The Graphic Novel and the Age of Transition: A Survey and Analysis

STEPHEN E. TABACHNICK
University of Memphis

OWING TO A LARGE NUMBER of excellent adaptations, it is now possible to read and to teach a good deal of the Transition period literature with the aid of graphic, or comic book, novels. The graphic novel is an extended comic book, written by adults for adults, which treats important content in a serious artistic way and makes use of high-quality paper and production techniques not available to the creators of the Sunday comics and traditional comic books. This flourishing new genre can be traced to Belgian artist Frans Masereel’s wordless woodcut novel, *Passionate Journey* (1919), but the form really took off in the 1960s and 1970s when creators in a number of countries began to employ both words and pictures. Despite the fictional implication of graphic “novel,” the genre does not limit itself to fiction and includes numerous works of autobiography, biography, travel, history, reportage and even poetry, including a brilliant parody of T. S. Eliot’s *Waste Land* by Martin Rowson (New York: Harper and Row, 1990) which perfectly captures the spirit of the original. However, most of the adaptations of 1880–1920 British literature that have been published to date (and of which I am aware) have been limited to fiction, and because of space considerations, only some of them can be examined here. In addition to works now in print, I will include a few out-of-print graphic novel adaptations of 1880–1920 literature because they are particularly interesting and hopefully may return to print one day, since graphic novels, like traditional comics, go in and out of print with alarming frequency. Outside of these adaptations, there are completely original graphic novels that utilize literary and historical characters and events from the period. Again, I do not have the space to treat them here. Two of the most famous are Alan Moore’s *League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* (1999), in which Sherlock Holmes, Allan Quatermain and Captain Nemo, among

One basic difference between graphic novels and films, another visual medium into which literary works are often adapted, is that graphic novels offer a reading experience in which, as in traditional reading, the reader controls the speed of perception and can linger or look backward at will. And a basic difference between graphic novels and drama, another visual experience, is that the graphic novel can accommodate reasonably long passages of narration, while drama usually includes only dialogue. Another basic difference between graphic novels and film and drama adaptations is that the graphic novel illustrator can draw characters as he or she desires them to look, while film and drama directors are limited to the appearances of living actors available for the necessary roles. Moreover, unlike film or drama, the graphic novel can be seen as the attempt of the physical book to survive in an electronic age by combining the advantages of the traditional reading experience with those of the computer screen, which often provides visual objects alongside text. This opens up the possibility of discussions (in the scholarship and in the classroom) about the different visual media and the history of the physical book, including William Morris’s emphasis on “the book beautiful” as a physical object, as well as about the very nature of reading. And improved text readers have moved the conversation about book history and the nature of reading to yet another dimension, since graphic novels no less than prose novels can be read on electronic readers, such as Amazon’s Kindle 2.

Regardless of the format in which it is read, what makes a good adaptation from pure text to graphic novel format? I think that two qualities are essential: first, a good adaptation should be faithful to the original text if it is to be called an adaptation rather than a retelling; second, the adaptation should be faithful to itself in that its visual side should have a style, which while in keeping with the intentions of the author of the original text, is itself unique. After all, graphic novel adaptations, like all adaptations from one genre or medium into another, necessarily represent interpretations of the works adapted. Since many interpretations of any literary work are always possible, absolute fidelity to the original text can never be accomplished, because
there are always intentional and unintentional gaps in the original, allowing for many variations in, for instance, how and why a given face, expression, gesture, statement or setting is depicted in a particular scene, or which scenes from the original text can be condensed by visual means. In other words, the most that the reader of any adaptation can ask is that the adaptation be convincingly rather than perfectly faithful to the original. In addition to these considerations, it is clear that since the graphic novel is a visual medium, graphic novel adaptors, like filmmakers, will be especially drawn to adapt works in which a striking visual object or action is at the center of the work. During this research, I have been impressed yet again by just how many of the most enduring Transition-era works are very strongly visual: *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, *Dracula*, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, *The Invisible Man*, *The Time Machine*, some of the Conan Doyle stories and of course the Jack the Ripper story, among many others, have a powerful visual element at the very center of their plots and thematic concerns.

The importance of visuality in late-Victorian and early modern literature is not surprising if one considers the powerful influence on the period of the Gothic tradition, including of course *Frankenstein*, the revival of spiritualism and the occult, and the movement from photography to film, which no doubt inspired writers to compete with a new and powerful medium. Painters moved from representation to Impressionism partially as a way of doing what photography and film could not do, and writers, too, created new visual experiences, some of which could not (at least at first) be captured by the realistic camera-based medium. At the same time, the new medium may have provoked writers to an ever-greater emphasis on the visual in the hope that their works would, indeed, be adaptable to film in the future.

But even work from our period that is not in the Gothic tradition—including, for instance, Conrad's *The Secret Agent*—often relies heavily on the visual. Not only is Verloc a seller of pornographic pictures, but the novel culminates in an explosion and a grisly knife murder. John K. Snyder III's 1990 Classics Illustrated adaptation of Conrad's novel is unfortunately out of print. I say unfortunately because it is an excellent adaptation—convincingly true to the original in text and vision albeit slightly abridged, and yet original and very striking in its presentation. In 1990, Berkley/First Publishing took over the venerable Classics Illustrated marquee (begun in 1941 by Albert Kanter, who continued it until 1971), and turned it into something far more elegant, adult, and sophisticated than the original youth series. And that more
sophisticated tradition has been continued since 2007 by Papercutz, the latest inheritor of the Classics Illustrated brand name. (The bibliographical details of the graphic works surveyed and analyzed in this article are listed in the order in which they appear on pages 27–28.)

Excellent one-page prose introductions to the novel itself and to Conrad’s life supplement Snyder’s 1990 adaptation. As the introduction to the graphic novel states:

The prose, as in Conrad’s other writing, is rich and vibrant, but the tone and subject represent an unusual departure. The story swells with irony, displaying the contempt Conrad felt for the political zealots of any persuasion, whether they were government officials or rag-tag revolutionaries. Critics consider the novel, one of the first marriages of detective fiction and political intrigue in literature, as the forerunner of the modern espionage thriller.

Whether written by Snyder or an anonymous editor, this is clearly writing intended for an intelligent audience. And the reader of this graphic novel must be an intelligent reader; in fact, the graphic novel adaptation—like all adaptations—is best experienced by someone who has already read the original. Understanding the adaptation without having done so is possible, but only the reader of the original will appreciate Snyder’s contributions to the understanding and irony of the story. Unfortunately, as in many graphic novels, there are no page numbers by means of which particularly excellent examples of those contributions can be indicated here.

Nevertheless, the visuals are striking because they are true to Conrad’s descriptions of, say, Verloc and his wife Winnie, while at the same time including a vague element that enables the reader to complete their features, just as he or she would when reading the story. Ossipon, too, is well characterized. His womanizing is clear from a single panel early on showing him smiling with an elegant high hat on, an obviously happy woman next to him (Fig. 1). Snyder’s characterization of Ossipon is particularly masterful in the scene in which he embraces Winnie after he learns that she has murdered Verloc: only a tiny dot marks his eye in his profile and yet that eye says everything—he is already plotting how to deal with this situation for his own advantage. On the last page, his bent-over posture shows, with no need for words, how his conscience has taken a toll on him for taking Winnie’s money and then abandoning her. The professor’s “amicable contempt” for him at the end is also implied by Snyder’s drawings, which are often masterpieces of suggestion more exact than other artists’ precision. Moreover,
Snyder needs only one panel to indicate Ossipon's predilection for womanizing.

*The Secret Agent*  Adapted by John K. Snyder III
© 2010  First Classics Inc.  All rights reserved.
By Permission of Jack Lake Productions Inc.
the words in the graphic novel are taken from Conrad's text and are true to Conrad's own writing. The use of different colored squares to show the dialogue of different characters keeps even the most complex conversations differentiated by character, although the viewer/reader can sometimes lose the thread despite Snyder's best effort.

Stevie's look is perfectly captured in a single panel, which leaves no doubt that he is mentally deficient. With only a few panels, Snyder is able to show Winnie's affection for Stevie and Verloc's relationship to him, thus avoiding Conrad's lengthy exposition of that situation. Winnie's comment to Verloc that "That boy worships you" is all the commentary needed to establish the relationship. Similarly, Mr. Vladimir's condescension to Verloc at the beginning of the story is apparent from Vladimir's face and posture, which perfectly match his comment to Verloc: "You don't seem to be very smart....." Verloc's confident face just before Winnie kills him reveals why she was able to do so easily, without his being aware at all of what was coming.

Puzzlelike configurations featuring panel borders of different sizes and shapes that are often superimposed on one another, an excellent use of darkness and shadow, fidelity to the architecture of London and the period, and an imaginative use of color, particularly blue, to indicate strange states of mind, such as Winnie's during the murder, make this an excellent package. The skewed graphics capture what is a politically and morally skewed tale, which essentially shows Conrad's view of the amorality of both the anarchists and the paid foreign embassy spy, Verloc. Not only can it be read in a fraction of the time that it takes to read the novel, but, like all good graphic novel adaptations, through the portrayal of faces it adds the adaptor's—in this case Snyder's—own take on the personalities of the characters and the most important incidents, which he highlights. It also adds a visceral sense of the emotions in the novel, which are rendered in colors, jagged forms, and facial expressions. So one gains a lot from this adaptation. Conrad's fairly lengthy sections devoted to descriptions of Stevie, and the anarchist discussions, have been cut but not completely eliminated, and whether or not these condensations should be regarded as a loss must be left to each individual reader. If I were to teach or write about this novel, and the Snyder adaptation were in print, I would use it as the basis for a discussion of the characters and of possible condensation of scenes. Snyder, who has a long list of popular comics work behind him, also has a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde adaptation forthcoming in the Paper-
Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* has appealed to generations of readers and students, given its hedonistic young hero and his freedom to do as he wants and yet remain young forever. Because of the transformation constantly taking place in the painting, this novel is also a prime candidate for graphic novel adaptation and in fact we have two versions currently available. One, in the Marvel Illustrated series, was illustrated by Sebastian Fiumara and textually adapted by Roy Thomas. In his enlightening introduction, Thomas writes that one problem in the adaptation was "the long stretches of philosophical rhetoric in which Wilde engaged. These, of course, did not readily lend themselves to being illustrated, and for the most part had to be omitted." On the other hand, there were the scenes that are only mentioned in the novel but which Thomas felt had to be expanded upon in a visual medium: for instance, the Shakespearean scenes featuring Sybil Vane, which are described only briefly in the original. Thomas comments that "Sebastian and I were making concrete what in Wilde had been airy and vague" and that "we were adapting Oscar Wilde to a new medium, while striving to be faithful to the spirit of the original one."

Thomas and Fiumara have accomplished this task very well indeed. Not only have Lord Henry's intelligence and many of his best witticisms been retained in this graphic novel, but his facial expressions and manner of dress have been perfectly captured by Fiumara's portraiture. We sometimes hear that a prose novel's descriptions of characters' appearances, being textual rather than actually visual, force the reader to fill gaps and guess what he or she looks like, and that this freedom and latitude is an advantage of a prose text over a graphic novel, film, or play, which concretely portray the characters with no vagueness. I, too, enjoy to some degree imagining a character's appearance in a prose novel and Snyder's vaguer portraiture in his *Secret Agent*, as I said, still leaves some room for a reader's visual imagination. But by filling in all the blanks as it were, Fiumara has produced a far more elegant and dapper Lord Henry than I had ever envisioned although I have read the novel many times. His Dorian, too, exceeds my imaginative power in terms of elegance and charm, especially in the scenes in which we witness him enjoying the study of philosophies, perfumes, and types of music in an appropriately dreamy manner. Fiumara is also able to show convincingly a change in Dorian's perpetually innocent face as he kills Basil Hallward and, in a full-page spread, the anguish in Hall-
ward's face when he receives the fatal blow. But Fiumara's rendition of the transformations in Hallward's portrait of Dorian exceeds even these achievements. Fiumara does not picture Dorian in the portrait as an outright ogre or devil but rather subtly shows first the change in his mouth toward harshness after the death of Sybil Vane; then we see a progressively colder, even less caring, and very cunning look as Dorian commits other crimes of cruelty and immorality.

The handling of panels and panel borders by Fiumara is also masterful. As Edouard Roditi wrote in his 1947 study *Oscar Wilde* (Norfolk: New Directions, p. 124), Dorian has been a bad student of Harry's. Harry never says a moral thing but never actually does an immoral one; he retains the balance of the dandy. Dorian, on the other hand, loses his balance and falls into genuine criminality. In one scene, where Dorian plays Chopin's music for Lord Henry and then semi-confesses that he has murdered Basil, the bottom panel of the page conceals all but Dorian's eyes, which are wonderfully anguished. He remains masked from Lord Henry but not from the reader, who knows the truth. Moreover, in the adaptation, Dorian upon his death is appropriately old and "loathsome" (as Wilde puts it in the original), but not hideous. Instead of indulging in the extreme tools of the popular comic book artist, Fiumara uses much more subtle and exquisite instruments. The coloring throughout—the work of Giulia Brusco—is excellent, too.

What does one gain from the adaptation beyond speed of reading? Essentially, an elegant and convincing realization of the characters, their states of mind, and the aging process. Using the original text accompanied by this adaptation would provoke meaningful discussion about Wilde's powers of description, the most important character elements in Dorian, the scenes Wilde (and Thomas) have chosen to emphasize and to condense, the difference between the aural and the visual, and also discussion about the changing nature of reading and cognition.

An even richer discussion would result from a comparison between the original and the two graphic novel adaptations, which have important differences. First, Thomas and Fiumara's colorful adaptation is no less than stunning in its realization. The adaptation by writer Ian Edginton and illustrator I. N. J. Culbard is also impressive, but it is in black and white. This brings up the old but ongoing argument in both film and graphic novel studies about the advantages and disadvantages of color versus black-and-white presentation. I continue to believe that this is entirely a matter of the individual work and which format
best suits its unique characteristics. In the case of *Dorian Gray*, color in my view allows the adaptor to show both Dorian’s beauty and the portrait’s disfiguration in more striking detail and power than black and white. On the other hand, according to Scott McCloud’s seminal theoretical work, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1994), the more iconic (that is, vague and undetailed) a face, the more a reader can identify with it, hence the power of many comics since the reader is able to insert himself or herself into the faces of the characters. So it may be true, according to this theory, that the reader is able to identify more with the characters in the Edginton-Culbard version because of its more cartoonlike vagueness. I did not particularly find this to be true in this case and was perfectly able as a reader of Thomas-Fiumara to identify—as much I am ever able to do—with a fully detailed Dorian presented in color. Moreover, we are told that Dorian is beautiful—but we cannot see that in Culbard’s drawings, partially at least because of the black and white presentation. Similarly, Sybil Vane’s lips are said to be like rose petals, but one cannot see that in Culbard’s work. On the other hand, one could argue that Culbard’s less defined drawings allow the reader to concentrate more on the story itself than when reading the Thomas-Fiumara version, which attracts the reader by its surface beauty, and that the use of shadowy black and white drawings is appropriate for a work much of which, like Dorian’s life, seems to take place in the shadows.

Both versions are convincingly faithful to the original text, but with different emphases. For instance, in Culbard and Edginton there are subtle hints as to Wilde’s homosexual subtext, as when Dorian and Lord Henry stand next to a nude male statue as they converse in the garden at Basil’s place when they first meet. Harry is shown upset in a panel after Dorian says that he will marry Sybil, and earlier Harry’s wife has paid Dorian a visit, an incident omitted from Thomas-Fiumara. Overall, Harry’s influence over Dorian is stressed more than in the Thomas-Fiumara version, which does not underline the homosexual subtext at all. On the other hand, while Thomas, like Wilde, makes much of the book—Huysmans’s *À Rebours*—that Lord Henry gives to Dorian and which corrupts him, devoting several pages to it before the murder of Basil, there is nothing about that book in the Culbard-Edginton version. Outside of Harry himself, then, the influences on Dorian’s behavior are therefore less clear in the Culbard-Edginton version.

Another difference is in the change portrayed in the portrait. The passage of time and Dorian’s downhill moral slide, as manifested es-
especially in the increasing decay of the portrait in the original, is not as well indicated in Culbard-Edginton as in the Thomas-Fiumara version. In sum, I personally prefer the Marvel version both as a reader and a teacher, but I would stress that Culbard and Edginton have also produced a very worthy if more quiet version of the story that might appeal more to others. The fact that we have two worthy graphic novel adaptations to discuss is a cause for celebration.

Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* is another visually oriented text that automatically lends itself to graphic novel—as well as to film—adaptations, given Dr. Jekyll's dramatic transformation. I will look at two presently available adaptations, both published by Waverley Books, both by the same artist, Cam Kennedy, and writer, Alan Grant, but with a difference: one is in the original English, the other—*Unco Case o Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*—is a translation into Scots by James P. Spence. It has often been commented that although set in London, this is really a story about Edinburgh, and so the Scots dialect version is not only charming but appropriate, although not for use except, perhaps, in a very specialized graduate course.

Whether in English or Scots, this is a very good adaptation, even if a few small points have been altered or eliminated. The elimination of Jekyll's "disappearance" from the terms of his will is a small, pardonable change. (Indeed, some critics have argued that a will such as Jekyll's, calling for Hyde to inherit whether Jekyll dies or disappears, would not have been any more legal then than now.) And on page 27 of the English version a speech balloon that should point to Utterson but instead points to Enfield is a small if regrettable typo. The text retains all of Stevenson's writing excellence, all of the chapters are duplicated, and the structure of the work remains completely intact. Of necessity, not all of the philosophical discussion in the original of Jekyll's "Full Statement of the Case" could be duplicated in the graphic novel, which while not eliminating long narrative passages, gives dialogue precedence over them. But as in the other chapters, the high points are almost all here: the idea that Jekyll lived a double life before he ever conceived of actually splitting himself; the discovery that man is not one but at least two; and particularly the way in which the caged Hyde is visually depicted (38) as roaring out, ready to commit murder after having been bottled up for a few months by Jekyll's desire to suppress him and to do good. The admiration that Jekyll feels for Hyde's love of life, and Hyde's complete contempt for Jekyll, however, are missing.
Once again, as in the case of Thomas and Fiumara and in the example of Thomas and Giordano (below), who have also worked in the popular comics tradition, Grant’s and Kennedy’s work on probably the best-known popular British comics character, Judge Dredd, has translated well when applied to Stevenson’s topflight material. (Kennedy’s rendition of Hyde, in particular, is superbly scary and unpleasant.) But perhaps these crossovers from the popular to the highbrow also remind us that in Stevenson’s own time, his work—like Wilde’s and Stoker’s—may have been regarded as more popular than highbrow, too. If I have any criticism of the Grant-Kennedy adaptation, it is that the faces of Utterson, Jekyll and Enfield, for instance, are not expressive enough and seem to resemble one another in unremitting sternness. Perhaps this is the result of Grant’s and Kennedy’s reading of the unspoken Scottish element in the story, with which they are far more familiar than I.

The translation into Scots includes a glossary, and even a Scots translation of the biographical write-ups for Stevenson, Grant, and Kennedy. An example will give you a sense of how drastic the translation into what almost amounts to another language is: Jekyll’s comment on his murder of Sir Danvers, “My devil had long been caged; he came out roaring. I mauled Carew’s unresisting body, tasting delight from every blow,” becomes “Ma divil hid lang bin jiled; hae iowpit oot rairin. Ah rived Carew’s feckless body, sowpin delicht frae iwerie blooter” (38, both editions). And the last sentence of Stevenson’s write-up, “He is popular with modern readers and his reputation continues to grow today,” becomes “Hae is jist is popular wi modern readers the day, an heez fame shows nae sign o dwynin awa” (42, both editions). Whether this is said in English or Scots, it is equally true; and what is also true is that this graphic novel adaptation of this great novel, like the original, will retain its interest into the future.

Before Grant and Kennedy did this, they had an adaptation of Stevenson’s *Kidnapped* to their credit. This is certainly one of the most exciting adventure stories ever written by anyone at any time. The physical action scenes, as one might expect, lend themselves to comics, which have long been noted for their ability to capture sensational and dynamic action, and are done very well here. But the really positive thing about the Grant-Kennedy version is their ability to capture the friendship between David Balfour and Alan Breck, with all of its complexities, to the point that the reader is sad when the two must part, even though David’s inheritance is restored. David and Alan, like son...
and father, do not always get along, especially when Alan loses all of David’s money at gambling, and at such times the conflict is developed calmly and well by Grant and Kennedy. The same calm yet convincing depiction is found in the final confrontation between David and his evil uncle, who has had him kidnapped, with both Alan and counselor Rankeillor as witnesses to his induced confession. The pacing, the characterization, the rendering of the scenery of the Scottish highlands, and the fidelity to the original are all admirable. This adaptation, too, has a Scots-language version by the creators. *Kidnapped* is also the subject of a Marvel Illustrated adaptation by Roy Thomas and Mario Gully which is forthcoming in July 2009.

The Graphic Classics series, produced by Eureka Publications of Mount Horeb, Wisconsin, brings different writers and artists to adapt and illustrate short stories by Stevenson, Stoker, Wells, and Conan Doyle among others. The idea here, as in some other adaptations that we have discussed, is to follow up the old Classics Illustrated series with a more adult format. Since much of Conan Doyle’s best work is in the form of the Sherlock Holmes short stories, it is admirably suited to the Graphic Classics series. As with all graphic novel adaptations, the risk for the adaptors of these stories is to be either too faithful to the original text to accomplish a successful adaptation in a visual medium or to cut too much of serious importance from the original, reducing it to a simpleminded comic. As might be expected, the success of this series depends on the individual artists and writers. “The Adventure of the Copper Beeches” is adapted and illustrated by Rick Geary. The use of black-and-white drawings seems to suit the Holmes stories particularly well, since the main emphasis is largely on his abstract rationality. Geary captures the high points of the story and manages to thread them together so that we can always follow it. The gain is in the facial expressions, such as those of Violet Hunter and Rucastle on page 21, which are not clearly expressed in the original (Fig. 2); and once again the visuals enable much quicker reading of the story. What is lost are the descriptions and the thoughts of Watson which he can express as narrator. Clearly, I would want a student to read the original because of the charm of some of these thoughts, such as Watson’s sense that Holmes is an egoist, which is textually omitted by Geary, but Geary’s rendition of Watson’s face does on occasion convey something of this attitude. Accompanying the original with Geary’s version would prompt an interesting discussion of Conan Doyle’s style and characterization. And, as in the case of the other graphic novel adaptations, a class dis-
"I rushed down the passage, through the door and straight into the arms of Mr. Rucastle."

"Miss Hunter, why do you think that I lock this door?"

"I am sure that I do not know."

"In an instant, his smile hardened into a grin of rage."

"And if you ever put your foot over that threshold again— I'll throw you to the mastiff!"

"My dear young lady, what has frightened you so?"

"I was foolish enough to go into the empty wing. Oh, it is so dreadfully still in there."

"It is to keep people out who do not belong there!"

Fig. 2 Geary portrays a fraught encounter between Violet Hunter and Mr. Rucastle in a masterfully done series of panels in which we at first see the two from some distance and then chillingly view Rucastle's threatening face from Violet's perspective.

Graphic Classics: Arthur Conan Doyle
© 2002 Eureka Productions and Rick Geary
discussion would certainly include comments on how teachers and future teachers of literature might deal with the hybrid reading and viewing style that has become for many people a supplement to, and in some cases a replacement for, purely textual reading.

A second Sherlock Holmes story, “The Adventure of the Engineer’s Thumb,” adapted by Rod Lott with illustrations by Simon Gane, is also included in Graphic Classics: Arthur Conan Doyle. The shadowy style of art, although black and white like all of the other Conan Doyle stories in the volume, is completely different from Geary’s more open faces and panels but no less worthy and interesting. Once again, the adaptation is true to the original, and one loses nothing of the plot or emotional element involved in the story; in fact, as in the case of other graphic novel adaptations, one may actually gain something emotionally from the facial expressions and postures of the drawn “actors” in the drama. Gane has a very unique style of drawing, and this gives the story a unique “look” from the start. The visual shock of the missing thumb is prominent in Gane’s illustration of the story, but it is not the focus of more than a few panels, and so he cannot be accused of sensationalism any more than Conan Doyle can. The use of shadow for the night scenes is very well done. Lott has added some verbal realism when he has the mysterious woman speak actual German sentences, which do not appear in the original. Here Lott undoubtedly felt that he had to fill in Conan Doyle’s vague description, “She spoke a few words in a foreign tongue in a tone as though asking a question” (Conan Doyle, The Annotated Sherlock Holmes, William Baring-Gould, ed. New York: Clarkson Potter, 1967. II, 216), since Lott and Gane are actually showing the scene, which then needs dialogue (108). Colonel Lysander’s face is suitably pinched and wicked. The picture of the house’s second story, lacking furniture (111), is appropriately spooky, as in a Gothic novel (Fig. 3). The hydraulic press, shown in a long, extra large panel, is impressive and complex (112). The thumb-chopping panel (116) is suitably horrific. The story ends, like the original, without the capture of the miscreants despite the visit to the now-burning house by Holmes and Watson accompanied by two Scotland Yard men, with the young engineer’s having nothing to show for the loss of his thumb and a fifty-guinea fee than, as Holmes puts it, experience and having a good story to tell. After reading both the original and the adaptation, the reader feels that the adaptation has caught not only the main points but the somewhat detached stiff-upper-lip spirit of the original, especially at the end when the lost thumb no longer seems painful or an issue. Be-
"It was a labyrinth of an old house, with narrow winding staircases and little low doors. Strangely, there was no furniture above the ground floor."

Tabachnick: The Graphic Novel

Fig. 3 Simon Gane's suffocatingly detailed depiction of the interior captures the threatening intensity of the situation of the young engineer in the Gothic mansion in which he will soon lose his thumb.

Graphic Classics: Arthur Conan Doyle © 2005 Eureka Productions and Simon Gane
sides these two Holmes stories, this volume also contains adaptations of seven additional Conan Doyle adventure stories by different writers and artists, each with his or her own style. The result of reading all the stories is a feeling for the small visual and verbal touches of Conan Doyle's adventure stories, perhaps not readily appreciated in text versions.

Besides his work on adaptation, Rick Geary is also known for his "Treasury of Victorian Murder" volumes, published by Nantier Beall Minoustchine in its Comics Lit series. His *Jack the Ripper*, while a fictionalized history rather than an adaptation of another work, would serve as excellent supplementary reading in a Victorian literature course, especially since it has been checked against twelve very reputable sources that he lists in the introduction. He presents his findings in the form of a journal "by an unknown British gentleman" and ends with the statement that the murders will probably never be solved—which has certainly proven to be the case. Once again, there is a strong visual element to this story, which is undoubtedly what attracted Geary to it for graphic novel treatment. Geary employs a dense style of drawing, with lots of crosshatching, which recalls Victorian-era printing styles. He emphasizes the bricks in buildings, cobblestones complete with rain puddles when necessary, winding streets, maps with arrows and circular inserts providing information about a victim's movements, plain, not particularly attractive, faces, and dark clothes and beards to give a wonderful feel of a lower-class setting in 1888–1889 London. Through the voice of his invented narrator, Geary takes the reader through the series of murders, one by one, and covers not only their unusual and ghastly elements, but even shows the contents of one victim's pockets in convincing detail (Fig. 4). Geary covers the theories about who might have done it, ranging from Jewish immigrants in East London, Freemasons, Chinese opium-eaters, Thugees from India, slaughterhouse employees, to respected surgeons. Coroners Bagster-Phillips and Bond and Inspector Abbeline are characterized as well meaning but unable to solve the mystery. Geary's best guess, expressed through his narrator, is that the murderer was a longtime resident of the district who quietly committed suicide, taking his secrets with him. The reader feels after reading this work that he possesses an accurate, unsensational but still horrifying view of the murders from a contemporary who has weighed all the evidence. I would gladly use this pamphlet to supplement a Victorian class (Fig. 5), since this is probably the most concise
Fig. 4 Geary touchingly depicts the possessions of one of Jack the Ripper's victims.
Fig. 5  *Jack the Ripper: A Journal of the Whitechapel Murders, 1888–1889*

© 1995  Rick Geary  Nantier Beall Minoustchine
and yet the most convincing read about Jack the Ripper that I can remember in any form.

Geary's new Classics Illustrated *Invisible Man*, published by Papercutz, is also a worthy read for adults. The appendix to this volume includes a history of its predecessor series Classics Illustrated, by William Jones, Jr., the author of *Classics Illustrated: A Cultural History* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2001). Besides comparing well with the other graphic novels inspired by Classics Illustrated and produced by other publishers, this new version may even offer some advantages to the reader over Wells's original. Wells's portrayal of the Invisible Man consists of a series of confrontations between him and the villagers of Iping and Port Burdock, culminating in a murder and an attempted murder. Wells derives a good deal of humor and surprise from describing these confrontations and does this as well as words can. Since so much of the action is physical—almost slapstick—the visual medium is more immediately striking and easier to follow than the original text. Once again, the graphic novel adaptation, which includes all of the major incidents in the book and uses Wells's own language—albeit with American spelling—is a quicker read and contains not only all of the important plot developments, but the thematic developments as well, including a depiction of how the Invisible Man gradually becomes obsessed with his own power to the point of becoming a murderer and would-be tyrant. The book's warning against the arrogance of the power of science misused comes through just as clearly in the graphic novel as in the original, or even more so thanks again to Geary's careful work. The original would be difficult to teach today because of the emphasis on physical mishaps, which take up most of its 270 pages; but the forty-page adaptation covers the same ground and might work better in the classroom.

A competing forty-four-page version by Rod Lott and Simon Gane appears in the Graphic Classics series' H. G. Wells volume, which also includes an adaptation of *The Time Machine* by Antonella Caputo and Seth Frail, as well as Caputo's superb and fascinating rendering of Orson Welles's radio broadcast of *The War of the Worlds* and its aftermath, and several other Wells stories by other artists and writers. The Graphic Classics *Invisible Man* adaptation differs from the Classics Illustrated Papercutz version; for one thing it is in black and white. Here color is perhaps less important than in the case of *Dorian Gray* because no particularly beautiful or ugly object is being portrayed; the Invisible Man is a neutral, if scary, quantity. Yet once again color has a strong
effect because it allows for more facial expression and a greater sense of verisimilitude in the Geary version. But on the other hand, color reminds one of animated films and children's books, while a black-and-white rendition seems to invoke seriousness. So the choice, as always, will be up to the reader. Lott and Gane's *Invisible Man* is also true to the major events of the story and to Wells's own words. They emphasize different events than Geary does, not lingering for instance on the discussion of who knows Greek but including more of the Bunting robbery than Geary does. In either case, it's a matter of detail and not ultimately important. Lott and Gane however do have one panel (31) that suggests that the Invisible Man was thinking of the sexual improprieties he might commit with his newfound power, following up on the thinnest hint by Wells; Geary does not go that far. For inexplicable reasons, Lott and Gane change the ending; where in the original, the former tramp Marvel now is the landlord of an inn and secretly has the books with the formula for invisibility without admitting as much to anyone, and this is faithfully repeated in Geary's version, in Lott and Gane the book ends with Marvel admitting to anyone who asks that he has the books.

*The Time Machine* also presents many opportunities to the graphic novel adaptor and illustrator. But Antonella Caputo (the adaptor) and Seth Frail (the illustrator) in Graphic Classics' adaptation do not always avail themselves of these opportunities. Wells's narrator states at one point that he cannot describe the facial expression of the Time Traveller as he relates his tale to his assembled friends—and Frail follows through with a vague face that disappoints the expectations of the graphic novel reader/viewer, who expects to see the Time Traveller's expression, regardless of the vagueness of the original. Frail's drawing of Weena, the Time Traveller's girlfriend of the future, is not clear enough to make her as attractive as the Time Traveller finds her. Moreover, Caputo has abridged the beginning and she and Frail inexplicably sometimes do not include simple details, such as Weena's trying to prevent the Time Traveller from going down the shaft into the Morlocks' realm, which would have been easy enough to portray by simply having her raise her hand in the appropriate panel. We also do not see the Traveller's journey into the far future, when there are no more humans or humanoid creatures and the earth seems on the edge of extinction. And at the end, the narrator does not see the Time Traveller take off in his machine as he does in the original. But despite these omissions, the story benefits from Caputo's and Frail's treatment in one way: Wells's
two primary themes—about the consequences of the separation of the classes and the danger of too much leisure and comfort to the maintenance of intelligence and culture—come through even more clearly than in the original, because of necessity the argument has been pared down to its essentials in the adaptation.

This Wells volume includes several other adaptations and one original piece, an exploration of the impact of Orson Welles’s famous 1938 radio dramatization of *The War of the Worlds*, whose resetting in America and convincing quality caused civil disturbances. This imaginative script is by Caputo and based on the text of the original broadcast, and the story is skillfully illustrated by Nick Miller. They capture the potential inherent in this dramatic broadcast and its consequences, which are a testimony to the power of Wells’s original story. Both the text and the visuals are engrossing and powerful and demonstrate how and why Welles’s radio show has become a memorable event, well over half a century later.

Sparkplug Comic Books of Portland, Oregon, is responsible for *Orchid: A collection of Victorian short stories adapted to comic book form*. This collection offers an opportunity to read some of the minor as well as the major Victorian fantasists. While there are two stories by Sheridan Le Fanu, and an adaptation of Poe’s “Raven” as well as a short story by H. H. Munro, there are also pieces by the less-known Rhonda Broughton and F. R. Loring, and one by the Polish Romantic writer Jan Potoki.

The retelling and adaptation of “Green Tea” by Kevin Huizinga is particularly worthy. Le Fanu’s Reverend Jennings is certainly onto something when he says that “I believe that everyone who sets out writing in earnest does his work on something—tea, coffee, tobacco.” My own reading of the green tea that Le Fanu’s Dr. Heselius holds to be the cause of the Reverend Jennings’s horrible hallucination of a grinning, malicious monkey who interferes with his thoughts and prayers and progressively urges him to do evil is that the tea is the equivalent of absinthe, which is also green and whose impure state is well known to be the cause of many a writer’s and artist’s mental anguish in the late nineteenth century. Le Fanu may have vaguely suspected the ill effects of this drink even then and for some reason masked it as green tea. This speculation of mine aside, Huizinga’s adaptation of the story proper is not only accurate but chilling. The lead-in, which recounts a contemporary student’s bout with an animal hallucination after studying too hard for finals and intensely reading Black Elk’s autobiography,
sets the tone and would help bring the tale to follow into relevance for a student in one of our classes today. Huizinga interpolates a passage from De Quincey's "Confessions of an English Opium Eater" as an example of another of Heselius's cases; though this has nothing to do with Le Fanu's actual story, it is at least in some keeping with the period. The facial expressions throughout are good, the settings suitably dark, the main points of the story adhered to, and the use of the narrator well done in terms of relevance to today. The retelling ends with the contemporary narrator very skeptically repeating and even mocking Heselius's proposed cure, namely the application of ice to the forehead and abstinence from green tea. If however my theory that green tea is the equivalent of absinthe is correct, then Huizinga's narrator's skepticism is not justified—absinthe can indeed produce hallucinations and has been implicated most famously in Van Gogh's self-mutilation and suicide.

The volume also contains F. G. Loring's "Tomb of Sarah," adapted by T. Edward Bak, but the adaptation, while well drawn, bears only a partial relationship to the original. Gabrielle Bell's "Tobermory" adaptation of the story by H. H. Munro, on the other hand, hews closely to the original and is perfectly rendered. The dress of the characters, their facial expressions, and the settings are all in keeping with the period, and Tobermory, the speaking cat, is very convincingly shown to have high intelligence. I would guess that Ms. Bell has a cat herself because she draws and characterizes Tobermory so well. The story remains a monument to people's tendency to backbite and it profits from Bell's visuals and her excellent adaptation, which sacrifices nothing of the original. Rhonda Broughton's "The Man with the Nose" is once again very visual and therefore very adaptable to a graphic novel format. But—as in the case of the Invisible Man—that story hinges on what the reader does not see: a man with a very peculiar nose. I must admit that I was waiting to see adaptor and illustrator Dylan Williams's vision of that nose even though it is not described very precisely anywhere in the story, but he has remained so true to the original that we never see the man with the nose, and the nose grows for the imagining. This is true in text or in graphic novel format, but I will suggest that since we have so many visual objects portrayed in the graphic novel, our expectation of seeing is all the more frustrated by not seeing than it is even in the original. If this volume teaches us anything, it is that the Victorian ghost story writers knew how to use ambiguity and
nonstatement and that the visual medium enhances rather than goes against this strength.

I will end this survey and analysis with a discussion of the most famous vampire of all—Dracula, invented by Bram Stoker. Clearly, Dracula has been the subject of numerous films and graphic novels. But Roy Thomas and Dick Giordano’s adaptation is one of the very best that I have seen or read. In an enlightening introduction, Thomas (who also did the excellent adaptation of Dorian Gray) discusses his own love of the book, which began in junior high, and his obsession “to draw and script the most faithful adaptation ever done, in any medium, of Bram Stoker’s Dracula.” Thomas has scripted major comic characters for Marvel, but the introduction tells us that “few things will ever please him more” than having seen this adaptation completed.

One can only be grateful for Thomas’s scholarly motivation and the illustrative talent of Dick Giordano, for they have largely succeeded in their ambitions, producing a Dracula which certainly could be taught alongside the original. This is also one of the most accomplished of the adaptations, as it were, comparable to Thomas and Fiumara’s Dorian Gray, although Dracula is rendered in black and white rather than color. The varied sizes and shapes of the panels, the looks upon the faces of Jonathan Harker, Lucy Westenra, Mina Harker, Van Helsing, and Dracula, among others, and the pacing of the tale show that years of experience in producing the X Men can have a valuable effect when applied to classic literature; these characteristics may also show how much Stoker’s book has influenced traditional popular comics and how much it has in common with those. The test, again, is whether or not the reader feels the power of the story through the adaptation. The answer is “Yes”; I found the adaptation difficult to put down, and I admit to being pleased that I could read through the story so quickly.

Following Thomas’s lead, Giordano uses different lettering styles to “convey changes in the narrative,” including script for diary entries, and the narrative caption styles change according to which character is telling that part of the story, all of which helps keep the narrative lines straight. Thomas however does not quite capture Lucy’s wish that she could marry three men—an important point in the psychology of the story—although he does have her talking to Mina about her three suitors. On one page, Dracula’s response to the London zookeeper’s statement that the wolves are upset at his presence, “Oh no, they wouldn’t like me,” needs more explanation. But basically these are minor quibbles. A larger issue is that Giordano says that circa 2004, when the
book was finally completed, he would have drawn the characters differently than he had originally done in 1971, when he and Thomas began this much-delayed project, but he was obligated to go on with the same characters. The characters we have are very well realized, but it would have been interesting to see his new as well as his older conception of them.

The high points of the story—including Jonathan’s confrontation with the three women vampires in Dracula’s castle, Lucy’s transformation into a vampire and back again, Dracula’s baptism of Mina in his blood, his confrontation with the men when he vows to enslave their women, and the final chase—are all there, and the whole is not more or less dramatic than the original. However, the visuals have enabled me to picture Van Helsing, Dracula and Mina, for instance, better than I have ever been able to do on my own from the text alone. Giordano says that he strove for photographic realism throughout, and the black and white has helped with that. Van Helsing’s character traits and those of Seward, Harker, Morris and Godalming are all expertly rendered, and Mina’s changing nature is excellently captured, as is her return to normality.

This will be a hard *Dracula* to beat, but a Classical Comics version is on the way. Classical Comics is an excellent company, based in the United Kingdom, and offers superb adaptations of *Henry V*, *Macbeth*, *A Christmas Carol* and *Jane Eyre*, among other works. Their work is distinguished by their three series, including a largely unabridged original text, as well as linguistically simplified and abridged versions. They have several Transition-era works in process, including Wilde’s *The Canterville Ghost*, but none available at the time of this writing. Their *Frankenstein*—adapted by Jason Cobley with linework by Declan Shavley, coloring by Jason Cardy and Kate Nicholson, and lettering by Terry Wiley—is an example of their work in the Gothic novel and doppelgänger vein which leads directly to *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, *Dorian Gray*, and *Dracula*, so I feel justified in saying a few words about it now. This is a full-color version, with the faces of the characters well rendered in both light and shadow, so that all emotions are fully shown. Frankenstein, the monster, Clerval, Elizabeth, all are convincingly depicted in appropriate period dress. Even the imagined woman companion that the monster desires Frankenstein to make but which he never does is shown in a striking imaginative scene in which the monster is arguing with her. When the monster speaks of being a fallen angel become a devil, an angel is shown falling. The coloring surrounding
the murders, the confrontation between Frankenstein and his monster, and the serene Swiss countryside and the polar wilds, is extremely well done, as is the rest of the artwork. What this adaptation does—like all good graphic novel adaptations—is bring out the inherent power of the original text visually and yet allow the reader to retain the pleasure of reading a book, including the original writer’s own language. The bold emphasis on some words and the balance between narration and dialogue are excellent. Clearly, the people who did this Frankenstein are highly literate and have produced a work with style, energy and imagination.

The same can, fortunately, be said of the other creators and adaptations reviewed here, including those I have not been able to discuss in detail. But as much good Transition-era graphic novel adaptation as there now is, what strikes me is how many works are still awaiting adaptation. At the moment, I know of no Rider Haggard, Henry James, or Rudyard Kipling graphic novels available or planned. So we and our students may happily look forward, at some point in the near future, to possibly seeing what amount to our own century’s “book beautiful” versions of She, The Turn of the Screw, and Kim. Like the other graphic novel adaptations discussed here, these potential adaptations would not only allow us to see the original novels in new and different ways, but would also bring the great literature of the Transition era to a broader audience, which is no small accomplishment in our very visual age.

Works Listed in the Order Discussed


