

Discourse

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Bovil's *Fältskärens berättelser*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A Swedish comic about Swedish history

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

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

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

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

The exciting plot, the captivating style of writing, the magnificent historical scenes that masterfully come together in this family chronicle make such a fresh and vibrant impression even on the modern reader that one hardly believes it to be true that Zacharias Topelius wrote *Fältskärens berättelser* between 1853 and 1867.³⁹²

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

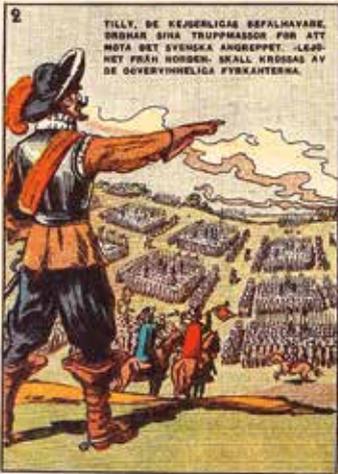
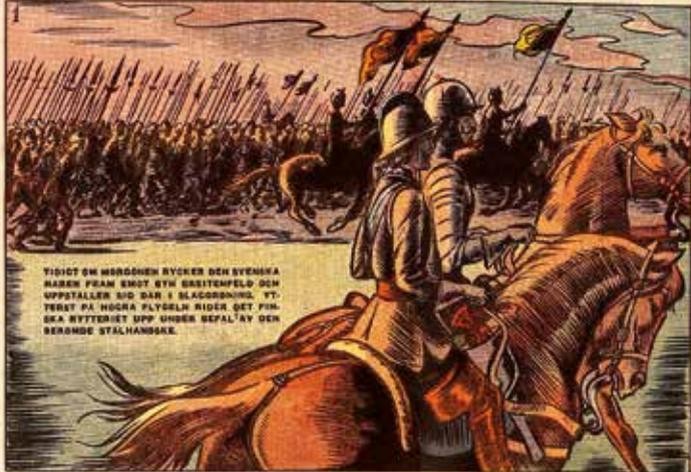
In addition to all social development and individual renewal, we need to read the same stories, see the same images and hear the same music over and over again in an effort to consolidate and revitalise our own cultural history and our own identity. And cultural icons contribute to this.⁴⁰⁸

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

Carl Larsson

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

SVENSK ORIGINALSERIE EFTER ZACHARIAS TOPELIUS' BERÖMDA ROMANVERK!

Teckn.: BOVIL
Text: KABESON

Fortsättning följer i nästa nummer.

Fig. 60

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



Fig. 61

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

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

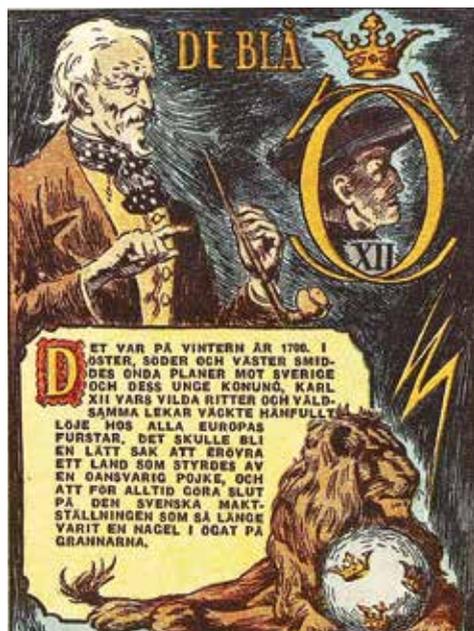
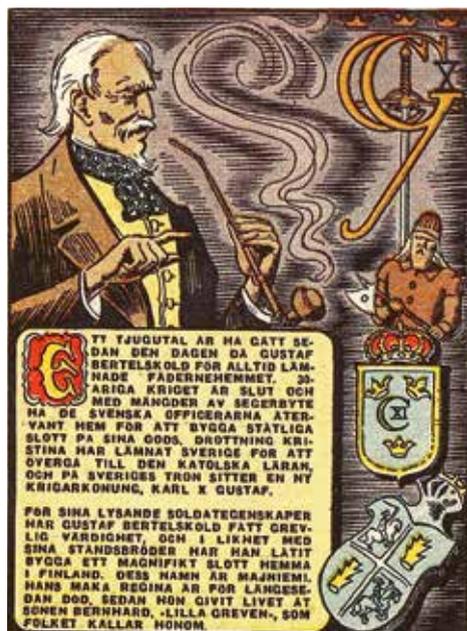


Fig. 62



Fig. 63

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

Gustaf Cederström

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

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

DISCOURSE



KARL XII HAD FALLIT. HAN KÄMBELERNA HÄLLEN VÄXA
VIG HANS SÄD, INOM DE ETT DET MÖRRA FÄLTSTREK AN
FÖRSLAGT. EMAN HÄR KONG. KONG. BORT PÅ DEN
SÖNDAGEN ETT HET TILGÅVST SEN NU AN AVSLUTAT DEN
KÄMBE MED SÄLLA ÅTERKÖPPT.



VÄGLED AV MÖRRA FÄLLOR TAGAR ARMEEN TILLBÄKA
MOT SVENSKA GRÄNSEN. DE TRÖDNA KÄMPARNA SÄR HJÄLL-
TRÖMNINGEN HAN EMELLAN SIG - DET IS GÖVTRÖMME
KÄLLT SOM ETT DÖVY SUG FRÅN MÖRDEVST VÄRLER EN
EN ANVÄLANDE SNÖSTORM.



I DEN FÖRSTA FÄLTHÖRAN ETT HAN EN HÖRRETT KÄMP-
GÖRSLAT SOM HÖRTRÖMME FÖRAN HAN TILL FÖR-
SÄTTA ANVÄLANDESNÄR. SUG PÅ SÄLLA LYTTER HAN
KÄMBE AV HAN SVENSKER DEN FÖRSTÖRRE SVÄNEN I SÖRA
KÄMBE



DEH MÄNNEN EN KÄMBELER SÖFTA BENTELSKOLA. HAN
HAN HÄRRENS SUG JÄMNLÄNDA SVENSKER SVENSK HAN-
SUG PÅ SÖLLA - SUG EN SVENSK TILL SVENSK SÄLLA HAN-
SUG SUG EN SUG SUG PÅ SUG SUG. HAN EN SVENSKEN
DEH TILL SVENSK SVENSK SVENSK I SVENSK. HAN
HAN SVENSK SVENSK.



INOM VÄRLER MÖRRETTA SUG HAN SVENSKER,
SUG SVENSKER SVENSKER. ETT HAN DET SVENSK HAN
HAN SVENSK SVENSK. DET HAN ATT
HAN SVENSK SVENSK SVENSK SVENSK I SVENSK SVENSK
SVENSK SVENSK.

Fig. 64a



VÄGLED AV MÖRRA FÄLLOR TAGAR ARMEEN TILLBÄKA
MOT SVENSKA GRÄNSEN. DE TRÖDNA KÄMPARNA SÄR HJÄLL-
TRÖMNINGEN HAN EMELLAN SIG - DET IS GÖVTRÖMME
KÄLLT SOM ETT DÖVY SUG FRÅN MÖRDEVST VÄRLER EN
EN ANVÄLANDE SNÖSTORM.



Fig. 64b

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

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

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

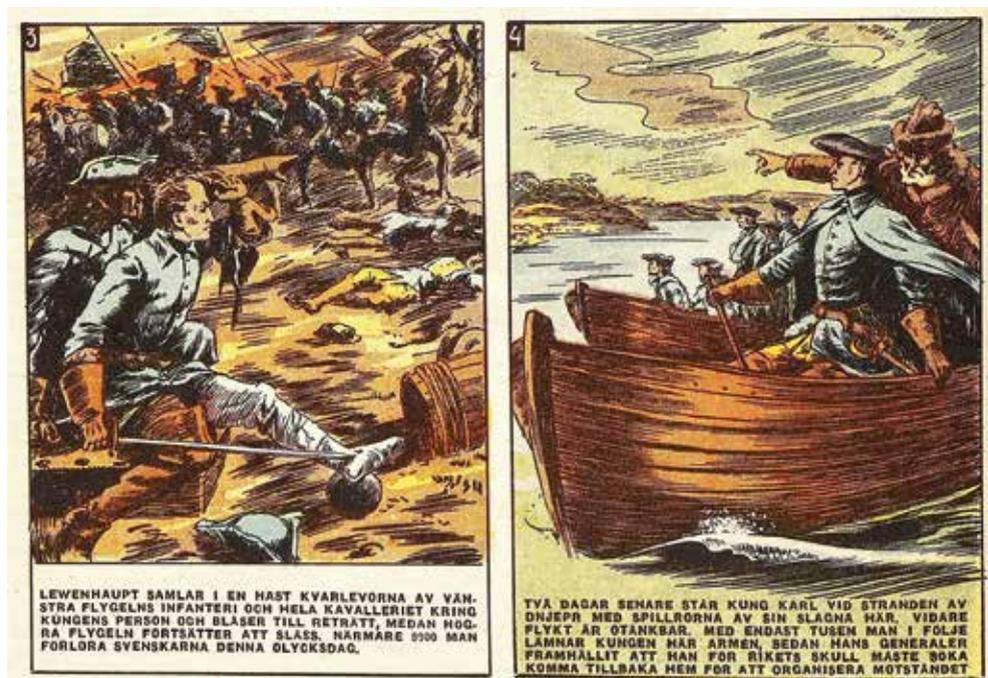


Fig. 65a



Fig. 65b



Fig. 66a



Fig. 66b

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

AFTERLIVES



Fig. 67a



Fig. 67b



Fig. 68a

Fig. 68b



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



Fig. 69a



Fig. 69b

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

Reflections

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

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

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

Cinzia Ghigliano's *Nora: Casa di bambola*

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

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

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

Second-wave Nora

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

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

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

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

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

Woman as decorative object

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

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

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

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



Fig. 70

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

Painted ladies

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

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

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

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



Fig. 72



Fig. 73a



Fig. 73b





Fig. 74a



Fig. 74b

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

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



Fig. 75a



Fig. 75b

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

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

Reflections

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

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

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