

## AFTERLIVES



# Afterlives

Scandinavian classics  
as comic art adaptations

Camilla Storskog



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No translation would be possible if in its ultimate essence it strove for likeness to the original. For in its afterlife – which could not be called that if it were not a transformation and a renewal of something living – the original undergoes a change.

Walter Benjamin,  
*The Task of the Translator*



# Preface

In the summer of 2013, struggling with my PhD thesis, I went to see a retrospective dedicated to Guido Crepax at Milan's Palazzo Reale. I had heard from friends and family how Crepax's female characters had made their adolescent hearts quicken – little did I know I was on the verge of seeing something that would make my heart beat even faster. On show in one room was a full page from *La storia immortale*, Crepax's revisiting of Karen Blixen's *The Immortal Story*, an exquisite combination of the draughtsman's craft, sophistication, and sharp irreverence and the mesmerising narrative wit of the baroness. In an adrenaline rush of delighted rapture, I knew I had the new research project I was not even looking for.

Challenged years on to write the preface to a book about how several Scandinavian works of literature (and a film) have been interpreted in comics, the powerful impact of Crepax's vision of Blixen's tale strikes me as clearly illustrative. It materialised the best of two worlds: word and image, Scandinavian literature and Italian artwork. The opportunity to move in and out of the worlds of telling and showing appealed on a personal level. After more than twenty years in Italy, with a background in illustration, and working as an instructor in Scandinavian literature at the University of Milan, rereading the Nordic classics in adaptations that had migrated not only across media, but also across time, place, culture, and language, attracted me immensely. By changing perspectives, adaptations have the power to overturn many of the expectations that come with the reading, studying, and teaching of the classics. Just when you think you have a fair grip on a text, adaptations can make you reconsider your habitual understanding by shining a light on dimly

perceived aspects of the adapted work. When in an imprudent pretension to familiarity with the text you let your level of attention sink beneath the threshold of receptiveness, adaptations can catch you off guard. In Julie Sanders's words:

in an academic context the study of adaptation has been spurred on by the recognized capacity of appropriations to respond to, and to write back to, an informing original from a new and revised perspective. In this set of actions the potential for creativity exists. Adaptations and appropriations, be they prequels, sequels, extensions, amplifications or alternatives, highlight often perplexing gaps, absences and silences within the original.<sup>1</sup>

Along these lines we will, for example, investigate examples of comic art adaptations of Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales that offer bewitching counternarratives to the global trend of sanitising Andersen as a writer merely for children; we will see how a comics creator like Guido Crepax has told his own story by using the autobiographical content in Ingmar Bergman's *Persona* as a springboard; how, as if by sleight of hand, the warrior kings and lion-hearted soldiers of a nineteenth-century Finland-Swedish historical novel were revitalised in comic strips in the Swedish 1940s to meet the need for national solidarity and heroic role models in another country and a different era. These examples hint at the aims of this book. Adopting a more practical than theoretically oriented approach, the nine case studies at the heart of this study are used to explore some of the various levels and degrees to which an adapted text manifests itself in an adaptation, chart how the process of adaptation can revitalise the perception of a familiar source, and reveal how new meaning is generated by intermedia translations and acts of decontextualisation. Last but not least, the formal inventiveness of the adaptations under consideration persistently confronts us with the question of the medium-specific narrative strategies of comic art.

While paying homage to a selection of Scandinavian classics and to the cross-national art of drawing, this book sets out, on a more general line, to contribute to the academic research on adaptations, an area

which has traditionally favoured forms of migration between other media than comic art. In her preface to the second edition of *A Theory of Adaptation*, Linda Hutcheon, who has expanded the field of adaptation studies to include videogames or art installations, claims: 'film and fiction still appear to remain at the top of the list of major academic concerns'.<sup>2</sup> Recent book-length studies and collections of essays dedicated to issues related to comic art adaptations testify, notwithstanding, to a growing academic interest.<sup>3</sup> However, the marginal attention paid to the Scandinavian scene is the reason for this book, which looks at transpositions building on works conceived by Danish, Norwegian, Swedish and Finland-Swedish authors: Hans Christian Andersen, Karen Blixen, Henrik Ibsen, Jon Fosse, Karin Boye, Ingmar Bergman, and Zacharias Topelius. A reading list of comic art adaptations drawing on Scandinavian source texts is also included.

Although the common context of the works under scrutiny is their being adaptations in the form of comics, the artistic outputs and narrative strategies employed are so disparate that the same methodological tools did not seem effective in all circumstances. While some adaptations that we will look at leave the storyline of the adapted text as good as intact and seem to have as their main goal for the retelling the exploration of the medium specificities of comics, others appropriate their source of inspiration to tell a different story, twisting the plot as we know it to the point where only paratextual information (title, foreword) or emblematic characters and visual homages identify the *oeuvre* as a revisitation of an earlier work. Others, though, engage more strongly with ideological discourses, exploiting the plot, ideas, themes, motifs in the adapted text to comment on their own cultural and contextual environment. The motley collection of narrative strategies and artistic expressions here explored thus raises questions that cannot be answered by applying a single interpretive grid, suggesting, instead, the need for analytical inclusiveness and a well-assorted methodological toolbox that is reorganised from case to case.

The book falls into three parts, sorted by category. 'Medium' gathers examples of adaptations whose artistic complexity is judged suitable for an exploration of the medium-specific potential of comics to rethink a

source work conceived in a different form of art. In 'Fabula' I look at reworkings of the adapted text which depart so profoundly from the story matter that a shift in focus, or of genre, occurs in the adaptation. Created expressly in response to the climate and context of their own times, the works present in the third part, 'Discourse', are seen as elucidative examples of how a classic not only adapts to the possibilities of a different medium and to transformations of its master plot, but also to new cultural, editorial, social, and geographical contexts. Each part is introduced by a brief discussion of the dominant modality in each of these three categories of adaptation.

The many paths to the art of adaptation have prompted consideration of the terminology in adaptation studies. In her influential book *Adaptation and Appropriation*, Sanders separates the two concepts in her title according to the nature of the relationship established between the two texts. For Sanders, an 'adaptation' consciously links up with its forerunner, while an 'appropriation', intent on becoming 'a wholly new cultural product', severs that connection.<sup>4</sup> Katja Krebs, by contrast, in a recent essay on stage adaptations and 'related modalities' qualifies the relationship between the source material and its rereadings as anything but mono- or even bidirectional.<sup>5</sup> Described as 'messy, multifarious, collaborative' (and 'reciprocal') this relationship not only leads to 'adaptations' and 'appropriations', but also to 'translation[s], version[s], (re) writing[s], (re)imagining[s]', and so forth.<sup>6</sup> While encouraging attempts to classify, categorise, and define boundaries between various modalities of adaptation, Krebs asserts that the difficulties that arise must be attributed to the context of reception and to the receiver's knowledge of the adapted text, rather than to the relationship established between the two texts:

we need to recognise that ... attempts to position boundaries may say more about our own context of reception than about the examples of (re)writing under discussion. In other words, we as spectators in the shape of reviewers, theatre practitioners, expert witnesses, and so forth, enact the boundaries between these categories. And such an enactment

of boundaries depends very much on the specific access a spectator has to the 'dialectical relation' between source and adaptation: a spectator with knowledge of the source will enter the dialectical relationship at a different point from a spectator who has no knowledge of the source.<sup>7</sup>

In this book, I abstain from exercises in terminological hair-splitting and adopt 'adaptation' as an umbrella term wide enough to accommodate works with different degrees of proximity to their sources of inspiration, ranging from faithful reproductions of the plot at one end to mere allusions to ideas, themes, motifs, characters, or visual styles present in the adapted text, at the other. This aligns with Hutcheon's definition in *A Theory of Adaptation*, where 'adaptation' is variously used to indicate (i) 'an acknowledged transposition of a recognizable other work or works'; (ii) 'a creative *and* an interpretive act of appropriation/salvaging'; and (iii) 'an extended intertextual engagement with the work'.<sup>8</sup>

Because of the attention given to the formal language of comics, to how the 'authority' of the source plot is challenged, and to the close connections between the adaptation and its own contemporary context of publication, potential readers should not expect the focus to be on comparative readings, relating the adaptation to the adapted text. True, this book addresses Krebs's 'spectator with knowledge', familiar with the source texts but willing to look beyond the mono- or bidirectional bond between adapted text and adaptation to see the multidirectional relationships established with visual intertexts, with genres foreign to the adapted text, with new publication contexts. Yet I also have in mind the general reader with an interest in comics, adaptation, and comics as adaptation – and in the number of ways literature travels the world and crosses the borders of media, language, and culture.

The title of the book is inspired by a passage in Walter Benjamin's essay *The Task of the Translator*. Benjamin writes of translation as an activity that goes above and beyond the reproduction of meaning; an occupation having as its ultimate goal the revitalisation of living things. He observes: 'no translation would be possible if in its ultimate essence it strove for likeness to the original. For in its afterlife – which could not

be called that if it were not a transformation and a renewal of something living – the original undergoes a change.<sup>9</sup> *Afterlives* singles out these changes and describes how several living classics have been translated into the language of comics.

Berkeley, summer 2023



# Introduction

All great texts contain their potential translation between the lines.<sup>10</sup>

## Classics as adaptations

Most reflections on what characterises a ‘classic’ work of art contain a paradox. Contributions to the discussion over the last fifty years have continued to stress the controversy in attempts to award classic status to literary works by a readership torn between retromania and a hunger for novelty, reluctant to accept arbiters of taste, but at the same time avid consumers of ratings and rankings.<sup>11</sup> According to Anders Olsson, the concept of a ‘classic’ is, indeed, encapsulated in a hierarchy of contradictions.<sup>12</sup> Not only do we speak of major classics and minor classics, great classics and modern classics, but, in the name of the frequently invoked quality of ‘timelessness’, a classic work of art is expected to be stable and unchanging, while at the same time capable of striking a chord with new generations of readers because of its ‘relevance’ and ‘contemporaneity’. In Frank Kermode’s words, ‘It seems that on a just view of the matter the books we call classics possess intrinsic qualities that endure, but possess also an openness to accommodation which keeps them alive under endlessly varying dispositions.’<sup>13</sup> J.M. Coetzee, pondering his individual experience and appreciation of Bach contra the composer’s historical constitution, similarly concludes that a classic work of art defines itself precisely by ‘surviving’ hostile interpretations; a classic, he claims, survives ‘the criterion of testing’.<sup>14</sup> Bach, suggests Coetzee, survived ‘the kiss of death, namely being promoted during the nineteenth-century revival as a great son of the German soil’.<sup>15</sup>

Both Coetzee and Kermode thus resolve the potential conflict embedded in ‘the relation of permanence and change’ by turning it into the touchstone of classic status.<sup>16</sup> According to Kermode, ‘the only works we value enough to call classic are those which, and they demonstrate by surviving, are complex and indeterminate enough to allow us our necessary pluralities.’<sup>17</sup> A classic copes with this paradox, triggers a variety of responses, and tolerates an infinity of interpretive readings. In Coetzee’s words:

So we arrive at a certain paradox. The classic defines itself by surviving. Therefore the interrogation of the classic, no matter how hostile, is part of the history of the classic, inevitable and even to be welcomed. For as long as a classic needs to be protected from attack, it can never prove itself classic.<sup>18</sup>

This tolerance for semantic fluctuation makes the classics particularly interesting for the practice of adaptation. ‘Adaptations suggest’, Joe Gixiti argues, ‘that what makes the ... classics “timeless” or “universal” is that their stories and characters can be made to look familiar and relevant to a contemporary audience.’<sup>19</sup> In their introduction to *Adapting Greek Tragedy*, Vayos Liapis and Avra Sidiropoulou note of the adaptation process’s capacity to confront and reread the classics that ‘adaptation often contests the notion of the classic as an inviolable, authoritative model, one relying on (or imposing) specific cultural, semantic, or interpretive assumptions.’<sup>20</sup> When originating in other cultures and linguistic areas, which is the case of most adaptations considered here, the freedom to alter or supplement accredited readings of the classics is perhaps greater, while readers with a familiarity with what has become customary to say about the adapted texts are privileged when it comes to detecting the ways in which the adaptations challenge interpretive traditions.

Around the act of rereading revolve other proposals for a definition of a classic work of literature. ‘Rereadability’ is the criterion that a book needs to fulfil in order to obtain the status of a classic, according to Olsson. In the essay ‘Värdet av att läsa om eller Vad är en klassiker?’ (‘The Value of Rereading, or, What Is a Classic?’), Olsson argues that

a classic must stand the test not so much of individual rereadings as of rereadings by generation after generation.<sup>21</sup> Several of Italo Calvino's fourteen proposals for a definition of a classic work of literature in the essay 'Perché leggere i classici' ('Why Read the Classics?'), first published in 1981, similarly depart from rereadability.<sup>22</sup> First on Calvino's list of definitions is an apparently simple statement according to which 'The classics are those books about which you usually hear people saying: "I'm rereading...", never "I'm reading..."'.<sup>23</sup> If Calvino argues that a classic is a book 'worth' rereading, the phrase also suggests the social importance of being well read: either you read the classics or you feign the need to refresh forgotten knowledge, similar to the sardonicism generally attributed to Mark Twain that holds that a classic is something everyone wants to have read and no one wants to read.

In all seriousness, rereading is above all about the pleasure of books. The classics, according to Calvino, take readers down untravelled paths with every new reading: 'A classic is a book which with each rereading offers as much a sense of discovery as the first reading', 'Classics are books which, the more we think we know them through hearsay, the more original, unexpected and innovative we find them when we actually read them'.<sup>24</sup> If rereading can change the understanding of a text and heighten perception, there is also enjoyment and comfort in retelling, rereading, and rehearing the same stories. As a form of rereading, the process of adaptation merges the act of repetition with elements of novelty and variation. In *A Theory of Adaptation*, Hutcheon speaks of the 'comfort of ritual combined with the piquancy of surprise'.<sup>25</sup>

From another viewpoint, as 'narratives of nostalgia', the avalanche of transpositions drawn from the classics could be framed in a general trend of 'retro' and 'musealisation', and as objects of interest for cultural memory studies. In this latter sense, the adaptation's reactualisation of stories from the past ultimately gives the lie to the appetite for absolute innovation presumed to characterise our contemporary age. Like musealisation, the process by which an object is detached from its original context and exhibited to be contemplated as to its meaning, transmedia rereadings of the classics may arguably compensate for what Kristian Handberg calls 'the acceleration of history and its changes and the quick

obsolescence of objects and ideas', in his discussion of the retro trend, arguing against 'the reading of retro as a depthless and inferior practice'.<sup>26</sup>

Calvino's suggested definitions moreover point to the network of intertextual relationships and influences that will surface in a classic. As his fifth and seventh definitions have it, 'A classic is a book which even when we read it for the first time gives the sense of rereading something we have read before' and 'The classics are those books which come to us bearing the aura of previous interpretations, and trailing behind them the traces they have left in the culture or cultures (or just in the languages and customs) through which they have passed.'<sup>27</sup> Here, Calvino is saying that no book is an island, and, fortuitously, points to the concept of 'originality' calling attention to a key controversy in the discourse about adaptations, where the tendency has been to view the adapted text as 'original' and the adaptation as 'imitative'.

In order to consider 'originality' and 'imitation' without taking up the cudgels in a strenuous defence of the outstanding oneness and otherness of adaptations, Robert Hutchins's and Mortimer Adler's idea of a 'great conversation', binding together texts in a dialogue that criss-crosses eras and nations, looks to intertextual influence to determine classic status. Where in his essay 'The Great Conversation' Hutchins speaks of canonical works of literature as examples that by their inspiration have 'lifted' their readers down the ages, and of the 'drive and creativeness' that the classics can spark, Adler builds in *The Great Conversation Revisited* on the idea of interchange between writers to strip these connections of any connotations of dispute or rivalry, and presents them as authors 'listening to what their predecessors have had to say ... They not only harken to the thought of their predecessors, but also respond to it by commenting on it in a variety of ways'.<sup>28</sup> In the present book, the adapted texts will variably be spoken of in terms of 'forerunners', 'predecessors', 'precursors', 'source texts', 'hypotexts', or 'prototexts', although the intention is never to rank the adaptation as subordinate to a 'classic original', which chronologically came first, but similarly has its own networks of influences.

In the field of adaptation studies, Sanders further underlines the close interdependence and the two-way communication between the

canon and the practice of adaptation. While ‘Adaptation and appropriation are dependent on the literary canon for the provision of a shared repository of storylines, themes, characters and ideas upon which their creative variations can be made’, it remains true that ‘adaptation becomes a veritable marker of canonical status; citation infers authority.’<sup>29</sup> Through the process of adaptation, the adapted text increases its impact and prestige and, in the case of a classic, affirms its status as an evergreen, while also giving cachet to the adaptation. Whether the adaptation reads as a homage to, an assault on, or a pastiche of the source, it is keeping the adapted text alive – echoing Coetzee’s admiration for Bach’s capacity to survive use and abuse. Manipulation and variation may prove necessary for the vitality of the source text, a phenomenon compared to biological evolution by Bortolotti and Hutcheon, as we will see.<sup>30</sup> With reference to cinematographic transposition, Robert Stam similarly points to the literary works’ dependency upon the practice of adaptation and appropriation for survival, even at the expense of their own metamorphosis: ‘if mutation is the means by which the evolutionary process advances, then we can also see ... adaptations as “mutations” that help their source ... “survive”.’<sup>31</sup>

Following up on the idea of a ‘great’ conversation, it is fair to assume that the bond between the adapted text and the adaptation is rarely an exclusive ‘one-to-one relationship’.<sup>32</sup> As the case studies in the present book show, adaptations often extend the ‘two-way’ communication to conversations involving more than two specific texts. Many of my examples form ‘mosaics of citations that are visible and invisible’, and can be read as palimpsestic patchworks in which the adaptation not only connects to the adapted text, but establishes webs of relations, in particular to iconographical sources.<sup>33</sup> A *fil rouge* in the analysis is therefore the concept of visual intertextuality – else known as intericonicity, art quotes, interpictoriality, or pictorial quotation – describing the interconnectedness between images.<sup>34</sup> In adaptations into a visual medium such as comics, the reader is often asked to look beyond the relationship to the adapted text and address the use of intericonic referencing – images, or iconic artworks, copied, sampled, changed, transformed or recombined to fit the flow of the narration, where they

produce new meaning. According to Thierry Groensteen, the practice of intericoncity in comics activates a process of reflection that calls on the readers to look deep into their personal image bank and identify the source image, the period, and the artist, and think about what function those references serve in the narration.<sup>35</sup> Whether extensively or occasionally, art quotes and references to iconic models and items external to the source narrative are visible in many of the adaptations investigated here: the visual language of Crepax's *La storia immortale* makes no secret of quoting the aesthetics that distinguish *Une Histoire immortelle*, Orson Welles's cinematographic transposition of Blixen's tale; in the adaptation *Bianca in persona*, Crepax likewise improvises on the relationship between the two women at the core of Ingmar Bergman's film *Persona* by using archetypal characters of his own creation while at the same time adapting his distinctive style to the recognisable aesthetics of the film. While Bim Eriksson taps into comics classics (Mickey Mouse, Wonder Woman) when creating the characters in *Baby Blue*, Bo Vilson reproduces emblematic history paintings from the Swedish nineteenth century in his comic-strip feuilleton of *Fältskärens berättelser*. In the two adaptations of Andersen's *Historien om en Moder*, there are allusions to the art of Edvard Munch and Gustav Klimt respectively, and the many references to the representation of women in art history are the backbone of Cinzia Ghigliano's visualisation of Ibsen's Nora. In such a way, comic art adaptations not only engage with stories from the past, but also with pictures from the past. They prove capable of continuing the great, intertextual conversation in a dimension where not only literature produces literature by 'writing back', responding to, and commenting on predecessors, but where visual art generates visual art by 'drawing back'.

### Choice of primary sources

This book considers comic art adaptations that build on a body of key texts in the Nordic tradition spanning various genres, media, and eras. Andersen's *Historien om en Moder* (*The Story of a Mother*) and *Den lille Havfrue* (*The Little Mermaid*), Karen Blixen's *Den udødelige Histoire*

(*The Immortal Story*), Jon Fosse's *Nokon kjem til å kome* (*Somebody Is Going to Come*), Ingmar Bergman's *Persona*, Karin Boye's *Kallockain*, Zacharias Topelius' *Fältskärens berättelser* (*The Surgeon's Stories*), and Henrik Ibsen's *Et Dukkehjem* (*A Doll's House*) are fairy tales, long and short prose, plays, and a film. They cover a period of almost 150 years, from Andersen's *Historien om en Moder* of 1848 to Fosse's *Nokon kjem til å kome* of 1996.

The reasoning behind this choice of hypotexts is threefold.<sup>36</sup> It springs out of the desire to produce a study with a pan-Scandinavian approach, in line with the Italian tradition of Scandinavian studies I share. It also relates to the method adopted in this book. Since comparative readings, systematically measuring the adaptation against the adapted text, have given way to a focus on multidirectional intersections – especially on the intericonic dialogue with other artworks – and to the adaptation's medium-specific qualities, a familiarity with the source work (regarded as likely with the 'classics') is, to a certain extent, expected of the targeted audience. Last, a source material made up of adapted texts conceived in many genres offers the opportunity to look at the capacity of comic art adaptations to confront a variety of encounters. The discordance between the presumed 'innocence' of a literary genre such as children's fairy tales and their remediation into stories of horror and nihilism, or between the 'high-brow' status of a canonical work and a medium often routinely associated with popular culture and escapist literature is approached. We will see how this distance can both be confirmed and shortened, for example through the comics creators' often extensive use of visual intertextuality.

The choice of hypertexts has been influenced by different criteria. One was to gather case studies to support the underlying theoretical frame: to what extent did a potential example of analysis reflect one of the three approaches to adaptation illustrated in this study? The choice was made intending to represent all three of the established categories – medium, fabula, discourse – and in order to offer heterogeneous variety as to the differences in the transpositional process. The adaptations chosen thus use the medium of comics with different intentions, they are more or less closely connected to the storyline in the source work,

they engage more or less overtly with ideological discourses and issues regarding their own cultural and contextual environment.

A second criterion is aesthetic: artistically complex and formally inventive adaptations have been favoured because of their capacity to provide information about how the formal resources of comics are used to create meaning. Medium-specific narrative strategies, for example aspects such as panelling, framing, braiding, visual intertextuality, and reverse ekphrasis, are my focus throughout the book.

The third and last criterion is seemingly at odds with the choice of hypotexts. While the adapted texts represent the Danish, Norwegian, Swedish, and Finland-Swedish culture canon, the adaptations chosen for closer scrutiny are more widely cross-national, with a majority stemming from traditions outside the comics mainstream. Some are lesser-known publications by acclaimed artists; many have been published by small independent presses or in magazines. To some extent they have been selected on the principle of ‘dig where you stand’. Four adaptations are the output of Italian *fumettisti*: *Storia di una madre* by Gabriele ‘AKAB’ di Benedetto; *La storia immortale* and *Bianca in persona* by Guido Crepax; *Nora* by Cinzia Ghigliano. Three adaptations have been conceived by Scandinavian comic art creators, *Historien om en mor* by the Dane Peter Madsen; *Baby Blue* and *Fältskärens berättelser* by the Swedes Bim Eriksson and Bo ‘Bovil’ Vilson, respectively. The last two works, *Quelqu’un va venir* and *Reflets d’écume*, were conceived by two artists based in France, Pierre Duba and Alberto Varanda. The wish to give priority to little-known comic art adaptations – all unresearched or under-researched – and bring them to a larger audience prompted my decision to produce a fully illustrated study.

## Previous research

In the introduction to the book *Comics and Adaptation*, Benoît Mitaine, David Roche, and Isabelle Schmitt-Pitiot trace the history of the rising interest in comics studies.<sup>37</sup> They argue that the publication of Eco’s 1962 essay ‘Il mito di Superman’ (‘The Myth of Superman’) and the foundation – by influential artists and intellectuals such as Alain Resnais,



Jean-Claude Forest, Francis Lacassin, Pierre Couperie, and Alain Robbe-Grillet – of the French association for devotees to comics, Le Club des bandes dessinées (the Comics Club), also in 1962, marked the start of a new era in which comics were to become culturally significant and academically acceptable.<sup>38</sup> While earlier studies mainly strove to map the history of the ‘ninth’ art, subsequent decades saw the publication of critical and pedagogical writings in the field before professional scholarship erupted in the early 1990s with Scott McCloud’s *Understanding Comics*, famously presented in the form of comics.<sup>39</sup> The rise of comics scholarship in the 1990s must also be considered in the light of the huge success of works of graphic literature such as Art Spiegelman’s *Maus*, or Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons’s *Watchmen*, to name but two.<sup>40</sup> By the end of the century, Groensteen’s *Système de la bande dessinée* had appeared, and John Lent’s *International Journal of Comic Art* had been brought into being, only to be followed in the early twenty-first century by an avalanche of works on comics theory and criticism, and of new venues for academic work on comics, specialised journals such as *Image [é] Narrative* (2000–), *ImageTexT* (2004–), *Deutsche Comicsforschung* (2005–), *Mechademia* (2006–), *SIGNs – Studies in Graphic Narratives* (2007–), *European Comic Art* (2009–), *Studies in Comics* (2010–), *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics* (2010–), *Comicalités: Études de culture graphique* (2010–), *Inks: The Journal of the Comics Studies Society* (2017–).<sup>41</sup>

If the appearance of specialised reviews mirrored a growing interest in the art of comics, the Nordic countries can claim to have been at the forefront in the early days. The Swedish magazine *Bild och Bubbla* (‘Image and Balloon’) saw the light of day in 1968, and the Finnish *Sarjainfo* (‘Comicsinfo’) followed in 1972. The Danish review *Seriejournalen* (‘Journal of Comics’) was established in 1990, while the *Scandinavian Journal of Comic Art*, a peer-reviewed academic journal, was launched in 2012 by, among others, the founding members of the Nordic Network for Comics Research, an association born in 2011 to strengthen comics research across (and beyond) the Nordic countries. In an article in 2016, Fredrik Strömberg took the pulse of comics research in the Nordic countries and concluded the field was small (as to the number of scholars, publications, conferences, and PhD theses) and young (if

compared to the international scene, France and Belgium, in particular), and not yet institutionalised as a discipline.<sup>42</sup> The inference is also that few comics scholars in the Nordic countries were doing research on ‘homegrown’ sequential art. In the years following Strömberg’s first study, the scholarly interest in Nordic comics has steadily increased, with conferences, publications, and research projects dedicated to the Scandinavian scene, something especially evident in Sweden.<sup>43</sup> In his 2022 publication, *Comics and the Middle East: Representation, Accommodation, Integration*, Strömberg could speak of a ‘fast-moving field ... in all Nordic countries’, even on the level of academic instruction.<sup>44</sup>

As we have begun to see, efforts have also been made in the Nordic countries to contribute to the theoretical reflection on comics.<sup>45</sup> One reason for the volume *De tecknade seriernas språk: Uttryck och form* was to offer perspectives on method in comics studies.<sup>46</sup> With Groensteen as the most high-profile theorist, the contribution of Christiansen, whose work draws on methods and a critical vocabulary from the field of film studies, and articles by a majority of scholars with a background in linguistics and literary studies, *De tecknade seriernas språk* can, on the whole, be positioned among those studies that take a literary and formalist approach to comics. This theoretical approach, which has dominated the field in Europe, is represented by Franco-Belgian scholars such as Groensteen, Philippe Marion, and Benoît Peeters, among others, and draws on semiotics and theories of visual literacy. It is countered – or supplemented – by what is sometimes thought of as a North American perspective, according to which comic art is rather seen as an object of interest in the field of cultural studies and focus is on how comics connect to social and historical structures, and incorporate issues of politics, power, and context.<sup>47</sup>

When studying comics as adaptations, any of these two ways blends with theories of adaptation. The adaptation of literary texts into comics is nothing new to the medium; as Mitaine et al. assert, ‘Adaptation has ... been an integral part of the history of comics from the very beginning’, and is still very much an ongoing process.<sup>48</sup> Among the reasons commonly cited to explain the popularity of the phenomenon is the will to raise the status of a low-brow medium by recruiting it to the service

of 'great literature'. Will Eisner, on the subject of the routinely lamented 'poor status' of comics in his book *Comics and Sequential Art*, marvels at the fact that this 'unique combination' of 'design, drawing, caricature and writing' has been so slow to win acceptance, yet individually each discipline has found its way into scholarly consideration.<sup>49</sup> In this, Eisner attributes part of the responsibility to the practitioners themselves, and to their resistance to engage with what he calls 'subjects of greater moment' and 'cerebral topics'.<sup>50</sup>

The yearning to legitimise a popular medium through the appropriation of source works with a valuable 'symbolic capital' has been challenged in the era of cultural studies, which has seen the levelling of the hierarchy of the arts.<sup>51</sup> Stam again reminds us of the fact that acquiring 'status' should be seen as a form of bilateral exchange, for 'In a Derridean perspective, the aureatic prestige of the original does not run counter to the copy; rather, the prestige of the original is created by the copies'.<sup>52</sup> Likewise, the idea that comic art adaptations offer an easy way into 'great classics' also needs to be reassessed by anyone aware of the fact that the reader of comics has to master the complex trade of unravelling both visual and literary codes in the reading process.<sup>53</sup>

Given the long, rich history of comics as adaptation, it is perhaps surprising that its specificities have been overlooked by even the most influential adaptation scholars. In *A Theory of Adaptation*, Hutcheon only briefly brings the art form of comics into the general discourse, partly owing to her choice to posit the 'process' of adaptation, rather than a specific medium, as point of discussion.<sup>54</sup> Hutcheon's view is that transpositions from and into any medium engage with their sources on three basic levels: by allowing readers to recognise the source; by functioning as creative, interpretive acts of a past *oeuvre*; and by creating intertextual relations between works.<sup>55</sup> Likewise, in *La Transécriture*, a collection of essays on the theme of adaptation curated by André Gaudreault and Groensteen, the attention paid to comics is only marginal.<sup>56</sup> These two scholars' view on the possibilities of classifying different approaches to adaptation has inspired the method used in the present book.

I set out in this book to contribute to the growing body of critical literature and to go beyond the individual case study to investigate

what adaptation has to say about the medium of comics. The issue has been discussed in a collection of essays entitled *Drawn from the Classics: Essays on Graphic Adaptations of Literary Works*, edited by Stephen E. Tabachnick and Esther Bendit Saltzman and presented, on its back cover, as the ‘first ever collection of essays focusing on graphic novel adaptations of various literary classics.’<sup>57</sup> The aforementioned Mitaine et al. volume *Comics and Adaptation*, which first appeared in French, is a collection of essays on comics both as the source for cinematographic adaptations and as adaptations of literary works.<sup>58</sup> It boasts a preface introducing the general and theoretical issues in adaptation studies, accompanied by an exhaustive bibliography. Single essays in more broadly drawn works also concentrate on adaptations into the comics medium: Rocco Versaci’s volume on ‘comics as literature’ has a chapter titled ‘Illustrating the Classics: Comic Books vs. “Real” Literature’, and Karin Kukkonen’s *Studying Comics and Graphic Novels* has a few pages on the question.<sup>59</sup> In *The Routledge Companion to Comics*, Henry John Pratt contributes an essay on ‘Comics and Adaptation’,<sup>60</sup> Paul Ferstl’s ‘Novel-based Comics’, Dirk Vanderbeke’s ‘It Was the Best of Two Worlds, It Was the Worst of Two Worlds: The Adaptation of Novels in Comics and Graphic Novels’, and Jan Baetens’s ‘Adaptation: A Writerly Strategy’ are all examples of insightful essays concerned with strategies in comic art adaptations.<sup>61</sup> In an article co-authored by Frank Pointner and Sandra Eva Boschenhoff, the transposition of literary texts into comics is treated in terms of what ‘advantages’ pictures may have over words.<sup>62</sup> Boschenhoff’s book-length study, *Tall Tales in Comic Diction: From Literature to Graphic Fiction*, investigating how the works of Wilde, Shakespeare, Poe, Kafka, Dostoyevsky, and others have been treated by comics creators, is a contribution both to the study of comics and to the discourse of intermediality.<sup>63</sup> Baetens’s volume *Adaptation et bande dessinée: Éloge de la fidélité*, which will be discussed in the following section, is a recent contribution to the field which trains a searchlight back onto the persisting ‘fidelity discourse’ in adaptation studies.<sup>64</sup>

Fidelity is a towering presence in adaptation criticism and a common topic in all discussions about adaptation, regardless of the medium. It was first invoked as a moral parameter establishing, in no uncertain terms,

that ‘faithfulness [to the source material] is good, infidelity is bad and a form of betrayal’.<sup>65</sup> Subsequently it was applied to mean quite the opposite: faithful adaptations are boring and banal, unfaithful adaptations creative and clever. In this spirit, by siding viewpoint, the fidelity discourse has been considered ‘helpful’ to determine the quality of an adaptation. Until the rather recent ‘pro-fidelity turn’ in adaptation studies, the debate favoured positions which, in their most radical forms, come across as declarations of independence on behalf of the art of adaptation, negating the request for ‘truthfulness’ to a source as the *bête noire* of adaptation processes and strategies. In the Bruhn et al. volume *Adaptation Studies*, Regina Schober consistently speaks up for freedom from faithfulness in the following way: ‘as soon as an adaptation has been created, it is automatically emancipated and disconnected from its source medium’.<sup>66</sup> Commenting on this state of affairs in the same publication, Lars Elleström concludes that ‘fidelity has become anathema’, obsessively and regrettably monopolising the field of adaptation studies, and taking time and energy away from more important lines of enquiry.<sup>67</sup> However, the persistence of the question, mirrored in the revival of the fidelity debate around 2000, prompts us to stop and consider recent developments, and to take a view on the place of fidelity in the present study.

Casie Hermansson’s article ‘Flogging Fidelity: In Defense of the (Un)Dead Horse’ summarises the critical positions during the fidelity discourse history, focusing on its developments in the decades following Dudley Andrew’s ‘anti-fidelity’ manifesto ‘The Well-worn Muse: Adaptation in Film History and Theory’, where faithfulness was dismissed as an irrelevant concern in adaptation theory.<sup>68</sup> However, with several strings to its bow – such as comparative stylistics, the case-study method, or meta-criticism – fidelity criticism never quite went out of fashion with scholars and the general public, and the ‘pro-fidelity’ discourse is enjoying renewed popularity; so much that being ‘against’ fidelity is seen as retrograde.<sup>69</sup> The pro-fidelity turn has also left its mark on adaptation studies specifically concerned with comic art. A recent example is Baetens’s volume *Adaptation et bande dessinée: Éloge de la fidélité*, in which the scholar staves off ‘fidelity-as-demon’, while working towards ‘a new appraisal of fidelity’ by returning to the practice of comparative readings.<sup>70</sup>

Hermansson argues that the old ‘fidelity horse’, which she wishes to exhume in her title, can still prove useful if admitted in the company of other creatures to the green fields of adaptation studies. As she writes, ‘It is time to include fidelity – aporias and all – in the intertextual toolbox of adaptation criticism. It is one tool among many, and sometimes not the right tool for the job. But at other times, and perhaps combined with other tools, it is the only one that will do.’<sup>71</sup> Hermansson thus suggests that adaptation studies remain open not only vertically – in relation to the source material – but also horizontally, by broadening the perspective to include different interconnections between texts, remembering however that ‘intertextuality exclusive of fidelity discourse is also a form of impoverishment to adaptation’.<sup>72</sup> Elaborating on these ideas, Shannon Brownlee concludes that while ‘the rejection of fidelity may lead to an overvaluation of *infidelity*’, our view is likewise restricted ‘if we only look for insights and transgressions in overtly unfaithful adaptations’.<sup>73</sup>

‘New’ fidelity criticism has also occupied itself with problematising the idea of ‘originality’, ‘authenticity’, and ‘completeness’ proper to the adapted text, pursuant to ‘old’ fidelity discourses. In Glenn Jellenik’s words:

A close look at the act and performance of adaptation offers the critical opportunity ... to grapple with the thorny questions of just what constitutes originality. That necessitates a move away from well-landscaped definitions of originality that rely on binary rhetoric: source/copy, original/derivative, pure/contaminated.<sup>74</sup>

Jellenik supports the ability of an adaptation to engage with a forerunner, which should not be seen as definite, by furthering its subtexts, unearthing its hidden elements, and completing its ‘narrative urges’.<sup>75</sup> Instead of considering distance as a space in which the adaptation manifests its infidelity to a stable, inviolable original, adaptations may be seen ‘as a form of dialogue with the original, as variants, as comments or as “revisitations”’, a view which has found a place in theoretical discourses.<sup>76</sup> Distance can thus translate as room for manoeuvre, a space for creative commentary where new understandings of the source text are

allowed entry. In a chapter on ‘Novels and Graphic Novels: Adaptations’, Kukkonen, in her *Studying Comics and Graphic Novels*, explains this approach to the study of comic art adaptation in the following terms:

Creators might indeed decide to foreground their own interpretation by changing details of the setting, the appearance of the characters or the way they communicate. This approach considers an adaptation as a translation of the classic, or perhaps even as a challenge to the classic and our assumptions about it, rather than as a reproduction in a different medium. An adaptation which translates a classic for a new audience places it into a new context and thereby suggests new perspectives on a well-known text.<sup>77</sup>

Lastly, another part of the ‘new’ fidelity discourse concerns the fresh emphasis not on textual fidelity but on the ‘fidelity of reception’, meaning the relationship between texts and their audiences. In the essay ‘Adaptation, Fidelity and Reception’, Dennis Cutchins and Kathryn Meeks celebrate the reader’s subjective experience of a text as a ‘brand of fidelity ... both inescapable and utterly invaluable to adaptation studies’, and put in a word for more personal interpretations and linguistic expression in scholarly writing about adaptation, too:

we are talking about a fidelity of reception: a faithfulness to the experiences with texts and fragments of texts that are embedded in our lives, and which actually help structure our lives. The reason audiences sometimes choose to describe adaptations with words like ‘faithful’, ‘true’, or ‘betrayal’, is because their personal experiences with texts are potentially very powerful. These emotionally loaded words are not too strong to express the feelings that one is being personally attacked by an adaptation.<sup>78</sup>

*Bête noir*, (un)dead horse, or Jellenik’s zombie: the fidelity discourse continues to haunt adaptation theory.<sup>79</sup> To address it head on, I will conclude my discussion of fidelity by explaining its presence here.

Since adaptations, like translations, 'owe their existence' to a past work, Schober's declaration of independence on behalf of the adaptation seems too radical to function in a discourse like ours, which departs from the idea that the nature of adaptations is translational.<sup>80</sup> An exclusive focus on the comic art adaptations under scrutiny as completely 'emancipated' and 'disconnected' from their source material would lead to a one-sided discussion of their capacities and qualities only as comic art, and make their identities as adaptations irrelevant. Whether we speak of adaptations, appropriations, transpositions, rewritings, re-readings, revisitations, or *transécritures*, we are undeniably dealing with works that engage with forerunners on multiple levels, most of the time making no secret of this connection. An adaptation will always bear the memory of the source it builds on, which is the reason the fidelity discourse cannot be erased without ruinous effect. It can, however, be reconsidered in the wake of the pro-fidelity turn. Hutcheon has sensibly reminded us of the 'double nature' of adaptations: derivations but not derivative, second but not secondary. For Hutcheon, an adaptation is 'created and received in relation to a prior text' but is also an 'aesthetic object in its own right'.<sup>81</sup> Excluding any of these innate features by either considering the adaptation only in terms of its dependence upon the adapted text or radically disconnecting it from its predecessor will lead to an equally partial and incomplete analysis. If acknowledging the relevance of the source remains important in the study of adaptations, what Casie Hermansson and others have brought to the discussion is the realisation that other sources – intertextual, interartistic, intercultural – are likewise significant; the dialogue, as we have seen, is vertical, horizontal, multidirectional. The relationship to the adapted text is but one of many possible trajectories in understanding the adaptation. It might not always be the best critical route, but it is worth exploring in order to understand the nature of the connection and negotiation between the adapted text and the adaptation.

A useful analytic approach might then be to begin with the selection undertaken in the adaptation process. Certainly, the comic art adaptations under scrutiny here are not evaluated as more or less 'successful' because of some hard-to-define 'closeness', 'distance', or 'likeness' to the



adapted text. I consider the question of fidelity mainly in terms of the adaptation's faithfulness to a chosen 'dominant', and explore how the choice of dominant orients a narration working with the means and properties specific to the medium of comics. Rather than privileging what could, if possible, identify as the 'original' dominant, the adapter and the reader take charge. In this view, the adapter is on a par with the translator who, having singled out the aim of the adaptation/translation, works to produce a text faithful to the desired outcome and dependent on the constraints and possibilities of the medium. This is yet another way of looking at the question of fidelity, formulated by Brownlee as '(in)fidelity criticism drained of its moralising' as 'questions of fidelity and medium are crucially linked in their attention to formal similarities and differences in the communication of narratives'.<sup>82</sup> In this sense, the process of adaptation can be likened to the act of translation, carried out at the cost of losing elements in the process, but with the bonus of finding, and making visible to the reader, other parts that sustain the translator's/adapter's view of the source work. It is this approach to the affinities between translation and adaptation as processes that will guide us.

## Theory

Anyone who has ever experienced an adaptation (and who hasn't?) has a theory of adaptation, conscious or not.<sup>83</sup>

In the etymological sense of the term, both dedicated consumers of adaptations and committed adapters 'theorise'. 'Theory', from the Greek *theōrein* (θεωρεῖν), in fact denotes an idea stemming from the act of considering, speculating, or looking at. To encompass this activity of observing and reflecting on adaptations into a theory, I will turn back to those voices that have questioned the appropriateness of founding a discourse about adaptations on a comparative perspective by systematically measuring the adaptation against the adapted text. The aim is to hit on a way of looking at adaptations which merges with a concept well-known to the field of translation studies: the 'dominant'.

In the 1990s Gaudreault and Groensteen edited the volume *La Transécriture*, coining the neologism *transécriture* to circumvent the lack of autonomy that the term ‘adaptation’, in their eyes, seemed to suggest and, with that, the long, limiting tradition of comparative analysis in adaptation studies. The term *transécriture* was conceived to capture the transformations that adapted texts undergo when transposed into a different medium. While a change in terminology does not on its own change mindsets, the prefix ‘trans-’ brings with it an idea of movement from one state to another, and suggests variation rather than accommodation. Gaudreault and Groensteen’s point is that *transécritures* reincarnate, in a different form, what their creators envision as the central ‘icon’ of the adapted text. This line of reasoning resonates with adaptation as a translation process, in which the decision-making largely depends on the adapter–translator’s view of the text. Gaudreault writes that ‘every reading of a text, every unique reading of a text, produces in the reader’s mind what one could call an “icon” of the text ... it is this icon of the text that the adapter will adapt by putting it through the “mill” of another medium.’<sup>84</sup> The ‘icon’ thus translates as the adapter’s individual reading, and emphasises the role of the receiver – be it the creator or the consumer of adaptations. So the interest in the adapted text raised by the adaptation lies in this subjective interpretive act rather than in the distance created, whether large or small, between the transposition and its source material.

Groensteen and Gaudreault’s definition of an ‘icon’ closely resembles the notion of ‘dominant’, which has migrated from the Russian Formalist school to the field of translation studies thanks to mediators such as Roman Jakobson, Peeter Torop, and Bruno Osimo. The conceptual device of the dominant is best known from the lectures given by Jakobson, who, in 1935, spoke of it as ‘the focusing component of a work of art, it rules, determines, and transforms the remaining components’.<sup>85</sup> In Jakobson’s theorisation, the ‘dominant’ is seen as an umbrella term for a wide range of textual parts related, but not limited to, form (rhyme, metre, or intonation may be the dominant in verse), function (for example, aesthetic or informative), and epoch (different genres of art

‘dominate’ different historical eras).<sup>86</sup> Thanks to its flexibility, the term has proved a useful tool in translation studies, where the prototext’s lead device, as singled out in the translator’s unique reading, can guide the translation choices. In the field of translation studies, however, scholars such as Elin Sütiste, Maria Lotman, and Kristiina Lotman have drawn attention to how the use of this term has shifted in a poststructuralist context, where the emphasis formerly awarded to the role of the author has undergone a change:

while for formalists and Jakobson [the] dominant is rather an objective quality of a text, which determines it and holds its structure together, then in accordance with [a] poststructuralist approach the dominant of a reader and hence also that of a translator can be completely different from the author’s intended dominant.<sup>87</sup>

If the ‘dominant’ was a concept with blurred edges already in Jakobson’s theorisation, the poststructuralist use of the term fuelled its indistinctiveness by pointing out that a text’s dominant can be determined from at least three directions: that of the producer–author; that of the mediator–translator; and that of the receiver–reader. The possibility of identifying the dominant in a text lies not only in the eyes of these different beholders, but also depends on focus – on the textual level any specific analysis operates – which adds to the flexibility of the concept. In his article ‘Change of Dominant from Modernist to Post-Modernist Writing’, Brian McHale turns to the detractors who judge it too vague to be useful, showing that the blurred boundaries of the term are precisely what makes it functional:

Jakobson’s critics have sometimes complained that his dominant is not a single unified concept, but more like a *bundle* of concepts. I agree; in my view, however, this is not a flaw but on the contrary, a virtue. The flaw in Jakobson’s lecture if there is one, lies in its failure to state explicitly that there is no *one* dominant, but rather that the dominant is a ‘floating’ concept, applicable at different levels of analysis and over

different ranges of phenomena. Confronting one and the same text, we may discern quite different dominants depending upon what question we are intent on answering. If we approach the text synchronically and in isolation, we may identify one dominant; if we approach it from the point of view of its position in the evolution of the literary system, we may identify a different dominant; if we analyse it as an example from the history of verse, we may discern yet another one; if as an example of verbal art in general, a fourth; and so on. In short, the dominant is a strategic category, and a good deal of misunderstanding might have been avoided if Jakobson had said so in so many words.<sup>88</sup>

‘Dominant’, just as ‘icon’, is a term indicating a personal vision and an individual reading of a source. To identify an element, at any textual level of the adapted work, which is instead maintained in the *transécriture*, Gaudreault uses the word ‘loan’ (*emprunt*).<sup>89</sup> In conclusion to the volume, Groensteen endorses a reading strategy that pays attention to how the *transécriture* approaches fabula (plot, narrative structure, time and place, characters), discourse (cultural, social, historical, or ideological contexts in which the new version is born), and medium (formal solutions proper to the target medium).<sup>90</sup> These conclusions fit with Brian McFarlane’s considerations on the adaptation process, where a distinction is made between those elements which are transferable because they are not chained to one or other semiotic system and others ‘which involve intricate processes of adaptation because their effects are closely tied to the semiotic system in which they are manifested’.<sup>91</sup> These are the elements that need to be run through the ‘adaptation machine’ or the ‘mill’ of another medium to be transferred.<sup>92</sup>

The process of translation, like the art of adaptation, is concerned with carrying a message from one language into another. Similar to the tendency in discourses on adaptation, ongoing debates in translation studies still often revolve around the polarised ideas of freedom and fidelity, although this was already declared obsolete a century ago. In 1921, Walter Benjamin invited his readers to look at translation as a form of artistic writing that goes above and beyond the derivative imitation of sense:

The traditional concepts in any discussion of translation are fidelity and license – the freedom to give faithful reproduction of the sense and, in its service, fidelity to the word. These ideas seem to be no longer serviceable to a theory that strives to find, in a translation, something other than reproduction of meaning.<sup>93</sup>

Following Benjamin, the primary task of a translation is not to communicate or inform, but to interpret its source material, choose a certain take on it, and act on this decision in the freedom to boost, disregard, and alter textual elements to express an *intentio*:

The language of a translation can – in fact, must – let itself go, so that it gives voice to the *intentio* of the original not as reproduction but as harmony, as a supplement to the language in which it expresses itself, as its own kind of *intentio*. ... A real translation is transparent; it does not cover the original, does not block its light, but allows the pure language, as though reinforced by its own medium, to shine upon the original more fully.<sup>94</sup>

The view on adaptation theory put forward in the present study thus aligns with Benjamin's 'intentio', Jakobson's 'dominant', and Gaudreault and Groensteen's 'icon'. The identification of an *intentio*, a dominant, or an icon behind the adaptations to be analysed will to a certain extent result from a subjective experience and depend on personal knowledge. There will always be alternative interpretations to be had, guided by the singling out of a different dominant, icon, or *intentio* in these adaptations. Thus, the fluidity of the three concepts reminds us that there are infinite possibilities of looking at the same text, and that the questions we ask depend on the viewpoint we assume. Kamilla Elliott's advice to anyone embarking on adaptation studies is to be open to conforming their theory and tools to what the examples they encounter demand:

Adaptations teach us that theories cannot predict or account for adaptations in all times and places, not only because the field is too large, but also because adaptations are always changing and adapting. Any

theory of adaptation must therefore incorporate process and change. Adaptations admonish us to move continually beyond our present ideas and methodologies.<sup>95</sup>

## Method

Any exploration of intertextuality, and its specific manifestation in the forms of adaptation and appropriation, is inevitably interested in how art creates art.<sup>96</sup>

The variety of expression in the works of the comics creators considered in this book made it plain at an early stage that a checklist model would not be the best method to study such a kaleidoscopic collection of adaptations. Writing about cinematographic transpositions of literary works in his *Fra bok til film*, Arne Engelstad suggests an analytical grid encouraging a systematic confrontation between the adaptation and the adapted work.<sup>97</sup> To track changes indicative of the adapter's perspective on the source text, Engelstad's model is broad enough to raise questions about content, form, and theme, but still urges to think of the forerunner as a ubiquitous presence that exerts its influence on all parts of the adaptation. As with translations, connections between adaptations and adapted texts exist on several levels and to different degrees. Elleström describes this issue in a finely tuned phrase: 'A media product may *hint* at, *allude* to or *refer* to another medium, it may *mention* or *name* another medium, and it may *quote*, *cite* or *comment* on another medium.'<sup>98</sup> The various 'kinds and degrees of adaptation' seemed of central concern considering the heterogeneity of narrative strategies observed in the comics.<sup>99</sup> What each adaptation revealed about the adaptation strategies at work required not a universal, one-size-fits-all model, but a method that could be adjusted from case to case. The overriding question then became 'how'. How was the transcoding accomplished? By concentrating on the specific potential of comics to retell the same subject matter? By challenging the plot-as-we-know it, charging the source with new meaning and paying little attention to the storyline in the adapted text? By leaving the core narrative unchanged,

but making it speak to the cultural or historical context in which the adaptation came into being?

These queries thus provide us with three ways of looking at adaptation: (i) a medium-oriented approach, focusing on the specific narrative properties of comics; (ii) a plot-oriented approach, concentrating on the transformations that the storyline has gone through in the process of adaptation; (iii) a context-oriented approach, probing adaptations that use the mainly unaltered plot of the adapted text to comment on their own historical, ideological, or cultural context. The formal, narrative machinery of comic art dominates the analyses in the first part, 'Medium', but is also central to the discussions in 'Fabula' and 'Discourse'. Because of their 'double nature', these objects of investigation are approached both as comic art and as adaptations.<sup>100</sup> When studying the connection between the adaptation and the adapted text, this relationship is treated as one of several hermeneutical tools, not to mourn 'losses in translation', but to attempt an understanding of the adapter–translator's choice of 'dominant' by looking at elements that have been modified or emphasised to fit the new context.

I assume some knowledge of the source works; equally, I have not written exclusively for students and scholars of Scandinavian studies. I hope anyone interested in adaptation strategies and in the medium-specific operations of comics, even if not primarily in Scandinavian literature, will find things of interest.

The theoretical concepts of the 'dominant', the 'icon', or the 'intention' are fluid and depend on the position and subjective focus of the observer. 'As always', following Patrick Cattrysse, 'analytical relevance depends on the researcher's (inter-)subjective points of interest [and] the purpose of the investigation', inevitably, the approach to the adaptations in this book is not exclusionary, but rather encourages other ways of looking at the same works.<sup>101</sup>





# Medium

First, the nuts and bolts of comic art as a sequential, visual narrative and an aesthetic expression. In the four adaptations considered here, the narration is primarily structured in images with the verbal storytelling either non-existent or heavily restricted. If, according to Eisner, ‘the “visual” ... functions as the purest form of sequential art’, the absence, or near-absence, of words seems to open a window onto the distinctive medial expression of comics.<sup>102</sup> It delivers a unique opportunity to dwell on why ‘being shown a story is not the same as being told it’, as Hutcheon observes.<sup>103</sup> Investigating media specificity in an adaptation is, according to Stam, particularly useful when studying examples in which the source plot is unaltered or relatively stable, because the change in medium then becomes what Stam calls ‘the automatic difference’ between the adapted text and the adaptation.<sup>104</sup> I will look at the formal complexity of comic art adaptations that make little or no change to the plot as we know it from the hypotext, but whose use of the possibilities offered by the comics medium creatively exposes the dynamics of this art form.

The analyses have been stimulated by the compelling draughtsmanship displayed by Peter Madsen, Gabriele ‘AKAB’ di Benedetto, Guido Crepax, and Pierre Duba. Even so, in *Comics and Sequential Art*, a book building on his lectures at New York’s School of Visual Arts, Will Eisner emphasises that a narration in the comics form does not necessarily gain from an exhibition of artistic prowess. Striving to convey the message that ‘Great artwork alone is not enough’, Eisner distinguishes between a ‘visual’ image and an illustration; in comics, he claims, the former has the power to ‘replace a descriptive passage told only in words’ while the latter ‘reinforces (or decorates) a descriptive

passage' by mere repetition – virtuosity as an end in itself, according to Eisner, can conflict with visual storytelling.<sup>105</sup> To understand how the artful design of these adaptations is functional and meaning-making, and never falls prey to what Eisner sees as redundant repetition of verbal narration, I will chart comics' formal expression by looking at the theoretical tools useful for revealing how narrative structures and technical mechanisms function in the case studies.

Awareness of the complexity of a medium described by Eisner as a combination of 'design, drawing, caricature and writing' is a first step towards identifying the methodological tools to investigate this form of narration.<sup>106</sup> While some have observed that 'comics demand to be studied through the lenses of a variety of disciplines, such as literature, film studies, library science, linguistics, and psychology', the parts that Eisner identifies as 'design', 'drawing', and 'caricature' rather point to the field of (fine) arts for critical perspectives.<sup>107</sup> If *Comics and Sequential Art* is the fruit of Eisner's wish to consecrate comics as cultural objects, art historians such as Aby Warburg, Ernst Gombrich, and David Kunzle have long since included comics in their work, proposing methods of investigation that offer interesting perspectives, as Ylva Sommerland and Margareta Wallin Victorin observe in their editorial 'Writing Comics into Art History and Art History into Comics Research'.<sup>108</sup> In the same special issue of *Konsthistorisk tidskrift/Journal of Art History*, Astrid von Rosen explores a zine using Warburg's art-historical approach.<sup>109</sup> Another sign of the network of influences that exist between the art of comics and the fine arts is pictorial quotations. The many examples of art quotes present in the adaptations in question here offer an opportunity to reflect on the function of intericonic referencing in comics.

'Writing', the last element on Eisner's list, seems, on the other hand, to suggest that the need to develop a capacity to 'read' comics is equally important. The 'literariness' of comics once again suggests a multifaceted medium with narrative strategies whose complexity, as Baetens observes on the subject of comic art adaptations drawn from works of literature, does not depend on that of the hypotext: 'if a graphic novel is worthy of being read as a "literary" work ... it is not because its plot is based on a literary text, but because its mode of narration can be compared to that

of writing, which is to say *complex* and *personal*'.<sup>110</sup> 'Reading' the 'writing' of a visual narration has led comics scholars to compare narratologies with those of literary scholars, and to adopt concepts and a terminology derived from literary studies and linguistics.<sup>111</sup> As an example, Gérard Genette's system of analysis of the representation of time as presented in *Figures III* has been successfully transferred to the study of comics, for instance in the collection of essays titled *Contributions to the Theory and History of Graphic Narrative*.<sup>112</sup> Genette's narratology discusses time in terms of 'order', by paying attention to chronological or achronological storytelling; 'frequency', by considering the number of times an episode is reported in the course of the narration; and 'duration', by assessing matches or discrepancies between 'story time' and 'discourse time' that give rise to 'scenes', 'ellipses', 'summaries', and 'pauses'. As in the literary narrations Genette mentions, the treatment of time in comics can be manipulated for rhetorical effects, something which the analysis of Peter Madsen's adaptation of Andersen's tale *Historien om en Moder* will show.<sup>113</sup>

In comics, key elements in handling time further involve the moment of turning the page, the choice of gridding, and the use of the gutter. In her book *Reading bande dessinée*, Ann Miller discusses the rhetoric of the gutter in these terms:

The temporal and spatial hiatus implied by the interframe space is indeterminate, and allows for considerable variations in the rhythm at which the story is narrated. There may be a conspicuous break in time or space within the fictional world, either between sequences or during a sequence, or, conversely, the break may be smoothed over by an impression of continuity. ... uninterrupted dialogue from one panel to the next can imply that the time excised by the inter-frame space is minimal. ... The gap may ... signify 'meanwhile', and articulate spatially distant, parallel actions, ... transition from outside to inside.<sup>114</sup>

Choices regarding panelisation can convey both meaning and rhythm in comic art, and variations in the size and shape of panels serve not only to communicate mood and emotion, but also the 'beat' of the episode shown.<sup>115</sup>

Genette's studies of focalisation in terms of 'mode' have given rise to a terminology which has also proved useful in the analysis of the visual focaliser in comics. Depending on the viewpoint that filters the narration, in Genette's categories focalisation can be 'zero' (seemingly unfiltered, omniscient), 'internal' (corresponding to the viewpoint of a character in the storyworld), or 'external' (viewed from the outside, behaviourist). As Kai Mikkonen asserts, the concept of focalisation was later revised both by Genette himself and by Mieke Bal, who reframed it in terms of the relationship between 'the agent who sees' and 'what is seen'.<sup>116</sup> Examples of how the adoption of a specific perspective can shape the understanding of what is shown in the panel – to the point of revealing a new take on the story matter – will be discussed for all four case studies. As an example, the choice to favour the viewpoints respectively of 'Death' and of 'the maiden' in the dramatic encounters taking place in Andersen's *Story of a Mother* and Blixen's *The Immortal Story* helps to guide the audience through the interpretive process.<sup>117</sup> As Eisner notes, in comic art, as in other visual media and literary texts, the function of perspective is primarily 'to manipulate the reader's orientation for a purpose in accordance with the author's narrative plan'.<sup>118</sup> In this sense, a bird's eye view can be exploited to provide general orientation or communicate a sense of detachment or control, a worm's eye view may help to evoke a sense of threat or awe, while the eye-level perspective can be taken advantage of to enforce the realism of the scene. In addition, the choice of framing can also be exploited to communicate not only the angle of vision, but also to help readers identify which character the narrative viewpoint belongs to.

In 'The Collapse of the Word–Image Dichotomy: Towards an Iconic Approach to Graphic Novels and Artists' Books', Martin Sundberg's contribution to the aforementioned issue of *Konsthistorisk tidskrift/Journal of Art History*, the nature of comics is seen as essentially anti-hierarchical as far as the contrast between word and image is concerned.<sup>119</sup> Sundberg therefore suggests that comics scholars 'take a step back both from literary theory and an art-historical perspective' and content themselves with a 'formalist approach focusing on the comic structure of the entity (i.e. the codex as material object, sequence and page)' rather than

tackling the contents of single panels.<sup>120</sup> This way of looking at comics, defined by Sundberg as an ‘iconic approach’, is promoted to avoid the methods of analysis of both art historians and literary scholars.<sup>121</sup> Its focus on ‘entity’, ‘page’, and ‘sequence’ recalls Groensteen’s lessons on the anatomy of comics, meaning the relationships between panels and pages defined as ‘arthrology’.<sup>122</sup> ‘Arthrology’ sees the comics page as a ‘unit’ and the visual narration as a ‘system’. It dissects the structure of comics into three systems of connection. The first is *mise en page*, the layout of the page, constituting the ‘spatio-topical code’ by which a single panel on the comics page is never perceived in isolation but always in relation to the other panels on the same page and, as a result, the panels’ sizes, shapes, and positions acquire narrative meaning.<sup>123</sup> Groensteen’s second code, ‘restricted arthrology’, is the breakdown of the narration into strips where panels are held together by a sequential relationship and the inter-frame space becomes significant. The third code, ‘general arthrology’, embraces the narration as a totality and considers the mechanism of *tressage*, or ‘braiding’. Panels related through braiding manifest correspondences in form, meaning, or visual detail, thus referencing, recalling, or prefiguring another panel in the narration. With a function similar to that of rhyme or alliteration in verbal communication, braiding is a technique that helps readers discover sometimes unexpected connections between different parts or aspects of the narration. Groensteen’s arthrology, as presented in his two theoretical volumes, *The System of Comics* and *Comics and Narration*, has provided material for insights into many of the case studies here.<sup>124</sup>

Eisner and others also discuss how lettering can support the message and contribute to meaning in comics. The design of letters, like the shape and outline of speech balloons or frames (or their absence), can inform readers about the sound of a dialogue or line, evoke emotions or moods, emulate foreign languages, and heighten an emotional response to the narrative.<sup>125</sup> Eisner, who sees a close relationship between comics and caricature, also stresses the comic artist’s need to master the art of expressive anatomy, of posture and expression indicative of emotion, which leave the reader to make judgements, his credo being that ‘In comics, body posture and gesture occupy a position of primacy over text’.<sup>126</sup>

I begin with two significantly different adaptations of *The Story of a Mother*, Andersen's fairy tale about a mother searching for her abducted child. The many transpositions of this fairy tale into feature films, stop-motion puppet animations, and anime are witness to the extent to which Andersen's production has been ransacked by artists working in different media. At least two songs draw their inspiration from the story, and a sculpture in central Copenhagen, Niels Hansen Jacobsen's *Døden og Moderen* (1892, 'Death and the Mother'), depicts the mother crouching on the ground while Death, represented as the Grim Reaper, stalks off with her child. The art of comics, to the best of my knowledge, has contributed to this body of appropriations with two adaptations: the Dane Peter Madsen's *Historien om en mor* of 2004, and the more recent *Storia di una madre*, conceived by the Italian comics creator AKAB in 2012. Both are predominantly visual, governed by image rather than word, to the point of becoming a wordless narration in the case of AKAB's retelling. In Madsen's transposition, aspects of the gridding, braiding, and page layout, as well as the treatment of time, will interest the analysis. *Storia di una madre*, AKAB's dark version of the same fairy tale – entirely entrusted to the visual code of comics and executed as a sequence of full-page wordless panels – finds a special place in this part of the book, where focus is on the medium as dominant.

I then turn to Crepax's transposition of Blixen's *The Immortal Story*, an adaptation rich in interesting technical solutions and, like Madsen's and AKAB's adaptations, also open to the study of intericonicity in its various uses and functions. *La storia immortale* visually references Welles's film based on the same tale, *Une Histoire immortelle/The Immortal Story* of 1968, but also *Citizen Kane*.

I end by returning to the art of (almost) silent comics with Duba's poetic *Quelqu'un va venir*, which builds on *Someone Is Going to Come*, written by the Norwegian playwright Jon Fosse, to see how the lyrical qualities of the play have been translated into watercolour. As compound artistic retellings more visual than verbal, these four adaptations offer insights into how the media affordances of comics can respond to and add new meaning to the adapted texts.

Peter Madsen's *Historien om en mor*

With its fine artwork and masterfully crafted narration, the aesthetic impact of Madsen's *Historien om en mor* is immediate.<sup>127</sup> Articulated as a preponderantly visual transposition of Andersen's 1848 tale *Historien om en Moder* (*The Story of a Mother*), Madsen lets the action unfold mainly through images and reduces the source text to sparse dialogue and sporadic captions.<sup>128</sup> Through a composition displaying a great variety in page layout by alternating regular grids with splash pages and spectacular inclusive panels hosting insets, Madsen constructs meaning by cleverly using the specific mechanisms of the comics medium. The morphology of the visual language is therefore at the core of the present investigation, which will, to a large extent, rely on the tools provided in Groensteen's *The System of Comics*, a work that argues for acceptance of

the ninth art as a system primarily speaking ‘by and through images’, not words.<sup>129</sup> Over and above the beauty of the album, Madsen’s craftsmanship and alertness to the expressive potentialities of a form of comics where the image is the true vehicle of storytelling make *Historien om en mor* particularly suitable for a semiotic analysis of the kind outlined by Groensteen.

### Andersen and comic art

For scholars working in adaptation studies, the name of Hans Christian Andersen is as awe-inspiring as it is inspiring, given that his tales are adapted all over the world daily. Transmedia adaptations of Andersen must therefore be said to be an elusive research topic, bound to take on colossal dimensions. While Elisabeth Oxfeldt has written about cinematographic transpositions of the fairy tales, the question of their appeal to comic art creators has on the whole received little scholarly attention.<sup>130</sup> The number of critical studies about the adaptation of his fairy tales as shorter comics or longer graphic narrations can be said to be inversely proportionate to the quantity of adaptations based on Andersen. A handful of shorter critical writings discuss Disney’s comic-strip version of *The Ugly Duckling* from the 1950s, and the series *Frit efter H. C. Andersen* (‘Freely Based on Hans Christian Andersen’) produced by Carlsen Comics.<sup>131</sup> In a concise survey of comic art adaptations of the fairy tales, Strömberg calls attention to an issue of the Swedish children’s comic *Bamse* inspired by Andersen’s work, to Rybka and Capezzone’s *H. C. Andersen Junior*, and, briefly, to Madsen’s *Historien om en mor*.<sup>132</sup>

For a rough idea of the number of transpositions of Andersen’s tales into the comics medium, the bibliographic database of the Hans Christian Andersen Centre in Odense is a good place to start, as it refers to many early comic-strip adaptations.<sup>133</sup> In 1905, the cover of a March issue of the review *Klods-Hans* displayed vignettes referencing Andersen’s tales to satirise the contemporary world.<sup>134</sup> However concise, it is noteworthy that some of these short satirical vignettes technically satisfy the textbook definition of the comic strip as a narrative sequence of images arranged in chronologically interrelated panels. The Brandes strip (Fig. 1), for example, referencing *Den standhaftige Tinsoldat* (*The*





Fig. 1



Fig. 2

*Steadfast Tin Soldier*), is designed to be read as a sequential narration and counts on the reader's capacity to mentally fill in the missing information in the gap between the two panels in order to create sense, in contrast to many of the early twentieth-century comic strips based on Andersen's fairy tales, which work as more static illustrations of the captions underneath each image. Examples can be seen in the stripped version of *Den lille Pige med Svovlstikkerne* (*The Little Match Girl*), which appeared in *Fyens Stiftstidende* in 1941 (*Den lille Pige* 1941), in Einar Syberg's booklet *Kejserens ny Klæder, Fyrtojet* (*The Emperor's New Clothes, The Tinderbox*), and in Helge Kühn-Nielsen's *Lille Claus og Store Claus* (*Little Claus and Big Claus*), published as a feuilleton in *Land og Folk* (Fig. 2).<sup>135</sup> In 1967, the review *Vanføres Jul* published a wordless comic based on *Prindsessen på Ærten* (*The Princess and the Pea*), also drawn by Kühn-Nielsen, while Stefan Fjeldmark's adaptation of *Snedronningen*

(*The Snow Queen*), which ran as a feuilleton in *Jyllands-Posten* for roughly a year in the early 1980s, seems to offer the most experimental formal solutions to the twentieth-century stripping of Andersen in Denmark.<sup>136</sup>

### The 'icon' and the medium

In view of my chosen categorisation of adaptations, *Historien om en mor* hardly reads as a rearrangement of Andersen's fabula. Both adapted text and adaptation are tales of grief with a strong religious message: a child dies and the mother—protagonist, who desperately wants her child back, goes through a series of ordeals in her search of the lost child before she resigns to God's inscrutable will and accepts the mystery of death. Although Madsen's version bears the subtitle 'frit efter et eventyr av Hans Christian Andersen' ('freely based on a fairy tale by Hans Christian Andersen'), the adaptation does not interfere with characters or chronology in the source text and remains faithful to the original plot and phrasing. A slight rewording of the mother's decisive line 'I am a mother' into 'I am *but*... a mother' does not however pass unnoticed, and reveals that Madsen's emphasis is in fact on the protagonist's hard-won acceptance of being a human with a limited vision of God's omniscience.<sup>137</sup> The subtext with its Christian values is left intact, and neither the temporal distance nor the sociocultural context of the twenty-first century have brought significant changes to the discourse. Hence, while Gaudreault and Groensteen's categories of 'fabula' and 'discourse' seem of little relevance to an adaptation study of Madsen's work, a reflection upon the third category, medium, will instead reveal how the comics format opens up unique narrative possibilities in the retelling of *Historien om en Moder*. My analysis is twofold, focusing on how the breakdown into panels affects the narration and on how Madsen's handling of time, which differs from the temporal dimension in the adapted text, proves thematically suited to the depiction of the mother's anguish and desperation. Because of the attention devoted to the psychological perception of time, I take the representation of time to be the 'dominant' in the adaptation or, in the words of André Gaudreault, the 'icon', which is passed through the mill of the comics medium.

## Gridding, braiding, and the rhetoric of the page

To grasp how medium-specific elements such as balloon, panel, strip, page, and double page spread are configured, function, and interact to create meaning in *Historien om en mor*, the syntax of Madsen's narrative will be analysed in the light of Groensteen's theorisation.<sup>138</sup> As said, Groensteen's codification of the spatio-topical structure of comics revolves around the unit of the page. Through the practice of gridding, the comics creator appropriates the page by breaking it down into panels whose form, area, and site can construct meaning. The choice of circumscribing each moment in the narration with a frame, thus electing 'a privileged fragment' for contemplation, opens up a range of possibilities regarding the function of framing. Groensteen identifies six basic functions of the frame, the first of which is the function of closure.<sup>139</sup> Famously explained in *Understanding Comics* as the 'grammar' of comics, McCloud uses the term 'closure' to describe how the reader looks at fragments, but mentally interprets them as a totality: 'Nothing is seen between the two panels, but experience tells you something must be there!'<sup>140</sup> In contrast to the function of closure, which connects distinct panels into a continuum of interdependent images, Groensteen's 'separative' function indicates that each panel can be read on its own as if the frame played the role of a punctuation mark in verbal communication.<sup>141</sup> The third function is 'rhythmic', and crucial to Madsen's interpretation of time in *Historien om en mor*. It emphasises how gridding 'rhythmically distributes the tale that is entrusted to it' and can attempt to establish a pace of reading.<sup>142</sup> According to its form (rectangular, square, circular, irregular, etc.), the frame can also have a 'structuring' function and guide the reader's gaze on the page.<sup>143</sup> Fifth on the list is the 'expressive' function, meaning that the form of the frame can support or highlight the narrative content of the panel.<sup>144</sup> Groensteen warns against assuming that regular frames automatically correspond to order and rationality, and points out that a traditional grid can be a significant exception to the rule in contemporary comics, where 'all configurations of pages have been authorized'.<sup>145</sup> Groensteen's final, 'readerly' function indicates to the reader that even 'an apparently trivial detail', if enclosed in a frame, asks to be registered, contemplated, and read.<sup>146</sup>

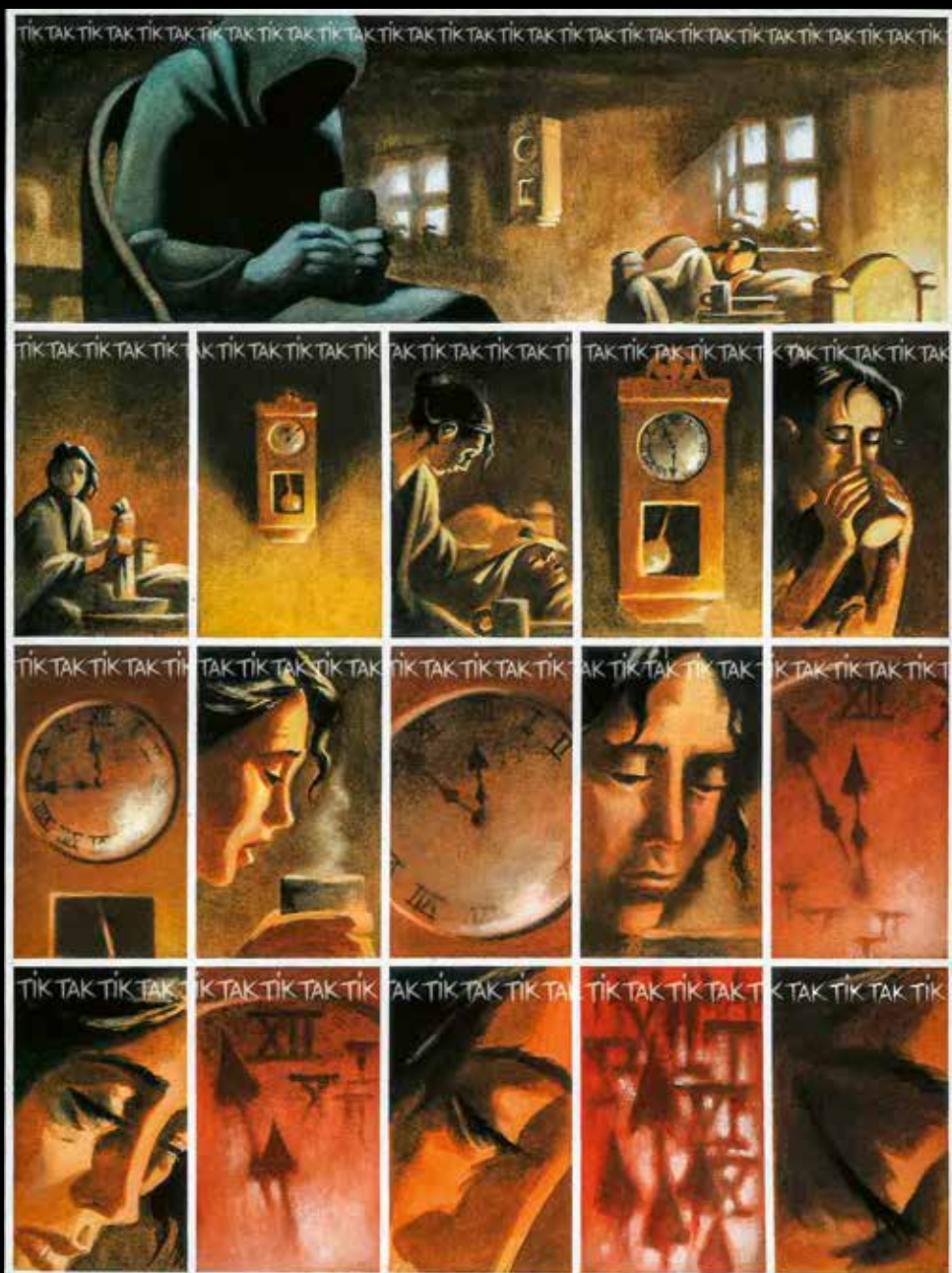


Fig. 3

As to the syntax of the page in Madsen's adaptation, the first part of the story, set inside the cottage where the mother cares for her ailing child, is devoid of the striking inclusive panels with insets that become characteristic of the page layout in the latter part of the album. Although the panels on pages 5 to 13 vary in size, the regular gridding is well-suited to the rendering of the monotony of the long hours that the mother spends at her child's bedside. Besides its expressive function, the choice of gridding also regulates the rhythm of the narration with its monotonous, repetitive pattern, further emphasised by the regular ticking – onomatopoeically visualised in capital letters interfering with panels and strips (Fig. 3) – of the ever-present clock hanging on the wall, an object not mentioned in Andersen's fairy tale until its lead weight falls to the ground at the moment when the child dies.<sup>147</sup> Another aspect of the rhetoric of repetition can also be observed in the design of this sequence. By framing alternately the clock and the mother, a connection between two apparently disconnected elements in the scene is established, thus bringing home to the reader the strong relationship between the mother's fight to keep her child alive and the inexorable march of time.

As structural devices, repetition and reiteration are closely related to the compositional relationship defined as 'braiding' in Groensteen's theory of comics.<sup>148</sup> In a way similar to rhyme or alliteration in texts, 'braiding' organises a visual narrative by connecting its parts, thus revealing the narration as a network complete with echoes, recollections, and iconic correspondences. An example from *Historien om en mor* shows how braiding works as a dialogue with semantic consequences between pages. While Andersen does not mention the geophysical surroundings, Madsen, in line with what is known as 'reverse ekphrasis' in comics studies, finds it necessary to contextualise the setting.<sup>149</sup> When the little house where the mother lives with her young child is visualised, the panels showing the cottage from the outside have, as Groensteen would put it, the same 'spatio-topical coordinates within their respective pages', thus creating a series, and a 'rhyme' with the neighbouring pages (Fig. 4).<sup>150</sup> If, as Groensteen observes, the parameter of 'site' – the panel's location on the comics page – can relate to the construction of





TROR DU IKKE, DER ER LUV AT BIKOLDE RAMT?



FOR... DET KAN DA IKKE VÆRE MENNESK, AT MAN SKAL TAGES FRA HUS...

VEL?



HAN ER GÅET?

MEN...



AH, GUD!





Fig. 5a

meaning, the reader needs to be attentive to the fact that the image of the little house, seen from the outside, closes every sequence in the page layout.<sup>151</sup> The last step in the reading of these pages coincides with a panel framing the cottage.

The next question concerns scope. How do we establish if there is more to the procedure of braiding than plain decoration, an exhibition of symmetries, formal virtuosity? My claim is that braiding is here infused with meaning as it creates a semantic field centred around the house, which foreshadows the story's theme and deeper meaning. First, the repetition of panels framing the isolated cottage with its single lit window displaying a cross-patterned window frame alludes to sorrow and death, but also to the tale's Christian message. Second, when observing these panels as a series, it is noteworthy that the distance to the house steadily increases – a somewhat uncanny detail making it hard to determine the identity of the homodiegetic onlooker. If one assumed the perspective to be that of Death approaching, this increasing distance seems a paradox since the growing distance in reality tells of somebody leaving the house. My assumption then is that the perspective is that of the dying child on the verge of abandoning the physical world. This interpretation is in line with another famous representation of a dying child and its mother, namely Edvard Munch's *Det syke barn* (*The Sick*





Fig. 5b

*Child*). Not only is Madsen's vision composition-wise closely related to Munch's image (Fig. 5a and Fig. 5b), but it also resonates with the Norwegian painter's view on the moment of death, in his diaries formulated time and again in the succinct phrase 'We do not die, it is the world that dies from us'.<sup>152</sup> Commenting on Munch's *Det syke barn*, the Danish art historian Poul Erik Tøjner states that



Fig. 6

the pain is therefore of the one who is left behind ... the image is not about the fear of dying, but about the fear of being left behind. It is the mother who notices death approaching and hides her face in desperation ... it is our world, the material world, which is always left behind.<sup>153</sup>

Turning back to the question of gridding as meaning-making; when Madsen first breaks the regular gridding, he does so to mark a dramatic highlight in the story, corresponding to the moment in which the mother wakes up to realise her child is gone (Fig. 6).<sup>154</sup> This black page, visualising the darkness of the unknown which faces mother and child, is designed as an inclusive panel hosting a close-up of the mother's startled face and a sequence of panels dedicated to the child, whose profile, panel by panel, grows indistinct until it disappears into the shadows. To heighten the sense of drama, the page is criss-crossed with the onomatopoeic 'tik-tak' of the clock. While the distance between the two words constantly increases, the size of the letters is gradually reduced until they vanish into a red glare at the bottom of the page. Benefitting from the readerly action of turning the page, Madsen confirms that the ticking corresponds to the beating of the child's heart which grows feebler and feebler until it stops as the clock, in the first panel of the following page, crashes to the floor, smearing the wall behind it blood-red.<sup>155</sup>

From this point, inclusive panels with insets are characteristic of the page layout.<sup>156</sup> In *Historien om en mor*, the inclusive panel often represents a landscape or a scene offering a background to the events taking place in the insets. Any action in the inclusive panel is frozen, as opposed to the succession of consecutive moments represented in the inset strips. An exception to this rule can be found on page 26, where the relationship between the inclusive panel and the inset strips is metonymic, with the inclusive panel representing an overview of the whole scene while the insets frame details of the totality.

### Time as 'icon'

Madsen's handling of time can be discussed with reference to form as a creator of meaning. While Andersen's tale is just five pages long, Madsen, though reducing the written text significantly, draws a standard 64-page

album out of the source text. As to handling time, the narrative techniques of the two authors are strikingly different, and can be compared by referring to Genette's (and Seymour Chatman's) analysis of speed in narrative.<sup>157</sup> Drawing on Genette's theorisation, Chatman distinguishes between 'story time', the duration of time in the fictional universe, and 'discourse time', the length of time taken up by the telling (or reading) of the text.<sup>158</sup> While Andersen's rapidly advancing discourse time unrolls through summaries and ellipses, Madsen repeatedly slows down the narration by stretching out the discourse time in the adaptation to make it exceed the story time. Three examples will illustrate his strategy.

In the introductory paragraph to the fairy tale, Andersen writes:

A mother sat by her little child. She was so sad, so afraid he would die. The child's face was pallid. His little eyes were shut. His breath came faintly now, and then heavily as if he were sighing, and the mother looked more sadly at the dear little soul.<sup>159</sup>

The discourse time (four-and-a-half lines) is close to nil. The same must be said about the story time, which is not specified but most likely amounts to the time it takes for the child to breathe in and out. The visualisation of this first paragraph is stretched out to cover the first six-and-a-half pages of the album, while the hands of the clock on the wall show that the hours are passing. Madsen's description of a psychological time proper to a mother waiting in vain for her child to recover is bolstered implicitly by reiterative action (many panels are configured as variations on the same scene representing the mother at the child's bedside) and, explicitly, in captions stating that the mother sings to make time pass, an addition to the original text: 'She continued singing the songs every night | But was it really to *him* she was singing... | or was it because they shortened the night?'<sup>160</sup> The hours go by slowly and this is but one of many never-ending nights: 'The night fell, yet another one of those nights in which she was counting the hours'.<sup>161</sup>

Two examples articulate Madsen's strategy of slowing down discourse time by breaking down the narration into several smaller units. A single line taken from Andersen's tale, 'The poor mother rushed wildly out



Fig. 7

of the house, calling for her child' ('Men den stakkels Moder løb ud af Huset og raabte paa sit Barn'), is substituted by a silent double page in the adaptation (Fig. 7).<sup>162</sup> Designed as an inclusive panel, the background image foreshadows the mother's encounter with her first helper, the dark-clad woman who will show her the way through the forest, while the wordless inset strips describe the mother's flight out into the snowstorm as a pantomime. In these sequences, the passage from panel to panel is logically motivated and of the kinetic 'moment-to-moment' kind, to use McCloud's terminology.<sup>163</sup> By dedicating a frame to each movement and placing the panels side by side, Madsen is analysing the mother's rapid flight by inviting the reader to stop, detect, and estimate the weight of her efforts. Again, this strategy has a rhythmic effect on the reading process: it slows down the speed of narration and extends the discourse time. In line with the function of slow-motion sequences in film, Madsen's narrative technique highlights the dynamics of the action and heightens the sense of drama.



Fig. 8

The same technique can be seen in the blackthorn bush episode, which takes up three whole pages in the visualisation of a few sentences (Fig. 8).<sup>164</sup>

She pressed the blackthorn bush against her heart to warm it, and the thorns stabbed so deep into her flesh that great drops of red blood flowed. So warm was the mother's heart that the blackthorn bush blossomed and put forth green leaves on that dark winter's night. And it told her the way to go.<sup>165</sup>

This dramatic embrace, in which the mother nourishes the bush with her heart's blood, is captured in slow motion in a wordless double page spread where the mother's movements and those of the blossoming bush are framed in single stills, each requiring the reader to pause and observe.

Another element conferring a slow beat on the narration is the handling of verbal statements. Throughout the album, rather than creating a single caption or word balloon for each utterance, even short lines

are divided into two balloons – united by a link as if to obtain two utterances divided by a pause.<sup>166</sup> In addition to regulating the rhythm of the discourse time, this strategy also seems to depend on the will to adapt the speech balloons to the panel to minimise intrusion on the image. Occasionally, captions are placed to overlap the panels in a strip, a choice that also indicates the wish to economise with the word in a story predominantly told through visual means.<sup>167</sup> Again, the text is kept to a minimum, summarising in a few words what the image sequence tells the reader in four panels, and the space occupied by the verbal narration is minimal.

### Reflections

This reading of Madsen's adaptation of Andersen's *Historien om en Moder* indicates how narrative strategies specific to the comics medium inform the reader and add meaning to the adapted text. While a strategy common to comic art adaptations of literary works is to compress the storyline of the source, Madsen's extension of the discourse time slows down the rhythm of narration in a way well-suited to the themes of this fairy tale and useful in highlighting its dramatic turning points. Through the example of the semantic field created by the panels framing the cottage from a steadily increasing distance, we have seen how the use of braiding in comics is, in Groensteen's words, rich in 'narrative consequences and symbolic implications'.<sup>168</sup> The intriguing perspective maintained in these panels, combined with the intericonic references to Edvard Munch's *Det syke barn*, add depth and complexity to the narration by opening up new possibilities of interpretation. Madsen's use of gridding, lettering, and organisation of sequences show how the layout of a comics page can be rhetorical and meaning-making. The episode with the falling clock demonstrates one way the action of turning the comics page can serve as a narrative strategy rich in surprises. By focusing on media affordances, *Historien om en mor* has been read as an example of what a comic art adaptation can do that its literary source cannot. Far from wanting to set up a hierarchy of the arts, the study of medium-specific aspects shows us the potential of adaptations to offer a 'creative response to an aesthetic experience'.<sup>169</sup>

AKAB's *Storia di una madre*

Because of its wordlessness and total focus on the image, AKAB's *Storia di una madre* has a special place among the medium-oriented case studies in this book. Wordless comics (also known as silent comics or pantomime comics) have sometimes been excluded, yet at other times ranked as the purest form of comics, in attempts to arrive at a definition of the genre and medium. Incautious definitions have determined the nature of comics to be mixed, stating that it is 'the text-image relationship that is characteristic of comics', and that comics 'give equal priority to the text and the pictures'.<sup>170</sup> Others have denied the relevance of a double presence – text *and* image – stressing that an exclusively visual narration can produce meaning on its own. Of these experts, McCloud speaks in favour of the image when proposing a definition of comics as 'juxtaposed pictorial and other images in a deliberate sequence', and Miller determines comics to be narratives that create meaning out of 'images which are in a sequential relationship, and which co-exist with each other spatially, with or without text'.<sup>171</sup> If, at one extreme, Eisner sees 'the visual' as the most genuine representative of the medium, others have pointed out that 'pictureless' comics exist, a phenomenon which Boschenhoff, at the other extreme, considers 'unthinkable'.<sup>172</sup>

While wordless graphic narrations have a long history and can boast creators of the calibre of Caran d'Ache, Frans Masereel, Helena Bochořáková-Dittrichová, and Max Ernst, they have always lived their silent lives on the sidelines.<sup>173</sup> There is a consensus, though, that our contemporary age, with its access to new publishing arenas online, in independent zines or helped by alternative publishers, is something of a golden age for wordless comics. In *The Routledge Companion to Comics*, Barbara Postema writes that 'if there has ever been a Golden Age of silent comics (besides the late nineteenth century), that period is right now'.<sup>174</sup> Groensteen likewise speaks of the comics' recent 'conquête du silence' ('conquest of silence'), which has resulted in numerous albums told entirely in images, but also in longer wordless sequences in graphic novels combining word and image.<sup>175</sup> In *Comics and Narration*, he considers this contemporary proliferation of wordless comics as part of



a long-standing tradition 'revivified by the innovative work of François Ayroles, Peter Kuper, Shaun Tan, Lewis Trondheim, Jim Woodring, and many others'.<sup>176</sup> He concludes that 'Contemporary artists are not afraid to turn the sound off where necessary, to give the drawing some breathing space, to allow for thinking in images, and to engender a visual emotion. Comics have learned to hold their peace'.<sup>177</sup>

The same trend can be seen on the Scandinavian scene. The early masters of humorous wordless comics such as Oscar Jacobsson, successful both in Sweden and abroad with the silent strip *Adamson* in the 1920s, or the Dane *Mik* (Henning Dahl Mikkelsen) who created *Ferd'nand* in 1937, have passed the baton to the comics creators of today, for example to the Swede Knut Larsson and the Norwegians Kolbeinn Karlsson and Jason, of whom Postema writes:

Jason's work stands out because it deals with silence thematically and stylistically as well as formally. He introduces silent-film elements by setting his stories in a period that evokes the 1920s while also using design elements like the intertitles from silent movies. He also foregrounds his choice of constraint in his titles, such as *Almost Silent*.<sup>178</sup>

Mute storytelling is always the result of a conscious decision and a challenge to comics creators and readers alike. From the viewpoint of the artist, the choice of silencing the narration can work as a limitation that releases creativity by enforcing original storytelling solutions. The absence of words puts the reader's visual competence to the test and calls for a deep interaction with a narration likely to be less univocal than one made up of images accompanied by explicatory captions. In Postema's words,

A constant quality of long-length wordless books is that they encourage active readers who pay close attention and get invested in the narrative, in order to glean every last bit of meaning from the visual offerings. Without support and guidance from text, it is up to readers to pick up on details and then notice them again when the narrative builds in features of characters, characteristics of the setting, and narrative cues

that were established in the visual representation earlier in the work. ... For long-length wordless books, the reader needs to bring to bear sustained attention, and the work thus needs to offer the necessary visual cues, ideally without becoming redundant or mystifying. This challenge, to both creators and readers, is one of the enduring pleasures of the long-form wordless book.<sup>179</sup>

While Postema highlights how comics creators need to meet their readers halfway to cater for an immersive and gratifying engagement with their work, she also suggests that wordless narratives are likely to express total artistic freedom, perhaps less regardful of reader-friendliness and therefore rarely found in the catalogues of mainstream publishers: 'While wordless comics are a regular occurrence in alternative comics, there are only very few mainstream silent comics ... Marvel has published silent comics sporadically, and when they do it is often made into some kind of "event"'.<sup>180</sup> Sharing the shelves with experimental independent comics does not necessarily mean reaching out to a limited number of readers since an exclusively visual communication may find it easier to carve out a niche in an international market, considering that the intervention of translators is not required. On the subject of the universality of silent comics, Pascal Lefèvre, discussing the 'cultural battle' that raged in the early twentieth century over the pros and cons of introducing 'American-style' balloons into European comics, observes that mute storytelling then enjoyed the advantage of not having to choose sides: 'Wordless comics can be seen as a way of evading the tricky choice between captions or balloons. It was also a practical way of dealing with international distribution in the multilingual context of Europe'.<sup>181</sup>

*Storia di una madre* was published in 2012 by Alessandro Berardinelli Editore (ABE), a small independent publisher and branch of the Berardinelli firm of Verona, which has long specialised in fine art prints and editions.<sup>182</sup> For Berardinelli, AKAB – otherwise Aka B, AkaB, or Akab, the pseudonym of Gabriele di Benedetto (1976–2019) – was engaged as a contributor both for the Sigilli series (long-length, wordless adaptations of the classics of world literature) and the Biblioteca Onirica (art books unfolding accordion-style in the leporello format).<sup>183</sup> AKAB's

*Storia di una madre*, as well as his concertina-fold *Human Kit*, are aesthetic experiences in themselves, both carefully curated as regards the quality of paper, print, and binding. In the case of *Storia di una madre*, the combination of a fringe imprint, a wordless adaptation calling for total focus on the image, and a comics creator with a background in underground comics is a recipe for an all-or-nothing gamble on the roll of the artist's dice.

### The book as object – materiality and structure

*Storia di una madre* makes use of the panorama format. The elongated form of the page lends itself to the representation of space and scenery, it suits the unfolding of barren landscapes with long horizontal lines, and supports the idea of the journey, or quest, underlying the plot. In the context of wordless comics, the panorama format can also be seen as a reference to the specificities of the silent film screen, an impression here enhanced by the black pages with the title, copyright information, epilogue, and acknowledgements in white (Fig. 9). If it is true, as in Charles Hatfield's paraphrase of Lefèvre, that format is important as it 'influences the total concept of [a] comic' and stimulates 'different manners of consuming' comics, *Storia di una madre's* fine materiality is, on its own, somewhat offbeat and encourages long contemplation.<sup>184</sup> Congruent with the specificities of the book as object, the internal layout is also formula-defying: AKAB eschews any gridding, and structures the story in forty single panels, each occupying the entire right-hand page of the spread, in a way reminiscent of the early woodcut novel or the flip-book.

According to Postema's studies, the single-panel page layout of the early twentieth-century woodcut novels entails a 'reduction of readability'.<sup>185</sup> In the case of *Storia di una madre*, I would argue, the format and design of the book suggest more than one way of reading. While the use of isolated large-scale panels may be seen as an invitation to move forward at a slower pace, a request to stop and scrutinise the single image, the lack of verbal or visual information on the left-hand side of the spread also evokes a flip-book designed to reveal an animation when rapidly flipped through. With the pictorial space invading the whole page and the absence of gridding and frames, the function of the page



Fig. 9

layout – which according to Groensteen’s theory of ‘spatio-topia’ creates meaning in comics – becomes irrelevant. Instead, it is the structure of the book in its entirety – Groensteen’s ‘general arthrology’ – that calls for consideration. In this sense, the adaptation’s forty black pages that make up the left-hand side of every double page acquire significance as important elements in the anatomy of the book. As parts of a sequential narrative, these black pages can be said to constitute the ‘gutter’, corresponding to the gaps in the narration that the reader is summoned to bridge mentally through the process of closure in order to interpret the story not as fragments but as a totality. According to this interpretation, the black pages ‘contain’ the mother’s transition from one break on her journey to the next: the black gutter between panels 17 and 18 corresponds her walk through the woods, while the voyage across the lake takes place on the black page between panels 20 and 21. It is significant that these pages appear as cavernous black holes in AKAB’s dark revisitation of a tale which in its original version scrutinises the mystery of death from a Christian viewpoint. It is also striking that many of the pregnant moments in the tale are represented as iconographic ellipses.



Fig. 10

The event triggering the action – that crucial moment in which Death leaves with the child – takes place in this dim gutter, on the black page between panels 8 and 9. Panel 8 shows the mother asleep in a room swallowed by darkness (Fig. 10); head hanging, she is sitting on a chair cradling thin air, her figure bathed in a cone of light that recalls the cot's curtains, thus instilling a false sense of security. Panel 9 brings us back to a recognisable architectonic environment where the woman wakes up to find her child is gone and rushes to the door (Fig. 11). Another pregnant moment hides in the dark gutter between panels 32 and 33, corresponding to the moment in which the mother's sight is restored.

The book's thick black paper combined with a predominantly black, grey, and white palette, a drawing style with caustic, jagged, black lines reminiscent of etchings, deformed human figures, and flat surfaces with minimal shading make *Storia di una madre* a work of high-quality terror, painfully expressive of the mother's desperation. It is not surprising AKAB found this sombre fairy tale worth exploring, considering his profile as an artist. In the words of Michela Ongaretti: 'His main themes are solitude and fear, a loss of identity often due to agony, deprivation,



Fig. 11

which is both physical and emotional'.<sup>186</sup> Lost in translation is however Andersen's Christian message with its show of blind faith in God's goodness and the conviction that the Lord knows what is best for man, even when his will is inscrutable from a human perspective.

### The absence of God

Despite its brevity, Andersen's *The Story of a Mother* is divided into several scenes corresponding to the mother's encounters with other characters, helpers and donors, on her journey towards a purgatory of sorts. This way station where the souls wait to be transported into the afterlife is described as a luxuriant garden in the adapted text and depicted as a stately hothouse in Madsen's adaptation, while AKAB presents a picture of a bleak plain reminiscent of a burial ground, faintly illuminated by the light of scattered matchsticks embodying the human souls (Fig. 12). If this barren territory resonates with a general display of terror and *gravitas* beyond the spirit of Andersen's tale, the detail of the matches references his more famous story of another dying child, *The Little Match Girl*. The flickering match, which features on the back cover set

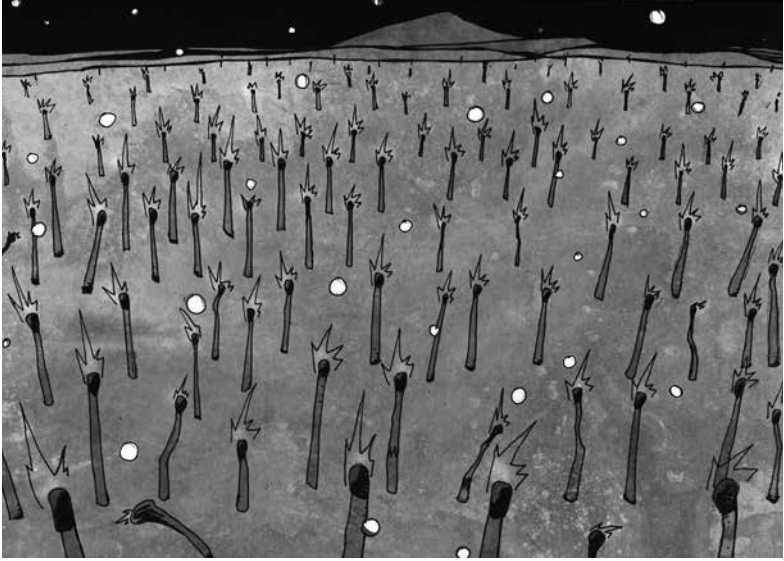


Fig. 12



Fig. 13

against a black night sky studded with falling white snowflakes, is an unambiguous visual symbol of the battle between light and darkness that unrolls in the tale (Fig. 13).

This sinister landscape with its splintered matchsticks dominates the last encounter in AKAB's adaptation. Despite its symbolic force, it delivers a one-dimensional version of Andersen's fairy tale, since an important part of the vision of death in the source work is tied to the biblical imagery of God as gardener, designer, and nurturer of life.<sup>187</sup> Andersen presents Death as God's servant, uprooting the plants in the greenhouse

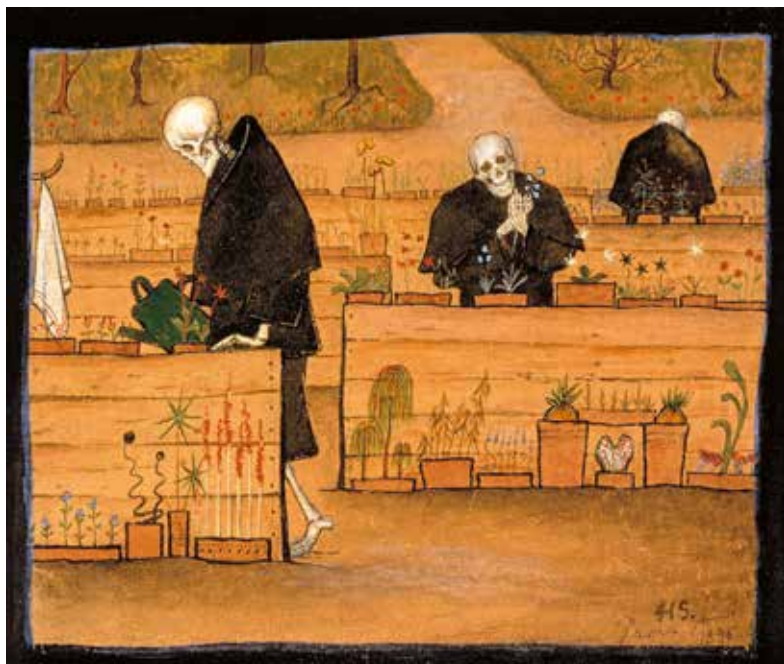


Fig. 14



Fig. 15



only when he receives God's permission to do so: "I only do His will," said Death, "I am His gardener. I take His flowers and trees and plant them again in the great Paradise gardens, in the unknown land."<sup>188</sup>

Death as gardener is a familiar theme in Nordic art, found in the works of the Finnish symbolist painter Hugo Simberg (1873–1917). Simberg explained his many versions of *Dödens trädgård* (1896, *The Garden of Death*, Fig. 14) as representations of a place where the dead are taken before being admitted to heaven, as indicated by the path leading away from the wooden greenhouse. In Simberg's vision, Death is personified by a small group of smiling, dark-robed skeletons, gently tending to potted flowers and cacti in what seems to be a subterranean nursery. This protean vision of Death is lost to the readers of *Storia di una madre*, where Death is more bluntly presented as a menacing personification, a conqueror, and a cruel punisher. This theme of the triumph of death is established early.

While Andersen's fairy tale famously begins with the words, 'A mother sat by her little child. She was so sad, so afraid he would die', the first panel in *Storia di una madre* presents a cottage seen from outside, perched against a black sky and in the midst of desolate grey fields surrounded by barren trees, as if from the perspective of an uninvited guest coming to pay a visit.<sup>189</sup> When Death enters the room where the mother is tending to her sick child, it is as a character faithful to Andersen's description of an old wayfarer in tattered clothing, shuddering from the cold despite the heavy horseblanket he is wearing. Andersen's straightforward revelation to the reader about the true identity of the stranger, 'the old man, who was indeed Death himself', has its counterpart in the similarly sensational unmasking of the old man in panel 7 of the adaptation, where he is shown for what he is: a skull face with a skeleton hand.<sup>190</sup> In this revelatory panel, the whole room is transformed into an abstract space where the gaping door is the only landmark to remind the reader of the former architectural structure (Fig. 15). The same macabre portrayal of Death returns in full force at the end of the adaptation when the two protagonists meet for the second time. Death now appears as a winged Grim Reaper of great expressive quality. In a dark robe and armed with a scythe, this personification ties up with an

imagery of destruction common in popular culture that goes back to medieval visions of the Angel of Death. Readers unfamiliar with Andersen's fairy tale will hardly discern a severe but righteous Christian God behind this figure. In AKAB's appropriation, Death is an obscure skeleton angel who seems to act independently when ushering the souls of the dead from one life to the next.

### The triumph of Death

The uncertainty that comes with the lack of written dialogue and captions in silent comics can be counterbalanced by artistic means to convey a clear message. Eisner and Postema both mention the role that body language and facial expressions play in wordless narrations. In silent comics, according to Eisner, gesture and expression need to be 'exaggerated in order to be effective', while Postema reminds us that 'body language and facial expressions, sometimes exaggerated to pantomime, as well as various forms of emanata, are common communicating features in silent comics'.<sup>191</sup> To communicate the vision of Death as a towering, triumphant character, AKAB skillfully plays with hierarchical dimensions, perspectives and viewpoints. In the first half of the book, the child gradually shrinks from panel to panel (3, 4, 6) and becomes a tiny mummy in the arms of Death (Fig. 15) before disappearing into the night. In the second half of the book, Death assumes titanic dimensions as he faces the mother, and the panels representing their confrontation amply support Death's perspective, his presence a looming shadow dominating the bottom half of pages 27, 29, 34, and 36 (Fig. 16). The angle of vision is rarely that of the mother. If, in panel 3, we are looking down with her on the dying child, we will not see through her eyes again before panel 18, just before she sacrifices her eyeballs to the sea in exchange for a ride on the waves to the other shore. From this moment onwards no angle of vision corresponds to that of the mother, and her viewpoint continues to be absent even after she gets her sight back in panel 30. As if in harmony with a storyline concentrating on her defeat, the closing scenes are either viewed from Death's superior position or from the perspective of an anonymous extradiegetic onlooker.



Fig. 16

The mother's defeat underscores the question of her battle, which is at the heart of the fairy tale. Even before Death enters, the house is represented as a battleground because of the chequered floor of its interior. The composition of a table with two chairs and two glasses ties in with the chessboard-like floor and preempts the confrontation between opposites on which Andersen has built his story: the old man and the little child; the black night and the white snow; the cold winter and the burning hearth; the antithetical destinies of two dying souls; God's all-seeing eye and man's limited vision. While these oppositions are flat in AKAB's black-and-white universe, Andersen's tale is ambiguous: in answer to the mother's question as to whether she will lose her child, Death jerks his head silently, 'strangely, in a way that might mean yes or might mean no'; when the mother reaches the lake, its surface is neither ice nor water, 'too thin to hold her weight, and yet not open or shallow enough for her to wade'; when she finally stands before the garden of Death she cannot tell whether it is a work of nature or of man, 'a cavernous, forested mountain or ... made of wood'.<sup>192</sup>

### The art of conversation

Between the mother's two encounters with Death she undergoes four trials. Each trial involves a helper who demands a sacrifice from her in exchange for showing her the way to her child. The mother's bargaining with these characters is narrated as dialogues in Andersen's text. To show her the direction, Night, the black-clad woman, requires her to sing all the lullabies she sang to her child; the spiny blackthorn bush asks to be warmed against her chest; the sea demands that she cry out her eyes; and, finally, the keeper of Death's greenhouse asks the mother to give up her long black hair in exchange for her own white tresses if she wants to enter the garden to look for the soul of her child. The final battle with Death is also structured as a dialogue between the anguished mother and the incorruptible servant of God. In these crucial sequences that so heavily rely on conversation in the source text, the lack of words – which undoubtedly suits the spectral, otherworldly atmosphere of the story – becomes a genuine challenge to the comics creator, who has to convey the meaning of the encounters without verbalising or losing the dramatic tension.

Except for the title, the paratext, and the last page quoting Andersen's final phrase, 'and Death took her child and went with it into the unknown land' in four languages, *Storia di un madre* is devoid of written text although by no means mute, as it represents a world of crying, screaming, and desperate bargaining.<sup>193</sup> Postema has identified a 'variety in the levels of silence and wordlessness' in pantomime comics, ranging from the presence of intra-iconic texts (the reproduction of written material within panels) to the representation of sound effects (onomatopoeia), and the use of speech balloons with punctuation marks, pictograms, or illegible text.<sup>194</sup> Speech balloons with pictograms can be found in the silent comics of the Norwegian cartoonist Jason.<sup>195</sup> In Jason's work, according to Postema,

silence is more about an atmosphere and a style and not about strict wordlessness. He includes dialogue in speech balloons in several stories, speech balloons with pictograms in others, and he will use textual sound effects throughout. Wordlessness in comics is always a self-imposed constraint, and cartoonists play around with that limitation, or break it, as they see fit.

In *Storia di una madre* there are examples of silent conversations (panel 5), of implied sounds such as crying (panel 6) and laughter (panel 7) or the ticking of a clock (panel 9). The most successful means of conveying verbal communication lies however in the rendering of the mother's conversations with the Night (panels 10, 11, 12), and with the guardian at the entrance to the garden of human souls (panels 22, 23, 25). Here, AKAB translates dialogue, lines, and desperate screams into images taking the form of speech balloons, whose shape almost mummifies the swaddled baby (Fig. 17). Panel 12 (Fig. 18a), representing the mother's tearful singing, has a speech balloon that engages with the embrace between mother and child in Gustav Klimt's *Die drei Lebensalter der Frau* (1905; *The Three Ages of Woman*, Fig. 18b) and that of the two lovers in *Der Kuss* (1907–1908; *The Kiss*, Fig. 18c). While Klimt's theme of motherly love ties in with Andersen's fairy tale, AKAB's mother and child rather suggests the couple in *The Kiss* locked in romantic intimacy,



Fig. 17

if not an overtly sensual *pietà*. This speech balloon seems an indirect homage to the only artist AKAB admitted in interviews to having been influenced by, namely Egon Schiele – Klimt’s pupil, admirer and, to a certain extent, imitator. As a reference to an anti-authoritarian, uncompromising representative of the Decadent movement such as Klimt, this image within an image also adds depth to our understanding of AKAB’s personal appropriation of Andersen’s *Historien om en Moder*. Panel 23, instead, uses a speech balloon of black-and-white stripes to communicate the bargain between the greenhouse keeper and the mother in an economic but efficient way.

There is no dialogue in the encounters with the non-human characters, the blackthorn bush and the sea. Here, AKAB resorts to other means of communication as he exploits the narrative potential of colour. The blackthorn bush becomes another helper and guide thanks to the detail of the white ribbon tied to a twig, whose green colour deepens



Fig. 18a



Fig. 18b



Fig. 18c



Fig. 19

as the mother nurtures it with her heart's blood, visually intensifying the dramatic tension. In an interview with Luca Barnabè, AKAB commented on his carefully meditated use of colour:

I've made the most of the narrative potential of chromatic elements by turning them into orientation tools, as in the case of the green bush indicating the way to the woman. The fairy tale is characterised by a number of dramaturgical turns, which I have highlighted with the use of colour.<sup>196</sup>

In line with this strategic use of colours, one is tempted to read the grey hues of the mummified child next to the almost imperceptibly pink flesh of the mother's arm in panel 3 as a foreshadowing.

Panel 33 (Fig. 19) offers an interesting example in the use of colour combined with an imitation of the cinematographic split-screen technique. The reader is shown two consecutive scenes and the character is doubled: to the left, the mother's confident features are brightened by a flaring match; to the right, her tormented face seems to shrink into



the fading flame of the other match. On a narrative level, this literal division of the page into two halves with opposite moods works well to illustrate the agonies of the mother's final decision, resolved on the following page as she implores Death to reveal the destiny of her child and save the innocent: 'Then the mother screamed aloud with terror, "Which of them belongs to my child? Tell me that. Deliver the unhappy child."' <sup>197</sup> The story ends by gradually pulling back from the abandoned mother in a sequence of images, leaving her defeated and small in a void of nothingness.

### Reflections

*Storia di una madre* is a fine example of how far wordless comics have come from their earlier phase as funnies. Although the mute storytelling of master cartoonists such as Sempé, Mordillo, or Quino has long testified to the vitality of this early category, today's silent comics are of any genre; thrillers, sociopolitical commentary, poetic or erotic visual narrations, and full-length graphic novels with complex storylines.<sup>198</sup> It would be ingenuous to subscribe to the idea that wordless narratives are 'mainly humorous narrations' or 'more likely to be associative, stream-of-consciousness, or surreal'.<sup>199</sup> What silent comics of all sorts have in common is a complete confidence in the image as a vehicle capable of transmitting any genre of narration. The examination of AKAB's wordless version of *Historien om en Moder* has shown the emotional force of a narrative exclusively focusing on visual expression. The drawing style, with its dramatic use of the human figure, line, and colouring, by itself conveys a sense of desolation and desperation in a way that would probably have required changes to Andersen's text, had it been included. Wordless storytelling caters for artistic freedom of movement, and, in contrast to any drawbacks associated with the concept of reverse ekphrasis characteristic of adaptations from a verbal into a visual medium, gives the reader's imagination full rein by not fixing the meaning of an image in captions or verbal speech balloons.

Guido Crepax's *La storia immortale*

There is no need to look too far for clues as to why Karen Blixen's *Den udødelige Historie* has so readily lent itself to adaptation. Its storyline is an oral legend told and retold by the characters throughout the tale, with only minor rearrangements. At the heart of the text one finds what Henrik Ljungberg has called 'the thrill and the recognition' of re-encountering a familiar and gripping story.<sup>200</sup> As the legend of the sailor employed to father an heir for a prosperous merchant outlives itself by endlessly duplicating within the storyworld, so Blixen's tale has lived on also through the process of adaptation. *The Immortal Story* first appeared in the American magazine *Ladies' Home Journal* in 1953 and was reprinted in Danish five years later as part of the collection *Skæbne-Anekdoter (Anecdotes of Destiny)*.<sup>201</sup> Migrating between different cultural contexts and from one medium to another, the tale lived on

in Welles's cinematographic transposition, also known by its French title *Une Histoire immortelle*, and in Italy as the comic art adaptation *La storia immortale*, penned by Crepax in 1987.<sup>202</sup> In the 2000s, the Italian actor and director Gabriele Lavia also adapted *The Immortal Story* for the theatre.

Guido Crepax (1933–2003) trained as an architect and worked in advertising and illustration before making his breakthrough as a comics creator in 1965. He created his best-loved character, the fashion photographer Valentina Rosselli, for *Linus*, the legendary Milanese comics magazine for adults, founded and directed by Umberto Eco, Oreste Del Buono, and Elio Vittorini. In his four-decade career, Crepax made a name for himself as a draughtsman, scenographer, costume designer, and art director. His *oeuvre* has been the subject of critical studies by such influential scholars and art critics as Roland Barthes, Umberto Eco, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Achille Bonito Oliva, and Emilio Tadini. Many of these today famous critical writings on Crepax's production were compiled in the exhibition catalogue *Guido Crepax: Valentina, la forma del tempo* ('Guido Crepax: Valentina, the Shape of Time').<sup>203</sup> In the Nordic countries Crepax is known because of several translations of his works into Danish, Swedish, and Finnish.<sup>204</sup> Among these is the Valentina series, published in Italy over thirty years, and some of his albums featuring Bianca and Anita as protagonists. Many of Crepax's comic art adaptations drawn from literary works have also appeared in translation.<sup>205</sup> In addition, through the mediation of the British author Noelle Harrison, Valentina has returned in the guise of the heroine of a trilogy of novels, the first of which was translated into both Norwegian and Swedish in the early 2010s.<sup>206</sup>

Except for a short, anonymous foreword to *Jekyll e altri classici della letteratura*, a volume bringing together the bulk of Crepax's comic art adaptations of literary texts, *La storia immortale* has no research history.<sup>207</sup> In commentaries comparing Crepax's adaptations to their source material, his work is defined as 'faithful' and 'respectful', and his method 'philologically stringent'.<sup>208</sup> However, his comic art adaptations do not escape being labelled *riduzioni a fumetto*, a definition which literally translates as 'reductions' or 'cuts' to the comics format.<sup>209</sup>

Though a common expression in discourses about adaptations in the Italian context, this terminology can hardly be considered neutral, as it suggests an asymmetric relationship according to which an adaptation is ‘less’ than the ‘replete’ and ‘unabridged’ ‘original’ – a long-standing view in adaptation studies globally, as we have seen.<sup>210</sup> Not more than eight pages long, *La storia immortale* could, at first glance, qualify as a textbook example of a ‘reduction’ to the comics format or a comics creator’s ‘cut’. In Crepax’s hands, *Den udødelige Historie* has been so heavily compressed that the ‘thrill and recognition’ deriving from the characters’ many retellings of the legend of the sailor is no longer felt. Readers of Blixen will also raise an eyebrow to find that the setting they knew as nineteenth-century Canton in China has been exchanged for an urban environment of the 1920s, a decade (and a century) foreign to Blixen’s fiction. For reasons we shall return to later, Crepax not only simplifies Blixen’s somewhat ambiguous final scene, but has also renamed all characters except for the young sailor. In *La storia immortale*, Blixen’s merchant with the symbolism-heavy name Mr Clay has become Mr Kane; her female protagonist with the maidenly name Virginie is renamed Françoise, and, in a tribute to one of Crepax’s much admired friends and colleagues, the bookkeeper Elishama Lewinsky has taken on the name Wolinski.<sup>211</sup> However, to look at *La storia immortale* as an ‘inaccurate’ version of Blixen’s tale due to its changes and radical abridgement would limit the view of the adaptation process to a question of hierarchical descent to the inevitable disadvantage of the comic art transposition. Such an approach would say nothing about its value. Instead, by considering the adaptation’s relationship to the adapted work as horizontal rather than vertical, and, further, as multi-directional rather than mono- or bidirectional, *La storia immortale* proves an immensely rewarding read, revealing not only a play with reflections in which Blixen’s tale and Crepax’s adaptation throw light on each other, but also a network of intertextual and intericonic references connecting the adaptation to other sources. A significant aspect of Crepax’s production as a comics creator is, in fact, how connections to other artistic expressions are established, and *La storia immortale* is no exception. This adaptation draws its inspiration primarily from the

world of cinema, though several other art forms are points of reference in its iconic lexicon.<sup>212</sup>

For greater awareness of this intertextual dialogue, the medium-specific ways in which narration is mediated in *La storia immortale* are rather more interesting than the extent to which direct loans from the adapted text are present. In Colin Beineke's words, 'it is the question of *how* the narrative is relayed and not necessarily *how much* of the narrative is adapted that is most pertinent'.<sup>213</sup> In keeping with the medium-oriented approach in this part of the book, the following analysis will converge on how the visual storytelling technique in *La storia immortale* creates new meaning. The close reading I propose is also designed to detect the details from *Den udødelige Historie* that Crepax has read through a magnifying glass. What part of the narrative content in Blixen's tale is 'dominant' in the adaptation/translation?

### The iconic lexicon of *La storia immortale*

The medium and aesthetics of film are stable reference points in Crepax's visual rhetoric.<sup>214</sup> Analogies between the artist's visual expression and cinematographic narrative devices are often evident, and film titles and screenplays permeate the plots of his comic art production, as *Bianca in persona* also exemplifies. In *La storia immortale*, the reference to Hollywood is made explicit from the title panel. Its geometric, well-measured combination of fine and bold lines typical of art deco lettering (Fig. 20) exemplifies how a visual medium like comics can make written text function as 'an extension of the imagery'.<sup>215</sup> Crepax's choice of font immediately evokes the age of jazz and ocean liners, and, perhaps more than anything else, of the silent film era of the American 1920s and 1930s. In the manner of a film title up in lights, the heading is angled as if seen from the worm's eye view of a filmgoer on a pavement or seated in the cinema, a view from 'obliquely underneath', often found in film posters from the same era.

A different example of cinematographic referencing is another panel in Crepax's adaptation, designed to evoke a single frame of a black-and-white filmstrip, with ten modernist wall sconces mimicking the border holes of the strip (Fig. 21). Considered in relation to the source work,

# LA STORIA IMMORTALE

Fig. 20



Fig. 21

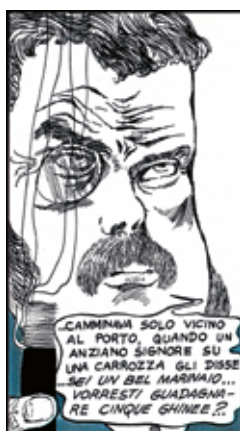


Fig. 22a



Fig. 22b

the function of these ten lamps is not merely decorative because they come to substitute the ten chandeliers in pure gold mentioned in the same scene in Blixen's tale. This is a pregnant moment in the tale, corresponding to the moment when Elishama reveals to his master that the story of the sailor is both universal and fiction. The 'immortal story' is not exclusive to Mr Clay nor a fact, but a tall tale known to every sailor crossing the seven seas. To prove his point, the bookkeeper proceeds to tell his own version of the immortal story, including the detail of the costly lighting: "The old gentleman," he recounted, "led the sailor to a bedroom which was lighted by candlesticks of pure gold, five on the right side and five on the left."<sup>216</sup> While the detail of the ten lights is a direct loan from the source text – perhaps the only 'proof' of Crepax's unmediated access to Blixen – the design of this panel also presents *La storia immortale* as a work of art in its own right. Here, Crepax's character Wolinski – renamed and refashioned if compared to the bookkeeper Lewinsky in Blixen's tale – steps forward as if on the verge of leaving the restricted space of the filmstrip. In this way, with minimal means and without forsaking a trademark of his own creative vein, Crepax suggests the nature of his dialogue with the two forerunners; *La storia immortale* is created in relation to both Blixen's tale and Welles's cinematographic transposition, but is also an independent work of art.

Beyond the single references to the silver screen, Welles's *Une Histoire immortelle* of 1968 is a permanent presence which occasionally shapes the drawings almost to the point of turning Crepax's version into an adaptation of an adaptation. As regards the visualisation of the old merchant, Mr Kane does not share Mr Clay's sinewy hands and parched body, described in Blixen's tale as 'tall', 'dry', and 'close', but has borrowed his stout physique and large fists from Welles, who played the part of Mr Clay in his own filmisation (Fig. 22a and Fig. 22b).<sup>217</sup> Since *Une Histoire immortelle* was Welles's first film in colour, it is also possible that the coloured details in the comic art version, rather unusual in Crepax's generally black-and-white universe, again reference Welles's adaptation or the hand-coloured silent movies out of which his heroine Françoise, judging from her looks, seems to step.



Fig. 23a



Fig. 23b

Another two implicit but unmistakable tributes to Welles surface in the narration. The wealthy merchant's change of name from Mr Clay to Mr Kane unequivocally invokes the newspaper baron protagonist of Welles's *Citizen Kane*, and a frame from this film's suggestive opening scene is also evoked through the design of one of the last panels (Fig. 23a and Fig. 23b).<sup>218</sup> In the film sequence here quoted, Charlie Kane is dying, and as his hand relaxes, the snow globe he has been holding onto drops to the floor. When setting the final scene in *Une Histoire immortelle*, likewise representing the death of a haughty oligarch, Welles was citing himself by reproducing the chain of events in *Citizen Kane's* opening scene: as Mr Clay dies, the magnificent seashell he has been given falls from his open hand onto the veranda.<sup>219</sup> While the composition with the open hand and the fallen object is found both in the filmstrip frame from *Citizen Kane* and in Crepax's comics panel, it has no visual equivalent in *Une Histoire immortelle*, a detail which connects to Bortolotti and Hutcherson's adaptation discourse in the essay 'On the Origin of Adaptations:





Fig. 24



Fig. 25

Rethinking Fidelity Discourse and “Success” – Biologically’, inspired by the principles of evolutionary biology.<sup>220</sup> Along these lines, the design of this frame can be said to have ‘skipped a generation’, to use the language of hereditary genetics. Where Welles’s film and Crepax’s comic art version both have Mr Clay/Kane himself receive the shell from the young sailor, Blixen’s tale uses Elishama as middleman, as if to underscore the central role of the bookkeeper in the original conception of the story.

The overly explicit final line in *La storia immortale* – ‘Mr Kane is dead, Miss Françoise!’ (Fig. 24: ‘Mr Kane è morto, Miss Françoise!’) – is another detail that can only be explained with reference to Welles’s filmisation of the tale. In the film, the trader’s death is clarified in the words Elishama directs to Virginie: ‘Il est mort, mademoiselle Virginie’. Blixen’s story strives to maintain a certain degree of ambiguity in the description of Mr Clay’s defeat, without explicitly revealing whether the tea merchant is dead or alive in the closing scene: ‘Elishama ... had never till now seen his master asleep’, but no wheezing breath is heard

from his chest; the man is depicted as ‘peacefully at rest in his armchair’, though he appears immobile and sunken.<sup>221</sup> To Elishama, it is by no means obvious that Mr Clay is lying dead in his armchair when morning breaks. As a parallel to the scene in which the seashell is handed over, Crepax once more draws on Welles’s clarifying reading of Blixen.

Crepax’s graphic universe is, by and large, a storehouse of references and citations not only from literature and film, but also from other art forms such as painting, architecture, design, and fashion.<sup>222</sup> The variety of cult objects cited in *La storia immortale* – Le Corbusier’s Bauhaus LC2 chair (Fig. 25), the De Stijl painting hanging on the wall in the last panel (Fig. 24), as well as several details of the clothing and interior decoration – helps the reader anchor the narration in the 1920s or 1930s. Judging from the few outdoor scenes, time and place are no longer neither nineteenth-century Canton (as in Blixen’s tale) nor the Portuguese island of Macao (as in Welles’s adaptation for the screen), but a modern urban milieu characterised by functionalist architecture (Fig. 26). Again, if this transposition in time and place reveals Crepax’s predilection for the image bank of the jazz age (his comic art adaptation of Henry James’s *The Turn of the Screw* shares the same modern setting), it also indirectly highlights the ‘timelessness’ and ‘immortality’ of Blixen’s tale, and its identity as a tall tale, a legend.

The treatment of space in relation to the ‘spatio-topia’ of comics is another example of Crepax’s skilful exploration of the specific narrative possibilities of the medium. In ways unknown to traditional literary works, comic art can benefit from the action of turning the page ‘for sudden shock, revelation or transformation’.<sup>223</sup> In the limited space of *La storia immortale* and with only one exception, Crepax takes advantage of every turning of the page to change the setting. Over the course of four double pages, the reader is taken from the wealthy old trader’s living room to the urban space, and subsequently from the bedroom in his stately manor to the adjacent room where Kane is spending the night in his armchair. Just as in Welles’s film adaptation, the first meeting between the bookkeeper and the young woman takes place outside, in broad daylight, while the same scene in Blixen’s version unfolds inside Virginie’s home. This choice provides Crepax with the occasion to explore

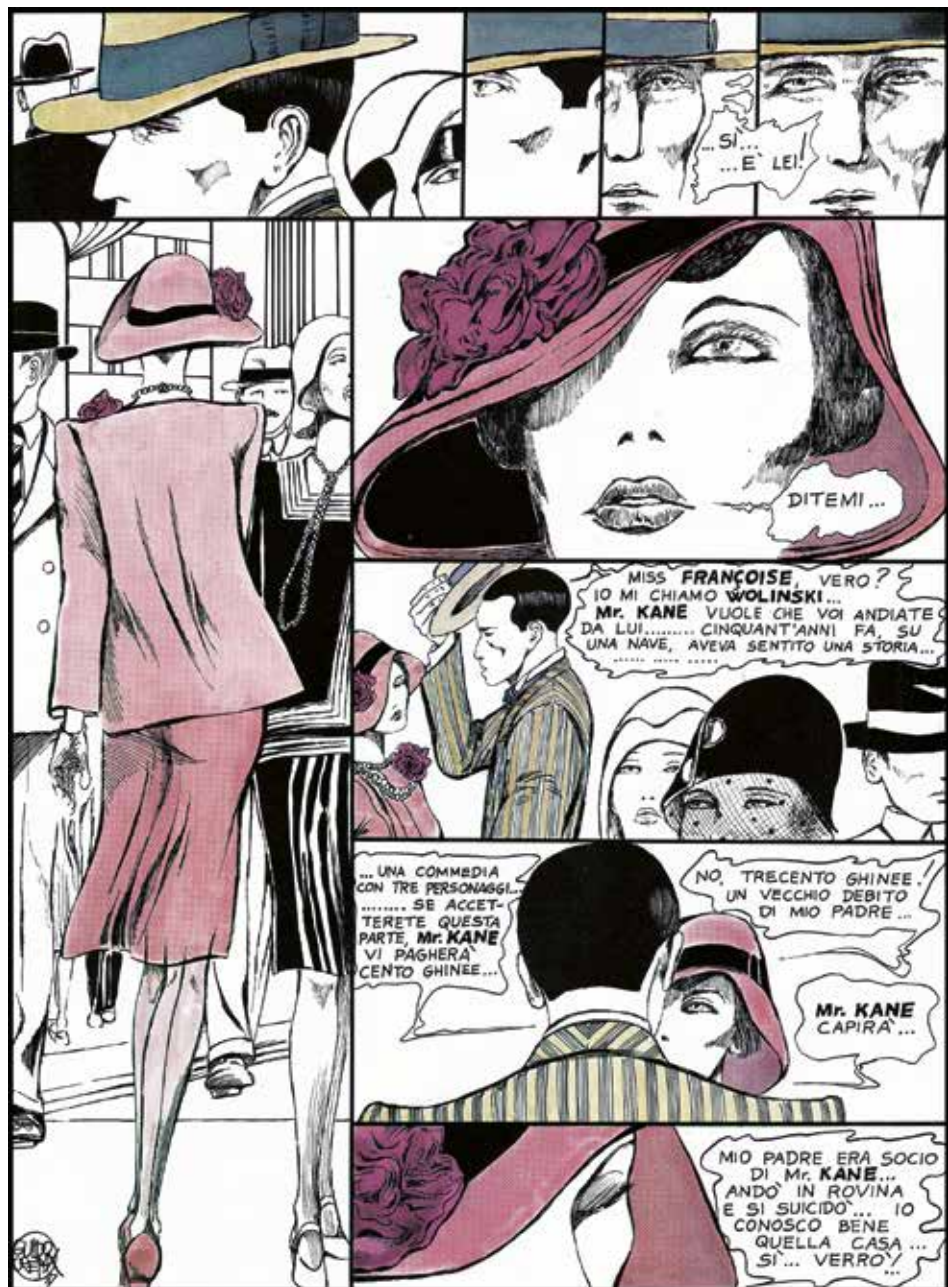


Fig. 26



Fig. 27

the functionalist urban architecture of the early twentieth century, a style whose symmetry and linear forms grew out of art deco, present in the lettering of the title, but also in the interior decor, which Crepax has taken great care to depict. The glazed door with its art deco tracery (Fig. 27) separating Kane's domain from the bedroom where his staging of the immortal story plays out, is a geometric detail which allows Crepax to tell the reader not only of Mr Kane's voyeurism, but also of the sense of imprisonment and exclusion evoked in Blixen's text, without dispensing with the style of the epoch in which the comics version is set. In addition, the tracery also resonates with the function of the fence present in both *Une Histoire immortelle* and *Citizen Kane*.<sup>224</sup>

### The 'poetics of absence' and its consequences

Vanderbeke has spoken of the transition from panel to panel as comics' 'poetics of absence', reflecting his idea of the potential of the gutter.<sup>225</sup> To elaborate on Vanderbeke's view on closure, the 'poetics of absence' is here taken to signify the many ellipses in Crepax's severely curtailed adaptation, cuts that open the text up to new interpretations. The narrative



Fig. 28

voice, so present and characteristic of Blixen's tale, which has been transformed into a voiceover in the opening sequence of Welles's filmisation, is totally ignored by Crepax, regardless of the fact that in comic art the space of the captions is often productively exploited for this purpose. In contrast to its two forerunners, the comic art adaptation starts *in medias res* with Mr Kane's exclamation: 'That's enough Wolinski, I'm sick of ledgers!' (Fig. 28).<sup>226</sup> The action then proceeds to unfold through laconic dialogue, brief lines, and thought balloons. By contrast, as we advance to the central pages, corresponding to the climax of the narration, dialogue, lines, and balloons almost disappear. Again, in the tradition of silent comics (or silent film, for that matter) the narration here advances almost exclusively in images. Instead of combining text and image, Crepax channels the verbiage in this tale of retakes into a few telling panels entrusted to the wordless possibilities of expression offered by the visual medium. The imbalance between word and image is productive; the isolated and at times incomplete phrases extrapolated from Blixen's text become the subtle means by which the adaptation engages with its literary precursor.

As is becoming evident, in the process of adaptation even an extreme compression of a rich storyline does not automatically constitute its banalisation. Indeed, in accordance with Vanderbeke, the necessity for abridgement may also be the mother of invention, a strategy encouraging creative a take on the adapted text:

The necessity for abbreviation may . . . be seen as an opportunity rather than a restriction. The very impossibility of adapting the whole text to the new medium may force the artist to search for some elements that can be used as a synecdoche for the individual approach. As the part that offers an artistic perspective on the whole, as the fragment that embraces the totality of the text.<sup>227</sup>

Crepax's treatment of the story matter only sparingly informs readers of the motives of Blixen's characters. However, one of the effects triggered by the 'poetics of absence' is the unveiling of the 'dominant' from the point of view of the adapter–translator. The only textual aspect which has not been sacrificed in the transposition process is the erotic intrigue in Blixen's tale. Indeed, the motif of sexual desire is enhanced and elevated to become the main theme of the plot in Crepax's version. Although the encounter between Povl and Virginie is central to the original tale, it is – somewhat paradoxically – reduced to little more than an ellipsis in Blixen's narration. The closing lines of the thirteenth chapter, 'Mødet' ('The Meeting'), testify to Virginie's experience of an earthquake during her night with Povl, while the following chapter, 'Afskeden' ('The Parting'), opens with the words 'When at last he fell asleep' – what has happened in the gap between the two chapters is buried in the blank space on the page.<sup>228</sup> If Blixen's litotes is measured against Crepax's hyperbole, it is evident that her play on allusions corresponds to the comics creator's 'graphic' visualisation, so much so that any verbal narration can be dispensed with. Like the strategy in Welles's filmisation, Crepax at this point extends the narration time; a choice which might not be surprising, considering his fame as an X-rated comic artist. Out of eight full pages, three have been earmarked for a visual representation of the encounter (Fig. 29). In addition, where Blixen writes of Virginie as set to



Fig. 29



‘dress and adorn her own person’ with lace and satin, coral and pearls, Crepax’s Françoise instead concentrates on the art of undressing.<sup>229</sup>

A detail which has been reinterpreted in a baffling way is that of the tall mirrors, the ones that in Blixen’s text are covering the bedroom walls closing in on Povl and Virginie. Here, a mirror effect is obtained through the layout of the two full pages in the double spread. On the left-hand side is Françoise, facing Paul, who is standing against the opposite wall of the room and on the right-hand side of the spread.<sup>230</sup> Both pages are structured with a horizontal panel representing the bedroom versus Françoise’s naked body at the top and a sequence of vertical panels at the bottom, the latter visualising the progressive turning in 360° as both protagonists undress. The close-up of Françoise’s face to the backdrop of her naked body at the right-hand corner of the left page can be interpreted as the mirror image Blixen mentions in the text, and as a specific reference to the mirrors in the room.<sup>231</sup>

Groensteen explains the relationship between the two pages forming a double page in comic art as a form of solidarity reliant on an internal symmetry, or as an encounter between opposites:

pages situated opposite each other are dependent on a natural solidarity, and predisposed to speak to each other. If it is possible for the artist to ignore this predisposition, there are, nonetheless, numerous ways to benefit from it. ... The layout, the color, and the effects of interweaving are the principle parameters implicated in this conception of ‘doubling’.<sup>232</sup>

The visual dialogue created between the two pages dedicated to ‘the Meeting’ establishes the division of the double spread as a site for this encounter. This scene is boosted not only owing to the space it is awarded, but also by the choice of breaking up the gridding into fractions and slivers corresponding to Mr Kane’s fragmented viewpoint from behind the tracery. Full-length portraits of the two protagonists alternate with close ups and fragments of close ups, bits and pieces of female anatomy entangle with panels framing details of the sailor’s body, as if to synthesise the erotic encounter. A vertical sequence of panels, visualising the



eyes of the two lovers, infringe the 'static' grammar of the comics medium. If, as Miller observes, the experience of time running its course is generally achieved in gutters where the temporal and spatial transitions take place, the absence of interframes in Crepax's adaptation creates an illusion of continuity, which again reminds us of the means and aesthetics of motion pictures.<sup>233</sup> The montage technique put to the test here alternates close ups of the sailor's body with the almost imperceptible movements of the woman's eyes as she scrutinises Paul's physique. By assuming Françoise's viewpoint, Crepax puts the woman in control in a way which is curiously at odds with Blixen's description of the same scene. Setting her eyes on Povl, Virginie feels 'mortally frightened'.<sup>234</sup> This volte-face can be explained in relation to the female ideal of the mythical 'new woman' of the 1920s, the vamp and the *garçonne*, a look which lies behind the creation of Valentina, drawing heavily on the style of the iconic film actress Louise Brooks, and here resurfacing in Françoise's flapper fashion and rakish red dress to signal the changing concept of femininity in the early twentieth century.

An important addition to the page syntax is Crepax's extreme close ups of single objects. Eco has described the draughtsman's attention to detail as a synecdochic procedure by which a small fragment comes to represent the whole.<sup>235</sup> By zooming in on an apparently insignificant detail, the intrinsic value of this object is brought forward for the reader to discover or, at other times, the framed detail is awarded an unexpected function in the narration. The frame is there to remind the readers of the fact that the object enclosed in the smallest unity of the page – the panel – is worthy of attention. On the subject of 'framing' as a technique, Groensteen writes: 'To dedicate a frame to an element is the same as testifying that this element constitutes a specific contribution, however slim, to the story in which it participates. This contribution ... asks to be read.'<sup>236</sup>

Let us look closely at four examples from *La storia immortale*. The first example (Fig. 30) is the art deco lamp which has no direct equivalent in the adapted text, but is a parallel to the Chinese lantern zoomed in on in Welles's film adaptation. According to Elsa Nagel, this lantern is a metanarrative symbol focusing the attention on Mr Clay's staging

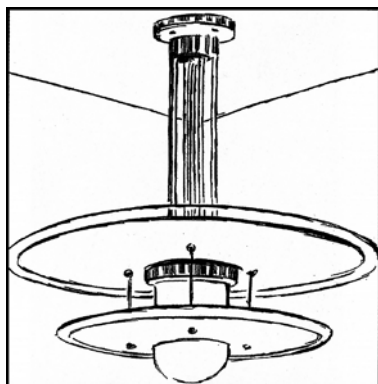


Fig. 30

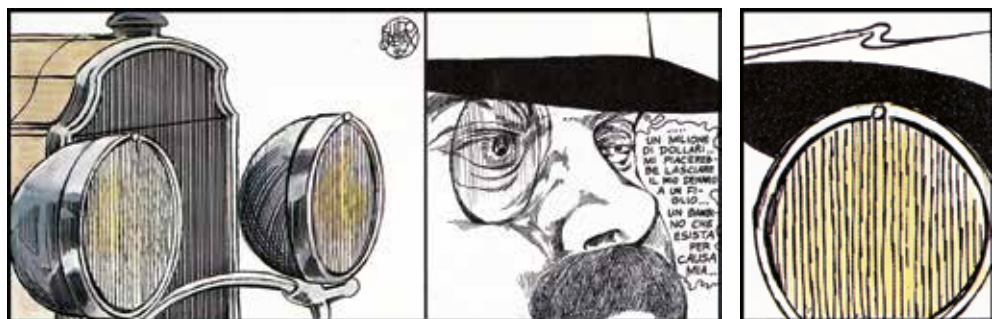


Fig. 31



Fig. 32



Fig. 33

of the immortal story and assuming the function of a *laterna magica* which Elishama, significantly, puts out when the show is over and the film ends.<sup>237</sup> The second example (Fig. 31) is the frame dedicated to the headlights and the radiator grill of the Oldsmobile, which in Crepax's adaptation substitutes Mr Clay's ominous black carriage. This panel functions as a visual alliteration to Mr Kane's eyeglass, which is framed in the subsequent panel, a detail with no equivalent either in Blixen's tale or in Welles's filmisation. The connection between the cold, mechanical eye of the car and Mr Kane's sterile, voyeuristic gaze is enhanced by the shadowing on the glass of the headlight and the lens of the monocle, making it hard to distinguish between the two eyes. The third example is a detail also mentioned in Blixen's text. The door handle, framed by Crepax (Fig. 32) and mentioned in *Den udødelige Historie*, represents, in both works, a solid boundary between the prying eye of the merchant and the 'immortal story' taking place on the other side of the door, to which the old man has no access.<sup>238</sup> The fourth and last example is the panel merging the right part of Mr Kane's torso with the left side of Wolinski's chest (Fig. 33), an image brilliantly illustrating how subtle the limit is between master and servant in Blixen's tale. In the second chapter of *Den udødelige Historie*, Blixen writes, 'Mr Clay had become aware of Elishama's existence, as Elishama had for a long time been aware of Mr Clay's.'<sup>239</sup> It is noteworthy that Crepax makes the left-hand side, where the heart is located, belong to Wolinski.

## Reflections

When Crepax removed *Den udødelige Historie* from Blixen's (and Welles's) exotic Asian setting and relocated it to the Western 1920s, the result not only turned out to be an aesthetic treat and a smorgasbord of art forms – literature, film, painting, fashion, architecture, interior design – but also a work bringing out unembellished elements of Blixen's tale. The relocation in time and place has transformed the protagonists, changed their looks and provoked subtle shifts in their roles, accentuating the agency of the female protagonist and the erotic intrigue that dominates the adaptation. The enigmatic bookkeeper Lewinsky is Wolinski, a hybrid character merging the looks of Dick Tracy with those of

Rudolph Valentino; Blixen's flourishing Virginie in white muslin and 'with a flower-like quality in her' is reborn as a flapper in a red dress, a symbol of a modern, liberal femininity.<sup>240</sup> In the adaptation process, Powl's masculine vigour is boosted as he keeps pace with a motorised horseless carriage. The figure of the wealthy merchant also undergoes a change of personality: while Blixen's Mr Clay is disgusted by carnal knowledge, Crepax's Mr Kane has become a voyeur, eagerly supervising the execution of the immortal story which sentences him to death.<sup>241</sup>

The storyline in *Den udødelige Historie* thematises how a legend lives on by being retold in new contexts and from different perspectives; a process that on its own is a form of adaptation. The transmedia transformations that Blixen's tale has undergone over the years – from film to drama to comic art – sustain the idea of a venture legend, constantly duplicating and outliving itself. In this way, though disregarding Blixen's typical embedded pattern of stories within the story, *La storia immortale* still plays its part in the intriguing, ritual art of repetition that the baroness elevated to a primary motif in her art of fiction. At the same time Crepax's adaptation, with its embellishments on the original, still surprises avid Blixen readers. In Hutcheon's words: 'Recognition and remembrance are part of the pleasure (and risk) of experiencing an adaptation; so too is change'.<sup>242</sup> In *La storia immortale*, Crepax merges the comfort of recognition with the pleasant thrill of surprise.

## Pierre Duba's *Quelqu'un va venir*

*Norwegian: A Comprehensive Grammar* teaches its readers that the Norwegian language has no specific inflectional verb form with which to indicate the future.<sup>243</sup> Among the possible constructions used to express the future, the form 'komme/kjemme til å + infinitive' suggests, in a way similar to the structure 'be going to' in English, a future event that the speaker thinks is certain to happen or has evidence for. Jon Fosse's 1996 play, *Nokon kjem til å kome* (*Someone Is Going to Come*), his debut as a playwright, exhibits this future tense in a title announcing and encapsulating the heart of the drama.<sup>244</sup> By resorting to a verb form for a prediction based on a substantial certainty, the reader's attention is not so much directed at what will happen in the play as it is to the who, when, where, why, and how of the plot. These are the elements of circumstance that become the bare bones for a play about a psychological state of alert, generated by the knowledge that an intruder sooner or later will upset the precarious balance of a couple troubled, it would seem, by past betrayals.

Driven by a desire to start anew, the protagonists, anonymised as 'He' and 'She', have decided to settle in an old house by the sea. The couple seems to project their hopes of wiping the slate clean onto the local setting. Their new home is geographically isolated, surrounded by a barren landscape and the sea. The first two acts take place outside the building. In Act III, as the couple finally venture into their new home, what they find is not the setting for a pristine future but a house with a past, rooms bearing the memory of their former residents, tatty furniture and old crockery, an unmade bed with dirty bed linen, black-and-white photographs on the wall, and a stale smell in the innermost room. The tension building up is not so much in the arrival of that 'Someone' foreshadowed in the title as in the keyed-up interaction of the characters on stage. As Lisbeth Wærp has observed, Fosse's plots are not so much concerned with action as they are with conditions, in line with his early beginnings as a poet. According to Wærp, Fosse does not produce *handlings-dramatikk* (action drama) but *tilstands-dramatikk* (static drama): 'It is more adequate to claim that a condition unfolds

than that an action unrolls in Fosse's production for the theatre'.<sup>245</sup> The feeble narrative drive in *Nokon kjem til å kome*, and the sketchiness of the characters, are both finely tuned to Fosse's 'drama poetry', a language and a style on which many scholars have commented. Wærp's claim is that Fosse's poetic diction not only leaves its mark on individual plays, but that it permeates his production for the stage in its entirety: 'It is a fact that all of Jon Fosse's plays are entirely arranged as poems, i.e., with an uneven right margin. Jon Fosse's plays are written in verse, free verse to be more precise – *vers libres*.'<sup>246</sup>

Other than their typographic arrangement into the distinctive short lines of poetry, the dialogues and monologues in *Nokon kjem til å kome* lack standard punctuation and present an insistent use of repetition and rhythmic effects. Claiming that this aspect should not be seen as an aesthetic experiment with language for language's sake, Solrun Iversen argues that these stylistic peculiarities contribute to the creation of meaning in the plays:

On numerous occasions the focus on language, emerging as a result of the minimisation of other means, acquires a dimension in which attention is drawn to the use of language. As plot development and the characterisation of the *dramatis personae* are reduced, dialogue moves to centre stage. The play evolves through the use of figurative language ... Literary and aesthetic qualities are not overshadowing the interchange which is the essence of language. Although the many repetitions and rhythmic pauses do not seem to be guided by communicative intent, a form of collaboration, not merely an aestheticised awareness, comes to life thanks to these common stylistic denominators.<sup>247</sup>

The way Duba has adapted Fosse's drama poetry to comics has given rise to an aesthetically complex artwork, poetic in a double sense: the verbal narration in *Quelqu'un va venir* maintains both the adapted text's typographic break-up of lines and its use of poetic devices; the visual imagery, with its exquisite use of watercolours, is poetically soulful and provides insightful access to the themes of the play. Although the free verse of Fosse's dialogues and monologues graphically seem to float across

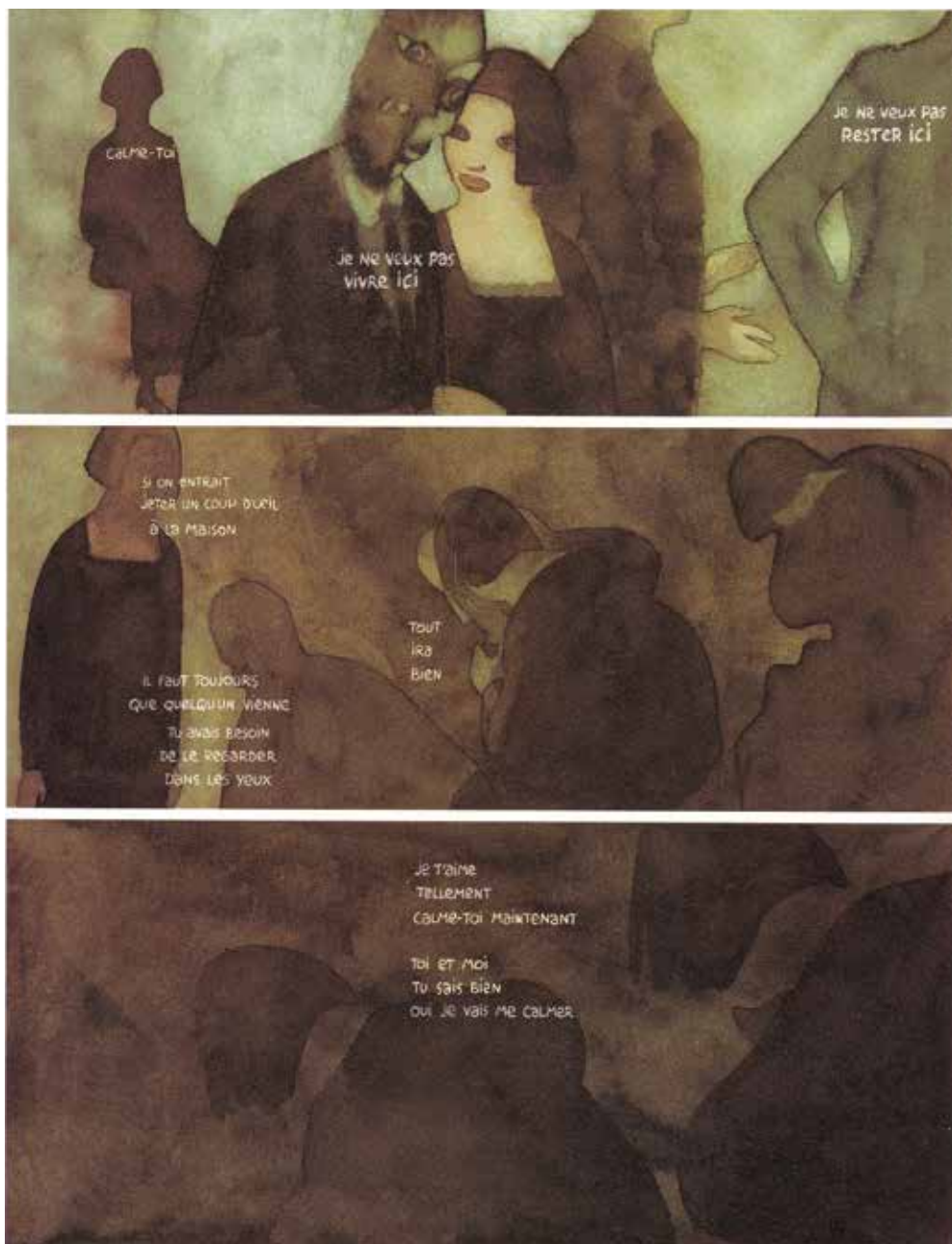


Fig. 34

panels and pages in the adaptation, the typography has been arranged to help the readers connect the line to the speaking character and gauge the rhythm and loudness of the voice (Fig. 34). As to 'poetic' in the latter sense, it is significant that those parts of the text which classify as prose, namely the stage directions, have been substituted by wordless panels in the adaptation. If, on the one hand, the descriptiveness of these wordless sequences has a storytelling mission, another series of mute panels seems to correspond to the pauses and instances of silence in Fosse's script. These latter panels framing blotches, blurs, haziness, and darkness have a substantial abstraction to which Duba's command of the transparencies and flow of watercolour contributes. They stand out as moments of inexpressiveness, subjectivity, and incommunicability; they express the inadequacy of words or the unspoken words. Their presence increases the anti-narrative character of *Quelqu'un va venir* and supports an analytic approach with focus on the translatability of Fosse's poetic style, structural composition, repetitions, rhythms, and visual rhymes. While the most obvious cases of repetition in the source work are a few phrases – refrains and variations on the leitmotifs or, in the words of Ellen Rees, the 'mottos' of the play – Duba also capitalises on the many non-verbal repetitions present in the stage directions, such as gazes, gestures, and movements.<sup>248</sup> My interpretive choice acknowledges the force of *Quelqu'un va venir* in its exploration of the poetic potential of the language of comics. I argue that the poetic quality of *Nokon kjem til å kome* is the 'dominant' or 'icon' of the source text that Duba has run through the mill of the comics medium in the adaptation process.

### The poetry connection

A look, however quick, at the interaction between comics and poetry will draw the unwary into an uneasy discourse about the hierarchy of the arts and onto the slippery slope of interart comparison. If, in adaptation, falling back on a genre of higher prestige has been seen as a strategy of 'cultural relocating or updating' (particularly relevant in the case of a 'low-brow' medium like comics which, as maintained by Groensteen, has been in search of legitimisation well into the twenty-first century),



transpositions of poetry into comics exemplify, on the other hand, that any subject, genre, or content can be approached and expressed in this art form.<sup>249</sup> The breaking down of barriers between the ‘popular’ comics medium and the ‘high-brow’ art of poetry was already discernible in the 1960s and 1970s, thanks to the philosophy of pop art. According to Julian Peters, ‘The decision to fuse comics-derived elements to poetic aims could not, in the sixties and early seventies, be divorced from an implied rejection of the established hierarchy of artistic genres.’<sup>250</sup>

Examinations of how poetic texts can be adapted into comics risk establishing loose, superficial analogies between media that use different means and techniques. As Steven Surdiacourt enters the discussion on what he calls ‘graphic poetry’, he argues for a relationship between poetry and comic art in terms of structural similarities, where the breaking down of a poem into verses is seen to correspond to the segmentation of strips and panel sequences. A brief example illustrating this link uses the trope of the enjambement as a lever. According to Surdiacourt, the enjambement finds an equivalence in the interruption of the action at the end of the right-hand comics page.<sup>251</sup> While this parallel might be useful in specific instances, confirming its validity as a general rule seems unwise, considering there are several reasons and implications to turning a comics page.

When Hillary Chute suggests that the art form with the closest connection to comics is poetry, it is because both media are site-specific: ‘Comics ... cannot be re-flowed, re-jiggered on the page; hence, it is spatially located on the page the way poetry often must be.’<sup>252</sup> Another ‘shared preoccupation’ of comics and poetry is, she writes, rhythm: ‘comics is about *nothing* if not the rhythm, established by its verbal and visual elements: the rhythms set up between successive panels, between words and images, between blank space and the plenitude of framed moments of time.’<sup>253</sup> Last but not least, Chute reminds us of the fact that comics and poetry are usually the arts of ‘distillation and condensation.’<sup>254</sup> As a visual transposition of a verbal text with lyric qualities, *Quelqu’un va venir* provides an opportunity to observe how certain writing techniques in a poem can be adapted to the language of comics. I will start

by looking at ways in which both poetry and comics are visual objects and then consider the poetic device of repetition, also as rhythm and rhyme patterns. These patterns can be said to be meaning-bearing in *Quelqu'un va venir*, because the principle of repetition chimes with the themes of recurrence, continuity, obsessiveness, and unbroken patterns of behaviour, which are at the heart of *Nokon kjem til å kome*.<sup>255</sup> Finally, special attention will be given to the wordless sequences in the adaptation, the ones transposing the prosaic stage directions as well as the non-representational panels, both considered a form of visual poetry.

### The spatiality of poetry and poetic comics

A prerogative of both poetry and comics is their engagement with space. Poetry comes in an arrangement of stanzas, verses, words, or letters on the page, while panels, gutters, captions, balloons, and lines negotiate the surface space in comics. Spatiality has been indicated as one of the purely technical parts that distinguishes a poem from prose, while establishing, as we have seen, a close relationship with comics. According to Tamryn Bennett, 'The liminal spaces and combination of visual and verbal lines inherent in both comics and poetry are distinct from the linear experience of reading prose'.<sup>256</sup> A poem is rarely written to be voiced or listened to: like comics, it is also composed for the page and speaks to the eye. A telling example of a poem's use of space on the page, and of a graphic organisation capable of creating meaning, can be seen in the first stanza of Isaac Rosenberg's *Marching (As Seen from the Left File)*, written after the poet and painter's enlistment in October 1915.<sup>257</sup> In addition to the sonic qualities reproducing the rhythm of marching feet, this poem displays an artful, visual arrangement of several cardinal terms in the composition. Rhetorically positioned at the end of the lines and at the corners of the stanza are semantically related items (here in italics): 'eyes', 'necks', (the homonymic) 'back', 'hands', 'feet'. Not only does the chain of lexically related words build cohesion in the stanza, it also reproduces the swift movement of the speaking persona's gaze, and transmits a rigidly ordered military formation. This set of words describing body parts – fragments of an army – intertwines on the page

with two semantic fields whose items are centrally arrayed: one (here in bold type) consisting of adjectives of colour, the other (here underlined) indicating movement:

My eyes catch **ruddy** necks  
 Sturdily pressed back –  
 All a **red** brick moving glint.  
 Like **flaming** pendulums, hands  
Swing across the khaki –  
**Mustard-coloured** khaki –  
 To the automatic feet.<sup>258</sup>

How this poem exists materially on the page – visually intersecting body parts, their movements and colours – concretely displays the clash between the investigative nature of the speaking persona's sharp gaze and the rapid, mechanical movements of the troop, between the vibrant reds of the human bodies and the dull military clothing. Thus, *Marching (As Seen from the Left File)* impresses on us that the formal appearance of poetry can generate visual patterns which participate in making meaning.

In a comment on the features of what has been called 'poetic comics', Groensteen describes how semantic clustering and the positioning of items on the comics page serve a similar end: 'It would seem that the preferred level at which poetic comics operate is that of the *series*: the images are "linked by a system of iconic, visual or semantic correspondences" that do not pertain directly to causality and are not under the sway of the logic of the action or the tyranny of the plot'.<sup>259</sup> In *Quelqu'un va venir* the freedom from 'the tyranny of the plot' makes space for a visual display of the semantic clusters in the source text, using a careful arrangement of panels, images, words, and lines on the page. Examples of how the graphic pattern of the adapted text is transferred to the layout of the page in the adaptation can be found almost anywhere in *Quelqu'un va venir*. These lines, taken from Act I, have been chosen because they significantly condense the main themes of the play into an entanglement

of semantic fields related to the crucial motives of the sea (italicised), the outsider (underlined), the dyad (bold type), and the gaze (small caps):

et là  
 c'est *la mer*  
personne ne va venir  
 et REGARDER comme *la mer* est belle  
 la maison est vieille  
 et *la mer* est belle  
**nous sommes seuls**  
et personne ne va venir  
personne ne vient  
 et là-bas *la mer* est si belle  
 REGARDER *les vagues* <sup>260</sup>

Although Duba splits up the text and distributes it to fit the series of three vertical panels on the left-hand side of the page, its overall pattern has been visually maintained (Fig. 35). In the adaptation, the image of the sea is similarly used as a frame to represent the key concept of the dyad ('nous sommes seuls') that is visualised in the central strip of the page. The images of water, introducing and closing the sequence, escalates in intensity from top to bottom: the indistinct seascape in the first panel gives way to a less distant dark, rippled sea in panel 2, and becomes an encumbering presence of green waves in the closing panel. A similar effect of crescendo can be seen if we turn our attention to the account of the gaze motif. If considered as a vertical sequence, the three panels on the left containing the verbal text illustrate a growing emphasis on eye movement: in panel 1, the reader is invited to assume the speaking persona's perspective; in panel 3, the male character's request to look introduces and guides the discourse, and panel 5, finally, frames the woman's stare. From this gradual increase in tension, achieved through a close-up technique tightly framing the motif of the sea and the gaze, emanates the fourth important motif in this passage – that menacing 'nobody' whose arrival is repeatedly exorcised in the refrain 'nobody is going to come' ('personne ne va venir').



Fig. 35

## Repetition and rhythm

In the case of *Quelqu'un va venir*, a comment by Duba himself seems to support the relevance of an interart comparison between comic art and poetry. When working on the adaptation, the artist comments, respecting the lyrical quality of the adapted text was a major preoccupation: 'In 2002, with *Quelqu'un va venir* ... I recall the importance of the rhythm, I remember that the musicality of the text guided and inspired the form and the images of the album'.<sup>261</sup> As Duba intuitively perceives, any visual translation of *Nokon kjem til å kome* has to address a fundamental part of Fosse's lyricism such as the rhythm established by the line breaks, pauses, and haunting repetitions. The reiterations stemming from a limited vocabulary and laconic speech are, as specified by Iversen, the very essence of Fosse's drama poetry: 'The most evident feature of the play is perhaps the lyric quality which lies in the taciturnity and in the repetitions. The vocabulary used in the dialogues is generally simple and limited. Many have spoken of this simplicity as linguistically innovative'.<sup>262</sup>

The most obvious distribution of rhythm in the play is its division into seven acts of varying lengths, a division not respected in the adaptation where the transition between acts is fluid. In the single acts, pauses and moments of silence or hesitation alternate with the repetition of phrases, concepts, and endless variations on a handful of themes. Comic art has its own medium-specific resources with which to express rhythm, rhyme, and repetition. This can be done by exploiting the so-called 'spatio-topical' system, through changes in the regular gridding, by alternating the number of panels on a page and their shapes and sizes, or through the use of braiding. A brief example of the rhythmic potential of gridding is suggested by Groensteen, who writes that 'On a page consisting of two large images one above the other, the beat is slow and steady ... in a page containing numerous rows of small panels, it is faster'.<sup>263</sup> As Groensteen further specifies, the use of colour as well as the organisation of speech balloons and lines also produce rhythm in a graphic narration – an observation to which Duba's craftsmanship bears witness.<sup>264</sup>

As already mentioned, the regular layout in *Quelqu'un va venir* is a three-strip grid where the three strips all have the same height and

consist of either a single panorama panel or two smaller panels varying slightly in shape. There are, however, significant exceptions to this rule; some sections challenge the norm by defying the grid or by breaking it up into several smaller units. These variations must be considered ‘rhetorical’ in Groensteen’s definition of the term – synonymous with the idea that ‘the size (and sometimes the shape) of each frame is adapted to the content, to the subject matter of the panel’.<sup>265</sup> Beyond a linear, narrative reading of *Quelqu’un va venir*, meaning can be extrapolated by looking at the non-linear relationships between individual segments, by ‘downgrading’, as Baetens has it, the ‘narrative strength’ of an already insubstantial plot even further.<sup>266</sup> How *Quelqu’un va venir* defies the linear sequence of the grid can be best understood by looking at some pregnant moments that stand out in relation to the whole. An example is the monologue with which ‘the Man’ addresses ‘She’ in Act V, during his second visit to the house. He has returned to drink with the newcomers and becomes openly flirtatious when finding himself alone in the kitchen with ‘She’. Before taking leave, he scribbles down his phone number and hands her the note, which she hides in her purse. This decisive episode corresponds in the adaptation to a striking spread presenting two full-page panels (Fig. 36). With the guidance of the source text, this double page allows for a linear ‘moment-to-moment’ reading.<sup>267</sup> However, given the absence of stage directions and grid structure, the narration is fluid, non-sequential, and dense enough to render the complexity of the encounter and allow for manifold interpretations.

Here, the two characters double and multiply. The different angles of vision from which they are seen create an almost cubist effect of simultaneity and continuity in space. The transition between the different moments making up the scene – ‘She’ is standing by the window, sitting down at the table, standing by the table – is as smooth as in a cinematographic reverse angle shot cutting back and forth from one character’s perspective to the other’s. The cuts to the human figures frame different body parts and details and fix the uncomfortable gaze of ‘the Man’ closing on ‘She’ from the side, scrutinising her profile. This assemblage of perspectives is further intensified because the scene is represented as if from the viewpoint of an outsider, who captures ‘She’ and ‘the Man’



Fig. 36

seated at the kitchen table. The viewpoint could be taken to be that of 'He', intensely but inexplicably aware of what is going on in the kitchen from his position on the sofa the other side of the wall. If so, the reader is viewing a piece of information which will not be verbalised until the following act opens. In Act VI, unexpectedly, 'He' reveals that he knows 'She' accepted the phone number and hid it in her purse:

Pourquoi as-tu  
fourré le bout du papier  
avec son numéro  
dans ton porte-monnaie?

Je n'ai pas fait ça

Ah bon  
Comment peux-tu savoir  
que j'ai fait ça?

Je le sais c'est tout<sup>268</sup>

Duba's artwork on this double page is an example of how comics, like poetry, have the capacity to condense and expand meaning. According



to Bennett, ‘in both comics and poetry there is the potential for works to be created and understood in multiple directions. They share an emphasis on spatial experimentation, manifold layers of “meaning” and combinations of visual–verbal parts that make them more malleable than prose.’<sup>269</sup> Multilayered is a key word, unlocking one aspect of the reiterative narrative technique. Duba works with duplicated characters and multiple perspectives and points of view, exploiting the transparency of superimposed layers of watercolour to create sensuous, palimpsestic images where background and foreground, present and past overlap, as suggested in the monologue (Fig. 37). The repetitive sequence of photographs in the album is particularly effective; here, the people portrayed gradually grow bigger and bigger until they step out of their frames like ghosts from the past to retake possession of the house before they again vanish into the shadows (Fig. 38), in line with a narrative dominated by the past.

A second example of ‘rhetorical gridding’ in *Quelqu’un va venir* is the sequence showing ‘He’ and his fit of jealousy, laid out as a double page with the greatest number of frames in the whole album (Fig. 39). By exploiting the accelerated narrative pace given by the breaking up of the regular grid into smaller panels and the feverish tones of crimson, the theme of jealousy is obsessively magnified. What might come across as a sudden burst of colour in the sepia-coloured universe of the adaptation has already been heralded: Act IV opens with the couple’s entry into the living room, a moment which corresponds to a monochrome crimson panel. By observing the adaptation in its totality and piecing together the visual information in retrospect, readers can deduce the introductory panel is framing the red velvet upholstery of the sofa. In the jealousy scene, the colour of that same sofa where ‘He’ is lying invades the whole room, bleeds into the human figures and spills onto the wallpaper with its ornamental pattern reminiscent of grotesques ensnaring the male protagonist caught up in his obsession. In a work where shades of sepia prevail, using crimson also contributes to the pattern of repetition and to the production of visual rhymes. Several details throughout the narration have been tinged red. In order of appearance: the chequered shirt of the ‘Man’, the coloured glass panes

AFTERLIVES

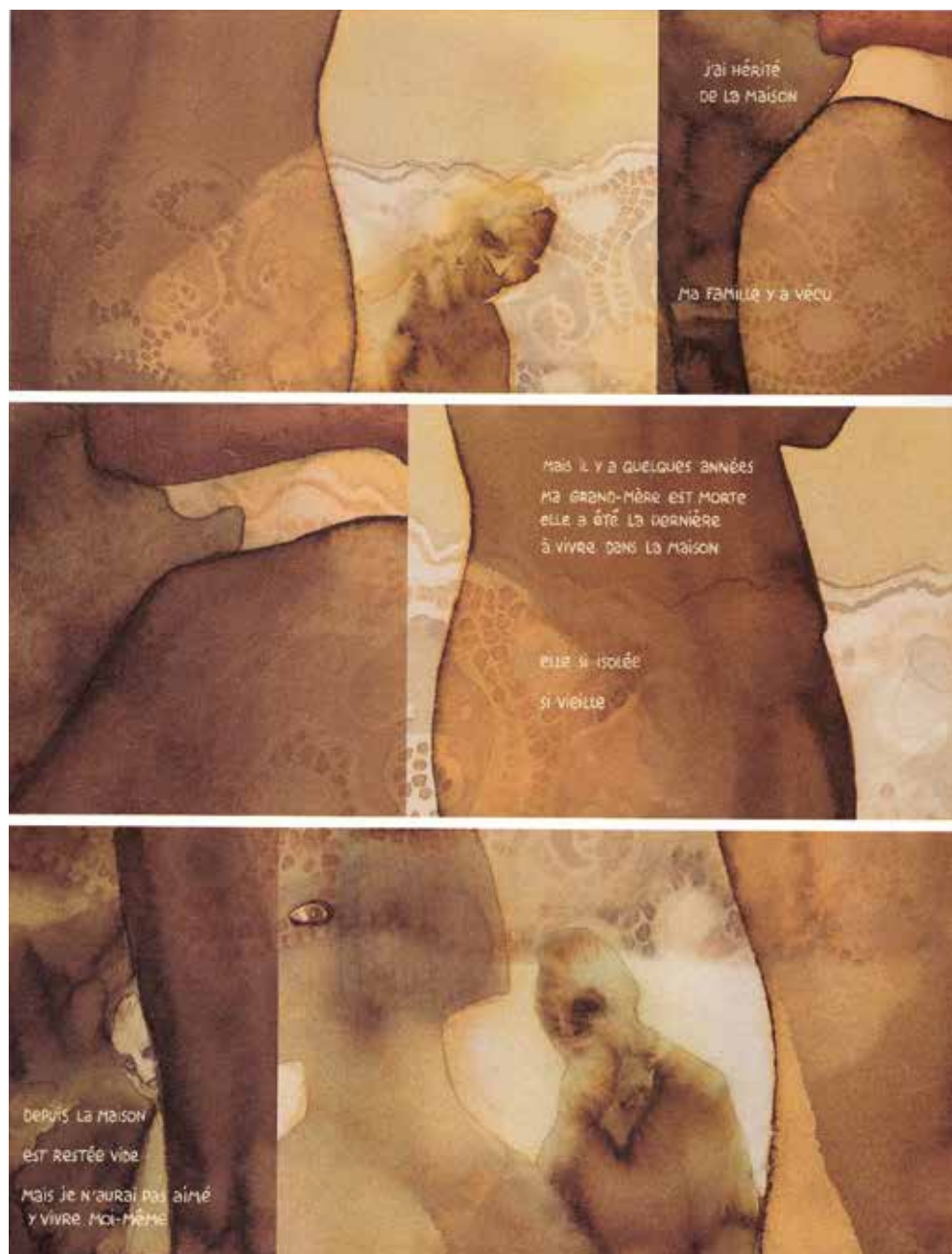


Fig. 37



Fig. 38



Fig. 39

of the cupboard, the wine glasses and the preserves on the shelves, the little purse belonging to 'She'. Thus, colour is a form of braiding by which the reader is encouraged to associate apparently disparate elements as connected by the themes of jealousy and as remnants of the past. With the close-up techniques that are often employed, these visual rhymes build the tension in the graphic narration.

### The wordlessness

Except for the imageless last page, which has only a quote summarising Fosse's final caption, the stage directions are not part of the verbal discourse of *Quelqu'un va venir*. This does not mean, however, that they are ignored in the adaptation. In wordless panels, Duba carefully reproduces the movements, gestures, and gazes stated in Fosse's directions for the stage. In these sections the pace of the narration again varies greatly: while one panel can condense different points of view and speed up a range of movements stated in the stage directions (Fig. 40),

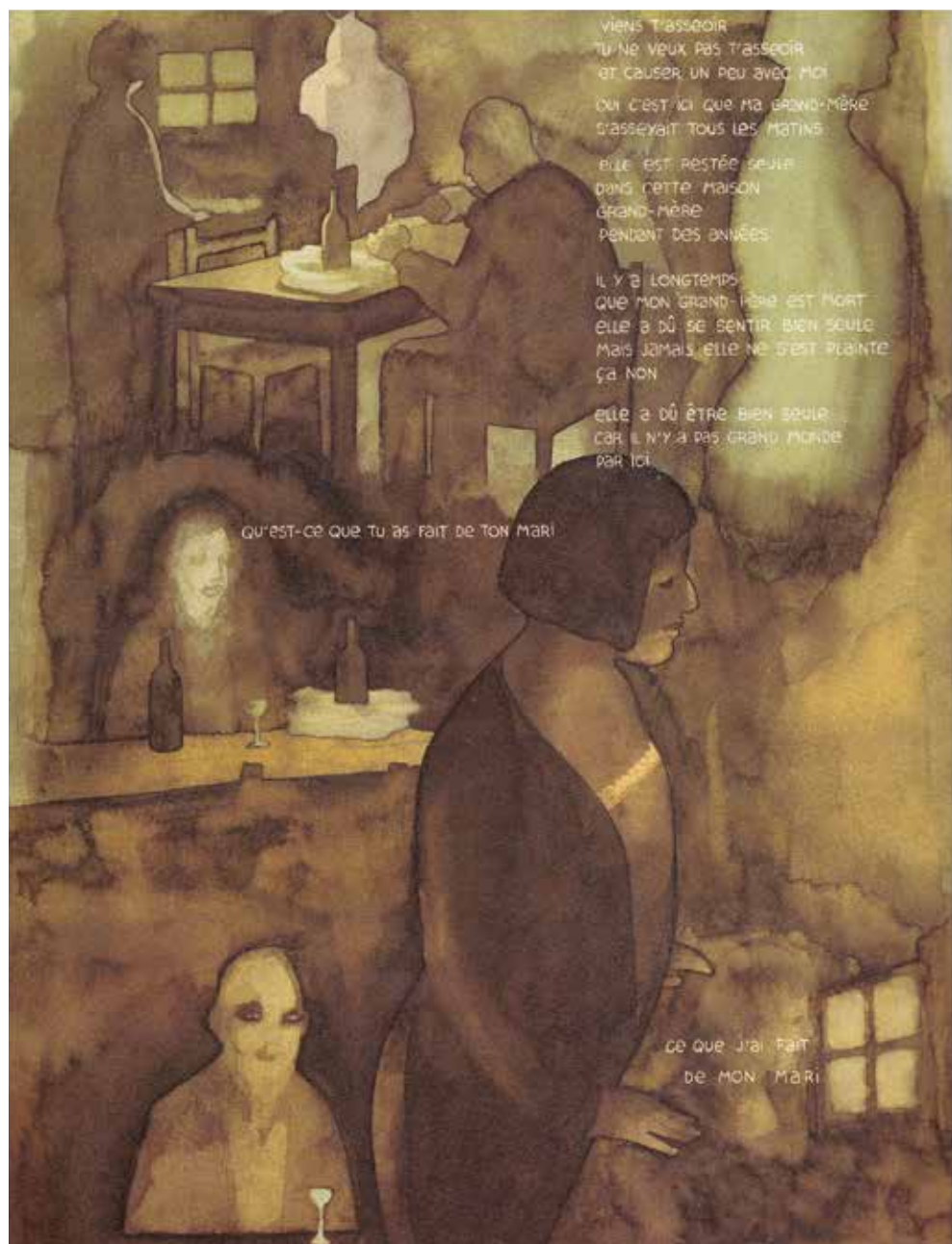


Fig. 40



Fig. 41

Fosse's indications can also be diluted and developed into a silent narration covering more than one page (Fig. 41). The example is taken from setting the scene in Act II. 'She' is alone in the courtyard, a man appears from behind the corner of the house, and at the very moment that 'She' catches sight of the intruder, Duba exploits the tension that arises from the turning of the page and interrupts the narration with a panel closing on the woman's startled, wide-open eye. The encounter is illustrated on the following page, where the absence of the gutter again speeds up the narration as if to render the flickering gaze of 'She' framing details of the 'Man'.

There is also another series of wordless panels in the album. Less evidently connected to the plot, they seem to explore subjectivities by framing soft, hazy colours, shadows or hardly recognisable details of natural elements, atmosphere, architecture or clothing. These are instances in which the action seems to hold its breath. The abstraction

seems to explore the unsaid, whether as thoughts, dreams, memories, or emotions. Groensteen explains a similar attention to the individual subjective impressions as characteristic of contemporary and poetic comics:

In modern or poetic comics ... what is shown does not necessarily pertain only to the level of action, but can bring two new categories into play: the subjectivity of the protagonists in all its varying forms (dream, emotion, fantasy, hallucination, projection, etc.) on the one hand, and/or, on the other hand, the deployment by the author of stylistic features such as analogy, metaphor, or allegory – or even graphic rhythmic and visual effects that exceed a strictly narrative intent.<sup>270</sup>

Two examples illustrate how these mute, abstract, panels are integrated into the album. Both are taken from Act I, though no verbal equivalent can be traced in the source text. The panels unexpectedly intrude on the ongoing discussion between ‘She’ and ‘He’; the subjects framed have no obvious connection to the visible world, an indecisiveness which makes the panels elusive. No unambiguous clues to help decipher the narration are offered but if considered as part of a sequence, the reader is likely to interpret them as signifiers in the narrative pattern. The first panel (Fig. 42) is positioned at the privileged bottom right corner of the right-hand page. In view of the preceding panel, this frame could be a visualisation of the train of thought exposed in the woman’s monologue, expressive of her fears or representing shadows from the past. Given its cliff-hanging position, the frame can be said to foreshadow the emptiness of the serialised abstract landscape on the following page. The second example (Fig. 43) is intelligible if considered as a visual rhyme, repeating a panel from the beginning of the album showing the black-and-white sea, no longer a guarantee for geographic isolation.

Other instances of braiding that contribute to the effect of repetition in the work are the almost compulsive doubling of eyes and concentration on gazes, and the framing of a window repeatedly approached by the protagonists. Reiterations of identical body postures also act as visual rhymes throughout the adaptation, some of which have intericonic echoes extending far beyond the album. Compositions representing a

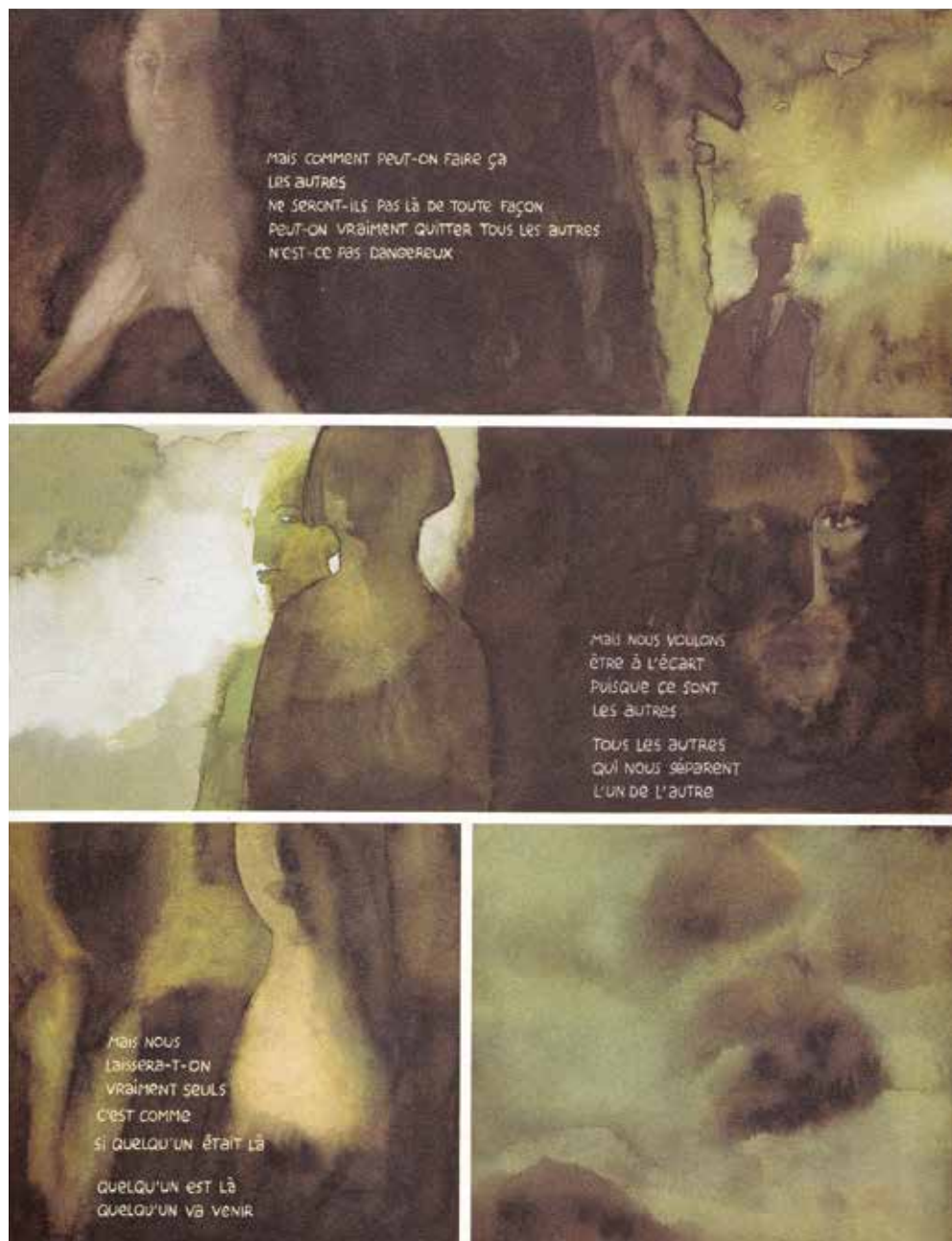


Fig. 42



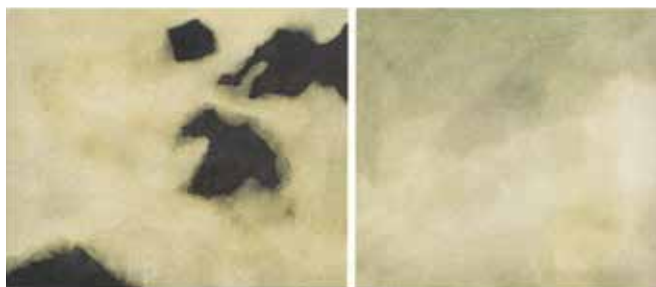
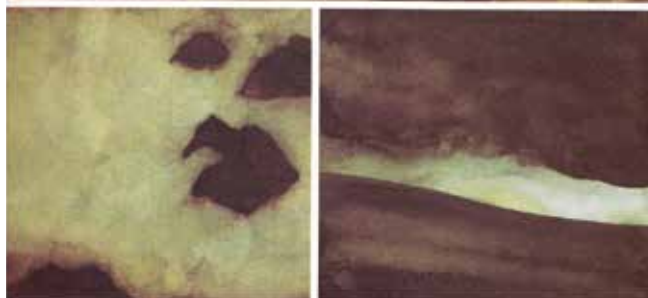
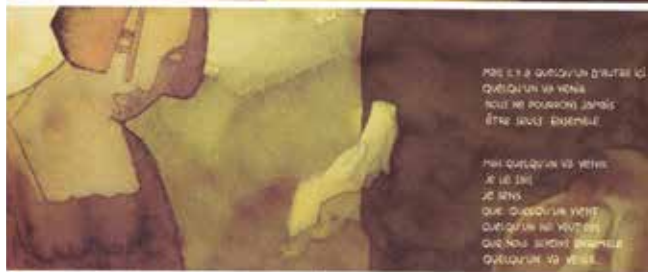


Fig. 43

man and a woman looking out to sea while a human figure, head resting in his hand, is crouching in the foreground, or 'She' bending over a cowering 'He' (or vice versa) repeatedly recur in the graphic novel, and recall Edvard Munch's many explorations of the motifs of love and attraction, melancholy and jealousy, anxiety and despair, illness and death in paintings such as *To mennesker/De ensomme* (1899, *Two People/The Lonely Ones*), *Melankoli* (1892, *Melancholia*) or *Vampyr* (1895, *Vampire*).

## Reflections

Duba's adaptation of *Nokon kjem til å kome* offers an opportunity to look closer at the connections between comics and poetry. It also serves as an example showing that the three directions from which a text's 'dominant' is determined can coincide. Fosse's drama poetry has, admittedly, inspired the adapter–mediator Duba to pick up on the lyrical qualities of the source text, and, as receivers and readers, we are left to focus on the poetic potential of graphic narration to show the number of ways the lyricism of the play has been translated into the visual medium.

As to the textual parts of the graphic novel, the playwright's stylistic choices have been maintained. When reproducing the characters' speech, Duba transfers the typographic arrangements into free verse and maintains the absence of punctuation. However, to a higher degree than commonly the case in poetry, words have a visual substance in comics in as much as they 'are not only meant to be read, but they must also be looked at, both in themselves and in reflection to the place they occupy in the work'.<sup>271</sup> The size of the lettering, the distance between letters, and the position of the words in the panel all inform the reader of *Quelqu'un va venir* as to the phonic qualities and the rhythm of the speech, and help connect the utterance to the speaker.

Rhythm and rhyme patterns achieved through laconic speech, pauses and repetitions, both verbal and non-verbal, are other important qualities of Fosse's poetic language transferred to the adaptation using its medium-specific resources. Changes in page layout and gridding, instances of braiding, experiments with the multiplication of the human figure, perspectives, and points of view, and the exploitation of the chromatisms and transparencies of watercolours are means with which

Duba creates visual rhymes and superimposes characters and settings to suggest emotions, tensions, and the complex overlapping of past, present, and future in the adapted text.

Finally, by translating prosaic stage directions into wordless panels and adding mute sequences with substantial abstraction, Duba not only creates rhythmic patterns and visual rhymes, but also fulfils the poetic aim of depicting a condition, a psychological state.



# Fabula

Turning to look at adaptations that distance themselves from the plot of the adapted work, the negotiation between the rewritten text and the rewriting seems to acquire greater relevance, at least at first glance. In their historical survey of comic art adaptations, Baetens and Hugo Frey suggest that a traditionally 'low-brow' genre of literature such as comics, in its confrontation with canonical culture, has long been reluctant to alter the plot of the great classics or in other ways intervene with the chain of events in the source material, instead assuming a 'didactic and reverential attitude toward the literary masterpiece and the big book'.<sup>272</sup> They observe that the event of the 'graphic novel', which was positioned in the literary system precisely as a form of 'literature' – culturally, formally, and visually different from the 'lower', more popular, comic strips – has encouraged adaptations in the comics format to take greater creative liberties with the adapted material, thus establishing a new, less compliant relationship with the canon.<sup>273</sup> If, today, the relationship between an adaptation and its source text is often more revisionary than reverential, this current artistic freedom resonates with the zeitgeist of an era famously occupied with the death of the author and postmodernist modes of rewriting, rather than with the confirmation of hypothetically 'stable' and 'ultimate' meanings in a work of art.

From intericonic homages to commentaries, from inspiration to dialogue, from parody to parasitage, the process of adaptation offers a boundless spectrum of possibilities to negotiate with the source text.

If we followed Sanders terminological distinction between ‘adaptation’ and ‘appropriation’, the case studies gathered in this central section of the book should be seen as appropriations of a forerunner, or, in Krebs’s wording, as reimaginings. Given the radical reworkings of fabula and characters known from the source work, discussing these comics in terms of adaptations is certainly dependent upon the specific access that only prior knowledge of the forerunner provides – without that knowledge the works stand firmly on their own as independent artworks. Thus, as Krebs observes, the identification of an adaptation is governed by a certain fluidity.<sup>274</sup> The question of how works such as *Bianca in persona*, *Reflets d’écume*, and *Baby Blue* can be read as adaptations of their forerunners despite the thorough changes to the plot as we know it, is a matter of interest because considerations on the connections established may enrich the understanding of the comics and bring certain features of the adapted works sharply into focus. Decoding these three works as adaptations requires the reader–receiver to actively establish parallels between hypotext and hypertext, in line with an extensive use of the term adaptation. When Krebs defines adaptation “as a process of forming connections”, which may be seen as acts of violence, or of radical updating, or anything in between or beyond’, she underlines the role and position of the spectator in this process:

Importantly, however, all such forming of connections needs to be understood as enacted by the spectator, at the point of reception, as much as (if not more so than) by the adaptor/translator/(re)writer. Thus, the connections are anything but stable entities fixed in time and place.<sup>275</sup>

On another note, the arts have also been influenced by the use of the term ‘adaptation’ in the natural sciences. In Bortolotti and Hutcheon’s reassessment of the process of adaptation, they move beyond the enduring question of the extent to which an adaptation is ‘faithful’ to its source. In the essay ‘On the Origin of Adaptations: Rethinking Fidelity Discourse and “Success” – Biologically’, they advance an evolutionary-developmental view on the relationship between source text and

adaptation, suggesting that ‘the “source” could be more productively viewed as the “ancestor” from which adaptations derive directly by descent; as in biological evolution, descent with change is essential’.<sup>276</sup> Thus, from an ‘evo-devo’ perspective, an intermedia adaptation, too, is seen as a descendant from an ancestor which has undergone a creative, diversifying process to reappear in a new medium and survive in a different environment equipped with unprecedented resources. Bortolotti and Hutcheon’s discussion sets the infamous fidelity discourse aside, without, however, forsaking to give credit to the ‘artistic significance’, the ‘cultural impact’ or the ‘vitality’ of the adapted text.<sup>277</sup>

Despite her extensive use of the term adaptation, Hutcheon however also reflects on the degree to which a revisitation needs to exhibit the presence of its source of inspiration in order to be regarded as an adaptation. She concludes that even a radical reworking has to connect to the ‘story’ of the adapted work if it is to be perceived as such: ‘For an adaptation to be experienced *as an adaptation*, recognition of the story has to be possible: some copying-fidelity is needed’.<sup>278</sup> A ‘recognition of the story’ is hardly limited to the act of tracing elements from the source plot in the adaptation. Awareness of the adapted work can emerge on different levels in the rewriting, and to subtle degrees; it can be expressed by revoking recognisable key figures or recovering a central motif, by imitating a style or rendering visual homage to the earlier work, as the examples will show. According to Hutcheon, ‘Sometimes homage is all that is possible – or allowed.’<sup>279</sup> While in the following three case studies, the comic art creators affirm their individual voices with a highly personal use of the source text, the connections to their forerunners are still stated in paratextual information (title, foreword, interviews), through hidden or explicit quotations from the source work, through iconographic references, or by transferring themes and motifs from the adapted text to the context of the adaptation. As Patrick Catrysse has observed, where the shared features between an adaptation and its source are few and discrete, the analytic focus needs to shift ‘from the definition of an adaptation (as an end-product) to the study of the adaptation as process’.<sup>280</sup> Like ‘water and steam are “similar” to

each other because one entity can be transformed into the other entity', he writes, by looking at the partial and gradual process of change that the source material has gone through in the adaptation procedure, a continuity between the two works can be perceived, although this connectedness does not involve 'fidelity' and 'equivalence', but gradual change and transformation.<sup>281</sup>

The question of fidelity to style becomes relevant in comic art transpositions drawing on another visual source, which is the case of Crepax's works that partly derive from films. Here I will consider the short story *Bianca in persona*, an adaptation that immediately strikes the reader as a visual tribute to Bergman's *Persona* while a more attentive exploration of Crepax's script opens up for a self-referential appropriation of the film's plot. Despite the strong iconographic references to Bergman's visual language, Crepax deconstructs the Swedish cult film by featuring his own 'darlings', Bianca and Valentina, as the two female protagonists, and proceeds to unearth the autobiographical theme of the artist's crises, present also in Bergman's original work. By concentrating on the autobiographical motif as the 'icon', or the 'dominant', in the transposition, *Bianca in persona* is read here as a reflection on Crepax's own double identity, in this comic art adaptation expressed as a 'schizophrenic' trade dangling between the mission of an independent artist and the necessity of a commercial adman to earn his living.

Andersen's iconic Little Mermaid is a literary character whose mythical potential has been exploited in diverse contexts; a protean figure with a thousand lives. In *Reflets d'écume*, the Little Mermaid undergoes a revisionist treatment relocating her to a Gothic setting of conspiracies and abuse. Ange and Varanda's rewriting of *The Little Mermaid* can be read as an attempt to resist what has been termed the Disneyfication of Andersen and of the fairy tale genre in general, while the choice of anchoring the timeless tale in a specific historical context of the Inquisition ties in with recent trends in the adaptation of fairy tale material.<sup>282</sup> According to Sanders:

If fairy tale and folklore make themselves particularly available for continuous re-creation and rewriting it is partly because of their essentialist



abstraction from a specific sociohistorical or geopolitical context ... The castles, towers, villages, forests, monsters, beasts, ogres and princesses of fairy tales exist seemingly nowhere and yet everywhere in terms of applicability and relevance. But a detectable counter-movement in twentieth-century reworkings of the form can be located in the desire to tie the stories back into a social, even social-historical, context, constituting in some respects an attempt to rationalise their magic.<sup>283</sup>

Ange and Varanda's reframing of Andersen's protagonist calls for a study not only of *Reflets d'écume* in relation to Gothic literature, but also of how the medium affordances of comics serve this particular approach to the source. I unravel the tangle of genre and medium using Julia Round's exploration of the connections between comics and Gothic in conjunction with Groensteen's semiotic study of graphic narratives.<sup>284</sup>

I round off by examining Bim Eriksson's graphic novel *Baby Blue*, which, according to its author, is freely based on Karin Boye's dystopic novel *Kallocain* of 1940. As many aspects of the sci-fi dystopia that Boye imagined in her novel were recognised as problems relevant to the audience of the 1940s so *Baby Blue*, despite its fanciful characters and updated setting, speaks to its readers about the anxieties of the 2020s. Even though the graphic novel's plot strays far from its source, I will look at how Boye's discourse is evoked and its complexities maintained in the adaptation.

A variety of patterns are recognisable in the reorganisation of the *fabula* in these case studies. All signal their connection to a well-known forerunner, but use its material freely: Crepax pays stylistic homage to Bergman and relates the film's autobiographical content to his personal situation; Ange and Varanda use the genre conventions of the Gothic as a filter to subvert *The Little Mermaid* into a tale of terror and horror; and, while evoking the malignancy of themes and motifs in *Kallocain*, *Baby Blue* updates its futuristic scenario.

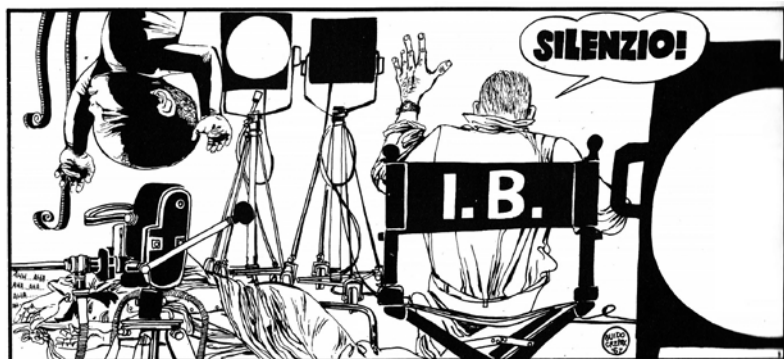


Fig. 44



Fig. 45

## Guido Crepax's *Bianca in persona*

In analysing the medium-specific features of comic art adaptation earlier, Crepax's revisitation of *The Immortal Story* was discussed. Blixen, however, was not the only Scandinavian celebrity to have crossed Crepax's drawing board. The Swedish actress Anita Ekberg was allegedly the source of inspiration for his character Anita, the heroine of the homonymous albums which appeared in the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>285</sup> In addition, several other works penned by the artist testify to his fascination with Ingmar Bergman's films. Bergman himself has a brief cameo in the short graphic narrative *Funny Valentine: Tautology* (Fig. 44), while a single-panel vignette referencing *Det sjunde inseglet* (*The Seventh Seal*) of 1957 appeared in the Milanese comics magazine *Horror* in 1970.<sup>286</sup> This drawing, titled *Omaggio a Ingmar Bergman* (Fig. 45), represents the Grim Reaper playing chess with one of the artist's famous female characters, Bianca, and is evidence of the special nexus between the Swedish film director and the enigmatic Bianca already at an early stage in Crepax's career. Some twenty years later this connection resulted in a short story in the comics format based on Bergman's 1966 film *Persونا* with Bianca as one of the two protagonists.<sup>287</sup> The adaptation bears witness to Crepax's appreciation of the aesthetics of Bergman's artistic language, but is also an appropriation of what he took to be the film's philosophical message. With its four-page-long narration, *Bianca in persona* is even more compressed in form than *La storia immortale*, but still succeeds in creatively redistributing the autobiographical subtext of the film to make it fit the comics creator's own self-referential discourse.

### In the beginning was the film

Crepax is known as an artist with a passion for cinema, as exemplified by *La storia immortale*. In 1945, as a 12-year-old, he made his debut as a comics creator by retelling in sequential drawings his mother's description of a film she had seen at the cinema the night before, Victor Fleming's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*.<sup>288</sup> The adaptation of film plots to comics is but one part of this interest, however. In Crepax's comic art production, the world of film is integrated in several ways, by paying

homage to favourite directors such as Fellini, Visconti, Buñuel, Eisenstein, Truffaut, Godard, Kubrick (and Bergman), or to actresses, above all Louise Brooks, who, as we have seen, has inspired the looks of the photographer Valentina Rosselli. In *La curva di Lesmo* ('The Lesmo Corner') of 1965, where Valentina made her first appearance as the protagonist of Crepax's comics, she is hired to immortalise the divas at the Venice Film Festival. In addition, as Alberto Fiz has observed, in Crepax's production the reception of films is also used as a theme, and film plots often break into the storylines of his comics.<sup>289</sup> The aesthetics of storyboards and the imitation of cinematographic techniques inform the formal organisation of his pages and panels: close ups and panorama shots are alternated to set the scene, extreme close ups of faces, eyes, and mouths are used to transmit emotions. Details in the surroundings and interiors are framed and isolated in single panels as if to zoom in on their symbolic meaning. Shifts in point of view are frequent, as are changes in perspective. Crepax also makes extensive use of split-screen techniques, shattering the page into several complementary or simultaneous images of the same episode.

### *Bianca in persona*

Like its cinematographic source of inspiration, *Bianca in persona* is a work designed to offer its audience an insight into the artistic and existential vision of its creator. It can also be said to represent a moment of truth. The adaptation replaces Bergman's two female protagonists, the mute actress Elisabet Vogler (Liv Ullman) and her nurse Alma (Bibi Andersson), with two of the characters closest to Crepax's own heart, Bianca and Valentina. In the late 1960s, Bianca, as suggested by her name, was brought into being as a symbol of pure beauty and total freedom; in Crepax's artistic universe she is eternally young and unchangeable, virtually mute, always naked, uninhibited, and unaffected by the rules and conventions of society. She has no regrets, she feels no sentimental longing and is untouched by grief. In *Bianca in persona* she is placed with Crepax's figurehead and alter ego, Valentina. Unlike Bianca, the fashion photographer Valentina Rosselli lives her life within the boundaries of society and daydreaming is her only form of escapism. She has

a name and a surname, a profession, a family, and an address – 45, Via De Amicis, Milan – she shares with her creator. She even has an ID card and, as the Valentina series continued to be published throughout the years, she was doomed to age alongside Crepax himself, whose life took an abrupt turn shortly after having confronted Bianca with Valentina in *Bianca in persona*. In the early 1990s Crepax was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, a condition that would affect his work as a comics creator and his style of drawing. In retrospect, the core message of Bianca's insistent monologue, which makes up the entire verbal discourse of the short story, is almost prophetic about Crepax's own situation:

your whole existence is schizophrenic... on the one hand you sell yourself... on the other you escape into an abstract and obscure world of fantasies... everybody knows your name but nobody knows the real you... even if you have not said anything, I know that you envy my free and happy life, maybe you would not want to exist... maybe you would just want to dream.<sup>290</sup>

As if by design, Bianca calls attention to how artists are defined by their *oeuvre*. Her words foreground the fluid and unstable dividing line between artistic freedom and the laws of the commercial market, a dilemma which Crepax personally came up against as an artist, and projected on his alter ego, the photographer Valentina. Bianca's prediction is that the commercialisation of artistic genius will cause the artist's identity to dissolve into two distinct personalities. She also points to the flickering creative flame which results from mercification and the focus on profit: 'your fire is out, your involvement is half-hearted... you are shutting yourself away' (Fig. 46).<sup>291</sup>

As for the 'dominant' steering the adaptation process, one theme present in the source work similarly concerns the reflection on the relationship established between the artist and his *oeuvre*, a theme heavily laden with autobiographical allusions in Bergman's film. According to a frequently quoted statement made by Bergman, *Persona* originated in a crisis which was both personal (autobiographical) and artistic, and the film that 'saved his life'.<sup>292</sup> *Persona* was his salvation while recovering



Fig. 46



Fig. 47

from pneumonia in 1965, and the film that showed him the way back to creativity after years when he had lost faith in the trade. With this autobiographical reading, Bergman's own creative crisis can be projected onto the muteness that plagues the actress Elisabet Vogler in the film; she has chosen silence to avoid playing false roles. Even if this understanding does not hold the key to the work in its entirety – *Persona* has been described as 'one of the most complex films ever made' and has lent itself to countless critical interpretations, in line with Bergman's advice that receivers 'dispose freely' of the material – the autobiographical reading of the work resonates with Crepax's own reflection on the subject of his adaptation.<sup>293</sup> For its publication in the April issue of the magazine *Il Grifo* in 1991, Crepax added a short preface (Fig. 47) sharing his personal idea of the tug-of-war between the two female characters, the mute and the loquacious, and noted his initial concerns regarding the casting:

The role of the nurse could just as well have been taken by Bianca instead of Valentina, and the same goes for the role of the actress. In the end, I decided to cast Bianca as nurse although she almost always is the mute protagonist of her adventures. Valentina, on the other hand,

who paradoxically is the most verbal creature I have forged, became the unwaveringly mute actress. It seemed to me that this contradiction was only superficial.<sup>294</sup>

### Form and content

Bianca and Valentina share an environment just as bare and essential as the space surrounding Alma and Elisabet in the film. The setting in *Bianca in persona* is, however, different. The sterile hospital room borrowed from Bergman's film is represented in only one panel of the adaptation, and the rest of the narrative unrolls on an island. While Bergman used Fårö, Gotland, as location for the film, Crepax chose Ponza, an island in the Mediterranean, where he had been on holiday. This connection to a personally lived experience foreshadows the motif of alienation in a familiar context, involving a sense of self-referential estrangement and questions of identity. The natural beauty of the landscape with its trees, cliffs, caves, and water is an efficient contrast to Bianca's (and Alma's) ruthless monologue.

Despite these parallels with the source work, *Bianca in persona* tells its own story. Its message cannot be found in the chain of events, which remains rudimentary and open-ended, even more so than what is the case of Bergman's film. Since Crepax reduces Bergman's wide range of narrative elements to a single, dominant theme of central importance, *Bianca in persona* discards the intricate entanglement of identities, the erotic intrigue, and the motif of leave-taking in *Persona*. The nurse's monologue is, however, as unyielding. To a greater extent than in the source work, her words are directed at the mute interlocutor and can hardly be understood as therapeutic or revelatory of her own inner life. Bianca's monologue dissects her mute adversary, making it clear that at the centre of the discourse in the adaptation is not a complex of problems proper to the speaking protagonist, but Valentina's personal dilemma:

I'm always appreciated ... nobody can criticise me ... since I've never set any rules for my behaviour, I've never crossed any lines ... you have come to a point where you want people to see you differently ... you compromise ... you accept roles that do not suit you.<sup>295</sup>



Fig. 48a

At stake in Crepax's adaptation is the self-referential problem of the commercialisation of art, limiting the freedom of the artist, as is also clarified in his preface. Crepax is alluding to his own double life as a convinced communist and salaried adman in the service of capitalism when he poses the following question: 'Is it possible to write "Viva Trotsky" on the window of a train compartment during a trip from Venice to Milan with one hand, while creating an ad for a perfume or a note pad with the other?'<sup>296</sup> The preface ends with a subtlety which not only works as an allusion to the adaptation's exploitation of one of Crepax's own successful trademarks, Valentina's raven-black bob (which seems to have faded in the adaptation), but also to the medium-specific possibilities of photography and film, both inspiring the narration: 'Valentina has not dyed her hair – this would have been a bad offence to the commercial laws she has to obey – she is rather exposed "as a negative"'.<sup>297</sup>

A glance at the last page informs the reader of Crepax's fascination for the simple but strikingly appropriate stylistic choices made by the film's costume designer Max 'Mago' Goldstein, functioning as an extension to the theme of duality in *Persona*.<sup>298</sup> Liv Ullman's white straw hat with its black ribbon and Bibi Andersson's black sunglasses have been transferred





Fig. 48b

to the comic art adaptation despite the women's nudity (Fig. 48a and Fig. 48b). In Crepax's composition, the legacy of Ingmar Bergman's and Sven Nykvist's eyes for structure is visible, and so is their preference for extreme close ups. The on-screen confrontation between the two protagonists is recreated in the adaptation not only by positioning the two women face to face in the monologue scene, but it is also visible in the slender 'filmstrip' dividing the second page into two halves (Fig. 49).<sup>299</sup>

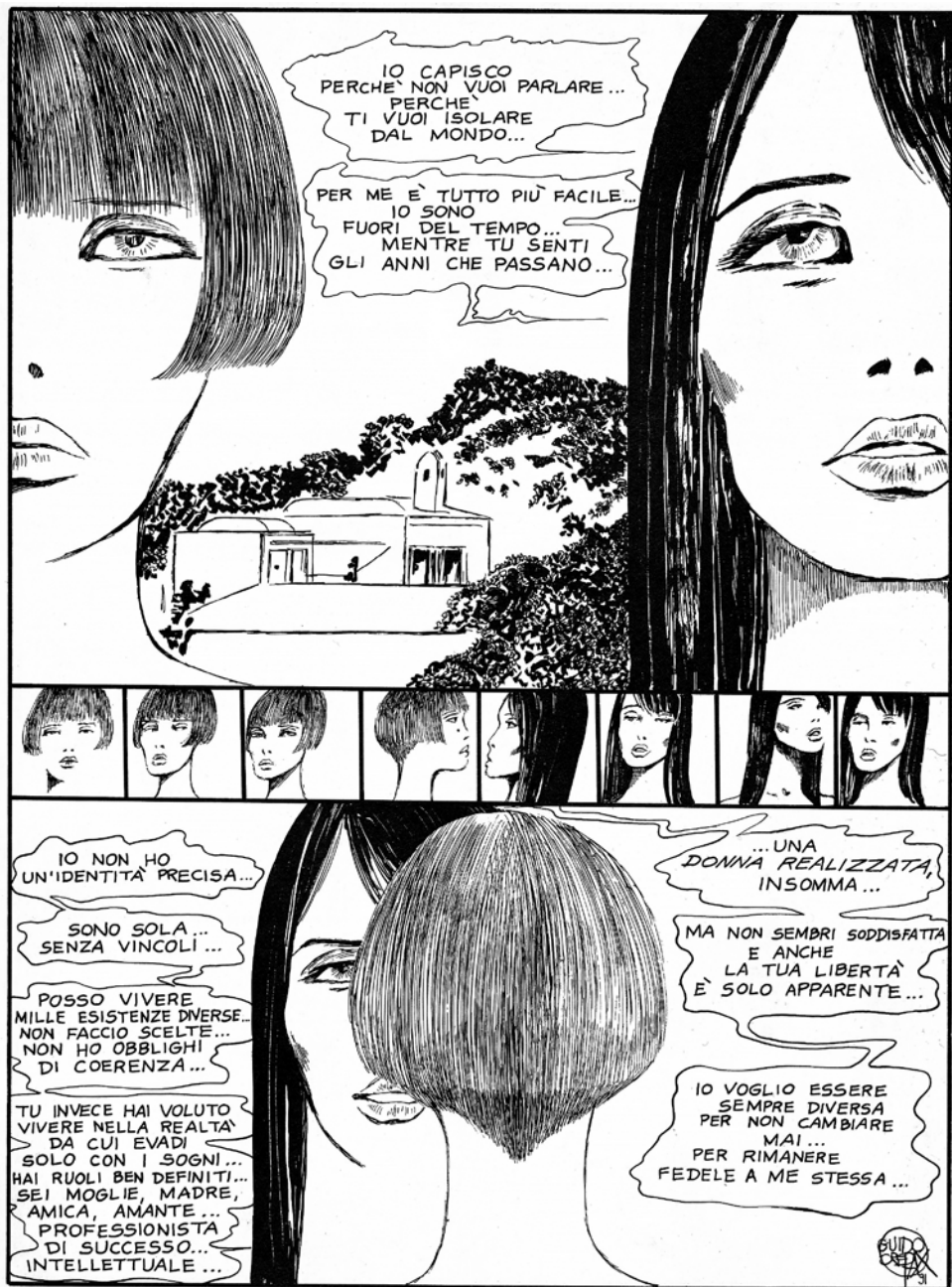


Fig. 49



Fig. 50a



Fig. 50b

## Reflections

Bergman's *Persona* has also been seen as a revisitation of the theme in Federico Fellini's self-reflexive film *8 1/2* of 1963, dealing with the writer's block of a suffering film director. Around the time of the publication of *Bianca in persona*, Crepax also adapted Fellini's film to comics, titling his adaptation *Bianca in '8 1/2'*.<sup>300</sup> In this transposition, Crepax himself appears in the role of protagonist, playing the part of the anguished artist who is consoled by Bianca, again acting as nurse. Despite their brevity, these two adaptations based on cinematographic sources are linked not only thematically, but also visually, as the first panel of *Bianca in persona* is replicated in *Bianca in '8 1/2'*. Both panels have been separated from the rest of the sequence by a gutter: in the former panel, Bianca is represented as one of the three Graces, a goddess of beauty and pleasure, a marble-white statue by the Mediterranean Sea; in the latter, her sculptural body is decomposed in an almost surrealistic way (Fig. 50a and Fig. 50b). Helped by these two introductory drawings, Crepax addresses the painful interdependency of artist and *oeuvre*, both as identification and slavery. Bianca's disjointed body also suggests the words used by Crepax to illustrate his fascination with characters with a double life. From his early drawings based on Fleming's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* to the mature artist's vision of Bergman's *Persona*, this proved artistically fertile, while unsettling. Crepax himself spoke of the attraction to duality as an obscure trait of his, an obsession with sequence and seriality: 'If I had not been occupied with serial drawing, I would have become a serial killer,' he claimed.<sup>301</sup>

## Ange and Alberto Varanda's *Reflets d'écume*

In the opening remarks of *H. C. Andersen og det uhyggelige* ('Andersen and the Uncanny'), a collection of essays exploring manifestations of the uncanny in Andersen's production, the editors observe that many translators of Andersen have taken great liberty with the original fairy tales, producing revisionist versions judged to be more 'suitable' for the young readership that, in their view, the author was addressing:

Translators have often taken special liberties in the translation of Andersen; because he has been considered a writer for children they have granted themselves a special license to reformulate and change his texts in order to address the readership, an audience of children speaking the target language, as flawlessly as possible.<sup>302</sup>

More often than not, the editors conclude, the international Andersen comes across as 'tamed, domesticated, and harmless', and his narrative is rendered void of any unsettling qualities.<sup>303</sup> In Oxfeldt's analysis of cinematographic transpositions of the fairy tales, *H. C. Andersens eventyr på film* ('Andersen's Fairy Tales on Film'), it is likewise pointed out that Andersen's own efforts and personal strategies to suit his storytelling to a dual readership of both children and adults seem to have been overlooked in many adaptations for the screen.<sup>304</sup>

Although the bowdlerising of Andersen is also common among comic art creators, his darker fairy tales have inspired sombre alternative readings, as exemplified by AKAB's *Storia di una madre*. Here I will look at *Den lille Havfrue*, one of Andersen's best-loved tales for children, and its transformation into a Gothic narrative aimed at adult readers. Scripted by Anne and Gérard Guéro (Ange) with artwork by Alberto Varanda, *Reflets d'écume* ('Sea-foam Reflections') is a graphic novel in two volumes unveiling the fairy tale's full Gothic potential.<sup>305</sup> In it we find complotting patriarchal tyrants and a protagonist, Louise D'Escandras, playing the role of both the innocent nun and the female victim; there are evil representatives of the clergy, a wicked bishop and nun in disguise, characterised by absence of reason, decency, and morality;

there are scenarios of entrapment and suffering such as hedge mazes and underground torture chambers, and a setting very far from Andersen's palace with its white marble, precious textiles, sparkling fountains, and glass dome that lets the sunshine in. In its place we have a decaying medieval castle with a candle-lit room covered in cobwebs where children are ruthlessly murdered. When showing the Little Mermaid around his residence, the Prince turns to his mute guest with these words: 'You would be surprised at the number of little boys of royal descent who have passed away in a foolish manner, suffocating on their breakfast so that a cousin, an uncle, or a brother could succeed to the throne' – a statement representative of the fact that the child-oriented message in Andersen's fairy tale is long gone.<sup>306</sup>

In contrast to the global tendency in the remediation of Andersen, Ange and Varanda catch hold of the author's nightside and contact that adult readership so often overlooked in the adaptation of his fairy tales. Of relevance in the transposition process is the strong emphasis on the unsettling qualities in Andersen's text, expanded and intensified to the point of being the element – the 'icon', 'dominant', or 'intentio' – that specifies *Reflets d'écume* and creates unity in the adaptation. The fabula of *Den lille Havfrue* is rewritten as Gothic horror, an interpretation enhanced in the visualisation to the point where it becomes splatter and abandons the subtleties of Andersen's own handling of terror.

### The Little Mermaid's Gothic new clothes

Readings of *The Little Mermaid* have taken many directions. As Jacob Bøggild and Pernille Heegaard observe in an essay dedicated to the reception of this fairy tale, biographical knowledge has led critics to look at the text as a literary enactment of Andersen's personal traumas, while the final scene, in which the mermaid is lifted up from the abyss by the Daughters of Air, has been judged both an artistically misplaced act of compensation and an aesthetic failure, as well as an ending perfectly in line with the text's Christian message.<sup>307</sup> This much-debated final scene is discarded in *Reflets d'écume* and, with it, the duality between the abyss of damnation and heavenly salvation is subverted. The Little Mermaid is instead lowered (forever, it would seem) into an uncomfortable realm,



Fig. 51

dense with less simplistic ambivalence: cross-contaminations not only of reality and fantasy, but also of ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ occur as a male *ondin* appears in Volume II to blur boundaries in a way that resonates with the Gothic, ‘where monstrosity is associated with the copying, mirroring, or incursion of one gender form onto or into the other’.<sup>308</sup> In the mermaid’s descent, one could argue, the text acquires a circular structure. Her return to the abyss at the end of this dark adaptation echoes the opening scene in which the newborn mermaid is lowered into the ocean, supposedly by her biological mother (Fig. 51). As Andersen’s famous opening lines are quoted in translation, the sombre hues characterising both volumes of the graphic novel turn transparent and fairy-tale blue for an instant:

Far out in the ocean the water is as blue as the petals of the loveliest cornflower, and as clear as the purest glass. But it is very deep too. It goes down deeper than any anchor rope will go, and many, many steeples would have to be stacked one on top of another to reach from the bottom to the surface of the sea. It is down there that the seafolk live.<sup>309</sup>

This is the only direct quotation from Andersen’s original; elsewhere the reader’s knowledge of the fairy-tale plot is taken for granted or judged irrelevant for the understanding of the story. When the mermaid appears at the castle entrance as a mute, bipedal young woman, only readers of Andersen will spot the intertextual reference to the sea witch, embedded in the puzzled Prince’s question: ‘How did this happen? I will never know, I suppose. Were you mute from birth? Or has a witch stolen your tongue?’<sup>310</sup>

The team behind *Reflets d’écume* has transposed Andersen’s tale by a shift of focus. From the underwater kingdom of the Little Mermaid where the fairy tale begins, the action is transferred to the medieval court of the Prince and to the realm of his adversary, King Lahr, and concentrates on a complex political intrigue in a society devastated by the Inquisition. In this overwriting of the fabula, the Little Mermaid saves a drunkard of a Prince, who falls overboard while spending a night on his ship with prostitutes. He then returns to the castle just in time



Fig. 52

for his own funeral, arranged by untrustworthy relatives and conspiring courtiers, celebrated in a Gothic cathedral by a vicious bishop. In a plot against the Prince, the Duchess of Valès tricks him into believing it was her niece, the novice nun Louise D'Escandras, who saved him from death by water. On discovery that Louise is carrying an heir, the bishop, now allied with King Lahr in the East, plans to kill the girl. In this plot of political intrigue, the love-struck Little Mermaid, who is found on the shore, mute and eerie, is but a ghostly presence. Being a mermaid, she is banned by the Inquisition as a demonic creature alongside witches, vampires, werewolves, and the sexually depraved, and fears for her life and mental sanity as people around her are being persecuted, tortured in the dungeons, and burned on pyres because of their inability to reveal the satanic rituals they supposedly use to evoke sea creatures. As the second volume comes to a close with the words *à suivre* (to be continued), King Lahr is planning to profit from the disorder in his rival's territory by overthrowing young Prince Louis, heir to the throne following to his father's mysterious death.<sup>311</sup>



As these ingredients reveal, horror and fear – bloodshed and violence – are the defining features of *Reflets d'écume*. This imagery of gore and rage, and appearances such as the zombie-like combatants involved in a sword fight (Fig. 52), have little to do with the instances of suspense to be found in Andersen's text. Although there are episodes in *Den lille Havfrue* incorporating elements of nightmarish atrocity, Andersen treads the line between a concrete display of these elements and the suggestion of an atmosphere of dread. In the central scene of the fairy tale, which sees the Little Mermaid approaching the witch's den in the forest, details make fear a tangible experience: skeletons; black blood spilling out of the witch's chest; snake-like creatures reaching out for the girl. But there are also obscure parts redolent of almost supernatural dread in the accounts of the witch's telepathic qualities and the irresolvability of the demonic pact:

She reached a large muddy clearing in the forest, where big fat water snakes slithered about, showing their foul yellowish bellies. In the middle of this clearing was a house built of the bones of shipwrecked men ... 'I know exactly what you want,' said the seawitch. 'It is very foolish of you, but just the same you shall have your way, for it will bring you to grief, my proud princess.' ... 'Once you have taken a human form, you can never be a mermaid again. You can never come back through the waters to your sisters, or to your father's palace. And if you do not win the love of the Prince so completely that for your sake he forgets his father and mother, cleaves to you with his every thought and his whole heart, and lets the priest join your hands in marriage, then you will win no immortal soul. If he marries someone else, your heart will break on the very next morning, and you will become foam of the sea.' ... Then she pricked herself in the chest and let her black blood splash into the caldron. Steam swirled up from it, in such ghastly shapes that anyone would have been terrified by them.<sup>312</sup>

In accordance with Ann Radcliffe's reflections on the two schools of Gothic writing, Andersen's register can be said to span from uncensored horror to suggestive terror, and back again. In her posthumous essay

'On the Supernatural in Poetry', Radcliffe explained terror as a narrative mode suggesting dread and obscurity while leaving the visualisation of these categories to the imagination of the reader.<sup>313</sup> Horror, by contrast, is for Radcliffe characterised by graphic detail. Building on this distinction, an authority in Gothic scholarship such as Devendra Varma has suggestively clarified the difference between terror and horror as the gap between 'the smell of death and the stumbling against a corpse'.<sup>314</sup>

Although *Reflets d'écume* offers no equivalent to the Little Mermaid's encounter with the witch, the examination of Andersen's juxtaposition of disturbing elements, on the one hand, and anxiety and suspense on the other, takes account of what the adaptation has no ambition to recreate. In a visual medium, a display of splatter and violence comes easily and, if compared to the instances of Gothic terror in Andersen's tale, unambiguously sprawls across the pages of the adaptation to be contemplated in detail.

### A medium-specific analysis of the Gothic

Beyond a cast and setting that exploit standard Gothic tropes to create an atmosphere of horror and decay, there is the question of how the medium-affordances of comics are used to signal the Gothic overwriting of Andersen's tale. Visual strategies concerning the representation of space (both domestic and outdoors) persuasively render the sense of entrapment of the imperilled heroine Louise D'Escandras and enhance her psychodrama. The pages visualising Louise as she reveals her pregnancy (the consequence of rape) to her maid, make use of changes in perspective to create a feeling of vertigo, while heavy curtains and dark labyrinthine castle corridors represent her imprisonment.<sup>315</sup> In Volume II, suiting the action to the word and the word to the image, young and innocent Louise is led into a hedge maze accompanied by the ambassador's words: 'A woman should not take part in power games, but be content with her role as wife and mother ... A wise philosophy in times of trouble'.<sup>316</sup> The maze also articulates the Prince's descent into folly as he gets lost in its twisting pathways and in his own subjective universe, where he is the only one to catch glimpses of the mermaid.<sup>317</sup>

While the portrayal of Louise D'Escandras resonates with the standard interpretation of the Gothic heroine as an oppressed victim, the representation of the Little Mermaid emphasises the turn towards the uncanny that the original tale takes on in this adaptation. The mermaid's presence in *Reflète d'écume* recalls and embodies the Gothic concept of haunting from several perspectives: on an intertextual level, she is the uncanny echo of Andersen's familiar fairy-tale heroine; in the narrative universe of the adaptation, she is both a repressed creature belonging to a pagan past and a revenant ghost, persecuting the Prince and causing him to have a mental and physical breakdown. Through the visualisation of water and sea foam that unexpectedly materialise to torment the characters, the grip of the past and the foreshadowing of a dreadful future is suggested, and the mermaid is reminded of who she is: an unwanted presence that has gone underwater to resurface unexpectedly. On several occasions, the panels are submerged by masses of water and the colouring changes to indicate a psychic relocation from the castle's domestic space to a supernatural underwater world.<sup>318</sup> When the Little Mermaid overhears a conversation and learns that the Prince will marry Louise D'Escandras, she is touched by reflections of light and transferred to a surreal abyss where anonymous voices urge her to kill the Prince (Fig. 53).<sup>319</sup> In addition to its function as an explicit reference to the title of the work, this recurring water detail resonates with Round's view on braiding in the context of 'graphic Gothic'. Here, Round asserts, the technique of braiding corresponds to 'a haunting, an echo of something previously existent in the story'.<sup>320</sup>

Braiding, as a form of visual alliteration through which the comics creator connects single panels or details in panels to one another, is commonly founded 'on the remarkable resurgence of an iconic motif'.<sup>321</sup> As Groensteen clarifies in his addendum to the chapter on the art of *tressage* in *Système de la bande dessinée*, connections are established *in praesentia*, when details in different panels in the single page relate, or *in absentia*, when visual parts on distant pages communicate.<sup>322</sup> While on a first level, braiding, like verse rhymes, is an 'embellishing' pattern of repetitions creating coherence and unity in the narrative, on a higher level it also says something about the relationship of a part of the narrative to



Fig. 53

the work in its entirety. In this latter occurrence, as already mentioned, braiding creates meaning by emphasising a certain element or by visualising how episodes, even if thematically, spatially, or chronologically distant, tie up with each other. In addition, Groensteen also suggests that instances of braiding can be hierarchically ordered, depending, for example, on the number of elements connected and their extension in the narrative.<sup>323</sup> Despite the different lines of action that have brought the narration to this point, certain forms of repetition that occur in *Reflets d'écume* decoratively link the two albums to each other: the title page of *Noyade* is scattered with bloodstains, mindful of the gory battle at the end of *Naiïade*; the image of the Prince literally drowning in his madness on the following page echoes that of the mermaid in a nightmarish underwater world which introduces *Naiïade*, and tells of his obsession with the sea creature. In addition, both volumes open and close with similar settings (a seascape and a desolate shore) and with the same motif (sea foam reflections). On other occasions the artist's use of braiding instead works as a dialogue with sematic consequences. By selecting a few examples, I will look at what braiding can tell us about media affordances and how visual codes are combined with verbal

messages to help build up an eerie atmosphere and communicate the true nature of these deceitful characters.

A full moon partially obscured by clouds is a recurring element throughout the two volumes of *Reflets d'écume*. It appears on the opening page of the first volume and its presence surrealistically goes along with most scenes of the narrative.<sup>324</sup> The moon is also framed in a panel of its own, thus inviting the reader to stop and contemplate its importance. The constant replication of the full moon accentuates the gloomy atmosphere in which the transposition is cast, and works with other elements, such as character enunciations or image combinations, to create the mood. By having one character metafictionally comment on its ghostly omnipresence – ‘but is not the full moon a pagan symbol?’ – by inserting the full-moon panel into sequences alternating the moon and the characters, as in page 32 of Volume II, where close ups of the unreliable counsellor come with the image of the moon or, on page 33, where panels representing the bishop and one of his victims are positioned in a sequence concluding with the moon, or by visualising the moon beclouded by the flapping wings of ravens, Ange and Varanda play on Gothic stereotypes.<sup>325</sup> The same function is held by the archetypal black cat which appears intermittently throughout the work.<sup>326</sup>

Like braiding, gridding and page layout can express both function and ornamentation. In Round’s analysis of the parallels between the Gothic trope of the crypt and the use of gridding in comics, she notes that both spaces host events and moments not fully revealed to readers and characters.<sup>327</sup> Not only is the gridding black throughout both albums of *Reflets d'écume*, it is also, occasionally, smeared with blood (Fig. 53).<sup>328</sup> The bloodstains around the panel framing a close-up of the bishop seem to foreshadow the evil deeds of which he will prove capable a few pages later.<sup>329</sup> If the bleeding gutter hints at the bishop’s devilish nature, it is made explicit as the blood extends to his speech bubbles, especially to the ones connecting his victims. The potential of the visual medium is put on display as the bishop’s statement, ‘I know what shapes his [the Devil’s] servants take’, is combined with his own revelatory shadow cast on the wall, visualising the true embodiment of the dark powers (Fig. 54).<sup>330</sup>



Fig. 54

A final structural interference with the Gothic in literary texts concerns the possibilities of comics to break down the page layout to represent simultaneous episodes. Where Gothic literature experiments with narrative layers, transposing the trope of the labyrinth on

a structural level by working with multiple perspectives, stories within stories, narrators introducing their own subjective worlds, dreams and nightmares, letters, manuscripts, and footnotes, comics can make use of medium-specific qualities to visualise the same complexity. On the subject of simultaneity, Round writes that ‘A Gothic structure is thus apparent in comics, as the narrative is presented in a non-linear manner where all moments co-exist on the page’.<sup>331</sup> An emblematic example taken from Volume II showcases four instalments simultaneously on a double page spread: witches being burned in public; the Prince drowning in his madness; the mermaid at little Prince Louis’s bedside; and Louise D’Escandras confronting her aunt, the Duchess of Valès.<sup>332</sup>

### Reflections

Measured against the child-friendly revisitations and representations of the Little Mermaid, Ange and Varanda’s Gothic account comes across as a welcome counternarrative to the global trend in intermedia translations of Andersen looking to reduce the complexity of the fairy tales and sanitise the author. In *Reflets d’écume*, tropes stemming from the Gothic tradition are handled with narrative techniques specific to comics and conspire with a gruesome intrigue to create a work of horror, decay, and haunting folly. In a graphic–Gothic guise, Ange and Varanda’s mermaid succeeds in drawing out the odd and uneasy ‘adult’ Andersen, but the subtle terror proper to the adapted text is overshadowed by the repertoire of ‘graphic’ horror on display in the adaptation.

Bim Eriksson's *Baby Blue*

In its subtitle, *Roman från 2000-talet (Novel from the 21st Century)*, Karin Boye's *Kallocain* of 1940 is presented to the reader as a work of science fiction.<sup>333</sup> Like many other dystopian visions of future societies, the text was also forged to articulate the author's anxieties over her current reality: the threat of rising totalitarian systems on the verge of the Second World War, and the dark side of the investigations into the human mind cultivated by depth psychology. *Kallocain*, Boye's most renowned work both in Sweden and abroad, and last literary achievement before her death in 1941, is a fictional autobiography written in the first person by the chemist Leo Kall, a citizen of the futuristic Worldstate and a prisoner of the enemy, the Universal State, as he informs the reader in



the introduction to his memoirs.<sup>334</sup> His dual role dealing in the two extremes in the fictional world – scientific research in the service of a police state and a private, diaristic form of literary writing in a context where culture has become a crime – reveals Kall's 'illicit' split personality right from the start.<sup>335</sup>

Betty Pott, the protagonist of Bim Eriksson's graphic novel *Baby Blue*, published in 2021, is likewise an unruly citizen with a split personality in a Swedish kingdom not too far distant. In the wake of a 'culture purge', she revels in any censored sentimental pop music that she can get her hands on with the help of a mysterious dealer.<sup>336</sup> In her miserable state she googles forbidden information on the internet: 'Why don't I fit in?' 'What's wrong with me?' 'Is this the way life should be?'<sup>337</sup> Like Leo Kall, her public manifestations of 'negative' emotions raise the authorities' suspicions in a regime where no tragic or dark thoughts are allowed. These faux pas, of which both protagonists are guilty, set the action in motion.

In analysing *Baby Blue*, I will consider it a spin-off and parallel to *Kallocain*. This understanding of the work is grounded in Eriksson's own comments that Boye's novel was her loyal companion throughout the creative process. As with *Kallocain*, the artist claims in an interview with Karin Bergström, *Baby Blue* was conceived as a critical commentary on the politics and values of contemporary society, despite its futuristic setting:

*Kallocain* was with me throughout the process. My main inspiration was the atmosphere and the creation of a new world. Karin Boye created one of the great dystopias in literary history, before both George Orwell's *1984* and Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*. From what I've gathered, Boye wanted to speak about her own contemporary age, about politics and about the values of the time, and she did it in a new and unconventional way. This is exactly what I have tried to do by using our contemporary society as springboard.<sup>338</sup>

This interpretive approach to *Baby Blue* is further sustained by several rather specific features shared by the two works: both the source text and its modern revamping can be defined as 'drug dystopias', near-future

societies 'where pharmacology produces or reinforces a social order'; in both works a resistance movement, organised by women or, at the very least, feminine 'in spirit', defies the tyranny of the totalitarian regime; both texts present protagonists incapable of putting aside their antisocial and obsolete 'sensibility' (expressed as a longing for forbidden forms of art or shown in the spectre of their human feelings) in the name of a 'sense' dictated by a state where the individual is only a cell in a totalitarian organism, as long as it is a 'happy, healthy cell'.<sup>339</sup>

The translation of an 'atmosphere', as Eriksson asserts in the quotation above, reads as the recreation of a near-future Swedish society which Boye envisaged as characterised by the suppression of cultural expression and individual differences, censorship, whistle-blowing, interception, monitoring, and pharmacological abuse of citizens by public officials. The common problem in the set-up of these brave new worlds is represented by the split personality protagonists and an opposition movement. If these motifs can be seen as 'dominants' in the interrelationship between *Baby Blue* and its source of inspiration, as an adaptation, the graphic novel also shares the adapted text's use of the genre of dystopia to denounce contemporary social and political ills.

### What to do with them?

If dehumanisation through the elimination of 'negative' personal feelings is the ultimate goal of the authoritarian states conjured up by Boye and Eriksson, the narrative function of the fictional drugs is to corroborate this part of the dystopia. Though serving the same purpose, the two drugs operate differently: Kallocaïn is a truth serum administered to extract the citizens' innermost antisocial secrets and condemn thought-crime as traitors of the regime; Magnazapin, in *Baby Blue*, is instead a therapeutic substance with effects like anaesthetics or antidepressants. It is described as a 'chemical, impermanent lobotomy', pacifying negative thoughts and eradicating existential anguish to produce docile and pleasantly euphoric citizens.<sup>340</sup> As Betty Pott is suspected of crying in public after witnessing a suicide and refuses to admit that she is experiencing 'problems' – instead blaming her condition on an allergic reaction – she is shopped by a community hostess. When her manifestation

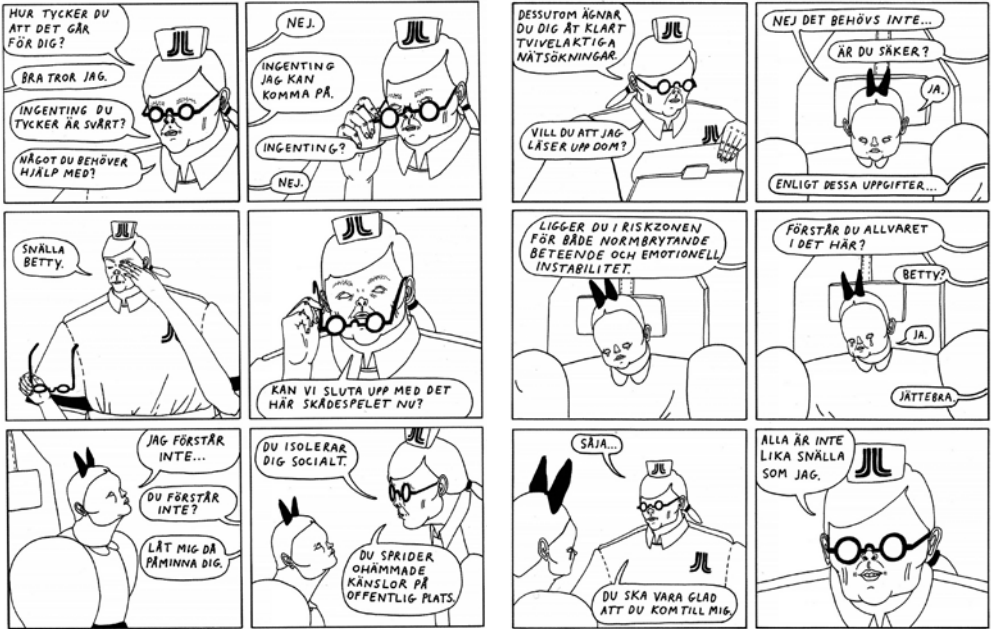


Fig. 55

of uninhibited emotion is reported to the authorities, Betty is evicted from her home and subjected to compulsory pharmacological treatment.

While Leo Kall has to justify his outburst of emotion in front of faceless administrators at the Propaganda Ministry's Seventh Bureau, Betty Pott is taken care of by frightfully cheery or methodically inquisitive nurses at the Public Health Agency. The dialogue between Betty and head nurse Solveig (Fig. 55) states her case:

'How do you think you are doing?' | 'I think I'm fine.' | 'You're not experiencing any difficulties? Anything you need help with?' || 'No. Nothing I can think of.' | 'Nothing?' | 'No.' || 'Betty, please.' || 'Can we just stop playing now?' || 'I don't understand.' | 'You do not understand? Let me just remind you.' || 'You are isolating yourself socially. You are spreading unrestrained emotions in public.' || 'You are searching for clearly dubious information on the internet. Do I need to read it out loud?' || 'Oh no, no need to.' | 'Are you sure?' | 'Yes.' | 'According to

this data ... you are in the danger zone of being accountable for both norm-breaking behaviour and emotional instability.' || 'Do you understand how serious this is? Betty?' | 'Yes.' | 'Very well.' || 'Well, then ... You've been very lucky to find a person like me.' || 'Not everyone is as nice as I am'.<sup>341</sup>

Betty's first dialogue with the patronising nurse covers eight pages and has been designed to envelop the reader-spectator in the miasma of disbelief and defeat emanating from the protagonist. The line drawings are clean and relevant, the gridding is befittingly regular and the number of individual frames dedicated to the two partners involved in the conversation does not significantly differ. However, any first impression of equality is contradicted by how the 'reverse shot' technique is mastered as the narration proceeds. Towards the end of the sequence, the head nurse, when seen from Betty's viewpoint, occupies the whole frame and careful attention is given to her mannerisms. Betty sits motionless and seems to disappear into her big chair as she is represented top-down from Solveig's perspective, a subdued position confirmed when both women are seen together from the viewpoint of the onlooker.

When not talked down to, Betty is treated like a child by ecstatic nurses who compliment her on her beautiful name and gorgeous photo ID. After her first treatment she is given a sticking plaster designed to look like a smiley, bearing the text 'A clean mind – my duty' (Fig. 56).<sup>342</sup> The text printed on the sticking plaster, the euphemistic coinages such as *sambällsvård* (community hostess) and *kulturrensning* (culture purge), and the head nurse's jargon exemplify how the language of the graphic novel contributes to recreating an atmosphere reminiscent of Boye's Worldstate, where propaganda is modelled on the discourse of the nascent welfare state in the Sweden of the 1930s, with its accent on collective solutions instead of individual needs. In Boye's novel the emphasis is on 'purpose' and 'method', on a matter-of-fact order and discipline regulating everything from military defence to demographics, while coinages such as 'individualistic-romantic thought' and 'sentimental existence' describe the obsolete past.<sup>343</sup> In *Baby Blue*, the prime minister's complacent wording in a television interview further ties in with



Fig. 56

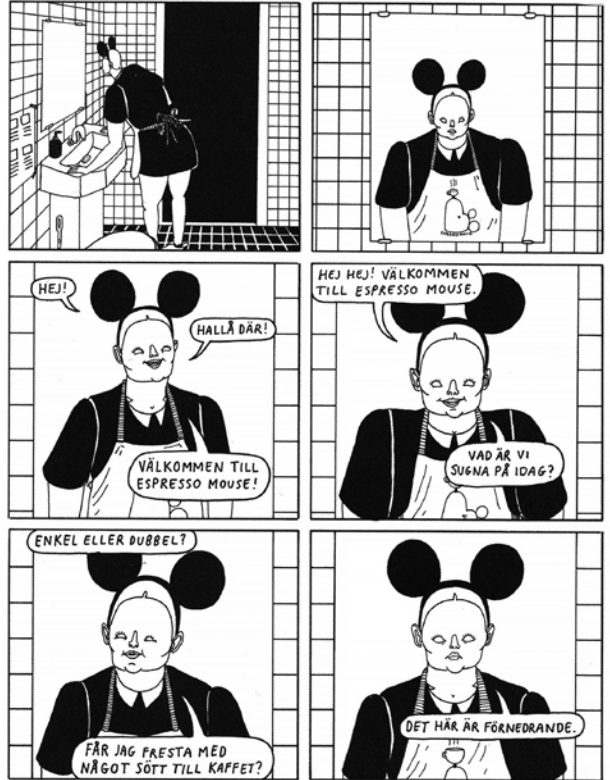


Fig. 57

Swedish interwar eugenics and racial biology. When speaking of the Swedes as the strongest nation on earth, and of majority society as a strong tree with healthy branches bearing the occasional rotten fruit, the politician's words echo the pseudo-scientific 'findings' of the racial biologist Herman Lindborg, according to whom the Nordic race, genetically superior to all races, was 'more prominent in Sweden than in other countries'.<sup>344</sup>

Both Leo Kall and Betty Pott are intensely aware of their own difficulties in conforming, but adopt different strategies to deal with their inner dislocations. With her Mickey Mouse-ears, Betty does her best to hide her 'splintering, dissatisfaction, and personal sentimentality under a controlled mask of happiness' (Fig. 57), an approach which is highly discouraged in *Kallocain*. Here, Leo strenuously sides with the

authorities as a defence mechanism, certain to be believed and forgiven because of the drug he has developed for the regime.<sup>345</sup> Thinking back to the night when he received the warning letter from the ministry, he writes, ‘here I lay, worrying over the splintered ones, as if I myself were one of them. ... I did not wish to be splintered; as a fellow-soldier I was wholehearted, without a drop of deceit or treason. ... *Shoot the splintered ones!* would from now on be my motto.’<sup>346</sup> While Kall makes it his mission to hunt down ‘the splintered ones’ and trace members of the resistance movement through his experiments with Kallocain, Betty makes friends with Berina, a rebel, during her first intravenous drip, and joins the all-female community of activists at their base in the woods.

### A female justice league

The design of the font used for the title *Baby Blue* (Fig. 58), with its block letters melting away, recalls the fluid, psychedelic typography invented by pioneering poster artists in the 1960s, such as the San Francisco-based ‘Big Five’ (Rick Griffin, Alton Kelley, Victor Moscoso, Stanley Mouse, and Wes Wilson). The choice of a style of lettering tied to the hippie scene connects with Betty Pott’s love for ‘transgressive’ music and mind-altering drugs, but also to the utopian counterculture of communal living, which is promoted by the resistance movements in both *Kallocain* and *Baby Blue*.



Fig. 58

While the 'organic' sect in Boye's Worldstate is a movement of non-aggression based on blind trust between loosely connected members who occupy an underground territory of ancient wells and timidly sprouting plants, the countermovement in Eriksson's graphic novel is a collective of women encouraging free expression of suppressed feelings such as despondency, erotic want, and aggressiveness – even armed resistance. The headquarters of the resistance far out in the woods is a place to hide or not to hide, depending on one's needs, according to the leader Hazel.<sup>347</sup> Dressed in boots and briefs, the rebels owe their looks partly to Wonder Woman, thus offering an alternative to Betty's girlish hair ribbon and puffed sleeves. The women in the collective share the superheroine's courage, strength, determination, and independence, though Hazel's feminist agenda is indebted to Virginia Woolf: 'A woman needs a room of her own with key and lock ... enough money to support herself ... and maybe a firearm'.<sup>348</sup> Among these women Betty Pott is reborn as Baby Blue after having suffered a panic attack and accepted her mental fragility.

This all-female justice league stands as a parallel to the 'organic' sect representing an alternative way of living in *Kalloccain*. Although Boye's underground movement is not exclusively made up of women and is not limited to supporting a female cause, it has been seen as an expression of a 'common feminine desire for an essence which is original and organic'.<sup>349</sup> In opposition to the totalitarian state, the underground sect has no official organisation, only bonds built on mutual trust. Its members live outside the militarised community in a subterranean area with uncontaminated soil suited to agriculture, among stacks of scrolls with musical scores no one can read. Despite the obvious differences, both forms of rebellion indicate the possibility of a philosophy of life in contrast to the one imposed by the regime. The 'anti-symbol', by which the female guerrilla in *Baby Blue* recognises its members, represents the humility of accepting that the same norms and conventions cannot regulate the lives of every individual.<sup>350</sup> In addition, the women's location in the verdant forest on the margins of society is a setting offering a visual alternative to the sterile hospital environment where Betty undergoes treatment. The rich vegetation occupying the entire

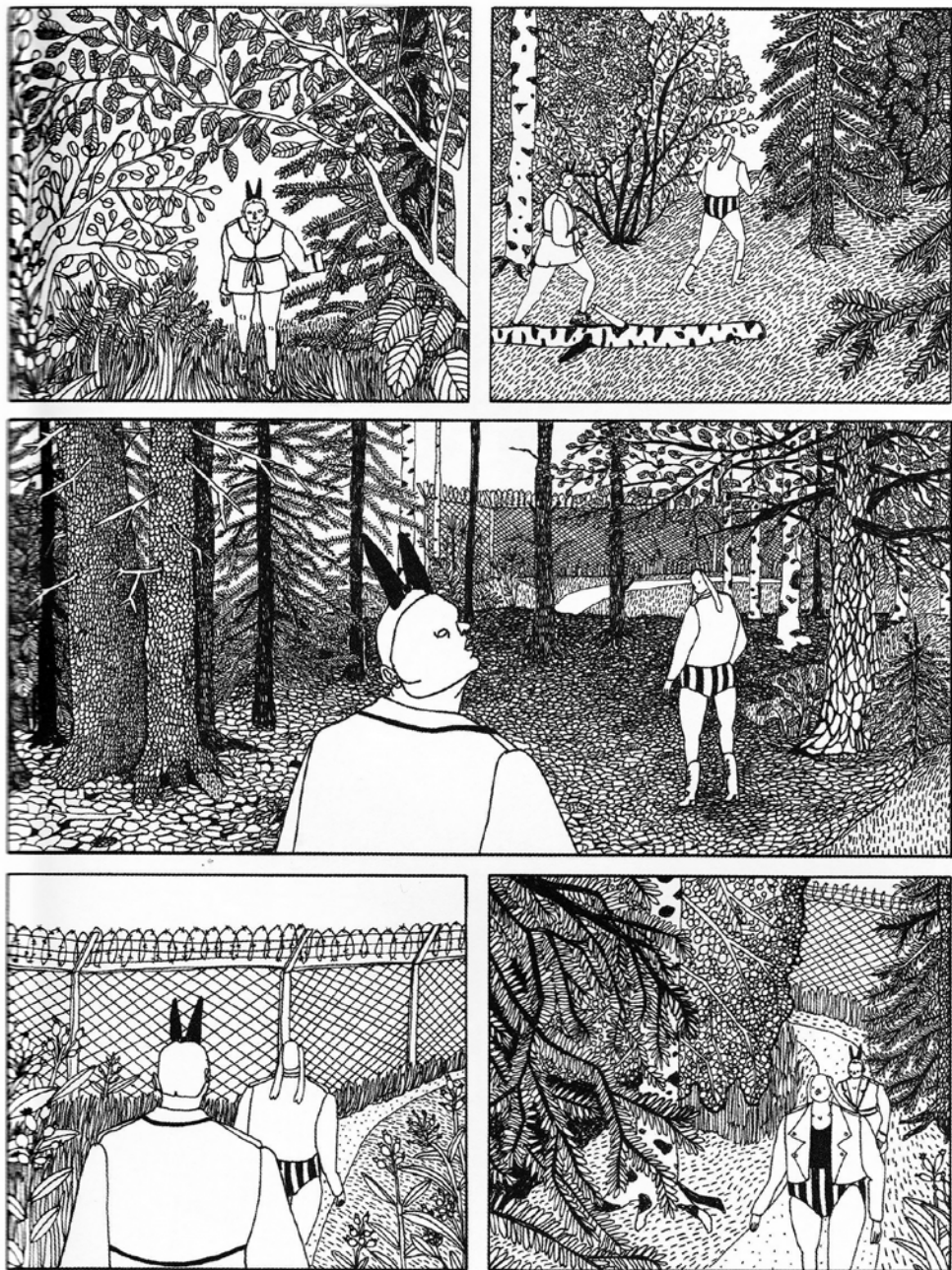


Fig. 59



space of the frames in a sort of *horror vacui* is a striking contrast to the whiteness and clean panels of the dystopian world (Fig. 59), while the vaguely medieval country house with its irregular shapes differs from the functionalist hospital architecture with its closed doors and straight corridors.<sup>351</sup> In this community of uncontrollable women, Betty goes from conforming to reconfiguring.

### Slaves to sanity and happiness

Bim Eriksson's graphic novel has been described as a work picturing a case of *lyckofascism* (happiness fascism) and a society where the welfare state's provisions for a good life have turned into a *hälsodiktatur* (health dictatorship).<sup>352</sup> In *Baby Blue*, it is the duty of every citizen to show a rational brain in a sound body. In creating a social order where anguish is a crime, Eriksson's dystopia simultaneously references both the past and the present. Berina is quoting the Swedish idea historian Karin Johannisson when she states that 'aspects such as gender, class, culture, and societal norms have always established when a condition descends into madness and when it can be tolerated as personality trait or an intriguing individual characteristic'.<sup>353</sup> Addressing the aesthetics of madness in relation to public mental health programmes, Johannisson's study *Den sårade divan* ('The Wounded Diva') focuses on the 'therapeutic passivation' imposed on women in the early twentieth-century Swedish welfare state.<sup>354</sup> Using methods ranging from restraint to lobotomy, the madwoman in the hospital ward was acclimatised to her role as patient, Johannisson claims.<sup>355</sup> She further observes that in the years 1944–5, 58 out of 65 lobotomised patients at the Seraphim Hospital in Stockholm were women, and that, according to the gendered logic of the time, lobotomy was seen to return 'bad girls' to their traditional role as 'good girls' by correcting rebellious behaviour.<sup>356</sup>

### Reflections

The references to mental healthcare in the Swedish welfare state again connect *Baby Blue* with the backdrop of Karin Boye's novel of 1940. However, in terms of 'adapting' a message from its forerunner, more important are the parallels that both works establish with their own

age. In *Baby Blue*, details in the representation of space tell of a contemporary or near-future Stockholm, and place names, institutions, city sights, monuments, familiar foodstuffs and common everyday objects indicate that pursuing chronic happiness and universal sanity really distinguishes present-day Scandinavia, not a dystopian future. The prospering Scandinavian concepts of *mys*, *kos*, and *hygge* can also translate as oppressive positive thinking and as a feel-good cult working to suppress unpleasant emotions, while contemporary phenomena such as genetic screening and compulsory vaccine passes could be likened to the duty to stay fit which has become law in *Baby Blue*.

# Discourse

While the main focus in the case studies up to this point was the medium-specific level of narration and the radical updating of storylines to suit specific purposes, the works considered in the final part of this study exemplify the ways in which cultural and ideological issues, pertinent to the contemporary setting in which adaptations come into being, play a part in the adaptation process. The modes and methods of comic art will continue to provide material for the analysis, but a look to the disciplinary perspectives offered by cultural studies can help approach the question of how an adaptation is related to its social context.<sup>357</sup> In his role as an adaptation scholar, Stam notes the importance of the interaction between an adaptation and its moment of production:

Since adaptations engage the discursive energies of their time, they become a barometer of the ideological trends circulating during the moment of production. ... 'Every age', Bakhtin writes, 'reaccentuates in its own way the works of [the past]. The historical life of classic works is in fact the uninterrupted process of their social and ideological reaccentuation'.<sup>358</sup>

Hutcheon reminds us that there are culturally and historically conditioned reasons for adapting specific texts, and that 'the particular way to do so should be considered seriously by adaptation theory'.<sup>359</sup> As the following case studies show, even with little or no changes to the plot the process of adaptation can pursue the reactivation of themes and messages that are tied to the historic moment and geographic place of the adapted text, but also relevant to the new environment. Again, without

neglecting to look ‘inside’ the adaptation – into the ‘particular ways’, to use Hutcheon’s wording, of the visual strategies – special emphasis is here on looking ‘around’ the adaptations to consider how the type of publication and its context – editorial, cultural, historical – can be ‘dominant’ in the adaptation process and determine the transposition.

With its evolutionary-developmental view on adaptation, Bortolotti and Hutcheon’s theoretical discussion has been used to make sense of the significant transformations that the storylines of certain adapted works have undergone. Observations about the natural world can likewise be drawn on to show how a change of environment can provide a fertile breeding ground for adaptation. In the essay ‘An Art of Borrowing’, Gaudreault and Marion relate adaptation to the concept of mimicry, meaning the phenomenon whereby an organism transforms itself to blend in with its surroundings or to resemble a different organism, often of a different species, for concealment or protection from predators. They argue that mimicry bears a resemblance to the process of adaptation, for ‘to adapt is to respond to new situations and to fit in with them “mimetically”’. They continue:

the mimicry in question concerns the environment of the target text (the hypertext, text B) more than it does any imitation of the source text (the hypotext, text A). It is as if adaptation were also the ability to adapt to what is ‘already there’ in the surroundings ... From this perspective, to adapt thus consists in accustoming the text (or certain elements of it) to another context. ... This other context may be a different audience or cultural community of reception (in a geographical, sociocultural, or historical sense), but it may also be a change of genre or especially a change of medium: in this respect, another medium is a ‘new situation’, a new ‘ecosystem’ to which the text one wishes to adapt must be accustomed.<sup>360</sup>

Mutations in the environment represent challenges to the migrating source texts in the following two case studies, Bo ‘Bovil’ Vilson’s comic-strip feuilleton *Fältskärens berättelser* and Cinzia Ghigliano’s album

*Nora*.<sup>361</sup> Perceived as topical, the adapted works fit into their new environment without significant changes to the storyline, but are called to face a network consisting of relocations on many levels: (i) a new audience (of mainly children and young adults); (ii) a different community of reception, not only geographically (from Finland to Sweden, in the case of *Fältskärens berättelser*, and from Norway to Italy, in the case of *Nora*) but also historically (a gap of almost a century separates the adapted texts from their adaptations) and culturally (from the context of the creation of a Finnish nation to Sweden's 'years of preparedness' in the 1940s, and from first-wave to second-wave feminism); (iii) another genre and medium (from novel and play to the visual medium of comics).

While these changes – and the cultural indigenisation that the source material has undergone – influence the understanding of the adaptations and will shortly be scrutinised in greater detail, it is worth dwelling on the encounter between the classics and a new audience of young comics readers. This will once more let us see that adaptation to a new environment, also in the field of literature, is a phenomenon of relevance both to the adapted text and to the adaptation.

Any discussion of the classics as comics for young readers cannot overlook the success story of the Classics Illustrated brand. The series, subtitled 'Stories by the World's Greatest Authors', was launched in the US in the 1940s by Albert Kanter as a form of entertainment and education for youngsters. By commissioning adaptations of novels by the likes of Verne, Dumas, Cooper, Stevenson, Dickens, and Scott, Kanter's project aimed to transform young readers of superhero comics into connoisseurs of world literature. At the same time, the status of these literary classics was expected to contribute to raising the prestige of a still much-disdained form of literature such as comics.<sup>362</sup> Educators and detractors turned against Classics Illustrated, claiming that great literature could not be transposed to comics without oversimplification, while comics creators, on the other hand, were concerned that Kanter's concept of 'illustrated classics' would jeopardise their art form. When the first issues in the series were published in the US, the extreme compression of the source texts and the low quality of the artwork in the

adaptations confirmed both fears.<sup>363</sup> Many professional comics creators distanced themselves from Kanter's venture and, as Ferstl has observed, 'comic artists yearning for critical acclaim showed little interest in being connected to the series, choosing instead to display open criticism'.<sup>364</sup> An exploration of the comics' medium-specific narrative strategies was admittedly not at the top of Kanter's agenda and seems to be something of a norm for comics with a didactic mission, according to recent scholarship. In the introduction to a volume on comics as a tool in education, Nicolas Rouvière concludes that comic art is still often called on to teach not its own technical machinery, but different subjects.<sup>365</sup> When the medium-specific affordances of comics are given a lower priority than the need to convey a verbal message, avid readers are cheated out of their chance to locate meaning that depends on the possibilities and constraints of the medium. A comparison between Bovil's *Fältskärens berättelser* of the 1940s and the comics magazines based on the same novel, issued in the Classics Illustrated series in the 1960s, exemplify how the latter were designed to adhere to Kanter's mission of combining education with entertainment, but less interested in exploring the potentialities of the visual medium.<sup>366</sup>

This is not the case with the adaptations investigated here, both displaying interesting medium-specific solutions. A look at the paratextual presentation of the two works further reveals that the educational drive behind both productions did not take precedence over the ambition to publish adaptations judged aesthetically appealing to a new readership made up of children and young adults. In their new guises as comic art, Topelius' novel and Ibsen's play are proof of the capacity of a classic to adapt to 'changing environments and changing tastes, as well as to a new medium', without extensive changes to the plots.<sup>367</sup>

Both adaptations can also be considered relative to the occasional efforts in the history of the medium to elevate comics to a 'ninth' art by finding ways of acquiring esteem, credibility, and symbolic capital. As Hutcheon has observed, 'one way to gain respectability or increase cultural capital is for an adaptation to be upwardly mobile'.<sup>368</sup> Along the same lines, and with specific reference to comic art adaptations,

Baetens comments that ‘Often, the issue of adaptation – especially the adaptation of literary works into comics – is posed in terms of cultural legitimation, whereby the lower system (comics) taps into the stronger system (literature) for considerations of prestige and the increase of symbolic capital.’<sup>369</sup> As an examination of the paratextual presentation of Bovil’s work on Topelius’ canonical novel proves, the artist’s technical virtuosity played out as a part with the power to legitimise comics as an art form in the 1940s. Bovil’s extensive use of art quotes seems to share this concern: intericonic references to Carl Larsson, Gustaf Ced-erström, Carl Wahlbom, Louis Braun, and Julius Kronberg establish a relationship between the ‘popular’ medium of comics and the canon of the ‘fine’ arts.

The interaction between comics and ‘fine’ arts has been looked into on several occasions. Bart Beaty’s *Comics Versus Art* is one contribution focusing, as the title suggests, on the opposition between the ‘art world’ and the comics universe.<sup>370</sup> This apparent contradiction has, however, not stopped comics from entering museums, as did the pop art of the 1960s, nor has it prevented comics creators such as Robert Crumb and Chris Ware from experiencing an ‘upgrade’, albeit somewhat reluctantly. Insofar as Beaty concentrates on showing how comic art has lent its visual rhetoric to the aesthetics in fine arts, his book is representative of the bulk of literature examining the nexus between comics and the canon of art history, but, as Martha Kennedy points out in her ‘Drawing (Cartoons) from Artistic Traditions’, this relationship has primarily been investigated unilaterally, and more rarely as a form of cross-fertilisation:

For years art historians and curators have recognized and investigated ways in which fine art incorporates, alters, or appropriates aspects of comic art and other forms of popular culture. It has taken longer for the same community, however, to give equally close attention to ways in which cartoonists draw on established artistic traditions or prototypes.<sup>371</sup>

Kennedy mentions Inge’s concept of ‘metacomics’ as a precursor to the studies that tried to veer in the opposite direction.<sup>372</sup> She notes that Inge

concentrates on ‘comic-strip creations that reference and build on the work of predecessors or peers *in the field*’, meaning cartoonists who refer to the works of other cartoonists.<sup>373</sup> One of eleven essays in Inge’s *Comics as Culture* is nevertheless dedicated to the influence of the avant-garde art on comics.<sup>374</sup> This essay, titled ‘Krazy Kat as American Dada Art’, entertains the possibility of reading the theme, structure, language, and visualisation of George Herriman’s *Krazy Kat* as Dadaist art.

Kennedy’s article is instead specifically concerned with how a handful of American comics creators have reused ‘well-established prototypes, iconography, or styles from famous works of art or well-established fine art traditions’.<sup>375</sup> Still, the fact that most of her examples are the work of cartoonists (Harrington, Telnaes, Cesare, Sorel) means that their reliance on painters such as Delacroix or Duchamp has a satirical bite to it. When Bovil puts Carl Larsson’s classic illustrations of *Fältskärnns berättelser* and nineteenth-century Swedish history painting into a comic-strip feuilleton, the intention is not to parody or satirise. The same can be said about the paintings in play when Cinzia Ghigliano leans into the art of Alphonse Mucha, John Everett Millais, William Lindsay Windus, and Gustav Klimt to redecorate Ibsen’s doll’s house.

Turning back to the scientific view on adaptations, the transposition of literary classics into comic art is rarely one-sided. In biology, co-evolution mimicry occurs for mutual benefit to the species involved, and can give rise to symbiotic relationships. Likewise, if comics can still benefit from the ‘cultural cachet’ of the classics, through adaptation the classics prove their versatility and capacity to appeal to new audiences – a process which Hutcheon likens to ‘a sort of reverse form of cultural accreditation’ exemplified by ‘classical music performers [who] sometimes aspire to become popular entertainers’.<sup>376</sup> These two adaptations, drawn in the 1940s and 1970s, show how a relocation into the comics format can contribute to the popularisation of a classic and render it more accessible to a younger readership, and how skilled adaptations of the classics also played a role in enhancing the status of a popular medium.<sup>377</sup>



## Bovil's *Fältskärens berättelser*

In the exhibition catalogue *En målad historia: Svenskt historiemåleri under 1800-talet* ('Painted History: Swedish History Painting in the Nineteenth Century'), Mats Jönsson opens his essay on the cinematographic use of history painting by stating that 'any dissemination of history reveals more of empirical value about the times of its own inception'.<sup>378</sup> He starts from the idea that narrations of the past always rely on interpretations grounded in their own contemporary world, and points to the relationship between a text from the past and its present-day audience, a connection foregrounded in many studies that focus on historiography.<sup>379</sup> The principle seems made to measure for the Finland-Swedish writer Zacharias Topelius, who turned the golden age of the Swedish Empire of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries into a 'foothold' and 'beacon' for his homeland of Finland, as the nation-building process gained momentum in the late nineteenth century.<sup>380</sup> Topelius' statement can also usefully open a discussion of the comic art adaptation of his historical novel *Fältskärens berättelser* (*The Surgeon's Stories*), which was first published between 1852 and 1866 as a feuilleton in the daily paper *Helsingfors Tidningar*. In the 1940s, in its new guise as a comics feuilleton, Topelius' best-selling novel interacted with the cultural and historical context which fostered the adaptation. With a narrator, Surgeon Bäck, who has served on the battlefields of the Napoleonic wars, which had redefined the map of the Nordic nations, the novel set out to campaign for cooperation, defence, and self-sacrifice. It found fertile terrain in neutral Sweden in the context of 'the years of preparedness', where the quest for national solidarity and heroic role models had been reactualised in the shadow of the Second World War.

With a script by Kåbeson and artwork by Bovil, the comic-strip feuilleton *Fältskärens berättelser* was published in the popular Swedish weekly magazine *Levande Livet* between 1942 and 1944, a type of publication which in its own way strived to create a sense of peoplehood and convey points of reference for the whole nation.<sup>381</sup> This new context of publication, I would argue, determined the choice of hypertext considered

appropriate for adaptation and influenced the visual glossary used by the comic artist. In the feuilleton, the 3,000 pages of Topelius' novel were broken up into 127 instalments. To begin with, the episodes were in colour and occupied almost a whole double page spread. The last instalments were printed as black-and-white strips, and their dimensions were significantly reduced. As in the source work, the narrative structure is feuilletonesque featuring cliffhangers, and adding the set phrase 'To be continued in the next issue'. The gridding is conventional and regular.<sup>382</sup>

Some of the instalments published in *Levande Livet* were later re-assembled into a comics magazine in the Classics Illustrated series. Cut, fitted with speech balloons, and adapted to a new layout, the magazine was titled *Riddaren och häxan* (1969, 'The Knight and the Witch'). A few years earlier, in 1963 and 1965, Classics Illustrated had published another two magazines based on Topelius' novel, *Kungens ring* ('The King's Ring') and *Kungens karolin* ('The King's Carolean Soldier'), featuring drawings by Göte Göransson.<sup>383</sup> The fact that an abridged version of Bovil's memorable interpretation was reprinted so shortly after Göransson's adaptation had appeared may indicate that the latter was not thought satisfactory.<sup>384</sup> In the 1940s, *Levande Livet* had hired an artist who Groensteen recently has described as one of the 'undisputed masters of European adventure comics'.<sup>385</sup>

Bo Wilson (1910–49) started in the 1930s as an illustrator in advertising and made his debut as a comics creator in 1941. His breakthrough in this field came with the adaptations of literary classics, mainly historical novels from the Nordic tradition, with the exception of *A Thousand and One Nights*.<sup>386</sup> With a realistic style reminiscent of Hal 'Tarzan' Foster and Alex 'Flash Gordon' Raymond, Bovil laid the basis for a Swedish tradition of realistically drawn adventure comics, not least with *Flygkamraterna* ('The Flying Companions'), a sci-fi comic both drawn and scripted by the artist himself, printed as a feuilleton in the magazine *Folket i Bild*.<sup>387</sup>

Determining the context – historical, cultural, editorial – as 'dominant' in the adaptation process of *Fältskärens berättelser*, I address why in the early 1940s *Levande Livet* turned to Topelius' tales of historical

conflict. Ask how his narration of the past unfolded in its new setting and we are taken, once more, to issues of intericonicity. Bovil's visual rendering of historical battles and events is not only an adaptation of a written text, but also of a national image bank consisting of Carl Larsson's famous illustrations for the deluxe edition of Topelius' novel and of history paintings from the height of nineteenth-century National Romanticism.<sup>388</sup> For a greater understanding of this particular adaptation, the analysis thus combines cultural and historical perspectives with a formalist approach.

### A Swedish comic about Swedish history

The choice of *Fältskärens berättelser* as the source for a comic-strip feuilleton in a Swedish weekly magazine in the early years of the Second World War was not unexpected nor independent of the need for national cohesion in times of military preparedness. How comics played their part in the promotion of political propaganda in the years of the war has been investigated by the historian Michael Scholz in a co-authored article titled *Between Propaganda and Entertainment. Nordic Comics 1930s–1950s*.<sup>389</sup> Scholz contributes a section on the Swedish comics scene and states that 'All comics published during the war, whether of Swedish origin or imported, were consciously or unconsciously part of the psychological warfare.'<sup>390</sup> He highlights the role played by comics set in the Viking age or in the era of the Swedish Empire produced by Alga, the comics imprint of the leading publishing house Bonnier:

*Alga* produced several comics about the heroic Swedish times, about the Viking age and warrior kings, a lot of them after popular Swedish novels. Most successful were *Fältskärens berättelser* about king Gustav Adolph the Great for Bonnier's *Levande Livet* (1942–1944) and *Karolinerna* about the Swedish warrior king Charles XII's campaign against Russia for Alga's *Veckans Serier* (1942–1943).<sup>391</sup>

*Levande Livet*'s presentation of Bovil's adaptation gives an insight into how Topelius' novel was understood in its new context and what parts were favoured in the general reasoning behind the production. In 1942,

when the first instalment went to print, the magazine celebrated the source work with these words:

The exciting plot, the captivating style of writing, the magnificent historical scenes that masterfully come together in this family chronicle make such a fresh and vibrant impression even on the modern reader that one hardly believes it to be true that Zacharias Topelius wrote *Fältskärens berättelser* between 1853 and 1867.<sup>392</sup>

In the same short presentation, *Fältskärens berättelser* is described as ‘the Swedish people’s favourite reading’.<sup>393</sup> The ingredients of the source work highlighted in the above-quoted lines – plot, style, history, entertainment, blood relations, modernity – can be identified as elements decisive for the commissioning of a comic-strip feuilleton based on the text. Another look at the promotion of the new venture confirms that the same criteria guided the process of adaptation. On a poster dating to 1942, the upcoming adaptation is expected as ‘a new comic that is better than the best: Swedish, Nordic, lively, exciting, historical, fun, and educational’.<sup>394</sup> The adjective ‘Swedish’ is an important addition, and the final claim – ‘this is what a Swedish comic should look like!’ – sets the tone for the launch: according to the presentation in *Levande Livet*, Bovil’s adaptation is to be read as an ‘out-and-out Swedish comic’ and ‘a Swedish comic about Swedish history’.<sup>395</sup>

A better basis for a sequential narrative in colour could not be imagined, and since it has long been *Levande Livet*’s great desire to come up with a new, truly first-class, out-and-out Swedish comic, *Fältskärens berättelser* was a natural choice. The comic has long been in preparation because of our conviction that such an outstanding comic deserves an outstanding execution. It is common knowledge that even the greatest idea may be spoiled if it falls into the hands of fumbling amateurs. By hiring the artist Bo Vilson to do the job for *Levande Livet*, we dare to believe that the sequential narrative *Fältskärens berättelser*, with the help of his refined pen, will gain as great popularity as the book. It compares very well with the best comic art ever created abroad – and

that should make us all happy, because *Fältskärens berättelser* is a Swedish comic about Swedish history. An invaluable comic!<sup>396</sup>

The ‘Swedishness’ of the source material and the ‘excellence’ of the artistic workmanship are the two characteristics said to guarantee the success of the adaptation. Bovil’s ‘refined pen’ was hired to compete not only with the quality of the adapted novel, but also with the standard of imported comics. These attempts to elevate the medium are confirmed by the adaptation’s use of art quotes.

The mythologisation of historic events and characters in Topelius’ novel has an equivalent in the genre of history painting, whose themes and subjects, according to Mats Jönsson, conform to a nationwide desire for ‘mythical tales about a common past’.<sup>397</sup> Just as Topelius’ *Fältskärens berättelser* or Heidenstam’s *Karolinerna* (*The Charles Men*) were popular classics in the 1940s, the trove of images that was Bovil’s visual intertext was well-known to the general public of the early twentieth century thanks to its circulation in popular culture.<sup>398</sup> Scholars have pointed out that Carl Larsson’s illustrations for *Fältskärens berättelser* made the novel ‘a classic in Swedish book art’ and, likewise, that history painting quickly achieved iconic status through the massive distribution of reproductions in textbooks, illustrated magazines, and in the weekly press, as well as by its assiduous recycling in fiction or as Christmas cards and postcards.<sup>399</sup> The many reproductions circulating in different media contributed to a general familiarity with these idealised representations of history as asserted by Tomas Björk, who writes that ‘the motifs sank into the consciousness of the Swedish people’.<sup>400</sup> In addition, Kristoffer Arvidsson observes that mass culture has readily accommodated these historical tableaux, whose influence ‘extends into our own time, though more in popular culture than art’.<sup>401</sup>

That visual references familiar to the wider public form the basis for many of the panels in Bovil’s adaptation must be regarded as an efficient strategy for a production aiming to be ‘representative of’ the Swedish people and the Swedish nation. If, in addition, the name of Carl Larsson and the ‘noble’ art of history painting had the power to legitimise the comics medium in its early stages, it should not be forgotten that the

1940s were a busy period for Bovil. Alongside *Fältskärens berättelser*, his own production *Flygkamraterna* and the adaptation of *Göingehövdingen* both ran as feuilletons in the magazine *Allt (för alla denna vecka)*, while instalments of *A Thousand and One Nights* were to be delivered regularly to *Vecko-Revyn*. All the while Bovil freelanced as a book and newspaper illustrator.<sup>402</sup> As the pace of production quickened, the need for iconographic sources of inspiration may have increased, though this hypothesis seems too simplistic to satisfactorily explain the extensive reiteration of paradigmatic paintings and illustrations. My claim is that the choice to incorporate national treasures into the adaptation helped to turn Topelius' 'Finnish' viewpoint on the history of Sweden into an 'out-and-out Swedish' narration that could serve to strengthen a Swedish identity in the 'years of preparedness'. Mari Hatavara, who has looked into the early Swedish reception of Topelius' novel, finds that *Fältskärens berättelser* was criticised in Sweden for having appropriated a history which was more Swedish than Finnish:

the reception in Sweden, although positive in its overall tone, rebuked Topelius for giving too much emphasis to Finnish history. From the Swedish perspective, the history Topelius wrote about was Swedish, and the Swedes scorned Topelius' attempt to appropriate a part of Swedish history for Finland, which had only been a small part of the Swedish kingdom at the time depicted.<sup>403</sup>

The reuse of aesthetically appealing representations of war and the homage to the warrior kings of the Swedish Empire, so characteristic of National Romantic history painting, can be assumed to have nurtured a sense of national belonging. At stake is the employment of a special collective property defined by Hans Lund as 'cultural icons' – artefacts that by appearing in countless contexts become etched in collective memory and contribute to building up and invigorating the identity and cultural history of a community.<sup>404</sup> An important criterion to determine the status of a cultural icon is, according to Lund, the diversity of contexts in which it appears.<sup>405</sup> In this way the artefact makes itself known across a wide range of social classes, it becomes 'the collective

ownership of many and therefore provokes an immediate interest and a quick response from a large number of recipients'.<sup>406</sup> If the skilful copying and appropriation of iconic images ensure the adaptation lives up to that 'truly first-class, out-and-out Swedish comic' announced in the promotion of the first instalment, Lund, however, stresses that the reuse of cultural icons is not necessarily done with artistic ambitions. The different contexts in which these icons reappear affect their function and production of meaning: 'The task of the cultural icon is to illuminate, affirm, inform, propagate, illustrate, protest and even banter. Focus is not on the hypertext, but rather on the current context'.<sup>407</sup> As with the adaptation of the classics, Lund observes that the circulation of cultural icons offers the special comfort of repetition, and with it the side effect of consolidating the identity of the community for which it is a point of reference:

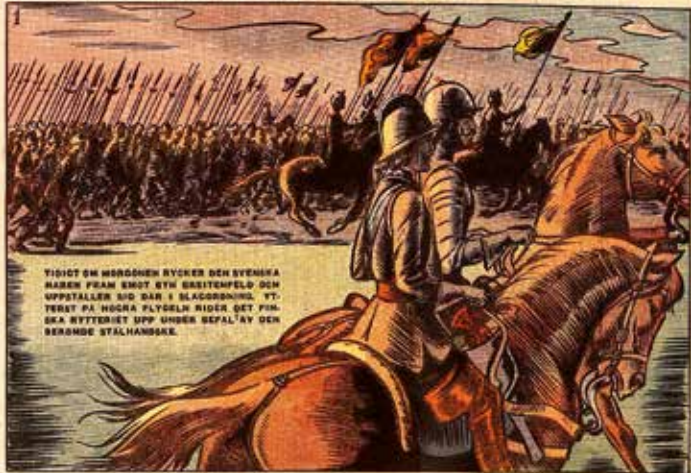
In addition to all social development and individual renewal, we need to read the same stories, see the same images and hear the same music over and over again in an effort to consolidate and revitalise our own cultural history and our own identity. And cultural icons contribute to this.<sup>408</sup>

In keeping with this function of cultural icons, I would argue that Bovil's use of visual intertexts should not be seen as banal duplication, but, by transferring an image bank of national treasures into the context of a sequential narrative where they become panels provided with captions, the adaptation is paraphrasing, rather than parasitising, its visual sources for specific purposes.

### Carl Larsson

Bovil's paraphrase of Carl Larsson's illustration for *Fältskärens berättelser's* frame story is the first panel of the first instalment of the adaptation (Fig. 60). In the novel's frame story, Topelius goes back to pre-capitalist communication where the participants meet in front of the fire in an attic. The 'sender', the field surgeon Andreas Bäck, is sitting in front of an audience of 'receivers' consisting of a schoolteacher, a postmaster,

## SVENSK ORIGINALSERIE EFTER ZACHARIAS TOPELIUS' BERÖMDA ROMANVERK!

Teckn.: BOVIL  
Text: KABESON

Fortsättning följer i nästa nummer.

Fig. 60

an old grandmother, the young, beautiful Anne Sofi, and a group of children including the anonymous first-person narrator and transcriber of the novel. This mixed circle of listeners suggests that the novel offers something of interest to everyone: history, suspense, adventure, romance, and education. In Larsson's illustration, the entire scene is represented





Fig. 61

against the backdrop of a portrait of Napoleon, a detail testifying to the field surgeon's past, of which the reader has been informed by the anonymous transcriber (Fig. 61).

In the comic art adaptation, the only trace left of Topelius' frame story and fictional narrator Bäck is in the introductory panels to instalments



Fig. 62



Fig. 63

numbers 1, 32, 64, and 96, mimicking Larsson's original illustration. These panels act as visual alliterations, as a form of braiding creating cohesion in the long-running feuilleton, and as a connector creating a link to the famous visual intertext (Fig. 62). The simplification of both image and narrative structure from the adapted text affects the reading of the adaptation. On the one hand, by ignoring the outer frame, the narrative pace speeds up and the reader is catapulted straight onto the battle fields of the Thirty Years War by the information in the captions. On the other, if compared to Larsson's illustration, the decision to do away with the motley original audience reminds us of the fact that, in its new guise as comics, *Fältskärens berättelser* was not expected to attract a similarly heterogeneous readership. Favouring an audience of largely male, often younger readers, *Levande Livet* was promoted as 'a magazine for real men and lively boys' (Fig. 63) offering tales of adventure, mystery and suspense, news items about hunting, fishing, and sports – and, in the 1940s, depictions of war.<sup>409</sup> The comics that were included in the magazine were Swedish classics featuring characters such as 91:an Karlsson and Åsa-Nisse, or Dotty Virvelvind (Sweden's answer to Wonder Woman), but also Flash Gordon and Zorro.<sup>410</sup>

## Gustaf Cederström

Gustaf Cederström is one of the Swedish history painters whose *oeuvre* was dovetailed into the adaptation. At least seven of his large-scale paintings of King Charles XII's military campaigns are used throughout the feuilleton. In the last instalment, two of Cederström's Carolean motifs inspired by the Great Northern War, *Likvakan i Tistedalen* (1893, 'The Wake at Tistedalen') and *Karl XII:s likfärd* (1878 and 1884, 'Bringing Home the Body of King Charles XII of Sweden') are put together and combined with a panel repeating Carl Larsson's illustration for the chapter 'Skuggan av ett namn' ('The Shadow of a Name') in the third cycle of *Fältskärens berättelser*, narrating the army's return from Norway after the death of the Swedish king.<sup>411</sup>

In the first panel of the black-and-white strip no. 127, Cederström's *Likvaka* has been cut to usher into the foreground a small group of three despairing soldiers. The caption reads 'Charles XII has fallen. When the Caroleans keep vigil by his stretcher, they realise that the Norwegian campaign is lost. All alone, King Charles had carried an entire era on his shoulders, an era that has now ended and will never be restored.'<sup>412</sup> The comment refers to the caption announcing the death of Charles XII in the concluding panel of the previous instalment (no. 126), consisting of a minute reproduction of Cederström's painting titled *30 November 1718*, the date of the king's death. In instalment no. 127, Cederström's procession of Carolean soldiers carrying the dead king over the mountains takes the lead role (Fig. 64a). The adaptation thus makes use of the persistent legend created by Jöran Nordberg in his biographical work *Konung Carl XII:s Historia* ('The History of King Charles XII') of 1740, according to which the dead king was carried on a stretcher across the national border – a literary fiction with no historical basis and absent from Topelius' novel.<sup>413</sup> In *Fältskärens berättelser*, as the news of the king's death reaches Armfelt's Finnish troops through a Norwegian messenger, the soldiers flee in the blizzard to cross the Norwegian mountains hoping to make a safe return to Sweden by entering the region of Jämtland. Out of the drifting snow emerges Topelius' superhuman hero, Gösta Bertelsköld; after having carried a cannon on his shoulders and broken a sledge into pieces with his bare hands to make firewood, he goes back





Fig. 64b

up the mountains to save ‘Finland’s last heroic troop’ lost in the cold.<sup>414</sup> It is noteworthy that Bertelsköld’s melodramatic monologue and Finnish nationalist tribute has been shortened and rendered universal in the adaptation, but more interesting is how Cederström’s painting has been retouched. This panel lacks the old huntsman at the left-hand side of the procession, a character usually seen as the viewer’s identification figure (Fig. 64b).<sup>415</sup> In Cederström’s original, the huntsman humbly lowers his head in respect for the dead king, thus inviting the onlooker to assume the same reverential attitude, while the dead grouse he carries over his shoulder has been read as a symbol of the fallen king.<sup>416</sup> The next frame in the sequence zooms in on Bertelsköld’s face in the very moment he goes back up into the mountains to save his fellow countrymen, transforming the bold soldier into the reader’s identification figure. Where in Cederström’s painting the figure of the huntsman exists to encourage the viewers of the late nineteenth century to bow their heads at the passing of the Swedish Empire, readers of *Levande Livet* are instead invited to subscribe to the message of solidarity, self-sacrifice, tenacity,

and courage, which is conveyed through the attitude of the adaptation's new identification figure. Bovil's strategy of reinterpretation aligns with what Nina Heydemann categorises as 'subtraction' and 'addition' in her theorisation of the practice of pictorial quotation, and does so to the purpose of re-engaging with peoplehood and national solidarity, both central to Topelius' novel, rather than with the standard reading of Cederström's painting.<sup>417</sup>

Instalment no. 108 builds on Cederström's painting *Mazeppa och Karl XII* ('Mazeppa and Charles XII', Fig. 65a and Fig. 65b), of a moment just after the Battle of Poltava in 1709. Peter Ericsson assumes that the king is shown considering his military strategy: 'an explanation ... could possibly be that Mazeppa is attempting to convince Charles XII to retire in search of safety, but that the king is highly unwilling to abandon his defeated army'.<sup>418</sup> In Bovil's adaptation, this painting is quoted by the strategy of 'division', splitting Cederström's composition into two panels.<sup>419</sup> In the first panel, the character of Charles XII is reversed: here, the king looks out over the battlefield next to General Lewenhaupt, who is ordering the retreat. In the second, the Swedish king is on a boat crossing the Dnieper with Mazeppa, who is indicating the direction and standing in the same position as in Cederström's painting. While in Topelius' novel the narrator condemns the king for having retreated and left the soldiers to die – 'an inner feeling tells us: King Charles would have been truer to himself and his greatness, had he ... fallen with his whole army on the shores of the Dnieper!' – the adaptation plays down this verdict. The division of the scene into two panels brings with it a caesura, as if to delay the king's decision, and the captions make it clear that General Lewenhaupt and the king's adviser Mazeppa should be held accountable for both defeat and retreat: according to the caption, they 'emphasised that he must bear in mind his kingdom and seek to return home to organise the resistance'.<sup>420</sup> The stereotyped idealisation of the king, typical of history paintings, lives on in the adaptation where Charles XII is hailed as a hero and moral example, in neat opposition to the novel's condemning narrative voice at the same point.



Fig. 65a



Fig. 65b



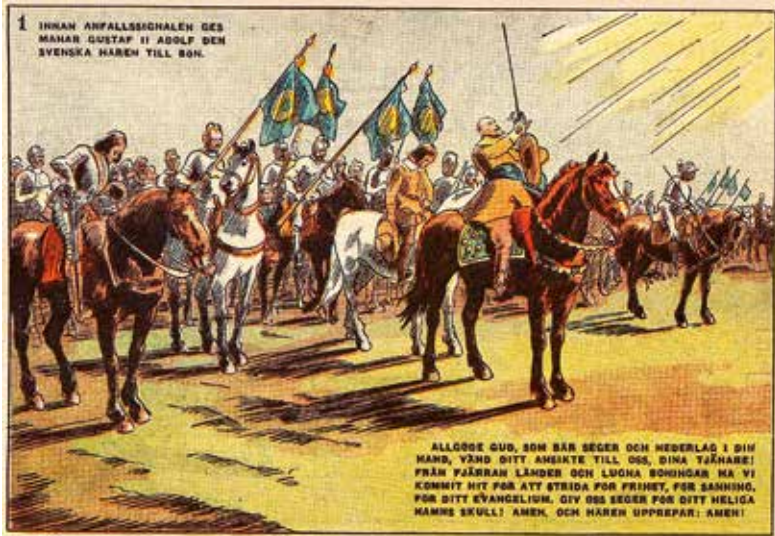


Fig. 66a



Fig. 66b

### Louis Braun, Carl Wahlbom, Julius Kronberg

Instalment no. 2 begins with a panel reproducing Louis (Ludwig) Braun's 1891 canvas *Gustaf II Adolf efter slaget vid Breitenfeld* ('Gustaf II Adolf after the Battle of Breitenfeld', Fig. 66a and Fig. 66b). In adapting this motif for the sequential narrative, the fallen soldiers lying on the battlefield in Braun's original painting have been subtracted, and the colour scheme of the panel is warmer. These details set the tone for the aesthetics of war in the adaptation: the depiction of suffering is limited or raised to martyrdom, and soldiers are portrayed with restrained expressiveness to look like stoic heroes. Thus romanticised, the horrors

AFTERLIVES



Fig. 67a



Fig. 67b



Fig. 68a

Fig. 68b



of war are kept at bay. The same goes for the representation of natural landscapes and urban settings: no vandalism is visible in this era of campfires and legendary heroes. In keeping with this vision, burning torches light up the stripped version of Carl Wahlbom's *Gustaf II Adolf återfinnes död efter slaget vid Lützen* (1855, 'Gustaf II Adolf is Found Dead after the Battle of Lützen', Fig. 67a and Fig. 67b) in instalment no. 30, and the whirls of smoke, as in other instalments of the feuilleton, become a decorative, cohesive element, uniting the panels in the strip. Here too, the colour scheme enhances the dramatic nature of the scene and differs from the visual intertext, a feature even more noticeable in the Bovil's reuse of Wahlbom's *Gustaf II Adolf vid Lützen* (1885, 'Gustaf II Adolf at Lützen'), whose outworldly, shimmering pastel colours are brightened beyond recognition (Fig. 68a and 68b).



Fig. 69a



Fig. 69b

The same approach applies to the paraphrasing of Julius Kronberg's *Karl XII* ('Charles XII') of 1893 (Fig. 69a and Fig. 69b). In addition to the dramatic colouring that sets the sky on fire, the allegorical elements in Kronberg's portrait have been substituted for the plain symbolism of waving banners. The silhouette of a fort and a soldier with a raised rifle both have a prominent place in the panel.

### Reflections

These examples of intericonicity have been presented to focus on the function of the specific visual code in the comic-strip adaptation of *Fält-skärns berättelser*. As Bovil transposes nineteenth-century history paintings into his work, he achieves a radical transformation; a monumental

art form, whose dimensions, according to Ericsson, are best suited to museums or royal collections shrinks to pocket-size format.<sup>421</sup> At the same time, by tapping into an image bank based on literary depictions of historical events and personalities – for example, Fryxell's *Berättelser ur den svenska historien* ('Tales from Swedish History') – he returns the history paintings to literature. In addition to Bovil's 'refined pen', it could be argued that the technical virtuosity of artists such as Carl Larsson, Gustaf Cederström, Carl Wahlbom, Louis Braun, and Julius Kronberg has also played a role in legitimising the popular medium of comics and confirming the artistic value of the adaptation. The idealisation of king, motherland, and the individual soldier – recognisable as a theme from Topelius' *Fältskärens berättelser* and supported by Carl Larsson's illustrations to the book – is shared by history painting and reappears in the feuilleton's visualisation of the past. The use of patriotic icons entrenches Bovil's adaptation in the culture and art history of Sweden rather than Finland. It is my belief that the use of images belonging to the collective consciousness wished to restore national identity and a sense of community in the 1940s, making Topelius' Finnish perspective less central. In addition, whenever the art quotes are to some extent manipulated and 'adapted' for sequential use, most clearly in the paraphrasing of *Karl XII:s likfärd*, this strategy attempts to foster a sense of solidarity in the reader and promote self-sacrifice in defence of the nation.

Against this background, Topelius' own view of historiography also shines through. Its task, according to his lecture 'Äger finska folket en historia?' ('Do the Finnish People Have a History?') was to offer a foothold in the present and a beacon for the future.<sup>422</sup> With its use of cultural icons, I would argue, Bovil's adaptation of *Fältskärens berättelser* pursued the same mission for Sweden in the 1940s.

Cinzia Ghigliano's *Nora: Casa di bambola*

'Since all three of us were women with a burning desire to fulfil a creative and personal need, it was all too obvious that the issue of feminism should hit close to home'.<sup>423</sup> With these words, Adela Turin, Nella Bosnia, and Francesca Canterelli presented their new publishing house *Dalla parte delle bambine* ('On the Girls' Side') in 1978. Inspired, and not only nominally, by Elena Gianini Belotti's influential essay on social conditioning and its effects on the stereotyped role of girls, the three founders made it their mission to publish feminist literature for children in a country and an era in which children's literature reminding girls of how to be submissive, pleasing, and selfless still proliferated.<sup>424</sup> In line with the publishing house's aims, the young artist Cinzia Ghigliano was commissioned to produce a comic art adaptation based on Henrik Ibsen's *Et Dukkehjem* (*A Doll's House*), a play defined by Unni Langås as 'a major contribution to the cause of women's emancipation'.<sup>425</sup> Starting with its title, *Nora: Casa di bambola* ('Nora: A Doll's House'),

the album foregrounded Ibsen's iconic female protagonist, re-enacting her battle for personal growth in the context of second-wave feminism in Italy and in a publication aimed at young readers, 99 years after the Norwegian playwright's critique of patriarchy.<sup>426</sup>

This new context raises issues concerning both classics and adaptations. While *Nora* exemplifies the 'timelessness' of a classic and its capacity to relate to different eras, it also shows the power of an adaptation to express the cultural climate of its own contemporary age. Here, the significance of Nora's character development for the feminist agenda of the publishing house will be explored and related to the visual glossary used in the adaptation. As we will see, Ghigliano's redecoration of Ibsen's doll's house has a plethora of references to the portrayal of women in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century art, pictorial quotes which inform the reader of a multifaceted heroine collecting and exposing 'various historic versions of womanliness'.<sup>427</sup> The comic art adaptation has transported Nora's story not only across media borders, but also transnationally, from its Norwegian setting in the 1870s to the graphic novel's Parisian belle époque. The implications of this choice determine the furnishings and the decor of the home of the Helmers, which forms the setting for a drama with an 'overtly architectural title'.<sup>428</sup> I will read the adaptation focusing on the concept of 'reverse ekphrasis' and postulating that elements and accessories of the interior design sustain the message of the play by visually informing the readers not only of a woman's role and function in a patriarchal household, but also of her hidden potential.

### Second-wave Nora

Dalla parte delle bambine was founded in Milan at the end of a decade which had seen important achievements of second-wave feminism in Italy. In 1970, a divorce law had been introduced; in 1974, a reform of family law had removed adultery as a crime; in 1978, abortion was legalised by law. The importance of gender equality and the right to divorce, two concerns central to the battles of second-wave feminism, were shared by the three founders and presented in picture books for children with animals in the roles of the protagonists: *Rosaconfetto* (*Candy*

*Pink*), *Una fortunata catastrofe* ('A Happy Disaster'), and *Arturo e Clementina*.<sup>429</sup> At a later stage, human characters were introduced to speak about issues such as female solidarity in *Le 5 moglie di Barbabrizzolata* ('Grizzlybeard's 5 Wives'), homosexuality in *Maiepoimai* ('Neverever'), or menstruation in *Alice e Lucia: sul nostro sangue* ('Alice and Lucia: About our Blood').<sup>430</sup> To target the category of young adult readers with a feminist discourse, different textual genres were employed: the photo-documentary book in the case of *Agnès: una nascita come una festa* ('Agnès: Birthing is a Party') on giving birth without pain, and the graphic novel format with *Nora: Casa di bambola* and *Aurora*, on the life of the woman writer George Sand.<sup>431</sup>

In this new context of engaged picture books and young adult literature exploring social issues of the 1970s, the presence of Ibsen and Sand – two nineteenth-century classics traditionally addressing an adult readership – raises questions. Should the adaptations building on their work and life be read as tributes to two monuments of first-wave feminism, or as timely reminders that Nora Helmer's goals and George Sand's demand for equality had not been achieved by 1978? Were the struggles of the heroines in these two publications distinctive as things of the past or in their lingering on as signs of our time? Looking back at the editorial project, Anna Maria Crispino describes *Nora* as an album representative of the discomfort and the sense of crisis that second-wave feminists in Italy were experiencing in the seventies. According to Crispino, Ibsen's feminist subject still resonated with 'the trap of dependency, the burden of conventions, the facade moralism' of the late twentieth century, and came across as 'a much too obvious "truth" even at the distance of a century'.<sup>432</sup> As several of the other books published by Dalla parte delle bambine thematically prove, a woman's choice was still very much a question of 'either' wife and mother 'or' an individual – perhaps not only to an Italian readership, it could be added, as the album was co-edited with the French Éditions des femmes, and caught the interest of foreign publishers in Germany and Norway in the years that followed.<sup>433</sup>

Unlike the climate in the age of second-wave feminism, the visual expression of Cinzia Ghigliano's *Nora* does not challenge stereotypes



regarding femininity. Ghigliano's version of Nora as a pretty woman-child in a flowery dress with full lips and a cascade of auburn hair rather recalls the 'pure beauties' in Pre-Raphaelite art who made no attempts to set a political agenda, according to Sandra Penketh.<sup>434</sup> In 1978, wrapping a feminist discourse in long, romantic dresses can be seen as a challenge to the flat-heeled, no make-up, armed-with-pamphlets feminism of the era, but also points towards the (re)discovery of the positive potential of 'cuteness' which has found a place in the imagery of girls in literature for young readers of the twenty-first century. As formulated in the introduction to the volume *Flicktion: perspektiv på flickan i fiktionen* ('Flicktion: Perspectives on the Girl in Fiction'), 'by overindulging in descriptions of looks, clothes and the culture of the girl's room, the traditional downgrading of girl culture is broken'.<sup>435</sup> A similar approach can be seen in Ghigliano's cover illustration for *Nora*, where the portrait of a voluptuous young woman surrounded by dolls is combined with the sinuous organic forms and floral patterns of art nouveau, thus setting the scene for an intriguing visual discourse about femininity in the adaptation.

### Woman as decorative object

In adaptation studies dealing with transpositions of literary sources into a visual medium, 'reverse ekphrasis' is often of crucial importance; through 'reverse ekphrasis', descriptive prose is translated into images. According to Vanderbeke, 'Any adaptation to a visual art must present the audience with completed images. A room only vaguely described in the book is filled up with furniture or, alternatively, left deliberately empty, but in both cases a decision has been made that the author of the novel could evade'.<sup>436</sup> As we will see in the case of the adaptation's doll's house, its interiors have been enriched with details invisible in Ibsen's stage directions. With additional providing, and elements such as designer objects displaying the female nude as a figural flower holder or scatter cushions decorated with women's profiles, the domestic environment has undergone an interpretation not only representative of the new art nouveau setting of the Parisian belle époque, but one that also underlines the very theme of the text.<sup>437</sup> In her discussion of the female

imagery promoted by art nouveau artists, Jan Thompson points to the uneasy subtext of this movement and its long-running implications as to the representation of women in art and adverts:

The art nouveau preoccupation with the female as decorative object appears as a last-ditch anxiety-ridden attempt to keep women in their traditional places: in a sense, it has succeeded down to the present day, as women continue to be featured as cunning advertising attractions and as objects of designers' whims.<sup>438</sup>

The art nouveau style and the artwork decorating the walls of the doll's house in Ghigliano's adaptation prove a congenial choice that smoothly blends in with the motif of 'woman-as-decoration' proper to Torvald's vision of his wife's function in the household. In her own domestic setting, Nora holds the position of decorative doll, submissive wife, and playful mother, quite literally adorning a home where her husband is the severe judge of taste. It is ironic that Nora should praise the refinement of a man – 'Nobody has such excellent taste as you' – whose aesthetic programme consists of the idea that a woman is an extension of the home decoration, as can be noted in Act III, when Torvald Helmer dispenses advice to Kristine Linde on suitable female activities.<sup>439</sup> According to the man of the household, a woman should rather embroider than knit, because the former activity is a thing of beauty and a joy to the beholder: 'you should embroider ... it's much prettier. Look: you hold the embroidery like this, with the left hand, and then with the right you guide the needle – like this – out in a delicate, extended arch; isn't that so?'<sup>440</sup> An eyesore is instead the vision of a woman bending over her knitting, arms cramped to her body: 'knitting – that can never be anything but unlovely; look here: the cramped arms'.<sup>441</sup> The light, lofty arch described by a woman's arm intent at embroidering resonates with the sinuous whiplash curves characterising the art nouveau furnishings in the adaptation's lavishly appointed home, as if to visualise the idea that the female presence in the doll's house is intended to fuse harmoniously with the interior design (Fig. 70). As Torvald cannot see beyond Nora's front as his own private 'song-lark' and 'squirrel', it is



Fig. 70

a case of dramatic irony that he should have adorned the walls of his house with examples of modern art that, underneath a highly decorative aestheticism which is surely consistent with Torvald's taste, are loaded with explosive content.<sup>442</sup>

## Painted ladies

Through the artwork hanging in the Helmers' living room, the graphic novel comprises an entanglement of references to the portrayal of women in the art history of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The painted ladies of the Pre-Raphaelites and the artists of the Vienna Secession, as well as the women depicted in the poster art of Alphonse Mucha, are clues to an understanding of the heroine who, in Ibsen's refined 'play-within-the-play' is 'a child, a liar, a dancer, a doll, a narcissist, a flirt, a seductress, and so on'.<sup>443</sup> As Torvald in his role as husband is ignorant of his wife's intellectual abilities, he is likewise, in his role as interior decorator, unaware of the hidden potential lying in the artworks he has surrounded himself with. Not only do these paintings complete a female identity which is more complex than that of the doll-like spendthrift ascribed to his wife, they also offer access to Nora's inner life. While, on the one hand, they form a frieze on the living room wall to satisfy Torvald's taste for beauty, on the other, these very same portraits are also used to display Nora's inner thoughts: through the use of monochrome colouring they become pictures in her head.<sup>444</sup> This 'visual thinking' can be likened to Nora's soliloquies in the play, monologues of which Toril Moi has written: 'Nora's moments alone onstage are there to show us what Nora is like when she is not under the gaze of the man for whom she constantly performs'.<sup>445</sup> Using this iconography for Nora's hidden mental images is not only a functional narrative tool, but also one that sits well with the play's identity as a typical Ibsen drama 'of disguise and concealment'.<sup>446</sup> As Joan Templeton has observed, the play opens with Nora's order 'Hide', getting the action under way.<sup>447</sup> If considered in chronological order, these paintings bear out Templeton's idea that *Et Dukkehjem* be read as the 'feminist Bildungspiel *par excellence*': through the changing face of femininity in the fine arts from the 1850s to the early twentieth century, Nora's progressive transition from performing a docile and submissive ideal of womanliness to her enactment of emancipation in the last scene is staged.<sup>448</sup> Let us see how.

John Everett Millais's *Ophelia* of 1851 (Fig. 71a) concerns the folly and tragedy of a young woman, although the painting is more often



Fig. 71a

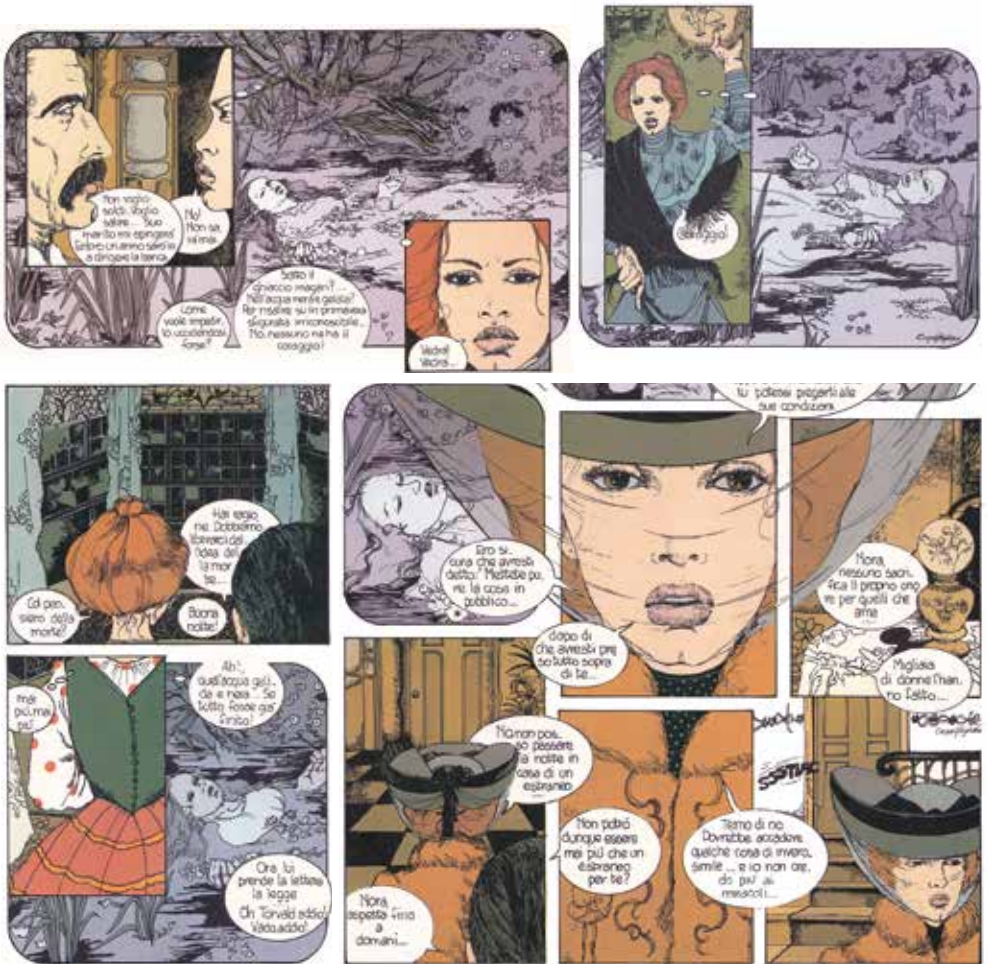


Fig. 71b

than not admired for its pure beauty. Caught between her father and her lover, Shakespeare's Ophelia has been used to represent women as hysterical, neurotic, strongly sexualised, innocent and ladylike, or as saints.<sup>449</sup> Ophelia's passive beauty in Millais's painting has also been linked to the theme of the 'modest maiden' in nineteenth-century art. According to Hope Werness, this theme involving 'beautiful women reclining out-of-doors, alone and fully clothed', 'a forest glade, a glimpse of water, and lush, often minutely detailed vegetation', reveals a view of the ideal woman corresponding to submissiveness, self-sacrifice, and innocence.<sup>450</sup> In the adaptation, the picture of the dying Ophelia appears to Nora's inner eye three times and always in connection with her crime (Fig. 71b), as if to suggest a self-effacing suicide. In Ibsen's play, after having revealed her crime, Nora imagines death by water – cold, black, bottomless water – as a solution to save her husband's honour and pride. While water and botanic vitality generally might suggest fecundity, Millais's 'entangled, overgrown network of plants' fearfully closes in on the woman and confines her space to a burial place.<sup>451</sup> In the Helmer house, where Torvald has his 'own living room', and a room of his own corresponding to the studio that his wife never enters, Nora struggles to find her place, secretly shutting herself in at night pretending to do some little-appreciated creative work at the cost of annoying her husband.<sup>452</sup> In the graphic novel, the structures of both the art nouveau architecture and the page layout (gridding) shape this sense of entrapment: Ghigliano uses period style cast iron gates, gratings, and fences to confine Nora (Fig. 72), exhibiting cropped views of her and the other women's bodies through the use of framing.

Pitted against William Lindsay Windus's painting *Too Late* (1859) are several scenes dealing with Nora's crime (Fig. 73a and Fig. 73b). Windus's canvas represents a young woman embracing a pale lady leaning on a stick who is staring, like the child on her left, at a man in the foreground hiding his face beneath his raised arm. The motif has been interpreted as that of a man covering his face in despair or shame when realising that he has come too late to save the love of his life from dying from tuberculosis.<sup>453</sup> When it was first exhibited in public, the painting came with four lines from Lord Tennyson's 1842 poem *Come*



Fig. 72



Fig. 73a



Fig. 73b







Fig. 74a



Fig. 74b

*Not, When I Am Dead*, said to have served as inspiration for Windus. In this section of the poem, Tennyson confronts the reader with a speaking persona who is mortally ill and tired of suffering, now asking the interlocutor to blame for this condition not to come mourning at the grave: 'If it were thine error or thy crime | I care no longer, being all unblest; | Wed whom thou wilt, but I am sick of time; | And I desire to rest'.<sup>454</sup> Although there are no indications of gender in Tennyson's poem, the speaking persona turns into a younger, feminised character – a 'child' with 'foolish tears' and a 'weak heart'.<sup>455</sup> Tennyson's indecision between the gender identities of his dramatis personae is lost in Windus's painting, where the dying person is represented as a woman, and a guilt-ridden man turns away in distress. However, the themes of mortal illness, guilt, denialism, and fierce pride – present both in poem and painting – still resonate with the plot of Ibsen's play and with Nora's transition from irresponsible child to decision-making individual.

On page 26 in the adaptation, Gustav Klimt's *Judith II* (1909) offers the backdrop to Torvald's monologue about a dissolute mother's harmful influence on her children (Fig. 74a and Fig. 74b). While the biblical



Fig. 75a



Fig. 75b

Judith is a pious and virtuous woman who sets her people free from a tyrant, Klimt's Judith is an eroticised seductress, clutching the head of the man she has killed by the hair. In the graphic novel, Holofernes' head dangling at Judith's waist is covered by Torvald's body and speech balloon, which is significant considering that the master of the house is incapable of grasping more than the ornamental, two-dimensional surfaces of the artworks he has surrounded himself with. The naked breasts and flowing robes of the seductress are on show, thus alluding to another role Nora must play. As Unni Langås has observed, the play's famous stocking scene, which sees Nora engaged with Dr Rank, can be described as 'a kind of striptease, where the woman attracts the man's desire in an oscillation between her exhibitionism and his voyeurism. It cites a cultural tradition where the female body as an object of desire participates in a gendered negotiation for power'.<sup>456</sup>

Highly decorative, sensuous, and feminine are descriptions that also apply to Mucha's graceful women with streaming hair and floating robes, framed by delicate flowers, to whom the aesthetics of the portraits hanging in the living room seem indebted. As has been noted, even though this iconography introduced a new kind of objectification of women, Mucha's protagonists are not passive, repressed, or helpless. In advertising posters they often engage in traditionally masculine activities such as smoking, drinking, and riding bicycles. In her essay 'Alphonse Mucha and the Emergence of the "New Woman" during the Belle Époque', Sarah Blattner describes this woman as progressive, elitist, and modern, 'hardly a passive vessel of docility', but rather one who 'refuted the traditional representation of femininity as domestic and compliant'.<sup>457</sup> Again, the art that Torvald has chosen for his living room show only one side of the femininity of Mucha's *femme nouvelle* (Fig. 75a and Fig. 75b).

## Reflections

'Helmer speaks like a painter, or perhaps even like a painter of theatre decor: all he can think of is surface effects', is Torild Moi's verdict of Torvald.<sup>458</sup> Ghigliano's use of intericonic references highlights this shortsightedness characterising Torvald Helmer. Through the practice

of the art quote, the adaptation creates analogies between the portrayal of women in art history and the femininity Nora needs to perform to fit into the patriarchal frame: she is the modest maiden, the tempting seductress, the poster girl. To become 'a human being' she must break this frame by stepping out of the door.

Given the principle of 'reverse ekphrasis', Ghigliano's rendering of the doll's house exemplifies how a visual transposition allows for an expansion of its verbal source. The visualisation of the Helmer household, where Nora on a surface level compliantly acts out her husband's ideal of femininity, highlights Ibsen's feminist message which resonated with the new context of second-wave feminism where the adaptation appeared. Without downgrading stereotypically feminine aesthetics, and through the use of period style and art quotes, Ghigliano's Nora and her domestic environment blend in with Torvald's idea of woman-as-decoration, but underneath the surface aesthetics there is an explosive content which he fails to recognise.

## Afterword

In his introduction to *The Routledge Companion to Adaptation*, Dennis Cutchins observes that ‘To study texts as adaptations ... requires the scholar to hold multiple things in his or her mind’.<sup>459</sup> Here, multidimensionality has been taken to mean not only the consideration of at least two texts at once, but also the numerous intersections to be found between literature and visual sources, comics studies and adaptation theory, as well as the presumed demands and supposed interests of a varied readership made up of both experts and non-experts in different fields. With their richness and heterogeneity, these research objects are naturally centrifugal in effect, eschewing an exclusively binary focus on the relationship between adapted text and adaptation, and revealing instead connections that sprawl in many directions – intericonic, intertextual, (auto)biographical, transcultural, historical, geographical. The common thread that has held such a varied assemblage of interpretive routes together is a curiosity for the formal and narrative machinery of comic art. It is my hope that the attention awarded to the medium-specific aspects of comics has worked as an opposing – centripetal – force with a cohesive function.

In an academic landscape devoid of comprehensive studies specifically concerned with comic art adaptations of works originating in Scandinavian literature and culture, *Afterlives* set out to examine how several Danish, Norwegian, Swedish, and Finland-Swedish texts with a ‘temporal stamina’ have lived on in the art form of comics.<sup>460</sup> The remediation of the classics is an object of investigation that has allowed us, on the one hand, to draw attention to the medium of comics itself by exploring its specific storytelling techniques and, on the other, to

sharpen and rethink the habitual observation of familiar texts. If it is true, as Groensteen puts it, that ‘Classics are, par excellence, works that should be revisited’ so their ‘shock effect’ and ‘innovation’ – his wording – can repeatedly be perceived by readers, this book has tried to show how intermedia adaptation of plots and characters, themes, motifs, and aesthetic or stylistic qualities can renew the vision of the classics and bring to the fore disremembered or previously unnoticed details.<sup>461</sup> Comparative readings measuring the adaptation against the adapted text, when undertaken, have had the principal aim to identify the ‘dominant’ in the adaptation process.

In the first part of the book, an initial four analyses set the scene by focusing on the change of medium. The discourse about comic art adaptations peculiar to the present study was here defined through a selection of case studies (Madsen, AKAB, Crepax, Duba) which operate with little or no verbal narration and remain ‘loyal’ to the plot as recognised in the source text. The closeness to the storyline of the adapted text and the absence, or near-absence, of words favoured a concentration on the visual expression as the ‘dominant’. The interest in what a comic art adaptation can do that its source cannot – because of different, medium-specific storytelling possibilities – turned the focus of evaluation to how the source narrative adapts to the specificities of sequential drawing.

The three adaptations discussed in the second part were viewed given the way their creators challenge the ‘authority’ of the forerunner by manipulating the plot. These highly personal responses to their precursors have produced adaptations discussing the adapter’s own self-reflexive dilemma (Crepax), reframing the source text in a different genre by expanding on its embedded, partly unexpressed potential (Ange and Varanda), or rewriting the story in order to establish connections to contemporary anxieties (Eriksson).

This last point has raised issues also relevant to the discussion in the third part of the book, focusing on works particularly suited for investigations from a historical and contextual perspective. By examining the motivations behind the two adaptations (Bovil, Ghigliano), the

role played by the new local and contemporary reality was highlighted. This time, the strategy of reconnecting with themes and messages of the adapted text is not achieved by changing its plot or moving it into an updated, present-time or futuristic setting, but by finding other ways to familiarise a new audience primarily made up of young readers with the source. Again, the observation of the formal inventiveness of both adaptations shows how these two nineteenth-century classics were made to address their new readerships with the medium-specific means of comics.

The examples discussed in this study give credit to it being not only uninspiring, but also unproductive to ‘treat the role of the precursor text with equal priority in considering all adaptations’, as McFarlane has reminded us.<sup>462</sup> Rather than systematically comparing the adaptation to the adapted text, I have proposed an analytical model that on one level singles out the dominant in the adaptation process from the viewpoint of the reader–receiver, yet on another level examines the adaptation by trying to reveal the different grids and lenses through which the adapted text has been reconceived by the adapter–translator. With no fixed meaning, the classic travels through the hands of readers and adapters, through different times, different places, and different media, new interpretations are advanced, and diverse (sometimes hidden) parts are foregrounded. As the case studies are understood as translations of the source texts, the interpretations presented are likewise possible translations of meaning, which can, and should, be countered with subjective experiences of the notions of ‘icon’, ‘dominant’, ‘intentio’.

As objects of investigation, comic art adaptations also invite consideration of the afterlives of images. Various instances of visual intertextuality mean that most of the adaptations discussed in this book should to an extent also be seen as ‘art about art’: while Bim Eriksson’s characters, referencing Mickey Mouse and Wonder Woman, find themselves quite comfortable in the company of the classic comics, other comics creators combine their work with the mechanisms of poetry (Duba), the aesthetics of art-house cinema (Crepax), or painterly traditions (Bovil, Ghigliano). The repeated art quotes in the adaptations examined have brought us to

consider the use and function of the referenced artworks in relation to their new environment. Removed from their original context they prompt resemantisation, which also depends on the 'spatio-topia' of the image in the sequence. There are examples of pictures manipulated to produce new meanings and of others, literally 'quoted' and more recognisable, which function as comments on the narrative in which they are inserted. In line with what Heydemann has called a 'strategy of subtraction', the gaps present in the art quotes in the stripped feuilleton of *Fältskärens berättelser* trigger interpretations that subvert former perceptions of the same visual sources and sustain the dominant in the adaptation. True to Heydemann's idea of the 'strategy of combination', AKAB's fusion of two of Klimt's most iconic paintings, *The Three Ages of Woman* and *The Kiss*, into a single image not only underlines the relationship between the two artworks, but also delivers an understanding of the comics creator's personal reading of the adapted text. As Heydemann writes, 'the reference to something else, forces to express something of the self at the same time' in an 'interplay between creation and recreation' that resonates with the adaptation of the classics.<sup>463</sup>

One of my first aims with this study was to locate comic art adaptations based on Scandinavian sources and survey the existing work in the field. The reading list of adaptations is far from exhaustive – and presumably growing – but has been included hoping to offer inspiring material for further research.

If translation, according to Walter Benjamin, is 'midway between poetry and theory', it is fitting to round off with a few lines from a poem by the Finland-Swedish scholar and writer, Lars Huldén (1926–2016), who habitually teamed up with the classics.<sup>464</sup> As a translator, he worked on Shakespeare's and Molière's *oeuvres*, and co-authored a prize-winning revisitation of the Finnish national epic *Kalevala*. As a poet, he was knowledgeable about classic verse and used pastiche and allusion to give oblique nods to the ancient tradition of epitaphic poetry and pastorals. As an academic, he wrote extensively on the masters of Swedish verse, Bellman and Runeberg, to name but two. In an untitled poem about 'the classics', he writes:



AFTERWORD

En klassiker är en vit kanin	A classic is a white rabbit
i trollkarlarnas hatt.	in the magicians' hat.
Så snäll, så med om alla	So good, so compliant to all
förvandlingar.	transformations.
Simsalabim.	Abracadabra.
Det är inte alla	Not everyone is
som är så döda	dead enough
att de kan bli klassiker.	to become a classic. <sup>465</sup>

With the wit and irony characteristic of so much of his poetry, Huldén puts his finger on at least two crucial themes in this book: the touch of the adapter–magician, by which the white rabbit inside the top hat can be transformed into an infinite variety of restive creatures, and the compliancy of the classics. In the very essence of a ‘classic’ work of art lies a tolerance for transformation, remediation, appropriation, compression, amplification, popularisation, relocation, and even abuse, which is a strategy of survival and a guarantee of a long afterlife.



# Notes

## Preface

- 1 Sanders 2016, 126.
- 2 Hutcheon 2013, xxvi.
- 3 Boschenhoff 2013; Mitaine et al. 2015, 2018; Tabachnick & Saltzman 2015; Baetens 2020.
- 4 Sanders 2016, 35. Svenn-Arve Myklebost 2013, 27 writing about manga adaptations of Shakespeare, relativises Sanders's two keywords: 'Even as a figure of speech, "adaptation" remains a somewhat misleading term and it is also one whose application is not always the same. I have seen fruitful discussions about Shakespearean interart derail into much less fruitful discussions about whether the work in question is an "adaptation" or an "appropriation", for example. At the end of the day, a professor of theatre studies is likely to use the word slightly differently from a film scholar whose usage in its turn may vary slightly from that of a professor of literature and so on.'
- 5 Krebs 2021.
- 6 Ibid. 75, 59.
- 7 Ibid. 71–2.
- 8 Hutcheon 2013, 8, original emphasis.
- 9 Benjamin 1996, 256.

## Introduction

- 10 Benjamin 1996, 263.
- 11 Kermode 1975; Coetzee 2001; Grixti 2009; Olsson 2016; Calvino 2021.
- 12 Olsson 2016, 139: 'en hierarki av motsatser'. All translations are my own unless otherwise stated.
- 13 Kermode 1975, 44.
- 14 Coetzee 2001, 18.
- 15 Ibid. 17–18.
- 16 Kermode 1975, 42.
- 17 Ibid. 121.
- 18 Coetzee 2001, 19.
- 19 Grixti 2009, 461.
- 20 Liapis & Sidiropoulou 2021, 4.
- 21 Olsson 2016, 133.

- 22 Calvino 2021; Calvino 1999.
- 23 Calvino 1999, 3; Calvino 2021, 5: 'I classici sono quei libri di cui si sente dire di solito: "Sto rileggendo ...".'
- 24 Calvino 1999, 5, 6; Calvino 2021, 7: 'D'un classico ogni rilettura è una lettura di scoperta come la prima', 'I classici sono libri che quanto più si crede di conoscerli per sentito dire tanto più quando si leggono davvero si trovano nuovi, inaspettati, inediti.'
- 25 Hutcheon 2013, 4.
- 26 Handberg 2014, 104–105, 252, quote at 104: 'As an element of this cultural condition, retro has an intricate double position, on the one hand functioning as a part of the economy and industry of "selling the past" ("The past is a foreign country with a thriving tourist industry," as historian David Lowenthal has said ...), but on the other taking an oppositional stance towards this commercialization. An important concept here is "musealization", describing the way historicizing and staging the past has entered all aspects of our culture.'
- 27 Calvino 1999, 5; Calvino 2021, 7: 'D'un classico ogni prima lettura è in realtà una rilettura'; Calvino 1999, 5; Calvino 2021, 8: 'I classici sono quei libri che ci arrivano portando su di sé la traccia delle letture che hanno preceduto la nostra e dietro di sé la traccia che hanno lasciato nella cultura o nelle culture che hanno attraversato (o più semplicemente nel linguaggio o nel costume).'
- 28 Hutchins 1952, 49; Adler 1990, 28.
- 29 Sanders 2016, 57, 12.
- 30 Bortolotti & Hutcheon 2007, 446.
- 31 Stam 2005, 3.
- 32 Bruhn et al. 2013, 8.
- 33 Hutcheon 2013, 21.
- 34 Heydemann 2020, 10 has attempted a theoretical framing and formalistic categorisation of the art quote. Using a corpus of artworks conceived between 1990 and 2010, the output of international artists working in different media and referencing works of art from any historical period, she identifies six strategies of representation: 'substitution' (something in the composition, a motif, figure, genre, or style is substituted by something else); 'addition'; 'subtraction' (something is added or subtracted from the artwork quoted); 'division'; 'multiplication'; or 'combination' (the art quotes are divided, multiplied, or combined with references to other artworks). To understand how intericonic referencing generates meaning in the case of comics, the reader needs to consider the flow of action into which the art quote is inserted – in other words, its relationship to the preceding and successive panels in the sequential narration – as we will see.
- 35 Groensteen 2017b, 206.
- 36 The use of 'hypotext' follows Gérard Genette's definition in *Palimpsestes* (1982, 14), where it is used to indicate an 'original' or 'primary' text to which the 'hypertext' refers. The 'hypertext' is explained as 'any text derived from a previous text' ('tout texte dérivé d'un texte antérieur').
- 37 Mitaine et al. 2018.
- 38 Ibid. 3; Eco 1962; Eco 1972.
- 39 Bramlett et al. 2017, 22; McCloud 1994.
- 40 Spiegelman 1986; Spiegelman 1991; Moore & Gibbons 1995.
- 41 Groensteen 1999; Groensteen 2007; Mitaine et al. 2018, 4; Strömberg 2016.

- 42 Strömberg 2016, 138. At the time of the survey Strömberg saw the field as dispersed, heterogeneous, and fervidly interdisciplinary, with most scholars standing with one foot in other disciplines such as languages and literature, art, cultural and media studies, history, or sociology, Strömberg 2016, 149. In assessing the international situation, the editors of *The Routledge Companion to Comics* claim that it was Charles Hatfield's influential *Alternative Comics: An Emerging Literature* (2005) that provided 'a kind of living defense of the idea that one can focus on comics studies as one's primary area of interest and nevertheless succeed in the academic world' (Bramlett et al. 2017, 23).
- 43 Among recent initiatives, the conference Tecknade serier: Ett utforskat språk (Comics: An Unexplored Language) in Stockholm in May 2015 was organised by David Gedin and Elena Balzamo to provide new theoretical perspectives on Swedish comics. It was followed up by the seminar Tecknade serier: Teoretiska och metodiska utgångspunkter för forskning (Comics: Theoretical and Methodical Premises for Research) in Uppsala in September 2016, and by a publication on the language of comics, see Gedin 2017. As to scholarship on Swedish comics, Strömberg 2003 deserves a mention, while more recent additions are Ernst 2017 on graphic memoirs, Arnerud Mejhammar 2020 on self-image and world views, and Beers Fägersten 2020 on language play. Together with Anna Nordenstam, Margareta Wallin Victorin, Mike Frangos, among others, Beers Fägersten is one of the driving forces in a research group investigating feminist comics in Sweden and beyond, with recent publications including Beers Fägersten et al. 2021 on comic art and feminism in the Baltic region. The historian Michael F. Scholz is interested in the role of Swedish comics as propaganda in the Second World War (Cortsen et al. 2014, 111–32; Scholz 2007). In 2017, Joachim Schiedermeir organised a two-day seminar on Nordic comics culture in Greifswald, Germany, titled *Comics im Norden: Punkt. Punkt. Komma. Strich.* with a number of resultant articles gathered in *European Journal of Scandinavian Studies* 2018, 42/2.
- 44 Strömberg 2022, 50.
- 45 Christiansen & Magnussen 2000; Christiansen 2001, Christiansen & Olsen 2015.
- 46 Gedin 2017.
- 47 Compare Miller 2017, vii and her presentation of Groensteen 2017b and his theoretical work: 'his approach differs from that of much scholarship in English, which has tended to adopt a cultural studies perspective, viewing comics through, for example, a postcolonial or gender-based lens, with a selective focus on relevant formal qualities. Groensteen's readings are, in contrast, more formal, although by no means exclusively so, since they are informed by the work of philosophers, psychoanalysts, and sociologists.' Miller 2007 delves deeper into the two approaches. See also Christiansen 2001, 17–29, 5; Beaty 2012, 8; and Mitaine et al. 2018, 4.
- 48 Mitaine et al. 2018, 7; Baetens 2020, 7–8 mentions Cham's irreverent comic art adaptation of *Les Misérables* from the early 1860s as one of the first examples in the field.
- 49 Eisner 2008, xi.
- 50 Ibid. xi.
- 51 Baetens 2018, 33; Miller 2007, 2.
- 52 Stam 2005, 8.
- 53 If the need to legitimise a poorly rated medium is no longer an issue in comic art adaptation, the motives for looking up well-known or best-selling works are today

- more commonly tied to hopes for financial returns, to manifestations of appreciation of the source works' quality and aesthetic value, to didactic issues, propaganda, and, last but not least, to the comics creators' personal, artistic impulse to interpret, renew, and revitalise. Mitaine et al. 2018, 8 describe the drive to revitalise as the manifestation of an 'emotional response', which pays homage to an author, a work, or a style by bringing into being adaptations that are the 'fruit of love' (9). Sanders 2016, 12 underscores that adaptations have the power to write back and criticise their forerunners: 'adaptation can be oppositional, even subversive. There are as many opportunities for divergence as adherence, for assault as well as homage.'
- 54 Hutcheon 2013, 34–5.  
 55 Ibid. 8.  
 56 Gaudreault & Groensteen 1998.  
 57 Tabachnick & Saltzman 2015, where the 'various' works discussed mainly stem from the English-language and French literary tradition.  
 58 Mitaine et al. 2015.  
 59 Versaci 2007, 182–212; Kukkonen 2013, 74–9.  
 60 Bramlett et al. 2017; Pratt 2016.  
 61 Ferstl 2010; Vanderbeke 2010; Baetens 2018.  
 62 I cannot agree with Boschenhoff & Pointner 2010, 92, 104 who conclude that visual narratives are superior in their depiction of space while prose texts excel in their treatment of allegory since images do not leave room for the readers' own interpretation.  
 63 Boschenhoff 2013.  
 64 Baetens 2020. Of the unpublished works, Beineke 2011 deserves a special mention for its model for analysing graphic novel adaptations of literary works.  
 65 Hermansson 2015, 148.  
 66 Bruhn et al. 2013; Schober 2013, 89.  
 67 Elleström 2013, 115.  
 68 Hermansson 2015; Andrew 1980.  
 69 Hermansson 2015, 149, 155.  
 70 Baetens 2020, 18, 25: 'un nouvel éloge de la fidélité'.  
 71 Hermansson 2015, 156.  
 72 Ibid. 157.  
 73 Brownlee 2018, 157, original emphasis.  
 74 Jellenik 2018, 183.  
 75 Ibid. 189.  
 76 Vanderbeke 2010, 107.  
 77 Kukkonen 2013, 81.  
 78 Cutchins & Meeks 2018, 309.  
 79 Jellenik 2018, 182.  
 80 Benjamin 1996, 255; Schober 2013, 89.  
 81 Hutcheon 2013, 9, 6.  
 82 Brownlee 2018, 158.  
 83 Hutcheon 2013, xiii.  
 84 Gaudreault 1998, 269: 'chaque lecture d'un texte, chaque lecture singulière, produi[t] dans l'esprit du lecteur ce que l'on pourrait appeler un 'icône' du texte et ... ce serait cet icône du texte que l'adapteur adapter[a], le faisant passer dans la 'moulinette' d'un autre média.'

- 85 Jakobson 1987, 41.  
 86 Ibid. 41–2.  
 87 Sütiste et al. 2016, 18.  
 88 McHale 1986, 55–6, original emphasis.  
 89 Gaudreault 1998, 269.  
 90 Groensteen 1998b, 273. Others have attempted to classify adaptations by the ways they treat their sources. On adaptations from novel to screen, Wagner 1975, 222–7 labels three different approaches: ‘transposition’ refers to those cases ‘in which a novel is directly given on the screen, with the minimum of apparent interference’; ‘commentary’ to instances ‘where an original is taken and either purposely or inadvertently altered in some respect’; and ‘analogy’ designates adaptations which represent ‘a fairly considerable departure for the sake of making another work of art’; see also Perdikaki 2017, 19.  
 91 McFarlane 1996, 20.  
 92 Stam 2005, 43; Gaudreault 1998, 269.  
 93 Benjamin 1996, 259.  
 94 Ibid. 260.  
 95 Elliott 2013, 34.  
 96 Sanders 2016, 1.  
 97 Engelstad 2007.  
 98 Elleström 2013, 120–1, original emphasis.  
 99 Cardwell 2018, 15.  
 100 Medium-specific possibilities are a common theme in both comics studies and adaptation studies. Baetens & Pylyser 2017 write that ‘Medium-specificity, i.e. the assumption that every medium (and comics is definitely a medium, not just a genre) is characterised by a special way of using and combining formal and thematic features, is a key approach in the study of comics.’ Likewise, adaptation studies have an interest in how different media can treat the same story by utilising their own specific formal features. Stam 2005, 16 asks, ‘Can stories “migrate” from a less to a more appropriate medium? Do stories pre-exist their mediation?’ recalling Philippe Marion’s notion of a story’s ‘mediagenia’ or of a media’s ‘adaptagenia’ (see Gaudreault 1998, 270–1; Groensteen 1998b, 276). Leitch 2003, 151, in studying cinematographic adaptations of literary works, criticises ‘the essential view’, which holds different media to be suited to different tasks; in his opinion, Seymour Chatman’s famous essay ‘What Novels Can Do That Films Cannot (And Vice Versa)’ is therefore ‘fallaciously entitled’.  
 101 Cattrysse 2018, 51.

## I. Medium

- 102 Eisner 2008, 136.  
 103 Hutcheon 2013, 12.  
 104 Stam 2000, 55, 16.  
 105 Eisner 2008, xi, 132.  
 106 Ibid. xi.  
 107 Bramlett et al. 2017, 27.  
 108 Sommerland & Wallin Wictorin 2017.  
 109 Rosen 2017.

- 110 Baetens 2020, 14: ‘Si un roman graphique mérite d’être lu comme “littéraire” ... ce n’est pas parce que son intrigue réutilise un texte littéraire, mais parce que sa manière de raconter se veut comparable à celle de l’écriture, c’est-à-dire *complexe et personnelle*.’ Original emphasis.
- 111 See Miller 2007, 29.
- 112 Genette 1972; Stein & Thon 2013.
- 113 On the handling of time in comics, see also Baetens & Pylyser 2017.
- 114 Miller 2007, 74–5.
- 115 Eisner 2008, 32–7. Miller 2007, 72–3 summarises the varying interpretations of the significance of gridding choice, and its terminology: while Peeters distinguishes between ‘conventional’ gridding (classic *gaufrier*), ‘rhetorical’, ‘decorative’ (aesthetic but without narrative relevance), and ‘productive’ gridding (engendered by the *mise en page*), Groensteen sees it in terms of ‘regularity’ versus ‘irregularity’ and ‘discreetness’ versus ‘ostentation’, underlining that ‘ostentation’, too, goes for the presence of a regular grid if it departs from the norm in the given context.
- 116 Mikkonen 2012, 73.
- 117 It should be added that Genette’s discussion of narrative voice, which distinguishes between a ‘heterodiegetic’ narrator (positioned outside the diegesis) and a ‘homodiegetic’ narrator (within) has also been applied to the analysis of comics. This terminology is of little relevance here, however.
- 118 Eisner 2008, 92.
- 119 Sundberg 2017.
- 120 *Ibid.* 41, 44.
- 121 *Ibid.* 31.
- 122 In *Reading bande dessinée*, Miller 2007, 61 provides a sharply focused overview of Groensteen’s ‘system of comics’ in far greater detail than will be attempted here, where aspects of Groensteen’s theorisation are clarified as they are introduced. Miller starts by positioning Groensteen’s formalist approach to comics and graphic novels within the tradition of structural linguistics and semiology. Through Roland Barthes’s mediation in the 1960s, Miller explains, Ferdinand de Saussure’s 1916 coinage ‘semi-ology’ was adopted by comic scholars active in the 1970s and 1980s such as Pierre Fresnault-Deruelle and Pierre Masson, and, in Italy, Umberto Eco. In the 1990s, Thierry Groensteen returned to this approach with an even broader scope.
- 123 Using the case studies, I will look at some of the implications of this principle, summed up by Miller 2007, 69 as ‘Certain positions on the page will tend to have more intrinsic narrative significance than others, most notably the bottom right-hand panel, which affords possibilities for suspense’. As Eisner 2008, 65 writes, the turning of a page can be exploited not only to travel in time and space, but also for specific effect, for ‘when the reader turns a page a pause occurs. This permits a change of time, a shift of scene, an opportunity to control the reader’s focus.’
- 124 Groensteen 2007, translating Groensteen 1999; Groensteen 2013b, translating Groensteen 2013a.
- 125 Eisner 2008, 2, 24, 48, 61.
- 126 *Ibid.* 106.
- 127 Madsen 2004.
- 128 Andersen 1964; Andersen 1949b. *Historien om en Moder* was first published in 1847 as *The Story of a Mother* in Charles Beckwith Lochmeyer’s English translation. It was



- part of the volume *A Christmas Greeting to my English Friends* (Andersen 1847) and appeared in Danish the following year among the stories collected in *Nye Eventyr*, ii: *Andet Samling* (Andersen 1848; *New Fairy Tales*, ii: *Collection Two*).
- 129 Beaty & Nguyen 2007, ix.
- 130 Oxfeldt 2009.
- 131 Nielsen 1977; Garde 1992; Barlby 1993; Kronborg 1995.
- 132 Strömberg 2005.
- 133 The Hans Christian Andersen Centre search engine [andersen.sdu.dk/forskning/bib/](http://andersen.sdu.dk/forskning/bib/) has 32 hits for the keyword 'tegneserie' (comics), of which 23 are adaptations related to Andersen's fairy tales, 11 of which were published in Denmark in the past century. The four volumes published by Carlsen Comics, scripted by Rune T. Kidde with artwork by Flemming Jeppesen (1991, 1992a, 1992b, 1994) are not listed, neither Madsen's version of *Historien om en Moder* nor AKAB's. The only reference to *H.C. Andersen Junior* by Jan Rybka and Thierry Capezone (2003, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010) is to a review. Most international adaptations go unmentioned.
- 134 Anon., 'Prøvebilleder', *Klods-Hans* (31 Mar. 1905).
- 135 Anon., *Den lille Pige* 1941; Syberg 1953; Kühn-Nielsen 1955.
- 136 Kühn-Nielsen 1967; Fjeldmark 1984.
- 137 Andersen 1949b; Andersen 1964, 163: 'Jeg er en Moder'; Madsen 2004, 60: 'Jeg er *kun*... en mor', my emphasis.
- 138 Groensteen 2007, 24–102.
- 139 *Ibid.* 40–3.
- 140 McCloud 1994, 67; for closure, see also Christiansen 2001, 49–54. McCloud's definition of closure has been questioned for example by David Gedin. Gedin 2019, 300 rightly points out that the use of blank space between panels (the 'gutter') to indicate a lack of information 'graphically' is not a medium-specific quality exclusive to the 'grammar' of comics. The use of blank space as a request to the reader to 'fill in the gaps' rather demonstrates comics' affinity to what Gedin calls 'pure text-media': 'For anyone familiar with textual analysis, there is no particular medium-specific mystery in the fact that a narrative is created of fragments of information or that time is represented spatially. That is instead the property of *every* text (something Genette also pointed out in 1972)', original emphasis.
- 141 Groensteen 2007, 43.
- 142 *Ibid.* 45.
- 143 *Ibid.* 46–9.
- 144 *Ibid.* 49.
- 145 *Ibid.* 49.
- 146 *Ibid.* 56.
- 147 Madsen 2004, 14; Andersen 1964, 161.
- 148 Groensteen 2007, 144–58; Groensteen 1999 first elaborated on the notion of 'braiding' (*tressage*) in his work *Système de la bande dessinée* (*The System of Comics*, 2007). His response to the subsequent discussion, Groensteen 2015b, is available both in English (Groensteen 2016) and Swedish (Groensteen 2017a).
- 149 For reverse ekphrasis, see Groensteen 2007, 124. Compare Vanderbeke 2010, 116. Eisner 2008, 148 interprets this aspect of visual narratives as a limitation for the reader, for 'There is a kind of privacy that the reader of prose work enjoys in the process of translating a descriptive passage into a visual image in the mind. This is a very personal

- thing and permits an involvement far more participatory than the voyeurism of examining a picture.’
- 150 Groensteen 2007, 151; Madsen 2004, 8, 10, 13, 17.
- 151 Groensteen 2007, 29.
- 152 Madsen 2004, 10. See, for example, Munchmuseet (Munch Museum), Oslo, MM T2547, Skissebok, 1930–1935, 25 [sketchbook], [www.emunch.no](http://www.emunch.no); Munchmuseet, MM N640, n.d., 2 [note]: ‘Vi dør ikke, Verden dør fra os’.
- 153 Tøjner 2000, 14–5: ‘smerten er derfor hos den, der bliver tilbage ... billedet handler ikke om dødsangst, men om at blive forladt. Det er moderen, der mærker døden og skjuler sit ansigt i fortvivelse ... det er vor verden, tingenes verden, den der altid bliver tilbage.’
- 154 Madsen 2004, 15.
- 155 Madsen 2004, 16.
- 156 See, for example, Madsen 2004, 9, 15, 16, 19, 22–3, 25, 26, 28, 30–1, 32, 33, 34–5, 36–7, 38, 42–3, 45, 46–7, 50.
- 157 Genette 1988, 33–7; Chatman 1980, 67–78.
- 158 Chatman 1980, 162.
- 159 Tr. Jean Hersholt, [andersen.sdu.dk/vaerk/hersholt/TheStoryOfAMother\\_e.html](http://andersen.sdu.dk/vaerk/hersholt/TheStoryOfAMother_e.html); Andersen 1964, 160: ‘Der sad en Moder hos sit lille Barn, hun var saa bedrøvet, saa bange for at det skulde døe. Det var saa blegt, de smaa Øine havde lukket sig, det trak saa sagte Veiret, og imellem med et dybt Drag ligesom om det sukkede; og Moderen saae endnu mere sorrigfuld paa den lille Sjæl.’
- 160 Madsen 2004, 8: ‘Hun sang stadig sangene hver aften | Men var det egentlig *ham*, hun sang dem for ... | eller var det, fordi de gjorde natten kortere?’, original emphasis.
- 161 Madsen 2004, 10: ‘Natten faldt på, endnu en af disse nætter, hvor hun talte timerne’.
- 162 Andersen 1949b; Andersen 1964, 161; Madsen 2004, 18–9.
- 163 McCloud 1994, 70.
- 164 Madsen 2004, 26–8; Andersen 1949b.
- 165 Andersen 1964, 161: ‘Og hun trykkede Tornebusken til sit Bryst, saa fast, for at den ret kunde opvarmes, og Tornene gik lige ind i hendes Kjød, og hendes Blod flød i store Draaber, men Tornebusken skjød friske grønne Blade og der kom Blomster paa i den kolde Vinter-Nat, saa varmt var der ved en bedrøvet Moders Hjerte; og Tornebusken sagde hende Veien, som hun skulde gaee.’
- 166 Madsen 2004, 13.
- 167 Madsen 2004, 29, 44.
- 168 Groensteen 2007, 158.
- 169 Vanderbeke 2010, 117.
- 170 Wartenberg 2012, 87.
- 171 McCloud 1994, 9; Miller 2007, 61.
- 172 Eisner 2008, 136; Meskin 2017, 417; Gedin 2019; Boschenhoff 2013, 15.
- 173 Thierry Groensteen 1997, 60 in the first of his two-part article *Histoire de la bande dessinée muette* (‘A History of Silent *bande dessinée*’) attributes the birth of silent comics to the Munich-based magazine *Fliegende Blätter* which, in the 1860s, published wordless visual narrations rarely longer than one or two pages. Caran d’Ache’s long-length wordless comics appeared in *Le Figaro* and in the satirical *Le Chat Noir* at the end of the nineteenth century. A different sort of wordless ‘funnies’ emerged in the 1920s with the Swede Oscar Jacobsson’s *Adamson* (*Silent Sam*), the forebear of a host

of bald, middle-aged men who, perhaps drawing on the comic personae of Chaplin, Keaton, and Lloyd in silent films, populated pantomime strips of the coming decades: Professeur Nimbus, Pitche, M. Subito, Ferd' nand, Professeur Pi (Groensteen 1998a, 95–6). In the 1950s and 1960s, silent comics were again revived in the works of Sempé, Mordillo, and Quino (Groensteen 1998a, 92–3). According to Groensteen 1998a, 98 the first truly accomplished wordless album was Milt Gross's *He Done Her Wrong* of 1930, still riding the humorous wave, while Moebius' *Arzach* (1975) with its dreamlike sequences is an example of silent comics entering the realm of the fantastic. Groensteen 1998a, 100–1 finds humor, satire (also declining into the burlesque and cartoonesque), and the fantastic to be the most popular genres in silent comics. For Postema 2018, 62–71 the woodcut novels of the 1910s form a group in their own right: often socially committed narratives, they maintained a high artistic level with work by the likes of Frans Masereel, who produced around fifty woodcut novels. Of his followers, Lynd Ward added colour to the wood engravings, while Otto Nückel employed lead print and Max Ernst collage techniques. The Czechoslovakian artist Helena Bochořáková-Dittrichová is an example of women's contribution to the genre, while Si Lewen and Milt Gross continued in the humorous or cartoon-style tradition. The production of woodcut silent novels slowed mid century, but socially engaged wordless narrations employing scratchboard and stencil techniques were seen again in the 1990s, with artists such as Eric Drooker and Peter Kuper. Successful pantomime comics from the late twentieth century are George A. Walker's works on Leonard Cohen and 9/11, Massimo Mattioli's *Squeak the Mouse*, Hendrik Dorgathen's *Space Dog*, Moebius' aforementioned *Arzach*, and the anthology *Comix 2000*. In Europe, Postema 2018, 68 argues, 'the decades since 2000 have been a Golden Age for the long-length wordless book in the form of the graphic novel'. Lewis Trondheim's recent formal experimentation with the leporello format, Joe Sacco's works about the First World War, or Shaun Tan's *The Arrival* are contemporary examples of this trend. For an exhaustive bibliography of silent comics, see Rhode et al. 2003.

174 Postema 2018, 387.

175 Groensteen 2005, 69.

176 Groensteen 2013b, 5

177 Ibid. 6.

178 Postema 2018, 68. The title of Jason's graphic novel *Sshhhhh!* is another example of a metanarrative underlining of the choice of genre, a strategy which is common to many wordless comics listed by Rhode et al. 2003: Caran d'Ache's *Histoires sans paroles* (1886), Gross's *He Done Her Wrong: The Great American Novel, and Not a Word in It* (1930), Kurtzman & Wood's *Sound Effects* (1955), Mahood's *Da War Ich Sprachlos* (1961), Bond's *Unspeakable Acts* (1981), Henderson's *Scene but not Heard* (1990), Marchesi & Tacconu's *No Words #5* (1998), Kuper's *Speechless* (2000), Chapman's *Quietus* (2000), Purvis's *Tacit* (2000), and Lash's *Words Do not Do Justice* (2002). Wordlessness can be imposed by the story matter as in *The Arrival*, whose silence can be said to resonate with the theme of incommunicability, or in Joe Sacco's *The Great War*, where it is expressive of horrors beyond words. And as Postema 2018, 59 notes, silence can aptly represent the universe of creatures with alien or non-verbal languages.

179 Postema 2018, 72.

180 Postema 2017, 389.

181 Lefèvre 2006.

- 182 Stamperia d'Arte Berardinelli 2022, s.v. 'Home'. [www.berardinelliarte.com](http://www.berardinelliarte.com).
- 183 Gabriele di Benedetto was an Italian comics creator, painter, and video- and film-maker. As one of the co-founders of the Milan-based underground comics collective Shok Studio (*fl.* 1994–9), AKAB took part in the scripting, drawing, and production of the miniseries *Morgue*, *Egon*, and *Ragno*. He also worked for international publishers such as Marvel, Dark Horse, and DC Comics. Between 2000 and 2006, after a longer sojourn in Iceland, AKAB worked primarily as a film-maker. In 2003, he wrote and directed the film *Mattatoio* ('Slaughterhouse'), presented at the Venice Film Festival as the first part of a trilogy that would include *Corpo di Cristo* ('The Body of Christ') and *Opere di un santo* ('The Deeds of a Saint'). Among his best-known works as a comics creator are *ReVolver*, *Come un piccolo olocausto* ('Like A Little Holocaust'), *Defragment*, and *Pop!* At the time of his death in 2019, he was starting an independent editorial project, Stigma ([progettostigma.com](http://progettostigma.com)) to publish 'radical' comics.
- 184 Hatfield 2005, 5.
- 185 Postema 2018, 60.
- 186 Ongaretti 2014: 'I suoi temi principali sono la solitudine, la paura, la perdita di identità spesso a causa del dolore, perdita intesa sia in senso fisico che emotivo.'
- 187 In the Bible, God as gardener is encountered in the narrative of the Creation in Genesis 2:8, 'the Lord God planted a garden in Eden'. In the New Testament, Christ also appears as a gardener to Mary Magdalene after the Crucifixion, perhaps reflecting his mission to tend human souls and exterminate evil.
- 188 Andersen 1949b; Andersen 1964, 163: "Jeg gør kun hvad han vil!" sagde Døden, "Jeg er hans urtegårdsmand! Jeg tager alle hans blomster og træer og planter dem ud i den store Paradisets Have i det ubekendte land".
- 189 Andersen 1949b; Andersen 1964, 160: 'Der sad en Moder hos sit lille Barn, hun var så bedrøvet, så bange for at det skulle dø'.
- 190 Andersen 1949b; Andersen 1964, 160: 'den gamle Mand, der var Døden selv'.
- 191 Eisner 2008, 16; Postema 2017, 392.
- 192 Andersen 1949b; Andersen 1964, 160: 'så underligt, det kunne lige så godt betyde ja, som nej'; *ibid.* 161: 'ikke frosset nok til at den kunne bære hende, og heller ikke åben og lav nok til at hun kunne vade igennem'; *ibid.* 163: 'man vidste ikke om det var et bjerg med skov og huler, eller om det var tømret op'.
- 193 Andersen 1949b; Andersen 1964, 164: 'Og Døden gik med hendes barn ind i det ubekendte land'. In terms of paratextual information, the Italian title is a literal translation of the original Danish title; however, *Storia di una madre* adds 'liberamente tratto dalla favola di Hans Christian Andersen' ('freely based on Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale') for readers unfamiliar with the story.
- 194 Postema 2018, 60.
- 195 Postema 2017, 391.
- 196 Barnabè 2013: 'ho impiegato l'elemento cromatico sfruttandone le potenzialità narrative e mutandolo in strumento di orientamento, come il rovo verde che indica la strada alla donna. La fiaba è contrassegnata da una serie di svolte drammaturgiche, che ho sottolineato con il colore'.
- 197 Andersen 1949b; Andersen 1964, 164: 'Da skreg moderen af skræk, "hvilken af dem var mit barn! sig mig det! frels den uskyldige!"'
- 198 Groensteen 2005, 70.

- 199 Postema 2017, 386; Postema 2018, 71.
- 200 Ljungberg 1998, 9: 'gyset og genkendelsen'.
- 201 Blixen 1958; in translation, Dinesen 1993.
- 202 Welles 1968; Crepax 1988d. Welles's film was financed by a French broadcaster, which not only explains the language of the original title, but also the casting of Jeanne Moreau as the female protagonist Virginie, see Mereghetti 2011, 86; Keller 1999. Crepax's adaptation was first published in the comics magazine *Corto Maltese*, but has been reprinted several times; in the magazine *Comic Art* (Crepax 1991f) and in the collections *Jekyll e altri classici della letteratura* (2011, 177–84; 'Jekyll and Other Classics of Literature') and *Donne inquiete: Allucinazioni e vita privata* (2015b, 125–32; 'Restless Women: Hallucinations and Private Life').
- 203 Crepax & Gallerani 2008.
- 204 Crepax 1975; 1981; 1985; 1987c; 1988b; 1989.
- 205 Crepax 1986; 1987a; 1987b; 1987d; 1988c; 1991a; 1991b; 1991c; 1991d; 1992a; 1992b; 1993.
- 206 Blake 2013; 2014.
- 207 Crepax 2011, 185. I wish to thank Antonio and Caterina Crepax for their assistance and for dedicating time to talk to me about their father's work on Blixen and Bergman.
- 208 Crepax & Gallerani 2008, 47: 'fedele', 'rispettoso'; Del Buono 2008, 125: 'filologicamente rigoroso'.
- 209 Crepax & Gallerani 2008, 45.
- 210 On the subject of transpositions from literary works to film, Stam 2005, 8 notes that the position of film adaptations is doubly uncomfortable, 'inferior' both to the literary work they build on and to 'pure' cinema – an observation which can easily be extended to comic art adaptations.
- 211 The reference is to the French cartoonist and comics creator Georges Wolinski (1934–2015), who was killed in the terrorist attack on the headquarters of the satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* in Paris on 7 January 2015.
- 212 The concept of 'iconic lexicon' ('ikoniskt lexikon') is one developed by the Swedish scholar Lund 1982, 119, 173 from Northrop Frye's concept of 'visual lexicon', indicating the image bank proper to a given sociocultural environment.
- 213 Beineke 2011, 17, original emphasis.
- 214 Fiz 2008, 101.
- 215 Eisner 2008, 2.
- 216 Dinesen 1993; Blixen 1958, 162: 'Den gamle Herre ... førte Sømanden ind i et Soveværelse som var oplyst af Lysestager af purt Guld, fem paa højre Side og fem paa venstre.'
- 217 Dinesen 1993; Blixen 1958, 149: 'høj', 'tør', 'strunk'.
- 218 Welles 1941.
- 219 For the parallel between *Citizen Kane* and *Une Histoire immortelle* made in critical comments about the latter, see, for example, Raspadori 1999, 35 or Tylski 2001, who takes the snow globe and the seashell to have the same metonymic and symbolic meaning: 'one containing snow, which brings to mind Kane's childhood, the other the sound of the sea, which recalls Paul and Virginie – in both cases a reminder of long gone and forever lost happiness' ('l'un contient la neige qui évoque l'enfance de Kane, l'autre le bruit de la mer qui évoquera Paul et Virginie – évocation dans l'un et

- l'autre d'un bonheur ancien et à jamais perdu'). In the short anonymous foreword to *La storia immortale* in *Jekyll e altri classici della letteratura* (Crepax 2011, 185), *Citizen Kane* is mentioned as a source of inspiration for the visualisation of the final scene in Crepax's adaptation.
- 220 Bortolotti & Hutcheon 2007.
- 221 Dinesen 1993; Blixen 1958, 212: 'Elishama ... havde aldrig før set sin Herre sove'; ibid. 214: 'trygt hvilende i sin Armstol'.
- 222 Crepax & Fiz 2001.
- 223 Beineke 2011, 24.
- 224 Branson 2000, 53 writes of the sense of isolation in *Une Histoire immortelle* that Mr Clay is 'imprisoned by his greed, in a house which formerly was filled with the light and laughter of his late partner's family'.
- 225 Vanderbeke 2010, 116.
- 226 Crepax 1991f, 8: 'Basta, Wolinski, sono stanco di libri mastri!'.
- 227 Vanderbeke 2010, 117.
- 228 Blixen 1958, 205; Dinesen 1993; Blixen 1958, 206: 'Da han tilsidst faldt i Søvn'.
- 229 Dinesen 1993; Blixen 1958, 199: 'pynte sin egen Person'.
- 230 Unfortunately, the two most recent reprints of Crepax's *La storia immortale* in 2011 and 2015 ignore this original disposition of the comics; unlike the first edition, where these two pages have a full-page spread, the reader has to turn the page to 'read' the encounter, and the refined symmetrical composition of the double page is lost.
- 231 Blixen 1958, 200.
- 232 Groensteen 2007, 35.
- 233 Miller 2007, 74–5. For the illusion of movement in comics, see also the section 'Bevægelsen i film og tegneserier' ('Movement in film and comics') in Christiansen 2001, 45–8.
- 234 Dinesen 1993; Blixen 1958, 203: 'dødelige forskrækkelse'.
- 235 Eco 2008, 66.
- 236 Groensteen 2007, 56.
- 237 Nagel 1997, 172–3.
- 238 Blixen 1958, 200.
- 239 Dinesen 1993; Blixen 1958, 156: 'Elishamas Eksistens var gaaet ind i Mr. Clay's [*sic*] Bevidsthed, saaledes som Mr. Clay's [*sic*] Eksistens allerede længe havde hørt til i Elishamas Livsopfattelse.'
- 240 Dinesen 1993; Blixen 1958, 171: 'med noget blomsteragtigt over sig'.
- 241 Raspadori 1999, 38 notes that Mr Clay undergoes a similar transformation in Welles's personification on screen: 'The fear of the carnal which has controlled Clay's existence is transformed into erotic desire' ('Il terrore della carne che ha dominato nella vita di Clay si rovescia in attrazione della carne').
- 242 Hutcheon 2013, 4.
- 243 Holmes & Enger 2018.
- 244 Fosse 1996; 2004.
- 245 Wærp 2002, 87: 'Det er mer dekkende å si at en tilstand utfolder seg enn at en handling utspiller seg i Fosses dramatikkk'.
- 246 Ibid.: 'Faktum er at samtlige av Jon Fosses dramaer i sin helhet er satt opp som dikt, det vil si med ujevn høyremarg. Jon Fosses dramaer er med andre ord skrevet på vers, og nærmere bestemt frie vers – *vers libres*.'

- 247 Iversen 2004, 48: ‘Det fokus, der opstår omkring sproget i kraft af minimeringen af andre virkemidler, antager i flere tilfælde en sprogtematiserende dimension. Når plotudvikling og personkarakterisering skæres ned, kommer dialogen i forgrunden. Dramaet bevæger sig ved hjælp af sprog billeder. ... De litterære og æstetiske kvaliteter overskygger ikke sprogets udvekslende natur. Skønt de mange gentagelser og de rytmiske pauseringer ikke synes styret af en kommunikativ intention, er det en samspilsmodus, som foldes ud ved hjælp af de stilistiske fællesnævnerne, og ikke en æstetiseret bevidsthed.’
- 248 Rees 2011, 201.
- 249 Sanders 2016, 3; Groensteen 2000.
- 250 Peters 2016, 98.
- 251 Surdiacourt 2012.
- 252 Chute 2013; for visual structures in comics and poetry, see also Gedin 2019, 304–5: ‘comics are characterised by onomatopoeic words which are given a particular typography and also a specific location on the page that emphasises the words and creates visual rhythm and volume, something that is unusual in novels but quite common in poetry, where layout (as well as different font size, capitalization, etc.) plays a more prominent role than in prose.’
- 253 Ibid., original emphasis.
- 254 Ibid.
- 255 See Hirsch 2014 for the definition of the term ‘repetition’ in his *A Poet’s Glossary*.
- 256 Bennett 2014, 108.
- 257 Rosenberg 1987, 56.
- 258 Ibid. 56, my emphasis.
- 259 Groensteen 2013b, 33–4, original emphasis.
- 260 Duba 2002, n.p., my emphasis: ‘over there | is the sea | nobody is going to come | look how beautiful the sea is | the house is old | and the sea is beautiful | we are alone | and nobody is going to come | nobody is coming | and over there the sea is so beautiful | look at the waves.’
- 261 Duba 2013: ‘en 2002 avec *Quelqu’un va venir* ... Je me souviens de l’importance qu’avait eu le rythme, je me souviens de la musicalité du texte qui avait conduit et inspiré la forme et les images de ce livre.’
- 262 Iversen 2004, 47: ‘Det mest håndgribelige træk i forhold til dramaerne er måske den lyriske kvalitet i ordknapheden og gentagelserne. Ordforrådet i replikvekslingerne er generelt meget simpelt og begrænset. Denne enkelthed er af mange blevet kaldt sprogfornyende.’
- 263 Groensteen 2013b, 136. Since panel content and the subjectivity of the reader also influence the perception of speed, it is difficult to establish universally valid rules. In Madsen’s adaptation of Andersen’s *Historien om en Moder*, we have seen how a sequence concentrating on slight variations in bodily movement broken up into a number of small frames can produce an effect of slow motion.
- 264 Ibid. 153.
- 265 Ibid. 148.
- 266 Baetens 2011, 106.
- 267 McCloud 1994, 74.
- 268 Duba 2002, n.p.: ‘Why did you | put away that slip of paper | with his phone number | in your purse? || I did not | Well | How do you know | that I did it? || I just know, that’s it’.

- 269 Bennett 2014, 113.  
 270 Groensteen 2013b, 39–40.  
 271 Baetens & Frey 2015, 152.

## 2. Fabula

- 272 Baetens & Frey 2015, 202.  
 273 Ibid. 203–4. Hatfield 2005, 4, 5–6 sees three main ‘packages’ of comic art – ‘the newspaper strip’, the ‘comic book’, and the ‘graphic novel’ – all with their own horizons as to content, readership, and symbolic capital, and he continues: ‘Terms like “comic book” and “graphic novel” are, strictly speaking, inaccurate; worse yet, they may encourage expectations, positive or negative, that are not borne out by the material itself. The phrase “graphic novel,” for instance, seems to imply a breadth and cohesion to which few graphic novels aspire, let alone achieve. The label, taken for granted within the narrow straits of the comic book hobby, threatens confusion as the graphic novel bids for acceptance within the wider field of literature and criticism. (Ironically, the novel – once a disreputable, bastard thing, radical in its formal instability – is here being invoked as the very byword of literary merit and respectability). Conversely, the term “comic book,” fraught with pejorative connotations, seems to undersell the extraordinary work that has been done, and is currently being done, in the long form. Yet to reject such terms completely is to run afoul of common usage and to risk obscuring the subject behind neologisms that are clumsy, counterintuitive and ahistorical.’  
 274 Krebs 2021, 75.  
 275 Ibid. 75.  
 276 Bortolotti & Hutcheon 2007, 446.  
 277 Ibid. 444.  
 278 Hutcheon 2013, 167, original emphasis.  
 279 Ibid. 92–3.  
 280 Cattrysse 2018, 47.  
 281 Ibid. 49, 52.  
 282 Sanders 2016, 106.  
 283 Ibid. 107.  
 284 Round 2014.  
 285 Crepax 1974; 1979; 1980; 1988a.  
 286 Crepax 1994.  
 287 Crepax 1991a; Bergman 1966.  
 288 Crepax & Brunati 2013, 20.  
 289 Fiz 2008, 101.  
 290 Crepax 1991a, 36: ‘vivi un’esistenza schizofrenica ... da un lato ti mercifichi ... dall’altro ti rifugi in fantasie astratte e oscure ... tutti parlano di te, ma nessuno ti conosce veramente ... tu non lo dici, ma io so che invidi la mia vita libera e felice forse vorresti non essere ... forse solo sognare’.  
 291 Ibid. 35: ‘i tuoi entusiasmi si sono raggelati, la tua partecipazione si è fatta prudente ... ti sei chiusa in te stessa’.  
 292 Ohlin 2011, 16: ‘I have at times said that *Persona* saved my life. It is no exaggeration. If I had not had the strength, I would probably have been eliminated’. See also Ibid. 27, and Michaels 2000, 13.



- 293 Quoted in Michaels 2000, 5. In the preface to the published version of the script, Bergman 1972, 21 writes: 'I discovered that the subject I had chosen was very large and that what I wrote or included in the final film (horrid thought) was bound to be entirely arbitrary. I therefore invite the imagination of the reader or spectator to dispose freely of the material that I have made available' (Bergman 2018, 7: 'Jag upptäckte ... att det ämne jag valt var mycket stort och att vad jag skrev eller vad jag tog med i den slutliga filmen [ruskiga tanke!] måste bli ytterligt godtyckligt. Därför inbjuder jag läsarens eller åskådarens fantasi, att fritt förfoga över det material som jag ställt till förfogande').
- 294 Crepax 1991a, 32: 'Il ruolo dell'infermiera poteva essere assunto sia da Bianca che da Valentina e così quello dell'attrice. Poi ho deciso che Bianca, protagonista quasi sempre muta delle sue avventure, fosse l'infermiera, mentre Valentina, paradossalmente la più loquace dei miei personaggi, avrebbe interpretato l'attrice, ostinatamente silenziosa. Questa contraddizione mi era sembrata solo apparente.'
- 295 Crepax 1991a, 36: 'io piaccio sempre ... nessuno può farmi delle critiche ... perché non mi sono mai data delle regole di comportamento e quindi non le ho neppure trasgredite ... tu ora vuoi apparire diversa da quella che sei ... vieni a dei compromessi ... accetti ruoli che non sono adatti a te.'
- 296 Crepax 1991a, 32: 'È possibile scrivere "Viva Trotsky" sul finestrino di un treno in viaggio tra Venezia e Milano e allo stesso tempo reclamizzare un profumo e dei quaderni di scuola?'
- 297 Ibid. 32: 'Valentina non si è tinta i capelli – sarebbe stata una grave infrazione alle buone regole che gli impegni commerciali le impongono – ma semplicemente è vista "in negativo".'
- 298 Ibid. 36.
- 299 Ibid. 33.
- 300 Crepax 2015a.
- 301 Conversation with Antonio Crepax: 'Se non fossi diventato fumettista sarei diventato un *serial killer*.'
- 302 Bøggild et al. 2015, 9: 'oversættere [har] ofte taget sig særlige friheder ved oversættelsen af Andersen, fordi man har opfattet ham som en forfatter for børn og derfor har ment at have en særlig licens til at omformulere og ændre teksterne, således at de så lydefrit som muligt har kunnet tale til målgruppen: målsprogets publikum af børn.'
- 303 Ibid. 10: 'en afrettet, domesticeret og uskyldiggjort ditto'.
- 304 Oxfeldt 2009, 23–4.
- 305 Ange & Varanda 1994, i. *Naiade* ('Naiad'); Ange & Varanda 1995, ii. *Noyade* ('Drowning').
- 306 Ange & Varanda 1994, 21: 'Le nombre de petits garçons de lignée royale qui s'éteignent bêtement, étouffés par leur petit déjeuner, pour qu'un cousin, oncle, frère accède plus facilement au trône ... vous seriez surprise!'
- 307 Bøggild & Heegaard 1993. Considering the body of critical studies of *Den lille Havfrue*, Bøggild & Heegaard discuss interpretations based on psychoanalytic and biographical approaches as well as readings founded on structuralism and New Criticism in the twentieth century.
- 308 Kavka 2015, 211.
- 309 Andersen 1949a, n.p.; Ange & Varanda 1994, 6: 'Loin en mer, l'eau est bleue comme les petals du plus beau bleuet, et claire comme le verre le plus pur, mais elle est

- profonde, trop profonde pour qu'aucune ancre puisse en atteindre le fond. Il faudrait poser un grand nombre de tours d'église les unes sur les autres pour monter du fond à la surface. C'est là, en bas, que des ondins ont leur demeure.'
- 310 Ange & Varanda 1994, 26: 'Comment est-ce arrivé? Je ne le saurai jamais, j'imagine. Êtes-vous muette de naissance? Ou une sorcière vous a-t-elle volé votre langue?'
- 311 There is as yet no sequel to the second album.
- 312 Andersen 1949a, n.p.; Andersen 1963, 98–100: 'Nu kom hun til en stor slimet Plads i Skoven, hvor store, fede Vandsnoge baltrede sig og viste deres stygge hvidgule Bug. Midt paa Pladsen var reist et Huus af strandede Menneskers hvide Been ... "Jeg veed nok, hvad du vill!" sagde Havhexen, "det er dumt gjort af dig! alligevel skal du faae din Villie, for den vil bringe dig i Ulykke, min deilige Prindsesse." ... "naar du først har faaet menneskelig Skikkelse, da kan du aldrig mere blive en Havfrue igjen! du kan aldrig stige ned igjennem Vandet til dine Søstre og til din Faders Slot, og vinder du ikke Prindsens Kjærlighed, saa han for dig glemmer Fader og Moder, hænger ved dig med sin hele Tanke og lader Præsten lægge Eders Hænder i hinanden, saa at I blive Mand og Kone, da faaer du ingen udødelig Sjæl! den første Morgen efter at han er gift med en anden, da maa dit Hjerte briste, og du bliver Skum paa Vandet." ... nu ridsede hun sig selv i Brystet og lod sit sorte Blod dryppe derved, Dampen gjorde de forunderligste Skikkelser, saa man maatte blive angst og bange.'
- 313 Radcliffe 1826.
- 314 Varma 1966, 130.
- 315 Ange & Varanda 1994, 31–2.
- 316 Ange & Varanda 1995, 15: 'La femme ne doit point prendre part aux jeux de pouvoirs. Se contenter d'être épouse et mere ... Un sage philosophie quand les temps sont troubles.'
- 317 Ibid. 16.
- 318 Ange & Varanda 1994, 19–20, 23, 40.
- 319 Ibid. 40.
- 320 Round 2014, pt 2, ch. 3 'Haunted Places'.
- 321 Groensteen 2007, 152.
- 322 Groensteen 2015b; Groensteen 1999, 171–86.
- 323 Groensteen 2015b.
- 324 See, for example, Ange & Varanda 1994, 5, 29, 33, 35, 45, 47, 48; Ange & Varanda 1995, 28, 30, 32, 33, 41.
- 325 Ange & Varanda 1995, 28, 33, quote at 33: 'mais la pleine lune n'est-elle pas un symbole païen?'
- 326 Ange & Varanda 1994, 25–6; Ange & Varanda 1995, 16.
- 327 Round 2014, pt 2, ch. 5 'Revenant Readers, the Crypt and the Archive'.
- 328 Ange & Varanda 1994, 10, 28, 36.
- 329 Ibid. 10, 28, 36.
- 330 Ibid. 28: 'Je sais, moi, les formes que prennent ses serviteurs [du demon]'
- 331 Round 2014, pt 2, ch. 3 'Haunted Places'.
- 332 Ange & Varanda 1995, 44–5.
- 333 Boye 2012.
- 334 *Kallocain* has been published in some twenty languages, including in English as Boye 1966 and Boye 2019.

- 335 In Storskog 2014 on the scientist as a tool of power in *Kalloscain*, I look at Leo Kall using archetypes of scientists in Western literature (Haynes 1994) and examine his uncomfortable position as a chemist with literary ambitions. In the past, Mjöberg 1944 has focused on the political aspects of *Kalloscain*, Bouman & Tivenius 1961 on its autobiographical content, and Domellöf 1986 on the contribution of psychoanalysis to the narrative. Gustafsson Rosenqvist 1999 considers the novel to be Boye's assembled critique of society, views on the nature and mission of women, and personal opinions on depth psychology.
- 336 Eriksson 2021, 191: 'kulturrensning'.
- 337 Eriksson 2021, 30: 'Varför passar jag inte in?' 'Vad är det för fel på mig?'; *ibid.* 31: 'Ska livet vara så här?'.
- 338 Bergström 2021: '*Kalloscain* har varit med under hela processen. Framför allt är det världsbygget och känslan som inspirerat mig. Karin Boye skapade en av litteraturhistoriens stora dystopier, före både George Orwells 1984 och Aldous Huxleys *Du sköna nya värld*. Som jag förstätt det ville Boye berätta om sin samtid, om politiken och om tidens värderingar och hon gjorde det på ett nytt och okonventionellt sätt. Det är i princip exakt det som jag försökt göra, men med vår samtid som utgångspunkt.'
- 339 For drug dystopias, see Hickman 2009, 141; for cells, see Boye 1966, xii.
- 340 Eriksson 2021, 159: 'Kemisk, icke-permanent lobotomering'.
- 341 *Ibid.* 44–5: 'Hur tycker du att det går för dig?' | 'Bra tror jag.' | 'Ingenting du tycker är svårt? Något du behöver hjälp med?' || 'Nej. Ingenting jag kan komma på.' | 'Ingenting?' | 'Nej.' || 'Snälla Betty.' || 'Kan vi sluta upp med det här skådespelet nu?' || 'Jag förstår inte...' | 'Du förstår inte? Låt mig då påminna dig.' || 'Du isolerar dig socialt. Du sprider ohämmade känslor på offentlig plats.' || 'Dessutom ägnar du dig åt klart tvivelaktiga nätsökningar. Vill du att jag läser upp dom?' || 'Nej det behövs inte.' | 'Är du säker?' | 'Ja.' | 'Enligt dessa uppgifter ... ligger du i riskzonen för både normbrytande beteende och emotionell instabilitet.' || 'Förstår du allvaret i det här? Betty?' | 'Ja.' | 'Jättebra.' || 'Såja ... Du ska vara glad att du kom till mig.' || 'Alla är inte lika snälla som jag'.
- 342 *Ibid.* 57: 'rent psyke – min plikt'.
- 343 Boye 1966, 3; Boye 2012, 5: 'avsikten' and 'planmässigheten'; Boye 1966, 22; Boye 2012, 20: 'individualromantisk tanke'; Boye 1966, 22; Boye 2012, 20: 'sentimental tillvaro'.
- 344 Eriksson 2021, 167: 'human material', 'the majoritarian society'; Björkman & Widmalm 2010, 388.
- 345 Boye 1966, 26; Boye 2012, 23: 'splittring, missmod och personlig sentimentalitet under en behärskad mask av glädje'.
- 346 Boye 1966, 31; Boye 2012, 27: 'här låg jag och kände mig ängslig på de splittrades vägnar, som om jag själv var en av dem. ... Jag ville inte vara splittrad, som medsoldat var jag absolut helhjärtad, utan en droppe svek och förräderi. ... *Skjut de splittrade!* skulle från och med nu bli mitt lösenord', original emphasis.
- 347 Eriksson 2021, 128: 'Ett ställe att gömma sig på. Eller ett ställe där man inte behöver gömma sig'.
- 348 *Ibid.* 139. The original text is in English.
- 349 Svanberg 1968, 184: 'den gemensamma kvinnliga längtan tillbaka till det ursprungliga och vegetativa'.

- 350 Eriksson 2021, 197.  
 351 Ibid. 111.  
 352 Bergström 2021.  
 353 Eriksson 2021: 'Faktorer som kön, klass, kultur och samhällsnormer har alltid avgjort när ett tillstånd skjuts över kanten till det sjuka eller när det kan tolereras som ett personlighetsdrag eller en spännande egenhet.'  
 354 Johannisson 2015, 130 *et passim*: 'terapeutisk passivisering'.  
 355 Ibid. 271.  
 356 Ibid. 140–1.

### 3. Discourse

- 357 Miller 2007, 135 discusses how cultural studies have taught us to consider the politics of a cultural product in relation to its context. Hague 2017, 781 similarly reflects on the 'longstanding' relationship between comics and cultural studies, identifying in Ariel Dorfman and Armand Mattelart's *How to Read Donald Duck: Imperialist Ideology in the Disney Comic* of 1972 'the first significant work on comics to be done under the banner of cultural studies'. He also indicates Roger Sabin's *Adult Comics: An Introduction* and Jean-Paul Gabilliet's *Of Comics and Men: A Cultural History of American Comic Books* as examples of works 'substantially engaged with the questions that characterise cultural studies as they relate to comics' (782). Hague describes the field as 'oriented around the human as it affects and is affected by broader cultural forces, power bases and ideologies. It thus rejects the idea that ideologies and/or structures occur without human influence, and reasserts the importance of understanding the relationships involved in the production and consumption of texts (as opposed to detaching those texts from their contexts)' (790).
- 358 Stam 2005, 45.  
 359 Hutcheon 2013, 95.  
 360 Gaudreault & Marion 2018, 328.  
 361 Bovil & Kåbeson 1942–4; Ghigliano 1978a.  
 362 Ferstl 2010, 61.  
 363 Jones 2011, 17.  
 364 Ferstl 2010, 61.  
 365 Rouvière 2012, 10: 'est encore utilisée le plus souvent pour enseigner autre chose qu'elle-même'; see also Meyer 2012.  
 366 See Storskog 2019b for details.  
 367 Stam 2005, 3.  
 368 Hutcheon 2013, 91.  
 369 Baetens 2018, 33.  
 370 Beaty 2012.  
 371 Kennedy 2008, 10.  
 372 Inge 1995.  
 373 Kennedy 2008, 11, my emphasis.  
 374 Inge 1990, 41–57.  
 375 Kennedy 2008, 13.  
 376 Hutcheon 2013, 91.

- 377 The desire for legitimisation was not exclusive to the early years of comics, as Groensteen 2000, 29 shows, for ‘If its validity as an art form appears self-evident, it is curious that the legitimizing authorities (universities, museums, the media) still regularly charge it with being infantile, vulgar, or insignificant.’
- 378 Arvidsson 2014a; Jönsson 2014, 107: ‘All historieförmedling säger mest av empiriskt värde om sin samtid’.
- 379 As György Lukács 1969, 57 wrote in his work *The Historical Novel*, ‘without a felt relationship to the present, a portrayal of history is impossible’. This motto is formulated again and again in the catalogue, see for example Arvidsson 2014b, 35. For comics with a focus on history writing, see also Scholz 2007, 286; Nicolas Rouvière 2012, 12: ‘Les auteurs recréent et réinterprètent les événements historiques, avec les présupposés et les codes qui sont ceux de leur temps’ (‘Authors recreate and reinterpret historical events through the assumptions and codes of their own time’).
- 380 Topelius 1845, 192: ‘ett fotfäste och en vägledare’.
- 381 Bovil & Käbeson 1942–4.
- 382 Given Bovil’s visionary experiments with layout, one may wonder to what extent the Bonnier publishing house controlled the design of this adaptation. In a letter from Albert Bonnier Jr to Bovil, 8 Mar. 1944, see Bovilgården Archive, Utterbyn, Torsby [private archive], Bonnier Jr expressed his own views on panelling. With reference to Bovil’s popular comic-strip version of *A Thousand and One Nights*, the publisher asked Bovil to ‘cut back on the large panels’ (‘hushålla med de stora rutorna’) and gave the following advice: ‘feel free to vary the size of the panels, but do not lose sight of the nature of the production’ (‘Variera gärna rutoras storlek men låt icke seriens karaktär gå förlorad’). See Bovilgården Archive, Albert Bonnier Jr to Bovil, 17 Dec. 1947 for the publisher’s comment on the bold composition in *Nordiska gudasagan* (‘The Tale of the Nordic Gods’), ‘As regards the layout of the instalments, I do not mind that you occasionally make a cluster of images, surrounded by panels, every 3rd or 4th instalment or so, but the main part should certainly be carried out in a traditional style ... It is my conviction that you had better start out with a panelling allowing the readers to read it as “regular comics”. Once you have captured the interest of the readership, you can break the traditional layout more often’ (‘Beträffande uppläggnigen av avsnitten har jag ingenting emot att Ni då och då gör en bildvävnad, omgiven av rutor, t. ex. på vart 3:e eller 4:e avsnitt, men huvuddelen bör nog få den traditionella stilen ... Säkerligen är det bäst att från början ge serien en viss indelning som gör att publiken kan läsa den som en “vanlig serie”. När man väl fångat läsarnas intresse kan man bryta den traditionella uppställningen oftare’). It appears that Bonnier Jr was particular about production values, though convinced that the average reader was not ready for advanced, formal experiments. I wish to thank the artist’s son, Björn Vilson, for his hospitality and kind assistance, and for showing me these private letters.
- 383 For Göransson, see Reimerthi 2003; Reimerthi 2005.
- 384 Høiby 2014, 52.
- 385 Groensteen 2015a: ‘un incontestable maître de la bande dessinée d’aventures européenne’.
- 386 Besides *Fältskärens berättelser*, Bovil adapted August Cederborg’s *Göingebövdingen* (1899, ‘The Göinge Chieftain’), and Mika Waltari’s bestseller *Sinuhe egyptiläinen* (1945, *The Egyptian*).

- 387 Bovil's production has been little studied. See Dahllöf 1990, Vilson 1992, Groensteen 2015a, and the webpage for the artist's home Bovilgården, [www.bovil.se](http://www.bovil.se); for *Fältskärens berättelser*, see also Harnby 2012.
- 388 Topelius 1883; 1884a; 1884b.
- 389 Cortsen et al. 2014.
- 390 Ibid. 122.
- 391 Ibid.
- 392 *Fältskärens Berättelser blir bildserie* 1942, 21: 'Den spännande handlingen, den medryckande stilen, de praktfulla historiska scenerna som på ett mästertligt sätt vävts in i denna släktkrönika, allt detta gör även på den moderne läsaren ett så friskt och levande intryck att man knappt tror att det är sant att Zacharias Topelius skrev *Fältskärens Berättelser* åren 1853–1867'. The years refer to the first print edition.
- 393 Ibid.: 'svenska folkets käraste läsning'.
- 394 'En ny serie som är bättre än de bästa: svensk, nordisk, levande, spännande, historisk, rolig, och lärorik.' The poster is held at Bovilgården.
- 395 Ibid.: *Fältskärens Berättelser blir bildserie* 1942, 21 original emphasis: 'helt och hållet svensk serie', 'en svensk serie om svensk historia'.
- 396 *Fältskärens Berättelser blir bildserie* 1942, 21: 'Ett bättre underlag för en bildserie i färger kan man inte tänka sig, och då det länge varit *Levande Livets* stora önskan att komma med en ny verkligt förstklassig, helt och hållet svensk serie, har det syntts oss naturligt att välja just *Fältskärens berättelser*. Serien har länge varit under förberedande, ty vi har ansett det viktigt att en så förnämlig serie också får ett förnämligt utförande. Även den bästa idé fördärvas som bekant om den kommer i kläparhänder. Nu har *Levande Livet* emellertid förvärvat konstnären Bo Vilson till detta arbete, och vi vågar tro att bildserien *Fältskärens berättelser* med tillhjälp av hans eleganta penna kommer att vinna lika stor popularitet som boken. Den tål att jämföras med de främsta serier som någonsin skapats i utlandet – och det bör glädja oss alla, ty *Fältskärens berättelser* är en svensk serie om svensk historia. En serie med värde!' Original emphasis.
- 397 Jönsson 2014, 111: 'mytiska berättelser om den gemensamma dåtiden'.
- 398 Heidenstam 1897; 1898; 1920 (tr.).
- 399 [www.topelius.fi/index.php?docid=35](http://www.topelius.fi/index.php?docid=35): 'en klassiker i svensk bokkonst'; for Carl Larson's illustrations, see Storskog 2011; see also Björk 2014, 67–9; Ericsson 2014, 86; Jönsson 2014, 111. Cinema also contributed to the popularity of history painting. An example is John W. Brunius's film *Karl XII* of 1925, which featured Cederström's painting *Bringing Home the Body of Charles XII*, as did Bovil's adaptation. For cinema and history painting, see Jönsson 2014.
- 400 Björk 2014, 68: 'motiven kom att sjunka in i svenskarnas medvetande'.
- 401 Arvidsson 2014b, 9: 'sträcker sig in i vår egen tid, men då i populärkulturen snarare än i konsten'.
- 402 Dahllöf 1992, 3; Vilson 1992, 17.
- 403 Hatavara 2015, 82. Köhler 2018, lxv, lxix points out that the Swedish reviewers who claimed Topelius had exaggerated the Finnish contribution to the common history of Sweden and Finland were a minority.
- 404 Lund 2012.
- 405 Ibid. 154.
- 406 Ibid.: 'mängas kollektiva egendom och ... kan [därför] framkalla ett omedelbart intresse och en snabb respons hos ett stort antal recipenter'.

- 407 Ibid. 156: 'Den kulturella ikonens uppgift är att belysa, bejaka, informera, propagera, illustrera, protestera och även raljera. Det är inte hypotexten som står i fokus, utan samtiden.'
- 408 Ibid. 155: 'Bredvid all samhällelig utveckling och individuell förnyelse behöver vi läsa samma berättelser, se samma bilder och höra samma musik om och om igen som ett medel att befästa och vitalisera den egna kulturhistorien och den egna identiteten. De kulturella ikonerna bidrar till detta.'
- 409 *Levande Livet*: 'en tidning för riktiga karlar och klämmiga pojkar'.
- 410 For *Levande Livet*, published 1931–61, see [seriewikin.serieframjandet.se/index.php/Levande\\_Livet](http://seriewikin.serieframjandet.se/index.php/Levande_Livet).
- 411 Topelius 1884a, 329.
- 412 'Karl XII har fallit. När karolinerna håller vaka vid hans bår inser de att det norska fälttåget är förlorat. Ensam hade Kung Karl burit på sina skuldror ett helt tidevarv som nu är avslutat och aldrig mer skall uppstå.'
- 413 See Ericsson 2014, 94, 105 n. 43; Jönsson 2014, 114; Lund 2012, 99–100.
- 414 Topelius 1884a, 332: 'Finlands sista hjelteskara'.
- 415 Jönsson 2014, 108.
- 416 Ericsson 2014, 97; Jönsson 2014, 108; Lund 2012, 100.
- 417 Heydemann 2020.
- 418 Ericsson 2014, 97: 'Innebörden ... torde vara att Mazeppa försöker övertala Karl XII att sätta sig i säkerhet, men att denne skulle vara ytterst tveksam till att överge sin slagna armé.'
- 419 Heydemann 2020.
- 420 Topelius 1884a, 107: 'En inre känsla säger till oss: konung Carl hade blifvit sig själf och sin storhet trognare, om han ... stupat jemte hela sin här vid Dnieperns stränder!', 'framhållit att han för rikets skull måste söka komma tillbaka hem för att organisera motståndet'.
- 421 Ericsson 2014, 86.
- 422 Topelius 1845.
- 423 Travagliati 2018: 'Essendo tre, tutte donne, e con molta voglia di realizzare e realizzarci, era logico che il problema femminista ci toccasse molto da vicino.'
- 424 Gianini Belotti 1973.
- 425 Ibsen 1879; Langås 2005, 165.
- 426 Ghigliano 1978a.
- 427 Langås 2005, 162.
- 428 Sandberg 2015, 69; Sandberg 2015, 83 investigates the 'house-and-home dichotomy' in *Et Dukkehjem*. Sandberg writes that Ibsen deliberately chose to avoid the 'common word for a miniature toy house, *dukkestue*' (70) and invented the term *dukkehjem* (doll's home), juxtaposing the 'positive potential' of the word *hjem* (home) with the 'empty associations of the doll' (77) to show that in Ibsen's play there is nothing but 'a house behind the façade of the home' (82).
- 429 Turin & Bosnia 1975a, tr. Turin & Bosnia 2016; Turin & Bosnia 1975b; Turin & Bosnia 1976a.
- 430 Turin & Bosnia 1976b; Turin & Galli 1977; Turin & Bosnia 1979.
- 431 Barki 1979; Turin & Goetzinger 1978.
- 432 Crispino 2006.
- 433 Ghigliano 1978b; 1981; 1986.

## NOTES

- 434 Penketh 2015.
- 435 Söderberg et al. 2013, 19 *et passim*: 'genom att frossa i beskrivningar av utseende, kläder och flickrumskultur bryts den traditionella nedvärderingen av flickkulturen'.
- 436 Vanderbeke 2010, 116.
- 437 Ghigliano 1978a, 21, 37.
- 438 Thompson 1971–2, 167.
- 439 Ibsen 2016, 138; Ibsen 1879, 36: 'Der er jo ingen, der har en sådan fin smag, som du.'
- 440 Ibsen 2016, 171; Ibsen 1879, 75: 'De skulde heller brodere. ... for det er langt smukkere. Vil De se; man holder broderiet således med den venstre hånd, og så fører man med den højre nålen – således – ud i en let, langstrakt bue; ikke sandt –?'
- 441 Ibsen 2016, 171; Ibsen 1879, 75: 'at strikke – det kan aldrig bli'e andet end uskønt; se her; de sammenklemte arme'.
- 442 Ibsen 2016, 110; Ibsen 1879, 5: 'lærkefugl', 'ekorn'.
- 443 Langås 2005, 162.
- 444 At other times the monochrome colouring is employed to distinguish between different time levels, between the *hic et nunc* of the doll's house and Nora's memories.
- 445 Moi 2006, 241–2.
- 446 Templeton 2001, 138
- 447 Templeton 2001, 138; Ibsen 2016, 109; Ibsen 1879, 139: 'Gem'.
- 448 Templeton 2001, 139.
- 449 Gonick 2006, 11–12.
- 450 Werness 1984–5, 7.
- 451 Barlow 2005, 36.
- 452 Ibsen 2016, 161; Ibsen 1879, 62: 'egen stue'.
- 453 Fowle 2000.
- 454 Tennyson 1873, 78.
- 455 Ibid.
- 456 Langås 2005, 163.
- 457 Blattner 2015, 4.
- 458 Moi 2006, 231.

## Afterword

- 459 Cutchins 2018, 4.
- 460 Bortolotti & Hutcheon 2007, 450.
- 461 Groensteen 2017b, 4.
- 462 McFarlane 1996, 201.
- 463 Heydemann 2020, 53, 54, original emphasis.
- 464 Benjamin 1996, 259.
- 465 Huldén 2006, 252.



# Comic art adaptations based on Scandinavian source texts

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- Fig. 51 Alberto Varanda & Ange, *Reflets d'écume: Naiade* (1994), 6. © Vents de l'Ouest.
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