Excerpts from Roger Fry, 'The Author and the Artist', *The Burlington Magazine for Connoiseurs* (July 1926), pp. 9-12.

Book illustration is a battleground, a no man's land raked by alternate fires from the artist and the writer, claimed by both, sometimes nearly conquered by one but only to be half recaptured by the other. One day, perhaps, when we have constructed some kind of aesthetic applicable to all the arts alike, some principles will be laid down to settle the dispute, but for the present it must rage. Even the question whether true illustration is possible at all has never been satisfactorily answered. Is it conceivable that one man should express a certain mood in words and that another should find forms expressing an identical one? Hardly, one supposes, since no two men can ever quite coincide in their emotional reactions. No one doubts that when facts only are at issue, this coincidence is possible; the illustrations to a scientific treatise or a trade catalogue can clearly be perfect, but where the writer is an artist there must be divergence.

[...]

[L]et us return to the general question. There is no doubt that a book may be decorated. Initials, borders, *culs-de-lampe*; these may be always admitted if they are good of their kind; they do not provoke any question with the writer. It is only when the artist's forms have a further significance, suggest ideas or feelings by what they represent or by symbolical or expressionist methods, that they impinge on the text. It is only then that the question arises, can it be done at all; and secondly, has the artist in question done it? It seems to me that real illustration in the sense of reinforcing the author's verbal expression is quite impossible. But it may be rather to execute variations on the author's theme, which will not pretend to be one with the text but are rather, as it were, a running commentary, like marginal notes written by a reader. Now, such marginal notes may, as we know, be horribly exasperating, or they may be illuminating, according to the writer and also to the nature of the book. A writing of close-knit texture and concentrated unity of effect, a lyric poem for example, should have its margins clear of all, even the best, comment, since nothing must distract us. In such a work there are no interstices, no pauses where the commentator can decently put in his word. But if the book be of a rambling, easy going, cut-and-come-again nature, there are hundreds of places where we may turn aside and chat with our invisible fellow-readers. And of all such marginal commentators, the draughtsman is the most discreet, for he is inaudible; he never puts a word into your head which might get confused with the words of the author. He merely starts a vague train of thought by the image which he puts before you in one of those pauses which the author's discussion allows—though even so, of course, the question of whether he is welcome or not will depend upon his tact, his appositeness and the absence in him of impertinent self-assertion.

[...]