Drawing on the Classics: Adaptation, Appropriation and Authority in Illustrating Novels

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A New Yorker cartoon depicts a pair of men walking past a bookstore window. One man, wearing an exasperated look, exclaims, “Now I have to start pretending I like graphic novels, too?” (Kaplan). This comic illustrates the rise in cultural capital that graphic novels have experienced in recent years. What was once a child’s genre has become an art form worthy of cultural and academic attention (even if feigned). Some suggest that this change corresponds to a wider shift toward visual media in general, as Robin Varnum and Christina T. Gibbons note in the introduction to The Language of Comics: “The balance of power between word and images which, after the invention of the printing press, shifted in favor of the word, seems now to be shifting in favor of the image” (ix).

When graphic novels are placed alongside classic literature, the sense of canonical authority we associate with the latter may appear threatened. Granted, some graphic novels address serious subject matter, such as Spiegelman’s Maus and Strapati’s Persepolis, and thus may more comfortably rub shoulders with the canon, but recent years have also witnessed the rendering of countless classic novels in visual form. Graphic novels of Austen’s Pride and Prejudice, Kipling’s Kim, and Sterne’s Tristram Shandy lead us to wonder if such adaptations trivialize or even insult the originals, or rather, if they further acknowledge the classic’s authority.

This essay will address the question of how tradition responds to adaptation by examining the relationship between the visual work and the written original, taking into account the types of interpretive decisions that the artists make in the process of adaptation. Tracking artistic renderings not as something that threatens or appropriates the authority of its source, but rather as models of everyday reading, allows us to better understand our own relationship with classics. We tend to think of tradition as stodgy, but illustrated classics help us recognize a dichotomy in our attitude; traditional texts are concurrently authoritative and open to appropriation. Great books are the ones we most worry about interpreting “faithfully” but then again, they are the ones that most often serve as fodder for creative inspiration.

Illustrated versions of traditional texts profoundly demonstrate the nature of this dichotomy. Rendering a novel in pictures can uncover the artist’s personal interpretation of the text, or it can suggest the artist’s dedication to the integrity of the source text and prompt us to more closely scrutinize the original. To represent the idea that a novel can be a very fruitful starting point for personal expression, open to unique interpretation, I turn to Matt Kish’s collection Moby Dick in Pictures and Zak Smith’s Pictures Showing What Happens on Each Page of Thomas Pynchon’s Novel Gravity’s Rainbow. For an example of an artistic project that strives to offer a “faithful” representation and celebrates the authority of a text I will examine the Ulysses “Seen” project. I will connect these collections of illustrations to cognitive theories, demonstrating how the mind interacts with fiction, tracking the authority of each bit of information we encounter. Illustrations make visible the fact that our notion of “canonicity” is a
paradox; our reading always toggles between elevating and preserving texts, and freely playing with them.

Cognitive theories offer one means of interpreting the split in approaches to illustration. Scholars like Lisa Zunshine and Alan Palmer view fiction as a series of meta-representations, or more simply put, a representation of a representation (Zunshine 47). Reading fiction, they argue, involves tracking a series of attributions, tracking which characters know what information, what they believe, or how they feel, and finally tracking the source of all this stimuli. Often these representations stack up. We see that character X knows that character Y knows some bit of information, and perhaps we know how or why he formulated this idea. To take an example from *Moby Dick*, readers perceive, early in the narrative, that Ishmael is fearful of bunking with Queequeg because he imagines the exotic foreigner to be hostile, unstable, and dangerous, due to stories heard from the landlord. As readers we encounter a representation of Ishmael’s representation of Queequeg, which is actually a representation of the landlord’s representation of Queequeg.

Meta-representations leave us with a collection of “source tags” or rather “according to…” notes (Zunshine 51). We perceive Queequeg according to Ishmael, who understands according to the landlord, who understands according to his observations of Queequeg. Another level of representation, one that is easily overlooked as readers become engrossed in the story, is the author’s. We understand Queequeg according to Melville’s description of Ishmael, who understands according to … and so on. An illustrated novel adds an additional source tag. Matt Kish offers his first illustration of Queequeg on page 18 of his book, corresponding with page 18 of the Signet Classic edition of Melville’s novel. His image is clearly stylized, drawn in squiggly lines on found paper, a collage cut-out skull head and red ink dripping like blood. It is rather unlikely that Kish’s image of Queequeg corresponds with your own, and hence the “according to Kish” source tag is emphasized.
Palimpsestic Illustrations and the Dream-Narrative

The illustration-for-each-page genre of text offers readers a compelling representation of the cognitive process of reading fiction. We might call them “palimpsests,” as they are much more works written upon Melville’s and Pynchon’s texts than “illustrations” of these texts. In that light, they allow us to see how Smith and Kish process a text. The stylization of each artist directly signals to readers that what we see are representations of their experience with the novels. We see their acts of processing texts. In short, we see the source tag made prominent: Moby Dick according to Kish, and Gravity’s Rainbow according to Smith.

Each of these authors admits that the pictorial work is a subjective interpretation. Kish writes in his introduction, “Really, I just wanted to make a version of Moby Dick that looks like how I see it” (v). Similarly, Smith explains after citing a particular line from page 49 of Gravity’s Rainbow, “when I read that sentence... I think of me – just as when you read it you probably think of you. So in trying to be thorough as well as faithful to my understanding of the words, I very occasionally end up making pictures that simply wouldn’t do if I’d actually been hired to illustrate the book” (xv, italics Smith’s). Smith admits to two kinds of loyalties – to his own vision, as well as to Pynchon’s words. A page later Smith explains that when Pynchon writes “ambulance” he draws an ambulance, not a washrag, assuring us “this book is not some hippie
word-association game” (xvi). When readers then examine page 49 of Smith’s book, they find a man with an amputated arm, just as Pynchon’s text describes, “the sight of your blood spurting from the flaccid stub of artery” (49). Smith tells us that this figure is “not some sort of WWII era British everyman or woman,” but a skinny guy with a tattooed arm (xv). Smith’s self-portrait in the back of the book does bear a strong resemblance to the man on page 49.


In addition to putting himself into the narrative, other source tags become evident through inconsistencies or anachronisms in Smith’s illustrations. One item that stands out is his treatment of nude or scantily clad women, such as his illustration of page 157, where he draws two young women undressing. Admittedly, a nude human is a nude human, and really bears no markers of time, but the posture of the figures and the illustrative style recalls Smith’s other paintings and drawings, seeming to agree with what we would expect from someone with books and art shows bearing titles like *Girls in the Naked Girl Business* and *We Did Porn*. We might expect a novel set in WWII to depict women in a style resembling the pin-up art of that era, but Smith’s women appear much more late twentieth or twenty-first century: one woman is wearing bikini-style underwear that seems historically inaccurate, a woman on page 36 in wearing a red brassiere that matches her unnaturally red hair. These are stylistic choices, to be sure, but in relation to the narrative being depicted, we might say such things are residue: they
are bits of Smith’s own world and experiences that become enmeshed in the emerging rendering of Pynchon’s narrative.


I take the term “residue” from Freud’s *Interpretation of Dreams*, where he writes that the “day’s residues” become “essential ingredients in the formation of dreams” (562). The illustrations discussed here are not dreams, but their interplay between external and internal, between conscious and subconscious, suggests a mechanism akin to Freud’s dream logic. Smith and Kish make particular choices in assembling an image for a page of text, and the source of these choices is varied. First, after reading a page of text, they must choose what to use as the visual focus of the page. Second, in choosing the shape, color, layout, style, et cetera, - in short in making the verbal visual – these artists must call upon images already stored in their minds. These stored images carry a psychological weight. For example, in his introduction Kish writes about being influenced by childhood memories of the art of Jack Kirby and of the 1956 film version of *Moby Dick* (v, vii). Memories of this sort are certainly “residue” that becomes essential to the formation of a visual representation. Other residue surely influences his style. Why do his humans so often appear like robots? Why is Ahab usually depicted with only one eye? These are prominent visual cues that clearly convey something to Kish. Finally, and probably the most literal sense of residue, Kish creates most of his drawings on found paper – orphaned leaves from books, pages of instruction manuals, or television repair diagrams. In some cases the connection between the contents of the pre-existing page and the superimposed image appears wholly random, while at other times the old image influences the new one and contributes something foreign to it and the perception of the narrative.
When we view these books we witness the artists’ processes of assemblage, their mixing of Melville’s or Pynchon’s words and ideas with scraps of memory, with the residue of daily life. This act of collecting disparate elements to create a narrative is something that those who study psychology have observed. Freud, in discussing wish-fulfillment through dreams, points out that the mind “will prefer to take possession of the ready-made day dream and seek to introduce it into the content of the dream” (492). Contemporary cognitive theorists suggest that when we read narratives our minds perform a similar task. Ralf Schneider, for example, explains that one of the mind’s tasks during reading is the creation of “character models”; we build up an understanding of the characters, and this process contains several steps, the first of which is “categorization” or what Schneider calls “top-down reading.” Here the reader seeks to “assimilate the target person into a structure of social knowledge stored in long-term memory” (Schneider 617). In other words, the mind wants to process a story as efficiently as possible, and so looks to match the descriptions in the text with pre-made components: we hope to recognize a literary, religious, or folk figure, or a social stereotype.

While we are reading a text it is easy to forget or to not recognize that this assembly or top-down reading is taking place. We can fall into the belief that we are consuming something, but this is not the case, for all reading is palimpsestic. Readers are rarely aware of their own contributions to the reading process, when in fact the “text” that exists in a reader’s mind is a collaborative project, consisting of the author’s descriptions as a sort of framework that is then further developed or fleshed out by the reader’s imagination; what the characters look like, the details of the setting, the weather, and a whole range of additional information comes from the readers subconscious. Kish’s and Smith’s collections of images help us recognize our individual contributions: it is clear that the Moby Dick inside Kish’s head does not look like the Moby Dick inside my head, nor does the Gravity’s Rainbow in Smith’s mind resemble the Gravity’s Rainbow in mine, because we each assemble the characters from different components.

This raises the question of how does one categorize these collections. They are not illustrations. They are not meant to clarify or offer some authoritative visual representation. They are not translations from verbal to visual. If, as we mentioned, reading is a process of building character models from recollections or images stored in our long-term memory, then Kish’s and Smith’s books are simply “readings.” We may be tempted to consider their books as peeks inside their minds’ experiences reading the novels.

But this assessment would not be altogether accurate either. There is, after all, a public aspect to the collections. Creating a shared artifact entails, first of all, consideration of what one wants to make public – in other words, the artist asks, “is this the vision of Captain Ahab or Tyrone Slothrop I want the world to see?” Such creation also requires the artist to be conscious of his or her process of mining the sub-conscious. While reading, many of us have likely had the experience of imagining a character resembles a particular actor, a figure in a painting, or someone we remember from childhood. But we are not immediately aware that we make such an association, and why would we be? Schneider explains that top-down reading is the mind’s way of handling narrative efficiently, and where is the efficiency in stopping to consider the source of associations? If anything, to say Kish’s and Smith’s collections are representations of
their reading, would be to say they are representations of book club or literature class discussions of reading. When a person shares his or her interpretation of a novel with other readers, differences are made clear. In describing a character, a reader might realize what memory is influencing his or her interpretation. Similarly, in creating visual representations of how they picture the novels, Kish and Smith call attention to their own associations.

The creation of these images works according the same sub-conscious mechanics of dreaming and creation, but it is nevertheless followed by conscious decision making in execution or creation. The images presented in Smith’s and Kish’s collections are the residue of their minds jumbled together with other narratives, and the result remains only semi-coherent, like a dream. And while the collections of images are un-like dreams, because of their public nature, let us remember that people do share their dreams with other people. Often we consider dreams interesting, curious puzzles worthy of shared contemplation. The ambiguity inherent in many dreams is not unlike the ambiguity of novels. The semi-coherence that comes from jumbling – and I would consider Kish’s and Smith’s books semi-coherent; they are not books that give us a very good sense of the source narratives unless we are already familiar with them – creates a comfort that facilitates sharing. Counter to what we might expect an illustration to do, these images do not close a text; they do not narrow our considerations by giving use a more concrete understanding of the characters and settings, but rather open the texts and invite additional interpretation. These books are ultimately illustrations, but not illustrations of Moby Dick or Gravity’s Rainbow; rather, they are illustrations of someone’s reading. They are palimpsests, written upon another text, and they are dream narratives that at once reveal and conceal their creators. They reveal because, in sharing their associations or residue, the artists expose a very individual, personal response to the texts. But they also conceal because what we see on the page is similar to what Freud would call manifest content, distorted by condensation, displacement, and the other mechanisms of dreamwork, thereby allowing the artist to hide behind the puzzling content.

The evidence of the source tags in these texts demonstrates an approach to canonical literature that is unavoidable. The text blends with residue, with other texts, and with memories. The artists responsible for these two collections of images simply choose to celebrate that intermingling, seeing it as an opportunity for art to yield more art. A contrasting attitude toward canonical literature is evident in the rendering of James Joyce’s Ulysses in graphic novel format. This project represents readers' attempts to ignore or deny the effects of residue when we read great books, because, by merit of their greatness, we owe them an authentic, unadulterated read.

“Scriptural” Authority and Illustration to Educate

At its most basic level Ulysses “Seen” intends to tell the story of James Joyce’s eponymous novel in graphic novel form and to make it available digitally. While Smith and Kish offered single illustrations “inspired” by each page, and generally keep the printed text off of their
pages, this project allows readers who have never cracked the covers of the source text to comprehend the plot and characters rather well, due to its fidelity and thoroughness.

Yet many novels have been rendered in graphic form and offer a reading experience that generally conveys the narrative in a fairly complete and faithful manner. *Ulysses “Seen”* is different. This i-pad app and web-based comic includes a reader’s guide explaining each page, as well as a forum for commentary in which readers/viewers may interact with the project’s creators. Furthermore, the particular frames have been designed to correspond to the minutest detail of the text and to offer visual representations of Joyce’s innovative narrative techniques. These features highlight a particular dedication to the text, a sense of fidelity that makes the project function more like Talmudic annotation than visual adaptation. Just as the intent of the Talmud is to elucidate Hebrew scriptural and oral law, the main purpose of *Ulysses Seen*" is to teach the text, to make it more open and accessible. Joyce’s ur-text is given nearly “scriptural” reverence and the illustrations and commentary are intended to discuss and teach the verbal text, never altering or subverting it. In an interview, the artist, Robert Berry, explains that his target audience is “a college-educated, *New Yorker*-subscribing, voracious reader who has never managed to make it through this famously difficult novel” and that he wanted it to be “educational” for uninitiated readers (Priego). His comments suggest that he does not intend for the the comic to replace reading *Ulysses*, nor for it to function as a curious body of creative work related to or inspired by *Ulysses*, but rather that it should serve as a portal into the novel.

The project promotes the authority and primacy of Joyce’s text in a number of ways, one of which is the carefully considered visual design of the pages. Take for instance the fifth page of Telemachus, the first chapter of *Ulysses*, in which Stephen Dedalus watches Buck Mulligan shave on the roof of the tower where they live. Mulligan performs a mock Catholic Mass, chanting Latin and consecrating his bowl of shaving lather. Joyce’s text reads:

He faced about and blessed gravely thrice the tower, the surrounding country and the awakening mountains. Then, catching sight of Stephen Dedalus, he bent toward him and made rapid crosses in the air, gurgling in his throat and shaking his head. Stephen Dedalus, displeased and sleepy, leaned his arms on the top of the staircase and looked coldly at the shaking gurgling face that blessed him... (5).

The corresponding comic page focuses quite distinctly on a few details: Mulligan’s hands forming approximations of priestly gestures, an over-the-shoulder glance as Mulligan seeks a response from Stephen, and a “displeased and sleepy” Stephen in a frame that notably lacks text.
The *Ulysses* “*Seen*” reader’s guide explores the panel’s fidelity to Joyce’s writing. Mike Barsanti, the scholar who wrote the guide accompanying each of Berry’s drawings says that it is “[i]nteresting how Rob [Berry] has drawn it, we’re getting Stephen’s POV here,” and Barsanti goes on to educate readers on Joyce’s signature technique of giving “elements of the vocabulary or stylistic tics or perceptions” of characters to the narrative voice (Berry). Without using the term, he explains Joyce’s free indirect discourse and how well Berry’s design choices represent this literary technique. Further on, in the comments section, Berry chimes in, asserting that the graphic novel is well-suited to Joyce’s novel since, “[v]iewpoint changes easily in comics with the shift of a camera angle, but in film or theatre the viewpoint is always focused through the specific position of the audience” (Berry). Similarly, Janine Utell notes that “[b]ecause the conventions of comics allow for representing shifts in perspective, splits in the subject, movement over time and space, and the manipulation of voice – in short because comics allow for a high degree of narrativitiy – this form is a good match for Joyce’s intensively allusive and elusive text.”

A good example of the manipulation of time, space, and mental state is found on page 0014 of *Ulysses* “*Seen*” when the shaving scene at the top of the tower begins to blend with Stephen’s memory of his mother’s death. Joyce’s text reads, “Stephen, an elbow rested on the jagged granite, leaned his palm against his brow and gazed at the fraying edge of his shiny black coat-sleeve” (7); the visual images once again shows us Stephen’s point-of-view in the top right corner, focusing on the cuff of his coat. In the reader’s guide Barsanti calls this “a marvelous bit of framing” (Berry). But the juxtaposition of images is also noteworthy: in the lower half of the
panel, the bay Stephen overlooks and the bowl of coughed-up bile intriguingly echo one another. Joyce’s text moves freely between the two: “The ring of bay and skyline held a dull green mass of liquid. A bowl of white china has stood beside her deathbed holding the sluggish bile” (7). Here we again see free indirect discourse rendered visual, a fidelity to Joyce’s blending of expository narrative and personal flashback.

Berry, *Ulysses “Seen”, I: Telemachus, 0014.*

Berry’s visual offering includes other nods to Joyce’s narrative techniques. In the opening scene to Telemachus, Stephen remains largely silent while Mulligan is quite verbose. Berry allows speech bubbles to dominate these frames. While Joyce’s text figuratively pushes characters and descriptions of the physical world aside for lengthy dialogue or monologue, the visual text mimics Joyce’s by literally pushing images of the characters to the edges of the frames and allowing speech bubble to populate the center. At another point in the novel, the comic quite distinctly delays illustrating Bloom’s wife Molly in the images from Calypso. We first encounter her only as a voice through the bedroom door, and when we are finally in the room with her, Berry frames the images to obscure her since she has not yet been physically described by the text. More significantly, on one particular page, Joyce’s text reads, “[e]ntering the bedroom he halfclosed his eyes and walked through warm yellow twilight toward her tousled head” (61). As with the earlier Telemachus panels, we are given the main character’s point-of-view, and Molly is drawn without detail as if seen through half-closed eyes, only allowing a detailed view of the top of her head. Furthermore, the visual design reinforces one
of Bloom’s significant character traits – a willful naïveté. He walks into the room with a letter from Blazes Boylan, knowing Blazes and Molly with have a romantic liaison later that day; Bloom’s refusal to acknowledge this is communicated through his refusal, and the comic’s refusal, to genuinely look at Molly.

The reader’s guide, beyond simply attempting to educate readers in Joyce's techniques, also serves a Talmudic role as it encourages a discussion of what Joyce's text itself means as well as how the comic can best adhere to the authorial intent. A discussion in the comments for page 0012 of Telemachus, for example, analyzes Mulligan’s use of the word “Hyperborean,” with posts by the artist and readers, drawing in published commentary like Don Gifford’s guidebook Ulysses Annotated, as well as their own interpretations. However accurate anyone's analysis may be, the point remains that the team behind Ulysses “See” and its reading community argue about whose interpretation falls closest to Joyce's thoughts; intentional fallacy be damned, the commentary on Ulysses “See” privileges the author above all.

This is not to say there is no place for detractors. One frequent contributor to the comments section, with the screen-name FrankD, observes on page 0005 of Telemachus that Stephen looks too old in the drawings, and on 0012 that Mulligan’s build and eye color do not match Joyce’s descriptions of the young man. On 0017, FrankD comments that the overcast sky doesn’t reflect that “June 16th was a bright sunshiny day” in Joyce’s novel (Berry). In response to this, both Barsanti and Berry note that these artistic choices “supported our methods” (Berry) and were “atmospheric” in foreshadowing a scene that will happen 100 pages later, a type of long-range interconnectedness that Berry claims Joyce frequently employs in his writing (Berry). FrankD simply responds that “Joyce would not have wanted” these inaccuracies (Berry). Whether we as readers agree or disagree with these discrepancies, it is important to note that both parties are arguing over which method offers the truest representation of Joyce’s text, therefore reinforcing its “scriptural” or canonical authority.

The reader’s guide further valorizes this attitude as it invites interaction, posing rhetorical questions and prompting viewers to add nuance to the creators' interpretation. Just as the reader’s guide helps explain Joyce’s use of free indirect discourse, a similarly educational issue arises on page 0036 of Telemachus, this time concerning the expository text included in the frames. As the housemates settle down to breakfast, a milkmaid arrives to make her daily delivery. The paragraph in Joyce’s text reads: “He [Stephen] watched her [the milkmaid] pour into the measure...”, but the text also includes a cryptic allusion to the woman: “Old and secret she had entered from a morning world, maybe a messenger;” and also an imaginative projection of her morning chores: “Crouching by a patient cow at daybreak, in the lush field...” (Joyce 15). The entirety of this text is preserved, nearly verbatim, in black boxes with white lettering on pages 0036 and 0037 of Ulysses “See.” In the notes Barsanti asks: “Who do you think is ‘saying’ the ‘Rich white milk’ passage? Is it Stephen? Are you sure?” (Berry). Thus while Barsanti hints that it may not be Stephen, he does not commit to it one way or the other.

One way of answering the question – not necessarily what Joyce intended, but at least what the Ulysses “See” interpretation is – would be to decipher Berry’s visual codes. What do black boxes indicate on other pages and how do they compare to other styles of text? And more
generally, how does this compare to the conventions of other comics? If it is meant to be Stephen’s thoughts, wouldn’t thought bubbles or clouds be a more appropriate choice? This convention has not appeared in Telemachus, but if one looks forward to Calypso, one sees Bloom’s thoughts rendered in similar clouds. But as a narrative Calypso is much more firmly tied to Bloom’s stream-of-consciousness than Telemachus is to Stephen’s. So we might look elsewhere in Telemachus to see how non-dialog text is handled. A return to page 0014 reveals the interplay of black lettering on light backgrounds, and white lettering on black backgrounds. All of this text comes from a single paragraph, again beginning with Stephen resting his elbow, looking past his cuff at the sea, but readers are never sure if the content of the passage is meant to be regarded as his thoughts. Instances of black lettering on light backgrounds, however, appear to deal with largely external observations: the sea, the skyline, Mulligan, and his razor. The white letters on black concern Stephen’s mother on her deathbed. It would seem that the color differentiates two camps of information, external and internal, and perhaps as a visual metaphor, points toward the latter type as indicative of Stephen’s “darker” thoughts.

Observations of how the narrative is delivered, or how each “voice” is denoted in the visual text, draws attention to the cognitive aspects of reading the graphic text. To come back to the same concepts examined in Kish’s and Smith’s representations of canonical texts, how does Ulysses “Seen” deal with source tags? While Smith’s and Kish’s texts quite distinctly emphasize a source tag – e.g. this is Kish’s representation of Ishmael’s impression of Queequeg... and so on, I would argue that Ulysses “Seen” aims to diminish or subdue the “according to Rob Berry” source tag. As we view the graphic novel our attention is drawn to the speech bubbles, thought bubbles, and narrative text boxes. This prompts us to mentally add the “according to Stephen” or “according to Bloom” tag, but our attention is diverted away from the “according to Berry” tag by the direct discussion addressing its fidelity to Joyce’s text. Smith and Kish unabashedly make their illustrations their own in a way Berry does not. The former clearly admire and respect the source text: Smith made 760 illustrations over a period of a few frantic months, and Kish made 552, one a day, every day while working fulltime. But a difference in loyalty can be detected in the Kish’s admission that, “[r]eally, I just wanted to make a version of Moby Dick that looks like how I see it” (v). Berry and Barsanti are undeniably in a different camp. They will not give us Ulysses how they see it, but rather strive like dedicated rabbis to provide the proper elucidation of Joyce’s text. The source tag which takes precedence above all others in Ulysses “Seen” is “according to Joyce.”

Attention to the source tags accompanying illustrations highlights a dichotomy in our attitude toward canonical literature – we give it reverence in such a way that demands fidelity to the source, but we also view it as a source of inspiration, a portal to our own creative abilities. Yet one can easily imagine switching the nature of the source tags on these two projects. Gravity’s Rainbow could be rendered as a precise graphic novel (given the book’s difficulty, an accompanying reader’s guide would be welcomed), and Ulysses would be good fodder for a creative artist to render in an image-a-page format, especially the more abstract episodes such as “Circe.”
But what of works of literature that are not canonical? Certainly, commercial fiction is often adapted for film, which arguably entails a similar consideration of source tags and fidelity. Still, movie-goers tend to accept deviations from the source novel as a natural part of the adaptation process, and serious criticisms are only voiced when the source material is a classic work of fiction, or a piece of genre fiction with a fervent fan base, giving it canonical status within a certain cult following.

Does this suggest that we read non-canonical works differently, shedding light on our relationship with tradition? Yes and no. We cognitively process them in a similar manner, as shown in the considerations of how Kish and Smith process text and residue to formulate their palimpsestic readings. We always blend the author’s descriptions with our own mental residue, practicing top-down processing; in this sense all literature can be said to inspire further creative spin-offs, if only in the confines of our own imaginations, and only yielding “according to me” source tags these issues to become worthy of discussion. Likewise, in order to make sense of what we read, we must display a certain degree of appreciation for the “according to the author” source tag. But it is only when we begin playing with the canon, drawing on the classics, that the stakes become high enough for these issues to become worthy of discussion.
Works Cited


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Smith’s book was initially titled Gravity’s Rainbow Illustrated, but Pynchon’s publisher was “concerned that the title implied an endorsement by Penguin or Pynchon,” and thus the title changed (Reid).