Graphic Poe: *Classics Illustrated* Adaptations of Edgar Allan Poe

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Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to define how transfer from the original writing of Edgar Allan Poe into a comic book can harm or complement the source. The *Classics Illustrated* adaptations of the original short stories and poems by Poe were used as a case study in this thesis.

Currently more than two hundred comic book adaptations of Poe's writing exist. The number of scholarly works that study those specific adaptations however, remains very limited. This thesis attempts to partially fill that void.

This thesis first presents the taxonomy of the comics medium which is necessary for a further work on comic book adaptations. In the Second and the Third Chapters the original and modern comic book adaptations of Poe's works are analyzed and compared when applicable.

This analysis reveals important aspects of transmediation of the classic literature into a comic book which can potentially harm or complement the source. Those aspects can either amplify and enhance the original message of the source, or oversimplify it. The results also show that the development of the comics medium in general brought an improvement in quality of comic book adaptations. However, it is worth noting that both the original and the modern series contain successful and unsuccessful adaptations.

Key words: comic book adaptation, Edgar Allan Poe, *Classics Illustrated*, Adaptation Studies, transmediation, Comics Studies

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Introduction

"Edgar Allan Poe...was the father of the detective tale, and...I fail to see how his followers can find any fresh ground which they can confidently call their own"

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

Preface to *Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's words can make creators of innumerable Edgar Allan Poe adaptations feel uncomfortable at best. Even if the author of Sherlock Holmes considered himself to be no more than an imitator, how can they claim their works to be something more than a simplified copy? Especially if the medium that they use is a comic book, which originally was considered to be "pure junk" (Chute 452).

However, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's words are slightly misguiding. His works and characters are no less famous than the works of Edgar Allan Poe. And, in fact, Poe also used adaptation in his works as he was often inspired by "pop-culture genres and sensational current events" (Perry, Sederholm 3). Moreover, some critics very straightforwardly call him a plagiarizer (Kaplan 45). However, his importance for American literature is undeniable. Poe's strong "connection to the contemporary [American] popular culture" (Perry, Sederholm 1) is also very significant.

Edgar Allan Poe was born in 1809 and from the very beginning his life was very uneasy. His father left the family when Poe was two years old and his mother died a year later. An orphaned Poe was adopted by a family from Richmond, Virginia. Edgar did not manage to establish a good relationship with his new family, because they "provided rather material comfort than attention and warmth" (Silverman 1). Poe was a talented student, especially learning languages like Latin and French. He even joined the University of Virginia, but left after the first year of study because of its "dissolute atmosphere" (2). After leaving the University he joined the United States Army in Boston and received "the highest possible rank for noncommissioned officer" (2), Sergeant Major. He even tried to proceed with his service in West Point, where his step father helped him to enter (they shortly reunited after the death of Poe's step-mother). However, he left West Point shortly after the remarriage of his step-father, who decided to break off all relations with Poe.

After that he started to live with his aunt, Marie Clemm, and her daughter, Virginia. Edgar fell in love with his cousin and they got married, even though Virginia was "barely

past the age of thirteen" (3). After the marriage the family moved to Philadelphia and Poe started to work for literary magazines. At the same time he was working on his own writing and wrote *The Fall of the House of Usher*, *The Gold-Bug*, *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* and others.

Even though Poe became quite popular, especially after publication of *The Raven*, he "barely scratched out a living from his writing" (4). The situation was heavily intensified by his addiction to alcohol and the mortal disease of his beloved wife. Virginia had been struggling with tuberculosis for several years, but did not manage to fight it and died in 1847.

After Virginia's death Edgar Allan Poe was involved in relationships with several women, as he presumably was trying "frantically to stabilize himself by remarrying" (5). Poe's mental instability was severely intensified by alcohol and drug addiction. Nevertheless, Poe managed to engage himself to Elmira Shelton, "whom he had courted during his adolescence" (5). Unfortunately, their marriage was never meant to happen because of Poe's untimely death. The circumstances of Poe's death are surrounded with mysteries. The only thing which is known for certain, is that he left Richmond on the 27th of September 1849. On the 3rd of October he was found in Baltimore in an unconscious state and was delivered to hospital, where he died on the 7th of October 1840. What had happened between the 27th of September and 3rd of October stayed unclear, as during his last days in hospital Poe was delirious and could not explain what happened to him.

The story of Poe's life is tragic and mysterious. However, his contribution to American literature in general and to the establishment of such literary genres as detective and horror fiction is widely acknowledged. For example, the famous horror writer, Howard Phillips Lovecraft, stated that the "bizarre conceptions, so awkward in unskillful hands, become under Poe's spell living and convincing terrors to haunt our nights; and all because the author understood so perfectly the very mechanics and psychology of fear and strangeness" (58).

Interestingly enough, another strong part of Poe's writing was the ability of the author to collect the ideas from various sources and remake them into new and popular stories. For example, *The Fall of the House of Usher* "re-imagines elements from specific texts such as Hoffmann's 'Das Majorat,' Warren's 'Thunder-Struck,' and Clauren's *The Robber's Castle*,[1] as well as a broader array of gothic tropes" (Perry, Sederholm 4). In his articles and short stories Poe also used popular themes, which were circulating in the newspapers of the time: "balloon

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[1] This texts are the examples of classic Gothic literature.

travel ("The Balloon Hoax"), unwrapping mummies ("Some Words with a Mummy"), lionizing military heroes ("The Man Who Was Used Up"), end-of-the-world prophecies ("The Conversation Of Erios and Charmion"), the fear of being buried alive ("The Premature Burial"), dying scenes ("Ligeia"), mesmerism ("Mesmeric Revelation"), and public fascination with Antarctica (*The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*)" (2-3).

In other words, as Poe's writing is an independent work, an adaptation also does not always become a copycat version of an original work. Adaptation is an independent artwork, which reinterprets and recreates a work (or works) by another author. One of the main features of adaptation is that it acknowledges the reinterpretation of the source (Hutcheon 1.8). Moreover, an adaptation can bring "repetition with variation" (1.4), as an audience can enjoy an altered version of the source. And, of course, adaptations not only "make simplified selections [of the source], they also amplify and extrapolate; they make analogies; they critique or show their respect" (1.3), and they also introduce the original writing to a new audience.

It is also obvious though that transmediation[2] has its own particularities and sometimes even difficulties. And the main question is how transfer from the original short stories and poems into comic books can complement or harm Edgar Allan Poe's horror and detective writing.

Edgar Allan Poe's fiction is a very popular source for adapters. His poems and short stories have been adapted into movies, comic books, animation series episodes (*The Simpsons*), and songs. It could be suggested that not only literary works attract the adapters, but also "Poe himself, who certainly possessed much of the depression, sensitiveness, mad aspiration, loneliness, and extravagant freakishness" (Lovecraft 59), was a very interesting person for them. The melancholic circumstances of his life and death turned him into a "ready-made literary legend" (Perry, Sederholm 1).

As mentioned before, until quite recently, all kinds of adaptations of classic literature were considered to be "secondary, derivative" (Hutcheon 1.2) or even "culturally inferior" (Naremore qtd. in Hutcheon 1.2). The field of Adaptation Studies started to appear about twenty years ago and since then has developed quite significantly. One of the most important books in the field of Adaptation Studies is the work by Linda Hutcheon *A Theory of Adaptation*, which provides a detailed overview of the process of adaptation, emphasizing the omnipresence of adaptations in the contemporary culture. As she puts it "adaptations are

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[2] A transfer from one medium to another.

everywhere today: on the television and movie screen, on the musical and dramatic stage, on the Internet, in novels and comic books, in your nearest theme park and video arcade" (1.1). Unfortunately, she also mentions that "most of the work done on adaptation has been carried out on cinematic transpositions of literature" (xiii), leaving adaptations in other media outside the field of research. It is interesting that even though Hutcheon's work itself tries to build on a broad range of media, contemporary researchers state that, "while acknowledging the multitude of the adaptation banner, many scholars coming from literature studies nevertheless continue to explore the novel-to-screen adaptation"(Bruhn, Gjelsvik, Hanssen 7).

As result of neglect, the study of comic book adaptations ended up in a situation which was even worse than Adaptation Studies in general. Not only were adaptations regarded as derivative, but the medium[3] itself was considered to be low culture or "childish" (Duncan, Smith 177) until the end of the twentieth century.

The situation started to change slowly when the first scholarly works on Comics Studies started to appear. However, the theoretical framework for research on these specific adaptations has not been established yet. It is interesting that even Comics Studies scholars rarely consider adaptations in their works. They believe that the comic book industry is divided in two categories which consist of 90 per cent mainstream "rubbish" (for example, vast majority of superheroes titles) and ten per cent of progressive works that are exploring the possibilities of the comics medium (for example, *Maus: A Survivor's Tale* by Art Spiegelman or *Watchmen* by Alan Moore). Still it remains unclear where adaptations fit in this spectrum.

As mentioned before, comic books were considered to be "pure junk" until quite recently. However, comics evolved from simple strips and cartoons to full scale graphic novels by the beginning of the twenty-first century. Nowadays comics can take different shapes and forms, presented in different art styles and convey all kinds of story from fairy tales to the personal stories of former Japanese-American internees[4]. Comics Studies has been developing alongside the medium. The first key works appeared at the end of the twentieth century. Some of them are concentrated on the development of the medium from comic strips in newspapers to underground comix like *Comics, Comix & Graphic Novels A History of Comic Art* by Roger Sabin or *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America* by Bradford W. Wright. Other studies are focused on comics conventions, for example, The *power of comics: History, Form & Culture* by Randy Duncan

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[3] The definition of the comics medium is treated in the First chapter.
[4] See *Citizen 13660* by Miné Okubo.

and Matthew J. Smith. The book not only briefly introduces the history of the medium, but it also describes the encoding process, i.e. the incorporation of the information in comics by an artist, and the decoding process, i.e. the interpretation of artist's message by readers. One of the most well-known scholarly works in Comics Studies is Scott McCloud's book *Understanding Comics.* It pays due attention to the media specific components of comics like panels, word balloons, captions and layout. It also focuses on such features of the medium as color, balance between words and illustrations, and the particularities of time flow.

Studies of the graphic novel as an important comics medium appeared very recently, for example, *The Graphic novel: An introduction* written by Jan Baetens and Hugo Frey. The book explores the main differences between an average comic book and a graphic novel using the most famous as well as quite recent graphic novels as case studies. It also introduces an overview of the main theories about components of the comics medium, for example, the theories of Benoît Peeters and Thierry Groensteen about layout. It should be mentioned that this book is one of the few studies which considers comic book adaptations of classic literature. It even has a distinct chapter "The Graphic Novel and Literary Fiction: Exchanges, Interplays, and Fusions", which is dedicated to the prospective of collaboration between literature and graphic novels.

Nevertheless, the number of scholarly works on comic book adaptation is still very limited. The problem of creating a comic book adaptation that would not oversimplify the plot and at the same time stick to the conventions of the comics genre is almost not studied (excepting several case studies and brief articles[5]). The cultural value of those crossovers is likewise rarely considered. Finally, those case studies that do deal with adaptations mostly describe the usefulness of those comic books for the educational process. For example, literature can be turned into comics, so that children would not be scared away by its complex language[6]. Almost all books mentioned above also either do not consider adaptations at all, or briefly introduce the *Classics Illustrated* series as an example of educational comics.

It is interesting to mention that currently there are more than two hundred Poe comic book adaptations in existence. Only a few scholarly works address this topic. One example, *Adapting Poe: Re-Imaginings in Popular Culture* is dedicated to various modern Poe adaptations, including *The Simpsons* adaptation and heavy metal covers of Poe' s works, and contains three brief articles on comics adaptations of Poe's writing. One of them is a list of

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[5] See, for example, Ada Pierce "New Books from Old: Turning Classics into Comics" (Publishers Weekly 256. 51 (2009): 27-29).
[6] See R. Blar "Comics Draw Attention To Literature".

Poe's works' comics versions[7], the two others are essays on a graphic novel called *Nevermore: A Graphic Adaptation of Edgar Allan Poe's Short Stories* and contains nine short stories adaptations[8].

 The article by Derek Parker Royal, "Sequential Poe-try: Recent Graphic Narrative Adaptations of Poe", was published in *Poe Studies Journal*, and it contains a broader overview of Poe's adaptations and even briefly touches upon the original *Classics Illustrated* series. The contemporary series, however, remains unstudied.

This thesis, then, will try to fill part of this void. It will study the process of adaptation of classic texts into comic books; distinguish elements that can harm or complement the source; and research the particulars of adapting horror and detective genres into comics, using *Classics Illustrated* comic book adaptations of Poe's works as a case study.

Classics Illustrated is one of the most famous comic books series that specializes in the adaptation of classic literature into comics. The original American series was published from 1941 until 1971. The modern series was published in the beginning of the 1990s by the First Comics. Unfortunately, the publishing house had suffered financial problems and "stopped publishing new original material" (Levin) in 1992. This was the reason why the series issued only twenty-seven books and was closed. The contemporary Papercutz[9] series began publication in 2008. It reprints the works by First Comics and also translates and reprints works of the French Publishing House, Guy Delcourt Productions. Both original and contemporary series published adaptations of Poe's writing, however those adaptations have been never compared before.

This thesis consists of three chapters. The First chapter describes a specific taxonomy of the comics medium, which is necessary for the subsequent analysis of adaptations. The taxonomy will be based on the key texts by S. McCloud, R. Duncan, M. J. Smith, J. Baetens, H. Frey, R. Sabin and B. W. Wright on decoding comics as an art form. The definition of the taxonomy will help us understand what the main components of the comics medium are and how they potentially influence the creation of comics adaptations.

The second chapter is dedicated to comparisons of original works of Edgar Allan Poe to their comics' adaptations published in the original *Classics Illustrated* series. The third chapter compares modern adaptations with original works and previous adaptations when

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[7] "Comic Book and Graphic Novel Adaptations of the Works of Edgar Allan Poe: A Chronology" by M. Thomas Inge.
[8] "Picturing Poe: Contemporary Cultural Implications of *Nevermore*" be Michelle Kay Hansen; "What Can "The Tell-Tale Heart" Tell About Gender" by Mary J. Couzelis.
[9] An American publisher of comic books.

applicable. In addition to original poems and short stories written by Edgar Allan Poe and their comic book adaptations, this chapters will be based on critical essays on Edgar Allan Poe's writing,[10] works on Adaptation Studies, books on history of the comics medium, and works on literary genres of detective and horror writing .[11] The analysis of the case studies will help answer several important questions such as why comic books adaptations are created, how they are created and how they can harm or compliment the original writing.

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[10] Eric Walter Carlson *Critical essays on Edgar Allan Poe* (Hall, 1987), Charles Edward May *Edgar Allan Poe: a study of the short fiction* (Twayne, 1991), etc.
[11] Jack Morgan *The Biology of Horror: Gothic Literature and Film* (Southern Illinois University Press, 2002), Charles J. Rzepka *Detective Fiction* (Polity Press, 2005).

Chapter 1. Defining Taxonomy

Like any other medium, the comics genre has its own conventions. This chapter will present an overview of terms associated with the comics medium before looking more closely at how those elements work in comic book adaptations.

1.1 Comic Strips, Comic Books and Graphic Novels

The first thing that should be addressed is the definition of the comics medium and its various types. According to Scott McCloud comics are "juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer" (9). Randy Duncan and Matthew J. Smith in their book *The Power of Comics* note that this definition is quite broad as it can cover a broad scope of artworks from comic strips to cave paintings. In order to narrow down McCloud's definition they suggest treating comic strip and comic books as distinct forms of a sequential art. The main differences between them are length and method of distribution. Comic strips contain few panels and are distributed as part of a newspaper, although in the contemporary digital world strips are also published daily on the websites of their creators[12]. Comic books are distributed on their own in volumes and therefore contain multiple panels.

It is interesting that Duncan and Smith do not define the graphic novel as a distinct form of sequential art as they say that it "meets the definition of the comic book" (4). They also state that the term graphic novel was primarily invented to distinguish those works from low quality comic strips and comic books. In the 1980s, even Alan Moore and Art Spiegelman considered the term to be a mere marketing trick (Baetens, Frey 1.1).

Nevertheless, it should be said that there are several specific features that make the difference between graphic novels and comics quite significant. The first one is the aspiration of an artist to experiment with such things as art style, layout, or size and shape of panel, etc. The second feature is the exploration of the unconventional within the genre of comic strips and conventional comic book themes, such as biography, autobiography and historical writing, etc. In other words content of graphic novels tends to be more "mature", "not in the sense of pornographic, but in the sense of 'serious'" (1.11). It does not mean that comic strips and comic books do not address serious and philosophic topics at all. This division in "high"

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[12] See, for example, "Garfield" or "Cyanide and Happiness" comic strips.

and "low art" is too restrictive. After all the word "comic" in the name of the medium does not automatically presume that its content has to be comical[13]. However, artists of graphic novels have an aspiration to explore and expand the conventions of the comics medium either in form or in content and sometimes even in both. Finally, graphic novels are usually published in a single volume format, rather than in a serial format, though this is not a strict rule.

1.2 Specific Components of the Comics Medium

Comic strips, comic books and graphic novels have very specific components that convey information to readers: panels, word balloons, thought balloons, captions, and sound effects. A panel is the spatial unit of comics, which encapsulates a single scene. The traditional form of a panel is a rectangle, although, in modern comics different shapes of panels are used. The word balloon is one of the main methods to incorporate text into comics. Word balloons are used to carry dialogue and can take different shapes in order to reflect different voice tones. Protagonists thoughts are represented by so-called thought balloons. Its "edge is scalloped and the tail is replaced by a series of small circles and bubbles" (Kannenberg qtd. in Duncan, Smith 156). Captions are used to convey background information and sometimes the narrator's voice. As comics is a visually based medium sound effects are also presented in a form of text (see fig. 1.1).
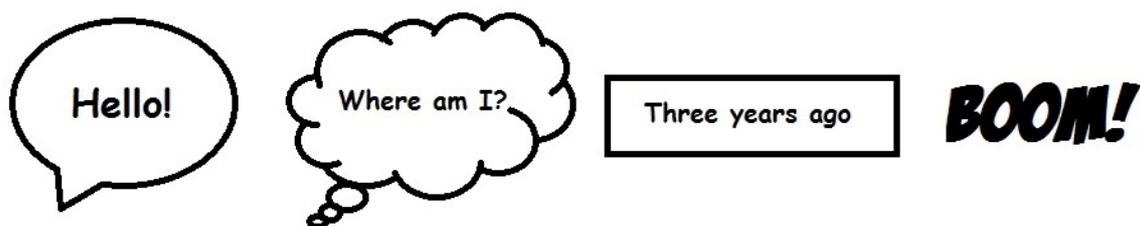
Figure 1.1 Word balloon, thoughts balloon, caption, and sound effect.

As we already know comic books and graphic novels contain multiple panels. The relationship of a "single panel to the succession of panels, to the totality of the page, and to

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[13] It should be admitted, of course, that comics started as merely entertaining "funnies". It is just a coincidence that "'comics' had already been semantically stuck to that art form" (Duncan, Smith, 4) by the time the medium became generically diversified.

the totality of the story" (Duncan, Smith 139) is controlled by layout. We also know that the comics is a sequential art. The word "sequence", however, does not imply that all panels in a comics should be of a one size and organized linearly . It means that they should be organized in such a way that the reader is not completely confused by its disorder.

As comics is a visually based medium, sometimes it is thought that illustrations deprive the reader of the opportunity to imagine the story on his own (281). However, the power of imagination is as important in comics as it is in books. An artist has to decide what information he should depict in each panel and what to leave out. As panels represent a moment (or a series of moments) in time, readers have to imagine what happens between those moments depicted in the panels[14]. The selection of the depicted moments, their position on the page, and even the size of each panel on the page is crucial to the readers' ability to decode the artist's message (139). Therefore one of the most important challenges for creators of comic books is to perform a breakdown, i.e. "divide a narrative into single images" (Baetens, Frey 5.26), in such way that layout will guide the reader through a comic book, and will not confuse or bore him (McCloud 90).

There are different theoretical approaches towards the relationship between words, images and layout in the comics. Jan Baetens and Hugo Frey in their book *The Graphic Novel: An Introduction* present the theory of Peeters and Groensteen, as well as their own addition to these theories. It is useful to briefly elaborate on both earlier theories and modern additions to those theories because they can help us not only identify the specific features of certain works, but also compare those works with each other (5.29). According to Peeters, layout can be used conventionally, decoratively, rhetorically and productively. Conventional layout presumes "systematic repetition of the same structure and form of tier and panel, independent of any content, style, or author" (5.6). It should be noted that this type of layout is not culturally inferior to more ambitious ones. Some authors, like Art Spiegelman, consciously choose conventional layout in order not to distract the reader from their thematic innovations of the graphic novel. This type of layout is used for verbally driven narrative in comics. Decorative layout, secondly, is developed independently from the content. To that end the artist creates an "idiosyncratic page organization first that is then filled in with contents" (5.2). Rhetorical layout is subordinate to the narrative. Its main purpose is to expand and enhance the narrative, using layout changes from one page to another depending on the content and preferred pace of the narrative. The last type of layout is the productive

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[14] Scott McCloud uses the term "closure" to describe this process.

one. In this case layout is an important driving force of the narrative, as the whole story could be constructed around one strong visual association or pattern, which the author wants to explore or deconstruct. Baetens and Frey mention that this classification is a bit restrictive as the type of layout can be changed from one page to another.

Thierry Groensteen proposes two pairs of qualities that can help us interpret the page layout. Layout can be either regular in size, shape or number of panels or irregular. It can also be either discrete[15] or ostentatious. An ostentatious layout usually attracts attention to the one particular quality of itself, whereas a discrete layout stays unnoticed by the reader.

Baetens and Frey add their own qualities that expand the analytical taxonomy for approaching layout of comics. They propose to complement "the combination of the axis stability versus instability with the distinction between page layout and panel content" (5.28). In other words both content and layout can be stable or unstable. A stable layout presumes preservation of the same layout (or limited amount of conventional layouts) throughout a comic book. Therefore unstable layout is a constant shift between different types of layout. The content of panels can be called stable when events in a comic book focus on the same characters. Therefore if events in a comic book revolve around characters that change from one page to another, its contents can be called unstable. Even though both taxonomies of Groensteen and Baetens/Frey are quite subjective, they bring the "interpretive input of the reader" (5.25).

The last type of layout that should be mentioned is a splash-page, which is a "full-page panel" (Duncan, Smith 139). It is usually used to enhance an action scene, although, they rarely play an important part in delivering the story. Art Spiegelman even described them as "pretty wallpaper, but poor storytelling" (Spiegelman qtd. in Duncan, Smith 140).

In addition to questions about layout, the issue of combination of pictures and words in a comic book should be also treated, as it is an important feature of the medium. Each page of a comic book contains several panels and each panel can contain different types of combination of pictures and words. Scott McCloud divides those possible combinations into seven categories:

1) "Word specific", where pictures serve as decoration for the words
2) "Picture specific", where words are either absent or provide only sound effects for the actions
3) "Duo-specific", where words and images convey the same message

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[15] Groensteen's book was originally published in French, and there he uses the French word "discret", which is antonym for ostentatious (Baetens, Frey Notes 15). The English version, however, uses the word "discrete".

4) "Additive", where pictures and words complement each other

5) "Parallel", where pictures and words are conveying entirely different messages

6) "Montage", where words and images compose a collage

7) "Interdependent", where a combination of verbal and visual elements conveys a message which cannot be understood if one element is excluded from the panel. (McCloud 153-155).

The last important component of comic books that should be mentioned is art style. Even though art style is "too elusive and individualistic to be fully described by the theorist or evaluated by the critic" (Duncan, Smith 146), in general terms art style can be described as a set of qualities that distinguishes works of one artist (or group of artists) from another. In other words, the "very manner in which an artist draws a line has expressive power" (146). In the comics medium however, not only the visual part of style is important. Jan Baetens and Hugo Frey mention that an analysis of an artist's style should take into account not only drawing style, but also writing style. It is important because not only "equally rigid and crippling use of language" (6.15) should be avoided, but also because the "interplay between words and images that [would] work" (6.16) should be created.

The combination of the theories presented above provide a strong interpretive tool that will help us analyze both the original Classic Illustrated series, which began publishing at the dawn of the medium, and the modern series, which appeared after the graphic novel revolution of the 1980s[16].

The Second and the Third Chapters are dedicated to the analysis of both the original and the contemporary Classic Illustrated series. We will see what role all components of the comics medium have in adaptations of Edgar Allan Poe's works into comic books. Of course, the form alone does not make an adaptation "good" or "bad". It should not be forgotten however, that artistic decisions taken during the process of adaptation could complement or harm the original text. How exactly it can happen will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

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[16] In this period Will Eisner's *A Contract with God and Other Tenement Stories*, Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns*, etc. were published.

Chapter 2. The Original *Classics Illustrated* Series Adaptations of Poe

This chapter will offer an analysis of Poe adaptations that were published in the original *Classics Illustrated* series. It will allow us to understand how adaptations are created, what kind of artistic decisions are made, and finally, how transmediation can harm or complement the original work.

It should be mentioned that terms "complement" and "harm" do not entail a simplified division into "good" and "bad" adaptations. They provide tools for analysis which can help to read and interpret adaptations as independent artworks. Thereby any aspects of adaptation (such as change of focalization, genre, or use of visual dimension) which amplify, extend, or highlight the original artwork's message can complement the original artwork. If the adaptation fails to convey or oversimplifies the message of the original work and does not substitute it with its own, it can certainly harm the source.

It is worth noting that there are several aspects that should be discussed at the very beginning of a work on adaptations. The first one is fidelity of the adaptation to the source. Complete fidelity to the text should not become a criterion for the evaluation of an adaptation. An adaptation is an independent artwork which is based on a work by another author. And like any independent artwork it bears a message that its author wants to convey. Sometimes this message does not coincide with the one of the source. The audience does not just expect the repetition of their favorite novel, but also expects a "different experience" (Leitch 63). Therefore a "lack of creativity and skill to make...[the adaptation]autonomous" (Hutcheon 1.20) could both harm the source and make adaptation unsuccessful.

The second aspect that should be mentioned is that in most cases adaptations are oriented to the mass market, particularly if they are a part of a series. The orientation to the mass market does not imply a transition to vulgar or low art, although it means that the experience of readers should be more important than the artists' desire for self-expression. In other words, even though mass market publishers quickly adapt and appropriate innovations of experimental graphic novels, it is highly unlikely that they would risk employing experimental artists to work on their series.

Potential financial profit also plays an important role when it is decided what artwork will be adapted. In order to ensure commercial success, only bestselling, famous or time-tested works are usually adapted. Adapters also often choose artworks "that are no longer copyrighted" (1.28) for both economic and legal reasons. The *Classics Illustrated* series

perfectly matches those conditions. Both the original and the contemporary series adapt only classic literary works that are in the public domain.

The last thing that should be mentioned is that any "artistic project...has to be evaluated by the reader" (Baetens, Frey 5.27). In the case of adaptations, artists should remember that their aim is to satisfy "both knowing and unknowing audiences" (Hutcheon 4.8). In other words, an adaptation should be interesting and clear for those who are familiar with the source and those who have never read it.

As we already know, the comics medium has moved a long way from comical strips to graphic novels. The most notable period in the history of comics was the 1930s and 1940s. Those years brought generic diversity and were a period of serious change and innovation. After the beginning of the Great depression in 1929 superhero titles and crime fighting comics became extremely popular, because audience wanted to see "strong men taking control of their world" (Mayer qtd. in Sabin 54). By the mid-1940s the popularity of action comics diminished and publishers introduced several new genres which included "westerns, detective, crime, war, science fiction and horror" (Sabin 66).

It is interesting to note that horror and mystical titles became the most controversial and notorious ones. They contained extremely violent scenes like "beheadings, eviscerations, gouged eyes" (67) and very soon became one of the reasons for the Comic book scare at the end of the 1940s. In order to pacify concerned parents, publishers appealed for self-regulation and created the Association of Comics Magazines Publishers (ACMP) and adopted a code which ensured that comic books "met acceptable standards for children" (Wright 103). In other words, the seal of approval by the ACMP guaranteed that a book did not contain extremely violent or pornographic scenes, did not depict crime or criminals in sympathetic ways and did not use vulgar language.

The 1940s also heralded a dawn for educational comics. One of the first and the most enduring comic book series with an educational purpose was the *Classics Illustrated* series[17]. It is interesting that the main goal of those comic books was considered to be an introduction of classic literature to its audience, and therefore the ACMP's code was not covering them. At the same time the series adapted mostly adventure novels, detective and horror stories to meet the readers' demand. The series adapted such famous titles of classic literature as *The Count of Monte Cristo* by Alexandre Dumas*, The Sign of the Four* by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, and *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* by Robert Louis Stevenson. The series was

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[17] The series was launched in 1941 under the title of Classic Comics, but in 1947 it was renamed into Classics Illustrated.

successful during several decades and even today is still considered to be iconic (Duncan, Smith 280).

However, despite its success the series "was not without critics" (280). First of all, *Classics Illustrated* received the same type of criticism as any adaptation usually receives. Its adapted texts were accused of infidelity to the sources, and its illustrations said to "[rob the] reader of the opportunity to visualize the story more fully on his own" (281). Contemporary comics researchers are also highly critical of the *Classics Illustrated* series. Baetens and Frey state that the series was a first attempt to make a bridge between comics and "serious" literature, although they mention that the series "never managed to play a role other than that of the model to be avoided at all costs" (6.16). Derek Parker Royal, who focuses on comic book adaptations of Edgar Allan Poe's works in his research, states that the series "provide a 'safe' or uncomplicated reading of the author, functioning more as adolescent [fiction], than as insightful engagements with Poe's texts" (58).

It is worth noting that the original Classic Illustrated series was an assembly line: a writer made a script, an inker drew sketches and the general layout, and an artist created a final version. An adaptation was made by different people who sometimes were not even credited in the book, and every member of the team was replaceable. The whole series had a unified drawing style as artists used soft lines, rounded shapes, pastel colors and realistic images. The authors used stable, regular and discrete layout as they usually combined several types of conventional layouts. This system did not leave any room for innovation and experiment and ensured that every issue would fit into the concept. However, the series managed to survive for thirty years and it even created its own fandom. The old issues are still getting reprinted[18] and they were even digitized in 2012.

The main goal of this chapter will be an analysis of strong and weak parts of the original *Classics Illustrated* adaptations of Edgar Allan Poe texts. The first subchapter will be dedicated to the first adaptationswhich were included in collections of adaptations by various authors.

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[18] Several different publishing houses like, for example, Classic Comic Store in the UK or Papercutz in the U.S. bought rights for reprinting the old titles of the series.

2.1 The First Adaptations of Poe in the Classic Illustrated Series

The first texts written by Edgar Allan Poe which were included in the series were poems. *Annabel Lee* and *The Bells* were printed on the last pages of *The Deerslayer* by J. F. Cooper and *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* by Victor Hugo adaptations.

As the composition of poetry is based on meter, rhyme and rhythm, there are two main problems with the adaptation of poetry into comics. First of all, transmediation of an artwork sometimes presumes "subtraction and contraction" (Hutcheon 1.18). In other words, as artists of the *Classics Illustrated* series had only a limited amount of space in comic books (because those books never had more than sixty-eight pages) they had to decide which details, characters or even subplots they wanted to cut out. Thereby subtraction of a poem can be complex because it is very hard to exclude a verse from a strophe without breaking the rhyme. The second problem is the undesirability of rupturing the rhythmic scheme. The beginning and the end of each strophe should be located on the same page of a comics adaptation in order to avoid a rupture.

Annabel Lee is a poem about love, death and grief about the dead. It consists of six stanzas and each stanza in adaptation has its own panel. Therefore neither rhythm nor rhyme are broken by the layout. All illustrations of the *Annabel Lee* adaptation could be classified as "additive" according to Scott McCloud's classification. Art style of illustrations fits into the concept of the series . However, the artist uses weather phenomena to highlight changes in the mood of the poem. At the very beginning we see two figures of the protagonist and Annabel Lee walking by the sea under a clear blue sky. The moment of Annabel Lee's death however, is accompanied by the appearance of a storm cloud and a strong wind (Figure 2.1). In general this adaptation can be called a successful comic book adaptation. It does not bring any innovation and looks quite old fashioned in its drawing style, however, it also manages to avoid all possible pitfalls of adapting poetry into comics.

Figure 2.1 The moment of death of Annabel Lee. Rolland Livingstone, *Annabel Lee*; by E.A. Poe (New York: Gilberton, 1944; print; 52; vol. 17 of *Classics Illustrated*).

The Bells is a poem about the cycle of life. Poe used "tintinnabulation"[19] as a "concrete representation" of the "idea of death or of man's life on earth" (Davidson 96). The poem has four parts, but in the adaptation it is divided into three pages as the two first parts of the novel are considerably shorter than the last ones. Therefore the first page of the adaptation is divided into two panels, whereas the other two are splash-pages. Illustrations of the first and the last pages are additive and represent three stages of life: childhood, marriage and death. The illustration on the second page is interdependent with the text. It represents the fast currents of life, and depicts fire which consumes screaming people, buildings and objects such as a clock and a calendar. The drawing style of the second page is also considerably different. On the first and the last page the artist used soft lines, pastel colors and realistic images whereas on the second page he used sharp and crooked lines, contrasting colors and depicted people with frozen expressions of horror on their faces (see fig. 2.2). This surrealistic representation of the "tale of terror" (Poe, *The Bells* 43) represents the culmination of the poem and stands out as an example of a more ambitious art style when compared to the other illustrations in both *The Bells* and *Annabel Lee* adaptations. It is interesting that the first and the last pages look considerably weaker than the second one. It creates a misbalance between pages, because, even though the second page depicts the culmination of the poem, the relatively poor quality of the other pages does not match the outstanding performance of the second page. Nevertheless, the *The Bells* adaptation can also be called successful. It manages not only to avoid potential pitfalls, but it also partly intensifies and enhances the message of the source.

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[19] The word "tintinnabulation" was invented by Edgar Allan Poe and it was used in the poem "The Bells" for the first time.
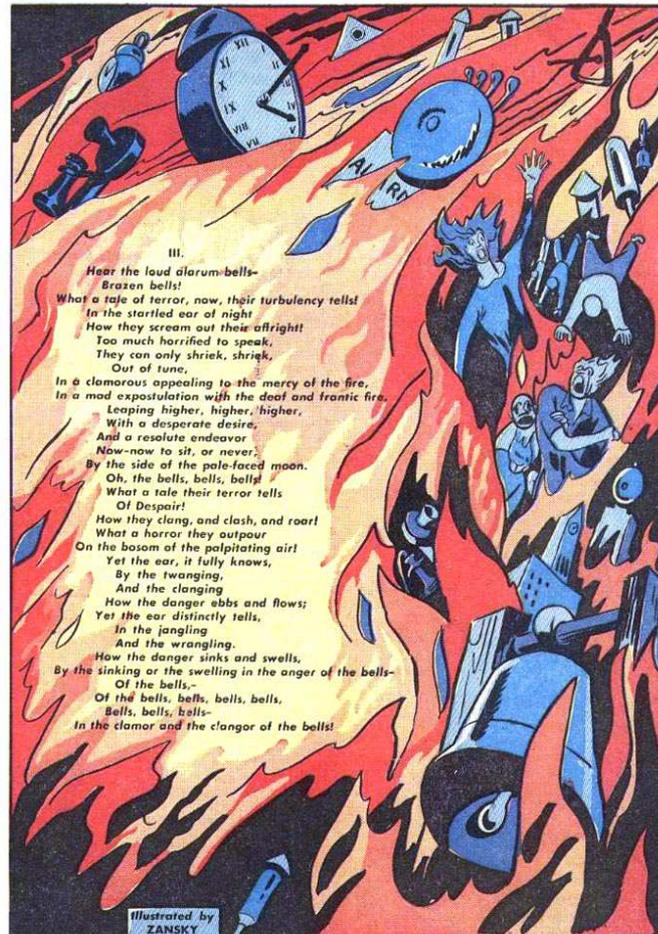
Figure 2.2 The third part of *The Bells* represents the unstoppable flow of time. The artist managed to depict horror and despair that brings the awareness of human mortality. Louis Zansky, *The Bells*; by E.A. Poe (New York: Gilberton, 1944; print; 57; vol. 18 of *Classics Illustrated*).

The third adaptation of a work by Edgar Allan Poe was the adaptation of *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* which was published in the *3 Famous Mysteries* collection. *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* was the first short story in the cycle about the amateur detective C. Auguste Dupin. The story is told by an unnamed first-person narrator. In the story Dupin and his friend solve the mystery of the double murder of Madame L'Espanaye and her daughter. Because in Poe's work the murderer had an unusual voice and slurred speech, possessed superhuman strength and because non-human hair was found in the palm of one of the victims, Dupin concluded that the murderer was an "Ourang-Outang" (Poe, *The Murders* 133). At the end, the animal was caught by its owner, a sailor, and sold to a zoo.

In the story Poe applied certain rules from the classic detection literary genre. First of all, he creates a mystery. Secondly, he provides clues, so the reader has an opportunity to solve the mystery and finally, Dupin has a sidekick who provides readers with access to all

information available to the detective. Instead of explaining his observations and conclusions to the reader, the detective usually answers the questions of his sidekick. It preserves the "feeling of intimacy" (Rzepka 77), but at the same time gives the reader an opportunity to solve the crime on his own. The only rule of classic detection that Poe breaks is the use of *deus ex machina*. In a detective story the criminal should "[play] a more or less prominent part in the story" (Wright qtd. in Rzepka 14) and the mystery should have a logical solution. In *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, however, the murderer appears only at the end of the story.

The *Classics Illustrated* adaptation consists of ten pages and starts with a splash-page which introduces Dupin and his friend and sets the scene. It also gives the reader a hint who the murderer is. The image of a giant shadow on the wall foreshadows that protagonists will have to fight with a monster of some kind. The authors decide to exclude first-person narration from the adaptation, but they also do not incorporate the voice of the third-person narrator. The reader, therefore, becomes a mere spectator of the adventures of Dupin and his friend, who was named after Poe in the adaptation.

The notable disadvantage of this adaptation is that it does not provide the reader with any clues. In the source version the culprit does not appear in the story until the very end, however the author provides the reader with the clues that can help him understand that the murderer is not human. In the adaptation two important clues were left out, namely, the voice of the murderer and hairs clenched in the palm of the victim. It becomes unclear how Dupin guessed that the murderer was the "ape".

In addition, the adaptation changed the ending of the story. In the original story the animal was not punished for its deed, whereas in the adaptation Dupin personally shoots the "killer ape". The artist decide to turn this fight into an action scene. They mostly use duo-specific, additive or interdependent illustrations throughout the story. The last fight between Dupin and the animal, however, is depicted in picture-specific illustrations; almost all word balloons are excluded and only sound effects signs are left. The authors used those specific illustrations in order to create an intense action scene, because the pace is usually "defined...by the contents of the panel" (McCloud 99).

Some critics state that original Poe's detective stories "lack a moral dimension" (Leer 78) because culprits are not punished for their deeds. In the adaptation balance seems restored at the first glance. However, the very manner of punishment creates a strong association with the action and crime fighting comics, which were popular in the 1940s. Therefore the artistic choice may have been motivated by a desire to please the adolescent audience.

The other huge disadvantage of this particular adaptation is its poor language. *Classics Illustrated* is supposed to be suitable for all ages. Therefore, on the one hand, the language of an original artwork usually has to be "translated" into modern language, so children would not be scared off by language complexity. On the other hand, the artist (or writer) should not use an odious "rigid and crippling use of language" (Baetens, Frey 6.15) which can significantly simplify the adaptation and harm the source. *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* adaptation, however, does not manage to avoid this pitfall. It uses a oversimplified paraphrase of the undoubtedly complex and old-fashioned language of the source text, rather than translating it (see fig. 2.3).
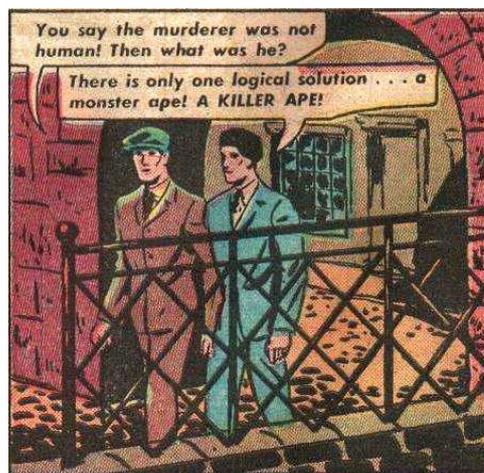

Figure 2.3 An example of the language which was used in the adaptation. Arnold L. Hicks, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue", *3 Famous Mysteries;* by E.A. Poe (New York: Gilberton, 1944; print; 42; vol. 21 of *Classics Illustrated*).

It should be mentioned, however that the main rules of the adaptation of literature into comics were not broken. The layout of comics can potentially harm the adaptation of detective writing. Unwise use of space, for instance, can prematurely reveal the culprit. It should be remembered that even though a person reads comics panel after panel, he also can see the entire page, therefore the reader can accidentally see the criminal before he reads the conclusions of the detective. In this case a page-to-page layout becomes a powerful tool. If the reader has to turn the page to see the culprit, it will maintain suspense and reader's curiosity and an adaptation should not lose the intrigue of the original detective writing. The adaptation in question follows those rules as its layout does not misguide the reader, and the only cliff-hanger is placed right at the end of the page, so the reader has to turn the page to

read the conclusions of Dupin. The authors also included all important narrative moments in the adaptation, so both knowing and unknowing audiences could easily reconstruct the plot.

Nevertheless this early adaptation of *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* adaptation is a perfect example of an oversimplified version of the source. On the one hand it preserves the story, on the other hand, however, it robbed the reader of the opportunity to solve the case on his own. Moreover, poor language and adventure scenes turn the story into a regular crime fighting comics. Poe turned the culprit into an animal to show "crime as the outbreak of the animal in the man" (May 89), whereas in the adaptation the animal is turned into a monster that should be killed.

2.2 *Mysteries by Edgar Allan Poe*

The *Mysteries* comic book was published in 1947 and contained three adaptations of short stories by Edgar Allan Poe: *The Pit and the Pendulum, The Unparalleled Adventure of One Hans Pfaall*, and *The Fall of the House of Usher*.

The Pit and The Pendulum is a short horror story where the first-person narrator tells how he was tortured both physically and mentally by the Spanish Inquisition. *The Pit and The Pendulum* fits into the convention of the horror genre. First of all, as any other horror story it explores the theme of human mortality. Secondly, the story contains violent scenes, because, as Jack Morgan states in his book, *The Biology of Horror: Gothic Literature and Film,* "[it] is characteristic of horror fiction that in it mortality is played out graphically" (15).

The Pit and The Pendulum has a happy ending, because the protagonist was unexpectedly rescued by the French army. It is worth noting that the story is very ambiguous. First of all, the reader neither knows why the man was prosecuted nor what happened after his rescue. Secondly, the tortured man constantly balances between reality and a dream-like or unconscious state of mind, so it cannot be said for sure what really happened to him and what did not. Finally, the whole story is "rather a nightmarish, symbolic story about every person's worst nightmare" (May 96) and the tricky ending is "not an ending at all, but rather the beginning of waking life" (97).

The comic book adaptation starts with a trial. A judge accuses the protagonist of treason against the state, therefore the story ceases to be an ambiguous nightmare, it immediately turns into reality. Unlike the source, the adaptation uses a third-person narrator. In general a narrator's voice is easily incorporated in comics through captions and word balloons. In comics, however, every type of text has to have its own unique style, font, shape

of caption or balloon in order to make the narrator's voice distinctive from any other type of text. This adaptation successfully meets the preceding requirement, as the narrator's voice is incorporated into a rectangular caption with yellow background, the font is unique and every sentence of the narrator starts with a capital letter colored in red.

The authors follow the concept of the series and use several types of conventional layouts in the adaptation. All of these are easily readable except the one which reminds of metal panels on the wall of the protagonist's cell. In this layout the first picture on the left is larger than the right one, and, therefore, the second picture on the right is located higher up than the second picture on the left. The layout itself is not confusing, as the reader has to figure out in which direction he should read only once. However, the authors change the rules every time this layout appears in the comic book. Sometimes the reader has to read from left to right despite the location of illustrations (see fig. 2.4), and sometimes he should look at the pictures that are located higher than the others first (see fig. 2.5). This constant change of rules brings unnecessary confusion and does not complement the story.

Figure 2.4 These panels should be read from left to right. August M. Froelich, "The Pit and the Pendulum", *Mysteries by Edgar Allan Poe*; adapt. by Samuel Willinsky (New York: Gilberton, 1947; print; 3; vol. 40 of *Classics Illustrated*).

Figure 2.5 These panels should be read from right to left. August M. Froelich, "The Pit and the Pendulum", *Mysteries by Edgar Allan Poe*; adapt. by Samuel Willinsky (New York: Gilberton, 1947; print; 6; vol. 40 of *Classics Illustrated*).

It should be noted that the language used is not that vulgar as it is in *The murders in the Rue Morgue*. The main events of the story were preserved, although the ending was slightly altered. In the source the reader does not know how the narrator managed to escape until the very end. In the adaptation the French army appears earlier and the reader realizes that the army can save the protagonist. At the same time the reader does not know if they will be there in time to save him. As a result we can witness a quite intense action scene which fits into the realistic style of the adaptation reasonably well.

The adaptation of *The Pit and the Pendulum* certainly avoids the ambiguity of the source version. It turns a nightmarish story into grim reality. Transmediation of the story also did not pass smoothly, as some elements of layout are confusing for the reader. Nevertheless, it is notable that, unlike the adaptation of *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, *The Pit and The Pendulum* comics version does not seem to damage or oversimplify the source. Therefore it can be called a successful adaptation.

The Unparalleled Adventure of One Hans Pfaall is a science fiction short story about a journey to the Moon. It was intended to be a hoax, but Poe included the most recent theories about space travel in order to make the story look realistic. The story was supposed to have another part, but, unfortunately, Poe "abandoned the narrative of his balloonist as another hoax rose to prominence" (Castagnaro 254), the Moon Hoax, which became more popular than the Poe story. Therefore, it should be mentioned, that the story has no clear ending.

In the story, Poe uses several stereotypic details to describe the Dutch city of Rotterdam and its citizens. For example, the Pfaalls live on the Sauerkraut alley and the burgomaster cherishes his pipe so much that he managed to hold it even when ballast bags "rolled him over and over...in the face of every man in Rotterdam" (Poe, *The Unparalleled* 26). The adaptation not only preserves but also enhances this stereotypic image. The reader can see citizens of Rotterdam, who gather near a windmill, they wear traditional wooden shoes and other traditional clothing and each and every character in the story, including the women, smokes a pipe. The representation of Dutchness through cultural symbols like windmills does not seem to be insulting in general. On the contrary, it makes the scene immediately recognizable. However, the devil is in the detail, and depiction of smoking habit of the Dutch people is certainly an excessive detail. Nowadays such excessive attention to smoking can be classified as inappropriate content for the youth[20].

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[20] For example, Marvel adapted smoking limitations in 2001, prohibiting smoking for background characters.

Some critics suggest that the story about Hans Pfaall was a failure because the "work was too esoteric for ordinary readers to appreciate, because it required familiarity with special kinds of knowledge" (Jones 10). The limited number of pages in a comic book does not allow all technical details that were described in the source to be conveyed. Interestingly enough, the absence of those details makes the narrative more smooth and vivid. The reader still knows how Pfaall constructed his air balloon and how he was able to breathe in space, but, at the same time, the reader does not need to read the quite boring description of old-fashioned theories that Poe decided to include in his story.

Another considerable advantage of this adaptation is that the humor of the source was preserved and even improved. Although Poe's story has no clear ending, the authors of the adaptation managed to use one detail of the source to elegantly wrap up the story. Hans Pfaall mentions that his wife did not protest against his journey, and was in fact "rather glad get rid of [Hans]" (Poe, *The Unparalleled* 31). At the end of the story, however, he asks permission to return to Earth because he misses his family. The last panel of the adaptation depicts Pfaall's wife who says that "he is too great a man for this Earth" and gives the reader a sly wink (see fig. 2.6). It is easy to understand that she does not want him to return.

The adaptation of *The Unparalleled Adventure of One Hans Pfaall* is a perfect example of an adaptation that complements the original writing, because it managed to do what the source could not. It turned an excessively detailed story into a humorous and exciting hoax. The only thing that should be avoided at any cost is potentially provocative cultural stereotyping that was implemented by the authors of the adaptation.

Figure 2.6 The wife of Hans Pfaall gives the reader a hint that she does not want her husband to return. Henry C. Kiefer, "The Adventures of Hans Pfall", *Mysteries by Edgar Allan Poe*; adapt. by Samuel Willinsky (New York: Gilberton, 1947; print; 33; vol. 40 of *Classics Illustrated*).

The last short story which was published in the *Mysteries* comic book was *The fall of the House of Usher.* This mystical story is considered to be one of the Poe's masterpieces. The story narrates of the mysterious mental disease of Roderick Usher, which leads to his death and the death of his twin sister, Madeline. In the story the internal fears and mental deterioration of the protagonist are mirrored in the physical appearance of materialistic objects. The first thing that a friend of Roderick notes, when he comes to visit the Ushers, is that the house the Ushers live in inspires feelings of dread and terror. He is also surprised by the good condition of the house even though each and every stone is in crumbling condition and a "barely perceptible fissure" (Poe, *The Fall* 49) crosses the wall of the building. The house represents the "fatal dislocation...which, as the story develops, destroys the whole psychic being" (Davidson 196-197) of Roderick Usher. Another important element of the story is the ambiguous relationship between Roderick and Madeline. The Usher family was "known for its inbreeding" (Kaplan 49) and Roderick mentioned that "sympathies of a scarcely intelligible nature had always existed between" (Poe, *The Fall* 57) his twin sister and himself. Her "death" leads to the complete deterioration of his fragile mind.

The adaptation of *The Fall of the House of Usher* tries to preserve scenes that create the dreadful mood of the story, but considerably simplifies them. The narrator describes the house as "horrible looking" therefore creating an image of a haunted house rather than a physical manifestation of the mental disease of its owner.

Another important element of the original story is artistic self-expression of Roderick Usher. Some critics suggest that Roderick's artistic gift was a partial cause of his insanity, because Roderick is the "ultimate romantic artist who, like Kafka's hunger artist, devours himself" (May 107). Unlike the source the adaptation suggests that Roderick's art was an outcome of his insanity, as he states that "[his] songs are as mad as [he is]" (*Mysteries by Edgar Allan Poe* 37).

Another considerable disadvantage of the adaptation is the depiction of Lady Madeline Usher. At the end of the story, when she comes to punish Roderick for her entombment, she appears before the characters covered in blood and with the "evidence of some bitter struggle upon every portion of her emaciated frame" (Poe, *The Fall* 62). The reader receives the clear perception that Madeline was suffering both mentally and physically during her entombment. In the adaptation, when Madeline appears in front of her brother, we can see a woman standing in a plain white robe and raising her hands to the sky. Only her facial expression evidences her insanity. However, she looks like a mad ghost rather than a person who suffered all the horrors of entombment (Fig 2.7).

Figure 2.7 Madeline Usher. Harley M. Griffiths, "The Fall of the House of Usher", *Mysteries by Edgar Allan Poe*; adapt. by Samuel Willinsky (New York: Gilberton, 1947; print; 43; vol. 40 of *Classics Illustrated*).

At the end it becomes quite clear why Madeline was depicted as a ghost-like figure. On one of the last panels the narrator looks back on the ruins of the house and says: "He loved his sister and had done no wrong, willfully, yet she killed him through fear". The ending not only "deromanticizes the tale by eliminating any flights of fancy or narrative ambiguity" (Royal 64), but also contradicts the previous events as they exist in the adaptation. In the adaptation it is made clear that Roderick knew that he had entombed his sister alive.

Unfortunately, the adaptation of *The Fall of the House of Usher* cannot be called a successful one as it rather harms the original story than complements it. It puts the story before the reader straightforwardly, depriving it of ambiguity and the dreadful atmosphere of mental insanity.

2.3 *The Gold Bug and Other Stories by Edgar Allan Poe*

The Gold Bug and Other Stories by Edgar Allan Poe collection was published in 1951 and contained adaptations of *The Gold-Bug, The Tell-Tale Heart*, and *The Cask of Amontillado*.

The Gold-Bug is an adventurous short story about a quest to find a hidden pirate treasure. At the very beginning of the story, however, the reader does not know anything

about the treasure. All that he knows is that a protagonist, Mr. William Legrand, was bitten by an unusual bug and that he started to act strangely. The unnamed narrator and Legrand's black servant, Jupiter, decided that Legrand became mentally deranged. Poe manages to intrigue readers and maintain suspense until the end of the quest, when the surprised narrator and Jupiter discover the real treasure. The last part of the story is dedicated to explanation of the events, which is no less important than the events of the story itself, as the "primary interest lies in the analytical interpretation of pattern based on following certain conventions and rules" (May 86).

The first thing that should be mentioned about the adaptation is that the language was improved considerably in comparison to previous adaptations. The adaptation either directly quotes the source or translates the most old-fashioned parts of it without oversimplifying the text. For example, the speech of a black servant (Jupiter) is written in dialect in the source, but in the adaptation his speech is indistinguishable from that of the other characters. The amount of text in the adaptation was also raised significantly in comparison to previous *Classics Illustrated* issues.

The adapters of *The Gold Bug* decided to preserve the first-person narration. Captions, which contain the narrator's voice, were designed in a shape of a papyrus scroll (see fig. 2.8). It certainly adds to the atmosphere of adventure. It should be noted, however, that even though the font of the narrator's voice always stays the same, the shape of the captions varies from panel to panel, and sometimes it resembles a regular rectangular rather than a scroll.

Figure 2.8 An example of a caption in a shape of a papyrus scroll. Alex A. Blum, "The Gold Bug", *The Gold Bug and Other Stories by Edgar Allan Poe*; adapt. by John O'Rouke (New York: Gilberton, 1951; print; 5; vol. 84 of *Classics Illustrated*).

The first splash-page of the adaptation introduces the main characters and straightforwardly says that the reader will see the story of the recovery of pirate treasure. It is interesting that this information does not break the suspense rather it creates a cliff-hanger that makes the intrigued reader proceed with the story.

The most considerable disadvantage of the adaptation is that it almost completely excludes an analytical explanation of the story. Therefore the readers focus is shifted to the adventurous part of the source text. It is clear, however, that the incorporation of the cryptogram into the text takes up a lot of space, which the original *Classics Illustrated* series never had.

Even though *The Gold-Bug* adaptation is not ambitious in any way as it does not challenge the source, it can be called a successful comic book adaptation. It manages to convey the story of an exciting adventure, preserving suspense and the readers curiosity.

The Tell-Tale Heart is a story about murder and guilt. An unnamed narrator, who is presumably insane, commits a murder in cold blood. However, the sense of guilt overwhelms him and he confesses to the crime. The most intriguing part of the story is the inner motivation of the criminal. The narrator states that the victim did not do anything wrong, or insult him. The wealth of the old man also did not interest the murderer. However, "a pale blue eye [of the old man], with a film over it" (Poe, *The Tell-Tale* 203) disturbed, irritated and scared the narrator. Critics, however, suggest that the narrator's obsession has nothing to do with the old man, because his hate and aggression were aimed at the narrator himself. It appears that senses are very important for the narrator. He even states that "the disease had sharpened [his] senses" (Poe, *The Tell-Tale* 203), especially, his hearing. Therefore, "when the narrator says he must destroy the 'eye', he means he must destroy the 'I'" (May 78). The reader can find other evidence of self-destructive motives of the criminal because the narrator tends to associate himself with the victim. For example, the narrator pities the victim when the old man groans, because for many nights he has himself felt this mortal terror. It is also clear that the narrator could not hear the victim's heartbeat from across the room and especially after his death, so "he mistakes his own heartbeat for that of the old man" (77).

The adaptation excludes several clues from the story. Therefore, when the narrator says to the police that he was the one who screamed, the reader cannot connect it to other episodes of the narrator's identification with the victim. The adaptation diminishes the ambiguity of the source and turns the old man's eye into a real motivation for the culprit.

The narrator's voice is incorporated into the text in exactly the same way as it is in *The Gold Bug*. However, in *The Gold Bug* the shape of the scroll is associated with pirate maps and ancient treasures, whereas in *The Tell-Tale Heart* it looks out of place.

Another disadvantage of the adaptation is its ending. The original story ends abruptly, when the narrator confesses to the police. In the adaptation the last panel shows us the narrator, who was placed in an asylum. It is possible that the adaptors decided to give the story a clear ending. However the way they did it strongly resembles the ending of every episode of the Looney Tunes cartoon, when Bugs Bunny says "That's all folks" (see fig. 2.8). In other words it adds inappropriate humor into a deeply serious story about madness, brutal murder, and guilt.

Figure 2.8 The last panel of The Tell-Tale Heart adaptation. Jim Lavery, "The Tell-Tale Heart", *The Gold Bug and Other Stories by Edgar Allan Poe*; adapt. by John O'Rouke (New York: Gilberton, 1951; print; 28; vol. 84 of *Classics Illustrated*).

This adaptation harms the source, even though it preserves the themes of crime and guilt. First of all, it does not give the unknowing audience a chance to understand the motivation of the criminal. Secondly, the incorporation of the narrator's voice into the papyrus scroll captions looks inappropriate. And, finally, the clumsy ending does not complement the original story.

The Cask of Amontillado is a story about revenge. The protagonist, Montresor, states that Fortunato offended him many times and that he wants "not only [to] punish [Fortunato], but [to] punish [him] with impunity" (Poe, *The Cask* 106). Montresor, however, is an unreliable narrator, as he never mentions exactly how Fortunato injured him. In fact, it is hard to say if there were any injuries at all. The adaptation resolves this problem quite straightforwardly as it adds a panel where Fortunato directly insults the narrator (see fig. 2.9), thereby destroying the ambiguity of the narrator's motivation.

Figure 2.9 Fortunato insults the narrator. Rudy Palais, "The Cask of Amontillado", *The Gold Bug and Other Stories by Edgar Allan Poe*; adapt. by John O'Rouke (New York: Gilberton, 1951; print; 33; vol. 84 of *Classics Illustrated*).

The narrative manner of the story forms an "oral presentation directed at... [a] listener rather than a manuscript intended for reading" (May 79), because at some point the narrator refers to "you, who so well know the nature of my soul" (Poe, *The Cask* 106). On the one hand, the adaptation quotes those words directly, although it once again uses the captions in the shape of the papyrus for the narrator's speech, which contradicts the manner of narration. On the other hand, on the first and the last pages the reader can see an old man, Montresor. He sits behind the table and looks into the reader's eyes, which creates a perception that he speaks directly to his listener. Unfortunately, the atmosphere of intimacy created by the illustrations is contradicted by the style of the captions.

The adaptation is a slightly simplified version of Poe's work, but it preserves the bitter irony of the source. The narrator drinks a toast to Fortunato's long life and constantly pretends to be worried about his health. Fortunato considers himself to be a great connoisseur of wine, but he lets Montresor to drunk him before they get to their destination. This contradictory image of Fortunato is greatly intensified by the fact that he wears the masquerade costume of a jester.

The Cask of Amontillado can be called a successful comic book adaptation. It manages to preserve the irony of the source, maintain suspense, and partially enhance the atmosphere of the intimacy between the reader and the narrator.

2.4 Conclusion

The original *Classics Illustrated* series consciously removed the ambiguity of Poe's work. However, the series still cannot be called the model that should be "avoided at all costs" (Baetens, Frey 6.16).

The drawing style of the series was not ambitious, and illustrations which managed to significantly enhance the message of the source were rather an exception than a rule. For example, an outstanding illustration in *The Bells* adaptation, or the depiction of the old Montresor in *The Cask of Amontillado* certainly complement the source. However, at the same time, the drawing style brought necessary variation for the knowing audience and helped the unknowing audience to visualize the story.

The layout of the series was not innovative either. First of all, not every graphic novelist uses layout as a field for experimentation and secondly, artists of the Classic Illustrated series were successfully performing the breakdown in most of the cases. There is only one example where authors brought confusion into a comic book. In *The Pit and the Pendulum* adaptation, frequent changes of the reading direction considerably complicated the reading process.

It should also be noted that the series was constantly improving its quality. In the first adaptation of the Poe's short story, *The Murders in The Rue Morgue*, we see a small amount of text, use of vulgarly low language, reduction of the narrator's voice and oversimplification of the plot. It can be said with confidence that this adaptation is unsuccessful and it harms the source. Almost all subsequent adaptations use better language and even quote Poe's stories directly, experiment with the incorporation of the narrator's voice into adaptations[21], eliminate ambiguity of Poe's stories but do not oversimplify them.

There is only one Poe adaptation in the original *Classics Illustrated* series however, which undoubtedly complements the source. *The Unparalleled Adventure of One Hans Pfaall* adaptation managed to turn an unsuccessful hoax by Poe into an exciting and humorous adventure story. Authors excluded excessive technical details, preserved and enhanced humor of the source, and managed to find an interesting and logical ending to the story.

Other analyzed adaptations, excluding unsuccessful adaptations of *The murders in The Rue Morgue, The Tell-Tale Heart,* and *The Fall of The House of Usher*, can also be called successful and complementary adaptations, although their performance is not as

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[21] For example, authors shift the first-person narrator to the third person narrator in *The Pit and The Pendulum* adaptation, or incorporate the caption for the narrator's voice in a shape of the papyrus scroll in *The Gold Bug.*

brilliant and outstanding as the one of *The Unparalleled Adventure of One Hans Pfaall* adaptation.

  In the subsequent chapter we will analyze adaptations that were published at the end of the twentieth century and in the beginning of the twenty-first century. Some of Poe's works which had been adapted in the original *Classics Illustrated* series were re-adapted in the modern series. Therefore we will have an opportunity not only to see how modern artists approach the adaptations, but also compare the old and the new versions where applicable.

Chapter 3. The Modern *Classics Illustrated* Series Adaptations of Poe

The original *Classics Illustrated* series was shut down in 1971. In the beginning of the 1990s publishing house, First Publishing, decided to launch a second run of the *Classics Illustrated* series. The new series was much more innovative in terms of art style. Each book had its own style, and adaptations were usually made by two people (writer and artist). They were accompanied by a team of editors, art directors, coordinators and other members of staff. At the same time the series followed several traditions of the original one. As was mentioned before, the series adapted only classic literary works that were in the public domain. The series also had a limited number of pages, as each book contained roughly fifty pages. Unfortunately, the publisher released only twenty-seven issues and the series was closed, because the First Comics ceased to publish any new issues. Among the released issues were two adaptations of Poe's works: *The Raven and Other Poems* and *The Fall of the House of Usher*.

In 2008 an American publishing house, Papercutz, revived the series. They decided to split the series into two branches. The first one, *Classics Illustrated*, was created to reprint the issues by the First Comics publishing house. It is interesting that Papercutz states that those adaptations are graphic novel adaptations, even though the First Comics did not use this term in the description of their works. The second branch, *Classics Illustrated Deluxe*, reprinted graphic novel adaptations of a French publishing house, Guy Delcourt Productions, which fit into the concept of *Classics Illustrated*[22]. However, those works initially were not intended to be a part of the *Classics Illustrated* series, and therefore they have more pages than the original series. The *Classics Illustrated Deluxe* included only one adaptation of Poe's stories: *The Murders in the Rue Morgue and Other Tales by Edgar Allan Poe*.

It is worth noting that one of the differences between the original *Classics Illustrated* and the modern *Classics Illustrated* series is the cover art. As was mentioned above, the original series used a "more or less mimetic [drawing] style" (Royal 57), and the covers of adaptations reflected this absence of a distinctive drawing style. As each adaptation of the modern series was made by a different artist, covers introduced both content of a comic book and a unique drawing style of an artist. Baetens and Frey suggest that one of the distinctive

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[22] As we already know, the series includes only time-tested works which are in the public domain.

features of graphic novel covers is the "continuity between paratext[23] and text, which both can easily share the same content... as well as the same grammatextual[24] features" (6.23). It is worth noting, that the quality of modern series covers was considerably improved. For example, the cover of *The Fall of the House of Usher* not only represents the drawing style and briefly introduces the contents, it also reflects on the one of the main themes of the story, the role of Madeline Usher in the tragedy of the Ushers family (see fig. 3.1).
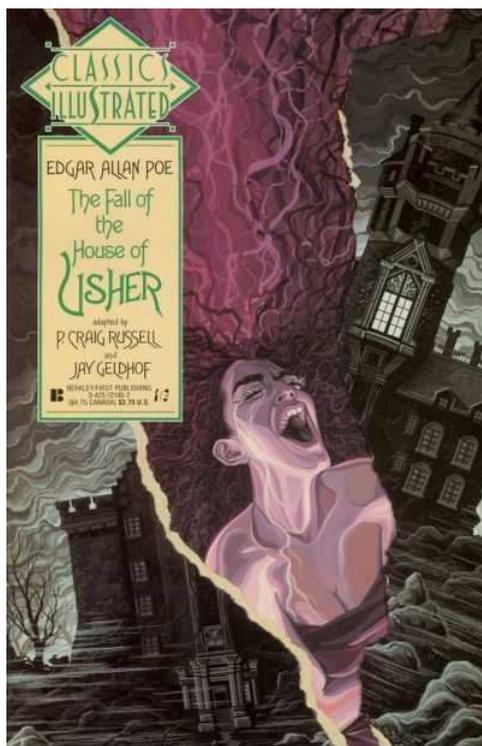

Figure 3.1 The image of Madeline Usher which is seen through fissure that destroyed the house of Usher. P. Craig Russel, *The Fall of the House of Usher*; by E.A. Poe; penciling and inking by Jay Gelghof (Chicago:First; New York: Berkley, 1990; print; 2; vol. 14 of *Classics Illustrated*).

In this chapter we will analyze Poe adaptations which were published in both the *Classics Illustrated* series by First Comics and the *Classics Illustrated Deluxe* series by Papercutz.

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[23] Paratext includes the title, the name of the author, and other additional information which is printed on the cover.

[24] Grammatextuality is a term coined by Jean-Gérard Lapacherie. It refers to the "'graphic substance' of the letter, line, and page" (Harpold qtd. in Baetens, Frey 6.19). In the comics this substance includes, for example, the "form of the lettering, the configuration of the words on the speech balloons and the insertions of these balloons in the panels" (Baetens, Frey), etc.

3.1 *The Raven and Other Poems*

The Raven and Other Poems was published in 1990. It contains texts of nine poems[25] by Edgar Allan Poe, which were illustrated by Gahan Wilson. Wilson is a well-known American cartoonist whose illustrations were published in *The New Yorker* and *Playboy*. It is interesting that he is famous not only for his "macabre illustrations" (The *Raven and Other Poems* 56) of horror stories, but also for several children's books he wrote and illustrated himself[26]. Therefore he seems to be one of the most suitable artists for creating adaptations of mysterious and terrifying Poe's works, which, at the same time should be suitable for all ages. And indeed, the artist manages to combine soft lines and pastel colors with surrealistically twisted shapes and dark themes of death and madness (see fig. 3.2).
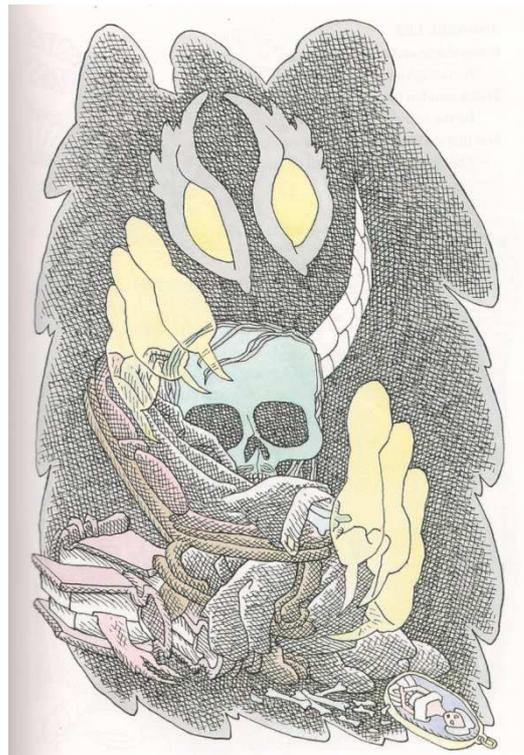

Figure 3.2 The illustration for *The Raven*. Gahan Wilson, "The Raven", *The Raven and Other Poems*, by E. A. Poe (1990. New York: Papercutz, 2009; print; 15; vol. 4 of *Classics Illustrated*).

Unfortunately, *The Raven and Other Poems*, which is stated to be a "full-color graphic novel adaptation" has several quite serious disadvantages. First of all, the adaptation itself occupies only forty-eight pages out of fifty-six in the book. The last eight pages are

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[25] *The Raven*, *Annabel Lee*, *Lines on Ale*, *The City in the Sea*, *The Sleeper*, *Eldorado*, *Alone*, *The Haunted Palace*, and *The Conqueror Worm*.
[26] See, for example, *The Bang-Bang Family* (1974), *Harry the Fat Bear Spy* (1973), etc.

used for the advertising of another graphic novel adaptation by *Classics Illustrated*. The second and most important, is that on occasion, *The Raven and Other Poems* only vaguely resembles a graphic novel. Illustrations and text of several long poems seem to exist separately from each other. The book is not divided into panels, and the amount of splash-pages is limited. In most cases one drawing illustrates several stanzas, and some pages of the book contain only text without any illustrations at all.

It was already mentioned before that the form of a graphic novel should be ambitious and innovative. It is also worth noting that graphic novels can include not only panels but also a combination of distinct illustrations and text. It has already been used in some graphic novels, for example, in *Citizen 13360* by Miné Okubo (see fig. 3.3). Nevertheless, one of the most important features of the comics medium is the interplay between words and illustrations. In *The Raven and Other Poems* illustrations and words function as separate elements rather than as integral parts of the comics illustration. The books does provide enough space for the incorporation of text into panels, splash-pages, or a combination of comics elements and separate illustrations. However, the authors decided to use illustrations that resemble splash-pages only for relatively small poems like *Annabel Lee* or *Eldorado* (see fig. 3.4), which are located in the second part of the book. The first part being occupied with *The Raven* poem, which contains a lot of text with very limited illustrations. It strongly creates the impression that the reader holds an illustrated book rather than a comic book adaptation in their hands.
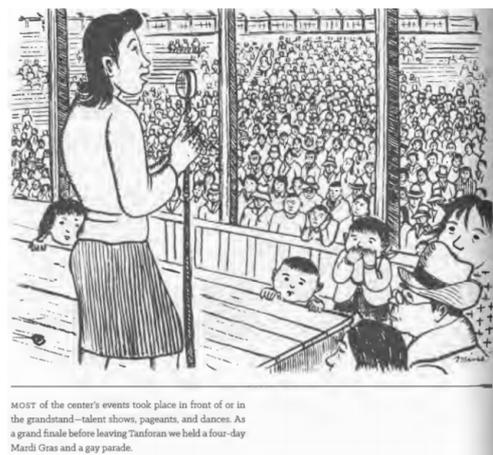

Figure 3.3 Miné Okubo's graphic novel about the internment camps for people of Japanese origin, which were constructed during the years of the Second World War in the US. Miné Okubo, *Citizen 13660*, (Seattle and London: U of Washington P, 2014, Print; 102).
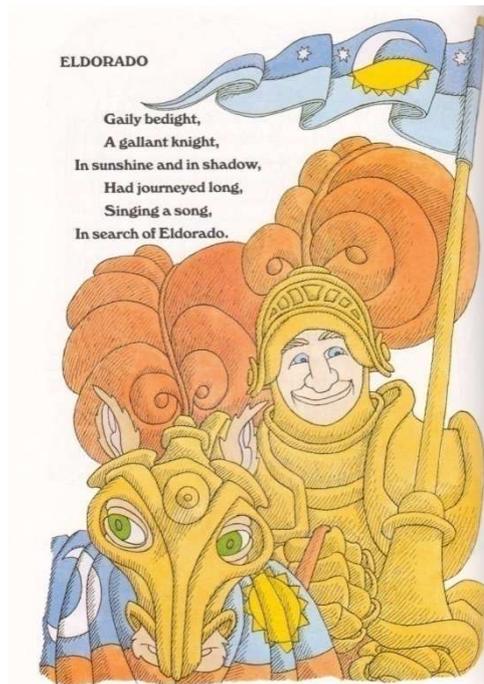
Figure 3.4 Illustrations of relatively short poems like *Eldorado* resemble splash-pages. However, the first impression of an illustrated book, which is created by the first poem, *The Raven*, is very hard to change. Gahan Wilson, "Eldorado", *The Raven and Other Poems*; by E. A. Poe (1990. New York: Papercutz, 2009; print; 32; vol. 4 of *Classics Illustrated*).

In conclusion it should be said that, even though *The Raven and Other Poems* contains incredible and outstanding illustrations, it cannot be called either a comic book or a graphic novel. It is interesting, that even though the old adaptations of Poe's poems did not have a distinctive art style, they managed to create an interplay between illustrations and words, and therefore those adaptations could be called more successful than *The Raven and Other Poems*.

3.2 *The Fall of the House of Usher*

The Fall of the House of Usher was published in 1990 by First Publishing. The adaptation has forty-four pages and does not contain any additional stories. The story was adapted by P. Craig Russell and Jay Geldhof. P. Craig Russel is famous for adapting operas into comics and cooperating with Neil Gaiman on *The Sandman* series. Jay Geldhof worked on such titles as *Spiderman*, *Grendel* and the *Epic Illustrated* series.

The first thing that should be said about this adaptation is that, unlike the old adaptation, it preserves the ambiguity of the source. The authors decided to include not only the ambiguous story of the Usher family, but also the contested state of mind of the narrator. In the old adaptation there was no mention of the fact that the events of the story "affect the narrator in any dramatic way" (Royal 64), whereas in the new adaptation he is certainly disturbed and scared by the mysterious house and its occupants.

The interesting feature of the adaptation is the use of color. In several key scenes "single-color saturation" (McCloud 188) is used to "express a dominant mood" (190). In the very beginning of the story, when the narrator approaches the house, the reader sees a castle and its gloomy surroundings depicted in black and white. The white road crosses the black forest with crooked trees, and the entirely black castle can be seen in the distance. The only spot of color on the page is the tower's window. The dominance of black and white creates a mysterious atmosphere and intensifies the sense of the dreadful terror, which the narrator finds unreasonable at first (see fig. 3.5).

Figure 3.5 The mysterious house of the Ushers, which scares the narrator at first sight. P. Craig Russel, *The Fall of the House of Usher*; by E.A. Poe; penciling and inking by Jay Gelghof (Chicago: First; New York: Berkley, 1990; print; 2; vol. 14 of *Classics Illustrated*).

Another key scene, which happens when a mysterious storm surrounds the house, is depicted in a glowing green color, highlighting the supernatural origin of the regular weather phenomenon. The last scene, the sudden destruction of the house, is colored in black, white, and various shades of red. It not only creates an atmosphere of fear and madness, but also expands the description of the scene by Poe. The "blood-red moon" (Poe, *The Fall* 63), which is seen through the widening fissure on the house's wall, floods the whole scene with its dreary light.

The adaptation successfully transmediates the protagonists of the story. The first appearance of Roderick Usher, which is preceded with the description of the dark story of his family, becomes a shock for readers. The exhausted skinny man with tired red eyes and white uncombed hair looks directly at the reader from the book's page. One half of his face is hidden in the shadow, and it only intensifies the feeling that the man suffers from a severe mental and physical disease (see fig. 3.6).

Figure 3.6 The disease changed Roderick Usher's appearance significantly, so the narrator even did not recognize him at first. P. Craig Russel, *The Fall of the House of Usher*; by E.A. Poe; penciling and inking by Jay Gelghof (Chicago: First; New York: Berkley, 1990; print; 2; vol. 14 of *Classics Illustrated*).

His sister, Madeline Usher, appears as an elusive shadow for the first time. The reader sees her silhouette, but her facial expression remains intangible. The development of the story

however, shows that she lives under the "pressure of her malady" (Poe, *The Fall* 52), and it brings her unbearable suffering, as we see her standing with her fists clenched, her head thrown back, and her face frozen with the expression of pain. The most impressive scene with her presence, is the climax of the story where the presumably dead Madeline appears in front of the terrified narrator and Roderick. Her white dress is torn apart and resembles mummy bandages, her hands are covered in blood, and she screams with pain and rage. The realistic drawing style greatly enhances and expands the sense of fear and disturbance. The artist manages to depict the worst nightmare of Roderick Usher, which finally kills him.

The adaptation consisting of forty-eight pages, contains only one story. At the same time, the source is quite short. It means that the authors had a large number of pages for a short source. Consequently the adaptation abounds with splash-pages, especially in the first and last parts of the book. In the first, they are used in combination with additive, parallel and interdependent illustrations which are drawn on the adjoining pages, helping to introduce the dreadful atmosphere of the house. The last four pages of the story however, are filled in with splash pages, which are combined only with additive and picture specific illustrations. One of those pages contains four illustrations in a row, showing the widening fissure, which seems excessive and perhaps almost does not contribute to the storytelling.

However, as was mentioned before, not all of the splash-pages in the book should be evaluated as "pretty wallpaper, but poor storytelling" (Spiegelman qtd. in Duncan, Smith 140). One of the examples of a perfectly fitting splash-page can be called an incorporation of Roderick Usher's rhapsody into the book. The rhapsody tells a story about a kingdom that falls into a state of decay, and therefore the poem "aesthetically mirrors the story itself" (May 106). The rhapsody contains six stanzas, and occupies a double-page spread. The first page depicts the royal couple standing in front of a large and beautiful castle. On the second page the reader can see the diseased queen and the sorrowful king. The "good angels" (Poe, *The Fall* 54), which are depicted in the shape of fire fairies on the first page, transform into malformed creatures on the second page. Some critics suggest that the decay in the poem "identifies the haunted palace of art with the person of Usher himself, complete with images of eyes as windows and pearl and ruby as teeth and lips [as] the door" (May 106). The authors of the adaptation, however, decided to compare Usher with the king of the palace. Moreover, the depiction of the queen's death only enhances the identification of Roderick Usher with the sorrowful king.

The Fall of the House of Usher is an outstanding graphic novel adaptation. It almost does not experiment with the contents, but every element of the visual part of the adaptation

enhances and expands the atmosphere of terror, madness, and despair. It carefully follows Poe's descriptions but at the same time does not use unnecessary violence and gruesomeness, which can easily overshadow the plot and turn an adaptation into a type of story where violence is exploited for violence's sake. The authors successfully incorporate Usher's poem into the adaptation only slightly altering its meaning. This change, however, only highlights the similarity between the poem and the story itself. Interestingly enough, the only disadvantage of the novel is an excess of space, which stimulated the authors to use an unreasonable amount of splash-pages and picture specific illustrations at the end of the adaptation. Nevertheless, this disadvantage does not significantly harm the source, and, it is overshadowed by the other elements that complement the source and help to create a remarkable graphic novel adaptation.

3.3 *The Murders in the Rue Morgue and Other Tales by Edgar Allan Poe*

The Murders in the Rue Morgue and Other Tales by Edgar Allan Poe was initially published by a French publishing house, Guy Delcourt Productions. The book includes three stories by Edgar Allan Poe: *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, *The Gold-Bug* and *The Mystery of Marie Rogêt*. The stories' adaptations were published separately in 2008, 2011 and 2012 respectively. Papercutz united them in one book, and it was published in the *Classics Illustrated Deluxe* series in 2013. The stories about C. Auguste Dupin were adapted by Jean David Morvan (writer) and Fabrice Druet (artist), *The Gold-Bug* was adapted by Éric Corbeyran (writer) and Paul Marcel (artist). These authors are quite famous in the French comics industry. For example, Corbeyran is widely known as the writer of *Assassin's Creed* comics. It is worth noting that even though the book is ranked suitable for children over eight years old, it has an additional mark of parental advisory on it, as it contains quite violent scenes.

　　The Murders in the Rue Morgue adaptation starts with the depiction of the crime scene. First of all, the reader sees dead Madame L'Espanaye lying on the street with her throat cut wide open. The subsequent two pages are made from the first person point of view, so it creates a perception that the reader personally enters the door of the house, goes up the stairs, sees bloody traces on the floor and a razor covered with blood, notes a mess in the room, and finally discovers the body of Madame L'Espanaye's daughter in the chimney. All illustrations of the crime scene are picture specific. The authors use advantages of the visual dimension of the comics, and provide readers with extreme close-ups of the crime scene to

draw the readers' attention to potential clues. They also focus on the details of the crime scene in order to create the mood of the story. The next page contains panels with extreme long views and close ups, which are used to set the scene and introduce the city of Paris. It is interesting that those illustrations occupy a lot of space, but do not contribute to the development of the story. This is why they can be rarely found in comic books with a limited number of pages. As the book was not intended to be a part of the *Classics Illustrated* series, its artists had an opportunity to insert those scenes (see fig. 3.7).

Figure 3.7 The illustration provides reader with details of the crime and reveals potential clues. Fabrice Druet, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue", *The Murders in the Rue Morgue and Other Tales by Edgar Allan Poe*; adapt. by Jean David Morvan; transl. by Joe Johnson (2008. New York: Papercutz, 2013; print; 3; vol. 10 of *Classics Illustrated Deluxe*).

Authors use rhetorical, unstable, and discrete layout. Each page has its own layout and it is changed in order to expand the narrative. For example, testimonies of witnesses are accompanied with a distinct type of layout. It starts with a panel, which contains a smaller panel. The smaller panel depicts the witness, while the larger, shows his relation to the crime or victims (see fig. 3.8).

Figure 3.8 The owner of a tobacco store gives testimony about the crime. Fabrice Druet, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue", *The Murders in the Rue Morgue and Other Tales by Edgar Allan Poe*; adapt. by Jean David Morvan; transl. by Joe Johnson (2008. New York: Papercutz, 2013; print; 20; vol. 10 of *Classics Illustrated Deluxe*).

Some critics suggest that Poe's first detective story contains three parts that do not fit together smoothly (Leer 68). The first part contains information about Dupin and his analytical skills, the second one consists of newspaper articles about the crime, and the final one narrates Dupin's investigation. The old adaptation, which was published in the original *Classics Illustrated*, solved this problem quite radically, as it simply excluded the first two parts from the adaptation. Unlike the old adaptation the modern one does not exclude those parts from the story. The first part, the monologue of the unnamed narrator about Dupin's analytical skills, was left in the adaptation. However, it is incorporated in the form of dialogue between the narrator and Dupin. Therefore, a quite complex philosophical discourse is turned into a vivid discussion. It is also worth noting that the adaptation widely uses the complex language of the source. Some phrases are shortened or excluded, although the writer almost does not simplify the text.

As was mentioned before, the adaptation includes testimonies of witnesses of the crime. Even though in both the source and the adaptation testimonies are incorporated through a newspaper article, the adaptation visualizes those testimonies and mixes them with comments of the narrator and Dupin. Therefore testimonies become an integral part of the whole story, whereas in the source they seem to be a separate part, which is later commented on by Dupin.

The adaptation of *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* is a good example of a successful graphic novel adaptation. Its visual part is not innovative, but it complements the source,

especially, the skillful use of space guides the reader through the story but does not confuse or exhaust him with an excessive amount of splash-pages or picture specific illustrations. The authors preserved the main clues, namely eyewitnesses who provide readers with clues about the unusual voice of the culprit, and hairs clutched in the victim's hand. Moreover, the authors managed to incorporate those clues, as well as the philosophical part of the story elegantly and smoothly, significantly improving the narrative flow.

The second adaptation in the book is *The Gold-Bug*. As it was made by another artist, the drawing style looks considerably different. The artist of *The Gold-Bug* also prefers to use rhetorical, unstable, and discrete layout. However, unlike the artist of *The Murders*, he sometimes uses panels without clear borders. For example, when Legrand explains where he found the treasure map, the author uses only difference in distance to divide the page into several distinct illustrations (see fig. 3.9). In another scene, when Jupiter climbs up an "enormously tall tulip tree" (Poe, *The Gold-Bug* 115), an image of a large tree serves as a background for events that happen in the foreground. Its branches cross the borders of the panels, and it helps the reader visualize how large is the tree.

Figure 3.9. The page does not have clear division in panels, however, the composition of the page can be easily distinguished from a splash-page. Paul Marcel, "The Gold-Bug", *The Murders in the Rue Morgue and Other Tales by Edgar Allan Poe*; adapt. by Éric Corbeyran; transl. by Joe Johnson (2011. New York: Papercutz, 2013; print; 70; vol. 10 of *Classics Illustrated Deluxe*).

It is interesting, that in the new adaptation the narrator's voice is also incorporated through captions in the shape of a papyrus scroll, as it was done in the old adaptation. However, in the old adaptation the papyrus scroll was sometimes turned into a regular rectangular, whereas in the new adaptation the caption always has a distinctive shape of the scroll.

Unlike the old adaptation, the new version does not reveal the plot from the very beginning. The reader is involved in a mysterious and adventurous story, and he does not know whether Mr. Legrand is mad or not. The way the artist drew Mr. Legrand only enhances the perception. At the very beginning of the story he looks like a normal man, but when he persuades his friends to follow his quest, his appearance changes considerably. On every illustration his eyes are wide open and shining, his face has an expression of nervous anticipation or even impatience (see fig. 3.10). The narrator, Jupiter and the reader himself start to have serious doubts about Legrand's mental sanity. However, Legrand returns to a normal state as soon as the treasure is discovered, and the reader understands that he was tricked.

Figure 3.10 Mr. Legrand's appearance makes the reader sure that the gold bug, which bitten him, infected him with some serious disease, which affected Legrand's mental sanity. Paul Marcel, "The Gold-Bug", *The Murders in the Rue Morgue and Other Tales by Edgar Allan Poe*; adapt. by Éric Corbeyran; transl. by Joe Johnson (2011. New York: Papercutz, 2013; print; 63; vol. 10 of *Classics Illustrated Deluxe*).

Authors also interestingly use the gold bug itself, the detail which was used by Poe to distract the reader's attention. The gold bug is present on every page of the adaptation, because the number of the page is written on its body. The bug, however, is not simply

located in the corner of the page. It can be found climbing up the tree, sitting on a stone or hiding on the tree's leaf. It creates a perception that the bug is extremely important for the narrative, whereas in reality it is simply a distracting element.

The new adaptation can be rather called a successful comic book adaptation rather than a graphic novel. The visual elements complement and partly enhance the narrative, although they are not ambitious or innovative. The adaptation manages to convey the plot and preserve all the elements of the story, including the last part, where Legrand shows the solution to the treasure map's riddle. However, unlike *The Murders* adaptation, *The Gold-Bug* does not significantly improve the story or bring any noticeable changes in the plot.

The last adaptation of the book is *The Mystery of Marie Rogêt*. The adaptation was made by the authors of *The Murders*, so the art style of the previous adaptation was preserved. *The Mystery of Marie Rogêt* is the second detective short story in the cycle about C. Auguste Dupin. The story was based on a real crime, the murder of Mary Cecilia Rogers, which happened in the US in 1841. In the story, Dupin tries to solve the crime without leaving the house. He analyzes materials from the Prefecture and newspaper articles to find out the truth about the murder. Finally, he suggests that the murderer was Marie's lover, the sailor. However, the story ends "prematurely with a bracketed 'editorial' passage assuring readers that the case was solved despite the narrative's failure to detail that solution" (Leer 66). The authors of the adaptation decided to preserve the unclear ending.

At the same time, the adaptation starts with a scene which cannot be found in the source. Readers can see the execution of one Lacenaire. This character is presumably based on a real historical person, Pierre François Lacenaire, who committed a double murder and was executed for his crime in 1836. The events that happen in the adaptation suggest that Dupin was the one who helped catch the culprit. The judge obliges Dupin and the narrator to watch the execution to ensure that Dupin would not accuse suspects lightly. Before his death Lacenaire shouts to Dupin:

> Look at me, detective! Contemplate your victor! The future belongs to brilliant scoundrels like me. No to stern upholders of law like y... (*The Murders in the Rue Morgue and Other Tales by Edgar Allan Poe* 100)

Dupin closes his eyes in order to not witness the scene of the murderer's beheading (see fig. 3.11).

Figure 3.11 Dupin closes his eyes disturbed by both the scene of the beheading and the murderer's last words. Fabrice Druet, "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt", *The Murders in the Rue Morgue and Other Tales by Edgar Allan Poe*; adapt. by Jean David Morvan; transl. by Joe Johnson (2012. New York: Papercutz, 2013; print; 100; vol. 10 of *Classics Illustrated Deluxe*).

The main problem of the scene, is that it does not fit into the narrative. The warning of the judge, and Dupin's reaction to the execution promise a moral dilemma which the detective will have to solve. The last words of the criminal create the impression that at the end of the story, Dupin will prove that the criminal was wrong, and the rule of law will triumph. However, the adaptation leaves the story's ending unchanged, so at the end of the story the reader can only guess if the crime was solved, who was the culprit and how he was punished. And the opening scene does not ever reappear in the story, making the reader wonder why it was included in the adaptation.

The visual part of the adaptation is exactly the same as it was in *The Murders*. It includes not only drawing style and layout, but also the way the artists perform the breakdown. The opening scene, which introduces the crime scene and shows the dead body of Marie, is made with the use of picture specific illustrations, which focus on the details of the brutal murder.

The adaptation leaves the reader with mixed feelings. On the one hand, the authors had an ambition to expand Poe's story by adding an extra scene. This scene reveals the personal qualities of Dupin, as it shows that he can be quite sensitive man who has to make difficult moral decisions. On the other hand, the scene does not have significant influence on the main events of the story, and therefore the added scene only partially complements the story. The visual part of the adaptation complements the source, but it does not surprise the reader, as it stays completely the same as in *The Murders* adaptation. The disadvantages do not turn the adaptation into an unsuccessful one, as the authors managed to convey the original story. However, the adaptation can be called an average comic book adaptation, rather than a graphic novel adaptation.

3.4 Conclusion

The modern *Classics Illustrated* series is certainly less restrictive than the old one. The series, which was published in the 1990s, preserved a limited number of pages and the general concept of the old series. At the same time, the publishing house employed different artists to ensure that each issue would have its own unique drawing style. The *Classics Illustrated Deluxe* series, which started to reprint the French adaptations in 2008, can be distinguished from the old series not only because of the drawing style, but also because of their length.

Nevertheless, the decreased number of restrictions does not assume immediate improvement of the adaptations' quality. *The Raven and Other Poems*, for example, can be called a failed attempt to adapt Poe's poetry. Gahan Wilson is an incredibly talented artist, and his skills allow him to create arabesque, macabre, but, at the same time, non-violent illustrations, which perfectly fit into the concept of the *Classics Illustrated* series. However, the presence of remarkable illustrations is not enough to create a complementary comic book or graphic novel adaptation. Illustrations and text should create an interplay, which the adaptation failed to do. The elements of the book exist separately from each other, and, therefore, the book cannot be attributed to the comics medium.

The Fall of the House of Usher, by contrast, is a complementary graphic novel adaptation. It does not challenge the text, but does manage to convey the message of the source, and preserve its ambiguity without oversimplifying it. The skillful use of color, the successful transmediation of the characters, the incorporation of Roderick's rhapsody, and even the intriguing cover constitute the visual part of the adaptation, which certainly complement the source. Even the excessive use of splash-pages at the end of the adaptation cannot be called a serious disadvantage.

The Murders in the Rue Morgue and Other Tales by Edgar Allan Poe is referred to as a graphic novel adaptation. However, only one out of three stories can be called a graphic novel adaptation. *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* successfully rearranges the events of the source, so that the narrative becomes more interesting, vivid, and smooth. The visual part with its skillful use of space and detailed depiction of the crime scene complements the narrative.

The Mystery of Marie Rogêt, which was adapted by the authors of *The murders* adaptation, is not that successful, and can be called a comic book adaptation rather than a graphic novel. It preserves the plot of the source almost without changes, but includes the

extra scene, which does not relate to the main events of the story. On the one hand, the scene reveals the personality of Dupin, but, on the other hand, it does not influence the plot. The visual dimension imitates the first story in every element, which does not harm the adaptation, but, at the same time, does not impress the reader, because he has already seen it in the previous story.

The Gold-Bug adaptation has several strong elements which complement the source. The depiction of the presumably mad Mr. Legrand, the panels without borders (which creates an impression that the illustrations flow smoothly into each other) and the presence of the gold bug on each page intensify and enhance the ideas of the source. Those elements, in combination with a good incorporation of the text create a successful and complementary comic adaptation, which is, at the same time, not ambitious enough to become a graphic novel.

It should be noted that the mark of parental advisory on the book is totally justified. First of all, scenes of violent murders in the detective stories can be too intense for younger audiences. And secondly, adaptations use the language of the source almost without simplifying it, and, therefore, it can be quite complex for children.

In conclusion it should be said, that even though the modern series applies all of the innovations of the comics industry, it still stays closer to successful comic books adaptations, than to graphic novels. Only two out of the four adaptations manage to complement the source with almost every visual and narrative element, which expanded and enhanced the message of the original. The other two stories conveyed the message of the source, but did not intensify it significantly.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that the modern series does not contain adaptations which harm the source, as the adapters do not oversimplify or fail to deliver the original stories. The only controversial adaptation is The Raven and Other Poems, which does not fit into the comics convention, and therefore simply could not be evaluated as a comic book adaptation.

Conclusion

Comics has its medium-specific aspects which can either harm or complement comic book adaptations of the classic literature. For example, layout can become a powerful tool for conveying a story. It can help to construct a logical narrative, manipulate pacing, maintain suspense and preserve the rhythmic scheme of the poetry. On the other hand, irrational use of space can confuse the reader, prematurely reveal the plot and break the rhyme of a poem.

Visual dimension can contribute to the creation of a successful adaptation. It can help readers envision their favorite characters, find clues to solve enigmas within the story and strengthen the emotional response to horror writing. A unique art style can add an unexpected twist to a well-known story. However, reliance on visual style and use of poor language can turn adaptation into a "pretty wallpaper" (Spiegelman qtd. in Duncan, Smith 140), which fails to convey a story[27].

Comics also have a great possibility to incorporate both first-person and third-person narrators. However, in order to avoid confusion the narrator's voice should be distinctive from the other types of text in the comics. An adaptation which manages to avoid all pitfalls of transmediation and succeeds in conveying the original message of the source can be seen to be a successful comic book adaptation. However, if an author decides to experiment with form or content, the adaptation can be seen to be a graphic novel. This thesis has shown how specific theoretical aspects can culminate in a successful comic book adaptation.

The original *Classics Illustrated* series has an iconic status for good reason. Even though both contemporaries of the series and modern researchers criticized the series, it should be acknowledged that most of its works fit the concept of a successful adaptation. First of all, they convey the stories for both knowing and unknowing audiences. In most cases the adaptation was deprived of the ambiguity shown in the source, but not oversimplified. Secondly, they managed to use all comics medium components in such way that readers could follow the plot easily. And, finally, the visual aspect created the variation which is crucial for any adaptation.

It should be admitted though that not all of the adaptations of the original series can be called successful. First of all, the oversimplification of the plot certainly harmed the original stories of *The Fall of the House of Usher* and *The murders in the Rue Morgue*. The latter story was also significantly harmed, first of all, by extremely simple language being

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[27] It should be mentioned though that experimental comics adaptations that do not use words at all have started to appear recently.

used in the adaptation, and, secondly, by an inability of the authors to transmediate the clues which were provided in the original story.

The authors of the most successful Poe adaptation of the original series, *The Adventures of Hans Pfall*, managed to improve an unsuccessful Poe's hoax. Simplification of the technical part of the story and amplification of the comical part made the adaptation far more dynamic and exciting than the source. The adaptation almost does not contain elements harming the source, although the exaggeration of stereotypic image of the Dutch citizens seems excessive and inappropriate concerning modern standards.

The main disadvantage of the series stems from its initial concept. The approach of an assembly line did not let the authors choose either drawing style or layout, as the series had a standardized concept. It considerably limited the artistic choices and almost did not leave room for experiments. Those limitations had a rather negative impact on the adaptations. The series contained nine adaptations, two of them were unsuccessful and harmed the source, six contained both complementary and harmful elements, but in general could be called successful, and only one almost entirely complemented the source. As was mentioned before, the most successful adaptation was the comical one, *The Adventures of Hans Pfall*. It partially supported the negative stereotype about the comics which stated that the medium existed for mere entertainment. Nevertheless, it should be acknowledged that the series was published at the dawn of the medium. It is obvious that today it looks quite old-fashioned, but it followed all the trends of that time and its adaptations can still be called quite successful.

The modern series, of course, was not that limited in the choice of drawing style. Moreover, the publishers were consciously striving for the diversification of the art styles in order to make the series more attractive and competitive in the modern comics market. However, this diversification did not always bring successful results. *The Raven and Other Poems*, for example, had intriguing illustrations, but failed to create an interplay between the text and illustrations, and stayed an illustrated book rather than a graphic novel. *The Fall of the House of Usher* in its turn was transmediated brilliantly, as its authors used all possibilities of the medium, including color (or its absence), layout, amplification of the narrative with the visual dimension, and outstanding cover art.

The *Classics Illustrated Deluxe* series not only provided readers with new adaptations of Poe writing, but also introduced the representatives of the French comics industry. The book contained adaptations by two different groups of artists who have considerably different art styles. The book included two detective stories by Poe: *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* and *The Mystery of Marie Rogêt*. Unlike the original series the new adaptation of *The*

Murders in the Rue Morgue provided readers with clues, as authors used detailed close-ups of the crime scene. The authors managed to improve the story considerably by rearranging the events of the source. This rearrangement made the narrative flow smoother and created a more vivid story. In *The Mystery of Marie Rogêt* authors decided to add an extra scene which was quite intriguing, especially for knowing audience, as it created an impression that the ending of the story would be changed. Unfortunately, even though the scene revealed the personal qualities of Dupin, it did not influence the main events of the story. The authors not only decided to preserve the ending, but also did not recall the added scene in the subsequent course of the story.

Those detectives were adapted by the same authors, so they share the art style. On the one hand, the art style is distinctive. On the other hand, unfortunately, the art style of both stories is not just easily recognizable, but is mimetic. In other words, the authors simply copy the visual patterns from *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* without altering them. It does not harm the visual part of the adaptation, but it does not surprise the reader as he had already seen it in the first adaptation. The mimetic visual style combined with some storytelling failures turn the book into an average comic book rather than a graphic novel. *The Gold Bug* adaptation does not change the text significantly and its visual part is not ambitious, although it brings necessary repetition with variation, which makes the work a successful comic book adaptation. Its visual part includes such complementary details as an image of the gold bug on each page, an image of one of the protagonists which highlights his presumable madness, and layout which lets the reader envision the size of a tulip-tree.

It should be acknowledged, that even though the modern series positions itself as graphic novel adaptations of the classic literature, the adaptations still stay closer to comic book adaptations. They neither bring radical changes in plots nor experiment with the visual part of adaptations, and "graphic novels are not afraid of taking liberties with the material they adapt" (Baetens, Frey 8.14). Nevertheless, as was mentioned before, the division on comic books and graphic novels does not presume division on "high" and "low" art, so the adaptations can be still considered successful.

The thesis explores how comic book adaptations can harm and complement the original Edgar Allan Poe stories by using the example of the *Classics Illustrated* series. As we already know there exist more than two hundred of Poe adaptations, and they, certainly include real graphic novel adaptations, for example, *Nevermore: A Graphic Adaptation of Edgar Allan Poe's Short Stories*. The thesis suggests some aspects that can harm or

complement the source material, and this list of aspects could certainly be increased by further analysis of other Poe adaptations.

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