

Gerald Egan, *Fashioning Authorship in the Long Eighteenth Century: Stylish Books of Poetic Genius*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2016. 292 pp. €62.

Gerald Egan's *Fashioning Authorship in the Long Eighteenth Century* takes as its central topic the problem of mediation between the material and immaterial. While his primary objects of inquiry are the fashionable editions published by Alexander Pope, Mary Robinson, and Lord Byron, his project seeks to map the common project shared by these authors with the thinkers of late-Enlightenment philosophy and art theory: how does one negotiate between the sensible and the insensible, or between the particular and the ideal? Highlighting the Kantian conception of *Darstellung*—the representation of the unknowable in sensible form—Egan reads the material form of the fashionable book as a manifestation of its author's genius. While the author's genius may be timeless and immaterial, it is the material object of the book that strives to make this genius sensible to the reader. In his investigation, Egan insists on the conceptual depth of fashionable objects often treated as less serious because of their very fashionableness.

The greatest strength of Egan's book lies in his ability to write across different literary, artistic and philosophical traditions, bringing a wide and often unexpected array of texts to bear on the central cultural dynamic that he traces. Because his main goal centers on exploring the eighteenth century's multiplicity of answers and responses to a pervasive intellectual problem, this wide-ranging mode is especially welcome. Scholars coming to his text because of a specific interest in authorship, for instance, will find that interest placed in productive conversation with media forms, historical conditions, and intellectual history in a way that is exciting and refreshing. Egan is especially compelling in his handling of visual culture, where he offers readings of the genre of the author portrait and connects it to wider developments in artistic theory and the profession of portraiture. This is an enduring thread throughout the book, with Egan assembling a well-curated field of images and readings.

This book is more uneven, I find, in its deployment of book-historical research. In the big picture, Egan delivers commanding readings of the material innovations that situate certain books as fashionable luxury products: his reading of Pope's 1717 *Poems*, for instance, is a lovely example of the interpretative depth Egan can draw out of surface details. There are, however, small inconsistencies and inaccuracies in the bibliographic description and book-historical analysis that is undertaken; to my understanding the interpretation of ornaments and catchwords in Bell's poetic editions (142) includes some small misstatements as to process and purpose that threaten to weaken the impact of Egan's overarching, persuasive claims.

Egan's engagement with theories of art, authorship, and the sociology of texts plays host to some of his most exciting suggestions. In a striking formulation, Egan synthesizes Derrida and Kant's concepts of the ornamental or "paregonal" to suggest that we may be misreading the aesthetic significance of fashion to an artist (or, to the creative genius), i.e. that the fashionable details should not be interpreted as the social signifiers they are for the

subject, but as the pure, Richardsonian play of forms and lines that they are for the painter (49). Such moments were, for me, some of the most thought-provoking of Egan's analysis—at times making me wish that he had more systematically offered some of his own theorizations of key concepts such as fashion and collaboration, so that the reader might have the opportunity to see these applied more systematically, and to render them more portable.

Overall, Egan's project is an ambitious one, asking us to think beyond the influences and decisions of a particular author in order to consider how a wider cultural fascination with the tension between material and immaterial, the fashionable and timeless, exerts a shaping influence on the material manifestations of an authorial career. What follows is a summary of chapters, with notes on key material covered and potential areas of interest.

After an introductory chapter that provides a clear and concise overview of the key ideas and stakes of the project, Egan argues in his second chapter that what he terms the "English school of commercial art", represented by popular artists and artistic theorist Jonathan Richardson, William Hogarth, and Joshua Reynolds, first cemented a theory of creativity in which fashionable self-presentation symbolized true creative self-consciousness. This material may initially seem distant from the book's main focus, but I believe this chapter pays dividends when put into conversation with the author-based readings in his later chapters. Egan argues that his art theorists are more influenced by Lockean empiricism than has been previously acknowledged, and traces an evolving emphasis on the particular in the work of each. These particulars allow him to draw in ideas of the sexual (in the case of Hogarth) and the fashionable (in the case of Reynolds), building an interesting conceptual nexus that will be reinvoked in his readings of Pope, Robinson, and Byron. Egan spends the rest of the chapter setting up a parallel between the perceiving/improving work of the painter who seeks to be original and the problems of reconciling nature and freedom in Kant and his commentators. The difficulty, at least to my understanding, with this embedded theoretical section is that many of the connections to the preceding reading of the "English commercial school" remain avowedly analogical, and this weakens the impact and applicability of the potentially striking theorizations. Overall, Egan's conclusions stress the unrepresentability of the authorial or creative subject under the Kantian model—a problem that subsequent chapters will claim the fashionable poetic edition highlights and resolves.

Egan's third chapter provides a concise overview of his approach to the book as material object, allowing him to draw on and synthesize recent developments in theory (Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe's "plural book") and book history (McGann, McKenzie, and the "sociology of texts"). Egan ably assembles a narrative that problematizes the idea of a unitary, stable book, and raises evocative issues of collaboration and plurality. This chapter maps in a thoughtful manner the multiple hands that went into the production of the eighteenth-century book and highlights and historicizes the different registers of visual signification invoked in author portraits, whether commissioned or satirical.

In his fourth chapter, Egan focusses primarily on Pope's 1717 edition of his *Works*, offering a thoughtful contextualization of Pope's use of several bibliographic features that we might otherwise overlook as conventional: the quarto format, the use of the brace around triplets, and the frontispiece portrait. He shows compellingly the tension and calculation that underlies these seemingly masterly gestures. Egan raises interesting connections to concepts raised earlier in his study such as Kantian free beauty, the punctual self, and the master-hand of the poet, with the weight of the analysis resting on the latter.

In his chapter on Mary Robinson, Egan assembles a compelling account of the "media event" of Robinson's first publication of her poems in book format. He argues persuasively for the 1791 *Poems* as a book that melds an impression of luxury and radical politics in its material form. His attention to the work of publisher John Bell renders the fashionable, design-oriented ethos of that volume particularly clear. Egan continues his fascinating construction of the wider social and visual world the influences the material text; his incorporation of the scientific concept of "gaze monitoring" (155-8) offers a compelling and memorable method of reading author portraits.

Egan's final chapter deals with Byron, rounding out his sampling of prominent celebrity authors of the long eighteenth century. He reconstructs the correspondence and authorial decisions around Byron's publication of "Fare Thee Well" and "A Sketch from Private Life," characterizing the process as an intentional, if miscalculated, attempt to sway public opinion in Byron's favour. The bulk of the chapter considers Byron's resistance to his own frontispiece portrait, refracted through the lens of Byron's responses to Greek and Roman sculpture, including the *Apollo Belvidere*. Egan uses this occasion to build his map of the ongoing tension between idealizing classical theories of beauty and empirical, sensory, sometimes sexual understandings of it—harking back most forcefully here to the terms of his discussion of the "English school of commercial art". His overall argument, that Byron's distance from visual representation represents a resistance to the idea of producing an identity that is "self-identical over time" (202), connects nicely back to his brief readings of the late-life portraits of Pope and Robinson in their respective chapters, and gestures towards a series of poses that might be adopted by celebrity authors over the course of a career.

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