

# Medium

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Peter Madsen's *Historien om en mor*



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

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

### Andersen and comic art

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

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





Fig. 1



Fig. 2

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

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

### The 'icon' and the medium

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

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

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

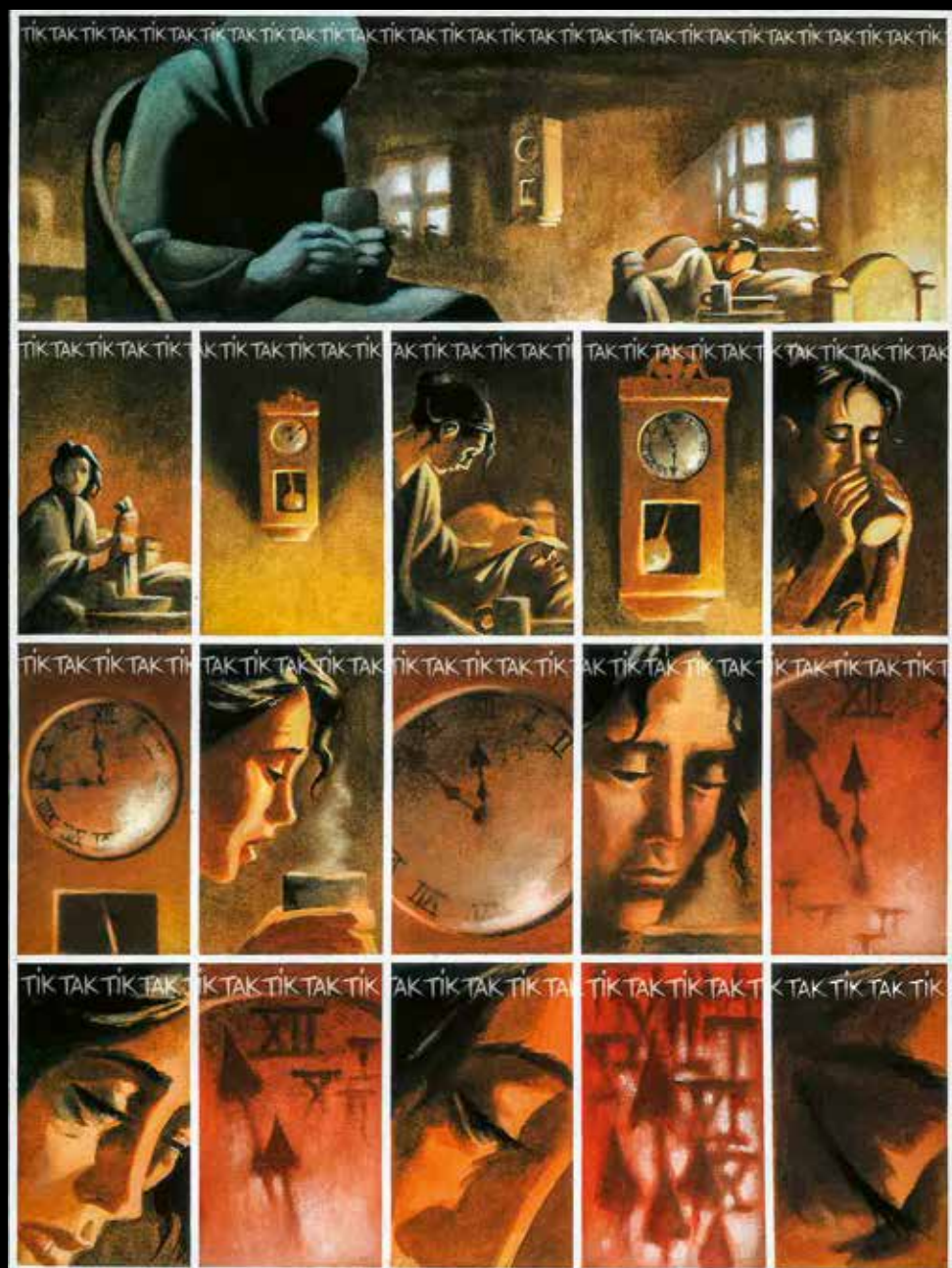


Fig. 3

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

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







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

56





Fig. 5b

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



Fig. 6

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

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

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

### Time as 'icon'

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

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

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

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

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

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



Fig. 7

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



Fig. 8

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

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

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

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

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

### Reflections

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

AKAB's *Storia di una madre*

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### The book as object – materiality and structure

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

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



Fig. 9

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



Fig. 10

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

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

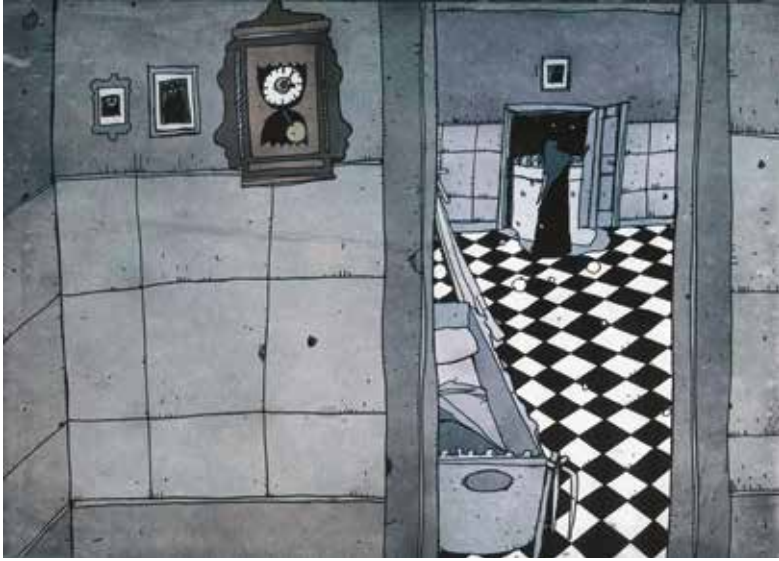


Fig. 11

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

### The absence of God

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

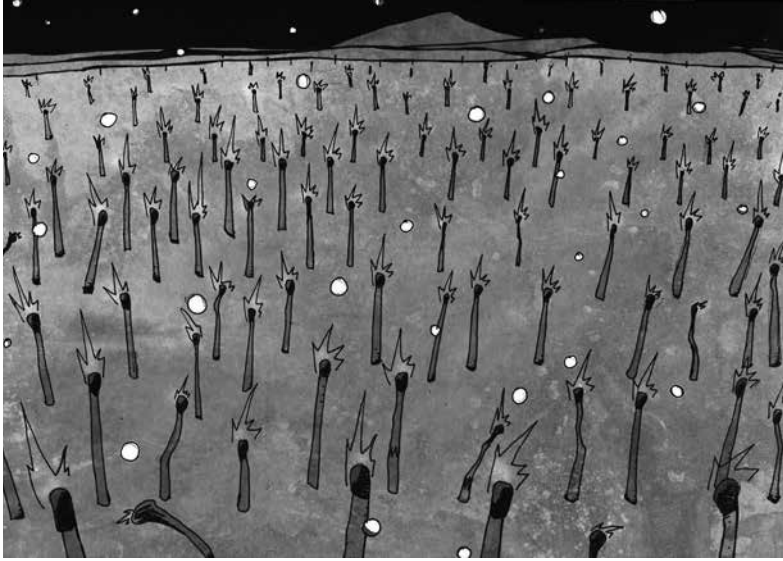


Fig. 12



Fig. 13

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

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

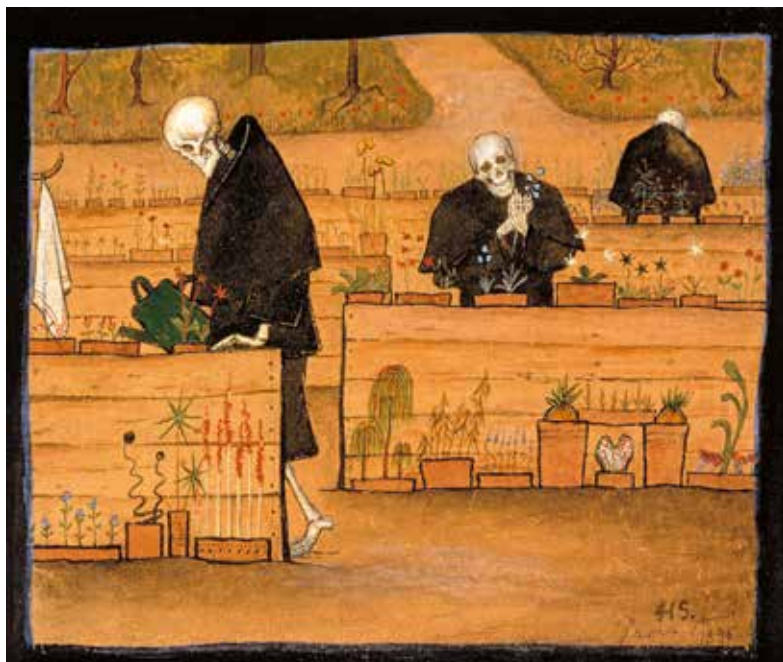


Fig. 14



Fig. 15



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

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

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

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

### The triumph of Death

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



Fig. 16

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

### The art of conversation

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

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

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

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



Fig. 17

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

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



Fig. 18a



Fig. 18b



Fig. 18c



Fig. 19

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

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

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

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



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

### Reflections

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

Guido Crepax's *La storia immortale*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

# LA STORIA IMMORTALE

Fig. 20



Fig. 21

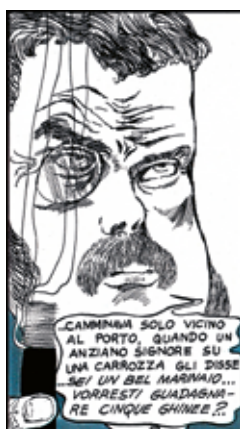


Fig. 22a



Fig. 22b

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

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



Fig. 23a



Fig. 23b

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





Fig. 24



Fig. 25

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

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

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

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

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



Fig. 26



Fig. 27

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

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

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



Fig. 28

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

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

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

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





Fig. 29



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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

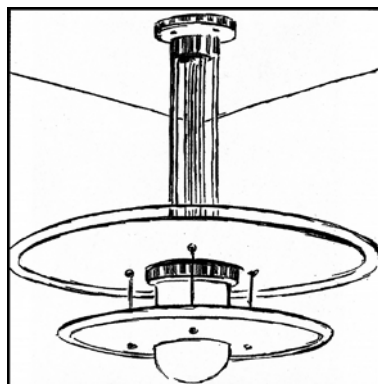


Fig. 30

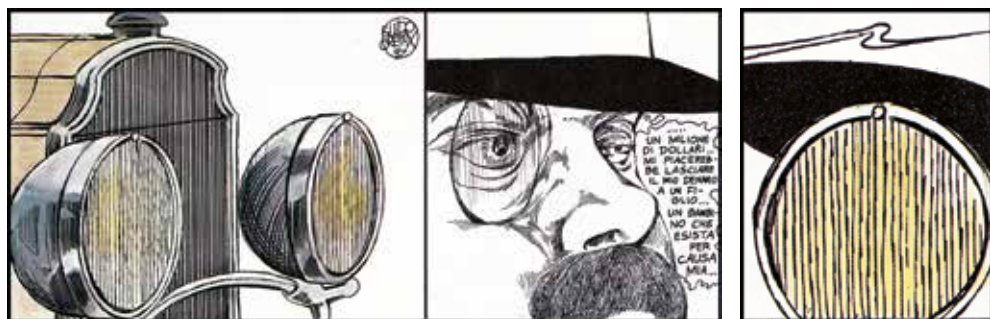


Fig. 31



Fig. 32



Fig. 33

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

### Reflections

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

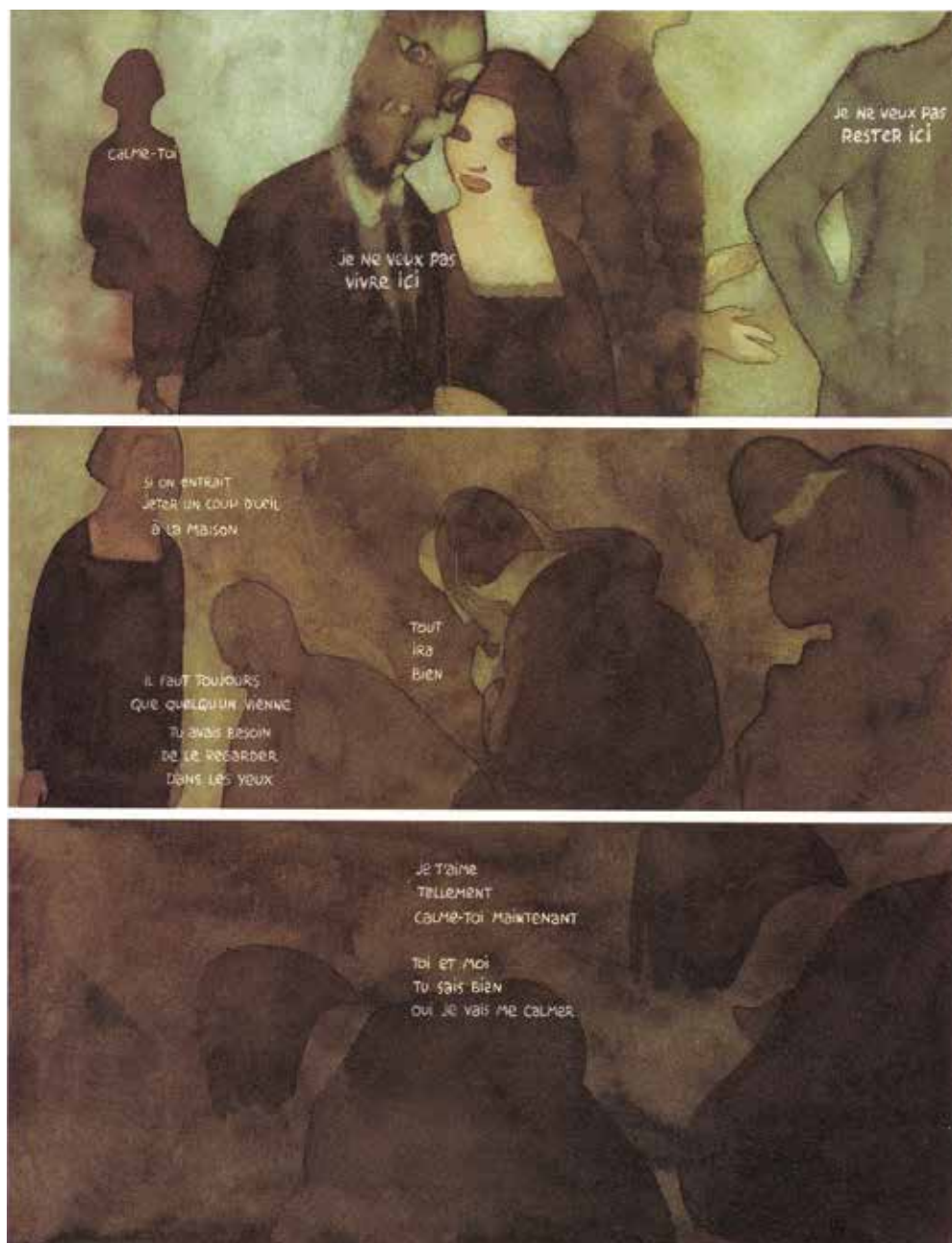


Fig. 34

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

### The poetry connection

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



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

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

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

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

### The spatiality of poetry and poetic comics

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

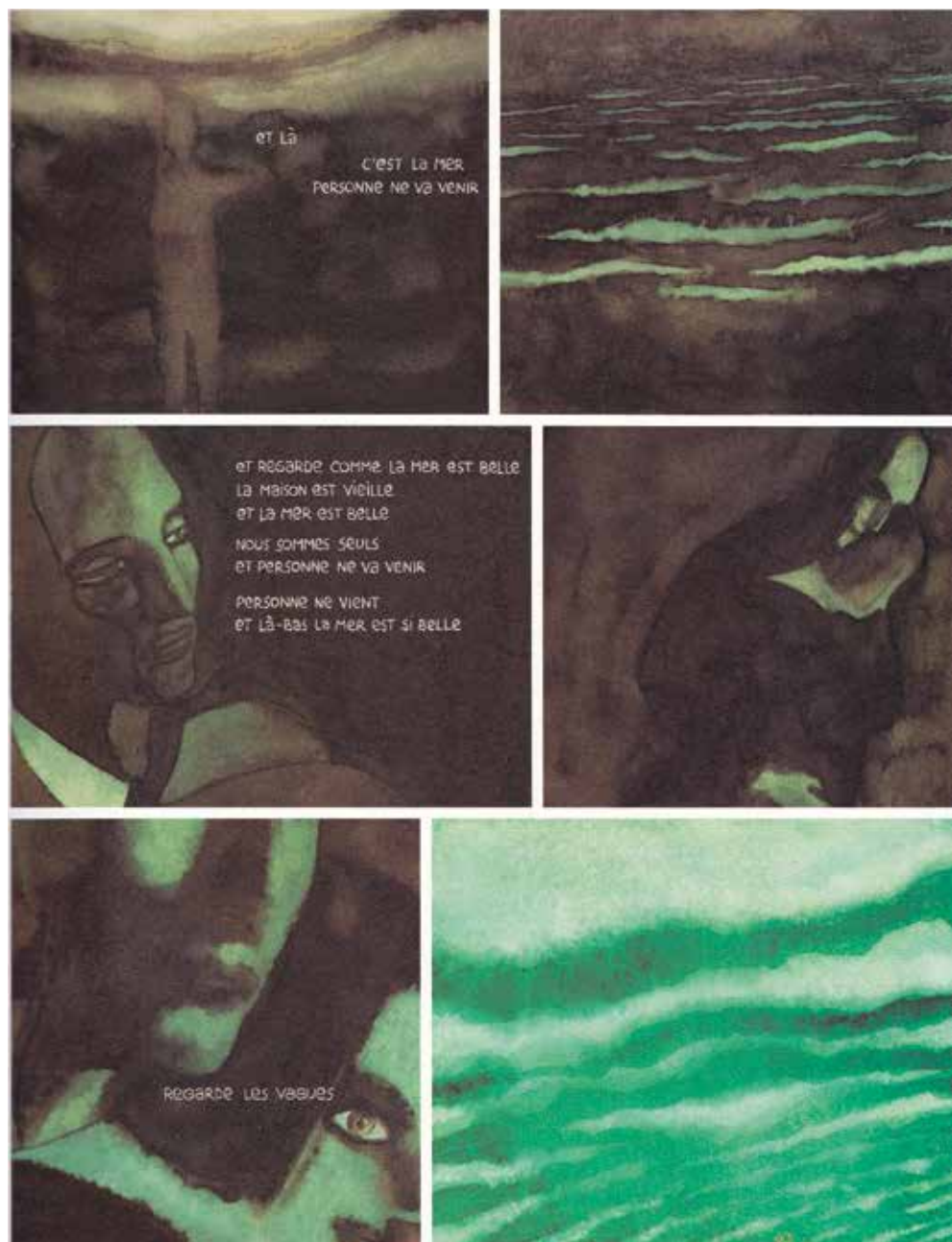


Fig. 35

## Repetition and rhythm

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

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

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

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

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



Fig. 36

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

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

Je n'ai pas fait ça

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

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

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



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

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

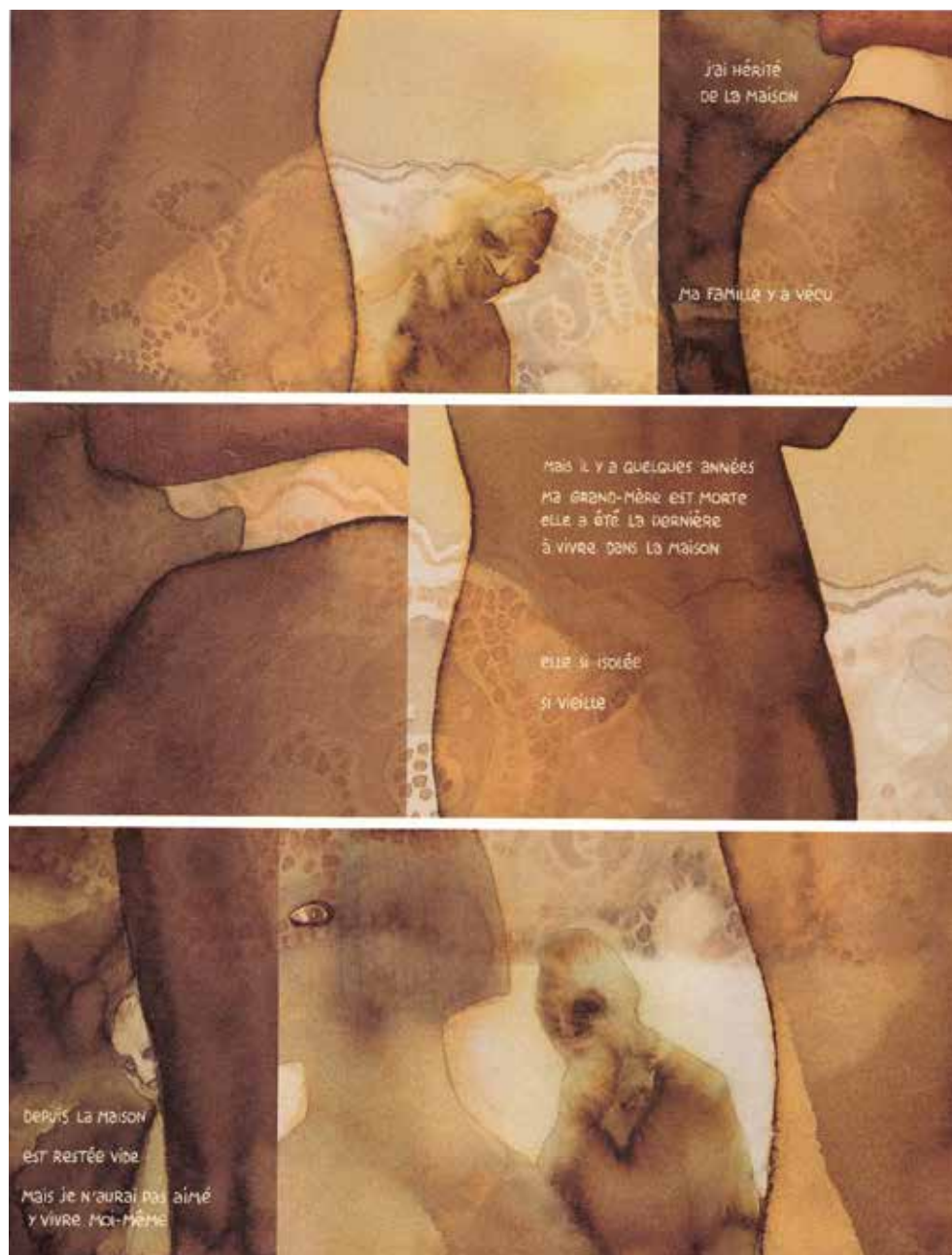


Fig. 37

## MEDIUM



Fig. 38



Fig. 39

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

### The wordlessness

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



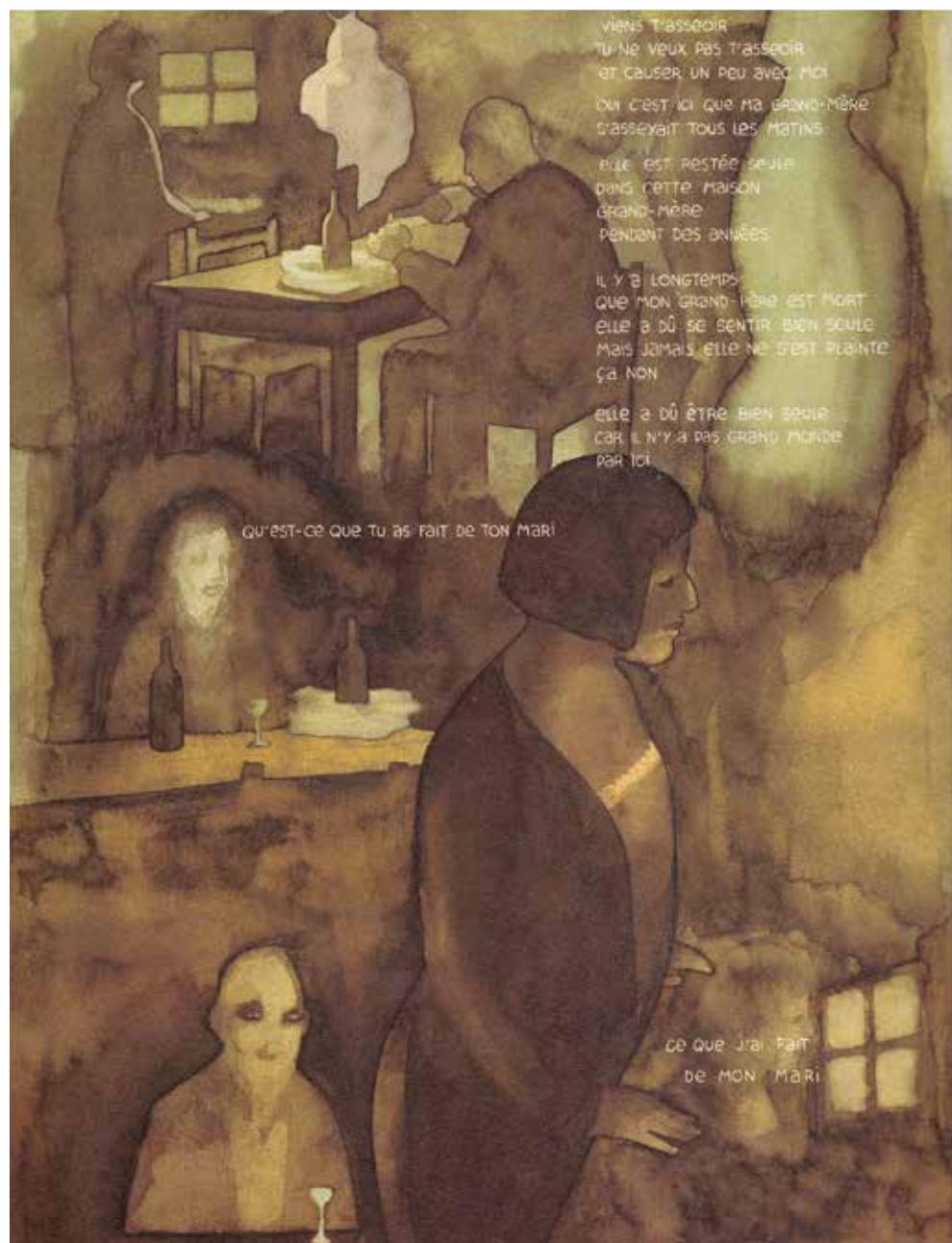


Fig. 40

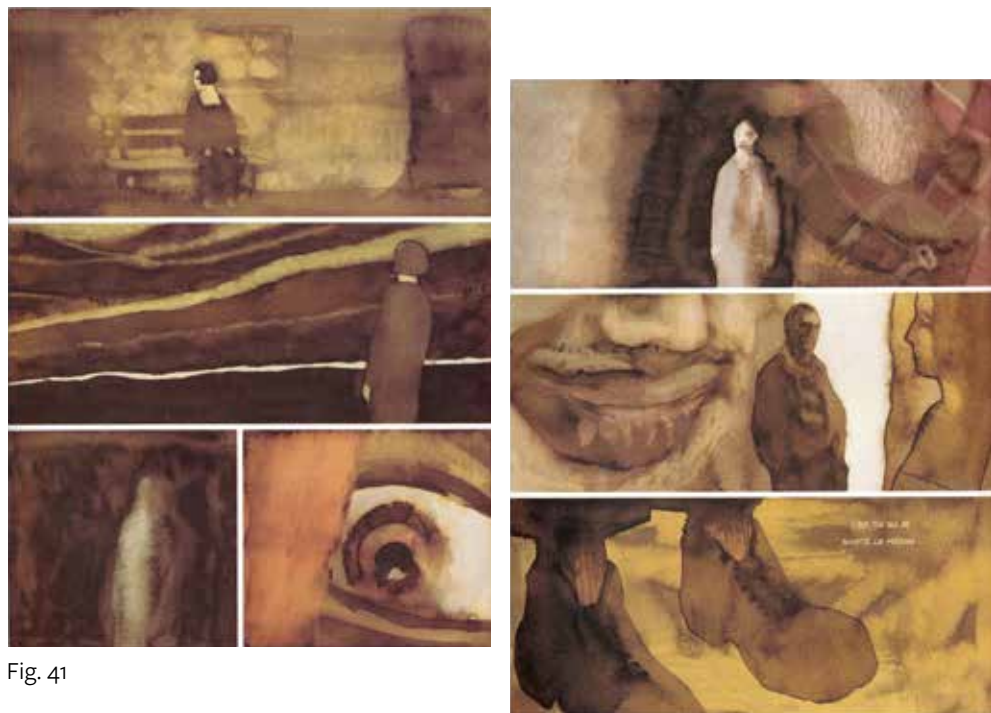


Fig. 41

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

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

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

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

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

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

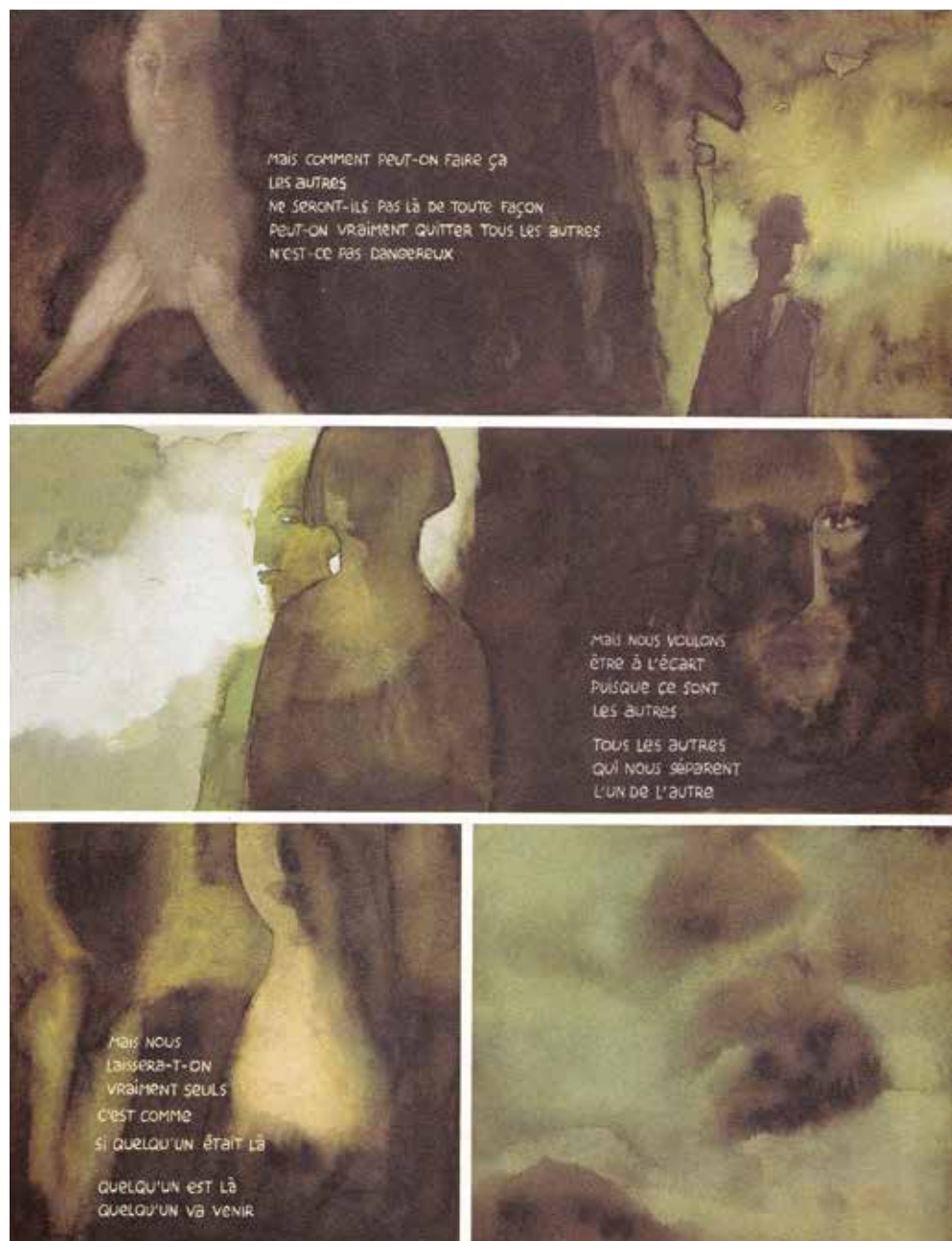


Fig. 42



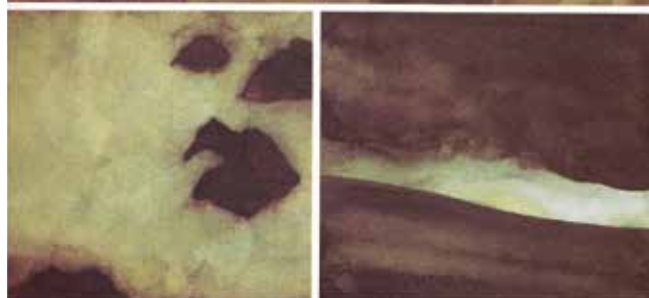


Fig. 43

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

## Reflections

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

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

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

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

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