



## The Graphic Canon, Vol. 2: From Kubla Khan to the Brontë Sisters to The Picture of Dorian Gray

*Russ Kick (Editor), Maxon Crumb (Contributor), Molly Kiely (Contributor), Gris Grimly (Contributor), S. Clay Wilson (Contributor), Dame Darcy (Contributor), Kim Deitch (Contributor), Seth Tobocman (Contributor), more... John Percellino (Contributor), John Coulthart (Contributor), Megan Kelso (Contributor), J. Ben Moss ...less*

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*The Graphic Canon, Volume 2* gives us a visual cornucopia based on the wealth of literature from the 1800s. Several artists—including Maxon Crumb and Gris Grimly—present their versions of Edgar Allan Poe’s visions. The great American novel *Huckleberry Finn* is adapted uncensored for the first time, as Twain wrote it. The bad boys of Romanticism—Shelley, Keats, and Byron—are visualized here, and so are the Brontë sisters. We see both of Coleridge’s most famous poems: “Kubla Khan” and “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” (the latter by British comics legend Hunt Emerson). Philosophy and science are ably represented by ink versions of Nietzsche’s *Thus Spake Zarathustra* and Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species*.

*Frankenstein*, *Moby-Dick*, *Les Misérables*, *Great Expectations*, *Middlemarch*, *Anna Karenina*, *Crime and Punishment* (a hallucinatory take on the pivotal murder scene), Thoreau’s *Walden* (in spare line art by John Porcellino of King-Cat Comics fame), “The Drunken Boat” by Rimbaud, *Leaves of Grass* by Whitman, and two of Emily Dickinson’s greatest poems are all present and accounted for. John Coulthart has created ten magnificent full-page collages that tell the story of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* by Oscar Wilde. And *Pride and Prejudice* has never looked this splendiferous!

This volume is a special treat for Lewis Carroll fans. Dame Darcy puts her unmistakable stamp on—what else?—the Alice books in a new 16-page tour-de-force, while a dozen other artists present their versions of the most famous characters and moments from Wonderland. There’s also a gorgeous silhouetted telling of “Jabberwocky,” and Mahendra’s Singh’s surrealistic take on “The Hunting of the Snark.”

Curveballs in this volume include fairy tales illustrated by the untameable S. Clay Wilson, a fiery speech from freed slave Frederick Douglass (rendered in stark black and white by Seth Tobocman), a letter on reincarnation from Flaubert, the Victorian erotic classic *Venus in Furs*, the drug classic *The Hasheesh Eater*, and silk-screened illustrations for the ghastly children’s classic *Der Struwwelpeter*. Among many other canonical works.

### The Graphic Canon, Vol. 2: From Kubla Khan to the Brontë Sisters to The Picture of Dorian Gray Details

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## **From Reader Review The Graphic Canon, Vol. 2: From Kubla Khan to the Brontë Sisters to The Picture of Dorian Gray for online ebook**

### **Roselyn says**

The second volume of the Graphic Canon is equally as impressive as the first in terms of both the variety of artwork, the depth of the commentary and the breadth of the selection of literature.

In order to refrain from repeating myself, I'll attempt to elaborate on my review of the first volume.

When thinking of the literary canon, one automatically thinks of novels and poetry, typically non-fiction. However, as Russ Kick points out, there are many important works that are non-fiction, or that are letters or speeches. To some degree, this book made me question what constitutes the literary canon and whether there even can be a concrete definition.

Another thing that I noticed, and that you are called attention to, is the number of works that at the time of their publication, were met with public disapproval or were ignored. It was only much later that these works were recognized as being valuable. Which, and I guess this ties into what I said above, makes you think about how literature, like everything else, requires the right time and place. There are probably works that have been lost to time that today we would find exceptional and conversely, how many novels that are famous today will remain so in a hundred years time?

The last thing I want to talk about is censorship – how over the course of time novels and stories have been censored to the point where the versions we are familiar with today are not what the author wrote or intended. Perhaps this should be remedied?

Recommended to lovers of literature and graphic novels.

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### **Amanda says**

There were a few highlights in here that I loved but, like the first, I found it overall fairly disappointing. A few I found myself skipping through entirely.

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### **Matt says**

Just as good as the last one. This covers probably my least favorite era in literature - the 18th and 19th centuries - but it still has a few really beautiful adaptations, notably Moby Dick and Huckleberry Finn.

A thought about the era: I recently read Jane Eyre and Les Misérables, two of the books adapted in this collection, and it's impossible to miss how much attention is given to minutia and detail, with Les Mis especially. My theory is that this was the first era where storytelling was dominated by the literate rather than the oral tradition. This isn't to say that there wasn't an oral tradition still, just that it was mostly overshadowed by actual books and the expansion of literacy. Books lend themselves to longer, more vivid description than we normally would hear in a spoken format, so the authors went somewhat insane with the

concept and, like in the case of Hugo, wrote a hundred goddamn pages on sewers. I know that the story adapts itself to the format of the storytelling - look at television and movies - but it seems like there's always a period where people haven't quite gotten the hang of it. Film-makers eventually caught onto how to do it particularly well around the 70's and 80's, and television has just started creating brilliant works of art in the past ten years or so.

Anyway, that's probably an underdeveloped theory, but the basic point is that the literature in the 18th and early 19th century was long and windy and was begging for Twain and Hemingway to come and chop it into something short, direct, and incredible.

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## Hollowspine says

This huge volume of graphic novelizations of various poems, stories and novels is almost too much to get through, some portions actually including large sections of works (Grimm's Fables and others) in very small print with relatively little illustration to accompany them.

Overall I enjoyed the various artists twists on the stories, some of my favorites include the Rime of the Ancient Mariner, I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud by Wordsworth I thought was conveyed very nicely by PMurphy, very colorful, but also adding a twist to the poem. I also really enjoyed the artwork accompanying Carroll's Jabberwocky and would read the entirety of Middlemarch in comic form by Megan Kelso.

I also enjoyed the various Alice montages and even more so those devoted to Moby Dick, many of which I would love to have for myself.

Something I could have seen more of were the 3 or 4 panel review/summary comics that were in the beginning of the book by Lisa Brown, they were quite funny and I thought deserved a lot more space than just a nod by the editor and a few dotted here or there.

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## Boyke Rahardian says

Again, similar with vol. 1, it's packed with gorgeous illustrations, one can simply flip through the pages and enjoy the spectacle even with limited knowledge on the context. Readers need not to worry though, as Russ's introductions before each piece give enough background information on the literary works which inspired them.

There are some drawbacks of course which several reviewers here already pointed out—lack of illustration for some pieces, and some illustrations that are difficult to decipher—which I tend to agree.

There are 3 pieces that notably need more graphical interpretations: Poe's "*Works*", H.C. Andersen's "*Fairy Tales*" and Grimm's "*Fairy Tales*". These pieces are presented in their original text form, sometimes 10 pages long, with only 4 or 5 illustrations. In fact, I don't think these 3 pieces can be classified as "graphic" at all.

Artist Dame Darcy made 2 adaptations in this volume ("*Alice in Wonderland*" and one Dickinson's poem). Russ in his introduction to the pieces applauded the much renowned artist but her works are visually too complex for me. Same with Tara Seibel's adaptation of "*Les Miserables*" although Russ has warned us that to read the text in this piece is "purposely not always easy or possible".

Interpreting and adapting poems are also challenging if not impossible. So for poems, it's already a success if the artists were able to simply express the nuances. This is more difficult when the poems are symbolic in style, for instance Blake's "*Auguries of Innocence*" and Rimbaud's "*Drunken Boat*". The approach for these two works seems too literal for me.

My favorites in this volume are all the three pieces by the acclaimed cartoonist Hunt Emerson and Matt Kisch's "*Moby Dick*". Emerson has a knack in creating humorous spin out of the literary works, while Matt Kisch, well, his illustrations are simply breathtaking. You need to see them for yourself.

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### **Kate says**

This compilation of graphic adaptations was hit or miss for me. I loved the takes on *Moby Dick*, *Middlemarch*, *Anna Karenina*, *A Message from Mount Misery*, and the poems of William Blake. I was far less enthused by the inclusions of the fairy tales of Hans Christian Andersen and the brothers Grimm. These entries consisted of the entire text of selected fairy tales reproduced in a very small font and paired with a **single** illustration. I'm not an expert but I doubt that that would fit the definition of a graphic work. In the same vein the editor included a gallery of single illustrations by various artists of the *Alice* franchise, but I actually loved those. Inconsistent I know but what can I say. Some of the adaptations were beautiful but essentially unreadable.

I did enjoy the brilliantly pithy "Three Panel Reviews" by Lisa Brown that accompany the introduction. My favorite was Brown's take on *Madame Bovary*:

"My husband bores me."

"I bore my lovers."

"Hey, is that arsenic?"

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### **Geoff Balme says**

The second of three volumes of great literature meeting graphic arts has some high points in depicting *Moby Dick*, Thus Spake Zarathustra, Lewis Carroll (there may be a bit too much Lewis Carroll, but the art inspired is brilliant) Rimbaud, *On the Origin of the Species*, and a tremendous section of *Les Misérables*. There's not as much pancultural devotion this time and as always one wishes for more. But these books are wonderful and thoroughly delightful.

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### **Christopher Rush says**

This volume was better than volume 1, but one has to say that with the same tone as one says "having a temperature of 104 is better than having a temperature of 106." Some of the artwork is great - this is a fine showcase of a number of up-and-coming artists who may make it big for all the right reasons. Some of the "artwork," though, is just sloppy mediocre pseudo-art pretentiously demanding we call it "art" just because it says so (even though Mrs. Wilson's 3rd-grade class could draw better than this). In what purports to be a collection of the "World's" best work during the 18th-19th centuries, we are led to believe "the world" is mostly the UK and the USA, with only a dozen or so selections from other countries, including one that is

essentially pornography (Venus in Furs), but Kick assumes we are enlightened enough to consider masochism is actually fine literature. Some artists do treat the source material with great respect. Others, like Hunt Emerson, don't. If I said Kick gives too much space to Nietzsche, Darwin, Ludlow, Carroll, and Blake, would that betray my biases? or his? Nat Turner, who killed people solely because of their race, we are told is a hero - killing people on the basis of their race is a quality of a hero? in the 21st century? or ever? I dunno. Kick, as usually, exerts himself to the point of apoplexy trying to get us to believe each selection is astounding and each artist is a genius: if the work doesn't speak for itself, no amount of cheerleading (i.e., grandstanding) is going to make it canonical. At other times, Kick makes us wonder if he even read the work in question: Huck Finn respects Jim as a human being early in the novel? Not really, no. Perhaps Kick's penchant for postmodern criticism has hindered his understanding of the actual works. Some inclusions just make us scratch our heads in bemusement, wondering why entire short tales are in here simply to show off one panel of artwork from Kick's heroes - especially since Kick includes other works about selections without the relevant prose (such as the lengthy litany of Alice adaptations). If the purpose of this is to encourage readers to go out and read the real thing, I fear it fails. If the purpose is to show off the contemporary panoply of artists, it may succeed both to tell us whom to admire and whom to avoid. Reading this is mostly a chore - it has some bright spots, but they are few and far between.

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## Susan says

spot illustrations + text  $\neq$  comics

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## cardulelia carduelis says

Where these anthologies excel is when they reinterpret the classics and bring to light the lesser known works. I may be in a minority but Kubla Khan was unknown to me before this and the rendition (see image below) is stunning - it's a great opening piece.

Equally, longer verse-style poetry, which can be hard to stick with and appreciate, is very digestible when interspersed with images.

The range of graphic styles and media is impressive as well.

## Choices

Obviously such a large undertaking is going to be limited by the size of the collection and cuts will be made but this volume in particular felt like the Anglo-centric, high school required-reading edition. Maybe that is what the editor wanted to do: provide an introduction to these works so that young people who might struggle with the texts have an entry point? Personally I would have appreciated some diversity but I can understand why this selection was put together and anyway it's an anthology - it will never be to everyone's tastes.

Not as great as Volume I (but I think that's because more of the texts were known to me) but definitely worth the read.

*The first page of the anthology.*

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## Dov Zeller says

(this review is the same as the one I wrote for volume 1. I really liked both volumes so far. I think perhaps the second one was more consistent in terms of sensibilities and quality, but I think that had mostly to do with the time period it was covering. Lots of great, beautiful stuff in both. Of course when dealing with canonization, what gets included and excluded, there is a lot to be debated. These books aren't super imaginative in that context, but hopefully they open up a space for others to create alternative volumes and alternative literary histories.)

This book has its ups and downs but all in all it's a nice reminder of the depth and breadth of our literary histories, and also a beautiful compendium of styles and approaches to adaptation. It's great to see the passion graphic artists have for their beloved prosy and/or poetical works.

Some perks: there are great prefaces to each adaptation contextualizing the text and its graphic adaptation. Also, a lot of artists are not published in a main-stream widely accessible format aside from these books, and so it's great to have an introduction to their work.

My main complaint is that a lot of the adaptations are short and come from the middle of books and they are confusing and unsatisfying and even if I wanted to read the rest, well, for most of the graphicized excerpts there is no rest. Also, a few of the adaptations are inscrutable.

I got the first two volumes of the Graphic Canon out of the library (most of the books I read are library books) and enjoyed them both. I am right now reading the childrens literature one. I imagine they are all prohibitively expensive to buy, though I haven't checked to see, and I suppose prohibitively expensive to me might not be prohibitively expensive to others. In any case I highly recommend checking them out of the library at the very least. A lot of fun and a lot to think about.

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## Joe Rouse says

I was fortunate enough to meet Russ Kick, the editor/curator of this amazing work, while he was in town for Books on the Banks. He mentioned (as he does deftly in the Introduction) that we are living in the "Golden Age" of graphic novels, and this behemoth is true testament to that. The popularity of graphic novels in both popular and academic cultures is not to be underestimated. Kick's appreciation of this is forward-thinking and prophetic, at the very least.

The Graphic Canon, volumes 1 and 2, are literally (and graphically) feasts for the senses, and by feasts, I mean, if these were meals, they'd blow Thanksgiving out of the water. There is so much great literature covered in these first two installments, and to see them come to life on the page is an extraordinary experience. A small example is Kick's addressing of the classic American behemoth novel, Moby Dick. It comes to light that an online blogger/artist named Matt Kish set out to create a drawing (in a number of different media) for each and every page of the novel (all 553 drawings can be viewed on Kish's site: <http://everypageofmobydick.blogspot.c...>).

There are so many talented artists involved in this project, and Russ Kick provides sharp, witty observations and pays sufficient homage not only to all included literary works, but also to the graphic representations of each piece. It certainly helps that he writes in a relaxed, low-key yet academic voice that can readily and easily be trusted. Whether you love or hate it, graphic representation of literature is here to stay. These books make it obvious that we should hop on board and fasten our seat belts.

One of the greatest things about these two volumes is that you can open the books up and at any point, on any page, find something wonderful and weird (even mind-blowing), and hell, you might even learn

something in the process.

Volume 3 is set for release in April, 2013, and spans from Conrad's Heart of Darkness to David Foster Wallace's Infinite Jest. My order has already been placed.

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### **Courtney says**

It's an anthology, and I'm starting to believe that you're not supposed to like everything in one because it is purposely a buffet and presents a wide range. My only complaint was that some font was hard to read, and in the case of William Blake's Jerusalem—illustrated by Blake—I couldn't read much of the lovely, stylized script.

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### **Lindsey says**

Like all anthologies, some of these were better than others. I personally enjoyed the following:

"The Message from Mount Misery"--Excerpt from Frederick Douglas famous speech

"An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge"--Wordless! Loved it. By far my favorite.

"Adventures of Huckleberry Finn"-- His escape with Jim. Does a great job showing slavery and how Huck was torn with helping Jim and turning him in as an escaped slave. The only part I did not like was Jim's thick dialect.

"Alice Gallery"--various artists depict the white rabbit and Alice in Wonderland. Very strange and wonderful.

"Jabberwocky"--Even though this is the poem, which means it is very difficult to understand, the illustrations paired with the verse was beyond fantastic. Super Creepy and Fun!

"Anna Karenina: Ch.22 & 23"--Really nicely done, but you really should have read the original to fully appreciate this adaptation.

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### **Molly ( \_Kindlingg ) says**

Volume 2 was my first introduction to Kick's "The Graphic Canon" collection. I really enjoyed the volume, but I can agree with the drawbacks that other reviewers have listed: lack of diversity, lack of illustration for some pieces, and some illustrations that were "unreadable" or difficult to visually decipher.

That being said, I am glad I picked up the volume. Another reviewer said that she approached the book like she would an art museum, which I thought was a good comparison. I paged through it in one sitting, carefully reading the stories and/or illustrations that caught my attention, and skimming through the ones that I didn't care for. Like an art museum, you are free to pay attention to what interests you. The excerpts are short enough that passing over some is no hassle.

I actually didn't mind at all that the excerpts were kept short. Kick is obviously not trying to adapt canonical works into graphic novels...but creating a visual "museum" for a textual era of work. I liked having these small visuals to attach to the works in my mind. Now when I hear or read Anna Karenina, or Huck Finn, or I Wandered Lonely As A Cloud, I have these reminders to refer to (but they are not so encompassing that they

would take the place of my own imagination, if that makes sense.) It made me want to go pick up the novels themselves and read them in their entirety, which I suspect was also the point of the collection. Also, as I said before, the short length makes it easy to sample the volume.

I also liked Kick's introductory writing before each piece. His writing was concise, casual, and presented the necessary nuggets of information along with some interesting things you might not have heard before--much like a good museum tour guide would do. I look forward to exploring the other volumes.

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