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H-France Review Vol. 14 (April 2014), No. 57

Keri Yousif, *Balzac, Grandville, and the Rise of Book Illustration*. Surrey, U.K. and Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2012. 212 pp. Notes, bibliography, 24 black-and-white illustrations, and index. \$114.95 U.S. (hb). ISBN 9781409418085.

Review by Anna Sigrídur Arnar, Minnesota State University Moorhead.

As books underwent the transformation from an exclusive commodity to a more democratically available medium, a rhetoric of anxiety developed centering on the question of who possesses the genuine skills to write a book. In France, such anxieties had been articulated as early as the seventeenth century, at a time when the literary marketplace experienced a significant expansion of books produced by elite *amateurs*. Early modern men of letters expressed profound resentment that simply *anybody* could publish a book. La Bruyère's opening statement in *Les Caractères* (1688) that it is a veritable *métier* to write a book, is a case in point because he believed that his writing should be distinguished from that of some enterprising *amateur*. [1]

More than a century and a half later, the nineteenth-century French literary marketplace became an even more crowded arena of enterprising individuals. Many nineteenth-century men of letters felt compelled to not only distance their books from *amateurs* but from journalists, hack writers, *feuilletonistes* (serial writers) and from those not even trained as writers including illustrators and caricaturists whose popular albums, keepsakes, *physiologies* and *almanachs* were taking the marketplace by storm at the height of the publishing boom of the July Monarchy. At stake here was not only a fight for "true" writers to earn fair compensation and credit in this crowded marketplace, but to save face and preserve authorial control and cultural status.

In her focused study, *Balzac, Grandville, and the Rise of Book Illustration*, Keri Yousif delves straight into the competitive arena of book publishing by closely examining the careers of two exceptionally prolific individuals during the July Monarchy: writer Honoré de Balzac and illustrator J.J. Grandville. These two figures make a particularly compelling case study because, although each figure enjoyed considerable success from publishing books, their successes highlight some of paradoxes that resulted in the "industrialization of literature," namely the change in cultural status that accompanied commercial success. Although many studies have examined the technological and economic transformations of the publishing industry during this crucial time period, her book is perhaps the first study in English to illuminate the particular tensions that arose between writers and illustrators as each negotiated the terrain of the potentially lucrative market of illustrated books. [2]

Along the way, readers learn not only about the important technical innovations that reshaped the publishing industry in the first half of the nineteenth-century, but also about how writers and illustrators such as Balzac and Grandville "defend and define themselves" in this rapidly evolving industry (p. 4). One of the great strengths of this book is that it challenges a central myth surrounding collaboration between the arts in the first half of the nineteenth-century in France. While the Romantic period in particular tends to be characterized as an era that produced fruitful encounters between text and image, Yousif reminds us (pace Philippe Kaenel) that writers such as Alphonse de Lamartine and Alfred de Musset went out of their way to protect their literary work by rejecting (and even tearing out)

illustrations from their books. Her examination of Grandville and Balzac provides further insight into the fraught relationship between word and image revealing how both men were cautious and rather peevish about sharing turf.

The introduction, titled “Out of Bounds: Book Illustration in France, 1830-1848,” is a nuts-and-bolts chapter that charts the popularization of book illustration by examining the key social, political and technological factors that contributed to the vast expansion of illustrated books during the July Monarchy. For those familiar with the history of illustration, this chapter does not necessarily introduce new ideas, but it serves as an important overview of crucial developments such as the rise of caricature and the satirical press during the brief interlude when censorship laws were relaxed in the early years of the July Monarchy, the expansion of government literacy programs and education reforms resulting in a new market of readers, the popularity of illustrated serial novels (the *roman-feuilletons*) in daily newspapers providing an effective marketing campaign to increase reader subscriptions. Yousif also addresses how the mechanization of the printing presses, paper mills and the production of printer’s ink served to improve the speed and efficacy of printing. Book publishers were quick to learn from newspaper publishers by wholeheartedly embracing illustration as an especially effective way to sell texts including works of literature, much to the alarm of literary critics and writers themselves, as Yousif observes. “With a plethora of illustrated texts, the image invaded the literary field, threatening the historic hegemony of the word and the ‘purity’ of high art” (p. 17).

Chapter one, “Frames of Competition: Balzac, Grandville, and Caricature,” is by far the longest chapter and it is here that Yousif elaborates on the methodological framework of her study. As is made clear throughout the book, her analysis hews closely to Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of “cultural fields,” in which cultural producers compete for both symbolic and cultural validation. [3] Yousif’s analysis is also shaped by her thesis advisor Alexandra Wettlaufer’s study on the Pygmalion myth that centers on the “rivalry” between the sister arts of painting and poetry, or between the cultural power of word and image.[4] Illustrated books are especially relevant for such an analysis because text and image literally compete on the same page but, more importantly, both writer and illustrator have a stake in the critical reception and economic success of the book. As Yousif explains, negotiating success was a delicate and even paradoxical task for Balzac and Grandville because in order to preserve an image of intellectual and professional integrity, both men were critical of the crass marketing ploys and commercialization of illustrated books, yet each of them benefitted from the very publications they criticized. “Acutely aware of the effects of consumerism on art, each attempts to distance himself, creating an isolated isle of aesthetic honor and lucidity within a commercialized system....The irony, of course, is that artists such as Balzac and Grandville, who were not independently wealthy, still had to earn a living” (p. 34).

A particularly poignant development in this first chapter is how Yousif begins by quoting Balzac in an article from 1830 paying lip service to the nobility of the artist as an intellectual and yet a decade later he is alarmed by the prospect of being eclipsed by the visual artists with whom he worked in publications such as *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes*. This publication tapped into the popularity of *physiologies* defined as satirical and light-hearted studies of contemporary social types, trades and professions. Such publications increasingly featured contributions from multiple illustrators and writers. Therefore, for this publication, Balzac was sharing the stage, not only with several writers, many of whom were second-rate, but with caricaturists and illustrators who happened to be highly successful and had greater renown than many of the writers.

Yousif nails it on the head when she writes of Balzac who saw himself as the “originator” of *les physiologies* with *Les scènes de la vie privée* and the “nascent” *Comédie humaine*, but then felt compromised, “if not menaced,” because he could no longer make sole “artistic claim on the representation of the period” (p. 67). Balzac’s life project of writing intimate and detailed portrayals of members of French society now appeared sullied and watered down by mediocre imitators, not to mention attention-grabbing illustrators whose images could capture in an instant the details of a carefully crafted textual

description. And yet, as Yousif's subtle analysis shows, Grandville also experienced challenges as an illustrator for *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes* for, although this publication gave pride and place to the illustrations, the images were obliged to follow the text rather closely. "Organized as such, the work presents a paradoxical frame for the caricaturist in that it celebrates the visual, giving illustration a new quantitative reign, but aesthetically limits the artists to an illustrative context that restrains artistic freedom. Grandville finds himself locked in a system that, despite promises of equality, requires the artists to play a secondary role" (pp. 77-78).

The following three chapters each center on a single illustrated publication that allows Yousif to highlight a particular facet within the shifting power dynamic between the writer Balzac and the caricaturist illustrator Grandville. In chapter two, *Les scènes de la vie privée et publique des animaux* shows how the traditional rules of illustration were rewritten so that Grandville "made a move toward authorship" and the writer became a "verbal illustrator" and was therefore limited. In this publication, the human *physiologie* was replaced by a menagerie of animals and each anecdote was punctuated or framed with eye-catching illustrations by Grandville. In contrast to Grandville's status as the single illustrator for the entire publication, Balzac was just one of many writers on the project, the list of whom included Paul de Musset, Charles Nodier, Jules Janin, George Sand as well as a host of lesser-known writers. Many of the entries were actually written by the publisher Pierre-Jules Hetzel under the pseudonym P. J. Stahl. Yousif shows how Balzac tried to outdo Grandville's illustrations in his narratives by providing probing insights and details that he believed eluded the superficial descriptions offered by visual imagery. Ultimately, however, "Balzac's texts all close with an illustration that follows the writer's signature. It is the artist, not the writer, who has the literal and metaphorical last word" (p. 102). Given that each short story in *Les scènes de la vie privée et publique des animaux* began with an illuminated letter and culminated with a illustration, she argues that the writer's text is "caged" in by images (from the chapter and section titles).

In the end, *Les scènes de la vie privée et publique des animaux* was a tremendous commercial success and Grandville enjoyed the additional honor of receiving positive reviews from peers including fellow artist and illustrator Rodolphe Töpffer. Töpffer not only praised Grandville's contributions to *Les scènes de la vie privée et publique des animaux* but he also encouraged Grandville to pursue independent projects in which the illustrator would be the sole creator. To Töpffer's mind, Grandville had attained the status of a poet, a creator who need not depend on the works of others to illustrate. The commercial success of the book, positive reviews in the press, and peer recognition combined to lift Grandville out of the "traditional role as visual secretary to become an author" (p. 111). Consequently, Yousif notes, "Balzac, Janin, Musset, and Charles Nodier were demoted to verbal illustrators. This power reversal worked to silence Balzac, the perpetual critic of the visual. Furthermore, the writer became a prisoner of not only Grandville, but of the image itself, as his own medium, the word, is repeatedly displaced, dismissed, and denied authority in *Les animaux*" (p. 111).

The power dynamic between writer and illustrator alters drastically in chapter three. Focusing on the illustrated edition of *La Comédie humaine*, Balzac's multi-volumed tour de force, Yousif argues that Balzac reclaims creative autonomy by making sure that the illustrations be limited to portraits, rather than entire scenes. "Décor, milieu, plot, and character interaction were reserved for the writer" (p. 117). As author of the text, Balzac wanted to be describer-in-chief but he also understood the importance of illustrations because there was no denying that they sold books. Moreover, as Yousif notes, the presence of images, especially those by reputable illustrators, meant that Balzac could market his illustrated series as "édition de luxe à bon marché" (deluxe edition for a good price) because *hors-texte* engravings (engravings printed on a sheet of paper independent from the page of text) would be inserted into the majority of the installments.

The key here is *hors-texte* for the image did not compete directly with the text on the same page and Balzac made sure to "limit and command illustration" by "forcing it into the service" of his literary

enterprise (p. 119). By carefully selecting artists and limiting the number, format and placement of illustrations, the writer regained a modicum of control. I applaud Yousif for being attentive to what I call the zones of illustration because there is a tendency among literary scholars to treat all book illustrations in the same way, when in fact the placement of illustrations shapes their function, their viewing experience, as well as their critical reception. One only wishes that Yousif would have supplemented her research into the matter beyond the secondary literature (e.g., Le Men, Gordon Ray) to include nineteenth-century studies on illustration by writers such as Charles Asselineau and Champfleury, because they illuminate additional concerns regarding illustration and provide critical insight on the reasons why so many writers of their time were reluctant to having their work illustrated.

Chapter four, “The Illustrator Unbound,” considers Grandville’s attempts to create a hybrid visual-verbal narrative in *Un autre monde*. In the anonymous text (written by Taxile Delord) a personified quill and the pencil (representing the writer and illustrator respectively) engage in an impassioned dialogue regarding creative freedom. The pencil declares that he will no longer follow the words of the quill, but will forge an independent pilgrimage to *un autre monde* where the image reigns supreme. Indeed, Grandville largely abandons imitating the natural world and creates instead a world of hybrid creatures with a combination of human, animal, botanical, mechanical, and phantasmagoric features. Yousif provides detailed examination of Grandville’s pun-filled illustrations that flaunt the artist’s clever ingenuity by proposing a new visual language that “borrows” verbal expressions “but is neither limited to nor ruled by the word” (p. 158). Viewing some of Grandville’s illustrations for “Un autre monde” one can see why the artist was embraced posthumously by Surrealists such as André Breton and Georges Bataille. These staged fantastical scenarios (such as dancing disembodied limbs) were rendered with such verve that they become nearly plausible.

Sadly, however, Grandville’s contemporaries were not so taken by the visionary illustrator, for his images “proved too radical for a public conditioned to traditional iconography and the standard visual-verbal parameters in which image illustrates the word” (p. 160). Such audience response is reminiscent of what the Symbolist artist Odilon Redon experienced decades later with his own hybrid creatures and dream-like imagery, for they also proved to be too bizarrely unnatural (or anatural) for French audiences. As Dario Gamboni relates, Redon received far better recognition outside of France among collectors and critics in countries such as Holland, Belgium and Germany than in France.[6] I mention this parallel to suggest that the cool reception of Grandville’s “Un autre monde” reveals something, not just about viewer expectations of the July Monarchy, as Yousif suggests, but a more profound and lingering antagonism in nineteenth-century French society toward images that visualize purely imaginative phenomena.

Yousif’s brief conclusion summarizes her arguments regarding rivalry between writer and illustrator in the July Monarchy. She compares her findings to that of the Second Empire, arguing that the changes in marketing illustrated books largely “neutralized the illustrator-writer rivalry” (p. 176) because there was a clear division between popular and luxury genres of illustrated books. A similar view is expressed early in her study where she claims that the later nineteenth-century predilection for the luxury *livres d’art* (sometimes referred to as *livres de peintre*) stressed collaboration, rather than rivalry and that writer and artist come together as equals. While there is some truth to this claim that illustrations produced by painters, rather than illustrators, conferred higher status to the image during the *fin-de-siècle*, a fierce anti-illustration attitude among French writers persisted throughout the nineteenth century. A survey published in the *Mercure de France* in 1898, for example, includes multiple authors arguing against the intrusion of imagery into books of literature. Rachilde, the celebrated *fin-de-siècle* novelist, expressed zero tolerance for illustration: “Mon avis est qu’il ne faut jamais, *jamais* illustrer une œuvre d’art littéraire.”[7] The poet Pierre Louÿs admitted that illustration might be useful for certain “genres littéraires qui ont la description exacte de la vie humaine et de l’être humain” but most writers drew the line with respect to subtle or ambitious works of literature or poetry because, as writer Georges

Rodenbach suggested, illustrations impinge upon a reader's imagination.[8]

The question of genre is crucial to understanding the anti-illustration attitude in France because it speaks to something larger than professional rivalry between writers and illustrators protecting their respective careers and egos. Illustration threatened to level the fundamental distinctions between different literary genres as is made plain in the prospectus for *Les scènes de la vie privée et publique des animaux*: "La définition du livre que nous publions aurait pu paraître embarrassante dans le temps où l'on s'inquiétait sérieusement de savoir si le *Télémaque* était ou n'était pas un poème, si *l'Esther* était oui ou non une tragédie selon les règles d'Aristote. Mais aujourd'hui qu'il est à peu près reconnu que tous les genres sont bons, hors le genre ennuyeux." [9] Here the hierarchy of genres is blatantly mocked as are the criteria used to assess genres. For this reason, critics such as Frédéric de Mercey, cited in Yousif's study, reflect not just a garden variety opposition to illustration but articulates in the most shrill terms a deep anxiety regarding the "holocaust" that ensues when "all conditions of style, thought, and language" are disregarded.[10]

## NOTES

[1] See Rémy Saisselin, *The Literary Enterprise in Eighteenth-Century France* (Detroit, Mich.: Wayne State Press, 1979), p. 116.

[2] The primary scholars on this subject are Ségolène Le Men, Michel Melot and Philippe Kaenel who all loom large in Yousif's study. As a sampling of this scholarship, see Melot's "Le Texte et l'image" and Le Men's "La Vignette et la lettre" from the third volume in the seminal study on French book history, Henri-Jean Martin and Roger Chartier, eds., *L'Histoire de l'Édition Française: Le Temps de l'Éditeur* (Paris: Promodis, 1985), pp. 287-311 and 313-327 respectively. For Kaenel, see his influential *Le métier d'illustrateur, 1830-1880* (Paris: Editions Messene, 1996). Although there are many studies in English on caricature during the July Monarchy, very little is devoted to the subject of book illustration during this period. One notable example includes Robert Bezucha, "The Renaissance of Book Illustration," in *The Art of the July Monarchy in France, 1830 to 1848*, Museum of Art and Archeology, University of Missouri (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1990), pp. 192-213.

[3] Pierre Bourdieu, *Les règles de l'art: genèse et structure du champ littéraire* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1998).

[4] Alexandra K. Wettlaufer, *Pen vs. Paintbrush: Girodet, Balzac, and the Myth of Pygmalion in Post-Revolutionary France* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001).

[5] Charles Asselineau, *La Bibliographie romantique. Catalogue anecdotique et pittoresque des éditions originales* (Paris, P. Rouquette: 1872); Jules Champfleury, *Les Vignettes romantiques. Histoire de la littérature et de l'art, 1825-1840* (Paris: Dentu, 1883).

[6] Dario Gamboni, *La Plume et la pinceau. Odilon Redon et la littérature* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1989). The book was recently translated by Mary Whittall (and reviewed in H-France) under the title *The Brush and the Pen: Odilon Redon and Literature* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

[7] André Ibels, "Enquête sur le roman illustré par la photographie," *Le Mercure de France* 97(January 1898): 111.

[8] Rodenbach writes "un lecteur un peu subtil aimera toujours mieux s'imaginer lui-même les personnages, puisqu'un livre n'est qu'un point de départ, un prétexte et un canevas à rêves." See André Ibels, "Enquête sur le roman illustré par la photographie," *Le Mercure de France* 97(January 1898), 113.

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Rachilde's and Louÿs statements appear on pages 111 and 109 respectively. Even Stéphane Mallarmé, another responder to the survey and a figure often cited as a pioneer of the *livre de peintre*, insisted that the images by Redon intended for the deluxe edition of his visually experimental poem "Un coup de dés" be placed *hors texte* rather than share or even face the page of his text.

[9] A copy of the prospectus is bound with *Les Scènes de la vie privée et publique des animaux* in the Réserve des imprimées in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (réserve Y<sup>2</sup> 1007).

[10] "On peut s'expliquer encore qu'en de tels ouvrages, où évidemment la partie pittoresque est le principal et la partie littéraire l'accessoire, les éditeurs fassent sans regret un holocauste de toutes les conditions de style, de pensée, de langue. F. de Lagenevais [Frédéric de Mercey], "La littérature illustré," *La Revue des deux mondes* (1 March 1843): 656.

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ISSN 1553-9172