

Bonafos on Lerner (2018)

Lerner, Jillian. *Graphic Culture: Illustration and Artistic Enterprise in Paris, 1830–1848*. McGill-Queen's UP, 2018, pp. ix + 252, 56 b/w illustrations + color section, ISBN 978-0-7735-5455-9

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This book provides a richly documented exploration of the increasingly commodified visual culture of the July Monarchy. It examines the professionalization of the cultural observers and producers of Parisian city life through analysis of their representations of manners and fashions in a period of important social and economic changes. Combining theoretical and critical perspectives on mass and material cultures, sociological and economic insights, and many captivating close readings of illustrations, Lerner's study serves as a cultural history of 1830s and 1840s depictions of Parisian modernity. It considers the marketing of graphic products and of their producers as intermediaries in the circulation of social commentaries and values which captured, shaped, and helped to catalyze performed identities in the French capital. Gavarni, Achille Devéria, Honoré Daumier, and Henry Monnier figure prominently as "seminal painters of modern life" (3), accompanied in decreasing importance by contemporaries such as Grandville, Bertall, Charlet, Philippon, Cicéri, Traviès, and Raffet.

Divided into five chapters, the book first examines these visual artists' biographical and social backgrounds, professional training, as well as the entrepreneurial and aesthetic strategies they used to market themselves as decipherers of Parisian society in an increasingly competitive field. Chapter two turns to the figure of the publishing editor who emerges as a business-savvy creator and authorial figure thanks to his deft crafting of typologies and panoramic anthologies such as Hetzel's *Le Diable à Paris*. Through a remarkable close reading of Gavarni's frontispiece for the book, Lerner analyzes the novel position of the publisher-turned-capitalist by examining symbolic tools of his trade present in Gavarni's illustration, such as the map, the monocle, the ragpicker's hook and basket, and the magic lantern. Orchestrating the "collection, triage, and recontextualization" (63) of contemporary images of the Parisian world, the publishing editor exemplified the new combination of "social discernment" and "aesthetic connoisseurship" (55) that established him, along with graphic artists, as an essential player in the publishing trade and the larger cultural sphere of July Monarchy Paris, which was being marketed and avidly consumed as a commodity.

As a continuation of these analyses of the editors' and artists' self-definition and promotion, chapter three delves further into the semiotics of the promotional techniques of illustrated typologies, with the example of the visual presence, and strategic circulation and recycling of Gavarni's advertisement drawings for Curmer's *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes*. Through detailed connections between the illustrations, Lerner demonstrates how these works positioned themselves as entertainment by alluding to traditional forms of publicity such as the circus sideshow and the boulevard theater *parade*—a self-reflexive strategy of legitimation for these novel media of spectacle and leisure. Such advertising images also included the depiction of publishing shops and the crowds of readers they attracted, in a circular *mise en abyme* that stands out as a characteristic and essential feature of the graphic culture of the 1830s and 1840s, denoting its playful self-awareness, but also the artists' entrepreneurial anxiety to establish their legitimacy in a market in flux and to assert their position as cultural producers.

Bringing the issue of gender into the picture, so to speak, the last two chapters focus more specifically on fashion plates, first with Devéria's *Les Heures du jour*. This 1829 collection of lithographic prints depicts the activities of a fashionable Parisian woman over the course of a day, detailing her successive outfits for various domestic, leisurely, and social activities, and thereby exemplifying the codification of the bourgeois feminine ideal and private spaces. Finally, in the context of Véron's directorship of the Paris Opera, chapter five examines Gavarni's central role in the renewal of Parisian masked balls. Lerner analyzes his creation and publicizing of historical and ball costumes, among which the *débardeur* constitutes the most salient example of travesty, which she posits as an essential element in the construction and navigation of gender identity within contemporary bourgeois social and moral constraints. Exploring the intersecting worlds of performing artists, their publics, and the demi-monde, in which graphic artists and journalists also fully participated, this chapter highlights the circulation, and consequently the potential and facilitated imitation of risqué, dandy, and bohemian-like appearances, behaviors, relationships, and transactions, through a range of illustrations covering Parisian nightlife and female celebrities such as Virginie Déjazet.

The terrain surveyed in this study will certainly feel familiar to the scholar of nineteenth-century France. This richly illustrated book is therefore all the more remarkable in making us rediscover familiar territory through its author's critical framework and mastery of visual evidence in numerous close readings. With this in-depth exploration of the graphic media's contributions to panoramic literature, we step into the world of the most eminent Romantic print artists who, with polyvalent skills, created an innovative, kaleidoscopic visual culture. They also directed, to a certain extent, the conditions of their fluctuating professional

spheres and “a protean commercial market” (38). In doing so, these artists not only benefited from the commodification of the self-conscious metropolitan world that they inhabited, they were also instrumental in fashioning that very world.

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