

# Illuminators and the Making of English Literature 1403-1476: Material Texts

When it comes to the history of English literature, the period between 1403 and 1476 holds a unique significance. This era saw a profound transformation in the production of written texts, with the rise of illuminators playing a crucial role. In this article, we will explore the impact of illuminators on the making of English literature during this period, delving into the material texts they worked on and the lasting legacy they left behind.

## The Rise of Illuminators

Before we delve into the fascinating world of illuminators, it is important to understand the context in which they emerged. The early 15th century witnessed a growing demand for manuscripts, as literacy rates increased and the desire for written texts expanded. Illuminators, skilled artists who decorated and embellished manuscripts, played a pivotal role in meeting this rising demand.

The art of illumination was not merely limited to adding vibrant colors to the pages. Illuminators meticulously adorned manuscripts with intricate designs, gold leaf, and illustrations, transforming them into visually stunning pieces of art. Their talent and craftsmanship elevated manuscripts from mere words on paper to exquisite works that enchanted and captivated readers.

## The Art of Allusion: Illuminators and the Making of English Literature, 1403-1476 (Material Texts)

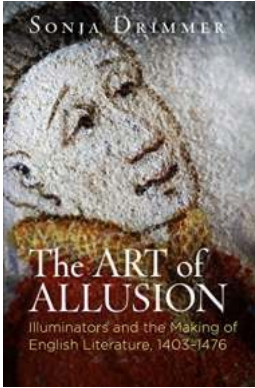
by Juliet Kabaka Kiplagat (Kindle Edition)

★★★★★ 5 out of 5

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Enhanced typesetting : Enabled  
Screen Reader : Supported  
Print length : 353 pages



## The Material Texts

During the period in question, numerous material texts were produced by illuminators. Some of the most notable examples include manuscripts of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, religious texts, illuminated law books, and astronomical works. These material texts were not only repositories of knowledge but also objects of prestige and status.

One particularly fascinating example is the Sherborne Missal, created by John Siferwas in the mid-15th century. This illuminated manuscript contains prayers, chants, and illustrations, embodying the religious fervor of the time. Its exquisite illuminations and calligraphy make it a masterpiece of medieval English literature.

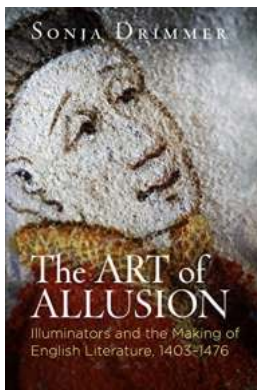
## The Legacy of Illuminators

The work of illuminators during this period had a lasting impact on English literature. By transforming manuscripts into visually stunning creations, they elevated the status of written texts and made reading an immersive experience. Their artistry influenced not only the aesthetic qualities of the manuscripts but also the writing styles and content.

One such example is the influence of illumination on Geoffrey Chaucer's work. Chaucer was familiar with illuminated manuscripts and would have been exposed to their visual splendor. It is believed that the vibrant illustrations and ornate decorations influenced his writing style, as he crafted vivid descriptions and brought his characters to life.

Furthermore, the legacy of illuminators can still be observed in contemporary book design. The emphasis on visually appealing covers, intricate illustrations, and decorative fonts can be traced back to the influence of medieval illuminators.

The period between 1403 and 1476 marked a significant transition in the production of English literature, thanks to the rise of illuminators. Their contribution in transforming manuscripts into visually stunning works of art cannot be overstated. By meticulously adorning material texts with intricate designs and illustrations, these skilled artists left an indelible mark on the literary landscape of the time and continue to inspire us today. The legacy of illuminators is a testament to the power of art and craftsmanship in shaping the world of literature.



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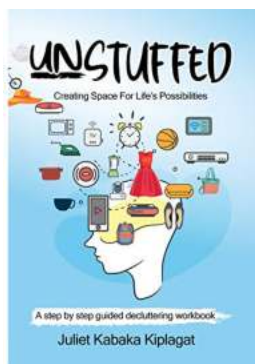
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At the end of the fourteenth and into the first half of the fifteenth century Geoffrey Chaucer, John Gower, and John Lydgate translated and revised stories with long pedigrees in Latin, Italian, and French. Royals and gentry alike commissioned lavish manuscript copies of these works, copies whose images were integral to the rising prestige of English as a literary language. Yet despite the significance of these images, manuscript illuminators are seldom discussed in the major narratives of the development of English literary culture.

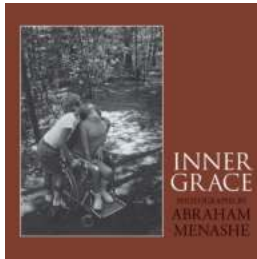
The newly enlarged scale of English manuscript production generated a problem: namely, a need for new images. Not only did these images need to accompany narratives that often had no tradition of illustration, they also had to express novel concepts, including ones as foundational as the identity and suitable representation of an English poet. In devising this new corpus, manuscript artists harnessed visual allusion as a method to articulate central questions and provide at times conflicting answers regarding both literary and cultural authority.

Sonja Drimmer traces how, just as the poets embraced intertextuality as a means of invention, so did illuminators devise new images through referential techniques —assembling, adapting, and combining images from a range of sources in order to answer the need for a new body of pictorial matter. Featuring more than one hundred illustrations, twenty-seven of them in color, *The Art of Allusion* is the first book devoted to the emergence of England's literary canon as a visual as well as a linguistic event.



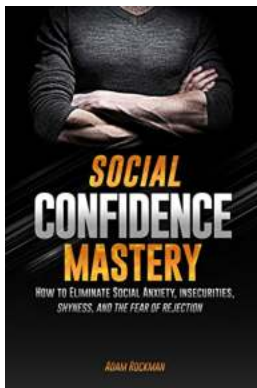
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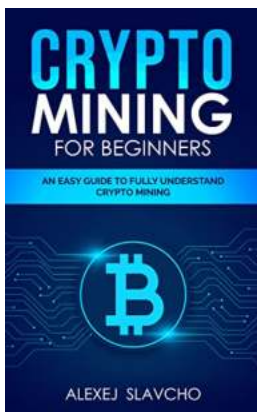
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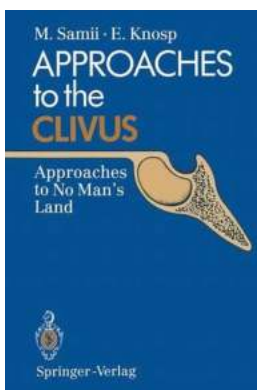
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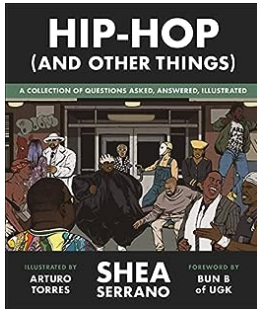
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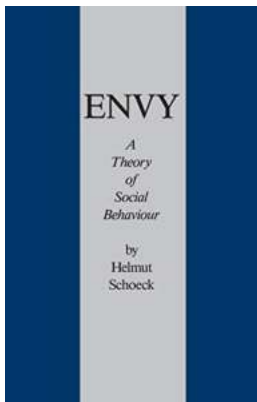
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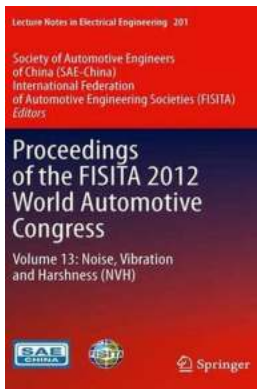
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