

January 2012

# Rudolph Ackermann

Katherine D. Harris

San Jose State University, [katherine.harris@sjsu.edu](mailto:katherine.harris@sjsu.edu)

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## Recommended Citation

Katherine D. Harris. "Rudolph Ackermann" *The Encyclopedia of Romantic Literature* (2012).

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## Bibliographic Details

### The Encyclopedia of Romantic Literature

**Edited by:** Frederick Burwick

**eISBN:** 9781405188104

**Print publication date:** 2012

## Ackermann, Rudolph

**KATHERINE D. HARRIS**

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Literature</b>
<b>DOI:</b>	10.1111/b.9781405188104.2012.x

Rudolph Ackermann (1764–1834) – print–seller, bookseller, publisher, inventor, businessman – popularized aquatint, lithography, and illustrated books from his vast London publishing house, R. Ackermann, and the Repository of Arts shop. **Allen M. Samuels (1974)** suggests that this savvy, German–born entrepreneur can only be qualified by the business records that he left behind. Without a centralized archive of his letters, we can only surmise the accuracy of a *Notes and Queries* article's (1869) description: ‘To the end of his days he retained a strongly marked German pronunciation of the English language, which gave additional flavor to the banTERS and jests uttered in his fine bass voice; but he wrote in English with great purity on matters of affection and of business long before middle life’ (130). Many publishers, artists, and authors, including Alaric A. Watts, John Clare, J.B. Papworth, John Murray, James Hogg, William Jerdan, Sir Walter Scott, J.M.W Turner, William Combe, Thomas Rowlandson, and Thomas Hood, refer to Ackermann in their memoirs and letters, but only as it pertains to his business acumen. Very few accounts exist of Ackermann's workplace, with the exception of a single 1798 mention by colourist John Sell Cotman, and that provided by his son, Miles Edmund. John Ford, Ackermann's only biographer, paints a picture of a well–liked humanitarian (1983). Ackermann built a successful business on innovative printing technology and capitalized on current movements in politics and culture but never seemed to personally subscribe to political views himself. Doubtless Ackermann was instrumental to London's publishing history especially the advancement of illustrated books, but Ford's portrait of a benevolent businessman has been explored more deeply in recent scholarly articles – though an updated full biography of Rudolph Ackermann has yet to be written.

Rudolph Ackermann, younger brother to Friedrich (1751–1822), Ferdinand (1754–1825), and Johanna, was born 20 April, 1764 in Stolberg, Saxony, in the Harz mountains near Hanover, Leipzig, and Weimer (**Bermingham 2000**: 132). His father's business as a saddler moved the family to Schneeberg in 1775. Showing a talent for drawing and design, Rudolph began as a draftsman and carriage designer while still in Germany and patented a movable axle for a carriage before moving from Paris to London in the 1780s. In 1791, in his first British publishing venture, he produced a book of designs for his carriages with another German, J.C. Stadler, and continued publishing them until 1819 in a series of 13 volumes (132). In a defining moment of his publishing career, Ackermann leased No. 96 Strand in the Beaufort Buildings in 1795. However, in 1796, he moved to a spacious multi–level building at No. 101 Strand by taking over the lease from the political lecturer, John

Thelwall (**Thompson 2004**: 182). Prior to Thelwall's occupation of No. 101 Strand, William Shipley ran an art school in the Beaufort Buildings – Shipley being the founder of the Royal Society of Arts (**Thompson 2004**: 177). Ackermann also ran a drawing school at No. 101 until 1806 when he closed it to make room for his now-famous Repository of Arts shop (**Jervis 1992**: 101), which he advertised in the first number of his premiere magazine, *Ackermann's Repository of Arts*: 'when the interposition of government put a stop to [Thelwall's] exhibition, Mr. Ackermann purchased the lease [*sic*], and it became once more the peaceful academy of drawing' (quoted in **Thompson 2004**: 182). Upstairs was the gallery, tea room, circulating library, and evening talks or *conversazione* for invited guests (**Thompson 2004**: 182). Ackermann sold subscriptions to the third-floor circulating library where patrons could borrow books as well as prints, water colours, and drawings, according to **Ann Bermingham (2000**: 138). The ground floor was the Repository – a large, and very successful shop that sold furniture in addition to prints. According to Thompson, with this segregated design Ackermann set up a hierarchy whereby the affluent and elite were invited upstairs, while the common consumer was allowed to browse the endless supply of artwork and art supplies downstairs.

Ackermann's shop was not the only one on the Strand to mix art and commerce. Ann Bermingham notes that the Strand also housed Lackington Allen & Co.'s Temple of the Muses and S. & J. Fuller's Temple of Fancy, both of which sold art supplies and artwork to an elite clientele to mingle 'art, education, and commerce [in the production of] a hybrid social institutional environment. These shops were places of social intercourse, commercial exchange, and aesthetic instruction ... they invested both commerce and art with an aura of domestic comfort' (2000: 127). Ackermann's shop preceded the opening of the National Gallery in 1824, but his idea was that his shop, commercial as it was, would essentially exhibit artwork by those who were not admitted into the Royal Academy, especially the work by his engravers, draftsmen, and colourmen. His shop and publications had a reciprocal relationship that catered to the idea of consumerism.

Ackermann printed and bound his publications in his building and employed a bevy of craftsmen, artisans, and artists to produce his popular publications: letterpress printers, bookbinders, leather suppliers, ink suppliers, fancy papers, colourmen, and more as chronicled by Bermingham and Ackermann's principle biographer, **John Ford (1983**: 46). After successfully establishing a business based on hand-coloured aquatint plates, in 1818 Ackermann became one of the first British publishers to operate (and own) a lithography press.

Having evolved into a very savvy businessman, Ackermann was constantly attuned to the changes in nationalism ever-present in London and used a rhetoric in his publishing that unmistakably built upon patriotism: 'Commerce, in Ackermann's mind, was a nationalistic, public-spirited labor and during the wars he made every effort to mix business with patriotism by producing endless caricatures of the French and by publishing books like *Loyal Volunteers of London* in 1809.... More ambitious schemes ranged from a proposal to leaflet Paris by balloon with anti-Bonaparte literature to a successful fund-raising effort for the relief of war-torn Germany' (**Bermingham 2000**: 142). Because of Leipzig's importance to British trade on the Continent, **John Ford (1983**:32) supposes that Ackermann's patriotism and benevolence towards the citizens of Leipzig was buoyed by the British government and that his reward was naturalization in 1809, an act that would reap trade benefits seven years later (**Ford 1983**: 33). In 1814, Ackermann again engaged in relief support, this time on behalf of orphans and widows affected by the Battle of Leipzig. The King of Saxony recognized his work and awarded him the Order of Civil Merit. Printed posthumously, *A Short Account of Successful Exertions in Behalf of the Fatherless and Widows After the War in 1814* provided correspondence and accounts of Ackermann's efforts. This pamphlet was apparently published to 'increase the Subscriptions for the Fatherless and Widows of 1870 and 1871' by relaying the generosity of Ackermann in supporting victims after an assault on Leipzig in the *Narrative of the Most Remarkable Events which occurred in and near Leipzig... 1813* written by Frederic Shoberl. Sir Walter Scott wrote to Ackermann commending him on his endeavours and speaking of his own actions. In a 26 March 1813 letter he calls Ackermann's *Narrative* 'the most striking picture I ever read of the realities of war' (14).

In 1825, Ackermann sent his son George to Mexico to inquire about setting up bookselling enterprises. After drafting a seemingly reluctant Joseph Blanco White as author and editor, Ackermann ventured into the Catholic, Spanish-speaking industry of Mexico, Guatemala, Caracas, Columbia, and Argentina. Because of the volatile economic and political climate and the frequent pirating and selling of his books by the French, Ackermann withdrew his business from South America by the end of 1828.

At the conclusion of the 30-year lease on No. 101 Strand, in 1827 Ackermann removed to No. 96 Strand which

had been completely redesigned by his friend and architect, J.B. Papworth (**Jervis 1992**: 108) with a massive warehouse, private residence, show rooms, library, ware rooms, printing presses, gilders' rooms, and framers' quarters spread over eight floors (**Ford & Fraser 1999**: 50). With more than 450 volumes (**Ford 1983**:220–232) attributed to his publishing house and a yearly income of £30,000, Ackermann succeeded in building a recognizable brand, especially with coloured plates. His most important contributions to the publishing culture of early nineteenth-century England were the result of various friendships and networks that he established, the successful and productive relationship between Thomas Rowlandson and William Combe among them. As a publisher, he continued printing manuals on drawing by various authors even after the drawing school closed (**Jervis 1992**: 101): *Ackermanns New Drawing Book of Light and Shadow, in Imitation of Indian Ink* (1809–12); *Rudiments of Landscape: In Progressive Studies* (1813); *The First Principles of Landscape Drawing* (1829); *Groups of Figures for Decorating Landscapes* (1798); *Grammar of Flower Painting*; *Six Progressive Lessons for Flower Painting* (1810); *Letters upon the Art of Miniature Painting* (1822); *Fifteen Academical Studies of the Passions*; *Principles of Practical Perspective* (1815); *An Essay on Mechanical Drawing*; and *A Treatise on Ackermann's Superfine Watercolours* (1801). Ackermann found a way to make architecture accessible and artistic to his clientele, the least of which was displayed in 372 000 aquatint engravings for his topographical books published in 1811–16: *The History of the Abbey Church of St. Peter's Westminster*, *A History of the University of Oxford*, *A History of the University of Cambridge*, and *The History of the Colleges of Winchester, Eton and Westminster* (**Jervis 1992**: 103). With the publication of the *Microcosm of London* (1808–11), Ackermann 'elevated the commercial building to the status of the major public landmarks featured in his famous and popular aquatints, equivalent to a church, a parliament building...' (**Bermingham 2000**: 184). Ann Bermingham suggests that this multi-volume work is a sign of a culture of commerce rather than a focus on art. In other words, Ackermann's publication 'is on the social and cultural institutions of London, the theaters, the shops, and the markets; the things that made the city an exciting and interesting place' (135). By focusing its engravings and articles on commercial buildings instead of historical landmarks, the *Microcosm* buoyed this idea of civic pride. Ackermann transported this pride, like other shop owners, into national pride. With his monthly magazine *The Repository of Arts*, published 1809–28, Ackermann eventually realized that the primary audience for the *Repository* should be women and shifted the tone and content of articles towards women, including fashion and cultural events as the primary topics. His shift, along with other publishers, encouraged 'female consumption by characterizing it as a patriotic and virtuous exhibition of taste in the home' (**Bermingham 2000**: 140).

*The Poetical Magazine* (1809–10) began the very successful relationship between author William Combe and artist Thomas Rowlandson, which eventually resulted in several volumes of *The Tours of Dr. Syntax* (1812, 1816, 1820–1). **Allen Samuels (1974)** notes that publishers during Ackermann's time were responsible for throwing focus on either the engravings or the writing, judging which was to be most profitable. Ackermann readily employed this technique with many of his works, including, most notably the *Forget Me Not* literary annual, published 1823–47 (**Samuels 1974**: 379). Though Ackermann was always careful to recognize Europe, especially Germany, France, and Spain, as the originators of useful materials and innovative printing techniques, he often shifted his rhetoric to exclude these countries in the face of British ingenuity. The same is true for the literary annuals, a genre for which Ackermann is the true creator, selling upwards of 20000 copies in some years. The *Forget Me Not* eventually became a vehicle for another innovation in printing: the steel plate engraving. Eventually, he would export his *Forget Me Not* to Spanish-speaking countries as *No Me Olvides* in 1825 (*Literary Gazette*). Not satisfied with remaining a London business, Ackermann expanded in South America and exported, specifically, *The Repository of Arts* to New York, Halifax, Quebec, the West Indies, Hamburg, Lisbon, Cadiz, Gibraltar, Malta, the Mediterranean, the Cape of Good Hope, and the East Indies (**Jervis 1992**: 105).

In 1794, at the age of 31, Ackermann married a Cambridge woman, Martha Massey (1769–1811), and subsequently had eight children, six of whom survived and were most likely educated at the German School in Savoy: Rudolph, Jr (1796–1868), George (1803–1901), Adolphus (1810–58), Ferdinand (ca. 1806–ca. 1865), Angelica (1797–1877), and Selina. The Ackermann family lived over the Repository of Arts shop while at No. 101 Strand until they moved to Camberwell, three miles from the shop. After Martha's death in 1811 Ackermann did not marry again until 1827, when he married Hannah, a woman with German connections who survived Ackermann to marry again in 1854. Eventually, the household moved to Ivy Lodge in Fulham Road and finally, after a stroke in 1830, Ackermann retired and moved to Finchley where he died on 30 March 1834. Though he

was born a Lutheran Protestant, he converted to Anglicanism after 1794 and worshipped at St Clement Danes in the Strand where he was interred in the family plot.

In 1825 Ackermann installed his oldest son, Rudolph Jr into a Regent Street print shop where he operated for the next 40 years, eventually dropping 'Jr' and renaming his shop The Eclipse Sporting and Military Gallery. After Ackermann's stroke in 1830, the three younger sons took over R. Ackermann, briefly adding '& Co.' to title pages, but they renamed the entire business Ackermann & Co. in 1832. They would continue to lead the publishing industry in illustration books and decorative prints for the next 20 years. In 1862, Ackermann's oldest son, George and his family immigrated to Canada. Originally intending to settle in Portland, Maine, the family's ship veered north to land them near Quebec, which began their lives in Canada (**Ford & Fraser 1999**). Ackermann's great-grandson, Edgar, was the first to breach the United States' shores in 1910 with a print and then antiques shop in New York, Arthur Ackermann & Son, later becoming Arthur Ackermann Inc. (**Ford 1983**: 166). In 1926, the printing business opened a small office in Chicago and began reproducing some of Rudolph Ackermann's classic prints, a move which continued the Ackermann legacy until the late twentieth century. Some of the family's treasures were sold to the Chicago Art Institute and the Huntington Library (**Ford 1983**: 173) and can still be found there today.

SEE ALSO: **Clare, John, Poetry; Clare, John, Prose; Croker, John Wilson; Hogg, James, Poetry; Hogg, James, Prose; Lamb, Lady Caroline; Literary Annual; Mitford, Mary Russell, Drama; Mitford, Mary Russell, Prose; Scott, Walter, Poetry; Scott, Walter, Prose; Shelley, Mary; Taylor, William.**

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### **Cite this article**

HARRIS, KATHERINE D. "Ackermann, Rudolph." *The Encyclopedia of Romantic Literature*. Burwick, Frederick (ed). Blackwell Publishing, 2012. [Blackwell Reference Online](#). 18 January 2012  
<[http://www.literatureencyclopedia.com/subscriber/tocnode?id=g9781405188104\\_chunk\\_g97814051881044\\_ss1-3](http://www.literatureencyclopedia.com/subscriber/tocnode?id=g9781405188104_chunk_g97814051881044_ss1-3)>

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