

Poetry, Pictures, and Popular Publishing: The Illustrated Gift Book and Victorian Visual Culture, 1855-1875 by Lorraine Janzen Kooistra. Athens, OH: Ohio UP, 2011. xiv, 305 pp. + 65 b/w illus. ISBN 978-0-8214-1964-9. \$59.95.

As the first major work of scholarship to highlight the cultural significance of Victorian illustrated gift books, *Poetry, Pictures, and Popular Publishing: The Illustrated Gift Book and Victorian Culture* represents an important contribution to Victorian studies, as well as to the fields of visual and material culture, popular literacy, and book history. It also builds on an impressive set of recent publications by Lorraine Kooistra (including her 2002 monograph *Christina Rossetti and Illustration: A Publishing History*, her 2007 article “Poetry in the Victorian Marketplace: The Illustrated *Princess* as a Christmas Gift Book,” and her 2008 essay “Home Thoughts and Home Scenes: Packaging Middle Class Childhood for Christmas Consumption,” to name only a few), confirming her as the leading authority on Victorian illustrated books of poetry. Continuing the work of such scholars as Richard Altick, Kate Flint, Peter Sinnema, Gerry Beegan, and John Buchanan-Brown, this study approaches the poetic gift book as a complex set of social, economic, and cultural interactions between writers, illustrators, publishers, and readers that offers a unique perspective on the high Victorian period. The analysis works both synchronically, closely examining the publication process from commissioning to engraving to printing, and diachronically, tracing the development of gift books as cultural artefacts from the height of their popularity on the Victorian market in the 1850s and ’60s through their gradual decline in the 1870s. Approaching the gift book as “a case study in what D.F. McKenzie calls ‘the sociology of texts,’” Kooistra seeks to account for both the materiality of texts and their role in society and culture. Her study therefore blends a keen historical attention to the materials and processes involved in the production of gift books – drawing the reader’s notice, for example, to bindings, frontispieces, and the techniques of mechanical reproduction – with sensitive close readings of the pictures and poems that populate the pages, as well as insight into the function of these books as items of exchange, markers of class, and producers of subjects. This sociological focus permits a remarkably inclusive analysis, revealing the illustrated gift book as an object fully embedded in the cultural and material practices of the Victorian age.

It is perhaps a fitting testament to *Poetry, Pictures, and Popular Publishing*’s brilliant consistency of form and content that the language of my review threatens at this point to echo contemporary newspaper notices for the very gift books Kooistra’s study explores: lavishly illustrated and beautifully