

*Illustration in Fin-De-Siècle Transatlantic Romance Fiction*

Kate Holterhoff. New York & Oxford: Routledge, 2022. xi + 198pp. ISBN: 9780367862091

Kate Holterhoff begins her exploration of fin-de-siècle romance illustration with a single question: how did the illustrators represent what writers call indescribable? The question is a prickly one; the sense of wonder and mystery that writers like Robert Louis Stevenson and H. Rider Haggard create in their texts was the cause for much of their success, but so too, were the illustrations that seem to show the face of the mystery. Holterhoff demonstrates that the illustrators' visual representations of ineffable wonders are a rich vein of pictorial commentary that not only speaks to the texts they adorn, but to the broader culture around them. So, to answer her initial question, Holterhoff closely examines the relationship between text and image, and the place of the illustrator within Transatlantic print culture.

The book's introduction is an insightful history of nineteenth-century illustration and an overview of the existing scholarship thereon. Holterhoff highlights the lack of scholarly attention given to the illustrations of romance fiction, especially during the fin-de-siècle, when romance was rapidly evolving into the many of the genres of twentieth-century popular fiction. Curiously, although Holterhoff includes a brief discussion of Lorraine Kooistra's bi-textual approach to the word/image dialectic, she does not mention that Kooistra's subjects were romance novels, nor does she mention the work of Ralph Crane and Lisa Fletcher on illustration in late-Victorian juvenile adventure novels. Even with these exceptions, however, Holterhoff's point stands, and there is no doubt that *Illustration in Fin-De-Siècle Transatlantic Romance Fiction* is an important contribution to illustration studies as it begins to address romance illustration more seriously. Moreover, Holterhoff integrates the analysis of illustration with more traditional textual analyses.

Holterhoff stresses the importance of including "visual paratexts beside the written texts they accompany" in any study of a work and cautions that scholars should "be wary of reading a hierarchy onto that connection" (14). In so saying, Holterhoff echoes scholars like Kooistra and Julia Thomas, whose respective theories of bi-textuality and interpictionality are based on non-hierarchical relationships between writers and illustrators. However, her warning is for anyone engaged in the study of literature and/or illustration, in which the artists for romance fiction are regularly seen as subservient to writers, and their artworks frequently dismissed as empty decoration. For Holterhoff, romance fiction was enriched by illustration, and the artists' engagements with the texts should not be ignored in the analysis and study of these works. She backs up her position with detailed examinations of the relationships of both the illustrations to the texts, and between the illustrator and the writer within the fin-de-siècle print culture.

Holterhoff approaches her investigation into romance illustration, and the question of how illustrators represent the inexpressible, through five author case studies. Four of the chosen writers are the usual suspects for studies of fin-de-siècle romance: Stevenson, Haggard, Rudyard Kipling, and H. G. Wells – the only absentee is Arthur Conan Doyle. However, aside from being more widely illustrated than most romance writers of the period, Holterhoff argues that they each represent a different function of romance: the unknown past in the historical fictions of Stevenson; the impossibility of talking animals in the works of Kipling; the "indescribably powerful and sexually alluring African women" in Haggard's adventures; and the futuristic machines of Wells. The fifth writer is James De Mille whose *A Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder* evokes the unimaginable horror of "white cannibalism" (16).

In each chapter, Holterhoff offers a close reading of illustrations from a tight selection of texts, allowing her to compare the ways different illustrators depicted the same textual events. Comparisons like these open up the discussion around what is happening in the text and the print culture around it in socio-political terms as well as literary ones. Holterhoff also provides biographical information about the artists involved, revealing their positions within the cultural dynamics of fin-de-siècle publishing. More, she relates how the writers valued some illustrations over others, such as Haggard displaying the originals in his house if he liked them, or Wells insisting a periodical leave his work unillustrated to avoid its usual artists handling his work. Each revelation produces another layer within the dialogical structure of print culture, with the individual artists and writers directly involved. We are accustomed to considering the Victorian realists and the more literary twentieth-century writers as creative agents, and the romancers and genre writers as craftspeople more interested in marketability than artistic expression. Holterhoff's revealing study breaks that scholastic illusion and reinserts the creative principles into every form of text, whatever its generic leanings.

The only downside to the book is the lack of a conclusion. Holterhoff rounds out each chapter with a neat summary of her arguments therein, but none for the work as a whole. The chapters, therefore, stand more as individual essays with a common introduction, than case studies working towards an overall argument. While the introduction directs the reader towards a central point, and the chapters all build evidence around it, it would be nice to have a concluding statement in which Holterhoff makes her case more clearly.

Aside from that absence, *Illustration in Fin-De-Siècle Transatlantic Romance Fiction* is an important step forward in the study of illustration's role in print production that broadens the field, while offering a positive approach to continue precise and detailed scholarship. Holterhoff's scholarship is solid, and she is an able writer, so her detailed analysis is insightful and entertaining to read – much like the illustrations and texts she discusses. Hopefully, this book opens the way for more studies on overlooked illustrators and writers from the nineteenth century and beyond.

Robert Jenkins