

# THE VICTORIAN ROOTS OF THE GRAPHIC NOVEL

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## INTRODUCTION

Graphic novels have become an increasingly important part of America's literary culture.

Because of their similarity to comic books, graphic novels are sometimes mistaken as juvenile – only geared toward people who either cannot or will not read “real” novels.

There is often a strict divide between the “higher” literary world of Dr. Jekyll and Ivanhoe and Elizabeth Bennet, and the “lower” world of graphic novels. It seems that readers of one genre are unlikely to read the other.

The purpose of this project is to build a bridge between both worlds by showing that the graphic novel has its roots in the Victorian-era serialized novel. The question this project answers is:

In their publication, subject matter, and art, what are the parallels between the Victorian-era serialized novel and the graphic novel, and how is the graphic novel a logical descendent of the Victorian-era serialized novel?



DETAIL FROM TRAJAN'S COLUMN  
SOURCE: [HTTPS://WWW.TRAJANS-COLUMN.ORG/?FLAGALLERY=TRAJANS-COLUMN-SCENES-XXII-XLV-22-45](https://www.trajans-column.org/?FLAGALLERY=TRAJANS-COLUMN-SCENES-XXII-XLV-22-45)

## LITERATURE REVIEW

- Trajan's Column, an ancient monument in Rome, is one of the fundamental artifacts of visual narrative (Ulrich). Examining photographs of the scenes carved into the column will establish the groundwork for the study of graphic narrative.
- The Bayeux Museum website along with a full video explanation of the Bayeux Tapestry's narrative provide important historical information on the Bayeux Tapestry. The Bayeux Tapestry continues to develop the form of visual narrative, implementing an early form of creating independent frames for scenes (Beige, Bayeux).
- David Perdue's website and the Victoria and Albert Museum website provide information on Charles Dickens' illustrators. Dickens was one of the most popular writers of the Victorian period, so his work is representative of the era.<sup>4,5</sup>
- Camus establishes the definition of a graphic novel (versus a comic book). (Camus)
- Halsell and Vandermeersche & Soetaert establish that the graphic novel genre often draws on themes from Victorian era, and borrows characters from them. (Halsell, Vandermeersche & Soetaert)

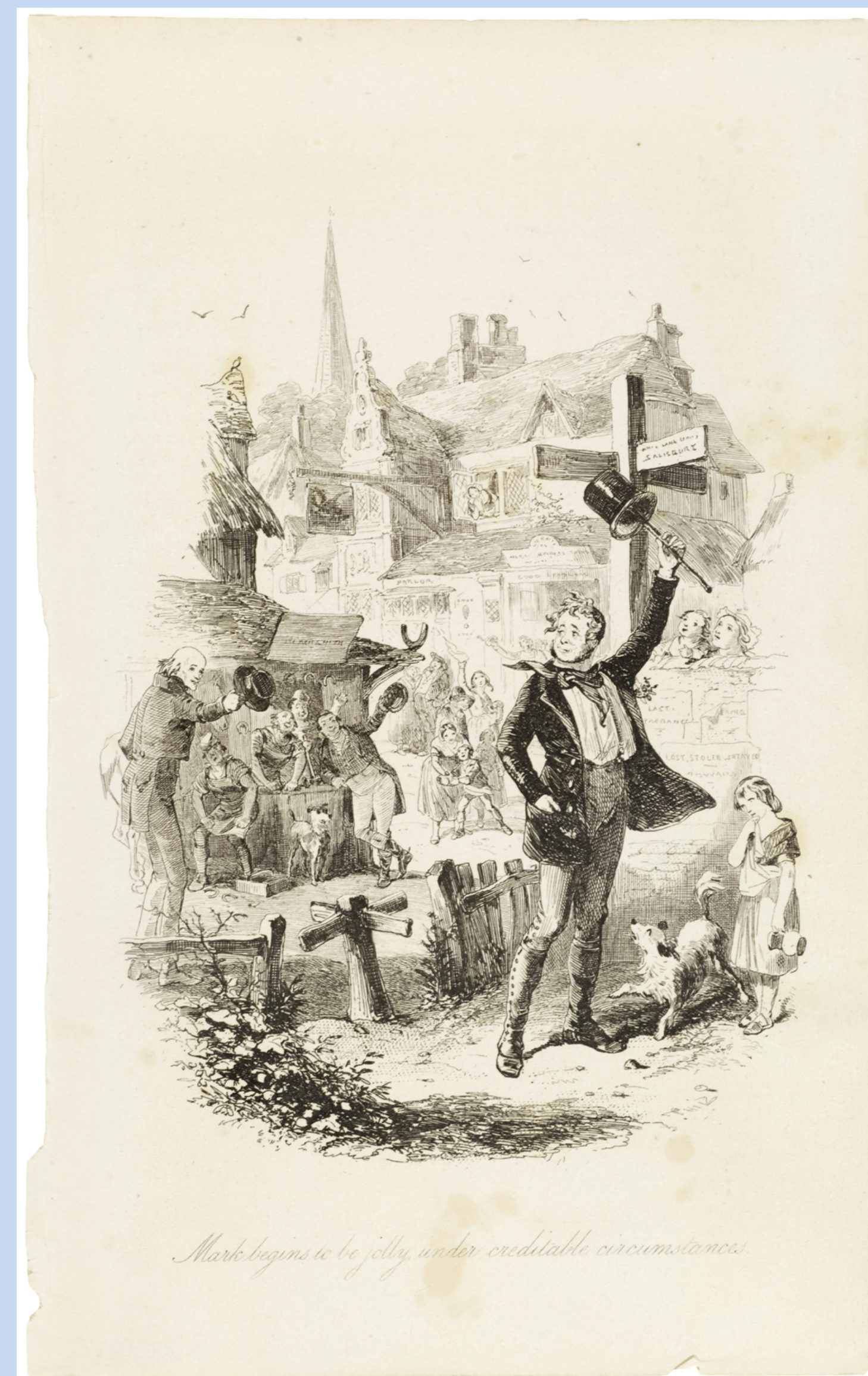
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## METHODS

This project takes a qualitative research approach. My materials will be both primary and secondary sources. They will include:

- Internet archives of photographed artifacts
  - Trajan's Column
  - Bayeux Tapestry
  - Victorian literature illustrations
  - Graphic novel illustrations
- Peer-reviewed scholarly articles
- Original sources
  - Victorian-era novels
  - Graphic novels



An illustration for Charles Dickens' *Martin Chuzzlewit*.  
<http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/i/illustrations-for-dickens-novels/>

The research will be broken into three areas:

- 1) Trajan's Column and the Bayeux Tapestry: Establishing Precedent for Graphic Narrative
- 2) The Victorian Serialized Novel: Themes, Structure, and Illustration
- 3) The Graphic Novel
  - Distinctions from Comics
  - Similarities to Victorian literature
  - Continuation of Victorian themes

The research intends to establish a logical historical and thematic link between the Victorian serialized novel and the graphic novel, and publish it in the form of either a research paper or a website.

## SIGNIFICANCE

This study will help to ground the graphic novel in the canon of literature, both historically and thematically. It will show that in both art and the writing, graphic novels follow and modify longstanding narrative cues. Additionally, it will show that the themes and structural constraints of the Victorian serialized novel carry over into the graphic novel. Perhaps most importantly, this study may help people realize that “classics” and graphic novels are not mutually exclusionary, and introduce readers of both genres to new areas of interest.



An illustration from Alan Moore's *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*. <https://html-f.scribdassets.com/1ew6qu4zk5d2tlc/images/3-ab7682d053.jpg>

## SOURCES

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Detail from the Bayeux Tapestry. <https://www.bayeuxmuseum.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Bayeux-recit-tapisserie-bayeux-museum-1-800x580>.

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