

## VIRGINIA WOOLF FOR THE COMMON COMICS READER: CAROLINE PICARD'S APPROPRIATION OF *THE VOYAGE OUT* IN *THE GRAPHIC CANON 3*

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In *Virginia Woolf Icon*, Brenda Silver shows how Virginia Woolf became an icon in the 1960s – as opposed to merely a writer – largely because of the success of Edward Albee's play, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* in 1962 and its movie adaptation by Mike Nichols in 1966, and how that partly stems from the fear she inspired as a highbrow British female writer – and still does:

Occurring across the cultural terrain, whether in academic discourses, the intellectual media, or mass / popular culture, the proliferation of Virginia Woolfs has transformed the writer into a powerful and powerfully contested cultural icon, whose name, face and authority are persistently claimed or disclaimed in debates about art, politics, sexuality, gender, class, the "canon," fashion, feminism, race and anger. (3)

In the 1970s, Woolf's work was included, however reluctantly, into the literary canon through academic research, anthologies, and university syllabi. This, however, was a complex phenomenon Silver illuminatingly analyzes, placing it in its multi-layered bibliographical and cultural context. Readers became increasingly interested in Woolf's private life at a moment when intimate documents were made available after a biography was published in 1974 by her nephew Quentin Bell, under the guidance of Leonard Woolf, *Virginia Woolf: A Biography*. The first volume of her letters, edited by Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, was published in 1975, and the first volume of her diary, edited by Anne Olivier Bell, Quentin's wife, in 1977. This was the first of five volumes, the last published in 1984, editing Virginia Woolf's complete diary, giving access to much more intimate or contentious entries than the selection edited by Leonard Woolf in 1953, *A Writer's Diary*, which focused on her intellectual life as a reader and a writer. This glimpse of her privacy, not just as a writer but as a woman too, radically altered her perception by academics as well as by the common reader. There was a renewed interest in the arts and politics of the Bloomsbury Group, of which she was a leading light, at once an excentric genius and the quintessence of the Bohemian

intelligentsia they embodied, building up public curiosity about all things Woolfian.<sup>1</sup> In the same decade, Women's Studies developed in American universities and fought to have the poetical and political value of her novels reappraised. At a moment when the education of women was developing and fear of feminism growing, Women's Studies also cristalized on "British, born into the intellectual aristocracy, Virginia Woolf" who "represents *par excellence* the *rentier* class identified with European cultural systems" (Silver 52) because she allowed American academics to oppose themselves to European and British Academia.

As Virginia Woolf was making her way into the (Western, male) canon and the (American, feminist) university, her figure became ubiquitous in world popular culture, overshadowing Shakespeare on t-shirts and mugs – her face even selling Brass Beer. It thus appears that Virginia Woolf has long been constructed as cultural shifter, one that both constructs cultural boundaries, or rather takes both actively and passively part in the cultural "battles of the brows" (Silver 36), and defies them:

Part of her complexity arises from her residency at the borders between long-established dualisms, for example, those of mind and body, powerful and female, the voice of high culture and popular culture. Doing so, Woolf emblemizes not one side or the other but the possibility of dwelling on both or all sides and, as a result, the possibility of disrupting familiar categories and boundaries. (Stimpson xii)

Such everywhere-ness, from top to bottom of the scale of cultural values, is what Brenda Silver has called the "versioning" of Virginia Woolf, a marketing term that refers to the offer of wide range of products declined into higher- to lower-value models. It is with such "'versioning' of Virginia Woolf – the production of multiple versions of her texts and her image" (Silver xvi) – in mind, that I would like to look at Caroline Picard's graphic adaptation of her first novel, *The Voyage Out* (1915), which was published in the third and final volume of an anthology of world literature edited by Russ Kick, *The Graphic Canon. The World's Greatest Literature as Comics and Visuals. Vol. 3 From Heart of Darkness to Hemingway to Infinite Jest*, which came out in 2013.

This versioning is a complex one, articulating canonization and anthologization, a conjunction that has been discussed at length in the (American) debate about anthologies and teaching. The word anthology is:

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<sup>1</sup> On the history of the marketing of the Bloomsbourn Group, see Marler.

from the Greek word for 'collection of flowers,' a term implying selection. The very format of an anthology prompts canon formation [...]. Anthologies convey the notion of evolution (the succession of literary movements) and hierarchy (the recognition of masterpieces). They create and reform canons, establish literary reputations, and help institutionalize the national culture, which they reflect. (Mujica 203-204)

*The Graphic Canon* sets out to constitute World literature and not national culture, which shows how anthologies adapt to new cultural values.<sup>2</sup> This versioning also articulates popularization, adaptation – the transmedia transfer of a work of art to another medium by another artist – and appropriation – the cultural transfer of values that this adaptation implies. In his seminal *Shakespeare and Modern Popular Culture*, Douglas Lanier defines appropriation in cultural terms:

Rooted in concepts of ownership (from Latin *appropriatus*, 'made one's own'), the term conceives of Shakespeare as a kind of property to which groups claim control. The term springs from Marxist analysis and retains the connotation that this struggle to claim Shakespeare is contentious, a matter of a weaker party wrestling something of value from unwilling or hostile hands. (5)

This, I argue, is what is at stake in Picard's adaptation of *The Voyage Out* as read within *The Graphic Canon 3*, as mass culture appropriates the ambiguous figurehead of British highbrow intelligentsia and American feminist Academia.

As in all anthologies, the selection of authors, works and extracts in the *Canon* mirrors what the editor and adapters would have us read and see in them, reflecting a particular moment of cultural appropriation and reshaping up to the point, perhaps, of adulteration, manipulation or contradiction.

However the purpose of this essay is not to point to deviation or disparity and analyze variations from the sourcetext. I agree with Thomas Leitch that one of the quandaries of Adaptation Studies is that they are "still haunted by the notion that adaptations ought to be faithful to their ostensible sourcetexts," overlooking the fact that any text is essentially bathed in "Bakhtinian intertextuality" (64, 63). This essay, then, will try not to "wrestle with the un-dead spirits that continue to haunt it however often they are repudiated: the defining context of literature, the will to taxonomize and the quest for ostensibly analytical methods and categories that will justify individual evaluations." (65). Looking at an extract, when adaptation studies usually deal with self-contained works, probably helps

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<sup>2</sup> It does not position itself in relation to the theoretical frame of world literature as articulated in Damrosch.

shake away the fetishistic belief in the holy wholeness and primacy of the sourcetext, ruthlessly maimed in anthologies.

This, however, poses the question of the delimitation of the sourcetext. How does the graphic medium, itself torn between highbrow and mass culture, appropriate the first novel of the Queen of Bloomsbury? What text does the adapter appropriate? Is it merely the extract or is the passage cleverly selected to epitomize the entire sourcetext? Does it echo other works by Woolf? If the graphic adaptation implies a shift from highbrow to lowbrow, does it necessarily do away with references to high culture? These are typical questions when dealing with transmedia adaptation, but it seems to me revealing to look at them from the unusual angle of the adaptation of an extract in the specific editorial and commercial context of an anthology. This essay will show in what way *The Graphic Canon* may be read as cultural battlefield between the highbrow and the popular. Then, it will propose a reading of Caroline Picard's "Voyage Out" *within* the series of adaptations of female authors in the graphic anthology. Finally, it will show that this embodies a new form a feminism and produces a new versioning of Virginia Woolf.

### ***The Graphic Canon as cultural battelfield***

The three-volume *Graphic Canon: The World's Great Literature as Comics and Visuals* engages with the canon, and therefore with cultural value and hierarchy, in two ways. First, it seeks to legitimize the graphic medium in combining it with long-acclaimed literary masterpieces, as underlined in reviews: "while it can serve as a study of cultures and histories or as a pedagogical tool (as the source lists, further-reading section, and four indexes attest), what this first volume does best is showcase the extraordinary potential of the artform itself" (Anon.). It both establishes an alternate literary canon and forms a new graphic canon, inviting budding artists, and even amateurs,<sup>3</sup> alongside well-established ones: "The list of contributors includes the comic masters Robert Crumb, Will Eisner, Peter Kuper, Molly Crabapple and Roberta Gregory, as well as emerging artists like Yeji Yun, Tara Seibel, Edie Fake and Vicki Nerino" (Weatherwax). Julie Sanders's remark that: "adaptation becomes a veritable marker of canonical status: citation infers authority" (9) appears a highly reversible process since the authority of some cited writers is reflected on the quoting graphic artists just as the celebrity of some graphic artists might put obscure literary works into the limelight.

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<sup>3</sup> Kish, a librarian, illustrated each page of *Moby Dick* and *Heart of Darkness* "simply for his own enjoyment" (Kick 2).

Second, it seeks to decompartmentalize cultural categories and markets, by bringing the literary canon to the popular readership of comic books. Reviewers rejoice that: “*Gulliver’s Travels*, *Wuthering Heights*, *Leaves of Grass* – these works of literature do not reside just on the shelves of academia; they flourish in the eye of our imagination,” (Weatherwax) producing “a must-buy for all academic libraries, many public libraries, and many high schools” (Cornog).<sup>4</sup>

The reception of *The Graphic Canon* in book reviews explicitly articulates it not only to the canon and tradition but also to education and “popular” culture. The values that are projected onto the *Canon* can sometimes seem disconcertingly clear-cut, as when *The New York Times Sunday Book Review* exults that: “Here you will discover that literature can be hilarious” or that: “Work that might normally put you to sleep will leave you awe-struck” (Weatherwax). That remark is about William Blake’s “Jerusalem,” which is illustrated by reproductions of Blake’s own colour plates, so that the value opposition literature – boring vs. graphic translation – impressive, strikes as a mere projection of the reviewer’s fancy. This fantasized antagonism might stem from another misrepresentation, that of two radically different readerships, the highbrow readers of the boring literary canon never leafing through a comic book and the mass readers of comics, if, as the *Guardian* has it: “the anthology’s purpose [is] to entertain, but also to broaden the mind, to foist James Joyce on people who never got beyond Buck Mulligan, to nudge lovers of literature to pick up a graphic novel or three” (Smart). But is that really so? As Stuart Hall points out, the category “popular culture” is constructed against the culturally, morally and economically dubious category “not of the people” (448). Furthermore, it presupposes fixed cultural values and groups, whereas:

what is essential to the definition of popular culture is the relations which define ‘popular culture’ in a continuing tension (relationship, influence and antagonism) to the dominant culture. It is a conception of culture which is polarised around this cultural dialectic. It treats the domain of cultural forms and activities as constantly changing field. Then it looks at the relations which constantly structure this field into dominant and subordinate formations. It looks at the process by which these relations of dominance and subordination are articulated. It treats them as process; the process by means of which some things are actively preferred so that others can be dethroned. It has at its centre the changing and uneven relations of force which define the field of culture – that is, the question of cultural struggle and its many forms. (449)

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<sup>4</sup> Cornog is the editor of *Graphic Novels Beyond the Basics: Insights and Issues for Libraries* (Libraries Unlimited, 2009) with Timothy Perper.

Russ Kick's project is not to simply *adapt* or *translate* masterpieces into another medium but to reshuffle the canon, to *appropriate* the landmarks of literature. If what is at stake here is *cultural* and *political* rather than *aesthetic*, since "what the concept of appropriation stresses is above all, the motivation of the appropriation: to gain power over" (Ashley and Plesch 3), what the reviews express is enthusiasm for the updated countercanon as well as resistance to it through reassertion of categories and boundaries. Such ambivalence, it could be said, is what defines *The Graphic Canon 3* as a cultural object, a constant confrontation of values, in Hall's terms: "the complex lines of resistance and acceptance, refusal and capitulation, which make the field of culture a sort of constant battlefield. A battlefield where no once-for-all victories are obtained but where there are always strategic positions to be won and lost" (447).

What matters for me in Russ Kick's countercanon is that, like any anthology, it manifests a political agenda. In 2001 and 2002 Kick directed two anthologies that sold over 500,000 copies, *You Are Being Lied To* and *Everything You Know Is Wrong*. He had published *Psychotropedia: A Guide to Publications on the Periphery* in 1998, an attack on the hierarchy of information that promotes popular sources of information such as fanzines and blogs. *The Graphic Canon* presents itself as a space for poetical justice where the wrongs of literary history are righted and disregarded authors integrated into the canon. Kate Chopin is thus adapted in full alongside James Joyce's *Ulysses*, "widely considered the greatest, most important novel of the twentieth century," because if "*The Awakening* is now recognized as a classic [...] Chopin has never quite gotten the recognition she deserves" (Kick 226, 13). What is Virginia Woolf's place in Russ Kick's new canon? Is she closer to Chopin or Joyce? What is at stake in the choice of *The Voyage Out* as the appropriate sourcetext for this anthology? In what way does *The Graphic Canon* appropriate it, and what image, or "version," of Virginia Woolf does it disseminate in return?

### **Reading Caroline Picard's adaptation of Woolf's *The Voyage Out* within *The Graphic Canon***

Although she was not mentioned in the first version of *The Great Books of the Western World* in 1952, Woolf appeared in the second edition in 1990 alongside Jane Austen, George Eliot and Willa Cather. However, a woman author's place in the canon is always controversial and peripheral at best, as illustrated in the publication of a *Norton Anthology of Literature by Women* in 1985 to sidestep the accusations of male-centredness repeatedly leveled at the *Norton Anthology of English Literature*. The *Norton Anthology* is a case in point because it presents itself as *the* expression of *the* canon. In the first edition, in 1962, Virginia Woolf appeared in a section entitled "Directions in Modern Fiction"

with "The Mark on the Wall," alongside Joseph Conrad. In the second edition in 1968, that section disappeared and Woolf and Conrad joined the "Twentieth Century" section. Other texts by Virginia Woolf were added in the fourth edition, in 1979 (comprising "Monday or Tuesday," "An Unwritten Novel," "The Mark on the Wall," "Modern Fiction," *A Room of One's Own*, and "Professions for Women"), and although the list varies in the seventh edition in 2000, it still excludes her novels ("The Mark on the Wall," "Modern Fiction," *A Room of One's Own*, "Professions for Women," "A Sketch of the Past," and "The Legacy"). This is in stark contrast to the selection of works by James Joyce. From the first edition ("Araby," *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, *Ulysses*, and *Finnegan's Wake*) to the seventh ("Araby," "The Dead," *Ulysses*, and *Finnegan's Wake*), the list has remained almost unchanged. While James Joyce's position as a canonical novelist has been clear and stable from the first edition, Virginia Woolf's categorization has been more uncertain and changeable as well as more complex: essays about literature or the condition of women coexist with short stories and short autobiographical reminiscences, but no novel is included, making her a thinker and a writer of the self rather than a stylist.

*The Graphic Canon 3* contains two adaptations of Joyce's *Ulysses*, one on-going hypertextual adaptation by Robert Berry and Josh Levitas – which is expected to take them 10 years to complete –, and one "minicomic" by David Lasky which condenses the whole novel into 36 panels – abridged to 7 pages here. "Araby" from *Dubliners* is there too. This selection is very much in keeping with Norton's, while the selection of two novels by Woolf has nothing in common with the *Norton Anthology*. It may be read as a political gesture to show that Woolf's fiction is as canonical as that of Joyce. *To the Lighthouse*, her fifth novel which sold so well that it bought her a car and which is listed in Time's "100 best English-language novels published since 1923" – it also gives "Three Panel Reviews" of *A Room with a View* (65),<sup>5</sup> *The Catcher in the Rye* (150), *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (303), and *Death in Venice* (554). It is Woolf's first novel, however, that becomes a ten-page adaptation by Caroline Picard.

Like Joyce's "Araby," *The Voyage Out* is an early work dealing with youth, its frustrations, alienation and aspirations. However, Mark Wollaeger has shown that it allows for a more political reading, not unlike that of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, which was published in 1899 and, precisely, opens *The Graphic Canon 3*. Kick sees it as the perfect landmark of a new literary era: "Volume 3 of *The Graphic Canon* is all about the twentieth century, and *Heart of Darkness* is the perfect way to start: its publication history, style, and themes make it a bridge between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries" (2). He also emphasizes the poetical complexity of the novel, illustrated by Matt Kish page by

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<sup>5</sup> See <http://graphicnovelresources.blogspot.fr/2014/04/the-graphic-canon-volume-3-from-heart.html>



page: “The work he produced is complex, layered and ambiguous, leading to numerous interpretations and endless debate. Although it deals with atrocities, it’s not straightforward tut-tutting”(2). Wollaeger believes Conrad’s novel has “haunted [Woolf’s] first novel from its inception, providing, among other things, a model for the journey upriver that effectively initiates and ends Rachel’s marriage plot” and “bec[omes] a nodal point for Woolf’s troubled yet productive relation to masculine power in *The Voyage Out*” (45, 46, 48).<sup>6</sup> The exploration of the self, which Picard’s adaptation focuses on, is central to both novels: “The dominant theme of the novel is Rachel’s self-discovery, and it is this exploration of the self which is the strongest link between *The Voyage Out* and *Heart of Darkness*” (Pitt 141). Rosemary Pitt also underlines that:

the hostile, elemental forces of nature which both writers evoke are thus partly used to support a theory of the futility of human endeavour and hope, particularly in *The Voyage Out*, where Rachel is largely victim of death and these hostile forces, which lend support to Helen’s theory of life as one which ‘made chaos triumphant, things happening for no reason at all, and everyone groping about in illusion and ignorance.’(144)

Rachel’s death, however, may be read in a political perspective: “One standard reading of Rachel’s death sees it as an expression of Woolf’s fear of heterosexuality: Rachel’s marriage to Terence cannot be consummated in Woolf’s imagination – literally, she would rather (Rachel) be dead. But I would argue that the really deadly snake is bourgeois marriage rather than heterosexuality *per se*” (DeKoven 127). Does this attack on bourgeois marriage account for the selection of *The Voyage Out* for *The Graphic Canon*?

Unlike *Jacob’s Room*, *Mrs Dalloway*, *The Waves*, or *To the Lighthouse* whose Modernist anti-narrativity Lisa Brown gently mocks, Virginia Woolf’s first novel is not experimental, but prepares her later novels: “Virginia Woolf started experimenting with form and plot, helping lead the way to Modernism” (Kick 111). However, Caroline Picard’s graphic adaptation seems to contradict Kick’s slightly low-key presentation of the novel, as it celebrates Woolf’s watery imagery, the fluidity of her writing, her experiments with focalization, feminine consciousness, and dream-states. *The Voyage Out*, however, is not part of the Woolfian Modernist canon. It is deemed too close to the tradition of romance, the *Bildungsroman*, and Jane Austen, as the presentation reminds us: “At the center of this bleak take on life is Rachel, who’s led an extraordinarily sheltered existence in England. Her Aunt Helen tries to educate her about the ways of the world, especially love” (Kick 111). The novel’s interest precisely

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<sup>6</sup> Wollaeger’s analysis occasionally relies on unconvincing biographical conjectures.



lies in its break with tradition or, rather, two traditions: the Austenian romance and the eighteenth century tale of female martyrdom and sainthood such as Richardson's *Clarissa: or, The History of a Young Lady*. But the selected extract ignores that political and poetical shift to focus on the self-discovery structure. In the extract, Rachel, a woman in her early twenties traveling from London to South America with her father, uncle and Aunt Helen, receives her first kiss from a married man, Richard Dalloway. Picard shows Rachel's confusion and the way she comes to draw a lesson from it, under the guidance of Helen: "I can be m—m—myself? In spite of you, in spite of the Dalloways and Mr. Pepper & Father & my aunts?" (121) [fig. 1] The graphic fragment contradicts the ironical (feminist) force of the novel, which has Rachel die of a fever to escape the romance marriage-plot and the dissolution of selfhood into

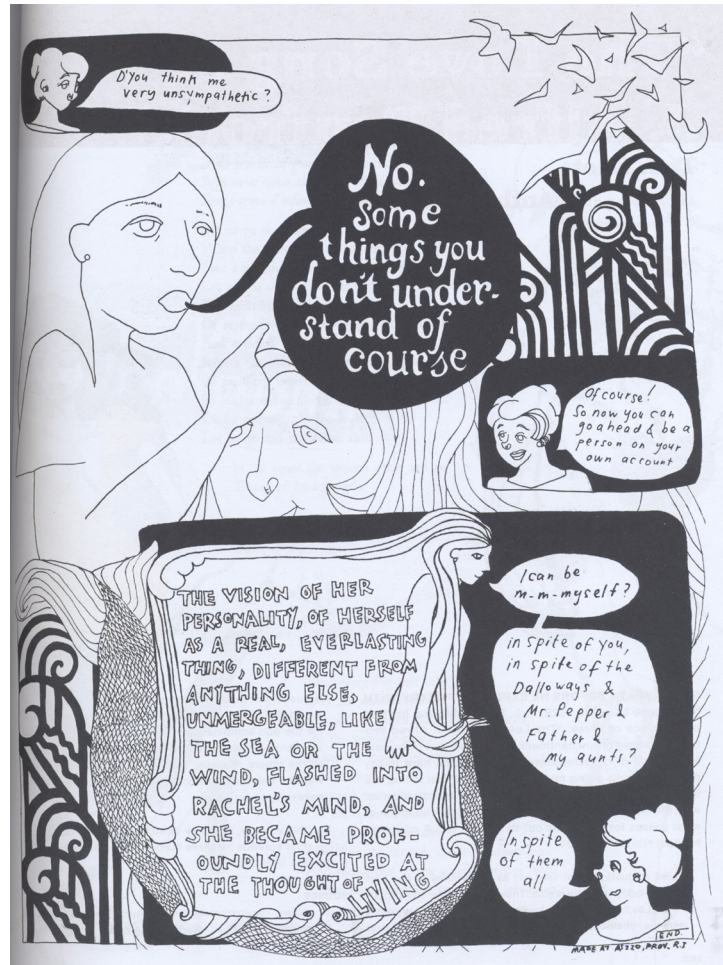


Figure 1: PICARD, Caroline. "The Voyage Out." Ed. Russ Kick. *The Graphic Canon 3*. 121. Reproduced by permission of the artist.

wedlock;<sup>7</sup> instead, it provides contemporary (young) (female) readers with positive female (feminist) role models, as it allows Rachel to be inspired by an older woman to become herself in spite of exterior constraints, precisely what the novel shows is impossible.

Both Caroline Picard's extract selection and Kick's presentation of Woolf's first novel screen out the political reverberations that allow a critical dialogue between *Heart of Darkness* and *The Voyage Out*. Their stance and choices make it difficult for the common comics reader to see that, like Conrad's tale, it functions as a "bridge" (Kick 2) between twentieth century literature and earlier literary traditions. However, that misreading is productive, as it allows Caroline Picard and *The Graphic Canon* 3 to shape a new version of Virginia Woolf's text that is relevant to our contemporary cultural tastes and needs, or what Picard and Kick – either consciously or unconsciously – sense them to be.

Woolf's feminist standpoint in *The Voyage Out* is very much like that illustrated in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, which, in Kick's words, "tells of Edna Pontellier, who is dissatisfied and upset with her roles as wife to a dickish husband and as mother of two children. She expands her vistas in various ways, including welcoming the attentions of a certain charmer" (13). However, the story, as visually interpreted by Migdal, loses some of its political force. Edna's two sons are mentioned once, when her father takes them with him and she remains in a happy state of "solitude" (Migdal 21), but in the sourcetext she feels alienated by her children and rejects her prescribed role as a mother, just as she decides to no longer live with her husband. In Migdal's adaptation, even though her husband clearly stands for conformity and social conventions, her despair stems primarily from her love for Robert. For instance, after he runs to Mexico, Edna fails to receive calls on Tuesday, and when blamed by her husband ("People don't do such things"), her unconventional attitude is accounted for by her unhappy passion: "Robert's going away had taken the meaning out of everything" (19). The psychological is highlighted at the expense of the political, and Edna even seems possessed when she declares that: "There must be spirits abroad tonight," and he answers: "One of them has found Mrs. Pontellier. Perhaps he will never wholly release her from his spell" (18). Consequently, through selection, Edna's story is no longer paradigmatic of the married woman's condition. The visual version downplays the fact that Edna commits suicide not so much because Robert has left her to preserve her honour, but because society compels her to be either a dutiful wife and mother or an isolated outcast, and leaves her no option if she wants to be neither.

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<sup>7</sup> The novel's political implications are complex, also because Richard Dalloway kisses Rachel after a conversation about colonialism, so that the novel hints at what Woolf was to develop in *Three Guineas*, that there is a connection between all forms of tyranny – patriarchy, imperialism and fascism – and that the domination of women and the control of their sexuality (the kiss illustrating the double standard) is a political issue related to other structures of domination.

This representation of marriage as a social trap is very much what Rachel fears, and both adaptations tone it down, although Russ Kick, Rebecca Migdal and Caroline Picard all explicitly propose a feminist updating of the canon.<sup>8</sup> Illustrating Woolf and Chopin alongside Conrad and Joyce is a committed, political gesture that is not without its contradictions, illustrated in the tensions between Kick's presentation of each graphic adaptation and the art itself. This makes *The Graphic Canon* a readable cultural battlefield, one where different conceptions of feminism, feminine discourse, and a feminist agenda are confronted. It reminds us that "we tend to think of cultural forms as whole and coherent: either wholly corrupt or wholly authentic. Whereas they are deeply contradictory; they lay on contradictions, especially when they function in the domain of the popular" (Hall 448). Barbara Mujica's statements about anthologies of Spanish literature, that "a writer's entry into the canon reflects above all else his or her conformity with the ideals of the dominant political and intellectual elite," and that "anthologies tell us as much about the cultures that produce them as about the writers they showcase" (208, 211), are convincing insofar as we remember that culture is a dynamic battlefield. *The Graphic Canon 3* operates as a progressive force attempting to update the canon, to make it right, more inclusive and, at the same time, it is a conservative force that unquestioningly assumes that women's literature tells stories about women, a rearward conception that has long been associated with popular culture. Feminist theory argues that women are excluded from the serious aspects of culture, probably because of the age-old but persistent "division between a (feminized) object-language and a (masculine) meta-language" (Morris 14). In that perspective, readers of *The Graphic Canon 3* might find themselves in the same position as Meaghan Morris looking in vain for feminist theory in Postmodern theory:

by resorting to the device of listing 'excluded' women, women excluded for no obvious reason except that given by the discourse – their gender – I have positioned myself in a speech-genre all too familiar in everyday life, as well as in pantomime, cartoons, and sitcoms: the woman's complaint, or *ragging*. (15)

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<sup>8</sup> Picard presents herself as a committed artist: "a Chicago-based artist, writer and curator who explores the figure in relation to systems of power" (www.cocopicard.com). About *Meowers: BSide BMovie*, she writes: "This comic tells the story of a material-girl gang that travels through time performing bank heists. They live in the future, at the end of time and even live past the final apocalypse, at which point they merge into one chubby sphynx cat. There is more to it, I suppose, but the concept began when I tried to imagine what the world would be like if female arousal punctuated public space. And because I wanted to make a fem-Bmovie in comic form" ("*Meosers*"). In the first volume of *The Graphic Canon*, she illustrated an Incan play, *Apu Ollantay*, because she loves Incan design and liked the feminist stance of the play: "There are a number of strong female protagonists in the play, at the center of which lies Cosi Cuyllur, the princess, who has decided to go against her father's wishes and sleep with a husband she chooses for herself" (Contributor Interview).

Still, they may look at the brighter side and read the *Canon* as a cultural point of intersection between literature, the canon, and feminine discourse. What does Picard's adaptation of Woolf as we read it within *The Canon* tell us about the cultural evolution of feminism, and what version of it is largely acceptable at this very moment for a specific market?

### **The question of feminism: Appropriating *The Voyage Out* and versioning Virginia Woolf**

*The Graphic Canon* proposes to include all marginalized literature, as Kick's enumeration of gender, colour and (Western) places in the Preface suggests:

We have two men who seem quintessentially nineteenth century, but keep going well into the twentieth: H. G. Wells and Rudyard Kipling. Three extremely varied writers – Jack London, Maxim Gorky, Saki – keep the century rolling. Then it's onto the Modernists, lots of them. Which of course leads us to the Postmodernists. The Beats are here. As well as Orwell, Nabokov, and Steinbeck. French women of letters are represented by Anaïs Nin and Colette, while Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston bring in the Harlem Renaissance. Black Elk, Khalil Gibran, Herman Hesse and Aldous Huxley provide much-needed doses of spirituality in the often bleak landscape of twentieth-century lit. Magical Realism, Existentialism, jazz, Southern Gothic, avant-garde science-fiction, hard-boiled detective fiction, war poetry, theoretical physics... all this and more appear in these pages. (xii)

There are women, and feminists, in that list, but strikingly pigeonholed. In Milton Knight's adaptation of Zora Neale Hurston's humorous play *Poker!*, the only female character comments in the last frame, after all the dumb poker players have cheated and killed each other: "It sure is goin' to be a whole lot tougher in hell now!" (335), the sane (female) observer of a mad (masculine) world. French women writers likewise fit their stereotype and sex up what's on offer, and although not all "sexually liberated French women of letters, Anaïs Nin, Simone de Beauvoir, and Anne Desclos (a.k.a. Pauline Réage, author of *Story of O*.)" appear in *The Graphic Canon* 3. Colette, who "referred to herself as an 'erotic militant'" (Kick 163), is there with a double-page worldless illustration of *Chéri*. Anaïs Nin's *Diaries* are illustrated by Mardou, who originally published this adaptation in "an anthology [she] edited, *Whores of Mensa*" (Kick 456). H. D.'s poem "The Iris" is adapted by Bishakh Som because it illustrates how "[l]ike Georgia O'Keeffe, H. D. used flower imagery to erotic effect" (Kick 134). Kick deems Nin important "as a pioneering female writer of erotic literature" and as an explorer of the diary genre, as she herself analyzed: "The diary taught me that there were no neat ends to novels, no neat denouement,

no neat synthesis. So I began an endless novel, a novel in which the climaxes consisted of discoveries in awareness, each step in awareness becoming a stage in the growth like the layers in trees" (Kick 456). In *The Graphic Canon 3*, female empowerment is achieved mostly through sexual themes.

Drawing the variations of female intimacy, and the female fear of sexuality, expressed in both *Heart of Darkness* and *The Voyage Out* through water images,<sup>9</sup> was an incentive for Caroline Picard as she decided to illustrate Virginia Woolf's novel:

Plus I got to play around a lot with underwater sea creature motifs, as these shadowy, peripheral fears of sexuality (for instance, when Rachel is trying to talk about what happened between her and Mr. Dalloway to another, older friend). What I especially loved was the way Woolf's characters are kind of blasé about the whole thing. (Contributor Interview)

The overcoming of that fear through sisterhood is in keeping with *The Graphic Canon's* feminist commitment, somehow boiled down to a "focus on women searching for identity and independence" (13), as Kick sums up Chopin's perspective – in this light, Picard's misrepresentation of Helen as a friend and not an aunt is interesting.

Such consensual political stance is deemed typical of popular culture and anthologies, in particular in relation to genre, as illustrated in Barbara Pace's pithy description of such editions:

The textbook canon<sup>10</sup> does not affirm differences of opinion or lifestyle. On the contrary. It whitewashes any issues of life in the United States and thus makes controversy seem unAmerican, a dangerous practice in a nation where free speech and debate provide fire to impassion the electorate. It also anchors the notion that those who are different had better be quiet, that those who are angry have no constructive outlet. (38)

Doesn't, therefore, Kick's declaration that his "vision from the start was to essentially create *The Norton Anthology Literature* in graphic form" (qtd. Cornog) somehow contradict the feminist bias he puts forward? However this may be, it seems to me that Picard goes beyond the production of a

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<sup>9</sup> In her chapter entitled "Vaginal Passages," DeKoven argues that the main connection between *Heart of Darkness* and *The Voyage Out* is the water imagery and its sexual connotations.

<sup>10</sup> This is how Pace created the "textbook canon" she analyzes: "First, I examined five commonly used US literature anthologies from major publishers: Harcourt; Scott Foresman; Prentice-Hall; Holt; and McDougal, Littell. Next I compiled a textbook canon by listing authors whose works appeared in three of the five books. When patterns of genre emerged, I grouped works according to genre. Finally I considered how this canon presents people of color and women, as characters and as writers." (33)

“whitewashed” (Pace 38), inspiring adaptation – like that *The Awakening* by Migdal, as I read it – and that it does so in two ways.

First, it points to the historicity of perception and reception through interpicturelity. It thus renders the transfer from highbrow to middlebrow culture more complex than first meets the eye, as it highlights “the artificiality of the great narrative” imposed on literature and its canon (Lerer 1253). Picard creates a sequence of self-contained imbricated shapes, creating a tension between frames and organic growth, which allows for a temporal reading, as though the eye – there are many eyes in the drawings – were led through temporal depths.<sup>11</sup> Numerous animals’ mouths swallowing or about to swallow the pictures<sup>12</sup> also contribute to representing the temporal layer-cake of our reception of *The Voyage Out*.

Picard’s manner itself is a palimpsest of the history of graphic styles. The hairstyles and clothes of the vividly sketched figures are very 1920s, as are the decorative elements inspired by Art Nouveau design. This is evocative of the time when *The Voyage Out* was published. Interpicturelity self-reflexively shows that we read the world through pre-existing pictures in a never-ending negotiation of cultural gaps and shifts. For instance, when Rachel asks Helen about “those women in Piccadilly” (Picard “The Voyage Out” 118), the silhouettes of the prostitutes are redolent of posters by Toulouse Lautrec. The opposite page, however, brings to mind the 1970s psychedelic posters, especially those of Wes Wilson, with their graphic use of typography. These rock posters were themselves palimpsests, redesigning Art Nouveau artists, Aubrey Beardsley or Alfons Mucha in particular, in a rebel attempt to revamp the pictorial canon and shatter cultural hierarchies. Interestingly, the resemblance of the full-page format with posters calls attention to the shift of values negotiated by the graphic medium, itself drawn between highbrow culture and the mass market.

As pop appropriation of highbrow culture, Caroline Picard’s adaptation of *The Voyage Out* self-reflexively draws from culturally hybrid pre-existing images that themselves negotiated tensions between cultural values and shifted the boundaries between what is proper and what is not. As it appears, popular culture does not shy away from highbrow references – how could it, it defines itself in relation with it. It plays on their value reverberation and historicity – there is nothing shocking in Lautrec’s representation of prostitutes today as they are sported on tote-bags – and on the complicity their familiarity establishes with certain readers.

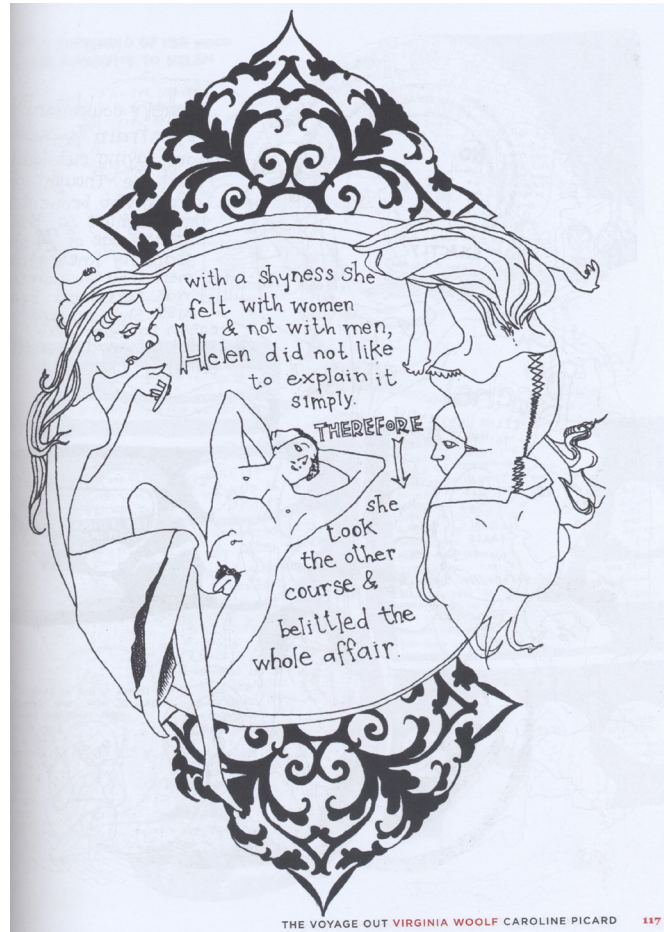
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<sup>11</sup> See two illustrations on Popova’s blog.

<sup>12</sup> See an instance on *Lantern Daily*.



Second, it shapes a new “version” of *The Voyage Out* through a new “versioning” of Virginia Woolf herself, from self-proclaimed outsider to positive role model based on the woman as much as on her texts. Any reader who has remotely heard of the Bloomsbury Group will see Picard’s Rachel in the extract, the young woman kissed without her consent, as a fictional double of Virginia herself, who was molested by her step-brother as a young girl, Gerald Duckworth – who published *The Voyage Out* – and who was only able to confess it two years before she died, in “A Sketch of the Past.” Any reader more familiar with the massive material about her life will probably see Virginia the unconventional woman, getting too close to her sister’s husband, art critic Clive Bell, after their first child was born. That Caroline Picard should give a visual quote of her sister Vanessa’s lifetime companion, painter Duncan Grant, seems to legitimize such biographical reading of Picard’s appropriation of the image of Virginia herself. A full-page drawing [fig. 2]<sup>13</sup> shows a man in the company of prostitutes in the same reclining position as the drawing by Grant entitled *Paul Reclining*.<sup>14</sup> This



**Figure 2:** PICARD, Caroline. “The Voyage Out”. Ed. Russ Kick. *The Graphic Canon 3*. 117. Reproduced by permission of the artist.

<sup>13</sup> For that illustration on p. 117, also see Chamberlain’s blog.

<sup>14</sup> The charcoal drawing, which



reminds us that the canon integrates perhaps not so much works as *people*,<sup>15</sup> and that, as *Cultural Capital*, it offers not so much a selection of texts as a “selection of values” (John Guillory 488 qtd Lerer 1252) – values that appear surprisingly conservative, here, in spite of some graphic – in the sense of crude – drawings.

The virgin preyed on by the Victorian male<sup>16</sup> and the flirt are postures that partake to the Woolf mystique. These female stereotypes also take us back to Edna Pontellier’s dilemma, Rachel’s first kiss, and, more generally, to the double bind of female sexuality, as summed up by another female figure in “The Singing-Woman from the Wood’s Edge,” a Modernist poem by Edna St. Vincent Millay: “After all’s said and after all’s done, / What should I be but a harlot and a nun?” (Kolitsky 193).

This control of female sexuality by a stifling patriarchal society is the major theme unifying women’s narratives in *The Graphic Canon 3*. In Mardou’s “*Diaries*,” Nin also proclaims: “‘I’m a virgin-whore.’ C’est moi! I intend to follow every impulse” (460). C. Frakes selects five chapters from Edith Wharton’s *The Age of Innocence* that show how manipulative, innocent-looking May Welland instrumentalizes that system to repeatedly trap Newland Archer into a loveless marriage. Another female writer appearing in *The Graphic Canon 3* is “‘literary terrorist’ Kathy Acker” from the “New York punk / underground scene” (Kick 504) who published from the 1970s till the end of the 1990s. Molly Kiely illustrates her *Blood and Guts in High School*, which “tells of Janey, a girl who has a series of sexual relationships with her father, gang members, a Persian slave trader, and the French writer Jean Genet, among many, many others, before dying of cancer at the age of fourteen.” (Kick 504)

Of course female writers present in the anthology are not the only ones who deal with sexuality, marriage or feelings; so do “Rain” by Lance Took after Somerset Maugham or *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* by Lisa Brown after D. H. Lawrence, to name a few. However, as a series, these adaptations of literary works by female authors make sense and reveal cultural stances or premises. First, women write stories, and mostly about themselves, since they are especially interested in self-discovery – the only notable exception is Jeremy Eaton’s adaptation of “The Heart of the Park” by Flannery O’Connor. No non-narrative text by a woman appears in *The Graphic Canon 3* alongside Freud’s *The Interpretation of Dreams* and Sartre’s *Nausea* – which, however autobiographical, founded existentialism – while

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was sold in 2011 may be seen on Pierre Bergé & Associés’s site.

<sup>15</sup> Picard is very much interested in the relationship between celebrities and visual arts. See Picard, “Smells like a movie star.”

<sup>16</sup> The “incest survivor” (1) contentiously fashioned by DeSalvo.

Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* or *Three Guineas* would have been obvious candidates among others. Even Anaïs Nin's *Diaries* become an "endless novel" (Kick 456) and Mardou has the Nin character exclaim: "Merde! Why can't I just write a novel?" (457), a heartfelt cry which encapsulates the limited literary space assigned to women, even in feminist *Canon*. Second, texts by women have been selected for their exemplary value. This shows in many presentations of female writers by Kick. Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*, of which Ellen Lindner gives a one-page illustration, "[I]argely autobiographical, albeit with a hopeful ending, [has] become a touchstone for young women who feel ill-at-ease in the world" (447). "The Voyage Out" is made to illustrate a moment of self-knowledge and empowerment, one of female education: "Her aunt Helen tries to educate her about the ways of the world, especially love" (111). In the end, the ultimate figure of empowerment in *The Graphic Canon* is that of the women writers themselves, Kick suggesting metonymical shifts from work to author: Colette is noteworthy because she has left "her scandalous mark" (163), and Acker is presented as the ultimate outsider female artist:

Acker has never been fully accepted into the world of high-brow Postmodernism inhabited by Pynchon, Barthelme, Don DeLillo, David Foster Wallace, et al. She and her work are just too untamable and confrontational, her techniques too experimental and personal for the literati. Still, through sheer, raw power, she created outside classics of Postmodernism. (504)

If "scandalous," or "too experimental and personal" are turned into qualities through Kick's pen, they still allow women artists to be judged primarily as women, from the point of view of morality and convention, albeit it as tremendously admirable cultural shifters.

*The Graphic Canon 3*, then, is not without a few contradictions. For instance, Kick includes Gabriela Mistral, a Chilean poetess who, he points out with a frown, "even in her native country [Chile], [...] has been watered down to make her safe for consumption" (406). The single-page illustration of her poem "The Dancer," "part of a cluster of poems called "Crazy Women" ("Locas Mujeres")" (406), by Andrea Arroyo is nevertheless a good example of watering down.<sup>17</sup> Such ambivalence is not to be slightly dismissed as misreading, betrayal, or failure but is revealing inasmuch as it points to the fact that feminism itself has a history and is constituted as a cultural battlefield between highbrow theory and popular practices, as these adaptations all reshape feminist texts from the past from contemporary feminist perspectives. As Julie Sanders shows, "the effort to write a history of adaptation necessarily transmutes at various points into a history of critical theory" (18).

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<sup>17</sup> See the illustration on: <http://www.andreaarroyo.com/publicartillustration.html>

The complex cultural entanglement and the mass market's catering to a contemporary trend or need are not incompatible phenomena:

Adaptation is frequently involved in offering commentary on a source text. This is achieved most often by offering a revised point of view from the 'original,' adding hypothetical motivation, or voicing the silenced and marginalized. Yet adaptation can also constitute a simpler attempt to make texts 'relevant' or easily comprehensible to new audiences and readerships via the process of proximation and updating. (Sanders 18-19)

The stories adapted from female writers in *The Graphic Canon 3* are feminist mostly in that they are about empowerment, liberation and self-discovery. They propose positive role-models for (young) (female) readers, a trend which probably ought to be put in relation with the fact that the market of self-help books is flourishing today.

Reading Caroline Picard's adaptation of Virginia Woolf's *The Voyage Out* as part of an anthology shaping an alternative canon has shown that, although it may be considered that adaptation is "an inherently conservative genre" (Sanders 9) that "whitewashes" (Pace 38) its source texts, such conservatism is also run through by contradictory forces, that adaptation looks both backward and forward. In that light, Picard's "Voyage Out" relocates Virginia Woolf's novel in interesting ways. First, it historicizes our reception of it by turning it into a graphic palimpsest, in the process reasserting that the values projected onto art works evolve in time. Second, it shapes a new version of Woolf for our contemporary which reflects a particular moment in the history of her appropriation by the market and illustrates the tensions inherent to a massified feminism. The extract selected ignores the ironical political statement of Woolf's novel to adapt "a generally circulated cultural memory" (Ellis 3, qtd Sanders 25) not of that novel – *The Voyage Out* is not one of those novels anybody could say a few words about even though they might never have opened it like, say, *Mrs Dalloway* – not even other novels by Virginia Woolf, but rather Virginia Woolf herself. Picard allows us to grasp a new version of Woolf such as she is appropriated by popular culture today. She has long been a "feminist icon" (Silver 150) but her new versioning illustrates the contemporary need for a popular feminist discourse that proposes concrete, inspiring female figures. Like Helen, who, in the extract, guides Rachel without any hint that she might also manipulate her, Virginia Woolf, or rather her "generally circulated cultural memory," is revamped as a self-help role model. The ambiguities of sexuality Virginia Woolf is usually associated with are wiped out, as Rachel seems to definitely overcome her fear of sexuality, visualized as sea monsters. What allows this revamping is an identification process brought to light by Lanier about the adaptations of Shakespeare's works, namely "how popular audiences use popular culture

as raw material to make meaning in their own lives, uses often contradictory to those for which the works were originally designed” in a way that is best exemplified by the phenomenon of “fans” (7). The Virginia Woolf Icon has grown even more independent of her published works, Academia, and popularization academic literary biographies, as it became familiar, and fans now identify with her globally. The contemporary Virginia Woolf no longer arouses fear; quite the opposite, she has become a narrative inspiring young women readers to self-discovery and independence. The reviews of *The Graphic Canon* might have prepared potential readers for something like *The Voyage Out* for dummies, but instead they discovered an inspiring book partaking in a literary tradition bent on helping “young women who feel ill-at-ease in the world” (Kick 447).

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