I am an illustrator and graphic artist with an emerging practice that explores the medium of the drawn line. Driven by my enjoyment of stories, I am interested in the possibilities of contributing to an audience’s understanding of them through image. I am inspired by the places and settings within these narratives and pepper my work with the patterns and shapes that form their individual aesthetic traditions.

Most recently I have been working to cultivate the foundations of a coherent, individual and commercially viable practice. To realize this, I mean to develop my skills as an illustrator, especially (but not uniquely) in the area of illustration for literary texts; a genre, which has always appealed to me through the expressive and theatrical treatment that it demands. Through the implementation of the following assignments, I hope to show how it can be used as an emotive and communicative tool in illustrating for literature.

Illustration for literature has a rich history dating back to the 14th century with the blossoming of illuminated manuscripts. It reached a peak in the 19th century, which produced such greats as George Cruikshank, Thomas Berwick and John Tenniel. Though digital technology has now diminished the demand for literary illustrations, the illustrated book still forms a lucrative sector of the publishing industry, as institutions like The Folio Society continue to thrive. Therefore Illustration for Literature is still a worthwhile area of study and one that I am very interested to enter.

Because of its local origins and strong connections with nature and landscape, the story of Wuthering Heights seemed a natural choice when selecting a work to be illustrated. With such intensity of emotions, variety of themes and use of symbolism, it is a text that offers many layers of understanding and so seemed ripe for illustration. It would seem appropriate then that the illustrations should be equally imaginative in their execution and serve to interpret the text rather than just showing 'what happens'. In this sense the work should reflect the whole mood and time period of the book, it should actively engage the reader and should present the narrative freshly and uniquely. The illustrations should be distinguishable from traditional literary illustrations by employing a contemporary graphic aesthetic that should aim to excite seasoned readers of the text but also intrigue a new generation.

Although the drawings will be presented in a book, it is important to remember that they are not meant to narrate the story, this is not a graphic novel, my interest is in working with the text, not replacing it. Indeed, the brilliance of the words is part of the justification for illustrating the story in the first place. It is a manner of celebrating a literary masterpiece, which is held dear by a large audience, who would surely appreciate the idea of owning a special illustrated edition.

From one great writer to another; the work of Shakespeare will be celebrated as part of the cultural Olympiad for London 2012 with a festival in his honour. To raise awareness of the occasion I wanted to create a set of posters that would enliven the curiosity of old and new audiences, encouraging them to find out more. In this sense they do not need to include all the practical information, but just need to offer a taste the festival’s spirit. It is important also that they are not alienating to people who might not otherwise be interested in Shakespeare. Therefore they should appear celebratory and informal. To this end, I want to avoid the ‘stuffiness’ often associated with Shakespeare, yet to still convey the antique people, places and
ideas of his dramas. Furthermore, they need to convey the diversity of his plays, whilst still maintaining a shared identity that can be recognised as distinctively Shakespearean.

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One of the inspirations for using the story of Wuthering Heights was the 2011 film directed by Andrea Arnold, which was highly atmospheric and packed with brilliant depictions of the Yorkshire moors.

In all honesty I have never been as taken with the actual story in the same way that so many people seem to be, it was the moorland setting that captured my imagination the most. So Arnold’s production, which uses the scenery to narrative effect, has been hugely informative to my handling of this story.

In this film it is the Yorkshire landscape that takes centre stage whilst the rest of the story is bravely stripped down to its bare bones; dialogue is minimal, central characters have been omitted and the second part of the novel is completely ignored.

Robbie Ryan’s handheld cinematography and square screen dimensions create a naturalistic viewpoint, which exposes the audience to torrents of rain that drive through the camera lens, close ups of scrabbling insects and jolting depictions of violence. The views of the moor are wide and sweeping, they are not used simply to link scenes as with many period dramas but are given due time and scrutiny - as Dave Calhoun of Time Out magazine puts it ‘landscape and wildlife are substitutes for needless dialogue and exposition’ (2011).

Everything is filmed on location with natural lighting – another elemental aspect that is used to narrative effect. The more gloomy scenes are flooded with darkness, with the characters barely visible. Whereas at one point, when the couple are reunited the sunlight is so intense that it refracts in the lens and the screen is pure white for a short while.

These camera shots along with Nicolas Becker’s vivid use of sound design awaken our senses in a way that lets us experience the story as if we were there; the sound of coursing wind, squelching mud, barking dogs and crackling fires resonate throughout and take precedence over the minimalist dialogue.

Even our sense of touch is catered to with startlingly prolonged observations of fingers running through sheep fleeces and hands stroking horses. Arnold’s fixation on atmosphere and the sensory is so paramount that it envelops the audience into the story more than any 3D film I have ever seen. Indeed, whilst a little cheesy, the film’s tagline – ‘Love is a force of nature’ perfectly encapsulates the tactile and raw presentation of the story.

In this way Arnold’s vision sweeps aside the clichés and expectations of an adaptation of a Victorian novel. She has been brave with stubbornly long scenery shots and contemporary language, where previous versions have been flighty and poetic. She further distances herself from other interpretations by an intense depiction of brutality. There are graphic scenes of animals being killed and a scene in which Heathcliff receives a lashing, where the sound of each strike is amplified to the point where you can almost feel the pain yourself. Although there are obvious omissions to the story, this roughness makes the film truer to the general tone of the book that was so shocking to readers when first published, as one American reviewer wrote ‘it is a compound of vulgar depravity and unnatural horrors...’. Clearly then Bronte did not mean to write a pretty Austin-type romance, so adaptations such as Peter Kominsky’s 1992 offering featuring a southern accents and a polished Hollywood cast, seem glaringly off beam in comparison.

It is notable that Arnold does not entertain the super-natural aspects that permeate Bronte’s original writing, but they are not at all missed. She favours instead subtle hints like the twig
tapping incessantly at the window in the opening scene and has Cathy’s ghost as more of a hallucination that flashes through the house towards the end.

*Wuthering Heights* is certainly not the saccharine story that some film adaptations would have you believe. This depiction however is so far removed from any sentimentality to the point of being unsettling – it’s certainly not a film you would watch for fun. It may be raw and coarse but the beauty of this film is in its honesty, which is at times shocking, captivating and even poignant.

The film’s greatest power though lies in the indulgent treatment of our senses and the flaunting display of the landscape, which just about eclipses the storyline. You leave feeling the cold in your toes, the wind in your ears and wishing you were in the countryside.

“’In the most extraordinary way, Arnold achieves a kind of pre-literary reality effect. Her film is not presented as another layer of interpretation, superimposed on a classic's frills and those of all the other remembered versions, but an attempt to create something that might have existed before the book, something on which the book might have been based, a raw semi-articulate series of events, later polished and refined as a literary gemstone.’”

*Peter Bradshaw, The Guardian*

In the spirit of this film, I want my illustrations to focus heavily on the landscapes, because although they appear to lack any incident, they are still effective in expressing tone and atmosphere. The more detailed images that are included should also act in the same way as Arnold’s selective dialogue – they should not reveal too much, but should be more like fragmented glimpses into the characters’ lives. This should engage the viewer by leaving their imagination to fill in the gaps, just like the film.

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Yet the question remains that if the writing is such a work of art in itself, why should it need illustrating at all? Despite Illustration for Literature being arguably the origin of the whole discipline, our language has become so much more refined and we have so many new forms of entertainment, that Literary Illustrations are no longer an essential part of our culture. Yet its legacy endures, as ‘with both illustrated and unillustrated editions of works of literature available, enough readers select the illustrated ones to encourage publishers to continue to issue them.’ (Hodnett, 1982). So Illustration must be adding substantial value to the readers’ experience. In order to create work that was capable of adding that value, I first needed to ascertain how exactly Illustrations can effectively compliment prose.

According to Edward Hodnett (1982), the primary function of an illustration for literature is to ‘realize’ significant aspects of the text, which is most commonly done through representation, interpretation and decoration to varying degrees.

The ‘Interpretation’ aspect is perhaps the most subjective element here and is what I consider to be the difference between simply an attractive design and a constructive illustration. Through thoughtful interpretation, an illustrator can give intangible emotions like fear for example reality. In this instance, rather than just drawing a scared person, they might transcend representational illustration by offering a picture of black crow – a symbol of fear. Or they might show a dark, stormy vista as in Hablot Browne’s frontispiece for *Bleak House*, which does more than just set the scene; it expresses the general trepidation that overwhelms the whole novel. (Sillars, 1995).

Some of the most engaging illustration makes ‘a parallel pictorial statement which can reinforce the author’s intent without being strictly faithful to its words’ (Hodnett 1982). Hodnett points to the example of Agnes Miller Parker’s drawings for *Essays in Russet*, where the author talks about the joys of talking a stick on a walk in the countryside. The obvious choice would be to
draw a man with a stick, but Parker instead chooses a close up of a bird and a rabbit in Ferns, keeping the man far in the distance. In this way she has extracted the whole essence of the essay and has ‘offered her version of what the author was writing about – the rich experience of life in the country’ (Hodnett 1982). These illustrators have managed to visually communicate the mood and tone of the whole book through their sensitive registration of the author’s intention – an approach, which I will try to adopt myself.

On the other hand simply representational images can be informative and in some cases can cover any details that the author has missed. For example, Dickens had a very prescriptive idea of what he wanted his readers to envisage and worked closely with his illustrators to ensure they understood accurately the settings and characters that he created (Hodnett, 1982). Furthermore, whilst the content of the illustration might be representational, the approach to shape and form might be more abstract and can influence the audience’s understanding. Of course they are also useful for placing emphasis on crucial scenes and through their beauty can provide extra entertainment. The decorative aspect is also instrumental in providing entertainment and adding luxury to a printed volume.

An illustrator’s moment of choice is another way of enhancing the reading experience. As well as highlighting pivotal scenes, the ‘moment’ of choice can be used to dramatic effect (Hodnett 1982). Boz’s work for Oliver Twist supplies a fine example of this; he manages to heighten the suspense of even Dickens’ writing by temporarily postponing a momentous event in the plot. He presents Fagin trapped on the roof moments away from potential death. ‘This illustration advances the narrative by restraining it, forcing us to contemplate what will happen next’ (Sillars 1995).

These are just a handful of the many ways that images can enhance the reading experience and help to justify the whole concept of illustration for Literature.

These ideas were taken into consideration as I pursued this assignment, which I think is relatively discernible in my finished illustrations…

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Throughout the story of *Wuthering Heights*, atmosphere is used to narrative and symbolic effect through the discourse between the famously tumultuous emotional environment and the physical environment of the blustery moors. As creation of atmosphere is clearly important to the author, I have paid it extra attention in my illustrations. I think this has effectively helped envelope the viewer deep into the story, as accomplished through the same method in Andrea Arnold’s film.

One of the ways I have done this is through the regular inclusion of elemental and natural elements to my compositions. For example, I have made extensive use of the moorland landscape. Indeed this body of work can be characterized by the sheer amount of pages devoted to the hills. This is intended as more than just scene setting however; it expresses their sense of isolation, the wild temperaments of the characters and of the novel as whole. Within this concept, I have occasionally tailored their content to the events of the plot, so for example when the narrator refers to a time when the central characters used to play all day on the moors, I have framed their silhouettes within a very decoratively patterned hill side that resembles embroidery to connote the serenity of that moment. Later on, black lines score through the sky like rain to imply the distress surrounding Heathcliffe’s departure. Although I could have given the scale a more dramatic treatment, I think the dominance of the wilderness is one of the most successful elements of this body of work. Not only does it create atmosphere, but the emptiness provides breathing space and is accommodating to the author’s weighty text. It also helps in visualising the theme of nature, so for a seemingly simple idea, these stripy hills can contribute a lot to the reader’s experience.
When appropriate I have taken what Hodnett would describe as an ‘interpretive’ approach (1982). At the death of Mr Earnshaw, I have reacted with the image of a dead rabbit. It is not the most obvious choice, but I think it encapsulates the notion of death whilst also giving the viewer an insight into the brutality of the characters’ lives and upholding the theme of nature.

In another case at Cathy’s death, I have used a bare bed frame not only as an image of her deathbed but to denote the emptiness her death bequeaths and cold turn the novel takes from this point. Sara Fanelli succinctly summarizes the logic in this;

“If the text is good its better to let the words describe and suggest the image directly to readers imagination, to offer instead a picture that shows a less obvious detail, or that gives an unexpected visual slant to the text” (Zeegan, 2005).

Reacting in a less predictable way like this has offered my audience a new level of understanding and sensitivity.

Equally though, there are also many occasions where I have been very literal as a means of placing emphasis on crucial developments in the plot. For example when the ghost’s hand crashes through Lockwood’s window, I have simply drawn a huge arm. Unimaginative though it may seem, it just didn’t seem appropriate to try anything too abstract here but have opted instead to amplify the drama through the sheer size of the arm, which might bring about the same shock experienced by the character in the scene. In this way, the illustration performs like a real arm, thus generating more entertainment and involvement for the viewer. A lot of my work is quite literal in this sense but I feel these straightforward representations impart honesty to the series. Furthermore, I feel no shame in making representational imagery, because as Varoom editor John O’ Reilly attests, it is ‘just a side effect of what illustration does, which is to give perspective’, and through my use of composition, form and colour, I genuinely believe this is what I am doing.

Even when my images are very literal, they are pared down and I have been consistently ambiguous, trying only to offer glimpses into the story line. For example when Heathcliffe returns, I portray him shadowed in darkness and with his face obscured. This bestows a mystery onto his persona and reflects the ambiguity surrounding his return. I think that the withholding of so much visual information here is another of the work’s strengths because it is more accommodating to reader’s sense of imagination.

Fritz Eichenberg’s dark and brooding wood engravings are brilliantly made and very suited to the tone of the novel with their sorrowful darkness. The expressions of his characters are brilliantly theatrical as are the swirling markings of the wind. They perfectly reflect the savagery within the novel, as he does not shy away from depicting the more dramatic scenes. However, he has been especially literal with his compositions. In the scene I described above for example he shows the most obvious composition of the ghost’s hand grasping at Lockwood, which gives too much away in my opinion. Whilst my treatment of this scene is also literal, I have tried to heighten suspense by utilizing the ‘drama of turning the page’. I depict the window in question in isolation on one page – small, black and intriguing, the eye is drawn to it creating a sense of anticipation. Then the moment you turn the page you are attacked by the hand, again it is almost part of a performance, which puts the reader at centre stage - a kind of involvement, which I believe would be valued by the audience.

Eichenberg’s highly theatrical approach to content is entirely at odds with Andrea Arnold’s, who is almost cryptic in comparison. As Peter Bradshaw of The Guardian says, through refusing to disclose a lot of information, she achieves ‘a kind of pre literary effect’, which lodges the story under the skin of the audience. I would say that my approach to content fits somewhere in the middle, to get the best of both worlds.

Most of the examples I have been referring to so far have been illustrators of the Victorian era, but contemporary illustrator Geoff Grandfield has also informed my approach. Renowned for
his work for Graham Greene and Raymond Chandler, it is clear to see how narrative is central to his practice. What I love about his work are the Film Noire visuals he references, which generate some show stopping uses of perspective, sinister silhouettes and a multitude of shady characters. Indeed his cinematic references attribute a shadowy mystery to the content of his work, which is somewhat literal, but like Arnold, he is selective with the amount of visual information he divulges, choosing often to hide people’s faces and making extensive use of silhouette. This is something I have tried to replicate in some of my drawings. The exclusion of these details sparks the curiosity of the viewer and builds a dark atmosphere.

His unconventional viewpoints are cinematic but are really involving for the viewer, as they instill a sense of voyeurism to the experience, which simultaneously distances and incorporates the audience. Again this is achieved through the selective visual information that his ‘camera angles’ afford; characters far in the distance, with their backs turned or whole scenes obscured by objects in the foreground.

I have also borrowed from his approach to presenting landscape. Again, he chooses to be very cinematic and you get a real sense of scale and space, especially when juxtaposed with the evocative silhouetted figures. When Cathy and Heathcliffe are on the moors, I have used this same treatment. The wide angles are refreshing amongst my other quite rigid drawings and the sense of space is calming.

I was lucky enough to be able to interview Geoff Grandfield in person, which gave me an invaluable insight into the practice of illustrating for literature;

Why do you prefer to illustrate for narratives?

I like the idea of contributing to the way people understand things. It’s like being an author, you are dramatising the world around you – you can politicise something, you can place emphasis on something and there is a huge aspect of entertainment. I like making that contribution - like making a record or writing a book. I’ve always found the narrative aspects of illustration more interesting than the decorative aspects, but I am a big fan of the decorative as well. But I’m certainly drawn to the darker narrative aspects of illustration.

What is about film noir that inspires you so much?

It’s that death and love aspect; a love affair that’s definitely going to go wrong, everyone is going to die, its all going to end up bad - I love the drama. Its like flinging yourself towards a cliff edge. Its wild, it has the best directors, musical scores and cinematographers, they were ahead of their time.

You have a very distinctive style of working. Do you ever feel restrained by this or want to try something completely different?

Not really, because I don’t think of it as a ‘style’. I think of it as just the way I make image. It doesn’t feel restrictive to me because I can pretty much do what I want with it, sometimes I like to think of myself as more of a film-maker, so I might be making a film about a piece of fiction and another day I might be making a documentary about Sunday football. In the visual treatment of those topics, there’s going to be some sort of visual continuity because that’s the way I envisage the world – that’s the way I look at things. But it will always be modified depending on the topic I’m tackling, so if I’m doing something for quite a positive social cause then I wouldn’t use something so harsh or aggressive. So effectively the means of that visualisation will always be modified depending on the content – it should be content driven. I understand where you are coming from with that question though, because you might think how lucky they are that they have a style (or how unlucky they are), but I do know people who have developed ‘a style’ and then found it frustrating because clients always want their work to look like that. I just think it’s a bit unnecessary. It is the way the market will commission, it is the way the market will understand a particular individual but it doesn’t have
to be straightjacket. It should have life in it, it shouldn't be dead, you shouldn't have to think 'oh yes I'll always draw people like that', it should be driven by content and it should be alive, so as such it isn't restrictive.

How has your approach changed in recent years?

I like to think I have become more direct and simpler. I've explored a lot of silhouette, which is useful if you want to show a generic type and as such you don't want to specify their age or hair colour, but it can become default. Then of course I do think there is a strong place for character and for identifiable character within visual communication. The way I've drawn people has certainly changed – because illustration is always about looking - some people have a great eye for character, others have to teach themselves. The more you see the more you understand and I understand more now with age about people – types, the way they express themselves with clothing and things like that.

It was very inspiring to hear someone talk so enthusiastically about their work and especially what drives them to create it. I can certainly identify with his desire to ‘dramatise the world around you’, I would even go so far as to identify this as the core of my whole practice.

Victorian illustrators have always struck a chord with me too. In a similar way that Grandfield is inspired by Film Noir, George Cruikshank was hugely influenced by theatre – the cinema of his day. Without the invention of the film camera, his viewpoints are conventionally square-on, but he opts instead to let the expressions of his characters create the drama, much like stage actors. This love of drama is something that I have in common with these two illustrators and have been keen to utilise in these illustrations.

This body of work can be characterised by its ominous black lines. These have grown naturally out of my instinctive preference for drawing, which is the medium that I have found to be the most effective in communicating such expressive content. The heavy weighting grew out of consideration of the gloomy narrative content, and indeed I think it communicates the dour tone of the novel well; at times they resemble wrought iron, the monochrome is cold, the angles are rigid and the heavy weighting is oppressive. The cumulative effect of this page after page creates a very ominous impression for its audience.

The line thickness changes in some instances to communicate the tone of a particular scene. For example, when the text refers to the death and funeral of Mr Earnshaw, the line is incredibly thick to denote the grave nature of the scene and again when Cathy unhappily marries Linton a thicker line is employed. In another instance when Cathy secretly visits Heathcliffe, the line is much thinner and graceful to evoke the poignancy of the moment. These changes are subtle but I do think the reader would subconsciously pick up on them, thus enhancing their understanding.

The drawings are simple to produce; I just use Indian ink and a paintbrush. This feels the most fitting for the design of my literary illustrations because as Saul Steinberg says of his use of ink, ‘it is a form of writing’ that ‘makes up its own syntax as it goes along’ (O’Reilly, 2011). I then remove the background and flatten the colour using the computer. I don’t feel this cheapens the illustrations because I believe their strongest value to be in how imaginatively they interpret the text, as Hodnett asserts - ‘the reader usually does not know or care how an illustration is made’ (1982). Then again, other illustrators have assumed that these drawings are linocuts and indeed I have been heavily influenced by the work of Edward Bawden. However, it is not his process of lino cutting that attracts me; it is the chunky shapes that it dictates and his ability to ‘condense and simplify but still express all the essential quality of his subject in an apparently ‘simple’ designs’ (McLean, 1978). This is a quality that the restrictions of the lino would impose, but which I simply admire as an illustrative device. So it is not surprising then,
that the forms found in German Expressionist Woodcuts, as well as the more discernable influences of Aubrey Beardsley and the bookwork of Eric Gill have also inspired me.

Within these drawings I have referenced the shapes of the stone architecture found in Yorkshire at that time. This is not just decoration; they work as indexical signs of that era, which help build a visual picture of the past in the viewer’s imagination. These solid man-made shapes lack human warmth and so add to realisation of the story’s callous nature. The significance of windows and doors within the story is also reflected in this architectural referencing. You can see how I have framed many of the illustrations like windows. This goes some way in making explicit to the audience the physical and metaphorical boundaries that confront the protagonists.

The drawings have been curated into a book with the quotes that best summarise the passages they would illustrate. Although they would ideally sit within the pages of the full novel, I think this book functions as a valid context in and of itself. It is the sort of thing that would be attractive to collectors or people who just love this classic story. Magazines that feature stories and niche publishing houses like ‘The Folio Society’ could also make use of this body of work. Considering the simplicity of these images, they might work equally well on screen and would be a welcome touch to otherwise cold eBooks, they might even lend themselves well to animation.

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In order to create illustrations that were capable of benefiting an already perfect text, I had to be as sensitive as possible to the author’s intentions and to register all the relevant themes and messages from within the writing that needed communicating. To do this I have had to make careful decisions about my ‘moments of choice’, about literal and none literal imagery and about form, lines and shape. These considerations have directed my approach in such a way that the illustration in its current form does not look contrived, as it is just a natural product of all these concerns. As I had intended, I think this contemporary graphic offers a fresh interpretation of a traditional text but still recalls its olden day setting and I think the bleak character of the novel has been adequately mirrored with equally bleak illustrations.

It is by no means a perfect body of work, the illustrations need developing and refining and I would like to experiment more with scale and perspective. However, for all the above reasons, I do think they perform their function of contributing further entertainment and engagement to my audience’s experience of reading the book.

Just like the Wuthering Heights book, the Shakespeare posters heavily reference the vernacular architecture of the time and therein lies their main power; the chunky lines, the monochrome and the crooked, angular shapes all make for a strong visual appropriate to the drama of Shakespeare’s words. The use of this pattern anchors the message of the posters in the Elizabethan era, which is almost synonymous with Shakespeare. It also echoes the architectural style of his Globe Theatre, which I think has successfully communicated a recognisable Shakespearean identity. However I am pleased to say that when given this graphic treatment, these ‘old world’ elements appear contemporary and rather whimsical, which should hopefully encourage a new audience and expel the stuffiness that I wanted to avoid.

I have differentiated the posters from each other with a small splash of colour, each in their own specific place to lift the composition. The connotations of each colour impart an extra layer of interpretation. For example Othello’s emerald green eyes might catch the attention of a viewer, who on reading the quote can make the necessary associations to the notion of jealousy – ‘the green eyed monster’. In a less subtle example with Macbeth, the point of the dagger is rendered red to first of all catch attention and then to depict the play’s murderous events. This should intrigue new audiences whilst simultaneously entertaining the intellect of seasoned Shakespeare fans.
To communicate his range of work, each poster depicts a different play. I have chosen to present each by an object that is most representative of their plot. This conveys the necessary information sharply and concisely but should again generate an alluring sense of drama through the extraordinary nature of the objects. The emphasis is on theatre with these posters and in accordance with this idea I have put the object centre stage on an empty background to create drama through contrast.

I wanted to showcase Shakespeare’s genius, so I felt it necessary to include quotes from his work. In the same vein as the objects, the quotes are among the most memorable and are chosen to best encapsulate the spirit of each play, again offering the audience a stimulating insight into Shakespeare’s work. To involve the viewer into the theatre of the event, I have not quoted full lines – just the beginning, allowing for the viewer to finish them off themselves. This is quite possible in most cases, as the lines are so famous that you don’t need to be an expert on Shakespeare to know what comes next … ‘is this a dagger which I see before me… handle towards my hand?’, ‘Two households, both alike in dignity… in fair Verona where we lay our scene’ and so on.

The font is hand rendered by myself – a hybrid of the chapbook style and Garamond, the signature font of the Elizabethan era. I am pleased with the historical aesthetic that this combination embodies, especially the blotchiness of the type, which works well against the severity of the black lines in the images. The inky appearance also recalls the quill and ink that Shakespeare would have used to write. These elements help create the sense of history and theatre that I think needs expressing to engage the audience.

The only materials used here are once again a paintbrush and ink, which is then distressed digitally to add texture. Because the designs are rendered so plainly, you would think that they might be done just as well in illustrator. However, I think there is a detectable hand drawn quality in them, which is vital to their Elizabethan character. I don’t think the smooth vectors of Illustrator could replicate this.

During this project, I have been referencing the retro illustration from the 1950s, especially Jerome Snyder whose work I have fallen in love with. You can clearly perceive how his use of line and blocky shapes has influenced my approach. You can also draw comparisons with the geometry of my work and that of illustrators Jim Flora and Stig Lindberg. I think using the quirky illustrations of the 50s as a touchstone has helped instill a less serious tone to the message and as I had wished removes it from Shakespeare’s apparent stuffy reputation.

Posters like this would work best in educational institutions like schools or Universities but I think would function well elsewhere too, together or in isolation. In my opinion the posters fulfill their brief – they are attractive and eye-catching and they have a shared identity whilst remaining individual. They communicate dramatically and they reflect Elizabethan London – the time and place that is synonymous with his name. Through the interplay between text and image, they offer involvement for the audience rather than a bombardment of detailed information. Ultimately I think they offer a good taste of Shakespeare’s work and the whole premise behind the festival. However I would like to revisit the Othello and the King Lear posters, which I feel need more rhythm in the patterning.

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Throughout this year I have had to remain conscious of how my practice would function in a professional setting if I am to survive as a freelance illustrator when I leave University. Should I choose to go down that route, I may want to enlist the help of an agent to help me find work. Though in its current shape, my practice has a long way to go to get to agency standard, there are a number of measures I can take to improve my chances of getting to that point.
First and foremost is the possession of a good portfolio, both real and online. Within that portfolio they want to see that your work is commissionable. What they mean here is that you should have a strong personal 'style' so they can show clients what it is they might be getting. Although this is the way the market commissions nowadays, if you have a strong 'style' it should be one that is always evolving as Geoff Grandfield attested in our interview. So although the question of style should be a consideration, it should not have to inhibit your artistic development. In this way, the approach I adopted to visually interpret texts has formed what may appear to be a style, but it doesn’t mean I will draw things like that forever. It was appropriate to those applications but that doesn’t mean it will be for everything else.

Agencies are looking for people who don’t follow trends or imitate others. This is something I have been aware of at every stage of the creative process, but sometimes it is easier said than done. I think the way to avoid this is to expose yourself to as many different types of illustration and art as possible - contemporary, ancient, foreign, British, every kind of genre there is to garner a wide creative vocabulary. Indeed, whilst my most discernable influences would be Jerome Snyder and perhaps Aubrey Beardsley, there is vast list of practitioners and movements that have informed the work in my portfolio – Sanna Annuka, Charles Rennie Mackintosh, Joe McLaren, David Gentleman, The Bayeux Tapestry, Ukrainian folk art, illuminated manuscripts – the list goes on.

An agency will also want to see that your work can function commercially. Therefore, I have ensured that my illustrations all have a specific purpose and context by creating a book and posters. However, I think that many of the drawings could work equally well outside of the specific context I have assigned to them here. For example, the designs on the posters would make interesting stamps, theatre flyers or even book jackets and the Wuthering Heights illustrations would make interesting animations, decorative prints or work well within a magazine.

As you can see, keeping abreast of considerations like this has dictated a lot of the decisions I make about my practice, as do the current debates and issues surfacing in the industry.

During my interview with Geoff Grandfield he explained that his preference for narrative illustration stemmed from the privilege of being able to contribute in his own way to an experience that can effect and move an audience, like an actor contributes to a play or a musician a song. I feel he articulated here exactly what has driven me to pursue my Illustrations - the desire to contribute to someone’s enjoyment of a story. However, some might argue that illustration as a discipline should be focusing its abilities on a more worthy cause, that this kind of illustration is a frivolous waste of its communicative potential. Lawrence Zeegan writing for Creative Review recently stated that

“Illustration has become entrenched in navel-gazing and self-authorship…Obsessed with its own craft, it has withdrawn from society’s big debates to focus on the chit-chat of inner sanctum nothingness. It’s time for the profession to stop pleasing itself and engage with the world outside.” (Zeegan, 2012)

His accompanying article reads more like a diatribe against contemporary illustration, listing the industry’s apparent inability to ‘engage with the world outside’ and preference for ‘style over content’ as his main grievances.

But his accusations are unfair. Whilst I think I understand where he is coming from, he is making a sweeping generalisation and therefore an inaccurate judgment.

Geoff Grandfield was equally perplexed when I asked him about the matter in our interview;
'It's absolute nonsense; it comes from a certain individual (I know him) whose worldview is completely coloured by what he's been interested in. He's been interested in one aspect of the industry which is geared around style and fashion, he's always wanted to know what's new, what's current and he's not ever really been interested in 90% of the industry which is about doing a job – about communicating, weather its children’s books, narrating, giving information or even propaganda. Illustration is much much broader than a tiny group of people working out of Shoreditch, its just not about that. Unfortunately he is a victim of his own preoccupations.'

As Geoff Grandfield attests, it certainly would seem the author is ‘a victim of his own preoccupations’. His judgement that Illustration has become a matter of ‘style over content, form over function’, is mainly directed towards the work exhibited at the Pick Me Up graphic arts fair at Somerset house. Yet this small exhibition, though growing in terms of its public profile, represents only a tiny proportion of the emerging industry. As Zeegan himself puts it, Pick Me Up exhibits what is ‘cool, new and exciting’ in illustration but this by no means translates as the best. It might just mean that it is the kind of work popular with London’s lucrative ‘indie’ market. Indeed the show is billed as Pick Me Up, graphic arts fair, and as such you could argue that the content of their work is entirely subjective and therefore impervious to Zeegan’s criticisms.

So from the outset the validity of his argument seems shaky. Just as you couldn’t judge the state of the music industry solely by watching MTV, you cannot pass judgment on the state of illustration based on this tiny, albeit popular sector of the industry.

On the other hand, his altruistic intentions are admirable and it would be great to see a few more topical issues in illustration. Nor can I argue that there is not a lot of self-indulgent work in circulation at the moment, which might be beautifully made but is vapid in terms of content. Take for example comic artist Gemma Correll’s recent offering What I Wore Today; one hundred and twelve case bound pages that invite you to journal what you wear each day, not exactly stimulating stuff.

However there are also equal amounts of thought provoking and stimulating illustration emerging. A browse through the AOI’s images annual for 2011 yields countless examples of practitioners tackling what Zeegan might esteem as ‘big debates’ and ‘commenting on the here and now’ (Zeegan, 2012). Take for example Sam Findley’s comment on organic pig farming, Daniel Puddles’ topical illustrations for the Guardian or Ellie Wintram’s treatment of the Israel/West Bank divide. And of course in between all these sit examples of the many other ways that contemporary illustration is making an input to society, such as illustration of children’s books, educational textbooks and social awareness campaigns. Maybe these aren’t the headline grabbing issues that Zeegan envisages but they provide a very necessary service to their audience and could not be further away from ‘inner-sanctum nothingness’ (Zeegan, 2012). Again, if Zeegan is not seeing any of this, then it is probably because he is looking in the wrong place. Instead, I would point him in the direction of institutions like The House Of Illustration, which covers a very broad spectrum of the industry rather than the blinkered view an exhibition like Pick Me Up could provide.

Though if the industry is awash with people drawing whatever they might please, there must be a reason for this. Contemporary illustrator Jay Cover voices the general tone of comments left on the Creative Review website, in saying that as illustrators they would love to be applying their skills to the contribution of social development, yet their experience of the market has not proved that ‘this kind of practice is sustainable and supported by anyone’ (2012). Many go further in highlighting the responsibility of the art directors to use illustrators to their full potential. Whilst I wouldn’t want to just pass the blame on, this is a fair and significant point to bear in mind. As a remedy to the author’s critique, Cover then offers a possible remedy through the suggestion of an ‘event with an alternative financial structure. Supportive of
illustrators, allowing them to express their personal perspective on social issues, rather than them having to take these opportunities to make an extra bit of cash.’ (2012). This is a great idea and if something like this were to get off the ground then it might go some way in mending the reputation of industry in the eyes of skeptics like Zeegan.

It also seems that illustration has been unfairly singled out as the sole offender in his allegations. Any creative practice can be used as a comment on social issues just as any creative practice no doubt has its own fair share of ‘chit chat’ and ‘tittle tattle’. (Zeegan, 2012)

He holds the current profusion of craft driven aesthetics in contempt, worrying that ‘design doing’ has taken over ‘design thinking’. But I think he can rest assured that this is most likely just a trend, a natural backlash after years of vector based work, and inevitably trends will pass. Personally I don’t have any problem with illustrators becoming reacquainted with what I see as legitimate tools of their trade and it is important to remember as Paul Burgess says that ‘the computer is only a tool, use it. Don’t let it use you’ (Burgess 2010). Furthermore it seems unquestionable in illustration that the style should grow in answer to the content but if that content should require a handmade aesthetic to better communicate its message then so be it. Indeed, that is partly why it is so prevalent at the moment, because in a time of corporate loathing, the wholesome connotations of work like this is so coveted by businesses keen to assert themselves as friendly, ethical and even innocent.

He also bemoans the illustration community for its inability ‘peer over the fence and see the world outside its own garden’ (2012) with reference to its relative passivity on being passed over for the 2012 Olympic posters, which instead was awarded to fine artists. This would really have been an exciting opportunity for illustrators and I can’t pretend to know why there wasn’t a more substantial protest. On the other hand, through my research I have seen evidence of illustrators reacting to the Olympics on their own accord like Freddy Boo and Andy Robert Davies. Furthermore, according to Creative Review’s sources, illustration’s apparent absence from the games has ‘not been for a lack of trying’ and that ‘numerous projects involving leading designers and illustrators were kyboshed by the client in favour of banal alternatives’ (Burgoyne, 2011). Zeegan also ignores the huge success of the promotional posters for the Para Olympics that feature some brilliant work of illustrator HelloVon. Clearly then the industry is engaging with the world outside, but again hesitant clients seem partly to blame for its lack of opportunities.

He also expresses his concern that self-authorship and people drawing what they please has shrunk illustration’s audience to the point that it is compromised mainly of other illustrators.

Yes, people draw what they want to, I am guilty of that myself. However I would argue that whilst it shouldn’t be the focus of one’s practise it can and should be part of it. Making work for yourself is surely part of the learning process; it lets you explore your own strengths and weaknesses in your own time on your own terms. As essentially a pencil for hire, illustrators will always be working to the dictation of their client so there will inevitably be creative aspirations that we have to pursue in independently. This kind of work, free of the necessity for clients, reputation or brief is feasible for anyone, which is probably why it has proliferated on the free web.

Moreover, with such a saturated market and so little investment, illustrators need to distinguish themselves amongst their peers. With ‘style’ being largely the way that art directors will commission, I see no harm in practitioners honing their skills through self-authorship or drawing to suit their own desires.

You could argue that rather than shrinking the audience, that actually self-initiated projects are attracting new consumers to illustration. For example high street chains such as Paperchase and Urban Outfitters pay hand over fist for the type of independently published and quirky illustrations that adorn their products. Whilst this may be as far away from the ‘big debates of
our society’ as you can get, it is at least promoting the illustration industry into the subconscious of a buying public. Zeegan also looks to business as a means of reinvigorating the industry but encourages his readers to think big, making a shining example of Javier Mariscal who’s international clients include hotel chains, financial institutions, banks, bars and restaurants. But I feel like he is preaching to the choir here, surely given the chance, most illustrators would love to be able to claim such a huge array of high profile commissioned work, if only there were less competition and more willing clients.

Zeegan closes by harking back to the good old days of studios like Pushpin and questions why existing examples of ‘good practise’ such as Nobrow can’t follow their model and branch out beyond the world of niche publishing. Though not to deny the merit of their publications, which provide entertainment for many people, I would agree, that it would be great to see such collectives apply their talent to new ventures. Again, surely this is the kind of practice that lots of illustrators aspire to. However, the difficulty is, that getting to that point takes a lot of time and self-promotion, of which self-authorship and the Zines that Zeegan so scorns are an inevitable product. After all it was the bi monthly publication The PushPin Graphic that first helped establish Pushpin Studios in the first place – everyone has to start somewhere.

Ultimately, I can understand how Lawrence Zeegan might have become a bit disenchanted with contemporary illustration. However, the situation isn’t as dire as he makes out. If he looked beyond the Blogosphere and Pick Me Up, or indeed if he himself took the trouble to ‘peer over the fence’ at the world outside his own garden, he might get a truer more dynamic picture of the industry. From the examples I have shown, it is clear to see as well, that contemporary illustration is representing the ‘Big debates of our society’. However, it could stand to work harder at this, but the same goes for all sectors of the creative arts. The problem remains though that many illustrators are struggling to stay afloat and paid commissions that call for this kind of work are few and far between. Maybe as Zeegan says we should take a leaf out of Mariscal’s book and conduct our business with more assertiveness, instead of waiting for clients to come to us, maybe we should go to them.

Lastly I would also be weary of condemning only serious work to be worthwhile, because illustration that entertains has its own role to play in our society, even if its just a pretty picture that makes you smile.

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In terms of my own practice I can’t really claim to be tackling any of the ‘hot topics’, but through my Shakespeare Posters and Wuthering Heights illustrations, I would like to think I am at least promoting British literature in some way. I would grant myself the excuse of being in the very nascent stages of my career, still finding my feet and still learning the basics, but with every intention of making work with a strong social conscience in the future.

One of the difficulties of dealing with such famous texts is that you will never please everyone. I’m sure there would be hoards of loyal Brontë and Shakespeare fans that would hate my work, for many it may be just too naive and others would dislike the modern graphic. Realistically, I think neither the Shakespeare nor Brontë illustrations could sit beside the authors’ work at an industry standard. They communicate the ideas I has wanted to but aesthetically they need a huge amount of polishing and development if they are to match the skill of the writers. A lot of them could stand finer detail in places and would benefit from a greater variety of line thicknesses. Despite my earlier comments about lino printing, they might well benefit from being printed as linocuts to give them more gravitas. One of the great weaknesses of my practice is its speed. Although I was working incredibly hard, it took me a while to discover my preferred approach, so I haven’t been able to do nearly as much as I would have liked. Having said this, I have learnt so much about my own manner of working that future undertakings should be quicker getting off the ground.
Overall though, I think I have developed an approach to working that produces the dramatic impact I have desired, which also reflects the theatre of its narrative content. Its power lies mainly in the striking impression made by the boldness of the design and the ability of the patterns to recall the setting of their particular narratives. I have enjoyed the simplicity of using ink and a brush, which has allowed me the flexibility of exploring the communicative impact of the different lines I create. My illustrations may still be in need of further development and refinement, but as an exercise in learning the art of illustration for literature, the completion of these two projects has been indispensable. In the future, I would like to be using more colour and would like to branch out into the craft of printmaking. I also intend to extend my subject matter past fiction to none-fiction and editorial. But my curiosity for stories will always stay with me, continuing to inspire me to work and to dramatise the world around me through the medium of illustration.
Bibliography


Names of countries and places are used to mean objects connected with them: china = porcelain; Madeira = wine, astrakhan = fur. Such cases of metonymy are dealt with in Lexicology. Staying within the boundaries of the same domain, metonymy involves transpositions between associated concepts and this commonly results in transfer between the part and the whole, a producer and the produced, an institution and its location and so on. Metonymy in which the part stands for the whole is a trope known as synecdoche. Thus this device consists in expressing the meaning of a word, phrase, etc., by many or several words instead of by few or one; a roundabout/indirect way of speaking, circumlocution.