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Kristen Hawkins

East Tennessee State University

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Marry The Night:
On the Creation of and Importance of the Illustrated Novel

K.L. Hawkins

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Thesis Chairs: Dr. Scott Contreas-Koterbay, Ralph Slatton, and Michael Cody

K.L. Hawkins

Koterbay

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Marry The Night: The Creation of an Illustrated Novel

I

Of Witches and Wardrobes

The illustrated novel is one of the simplest methods of visual communication. The first languages were composed of pictorial symbols. We teach our children to read with picture books so they might associate an image with script. The writer's job and the artist's job is to convey a certain message to an audience. Each is under the impression that she is blessed with the ability to pluck images from the mind and make them concrete, when in reality what it all boils down to is how well one is at communicating one's ideas, and often this is what makes a successful writer or artist. The work that she makes is able to reach a large number of audiences.

My goal is to marry the two methods and tell a story both with words and pictures. Now both methods are successful in their own right, but I believe that combining the two allows the creator more control over the audience. Writing allows the reader the ability to understand the message, but it is always limited to the reader's imagination. Even the clearest and descriptive language is subject to interpretation. The visual arts, on the other hand, take out most of the imagination on the viewer's part. I say most, because even though the image is clear, the situation can become reversed and now the viewer must try to infer the story or meaning behind the work. The process of merging the two is not meant to dumb down the audience, but to allow the creator a bigger window into the mind.

The story of *Alice in Wonderland* is a nearly universally known tale. Upon hearing the title even those who haven't read the book conjure up the mental image of a girl in a blue pinafore, long blonde hair streaming down her shoulders, holding a pink flamingo. Interestingly though, Lewis Carroll's image of Alice when he wrote her was a girl with dark hair cut into a short Dutch bob and the color of her pinafore was never addressed. The image we associate with Alice is mostly thanks to the etchings of John Tenniel who was hired to illustrate Carroll's work. He had his own idea of what Alice looked like and it was further established by later illustrations done Arthur Rackham, and the Walt Disney animated movie *Alice in Wonderland*, which is the primary reason we visualize the Technicolor robin's egg blue of her dress. This is what makes both the forms, words and pictures, powerful in conjunction with each other.

Everything that happens in Carroll's story is known and understood by many, but there is also a universal image conjured up as well.

Now not every written story is successful and not every piece of art is either. Art should be expected to carry a bad story. A story can survive with bad art, but if that is the case there is no reason to add the art at all.

There are certain elements that make stories successful. Once those elements are understood then it should be clear to the author how to connect with the audience in order to communicate the story. The same principle applies with art but elements are elements of design and composition. In trying to understand these elements I hope to create a successful illustrated novel or at least understand where I fell short in doing so.

II

A Screaming Comes Across the Sky

Russian folklorist Vladimir Propp believed that all stories regardless of their place of origin, or perhaps even the time of their origin, contained 31 narrative elements (narratemes) that could basically be broken down into four spheres. The first sphere is the introduction, in which the villain of the story takes someone or something and the hero becomes aware of it. (Propp) Now Propp's theories applied to tales with clear cut and defined heroes and villains, and some might argue that not all characters in stories are so clear cut and defined as being wholly good or wholly even. Some might point out that the main character in the story may be at odds with something abstract, like a character being lost in the wilderness and trying to survive. This is a concept and not a thing that has a motivation. The root of what Propp is trying to say when he is talking about the first sphere is that there must be a conflict within the story. There must be two elements at odds with each other in the story; otherwise there really is no story. (Propp)

If I say, "Once there was a family that lived on Venus, but since there is no air on Venus, they died," there is a story, but if I say "There is a ball sitting in a dark room," there is no story. Both of those read like statements but the Venus tale implies that perhaps a family flew to Venus, but their physical make-up was at odds with the natural environment of Venus and therefore it killed them. The ball is merely sitting there and nothing is happening. It cannot be a story if nothing ever happens. Propp introduces the idea of conflict in his first sphere and wisely so because it is important to establish or imply some type of conflict early on rather than later. The one telling a story must always take the audience into account. One should not berate the audience with constant exposition in the beginning. Every writer starting out with

their first story feels like it is necessary to establish the time, place, characters, worldview, fashion, etc., in the first chapter. This is a habit that has to be overcome. It is only necessary to establish the pertinent details about the object in the story, and this must be done quickly in order to start addressing what the object comes in conflict with. This is a really big problem with science fiction and fantasy writers as many of them get so caught up in the exposition, trying to paint every last detail of the world they have created in their head that the blocks of text go on forever and all they are really saying is "There is a ball sitting in a dark room". They have just gone to great lengths to describe the dark room and in doing so they have lost the attention of the audience.

The Second Sphere is the actual body of the story, in which the "hero" goes off on his "quest." There is a lack, or something that is not right. The hero discovers the lack and chooses positive reaction (Propp). Now that the conflict has been addressed, the question is what is to be done about it? For every reaction there must also be an equal or opposite reaction, something has happened, how does the character or characters choose to react? If the princess has been stolen, why should the hero save her? Maybe he loves her or he has just been paid really well to do it, but regardless, this causes the hero to grab his blunt instrument and walk out the door. In the second sphere, motive and action must be introduced. If a character is supposed to be believable, it should also be understood that he could say no at anytime and thus end everything right there. Why must the character react? Is the character just destined to do so, or are they the only one that can do it? What if the character still says no? What drags him, possibly kicking and screaming, to destiny?

The Third sphere is everything that happens to the hero once he chooses to address the conflict. It can be anything from the hardships and challenges the character suffers on its way to addressing the conflict or the pivotal moment when the character faces the problem head on. The "villain" is defeated and the "lack" or initial misfortune is resolved (Propp). The Third sphere is what actually completes the tale and provides the most action. Everything that is proposed in his first three sections is key to solid story telling, however Propp's writings do not end there. He goes on to talk about a Fourth Sphere that encompasses the last twelve narratemes, all of which revolve around the hero's return and the aftermath (Propp). In my opinion this is the most useless part of Propp's theories because they all technically could fit under the nineteenth narrateme in the Third sphere: Resolution (Propp). His theories do apply to folktales and the punishment of the villain, the heroes apply to numerous fairytales, myths, and even to some modern stories (though often those that are harking back to the classical folktale feel like *The Lord of the Rings*.) The Fourth Sphere does not apply to most modern stories. Sometimes we are given a re-assurance that everything turns out well and perhaps the main character gets the girl and everything is a-ok. These things, however, can usually be surmised with a couple of sentences or maybe a chapter tacked on at the end. There is no need to continue the story much further. If this is done one risks the audience just getting up and walking away, there is no reason for them to stay if their curiosity relating to the characters has been answered in a satisfactory manner.

A story needs resolution, otherwise the audience has devoted its time and interest into something that has no pay off. The resolution need not always be positive, as sometimes the

villain wins. This is often the case with horror movies. The hero is not powerful enough to thwart the zombie invasion or the unearthly serial killer, but the absence of a pleasant ending, does not mean that the conflict has not been addressed. Furthermore, there are some stories that end with questions unanswered. Take the science fiction movies *The Thing* (1982) and *Blade Runner* (1982). *The Thing* ends with the last two surviving staring at each other in a drift of snow," and the film goes black. The audience must ask, "Is one of them the monster?" "Will one of them live? It is hinted that Harrison Ford's character in *Blade Runner* might be an android himself and that he will only have a few years left to live, but this is never really proven or denied. The movie ends with him and his android lover escaping from the city. There is nothing wrong with these endings, even if Propp would disagree. The main conflict needs to be addressed, the villain of *Blade Runner* is defeated, and the monster is exposed and attempts are made to destroy it in *The Thing*. The audience has been given its due, all the other loose ends shall be tied up by the viewer's imagination. This is something that has been ruined by modern film industry, by assuming their audience is dumb it feels necessary to tie up every loose end or purposely leave loose ends in order to address it in subsequent films. Thus, we now have a generation of "viewers" for both film and literature who complain when an ending is left ambiguous.

Ambiguity is still however a valid ending. If the hero is doomed to some kind of hell where he must struggle to find, slay the monster, forget everything, and return to the beginning again, it is still a complete story. Happiness ever after is not a concrete law in story telling. The villain can get away. The hero may never return home. Satisfactory resolution of the conflict is law. The two should never be confused. Another large mistake young writers make is to write themselves into a box and then end with a, "to be continued." This should never, ever be done. Even if the story is resolved suddenly by Tom Selleck coming down *dues ex machina* in a gold chariot, it is still better than no ending at all. Without an end to the conflict everything written becomes moot. Propp was writing about a different time period though. While there still is a need for stories that show good triumphs over evil and everything will be ok in the end. The modern audience all needs a reassurance that the world is full of cruelty and bad things happen and at least we aren't the only ones who experience them.

Tzvetan Tordov's approach was far more streamlined than Propp's. His theories were that a narrative consisted of five stages. The first stage being a state of equilibrium or that of normality, the characters' world is established (Tordov), The second stage is a disruption of the order or, as we have all ready established, the conflict that is need for the story. The disorder is then recognized in the third stage and an attempt is made to repair the damage which constitutes stage 4. The final stage is a creation of new equilibrium (Tordov).

Tordov removed all of the elements of mythology and folklore, such as the magical aides, the donor sequence, and the heroes return in favor of a structure that was more applicable to all forms of story telling, both past and present. Tordov's structure allows for more endings than simply good triumphs over evil. While Propp was correct with some elements of structure. To follow his narratemes completely is to limit the writer to an archaic set of rules, but Tordov's theory allows for modernist writing, post-modernist writing, horror, trashy-romance novels, and other genre that doesn't adhere to the heroic quest theme. Even if

the equilibrium is not returned to the way it was when the story started, and it hardly ever is, a new equilibrium is reached. Even if that equilibrium is that the human race is destroyed in the end and the cockroaches take over.

Both of these literary theorists have been writing about the structure of story telling. Roland Barthes asked the deeper question of what do these stories mean? Barthes believed the types of stories we tell all serve a function. He created a list of codes that in order to help the reader determine what type of story they were being confronted with and what the elements in the story meant.

First is the Action story or the proairetic code, being any story in which tension is produced by physical action (Barthes). This can be applied to fantasy, sci fi, westerns, horror, crime drama, and any *Die Hard* type story. These the stories of adventure and excitement, in which good triumph over evil because the character took a proactive stance. The audience identifies or roots for the heroes: John McClain, Clarice Starling, Han Solo, Ash, because what these stories are telling them is that yes, they too can do amazing things if they persist against all odds.

The second type of story is the enigma or puzzle story or the hermeneutic code (Barthes). This story is usually a mystery in which the audience becomes involved with the story out of the earnest curiosity of finding out why the sequences of events are happening within the story. A good mystery will keep its audience involved until the very end. Mysteries also happen to one of the most persistently popular genres of film and literature, like the action story. It allows the audience a method to identify with the main character as the character solves the mystery. However, instead of sheer will, these stories are often about cleverness, and the audience is constantly making their own guesses while being involved with the story.

The Symbolic code addresses stories that have a rhetorical way of dealing with issues that can be antithetical, sexual, and economic. (Barthes) This is when the story addresses an issue but never comes out directly to talk about the issue. Instead things in the story become metaphors for the issue. This technique is used often in in books that are thought to have literary merit and science fiction. It is thought that the figure of Cthulhu presented in many of H.P Lovecraft's short stories is a representation of the fear of the vaginal. Now a lot of this is inferred not only from texts but also from Lovecraft's own life, because symbols provide a level of ambiguity in a story. Unless the author is present, one can never be a hundred percent certain of the true intention and thus numerous literature classes have been structured around breaking down symbols and describing what they mean. This is not to be confused with the semic code which is a method of showing that character or a place is something rather than directly telling the audience a certain fact(Barthes).

In the crafting of a good story it is always better to show for instances instead of writing this was so. The audiences' mind is like an eager child constantly asking, "But why?" If the character in a story is supposed to be mentally unstable, how is the character mentally ill and what does he do to prove this. The semic allows for an amount of emotion in a story, if everything reads as happening, fact, happening, fact, the story begins to sound like a robot

reciting actions it has seen carried out by humans. Interestingly, this has always been one of the hardest things for me to master. I understand the logical progressions of a story, which constitute hermeneutic and proairetic of Barthes' codes, but I often lack the needed emotion of a story.

The final code is the referential code, also known as the cultural code; or how the text interacts with real world. (Barthes) This is every time that a real world reference to a product, a place, a law of science, or a work of art is used inside a story. No matter how fantastic or removed from the real world a story is, there should be some form of reality to it in order for it to have authenticity even if it is as minute as having the laws of gravity are work in the same way. Stephen King's *The Dark Tower* books focus on the idea that there are multiple realities, the main character Roland exists in a fantasy/western type world, but yet there is a scene where he walks into a bar and The Beatles *Hey Jude* is playing on the player piano. This gives the audience a sense of familiarity in world that doesn't exist. This is not necessary in science fiction and fantasy and some would argue it would be better for the writer to make up a song that fit in their fantasy world. Yet, the more one drifts into a fantasy world the more one needs to build a universe to hold it. The writer must start inventing cultures, economies, religions, and even science that logically support their creation. The storyteller must be an authority on the world; he has to be reliable and trustworthy. If we apply the reference code not to hard fantasy, but the fictional stories believed to happen in the real world this rule is really driven home. If something is said and done and the author has not taken the time to research the mechanics of the reference, the whole story is at risk of falling apart. If someone was writing a story about a printmaker and was talking about the character using sulfuric acid to etch a Litho-stone they have, in a sentence, discredited the entire story. Printmakers use nitric acid to etch limestone, never sulfuric. Even if the major audience do not happen to be printmakers and would never catch the mistake, the writer has created a world where the one axiom is invalid which mean several other things could be backwards as well. Mistakes like this make the storyteller look like a fool. This is why writing what you know is stressed heavily in beginning writing classes. There has to be some authenticity to the story.

Taking the theories of Barthes, Propp and Tordov, I will apply them to my favorite short story: H.P. Lovecraft's *The Outsider* and will see how well it adheres to these models of Narrative Theory.

"I know not where I was born, save that the castle was infinitely old and infinitely horrible; full of dark passages and having high ceilings where the eye could find only cobwebs and shadows. The stones in the crumbling corridors seemed always hideously damp, and there was an accursed smell everywhere, as of the piled-up corpses of dead generations. It was never light, so that I used sometimes to light candles and gaze steadily at them for relief; nor was there any sun outdoors, since the terrible trees grew high above the topmost accessible tower. There was one black tower which reached above the trees into the unknown outer sky, but that was partly ruined and could not be ascended save by a well-nigh impossible climb up the sheer wall, stone by stone (Lovecraft)."

Here is our introduction; we know the environment in which our “hero” exists, an impossibly old, dreary, empty castle from which there seems to be no escape. There is no villain in this story, in fact there really are no more characters but our narrator, but it is a good example of how conflict can exist without two characters coming in opposition with each other. The conflict of the story is our narrator versus the strange world outside his confines. In Lovecraft’s story the narrator discovers a way to escape and he departs on an adventure in the outside world. Now this is the part where the story no longer can hold up to Propp’s theories by any stretch of meaning. There is a climax, in which our narrator arrives at an elegant soiree and encounters at last, human civilization only to find that there is a horrible monster in the vicinity of the part that frightens everyone away. After that pivotal point everything travels in a downward motion to the resolution of the story and it is not a pleasant, happy ending. This is why Tordov’s theory has a broader reach, it’s simplicity works with the format of *The Outsider*. We begin with the character in his first environment, the castle and then the method of egress from that environment is introduced. The narrator chooses to go out into the outside world, there are consequences that follow the action, and then there is a resolution and new equilibrium is reached. After the experience our hero realizes that he cannot return home, but doesn’t mourn the loss because he realizes, “I had hated the antique castle and the trees(Lovecraft).” This is an illustration of another important rule of writing that goes in hand with both Propp’s and Tordov’s theories of narrative structure; there must be a change in the character. Whether it is the hero’s return with some special boon or a new state of equilibrium that has been achieved, the main character needs to exhibit a change from what they were at the beginning of the story. The character’s personality may not change, but there should at least be a change in the character’s perception of the world. In *The Outsider* the narrator realizes certain truths about himself at the end of the story.

The Outsider fits into Barthes’ Hermeneutic Code. There is an element of mystery throughout the story. The audience does not know why the main character has been secluded in his childhood or where all the people have gone. The audience also has to mull over the incident of the monster that chased all of the party goers and our main character away from the house. The meaning of everything is revealed in the last line of the story when the narrator explains that the monster was a reflection of himself in a mirror. This is why this story is successful, it is structured to keep the audience guessing and then punch them in the stomach with the last line.

The Outsider is also highly symbolic. “For although nepenthe has calmed me, I know always that I am an outsider; a stranger in this century and among those who are still men.” (Lovecraft.)

It is obvious from the title of the story that this is about an outcast and that was what Lovecraft’s fan base (subscribers to the original *Weird Tales* magazine) was and arguably what Lovecraft himself was. The Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Horror fan base have always appealed to people who feel that they do not fit into society or the real world and wish for a method of escape.

“Now I ride with the mocking and friendly ghouls on the night-wind, and play by day amongst the catacombs of Nephren-Ka in the sealed and unknown valley of Hadoth by the Nile. I know that light is not for me, save that of the moon over the rock tombs of Neb, nor any gaiety save the unnamed feasts of Nitokris beneath the Great Pyramid; yet in my new wildness and freedom I almost welcome the bitterness of alienage (Lovecraft).”

The subtext of the story is that the individual recognizes himself as an outsider and accepts and embraces it. He finds comfort in other individuals (ghouls) like himself and together they will be the creatures that they were made to be. An author can tell a successful story that contains several narrative elements in just a few pages, but often method and practice can be to different things.

III

Multiple Methods of Cat Skinning

So how do we tie written words with pictures? Traditional book illustration is one way of telling a story with pictures, as well as picture books, graphic design, and comic books.



Figure 1: Woodcut engraving. (Lang, Ford and Hood)

Traditionally printmaking and book illustration go hand in hand. Printmaking was the original method of creating mass market print and imagery, from woodcuts, to etchings and later to lithograph prints accompanied every form of literature from bibles to scientific illustrations, to childrens stories. Wood engravings (figure 1) and etchings allowed for an amazing amount of line detail that could be constantly replicated over and over, something that hand illuminations could not achieve. Artists exploited the the processes' ability to create depth and tone and texture. Engraving could create convincing scales on both fantasy monsters and the tangible fish of this world. There was an undeniable amount of decadence in the work and there was always constant nod to the master printers Durer and Dore even after centuries of the printmaking process. Etchings and engravings are decadent and lush and it was usually because the literary work that accompanied it was also lush and descriptive. The image created a further pull of the reader out of the real world and in to the world of fantasy. Prior to radio, tv, and the internet, books were often the only acessasible forms of entertainment. Books were also considerably longer and the language used was often more dense and flowery, not because it was how the people of anitiquity talked, but rather because they want to be more involved with a story for longer periods of time. This is why I feel Propp's templates for Mythology were more applicable to ancient myths than modern stories. There was a need for more information and detail. Similarly illustration called for detail. The illustration work in books from the 1500s

to the 1900's are exactly as interested in controlling the viewers thoughts as the World War II Russian propaganda posters. Durer's and Dore's illustrations of angels invoke the beauty of the divine and similarly the illustrations of Demons and of hell are completely dark and grotesque. (Figure 2).

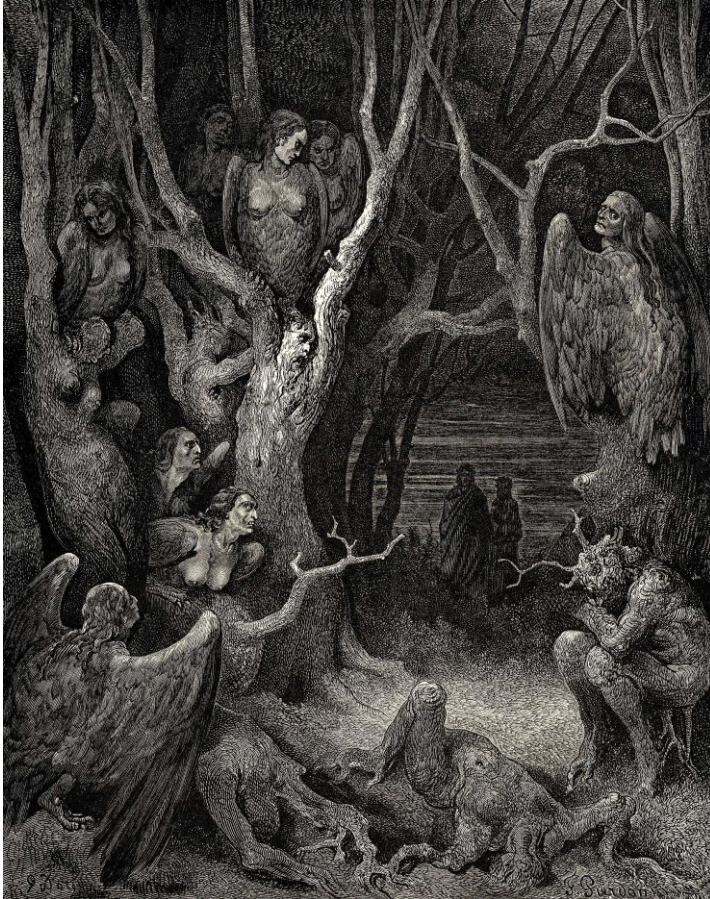


Figure 2 : Wood engraving (Dore)

The images provide clear mental associations of what is “good” or what is pleasing to the eye and what is “bad” and what is optically jarring. Images given to those who are young and impressionable can easily be used to manipulate the mind into certain directions. Fairy tales often have a moral lesson attached to them that display cultural morals and values. Similarly, the illustrations attached to them are meant to drive a point home. Princes and princesses who adhere to social norms are always comely figures, but the witches and trolls, those who are the outcasts and live on the fringes of society are portrayed as dirty and malformed. Little children who do not behave in fairy stories often have some strange and clearly rendered punishment for their bad behavior.(Figure 3)



Figure 3: Illustration of Alice and the

Carmen (Rackman)

The artist can always manipulate the tone of a story. Even if it does not seem like that is their purpose intrinsically.

Aubrey Beardsley illustrated numerous popular stories from *Le Morte De Arthur*, 1894 to *Lysistrata*, 1896, but it is arguable that he did not portray any of the scenes in these stories with any added dynamism, nor did they add anything to the stories which by time of his illustration were hundreds of years old. A pivotal action is always the chosen scene of illustration subject matter, but Beardsley would often take a scene that was stationary, a portrait of two of the characters perhaps, and using numerous patterns, grotesqueries and filigrees so that image decorative was and absolutely gorgeous to behold.



woodcut illustration. (Beardsley)

Figure 4: An example of highly decorative

I believe that creating an illustration solely for a decorative additive is completely valid. Because it still sets a background and a mood for a story. Beardsley's illustrations for *Le Morte De Arthur* (Figure 4) adds a grand and mystical quality to an already grand and mystical story. An artist may take any narrative and skew certain elements of it to fit their own needs. There are numerous dark and psychedelic illustrations of *Alice in Wonderland* that exploit the oddity of the story. Take Junko Mizuno's *Cinderella, 2001* for instance, the story of Cinderella has been redone ad nauseum, but Mizuno chose to take the age old story and warp it into a psychedelic sex romp filled with zombies. (Figure 5) She did so with a very few changes to the original story, but created a whole graphic novel full of decadently bizarre images.



Figure 5 : Non Color Ink Illustration of

Cinderella or Cinderella (Junko)

Images are so powerful one doesn't even need text to form a narrative and thus the whole process of book illustration can work in reverse as well. Max Ernst's *Une Semaine de Bonté*, 1933 or *A Week of Kindness* is a surreal novel made up of collages of public domain etchings. The novel, which contains no written elements other than text sectioned the images into different days of the week and their corresponding elements. This is an example of something I like to call a picture book, or a book with no text that relays solely on the images to build a narrative. The imagery in *Un Semaine de Bonte'* is absolute nonsense, as most surrealist work strove to be. It demands the viewer to make sense of the images present. (Figure 6)



Figure 6: Collage Piece made from old stock

images(Ernst)

Graphic Design is, in its own right an illustrative method. After all, the primary method of graphic design is to force an audience into buying a certain product or think a certain way and it is no surprise that book illustration is often categorized under the wing of graphic design. In my opinion, the film and propaganda posters of the Russian Constructivist and the post Russian Constructivist (In which art was completely controlled by soviet politics.) are probably the most successful methods of Graphic Design and of visual communication. The Constructivist period was heavily influenced by Cubism, and thus there was an obsession with breaking complex forms down to basic shapes. In doing this very much can be said with very few visual elements. A simple red triangle penetrating a white circle represents the struggle of the Bolsheviks over the Bourgeoisie. The posters strip a concept down and make it into something so basic; the viewer can't help but constantly conjure the image up after seeing it and it leaves no room for the viewer to misinterpret the meaning.



Figure 7: Russian Propaganda Art (LaFont)

The posters were specifically designed to brainwash. Even a viewer that doesn't speak Russian clearly understands that a woman with her finger over her mouth in *Don't Speak, 1941* (Figure 7) is a *Lose Lips Sink Ships* image. There are numerous visual cues employed by these posters, scowling figures to reprimand bad behavior and benevolent, almost god-like images of Marx, Lenin, Stalin looking favorably upon Russian citizens who adhere to the common good. Then of course the elements of design such as shape, line, and negative space meant to draw the viewer's eyes in certain directions so if there is text that accompanies the images the viewer will not fail to read it. There are constant harsh contrasts thrown out from the posters. Typically the colors used are red, yellow, black, and white. The red and yellow, logically, because they were two colors of the revolution, but red was a perfect choice. Red is the color of blood and passion. Blood and passion are very good associations for a revolution. Black and white are colors that also draw numerous associations, light and dark, good and evil. One of the most parodied images that come out of this time period is the "figures looking off into the glorious Russian sunset" image. Usually it involves disembodied heads looking off to one side. Sometimes, but not as often as pop culture would have us believe, it will involve lines radiating off the page. The lines or in the above picture, the implied lines draw interest to the image because it is telling our eyes to look right, the faces and people marching are like dotted lines telling the brain to look forward as Russia moves forward.

Russian Constructivist Art gets lumped in pretty easily with the propaganda art. In the fledgling years of the Soviet Union avant-garde artists were welcome contributors, but art is a very powerful method of persuasion and it wasn't very long before most of the Constructivists fled the Soviet Union. The Russian propaganda art of World War II are artists mimicking the design elements that were created by the Constructivists.



Figure 8: Example of a Constructivist movie poster (Pack)

In Figure 8 harsh contrasts, implied line in the buildings which draw the viewers eyes in to the center and implied movement in the spirals of the text. The image perfectly conveys a falling sensation even though we aren't clearly shown an image of this female figure falling off a building . We aren't even show the full femal figure, just a face, legs, and arms, but the mind still puts the pieces together and we see it as a whole. The posters of 1920's Russian Avant-Garde can be a simple as a few disembodied faces dramatically shadowed and over black backgrounds to being incredibly complex with many colleged layers and visual textures, yet still maintaing a simple and dramatic focal point. (Figure 9)



Russian Design Work (Constantine)

Figure 9: Example of Avant-Garde

The Constructivists made a large impact on the graphic design world and still to this day the style that they made popular is constantly copied in art from print ads to graffiti.

Comic books are a combination of all the successful elements of book illustration, picture narratives, and graphic design. Comic books and graphic novels use text to carry so much of a story, mostly just the dialogue, and then uses images and design elements to carry the rest of the narrative.



Figure 10:A Sin City pannel (Miller)

In Frank Miller's *Sin City* 1991, forms are broken down into hard basic shapes and other than maybe a handful emphasis colors used in the entire series, it is entirely black and white. Miller had an excellent way of balancing the black and white so that there was always perfect chiaroscuro. (Figure 10) Text elements are incorporated into the design of the panels. Lines are used to create the impression of jail cells, falling rain, bullets, and the elements in each panel thoughtfully arranged to create motion. In a way all of his methods hark back to the methods employed by the constructivists, but his work manages to create a linear narrative as well.

There are so many infinite styles and methods of narrative illustration it is impossible to touch on all of them. The important thing to note is that there is no right or wrong way of illustrating a story. As long as the image somehow related to the story, visual elements usually add to a story, hardly ever taking away. Even stick figures add to a story, because unless the writer decides to put absolutely every stage detail into the story, which would bog down a narrative to the point of unreadability, an image tells the viewer which character was standing on the left or the right. Was the character wearing a hat? Was the girl fair haired or not? Not only is illustration a method of control it is also a method of supplementing details. No matter how poor a drawing is, showing is always better than telling. Good imagery can often save a poor story. There are numerous graphic novels in existence with inane plots and drivel for dialogue that have been rescued from obscurity due to excellent art. A mediocre story with mediocre art achieves about as much as one might think it would.

IV

The Better Mouse Trap

There is something that cannot be learned from reading about narrative theory or taking creative writing classes, how to conceive an idea and carry it to term.

Ideas are cheap and there are numerous people out in the world who have ideas for short stories or screenplays. They might have the beginning, middle, and end figured out and will be more than eager to share it with you, but the difference between them and the published authors is that they never made those ideas into anything concrete. Some authors have tomes of ideas and passages that will never see the light of day.

In the year I worked on this project, I started stories only to push them away later in disgust. My first idea was to create a series of short stories that eventually linked together into one big narrative, but the main problem was that some stories were weaker than other ones and it was hard to tie everything together in a neat package so I decided I'd do something more linear instead.

Then I started on a *Mad Max*, 1979 style wasteland epic complete with a reluctant hero on a quest. It would have fit Propp's theories, but it was a little too ambitious and the more I worked on it, the more I realized it needed more. It needed more of the elements of Barthes' Referential code, I need to create more of this world to make viable and it also need more of the Semic. I need to really get inside these characters heads and get to know how this world worked for them.

I think every storyteller wants to tell an epic or has the potential to tell an epic, but one must be able to devote the time in order to make it work and that was something I did not have.

I needed to think simple and for me that is the hardest thing to do. There is something fundamentally wrong with my personality that causes me to seek out chaotic and complicated things. When it comes to writing I am notorious for starting things and never finishing them because something else will inevitably come along and my interest will shift to that. I also get caught up in whether or not something is good. If I am not satisfied with the work, rather than trying to rework it I simply just abandon it .

I must finish what I start. This above all represents the prime directive of this project; there should be a finished body of work at the end.

The story I settled on came in August. I wanted to do something short and simple and I was working on my senior BFA show and the premise featured a lot of images of deep sea fish and I thought it might be interesting to do a short story about people turning into fish monsters. I jotted down a simple outline. I laid everything out from end to beginning so I wouldn't have to spend long hours brooding over the middle section. This is a short summary:

The story is about two characters Nick and Miranda. Nick is mentally unstable and Miranda is his enabler. They both feed off of each others toxicity, together they go on a beach trip. Nick works in a library and steals a book pertaining to Dagon from the rare book room and on the trip he attempts to translate it. He raises something up out of the sea that attacks them. They discount it as being some kind of freak man-o-war attack.

The following day the two become ill. Strange transformations begin. Being prone to escapist fantasies, the two find it exciting. They gave been granted a method of no longer having to take responsibilities for their actions and become drunk with ideas of power. However, when they actually kill another human being Miranda can't handle the guilt while Nick enjoys it a little too much.

Nick always wants more and Miranda abides, until his plans for power, which involve merging with her body, become the breaking point. She rises up and kills him.

The conflict is meant to be between the characters, one acts on sheer impulse representing the id, Nick, and the other Miranda, has a conscious, not necessarily the representing ego, but the superego trying to mediate and understand the action. The narrator, Miranda must learn to let go at the end of the story. The person she is attached to is a leech and she has to learn sometimes it is better to be alone and be one person rather to cling to someone that is harmful, but also the story is also posing a question to the audience, Who is the bigger monster, Nick or Miranda. They become monsters in the story, but the point was they always were monsters. They were just given the excuse to act the way they always wanted. I wanted this to be the primary influence of the story, not the element of supernatural. The otherworldly influence is only a walk on part. It served my plot and then I threw it away.

I wanted to start pulling apart Propp's theories right off the bat because quite frankly I don't believe in heroes. Real human beings have flaws and people don't always do what is necessary or right. I believe that a hero in a story serves a function and I believe that they serve a purpose in myths and folklore, but when I write I am more concerned with the idea that people are neither inherently good nor inherently evil. Everyone is given choices and what we chose determine the outcomes we are given. I have always been enamored by the idea of the antihero and stories such as Camus *The Fall*, in which the main character or narrator is not necessarily a likeable or sympathetic character. Many will argue that one needs the characters to be sympathetic to in order to secure to the readers interest. However, I do not think that is the case. A writer needs characters that are interesting to an audience. The story of *It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia 2005-2011* is based around a group of absolutely deplorable people who get into all kinds of strange mishaps due to their deplorable behavior.

Now it isn't easy to make unlikeable characters interesting, and I don't know how well I managed to do it, but there comes a certain point when one has to let go of the fears of what others might think of the work or the quality and just to the work. There is also always the possibility that the meaning of the story, in my case that both characters are equally monstrous

and always were, will be lost on the audience. There is a delicate balance when it comes to addressing the symbolic code in a story. Sometimes the symbols are so subtle in a story, no one but the author understands them, but there also times when the author beats the audience with an idea over the head so many times the story becomes drivel. It takes practice to get a symbolic message across just the right way. It all goes back to how well one articulates the message.

One may not be able to address all of Barthes codes in the work, and if the work may not benefit humanity or say anything about a culture's political and social mores, but it exists and in the creative world material product often does create success. There are numerous bad movies floating out in the world. In 2010 a film was released called: *Birdemic: Shock and Terror*. It fails follow any of the aforementioned narrative structures when it comes to story telling and it also fails at most elementary principle of film making, but the real difference between it and a master work of script some writer is working on probably as we speak is that *Birdemic* is available for purchase on DVD and Bluray and that director is making a profit off of it.

I had to force myself to sit down and write to the ending of my story and after a certain point I stopped thinking so much about what I was trying to accomplish and just began to enjoy the process of writing. When I reached the end I knew that I had adhered to one principle I had started from one state of equilibrium in the story and created another.

The artwork didn't really come until I had finished the story, obviously because I had to know what scenes I would need to illustrate, and therein lays the crux of the project. What images in the written text needed to be supplemented? I knew that I had to illustrate something that represented the switch in stasis, a beginning piece where everything is normal and ending piece that shows the final stages of the metamorphosis. The rest of the scenes were determined by picking out the pivotal actions scenes of the story. Being such a short story there was not a lot of information to work with. I chose to do one drawing of the attack, one drawing of the initial transformation, and the climax scene. I also created a cover, which is the most important visual piece of information, it determines whether or not the viewer will pick it up and choose to read it. This was the piece of work I spent the longest time with. Not only did the imagery have to be visually interesting, but I also had to spend time orienting the text so that it worked with the image and didn't clash. The final addition was the frontispiece, there really wasn't a need from the image, but I thought it would be a nice nod back to the classic illustrated novels that included a title page image.

All of the illustrations were an amalgam of all of the aforementioned artistic influences. I enjoy breaking things down into simple basic shapes and using harsh contrast black and white images, but I also enjoy highly decorative and detailed work. In a way, throwing all the ingredients that I enjoy from other narrative artists, placing them into a blender, and pouring it out is my way of trying to create my own voice as an artist. I hand drew everything, save for the frontispiece which was an intaglio print, with black India ink on a white background and scanned them into a computer where I continued punch them up in Photoshop. I discovered that this project worked better with deconstructed images rather than highly detailed ones. The first image I created of the two characters sleeping in their state of normality is to me the

weakest of the lot. I spent an incredible amount of time linking in the little wood grain textures and the paisley patterns on the bed and when I scanned the image in, all the details were blurred and lost. Had I chosen to do this novel in all intaglio prints I could have gotten away with all of those minuet details, but since I knew I was compiling this work digitally I felt that it was better to use the technology available to me.

Not every medium works in the same way and so it was really a method of finding a way to master it. I really loved the outcomes of the cover and the image of Nicky's silhouette being attacked underwater. After working on the illustrations, I began to wish that I had to put more action into the story so that there were more things to do. It felt like it need something more, but I couldn't quite put my finger on what that thing was.

A few things I would like to add about the finished product is that I know the story is weak and if anything it could benefit more from Barthes codes to give it something added. While I think Propp's writing is very general I would say that my story does need some building of conflict and maybe a good chunk of padding. I think a lot of what Propp was writing in his analysis of folklore was about padding. Perhaps padding isn't even a good word for it; because that word implies filler, like pillow fluff, what I mean is that it needs something substantial. A story structured in Propp's way would be engaging and with Barthes codes would add needed depth. As of now I think the story is as interesting as reading a car manual. They say that the true writing process comes from the revision of a story. The story could be revised and more depth could be added. I don't know that I will ever actually go back and edit the story. It bores me and I am bored with it. I would rather cannibalize some of the creepy ideas about relationships and use it for some other's tale, one not about fish monsters.

The presentation of the book was done in a digital format. At the time it seemed like a logical choice being both economical and progressive, considering that most printed work now reaches a larger audience through the Internet and nearly all printed work is available in e-book format. However, the formatting of e-books is not aesthetically pleasing. The current e-book format is to use pdf files that have the pages lined one right after the other to be scrolled through like a web document. This destroys the storybook feel or turning pages and gazing at the illustrated work beside blocks of text. In fact that is often the best part of the book, glossing over the pictures and deciding whether or not it is worth the read. I would have loved to have the story laid out with a full illustration on every other page, but I did not have the technological knowledge to format it that way. I can also say that from the research I did on creating an e-book is that few people are working to create illustrated works that can be viewed on Kindle and Nook devices, it just seems clunky and awkward. I hope that this will change in the future, as our technology progresses, but perhaps it might be a crusade I will have to take up on my own. I would hate to think of a world where we might lose the magic of the illustrated novel.

This project was about writing a story and then creating the images, but now I am enchanted by the idea of going in reverse, creating pictures and writing a story that fits around it. I am also open to possibility of trying to illustrate work for someone else. I want to let my ideas soak a little bit longer and work with someone whose ideas are concrete. I have been in contact with a poet who is interested in getting an artist to provide illustrations for his chapbooks, though as with most collaborative efforts, nothing has really been committed to at this point. It will take some time to see how it pans out.

In the end, I thought that this project was kind of neat. Yes, those exact words. I don't think that story is that great, It could be more interesting, and I feel like it was a tale that I wanted to spin and now that it is out of my system, I have no interest in it anymore and want to move on to other things. (Perhaps that Wasteland epic?) To me it all seems like a start of something. Like a story written out with stick figure illustrations. *Kat's first Illustrated story*. It was all about seeing if I could actually do it and now that it is done it is now about quality control. The question is, "What can I do to make this better?"

When it comes to writing I know one of my fatal of flaws is still telling and not showing. Let Barthes beat me on the head all he likes, I'm trying my very best to work on it. I also have a bad habit of constantly writing in passive voice and that is something that I know will be very hard to break the habit of. At times, I believe it's because I actually *think* in passive voice. With the passive voice and the narrator blabbing on this weird Asmovian meets Lovecraftian way of overanalyzing everything I may be a pretty boring writer that just likes to put puppets on a stage and make them dance. I think that if you want to be serious about writing, there has to be an awful lot of work that goes along with it. Every writer has their pitfalls, some are too wordy, some like to write in run on sentences that don't have any end in sight, and some are so minimalist that fail to use quotation marks, but the argument is, that is their style and at this point I don't know if I have been doing this long enough to have a style yet. This project is a great way to hone my writing skills and a finished work, not matter how bad it seems, can always be edited, things can be expanded upon and things can be taken away, and sometimes it can be thrown away entirely and elements cannibalized into a new work.

In contrast to my writing skills, I feel a little more confident in my abilities as an artist. I feel that I can take on a job and get it done and make it visually interesting, however, I know I can do better. There are lots of visual artists out there who are all striving for attention, and I am just another one trying to scream over the crowd. I want to push the boundaries of my work so that it will be undeniably attention grabbing and cool and I'm not there yet. I feel like the illustrations in this story acted as supplements, but they don't hold hands with the work in certain unison. Drawing skills can always be improved upon, but I do think illustrative work allows for more cartoony fun than the work I do for "fine art" projects. This is not to sit that I don't think illustration work can be fine art. I'm saying that it's tight rope thin line that is hard to walk. In order for any piece of visual art to be successful it has to scream for attention, and I am at dull roar at most right now. I don't think I can control the viewer like I want to, like stiff writing, a drawing can also be equally boring.

The more time I spend looking at the things that I create the more dissatisfied I feel, however the fact that I made something tangible is satisfactory to me. I can take what I learned go out in the world and do more which is my ultimate goal, and I can improve upon everything I did on this project. I can spend more time with the work that inspires me and I can read more on how a narrative is structured, read more stories, and most importantly, keep creating .

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