

### Gail Caskey Winkler. *Capricious Fancy: Draping and Curtaining the Historic Interior, 1800-1930*.

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Bates also demonstrates how uniforms became integral components of public and private rituals. Drawing on Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger's *The Invention of Tradition*, the author describes how nurses' capping ceremonies, replete with traditions such as processions and lighting candles are deeply connected with the construction of a larger professional nursing identity. Other informal rituals also played integral roles in the production of a nursing student's identity, such as "Rip Day," where fellow classmates, nurses, and doctors ripped a student's uniform, marking the lead-up to graduation when a student received a new uniform. Old uniforms were also desecrated by students dunking them in water or even burning them. These highly ritualized experiences helped to cement a student's identity as part of a larger nursing tradition that marked the transition from apprenticeship and schooling, to a fully trained nurse. However, this discussion raises questions about whether nurses in other Western countries participated in similar rituals. Are such nursing rituals unique to Canada? Such questions point to the possibility for future comparative studies that could shed further light on professional sartorial traditions.

*A Cultural History of the Nurse's Uniform* makes important contributions to the study of material culture through its examination of the relationship between nursing uniforms and the construction of professional identities. This book will be of particular interest to gender and labour scholars for the important contributions it makes to the history of women's work. Those interested in the history of medicine, education and professionalization in Canada will also find that this work is a valuable addition to the literature in these fields. However, the book's beautiful visual appeal, its accessible prose and its meticulous documentation of nurses' lives, education and work—including compelling first-hand accounts from these professionals—ensures that it will attract a broad cross section of readers to its pages, including nurses and other medical specialists. Ultimately, *A Cultural History of the Nurse's Uniform* reveals how sartorial transformations in nurses' uniforms both propelled and embodied critical changes in nursing's professionalization, and makes significant contributions to the study of material cultural history in this country.

## MEGHANN E. JACK

Review of

Winkler, Gail Caskey. 2013. *Capricious Fancy: Draping and Curtaining the Historic Interior, 1800–1930*. Foreword by Roger Moss. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Pp. 408, 293 colour illustrations, ISBN 9780812243222, \$85.00.

Perhaps the most memorable work of literature concerning curtains is Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* (1955 [1936]). Destitute and fearful of the future of her home in the wake of the Civil War, Scarlett O'Hara is desperate to attract Rhett Butler and his money. Though the once-proud plantation, Tara, is almost as ragged as Scarlett herself, it does retain Miss Ellen's moss green velvet curtains, or "po'teers"—plenty of fabric for a new dress to seduce Rhett. Indignant of Scarlett's scheme, Mammy declares: "Miss Ellen set gret sto' by dem po'teers an' Ah ain' 'tendin' ter have you muss dem up dat way.... Not outer Miss Ellen's po'teers is you gwine have a new dress" (545). Of course Scarlett gets her own way. But Mammy's protest speaks to the

significance of curtains as markers of gender, domesticity and social status. In the chaotic world of the Reconstruction Era, Miss Ellen's "po'teers" are one of few refinements left in the house. When the drapery goes, as Mammy maintains, so will domestic decorum and the O'Hara's grasp on the gentry class.

It is this power of "po'teers" that Gail Winkler explores in *Capricious Fancy: Draping and Curtaining the Historic Interior, 1800–1930*. Copiously illustrated, descriptive in context and commentary, the book positions the social and aesthetic place of drapery and curtaining in the historic domestic interiors of Great Britain, the Continent and America through the 19th and early 20th centuries. Drawing on trade

manuals and catalogues, pattern books, household compendia, magazines and other period texts on interior style and design, Winkler considers the influence of craftsmen, critics and reformers on the dissemination, consumption and evolution of curtain and drapery fashion across varying social classes and geographies. Historical source material is selected from the rich holdings of the Philadelphia Athenæum and the Samuel J. Dornsife interior design collection of the Victorian Society in America. Dornsife, a specialist in the restoration and re-creation of house interiors, was a prolific collector of historic design literature. Winkler's text serves as an expansive companion catalogue for Dornsife's collection, and is also the published form of her National Endowment for the Arts-sponsored exhibition on the history of draping and curtaining at the Philadelphia Athenæum.

*Capricious Fancy* arranges this source material into chronological chapters that span the decadence of early, mid- and late-19th-century domestic interiors, to the "great clean-up" of the early 20th century. A rather broad introductory essay on the meaning and evolution of curtaining and drapery since the industrial revolution contextualizes these four chapters. A useful glossary makes clear specialized terms encountered throughout the text. The book focuses on more than ninety examples of historical drapery and curtaining literature within the Dornsife and Athenæum collections. Each text is approached through the reproduction of selected illustrative plates and a short, descriptive essay. The abundant, vibrant plates are the most appealing aspect of Winkler's book, illustrating the textile treatment of not just windows but also bedsteads, doorways, mantelpieces and pianos. Many show complete images of interior room arrangements, and are as useful for their examples of period furniture and wallpaper as they are for textiles.

As any material culture book of worth should be, *Capricious Fancy* is visually rich: the illustrations pop from the glossy page and draw the reader in. The depth of detail contained in the illustrative plates makes reading a multi-layered, satisfying experience. Subtlety of pattern, colour selection, the particular landscape scene on a lace panel, the intentional fold and arrangement of fabric: a number of questions and observations can be drawn from this exercise in looking at

representations of interiors. Winkler's essays and image captions are observational in nature and helpful in pulling out these details in order to trace subtle change across time. This attention to the visual is very much in keeping with the nature of the design manuals themselves.

Winkler's accompanying commentaries on the sources are thorough. She relates biographical details about the author, positions the text in relation to other publications across time and region, and suggests the significance of the texts in terms of their influence on style, their longevity as a source of design inspiration, and their usefulness as primary texts for scholarly research. The first chapter explores sources from the Regency period (1800-1839). Most sources are French in origin, and an underlying theme throughout the book is the prominence of French designers within the draping and curtaining business. While émigré craftsmen spread French style ideas, illustrative design plates from manuals such as Pierre Antoine Ledoux de la Mésangère's *Meubles et objets de goût*, published in Paris from 1802-1835, were also reproduced in British and American publications. The French, Winkler implies, invented drapery, and their influence was most profound during this early period before Anglo-Victorian reformers like Pugin and Eastlake declared French drapes to be impractical and in "abominable taste."

In the second and third chapters, Winkler explores the democratization of curtaining in the mid- to late 19th century. *Godey's Lady's Book* (published 1830-1898) was "the most important vehicle through which middle-class American women learned about the latest fashions" during this period (p. 42). While many of the early source books featured in *Capricious Fancy* were intended for an audience of male tradesmen and their upper-class male customers, as the 19th century progressed, middle-class women increased their stake in the consumption of drapery and curtaining. Industrialization prompted new forms of popular literature that catered to new audiences of Victorian middle-class housewives. Improved transportation allowed these monthly journals to circulate among domestic subscribers, and mail-order purchasing made material goods more accessible in rural America. At the same time, household compendia and architectural stylebooks offered advice regarding the arrange-

ment of interior space. Texts like John Claudius Loudon's *An Encyclopedia of Cottage, Farm, and Villa Architecture and Furniture* (1833), Catharine and Harriet Beecher's *The American Woman's Home* (1869) and Clarence Cook's *The House Beautiful* (1878) emphasized domestic comfort through economy, practicality and simple, good taste. Women of more modest means could sew their own curtains, or learn how to stretch their budget to purchase the best fabric and arrangement for the least amount of money. Such texts, Winkler demonstrates, became new arbiters of style for the middle class, eager to rise in social status through the adornment of their parlour.

In the fourth chapter, Winkler chronicles how the "complex curtains, Turkish corners, walls papered in multiple patterns, and the clutter artfully arranged on every conceivable surface," that so characterized the Victorian era, "were swept away by the new fashion" (p. 246). The idea of "less is more" continued into the 20th century, and the Aesthetic Movement, Arts and Crafts, Art Nouveau and Art Deco styles preached a minimalist approach of "simple curtains without draperies" (156). New curtain types for new spaces—such as the bathtub—are included by Winkler in this chapter. Photographic plates of interiors emerge, and drawn design plates like those in Casimir Hermann Baer's *Fabrike Raumkunst Entwurfe moderner Kunstler* (1911) are more richly illustrated, so that this final chapter is the most visually pleasing.

Winkler, in the end, is exploring the question of who determines style. Or, rather, of where new ideas come from. Throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries, pattern books, trade manuals, household compendia and popular magazines were in the business of disseminating "appropriate" notions of style and taste in domestic interior adornment. Part of a global system, French designs influenced British tradesmen, and both British and French ideas were subsequently circulated throughout America. We should be cautious, however, in thinking that the styles, arrangements and reforms offered in these texts were replicated in the day-to-day

aesthetic choices of ordinary people in their ordinary domestic spaces. Such prescriptive literature reflects the ideals and taste preferences of certain individuals. Aesthetic choice is a complex process: ideas circulate through vernacular means and vernacular inspiration as much as print sources. Conservatism, and the conscious rejection of reform, is also a powerful influence. However, the professional design texts that Winkler explores are a rich source of data in an otherwise limited field. Interior textiles wear out, change in style, and are replaced much more quickly than exterior architectural detail. Drapery pattern books and manuals do offer, at least, a general sense of the stylistic preoccupations of their contemporary audiences.

*Capricious Fancy* is a useful resource for material culture researchers interested in domestic interiors. Museum and preservation professionals who are restoring historic house interiors or have drapery and curtains within their collections will also find this book valuable. Winkler's focus on showcasing the historical sources themselves through illustrative plate reproductions and accompanying descriptive essays make examples of period installations of drapery and other décor more accessible. Though a well-researched, academic publication, I did expect a more synthesized analysis of drapery and curtaining. Few material culture books seem able to achieve that desirable balance of analysis and visual imagery, and *Capricious Fancy* is essentially a reference volume. Winkler may have put her knowledge and the material she accessed to better use in writing an encyclopedia or practical sourcebook for drapery and curtaining, period by period, style by style. *Capricious Fancy* fulfills this idea in part—it is an excellent reference for historic publications concerning drapery and curtaining. But a guidebook with a broader scope that situates the materiality of drapes and curtains in stylistic type and era, and in an economical, quick-reference, easy-to-use format, would be a welcome resource.

## Reference

Mitchell, Margaret. 1955 [1936]. *Gone with the Wind*. New York: MacMillan.