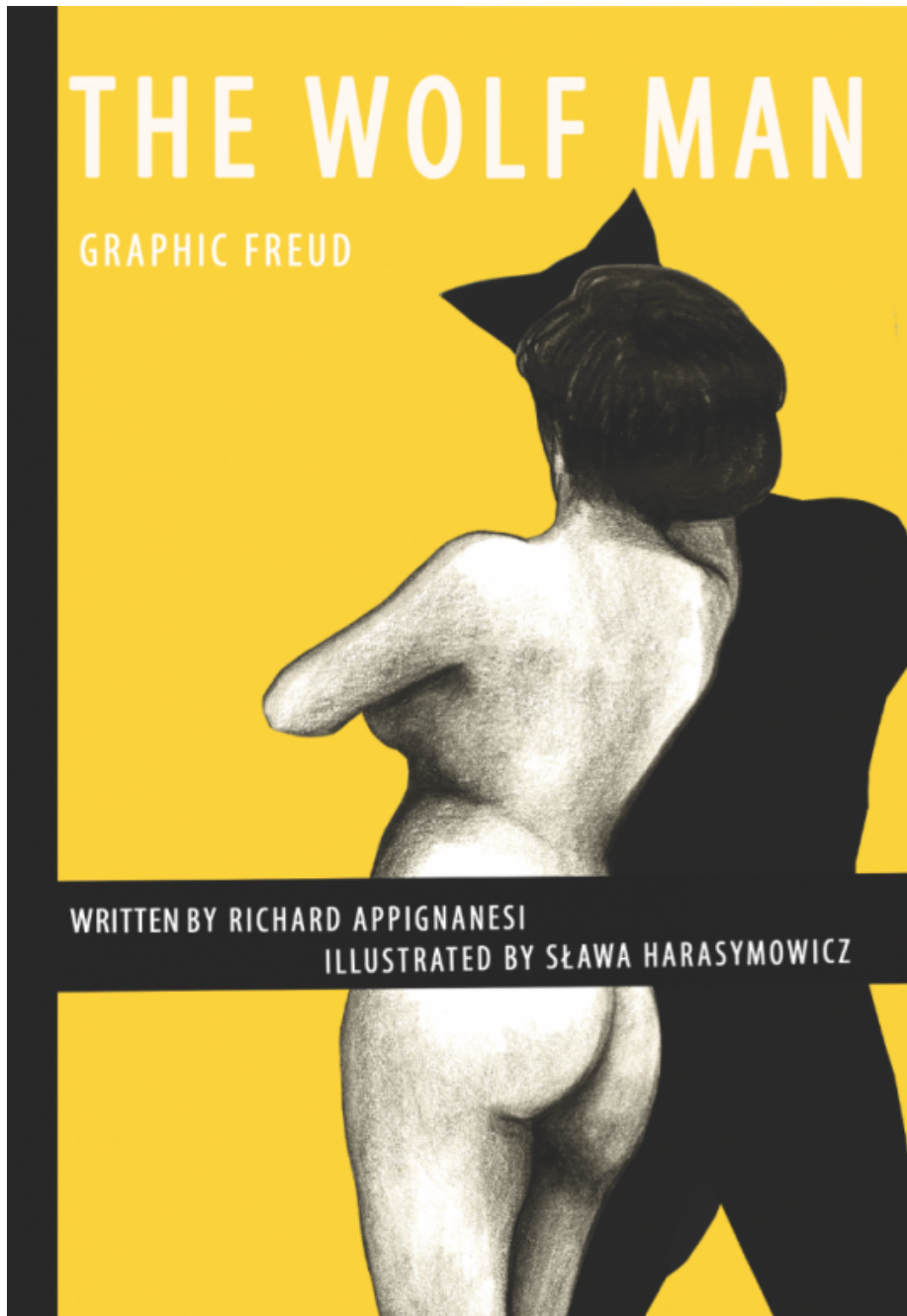


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The Wolf Man

By Richard Bruton

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By Richard Appignanesi and Slawa Harasymowicz
SelfMadeHero



We're back to Vienna in 1910 here, with Europe on the brink of war and revolution in the air. Against this backdrop young Russian aristocrat Sergei Pankejeff comes to Sigmund Freud to unravel his troubled life, depression, and crippling neurosis.

Freud's analysis of the Russian focused on the childhood dream of a pack of white wolves that inhabited the tree outside his bedroom window. The Wolf Man was born, Freud's analysis and subsequent case history cemented his place in psychiatry, as the Wolf Man's case, amongst others, allowed Freud to develop his core theories of psychosexual development and transference. But as you'll find out in this graphic novel adaptation of Freud's case history, all of Freud's analysis, all the years of treatment for Pankejeff, really did little to alleviate the Russian's struggles with his inner turmoil. Against the details of the treatment, the world plays out two world wars, a revolution stripping Pankejeff of his privileged status and significant familial riches, and the failing health of Freud.

Appignanesi describes Freud's case history as "*frankly a mess*", and goes on to talk of giving it more narrative coherence, yet leaving the ambiguities and uncertainties in place to allow us to make up our own minds. Unfortunately, nothing in here really worked for me, and although this adaptation may illuminate some of Freud's theories and techniques, it doesn't do it in any way that I found engrossing or enjoyable, and frankly, it's creating all sorts of new mess.



This is the sort of book that lends itself to scholarly analysis, referential words talking of the importance of the work, the essential position it holds in Freud's legacy. The Wolf Man was one of the most important cases in Freud's career, described as a "*founding text of modern psychoanalysis*".

But a scholarly paper does not necessarily an enthralling and entertaining read make. And to adapt something like this into a graphic novel adds another set of problems onto the work.

It's another one of those where I find myself wondering if I've perhaps missed something. But let's call a spade a spade, or to alter W.S. Maugham's words, let's call a spade a bloody shovel. It lost my attention fairly early on and struggled to get it back. Perhaps it's simply my relative disinterest in the subject matter, perhaps it's a problem with Appignanesi creating narrative coherence by giving us a dry, reportage chronology of the case, a list of events in Freud's life, Pankejeff's life, and the cultural and historical events of the time mentioned in the background.



Perhaps it has something to do with the art, which just felt pretty unsatisfying to my eye. Harasymowicz says, '*The greatest challenge in depicting Freud's story visually was to create a narrative of reality, dream memory and fact, which looks like it is just about to fall apart, yet, somehow, doesn't and is quite seductive – like the Wolf Man in his state of mind.*'

And sadly, that page of the wolves is perhaps the most impressive you get. The rest of it is simply too static, a montage of reported moments, of individual images one after another rather than sequential art. Occasionally these snapshots can be pretty and attractive, but not too often connected well enough to make good comics.

I'd really have liked to have been able to say good things about The Wolf Man, as it expands comics into another venue, another sub-genre, and that's always a good thing. Sadly, not here though, there's just nothing that appealed beyond the initial concept.