POE ONLINE: A DATABASE OF ILLUSTRATED EDITIONS FOR TEACHING PURPOSES


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Abstract

The interdisciplinary and consolidated research group “LyA” (Literature & Art) of the University of Castilla-La Mancha was established in 2015, being granted by the Spanish Ministerio de Economía y Competitividad for the development of a four-year research project: “Poe On-line: Text and Image” (HAR2015-64580-P). Among the main goals of this project, co-directed by Prof. Dr. Rigal-Aragón (Department of Modern Philology) and Prof. Dr. González-Moreno (Department of History of Art), we must highlight the compilation of a specific collection of illustrated editions of Edgar A. Poe’s works and the design and implementation of an online catalogue to offer public access to those editions. This paper will present the current state of this database as well as some of our future and priority lines of action.

Keywords: Poe, Text, Image, Illustrations, Editions, Database.

1 INTRODUCTION

The image of Poe has been -and it still is- subjected to different iconic constructions within the context of several manifestations of Spanish culture, more specifically in popular culture. This fact shows the increasing interest that the figure of the American writer has aroused in Spain. A myriad of reasons may be pointed out in order to explain this phenomenon, but due to space reasons we are going to highlight just a few of them. Firstly, few writers like Poe have made use of literature as a powerful resort to arouse collective fear, a circumstance which many Spanish mass media have exploited to draw the attention of the audience. More specifically, TV has found in the exploitation of hackneyed stereotypes, such as those concerning Poe’s life since his last years, a profitable strategy to increase their ratings. Considering the significant capacity of TV to firmly instil behavioural and visual patterns in the audience, the main consequence of using those stereotypes with an evident profit-oriented purpose is the fact that the American writer has become a synonym for tragedy, alcohol, drugs and mental instability in the Spanish collective imagination; these elements, to some extent, often trigger heterogeneous responses such as laughter, uneasiness, and an attraction, sometimes morbid, towards macabre and terror. Secondly, the growing interest of Spanish population in topics related to occultism, psychological introspection, and horror fiction has contributed to turning the spotlight on Poe as a popular icon in which all these fields merge. The increasing interest in this author may have motivated the appearance of fewer sensationalist approaches to the figure of Poe, especially on the radio, emphasizing more the literary and unbiased biographical aspects. Finally, besides some turbulent episodes of his life, media in Spanish culture, such as TV and radio, have found his originality in the treatment of terror, the thematic richness, the suggestive aesthetics, and the musicality of his writings an almost inexhaustible resource to create shows, images, and sounds which have proved to attract a significant number of popular culture consumers in Spain, either to perpetuate long-standing fallacies concerning the biography of Poe or to unveil a more realistic and unknown vision of his life and works.

To address -and to correct as far as possible- this situation of long-standing fallacies and topics, our project intends to show a wider and richer panorama of Poe’s works, emphasizing the pictorial richness of his literary production and showing the different visual readings that, generation after generation, artists and illustrators have offered trying to cover such endless source of inspiration [1].

2 METHODOLOGY

As regards the compilation of our own collection of illustrated editions of Edgar A. Poe’s works, we have had the invaluable help of a fundamental starting point for this kind of studies: Burton R. Polin’s Images of Poe’s Works (1989) [2]. Polin’s catalogue has provided us a basis from which we have been able to decide which editions we were more interested in. In this sense, our collection has been created taking into consideration four main guiding principles:
In the first place, we have acquired those editions that mean a milestone in the graphic history of Poe’s works, especially for being the first in their sort.

Secondly, we have tried most of the main artists who have approached Poe’s works to be present.

In the third place, and with the purpose of studying the particular reception of Poe’s works among the Spanish artists, we have incorporated the most significant editions illustrated in our country, Spain.

In the fourth and last place, the presence of comic adaptations and graphic novels is remarkable, which proves that this visual media has become one of the most appropriate and innovative to approach Poe’s works.

Regarding the construction of the database of the project “Edgar A. Poe On-Line: Texts and Images,” this is, undoubtedly, the most important of the goals that the research and work groups intend to achieve during its duration. To reach this vast objective, a huge amount of work has been required to systematize Poe’s seventy-one tales, about seventy poems and two “novels” (The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym and The Journal of Julius Rodman). Different work meetings have been dealing with these elements, stating for each text the original title, how it has been translated into Spanish (for those which have), the year when it was originally published, and the genre to which it belongs. As one of the key points of our research is the reception of Poe in Spain, we have paid special attention to the translations and Spanish editions. In consequence, a good selection of editions has turned as crucial when carrying out this task [3], [4].

First of all, the English edition we have used is the one prepared by Thomas Ollive Mabbot for the University of Illinois, which includes Tales & Sketches (in two separate volumes) [5], [6] and Poems [7]. As known, this edition includes outstanding related texts and academic Studies that offer exhaustive data about Poe himself, the context of the tales and poems, and how these are to be interpreted (with sources, references, etc.). Then, when dealing with the Spanish translations, we have taken into account three different sources. For the prose texts, we have gone through the edition prepared by our colleague Margarita Rigel-Aragón for Cátedra, which includes all the short stories plus the novels (Narrativa completa) [8]. Besides, this is considered the best academic edition of Poe’s prose that has been published in Spain so far. As for the poetry, we have used both the volume of the complete poems published in 2010 (prepared by María Cóndor and Gustavo Falaquera) [9], and the recent edition of 2016 (by José Francisco Ruiz Casanova) [10]. Both editions are bilingual, but the former does not include the whole corpus of Poe’s poems. On the other hand, Ruiz Casanova has achieved a magnificent task at collecting and translating even those poems upon which Poe’s authorship is still doubtful. By doing so, Ruiz Casanova has completed what José Manuel Benítez Ariza began with his doctoral dissertation [11], one of the few academic approaches to Poe’s poetry in Spain (along with Santiago Rodríguez Guerrero-Strachan’s chapter “Spanish Versions of a Modern Classic: Poe’s Poetry in Spain through the Twentieth Century”) [12]. So, as seen, we have covered the vast majority of Poe’s fictional texts: this is core of our digital database.

3 RESULTS

As stated above, two of the main aims of our project have been the creation of a physical collection of illustrated editions of Edgar A. Poe’s works, which help to understand the visual reception of this author since mid-19th century till nowadays, and, on the other hand, an online catalogue to offer open access to those images.

3.1 A collection of illustrated editions of Poe’s works

Throughout these three years, we have been able to build up a collection with over one hundred editions, including many of the most relevant to understand the history of Poe’s graphic reception. Just to give an idea about the collection, we must highlight our copies of Tales of Mystery, Imagination, and Humour; and Poems, published in London in 1852 by Henry Vizetelly, and Tales of Mystery, Imagination, and Humour (second series) published in London in 1853 by Clarke Beeton & Co. Those are considered as the first illustrated editions of Poe’s works ever. Another milestone present at our collection is the first illustrated edition of Poe’s works published in the United States: The Works of Edgar Allan Poe published in New York in 1884 by A. C. Armstrong and Son in six volumes: “The Stoddard Edition.” In the same year of 1884, publisher and bookseller Albert Quantin (1850-1933) promoted an extraordinary re-edition of Baudelaire’s translation; a two-volume edition including a series of twenty-six plates (etchings and photogravures) of great quality. This set had such a success that Quantin even sold them as an
independent portfolio for print collectors. Our collection does not include a copy of this edition, but one portfolio [13]. Just three years later, in 1887, the first illustrated anthology entered the Spanish scenery. The book was entitled Historias extraordinarias, and it was published in Barcelona by Daniel Cortezo & C. by the Biblioteca de Arte y Letras with illustrations by Fernando Xumetra. Our collection includes three early copies of this book [1].

Figure 1. Fernando Xumetra’s illustration on “Metzengerstein” (Barcelona: Daniel Cortezo, 1887).

Our collection also includes artworks by the acclaimed artist and leading figure in the Aesthetic movement Aubrey Beardsley, although not from the first edition of 1894-95; Albert Edward Sterner, whose illustrations first appeared in the ten-volume The Works of Edgar Allan Poe edited by Edmund Clarence Stedman and George Edward Woodberry (Chicago: Stone & Kimball, 1894-95) –we possess the immediate British edition (London: Lawrence & Bullen, 1895)–; Byam Shaw, whose colourful illustrations, under the influence of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, were published in 1909 both in Philadelphia and London by J. B. Lippincott Co. and Sidgwick & Jackson Ltd; Alfred Kubin, Austrian expressionist painter who approached most of Poe’s tales in different editions such as Das Schwatzende Herz und Andere Novellen [The Tell-Tale Heart] (München & Leipzig: Georg Müller, 1909), Das Feuerpfurd und Andere Novellen [Metzengerstein and other tales] (München & Leipzig: Georg Müller, 1910), Der Goldkaffer und Andere Novellen [The Gold-Bug] (München & Leipzig: Georg Müller, 1910), and König Pest und Andere Novellen [King Pest] (München & Leipzig: Georg Müller, 1911); Edmund Dulac, whose illustrations for The Bells and other Poems, filled with melancholy, mystic beauty and hedonism, were first published around 1909 (London / New York: Hodder and Stoughton) -we do not own this first edition, but a recent reprint from 2011–; or Harry Clarke, one of Poe’s most acclaimed illustrators thanks to his arabesque and meticulous designs for Tales of Mystery and Imagination. This edition was first published in 1919 in London by George G. Harrap and Co., being reprinted in 1923 with eight additional plates in colour both in London and New York; we own a copy of this North-American edition, published by Brentano’s Publishers.

Together with Clarke’s, Arthur Rackham’s illustrations must be recognized among the most outstanding visual readings of Poe’s works, too. Rackham, whose work is recognizable by the use of very expressive black silhouetted forms, illustrated the 1935 edition by G. P. Harrap (London); that very same year, the same set was published by J. B. Lippincott in Philadelphia, appearing again in latter editions such as the one published by Weathervane Books (Crown Publishers) in 1976 in New York; we own this last edition. Other artists may not be as well-known as Clarke or Rackham, but their contributions to Poe’s graphic history are not less remarkable; among others, we can highlight the French artist Gus Bofa, who illustrated Histoires extraordinaires and Nouvelles histoires extraordinaires (Paris: Librairie Gründ, 1941) with his peculiar humourist style; William Sharp, whose aquatints were reproduced by photogravure for Tales of Mystery & Imagination (New York: The Heritage Press, 1941); the German-American illustrator Fritz Eichenberg, whose expressive and imaginative wood engravings, first published in 1944 in New York by Random House (Tales of Edgar Allan Poe), must be considered one of the most original approaches to Poe’s tales; the French illustrator Albert Dubout, who illustrated a limited edition of La Chute de la Maison Usher suivie d’autres Nouvelles extraordinaires (Monte-Carlo: Aux Éditions du Livre, 1948) with chromolithographs, and making use of his peculiar parodic style; or the Austrian painter and illustrator Hans Fronius, who can be considered as a worthy successor of Alfred Kubin. His drawings appeared in Phantastische Erzählungen (Wiesbaden: Insel Verlag, 1959) and Das verräterische Herz [The
Tell-Tale Heart] (München: Rütten & Loening Verlag, 1965). Our collection includes first editions of all these titles.

As a way to support one of the main research lines of our group, another part of our collection is specifically dedicated to the Spanish editions. We already mentioned our three early copies of Historias extraordinarias illustrated by Ferran Xumetra. Since that first edition, we have tried to cover, in the most complete and representative way, the Spanish scenery until nowadays. We own a 1908 copy of Narraciones extraordinarias, published by Saturnino Calleja in Madrid and illustrated by Manuel Picolo López, Elías Corona, J. Cuevas, Isidro Gil y Gavilondo, and Evaristo Barrio. In 1914, Cuentos de Edgard [sic] Poe was published with Josep Segrelles’ eight illustrations in colour. The edition was so popular that it was reprinted in several occasions: the second appeared in 1923, the third in 1937, and the fourth in 1952 (we own copies of the second and the third). Segrelles was a gifted and talented illustrator, earning such a success that in 1935 he was commissioned by The Illustrated London News to illustrate the special Christmas number of that year with six new and outstanding drawings based on Poe’s tale. Our collection includes a copy of this issue. In 1942, after the Spanish Civil War, Joaquín Gil published a new illustrated edition of Poe’s writings in Barcelona. This work, Narraciones extraordinarias, included the illustrations commissioned to Pedro or Pere Riu Baragnes.

Some fifteen years later, in 1957, another illustrated edition saw the light of print in Barcelona; this edition of Narraciones extraordinarias included illustrations by José Narro Celorrio, one of the most celebrated illustrators in Spain at that moment despite living in the exile. Due to the success of this book, the same house published, in 1968, Nuevas narraciones extraordinarias. This second volume was illustrated by Jaime Azpelcueta, whose style, characterized by fine and arabesque drawing lines, is indebted to late Art Nouveau and reminds us of the tradition inaugurated by Aubrey Beardsley in 1894. A very representative edition from the 1970s is Obras selectas by Ediciones Nauta (1971). The illustrator chosen on this occasion, Ramón Calsina Baró, was a painter, lithographer, and illustrator praised by his colleagues and by a select group of admirers, but he never enjoyed official recognition due to his ideological republican past. Over the 1980s and 1990s, in Spain, Poe’s works were mainly published as editions intended for high school students. That is the case of Vicens Vives, which decided to include Poe as part of its 1988 collection “Aula de Literatura.” That edition included reproductions of the works by Arthur Rackham, maybe too adult for the target reader of this collection. Thus, in 1995, the book was re-edited with a new set of ten illustrations in colour by the Spanish painter and illustrator Tino Gatagán. Vicens Vives completed the presence of Poe in its collection with a new edition in 1996, now including thirty-six illustrations by Jesús Gabán Bravo.

In Spain, the editions that could be considered as “artistic” or “deluxe” are scarce, although three notable exceptions must be mentioned. First, The Mask of the Red Death. A Fantasy, with sixteen lithographs of extraordinary quality by Federico Castellon; we mention this edition here because Castellon was a Spanish artist living between the United States, Spain, France and Italy, but it was published in Baltimore in 1969 by Aquarius Press; we own n. 77 of 500 copies signed by the artist. Another exceptional publication is Berenice with five etchings by Ángel Bellido, published by Gisa Ediciones in 1976 (Madrid). Ours is n. 72 of 250 copies numbered and signed by the artist. Together with these two examples, the edition of Poe’s tales published by Galaxia Gutenberg and Círculo de Lectores in 2004, Todos los cuentos, it the most ambitious project in Spain, offering a complete and deep visual reading of this
author's literary work. Joan-Pere Viladecans, a self-taught painter and illustrator from Barcelona and one of the most acclaimed Spanish graphic artists in recent decades, elaborated more than 100 drawings to recreate in images sixty-seven of Poe's tales as translated by Cortázar.

The last group of editions that has become a very significant part of our collection refers to comics and graphic novels. Names such as Jay Geldhof (1990), Gris Grimly (2004 and 2013), Richard Corben (2012-14), Dennis Calero, Jim Jimenz, Emerson Dimaya, and J. C. Fabul (2013), among others, must be celebrated [14].

3.2 The Poe online database

The IT tool to catalogue our textual and illustrated materials has been designed and developed, generating a highly customized device for our purposes. The database is centered on three different and interconnected databanks:

1. Databank “Works,” which allows to establish a taxonomy of Poe’s complete works and related materials (tales, novels, poems, theoretical texts, others –biographies, documents, preliminary studies, introductions, teaching materials, prologues, prefaces).

2. Databank “Editions,” which includes fourteen fields to catalogue the illustrated editions that the research group is collecting in order to create our specific collection: title, author, language, publication place, kind of edition (original version, adaptation in English, translation, children's edition, anthology…), year, volumes, number of pages, size, publishing house, translator, library/owner, biographical references, description; once that the edition is created, we can link to its entry the tales, poems, or works included in the edition according to its index, indicating if they are illustrated too.

3. Databank “Illustrations,” which allows us to catalogue each of the images included in the editions according to a form with thirteen different fields: edition, work, title, image (pre-scanned illustration of 600 ppp), illustrator, engraver, volume, page, illustration measures, page measures, colour, notes, and technique. Then, each illustration is tagged following a pre-established taxonomy of the relevant characters, places, plants, animals, and objects included in each tale, poem, or novel. And finally, it is linked to the part of the text that it illustrates; in order to accomplish this, we have pre-established a structure/division for each tale, poem or work as it was stated previously.

By carrying out these taxonomies, a thorough examination of how Poe’s works have been translated can be carried out. The use of one word or other becomes significant as to how a text has been “read” by the different translators. It is also relevant to highlight how by means of this database, the use of different semantic fields can be easily noticed. Thus, the reader can analyse the frequency in use of the word “cat” or settings most commonly used by Poe. In this sense, if this online database is a powerful resource for scholars, it is also a valuable tool for teaching purposes. By means of Poe’s literary works, the student can work with semantic fields, building their own thesaurus and corpora, and get to learn words in context. In addition to this, the student gets more easily familiar with close reading; by focusing on those words jumping out from the text, students can then move on to an in-depth analysis. Starting from a smaller portion, they can then identify a pattern and access to a much more pondered meaning.
In an image-mediated era, students are further encouraged when offered the possibility of connecting text and image. In Edgar A. Poe’s works the idea of word-painting can be easily explored; and, in this regard, the database discloses a semantic field which account for that pictorial technique. Simultaneously, once these passages have been identified, the student can begin a dialogue of comparison with the different illustrations for that specific purpose. To what extent is the illustrator being faithful to the words? What is he adding to the text? What is being neglected?

Nowadays, the study of feelings and emotions has become very fashionable; but this has been the aim of Aesthetics from long ago. The different aesthetic categories have served as a vehicle for exploring our feeling and emotional responses when confronted with a work of art. It is our experience in the subject “Art and Literature”, just as part of the research group “LyA,” that exploring categories such as the beautiful, the sublime or the picturesque, when combined with both the different illustrations/images and the corpora, becomes an enriching process. The student realizes how words interact with the illustrations, and how they themselves interact with it all. In their book, Art as Therapy, Alain de Botton and John Armstrong explain how Art (and we include under the label Art, both the visual and the written text) becomes a frame for experience and self-knowledge, among many other psychological insights [15]. Bearing that in mind, our database becomes the appropriate tool for making the most of both Art and Literature. How? By awakening in our students the main principle of any aesthetic experience: Curiosity. Quoting from Burke’s Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful (1757): “Some degree of novelty must be one of the materials in every instrument which works upon the mind; and curiosity blends itself more or less with all our passions.”

4 CONCLUSIONS

As specified at the beginning, we hope to continue increasing our collection in order to enlarge the basis of our project: a significant number of illustrations that will be digitalized and uploaded to our database and online catalogue: “Poe online: text and image.” This intends to be a multilayer online catalogue-edition that will allow the user to read Edgar A. Poe’s works combining his texts with the most relevant visual readings. The user will be able to browse our catalogue exploring these materials in several directions: from the illustrations to the texts and vice versa; selecting a specific tale, poem, or work and deciding the illustrations that should accompany it; comparing the different interpretations that the illustrators (Coburn, Rackham, Dulac, Sterner, Doré, Beardsley, Manet, Grimly, Viladecans, etc.) have elaborated since mid-19th century till nowadays; etc.

Presently, we are dedicated to upload and catalogue these textual and visual materials, anticipating that public access to the database will be ready in less than a year. In this way, we expect to create an online didactic resource of a high level and to promote the knowledge of the reception that Poe’s works have had in Spain. Teachers may find in this database a resource with manifold applications in class. Besides its condition as a tool which enables students to have a preliminary knowledge about one of the icons of US literature -something interesting enough if we consider that there is no much room in Spain for a comprehensive study of North American authors-, the database may also provide an insight into the symbolic universe of Poe through the analysis of types of images, their possible origins, their recurrence, etc. and the linguistic patterns used by the author through the study, for example, of lexical fields and word clusters.
Moreover, the interest of the database is noteworthy in terms of interdisciplinary binds between Literature and Art due to the close relationship the database establishes between words and images; this resource makes possible a textual and visual study which allows students to learn about parallel iconic discourses and interpretations developed around Poe’s works, such as the series of illustrations which have contributed to enlightening the different editions of his writings since the 19th century. Simultaneously, teachers can use the database as a tool for reflecting on how versatile and enriching the dialogue between words and images may be in class; in a broad sense, this relationship proves to be a fruitful teaching and learning resource as it may help students find the approach to Poe’s works more attractive, give shape to the somewhat abstract universe of words, and better understand the connections and differences between the iconic representations of his writings.

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