

Home Economics



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In "Home Economics: Domestic Fraud in Victorian England," Rebecca Stern establishes fraud as a basic component of the Victorian popular imagination, key to its intimate, as well as corporate, systems of exchange. Although Victorian England is famous for revering the domestic realm as a sphere separate from the market and its concerns, actual households were hardly isolated havens of fiscal safety and innocence. Rather, the Victorian home was inevitably a marketplace, a site of purchase, exchange, and employment in which men and women hired or worked as servants, contracted marriages, managed children, and obtained furniture, clothing, food, and labor. Alongside the multiplication of joint-stock corporations and the rise of a credit-based economy, which dramatically increased fraud in the Victorian money market, the threat of swindling affected both actual household commerce and popular conceptions of ostensibly private, more emotive forms of exchange. Working with diverse primary material, including literature, legal cases, newspaper columns, illustrations, ballads, and pamphlets, Stern argues that the climate of fraud permeated Victorian popular ideologies about social transactions. Beyond providing a history of cases and categories of domestic deceit, Home Economics" illustrates the diverse means by which Victorian culture engaged with, refuted, celebrated, represented, and consumed swindling in familial and other household relationships.

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