

Book as an object: conceptual illustrations in Edgar Allan Poe's books and a sample study

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Abstract

Today, when the future of the book is discussed, the main question is whether it has one. Information age transformed ongoing traditional features of a book. It has been foreseen by the critics that printed books, libraries and book stores are doomed to lose their values on the ground of developing technologies. As James O'Donnell cited from Pulitzer winner author E. Annie Proulx in his paper, "Nobody is going to sit down and read a novel on a twitchy little screen. Ever." (Nunberg, 1996). Although printed books are less popular in this digital age, there are still readers and book lovers who always get fascinated by the feeling of flipping pages of a book. According to a research done with readers, they would prefer to have a reading experience with a printed book rather than a screen especially if it is a classic literature book. Two of the main components of verbal and visual dimensions of imagination are illustration and literature. Aim of this paper is to try and find a way to maintain the tradition of a printed book and to explore the relation between these principals in one medium through narrative illustrations of Edgar Allan Poe literature. Also the purpose of this paper is finding the similarities of the two disciplines, as both reveal ideas in unexpected and innovative ways in one's mind. A selection of his short stories and poems will be illustrated and designed to engage the two areas, literature and illustration to reach readers in a more different way than usual in order to communicate with them more effectively.

Keywords: Edgar Allan Poe, book as an object, illustrations, conceptual narrations, book design

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1. Introduction

First examples of visual storytelling are pictograms, ideograms and illustrations on the caves. They all carry a message from the painter to the audience. Lascaux caves in France has one of the first examples of cave paintings depicting animals on the cave walls. It is mostly believed by many that those paintings were carrying a message to be delivered to the next generation, depicting their everyday life. As centuries past and civilized, storytelling became written. By the development of our modern day alphabet and the invention of the press later on, illustrative narration has given way to text base alternatives, and illustrations have turned to a supportive element for written text. Now, artists and illustrators often use visual elements to depict written texts to make them more comprehensible and to communicate with the readers more directly. Texts with illustrations and visual elements are often preferred by the readers, and they enhance the reading experience. Illustration is one of the core elements of communication throughout history. With the recent developments in technology, digital media has become more dominant, while the printed media is no longer what it used to be. Yet, there are still some groups prefer printed books to e-books. This paper will be giving referencing examples of the use of illustrations within the framework of Edgar Allan Poe books and the way how those illustrations is used for effective communication through some examples from different artists, while explaining the term 'book as an object', and discussing how the term is still trying to have a say in today's ever changing digital developments.

2. Book as an object

Today, when the future of the book is discussed, the main question is whether it has one. Information age transformed ongoing traditional features of a book and printed platforms leave their place to digital platform. It has been foreseen by the critics that printed books, libraries and book stores are doomed to lose their values on the ground of developing technologies. As James O'Donnell cited from Pulitzer winner author E. Annie Proulx in his paper, "*Nobody is going to sit down and read a novel on a twitchy little screen. Ever.*" (Nunberg, 1996). Literature Nobel Prize winner Jean-Paul Sartre created a whole new concept in his book "The Words" 'book as an object'. One of the best examples of 'book as an object' concept are religious texts such as Qur-an and Holy Bible. Believing in God and believing in those books become nearly the same thing for people (Debray, 1996). Thus, books become as objects once they are read and used for not only the text written in it, but the meaning and the value they carry for specific group of readers. Although printed book transformed into e-books, collection or limited editions designed for the specific targeted group of readers can be accepted as an object as it creates a special connection with the readers. The term collector's, special or deluxe editions are used as a marketing promoting terms for products such as books, prints and music records, while limited editions means the product only produced for a limited number of editions. English Professor Leah Price discusses the uses of books and the messages they give to readers apart from the text written on it. She says, "I'm interested not just in words — the verbal structure of a book — but also in the material object," and Price also argues that people are being forced to think about the relationship between the medium and the message. (Price, 2011). Whether it is a marketing product launched as a collector's edition to serve to the consumerist society or it's a work of an artist trying to give a specific message to his audience, books accepted as mediums carrying a message to another.

2.1. Book as an art object and altered books

In relation to the term 'book as an object', designers and artists bring the term to a whole new level making it an art object as well. Altered books and cut-out paper sculptures are two of the many examples of those arts objects (Tascioglu, 2013). Altered books are usually created with mixed media tools changing the book from its original form to a different one by altering its appearance. It's a

collage work of art which an artist can apply any technique while creating their work. As an example to these terms; British artist Sue Blackwell creates paper book cut sculptures using books as a medium to create an object which is also a work of art. She is transforming books to 3D sculptures but she reads them first to reflect into her work, in which the content of the book inspires the work.



Figure 1. Sue Blackwell, *Migratory Words*, 2014, deconstructed concise English Dictionary in wood box with lights.

3. Edgar Allan Poe Style and American Gothic Literature

Edgar Allan Poe is an American poet and writer lived in the early 19th century and one of the one of the earliest American practitioners of the short story and is considered the inventor of the detective fiction genre. He is a part of the American Romantic movement. He is famously known for his poem *Raven* which is written in 1845 and acknowledged by many both nationally and internationally. His literary style is romantic and Gothic fiction. Gothic tradition main elements are isolation, borders, impenetrable walls (physical or psychological), mystery, and darkness (Markman, 2000). Moreover, Poe's literature main themes are murder, obsession & love, mystery, black Comedy, parody and hoaxes (Miller, 1993).

3.1. *Edgar Allan Poe Book Illustrations and Conceptual Narrations*

One of the most well-known writer of his generation and his genre, Edgar Allan Poe inspired and influence many artists. Over the past century, under the influence of Gothic movement illustrators and artists commissioned and volunteered to illustrate Poe's stories and books. Harry Clarke and Gustave Doré are two of the most popular artists who work on Poe. Today the stories are still inspiring contemporary artists such as Lorenzo Mattotti and Lou Reed.

Harry Clarke is an Irish stained-glass artist and a book illustrator later resided in London. His is most famous for his stained-glass works but he sought work as a book illustrator as a profession. Harry Clarke illustrated an edition of Edgar Allan Poe 'Tales of Mystery and Imagination' with engraving technique with halftone illustrations. His works are under the influence of symbolism movement. Clarke created eerie and haunting illustrations with the Edwardian-era aesthetic aspects. Illustrations have gothic elements, depicting the dark side of the stories.

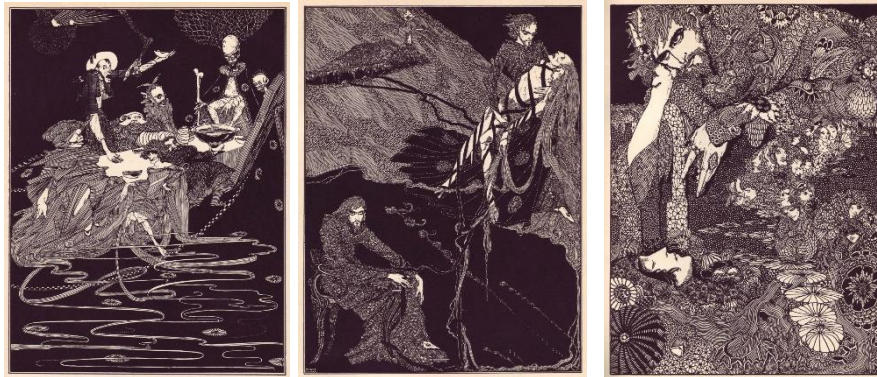


Figure 2. Harry Clarke, 1919 drawings, Edgar Allan Poe's Tales of Mystery and Imagination.

Gustave Doré was a 19th century artist who is famously known for his illustrations of Edgar Allan Poe's 'The Raven'. (Doré). In 1884 he produced 26 steel engravings for the poem. Illustrations were fine detailed and had a sense of darkness and gloominess appropriate to the mood of the poem.



Figure 3. Gustave Doré, 1884 steel engravings, Edgar Allan Poe's poem The Raven.

A contemporary Italian artist Lorenzo Mattotti, is a former architect later comic book artist born in 1954. He created beautifully haunting illustrations for The Raven in collaboration with musician Lou Reed in 2003. "Lorenzo Mattotti, whose mesmerizing crayon pastel illustrations amplify the dark whimsy of Poe's poetry and infuse it with the defiant eroticism of Reed's lyrical adaptation." (Popova)

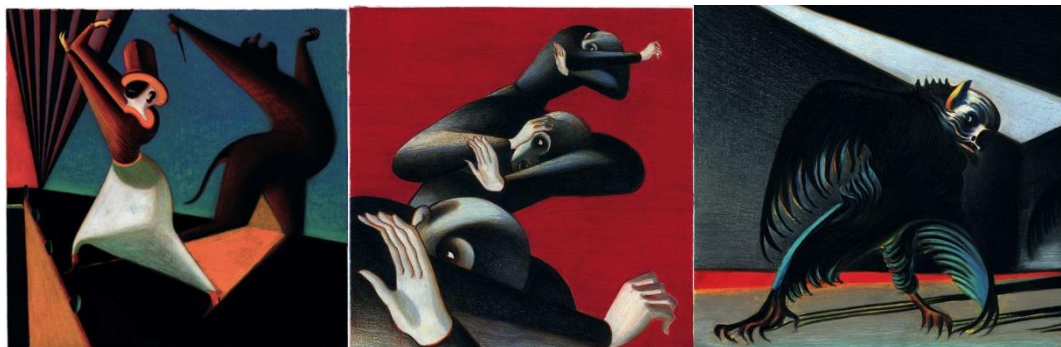


Figure 3. Lorenzo Mattotti, 2003 crayon pastel illustrations, Edgar Allan Poe inspired music record 'The Raven'.

4. A sample project on 'book as an object' within the framework of Poe's stories

An extensive research about Poe had been done about his literature, book designs, and story illustrations to decide target audience for the project picked as Poe readers between 25-40 years of age. The project built around on the theme of Poe's writing style, which is Gothic Tradition, and Romantic Movement. While the edition looks traditional from the outside, the inside has a contemporary look. One of the main themes of the Gothic Tradition is the impenetrable walls, and the isolation feeling, that victims usually feel trapped alone in a situation, physically or psychologically (Punter, 1996). The use of lines and borders in the books are referring to the trapped and isolated feeling. Therefore, the covers for the books have simple designs with rectangular cut-outs to create a little space to breathe. The project consist of 6 books and each book has a different and specific style and way of communicating with the reader according to the story's main theme. Referring the story's style and theme, experimented and found the best solution to suit the whole concept of each story.



Figure 4. Edgar Allan Poe Collector's Edition Book Box Cover. (2012)

4.1. *The City and The Sea*

"The City in the Sea", previously named as 'Doomed city' is a poem of Poe, written in Romantic Gothic literary style. From the very beginning, the Gothic setting of the poem's structure catches the eye as its main theme is 'death' like many other Poe's writings. The city is located in an unusual and unrealistic place which promotes the feeling of an isolated and mysterious place and it sets the mood and atmosphere of the entire poem. Briefly, the poem is about 'Death' rules in a lonely, archaic city with no show of a movement or sound. At twilight, a breeze finally causes some movement and the city begins to sink into the sea.



Figure 5. Edgar Allan Poe's The city in the Sea 'book as an object'. (2012)

5. Conclusion and future work

This paper presents a literature survey towards understanding and establishing definitions for the terms 'book as an object' and 'book as an art object'. In light of Marshal McLuhan's oft-quoted dictum that 'The medium is the message' (McLuhan, 1964) and Leah Price's arguments about understanding the relationship between medium and the message, one can arguably say that books can carry more messages than intended when it becomes an object. Changing the form of a book from its original to a different form can establish another way of communication with the reader. Taking into consideration that digital media is taking over printed media, the future of the printed book looks bleak. Although, art and design can save the future of the book, maybe not in the traditional way as its used to be but as a different form of book art. As a consequence, the initial findings are promising that it is possible designers and illustrators can develop new ways to communicate more effectively with readers, offering them a different reading experience by creating mixed media forms of art with books. Our findings shows that printed books can stand a chance to survive in a digitally surrounded world, only if it changes it's meaning by adding itself more value by becoming an object and not just a book.

Thanks to internet and developments of technology, one can access data and information much more quickly than ever. With internet, most of the information is free and accessed easily in contrast to encyclopaedias and dictionaries. Research sources relocate their data onto electronic platforms and that, frees books from their information provider responsibility. Although it seems like a damaging and negative effect for printed books, but it essentially provides more freedom. For ages, books function was primarily to carry information in a codex form. However, today, electronic media and digitalization is the cue for books to become more artistic, sensual, reflective, and creative. The term 'book as an object' enables readers to become 'users' and by that, they are not just a 'text reader' but also can read the form, and material of an objectified book.

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