

CASE STUDIES IN ILLUSTRATION:
LAURENCE HOUSMAN IN *THE YELLOW BOOK* AND
THE FIELD OF CLOVER

Lorraine Janzen Kooistra

This essay on the pictorial work of fin-de-siècle book artist Laurence Housman engages perennial questions in image/text studies: *What is an illustration? What is an illustration's function? And how do media and format contribute to meaning?* I take up these questions in two illustrative case studies, each instantiating distinct, localized, and sometimes contradictory answers. My first case study examines two illustrations Housman published in *The Yellow Book*, a magazine known for its segregation of letterpress and pictures: “The Reflected Faun” (volume 1, April 1894) and “Barren Life” (volume 10, July 1896). The second case study examines Housman’s self-illustrated collection of fairy tales, *The Field of Clover* (1898). While the selection, arrangement, and photomechanical reproduction of Housman’s *Yellow Book* images were determined by the magazine’s editors and publisher, the artist was responsible for the design of *The Field of Clover*, whose full-page illustrations and initial letters were wood-engraved by his sister Clemence Housman, a skilled craftswoman. In what follows, I show the extent to which an illustration and its functions are context-dependent. Meanings shift with changes in relations between original and copy, image and text, and object and audience.

What is an illustration? In common usage, the term “illustration” signifies a work of visual art produced in response to and intended to accompany a verbal text of some kind. Like all forms of language use, this everyday definition is rooted in cultural history. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*’s chronology of usage, the primary meaning of illustration prior to the nineteenth century was a verbal example given to expand on a topic and illuminate its meaning. The specifically pictorial meaning of illustration did not emerge until 1816. By the 1840s, illustration in this visual sense had as secure a place in the everyday lexicon as it enjoys today.

Coinciding with the Victorian explosion of illustrated texts of all kinds –