Authors Queries

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Artists who turn their talent to illustrating novels have often found themselves in a double bind. If they restrict themselves to visualizing faithfully what the verbal artist has already created, thereby simply repeating what has already been done in another medium, they risk appearing to have subordinated their art to producing superfluous aids for the imaginatively lazy. On the other hand, if, like jazz artists doing a riff on someone else’s tune, they treat the text as only a point of departure and take off where their own talents and inspiration lead them, they risk being condemned for having ‘gotten it all wrong’ by readers who see an illustrated edition simply as a novel with pictures. Unlike other visualizations of literature — movies, theatricalizations (plays, operas, musicals), comic books — the illustrator’s work occupies the same space as the text and would therefore seem to be under some obligation to relate to and even coincide with it. Can it do so, however, and still be valid original, creative art?

There is a third option for literary illustrators, one in which they neither limit their work to helping those unable or unwilling to handle the writer’s creation nor leave that creation behind in a flight of independent fantasy. Aware of the inevitable comparisons between their work and the text that will occupy the same space of encounter, artists who choose this third option use their medium for original development informed by their interpretation of the text. More than just the visual equivalent of a literary critic, though that as well, this sort of illustrator creates art that interacts with the text on its level, responding to questions raised by it and raising questions of its own. Because such illustrations are coherent with the text in a single space of encounter, the two become one, a new artwork in its own right. No longer just a novel with pictures, this becomes a new, multimedia art form, the illustrations and the text constantly referring to each other, each influencing how the reader-viewer experiences and interprets the other.

When the novel has covert subtexts, this third option offers particular potential to the illustrator. When, in addition, the illustrator also needs to be covert with his or her interpretive contribution, the whispered dialogue that goes on between the text, the illustrations and the perceptive reader-viewer takes on a sense of participatory intrigue, a conspiratorial involvement that considerably augments the experience of this new form of art.

Because it contains a covert subtext, Pierre Loti’s Iceland Fisherman (1886) has given rise to several such new artworks. One of the great publishing successes of late nineteenth-century French literature1 as well as one of its most esteemed examples,2 it has been the object of an impressive number of illustrated versions, primarily in France, of course, but also in translation abroad (see bibliography). Most of these versions belong to the first two categories described above, their illustrators having taken the story for what it initially appears to be and depicted scenes from that with greater or lesser fidelity to the text. A few, however, have gone further, seeing beneath the heterosexual tale of Gaud Mevel’s long-unrequited love for Breton fisherman Yann Gaos another love story that neither Loti nor they could portray openly, but that they, like Loti, sought to suggest in covert ways to those who might be interested in seeing it. In In Love with a Handsome Sailor, I showed how the author encoded this homoerotic subtext in Iceland Fisherman.3 Here I would like to show how four of its illustrators, working in tandem with Loti’s words, went about drawing the potentially interested reader into multimedia works that intrigue with a variety of clues which suggest the presence of something more — certainly one definition of a work of art.

Iceland Fisherman begins with a scene that could be — and probably has been — the opening of a gay male porn video. Down in the cramped cabin of a fishing vessel isolated in the North Atlantic far from sexually-censorious Western civilization, five broad-shouldered Breton fishermen sit tightly packed around a table, drinking. One of them, Sylvestre Moan, who, though only 17, was already a man, as far as his size and strength went, was bothered, because of another man named Yann, who had not come yet. So then, where was Yann; still at work up above? Why didn’t he come down to join a little in the celebration? (I:1).4

Most of the novel’s illustrators have chosen to present this first scene, and almost all who have done so seem to have used it to signal whether they were going to deal with the novel’s homoerotic subtext or avoid it. The first of them, Paul-Léon Jazet (1848–?), working for the 380 select individuals who had subscribed to buy a special illustrated printing of the regular version of the novel that Calmann-Lévy had been publishing since 1886, was one of the former.5 He opted to depict the scene a few moments later, once that awaited sixth man, Yann Gaos, had joined the others. Captain Guermeur has just joked

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1. RICHARD M. BERRONG

2. Word & Image, Vol. 000, No. 000, Month 2006

3. Rev 7.51n/W (Jan 20 2003)
about what the young women back in Paimpol must think when they see this sailor, 27 but not yet married, and Yann scoffs at the idea that they might question his virility. The last time he was with a woman, he boasts, she was so pleased with him that when he left her after three weeks she gave him a gold watch. ‘And, in order to show it to them, he threw it on the table like a worthless toy,’ making his feelings for her clear (figure 1).

Jazet’s choice of this particular moment in the first scene — Yann’s declaration of disdain for a female lover and marriage in general — to feature at the head of the first page of the text might have struck at least some contemporary French reader-viewers, particularly those with enough interest in Loti’s work to have spent extra money on a limited edition of the novel, as they would almost certainly have been familiar with the author’s earlier books and the rumors already surrounding his sexual preferences. In addition, however, as Jazet’s Yann tosses the woman’s present down disdainfully, he has his arm around Sylvestre’s shoulders. This element is original on Jazet’s part and is a good first example of how an illustrator can invent elements of his own based on his interpretation of the text to produce an original work that, while it remains within the parameters established by the verbal art, goes beyond it. Jazet’s positioning of Yann and Sylvestre on the other side of the table from the rest of the crew, distant from them but not from each other, is another example of this, and suggests that they are a couple. The interested reader-viewer might also notice that directly behind them is the only bed visible in this illustration, though Loti’s text mentions three. Jazet’s initial illustration demonstrates very clearly, therefore, the third of the illustrator’s three options in working with a novel: he can take advantage of open spaces in the narrative to add elements of his own that constitute not just a visual reproduction but something more: original interpretive elements that join with the writer’s work to form a greater coherent whole. For at least some of this version’s 380 reader-viewers, Jazet’s illustration must have seemed like an advertisement regarding the story that was about to unfold in words and pictures. On the other hand, unlike most of the other illustrations in his version, which are full-page plates, this initial engraving is only a small 1.5’ x 3’ chapter head, so the inattentive reader could have missed the details just noted.

So great was the success of Iceland Fisherman from its first appearance that, after seven years and about 150 editions, Calmann-Lévy decided to bring out not one but three new versions. One, designed to replace the general mass-market version that had been in use since 1886, had no illustrations and was never subject to an illustrated printing like the Jazet. The second is the best-known and most often reproduced of the illustrated versions of the novel and the most intriguing on this issue. By the 1890s, middle-class French society had developed a tradition of giving children lavishly illustrated versions of suitable French literary classics as Christmas and New Year’s gifts, of which Hetzel’s editions of Jules Verne are perhaps the best-known examples. Publishers who had the rights to such titles would commission distinguished artists to prepare many often full-page drawings for each episode in a text. Because Iceland Fisherman was a perfect candidate for this, being both very popular and suitable, with just a few changes, for young readers, Calmann-Lévy hired the much-admired painter and engraver Edmond Adolphe Rudaux (1840–1914) to illustrate such a version, even paying for him to spend time in Paimpol, where most of the work is set, so that his drawings would be true to the reality that inspired the story. Because Rudaux was an esteemed artist in his own right and because Iceland Fisherman was popular with adult readers, Calmann-Lévy also brought out a parallel and more elaborate limited version of 650 copies on fine papers that retained the original text, so Rudaux knew he would have a dual audience.

Figure 1. Jazet’s illustration of the opening scene (page 3).
Which of them he had in mind when he set about visualizing *Iceland Fisherman* cannot be determined, but it is very clear that Rudaux imagined part of at least one of them to be males interested in other males. Over and over again throughout his more than one hundred drawings he seems to be winking at such reader-viewers, doing his part to point out the homoeroticism in the story, just as Jazet had done with his first illustration.

Rudaux’s first illustration for the opening chapter is not particularly homoerotic: he chose a moment before Yann’s entry, like most of its other illustrators, simply showing the other five fishermen huddled around the table. That is not the first drawing one sees in the Rudaux version, however. The first, on the title page where no one could miss it, is a line-up of the novel’s four main characters, Sylvestre, Yann, Gaud and Sylvestre’s grandmother, Yvonne Moan (figure 2). Here for all to see is the tall, broad-shouldered Yann looking not at Gaud but in the direction of Sylvestre and with an expression that suggests he has something on his mind. Then, at the end of the first chapter, Rudaux depicts the cabin boy and the captain smoking their pipes with another sailor looking on (figure 3). Loti’s text mentions only that Yann called the cabin boy to refill the fishermen’s pipes but says nothing further about him. Rudaux takes advantage of this opening in the text to position the cabin boy between the captain’s spread legs — legend had it that cabin boys often ended up serving as surrogate women on ships such as these, which his positioning in this drawing would have recalled — and has another sailor gaze either at the cabin boy’s backside or the captain’s crotch, making clear that the potential homoeroticism of that positioning is not accidental. Once again the illustrator is taking advantage of opportunities in the narrative to create original art that derives from his interpretation of the text. As a result, by the end of the first chapter the perceptive and interested viewer-reader of the Rudaux version would have had reason to be on the lookout for hints of homosexuality in the work to come.

The next scene treated by illustrators that offered homoerotic potential occurs at the end of Part I, again aboard the *Marie*. Yann and Sylvestre, each having received a letter from home, sit together on the deck reading them: ‘the two of them, sitting out of the way in one corner of the deck, their arms entwined and holding each other by the shoulders, read very

Figure 2. Rudaux’s title-page illustration.

Figure 3. Rudaux’s end illustration for Part I, Chapter I (page 15).
slowly, as if to drive deeper into themselves the things about where they lived that were being told to them’ (I:6). The potential for homoeroticism is much more obvious here, which may explain why most of the artists who avoided it when picking a moment in the first scene to illustrate simply chose not to deal with this episode.

Rudaux, however, did. His Yann holds the much smaller Sylvestre close beside him, a smile on his face (figure 4). The bowsprit sticking up long and straight as if protruding directly from Yann’s body would not seem to require a lot of commentary given its angle; it certainly suggests a state of mind and body that could have resulted from that intimacy and produced that smile. The deck planks reinforce its rigidly straight lines and draw attention to it because they run parallel and lead to it. As we shall see, this is the first of several examples in which Rudaux used parallel straight lines to highlight a covert element in his and Loti’s work.

The potentially homoerotic scene is observed by characters in this illustration as well, but in a different fashion. The two fishermen near the bow who look on are frowning. It is hard therefore not to see them as a representation of society, and particularly male society, always looking on, watching every time two men get together to see if they are up to something. Rudaux drawings like this—as we shall see, there are several of them—suggest a gay paranoia, the fear of a closeted man worried that someone might catch him in flagrante and condemn him for being gay, or even see him with another man and suspect him of such. Again, the illustrator has added an element not found in the text yet compatible with it, one that would certainly have spoken to the audience within an audience that Rudaux seems to have imagined.

Comparison with a similarly composed illustration shows just how homoerotically original Rudaux’s drawing is. In 1923, after considerable urging from Loti, who admired their edition of Edmond Rostand’s work, Pierre Lafitte brought out a lavishly and often very beautifully illustrated five-volume set of (most of) the author’s novels. In this set Adolphe Ernest Gumery (1861–?) did all but one of the illustrations for Iceland Fisherman 12. By choosing a higher perspective for his depiction of Yann and Sylvestre reading their letters, Gumery makes them smaller and less the focus of our attention—the mist-shrouded ship in the center of the frame is far more intriguing (figure 5). Soft, wavy lines everywhere remove phallic potential—the stiff mast against which the two of them lean is softened by the remarkably fluid sail attached to it; another sail in the left background undercuts by its curves any rigidity in that part of the ship and altogether hides the necessarily rigid and erect bowsprit. If one looks carefully one can see Yann’s arm around Sylvestre’s shoulders again, but his hand seems so small as not to be constraining and there is a lot more space between the two of them than Rudaux allowed. Their legs are clearly separate, whereas in the Rudaux they are so entwined that it is hard to determine which are whose. Like several of Gumery’s other contributions this is beautiful but also de-eroticizing art; it highlights the extent to which Rudaux’s drawing uses various elements to suggest what neither he nor Loti could have presented openly.

Two later artists who opted to depict this same scene, Daniel-Girard (1890–?), working for the profusely illustrated limited version that Cyral brought out in 1928, and Henri Faivre, working for the first of the three expurgated popular versions of the novel that Hachette created for young readers (1930), also de-eroticized it, though in a different and more clearly intentional fashion. In both cases they chose a perspective that allowed them not to show Yann holding Sylvestre at all (figures 6 and 7). In each depiction he could have an arm around Sylvestre, but because of the angle the artist could refrain from contradicting the text, which might have drawn attention, without having to depict the potential homoeroticism. It is not surprising that the other illustrations in both these versions do nothing to hint at the subtext of the novel.

If the Daniel-Girard watercolor is not homoerotic in itself, however, it becomes so because of its placement. All the
illustrations in the Cyral are placed at the heads of the chapters in which the scene that they depict figures, with this one exception. The book designer put this one illustration not at the head of a chapter but rather in the middle of one. Nor is it in Part I, Chapter 6, where this scene occurs, but rather in the middle of Part I, Chapter 5, which deals with Gaud’s despair at Yann’s indifference to her. In fact, the illustration is placed very specifically in the middle of the paragraph that says of Gaud: ‘her shoulders and her chest, her admirable shape … were probably going to be lost for all men, going to dry up without ever being seen, since Yann didn’t want her for himself’ (I:5). Despite its own de-homoeroticizing composition, this illustration, because of the exceptional nature of its placement, becomes involved in the narrative’s homosexual subtext, seeming to hint that his relationship with Sylvestre lies behind Yann’s not showing any interest in Gaud. This is another way in which illustrations can dialogue with a text, one that, as here, can be independent of and even undercut the illustrator’s apparent intent.

In 1946 Alfred Knopf brought out a general trade version of the novel in English that included 28 black and green drawings by Frederick Trench Chapman (1887–1983). Chapman chose to depict the letter reading as well, changing the perspective once again so that, this time, the encircling arm is front and center where the reader-viewer cannot miss it (figure 8). This time Sylvestre has his arm around Yann, but not, it bears noting, around his friend’s shoulders as in Loti’s text; rather, he holds him as any lover would hold a partner, around the waist. Note, in addition, the butt-shot perspective, which Chapman favored in quite a few of his illustrations. Note also the other fisherman, again positioned with his backside offered to our gaze, seated on the in-this-context phallic post. (The difference between this illustration and figure 4, between having one sailor propped on a potentially phallic post showing no interest in Yann and Sylvestre’s intimacy and Rudaux’s two frowning sailors looking at the couple askance, is certainly striking. It shows an absence of the gay paranoia that runs through Rudaux’s version but not Chapman’s.) Chapman becomes the third of the illustrators who used their own art to develop a dialogue between images and text.

The fourth illustrator to do so also worked with a translation. In 1963, near the end of its existence and after the founder’s son had moved the operation to England, Classics Illustrated brought out a comic book version of the novel under the title Saga of the North. There is no indication of the artist or the writer, but the text does not come from any of the seven English translations published up to 1963, so it was probably based on Loti’s French original. Unlike the work of the other illustrators I examine here, the drawings for this version do not occupy the same space with Loti’s text. In that sense, Saga of the North is like a movie or theatrical adaptation: it replaces Loti’s work in the space of encounter, rather than interacting with it. On the other hand, several of the illustrations make it clear that the unnamed artist knew Loti’s text: they depict elements of the novel not in the comic book script. Therefore, they are still illustrations of the novel and still offer an artist’s interpretation of it, though they would not have participated in the reader-viewer’s immediate encounter with it. Given Classics Illustrated’s proclaimed goal of serving to get young people to read great literature, however, one could argue that the artwork was done in at least the hope that the reader-viewer would soon pick up Loti’s text.

Even though drawing for adolescent males who are often on the lookout for signs of homosexuality as they come to terms with their own sexual impulses, the Classics Illustrated artist was remarkably suggestive in dealing with the letter-reading scene. Yann, his well-developed pectorals outlined by a form-fitting sweater and with as masculine a chin and torso as any gay-male-in-the-making could ever desire, has his arm softly around Sylvestre’s shoulders (figure 9). There is more space between them than Rudaux or Chapman allowed and Sylvestre’s crossed legs protect his sexual region, though not to the extent one sees in the Gumery. The curve of the thick...
rope coming off the coil in the foreground parallels that of the gunwale behind the younger fisherman, however, both repeating that of Yann’s encircling arm and thereby calling attention to it. Whereas Rudaux had used rigidly straight lines to suggest homoeroticism, the Classics Illustrated artist employed curves, again highlighting the potentially homoerotic element here, derived from the text, with parallel repetitions.

The next relevant scene is in the first chapter of Part II and occurs during that de rigueur moment in all stories dealing with the sea: the great storm. At its height, Yann and Sylvestre are on deck, trying to keep the Marie headed into the waves so it will not capsize. ‘Yann and Sylvestre were at the tiller, attached at their belts. They were still singing the song Jean-François de Nantes [a highly misogynistic sea shanty]; drunk with movement and speed, they sang with full voice, laughing at not being able to hear each other in the midst of all those
unleashed noises, taking pleasure in turning their heads to sing against the wind and lose their breath’ (II:1). Loti’s text is not particularly homoerotic here, but some of its illustrations are.

In the Rudaux, Yann and Sylvestre are butt-to-butt (figure 10). The ropes repeat the angles of Yann’s spread thighs and therefore draw attention to his crotch. (As in Figure 4, Rudaux uses parallel straight lines to highlight.) If this makes the boom a visible suggestion of his erect phallus, the raised spot of Yann’s pants over his right knee, which does not resemble a kneecap, also suggests a particularly impressive erection — understandable, given that Sylvestre’s backside is pressed hard against his. Once again, the illustrator adds original elements of his own that remain within the parameters laid out by the text, but that, being original, go toward the creation of a greater, self-analyzing, coherent whole.

Again, the creative homoeroticism of Rudaux’s work becomes even clearer when compared with a similarly composed illustration of the same scene. The third version of Iceland Fisherman that Calmann-Lévy brought out in or around 1893 was part of a set of Loti’s complete works that the publisher undertook that year, no doubt to cash in on their author’s ever-growing popularity and recent advance in prestige — in 1891, at the exceptionally early age of 41, he had been elected to the French Academy; the set, which otherwise presents his works in chronological order, starts with the acceptance speech that he delivered upon entering that body. In A. Le Vasqueur’s illustrated printing of this version Iceland Fisherman has only three drawings, by Gustave Bourgain (?–1921), of which the storm scene is one. Though Bourgain arranged the scene in much the same way as Rudaux, he left plenty of room between the two men (figure 11). The boom, which unlike the rugged protrusion in the Rudaux is neatly stowed, is held in place by ropes that this time parallel and reinforce the angles at which the two lean away from each other, highlighting the distance between them rather than anyone’s crotch. There is no hint of homoeroticism here. Indeed, this depiction is too similar in composition to the Rudaux not to suggest some intentional redoing or undoing on Bourgain’s part. He seems to be not simply illustrating Loti’s text, but trying to undo the homoerotic interpretation proposed by his immediate predecessor. His other two drawings, not surprisingly, are equally un homoerotic, though they do not enter into confrontation with Rudaux’s.

As we have already seen with the Daniel-Girard (figure 6), an illustration can be homoerotic and yet not so at the same time. In the 1930s, Calmann-Lévy undertook another, more profusely illustrated set of Loti’s works, one that covered all the
novels and some of the travel narratives and that, unlike the
one undertaken with Le Vasseur, employed a different illus-
trator for almost every volume. For this set they chose the
distinguished Breton painter Mathurin Méheut (1882–1959) to
do the Iceland Fisherman (1936). Méheut had already illustrated
Loti’s at least partly Breton My Brother Yves eight years before
(Paris: Mornay, 1928). Although there are 60 illustrations in
that version and many scenes in the novel that have fairly
obvious homoerotic content, not one of the artist’s renderings
suggests homoeroticism. It therefore comes as little surprise
that Méheut’s depiction of the opening scene in Iceland
Fisherman is among the non-homoerotic, leaving spaces between
most of the fishermen and showing no smiles despite Loti’s text,
and that Méheut did not choose to illustrate the letter-reading
scene.

He did, however, depict the storm scene, and in a fashion
that, at least at first, would seem homoerotically suggestive.
The tiller comes out of the one fisherman’s crotch area at just
the angle a gay reader would expect of the relevant body part
(figure 12) and the boom above it reinforces the importance of
this by its relatively parallel angle. The two men are side by
side, if not butt to butt, so the metaphorical erection comes as
no surprise. They have very worried and not at all happy
expressions on their faces, however, contrary to Loti’s text; it is
also impossible to determine who is who. Méheut does not
remove the homoeroticism here as he did in his illustration of
the opening scene, therefore, but neither of his fishermen seems
to be deriving any pleasure from it.

The same is true of the work done by Paul Durand for the
second of Hachette’s expurgated versions of the novel (1967),
this one created for its Bibliothèque verte, a collection aimed at
young boys. As in the Méheut, which he seems to have
known, Durand positions the tiller as the possible suggestion of
an erect phallus protruding from one of the fishermen’s
crotches (figure 13). The two men have considerable space
between them this time, however — the one in the back-
ground, despite the text, does not appear to be tied to the tiller
— and the one holding the phallus seems for all the world to
be masturbating it, a solitary pastime. There is no togetherness
here and no one is smiling, so it does not come as a surprise
that Durand’s other illustrations do nothing to suggest happy
homosexuality.

Chapman remembers that the two are supposed to be
joyously singing, but because he evidently did not know what
the tiller of a nineteenth-century gollette looked like (the French word ‘barre’ means both tiller and helm, and Guy Endore, the author of the translation used by Knopf, had mistakenly chosen helm), he missed an opportunity for storm-tossed intimacy. In the Classics Illustrated version of the scene we cannot see the two men through the sea spray, leaving their positions and expressions to the interested reader-viewer’s by-now awakened imagination.

In the next relevant scene comparison once again brings out the homoeroticism of Rudaux’s work. When he sails for Indochina and the French war there as part of his military service, Sylvestre, being a topman, spends his time in the crow’s nest: ‘He lived in the rigging, perched like a bird, avoiding the solders piled up on the deck, that confused mass down below’ (II:9). Henri Lucien Cheffer’s beautiful watercolor for a lavishly illustrated version published by Piazza in 1945 does a magnificent job of evoking the young sailor’s isolation and longing for Brittany — the gaze in the direction from which the ship is coming (figure 14). Rudaux, however, inserts yet another observer not found in Loti’s text (figure 15), this one positioned so as to stare directly into Sylvestre’s crotch. (He resembles the fisherman who stares at Captain Guermeur’s crotch in figure 3.) Unlike in the Cheffer, nothing softens all the straight lines that run parallel with Sylvestre’s erect torso and the thick, powerful mast against which he leans and which therefore becomes associated with him. With all of these parallel straight lines reinforcing Sylvestre’s rigidity and solidity, it is no wonder the other sailor is staring at his crotch. Notice, in comparison, how the ropes running in various directions in the Cheffer as well as the soft sail hanging in graceful curves from the yard remove any suggestion of phallic rigidity there. It is less likely that Cheffer, working half a century after Rudaux, was trying to de-eroticize him, but the differences between the two using the same basic composition are no less telling. Again, Cheffer’s many other often very beautiful illustrations never suggest the novel’s homoerotic subtext.

Sylvestre reading another letter, this time on a cruiser off the coast of Indochina (II:13), provided another opportunity for the Classics Illustrated artist. The comic book representation offers, in addition to the thick, heavy chain passing close to his shaded and therefore mysterious crotch as if a metaphorical representation of the unseen (figure 16), like the rope and gunwale in Figure 9, the sailor in the left background who

Figure 13. Durand’s depiction of Yann and Sylvestre during the storm (page 55).

Figure 14. Cheffer’s depiction of Sylvestre in the crow’s nest (page 105).
stares at the very ruggedly handsome Sylvestre with a strange intensity (note the eyebrows). Is he a descendant of Rudaux’s prying male observers (figure 4) or an interested party like the other sailor in Rudaux’s crow’s nest (figure 15)? There is definitely an interest of some sort here.

At the exact center of the novel, III:9, the 28th of its 55 chapters, Loti, with a sense of balance and design worthy of his training as a visual artist, put the scene that is the center of his work’s homosexual subtext. Yann, fishing in the North Atlantic, has received a letter telling him of Sylvestre’s death in Vietnam. At first he cannot deal with the news and goes to sleep, placing the letter beneath his sweater against his heart. The next morning, however, he climbs up on deck, stares at the sky and, gazing at a strange cloud formation, imagines that he sees Sylvestre, arms outstretched as if hoping before leaving this earth for one final embrace.

As his shifting pupils got used to the darkness out there, Yann looked more and more at that unique marbling in the sky; it had the shape of someone who was buckling at the knees, with two arms that were reaching out….

Then, in his imagination, where dreams that could not be put into words and primitive beliefs floated together, this sad shadow, collapsed at the bottom of that darkness-filled sky, little by little mixed with the memory of his dead brother, like a final manifestation of him.

For the first time in his adult life, Yann cries. Rudaux accords that difficult expression of grief all the noble seriousness one would expect. Even at such a moment, however, another man looks on, as if wondering why Yann should be so emotional — another detail absent from Loti’s text. For Rudaux’s gay man, as in figure 4, there is no escape from society’s prying, homophobic eyes. Again, the illustrator adds a new element to the novel’s subtext, producing a greater but still coherent whole.

Another artist was not so sympathetic. The most lavish and limited of the illustrated versions of the novel published so far is that produced in 1934 ‘By a booklover’ for just 150 well-heeled subscribers and featuring 50 often very beautiful color illustrations by another distinguished painter, Lucien J. Simon (1861–1945). Despite the number of his contributions, Simon avoided the potentially homoerotic scenes in the novel, focusing instead on the heteroerotic ones such as Gaud’s second meeting with Yann at the wedding dance (I:5) or Sylvestre’s encounter with the female prostitutes in Brest (II:8). Here, however, rather than avoid a homoerotic moment, Simon chose to de-eroticize it. In the black-and-white draft of...
his illustration for this chapter he simply shows Yann weeping (figure 17), as Jean-Gabriel Daragnès (1886–1950) had done before him (1922). In the final color version, however, and unlike any other illustrator, Simon depicted the cloud formation that Loti’s Yann sees at the horizon (figure 18). In direct defiance of the passage in the text quoted above that he knew the reader-viewer would have before her, however, Simon altered the cloud-shape’s position: the apparition no longer reaches out to the grieving fisherman but rather lies on his back like a corpse, thereby losing his homoeroticism. Here the illustrator goes beyond what Daniel-Girard and Faivre had done with the letter-writing scene: his contribution is in direct confrontation with the text. It becomes a question of which positioning of the cloud figure the reader will retain.

Illustrated editions of novels are usually treated as literary works to which pictures have been added. If the illustrator is a respected artist in his or her own right, like Picasso or Dore, the illustrations receive the respect and attention accorded their creator. Otherwise commentary, if there is any, usually runs along the lines of whether the illustrator did an accurate job of depicting what the author had already depicted, much like literary scholars who are asked their view on National Public Radio of the latest cinematic adaptation of Shakespeare or Jane Austin. This treatment leaves the illustrator with restricted room to be an independent creative artist.

As I hope to have demonstrated here, however, there is another option available both to the illustrating artist and to those who contemplate the illustrated work. If, rather than simply reproducing the verbal text in a visual medium, the illustrator probes the depths of the work to discover what is going on inside and then interacts with those inner workings...
with original creations of his own, the result is not only valid art but a whole new artistic genre in which the illustrations and the text, referring back and forth to each other, constitute a new coherent whole. The visual artwork is no longer a subordinate lackey serving the mighty literary master for the benefit of those incapable of appreciating the latter's exalted heights, but rather an equal partner with much to say on its own. There is no secondary status in this. Though not all art is the result of what Harold Bloom has called 'the anxiety of influence,' most of it is at least in part a reaction to previous art, something that has never bothered even the purest of art critics. Here, in addition to whatever response it may be making to previous visual creation (in this instance, the Bourgain [figure 1] is the most obvious example), the illustrator's art reacts to literary art as well.

In a recent essay, Stuart Sillars has shown how illustrations of Shakespeare's King Lear can be used as keys to discovering how that play was understood in different eras.²⁹ Here I have proposed that some illustrations not only can but also must be used to show what certain artists have found in a given literary work, but also, thanks to the fact that they interact with the verbal text in the same space, actually fuse with the novel to constitute a new, enriched, self-interpreting multimedia art form.

NOTES

1 By 1924, 38 years after its first publication, Calmann-Lévy, Loti's publisher, had brought out 445 regular editions of Iceland Fisherman in addition to the illustrated ones we will discuss here (N. Serban, Pierre Loti: Sa vie et son ouvrage [Paris: Les Presses françaises, 1924] p. 340).


4 Since the chapters are very short, I cite Iceland Fisherman using the method standard among Loti scholars: by Part and Chapter number rather than page numbers referenced to a particular edition. There are many editions of the novel, both in the original French and in many other languages (including seven English translations, several of which have been used in different editions), so referring to page numbers in any specific edition would be useless for most readers of this essay. All translations are my own.

5 According to Emmanuel Bénétaz's Dictionnaire critique et documentaire des peintres, sculpteurs, dessinateurs et graveurs de tous les temps et de tous les pays (Paris: Grund, 1976) VI:48, Jazet, a painter as well as an engraver, was a student of Barrias, had works accepted for the Salon as of 1889, and became a sociétaire as of 1886, just shortly before Calmann-Lévy hired him to illustrate Iceland Fisherman. His name does not figure on the title page of those 380 copies, oddly enough — Calmann-Lévy evidently did not see it as a selling point, unlike Edmond Rudaux's, which they displayed prominently on the title page of their second illustrated version, of which more shortly — but it is in the lower left corner of the nine engravings.

6 My Brother Yves (1883), Loti's previous novel, had been fairly clearly homoerotic. That and certain aspects of the author's public behavior led to repeated rumors in the French popular press about his having homosexual interests. On the depiction of Loti as homosexual in various satirical Parisian publications of his era, see: Patrick Cardon, 'Caricature' (78–79), and Louis-Georges Tin, 'Littérature' (265), in the recent Dictionnaire de l'homophobie, ed. Louis-Georges Tin (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2003). Edmond de Goncourt, in his famous and often malicious diary, repeatedly declared that Loti was sexually interested in men (Journal, ed. Robert Ricatte [Paris: Fasquelle, 1956] 3:1290, 4:227, etc.).

7 The French use of the word 'édition' needs explanation here. They traditionally referred to each new printing of a novel as a new edition, even though nothing was changed and the same plates were used. These first 150 or so editions of Iceland Fisherman all used the plates created for the first edition, which had 319 pages. None of what I refer to as the three new 'versions' of 1893 used these plates, which seem to have been discarded at this point.

8 This version had 344 pages and was reprinted into the 1940s.

9 The changes in the text to make it appropriate for late nineteenth-century middle-class French children consisted mostly of deleting references to prostitutes and the last few lines describing Gaud and Yann as they start their wedding night (IV:7). Rudaux was a student of Lanielle, Leclaire and Boulanger, and exhibited in the Salon as of 1865 (Bénétaz IX:165; see also Léon Thévenin, Edmond Rudaux peintre et illustrateur [Paris: Meunier, 1903]). There was an exhibition devoted to Rudaux, his stay in Paimpol, and his illustrations for this version of the novel at Paimpol's Musée de la mer, 23 April–17 September 2000. Bénétaz's Dictionnaire cites Rudaux's Iceland Fisherman as one of his most notable works.

10 Rudaux always makes Système small, though Loti's text remarks on his height as well as his strength several times (I:1, etc.). I find this particularly interesting given that this version was created for younger (male) readers. It is tempting to imagine that Rudaux 'scaled down' Système to give his young readers someone with whom to identify, an entry-point into the story.

11 In his History of Sexuality: An Introduction (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), Michel Foucault argued that nineteenth-century European medicine and law set about cataloguing what it saw as signs of homosexuality in order to make society as a whole aware of them and thus all men perpetually on their guard not to exhibit them. This paranoia is absent from Iceland Fisherman, which was published nine years before the Oscar Wilde trials, but can be seen in the author's Ramantche, published two years after them.

12 A student of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, Gumery exhibited with the orientalists and often traveled to North Africa (Bénétaz V:308).

13 Daniel-Girard had a distinguished career as an engraver and illustrator. A member of the Sociéte nationale des Beaux-Arts, he exhibited at the Salon des Tuileries and illustrated the works of many of Loti's contemporaries (Bénétaz III:338–49). I was not able to find any information on Paul Faivre. Though the Faire edition makes no mention of it, a few passages of Loti's text are missing: the last paragraphs describing Yann and Gaud's wedding night (IV:7), Yann's tale of his affair with the singer in Nantes (I:3), Système's encounters with prostitutes (II:5, II:8, II:10), etc. This is not the expurgation that Loti himself created for the general version of the Rudaux edition described above.

14 Born in California, Chapman studied at the Art Students League with George Bridgman, going on to do illustrations for several of the major illustrated magazines of the era, such as Harper's Bazaar, Collier's, Liberty and Women's Home Companion. He scored his first success as a book illustrator in 1942 with Voyages to Vinland, also for Knopf. See Walt Reed, The Illustrator in America (New York: Society of Illustrators, 2001) p. 216.

15 Chapman's Voyages to Vinland also contains a lot of butt-shots, though usually composed so as to show women's derrières.


17 The German-language edition, unlike the English, has 'Pierre Loti' on the cover under the title, which is very dramatic: Die Rauche des Meeres (The Rage of the Sea). Again, however, there is no mention of the illustrator or the writer. The German text is not a translation of the English comic book, however; it also seems to have been adapted directly from the novel itself. (I
thank my colleague Stephanie Libbon for going through it with me.) I have not been able to examine copies of the Swedish, Danish, Norwegian, Dutch, Spanish or Greek versions.

18 – Given the focus of this essay, I will not get into how the comic book’s text interprets Loti’s. For an example of how that can be done, see: Michael C. Berthold, ‘Color me Ishmael: Illustrated versions of Moby-Dick’, Word & Image, 9/1 (January–March 1993): 1–8.

19 – Calmann-Lévy published this set without illustrations, bringing out the first volumes quickly, several a year, with two or three works in a volume, but then slowed down and finally abandoned the project after the tenth volume, which covered Loti’s output through 1905. The same volumes were published with illustrations, all by Gustave Bourgain, in cooperation with A. Le Vasseur et Compagnie, but do not have dates. Iceland Fisherman figures in Volume Three, which Frédéric Mallet assigns to 1893 (Pierre Loti: son ouvre [Paris: La Nouvelle revue critique, 1923], p. 31).

20 – A painter of genre scenes and portraits as well as an engraver, Bourgain was a student of the now often dismissed but once highly admired Gérôme and exhibited in the Salon as of 1880 (Bénizet II:237). 20 – Of course, this suggests that Bourgain had a chance to see Rudaux’s illustrations before doing his own, which seems to be likely. Though the Rudaux is dated 1893 on the title page, on the last page there is a notice reading “Printed for Calmann-Lévy, publisher, by Chamerot and Renouard 15 November 1892.” The Bourgain, as already noted, has no date anywhere. Since Loti bibliographers agree that the first volume of the Le Vasseur set was published in 1893, however, and since Iceland Fisherman is in the third volume, it would seem safe to assert that Bourgain would have had time to see Rudaux’s drawings. The composition is too similar to believe otherwise.

22 – A student at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Rennes, Méheut specialized in Breton scenes, later becoming the official painter of the Ministry of the Navy. There is a Musée Mathurin Méheut in Lamballe, France. Bénizet’s Dictionnaire cites his My Brother Yves illustrations as among his best work (VII:306).

23 – The Durand version uses the same expurgation of the text employed in the FAivre version (see note 19). It is interesting that even in 1967 a French publisher felt it appropriate to remove certain passages from the novel, passages that no one would think to delete today. In fact, Hachette used this expurgated text even in their subsequent 1974 Idéale bibliothèque version (with non-homoerotic illustrations by Jacques Poirier), though they reverted to the complete original for the version they published in 1994 (with illustrations by Jean-Vincent Sénac) as part of their latest collection for young readers, Trésors.

24 – The French word, gebir, does not have the sexual connotations of the English term.

25 – Cheffer (1880–1957), a student of Bonnat and Patricot, was a painter, engraver, and illustrator. He exhibited in the 1927 Salon (Bénizet II:728). 26 – On Loti as an illustrator, see: C. Wesley Bird, Pierre Loti, correspondant et dessinateur 1872–1923 (Paris: P. André, 1941); Claude Farrère, Gent dessins de Pierre Loti (Tours: Auvall, 1948).

27 – The entire chapter is an astounding stylistic tour de force, painting a late-Monet sky while theorizing about the function of Impressionist art for memory and self-understanding in a way that clearly foreshadows Proust. It is not surprising that Loti was one of the adolescent Proust’s two favorite figures in Volume Three, which Fre [sic] in 1922. Paris: Editions de la Banderole, 9 illustrations by Jean-Gabriel Daragnès.

28 – Though born in Paris, Simon, like Méheut, specialized in Breton scenes. He exhibited regularly in the Salon and was elected a member of the Institut in 1927 (Bénizet IX:633; see also André Carious, Lucien Simon [Paris: Editions Palantines, 2002]).


Bibliography: Illustrated versions of Iceland Fisherman

French versions:


American versions:


German versions:


Swiss version:


Comic book: