"Trifles of value": Craft as communication in Victorian literature

Amanda C. Larson

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“Trifles of Value”: Craft as Communication in Victorian Literature

By

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Thesis

Submitted to the Department of English Language and Literature

Eastern Michigan University

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in

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Thesis Committee:

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Ypsilanti, Michigan
Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the support group who made it possible to make it to the end: the unconditionally supportive Dee, Katie, Kelly, and Susan. Thank you for putting up with me through this process, because without your encouragement, love, and support this would not have been possible to accomplish. To my unequivocally supportive parents, Judy and Avery, who have never once asked me, “What kind of job can you get as an English major?,” all my thanks and love. And to my sister, Kara, who encouraged me to follow my dreams and go wherever my heart takes me despite any obstacles in the way.
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Abstract

This thesis argues that craft functions in the nineteenth century as a form of communication that expresses female identity in Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Cranford* and Margaret Oliphant’s *Miss Marjoribanks*. By looking at the novels through the lens of Talia Schaffer’s craft paradigm in connection with Thing theory, it is possible to make connections between the role of craft and identity, which in turn raises questions about craft and female agency. These connections to female agency illuminate tensions between craft and the economy, gender disparity in the arts, and the limitations of class. In order to explore these notions it is integral to investigate the craft movements that surround them (such as domestic handicrafts, the Design Reform movement, and the Arts and Crafts movement) because each brings with it a set of aesthetic standards that inform craft culture. This inquiry ultimately begs the question: has anything changed in the twenty first century?
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Introduction: Craft as Communication in Victorian Literature

In the late 1990s, the modern handicraft movement took off, revitalizing the interest in craft as a leisure activity and as a business prospect in response to mass production of goods (Stoller ix). Since then, crafts like knitting and crochet have become ubiquitous activities in communities all around the United States. The craft babuuu does not remain strictly located in domestic space, but instead infiltrates the economy, the Internet, and the local coffee shop. Craft creates a niche market in the economy through websites like Etsy, Big Cartel, and Artfire that provide a place where crafters can sell their creations without the limitations of the economy of the craft bazaar. Craft also creates a need for websites like Craftsy and Ravelry where crafters can locate patterns, classes, and a community to interact with around the central theme of handicrafts. Ravelry, in particular, offers an enticing forum for crafters because knitters, crocheters, and spinners can create groups to interact with one another around shared interests outside of the craft they participate in. Another form of this interaction exists in the community of podcasters who create videos where they discuss their craft and their lives allowing crafters to connect around the world. These videos are then watched by individual members who make up a virtual community.

When contextualized with the connection to the mass production of goods, the modern return to craft points to the cyclical nature of craft production. Craft never truly disappears from culture, but instead goes through cycles of decreased and increased popularity. What I notice is that in two very specific cases, the return to craft in the 1990s and the domestic handicrafts of the Victorian Period, craft production increases in relation to the saturation of the market with cheap, mass produced goods. The craft boom of the 1990s echoes the domestic handicraft movement of the Victorian period through this connection to
industrialization. In the 1990s, the craft movement is connected to flooding of the market with cheap industrial goods that have been outsourced to places like China and Taiwan. In reaction to this, the Made in America movement and Handmade movement begin and sweep across the United States gaining popularity for independent craft businesses who use sites like Etsy to reach their market. There is an emphasis on handmade items that are made locally, created from recycled and salvaged materials. One way that these items find an audience is through their imitative quality. Artisans create goods that look like pop culture iconography (references to geek culture like Star Wars and Star Trek, Disney characters, or memes) to draw in sales. Craft also creates discourse of its own in the form of books, magazines, and video instruction.

Much like the craft movement today, domestic handicrafts in the Victorian Period were ubiquitous, imitative, and made often from repurposed materials (Schaffer). Domestic handicraft became popular in reaction to Industrialization. For the middle-class, industrialized goods and the factories that make them led to a reinforcement of separate gendered spheres. Women produced craft in the home with recycled industrial goods (paper, metal scraps, wire, etc.) and salvaged natural materials (leaves, fish scales, nuts) and applied them to objects made by industrial production. These crafts demonstrated their thrift, and generated a way for women to be seen as industrious. In addition, the domestic handicraft movement also generated a plethora of print materials that offered patterns, guides on how to replicate the featured object, and even styling advice for how to best display the crafted items, or arrange the décor of one’s house. These connections not only highlight the cyclical nature of craft, but also raise several questions about what crafts communicate, how they do so, and what role they have in shaping agency for their producers. By engaging with texts
from the Victorian period, I argue it is possible to answer these questions by connecting craft
with the industrial economy that creates the conditions for their increased popularity.

In order to analyze craft through literature, it is important to understand the ground
work that has been laid by other scholars in connection to craft, because my argument builds
on their ideas that objects have the ability to transcend their physical and sentimental purpose
in order to affect their creators and recipients. My thesis makes three arguments in
connection to craft: I argue that craft objects have the ability to not only generate individual
identity, but to communicate it; I argue that craft builds homosocial bonds and generates
community identity; and I argue that examining the representation of craft in the novels
exposes anxieties about the new industrial economy, and in turn the limitations of agency for
women within that new economy. By doing so, I join scholars who have picked up Bill
Brown’s “Thing Theory” and the study of objects to do critical analysis through its lens by
examining craft. One of those scholars is Talia Schaffer, whose book, Novel Craft, explores
what she calls the “craft paradigm” in relation to the way crafts are produced within the
pages of Victorian novels and how that relates to the craft of writing a novel. According to
Schaffer, “the craft paradigm is a set of beliefs about representation, production,
consumption, value, and beauty that underlies a great deal of mid-Victorian creative work”
(4). Schaffer’s book also serves as an excellent reference to contextualize the history of
Victorian handicraft and offers a model for investigating craft from the center out, rather than
from a global perspective inward (15).

With Schaffer’s definition of the craft paradigm in mind, I examine how domestic
handicraft functions as a form of communication in the novels Cranford by Elizabeth Gaskell
and Miss Marjoribanks by Margaret Oliphant. By analyzing these texts through the lens of
the shifting modes of craft during the Victorian Period, the novels demonstrate that craft is intrinsically connected to the individual identity of Miss Matty, Mary Smith, Rose Lake, and Lucilla Marjoribanks. Each woman represents either a specific movement’s aesthetic ideals or a shift in the craft movements of the period. As such, I see the craft functioning in three ways. The first way is when the crafted item takes on a part of the crafter’s identity that it transmits even once it has been gifted, traded, or sold. The second way is that crafters (in the context of my argument, women specifically) are identified solely by their crafts. The third way is when the aesthetic ideals of a particular craft movement are used to express identity. I argue not only that craft clearly connects to individual identity in each novel, but also that craft helps to shape the community within the novel. Craft shapes the community by strengthening homosocial bonds between crafters, because as the community interacts with craft discourse and socialized crafting, the bonds of friendship grow stronger from the communal activity. The community also comes together to craft for charity, providing handmade items to people who do not have access to or cannot create them on their own.

I also argue that through craft it is possible to interrogate the connection between the anxiety about the new industrial economy and the access to agency for women. There are two major sources of economic anxiety in the background of these novels: the Industrial Revolution and the Bank Charter Act of 1844. By the time the novels were written, the Industrial Revolution has firmly taken hold of Great Britain, and as I mentioned earlier women begin to craft industriously in order to participate in the sweeping changes that industry makes to Great Britain from within their gendered sphere of the home. By contrast, the Bank Charter Act of 1844 brings with it a great deal of anxiety. Up until 1844, private banks could issue banknotes on their own. After the charter passed, banks could no longer
print their own banknotes; instead, the Charter gave exclusive rights to print banknotes to the
central Bank of England. In Cranford, Gaskell depicts a private bank that becomes insolvent
which ties nicely into the historical context of the switch from many private banks to a
centralized banking system. The fallout of the bank collapse raises a question in Cranford: If
a middle-class woman has to work in the Victorian Period, what are possible occupations that
are respectable? That question in turn gives way to more questions for both novels: What
does she have to know in order to be eligible for those positions? How many of those
positions are tied to the crafts that are solely considered feminine? If a middle-class woman
does not have to work, how does that affect her agency in the period? How in turn do the
crafts that women make represent and transmit their creator’s identity? How do crafts shape
the community that they are made within?

Throughout this thesis I trace how much agency is available to women in the
Victorian Period through craft with the aim to answer all of these questions. In order to do so,
I look specifically at the portrayal of women and their connections to craft, and by extension
the craft movements connected to them. By reading these texts through the Victorian craft
movements in chronological order (progressing through domestic handicraft to the Design
Reform movement to the Arts and Crafts movement) it becomes possible to hone in on how
craft affects the agency of women, how craft shapes their identity, and how craft strengthens
the homosocial bonds of the community.

In chapter one, I examine Elizabeth Gaskell’s unconventional novel, Cranford,
through the lens of the shift from the domestic handicrafts movement into the Design Reform
movement which allows me to explore how the changing craft paradigm creates and affects
the identity of the characters, the structure of the community, and the representation of
female agency. In the Victorian Period, handicrafts were expressly connected with a woman’s identity. The implication that a woman’s selfhood is represented by the material goods that she creates suggests that the crafts women make transmit quite a lot of information about their creator when they are given away or traded in exchange for someone else’s handicraft. The connection between women identifying themselves through craft and the possibility of selling their craft raises questions about what sort of agency women can have in this period. If they cannot sell their crafts, how exactly are they supposed to provide for themselves if they experience a financial crisis?

The novel presents an interesting community made up almost entirely of women who live in Cranford. These are middle-class women, to use the term broadly as the novel encompasses a wide range of representations of the occupants of the middle-classes, who hire young women as servants and practice domestic handicrafts in their leisure time. At the heart of the story is Miss Matty, an aging middle-class woman, who undergoes a financial crisis when the bank her sister invested their money in goes under. As I mentioned earlier, private banks could issue banknotes whenever they pleased without the necessary capital to back them (in this case gold). The representation of this financial crisis ties into the anxieties that Victorians felt about the new economy, which replaces these private banks with a centralized banking system. I argue that in handling Miss Matty’s future, the narrator, Mary Smith, enacts a care ethic in order to prevent Miss Matty from sacrificing her identity completely to remain financially afloat. As a friend of Miss Matty’s, Mary tasks herself with finding the solution as to what Miss Matty can do to earn a living. Her thought process when seeking an adequate solution touches on both questions of agency for women and how closely craft is
connected to a woman’s identity. When she runs through the list of Miss Matty’s skills, Mary inevitably considers the domestic handicrafts she could make or teach others to make:

A present of these delicately-wrought garters, a bunch of gay ‘spills,’ or a set of cards on which sewing-silk was wound in a mystical manner, were the well-known tokens of Miss Matty’s favour. But would anyone pay to have their children taught these arts? or indeed would Miss Matty sell, for filthy lucre, the knack and the skill with which she made trifles of value to those who loved her? (Gaskell 130).

Mary considers three important factors in the passage: She questions whether craft is a viable source of income, indicates that Miss Matty’s crafted items communicate her favor to her loved ones. Mary questions whether Miss Matty’s choice of selling her skill at creating these crafts could force a shift in her identity. The tension Mary feels surrounding Miss Matty’s identity and the sale of her crafts highlights the fact that “products of the handicraft craze were not supposed to be sold. Since they represented a woman’s selfhood, putting a price on handicrafts felt rather like selling the woman herself” (Schaffer 11). Instead, handicrafts could be traded among women crafters, or sold at charity bazaars (11-12). The fact that Mary Smith finds a solution that allows Miss Matty to retain her craft-related identity through the sale of tea suggests that craft is not a viable source of agency, but that setting up shop is. Yet, the establishment of the tea shop provides financially for Miss Matty while protecting her selfhood attached to her craft, all the while allowing her to continue crafting in her spare time. In analyzing Miss Matty’s financial crisis, it is impossible to ignore the connection to community. By analyzing the relationships of these women it becomes evident that craft plays a large role in the community of Cranford; as such, I argue that craft further helps
define the identity of the community while strengthening the homosocial bonds between the women in the text.

In chapter two, I examine Margaret Oliphant’s novel, *Miss Marjoribanks*, through the lens of the shift between the Design Reform movement and the Arts and Crafts movement by focusing on the character of Rose Lake. Building on the groundwork laid in the first chapter concerning female agency, this chapter explores what it means to earn an income in connection to craft during the Victorian Period. Oliphant depicts a family of artists, the Lakes, who function in a liminal space between middle and lower class. Their class position underscores the economic tensions in the novel contrasting the need for employment against the need to be true to the artistic self. The question of agency is framed differently for Rose, as she has a paying position as a teacher at the School of Design in Carlingford and is not in a financial crisis. Instead, I argue that Rose raises questions about how the need to earn money limits her ability to pursue her desire to be an artist. As a girl, Rose studies art at the School of Design, and is such a promising student that when the main character of the novel, Lucilla, comes back from school, Rose now teaches at the School of Design. Her position at the School of Design demonstrates the role of teacher that Mary Smith rules out as a viable option in her debate about what sort of employment Miss Matty would best be suited for in *Cranford*. Rose’s role as a teacher at the School of Design also locates her within the ideological camp of the Design Reform movement. Despite her alignment with the School of Design in the novel, I argue that the character of Rose actually functions to articulate the ideological tensions between the Design Reform movement and the Arts and Crafts movement. In her personal designs she is forced to choose between creating craft that fits the Design Reform aesthetic (embracing industry, creating items with unity of form and style,
and nature motifs) which may lead to marginal success as a woman, or to create designs that have an Arts and Crafts aesthetic (shunning any connection to industrialization by embracing handmade items that are skillfully made, using specific color palettes, and refined nature motifs) which may not be welcome because she is attached to the School of Design and through it the Design Reform platform.

In the previous chapter, I discuss Miss Matty’s lack of agency because of financial crisis; however, Rose’s lack of agency stems from not only her class position as neither lower class nor middle-class, but also from the gendered division of art and craft. I argue that Oliphant selects to have Rose weigh in on a greater cultural debate during the Victorian Period of whether or not women should be able to study the human figure by having Rose teach her students to draw the Belvedere Apollo in order to highlight this gendered divide. Exploring this depiction leads me to question what else Rose could have done to earn money during the Victorian Period such as designing embroidery patterns that could be published in craft magazines, or working as professionalized embroiderer. My argument builds towards a conclusion that Rose is essentially trapped within a system that limits her agency through the systematic exclusion of women from professional crafts.

In chapter three, I focus again on Oliphant’s Miss Marjoribanks, but this time solely through the lens of the Arts and Crafts movement. Her depiction of Lucilla Marjoribanks offers quite a different point of view from that of Miss Matty and Rose Lake. Lucilla is not in the same economic position as either Miss Matty or Rose Lake; instead, she is in a position where she does not need to earn an income. This is significant because it places Lucilla in a different class position, which offers her more agency, but complicates her connection to craft. Where both Miss Matty and Rose Lake most definitely engage in craft production in
the novels, Lucilla does not. She is in no way physically connected to craft production in the novel. Instead, Lucilla has a different relationship with craft through the Arts and Crafts movement. I argue that Lucilla functions in the role of a connoisseur, even though it is typically a position in the Victorian Period that is gendered masculine. Connoisseurship is another aspect of the Arts and Crafts movement that differs from the Design Reform movement; it redefines “home decoration [as] the province of men, a place to showcase the ‘finds’ that demonstrated their taste and knowledge” (Schaffer 56). I argue that Lucilla demonstrates her taste by adhering to the Arts and Crafts aesthetics in her redecoration of her drawing-room. To do so, I trace the importance of the drawing-room in the Victorian Period, in addition to the way she uses the aesthetics to create a space that will help her generate social agency by showing her expertise. I also argue that Lucilla exhibits her expertise by selecting the right people to attend her Evenings. Instead of objects of art, Lucilla’s “finds” are the people she surrounds herself with. Lucilla’s expertise, I believe, stems from her ability to learn from failed attempts at managing people, combined with the education her class position affords her which would expose her the tenets of the Arts and Crafts aesthetics she would need to be successful. These are the tools that she uses to hone her expertise. In a world where “selecting wallpaper meant exercising a principled choice between truth and falsehood, of the gravest importance for the soul of the consumer, and, indeed the nation” her expertise becomes a skill that is essential in navigating the rigor of expertly selecting the right décor or choosing the correct attendees for one of her Evenings (Schaffer 53).

Throughout these chapters, examining the connections between craft and how it shapes identity, strengthens homosocial bonds, and influences agency for women in the Victorian Period, brings me back to how cyclical the craft movement is: in the still-present
craft movement of the 1990s, these connections still play out. My argument concludes by looking at how craft shapes these connections today, and how modern technology has changed and perhaps even strengthened those connections.
Chapter One: Crafting Identity and Community in *Cranford*

In this chapter, I examine how Elizabeth Gaskell’s novel, *Cranford*, reflects tensions between craft and the emerging financial systems of the nineteenth century. These tensions take place throughout the novel in the representations of the community of Cranford, and raise questions not only about the economic position of craft and generation of female agency, but also how craft is intrinsically connected to the generation of identity. The first hint of these tensions surrounding the economic growth is evident in the description of the town of Cranford. Initially published in Dickens’s *Household Words* from 1851 to 1853, *Cranford* is Gaskell’s fictional representation “of the real town of Knutsford,” explains Margaret Croskery, further noting that Knutsford was “a peaceful, antiquated spot where [Gaskell] had lived during much of her childhood” (203, clarification mine). The industrial city of Drumble that Gaskell uses to contrast the peaceful Cranford throughout the text is also based on a real place: “the quickly growing industrialized town of Manchester” (Croskery 203). In *Cranford* the two cities function as foils for each other. Drumble represents an industrial town filled with the latest technological advancements and the business of men which links up with the new economy, whereas Cranford is filled with what the narrator describes as “Amazons” because “all the holders of houses, above a certain rent, are women,” and Gaskell focuses on the out of fashion social rituals observed by women of the town (Gaskell 3). The description of these towns sets the tone for the economic anxieties that play out later in the text surrounding the insolvency of the bank that creates Miss Matty’s financial crisis.

Over the course of the novel, the narrator, Mary Smith, relates all the doings in the town. She traces all the tragedies and triumphs that befall the community of women. One
such tragedy occurs when Miss Matilda Jenkyns (lovingly referred to as Miss Matty by her friends) loses her income due to the financial collapse of the bank in which all her money was invested. This crisis illuminates not only the economic tensions underpinning the question of female agency in the new economy, but also brings ethics of care versus ethics of gain to the forefront. Can Miss Matty do something to earn an income? If so, what is appropriate? Is it necessary for Miss Matty to sacrifice her last bit of money to make reparations for the bank’s collapse? Mary Smith steps up to the plate to find a solution to Miss Matty’s financial problems, and considers the different avenues that Miss Matty could pursue to earn an income. One idea that occurs to Mary is to market Miss Matty’s skill with domestic handicrafts. Mary, however, rules out craft as a possible avenue of income out of concern that Miss Matty would lose an integral aspect of her identity if she sold her handicrafts. I argue that in doing so, Mary chooses a position of care ethics over whatever economic gains Miss Matty could see from selling her crafts. This position also highlights the transcendent value of craft objects as more than just objects, carrying with them remnants of their maker’s identity.

In my argument, Mary’s debate over what Miss Matty can do to earn an income is central in understanding the depiction of craft in the novel, because it illuminates the changing craft discourse from domestic handicrafts into the Design Reform movement. Domestic handicraft developed in reaction, but not in opposition, to industrialization, providing a counterpoint to newly available mass produced goods; it offers Victorians instead a hobby that creates handmade goods that benefit from “the changes in mass production, transportation, advertising, and sales that made it possible to procure craft instructions and materials” (Schaffer 15). Its tenets included “thriftiness, imaginativeness, and manual
dexterity” (Schaffer 38). Aesthetically, domestic handicraft favored using colors with high contrast like crimson, green, and black (50). The Design Reform movement stemmed out of The Great Exhibition, a showcase of Great Britain’s industrial achievements “that combined both artisanal and mechanical works” and “fit into the machine ethos” of Industrialization (38-39). But the Great Exhibition also displayed what Design Reform movement leaders would describe as Great Britain’s lack of taste allowing for the movements deliberate development against domestic handicrafts (52). In reaction to domestic handicrafts, the Design Reform movement championed conventional design and specific design tenets in personal crafting, such as: “truth to one’s materials, sturdy construction, and muted tertiary hues” (50). It was still closely linked to mechanized production, but wanted to set aesthetic standards for design. By positioning the period depicted in the novel with the time it was published (in the early 1850’s) the shift in craft discourse becomes clear. This shift takes place between 1830 and 1860. Mary’s elimination of things that Miss Matty can do to earn an income provide the contextual clues needed to position the time period in the 1850’s. Her debate suggests that the older generation of Amazons in Cranford persist in the creating domestic handicrafts with outdated aesthetics, while the younger generation are being taught crafts with design aesthetics similar to those from the Design Reform movement. Placing the novel in the 1850’s through craft also allows for historicizing the Bank Charter Act of 1844 as the context for the defaulting of the bank that brings about Miss Matty’s financial crisis.

The rich craft description throughout the novel further demonstrates how craft is able to generate identity, but on a larger scale – it grants identity to the community of Cranford. Craft plays a large role in the development of social bonds between the women, and often serves as a sole identifier for particular women within the community. In addition, craft ties
back into the economy indirectly in the way that women not only spend both their time and energy creating handicrafts, but also their money by purchasing craft discourse (the latest patterns and stitches that magazines have to offer the women of Cranford); this functions as a way of building larger communal bonds and personal friendships.

While I will investigate how themes of economy, female agency, identity formation and communication are tied to craft throughout this chapter, I feel it is also important to note the unusual narrative construction of the text because of the central position of the narrator, Mary Smith, to my argument. Mary plays an integral role in determining if Miss Matty has any agency to improve her newly impoverished situation, and if she can use craft to generate income. In fact, a lot of the critical scholarship of the novel focuses on questions of narration and genre. The novel is unusual because of its structure as a collection of vignettes of daily life in Cranford. This is largely because Gaskell never intended to write *Cranford* as a novel, but rather just as series of short narratives for *Household Words* (Croskery 201). As Croskery explains, it is only due to “popular acclaim and Dickens’s urging” that Gaskell was convinced to add fourteen more chapters (201). Some critics debate whether *Cranford* actually is a novel, and if it is, what about its narrative structure makes it so? Croskery makes the case for Cranford as a novel:

It is the sympathetic resonance that defines Cranford’s charm and that constitutes its radically different narrative. The novel’s unique charm derives its essence from an innovation in the compelling dynamic of narrative that eschews traditional plotting in order to create a narrative mode that embodies a desire (more precisely, a sympathetic resonance) antithetical to seduction. (207)
In her argument Gaskell’s “Cranford represents not only an important achievement in narrative but also a unique hybrid between the novel of sentiment and the novel of reform” (218). I argue this hybridity can be pushed further by examining Mary Smith’s role as both narrator and character. As such, she allows the reader a window into Cranford and shapes our perception of the denizens of the town. In doing so Mary Smith also chooses to depict the function of craft in the structure of the community and in the formation of identity. Yet she also participates in the text as a character with her own fears, worries, and attachments. More specifically, in the sense of my argument, it also depicts the hybridity in how domestic handicrafts are valued, because Mary assesses both the sentimental and economic value of Miss Matty’s craft based on her own aesthetic background.

As for genre, other critics like Hilary Schor, Natalie Kapetanios Meir, and Margaret Tarratt position the novel’s narrative in relation to or in opposition with etiquette handbooks, encyclopedias, and fashion guides that offer instruction in social codes. I see the novel functioning similarly to a guidebook, but instead of offering insight into etiquette or fashion, I argue the novel represents the changing social codes surrounding craft discourse and the emerging economy. Schor suggests that Cranford “is in fact better read as a woman writer's experiment with narrative, an extended commentary on the ways women are taught to read cultural signs, and a serious critique of the role of literature in shaping female readers” (288). I agree with this line of thought; it partakes in a larger argument that novels intended for middle-class women were designed to reinforce social values and expectations of behavior, and that Gaskell is acting outside of that prescriptive form. But Meir points out that Schor’s argument “suggests that Cranford ridicules the rigid ‘codification of experience’ associated with handbooks” (1). Schor contends that “turning to encyclopedias-or fashion guides, or
books of baronetcy-to explain the world is futile: one might laugh at Cranford itself for its rigid following of codes like fashion books or guides to manners, for all its guidebooks are out-of-date. But all these codes begin to seem arbitrary” (296). I disagree: I do not see Gaskell’s novel as ridiculing these types of books, but rather functioning as a platform for a different set of social codes. Instead of Cranford playing out a set of futile social codes, it demonstrates how social codes change over time, which echoes the shifting craft discourse. For example: when Mary weighs Miss Matty’s options for work she lays out the expected social codes surrounding domestic handicraft and then asks the following questions: is it socially acceptable to sell crafts for money? And if it is, what would selling crafts do to Miss Matty’s sense of self? In another context, looking at the community of Amazons in Cranford, they may be old enough to cling to their past social codes and crafts (and often for comic effect), but there are moments throughout the novel where they have to adapt. For example, when the bank collapses and Miss Matty is left very close to destitute, her friends do not abandon her as persona non grata, but rather work within the strata of their entrenched social codes to find ways to help her. In this sense, I agree with Meir, who notes that Tarratt “argues that Gaskell examines the implications of social codes on women’s lives; the novel’s basic message … is that the individual has an ‘occasional need to question authority and in certain cases to defy convention’” (1-2).

Throughout the chapter I trace the crafting rituals of Cranford in order to discern how craft becomes the common thread that helps tie the community of Cranford’s Amazons together. Meir’s argument is in a similar vein, she traces the function of eating rituals in the text as a locus of social convention where behaviors are tested, modified, and then codified through repetition. She does this by situating “Gaskell’s narrative techniques with respect to
those that tend to recur in social instruction handbooks of the mid-to-late nineteenth
century….which present conventions as finished products apart from individual experience
and agency, Victorian novels’ narrative methods can provide insight into the ways in which
social practices are codified” (2). My argument follows a similar trajectory: I believe that by
looking at the different crafting rituals throughout the novel, it is possible to see how the
community identifies itself through craft.

In order to address my argument that craft expresses anxieties about the changing
economy, allows or disallows agency for women, and shapes the generation of identity, it is
essential to look at the work of Talia Schaffer, who situates the novel through handicraft and
its relation to women’s writing in her book Novel Craft. Schaffer views the women of
Cranford as partaking in a specific mode of Victorian domestic handicraft – salvage. She
also ties the paper crafts in the novel to the act of women’s writing, suggesting that
“handicraft simultaneously offers a way to write on the metanarrative level, for Gaskell uses
it self-referentially to express anxieties about constructing the novel itself” (Schaffer 51). I
share Schaffer’s trajectory of viewing craft as a “category of thing, reading back out from
this specific category to see how pervasive, important, and unresolved the anxieties it
encodes are” (15). While Schaffer ties craft in the novel to anxieties about writing, I see craft
functioning in a different way throughout the novel. In this chapter, I will demonstrate the
centrality of craft as a generative force for identity and a locus of anxiety surrounding the
emerging economy, going beyond Schaffer’s focus on the connection between paper craft
and women’s writing.

In order to do so, I draw on Thing theory to demonstrate how the crafts women make
transcend their status as objects with symbolic qualities to act as objects that constitute their
creator’s identities and create community, and because of their “thingness”, complicate the sale of crafts for money. I am largely indebted to Schaffer for making this connection to craft: she positions her book’s connection to craft via the field of thing theory; “it focuses on one category of thing,” in this case domestic handicraft, “reading back out from a specific category to see how pervasive, important, and unresolved the anxieties are it encodes” (15). One of the anxieties that Schaffer sees encoded is an anxiety about the economy; she argues that texts like Cranford “mobilize the craft paradigm against an emergent financial system” (10). I see this anxiety exhibiting itself in the novel through Mary’s inner debate about whether Miss Matty can sell her crafts or the skills used to make them. Thing theory also opens up another avenue for scholars to generate “new thoughts about how inanimate objects constitute human subjects, how they move them, how they threaten them, how they facilitate or threaten their relation to other subjects” (Brown 7). The reason Mary debates if Miss Matty can use craft as an income is because in the Victorian Period craft is intrinsically connected to female identity, which raises questions in Mary’s mind about what that would do to Miss Matty’s identity. Would her identity be threatened by the sale of her crafts because they are so markedly personal? By looking at these issues in this chapter, I demonstrate Thing theory’s assertion that things show “how inanimate objects organize the temporality of the animate world” (16). In Cranford, I see domestic handicraft as Schaffer defines it to be “anything made by hand, at home” and as fulfilling both of these functions of Thing theory (15).

As I mentioned previously, Mary Smith plays an integral role in the novel in her position as both a character and the narrator. As such, I argue that Mary also enacts the use of care ethics in her deliberate thought process in procuring Miss Matty a profession; instead of
allowing Miss Matty to sacrifice one of the things that makes her uniquely her (her craft), she finds a solution that allows Miss Matty to keep her craft and its connection to her identity intact by helping Miss Matty set up a tea shop. In order to do so, Mary exists as a liminal figure within the text who elaborates “the women’s code of conduct … as an outsider who is a regular visitor to the town,” allowing the reader access to “reliable knowledge regarding the social intricacies of Cranford while, at the same time” leaving room to question “their logic and function” (Meir 3). Other scholars also note Mary Smith’s integral role in shaping the novel and the reader’s perception of the town. I would extend these thoughts further and suggest that Mary not only shapes the reader’s perception of Cranford through her role as narrator, but also acts with agency in the plot as character. This hybridity of narrator/character allows Mary to perform care ethics within the text to protect the perception of the women of Cranford by the reader. Mary Jeanette Moran argues that Mary provides the women of Cranford subjectivity, explaining: “Mary focuses on others; she presents the story of the Cranford women in a way that recognizes their subjectivity, translating their markedly feminine society so that they seem less alien than an unmediated version of their idiosyncrasies would suggest” (18). Moran envisions this taking place through care ethics; in this context, care ethics relate to the moral theory that suggest that human beings seek “to maintain relationships by contextualizing and promoting the well-being of care-givers and care-receivers in a network of social relations” (Sander-Staudt). Put another way, as Carol Gilligan, one of the preeminent scholars on the subject suggests, it is “a voice that join[s] self with relation and reason with emotion” and “the ethics of care starts from the premise that as humans we are inherently relational, responsive beings and the human condition is one of connectedness or interdependency” (Ethics of Care). So, in this sense, Moran views Mary
intervening in how the reader perceives the women of Cranford. I further argue that by doing so Mary not only acts with agency to tell their story in a manner that makes them seem charming rather than alien, but also specifically intervenes on Miss Matty’s behalf with the ethics of care guiding her intervention.

I agree with Moran’s argument that Mary Smith enacts care ethics from a position that empowers female agency, which lends itself to a feminist reading of the text. However, one of the contested points of care ethics is that it positions women to be codified as caregivers “within a patriarchal context” which means “reductively aligning women and care risks reifying restrictive stereotypes of femininity” (Moran 11). These stereotypes often position women in the role of caregivers who sacrifice themselves in order to take care of others. In order to distance her argument from any stereotypical patriarchal depictions of women, Moran argues that “in order to enact an ethic that is feminist in reality as well as in name, then, people must avoid the trap of sacrificing themselves in order to meet the needs of others” (11). This concept of women sacrificing themselves is integral to my own argument of Mary enacting care ethics to intervene on Miss Matty’s behalf by figuring out what she can do to earn an income. Moran positions Miss Matty as sacrificing herself to care for others in the scene where she discovers that the bank is defunct, and gives her five sovereigns to Mr. Dobson out of a sense of responsibility as one of the investors (Gaskell 122). Mary Smith, on the other hand, Moran sees as enacting a care ethic that does not include self-sacrifice by interceding between the women of Cranford and the reader to provide them with subjectivity. I argue this intercession can be extended further, because Mary does not just intercede on behalf of the women of Cranford and their depiction, but
deliberately intervenes on Miss Matty’s behalf by coming up with a solution to Matty’s financial crisis that will not sacrifice her identity through the sale of her crafts.

In the aforementioned scene, economics come into play with care ethics because in essence, Matty sacrifices her future economic security by giving away the money out of a sense of duty as shareholder of the bank. In reaction to witnessing Miss Matty give away her last five sovereigns, Mary exhibits a flash of anger. Moran views this as “aris[ing] from a recognition that if Miss Matty continues to put the interests of others before her own, she will reduce herself from a financially restricted situation to that of abject poverty” (18). Mary Smith sees what Miss Matty cannot, if she continues down this path of sacrificing herself, ultimately Miss Matty will be left destitute. In this sense Miss Matty fulfills the patriarchal stereotype of a caregiver that demands “women must give themselves until they have nothing left” and if left to her own devices, she might give up integral components of her identity to find some sort of financial stability (Moran 18). Mary, however, enacts care ethics that prevent Miss Matty from doing so. I believe that in Miss Matty’s case, the items she crafts are tied closely to her identity as I explain later in this chapter. I see Mary using this type of care ethic to intercede on behalf of Miss Matty after her finances have dried up. She does this by imagining a solution to Miss Matty’s financial problems that does not require Matty to sacrifice until she has nothing left of herself to give. Schor recognizes that “Miss Matty's fate is what middle-class Victorians must most have feared: she is left with no income, but with social obligations; she is embarrassed in front of her friends; she must give up her family home” (300). But Mary Smith, respectful of Miss Matty’s identity, creates a position for Miss Matty that will allow her to remain autonomous by deciding Miss Matty will sell tea. However, before arriving at this decision, it is important to look Mary’s consideration of all
of Miss Matty’s talents, beginning with her skill at domestic handicraft, because by the nineteenth century skill at domestic handicraft fulfills the societal expectation of female identity.

I argue that Mary rules out domestic handicraft as a way to generate income for Miss Matty - not only because Matty’s crafts are intrinsically linked to her sense of self, but also because of the shift in the economy in relation to domestic handicrafts. By the early nineteenth century, “handicraft became coded as a woman’s hobby specifically, and it was increasingly identified with a middle-class sensibility, as a thrifty, skilled mode of domestic management” as opposed to an economic venture (Schaffer 33). This shift is meticulously documented by Rozsika Parker in her book, *The Subversive Stitch*, where she argues that the association of needlework as part of the inculcation of femininity began as early as the sixteenth century, but by the nineteenth century the “total identification that had been effected between embroidery and the Victorian feminine ideal” meant that they were inseparable (39). This began in childhood where “girls were instructed to be little women, and embroidery” serves as “the continuum in their lives that linked childhood and womanhood” (Parker 83). Women who fell into genteel poverty may have turned to embroidery and sewing in the past as a way of generating income; but with the new economy and the shift away from domestic handicrafts, Mary worries Miss Matty’s skills might be too out of fashion to generate income. Yet, despite that Mary begins her assessment of what Miss Matty can do with domestic handicrafts because of that past cultural precedence of taking up sewing or embroidery as a viable option. The skills that Mary notes but rejects as an avenue of income for Miss Matty are: embroidery, drawing, reading globes, knitting, and making
trinkets. In the following passage Mary explains why teaching drawing is not a suitable avenue of income for Miss Matty:

[Miss Matty] had also once been able to trace out patterns very nicely for muslin embroidery, by dint of placing a piece of silver paper over the design to be copied, and holding both against the window-pane, while she marked the scollop and eyelet-holes. But that was her nearest approach to the accomplishment of drawing, and I did not think it would go very far. (Gaskell 129)

With drawing dismissed as an option, Mary turns to consider Miss Matty’s ability to teach the younger generation her style of embroidery. Yet, embroidery in the nineteenth century was a hotly debated subject. It was simultaneously associated with both morality and immorality. The “new feminine ideal was constructed – domestic femininity” where women were “urged and instructed to achieve” this modality, so “it became increasingly important that embroidery not been seen primarily as a badge of leisure but as a contribution to the happiness and well-being of the home” (Parker 138-139). Rather than be associated with highly immoral ideals of aristocracy and their bountiful leisure time, the middle-class recodes embroidery as a moral activity that demonstrates domestic bliss. In both of these sets of ideals surrounding embroidery, craft is disconnected from the exchange of money. As such it is even further disconnected from the new burgeoning economy predicated on the sale of mass produced items. Schaffer notes that “a woman making domestic handicraft was involving herself in early-Victorian gender roles. The domestic handicraft demonstrated her leisure time, domestic management skills, thrift, and housewifely skill” (7). Domestic handicraft allows women to interact with the new economy by showing their ability to save money through thrift and salvage. Yet, they also face restrictions on how they can craft by
the more pious reformers often espoused that “unless embroidery was performed as a moral
duty, in the spirit of selfless industry, it was regarded as sinful laziness redolent of
aristocratic decadence” (Parker 154). The underpinnings of this line of thought are evident in
the connection of craft to Miss Matty’s identity and the appropriateness of craft as a form of
income. In addition, Mary worries that despite Miss Matty’s skill at that particular older
form of embroidery is more than likely completely out of fashion. The description of the kind
of embroidery pattern Miss Matty was capable of drawing out nicely also demonstrates how
out of fashion her skills are with the current embroidery practices. Scollops and eyelets are
replaced by natural motifs in the Design Reform movement. These quick aesthetic changes
highlight how handicraft in the period functions as much as a locus of change as technology
does now.

The shift in domestic handicraft to the Design Reform movements plays a large role
in why Miss Matty’s skills in craft are not a good avenue of generating income. Over a span
of sixty years the position of domestic handicraft drastically changes in the nineteenth
century. In the 1840s, craft “was synchronized with the prevailing feelings about economic,
aesthetic, and social conventions, but by the 1860s, to use craft was to deliberately align
oneself with a now-receding set of values. After the 1860s, domestic handicraft became a
reactionary pursuit” against the reigning aesthetic ideals (Schaffer 7). By examining the
novel’s setting as existing coterminously with the time in which the novel was written (the
1850s) allows for connections between the craft pursuits of the characters in the novel with
the larger craft movements happening in Great Britain. Miss Matty’s craft pursuits align with
the past craft aesthetic of domestic handicrafts like Berlin woolwork. Berlin woolwork is a
form of embroidery created “in wool on canvas, from patterns drawn on squared paper with
Figure 1 depicts a purse created in the Berlin woolwork style of embroidery; notice the red and green colors set against black and gold. This is the style of embroidery that was popular in Miss Matty’s time, so Mary is right to be worried about Matty’s skills being out of fashion. What is in fashion at the schools young women attend in Cranford is “fancy work and the use of globes” (Gaskell 129). Fancy work is any ornamental needlework that is not plain sewing; the OED defines it as “ornamental, as opposed to plain, work, esp. in needlework, crochet, knitting, or the like” (Fancywork, n. def. a). At this point in the novel the kind of fancywork that suited Miss Matty’s generation (berlin woolwork) is out of fashion and has taken on the aesthetics of the Design Reform movement. The young women of Cranford most likely would learn needle painting (an embroidery technique where the artist uses thread to imitate oil painting) and stumpwork (a three-dimensional embroidery effect that uses cotton or wool to raise the fabric of the embroidered piece) (Parker 241).

Another mark against Miss Matty teaching embroidery at the Ladies’ Seminary is her failing eyesight. Mary doubts “if she could discover the number of threads in worsted-work pattern, or rightly appreciate the different shades required for Queen Adelaide’s face, in the loyal wool-work now fashionable in Cranford” (Gaskell 129). Mary ends her ruminations on what Miss Matty could do for a living with two integral questions: “would anyone pay to have their children taught these arts?” or “indeed would Miss Matty sell, for filthy lucre, the knack and the skill with which she made trifles of value to those who loved her?” (130, emphasis mine). The former is addressed above in Mary’s reasoned inner debate to rule out prospects,
but the latter keys in on the transcendent quality of the domestic handicrafts Miss Matty makes that I will explore momentarily.

Instead of turning to craft, Mary Smith lands upon Miss Matty setting up a shop where she sells tea. The question remains, though, as to why Mary decides that craft is not an option when it is commonly the work that women in Miss Matty’s position tend to fall back on. Sarah Stickney Ellis, writing in the 1840s, explains that “women accustomed to working with their hands would able to ‘sink’ gracefully and without murmuring against providence” which suggests when considered contemporaneously with Miss Matty’s character that turning to craft (particularly sewing and embroidery) would not be the obvious choice for income (20). In Matty’s generation a woman “could easily turn to her needle for income, as “impoverished women of [her] generation lost no status by selling fancywork in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century” but in the new economy with mass produced items, this mode of income has become less stable (Schaffer 67). Parker expands on this as well, explaining “all women embroider, but only once a woman shifts on the social scale is her ‘work’ recognized as work” (154). It was common for women who fell upon hard times to turn their domestic handicraft skills for income. Yet, Mary rules this option out, suggesting that times have changed since it was commonly accepted as a genteel form of labor for women whose fortunes have shifted. For Miss Matty to use her skill at domestic handicraft to work, Mary quite rightly fears it would shift not only her perceived social class, but perhaps even her identity. Miss Matty’s solution to her situation is “to take a single room, and retain as much of her furniture as would be necessary to fit up this, and sell the rest; and there to quietly exist upon what would remain after paying the rent” (Gaskell 128-129). But Mary admits to being more ambitious; she wants to find a solution that would allow Miss Matty to
“earn or add to a living, without materially losing caste” (129). Miss Matty’s identity is tied to her class position, but also to her craft. Mary makes this connection when she recalls Matty’s distressed reaction to her wanting to show off the knitted garter Matty made her. This connection between Miss Matty’s identity and domestic handicraft is worth exploring further because it suggests that crafted items hold far more significance to one’s identity than their ubiquitous presence in the Victorian period leads one to believe.

I see Cranford offering two experiences with the craft paradigm: the first is that of the individual, and the second is that of the community. Through Mary Smith’s narration, the individual experience of domestic handicraft ties largely into the formation of identity. Early on in the text, the reader learns that “Miss Matty was chary of candles. We had many devices to use as few as possible” (42). This ties nicely into the domestic handicraft ideal from the 1840s, because Miss Matty’s sparse use of candles allows her to be thrifty. Mary goes onto explain that Miss Matty “would sit knitting for two or three hours; she could do this in the dark, or by fire-light; and when I asked if might not ring for candles to finish stitching my wrist bands, she told me to ‘keep blind-man’s holiday’” (42). But despite her thrifty implementation of candle-light, what Miss Matty prides herself on “as arts, in which she excelled, was making candle-lighters, or ‘spills’ (as she preferred calling them), of coloured paper, cut so as to resemble feathers” (129). Here she also manages not only to be thrifty, but also to create through salvage because she creates her candle-lighters by recycling “all the notes and letters of the week” (72). Her craft allows her to communicate “elegant economy” as part of her identity to Mary Smith when she visits (5).

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1 A proverbial term for night or twilight, when there is insufficient light to work (Birch 204).
The next level of personal identity that is represented through craft in the novel is the connection between Miss Matty and the objects she creates. Specifically, Miss Matty is renowned for “knitting garters in a variety of dainty stitches” (129). Later in the novel, the narrator describes Miss Matty sitting “behind her counter, knitting an elaborate pair of garters” which seemed elaborate to an outside viewer, but for Miss Matty “the difficult stitch was no weight upon her mind, for she was singing in a low voice to herself as her needles went rapidly in and out” (145). She is so skilled at knitting that she can do it in the dark and has enough muscle memory that she can sing while she knits without missing a stitch. This also demonstrates her ability to be thrifty, because she can craft in the low light environment she has created by being chary of candles. Being able to craft in such an environment allows Miss Matty to not waste time either.

This connection between identity and craft becomes more evident when Mary examines Miss Matty’s reaction when Mary receives “a present of an elaborate pair” of garters, she teases Miss Matty with the idea that she is “quite tempted to drop one of them in the street, in order to have it admired” (129). This speaks volumes to the skill that Miss Matty puts into her knitted creations. They are worthy of being admired, even envied by passing Amazons in the streets of Cranford. However, Mary explains that her joke “was such a distress to her sense of propriety, and was taken with such anxious, earnest alarm, lest the temptation might some day prove too strong for me, that I quite regretted having ventured upon it” (129-130). Miss Matty’s reaction demonstrates that even after gifting the knitted garters to Mary they retain a connection to her. Mary dropping them in the street would to be admired would bring attention not just to Matty’s skill, but also her person. It goes against
the grain of what Matty considers proper behavior, and breaks the social codes that the women live by in Cranford.

Being aware of how Miss Matty feels at the idea of her work being shown off, Mary also considers that the items Miss Matty gifts are often tokens of her favor. She notes how “a present of these delicately-wrought garters, a bunch of gay ‘spills’ or a set of cards on which sewing-silk was wound in a mystical manner, were the well-known tokens of Miss Matty’s favour” (130). This shows that the crafted items Miss Matty makes communicate to the recipient that they are worthy of her favor. Just as selling them would disrupt her identity, having her crafted goods fawned over is also distressing to Matty because she is not the kind of person who likes to be fawned over. If Miss Matty does not want her gifts to friends to be fawned over, how could she possibly sell them for a profit to strangers?

This question ties into the same tensions around selling domestic handicrafts. Schaffer highlights this when discussing bazaar culture; she explains “products of the handicraft craze were not supposed to be sold. Since they represented a woman’s selfhood, putting a price on handicrafts felt rather like selling the woman herself” (Schaffer 11). The implication in both instances is that a woman’s selfhood is represented by the material goods that she creates, thus suggesting that selling or gifting crafts transmit a good deal of information about the producer of the item. By gifting Mary the elaborate garters that she knitted, Miss Matty communicates to Mary that she appreciates their friendship and finds Mary a worthy recipient for her domestic handicrafts. Modern craft terminology also has a neologism for this: a person who is deemed worthy of a hand knitted item is considered “knitworthy.” Typically this means that the knitter believes the person is going to appreciate the hand-knit item (the time it took to create and the thought behind it), will take care of the
item, and will be proud to use the item. So Miss Matty’s knitting, candle-lighters, and cards covered in silk transcend their physicality and useful purposes to communicate emotion (Matty’s favor) to the people who receive them. They also communicate that Miss Matty is skilled at domestic handicraft, that she is thrifty, and that she cares about how she is perceived by the community in Cranford.

Another important aspect of craft in the novel is its ability to completely communicate a woman’s identity. There are several instances in Gaskell’s novel where women are known only by what they can craft. For example, Lady Glenmire and Miss Pole seek out a woman “who was famous in the neighborhood for her skill in knitting woollen stockings” (Gaskell 100). The whole of this woman’s identity is communicated in her craft. The ladies stop at a public house to inquire the appropriate direction of the “knitting old woman” and stumble upon their next adventure because “they were perplexed about the exact path which they were to take across the fields” (101). Not only do Lady Glenmire and Miss Pole only know this woman by her craft, they expect that the general populace to also know this woman by her craft. While this seems like an insignificant trifle, I think it demonstrates how closely within the community of Cranford that a woman’s identity could be tied to craft. This woman remains unnamed, yet the reader knows she lives across the fields and is skilled in knitting a specific item (woollen stockings) much as Miss Matty is renowned for her elaborate knit garters.

As I mentioned previously, there is a second way that domestic handicraft functions in the novel as an experience, and that is through community. Craft functions to generate an identity for the community as a whole, builds homosocial bonds between women, and provides for shared communal experiences. Among the first descriptions of the community
of Cranford, the reader discovers that the community at large is engaged in the domestic handicraft ideals of thrift and salvage. Mary explains:

I had often occasion to notice the use that was made of fragments and small opportunities in Cranford; the rose-leaves that were gathered ere they fell, to make into a pot-pourri for someone who had no garden; the little bundles of lavender flowers sent to strew the drawers of some town-dweller, or to burn in the chamber of some invalid. (17)

This description generates an identity for the community through their craft acts. Notice the connection between gathering flowers which are freely found and turning them into charitable gifts for people who would not have access to them. The community of Cranford, through Mary’s narrative intervention, are now to be identified with upholding domestic handicraft ideals by salvaging materials to be recycled into new items the women of Cranford can use to benefit the community through charity.

Another way Gaskell depicts communal crafting is in the community’s preparation for Miss Jenkyns’s party. In protecting the new carpeting in the house, the community further demonstrates their craft skills in connection with the economic ideal of thrift. Mary notes “we were very busy, too, one whole morning before Miss Jenkyns gave her party, in following her directions, and in cutting out and stitching together pieces of newspaper, so as to form little paths to every chair, set for the expected visitors, lest their shoes might dirty or defile the purity of the carpet” (15). While to the modern reader this passage may seem silly, it is important not to toss it aside because of the humor it evokes; but instead to note that it also depicts not only the women rallying together as a community to create the paper pathways to the chairs, and their use of thrift in doing so. They demonstrate the ideal of thrift
through recycling the newspapers by transforming them into pathways, and they protect the carpet (a costly investment) so it will last longer. Thus, not only does the scene represent the women coming together in a communal effort of craft which builds the bonds of their friendship, but also highlights how women could live up to the codes of domestic handicraft of the 1840s through recycling which ties into the idea of elegant economy that the Cranfordians practice in their everyday lives.

The communal experience of crafting in the novel not only communicates the identity of the community, but also depicts how craft creates and maintains friendships, spreads via craft discourse, and provides shared experiences. Early in the novel, Gaskell establishes how domestic handicraft creates friendships among women. The narrator explains: “Miss Pole and Miss Jessie Brown had set up a kind of intimacy, on the strength of the Shetland wool and the new knitting stitches; so it happened that when I went to visit Miss Pole, I saw more of the Browns than I had done while staying with Miss Jenkyns” (12). They begin forging their friendship over Shetland wool at a party, and by the time Mary Smith is staying with Miss Pole, their friendship is well established. The underwritten craft discourse is also present in the scene, because the women receive knowledge of the new knitting stitches from one of the various and sundry crafting magazines published during the period.

As these friendships blossom among the women they begin to interweave craft into their own discourse. This is evident when Mary relates that Miss Pole “was becoming as much absorbed in crochet as she had been once in knitting; and the burden of whose letter was something like, ‘But don’t you forget the white worsted at Flint’s,’ or of the old song; for, at the end of every sentence of news, came a fresh direction as to some crochet commission I was to execute for her” (13). Miss Pole’s letters show how craft shapes her
discourse. She needs more craft materials (the white worsted) from the shop, and needs Mary to distribute/or receive craft commissions for her. Her obsession with her crochet slips into her letters and even fashions her behavior later in the novel when Mary Smith, Miss Matty Jenkyns, and Miss Pole visit her cousin Mr. Holbrook. He offers to read the poems he told the women about while they were walking, and Mary relates how “Miss Pole encouraged him in his proposal” thinking it was “because [Miss Pole] wished to [her] to hear his beautiful reading” (36). In reality, Miss Pole uses her cousin’s reading as a clever ploy to focus on her craft; she explains to Mary afterwards that “it was because she had got to a difficult part of her crochet, and wanted to count her stitches without having to talk” (36). Miss Pole mildly orchestrates the situation so that she does not have to participate in conversation, but can concentrate on crocheting instead in a socially acceptable manner by providing Mary with entertainment in the form of her cousin’s reading, while she focuses on the complicated stitches of her crochet project.

Throughout the novel there are also shared crafting experiences in which the women of the community strengthen their homosocial bonds. Mary highlights crafting when she explain how she spends her time visiting Cranford. When visiting Miss Pole, Mary admits “there was all the more time for me to hear old-world stories from Miss Pole, while she sat knitting, and I making my father’s shirts. I always took a quantity of plain sewing to Cranford; for, as we did not read much, or walk much, I found it a capital time to get through my work” (25). While Mary leads a busy life with her father, she may not often have time to attend to her plain sewing, but staying in Cranford with Miss Pole allows her the time to sew her father’s shirts (possibly a boring task) in Miss Pole’s company. She can listen to Miss Pole tell old world stories, and the two of them can chat. This opportunity to socialize and
craft at the same time demonstrates how women can strengthen the bonds of their friendship while living up to the feminine ideal of the time period by not being idle.

Of all the scenes of women crafting together and developing homosocial bonds of friendship, I find the ones between Mary Smith and Miss Matty to be the most poignant. They demonstrate the deep level of connection that people can experience when crafting together in a social setting. When Mary visits after Deborah Jenkyns’s death, she and Miss Matty spend quite a bit of their time knitting or sewing by firelight. The previously mentioned scene where Mary describes them knitting by firelight and Miss Matty telling her to take a ‘blind man’s holiday’ has other implications besides thrift. Richard Leahy writes about *Cranford* in connection to firelight and the state of reverie it induces. He explains “reverie is a lot more self-analytic than the dream; reverie is mostly focused on the individual. There is a link between the state of emotion and the quality of the reverie experienced, as well as a clear reflection of the varying states of reverie within the varying flames of fire” (76). The relationship between Miss Matty and Mary Smith deepens during the scenes when they are crafting in front of the fire in the evenings. When they make candle-lighters out of old letters, Mary discovers the possibility that Matty had the opportunity for romance and that the Jenkynses had a brother. Without craft these revelations may not have otherwise been discovered by Mary. Crafting by fire-light allows the women space to be emotional. Leahy suggests “there is an element of emotional cultivation in the act of sitting before the fireplace. It is an atmosphere that allows the ladies of Cranford the opportunity to rescind their gentle social fronts and become caught up in emotional burdens that can accompany intense reverie (77). Between the safety of communal crafting and the atmosphere of the fireplace the women can feel free to sit in silence together, cry, and share
their long pent up memories. Mary describes the effect by sharing that “I saw the tears quietly stealing down the well-worn furrows of Miss Matty’s cheeks, and her spectacles often wanted wiping. I trusted at last that she would light the other candle, for my own eyes were rather dim, and I wanted more light to see the pale, faded ink” (Gaskell 44). Rather than make candle-lighters as she normally would of old letters, Miss Matty decides instead to burn them, inscribing them to the past forever rather than recycling them into new life and suggesting that she has inscribed her romance firmly to the past, while the shared experience strengthens the friendship between the two women.

Throughout this chapter, I have looked at how craft functions to build identity and create community among the denizens of Cranford, but there is also an important transitional craft dynamic playing out in the novel as well. Cranford portrays the changing craft paradigm with Miss Matty Jenkyns’s generation representing the 1840s phase of domestic handicraft, and Mary Smith representing the transition to the modality arriving in the 1860s that heralds the Arts and Crafts movement. The Amazons of Cranford spend a lot of their time crafting from recycled materials as shown in the examples of reusing newspapers, flowers for potpourri, lavender, scraps of ribbon and wool. But Mary’s personal crafting is never connected to the recycling mode of the earlier generation. Mary knits, does her plain sewing, and helps in communal crafting, but her own work is not tied to the salvage method of crafting. Instead, the contextual clues I have discussed point to Mary being influenced by the Design Reform movement. The fact that Mary is very knowledgeable about what kinds of crafts are being taught to the younger generation is evident from her inner debate over what Miss Matty can do to earn an income. When Miss Matty sinks into genteel poverty because of the bank collapse, she informs Mary that she is willing to do whatever needs to be done
(more than likely at the expense of her identity) in order to stay economically afloat. She tells Mary “remember dear, I’m the only one left – I mean there’s no one to be hurt by what I do. I’m willing to do anything that’s right and honest” (Gaskell 139). This suggests that Miss Matty is willing to sacrifice her position completely; but in her search for a job for Miss Matty, Mary cannot see past her “exclusive focus on her own generation’s fashionable craft[s]” (Schaffer 67). In doing so, Mary overlooks the other craft skills that Miss Matty could fall back on, like teaching basic plain sewing, that were universal throughout the nineteenth century; further, Schaffer posits Miss Matty’s identity as the reason, rather than her own middle-class Mid-Victorian mindset about domestic handicrafts (66). This mindset encompasses not only the idea that the crafts Miss Matty makes are out of fashion, but also highlights the economic anxieties attached to selling domestic handicrafts. As such, Mary straddles the border between the domestic handicrafts movement and the Design Reform movement throughout the novel by looking into the past with her narration of the Amazons of Cranford and looking at the present with her own relationship to craft throughout the novel.
Chapter Two: The Gendered Difference Between Art and Craft

In contrast to Miss Matty in the last chapter, who needs to work because of a financial crisis and is steered away from craft as a source of income by Mary Smith’s intervention to protect her identity, Margaret Oliphant’s novel, *Miss Marjoribanks*, offers a portrayal of a woman who makes a living at craft with the character Rose Lake. The novel first appeared as a fifteen part serialization in *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* between 1865 and 1866. It shares with Gaskell’s *Cranford* the author’s intentions that it would only be four to five episodes long, but, unlike Gaskell’s experience of being elicited to extend the text, Oliphant herself decided to extend the text. She wrote John Blackwood, admitting: “I meant it to be only four or five in numbers, but I have already put in too many details to make that possible, and it seems to suit my demon best to let it have its way” (Oliphant, *Autobiography and Letters* 197). After the serialization finished, Oliphant edited the text herself and it was published by Blackwood and Sons in a three-volume form in 1866; the three-volume version is the text I am drawing from for my analysis of the novel. The last chapter explored tensions surrounding the new economy and craft as an extension of female identity. It also demonstrates how craft creates homosocial bonds between women. But what about the women who are actively working in craft? Oliphant’s depiction of Rose helps to frame other tensions surrounding the opportunities available to women in connection to craft. In this chapter, I will continue to explore economic themes of agency for women in craft. Much like Miss Matty, craft is deeply connected to Rose’s identity, but the novel raises a new tension between craftsperson and artist. I argue that Rose’s position articulates the gendered line between high art and craft. Men can create art, but women are given opportunity only to create craft. This gendering of art and craft plays out in the restrictions on women in art
classes. In the novel, Oliphant’s depiction of Rose is firmly planted in the realm of craft where she designs handmade lace and embroidery and teaches at her father’s Design School, but is complicated by Rose’s longing to be an artist. Throughout the novel Rose thinks of herself as an artist and buys into her father’s statement that artists comprise their own class in order to justify their poverty; yet all of her work is firmly grounded in craft. In order to be successful, Rose clings to the aesthetics of the Design Reform movement, much like Mary Smith dismissing Miss Matty’s ability to teach the younger generation because she does not meet the aesthetic qualities of the Design Reform movement; but secretly Rose wishes to indulge her artistic feelings in the Arts and Crafts movement, which is as close to the fine art of pre-Raphaelitism as she is allowed to get. I further argue that Rose’s internal conflict about which school of aesthetics to adhere to in her design mirrors the real ideological struggle between the Design Reform movement and the Arts and Crafts movement.

In order to understand Rose’s position in the novel as both an artist, and as an artist who is caught between both fine art and craft, as well as Design Reform and the Arts and Crafts movement, it is important to understand the Design Reform movement and Arts and Crafts movement more fully. As I mentioned briefly in Chapter One, the Design Reform movement is an aesthetic movement that developed in reaction to the aesthetic quality of the materials on display at the Great Exhibition in 1851. The “Government Schools of Design were founded in 1837 to improve the education of designers, which, it was assumed, would in turn improve the output of British industry” (Oshinsky). Originally closely aligned with British industrial manufacturing, their goals were to increase the output of items that matched the popular aesthetic taste stemming from the domestic handicraft movement. However, by the time of the Great Exhibition in 1851, the taste of the critics (such as Henry Cole, the artist
Richard Redgrave, and the ornamentalist and theorist Owen Jones) had changed; the aesthetics they preferred were more refined, and they decided that the works displayed were of very low design quality, meaning that they exhibited the traits of domestic handicraft (made from salvaged materials, in high contrast color schemes of black, crimson, and green) (Oshinsky). The Great Exhibition hosted four kinds of materials in its exhibits: skilled needlework, decorative handicrafts, objects made wholly by machine, and imitative arts. One could see “displayed needlework and other decorative handicrafts alongside its turbines, ores, and knives, glossing all these objects as equally significant components of the newly flourishing industrial economy” (Schaffer 39). An encompassing tenet of crafts made at the time was that they were “made of inexpensive, readily available material (wax, cardboard, wool) formed into something finer” (39). This was especially true in the case of the display of imitative arts, because they comprised a large portion of the objects that critics found fault with due to their disposable nature, low quality materials (a lot of these projects are made from recycled goods – fish scales, wire, wool, etc,) and amateur artistry (Schaffer 39). Overall, the critics were anxious about the originality of the pieces and the lack of imagination in their designs (38). The Great Exhibition demonstrated to the critics that Great Britain was lagging behind the continent both in the taste level of manufactured goods, and in the government policy surrounding industrial education (Victorian Web). These new policies lead to a restructuring of what was required education at the government design schools. Elizabeth Jay notes that “in 1852 art was introduced as a subject in national [design] schools and the Schools of Design commissioned to supply the teaching” (499, clarification mine). This background information is integral in understanding how the Schools of Design function in Great Britain and how working at one affects Rose’s life. The background information
also lends insight into the conflict of ideologies between the Design Reform School and the Arts and Crafts Moment. The most glaring difference between the two schools of thought is that Design Reform embraces industrialization, whereas the Arts and Crafts movement rejects it, privileging handmade crafts over machine made items. They also have aesthetic differences. Jay explains that the School of Design favors “workmanlike skills over aesthetic refinement,” whereas, the Arts and Crafts movement favors items that are handmade, and skilled artistry over mass production (499). Since Rose’s father, Mr. Lake, runs a Design school, and Rose spends a great deal of her time teaching there, it is important to look at how the schools come into existence and what their intentions were. At the heart of the design school system was the South Kensington museum (now the Victoria and Albert Museum), which established the curriculum of the one hundred and thirty subordinate schools connected to it. These schools were free to attend with instructors who graduated from the main South Kensington branch. They were established “for the purpose of teaching instructors in art throughout the kingdom, as well as for the instruction of students in drawing, designing, and modeling, to be applied to the requirements of trade and manufacture” (Victorian Web). They had a very rigorous curriculum that required students to “present drawings, paintings, and models; to write papers on various art topics, and to sustain rigid and thorough examinations” (Victorian Web). So in order to open the branch in Carlingford, Mr. Lake had to graduate from South Kensington. The narrator explains: “as for Rose, she had been brought up at the School of Design in Carlingford, of which, under the supervision of authorities who, in those days, inhabited Marlborough House, Mr. Lake was the Master” (Oliphant, *Miss Marjoribanks* 17-18). During the period in which Rose attends school, the authorities of the National Art Training School are located in Marlborough
House. Within the novel, Marlborough House is referenced several times in connection to Rose’s design work. For example, Rose is flattered when one of the men from Marlborough House takes off his hat to her in the street, and believes that it is connected to his admiration for her Honiton Flounce design (95). In the Design Reform movement the men at Marlborough House are very influential, because the seat of artistic authority is housed there from 1853 to 1861; at its helm is Sir Henry Cole, an influential who was (along with the Queen’s consort, Prince Albert) largely responsible for the Great Exhibition. His official title was “General Superintendent of the Department of Practical Art”, created as part of the initiative set up by the government to “improve standards of art and design education in Britain with reference to their applicability to industry” as a whole so that they can compete on the same level as the manufacturers on the continent. As such, the decisions about design that are handed down from Marlborough House have the potential to influence the aesthetics of the entire Design Reform movement (Albertopolis).

Now that I have introduced how influential Marlborough House would have been in shaping the aesthetics that Rose uses in her design work, I want to attend to the influential role of the artist Richard Redgrave in shaping the materials that Rose Lake would teach at the School of Design in Carlingford. Redgrave was a prominent figure in the School of Design, who published the Manual of Design from his collected essays and speeches over the span of his career there. The Manual of Design was then used to instruct pupils at the schools on matters of style, construction, utility, unity, decoration and ornamentation, as well as offering instruction for teaching design. His book offers a wealth of insight into the tenets of the Design Reform aesthetics. Redgrave elucidates that “it must be remembered that style does
not merely relate to decoration, as is too often supposed, but originates in construction, to which decoration is only secondary” (15). He then breaks style down into five arguments:

First, that style implies some dominating influence reflecting the mind of the age in all its works, and therefore presumes a certain unity of character throughout. Secondly, that the primary elements of style are constructive, and that the design of a work must have regard to construction, and consequently to proper use of materials, prior to the consideration to ornamentation.

Thirdly, that as construction necessarily implies a purpose utility must have the precedence of decoration. Fourthly, as construction necessitates a proper consideration of materials, and as each mode has its own mode of manipulation, and is wrought by separate and varied processes; design must be bad that applies indiscriminately the same constructive forms or ornamental treatments to materials differing in their nature and application.

Fifthly, that as greater regulates the lesser, the building should determine the style, and all which it contains of furniture or decoration should conform to its characteristics; and thus there would be a proper uniformity throughout, and subordination of all the inferior objects to one another and to the whole.

(Redgrave 15)

These tenets shape the aesthetics of the Design Reform movement at its core, making it easy to see how this reacts against the domestic handicrafts in which décor was often a hodgepodge collection of handmade items made with salvaged materials and stuffed with sentimentality. The Design Reform aesthetic would dismiss such items because the parts do not form a unified whole; for example, crafts where the materials do not come from the same
place, where there might be a mixing of styles, or where the materials do not go together would be very commonplace during the Domestic Handicraft movement. With the rise of the Design Reform movement these items would be considered tacky because they do not meet the exacting standards of design. In the next chapter, I will discuss how these tenets further shape home décor in connection to connoisseurship, because the entirety of a house would now be recoded as a unified whole, where every piece of decoration should contribute to achieving unity of style with all the parts within subordinate to the overall construction. Later in the period, the Arts and Crafts movement shifts aesthetics back to the forefront of design, but it is interesting how explicitly Redgrave calls out what equates poor design.

Now that I have covered the Design Reform movement in which Rose is firmly entrenched due to her teaching position and family affiliations, it is important to elucidate how the Arts and Crafts movement differs. Both movements exist coterminalistically and share similar tenets, but differ greatly in their treatment of aesthetics. In understanding how these movements differ from each other aesthetically, I argue that it is possible to locate how Rose is caught between them. The Arts and Crafts movement was “founded by the socialist William Morris in an attempt to reclaim the preindustrial spirit of medieval English society. It was rooted in the teachings of the designer August Welby, Northmore Pugin and John Ruskin” (Oshinsky). The movement constructs itself not only against domestic handicrafts, but also against the Design Reform movement by focusing on handmade, but skilled crafts. The movement’s philosophy has some socialist undertones, like believing that “a happy worker made beautiful things regardless of ability, and that good, moral design could only come from a good and moral society” (Oshinsky). The Arts and Crafts movement envisions helping workers make good, original, and imaginative designs, but believes that can only
happen through a good and moral society. This also ties into the conflict over embroidery that crops up around the same time as I mentioned in my discussion of Cranford where women should only use their skills out of a sense of moral duty. The Arts and Crafts movement used “medieval English and Celtic traditions” as inspiration for their work, hoping to “create affordable, hand crafted goods that reflected the workers’ creativity and individuality (qualities not found in industrially produced goods)” (Oshinsky). Mostly, they wanted to reclaim what they considered the glorious past of Great Britain’s art and crafts before industrialization. This emphasis on skill in connection to handmade goods reflects their belief that domestic handicrafts were not skillfully created due to what the Design Reform movement considered poor aesthetics. The moral undertone of the movement is believed to stem from Ruskin’s influence. One of his major contributions to the movement was an essay, The Seven Lamps of Architecture, which established new aesthetic principles that he divided into seven categories. They were associated with morality and spirituality. Schaffer notes that “Ruskin disliked the conventionalizing cause, feeling that naturalistic design offered more scope for artistic skill, but in all other respects his emphasis on truth to materials corresponded with the other reformers” (53). His work changed the way people view aesthetics. As Schaffer puts it: “now selecting wallpaper meant exercising a principled choice between truth, and falsehood” (53). This moral impetus attached to design and craft plays out in the novel in Rose’s conflict between the two movements.
Perhaps the most obvious way that Rose is conflicted between the two movements is through the aesthetic choices she wants to make in her designs. As I will further discuss in Chapter Three, the movement had a preference for the use of tertiary hues in specific color palettes. Both movements favored natural motifs, but the Arts and Crafts movement believed that all “natural objects should be reduced to their basic geometric shapes, in flat, unshaded, abstracted shapes, and arranged in repeating patterns” (Schaffer 52). Figure 2 is an embroidery design by William Morris; it highlights the aesthetics of the Arts and Crafts movement. Notice the use of the natural motif, tertiary hues, and repetitive (in this case mirrored) motif. The Arts and Crafts movement was also influenced by the Pre-Raphaelites: “Ruskin particularly admired the Pre-Raphaelites' significant innovations to English landscape painting: their dedication to working en plein air, strict botanical accuracy, and minute detail” (Meagher). This is particularly important in connection to the Lakes because Mr. Lake favors their aesthetics, and the narration frequently refers to Rose as the “young pre-Raphaelite” (Oliphant, *Miss Marjoribanks* 145). In addition, while Sir Henry Cole headed the National Art Training School, Ruskin was on the council of the Dudley Gallery in London which presented exhibitions of watercolors, oil painting, and black and white works (Victorian Web). According to Lara Kriegel, another contributing factor for the split between Design Reform and the Arts and Crafts movement despite the common ground they shared was “the clash of personalities between” Cole on the Design Reform side and Ruskin and Morris on
the Arts and Crafts movement side, which made choosing an aesthetic problematic when pursuing a career in design (201).

This conflict between the Design Reform movement and the Arts and Crafts movement plays out in the novel through Rose Lake. She spends her time conflicted about embracing her innate artistic vision (which falls more under the Arts and Crafts aesthetic) or continuing to use her training and desire to move ahead in the profession (which falls under the Design Reform sense of ethics). Elizabeth Jay argues that “part of the pathos of Rose Lake’s position derives from her being a workmanlike copyist with aspirations to a Ruskinian aesthetic” because in order “to gain the professional recognition of Marlborough House she keeps to the utilitarian production of flounces, handkerchiefs and veils, while also hankering after the contrary method of ‘handling her subject in a boldly naturalistic way’” (499). During a scene where Barbara Lake is having a temper tantrum about Mr. Cavendish’s behavior, Rose is distractedly listening because she is focused on what to do with her design.

Rose’s tastes in ornamentation were very clearly defined for so young a person. Instead of losing herself in vague garlands of impossible flowers, the young artist clung with the tenacity of first love to the thistle leaf, which had been the foundation of her early triumphs. Her mind was full of it even while she received and listened to Barbara; whether to treat it in a national point of view, bringing in the rose and the shamrock, which was a perfectly allowable proceeding, though perhaps not original – or whether she should yield to the ‘sweet feeling’ which had been so conspicuous in her flounce, in the opinion of the Marlborough-House gentleman – or whether, on the contrary, she
should handle the subject in a boldly naturalistic way, and use her spikes with freedom – was a question which occupied at that moment all Rose’s faculties. (Oliphant, Miss Marjoribanks 118-119)

Rose is clearly conflicted about which influence she wants to pursue in her design, but there is an obvious longing to use the Arts and Crafts aesthetics. Using the thistle leaf, patriotic emblems, or traditional flowers like the rose and shamrock are all earmarks of the Design Reform aesthetics. Yet, she longs to “yield”, suggesting that the two aesthetics are in conflict in her mind (119). Her thoughts associate the Arts and Crafts style with boldness, naturalism, and freedom, but more importantly with a “sweet feeling” (119). The Design School aesthetic is “perfectly allowable, though not original” suggesting that she longs to give into that sweet feeling. Despite her longing, Rose also craves professional approval. Rose has never forgotten that she just missed being selected for the prize for her design, and she is consistently working towards refining it to win a prize for it in the future. The narrator explains that while waiting for Barbara, Rose “had been amusing herself as she waited by working at a corner of that great design which was to win the prize on a later occasion” (118). This demonstrates her intention to be professionally successful, but when considering her gender this also raises the question: is it even possible for her to be successful? And if it is possible as a woman to be successful professionally, does it have to be through Design Reform, or can she embrace the Arts and Crafts aesthetics she longs to use?

In Oliphant’s novel, Rose is positioned in the role of teacher at her father’s School of Design. Her position there suggests that women had a presence as instructors in the Schools of Design, but as a social construct, history typically overlooks women in these positions obscuring how many women may have actually been educated and active in the arts. As
such, I want to attend to what specifically education was like at these schools because it informs Rose’s own education in design, and what she would be instructing her students in. The curriculum of the schools of design required students to “present drawings, paintings, and models; to write papers on various art topics, and to sustain rigid and thorough examinations.” Of those students, “more than a thousand students (women predominating) are fitted annually in all branches of art, — painters, sculptors, engravers, lithographers, architects, and designers, as well as public instructors” (Victorian Web). This accounts for the wide range of artistic skills that Rose Lake has throughout the novel, and her ability to teach students at her father’s school. At the schools “the sexes are divided in class-rooms and working-rooms while the lectures, libraries, etc. are open equally to both men and women” (Victorian Web). They even sit for the same examinations, the only difference being that women “are not required to take papers in machine-drawing or architecture” (Victorian Web). Machine-drawing is a form of mechanical engineering where the user drafts schematics that “generally give all the external and internal details of the machine component from which it can be manufactured” (Mechanical Engineering). Obviously, the Design School did not consider these topics women should study since they were not included in the exams for women. Then after four years, and the students passing an examination committee, “he or she is given a diploma, which is accepted throughout the civilized world as the highest reward of excellence in that particular discipline” (Victorian Web). After graduation the student would be able to teach in one of the Design Schools. This is not to say that because women had a presence in the Design Schools that they did not have a difficult time making a career for themselves. Rose is specifically in charge of teaching young girls design, suggesting that even in Carlingford the classes were segregated. This type of segregation also
exists at the other art schools at the time such as the Royal Academy of the Arts. Women had to overcome the prejudice that they were not capable of making great art, to deal with the discrepancies in their education (they were not allowed to study nudes), and to deal with popular male critics who did not hesitate to make their opinions about women artists known; “and yet it is” equally “true that thousands of women showed works to the public, even at the Royal Academy’s exhibitions” (Victorian Web). Rose is taught at the School of Design some art subjects; as I mentioned earlier they learned drawing, painting, and sculpting in addition to the more commercial branches of art design like lithographs, engraving, and mechanical design. This gives Rose access to a small taste of what the fine arts have to offer.

In Rose’s case, the narrator makes sure that the reader understands that Rose is prized for her artistic and craft skills, but through the actual descriptions used it becomes clear that Rose’s work is grounded in craft rather than art. Her instruction begins at the school at Mount Pleasant where she is the “pride of the school” and is praised for her art specifically: “her copies ‘from the round’ filled her father with admiration” (Oliphant, Miss Marjoribanks 18). These copies from the round are a standard part of the elementary education in art that students received along with copies from nature (Jay 500). The narrator also elucidates the work that Rose almost won the prize for: a “Honiton-lace flounce, a spirited competition of dragons’ tails and the striking plant called teazle, which flourishes in the neighborhood of Carlingford (for Mr. Lake had leanings towards Pre-Raphaelitisim) was thought by the best judges to show a wonderful amount of feeling for art, and just missed being selected for the prize” (Oliphant, Miss Marjoribanks 18). This section of description provides several clues as to the artistic styles of both Rose and her father, Mr. Lake. Honiton Lace was popularized in the Victorian Period because Queen Victoria’s wedding dressed was trimmed in it; as
such, it was frequently “used as a light trim to the very heavy tiered flounces of this period” (Jay 500). According to Jay, Honiton Lace is a “slightly awkward imitation of Belgian Duchesse Lace” created by hand with bobbins (500). In Figure 3, an example of Honiton Lace from 1884, the emphasis on natural subject matter is evident in the leaves, flowers, and abstract plantlike scrolls. The repetitive nature of the pattern also fits into the Arts and Crafts aesthetics. The narrator explicitly explains that Rose’s Honiton Lace flounce has similar nature based features. The teazle is an interesting choice on Oliphant’s part because not only is it a “tall prickly Eurasian plant with spiny purple flower heads” but it is also a textile device, defined as a “large, dried, spiny head from a teasel plant, or a device serving as a substitute for one of these, used in the textile industry to raise a nap on woven cloth” (Teazle, n. Def 1a, 1b). It is also important not to discount Mr. Lake’s affinity for Pre-Raphaelitism, because Rose’s work captures their emphasis on botanical subject matter.

This is not Rose’s only early accomplishment that sets her apart as artistically talented. She has also created a design for Miss Marjoribanks’s handkerchief by embroidering it with Lucilla’s name:

She made a charming design for Miss Marjoribanks handkerchief – ‘Lucilla’ in Gothic characters, enclosed in a wreath of forget-me-nots, skillfully combined with thistle leaves, which Rose took great pains to explain were so much better adapted to ornamentation than foliage of a less distinct character;
and the young draughtswoman was so charmed by Lucilla’s enthusiastic admiration, that she volunteered to work the design in the cambric, which was a much more serious matter. (Oliphant, *Miss Marjoribanks* 18)

Here again, Rose’s preference is for a boldly natural subject matter for her design. As I mentioned earlier, this preference for distinct elements rather than just skillful workmanship is a representation of the conflict between the Arts and Crafts movement and the Design Reform movement in the text. These examples of her past work demonstrate her natural inclination is to reach for the Arts and Crafts aesthetic, but Rose questions whether she should trust her instinct or stick to designs that are acceptable in Design Reform. I believe her attraction to these elements stems from her father’s influence and his preference for the aesthetics of Pre-Raphaelitism.

Yet, influencing the aesthetics Rose prefers is not the only area of her life over which Mr. Lake has dominion. As *paterfamilias* of the Lakes, he has absolute control over Rose’s future, and his nepotism which leads to his desire to have her work with him might be preventing her from pursuing a career as an artist or designer. He secures her a position at the School of Design in Carlingford:

Rose had made such progress, after leaving Mount Pleasant, under her father’s care, and by the help of that fine feeling for art which has been mentioned in the earlier part of this history, that the charge of the female pupils in the School of Design had been confided to her, with a tiny little salary, which served Mr. Lake as an excuse for keeping his favourite little daughter with him. (93-94)
This passage suggests that Rose graduated from the School of Design, because it is necessary to have done so in order to teach there. It also makes explicit that Rose is her father’s favorite daughter, and that he gets the position for her so that he can keep her close to him, which may be stifling her desire to pursue a career of her own. This underlying frustration becomes noticeable later in the novel when Rose discusses her brother Willie, who is an artist allowed to pursue his art away from home (96). This highlights a gendered difference that as a man it is not only possible for him to pursue his art elsewhere, and establish a career, but is expected of him.

In addition to Rose’s brother Willie being able to pursue an art career, I would further argue that Rose’s frustrations mirror the connection to craft I explored in Chapter One between Miss Matty and craft. Rose’s identity is intrinsically connected to the actual work she produces. When Lucilla Marjoribanks deftly manipulates Rose into attending one of her Evenings through a misguided sense of family honor (she is to replace her sister Barbara at the gathering), the reader deduces a small inkling into not only how important her art is to her, but also how much she wants to be seen as a person. Rose is dissatisfied at the outcome of the Evening. She realizes that Lucilla invited her “not for herself, but for her portfolio and the talk that arose over it” (159). This offers up the clue that Rose’s artwork was well received and helped make Lucilla’s Evening a success, but that success came at Rose’s expense. Lucilla encourages her guests to attend to Rose’s art, but not Rose herself, which commodifies the portfolio of Rose’s work. I believe this is the same underlying tension that prevents Mary Smith from allowing Miss Matty to use craft for an income. Rose’s art is as closely connected to her sense of self as Miss Matty’s crafts are in Cranford. Rose’s art was so well received that Lucilla decides to invite her back, but Rose will have none of it; she
declines Lucilla’s offer politely: “‘Thank you, Lucilla,’ said Rose, ‘but I shall not come back again. I am much obliged to you. It does not do for people who have work to do. My time is all I have and I cannot afford to waste it’” (163). Rose is unwilling to put herself back into the position to be commodified because it offends her sense of self. In order to get around Rose’s objections, Lucilla appeals to Rose’s sense of duty, questioning: “how are you ever to be an artist if you do not know life?” (163). The real clincher in my assessment is the connection between the two: art and duty. The narrator posits it the same way: “Little Rose left her friend,” a term I would use loosely in connection to Lucilla and Rose, “with the conviction that it was her duty, too, to sacrifice herself for the benefit of society and the advancement of art” (163-164). What I see happening in these manipulations on Lucilla’s part to secure Rose’s attendance is a play on her desire to be an artist and to make a name of her own for herself. In the next chapter, I will more fully explore how Lucilla manages people much in the same way a connoisseur curates art.

I believe Rose’s frustration with her pupils at the School of Design stems from how their work might reflect back on her own artistic skill and ability to teach. Her position also demonstrates the gendered approach to art and design education. She is given care of the female pupils, and takes her appointment quite seriously throughout the novel. She contemplates how to redirect the girls’ skill towards their task of accurately representing the Belvedere Apollo, because “it was utterly inconceivable to the young teacher how her girls could be so clever as to find out each a different way of putting the sublime features of the Belveder (sic) Apollo out of drawing” (94). If the Design School’s job is to churn out individuals who can produce good copies of their subject matter, Rose would have to be frustrated that the girls cannot succeed. She may also be worried that it reflects poorly on her
own skill set. The Belvedere Apollo is “a marble statue copied from a Greek bronze of the late Hellenistic period” which was “the most admired and imitated example of Greek art” so it would be important that the girls could replicate it accurately (Jay 505). In Figure 4, a group of female and male students in the Life Room draw a fully clothed model, whereas in a room with the Greek statue typically one would only find male students. This is another area of the novel where Rose is a representation of a conflict in the art world, as Jay notes: “Rose’s decision to encourage young working-class scholars to attempt the human figure places her at the centre of a battle which had polarized the Schools of Design” (505). Anne Sutherland Harris and Linda Nochlin note that popular opinion of men “expressed that the students' fragile feminine natures were violated by contact with... degraded women and the sight of nude males in the stifling heat of the Life Class" despite the fact that “the men” were often “actually still clothed about the loins” (Victorian Web). This plays out in the way that men and women are judged for juries: “in 1885, the Royal Academy demanded to see a male student’s drawings of a whole figure” whereas “the female student was only required to submit a drawing of the model’s head” (Victorian Web). Using Figure 4 as a visual example of how these classes would exist during
the period, both the male and female students could attend the same Life Room class (provided the model was clothed), but the men would draw or paint the full figure of the model, and the women would be expected to only draw or paint the model’s head. This gendered difference of artistic expectation suggests that women are not capable of rendering the human figure accurately, as well as that it was morally wrong for them to do so. Rose expecting her students to render the Belvedere Apollo (see Figure 5) suggests that she believes that women are capable of drawing the human figure, and her pupils are frustrating that aim. Rose’s frustration suggests that she cares about being successful in her endeavors whether they are strictly artistic or teaching. I also think that her frustration might signal a larger frustration with the opportunities provided for women in the arts, which is why she has selected to let the girls draw the controversial nude figure.

My interest in Rose Lake and her conflict between design and art illuminated another underlying tension within the novel. Throughout the novel, Oliphant elects to have Rose claim that artists are in a unique class of their own, but as the context of the novel demonstrates, the rest of society in Carlingford does not seem to place artists in a class of their own. This raises the question of why Oliphant has Rose repeatedly claim a special liminal class function for artists within the text. The Lakes are not poor, but they are not securely middle-class either. They seem to have the same sort of economic status as Matty in Cranford, after her financial crisis and life in genteel poverty. Matty ends up being able to just support herself on the income she makes from selling tea, much as the Lakes earn just enough to afford their home and supplies. Many women who pursued the arts during this
period were likely to live in the same sort of state. In making the connection between Miss Matty’s and the Lakes’ similar economic position, I realized that perhaps what Oliphant is trying to create through Rose’s instance that they are in their own class bracket due to their profession as artists is to highlight the plight of women in this class position. Middle-class women who had to work to earn an income can be seen as existing in a liminal class position. When giving Barbara a mild set down for being so proud and rude, Rose upbraids her, saying “‘but then you have always taken a false view of our position, Barbara. We are a family of artists’ ... ‘When papa is appreciated as he deserves, and when Willie has made a name,’ said Rose, with modest confidence, ‘things will be different. But the true strength of our position is that we are a family of artists. We are everybody’s equal, and we are nobody’s equal. We have a rank of our own’” (Oliphant, Miss Marjoribanks 95-96). First there is Rose’s naïve belief that in the future her father will be appreciated in a financially successful way, and that her brother is talented enough to make a name for himself as an artist.

Realistically, her father is old enough to have already made a name for himself, and will mostly likely be the Master at the School of Design for the rest of his life. Then, Willie will probably take over the position. There is also an interesting emphasis on the fact that they are a family of artists, which might suggest that they function as an economic unit which shares the unique class position that Rose envisions. Yet, it is Rose’s father who puts these thoughts into her head: maybe as a way to prevent Rose from feeling ashamed about their poverty, or it might be a way to retain control over her. She needs to stay home, work at the design school, and contribute to the family’s coffers, but she can feel respectable about doing so because they are in their own special class. Keeping her home also prevents her from pursuing a career as an artist, or as a designer outside Carlingford. In regards to Barbara she
tells Mr. Lake, “I don’t want her to be fine, or to imitate the Grange Lane people; but then you always say that we have a rank of our own, being a family of artists”’ (107). This statement illuminates that Mr. Lake put this notion into Rose’s head, but she firmly believes it. When she heads over to Miss Marjoribanks to apologize for her sister’s behavior, and to let Lucilla know that Barbara will not be attending the Evening, she walks “erect and open-eyed, in confidence of her rank, which made her everybody’s equal” (144). Yet, through Lucilla’s inner monologue the reader learns that “society was utterly unconscious of the Lake family” (145).

I posit two theories for Rose’s obsession with their family having its own rank. The first is that Rose learns it from her father and it may very well be a way of distancing herself from their poverty or his ulterior motives for keeping her at home. The second is that Rose believes it is because they are artists that they have this supposed difference in class rank. As such, if extended outside of the Lake family to encompass artists on a social whole, it may in fact actually represent women who are artists who exist somewhat outside the existing middle-class rank: women who work. Women like Oliphant are placeless in society because they have to find a way to secure an income in order to stay respectably middle-class. Schaffer notes this in connection to women connoisseurs in connection to the Oliphant’s other novel *Phoebe Junior*. She explains: “Oliphant, was in fact, acutely aware of her own anomalous identity as quasi-masculine head of the household, as well as feminine manager” and that in another writing, “The Grievances of Woman”, Oliphant bemoans “the fact that there was no legal category for women like her” (Schaffer 148). But I think the connection can extend to her representation of the artist class in *Miss Marjoribanks*. If women are being excluded from certain facets of artistic education and production, why not create an instance
where they are not excluded? Why not create a special class for artists who could be painters, designers, or even writers? In that sense, Rose’s class assertions function as a way for artists to stand in for women who are outside the conventional social structure.

In regards to economics, Rose finds herself in the position of an instructor at her father’s School of Design, but what other career options would have been available to her as woman in the art field? Moira Thunder’s case study on Sarah Bland, a middle-class amateur designer, offers some clues as to another route that Rose’s career could take. Thunder’s case study is an intriguing “who done it?” investigation into both Bland’s collection, but also into the way that museums catalog women’s textiles and designs. Bland is particularly interesting because her collection straddles all three avenues of design work – amateur, gift, and professional designs. Amateur designs would be for personal use by the designer and would not necessarily ever leave their possession. Gift designs could be both designed personally by the gifter or be a design they purchased or copied, but would come with an unspoken code of reciprocity (Thunder 77). Professional designs would be those that were published in some fashion and circulated. According to Thunder, Bland “made an album of a collection of drawn and printed designs between 1835 and 1854 that includes her original designs, patterns traced from magazines, and commercial, printed designs for Berlin wool work” (68). These are the main three avenues that women could traverse with embroidery designs. As a passionate artist, Rose could design embroidery patterns and attempt to have them published. The sampler in Figure 6 is Sarah Bland’s work and details “drawn and copied designs in the album” which are “generally executed directly onto the page alongside the pasted-in printed designs. Bland’s collection included her own botanically accurate designs, simplified patterns from botanical observation, patterns traced from magazines, commercial, printed Berlin wool
work patterns, gifts of patterns, including commercial ones from friends and relatives” (70). Because of the way that designs and embroidery are handled in the cataloguing system it is difficult to tell if Bland published her original designs; this largely has to do with the fact that a lot of embroidery is published anonymously and as such she is labeled an amateur embroiderer.

Based on the sampler’s date, in the context of the shift between domestic handicrafts to the Arts and Crafts movement, it is easy to see that the sampler spans both movements. The motifs in the bottom right corner are very characteristic of the domestic handicrafts in color and form. The grape leaf motif in the center of the panel is very typical of the Arts and Crafts movement in both color and style. Thunder comes to an important conclusion about the case study:

The Sarah Bland case study shows that a woman’s name attached to a collection of designs for embroidery requires researching that woman to establish whether she was designing as a professional and working as an embroiderer or working as an amateur with responsibility to her immediate
and extended family and social network. If the designs are a collection of different types of pattern, whether original, commercially produced, traced from magazines, and if there is evidence that they belonged to a relative or friend who gave them to the woman or allowed their pattern to be copied, then it is likely that the woman can be identified as an amateur. If there is no evidence of the woman working as a professional, then it is likely that the collection was used for family and social networking purpose. (94)

Because of the position of women, the likelihood that they could only be semi-independent, and the way that women’s contributions were recorded, it is hard to account for how exactly they participated in professional embroidery (74). In fact, it is important to note that up until the eighteenth century, embroiderers were mostly men (Parker 60). Parker spends a large portion of The Subversive Stitch tracing through historical documents (in particular census data) how women were slowly excluded from the embroidery profession. This starts as early as the fifteenth century, so by the eighteenth century most women did not work in the family trade any longer. Parker explains that “within craft production the tighter regulations and increasingly hierarchical organizations worked to exclude women from positions of responsibility and prestige” (60-61). This is another reason why, in the previous chapter, Mary might not automatically think of embroidery or craft as a possible solution to Miss Matty’s problems. Women had been excluded from external (outside of the home) craft production for several generations. In the wake of this exclusion they find positions related to craft through teaching craft to the younger generations like Rose does. Bland’s sampler, however, with its wealth of designs from multiple sources, shows that while it would be possible to find another avenue of artistic income, it would also be as challenging and
frustrating as trying to succeed professionally within the School of Design in which Rose is already ensconced.

Overall, Rose Lake shows readers what the alternative to Miss Matty’s tea shop would be like. The position of women as teachers of craft is just as complicated by tensions surrounding economics, questions about gender and agency, and the formation of identity as that of women who craft at home. Rose demonstrates that even within a craft profession, women faced restrictions based on their gender. She is more than welcome to teach craft and create designs, but when it comes to being an artist, things are far more complicated. Just receiving full art education as a woman in the Victorian Period is difficult because of the differing requirements for each gender. Men claim that it will corrupt their morals or trouble their delicate sensibilities to look at a nude human figure. Yet, Oliphant does not hesitate to enter into the debate by depicting Rose teaching that material to her pupils. The depiction of Rose also articulates the struggle between the Design Reform movement and the Arts and Crafts movement at a professional level. How can she move forward in her career if she continues to embrace her natural impulse for the Arts and Crafts aesthetics? How can she claim to be an artist if she is solely confined to craft? Perhaps the real answer to these questions is that she cannot, because she is working within a system that intentionally prevents female agency.
Chapter Three: Connoisseurship and the Arts and Crafts Drawing-Room

In the first two chapters of this project, I have looked at how craft shapes the identity of women, what agency it allows or disallows them, and how craft functions in relation to economic and gendered forces. The common connector (other than craft) between Miss Matty and Rose Lake is their disadvantaged economic status. This raises the question: What if money is not a factor? By this I mean that there is no need to respond to a financial crisis or a need to earn an income. In Miss Marjoribanks this type of character exists in Lucilla Marjoribanks as a sort of antidote to Rose Lake. Lucilla is positioned firmly in the middle-class, and while her financial agency is constrained in two ways (she has to rely on her father for income, or marry and rely on a husband for income), she does not have the problem of having to earn an income for herself like Miss Matty and Rose do. Instead, I believe Lucilla interacts with craft in a different fashion in the role of a connoisseur. Her identity is shaped through craft via her expertise with the aesthetics of the Arts and Craft movement, which allows her to claim a position of power within her community. In this chapter, I argue that Lucilla functions as a type of connoisseur (one who can intelligently identify artifacts that merit acquisition) rather than an actual craftsperson. She represents how the Arts and Crafts aesthetic extends past just craft objects to shape the culture as a whole. By positioning Lucilla as a connoisseur, I draw on Schaffer’s use of the term to describe “anyone who uses special expertise in evaluating objects” and extend objects to being able to evaluate people (210). In order to do so, I examine how Lucilla’s education (in particular, learning from her failures) helps to develop her expertise to generate social agency that she then uses to claim a position of power in Carlingford. I argue that after establishing herself in a position of power in Carlingford, Lucilla’s expertise with the aesthetic qualities of the Arts and Crafts
movement allows her to influence both her surroundings and the people within them to the best advantage. This helps further her goal of becoming the head of society so that she can set the standards of taste for the town.

In the previous chapter, I discuss the conflict between the Design Reform movement and the Arts and Crafts movement and how Rose’s internal conflict about which aesthetic to use mirrors that debate. In this chapter, I argue that Lucilla Marjoribanks represents only the aesthetics of the Arts and Crafts movement throughout the novel because of her class position. Since Lucilla has no need to work within the design community, she has no need to adhere to Design Reform tenets in order to make a name for herself. Instead, through Lucilla’s advanced education, she can instead make use of her expertise with the Arts and Crafts aesthetics to create the social agency she uses to claim leadership of the society in Carlingford. As I mentioned previously, the Arts and Crafts movement does not directly replace the domestic handicraft movement, but rather stems from the Design Reform movement from 1830-1850. My project begins with Cranford positioned on the cusp of the shift between domestic handicraft and the Design Reform movement, with its depiction of the older generation of women and their salvage crafts in contrast to Mary Smith and the younger generation of women adopting the aesthetics of the Design Reform movement. Though domestic handicraft falls out of popularity, its aesthetics never really disappear during the nineteenth century; instead, they become aesthetically unfashionable or subtly recoded in the new tenets of Design Reform and the Arts and Crafts movement, which is why women like the Amazons of Cranford are still creating domestic handicraft to relieve their anxieties about the new economic structure of centralized banking and Industrial economy. Domestic handicraft was a reaction to the way Industrialization reshaped the middle-class
Victorian home. Men left the home in order to go out and work, women stayed ensconced within the home, turning it into the haven their men would return to by decorating it with domestic handicraft décor which allows them to be perceived as both industrious and thrifty. Domestic handicraft is also renowned for its oddness, specifically in the choice of materials women used to create their craft objects like fish-scales for embroidery, molten wax for castings, and homemade varnishes to lacquer finished items, or like the example I use in Chapter One of Miss Matty’s candlelights that she fashions out of old newspapers (Schaffer 7).

In Chapter Two, I discuss how the Design Reform movement starts as a reaction to the ubiquitous nature of domestic handicrafts, and then defines itself against handicrafts but retains a connection to industrialization. This connection to industrialization is important because the Arts and Crafts movement tries to reject mechanical production in favor of handmade goods. Schaffer notes that “industry aligned handicraft with mechanical manufacture” at this time (37). As such, craft becomes interlinked with mechanization at this point because it provided mass produced patterns for embroidery where the design was already printed on the canvas; all the crafter had to do was match the right color yarn to that spot on the canvas. Another example would be the paper patterns with holes already punched into them by machinery that could be laid over the cloth and then be sewn right onto the fabric (42). Victorians even had stitch by numbers sets which are reminiscent of modern cross-stitch, latch hook, and embroidery patterns that exist today. The establishment of government design schools signals the end of domestic handicraft’s aesthetic dominance, because students learned Design Reform aesthetics at these schools and were taught they were superior to the aesthetics of domestic handicraft. Here I position Rose Lake on the cusp
of the shift from Design Reform aesthetics to Arts and Crafts aesthetics. For her the conflict stems from a desire to be successful in her field or possibly as an artist, and needing to work within that structure in order to find that success. Established in 1837, these schools taught three main principles to their students: 1) “decoration is second to form,” 2) “form is dictated by function and the materials used,” and 3) “design should derive from historical English and non-Western ornament as well as plant and animal sources, distilled into simple, linear motifs” (Oshinsky). These principles are meant to influence not only designs created through mechanized industry, but also how the home crafters use them in their decor. Schaffer gives an excellent example of how these principles translate into a physical object by describing how one might decorate a water pitcher; she explains it “might be decorated with fish and reeds, but not tigers or cherubs” (52). Because it is a water pitcher, water-themed ornamentation is a logical, organic choice whereas tigers and cherubs would be construed as inorganic to the object (Schaffer 52). An element that both domestic handicraft and the Design Reform movement embraced was the ability to use materials aligned with factory work like salvage and scrap materials, or mass produced bases that they could then decorate with elaborate imitative designs.

In this chapter, I focus my analysis solely on the connection between Lucilla Marjoribanks and the aesthetic tenets of the Arts and Crafts movement. While the Arts and Crafts movement shares some of the same tenets as the Design Reform movement, it divorces itself from any aesthetic attachment to machine-made goods. According to Schaffer, the “Arts and Crafts followers devoted themselves to reviving medieval techniques to produce handmade lace, illuminated manuscripts, jewelry, and embroidered cloaks patterned after Tudor portraits” (51). This was a new emphasis that revered skilled handmade objects
over those that are mass produced or machine-made. The dogma goes as far as to suggest that machine-made objects are “always repulsive to the artistic eye” (*Artistic Homes* qtd. in Schaffer 55). This directly opposes both how domestic handicraft and Design Reform functioned in relation to industrialization. They often took items that were machine made and added ornamentation to them, like Miss Matty in *Cranford*, recycled and salvaged items into new purposes like her candlelighters made from recycling paper. This does create a very muddy area of representation, because the Arts and Crafts movement espouses the superiority of handmade creations over machine-made, but that does not prevent influential people like William Morris from profiting from designs for machine made goods like embroidery patterns.

Instead, the Arts and Crafts movement calls for a different set of aesthetic qualities in addition to the tenets laid down by Design Reform. The aesthetic codes the movement focuses on are “personal skilled crafting, truth to one’s materials, sturdy construction, and muted tertiary hues” (Schaffer 50). Over time as the movement develops, it would focus less on craft and shift to emphasize decorative art. The idea was to elevate the decorative arts to the same level as fine art. This shift stems in particular from the influence of John Ruskin. His essay *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1849) helps set the standard for the new aesthetic principles that recodify the arts and crafts produced in the period. Schaffer notes: “now would-be artists had to learn skills from intensive study of surviving treasures at the South Kensington Museum and painstakingly emulate these long-vanished craft masters; would-be collectors had to be taught the principles of connoisseurship to detect the signs of age and handmade provenance in the few, frail, surviving treasures” (51). Domestic handicraft does not disappear with the popularity of the Arts and Crafts movement aesthetics;
instead both threads of craft are actively being pursued at the time. For example, Berlin woolwork remains popular throughout the nineteenth century despite using outdated black backgrounds and out of fashion bold primary colors, or colors that provided a strong contrast, as opposed to the muted tertiary colors that the Arts and Crafts movement makes popular (46, 54). In the 1870’s a craft called art needlework emerges, giving domestic handicraft a facelift with the Arts and Crafts aesthetic values (53). It does this by using “the fashionable aesthetic tertiary hues conventionalized in decorative borders” (53). Figure 7 is a screen that is embroidered in the Arts and Crafts aesthetic using the art needlework technique. Notice the use of the tertiary hues that are emphasized in the Arts and Crafts aesthetic which Schaffer lists as “bronze, salmon, terracotta, olive, sage, and peacock blue” (50). Yet, it is still very similar to the Berlin woolwork in Figure 1 in Chapter One. The materials are the same, both styles use “coarse cottons and thick crewel yarns,” but the colors and stylization of the flowers reflect the new aesthetics of Arts and Crafts (54). Parker also notes that the art needlework and the embroidery patterns of the day “hardly deviated from established nineteenth-century traditions” (180). She points out that William Morris was selling patterns for the same household objects as the domestic
handicraft movement did previously (Parker 180-181). Another way domestic handicraft and the Arts and Crafts movement overlap is through the art of china painting. The nod to domestic handicraft is the purchasing of blank pre-made china plates, and then painting them with ornamentation befitting the Arts and Crafts aesthetic principles. Schaffer notes “its ease, its adaptability to naturalistic patterns of flowers and birds, and its reliance on mass-produced cheap components felt comfortably familiar to the women who had grown up in the domestic handicraft tradition” (55). The reason it was acceptable is because it provided an opportunity to apply “the laws of decorative arts, and it therefore satisfied the new Arts and Crafts Standards” (Schaffer 55). Despite being mass produced, the plates function as a canvas where the craftsperson could articulate the aesthetics of the Arts and Crafts movement.

Perhaps one of the most important concepts in the context of my argument regarding Lucilla is the Arts and Crafts movement development of educating oneself as a connoisseur. As I stated previously, I argue that Lucilla functions in Oliphant’s novel as a type of connoisseur. A connoisseur is “a person well acquainted with one of the fine arts, and competent to pass a judgment in relation thereto; a critical judge of art or of matters of taste” (Connoisseur, n. Def 2a). Through Lucilla’s education she becomes well-versed in the aesthetics of the Arts and Crafts movement, which I argue allows her to exert her expertise to influence the standards of taste in Carlingford. Yet, in the Victorian Period the connoisseur is typically male. Schaffer notes “it took a trained male eye, apparently, to spot the authentically preindustrial object” (56). This new role as connoisseur also shifts the dichotomy of the home. The house is no longer necessarily a woman’s domain. Instead, it is also re-coded during this period as masculine showcase of what Schaffer calls “connoisseurship credentials” (57). In Oliphant’s novel, the house begins as Lucilla’s father’s
domain, but when Lucilla returns from her Tour of the Continent she claims it as her own by
determinedly managing her father. After Lucilla successfully conquers him, the house is no
longer a location where men hold dominion. As such, I posit that in *Miss Marjoribanks*,
Oliphant positions Lucilla as a connoisseur of sorts. Instead of giving her explicit art
knowledge, Oliphant demonstrates Lucilla’s educated taste and skillful acquiring of just the
right people to set off her Evenings as successes. These skills make her extremely successful
in her social career and allows her to preside over the social milieu in Carlingford. Schaffer
notes that one way men could assert themselves as connoisseurs is through “the ordering of
furnishings” with which to decorate their homes. Lucilla accomplishes this same kind of
assertion through the redecoration of her drawing-room, where she displays not only that it is
she who now rules the house, but also exhibits her mastery of the Arts and Crafts aesthetic
and her taste level in the choices she makes in furnishings and décor.

In order for Lucilla to generate an identity for herself as the head of society in
Carlingford, she must strategically plan her conquest of society. One thing that becomes
obvious to Lucilla is that she needs a base of operations. In beginning this project, one of my
main questions was: Why does Lucilla choose the drawing-room? Lucilla devotes a great
deal of her time to acquiring her father’s permission to redecorate the drawing-room to her
taste. The fact that she decorates it in accordance with the Arts and Crafts aesthetic was
revealed by my investigation of my first inquiry. In looking for an answer to this question, I
am greatly indebted to Andrea Kaston Tange’s focus on Victorian architecture in aiding my
understanding the importance of the drawing-room in Victorian households. In addition, the
novel also makes a clear answer as Lucilla sets up her social kingdom and rules it from her
drawing-room. She wields her knowledge of the Arts and Crafts aesthetics to design her
drawing-room by the proper use of color, personal belongings, and decorations as a weapon to conquer the society in Carlingford. In essence, the drawing-room in Victorian society plays a large role in social functions: it is the heart of the home. During social events guests would gather and socialize within it before dinner and return to it after dinner to continue socializing. Tange asserts that Lucilla’s “drawing-room functions as a perfect ‘container’ for Lucilla’s ultimately political projects in large part because of its cultural associations” (166).

But what exactly are the cultural associations of the drawing-room?

The emotional center of Victorian social and family circles, architecturally, it was also located at the heart of the house, occupying most, if not all, of the central story of a house in town. With dining room and men’s rooms such as the study, library, and/or billiard room on the floor below, and family bedrooms on the floor above, the drawing-room was carefully protected from the noise or the more “vulgar” associations of the street, the basement kitchen regions, or the servants’ attic. The importance of the drawing-room in the lives of the middle-class went far beyond the simple metaphor of its location within the house, for it served to connect the daily lives of the family with the lives of their friends and guests by providing the space in which guests were invited to judge the respectability of the house. (Tange 166)

This means that the drawing-room is absolutely the best choice for Lucilla to put her mark on. It is the room where society is going to judge her skill as a hostess, and through her decoration of the space measure her skill as a connoisseur. Juliet Kinchin further explains that drawing-rooms are “conventionally gendered as a ‘feminine’ space, women within it were in a sense actors, performing elaborate social rituals as ‘naturally’ as possible without
registering the analytical gaze of their audience” (70). But in Lucilla the reader finds a woman who is not only very much aware of the gaze of her audience as many women were, but who also does not hesitate to say so upon occasion, and who strategically decorates her drawing-room in a fashion that makes full use of her skill as a connoisseur to make sure it will show her off to her best advantage, is adaptable over a long period of time, and is easy to change so that her guests do not become bored with the space.

As such, the drawing-room becomes the place where Lucilla can spend her time completing any necessary duties, and for socializing with the community. I argue that Lucilla sets up her drawing-room as an Arts and Crafts space, drawing on her expertise with the aesthetic tenets of the movement from her extensive education. Other scholars have written about the importance of Lucilla’s drawing-room makeover and the role it plays in shaping her identity as a social leader. Kinchin argues the novel “presents a pivotal moment with just such a self-regarding glance, as the author deftly charts her heroine's coming of age in tandem with the transformation of the family drawing-room” (68). Kinchin sees Lucilla imagining a fantasy self when she looks into the mirror in her drawing-room and at the upholstery shop, using her reflection as a space where she can imagine herself as the queen of her domain. Then, through her efforts redecorating her drawing-room she can take on that imagined role as her identity. The scene in the upholstery shop that Kinchin refers to can also be read as evidence of Lucilla’s role as a connoisseur. She goes to Mr. Holden’s upholstery shop, and “found among his stores a delicious damask, softly, spiritually green, of which, to his great astonishment, she tried the effect in one of the great mirrors which ornamented the shop” (Oliphant, Miss Marjoribanks 54). Lucilla demonstrates her expertise to select the right shade of green (a muted, tertiary shade) from all the fabric Mr. Holden has on hand. She
even asserts “it is just the tint I want” suggesting that Lucilla has well thought out her design plan for the space (54). Kinchin further argues: “Lucilla perceives the drawing-room as a space of potential liberation rather than passivity and confinement, as a means to an end of realizing the ‘extended capacities’ she feels within herself, of controlling her relations with men…and ensuring her social progression within the local community” (68-69). While Kinchin’s argument is compelling, I do not believe it gives Lucilla enough cognitive credit for the re-inscription of her identity after she returns home from her tour of the continent. Her argument hinges on the idea that the drawing-room reinforces the external societal gaze and that people function within its walls as actors performing their appropriate societal roles (Kinchin 70). On one hand, her argument denies Lucilla any real agency in the creation of herself. She has already failed once at taking over the reins of the household when her mother died, and her father sends her back to boarding school. When she returns from school and her grand tour of the continent, Lucilla has already achieved some of her coming of age with her further education. She has already had to learn the prescribed societal roles in order to effectively enact her plans. On the other hand, acting as a connoisseur is not necessarily coded as an appropriate societal role for a female. I argue that Lucilla learning from her failures, intentionally seeking further education (like lessons in political economy), and having the gumption to try again to assert herself as an authority on taste is essential to her ability to establish herself as the first in Carlingford society. The scene in the upholstery shop reinforces Lucilla’s ability to select the correct colors and furnishing for the space she is creating for her Evenings as a reflection of herself. I also think that in Lucilla, Oliphant redefines the narrow scope that a connoisseur can have when gendered only as male. Instead, Lucilla is capable of ascertaining not just what objects have merit to display, but what people
have merit to add to the perfect composition of an Evening. Another critic, Melissa Schaub, also picks up on Lucilla’s first failure, but she ascribes it to Lucilla’s failure to read her surrounding narrative correctly. She writes, “Miss Marjoribanks has not yet learned the most important lesson of authorship: ‘to take the characters of the other personae into consideration’” and after her first attempt fails, she believes “Lucilla conceives a greater ambition than merely being mistress of her father’s house; she intends to take Carlingford society into her own hands and transform it into an organized body, a monarchy, with herself as ‘despotic’ ruler” (Schaub 206-206). Schaub sees Lucilla as an author who re-textualizes herself now that she can account for the roles of other people in her own narrative. While Lucilla learns to how better to read people and react to them, she also learns how people fit into a larger picture. She can now envision how they fit together in order to make a pleasing composition and uses this to her advantage when planning her Evenings.

Before delving into Lucilla’s redecoration of her drawing-room, it is important to reiterate that most connoisseurs in the Victorian period are men who have the education to decipher the worth of art objects for display (also known as “finds” that they can exhibit in their homes) and an extensive knowledge of art history. As I demonstrated in the previous chapter in connection to Rose’s ambitions to be an artist, the way art education was structured during this period made it hard for women to find equal footing. These gendered differences are why I argue that instead of explicitly connecting Lucilla to high art, Oliphant instead attaches her to the Arts and Crafts aesthetic, and demonstrates Lucilla’s skill in deploying those tenets in both her drawing-room and in her selection of people to attend her Evenings. In Schaffer’s work she looks at another Oliphant novel, *Phoebe Junior*, as an example of connoisseurship at work in a novel. The title character, Phoebe, possesses all the
skills required to demonstrate connoisseurship in the novel – “art history knowledge, attention to detail, discipline, and recognition of handwriting” – that allow her to unravel the secret of who the forger is in the novel (Schaffer 167). In Miss Marjoribanks, Lucilla possesses these qualities (excepting the recognition of handwriting which is essential to Phoebe being able to reason out who the forger is and why) using her art history knowledge, attention to detail, and discipline to redecorate her drawing-room after she wins her father over to the idea. While Oliphant does not ascribe specific fine art pieces as part of Lucilla’s repertoire (perhaps to keep her properly gendered) she does, however, hint that Lucilla is aware of fine art principles. When Lucilla discovers Barbara Lake she describes the house in art terms: “two little blank squares hung in the centre of each of the lower windows, revealed to Lucilla’s educated eye the existence of so much ‘feeling’ for art” (Oliphant, Miss Marjoribanks 33). Lucilla’s “educated eye” that notes the existence of art suggests that she has some sort of art education in her background. This kind of knowledge helps Lucilla to carve out a space for herself that allows her to deftly manipulate Carlingford society. But both of these women (Phoebe Junior and Lucilla) are acting outside of conventional boundaries as connoisseurs. As Schaffer explains, “a woman connoisseur … is showing her ability to excel in a realm of knowledge not normally acceded to her” because it is normally a skill that is entirely in the realm of men (Schaffer 148). The aesthetic tenets of the Arts and Crafts movement are prescribed by men like John Ruskin (an art critic), William Morris (a designer), and Augustus Pugin (an architect), yet Lucilla shows a deft hand at mastering those tenets as shown in the redecoration of her drawing-room.

As a whole, Lucilla Marjoribanks is a remarkable character. In addition to performing as a feminized version of the connoisseur, Lucilla is also quite different from the typical
Victorian heroine. As Tange puts it, Lucilla is “far from the delicate, soft-spoken, dependent ideal of a middle-class young lady, Lucilla ‘always enjoys perfect health,’ always says exactly what she means, and can clearly take care of herself far better than could any of the intellectually inferior suitors who pay her attention” (164-165). Early in the novel, Lucilla is portrayed by the narrator as atypical of the middle-class heroine stereotype that Tange mentions:

For it was already known that the Doctor’s daughter was not a mild young lady, easy to be controlled; but, on the contrary, had all the energy and determination to have her own way, which naturally belonged to a girl who possessed a considerable chin, and a mouth which could shut, and tightly curling tawny tresses, which were still more determined than she was to be arranged only according to their inclination. (Oliphant, Miss Marjoribanks 13)

Lucilla also does not match the physique of a delicate middle-class girl. She is described as “large in all particulars, full and well developed, with somewhat large features, not at all pretty as yet” with a “mass of hair which, if it could have been cleared a little in tint, would have been golden, though at the present it was tawny, and curly to exasperation” (4-5). In a sense her physical description of being large resonates with her larger than life personality and the role she will fill in Carlingford. The description of Lucilla’s hair, both its color and curl, help to describe her personality too. It is “curly to exasperation” and has a mind of its own. Lucilla wears it in “large thick curls, which did not, however, float or wave, or do any of the graceful things which curls ought to do” (5). Lucilla is also a force to be reckoned with who does not necessarily do the things a daughter is supposed to do, such as be meek and obeisant. Lucilla’s hair also has “this aggravating quality that it would not grow long, but
would grow ridiculously, unmanageably thick, to the admiration of her companions, but to her own despair, for there was no knowing what to do with those short but ponderous locks” (5). Lucilla’s reaction to her hair is much the same as the reaction people have to her. They do not know what to do with this girl who wants only to be a comfort to her father but manages to rearrange their entire social sphere through her Evenings, and positions herself so she is at the center in a place of power. Much like the skilled way she redecorates her drawing-room to communicate an Arts and Crafts aesthetic that generates an identity of expertise and authority, Lucilla often uses her ability to set people off balance to her advantage, and brings them around to see her point of view or to some form of agreement with her. For example, see the passage I discussed in the previous chapter where Lucilla deftly uses the rhetoric of duty in connection to art to convince Rose to attend her Evening in her sister Barbara’s place. The narrator also boldly asserts that Lucilla prefers the company of men, stating “as it not uncommon with women who are clever women, and aware of the fact, Miss Marjoribanks preferred the society of men, and rather liked to say so” (15). This is another odd facet of her personality that may explain her ability to comport herself with cool behavior when Miss Barbara Lake tries to steal the attention of Mr. Cavendish during one of her Evenings. Instead of becoming jealous and making a scene, Lucilla has Cavendish escort Barbara to get some tea, removing them from the eyes of the rest of her guests for a time. It demonstrates her ability to manipulate the situation with great acumen, so that the night is not spoiled by their excessive flirtations. By managing her emotions, Lucilla skillfully takes control of the situation, and demonstrates her expertise in arranging people to the best effect in her home.
So how did Lucilla come into her ability to masterfully arrange people like fine art pieces at her Evenings? I argue that it is through Lucilla’s extensive education and her master of the Arts and Crafts principles that she becomes the leading force in the society of Carlingford. As I mentioned earlier, Tange’s article investigates how architecture, in this case the drawing-room, allows Lucilla to establish herself in society. She also posits the possibility of seeing Oliphant working to redesign femininity by creating a space within her novel that depicts women like herself in a socially respectable light. I argue that not only does Lucilla redecorate her drawing-room in order to “redesign femininity” but also to create a space that reflects the dominant aesthetics of the Arts and Crafts movement, which in turn allows her to generate social agency. Tange argues “that novels operated for Oliphant the way that drawing-rooms do for Lucilla: they provided a culturally-sanctioned place in which to locate herself, and thereby reaffirm her respectable feminine position, even while she undertook projects that challenged Victorian assumptions about gendered identity” (163). Tange also sees Lucilla in opposition to John Ruskin’s idea of women as queens; she explains “far from Ruskin’s vision of domestic Queens with ‘natural’ feminine attributes, Miss Marjoribanks demonstrates that a woman must learn the skills required to become a socially-powerful figure” (173). This emphasis on education is integral to my own argument for several reasons. First, Lucilla must be educated in order to be a connoisseur. Her brand of connoisseurship in the novel requires an extensive education in the Arts and Crafts aesthetic, and development of the correct refinements of taste. Second, I believe it is important that Lucilla fails not once but twice in managing her father, because she learns how to better to adapt her strategies to winning over individual people because of her failures. Lucilla, in turn, uses this skill to successfully arrange her Evenings. Tange includes Lucilla’s failure as
an important part of Lucilla’s education as well; she explains it is “because she has not yet
learned the skills of gracefully reading, responding to, and even shaping others’ desires”
(173). In essence, it is through her education that Lucilla learns how to more skillfully
influence the people around her, and also learns the tools to establish her expertise as a
connoisseur who can find just the right people to exhibit to make her Evenings a success.

Lucilla’s quest to rule Carlingford starts when she is fifteen, just after her mother’s
death. I posit that, like all quests, there have to be a few setbacks that the heroine learns from
in order to become successful at whatever the end goal is for the journey: in Lucilla’s case
her quest is to rule Carlingford society, and her failures provide her with the opportunity to
garner more education in both the Arts and Crafts aesthetics and managing people. I see
Lucilla’s ability to learn from failure and adapt new strategies to counter the situation as an
integral role in her success in reorganizing the society of Carlingford. At fifteen when her
mother dies, Lucilla is ready and determined to take up the reins of the household and “be a
comfort” to her father. She fails in this first attempt, because she does not have the skill yet to
fully assess people and maneuver them to suit her own goals. And while she is honestly
disappointed, Lucilla has at this point already “contemplated new furniture in the drawing-
room, and expected to be mistress of her father’s house” (Oliphant, *Miss Marjoribanks* 10).
The narrator firmly expresses that at this point Miss Marjoribanks had not “by any means
learned by this defeat to take the characters of the other *personae* in her little drama into
consideration”; but upon her return to the school at Mount Pleasant she convinces Miss
Martha to let her “learn all about political economy and things, to help [her] manage things”
in the future (11). She may not have been successful in her first attempt at maneuvering the
world around her to suit her plan, but Lucilla is certainly not easily daunted by failure either.
Lucilla fails, re-assesses the situation to see what is in her power to accomplish now, and moves onto the next task. It is the experience of this failure that provides Lucilla the opportunity of being educated further which leads to her eventual success in positioning herself in her drawing-room as the social center of Carlingford.

Lucilla being deemed an enlightened critic when she arrives home at nineteen after finishing school, and spending a year on the grand tour of the continent, is the first hint the reader receives that Lucilla has the skill of a connoisseur who is ready to fill the role of mistress of the house. One of the first things Lucilla does upon her arrival is assess the drawing-room which she finds sadly wanting. The room is described as “not an uncomfortable sort of big, dull, faded respectable drawing-room” and Lucilla admits that if there were personal familial connections to the pieces around the room “it would have been charming, but it was only a waste and howling wilderness to her” (27). In essence, the room is unsuitable for Lucilla’s plan, because it lacks any deep familial connections that she could work with out of sentimentality, and is completely out of fashion with the current aesthetic mode. Her father discovers Lucilla “regarding everything around her with the eye of an enlightened critic and reformer” where she is mentally going over her “long conceived” ideas “for the embellishment of this inner court and centre of her kingdom” (27). Her father has already caught on to her intended role at this point subconsciously the role that Lucilla plans to establish for herself as the queen of their society in Carlingford. My argument is that she does this by creating a drawing-room that demonstrates her expertise with the Arts and Crafts aesthetic, which in turn generates social authority as she carefully manages her Evenings.

Because of Lucilla’s position as a middle-class woman, she has to engage with the dynamics of the economy through a different set of complications than Miss Matty or Rose
Lake. Lucilla is not expected to earn an income, but rather has to ask her father to pay for the things she requires. This economic dynamic of having to rely on a man to provide for her wants is what begins Lucilla’s conquest of her father almost immediately upon returning home. She begins by demonstrating that the drawing-room is now her space. In order to establish this she starts by simply re-arranging furniture and adding a few personal effects to make it hers. The narrator relates:

Miss Marjoribanks had succeeded in effect another fundamental duty of a woman – she had, as she herself expressed it harmonized the rooms, by the simple method of re-arranging half the chairs and covering the tables with trifles of her own – a proceeding which converted the apartment from an abstract English Drawing-room of the old school into Miss Marjoribanks’s drawing-room, an individual spot of ground revealing something of the character of its mistress. (28)

It takes aesthetic skill to make a room read as an expression of individuality through such minor touches. And the ultimate goal is to eventually decorate so that the room would be an exact reflection of one’s character. Or as Kinchin explains, “it was important to appear ‘at home’ and at one with the room in order to stress the consistency between one’s ‘true’ character and one’s projected image (70). By re-arranging the room, Lucilla changes the tone of its appearance so much that her father, the Doctor, is taken in by it, and ends up spending time with Lucilla after dinner “even though it was against his principles” (Oliphant, Miss Marjoribanks 28). This leaves Lucilla with a feeling of “satisfaction” and the belief that “she had made a conquest of the Doctor, which, of course the grand and most essential preliminary” (28). With the first steps of redecoration taken (re-coding the room as hers) and
making a conquest of her father, Lucilla starts plotting her redecoration plans.

A few days later the Doctor and her cousin Tom arrive to find her pacing the drawing-room in a dramatic fashion. Lucilla counts her paces to get a sense of the size of the room so she will know how much carpet to order. Lucilla’s strategy on the surface appears to be quite direct – she assumes her father will redecorate the room for her – but it is far more nuanced than that.

In order to set the scene, Lucilla demonstrates her skill with the Arts and Crafts aesthetic and her belief that green will suit her for the room by adorning her dress with green ribbons. Her father notes Lucilla “had put on green ribbons on the white dress which she always wore in the evening, and her tawny curls and fresh complexion carried off triumphantly that difficult color” (48). Then Lucilla knocks her father off balance by asking how long it has been since he was married in order to determine how long the drawing-room has been furnished in its current state. She turns his answer back around at him and exclaims: “Twenty-two years!...The things are all the same as they were when mama came home, though, I am sure, nobody would believe it” (46). Next, Lucilla presents the question of permission in a form where she assumes permission is already granted, “Papa, if you have no objection, I should like to choose the colors myself” (46). Her next recourse is to show the practicality of her plan. She tells her father, “There is a great deal in choosing colors that go well with one’s complexion. People think of that for their dresses but not for their rooms, which are of so much more importance” because “one can change one’s dress...as often as one likes – at least as often, you know, as one has dresses to change; but the furniture remains the same” (46). She has given considerable thought to a color that will match her complexion since she intends to spend at least ten years on the first portion of her career in
Carlingford. Finally, Lucilla displays her art expertise in the matter, explaining, “what I mean is a delicate-pale green, papa. I think it wears as well as any other color; and all the painters say it is the very thing for pictures” (47). With the end of this setup, Lucilla proves her connoisseurship by demonstrating her expertise of color. She even locates the Arts and Crafts movement as the authority on aesthetic taste by citing the painters. She continues to describe the rest of the décor for her father and describes “the carpet, of course, would all be a darker shade; and as for the chairs it is not at all necessary to keep to one colour. Both red and violet go beautifully with green” (47). Her plan is to decorate the drawing-room tertiary hues of green, a paler shade for the walls and darker hue for the carpets. The red and violet suggest the lingering domestic handicraft aesthetics where black, gold, red, and violet were popular colors.

Despite her strategy, Lucilla’s volley fails, but in the end she is ultimately successful in achieving her goal of redecorating the drawing-room space. The Doctor finds himself angry, albeit amused, at her assumption that he would pay to redecorate the room for her. He refuses to pay for it at first, but his refusal does not change Lucilla’s plans. Instead, she decides to convince him to pay for it. After Lucilla explains that she has no intention of being anything but a comfort to him for the next ten years, harboring no desire to throw parties, but rather the idea of extending his own dinner parties into Evenings at which women could also attend. The Doctor admits to himself that he is almost charmed enough by Lucilla’s efforts to give her exactly what she wants. He takes note that “nothing could be more faded than the curtains, and there were bits of the carpet in which the pattern was scarcely discernable” (50). The brief setback in Lucilla’s plans does not last long because she has learned both patience and to consider how other people affect her plans since that first
failure at fifteen. She continues to charm her father after dinner in the drawing-room when she takes tea, and enjoys a rousing success at being an addition to his dinner parties. Eventually the Doctor must cave into Lucilla’s demands offstage, because very soon afterward Lucilla hires Mr. Holden, an upholsterer, to the house to start measuring the room for new wallpaper and new curtains for the drawing-room.

It is during the renovation of the drawing-room that Lucilla further establishes her expertise with the Arts and Crafts aesthetics and her ability to manage people in Carlingford. Oliphant sets the scene so Lucilla has to find way to deflect her cousin’s, Tom Marjoribanks, declaration of love. To do so she uses her curiosity, definition of taste, and her position of expertise to try and escape the situation, telling him “everybody knows that hanging pictures is just the thing of all others that requires a person of taste. If they have spoiled the room, it will be all your fault” (73). This serves as another indication that Lucilla believes herself to be a person of taste. In Lucilla’s case, I connect her use of taste to being able to accurately interpret the Arts and Crafts aesthetics into decorating her drawing-room to reflect those aesthetics, and uses taste to function as an extension of her public identity. The fact that the workers did hang the paintings in the wrong places confirms her statement that it requires skill to locate them in the most aesthetically advantageous positions on the walls of the room.

At this point, with the redecoration of her drawing-room under way, I posit that Lucilla begins to use her skill for influencing people to generate suspense about the outcome of her renovations, so that the people of Carlingford will be anxious for the reveal of the room, and to generate interest in her as a person of note in the community. By doing this, she can assess what they believe she has chosen (or what their taste level is) and create a sense of anticipation for the Evenings, so that they will want to attend to see what she is up to. By
doing so Lucilla sets herself up into an advantageous position to influence the taste of society around her and secure her position as the ruler of their society. In order to build suspense for her Evenings, Lucilla keeps her redecoration plans a secret. She allows Mrs. Chiley to see it “under a vow of secrecy” but does not share it with anyone else (78). This sets the town on edge with the desire to see Lucilla’s drawing-room. There are multiple attempts by the townsfolk to sneak a peek at the room. Mr. Cavendish tries to sneak up and see it during one of the Doctor’s dinners, but is only rewarded for his clandestine invasion with “three white blotches [of moonlight] on the carpet” and “knock[ing] his foot against something which reduced him to sudden and well-merited agony” (78). The narrator also relates that “many people even went so far as to give the Browns a sitting in their glass-house, with the hope of having a peep at the colour of the hangings” (78). With the anticipation building and no one successfully seeing the room, the people of Carlingford start to try guessing how Lucilla may have redecorated it. Mrs Brown guesses it is blue because “Lucilla was always a great one for blue; she thinks it is becoming to her complexion” (78). In order to keep them guessing, Lucilla tries to throw the citizens of Carlingford off the scent of their chase by announcing that “for my part, I am fond of natural tints … I do so like the drabs and greys, and all those soft colours” (79). She also doles out advice about what constitutes as bad taste in the same conversation suggesting that “you can have as much red and green as you like abroad, where the sun is strong, but here it would be bad style” (79). The reader knows that she has selected a pale-green, so it is obvious that Lucilla is trying to throw them off. What this accomplishes is a level of anticipation that makes the citizens of Carlingford want to attend Lucilla’s Evenings to see how she has redecorated. In the context of my argument for Lucilla as a connoisseur, it builds suspense so that they want to come see her exhibit: a room decorated in
impeccable taste in the latest Arts and Crafts aesthetic, where not only her décor is on display, but so are her guests in order to create successful Evenings.

As for the setting the taste of the town, Lucilla draws on her expertise in order to establish a position in order to do so. By using her drawing-room redecoration as an extension of her own taste and the location of her Evenings, and then influencing what the women wear to her Evenings, Lucilla helps to define the taste of Carlingford. The narrator signals early on in the novel that it is Lucilla’s desire to set the standards of taste in Carlingford when discussing the upcoming success of Lucilla’s Evenings. The description paints them as charming, revolutionary, and as having set the taste for the society. Lucilla secures Barbara Lake as a singing partner which highlights the range of activities and diversions she expects to have at her parties. Lucilla’s success at conquering the town and setting the standards of taste are explained by the narrator, who relates, “the great charm of those Thursday evenings which made so entire a revolution in the taste and ideas of Carlingford” (33). Another way that Lucilla starts to manipulate the taste of Carlingford is through her dress and what she encourages the other ladies in town to wear. Throughout the first chapter of her career Lucilla espouses an affinity for wearing a “white frock high” which is a modest white muslin gown with a high neck similar to the dresses shown in Figure 8 (79). Like the dress Lucilla wears with green ribbons to possibly influence
her father’s belief that pale-green suits her complexion, she chooses to wear similar dresses to her Evenings. Elizabeth Jay points out that Lucilla’s decision to wear this style of dress “convey[s] a series of messages to her guests: it demarcated the eligible virginal ‘entourage of white-robed angels’ from the married women, privileged fine fabric and elegant cut, and emphasized the extreme respectability of the evening at which day bodices, covering the chest up to the neck, rather than the increasingly indecorous, low-cut evening gowns of this period, were to be worn” (Jay xxix). What Jay does not mention is that it is also excellent way to help the different classes mingle as well. Lucilla, at this point in the novel, can be firmly placed in the middle-class, but she invites people like Barbara Lake whose social station is not as firmly secured. The Lakes fill an interesting liminal space in the novel, representing an artist class that is neither well off or completely destitute. But even someone like Barbara can find a muslin dress in her wardrobe despite it being “six times washed” (Oliphant, Miss Marjoribanks 85). The white muslin dresses also make an excellent canvas to showcase the women’s beauty, or in Lucilla’s case, to allow her complexion to be the star rather than the dress. This exhibits the advice that appears in Blackwood’s that women should “never forget that the object of a dress is not to exhibit itself but the wearer” (Mozley).

All of this preparation leads up to the big reveal of Lucilla’s newly decorated drawing-room which takes place at her first official Evening party. She chose to redecorate the room in green wallpaper “of the most delicate tint, and looked, as she flattered herself, exactly like silk hangings” (Oliphant, Miss Marjoribanks 69-70). Her choice not only flatters her complexion, but also displays to her peers that she is aware of “fashionable aesthetic
tertiary hues” of the Arts and Crafts movement (Schaffer 53). The wallpaper in Figure 9 demonstrates what the wallpaper that was popular during the Arts and Crafts movement looked like, and the aesthetic that Lucilla would be trying to achieve with her choice of pale-green. While Lucilla’s choice is all one color – green of a delicate tint – the fact that it looks like silk hangings suggests to me that there is some sort of textured pattern on it, perhaps not as detailed as the figure; notice that it contains several shades of green. In Figure 9 I can picture Lucilla’s drawing-room. The darker green of leaves could be the color of the carpet, the inner leaves of the artichoke the silk hangings, and the outer leaves the green of her wallpaper.

Throughout the first portion of her career not only does Lucilla display her ability as connoisseur, but she also extends her skills to repeatedly putting together interesting parties with an interesting array of guests. In order to do so, Lucilla first had to acquire education in the Arts and Crafts aesthetic and convince her father to pay for the redecoration of the drawing-room that becomes the center of her machinations throughout the text. Lucilla’s skillful maneuvering of her father shows that despite not having to work for an income, engaging in economic interactions still requires extra work as a female. One must manage the man who holds the purse strings. Once Lucilla secures the new furnishings and décor for her drawing-room, she makes certain that the people of Carlingford will be curious to see it by building suspense around what it looks like. This ensures attendance to her Evenings. Once her Evenings take off, Lucilla further demonstrates her expertise at arranging the room and
the people she “finds” to keep the gatherings fresh and interesting for her regular guests. This Lucilla accomplishes by varying the arrangements around the room, leaving the Evenings as an open invitation so the guest list is varied, and providing different entertainments at each gathering. Through her aesthetic expertise, her attention to detail in managing the people in her life, and her self-discipline, Lucilla generates the social agency that allows her to successfully claim leadership over the society in Carlingford.
Conclusion: The Legacy of Victorian Craft

Throughout this project I discuss the connection between craft and what it communicates, how it allows or disallows agency for women, and how it generates identity. By looking at the texts in connection to specific craft movements during the Victorian era, I demonstrate how women within these novels mirror those changing modes of craft discourse. I started this project discussing the connections between Victorian domestic handicraft and craft today because I see an interesting tie between the two. Domestic handicraft begins as a reaction to industrialization, providing middle-class women a way to also be industrious within their separate sphere. The resurgence of craft today gets a similar start. Craft becomes popular again in the both the Handmade and Made in America movements that swept the United States in the 1990s in reaction to the over-saturation of the economic market with mass produced goods imported from places like China. Craft today has a lot in common with the domestic handicrafts in the Victorian period. Crafters have returned to an interest in salvaged materials, recycling items into crafts is a large part of the Go Green movement, and craft is wildly imitative. The only difference today is that the imitative quality does not take on nature as much as it does pop culture. Craft discourse is now wildly diverse with many aesthetics, but still deeply connected to the ability to communicate identity, provide opportunity for agency, and strengthen homosocial bonds.

In Chapter One, I located the tensions between craft and the economy beginning with the separation of the towns described in Cranford. Drumble represents a booming city filled with industry and new technology, where Cranford clings to the past traditions prior to the new industrial changes. The cities also represent the schism between men and women brought on by the advances of industry. Men are off in Drumble in Gaskell’s novel, and the
charming Amazons are located in Cranford. As I mentioned previously, these cities underscore the tensions within the text surrounding the new economy attached to industrial advancement. Over the course of the novel, these tensions play out in connection to craft through the types of craft the women in Cranford create, and in Mary Smith’s debate over the career options available to Miss Matty after a financial crisis. These options are to sell her handmade goods, or to teach crafts skills to the younger generation. Mary rules out both options, instead deciding on a third option of selling tea, because of the deep connection between crafts and the Victorian woman’s identity. In Chapter Two, I located the economic tensions surrounding the character Rose Lake who works for a living as a teacher in the School of Design in Carlingford. Both situations raise questions about female agency in the novels. By reading them in the context of the craft movements of which they are a part (domestic handicraft for Miss Matty and the Design Reform movement for Rose), craft disallows female agency. Miss Matty’s identity is too closely connected to the items she crafts and Rose is quite possibly stuck in the field of craft rather than art. Yet their situations are not completely hopeless. Miss Matty ends up selling tea which affords her time to knit while she waits for customers. Rose Lake makes artistic choices in her teaching that allow her to weigh in contextually on cultural art debates.

Today, craft serves as a possible avenue of agency on much wider scale. Web sites like Etsy, Artfire, Big Cartel, and Ravelry allow crafters (who are predominantly women, and oftentimes single mothers or stay-at-home moms) to carve out economic ground in the niche craft market. They can sell everything from handmade items (knitwear, crochet, paintings, jewelry) to designs for patterns to the supplies needed to make crafts (hand-dyed yarn, jewelry findings, knitting needles, crochet hooks). Although this new, burgeoning craft
economy suggests Mary Smith’s debate about whether Miss Matty could make a living selling or teaching craft is out of date, there are still plenty of people who cling to stereotypes about craft as a form of income. For example, Double X (now an extension of Slate, a daily webzine) printed an article in 2009 called “Etsy.com Peddles a False Feminist Fantasy” by Sara Mosle which posits that Etsy creates a female ghetto where male investors take advantage of the creative work and the revenue generated by female shop holders on the site. This article created a backlash of rebuttals like “Slate Ladyblog Slaps The ‘Feminist Fantasy’ Of Etsy” by Megan Carpentier which takes the form of a dialogue between Carpentier and another woman named Sadie where they discuss Mosle’s article in a chain of letters. What Carpentier finds “problematic with the analysis is the idea that a site to which women of their own accord flocked in order to start engaging in entrepreneurship with their artistic endeavors is referred to by Mosle as ‘a female ghetto’ — but without the corresponding male-dominated alternative environment from which women are isolated” (Jezebel). She then keys in on a main component of the lasting stereotypes surround women and business. Carpenetier writes: “but what I feel is most problematic is the idea inherent in the work that women should, in some sense, face the reality that their dreams of successful entrepreneurship will never be realized” and that Mosle’s article “attempts to convince women not to take a relatively risk-free wade into the entrepreneurial waters of the American marketplace because they’ll ‘fail,’ as though economic failure is something with which women cannot or should not be expected to cope” (Jezabel). These sentiments surrounding craft entrepreneurship seem very similar to the argument in the Victorian Period to keep women out of the new industrial economy. As I noted previously, Parker traces in The Subversive Stitch the lengths that were taken to keep women out of professionalized craft
starting as early as the fifteenth century, so much so that by the time the Victorian Period had a craft renaissance it was seen primarily as a hobby with which women could show their industrious use of leisure time. Yet, the interesting theme that comes up in the rebuttal to Mosle’s attack on Etsy is the connection of craft to community. Carpentier asks, “doesn’t it seem like she ignores the fact that Etsy functions as a community as well as a selling site?” adding, “if one reads the boards, it's clear that Etsy is a real support network and intellectual forum for any number of like-minded people” (Jezebel). Six years later from the publication of the Double X article, Etsy and its crafting community are still going strong.

In Chapter One, I argue that craft helps build homosocial bonds between crafters through community outreach, socialized crafting in small groups like the preparation for the Jenkynses party, and that the women of Cranford use craft specifically to build their individual friendships. The women of Cranford often get together to craft throughout the novel, and define their relationships around it (for example, Miss Pole and Miss Jessie). This kind of community is also a large part of the modern craft movement, and thanks to the advent of the Internet, the crafting community is now international. Web sites like Ravelry provide a place where knitters, crocheters, spinners, and quilters can come together on a forum and discuss their craft. From personal experience, I know how deeply connected these virtual friendships can be. In one Ravelry group, the women on the forum came together to secretly knit a baby blanket for another group member. It turned into a three-blanket affair after the number of people who wanted to participate were taken into account. Figure 10 is a photo of the modular baby
blanket. This project required communication over the Ravelry group forum where it was decided that each individual would knit 1-2 12x12 squares that would then be seamed together at the end of the project before being mailed to the expectant mother. Figure 11 also required communication over the same Ravelry board, but it was decided that it would be knit in a round robin style where each person would knit a chevron stripe and then mail it to the next person until all the stripes were knit and it would be sent to the expectant mother. A third chevron stripe blanket for this project was also created in the same manner as Figure 11 in order to accommodate the number of willing participants. None of the knitters involved in the project, nor the expectant mother have ever met as a group in person. A few of the women have met in small groups from time to time, but for the most part the community was built online in a virtual craft space. Yet, the homosocial bonds between these women are as strong as the ones made in person. Through the forums on Ravelry they can not only talk about craft, but they can also talk about their personal lives. By sharing their joys and sorrows with each other along with their craft projects these women are able to build friendships.

Another way that community develops over forums like Ravelry is through community outreach. The forums are an excellent way to crowdsource for donations to charities. The community comes together to knit and crochet hats for newborns in the NICU, chemo caps for people going through cancer treatment, or even hats, gloves, scarves, etc. for the homeless. Then they are collected and distributed to the charities. A quick search for groups on Ravelry that are tagged charities comes up with 26 pages of results which isFig. 11 “Baby Blanket 2” courtesy of Wren Manderscheid

roughly just over 800 individual groups dedicated to some kind of charitable project. As Mary Smith notes in *Cranford* charity crafting plays a large role in the identity of the community of Amazons in Cranford. These connections show that community is an essential part of crafting as a whole. I mentioned that the crafting community is international. This is in part thanks to sites like Ravelry, but also due to the rise of vlogging (video blogging) which led to podcasts. A podcast is “a program (as of music or talk) made available in digital format for automatic download over the Internet” which was made widely popular by the users of Apple’s iPod (podcast). These podcasts can have different themes and one such theme is knitting or crocheting. The podcasters record or film themselves talking about the craft of their choice, uploads it to iTunes, YouTube, or Blip, and then audiences interested in that hobby can download or watch/listen live to the podcast. The typical anatomy of knitting podcast includes an administrative section where the podcaster talks about any details related to the show, a works in progress section that shows what projects they are currently working on, a finished objects section where they display any project that they have recently finished, and a section where they chat about their lives. This is the most basic formula; there are plenty of different variations and each podcast varies due to the podcaster’s individual personality. Podcasters often maintain blogs in association with their show as well as Ravelry groups where their following can interact with them over the forum or through personal messages. What is really interesting about craft-related podcast is the amount of community that gathers around them. Popular podcasts can have anywhere from 500 to 5,000 viewers across the globe! This means that isolated people who would not have access to crafting community in their location can now connect with other crafters through the Internet.
With the modern crafting community established, I would like to switch focus back to the question of agency, and hone in on another function of Ravelry: pattern publication. In Miss Marjoribanks, Rose Lake spends quite a bit of her time working on her designs. In Chapter Two, part of my argument is envisioning other work Rose could do besides teach at the School of Design. One of the avenues I imagine is her claiming some agency for herself by publishing her designs. In the modern craft dynamic it is an easy step to take because Ravelry allows designers to upload and sell their patterns to the crafting community. This is also possible on another platform called Craftsy, which I will talk about more in a moment in connection to Rose’s teaching. Today, all the designer has to do is assemble their pattern into a .PDF file format and then follow the instructions on the site to upload it into Ravelry’s pattern database and set a price. For designers, “the money from pattern sales goes directly to [their] PayPal account; if [they] sell more than $30/month in patterns, Ravelry charges a small fee based on the amount of money made from the patterns sold” (Ravelry). So for virtually no start-up cash, a crafter can upload a pattern to sell to other crafters via the Ravelry platform. The Craftsy platform also allows designers to upload their patterns for sale at no cost to the designer. The only fees incurred there are from the PayPal account attached to collect payments. Both sites offer plenty of support to a designer trying to get their patterns put up for sale. This is a far cry from the anonymity of pattern publication in the Victorian Period, and is one way that modern designers have been able to claim more agency than their Victorian counterparts.

As I mentioned before, Craftsy is also a teaching platform. They offer both free and paid classes in a wide variety of skills: knitting, crochet, sewing, jewelry, painting, drawing, photography, cooking, cake decoration, embroidery, quilting, paper crafts, gardening, and
woodworking. When assembled in a list like this it becomes easy to see the connection to many of the skills that were taught in the Victorian Period, some even at Schools of Design. Through new digital media, classes are available equally to people of all genders, but there is still a class component to being able to access them. In order to take these classes, it is suggested that the student watch on high-speed Internet. This means that the student has to be able afford high-speed Internet access and a computer (or tablet). This excludes people of a lower income bracket who cannot afford such luxury items. So while access due to gender has become much easier to receive, it is still integral to consider how being located in a certain economic class affects accessibility.

Investigating Rose Lake’s role as a teacher illuminates the tensions between her possible career paths. In Chapter Two, I argue that while Rose may want to be an artist, her gender situates her in craft. While access to education in the arts has evened out since the Victorian Period, unfortunately women’s representation in art is still problematic. A video published on Jan 24, 2014 by Tate’s social media department on YouTube discusses how women are still underrepresented in the Arts. The video is now part of a Khan Academy course called “A Brief History on Women in Art.” It hails the video as depicting “the changing role of female artists in a male dominated art world over the centuries” and that it “guides us through a history of women in art, exploring the ways in which they have been represented, underrepresented, and sometimes misrepresented” (Khan Academy). The disturbing statistic that Jemima Kirke uncovers in the video about modern art galleries is that women’s art comprises less than ten percent of the total art shown - and that is if the galleries

2 The Tate is an institution that houses the United Kingdom's national collection of British art, international modern, and contemporary art.
show any women’s art at all (Unlock Art: Where are the Women?). The goal of the video is
to highlight the gender disparity that still exists in art today. Women are still fighting a
difficult battle to have their work taken seriously. What the video does uncover is that
women turned to new forms of media (video, textiles, experimental art) and embraced the
crafts because they were areas where men did not participate as much. This illustrates that
there is still a gendered divide between arts and crafts.

In Chapter Three, I focused on Lucilla Marjoribanks’s role as a connoisseur, who
through her education acquires expertise in both the aesthetics of the Arts and Crafts
movement and in the arrangement of people at her Evenings. I would argue that today there
is less of a gendered divide between who can act as a connoisseur, but that it is a role that is
still largely tied to class. Like Lucilla, the connoisseur of today usually has to have money to
have access to the education and items that are worth having expertise about. I would suggest
that it is associated with the very rich or at the least the very upper echelon of the middle-
class, because the term has taken on a level of pretention in modern times. It is still a very
valuable skill to have in art, and is used to identify and properly attribute works of arts. It
also applies to more than just art in modernity; one can be a connoisseur of wine, cheese,
beer, or tea. In the late nineteenth century, the role of art historian becomes professionalized.
This causes a great level of tension between those who work as art historians and those who
lay claim to connoisseurship. What I find interesting is that with the Internet’s growth, people
with access have developed a desire to curate things. This desire has led to the success of a
website called Pinterest, where users can pin (save) photos to a pinboard (gallery) to save for
later. It is possible to set up different boards for different reasons (art, crafts, recipes, tips,
etc.). I feel that this behavior stems from roots in the Victorian Period and the role of the
connoisseur as one who had a refined sense of taste and understood complex aesthetic qualities of what was worth collecting.

Over the course of this project and my research in the shifting craft movements of the Victorian Period, I discovered that while they shaped the discourse of craft over two centuries ago their influence can still be felt in both art and craft today. By looking back to see how craft shaped identity, created homosocial bonds, and created or prevented opportunities of agency for women, it is possible to see how craft still does these things today. More importantly, I hope that this thesis has shown that there is still a lot of work to be done in matters of gender equality in the arts, and that craft is a worthy lens with which to uncover new and rich avenues to analyze literature through. This is especially true of Victorian literature where texts are richly laden with crafts and the aesthetics of the craft movements of their time. Again, I would like to thank Talia Schaffer for leading the way with her book *Novel Craft*. I hope that other scholars will pick up the torch and continue the work of creating scholarship about craft discourse. I, for one, am deeply enriched and honored to have followed her “paper pathway to the past” (Schaffer 191).
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