

GRAPHIC NOVEL ADAPTATIONS AND THE CRISIS OF THE IDEAL READER: A RECEPTION THEORY ANALYSIS

Hichem Souhali¹ 

University of Batna 2, Algeria

h.souhali@univ-batna2.dz

Abstract: Graphic novel adaptations of canonical literary works challenge fundamental assumptions within contemporary reception theory, particularly the privileged status of the ideal reader construct. This paper examines how graphic novels expose the limitations of traditional reader response frameworks that marginalize visual literacy and multimodal interpretive competencies. Through analysis of online reader communities discussing graphic novel adaptations of *The Great Gatsby* and *To Kill a Mockingbird*, this study demonstrates how these multimodal texts fundamentally disrupt the hierarchy between ideal and actual readers. The analysis reveals that visual-oriented readers possess sophisticated interpretive capabilities that have been systematically devalued in text-centric literary theory. These findings necessitate a theoretical reconsideration of reader response models that can accommodate the interpretive complexity revealed by graphic novels, suggesting that multimodal literary texts democratize interpretation by validating multiple forms of reader expertise within our increasingly visual culture. Building on this argument, the paper situates graphic novel adaptations within broader debates on canon formation, cultural authority, and pedagogical practice. Rather than functioning as simplified or derivative versions of their prose counterparts, these adaptations invite readers to engage in complex acts of meaning-making that integrate visual symbolism, spatial design, and narrative pacing. Reader responses drawn from digital forums reveal interpretive strategies that challenge the assumption that literary competence is primarily linguistic. Instead, readers frequently draw on visual cues to construct thematic interpretations, assess character psychology, and evaluate narrative reliability. By foregrounding these practices, the study highlights the inadequacy of reception models that privilege abstract textual idealization over lived, socially situated reading experiences. Ultimately, the paper argues that graphic novel adaptations not only reshape how canonical texts are read but also compel literary theory to recognize multimodality as a central component of contemporary literary reception rather than a peripheral or subordinate mode of interpretation..

Keywords: Graphic novels; reader response theory; Reception Theory; ideal reader; visual literacy; multimodal interpretation; digital reading communities

How to cite the article :

Souhali, H. (2025). Graphic Novel Adaptations And The Crisis Of The Ideal Reader: A Reception Theory Analysis. *Journal of Studies in Language, Culture, and Society (JSCLCS)*8(4), pp. 375-392.

¹Corresponding author: Hichem Souhali, ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2102-8446>

1. Introduction

Can classical literature survive in our digital age? Is it still possible to cultivate new readers for works by Shakespeare, Dickens, or Austen? What role will physical books play in an increasingly screen-dominated world? These pressing questions concern writers, educators, and belles-lettres amateurs who witness a fundamental shift in how culture is consumed. The digitization of media and the widespread adoption of social platforms have radically transformed where and how audiences engage with literature and the arts, posing significant challenges to traditional literary culture. However, there are serious narratives of reading decline which mask a more complex transformation. Reading hasn't died—it has migrated and morphed. Digital platforms like Wattpad host millions of reader-writers engaging with serialized fiction. BookTok has created vibrant reading communities that can propel obscure titles to bestseller status overnight. Audiobook consumption has exploded, challenging traditional definitions of "reading" itself. Most significantly for this study, graphic novels and comics have experienced unprecedented growth, with manga sales alone increasing by over 100% in recent years. Furthermore, auto-editions enabled independent writers to escape the formatted edition circles and publish their works in open access platforms and, often, gratuitously.

The supposed death of paper fiction reading reflects not the end of literary engagement but rather its democratization and diversification. Contemporary readers have developed sophisticated reading / pseudo reading skills via multiple platforms, formats, and genres with subtle interpretive skills that traditional literary theory has failed to acknowledge or validate. The emergence of graphic novel adaptations of canonical works does not represent only literature's capitulation to visual culture but its intelligent adaptation to contemporary reading practices. In this transformed media ecosystem, contemporary readers—particularly younger generations—demonstrate a marked preference for visual narratives and serialized content. Comics, manga, and graphic novels have emerged as dominant cultural forces, with iconic characters commanding global audiences that often exceed readership numbers for canonical literary works. These visual mediums offer immediate accessibility, dynamic storytelling techniques, and multimedia experiences that align with contemporary attention patterns and consumption habits.

Yet, within this apparent crisis lies opportunity. The emergence of graphic novel adaptations of canonical works like *The Great Gatsby* and *To Kill a Mockingbird* suggests that classical literature can transform and adapt while preserving its essential value (storytelling). More provocatively, these adaptations reveal fundamental limitations in how literary theory conceptualizes competent reading and interpretive authority.

This qualitative study of a corpus made of readers' interactions in forums intends to demonstrate the mutation of fiction reading, readerships, and interpretative communities. It highlights the particularities of reading pictures (the graphic novel) in order to understand the reception and response modes of text-readers and picture-readers. The ground base theory used in this paper is first the legitimization of the redefinition of the concept of literature (traditionally defined as poetry, prose, and drama), and then a divergent approach to the text—marking the shift from close reading to distant reading.

2. The Global Decline of Reading: A Worldwide Cultural Shift

The decline of reading represents more than a simple shift in media preferences—it signals a fundamental transformation in how humans process knowledge and meaning. We are witnessing a move from "deep hermeneutic engagement" (sustained interpretive dialogue with texts) to "surface pattern recognition" (algorithmic processing of information). This change affects the very cognitive architectures through which societies generate and validate

knowledge. This transformation spans diverse intellectual traditions—from Germanic philosophy to Islamic scholarship to Indigenous knowledge systems—suggesting a species-level change in cognitive ecology rather than merely local cultural shifts. Traditional literary competence, which historically converted into social and symbolic power, is being disrupted by new forms of digital literacy. The contemplative, sustained attention that reading requires has become economically and socially obsolete under late capitalism.

The decline challenges democratic discourse itself. Reading has historically provided the cognitive foundation for reflective, evidence-based argumentation essential to public deliberation. Algorithmic feeds replace shared textual experiences, potentially undermining the common cultural knowledge necessary for collective democratic action. Digital technologies have created systematic fragmentation of attention into micro-tasks optimized for data extraction rather than meaning construction. This makes the deep, non-instrumental engagement that reading requires cognitively alien to subjects formed within digital attention economies. The "death of reading" reflects a global transformation in human consciousness under late capitalism—where contemplative practices are rendered obsolete by market imperatives focused on efficiency and immediate utility rather than critical thought and sustained reflection.

3. The Theoretical Crisis: Reception Theory's Blind Spot

Along with the rapid change in reading habits, contemporary reception theory operates on a fundamental assumption that privileges text-based literary competence and constructs an "ideal reader" who possesses specific cultural and educational capital traditionally associated with canonical literature. However, the emergence of graphic novel adaptations of classical works exposes critical limitations in this theoretical framework. The core problem lies in reception theory's systematic marginalization of visual literacy and multimodal interpretive competencies, which graphic novels reveal to be sophisticated forms of literary engagement rather than deficient alternatives to textual analysis.

Reception theory, as developed by Wolfgang Iser and Hans Robert Jauss, established the concept of an "ideal reader" who possesses the cultural knowledge, literary education, and interpretive skills necessary for sophisticated textual engagement. This framework implicitly creates a hierarchy that positions actual readers—particularly those who engage with visual or multimodal texts—as somehow lacking in literary competence. The proliferation of graphic novel adaptations challenges this hierarchy by demonstrating that visual-oriented readers employ complex interpretive strategies that traditional literary theory fails to recognize or validate. (See figure 1)

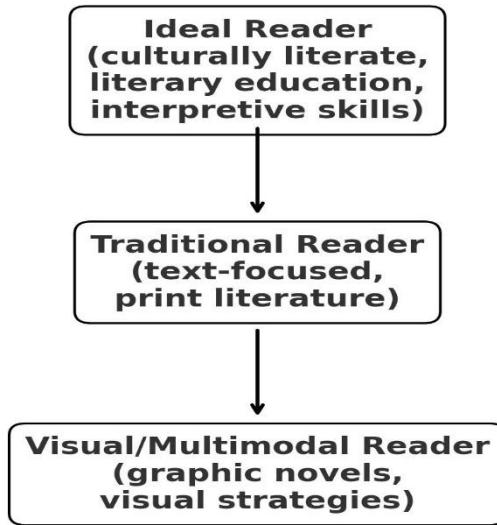


Figure 1

Readers' Hierarchy

This theoretical crisis generates several urgent research questions: How do graphic novel adaptations challenge and potentially reconstruct the concept of literary competence within reception theory? What interpretive capabilities do visual-oriented readers possess that traditional reader response models fail to acknowledge? In what ways do multimodal texts like graphic novels democratize literary interpretation by validating diverse forms of reader expertise?

4. Literature Review: Theoretical Landscape

4.1 Classical Reception Theory and Its Limitations

Reception theory emerged in the 1960s and 1970s as a revolutionary approach to understanding how texts acquire meaning through reader interaction. Wolfgang Iser's *The Act of Reading* (1978) introduced the concept of the "implied reader"—an idealized construct embedded within the text that guides interpretation. Iser distinguished between this implied reader and actual readers, whose responses might deviate from textually sanctioned interpretations due to cultural, educational, or experiential limitations.

Hans Robert Jauss's *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception* (1982) complemented Iser's work by introducing the "horizon of expectations"—the cultural and literary knowledge that readers bring to texts. Jauss argued that literary value emerges from the tension between textual innovation and reader expectations, positioning interpretation as a dynamic historical process rather than static textual property. However, both theorists operated within assumptions that privileged text-based literacy and traditional cultural capital. Their "competent reader" possessed classical education, familiarity with literary conventions, and facility with complex prose—criteria that systematically excluded readers whose strengths lay in visual literacy, popular culture knowledge, or non-Western interpretive traditions. This exclusivity problem has become increasingly problematic as global literature diversifies and digital media transforms reading practices.

4.2 Reader Response Theory in the Digital Age

Stanley Fish's *Is There a Text in This Class?* (1980) radically democratized interpretation by arguing that meaning emerges from "interpretive communities" rather than textual properties. Fish's work suggested that any community's interpretive strategies could generate valid meanings, potentially validating non-traditional reading practices. However, Fish's examples predominantly focused on academic interpretive communities, leaving questions about popular culture readers largely unexamined.

Janice Radway's *Reading the Romance* (1984) pioneered empirical study of actual reader communities, demonstrating that popular fiction readers employed sophisticated interpretive strategies that academic critics had dismissed as naive. Radway's work revealed the theoretical limitations of reception theory's idealized constructs while validating the interpretive competence of marginalized reading communities.

Louise Rosenblatt's transactional theory, articulated in *Literature as Exploration* (1938) and refined throughout her career, emphasized that meaning emerges from the transaction between reader and text rather than residing in either alone. Rosenblatt's framework has proven surprisingly durable in digital environments, where readers actively construct meaning through multimodal engagement. However, transactional theory was developed primarily for text-based literature and requires significant expansion to accommodate graphic novel adaptations.

More recent academic contributions started to address these limitations. Henry Jenkins's work on "participatory culture" demonstrates how digital communities create sophisticated interpretive frameworks that traditional literary theory struggles to recognize. Jenkins's analysis of fan communities reveals interpretive practices that parallel academic literary analysis while drawing on different cultural resources and operating through different social structures.

4.3 Visual Literacy and Multimodal Theory

The emergence of multimodal texts like graphic novels requires theoretical frameworks that can analyze how meaning emerges from the interaction of visual and textual elements, beginning with Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen's *Reading Images* (2006). This interaction provides essential tools for understanding how visual elements communicate meaning through composition, color, perspective, and symbolic representation, with their "grammar of visual design" demonstrating that visual communication operates according to systematic principles comparable to linguistic grammar. Building on this foundation, W.J.T. Mitchell's *Picture Theory* (1994) examines the complex relationship between visual and textual meaning, arguing that contemporary culture requires "visual literacy" as sophisticated as traditional textual literacy, with Mitchell's analysis of how images and texts interact providing crucial groundwork for understanding graphic novel adaptations that constantly negotiate between visual and verbal communication systems. Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics* (1993) remains the foundational text for analyzing sequential art as a distinct medium, demonstrating that comics employ unique techniques—panel transitions, visual metaphors, time manipulation—that create meaning unavailable to either pure text or static images, suggesting that graphic novels require specialized interpretive competencies that traditional literary theory has not acknowledged. Finally, Thierry Groensteen's *The System of Comics* (2007) provides more sophisticated theoretical tools for understanding how graphic novels create meaning through "arthrology"—the systematic relationships between panels, pages, and narrative sequences—with Groensteen's work suggesting that competent graphic novel reading requires complex cognitive skills that parallel but differ from traditional literary analysis.

4.4 Gaps in Current Theory

Despite these theoretical advances, significant gaps remain in our understanding of how readers actually engage with graphic novel adaptations of canonical literature. Most scholarship focuses either on graphic novels as independent artworks or on adaptation theory in general, without specifically examining how these texts challenge traditional concepts of literary competence. Furthermore, empirical research on actual reader responses to graphic novel adaptations remains sparse. While theoretical work has advanced our understanding of multimodal communication, we lack sufficient data about how diverse reading communities actually interpret these texts. This gap is particularly problematic given that graphic novels often explicitly target readers who struggle with traditional texts, making empirical investigation of reader response essential for understanding their cultural impact. (See figure 2)

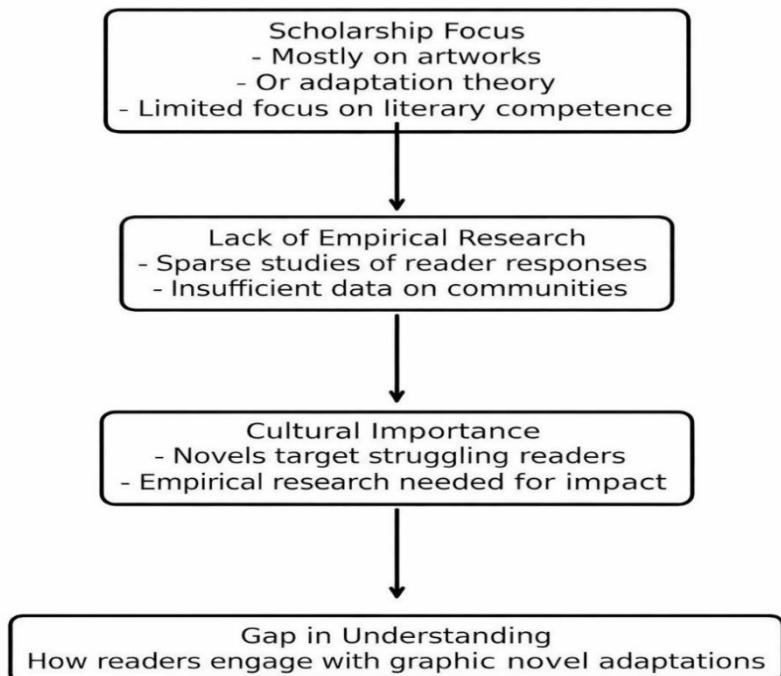


Figure 2.

Theoretical Gap

This chart maps out why we still do not fully understand how readers engage with graphic novel adaptations. Scholarship so far has mostly concentrated on the artworks themselves or on broad adaptation theory, leaving literary competence underexplored. At the same time, there is a lack of solid empirical research—very few studies capture real reader responses or community experiences. Yet, the cultural importance of these works is clear: graphic novel adaptations often reach struggling readers, but without data we cannot measure their true

impact. Taken together, these gaps lead us to the central issue—the missing piece is a clear understanding of how readers actually interact with graphic novel adaptations. Consequently, the present study will address these gaps by examining how online reading communities actually engage with graphic novel adaptations, using their interpretive practices as evidence for expanding reception theory's conceptual framework.

5. Digital Reading Communities in Action: Reader Responses to Graphic Novel Adaptations

5.1. Corpus Description

The field work analyses reader responses across multiple digital platforms to understand how diverse communities engage with graphic novel adaptations of canonical literature. The corpus consists of 20 distinct items collected from various online spaces where readers discuss, review, and debate literary texts.

5.1.1 Platform Selection and Data Sources

Reddit (9 discussion threads): Reddit's pseudonymous structure and community-driven moderation creates spaces for authentic reader discussion without commercial or institutional pressure. Subreddits like r/books, r/graphicnovels, and r/booksuggestions attract different demographics and discussion styles.

Goodreads (6 representative reviews): As the world's largest social cataloging platform for books, Goodreads provides access to reader responses across diverse demographics, educational backgrounds, and cultural contexts.

Professional and Creator Sources (5 items): Academic blogs, industry reviews, and creator reflections provide comparative perspectives that illuminate how different types of interpretive authority operate.

5.1.2 Corpus Composition

The corpus includes responses to graphic novel adaptations of two canonical American texts:

- **"To Kill a Mockingbird" (Fred Fordham, 2018):** 9 total items analyzed
- **"The Great Gatsby" (Multiple adaptations, 2020-2021):** 11 total items analyzed

Data collection focused on responses published between 2023-2025, prioritizing naturally occurring discussions rather than researcher-prompted responses.

5.2. Methodology: Listening to Actual Readers

This study employs a qualitative content analysis approach focused on naturally occurring reader discussions in digital environments. Following Janice Radway's pioneering approach in *Reading the Romance*, the methodology studies readers "in the wild"—observing their interpretive practices in natural social contexts.

5.2.1 Analytical Framework

The analysis examines four key areas:

- **Interpretive Strategy Documentation:** How readers approach visual vs. textual elements and integrate multimodal information
- **Community Validation Patterns:** Which interpretive approaches receive community support
- **Demographic Variation:** How different backgrounds influence interpretive approaches

- **Cross-Platform Comparison:** How different digital spaces shape interpretive discussion

Interpretive Dimensions of Graphic Novel Reception

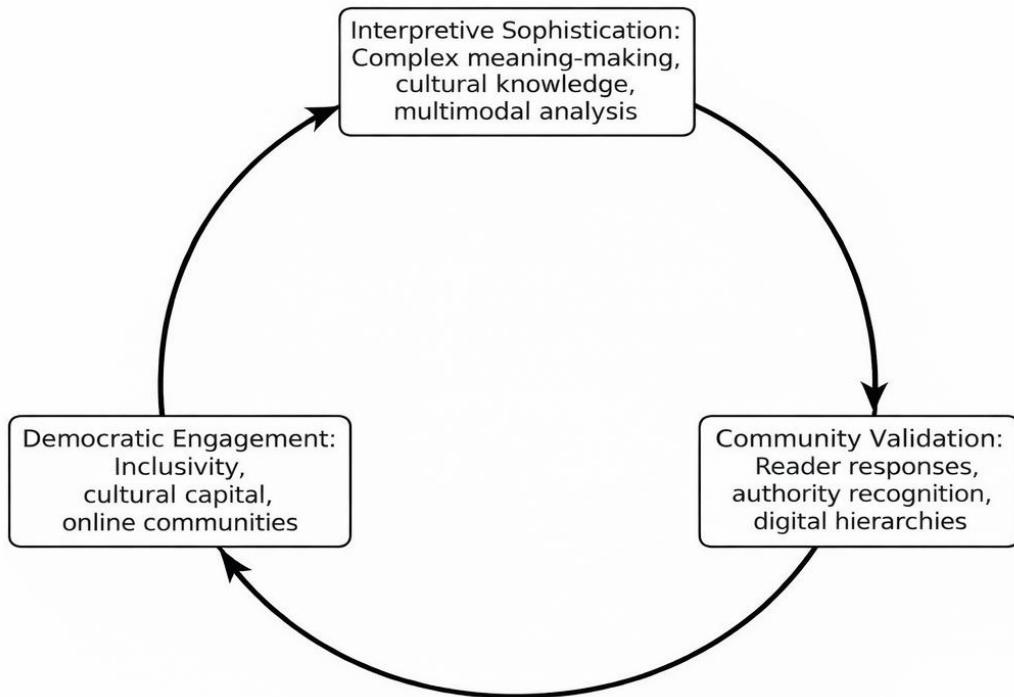


Figure 3

Analytical Patterns

This figure illustrates the theoretical and methodological scaffolding underlying our analysis of graphic novel reception, positioning three critical dimensions—interpretive sophistication, community validation, and democratic engagement—as the foundational framework for understanding how meaning-making operates within contemporary reading communities. The circular configuration reflects our methodological approach of examining these dimensions as mutually constitutive rather than hierarchical, thereby establishing a theoretical lens that bridges reader-response theory, digital humanities methodologies, and community-based cultural analysis. The aim is to demonstrate the complex interpretive ecosystems surrounding graphic narrative reception.

6. Case Studies: Graphic Novel Adaptations in Digital Communities

6.1 To Kill a Mockingbird: Accessibility and Democratic Interpretation

Fred Fordham's 2018 graphic novel adaptation demonstrates how visual narratives can enhance accessibility while maintaining thematic complexity. Online reading communities consistently highlight the adaptation's ability to preserve Harper Lee's challenging themes while making them approachable through visual storytelling.

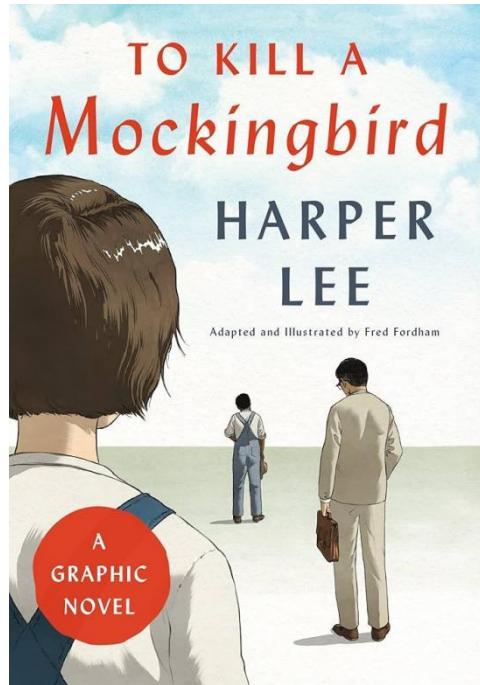


Figure 4

To Kill a Mockingbird Cover

Visual Literacy as Interpretive Sophistication: Digital platforms reveal readers employing sophisticated analytical frameworks when engaging with the adaptation. Rather than viewing visual elements as simplifications, community discussions demonstrate nuanced understanding of how illustrations function as interpretive tools.

Bridging Rather Than Replacing: Reddit discussions reveal complex negotiations between traditional literary hierarchies and emerging multimodal appreciation. The adaptation creates pathways for readers who might struggle with Lee's dense prose to engage meaningfully with the novel's themes, validating different cognitive and cultural approaches to literary meaning-making.

6.2 *The Great Gatsby*: Atmospheric Interpretation and Artistic Achievement

Multiple graphic adaptations of *The Great Gatsby*—including Fred Fordham's 2018 version and K. Woodman-Maynard's 2020 adaptation—have generated sophisticated interpretive discourse in online reading communities.

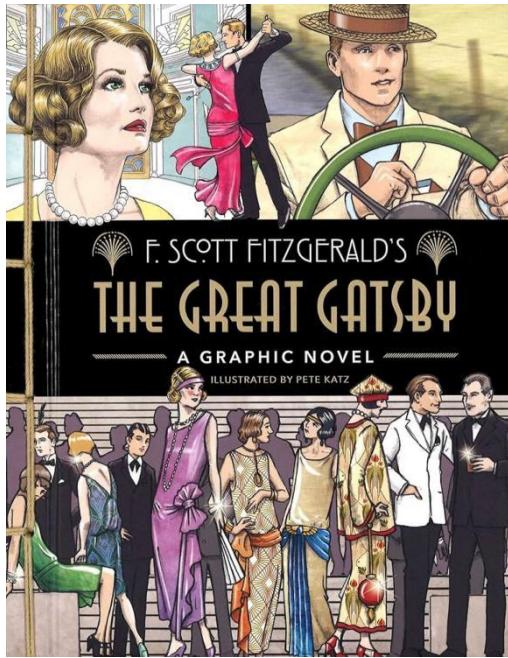


Figure 5

The Great Gatsby Cover

Beyond Plot Fidelity: Online communities evaluate Gatsby adaptations through frameworks that prioritize atmospheric authenticity over strict plot adherence. Readers focus on whether adaptations successfully capture "the feeling of Fitzgerald's world" through what they term "creative presentation" and "getting the atmospherics."

Comparative Visual Analysis: Having access to multiple Gatsby adaptations has enabled readers to develop comparative analytical skills. Online communities discuss different artistic approaches to identical scenes, evaluate various character interpretations, and assess how different visual styles affect thematic emphasis.

Legitimacy and Independence: Many community members reject framing graphic adaptations merely as educational stepping stones to "real" literature. While acknowledging pedagogical value, readers approach these adaptations as standalone artistic achievements deserving independent critical attention.

7. Key Findings: Multimodal Literary Competence

7.1 Sophisticated Visual Literacy Skills

The two case studies demonstrate that contemporary readers possess advanced visual literacy competencies that traditional reception theory fails to acknowledge. Online discussions demonstrate consistent ability to:

- Analyze how visual metaphors extend textual themes
- Evaluate adaptation choices for cultural sensitivity and historical accuracy
- Compare multiple versions for artistic and interpretive merit
- Understand how visual pacing and panel sequences affect narrative meaning
- Develop specialized critical vocabularies merging literary analysis with visual art criticism

7.2 Democratic Interpretation Spaces

Digital reading communities create more inclusive interpretive environments where diverse cultural knowledge, visual literacy, and experiential backgrounds function as resources rather than deficiencies. Both communities demonstrate how graphic adaptations validate different learning styles while maintaining engagement with complex literary themes.

7.3 Challenging Reader Hierarchies

The evidence challenges traditional binaries between "ideal" and "actual" readers. Online platforms reveal that supposed hierarchies represent false constructions that limit rather than enhance literary understanding. Multimodal engagement often leads to deeper appreciation of original texts' complexity.

7.4 Comparative Analysis

Table 1

Comparative Analysis

Aspect	To Kill a Mockingbird	The Great Gatsby	Global Tendency
Primary Evaluation Criteria	Emotional resonance and cultural sensitivity	Atmospheric authenticity and artistic achievement	Focus on thematic capture over plot fidelity
Visual Literacy	Analysis of emotional representation and historical context	Comparison of artistic styles and medium choices	Advanced multimodal interpretive skills
Relationship to Source	Bridge for accessing difficult themes	Independent artistic achievement with canonical respect	Complementary rather than competitive positioning
Community Focus	Scaffolding and accessibility	Comparative analysis and artistic merit	Sophisticated critical discourse

The comparative table outlines how discussions of the graphic novel adaptations of *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *The Great Gatsby* reveal different emphases yet converge in broader interpretive tendencies. For *To Kill a Mockingbird*, readers focus on its emotional resonance and cultural sensitivity, with strong attention to how visual storytelling helps scaffold difficult themes and provide accessibility, especially in educational contexts. By contrast, *The Great Gatsby* is evaluated primarily through its atmospheric authenticity and artistic achievement, with readers highlighting stylistic choices and mood as central to its success, often treating the adaptation as an independent work of artistic merit. While *To Kill a Mockingbird* is framed as a bridge to understanding socially and historically complex issues, *The Great Gatsby* is positioned as an example of canonical respect fused with artistic freedom. Across both cases, however, the global tendency points toward a critical discourse that privileges thematic capture over strict plot fidelity, values multimodal literacy, and situates graphic novel adaptations not as competitors to their source texts but as complementary works that enrich interpretive possibilities.

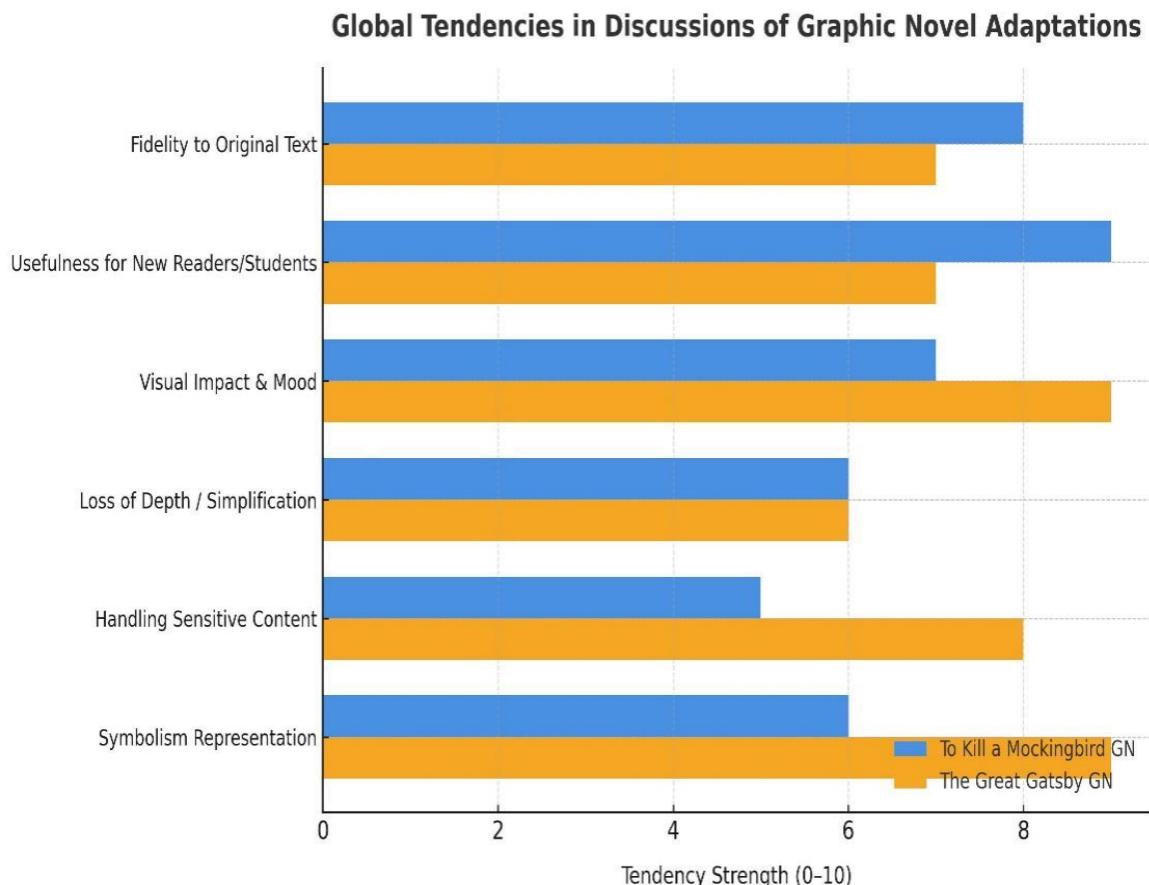


Figure 6

Global Tendencies in Responses' Chart

The chart (Figure 6) illustrates how forum discussions evaluate the graphic novel adaptations of *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *The Great Gatsby*, showing distinct tendencies in how readers respond to each text. *To Kill a Mockingbird* is praised for its fidelity to the original and its usefulness for students, suggesting that readers see it as a strong pedagogical tool, though concerns remain about whether the adaptation simplifies complex themes and adequately conveys sensitive issues such as racism and injustice. In contrast, *The Great Gatsby* scores highest on visual impact, mood, and symbolism representation, reflecting how its imagery and iconic symbols translate effectively into graphic form, though it too faces criticism for loss of depth. Overall, the discussions highlight that *Mockingbird* is valued more for accessibility and educational clarity, while *The Great Gatsby* is celebrated for its aesthetic richness and symbolic resonance, revealing that different canonical works benefit from adaptation in different ways.

It is worth noticing that the readers' responses do not suggest the substitution of the text for the graphic novel. There is a certain awareness – visible in the commentaries – that both supports extend the artistic/aesthetic experience. It clearly appears that the culture of sharing and interactions (inherited from the social networks) has become an alternative culture. These readers read and feel the need to share their reception of the works- had they been written or visual. Consciously or unconsciously, they are engaging in comparative literature in its largest scope. Subsequently, they are actually ideal readers.

8. Theoretical Implications: Toward Inclusive Reception Theory

8.1 Expanding Literary Competence

The evidence demands expansion of reception theory's "ideal reader" construct to include digital native competencies, visual-textual integration skills, and contemporary cultural literacies. Rather than abandoning the concept of literary competence, we must recognize that competence takes multiple forms in our multimodal cultural environment.

8.2 Digital Communities as Theoretical Sites

Digital reading communities represent legitimate sites for literary interpretation that deserve theoretical recognition. These communities validate diverse interpretive approaches while maintaining critical engagement with textual complexity, demonstrating that democratization of interpretation need not mean abandonment of analytical rigor.

8.3 Implications for Literary Education

If graphic novels reveal that actual readers possess sophisticated interpretive capabilities that have been systematically devalued, then current approaches to literary education, canon formation, and cultural evaluation require fundamental reconsideration. Educators might consider graphic novel adaptations not as stepping stones to "real" literature but as legitimate literary texts that validate different forms of cultural knowledge and interpretive skill.

8.4 The New Literary Ecosystem

The graphic novel adaptations of *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *The Great Gatsby* reveal a fundamental shift in how contemporary reading communities engage with canonical literature. Digital platforms have enabled the emergence of sophisticated interpretive discourse that validates visual literacy as equally complex as traditional textual analysis.

Rather than diminishing the originals, these adaptations extend their cultural reach and create new contexts for their themes to resonate. The result is not a literary hierarchy but a literary ecosystem, where different formats serve different readers while contributing to a shared cultural conversation about timeless themes and enduring stories. The success of these graphic novels suggests that the future of classic literature depends not on preservation alone but on creative adaptation that honors both the source material and the needs of evolving reading communities.

Conclusion: Democracy, Not Deficit

The contemporary anxiety surrounding graphic novel adaptations of canonical works reflects a deeper uncertainty about the evolution of literary culture itself. This study demonstrates that what appears to be a crisis of traditional reading practices actually represents a profound transformation in how meaning is created, shared, and valued within literary communities. The sophisticated interpretive practices evident in online reading communities reveal that contemporary readers possess complex literary competencies that traditional reception theory has systematically overlooked or dismissed. These readers are not passive consumers of simplified content but active participants in a democratized form of literary engagement that challenges hierarchical assumptions about textual authority and interpretive legitimacy. The evidence suggests that visual-oriented readers employ sophisticated interpretive strategies that constitute legitimate forms of literary competence, demonstrating complex cognitive skills that expand rather than diminish interpretive possibility. Their engagement with graphic novel adaptations reveals multimodal literacy practices that bridge visual, textual, and digital competencies, creating new forms of

hermeneutic sophistication that traditional literary scholarship has yet to fully recognize or theorize.

The perceived decline of traditional reading practices often obscures the emergence of vibrant, participatory literary communities that operate primarily in digital spaces. Online reading communities create democratic interpretive spaces where diverse cultural knowledge and experiential backgrounds function as hermeneutic resources, validating multiple forms of reader expertise while maintaining critical engagement with literary complexity. These communities demonstrate that the supposed death of serious literary engagement is largely mythical—what has actually occurred is a migration of interpretive activity from institutionally sanctioned spaces to more accessible, collaborative platforms. Graphic novel adaptations serve as crucial mediating texts that bridge traditional and digital literacies, creating pathways for broader literary engagement that preserve essential cultural values while acknowledging contemporary reading practices. Rather than representing a dumbing-down of literary culture, these adaptations often function as sophisticated intertextual works that require readers to navigate complex relationships between visual and verbal narratives, original texts and adapted forms, canonical authority and interpretive innovation. The apparent crisis of paper fiction reading hence reveals itself to be a transformation in the social and material contexts of literary interpretation, one that demands new theoretical frameworks capable of recognizing the legitimate complexity of multimodal meaning-making.

Instead of deplored the decline of traditional reading practices, literary scholars might recognize graphic novel adaptations as spaces / objects where reception theory can evolve to encompass the full range of contemporary interpretive competencies. The nowadays readers have changed and evolved into hybrid-multimodal culture consumers. The future of literary studies may not depend only on defending traditional hierarchies but on developing theoretical frameworks sophisticated enough to acknowledge the democratic potential inherent in contemporary reading practices. Thus, the rise of graphic novel adaptations does not represent a crisis of the ideal reader but an opportunity to construct more inclusive and theoretically robust approaches to literary interpretation that can account for the ways digital culture has transformed the social life of texts. In our increasingly visual and interconnected culture, the question is not whether canonical literature can survive, but whether literary theory can evolve to recognize the sophisticated interpretive practices already transforming how we read, understand, and value literary texts. This transformation offers the possibility of a more democratic literary culture—one that maintains critical rigor while expanding access, preserves cultural heritage while embracing innovation, and recognizes interpretive authority as distributed across communities rather than concentrated in institutional gatekeepers. The challenge facing literary studies is not to resist this transformation but to develop the theoretical sophistication necessary to understand and nurture it, ensuring that the democratization of literary interpretation enhances rather than diminishes our collective capacity for critical thought and cultural understanding.

References

Anderson, B. (1983). *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. Verso.

Bilouk, I. (2025). Towards understanding new digital-based reading practices in higher education institutions. *Journal of Studies in Language, Culture and Society*, 8(2), 311–325.

BooksFan42. (2023, October 10). Just finished the graphic novel adaptation of To Kill a Mockingbird—thoughts? [Online forum post]. Reddit. https://www.reddit.com/r/books/comments/174q2tx/just_finished_the_graphic_novel_a_daptation_of_to/

Bouacida, S., & Chellouk, H. (2024). Performing fatherhood: New father vs. old father in To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee (1960). *Journal of Studies in Language, Culture and Society*, 7(3), 102–112.

Boukemoum, A., & Maoui, H. (2021). Writing back to the center: The postcolonial novel as counter-discursive. *Journal of Studies in Language, Culture and Society*, 4(1), 44–54.

Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. In J. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education* (pp. 241–258). Greenwood.

Cannonball Read. (n.d.). Professional reviews. Retrieved April 8, 2024, from <https://cannonballread.com>

ClassicLitFan. (2024, January 22). Can graphic novels do justice to To Kill a Mockingbird? [Online forum post]. Reddit. https://www.reddit.com/r/booksuggestions/comments/19e5pqm/can_graphic_novels_do_justice_to_to_kill_a/

El Messaoudi, M. (2023). Unveiling the dynamic power of gamification in student learning through novel conceptual and theoretical frameworks. *Journal of Studies in Language, Culture and Society*, 6(2), 1–19.

Fish, S. (1980). *Is there a text in this class? The authority of interpretive communities*. Harvard University Press.

Fitzgerald, F. S. (2018). *The great gatsby: A graphic novel adaptation* (F. Fordham, Illus.). Scribner. (Original work published 1925)

Fitzgerald, F. S. (2020). *The great gatsby: The graphic novel* (K. Woodman-Maynard, Illus.). Scribner. (Original work published 1925)

Foucault, M. (1986). Of other spaces: Utopias and heterotopias. *Diacritics*, 16(1), 22–27.

GatsbyVisualReader. (2023, November 8). Comparing two graphic novel adaptations of The Great Gatsby [Online forum post]. Reddit. https://www.reddit.com/r/graphicnovels/comments/17qz8as/comparing_two_graphic_novel_adaptations_of_the/

Goodreads. (n.d.). *The great gatsby: The graphic novel* (K. Woodman-Maynard, Illus.) [Reader reviews]. Retrieved April 8, 2024, from <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/53265750-the-great-gatsby>

Goodreads. (n.d.). *To kill a mockingbird: A graphic novel* (F. Fordham, Illus.) [Reader reviews]. Retrieved April 8, 2024, from <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/39817995-to-kill-a-mockingbird>

Groensteen, T. (2007). *The system of comics* (B. Beaty & N. Nguyen, Trans.). University Press of Mississippi.

Habermas, J. (1989). *The structural transformation of the public sphere: An inquiry into a category of bourgeois society* (T. Burger, Trans.). MIT Press. (Original work published 1962)

Heidegger, M. (1962). *Being and time* (J. Macquarrie & E. Robinson, Trans.). Harper & Row. (Original work published 1927)

Houamdi, D. (2018). Critics' reception and readers' response to William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* and Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind*. *Journal of Studies in Language, Culture and Society*, 1(1), 72–84.

Husserl, E. (1970). *The crisis of European sciences and transcendental phenomenology* (D. Carr, Trans.). Northwestern University Press. (Original work published 1936)

Iser, W. (1978). *The act of reading: A theory of aesthetic response*. Johns Hopkins University Press.

Jauss, H. R. (1982). *Toward an aesthetic of reception* (T. Bahti, Trans.). University of Minnesota Press. (Original work published 1967)

Jenkins, H. (1992). *Textual poachers: Television fans and participatory culture*. Routledge.

Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence culture: Where old and new media collide*. New York University Press.

Kassous, I. Z., & Sarnou, H. (2021). Investigating the effectiveness of digital storytelling in developing Algerian learners' emotional intelligence: A case study of third year LMD students of English at Abdelhamid Ibn Badis University. *Journal of Studies in Language, Culture and Society*, 4(1), 109–120.

Kress, G., & van Leeuwen, T. (2006). *Reading images: The grammar of visual design* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

Kuhn, T. S. (1962). *The structure of scientific revolutions*. University of Chicago Press.

Lee, H. (2018). *To kill a mockingbird: A graphic novel* (F. Fordham, Illus.). William Morrow Paperbacks. (Original work published 1960)

Majoul, B. (2024). The power of literature: Can the dead speak? *Journal of Studies in Language, Culture and Society*, 7(1), 159–167.

McCloud, S. (1993). *Understanding comics: The invisible art*. HarperPerennial.

Mellit, D. (2021). The effects of film adaptations on EFL students' engagement with English literary texts: Students' and teachers' attitudes. *Journal of Studies in Language, Culture and Society*, 4(2), 65–77.

Mitchell, W. J. T. (1994). *Picture theory: Essays on verbal and visual representation*. University of Chicago Press.

Moretti, F. (2000). Conjectures on world literature. *New Left Review*, 1, 54–68.

Moretti, F. (2005). *Graphs, maps, trees: Abstract models for a literary history*. Verso.

Moretti, F. (2013). *Distant reading*. Verso.

Radway, J. (1984). *Reading the romance: Women, patriarchy, and popular literature*. University of North Carolina Press.

Rosenblatt, L. M. (1938). *Literature as exploration*. Appleton-Century.

School Library Journal. (n.d.). Adaptation reviews. Retrieved April 8, 2024, from <https://slj.com>

Spivak, G. C. (1988). Can the subaltern speak? In C. Nelson & L. Grossberg (Eds.), *Marxism and the interpretation of culture* (pp. 271–313). University of Illinois Press.

Spivak, G. C. (1999). *A critique of postcolonial reason: Toward a history of the vanishing present*. Harvard University Press.

Touche-kharouni, N. (2020). Using films as teaching materials in the course of civilization: Teachers' and learners' perspectives. *Journal of Studies in Language, Culture and Society*, 3(2), 153–173.

Union University Library. (n.d.). Comparative analysis blog posts [Blog]. April 8, 2024,, from <https://library.uu.edu>

Weber, M. (1946). Science as a vocation. In H. H. Gerth & C. Wright Mills (Trans. & Eds.), *From Max Weber: Essays in sociology* (pp. 129–156). Oxford University Press. (Original work published 1918)

Weber, M. (2001). *The Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism* (T. Parsons, Trans.). Routledge. (Original work published 1905)

Appendices
Discussion thread samples

Discussion Threads on Graphic Novel Adaptations

1. To Kill a Mockingbird (Reddit r/books)

"To Kill a Mockingbird published as a graphic novel" – noting this is the

first graphic novel version of TKAM, adapted with permission.

Community reactions: curiosity, skepticism, legitimacy debates.

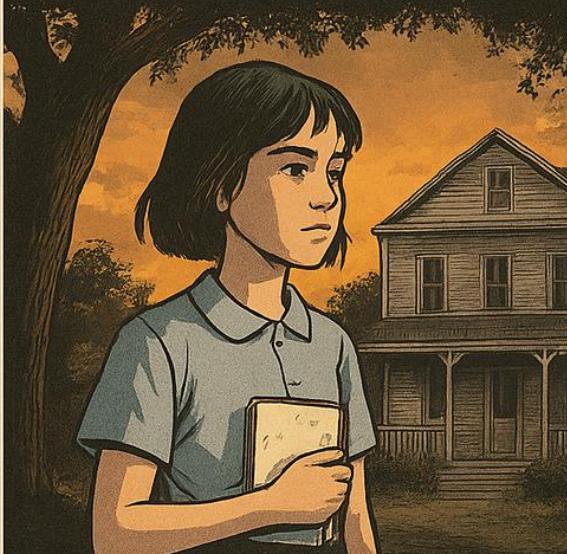
2. The Great Gatsby (Reddit r/bookclub)

"I loved this. During the book discussion, I said that Gatsby reminded

me of a child who was playing at being a rich adult."

Community reactions: nuanced character analysis, reflection on adaptation impact.

TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD

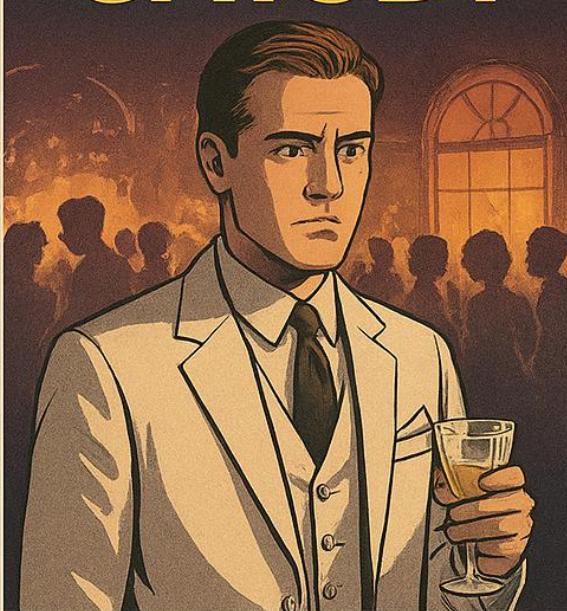


FRED FORDHAM

I just saw that *To Kill a Mockingbird* has been turned into a graphic novel. My first thought was "You've got to be kidding me!"



THE GREAT GATSBY



Gatsby is rightly afraid of people judging him ... we even see with all the rumors and judgments from his party guests.

