*The Image in the Text:*

*Literature, Illustration, and the Rise of Mass Visual Culture in Nineteenth-Century America*

Christopher J. Lukasik, Purdue University

Ours, we are constantly being told, is a visual culture. With the visualization of knowledge integral to the functioning of all societies, the image has increasingly been seen as the key to solving imperatives of speed and efficiency in our so-called “Information Age.” Humans not only process images faster than words, we remember them better. Unsurprisingly, images are central to how we connect to technology and to one another. Every day more than 95 million images are uploaded to Instagram with 760 million more to Snapchat. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that the scale and speed of image production, distribution, and reception is at a level unprecedented in human history. “The problem of the twenty-first century,” as W.J.T. Mitchell presciently identified it years ago, “is the problem of the image.” Yet, as Mitchell himself admits, images are never exclusively visual. They are always mixtures of sensory and semiotic elements, combining image and text. While it may be true that we remember images better than words, recent studies in psychology suggest that this is only because our brains code the information twice: first visually, then verbally. The very images we see, cognitive neuroscience tells us, are not passively transmitted to us, but actively created by us. The brain’s natural ability to link perceptual and pattern recognition—image and word—through its vast neural networks now serves as the model for computer scientists working on the cutting edge of AI programs and computer vision. So why do the humanities continue to separate them on the basis of their distinct sensory vehicles and perceptual channels?

This deep imbrication of images and words hard-wired into our brains and reproduced by our cultures—along with the perceived dominance of the visual image in the twenty-first century—underscores the urgency and necessity of better understanding how images operated across and within a variety of print and optical media during the century in which our modern mass visual culture emerged. Nineteenth-century America saw an array of innovations in printing and imaging technology, a revolution in transportation, and an expansion of the literary and pictorial market that transformed the publishing industry as well as the nascent consumer culture of which it was a part. These changes resulted in visual images being produced and reproduced more rapidly, with more sophistication, and in unprecedented numbers. Over the course of the century, illustration went from an expensive ornament to a crucial component of print culture. As literary and art historians have discussed recently, printed images—particularly engraved illustrations—were instrumental to the development of a mass visual culture across the nineteenth century. In the US, illustrations were a staple of mass-produced religious, abolitionist, and children’s publications from the 1820s forward and their presence alongside literature would grow in the decades to come. During the 1830s and 1840s, lavish steel-plate engravings propelled the enormous popular success of literary annuals, while cheaper wood engravings fueled the demand for more widely circulating illustrated newspapers and magazines in the 1850s. Nathaniel Hawthorne, Catharine Maria Sedgwick, and Lydia Maria Child—to name but a few canonical authors—all published their work in illustrated literary annuals, while Edgar Allan Poe, Louisa May Alcott, E. D. E. N. Southworth, and Fanny Fern saw theirs appear in pictorial weeklies. Countless nineteenth-century American authors— Washington Irving, James Fenimore Cooper, Benjamin Franklin, and Harriet Beecher Stowe perhaps the most widely remediated among them—had their work illustrated. By the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the reading public was as interested in viewing pictures as it was in reading text, a fact undoubtedly not lost upon the iconoclastic Henry James who would later lament the “picture-book” quality of American prose and refer to illustrations as “mere optical echoes” competing with the literary text.

Yet, the relationship of image to text within nineteenth-century literary illustration was much more complicated than the mere “optical echo” that James condescendingly suggests. While the illustrations in mid-century literary annuals, to take one example, were often identified as “embellishments” and were frequently separate—physically and conceptually—from the texts they accompanied, it was not uncommon for literature to illustrate these images. Many of the most popular women writers of the period—including Lydia Huntley Sigourney, Eliza Leslie, and Caroline Kirkland —penned a number of such “textual illustrations.” Illustration, as the practice of mid-century literary annuals suggests, was not exclusively a visual medium. For at least the first third of the nineteenth century, if not longer, American literary culture was an intermedial environment—one in which images were produced by words; texts “illustrated” images; and images, in turn, illustrated texts. It was a mediascape at once more complex than the one Henry James describes and more central to literary, art, and media history than the prevailing critical paradigms have allowed us to see.

While humanities scholars have long known that images and words live in an intimate relation, the methods that historically have been brought to bear upon them have tended either to discuss them separately (as comparative studies of the arts do when they reduce the image to the optical) or subordinate one to the other (as cultural semiotics does when it reduces the image to a text). However, the explicit intermediality of nineteenth-century print culture, on the one hand, and the limitations of comparative and cultural semiotic approaches to that print culture, on the other, suggest that we need to reconsider our approach to images and their evolving relationship to literature. *The Image in the Text* will be the first book to do so by considering the rise of illustration in nineteenth-century America in terms of the fundamental intermediality of the period’s literature. It synthesizes literary, book, and art history with theoretical work from visual and media studies to study the role of literary images–verbal, mental, and visual–in the development of a mass visual culture in nineteenth-century America. Drawing upon the theories of the image articulated by W. J. T. Mitchell, Jacques Rancière, and Hans Belting, the project tries to understand images in terms other than the technical properties of the medium (that is, as something not necessarily optical) and thus hopes to avoid reproducing the longstanding historical separation of image from word.

*The Image in the Text* has a number of important consequences for literary and art history. First, its intermedial methodology will challenge literary and art historians to reconsider how they think about images and their relationship to texts. Second, its analysis and arguments will ask them to reassess the ways in which we study nineteenth-century American literature in particular and early American print culture in general (a provocation all the more urgent given the critical tendency to conceive of literary and art history independent of media and visual studies). Third, *The Image in the Text* expands our sense of nineteenth-century American literature to embrace not only the full range of print media in which literature was published—illustrated novels, literary annuals, illustrated magazines, and pictorial weeklies—but, more broadly, to include the mass-produced images that were often so vital to their circulation and consumption. Among the questions it raises are: what role did these images play in the production and reception of nineteenth-century literature? Can the media combinations and intermedial references found within much nineteenth-century American literature be included as part of the “new image ecology” that art historian Michael Leja claims took shape during the 1840s and 50s as publishers began to target mass audiences? How did gender, race, and class shape the production and reception of these images and the development of a mass visual culture in America? And, finally, what happens if we place the growth of illustrated literature across the nineteenth century at the center of media history rather than at the margins of literary or art history (where they currently reside)?

To answer these questions, *The Image in the Text* examines the spectacular growth of illustration within American literary culture in the years running from the 1820s—when, from a technological perspective, steel-plate replaces copper-plate engraving and facilitates the rise of the literary annual in the United States––to the 1870s when the introduction of the photographic half-tone will once again transform how images appear in print. The book is divided into two unequal parts. The first four chapters discuss literary illustration within the context of emergent forms of mass print culture in America between 1820 and 1850: periodicals (chapter one), books (chapter two and three), children’s literature (chapter three), and the literary annual (chapter four). The final two chapters focus more on the literary illustrations of Alexander Anderson (chapter five), Hammatt Billings (chapter five), and David Hunter Strother (chapter five) whose work directly contributed to the formation of a mass visual culture during the 1850s in the US. The book concludes with a coda on Henry James and the state of literature’s relationship illustration at century’s end.

The significance of the methods and arguments of *The Image in the Text* extends well beyond the history of literary illustration itself. Its analysis of the word/image operations found within nineteenth-century American literature will not only bring illustration to the center of nineteenth-century literary and cultural study, it will begin to establish the foundation for articulating a new history of the dominance of modern optical media during the twentieth century and beyond. By understanding the rise of the mass-produced image (from illustration to photography and later to film) as the possible extension rather than the antithesis of prior literary forms (as Sergei Eisenstein suggested long ago when he compared D. W. Griffith to Charles Dickens), *The Image in the Text* reverses our familiar understanding of the relationship between technology and culture—one in which technological innovations drive cultural transformations--by showing how prior cultural forms—when conceived in terms of media environments—might generate practices which facilitate (or, alternatively, restrict) the introduction and acceptance of new cultural technologies. In short, my project argues that the production of images might have *already* been inside the text.

Given the ubiquity of the image in our culture today as well as the current debates within the field concerning the relationship between literary and media studies, *The Image in the Text* is well-positioned to engage a wide audience and impact a number of fields in the humanities (including Literary Studies, Illustration Studies, American Studies, American History, American Art History, Book History, and Media Studies). The intellectual significance of the project as well as the breadth of its potential audience was confirmed last year when *American Literary History*, arguably the top journal in American literary studies, published a section of chapter five. At the moment, the introduction and four of the projected six chapters of *The Image in the Text* have been drafted. My work plan is to finish the primary and secondary source research needed to complete the remaining chapters, draft those chapters, and begin the process of finalizing the manuscript for publication submission by Fall 2022.

*The Image in the Text:*

*Illustration, Literature and the Rise of a Mass Visual Culture in Nineteenth-Century America*

By Christopher J. Lukasik

***Table of Contents***

**Introduction**: Literary Studies’ Image Problem (Drafted; ~5,000 words)

The Introduction contends that the predominant ways that literary studies has understood images has contributed to the problem of its perceived image of obsolescence in the eyes of the public. This sense of obsolescence has been exacerbated by a characterization—fair or not—of our contemporary media environment as one dominated by visual images, on the one hand, and an acceptance that images—while routinely discussed in literary studies—still somehow fall outside our domain (as in the common institutional notion that English professors are primarily scholars of language, texts, and words), on the other. As a result, the relationship of literary studies to the images that have come to dominate our current media-scape is often seen as antiquated and distant at best, opportunistic and misguided, at worst. The notion that our world is comprised of images that are somehow outside of or, at best, adjacent to our disciplinary jurisdiction, as this book will explore, is undoubtedly reinforced by the field’s critical tendency to privilege comparative and semiotic models in our discussion of the relationship of images to literature. In contrast, *The Image in the Text* asks us to reconsider the field’s approach to images: both the visual ones that have long accompanied literature (as in the case of illustration) and the verbal ones that have often been at the center of literature’s reception and production. *The Image in the Text* hopes to show how the image—when discussed in its verbal, mental, and visual forms—can provide us with an opportunity to better understand how images operated across and within a variety of print and optical media during the century in which our modern mass visual culture emerged.

**Part 1:** Literature and the Mass-Produced Image

The chapters of Part 1 trace the parallel development of two claims whose convergence will be the subject of the case studies in Part 2. The first entails the alignment of the visibility of the verbal image with the performance of a white male gaze. The second tracks the historical transformation in the visibility of an image—from the active imagination of an individual reader visualizing verbal images to the passive, mass consumption of identical optical media. Using a series of both distant and close readings, the case studies of the first four chapters explore the ways in which this particular kind of visibility emerged within the context of the de-individualization of readerly visualization; one in which the mass-produced image functioned primarily to legitimate the accuracy of this way of seeing no matter the technical medium used.

**Chapter 1**: The Transformation of the Medium and Meaning of Illustration in Early Nineteenth-Century America (Drafted; ~10,000 words)

Chapter 1 demonstrates how literature was at the forefront of transformations in the meaning and medium of illustration during the 1820s. Literature by Scott, Crabbe, Cooper, and Irving, as the chapter discusses within the context of periodical literature, were among those most frequently identified as engaging in these transformations within the context of Anglo-American print culture. Literature served as the occasion for the convergence of two meanings that had been historically assigned to separate media. Using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, this chapter examines the meaning of the word “illustration” as it appears in periodicals published in America from 1775 to 1825 and digitized in ProQuest’s American Periodical Series database. The evidence from this case study suggests that: (1) illustration involved multiple media in American periodicals between 1775 and 1825, but the predominant medium was textual, not optical; (2) illustration had multiple meanings during this period, but the most common meaning was one text explicating another, not a pictorial elucidation of a text; (3) when the medium of illustration was an optical image in American periodicals at this time, its purpose addressed the book as an object more than the book as a text; (4) the transformation of the meaning and medium of illustration appears to have begun before 1825 and it was not the result of technical innovations alone; and (5) it appears that cultural factors were just as important as technical innovations when it comes to the transformations to the medium and meaning of illustration in the period before 1826.

**Chapter 2**: Irving’s Medium: The Images of the *Sketch Book* and the Rise of the Mass-Mediated Image (Drafted. ~11,000 words)

The findings of Chapter 1 suggest that the publication of Washington Irving’s the *Sketch Book* during 1819 and 1820 occurred during an auspicious moment in media history. Chapter two explores how the intermedial references found within and the subsequent media combinations generated by the *Sketch-Book* participate in the more general historical transformation of the image that was outlined in the Introduction and discussed in Chapter 1. As one of the nineteenth century’s most canonical and widely remediated texts, the *Sketch Book* provides a remarkable case study of how images work both within and through literature. If images, at their most elementary, are the presence of an absence, then what the verbal images of the *Sketch Book* presence, I argue, is not merely an object to be seen, but the vantage point from which it was seen. Crayon’s images serve as occasions for the performance of his gaze which readers, in turn, experienced and, for some, recognized as their own. As the reception history of the *Sketch Book* demonstrates, the transmission of Crayon’s vantage point through verbal images circulated its mode of visibility (its particular distribution of sensible) widely even without the presence of any optical media. The expansion of the mass-mediated image and the development of a mass print culture, as the later chapters of this book will explore, would in no small part depend upon the recognition and reproduction of this shared way of seeing.

**Chapter 3**: Learning to Look: Nineteenth-Century Children’s Editions of Benjamin Franklin’s *Autobiography* (Drafted; ~9,000 words)

Despite the fact that Franklin’s *Autobiography* is one of the most widely reprinted texts in American literature, little has been said about the hundreds of illustrations that accompanied it throughout the nineteenth century. When the subject of Franklin’s relationship to visual culture has been addressed, the critical conversation invariably returns to either the pictorial representations that Franklin made or the painted portraits in which he appeared. In contrast, Chapter 3 will be the first to analyze the intermedial operations of the illustrations of Franklin diachronically within the context of a developing mass visual culture in the United States. Chapter 3 analyzes the image/text operations of illustrations as they appear within three nineteenth-century children’s editions of Franklin’s *Autobiography*: Mahlon Day’s *A Brief Memoir of the Life of Dr. Benjamin Franklin* (1824), Samuel G. Goodrich’s *The Life of Benjamin Franklin* (1832), and John Frost’s *Pictorial Life of Benjamin Franklin* (1846). The arc of these three case studies documents a historical transformation in how the visibility of Franklin’s text was understood to operate in terms of media history (and, in particular, literature’s relationship to that media history). Where, in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, the visibility of Franklin’s *Autobiography* was generated by the active imagination of an individual reader visualizing the verbal images of his text, by the end of the second quarter of the nineteenth century, that visibility shifts significantly to the passive, mass consumption of identical optical media. This transformation is consistent with broader trends within the publication of nineteenth-century print culture, which saw not only a substantial increase in illustration, but an acknowledged decrease in the pictorial power of words.

**Chapter 4**: Literature Before the Image: Textual Illustration and the Literary Annuals of the 1830s and 40s. In Progress.

**Part 2:** Racialized Viewing and the Rise of Mass Visual Culture

The more detailed case studies of Part 2 demonstrate how the parallel development of the two central claims of Part 1 converge in the context of racialized viewing and the development of a mass visual culture in nineteenth-century America.

**Chapter 5**: Alexander Anderson, Hammatt Billings, and the Limits of Anglo-American Abolitionist Media Practice. In Progress.

Chapter 5 discusses Alexander Anderson’s illustrations to *Injured Humanity* (1805-1807) and Hammatt Billingsillustrations to *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (185) to discuss the limitations of nineteenth century abolitionist print media practice. This chapter studies how the image/text operations of *Injured Humanity* and *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* articulate what can be seen and said, be visible and invisible. Despite their explicit calls for political opposition and social justice, *Injured Humanity* and *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* are actually unable to picture the human cruelty and suffering that their words evoke and that their politics seeks to end; for that work remains the provenance of the words of the white male witness whose legitimacy, authority, sensibility, and political subjectivity fund both these scenes of domination and their forms of dissent.

**Chapter 6**: Race and the Rise of a Mass Visual Culture: The Case of David Hunter Strother’s *Virginia Illustrated* (1854-56) (Drafted; ~11,000 words)

The publication of David Hunter Strother’s *Virginia Illustrated* in *Harper’s Monthly* (1854–56) provides a compelling case study to address the relationship between literature and media history as well as to consider the role of race in the development of a US mass visual culture. The media combinations found within and the reception history of *Virginia Illustrated* demonstrate the importance of racialized viewing to the early success of *Harper’s Monthly* at a critical moment in media history. To be sure, *Virginia Illustrated* circulated racist stereotypes to be mass consumed, but the image/text operations of Strother’s literary sketches and illustrations also extended the privileges and pleasures inherent in the performance of the white male gaze to the expanding readership of *Harper’s Monthly* despite the differences in region, gender, and class of that audience. The case study of *Virginia Illustrated* challenges us to revisit the oddly marginalized relationship of nineteenth-century illustration to literary, art, and media history and invites us to situate nineteenth-century US literature into the wider media landscape of which it was undoubtedly a part.

**Coda**: Henry James and the Optical Echo. In Progress.

Total Word Count (Manuscript and Endnotes): ~ 65,000 words

Total Number of Illustrations: ~50 black and white (nearly all out of copyright, many of which have already been obtained for publication)