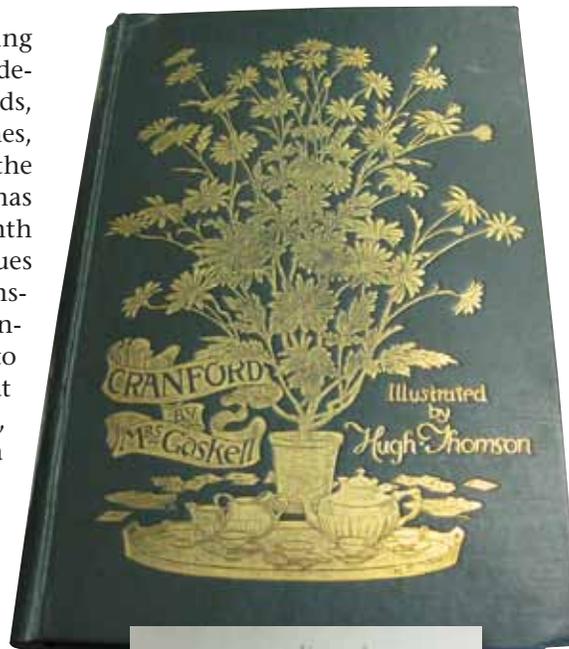


Book Illustration in the Victorian Age

by Gwen Vredevoogd

With books now being read on mobile devices like iPads, Kindles, and even smart phones, it's easy to forget how much the format of a standard book has changed since the nineteenth century. Publishing techniques and books themselves have transformed so much in the intervening years that it's hard for us to imagine the effort and care that went into editing, typesetting, illustrating, and preparing a manuscript for publication 150 years ago. Then as now, visual elements enhance the reader's understanding of a work in a way that changes the reading experience. As Alice wonders before she goes down the rabbit hole, "What is the use of a book... without pictures or conversations?" (Carroll 1870).

Many consider the late nineteenth century to be a high point for book illustration. This time period pre-dates widespread use of photography as illustration and publishing techniques were improved to the point that many more readers could afford to purchase books. At the same time, the magazine industry was hitting its stride in England, and artists drew illustrations or political cartoons for magazines like *Punch*. Notable among this group were George Cruikshank and Hablot Knight Browne, or Phiz. The illustrations were often for comic intent and this style crept into book illustration as well (Goldman 2004).



Top, cover of *Cranford* by Elizabeth Gaskell; with illustrations by Hugh Thomson. London: Macmillan, 1891.

Above, an illustration inside the book.

Victorian era book illustration spans several distinct styles and employs various techniques (although wood engraving was by far the most common). In *Victorian Illustration*, Paul Goldman divides Victorian styles of illustration into three groups: the Pre-Raphaelites, the Idyllic School, and the High Victorians, so we will borrow his categories.

The Pre-Raphaelite painters like Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Edward Burne-Jones, Ford Madox Brown, John Everett Millais, and William Holman Hunt brought a seriousness and great skill to their work as illustrators. They would draw scenes from the work that would be etched or more often engraved by someone else to be included in publications. Often fine artists would work with craftsmen to create illustrations as bold as the text they were meant to enhance.

By the 1880s the Arts and Crafts

Gwen Vredevoogd is Collection Development Librarian at Marymount University in Arlington, Virginia. She has been an academic librarian for fifteen years, coordinating collection management to support the curriculum, managing electronic resources, providing reference and liaison services, and teaching information literacy sessions. She selects literature, design, and fine art materials in all formats for the library. She has an MLS from the University of Pittsburgh and an MA in English from Ohio University.



Top, cover of *Through the Looking-Glass* by Lewis Carroll, with illustrations by John Tenniel, 1889. On either side are *Individual pages from the 1870 edition*.

Open book above is from the *inside papers of Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll, 1890.

movement was well underway, and the Kelmscott Press—the publishing house founded by William Morris—promoted their ideals. The production process was slow due to the high standards employed, but early books from this press were stunning. Less elaborate than the Kelmscott Press publications, the Vale Press founded by Charles Ricketts (1866–1931) produced materials that were easier to handle as objects, and they are adorned with lovely engraved decorations and illustrations designed by Ricketts (Ray 1976).

Many of the illustrators of the nascent gift book industry, as well

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as illustrators of children's books, fell into what Goldman calls the Idyllic School. Prominent illustrators of children's books of the day were Randolph Caldecott (1846–1886), for whom the Caldecott

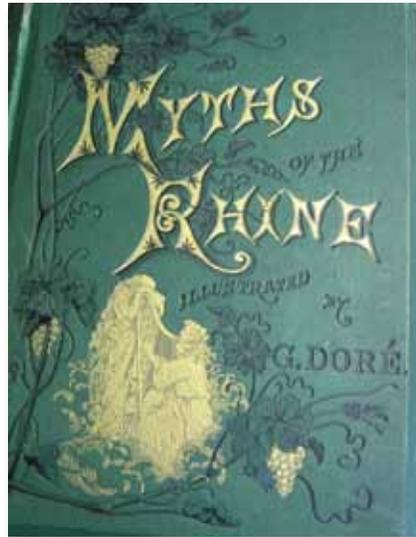
Medal is named, and Kate Greenaway (1846–1901). Caldecott's work was very popular because of its economy of line and good humor. Greenaway's work, also popular in its day, often depicted quaint, old-fashioned scenes of children (Ray 1976).

Marymount University holds an eclectic special collection that includes interesting book illustration examples in the John T. and Agnes J. Gomas Reading Room. Illustration highlights of the Gomas collection at Marymount include:

- An 1852 edition of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe

with 27 illustrations by George Cruikshank.

- While the first edition was published in 1865, Marymount has four editions of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, ranging from 1870 to 1907, and two copies of *Through the Looking-Glass* by Lewis Carroll, which are fascinating to compare. Sir John Tenniel (1820–1914) was most well known at the time as a political cartoonist for *Punch* magazine when he agreed to do the illustrations for an Oxford math professor named Charles Dodgson, who would come to be known as Lewis Carroll. His forty-two illustrations emphasize the whimsical nature of the text. The 1907 *Alice* is illustrated in a very different style by another artist, Arthur Rackham, and includes some color illustrations. This only seems to emphasize the synergy between the Tenniel illustrations and the work itself.
- Marymount University holds *Myths of the Rhine* (1875) illustrated by Gustave Doré (1832–1883). Doré was a fine artist who drew for wood engravers and was most known for the wood engraved plates in *London: A Pilgrimage* by Gustave Doré and Blanchard Jerrold. London, Grant & Co., 1872.
- Hugh Thomson (1860–1920) was a prolific illustrator of primarily gift books. He is most known for his illustrations of Jane Austen titles published in 1896 and for illustrations in “the Cranford series.” This popular set of 22 volumes began with *Cranford* by Elizabeth Gaskell. In the style that became known as the Idyllic School, Thomson’s work tends to be charmingly sentimental with striking bindings and black and white illustrations of the works within that are quite expressive. Marymount University has an



Top, cover of *Myths of the Rhine* translated from the French of X.B. Saintine by M. Schele De Vere; illustrated by Gustave Doré. New York: Scribner, Armstrong, and Co., 1875.

Above, inside page from the same book.

1891 copy of *Cranford* from the original series as well as a 1907 *Silas Marner* by George Eliot, also illustrated by Thomson (Ray 1976).

- A 1907 Lippincott reprint of *The Princess and the Goblin* by George MacDonald with the original Arthur Hughes wood engravings, plus color illustrations by Maria

L. Kirk. The original published by Strahan and Co. in 1872 was engraved by the Dalziel Brothers (respected wood-engravers of the day), and these illustrations are retained while also adding color illustration (Goldman 2004).

With the help of a Faculty Development Grant, Dr. Tonya Howe has designed a website, <http://cerisia.cerisia.org/gomatos/>, to make the resources of the Gomatos collection electronically accessible to the public and to serve as an extensible tool for the sharing of student-authored digital media relevant to the collection. Marymount University plans to digitize additional selections that are past copyright protection to make them more widely available, but for now classes and visitors can make appointments during regular business hours to use the materials in this special collection. For more information on accessing the collection, visit <http://www.marymount.edu/academics/lls/collections/specialCollections/gomatos.aspx>.

Works cited

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