

Stony Brook University Libraries

Interlibrary Loan

ILLiad TN: 423897



Borrower: ZGM

Lending String: *YSM,SYB,CTB,CTB,ISM

Patron:

Journal Title: Textual practice.

Volume: 26 **Issue:** 6

Month/Year: November 2012 **Pages:** 1121-1123

Article Author: Zakreski

Article Title: Novel Craft

Imprint: London ; Methuen, 1987-

ILL Number: 99911154



Call #: Taylor & Francis Online

Location: ejournal

Mail

Charge

Maxcost: 0.00IFM

Shipping Address:

CUNY Graduate School (LAND)
Interlibrary Loan
365 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10016

Fax: 212 817 2982

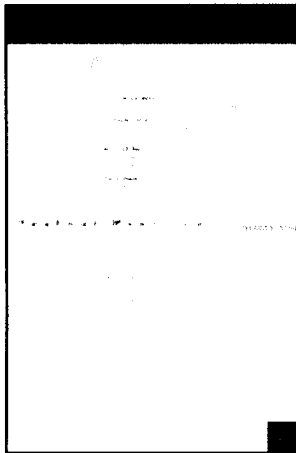
Ariel: 146.96.128.166 new

Odyssey:

Photocopy Office

NC

This article was downloaded by: [Stony Brook University]
On: 30 January 2013, At: 07:49
Publisher: Routledge
Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954
Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH,
UK



Textual Practice

Publication details, including instructions for authors
and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rtp20>

Novel Craft: Victorian Domestic Handicraft and Nineteenth- Century Fiction

Patricia Zakreski^a

^a University of Exeter

Version of record first published: 21 Nov 2012.

To cite this article: Patricia Zakreski (2012): Novel Craft: Victorian Domestic Handicraft and Nineteenth-Century Fiction, *Textual Practice*, 26:6, 1121-1123

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0950236X.2012.739302>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Full terms and conditions of use: <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae, and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand, or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

their postal romance. This terrific analysis of postal connections as generating queer desire provides a fitting endpoint for the book. The organisation of *Postal Pleasures* may itself be a bit unruly and promiscuous at times, but its pleasures are real.

University of Georgia
2012 © Richard Menke

Patricia Zakreski

Talia Schaffer, *Novel Craft: Victorian Domestic Handicraft and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 228 pp., £40.00 (hbk)

In Margaret Oliphant's 1866 novel, *Miss Marjoribanks*, the narrator considers how important it is to Carlingford society that a woman would appear who could do something 'in the way of knitting people together, and making a harmonious whole out of the scraps and fragments of society'. When this woman comes in the form of Lucilla Marjoribanks, she is described as the 'sovereign intelligence which was to develop it from chaos into order and harmony'. Though scholars have often recognized Lucilla's managerial skill in organizing and harmonizing Carlingford society, Talia Schaffer's concept of the 'craft paradigm', which she has set out in her new study *Novel Craft*, opens up an important new perspective on such seemingly inconsequential references to women's domestic handicraft that populates a surprising number of mid-Victorian novels. While the endless references to women's sewing in the nineteenth century have been often noticed and discussed, Schaffer catalogues a much more diverse, and sometimes bizarre, list of handicrafts that were practiced by middle-class domestic women in the middle of the century. Though some of these crafts have never disappeared, and some, such as knitting, have recently enjoyed something of a renaissance in popularity, others such as potichomaine, hairwork, and taxidermy have fallen out of favour as everyday recreational activities. But while the items that were produced by such practices are generally mundane – picture frames, brooches, candlelighters, card trays, and other ornamental objects – the real surprises come from the materials used. Fish scales that were used as sequins, twisted wire dipped in wax that simulated coral, and flowers made from shells are just a few examples of the fascinating ways in which domestic women processed, imitated, and asserted mastery over the natural world through the practice of handicraft.

Although women's work in the Arts and Crafts movement and Aestheticism has been well established and well researched by scholars

Textual Practice

over the last 30 years, including Schaffer in her earlier work *The Forgotten Female Aesthetes*, *Novel Craft* mines the earlier period of 1850–1870 and places the often overlooked area of women's domestic and leisure craftwork in the tradition of these more visible movements. Schaffer's craft paradigm attempts to locate these items and the practices used to create them at the heart of nineteenth-century discussions of art and creative work more generally. As Schaffer shows, Oliphant's comparison between society and women's domestic handicraft was not an isolated or haphazard occurrence. In a series of meticulous and insightful chapters devoted to specific novels – Elizabeth Gaskell's *Cranford*, Charlotte Yonge's *The Daisy Chain*, Charles Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend*, and Oliphant's last Carlingford novel, *Phoebe Junior* – Schaffer traces the development, and eventual demise of the craft paradigm in fiction. In fact, Schaffer argues, from 1850 to 1870, domestic handicraft was an 'ideal metaphor' through which writers worked through the intersection of key concerns about issues such as production, consumption, and value with questions about the nature of representation (p. 20).

The intersection of these concerns comes out most clearly in Chapters 2 and 3. In Chapter 2, Schaffer focuses on Gaskell's exploration of the ephemerality of paper-based creative work in *Cranford*. Schaffer argues that in *Cranford* Gaskell addresses the anxieties about the social purpose and lasting significance of the novel as an object as well as a story. This anxiety is placed in the context of the social and technological developments which made paper cheaper but also less durable. In tracing how the effects of paper production in the modern economy reaches out of the great industrial centres like the novel's Drumble and invades even the quietest corners of England, Schaffer's reading of *Cranford* not only opens up an interesting dialogue with Gaskell's two overt Condition of England novels that *Cranford* appeared between *Mary Barton* and *North and South*, but it also opens a new perspective on *Cranford* as a story about the nature of authorship in the new economic conditions of industrial modernity.

Schaffer comes back to the relationship between craft and authorship throughout this study, because, she argues, 'Handicraft allows writers to work through a vision of themselves as makers: crafters of an item that might not survive, whose value is unfixed, whose circulation is uncontrollable, whose existence depends on worrisomely cheap and fragile materials' (p. 19). It is this notion of the author as crafter – treating her characters as 'raw, inert materials awaiting the guiding intelligence of the craftsperson' (p. 94) and seeking to preserve the natural vagaries of character in the rigid framework of typological realism – that Schaffer ascribes to Charlotte Yonge's depiction of making leather leaves in *The Daisy Chain*.

The final two chapters outline the decline of the craft paradigm as handicraft came to be seen as outmoded and old-fashioned, eventually to be replaced by Arts and Crafts. Whereas Chapter 4 explores how Dickens uses scraps of cloth to imagine the unravelling of the values enshrined in the craft paradigm at the same time he is promoting them, Chapter 5 argues that Oliphant represents in *Phoebe Junior* the ascendancy of Arts and Crafts values of connoisseurship and consumerism over those of domestic handicraft.

Though the values of the craft ideal were eventually superseded, Schaffer shows the craft paradigm's important implications for how women's relationship to creative work could be imagined. Craft practices constituted a form of creative labour where raw, natural, or waste material was subjected to 'genteel female processing to render it usable' (p. 82). Craft, thus, enabled a form of specifically female mastery in creative work that could stand alongside notions of genius or professionalism as an authentic form of creative endeavour. However, whereas Arts and Crafts and Aestheticism would try to turn away from the industrial, and in some ways from the modern, handicraft both embraced but also kept in check the increasingly insistent demands of the industrial economy. Schaffer's descriptions of forgotten but ubiquitous handicraft practices and materials make this book an enjoyable and informative study, but it is the connections she makes between female creative work and broader nineteenth-century discourses of aesthetics and economics that make *Novel Craft* an essential read.

University of Exeter

2012 © Patricia Zakreski

Katherine Craik

Matthew Dimmock and Andrew Hadfield (eds.), *Literature and Popular Culture in Early Modern England* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 219 pp., £65.00 (hbk)

Members of today's social elite are perhaps not greatly interested in graffiti. But highly educated Elizabethans certainly were, and enjoyed many other 'low' textual activities besides. Edmund Spenser goaded Gabriel Harvey into reading his collection of jest books, which included *Scoggin's Jest* and *Skelton's Merrie Tales*, and Elizabeth I herself savoured in her final days the lewd humour of Scoggin, Howelglas, and Skelton. In his landmark, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (1978), Peter Burke defined 'popular culture' as 'everyone's culture' (p. 7), appealing to wide and restricted audiences alike. This definition remains useful, and the contributors to this fine new collection are almost all committed to what