

THE ILLUSTRATED *ENOCH ARDEN* AND VICTORIAN VISUAL CULTURE

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“Because things seen are mightier than things heard.”
– Tennyson, *Enoch Arden*

The three months between December 1865 and March 1866 are of great interest to students of Victorian visual culture, for in this winter-quarter three separate but related commodities were made available to middle-class consumers. Each was enabled by the technologies of photography and wood-engraving and each raised questions, informed by contemporary reproduction discourses, about the value of originals versus repetitions and the power of the material and the visual to shape lived experience, manipulate responses, and direct choices. These textual and commercial events are a promotional article in an illustrated periodical, a Christmas gift-book, and an art exhibition. The central event framed by the periodical advertisement and the gallery spectacle, and the one this essay will focus on, is the publication of Tennyson’s most popular poem, *Enoch Arden*, with illustrations by Arthur Hughes.

As many critics have observed, *Enoch Arden* invokes the visual at every level from poetic methodology to thematic concerns.¹ Gerhard Joseph goes so far as to argue that *Enoch Arden*’s series of pictorial tableaux not only illustrate “the poem’s emphatically visual aesthetic,” but also enact “the aesthetic principle of the Tennyson idyll more generally: ‘things seen are mightier than things heard’ (l. 762)”² (68). However, with the single, significant exception of Patrick Scott, no critic has examined *Enoch Arden* as a visual object in its own right: that is, as a material book with physical pictures on printed pages that occupied space in Victorian culture. In his influential article, “Tennyson’s *Enoch Arden*: A Victorian Best-Seller,” Scott refers to Arthur Hughes’s illustrations in the gift book published by Moxon as “in a sense the ‘official’ version” because it was brought out in the poet’s lifetime by his own publisher. Furthermore, he suggests that Tennyson “may have kept in mind while planning the poem that his text should be able to be meaningfully illustrated” (19).

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1970. Scott, Patrick. Tennyson's "Enoch Arden": A Victorian Best-Seller. Lincoln: Tennyson Society Monographs, no. 2, 1970. <http://community.lincolnshire.gov.uk/thetennysonociety/index.asp?catId=15855> © P. G. Scott 1970. This Book is brought to you by the English Language and Literatures, Department of at Scholar Commons. In an essentially simple work; and the fourth section traces out in Enoch Arden various elements well known in Victorian popular narrative. I. The Critics and the Best-Seller. 2005. The Illustrated Enoch Arden and Victorian Visual Culture. *Journal of Pre-raphaelite Studies* 14 (Fall): 43-66. Google Scholar. Kooistra, Lorraine Janzen. 2007. Poetry in the Victorian Marketplace: The Illustrated Princess as a Christmas Gift Book. *Victorian Poetry* 45 (1): 49-76. Project Muse, <https://doi.org/10.1353/vp.2007.0016>. 2001. The Victorian Parlour. *Cambridge Studies in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture* 30. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Google Scholar. Lottes, Wolfgang. 1988. "The Lady of Shalott: Tennyson's Poem and Some Victorian Illustrations." In *Word and Visual Imagination: Studies in the Interaction of English Literature and the Visual Arts*, edited by Karl Josef Hiltgen, Peter M. Daly, and Wolfgang Lottes, 269-302. ship between visual culture, the public, and science in the Victorian period. Instead of focusing on elite culture, recent studies of visuality have emphasized the visual culture of the Victorian public (Otter 2008; Armstrong 2008; Nead 2007). In doing, so scholars have followed Richard Altick's lead in his magisterial *Shows of London*. (1978). Historians of science, and those engaged in the study of literature, have turned their attention to the visual culture that was an integral part of Victorian science. Taken together, the essays conceptualize the visual culture of Victorian science as a mosaic of traditions that criss-cross the disciplines and the different forms of visualization while moving between the laboratory, the lecture hall, and the popular. In the Victorian period the illustrated Shakespeare edition was, according to Stuart Sillars, an expert on Shakespeare and the visual arts, "the broadest channel by which the reading public gained an acquaintance, whatever its nature or intensity, with the plays of Shakespeare." These illustrated editions of the Complete Works would have been the first encounter with Shakespeare that many readers would have had. Members of the working class, who may not have been able to experience Shakespeare in the London theatre, would have found these editions more affordable. A consequence of this was tha