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book review of

Graphic Culture: Illustration and Artistic Enterprise in Paris, 1830–1848 by
Jillian Lerner

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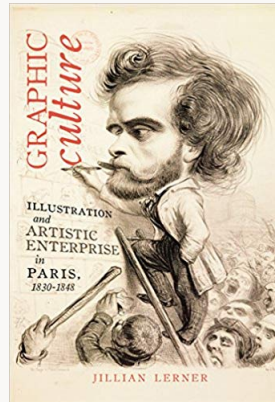
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Jillian Lerner,

Graphic Culture: Illustration and Artistic Enterprise in Paris, 1830–1848.

Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2018.

264 pp.; 24 color and 56 b&w illus.; illustration list; notes; bibliography; index.

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Jillian Lerner's *Graphic Culture: Illustration and Artistic Enterprise in Paris, 1830–1848* is a valuable contribution to the growing literature on a subject that is still in its infancy. As she points out, serious attention has been paid primarily to fine art prints and political caricature; the work of Honoré Daumier has been the subject of more scholarship than all other illustrators combined. Lerner, instead, focuses on fashion prints and urban guides, with chapters devoted to the work of Achille Devéria and Paul Gavarni, showing how their imagery was imbedded in the culture, both as depictions of it and—more importantly—as active forces shaping it. By insisting on their importance, she raises the status of once devalued images and forces us to see them as integral to any discussion of the development of modern urban culture. Her great talent, apparent throughout this study, is her ability to read these images, giving them the attention and respect that is usually accorded only to works of high art. Her attentiveness to detail, context, and shifts in scale results in even familiar images assuming new dimensions of significance.

As befits a study of graphic culture, the book's typography and design is outstanding, with a particularly inventive cover illustration. Its five chapters are not organized chronologically, but rather as case studies, each treating a different aspect of her subject. The first chapter, "The Illustrator of Modern Life," claims for these artists the mantle traditionally accorded to Impressionist painters as inventors of scenes of modern life. While this is no doubt true (and it is a fact always bearing repetition), Joel Isaacson proposed this in a groundbreaking essay of 1982,^[1] so it is not a new observation. This chapter does, however, provide a "prequel" to Isaacson's work insofar as it focuses on the earlier period.

The second, on city guides, is more original. Entitled "The Editor as Ragpicker," it focuses on the illustrated anthologies of social life and types popular in the 1840s. Numerous literary critics have theorized about the phenomenon of "panoramic literature" as it is called, but Lerner brings to the topic an art historian's sensibility to images. This leads into the

discussion of “Marketing Vision: Publishers, Posters, and Parisian Types,” the focus of chapter 3. Particularly valuable here is a discussion of how July Monarchy publishers attempted to expand their offerings, traditionally limited to the sale of classical works of literature, by inventing and commissioning new types of publications by the major writers and illustrators of the period. Riffing off the familiar images of *Le Chiffonnier* (*The Ragpicker*) (1869) by Edouard Manet and Traviès, she points out that these editors often recycled material just as did ragpickers. Focusing on one such anthology, Pierre-Jules Hetzel’s *Le Diable à Paris*, published under his pseudonym of P.-J. Stahl, her readings of this imagery are both insightful and delightful. Her analysis of the development of the motif of the *parade*, or the carnival barker’s come-on (75–80), best known today through Picasso’s sets for the 1917 opera, is a splendid example of what she does best.

The fourth chapter is devoted to Devéria’s *Hours of Her Day* (1829), a series of hybrid lithographs that were at the same time fashion illustrations, genre prints, and portraits of the artist’s friends. Here the author’s ability to read images in a particularly insightful way is on full display. For example, she notes the vastly different visual effect of these hybrid creations resulting from raising the traditionally low horizon line of fashion prints. Her attentiveness to issues of gender is notable in her discussion of Devéria’s acclaimed portraits of male celebrities, where he uses a centrifugal vignette style whose lack of setting emphasizes the individuality and importance of the sitter, while his portraits of women, as in *Hours of Her Day*, present his subjects as either genre or fashion images, always inserted within a social setting.

The discussion of Devéria is followed by what is arguably the richest section of the book, a discussion of Gavarni’s costume designs. Within even the relatively limited history of illustration, Gavarni has always been dismissed as a lightweight, but Lerner pulls together insights from a broad spectrum of scholarship, not just art history and costume history, but also studies of theatre and popular entertainment, to insert him into a position of importance in the creation of a new modern visual culture. Focusing on the masquerade of the masked balls, a topic that has already attracted the attention of cultural historians, Lerner points to the germinal role of illustration—Gavarni’s in particular—in guiding and directing the shift from an entertainment of the aristocracy to a more popular audience. He is best known for his invention of the *débardeur* costume based on the working uniform of the dockworker, but Lerner here discusses its genesis and development as a transgressive gender statement, first for his bohemian friends, then for theatrical personalities, and eventually for a descending social order from aristos to working class women.

If the book has any flaws, they are those of omission. While Gavarni was certainly instrumental in establishing non-conformist costume, the idea of a generation distinguishing itself through eccentric dress had earlier precedents: the *Barbus* (Bearded Ones) of Jacques-Louis David’s studio in the 1790s and the early nineteenth-century Nazarenes did much the same. The famous gargoyle of Notre Dame (*Le Stryge*), known principally through Charles Nègre’s iconic photo, is the subject of several pages of discussion (56–60), but it was not medieval at all. It was a creation of the 1840s, designed for Eugène Viollet-le-Duc’s medievalizing vision of the cathedral. In most cases, what is omitted would, if anything, strengthen her argument. If Edmond Texier’s *Tableau de Paris* (1852–53) recycled Gavarni’s *Gens de Paris* illustrations from Pierre-Jules Hetzel’s *Le Diable à Paris* (1845–46), it is

because Texier's tomes were actually comprised of reprints from the periodical *L'Illustration*, which had already published these excerpts from the Hetzel work; that would make Texier, in Lerner's lexicon, a double ragpicker (64).

These are relatively minor points, however, and do not detract from the book's great contributions. Despite the dismissal of these images by the great print historian Henri Beraldi, Lerner reinserts them into the visual context of their century, reinstating their value, and uncovering their layers of meaning. She opens the route to a fruitful reconstruction of the history of nineteenth-century art that not only includes the ephemeral but also valorizes it. As this book is the author's first, based on her dissertation, we can expect many future contributions that will enrich our understanding of the important role played by graphic imagery in the cultural fabric of its time.

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Notes

[1] Joel Isaacson, "Impressionism and Journalistic Illustration," *Arts Magazine* 56, no. 10 (June 1982): 95–115.