
SOCIALIST THOUGHT AND COMICS FORM – NARRATIVE AND RHETORICAL STRATEGIES IN KATE EVANS' *RED ROSA*

by Magnus Nilsson





Red Rosa is a graphic biography of the socialist politician and theorist Rosa Luxemburg, written and drawn by the Canadian-British comics artist Kate Evans. It was published in 2015 by Verso, a left-wing publishing house affiliated with the socialist journal *New Left Review*, and formerly known as New Left Books. Its publication received support, “financially and by advice,”¹ from the New York office of the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, a transnational alternative policy group affiliated with the German socialist party Die Linke. This support is motivated by the claim that Luxemburg’s works have “much to say to our contemporary world.”² In other words, for the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, *Red Rosa* is viewed as a means of promoting the socialist ideas and ideals that Luxemburg expressed in her works. And this view is probably shared by Verso, which, although being an actor in the book market, primarily has ideological ambitions: it aims to disseminate left-wing thought.

Evans’ *Red Rosa* is far from the only contemporary graphic novel to promote left-wing ideas and ideals. Other examples include several works published by Verso, such as *Che: A Graphic Biography* (2008) by Spain Rodrigues; *Wobblies: A Graphic History of the Industrial Workers of the World* (2005), edited by Paul Buhle and Nicole Shulman; and Evans’ *Threads: From the Refugee Crisis* (2017); as well as Variety Artworks’ *Capital in Manga* (2012) and Corinne Maier and Anne Simon’s *Marx* (2014), published by Nobrow.

Although all the above-cited examples are of recent vintage, the use of comics to promote left-wing thought is not a new phenomenon. As has been demonstrated by visual culture scholar Sharon Kinsella in her book *Adult Manga*, already in the 1920s, Japanese comics artists with “Marxist leanings” produced a “range of publications containing political cartoons and comic strips,” including *Workers’ News* and *Laborers’ Manga*.³ In the 1960s, manga (especially the genre of *gekiga*) once again “became linked to political radicalism.”⁴ One example of this was the launching in 1964 of the manga magazine *GARO*, which aimed at promoting a “Marxist historical perspective” to schoolchildren.⁵ In the U.S. too, comics have long been used to propagate left-wing ideas and ideals. In the 1930s, for example, the New York *Daily Worker*, which was published

¹ Scharenberg 2016.

² Scharenberg 2016.

³ Kinsella 2000, 22.

⁴ Kinsella 2000, 4.

⁵ Kinsella 2000, 31.



by the Communist Party USA, contained several socialist comics.⁶ There are also many examples from communist countries such as China,⁷ Yugoslavia,⁸ Poland,⁹ and East Germany,¹⁰ of how comics can be used to propagate socialist thought.

As Germanist Silke Horstkotte has pointed out, “[t]elling a story through a series of discrete images accompanied by textual elements is an old and efficient method of addressing, and entertaining the illiterate or semi-illiterate.”¹¹ This possibility of reaching out to new audiences – in this case audiences made up of people who, although not illiterate, are nevertheless unlikely to be reached by more traditional political (print) media, such as books, journals, or newspapers – has probably been an important reason for the historical use of comics to disseminate left-wing ideas and ideals. As indicated by its title, for example, one of the most well-known examples of a comics work with this aim – *Marx para principantes* (1972, in English as *Marx for Beginners*, 1976) by Eduardo del Río (better known under his pen name “Rius”) – seeks to introduce Marx to an audience not yet acquainted with him or his writings. Evans and Verso’s motivation for publishing *Red Rosa* seems to have been similar to del Río’s. In 2013 Verso began publishing *The Complete Works of Rosa Luxemburg* (which also received support from the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung). Thus, they are at the same time presenting Luxemburg’s ideas and ideals in a form that she herself used – that of the traditional book – and in a new form: comics. That the latter could effectively serve as an introduction to the former, or as a way of disseminating Luxemburg’s ideas and ideals to those who might not read her complete works is not a far-fetched idea.

Socialist thought has thus, for a long time, traveled across media, for example from books to comics, as in the examples above. However, these travels result in change. This is stressed by scholars within the “project,” as they themselves call it, of “narrative across media,” such as literary critic Marie-Laure Ryan, who argues that “the intrinsic properties of the medium shape the form of narrative.”¹² In this article, I will take a first step towards an analysis of how the

⁶ Brunner 2007.

⁷ Seifert 2008.

⁸ Dobrivojevic 2009.

⁹ Timofiejuk and Szostak 2011.

¹⁰ Scholz 2015.

¹¹ Horstkotte 2013, 27.

¹² Ryan 2004, 1.



medium of comics may shape socialist thought, by analyzing how the ideas and ideals formulated by Luxemburg (and, to some extent, by Marx) are affected when expressed in comics form by Evans.¹³ However, I will not limit myself here to looking only at *narrative* structures, but also include *rhetorical* structures in the analysis. Furthermore, I will not only study how the medium of comics may shape socialist thought, but also how it might be affected when it is used to present and disseminate such thought.

However, before turning to the analysis itself, it is prudent to give a brief presentation of Kate Evans and Rosa Luxemburg. Evans presents herself on her webpage as a cartoonist, artist, activist, author, mother, and public speaker.¹⁴ She is the creator of several non-fiction graphic works on social and political topics, such as environmental activism (*Copse*, 1998; *Funny Weather We're Having at the Moment*, 2006), breastfeeding (*The Food of Love*, 2008), and the refugee crisis (the already-mentioned *Threads from the Refugee Crisis*). *Red Rosa* is by far her most successful work. Among other things, both the *Observer* and the *Independent* newspapers selected it as a "graphic book of the year," and it sold out in Britain on the day of its publication.¹⁵

Luxemburg was born in Poland in 1871, as Rozalia Luxenburg, and is considered one of the most important theorists and politicians of all times within the socialist labor movement (as evidenced, for example, by the fact that Verso is collecting and publishing her complete works). Today, she is best known for her anti-war activism, her theory of imperialism, and her critique of both reformist social democracy and Leninist communism. She was one of the founders of the Spartacus League, which eventually became the German Communist Party. She was murdered by right-wing militia in Berlin in 1919 in the aftermath of the German revolution. Since then she has been viewed as a socialist martyr, and in January every year, thousands of people take part in marches in Berlin commemorating her death.

¹³ In a note to the reader, it is stated that *Red Rosa* is "a fictional representation of factual events," and that its text and images are based on "[p]hotographic source material" as well as "Luxemburg's writings" (unpaginated page preceding page 1). The source material – which also includes works by Karl Marx – is presented in a notes-section encompassing more than thirty pages.

¹⁴ Evans 2017.

¹⁵ Evans 2017.



NARRATIVE STRATEGIES

The most fundamental, and also most obvious, difference between *Red Rosa* and the sources on which it is based is that, whereas many of the latter – for example Luxemburg and Marx’s writings – are mainly verbal, the former, being a comic, has a strong visual component. However, verbal discourse is given an almost surprisingly prominent role in *Red Rosa*. For example, Evans’s first attempt at representing socialist thought takes the form of a scene depicting how Luxemburg presents some of Marx’s ideas to her brothers. This presentation encompasses – as *Red Rosa*’s notes point out – a summary of “the opening chapter of *Das Kapital*,” a “simplified” version of the argument in chapters two and three in the same work, and an explication of “Marx’s incomparably original contribution to economic thought”: the labor theory of value.¹⁶ In this seven-page scene scene, speech (by the character Luxemburg, interpreting Marx’s writing) is represented in 45 out of 47 panels. The role played by images in this scene, on the other hand, is limited. What is described visually is mainly how Luxemburg lectures to her brothers and uses everyday objects to illustrate Marxist concepts, for example declaring that the “pepperiness” of pepper constitutes its “use-value.”¹⁷

Nevertheless, since the medium of comics is not an exclusively verbal one, but one that combines verbal and visual elements, and even though Evans gives communicative priority to verbal discourse, she must also narrate visually, or at least, as in the scene described above, supplement her verbal narration with images. Her main strategy for doing this, when it comes to representing left-wing thought, is to mimetically represent realistically motivated speech (i.e., speech by characters that is integrated into the plot) in the form of scenes in which Luxemburg is presented in conversation, lecturing, or telling someone something – a representational strategy common also in other visual media, such as film and theatre. The scene described above is a prototypical example of this. Others include scenes representing Luxemburg conversing with fellow activist Clara Zetkin,¹⁸ giving a lecture at the social-democratic party’s school in Berlin;¹⁹ or explaining the “problem of accumulation” to her cat.²⁰ There are also examples of realistically motivated writing,

¹⁶ Evans 2015, 180–181.

¹⁷ Evans 2015, 17.

¹⁸ Evans 2015, 64.

¹⁹ Evans 2015, 94–101.

²⁰ Evans 2015, 107.



such as descriptions of Luxemburg debating in writing with Eduard Bernstein²¹ or penning propaganda.²²

In these scenes, verbal discourse predominates, since the imagery mainly depicts the act of speaking (or writing) or illustrates concepts and ideas already formulated in writing (as in the case of pepper illustrating the “use-value” of “pepperiness”), without adding much new information. Here, then, images play an even less important role than in the “word specific” mode of combining verbal and visual storytelling described by Scott McCloud,²³ since they do not, mainly, illustrate the text’s content, but rather its enunciation (characters’ talking and writing) of this content. According to McCloud, “the more is said with words, the more the pictures can be freed to go exploring.”²⁴ But Evans does not use this freedom here. Instead, the visual storytelling is subordinate to verbal narration. Nevertheless, comparisons with Luxemburg’s written works show that the comics form as used by Evans does result in changes to the narrative structure.

One example of this is that, in *Red Rosa*, the narrating character Luxemburg becomes more overt than the narrating author in Luxemburg’s books. Take for example the scene in which Luxemburg lectures at the party school. Just like the lectures given by the historical Luxemburg, it is based on an unfinished manuscript from 1909–1910, later published as *Introduction to Political Economy*. In this manuscript, the narrating author has a relatively high degree of visibility:

Since it is the custom for these learned gentlemen to work with definitions, that is, to reduce the nature of the most complex things to a few well-ordered sentences, we shall seek by way of example to find out from one official representative of political economy what this science is basically about. Let us listen first of all to what the doyen of the German professorial world, the author of countless frightfully thick textbooks on political economy, the founder of the so-called “historical school,” Wilhelm Roscher, has to say on the subject.²⁵

²¹ Evans 2015, 56.

²² Evans 2015, 59–60.

²³ McCloud 1994, 153.

²⁴ McCloud 1994, 155.

²⁵ Luxemburg 2013, 89.



The mocking tone, for example in the description of Roscher as an author of “frightfully” thick books, or in the claim that academics “reduce” complexity to “a few well-ordered sentences,” draws attention to Luxemburg, as does the distance she establishes between herself and the “official representative of political economy.” (A few pages later, this distance is further increased through the following formulation: “Let us try to translate this learned ‘definition’ into the language of ordinary mortals.”²⁶) In other words, the narrating author’s discourse in Luxemburg’s *Introduction to Political Economy* is indexical, giving indirect information about the author. However, in the scene in *Red Rosa* in which the lecture at the party school is represented, Luxemburg, who is here a narrating *character*, is directly visible, and hence a more overt presence than she is *as an author* in *Introduction to Political Economy*.²⁷ After all, being a narrating character in a graphic biography generally means – since the medium of comics is in part visual – to have, quite literally, a high degree of visibility.

In *Red Rosa*, the narrating author (Evans) is – generally speaking – less visible than the work’s protagonist (Luxemburg). And, of course, she is visible only in a metaphorical sense. But she is far from invisible. Evans’s narration is perceptible, for example, in the introduction of the scene at the party school. This introduction has the form of a caption, which is not placed in a textbox, but distinguished from Luxemburg’s direct speech, which is not placed in speech bubbles, by the use of a different font. Here, Luxemburg is referred to in the third person: “Autumn 1907. Rosa is employed to lecture in political economy at a new institution: the SPD Party School.”²⁸ This is also the case in the narrative caption that describes Luxemburg as “an inspirational teacher” who “never stops learning.”²⁹ This clear distinction between the narrating character’s (Luxemburg) discourse, and the narrative voice in the captions draws attention to the fact that the latter should be attributed to the narrating author (Evans).

In addition to this, Evans herself appears as a character in *Red Rosa* (see Figure 1).³⁰ This appearance – which, in the narratological terminology developed by Gérard Genette, constitutes a

²⁶ Luxemburg 2013, 94.

²⁷ Following Richard Walsh (2007, 78), “the narrator is always either a character who narrates, or the author.”

²⁸ Evans 2015, 96.

²⁹ Evans 2015, 100.

³⁰ Evans 2015, 101.



“metalepsis”³¹ – is self-reflexively described by Evans as an “authorial intrusion.”³² One effect of this intrusion is that it draws attention to the kind of narration that is sometimes, mainly within French comics theory, attributed to “an implicit higher level ‘mega-narrator’” or “fundamental narrator.”³³ According to media studies scholar Jan-Noël Thon, narrators of this kind “tend not to be represented as being in control of the selection, organization, and presentation of the verbal-pictorial elements of the overall narration.”³⁴ Hence, he argues, comics’ “verbal-pictorial mode of representation” can usually “be understood as a form of *non-narratorial* representation.” In *Red Rosa*, however, the authorial narrator is made visible as a character. Thus, the work highlights that its verbal-pictorial mode of representation is narratorial.

Evans, the intrusive author, comments upon, erases, and alters figures that the character Luxemburg has drawn on the blackboard. To be more specific, she – the Evans character – alters Luxemburg’s visual representation of capitalists. Evans motivates the change by arguing that “capitalists no longer wear top hats,” as they do in Luxemburg’s drawings on the blackboard.³⁵ At the same time, however, Evans claims that, on a fundamental level, the capitalist system is “still the same.”³⁶

This brings to the fore an important distinction within Marxist theory, which has been conceptualized by political scientist Michael Heinrich as one between class in a structural sense and class in a historical sense. A class – for example that of capitalists – is determined structurally by its “position in the social process of production.”³⁷ Historically, however, the same class manifests itself as a social group that “in a particular historical situation” understands itself as a class “distinct from other classes,” distinguishing itself “by means of a common ‘class consciousness.’”³⁸ In other words, historical manifestations of a class may change over time (after

³¹ Genette 1980, 234–235.

³² Evans 2015, 101.

³³ Mikkonen 2013, 111.

³⁴ Thon 2013, 82.

³⁵ Evans 2015, 101.

³⁶ Evans 2015, 101.

³⁷ Heinrich 2012, 192.

³⁸ Heinrich 2012, 192.

all, that is what makes them historical), while the class in a structural sense remains relatively stable (as long as the mode of production by which it exists lives on).

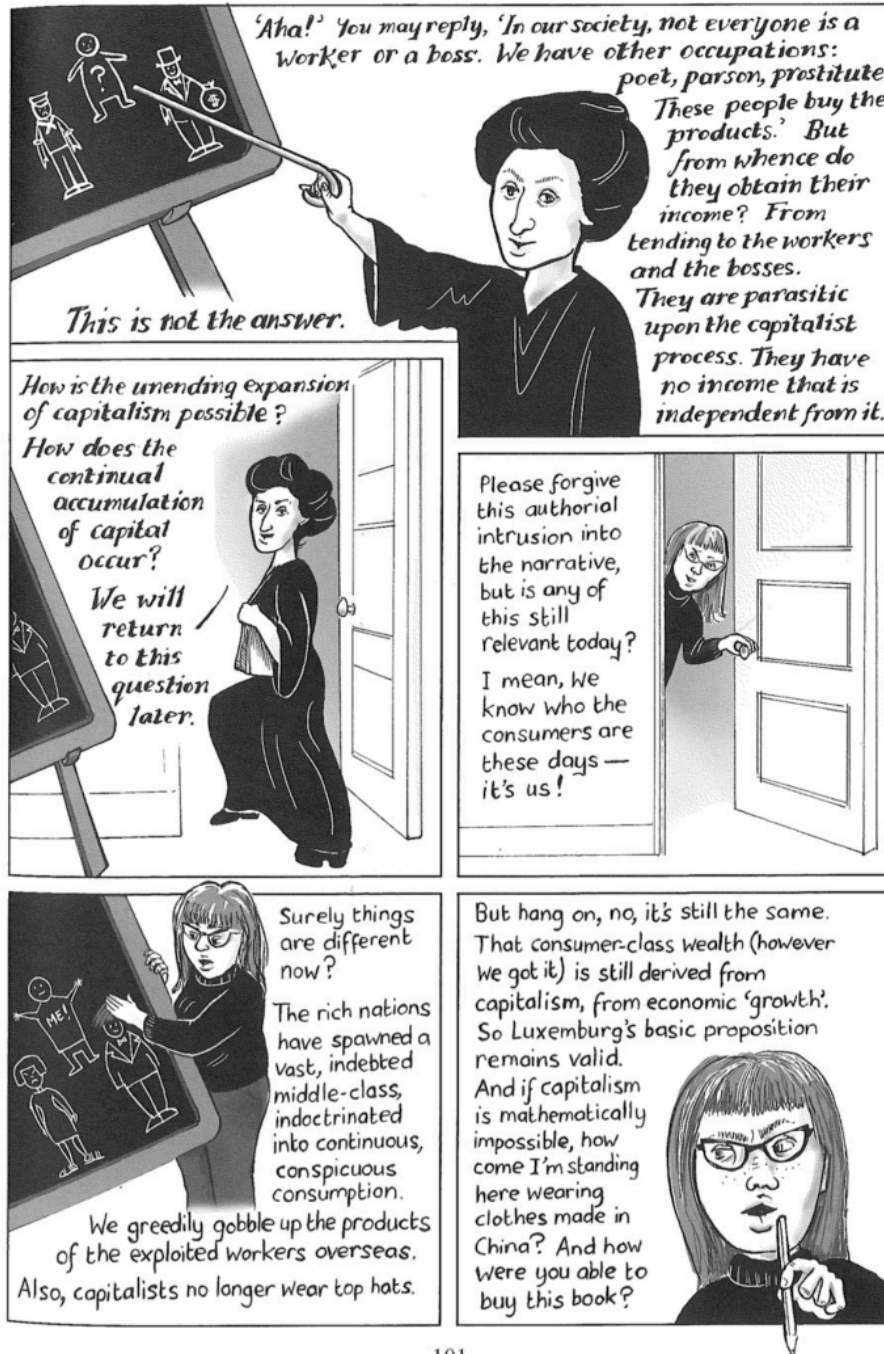


Figure 1. Kate Evans, *Red Rosa. A Graphic Biography of Rosa Luxemburg*, Verso, 2015, p. 101. © Kate Evans



These two aspects of the concept of class are brought to the fore by the intrusive author, who argues that even though capitalists no longer wear top hats, the economic mode of production of capitalism – and, hence, also the capitalist class – still functions by the same logic. In other words: the capitalist class still exists in a structural sense, even if, in a historical sense, it has been radically transformed. But the authorial intrusion also highlights how the character Luxemburg's *visual* representation of the capitalist (as someone wearing a top hat) may obscure the economic role assigned to the capitalist class in Marxist theory.

In *Philosophical Investigations*, Ludwig Wittgenstein argues that we may be held captive by (metaphorical) images in our language.³⁹ Here, however, it is *real images* (pictures, not verbal imagery) – in the form, for example, of the character Luxemburg's drawings on the blackboard of capitalists wearing top hats – that risk holding us captive, by pushing petrified *historical* manifestations of class into the foreground and thereby obscure the *structural* relationship between labor and capital. In the historical Luxemburg's written work, the capitalist remains an abstract, structural phenomenon (when discussed as such). In *Red Rosa*, the *visual* representation of capitalists risks rendering them concrete and historical, or at least directing the reader's attention toward their historical manifestations. That this is a problem typical for visual storytelling – and, thus, for comics – has been pointed out by many commentators. One example can be found in Will Eisner's *Graphic Storytelling and Visual Narrative*: “Static images have limitations. They do not articulate abstractions or complex thought easily.”⁴⁰ Thus, the intrusive author Evans' critique is not directed primarily at the historical Luxemburg, but at the author's own creation: the narrating character Luxemburg who propagates socialist ideas and ideals in visual narrative form, and thereby – at least indirectly – at the visual mode of representation that constitutes an integral part of the medium of comics.

RHETORICAL STRATEGIES

The appearance in *Red Rosa* of an intrusive author, who emphasizes the importance of not viewing class (only) as a concrete and historical phenomenon, can be viewed as an attempt at overcoming a potential problem when expressing left-wing ideals and ideas – or indeed

³⁹ Wittgenstein 2003, 41.

⁴⁰ Eisner 2008, 10.



conceptual discourse in general – in visual form, namely that there is a risk that these ideas and ideals become too concrete or tangible and, thus, invite new kinds of meaning production (in this case: directing attention to the historical, rather than the structural aspects of class). However, using the medium of comics to disseminate left-wing thought necessitates not only the development of different *narrative* strategies – for example the use of metalepsis to comment upon a character’s visual narration – than those used in verbally dominated media, but also the elaboration of new *rhetorical* approaches. Above all, a comparison between Luxemburg’s writings and *Red Rosa* shows that they rely on different strategies of *persuasion*.

Following Aristotle, modern rhetoricians distinguish between three modes of persuasion: *ēthos* (“the projection of the speaker’s character”), *pathos* (“awakening the emotions of the audience”) and *logos* (“logical argument”).⁴¹ The distinctions between these modes are, however, analytical, and in her written work, Luxemburg relies on a combination of all of them. As has already been pointed out, in Luxemburg’s *Introduction to Political Economy*, there is a narrative “voice.” And as Aristotle, perhaps somewhat pleonastically, puts it, “whenever the speech is spoken,” there is persuasion “through character” – *ēthos*.⁴² Furthermore, as has also already been pointed out, the mocking tone in the presentation by the narrating author Luxemburg of various academic authorities within the field of political economy does indeed project a specific image of its speaker’s character, at the same time as it awakens emotions. But Luxemburg also relies heavily on logical reasoning, as indicated by the following excerpt from a passage summarizing her answer to the question how “the capitalist economy” can “exist and function as a whole” despite “its total lack of planning” and “its lack of any conscious organization.”⁴³ This happens, Luxemburg claims:

By the capitalist law of value, which on the one hand automatically takes care that wage workers never rise up from the proletarian state and escape labor under the command of capital, while on the other hand making possible an ever greater accumulation of unpaid labor into capital, and thereby ever greater concentration and extension of means of production;

⁴¹ Aristotle 1991, 37–39; Kennedy 1991, ix.

⁴² Aristotle 1991, 38.

⁴³ Luxemburg 2013, 293.



By the industrial reserve army, which provides capitalist production with a capacity for extension and adaptation to the needs of society;

By equalization of the rate of profit, which governs the constant movement of capital from one branch of production into another, and thus regulates the balance of the division of labor; and finally

By price fluctuation and crises, which in part daily, and in part periodically, lead to a balance between blind and chaotic production and the needs of society.⁴⁴

Here, the “speaker’s” character is not very visible, and little is done to awaken the reader’s emotions. Instead, Luxemburg uses logical reasoning, arguing, for example, that the “capitalist law of value” lends stability to the capitalist system by reproducing its basic classes (and even increasing the division between them), that the “equalization of the rate of profit” makes sure that capital can be accumulated in all sectors of the economy, and that crises, contrary to popular belief, actually result in the emergence of “a balance” within the capitalist economy.

As can be seen in Figure 1, the same question that Luxemburg discusses in the passage analyzed above – how the capitalist economy can exist and function despite a total lack of planning and conscious organization – is posed also in *Red Rosa*, where it is phrased as follows: “How is the unending expansion of capitalism possible? How does the continual accumulation of capital occur?”⁴⁵ Here, however, no answers are given. And the question is if providing answers would even be possible without radically downplaying the visual aspect of the medium of comics. How, for example, could concepts such as “the capitalist law of value,” “accumulation of unpaid labor,” “means of production,” “the industrial reserve army,” “rate of profit,” “price,” or “crises” be defined and discussed visually with logical stringency?

Still, it is not in any way unthinkable that strategies for logos-based persuasion in comics form could be developed. For example, McCloud’s argument, that by “de-emphasizing the appearance of the physical world in favor of the idea of form, the cartoon places itself in the world of concepts,”⁴⁶ indicates that the distinction between verbal/conceptual and visual/concrete

⁴⁴ Luxemburg 2013, 293–294.

⁴⁵ Evans 2015, 101.

⁴⁶ McCloud 1994, 41.



representation, upon which the association between verbal and logos-based argumentation rests, is not absolute. However, developing strategies for logos-based persuasion is not what Evans does in *Red Rosa*. Instead, she presents and propagates Luxemburg's (and Marx's) socialist ideas and ideals by relying more on *ēthos* and *pathos* than on logos-based reasoning.

The shift of focus in *Red Rosa* away from logos-based persuasion toward persuasion based on *ēthos* and *pathos* is not the result only of a *problem* (i.e. that it is difficult to communicate logical arguments visually). The medium of comics also *invites* these kinds of strategies of persuasion. The emphasis in *Red Rosa* on *ēthos*-based persuasion, for example, is facilitated by the fact that Luxemburg is a narrating character that is represented visually. Since she is visible in a concrete and direct way in *Red Rosa*, the character Luxemburg is always more overt than the narrating author in the historical Luxemburg's written works. Furthermore, Evans not only presents Luxemburg's ideas and ideals, but also describes her life, thus providing the reader with more information about the narrating character Luxemburg than Luxemburg's own works give about their author.

When reading the scene in *Red Rosa* that describes Luxemburg's lecturing at the social-democratic party's school, for example, readers have already been presented with an image of her as someone who studies hard;⁴⁷ who mesmerizes the other delegates at the Socialist International with her speeches;⁴⁸ and who has published a doctoral thesis on the industrial development of Poland,⁴⁹ and so on. Thus, her *ēthos* is already established. However, it is also further developed in this scene, where Evans argues that Luxemburg is "an inspirational teacher because she never stops learning."⁵⁰ This could be interpreted as an emphasis on one of the three aspects of *ēthos* defined by Aristotle: *aretē* ("virtue").⁵¹ But a teacher who never stops learning does not only display a (teacher-specific) virtue. Since she lets her students (and the readers of *Red Rosa*) benefit from her learning, she also displays "good will," which, according to Aristotle, is another aspect of *ēthos*: *eunoia*.⁵² A teacher who is dedicated to learning will also acquire wisdom of a

⁴⁷ Evans 2015, 38.

⁴⁸ Evans 2015, 41.

⁴⁹ Evans 2015, 43.

⁵⁰ Evans 2015, 100.

⁵¹ Aristotle 1991, 121.

⁵² Aristotle 1991, 121.



kind that, for teachers, is very practical indeed. Thus, the characterization of Luxemburg in this scene also highlights the last aspect of *ēthos* defined by Aristotle: *phronēsis*, which means precisely “practical wisdom.”⁵³

There are many scenes in *Red Rosa* that may stir up feelings in the reader – such as the one showing Luxemburg being abused, killed, and dumped from a bridge by members of the right-wing Freikorps⁵⁴ – but these are seldom *directly* connected to the promotion of Luxemburg’s socialist ideas and ideals. In some cases, however, her ideals are represented in a way that does give priority to pathos over logos. The perhaps best example of this is the image on the cover of *Red Rosa* (which also appears in the book) of Luxemburg carrying the theatre of war on the back of her head (see Figure 2). This display of Luxemburg’s devastation – the war seems to literally weigh her down, and the expression on her face indicates that she is tormented by the fact that soldiers are marching toward their death on the battlefield – might very well move the reader into sympathizing with Luxemburg’s anti-militarist ideals.

However, the same image may also be criticized for corrupting Luxemburg’s view of the war. Luxemburg was a fierce opponent to World War I, and the description in *Red Rosa* of her devastation when it broke out is probably true to the historical facts. However, the pathos-laden picture of the war weighing her down has an abstract character that is foreign to Luxemburg’s critique of the war. It shows Luxemburg lamenting soldiers marching to the battlefield where they are killed by exploding bombs. But it does not show *why* she reacts the way she does. Luxemburg was not a pacifist. She was a revolutionary socialist who wanted to overthrow the capitalist state by mass actions that did not exclude armed force. In an infamous formulation in an article published in *Die Rote Fahne* (*The Red Flag*) – the central organ of the organization of which she was a founding member; the Spartacus League – on November 24, 1918, for example, she argued that whoever stands in the way of the socialist revolution will be left lying on the ground with crushed limbs.⁵⁵ Thus, it was not the fighting as such that she opposed, but the fact that workers marched out to fight each other, instead of turning their weapons against their

⁵³ Aristotle 1991, 121.

⁵⁴ Evans 2015, 167, 172.

⁵⁵ Luxemburg 1979, 414. The original quotation reads: “Wer sich dem Sturmwagen der sozialistischen Revolution entgegenstemmt, wird mit zertrümmerten Gliedern am Boden liegenbleiben.” It has often been used to undermine Luxemburg’s *ēthos*, thereby discrediting her critique of the Bolsheviks’ use of terror and their lack of respect for political rights such as the right of expression and political democracy.



capitalist oppressors. This is not shown in the image, which, hence, evokes feelings in the readers, but does not properly connect these feeling to the reasons behind Luxemburg's lamentation.

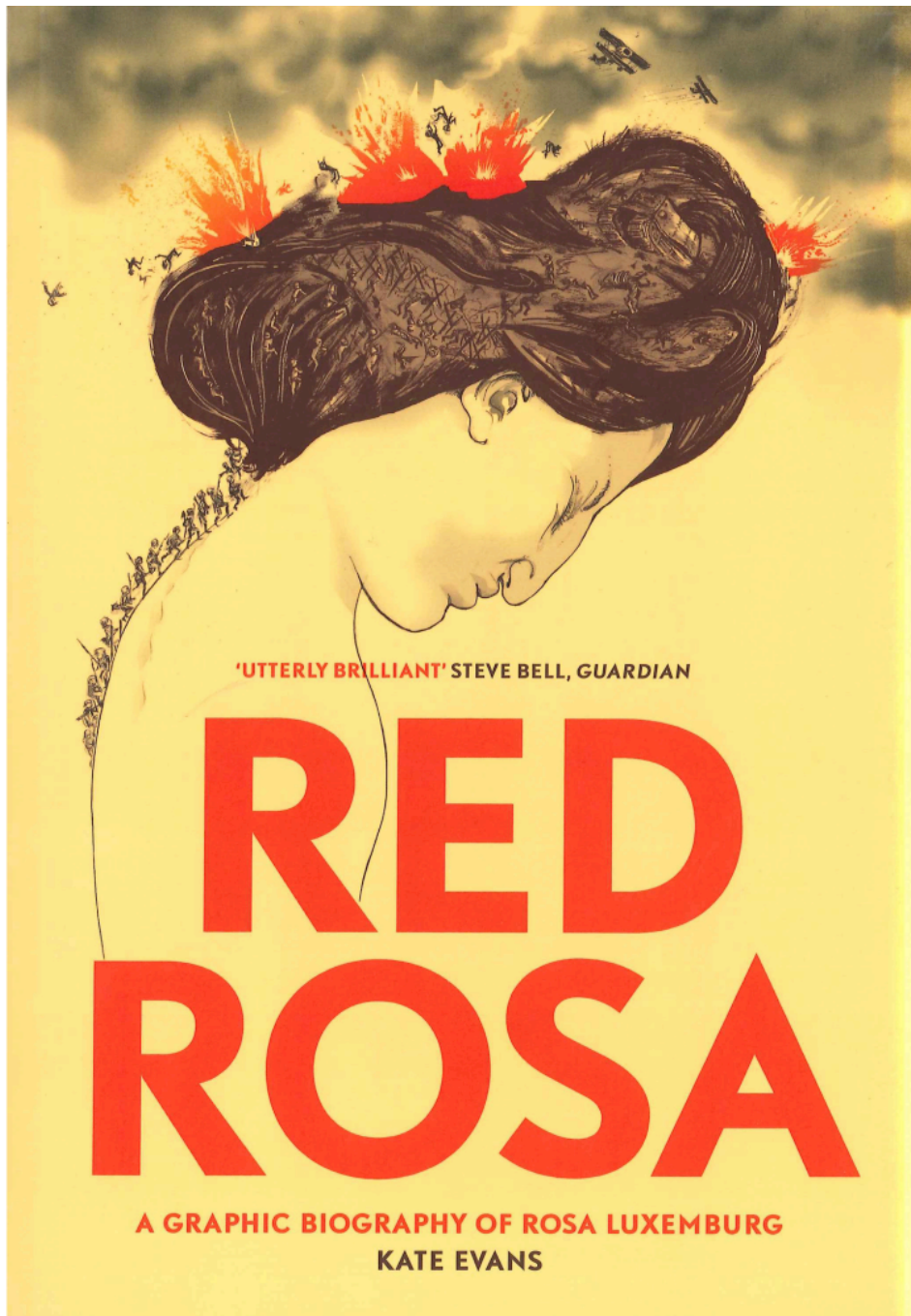


Figure 2. Kate Evans, *Red Rosa. A Graphic Biography of Rosa Luxemburg*, Verso, 2015, cover. © Kate Evans



Another interesting example of the emphasis on pathos in *Red Rosa* can be found in the description of Friedrich Ebert. He was the leader of the German Social-Democratic party from 1913, and after World War I he became Germany's first president. In these capacities, he played a key role, first in supporting the German war effort, and thereafter in striking down the revolutionary movement after the war. Thus, he represented a tendency within the labor movement diametrically opposed to the one to which Luxemburg belonged. However, in *Red Rosa*, this opposition is not only described in terms of political differences, but also as a difference between two personalities, and whereas Luxemburg could be said to be idealized – through, for example, Evans' praise of her, or the omitting of her support of revolutionary violence – Ebert is definitely caricatured. As a student at the party school, he is portrayed as being totally incapable of abstract thinking, and hence of understanding the concept of dialectics. "How can something contain its opposite?" he asks, and continues: "It makes my head hurt. I like things to be straightforward, either black or white."⁵⁶ As president, he is portrayed as a slob who is so fat that he cannot button his shirt, who stands at strict attention when receiving orders from general Ludendorff, and who talks while shoveling food down his throat.⁵⁷

This caricaturing is an example of argumentation by way of pathos, since it aims to evoke negative feelings toward Ebert. (It can of course also be understood as persuasion through *ēthos*, since it undermined Ebert's political ideals by questioning his virtuousness.) Examples of a similar strategy can be found in Luxemburg's written works, for example in the mocking tone she uses when describing professor Roscher (see above). But whereas in *Introduction to Political Economy*, caricature – and, hence, pathos (and/or *ēthos*) – works in tandem with logos-based argumentation demonstrating the differences between Luxemburg's view of political economy and the dominant academic view, in *Red Rosa* it constitutes a *central* strategy for establishing an opposition between Luxemburg and Ebert.

Many commentators have pointed out that comics and other forms of visual narrative often tend toward simplification. The literature scholar Nina Ernst states, in her doctoral dissertation about graphic autobiographies, that simplifications and exaggerations are necessary for the creation of visual narratives,⁵⁸ and Eisner even goes as far as arguing that stereotyping is a fundamental

⁵⁶ Evans 2015, 99.

⁵⁷ Evans 2015, 151–152.

⁵⁸ Ernst 2017, 35.



feature of the art form of comics: “Comic book art deals with recognizable reproductions of human conduct. Its drawings are a mirror reflection, and depend on the reader’s stored memory of experience to visualize an idea or process quickly. This makes necessary the simplification of images into repeatable symbols. Ergo, stereotypes.”⁵⁹ However, it would, of course, not have been impossible for Evans to describe the opposition between Luxemburg and Ebert in a more analytical way, or to be more precise regarding the representation of Luxemburg’s critique of World War I. This is indicated not least by her nuanced discussions about the capitalist class in a structural and historical sense, as well as her rather detailed explication of ideas from Marx’s *Capital*. The caricaturing of Ebert in *Red Rosa* is, in other words, not *determined* by the medium of comics. However, when compared to Luxemburg’s written works, the comics form used by Evans seems to *invite* a move away from logos to ēthos and pathos, and this move may, at least to some extent, effect the representation of Luxemburg’s socialist ideas and ideals.

CONCLUSION

As was stated in the introduction to this article, the possibility of reaching out to new audiences has probably been an important reason for the historical use of comics to disseminate left-wing ideas and ideals, and this is probably also one of the motivations behind the publication of *Red Rosa*. The fact that Evans’ graphic biography has been a success both in terms of critical reception and in terms of copies sold indicates that the strategy has been a good one. However, as I have hoped to demonstrate above, the migration of socialist ideas and ideals from the verbal media in which they were originally formulated to the medium of comics, which combines visual and verbal communication, results in an interplay between left-wing thought and the medium of comics, which has consequences for both.

On the one hand, the medium of comics seems to invite certain narrative and rhetorical strategies that have specific effects for the interpretation of left-wing ideas. The shift in focus described above, away from logos-based toward ēthos- and pathos-based persuasion, which may obscure the specific socialist character of Luxemburg’s antimilitarism, is an example of this. On the other hand, the ambition to stay true to left-wing ideas and ideals also has consequences for how the medium of comics is used. One example of this is the fact that Evans often gives priority to verbal

⁵⁹ Eisner 2008, 11.



discourse, for example by representations of realistically motivated speech and writing. However, a more interesting example is her introduction of an intrusive author, which not only self-reflexively thematizes and discusses the relationship between abstract concepts and visual narration, but also emphasizes – by drawing attention to authorial narration – the narratorial aspects of its visual representations.

Thus, a comparison between Evans' *Red Rosa* and Rosa Luxemburg's written work shows that Evans' use of comics form does indeed condition her representation of left-wing ideas and ideals, but that those ideas and ideals can also function as catalysts for the development of new narrative and rhetorical strategies. Hopefully, this can serve as a starting point for a more systematic analysis of the relationship between socialist thought (as well as other ideas) and the medium of comics.

Other questions that are brought to the fore by my analysis of the migration of socialist thought from predominantly verbal media such as those used by Luxemburg and Marx to the medium of comics – but which have not been analyzed here – include the possibilities to use comics to disseminate political ideas in social spheres in which more traditional media might not be very effective, and perhaps even to contribute to the deconstruction of the borders between both social spheres and media. The long history of comics promoting socialist thought – ranging at least from the Marxist comics published in Japan in the 1920s to the contemporary works by Evans and other socialist comics artists – indicates that this has probably already happened. Analyzing this – which requires a shift of focus away from texts to audiences, media, and public spheres – should be an important task within the field of comics research.



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