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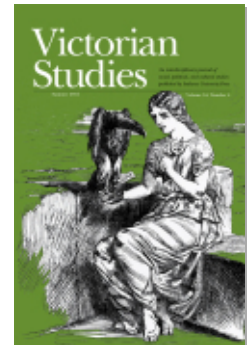
Novel Craft: Victorian Domestic Handicraft and Nineteenth-Century Fiction by Talia Schaffer (review)

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given in the text, and published works—in the Victorian period, say, which I culled for this review—can be dated by glancing down the bibliography. But it takes more effort than should be necessary to pinpoint the visual artists and their works in time. Since the illustrations are not dated, one must skim the chapters looking for names and works from the period desired. Including dates on the list of figures or dating all the figures, or both, would have facilitated navigation considerably.

Despite that caveat, motivated readers will find what they seek and more. Page and Smith's work provides scholars a most inviting and thought-provoking resource to explore, as did the nineteenth-century disciples of Flora, "new possibilities of enterprise and occupation" in their research and teaching as well as "in the garden" (10).

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Novel Craft: Victorian Domestic Handicraft and Nineteenth-Century Fiction, by Talia Schaffer; pp. xii + 228. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011, £40.00, \$65.00.

The work of handicrafting in Victorian literature tends to be read (when read at all) as a mode of characterization illustrating such gendered values as obedience or patience. Even less critical attention has been paid to the products of this labor, the penwipers and embroidery that litter Victorian fiction. Talia Schaffer's *Novel Craft* cogently demonstrates that such oversights impoverish our understanding of a deeply significant cultural phenomenon whose attendant belief systems richly inform the mid-Victorian novel. In taking up this apparently quiet corner of nineteenth-century culture, she has made an invaluable contribution to the field of thing theory. *Novel Craft* performs three related and equally crucial tasks: it theorizes what Schaffer names the "craft paradigm," or the values that craft was understood to embody (4); provides a brief but erudite social history of nineteenth-century craft; and, through sustained and intricate analyses of Elizabeth Gaskell's *Cranford* (1853), Charlotte Yonge's *The Daisy Chain* (1856), Charles Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend* (1864–65), and Margaret Oliphant's *Phoebe Junior* (1876), reveals precisely why this context is indispensable.

Schaffer defines the craft paradigm as a constellation of ideas about "representation, production, consumption, value and beauty that underlies a great deal of mid-Victorian creative work" (4). This paradigm conceives of craft as a popular practice that both inculcates and displays feminized middle-class virtues, particularly "management, thrift, industry, and ornamental talent" (5). Craft's deep cultural resonances allowed it to stand for "a complexly allusive and enabling form of writing" that could itself make domestic handicraft signify, at different moments, aristocratic leisure or industrious middle-classness, an alignment with or opposition to industrial production, a modern outlook or an attachment to history and tradition, and a means of contesting the values of the credit economy (58). While Schaffer's baseline definition of domestic handicraft as "anything made by hand, at home" encompasses crafts made by men, her analysis reflects the highly gendered nature of a paradigm that blurred the boundaries of labor and leisure yet was frequently deployed by novelists to critique emergent economic practices (15).

From a twenty-first-century perspective, much Victorian handicraft appears absurd, as Schaffer cheerfully concedes; far from attempting to solicit our admiration of handcrafted objects, she revels in their oddness. Crafters preserved, transformed, and imitated natural objects, which they “gilded, shellacked, wrapped in foil, dipped in wax, pierced, glued together, wrapped in fabric” (31); they decorated picture frames with fruit pits and made sequins from fish scales; they purchased cheap commodities to “wrap, glue, spangle, or paint” (8). Who might not object to such pursuits? Yet while progressive women from Mary Lamb to Frances Power Cobbe critiqued the tyranny of so-called women’s work, the received conception of craft that underpins our aesthetic disdain—craft as the timeless, flawless product of a master’s hand—did not precede the craft paradigm. Rather, it emerged in the 1850s, when Design Reform and its successor, the Arts and Crafts movement, gained prominence by vilifying domestic handicraft and opposing it to newly-coined aesthetic values that have since “become internalized” (179).

To the degree that we read domestic handicraft on its detractors’ terms, Schaffer argues, we misread its literary significance. Chapter 1 serves as a corrective history, tracing domestic handicraft’s emergence, explicating its cultural functions and most popular forms, and charting its decline as the worldview it supports succumbs to cultural attack and economic change. Devoting a separate chapter to Victorian handicraft’s history allows Schaffer to produce a more comprehensive and fully theorized account than the contours of her four novels might permit, but more importantly, it clears a space and provides a point of reference for extended close readings that elucidate the craft paradigm’s centrality to the mid-Victorian cultural imaginary even as they recapitulate its rise and fall. In chapter 2, Schaffer demonstrates how *Cranford*’s ornamental candlelighters, made by Matty from each week’s bills and letters, allow Gaskell to explore questions of authorship, authority, and the nature of change and loss. Schaffer’s reading of Matty’s incendiarism, “papered over . . . as duty” and thrift (79), reframes her as a gently rebellious spirit who by “making the [family] history go up in smoke . . . has acquired the right to write her own life” and oppose her values to those of a shifting marketplace (79–80).

While Gaskell’s relationship to craft, informed by a Unitarian ethos, represents a relatively capacious worldview, Yonge’s religious beliefs and craft sensibility evince “a crushing drive toward conformity” (91). In *The Daisy Chain*, scenes in which plants are pressed, catalogued, or counterfeited serve as links in a narrative chain connecting the May children’s intellectual subjugation, the “pruning” of the Melaneseans, and the disciplining of Cocksmoor’s Irish “savages” (101, 104). As in *Cranford*, craft connects the local and global, but while Gaskell mentions India largely in passing, Yonge’s foreign places are specific loci of conversion and control. In each of Schaffer’s readings, the craft paradigm makes legible a text’s operative metaphors, opening worlds of meaning that resonate far beyond its pages.

By the mid-1860s, Schaffer argues, fiction can no longer sustain the pretense that the craft paradigm represents a viable economic or spiritual alternative to the burgeoning credit economy. Thus, in *Our Mutual Friend*, handicraft “is still frequently invoked and sentimentally defended but persistently associated with vocational failure and financial instability” (146). The vision of an “alternative social world” dies with crafter Betty Higden (131); although Betty’s letter circulates beyond the grave, connecting disparate communities, her death renders her status as the “restoring,

recycling, purifying, transforming" exemplar of Dickens's "humane economy" close to meaningless (119). By 1876, when *Phoebe Junior* appeared, the craft paradigm was a dead letter, its solidity displaced by the "fluctuating, impermanent, abstract paper trash" of credit, and the forgery that credit engendered (148). Handicraft's supersession by masculinist connoisseurship—as Schaffer notes, "to be a connoisseur was, in some sense, to be the opposite of a woman" (153)—is nonetheless complicated by Phoebe's mastery of the new artistic principles. Her connoisseurship guides her grandfather through a crisis that, by implicating his social betters, valorizes his connection to the craft paradigm and its economic arm, the older merchant economy.

This attention to contradiction, unevenness, and residual and overlapping practices characterizes the book's method as well as its intellectual investments; its periodic pauses to summarize, refer back, and mark points of convergence and divergence across chapters register occasionally as repetition but more frequently as acts of authorial generosity. With *Novel Craft*, Schaffer has taught us to read women's work, and we benefit by her effort.

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Perceptions of Childhood in the Victorian Fin-de-Siècle, by Jennifer Sattaur; pp. 165. Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011, £34.99, \$52.99.

History and the Construction of the Child in Early British Children's Literature, by Jackie C. Horne; pp. xiv + 283. Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2011, £55.00, \$99.95.

Childhood, that slippery hegemonic customer, is often contradictorily defined and is certainly impossible to pin down. From the cherubic wings of innocence to the sinful horns of corruption, childhood is dependent upon ideological perception and its discursive positioning.

In her book *Perceptions of Childhood in the Victorian Fin-de-Siècle*, Jennifer Sattaur outlines some of these associative traits by emphasising that they are perceptions based upon grand narratives. As if such kaleidoscopic multiplicity were not enough to destabilise fixed definitions, Sattaur focuses on the fluid anxieties, turbulences, advances, and changes felt during the Victorian fin de siècle. Touching on a variety of themes, including degeneracy, Darwinism, colonialism, aestheticism, and spirituality, this book uncovers a myriad of childhoods as perceived through various literary narratives: the child as monstrous, idealised, suffering, uncanny, savage, and criminal. Rather than remaining within the realms of fin-de-siècle children's literature, Sattaur extends her discussion into representations of childhood within adult fiction, such as Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) and Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* (1898).

Other texts include Oscar Wilde's *The Happy Prince and Other Tales* (1888), George MacDonald's *Lilith* (1895), Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book* (1894) and *The Second Jungle Book* (1895), and Hilaire Belloc's *Cautionary Tales for Children* (1907). This blurring of literary approaches seems apt, given her argument "that as the end of the