
Narrative Cohesion and Cultural Reclamation in *A Girl Called Echo* and *Three Feathers*

Lakxana S¹, Dr. A. Vanitha²

Research Scholar¹, Associate Professor²

PG & Research Department of English

Vellalar College for Women, Erode, Tamil Nadu, India

Paper Received on 19-10-2025, Accepted on 23-11-2025

Published on 25-11-25; DOI:10.36993/RJOE.2025.10.4.343

Abstract

This paper examines how contemporary Indigenous graphic novels employ formal mechanisms of comic theory to articulate themes of identity, history, and cultural reclamation. Drawing on concepts such as closure, iconic solidarity, figural solidarity, and multimodality, the analysis explores how these narrative strategies operate within Katherena Vermette's *A Girl Called Echo* and Richard Van Camp's *Three Feathers*. Both works rely on nonlinear structures, spatial networks, and the interplay of visual and verbal modes to guide readers through complex temporal shifts, cultural teachings, and restorative justice frameworks. Through their accessible visual storytelling, these graphic novels challenge colonial narratives, foreground Indigenous epistemologies, and offer powerful models for community healing and intergenerational knowledge transmission.

Keywords: Indigenous graphic novels closure, figural solidarity, iconic solidarity.

Introduction

The field of comic studies is anchored by many of the foundational theoretical approaches that seek to define the unique language and formal mechanisms using this sequential art communicates complex ideas. In fact, chief among these foundational works are the theories of Scott McCloud, which prioritize the reader's imaginative role in narrative progression, and Thierry Groensteen, who offers a rigorous semiotic structuralism focusing on the systematic architecture of the comic's page. This scholarly framework is essential for analyzing modern graphic novels, particularly

those such as Katherena Vermette's *A Girl Called Echo* and Richard Van Camp's *Three Feathers*. These works engage with deep cultural themes like Indigenous identity, historical trauma, and restorative justice.

Comics as Myraid Communication

Generally, comics are often recognized as a multi-modal form of communication that fuses pictorial and linguistic elements. It provides a powerful, accessible vehicle for addressing difficult or complex subjects. The graphic novel format, in particular, offers a means for challenging harmful narrations, and it allows us to see possibilities for the future outside of colonial ideals. This paper will apply key concepts from comic theories, particularly mechanisms of narrative cohesion like closure and figural solidarity, to examine how *A Girl Called Echo* articulates narratives of cultural reclamation, resistance, and healing. By analyzing all of this as formal structures of these Indigenous creative graphic novels, one can understand how the unique combination of words and many of the images provide an accessible, transformative medium for sharing crucial contemporary also they pave way for historical truths.

The comprehension of sequential images not only relies on the reader's ability to connect many of the discrete panels and to maintain narrative flow. Two central concepts in comics theory are important. One is called closure, and the other one is called figural solidarity, which illuminates how the authors and illustrators of these two works, *A Girl Called Echo* and *Three Feathers*, manage this process, especially when they are dealing with non-linear or complex temporal structures.

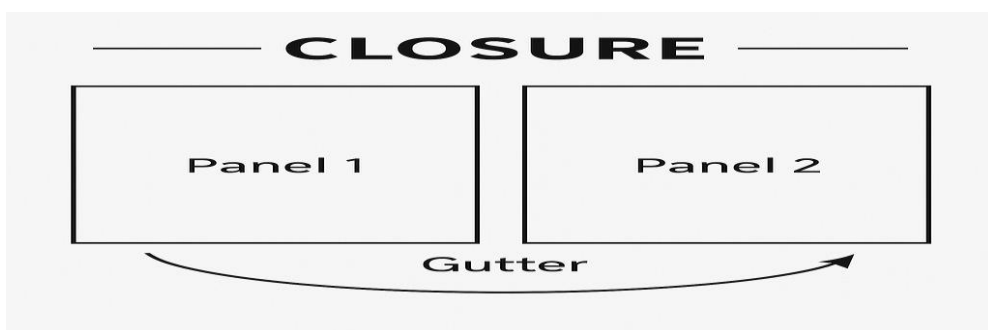


Figure 1. Closure

Closure and Spatial Networks

Scott McCloud popularized the concept of closure. This defines the phenomenon of observing paths. That is, in a graphic novel, there are panels. But perceiving the whole, where the human imagination takes two separate images and transforms them into a single idea in the limbo of the gutter, is very important. McCloud developed a taxonomy of six-panel transitions, ranging from moment to moment to non sequitur, to describe how artists manage spacing and flow of narrative information. This approach, in fact, primarily focuses on micro-level gutter mechanisms and linear progression.

In contrast, Thierry Groensteen's structural analysis emphasizes the macro-level composition of the page as a holistic unit. This is known as the multistane. Groensteen focuses on iconic solidarity. This is defined as the interdependence of images in a series, which are simultaneously separated and semantically overdetermined by their coexistence *in praesentia*. This view certainly acknowledges that readers can view the arrangement of panels in a temporal or dechronalized mode. It creates new relationships between panels outside the usual narrative flow, which Mayor Wragg describes as a spatial network of connections. This capacity for nonlinear reading is implicit in all comic formats. The nonlinear nature of the graphic novel *Three Feathers* leverages these macro-level structural potentials. The narrative, which is inspired by a true event in Fort Smith, NWT, not only deals with three young men sentenced by a sentencing circle to spend nine months living on the land as part of restorative justice.

The comic intentionally utilizes a nonlinear narrative structure, which opens with the boys returning from the land before charting the events. This requires the reader to actively piece together a story, and it makes sense of a legal approach. The use of repeated images, the shape of the panels, and different speech bubbles not only intentionally helps the illustrator, Krishnal, shape this complex story. In fact, the visual structure certainly compels the reader to engage in a nonlinear interpretive process, because they can look at the whole picture, or they can go from one place to another, unlike textual analysis, which helps in a linear format. This not only mirrors the holistic systematic approach, rather than relying solely on simplistic linear transitions.

Figural Solidarity

Building upon iconic solidarity, the concept of figural solidarity, which is introduced to provide additional explanatory power, especially in narrative comics, is important.

FS is founded on the core referentiability of sequential figures. It primarily requires characters, which ensures cohesion and provides the driving force for the visual narrative. This mechanism recognizes that readers concentrate on recurring characters actively in order to make sense of the story; reading for the narrative is very important. In Katherena Vermette's *A Girl Called Echo* series, this concept is central to engaging the complexity of the plot, because the story involves many time-travel aspects as well. The series follows Echo Desjardins, a Métis girl who is navigating loneliness and foster care in Winnipeg. Through her history class and her mother's music, Echo is repeatedly transported back in time to observe and interact with historical Métis figures during key events like the Pemmican Wars and the Red River Resistance. Figure 2 represents Figural solidarity.

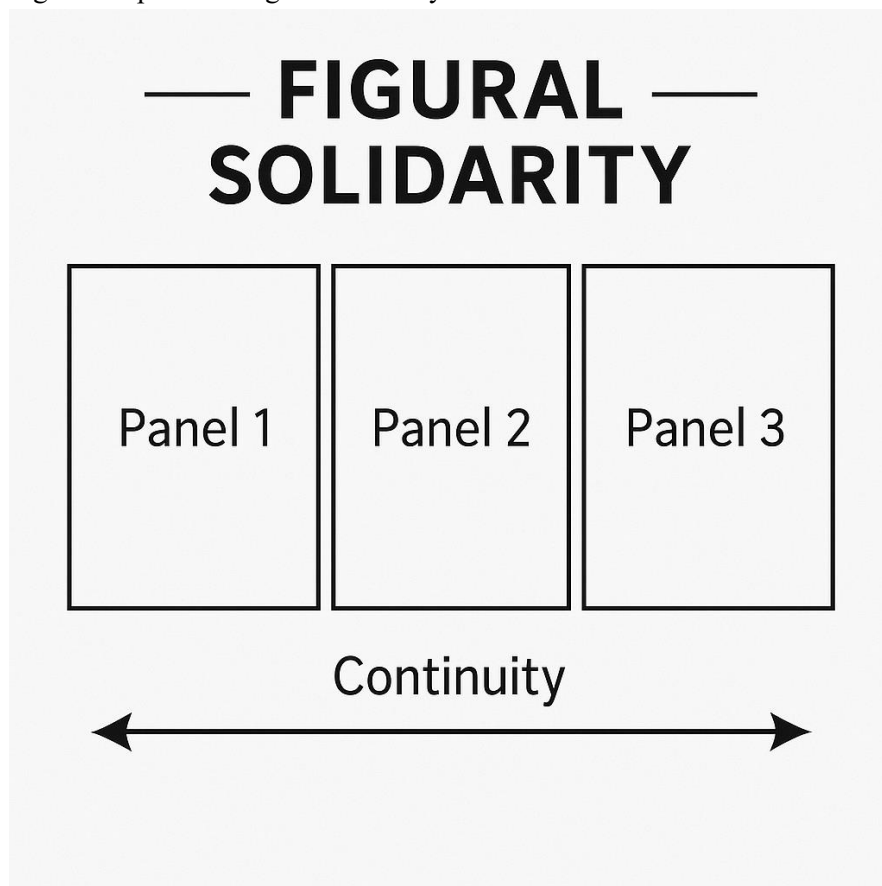


Figure 2

Echo herself serves as the primary mechanism of efforts throughout the narrative. Her consistent visual representation across the different temporal settings establishes a chain of reference linking her contemporary experiences. Her recurring figures, that is, regardless of the time period, allow the reader to navigate a sense of continuity and coherence. This not only enables the narrative to transfer significant distances of time and space, which McCloud characterizes as scene to scene. This not only allows Echo to physically endure and witness these historical events, but it also actively engages resurgence and connection with the culture.

Cultural Reclamation

Comics and graphic novels are recognized as hybrid forms defined by the blending of word and image. It is clear that the blending is asserted by some scholars, and it shows that there is an essential characteristic that distinguishes comics from other pictorial narratives. In fact, the rich interplay of visual and verbal elements allows graphic narratives to convey intricate concepts, and also feelings and beliefs, and is particularly powerful when addressing complex socio-cultural themes.

Comics are dynamic multimodal texts that combine at least two streams of learning, visual and read-write. This multimodal nature is one of the form's superpowers, allowing for the building of both textual and visual literacies, making complicated subjects accessible. The graphic novel format is often considered less intimidating than traditional written literature, serving as a pragmatic tool for youth and those for whom dense text is inaccessible. In the context of Indigenous narratives, this accessibility is critical for the project of cultural reclamation and correcting harmful colonial narratives. The graphic novels discussed are part of a growing body of work that helps in creating a heritage by Indigenous writers, and that teach readers about contemporary Native American peoples, their traditions, stories, and ongoing struggles for cultural continuance as well.

Scholars have shown that graphic novels/comics literacies (Jacobs, 2007; Pantaleo, 2011) are one way to engage youth in multiliteracies learning. The use of a graphic novel format can engage youth in the use of multiliteracies to learn academic content. Jacobs (2007) points out that 'reading comics involves a complex, multimodal literacy and help(s) students develop as critical and engaged readers of multimodal texts' (p. 19). Engagement is an important facet of media literacy pedagogy as well. (Begoray and Brown 135)

A Girl Called Echo, in this novel, uses accessibility to bring out and communicate the impact of colonialism on Métis communities. It not only focuses on themes like the fight for land rights, identity, and the reality of foster care. Katherena Vermette also seems to intentionally insert musical references at key points. This allows the lyrics to resonate with the mood and action. This not only includes music as an auditory dimension, creating contemporary links that enhance the emotional and thematic depth. That is beyond the strictly visual and textual modes. The graphic format allows Echo's journey to be a reconciliation with girlhood. It not only resists the internalized oppressor's voice by showing resilience and pride. In a way it is about closure and spatial network.

Justice and Traditional Teachings

There are three features exemplifying the use of multimodality to convey complex traditional and judicial concepts. The graphic novel not only addresses the importance of restorative justice, stewardship, and traditional teachings within a First Nations community. The narrative follows three young men who, rather than serving a conventional prison sentence, are sent to live on the land for nine months with elders. This not only results in a profound transformation, the graphic novel explicitly links learning and cultural exploration, themes of justice, and conflict resolution. Crucially, this book is available in multiple languages, including English, Chipewyan, Slavey, and Cree, and supports the theme of Indigenous language revitalization. The format seems to bring out the contextual and visual modes, and it helps in depicting traditional knowledge and the spiritual relationship with the land as an integral healing. The writer Richard Van Camp notes that the story was inspired by real events. This illustrates how the comic medium tries to share community truths and the power of grounded normality. The visual narrative conveys how traditional governance provides a graceful and powerful alternative through the explicit combination of traditional knowledge and modern narrative communication. These stories are essential to understanding the evolution of society and its delivery effectively.

Conclusion

The graphic novels *A Girl Called Echo* and *Three Feathers* not only demonstrate how specific principles of comic theory, particularly those concerning narrative coherence and multimodal communication, are strategically employed to articulate profound themes of Indigenous identity, history, and social justice. By utilizing mechanisms of coherence and figural solidarity, Vermette and Henderson successfully guide the reader and use the character Echo as an anchor connecting contemporary struggles to the history of Métis resistance. Similarly, Van Camp and Métis creators leverage the

inherent non-linearity and spatial networks, and they challenge the reader's assumptions about linear narrative progression and justice itself. The graphic novel's medium strength lies in its ability to blend word and image. It offers an accessible and powerful platform for cultural exploration. Both series serve as vital interventions. They share Indigenous stories and possibilities for girlhood and community healing. Ultimately, these works affirm the potential of comics to operate not merely as sequential entertainment, but as texts of cultural significance that foster critical visual and textual literacies. They preserve traditional teachings for new generations.

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