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The Graphic Canon, Vol. 1: From the Epic of Gilgamesh to Shakespeare to Dangerous Liaisons (The Graphic Canon Series)

Russ Kick

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THE GRAPHIC CANON (Seven Stories Press) is a gorgeous, one-of-a-kind trilogy that brings classic literatures of the world together with legendary graphic artists and illustrators. There are more than 130 illustrators represented and 190 literary works over three volumes—many newly commissioned, some hard to find—reinterpreted here for readers and collectors of all ages.

Volume 1 takes us on a visual tour from the earliest literature through the end of the 1700s. Along the way, we're treated to eye-popping renditions of the human race's greatest epics: *Gilgamesh*, *The Iliad*, *The Odyssey* (in watercolors by Gareth Hinds), The *Aeneid*, *Beowulf*, and *The Arabian Nights*, plus later epics *The Divine Comedy* and *The Canterbury Tales* (both by legendary illustrator and graphic designer Seymour Chwast), *Paradise Lost*, and *Le Morte D'Arthur*. Two of ancient Greece's greatest plays are adapted—the tragedy *Medea* by Euripides and Tania Schrag's uninhibited rendering of the very bawdy comedy *Lysistrata* by Aristophanes (the text of which is still censored in many textbooks). Also included is Robert Crumb's rarely-seen adaptation of James Boswell's *London Journal*, filled with philosophical debate and lowbrow debauchery.

Religious literature is well-covered and well-illustrated, with the Books of Daniel and Esther from the Old Testament, Rick Geary's awe-inspiring new rendition of the Book of Revelation from the New Testament, the *Tao te Ching*, Rumi's Sufi poetry, Hinduism's *Mahabharata*, and the Mayan holy book *Popol Vuh*, illustrated by Roberta Gregory. The Eastern canon gets its due, with *The Tale of Genji* (the world's first novel, done in full-page illustrations reminiscent of Aubrey Beardsley), three poems from China's golden age of literature lovingly drawn by pioneering underground comics artist Sharon Rudahl, the Tibetan Book of the Dead, a Japanese Noh play, and other works from Asia.

Two of Shakespeare's greatest plays (*King Lear* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*) and two of his sonnets are here, as are Plato's *Symposium*, *Gulliver's Travels*, *Candide*, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Renaissance poetry of love and desire, and *Don Quixote* visualized by the legendary Will Eisner.

Some unexpected twists in this volume include a Native American folktale, an Incan play, Sappho's poetic fragments, bawdy essays by Benjamin Franklin, the love letters of Abelard and Heloise, and the decadent French classic *Dangerous Liaisons*, as illustrated by Molly
Crabapple.

Edited by Russ Kick, ***The Graphic Canon*** is an extraordinary collection that will continue with ***Volume 2: "*Kubla Khan" *to the* Bronte Sisters *to The Picture of Dorian Gray*** in Summer 2012, and ***Volume 3: From Heart of Darkness to Hemingway to Infinite Jest*** in Fall 2012. A boxed set of all three volumes will also be published in Fall 2012.

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