

*Special Issue:*

*Making Masculinity: Craft, Gender and Material Production in the Long Nineteenth Century*

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<1>Craft is a particularly complex term - referring to an interrelated set of practices, categories, and actions. As verb, noun, and adjective in its various forms, craft can denote the physical act of labour; a category of material production; or something judged to be of a certain level of quality. When used as a descriptor of creative practices, the word craft encompasses a broad range of material production, from ceramics, textiles and metalwork, which Glenn Adamson defines as “normative craft practices”, to fashion, design, and amateur practice (xv). At the same time, “craft” can stand as a synonym for how both things and people were “made”. This special issue of *Nineteenth-Century Gender Studies* identifies craft as a powerful lens through which to think about nineteenth-century gender and its construction, playing on the linguistic and semantic flexibility of craft and its many manifestations in order to better understand the complexities of nineteenth-century masculinity.

<2>Masculinity underwent significant change in the “long nineteenth century” (c.1789-1914), the period covered by this special issue (Begiato “Between Poise and Power”; Tosh; Myrone). This shift can be broadly characterised as a move from eighteenth-century masculinities rooted in polite behaviours and notions of civility, towards a “rougher, tougher and more taciturn” model of manliness as the nineteenth century progressed (Harvey, “Craftsmen in Common,” 69). As both lived experience and historical narratives attest, however, this was a time when numerous competing masculinities existed simultaneously. Nineteenth-century masculinity is accordingly perhaps best understood in terms of plurality, contrast and flux; with various models of sensibility, morality, authority, exemplarity, virtue and heroism, operating as part of the construction of manliness throughout the period under discussion.

<3>This special issue follows Karen Harvey’s assertion that the history of men as both consumers and producers of material objects should be more fully integrated into our general

understanding of such masculinities (“Craftsmen in Common,” 69). Each author’s contribution uses “craft” as a framework for understanding how its various forms were constructed and expressed in the nineteenth century. Specifically, the authors have focused on the relationship between craft and professional and public masculine identities, playing on craft’s malleable meanings (as outlined above) in order to examine how this relationship operated on both a literal and metaphorical level. Highlighting the role of craft within these outward-facing roles, we examine the reciprocity between the crafting of those public and occupational masculinities and contemporary visual and material culture. In so doing, the issue brings together essays examining this relationship in both Britain and Italy, and throughout the broader British Empire, between the late eighteenth and the early twentieth centuries.

<4>As such, the volume expands upon and offers nuance to traditional histories of nineteenth-century craft, which, as Adamson has identified, have tended to focus on the role of the craftsman, and indeed labour more broadly, in contradistinction to an increasingly mechanized world (2013). Both the industrial revolution in the early nineteenth-century, and the emerging Arts and Crafts movement in its second half, have been the focus of much of the work in this area, which has also centred on events such as the Great Exhibition and other international expositions, as well as figures such as John Ruskin (1819-1900) and William Morris (1834-1896). Although several articles in this issue (Harvey, Petiot) deal explicitly with this legacy, they shift the focus of existing scholarship away from a generalised account of industrialisation and its effects. Although, as Adamson outlines, the history of craft has traditionally been “understood as a tide of depersonalization,” as small workshops and craftspeople became unable to compete with the efficiency and power of mechanised production, these articles show that both individual and collective personal identities remained at the core of craft production throughout the nineteenth century (xiii).

<5>Our special issue also interrupts the traditional art historical narratives, focusing on the heroic male artist and privileging fine art over craft, which emerged in the eighteenth century. Domestic craft practices have traditionally been identified with the genre of polite accomplishments practiced by women. Indeed, in conduct literature written throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, such forms of cultural production are identified as the exclusive preserve of their female pursuants. From John Gregory’s *A Father’s Legacy to his Daughters* (1761) to Sarah Stickney Ellis’ *The Family Monitor and Domestic Guide* (1844), these texts presented such accomplishments as a skilled means of demonstrating femininity, gentility, and eligibility, in equal measure. The hierarchical separation of painting and sculpture from forms of cultural production such as needlework, paper cutting, shell work and wax modelling is a deeply gendered narrative of inclusion and exclusion. Feminist interventions within art historical scholarship have challenged the enduring preoccupation with the male genius and his masterpieces by explicitly calling out this division between ‘high art’ and craft practices as an explicitly gendered one. This work has often reintroduced the significance of craft, and its female practitioners, into histories of material production. As early as 1981, Griselda Pollock and Rozsika Parker argued that the “sex of the maker was as important a factor in the

development of the hierarchy of the arts as the division between art and craft on the basis of function, material, intellectual content and class,” in their foundational feminist text *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology* (51).

<6>This endeavour has found a particular ally in material culture studies. Unburdened by art historical divisions between the fine and decorative arts, high art and craft, a substantial literature on the relationship between women and material culture in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries has recently emerged, often dealing at length with women’s craft production (Daly Goggin & Fowkes Tobin). Despite this historiographical richness, the figure of the male crafter is noticeably absent from the history of nineteenth-century art and culture. This is particularly true in histories of the kinds of non-professional and private crafts with which women were traditionally associated. This omission is deliberate: although fine arts were certainly gendered as masculine pursuits, men engaged in all kinds of domestic craft practices throughout the long nineteenth century. Taking the production of scrap screens (a hugely popular pastime throughout the duration of the long nineteenth century, which involved the cutting out, arranging, and decoupage of printed materials onto a wooden screens) as an example, we know that Lord Byron, Beau Brummell, Charles Dickens, Sir Nevil Macready, and Hans Christian Andersen were all involved in the production of such objects. Yet these are conspicuously absent from histories of nineteenth-century craft, which, when practiced in the home, has historically been identified with women.

<7>Maya Wassell Smith’s article, “‘The fancy work what sailors make’: Material and emotional creative practice in masculine seafaring communities,” adds important nuance to the history of men’s production of what might traditionally be thought of as domestic craft. Examining “sailor-making” such as the production of canvas hammocks and cots, needlework and embroidery, and carved stay bones, Wassell Smith uses both surviving examples and written testimony to ask how such objects allowed sailors to exist between two emotional communities, the familial, at home, and his professional life, at sea. Drawing on work from the history of emotions and material culture studies, Wassell Smith’s article contributes to and expands upon the recent body of work that has become increasingly concerned with the cultural lives of sailors and soldiers. Demanding a reconsideration of the “cultural work” of men away from home, this body of literature prompts us to consider “connections between manliness, violence, emotional eloquence, tactile care, and domesticity” (Furneau 2).<sup>(1)</sup> Thomas William Wood’s [\*Portrait of Private Thomas Walker\*](#) (1856)—the cover image of Holly Furneau’s book *Military Men of Feeling: Emotion, Touch and Masculinity in Crimean War* (2016)—exemplifies the centrality of craft within these complex configurations of masculinity. Hand-making was essential to bridging physical and emotional distance whilst away at sea or at war, as well as to aiding recuperation upon return home. In line with the work of Furneau and others, Wassell Smith shows how such “domestic” crafts were central to both sailors’ personal relationships and their professional selves. Identifying acts of making, teaching and gift-giving as the central emotional transactions through which such crafts operated, the article reveals

how they allowed sailors to create and maintain their affective ties even during long periods away from home.

<8>Similarly useful for understanding the role of craft in creating contemporary collective masculine identities is Serena Dyer's article, "Masculinities, Wallpaper, and Crafting Domestic Space within the University, 1795-1914." The article focuses on the creation of a so-called "wallpaper sandwich," removed from the walls of Peterhouse College, at the University of Cambridge, and which now forms part of the collections of the Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture at Middlesex University. Formed from twelve layers of wallpaper mounted on the walls of a student room between the late eighteenth and the early twentieth centuries, the "sandwich" fittingly spans the period covered by this special issue almost exactly. Discussing the sandwich layer by layer, Dyer's article relates the decoration of such student spaces to contemporary notions of institutionality, domesticity, and sociable exchange.

<9>Employing a material culture studies framework to discuss the sandwich's various layers, Dyer's piece uses traditional formulations of "craft" to refer to a kind of creative consumption, arguing that the room's inhabitants' "consumer engagement with material culture acted as a means of crafting a sense of self-hood through domestic design." In so doing, Dyer's article works to collapse the traditional, and specifically gendered distinctions between consumption and production that have characterised the historiography of material culture (Harvey, "Craftsmen in Common," 75). This literature, as Margot Finn has argued, has tended to "promote the assumption that 'the sex of things' is predominantly female, that the history of gender and consumption in the modern period is primarily a history of women's experiences" (Finn, 134). Instead, by offering a model of consumption and production as complex, reciprocal and ongoing processes within the lifecycle of a single object or space—as in the object biographical approach adopted here—Dyer's article accordingly troubles the old adage that men produce and women consume (Styles & Vickery 4). In positing men not only as consumers of wallpaper, but as active producers, and indeed crafters, of their private spaces, shaped through a dialogue of consumption and production, Dyer's piece reinforces how object, space and self alike were crafted during this period.

<10>From interior decoration to domestic creative processes, craft sits provocatively at the interstices between the kinds of consumption and creative practice, in which women's participation has been well fleshed out. However, as Wassell Smith's and Dyer's articles demonstrate, using craft as a framework to examine such objects and practices allows for the identification of men's participation within such traditionally feminine pursuits, and of the ways in which these practices in turn shaped explicitly masculine identities. Nevertheless, men in this period were primarily identified with the forms of craft production practiced outside of the home, that is, in a professional, public setting, despite the art historical and historiographical associations between craft and femininity as outlined above. Craft in this formulation manifests itself in the idea of the "craftsman," or "artisan," that is, a skilled manual worker who makes or creates things by hand, to be sold. Here, craft is a complex and learned practice, something—to

use tellingly gendered language—that one can gain a mastery of through labour and experience.

<11>As Karen Harvey’s contribution to this special issue demonstrates, this kind of craftsmanship was an embodied one, intimately connected to male physicality. Following recent work on the history of embodied masculinity during this period (Begiato), and Harvey’s own previous configuration of body as “an instrument that performs socially or culturally constructed sexed or gendered identities” (“Men of Parts,” 801), Harvey’s article, “The end of craft? The force of embodied male labour in industrial manufacture in early-nineteenth century Sheffield and Birmingham,” focuses on a fascinating illustrated manuscript account of the production of Sheffield silver plate, written by Robert Michael Hirst between c.1820 and 1832. Describing the processes of silver-smithing in some detail, the manuscript showcases the skilled work of the craftsman and the value of his labour, while variously emphasising the changing configurations of his body – from a skilled and virtuous worker during his employment, to a damaged and broken figure at retirement.

<12>Here Harvey identifies craft as a complicating force that disrupts simplistic narratives of an iconic and heroic masculinity under threat from, and eventually eradicated by, the mechanization of labor. Harvey’s article therefore troubles an account of industrialisation where the figure of the craftsman is offered as heroic configuration of resistance, as in Tim Barringer’s presentation of the blacksmith and his representations as offering a “utopian fantasy of craft autonomy produced at precisely the historical moment when the last vestiges of that autonomy were being demolished” (177). Instead, Harvey’s article shows how this oppositional narrative—of craftsmen and their bodies read in contradistinction to machines—does not represent the full picture, particularly in the regional context of Sheffield. Rather, Harvey demonstrates how an examination of embodied male labour helps us to understand the creation of a masculinity simultaneously rooted in industrial practices and craft skills.

<13>This focus on men’s bodies, particularly considered in relation to increasingly mechanised forms of production, is also a feature of Aurélie Petiot’s article “Crafting Colonial Masculinity: Charles Robert Ashbee’s Educational Programme in Egypt and Jerusalem, 1917-1921.” Petiot focuses on Ashbee’s transplantation of the various educational programs that he established in his short-lived Guild and School of Handicraft (set up in 1888) in East London, and Chipping Camden in the Cotswolds, into the colonial settings of Egypt and Jerusalem in the early twentieth century. Petiot argues that Ashbee’s implementation of this craft-centred program was central to his creation of a new, transnational man. As men dominated both professionally practiced craft and the nineteenth-century imperial project, an examination of their convergence lends itself particularly well to a discussion of contemporary masculinities and their construction. Indeed, as Adamson argues, “craft was a crucial prop in the theater of imperialism” (xvi). This was certainly true for Ashbee, who used the institutional structures of craft to introduce, as Petiot sets out, a kind of “colonial reform” developed from the social improvements traditionally identified with participants of the Arts and Crafts movement (Zipf

2). Exemplifying Adamson's formulation of craft as conditioning "the relations between colonizer and colonized by framing the latter as static, trapped within tradition" (xvii), Ashbee's approach to Egypt's pre-industrial workshop system was one of "wishful medievalising" (Petiot <8>), in which he contrasted Egyptian craft production with Britain's own mechanization.

<14>Focusing initially on how this paternalistic and colonial understanding manifested in Ashbee's educational programmes, such as his conversion of the old cotton market in the southwest of Jerusalem into the Jerusalem Looms, Petiot's article situates this agenda in relation to the contemporaneous ideas of comradeship, citizenship, and homosociality, which were at the heart of his educational method, particularly in Egypt. This was a Ruskinian collapsing between private affections and economic relations (Adamson 209): employing the poet and philosopher Edward Carpenter's notion of "homogenic love," Ashbee's pedagogical programme was predicated on his close (albeit hierarchical) relationship with his students, which was further consolidated through group activities such as swimming. Relating to both physical and moral strength, these sporting activities accorded with the later nineteenth-century masculine ideal of "muscular Christianity", a specific formulation of the masculine body that conflated physical health with moral fiber (Putney). Outdoor exercise was also complemented by Ashbee's interests in theater and dress, all of which worked sympathetically with his use of craft to fashion these new men. Following Wilson Chacko Jacob's definition of masculinity as performed through everyday activities, Petiot's article therefore demonstrates how Ashbee used such practices to create a communal masculinity rooted in paternalistic imperialism (1).

<15>As in Harvey's article, the final two pieces of the special issue deal with the representational processes that connected craft and masculinity during this period, examining variously how literary and visual depictions of craft and the crafter functioned to make masculinity and vice versa. In accordance with John Tosh's configuration of masculinity as existing in relation to "visual metaphor" (3), Penelope Wickson's and Chloe Northrup's contributions provide new interpretations of male bodies and their depictions. Whereas scholars such as Barringer have laid out a narrowly-defined "critical iconography" (Barringer, *Men at Work* 1) of the labouring male body, focusing on dramatic visual representations of workers such as blacksmiths (Adamson 79-82; Solkin; Fox 428-433), Wickson and Northrup diversify notions of the relationship between craft and masculinity through their discussions of representations of female Italian textile workers and European men in the West Indies.

<16>Firstly, Wickson's article "Wearing His Heart on His Sleeve: Odoardo Borrani's *The Seamstresses of the Red Shirts* and the Cult of Garibaldi," examines the Italian Ottocento painter Odoardo Borrani's images of textile production as painted during a particularly volatile moment in the history of the Italian nation. Wickson focuses on Borrani's 1863 painting, *The Seamstresses of the Red Shirts*, which depicts a group of middling-class women who are shown sewing the red shirts that would become emblematic of Giuseppe Garibaldi's campaign to unite Northern and Southern Italy. Highlighting the visual complexity and referential sophistication of

Borrani's image, Wickson identifies reflexivity as a central visual strategy employed by the artist, arguing for the painting's self-conscious use of fragmented forms as central to its participation in the emergence of the Garibaldian cult.

<17>At the same time, Wickson interprets Borrani's image in the context of contemporary religious iconography and practices, such as the donation of votive offerings, in order to think about the painting's role in the construction of Garibaldi as a kind of secular saint. In common with Wassell Smith's article, Wickson highlights craft's role in creation of emotional communities. In so doing, the article places Borrani's painting in the context of the deliberately affective narrative that emerged around Garibaldi at this time, one rooted in the generation of a kind of civic emotion that was intimately tied to the viewing and making of objects and images. Indeed, as Wickson argues, Garibaldi's Christ-like suffering can be viewed in direct correlation with the craft practices employed by the painting's eponymous seamstresses, whose red cloth explicitly evoked the injuries sustained by the General at the important Battle of Aspromonte of 1862. Wickson's account, therefore, collapses boundaries between women's domestic occupations, such as needlework, and radical public actions, showing powerfully how practices often thought of as feminine constructed contemporary political, religious and national masculinities.

<18>Finally, Chloe Northrop's article "Satirical Prints and Imperial Masculinity: Johnny Newcome in the West Indies," examines the role of printed satirical images in the crafting of a particular kind of imperial masculinity. A "Johnny Newcome," was characterised as a hapless and miserable figure, newly arrived in the West Indies, and liable to engage in the licentious behaviour that was perceived to be endemic in this region in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. Following the extensive work done on the history (Burnard; Hall) and visual culture of the imperial Caribbean (Kriz; Barringer; Odumosu) during this period, Northrop expands upon these accounts to examine a suite of images created by the London-based satirists Abraham James and William Elmes, who produced prints featuring these "Johnny Newcomes" between 1803 to 1812. Beginning with an examination of the charges levelled at these new arrivals on Caribbean soil, Northrop situates the Newcome prints in relation to a number of contemporary concerns around imperial manliness, particularly regarding the "decadence and corruption coded as luxury, effeminacy, gluttony, racial degeneracy or sexual hybridity" identified by Burnard (192). As Northrop argues, the indulgence of such behaviours was in direct contrast with the models of masculinity that had become increasingly standardised throughout the eighteenth century, such as politeness, civility, and sexual and moral restraint.

<19>Such anxieties around morality and masculinity were consistently expressed through visual satire, with prints often focusing on interracial sexual interactions, a recurrent theme within the Johnny Newcome series of images. As Northrop demonstrates, fears over racial miscegenation were deeply rooted in contemporary political events, responding directly to the abolitionist movement and the perceived consequences for the imperial workforce. Providing a detailed

examination of the Johnny Newcome prints, Northrop situates these images in relation to this racially-charged climate of abolition and revolution that characterised the region at this time. Reading the prints against contemporary literary accounts, which charged planters as lazy, licentious and inherently corruptible, Northrop pays close attention to how these images visualised undesirable masculine qualities, crafting an iteration of imperial manliness that powerfully articulated British anxieties regarding its place in the world.

<20>Together, the articles included in this special issue demonstrate the utility and potential of craft as an interrogative framework for thinking about nineteenth-century masculinities. Although this issue has primarily focused on the role of craft in the creation of public masculine identities, such as those relating to occupation, status and political roles, its various articles nevertheless offer a dynamic and expansive notion of nineteenth-century craft, which complicates simple boundaries between public and private, home and abroad, production and consumption. The editors and contributors hope that this issue will enable new avenues of research to emerge around the terms masculinity and craft – prompting scholars to re-examine the objects, collections and the (gendered) personalities behind them.

#### Endnotes

(1)See also Joanne Begiato (Bailey) “Tears and the manly sailor in England, c.1760–1860.” *Journal for Maritime Research*, 17:2 (2015): pp. 117-133, doi:10.1080/21533369.2015.1094981([^](#))

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