

RESEARCH

Illusion, Kayfabe, and Identity Performance in Box Brown and Brandon Easton's Andre the Giant Graphic Biographies

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Drawing on Bourdieu's concept of 'the biographical illusion' and Eakin's concept of the 'relational self', this article explores the ways in which the conventions of wrestling add new layers of multimodal storytelling in Box Brown and Brandon Easton's Andre the Giant graphic biographies. Through textual and visual analyses, the article argues that Easton's first-person narration blurs the relationship between biographical writer and subject to create an intimate portrait of Andre as a conflicted individual. Conversely, the article shows how Brown's referential narration refuses entry into Andre's inner life while illustrating the entanglements of the self with others.

Keywords: biography; comics; kayfabe; performativity; wrestling

As seven-foot-four professional wrestler Andre Roussimoff, better known as Andre the Giant, stepped out of bed one morning in 1982, his ankle snapped beneath the weight of his five hundred pounds. The glandular condition acromegaly, which caused his spectacular strength and size and made him a sensational figure in professional wrestling, began to break his body down when he was in his thirties. From the beginning of his wrestling career in 1963 until his death in 1993, the strength and size of Andre's body defined how his matches were 'booked' or scripted in the wrestling arena. He was an — 'unstoppable force' (Brown 2014: 69). The World Wrestling Federation (WWF) scripted his broken ankle into an earlier match with Killer Khan, thereby maintaining Andre's undefeatable wrestling

persona and furthering the feud between the wrestlers. In wrestling culture, inserting an ex-diegetic injury into the diegetic narrative of the wrestling match is referred to as "keeping kayfabe".

As recent graphic biographies of Andre, Box Brown's *Andre the Giant: Life and Legend* (2014) and Brandon Easton and Denis Medri's *Andre the Giant: Closer to Heaven* (2015), demonstrate, the culture of kayfabe and Andre's spectacular body affected how both other wrestlers and the public perceived him. The texts negotiate the blurred lines between Andre's professional persona and personal identity, and between his embodiment and performance, as they each construct a life narrative for Andre. These negotiations also require the biographers to contend with the performative or narrative convention of kayfabe. 'Kayfabe,' which derives from an 'old carnival term [and reflects] professional wrestling's fairground and circus roots' (Litherland 2014: 531), refers to 'the illusion that wrestling [is] a legitimate sport and not scripted' (Schulze 2014: 55). The illusion of kayfabe often requires wrestlers to maintain their personas in a 'practice of sustaining in-diegesis performance into everyday life' (Litherland 2014: 531). Kayfabe, therefore, further obscures the lines between Andre's public persona and personal identity.

Just as kayfabe requires the acts of wrestling matches to fall under the illusion of reality, the form of comics and the generic expectations of biography require the construction of sequential images and a coherent narrative out of the disparate events of Andre's life. The graphic biographers select, visualize, and assemble individual moments into a sequential narrative in order to gain insights into the professional development and private life of this famous figure. Although the narratives of both graphic biographies similarly follow Andre's life from childhood to death, each biographer fleshes out his comic within his own writing and drawing style. Medri's bombastic and detailed illustrations resemble superhero comics. In contrast, Brown shapes Andre's life with simple characters and sparse backgrounds. Through comparative analyses of the paratextual elements, openings, and climactic moments of *Closer to Heaven* and *Life and Legend*, I demonstrate how these differences reveal the illusions required to construct graphic biographies from Andre's life. Easton and

Medri's introspective first-person narrative centers on an internal conflict between the person of Andre and his professional persona. The narrative blurs the lines between biographical writer and subject by depicting the narrator, author, and subject as a single individual so as to create an intimate portrait of Andre as a conflicted, but spectacular figure. Conversely, while Brown's referential narration refuses entry into Andre's inner life, it illustrates the entanglements of the self with others and the convergences of professional and personal identity. To construct biographical narratives and render drawn depictions of Andre in comics, the authors each confront, create, and kayfabe illusions of Andre's persona and life. Finally, because of the tradition of audience involvement in the storytelling process of wrestling performances, I examine the near absence of audiences in Medri's illustrations and Brown's panels. I conclude that Easton and Medri's audience encounters an illusion of intimacy with Andre that incites them to extol Andre as a champion of his inner battles, while Brown's readers remain in the dark to most aspects of Andre's life.

Easton and Medri's style in *Closer to Heaven* is simultaneously cinematic and intimate. It begins with paratextual elements of a credits page, designed as a wrestling or film poster, and a foreword that present an internal wrestling match between Andre's professional and personal selves. Easton concludes the comic with the word "fin", adding another cinematic cue. These filmic and wrestling conventions enclose and constrain Andre's life into a narrative with a beginning and an end that illustrates how Andre's professional persona beat against his personal life. It declares, 'Andre the Giant-vs-Andre Roussimoff'. Two contrasting black and white images of Andre accompany this declaration. As such, the credits page and the comic 'work' like a professional wrestling match. Leon Hunt explains, 'A 'work' is another word for a match, pointing to the performed, constructed, narrative qualities of wrestling... To 'work' is to draw the audience into this performance, to 'sell' one's opponent's moves or 'put them over', to make fans suspend their disbelief' (Hunt 2005: 122). The paratextual elements and the narrative of *Closer to Heaven* set up the conflict or match and then "work" to put Andre Roussimoff over Andre the Giant by selling that the constructed conflict reveals a true portrait of Andre the person.

In the credits page poster, Medri sets the match between the Giant and Roussimoff that the biographical work explores. Medri depicts the Giant as a hulking figure.¹ A shadow obscures his furrowed brow, almost resembling war paint. His body angles towards the image of Roussimoff on the opposite page while action lines extend from the Giant's body, emphasizing how he bears down on Roussimoff. In contrast, a young Roussimoff appears pale-faced and sullen, resembling a prosaic French mime. He stands unmoving. The scarf around his neck, a cloth that protects against the cold, lends vulnerability to Roussimoff. The juxtaposition of the two images, embedded in the wrestling poster, establish the conflict as a David and Goliath story, in which Andre plays both figures. Audiences then drawn into the work hope not only to see the "true" Andre, but expect to see Roussimoff victorious over the Giant by the end. By alluding to David and Goliath, the credits page also anticipates Andre's wrestling matches. When Andre first establishes himself as a victor in the ring, the narrator explains, "Pro wrestling is theater. People are hungry for a story. Every match, no matter how poorly constructed, tells a story. My story was always 'David vs. Goliath' except that Goliath was the hero" (Easton and Medri 2015: n.p). By connecting the professional persona of Andre the Giant and the victories of the Goliath character in the ring, the credits page suggests that Roussimoff's personal life lost repeatedly at the hands of the constructed narratives and kayfabe of professional wrestling.

Closer than Heaven identifies the particular personal losses in a heartfelt foreword, written by Andre's daughter, Robin Christensen Roussimoff, that immediately follows the credits page. In doing so, it "kayfables" an illusion of intimacy and insider knowledge by employing a real life source to attest to Andre's internal conflict. Robin writes, 'I'll never get to really know who he really was as a person, as opposed to the identity that the media and his employers manufactured for him... many parts of [Andre's] private life are still a mystery to me.' Both Robin and the comic attribute Andre's absence in Robin's life to the traveling required for wrestling performances, his Giant persona, and the culture of excess within the wrestling world. Just before depicting Andre receiving a letter from his daughter in the comic, Easton and Medri show Andre drinking and fighting with other wrestlers. Andre thinks, 'The excesses

of my life had pushed me into an unfamiliar place. I wasn't raised to be a disrespectful lout' (Easton and Medri 2015: n.p). The narration supports Easton's overarching theme by suggesting that the excessive lives of professional wrestlers led Andre to act as a monster outside of the ring. The Giant in the ring destroys the everyday person.

Further, when Easton and Medri portray Andre reading the letter in the following pages, they link the comic's narrative to the experiences of Andre's daughter by mimicking the font of the foreword in the letter. This blurring of diegetic and non-diegetic worlds echoes that between Andre's scripted persona and personal identity. By bringing Andre's daughter, his flesh and blood, into the comic's narrative, the writers suggest that they can embody Andre's conflicted person on their pages. Robin affirms, 'I hope when people read this graphic novel, they will get answers not to who Andre the Giant was as an entertainer, but who Andre Roussimoff was as a person' (Easton and Medri 2015: n.p). Like the WWF's insertion of Andre's broken ankle into his match with Killer Khan, Easton and Medri use kayfabe to enhance the work of their text and encourage their readers to believe in and follow the conflict between Andre's selves.

By framing the comic with sequences in which Andre reflects on his life, Easton and Medri further perform an illusion of intimacy with Andre that reinforces the theme of inner conflict. The initial comic sequence begins at Andre's North Carolina home in 1992, the year before his death. Over two panels, Medri zooms in on a warm-toned image of the house, bringing us closer into Andre's personal space (**Figure 1**).

The corresponding text opens, 'the internal struggle within all people isn't between good and evil... it's between optimism and pessimism. I learned this lesson far too late in life' (Easton and Medri 2015: n.p). By writing in the first person, Easton brings us into Andre's personal thoughts as he ascribes to him an internal battle. His autobiographical performance extends to both Andre the Giant and Andre Roussimoff. In "The Biographical Illusion" Pierre Bourdieu theorizes that the proper name designates the constant biological subject in disparate social spheres (Bourdieu 2000: 299). In *Closer to Heaven*, the first person voice replaces the proper name. This allows Easton to show Andre, the biographical subject as



Figure 1: The opening page of the *Closer to Heaven*. Easton, Brandon and Denis Medri (2015) *Andre the Giant: Closer to Heaven* (San Diego: Lion Forge, n.p).

a self-contained, sustained identity, while simultaneously building the David vs. Goliath battle throughout the text.

By speaking in what appears to be Andre's voice, Easton designates ownership of the conflict and the ordering narrative to Andre. Employing Hayden White's concept of 'emplotment', Michael Benton explains that the biographer imposes stories on the subject's life by creating 'order, continuity, coherence, and closure' from the data and events of the biographical subject's life (Benton 2015: 5). The narration suggests that the biographer is Andre and not Easton and Medri. As the sequence continues, Medri visualizes the promise of intimacy with the real Andre. Initially, Andre faces away from us and towards wrestling belts and photographs that hang on his wall. Medri draws the scene off-kilter, causing the room and image to lean under the weight of Andre. He is a giant within his own life story. On the final panel of the page, Medri draws a close-up of Andre. His face fills the frame, drawing the focus away from his body, the sight and site of his profession, and towards his personhood. Andre appears to promise that he will tell us what each visualized moment of his life meant to him professionally and personally until the moment of his death.

Like *Closer to Heaven*, Brown's *Andre the Giant: Life and Legend* also frames the narrative through visual media references and an introductory forward or note. However, unlike Easton's use of cinematic conventions and a foreword, Brown's renderings of televised interviews and wrestling matches draw attention to how the performance and kayfabe of wrestling resists intimate knowledge of wrestling figures. Moreover, *Life and Legend* does not pit Andre's professional and personal identities against each other, but instead shows these identities to be enmeshed. Brown's introductory note, entitled, "Isn't It Fake? A Note about the Nature of Professional Wrestling and Comics", addresses how kayfabe and the corresponding performance culture add an additional layer of artifice that must be interpreted. Brown explains, 'Because of the nature of kayfabe it's hard to believe anything a wrestler says. Sometimes wrestlers will hide things from each other; they'll 'work' even each other' (Brown 2014: 6). Therefore, all depictions of Andre, from television interviews, wrestling performances, and wrestlers' memories, must be considered performances.

In attempting to resist creating a new kayfabe or illusion of Andre, Brown points to the performative mediation in his depictions and avoids entering Andre's thoughts. Stylistically, Brown's minimalist cartoons maintain distance from their subject matter through their dissimilarity to real human beings. His characters have dots for eyes and simple lines for mouths. Benton argues that "the biographical subject is a textual creation as much as a historical recreation" (Benton 2015: 17). Brown's biographical subject is as much a *pictorial* creation that reveals images as interpretations of those they depict.

Likewise, as his images remain at a visual distance from their subjects, the comic remains observational and Andre remains emotionally distant from readers. Immediately following his note on kayfabe, Brown opens with a recreation of a video interview with wrestler Hulk Hogan that uses both the figures and settings to interrogate the memory of Andre that Hogan shares. Brown represents the mediation of the television interview and the role of performance in Hogan's memory by interspersing and altering the images of Hogan performing the story with depictions of the story events (**Figure 2**).

In his illustrations of Hogan recounting the memory of Andre yelling at the Nasty Boys, a group of young wrestlers, for interrupting his card game, Brown uses light and darkness to point to how while Hogan's story sheds light on Andre, he may also obscure elements of the truth. Brown draws Hogan within the typified "talking head" shot of television interviews. In the first panel of Hogan he uses very little black. A curve of light focuses on Hogan, as he illuminates us on the subject of Andre.

Correspondingly, the light also spotlights Hogan himself. The interview is a performance centered on Hogan, not Andre. By constructing the subject of Andre through the testimonies of others, Brown demonstrates how 'all identity is relational' and that narrative is the 'principal mode in which relational identity is formed and transacted' (Eakin 1998: 63). As a wrestler speaking to an outside audience, Hogan may maintain elements of kayfabe with his performance. He may be putting himself over as a closer friend to Andre than the Nasty Boys to show his greatness within the wrestling industry. Therefore, Hogan's narrative order as well as Brown's work as the

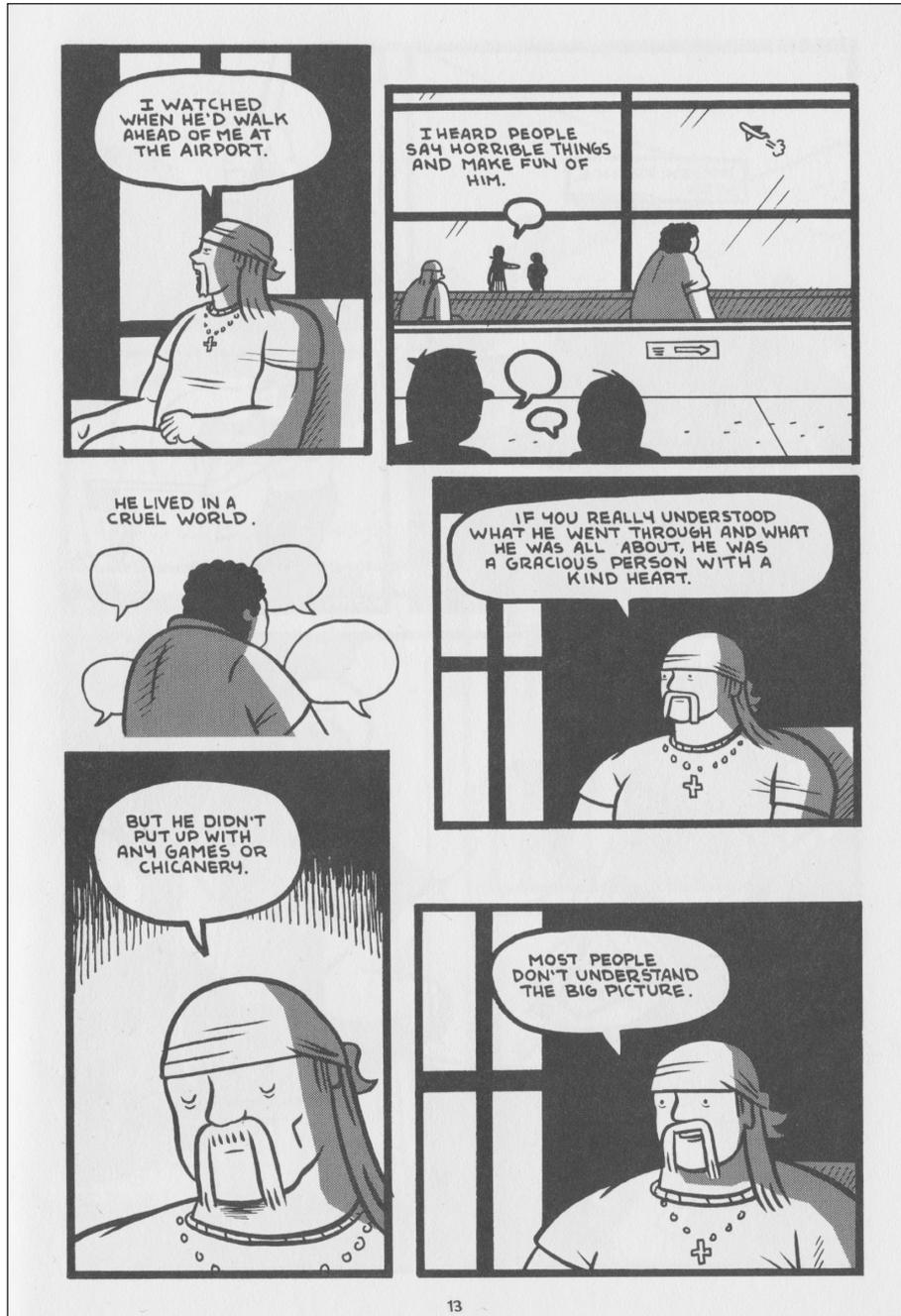


Figure 2: Hogan recounts his memory of Andre. Brown, B (2014) *Andre the Giant: Life and Legend* (New York: First Second, 13).

biographer arranges our understanding of Andre. As the sequence continues, Brown pulls back from the close-up of Hogan to reveal more of the space. The ensuing distance from Hogan prompts us to question his ability to illuminate Andre's life. These questions become more pronounced as black fills the top of the panel. When Brown returns to close-ups of Hogan later in the sequence, the light has disappeared and a shadow partially covers him, reflecting the limitations of his knowledge and the way kayfabe withholds information from audiences. As Brown mediates and interprets Hogan and his story, Brown echoes the mediations and interpretations in Hogan's performance in the source television interview.

Brown also identifies the limitations of knowing Andre's identity through a graphic biography by pointing to the limitations of Hogan's knowledge. Hogan cannot know what Andre thought or felt. He remembers, 'I watched when he'd walk ahead of me at the airport' (Brown 2014: 13). In a corresponding medium-shot image, Andre faces away from Hogan, the reader, and the blacked-out figures of the spectators in the foreground and background of the image. Hogan's narration continues, 'I heard people say horrible things and make fun of him' (Brown 2014: 13). In the following borderless panel, Brown closes in on Andre. Empty speech balloons press against him. In a later depiction of Andre and Hogan's climactic wrestling match, starburst-shaped flashbulbs similarly crowd Andre. These parallel images demonstrate how the public scrutinized Andre both inside and outside of the wrestling ring.

Further, the claustrophobic nearness of the speech balloons in the earlier panel suggests that the negative words of strangers bear down on Andre. By not enclosing the panel, Brown implies that Andre's struggles were outside the borders of the wrestling ring in the everyday world. Hogan reinforces Brown's pictorial assertion, stating, 'He lived in a cruel world' (Brown 2014: 13). However, Brown refuses to represent how Andre responded to such a 'cruel world'. The speech balloons are empty. Neither Hogan nor we, the audience, know what Andre heard. Brown asks us to empathize with Andre, but not to imagine that we know how he was thinking or feeling. Although he draws Andre's shoulders slumped in the close-up image, he continues to face away from us. Unlike Easton and Medri's text, which delves closer

to Andre and performs intimate inner knowledge through first person narration, we remain outside of Andre in this sequence. Brown creates a performance or depiction of Andre, but also shows the limitations or constructions that accompany his narrative illusion.

The narrative frameworks established in the openings of these two graphic biographies carry through to the same climax: Andre the Giant's 1987 WWF Wrestlemania III match with World Champion Hulk Hogan (WWE 2013). Through collecting and ordering the moments of Andre's life up to the Wrestlemania match, these graphic biographies use the kayfabe and work of wrestling to grant meaning to the match in the larger context of Andre's life. Bourdieu explains that the autobiographical (and biographical) narrative is, in part, --'motivated by the concern to give meaning, to rationalize, to show the inherent logic, both for the past and for the future, to make consistent and constant, through the creation of intelligible relationships, like that of the cause (immediate or final) and effect' (Bourdieu 2000: 298). Every wrestling match, every moment illustrating Andre's struggles related to traveling for wrestling, and every personal event outside the ring leads to this moment.

Nevertheless, their climaxes retain their divergent focuses. While the audience's marginalization in *Closer to Heaven* amplifies the feeling of intimacy between reader and text, the lack of in-arena audience in *Life and Legend* projects the representational distance Brown keeps from Andre. In "Debating with Fists: Professional Wrestling: Sport, Spectacle and Violent Drama," Daniel Schulze asserts that wrestling 'audiences are active agents in the match; they scream, shout, cheer, and ridicule' (Schulze 2014: 54). He explains, 'In a live event, the relationship between wrestler and crowd is reciprocal and fans do play a highly active part in the construction of the event. In this sense, fans are also performers' (Schulze 2014: 59). Therefore, because crowds play such an important role in the performance of wrestling, it is productive to consider how their marginalization serves the narratives and draws attention to the comics' audience. By interrogating the crowd's near absence in the climax, we might also further consider what illusions of Andre are constructed and confronted in the representations of his wrestling performances.

The graphic biographies present information that the Wrestlemania and television audiences do not possess. In both sequences of the match, the comics portray an aging Andre the Giant passing the torch to a virile Hulk Hogan. The process requires a narrative that turns Andre into a heel, a wrestling villain, while extolling Hogan as a face, or hero. Brown observes, 'The match itself was an example of the magic of pro-wrestling storytelling' (Brown 2014: 199). In fact, growing pain and immobility meant that Andre could no longer wrestle. Yet, as Emily Wilson notes, 'the erasure of pain is a crucial aspect of the performance of wrestling' (Wilson 2015: 7). To lift Hogan as the star of the WWF, the match could not reveal Andre's illness or pain. Because the WWF portrayed Andre as an 'unmovable force' throughout his career, his departure paradoxically also required the wrestlers to momentarily break the illusion of Andre's invincibility to glorify the kayfabe of Hogan's wrestling prowess. Most importantly, the audience needed to emotionally buy that Hogan defeated the Giant for the torch to be passed. Broderick Chow and Eero Laine argue, 'When wrestling fans participate in the illusion, keeping the game in play, their affirmation of the action of the match is an affirmation as if it were a real contest and simultaneously an affirmation of the reality of a violent move' (Chow and Laine 2014: 46). The success of the Andre the Giant-Hulk Hogan match requires the active and embodied support of the audience.

However, as noted earlier, both graphic biographies marginalize the audience of the match. *Closer to Heaven* maintains the illusion of intimacy with Andre and the internal battle of David and Goliath into its final frames. As such, it shows the climactic Hogan and Andre match to be primarily a match between Andre and himself. The sequence, therefore, devotes less space to Andre and Hogan's give-and-take performance. Easton requires only four pages compared to Brown's twelve pages. In each panel, Andre and his actions fill the frame. Medri's action lines wipe out the crowd, excluding it from participating in the match. Yet, video footage of the match shows that, although the audience appears blurred, their voices, cheering and booing, provide a sonic background (WWE 2013). The lack of detail in the Wrestlemania crowd reinforces our intimacy with Andre. We are not with the crowd; we are with Andre (**Figure 3**).

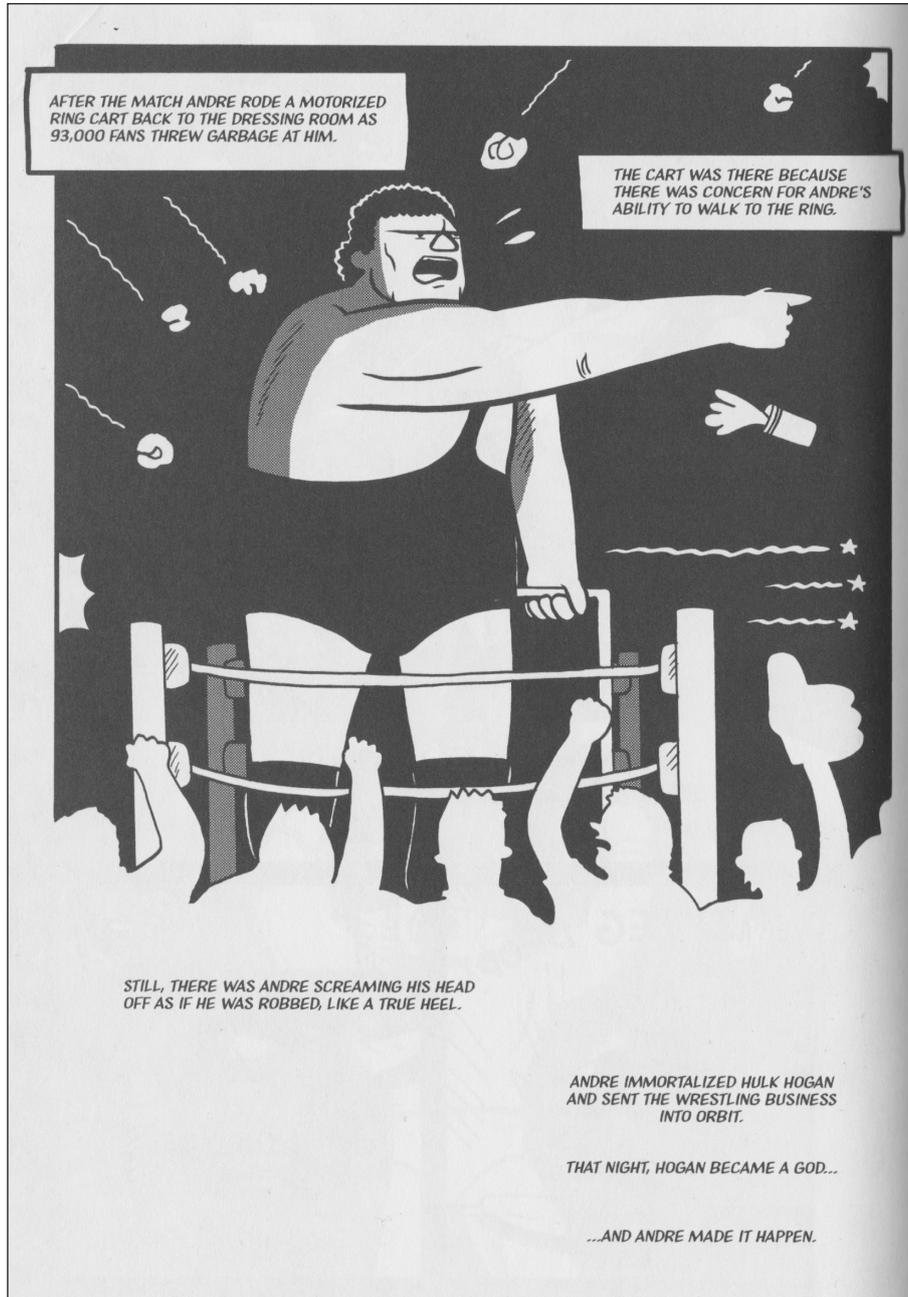


Figure 3: Andre the Giant and Hulk Hogan's Wrestlemania III match. Easton, Brandon and Denis Medri (2015) *Andre the Giant: Closer to Heaven* (San Diego: Lion Forge, n.p).

His actions, reinforced by the first-person narration, construct the match. By removing the collective voices of the crowd, Easton continues the development of Andre as an individually spectacular figure. The ropes in *Closer to Heaven* appear flimsy and low next to Andre's massive body. They cannot separate us from Andre, nor can they contain him. Moreover, by emphasizing Andre's vast size against the ropes, the authors once again point to how the conflict between Andre the Giant and Andre Roussimoff spills outside of the ring into everyday life when carried in Andre's psyche.

As Hogan defeats Andre in the Wrestlemania match, Easton and Medri bring the match between Andre Roussimoff and Andre the Giant to a close (**Figure 4**). In a wide panel, Medri draws Hogan, pulling Andre's leg back as he pins him. The wrestlers fight against a solid, pale yellow background, which suggests the glare of the spotlight on the wrestlers. Against the light, we cannot see the crowd or textual visualizations of their cheers. Instead, Easton filters their voices, and therefore the reciprocal relationship between wrestler and fans, through Andre. In doing so, Easton draws us into Andre's reflections on the match, career, and life with his narration. We hear Andre's meaning, not theirs. As Hogan pins Andre, the narrator states, "It was the loudest noise I'd ever heard in my life. All 93,173 of that record-breaking crowd shouted at the top of their lungs" (Easton and Medri 2015: n.p). The work of the match succeeds in putting Hogan over. However, Andre's perception emphasizes the climax of the match as a positive climactic moment in his life as well. Imagining Andre's perspective, Easton reminisces, "I'd done my part. I'd handed my legacy to Hogan. Whatever it is I'd done for the business would now be placed in his capable hands" (Easton and Medri 2015: n.p). These statements occur only pages from the conclusion. With his in-match defeat, Andre Roussimoff defeats Andre the Giant, bringing together the two sides of his identity. The conclusion wraps up the "biographical illusion" by using Andre's narration to grant meaning to his final work. When Andre ceases to speak on the last page, his life and the *Closer to Heaven's* biographical narrative end together. David finally defeats Goliath and the comic's work is complete.

In *Life and Legend*, the audience disappears through Brown's television-viewer modulated format. The black gutters and backgrounds reflect the black frames and



Figure 4: Andre the Giant leaves Wrestlemania III after being defeated by Hulk Hogan. Brown, B (2014) *Andre the Giant: Life and Legend* (New York: First Second, 210).

focus of the television lens while blocking out the audience completely. Brown correspondingly separates the wrestling performers and the arena and reading audiences by using the construction of the wrestling ring. Writing from a disabilities studies perspective, Wilson argues, 'There remains a surrogate gutter containing and constituting the temporal structure of the scene: the ropes of the wrestling ring. In their resemblance to comic gutters, the arena ropes act as another means of containing and constructing the dis/abled body' (Wilson 2015: 7). By containing Andre within the wrestling ring and the surrogate gutters, Brown aligns the construction of Andre's persona in the ring with the construction of Andre's life narrative in the comic's panels. In many moments, we must watch from outside. Like the in-arena audience, we are wrestling "marks", outsiders to Andre's life and remain in the dark.

Although Brown interprets the significance and narrative of the event through play-by-play text boxes, he also maintains elements of the official kayfabe by pointing to details that cannot be known to the audience. As the match begins, Hogan yells at Andre, but Brown's text box obscures the speech balloon. The arena and television audiences, cannot hear his words. Neither can we. Brown further reinforces the boundaries of the performance by illustrating the match's mediation. He inserts flashbulbs throughout the sequence, drawing attention to the spectacle of wrestling and the focus of cameras in shaping it. The starburst shape of the flashes mirrors the blocked out speech balloon, suggesting that although the words cannot be heard, the spectacle only requires the performance of speaking and not the words themselves. Furthermore, the empty speech balloon recalls those in the opening scene: Hogan's interview performance. Just as the absence of words in those speech balloons indicate that we cannot know what Andre experienced as a public spectacle in everyday life, the spectacle of wrestling blocks out aspects of what Andre experiences in the ring.

As Brown reinserts the audience in the final panel of the match, he makes it clear that any performance or depiction of a life, whether in the ring or in his graphic biography, creates an illusion or kayfabe of a meaningful narrative. In a two-thirds splash page, Andre, defeated, leaves the ring to the raised fists of the spectators. Because

Brown leaves the bottom of the frame open, the audience blends into the remaining blank space of the page. The gutters disappear completely, breaking down the boundary between the audience in the comic and the audience reading the comic. In this climactic and connective space between the in-diegetic match audience and the ex-diegetic comic audience, Brown points to the conflicting constructions of Andre's identity or persona in his wrestling performance and in the pages of the comic. The arena and television audience interpret the emplotment of the match, following the kayfabe narrative, to identify Andre as a heel and loser of the match. They perform their hatred by booing and throwing garbage as Andre exits the arena. Conversely, following Brown's narration, we celebrate Andre's success. Summing up the match, Brown explains, 'Andre immortalized Hulk Hogan and sent the wrestling business into orbit. That night, Hogan became a god... and Andre made it happen.' He leaves the arena having successfully completed his performance as Andre the Giant. Andre remains the "face" of the comic (Brown 2014: 199).

In 2014, at *Wrestlemania XXX*, wrestlers took to the ring for the Andre the Giant Battle Royale. The multi-wrestler match concluded when the svelte wrestler Cesaro body-slammed the gigantic wrestler Big Show, who was originally billed as Andre the Giant's son. The moment echoed the climax of Hogan and Andre's iconic match, showing that Andre's identity and performance continue to be jointly reimaged and reinterpreted. Although Roland Barthes argued that wrestling does not require interpretation, the referential act in the Battle Royale suggests that every action and moment in wrestling may bend to the narratives and histories surrounding it (Barthes 2012: 4). Likewise, the graphic biographies by Easton and Medri and Brown illustrate how an identity and life also become malleable through the emplotment and framework of narratives. The contrast between Easton's intimately constructed and conflicted depiction of Andre and Brown's relationally entangled, but ultimately unknowable, Andre point to the ways in which graphic biographies perform the identities of their subjects. Through visual and textual interpretations, both *Closer to Heaven* and *Life and Legend* shape Andre to fit within their own kayfabes or illusions of his life.

Note

¹ In "Hyperability: The Superhero Influence and Disability in Box Brown's *Andre the Giant: Life and Legend*", Emily Wilson (2015) makes a similar observation in regards to the depiction of Andre in Brown's comic. However, I would note that Brown's "Hulk" appears less aggressive than Medri's illustration.

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The author has no competing interests to declare.

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