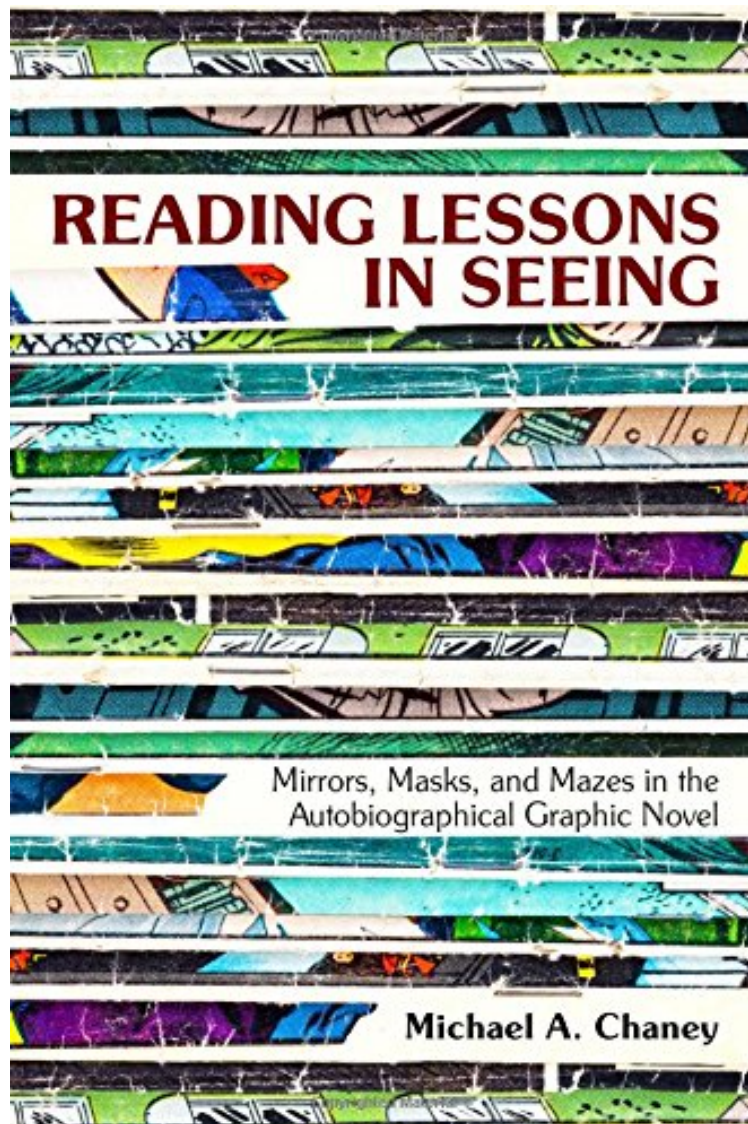


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## Reading Lessons in Seeing: Mirrors, Masks, and Mazes in the Autobiographical Graphic Novel

*Michael A. Chaney*

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## Lessons in Seeing: Mirrors, Masks, and Mazes in the Autobiographical Graphic Novel:

Literary scholar Michael A. Chaney examines graphic novels to illustrate that in form and function they inform readers on how they ought to be read. His arguments result in an innovative analysis of the various knowledges that comics produce and the methods artists and writers employ to convey them. Theoretically eclectic, this study attends to the lessons taught by both the form and content of today's most celebrated graphic novels. Chaney analyzes the embedded lessons in comics and graphic novels through the forms' central tropes: the iconic child storyteller and the inherent childishness of comics in American culture; the use of mirrors and masks as ciphers of the unconscious; embedded puzzles and games in otherwise story-driven comic narratives; and the forms' self-reflexive propensity for showing its work. Comics reveal the labor that goes into producing them, embedding lessons on how to read the work as a whole. Throughout, Chaney draws from a range of theoretical insights from psychoanalysis and semiotics to theories of reception and production from film studies, art history, and media studies. Some of the major texts examined include Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis*; Chris Ware's *Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth*; Joe Sacco's *Palestine*; David B.'s *Epileptic*; Kyle Baker's *Nat Turner*; and many more. As Chaney's examples show, graphic novels teach us even as they create meaning in their infinite relay between words and pictures.

Chaney's sophisticated application of theory from several fields to autobiographical comics reveals just how rich in effect and meaning these comics can be and precisely why this is so in each case that he analyzes. Stephen E. Tabachnick, professor of English at the University of Memphis and author, editor, and coeditor of numerous books, including *Teaching the Graphic Novel*, *Reading Lessons in Seeing* stands out because it is unafraid to be suggestive; it is evocative and often quite beautifully written; and it draws on critical theory, philosophy, and psychoanalysis with sophistication. Chaney argues that comics teach their viewers how they ought to be read. In elucidating how comics form makes abstractions of identity visible, he proposes, significantly, that comics present a new compact of textual engagement. Hillary L. Chute, author of *Disaster Drawn: Visual Witness, Comics, and Documentary Form* About the Author Michael A. Chaney, White River Junction, Vermont, is associate professor of English at Dartmouth College and chair of the African and African American studies program. He is the author of *Fugitive Vision: Slave Image and Black Identity in Antebellum Narrative* and editor of *Graphic Subjects: Critical Essays on Autobiography and Graphic Novels*.