Literature and Image in the Long Nineteenth Century

Literature and Image in the Long Nineteenth Century:

Speaking Picture and Silent Text

Edited by

Amina Alyal

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing

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This book first published 2023

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-5275-1972-4
ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-1972-5

To the memory of

Rosemary Mitchell

Deacon, Poet, Professor Emeritus of Victorian Studies
at Leeds Trinity University and former Director of the
Leeds Centre for Victorian Studies (LCVS)

much missed by all who knew her

Poema pictura loquens, pictura poema silens

—Plutarch quoting Simonides of Keos

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful for the support of the Leeds Centre for Victorian Studies @LCVSLeeds in the writing of this book, including funding copyright image use, for the support of Leeds Trinity University (LTU), especially the Research Office, the Writing Group, the Library, and my colleagues, especially in the final stages, and especially in English @LTUEnglish. Images have been obtained with the support of the National Gallery, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, the Rossetti Archive, and the Maas Gallery. The British Library, the Wellcome Collection, Project Gutenberg, the Internet Archive, the Victorian Web, Google Books and Wikimedia Commons have been invaluable repositories of public domain material, both text and image. Last but not least I thank my family, who have supported me throughout the process.

A version of Chapter Nine originally appeared as a short blog: Stephen Basdeo, “Victor Hugo’s Ninety-Three (1874).” *Reynolds’s News and Miscellany*, 27 September 2021, https://reynolds-news.com.

INTRODUCTION

As Horace's famous dictum suggests, word and image can each do more than they are expected to do, and indeed trespass upon each other's territories.[1] The authors of this book explore some of the ways in which we can understand how word and image worked together in the nineteenth century, in terms of both picture and poetry/fiction. It is worth saying here that the term "poesis" has traditionally had a broader meaning than the one we currently give to poetry, and includes creative writing generally.[2] *Literature and Image in the Long Nineteenth Century* keeps in mind how word and image negotiate and compete for each other's spaces. It seeks to interrogate how image arises from absences in texts, and image gives rise to narrative or voice. Topics include ekphrasis, illustration, literary representations of artists, the visual in writing, the staging of images and the textualization of theatrical tableaux, and related cultural and ideological tropes. A more relevant Latin tag is therefore the one of which the title is a loose translation, the statement (originally in Greek) by Simonides of Keos, quoted by Plutarch: "poema pictura loquens, pictura poema silens (poetry is a speaking picture, painting a silent [mute] poetry)".[3] Hence a useful term for the endeavours of the scholars in this present volume is one discussed for example by Antonia Losano: "interart criticism". As Losano indicates,

> [i]nterart criticism is an enormous and varied field, including studies of the influence of painitngs on particular authors, […] broader studies that argue for similarities across art media in the same historical period, […] studies in the way narrative relies on or makes use of the more formal elements of painting (description, [perspective, fore- and background, etc) […] and theoretical or historical studies of "the visual" as such.[4]

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[1] Ut pictura poesis in Alex Preminger, ed., *The Princeton Handbook of Poetic Terms* (Princeton New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1965; reis. 1986), 288.

[2] See for example Barbara Herrnstein Smith, "Poetry as Fiction." *New Literary History* 2, no. 2 (1971): 259–81. https://doi.org/10.2307/468602.

[3] Preminger, *Princeton Handbook*, 288.

[4] Antonia Losano, *The Woman Painter in Victorian Literature* (Columbus: The Ohio State University, 2008), 5.

Broadly, there are three aspects of this field covered by this volume: ideological and philosophical resonances of image and text in fiction (the first four chapters); that peculiar fusion of text and image that was the bread and butter of the Pre-Raphaelites (the next two chapters); and book illustration, especially the tensions between writer and artist as *authors* of the text (the last four chapters).

The arrangement is thematic and conceptual rather than chronological. The first and last chapters (by Nathan Uglow and Françoise Baillet, respectively) effectively introduce and conclude the book with wide-ranging content and argument that pull together many of the topics covered by the chapters in between. And although chronology is not a formative principle, the period covered needs a note of explanation—the debate spills over into the eighteenth and twentieth centuries with two of the chapters (Zoe Copeman on early Gothic and Paul Hardwick on Edwardian children's books). Although the collection is very Victorian in the bulk of its preoccupations, the conceptualisation of the "long nineteenth century" is aptly illustrated in the way these two chapters usefully extend into what feeds into the Victorian age and what its legacies are at the other end.

"Is painting a language?" asks Roland Barthes, before characteristically shifting focus onto the (endlessly deferred) nature of how images exist in the language that describes them, principally by evoking the cinema theorist Jean-Louis Scheffer: "What is the connection between the picture and the language inevitably used in order to read it—i.e., in order (implicitly) to write it? Is not this connection the picture itself?"[5] The picture and the language used to describe it are necessarily the topic of the first four chapters, in terms of the ways in which elusive concepts are captured or made concrete, concepts such as aging, racialization, and the self—or indeed figures of speech. Murray Krieger opines that "[w]hat emerges, in the aesthetic from Kant through the New Critics, is the possibility of a rebirth of the notion of the verbal emblem,"[6] and the verbal emblem provides a succinct introduction to the dialogue between word and image in our first chapter. All four chapters are concerned with the representation of verbalised appearance of self in the text, as the performative self, as a portrait, as grotesque fragmentation, and all are at least partially examined in terms of the evoked responses, attendant on genre, such as horror, laughter, or disconcertion, or various combinations of the same. Anxiety is a key to much of this discourse—whether in Pooter's worries over being taken for a ride or the Creature's sense of societal rejection, in Medardus's fears about bodily corruption or Dorian's concealment of his moral corruption. Anxiety is, of course, always already about influence, and Bloom's recursive understanding of textual and conceptual dialogue adds texture to some of the interconnections and mutual influences covered in these chapters: "[…] the poem is now *held* open to the precursor, where once it *was* open, and the uncanny effect is that the new poem's achievement makes it seem to us, not as though the precursor were writing it, but as though the later poet himself had written the precursor's characteristic work.'[7] Similarly, it is sometimes hard to tell which came first, the image or the verbal apprehension of it.

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[5] Roland Barthes, *The Responsibility of Forms*, translated by Richard Howard. (1985; reis., Oakland, California: U of California press 1991). 149, 150.

[6] Murray Krieger, *Ekphrasis: The Illusion of the Natural Sign* (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins, 2019), 198.

In Chapter One, "Speaking Pictures", Nathan Uglow reflects on the classical context for the rivalry between the "sister arts" of text and image, and traces its historical development through the Enlightenment and Romantic eras, before examining sections of two novels (and one narrative poem) at the end of the nineteenth century, making an important point that "the triumph of image over text is best evoked in, and demonstrated through, writing". Uglow explores how the emblem, predominantly in words rather than visual image, is reformulated into quasi-dramatic episodes in *The Diary of a Nobody* by George and Weedon Grossmith and *Three Men in a Boat* by Jerome K. Jerome, and informs Robert Browning's poem "Development". Uglow explores how common sayings ("pride goes before a fall") or popular images (Janus, the two-headed god looking to past and future) can lead to comic treatment, the effects of which arise from their being taken literally or to their logical extreme. He covers the question of the tension between text and image in terms of whether the image merely illustrates the text or forms the basis of character and scene to which the text merely adds "narration". Indeed, he briefly discusses mid-century sensation plays before going on to discuss the comic effects of incident (akin to drama) in the two episodic novels.

Chapter Two, "Ma®king a Monster: The Afterlife of Frankenstein's Creation and the Racialization of Criminality", follows this philosophical treatment of image in language, and indeed the intersection with stage spectacle, with Zoe Copeman's analysis of the "monstrous" Creature in

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[7] Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973; reiss., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 16.

Frankenstein. Copeman dissects the textual parallels between the Creature made of pieces and Frantz Fanon’s fragmentation of Darwin

Black identity by a white gaze. Copeman considers contemporary stage spectacle, finding that the dark blue or black greasepaint used in stage productions of *Frankenstein* and of *Othello* connect the two. Copeman develops this specific application of appearance into an examination of physiognomy and “a larger system of appearance-based discrimination”, demonstrating how images of a “criminal” physiognomy gave rise to a pseudo-science, reflecting a Europe-wide movement to identify the “‘standard’ or ‘normal’ subject” and to present visually a constructed deviant form that encompasses the inchoate fears of society at the time—the criminal, the racialised other, the non-European. The chapter explores how taking the body apart and categorising its constituent features leads to a (re)construction that provides a seemingly concrete justification for social oppression.

Chapter Three, “The Gothic Novel and Grotesque Art: E. T. A. Hoffmann’s *The Devil’s Elixir*” leads naturally on from the previous chapter, Hannah-Freya Blake exploring the genesis of “the doppelgänger and dual-personality tropes of the Gothic”, arguing that “the [Gothic comic] novel mimics the confusion of the grotesque form”. Blake sees in the Bakhtinian qualities of this genre a confusion of being, between animal and human, and between the self in its (delusory?) authentic embodiment vs. its performative imitator. The chapter examines the moment when the self sees the doppelgänger as a moment of uncanny self-violation, an externalised internal gaze. Blake hence sees the form as ultimately of the “in-between”—text and image, laughter and fear, the solid and the intangible. The uncanniness of the form, Blake contends, lies in these contradictions and escaping certainties, a response to the fragmentation of modernity, and the performativity of identity. This leads on to tangled, multiplying narratives (or anti-narratives), in which reproduction produces incongruity and horrified laughter, pleasure and disgust as evoked by the grotesque. Her final point about the ways in which parody by its very nature underscores the performativity of identity leads to a conclusion about the anxiety of influence that Harold Bloom might have appreciated.

Chapter Four, “Ekphrasis and the Illusion of Self in Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray*” continues the theme of the Gothic, as broached by the previous two, and also considers the self in terms of a split or copy. Erkin Kiryaman discusses “notional ekphrasis” within *Dorian Gray*, since the painting does not have an existence independent of the text evoking it (as indeed Barthes would see it). Kiryaman develops an intricate argument that how the portrait and the character interact can be illuminated by an application of Lacanian theory of the mirror stage. The chapter raises the spectre of the illusory self and even the narcissistic self, since it is Dorian's desire for permanent youth and beauty that is the trigger for magical transformation. This chapter too discloses the effects of including the stasis of a visual image in direct conflict with the temporality of narrative——in the case of this novel there is an uncanny reversal of those properties. Kiryaman argues that that very reversal allows for insight into "Dorian's oscillating self", negotiating the fear and desire of subsumption with the other that is implicit in the ekphrastic encounter. These implications of linguistic psychoanalysis lead him to demonstrate that the ekphrastic enterprise is itself unstable, movable as words are, incapable of achieving the stasis promised by the image.

In this last chapter, the very idea of portraiture and the artist is explored. The visual representation of character, in a unique equalisation of text and image, is the subject of the next two chapters, both on the Pre-Raphaelites, their visual art and poetry. As Barbara Onslow argues, the idea of the portrait was employed for ideological and gender-political purposes, Onslow's focus being specifically on female novelists who explore visual representation as unreliable idealisation in their novels. According to George Eliot (complaining about portraits and photographs): "How can a thing which is always the same be an adequate representation of a living being who is always varying?"[8] Nowhere is this question more comprehensively and wittily explored, perhaps, than in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.[9] Onslow suggests that George Eliot's view influenced other women writers in their complaints about false idealisation, and that this view was that "Art *should* celebrate beauty and avoid falsity" [my italics].[10]

This rather implies that that the Romantic notion that "Beauty is truth, truth beauty,—that is all/ Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know"[11] continued to be felt in the bones of literary writers well into the Victorian period—Pre-Raphaelitism is perhaps the most fertile ground for that sentiment to flourish, for example in the declared intents of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (PRB) to be "direct and serious and heartfelt" and

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[8] Quoted in Barbara Onslow, "Deceiving Images, Revealing Images: The Portrait in Victorian Women's Writing." *Victorian Poetry* 33, no. 3/4 (1995): 450–75. http://www.jstor.org/stable/40002332, 456.

[9] Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray and Other Writings* (London: Ward, Locke & Co., 1891).

[10] Onslow, "Deceiving Images", 457.

[11] John Keats, "Ode on a Grecian Urn" in John Keats, *Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St Agnes, and Other Poems* (London: Taylor and Hessey, 1820), lines 49-50.

"produce thoroughly good pictures and statues".[12] For the Pre-Raphaelites, in contrast, beauty and truth resonate together, in an aim possibly more Wordsworthian than Keatsian of "looking directly to nature".[13] John Ruskin asserted this (mysterious) apprehension of "loveliness" and "truth" first in 1865, although he endorsed it in 1893:

> Art is neither to be achieved by effort of thinking, nor explained by accuracy of speaking […] the more beautiful the art, the more it is essentially the work of people who *feel themselves wrong*;—who are striving for the fulfilment of a law, and the grasp of a loveliness, which they have not yet attained, which they feel even farther and farther from attaining the more they strive for it. And yet, in still deeper sense, it is the work of people who know also that they are right. The very sense of inevitable error from their purpose marks the perfectness of that purpose, and the continued sense of failure arises from the continued opening of the eyes more clearly to all the sacredest laws of truth.[14]

This is a full statement of what Barthes would later call the "the old humanist superstition",[15] the notion, perhaps Platonic in origin, that the artist sees an abstract truth and beauty of which "nature" merely acts as a suggestion.[16] And hand-in-glove with this sentiment goes the belief that art should be useful as well as beautiful. "[I]f you only try to make showy drawings for praise," wrote Ruskin in 1893, "or pretty ones for amusement, your drawing will have little of real interest for you, and no educational power whatever."[17] It was not until the truly post-Romantic energy of the decadent movement that beauty superseded truth, the aesthetic predominated and the principle of l'art pour l'art took over, which Stefano Evangelista and Catherine Maxwell see as the legacy of "Pater's emphasis on pleasure rather than utility or didacticism”.[18] (After all, “All art is quite useless”).[19]

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[12] William Michael Rossetti, ed., *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: His Family-Letters, with a Memoir*, vol. 1 (London: Ellis and Elvey,1895),135.

[13] Quoted by Elizabeth Prettejohn, "Introduction" in Elizabeth Prettejohn, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to the Pre-Raphaelites* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 4

[14] John Ruskin, "Lecture III. The Mystery of Life and its Arts." In Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies* (1893; reis., London: George Allen, 1894), transcribed by David Price. www.gutenberg.org.

[15] Barthes, *Responsibility of Forms*, 149

[16] See for example Sir Philip Sidney, *The Defence of Poesie* (London: William Ponsonby, 1595).

[17] John Ruskin, "Preface to the Later Editions", in *Sesame and Lilies*

The Pre-Raphaelites’ pre-eminent image as artists over writers belies their focus on the text, as Elizabeth Prettejohn articulates:

> How then should we interpret the relationship between the visual and the literary arts, between drawing and painting on the one hand and reading and writing on the other, in a movement that takes its name so obviously from the history of painting?[20]

The Pre-Raphaelites both painted and wrote: Dante Gabriel Rossetti is well known as a poet, for example, as is Elizabeth Siddal, his partner and model.[21]

> The enthusiasm for trying one’s hand at any medium, already apparent in the first entry of the *P. R. B. Journal*, doubtless reflects the reckless confidence of youthful inexperience, but it is also closely related to a distinctive feature of Pre-Raphaelitism, […] its readiness to transgress the conventional boundaries between art forms, and moreover between the creative arts ad those activities more usually considered scholarly, art-historical or critical. Thus we have not only “literary” painting and “pictorial” poetry, but also art criticism by poets, literary criticism by artists, and works in a variety of media that engage with the emerging scholarly discipline of art history, or that conduct criticism through creative means.[22]

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[18] Stefano Evangelista and Catherine Maxwell, “The Arts in Victorian Literature: An Introduction.” *The Yearbook of English Studies* 40, no. 1/2 (2010): 1–7, 2. http://www.jstor.org/stable/41059778. For Théophile Gautier’s dictum “l’art pour l’art” and related views of Poe, see Preminger, *Princeton Handbook*, 210. For aestheticism and decadence, see Carolyn Burdett, “Aestheticism and Decadence”, British Library, https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/aestheticism-and-decadence.

[19] Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, vii.

[20] Ibid., 2.

[21] Rossetti’s principle poetic works are *Sir Hugh the Heron, A Legendary Tale, in Four Parts*. London: G. Polidori's Private Press (For Private Circulation Only), *1843*. 8vo (204 x 156 mm); and *Poems* (London: F. S. Ellis, 1870). The latter was reissued in various forms including as *Ballads and Narrative Poems* (Hammersmith: Kelmscott Press, 1893), with all the Kelmscott focus on the book as a work of visual art. Images may be viewed here: https://collections.library.yale.edu/catalog/11148897. Siddal’s poems were published posthumously in *Poems and Drawings of Elizabeth Siddal* (Canada: Wombat Press, 1978).

[22] Prettejohn, “Introduction”, 6.

So an exploration of the Pre-Raphaelites continues that focus on porous categorisation that the first chapters have begun, and in the person of the practitioners of both the sister arts. Apart from their own facility in the form, the artists' relationship to others' poetry, and Tennyson in particular, produced some of the most iconic paintings of the movement, which achieved a status that went far beyond illustration, and stood alone as coherent art in their own right. Poetry and pictorial art in the hands of the Pre-Raphaelites are scrutinised in the next two chapters.

Chapter Five, "The Sensuous Pastoral: Vision and Text in Pre-Raphaelite Art" examines the focus on detail and desire in the twin arts of Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Richard Leahy examines the method in the construction of what he terms "the sensuous pastoral" in PRB visual art, microscopic attention to a plethora of detail in the imagined or remembered "nature" that results in "hyper-realised minutiae of description […] emphasising the sensuous desires in their works", noting that a similar effect is apparent in their poetry. Leahy argues that this heightening of observation connects to what we might call the PRB's mission statement, and its focus on a paradoxical intensity of feeling that is super-imposed onto the depiction of natural detail. "The simple face becomes significant when examined through the Pre-Raphaelite gaze", so that details such as hair or natural landscapes are both objectified and infused with subjectivity. Hence, the attempt of the artist to capture or control the muse or object of his desire is in part a demonstration of its elusiveness. Rossetti's poems are further amplified by a comparison with Elizabeth Siddal's, demonstrating both a closeness and a gendered difference in the two poets.

Chapter Six, "'Half-sick of Shadows': Imagining Women, Reverse Ekphrasis and the Lady of Shalott", is also concerned with women and desire, in Pre-Raphaelite depictions of the Lady of Shalott. Cassandra Atherton and Paul Hetherington evoke "a notional third space" arising from the confluence of word and image. This space is also usefully the no man's land between the private and public situation of the woman who, typified in the lady of Shalott, resembles "a revenant returned, via poetry, from the legends of a remote chivalric past." This interpretation is underpinned by reference to a range of contextual pictorial representations of which the Lady is an example, with a general gesture towards the deathlike stillness of a Sleeping Beauty, or even a female corpse—and including the statement of Poe, that master of the Gothic, that this last is the ultimate poetic theme. Elizabeth Siddal's anomalous position as both muse and artist produces a different take on the Lady. In their paintings based Shakespeare or Tennyson, amongst others, the artists are shown to be "in a close artistic dialogue" with the poetry, "thus actively contributing to and modifying understandings of these texts". Atherton and Hetherington term this process, the repositioning of the poem through visual depiction, "reverse ekphrasis", unearthing a disturbingly mortuary frame of reference for the Pre-Raphaelite muse.

William Morris, who might be called an honorary or tangential Pre-Raphaelite, an artist who wrote, a writer who painted, and founder of the Arts and Crafts Movement, believed that with "really beautiful ornament and pictures, printed books might once again illustrate to the full the position of our Society that a work of utility might be also a work of art, if we cared to make it so."[23] The final four chapters of this volume are principally concerned with illustration. Book illustration in this period—perhaps more generally—can range from amplification of a text, to effectively dramatizing the text, to critiquing or reinterpreting it, to dictating or preceding it. George du Maurier, of Svengali fame, and an illustrator as well as a writer, argued that images stay in the mind long after the text they illustrate has been forgotten, if it has been read at all; even though his article nominally maintains the position that the illustration serves the text, his comments suggest he elevates, above the mere narrative, "the little figures in the picture […] the arrested gesture, the expression of face, the character and costume, [which] may be as true to nature and life as the best actor can make them." [24] He asks,

> what does not the great Dickens himself owe to Cruikshank and Hablôt Browne, those two delightful etchers who understood and interpreted him so well! […] It would be interesting to know for certain what Charles Dickens thought of these illustrations—whether they quite realised for him the people he had in his mind, or bettered them, even—for such a thing is not impossible; indeed, it is the business of the true illustrator to do this if he can" (350).

Here du Maurier seems to be wavering on the brink of admitting the creative role the illustrator might have to play, especially since his article also discusses Pre-Raphaelite "illustrators". Precedence is hard to determine, in some cases. In Rosemary Mitchell's words, "[t]he relationship of text and image, and the interplay of meaning between them, is often very subtle, and thus the question of priority, in terms of ideological content and influence, is sometimes difficult to establish."[25]

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[23] William Morris, "Printing" in *Arts and Crafts Essays* by Members of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society, with a Preface by William Morris (London: Rivington, Percival, & Co., 1893), 134.

[24] George du Maurier, "The Illustration of Books from the Serious Artist's Point of View. — I", *Magazine of Art* (1890), London: Cassell and Company: 349-53, 350. Digitised by Google Books, www.books.google.co.uk.

Mitchell investigates the case of William Harrison Hainsworth, who is inspired to produce his narrative after seeing the pictures that would later become illustrations to his novel *Boscobel*:

> The illustrations of this work are particularly significant, as they were prior to the text and inspired Ainsworth to write the novel. […] In the Preface to *Boscobel*, he explained that he had long wished to write a tale on the subject of Charles III's wanderings after Worcester, but "I deferred my design, and possibly might never have executed it, had I not seen a series of views depicting most graphically the actual state of the different places visited by Charles […] (281)

Illustrations, then, clearly do more than simply reproduce in another medium the narrative or descriptions of a writer, and how they may operate is examined in different instances in the last four chapters of this book.

Chapter Seven, "*Oliver Twist* and the Transportability of the Image", explores Cruikshank's illustrations and their independence from the text, taking this even further than du Maurier does. Courtney Krolczyk argues that these illustrations are adaptations on a par with the stage adaptations that appeared almost in tandem with the serialised narrative. Krolczyk discusses "the image's inherent transportability", arguing that some texts are more image-based than others, and that these are the most adaptable, in illustration or on the stage. She examines dramatisations of the novel, which remove the spotlight from systemic problems, arguing that this is an effect of adaptation "through individualised bodies on a stage". She points out that the Cruikshank illustrates already have elements of the stage in terms of tableau, that can be easily transposed to the theatre. Further, she investigates Cruikshank's claim that Oliver Twist was born of his own idea for a Hogarthian progress narrative in pictures, and considers the illustrations "as a group", whereupon they do make up "something of a Hogarthian progress narrative (after all, the subtitle of the novel was 'The Parish Boy's Progress')", although by examining illustrations for different sections of the novel, Krolczyk is able to determine the extents and limitations of the influence of Cruikshank's "progress" on the novel.

Chapter Eight, "Visions of Long Will: Langland and *Piers Plowman* for Children at the End of the Long Nineteenth Century" is on the subject of Florence Converse and two very different approaches to medievalism in children's book illustrations. Paul Hardwick frames his chapter with reference to Douce manuscript of Chaucer (1426), one of the contexts in which to read the interpretative effects of the illustrations he examines, and how these "creatively nuance our reading". Hardwick argues that there are opposing views of the medieval era in Converse's time, that of the sentimentalised courtly Chaucer, and that associated with Langland's "unsparing truth-telling". He examines W. Heath Robinson's idealised illustrations for *Stories from Chaucer told to the Children* (1906) in comparison with Garth Jones's illustrations for *Long Will* (1903). A fruitful exploration of an image by John R. Skelton indicates ways in which Langland's "message of social equality" is either brought out or obscured by the mode of representation. Hardwick shows how Florence Converse's sometimes inconvenient Christian Socialism directs her representation of the Peasants' Revolt, aided by the "harsh, very human, corporeal realism" of Garth Jones, not included in later publication of the text, suggesting there may be ideological reasons for how Langland is illustrated.

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[25] Rosemary Mitchell, *Picturing the Past: English History in Text and Image 1830-1870* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 22.

Chapter Nine, "'La Torgue was Monarchy; the guillotine was Revolution': Anti-Medievalism in Victor Hugo's *Ninety-Three* (*Quatrevingt-Treize*)", continues the focus on ideological representation in image and text. Stephen Basdeo's theme is the historical novel by Victor Hugo based on revolution in France, situating the text's overt topic, the French Revolution, within the troubled politics of Hugo's own days, to which Basdeo argues he is acutely responsive. He reads Hugo's approach as "Revolutionary Anti-Medievalism", which "[uses] the Middle Ages to deride the medieval past and foreground the progressive nature of the French Revolution". This reading of Hugo gives rise to the view that Hugo, like Scott, aimed for entertainment along with political influence—Basdeo explores Hugo's own involvement, through published writing, in opposing Napoleon III with satire. Closely analysing the images that illustrate Hugo's novel, Basdeo demonstrates how the aristocrat is represented as out of sync with the times, and the revolutionary soldier as a protective figure. But he unpicks the subtleties and ambiguities of Hugo's stance, as represented, for example, in the positioning of figures in the illustrations, so that heroism is ultimately a matter of qualities that can be demonstrated by those on either side.

Chapter Ten, "The Question of Authority in Nineteenth-Century Book Illustration", offers a broad and at the same time rigorous examination of the "unstable and wavering border between text and image within the illustrated book […] through three distinct moments in the history of Victorian pictorial literature". Françoise Baillet traces the development, throughout these key points in the Victorian period, of illustration, from

Hablôt K. Browne's faithful renditions of Dickens's instructions in *Dombey and Son* (1848), sometimes relegated for mechanistic reasons as much as any, to the margins, to the rise of the Pre-Raphaelite movement. In the Moxon Tennyson (1857), painters and poet are of equal artistic status, and Rossetti's illustration, for example, is known to be at odds with Tennyson's preferences, coming across as a "critical interpretation of the text". Finally, Baillet proceeds to William Morris and the Arts and Crafts movement, examining the Kelmscott Chaucer (1896) and *The Story of the Glittering Plain* (1894), in which "the unity of the whole design" is paramount, decorative borders, designer fonts and illustrations all contributing to Morris's vison of "harmony between text and image, [and] between craftsmen and artists". This chapter thus provides a cohesive close to the collection, in its journey through the Victorian period, and its tracing of shifting relationships between image and text.

Some of George du Maurier's speculations are answered by these chapters, and the sister arts explored in terms of a close partnership and even exchanging of roles. Literature may not always "speak", and indeed its silences are filled with the clamour of the pictorial at times, so that the two voices, while they can be harmonious, are at their most energised, perhaps, when producing discordant sounds—suggesting alternatives, opening up dialogue, and increasing the dimensionality of the "beautiful book".

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CHAPTER ONE

SPEAKING PICTURES

NATHAN UGLOW

Introduction

At first glance, words and images seem so clearly different that we could never really get them mixed up. But in any discussion of words and images confusion is never far away. In everyday usage there is acceptance of this confusion: we understand that words engage metaphoric imagery and evoke visual scenes without losing a sense that we remain focused on words. And when images constitute evidence, we can speak of what those images "tell" us (or point out the "tell-tale signs") without implying an inability to distinguish image from word. Furthermore, we are happy to believe that the distinction between word and image is self-evident even as we acknowledge that word and image are, in practice, tricky customers.

The title of this volume of collected essays, *Speaking Pictures and Silent Text*, acknowledges a level of complicity between word and image, while also preserving that common-sense distinction between them: it is pictures that are speaking and words doing the showing.[1]

In the following pages I will argue that there is a specific late-Victorian approach to the word-image relation. I will illustrate this through three texts that happen to have been published in the same year, 1889. What they share is a relaxed and accepting view of the confusion between words and images: they don't try to resolve that confusion so much as find ways of exploiting it. I will introduce each of the texts at a later stage in order to contextualise the key passages, but a few words of introduction seem appropriate here.

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[1] The title reflects that of various intermedia studies, such as Michael Bath, *Speaking Pictures: English Emblem Books and Renaissance Culture* (London: Longman, 1994) and Leonard Barkan, *Mute Poetry, Speaking Pictures* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

Firstly, George and Weedon Grossmith's *Diary of a Nobody* will provide some basic illustration of the extent to which late-Victorian culture could derive enjoyment from the confusion between word and image.[2] This is not a text that aims at subtlety or nuance and is a useful scene-setter for my argument precisely because it is so willfully superficial. Perhaps unsurprisingly for a comedy, it seeks to entertain its readers without any pretentions to depth and succeeds in both these aims. It is a remarkably depth-less book, having no beginning, middle or end (it is a diary after all) and no character growth or plot development. It is a series of amusing episodes that could really come in any particular order, except for a few running gags. It is this very flatness that will put the visual and the verbal on the same level.

In my analysis I will zero in on a single set-piece episode, which is particularly flat, being nothing more than the literalization of a visual emblem. It is part of the essence of humour to take things in a literal way through verbal puns or taking elaborate imagery at face value. Comedy had always drawn on these elements, but I suggest that late-Victorian moment was generally receptive to this willful catachresis of the visual and the verbal and enthusiastic in exploring its effects.

Second up is Jerome K. Jerome's *Three Men in a Boat*, which rehearses the same themes as are found in the *Diary of a Nobody*.[3] The story aspect is downplayed in order to foreground the banter, irony, corny gags, shaggy dog stories and slapstick humour. In my analysis I explore one of its comic anecdotes, which constitutes an extended slapstick riff, entirely elaborated out of verbal humour. The relation of visual slapstick to verbal puns is further evidence for the view that the confusion of word and image offered opportunities to create new effects.

Finally, I turn to Robert Browning's late poem "Development", from his final collection *Asolando*.[4] This also entertains (it is "much-loved"), but I will argue it has a more sophisticated structure that trades on the tricksiness of words and images to foster reflection rather than laughter. The early sections of the poem present an idyllic vision of childhood play and the wonder of stories. This is the "much-loved" bit and the only bit the poem's few critics have examined. The later sections make it clear that this vision is the product of a bitter and frustrated narrator and perhaps only exists to fuel and justify his bitterness to himself. This will turn out to involve more complex and intricate confusions between word and image.

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[2] George and Weedon Grossmith, *The Diary of a Nobody* (London: Arrowsmith, 1892).

[3] Jerome K. Jerome, *Three Men in a Boat (To Say Nothing of the Dog)* (London: Arrowsmith, 1889).

[4] Robert Browning, *Asolando* (London: Smith & Elder, 1890), pp.123-30.

By focusing on three texts, my account is obviously going to be one-sided. The Grossmiths did add images to the second edition of the novel, but I will not be considering these, as my focus will be on the visual aspects of writing. To consider the verbal aspects of images would not require new arguments, but the shift between textual and pictorial analysis would complicate and extend an already long and complex story.

My focus is on the way these texts take an almost theatrical approach to designing scenarios to illustrate or embody a simple confrontation, just as jokes often involve a contrived story whose only purpose is to cue up a specific punchline.

My commentary on the texts will be the same kind of commentary we use when spelling out a joke. This kind of commentary does not add depth, but rather emphasizes surface. It is a matter of clarifying how the punchline and the lead up present the *same* point but from different perspectives. The differences are forced onto the same level. Example:

> Q: What is the difference between Noah's Ark and Joan of Arc?
> A: One was made of wood and the other was Maid of Orleans.

Here, it is a matter of verbal play between the similarity of phrases that sound alike but have different values. The punchline shows them to be alike and yet clearly different. It is this insistence on the identity of word and image, even as they are obviously different, that I argue starts to appear in late-Victorian writing and, though I don't explore it here, in visual design. The following section aims at a broad explanation of, and justification for, a distinctive late-Victorian aesthetic amenable to the aesthetics of flatness.

Background

I started by saying that word and image are both obviously distinct and unsurprisingly entangled. There is always a specific cultural framing for this situation; in some cultural situations the distinction of word and image is insisted upon and at others the identity is prioritised. In order to cue up my point that my texts demonstrate a late-Victorian take on this issue, I will sketch in some of the key positions on this issue, leading up to the late-Victorian period.

In the Enlightenment classical aesthetics policed the boundary between word and image with care. Text was the medium for making clear statements and image was the medium for depicting beauty. They were "sister arts" and even when they became rivalrous, word and image remained distinct. Writers could deploy poetic imagery and depict scenes; artists could design images that had evidentiary status, asserting claims about characters and situations. But it always remained clear when words were *rhetorically* reconstructing visual effects and equally clear when images deployed *pictorial* techniques to establish precise statements.

With the Romantic era the relation between words and images became more confusing. It was no longer simply a matter of techniques and tropes (rhetoric), constructing something in words that was similar to what images achieved, or constructing images that rivalled effects that writing achieved. Under Romantism the rivalry became more existential: which of the two was the royal road to reality and which was a wrong turn? One, and only one of them, was more complete and ontologically vital than the other. Whichever had this status was the only one that mattered. It properly had all the attributes, previously distributed between both words and images. Here, images really could be speaking images or texts really could be silently pictorial.

To clarify this distinction between an Enlightenment and a Romantic model of how images and words relate, I will appeal to Martin Meisel's *Realizations*, which seeks to document the transition from classical to Romantic through the changing relation of word to image.[5] Meisel's analysis of the altercation between Cruickshank and Dickens about who was the true author of Dickens's novels is a good example of what I have called the Romantic confusion between word and image.[6] Dickens assumed that Cruickshank *illustrated* his text and thus that his images were subordinate to his words, which is probably how we would understand it. But Cruickshank argued that his pictures showed character, relations, and scenarios and that Dickens's text merely joined the dots between the images. The story is *all there* in the images and Dickens was articulating the logic and managing simple transitions between scenes. It was as if Dickens merely added laborious subtitles or audio narration.

Cruickshank was not arguing that his images were making a fair imitation of textual effects, but that the storytelling power was *all* in the images and that the text was a mere supplement, an inessential aspect. The images spoke and the text really was silent. Cruickshank was claiming to *be* the author in a very real sense.

Well, Cruickshank lost that particular argument, but Meisel goes on to show how his viewpoint did have a future, becoming a common view of

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[5] Martin Meisel, *Realizations: Narrative, Pictorial, and Theatrical Arts in Nineteenth-Century England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

[6] Meisel, *Realizations*, ch.2.