

# NARRATIVE ROLE OF ILLUSTRATION IN CONCEPT ALBUMS: ANALYSING 'CRY BABY', 'ART ANGELS', AND 'CONSOLATION'

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*This study complies with research and publication ethics.*

## Abstract

This study investigates how illustrations in concept albums by Melanie Martinez, Grimes, and Pomme narratively interact with lyrics. Examining *Cry Baby* (2015), *Art Angels* (2015), and *Consolation* (2022), the research analyses how dedicated illustrations for each song reinforce, complicate, or extend their emotional and symbolic content. Moving beyond music videos, the study argues that illustrations actively shape focalisation, tone, and symbolic coherence within track-image pairings, contributing significantly to literature of storytelling in contemporary music and warranting a reevaluation of visual narratives in popular culture..

**Keywords:** music album, visual storytelling, narrative, intermediality, illustration.

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# İLLÜSTRASYONUN KONSEPT ALBÜMLERDEKİ ANLATI ROLÜ: 'CRY BABY', 'ART ANGELS' VE 'CONSOLATION' ANALİZİ

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*Bu çalışma araştırma ve yayın etiğine uygun olarak gerçekleştirilmiştir.*

## Öz

Bu çalışma, Melanie Martinez, Grimes ve Pomme'un konsept albümlerindeki illüstrasyonların şarkı sözleriyle nasıl anlatısal olarak etkileşime girdiğini araştırmak amacıyla gerçekleştirilmiştir. Çalışma sürecinde *Cry Baby* (2015), *Art Angels* (2015) ve *Consolation* (2022) incelenmiş, her şarkı için ayrılmış illüstrasyonların duygusal ve sembolik içeriklerini nasıl güçlendirdiği, karmaşıktırdığı veya genişlettiği analiz edilmiştir. Müzik videolarının ötesine geçen çalışma, illüstrasyonların parça-görüntü eşleşmeleri içinde odaklanmayı, tonu ve sembolik tutarlılığı aktif olarak şekillendirdiğini, çağdaş müzikte hikâye anlatımı literatürüne önemli ölçüde katkıda bulunduğunu ve popüler kültürdeki görsel anlatıların yeniden değerlendirilmesini gerektirdiğini savunmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** müzik albümü, görsel hikaye anlatımı, anlatı, ortamlararasılık, illüstrasyon.

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## Introduction

In contemporary music, the relationship between sound and image has become increasingly layered and narratively charged. Music is no longer a purely auditory medium but is shaped by visual elements that influence how it is interpreted, remembered, and felt (Chion, 1994, pp. 5-7; Cook, 1998, pp. 9-12). While significant academic focus has been given to dynamic formats like music videos and stage performance (Buhler et al., 2010, pp. 215-218), comparatively little attention has been paid to static media -especially illustration- as a narrative device within album storytelling. This research investigates the role of illustration as a narrative device in concept and theme-based music albums. In works where each track is paired with a dedicated image, illustrations extend beyond decoration to visualise emotional tone, symbolic subtext, or the song's narrative world-creating a layered interplay between music, text, and image (Mitchell, 1994, pp. 5-11; Groensteen, 2007, pp. 13-16). This produces a multimodal structure in which illustration deepens storytelling and enhances emotional and interpretive engagement (Wolf, 2005, pp. 253-254). A concept album is typically defined as a collection of songs unified by a central theme, character arc, or philosophical idea, where each track contributes to a broader artistic vision (Tagg, 2012, p. 405). Examples of this phenomenon include *The Wall* (Pink Floyd, 1979), *Ziggy Stardust* (David Bowie, 1972), *Lemonade* (Beyoncé, 2016), *The ArchAndroid* (Janelle Monáe, 2010), and *Blonde* (Frank Ocean, 2016), all of which blend personal narrative with broader cultural commentary. What sets the albums in this study apart is their intentional pairing of each song with an illustration that reflects its emotional or symbolic tone. This creates a visual rhythm that parallels the album's narrative arc, positioning the still image as a space for resonance and reflection (Groensteen, 2007, pp. 118-120; Mitchell, 1994, p. 25). In the end asking how illustration operates as a visual storytelling medium in concept and theme-based music albums is the goal of this study. Using a narratological approach grounded in structural and cognitive theory (Herman, 2004, pp. 15-20), it treats each song-image pair as a narrative unit, analysing focalisation, emotional arc, symbolism, and temporal flow (Culler, 2001, pp. 6-8; Herman, 2004, p. 128). This approach highlights illustration as an active force in shaping narrative and emotional tone-constructing identity, setting, and story (Mitchell, 1994, p. 35; Cook, 1998, p. 39). Rather than passively reflecting music, illustrations extend a track's meaning visually, inviting interpretation through both reading and seeing. This framework treats illustrated concept albums as multimodal storytelling systems, where sound, text, and image converge into cohesive experiences (Wolf, 2005, pp. 254-255). The study contributes to narratology, musicology, and visual culture literature by offering new insights into narrative construction in contemporary music. This approach also repositions the listener as an active interpreter. Static illustrations invite reflection and personal association, transforming image into a dialogic space between artist and audience (Tagg, 2012, pp. 88-91). Research does not position illustration as central to all concept albums, but argues that when integrated with track structures, it enables a distinct

narrative cohesion (Chion, 1994, p. 20). Such albums that blur visual and sonic storytelling, suggesting a new paradigm for narrative in contemporary music. What follows is a methodological outline and three analytical chapters, each centered on an illustrated concept album. These case studies examine the narrative interplay between track and image, culminating in a comparative discussion. The study highlights the narrative role of static illustrations and proposes a cross-disciplinary framework for their analysis.

### **Key Concepts and Definitions**

Focalisation; the narrative encoding of 'who sees?' and 'from where?'. Genette's typology of zero, internal and external focalisation (1980, pp. 186-211) is followed here, with Bal's clarification that focalisation governs not only viewpoint but emotional colouring (2009, pp. 119-121). Symbolic layering; Barthes shows how visual motifs accrue second-order meanings through repetition and association (1977, pp. 36-50). In an album sequence, a recurring icon, palette or spatial trope gathers interpretive weight from track to track. Emotional diegesis; adapting Ryan's notion of 'storyworld atmosphere' (2004, pp. 13-17), this term refers to the affective tone projected by colour, texture and negative space. Palette, gaze and spatial hierarchy are described with Kress and van Leeuwen's grammar of visual design (2006, pp. 160-199), allowing emotional cues to be discussed consistently. Stating these definitions up front supplies the critical vocabulary used throughout the analyses and grounds the argument in established narratological and visual-semiotic scholarship.

### **Methodology**

Methodologically, research examines how static illustrations in concept albums contribute to narrative meaning, drawing from structuralist and post-classical narratology to outline the theoretical framework guiding the analyses. Narrative is broadly understood as a structured sequence of events involving characters within a temporal and causal order (Bal, 2009, pp. 5-8). Classical distinctions such as story, discourse, and narrative voice (Genette, 1983, pp. 25-34) help frame how events are presented, while Ryan's (2004, pp. 7-11) work expands narrative theory to multimodal contexts like music and illustration. When aligned with a track (i.e. its lyrics), illustrations function as carriers of narrative meaning. Herman (2009, pp. 85-92) views narrative comprehension as a cognitive process of constructing stories from fragmented or multimodal cues. In concept albums, images and lyrics form an intermedial narrative ensemble (Wolf, 2003, pp. 18-20), where illustrations contribute to the diegesis rather than merely reflecting lyrical content. To analyze these dynamics, this study draws on Mitchell's (1994, pp. 57-82) concept of the 'pictorial turn,' which emphasizes visual media as active agents in meaning-making.

Applied to music albums, illustrations are treated as narrative sites in their own right-conveying symbolism, sequencing, and tone that participate directly in storytelling. Groensteen's (2007, pp. 34-38) concept of iconic solidarity-how visual elements relate within a sequence- offers a useful lens for examining narrative cohesion in non-verbal frames. Though rooted in comics theory, it applies to album illustrations that build continuity without text. Likewise, Kafalenos (2006, pp. 155-162) provides a framework for analysing how discrete elements like image or lyric drive narrative transformation over time. Together, these theories form a methodology that treats each track-illustration pairing as part of a cohesive visual-musical narrative. This interdisciplinary lens enables analysis of how narrative meaning emerges, shifts, or is reinforced across static imagery associated with lyrics. The analysis follows a qualitative, close-reading lens that fuses multimodal narratology with visual semiotics. For every track-illustration pair I (a) outline the lyrical situation, (b) describe salient visual features -palette, gaze, spatial hierarchy and iconography- using Kress and van Leeuwen's grammar of visual design (2006, pp. 40-73; 160-199), and (c) relate the two through four recurrent concepts: focalisation (Genette, 1980, pp. 186-211), symbolic layering (Mitchell, 1994, pp. 57-82), emotional diegesis (Ryan, 2004, pp. 13-17) and iconic solidarity (Groensteen, 2007, pp. 18-23, 146-149). Naming these concepts up front supplies a shared critical vocabulary; applying them consistently keeps each reading analytical rather than impressionistic, while still preserving the richness of qualitative interpretation. To maintain consistency, the study applies a uniform structure that examines each track-illustration pairing through lyrical narrative cues, visual composition and symbolism, and their interrelations. Each case is presented as a brief narrative interpretation. This method enables comparisons across albums with varied artistic aims, languages (English and French), genres, and illustrative styles. It allows for a nuanced understanding of how illustrations contribute to, or even construct, narrative meaning in concept-driven music.

## Sampling

The sample includes three concept albums -*Cry Baby* (Melanie Martinez, 2015), *Art Angels* (Grimes, 2015), and *Consolation* (Pomme, 2022)- selected for their cohesive thematic and visual narratives. In each, illustrations actively complement or expand the musical and lyrical content, making them ideal case studies for examining how static imagery contributes to narrative meaning in music. This study adopts purposive, maximum-variation sampling to assemble a heterogeneous corpus (Patton, 2015, pp. 264-270). The aim is to keep one constant -an official illustration for every track- while maximising variation in genre, visual idiom, and market context, so that claims about visual-narrative function remain robust across stylistic differences. The corpus was delimited through a four-step sieve applied to a preliminary list of forty contemporary concept albums. First, each album had to provide an official illustration (artist- or label-sanctioned) for every track, ensuring a one-to-one image-song pairing

suitable for narratological comparison. Second, to test whether the theoretical claims travel across musical styles, the final set had to span at least three distinct genres; *Cry Baby* (alternative pop), *Art Angels* (art-electro pop), and *Consolation* (French indie-folk/chanson) meet this requirement. Third, the albums needed visibly divergent illustrative idioms -pastel grotesque naïveté, hyper-saturated manga-inflected collage, and water-colour minimalism- so that formal contrasts, not similarities, would illuminate how visual rhetoric shapes narrative perception. Finally, at least one artist had to operate outside the Anglo-American market to attenuate cultural bias; Pomme’s French-language work fulfils this criterion. These filters produced a balanced triad that is small enough for close reading yet heterogeneous enough for meaningful comparison. Such deliberately contrasting cases seek analytical generalisation rather than statistical inference (Seawright & Gerring, 2008).

## Results

The analysis indicates that illustrations in concept albums function as narrative devices that shape and extend the meaning of the music (*Table 1*). Across all three albums, illustrations are used not only to echo lyrical themes but to offer new focal points, suggest emotional undertones, and symbolically condense entire arcs of character or concept. While stylistically distinct, each album establishes a visual rhythm that parallels and sometimes subverts its sonic trajectory, showing that static imagery can actively participate in the narrative structure of music albums.

*Table 1. Summary of core findings and future research directions*

| Focus               | Key insight                                                                                                         | Next step                                                    |
|---------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| Illustration’s role | Static images shape —rather than decorate— album narratives through focalisation & symbolism.                       | Test listener reception of image-driven storytelling.        |
| Style diversity     | Grotesque pastel, post-human collage, and watercolor minimalism show multiple visual idioms that can narrate music. | Compare additional genres / cultures to map stylistic range. |
| Method contribution | A three-step qualitative close-reading lens works across 43 track-image pairs.                                      | Adapt the lens to animated or interactive album visuals.     |

In *Cry Baby*, the grotesque-naïve, storybook-like illustrations adopt a pastel-colored, dollhouse aesthetic that visually masks -and narratively heightens- the album’s dark themes of trauma, alienation, and emotional excess. *Art Angels*, by contrast, utilises bold, hyper-saturated, anime-inflected visuals

that mirror the album's sonic maximalism and genre hybridity, emphasising themes of transformation, power, and identity through visual exaggeration. Finally, *Consolation* employs soft, watercolor-based illustrations with sketchy textures and limited palettes, aligning with the album's introspective tone and lyrical vulnerability. These stylistic choices are not incidental; they act as semiotic codes that frame the listener's interpretive engagement, guiding emotional resonance and narrative coherence through visual atmosphere.

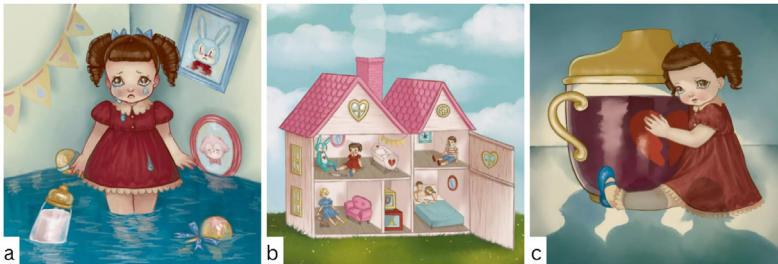
## Discussion

The illustrations examined in this study are approached as narrative agents embedded within the multimodal structure of each album. Drawing on a narratological framework, the research applies close reading to each track-illustration pairing, analysing how meaning arises through their interplay. As Ryan (2004) notes, narratives can emerge through images when representational coherence and progression are present. Accordingly, each pair is treated as a narrative unit where visual and verbal storytelling co-construct meaning.

### 'Cry Baby'

Melanie Martinez's *Cry Baby* (2015) constructs a surreal, pastel-hued universe in which an emotionally volatile heroine negotiates trauma, intimacy, and self-definition. Chloé Tersigni's fourteen illustrations extend the songs beyond sound (2015), functioning as interpretive anchors rather than decoration; all lyrics cited here come from the album booklet. To keep detail manageable, the discussion moves through three thematic clusters: Corrupted Domesticity (*Cry Baby*, *Dollhouse*, and *Sippy Cup*), Unattainable Affection & Self-Doubt (from *Carousel* to *Training Wheels*), and Agency & Metamorphosis (from *Pity Party* to *Mad Hatter*). Each cluster closes with a synthesis so the larger emotional arc remains visible. The opening triptych stages the home as a pastel-coloured theatre of repression. In *Cry Baby*, a tear-flooded nursery (Figure 1a) internalises focalisation, drawing viewers into the protagonist's hypersensitive perspective.

Figure 1. Accompanying illustrations for the tracks, from left to right,  
(a) *Cry Baby* (b) *Dollhouse* (c) *Sippy Cup*



*Dollhouse* (Figure 1b) literalises performative respectability: lifeless parents occupy doll-compartments, mirroring compartmentalised dysfunction. *Sippy Cup* (Figure 1c) deepens domestic horror-an oversized cup conceals addiction and violence, its broken-heart motif masking trauma beneath saccharine tones. Taken together, these first three images expose the home as a pastel engine of repression, framing *Cry Baby*'s hurt before her quest for intimacy begins. Tracks four to seven translate longing into circular stasis. *Carousel* (Figure 2a) shows *Cry Baby* grasping for cotton-candy love from a moving pony: motion without progress.

Figure 2. Accompanying illustrations for the tracks, from left to right,

a) *Carousel*

b) *Alphabet Boy*

c) *Soap*



In *Alphabet Boy* (Figure 2b) toys become weapons; fridge magnets spell defiance, destabilising infantilising language. *Soap* (Figure 2c) immerses the heroine in a bubble bath, bar of soap between her teeth, visualising shame at emotional disclosure. *Training Wheels* (Figure 3a) flips the bike metaphor: *Cry Baby* kneels with a wrench, eager to remove safety aids for a boy who hesitates-underscoring unreciprocated care. Across these tracks, love appears as motion without arrival, priming *Cry Baby*'s pivot from self-doubt to rebellion.

Figure 3. Accompanying illustrations for the tracks, from left to right,

a) *Training Wheels*

b) *Pity Party*

c) *Tag, You're It*



The album's back half charts a grotesque ascent to agency. *Pity Party* (Figure 3b) conflates birthday décor with post-apocalyptic wreckage, framing abandonment as theatrical collapse. *Tag, You're It* (Figure 3c) juxtaposes pastel innocence with predation, turning a childhood game into a trauma tableau. *Milk and Cookies* (Figure 4a) enacts fairy-tale retribution: a wolf-like vendor faces poisoned treats, signalling reclaimed power.

Figure 4. Accompanying illustrations for the tracks, first line and second line respectively, from left to right,

a) *Milk and Cookies*      b) *Pacify Her*      c) *Mrs. Potato Head*      d) *Mad Hatter*



*Pacify Her* (Figure 4b) shows *Cry Babysilencing* a rival with a pacifier-aggression masked as a nursery icon. Plastic surgery satire drives *Mrs. Potato Head* (Figure 4c), where a television broadcasts cosmetic mutilation, critiquing commodified femininity. Finally, *Mad Hatter* (Figure 4d) crowns the protagonist in a candy-strewn field, toy gun and decapitated lollipop in hand; pastel carnage signals that madness has become liberation. The closing sextet reframes ruin as empowerment, resolving the album in a register of candy-coated menace where the grotesque becomes a new form of beauty (Table 2).

Table 2. Thematic clusters, dominant visual cues, and narrative functions in *Cry Baby* album

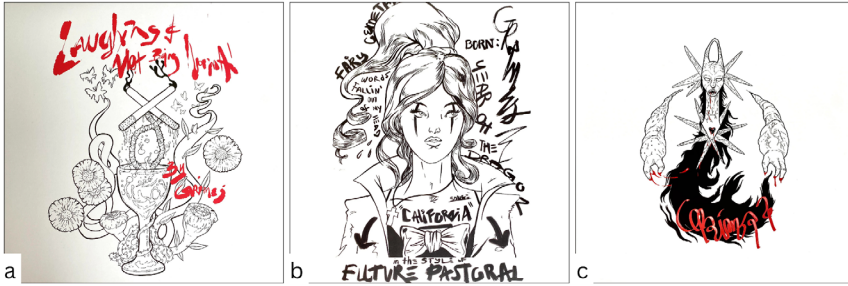
| Cluster                | Dominant visual cue | Narrative work                     | Tracks                            |
|------------------------|---------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Corrupted Domesticity  | Pastel dollhouse    | Exposes repression at home         | Cry Baby, Dollhouse and Sippy Cup |
| Affection & Doubt      | Carousel motion     | Shows love as circular stasis      | from Carousel to Training Wheels  |
| Agency & Metamorphosis | Candy-grotesque     | Turns trauma into empowered menace | from Pity Party to Mad Hatter     |

Narratively, the focalisation is internal: *Cry Baby* is no longer reacting to trauma but reshaping reality through a surreal, chaotic lens. The sugary landscape becomes a site of catharsis, where violence and play converge. Rather than signaling a descent into madness, the illustration marks her arrival—an empowered reclamation of agency within a world ruled by her own logic. In closing, Melanie Martinez frames madness not as breakdown but breakthrough; lyrics and illustration converge into a self-defined world where the absurd offers sanctuary and the grotesque becomes a new form of beauty.

### 'Art Angels'

Grimes' *Art Angels* (2015) offers a fragmented mythology rather than a linear plot. Each track functions as a self-contained vignette shaped by alter-egos, stylistic clashes, and speculative-pop iconography. The illustrations—drawn by Grimes herself (2015b)—extend that dispersion, inviting the listener-viewer to assemble meaning across a constellation of images and sounds. To keep the thirteen readings cohesive, they are grouped into three constellations: Identity & Self-Mythology (*Laughing and Not Being Normal*, *California* and *Flesh Without Blood*), Bodily Power & Transformation (*Scream*, *Belly of the Beat* and *Kill V. Maim*), and Posthuman Reverie & Reckoning (from *Art Angels* to *Butterfly*). Each segment ends with a synthesis to hold the larger arc. *Laughing and Not Being Normal* (Figure 5a) opens the album with operatic minimalism: a chalice-like emblem amid ritual flora conjures sacrifice and transformation.

Figure 5. Accompanying illustrations for the tracks, from left to right,  
a) Laughing and not being normal b) California c) Flesh without Blood



*California* (Figure 5b) critiques the commodified self; handwritten slogans and melancholic pop tears expose the gap between persona and truth. *Flesh Without Blood* (Figure 5c) externalises emotional rupture through a bleeding, hybrid form, mirroring the song's shift from devotion to disillusionment. These vignettes stage fractured identity as the problem the album will probe through ever more visceral imagery. In *Scream* (Figure 6a) a dual-headed creature embodies trauma as perpetual, embodied noise; oscillate between vulnerability and violent catharsis.

Figure 6. Accompanying illustrations for the tracks, from left to right,  
a) Scream b) Belly of the Beat c) Kill V. Maim



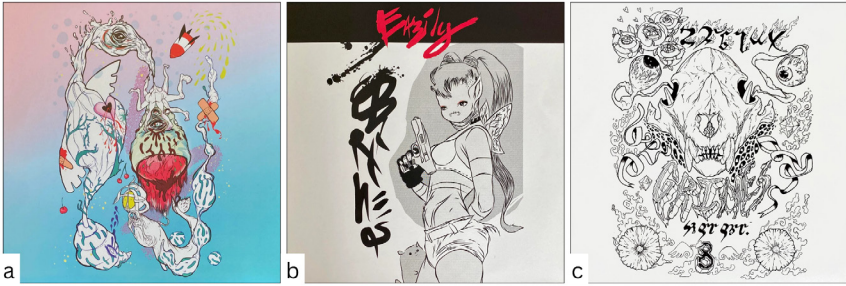
*Belly of the Beat* (Figure 6b) suspends the subject between mortality and transcendence -pierced heart, coiling tigers, cyclical spiral- while the lyrics seek refuge in rhythm. *Kill V. Maim* (Figure 6c) fuses bodies and blurs anatomy; serpentine limbs and alien glyphs visualise gender-fluid rebellion against behavioural norms. Here the body becomes both weapon and spectacle, marking the album's pivot from self-definition to ecstatic excess. *Artangels* (Figure 7a) mixes ruptured limbs, stitched organs, and cherries, framing love as chaotic battleground.

Figure 7. Accompanying illustrations for the tracks, from left to right,

a) Artangels

b) Easily

c) REALiTi



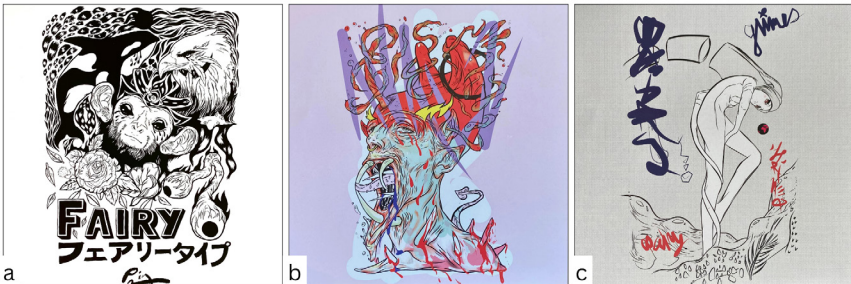
*Easily* (Figure 7b) shows a grayscale elf-android brandishing weapons—armor against abandonment. *REALiTi* (Figure 7c) centres an animal skull in floral flames: mortality meets mysticism, echoing lost intimacy. *Pin*, *Venus Fly* and *World Princess Pt. II* (Figures 8a, 8b, 8c) escalate the hybrid grotesque -crowns, screaming faces, ribbon-figures- shattering the gaze and reclaiming agency.

Figure 8. Accompanying illustrations for the tracks, from left to right,

a) Pin

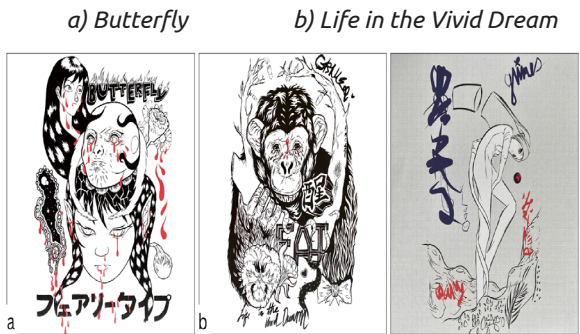
b) Venus Fly

c) World Princess Pt. II



*Life in the Vivid Dream* and *Butterfly* (Figures 9b, 9a) close the cycle: a medicated ape and a cracked yin-yang head confront truth as painful metamorphosis, accepting ruin as prerequisite for self-definition.

Figure 9. Accompanying illustrations for the tracks, from left to right,



The butterfly, emblematic of metamorphosis, is visually undercut by bleeding eyes and severed roses, suggesting that liberation is painful, not idyllic. Together, the image and lyrics close the album on a note of uneasy empowerment -embracing rupture as a path to self-definition (Table 3). The final constellation reframes decay, mutation, and myth as survival tools, resolving *Art Angels* in a mood of uneasy transcendence.

Table 3. Thematic clusters, dominant visual cues, and narrative functions in *Art Angels* album.

| Cluster             | Dominant visual cue | Narrative work           | Tracks                                                |
|---------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|
| Identity & Myth     | Ritual emblems      | Frames fractured persona | from <i>Laughing...</i> to <i>Flesh Without Blood</i> |
| Body & Power        | Hybrid monsters     | Weaponises the self      | from <i>Scream</i> to <i>Kill V. Maim</i>             |
| Reverie & Reckoning | Post-human collage  | Recasts ruin as survival | from <i>Artangels</i> to <i>Butterfly</i>             |

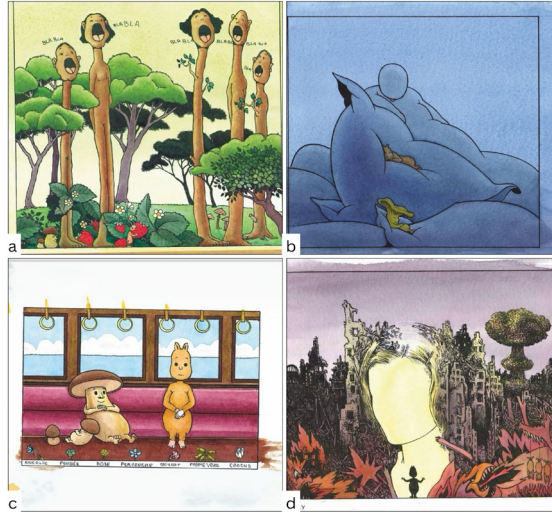
‘Consolation’

Pomme’s *Consolation* (2022) is a quiet cycle of grief, memory, and gentle defiance. Claude Ponti’s sparse but symbol-rich illustrations (2022) mirror the album’s soft-spoken intimacy, turning each song into a fragment of an affective mosaic that blends internal focalisation with subtle emotional diegesis. Fourteen tracks resolve into three waves: Memory & Childhood Echoes (from *jardin* to *septembre*), Distance & Yearning (from *rien pour toi* to *when I c u*), and Quiet Resilience & Communal Care (from *puppy* to *B.*). Each wave ends with a synthesis to keep the emotional curve clear. In *jardin* (Figure 10a) anthropo-

morphic trees chatter over a sensory garden, capturing nostalgia tinged with unease.

Figure 10. Accompanying illustrations for the tracks, first line and second line respectively, from left to right,

a) *jardin* b) *dans mes rêves* c) *la rivière* d) *Nelly*



*dans mes rêves* (Figure 10b) shows a faceless figure curled in blue half-nest forms-maternal tension suspended between sleep and memory. *la rivière* (Figure 10c) sets a tense rabbit beside a calm mushroom on a passing train, framing grief as slow transit toward healing. *Nelly* (Figure 10d) raises a faceless woman-monument amid botanical ruins, turning post-trauma tenderness into silent resilience. These first four images cast memory as both refuge and snag, establishing *Consolation's* tension between tenderness and ache. *septembre* (Figure 11a) mirrors orange figures across a lake, autumn light marking love that endures in reflection.

Figure 11. Accompanying illustrations for the tracks, first line and second line respectively, from left to right,

a) septembre b) rien pour toi c) rdv d) bleu



*rien pour toi* (Figure 11b) splits a mushroom to reveal skull and marionette, picturing helpless witness to another's decline. *rdv* (Figure 11c) floats a child-like figure in a balloon of umbrellas, a dream of judgment-free reunion. *bleu* (Figure 11d) leaps twin blue fish into a heart-arc while whirlpools tug two small figures apart, translating immersive love into disorienting pull. *when I c u* (Figure 12a) perches a lone figure on a cliff, thoughts trailing toward a sun-like beloved-absence as guiding light. Mid-album illustrations dwell on separation and deferred reunion, deepening *Consolation's* atmosphere of suspended longing.

Figure 12. Accompanying illustrations for the tracks, first line and second line respectively, from left to right,

a) when I c u b) puppy c) tombeau d) allô



*puppy* (Figure 12b) places two tiny figures atop a monumental dog, blending comfort with the fear of inevitable loss. *tombeau* (Figure 12c) inverts scale: towering, withered roses overshadow a small mourner, love sustained through remembrance. *allô* (Figure 12d) encircles a bifurcated child within clasped-hand branches, celebrating queer kinship and mirrored selves. *tout ça* (Figure 13a) sets a drifting figure on a leaf under a vast yellow sky-fragility as persistence.

Figure 13. Accompanying illustrations for the tracks, first line and second line respectively, from left to right,

a) *tout ça*    b) *un million*    c) *very bad*    d) *B*



*un million* (Figure 13b) cradles a teardrop vessel beneath a rain fountain, sorrow nurtured into quiet ritual. *very bad* (Figure 13c) indicates exploitation with a suited hand targeting a pedestal-bound figure, visualising the speaker's moral reckoning. *B*. (Figure 13d) ends with a lone figure watching doves ascend, one dark among white absence framed as gentle guidance. The closing wave turns mourning into soft endurance, offering chosen connection and modest strength as *Consolation's* answer to loss (Table 4).

Table 4. Thematic clusters, dominant visual cues, and narrative functions in *Consolation* album.

| Cluster             | Dominant visual cue | Narrative work               | Tracks                                         |
|---------------------|---------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| Memory Echoes       | Talking flora       | Renders nostalgia ambivalent | from <i>jardin</i> to <i>septembre</i>         |
| Distance & Yearning | Mirror / dual forms | Dwells on suspended longing  | from <i>rien pour toi</i> to <i>when I c u</i> |
| Quiet Resilience    | Gentle surrealism   | Transforms grief into care   | from <i>puppy</i> to <i>B.</i>                 |

*Consolation* unfolds as a soft-spoken epic of grief, memory, and healing, where each track adds gently to a growing emotional landscape. The accompanying illustrations offer a parallel visual narrative -whimsical, melancholic, and symbolically rich-blending nature and dream to mirror the album's quiet intimacy. Together, sound and image create a tender space shaped by loss, kinship, and quiet resilience. Though marked by sorrow, the album leaves behind a sense of warmth and care-an invitation not to resolve pain, but to hold it gently and continue forward, seen and remembered.

## Conclusion

This research has explored how illustration functions as a narrative agent within concept and theme-based music albums, offering a multimodal framework where visual and verbal elements construct emotionally resonant and symbolically rich storytelling environments. By analysing 43 track-illustration pairings across *Cry Baby*, *Art Angels*, and *Consolation*, the study demonstrated that illustration is not merely decorative but can participate actively in shaping the listener's narrative experience. *Tables 1 to 3* reveal that each album's track-level stories settle into a distinct overarching narrative: domestic trauma that flips into candy-grotesque empowerment in *Cry Baby*; hybridised self-mythology evolving into post-human survival in *Art Angels*; and grief softening into communal care in *Consolation*. Despite their divergent palettes and idioms, all three arcs share a trajectory from containment to release and from single-voice confession to collective or transformed identity (*Table 5*).

Table 5. Comparative visual style and representation strategies across the three albums

| Album              | Illustrative idiom                         | Dominant palette / texture                    | Representation strategy                  | Core narrative function                                  |
|--------------------|--------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Cry Baby</i>    | Pastel grotesque, story-book naïveté       | Powder-pink & baby-blue; flat shading         | Satiric inversion of childhood icons     | Turns domestic trauma into candy-coated empowerment      |
| <i>Art Angels</i>  | Hyper-saturated manga / collage            | Neon primaries; dense line-work               | Hybridised, post-human bodies            | Weaponises identity and reclaims agency through excess   |
| <i>Consolation</i> | Water-colour minimalism, gentle surrealism | Soft blues & earth tones; paper grain visible | Symbolic natural hybrids (flora / fauna) | Transforms grief into quiet resilience and communal care |

Stating these higher-level patterns clarifies how visual rhetoric steers different-yet structurally comparable-routes toward agency, survival, or solace. Through focalisation, symbolic layering, and visual rhythm, each image contributes to the emotional and diegetic structure of its corresponding track. Moreover, the contrast between each album’s stylistic and thematic approaches -ranging from hyperstylised grotesque to introspective minimalism-reveals the diverse narrative potentials of imagery within musical works. The study contributes to a growing body of interdisciplinary research bridging narratology, visual culture, and popular music studies, proposing that album illustrations be considered legitimate components of narrative design literature and such. Future research could expand this inquiry by examining audience reception, exploring mostly around animated or interactive visual formats, or conducting comparative studies across genres and cultural contexts. As the boundaries between media forms continue to blur, understanding how visual storytelling evolves in conjunction with music remains a critical area for further investigation. By showing how three radically different visual idioms achieve comparable narrative effects, this study extends multimodal narratology into the largely unexplored territory of static album illustration.

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