

*THE PORTRAYAL OF THE GROTESQUE IN
STODDARD'S AND QUANTIN'S ILLUSTRATED
EDITIONS OF EDGAR ALLAN POE (1884): AN
INTERDISCIPLINARY ANALYSIS OF THE
RELATIONS BETWEEN THE VISUAL AND
VERBAL.*

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RIGAL-ARAGÓN

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In Fernando González-Moreno and Margarita Rigal-Aragón's book on the grotesque, two illustrated editions of Edgar Allan Poe's tales that were published on both sides of the Atlantic in 1884 take center stage. This in itself is an important revisionist move as the illustrations of the Quantin edition and the Stoddard edition have often been overlooked or relegated to the sidelines. In *Images of Poe's Works: A Comprehensive Descriptive Catalogue of Illustrations* (1989), one of the main works of reference for the authors, Burton Pollin, for example, merely criticizes the Quantin edition for the general dullness of its images even though he concedes their lasting influence on Poe illustrations. Art historian González-Moreno and Poe scholar Rigal-Aragón approach both editions from an interdisciplinary vantage point and fruitfully explore how 1884 marks a watershed moment for Poe illustrations. They argue that an increasing demand for illustrated books, technological innovations, the influence of the symbolist movement, and the fact that the artworks were no longer produced only by landscape painters but also by caricaturists and artists working for satirical magazines coincided with a shift in Poe's public reputation. Griswold's

malicious and harmful portrayal of the author was being overturned by more nuanced and positive accounts by the likes of Sarah H. Whitman and Henry Ingram and, prominently, by Charles Baudelaire's admiration. Consequently, readers as well as visual artists opened up to the unconventional and darker aspects of Poe's aesthetics. This was the moment when A.C. Armstrong, who was in charge of the "Stoddard edition" (which acquired its name because it contains a memoir by Richard Henry Stoddard), and Albert Quantin decided to publish Poe's tales with images that went beyond the conventional. Whereas earlier publications had mainly been interested in Poe's poetry and had catered to Victorian aesthetics, Quantin and Armstrong hired artists who were ready to delve into the more somber aspects of Poe's tales.

In the first chapter, González-Moreno and Rigal-Aragón outline Poe's own keen interest in illustrated editions and point to his demand that the images needed to be consistent with the literary texts and were supposed to function as artifacts in their own right rather than as mere adornments. In his outlines for projected literary journals, he also showed a careful awareness of the material components of the publications, thinking about the paper, the binding, the format and typography. González-Moreno and Rigal-Aragón take up this interest in the materiality of the literary text by describing the consequences of how engraving developed from chalcography to xylography. Xylographic illustrations could be produced cheaper and faster and allowed for new formats and combinations between text and image. Together with other innovations such as the daguerreotype and lithography, xylography contributed to the blossoming of visual culture in the 19th century.

The first chapter concludes with an overview of the first illustrations for Poe's work. In 1843, Poe and the publisher Thomas C. Clark commissioned Felix O.C. Darley to furnish designs for Poe's projected journal *The Stylus* "or for other purposes" as the contract states. While the *Stylus* project never came to fruition, Darley provided two vignettes for "The Gold-Bug" in 1843, the first illustrations for a tale by Poe and the only ones published during his lifetime. As these vignettes focused on the treasure hunt plot, they established the persistent tradition of reading "The Gold Bug" as an adventure tale.

The fact that Griswold did not include any illustrations in *The Works of the Late Edgar Allan Poe* (1850-1856) had a lasting impact on the American market, which is why the first illustrated edition of

Poe's poems and tales was published in England in Henry Vizetelly's series of "Readable Books." These *Tales of Mystery, Imagination, and Humour; and Poems* (1852 and, in the Beeton edition, 1853) catered to a Victorian sensibility. They offered but a few glimpses into the grotesque and generally avoided any drastic or dramatic depictions that went beyond the genre of the adventure story which had proved successful with "The Gold-Bug." Other illustrated editions exclusively focused on the poems. Their images were mainly executed by landscape painters and remained limited to the visual tradition of the beautiful, the sublime, and the picturesque, a model that was commercially successful.

The second chapter turns to Quantin's *Histoires extraordinaires* and *Nouvelles histoires extraordinaires* and Armstrong's Stoddard edition, *The Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, which were published in Paris and, respectively, New York in 1884 and inaugurated a new era in the history of the illustration of Poe's tales. Building on Baudelaire's previously published collections, Quantin's two volumes cement a Baudelairian conception of Poe as a genius and craftsman interested in the grotesque and capable of producing effects ranging from the terrible to the humorous. González-Moreno and Rigal-Aragón show how the prologues of both the Quantin and the Stoddard editions and other biographical analyses by Stoddard, Whitman, and Ingram paved the way for readers and artists to conceive of a "pictorial Poe" who not only covered his room at college with crayon sketches but whose writing had a pictorial quality to it.

The third chapter offers biographical information about the illustrators of the Quantin and the Stoddard editions. When referring to the artists Robert Swain Gifford, Charles Adams Platt, and Frederick Stuart Church, who worked for Armstrong, González-Moreno and Rigal-Aragón comment on the contemporary revival of etching, which allowed the artist to control the whole process of print production instead of being dependent on intermediaries. Ten prints on satin of Gifford's, Platt's, and Church's illustrations were offered to subscribers to the deluxe "Amontillado" version of Armstrong's publication, which underlines, I would add, that the status of illustrations had indeed gone beyond that of mere embellishments or distractions. In Paris, Quantin enlisted Hermann Vogel (Wögel), Eugène-Michel-Joseph Abot, François-Nicolas Chiffart, Daniel Urrabieta Vierge, Jules-Descartes Férat, Herpin, Henri Meyer, Jean-Paul Laurens, Fortuné-Louis Méaulle to take up Baudelaire's project of producing an illustrated version. The last section of the chapter

examines the contrasting authorial personae constructed by the portraits of Poe included in these volumes, one of them a transformed reproduction of the “Ultima Thule” daguerreotype, the other one a Byronic portrait by Chiffart.

The final part of the book is dedicated to showing how the illustrations of both Quantin’s and Armstrong’s editions are simultaneously conservative and innovative, just like the authorial portraits previously analyzed. While especially Vogel often remains close to genre paintings, many other illustrators relish the gory details of scenes of violence and death. A case in point is Vierge’s illustration of “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” in which Madame L’Espanaye’s facial features are distorted beyond recognition while blood is gushing from her neck. Another impressive example of how the illustrators transform Poe’s notion of the arabesque into images of the grotesque-macabre and grotesque-supernatural is Férat’s image of “The Pit and the Pendulum” that (just like Vierge’s image) fuses human and animal elements and brings the fantastic of the tale to life. The Quantin edition adds the grotesque as parody but also the picturesque and beautiful to the latter two modes of the grotesque, thus representing the richness of Poe’s tales and paving the way for illustrators such as Aubrey Beardsley, Harry Clarke, and Arthur Rackham.

Building on Rigal-Aragón’s and González-Moreno’s contributions to *Los legados de Poe* (2010), this book productively contextualizes the categories of the beautiful, sublime, picturesque, arabesque, and grotesque (in its various forms) and manages to provide an overview of the history of Poe illustrations from 1843-1884. González-Moreno and Rigal-Aragón continually emphasize how each illustration constitutes an interpretation in its own right that depends on the aesthetic and economic motivations of artists and editors as well as the perceived inclinations of the readership and the current state of printing technology. The appendix, which includes 34 plates placed next to the excerpts that inspired them, is a great resource that many will find useful for teaching purposes.

The authors add to the continuing focus on the relationship between Poe’s work and visual culture, as Barbara Cantalupo, whose own *Poe and the Visual Arts* (2014) is one of the latest embodiments of this field of scholarship, remarks in the foreword. As the first contribution to the study of Poe illustrations from Spain, this book achieves its aim of vindicating the illustrations of the Quantin and the Stoddard editions and canonizes them as the first attempts at

doing justice to the aesthetic variety of Poe's tales. Rigal-Aragón and González-Moreno make a convincing argument about how these images served as trailblazers for some of the most popular and intriguing Poe illustrations of the late nineteenth and twentieth century.