

Iconographic repertories in graphic novels. The reconstruction of identity in Emil Ferris' and Una's graphic novels

Repertorios iconográficos en la novela gráfica. La re-construcción de la identidad en Emil Ferris y Una

José-Manuel Trabado-Cabado^{1,a} 

¹ Universidad de León, Spain

✉ ^a Correspondent author: jmtrac@unileon.es

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Abstract

This paper aims at analyzing the different discursive strategies used to find a language to express traumatic feelings in comics. Attention is focused on Emile Ferris' *My Favourite Thing Is Monsters* and Una's *Becoming Unbecoming*. The analysis aims at analyzing the construction of iconographic repertories that visually shape the story conceived as a device to organise text and confer meaning to discourse. While Emil Ferris uses what we can call a sort of graphic *Koine* rooted in conventions taken from terror films and comics, Una creates a new graphic code to draw symbolic images valid only for that concrete context: she creates a graphic idiolect.

Keywords: Iconographic repertories; graphic novel; comics; trauma; emotional problems; violence; discourse analysis.

Resumen

Este artículo pretende estudiar las diferentes estrategias para encontrar un lenguaje que exprese sentimientos traumáticos. Se centra en la obra de Emile Ferris *Lo que más me gusta son los monstruos* y en *Una entre muchas* de Una. El análisis pretende estudiar la construcción de repertorios iconográficos que configuran visualmente la historia, concebidos como un dispositivo para organizar el texto y otorgarle significado al discurso. Mientras que Emil Ferris usa lo que podríamos denominar una especie de *Koiné* gráfica, enraizada en las convenciones de las películas y cómics de terror, Una crea un nuevo código gráfico para dibujar imágenes simbólicas, que son válidas solo para ese contexto: crea un idiolecto gráfico.

Palabras clave: Repertorios iconográficos; novela gráfica; cómics; trauma; problemas emocionales; violencia; análisis del discurso.



INTRODUCTION: THE ENRICHED READING OF THE TRAUMA STORY

Under the concept of the graphic novel, comics had the opportunity to free themselves from both the generic formulas borrowed from popular fiction and the tight restrictions imposed by the industry's pre-established formats, which dictated the space they had to tell their story. This liberation was given by the need to narratively confront a vital territory framed more often than not by a painful experience above all, which is often of a traumatic nature (Romero-Jódar, 2017; Orbán, 2020). Will Eisner disguised the loss of his daughter as fiction in *A Contract with God*. For his part, Art Spiegelman, conceived the extermination of the Nazi concentration camps as a narrative core for *Maus*. The story of this atrocity in a comic book was a profound shock due to the novelty of its subject matter and facilitated the incorporation of this language into the cultural circuits reserved for other fiction: it was a sign of the normalisation of a peripheral language. However, the sheer scale of the horror of this backdrop has sometimes failed to focus on the significance of the individual trauma of the perpetrator. At the heart of it all is the son's desolate vision of his mother's suicide; the bond of love and detachment from his father, the ghost of the brother he never knew. *Maus*, as canonical fiction within the comic turn, is also a reflection on loss, memory, the implosion of the family structure, all narrated through the sieve of the everyday. There is a historical trauma, but also an individual trauma that needs to be told through a new narrative rhythm and with a graphic discourse moulded to this strictly personal feeling. Similarly, other works sufficiently familiar to comic readers such as by Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* (Chute, 2010; Gilmore, 2011) or David B's *Ascension du Haut Mal* (Tabanchnick, 2011), can be understood in the same way. All of them strive to metabolise pain and make it narratable. A traumatic experience that puts the identity of the narrator in crisis lies in the core thereof. The creative response of all of them involves a reconstruction of the "I". What is particularly relevant in this reconstruction is the expressive tool it uses: the comic. In its capacity to articulate various codes (narrative, textual, iconographic), graphic narration offers a ductile expressive instrument that allows us to outline a story with nuances that were not easy to observe until then. Comic books brought to autobiographical stories born out of traumatic experiences the possibility of experiences that refer to an enriched reading where reading and looking are two complementary acts necessary for understanding and at the same time (Gilmore, 2001). The image as a vehicle of memory is closely linked to the traumatic experience. Whitlock (2006) has used the term "autographics" to account for this close relationship. On the other hand, the narrator is not only urged to narratively break down his "I" but also has the obligation to self-represent himself: to become a character that has to be drawn with an appearance (Trabado-Cabado, 2012). Thus the monolithic character of textual discourses anchored in the "I" gives way to a polyhedral and multimodal discourse in which the graphic and the textual act equally as powerful narrative generators. This wide range of constituent elements of the comic allows for a richer way of thinking about oneself, of telling one's experience and explaining oneself to others.

This paper precisely aims at exploring the idea of hypercodified discourse embodied in comics, by looking at a textual reading of two practically contemporary works: Emile Ferris' *My Favourite Thing Is Monsters*, published in 2018, and Una's *Becoming Unbecoming*, published in 2015. The fact that they were published in a short space of time and that both stories feature a teenage girl with the need to recount a traumatic event, allows us to establish a cross reading in order to see what strategies are put into practice when it

comes to giving voice to something that had been silenced. Trauma in both works not only operates on a personal level, affecting the narrator's identity, but also takes place on a family level, showing the implosion of human relations in the domestic sphere. The parallels between the two stories can be further enhanced by the fact that the trauma in both cases decorates the social scene by anchoring the life stories of both main characters to historical events: the death of Martin Luther King in April 1968 and the series of murders of young women that began in July 1975 in Yorkshire.

METHODOLOGIES BEYOND STORYTELLING. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF ICONOGRAPHIC REPERTOIRES

In order to delimit the singularity of the language used, both by Emil Ferris and Una, a parallel reading of both is necessary that examines the iconographic repertoires used. The aim is to problematise the nature of graphic narrative, which is far from a sequential arrangement of images with purely narrative values. Based on this iconographic perspective, a valid tool is created to account for the referential crisis of the image, which no longer only carries realistic values but also harbours a whole symbolic world, opening the doors to social criticism and the emotional expression of trauma. The construction of an iconographic repertoire also presupposes a coherent strategy in the arrangement of the images that goes beyond a causal argumentative logic and requires a collaborative attitude on the part of the reader, who must assign values to the images that go far beyond their merely referential function. The image will no longer support narrative only, a way of making the action visible, but it will necessarily become the visual container of a thought and an emotion.

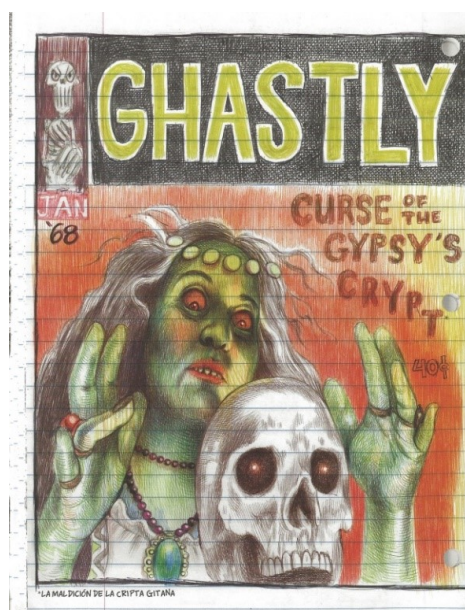
ICONOGRAPHIC REPERTOIRES IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE "I" AND ITS TRAUMAS.

Iconographic repertoire means the whole wealth of images and graphic thematic motifs of a symbolic nature associated with a certain style used by the authors to visually embody the story. This wealth of images inevitably establishes a dialogue with the stereotypes that have been shaping the previous tradition of comics. In fact, a first hypothesis could be drawn to establish an essential difference between the texts of both authors, which essentially concerns the link established with the previous iconographic tradition.

Emil Ferris uses imagery borrowed from pulp fiction, horror comics and Universal cinema to construct a personal universe based on the figure of the monster. So to speak, he makes use of a graphic *Koine* that can be easily identified by any regular comic reader¹. There is an appropriation of these styles and visual materials that are reread from a purely personal point of view. In a second movement, this communal graphic heritage becomes a singular and non-transferable language that serves to visualise the affective world of Karen, the young main character. Her self-portrayal as a werewolf is based on the figure of Larry Talbot when he played that character in the Universal film. The beginning of Karen's story shows the moment when the whole city seems to hear the howling of the beast they want to kill. The way she tells of her feeling of exclusion leads her to narrate herself under the narrative template of horror films. "Monster-consciousness" stems from the thought of knowing oneself to be strange in the normative gaze of others.² The howl of the main

character does not only bring purely argumentative references to the rhetoric of terror together, but also the formal expression of a barely concealed sexual awakening. This self-marginalisation related to her lesbianism leads to the creation of a “graphic self” anchored in the imaginary world of her favourite readings in which monsters were currency. Everything that emanates from Karen’s imagination and her emotional universe is expressed through this graphics imported from the monstrous. So much so that the whole story is punctuated by a series of apocryphal magazine covers, mimicking horror comics. The whole series of covers reproduced make up a calendar that runs from January to May ‘68. This calendar does not only bear witness to the passing of time, but it also reflects, under the form of visual pills, a skeleton of the story Karen is telling us: it is, in short, a second-degree narrative that synthesises what is happening but through the prism of the main character’s distorting gaze (figure 1). The monster does not only provide a rhetoric for self-telling and self-representation; it is also a language for understanding everything: a necessary intermediary to refer to reality. It does not play a minor role either: that of being a shield to protect oneself against the hostility of the other. This armour is, of course, constructed from the material of the imagination.

Figure 1. First of the horror comics covers to present the story that not only speaks to Karen’s tastes but builds a seconddegree narrative

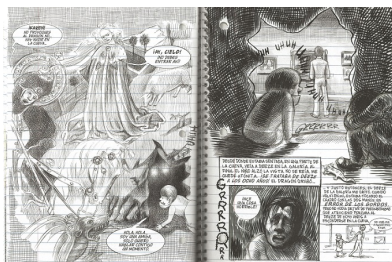


Despite the omnipresence of the monster, not all the graphic repertoire is generated from it. The spectrum of intertextual references expands to include the world of art and, more specifically, painting. If magazine covers appeared recurrently, references to paintings (in this case real ones, as opposed to magazine covers) are also commonplace and are of enormous importance in unravelling the most conflictive and hidden substrata of the plot. Not only do they speak of Karen’s fascination with a visual world that eliminates any segregation between high culture and mass culture, but something also that Bauman (2013) has described perfectly with the concept of liquid culture. They are seen as clues that lead Karen on her quest to find out what family secrets are being kept secret and who might have killed her neighbour Anka. Each painting shows and, at the same time, hides something. Every glance Karen casts on them probes into their secret in an act of understanding not only what the painting says but, above all, what the observer carries

within and does not dare to look at. The paintings somehow act like dreams in Freud's theory and open the doors to the subconscious, to what is known and, because it is painful, has been repressed. Each painting Karen contemplates can be understood as the visual sublimation of a traumatic experience.³ In this respect, it is worth focusing for a moment on two paintings that have an enormous impact on the plot and which are directly related to the figure of his brother Deeze. I am talking about are *The Temptation of Magdalene* by Jacob Jordaens and *Saint George Killing the Dragon* by Bernat Martorell.

Bernat Martorell's painting is interpreted in a personal way. In it Karen sees a transcript of her brother in the three main characters who are the concretisation of facets of Deeze's personality. The princess alludes to Deeze's artistic side; the knight symbolises her brother's protective side and the dragon is directly related to her brother's violent character: "Sometimes, as mama says 'The Devil gets into Deeze'. A few times Deeze has even lost his temper with Mamma and me. It's a blind rage –he sort of loses sight of how hurtful he gets. Afterwards It's 'knight' part of Deeze that apologizes and I can tell that Deeze is furious with himself, as he stabs the dragon back into its lair" (s.p). Karen thus finds another graphic reference to understand part of her environment. Whereas the pulp world of monsters offered a rhetorical template for expressing their emotions, painting offers a kind of coded language that serves to penetrate familiar secrets. It is a discovery for the character; for us, as readers, these paintings function as a narrative relay. In this case the painting shows us her brother's bipolar disorder, which can become extremely violent, through Karen's interpretation. This creates an unsettling connection to family secrets and the mysterious death of Anka, the neighbour. However, the story is not told openly but surreptitiously, using the support of another plastic language - painting - which complements and relieves the language of the comic itself. By inserting these pictorial references and assigning them a cardinal function in the course of the story, the painting changes its essence. The static image becomes a story and this is achieved through the rupture between fiction and reality. Karen will enter the painting to ask the dragon what secret it is protecting. She will enter the cave ignoring the warning of the other characters in the picture. Once inside, he will look around the museum hall and find his brother Deeze, turned into an eight-year-old boy who is crying because he has committed a horrible act. This is the end of this imaginary journey into the painting. This journey to the painting has a dual narrative function: on the one hand, it will help in the process of creating a series of clues with which Karen will gradually assemble the family puzzle and, on the other, it generates a narrative tension that keeps the reader's interest alive in finding out what has happened, what has been silenced (figure 2).

Figure 2. Double page in which Karen enters the painting *Saint George Killing the Dragon*, by Bernat Martorell. There he meets his eight-year-old brother Deeze, the dragon's reflection, who tells him a secret.



If Martorell’s painting is an X-ray of Deeze, Jordaens’ painting, *The Temptation of Magdalene*, is also of structural importance. The strategy is repeated again. By beholding it together with her friend Franklin, Karen will once again enter the world represented by the painting. She is now keen to find out about the death of her neighbour Anka (figure 3). This painting treasures something hidden that is already hinted at the beginning of the story when Karen says goodbye to her neighbour Anka, as she did every day when she left for school. As she watches her from behind the window, the last time she sees her alive, the painting *The Temptation of Magdalene* comes to mind. It is not so much a Mary Magdalene/Anka identification as the need to see what figure is hidden in the darkness of the painting and what relation it has to Anka’s death:

I now can ‘get it out of my head that there was some with Anka... a shadow, or maybe it was... like she was waiting for something or someone... and there was a kind of strange sort of... dead thing about her. She reminded me of this FREAKY PAINTING in the museum. Not that Anka looked or looked or acted like the Magdalene holding a skull in her lap... No.... It was something about darkness... The shadows that hung heavy above them both. It made me smell the damp odor of the basement... the secrets of bones and other HIDDEN THINGS. I should mention that this seeing /smelling thing happens a lot to me. I’ve been learned to pay attention to it. I sense that there is something else in that painting that I need to see, something I’ve forgotten... A CLUE

Figure 3. Doublepage spread in which they contemplate the painting *The Temptation of Magdalene* by Jacob Jordaens Karen will also enter it to discover something that was hidden in her subconscious



After entering the world of the painting, she will ask the devil if he knows who killed her neighbour. The devil replies that he already knows: “It’s perfectly normal to bury a thing that you’d rather not admit... we-in my profession- definitely encourage humans to keep secrets from themselves. Nothing makes you sicker faster than that!” Karen reacts by wondering if it could have been Deeze who killed Anka or even-and now the devil helps her-by saying “ Can´t even say ... mama... can you, honey?” The content of the paintings under Karen’s gaze is disturbing. They can be soon as vestiges of a traumatic experience turned into a symbolic ruin. Opposite to self-inflicted oblivion, painting awakens memories. If the monsters helped Karen to define herself, the devil and the dragon in these paintings are directly related to the familiar hell and have the function that has always been assigned to the infernal powers: knowledge.

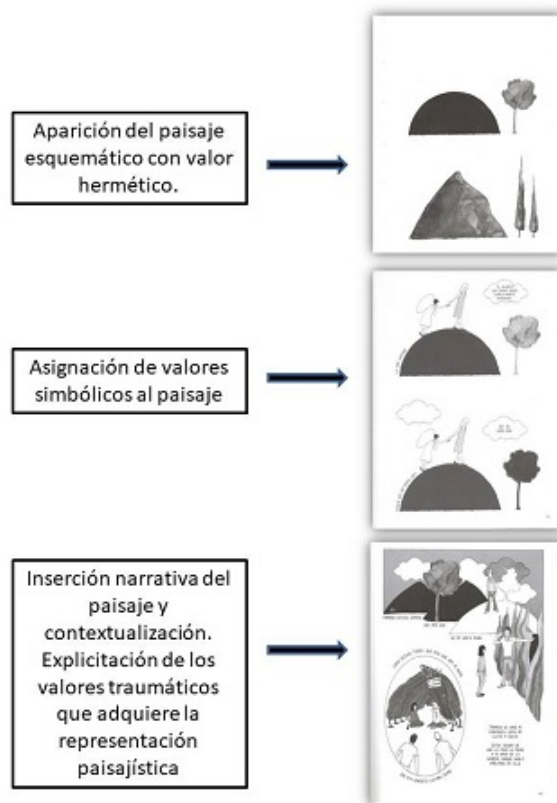
It seems clear, then, that there are two alternating registers in the iconographic repertoire of Ferris’s work, one derived from pulp culture and the other from painting. Each has its own clearly defined function and role. References to comic book covers have to do with an expressive function, while the paintings contemplated by Karen harbour a repressive function. This creates a dialectic between the need to be and the pain of silence. On closer examination, these iconographic repertoires still perform other functions, of a much more subtle nature but of enormous constructive effectiveness. In *My Favourite*

Thing Is Monsters, not only does Karen's story unfold, but we also witness Anka's own retrospective account of her life, which we learn about when Karen finds and listens to cassettes in which her neighbour tells a journalist about her life in Nazi Germany and how she was sold by her mother to a brothel to satisfy the paedophile appetites of certain clients from the upper classes. Two stories are thus intertwined. Ferris manages to delimit them by inserting those horror comic book covers. They are a graphic indicator that we leave Anka's story in the past and return to Karen's story in the present. In a way, some of these covers function as graphic shifters: cues that function as interchangers of narrative levels.

If we compare the strategy used in *My Favourite Thing Is Monsters* and confront it with *Becoming Unbecoming*, we see a radically different approach. While Emil Ferris made use of this tradition of pulp and artistic culture to appropriate and transform it for very personal ends, Una created her own symbolic language, which is non-transferable and which is not based on the usual conventions or styles of comics. The interpretative behaviour of the reading will consequently be of a very different nature. Una's iconography generates an initial bewilderment in the reader, who has to construct a grammar *ex professo* to understand the message.

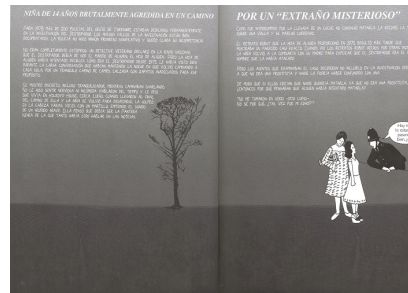
In *Becoming Unbecoming*, the recurrent appearance of certain images that make up a landscape composed of a mountain and some trees is striking in its iconographic repertoire. It is a schematic landscape that, placed in the opening pages, leaves the reader without a compass; the reader does not know how to understand it because it has been decontextualised. In his graphics, he clearly seeks a primitive language that fits perfectly with the idea of a style associated with children's drawing. This schematism can also be related to the author's need to use images as a tool not only to tell stories but also to convey ideas: the transmission of information is more efficient if we use impoverished images that do not distract attention. A few pages further on, and continuing with the semantic evolution of the landscape, we see the figure of Una with her mother climbing that mountain and carrying a bundle on her back, which is a wordless comic sketch. It talks precisely about the traumatic episode she suffered when she was raped as a child. The text already offers us a semantic anchorage in which this hitherto hermetic landscape is situated. However, this landscape is not conditioned by any realistic need to construct a space to place the story. It is a state of mind associated with a traumatic experience. It is also a symbol that will be repeated as a graphic leitmotif, a way of constructing coherence within the story that we can relate to Groensteen's concept of braiding (2011, p. 173-186). At a certain point, landscape does have a function related to the construction of space (Una, 2015, p. 35). At that moment, a suture is produced between the symbolic image and the narrative argument. Una then remembers the moment when Damian convinced her to take her away to a secluded place. In this way, an inertia can be observed in which the same image initially starts from the hermetic, moves to the symbolic and is explained in the narrative (figure 4).

Figure 4. Three pages of *Becoming Unbecoming* in which the evolution of an iconographic motif is shown from an initial hermeticism through a symbolic value to an anchorage in the narrative context that explains its semantic values



It is not only the landscape that will be reproduced under these graphic registers of a schematic nature. There will be another insistent graphic motif related to it, far more realistic in its execution, thus creating a thematic-symbolic link with this other landscape, but at the same time creating a contrast with it in its style. Its appearance in the story is linked to the series of violent deaths caused by the so-called Yorkshire Ripper. A solitary tree appears on an empty stage. This landscape element takes place when news of a brutal assault on a 14-year-old girl who is not taken seriously by the police is reported (Una, 2015, pp. 30-31) (figure 5). The solitary tree framed in a barren landscape is thus imbued with symbolic values: loneliness, helplessness, insecurity as emotions shape the content of this image and define it indirectly from a semantic point of view. On other occasions, this scenographic element is recovered, such as the time when the aggressor of women approaches one of his victims to make some kind of sexual proposition (Una, 2015, pp. 62-63). At this point it is possible to see a greater closeness between the use of the image and its possible naturalisation as a scenographic use within the story. This insertion within the story, as a scenographic element, fully justified by its narrative function, does not discard the symbolic value but complements, reinforces and explains it.

Figure 5. Double page of *Becoming Unbecoming* in which the landscape acquires symbolic values related to the attack on women in Yorkshire. It has a more realistic register



It could be said that Una creates a language of her own to translate the violence exercised against women through a series of landscapes. This use of the same landscape element in two stories serves to enhance the link between Una's personal story of being raped as a teenager and the series of women violently assaulted and murdered by the Yorkshire Ripper. They are two sides of the same coin but presented from a different position. Una's story has to do with a personal explanation based on emotions: it is a heartfelt story; the story of the other assaults is documented with press clippings and responds not so much to that personal story, but to what would be a more journalistic reportage. This story is told from a more objective perspective, supported by data and a relevant bibliography. It is precisely this different discursive nature that justifies the use of a different graphic style. The schematic landscape could thus be related to a subjective and emotional vision that characterises Una's story. This is graphically opposed to the more realistic landscape that identifies the story of assaults on other women in Yorkshire. This double stylistic realisation is in keeping with the type of story in which it appears. It is a different perspective on the same problem: violence against women. The author herself is responsible for showing us these two achievements together, accompanied by a message that is enlightening if this interpretation is accepted: "Hindsight is a marvellous thing" (Una, 2015, pp. 46-47) (figure 6).

Figure 6. Double page spread of *Becoming Unbecoming*, alternating between two landscape registers that speak of Una's emotional state (left) and of violence against women in Yorkshire (right).



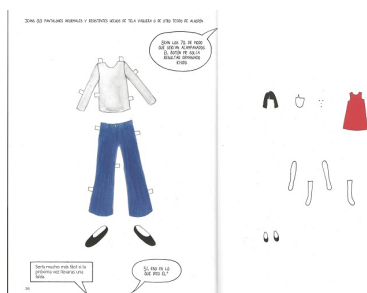
This use of landscape from a double perspective can be understood as an identical procedure. In both cases there is a narrative use of these scenographic elements that are linked to with traumatic moments in which there is a violent act. This spatial element is decontextualised and isolated from the narrative chain to which it belongs. This way, images enhance their symbolic values that justify their insistent repetition throughout the story. They thus create a form of graphic coherence achieved by the repetition of the same element, but also semantic coherence because they create links between subplots and

develop values that go beyond their original function, which was to locate the story. These landscapes first appear out of context and, later, their value becomes clear when the reader sees them conveniently placed within the plot. Therefore, strangeness is provoked and warns us as readers of the high symbolic potential of each image. This way of understanding the image is more complex than in traditional comics, as its function goes beyond the fact of visually specifying the development of the action to suggest, also, a form of thought. The image is problematised in its references because the theme it develops demands greater complexity in its functioning.

One generates a very special idiolect to construct an iconographic repertoire that was capable of housing the story of a traumatic experience, both from a collective and a purely individual point of view. Through this interweaving of personal trauma with a social problem, the author finds an explanation of a cathartic nature to understand what happened to her. Similarly, she manages to ensure that her painful experience of rape can be understood, within a more general framework, as a symptom of a sick society that chooses not to confront a problem. However, this dual function - self-understanding and explaining to society what is going on - is not only based on this hermetic use of certain images that I have characterised here as a graphic idiolect. On other occasions she uses iconographic procedures that could be understood as more conventional.

From this point of view, other images in this iconographic repertoire are directly related to forms of self-representation. While Emil Ferris used the monster inherited from the comics tradition, Una uses two possible resources. On the one hand, there is the reference to the clothes of the cut-out paper dolls. This procedure is of great interest because under this strategy the author manages to project the ideology of how men and society are generating an imaginary of what women in general and, more specifically, girls should be in order to meet their needs. When the author refers to Damian's words after he abused her: "It would be a lot easier if next time you wore a skirt" defines how she should be dressed to please the male action. This generates a dialectical process of how she was dressed and how these cut-out dolls are dressed. (Una, 2015, pp. 33 and 36). Precisely, the main character had been graphically represented as a cut-out doll playing the guitar. This creates an iconic code of great functional versatility. Young Una sees herself as a doll whose clothes can be changed at the pleasure of someone who uses her for his amusement. In a way it functions as a metaphor, since Una generates a graphic avatar that is the main character of the story, which is also, in its own way, a paper doll. She even explicitly insists on this convention when he dismantles its components and fragments the graphic representation of this avatar so that it can be seen as a doll: hair, face, dress, limbs. This drawing functions as a metalanguage: the author shows the mechano of graphic pieces that constitute her graphic representation but, also from an emotional point of view, she gives us an image of how her "I" fragments and her identity enter into crisis. (Una, 2015, p. 39) (figure 7). Behind this graphic decomposition there is a new recomposition of the graphic "I" that makes use of another procedure: the metamorphosis of a young teenage girl that is narrated through the transformation of a larva into a flying insect whose wings do not work. From that moment on, it will be common to see Una's graphic avatar endowed with these wings with which she tries to take flight, metaphorically speaking.

Figure 7. Two pages of *Becoming Unbecoming* in which through the idea of the cutout doll we talk about the identity of women and the imposing vision that is imposed on them through the way they dress



When Una constructs an image in which her graphic avatar is seen walking with shrunken wings through the landscape that encoded her emotional pain (Una, 2015, p. 76), a kind of amalgamation of the different codes that make up the iconographic repertoire is produced. These images concentrate a great semantic load due to a slow process of sedimentation that creates layers of meaning that the reader can decode as if it were a geological cut.

CONCLUSIONS

After what has been seen in these pages, it can be said that both Emile Ferris and Una create a reticulation of images that provide a symbolic wealth of enormous magnitude. In doing so, they go beyond the realistic referentiality of part of the comic tradition and do so in response to an expressive need. The graphic novel had carved out intimate territories in which pain and trauma sought an adequate visual manifestation, which could not be confined to traditional comic forms of representation. The “I” lies at the core of the narrative, but within the graphic narrative it is not enough to state it: it has to be represented. It is then that a spectrum of graphic possibilities emerges that serve to give notice of this tormented “I” that expands into a multitude of visual strategies. This emanation of graphic motifs associated with trauma creates what I have called an “iconographic repertoire”, a concept somewhat akin to what might be an “iconographic programme” whereby works of art generate a message through a narrative made up of images. Emile Ferris and Una present two models of iconographic construction: Ferris starts from the fusion and appropriation of the traditions of pulp narrative and art, while Una generates her own iconographic grammar modelled on infographic elements typical of journalistic reportage; the landscapes in which the action is set are altered and symbolically tinged with pain to turn them into icons: this schematisation of the image shows how the image alters its functional regime in the field of the graphic novel. These new uses of the image, which is positioned close to a hermeticism that demands constant interpretative work, are perfect for bearing witness to this need to communicate the silenced, to bring the hidden to light. Even with such different proposals, Emil Ferris and Una face the challenge of recounting their traumatic experience and this fact leads them to share an image that is very significant: their main characters carry a text balloon on their backs, which now becomes a heavy burden. As for In Karen, you see the faces of her colleagues insulting her; as for Una, it is a mute balloon. In a perfect synthesis of how

graphic language translates “that symbolic weight” into a shared metaphor (figure 8) that makes legible the pain hidden in the bedrooms of adolescence.

Figure 8. Page taken from *My Favourite Thing Is Monsters* (left) and *Becoming Unbecoming* (right). Both share the metaphor of carrying a burden represented in the form of a text balloon. One contains the insults of colleagues and the other silence.



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Notes

¹ This graphic *Koine* is facilitated by belonging to a common tradition: the American comic book drew from precisely three sources: animated films, newspaper strips and pulp magazines. (Lopes, 2009: 2-5). See also Gerard Jones (2005: 30-39). For the monsters of Universal and Hollywood cinema, see the text by Quim Casas, 2010).

² Charlie Fox's words are interesting when he explains the function of the monster in his autobiographical construction: "Even as a kid I hated the autobiographical and I was always reprimanded because in class I drew myself as if I were a vampire, a werewolf or a witch" (2017:24). And he continues: "gothic and horror fiction are the forms to which we turn to give vent to the fear we feel of our bodies being deformed or infected by strange beings" (2017:26). For an overview of the sexual implications of the figure of the monster, I refer to the work of Atilio Rubino, Facundo Saxe and Silvina Sánchez (2021).

³ The link of painting to a traumatic experience is something that lies at the core in other comics such as Catherine Meurisse's *Lightness* and Jimmy Liao's picture book, *Starry Starry Night* (Flórez, 2020).