

The Printed Image and the Transformation of Popular Culture, 1790-1860 by Patricia Anderson. Oxford, 1991. 244 pp. ISBN 0-19-811236-X; \$59.00.

Patricia Anderson's title promises a more sweeping examination of the printed image than it delivers. Though she does give some attention to other sorts of printed images, her primary focus is the printed image as it appeared in the four major illustrated periodicals of the time—the *Penny Magazine* (1832-45), the *London Journal* (1845-1906), *Reynold's Miscellany* (1846-69), and *Cassell's Illustrated Family Papers* (1853-1932). Still, the limited focus offers much in its own right. The periodicals, in Anderson's view, reflect the transformation of popular culture (which she defines, somewhat loosely, as "the entire culture and associated artifacts of and available to working people") into mass culture.

Eschewing E. P. Thompson's view of popular culture as strictly working class and "oppositional," Ander-

son prefers Stuart Hall's view of it as one site where power relations were enacted. For Anderson, mass culture signifies a change not only of quantity (though that was part of it) but of kind. She quickly surveys the earlier printed imagery of popular culture (including advertising, chapbook, woodcuts, broadsides), religious culture, and the culture of secular radicalism, showing the mixture of the various "cultures." In 1832, however, Anderson sees a significant shift in the dissemination and use of the printed image. Before 1832 (the advent of the *Penny Magazine*), one finds a "non-elitist popular culture of the working population"; after 1832 a much larger cultural formation takes its place, which is primarily, but not wholly, "of and for working people." The medium of the illustrated periodicals provided a new common ground where middle-class, lower middle-class and working people could meet.

Anderson's more nuanced approach to mass culture denies that it brought about "passive acculturation." It was neither, in her view, the "democratization of

culture" (the "liberal pluralist" approach) nor an "instrument of capitalist domination" (Adorno and the Frankfurt School critics). Instead, working people consented to the values offered and exhibited in the periodicals by their purchase of them. Publishers used the periodicals as a channel for "informally and not necessarily deliberately" exercising "their social, moral, and intellectual leadership" (in a Gramscian sense).

This view does justice to the diverse nature of working-class interests and motivations, refusing to see the group as an undifferentiated mass awaiting the imprint of their social "superiors." One question, however, the freedom involved when the less powerful consent to particular values in the hopes of achieving greater material success. Further, whether the publishers purveying the social and moral values are doing so intentionally or not does not completely negate the views of those who see the venture as a form of social control.

Despite these questions the book has much to recommend it. No study has considered the printed image—or indeed print itself—in its social context in the nineteenth century (as Elizabeth Eisenstein's *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change* did more extensively for an earlier period). The wealth of historical examples from the images themselves, to newspapers, parliamentary reports, and workers' autobiographies that Anderson uses have value even if one disagrees with the interpretations placed on them. The biographical portraits of the publishers provide a telling glimpse into early nineteenth-century British social sensibility. Deriving his notions in part from the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, for which he was the publisher, Charles Knight, the publisher of the *Penny Magazine*, decided that the public needed access to the "preserves of art, high culture, and instructive amusement" (i.e., galleries, the British Museum, the Tower, Kew Gardens, etc.). Publishing the works contained in the museums and galleries and informative articles on science and mechanics would "enlarge the range of observation" and "awaken the reason."

Anderson's speculative interpretations on the altered meaning that the various images acquired in the context of the periodical provide perceptive readings of social forces arrayed in the periodicals. The printed image of the sculpture *The Dying Gladiator* presented in the *Penny Magazine* reshapes the agonized scowl into an attitude of stoic endurance, and his "life" is

interpreted there as one of laborious toil. The altered image and surrounding textual interpretation encourage the downtrodden to buck up and endure. Anderson shows similar alterations done to works from Murillo, Carracci, and others. Despite the overtones of control in such interpretations, Anderson insists that Knight was not worried about worker unrest as much as in making a profit, employing the latest printing technology, and educating people at all levels of society.

Some support for Anderson's view lies in the fact that the remaining three publications had no connections with any sponsoring agencies. Their primary focus was purely financial. Though war illustrations glorying the martial accomplishments of the nation were popular, the various tales of horror and intrigue ("The Haunted Mirror," "The Living Corpse," "The Fatal Pleasure Trip"), which culminated in the serial novel (*Wagner, the Wehr-Wolf, The Coral Island*), found a much more ready audience. All achieved their popularity not only with the tale but with the bold and bloody engravings that accompanied them. Anderson also notes that the inclusion of art reproductions, once the centerpiece of earlier publications which surrounded them with critical commentary, gradually became an afterthought, relegated to the back pages and usually marshalled to illustrate moral sententiae. Despite the new focus on profit, though, the periodicals managed to contribute to "the dissemination of civilizing values associated with individual virtue and social stability."

The periodicals seemed especially concerned, Anderson suggests, about the doings—social and otherwise—of women. Significantly, the variance allowed for other social ideals was not tolerated when it came to definitions of gender. She concludes that power relations had a greater focus on gender than on social or economic considerations.

Anderson also speculates on the readership of these periodicals after careful study of the printed replies to the editor (an admittedly uncertain method in the absence of the original correspondence). The letters were often signed with the writers' occupations or occupations can be gleaned from the letter itself. Judging from this source of evidence, the periodicals did indeed enjoy a diverse readership. The evidence does much to bolster Anderson's claims for working people's voluntary agreement with the values promoted in the periodicals.

The latter chapters of the book widen the focus to the new printed images of advertising that came to

dominate the late nineteenth century, along with illustrated novels, pictorial Bibles and the like. The quick skimming of these later printed images results in a dissipation of the earlier force of her argument. Nevertheless, this is an important and illuminating study. Anderson explores a topic too little considered, and her study has wide implications. The book never explicitly considers the effects of these periodicals and the illustrations on writers and artists, but one can see

the impetus that led some of these individuals to revise their visual aesthetic. They, however, blamed debased working-class taste on the changes they saw, while Anderson shows the change included the wider population.

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