
Carolyn Lesjak. *Working Fictions: A Genealogy of the Victorian Novel*.
Durham: Duke University Press, 2006. 270p.

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This study draws upon Carolyn Lesjak's wide reading on the relationship between labor and enjoyment in Victorian literature. Taking a fresh look at works by canonical novelists such as Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848), Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations* (1860-61) and Oscar Wilde's fin-de-siècle work *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), this research is concerned with asking the question "why do we unthinkingly take our pleasure separately from our work and what might this have to do with the Victorian novel?" Lesjak closely analyzes the selected texts, placing them in their historical and cultural context to reconceptualize Victorian literary history and to break down the complex relationship between literature and labor. Using a Foucauldian framework and his idea of genealogy analysis, Lesjak argues that the divide between pleasure and employment is both challenged and transformed during the nineteenth century.

Although the Victorian authors that Carolyn Lesjak analyzes have previously been studied in relation to the industrial novel, her research moves beyond simple repetition to examine selected narratives in relation to their absence of representations of work, undermining the glorified image of industrial progress that Victorian society relentlessly presented. Moreover, Lesjak states that any portrayal of the working classes would have created "an engagement with labor's overall problematic" and the promoting of social revolution: consequently, the Victorian novel is weary to address the realism of employment and, as such, industrial labor is unexpectedly peripheral in Victorian industrial texts.

Following on from a lucid introduction, Lesjak's work challenges Catherine Gallagher's analysis of the Victorian industrial novel in *The Industrial Reformation of Victorian Fiction*—with its argument that the tension between work and pleasure is resolved by placing them in serial relation to each other—to contend that the struggle to come to terms with the relationship between labor and pleasure, and the larger social implications, remains undecided in the Victorian period. Moreover, *Working Fictions* significantly argues that the connection between work and home, and the emergence of capitalism alongside the Victorian reorganization of social space, is key to understanding the intricate relationship between work and pleasure and the ever evolving meanings of the words throughout the period.

While the reader has much to gain from Lesjak's close literary analysis in *Working Fictions: A Genealogy of the Victorian Novel*, there is a feeling that her choice of texts—the genealogy moves from the industrial novel and its development in the

early-Victorian period to the late *Bildungsromane* of Dickens to the utopian novels and non-fiction of William Morris—lacks consistency. At times the study abruptly moves between different literary genres, authors, and time periods so that Lesjak's complex research is occasionally overshadowed. Nevertheless, Lesjak's clear and sophisticated style makes the work accessible across a wide audience to produce a significant contribution to nineteenth-century literary analysis. ✱