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The Presence of the Number Three on Paper Back Book Covers

Book covers are a part of the media that many take for granted. People see thousands of paperback book covers a year, without paying much attention to them. Some readers are even hard pressed to describe the cover of a book that they are currently reading. However, book covers, like all forms of the media, contain a wealth of folklore. In this paper, I focus on books that were printed between the years 1985 and 1993. All of the book covers that are represented in this collection come from books that were purchased at the Hawley-Cooke Booksellers on Gardener Lane in Louisville, Kentucky. In this paper, I will focus on the recurrence of the number three that I found while examining the lay out of each cover. All of the books used in this paper are from the horror genre, but the presence of the number three is evident in almost any paperback book cover.

I decided on this topic because my favorite pastime is reading and I constantly have a book in my hands. I have an obsession with discovering the unnoticed in the common. ~~The aspect that is so common that it goes unnoticed.~~ That is why I settled on this topic for this paper. It made me notice an aspect of the media that I had never paid much attention to before.

I think that the book covers in this collection say a lot about the prevalence of the number three, especially in relation to

lay outs. Every cover in this collection is laid out with three components: the illustration or design, the lettering of the title, and the lettering of the author's name. The lettering of the author's name and the book title are rarely right next to each other on the page, they are almost always divided by the illustration or design, making three components. Even when the lettering is placed together on the page, the font and size of the author's name is different from the font and size of the title. The covers are always laid out in three parts, picture, author and title. It is rare to find a recent book cover that does not lay out in this way.

It seems that when it comes to book covers that the number three is so prevalent that it has become the formula for designing the covers. In the horror genre particularly, the number three shows up everywhere. One book in this collection is actually titled The Drawing of the Three. The whole book is based on the premise of finding three people who, when their skills are combined, will be able to beat an evil force. This calls to mind the idea of the trinity in Catholicism. The cover of this book is particularly stark, and the three components of the cover design are vividly evident. The three main parts are the large gold lettering used for Stephen King's name, the graphic of the three cards in the center of the page, and the smaller, pink lettering of the title on the bottom of the page.

Though the number three is prevalent in the lay out of book covers, that is not the only place that it is apparent on the covers. The graphics and designs that are used to illustrate the

covers also contain components in groups of three. The most obvious example is, again, the cover of The Drawing of the Three, with its three cards centered on the cover page. It is also easy to spot on the cover for The Vision by Dean Koontz. The design has three parts: the ouija board, the planchet, and the note pad. The number three is used in a very interesting way on the cover for Snake Eyes by Rosamond Smith. The background that is made up of what appears to be paper cut outs is made of three layers that alternate black, red, black. Then the foreground of the graphic is made of three parts again: the tear, the eye and the iris.

It is obvious that the use of the number three is not only present in the profession that designs the lay out of paper back novels, but it is also present in the graphic arts profession. This idea makes sense when one realizes that almost all of the commercial media that we are exposed to is designed by graphic artists. The number three plays a huge role in this profession and what this profession produces.

This collection is organized in two sections. The first section consists of book covers that are the best examples of the use of three in terms of lay out. The second section contains the best examples of book covers that use the number three in graphics.