ENGL 4100 – Comic Analysis Script

(Voicethread Slide One)

Fables by Bill Willingham is a comic that is about several different well known characters of folklore, and how they have been banished from their homeland to live in New York city. They are referred to as Fables, and have been given the ability to appear as humans in order to blend in with society. The main protagonist is the "The Big Bad Wolf", who in our story, is known as Bigby Wolf and has gone through a reform in character and morality since he gained his bad reputation chasing down the three little pigs. The villain who has banished him and all other "fables" is an enigma known as the Adversary. Not much is known about this villain in *Fables: The Deluxe Edition Volume One*, which is the comic that I am going to be analyzing. This volume includes the first ten issues of the series.

(Voicethread Slide Two)

Comic books in general are a form of art that seem to be largely misunderstood. Novels seem to be slightly more popular among readers, and other forms of art seem to be more popular among artists. But there is a layer of complexity found within comic books that can't be replicated anywhere else. In his book *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*, Scott McCloud points out the features found within this form of art that allow it to stand on its own. After analyzing Fables, it is evident that this particular comic adheres closely to the techniques found within Scott McCloud's text.

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The most basic concept brought up in McCloud's text is actually determining what should or shouldn't be considered a comic. In an attempt to have a broad enough definition to encapsulate all styles of comics, McCloud settles on the idea that comics are "sequential art", meaning that they include images that move along in a sequence. Anywhere that a sequence may be taking place, there also has to be room for some type of transition. This image illustrates a "moment to moment" transition. Each panel on this page takes place only seconds before the next. There are very short moments of time passing by in the white space between the panels. "Moment to moment" transitions seem to be nearly the only type that I could find throughout the whole first volume. This is likely because of the way that the comic utilizes another one of McCloud's features, which is the concept of time frames.

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As far as time frames are concerned, every detail of a comic is important, but none more so than the visual representation of what is actually taking place. In the moment to moment transitions

that occur throughout the comic, there is a very small amount of time taking place between each panel. This is because, as displayed in this image, most of what takes place throughout the story is extremely conversational. Good conversations move at the same pace in real life that I would imagine they are moving within the comic. Another type of time frame that is explored a lot throughout the comic is a representation of the protagonists thoughts as he is walking from point A to point B. It is uncertain as to how much time is actually taking place, but we do know that there are no stops or jumps along the way. Because of this style, it seems as though the only time frame that is explored is a relatively short term and linear one. Most of the big jumps in time take place between issues, and there are no *visual* flashbacks. This opens up a little bit of room for debate, as some of the text creates flashback, even if the art does not. Does

this detract from the linearity of the story, even without being aided by a visual? Considering the relationship between text and visuals within a comic, it does not. However, the fact that the comic follows a linear path allows it to easily identify with McCloud's idea that, in some way, all comics must have some type of time frame, whether that time frame easy or hard to distinguish.

(Voicethread Slide Five)

Outside of conversations between two or more people, there are a lot of situations where the main character has elaborate thought processes in his head. They are distinguished as yellow boxes of text that do not have a tail pointing towards any particular character. The page that is currently on display shows the effect that this type of situation has on the comic itself. We see some images of Bigby Wolf, from different angles, but we wouldn't really have any idea what's going on without the yellow blocks of text that show his thoughts. Towards the end of the page, he starts to come across a smell – a sense that can be difficult to display solely with visuals. However, the final frame has him running into the lady who is the source of the smell, and allows the interdependent text to visual relationships found throughout the page to go full circle. Without all of the text on this page, as well as all of the visuals, it is doubtful that the reader would have any idea what is actually going on here. One could argue that the text is the main contributor to the advancement of the ideas that are found on the page, but the visuals account for a required amount of detail. This is a key feature of interdependent text and visual relationships, in the fact that sometimes one element will outweigh the other, but both are required for full understanding. Touching upon the idea of time frame once again, this page gives a good representation of the idea of the main character moving from point A to point B, having thoughts within his head, but maintaining the same linear time frame. Even if these thoughts were flashback, because of the text to visual effect that it would create, the time frame would not change.

(Voicethread Slide Six)

Color scheme is arguably the most important factor in Fables. The browns, grays, blacks, and dark greens that we have seen throughout this voicethread alone do a good job of representing the overall color scheme found throughout the comic. This creates a truly mysterious and evil world. The colors found within this comic create an unsettling tone. This is a page that takes place inside of Bigby Wolf's apartment. We can see several tones of brown between the floor,

the coffee table, and the backdrop on the top right frame. We can see exaggerated shadows and thick arm hair that allow the artist to make full use of the color black. The blues and greens that complement these two main colors are not given much vibrancy either, which give the room a somber and hopeless feeling. In fact, the pig that is in the room is even a darker shade of pink than what we would probably expect to see in real life, giving him an unsettling and mysterious effect of his own. McCloud states the importance that a color scheme can have on a comic as a whole. Imagine this page if it had less black and brown, and the complementary colors had a more vibrant effect. It wouldn't be nearly as unsettling, and therefore wouldn't fit as well in the world that Bill Willingham has created.

(Voicethread Slide Seven)

Fables: The Deluxe Edition Volume One utilizes the features of panel transitions, time frame, text to visual relationship, and color scheme to effectively represent Scott McCloud's ideas. In doing so, he has created a comic that has a very powerful effect in terms of creating a thrilling story and an unsettling mood that pulls the reader in. It is also a testament to the idea that comic books have a layer of complexity that simply can't be found anywhere else.

Works Cited

McCloud, Scott, and Mark Martin. *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*. New York, NY: William Morrow, an Imprint of HarperCollinsPublishers, 2014. Print.

Willingham, Bill, and Lan Medina. *Fables: The Deluxe Edition, Book One*. New York: DC Comics, 2009. Print.