

**'MAKE THE NEXT AGE A BETTER THING, AND LEAVE POSTERITY IN YOUR DEBT':**

**THE INFLUENCE OF SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY CONDUCT BOOK FRONTISPIECES ON EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY BOOK ILLUSTRATIONS**

A small cluster of books first published in the late seventeenth century provides the point of departure for this paper. Each exhorts its readers to govern their behaviour according to a pattern laid down in the text, and each uses an engraved illustration to reinforce its message. Although these spiritual guides and conduct manuals were written by different authors and addressed to different readerships, their frontispieces adopt a pattern, the effect of which is to place an emphasis on solitary contemplation and to set up a parallel between an act of private reading and an act of private devotion. Alone in thought or prayer, a figure sits or kneels beside a book. The design of the engravings is strikingly similar.

This paper explores the influence of these images upon the illustrations that appear in books over the decades that followed. The original designs themselves proved remarkably long-lived, some continuing to partner successive editions of the same text well into the eighteenth century, and continuing to link that text back to a tradition of self-scrutiny that had begun with the Reformation. Did the trope of the solitary figure – particularly the female figure – seated before a book, deep in thought, also find its way into new designs, not only for conduct manuals but also for other kinds of literature?

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