

*The Artist as Critic: Bitextuality in Fin-de-Siècle Illustrated Books* by Lorraine Janzen Kooistra. Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1995. xiv, 304 pp. ISBN 1-85928-159-1, \$66.95.

Lorraine Kooistra has succeeded well in her aim of studying the illustrated first edition as the *fin de siècle*'s "predominant textual form." She devotes the first fifty pages to theorizing the visual/verbal interactions which characterize *fin-de-siècle* illustrated books. She rightly laments that literary critics routinely--and one might add, arrogantly--disregard the illustrations which accompanied so many Victorian texts on their first appearance (a kind of treatment sanctioned in literary studies by the standard approach to Blake's poetry), while art historians and collectors stress the illustrations and overall design of the books. She overlooks a number of significant exceptions to her generalization--neither the work of Michael Hancher on the Alice books nor Allan Life's on Millais's illustrations of Trollope appear in her bibliography. She might also have mentioned the brief but telling discussion by Maurice Sendak of Randolph Caldecott's brilliant exploitation of visual/verbal interactions in his Picture Books from 1878-85. Nevertheless, the kind of study that Kooistra has undertaken is long overdue.

Early on Kooistra quotes W. J. T. Mitchell's recent *Picture Theory* and, inevitably, Bakhtin, to bolster her critical strategy of reading illustrated books as "imagetexts," whose interactions are "inseparable from struggles in cultural politics and political culture" (4). Kooistra's notion of bitextuality derives from Derrida's "Two texts, two hands, two looks" ( *Truth in Painting*) and Cixous's model of bisexuality in a single body/text ("The Laugh of the Medusa"). By contrast, studies of illustration have traditionally employed a marital trope which entrenched text and illustration in sexual positions: text in the role of male authority, illustration in the female role of "submission, reflection and ornamentation." She does not, however, prefer Cixous's hermaphroditic model, arguing, with a nod to Derrida, that "illustrated books are seductively engaged in two ways of making and two ways of looking at the world--and each other"(12). The relationship between image and text is, we are frequently told, dialogic, constituting "a sexual/textual struggle in which meaning is produced out of the conflict of confrontation" (13) (her reference here is to a passage in Bakhtin's *Art and Answerability*).

Chapter 1 proposes five strategies at the disposal of the artist as critic for interpreting the verbal text: quotation, impression, parody, answering, and cross-dressing. Although chapters 3 to 7 discuss each of these strategies separately, Kooistra is at pains to emphasize that none of them operates exclusively in a given book. Before turning to the first of the critical positions, she devotes a chapter to contextualizing the books by reference to the three contemporary discourses which influenced their representational forms and ideological concerns: "socialistic arts and crafts, individualistic aestheticism, and journalistic realism" (26). Although there is little that is new in this chapter, it demonstrates Kooistra's wide reading in the standard books on the arts and crafts and aesthetic movements, developments