

Visual Words: Art and the Material Book in Victorian England by Gerard Curtis. Aldershot, Hants / Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002. xii, 305 pp. + 77 b/w illus. ISBN 1-84014-657-5. \$84.95.

There was a time when literary scholars lost sight of their object, the book. In their extreme focus on linguistic meaning, critics overlooked the text's materiality in all its complex social and historical density. But with the growth of interdisciplinary and cultural studies, and the expansion of bibliography into publishing history, we now recognize that the material book is itself a discursive form.

Gerard Curtis's fascinating study offers an art historian's perspective on Victorian literary culture, viewing literature as image or object rather than text. Curtis examines various images of the Victorian text, including paintings of contemporary life; graphic illustrations; graphic texts such as advertising; calligraphy and typography; portraits of authors; bookbinding; and the material book itself as cultural artifact. His explorations of these different aspects of literature as visual culture are linked by a number of thematic concerns, such as the sister arts tradition in the Victorian period, the model of author as national hero, and the role of the book as cultural icon.

In Chapter 1, "Shared Lines: Pen and Pencil as Trace," Curtis examines the relationship between pen and pencil, arguing that the partnership of the textual and the graphic lines was "at the heart of communication in the Victorian period." Emphasis in the elementary school system on drawing and calligraphy ensured both a visual literacy and an understanding of the written or drawn mark as "indexical trace." At the same time, advertising and sign writing became increasingly a part of the visual landscape, while illustrated books and newspapers contributed to a "new 'hieroglyphics' sweeping Victorian society." The development of photography and new market forces in publishing, however, changed the relationship of image to text and artist to author. Curtis claims that by the end of the century, the former partnership of graphic and textual line had been replaced by a new competitiveness, with art forced to take a secondary position to literature.

"The Hieroglyphic Image" is the subject of Chapter 2, which focuses on how the close relationship between text and graphic media manifested itself in paintings of contemporary life. Curtis takes the intertextual and allusive methodology of Ford Madox Brown's monumental *Work* (1852-65) as his object lesson. In a sophisticated and detailed reading of this well-known painting, Curtis shows how the artist uses a combination of emblems, written text (a five-page catalogue entry), symbols, iconography, graphic illustration, and textual reference to comment visually on one of the period's dominant social concerns: the accessibility of adequate supplies of fresh, safe water in the metropolis. According to Curtis, in *Work* we see the Victorian desire to