

HOUND VOICE

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Integrative Project Written Thesis

April 30, 2018

Introduction

Storytelling through illustration is about as far from a “new” concept as it is possible for an artist to get. The intersection of narrative and illustration is one that’s ancient, and familiar to almost everyone. Most people can recall being read picture books by their parents, and later reading these books to themselves. *My* interest began here, in the combination of words and drawings.

To clarify: I am not referring to graphic novels or comics (which are diverse and fascinating art forms themselves). My work specifically involves books that feature varying numbers of illustrations alongside the text, rather than panels of illustration which communicate the story on their own or through written dialogue. By presenting long-form prose and image side by side in my work, I wanted to produce a story that would draw on influences in literature, folklore, and illustration. The result would be a fantasy-fiction novel featuring illustrations of characters, scenes, and settings. To this end, I researched methods of illustration and visual storytelling ranging from Rembrandt to modern-day video game production art. I studied scientific processes, gathered historic and literary references and, of course, read endlessly. The overall process for me has been about the translation of idea into writing, and writing into image.

Illustration Research

Researching for my IP work quickly became a project in and of itself. In general, this background work can be divided into two categories: research done to establish context and foundation for my *illustration* work, and research done to further my base of creative writing knowledge and skills. There was always significant overlap between the two types of research, both in what I found and in its application, and I will devote a third category to works that combine the visual and literary in ways I found to be influential.

My research into visual illustration has progressed over the course of this year by studying a series of artists I admire. When selecting work that appeals to me or that I want to emulate, I look for qualities such as composition, level of “polish” (or how finished the drawing looks), and how the artist uses line and/or value to shade their work. These are qualities which are unique to each artist, and which dramatically influence the overall tone of the finished illustration. Through my research, I worked to learn new techniques that I incorporated into my own work. I am less interested in limiting my search by medium: painting, printmaking, pen and ink drawing all use skills that overlap, and which can be applied when working in any format. Because of this, my visual research covers a broad (but ultimately interconnected) range of disciplines.

My influences for my illustrative work go as far back as the 1650s, to Rembrandt van Rijn and the tradition of baroque painters. The sense of mystery, drama and danger present even in paintings with relatively mundane subject matter is an element that I aspire to emulate, however subtly. Formally, Rembrandt's used of stark lighting and high contrast on one main focal point (usually the face of his subject) is stylistically appealing to me as I create my own work. The uncanny nature of paintings like "The

Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp¹" (1632), lends the depicted scene a sense of creeping horror that I find fascinating.



Source: Mauritshuis Museum

It is probably not surprising, then, that I turned from Rembrandt to

Gustave Doré. Doré was a 19th century illustrator (working most often with engraving) who illustrated literature including Aesop's fables, Danté's *Inferno*, and the Bible. His

¹ Rembrandt van Rijn. "The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp." Mauritshuis. <https://www.mauritshuis.nl/en/explore/the-collection/artworks/the-anatomy-lesson-of-dr-nicolaes-tulp-146/detailgegevens/>

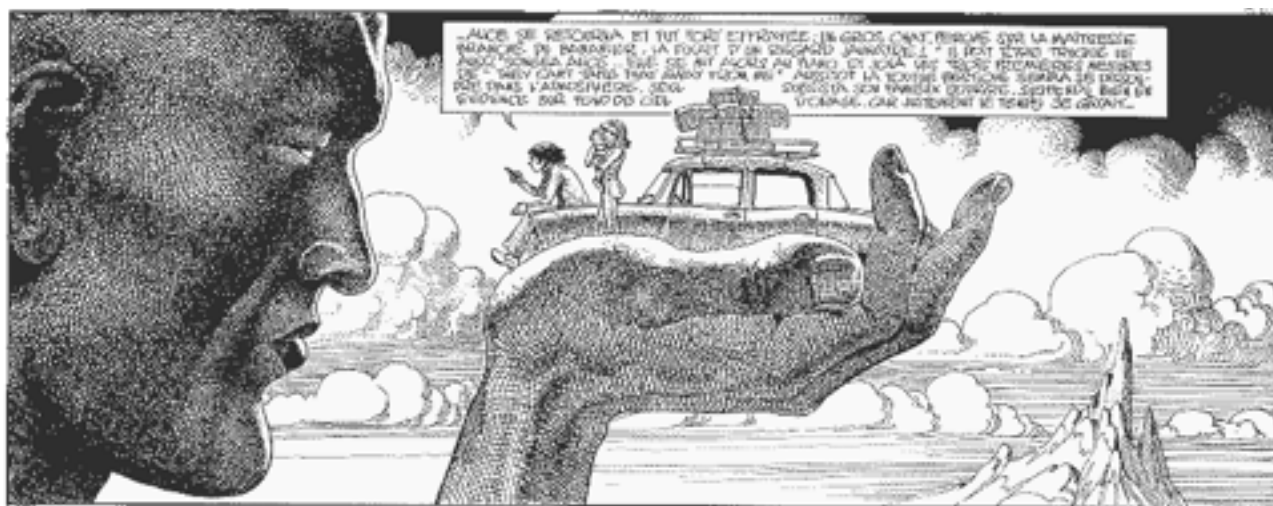
work utilizes high contrast black and white, and displays a mastery of chiaroscuro.

When I was growing up, my parents kept several collections of his work in our home, and so it was satisfying to revisit these illustrations as an adult. The Bible illustrations in particular can be disturbing and unsettling to look at — many are violent, and almost all are harshly lit and high contrast.²

Not every artist I researched relies exclusively on visual contrast in their work, however. Jean Giraud,



Source: Wikimedia Commons
(image in public domain)



Source: JVJ Publishing

² Doré, Gustave. *A Doré Gallery*. New York: Arco Publishing Company, Inc., 1974

also known as Moebius (1938-2012), was an illustrator who worked in a cartoon-like style, often with intensely detailed hatching and cross-hatching. The visual

characteristics of his work changed

dramatically throughout his nearly sixty year

career, sometimes using massive amounts of

line to create areas of dark³ and at other times

allowing the image to remain relatively flat⁴.

Regardless of the level of overall contrast, his

visual compositions and differences in line

weight have been influential in my own

work.



Source: Heritage Auctions

In addition to artists that are no longer working,

some of my most important research has focused on contemporary concept art and

artists. “Concept art” is about the translation of idea to screen: the artist creates an

image to represent an initial idea, and the image is refined until it can be animated into

a game or put into the actual setting of a movie. The idea presented in the work is

³ Vadeboncoeur, Jim. “Gir & Moebius.” JvJ Publishing Illustrators. <http://www.bpib.com/illustrat/giraud.htm>

⁴ “Barnier’s Escape Collector’s Cards.” Heritage Auctions. Last modified November, 2015. <https://comics.ha.com/itm/original-comic-art/illustrations/moebius-jean-giraud-moebius-collector-cards-8-barnier-s-escape-illustration-original-art-comic-i-total-2-original-art-/a/7152-92178.s>

communicated as clearly as possible by the artist, with less attention paid to the finality of the illustration itself than to the idea represented. Concept art is important to me personally as a long-term career goal, and so studying artists currently working in the



Source: Kotaku

field has been crucial in my work. Even Amundsen⁵, Piotr Jablonski⁶ and Viktor Antonov⁷ are all prolific artists whose work I greatly admire, and who all produce images that are intricate, dark and sometimes unsettling, telling or implying a broader story. Though their drawings are rarely accompanied by text, they reference or hint at narrative via their subject matter. This is particularly important to me because my work

relies so heavily on storytelling. I want my

illustrations to tell the viewer a story, with or without text.

⁵ Amundsen, Even Mehl. Artstation Portfolio. Last modified April 16, 2018. <https://www.artstation.com/mischeviouslittleelf>

⁶ Jablonski, Piotr. Artist Portfolio and Bio. Richard Solomon. Accessed April 19th, 2018. <http://richardsolomon.com/artists/piotr-jablonski/#general>

⁷ Plunkett, Luke. "The Art of Dishonored." Kotaku. Last modified August 30, 2012 <https://kotaku.com/5939152/dishonored-has-some-of-the-best-video-game-art-ive-ever-seen>

While illustration is critical to my project, it is accompanied and informed by writing — specifically fiction writing. My drawings have all centered on my work on a fantasy fiction novel, and drawing the world as I envision it in my writing has been critical to my practice. Improving the quality of my writing, as well as reading as much relevant literature as I can, has been a constant throughout this year. I consider the writing itself to be a form of research: some of the prose will be presented in the final BFA show, but the vast majority of the text will not. It's invaluable, however, in allowing me to get to know my setting, characters and plot enough that I feel confident illustrating them. *Writing Fiction: A Guide to Narrative Craft* is a writing textbook⁸ (recommended to me by Jennifer Metsker) which has given me many important elements to consider as I both read and write: compelling characters, consistent voice, new vs. received language, and many more. I work hard in my writing to avoid overly flowery language, and to inject honesty and my own voice into every scene. I draw inspiration from genre authors like Ken Follett (historical fiction), Douglas Adams and Ursula K. LeGuin (science fiction), and Stephen King and John Connolly (fantasy). There are many other authors whom I admire, of course, and I still have a lot to learn.

In addition to my research into writing techniques, some of my time has been devoted to learning more about how certain scientific processes work — for example,

⁸ Burroway, Jane and Elizabeth Stuckey-French. *Writing Fiction: A Guide to Narrative Craft*. 7th Edition. Copyright 2007.

how bacteria reproduce and cause disease. These are important plot elements in my book, and so learning how to effectively write about bacteria and real-world science has been crucial. I am interested in avoiding a book that is based purely in pseudoscience or magic; while both of these elements do factor into my writing, I want the story to be solidly based in reality before I add in the supernatural.

Finally, my research into literature and writing eventually drew my attention back to a type of book that I had taken for granted for most of my life. Many books, particularly young adult literature,

contain illustrations of scenes, people, or creatures described in the text. The illustrations appear opposite the text, and might only occur once or twice in a chapter. I studied several examples, including *The Spiderwick Chronicles* by Tony DiTerlizzi and Holly Black, *The Invention of Hugo Cabret* by Brian Selznick⁹, *Leviathan* by Scott Westerfeld (art by Keith Thompson)¹⁰, and *The*



ASCENDING
www.keiththompsonart.com

Source: Keith Thompson Art

⁹ Luciano, Jonathan. "The Invention of Hugo Cabret." *The Invention of Hugo Cabret*, by Brian Selznick. Copyright 2007. <http://www.theinventionofhugocabret.com/index.htm>

¹⁰ Thompson, Keith. "Ascending." <https://www.keiththompsonart.com/pages/ascending.html>

Hobbit by J.R.R. Tolkien. These books were published with audiences of varying stages of childhood or adolescence in mind, and yet are popular among wide audiences. This is in part because of the imagination and vividness of the illustrations presented alongside the stories — when the artist is able to create an illustration to go along with their verbal description, the audience gets a glimpse of what the author envisioned. It is concept art with the smallest possible amount of dilution: we see the idea exactly as intended, and can read the story with the benefit of reacting to depicted scenes alongside the characters. The images are influential and stick with us (particularly when they're read at a young age), and when the accompanying story is engaging, they have the power to resonate with wide audiences.

Methodology

My work this year started with the intent to illustrate a story, and early in the process I began to move into writing. I had entered the year fascinated by a poem by William Butler Yeats titled "Hound Voice." The final stanza of the poem is as follows:

*"Some day we shall get up before the dawn
And find our ancient hounds before the door,
And wide awake know that the hunt is on;
Stumbling upon the blood-dark track once more,
That stumbling to the kill beside the shore;
Then cleaning out and bandaging of wounds,
And chants of victory amid the encircling hounds."*¹¹

¹¹ Yeats, William Butler. "Hound Voice." *The Nation*. Last modified March 23, 2015. <https://www.thenation.com/article/hound-voice/>

I spent a lot of time trying to articulate what this poem means to me and to my thesis work. In essence, I believe that it is about embracing our wildness and our history, in all their gory details. It's about enduring feelings, and how our past remains with us as the world changes. While there is only one literal hound present in my final project, the notions of ancient fear and magic beyond what we can see have been driving factors in my work since the very beginning.

By December, my intent was to finish and self-publish a novel to present at the final show. The writing and illustration processes evolved in ways that mirrored one another: the initial stages of producing work involve creating as much work as possible,



without worrying about the cohesiveness of the project as a whole or the success of each individual piece. From there, I narrowed down both the prose and the illustrations to a point at which I felt I was presenting my best material. My drawing work always centered itself around my writing practice, the majority of which developed outside of class time. By writing and producing as much as I could during the first semester of

A selection of exploratory drawings pinned to my studio wall.

this year, I was able to develop characters, settings and plots that drew me to pursue them further. As a result of this work, I ended up with more than 60,000 words (over 150 pages) of a first draft manuscript. While writing this much content was informative and exciting work, I realized by the end of November that editing my raw manuscript



The first of six page layouts presented at the final show.

into something I felt comfortable publishing would take much more time than I had

available to me. The illustrations were just as important to my project as the prose (if not more so), and I wanted to devote adequate time to producing them. After several critiques, I scaled my goals down to a more reasonable level: I would exhibit a single chapter of the story, with illustrations made for each page of prose and presented as framed page layouts. This format mimics an open book, but allows me to present the work in a larger, more visible format. I wanted to avoid confusing the viewer as much as possible, and without detailed knowledge of the characters and plot it would be difficult to interpret the variety of scenes I had initially wanted to illustrate. This decision also allowed me to tailor the tone and subject matter of my illustrations to more closely match the presented text.

When it came to the drawings themselves, I kept experimentation with medium fairly limited throughout the process. I chose to utilize methods I felt comfortable with, in order to do as much as possible with the content of the drawings. My illustrations began as pen and ink sketches and full drawings, and moved gradually into digital media (namely, software like Procreate and Photoshop). I was able to maintain the hatching and high contrast style I had already developed with the traditional medium, while allowing myself to achieve a greater range of values and shading styles than I would otherwise have been able to access.

My idea for the visuals of this project started with an image that had been floating around in my head for a long time. I've always been fascinated by dramatic differences in scale, and on one occasion drew a girl standing next to an impossibly large bear. The story developed from that point on, and has evolved into a project that features these characters, as well as many others, acting across a variety of settings.



A scene evocative of my original idea for the project, presented at the final show.

When reading for fun, I've always loved generating a mental picture for the words as I read them. I want others to share this sensation, and to see what I see when I tell a story. When audiences look at my work, my intent is for them to see the illustrations first — they should be eye-catching and hint at a story that entices the audience to focus on the prose. Once the viewer leaves, I want them to

want to read on. I try to evoke

sensations and images in my writing that are unnerving, that make the reader feel the stress the characters are placed under.

“The voice had come from all around her, deep and rasping like dry lungs and shattered bones.”

This the same feeling I want to evoke with my illustrations. Overall darkness with high levels of contrast help to heighten the drama of the piece, and I used both of these elements in every drawing that I displayed in the final show. A strong, single light source (usually firelight) also helped make the illustrations more striking. All of my illustrations are black and white, emphasizing elements of fear and danger present in my story.

Overall, the illustration and drawing work was where I felt most at home during this project. These have always been my favorite methods of creating, and when laying out pages I got the chance to see my work coming together as a whole. It was



Another scene from the final show.

immensely satisfying to produce something that really *looked* like a page from a book. This kind of creative work — bonding concept and image, moving from the writing of a story to the visual production of an image — is something I have loved doing, and hope to do again and again throughout my career. Although my own novel will not be ready for publication by the time my project is completed, I have already made enough progress that I hope to publish my novel by the end of 2019.

Conclusion

Over the course of the year, the idea behind my project changed relatively little. This was surprising to me — I didn't expect to be as drawn towards my particular project as I was, or to receive the support that I did. I knew from the start that I wanted to write, and to illustrate what I wrote. Within that framework, however, I myself changed more than I could ever have predicted. I had expected to change my mind often, and to vacillate between ideas as time went on. Instead, I grew more and more excited and inspired by what I was creating. This project, *Hound Voice*, has taken me through every emotion I have ever experienced with regards to my creative work. I have at times loved it, hated it, and wanted more than anything to make it the best that it could be. Working up the courage to produce something that is completely mine, something I can't (and wouldn't want to) distance myself from, has been an enormous growing experience. This is a process that I plan to continue. If I've learned nothing else

in my time here at Stamps, it's that there is always room for improvement in my work; I will never be finished learning how to draw, write, or anything else that I love. With that in mind, I will to continue to write and eventually publish my novel. I want to draw dramatic places and people; I want to write prose that keeps the reader reading; I want to produce work that is satisfying to me. More than anything, I want to tell my story.

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**While this book itself was published long after Doré's death, it is a collection of his printed works, and I have used the book to reference these images. No text was referenced.*