Idunn Nielsen Hatling

Constructing Libraries of Life and Death

Textual Artefacts, Visuality and Space as Narrative Devices in Giant Sparrow's *What Remains of Edith Finch* and Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home*

NTNU
Norwegian University of
Science and Technology

Idunn Nielsen Hatling

Constructing Libraries of Life and Death

Textual Artefacts, Visuality and Space as Narrative Devices in Giant Sparrow's *What Remains of Edith Finch* and Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home*

NTNU

Norwegian University of
Science and Technology

CONSTRUCTING LIBRARIES OF LIFE AND DEATH:

Textual Artefacts, Visuality and Space as Narrative Devices in Giant Sparrow's *What Remains of Edith Finch* and Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home*

by

Idunn Nielsen Hatling

Norwegian University of Science and Technology

Faculty of Humanities

Department of Language and Literature

Trondheim June 2020

ABSTRACT

By examining two different forms of multimodal stories, the video game *What Remains of Edith Finch* and the graphic memoir *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic*, this thesis shows the functionality of textual artefacts, visuality and space as narrative devices. Both works include allusions to and graphic representations of literary canon, as well as personal documents that expand the storyworld and opens up for more profound interpretations. The visual and interactive construction of narrative in both works invites the reader to partake in the creation of meaning in a unique way that is generally not found in traditional prose literature. The recent developments of these forms, both technologically, in terms of storytelling complexity and the shift of creators focusing on artistic expression as well as addressing topics of cultural importance, has changed, and is changing, the scene of literary studies.

Keywords: multimodal storytelling, game studies, autographic, archive, frame narratives

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

In 1985 American cartoonist and writer Will Eisner suggested that thoughtful, scholarly concern and serious intellectual work on the graphic technology of sequential art, such as graphic novels and comics, would probably not emerge unless the works themselves started to "address subjects of greater moment" (5). He concluded that the lack of academic interest was not just the fault of critics but a failure of the practitioners—the medium had to make itself "worthy" of scholarly consideration. Whether one agrees or disagrees, the same could be said about other multimodal works that are generally and similarly to comics seen as "pop culture" or even "low brow", such as video games. Arguably, their time has now arrived. The narratives and storytelling techniques in multimodal stories have not only started to address "subjects of greater moment", but their ways of *telling* stories have developed together with the technological advances of our era and new forms have surfaced through these developments[1].

The way these new forms make use of different modalities within the same work, combining audio, visual and textual elements, as well as the possibility for interaction with the reader or player of the works, brings new opportunities for storytelling. This thesis explores two, quite different, examples of multimodal works in which the interplay between the media, mainly the visual and textual layers, and the player or reader experience open up for more in-depth interpretations. The project focuses on the use of textual artefacts, such as books (including canonical works), letters, diaries and photographs, and how these not only expand upon the storyworld and open up for deeper interpretations but work narratively as gateways between the different narrative layers, as containers of memories, and as part of larger archives that connect the threads between all of the layers within the stories.

---

[1] See for instance: N. Katherine Hayles and Jessica Pressman who has done an extensive work on these new approaches within the Humanities in their book *Comparative Textual Media: Transforming the Humanities in the Postprint Era*, coining the broad term covering the study of print in context with other textual medias (from scrolls to video games) "comparative media studies", they provide great insight into the new media forms and how their many aspects apply well to several disciplines within the Humanities.

The first work that is explored in this thesis is the videogame *What Remains of Edith Finch*, by the independent video game company Giant Sparrow. The game received high critical acclaim and won, among several other wins and nominations[2], the British Academy Games Award for Best Game in 2017. Although the game generally received positive reviews from the gaming community as well as from critics, some argued that it was not a game, merely a playable story and, therefore, not a "good game"[3]. The reason for this critique from more "traditional gamers" could be caused by the fact that *What Remains of Edith Finch* is not a classic "ludic-game"[4]. It is part of a new wave of "art-games": games purposely designed for creative expression.

In contrast to the ludic games, these art-games do not necessarily have aims to be *won* through strategy or skill but are to be *experienced*, *interpreted*, and *read*.[5] There is, however, still an ongoing debate on whether video games, even such literary games as *What Remains of Edith Finch*, should be considered works of art at all. This thesis will not partake directly in this discussion of legitimising the genre but will instead provide a possible reading of a video game with the idea of it being a piece of art with high literariness, worthy of analysis at the same scale as any other piece of art, in an attempt to showcase the possibilities that this multimodal form of cultural and literary expression brings to the realm of storytelling.

Within the field of sequential art and comics, some of the most notable instances of Eisner's "subjects of greater moment" have taken place in the form of the graphic memoirs

---

[2] The Game Awards 2017 for Best Narrative, National Academy of Video Game Trade Reviewers Awards for Original Adventure and Lighting/Texturing, Italian Video Game Awards for Best Indie Game, SXSW Gaming Awards for Excellence in Narrative, Game Developers Choice Awards for Best Narrative, 12th British Academy Games Awards for Best Game, Game for Change Awards for Best Gameplay.

[3] These few negative reviews from gamers can be found on the steam platform's page where the game can also be purchased for PC: https://steamcommunity.com/app/501300/reviews/

[4] "Ludic" comes from the latin word of "ludo", meaning "game". A ludic game focuses on gameplay mechanics, rather than story and narrative. These games are meant to be won through gameplay skill and strategic thinking, and is based around objectives rather than exploration. Most modern games are combinations of ludic elements and narrative elements, but the structure of these games mostly ludic due to the final objective being focused on "winning" rather than just experiencing or reading.

[5] WRoEF also contrasts to other games with that in order to make progress in the game, you need to play out the deaths of the characters, something which is normally what one tries to avoid doing in other games.

with great titles such as Art Spiegelman's *Maus*[6]; Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis*; and Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic*—the latter which will be examined in this thesis. *Fun Home*, which can be considered one of the most important queer narratives of the era, is an intricate autobiographical examination of Bechdel's coming of age and coming out story. Special attention is put on her complicated relationship with her father and his problematic behaviour and secret life as a closeted gay man with a particular fondness for underage boys. The use of the textual artefacts in *Fun Home* works similarly to in *What Remains of Edith Finch* as gateways between the quite complex composition of narrative layers in the story. The artefacts play with the perspective of the reader—bringing them into the storyworld and thus makes them part of the narrative—while also inhabiting memories and histories of past lives, making them objects of communication and interpretation both for Bechdel and the reader.

The thesis is divided into two chapters. The first chapter, "Gateways Between Worlds – Textual Artefacts as Narrative Structures in *What Remains of Edith Finch*", explores the interplay between textual artefacts in the visual, interactive space together with the gameplay elements and player-reader experience. Firstly, I discuss the genre of the game as a Walking Simulator, and how this genre works and exists on the intersection between game and literature. The chapter then examines the structure of the game as a frame narrative where the textual artefacts function as gateways between the narrative layers of the story. The chapter then moves on to look at some excerpts from the game, where the literary dimensions are especially salient in the gameplay and in which the textual artefacts add further depth for interpretations of the narratives when examining the game from a literary perspective.

The second chapter, "Textual Archives of the Personal and Public Spheres in Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic*", concentrates on textual artefacts as part of a

---

[6] Art Spiegelman's *Maus* in 1992 notably became the first graphic novel to ever win a Pulitzer Price.

larger archival work constructed by the author as a means to both explain and show her personal story, as well as to interpret events from her past. The chapter explores how the textual artefacts serve as containers of memories, conveyers of different voices from the past, and as objects of interpretations both for Bechdel in her journey through her own memories and for the reader as both an observer and participant. This chapter also focuses on the use of literary canon as textual artefacts for this same purpose. The chapter starts with an introduction to the memoir as an "autography", a term coined by Gillian Whitlock. The autography is a term which puts more emphasis on the conjunctions between the textual and visual elements in the work. The textual and visual layers are interdependent as narrative structures and *can* be looked at separately; however, a lot of the meaning still lays in the interplay between the different fragments and in the blank space left between the layers, where the reader is invited to "fill in the gaps". After examining how *Fun Home* fits into the mould of an autographic work of narrative, the chapter moves on to looking at several excerpts from the memoir while discussing the different functions of the narrative techniques and offering some possible readings of these excerpts. In these selections the textual artefacts, as part of an archive of feelings and memories, shift the narrative between layers and plays with the reader—inviting them to partake in both the creation and interpretation of the story.

CHAPTER 1: Gateways Between Worlds – Textual Artefacts as

Narrative Structures in *What Remains of Edith Finch*

> Edie told me once that every Finch who ever lived
> is buried somewhere in the library.
>
>   - Edith Finch, *What Remains of Edith Finch*

The connection between games and literature is not something new; in fact, it has been present even long before the age of digital gaming (Bozdog and Galloway). We see throughout the history of literature how games have been present or connected within the literary field—although through other ways than we think of today. Some examples date back to Medieval times with, for example, Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, where the collection of short stories is part of a game played by the characters (Corrigan). Other examples are instances of playful writing; game-like literature; and literature that plays games with the reader. There are also the more recent works such as the *Fighting Fantasy* role-playing book series that was highly popular in the 1980s. These gamebooks mixed elements from "choose your own adventure"-style storytelling with dice-based role-playing elements included within the printed work.

       All of these works embedded games within the literature or presented the stories through game-like forms and puzzles to be solved (Detweiler). Today, however, we see the interplay between games and literature in a different shape; we can now consider how elements of (print) literature manifest within (video) games, not just the other way around. There are many instances of this type of connection between games and literature, such as games adopting a literary genre (*Amnesia: The Dark Descent*), adaptations of literary works (*The Witcher* series*)*, games inspired by literary works (*Bioshock)* or where books have a central function for the plot development or gameplay (*Alan Wake; Gone Home*). However, it is only in recent years that the interplay between gaming and literature has been taken into the academic fields of study to a more considerable extent. We see this with scholars such as N.

Katherine Hayles and Espen Aarseth[7], and with the creation of the academic Game Studies journal, which was the first of its kind.

The modern developments of game studies started with the highly influential work of Aarseth, *Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature,* and developed further through works by the prominent scholars partaking in the debate concerning the nature of video games and how they should be studied. In *Debates in the Digital Humanities,* James Coltrain and Stephen Ramsay provide an in-depth look at the ongoing development within academia dealing with the question on whether Humanities scholarship can or should be concerned with video games. They conclude that the most significant challenge that video games face in their scholarly endeavours is that they are still undergoing major change. Like other genres, even such genres as novels and films, the video game form started out as a curiosity rather than a medium meant for artistic expression (43). We are now, they argue, in the middle of a shift towards more scholarly concern

However, being in the middle of such a shift towards more scholarly concern, there is also an unavoidable split between scholars. It should be noted that most of the discussion and disagreement present in this shift is somewhat grounded in a more political question of the genre—the competition over the games' generic categorisation is also a competition about what field should have the academic influence over this contemporary form of cultural expression. Some of the scholars who voiced their opinions early in this shift, in the late '90s and early 2000s, who were part of establishing Game Studies as its own academic field, were reluctant to include methods and perspectives from other already established fields. For instance, in the first issue of the *Game Studies* journal, Markku Eskelinen wrote that: "if and when games… are studied and theorized they are almost without exception colonised from

---

[7] In addition to scholarly work, games have also been included into narrative competitions that have generally been reserved for other mediums, such as the SXSW narrative competitions where there is now a Gaming Award: https://www.sxsw.com/awards/gaming-awards/

the fields of literary, theatre, drama and film studies" (Eskelinen "The Gaming Situation" 1),

something which he argued was an issue, rather than an opportunity, for the study of games.

At the time he published this article, video games looked very different from today. At the

time, narratives were present in games, no doubt about it, but they were not on par with

narratives presented in other mediums—at least not in what could be considered "worthy of

scholarly concern". Eskelinen concluded with saying that "stories [were] just uninteresting

ornaments or gift-wrappings to games" and that "laying any emphasis on studying these kinds

of marketing tools [was] just a waste of time and energy" (13). Jesper Juul, who goes under

the pseudonym "The Ludologist" on his website, similarly to Eskelinen rejected that

narratology and focus on narrative, in general, was useful for understanding videogames,

during the early times of the debate. Both of these scholars have more recently, however,

turned towards embracing narratives and stories in games as worthy of study (see Eskelinen

Cybertext Poetics; and Juul *Half-real*). This shift, I believe, could be caused by the games

having developed together with new technology for improved storytelling, thus not being only

"ornaments" for the game, but rather one of the essential pieces of the entire work. We have,

for instance, seen the emergence of developers and teams who work with narratives as the

main focus in the creation of the game, building the ludic elements around the narrative

elements, instead of the other way around as was typically done in earlier games.

With this debate aside, however, there is no question that video games *can* and, in

some cases, *should* be studied within already fully established academic fields such as visual

media, sociology, pedagogy, technology and literature. This due to games being not just *one*

form, but *many* (Aarseth "Genre Trouble"). An important thing to keep in mind, despite the

multimodal construction of games, is that they are still self-contained; they come in many

different variations, and should, therefore, be treated differently from one another as

independent objects of examination, just as we would any other piece of art or literature. This

thought lays the groundwork for establishing how one should study specific games through specific lenses, where some lenses are better suited for particular games.

This chapter will be looking at the game *WRoEF,* which blends different literary elements, aesthetic use of text and intertext together with gameplay in a unique manner. The use of the textual and literary elements in its interplay with the game's ludic elements is of interest, and the chapter attempts to expose hidden layers of meaning in the game's narrative through looking at a selection of textual artefacts that the reader-player encounters and interacts with in diverse ways through the game, as well as narrative textual structures found in the visual space. I propose that there is a literary dimension manifest both in the game's structure as a frame narrative, in its various themes, storytelling techniques, and influences from and adaptations of canonical works and its metaphoric use of textual artefacts as containers of memories and past lives. My reading will be grounded in the idea that this game, in particular, can be considered to be a literary game and is thus suited for being studied within the field of literary scholarship. A literary game is defined by Ensslin as a game in which "language is foregrounded as verbal art rather than used as a purely functional tool" (141), which is something that will be addressed again later in the chapter.

This chapter will start by discussing the genre of the game and how it can be considered literary, as it is not simple to fit this particular game into a specific mould, be it "literature" or "video game" due to its contradicting nature and position on the intersection between these forms. Before moving on to an analysis of a selection of textual artefacts and game sequences from the game, the chapter will be looking at some key ideas that are important to understand when working with the game. The first key idea that will be looked at is the concept of the "walking simulator", how these types of games are constructed in comparison to other ludic-games and traditional print literature. As the walking simulator is situated on the intersection between games and literature, similarly—the person interacting or

reading these games find themselves between the role of a player and a reader. I will, therefore, also introduce the concept of the reader-player to understand better what it entails. After tackling these issues, the chapter moves on to look at the game more specifically starting with an overview of the structure and story found in the game's frame narrative. I will both be looking at the visual spaces that the reader-player encounters, and at an assortment of textual artefacts that have different functions both in the gameplay and in our study of the narrative. With this exploration, I hope to illustrate some of the potentials for the video game as a literary storytelling medium, as well as suggest that literary studies can and should open up for the study of games and other multimedia works of literature on a greater scale.

Literary Gaming and the Literariness of *What Remains of Edith Finch*

The idea of video games has been redefined, and developers have been pushing at the boundaries of the form for the past decade, thus changing and expanding the potential objects of study within the ever-expanding field. There is also an ongoing wave of video game developers (The Chinese Room; Tale of Tales; Fullbright; Giant Sparrow; and others) who explore the medium's potential for social change, critique, and not to mention: artistic expression. This wave is known for their "art-games", which Coltrain and Ramsay say is a term not only on the rise but believed to become a natural term within Humanities scholarship on par with how "art novel" and "art film" is considered today (43). These game developers have partaken in the creation of a sub-genre of these "art-games" today commonly known as "walking simulators". The term was initially coined in mockery of these games' perceived lack of gameplay by some more traditional gamers in the gaming community (Bozdog and Galloway). This frustration originated through the gaming community's perception of what a game should be (e.g. filled with traditional objectives, challenges and rewards, in-game actions, and player autonomy and choice). However, these new games were nothing like the

traditional games: they were not meant to be *won*, but to be *experienced*, to be *interpreted* and *read*. This new form also lead to the games being accessible to a larger and more diverse player community, due to the main in-game ludic actions being quite straightforward and effortless (walking and occasional simple interactions with objects), as they did not require any previous gaming knowledge or skills.

This more diverse player community has also opened up for a broader critical audience within the many academic fields interested in the genre's potential. The ongoing shift has lead to the study of games being spread out over many corners of academia—in addition to creating debate among scholars within these fields; we also encounter the issue of inconsistency when it comes to theory, methods, terms and definitions. One of the discrepancies we encounter is the question of what these narrative-driven games should be called. Games with pre-written stories or games that can be considered to exist on the intersection between games and literature, such as *WRoEF*, has throughout the last decades, been referred to as many things. Some call them pieces of interactive fiction (Montfort), digital literature (Barrett), environmental narrative games (Zakowski), or unicursal quest-based adventure games (Aarseth "From Hunt the Wumpus"). In this thesis, however, I will be referring to the game as a Walking Simulator (despite the initial negative connotation of the name), as this is the most commonly used term on such games both in popular culture and in academic circles (Bozdog and Galloway).

What is important to note about Walking Simulators, is that they foreground the interpretive abilities of the reader-player, as they are sensory-rich and, at least in the case of *WRoEF*, filled with textual elements. They are short and contained within a smaller game world than many other games, as well as being slower-paced, which in turn opens the

possibility for interpretive work as one goes through the story[8]. Bozdog and Galloway argue that Walking Simulators are compatible with both a ludostylistic analysis (Ensslin "Between Ludicity"), in other words, an analysis from a gameplay perspective, as well as the literary lens, as these can offer readings of these games' complex nature as concurrently readerly and playerly objects (5). As they shift the focus from the Walking Simulator's "lack of traditional gameplay" (5), they simultaneously open up the discussion and shifts the focus onto the *potential* of the genre as a textual/ludic hybrid that provides an interpretive complexity that many other forms of games lack.

Something that makes *WRoEF* even more textual is that it foregrounds reading through the engagement with literary structures and text throughout the entire experience, embedded into the environment of the gameworld and through the interactions made by the reader-player. The concept of the "reader-player", as opposed to merely a player or a reader, is well suited when working with walking simulators, as the person interacting with the game is simultaneously playing and reading, as the term suggests. The concept of the reader-player springs out from the initial idea of Espen Aarseth's *ergodic literature* from his extensive and influential work *Cybertext*, where he originally coined this term to cover literature in which the reader must go through "non-trivial effort" to "transverse the text". When reading non-ergodic literature—that is: traditional print literature—the actions we do, other than the process of reading itself, involves trivial actions such as the occasional flipping of the page and the movement of the eyes. In ergodic literature, however, the effort to transverse the text expands to become non-trivial, where the reader has to, for example, move an avatar through a game world and make interactions with objects.

---

[8] See Keith Basset's psychogeographical approach to walking simulators, where he looks at the action of walking both as a critical tool and an aesthetic practice. Also see Karhulahti's demand-based ontological theory of storygames as postclassical literature.

The reader-player concept thus represents both the cognitive and embodied approach, both the readerly and the playerly aspects of interaction, that one brings to the game. A person traversing and reading the text has to both do the actions of reading and interpreting at the same time as they have to do actions like navigating in the space and interacting with objects through the use of the controller or keyboard. In *WRoEF* especially, this embodied approach to storytelling is further enhanced through the specific movements that mimic the movements in real life. The walking simulator thus blends literacy and the skill of navigation in the game, making them interdependent of one another. The interaction with objects and textual artefacts is what leads the way to a new narrative layer to uncover the story. Likewise, without the ability to read and interpret the story, the narrative becomes lost, and the game loses its function as a storytelling device. These two aspects must, therefore, both be present, and they both rely on each other.[9]

The walking simulators lack of gameplay complexity is, in other words, compensated by what we can consider interpretive complexity due to the hybridity of the form. Interestingly this design strategy, according to Pinchbeck, could be considered to create "vacuum space" in the game. He argues that "lack of stimulation is not lack of experience", but rather, "lack of stimulation allows different kinds of reflective, emotional experiences. We have to provide space and time for different types of experiences and different types of resonances to flourish" (Pinchbeck).

---

[9] I would like to put emphasis on the controls of *WRoEF* being very intuitive and simple to understand for a non-gamer. In a way, the interpretive skill is more important than the skill of knowing which keys to press. The game does, however, not give any instructions, as this would disturb the immersion of the story, so they might take some getting used to in the very beginning for someone not familiar with navigating an avatar in a game-world.

In Words We Trust – The Many Layers of *What Remains of Edith Finch*

WRoEF is structured as a collection of short stories where each of these stories belongs to a different literary genre and uses unique storytelling techniques fitted to the narrative layers. The game works in the same way as the literary "frame narrative", where the different stories are told through layers where one story is placed within another story, often through the use of textual artefacts such as letters. The frame narrative of *WRoEF* starts in the first scene of the game. The reader-player finds themselves on a ferry under an overcast sky with a book in their lap and a bunch of lilies in their hand. This scene is the first narrative frame we encounter. The next narrative structure is entered through opening the book in our hands—a diary belonging to the titular character, Edith Finch—by moving the mouse in the direction that the hand would have moved as one would open a page of a real book. As the reader-player turns the page, the narrative voice of Edith can be heard, as the text from the diary materialises in the middle of the screen as the environment shifts to black and dissolves into a new scene (figure 1).

Figure 1. Opening sequence from *What Remains of Edith Finch*

We enter the second frame, where we join Edith as she returns to her childhood home on Orcas Island in Washington State. We learn that Edith and her mother, Dawn, fled the house when she was eleven—but we are not told the reason why. We follow the path towards the house, which is littered with "missing"-posters of her brother, Milton, as Edith narrates a brief introduction. She has recently inherited the old family house but has been reluctant to revisit it after her mother's passing. We learn about the so-called "Finch Family Curse": the children of each generation were destined to die at a young age, leaving only one long enough to bring the family to the next generation before they, too, would pass. Through Edith's uncovering of the house, we enter the remaining frames of the narrative: the short stories where each family member's death must be played out until its conclusion.

In this exploration, we are constantly surrounded by writing. The writing lives in the woods, around the house, in key-holes and peep-holes, in fireplaces, letters, books and diaries, guiding the reader-player forward in the narrative. It lets them into the most unusual places and hidden passageways, while it dances on the screen, disappears, crawls, flies, and jumps. The words are alive and endowed with a playful personality, and sometimes with a grave sorrow. The text does not give instructions or objectives to move the story forward: it has an aesthetic and narrative function, it is verbal art in Ensslin's terms, as it plays games with the reader-player, teasing and hinting rather than instructing.

We also see this function of text as we move between the different layers, the different narrative frames of the game. This transition is done through the use of textual artefacts, as described in the transition between the first and second frame (figure 1). Some of the artefacts are simply scattered around the rooms, put up on display for the reader-player to notice on their own accord, and do not transport the reader-player in the physical gameworld or space[10]. Other artifacts play a more direct role in the gameplay and story progression, such as the diary

---

[10] It could be argued that these artefact still open up new layers for interpretation, however, and can thus serve as part of their own narrative frames, without explicitly transporting the avatar in the game-world.

entries and letters that the reader-player has to interact with and read in order to enter the new narrative frames. The player does not only read or observe the final moments of the family members but plays them out from a first-person perspective, through various action sequences, from the innocent baby Gregory playing with toys in the bath, to the heart-wrenching suicide of Edith's oldest brother, Lewis. The textual artefacts become gateways between the narrative layers, connecting them together in the frame narrative.

Figure 2. Screenshot from Molly's room, *What Remains of Edith Finch*

While the structure of the frame narrative, the playful text on the screen, and the overarching theme of the family curse, which seems to affect all the family members, connects together all of the stories, the narratives are also linked together spatially. The house itself encompasses and represents all of the stories and characters in the game. The rooms in the house become internal narrative frames, windows (or peep-holes) into past lives, much like scenes or chapters in a book[11]. The rooms are painted, furnished and decorated to embody the people who used to live there, becoming archives or time capsules of the personas' lives, such as

---

[11] It should be noted here that these "chapters" function differently from chapters in print literature, as it is impossible to go back and re-read the stories until the entire game has been fulfilled. This also brings a stronger sense of finality to the deaths that are played out in the game.

Molly's bedroom decorated with animals, costumes and books about monsters (figure 2), a spatial design which fits perfectly with the story of Molly's last night alive, after she was locked in her room and sent to bed without dinner. Molly's story adopts the literary genre of magical realism, with its extravagance and excess (Bozdog and Galloway 12), perhaps in an attempt to introduce the reader-player to the idea of magic and reality coexisting in the storyworld. After Edith picks up Molly's diary, the ten year old girl takes over the narration. We walk her around the room, picking up various things to eat as she is very hungry after being sent to bed without dinner. She then starts to transform into various animals and monsters, eating everything she comes across. She is a cat, a hawk, a shark and a sea moster that eventually crawls from the sea and up into Molly's room through the toilet plumbing. She, in the end, dies in her bed as she believes the monster underneath it is going to eat her. The story could be read literally, but more likely she was simply having vivid fever dreams after eating poisonous berries. Edith states after placing Molly's journal back on the desk: "I'm not sure if I believed all that. But I'm sure Edie would have".

One might wonder why Molly's room was still exactly as she left it, especially considering she died in 1947 and the game takes place in 2017. This, we learn, is because the matriarch of the family, Edith "Edie" Finch, mother of Molly and great grandmother of Edith, had locked up the rooms of every family member right after their deaths. This was done to contain their memories inside, to prevent them from being tainted by the hands of others. As Edith states, when she first speaks about the house, that she was "not allowed inside half the rooms". The rooms were left as galleries or museums of lost lives. Edie even created "shrines" in every room, putting together items she had decided represented her family members, together with a portrait she had painted of them (seen at the top of the drawers in figure 2). Edie drilled peep-holes into the doors after Dawn sealed them in an attempt to keep the past in the past after her sons had died. Edie also put a plaque underneath the peep-holes

showing the dates of birth and death of her children and grandchildren, epitaphs on which her family was put on display. Interestingly, Dawn also sealed up the door of the library—a room we never get to explore fully, said by Edie to be where "all the Finches are buried"—to protect her last child from the supposed family curse and from the stories Edie was so insistent on telling.

This obsessiveness with stories that we soon learn Edie holds on to is further enhanced by the spacial geometry and architecture of the house. Not only is every room littered with books and stories that reflect the madness in the house[12], but the house itself proves witness to this. When a new generation was born, Edie wanted to keep the family from disturbing her "exhibits" and tales. Instead of refurbishing and reusing the already plentiful number of rooms, she had new rooms built onto the exterior of the house, making the Finch home a branching, unordered stockpile of living quarters, crammed on top of each other in an unnatural manner (figure 3).

Figure 3. Screenshot from *What Remains of Edith Finch*

---

[12] The littering of books itself reflects the madness, but there are also some notable examples of canonical works present in the visual space that allude to the family curse and history. Titles such as Robert Chambers' *The King in Yellow*, Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*, Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*, and Jorge Luis Borges' *The Aleph* and *The Book of Sand*, can be seen in shelves and stacks around the house.
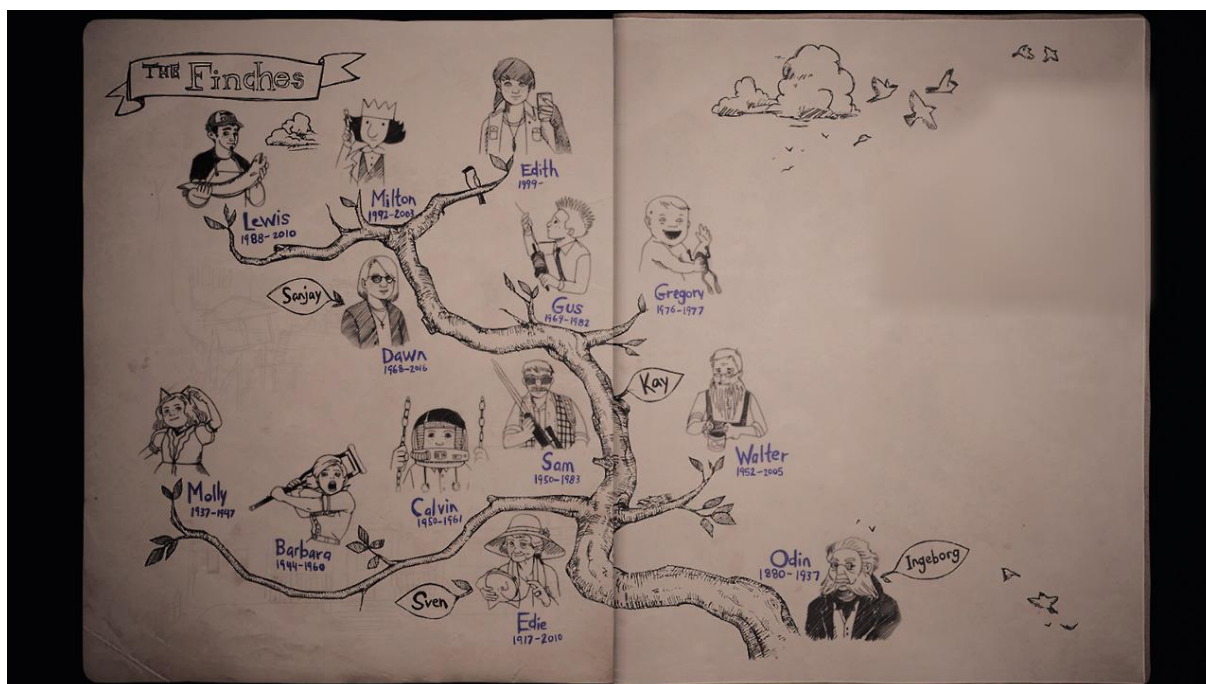
Figure 4. Edith's drawing of the family tree, *What Remains of Edith Finch*

Although Edith draws an actual family tree in her diary and adding sketches of the family members after each of their stories have been concluded (figure 4), the house itself is also an embodiment of such a family tree—an archive of the family history. The house contains all the stories and memories—as Edie wanted them to be remembered. The spatial geometry in the house thus operates not only as a framework for the narrative, with its passages and paths, but is essential to the narrative itself. It contains the stories both physically through all the objects and literary references within it, and through the memories that it inhabits as an archival artefact itself. Edith states that she "was afraid of the house" when she comes back to visit it in the early stages of the story. She is afraid of the house because it is an archive of her family's history, her own history, and the only thing she has ever been told about the stories from her mother, has been to stay away from them because they were dangerous.

"My children are dead because of your stories!" shouts Dawn as she argues with Edie the night she takes her daughter and leaves the house and the family history for good. Dawn believes that there is no family curse, arguing that the stories and Edie's obsession with them

are the reasons why the family members seemed to perish. The stories, the text, the words that the reader-player and the character of Edith encounters leads the narrative in a certain direction. The spatial geometry of the house and the surrounding area, the gameworld in which it is possible to navigate in, is set in stone. We cannot open other books than the books that have been picked out for us. In a way, Edie's motives, the way she wanted things to be, is the way things are. Just like the Finch family members, the stories we are told, the stories we play out, have been carefully placed and, as far as we know, could even be forged by Edie. The different narrative layers tell different truths: the textual artefacts that we can interact with are purposefully put in the centre of attention, while the artefacts placed surreptitiously around in the visual space as seemingly nothing but decorations might be even more important for us to understand the whole truth of the story. The reader-player's role as an interpreter rather than an observer, their role as a *reader*, becomes crucial to the understanding of the narrative. If approached without this interpretive ability, the player could be lured to believe the words on the screen and follow the house's geometry and Edie's crumbs straight into the trap that all the other family members fell into.

As we shall see in the following pages, the stories Edie told affected the family members in different ways, some more than others, and almost exclusively played a part in the family members deaths. To understand what went down with each family members demise, the textual artefacts that transport us into and through the narrative frames and stories have to be read critically. With the help of the less-noticeable works in the visual space, most being prominent canonical works that deal with central themes present throughout the narrative, the stories themselves might make more sense. Edith never reaches, or at least never voices, a conclusion as to how she fits into it all. It is up to the reader-player to make these interpretations and connections, through their reading and analysis of the many different narrative layers.

To illustrate how text and literature work together with the reader-player and the visual and spacial levels of the narrative to create meaning, we will move on to look at a few examples from the game. The first sequence of interest is the story of Edith's older brother, Lewis, and the events that lead up to his suicide. Lewis' story stands out as one of the more noteworthy parts of the game when considering the complexity of blending narrative techniques, text and gameplay. Bozdog and Galloway described Lewis' story "a masterpiece in game storytelling" and a "perfect illustration of what gameplay and storytelling can achieve when designed to complement each other and take advantage of the strengths of both mediums" (15). In addition to blending the narrative techniques from both mediums, Lewis' story can also be read as a loose adaptation of *Through the Looking Glass* by Lewis Carroll[13], as well as an adaptation of Lord Dunsany's short story "The Coronation of Mr. Thomas Shap". In Carroll's famous work, the Red King's function is that he is the creator of the storyworld: the world is his dream, and everyone who lives there is part of that dream. Were he to wake up, the dream would cease to exist, and everyone within it would disappear. Dunsany's story "The Coronation of Mr. Thomas Shap" recounts how a businessman, Mr. Thomas Shap, escapes into his imagination due to his mundane and repetitious life. His travels to his imaginary life become more and more detailed and tempting, ending in him choosing to live the rest of his life in his mind, while his body stays at the Hanwell Asylum. Lewis Finch similarly to this escapes his job at the cannery factory and what is described as "the monotony of his daily life" (*WRoEF*) with dreaming up a new life for himself in a world where he has absolute control.

We enter Lewis' story through a letter addressed to his mother from his psychiatrist. The psychiatrist narrates and explains what happened to Lewis, and takes us through his story

---

[13]On the desk in Lewis' room, a copy of a book named *The Red King's Dream* can be found. This made-up title refers to the Red King in Lewis Carroll's story *Through The Looking Glass*. Lewis' name can also be a nod towards Carroll, to make this connection more prominent for the reader-player as they go through the story.

and experience with mental illness. After a long time of substance abuse, Lewis had become

clean and had started working at a canning factory. The work was repetitive and

straightforward: he only had to grab a salmon from his left, chop its head off on the right, and

throw it onto the conveyor belt in the front. This simple action becomes the job of the reader-

player as they enter into the first-person perspective of Lewis as he is working. As we are in

his mind, we start to experience his illness for ourselves.
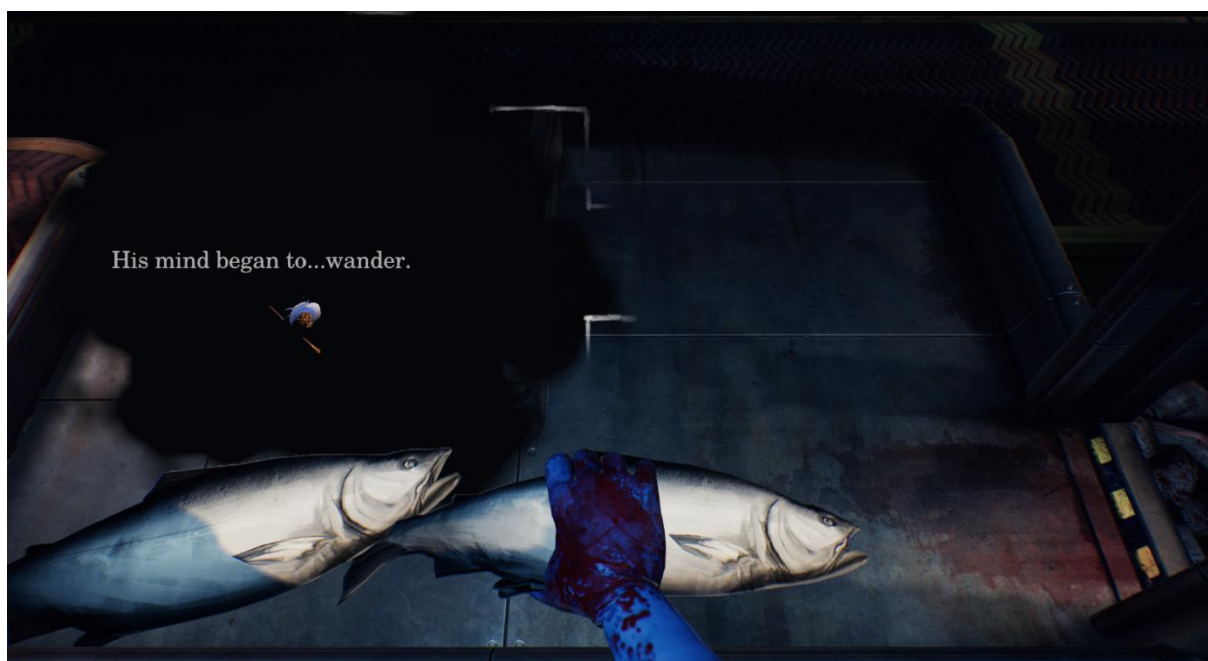
Figure 5. Lewis' story: his mind begins to wander, *What Remains of Edith Finch*.

Lewis' symptoms start out as a small day-dream. In the corner of the screen, we see a

tiny avatar of Lewis, dressed up as a royal, from above (figure 5). The reader-player starts

navigating the avatar through a simple maze, while the repetitive chopping of the fish persists.

After a while, Lewis' mind goes into a space of delusions and hallucinations of another reality

which infects his actual reality. His hallucinations become more and more grandiose, and take

over the screen as the reader-player tries, with some difficulty, to still chop fish while also

navigating Lewis' avatar in the dream world. After some time, the imagined world where

Lewis has become the ruler of everything has taken over the entire screen. With our left hand

we have helped him to conquer and build new worlds: "Lewistopia, New Lewisville, St.

Lewis, Minneapolewis", while our right hand has been given the task of chopping the

occasional fish jumping into the frame—reminding the reader-player that the scene they are in

is, in fact, still a dream (figure 6).
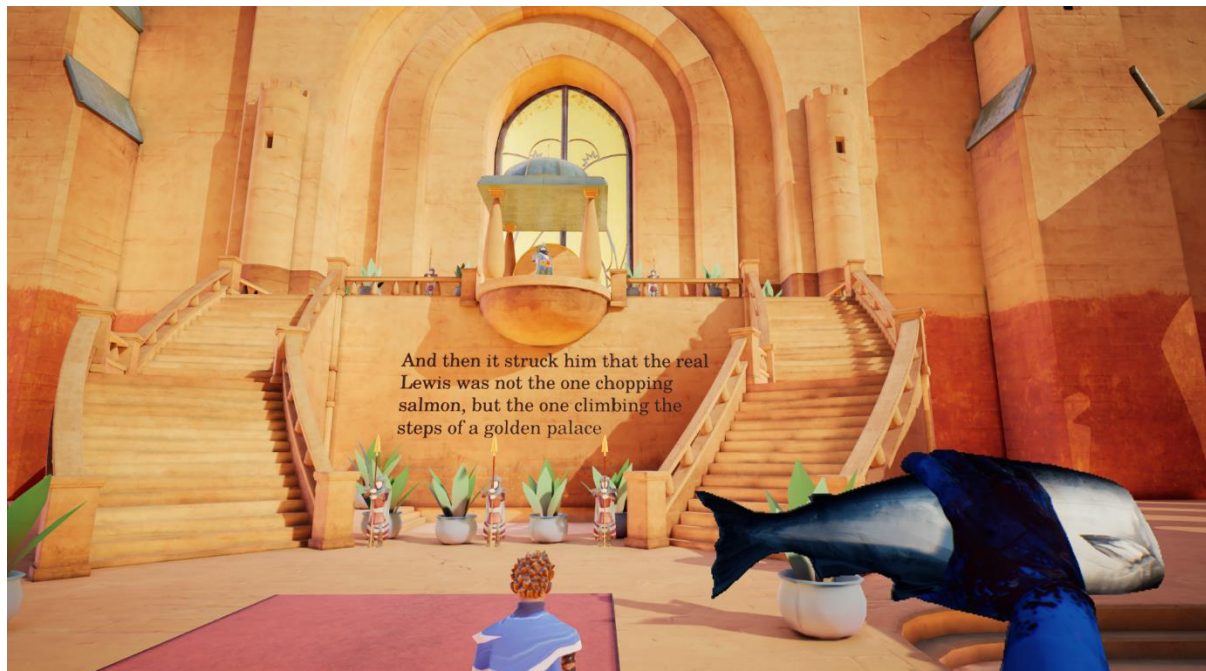
Figure 6. Lewis' story: the fantasy has taken over, *What Remains of Edith Finch*

Towards the end, Lewis walks through a door that brings him back to the real world,

in the canning factory. As the reader-player moves into the room, we see Lewis standing by

the chopping machine as if his mind and body truly were two separate beings. We climb the

conveyor belt and enter a palace, where a prince or queen[14] is waiting for him. This scene is

Lewis' coronation. As we place our head down to be crowned king of all the land, we notice

that what we are laying our head on is a guillotine. The screen goes black as we hear the

sound of the blade falling. The Red King wakes up, and the dream vanishes. For Lewis, the

real world had become less real than his imaginary world. As his psychiatrist states: "it struck

him that the real Lewis was not the one chopping salmon, but the one climbing the steps of a

---

[14] The reader-player is able to pick between a "handsome queen" and a "beautiful prince" during the sequence. This is one of the only player-choices presented in the game.

golden palace". When he "wakes up", it is not the dream that disappears, but the real world, as he dies to spend eternity in the world he has created for himself.

As a reader-player, one experiences the estrangement between the body and mind and the blurred lines between fantasy and reality that Lewis experiences in his illness. This is captured through the game mechanics as the reader-player performs actions with both hands, controlling two Lewises simultaneously. The narration and text on-screen, like before, do not give instructions, but rather moves the story onwards in the direction it is meant to go, like words on a page.

The works that are adapted in Lewis' story are only two examples of texts that provide a framework for storytelling and interpretation. Some other works are not only connected to one short story, however, but acts as frameworks for the entire narrative with all its layers included. One of these canonical works is Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time,* which can be found laying around the house in several of the rooms. Proust's masterpiece is not uncommonly referenced or alluded to in literary works dealing with autobiographical memory or "involuntary memory", as psychologist Daniel Schacter calls it. He writes that "No single work of literature is more closely associated with human memory than Marcel's Proust's *À le recherche du temps perdu* (*In Search of Lost Time*)" (Schacter 26). The work, which follows the narrator's recollections of childhood and experiences into adulthood, reflects on the loss of time and lack of meaning in the world. The narrator gradually becomes acquainted with the true stories of people in his life, much like Edith Finch does, through encountering artefacts and rediscovering lost memories through sensory experiences. Bozdog and Galloway argued that the artefacts that the reader-player encounters through *WRoEF* is "the gameplay equivalent of Marcel Proust's 'madeleine,' an artefact that summons the past into existence" (9). While in Proust's case the memories are revisited only in the narrator's mind, in the game

the reader-player is transported in the gameworld to a new narrative frame, to a different time, and into a different body or mind[15].

In the end, the reader-player is left to puzzle together the pieces of the Finch story themselves, to create their own narrative of what went down and why. Some are left only with questions unanswered, while others who are, perhaps, more versed in the literary canon, can "read between the lines" and use the clues found in the environment to piece together some possible answers. We now turn to look at the central character that binds together everything: the matriarch Edie. Edie's room is filled with memorabilia and mementos of death[16]. There is a shrine devoted to her dead husband, Sven, who died building a dragon slide in the back yard. Edith comments that her great grandmother had claimed her husband had been killed by a dragon, failing to mention the dragon was a slide and not a real one. There are several more clues to Edie's obsession with outer appearances and exhaggerated stories in the room, from her bookshelf which sprouts titles such as *The Illusions of Life*, *In Search of Lost Time*, *Norwegian Folktales, The Dreams in the Witch House,* and *Alice in Wonderland*, as well as folders marked "Mural Sketches", "Molly Concepts" and "Barbara Concepts". She has a collection of bird cages with tiny shrines dedicated to her dead birds[17], and several newspaper clippings related to her supposed "fame". One of these is of particular interest: the framed newspaperclipping hung on the wall titled "Mole Man Beneath the Finch House" (figure 7). Edith comments that her great grandmother had given an interview that had made her mother furious. She had claimed there was a "mole man" living underneath the house. We later learn

---

[15] Something to note is that Proust's work does not aim only to retrieve memories but to produce knowledge about the past, the present and the future (Iuliano). Perhaps this idea of how knowledge about the past forms our present and future is why Edie wanted her great-grandchild to learn about the stories. Maybe she wanted Edith to learn about herself, where she came from, and where to go next, to guide her on the path of life.

[16] On the desk is a half-finished painting of Lewis' face – she had started to memorialise him already, only a few days after his passing.

[17] The dead birds could be a reference to the family name Finch.

why this interview had made Dawn furious. There was, indeed, someone living underneath

the house: Edie's youngest son, Walter. We learn that he had moved into a bunker in the

basement at a young age because of his crushing fear of the supposed family curse that had

killed all but one of his siblings. He had lived through losing Molly who had died in her bed;

Barbara who had been
murdered while Walter had
been hiding in his room; and
Calvin who had plummeted to
his death while trying to "go
around" on the swingset
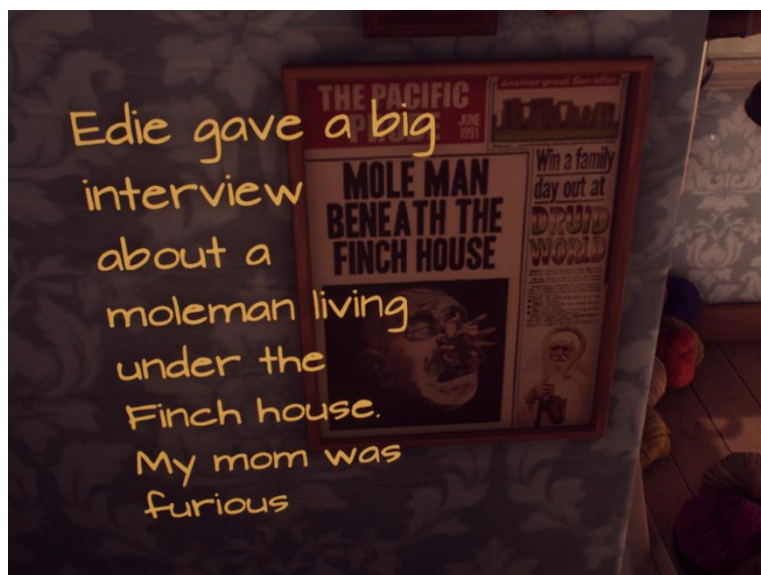meticulously placed on top of a
steep cliff by the seashore[18].
Walter lived to be one of the

Figure 7. Newspaper Clipping in Edie's Room, *What Remains of Edith Finch*

oldest members of the family, with the exception of Edie, but had died the moment he set his

foot outside of his bunker. Edith had been unaware about his existence until her discovery.

She found out that she had been six years old at the time of his death.

The newspaper clipping of the mole man shows how cruel Edie could be to her own

children, just to get a moment in the spotlight. Similarly, this could be said about most of the

stories one encounters through the game. As discussed earlier—Edie's shrines are not only

methodically placed in every room, but are created to tell a specific story. For all the reader-

player knows, and for all that Edith knows, the whole house could be staged to fit Edie's

vision or idea of the family history. There is no proof that the textual artefacts we encounter

are actually created by who we believe, but even if they are: they are still selected by Edie to

fit into her vision. The shrines and the rooms, and in extension, even the whole house, no

---

[18] Calvin's story, which is one of the simpler ones, shows the carelessness of the family. Calvin is also seen
wearing a cast of his leg, which further supports this.

longer represent the family members who died, but Edie's memories or narrative about them.

One of the more noteworthy examples that could support this reading is the story of Barbara,

Edie's second daughter, who was supposedly murdered in the house on Halloween. The story

of Barbara is not told through a personal diary or letter, as most of the other stories are, but

through a comic book titled *Dreadful Stories*, its visual style being a reference to the comic

Tales from the Crypt that
was popular during the
1950s (figure 8). The
story of Barbara stands
out as quite different from
the other stories, as it is
more clearly constructed
as a fiction through
drawing on horror
conventions, even

Figure 8. Comic Book found on Barbara's shrine, *What Remains of Edith Finch*

accompanied with the iconic musical theme of Carpenter and Hill's *Halloween*. The comic

concludes that Barbara was murdered by a group of monsters and that her last moment was "a

dream come true" as "she was going to be famous". Her last scream was described as "the

performance of her life". Edith comments that "of all the stories about Barbara's death, I'm

surprised that Edie saved this one". The comic not only tells an absurd tale of Edie's own

daughters death, but it also mocks her character as a fame-obsessed teen and reduces her final

moments, which were probably horrifying in truth, to entertainment for others. Why would

Edie pick this artefact to tell Barbara's story? The only answer provided in-game is that Edie

had told Edith that all Barbara wanted was to be remembered. In a somewhat twisted way,

one could see this as a homage to Barbara's memory, but a different reading could be that

Edie was the one obsessed with fame, not only Barbara, which is proven when we see the artefacts in her room, as described.

In this chapter, we have seen how *WRoEF* combines literary elements with the embodied experience of the reader-player, with environmental storytelling and short action sequences. The game achieves a layer of interpretive play and showcases the potential for artistic expression through its hybridity and cross-disciplinary experimentation with video games and literature. The reader-player is asked to utilize both ludic and literary skills to transverse the narrative—deep and hyper attention, cognitive and critical literacy, as well as the interpretive abilities that reading normally requires.

The visual storytelling of the game blends together with the textual layers in the form of narration and monologues, epistolaries, poetic address and through the textual artefacts. This chapter has argued that some video games are well suited to be studied from a literary perspective, and especially games belonging to the new wave of "art-games" such as "walking simulators". We have seen how the game *What Remains of Edith Finch* combines literary elements with visual environmental storytelling and simple gameplay mechanics to create a hybrid experience of reading and playing. The reader-player is invited to deploy both their interpretive and literary skills as well as their ludic skills, as the game blends literary, ludic as well as cinematographic and spatial techniques in their storytelling. These literary games, which blurs the boundaries between disciplines and genres, can help us to shift the emphasis away from the lack of traditional gameplay complexity, and onto the opportunities that they provide for multimodal and hybrid storytelling.

CHAPTER 2: The Personal and Public Libraries of Alison Bechdel's

Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic

> The line that dad drew between reality and fiction was indeed a blurry one.
> To understand this, one had only to enter his library.
>   - Alison Bechdel, *Fun Home*

As we saw in the first chapter of this thesis, multimodal media opens up the possibilities for storytelling through the interplay between different narrative and textual layers, as well as the inclusion and participation of the reader in the storyworld. This chapter will focus on a different multimodal form than the video game: the graphic novel, and how it works similarly, and differently, to the walking simulator in its use of textual artefacts, visuality and space. Graphic novels and other pieces of sequential and graphic art have come further on their way to acceptance into the field of literary scholarship than that the video game. As the video game form started to develop into a more complex and serious storytelling medium during the early 2000s, and is still in mid-development, the comic books and graphic novels started its maturation much earlier. Most prominently, we see this development during the 1980s with writers such as Bryan Talbot, Grant Morrison, and the aforementioned Will Eisner. Eisner, in addition to being a creator of comics, and the one considered to have popularised the term "graphic novel", also contributed significantly to the establishment and development of the field of comics studies with his highly influential work *Comics and Sequential Art.* This work, along with Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics*, is considered as the foundation for formal comics studies today. These works will, therefore, lay most of the theoretical foundation for this chapter, along with more recently developed scholarship, mostly that of Hillary Chute and Gillian Whitlock, that is particularly concerned with graphic memoirs or "autographics", as well as theories on memory and construction of personal, and public, archives.

This chapter explores the wonderous work by Alison Bechdel, *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic*, and in particular how it uses the narrative layers present in the visual and textual space to expand the story and possibilities for interpretations. Similarly to *What Remains of*

Edith Finch, which was explored in the previous chapter, Bechdel's memoir includes the reader in the storyworld in a unique way both through its use of perspective and the usage of "the space between" the images and words—commonly known as the gutter between the frames.

The chapter first gives an introduction to *Fun Home* as a cultural text, and the "autographic" as a form, what this form entails, and how Bechdel's memoir fits into this category. The chapter will then move on to look closer at the content of the memoir, its expanding upon the diegetic levels and layers of narrative, and how it works with textual artefacts, visual (and invisible) space, as well as reader-inclusion. A few excerpts from the work will be used as examples for the discussion. The discussion will be drawing some lines back to the previous chapter in order to showcase some of the similarities and differences between the two multimodal forms of cultural and literary expression. I hope to show how *Fun Home* as an autographic and its use of textual artefacts, visuality and space can produce a depth-effect to characterisation and interpretation that goes beyond what traditional prose autobiographies can typically achieve.

While *What Remains of Edith Finch,* although received very well, is part of a new wave of games that have been less explored by critics and scholars, *Fun Home* is situated somewhat on the other side of this spectrum. The memoir was at the time of its publishing described as "the most ingeniously compact, hyper-verbose example of autobiography to have been produced" (Wilsey)*,* winning several awards[19] and spent two weeks on the *New York Times Best Seller List*. The memoir claimed both public space and historical significance through being one of the most important coming-out narratives of the century, but also for

---

[19] Awards included the GLAAD Media Award for Outstanding Comic Book, the Stonewall Book Award, the Lambda Literary Award for "Lesbian Memoir and Biography", and perhaps most noteably the Eisner for Best Reality-Based work (an award fittingly named after no other than Will Eisner himself)

being an account tied to what some people might see as "shameful sexual histories"[20] (Cvetkovich 112), bringing the contemporary LGBTQ+ culture together with public discussions of historical trauma connected to the community and the individual experiences of queer people.

Similarly to other major and impactful graphic memoirs, such as the aforementioned *Maus*[21] and *Persepolis*, Bechdel's memoir also deals with trauma on both an individual level and on a greater scale—it represents the public traumas and histories of queer people and their shared experiences. *Fun Home* is thus a valuable part of a queer, transnational archive as it contributes to these "felt experiences" of the LGBTQ+ community (Bauer)[22]. So, although the memoir essentially tells Bechdel's personal coming of age story and coming out story as a lesbian woman and her connection to her father's story, it also inhabits the feelings of queerness: the shared history of queer people, and, as Bauer puts emphasis on, the felt experience of living in a homophobic society.

Fun Home uniquely plays with reader-perspective in the visual space as a way to place the reader into the storyworld and grant them both an observing role and an experiencing role—in a way Bechdel queers the reader, promoting the feelings of queerness and alienation through its narrative devices. The graphic memoir form is particularly well suited as a personal and public archive of feelings, as it can and does contain many layers of narrative and information through its multimodality, the inclusion of the reader, as well as providing innovations that open up new ways of thinking about ethics of life narratives that move across cultural borders (Whitlock 969). This aptitude for unique mediations of topics such as trauma

---

[20] Some people even went as far as attempting to have *Fun Home* banned from library shelves, claiming it was pornographic, and expressing concern over the work being read by children as it was a "comic book"—a genre "traditionally" read by very young readers. Bechdel stated in an interview that she saw this attempted banning as "a great honor", and as a natural "part of the whole evolution of the graphic-novel form".

[21] In an interview with Hillary Chute, Alison Bechdel states that she "couldn't have done anything without *Maus*… No one had addressed anything serious in comics before then" (1013), and Spiegelman's work also inspsired *Fun Home*'s chapter structure, such as the use of photographs on the chapters title-pages.

[22] The transnational borders will not be fully explored in this thesis. Read more about this in Heike Bauer's work on difficult feelings in *Fun Home*.

and cultural differences is manifested in the interplay between the narrative layers where the reader finds their place in the story. For this reason, this chapter will refer to *Fun Home* not only as a graphic memoir but specifically as an "autographic". This term is suited for graphic memoirs as more emphasis is put on the specific conjunctions of visual and verbal text[23]. It also emphasises how the different narrative layers that are presented through the text and images are interdependent from one another, although simultaneously play together to make not only a cohesive narrative but a layered narrative much like we saw in chapter 1. The term thus unifies the different interdependent narrative structures and layers to work together concurrently while still being containers of their own narrative voices. The autographic will be explored in more detail later in the chapter.

Due to its success as an autographic, *Fun Home* has attracted not only a general extended readership but also gained the attention of many well-established scholars within academia[24]. The high academic interest in *Fun Home* could be a result of the autographic's "high brow" intertextual references and use of canonical works, but Hillary Chute rejects the idea that these elements are the reasons for its success. She puts the emphasis on the memoir's formal elements, giving it autonomy separate from the canonical works, writing that "*Fun Home* is an enormously successful work because it hinges on the shades of complexity in the relationship between the author and her paternal subject—the anger and the identification". The emphasis is, in other words, put on the subject matter, its ability to convey and contain feelings, and the complexity of how these matters are being dealt with, where the intertextual references and usage of canonical works is only part of. These included works become tools for Bechdel's storytelling, while also being used as a way of interpreting her previous

---

[23] By visual and verbal text, I mean to place attention on both the textual narrator and the written dialogue as verbal text, and the images as well as the drawn copies of textual artefacts as visual text.

[24] See, for instance feminist scholar Nancy Miller who studies life writing; Ann Cvetkovich who has done several studies on queer trauma; and Hillary Chute whose scholarship focuses on the intersection between comics and life narratives.

experiences subsequently. It should be noted that literary canon is not, in this case, considered a solidified collection of texts as one usually thinks of novels. The canon is a living body of literature that is continuously reshaped through its adaptations and productions of new texts that draw inspiration from or alludes to these works[25]. The general idea that all texts of the modern age draw upon canonical works that came before them, and how new texts warp how the canonical works are interpreted, is central. Bechdel emphasises this idea through adapting or re-creating the canon in her own terms for her own purposes.

Similarly to what was explored in the first chapter, the canonical works are present in the visual space to serve as gateways to the layers of meaning and narrative. They provide frameworks for interpretation, for understanding, and creation. Some of these canonical works are also featured more prominently and is present in several of the narrative layers from title pages, visual representations, recreations, but also in the textual and verbal narration. Most notably, this chapter will be focusing on the canon by Camus, Joyce and Proust, but other notable names to mention are Homer, Tolstoy, Virginia Woolf, Radclyffe Hall, Faulkner and the less canonical, but still influential, Kate Millett.

These works are referred to by the narrator, as she makes connections that would, for example, in *WRoEF*, be made by the reader rather than the narrator. Bechdel thus becomes a sort of "reader" inside of her own memoir, as she explores memories and artefacts from the past. Instead of merely reading and commenting on the works, as Edith does in *WRoEF*, Bechdel's narrator continuously draws these connections and voices them through her narration and reflections in text. The reason behind her connecting these books together with her personal narrative could be explained by her own history. As we will learn throughout her memoir, she grew up with literature not only being prominently present in her life as

---

[25] The western literary canon includes classical works from Ancient times to the modern age, from Homer to Virginia Woolf.

entertainment and art but as a way of communication and an applicable way of understanding her parents and her growing up and later coming out.

It should also be noted that the canonical works we find in the visual and textual spaces are Bechdel's versions of the works. This highlights the idea of the recreated canon not belonging to their authors, but rather to Bechdel as she is the one creating the meaning of them in this context. As canonical works, the author loses the integrity over the meaning of the text—it belongs to the public and the individuals that engage with it[26]. It is not Joyce's

Ulysses that is present in the visual space on page 228 (figure 9): it is Alison Bechdel's *Ulysses*. The selection of text has been made by her, the actual recreation in drawing is made by her, and the narrator's comments and reflections that can be found in the captions, are also created by Bechdel[27]. In addition to the recreation, her captions are placed on top of the work, thus giving autonomy to her reflections and narration over that of the canonical work itself.
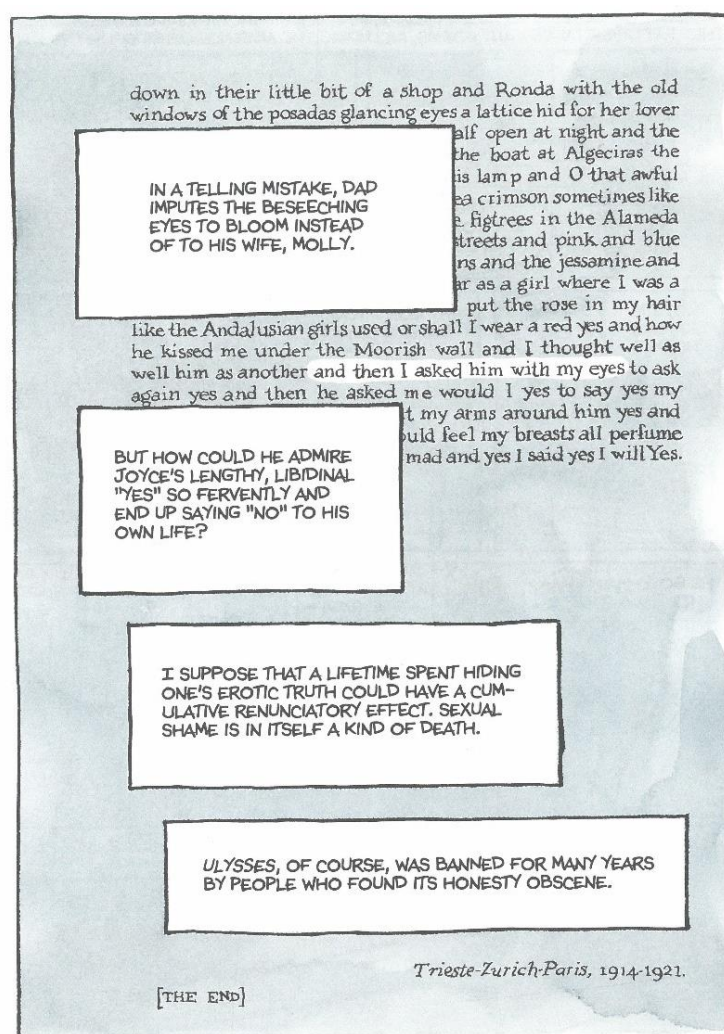

down in their little bit of a shop and Ronda with the old windows of the posadas glancing eyes a lattice hid for her lover half open at night and the the boat at Algeciras the is lamp and O that awful ea crimson sometimes like e figtrees in the Alameda streets and pink and blue ns and the jessamine and ar as a girl where I was a put the rose in my hair like the Andalusian girls used or shall I wear a red yes and how he kissed me under the Moorish wall and I thought well as well him as another and then I asked him with my eyes to ask again yes and then he asked me would I yes to say yes my t my arms around him yes and uld feel my breasts all perfume mad and yes I said yes I will Yes.

IN A TELLING MISTAKE, DAD IMPUTES THE BESEECHING EYES TO BLOOM INSTEAD OF TO HIS WIFE, MOLLY.

BUT HOW COULD HE ADMIRE JOYCE'S LENGTHY, LIBIDINAL "YES" SO FERVENTLY AND END UP SAYING "NO" TO HIS OWN LIFE?

I SUPPOSE THAT A LIFETIME SPENT HIDING ONE'S EROTIC TRUTH COULD HAVE A CUMULATIVE RENUNCIATORY EFFECT. SEXUAL SHAME IS IN ITSELF A KIND OF DEATH.

ULYSSES, OF COURSE, WAS BANNED FOR MANY YEARS BY PEOPLE WHO FOUND ITS HONESTY OBSCENE.

Trieste-Zurich-Paris, 1914-1921.

[THE END]

Figure 9. Recreation of Joyce in *Fun Home*

---

[26] See for example "The Intentional Fallacy" by Wimsatt and Beardsley which lays the groundwork for the idea that authorial intent is irrelevant to understanding a work of literature. The meaning is created in the reader.
[27] Some of these recreations of canonical works, for example Camus' *Happy Death* (27), include hand-written notes and highlights by her father. Even though these were originally written by her father, Alison Bechdel is the one creating meaning out of these comments—thus making them *her* version again.

The canonical works, however, are not the only re-creations of textual artefacts we find in Bechdel's memoir. They are put into conversation through juxtaposing them with scenes of her family life, memories from her past, and the personal textual artefacts. *Fun Home* is permeated with these archival elements: the handwritten and typewritten letters from her parents, police records, dictionaries, diaries, maps, and photographs, as well as books and newspaper clippings. These textual artefacts are re-created, drawn by Bechdel's own hand, not just to fit into the comic-book style, but because they represent *her* interpretations and versions of what took place[28]. Even though the artefacts are almost exact copies of the originals, traced and painstakingly drawn to capture the likeness of the real-life documents, they are still Bechdel's version and part of the archive she builds for herself to gain some understanding and, perhaps, find some closure and answers to questions she has about her own past and her father's life and death.

Bechdel's archive-construction is, according to herself, part of some impulses she has had throughout her life. She says in an interview with Hillary Chute: "even as a child I saved [all my drawings]. My mom didn't save them; I did it myself. I've always had this archiving impulse. I started my diary when I was ten. I'm the most anal-retentive person I've ever met" (Chute 1007). These archival impulses have been documented well by scholars working on *Fun Home*, such as Chute herself who looks into the embodied processes of re-penning the archival documents—the recreation of the archive being a procedure of embodiment rather than the archive being a source for truth (Chute "Comics Form"). Ann Cvetkovich focuses on queerness and the archival practices as a form of witnessing and contends that *Fun Home* offers "a queer perspective that is missing from public discourse about both historical trauma and sexual politics" (112). Julia Watson investigates the autobiographical use of textual

---

[28] The only recreation that is an exact copy, that is: scanned and pasted onto the page, is one of her diary entries from her childhood (143). In her interview with Chute, Bechdel talks about the process of re-tracing handwritten letters and how she did all of them "Except for one very small bit of actual childhood handwriting that [she] just scanned in a moment of laziness".

artefacts and memory arguing that Bechdel constructs and reconstructs subjects and assumptions established within the work. In other words, Bechdel both tells the stories and interprets them simultaneously through her engagement with these constructred libraries or archives. This chapter will be mostly concerned on the narrative functionality of Bechdel's archive through her use of textual artefacts, visuality and space in the autographic form. It will also explore how *Fun Home* makes use of multiplied diegetic levels, perspective and reader-inclusion to expand the possibilities of interpretation and cultural impact.

A Convoluted Concoction of Diegesis—The Structure of the Autographic Narrative

Due to *Fun Home* expanding upon the traditional genres of both the graphic novel and the autobiography, merging them together and playing with the layers of narrative through the visual and verbal texts, I will, for clarity's sake, be using the term "autography" to refer to the work. This term covers the somewhat complex use of these combinations of media within a graphic memoir. The term "autography" was first coined by Gillian Whitlock ("Autographics"), and has been used by several other prominent scholars such as Jared Gardner, who looks at the autography's relationship to the visual vocabulary of self-reference that emerged in cartooning practices from the early 1970s until the 2000s; and Julia Watson, who has done extensive work on autobiographies and autographies in her academic career.

The word "auto-graphy" suggests the writing of the self, the drawing of the self, as well as "autograph", which indicates the authentic imprint of the author (Warhol)[29]. The

---

[29] As Hillary Chute puts emphasis on, the comic is "largely a hand-drawn form that registers the subjective bodily mark on the page; its marks are an index of the body, and its form lends its pages the intimacy of a diary" ("Comics Form" 112), which is also why the medium of comics is especially suited for autobiographical work. This is also something Bechdel herself noted in an interview with Chute: "I always felt like there was something inherently autobiographical about cartooning, and that's why there was so much of it… It does feel like it demands people to write autobiographies" ("Life Drawing" 37)

author's selves encountered in the autography are, therefore, plural, and encountered on different narrative levels of diegesis. We have the intradiegetic (the world inside the story) and the extradiegetic (the world which is inhabited by the narrator's voice—existing outside the storyworld). The author or narrator is encountered in the captions, that is: the square "boxes" of text presented within the drawn frames, or in the gutter (the space between the frames on the page). The representation of the "past self" of the author is voiced through written text in speech bubbles within the frames[30]. These two narrative layers exist in most autobiographic works, but the autography adds a third dimension to the autobiographic narrative. This third dimension manifests through its use of images, where we see cartoon avatars act out the memories that are being revisited and the past events that are being imagined and recreated.

With this, the autographic form takes the narrative away from the dual model of discourse generally used in autobiographic works or works involving remembering or "flashbacks" into a third dimension. In *Fun Home,* however, we see these levels going even beyond the three that are normal in most graphic memoirs. Bechdel plays with the diegetic levels of narrative in quite a unique way, both within the textual and visual elements of her work. Her memoir operates on many more narrative layers than three—the visual and verbal narrative paths subdivide into several separate narrative pathways, which again creates new narrative elements that work together with each other in the space between the images and words where the reader is invited to participate in creating meaning.

This space between the images and words, and between the frames on the page, has been subject of scholarly concern over the past three decades by several theorists of comics (Warhol 4). McCloud refers to these gutters as "limbo" (95). He argues that comics are mono-sensory, but that between the panels, no senses are required to transverse meaning. The reader

---

[30] For clarity, I will hereafter be refering to the narrator as Bechdel and the past-version of her as Alison.

creates meaning from the spaces between the images and words—"both the source and receiver in the exchange contribute to the dynamics of meaning making" (8). Similarly to *What Remains of Edith Finch*, *Fun Home* engages the reader to make their own connections and interpretations through its carefully assembled structure. The gaps that are left to fill by the reader is in *Fun Home* visible as a blank space, "limbo", in the gutter.

Some scholars use mainly literary-critical models to discuss comics, such as Charles Hatfield and Rocco Versaci, while others reject literary criticism in favour of emphasising the visual elements in their analysis (Groensteen). We see here a divide between scholars, just like in the field of game studies and other literary studies, on what should be of scholarly concern and how the object of study should be approached. We do also see scholars working from both of these perspectives simultaneously. However, according to Robyn Warhol, these critics tend to "think along binary lines, separating the comics form into dual, opposing elements corresponding to 'word' and 'image'". Hatfield, for instance, calls attention to the duality of the comic form as a way to achieve both a sense of intimacy as well as a critical distance to and from the cartoonist/author (Hatfield 115).

However, the idea of the autographic, in opposition to Hatfield's dual concept, emphasises the *conjunction* between these two separate elements of the visual and textual space. But as we have also seen, there are not only two separate narrative layers present in *Fun Home*: there are at least three, and, arguably, many more present in the pictorial level. It is in this visual space where we find the cascade of reproduced and copied texts and photographs. These artefacts multiply the narrative dimensions that are normally unprecedented in other narrative genres[31]. All of the artefacts help to multiply the worlds invoked by the structure of *Fun Home*. They tell their own stories on a narrative level that is

---

[31] Here refering to print-narratives. As we have seen in chapter 1, video games also have this possibility of artefacts adding to the narrative layers, and, perhaps, even more blatantly through its physical transportation of the reader in the game-world when interacting with some of the artefacts.

distinct from both the extradiegetic narration and the intradiegetic dialogue and drawings of avatars.

Warhol does not directly condemn the work of those scholars with this dualistic approach, such as Hatfield, but she does put emphasis on how comics theory "needs to push past that dual model" arguing that "post-classical narratology can help" (4). This, Warhol believes, will make it possible to understand better how the narratives work. With this in mind, this chapter will be looking at *Fun Home* not as a simple dual form, but as a more complex hypertextual and many-layered narrative: an autographic.

Between Images and Words – A Textual Analysis of the Visual Space

Alison Bechdel traces her journey from being a young girl to a young adult through what is considered a recursive, rather than linear, narrative. We jump between different periods of her life, between different narrative layers and structures, and into and out of traumatic or central events. We learn that Alison Bechdel's parents were quite emotionally distant and often refracted their own experiences through literature. Bechdel uses this to her advantage and tells the story through the lens of her father's most beloved pieces of writing. Bruce Bechdel identified almost obsessively with literary characters, letting them define him and, perhaps, even affect his ways of living. As Bechdel writes: "the line that Dad drew between reality and fiction was indeed a blurry one", something we can see in the way Bruce Bechdel speaks of himself in the letters he wrote to Helen, Alison's mother, during their courtship.

When writing about Fitzgerald, Bruce says: "He reminds me much of myself", and claims that the protagonist from Fitzgerald's "Winter Dreams" is not only similar to him but *is* him. He compares Faulkner to Beech Creek, the area in which the family lived, and that the "Bundrens ARE Bechdels". Finally, when talking about Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* to his daughter, when she has been assigned it as a reading, he tells her: "You

damn well better identify with every page". With this, we can say that Bruce not only sees himself in literary terms but passes this on to Alison. Her conception of him and her mother also ends up being in literary terms. She states that "If my father was a Fitzgerald character, my mother stepped right out of Henry James", and that she employed "these allusions to James and Fitzgerald not only as a descriptive devices, but because [her] parents [were] most real to [her] in fictional terms" (67). This is a trend that permeates the whole narrative and becomes apparent already on the first few pages.

The story starts with a scene where Alison is playing aeroplane, or "Icarian games", with her father. She immediately draws a connection between her father and the mythological characters of Daedalus and Icarus. According to the myth, Icarus defied his father's advice and flew too close to the sun with his wax-wings, and plummeted to his death. Bechdel states

Figure 10. Bruce Bechdel's passion for historical restoration, *Fun Home*

that "it was not me but my father who was to plummet from the sky" (4), already revealing Bruce's inevitable downfall and hinting at his death. He defied his own advice, in a way, as Bechdel then draws a connection between him and the father figure, Daedalus, from the myth. We learn about his obsession with architecture and the restoration of the family's old

Gothic Revival house (figure 10)[32], drawing upon Daedalus' mythological craftmanship. This fixation with the outward appearances proves to be more than a fascination: "he used his

---

[32] In this frame, Bruce Bechdel is not only depicted as someone hard at work, but is described as a martyr and pictured similarly to Jesus carrying the cross on his way to his own crucifiction.

skillful artifice not to make things, but to make things appear to be what they were not" (16)

[33]. Bruce Bechdel used the outward appearances to seem like the impeccable and ideal

husband and father. However, as Bechdel states in one of the perhaps most memorable

sentences in her memoir: "would an ideal husband and father have sex with teenage boys?".

This question is accompanied by a drawing of the family in church where Bruce can be seen

eyeing up the alter boys walking past him on his right side (figure 11).
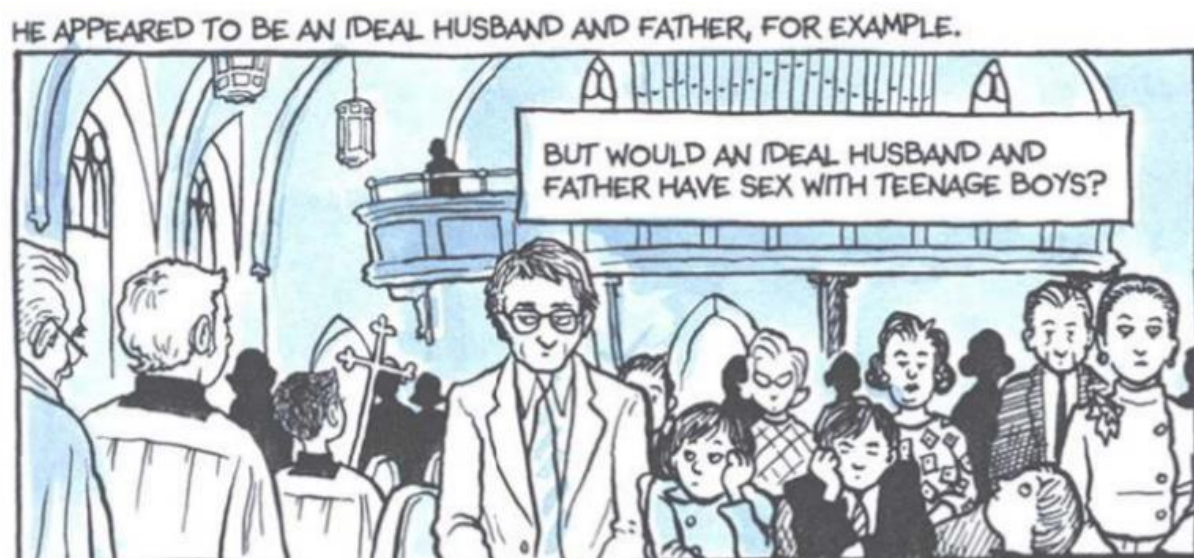
Figure 11. The Bechdel family at Church, *Fun Home*

Not long after this revelation, we are presented to one of the major traumas in

Bechdel's life. We learn about her father's untimely death at the age of 44, after he is hit by a

truck while restoring a house near a road. Alison, who was in college at the time of her

father's death, ponders if whether her own coming out might have impacted the event. She, as

well as her mother, concludes that he most likely took his own life. She thinks back to when

she wrote the letter to her parents stating "I am a lesbian" (58) and how this was the start of

the unraveling of her father's hidden identity, as her mother reveals to her on the phone that

she is divorcing her father as she had found out that he had been having an affair with other

---

[33] The Gothic house also connects to tropes from Gothic fiction wherein the architecture of the house, with its dark corridors and hidden rooms, serves as a symbol of the secrets and psyche of the characters in the work—which again is a direct parallel to the Bechdel family. Read more about this in Schneider's work on constructing the Gothic in *Fun Home*.

men, in particular Alison's babysitter from childhood. In this reflection on her father's death, Bechdel pieces together "evidence", or as she calls it "suggestive circumstances"(27), to support her suicide-theory. In addition to the assumed current state of her father's mentality at the point—with the reveal of his hidden sexuality and illicit sexual activities, as well as the upcoming divorce with his wife and imminent disruption of the family he had worked hard to maintain the image of[34]—Bechdel brings forward a novel that Bruce was reading in the weeks leading up to his death. Albert Camus' novel *A Happy Death,* which is also the title of the chapter in which this event transpires, has been left around the house in what Bechdel suggests "might be construed [in] a deliberate manner" (27). She draws a picture of the book together with a newspaper, letters and other ordinary items one might find on a kitchen table (figure 12)[35]. She goes on to explain how the novel and Camus' own fate shared similarities to her father's life and death; Albert Camus died at the age of 46, in a car accident. Bruce Bechdel had also highlighted a sentence from the novel: "He discovered the cruel paradox by which we always deceive ourselves twice about the people we love—first to their advantage, then to their disadvantage". She calls this sentence "a fitting epitaph for [her] parents'

Figure 12. Camus' *A Happy Death* left on a table, *Fun Home*

marriage" (28), and sees the highlight on this page as her fathers' way of making sense of his own feelings, and perhaps even to communicate his thought process, just like Alison Bechdel

---

[34] Bechdel notes: "Sometimes, when things were going well, I think my father actually enjoyed having a family. / or at least, the air of authenticity we lent to his exhibit. A sort of still life with children" (13)
[35] The newspaper-clipping also puts the event into a historical context.

is now, as a grown woman, revisiting her memories through textual artefacts and connecting them up through drawing lines to canonical works in an attempt to make sense of it all.

Bechdel continues to write that she is in need of using the classics to measure her own experience up against the happenings described in these works to understand her family, and thus her own past and her own self. She further elaborates on this in her interview with Hillary Chute, stating that she drew upon the "literary allusions not only because it was a useful device, but also because it was a technique for emotional distancing that I had learned from my parents." She found it easier to see her parents through these prisms of fictional characters rather than seeing them as real people. It was, perhaps, easier to relate to them through reading about "similar characters", putting some distance between her and her parents to allow her time and space for reflecting and interpreting them—just as one would with characters in a book.

Thierry Groensteen even argues that "Bruce has become what he would always have wanted to be: a character in a great work of literature", now that his daughter has made him a character in *Fun Home*. Whether one agrees with this quite bold remark or not, it is not grounded in nothing: Bruce frequently seems to live his life as if he is a character in a book, constructing an outward identity to hide his inner self. Alison Bechdel compares this side of her father to Marcel Proust in the way they both intermingled their lives with fiction to conceal their identities and "homosexual proclivities", and, as she puts emphasis on, their mutual fixation with the beauty of flowers[36].

Bechdel references several major literary masterworks of the modern age, like her allusions to Joyce, for instance, are multiple—he is "the most ubiquitous" (Freedman 130) among the authors she references. Although his role is less visible and apparent than that of Joyce, Marcel Proust is also a constant throughout the memoir. The memoir's narrative

---

[36] Bechdel also mentions that her father's love for flowers made him seem like a "sissy", which was a contrast to her "butch" and more masculine way of representing herself.

structure seems to come from Bechdel's merging of Proust's echoes with her memories of her father. The most important work of Proust to colour and frame the narrative in *Fun Home* is, similarly to the last chapter, his masterpiece *In Search of Lost Time*[37]. As touched upon in the previous chapter, this specific work is very commonly alluded to in narratives dealing with remembering and "involuntary memory" (Schacter). In *Fun Home*, Proust's work provides a framework of both narration and interpretation, not only for the reader of the narrative but for Alison Bechdel herself, as she, on many occasions, refers back to the work, drawing connections between Proust and her father. Although one can argue that Proust's masterpiece is present throughout the entire memoir, it is especially salient in chapter 4, which is named after one of the stories, "In The Shadow of Young Girls in Flower".

The chapter in question explores Alison's perspective on puberty as well as her positioning of herself and her father outside of the heteronormative procreative structure of the family, as "inverts". She draws upon Proust's use of the expression of "inversion", which is in its origin a Freudian concept. She explains that:

> Proust refers to his explicitly homosexual characters as "inverts." I've always been fond of this antiquated clinical term. It's imprecise and insufficient, defining the homosexual as a person whose gender expression is at odds with his or her sex. But in the admittedly limited sample comprising my father and me, perhaps it *is* sufficient. Not only were we inverts. We were inversions of one another. While I was trying to compensate for something unmanly in him… He was attempting to express something feminine through me (97-98).

In this scene (figure 13) Bechdel as the narrator is anticipating knowledge that Alison is yet to realise. Bechdel reveals that her father's attempts to police her gender identity, by imposing her to wear dresses, barrettes in her hair, and jewellery, as well as shaming her into rejecting forms of masculine expression, resulted in resentment and tears on her part.

---

[37] Bechdel refers to the work as *Rememberance of Things Past* in her memoir, an older translation of the original work *À la recherche du temps perdu,* but for consitency with the last chapter I will be refering to the work by its most current translation *In Search of Lost Time*.
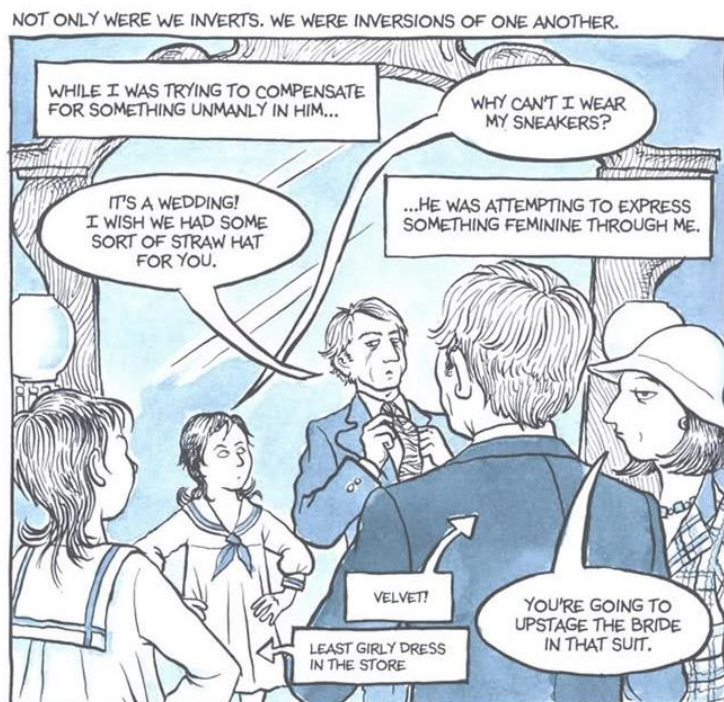
Figure 13. Alison and Bruce as inversions of one anothe*r, Fun Home*

Her resentment of her father is also grounded in her embarrassment and hurt at the notion of him not being "powerful" enough—not because he is feminine or engages in sexual affairs with young men, but because he is covert and craven (Mitchell). She, as a daughter, expects her parent to have a certain confidence and clarity about them as they are supposed to be older, wiser, and function as a body of comfort to their child. This becomes especially apparent when she has her first face-to-face encounter with her father after her coming out as gay. She describes the meeting as "not the sobbing, joyous reunion of Odysseus and Telemachus. It was more like fatherless Stephen and sonless Bloom", referring to the characters from Joyce's *Ulysses*, then asking herself which one of them was the "father", as she had felt like she was the one to be parentally listening to his "shame-faced recitation" (221).

In the fifth chapter, "The Canary-Colored Caravan of Death", Bechdel narrates her childhood struggles with obsessive compulsiveness, starting with her troubles with narrative signifiers. She starts keeping a diary, writing down events that happened during the day—and soon she begins to insert the phrase "I think" between the recorded activities. The narrator explains: "It was a sort of epistemological crisis," and goes on to ask herself: "How did I know that the things I was writing were absolutely, objectively true? All I could speak for was my own perceptions, and perhaps not even those" (141). Bechdel, as a narrator, goes on to

interpret her childhood obsession with writing "I thinks" saying that they were "gossamer structures in that gaping rift between signifier and signified"(142). As the child keeps falling deeper into this compulsiveness with her journalling, the words "I think" are soon replaced with a "curvy circumflex" to signify the thought. This circumflex is not only a representation of the phrase "I think", but signifies everything unsaid—everything between the lines. For instance, even though Alison as a child has no direct knowledge of her father's sexual desires or activities, the diaries provide witness to the secrecy and uncertainty that permeate the house, testifying to her inchoate reaction to that which cannot be narrated. She is somewhat aware that everything she writes might not be the whole truth and nothing but the truth, leading her to draw the circumflex as to communicate this worry (figure 14).
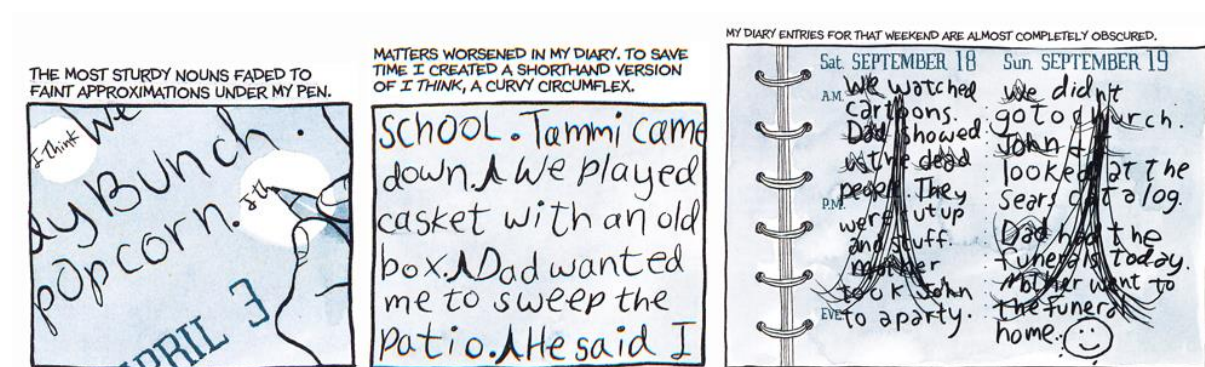

Figure 14. Development of Alison's circumflex, *Fun Home*

In continuation of this, Alison's drive to account for what is unaccountable is reflected in the role of the reader of the memoir. The act of finding connections across the pages, between the narrative layers, across the temporal and spatial distances, as Bechdel's narrator continuously does throughout *Fun Home*, is also done by the reader. The reader's role becomes a mirroring of the act of constructing memory and narratives. It is between the frames where these meanings and narratives are constructed. As Bechdel states: "the space between the image and the words [is] a powerful thing if you [can] figure out how to work with it". Her inclusion of textual artefacts, allusions to the literary canon, and her carefully

planned compositions of the image within the frames, make the gutter a place for the reader to

"pause" and think.

One example of how Bechdel composes the visual images to promote reader-inclusion

is her way of using perspective. Some events from her story stand out as especially interesting

in this regard. The middle pages of *Fun Home*, the centrefold, is the only full double-page

spread in the entire memoir. The spread, which depicts her father's lover, and Alison's

babysitter, Roy in a hotel room, was taken in secrecy on a family vacation when Alison was

eight[38] (figure 14). Roy is sprawled on the bed. The photograph of Roy is held by the fingers
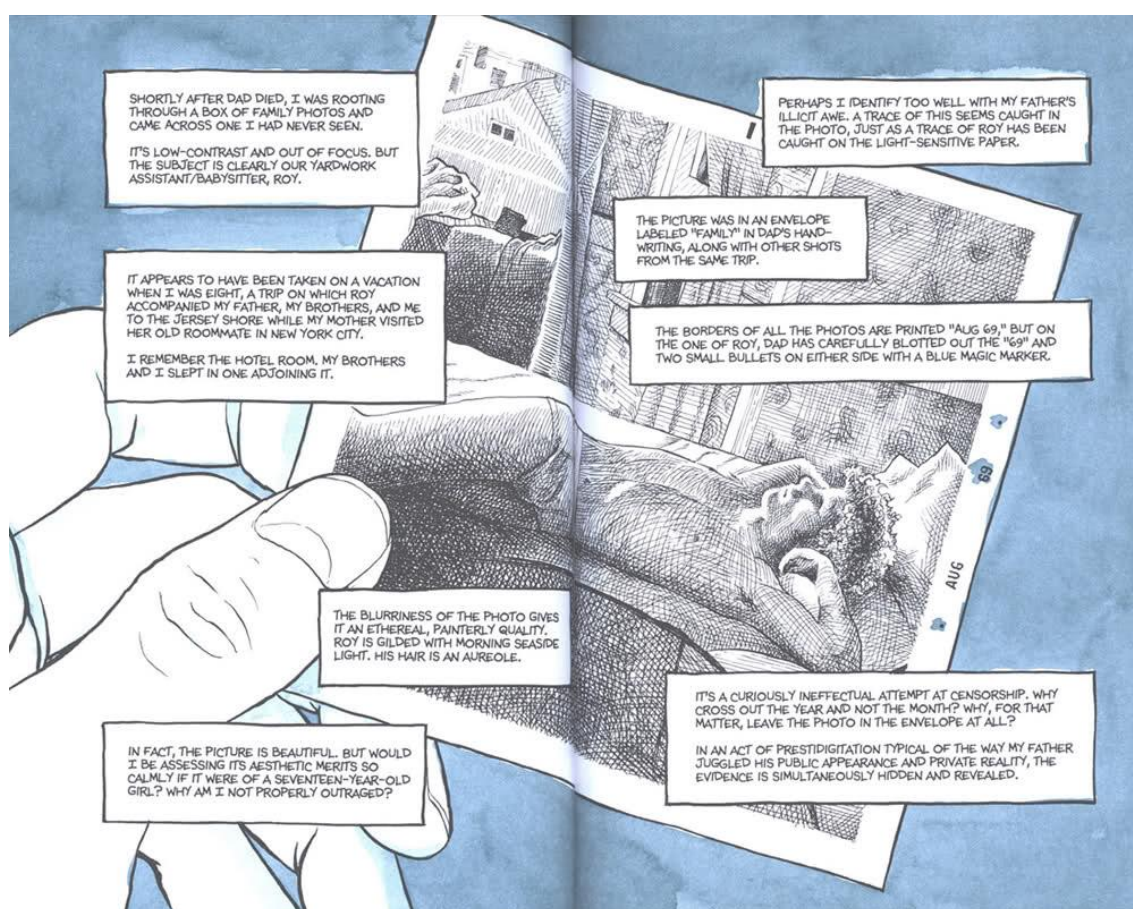

Figure 15. Photograph of Roy the babysitter, *Fun Home*

of a left hand that interestingly is overlapped by the reader's hand as they hold the physical

copy of *Fun Home*. The reader is no longer only an observer from the outside but becomes

embodied in the experience as the perspective shifts into first-person. It is the reader's hand

---

[38] Bechdel states: "In fact the whole story was spawned by a snapshot I found of our old babysitter lying on a hotel bed in his Jockey shorts" (Chute 1005).

holding the photograph of Roy. This is a perfect example of how Bechdel queers the reader—by putting them into her position as she explores the artefacts.

In this chapter we have seen how the narrative structure of *Fun Home* offers a range of perspectives through its use of textual artefacts, visuality and space, as well as the point of view or perspective of the reader in respect to the drawn avatar of Alison. Her complex and intricate use of canonical texts in all layers of the narrative creates a framework for interpretation and understanding for both Bechdel as she explores and looks for meaning, as well as for the reader which partakes on this journey after truth.

The visual point of view that the reader experiences through the various positions and perpectives in respect to Alison's drawn avatar and the textual artefacts—for instance the third-person perspective that is used in most sequences, and the subject position that is the result of the first-person perspective used in the centrefold—includes the reader into the storyworld in a way that is impossible in traditional prose narratives. The reader becomes embodied into the narrative, and in some instances takes the place of Bechdel herself, partaking in her experiences, feelings and reflections. The reader becomes part of the queer experience and partakes in the feelings of alienation in a society and culture that is not fitted to them. The reader does not only observe Bechdel's journey and her reflections on her past, but partakes in the experience, creating a narrative and meaning separate from the work.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has explored two multimodal works of fiction in which textual artefacts are central to the storytelling through serving as narrative structures, gateways between the different frames and layers, containers and conveyers of memories, and objects that draw the reader or player into the narrative as participators and meaning-makers. Both *What Remains of Edith Finch* and *Fun Home* use visuality and space to their advantage and use the multimodal form of the video game and graphic novel to enhance and expand the storyworld and possibilities for interpretive work.

Canonical works play a role in the structure of the stories, such as Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* (or *Remembrance of Things Past*) which is prominently present in both stories as a framework for the creation of narrative and for the interpretation of it. In contrast, many other canonical and non-canonical works of literature are referenced only briefly in text or re-created in the visual spaces. These artefacts, without being explored by the narrators directly, engage with the reader or reader-player through opening the storyworld and providing suggestions for deeper interpretations.

Both Edith Finch and Alison Bechdel as explorers of their own past interpret the artefacts they encounter in their own way to construct a narrative for themselves and their past familymembers. In the case of Edith, her reflections are less articulated than that of Alison Bechdel, and are presented more as comments rather than deep interpretations. This might be done decisively to give room for the reader-player to create their own ideas and conclusions. It could also be an effect of her young age at the time, and the fact that she belonged to a family not exactly known for their prowess in critical thinking. In the case of Bechdel, however, as her work is an autobiography, her interpretations are connected to her real life and to real people. Her understandings and readings run a lot deeper and in more detail, as her role in the process is not as an observer, like Edith, but as an explorer and storyteller. As Edith explores artefacts almost solely about family members she never met, it should also be

put attention that the library of artefacts she encounters have not been constructed by her, but by the matriarch Edie and based upon her somewhat problematic relationship with fame, death and stories. Bechdel, however, constructed her library or archive by herself, for herself. She is exploring her own past, making connections between artefacts, canonical works and events and people in her life not only to tell a story: but to construct a narrative for her own sake of understanding where she comes from, to approach her difficult relationship with her father, and, perhaps, in an attempt to gain some closure.

Even though Bechdel makes all of these connections and reflections, it does not, however, exclude the reader from participating in this constructional work. The graphic novel form, or the autographic in this case, leaves space for the reader to pause between the frames to connect together the threads. The gameplay equivalent of the use of the gutter, is its lack of gameplay complexity, as well as the leaving out of the narrator's reflections. The interpretive complexity is compensated by the hybrid form: through what Pinchbeck calls "vacuum space" the lack of direct stimulation opens up for reflective work and emotional experiences. The environmental details, such as the construction of the house, rooms and the book titles spread around in the different areas, provides the framework for interpretation, rather than the books explicitly (and implicitly) mentioned or put to attention by Bechdel in *Fun Home*. In *WRoEF*, these books have to be found by the reader through their exploration of the house, they are not always visible in the space—such as in *Fun Home*.

With this I hope to have shown how the multimodal forms, such as the video game and graphic novels, have moved beyond their traditional function as only pieces of "pop-culture" and entertainment, into more complex storytelling forms. This shift started earlier with the comic books than with the video game, but we can see some similar trends in how the use of visuality and space has opened up for more focus on artistic and literary expression. The video game still has some way to go, as it is continuously developing—and quickly at

that. Together with new technological advances, such as the more recent developments in virtual reality, for instance, the video game form will, I believe, become an even more prominent form of cultural expression in the future.

WORKS CITED

Aarseth, Espen J. *Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature.* John Hopkins University
Press, 1997.

---. "From Hunt the Wumpus to Everquest: Introduction to Quest Theory." *International
Conference on Entertainment Computing*, Springer, 2005, pp. 496-506.

---. "Genre Trouble: Narrativism and the Art of Simulation." *First Person: New Media as
Story, Performance, and Game*, edited by Noah Wardrip-Fruin and Pat Harrigan, MIT
Press, 2004, pp. 45-55.

Barrett, James. "The Ergodic Revisited: Spatiality as a Governing Principle of Digital
Literature." Umeå University, 2015.

Bassett, Keith. "Walking as an Aesthetic Practice and a Critical Tool: Some
Psychogeographic Experiments." *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, vol. 28,
no. 3, 2004, pp. 397-410.

Bauer, Heike. "Vital Lines Drawn from Books: Difficult Feelings in Alison Bechdel's *Fun
Home* and *Are You My Mother*?" *Journal of lesbian studies*, vol. 18, no. 3, 2014, pp.
266-281.

Bechdel, Alison. *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic.* Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2007.

---. "An Interview with Alison Bechdel." Interview by Hillary Chute, MFS Modern Fiction
Studies, 2006, pp. 1004-1013.

Bozdog, Mona and Galloway, Dayna. "Worlds at Our Fingertips: Reading (in) What Remains
of Edith Finch." *Games and Culture*, 2019.

Camus, Albert. *A Happy Death.* Vintage, 1995.

Canby, Vincent. "Fighting, Fantasy In'conan the Barbarian.'." *New York Times*, 1982.

Carroll, Lewis. *Through the Looking Glass: And What Alice Found There.* Rand, McNally,

    1917.

CD Projekt Red. *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt.* Atari, 2015.

Chaucer, Geoffrey. *The Canterbury Tales.* Broadview Press, 2012.

Chute, Hillary. "Comics Form and Narrating Lives." *Profession*, vol. 2011, no. 1, 2011, pp.

    107-117.

Coltrain, James and Stephen Ramsay. "Can Video Games Be Humanities Scholarship? ."

    Debates in the Digital Humanities 2019, edited by Lauren F Klein and Matthew K

    Gold, University of Minnesota Press, 2019, pp. 36-45.

Corrigan, Nora. "The Knight's Earnest Game in Chaucer's the Cantebury Tales." *Games and

    Gaming in Medieval Literature*, edited by Serina Patterson, Palgrave Macmillan,

    2015, pp. 147-164.

Detweiler, Robert. "Games and Play in Modern American Fiction." *Contemporary Literature*,

    vol. 17, no. 1, 1976, pp. 44-62.

Eisner, Will. *Comics and Sequential Art: Principles and Practices from the Legendary

    Cartoonist.* WW Norton & Company, 2008.

Ensslin, Astrid. "Between Ludicity and Literariness." *Literary Gaming*, Cambridge, Mass:

    The MIT Press, 2014.

Freedman, Ariela. "Drawing on Modernism in Alison Bechdel's Fun Home." *jml: Journal of

    Modern Literature*, vol. 32, no. 4, 2009, pp. 125-140.

Frictional Games. *Amnesia: The Dark Descent*. Frictional Games, 2010.

Fullbright. *Gone Home*. Annapurna Interactive, 2013.

Gardner, Jared. "Archives, Collectors, and the New Media Work of Comics." *MFS Modern

    Fiction Studies*, vol. 52, no. 4, 2006, pp. 787-806.

Groensteen, Thierry. *The Expanding Art of Comics: Ten Modern Masterpieces.* University

    Press of Mississippi, 2017.

Hayles, N Katherine and Jessica Pressman. *Comparative Textual Media: Transforming the*

    Humanities in the Postprint Era. U of Minnesota Press, 2013.

Irrational Games. *Bioshock.* 2K Games, 2007.

Iuliano, Fiorenzo. "Du Côté De Fun Home: Alison Bechdel Rewrites Marcel Proust." *Partial*

    Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas, vol. 13, no. 2, 2015, pp. 287-

    309.

James, Joyce. *Ulysses.* Ripol Classic Publishing, 2017.

Karhulahti, Veli-Matti. "An Ontological Theory of Narrative Works: Storygame as

    Postclassical Literature." *Storyworlds: A Journal of Narrative Studies*, vol. 7, no. 1,

    2015, pp. 39-73.

Lord Dunsany. "The Coronation of Mr. Thomas Shap." *The Book of Wonder*, edited by

    Edward J. M. D. Plunkett, Project Gutenberg, 2010,

    http://www.gutenberg.org/files/7477/7477-h/7477-h.htm.

Mitchell, Adrielle. "Spectral Memory, Sexuality and Inversion: An Arthrological Study of

    Alison Bechdel's Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic." *ImageTexT: Interdisciplinary*

    comics studies, vol. 4, no. 3, 2009, p. 19.

Montfort, Nick. "Narrative and Digital Media." *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*,

    edited by David Herman, Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp. 172-186.

Pinchbeck, Dan. "Ambiguity and Abstraction in Game Writing: Lessons from Dear Esther."

    Game Developers Conference Europe, 2012.

    https://www.gdcvault.com/play/1016695/Ambiguity-and-Abstraction-in-Game.

Remedy Entertainment. *Alan Wake.* Microsoft Game Studios, 2010.

Satrapi, Marjane. *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood.* Pantheon, 2004.

Schacter, Daniel L. *Searching for Memory: The Brain, the Mind, and the Past.* Basic Books, 2008.

Spiegelman, Art. *The Complete Maus.* vol. 1, Pantheon, 1991.

Warhol, Robyn. "The Space Between: A Narrative Approach to Alison Bechdel's" Fun Home"." *College Literature*, 2011, pp. 1-20.

Whitlock, Gillian. "Autographics: The Seeing" I" of the Comics." *MFS Modern Fiction Studies*, vol. 52, no. 4, 2006, pp. 965-979.

Wimsatt, William K and Monroe C Beardsley. "The Intentional Fallacy." *The Sewanee Review*, vol. 54, no. 3, 1946, pp. 468-488.

Zakowski, Samuel. "Environmental Storytelling, Ideologies and Quantum Physics: Narrative Space and the Bioshock Games." *1st International Joint Conference of DiGRA and FDG*, 2016.

LIST OF FIGURES

APPENDIX: The Pedagogical Relevance of the Thesis

The shift we now see in academic circles with the introducing of comics or sequential art as well as digital storytelling and video games, has seemingly also happened within the Norwegian schools. The usage of games in learning is as old as history, or even older. Games can help us to learn strategic and tactical thinking, language and communication skills, among other things. Recently, teachers have been using video games to teach specific subjects such as *The Walking Dead* games being used as an exercise in ethical choice, the *Assassin's Creed* series as a way to teach about history in an entertaining way, and *Minecraft* to teach students about cooperative work and geometric building. *What Remains of Edith Finch* can offer a different approach to video games through its textual elements, having the students engage with literature and literary canon in new spaces and mediums.

Comics have also been used in schools for decades, mostly as "lighter reading" for students struggling with reading whole novels, where they would be able to transverse the text easier when accompanied by pictures. Today, however, the general view of sequential art, and especially graphic novels, has changed. There has been an increase in the usage of these works, and not just as an aid for struggling students. *Fun Home,* it could be argued, offers even more significant challenges to literacy than prose literature does, as the interpretive abilities expand beyond that of the printed text. The students can thus practice their ability to draw lines between different layers of narrative to create their own analysis.

The Norwegian Curriculum has very recently undergone a major change, with the new educational reform taking full effect from August 2020. This reform puts further emphasis on deep learning, literacy across many mediums—not just print text—and interdisciplinarity between the school subjects. It is thus not only possible but even encouraged, by schools to include multimodal narratives and new forms of cultural expression in teaching.