

**A Graphic Memoir: The Perception of Authenticity in Alison Bechdel's**  
*Fun Home*

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## 1. Introduction

As an autobiographical account Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home* from 2007 relies on the reader's assumption that a memoir always is a true life story. To prove this to reader, the text employs various means that increase the perception of an authentic narrative while still using distinct feature of the genre to point out a certain fictionality of the text as well as the unreliability and subjectivity of memory. Various means of self-reflexivity of the narrator-protagonist show the author's awareness of this fact. Miller also argues, that autobiographers are mainly concerned with an "emotional truth" (543) rather than an objective truth. The recreation of family documents in *Fun Home* as well as Bechdel's ambition to reevaluate her past in the present, to examine her own identity in contrast to her old self and in relation to her family (and especially father's) history point to this. The "imaginative (re)construction of the past in the response to current needs" is what Neumann calls "fictions of memory" (334). All these means used in the text to present and reflect on memory Neumann therefore calls the "mimesis of memory" (334) since autobiographical works rather reproduce than imitate memory.

In the style of Neumanns argument, that presentation of the past is significantly dependent on the media used and available for cultural memory and that the prevailing memories on the past are dependent on whose memories last (339), the media that are actual witnesses to past events in Bechdel's life constitute the reproduction of her remembered past. These are the documents she tries to depict in her novel, like photographs, letters, maps and her diary. They are mainly her own, so that *her* memory of the past is reestablished and the other persons' point of view are mainly disregarded. Furthermore, the selected memories that are portrayed are always a conscious choice by the author-cartoonist to serve her intended goal of representation and the amount of intimate information shared. Also the full range of memories cannot be exhausted because of the restricted length of the medium and the restricted space of the actual page and its panels.

In the following I will examine the techniques Bechdel uses for the creation of what may look for the reader like authenticity by firstly analyzing the visual and verbal self-portrayal of Alison in the graphic novel and her (changing) identity before continuing with the means of fictionalization employed in the text. In the second part of the paper I will then go on to examine the documents recreated by Bechdel as another means to invoke a perception of truthfulness in

the text. I will pay special attention to photography as means of memory and truth, based on theories by Roland Barthes and Susan Sontag.

The examination of the main arguments shows that Bechdel's portrays an awareness of memory as a combination of fact and imagination by drawing documents of the past rather than giving the original. This questioning of memory eventually authenticates it. By illustrating how the perception of authenticity in *Fun Home* is constructed my results might question the credibility of the works as a graphic memoir and point to the necessity to handle *Fun Home* more like a fictional context in other aspects.

## 2. Autobiographical writing

Memoirs are a form of autobiographies that are more concerned with the protagonist's story in relation to its situation in a social environment, especially in relation to others surrounding the protagonist (Smith and Watson 274). Nevertheless, the reader has certain expectations when encountering a memoir. They assume that the author named on the outside of the book is telling their true life story and that the protagonist of the story therefore is said author. This is what Lejeune calls the autobiographical pact, which most autobiographical narrative conforms to: "the *author*, the *narrator*, and the *protagonist* must be identical." (5, emphasis in original). Therefore, the first strategy Bechdel employs in order for her story to be perceived as true is to enact this pact.

In *Fun Home* Alison Bechdel is the author – her name is on the cover of the book. The first hint, that the narrator might be the same person, is the first-person narrator in the captions at the very beginning of the graphic novel. The narrator tells us how she and her father engaged in the play of 'airplane', while also giving an emotional evaluation of the situation (3). Since a grown man and a child can be seen in the panels underneath, the instinct assumption is that the child is the protagonist and therefore identical to the narrator. Only two pages later this is confirmed, when in a speech bubble connected to a person outside the panel, someone calls for "Alison!" (5) and the child from the panel on the first page reacts.<sup>1</sup> Through the continuous combination of the same drawn character and the first-person narrator, the autobiographical pact is maintained and the reader can believe in the relative verity of the story. However, in the graphic novel as a form of comics a fourth instance could complicate this contract to support

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<sup>1</sup> During the course of the paper I will further refer to the author as Bechdel and to the protagonist as Alison.

the author's claim of truthfulness. The cartoonist can be a completely different person, while the traditional autobiographical pact is still followed. Is then the representation of remembered past experience still true to the author's memories? In *Fun Home* the cartoonist is the Bechdel herself, therefore the pact is not disrupted. Nevertheless, the cartooning as a fourth way to express memories and to provide authentication of the story poses a special case for autobiographical narratives and will be considered in the following.

## 2.1 Verbal representation

In an autobiographical work a narrated 'I' and narrating 'I' can be distinguished. In *Fun Home*, partially because of the peculiarities of the graphic novel, the narrated and narrating 'I' can be easily differentiated. "[T]he narrated 'I' is the subject of history whereas the narrating 'I' is the agent of the discourse" (Smith and Watson 73), so that the protagonist in the panels is the narrated 'I' and the narrator only voiced in the captions is the narrating 'I'. Bechdel uses these two aspects of a first-person perspective to express the distance between her past self that she tries to examine in retrospect, and her older evaluating self-recreating the story of her past.

The narrated 'I' in a memoir is often a younger self of the author-narrator presenting "a remembered or reimagined consciousness of the experience [...] voiced through dialogue or an interior monologue." (73) In *Fun Home* we therefore see the protagonist Alison during varying stages of childhood, presenting the narrated 'I' in speech bubbles. The visual age of the protagonist then matches the quality and tone of speech: young Alison uses simple speech and talks about things children are interested in, like her Grandmother's bedtime stories (40). The older Alison gets, the more elaborate her dialogues become, but they do not reach the evaluating quality of the narrating 'I'. Most importantly the narrated 'I' always uses the present tense, for the 'I' lives the past in this moment. The remembering and telling of this past experience is then done by the narrating 'I' (Smith and Watson 73) in the captions. The narrating 'I' in *Fun Home* is a (probably) older, more mature version of Alison, evaluating and commenting on the actions in the panels that represent the past. This is underlined by the use of the past tense. Often the narrating 'I' does not describe the direct action of the panel but rather connects with a larger frame narrative within the actual narrative, often telling a different story than what actually happens in the panels and thereby "constitutes his or her own identity in the dialog with his or her past self" (Neumann 336). By giving more refined and reflected adult thoughts this narrator

also connects various events from different times during Alison's life in order to tell a coherent story, that conforms to the genre's aesthetic entitlement.

By reassessing the protagonist Alison's experiences, the narrating 'I' delivers an "ongoing intertextual and metatextual commentary, a possibility that threatens the very idea of a unified self" (Hatfield 127). The narrating 'I' presents a constant awareness of the distance of the narrated 'I's past experience, so that the reader's perceive a sense of changing identity from the past Alison to the present point of storytelling. By making the narrator realize this distance, she critically engages with the assumption of a unified identity in an autobiographical narrative, that Lejeune presupposes. She proves that the autobiographical pact is not broken, even if the narrator is not the exact same person as the protagonist anymore. It rather questions the legitimacy of her own memory by pointing out the amount of interpretation remembering in a literary genre requires and the role memory plays in the forming of identity, and therefore making her retrospect account more real to life.

Another means Bechdel employs to authenticate her narrative in a verbal way is the confession such as Alison's guilt and trauma about the death of her father, Bruce's and her own homosexuality, her OCD, masturbation, sex and puberty as well as the dysfunctionality of her family. The reader seldomly questions the revelation if innermost, often painful truths because they are often more dramatic and unadorned than in fictional works and assuming the author will only go through this discomfort to get a real life trouble of her chest.

## 2.2 Visual representation

In a graphic memoir, Bechdel's (self-)portrayals do not only work verbally, but the narrated 'I' also has a second, visual quality. Alison is portrayed during various different stages of childhood, from a toddler walking over a field, while not talking due to her age (*FH* 40), to playing with her friends and brothers (37), to a young adult at college (205). In every stage, however, the protagonist can be easily recognized. Even though the drawing undergoes slight changes from a childlike, round face, with big eyes and snub nose to a sharper form of the face and pointed nose, some distinct features always stay the same. Examples of those features are Alison's high eyebrows and often half closed eyes, that give her alternating a bored or surprised look. Also Bechdel's drawing of Alison's hair mainly stays the same, underlined by the convenience, that her haircut hardly varies over time. Particular about the drawing of the older

Alison is her growing similarity to both her parents, illustrating Bechdel's attempt to portray herself as her parent's child. Generally, the continuity of the character's drawing is a sign of reliability of the author-cartoonist, while changing shapes in connection with identity could be a means of reinterpreting and a changing understanding of the character/narrator throughout time, especially if the reader understands the drawing of the protagonist Alison as symbolical or metaphorical reflection of her inner life (Hatfield 114). In *Fun Home* Alison matures visually and so does her understanding of her own identity.

According to Charles Hatfield in his monograph on *Alternative Comics*, "persuasiveness resides in literal accuracy, in minute fidelity to 'mundane events' as they happen" (113) and the reader can only identify if the narrative entails the highest level of accuracy. For this to apply the reader must know what is 'accurate' in the autobiographer's life - however, this is exactly what the reader does *not* know, neither in relation to the character's look, nor the story. But Bechdel finds ways to suggest exactly this accuracy to the reader. Generally, her drawing style is very realistic. This allows for very detailed facial expressions in the character's presentation pointing to their emotional state at this very moment. Furthermore this suggests a kind of photographic quality that serves as proof for the fidelity of the representation.

However, the visual character of graphic novels automatically distorts the claim to truth concerning the characters. The simplifying cartooning Bechdel has to employ in drawing the book's character for aesthetic purposes, serves as an intended way of "alienation or estrangement" (Hatfield 114), by which the author-cartoonist can see herself through the eyes of others and in this tension shapes her identity. She can also point us to the most important features in the character's appearance, simultaneously underlining their inner state. For example, the line beneath Alison's mother's mouth, and her eyebrows that look constantly raised, give her tight-lipped, disapproving demeanor. This analysis, however, is open for different interpretations due to the simplicity of the features. The cartooning also makes it easier for the reader to identify with the character, therefore taking part in her story and being more inclined to believe that story to be true. "[T]he placement of this self-image among other figures within a visual narrative confers an illusion of objectivity" (Hatfield 115) but at the same time disrupts the authenticity of Alison's first-person account by portraying herself from another person's point of view and while only reproducing an creatively imagined visual representation of herself. Bechdel uses a realistic drawing style to emphasize closeness to reality, while simultaneously losing the credibility due to her pretense of objectivity in relation to other people in her life.

In contrast Bechdel does employ a less complicated way of accuracy as another means to prove the authenticity of her life story. Rather than verbally trying to reproduce her childhood home and her family member's characters, she draws her surrounding in very detailed, often over-realistic ways. She visually realizes Barthes' "Reality Effect". Barthes describes this as the effect of ekphrasis - the surplus use of description, with details that have no consequence for the story whatsoever, that nevertheless produces a realistic mental picture. He gives examples of writers describing their environment (*The Rustle of Language* 141-142). Bechdel similarly focuses the attention on immaterial things in the background that do not contribute to the story at first glance, such as the pattern of the carpet in the very first page. While the narrator sets the beginning of the narrative, the first panel shows the two main characters of the memoir (for this is as much Bruce's biography as Alison's autobiography) from the side. The second panel places the reader in Bruce's point of view and in the last, broader panel the perspective changes to a bird-perspective of father and daughter together. The carpet they are both lying on takes up most of the background and its pattern is reproduced with great fidelity. Also the title of the book lying next to Bruce is legible. Only on the next page the role of the carpet becomes clear when Bruce remarks the uncleanliness of it and the narrating voice explains Bruce's typical investment in the presentability of the house (*FH* 2). Often the detailed background also is a sign-post of an event in the story.

Smith and Watson also describe this as 'Autotopography' - an imprint of the autobiographer's mind on material objects. Therefore, the house could function "as a kind of screen memory" (262). This can also be extended to the frequent sight of book titles. The titles are most often legible, even if they are not directly part of the story in the panels and sometimes even stand in the background, but they are often addressed in the meta-story of the narrating 'I'. Especially important ones even have explicitly drawn book covers - like Albert Camus's *A Happy Death*, that shows the even more detailed than her usual drawing style profile of a smoking man, right next to a newspaper where every headline is readable and even the content of the pictures in it can be distinguished. The caption of this panel then informs the reader that this book might have been an open hint for Bruce's imminent (alleged) suicide (*FH* 27). Bechdel uses these detailed drawings to underline the character's personality and to illustrate important stations in their lives. By situating her characters next to objects that appear realistic and therefore employing the "Reality Effect", Bechdel tries to prove that her story occurred in the real world.



## 2.3 Fictionalization

Various instances of fictionalization occur in *Fun Home*. For example, the constant comparison and intertextual reference of Alison's and Bruce's lives to the Icarus myth as well as Joyce's works *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses* hint at a fictional, intangible quality of both their lives. *The Portrait* may fittingly describe Alison's development to become an artist, but it also juxtaposes her life to the more ideal than in real life form of education and development in the bildungsroman. These "literary texts whose narratives provide clues, both true and false" (Miller 543) clearly point to a mingling of fact and fiction. Alison's statement that her "parents are most real [...] in fictional terms" (*FH* 67) underline this assumption. This quote might point out the therapeutic quality of *Fun Home*, in which Bechdel can fictionally create a closeness to her parents she has never had in real life, but hereby disrupting her claim to portray her life accurately.

Another fictionalization of Alison's story is the anachronous order of events. The narrator juxtaposes events from different times in Alison's life in order to connect them to a superordinate story. There is no consecutive timeline whatsoever. Here the evaluating quality of the older, more mature narrating 'I' becomes clear. In retrospect Bechdel chooses only the memories she deems necessary for her interpretation of her past and her identity making through it. Maybe the aligned events have had a strong influence on each other, but this connection Bechdel can only have made in retrospect. Furthermore, as an artist Bechdel tries to create a story for the reader's entertainment by giving her story a dramatized arch. This particular arrangement of experiences is one of the main reasons the story does not comply to traditional autobiographic narratives. It points out the influence of the author on the crafting of the story, making the reader aware of its artificiality.

On the other hand, the specialty of memoirs is their occupation with themes more than chronological events in the life of the author. Also, Neumann argues that this ordering of events "illustrate[s] the haphazard workings of memory and thus contribute substantially to highlighting the memory like quality of narratives" (336). By the particular employment of nonconsecutive events Bechdel recreates memory's nonlinear way of remembrance. Moreover, Hatfield questions his aforementioned argument of word for word accuracy in autobiographical texts later in his text and asks: "How can one be faithful to objective 'truth' when such truth seems inaccessible or even impossible?" (Hatfield 113). The greatest difficulty I see in the

reception of authenticity in a memoir is the implication of the author. Following Barthes' theory of "The Death of the Author", the meaning of a text is always constructed by the reader, therefore the author's intention does not play a role (*Image, Music, Text* 148). Thinking back to Lejeune, however, in an autobiography the author plays an important role and the reader assumes their conscious impact on the design of the story. How are these two approaches compatible then? One way would be to treat the memoir like fiction and to ignore the construction of a fixed meaning by the author, therefore opening up the possibilities of interpretation for the reader. This is what Bechdel does by trying to create an illusion of authenticity and in places to disrupt the credibility of the story without too much of the author's guidelines on what exactly to believe as real to life.

Still, in a memoir the reader is more in contact with the author than in explicitly labelled fiction. In "The Entangled Self: Genre Bondage in the Age of the Memoir", Nancy Miller even argues that "[t]he reader [...] is the autobiographer's most necessary other" (545). This is especially important in graphic memoirs, because the genre demands increased reader involvement through the sequentiality and associated imaginative investment. The author's identity becomes manifest not only in the recreation of her past while writing the book but especially in dialogue with the reader. This is why the perception of authenticity is important, only if the reader accepts the story as a true life story, the reality of Bechdel's life story is confirmed. This 'truth', however, only exist in relation to every individual reader, since the reader fixes the texts meaning during reception. Considering this I conclude that Bechdel very consciously uses the form of the graphic memoir.

### **3. Documents**

#### **3.1 Photographs**

In order to further legitimize the portrayal of her characters, which are constructed from only her perspective, Bechdel tries to give proof to authenticate her family member's characters and the story she is trying to tell. Throughout the book numerous forms of documents can be found, turning the memoir into kind of a family album or archive of family treasures. By trying to creatively recreate photographs (for they are drawn, not scanned), she tries to get in touch again with persons, that do not exist anymore. This is mainly her dead father, but also old versions of herself. Even though she and other family members are still alive, the instance when

the photograph is taken is gone. However, photographs have an undeniable link to the object of their portraiture, a photograph is “the model of which it is the reproduction” (Bazin and Gray 8). They are instances between life and death because photographs have an undeniable connection to the object that has been photographed; they show the reality of the object’s present in front of the camera – and therefore evoke a feeling of it being alive - as well as the past, because this moment is already gone when the photograph is taken and thus suggest the object is dead (Barthes, *Camera Lucida* 78-79). They preserve its object for all time, and therefore are “more objective, accurate, or authoritative” (Cook 129) than other means to reproduce veracity. Through her family’s photographs Alison can get in touch again with what she lost and help herself “to remember the subject and to preserve him from a second spiritual death” (Bazin and Gray 6). Fittingly Bechdel mainly uses a variation of grey-greenish shades to draw the characters as well as their surroundings. This gives the reader the impression of long gone past that cannot be remembered in all its aspects, but is reenacted in the present through the reading process.

The importance of photographs in this book becomes apparent when the reader looks at the centerfold spread panel. It fills two full pages showing a young man lying on a bed in only his underwear, looking up dreamingly instead into the camera. The photograph is dated August ’69 and as Alison explains, shows their babysitter, Roy, in a hotel which Alison can vividly remember. By describing the origin of this photograph, when and where it was taken as well as when and where she found it, and by describing her own conflicted emotions about the discovery of the photograph, she tries to recreate the moment in such detail as if the reader witnessed the whole situation by themselves. She describes and tries to evoke what Barthes in his autobiographical photo theory *Camera Lucida* called the “punctum” (96), the sensual effect of the photograph on the viewer, giving the photograph a quality every reader can relate to. However, she also questions the photograph and its “ineffectual attempt at censorship” (*FH* 101) by the blotting of the year, reflecting on the actual ‘amount’ of proof this image holds. This conscious use of evidence, that seems to fail its revelation of the past, shows Bechdel’s critical engagement with the form of the photograph. She tries to undermine her claim for authenticity with the reproduction of photographs but simultaneously restricts their expressiveness by drawing them and pointing out their evidentiary faults.

Furthermore, the importance of photographs for the book is shown by the use of photographs at the beginning of each chapter. These single panels in the middle of the page can be differentiated from the rest of the story because of their more realistic style of drawing. The picture illustrating the first chapter title “Old Father, Old Artificer” (*FH* 1) seems to be Alison’s

father Bruce as he bears resemblance to him in the rest of the drawings and Alison later associates her father as the “Old Artificer” in their relationship. While the Bechdel’s style of drawing characters uses cartooning, the style of this picture is very detailed in showing the features of the face, hair and body, and uses different kinds of shading to create depth. The corners are border with what seems to be a frame, however, in one corner this is missing, so that the photographs excites a used or worn impression.

This style is repeated at the beginning of every chapter, only with different images. Sometimes inanimate objects are presented, sometimes other family members, like Alison’s mother. The drawn condition of these photographs varies, too. The beginning of chapter 4 features a different format of photographs. While the other photographs are mostly rectangular, this one is square and not framed. Its white strip circling the actual image as well as its ragged edges and lines indicating bends suggest it being a polaroid (*FH* 87). These photographs set the theme of the following chapter and correspond with the chapter title. Whereas the first chapter introduces Bruce and his particularity assigned by Bechdel, the title of the fourth chapter is “In the shadow of young girls in flower” (87) and a person in a female bathing suit posing sensuously. The reader assumes this to be Alison or one of her female family members, but only in the following chapter the reader learns that this again is Bruce, because he liked to pose in women’s close when he was younger. Because these introductory photographs are outside of the panel of the actual narrative they occupy a meta-textual position in the graphic narrative (Cook 136-137). They stand outside of the story and suggest a certain direction for the reader. They “problematize the processes of remembering” (Neumann 337) suggested by the form of the photograph because they couple individual memory with a self-aware mode of narration.

The photographs at the beginning of the chapter are often repeated within the story, next to more photographs. At the beginning of chapter seven, the photograph even deals with an event that is then taken up in the chapter from another perspective. The photograph shows Alison as a child jumping from the side of a pool into the arms of her father. The photographer must have stood at the other end of the pool, capturing Bruce from behind (*FH* 187). The last page of the book also shows this situation, only as part of the story line and from Alison’s perspective (232). Such as the polaroid photograph of Bruce in a women’s bathing suit. On the last page of the chapter, Alison explains where she found the photograph, while the panel below the captions shows a left hand holding the same photograph cropped only at the upper left and lower right corner. She further minutely describes her thought process, thinking that this might have been a joke, but the pose her father strikes does not seem to be jestingly at all (*FH* 120). In the second panel on the page the (seemingly same) hand holds another photograph of a smiling young man

with another young man reading in the background. The caption identifies the man in the foreground as Bruce at twenty-one, and his personal lover. Parallel, a second is shown on the right side holds another polaroid of a very similar figure in a bathrobe, taken by her own lover, as the caption states. The bathing suit picture from the first panel, is lying in the background, disregarded. Comparing the two very similar photographs in the last caption at the bottom of the panel, Alison tries to aligning her own past with her father's and looking for a similarity, a hint on his past connected to her own present that is inscribed on this photograph, in order to make sense of her father's photograph in women's clothes. She is looking for an essence of her father within the photograph, which a photograph, according to Barthes, can never reflect. It can only reproduce the objects features (*Camera Lucida* 65-66).

All these family photographs are drawn in a more detailed way, which lets them appear like a scan and just as realistic as photographs are deemed to be. Also the reader assumes, that there has been a real photograph on which Bechdel based her drawings, just as they assume that the person pictured is connected to a living person based on the particular characteristics of photographs. However, they are still a recreation, a re-imagination and possible invention through Alison's hands, which Bechdel is aware of and directly points the reader to, by drawing the photographs in her literal hands. By drawing the photographs she takes away their objectivity and fictionalizes them but at the same time authenticates them through the reader's perception. The reader assumes them to be Alison's hands, since the narrating 'I' talks of how she discovers them and they "are drawn in a less realistic, 'cartoony' style" (Cook 132), like the rest of the graphic novel, to signal the subjectivity of her memory. The life-sized drawing of the hands holding the photograph of Roy (*FH* 100-101) as well as her and her father's parallel photographs (120) also reach a meta-textual level because they align with the reader's hand holding the book, letting them take the place of holding the photograph. This partaking of the reception-evaluation process creates a real-life perception. Her choice of particular photographs also points out her evaluation and selection for the purpose of exploring her and her father's relationship and their 'shared' homosexuality, illuminating particular instances.

Photographs are prove of truthfulness, because they are "incontrovertible proof that a given thing happened" (Sontag 5) and its connection to the photograph's object. Do photographs like the centerpiece of Roy in *Fun Home* really present a lived experience? The photograph is evidence that Roy has been in that hotel, lying on the bed, but this does not prove that Bruce had a sexual relationship with the boy. Bechdel assumes that there might have been more to the story, basing this personal interpretation on a variety of photographs that in connection seem to tell a story to her, but never states that what she sees in the story is the whole truth or that she

can ever really know such truth, with her father gone. Without Bechdel's framing of the photograph in the story, the reader could never associate that meaning to the photographs, only the obvious facts and their own emotions. By drawing the photographs she gives them emotional value, expressed her personal 'punctum' as mentioned before. In her recreation of the photographs this may even play a greater role for the authenticity of her story, because the "interpretation often exceeds and even sabotages literal description" (Hatfield 116) of the photograph, thus illustrating her emotional connection to her personal life story rather than an objective story about her family.

### 3.2 Letters and Diary

Other documents in *Fun Home* that are mimetically reenacted are e.g. handwritten letters. In the third chapter Alison portrays her father's time at the army in order to illustrate her father's parallels to F.S. Fitzgerald's life. She visually conveys him sitting and reading or writing letters on his bunk next to one of his fellow soldiers (*FH* 62-63). Since this was a time before Alison was born, she could not have known what her father looked like or what exactly he was doing, so the situation and the dialogues clearly have an imaginative investment. She could, however, make this part of Bruce's life more credible by drawing the letters her father send her mother. She recreates his handwriting and envelopes in detail, to make them look like real life letters. The reader does not know whether these letters really existed or whether Bruce's handwriting looked as portrayed in the book, but their content matches Alison's description in the captions. They also fit well into the literary equation the narrator establishes before. Later in the memoir other letters show Bruce's handwriting again – the continuity of the same style of writing underlines the seeming originality of the letters.

The handwriting also differs from other handwritings produced in *Fun Home*. In chapter five Bruce gives Alison a wall calendar for her to write in. To help her start her diary Bruce writes the first three words of a sentence, which Alison finishes. The juxtaposed handwritings show a clear difference. This diary, then, is a form of presentation of the story within the story, but it also serves as a proof of Bechdel's early obsession "with representing the truth" (Chute 188). After Bruce tell Alison to "[j]ust write down what's happening" (*FH* 140), Alison explains how she soon needed a bigger space to record all of her impressions. The next panel displays a page of a diary, with the words "I think" (141) in-between her record of the day, including the

preparation of popcorn. Here is where Alison's questioning of perception and memory begins. In the captions to the following panel showing her making a bowl of popcorn she remarks: "How did I know that the things I was writing were absolutely, objectively true? All I could speak for was my own perceptions, and perhaps not even those" (*FH* 141). She critically engages with the subjectivity and unreliability of her memory, by portraying the action she remembers to have done. In the following, Alison even starts to strike out her "I think" supplements, because to her they did not seem to appropriate her reality (*FH* 141-142). Because "[w]ords are unstable [...] she protects herself with the visual." (Chute 189). Soon the canceled words become circumflexes that Alison started to draw over the words, then the whole text (142-143). For Hillary Chute this "shape-shifting from prose to protocomics occupies a part of the book's reflective plotline, but also [registers] the desire to record, to inscribe, and also the difficulty of doing so – the problem Bechdel will return to as an adult writing and drawing *Fun Home*" (189). Bechdel documents her meta-reflexivity of thought and memory processes by incorporating it into her plotline, authenticating her occupation with and her awareness of the limitations in representing the 'truth' in her graphic memoir. In recreating only selected part of her childhood diary, Bechdel even withholds the ultimate truth she tried to convey a child, showing a coming to term with the faulty concept of objectivity.

#### 4. Conclusion

"[C]omics represent a struggle for an understanding both emotional and intellectual" (110) Hatfield remarks in his essay. Alison Bechdel conforms to this notion by trying to negotiate fidelity to her autobiographical story, while simultaneously being aware of the limitations of memory and literary representation of such, as well as the true representation of her own emotional connection to the events and characters she portrays. Autobiographies and fiction cannot be entirely separated because autobiographies employ fictional means. Smith and Watson call this particular form "Autofiction" (259-260), which uses these means on an aware mode. These fictionalizations appear to be counter-working of the perception of authenticity, but by consciously using these strategies in connection with real effort to appear authentic, the perceived authenticity of the reader's experience is intensified. This interdependency of claiming the 'truth' and mechanisms of fictionalization eventually legitimize the questioned

memory, because “only by exploring such doubts can the emotional ‘honesty’ of autobiography be recovered” (Hatfield 114.)

Of course the analysis of Bechdel’s strategies to invoke a perception of veracity is not exhausted in this paper, this would have exceeded the scope of this paper. Certainly, the various documents reproduced accumulate to an increased credibility – the constant confrontation with these instances of proof must convince even the most sceptical reader. I, of course, could only cover a small part of these documents, I could also have included the newspaper, could have further gone into the portrayal of book covers or taken up all the other forms of documents, that are presented in *Fun Home* in obvious or unapparent ways. Especially interesting for further works on this topic may be the drawing of maps. In her essay “The Literary Representation of Memory” Neumann argues that “[f]ictions of memory may exploit the representation of space as a symbolic manifestation of individual or collective memories” (340), so that Bechdel may present these maps as a form of memory inscribed into the landscape, a kind of “map of psychic life” (Chute 216) of a character. By giving the reader this spatial understanding of the surrounding she might emphasize the places of her life story as real places in the actual world, therefore further increasing the credibility of her life narrative.



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