

# Introduction

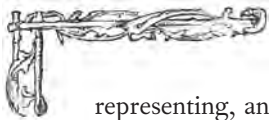
## *Poetry, Pictures, and Popular Publishing*

“I sing,” says the modern Bard, “speaking to the eye alone, by the help of type-founders, papermakers, compositors, ink balls, folding, and stitching.”

*Anglo-American*<sup>1</sup>

Taken from an 1847 review of Eliza Cook’s poems, the epigraph points to a nineteenth-century recognition of poetry’s materiality in print culture. Far from functioning as a uniquely inspired transcendent voice, the “modern Bard” operated within an industrialized publishing industry that—as the magazine’s title suggests—had a transatlantic, if not global, reach. Poetry’s “author-function” encompassed “type-founders, papermakers, compositors,” and all the other workers who built books out of texts and brought them to the reading public.<sup>2</sup> The sensuous address of modern poetry, this critic observes, is principally to the eye.

This recognition of poetry’s visuality underscores two critically important points I take up in this study. The first is that at the moment the text becomes embodied form and enters the material world, the “eye” of the reader replaces the “I” of the poet, affirming the book’s human uses and social destinations. The second is that, as a material object addressed to the eye, the book occupies a significant position in visual culture: it is an optical instrument for viewing,

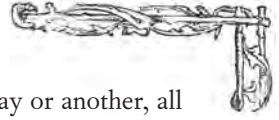


representing, and forming the world.<sup>3</sup> While this may be true for the book in general, it has special bearing on the gift books of illustrated poetry that proliferated in Britain between 1855 and 1875.

The illustrated book participates in the nineteenth-century process of elevating the image and the reader and detaching the author from the work. As I hope to demonstrate, the role of the periodical press is critically important to this process. This study traces the complex interconnections between the periodical press and the gift books of the “golden age” of wood-engraved illustration, known as “the sixties” and encompassing the decades between 1855 and 1875.<sup>4</sup> As an annual publication whose bindings often branded it as part of a publisher’s uniform series, the Christmas book of poetry and pictures was itself a form of serial. Moreover, its reception and audience were constructed through the increasingly sophisticated advertising and marketing mechanisms of the periodical press. Magazines and newspapers in the second half of the century sponsored an extensive reviewing apparatus dedicated variously to “Illustrated Gift Books” (*Illustrated London News* [hereafter abbreviated as *ILN*]), “Christmas Books” (*Saturday Review* [hereafter abbreviated as *SR*]), and “Christmas Gift-Books” (*Athenaeum*) in the weeks leading up to the end of the year. Extended notices, complete with poetic extracts and sample pictures, appeared in illustrated Christmas supplements. These reviews, advertisements, and supplements schooled their readers in a form of bibliographic consumption designed to mark a season organized around the activities of selling, buying, giving, and reading.

The principal criterion for a Christmas book was not seasonal content but rather the material features of ornamental binding and wood-engraved illustration. In brilliant reds, blues, and greens picked out with gilt, the packaging of these books announced their exchange value as gifts to be presented and then displayed: aesthetic objects combining instruction, entertainment, decoration, cultivation, and conspicuous consumption. These ornate illustrated works collectively reviewed as “Christmas books” included a wide variety of subjects; their only common feature might be identified as “pictureability.” As the reviews indicate, illustrated gift books typically included works of travel and adventures in exotic lands; books of popular science displaying the beauties of seaweeds, shells, and flowers; religious books; fine-art books; poetry; children’s literature; and short fiction.<sup>5</sup>

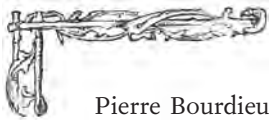
Among this heap of books piled high on the booksellers’ tables each Christmas, volumes of illustrated verses predominated—not because they outweighed the other genres in size of print run or proportion of the market, but because more was at stake in their production and reception. Reviewers gave poetic gift books pride of place in their columns and frequently characterized the ideal



Christmas book as a volume of pictures and poems; in one way or another, all engaged with the way material packaging affected poetry's place in Victorian culture. Some critics saw this ornamental object as a literally closed book, not designed or used for reading at all: a mere "furniture book" for vulgar display that, by its very nature, degraded the poetry associated with it.<sup>6</sup> Others, more confident in the gift book's openness to readers, celebrated its association of poems and images, seeing mass production as a means of disseminating the elite arts of poetry and pictures to an audience in need of cultivation. In this respect, the technologies of the age of mechanical reproduction play a crucial role in the story of this middlebrow artifact, connecting the "high art" of painting and exhibition culture with the mass art of wood engraving and print culture.

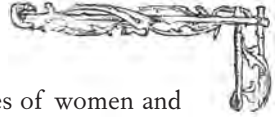
In what sense were poetic gift books a form of popular publishing? Although mass-produced, they were clearly not produced for the masses, if we equate the working classes with this undifferentiated term. Nor were they a mass art in terms of the reach and size of their readership in the way that, for example, many illustrated periodicals of the time were. Gift books typically came out in print runs in the thousands rather than the tens of thousands, constituted less than 5 percent of titles published at midcentury,<sup>7</sup> and were aimed at the broad middle classes, who represented about 20 to 25 percent of Britain's population.<sup>8</sup> Produced in the industrialized economy of Victorian print culture and priced at twenty-one shillings—roughly the equivalent of a maidservant's annual salary (Hibbert, *ILN*, 20)—the Christmas gift book appears far removed from any notion of the popular in the sense of a folk culture made by and for the people (although, as I demonstrate in chapter 4, it does have some complex connections with both oral traditions and chapbooks). Drawing on Raymond Williams's *Keywords*, I understand the gift book as a popular form in the sense of a cultural product that "deliberately sets out to win favour" (237). I also recognize that its hostile critics viewed it in the derogatory sense of inferior work, as in "popular literature." For the gift book's proponents, however, the special meaning of *popular* that emerged in the nineteenth century—"presenting knowledge in generally accessible ways"—is certainly relevant (237). As I hope to demonstrate, poetic gift books were a "popular" form of "high" art—that is, mass-produced, accessible forms of the elite arts of pictures and poetry, packaged for a middle-class audience eager for cultivation.

In distinguishing painting (high/fine/elite/unique) and illustration (popular/applied/decorative/mass-produced) and in conceptualizing poetry as the acme of literary production, I invoke traditional categories to clarify what is at stake in the gift book's categorical challenge. However, throughout this study I also employ the less value-laden and more carefully theorized terms used by



Pierre Bourdieu: restricted and large-scale cultural production. *Restricted cultural production* refers to the creation of supposedly noncommercial “art as art . . . for a public of producers of cultural goods”—the educated intellectuals and creative elites (“Market,” 1232). Opposed to this is middlebrow culture, defined as “the product of the system of large-scale cultural production” (1242). Explicitly market-driven and focused on maximum profits, *large-scale cultural production* is “organized with a view to the production of cultural goods for non-producers of cultural goods, ‘the public at large’” (1234). Bourdieu shows how the two fields have unequal symbolic and material values, and how symbolic cultural capital accrues to those with “cultural competence”—that is, the learned ability to appreciate restricted cultural goods (1244). Because this ability is classed and (to a lesser extent) gendered, it is also a status indicator. Connoisseurship of art and poetry thus becomes a means of upward mobility through the display of refinement and cultivation. These desires and tensions, too, are embedded in the illustrated gift book, as a product of large-scale cultural production that carries with it some of the symbolic value of restricted cultural production.

This book offers a case study in what D. F. McKenzie calls “the sociology of texts,” an approach to book history that takes into account both the materiality of the works it investigates and their social and cultural functions. Taking as its object a largely forgotten material artifact of middlebrow culture, it proposes that the poetic gift book’s brittle and crumbling pages offer new ways of seeing and understanding the high Victorian period. A hybrid form, the poetic gift book linked the elite arts of poetry and pictures with a mode of popular publishing unabashedly commercial. Its *raison d’être* was its ornate bibliographic form, which connected it to the scopic regimes of spectacle, visual art, material culture, and social status. Made and marketed as a gift to mark a ritual occasion, it connected the commercial world to the domestic home, even as it constructed and interpellated subjects marked by class, gender, and nation. Its recipient was usually a woman, and it lived with her in the space central to Victorian middle-class domesticity: the drawing room. Here, as Thorstein Veblen observed in his *Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899), both recipient and object were on display as material evidence of the household’s level of income and cultivation (83–86). But here, too, readers had the opportunity to turn the book’s creamy pages—to look at its black-and-white pictures by contemporary British artists and to read its printed poems by national poets. Mass-produced by the Victorian culture industry, the poetic gift book was a standardized form whose ideological and disciplinary manipulation of consumers cannot be ignored. However, I do not wish to lose sight of the fact

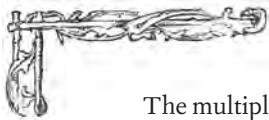


that it was also a domestic object embedded in the daily lives of women and accessible to their creative work as readers and users.<sup>9</sup>

Historians of the book and reading recognize that “all reading takes place in context” (Colclough, “Readers,” 52). Gift books did not fit in masculine pockets or travel between city and suburbs on commuter trains. Their large quarto size and ornately tooled and gilded bindings marked their exhibit value for face-up display on the surface of a table. Gift books were designed for the drawing room, the physical and spiritual center of the Victorian home that functioned as “the status indicator, the mark of gentility, the room from where the woman governed her domain” (Flanders, *Victorian House*, 131). As Thad Logan’s detailed *Victorian Parlour* has shown, the parlor or drawing room in the middle-class home was a privileged, feminized cultural space “in which material things simultaneously asserted and concealed a relation to the marketplace” (xiii).<sup>10</sup> If the drawing room was the center of the middle-class home, the center of the drawing room was the circular table with its display of books (2).

It is in this complex material context of domesticity and display that we can begin to understand the aesthetic and ideological features of the poetic gift book as a middlebrow art form. In its ornate architecture, the book symbolically represented the middle-class home itself, and its most cherished values, while also marking boundaries of inside and outside, public and private, female and male, individual and community, nation and world. As I hope to demonstrate, these ornamental books displayed in middle-class homes constitute a crucially important site for our understanding of poetry’s *place*—I use the word in all its senses—in nineteenth-century culture.

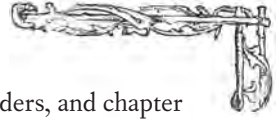
In reading the book as an expressive form, then, I am not as concerned with inter-art analogies and comparative structures relating image to text as I am with the various ways in which pictures and poems on the printed page build readers and meanings. Gérard Genette has written about the significance of paratextual matter—which he defines as “a heterogeneous group of practices and discourses”—in making texts *present* in the world and available to readers as historicized, material objects (*Paratexts*, 1–2). This study follows Genette’s methodology in its examination of both internal elements that present the text materially (for example, bindings, title pages, prefaces, tables of contents, and the like) and external elements that interact with, and constitute, the text in the public sphere (for example, interviews, reviews, publishers’ advertisements, catalogs, contracts, letters, and so on) (5). It also takes up as one of its principal points of consideration the “immense continent” of paratextual significance Genette identifies but does not examine: “that of *illustration*” (406).



The multiple roles played by illustration in nineteenth-century print culture do indeed constitute an immense continent. Even while I focus on the poetic gift books produced during the golden age of illustration, I am aware of the enormous variety of wood-engraved images in the periodical press: war journalism by “special artists,” scientific drawings and diagrams, rural scenes, fashion plates, zoological specimens, exotic topography, images of train wrecks, caricatures of contemporary life, documentary records of destitution, illustrations for serial fiction and other forms of literature—the list seems endless.

Similarly, if we move from the volume of poetry and pictures promoted as the ideal Christmas present to other illustrated books produced during this period, we immediately enter another enormous terrain. Even if we set aside school and travel books, we are still left with the Victorian novels that Robert Patten, John Harvey, David Skilton, J. Hillis Miller, and others have written about so insightfully; the works of popular science to which Bernard Lightman and Ann Shteir have opened our eyes; and the huge field of children’s books explored by many astute scholars, including Richard Dalby, F. J. Harvey Darton, Percy Muir, and Perry Nodelman. Furthermore, the illustrated gift book of the 1860s is positioned between the “Romantic book” surveyed by John Buchanan-Brown and the decorated belles lettres produced at the *fin de siècle* discussed by Nicholas Frankel, Simon Houfe, and John Russell Taylor, as well as many others. Much as I want to situate the poetic gift book historically and materially as an integral part of visual culture in the third quarter of the nineteenth century, I am well aware that even if I could travel this vast continent comprehensively, my ability to map it remains limited.

In establishing the limits of my synchronic study, I have found it helpful to reimagine Genette’s enormous land mass as a vast body of water. Inspired by Lytton Strachey’s historiography, I shall be purposely selective as I “row out over that great ocean of material, and lower down into it, here and there, a little bucket, which will bring up to the light of day some characteristic specimen, from those far depths, to be examined with a careful curiosity” (*Eminent Victorians*, vii). In the following chapters, I examine the material form and physical features of selected Christmas gift books produced between 1855 and 1875, attentive to the ways in which their pages bring readers and relationships (social, cultural, ideological, and economic) to the fore. Each chapter presents historicized case studies of individual texts, relating them to specific elements of Victorian visual culture as it overlaps with publishing history. To recognize the contributions of different makers, each chapter also highlights a different aspect of the production process: chapter 1 provides an overview of gift-book commissioning, printing, marketing, and reception, while chapter 2 focuses on



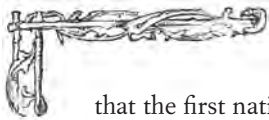
illustrators, chapter 3 on engravers, chapter 4 on poets and readers, and chapter 5 on Tennyson and his relationships with his illustrators (especially his female illustrators) and publishers.

Chapter 1, “Reading the Christmas Gift Book,” establishes the contexts out of which the illustrated poetic gift book emerged. I distinguish the poetic gift book of the 1860s from the earlier Victorian annuals in terms of its material form, mode of production, and implications for the history of authorship, publishing, and reading. My genealogy begins with James Burns’s *Poems and Pictures: A Collection of Ballads, Songs, and Other Poems* (1846), regarded by Victorian critics as “the very first of the Christmas Books of which illustrations were planned with an artistic aim” (*JR*, Dec. 31, 1859, 818). Citing contemporary reviews, I show how the well-bound book combining poetry and artistic illustrations became a standardized object of Christmas gift exchange, directed principally at women, and caught up with notions of British identity and cultural capital.

The gift book moved poetry into popular publishing through its complex associations with visual culture. A hybrid form, the book of wood-engraved pictures and poetry was connected to the graphic vernacular of the periodical press while also asserting some of the elite values of art from the fields of restricted production. In the nineteenth century’s age of mechanical reproduction, the gift book’s principal technology, wood engraving, facilitated a new modular art form simultaneously unique and multiple. I examine in detail just what this technology meant in terms of bringing a book through the press and connecting it to readers. This chapter also establishes the theoretical and methodological frameworks I use in my analysis of the poetic gift book as an expressive form. A product of corporate authorship, its composited text interpellates a mobile modern reader who is also a producer capable of authorizing uses and meanings.

Chapter 2, “The Moxon Tennyson, Pre-Raphaelite Art, and Victorian Visual Culture,” recognizes the important contribution that Pre-Raphaelite artists made to the art of the sixties book and its meanings in both the private reading experience and the public sphere. As is well known, the Pre-Raphaelites were literary artists and poets whose short-lived journal, *The Germ* (1850), announced their combined commitment to “Art and Poetry.”<sup>11</sup> Three of the founding members—John Everett Millais, William Holman Hunt, and Dante Gabriel Rossetti—revolutionized the art of illustration by taking their woodblock designs as seriously as their easel paintings. Their pictures for the Moxon Tennyson of 1857 launched the new style of illustration the sixties became known for.

Well known as it is, however, the Moxon Tennyson needs to be examined more thoroughly as a material object in the historical context of its publication and reception. Significantly, the Moxon Tennyson came out in the same month

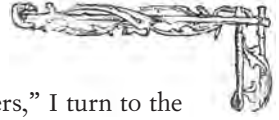


that the first national exhibition, “Art Treasures of the United Kingdom,” was held in Manchester. Consequently, its wood-engraved illustrations were immediately caught up in contemporary discourses about art, national culture, and tradition. This chapter explores the complex relationships instituted between the illustrated gift book and the fine art of painting through a synchronic investigation of visual discourses and practices in the formative year of 1857.

In chapter 3, “The Dalziel Brothers’ Fine Art Book and the Mass Production of Culture,” the focus switches from artists to engravers and from the discursive practices of the field of restricted cultural production to those of large-scale cultural production. In this chapter, I examine the formidable role played by the engraving firm of the Dalziel brothers in the production and reception of Christmas gift books. The Dalziel family of artists and engravers dominated the second half of the nineteenth-century book and periodical trade. They provided cuts for important newspapers and magazines, including the *Illustrated London News*, *Once a Week*, the *Cornhill*, *Good Words*, and *Punch*, and engraved many of the images that have come to be most associated with this period, from Tenniel’s illustrations for Lewis Carroll’s *Alice* books to the zoological and botanical images in Reverend J. G. Wood’s *Illustrated Natural History* series to the Moxon Tennyson and other gift books. They trained both illustrators and engravers and helped establish the careers of many of the period’s book artists, including Frederick Walker and Arthur Boyd Houghton. Significantly, they also supported and promoted women writers, featuring the work of women in books produced for domestic consumption.

As we shall see, the Fine Art Books produced by the Dalziels at their Camden Press became, in many ways, synonymous with the Christmas gift book of poems and pictures. Effectively, the Dalziel Fine Art Book was a new form of serial publication, produced specifically for an annual event and caught up in cultural practices associated with the season. This chapter situates the Dalziel gift book in relation to the illustrated poetry published in the periodical press and to print culture’s discursive production of Christmas as the British festival of the home. It examines two particular types of Christmas book: the poetic anthology of standard or popular authors illustrated by the original work of contemporary artists; and the gallery of pictures by a popular artist accompanied by the ekphrastic poetry of commissioned authors. Seeking to demonstrate the importance of illustrated poetry to daily middle-class life in the third quarter of the nineteenth century, this chapter investigates how the poems and pictures of the Christmas gift book both expressed and shaped middle-class concepts of childhood, femininity, home, and family, inscribing ideologies of gender, nation, and class in its gilt-edged pages.

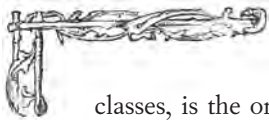




In chapter 4, “Second-Rate Poets for Second-Rate Readers,” I turn to the questions of value raised by Christmas books produced by women poets for a principally female audience. This chapter also explores the transatlantic reach of popular poetry and the Christmas gift book as an object of exchange, situating works by Eliza Cook, Adelaide Anne Procter, and Jean Ingelow within the periodical culture and reading constituencies of Britain and the United States. As in chapter 3, I position the production and reception of these gift books within the emergent feminist discourses of the 1860s. Because Cook, Procter, and (to a lesser extent) Ingelow were all involved in the women’s movement, gift-book editions of their poetry offer particularly compelling sites in which to explore the form’s uneasy dialogue between conservative and progressive values and ideologies. Moreover, as each of these women poets had large followings on both sides of the Atlantic, the physical features of their illustrated editions provide an opportunity to analyze how the “popular” is constituted within daily life and to ask how poetry takes up its traditional role of instruction and delight in works by women for women.

Chapter 5, “Poet and Publishers: Tennyson and the Image,” examines the numerous illustrated editions of Tennyson’s work that proliferated in the 1860s, when his peak popularity as a poet coincided with the craze for Christmas gift books. The emphasis here is twofold. First, I examine the author-publisher relationship and show how even a poet with the laureate’s muscle was no match for the publishing industry’s agenda for extending readerships and increasing purchases in the nineteenth-century age of the image. Here I consider the image both in its metaphoric sense, as the poet’s “brand” or identity within celebrity culture, and in its material sense, as a visual picture. Tennyson’s well-known dislike of illustrated editions did not prevent him from being a partner in, and profiting from, the production of illustrated editions with various publishers between 1857 and 1875. Citing some illustrated editions of his work by women artists and independent publishers, I also suggest that Tennyson’s objections had more to do with issues of authorial agency and control than with the actual practice of picturing his poetry. Indeed, I find that Tennyson and his publishers learned a great deal to their profit from the work of women artists.

My second emphasis in this chapter is the importance of various nineteenth-century technologies to the production and reception of illustrated gift books. In particular, I analyze the significance of a variety of photographic processes and discourses to gift-book editions of Tennyson’s poetry, from *Enoch Arden* (1866) to the Cabinet Edition of his *Poetical Works* (1874–75), the last of his books to be illustrated in a new edition by his own publisher and with his consent. Indeed, the Cabinet Edition, published serially in inexpensive volumes for the working



classes, is the only one of Tennyson's editions to have been illustrated at his instigation. Evidently, by this late date, the association of images and poetry in popular culture was incontrovertible even for the laureate: the target audience of "the people" thus made the inclusion of illustrations desirable for the man who had become known as "the People's Poet." The fact that Tennyson shared this appellation with Eliza Cook, as he did the material form of the poetic gift book and its associations with middlebrow culture, popular readerships, and women, may well have contributed to the so-called reaction against Tennyson that emerged at the end of the 1860s (Mazzeno, *Tennyson*, 20).

The coda, "Poems and Pictures in the Modern Age," examines why the sixties Christmas book lost its central place in Victorian culture and explores its legacies for literary and publishing history. By the early 1870s, the illustrated gift book had virtually played itself out as a popular form combining pictures and poetry. Artistic innovation in the textual interaction of picture and word began to be redirected to the burgeoning field of juvenile publishing. Replacing verses with fairy tales and wood-engraved images with pictures reproduced from the three-color process, the new Christmas gift books inculcated the practice of collecting in a generation of child readers. Meanwhile, the most popular poetic gift books of the golden age—Willmott's *Poets of the Nineteenth Century*, for instance, or Mackay's *Thousand and One Gems of English Poetry*—continued to appear each Christmas season in a variety of versions: as new editions or reprints, as recycled pictures with new texts, and as cannibalized parts of previous works. But new poetic gift books with original wood-engraved illustrations all but disappeared from the adult market. By the fin de siècle, process reproduction had replaced wood engraving so effectively that the Dalziels, together with other engravers, were forced to close shop. With the new technologies, new art forms emerged, along with new ways of combining poetry and pictures and new types of books for another generation of buyers and readers.