



The Graphic Canon, Vol. 3: From Heart of Darkness to Hemingway to Infinite Jest

Russ Kick (Editor) , Various (Contributors)

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The classic literary canon meets the comics artists, illustrators, and other artists who have remade reading in Russ Kick's magisterial, three-volume, full-color *The Graphic Canon*, volumes 1, 2, and 3.

Volume 3 brings to life the literature of the end of the 20th century and the start of the 21st, including a Sherlock Holmes mystery, an H.G. Wells story, an illustrated guide to the Beat writers, a one-act play from Zora Neale Hurston, a disturbing meditation on *Naked Lunch*, Rilke's soul-stirring *Letters to a Young Poet*, Anaïs Nin's diaries, the visions of Black Elk, the heroin classic *The Man With the Golden Arm* (published four years before William Burroughs' *Junky*), and the postmodernism of Thomas Pynchon, David Foster Wallace, Kathy Acker, Raymond Carver, and Donald Barthelme.

The towering works of modernism are here--T.S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" and "The Waste Land," Yeats's "The Second Coming" done as a magazine spread, *Heart of Darkness*, stories from Kafka, *The Voyage Out* by Virginia Woolf, James Joyce's masterpiece, *Ulysses*, and his short story "Araby" from *Dubliners*, rare early work from Faulkner and Hemingway (by artists who have drawn for Marvel), and poems by Gertrude Stein and Edna St. Vincent Millay.

You'll also find original comic versions of short stories by W. Somerset Maugham, Flannery O'Connor, and Saki (manga style), plus adaptations of *Lolita* (and everyone said it couldn't be done!), *The Age of Innocence*, *Siddhartha* and *Steppenwolf* by Hermann Hesse, "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" by Langston Hughes, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, *Last Exit to Brooklyn*, J.G. Ballard's *Crash*, and photo-dioramas for *Animal Farm* and *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. Feast your eyes on new full-page illustrations for *1984*, *Brave New World*, *Waiting for Godot*, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, *The Bell Jar*, *On the Road*, *Lord of the Flies*, *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, and three Borges stories.

Robert Crumb's rarely seen adaptation of *Nausea* captures Sartre's existential dread. Dame Darcy illustrates Cormac McCarthy's masterpiece, *Blood Meridian*, universally considered one of the most brutal novels ever written and long regarded as unfilmable by Hollywood. Tara Seibel, the only female artist involved with the Harvey Pekar Project, turns in an exquisite series of illustrations for *The Great Gatsby*. And then there's the moment we've been waiting for: the first graphic adaptation from Kurt Vonnegut's masterwork, *Slaughterhouse-Five*. Among many other gems.

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Details

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From Reader Review The Graphic Canon, Vol. 3: From Heart of Darkness to Hemingway to Infinite Jest for online ebook

Paul Bryant says

"an encyclopedia of ways to merge images and text"

This enormous book is a hubristic folly which is hard to love but impossible not to admire.

FOLLY :

a costly and foolish undertaking; unwise investment or expenditure; a whimsical or extravagant and often useless structure built to serve as a conversation piece, lend interest to a view, etc.

This is the third volume of a gigantic undertaking which, in its editor's words

Was always meant as an art project, part of the ages-old tradition of visual artists using classic works of literature as their springboard... It turned into a lot more – a survey of Western literature (with some Asian and indigenous works represented) , an encyclopedia of ways to merge images and text, a showcase for some of the best comics artists...

So what you get is a one page (sometimes one paragraph) summary of the author of the work to be illustrated, a discussion of the work itself, its position in the canon, the reasons why the artist chose this particular work, and a short précis of the artist. That's a hell of a lot to cram into a page (or a paragraph).

Then you get the illustration. This might be *one page only* -

here's 1984:

or up to 12 pages.

What is this canon anyway? Who sez? It's the usual problem, same as that encountered by the notorious 1001 Books You Must Read Before You Have Dinner. Russ Kick's version includes short stories, poems, essays, plays, Freud, Colette, Sartre, diaries and a song ("Strange Fruit"), along with the usual-suspect novels. A real supermarket dash of the written word. So the format of this book means that Rudyard Kipling's repulsive poem "If..." gets 6 pages, and *Infinite Jest* gets – 6 pages.

Some entries try to graphic-novelise the whole work, here's an example :

- the ones for short stories do that especially. Many choose one "significant" scene from a novel. (Like playing your guitar version of one minute from someone else's symphony). Most splash their pix with lots of text from the work but some are wordless.

Is this anything more than beautiful (and often God-damn ugly) but pointless, occupying precisely the no-man's land between graphic art and literature, a forced hybrid to be regarded with curiosity which no one will particularly love except graphics fans who can treat this as a large exhibition catalogue displaying the work of 75 or so artists? Interesting for them, I guess. But for lit fans, it's neither fish nor fowl. If you don't know the artist and you haven't read the work, your encounter with it here may permanently put you right off – *I'm never going to read Gorky now!*

I loved some artists! Sonia Leong mangarises a Saki story and it's just de-lovely. Bishakh Som does an obscure DH Lawrence story and it's a delight. And here's Animal Farm :

I want a whole book of that, please! And Steve Roiston's version of Hemingway's essay is great :

But for every ladder you climb up there's a snake you slither down – for instance, Crumb's beautiful text-rich 9 page version of Sartre's "Nausea" has all the text in French. Great. And then there's moments when the choice of work by the big name author is way too cute – for William Faulkner they dig up a story which was omitted from all his collections because it's a piece of juvenilia. Same thing with Thomas Pynchon.

Even so, in every page there is the strong feeling that the artists themselves really believe in what they're doing. Maybe I just don't get this thing. Three baffled stars.

Joey says

This is an ambitious collection, but is more like an appetizer sampler, not a full meal.

There are two adaptations of Ulysses by Robert Berry with Josh Levitas & David Lasky.

J. Ben Moss' adaptation of Siddhartha looks an awful lot like Jesus.

Molly Kiely's adaptation of Kathy Acker's Blood and Guts in High School is reminiscent of all the dick drawings in the film Superbad.

Kafka's Metamorphosis stylized as a Peanuts strip by R. Sikoryak was my favorite.

My least favorite were Tara Seibel's interpretation of The Great Gatsby and PMurphy's brief One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest.

My biggest gripe was that Infinite Jest was advertised in the collection's title, but there are only 5 full page images coinciding with 53 total words from the source material. There are only 8 total paragraphs (including the Further Reading section) addressing the novel. Hal Incandenza is described as a "stressed out" "tennis whiz" and Don Gately looks like Bubba Ho-Tep.

The silver lining of this collection was the discovery of Zak Smith's 760 pager, Pictures Showing What

Roselyn says

Commentary on classics, samples of great works and lovely art are the trademark of the Graphic Canon series. Since the three volumes were worked on in tandem, they flow seamlessly. Volume 3 doesn't disappoint, and presents a new perspective on the literature of the 21st century.

In my review of the first volume I commented on the fact that I enjoy reading these anthologies as they give me a taste and understanding of great literature from around the world without having to read them in their entirety. In my review of the second volume I talked about how one goes about deciding what gets included in the canon, how literature becomes famous, and censorship.

This volume included some lesser known works of famous authors which were nice to see included. It makes you wonder about what works become famous and why. There were even some that were written in high school. While I don't think they should really be part the graphic canon seeing as they aren't really part of the literary canon, they were really interesting to read.

I also noted how bleak and dismal the portrayal of the world was in the 21st century. The vast majority of the works included are about sex, drugs, poverty and violence. I much preferred the fantasy that suffused the earlier centuries. But, it was really cool to travel through history across the three volumes and watch new movements and styles emerge.

Recommended to lovers of graphic novels and classic literature.

Geoff Balme says

I can't say enough in praise of this three volume project. The volumes are phone book sized and still leave one gasping for more. The meeting of visual arts and literature isn't just clever it's mesmerizing and inspired. Of course there are many favorite writers i wish had been included but that's just a matter of logistics. Maybe an alternative volume 4 could capture more of the stuff that fell through the cracks. But i have a feeling it could go on and on so why not a serial publication? I'm on board for a subscription.

Kerfe says

Russ Kick's idea, to render great works of literature graphically, is certainly worthwhile. And Volume 3 starts out with a bang: Matt Kish doing "Heart of Darkness". How could the rest of the artists improve on that?

They don't.

And so, though other interpretations sparkled here and there, I was basically disappointed with the whole. My daughter, a big fan of graphic novels, was also not that impressed.

Still, of note: Caroline Picard's "the Voyage Out", Lisa Brown's Three Panel Reviews, R. Crumb's Sartre, Jeremy Eaton's "The Man with the Golden Arm", Yeji Yun's "On the Road", Juliacks' "Last Exit to Brooklyn", Mardou's "Diaries of Anais Nin", Rick Tremble's "Wild at Heart", Aiden Koch's "The Famished Road".

I have not seen Volumes 1 and 2, but I would certainly give them a look.

But no one else here gave me the double whammy of Matt Kish: I want to look at all his other work, and I want to re-read "Heart of Darkness".

Margaret says

My father sent me this. From my limited understanding of parent-ness, parents want to give their children the future. Thus, The Graphic Canon was the perfect gift. If I am still teaching literature ten years from now, I suspect I will make the Graphic Canon part of my surveys, not just because they give students a quick, accessible reading off which they can gauge their own, but because they are beautiful, necessary books. I'm jealous and hopeful that someday these will replace the corporeal Norton Anthologies (each of which is an argument for the Kindle) as the provocation for backaches in English majors everywhere.

Lawrence says

Introducing myself to the graphic novel format - this was a good way to do it; - with familiar classics. Fun. I don't feel qualified yet to really critique with any intelligence.

Laura Paxson says

How can you not love a book that combines most of the greatest books of all time?

The artwork was done by different artists so you got to see a lot of different styles and interpretations. Some were long, cartoon-like panels while others were single, memorizing pieces (The Wind-up Bird Chronicle artwork sticks out the most. That long, strange book was done up in a single picture. Same with The Bell Jar...and many others but I've returned the book to the lib and can't reference it). Some missed the mark completely while other will stay with me long after the book itself fades from my memory.

My own complaint is that it was done by mostly graphic artists and ultra modern illustrators. There was nothing poetic about the artwork or any of the artists interpretation...it was too straightforward and cold for the most part. Interesting pictures and a lot of raw talent but very little true beauty. You wouldn't put any of this on your wall unless you were 15.

I keep dropping my rating down to a 3 and then moving it back up to a 4. Why OH WHY can't they start doing half stars?! I think I'm in love with the idea of this more than the actual execution. While writing all this I realized that I can't really name one image that I LOVED...in fact, I can only remember a handful of images at all. Nothing was really that memorable or stood out. I can't even remember the imagery for Borges short stories and that was the main reason I even picked up The Graphic Cannon in the first place. It's a bad sign when I can't name one image I absolutely loved in a book with this many artists(not to mention

references to books I love)...

What I loved most was getting to read the story burbs and adding books to my To Read shelf.

It's huge so flip through it at the library. If you like it, I definitely suggest buying it to own. It's one of those books that needs to be looked through several times.

Stewart Tame says

A comics anthology, with all the variability in quality that the term implies. This is the final volume of a Quixotic attempt to adapt the canon of world literary classics in comic form. Since the entire series is only three volumes, obviously some abridgment is happening. "Comics" is given a broad interpretation, encompassing creative typography and single page illustrations as well as the more traditional sequential art. In at least most cases, straight adaptation is abandoned in favor of interpretation, comics inspired by the literary sources. Often, if one isn't familiar with the original work, the comics rendition of it will be all but meaningless. There's some good work here, but there's also mediocre work as well. It's an interesting project, but there are certainly comics anthologies of more consistent quality out there.

Amanda says

I felt some real running out of steam in this last volume. A lot of one page images rather than more full interpretations. And of course I quibble with many of their more modern canon inclusions, but I suppose that your never going to make people happy there.

John Bond says

Great finish to the series. I enjoyed the more recent classics vs earlier volumes. Great mix.

Matt says

Unfortunately, I thought this series got progressively worse. The first had a lot of full stories - the Arabian Nights, the Native American "How the Coyote got his..." stories, the great Greek and Roman myths - and that made for more entertaining reading. As the series went on, the illustrations became more abstract, and they reflected less of the stories I actually like.

I know it's pointless in a collection to say, "Why didn't you choose THIS?" because ultimately, it's impossible to satisfy everyone, but I was supremely annoyed to see someone like Richard Brautigan - who wrote my least favorite book ever ("Trout Fishing in America,")- getting a spot, while Joseph Heller, Hunter Thompson, and Kurt Vonnegut all failed to make an appearance.

That's the curse of any collection though. It was an awesome project, and I'm glad someone did it, but I hope - I'm sure it won't - stop there. Adapting literature in graphic form is a fantastic idea, and, like literature,

some of it's going to leave me cold, and some of it's going to excite me. Kick, I thought, tended to lean towards the more Harold Bloom camp, which is probably the more "serious" literature, and I can't deny that most of what he picked would be agreed upon by most academics. I hate Harold Bloom's taste though. Give me Stephen King over Ulysses any day. I don't care if that makes me a philistine.

It was a good series, and it's not up to Kick to pick my favorites.

Eve Kay says

Here are the top picks for me out of this canon:

Ernest Hemingway - It's a matter of colour. Who knew I'd enjoy Ernest Hemingway?! I sure didn't. This was very well drawn by Dan Duncan and the story was very good!

Hemingway's Living on 1,000 a year in Paris also stood out from the other works!

Colette - Cheri. Oh how beautifully drawn By Molly Crabapple!!

John Blake - Dulce et Decorum est. Completely and totally spoke to me. Mainly because of its topic.

Edna St. Vincent Millay - The Penitent and The singing-woman from the Wood's Edge.

These were such beautiful poems, I felt so moved when I read them the first time that I had to read them again immediately. Also wrote them down and have to read more of her work in the future. Also, very beautifully drawn by Joy Kolitsky.

T.S. Eliot - The Waste Land. Yes, I've found T.S Eliot and though he might have been talking about entirely different things in this poem than I think, I found myself in the midst of it all anyway! Very modern drawing by Chandra Free which gave the poem a nice edge.

There were some other good and interesting works there too, some of them I've already read and others have not. In some of the works the drawing might have been better than in others but that's just me.

Patrick Book says

Very neat! Great concept, delightfully executed.

Ch J Loveall says

All graphics; all the time.
