). He uses a religious discourse and talks about suffering, forgiveness, and refers to the “good book,” but he claims revenge at the same time since “elsewhere Jews have been slaughtered for no reason but that they are Jews” (*Jew Gangster* 138). The evolution of this kind of organizations is described as follows:

Crime patterns were essentially similar for the various ethnic groups. In the early years of settlement, loose organizations were born out of the need to preserve identity, to protect the small clusters of immigrants, and to channel desires and frustrations the official organizations often did not meet. Social isolation, ignorance of language and mores, competition in the labor market made them an

unavoidable reality. In time, a stable structure evolved, often molded upon similar societies back home, and these organizations became real gangs in the Lower East Side's variegated underworld, still very much neighborhood-centered and generally linked—in a subterranean way—to the community's economic potentates. (Maffi 129).

Revenge is often in the form of violent actions. For Bergoffen, in order to “represent gangsters as noteworthy Jews, graphic violence must be sanitized” (94). However, the frames including violence are abundant and contrary to Bergoffen's claim, violence is depicted as a means to protect the Jewish community and discourage anti-Semitic attacks by indicating the power of Jewish men. As a historical figure, Meyer Lansky, “one of America's most powerful gangsters, also embraced violence as a necessary means of Jewish self-defense in an environment pervaded with anti-Semitic menace” (Norwood 173).



Fig. 2.25. Jewish gangsters decide to pay a visit to Italian gangsters and the depiction of the frame foreshadows the future criminal activity (*Jew Gangster* 100).

In the graphic novel, defending the Jewish community is one of the salient points carried out by gangsters (Fig 2.26). Kubert narrates Jewish gangsters' attractive qualities, which include their sense of loyalty and willingness to defend the Jewish immigrants. Although the novel is based on Ruby's individual life, “If a community agrees traumatic events occurred and weaves this fact into its identity, then collective memory survives and individual memory can find a place (albeit transformed) within that landscape” (Kirmayer 190). Jewish immigrants' experiences in the Depression

reflect on Kubert's drawings. While the character Ruby reflects a slice of life from the tenements, the immigrant life in the environment becomes the background setting.



Fig. 2.26. Ethnic hoodlums prosecute their own way of justice (*Jew Gangster* 103).

On the other hand, violence could be turned into a favorable representation. Boxing becomes the leading sport to prove the success and power of Jewish society. For Michael Berkowitz “Jewish boxers in the United States partook in the sport’s intimacy with criminality” and “muscular Jews, especially boxers became important cultural icons in the United States, Britain, Germany, and the Netherlands” (427). Harvey Pekar is interested in sports and he attempts to start a career as an American football player, but quits it because of some controversies with his coach. Although he does not have any interest in boxing, along with other Jewish kids, he cannot “help feeling good about” (*The Quitter*) the victory of a Jewish middleweight boxer. Jewish sports heroes were popular at that time, such as Benny Leonard, an idolized boxer. As Linden comments on Leonard’s idolization,

Jewish fighters had to prove themselves worthy of the sport, given stereotypes of Jewish men as either bookish intellectuals—and therefore passive and feminine—or factory workers whose bodies were weakened by tuberculosis. In Leonard’s choice of blue and white boxing trunks decorated with a large Mogen David, he wore his Jewish identity in the ring for all to see. . . . Leonard took control of his own representation and also served as a role model, disrupting prevailing ideas about Jewish bodies. (288)

Pekar enters into fistfights and he finds a parallelism between himself and the Jewish boxers. He says, “this indicated that they weren’t in love with boxing, just wanted to make a living until something better came along ... I was proud of a lot of Jewish Boxers, like Benny Leonard, considered one of the finest lightweights of all time” (*The Quitter*). Pekar fights to be recognized by his friends and he justifies his actions through racial interests. He describes one of his opponents: “A while later, I scored a more impressive victory over a guy I really disliked ... This guy was German and his parents were rumored to be pro-Nazi, he and I hadn’t gotten along well for years” (Fig 2.27). After he beats Schultz, his friends support and congratulate him. Even though he states that he is not in favor of beating others, he knows that being a fighter provides him with the respect he desires.



Fig. 2.27. Pekar feels that fighting provides self-confidence and authority (*The Quitter*).

Boxing is important for ethnicities since they want to feel superior to other groups. In *Dropsie Avenue*, when Eisner depicts a boxing panel, in which the boxers are Irish and Italian, the audience praises the boxer’s victory by saying “you beat Irish Mike! You are the new pride of the neighborhood” (66) and a celebration is held at an Italian Restaurant (67). The ongoing competition among ethnic immigrants finds a fertile ground in boxing. Instead of emphasizing the fair and healthy competition among ethnic groups, boxing becomes a symbol for showing off the power of the group (Fig 2.28).



Fig. 2.28 Boxing is a competition among ethnic minorities in *Dropsie Avenue* (66).

Violence, boxing, illegal organizations might be functional in protecting a group or it might help people feel as a part of a group. People express themselves in boxing and these activities take the place of religious organizations. In *The Jew of New York*, the synagogues or religious charities are more effective for the community members while the understanding of collectivity changes and the religious institutions' prosperity declines in the other graphic novels. In Will Eisner's *A Life Force*, synagogues are not visible, but there is an indication that Jewish immigrants intend to transmit their traditions to the next generations. However, social conditions are not very heartening for a religious education. In the third chapter, Will Eisner depicts children who take Hebrew lessons and speak of preparations for a bar mitzvah conducted by Rabbi Bensohn (*A Life Force* 31). Those lessons are for people "who could not afford the cheder" (*A Life Force* 31). Like Ruby, children are unwilling to listen and the rabbi has an authoritative, stern attitude towards students. Moreover, the rabbi has his own problems and cannot properly educate the children. In *The Quitter*, Harvey Pekar is also reluctant to receive religious education, but continues his education since he wants to make his parents proud. He also finds temporary jobs through Jewish vocational service, which shows that Jewish institutions manage to help the community members.

In the first chapter of *A Life Force*, the harsh life conditions of the Great Depression are exemplified in a survival story of a Jewish immigrant, Jacob Shtarkah. Jacob has earned his living by building a study hall for a shul, a synagogue, but now he has lost his job.



His unemployment causes him to lose his motivation. He questions the purpose of life, the will of God and compares his life to a cockroach. His membership and job in the synagogue fails to bring him rewards or some form of compensation. Social charity and fraternity organizations and synagogues lose their functions and underground organizations and questionable “connections” handle financial and cultural problems. In *A Life Force*, ethnic mobsters take advantage of the Depression. Jacob seeks an Italian mobster’s, Angelo’s, help to bring Frieda Gold from Germany to the United States. Jacob is not trying to bring Frieda for the sake of helping a Jewish person; he actually wants to marry her. For this reason, one night, he quarrels with his wife, who does not want a divorce, and leaves the house (*A Life Force* 122). It turns out that Frieda Gold is not in love with Jacob but she acts as if she is since she needs shelter and help. She easily abandons him after communicating with her daughter in Palestine and when Jacob offers to go with her, she refuses his offer (*A Life Force* 136). Jacob turns back to his ex-wife and pretends not to be a “schlemiel,” a loser (*A Life Force* 134). The love triangle shows that relationships are superficial and the characters are interested in personal gains.

When working conditions are deteriorated, solidarity is sought through strikes and labor unions. Communist and socialist ideas are embraced as an option for better living conditions. However, in *A Life Force* this option causes separation rather than unity. Willie participates in labor unions and he thinks “unions are the only effective weapon against the capitalist exploitation” (Fig. 2.29). However, the depiction of the underground meeting implies that it is a secret and illegal organization that aims to become provocative. His father has objections since he is forced to become a member of a union and his employer is assaulted by mobsters who want to “organize” his shop (*A Life Force* 70). Willie has to make a decision about his support when his friend asks “it is either them [Willie’s family] or the revolution! . . . Choose now! You in or not, Willie?” (*A Life Force* 74). Willie prefers to take the side of his family.



Fig. 2.29. Political used as a tool for survival of the community (*A Life Force* 72).

Pekar associates the socialist movement with complicated family relationships (Fig. 2.30). Pekar defines his neighborhood as the most communist populated neighborhood in Cleveland (*Not the Israel* 12). He constantly mentions her mother's sympathy for communism. She asks him to pass out political leaflets to support party candidates with communist ideologies. Pekar thinks, "The fulfillment of the communist dream seemed more important to them than the fulfillment of religious prophecy" (*Not the Israel* 15). His mother, although a Zionist, does not care for Pekar's religious education since she "abhorred religion" (*Not the Israel* 26). In this sense, political ideas in Jewish families cause versatile and complex relations.



Fig. 2.30. Pekar feels that his mother's ideological stance affects their relationship negatively (*The Quitter*).

*Jew Gangster* depicts labor union struggles from a different perspective. Jewish mobsters are hired by a businessman to disperse the union demonstration by force. As Daniel Katz states,

[I]nfamous garment manufacturers resorted to violence and public humiliations to break strikes, including the hiring of gangsters and prostitutes to beat down women picketers . . . In New York City, as in Russia, the face of the oppressor in the sweatshop and the modern factory was most often another Jew, sometimes a compatriot . . . their concentration in the Lower East Side allowed Jews to form labor unions, fraternal societies, newspapers, and political organizations that were mutually supportive and bound together by the growing socialist movement dedicated to fighting back in the war against garment manufacturers. (195)

In the graphic novels that this study has dealt with, Jewish immigrants' approach to the labor unions is multifaceted. Members of the Jewish community may support either side, but obviously socialist ideas have affected their behavior and allegiances. The influence of socialism on Jewish life is open to various interpretations. Nevertheless, the socialist movement played an effective role in the assimilation and integration of Jewish immigrants. Rather than a fraternity based on ethnic and religious connections, the working conditions unite workers from different groups. On the other hand, anti-unionists and employers were not concerned with cultural and religious issues but with increasing their profits. Whether the source is religious, illegal or political, the Jewish community has gained a resourceful power in New York. As Polland and Soyler point out,

As New York Jews shaped their own local Jewish polity, they also took steps to aid Jews throughout the world. New York became the unofficial capital of the Jewish world. Not only was it now home to more Jews than any other city in the history of the Jewish people and not only did many of the world's most prosperous Jews live there . . . From their relatively safe haven, New Yorkers took the lead in organizing American Jewry's political and relief efforts for Jews abroad. Many of these same New York—based agencies mobilized to counter anti-Semitism in the United States as well. (138)

While the land becomes a symbol for the collectivity of Jewish immigrants, the institutions in the city, such as political groups, labor unions, crime and religious organizations are analyzed in relation to their distance and contribution to the sense of Jewishness. City and land images are recognizable in this context. For example, the graphic narratives use stereotypes associated with the cities. Stereotypical characters are functional in creating shortcuts between the outside world and the cultural background

of the people. Cityscapes and landscapes interact with the cultural codes since the stereotypes are presented in these contextual frames. Stereotypes carry prejudicial assumptions but their iconic value contributes to the progress of storytelling. In order to mediate on the cultural lore, the artists create visually interpretable identities and produce simple and understandable stereotypical images. Since the characters live, act and socialize in a certain space, the environment becomes a product of their cultural and social conditions. The body becomes an image for reproducing and rendering identities, landscape and cityscape become cultural representations that reveal the characters' physical surroundings and psychological features.

On the other hand, both the environment and the characters may transform throughout the graphic novels. The rapid change and development in the cities reverberate on the characters who constantly adapt themselves to the versatile living conditions. As a result of this compliance, people transform with or through their environments, which is also visibly altered in the graphic narratives. In *Jew Gangster*, the lawless and corrupted world of the criminals is reflected with the filthy and dark streets of Brooklyn. Eisner's frames restrict the characters, who are also stuck within their stereotypical images, in cyclical stories. *The Jew of New York*, produces its own merchants, cynical citizens and multicultural society. Harvey Pekar traces the images of Jewish culture in his daily life experiences as a secular Jewish American. When the cities go through a construction, people construct themselves to keep up with the evolving and homogenizing society and they develop alternative survival mechanisms.

## CONCLUSION

Narratives using text with visuals are being published extensively and studying graphic novels has become more prominent in academia. Graphic narratives have already proven to handle social, ethnic, economic, historic, and politic issues effectively. Several published works have demonstrated that graphic narratives are unique in storytelling through their use of panels, gutters, colors, speech balloons, words and images. The hybrid character or combining images and texts has allowed artists/writers to create powerful stories and to provoke new discussions. Although graphic narratives, as comic books, were considered as a part of popular culture and anti-elitist art, starting from the 1980s, with the publication of Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, several sophisticated themes, such as trauma, illness, old age, immigration, cultural change and personal growth have been the subject matters of the ever growing field of graphic narratives.

Jewish American identity is also explored in graphic novels since Jewish American artists have been productive in this genre since the beginning of the first publication of comics. There are several works related to Jewish themes, such as the Holocaust,<sup>8</sup> immigration and identity conflict. It is possible to view Jewish cultural elements in different representations of characters and landscapes. Sociological and personal contexts are depicted with Jewish identity and the artists/writers mirror such problems in graphic narratives. Even though there are academic works focusing on the relationship between the Jewish American identity and graphic narratives, these works tend to examine superhero comics or Holocaust themed graphic novels.<sup>9</sup> Since graphic

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<sup>8</sup> Holocaust themed graphic novels include Art Spiegelman, *A Survivor's Tale* (New York: Pantheon, 1986); Joe Kubert, *Yossel* (New York: ibooks, 2003); Miriam Katin, *We Are on Our Own* (Montreal: Drawn&Quarterly, 2006); S. Hanala Stander, *My Parents Went through the Holocaust and All I Got Was This Lousy T-shirt* (Santa Ana: Matter Inc., 2006); Bernice Eisenstein, *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* (New York:Riverhead, 2007); Martin Lemelman, *Mendel's Daughter: A Memoir* (New York: Free Press, 2007); Miriam Katin, *Letting It Go* (Montreal: Drawn&Quarterly, 2013).

<sup>9</sup>Academic books focusing on the Holocaust in graphic novels include Deborah R. Geis (Ed.), *Considering Maus: Approaches to Art Spiegelman's "Survivor's Tale" of the Holocaust* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2010); Derek Parker Royal (Ed.), *Unfinalized Moments: Essays in the*

narratives are part of an inventive and creative medium in terms of storytelling and narrative techniques, there is still a large slice of uncovered topics and less examined issues waiting for exploration. The Jewish American artists/writers' works analyzed in this study focus particularly on Jewish American themes. The use of images, colors, frames, and speech balloons create an intriguing structure, which allows for analyzing the connection between the narrative techniques and Jewish references.

This study has examined the relationship between Jewish American culture and the landscape through the following works of Jewish American artists/writers: Will Eisner's *The Contract with God Trilogy* (*A Contract With God* 1978, *A Life Force* 1988, *Dropsie Avenue* 1995), Ben Katchor's *The Jew of New York* (1999), Joe Kubert's *Jew Gangster* (2005), and Harvey Pekar's *The Quitter* (2005) and *Harvey Pekar's Cleveland* (2012). The first chapter of this study has focused on different functions of images such as metaphorical, intertextual and psychological dimensions. These images include landscapes and are interwoven with transitions and frames. The representation of characters expands on to the landscape and there is an indisputable correlation between the characters and the landscape. In *The Jew of New York*, Ben Katchor creates connections between the landscapes and characters via images and frames. He draws petty objects that seem unimportant for the story, but opens a space for the reader to follow the story. He also makes use of imitated documents, posters and flyers that belong to the period in which the story takes place. These pseudo-realistic images refer to past events in a fictionalized manner and reveal daily life. Since there are various sub-stories, there are multiple made-up documents focusing on various actions. While a banner apprises a coming play, another document reveals a speech about the lost tribe of Indians. The documents are illustrated as full-page panels or placed without panels to attract the readers' attention and lead them to ponder upon the background of the actions. The story progresses around a play about Mordecai Noah, and Katchor constructs multidirectional storylines for the characters who are somehow related to each other. One of the common points of the characters is their Jewish associations and this association is depicted with images such as a handkerchief decorated with Jewish

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*Development of Contemporary Jewish American Narrative* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2011); Elizabeth R. Baer, *The Golem Redux* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2012), Stuart Hood and Litza Jansz, *Introducing Fascism: A Graphic Guide* (London: Icon Books 2013).

symbols. Katchor narrates the emergence of the Jewish garment industry through this image while presenting the function and significance of these images in daily life. *The Jew of New York* offers an exclusive, complex and thought-provoking narration with Hebrew letters, realistic pamphlets, stereotypes and reference to historical facts to explore the Jewish American identity in the nineteenth century. The historical, mythological and religious search for a promised land becomes a fantastic and sarcastic voyage to reveal the relationship between New York and Jewish American identity.

Images present the various aspects of Jewish culture and frames construct borders and parallels between landscapes and characters. The Soda Water Company is associated with Jewishness and it refers to soda water as one of the connotative elements for the Jews living in New York. The founder of the company asks for financial support from a Middle Eastern Jewish immigrant and the depiction of the water system indicates that the Jewish population and culture has already spread all over the city. On the other hand, there is a utopian society, which blends scientific facts and religious doctrines to form a kind of sect. This society avoids urban life and uses Hebrew letters in their isolated dwelling place. Frames present this isolation and integration and they contribute to the narration of the multilayered storylines while portraying a coherent picture of different lives. Katchor's fragmented depictions of different characters are related with organizations such as the Soda Water Company, the Sheriath Batsal and the Ararat society. Katchor narrates stories with authentic characters and these organizations reveal the general picture of the setting. He uses postmodern narrative elements like metafiction and black humor, and every panel of the book is filled with literary and social issues. Although depicting a connection between land and identity has been explored in textual narratives, the unique elements of graphic narratives create a visual awareness, which is worthy of commentary.

Will Eisner is one of the forerunners of graphic narratives. He does not employ postmodern narrative techniques as Katchor does, but he breaks the classical comic storytelling conventions and is among the initial artists who employ a realistic story line. In *The Contract with God Trilogy*, he presents various ethnic groups living in the tenements. His drawings tend to associate the dramatic characters with tenement buildings. The immigrants' survival story in a new area is his major theme and he

emphasizes social awareness and collective identity. The atmosphere in the city reveals the moods the characters experience. New conditions, hardships and burdens of modern life force the characters to adopt new life styles. These characters try to act together and build a stable society and gather around certain virtues and ethnic identities, which work to some extent. However, modern life creates obstacles in sustaining a collective identity. Jacob Shtarkah, a Jewish American carpenter, is fired from his job as a synagogue constructor but he tries to survive by employing various strategies. The hardships the characters face and their adaptation problems are depicted through elements in the living area, such as streetlamps, ruined buildings and desolate streets. Shtarkah finds himself in a dead end street, contemplating on a cockroach and comparing his own survival to the struggle of the insect. Sometimes, Eisner's physical descriptions turn into abstract and psychological representations of the characters.

Eisner's characters have different stories but they are connected with each other since they live in the same settlement. The tenements are their common ground and the buildings function as physical and psychological markers. The desperate conditions of the Depression era permeates the atmosphere of the tenement buildings and the mood of dwellers. Eisner's frames contribute to the isolated and restricted character representations. While his panels surround the tenements and disconnect the buildings from the remaining part of the city, the frames reveal the individual stories in the context of the neighborhood. Eisner uses natural framing in his stories, such as windows, doors, buildings, and rooms, which create cyclical stories since all characters end up being confined in the physical borders of the tenements. Although some attempt to break this cycle and actualize their "American Dream," these ventures end in failure. Frimme Hersh, who used to be a religious Jewish immigrant, feels disappointed and depressed since he interprets his daughter's death as a breach of his contract with God. His depiction in the frames shows his constraint. The street singer is also entrapped in the streets and the narrator seems to suggest that he will not be able to break the vicious cycle of life in the tenements will continue to sing in the streets.

In *Jew Gangster*, Joe Kubert portrays similar characters, but he focuses on the crime world in the tenements. In a society suffering from the Depression, Ruby Kaplan chooses to join a group of Jewish gangster group to have better living conditions and to



protect his community. Visual representations and repeated images preserve and transmit this traumatic period. Especially the images characterizing the city such as the railroads, devastated streets and clotheslines are used repeatedly either as a nexus between Jewish American culture and the city or as a reminder of traumatic experiences. Kubert's transitions provide a realistic approach to the period and ground his story in a recognizable atmosphere. The street sellers, beggars, and the picture show represent an era in which immigrants have to find innovative techniques to survive in daily life. His black and white color preferences contribute to the gloomy atmosphere of the story. Drawn on black pages, his panels—which have similarities to film noir—contribute to the pessimistic atmosphere of the story.

The frames, like images, create a strong connection between the characters and the city. The characters are depicted with city views, and frames provide closures of these scenes. To achieve his purpose, Kubert uses bird's eye views, crowded places, and speech balloons coming out of windows and streets. Panels do not only depict characters to further their stories, but they also illustrate distinctive background images to reveal the cultural and social codes of the landscape. Kosher restaurants, candy shops, and children playing in the streets are the most common images depicted in the backgrounds of frames. All these images serve to represent Ruby's entrapment in his neighborhood. Despite his wish to break free from his environment, the crime world engulfs him. The cinema and amusement park frames are given in larger sizes to denote a possible escape, but Ruby's fate seems to be sealed similar to the other characters living in the tenements.

In his autobiographical works, *The Quitter*, and *Harvey Pekar's Cleveland*, Pekar uses images and scenes from daily life and events. Both of the works include his childhood memories portrayed with city depictions. The reader repeatedly sees characteristic Cleveland buildings such as the Terminal Tower and the public library. The sense of space is given with these images, which imply that Pekar's memory is associated with city scenes. His first friendships are drawn among the residential areas or his formal Jewish education is illustrated in the new area his parents have moved. He is the writer, not the illustrator of his life story, which explains the difference in the drawing of both books. His narratives, nevertheless, always progress within the cityscapes and the frame

progression is deliberately kept simple to sustain the focus on the narrative voice and stories along with the background images. The buildings are represented from different angles in different contexts and the narration of the history of Cleveland presents Pekar's intention to create a connection between the city and his memories while narrating his story.

The second chapter of this study has examined the stereotypical characters and their contribution to the narrative and the content. The transformation of the characters and the environment, and the interaction between them are explored through the narratives. Stereotypical characters are used as a narrative tool and they provide recognizable images for the readers to participate in the story, although they obviously entail prejudices. The images of landscapes/cityscapes work together with the character depictions whose emotions and ideas are reflected in the environmental images. In *The Jew of New York*, there are various Jewish stereotypes: an authentic Jew from the Middle East with his traditional clothes, a greedy merchant, and a Jewish scholar who searches for onomatopoeic new words. There is also a German Jew, who represents part of the Jewish community. Another Jew walks half naked in streets of the city and is mistaken for a Native American while Moishe Ketzelschlag, who used to be Jewish, acts like an animal. All these character representations create a vivid picture of the modern metropolis, New York, and they present the political and social issues of the period.

The transformation of the city and characters are visualized together. As the city moves toward becoming an industrialized trade center, merchants, entrepreneurs, politicians and the growing population are depicted in the panels. New investments such as the Soda Water Company gain prominence and the anti-Semitic Prof. Solidus states his irritation about the improvement of the Jewish community. The community in the rural area is depicted in contrast to the community in the urban area. The panels briefly illustrate the transformation of the city from the first European settlers to the modern streets of Broadway. This change is reflected in the clothes and attitudes of the characters. The visitors and immigrants flooding to the city create the multicultural atmosphere in which various people from different backgrounds could be observed. The growth of the Jewish community is evidenced in the growing size of the Jewish cemetery. Nathan Kishon, who returns to the city after five years to join the new

society, shows how fast the city changes and how people integrate into the society. Ketzelschlag is an example of those who may straggle away from the path and disintegrate themselves.

In *Jew Gangster*, a melodramatic plot and stereotypical characters are used to represent the historical context of the story in identifiable frames. To reconstruct the social issues concerning the first and the second generation Jewish Americans of the Depression era, the protagonist is depicted through decodable and repetitive drawings. Ethnic gangster stereotypes appear as the illegal protection force of their communities. The main character, Ruby Kaplan, joins a Jewish gangster group because he believes that this is a shortcut to actualize his American Dream and a way to protect his family. Hardworking Jewish mother and sister, and shiksa stereotypes become distinguishing images in separating the good and bad paths for Ruby. As he adapts to the crime world, he legitimizes his affairs by viewing himself as the savior of his people. At the end of the story, a religious figure appears as the head of the mafia and asks him to build connections and protect Jews all over the world.

As Ruby Kaplan transforms into a gangster, his environment changes. He first notices a gangster when he is playing with his friends in the neighborhood. Later, Ruby immitates him and dresses like the other gangsters in his group. The streets and the buildings are always dark, ragged and filthy; but as he becomes more affiliated with the gangsters, he starts attending the billiards pool parlor where the group meets. The cars also indicate the change in his environment since the members of the mafia drive cars to take care of their business and, after a while, Ruby also starts to drive a car. Kubert depicts the character's transformation with contrastive images such as poverty-luxury, darkness-whiteness and narrowness-wideness. Since the story is about the crime world, his compositions balance realism and action with active points of view, city depictions and stereotypical characters. The reader feels the heavy mood of the Depression era as Ruby transforms into a mobster in the classical visual style of gangster stories.

In *The Contract with God Trilogy*, stereotypical characters are the people living in the tenements. They agonize under the heavy burdens of the Depression but they cannot help dreaming of a bright future with luxurious pastimes. However, they are entrapped in their stereotypical representations in the tenements. Izzy and Frimme Hersh are two

similar Jewish stereotypes. Izzy is a short, hairy peddler who becomes rich after buying a share in the tenements and he constantly ponders upon his material gains. Frimme Hersh, once a religious Jew, becomes rich in a similar way and ends up as a greedy, mean landlord. These characters transform from one stereotype to another and their visual representations reveal their physical and psychological conditions. The outfits point out their drastic change and their former and later depictions present this contrast. Again, there are mobsters, bulky, dominant Jewish mothers and cynical, puny Jewish boys.

However, the character transformations are not always negative or prejudiced. A rabbi and a priest take steps to actualize an inter-faith marriage. Thus, the relationship between a Jewish boy and an Italian girl, despite all unfavorable comments, is completed with the marriage ceremony. Interaction between different ethnicities indicates that the homogeneous nature of the areas is changing. Time and hard conditions cause the decay of the tenements and restoration causes change in the ethnic population. The darkest-skinned people live in worse conditions of the tenements since it is cheaper. Later, new residences, which are built for wealthy people, take the place of the old tenements and a new neighborhood appears. Eisner depicts this transformation starting with the arrival of the first European settlers. He points out that immigrants feel a necessity to change their environment, since they feel disturbed by the new comers, irrelative of their ethnicity. Eisner's depiction of the transformation states that the ethnicities gradually integrate into the dominant society as the ethnic tenements are evacuated and rebuilt.

Harvey Pekar's stories generally take place in a mostly white homogenous society in Cleveland. Nevertheless, Pekar's childhood stories are heavily influenced by the ethnic districts of the city. He narrates his childhood stories in the environment where he is the only white child. His family later moves into an area where the Jewish population is higher. This move into an suburban area indicates that Jewish groups have the option to live in the white-populated neighborhoods while African Americans are restricted in upward mobility. Later, Pekar narrates the relationship between the Jewish and African American communities and depicts the riots and living conditions of African Americans. Pekar's later stories are not directly concerned with the Jewish life style

since he is not deeply engaged in Judaism, although he views religion as a heritage and as a part of his identity. He is not particularly concerned with living in a Jewish populated area, but he depicts stories related to Jewish people he encounters in his daily life and he interviews Jewish people to find out and write about his family's past. His autobiographic stories include Jewish elements and reveal Jewish Americans in daily life situations. While he narrates the brief history of Cleveland, he states the statistics about the Jewish population and narrows down the general history of Jewish immigrants in Cleveland to his family history. His parents' immigration history, their life in Poland and their survival story in America are integrated themes. Jewish jokes, rituals, and traditions present the cultural elements in Pekar's secular life. Stories also explore immigrants' survival techniques with the changing conditions.

In conclusion, graphic novels narrate stories through words and images. Narrative tools such as frames, gutters, speech balloons, fonts and page layouts contribute to the construction of the narrative and create a unique medium. Graphic narratives are able to render time, landscapes, and stories with multiple ethnic, social and ideological themes. Jewish American artists/writers use graphic narratives to reveal the cultural, religious and social elements of Jewish community in their works. Landscapes and characters are interrelated and places are connected with the identity of the characters. Images reflect the psychological, physical and cultural settings. The images included in city depictions are connected to the character's cultural and personal background and they constitute recognizable scenes for the reader. Repeated images serve to create cyclical stories. Frames are used to convey constraints, restrictions, psychological and physical spaces for the characters and they determine the storylines. Their shapes, sizes, order and focus follow a certain pattern to construct the multilayered stories. Since stereotypes are decodable images for the reader, the artists use them to reveal certain background information. The cities and environmental images depict the social change and physical transformations of the city. The transformation of places and characters trigger the evolution of Jewish culture, identity and community.

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## APPENDIX 1: ORIGINALITY REPORT



**HACETTEPE UNIVERSITY  
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES  
THESIS/DISSERTATION ORIGINALITY REPORT**

**HACETTEPE UNIVERSITY  
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES  
TO THE DEPARTMENT OF AMERICAN CULTURE AND LITERATURE**

Date: 04/06/2015

Thesis Title / Topic: Jewish American Graphic Narratives: Landscapes, Stereotypes and Transformation in Will Eisner, Ben Katchor, Joe Kubert and Harvey Pekar.

According to the originality report obtained by myself/my thesis advisor by using the Turnitin plagiarism detection software and by applying the filtering options stated below on 04/06/2015 for the total of 138 pages including the a) Title Page, b) Introduction, c) Main Chapters, and d) Conclusion sections of my thesis entitled as above, the similarity index of my thesis is 2 %.

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I respectfully submit this for approval.

**Name Surname:** Bülent Ayyıldız  
**Student No:** N11227104  
**Department:** American Culture and Literature  
**Program:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Status:**  Masters  Ph.D.  Integrated Ph.D.

14.07.2015

*Bülent Ayyıldız*

### ADVISOR APPROVAL

APPROVED.

*Bilge Mutluay*

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Bilge Mutluay Çetintaş



**HACETTEPE ÜNİVERSİTESİ**  
**SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ**  
**YÜKSEK LİSANS/DOKTORA TEZ ÇALIŞMASI ORJİNALLİK RAPORU**

**HACETTEPE ÜNİVERSİTESİ**  
**SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ**  
**AMERİKAN KÜLTÜRÜ VE EDEBİYATI ANABİLİM DALI BAŞKANLIĞI'NA**

Tarih: 04/06/2015

Tez Başlığı / Konusu: Yahudi Amerikalı Yazarların Grafik Anlatıları: Will Eisner, Ben Katchor, Joe Kubert ve Harvey Pekar'ın eserlerinde Mekan, Basmakalıp Karakterler ve Dönüşüm.

Yukarıda başlığı/konusu gösterilen tez çalışmamın a) Kapak sayfası, b) Giriş, c) Ana bölümler ve d) Sonuç kısımlarından oluşan toplam 138 sayfalık kısmına ilişkin, 04/06/2015 tarihinde şahsım danışmanım tarafından Turnitin adlı intihal tespit programından aşağıda belirtilen filtrelemeler uygulanarak alınmış olan orijinallik raporuna göre, tezimin benzerlik oranı % 2'dir.

Uygulanan filtrelemeler:

- 1- Kabul/Onay ve Bildirim sayfaları hariç,
- 2- Kaynakça hariç
- 3- Alıntılar hariç
- 4- 5 kelimedenden daha az örtüşme içeren metin kısımları hariç

Hacettepe Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Tez Çalışması Orijinallik Raporu Alınması ve Kullanılması Uygulama Esasları'nı inceledim ve bu Uygulama Esasları'nda belirtilen azami benzerlik oranlarına göre tez çalışmamın herhangi bir intihal içermediğini; aksinin tespit edileceği muhtemel durumda doğabilecek her türlü hukuki sorumluluğu kabul ettiğimi ve yukarıda vermiş olduğum bilgilerin doğru olduğunu beyan ederim.

Gereğini saygılarımla arz ederim.

**Adı Soyadı:** Bülent Ayyıldız  
**Öğrenci No:** N11227104  
**Anabilim Dalı:** Amerikan Kültürü ve Edebiyatı  
**Programı:**  
**Statüsü:**  Y.Lisans  Doktora  Bütünleşik Dr.

14.07.2015

*Bayraktar*

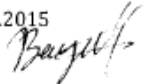
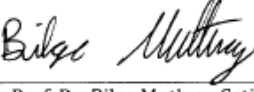
**DANIŞMAN ONAYI**

UYGUNDUR.

*Bilge Mutluay*

Doç. Dr. Bilge Mutluay Çetintaş

## APPENDIX 2: ETHICS BOARD WAIVER FORM

<b>ETHICS BOARD WAIVER FORM FOR THESIS WORK</b>	
<p><b>HACETTEPE UNIVERSITY</b>  <b>GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES</b>  <b>AMERICAN CULTURE AND LITERATURE TO THE DEPARTMENT PRESIDENCY</b></p>	
Date: 14/07/2015	
<p>Thesis Title / Topic: Jewish American Graphic Narratives: Landscapes, Stereotypes and Transformation in Will Eisner, Ben Katchor, Joe Kubert and Harvey Pekar.            My thesis work related to the title/topic above:</p>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Does not perform experimentation on animals or people.</li> <li>2. Does not necessitate the use of biological material (blood, urine, biological fluids and samples, etc.).</li> <li>3. Does not involve any interference of the body's integrity.</li> <li>4. Is not based on observational and descriptive research (survey, measures/scales, data scanning, system-model development).</li> </ol>	
<p>I declare, I have carefully read Hacettepe University's Ethics Regulations and the Commission's Guidelines, and in order to proceed with my thesis according to these regulations I do not have to get permission from the Ethics Board for anything; in any infringement of the regulations I accept all legal responsibility and I declare that all the information I have provided is true.</p>	
<p>I respectfully submit this for approval.</p>	
<p><b>Name Surname:</b> Bülent Ayyıldız</p>	<p>14.07.2015  </p>
<p><b>Student No:</b> N11227104</p>	
<p><b>Department:</b> American Culture and Literature</p>	
<p><b>Program:</b> American Culture and Literature</p>	
<p><b>Status:</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Masters    <input type="checkbox"/> Ph.D.    <input type="checkbox"/> Integrated Ph.D.</p>	
<p><b><u>ADVISER COMMENTS AND APPROVAL</u></b></p>	
<p>            Assoc. Prof. Dr. Bilge Mutluay Çetintaş</p>	



**HACETTEPE ÜNİVERSİTESİ**  
**SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ**  
**TEZ ÇALIŞMASI ETİK KURUL İZİN MUAFİYETİ FORMU**

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**AMERİKAN KÜLTÜRÜ VE EDEBİYATI ANABİLİM DALI BAŞKANLIĞI'NA**

Tarih: 14/07/2015

Tez Başlığı / Konusu Yahudi Amerikalı Yazarların Grafik Anlatıları: Will Eisner, Ben Katchor, Joe Kubert ve Harvey Pekar'ın eserlerinde Mekan, Basmakalıp Karakterler ve Dönüşüm.

Yukarıda başlığı/konusu gösterilen tez çalışmam:

1. İnsan ve hayvan üzerinde deney niteliği taşımamaktadır,
2. Biyolojik materyal (kan, idrar vb. biyolojik sıvılar ve numuneler) kullanılmasını gerektirmemektedir.
3. Beden bütünlüğüne müdahale içermemektedir.
4. Gözlemsel ve betimsel araştırma (anket, ölçek/skala çalışmaları, dosya taramaları, veri kaynakları taraması, sistem-model geliştirme çalışmaları) niteliğinde değildir.

Hacettepe Üniversitesi Etik Kurullar ve Komisyonlarının Yönergelerini inceledim ve bunlara göre tez çalışmamın yürütülebilmesi için herhangi bir Etik Kuruldan izin alınmasına gerek olmadığını; aksi durumda doğabilecek her türlü hukuki sorumluluğu kabul ettiğimi ve yukarıda vermiş olduğum bilgilerin doğru olduğunu beyan ederim.

Gereğini saygılarımla arz ederim.

**Adı Soyadı:** Bülent Ayyıldız  
**Öğrenci No:** N11227104  
**Anabilim Dalı:** Amerikan Kültürü ve Edebiyatı  
**Programı:** Amerikan Kültürü ve Edebiyatı  
**Statüsü:**  Y.Lisans  Doktora  Bütünleşik Dr.

14.07.2015

**DANIŞMAN GÖRÜŞÜ VE ONAYI**

Doç. Dr. Bilge Mutluay Çetintas

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