

**Ian Haywood, Susan Matthews, and Mary L. Shannon, eds., *Romanticism and Illustration*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019. Pp. xvi + 326. £94.99. ISBN: 9781108425711.**

‘We have lost the ability to fully understand and appreciate the place of illustration in the Romantic period’ (1). The bold declaration that opens *Romanticism and Illustration* captures the guiding and unifying principles of this carefully curated and expertly edited scholarly collection. As the editors note, scholars have not always grasped the specific meaning of ‘illustration’ in the Romantic period and the extent to which illustrations played a dynamic role in the determination of meaning, offering perspectives that encouraged nuanced and, sometimes, radical reinterpretations of the books in which they appeared.

Central to this book’s argument is Julia Thomas’s claim that ‘illustration is an eminently social genre’ that crosses class boundaries (*Nineteenth-Century Illustration and the Digital* (2017), p. 97). In London exhibition spaces (including Spring Garden, Somerset House, and the Boydell Gallery), middle-class audiences could learn from accompanying textual and visual clues to pass as members of the cultural elite. But outside these spaces, illustrated books encouraged reader-viewers to become active participants in the creation of meaning. For Peter Otto and Sophie Thomas, in their respective readings of William Blake’s illustrations for Genesis and Thomas Gray’s ‘The Bard’, it is Blake himself who sets the standard for this notional reader-viewer by enabling the role of the image to expand ‘from explanation (in the service of the restoration of the author/creator’s meaning), to critique, renarration, and re-envisioning’ (44).

This blurring of category distinctions is sustained in Dustin M. Frazier Wood’s chapter on illustrated histories, poetic drama, and the representation of the national past. Focusing on representations of the Anglo-Saxon queen Elfrida, Frazier Wood observes how the conflation of historical, creative, visual, and dramatic illustrations ‘each informed the ways in which reader-viewers encountered, understood, and imagined the other’ (89). Similarly, Martin Priestman examines how Erasmus Darwin ‘increasingly turned to Fuseli to convey the often-abstruse science of his long “philosophical” poems’ (99–100) and how Blake, in his role as the engraver of Fuseli’s images, challenged a received view of the hierarchical relationship between painter and engraver. Focusing on Fuseli’s illustrations of domestic space in William Cowper’s *Poems in Two Volumes*, Susan Matthews’s chapter reveals an artist revelling in the seductive interiors of bourgeois life while recoiling from ‘the power of feminine taste’ (138).

Questions of scale inform the next two chapters. Thomas Stothard’s illustrations of Robert Bloomfield, Byron, and George Crabbe, Sandro Jung argues, are small-scale engraved designs (vignettes) that allow the image to take priority in the reading process, one that ‘enables first and foremost a visual experience of the text’ (143). Maureen McCue’s reading of Stothard’s and J. M. W. Turner’s illustrations of Samuel Rogers’s *Italy*, sympathetically concludes that the ‘gap between the verbal description and the illustrated vignette’ encourages the ‘reader-viewer to become an active participant in both the visual and verbal texts’, thereby serving ‘the needs of a more sophisticated audience than has previously been acknowledged’ (193).

The expansion and democratisation of cultural experience underpins Ian Haywood’s chapter on Thomas Macklin’s Poets’ Gallery. In an exemplary reading of William Artaud’s anti-war image, *Mercy Stopping the Rage of War* (1794), Haywood demonstrates ‘how illustration could be used to re-politicize “old canon” literature by transposing it into the revolutionary decade of the 1790s’ (214). In a second chapter on Macklin’s Poets’ Gallery, Luisa Calè writes that ‘collections of prints constituted museums without walls that had the potential to include the whole field of art’ beyond the ‘universal’ concerns, advocated by Reynolds, of the classics and the Bible (222–21). Focusing on Maria Cosway’s *Hours*, a

painting retrofitted by Macklin as illustration for Gray's 'Ode on the Spring', Calè examines how the cosmopolitan aspirations of the literary galleries were curtailed in the post-revolutionary period by the return of an older 'aristocratic model of patronage of the arts' (236).

In her reading of Stothard, R. H. Cromek, and literary illustration on London's Newman Street, Mary L. Shannon considers the 'Artists' Street' as network, showing how 'interactions between art and literature played out on the ground' (243), fostering shifting and unstable relationships between painters and engravers, texts and images. Shannon offers the volume's most sustained demonstration of how Romantic illustration contributed to the destabilising of traditional artistic hierarchies. Equally, Brian Maidment's complementary account of *Arliss's Pocket Magazine* (1818–1833) shows how a modest magazine adopted a range of engraving techniques to produce high quality images for an expanded readership and viewership, anticipating the rise of professional illustrators in the 1830s and beyond.

In a provocative coda, Martin Myrone displaces the emphasis placed by art historians on the great painters of the sublime to suggest that readers might speculate on how commercial and democratic impulses can sometimes collude in the loss to society 'of heroic, virtuous action' (297). For Myrone, Fuseli's assertion, that 'he who has no visible object of worship is indifferent about modes, and rites and places', is as good a rejoinder as any to those who, suspicious of the sacred calling of art, would overlook 'the costs as well as the benefits of the "democratization of British art"' (297).

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