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“Walking around with broken hearts on their hands:” Intimate Writings in Contemporary Comics

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Abstract

This thesis aims at analyzing diary fiction in contemporary comic books. I have selected three primary sources, *Wet Moon* by Sophie Campbell (2004), *Skim* by Mariko Tamaki and Jillian Tamaki (2008), and *Le Bleu Est une Couleur Chaude* by Julie Maroh (2010). These works are close in time of publication, all written and illustrated by women. Moreover, they share other similarities: the protagonists are young female adults, and there is a queer motif underlying the stories. All three protagonists use diaries in order to express their thoughts, and feelings. Diary fiction focuses on character development, and the narrator's journey to the self more than on action. Especially, the narrator's journey towards him/herself. Despite their initial parallels, each text is from a different country, providing a scope of analysis across different cultures. My goal is to compare and contrast these texts in their use of intimate writings to portrait female characters in the comics medium.

Key words

Comics. Diary fiction. *Wet Moon*. Sophie Campbell. *Skim*. Mariko and Jillian Tamaki. *Le Bleu Est une Couleur Chaude*. Julie Maroh.

Epigraph

“It’s kind of brutal watching someone walk with broken hearts on their hands.”

Jillian and Mariko Tamaki

“Maybe my undoing is already in progress, and tomorrow I’ll wake up undone.”

Sophie Campbell

“Personne n’a dit que ce serait facile, c’est just mon petit cervelet d’ado qui se l’est imagine.”

Julie Maroh

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Introduction

This thesis is about representation of young female protagonists in contemporary comic books. I have selected three primary sources, *Wet Moon* by Sophie Campbell (2004), *Skim* by Mariko and Jillian Tamaki (2008), and *Le Bleu Est Une Couleur Chaude* by Julie Maroh (2010). These titles are close in time of publication, all written and illustrated by women. Moreover, these titles share other similarities: the protagonists are young adults, who maintain a diary throughout the narrative. Despite their initial parallels, each text is from a different country: *Wet Moon* is from United States; *Skim* is from Canada; and *Bleu* is from France. This provides a scope for my analysis across different cultures.

Wet Moon (2004) is a series of comics written by Sophie Campbell, currently it has six completed volumes. Sophie Campbell is a writer and illustrator from New York State, United States. The story follows various characters, mostly female in their late teens, starting university at the fictional town of Wet Moon. The characters are from different ethnicities, sexual orientations, and backgrounds. The first volume, *Wet Moon: Feeble Wanderings*, focuses mostly on Cleo Lovedrop, as she starts classes. Cleo writes in her diary daily, registering her thoughts and feelings.

Skim (2008) is written by Mariko Tamaki and drawn by Jillian Tamaki. Jillian and Mariko Tamaki are two cousins from Canada. The story is set in a Toronto catholic school, and concerns the outcast student Kim, known as Skim. When the boyfriend of a girl in school kills himself, everyone goes into a mourning period. As an outsider, Skim starts to draw unwanted attention from her peers. School staff and students think she is a suicide risk, which only deepens her status as an outcast. On top of that, she falls in love with her English and drama teacher, Ms. Archer. Skim uses her diary to express her feelings of being in love, and dealing with school pressures.

Bleu est une couleur chaude (2010) is written and illustrated by Julie Maroh, who is from the north of France. This graphic novel was adapted to the cinema as *La Vie d'Adèle – Chapitres 1 & 2* (2013) by Abdellatif Kechiche, where it gained popularity. The story is set in France between 1994 and 2008. It is a love story between Emma, a blue haired girl, and Clémentine, a high school student. Clémentine's diary tells the story of their first encounters; Clémentine coming to terms with her sexuality; and the development of their relationship.

The selection of these three authors is not intended to be representative of all contemporary female cartoonists[1,2]. Rather, my thesis performs a close reading of these three authors' texts in order to explore how they use the comic form to focus on interiority rather than on plot-driven action. The comic form has greatly expanded in scope since the early days of Marvel and D.C. action heroes, and these three authors build on a growing alternative tradition that exploits the diary form, an absence of plot, image at the expense of words, and intimate topics such as sexuality. While this alternative tradition is certainly not exclusively feminine, I suggest that it nevertheless constitutes a move away from the earlier masculinized model of action-hero comic books. These three authors' focus on specifically queer female protagonists also creates a space for exploring interiority through a queer lens. Thus, the research question guiding this thesis is: How do female cartoonists use diary fiction to portray young female protagonists? In order to answer this question, I will contextualize contemporary Young Adult fiction for female adolescents; then, I will define the genre of diary fiction; finally, I will contextualize comics as a medium and define some key aspects pertinent to this research.

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[1] For instance, female cartoonists have been extremely prolific in creating autobiographical works such as Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* (2000), Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home* (2006) and *Are You My Mother?* (2008), Joulie Doucet's *My New York Diary* (2010), Phoebe Gloeckner's *Diary of a Teenage Girl: An Account in Words and Pictures* (2002).

[2] For in depth critical analysis of contemporary autobiographical comics by female cartoonists see: Chute, Hillary. *Graphic Women: Life Narrative and Contemporary Comics*. Columbia University Press, 2010.

Contemporary comics still present a discouraging state of affairs for women creators and characters. In her quantitative and qualitative research, Carolyn Cocca found that, out of the 144 issues of comics studied, 136 portrayed women in a sexually objectifying manner (420)[3] . Cocca's sample was from the years 1993 to 2013 of the two main comic publishers, DC Comics and Marvel. It is a significant analysis of the *status quo* of women's representation in a male dominated medium. According to a French report, only 12% of cartoonists are female (France Info). Not only women are under-represented in comics, but they are also under-employed.

According to Linda Hudson, most female characters do not represent liberated women; on the contrary, "They're how dudes want to imagine those women would be … [t]hey read like men's voices coming out of women's faces." Hudson continues to argue that this type of representation feels unrelated to her experiences as a woman:

> But this is what comics like this tell me about myself, as a lady: They tell me that I can be beautiful and powerful, but only if I wear as few clothes as possible. They tell me that I can have exciting adventures, as long as I have enormous breasts that I constantly contort to display to the people around me. (no page)

Reports, such as Cocca's, tells us that women are not playing a large enough part in the production of comics. Moreover, articles, such as Hudson's, point out that comic books characters do not realistically represent women. Hudson's article is one of the many similar critiques on the internet demanding a better characterization of women within comics. Comics play a great role in the larger realm of popular culture, and "thus [are] a

[3] The most cited example is the "Broken back pose," which twists the spine of female characters in order to show at once the breasts and the bottom in unrealistic manner. There is a tumblr page dedicated to posting solely images of this pose. See: The Broke Back Pose, http://thebrokebackpose.tumblr.com/. And, Mitchel, Nigel. "10 Most Ridiculous Broken Back Superheroine Poses," *The Geek Twins*, http://www.comicsbeat.com/fact-check-can-you-really-fight-in-the-brokeback-pose/.

conduit to a critical consideration of pop culture" (Thomas 189). Comics done by women, like the ones analyzed in this thesis, seem to be a form of resistance, and a subversion of the norm. Studying the ways women are producing and being represented in comics is a way of understanding a path to resist gender stereotypes in a male-oriented medium.

I will first talk about young adult fiction for adolescent women. Next, I will provide a brief definition of diary fiction. Finally, I will contextualize and define the genre of comics.

Girl Fiction

In *Reading Like a Girl*, Sara Day analyzes female readership of young adult fiction. Day is interested in first-person narrators who are adolescent woman writing for adolescent readers like themselves. The three comics selected for this thesis are classified as young adult literature. According to Day, adolescence is paramount in American culture:

> As adolescence has come to occupy a longer period of time, it has also become more central to American culture, particularly in ongoing conversations about adolescent behaviors (or, perhaps more accurately, misbehaviors). Particularly in the years since World War II, concerns about teen drug use, sexual activity, and violence have played a prominent role in portrayals of and discussions about adolescents, leading to a more general understanding of adolescence in America as a time fraught with insecurity and instability, anger and alienation. (Day 8)

As it is generally understood, adolescence is a period of turmoil and instability. The protagonists of the selected comics are no different, as they try to navigate youth's

hardships. Their diaries becomes a coping mechanism, and a safe haven to process their thoughts, emotions, and struggles. The first-person narration in the form of diary entries conforms to Day's parameters as well. Day, however, choses to focus on female narrators who are part of the norm, namely, white, middle class, and heterosexual (Day 10). The protagonists in this thesis do not conform to these expectations. Instead, the young narrators are in line with Gina Hausknecht's definition of "girl's stories," which are "about not fitting in, about failing, willfully or unwittingly, to fulfill normative cultural expectations" (22). The three protagonist are of different ethnicities, middle class, and queer.

Day is interested in identifying the ways in which these first-person narrators create what she calls "narrative intimacy". Day defines narrative intimacy as a shared space between narrator and reader. To achieve narrative intimacy, the narrator signals awareness of a reader who plays the role of a confidant and a friend. In this sense, Day explains that narrative intimacy

> employs a first-person narrator who self-consciously discloses information and who implicitly or explicitly signals an awareness and expectation of a reader, either through direct address (which may identify the specific audience to whom the story is being related) or through a more general construction of the narrator's tale as disclosure, confession, or other interpersonal discourse. (4)

Combining diary entries and images, the comics analyzed construct a reader who can be a dear confidant or a voyeur. It allows readers to experience the narrators' experiences with them. Intimacy, as the stories show, is not always easy for the narrators. The diaries become a safe space where disclosure and secrets can be kept. As readers, we share this intimate space with them. For Day, "the prevalence of narrative intimacy …

reflects a concern with the threats posed by these interpersonal connections while suggesting a more general understanding of the reading experience as a type of interpersonal relationship" (4). Thus, readers and narrators can share experience as a way to deal and process the troubles of adolescence, such as love, sexual desire, and friendship fallouts.

On occasion, however, the events become too complex or too serious to be fully expressed by the young narrators. There are times when important events in the comics are conveyed by not being mentioned at all. In *Having a Good Cry* (2003), Robyn Warhol identifies this refusal to narrate as "unnarration."[4] Unnarration is the "the technique of naming that which cannot be told in a story" (Warhol *Having* 45). This narrative strategy leaves for the readers to complete the gaps the narrator cannot bring into words. Warhol remarks that often "representation, in the form of mere language, is inadequate to convey the depths of emotion the characters and narrator are presented as feeling" (Warhol *Having* 43-4). Unnarration occurs in the moments that the narrator or the character is "pushed beyond speech by their feelings" (Warhol *Having* 45). Through this technique, the narrator signals to his/her own inability to describe such intense emotions, leaving it up to readers to 'complete' the scene. According to Warhol, "The cooperative reader must follow the cues and take an active part in co-creating the scene's affective power" (*Having* 44). Thus, through unnarration readers are asked to take part in understanding and relating to the emotions taking place in that moment.

[4] Gerald Prince first coined the term in an essay entitled "The Disnarrated," but Prince never made a clear definition of the terms introduced, or a terminological distinction between 'disnarrated' and 'unnarrated' (Warhol "Neonarrative" 221).

Defining diary novel

At one time or another, a diary becomes part of everyone's life. Most likely during adolescence, one finds comfort in writing about the daily events, emotions, thoughts, and daydreams in a private notebook. Many writers have even published their private journals. Knowing what a diary is proves to be easier than defining it. Diaries can take any shape, format or style their authors desire. In *The Diary Novel* (1985), Lorna Martens defines it as "a first-person narrative that the narrator writes at periodic intervals and essentially for himself" (4). Distinguishing it from autobiography is important. Autobiography is an account of the author's own life told retrospectively, in which the author/narrator shapes his own life into a coherent narrative. A diary, however, is told in the moment, with ongoing entries, and without an end in sight. According to Gerald Prince, "in the diary novel, the narration is fragmented, as it were, and inserted between various sequences of events" (478). Moreover, "a diary novel always implies several narrative occasions: the narrator does not tell a story in one sitting" (Prince 478).

In this thesis, I am not interested in real diaries, but fictional ones. In regards to diary fiction, Trevor Field formulates: "'I' write *in medias res* about myself for myself" (5). The 'I' being the fictional character/narrator, as opposed to a real diary in which author and narrator coincide. *In medias res* is another important aspect of diary fiction, that is, writing about the events of life as they are happening. Additionally, the very beginning of the diary novel is *in medias res*, as it starts in middle of the narrator's life. Sometimes a new notebook marks the beginning of a diary novel, but, as one of the comics studied in this thesis demonstrates, it is not necessarily the case. Expanding on these formulations, Martens describes diary fiction as "a fictional prose narrative written from day to day by a single first-person narrator who does not address himself to a fictive addressee or recipient" (4). Thus, we can discern three important characteristics of diary

fiction: (1) first-person narration, (2) *in medias res*, (3) apparent absence of a narratee. Martens proposes a collapse of narrative functions that is exemplified by the following figure:

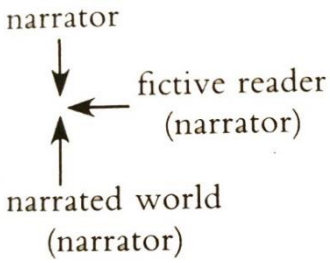

Figure 1. Martens, Lorna. *The Diary Novel*, p. 10.

Martens explains that "instead of a narrator who creates a narrated world and addresses himself to a fictive reader, we have a narrator who takes himself as subject and is his own reader" (5). Unlike a real diary, however, the diary novel does have a real author behind the communicative frame of the diary and a real reader who is meant to enjoy the text. Martens presents the following figure:

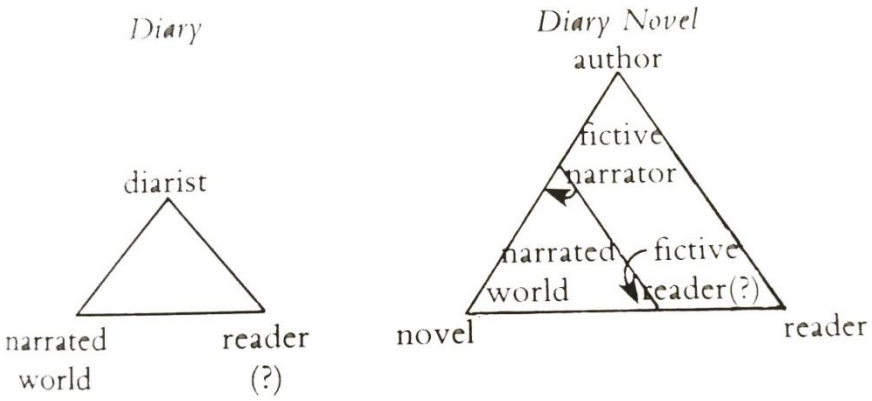

Figure 2. Martens, Lorna. *The Diary Novel*, p. 32.

As the diagram demonstrates, the real author has control over the narrative, unlike the real diarist. Fictional diaries conceal the second triangle, mimicking real diaries. According to Field, "the journal form is well suited to creating positive belief on the part of even the least willing reader" (54). For readers, it becomes easy to forget that there is another communicative instance circumventing the fictional diary. Abbott argues that

fictional diaries employ other tools to create this mimetic effect. First, the spontaneity of the accounts in the entries (Abbott 19); second, the diary as a document, as "the sort of document that people who are not professional writers actually write" (Abbott 19).

As a first-person narrative, readers' point of view are aligned with that of the narrator, which tends to be presented in a sympathetic light. For Martens, the apparent absence of a narratee implies a safe space of confession: "The lack of a fictive-reader suggests uninhibited self-expression, while the periodic scheme makes possible an immediate and vivid presentation of the narrator's sentiments" (37). Sarah Day defines diaries as spaces of disclosure and concealment (144). Narrators seek to disclose information at the same time they conceal that information from other characters in the narrative.

Diary fiction is still enclosed in a communicative triangle that accounts for a reader. Thus, the apparent absence of a narratee is only a device. Day argues that the fictional diarist constructs a reader in order to shape the account: "diarists have a tendency to construct a reader to whom to direct their writing as a means of offering some shape to the type, tone, and amount of disclosure they make" (148). Moreover, for Day: "Fictional diarists' tendency to construct an understanding of the unknown reader who becomes a familiar confidante, then, signals the desire for an audience who can receive disclosure without responding with judgments or criticism" (149). Thus, fictional diarists strive to create a shape of narrative intimacy in which to share with readers.

Diaries are usually marked at their start; this can take many forms, such as "a name, a title, an epigraph, a commitment, a self-presentation" (Lejeune 99). In "How Do Diaries End?," Philippe Lejeune argues that it is harder to explain how to end a diary, because "it would be like writing a treatise on suicide" (100). Unlike autobiography where the author aims at reaching his/her current state of affairs through the story, diaries are a

never-ending activity. One does not know where to stop, because life keeps going, and so does the possibility to carry on writing.

Diary entries are usually marked by either a date, a time, and/or a place. These indications of a new entry are not always present all at once. Often there are no indications to announce a new entry. This freedom from restrictions is a characteristic of diaries. According to Martens, "lacking rules that restrict style, topics, and length, the literary diary is a form that requires a minimum of conformity and hence allows for a maximum of self-expression" (186). Furthermore, the focus on ruminations, emotions, and thoughts, makes the diary "less of a story and more of a portrait" (Abbott 33). The self-expression comes at a cost, as the diarist has a limited perspective on the other characters. For Martens, "at best, the diary can filter second points of view through the uniform lens of the diarist's perception" (188). The focus on character is not necessarily detrimental to plot, "because action is inseparable from character" (Abbott 33). Thus, diary fiction can be said to focus on character's development, more than on action. Especially, the narrator's journey towards him/herself.

One begins a diary for different reasons. According to Abbott, a recurrent reason to start a diary is to better understand oneself:

> The true self is necessarily the hidden self, difficult of access, requiring special tools for its excavation ... the diary is just such a tool because, writing as he often does with emotional immediacy, unconstrained by a concern for an audience beyond himself, the diarist is allowed to uncover the contours of his buried self. (Abbott 47)

In other words, the private nature of diaries allows the narrator to explore his or her (un)conscious mind and delve into things that s/he would not admit to a larger audience, or even an intimate friend.

Lejeune outlines four functions of the diary, namely, to express oneself, to reflect, to freeze time, and to take pleasure in writing. I will focus on the two first functions. To express oneself Lejeune divides into two: to release and to communicate (106). For Lejeune, to release is "to unload the weight of emotions and thoughts in putting them down to paper" (106). The idea is that by putting something to paper one is separating oneself from those thoughts and/or emotions, and therefore "purifying and cleansing" oneself (Lejeune 106). To communicate is to "empty your heart out onto paper because you are alone, unable to pour it out to a friendly ear" (Lejeune 106). The activity of the diarist is essentially a lonely one. Prince argues that "it is very common indeed for diary novels to contain passages underlining not only the essential loneliness of the diarist but also the fact that his writing is a very private matter intended to remains very private" (478). The diary provides a safe and private space in which the diarist can express his/hers emotions, and to reflect on actions, events, decisions. To reflect means that the diary is a space to meditate on the state of affairs of one's life. Lejeune points that "reflection is also at the heart of diaries maintained in times of crisis," such as when one is going over change, difficulties, pain, and so forth (107). For Lejeune, a crisis diary is "searching for its own end," that is, "searching how to get out of the crisis" (107). The protagonists in the comics analyzed use their diaries to express themselves, and to reflect.

Diary keeping is largely associated with adolescence, thus it is not surprising that many young adult novels are written as diaries. Martens notices that, "secret diary keeping became an encouraged adolescent exercise; a confirmation candidate could expect to receive a blank volume so labeled as a present" (185). According to Martens, "the diaristic *in medias res* implies a state of turmoil or excitement, an inability to predict the future, an urge to master and purge overwhelming experiences or intense emotions" (3). Adolescence and all its associated crises fit the turmoil that drive one towards a habit of

diary keeping. Most importantly, diary keeping "has come to be closely associated with adolescent womanhood in contemporary American culture" (Day 144). Hence, diaries are largely regarded as an adolescent girl's activity.

In "Engendered Autobiographies: The Diary as a Feminine Form," Rebecca Hogan argues that the diary genre is a feminine genre. According to Hogan the characteristics of the diary, and the cultural constructions of femininity are similar in several aspects. For example, Hogan argues as follows:

> The modern idea of the diary as private, secret, locked – the paradoxical idea of a writing, which will remain unread, a sort of 'silent' text. If we see 'feminine' as a cultural signifier, standing for the historically determined social construction of feminine behavior, psychological characteristics, and the like, then the diary is a feminine form. (Hogan 99)

In other words, the diary form is concerned with private life, domestic affairs, and inner life, all of which are deemed to belong to the realm of women. Moreover, Hogan links the idea of *écriture feminine* and the diary genre. *Écriture feminine* is often described as "open, non-linear, unfinished, fluid, exploded, fragmented, polysemic" (Makward qtd. In Hogan 100). Similarly, this set of key words can be used to describe the diary form. Hogan argues that the diary "is by its very nature open-ended, unfinished and incomplete … A diary is both repetitive and cumulative, each entry discrete (and discreet), and each entry an addition to the flow of days" (100). Thus, the diary form has come to be associated with ideas that are also linked to femininity. In this sense, Hogan concludes that the diary is a feminine form.

Defining Comics

What is the definition that sets graphic novels, that is, comics, and other media, apart? Scott McCloud defines it as "juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate

sequence" (9). By other images, McCloud means words as well. His definition is broad and open as to where these juxtaposed images occur, and how they are sequenced. Hillary Chute elaborates by saying that "comics might be defined as a hybrid word-and-image form in which two narrative tracks, one verbal and one visual register temporality spatially" ('ComicLit' 452). The spatial and temporal recognition of the page is important as a way of defining comics. Moreover, many scholars comment on the distinction between words and images, but there seems to be no consensus on this matter.

Comics are not necessarily a combination of words and images on the page. In *Making Sense of Fragments*, Barbara Postema traces the conceptual disagreement between scholars concerning the relationship between word and image in comics (79). Postema says that scholars do not reach any sort of agreement in the degree to which comics depend on words and/or images, or whether they are a complete symbiosis of both. The debate seems never-ending, since it is easy to gather evidence for both sides. There are comics completely without words, such as *The Arrival* (2006) by Shaun Taun, and comics that would unlikely exist without both words and images, such as *Watchmen* (1986) by Alan Moore. More interesting than establishing a hierarchy between words and images within the comic medium is to note that both coexist and each acquires some characteristic of the other. Postema writes that "comics are conceptually interesting in the way the form allows images to adopt linguistic patterns of encoding and decoding into their signification, while conversely text in comics often takes on visual signification" (81). For instance, the visual images organized in panels are read in sequence, and decoded by readers in the same fashion as sentences are. As for the text, it frequently gains visual attributes that further expand the meaning of the words, such as lettering, font size, and placement, all of which serve to determine, for example, loud or soft voices, fear or excitement (Postema 81).

Pinpointing the inception of comics proves as problematic as defying it, because if we adopt McCloud's definition, then we can go back as far as Egyptian hieroglyphs as a form of comics. Most critics set the beginning of comics from 1731, when William Hogarth created *A Harlot's Progress*, which a set of six paintings come together to compose a story (Chute, 'Intro' 768-69). Later, in the mid-nineteenth century, Rodolphe Töpffer, "established the conventions of modern comics, such as panel borders and the combined use of words and images. [Töpffer] specifically described his work as drawing on two forms – the novel, and the 'picture stories' of Hogarth" (Chute, 'Intro' 769).

American comics started in 1895 with the publication of Fenton Outault's *The Yellow Kid* in the *New York World* newspaper. Comics then developed as a mass consumption medium, circulating in newspapers. Since their beginning, comics have flourished within a mass popular culture of consumption. It is only in 1978 that the term graphic novel gained some popularity with Will Eisner, who called his book, *A Contract with God*, a graphic novel in order to sell it as a serious narrative. It was "the first book marketed as [a] graphic novel" (Chute, 'ComicLit' 453). From that moment, the term graphic novel starts to creep into academic vocabulary, as the genre gains momentum as well as critical attention. According to Versaci, "graphic novels are more 'acceptable' forms of reading - particularly by adults. The word 'novel' calls to mind … you know, 'real' literature" (30). Bookstore chains usually carry a graphic novel section, but rarely a comics section. This shows that graphic novels are more closely related to an idea of traditional literature, than are comics. The main difference, however, resides primarily in terminology.

Despite the recognition of the term 'graphic novel', Chute proposes that we drop the terms comics and graphic novel altogether. Her claim is that the most interesting productions in the medium are not novels at all, as the term graphic novel suggests, but

works of nonfiction (‘ComicLit’ 452). Therefore, she proposes the use of graphic narratives. However, I believe that when critics adopt the term graphic narrative, as well as graphic novel, for that matter, as an umbrella term, it is relocating comics outside their history, and outside their network of relations. I agree with Postema, who argues that, “the desire to replace the name of the comics form seems to suggest an anxiety about the particular history and social status of the comics” (xi). Just as Will Eisner used ‘graphic novel’ to market his work as more serious, using new terminology displaces the whole genre onto an artificial realm that tries to “dignify” it by placing it elsewhere. It is undeniable that comics come from mass culture and mass production, just as it is undeniable that they have an intrinsic relationship with the novel, even when comics are nonfictional. Therefore, in this thesis, I adopt the term ‘comics’ to refer to the works being analyzed.

This thesis consists of four main chapters and a conclusion. The first chapter is a theoretical overview of comics. I focus on the panel structure of the pages, according to Groensteen's descriptions. Next, I talk about the relationship between the images and text, especially the text in balloons. Finally, I focus on the drawn quality of comics as an inevitable mark of its storyteller. Chapters two, three, and four are an analysis of each comic in turn, *Wet Moon*, *Skim*, and *Le Bleu Est Une Coleur Chaude*. The final chapter presents my final considerations regarding this thesis.

1 Comics

In the following sections, I will examine the formal aspects of comics. First, the organization of panels in the page; second, the functions of balloons; and third, the materiality of comics.

1.2 Panels: iconic solidarity

In *The System of Comics* (2007), Thierry Groensteen claims that iconic solidarity is the "ontological foundation of comics" (17). Iconic solidarity is defined by the author as, "interdependent images that, participating in a series, present the double characteristic of being separated"; they are also "plastically and semantically over-determined by the fact of their coexistence *in praesentia*" (Groensteen *System* 17-8). In other words, panels are at once complete utterances in themselves, and fragments in relation to each other. For McCloud, the importance of the panel is often overlooked by scholarship on comics (98). Groensteen, as the aforementioned quote demonstrates, gives prominence to the panel in his theoretical work. Thus, I take the panel as a starting point to interpret comics.

Groensteen explains that the panels function as complete utterances, each one adding to the preceding one to form a narrative. Even if panels are similar, Groensteen says, "one could not connect the visual utterances if they were not distinct" (*System* 45). According to McCloud, "the panel acts as a sort of general indicator that time or space is being divided" (99). Through the passage between one panel and the next, the reader understands that time has passed within the storyworld. Moreover, the space changes from one panel to the next, even if it is only the spatial location of each panel on the page. Groensteen conceptualizes a spatio-topical apparatus that is key to the whole system of comics he is attempting to describe. For Groensteen, "comics panel, situated relationally,

are, necessarily, placed in relation to space and operate on a share of space" (*System* 21). Accordingly, the breakdown of a page within panels, and the panels' spatial relationship influences the development of the narrative as much as the narrative influences the page configuration. In other words, the spatio-topical apparatus is a means of producing meaning as much as is the content of the panels, as either images and/or words. Given the importance of panels to comics, it is essential to explain how they operate in relation to each other and in relation to the narrative as a whole. I will first examine the relation between concurrent panels, followed by the relation between the panel, the page and the narrative as a whole.

1.2.1 Panel to panel

According to Groensteen, there are six framing functions in panels. The functions are (1) closure, (2) separative, (3) rhythmic, (4) structural, (5) expressive, and (6) readerly. I will explain each function separately:

1) Closure: If we think of film, each shot represents a decision as to what will be visible to the spectator and what will remain invisible, that is, outside of the frame. In comics, however, what is left out of the panel represents a mere virtuality that readers can infer, but it does not actually exist (Groensteen *System* 40-3). In a comical way, McCloud explains that, for instance, "in this panel you can't even see my legs, yet you assume that they're there … Even though they're not!" (61). According to Groensteen, "the frame assigns limits to the profusion of the represented elements, and it elects a privileged fragment" (*System* 40). Each panel, then, is crafted to privilege a selection of possible elements to exist within the limits of the panel. Readers then can infer elements they do not see, even if they are not drawn.

2) Separative: The frame separates a panel from the adjacent ones. Groensteen compares the separative function to punctuation marks. As the author explains, each panel can be seen as an utterance, and the frame delimits the utterance in the same manner that commas and full stops do. According to Groensteen, "the panel frame plays an analogous role to that of punctuation marks in language, [so that] these signs divide within a *continuum*, the pertinent units, thus allowing – or facilitating – the comprehension of the text" (*System* 43).
3) Rhythmic: Each frame provides a rhythm to the story. Panels come in many different shapes and sizes that can accelerate or slow down the reading, providing a rhythm to the text. According to Groensteen:

> the 'text' of comics obeys a rhythm that is imposed on it by the succession of frames – a basic heartbeat that, as seen in music, can be developed, nuanced, and recovered by more elaborate rhythmic effects stressed on by other 'instruments' (parameters), like those of the distribution of word balloons, the opposition of colors, or even the play of graphic forms. (*System* 45)

4) Structuring: the frame helps to shape the story. The author/artist has to take into account the frame in order to best structure the narrative. In the West, the most common comic frame is the rectangle (or the square). Firstly, the rectangle mimics the book format. Secondly, the rectangle is easily arranged in strips. Groensteen argues that "a frame, while it structures space, is a determinant element of the composition of the image: it informs, during all phases of execution, the drawing that is elaborated within it, just as it inflects its reading" (*System* 46).
5) Expressive: the frame can act as a guide to the reader, assisting in determining a reading protocol. Moreover, Groesnteen explains that:

> The expressive function: it acts upon the layout, or, if one prefers, upon the physical characteristics of the outline. Indeed, when these terms change between two consecutive panels, the modification serves, in principle, to draw attention to a rupture in the level of enunciation regarding the status of the image. (*System* 53)

6) Readerly: the frame always indicates that something should be read. For Groensteen, "the reader is taken to presuppose that, within the perimeter that has been drawn, there is a content to be deciphered. The frame is always an invitation to stop and scrutinize" (*System* 54). In other words, the elements depicted within the frame are given a prominent position.

While Groensteen focuses on defining the function of the frame in each panel, McCloud proposes six types of transitions between panels themselves. For McCloud, they are: (1) moment-to-moment; (2) action-to-action; (3) subject-to-subject; (4) scene-to-scene; (5) aspect-to-aspect; and (6) non-sequitur (70-2). McCloud admits that his categories are "an inexact science at best" (74); however, it serves to verify trends among comic books. As McCloud's sampling demonstrates, most Western comics use primarily action-to-action transitions, followed by subject-to-subject, and then scene-to-scene (75). Western comics that do not follow this pattern are experimental comics, such as early Art Spiegelman, but these examples are few and far in between. Examining Japanese comics, McCloud notices that they do not present the same panel transitions as Western comics. Japanese comics have a high incidence of aspect-to-aspect transitions, which is almost nonexistent in Western comics (78). Furthermore, in Japanese comics, the different transitions are more evenly distributed. McCloud tries to explain this distinction between East and West comics through a difference in length (Japanese comics are far longer than

Western ones), as well as a difference in culture, Western comics being more goal-oriented, and having little interest in setting scenes through aspect-to-aspect transitions.

1.2.2 Panel to page

According to Groensteen, the page layout "is an instrument in the service of a global artistic project" (*System* 92). Groensteen argues that the page layout and the breakdown of the narrative into panels inform each other along every step of the creative process. In this manner, the story conforms to the medium, and the panels adjust themselves to better suit their contents. There are infinite ways that a layout can be arranged in comics, from gutterless panels to single frames within a page[5]. In this section, I will focus my attention on the most common layout, the grid systems, or waffle-iron, and the use of inserts.

The most regular and widely used page layout in comics is known as the waffle-iron. In this model, panels are organized in tiers, and each page usually has three or four rows of tiers. The gutters usually meet at the angles, forming a grid. This basic layout can be applied strictly, with same-sized panels per page; or more flexibly, with varying sizes that are a multiple of the original size (Groesnteen, *Narration* 44). Postema claims that "panel size, as well as the number of panels on the page, can affect what the panel contents mean" (29). Thus, even though the waffle-iron is the most common type of layout, the variations among the panels still produce meanings that contribute to the narrative as a whole. For instance, maintaining the constant size of panels can represent the constant move of time in daily life, whereas enlarging an image can give it prominence and a sense

[5] For a more in depth theory of the page, see Peeters, Benoît. "Four Conceptions of the Page," *ImageTexT: Interdisciplinary Comics Studies*, vol 3, issue 3, 2007. Also, Groensteen, Thierry. *The System of Comics*. The University of Mississippi Press, 2007.

of arresting time. Groensteen explains that the popularity of the waffle-iron comes from its inherent ability to suit all kinds of stories:

> The 'waffle-iron' is remarkably well suited to any narrative (or section of a narrative) that itself relies on the stability of some element, or in which a phased process unfolds. It is also ideal for materializing the inexorable flow of time. (*Narration* 138)

In "Lost in the Gutter: Within and Between Frames in Narrative and Narrative Theory," Eric Berlastsky offers an understanding of literary frames through comics, relating the narratological concept of literary frames to the actual frames of comics. Quoting Schapiro and Uspesky with regard to frames of paintings, Berlastsky points out that "the frame effects a binary separation between work and world, reality and representation, art and life" (Berlatsky 163). Similarly, Groensteen defines the hyperframe as the physical book page that contains all panels (*System* 30-1). The hyperframe separates the storyworld from the real world, containing each panel within the realm of representation.

I want to focus now on a type of panel relationship that is frequent in comics, the inset. The inset is "a frame welcomed within one or several other frame(s)" (Groensteen, *System* 86). Inset panels are particularly interesting, because "[they are] never quite independent or univocal, it depends on the larger panel for its meaning, just as it acts as part of the compositional meaning of that surrounding picture" (Berlastsky 178). Inserts often occur in relation to a background panel that "bleeds" out of the page. For McCloud, "when a panel runs off the edge of the page … time is no longer contained by the familiar icon of the closed panel, but instead hemorrhages and escapes into the timeless space" (103). Groensteen establishes that one of the most frequent uses of the inset is to present a background image, such as a landscape, and the insert then serves to highlight pertinent

details of said background (*System* 87-8). The temporal relationship between insert panels is also different. Inserts operate simultaneously, as in a *meanwhile* temporality; while traditional (side-by-side) panels are equivalent to a succession of time (Groensteen, *System* 89). In sum, panels help convey meaning to the story in comics: both through the relationship between panels next to each other, and through the relationship between panels and their page. The layout of each page is also expressive. It can indicate striking moments, such as those panels that are given a larger size. It can also point to a change in temporality, such as inset panels or side-by-side panels.

1.3 Balloons: the text within the page

For Groensteen, the panel and balloon share many common traits. The author explains that "like the panel, the balloon is, as a general rule, a closed, compact space" (*System* 67). Panels, continues Groensteen, are of a higher hierarchical order, because panels frequently do not have a balloon (or caption), but balloons are always inserted within panels (*System* 68). The balloon, according to Groensteen, "is an emission," and "every emission presupposes a source, or a place of origin" (*System* 68). The panel presents the place of origin of said emission, which is most commonly the character's speech. Ultimately, all balloons can be attributed to "a known or supposed speaker" (Groensteen, *System* 75). The position of a balloon within a panel is relative to three elements, that is, "the character who is speaking, the frame of the panel, and, finally, the neighboring balloons" (Groensteen, *System* 75). Thus, for Groensteen, the functions of the panel can also be applied to the balloon.

In *The Aesthetics of Comics* (2010), David Carrier claims that "the speech balloon is a great philosophical discovery" (4). Carrier places great importance on the balloon as a defining aspect of comics. For him, "the speech balloon defines comics as neither a

purely verbal nor a strictly visual art form, but as something radically new" (Carrier 4). Carrier understands the balloon as the unique mark of comics, that is, what makes the medium different from all others. As my discussion on the definition of comics has shown, comics are not necessarily an image/text hybrid. Carrier seems fascinated by the philosophical implications of the balloon. For him, it gives access to something that philosophy longs for, namely, it allows readers to access thoughts. Carrier says, "words in a balloon usually are in the present tense, like dialogue in a novel. We see the character and learn what he is saying or thinking" (33). By materializing speech and thought, the balloon grants readers access to the inner world of characters (Carrier 73). Moreover, it allows readers to see the bodily expressions of characters simultaneously. Therefore, it is possible to see at once the dualism between mind and body in characters, as the represented thoughts can contradict, inform, or confirm bodily expressions (Carrier 73).

We understand balloons primarily to convey text in comics, but they also convey visual meaning. According to Carrier, "awareness not just of the words balloons contain but also of their purely visual qualities is part of our experience of comics" (29). Balloons frequently carry the expressive function in the same way that panels' frames do. For example, the outline of balloons serve to indicate whether they are a speech, a whisper, a thought, or a scream (see fig. 3). In addition, artists may use different lettering or colors to indicate who is speaking or how one is speaking. These visual cues add meaning to the words. Ultimately, balloons help readers to establish a reading protocol; their position within or between panels establishes connections between utterances.

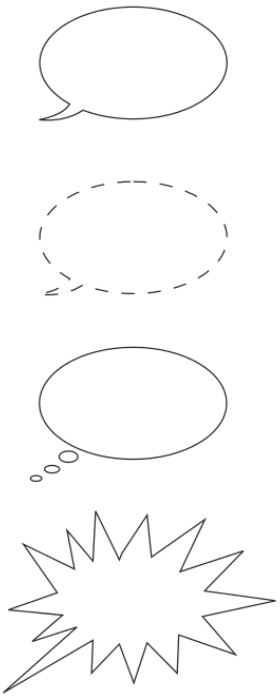

Figure 3. The most common speech balloons, top to bottom: speech, whisper, thought, scream.
Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Speech_balloon#/media/File:Comic_balloons_4_types_1x4.svg

Carrier explains that readers constantly seek consistency, therefore, "we expect every picture element to contribute to the meaning of the image, and so read words within the frame as represented elements" (28). For Groensteen, however, word and image are in an ongoing struggle. The image relies on three-dimensionality; the balloon, however, conforms to "the bi-dimensional materiality of the writing surface" (Groensteen, *System* 69). In a sense, the drawing is contradicted by the text, since the three-dimensional representation enters into conflict with the two-dimensionality of the written word. The balloon, in its bi-dimensionality, is not occupying a space within the image, but nor is it a hole in said image (Carrier 29). Carrier argues that, "balloon words are neither in nor outside the picture; like thoughts, sometimes said to be located 'inside your head,' they have no position in space" (29-30). Even if readers see them in the page, the characters

either hear the speech or do not know the other characters' thoughts. The balloon transforms the sound of voices and the immateriality of thoughts into images (Carrier 36).

For Groensteen, "The balloon, even when it tends to be discrete subtracts from our view a portion of the image, even when this portion is supposed to be virginal" (*System* 70). Readers tend to perceive the balloon as a mask in front of the image. In other words, the panel is understood as a complete image, and the balloon is superimposed on top of "a previously complete and homogeneous image" (Groensteen, *System* 71). In the same manner that readers project an off-panel continuity with the images within a panel, they also perceive an "out-of-sight" continuity behind the balloon. The function of closure of the panel frame works similarly for the balloon, that is, readers formulate this "out-of-sight" continuity, which is in fact a mere virtuality. Thus, for Groensteen, the image in a panel is contained by two frames: the exterior frame of each panel, and the interior frame of the balloon, both demanding closure from readers (*System* 72).

Groensteen notes that balloons are more obviously endowed with the readerly function. Images can be ambiguous, vague, or abstract on what they require readers to assimilate. Text, however, "is immediately identified as a pertinent segment of information for the intelligibility of the story, without which the balloon would have no reason to exist" (Groensteen, *System* 84). Of course, there may exist redundant texts, but as a general rule, the balloon is added to the panel when there is pertinent information the artist wants to convey. Readers are then required to stop and read this information, while images might be skimmed over. Groensteen also relates the balloons to the function of rhythm. For instance, the rhythm of the narrative changes if one character speaks two phrases within the same balloon versus on two different balloons (Groensteen, *System* 83). While the two phrases within the same balloon imply a speech without pause, to separate them indicates a pause between the utterances.

One of the main functions of the text in comics is to expand on the images. According to Postema, "the function of text in comics is to fill the gaps left by the images, the layout, the sequences" (79). Postema argues that most comics attempt to have text and images complementing each other (82). However, the degree to which images and text relate to each other is not always complementary. The disparity between the text and the image creates 'gaps'. Readers are driven to bridge these gaps constantly. Comics, as a medium, creates gaps not only between panels, and between images, but also between images and words. Ultimately, argues Postema, comics is a medium of gaps:

> Comics as a narrative form and as a body of narrative work – a literature – thrives on the breaking up of actions and operations. It excels in leaving things unsaid in order to articulate them all the clearer. Narration does not occur smoothly and gradually, but it starts, hitches, and elisions, with things left out – invisible. (Postema 122)

McCloud admits that words and images can be combined in an infinite number of ways, but he attempts to provide a few general categories. McCloud establishes the following categories to the ways in which images and text can be related to each other (153-55):

1) Word specific: when pictures do not add to or complete the text, images serve mainly as illustrations.
2) Picture specific: when words function mainly as a soundtrack.
3) Duo-specific: when words and images convey the same message.
4) Additive: when words elaborate on the images or vice versa.
5) Parallel: when words and images do not seem to intersect.
6) Montage: when words are part of the image.

7) Interdependent: when words and image work to represent an idea neither could by itself.

In short, balloons and/or captions comprise the space within panels that are usually dedicated to text. They can relate to the images within the panels in a number of ways, as McCloud has identified.

1.4 Linework: embodiment in comics

"Don't all lines carry with them an expressive potential?" asks McCloud (124). The materiality in comics is an imperative part of the storytelling. For Gardner, "the line [is] arguably the most undertheorized element in comics scholarship and one that has no neat equivalent in any other narrative form" (53). The line marks the craftsmanship of comics in a singular way, making the medium inherently different from novels and/or films (Gardner 54). Thus, this section will focus on the ways the artist creates a style through his/her lines.

The personal mark of each artist is present in comics, stemming from a tradition of craftsmanship that leaves an impression of the artist's body in the work. "So many comic writers," explains Tinker, "seek to imprint a trace of themselves, of their bodies in their hand-drawn, handwritten, homemade texts" (1179). For instance, it is common for independent artists to handwrite the text instead of using digital fonts, "because it is much easier to achieve a visual unity of word and image if both retain the same style and texture of marks" (Tinker 1176). Moreover, the handwriting is another layer of expression the artist can explore within the composition as a whole.

Gardner compares the craftsmanship between a writer and a comic artist with regard to the materiality of each medium. Nowadays, if a writer uses a pen, a computer or a tablet, it is irrelevant to the story the writer aims to tell, because "the writer at work

has moved from the one who inscribes lines upon paper to one who crafts ideas in his mind" (Gardner 54). In comics, however, if the artist works in black ink, colored pencil, or on the computer screen, s/he will achieve different outcomes in the overall narrative. Gardner points out that the artistic lines, that is, the drawing style of each artist, is what is lost if one paraphrases a comic book story (58).

The particularity of the line lies with the fact that the presence of an artist behind the work becomes undeniable, self-evident, and a constituent of the narrative itself. According to Gardner:

> Unlike literary style or indeed any aspect of narrative prose, with the line we come face to face with a graphiteur, … whose line is determined by physical specificities that cannot be ignored or effaced … we *cannot* look at the graphic narrative and imagine that the line does *not* give us access to the labored making of the storyworld we are encountering. (64, emphasis in the original)

In comics, Gardner concludes, one is always confronted with an "embodied graphiteur" (65). Gardner links this embodied artist with Walter Benjamin's notion of the storyteller. Storytelling comes from a tradition of orality, so that the story is inevitably connected to the one telling it. For Benjamin, "true storytelling … requires a living connection to *work*, to the artisanship of making words" (Gardner 55, emphasis in the original). In the era of mechanical reproduction, the connection between work and artist has been lost. As aforementioned, the writer's craft resides in his/her ideas, not in the medium of the book. Comics retain the connection between the artist and the materiality of the work through lines. Baetens explains that, "lines display a story world in which the act of drawing cannot be separated from the drawn result" (165). Hence, Gardner argues, Benjamin longed for an art that would "restore the biological and biographical author"

(55); one answer to this longing is not going back to traditional orality, but moving forward to the medium of comics. Ultimately, the line epitomizes the connection between work and body, since it is a constant reminder of the hand who produced it (Gardner 66).

The line not only represents the artist's hands at work, but it also constructs the storyworld. For Gardner, "the line compels a physical, bodily encounter with an imagined scene of embodied enunciation, one necessarily effaced in print" (66). The discussion of the line in comics brings back the ontological implications of representing the character's body and mind simultaneously within panels. This concurrence is radically different from traditional novels, where characters are present only as printed words. Comics is an inherently embodied medium, where the dichotomies between mind and body seem to be rendered futile. According to Baetens:

> Thanks to our better understanding of the graphic novel, it is now possible to disapprove of much narrative speculation as excessively disembodied. This rediscovery of the body in cultural theory is far from being an isolated phenomenon: the flight into pure and virtualized bodies is a permanent temptation in a culture characterized by the split between body and mind, and the example of the graphic novel, which roots the story in stubborn materiality of characterization, is a modest but useful way of backing the efforts of those who, like N. Katherine Hayles, resist the 'disembodying' effects of certain posthumanist thinking. (Baetens 175)

Thus, linework embodies characters and places within the storyworld as much as it embodies its creator. A structural analysis of comics would be incomplete if we did not account for the narrative properties of lines. As Baetens explains, lines "do inevitably manifest themselves as narrative agents and vehicles of storytelling" (165). Because the

story is told in images and text, the narrator telling this story can be observed in this twofold manner: within the text and within each image.

"Even if graphic novels do tell stories," claims Baetens, "their first concern is not infrequently the portrait of the characters and the multiperspectival representation of their bodies" (176). The representation of characters is one of the primary concerns of the storyteller. Comics offer a multitude of views of the same character, such as close-ups, side views, front views, and ever-changing expressions. The face, obviously, is the most focused-on aspect of any character. Accurately, Baetens asserts that this emphasis on the body "produces new forms of storytelling in which the story told is that of a body or face in action" (186). Comics devote a large space to depicting characters doing things, often without the need for words. There is a merge between narration and description (Baetens 180). While the images are inherently descriptive in themselves, they also convey the action performed by the characters. As my analysis will demonstrate, often the protagonists in the comics do not address events in their diaries, but said events are told through the images. I use the term unnarration to analyze their silence in the diary. The full significance of these moments are expressed through the visual representation of their bodies and face expressions. Now, I turn my attention to the analysis of each comic.

2 *Wet Moon: Feeble Wanderings* (2004) by Sophie Campbell

Writer and artist Sophie Campbell is from United States. She is well known for her artwork on *Jem and the Holograms* (2015), *Glory* (2014) and *The Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (2012-2014). As writer and artist, Campbell has published, among others, *Water Baby* (2008), *Shadoweyes* (2010), and webcomic *Can't Look Back* (2014). Sophie Campbell is also a trans artist, having come out to her fans on a tweet in early 2015[6]. Campbell's work is being reprinted to correct her name, especially her *Wet Moon* series, which is being re-released with new cover art by Annie Mok.

Wet Moon is an ongoing series currently comprised of six books. The story is set in the fictional town of Wet Moon located in the gothic American south; it is a swampy and eerie place. The story presents the day-to-day life of different characters, mainly gothic gang, Cleo Lovedrop, Trilby Bernarde, Audrey Ritcher, and Mara Zuzanny. The story is slow paced, uncanny and mysterious. It is primarly about "all the terrible and wonderful things people do to each other" ('Wet Moon'). I focus my analysis on the first book of the series, *Wet Moon: Feeble Wanderings* (2004).

In *Feeble Wanderings*, we follow mostly Cleo Lovedrop over a few days at the end of the summer break and at the start of her college degree. She is moving into her new dorm room, hanging out with her friends, and trying to deal with some trauma, which readers do not fully understand yet. Later on in the series, it is revealed she had an abortion after a brief romance with, Vincent, who she keeps bumping into and running away from. The story is character driven, with long sequences without any words. The chronology is not exactly linear, but it moves between the point of view of different characters. Some

[6] My copy of *Wet Moon* was printed before Campbell came out as transgender and figures her old name, Ross Campbell, thus this is the name that appears on my Works Cited list.

sequences are definitely uncanny, such as Fern going into the swamp in the middle of the night. Other sequences are so intimate it feels as if we are intruders, such as Cleo pacing around her room aimlessly, or crying while brushing her teeth.

Queerness is also a recurring theme. The only openly lesbian character in the first book is Audrey, although she is not out to her own family. After a few beers at a party, Trilby makes a move on Cleo, which Cleo does not reciprocate. At the end of *Feeble Wanderings*, however, Cleo meets Myrtle, who will become her girlfriend soon after. Moreover, in the following books, we learn that Mara's angst is in part a result of her closeted homosexuality. The diversity of characters, not only in their personalities, but also in their physical appearances, is one of the greatest achievements of *Wet Moon*. According to critic Elle Collins:

> Campbell is a creator who obviously puts deliberate effort into making her characters diverse … The world of *Wet Moon* is one where strange things happen, but it's also a world populated by the same wide variety of people that fill our world, and that makes it feel real. (Collins 'Revisiting')

In an interview, Campbell admits that the focus in female identity on *Wet Moon* was one way she was able to experiment with her own identity:

> Mey: *Wet Moon* has a lot of queer characters, and its focus is on female characters; was it a way for you to explore those identities before you could come out?
>
> Sophie: I'd say yes. I don't think I realized it or understood it at the time, though, but there was definitely a strong personal connection happening that I didn't yet understand. Looking back on it now I feel like it was there all along and *Wet Moon* was my way of working it out by living vicariously through the characters. (Mey 'Wet Moon Exclusive').

I will first analyze the panels in Wet Moon, focusing on an example to characterize Groensteen's six functions of the frame. I will also examine the distribution of panel transitions in *Wet Moon* according to McCloud's categories. Finally, I will address Cleo's diary in the comic.

2.1 Panels

This section will focus on *Wet Moon*'s panels and page layout. *Wet Moon*'s waffle-iron is two panels per tier and three tiers per page. Sophie Campbell uses this grid flexibly. Frequently, *Wet Moon*'s layout varies by making panels smaller, increasing the number of panels in a tier or on a whole page. Campbell also changes the gutters, making panels further apart or centralizing panels on a page and leaving large gutters on each side. Most gutters are black, but there are also white gutters; however, the change is not motivated by chronology, and it appears to be at random. Moreover, *Wet Moon* is all in black and white.

Page 116 is an example of Campbell's use of panel size and disposition to create meaning (see fig. 4). In this page, Trilby is waiting for Martin at the diner. They are about to meet for the first time, and she seems unsure about this meeting. Audrey, who assures Trilby that it is not a date, set them up. Nonetheless, Trilby thinks that going out to meet a boy means a date. She is waiting for him in a diner booth with coffee she is not drinking and several packs of sugar she emptied into her mug. There are only three panels on this page and a large black space on the bottom of the page. There is no text to accompany the images. The panels offer a wide view of Trilby alone in the booth and Martin slowly appearing on the far right.

The first function, closure, is performed by the wide view of these panels. This format allows the whole booth to be revealed on the panels, showing that Trilby is sitting

by herself. Although there is no other booth on the panel, readers safely deduce that this scene is at the diner, where she was previously with Cleo, Audrey, and Mara.

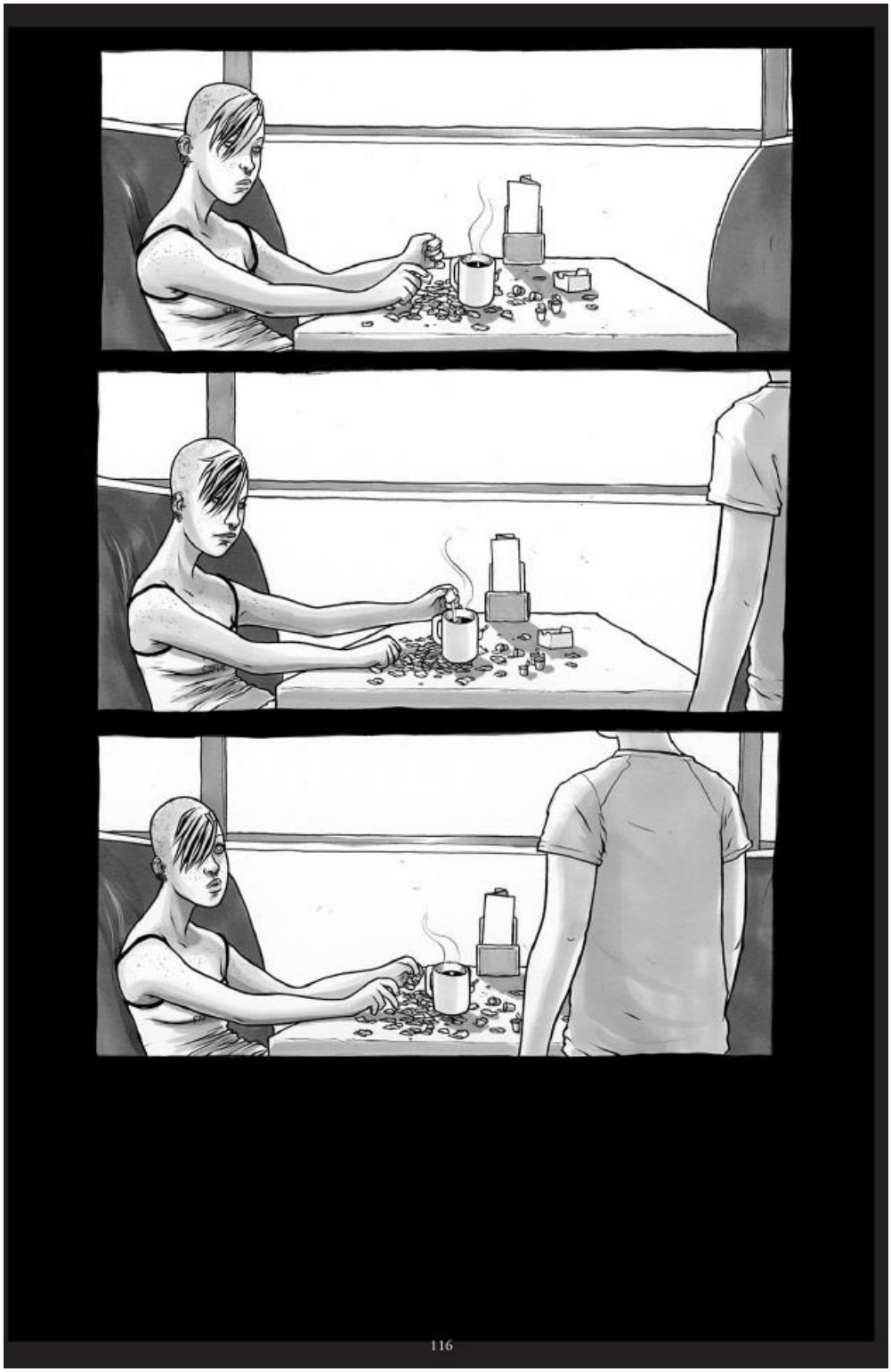

Figure 4. Campbell, Ross. *Wet Moon*, p. 116.

The separative function works to inform readers that time has passed between these panels, albeit slowly. The panels show almost the same thing, that is, Tribly waiting. To repeat this image three times serves to drag readers through the monotony of waiting. Like Trilby, readers are waiting for something to happen. Martin approaches slowly, the first panel he is not there; the second panel shows only his shoulder; and the third panel finally shows his whole back. Trilby changes even less between these panels: she opens yet another sugar pack, and finally lifts her eyes to see Martin. These panels are like repeated utterances, meaning that they are redundant, but that separating them into three instances serves to convey a slow passing of time.

Third, the rhythmic function is the slow pace of this page. The wide panels make time seem longer, as if each moment depicted has stretched itself into the whole width of the page. Moreover, the repetition of these elements create a pattern of time that keeps on expanding itself. A long black gutter follows the final panel through to the bottom of the page. This gutter serves to suddenly break off this slow rhythm.

Forth, the three wide panels work to structure this page. According to McCloud, long panels are perceived as spanning a greater length of time than smaller panels (101). The act of waiting is better represented through this type of panel, since it conveys the boredom and monotony of time, during which Trilby is just there. Thus, the wide panel not only helps with the rhythm of the page, but this structure also helps to transmit the notion of time.

Fifth, the expressive function is subtle on this page. The frame itself does not vary between these panels. A significant change, however, is on the last gutter. The distance between the third panel and the end of the page draws out readers' attention to it. It is a clear break on the slow-paced page's rhythm. The break emphasizes Martin's arrival as a

disruption to the waiting, thus giving meaning to Trilby finally seeing Martin, and foreshadowing their romance.

The sixth and final function, readerly, indicates that these slow panels are important to the narrative. It is through them that Trilby's boredom is conveyed to us as we read. Additionally, similar frames invite readers to scrutinize them in order to notice the small differences between them. The previous page shows for the first time Trilby sitting at the booth by herself waiting. In this panel, there are already a few empty sugar wraps and cream cups around the table, although the container with the sugar wraps is still mostly full. In page 116, the reader notices that almost all sugar wraps have been emptied into the coffee, as Trilby sprinkles another one. There is only one sugar wrap left, this detail invites interpretation due to the readerly functions of these frames. Readers wonder whether Trilby had used the last sugar, would she have kept on waiting for Martin or whether she would just have gone home. Furthermore, the amount of trash on the table she generated between the previous page and this one indicates the amount of time she has been sitting there by herself. Such details become evident because of the readerly function on this page.

Now I turn my attention to the panel transitions in *Wet Moon*. The comic has 699 panel transitions. The table below illustrates the distribution of panel transitions according to McCloud's categories:

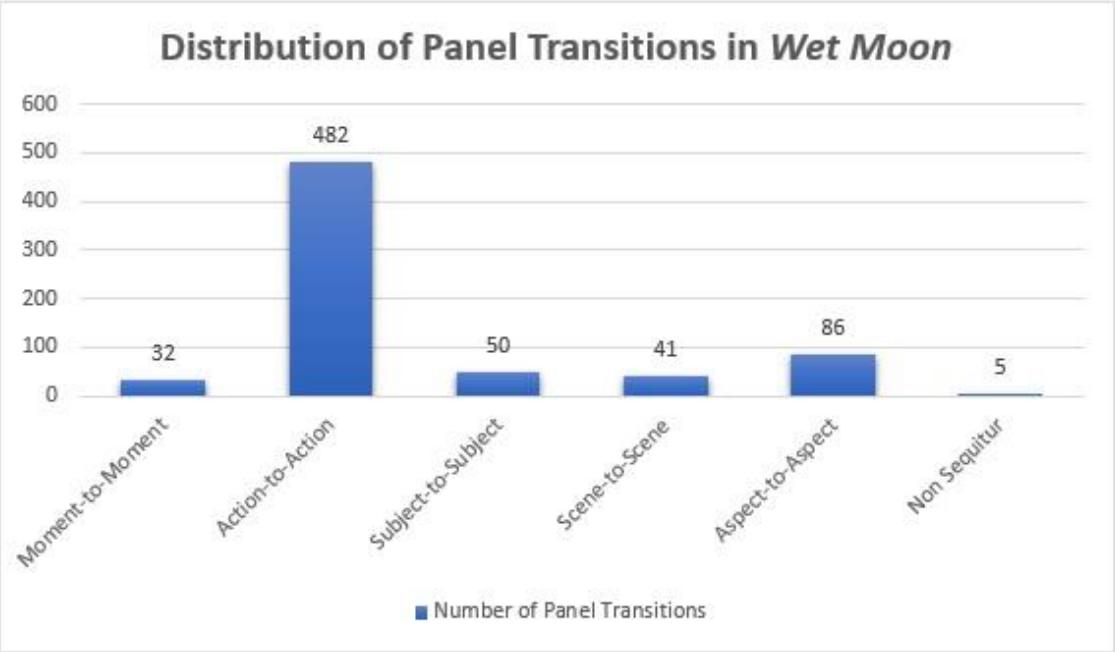

Table 1. Panel Transitions in *Wet Moon*, created by the author.

This graphic shows that *Wet Moon* has all six types of transitions. Although the highest proportion is that of action-to-action, the other transitions have a similar proportion, with the exception of non-sequitur, which represents only five transitions. The type of story *Wet Moon* tells could offer an insight into this distribution of panel transitions. The narrative of *Wet Moon* is not a plot driven one, but it aims to create an atmosphere for the town itself. Hence the high number of aspect-to-aspect transitions. Additionally, the non-sequitur panels appear to be views of the surrounding swamp of Wet Moon town. These non-sequitur panels help create the damp atmosphere of the town. When Cleo hops on the bus or walks around downtown, several panels are dedicated to the people and to the details of this place. The time span of the narrative is rather short, only two days, between September 17th and 19th. The limited period allows Campbell to focus on the particulars of her characters' lives during these two days.

I want to focus my analysis on a sequence between pages 84 and 88 that present both aspect-to-aspect and moment-to-moment transitions (see figures 5, 6, and 7). These pages have no text. Cleo and Trilby have just returned from the party at the House of Usher. Trilby is drunk and makes a move on Cleo. After rejecting Trilby, Cleo goes to her room and takes out a photograph of Vincent from her diary. Page 88 is a single page panel in which we see Cleo's hand holding this picture. The next page has two vertical panels, a view of Cleo's window, and Cleo herself holding Vincent's picture. Page 88 is the only single panel page in the whole book. Cleo's hand holding the photo at the bottom of the page mimics the reader's own hand holding the page, as readers assume Cleo's point of view on this page. The importance given to this panel expresses Cleo's own feelings towards this picture. The next panel, showing the door to the balcony and the full moon on the sky sets the gloomy mood of these pages. Then, we see Cleo's full body as she holds the photograph. Cleo has an almost untouched cigarette in her mouth, with one hand holding the photo and the second holding her belly, as if in pain or discomfort. These two pages represent aspect-to-aspect transitions in which the readers are shown different features that compose a single moment. As in a movie, readers assume Cleo's eyes while seeing the picture, then, they are directed to at the moon shining through her door, then back to her full body now seen from an outsider's point of view. Therefore, not only readers see what Cleo is looking at, but also her body language while looking.

Following these pages, Cleo gets up and goes to the door, where she paces aimlessly. Page 88 only has moment-to-moment transitions. From a three tiers per page layout, this page increases this number by adding a fourth tier, thus making the panels smaller. Moreover, the gutter at the bottom of the page is larger than on most pages, also decreasing the space of each tier. The small panels give a claustrophobic feeling of Cleo being restricted. She keeps holding her belly and the cramped panels add to the sense that

she is in discomfort, both mental and physical. Unlike the gutter on the bottom of page 116 that breaks the rhythm of the page, this one functions as an ellipsis. In other words, it leaves Cleo's pacing unfinished. Cleo is still in motion even if the page has ended.

Figure 5. Campbell, Ross. *Wet Moon*, p. 84.

Figure 6. Campbell, Ross. *Wet Moon*, p. 85.

Figure 7. Campbell, Ross. *Wet Moon*, p. 88.

2.2 The Text

The text in *Wet Moon* appears in three forms: balloons, captions, and diary entries. I will focus on each one in turn. First, the balloons are the predominant form of text in the comic. Campbell does not offer much variation in terms of balloon shape. The most regular is the oval-shaped balloon indicating dialogue. Occasionally, there are rectangular balloons expressing phone conversations, or television voices. Visually, Campbell uses bold words in the balloons to indicate inflection. When Cleo, Mara, and Trilby go to the party at House of Usher, all the words in their balloons are capitalized expressing that they are shouting over the music to hear each other. Characters constantly asking each other to repeat sentences further emphasize the noisy background at the House of Usher. For instance, Cleo asks Mara: "Why?? Won't you be upset??," to which Mara asks "What?!?," forcing Cleo to repeat the question: "I said won't you be upset?!" (Campbell 66). Thus, using some bold letters, capitalizing words, and changing the balloon format are ways in which the text is also visually signifying in *Wet Moon*.

Campbell's balloons help establish a reading protocol. She positions them in strategic places guiding readers towards an understanding. Constantly, Campbell places balloons between panels, indicating that one panel follows the other. In addition, the author juxtaposes balloons to indicate that one character has interrupted the other. Page 15 offers some examples on how Campbell uses the placement of balloons (see fig. 8).

Figure 8. Campbell, Ross. *Wet Moon*, p. 15.

In this page, Cleo has just moved into her new dorm, and her friends come to visit her. Audrey has seen a graffiti that says, “Cleo eats it,” in a bathroom stall on campus and is eager to let the others know about it. In the first panel we can see Trilby and Cleo sitting on the couch. Trilby’s balloon occupies the top of the panel, indicating it should be read first. Moreover, Trilby’s balloon is divided into two utterances, which signifies a pause in Trilby’s speech. Cleo’s balloons are on the bottom of the panel, thus are read sequentially after Trilby’s. Cleo’s speech is also divided, but the second half appears on the next panel, further emphasizing a connection and sequentiality between the two. At the bottom of the second panel, there is a knock sound coming from outside the frame, interrupting Cleo’s previous sentence. The knock comes from Audrey who has arrived. Audrey and Cleo are in a vertical panel that is followed by two smaller panels on the right. This type of arrangement can cause readers uncertainty in terms of which order to read the next panels. Campbell’s strategy is to connect the panels through Audrey’s speech balloon: the bottom panel’s balloon invades the top panel, therefore making it clear that the bottom frame is a continuation of the top one. Finally, on the last frame we can see Trilby’s speech superimposed on Audrey’s, demonstrating that Trilby has interrupted Audrey; that is, talking over her friend.

The second instance of text in *Wet Moon* are captions, which are not so frequent, occurring only four times. The first two are Cleo’s thoughts, and the third is Myrtle’s. These captions are visually different from the rest of the text in *Wet Moon,* mainly because they are typed and outside the panels, appearing on the gutters. Additionally, they have quotation marks, as if a narrator is reporting the characters’ thoughts in direct speech. At first, I attributed Cleo’s captions to sections of her diary, but it is visually too distinct from her diary entries to be a part of it; also, it would not explain Myrtle’s caption. Therefore, a more accurate interpretation is to connect these captions to the panels

surrounding them. These captions function as a fleeting thought transcribed by an omniscient narrator. Like Carrier's definition that thoughts have no position on space, to locate these captions on the gutter, and outside the "material" world of the panels, where characters inhabit, Campbell suggests that these captions have no material presence, occupying no definitive place. The downside of using captions in this manner is that the captions are not properly anchored within the narrative. It is easy to attribute the caption to multiple characters, for instance, the first one could be either Mara's or Cleo's thoughts, as both appear on the surrounding panels (see fig. 9). Since we follow Cleo from the beginning, and she appears to be the protagonist, it leads readers to conclude that those are Cleo's ruminations. It is no surprise that Campbell dropped this type of caption all together on the subsequent volumes of *Wet Moon*, due to the type of confusion it generates.

Figure 9. Campbell, Ross. *Wet Moon*, p. 12.

The fourth and last caption, on page 124, is more traditional than the previous ones. The text is inside the panel in a rectangle. In this page, Penny is leaving Fern's house. Earlier, Fern made a comment about Cleo, and Penny is now reflecting on how could Fern have learned about her sister. According to McCloud's categories for the relationship between words and images, these captions are in an interdependent relationship to the images in the panels. While the drawing shows us that Penny is driving, looking forward, and seemingly concentrating on her the road, the caption grants us access to the ruminations on the conversation she just had. This type of caption is more common in comics, and it is the type of caption Campbell adopts in the following volumes of *Wet Moon*.

The third and last instance of text in *Wet Moon* is Cleo's diary. Cleo starts the entries indicating the day and month, but not the year. She even goes as far as writing twice in a day and dating the second entrance with an added "continued" next to the date (Campbell 139). By the first entry, we can see that this is not a new diary for Cleo, and that she has a habit of writing at regular intervals. Cleo writes: "This is the first time I've had the chance to write since we visited Uncle Dwight and Aunt Annie" (Campbell 17). She goes on to describe her family trip, her distress with moving into her dorm, and her first impression of her new roommates. Cleo's diary is *in medias res* in the sense that this is not the first entry in her diary, but it is the first one shared with readers. *Wet Moon*'s beginning is marked by a significant change in Cleo, namely, the start of college, but it is not marked by a new diary entry.

The materiality of the diary is made present through the pages shown to the readers. The diary entries are in panels of their own, in which we can see Cleo's handwriting and doodles. However, readers are not a witness to the writing itself, as Cleo is not shown writing those entries. The interaction between the diary entries and the panels

surrounding them changes. On page 29 (see fig. 10), the diary and panels are in a word specific relation. The diary entry occupies the space of two panels; also, it is set in the foreground by being on top of the tier below. The entry describes all the things Trilby and Mara found while snooping on Natalie's room. The following panels are drawing of those things, which do not add any new information, functioning mainly as illustrations. Cleo considers the photo of the conjoined twins to be "the weirdest thing" (Campbell 29), but the drawing of said picture is not given any special position. The panels in this page maintain the waffle-iron layout and are given the same space. The text is given more prominence, subordinating the images to it.

Cleo's diary focuses on her thoughts, feelings, and reactions to the events, but not on a description of said events. The action is told by the drawings and the balloons. For instance, Cleo writes about the fortune cookie she ate, "I wonder when my evil fortune is supposed to come true" (Campbell 138). There is no previous mention in the diary about eating the fortune cookie or the fortune she got, which was "Beware: your stupidity will be your undoing" (Campbell 32). In a later entry, Cleo signals that she will talk about something that is bothering her: "I'm really pooped, so I'll write about what happened tomorrow" (Campbell 61). However, she never gets around to actually writing about what upset her. This diary entrance refers to the House of Usher party, but its placement in the narrative precedes the events of the party. Thus, it functions to foreshadow that something will happen. What does end up happening is that Tribly makes a move on Cleo after they get back from the party. Cleo rejects Trilby and goes to her room. This could be reason enough for Cleo to be "pooped," as her best friend tried to kiss her unexpectedly and the subsequent rejection could potentially make things awkward between them. Yet, the sequence that follows this interaction does not confirm this idea.

Figure 10. Campbell, Ross. *Wet Moon*, p. 29,

Following the Cleo's rejection of Trilby, is the sequence from page 83 to 88 in which we see Cleo in her room, opening her diary to a photo of Vincent (see figures 5, 6, and 7). As she holds the photo and paces around the room, it becomes clear that he is a much stronger reason for Cleo to be upset than the incident with Trilby. Cleo's diary does not offer full disclosure as to what is going on her mind. The images express her discontent, but she is unable and/or unwilling to submit it to paper. In this sense, Cleo's turmoil remains unnarrated, that is, it is never put into words her discomfort and stress at seeing or remembering Vincent. The reader is left to fill in the gap and deduce her feelings from her intense reactions, such as vomiting (Campbell 46), and running away from him (Campbell 45, 126, 148).

Opposite to Day's notion that diaries conceal information from other characters and disclose it to readers, Cleo's diary seems to further conceal her distress. Not only she does not talk to her friends about running into Vincent, but she also does not use the diary as an outlet to process her feelings. Vincent seems to be a matter too big for Cleo to tackle through language, as she does not speak or write about him. Vincent is unnarratable to Cleo, as confirmed by the extreme physical reactions she has when encountering him.

This brings the question of the role of the narratee in *Wet Moon.* Cleo writes to a future self, which is evident from the fact that she does not describe situations, events, or people. This would be redundant information, since her constructed reader is herself. This becomes clear from the example of the fortune cookie aforementioned, in which the fortune is mentioned two days later in the diary, but not how she came across it. Privacy, then, does not seem to be a concern in Cleo's case, as she does not bring up the inability to talk to her friends in her diary.

Cleo's diary is mainly a tool of reflection. She writes down in order to "take refuge in its calm to 'develop' the image of what [she] has just lived" (Lejeune 107). For

instance, Cleo constantly hypothesizes about other people's feelings towards her, "I thought roommates were supposed to greet you when you moved in, and make you feel at home. But all I get is an empty room. I know they're avoiding me" (Campbell 17). She takes their absence as a personal insult against her, without even having met her roommates. The truth is that they were probably busy with other matters. Later she writes, "both my roommates seem to hate me already, and, of course, Malady's first sight of me is me bent over and my face in the fucking toilet, retching" (Campbell 61). Cleo uses her diary to process and reflect on the events of her life, drawing (often inaccurate) conclusions. It is too soon to think her roommates are either avoiding her or hate her, but that is her point of view on their behavior.

In addition to hypothesizing about people's behaviors, Cleo also uses the diary to consider her actions. She is nervous about starting her classes, so she considers not even attending the first one. Cleo writes: "Maybe going to class tomorrow is stupid, and I'll be undone by that… but I'd think I'd be more likely to be undone by <u>not</u> going to class, because that would be stupider than going, definitely" (Campbell 138 ellipses in original). Even though she is nervous, she comes to the conclusion that going to class is what she should do. Thus, deliberating through her diary helps her come to the right course of action. In short, Cleo uses her diary to reflect on her surrounding, either the attitudes of others towards her, or her own actions. She might not always come to correct conclusions, as assuming her roommates hate her because they are not there in the house to greet her, but she can come to the correct conclusion as to what action to take, as the decision to go to her first class demonstrates.

3 *Skim* (2008) by Mariko Tamaki and Jilian Tamaki

Jillian Tamaki and Mariko Tamaki[7] are two cousins of Asian Canadian background. *Skim* (2008) was the first collaborative work between the two of them. They have also published together *This One Summer* (2014). Mariko is a Toronto born artist, a writer, and a playwright. Mariko also writes fiction and nonfiction prose, and she currently writes for DC and Marvel. Jillian is a Calgarian illustrator, who has worked for *The New York Times* and *The New Yorker,* and published independent comics. Jillian currently lives in Toronto doing illustrations for different clients. Both *Skim* and *This One Summer* have been nominated and won several awards[8].

Skim tells the story of a 16-year-old girl, Kimberly Keiko Cameron. She is an Asian Canadian studying in an all-girl Catholic high school in Toronto. Skim, as she is called by her classmates, is an outcast, a Goth, and a wanna-be wiccan. The story is told in the first person by Skim herself, and it is tied to her diary writing. From the comic's introduction, it is safe to assume that the beginning of the narrative is also the beginning of an intimate diary begun in 1993.

Skim presents two parallel stories. First, there is the overall high school drama involving Skim's classmate, Katie Matthews. Katie's boyfriend, John Readder, commits suicide, due to his (supposedly) closeted homosexuality. The school enters into a mourning period, in which both school administration and students see suicide threats everywhere. Since Skim is a shy and quiet girl, she begins to be ostracized by the other students, who see her as being in danger of committing suicide herself. The environment

[7] To avoid confusion, from now on I will refer to each by their first name.
[8] *Skim* won the 2008 Ignatz Award for Outstanding Graphic Novel; the 2009 Doug Wright Awards for Best Book; and the 2009 Joe Shuster Award for Writer.
This One Last Summer won the 2014 Ignatz Award for Best Graphic Novel; the 2014 Governor General's Literary Award for Children's Illustration; the 2015 CBC Bookie Award for Best Young Adult Novel; the 2015 CLA Young Adult Book Award; and the 2015 Eisner Award for Best New Graphic Album.

at the school starts to be very oppressive, as administration and students regard Skim's attitude as a suicide risk. Secondly, there is the internal struggle Skim faces during this time. In order to be left alone, Skim starts to skip some classes to smoke, which is how she starts to meet up and interact more intimately with Ms. Archer, her English and drama teacher. She falls in love with Ms. Archer once they share a kiss during one of these smoke breaks. The love cannot be reciprocated. While the school environment gets progressively worse for Skim, Ms. Archer stops going to school altogether. In an attempt to see her or, maybe, to repeat their intimate encounter, Skim finds her address and pays her nightly visits. It becomes increasingly clear that Skim has to get over their fleeting romance. Moreover, Skim finds herself unable to trust her only friend, Lisa, who actively participates in the school's gossip. Once Skim realizes that the schoolgirls expose and turn personal experiences into gossip, she begins relying solely on her diary to process her feelings. Gathering that John Reddear's suicide might have been the result of a queer romance (even though this fact is mainly gossip), Skim feels even more uncomfortable to share her feelings with others. Finally, she begins to spend more time with Katie, who also feels the need to escape the school drama. I will first analyze the panel structures in *Skim*. Next, I will focus on the Skim's diary as a safe space to communicate her thoughts.

3.1 Panels

This section presents an analysis of *Skim*'s panels and page layout, relating to the theories previously discussed. Skim's waffle-iron grid is three panels per tier and four tiers per page. However, it is rarely used consistently. Jillian Tamaki uses this format flexibly, frequently varying the number and size of the panels. Moreover, *Skim*'s gutters change depending on the time of the story: when the events occur during the day, the gutters are white; when it is night, the gutters are black.

Figure 11. Tamaki, Mariko and Jillian Tamaki. *Skim*, p. 80.

Page 80 offers a sample of *Skim*'s expressive use of page layout and frames (see fig. 11). This page represents the day Skim learns that Ms. Archer is not returning to finish the school year, therefore Skim knows she will no longer be able to see her. The text is minimal: a sentence on the first tier and another one on the last. The first and third tiers have two panels, and the last tier is a frameless panel. The whole page is a day in school for Skim; we can see her through different classes, walking the hallway, changing in the bathroom, and finally leaving a classroom.

The frames are almost nonexistent as well as the background drawings. Skim is desperately in love with Ms. Archer and finding out that her teacher is not returning is a big emotional blow. The faded background and disappearing frames capture Skim's unraveling over the course of the day. We can observe Groensteen's six framing functions in this page. First, closure, we see Skim from different angles, performing different actions. On the first panel, in which she is carrying her books, we do not see her full head or her feet, but we infer her whole body. In the third panel, Skim's entire body is shown as well as her locker in bold outline. We can presume she is in the school's hallway and next to her are other lockers and other kids, even if we cannot see them on the fading lines. Additionally, readers are not shown the details of this day, only mere snippets. Readers can interpret the panel transitions as moving from one school moment to the next, that is, from hallway to classroom, to bathroom, to classroom again, without the need to break down the sequence into more panels or the addition of more text.

Second, the separative function is almost nonexistent. The frames are barely there, almost blending the panels together. This is consistent with the atmosphere of this page. Skim is oblivious to the things happening around her, because her internal turmoil is much more prevalent at this moment, thus, the background fades in comparison.

Third, the rhythmic function is given by the succession of frames. This page has almost a strict waffle-iron layout, giving a fairly regular beat to the reading. The first and third tiers have only two panels, but the repetition of this format adds to the overall rhythm of this page. The similar size of each panel represents a daily routine, namely, Skim's school life. The panels show how Skim can be present as a body and absent in her mind, because the activities she is performing, such as her classes, are so familiar that she can fade into her own emotions without paying attention to her actions. The rhythm of this page contributes to this interpretation by making the panels follow a repetitive format.

Fourth, the structuring function happens through the rectangular panels in the first three tiers. The last panel is a bleed out in which the bottom end of the page becomes the end of the panel as well. Bleed out panels feel "uncontained" by the structure of the frame (McCloud 103). This last panel, then, is set in contrast to the other tiers. In it, Skim is opening the door of a classroom to walk into the school hallway. After the strict structure of the daily routine of school on the previous tiers, this panel feels light as it spreads to the end of the page. Moreover, the hallway is not faded like the rest of the panels, but drawn in bold black. This contrast informs us that the routine of classes is over. Skim walks out of the classroom at the end of the day and is free to finally go home and be with her emotions. The structure of the frames informs readers' interpretations of this page.

Fifth, the expressive function helps readers to understand this page. The fading frame, as I have already explained, carries the meaning of Skim's fading attention to the world that surrounds her. Like the panel frames, the physical world loses its materiality for her.

The sixth and final the readerly function highlights what readers cannot see as much as what they can. In other words, the fading frames and background, even if barely legible, play an important role in this page. They inform the readers of the foggy mental

state of Skim during this day. Within this panel, only Skim's body is fully drawn, calling attention to it inhabiting a fading world. In this sense, Skim feels detached from her life, neither present nor sociable. These feelings are conveyed to readers through the fading frames. In short, the functions of the frame defined by Groensteen help us understand the structural and semantic meanings these devices produce in comics.

Now I would like to address the panel transitions in *Skim* as described by McCloud (70-2). This will help us verify whether *Skim* conforms to the trends identified by McCloud. *Skim* has a total of 754 panel transitions. The table below shows the distribution of these transitions among the six categories proposed by McCloud:

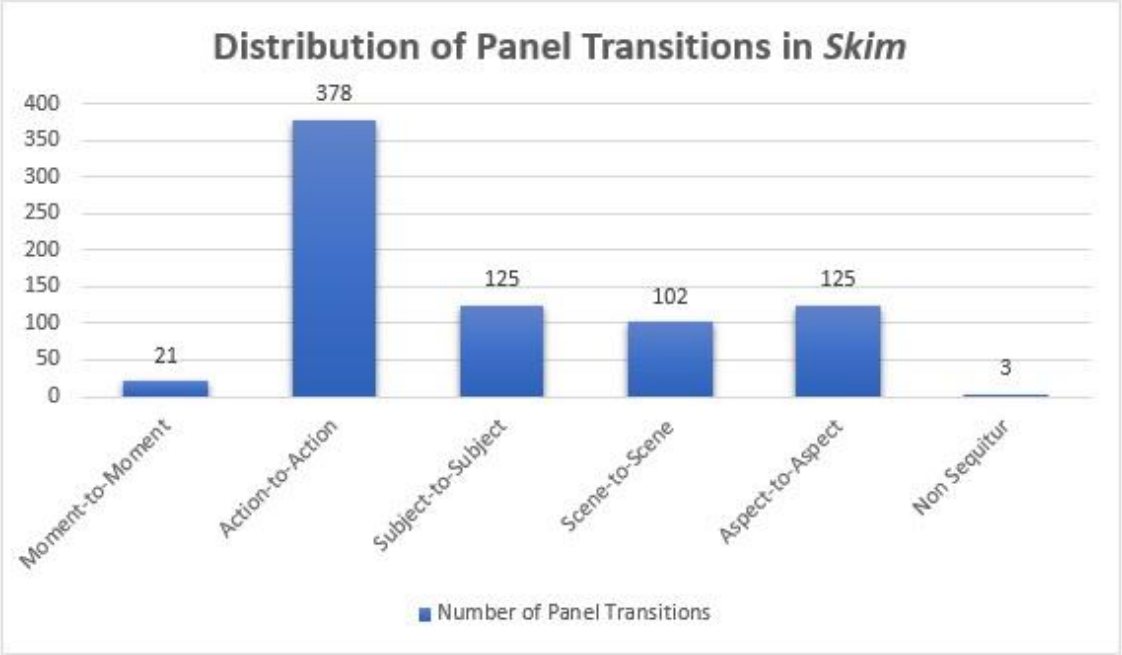

Table 2. Panel Transitions in *Skim*, created by the author.

This graphic shows a different trend than McCloud's initial observations, which are that Western and Japanese comics do not share the same panel transitions. McCloud's theory is that Japanese manga culture has stories running on for thousands of pages (80), which allows artists the time to focus on portraying the mood of a scene, rather than the action. Moreover, McCloud attributes this to a cultural difference between east and west. Interestingly, the majority of authors analyzed by McCloud are male, with the exception of Roberta Gregory's *Naughty Bits* (2001-2004).

My first assumption was that Mariko and Jillian were influenced by manga culture, and that the graphic demonstrated said influence. However, in an interview, Jillian says she "grew up reading *Archie Comics*;" but as soon as she was too old for them, she "didn't think of comics in any way" (Davies 'Boundless'). Thus, if Jillian had experienced any influences they would have been North-American, which does not explain the distribution of panel transitions in *Skim*. A more accurate explanation is the type of story Tamaki and Tamaki aim to tell. Like *Wet Moon*, *Skim* is a character-driven story, not an action-driven one. Tamaki and Tamaki are conveying a story about a Goth teenage girl who is dealing with depression, heartbreak and school drama. The action in the narrative is limited, and the focus is on the atmosphere perceived by Skim, both in her daily life, and in her feelings. As the previously analyzed page demonstrates, transmitting emotions and interior struggle are much more relevant than the actual events. Therefore, moment-to-moment and aspect-to-aspect transitions are adequate choices to suit this narrative.

The most unexpected type of panel transition, the non-sequitur, is also present in *Skim*. On page 89, there is a bleed image of Skim on a snowy field writing a statement in capital letters (see fig. 12). On the right lower corner of this image, there is an inset of GCL's (Girls Celebrate Life) board with an image of the boy who killed himself, John

Reddear, in which someone has written the word “fag.” Because it is an inset, the image of John Reddear is understood as subordinate to the host panel. There is no text linking the transition from Skim writing in the snow and the inclusion of this inset. The transition is not logical from a visual perspective either, because it does not connect to the host panel in any obvious way. The relationship between the two panels is then open to interpretation by the readers.

At the top of the page, we read, “Dear diary”, followed by: “I hate ~~you~~ everythin” (Tamaki and Tamaki 89), which Skim is in the process of writing and editing. The traditional initial statement, “Dear diary”, signifies that this is a new diary entry; the medium, however, is the ephemeral snow. The aerial point of view of this image enables us to size up her words in relation to her body, and they are truly bigger than herself. The lack of the final letter in ‘everything’ means Skim is still writing this utterance. According to Danziger-Russell, the size of the words are proportional to the size of her emotions, as “Skim’s words dwarf her” (99). Moreover, “her feelings could be understood to be bigger and more oppressive than can be contained by her diary, as Skim appears to be bursting with sadness and anger” (Danziger-Russell 99).

Skim’s message in the snow is ambiguous. First, the statement should read “I hate you,” however, the “you” could refer to multiple people. “You” could simultaneously refer to: Ms. Archer for leaving; Lisa for not being a supportive friend; the girls in school for being nosy; and, even, Skim herself. By crossing out “you” in the statement to say, “I hate everything,” Skim could be referring to all of these at the same time. The change from “you” to “everything” suggests that Skim herself does not know who the recipient of her anger is, and all these possible referents have a part to play in the way she is feeling. Secondly, the snow statement is followed by a mellow, “It’s snowing” (Tamaki and Tamaki 89), which appears redundant and ultimately unimportant. The second statement

conflicts with the more personal statement in the snow. It is possible that Skim only wrote those words in the snow, without transcribing them to her diary. For Danziger-Russell, "the reader could interpret the writing in the snow as an omission from her diary – a raw statement of Skim's feelings that she cannot bear to commit to paper" (99). In other words, even though Skim's feelings are overwhelming, she is not ready to deal with them by admitting to them in a more permanent place, such as her intimate diary.

The inset panel on the bottom of the page offers yet further possibilities. Danziger-Russell argues that, "one gets the feeling that Skim had seen the graffiti marring the boy's photograph and that she is now reflecting on the discovery of her own sexual orientation and how the school and society at large may perceive her" (99). Taking into account the statement in the snow and the inset panel, "everything" means the way society at large perceives and deals with homosexuality. Conversely, we have no evidence that Skim has in fact seen the graffiti on GCL's board. Since inset panels convey an idea of events happening simultaneously, the graffiti and the act of writing in the snow could be happening at the same time. In this case, it was not the graffiti that caused Skim's outburst; the graffiti could be one more reason to hate everything. Additionally, Skim might be oblivious to it, and the graffiti is being shown to readers by the narrator. Readers can perceive the inset as proof of Skim's statement, even if she herself does not know about it. Because this sequence is a non-sequitur, these are all equally possible readings. Ultimately, The lack of explanation between these panels opens the range of possibilities and allows readers to formulate their own connections.

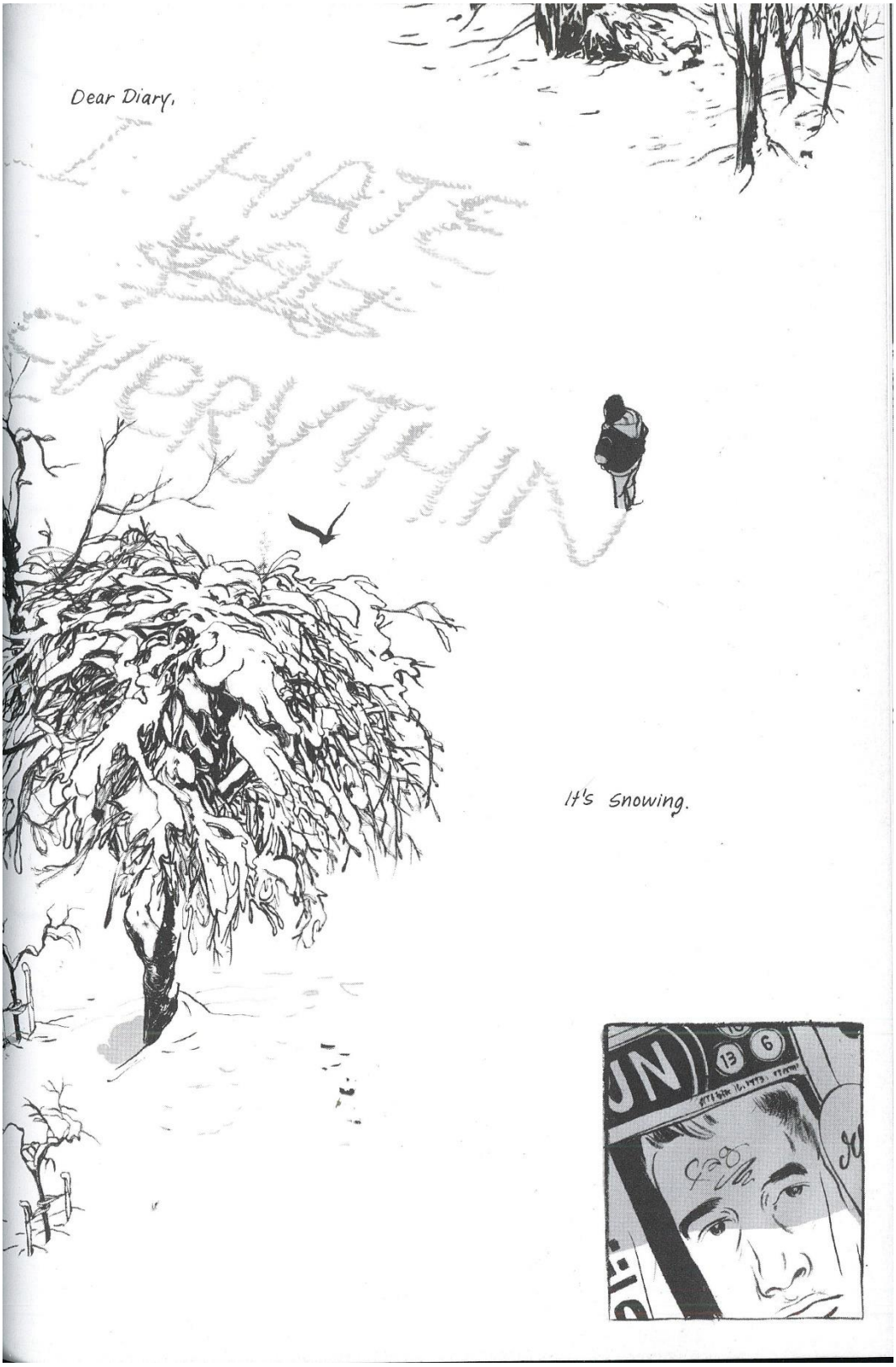

Figure 12. Tamaki, Mariko and Jillian Tamaki. *Skim*, p. 89.

2.2 The text

Unlike *Wet Moon*, which had predominantly speech balloons, *Skim*'s story is told mainly in captions. The comic is narrated by Skim as diary entries accompanying the images. The speech balloons in *Skim* are the main form of representing dialogue. I will first talk about the balloons and then about the captions as Skim's diary.

Jillian uses different balloon outlines to signify different speech intonations. For instance, a dashed balloon is used when characters are whispering during a school announcement (Tamaki and Tamaki 45). When the balloon indicates a shout or harsh tone, the frame is thick and the words are capitalized, that is the case when Skim's mother shouts at her for leaving a mess (Tamaki and Tamaki 76), or when Lisa screams at Skim during a card game (Tamaki and Tamaki 81). Likewise, during a phone conversation between Skim and Lisa, the voices coming out of the phone are identified by balloons framed by straight angles (Tamaki and Tamaki 112). The use of different frames expands on the meaning of the balloons, conveying not only the words, but also how the characters speak them.

While *Wet Moon* presents many long dialogues, *Skim* has fewer and smaller speech balloons in comparison. Thus, placement of the balloons within the panels is not as complex as in *Wet Moon*. Frequently there are only one or two speech balloons per panel, positioned at the edges of the frame. On some cases though, Jillian employs an odd framing of the images, centering the speech balloons at the focal point of the panel, and leaving out the faces of the speakers. This framing is also a type of unnarration. According to Warhol, some movies use this "aggressively odd framing," which "is tantamount to an assertion that the experience cannot be captured in narrative" ("Neonarrative" 203). The same can be said of Skim's framing in which the dialogue is centered, but the characters' faces or bodies are not represented. It is pertinent to note that this type of unusual framing

appears mostly in scenes where Skim is interacting with Ms. Archer. Mary Ann Doane points out that "the face is the most *readable* part of the body" (47). By not representing the faces or bodies of characters during their interactions, the emotion that could be read in their expressions is left for readers to conceptualize and imagine. Consequently, this refusal to show the face works as a "means of indicating that the emotion of the moment transcends representation" (Warhol "Neonarrative" 203). The visual unnarration of these interactions between Ms. Archer and Skim reinforce Skim's own refusal to put into words her exact feelings for Ms. Archer.

Skim's unnarration is twofold: the refusal to show bodily expressions, as aforementioned, and the refusal to write about pivotal events. The two-page spread of Skim and Ms. Archer's kiss goes unmentioned in the diary (see fig. 13). The kiss, however, is central to the story and to Skim, and as such it is expected that Skim would write about it. However, that is not the case. Prior to the kiss, Skim writes, "Technically nothing has happened" (Tamaki and Tamaki 38). Skim's dismissal creates a negative anticipation on the reader that is subverted by the fact that something actually did happen. According to Kahn:

> The image of the kiss subverts the authority of the textual claim on the previous page that 'nothing happened', whilst allowing us to return to Skim's 'reading' of her Wiccan passage with renewed comprehension, re-reading the text in light of a counterpointing image. Seeing this erotic encounter as a 'calling to the mysteries.' (341)

Skim copying a passage from a Wiccan book on "the charge", indicates that she also understands the kiss to have been decisive moment in her life. Yet, she is unable to describe or recount the event in her own words, leaving the moment to be revealed only

through images, and using the words from a book she owns. Therefore, the unnarration of this moment points out to the intensity that the kiss has for Skim.

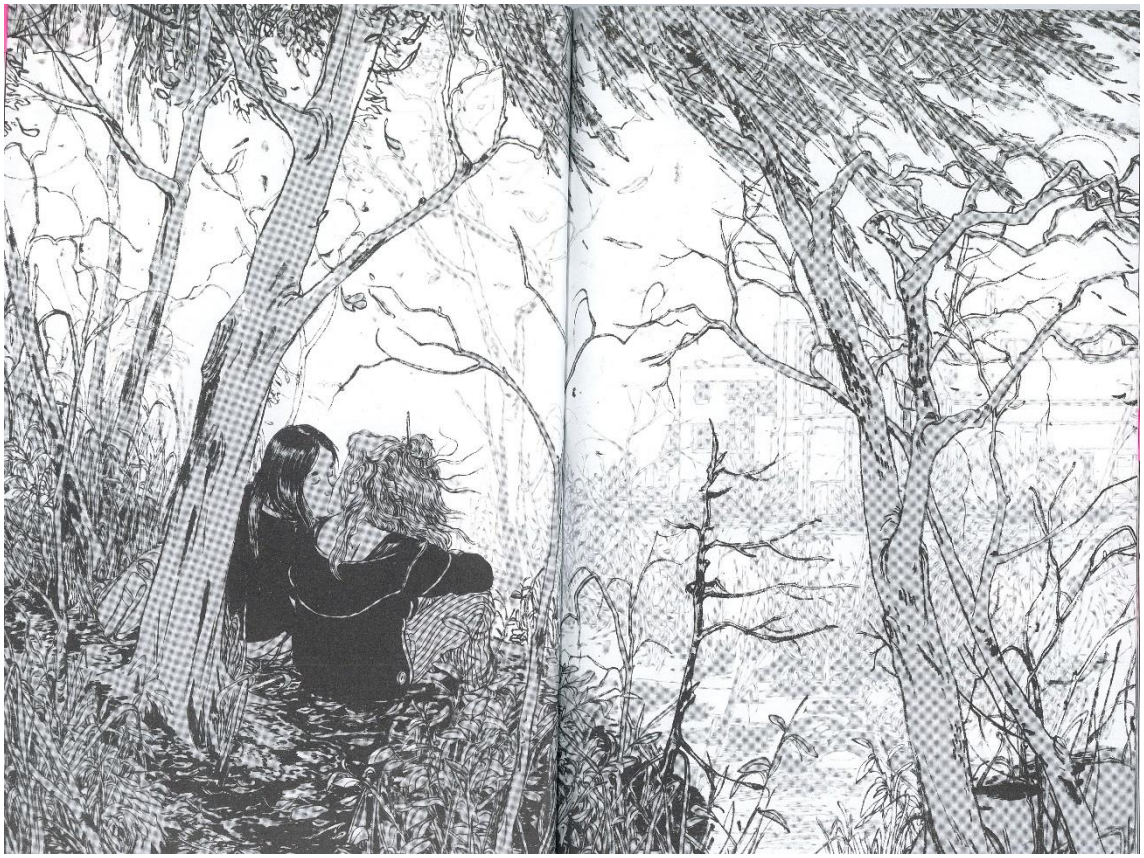

Figure 13. Tamaki, Mariko and Jillian Tamaki. *Skim*, p. 40-1.

Figure 14. Tamaki, Mariko and Jillian Tamaki. *Skim*, p. 57.

Skim frequently signals her own inability to find words for her feelings. Towards the end of the story, Lisa is talking about how love changes you, which "resonates with Skim, who is unable to speak of her love for Ms. Archer not just because it is taboo, but also because it is too complex to put into words" (Mallan 46). On one of Skim's nightly visits to Ms. Archer's house, the twofold aspects of unnarration in the story can be observed (see fig. 14). It is the second time Skim goes to Ms. Archer's house, but she was not expecting to encounter Ms. Archer on the porch. Skim is invited in and they have a cup of tea. During their interaction, we cannot see Ms. Archer's face: the first couple of panels focus on her hands, and the pouring of tea; then, we can only see the back of her head; lastly, neither Skim nor Ms. Archer are framed. Not being able to see Ms. Archer points at Skim's shyness at facing her loved one, therefore avoiding her gaze. It also indicates that the interaction between them is beyond representation, leaving a space for the readers to fill the gap with their own understanding of the potential awkwardness and uncertainty of the moment. Moreover, Skim writes: "Everything I had to say is sticking to my insides" (Tamaki and Tamaki 57). Skim finds difficult to express herself, because love seems to be too hard to be able to talk or to write about it. Skim leaves without talking to Ms. Archer about "everything she had to say". Moreover, she does not use the diary as a tool to unload those feelings and thoughts. Whatever are the things Skim felt she wanted to say to Ms. Archer are left to the reader to interpret based on their own assumptions about love and desire.

Skim's diary constitutes the main part of the text in the comics. Mariko claims in an interview that her own diary as a teenager was a source of inspiration when writing *Skim*:

> I remember a period as a teenager when my diary entries got really, really brief. Because if you are not really sure what is happening, you don't really

> want to commit anything to paper so I thought it would be a nice approach. I knew Skim was going to be a really quiet character, so I thought I'd give her another voice, but even that voice can be truncated …. So she would cross stuff out. Like an interior monologue that was as shy as exterior monologue. (qtd in Hughes and King 74)

The start of the narrative indicates the start of a new diary, as Skim presents herself: "I am: Kimberly Keiko Cameron (aka Skim)" (Tamaki and Tamaki 7). Skim starts her entries with the traditional "Dear diary," but nothing else, no date or location. The year, 1993, is only indicated in her introductory entry. From the images, we can see that the story spans between fall and winter. Skim's diary is not shown the same way as Cleo's is. Readers almost never see Skim writing, and the pages of the diary are not actualized like in *Wet Moon*. The diary entries are mostly in fragments appearing as captions, throughout the pages. Page 15 offers the only instance in which Skim is writing and the captions are mimicking her diary page including some doodlings Skim makes (see fig. 15). In this page, Skim is describing the current items she has in her Wiccan altar, and she is also listing the items she still needs to complete it. The drawing shows her altar with the words functioning as captions to the each item. This page presents a word specific relationship between the text and the images, since the images are mostly illustrating the altar Skim is writing about. At the top of the page, Skim decorates the title, "My Altar," while at the bottom we can see three doodles that accompany the entry.

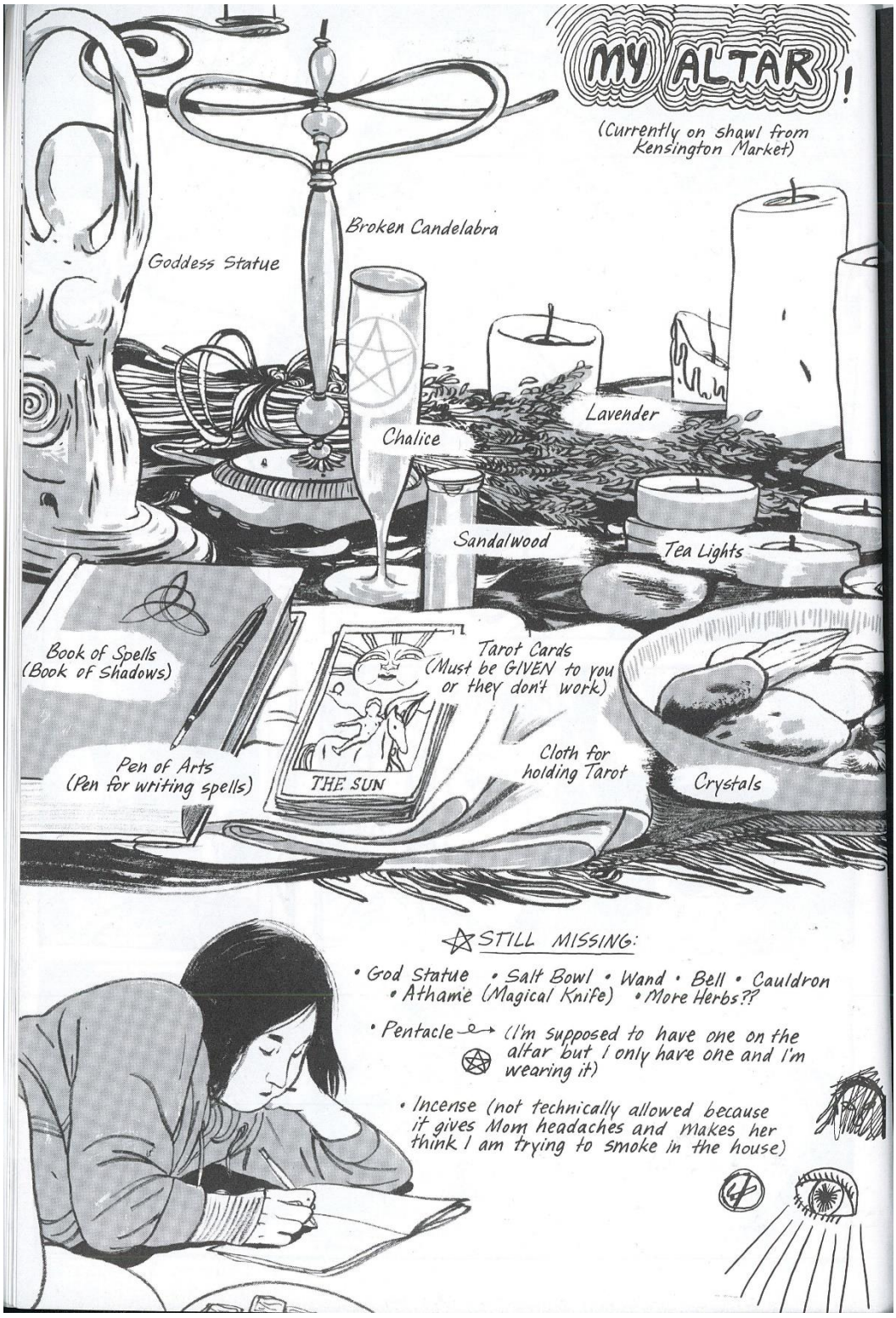

Figure 15. Tamaki, Mariko and Jillian Tamaki. *Skim*, p. 14.

Skim writes about her recent past, especially her failing relationship with Lisa, and her infatuation with Ms. Archer. Skim tries to balance her need of privacy and her need for disclosure, as such her diary becomes a safe space for both. Concerning first-person narratives for young adults, Day remarks that "the narrators' stories frequently reveal a desire to share personal, private feelings, questions, and struggles as well as a hesitation to share them with other characters within the fictional world of the novel" (4). Skim is actively keeping things from Lisa, who she insists is her best friend. Skim writes: "Three things I will not tell Lisa: 1) My heart feels like a piece of chalk in my throat. 2) I feel like I am definitely a witch, although I am technically only starting to be a witch. 3) I have a piece of paper in my bra." (Tamaki and Tamaki 28). During a conversation in the bathroom, Lisa says to Skim: "Well, that's you. I'm more independent than you are" (Tamaki and Tamaki 33). Indicating that possibly Lisa does not see Skim as an equal. Taylor argues that, "there is a central tension between Lisa and Skim - Lisa feels she is slightly cooler and more independent of thought than Skim" (463). In turn, "Skim does not trust Lisa with her crush, keeping news of kissing her teacher, Ms. Archer, and visiting her house, to herself" (Taylor 463). The tension between the friends escalates during the story to the point that Skim thinks that, "Everything Lisa says drives me crazy these days" (Tamaki and Tamaki 71), and she starts to avoid Lisa's company altogether (Tamaki and Tamaki 100).

All the things that she will not tell Lisa, Skim discloses to her diary, and, consequently, to the readers. In this sense, Skim's diary serves to communicate what she is unable to share with the other characters, especially Lisa, who as a best friend should also function as Skim's confidant. For Danziger-Russell, "The act of writing aids Skim in clarifying her thoughts, distilling them into a deeper meaning" (93). In other words, Skim's writing also functions as a tool of self-knowledge and reflection.

Despite the diary being a safe space, Skim restrains herself. As Mariko commented on the aforementioned interview, Skim crosses out passages of her diary, because she is not entirely comfortable with fully disclosing her thoughts and feelings. According to Danziger-Russell, "the act of crossing out what she has previously written appears to be an act of self-censorship or self-denial; it is as if Skim is too embarrassed to commit her feelings to paper or not yet ready to admit them to herself" (93). When she lists the things she will not tell Lisa about, Skim details the spell she has on her bra, and adds: "Because of Ms. Archer. Four things" (Tamaki and Tamaki 29). She crosses out these last two lines, meaning not only she will not tell this to Lisa, but she also will not admit this to herself, or the reader. Day explains that, "intimacy also necessarily involves elements of vulnerability and danger, as one must determine whether or not it is 'safe' to share certain information or feelings with others" (5). By crossing out some of her confessions, Skim signals her fear of vulnerability. If she were to fully disclose these thoughts, even to her diary, it would be an admission of her own insecurities and uncertainties. The things Skim is not willing to confess to Lisa extend to herself as well.

The constant self-editing of statements signals to an awareness of potential readers. This awareness "influences the diarist's choices regarding what to *do* as well as what to *write*" (Day 150). Skim writes with a potential reader in mind. The text constructs a narratee that is at the same time a confidant and a voyeur in Skim's life. A confidant because the initial statement, "Dear Diary," "suggests a private communication in that the diary itself is the patient listener or receptor of her secrets, and as readers we also serve this function" (Mallan 46). A voyeur because the censored passages are still legible, thus readable and prohibited at the same.

Other ways that Skim constructs a narratee is by describing people and places, using flashbacks, and reporting speech. This creates a stark contrast between Cleo's diary,

which did not address a potential reader other than Cleo's future self, and Skim's diary. For instance, the flashback sequence tells of a birthday party in which Skim and another Asian born girl were thrown out by the host. She writes that this occurred when she was in grade seven, meaning four years prior to the events of the diary. There is a panel we see Skim's handwriting anticipating the flashback as "A Memory by Skim Cameron" (Tamaki and Tamaki 83). The use of descriptions and flashbacks like this one helps situate readers, who are clearly not Skim herself, since "the details … [included] not only help to make her experiences more accessible to the reader but also provide clear insights into her character" (Day 160). If Skim were writing for her future self, this type of information would be redundant, as Cleo's diary demonstrates. Skim's tale of the birthday party helps readers understand her loneliness as a strength, rather than a mere sign of depression, as her peers see it.

Ultimately, the comic offers the single point of view of Skim herself. Her diary acts as a portrait of her inner workings, but leaves questions unanswered. For instance, whether or not John Reddear was truly in love with another boy. Additionally, the real reason for Ms. Archer leaving in the middle of the academic year is left for speculation.

To conclude, *Skim* uses unnarration to point out to topics that are too big or too complex for mere representation either through language or drawing. The use of unnarration asks for reader cooperation in interpreting and understanding the difficult moments some scenes depict. Skim uses her diary as safe space to navigate the school drama, her feelings, and her thoughts. She feels ever more distanced from her best friend, who is judgemental and critical of Skim. The diary becomes a place for safe disclosure, even if Skim sometimes is not able to fully commit herself to paper, as the constant cross outs demonstrate. The narratee, then, is constructed as a confidant through flashbacks and

descriptions, Skim constructs a reader who can have a better insight into her personality than the other characters.

4 *Le Bleu Est une Couleur Chaude* (2010) by Julie Maroh

Julie Maroh is an artist and comic book writer from north of France. As writer and artist, she has three published comics, *Le Bleu Est une Couleur Chaude* (2010), which received several awards[9]; *Skandalon* (2013); and *Corps Sonores* (2017). Moreover, she has published a collection of short comics, *City & Gender* (2015), and a BD-musique on the life of composer Johannes Brahms, *Brahms* (2014).

Bleu tells the story of first love between high school student, Clémentine, and blue-haired young artist, Emma. The narrative is not organized chronologically, but told through flashbacks of Clémentine's intimate diaries. After Clémentine dies of a heart condition, Emma goes back to Clémentine's childhood home to read her diaries. Emma spends the night reliving the initial stages of their relationship, reflecting about their life together, and mourning the loss of her partner. Maroh uses color to distinguish between the narrative timelines. The present moment, when Emma is reading, is depicted in full color. The past, as retold by the diary, is depicted in sepia. Maroh uses blue in some key moments to signify Clémentine's interests. "Le bleu est devenu une couleur chaude," writes Clémentine to Emma in her final letter (Maroh 7). The blue objects in certain panels stand out in contrast to the, otherwise, monochromatic world of Clémentine's youth. *Bleu* was adapted to the screen in 2013 under the title, *La Vie d'Adèle*. The movie directed by Abdellatif Kechiche and with Léa Seydoux and Adèle Exarchopoulos in the main roles was internationally praised, receiving the Palme d'Or in Cannes.

[9] Prix Jeune Auteur at the Salon de la BD et des Arts Graphiques of Roubaix 2010; Prix Conseil Régional at the festival of Blois 2010; Fnac-SNCF Essential at the 2011 Angoulême International Comics Festival; Prix BD des lycéens de la Guadeloupe; Prize of the best international album during the 4e Festival international de la BD d'Alger in 2011.

Clémentine's diaries comprise the period between 1994 and 2008. She considers them to be "ce que j'ai de plus précieux" (Maroh 6). She writes about her daily life at school and at home, focusing on her first experiences of sexual desire. Clémentine is going on her first date with a boy, Thomas, when she sees Emma for the first time. It is an instant attraction, as Clémentine's dreams of Emma later that night demonstrate. In a vain attempt to suppress her desires for another girl, Clémentine continues to go out with Thomas, which ends once they attempt to have sex and Clém runs away from his bedroom in the middle of the night. When Emma meets Clémentine in front of her high school, Clémentine is immediately labelled as lesbian by her so-called friends who begin ostracizing her. In rage, a female friend declares: "[homosexuals] C'est de vrais pervers, des malades … Ça me donne envie de gerber rien que de penser que t'étais ma copine et que je t'ai invitée pour dormir chez moi!" (Maroh 63). A major theme of the story is homophobia, as Clém has to face prejudice from school and from her parents. When her relationship with Emma is discovered at home, she is kicked out of the house in the middle of the night. The couple goes on to live together until Clémentine admits to having had a brief affair with a male colleague. Emma and Clémentine fight and are separated for a couple of months. When they reunite on the beach, the heart condition Clémentine is suffering from becomes known. She has little time left, and is hospitalized until her final days.

4.1 Panels

This section analyzes *Bleu*'s panels and page layout. *Bleu*'s waffle-iron layout is three panels per tier and three tiers per page. Maroh varies this format throughout the book, constantly using a single wide panel per tier to emphasize certain elements. Additionally, there are examples of pages with four tiers, only two tiers per page, and

single panels per page. Maroh uses gutter variations between tiers and between panels in some pages. Thus, the waffle-iron grid is not used in a strict manner.

I will focus my analysis of Groensteen's framing functions on page 17 of *Bleu* (see fig. 16). Clémentine is lying awake in bed after having spent the day with Thomas. The important event of the day is not Thomas, but Emma. It was the first time she had encountered Emma while crossing the street; their eyes locked, and it made a big impression on Clémentine. While Clémentine is reliving that brief encounter, she is imagining that Emma is next to her, as her lover. This page has no text to accompany Clémentine's reveries. There are four tiers in this page, with two panels on the first tier, three panels on the next, a single panel on the third tier, and three panels on the fourth tier.

On this page, the first function, closure, frames Clémentine's point of view. Readers share her gaze as she remembers the brief encounter with Emma. First, she recollects two people arm in arm. Next, she sees Emma's face and focuses on her lips. Finally, she gazes into Emma's eyes. Even if Emma appears fragmented in these panels, readers infer that she is a whole character and that these close-ups are details Clémentine is remembering in vivid fashion. Moreover, the close-up of Emma's features indicates Clémentine's intense gaze upon them.

The second function, separative, makes this page intelligible. In other words, if it were just a single panel of Emma's face, readers might not notice her lips and eyes with the same intensity as the close-ups. The first panel shows Clémentine from a third person point of view. The following panel shows both Clémentine and what she is thinking about, namely, her encounter with Emma. The next two tiers are from Clémentine's point of view. Moreover, Emma's features are emphasized through the single panels.

Third, the rhythm of this page starts at a steady pace, and then there is a sudden break. The page starts with two panels in the first tier, then it increases to three panels in the second tier, but it is slowed down by the single wide panel in the third tier, only to be accelerated again in the last tier with three panels. The wide panel of Emma's eyes stretches the time of reading, giving this panel prominence over the others on the page.

The fourth structure functions and the fifth expressive function are congruent. The three equally sized panels in the second tier indicates that Clémentine remembers them similarly. In contrast, however, is Emma's eyes are represented in a single wide panel. This structure gives prominence to Emma's eyes, by changing the structure from three equal panels to a single one. Furthermore, this change highlights how Emma's eyes have had a bigger impact on Clémentine than her other features (face and lips); thereby, meriting its own panel.

In the sixth readerly function, each element that is focused on these frames is automatically given importance. According to Groesnteen, "to dedicate a frame to an element is the same as testifying that this element constitutes a specific contribution, however slim, to the story in which it participates" (56). The focus panel of this page is Emma's eyes, which invite readers to scrutinize this panel dues to its uncommon size within the page. When reading this image, readers notice that Clémentine is also reflected in Emma's eyes. This indicates that Emma has also noticed Clémentine, who in turn, realized that she is being observed as well.

Now I turn my analysis to the panel transitions in *Bleu* according to McCloud's categories. This comic has 1176 panel transitions in total. The distribution of panel transitions is demonstrated in the table below:

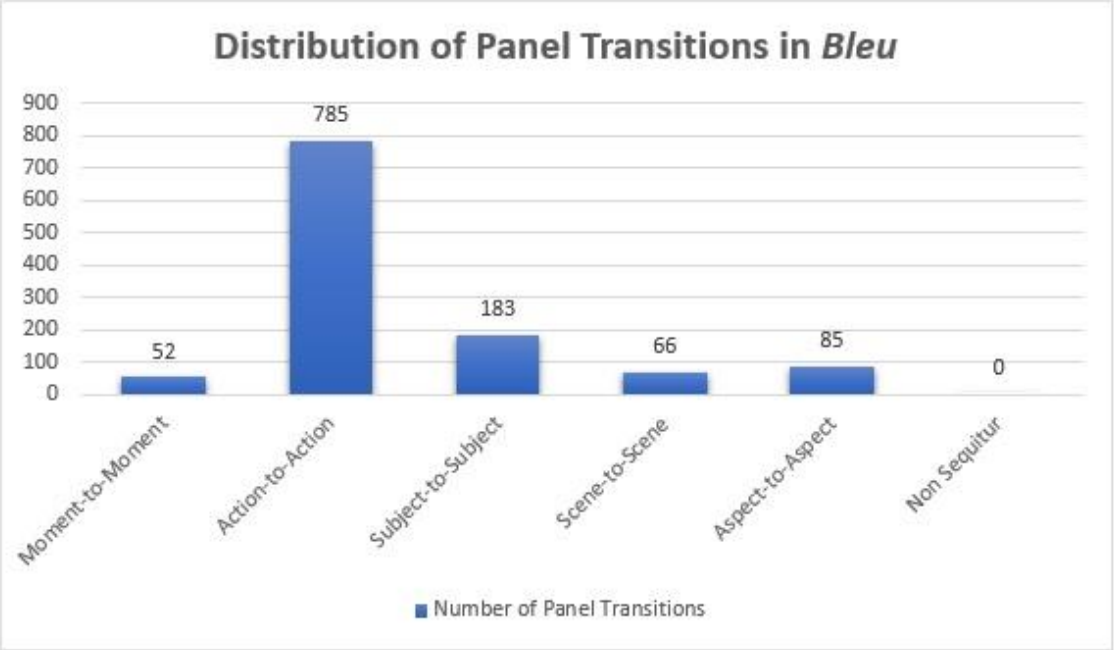

Table 3. Panel Transitions in *Bleu*, created by the author.

Unlike the two last comics analyzed in this thesis, *Bleu* has no non-sequitur transition, but it has a significant number of all other types of transitions. The most prevalent, again, is action-to-action. The second highest number of transitions is subject-to-subject, which I will focus on my analysis. *Bleu*'s panel distribution, even if it does include all transitions, still stands in contrast to the sample analyzed by McCloud, especially because moment-to-moment and aspect-to-aspect are prevalent transitions. In contrast to the other two comics analyzed, *Bleu's* narrative is more action driven. However, the intimate atmosphere of Clémentine's diary focuses the narrative on her interior struggles, and Maroh uses color to focus objects in the same way as *Skim* and *Wet Moon* use framing as a focusing device. A more suitable explanation for these results is the diary genre as explained by Rebecca Hogan in the introduction. The diary is a genre concerned with inner life and private ruminations, both of which are closely linked to female subjectivity. All three comics use the diary form to express the inner lives of the young female protagonists. These narratives are not action based, but aim at creating a portrait for their inner struggles. The analysis of panel transitions in the three comics show that the authors

use the full potential of the comic medium to convey these stories. The comics analyzed in this thesis take advantage of different transitions in order to set the mood and atmosphere of the stories. The main atmosphere these panel transitions aim at conveying is the inner selves of the adolescent protagonists.

Page 130 offers an example of subject-to-subject transitions and a striking use of inset panel (see fig. 17). This page follows immediately after Clémentine is kicked out of her house in the middle of the night by her parents for being in a lesbian relationship with Emma. There are three tiers with an increasing number of panels in each. This increase in panels represents a speeding up of time in that Clémentine is experiencing time moving more quickly. The panels are finally acquiring color which indicates that the diary's timeline and the most current timeline are converging. The panels show daily activities in Clémentine's life – moving in with Emma, classes at university, their life as a couple, her teaching, etc. Despite being different moments, and separated in time, these panels are connected by the idea of Clémentine growing up. The unity of this page is further emphasized by the inset image of Clémentine that appears on top of the panels. Because this page is organized around a single idea and it requires reader engagement to connect the several panels into said unity, these transitions are subject-to-subject rather than scene-to-scene.

This page simultaneously represents several panels spanning a large period of time, and a single unified panel of Clémentine's life. The unity is achieved by the image of Clémentine naked in a fetal position. Clémentine's body is superimposed in front of the other panels, making it an inset panel subordinated to the rest of the page. While the background panels are presenting movement in time, this inset operates as a simultaneous occurrence with all the other panels on this page. Rather than highlighting a detail in the background, this inset panel serves to unite the multiple panels. In narratological terms,

it is neither an action nor plot development, but rather a description of Clémentine during this lapse of time. It functions to describe her both physically and mentally. Physically, we can see that her hair is longer, that her body is that of a woman, and that she has matured. Mentally, she feels simultaneously like a grown woman, and like an infant. Her fetal position and her nakedness resemble a baby in the womb. This notion is reinforced by the text: “Et j’ai grandi plus vite que prévu” (Maroh 130). In a sense, while she is an adult on the outside, she still feels like a schoolgirl on the inside. Having had to grow up too fast, Clémentine does not feel comfortable in her adulthood. The following section will analyze the text in *Bleu*, especially Clémentine’s diary entries.

Figure 16. Maroh, Julie. *Le bleu est une* couleur *chaude*, p 17.

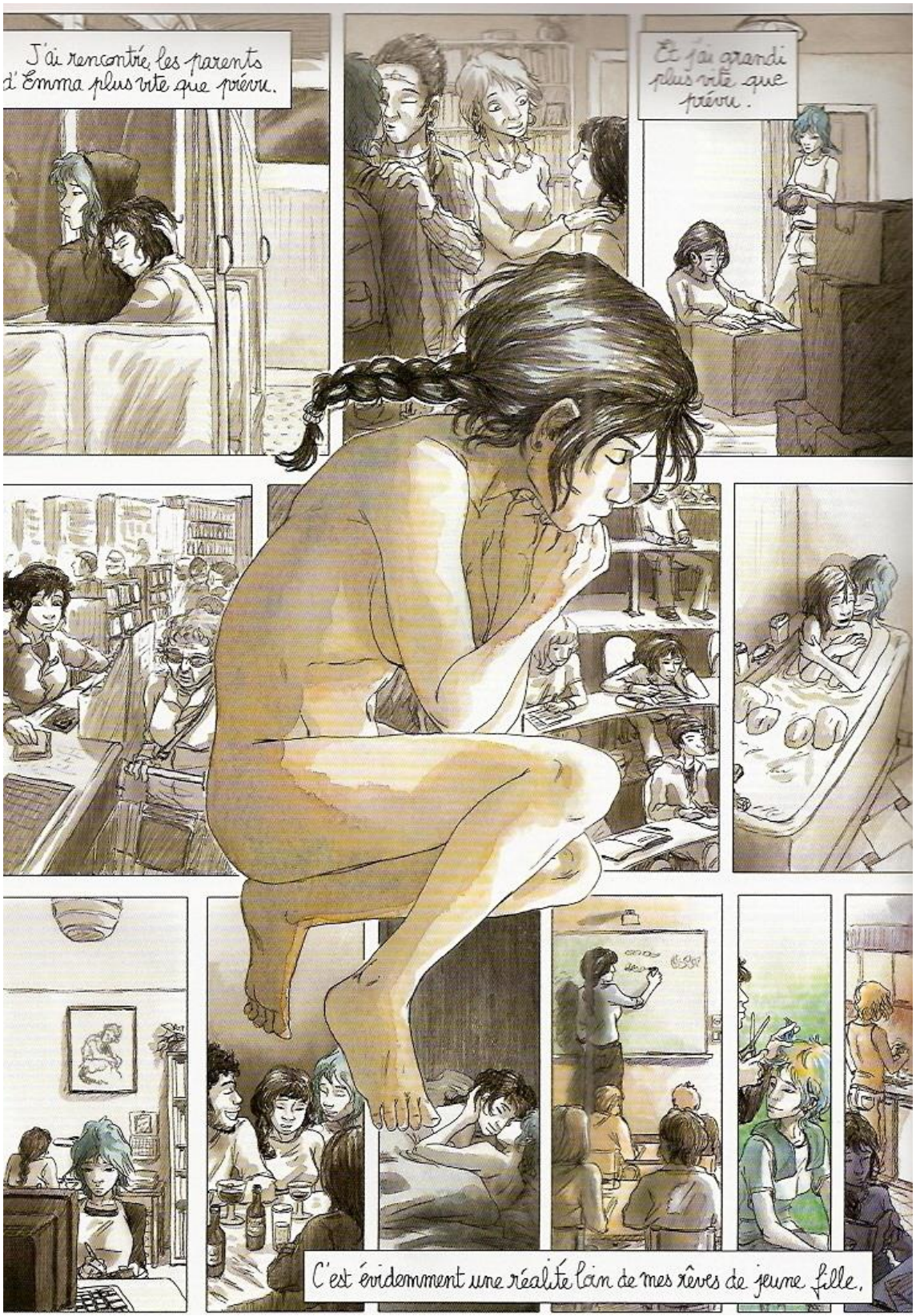

Figure 17. Maroh, Julie. *Le bleu est une* couleur *chaude*, p 130.

4.4 The text

Bleu has a similar number of balloons and captions. I will address first the former and then the latter. The balloons are used to convey both speech and thoughts. As speech, the balloons are most frequently oval, but they can be angular, as in telephone conversations and TV broadcasts, or spiky as in yelling or loud voices. As thoughts, the balloons are identified by the conventional chain of bubbles leading back to one of the characters. In some instances, Maroh uses speech balloons without actual words, but with drawings. For example, when Emma is reading Clémentine's diary, she has dinner with Clémentine's parents when a heated argument ensues. Emma leaves the table, and goes back upstairs. Until she closes the bedroom door, there are balloons indicating that the argument is escalating between Clémentine's parents, as the drawings show a tombstone, a bloody axe, a devil, and a flag of France (see fig. 18). Before closing the door, the balloon has an image of Emma herself being burnt at the stake by Ku Kux Klan figures. The use of images instead of words to depict the altercation between Clémentine's parents allow for a flexible interpretation of what exactly is said. It is still clear from the images that good things were not said about Emma, especially because Emma stands for their daughter's homosexuality, and as such is seen as the culprit of their broken family. This type of substitution, from words to images inside the speech balloons, is frequent in comics. Postema argues that "while word balloons are a common vehicle for words, they are equally suited to carrying pictures, or any combination of the two" (83). In the case of this sequence in *Bleu*, the use of images instead of the exact words spoken guides readers towards a general understanding of the argument ensuing without fixing a precise utterance.

Visually, Maroh distinguishes between the balloons and the captions by using different letterings. While the balloons appear in capital letters, the captions are in cursive

letters. *Bleu* has a similar balloon distribution as *Skim*, with one or two balloons per panel positioned at the edges of the frame. Like Campbell, Maroh positions one balloon on top of another to indicate that a character has interrupted another's speech, for instance, when Emma's girlfriend finds Emma talking to Clémentine at the gay pub. Another visual technique Maroh uses is diminishing the balloon size and the size of the text to indicate that the conversation keeps on going, making the balloons function as visual ellipses. This is the case when Emma meets Clémentine at school, and they have the afternoon to chat and get to know each other. The ever-smaller balloons and text indicating that it no longer matters what they talk about, but just that the conversation never seems to die out (see fig. 19).

Bleu's story begins at the end of Clémentine's diary. Clémentine is already dead and has left a final letter to Emma instructing her to take possession of her intimate journals. This final letter and final request can be seen as Clémentine's last diary entry. According to Lejeune's notions that it is hard to explain the end of diaries since diary keeping is an activity that ends only at the end of life itself, *Bleu* offers an insight into the end of a life and the end of a diary. Clémentine's diary is the only one of the three diaries analyzed in this thesis that truly comes to an end. *Wet Moon* ends without a resolution to Cleo's trauma regarding Vincent, and it also does not indicate it is the end of her diary. Skim seems to be getting over Ms. Archer by the end of the story, but there is no indication that the diary is coming to an end in itself. Clémentine being bedridden in the hospital, and knowing that she will soon die, writes her final entry confirming that journaling only truly ends with death. As her final request. Clémentine gives Emma not only possession of her diaries, but also permission to read all her entries.

Figure 18. Maroh, Julie. *Le bleu est une* couleur *chaude*, p 28.

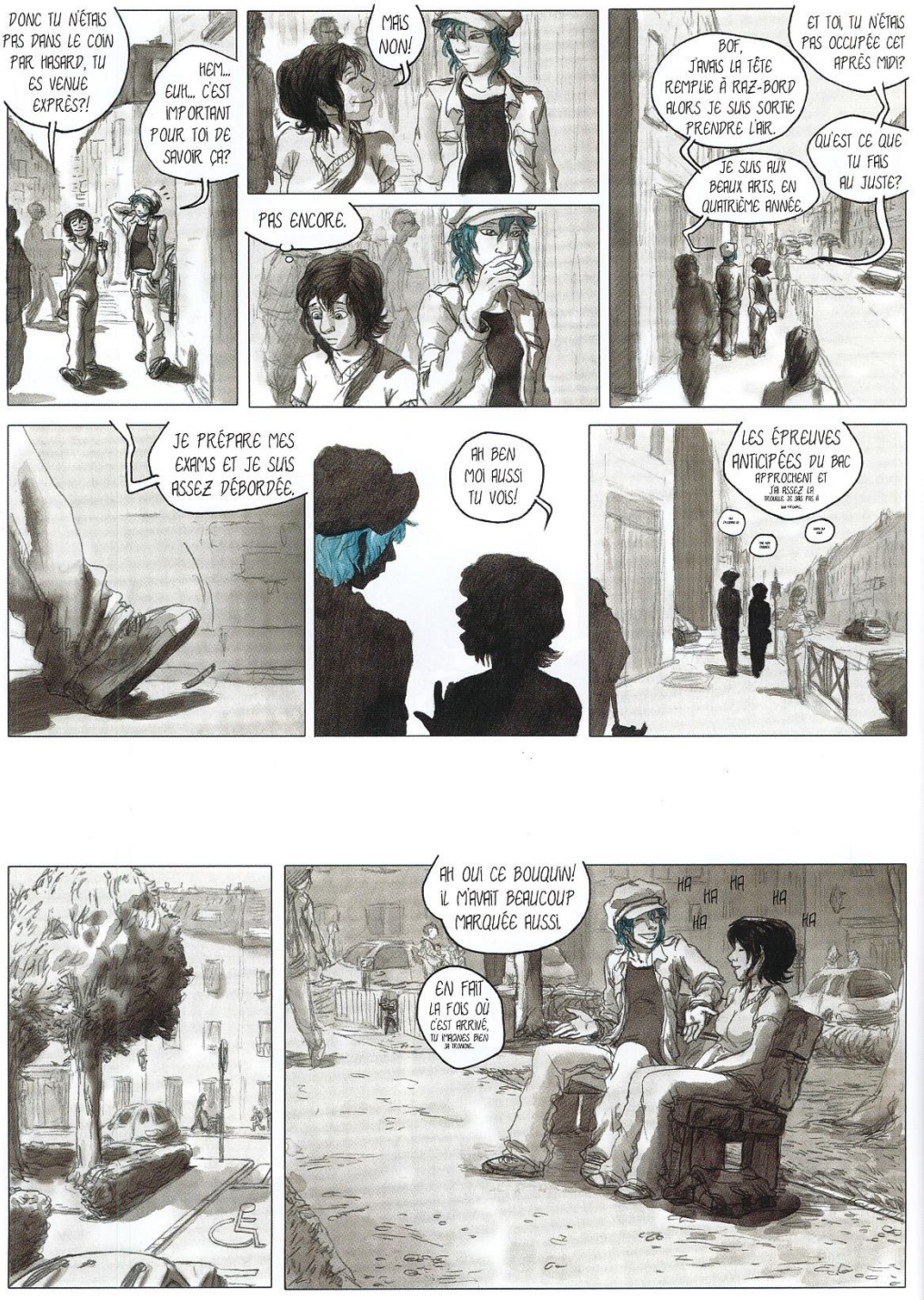

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Figure 19. Maroh, Julie. *Le bleu est une* couleur *chaude*, p 56.

The events told in the diary and the reading of the diary by Emma are distinct timelines. Maroh stylistically distinguishes between the two by using different color palettes. While the present moment is in color, Clémentine's youth is sepia. The transition between the present and the past can be seen on page 8, which also marks the beginning of Clémentine's diary (see fig. 20). Emma is sitting down to read the diary: the room is colored in tones of blue. The diary, which Clémentine describes as "ce que j'ai de plus précieux" (Maroh 6), is also blue. The last panel shows the first entry; when Clémentine got the diary as a birthday present, everything else is dull, but the blue diary. The narrative establishes then that blue is a paramount color. According to Doro Wiese, "first, colour establishes a perspective from which the story is told, one that bestows extraordinary qualities on some of the objects depicted; second, colour shows what precisely is seen as outstanding" (6). Thus, it is guiding readers' attention to the presence of blue in all subsequent panels.

Clémentine uses her diary to present her thoughts, feelings, and experiences. She provides almost no description of the events, offering mostly comments on them. A recurring topic is her desire for Emma, as she tries to come to terms with her own sexuality. She constantly fears the reactions her friends would have if they knew of her dreams of Emma. The diary becomes a safe space for her to process said desires. According to Leujeune's functions of the diary, Clémentine uses her diary to reflect, mainly to ruminate on her feelings towards Emma. One example of her reflection is when Clémentine is rationalizing her reasons to go out with Thomas. Her reasoning for pursuing a relationship with Thomas seems to reside on the fact that he is a boy. Clémentine writes, "Thomas est super. Je sais qu'il ferait beaucoup de choses pour moi. Pourquoi je suis pas capable de le voir, ça? Je suis une fille et une fille, ça sort avec des garçons" (Maroh 20). According to Day, "adolescent woman face expectations that they will and should

develop romantic relationships" (65). Clémentine understands the cultural expectation that she should like Thomas, but her desires do not correspond to these expectations, which makes her confused as to why she is not 'normal' like her friends. However, her rationalization does not pan out, as she is unable to convince herself into liking him only because she is "supposed to." It is no wonder that ultimately Clémentine feels uncomfortable being intimate with him, and runs away from his bedroom when they attempt to have sex.

Clémentine also uses her diary to communicate, since she feels unsafe with her own friends. When she starts having sexual dreams of Emma, she does not know how to react to them. Besides, she feels that these dreams are not "normal" or "natural" and thus she cannot discuss them with her friends. Alone with these reveries, she confides in her diary. Clémentine writes, "Ca me fait vraiment paniquer, je n'ai pas le droit d'avoir ces pensees. Je me sens perdue et je ne peux pas parler de trucs aussi tordus avec mes amis, ils ne voudraient plus de moi" (Maroh 20). This diary entry presents a parallel relationship with the hosting panels (see fig. 21). While Clémentine is describing her insecurity and impossibility of disclosing her dreams to her friends, the images show her trying to avoid Thomas. Thomas is recognizable by his blue shirt. As it was established that blue is a color of interest for Clémentine, Thomas tinted in blue symbolizes that she is not completely uninterested in him. This interest is forced, by Clémentine as she rationalizes it in her diary. In the following pages, when they attempt to have sex, Thomas transition to the same sepia color of the background, indicating that her desire is completely gone (Wise 8-9).

There are two ways that *Bleu* signals an awareness of readers: the address Clémentine gives at the beginning of every entry, "Cher Journal," and the thematic emphasis of her entries. Clémentine's journey is a coming-to-age and coming-out story.

She has both to accept her desire for Emma, and to deal with the social pressure of coming out as a lesbian. The diary becomes a space where Clémentine and the reader can process the feelings of desire and sexuality without the social pressures that come attached to these topics. For Day, "Narrative intimacy relies on the construction of the adolescent woman reader as a safe partner in the narrator's desire because she shares in the narrator's experience without being able to exploit or threaten the narrator" (72). Unlike Clémentine's friends or parents, who cast her out for loving Emma, the reader becomes a welcomed partner who will not disavow Clémentine's experience out of homophobia. Moreover, according to Day, the reader becomes a welcomed voyeur to the experiences of desire the narrators go through:

> The potential for young readers to experience arousal or desire as a result of reading such novels, in turn, highlights the manner in which narrative intimacy may cast the adolescent woman reader as a voyeur and, more importantly, an implicit but welcomed participant in the sexual experiences of the narrator. (71)

In other words, Clémentine's disclosure becomes a space in which the reader can also experience these desires without having to suffer the harsh repercussions of queer desire that Clémentine goes through. Therefore, the reader becomes a voyeur to the sexual experiences of Clémentine, without being judged or cast out.

Though homophobia is a topic in all the comics analyzed, it is most foregrounded in *Bleu*. In *Wet Moon*, it appears as Audrey refuses to come out as lesbian to her family, keeping a fake relationship with her roommate, Slicer, as a decoy. In *Skim*, John Reddear might have committed suicide because he was in love with another boy, hinting at the potentially homophobic environment. In *Bleu*, Clémentine is cast out by her friends for being seen with Emma and automatically presumed to be lesbian. More poignantly, she

is thrown out of her parents' house in the middle of the night when the status of her relationship to Emma is uncovered.

Being from three different social-political backgrounds, the three comics contextualize queerness in different ways. As the different treatments to homophobia demonstrate, the comics are influenced by the context of each country regarding gay rights. *Bleu*'s focus on the hardships of homophobia reflects France's slow progress to assimilate gay rights. While *Wet Moon* hints at the need to keep homosexuality hidden, in the case of Audrey, it comes from a more complex cultural and political mix than the French context. While cities like San Francisco are considered liberal, the Southern United States, where *Wet Moon* is set, can still be very conservative. Finally, *Skim*'s virtual glossing over the fact that John Reddear might have been a homosexual shows Canada's more progressive view towards gay rights.

Same-sex marriage was legalized in different years in each country. Canada, as the most progressive one, being the first of the three to legalize gay marriage. The final bill to make same-sex marriage legal nationwide passed in June of 2005, but the Supreme Court had recognized same-sex common-law partners as having the same rights and obligations as opposite-sex couples since May of 1999 ('Same-sex rights in Canada'). Skim feels insecurities and uncertainties regarding her love for Ms. Archer, but she does not seem to feel this because of Ms. Archer's gender. Skim's misery comes from unrequited love. Although John Reddear is speculated as being gay, this is neither proven nor shown to be the cause of his suicide. This absence of confirmation makes homophobia fade into the background of Skim's story.

The USA has only recognized same-sex marriage nationwide since June of 2015. The first state to recognize same-sex unions was Hawaii in 1996 ('Same-Sex Marriage Fast Facts'). In San Francisco, over four thousand same-sex couples got marriage licenses

during the first months of 2004 (‘Same-Sex Marriage Fast Facts’). While these numbers show a progressive side of the USA, the South, specifically the southeast, maintains conservative laws with regard to same-sex marriage. For instance, Texas, Florida, and South Carolina have no protection against discrimination in the work place, in housing agreements, or in the school environment (‘Gay rights in the US, state by state’). This lack of policies attests to the South’s conservative perspectives. While *Wet Moon* is a fictional town, it is nevertheless located in the Southern USA. Considering this geographical location, Audrey’s fear of coming out to her family becomes understandable. Although the context of the liberal arts college signals an open-minded and liberal atmosphere – confirmed by homosexuality never seeming to be an out of the ordinary occurrence – it is likely that not all families would have the liberal mindset to accept homosexuality.

Finally, France same-sex marriage has been legal since May of 2013. In 1999, the National Assembly had approved a “Civil Solidarity Pact” which granted same-sex couples, among others, domestic partnership (‘Homosexual Rights in France’). However, even after legalizing gay marriage, France has struggled with gay rights, as the number of homophobic acts spiked 78 per cent in the same year as the legalization of same-sex marriage (Daldorph ‘France sexually liberated’). The battle against homophobia is centered in *Bleu* as the battle to accept oneself. Not only does Clémentine have to overcome her own insecurities, she also has to deal with a society that oppresses her same-sex desires.

One strategy that Maroh uses to convey homophobia is through unnarration. Unnarration in *Bleu* is more subtle then on the previous analyzed comics. Unlike Skim and Cleo that keep things from their diaries, Clémentine seems to be the most open diarist of the three, confiding her insecurities in it. In the sequence that describes the intense

confrontation between the young couple and Clémentine's parents, is an example of how Maroh uses unnarration. The sequence spans for several pages with the accompanying captions of Clémentine's diary. The diary entry, however, provides very little details. Clémentine writes, "Aujourd'hui tout a basculé. Aujourd'hui l'innocence a été emportée. Mon ange bleu, bleu du ciel, source de vie. Aujourd'hui un vent de cris a balayé nos secrets. Les mien. Ceux de cette famille. Et nous ne serons plus jamais les mêmes" (Maroh 120-9). As an eager diarist, Clémentine's lack of words to describe exactly what happened between her and her parents is particularly striking. The sequence is told through the images, and captions are few and far between. Moreover, it is a strong sequence, in which a lot of emotions are depicted through the drawings as the writing only hints at a loss of innocence, and of a shattered home. On page 128, we can see Emma and her mother looking distressed and Emma with wide open eyes, surprised at the reactions (see fig. 22). Next, it is an exchange of looks between Clémentine and her father, her father baffled and Clémentine scared. The bafflement soon turns to rage as his expression changes to anger and he is pointing a finger at them. This is a striking image as Clémentine's father is at the focal point of the panel. His pointing finger as an accusation, and his mouth is left hanging as if he shouted loud words at the young couple. The expression shows that words were exchanged and the silence of this panel makes it even more distressing. On the last tier in this page, we see Emma also with an open mouth as if trying to reply to the accusations. First looking scared, then enraged as well. She tries to come in between Clémentine and her father, holding Clémentine face and telling her something. The array of emotions and interactions represented in these panels is immense. The absence of words intensifies these images, leaving readers to interpret the possible exchanges. As for Clémentine's diary, she had to deal with homophobia from her friends at school, and now from her own parents. The flat description of this event

points to the significance it had, in a sense, too big for words. It clearly altered the course of Clémentine's life forever, since she had to leave home. Moreover, it stands for not being accepted by her own family as she is. In this scene, that functions as an ultimatum, where Clémentine chose Emma which is not an easy choice to make, or a desired one. Ideally, no one should have to choose between family and love. Ultimately, this scene tackles the fear, anger, and sadness that come when one has to confront homophobia face to face. Clémentine's father with his accusative figure sums up the most feared reaction that queer loves brings: being accused for loving the wrong person.

In sum, Clémentine has to overcome her homophobic environment, and she does so by coming to terms with her own sexuality and owning it in spite of the hardships. Wiese argues that "Clémentine's coming-of-age could be seen as a process of accepting her lesbian desires as natural, since they belong to her – as bodily feelings and affections that are directed at other persons, in this case at persons of the same sex" (9). For instance, when Clémentine begins to describe her relationship to Thomas as "contre ma nature" (Maroh 25), she begins to understand that the "norm" does not fit her. Maroh asserts that for Clémentine unnatural is to keep seeing someone from the opposite gender. *Bleu* ends on an optimistic note that love will go on, despite adversities. This is reinforced by Clémentine's journey, as she overcomes hardships to own her love of Emma.

Figure 20. Maroh, Julie. *Le bleu est une* couleur *chaude*, p 8.

Figure 21. Maroh, Julie. *Le bleu est une* couleur *chaude*, p 20.

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Figure 22. Maroh, Julie. *Le bleu est une* couleur *chaude*, p 128.

Conclusion

The three comics analyzed create a portrait of their protagonists through the diary entries and the drawings. Combining intimate writings with unnarratable moments, these stories are able to express complex emotions to readers. In the introduction, I have outlined and discussed some key concepts, namely, narrative intimacy, diary fiction, and the comic genre. The adolescent protagonists try to navigate youth's adversities by writing in their diaries. The diary, then, is a safe space for them to process their thoughts, emotions, and struggles. Narrative intimacy is a shared space between narrator and reader. The comics selected achieve narrative intimacy by constructing a reader who is both a confidant and a voyeur. Each protagonist struggles with intimacy with the other characters in the stories, relying on the diary to confess, or not, their most secret feelings. For instance, Cleo tries to adjust to her new dorm in college; Skim will not confess her infatuation with Ms. Archer to her best friend; and Clémentine fears her desires for Emma. The diary, as a tool of self-knowledge, and of expression, becomes the vehicle of these thoughts. The reader, sharing the space of the diary, becomes the confidant these protagonists ache to find in their peers.

As they face the turmoils of adolescence, some of the feelings and events become too big for words, driving them into silence. These unnarratable moments further invite reader participation, since readers are compelled to complete the gaps left by the narrators. Cleo has intense physical reactions at seeing Vincent, like running away and vomiting, but she never mentions him to the diary. In turn, Skim feels incapable of finding the words she wants when she faces Ms. Archer. Furthermore, the drawings do not show Ms. Archer's face emphasizing Skim's difficulty to fully convey this encounter. Finally, Clémentine lacks words to describe the night when she is forced to leave her parents'

house because they uncover her relationship with Emma. Each protagonist uses unnarration in different manners to signal the depth of emotions they face.

In the first chapter, I have examined some formal aspects of comics. Using Groensteen's notions of frames and page layout, and McCloud's categories of panel transitions, I have examined the relation between panels, and between panels and pages. The six functions of the frame defined by Groensteen is a way of understanding the structural and semantic meanings these panels produce in comics. McCloud's categories of panel transitions serve to verify trends in comics. As my analysis has demonstrated, the three comics have a more even distribution of all panel transitions, while being from the west, and short in length. The three comics use the diary form, which is seen as fragmented, open-ended, and cumulative. In addition, the diary serves to create a picture of the inner world of the diarist, instead of a story based on action and plot. These elements are often associated with the notions of *écriture feminine.* Thus, these stories use the panel transitions to convey the mood and atmosphere of the life of these protagonists.

In chapter two, I have focused on the analysis of *Wet Moon*. Cleo uses her diary to reflect on people's feelings towards her, and her own actions. She does not offer full disclosure, keeping her trauma with Vincent quiet from her diary and from her friends. The unnarrated moments, like Cleo looking at a picture of Vincent, invite readers to participate in the scene, by sharing her gaze and looking at her. The intensity of the moment is left for the reader, as Cleo offers no disclosure to her distress. Cleo does not describe the events of her life, but comments on them as she sees fit, such as the fortune cookie that she only comments on her fear of the possible evil fortune upon her. The potential reader of Cleo's diary is her future self, as the details of her life go unmentioned by her. Most of the narrative being carried by the dialogue or the images in *Wet Moon*.

In chapter three, I analyzed *Skim*. Skim finds in her diary a safe space to disclose her thoughts and feelings. She writes with a potential reader in mind. The reader is both a confidant and a voyeur in Skim's life, a confidant because she uses the diary as a place to tell her secrets; a voyeur because she censors passages that nonetheless remain visible. In addition, the reader is a witness to the kiss Skim shares with Ms. Archer, even if said kiss remains unnarrated in the diary. Ultimately, the diary offers a place in which she can balance her privacy and her confessions, as the constant cross-outs demonstrate that Skim is learning the degree of disclosure with which she is comfortable.

In chapter four, I examine *Le Bleu Est une Couleur Chaude.* Clémentine uses her diary to process her feelings and desires for Emma. Out of the three, Clémentine faces the most challenges due to homophobia. The reader becomes like a kind friend who will not disavow Clémentine's experience. More than a friend, the reader is also a voyeur, as Clémentine's diary turns into a space for the reader to share her desires without dangers attached to queer love. Despite the hardships, Clémentine comes to accept her sexuality as natural to her. In this sense, Maroh posits homosexuality as the norm for the young protagonist, and heterosexuality as unnatural.

Homophobia is a recurrent topic in all the comics analyzed, being more explicit in *Bleu*. It is not a matter of identifying tolerant narrative versus intolerant narratives, but rather the different shades in which it is present in each story. These different nuances also reflect the context in each country. While in *Wet Moon*, the characters are accepting among themselves, Audrey still refuses to come out to her own family, demonstrating that the conservative mindset of the south of the US seeps into the constructions of the fictional the town. In *Skim*, the schoolgirls speculate that John Reddear might have committed suicide because he is a homosexual, but it is never confirmed. In turn, Skim never seems to struggle with her sexuality, only with being heartbroken. The more

progressive context of Canada can be a reason that Skim does not worry about her sexuality in the same manner as the characters in the other two comics. In *Bleu*, Clémentine is outcast by her friends and thrown out of her house for being in a relationship with Emma. The message, however, is an optimistic one having love triumph over adversity. In the end, the intimate writings in these three contemporary comics provide readers with a space to experience and share love and desire with each young female protagonist.

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