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*Communities of Care: The Social Ethics of Victorian Fiction*

by Talia Schaffer (review)

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Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature, Volume 42, Number 1, Spring  
2023, pp. 162-165 (Article)

Published by The University of Tulsa



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the poem's popularity and pseudonymous authorship was "both boon and catastrophe" (p. 206). She finally convinced publisher Ticknor and Fields to include her actual name, not just "Florence Percy," on the spine of her 1866 collected works, but the controversy all but ended her literary career and is one mark, Putzi says, of the rising power of "individual, identifiable, and commodified authorship" after the Civil War (p. 207).

Putzi gives us an inspiring book, designed to persuade scholars of both traditional and critical literary analysis to join her in reading with respect and pleasure this body of antebellum American women's poetry. Putzi's work puts together pieces of an intriguing interpretive puzzle that might only be supplemented by a few pieces from the "neo-classical" tradition, which she suggests is a guide to these women poets (p. 26). That venerable tradition identifies poetry as not particularly domestic but as a significant genre of persuasion and, in particular, as a vehicle of "sentiment" seen to cultivate moral empathy. If we knew its contemporary rhetorical strategies, we might all read antebellum poetry more thoughtfully. Readers of Putzi's generous book might find useful two earlier texts on the rhetoric of sentiment that informed antebellum women's poems: *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1776) by George Campbell and Hugh Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1783). Putzi's work adds to helpful analyses of women's eighteenth- and nineteenth-century poetry, especially studies of poetry's contemporary rhetoric by Jane Donawerth, Winifred Bryan Horner, and Lynee Lewis Gaillet.

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COMMUNITIES OF CARE: THE SOCIAL ETHICS OF VICTORIAN FICTION, by Talia Schaffer. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021. 296 pp. \$45.00 hardback; \$31.50 ebook.

*Communities of Care: The Social Ethics of Victorian Fiction* by Talia Schaffer is a rare academic book that provides a fresh approach to Victorian literature, stimulates the scholarly mind, and offers sage lessons for academic life. As the subtitle promises, the book examines nineteenth-century fiction in which acts of care are omnipresent. Novels by Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, Charlotte Brontë, Charlotte Mary Yonge, George Eliot, and Henry James offer a record of caregiving before and after the mid-century ascendancy of paid care and care communities that we can emulate today. Schaffer is admittedly "trying to do a lot of tasks at once," but she does these tasks with excellence (p. 2). The result is a capacious, smart, and engaging book that is part theory, history, literary case

study, and pedagogy, bridging nineteenth-century literature with ideas of how we can care for one another today.

The book is comprised of an introduction, six chapters, and an epilogue. The opening line, “Reader, I want to warn you from the start”—reminiscent of *Jane Eyre’s* (1847) “Reader, I married him”<sup>1</sup>—imparts intimacy, inviting us on a journey to uncover care ethics in fiction and life (p. 1). The introduction establishes a theoretical framework for the ethics of care and a definition of care, here meaning “an action, not a feeling” and “the connective tissue of social life” (pp. 5, 21). Chapter one, “Ethics of Care and the Care Community,” draws on feminist ethics and theories of community. Schaffer outlines five essential characteristics of care communities—“performativity, discursivity, affiliation, egalitarianism, and temporality”—a constellation of qualities evident in fiction and lived experience (p. 49). Schaffer also introduces the sustained metaphor of a cantilevered bridge (aptly a nineteenth-century invention), illuminating how relationship is a founding principle of care. For instance, Schaffer notes that “each side must seek the other by reaching toward that other from its own anchorage, braving the risks of empty space” (p. 30).

Turning from theory to history in chapter two, “Austen, Dickens, and Brontë: Bodies before the Normate,” Schaffer considers a shift in nineteenth-century Britain from homebased care (a model she calls “ordinary bodies”) to a professional model of paid caregiving that institutionalized what was once part of everyday life (p. 24). Here we meet skepticism toward the medical professional through Austen’s *Sanditon* (1817) and the merits of ordinary bodies in Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* and Austen’s *Persuasion* (1818) through, respectively, the social relationships Jane forms with the Rivers sisters and the inclusive care community that tends to Louisa Musgrove after her impetuous leap from the Cobb. Dickens’s *A Christmas Carol* (1843) teaches us about more than saving just one boy with a visible disability but rather about forming a community of care that, in Tiny Tim’s words, embraces “every one!”<sup>2</sup>

Chapters three through six offer literary case studies of Victorian novels. Chapter three, “Global Migrant Care and Emotional Labor in *Villette*,” incisively examines professional care by an emerging global migrant population through Brontë’s *Villette* (1853). As Schaffer teases out the emotional labor of enigmatic Lucy Snowe in her roles as paid companion, nursery-governess, and schoolteacher, she aptly acknowledges the connection between the paid migrant caregiver to today’s disproportionate number of women caregivers of color, a group particularly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic (p. 95). Chapter four, “Beyond Sympathy: The State of Care in *Daniel Deronda*,” addresses what Schaffer calls “feeling without acting” and a move from sympathy to care in her perceptive reading of Eliot’s last published novel, *Daniel Deronda* (1876) (p. 117). Schaffer

foregrounds a dyad of mutual reciprocity that forms between the titular Deronda seeking his identity and the spiritually rich but economically poor, disabled, and dying Mordecai Cohen. This chapter proposes a way of reading *Daniel Deronda*'s oft criticized turn to Zionism as an imagined "care community on an international scale" (p. 139).

Moving beyond an examination of characters transformed by care, chapters five and six consider acts of reading and writing as forms of care. In chapter five, "Care Meets the Silent Treatment in *The Wings of the Dove*," Schaffer argues, "Instead of trying to care for [protagonist] Milly Theale, we care for her story" (p. 142). Likewise, chapter six, "Composite Fiction and the Care Community in *The Heir of Redclyffe*," treats care on a formalist level. Whereas James uses silence to draw in his readers to become caregivers, Yonge—who was a mentor to many and influenced by writers before her—creates in *The Heir of Redclyffe* (1853) what Schaffer calls "composite fiction" (p. 179). In Yonge, "emotional effect is amplified because it harmonizes with so many other stories" by, among others, Dickens, Austen, and Sir Walter Scott; Yonge's achievement "is a textual community of care" (p. 181).

The epilogue, "Critical Care," discusses the place of the care community in academia, asking "whether the department, the classroom, the institution, can or should operate like one of those care collectives" (p. 190). Shaffer reminds us that "the need for care is urgent," especially for an academy still dealing with hybrid teaching, the aftermath of online education, and the rise of quiet quitting and disengagement (p. 190). This final chapter with its messages of care and cooperation over competition is a must read for faculty (both tenure and non-tenure track), staff, and administrators of all ages, ranks, and genders.

Potential readers might question why a Victorianist by training has written an examination of the history of care relations, using fiction to address a contemporary problem. Schaffer explains that "in making ethics of care theory speak to Victorian fiction, I hope to enrich both" (p. 2). Indeed, she does, although the subtitle might more accurately read *The Social Ethics of Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, since it features two pre-Victorian novels (Austen's *Sanditon* and *Persuasion*) that blend well with the Victorian texts. Titles are notoriously tricky, but the current title and subtitle do not express Schaffer's intent to illustrate how the nineteenth-century novel offers a model for care communities today. In addition, I am eager for more discussion of care in the work of Dickens to complement *A Christmas Carol*, as compelling references to *Oliver Twist* (1838) and *Dombey and Son* (1848) invite further thought. The jacket cover—Ford Madox Brown's painting *Henry Fawcett, Dame Millicent Fawcett* (1872)—while arresting, suggests the book will be a study of disability in Victorian fiction.

In sum, *Communities of Care* is a timely, well-researched, and extraordinary academic book motivated by the 2016 election and published during the height of a global pandemic. Practicing care, Shaffer engages popular and academic writing, literary criticism and theory, new voices and established ones, all “while working to place care communities in a rich field of racial, ethnic, and national perspectives” (p. 211). Service, teaching, research, editing, and even citation become acts of care when we “remember that there is a living other behind the text,” ever “braving the risks of empty space” to reach toward our students, colleagues, and the community at large (pp. 213, 30).

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 2008), 448.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol* (London: Blackie and Son, 1908), 112.

ENGAGING ITALY: AMERICAN WOMEN'S UTOPIAN VISIONS  
AND TRANSNATIONAL NETWORKS, by Etta M. Madden. New  
York: SUNY Press, 2022. 342 pp. \$95.00 hardback; \$33.95 paperback.

It is a rare treat to sit in a nineteenth-century Roman *salotto* where upper-class American expatriates gather and exchange their impressions of Italy. This is what happens when you open Etta M. Madden's volume *Engaging Italy: American Women's Utopian Visions and Transnational Networks*. The book's first pages bring the reader inside a Roman salon where American poet and educator Henry Wadsworth Longfellow is the guest of honor. The following pages leave the man behind to focus on three women who frequented these receptions—Emily Bliss Gould (1822-1875), Caroline Crane Marsh (1816-1901), and Anne Hampton Brewster (1819-1892)—and who asked the question, “What can we do to make this crazy, beautiful country better?” The author's detailed archival research and her laborious deciphering of handwritten letters unearthed from long-closed drawers afford the readers this leap in time. It is no small task, and the author immediately indicates to readers of the uniqueness of her sources by asking: “How to capture the numerous abbreviations (often singular to the author), the underlining and double underlining, the superscripts, and the strikethroughs?” (p. xv). The answer is the secret of this book: by getting to know them personally and becoming privy to their habits and peevishness, allowing them to take life in the pages.