Lisa H. Cooper offers new insight into the relationship of material practice and literary production in the Middle Ages by exploring the representation of craft labor in England from c. 1000–1483. She examines genres as diverse as the school-text, comic poem, spiritual allegory, and mirror for princes, and works by authors both well known (Chaucer, Lydgate, Caxton) and far less so. Whether they represent craft as profitable endeavor, learned skill, or degrading toil, the texts she reviews not only depict artisans as increasingly legitimate members of the body politic, but also deploy images of craft labor and its products to confront other complex issues, including the nature of authorship, the purpose of community, the structure of the household, the fate of the soul, and the scope of princely power.

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This series of critical books seeks to cover the whole area of literature written in
the major medieval languages – the main European vernaculars, and medieval
Latin and Greek – during the period c. 1100–1500. Its chief aim is to publish and
stimulate fresh scholarship and criticism on medieval literature, special emphasis
being placed on understanding major works of poetry, prose, and drama in relation
to the contemporary culture and learning which fostered them.
ARTISANS AND NARRATIVE CRAFT IN LATE MEDIEVAL ENGLAND

LISA H. COOPER
All these trust to their hands, and every one is wise to his own art. Without these a city is not built. And they shall not dwell, nor walk about therein, and they shall not go up into the assembly. Upon the judges’ seat they shall not sit, and the ordinance of judgment they shall not understand, neither shall they declare discipline and judgment, and they shall not be found where parables are spoken: But they shall strengthen the state of the world, and their prayer shall be in the work of their craft, applying their soul, and searching in the law of the most High.

Ecclesiasticus 38:35–39

And it is to wete that these crafty men and werkemen ben soveraynly proffytale unto the world. And wythout artificers and werkmen, the world myght not be governed.

William Caxton, *The Game and Playe of the Chess*, iii.2 (1483)
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Note on citations and quotations

Citations for all works quoted or cited have been made as briefly as possible in the endnotes; full references are to be found in the bibliography. The capitalization of some quoted matter has been silently changed as needed for syntax. All quotations from the Latin Bible are from *Biblia Sacra iuxta vulgatam versionem*, 3rd edn (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1983), with long passages punctuated as needed for sense; English translations are from *The Holy Bible: Translated from the Latin Vulgate* (Rockford, IL: Tan Books, 1989).
Abbreviations

*ChRev* The Chaucer Review

**EETS** Early English Text Society (o.s., Original Series, e.s., Extra Series, s.s., Supplementary Series)


**MLR** Modern Language Review


**SAC** Studies in the Age of Chaucer
