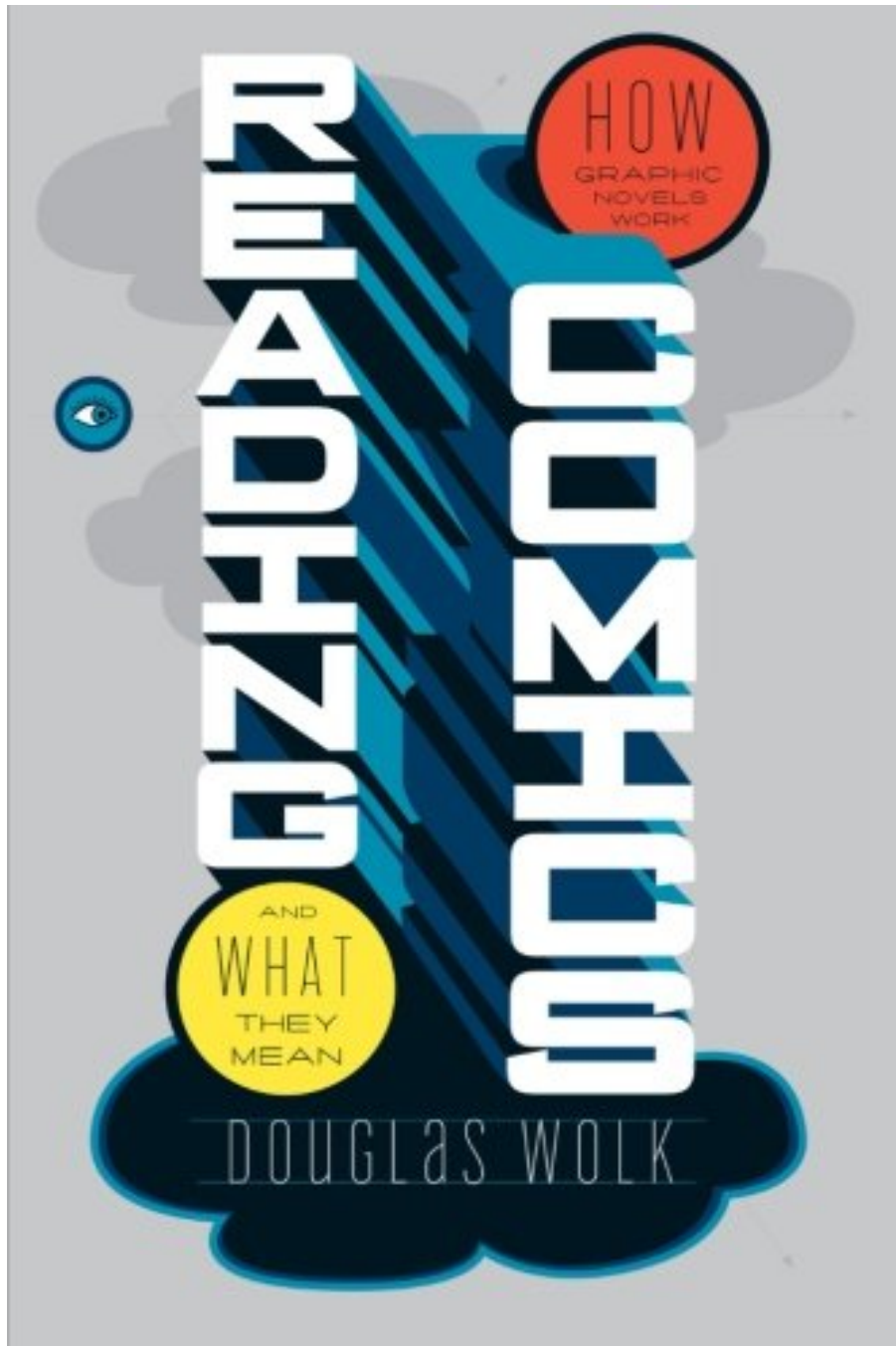


# READING COMICS: HOW GRAPHIC NOVELS WORK AND WHAT THEY MEAN BY DOUGLAS WOLK



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I want my money back. I bought this for ...

By Anonymous

I want my money back. I bought this for a college class and the teacher just lectured about how this isn't how to read comics.

35 of 39 people found the following review helpful.

A book that wants to be more than it is

By Blake Petit

This is rather a difficult book to review. While I definitely appreciate the fact that comics are being treated seriously as a scholarly work, I'm not really sure that this book is, in fact, what it claims to be. The first third of the book is ostensibly dedicated to a discussion of the format of comics and the potential of the medium, but Wolk constantly peppers the book with condescending commentary on mainstream books even as he purports to love them, going so far at one point as to suggest that there's something developmentally wrong with an adult who still enjoys a character he enjoyed as a child. While there's certainly nothing wrong with the heavy bias towards independent comics this book displays, he often paints most superhero comics with the same brush (except, of course, for perennial exceptions Watchmen, The Dark Knight Returns and a few others). In other words, he does quite a bit to perpetuate the same primitive attitudes about comics that this book supposedly works to dispel.

The rest of the book is essentially a recommended reading list, with chapters devoted to different comic creators and their work. This section, honestly, is rather predictable. He gushes over the work of Alan Moore (even the total derailment of Promethea), pretentiously assures us that it's "okay" to read Dave Sim and Steve Ditko though they display (horrors!) conservative ideas in their work, and talks about the mastery of Maus. Not to say this section is all bad. Even in his predictability, he provides a very strong analysis of the Hernandez brothers' work, that of Chris Ware, of Chester Brown, and several other names that a mainstream reader may never have heard of. Perhaps the best chapter in the book is his analysis of Grant Morrison's work, which has actually convinced me to give The Invisibles another try. (I was put off by the anarchist tone of the first volume, something that doesn't appeal to me, but the idea in the analysis that the intended readers of the comic are actually people who have already read it makes me think that it's worth trying again).

This isn't a bad book - there are a lot of interesting ideas and thoughtful insights into comics as a whole and several comics in particular. But in the end, Wolk suffers the same fate as a lot of people who have tried to analyze comics as an artform. Simply put, the book thinks it's more important than it actually is.

11 of 11 people found the following review helpful.

Needed an editor to really polish it

By Andrew Otwell

There's a lot to recommend this book. No matter how versed you are in comics (I'm not), you're sure to find something new here about an amazingly complex medium.

But it's got some annoying flaws. Particularly in the first third of the book, it can be seriously geeky when it should be introductory and welcoming. You may find yourself stumbling on what seems like fan jargon or expert knowledge. I didn't (and still don't) understand the stylistic differences between Jack Kirby's early and late work. But that's the kind of thing Wolk more or less assumes at times.

At best, the book has some wonderful visual analyses of comic panels and styles. That's good, because most of the arguments require you to trust the visual descriptions. For a book about comics there aren't nearly enough illustrations, and none in color. How about a companion website where readers could look at more

than a few low-quality black and white reproductions?

But Wolk's writing style gets annoying at this length. The book's trying to be academic and authoritative, but do it with a casual writing style. It doesn't work. Wolk often writes like a smart blogger; in other words, like someone who \*really\* needs an editor with a sharp red pencil. For example, he'll use annoying terms like "wave at" or "poke at" to mean "show" and "examine." He has a short "interview" between himself and Mr. Straw Man which feels like a clumsy way of avoiding constructing actual prose. Or he'll discover a new ten-dollar word (like "somatic") and use it two or three times in as many pages. He uses cliched writing (calling someone "a god-awful hack") constantly.

Worst, nearly every page has at least two or three parenthetical phrases, which makes following arguments clunky. An editor would have deleted these as either truly side comments, or else rewritten them to be part of the argument.

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Wolk: I was talking with some friends recently about the common mistake of recommending Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons' *Watchmen*, as great as it is, as a starting point for superhero comics--as one of them put it, that's like recommending *The Seventh Seal* as someone's first movie! For pure, unencumbered superhero joycore, I love Grant Morrison and Frank Quitely's *All-Star Superman*--if you've heard of Clark Kent and Lois Lane, you know everything you need to know to enjoy it, and it deepens with repeated reading. Brian Michael Bendis and Michael Gaydos's cruelly witty *Alias*, about a self-loathing ex-superheroine-turned-P.I., has lots of Easter eggs for the continuity-obsessed, but it probably works even better as a stand-alone story. And if you're at all into Victorian literature and/or want to sample Moore's work, the two volumes of *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* (drawn by Kevin O'Neill) are hugely fun on their own, and also illustrate by analogy the way a lot of the best superhero comics and other pulp art work: providing metaphors to illuminate the central concerns of their moment.

Amazon.com: You're as prolific a writer about music as you are about comics. How do you compare writing about the two?

Wolk: They're hard to compare--it feels like different parts of my brain deal with music and comics. I suppose both of them present the risk of paying too much attention to the words and missing the really important stuff. There's also much more of a tradition of music criticism with a strong, personal voice, and a richer shared vocabulary for talking about what's happening in music. ("Musical," for instance, is a perfectly normal word; there's no word that means "comics-ish"...) Right now, people writing about comics (in English, anyway) are still making it up as we go along, which is risky but exciting.

Amazon.com: I'm a big fan of your little book on James Brown's *Live at the Apollo*, my favorite so far in that wonderful 33 1/3 series, and one thing that struck me, having read your two books now, is that one, the James Brown book, is super-tight (fitting its subject I guess), aphoristic and efficient, while the other, *Reading Comics*, seems purposefully loose, willing to take a stroll and maybe not come back. Is that a difference you thought about while writing the two books?

Wolk: It was! I thought of Live at the Apollo as one long essay, a way of diagramming how the 35 minutes of that album exploded outwards in time, and I stole a lot of its tone and technique from George W.S. Trow's tiny fireball of a book In the Context of No Context. I wanted Reading Comics to be more conversational--the idea was to open up as many arguments as I could, to try to broaden the way people talk about comics instead of codifying it.

From Publishers Weekly

As the graphic novel flourishes and gains legitimacy as an art form, serious comics criticism is an inevitable byproduct, and PW contributing editor Wolk's analytical discourse is a welcome starting point. The volume contains two sections: Theory and History, an explanation of comics as a medium and an overview of its evolution, and Reviews and Commentary, a diverse examination of creators and works. This section spans Will Eisner's pioneering efforts as well as the groundbreaking modern comics by the Hernandez brothers, Chris Ware and Alison Bechdel. Since there are decades worth of books already focusing on the superhero genre, the raw clay from which the comics industry was built, the relatively short shrift given to the spandex oeuvre's insular mythologies is a wise choice that allows the nonfan a glimpse into the wider range that comics commands. Wolk's insightful observations offer much to ponder, perhaps more than can be fully addressed in one volume, but the thoughtful criticism and knowledgeable historical overview give much-needed context for the emerging medium. B&w illus. (July)

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From School Library Journal

Wolk certainly knows the field of comics and has interesting things to say about a wide variety of them. Unfortunately, his first two chapters are so bogged down because of his arrogant and condescending style that it's hard to find any content. In later chapters, some of his excellent assessment of comics and what makes them work as both art and entertainment shines through. The book is not meant to be a canon of what comics are good; as he states, "I'm more interested in starting discussions (and arguments) about comics than settling them with any kind of self-appointed authority." His critiques and in-depth looks at comics creators whose works he finds particularly interesting to discuss certainly meet that goal—but only for readers already familiar with the artists he's discussing. Despite his insight, his overuse of the phrase "more on that later" (oftentimes leaving readers with little explanation until chapters after his first argument) and the extremely antagonizing first two chapters make the book a difficult read. It may find use in classrooms about comics as literature or the nature of criticism, but it will have a difficult time finding an audience anywhere else.—Alana Abbott, James Blackstone Memorial Library, Branford, CT

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What sort of book **Reading Comics: How Graphic Novels Work And What They Mean By Douglas Wolk** you will choose to? Now, you will not take the printed publication. It is your time to get soft documents publication Reading Comics: How Graphic Novels Work And What They Mean By Douglas Wolk rather the published records. You can appreciate this soft documents Reading Comics: How Graphic Novels Work And What They Mean By Douglas Wolk in whenever you anticipate. Even it remains in expected area as the other do, you could read guide Reading Comics: How Graphic Novels Work And What They Mean By Douglas Wolk in your gadget. Or if you want a lot more, you can read on your computer or laptop computer to get complete display leading. Juts find it right here by downloading the soft file Reading Comics: How Graphic Novels Work And What They Mean By Douglas Wolk in link web page.