

Reading Victorian Illustration, 1855-1875: Spoils of the Lumber Room edited by Paul Goldman and Simon Cooke. Farnham, Surrey; Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 2012. xiii, 224 pp. + 42 b/w illus. ISBN 978-1409411659. \$99.95.

The 1860s has long been recognized by collectors and scholars as a “golden age of illustration” in Britain, when figures such as John Everett Millais, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Frederic Leighton and many other artists brought a new aesthetic to the illustration of books and periodicals. Since at least the 1890s, collectors have valued these illustrations as works of fine art, often removing them from the volumes in which they first appeared and treating them as autonomous images. In more recent years, scholars from a variety of disciplines have sought to reverse this trend by examining these illustrations in the textual, material, and cultural contexts within which they were originally embedded. This volume marks a large step forward in that enterprise, bringing together nine essays by eminent scholars of Victorian illustration, including art historians, literary scholars, and museum curators. Collectively the essays argue that illustration of the period between 1855 and 1875 constitutes a distinct and important moment in British visual culture, and suggest that these works of art be addressed within a new academic discipline of “Illustration Studies.”

The editors’ introduction and the final essay by Robert Meyrick work to define and document the flowering of illustration during the years between 1855 and 1875, commonly referred to as “Sixties illustration.” Goldman and Cooke open the volume by arguing for the stylistic significance and coherence of the illustration of the period, which they argue marks “a radical change in the aesthetics of the printed page.” In contrast to previous decades, many illustrators of the period were professional painters and their Academic training and commitment to naturalism shaped the dominant aesthetic of “poetic naturalism” that characterizes the illustration of the period. These illustrations were valued as works of art at the time they were produced, and quickly reissued in higher quality albums. But most copies of them remained hidden on libraries’ and booksellers’ shelves, until collectors such as Gleeson White began to call attention to them as valuable prints that could be cut out of the original volumes, mounted, and preserved and enjoyed independently. Meyrick’s engaging essay charts this early history, and the emergence of “Sixties” illustration as an established category through the collecting and writing of its admirers such as White, Harold Hartley, and Forrest Reid.

Paul Goldman’s opening essay continues this tradition of championing Sixties illustration, calling for a new academic discipline of “Illustration Studies” to do justice to these works’ complexity and significance as artistic achievements and cultural artefacts. Much of the essay is devoted to mapping