

## TEACHING THE GRAPHIC NOVEL: RUTU MODAN'S *EXIT WOUNDS*

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The graphic novel has come into its own in the academic world. Increasingly, it has become the subject of scholarship, and comic books are being taught widely at universities in composition, literature, and culture courses. Just one indication of this phenomenon is the fact that in 2009 the MLA published a collection of essays called *Teaching the Graphic Novel*.<sup>1</sup> Comics have also found recent success in Hebrew, in the work of Rutu Modan, Yirmi Pinkus, Itzik Rennert, Asaf and Tomer Hanuka and others.<sup>2</sup> In college level Hebrew courses, such texts present opportunities for strengthening language skills at the third year and beyond, while also presenting substantive stories of Israeli life. Furthermore, as a newly emergent genre that combines visual and textual elements, graphic novels offer welcome opportunity to introduce students to narrative theory in general, as well as to the distinctive narrative possibilities of this artistic medium.

My comments here focus on Rutu Modan's *Karov Rahok*. This novel provides an instructive example of graphic novel that can be adopted usefully as a teaching tool. Modan's work also illustrates how comics are overcoming initial resistance within the world of Hebrew literature and gaining greater acceptance. Although the author composed the dialogue in her native Hebrew, she published this novel first in English (under the title *Exit Wounds*, in 2007)<sup>3</sup> because she anticipated a bigger audience that way. In Israel at the time, graphic novels were not widely accepted as literary art. Only after it enjoyed many accolades abroad and translation into multiple languages was this novel published in Hebrew in 2008.<sup>4</sup>

As I lay out my reading of *Karov Rahok* and suggest approaches to teaching it, let me note from the start that I use both Hebrew and English as

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<sup>1</sup> S. E. Tabachnick, ed. *Teaching the Graphic Novel* (New York: Modern Language Association, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> For an outline of these trends, see S. Baskind and R. Omer-Sherman, eds. "Introduction," in *The Jewish Graphic Novel: Critical Approaches* (Rutgers University Press, 2008), pp. xv–xxvii. This anthology also includes two essays that deal directly with Israeli comics.

<sup>3</sup> R. Modan, *Exit Wounds* (Montreal: Drawn and Quarterly, 2007).

<sup>4</sup> R. Modan, *Karov Rahok* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2008). See the interview with Joe Eskenazi from October 27, 2007: <http://www.jweekly.com/article/full/33661/uncommon-comic/> (accessed May 19, 2012). One of the curiosities of this publication process is that Modan drew the panels in keeping with the left-to-right orientation of English books. Publication in Hebrew then affected the design of some of the drawings and entailed the reversal of some panels. *Exit Wounds* won the Will Eisner Comic Industry Award in 2008.

languages of instruction in the classroom. In a small program with few truly advanced students of Hebrew, I opt for a “both/and” rather than an “either/or” solution to the challenges of teaching introductory literature courses. Some class sessions are dedicated to activities in the target language (such as listening, reading aloud, summarizing, and practicing vocabulary); other sessions, designated for English discussion, serve as an additional way to focus closely on the language of the text. My stance grows out of a conviction that one of the most important goals of literature courses is to equip students with tools for close reading and to provide exercises in sustained focus, concentration, and textual analysis. In my remarks here I begin with comments on building language skills, but I am particularly interested in arguing that Hebrew literature courses—for students at level *gimmel* or above—may serve as suitable venues for introduction to narrative theory. Presenting concepts from that field can both enliven discussion of specific literary texts and also strengthen students’ long-term reading strategies.<sup>5</sup>

## 1. LANGUAGE SKILLS

*Karov Rahok* lends itself easily to building Hebrew language skills. First, it effectively fosters classroom discussion in Hebrew, since the verbal component on the page is often at a minimum, supported by maximum visual context. Furthermore, much of the printed text consists of short conversational exchange among the characters, making use of everyday vocabulary, slang, and onomatopoeia. These features make the material highly accessible. Moreover, because this is a sequential art, consisting of static panels that imply motion, graphic novel easily elicits plot summary. Comics are better than film for this purpose because the pictures are not themselves in motion, and so students can take as much time as they want to absorb each panel. In addition, it is natural for readers to fill in the gaps in between the panels. Theorists of graphic art such as Scott McCloud and Pascal LeFevre note that panels suggest a sequence of events while representing only a “subset of significant actions.”<sup>6</sup> It is readers themselves who seek coherence and who, through active reading, construct a continuous, unified storyworld out of the

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<sup>5</sup> I have pursued this argument at greater length in N. Sokoloff, “Teaching Narrative Theory: Etgar Keret’s ‘Goldfish,’” *Hebrew Higher Education* 14 (2012): 77–89.

<sup>6</sup> P. LeFevre, “Some Medium-Specific Qualities of Graphic Sequences,” *SubStance* 124, vol. 40.1 (2011): 14–33. The quotation is from p. 26. Scott McCloud’s *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* is a foundational text in the field of comics criticism (New York: Harper Collins, 1993). A helpful survey of recent trends in comics criticism and theory can be found in J. Gardner and D. Herman, “Graphic Narratives and Narrative Theory: Introduction,” *SubStance* 124, vol. 40.1 (2011): 14–33.

visuals provided them. As graphic novels encourage readers to piece together narrative action, this genre can readily prompt students in the classroom to articulate plot lines and story arcs. In addition, comics are especially useful for eliciting description. In my experience teaching *Karov Rahok*, students are quick to comment on appearances, settings, and physical interactions that are expressed through drawing style.

Thanks to the three main facets of comics just mentioned—the buttressing of verbal components with visual ones, the deployment of sequential panels, and drawing style—even readers with limited Hebrew arrive with ease at fundamental understanding of the actions and themes of *Karov Rahok*. In this tale, Koby, a taxi driver in Tel Aviv, meets Numi, a young woman who reports that his father may have died in a suicide bombing. Together they begin to search for him, and as they search they uncover surprising stories about the past. Koby has not heard from his father, Gabriel, for a long time, and he is shocked to discover that Gabriel had a love affair with Numi, as well as with a woman from a moshav, with a haredi woman too, and perhaps even with Koby's Aunt Ruti. Gabriel has left all of them feeling abandoned—not to mention Koby's mother and Koby himself. Along the way readers learn that suicide bombings have affected many people, who must deal with a variety of physical and emotional wounds. How those people respond to the pain may rip them apart, but it may also bring them closer together. Accordingly, the title *Karov Rahok*—meaning “a distant relative”—can refer to the emotionally inaccessible father who has disappeared from his son's life. Understood more generally as meaning “near/far,” the title points to a wider web of social connections in contemporary Israel, suggesting ways in which national security issues and the uncertainties of everyday life draw people closer together and also drive them away from one another.

All of this can be discussed in Hebrew at a basic level, and a variety of exercises can be developed to enhance students' understanding of the material. There exists an abundant pedagogical literature on comics (particularly in the field of French, since in France, Belgium and other parts of the Francophone world comics for decades have held considerable prestige), and those studies include a range of suggestions for productive lesson plans.<sup>7</sup> Useful assignments might be, for instance, to imagine the thoughts of characters in a silent frame; to describe what's hidden from view; to fill in

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<sup>7</sup> See for example, an overview of the field, already well established decades ago, in R. K. Marsh, “Teaching French with the Comics,” *The French Review* 51.6 (May 1978): 777–785.

blanked-out word balloons with appropriate sentences; to arrange selected sentences in proper sequence based on the visuals at hand; or to create compound sentences in order to practice the use of causal or temporal connectors. The question remains how best to integrate such exercises with analytical discussion.

As a proponent of *ivrit b'ivrit* approaches for ulpan setting, and as someone who has come to accept that discussion in English is necessary for sophisticated literary analysis in the classroom, I aim for alternating sessions: one in Hebrew, followed by one in English. The fact that the English edition of this novel is well-known and easy to access enhances a dual-language approach and helps bridge the two approaches. It is a plus that *Exit Wounds* can serve as a resource for students in their first encounter with *Karov Rahok* and help ease them into understanding the Hebrew. Also, and much more importantly, tandem use of the English version with the Hebrew version gives rise to comparisons, alerting students to the need for close reading, and demanding that they pay attention to the exact wording in each language. The texts thereby invite analysis of issues in translation—starting most immediately, with the title. The Hebrew title, highlighting tensions between closeness and distance, emphasizes the theme of strained family relations. In contrast, the words in the English title, “exit wounds,” refer to damage caused by shooting, which is greater when a bullet exits a target than when it first penetrates. In the context of the novel this phrase recalls the suicide bombing central to the plot and conjures up images of explosions and the spraying of shrapnel. The title may also suggest the pain of break-ups or abandonment, and it hints at the ending of the story, when the main character exits the final scene faced with painful choices.

## 2. GRAPHIC NOVELS: NARRATIVE ART

English discussion, by bringing students greater awareness of narrative theory, encourages them to identify and reflect on the distinctive components of storytelling in graphic novels and so to articulate more specifically how this novel conveys its thematic concerns. Here are some of the central ideas that have guided my class discussion of Modan’s work.

One arresting example of how the author combines text and image to illustrate the idea of “*karov rahok*” (near/far) comes up on pages 19–23. Throughout these pages the gutters between the panels separate Koby from his sister Orly, who is speaking by phone from her home in New York. Their opposition in the layout of the page indicates these close relatives are on op-

posite sides of the ocean and also that they are opposed to one another in many ways.<sup>8</sup> Above all, he is upset and wants to talk about their dad's disappearance; she is indifferent and does not. In another sense, as well, the relatives here are close and distant at once. Koby's Uncle Arieh is in the background, intent on eating his lunch. Arieh squabbles with Aunt Ruti while Koby squabbles with Orly.

Comics easily capture such simultaneity, and here the result is both amusing and a bit wrenching. We can see at a glance that the family is at once too close (Koby and his relatives are constantly in each other's pockets—they work together, eat together, and are often cranky with one another), yet they also ignore each other's anguish. Arieh is a comic figure, who cares only about his food, but at the same time it is genuinely sad that Koby finds himself so alone with his hurt feelings and receives little sympathy from either his uncle or his sister. Note that, while all of this takes place, there is another story going on as well. The photo of an unidentified soldier, featured prominently on the wall (p. 19), begs for comment or explanation.

Narrative is an art of opening and closing gaps; gaps in knowledge beg for a narrator to recover a story and fill in details, to give plausibility to what initially looks strange or incomplete.<sup>9</sup> Here, in this panel, the burden of narration is largely nonverbal, and it is the illustration that opens up a compelling gap, inviting the reader to ask, who is that soldier? The implied story in the background adds another dimension to Koby's world, though it is only later in the novel that readers find out how this story adds depth to Koby's experience. (The soldier, Arieh and Ruti's son, was killed in action and this tragedy adds to the dynamic of family members clinging to one another tightly while feeling alienated from one another.)

An example of how Modan uses sequential arrangement to further advance and enrich the theme of "near and far" appears on page 31. Here Koby and Numi are in his taxi and, in a panel that shows them in close-up, they kiss. The next panel presents a long shot of cars lined up at a (green) traffic signal, and the text balloons read "beep beep beep beep." The gap provided by the gutters between the final two panels on the page allows readers to construct the plot themselves. Accordingly, they could see the last picture

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<sup>8</sup> An image from this segment of the text (English version) is posted in a review at [http://www.comicbookbin.com/artman2/uploads/4/Exit\\_Talking.jpg](http://www.comicbookbin.com/artman2/uploads/4/Exit_Talking.jpg) (accessed October 16, 2012).

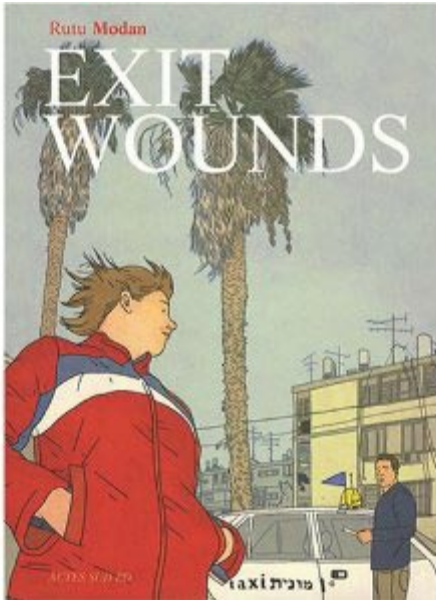
<sup>9</sup> On narrative as an art of opening and closing gaps, see H. P. Abbott, "Story, Plot, Narration," in *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative* (ed. D. Herman; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 39–51.

merely as a traffic jam and they might think about Israelis as impatient drivers who want to hit the gas pedal even before the light turns green (which would be a plausible and culture specific interpretation). However, they could also read this sequence as denoting a long kiss or implying that the people kissing are oblivious to their surroundings and have not noticed that the light changed. The sentimental reading is the likely one, since the sentiments of the characters themselves have been growing. After a long period of mutual skepticism, Koby and Numi have slowly come to feel tenderness for each other. It is also striking that, just at this moment, as they draw close, the artistry distances readers; the move from close-up to long shot assures comic relief. The audience does not get too caught up in tenderness, since the last panel suggests that this is not a grand, romantic moment. Part of the charm of this scene, indeed, is that it captures the awkwardness of the newly romantic relationship between Koby and Numi. The sequence reminds readers that a dance of intimacy has been taking place, as these characters navigate feelings of hurt, mistrust, and attraction. Pendulum swings of approach and distancing keep these two constantly off-balance.

The third central aspect of comics, drawing style, is particularly important in *Karov Rahok* with regard to characterization. Cartoon may seem to omit much of the ambiguity and complex characterization that are hallmarks of modern literature and that verbal texts convey through, for instance, the depiction of interior states, modulations of narrative voice, and nuanced descriptions that convey multiple perspectives and attitudes. Nonetheless, comics can deploy many techniques—some resembling cinematic ones—to convey emotions and points of view. Elements of drawing that help express character include:

- types of shot (such as close-ups, long shots, or full-shots)
- angles (for example, straight, high, or low angles)
- lines (which may be fuzzy or sharp, jagged or smooth, very fine or more like puddles of ink)
- colors (ranging, for instance, from bright to muted, low contrasts to high contrasts, or monochromatic to varied palettes)
- composition (as, among other possibilities, it arranges design on the horizontal, vertical, or diagonal; places characters centrally or on the margins; or strives for symmetry or asymmetry)
- gutters and panel shapes (that may provide special divisions of narrative and serve as framing devices or editing techniques).

Each of these factors contributes to characterization in *Karov Rahok* and merits a closer look. My discussion of the cars at the intersection has already provided an example of how type of shot can add to the interpretation of a scene. In addition, consider the following.



An image illustrating the importance of angle appears on the cover of the novel; it casts Numi from below, at a stilted angle, exaggerating her height and calling attention to the derisive nickname by which Koby calls her at first: “The Giraffe.”<sup>10</sup> At the end of the novel, however, Koby finds himself up in the branches of a tree, and so circumstances are reversed. Now he is up high, looking down toward her, fearing that she is not tall enough to catch him but hoping that maybe she

is. Modan’s artistic technique again shows some of the strains and awkwardness in their relationship. At first Koby considered Numi unattractive, ungainly, and too tall. Later, he comes to depend on her and respect her, and finally he values her for who she is—including her height—but is unsure she will save him. The final panel, therefore, raises once more the central questions with which these characters struggle all along: to trust or not to trust? To respect or not to respect? What does it mean to look up to or to look down on someone?

With regard to line in Modan’s artwork, it is important to note that all the characters consist of similarly simple, precise outlines, and they usually feature dots for eyes. While each figure is unique, such cartoonlike rendering suggests universality. As McCloud points out, in the comics, simplification amplifies; the simpler the drawing of the human being, the more universal it is. (Think of a smiley face, for instance, in comparison to a photograph of an individual.) The artist’s approach in *Karov Rahok* ensures that readers everywhere can identify with the characters in the story, even as readers fa-

<sup>10</sup> This image was accessed October 16, 2012 at [http://www.amazon.com/Exit-Wounds-Rutu-Modan/dp/2742771077/ref=sr\\_1\\_2?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1350399561&sr=1-2&keywords=rutu+modan+exit+wounds](http://www.amazon.com/Exit-Wounds-Rutu-Modan/dp/2742771077/ref=sr_1_2?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1350399561&sr=1-2&keywords=rutu+modan+exit+wounds). In the Hebrew version of the novel, the cover image is reversed (with Numi standing to the right and Koby on the left).

miliar with Israel will likely take special delight in noting recognizably Israeli types and stereotypes (IDF soldiers, Haredim, rude taxi drivers, and more).<sup>11</sup>

As for color, students readily observe that bright, vibrant colors in *Karov Rahok* serve primarily to depict people, in the foreground, as in this scene from the opening of the novel:<sup>12</sup>



Emphasis consequently falls on interpersonal relationships. Much of the local, Israeli feel of the story comes from the setting, but the muted, often monochromatic backgrounds de-emphasize the environment or tone down its prominence.<sup>13</sup> As a result, although a specific milieu is always present and is a crucial element of the storyworld, this is not primarily a political or

<sup>11</sup> Reviewers have noted that Modan's minimalist but evocative style bears the influence of Hergé (Georges Prosper Remi), the widely admired Belgian author of the Tintin comics. See for instance, "Comic Milestone," a review by Rachella Zandbank that appeared in *Haaretz*, October 20, 2008: <http://www.haaretz.com/misc/article-print-page/comic-milestone-1.255746?trailingPath=2.169%2C> (accessed July 23, 2012).

<sup>12</sup> Accessed October 16, 2012 from [http://www.drawnandquarterly.com/blog/uploaded\\_images/EW-739535.jpg](http://www.drawnandquarterly.com/blog/uploaded_images/EW-739535.jpg). In the Hebrew version, this image is not reversed, except for the caption posted in the upper right corner.

<sup>13</sup> There are some notable exceptions when the landscape is vividly colored—particularly in scenes at the ocean and scenes depicting a sunset. These, however, are moments that capture a swelling of emotion; they are distinctive occasions that show the characters experiencing a heightened sense of vitality.



societal novel. Despite the fact that the events take place in 2002 and the effects of the Second Intifada are everywhere, the novel presents no debates or pronouncements about politics nor does it depict violent actions per se, only their aftermath. The implication is that violence has become mundane. Suicide bombing serves merely as a backdrop against which the characters' personal stories of approach and withdrawal, near and far, play themselves out.

Modan confirms this reading of color coding as she introduces one big **"BOOM"** into the novel. It is indicated as text—that is, the word "boom" appears as large red letters, bursting out past the contours of a jagged word balloon (p. 122). The shape of the balloon, the fact that the balloon dominates the panel and also exceeds and breaks past the frame of the panel, the size of the letters, and the color of the image (bright red on a bright yellow background, contrasting with the white background of all the other word balloons)—all these indicate a noise that is both loud and explosive. However, the event in question is not a bomb; it is a door slamming. Koby and Numi have gone to a moshav, seeking a woman who may have been a witness to Gabriel's whereabouts. She, it turns out, does not want to talk to them because (unbeknownst to them at this point) she is in love with Gabriel and is trying to keep her affair with him a secret from her husband. When Koby and Numi knock on her door and explain who they are, she abruptly shuts them out. The visual irony here is pointed; when readers encounter **"BOOM"** they likely assume at first that a bomb has detonated, but, instead, it is the woman's feelings that are explosive. The author here coordinates color, composition and framing devices to place personal feelings and an emotional minefield at the forefront of the scene, relegating national political struggles to the background.

In short, the main drama of *Karov Rahok* concerns not physical danger, nor even the trauma of living with terrorist attacks as a fact of daily life, but the search for trust and the need for intimacy—both of which are magnified, exacerbated, and frustrated by ongoing violence. As one reviewer put it,

While apolitical, Modan sees "Exit Wounds" as an only-in-Israel story—Israel is a country where one end of the country is close to the other and families hold on to each other even more closely.... "They are living in a very extreme reality. But they don't want to think about it. They want to deal with their own lives," she says of her characters.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> J. Eskenazi. <http://www.jweekly.com/article/full/33661/uncommon-comic/> October 27, 2007 (accessed May 19, 2012). My reading disagrees with the much more politicized interpretation offered by Ariel Kahn's essay, "From Darkness into Light: Reframing Notions of Self and Other in Contemporary Israeli Graphic Narratives," in *The Jewish Graphic Novel* (ed. S. Baskind and R. Omer-Sherman), pp. 198–213.

At another level, too, *Karov Rahok* reads as a uniquely Israeli text. An interweaving of lives comes about through contact with Gabriel and because of his absence. Various sectors of Israeli life—Ultraorthodox Jews, moshavniks, olim and yordim, affluent and working-class Israelis, and foreign workers—all make an appearance here as Koby finds one individual from each community who feels disoriented or at a loss without Gabriel. *Karov Rahok* consequently offers an oblique comment on Israel as at once a fragmented and close-knit place, where at times it seems everyone knows everyone or is connected to everyone (whether they realize it or not, and even if the connection, like Gabriel, seems enigmatic and elusive). Through the distinctive narrative capabilities of graphic novel, Modan conveys the impression that that in this highly diverse society there is something that ties all these people together, however loosely, but it is hard to say exactly what that common denominator might be. And all of them feel that they have lost something they used to have.

### 3. NARRATIVE THEORY: CHARACTER AND PLOT

The figures that populate the world of *Karov Rahok* merit extended discussion of characterization not just in connection with the formalisms specific to graphic novels but with narrative theory more broadly. There is plenty for students to say here about the characters' acts (committed and omitted), description (appearances and physical qualities), speech, and names, as well as the ways characters metaphorically or metonymically relate to their environment, the ways they parallel one another, the qualities they attribute to one another, and whether or not they reveal interior lives. Furthermore, it is useful to discuss where characters fall on the spectrum from simple to complex and from static to developing. In addition, however, this novel provides special opportunity to talk about character as readerly construct—that is, to consider character in relation to cognitive processes of the reader. This approach to character focuses crucially on the order in which information about a character is presented to the reader and how that then affects the way readers construct understanding of the character.<sup>15</sup> As narratologist Uri Margolin explains,

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<sup>15</sup> Margolin provides a concise discussion of readerly constructs and other theories of characterization in his essay U. Margolin, "Character," in *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative* (ed. D. Herman; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007) pp. 66–79.

Reading for character is triggered or initiated by the reader identifying in the text a referring expression and opening a mental file bearing this name in which all further information about the corresponding individual will be continuously accumulated, structured and updated as one reads on, until the final product or character profile is reached at the end of the reading act.<sup>16</sup>

In *Karov Rahok* categorizing and de-categorizing character becomes a central issue, because the text so prominently features the evolving relationship between Koby and Numi. Koby's first assumption about Numi is that she is of no interest to him, and, furthermore, that she is unattractive. However, she surprises him. Her involvement with Gabriel makes her extremely interesting. In addition, she turns out to be very wealthy (itself a fact that fascinates Koby), yet her family is beset with tensions which indicate that wealth does not solve everything. That makes her all the more intriguing to working-class Koby, and, later, her vulnerability, her tenderness, and her toughness make her increasingly desirable as a romantic partner. He no longer dismissively labels her "The Giraffe," and as readers follow his process of reassessing her, they, too, are invited by the text to reconsider characters, to see their complexities, to reject easy stereotypes and eschew simplistic first impressions.

The notion of character as readerly construct is above all pertinent in connection with the absent figure, Gabriel. Indeed, the entire story is cast as a quest for information about him and as a process of accumulating and updating clues about his whereabouts and his personality. The novel poses the questions, who is he, what is his character, what are his motives for disappearing? When, late in the novel, his children suddenly and without explanation receive a large amount of money from the sale of his apartment, this development prompts even more questions. The readers never find definitive answers, nor do they meet Gabriel directly. They can rely only on what other characters say about him. This point is especially significant, because, at the end, it becomes clear that Koby and Numi, too, will not be able to piece together a clear or complete picture of him or his past. Consequently, the basic insight they achieve is one of the tenets that narrative theory teaches: that stories are always only partial accounts of a storyworld and that no one story—no one version of the events of the past—accounts for that world in its entirety. Koby and Numi similarly realize that they will fail if they continue trying to determine what happened before, but at the same time they can choose to build toward the future by constructing their own story—the

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<sup>16</sup> U. Margolin, "Character," p. 76.

story they are creating, at hand, in the present, through their own interactions. They have to decide whether or not to continue their relationship. In the final panels, as Koby decides he wants to stay together with Numi, he takes a leap of faith—literally jumping out of a tree and depending on Numi to catch him. Significantly, as he moves beyond his belittling preconceptions of her, he also lets go of his anger and his rigid ideas about how his father, ideally, should have been or behaved. The result is that Koby and Numi, at first simplified through cartoonish depiction, both become more complex. Furthermore, as they develop, they also come to see one another and the other people in their lives as complex, developing individuals.

This ending, which resists simple notions of closure, can bring to the fore important considerations about plot. A basic understanding in narrative theory posits that fiction is always read at least in part to do detective work, that is, to construct hypothetical narrated events out of the information available in the narration. In mystery tales, the work of detection is overtly present for the reader, since these texts create suspense concerning the past, waiting until the end of the narration to reveal an inciting incident that occurred near the beginning of the story events. *Karov Rahok* is a narrative that at first presents itself as a kind of detective story. Most of the events in the plot are driven by a need to uncover evidence, primarily about Gabriel but also about other characters as well.<sup>17</sup> The ending, though, frustrates expectations and defies the conventions of the genre (since Gabriel and his fate remain unknown). This means that Modan's novel initially puts into relief the nature of reading as detective work, then undercuts the primacy of reading for plot, and finally presents a compelling twist on the mystery genre as it calls heightened attention to the challenges and rewards of reading for character.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

Altogether, many factors make *Karov Rahok* a highly appealing text for pedagogical purposes. This is not to say that it poses no difficulties. One of the drawbacks of teaching this novel is the font, which at times is almost il-

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<sup>17</sup> *Karov Rahok* in effect poses one mystery after another. At the start it asks, who is "the Giraffe"? (Koby does not know Numi's name when he first meets her, nor does he understand why she contacted him.) Later, other questions arise, such as, who is the guy in the photograph at the Aunt and Uncle's apartment, or what happened to Koby's mother and why is she absent from his life? Similarly, when Koby shows Numi a family photo, he does not recognize many of the relatives, leaving her and the readers to wonder who is who. Each discovery made by Koby and Numi generates more questions.

legible. In addition, a certain amount of vulgarity in the slang and a brief sequence of R-rated material may be problematic for some classrooms and some audiences. The length of the book, too, is a challenge; to read all of it aloud in class would take an inordinate amount of time—much more than is needed for a short story. Similarly, while making a voice recording of a short story is a simple matter and can provide a crucial homework aid, to provide parallel material for a graphic novel would require the design of interactive audio-visual software (not to mention, more complicated copyright issues). Nonetheless, the advantages of teaching this book outweigh the disadvantages. For one thing, *Karov Rahok* tells an engagingly universal story of family strains and budding romance, yet, at the same time, it contains richly specific Israeli material captured with arresting verisimilitude. Moreover, through its winning graphics, the novel presents comic and entertaining depictions of everyday activities and so it is particularly enjoyable for students, yet this text also grapples meaningfully with some of the most heart-wrenching and tragic aspects of contemporary Israeli life. Importantly, *Karov Rahok* retains a measure of optimism and leaves open some possibility for hope and happy endings. This graphic novel offers abundant possibilities for discussion of narrative art. In addition to the issues explored here already, *Karov Rahok* may inspire discussion of shifting perspectives; temporal structuring in narrative (particularly, matters of duration and story tempo); transitions between scenes; and issues of translation (beyond the comparison of the titles), noting salient differences between the English and the Hebrew versions of the story.

Graphic novel is a growing phenomenon in Israel, and *Karov Rahok* is but one text that can make a significant contribution to university curricula in Hebrew literature and culture. Other notable comic books that may work well in the classroom, both because of their artistic substance and because they are available in both Hebrew and English, include *Pizzeria Kamikaze* by Etgar Keret with drawings by Asaf Hanuka (2004 [Hebrew])<sup>18</sup> and *Waltz with Bashir* by Ari Folman with illustrations by David Polosnky (2009).<sup>19</sup> *Waltz with Bashir*, as a spinoff of a feature length film, is of particular interest since it can be incorporated into teaching to explore comparisons between storytelling in print and storytelling in cinema. Whether in conjunction with film studies and other media or standing on their own merits, Hebrew graphic novels most likely will continue to attract attention,

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<sup>18</sup> E. Keret, *Pizzeria Kamikaze* (Gainesville, Fla.: Alternative Comics, 2005).

<sup>19</sup> A. Folman, *Waltz with Bashir* (Tel Aviv: Zemora Bitan, 2009).

and they can be of considerable value for helping students gain analytic sophistication in an era of increasingly visual literary culture.