

# WORD AND IMAGE

## In Literature and the Visual Arts

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With a Preface by Federico Vercellone

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A BRAND NEW STORY? FROM LITERARY  
CLASSIC TO GRAPHIC NOVEL:  
*THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY*  
AND *DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE*

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Graphic novels have increasingly featured in the scholarly practice and discourse in the past decade. Since the late 1980s they have grown considerably, both in sophistication and popularity, to the point that they have also deserved attention in higher education. Some scholars identify a decline in the dominance of exclusively text-based sources of information in modern society and exhort those involved in information literacy education to help the new generations acquire the skills and competencies needed to read through texts containing multiple modes of information, including visual texts. In their view, teachers and professional educators should provide the theoretical and practical means to form a “media literate person”, that is, one who ‘can decode, evaluate, analyse and produce both print and electronic media’.<sup>1</sup> Harris underlines that ‘while few have questioned the fact that verbal and alphabetic literacies must be learned, a lack of sensitivity to (or fear of) images and visual texts has obscured the need for instruction in reading images’.<sup>2</sup> Among the visual media that could be profitably used in education, Jacobs has explicitly referred to comics (and by extension graphic novels) suggesting that ‘by situating our thinking about comics, literacy, and education within a framework that views literacy as occurring

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1 Steven Hoover, ‘The Case for Graphic Novels’, in *Communications in Information Literacy*, 5:2 (2012), p. 178. Hoover takes this definition from P. Aufderheide’s report on the 1992 National Leadership Conference on Media Literacy.

2 Benjamin R. Harris, ‘Visual Literacy Via Visual Means: Three Heuristics’, in *Reference Services Review*, 34:2 (2006), p. 213.

in multiple modes, we can use comics to greater effectiveness in our teaching at all levels by helping us to arm students with the critical-literacy skills they need to negotiate diverse systems of meaning making'.<sup>3</sup>

The graphic novel can be considered as a complex and multi-layered text, as it relies on a synthesis between textual and visual information to create meaning, conveys a message or narrative, and follows a precise set of conventions which need to be decoded by readers. It is therefore particularly useful to develop “multimodal literacy”, that is, the ability to understand the mechanism behind multimodal texts. The term “multimodal” is used by Cope and Kalantzis with reference to the way meaning is produced in today’s globalized world:

Meaning is made in ways that are increasingly multimodal — in which written-linguistic modes of meaning are part and parcel of visual, audio, and spatial patterns of meaning. [...] To find our way around this emerging world of meaning requires a new, multimodal literacy.<sup>4</sup>

Lisa Schade Eckert also encourages American teachers to include graphic novels in their literacy/literature curricula on the basis that they comply with the notion of “textual complexity” as required by CCSS.<sup>5</sup> American students, she adds, are often ‘unsophisticated readers who are reading at “levels” far beneath that which is appropriate for their age or grade’.<sup>6</sup> Drawing on the works of Roland Barthes, Umberto Eco and Dorothy Parker, who ‘were applying critical concepts to comics long before the

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3 Dale Jacobs, ‘More than Words: Comics as a Means of Teaching Multiple Literacies’, in *English Journal*, 96:3 (January 2007), p. 21.

4 Bill Cope, Mary Kalantzis, ‘Introduction’ in Cope & Kalantzis (eds.) *Multiliteracies: Literacy Learning and the Design of Social Futures* (New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 5.

5 CCSS is the acronym for Common Core State Standards: the set of educational standards describing what students should know and be able to do in each subject in each grade. Since 2010 a number of US states have adopted the same standards for English and maths.

6 Lisa Schade Eckert, ‘Protecting Pedagogical Choice: Theory, Graphic Novels, and Textual Complexity’, *LAJM*, 29:1 (Fall 2013), p. 40.

term graphic novel became pedagogically provocative',<sup>7</sup> she argues that reading graphic novels does not mean looking at the illustrations that accompany a written text and is also more complex than code switching:

Graphics add layers of signifiers to a semiotic system, and layers of complexity for the reader within a text. Instead of consisting of an unproblematic kind of "translation" from one semiotic mode to another, the images and text form a complex, interrelated semiotic system: a layered interaction of multiple semiotic systems within a text. Rather than simply adding another decoding task to enhance a text, the sequential art of a graphic novel multiplies the interpretive challenges and opportunities for analysis and interpretation.<sup>8</sup>

Reading a graphic novel is therefore a complex cognitive exercise that helps develop critical thinking as well as adding to information and visual literacy.

In this essay I will first trace the historical origin of the graphic novel, then I will summarize its main features and outline the technical aspects that need to be taken into account for a correct approach to this genre. Finally, I will analyse the graphic novel adaptations of two masterpieces of British literature: Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, illustrated by I. N. J. Culbard and adapted by Ian Edginton (2008), and Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, illustrated and adapted by Andrzej Klimowski and Danusia Schejbal (2009). My aim is to decode their modalities of meaning making and apply the proper critical instruments in order to see what is lost and what is gained in the passage from original text to adaptation.

The domains of word and image have a long history of mutual migration and collaboration in literature, as testified by the past success of illustrated novels, probably the ancestors of today's graphic fictions. In tracing the evolution from illustrated novels

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7 Schade Eckert, p. 41. She refers to R. Barthe's *The Rhetoric of Image* (1977), U. Eco's essay *The Myth of Superman* (1962), and D. Parker's letter 'A Mash Note to Crockett Johnson' published in *PM Magazine* (1943).

8 Schade Eckert, p. 42.

through comic strips and comic books up to graphic novels, Andrés Romero Jódar expresses his belief in the potentials of iconic genres, which seem to ‘develop into a field directly related to literature’ and show ‘a complex relation to the transformation of Western culture’.<sup>9</sup> This conviction has been influenced by John Barth’s stances on the exhaustion of the novel as a major art form and, conversely, the dynamism of the comic-book genre, as exposed in his two essays ‘The Literature of Exhaustion’ (1967) and ‘The Literature of Replenishment’ (1980). One may agree or not with this view, but there is no doubt that verbal-iconical productions are evolving steadily. The vitality of the graphic novel, in particular, is confirmed by the recent publication of the first book-length study devoted to this subject, *The Graphic Novel: An Introduction*, by Jan Baetens and Hugo Frey (2015).

Romero Jódar takes into consideration only those verbal-iconical genres that originated in the industrial production promoted by the advent of the printing press. The illustrated novel is the oldest of them. It consists of a ‘*closed frame written text* inside which some images (pictures, drawings...) are embedded’.<sup>10</sup> The meaning of an illustrated novel comes primarily from the written text, whereas the iconic aspect adds unnecessary information. Illustrations may show details that are not included in the verbal text or reinforce the content, repeating iconically what has already been uttered in words. They can also be considered as individual representations of the textual world according to one single reader: the artist. In this sense, the artist’s signature somehow limits the readers’ possible imaginative representations of the text. Many classics have appeared with illustrations by various artists, from the Bible to *The Divine Comedy* and *Don Quixote*.<sup>11</sup> There are also works originally

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9 Andrés Romero Jódar, ‘The Quest for a Place in Culture: The Verbal Iconical Production and the Evolution of Comic-Books towards Graphic Novels’, *Estudios Ingleses de la Universidad Complutense*, 14 (2006), p. 95.

10 Romero Jódar, p. 97.

11 Among the most famous ones are Gustave Doré’s illustrations of Dante’s *Divine Comedy* and Cervantes’ *Don Quixote* and Aubrey Beardsley’s

conceived of as texts accompanied by images. Being the result of the combined effort of a writer and a specific artist, this type of illustrated novel is based on a unity that cannot be divided. Although verbal text and pictures are more closely related than in the other illustrated novels and the text cannot be actualized by new artists, the two components still do not interact.<sup>12</sup>

The next step in the evolution of the verbal-iconical genres is the comic strip, which started to appear in magazines and newspapers in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, sustained by the improvements of the printing press. It is formally made of ‘one or several coordinated pictures (vignettes) usually humorous in tone and based on a slapstick effect or sudden dénouement, producing a final laughter/joke’.<sup>13</sup> In contrast to the illustrated novel, the iconic aspect prevails over the verbal one in terms of meaning producer. Historically, the third genre taken into consideration by Romero Jódar — comic books — began as compilations of comic strips, detached from magazines and newspapers. The first comic book worthy of note was issued in 1884: *Ally Sloper’s Half Holiday* by Gilbert Daziel. A specific market developed around these works, prompting the rise of ‘a new productive industry under the common name of comic-book creation’.<sup>14</sup> In 1954 comic books were given a formal definition by a US senate interim report on ‘Comic Books and Juvenile Delinquency’. They were described as pamphlets of some 30-40 pages, including from three to five stories told in pictures with balloon captions and issued monthly, bimonthly, quarterly or sometimes as one-time publications.<sup>15</sup> Comic books departed from the humorous basis of the comic strip, gradually introducing other subjects related to crucial

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illustrations of Wilde’s *Salomé*.

12 Romero mentions Neil Gaiman’s *Stardust* (with Charles Vess, 1997) and *The Dream Hunters* (with Yoshitaka Amano, 1999) as examples of this type of illustrated novel. Other two novels by Neil Gaiman and Dave McKean are considered by Romero as closer to graphic novel. *The Day I Swapped my Dad for Two Goldfish* (1997) and *The Wolves in the Walls* (2003). Romero Jódar, p. 98.

13 Romero Jódar, p. 99.

14 Romero Jódar, p. 100.

15 Romero Jódar, pp. 99–100.

issues of their time. It is no accident that the first superhero comic book, Superman, appeared at a time of worldwide uneasiness and social instability, one year before the outbreak of World War II in 1939. The superhero comic book has been in fact the mainstream of Anglo-American comics production up to the 1980s (after Superman, it featured Batman, Captain Marvel, Captain America, The Fantastic Four), providing a Manichean representation of the reality.<sup>16</sup> This uniformity in content was actually the result of the restrictions imposed by censorship. In the late 1940s an anti-comics crusade spread in the USA, due to the increasing rate of juvenile criminality. Comic books were accused of having a negative impact on adolescents because of their violent content and frequent references to sexuality. An intellectual often associated with this phenomenon is psychologist Fredric Wertham, whose articles and later extended study *The Seduction of the Innocent* (1954) influenced the public opinion and politicians, leading to the appointment of the senate committee that issued the above-mentioned report on the connection between the growing success of comics and the rise of youth delinquency. As a consequence, a self-regulation code was created in 1955, the Comics Code,<sup>17</sup> which was overcome only in the 1980s-90s, after comic books had increasingly become works of specific authors. This meant a ‘transformation from market-oriented industry to more author-conscious productions’ with authors such as Alan Moore, Art Spiegelman, and Frank Miller, to mention just a few.<sup>18</sup>

In the 1950s comics, however, were not always considered dangerous. The so-called “sequential art”<sup>19</sup> was being regularly used for educational and instructive purposes. Comics were

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16 Romero Jódar, p. 101.

17 Jan Baetens and Hugo Frey, *The Graphic Novel: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 30–31.

18 Romero Jódar, p. 101.

19 Famous cartoonist Will Eisner (1917–2005) called comics and graphic novels “sequential art”, which he described as ‘a means of creative expression, a distinct discipline, an art and literary form that deals with the arrangement of pictures or images and words to narrate a story or dramatize an idea’. See W. Eisner, *Comics and Sequential Art* (Tamarac, Florida: Poorhouse Press, 1985), p. 5.

regularly published to draw younger readers into the world of classic literature. The famous *Classics Illustrated* series were an important genre of comics and they worked as a bridge toward serious literary fiction. The text-image art was also used in instruction manuals. Will Eisner (one of the future father figures of the graphic novel) worked on the illustrations of a guidebook for the American Army, concerning the utilisation of equipment. Comic strips were being used by Health Services and Park authorities to inform people on issues of safety.<sup>20</sup>

The 1950s were often regarded as a period of conservatism in graphic arts, but they were also the decade that produced the challenge to conservative dominance.<sup>21</sup> Baetens and Frey are sceptical on the impact of Pop Art's recuperation of comic strip images for the change in comics' fortune.<sup>22</sup> It certainly revived public interest in comics, but the two scholars believe that 'the post-Wertham resurrection of comics toward a more serious and engaging mode was probably underway before Pop Art's full ascendancy. [...] Nonetheless, the Pop Art phenomenon did reposition how one can understand comics, and indeed all mass consumer products.'<sup>23</sup> According to Baetens and Frey, however, comics were 'changing from within'.<sup>24</sup> They point to the underground comix of the late 1960s as a major influence on the development and rise of the graphic novel in the late 1980s.

What is important to recognise is that in the mid- to late 1960s, it was on university campuses [...] and in the radical districts of major urban spaces [...] that graphic narratives aimed at adults, and with little or no connection to superheroes (including pop and the post-pop variants) were first circulated, printed on the new off-set presses that facilitated self-publishing and small press endeavours. Robert Crumb,

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20 Baetens, Frey, p. 39. *Classics Illustrated* is a comic book series featuring adaptations of literary classics such as *Moby Dick*, *Hamlet*, and *The Iliad*. Created by Albert Kanter, the series began publication in 1941 and finished its first run in 1971, producing 169 issues.

21 Baetens, Frey, p. 40.

22 Baetens, Frey, p. 41.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

Gilbert Shelton, Kim Deitch, Jaxon, and Justin Green, among others, produced new amusing, sexually explicit, and often satirical strips in self-produced magazines or in supplements to student newspapers. Their work was self-conscious, sometimes quasi-autobiographical, and utterly irreverent. For them no topic was taboo.<sup>25</sup>

Baetens and Frey, quoting Charles Hatfield's *Alternative Comics: An Emerging Literature*, continue by asserting that 'the underground comix changed the pre-existing assumptions of what comics could achieve', both in subject and style, 'and laid the groundwork for the alternative comics and the breakthrough of the graphic novel'.<sup>26</sup> Autobiography, introspection and personal outlooks on life became the most common subjects. The underground community also demonstrated that 'artists could achieve success without being entangled in the formal comics industry' and comics did not have 'to be based on extended runs of serialised plots, either in a daily newspaper or weekly magazine',<sup>27</sup> paving the way for the longer form of the one-shot "novel".

After discussing the birth of the graphic novel as an evolution of the comic book, Romero Jódar also traces a major difference between these two genres using Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of "chronotope". The chronotope is 'the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature'. According to the Russian formalist, the chronotope defines 'genre and generic distinctions',<sup>28</sup> for time is the primary category in literature and it is also the fourth dimension of space, in Einstein's terms. For example, he distinguishes three categories in the ancient Greek novel, which depend on three different chronotopes, to wit, three methods to fix time and space: the Greek Romance, the adventure novel of ordeal, and the ancient biography and autobiography. Romero Jódar associates the chronotope of the Greek Romance with the comic book and the chronotope of the

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25 Baetens, Frey, p. 55.

26 Baetens, Frey, p. 56.

27 Ibid.

28 M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1981), both quotations, p. 84 and p. 85.

Greek adventure novel with the graphic novel. In the Greek Romance and comic book characters remain essentially the same throughout the story: for all their exploits, their identity is unchanged. In fact, characters are not affected by the passing of time in comic books and their identities are static. Superman never makes decisions that would effect a turn of events in his life, like getting married. In his essay on Superman, Umberto Eco refers to comic strips as a typical product of mass literature, which is a formidable myth-making machine in today's mass society. Superman exemplifies a myth of the present. He needs to be a common man and live an ordinary life (otherwise the process of identification with the readers would not occur) but, at the same time, he must also be fixed in timeless immutability. His deeds are never seen in temporal continuity, because this would enact a representation of real time and would push Superman towards his death: he could no longer be a myth. So Superman is not given the possibility of development.<sup>29</sup>

By contrast, according to Romero Jódar the graphic novel relies on the chronotope of the adventure novel of ordeal, in which time 'leaves a deep and irradicable mark on the man himself as well as on his entire life.'<sup>30</sup> This category implies 'the metamorphosis of the character, the evolutionary process of an individual affected by the passing of time'.<sup>31</sup> Change is the most important element in this type. The revision of the superhero is one of the main topics of the graphic novel, which deals with themes suitable to an adult and mature readership. It can be defined a "novel in a graphic form" or, as Romero Jódar says, quoting Roger Sabin: 'lengthy comics in book form with a thematic unity'.<sup>32</sup> The graphic novel is a hybrid genre that uses the comics visual language and the novel literary narration. The stories narrated involve dynamic characters that develop and change, and a structural cohesion. The first graphic novel is commonly attributed to Will Eisner with *A Contact with God* (1978).

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29 Umberto Eco, 'Il mito di Superman', in *Apocalittici e integrati* (Milan: Bompiani, 1964), p. 224.

30 Bakhtin, p. 116.

31 Romero Jódar, p. 104.

32 Romero Jódar, p. 105.

In the second section of their volume, entitled ‘Forms’, Baetens and Frey discuss the basic formal aspects of the graphic novel, starting from its vital properties: the panel (or frame) and the page layout.<sup>33</sup> The graphic novel is basically a story told by a multiplicity of panels, which are organized according to three levels or layers: the strip or tier (organized horizontally, vertically or both); the page (which can have a variety of sizes and formats); and the book (whose size and format can also vary considerably). This description is however not sufficient, because the contact between the frames is crucial. This can be sequential or more like a single picture. Panels must be read both one next to the other and all at once. The sequential organization is necessary in order to keep the story going. Non-sequential reading is inevitable, given the impossibility for the human eye to separate the panels from the page. This second type of organisation can be called “tabular” or “translinear” and aims at achieving an overall effect (for example a chromatic balance or alternation of action and stasis). Moreover, the grid-form page layout can be interrupted for aesthetic or diegetic purposes by a single-page frame or a double spread, made of a panel covering all the available space (two pages), including the margins of the book.

Baetens and Frey also underline that the relationship between the unit (image or panel) and the whole (strip, page, book) is never fixed or definitive but always shifting. Graphic novels were often serialised before being printed in book form. Furthermore, the publication business is such that between two editions formats can change quite dramatically. Graphic novels embody the notion of “differential texts” in modern multimedia society, that is, texts that exist in different material forms, with no single version as the definitive one. The migration of literary works from one form to another (the novel, verbal-iconic arts, visual arts and the cinema) may represent the cultural environment of the future.

The page layout of graphic novels can be analysed according to a system devised by Benoît Peeters and described by Baetens and

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33 Baetens and Frey, pp. 103–187.

Frey in detail.<sup>34</sup> Peeters articulates a taxonomy based on the various relationships between two basic elements: narrative (the graphic novel as a storytelling) and composition (the visual patterns or tableau). Either forms can be dominant (at the automatic expense of the other) and the connection between narrative and composition can be either autonomous (no direct interaction between the two dimensions) or interdependent (both dimensions influence each other). Peeters indicates four modes of panel utilization:

1– the conventional (or regular) mode: narrative is dominant; the relationship between narrative and composition is of autonomy. This system has no visual ambition since storytelling is dominant and tends to repeat the same structure of panels/tiers independently of content, author or style. Regularity however does not mean lack of sophistication.

2– the decorative mode: visual properties are dominant; the relationship between narrative and composition is of autonomy. The narrator treats the page as a canvas, each page can have a different composition. This system is very artistic, but not the most frequent format in graphic novels, given the importance of narrative in this type of drawn literature.

3– the rhetorical mode: narrative is dominant; composition and narrative are interdependent. This is probably the most frequent mode. Panel and page, sizes and forms of the images, their distribution: all is in the service of the narrative. The narrative pre-exists and informs, selects, shapes the panel and page structures. This is probably the most frequent type in graphic novels.

4– the productive mode: visual properties are dominant, the relationship between composition and narrative is of interdependence. In this type, the organisation of the page dictates the narrative. The form of the page structure helps the author to invent a story, which becomes the consequence of a pre-existent structure.

Peeters invites to use this taxonomy in a non-doctrinarian way, remembering that the four categories are not mutually exclusive.

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34 Benoît Peeters, "Four Conceptions of the Page" (1983). In Baetens, Frey, p. 107.

Certain panel structures obey to more than one mode and in certain cases it is not easy to distinguish between different modes. Nevertheless, this system will be of great use in the analysis of the two texts that I will take into consideration below, together with other two approaches, mentioned by Baetens and Frey. One is Thierry Groensteen's theory expounded in his *Systems of Comics*. Groensteen pays tribute to Peeters but also integrates Peeters' system with a model of analysis that takes into account the regularity or irregularity of the layout and if it is discrete (a literal translation from the French *discret*, here in the sense of non-ostentatious) or ostentatious. He then demonstrates that there is a complex interconnection between these alternatives, as regular layouts can be quite ostentatious and vice versa. A conventional, regular grid-like page layout and its "discreteness" can be dramatically disrupted each time something important takes place in the story. Moreover, a regular layout can be quite ostentatious in its fixity, which may have a great evocative power or implicate allusive references. Groensteen's theory merges with the other approach, by Charles Hatfield, in emphasising the interpretive input of the reader in addition to the strategy of the artist. In his *Alternative Comics: An Emerging Literature*, Hatfield makes a distinction between "single image" and "image-in-series", which constitute a graphic novel, whose creation results from the tension between "breakdown" (dividing a narrative into single images) and "closure" (the reverse process of reading through such images and inferring connections between them). The author's role is to organise a visual series and break down the narrative into images; the reader's task is to translate the series into a narrative sequence. Like Groensteen, Hatfield stresses the reader's position and activity as complementary to the author's.

After this excursus on the formal organisation of graphic novels, I will focus on the close analysis of two of them — *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, by Edgington and Culbard, and *Dr. Kekyll and Mr. Hyde* by Klimowski and Schejbal — using Peeters' taxonomy and the above-mentioned categories formulated by Groensteen and Hatfield. Although quite faithful to the original stories, each adaptation must enact necessary strategies of simplification of

the literary texts that are however compensated and integrated by the complex visual apparatus. The original text is therefore transformed into a new interrelated semiotic system where images and words interact, and meaning is produced in different modes.

Both graphic novels are printed in a black-and-white 17x25cm book format. The role of narrative is dominant in panel structure and page layout, as expected in this form of drawn literature. Starting from *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the authors use a “rhetorical mode” in panel utilization: narrative is dominant but interacts with graphic composition. The most common grid-form page layout consists of four or three horizontal tiers of panels, as on pages 18 and 19 (fig. 1).<sup>35</sup> The four-tier grid accelerates the rhythm of the narrative, illustrates action or intense dialogue, makes the plot advance. The three-tier grid, by using larger images, slows down the narrative and focalizes details. It includes close-ups on facial expressions and parts of the body, emphasizes on important objects, and descriptions of settings. This is a novel centred on the search of beauty, the worship of art, and the importance of sense-experience, so the reference to sight as a privileged sense is underlined by frequent close-ups on the eyes of the characters (fig. 2, p. 21). When characters expound their philosophical views there is a high density of speech in the balloons. Captions are used to convey temporal coordinates, reported speech or thought. There are also “silent” panels with no balloons or captions. They are used to stress a detail, a mood, an atmosphere or a consequence of previous actions.

Although this is the most frequent organization of the multi-panel pages, there are numerous exceptions. The irregularity of the tableau is striking and always in the service of the narrative. At one point (fig. 4, p. 85) the grid is divided into four panels of the same size: a visual effect to create a stasis. The page represents Dorian’s escape to a sordid neighbourhood in search of opium. The four identical panels suggest the duration of the

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35 Oscar Wilde, I. N. J. Culbard, Ian Edginton, *The Picture of Dorian Gray: A Graphic Novel* (London: Self Made Hero, 2008). Further page references, henceforth indicated in brackets in the text, are to this edition.

night trip on a carriage and Dorian's necessity to go to a far-away place, where nobody knows him. This is the only way for him to be free to experience any kind of sensations, without having to justify his behaviour or submit to people's moral judgement. Another irregular layout is for the "picture", given its importance in the story. It generally occupies an entire single-page frame (or covers over half a page in a double-frame page) and is displayed in its gradual degradation, reflecting Dorian's sinful life (fig. 2, p. 20; fig. 3, p. 125; fig. 5, p. 64). When Dorian first meets Sybil Vane, her image dressed in Juliet costume (fig. 6, p. 34) also occupies a large panel in a double-frame page. The big size of this image in the economy of the page reflects Sybil's importance as an actress in Dorian's imagination. Later in the story, she will never receive the same graphic attention again, a sign of Dorian's fading attention towards her, too. "Irregularity" tends therefore to be "ostentatious", in Groensteen's terms, marking changes, crucial events or relevant characters in the story.

In this graphic novel, however, panels have different sizes even within the prevalent types of grid forms (with three or four horizontal tiers of panels every page). Each tier, in fact, can include a single image or be divided into two images. Tiers can also differ in height considerably. This is typical of the rhetorical mode. The size of panels and page layout are absolutely functional to the necessities of the narrative. The complexity of Wilde's work has required many visual integrations in the graphic novel and a considerable amount of interaction between narrative and graphic composition. Moreover, the literary text is very long and the adaptation has also required some cuttings. Minor scenes and characters have been omitted, like the dinner at Lady Agatha's house in chapter III of Wilde's novel. Descriptive parts or highly philosophical dialogues have been cut out or considerably reduced. For example, chapter XI about Dorian's refined lifestyle and his search of precious objects from all over the world is basically absent. The influence of the so-called "yellow book" is not mentioned either, so Dorian's transformation into an aesthete is mainly due to Lord Henry's charismatic presence. A little amount of simplification has been necessary.

The simplification of the narrative is however compensated by particular visual effects. In the scene of the first encounter between Lord Henry Wotton and Dorian, on p. 13 (fig. 7), one of the four tiers of the grid is a very narrow strip representing a piano keyboard with Dorian's hands on it. This is Dorian's introduction to the reader, an evident allusion to his artistic sensibility: his being a fertile soil for Lord Henry's aesthetic doctrine. In Wilde's novel (at the beginning of chapter II) Dorian is first presented from the back, while he is sitting at the piano looking at music scores, but not playing. Dorian will play the piano only later in the story. The visual representation, on the other hand, anticipates a detail in a functional synthesis that illustrates the protagonist's personality but also graphically reproduces the effect of a keyboard. Another example of functional synthesis is after a few pages, when Lord Henry and Dorian move to Basil's garden. The drawings in the panels show them surrounded not only by flowers (as in Wilde's novel) but also by marble statues of young men, resembling Michelangelo's David or the Greek god Adonis (fig. 1, pp. 18–19). There is no mention of them in Wilde's text, but the graphic representation is obviously referring to Dorian as an aesthetic ideal for both Basil's painting and Henry's hedonistic philosophy. In the next chapter of Wilde's novel, Lord Henry will in fact think of him as an example of pure Greek beauty and will mention Michelangelo, too: 'Grace was his, and the white purity of boyhood, and beauty such as old Greek marbles kept for us. [...] Was it not Buonarrotti [*sic*] who had carved it in the coloured marbles of a sonnet-sequence?'<sup>36</sup>

Besides borrowing the image of Michelangelo's David from sculptural art, the graphic novel also appropriates some techniques of another visual medium: the cinema. The first conversation between Lord Henry and Dorian in Basil's garden, which inaugurates Dorian's "aesthetic education", is depicted with a four-tier grid of identical panels reproducing the zooming-

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36 O. Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, [1890], in *Plays, Prose Writings and Poems* (Dent, London and Melbourne: Everyman's Library, 1975), p. 100.

in of a camera movement, from a long shot to a close-up of the characters' faces (fig. 1, p. 18). The overall effect of the tabular organisation is to underline Dorian's growing interest in Lord Henry's speech and Lord Henry's growing influence on Dorian. Another example of film technique is at the end of the novel, when Dorian convinces James Vane (Sybil's brother) not to kill him thanks to his boyish appearance. Dorian argues that he is too young to be the man who caused Sybil's suicide eighteen years before. Then he stands up, walks away and slowly disappears in a typical fade-out effect of a film (fig. 8, pp. 92–93). The repetition of the same page layout, with a four-tier grid of identical panels, is "regular" but also "ostentatious" in its fixity, to use Groensteen's categories, and marks a crucial point in the novel. The readers' "closure" of these frames leads them to interpret Dorian's increasingly small figure disappearing in the background not only as a man escaping from danger but also as a person whose humanity is diminishing under the heavy burden of his corrupt soul.

The final two pages of the book juxtapose the dead Dorian — an old, twisted and hideous body devastated by evil — and the rejuvenated picture — an erect figure epitomising eternal beauty and youth. The irregular layout of two consecutive single-frame pages highlights the contrast and conveys a forceful moral ending (fig. 3, pp. 124–25).

As to the second graphic novel, the narrative is dominant and the development of the plot fully respected, even in the use of time devices like the flashbacks provided by Dr Lanyon's letter and Dr Jekyll's written confession. The first part of the novel (48 pages, approximately)<sup>37</sup> follows the "conventional mode" in panel utilization, that is, narrative and composition are independent. The layout of each page generally consists of a double-tier grid and each tier includes a single panel. The size of panels does not differ considerably (fig. 9, pp. 6–7). There are just very few

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37 Stevenson, Klimowski, Schejbal, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (New York and London: Sterling, 2009). Further page references, henceforth indicated in brackets in the text, are to this edition.

departures from this grid system, used for emphasis. For example, the first appearance of Mr Hyde to Mr Utterson is foregrounded by a large image that covers a single-panel page (fig. 10, p. 19). However, in the second part of the book, after Mr Utterson goes to Dr Jekyll's house on his butler's request (from p. 49 to the end, p. 121) and hears Hyde's voice coming from Jekyll's laboratory, the mode turns "rhetorical", that is, narrative and composition are in a relationship of continuous interaction. There are frequent double spreads, that is, the usual grid-form page layout is interrupted by an image that covers all the available space except for the margins of the book. These oversized images are meant to highlight crucial moments in the story, like the discovery of Hyde's body (fig. 11, pp. 58–59). Other irregular features are two consecutive and inter-connected single-panel pages, as those on pages 88 and 89 (fig. 12) to describe two parts of Hyde's body after his first transformation.

This passage from a rigid visual structure to a more flexible one, where composition serves the narrative, seems to result from a turn in the text's complexity that necessitates a wider range of graphic solutions and possibilities. If the first part of the story appears neat and ordered, the irregularity of the second part is definitely more dramatic. This also reflects Jekyll's growing physical and moral confusion, his loss of identity, his anguish for being unable to control the experiment. Somehow, the regular visual organization of the first pages reflects a world before the collapse of its certainties and unity.

Captions and balloons are used as in comic books (fig. 9, 10, 11). The authors use captions for narration and descriptions; speech balloons for dialogues, with tails indicating the speaker; and thought bubbles for the characters' thinking (cloud-like bubbles containing the text of the thought, with a chain of increasingly smaller circular bubbles leading to the character). The number of words in the balloons is generally limited. Stevenson's work is shorter and less verbose than Wilde's. Moreover, Klimowski and Schejbal's adaptation is mostly built around the action of the mystery thriller that informs the original novel. Only in the last part of the book, when Utterson reads

Jekyll's confession, speech balloons become more dense with writing: reported pieces from Jekyll's letter. Now the other aspects of Stevenson's multifaceted story arise (for example, the scientific, philosophical and moral implications) and are vigorously reinforced through the images.

The pictorial quality of this graphic novel is impressive. Some panels are real masterpieces of charcoal drawing. As the story proceeds, assuming increasingly mysterious and dramatic overtones, the drawing style becomes more and more intense: obscure and abstract in the form, and darker in the overall chromatic effect. Jekyll's moral drama is visible in the suffering expressions during his transformations (fig. 12). The images representing Jekyll and Hyde gradually become less clear, until distinctions between them are almost blurred. The last image of the novel, accompanying the final lines of Jekyll's confession and representing his eternal torment, is a highly evocative reference to Edvard Munch's famous painting: "The scream" (fig. 13). There are numerous artistic "quotations" in the authors' style. Group images (fig. 9, p. 7) are often reminiscent of Goya's famous "Pinturas Negras" (The Black Paintings) and the figure of Jekyll led by his studies 'toward the mystic and transcendental' (p. 82) recalls one of those angel-like flying figures in Chagall's paintings (fig. 14, p. 84). The striking contrast between light and shade, white and black evokes the paintings of Johan Heinrich Füssli, the visionary artist that called himself "the official painter of the Devil" and loved representing dreams and nightmares. Füssli was highly estimated by surrealist painters and considered a forerunner of expressionism. Finally, the appearance of Hyde in Utterson's dream on p. 16 (fig. 16), a disquieting figure drawing a curtain, reminds us of the geometrical figure appearing in Balthus's painting *La Chambre* and symbolizing the unconscious. All these references might derive from the formal artistic education of the authors, both coming from the Academy.<sup>38</sup>

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38 Klimowski studied at the Saint Martin School of Art in London and at the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts. Schejbal studied Fashion and Textiles at the Ealing School of Art and then stage design at the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts.

Finally, a major iconic thread running through the book is the symbol of the double. The novel opens with a single-panel page showing a man, apparently asleep, next to a mirror reflecting a face that is not his own (fig. 15). Other mirrors appear in the novel as pieces of furniture in Jekyll's elegant house (pp. 24–25), in Hyde's apartment in Soho (p. 31), and in Jekyll's laboratory (pp. 59, 62–63, 92–93, 102). The other recurrent image utilised to suggest the theme of the double is the shadow, usually associated with Hyde. On their first encounter, Hyde's shadow appears to Utterson before his real body (fig. 10).

Klimowski and Schejbal's work is far removed from the usual drawing style of comic books and graphic novels. Their evocative artistic rendering of the story has a powerful impact on readers. Not only does it activate a non-sequential reading of every page (which stands on its own as an individual picture) and of the book (which can be overall seen as a piece of art). It also prompts a series of associations with the wider world of art, drawing on the readers' cultural "collective unconscious". The gap between the author's "breakdown" (breaking the narrative into single images) and the readers' "closure" (reading by connecting those images) is enriched with a multitude of inputs and references that go far beyond simple story-telling.

The close analysis of these graphic novel adaptations reveals complex texts that apply to the readers' imagination and cultural background and require multimodal skills to be penetrated, because their meanings are created in multiple ways. They are not just illustrations of previous "closed" texts. The personal style of the authors and the elaborate synthesis of verbal and iconic language make them original products in-between literature and art: the expression of a specific authorial voice, like that of a film director in a cult-movie or an artist in painting. Being cultural products that reflect the evolution of a society increasingly relying on iconic language for communicative purposes, they can also help us learn how to decode images. The value of the graphic novel, for children and adults alike, should therefore not be underestimated in education and the world of "high culture".

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Fig. 1



Fig. 2

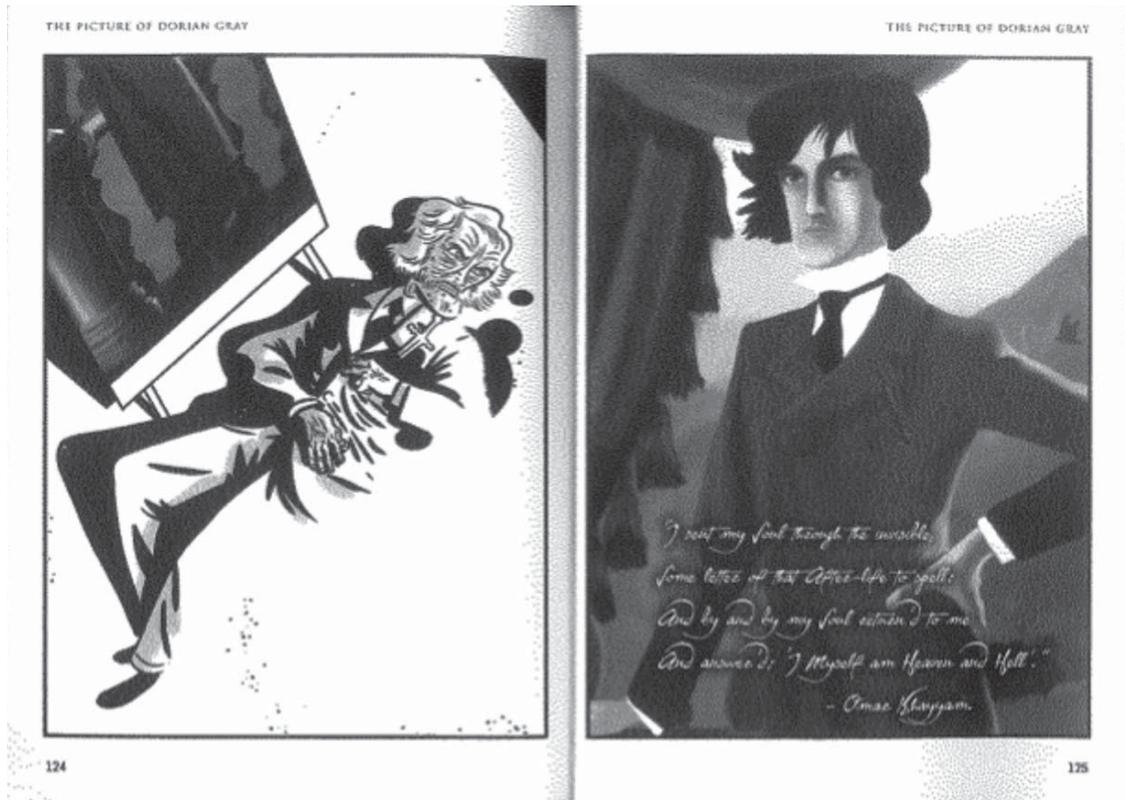


Fig. 3

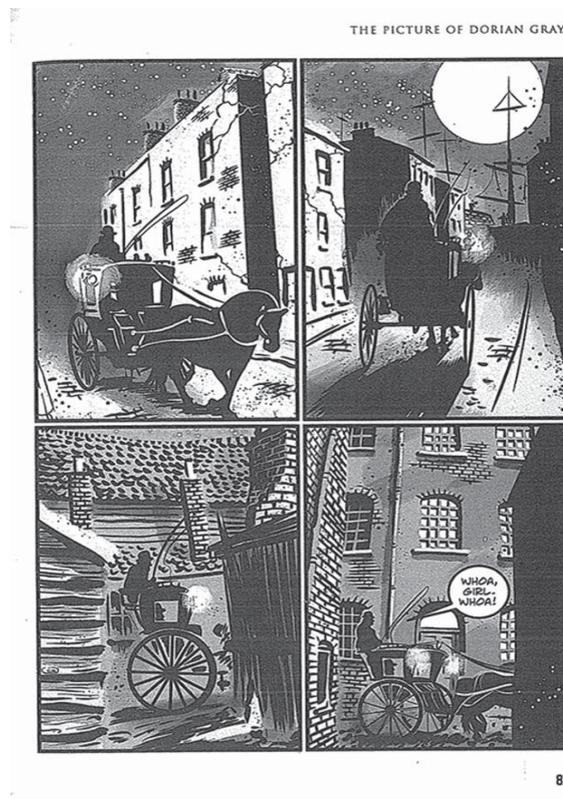


Fig. 4

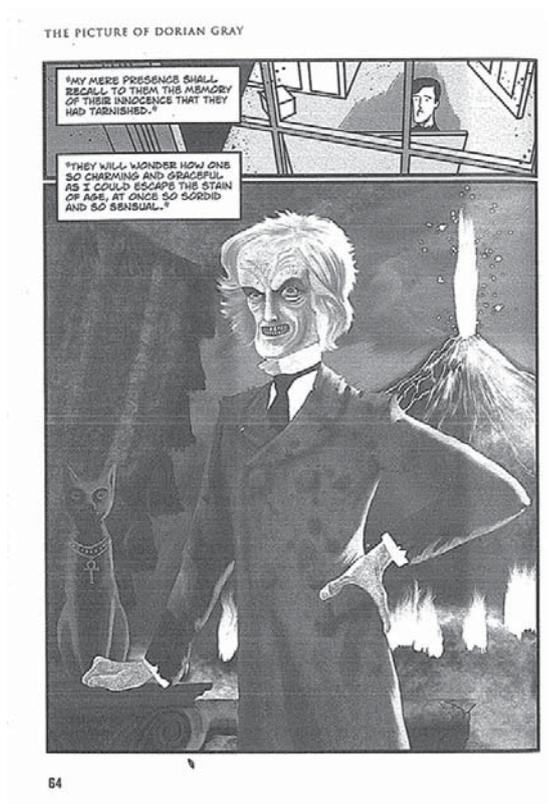


Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Fig. 7



Fig. 8

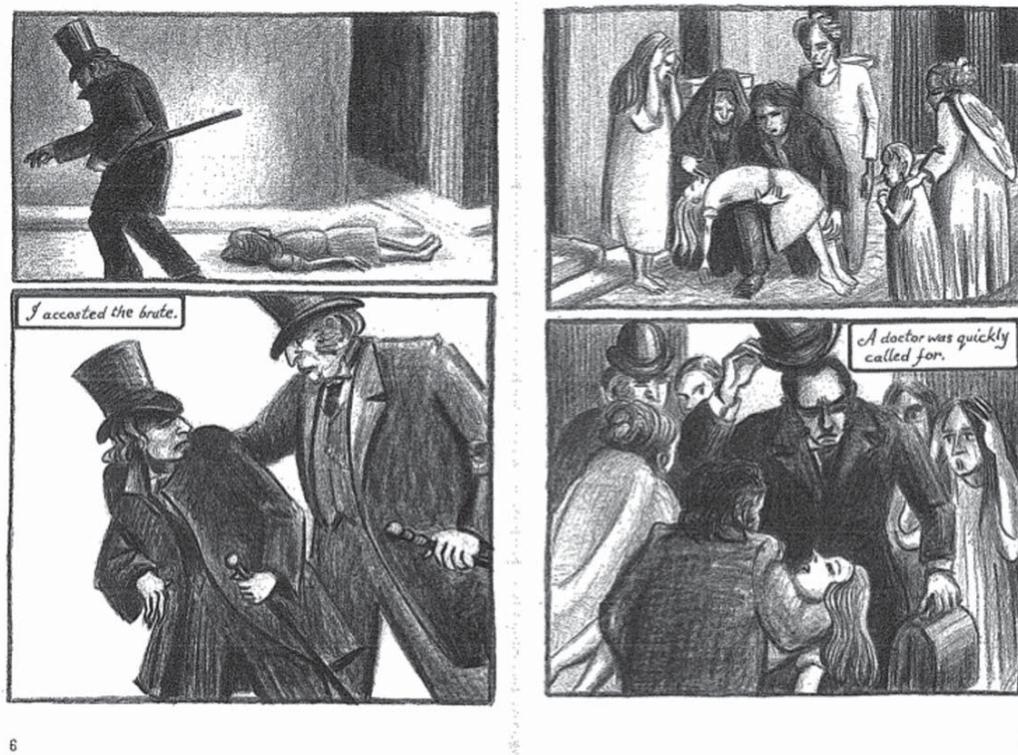


Fig. 9

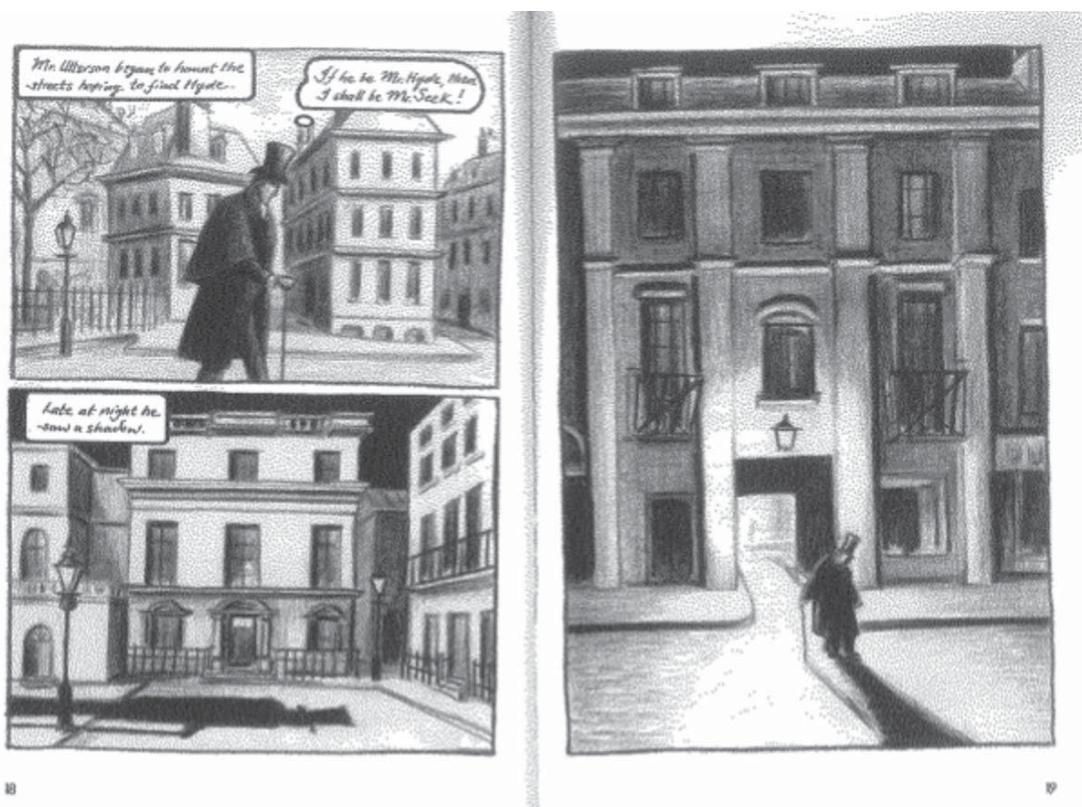


Fig. 10

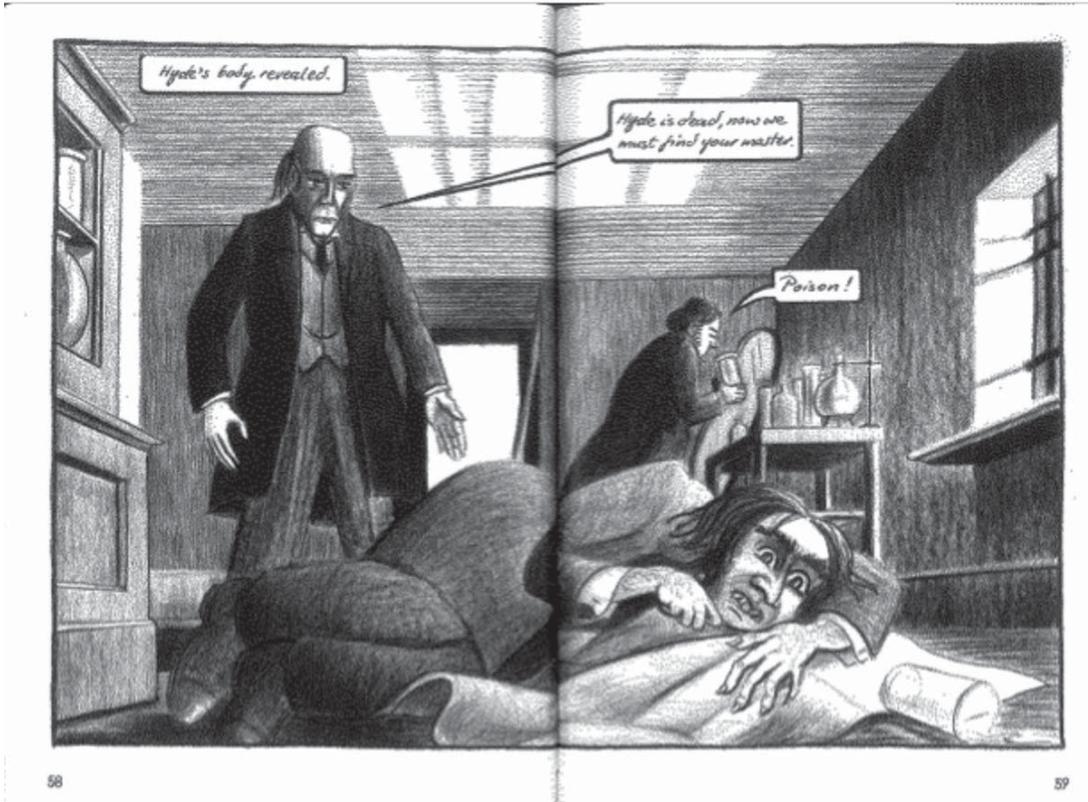


Fig. 11

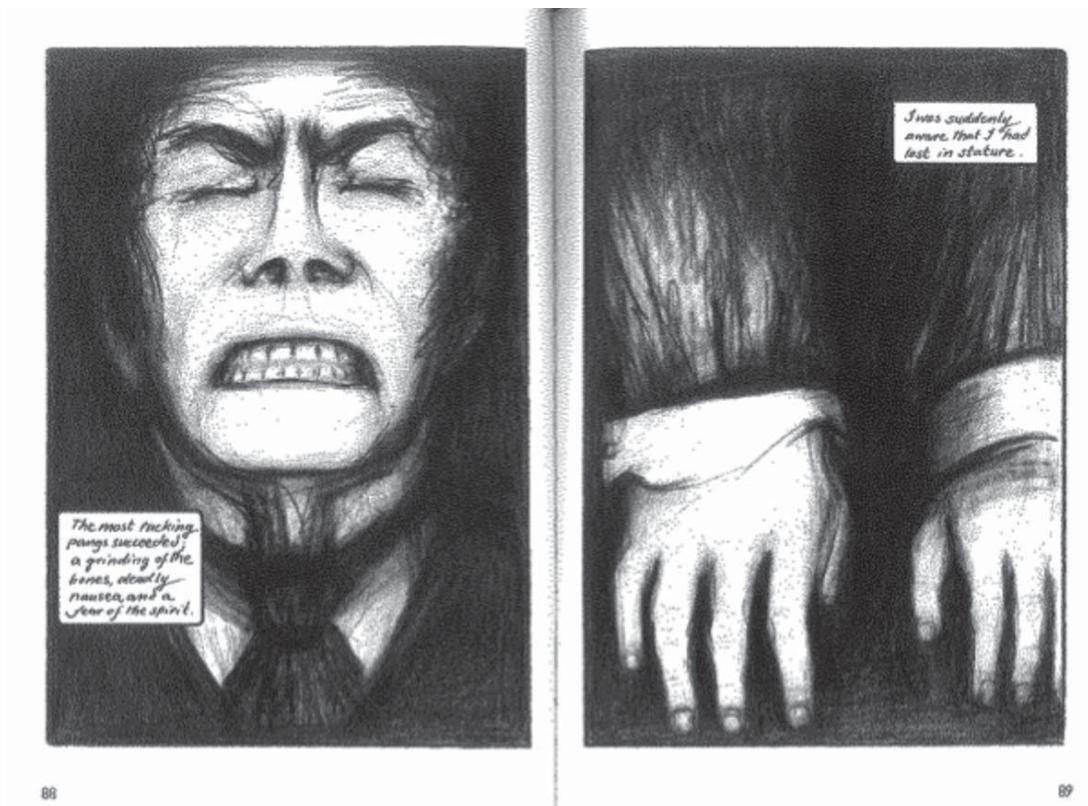


Fig. 12

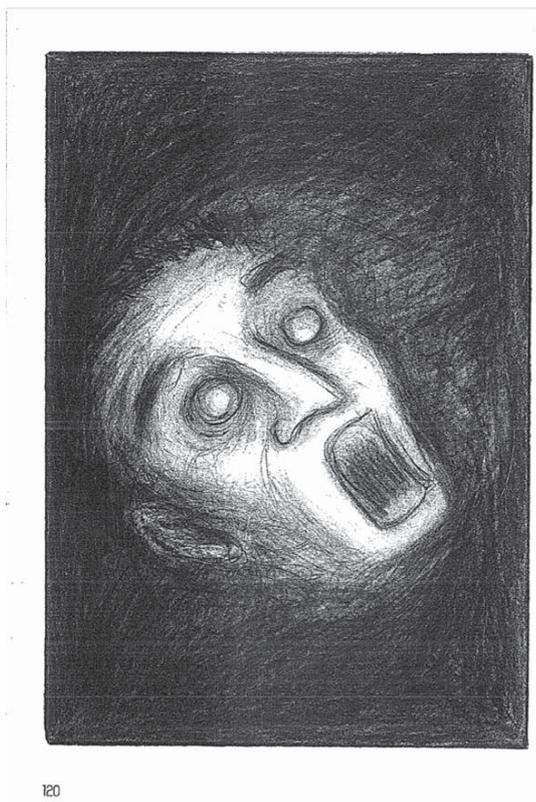


Fig. 13

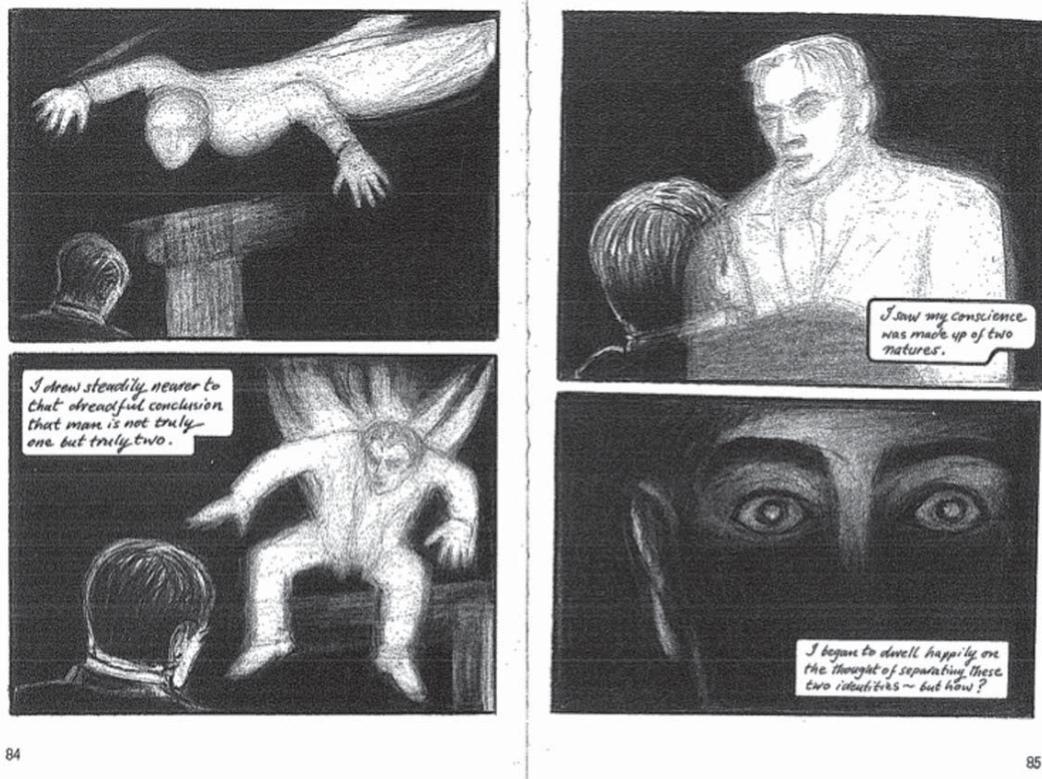


Fig. 14

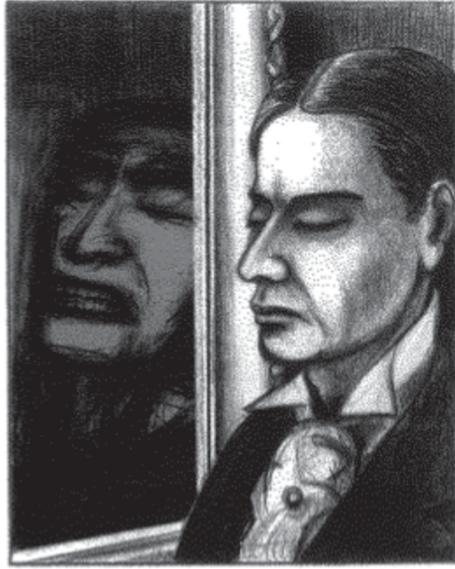


Fig. 15

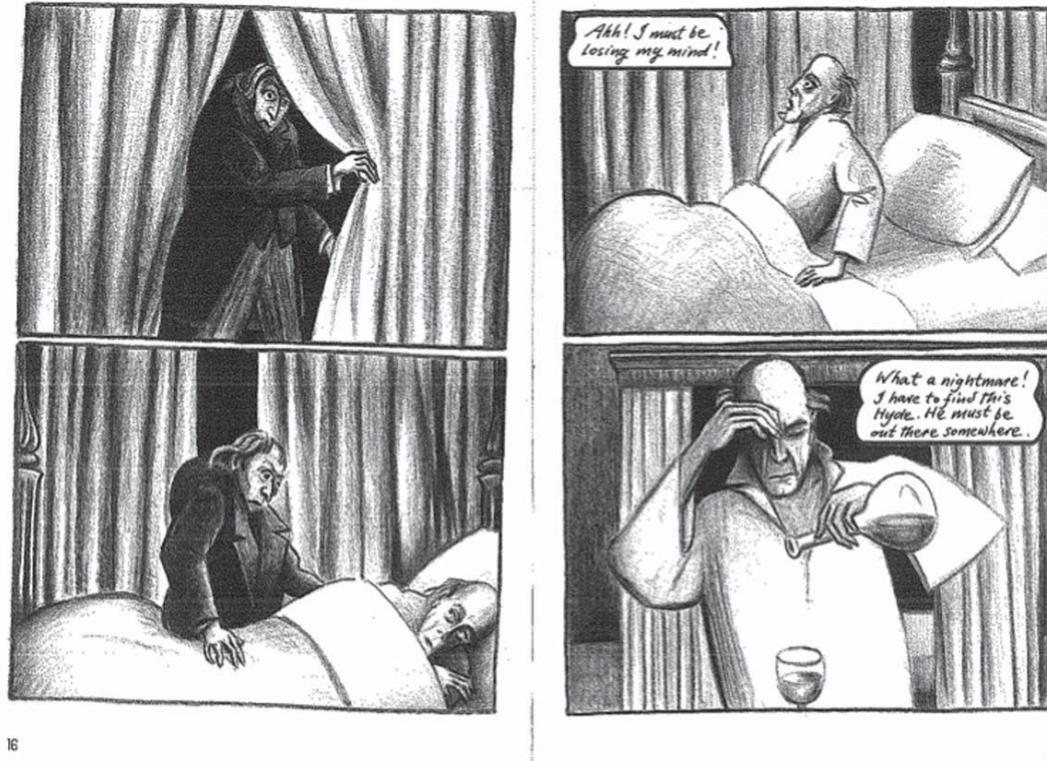


Fig. 16