

## GASKELL'S DETOURS: HOW *MARY BARTON*, *RUTH*, AND *CRANFORD* REDEFINED "REDUNDANCY"

---

By Anna Fenton-Hathaway

WHEN THE 1851 CENSUS REPORTED AN "excess" of some half-million women in Britain, feminists and anti-feminists quickly took to the press to debate the implications of the demographic imbalance. Yet Victorian novelists also wishing to convey and alter the "Condition of England" experienced something of a quandary: How should fiction respond to news of the imbalance, and what options could be suggested for resolving it?

While anti-feminists such as W. R. Greg, a literary and social critic, argued notoriously that Britain's "surplus" women would never marry and should thus be thought socially "redundant," Elizabeth Gaskell sought to rethink and revalue the concept of "redundancy" itself.<sup>1</sup> In the three novels she wrote immediately before and after the 1851 census, two of which Greg reviewed, she contributed to the debates by incorporating – then increasingly defending – the idea of *literary* redundancy. Ingeniously, that is, she tackled the narrative equivalent of Greg's social pronouncements. First targeting the assumption that matrimony represented a triumphal point of narrative closure, a notion dating to the novel's earliest forms in the eighteenth century, Gaskell then challenged the related claim that episodes and plotlines should work concertedly toward that end.

To upend those assumptions, Gaskell briefly but significantly handed the reins of her narrative to older, unmarried women – figures that more conventional novels generally sidelined. The episodes that result from Gaskell's strategy enlarge the emotional scope of the story while slowing its progress. With these "detours," Gaskell reenacted the perceived crisis of "superfluity" in narrative terms, pitting the novel's excessive elements against critics' assumptions that a work of fiction should move incrementally and lineally toward closure in marriage. Her digressive stories, I will argue, strongly encouraged readers to rethink the concept of "redundancy" as a literary error and an alleged social ill.

Gaskell's first three novels were not just contemporaneous with the 1851 census, but also centrally concerned with it. *Mary Barton*, her first novel, appeared in 1848, three years earlier, but *Ruth* and *Cranford* were published in 1853, with the latter beginning serialization in 1851.<sup>2</sup> Considering the thematic concerns of each novel – unemployment and poverty; a "fallen" girl; and a community of "old maids," respectively – their relation to the "redundant

woman” crisis is plain. Reviewers including the Rev. W. Lucas Collins indicated as much. As the vicar counseled his young female readers, “If you ever live to be old maids, my dears (such a thing is really possible in these times) . . . you might be very glad to make a fourth at quadrille at Cranford” (424).

Collins’s avuncular concern was emblematic of broader attitudes toward “redundant women,” to which Gaskell herself was not wholly immune. In her correspondence, for example, she voiced concern about single women “deprived of their natural duties as wives & mothers,” and contrasted their fate with her own: “I am always glad and thankful to Him that I am a wife and a mother and that I am so happy in the performance of those clear and defined duties” (qtd. in Chapple and Pollard, eds. 118). Yet in her fiction – and in *Cranford* in particular – she repeatedly passed over “wives & mothers” to describe women who lived beyond or outside such roles. Rather than lamenting such unmarried subjects as unnatural or useless, she entertained the possibility that “redundancy” might not be so detrimental, either to “redundant women” or to society at large. To put the question in the terms of Gaskell’s fiction: While to some the Cranford ladies’ brief afternoon visits, with their strict timing and superficial talk, might epitomize “superfluosity,” couldn’t the same rituals just as easily represent contented sociability in good and enjoyable lives?

This question was especially pressing as judgmental claims about Britain’s “surplus” women became more pervasive. Greg, for one, imagined “redundant” women’s lives as “wretched and deteriorating, their minds narrowing and their hearts withering, because they have nothing to do, and none to love, cherish, and obey” (“Redundant” 436–37). Their pitifully “incomplete existence” corresponded, he thought, to the “superficial,” “partial” nature of women’s novels, and he mourned the rise of both (“Redundant” 436; “False” 108).<sup>3</sup> That curious specter of overabundant incompleteness took hold culturally in what Deborah Vlock calls the “repetitive, illogical, under-punctuated, and redundant monologues delivered by widows and spinsters in novels, in journals, and on the stage” (96). But how, as Gaskell wondered in her fiction, had “redundancy” as a concept come to be so roundly disparaged and so widely feared?

The answer lies in the mid-Victorian worship of the organic whole, and the optimal productivity promised by such an ideal. Marriage was thought to encapsulate this notion on an intimate scale, but nations were apparently subject to this logic, too. Greg aimed to restore national wholeness through excision, calling for the deportation of half a million women to the colonies. “We must restore by an emigration of women that natural proportion between the sexes in the old country and in the new ones,” he proclaimed (even though, he allowed, “it is not easy to convey a multitude of women across the Atlantic”) (“Redundant” 443–44). In “How to Provide for Superfluous Women” (1869), her powerful retort to Greg’s essay, feminist Jessie Boucherett firmly disputed the need for large-scale female emigration, envisioning instead a new national unity to be gained from incorporating women workers. Although ideologically opposed, Greg and Boucherett capitalized on the same demographic imbalance – and the imaginative opportunities that imbalance created – to make their claims. Moreover, both wanted to convert single women into “useful members of society” (Boucherett 45). Whether through exportation or employment, the object was to render the “redundant” population useful. In her fiction, by contrast, Gaskell dispensed with such standards altogether.

In *Mary Barton*, Gaskell exposed the exclusions on which both social and narrative “unity” depended. With *Ruth* and *Cranford*, she developed ways to include excluded

figures and stories – without reinstating the criteria that excluded them in the first place. Through older single women in *Ruth* and *Cranford*, she gave readers self-contained tales that diverged quite noticeably from the tone she adopts elsewhere in both novels. In neither case, however, do such detours advance the novel's plot.<sup>4</sup> Instead, such embedded (or, technically, *hypodiegetic*)<sup>5</sup> stories reinvest the reader's attention in narrative byways that appear "superfluous," thereby flouting contemporary edicts about tonal consistency and story-telling efficiency. Such digressions provide an indirect commentary on the "redundancy" debates. They also reveal the normative plots that underlie midcentury notions of "redundancy" and hint at the subtle, sometimes-explicit violence with which such norms were enforced.

\*

"I KNOW NOTHING OF POLITICAL ECONOMY," Gaskell famously proclaimed in her preface to *Mary Barton* (38). Yet critics have differed in their understanding of that disclaimer, and have addressed her Malthusian, "perverse," and political economies in interesting, productive ways.<sup>6</sup> My interest in *Mary Barton* lies in Gaskell's recognition and reaction to the literary pressures of "economy" – the imperative to cleave closely to the plot, to avoid digression, and to excise what Sir Walter Scott memorably called the "various prolixities and redundancies [that] . . . hang as a dead weight on the progress of the narrative" (141; ch. 1).<sup>7</sup>

It makes sense that "redundancy" proponents worshipped utility when we consider their thinking against the backdrop of nineteenth-century political economy. Many Victorians thought of "political economy" as "inseparable from Utilitarianism" – so much so, Richard Altick claims, that the former "often served as a further loose synonym" for the latter (120). The very premise of "female redundancy" – that women should be useful, as wives or as workers – relied on the same value system. What Gaskell shows us is how closely the orthodoxy of literary economy followed the same line of thought.

A purposeful, efficient literary "economy" was, in one sense, of the utmost importance to Victorian critics and authors. Catherine Gallagher has examined the rich commonalities between literature and political economy in nineteenth-century Britain, remarking that "the American New Critics, the Leavisites, [and] the Marxists" worked hard to obscure such connections (*Body* 1). According to Gallagher, more recent scholarship has unearthed that original kinship, "demonstrat[ing] that political economists and their literary antagonists had a great deal in common" (*Body* 2): over the nineteenth century, scientific premises about supply and demand; meaningful pleasure and instructive pain; and the "emotional and sensual feelings that are both causes and consequences of economic exertions" increasingly obtained in both literary and political thought (*Body* 3). The goal of such theories was to discover the most healthful, sustainable way to promote life. Doing so *efficiently* became the appointed aim for novelists and economists alike.

Suzanne Keen and Leah Price have separately investigated how broad consensus was reached on this matter. In accumulating substantial evidence of Victorians' "prescriptive models for representation," Keen shows that "the [midcentury] novelist stray[ed] from the path of straight-ahead narration at his own peril" (42; 55). For Keen, Trollope exemplifies that novelist at midcentury, for it was he, she claims, who internalized the proscription against narrative "straying" before enshrining the principle in his *Autobiography*. "There should be no episodes in a novel," he admonished there. "Every sentence, every word, through all those pages, should tend to the telling of the story" (237). In *The Anthology and the Rise of*

*the Novel*, Price confirms Victorian novelists' perceived obligation to "modern efficiency," noting that such a principle "forbids characters to waste on domestic politics, or writers to waste on epistolary narration, the time that both should be saving for 'earnest work'" (61).<sup>8</sup> "Digression," Price concludes, "becomes the textual equivalent of loitering" in the midcentury mindset (151).

While Keen charts Trollope's defensive reaction to the "hectoring" of a fictional critic, she argues that "in his contemporaries we find more positive formulations of . . . techniques that at once expand and fracture their fictional worlds" (62). Dickens, for example, is well known for drawing on such expansive, diffusive energy. In "Dickens and the Form of the Novel," to cite just one example, Nicola Bradbury asserts that the "proliferation of novelistic effects" in *Dombey and Son* (1848) "amounts to a multiple-personality disorder of the form" (160). Still, Bradbury is quick to add that such disorder seems highly "orchestrated" in the novel (160) – a qualifier underscoring a longstanding critical preference for consciously crafted plots.<sup>9</sup> Dickens himself was aware of that preference, nowhere more plainly than in his 1837 preface to *The Pickwick Papers*, the only one of his novels to feature several "incidental stories in deviant modes" (Bradbury 153). He wrote the preface in part to excuse such interpolations. According to him, the work's "detached desultory form of publication" made it "obvious that . . . no artfully interwoven or ingeniously complicated plot can with reason be expected" (xxxix-xl). Regardless of *Pickwick's* enormous popularity in serial form, Dickens's preface to the single-volume version reveals, as Norman Page puts it, a writer "conscious of the loose structure of the novel, and anxious to disarm criticism" (69).

Trollope took pains to unify his multiplotted novels tonally, exploring his subjects from a remarkably consistent authorial stance, but Dickens bound his stories together through strategically coincidental plotting and thematic resonance. After *Pickwick*, he carefully aligned tonal shifts with plot advancement, ensuring the "tighter form" of later novels with the use of "mems," a set of plans that guided him through the serialization process (Bradbury 157). Gaskell, in contrast to both novelists, developed an uneven and multivocal form that expanded her novels' tonal range *without* advancing their plots.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given Victorian resistance to such moves, Gaskell's unexpected alternations in tone and perspective were met with critical disappointment. That verdict focused on *Mary Barton*, whose varying narrative postures were widely seen as evidence of the author's immature skill and lack of focus – qualities appearing to confirm her "uncertainty" and "fundamental doubts about authority," in particular the authority of a woman writer commenting on public affairs (Hughes and Lund 35). Her "know-nothing" disclaimer at the start of the novel did nothing to assuage that impression, critics have since noted. As scholar Patsy Stoneman explains, "Most critical accounts of *Mary Barton* begin with the *a priori* assumption that it falls into a clear category of fiction, . . . which defines . . . its proper subject-matter – class relations – and its proper orientation – political and economic. The 'faults' which most critics identify stem from this assumption" (68).<sup>10</sup> Gaskell's objection notwithstanding, such critics assume that political economy must be the novel's focus, and proceed from there to "deplore the presence of 'extraneous factors' such as the love story and the murder plot" (Stoneman 68). A recurring allegation, the charge of extraneousness apparently cements Gaskell's narrative "failure." Yet in her subsequent novels *Ruth* and *Cranford*, as we'll see, Gaskell went on to investigate the premises on which such charges were based – specifically, those about a novel's proper scope – and found them wanting.

In *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction*, Gallagher, an outlier among Gaskell's critics, disputes the idea that her shifts in tone were purely inadvertent, recognizing the novelist's struggle with the principle of formal unity. In Gallagher's view, Gaskell did "not find a narrative form [in *Mary Barton*] that satisfactorily reveals the reality of working-class life" – but she did nonetheless "identify several conventional genres that hide the reality" (67). Yet even Gallagher ends up interpreting those varying narrative modes as an artistic failure: Gaskell's "criticism of false conventions" may be a worthy goal, she writes, but Gaskell ultimately "does not succeed in deflecting attention from the absence of a stable, self-assured narrative posture" (*Industrial* 67). What Gallagher counts a failure can, however, be seen in light of Gaskell's later fiction as a growing interest in the concept and judgment of "redundancy," both in narrative terms and as applied to single women.

\*\*

IN *MARY BARTON*, GASKELL APPEARS to realize that plots gain momentum at the expense of conventionally peripheral characters, and that stereotypical "redundant women" are particularly vulnerable to such plot-based culling. As the plot unfolds, two such figures, the "fallen" Aunt Esther and old Alice Wilson, grow increasingly estranged from the other characters as the plot picks up. In that way, Gaskell highlights how conventional versions of proper plotting tend to minimize interest in such characters, rather than allowing them to slow the story's pace or, indeed, to risk its advancement.

To convey Gaskell's gradual rejection of such thinking, we must first acknowledge that *Mary Barton* splits into two quite different sections. As one 1849 reviewer observed, "the close of it . . . seems to have been twisted out of shape" (Rev. of *Mary Barton*, *British Quarterly Review*).<sup>11</sup> Critic Stephen Gill extends the observation, arguing, "One feels the second part [of the novel] to be in quite a different and a lesser genre from the first" (21). In an 1859 letter to Gaskell, George Eliot hinted similarly, writing that "my feelings towards life and art had some affinity with the feelings which had inspired 'Cranford' and the earlier chapters of 'Mary Barton'" (qtd. in Easson, ed. 488; emphasis added).

In its slow-going, ethnographical opening half, the novel makes ample room for Alice, Jem Wilson's devout maiden aunt; she appears in most of the chapters in Volume 1, and two chapters are named for her ("Old Alice's History," ch. 4; "Old Alice's Bairn," ch. 12). She introduces the young Mary Barton to her new friend, Margaret; welcomes home her "foster-child," Will Wilson (194, ch. 12); and lovingly attends her nephews, the Wilson twins, as they succumb to a fatal illness. Her decline from prominence inversely follows the acceleration of the novel's plot. In almost the same chapter where the action gathers speed – moving briskly through Harry Carson's murder, Mary's desperate journey to Liverpool to secure Jem's alibi, and Jem's suspenseful trial – Alice becomes nostalgic, inert, and rendered senseless by a "paralytic stroke" (253; ch. 17). After this, her few appearances reveal her to be either comatose or hallucinating, and the same stock description sharpens the impression of stagnancy. In her post-stroke coma, for instance, Alice is said to lie

as before, without pain . . . but totally unconscious of all present circumstances, and absorbed in recollections of the days of her girlhood, which were vivid enough to take the place of reality to her. Still she talked of green fields, and still she spoke to the long-dead mother and sister, low-lying in

their graves this many a year, as if they were with her and about her, in the pleasant places where her youth had passed. (309; ch. 22)

Not until the adventures are finished and Jem's gripping trial is resolved does the old woman reappear: "They found Alice alive, and without pain. And that was all. A child of a few weeks old would have had more bodily strength; a child of a very few months old, more consciousness of what was passing before her" (405; ch. 33). Helpless, infantilized, and mentally isolated from her loved ones, Alice may indeed "imagine . . . herself once again in the happy, happy realms of childhood," but this mental transportation finds no support in the material realm, and it effectively removes her from the world of the novel (405).

Gaskell ultimately subordinates Alice's stagnated story to the novel's plot-driven portion, in a move she almost certainly would have rejected in her later novels. But such an outcome in *Mary Barton* was partly predictable; as Greg would later affirm, many viewed older single women as "*natural celibates*," ones "whose heart overflows with all benevolent emotions, but the character of whose affection is rather diffusive than concentrated – ideal old maids" ("Redundant" 439). Becoming a good deal more "diffusive" as the plot grows more "concentrated," the unemployed, unmarried Alice gradually diminishes from the reader's view, then quietly disappears altogether.

Esther, by contrast, posed a challenge to the reigning narrative wisdom, which held that "fallen" women should be feared but not heard.<sup>12</sup> Gaskell describes her as a "victim of temptation"; after she is seduced, then abandoned, by a relatively wealthy officer, Esther is left without means to raise their child, who subsequently dies of hunger (446; ch. 36). Already "ruined" when the novel opens, she has since turned to prostitution.

Yet even though she epitomizes Gaskell's concerns – poverty, limited work opportunities, inequality between rich and poor, and women's sexual vulnerability – Esther is routinely characterized as one of the novel's excessive elements. As Maria Edgeworth put it in an 1848 letter to Gaskell's cousin, Mary Holland: "I think that some of the Miserables might be left out. For instance Esther, who is no good & does no good to Mary or any body else – nor to the story" (qtd. in Easson, ed. 92). Akin to the pitiful deaths of the Wilson twins, whom one reviewer complained "might just as well have been left out," Esther was seen as neither altering nor raising the novel's emotional stakes (qtd. in Easson, ed. 112). In this perceived failure, we grasp the prevailing economical view of the novel, whereby scarcity confers value – but only so much narrative currency can be spent on tragedy. For many critics and readers, Esther exceeded the limit.

In their comments on the Wilson twins, Esther, and Gaskell's alleged "hankering after death scenes," Victorian reviewers criticized *Mary Barton* as too dark (qtd. in Easson, ed. 112). Still, even Gaskell's sunnier moments – most of which come at the end of the novel – also registered to them as false. Perhaps the most egregious example of narrative expediency is Gaskell's last-minute reprieve for Margaret, conveyed in the following vague fashion: "They've done something to Margaret to give her back her sight!" (*Mary Barton* 466; ch. 38). Discerning readers will also note that Gaskell dispatched Jem, Mary, and Mrs. Wilson to Canada, so closing *A Tale of Manchester Life* several thousand miles from the northern city. As an unsigned review in the *Economist* stated disappointedly, "the author has but little hope of a speedy realisation of that object [relief for the poor], for he [*sic*] has not been able to find any other means for securing the happiness of his [*sic*] hero and heroine, than of sending them to Canada, into voluntary banishment" (Rev. of *Mary Barton*, *Economist*



1337–38).<sup>13</sup> Edgeworth, too, perceived the flaw in both literary and social terms, dismissing Gaskell's conclusion as a novelistic pass-taking: "Hopelessness remains in the reader[']s worn out mind – No remedy proposed – But Emigration which is only an evasion, an escape not a remedy" (qtd. in Easson, ed. 89).<sup>14</sup>

Admittedly, *Mary Barton* offers no immediate, local remedy to the problems it illustrates so painstakingly; Gaskell left its solutions pointedly vague.<sup>15</sup> As the narrator offers weakly, "Many of the improvements now in practice in the system of employment in Manchester owe their origin to short earnest sentences spoken by [the mill owner] Mr Carson" (460; ch. 37). The narrator qualifies even this modest progress, adding hastily that many improvements were "yet to be carried into execution" (460). Shipping off the novel's surviving characters and promising unspecified reforms were clearly insufficient answers to the misery Gaskell had earlier depicted.

But Edgeworth was surely wrong to view the ending as an "escape." The conclusion suggests instead how narrow a solution emigration was, and what an inadequate answer it would be to *Britain's* crises – especially when the numbers discussed included half a million single women looking for work and a way to survive.

Consider Esther: neither Mr. Carson's reforms nor Jem and Mary's move to Canada are any help to *her*. Gaskell emphasizes this fact by having the young lovers, not the more worldly characters, mouth their naïve confidence in emigration. To Jem, Mary pleads, "Oh, bring her home, and we will love her so, we'll make her good" (463; ch. 38). Jem eagerly agrees that Esther "shall go to America with us: and we'll help her to get rid of her sins" (463).<sup>16</sup> But when Esther's dying figure appears at the window, her quick death cuts short Mary and Jem's unrealistic dreams, leaving untested (but implausible) the possibility that emigration could wipe clean a woman's moral slate and/or secure her place in a new society. Coupling Mary and Jem's hopes with their dramatic dashing, Gaskell implies that, for Esther at least, emigration and rehabilitation were solely theoretical – too belated and unsound to do any real good.<sup>17</sup>

The text of Esther's epitaph – "For He will not always chide, neither will He keep his anger for ever" – precedes a break before the novel's famous concluding passage: "I see a long low wooden house . . ." (465; ch. 38). That shift from third- to first-person perspective, combined with the extra line separating the two paragraphs, underscores how fully Jem and Mary's happy trajectory differs from Esther's. Hardly by chance, Gaskell carefully illustrates through both story and discourse how the "fallen" woman is expelled in the name of progress. Her next novel would scrutinize more closely the society and narrative form that were complicit in that expulsion.

\*\*\*

IN DESCRIBING A YOUNG GIRL'S SEDUCTION and her steady rehabilitation before her tragic death, *Ruth*, Gaskell's second published novel, raised many questions pertinent to the "redundancy" debates, centrally: Who is to blame for Ruth's "ruin"? Does the fault lie with her seducer, Bellingham; herself; or is it a tragedy of social circumstance? Commenting on the novel in his unsigned review essay "False Morality of Lady Novelists," Greg unsurprisingly absolved Bellingham of guilt. What is remarkable is that he foisted the blame for Ruth's demise on Gaskell herself.<sup>18</sup>

In Greg's words, Gaskell "first imagined a character as pure, pious, and unselfish as poet ever fancied, and described a lapse from chastity as faultless as such a fault can be; and then, with *damaging and unfaithful inconsistency*, [gave] in to the world's estimate . . . by assuming that the sin committed was of so deep a dye that only a life of atoning and enduring penitence could wipe it out" ("False" 166–67; emphasis added). Greg certainly struck at Gaskell's moral judgment, but he directed a greater blow at her artistry.<sup>19</sup> Echoing midcentury critiques of her artless inconsistency and presaging those to come, he concluded: "Mrs. Gaskell scarcely seems at one with herself in this matter" ("False" 166). Greg turned this last charge into a broader indictment of Gaskell's skill, but such attacks arguably steered her to continue in *Cranford* the experimentation she had begun in *Ruth*.<sup>20</sup> Taken as a series, *Mary Barton* and those two works increasingly disengage narrative worth from narrative utility, thereby exposing Gaskell's detractors' premises about a novel's proper economy.

While the controversy over *Ruth* focused primarily on the heroine's "fall" and its consequences, the characters and moments Gaskell imagined in juxtaposition to that central storyline deserve fresh attention. Vivid, digressive, and comic, the anti-marriage tale that is narrated by Sally, the Bensons' unmarried housekeeper, spans four pages without a single paragraph break. Its lavishness is part of the joke: "'I'm a rare hand at talking folks to sleep,'" she promises Ruth (138; ch. 16). For all its lightheartedness, Sally's hypodiegetic tale about her "sweethearts" thoroughly counters the version of single life that Greg and others insisted on depicting. To challenge the premise that single life axiomatically equates to loneliness, fallenness, or victimhood, that is, Gaskell added a "superfluous" level to the novel, and then relayed the pleasure and relief to be found therein. Such "superfluousness" punctures the story's tension and serves as a powerful antidote to harsh cultural judgments about moral and narrative economy.

Sally opens by listing the standard narratives available to storytellers, then quickly goes her own way. Addressing her exhausted young charge, she muses: "'Shall I tell thee a love story or a fairy story . . . or shall I tell you the dinner I once cooked, when Mr Harding, as was Miss Faith's sweetheart, came unlooked for, and we'd nought in the house but a neck of mutton, out of which I made seven dishes, all with a different name?'" (138).<sup>21</sup> The options are suggestive: Sally offers the two reigning plots of the day ("a love story or a fairy story") as mere iterations of the same conventional narrative. Her deft multiplication of the mutton, however – making "seven dishes" from one – is her answer to such conventional fare.

Rather than a tale of lost opportunity and regret (or even of sentimental reminiscence, like Alice's memories in *Mary Barton*), Sally's story marks a new tone in the novel. For one thing, it is meant to be funny: her original "sweetheart," John Rawson, is "shut up in a mad-house" the week after he proposes; though, Sally adds with a grin, "I remember, after I had turned forty, . . . I began to think [he] had perhaps not been so very mad" (138). She also merrily rejects a more viable suitor, Jeremiah Dixon, a former Methodist (or "Methodee," as she calls him), and, in doing so, demonstrates that a single life might not be a penance or a duty (as it is, respectively, for Ruth and Faith Benson), but rather a robust and healthy decision.

The scene opens at the Bensons' home on a Saturday night – "the busiest of all for servants," Sally remarks in exasperation (139; ch. 16):

At last he says, . . . "Sally! will you oblige me with your hand?" So I thought it were, maybe, Methodee fashion to pray hand in hand; . . . so says I, "Master Dixon, you shall have it, and welcome, if I may



just go and wash 'em first." But, says he, "My dear Sally, dirty or clean it's all the same to me, since I'm speaking in a figuring way. What I'm asking on my bended knees is, that you'd please be so kind as to be my wedded wife . . ." My word! I were up on my feet in an instant! It were odd now, weren't it? I never thought of taking the fellow, and getting married; for all, I'll not deny, I had been thinking it would be agreeable to be axed. But all at once, I couldn't abide the chap. . . . "Master Dixon, I'm obleeged to you for the compliment, and thank ye all the same, but I think I'd prefer a single life." (140; ch. 16)

When Dixon pushes the matter, ticking off the financial rewards of marriage and warning, "You may never have such a chance again," Sally offers a rebuke that completes the comic circle (141; ch. 16). She hauls out old Rawson to her aid: "'You're not the first chap as I've had down on his knees afore me, axing me to marry him'" (141). Dixon repeatedly threatens Sally with a curse of singleness ("You may live to repent this"; "I'll not be too hard upon ye, I'll give you another chance" [141]), and his insistence that she reconsider recalls the hilariously inflated self-assurance of Mr. Collins proposing to Elizabeth Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*.<sup>22</sup> But whereas Elizabeth eventually marries Darcy, Sally is truly happy remaining single.

While the literary echo accents the scene's humor, Sally's complaint resonates with the novel's larger theme of male power, irresponsibility, and selfishness. "[D]id you ever hear the like!" she sputters to Ruth. "But that is the way with all of them men, thinking so much of theirselves, and that it's but ask and have" (141). The poignant irony of telling Ruth such a thing is not lost on the reader.

A short framing episode reminds us of the strict value system from which Sally, with her expansive detour, has diverged. An early scene in the same chapter features Ruth's imperious employer, Mr. Bradshaw, fundamentally misreading Ruth's acts of thrift. As the narrator comments, the "love which dictated . . . [Ruth's] extreme simplicity and coarseness of attire, was taken for stiff, hard economy by Mr. Bradshaw, when he deigned to observe it. And economy by itself, without any soul or spirit in it to make it living and holy, was a great merit in his eyes" (133; ch. 15). Casting Bradshaw's soulless economy in narrative terms, Sally's decidedly uneconomical storytelling (and, by extrapolation, Gaskell's as well) figures as its more desirable alternative. That distinction sets up a frame of reference for Sally's story, pitting Bradshaw's "hard economy" against her lavish, lively expenditure.

Sally's embedded story and its frame have two effects worth stressing. First, in the embedded story itself, we see a version of female singleness rendered without reference to loneliness, inactivity, regret, or silent forbearance. Second, in its very nature the embedded story calls into question the economic and literary-critical aversion to "extraneous factors" and waste. We might recall here Trollope's prescription that "there should be no episodes in a novel" (*Autobiography* 237). *Cranford*, Gaskell's next-published novel, is composed of nothing else.

\*\*\*

A MALE CAPTAIN AND HIS DAUGHTERS ENTER Cranford's all-female society; a magician creates a sensation in the town; crimes are suspected; a modest fortune is lost; a long-lost brother returns home. These and several other small tales make up the novel's "plot," such as it is. As one critic aptly warns, "If we told you it contained a story, that would be

hardly true” (Rev. of *Cranford*, *Examiner* 467–68).<sup>23</sup> Yet just as *Mary Barton*’s genre shifts demonstrate how “redundancy” is constructed, and the digressive episode in *Ruth* appreciates such “redundancy” anew, so *Cranford*’s plotlessness arguably harbors a purpose.

As plots routinely give order and emphasis to a reader’s experience of a novel, they help indicate which characters might be glossed over (Alice; Esther) and which ones should not be (Mary Barton; Ruth). Almost inevitably, the marriage plot arranges these judgments around a protagonist’s marital prospects. But with its cast of apparently post-marital women and haphazard, non-sequential episodic structure, *Cranford* alters that configuration. Here, the relationships among unmarried women provide most of the narrative interest, in particular the relationship between the narrator, Mary Smith, and the women she describes. As critic Margaret Case Croskery notes insightfully, “desire is not the only structural paradigm for a narrative dynamic – novels rely on the sympathetic impulse as well . . . Normally, character and sympathy are subordinate to action and desire. *Cranford*, however, reverses that hierarchy” (217). In doing so, the novel draws attention to the conventions and mechanisms of plot itself – and the marriage plot in particular.

Gaskell’s “collection of sketches” (as the *Athenaeum*’s Henry Fothergill Chorley called the work [765]) takes the very population Greg denounced as “the source of . . . disorder” and imagines a new “order” for them. To do so, *Cranford* overturns the system whereby one narrative (“the plot”) defines and subordinates all others. Gaskell’s answer to the “redundancy” crisis, in short, is to imagine older single women’s lives as rich, narratable, and largely immune to the conventional plots in which they previously had been marginalized. In *Cranford*, that is, Gaskell formulates a comprehensive narrative rejoinder to the concept of “redundant women.”<sup>24</sup>

Her first step toward that end is to topple the equation of marital prospects with narrative attention. In “The Captain,” her second chapter, Gaskell’s narrator ventriloquizes the Victorian tendency to look to romance and marriage for narrative order. Recalling her return to Cranford after an absence, the narrator reports: “There had been neither births, deaths, nor marriages since I was there last” (20; ch. 2). Here the narrator acts as cipher for the typical reader, who has been taught to scan the text for just such events. Parodying that checklist through its excessive fulfillment, Gaskell supplies all three in the following few pages: Captain Brown dies, his daughter Jessie hastily marries, and, by the end of the chapter, Jessie’s daughter Flora is born. After this swift succession, the family largely disappears from the story, taking such conventional plotlines with them. In short, Gaskell teaches her reader, as Sally did Ruth, to forget the fairy stories and romances in favor of the more mundane, repetitive joys of a seven-course mutton dinner.

Absent the familiar narrative and marital markers, Mary Smith, *Cranford*’s narrator, must grapple with the “question of difference for single women” (Niles 295). Herself unmarried, Mary seems particularly attuned to Cranford’s smaller forms of difference, and takes care to accord each lady a detailed identity unrelated to marital status. Her portraits of the Cranfordians are indeed distinctive, and episodes abound with reminders of the ladies’ individuality, including reference to their “individual small economies” (51; ch. 5); “bugbear faults” (132; ch. 12); “pet apprehensions” (117; ch. 10); “individual fears” (117); and a sometimes troublesome wealth differential (7–8, ch. 1; 162–63, ch. 14). She conveys these factors and the small goings-on that disclose them with alternating ironic detachment and enthusiastic identification, and many critics see her as an ideal guide to Cranford.<sup>25</sup>

Yet Mary also marginalizes her subjects, and to some extent reiterates the judgmental, marriage-plot generalizations that Gaskell calls into question. These include stereotypes of the marriage-hungry spinster and the old woman embarrassingly aping her lost youth. As Talia Schaffer has ably shown, Mary's "loving relationship" with the subjects of *Cranford* "does not automatically make . . . [her] a reliable narrator" (224). Most egregiously, Mary wrongly "insists that Matty Jenkyns has a transparently simple emotional life, constructing Matty as an adorably dignified little companion who trots about" (224). As in *Mary Barton* and *Ruth*, however, Gaskell once more relies on hypodiegetic narration to expose that oversimplification. In the embedded story of "Poor Peter," Matty narrates her brother's exile with a profound, sensitive skill that cuts through Mary's comic, sometimes dismissive, mediation.

That episode also reinforces the novel's implication that plots are a threat to the Cranford ladies' way of life. Matty's account begins with Peter dressing up like Deborah, his unmarried sister, and adding one last wardrobe flourish before waltzing through town: "he made the pillow into a . . . little baby, with white long clothes" (64–65; ch. 6). As Matty explains, "It was only, as he told me afterwards, to make something to talk about in the town: he never thought about it as affecting Deborah" (65). Still, his plotting – concocting "something" that people can "talk about" – does of course affect Deborah, and its repercussions ripple through the entire family.

As Matty narrates it, the Rev. Jenkyns sees a crowd gathering near his house and assumes that the source of the attraction is his impressive flowerbed. Matty imagines that her father "walked slower, that they might have more time to admire. And he wondered if he could make out a sermon from the occasion, and thought, perhaps, that there was some relation between the rhododendrons and the lilies of the field. My poor father!" she exclaims suddenly, pulling up short the imaginative projection into her father's mind (65). Humorous and ironic when she pokes fun at her father's pride, Matty's abrupt solemnity seems to indicate her regret about such presumptuousness. As she reflects on his reaction to the prank, she admits that she cannot guess what he felt: "I tremble to think of it – he looked through the rails himself, and saw – I don't know what he thought he saw, but old Clare told me his face went quite gray-white with anger" (65). Acknowledging that her father's perspective is worth reconstructing, yet is ultimately unknowable, Matty models the sympathy and respect that a narrator is thought to owe her subject.

When he discovers the prank, Rev. Jenkyns rips off Peter's disguise, hurls the pillow at the assembled crowd, and then, "before all the people[,] lift[s] up his cane, and flog[s] Peter!" (65). The brutal beating prompts Peter to flee Cranford, effectively ejecting him from the story (at least temporarily). After describing the incident, Matty reverts to her earlier psychological mode, its sensitivity acquiring a new resonance in light of her brother's and father's callous actions. As she explains, Rev. Jenkyns realizes what he's done only after an excruciating search for his son, during which he and his wife suspect Peter might be dead. This realization is brought exquisitely to life by a daughter who was not privy to her parents' thoughts. The following narration is purely a product of Matty's sympathetic imagination, yet is implicitly endorsed as reality:

"Molly," said he [to Mrs. Jenkyns], "I did not think all this would happen." He looked into her face for comfort – her poor face, all wild and white; for neither she nor my father had dared to acknowledge – much less act upon – the terror that was in their hearts, lest Peter should have made away with

himself. My father saw no conscious look in his wife's hot, dreary eyes, and he missed the sympathy that she had always been ready to give him – strong man as he was; and at the dumb despair in her face, his tears began to flow. (67; ch. 6)

The passage is as poignantly rendered as Gaskell's best scenes in *Mary Barton* or *Ruth*. Matty's layered interpretation of her parents' emotional lives deftly expresses their unconscious looks, unacknowledged terror, and "dumb despair." Such insights give the lie to Matty's obtuseness, prompting the reader to honor the unexpected range and sensitivity of her perspective. Indeed, the passage itself exposes such misreading by detailing failures of sight, recognition, and voice.

The revelation that Matty is more than a comically "dignified little companion" has broad-ranging effects, including that it prompts readers to inquire: "Have we underestimated other apparently incidental characters as well?" In *The One vs. the Many*, Alex Woloch has investigated how nineteenth-century novels breed such questions, arguing that "disjunctions between story and discourse . . . facilitate the production of meaning, the production of significance" (41).<sup>26</sup> In the case of *Cranford*, the disjunction between what Mary narrates and what readers might glean grows wider when we consider how Mary treats the Cranford ladies' single status.

As Mary describes them, Cranford's "Amazons" (5; ch. 1) seem – against all odds – to suspect marriage around every corner. In her youth, for instance, the formidable Deborah Jenkyns pledges, out of duty to her father, "that if she had a hundred offers, she never would marry" (72; ch. 6) – an overblown pronouncement considering the eventual number of offers that she in fact receives (zero). Meanwhile, Miss Matty has a "sort of mysterious dread of men and matrimony" (33; ch. 3) and "both the Miss Jenkynses looked upon [their servant's] 'followers'" with "horror" (48; ch. 4). Of the group, the energetic Miss Pole is most voluble in her wariness of suitors – a caution that Mary shows to be utterly unnecessary. Miss Pole is quickest to imagine affairs "in the matrimonial line" (184; ch. 16) and, when such events seem certain, shares the news as if it were of grave public import. Treating the engagement of Lady Glenmire to Mr. Hoggins as if it were the harbinger of an epidemic, for example, she tells Matty that the news had come "so near that my heart stopped beating, when I heard of it" (136; ch. 12).

Mary punctures these unrealistic expectations with mocking humor, including by undercutting Miss Pole's purported disdain for marriage with asides detailing the latter's early pursuit of the Rev. Hayter (106; ch. 9) and designs on Peter Jenkyns (185; ch. 16). She is somewhat gentler in the case of Miss Matty, but still makes sure to convey that she perceived long before Matty did that the affections of the "Old Bachelor" Mr. Holbrook, Matty's one-time suitor, would thereafter remain permanently dormant (38; ch. 3). The humor in these passages comes at the expense of the marriage plot and its would-be heroines.

But the reader who grasps the lessons of the "Poor Peter" episode will read past such easy parody. If we look beyond Mary's mockery, each of these characters recognizes the difference between a fantastical romance plot and the substance of actual marriages. Miss Matty relaxes her strictures on Martha after her visit to Mr. Holbrook ("God forbid! . . . that I should grieve any young hearts," she exclaims, presumably thinking of her own young disappointment [50; ch. 4]), and even the severe and proper Deborah facilitates the marriage of the orphaned Jessie Brown after she sees it is in the girl's best interests (29; ch. 2). Setting aside her "dread," Matty "was almost coming round to think it a good thing" that Lady Glenmire

marry (149; ch. 13), and her about-face is in keeping with *Cranford*'s preference for the steady, unexciting persistence of its female community, as opposed to the transformations that accompany the typical marriage plot: "Now," she observes, "Lady Glenmire, instead of being tossed about, and wondering where she is to settle, will be certain of a home among pleasant and kind people, such as our good Miss Pole and Mrs Forrester" (149).

Executed without resorting to the marriage plot, Gaskell's complex treatment of the *Cranford* ladies is a revolutionary alternative to the sweeping assumptions that inhered in charges of "redundancy": that single women were individuated only through marriage; that without marriage, they must prove their "worth" through familiar channels such as charity or socially appropriate forms of work; and that such lives should only be narrated if framed as a prelude to a wedding.

By de-emphasizing plot in favor of episodes and focusing more on "redundant" women than young brides-to-be, Gaskell's *Cranford* successfully articulates narrative worth apart from, and in distinction to, the utilitarian premises of the "redundancy debates." No less a traditionalist than John Ruskin praised the approach: "I do not know when I have read a more finished little piece of study of human nature," he wrote Gaskell about *Cranford* – "Nor was I ever more sorry to come to a book's end" (qtd. in Easson, ed. 198). But his playful reprimand is telling. In urging her to write more, he avoids a request for more *plot*: "I can't think why you left off! You might have killed Miss Matty, as you're fond of killing nice people, and then gone on with Jessie's children, or made yourself an old lady – in time – it would have been lovely" (qtd. in Easson, ed. 198–99). Rather than defending these ladies' worth by their output, as Boucherett might have done, or trying to marry them off, as Greg would doubtless have counseled, Ruskin's urging shows that readers' interest can indeed be sustained merely by the author's "go[ing] on . . . in time."

### Conclusions

CLEARLY, GASKELL'S WORKS SHARE many of the concerns animating the "redundancy" debates, including an interest in emigration and the role and activities of single women. During those debates, "economy" was the dominant concept for discussing such matters – and one that gained ground as the basis for literary judgments, too. I have argued that Gaskell resisted the concept on both fronts – the formal or narratorial, and the marital. With her narrative detours, she mounted a challenge to the notion that novels must maximize efficiency, so breaking in important but overlooked ways from the stances of both feminists and anti-feminists over Victorian England's so-called "redundant women."

*Northwestern University*

### NOTES

I would like to thank Christopher Herbert and Jules Law for their advice on an early version of this essay. Christie Harner was also influential in helping me articulate my argument early on, and Christopher Lane deserves special thanks for his invaluable comments from start to finish.

1. Reflecting the terms' contestation in the debates, this essay refers occasionally to "surplus women," but more often to "redundant women" and "superfluous women," treating "redundant" and "superfluous"

as interchangeable. Literary references to the concept of excess, however, tended to be articulated in terms of “superfluosity.”

2. For a comprehensive account of how the Cranford “papers” became *Cranford*, see Recchio.
3. In “False Morality of Lady Novelists,” Greg grasped onto the troubling superabundance of “vast numbers of lady novelists,” a sum that he claimed “was unparalleled at any former epoch” (107–08).
4. In this way, Gaskell’s “detours” diverge from the episodes that Keen has called “narrative annexes”; one of the constitutive elements of those annexes is that they “are always consequential for the plot” (3).
5. As Herman explains, a “hypodiegetic narrative” is simply “a story within a story,” such as “Marlow’s tale about his trip to the Belgian Congo” in *Heart of Darkness* (292).
6. In “*Ruth’s* Perverse Economies: Women, Hoarding, and Expenditure,” for instance, Freeland compares the pressures of the sexual and moral systems in that novel. In “Malthusian Menopause: Aging and Sexuality in Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Cranford*,” Niles argues that the latter novel’s “Malthusian economy” reclaims for menopausal women a power they were denied in contemporaneous discourse on female sexuality and aging. And Mulvihill grapples with the nineteenth century’s changing conception of “economy,” contrasting Gaskell’s capacious “economies of living” in *Cranford* with the “specialized instrumentality” that the Victorian social sciences favored elsewhere (340; 339).
7. Price discusses this early-century quotation alongside its late-century echo by Mary Augusta Ward, who reflected disapprovingly on the “redundancy of Richardson’s style . . . dead to the delights of that earnest work for good” (qtd. in Price 59).
8. This holds true “not only for the Victorians, but for us,” Price observes (61).
9. For a sophisticated discussion about the criteria Victorian critics used to evaluate “plot,” see Schor.
10. Instead of reading Gaskell’s prefatory disclaimer as explicitly denying that assumption, Stoneman continues, critics have interpreted it as a “naïve acknowledgement of unfitness for the task she has undertaken” (68).
11. The anonymous review was published in February 1849 (qtd. in Easson, ed. 110).
12. Registering such harsh wisdom, Gaskell has Esther’s several impassioned warnings fall on deaf ears, including her rejected appeal to John Barton, her brother-in-law: “‘He would not listen to me; what can I do? He would not listen to me, and I wanted to warn him!’” (170).
13. Quoted in Easson, ed. 78.
14. The passage comes from an 1849 letter to Edgeworth’s half-sister, Honora Beaufort. In an 1848 letter to Mary Holland, Gaskell’s cousin, Edgeworth elaborated on this point: “All that can be done is to prevent the laborers from being made slaves and to deter the masters from becoming tyrants. Such a powerful writer as the author of *Mary Barton*” could have achieved this goal, she added, but “I doubt whether this has been effected by the present tale. *Emigration* is the only resource pointed out at the end of this Work, and this is only an escape from the evils, not a remedy nor any tendency to reparation or improvement” (qtd. in Easson, ed. 91). Edgeworth died in 1849.
15. For Gaskell’s recognition of this fact, see Easson, ed. 85.
16. The pair eventually settles in Canada, not the United States.
17. Michie discusses Gaskell’s skepticism about female emigration (91–92).
18. Reviewing *Ruth* alongside four other novels written by women in “False Morals of Lady Novelists,” Greg fretted that women writers, “whose experience of life is seldom wide and never deep,” were in their works promulgating “unsound and immoral doctrines” (108).
19. Others, however, did take aim at the novelist’s moral judgment. “Since this novel’s publication, critics have noticed that no sinner was ever more blameless and innocent than Gaskell’s *Ruth*,” observes Matus (113). “Why should she die?,” Charlotte Brontë demanded in an April 1852 letter to Gaskell: “Why are we to shut up the book weeping?” (qtd. in Easson, ed. 200). The outcry from Brontë and later critics arguably stemmed from a belief that *Ruth* had been heartlessly seduced, yet had repented and reformed as if her sin were at issue – and had *still* been sentenced to death at the novel’s end.
20. For an insightful account of these critiques, see Michie (108–10).



21. Faith Benson – an unmarried, middle-class fifty-seven-year-old – matches Greg's version of the "redundant woman" more closely than a domestic servant like Sally would, of course. Indeed, Faith's marital story follows one of Greg's explanations for "female redundancy": after turning away an offer for marriage out of familial duty, Faith did not receive another. Yet rather than fading into stereotypical obscurity, both Faith and Sally claim narrative space by telling stories. Indeed, Gaskell notably endows Faith with a self-proclaimed "talent for fiction" (*Ruth* 126).
22. See vol. 1, ch. 19.
23. Qtd. in Easson, ed. 195.
24. The publication history of *Cranford* has much to do with this narrative accomplishment, writes Ingham, for it was "not originally written as a novel. It had its genesis in a series of eight episodes about the imaginary village of Cranford," and these episodes "appeared at irregular intervals in Dickens's periodical *Household Words*" ("Note" xxxiv).
25. See Croskery; Ingham, "Introduction" (xix-xx).
26. Woloch asserts that this "dialectical tension" between the "formed distribution of attention within the discourse and the potential patterning of distribution within the story" is fundamental to all literary narratives, but that it "takes a particularly acute and meaningful form in the nineteenth-century realist novel" (41).

### WORKS CITED

- Altick, Richard D. *Victorian People and Ideas*. New York: Norton, 1973.
- Austen, Jane. *Pride and Prejudice*. Ed. Vivien Jones. London: Penguin, 2003.
- Boucherett, Jessie. "How to Provide for Superfluous Women." *Woman's Work and Woman's Culture: A Series of Essays*. Ed. Josephine Butler. London: Macmillan, 1869. *Google Books*. Web. 1 May 2012.
- Bradbury, Nicola. "Dickens and the Form of the Novel." *The Cambridge Companion to Charles Dickens*. Ed. John O. Jordan. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001. 152–66.
- Chapple, J. A. V., and Arthur Pollard, eds. *The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1966.
- Chorley, Henry Fothergill. Rev. of *Cranford*. *Athenaeum* (25 June 1853): 765. Rpt. in Easson, ed. 194–95.
- Collins, W. Lucas. "A Few Words on Social Philosophy." *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 83 (April 1858): 416–27. *The Online Books Page*. Web. 1 May 2012.
- Rev. of *Cranford*. *Examiner* (23 July 1853): 467–68. Rpt. in Easson, ed. 195–97.
- Croskery, Margaret Case. "Mothers without Children, Unity without Plot: *Cranford's* Radical Charm." *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 52.2 (Sept. 1997): 198–220.
- Dickens, Charles. *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club*. 2 vols. London: Macmillan, 1886. *Google Books*. Web. 25 May 2013.
- Easson, Angus, ed. *Elizabeth Gaskell: The Critical Heritage*. London: Routledge, 1991.
- Freeland, Natalka. "Ruth's Perverse Economies: Women, Hoarding, and Expenditure." *English Literary History* 70.1 (Spring 2003): 197–221.
- Gallagher, Catherine. *The Body Economic: Life, Death, and Sensation in Political Economy and the Victorian Novel*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2006.
- . *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction: Social Discourse and Narrative Form 1832–1867*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1988.
- Gaskell, Elizabeth. *Cranford*. Ed. Patricia Ingham. London: Penguin, 2005.
- . *Mary Barton: A Tale of Manchester Life*. Ed. Stephen Gill. London: Penguin, 1985.
- . *Ruth*. Ed. Angus Easson. London: Penguin, 1997.
- Gill, Stephen. "Introduction." *Mary Barton*. By Elizabeth Gaskell. 9–28.
- Greg, W. R. "False Morality of Lady Novelists." *National Review* 8 (January 1859): 144–67. Rpt. in *Literary and Social Judgments*. Vol. 1. Trübner, 1877. *HathiTrust Digital Library*. Web. 1 May 2012.
- . "Why Are Women Redundant?" *National Review* 14 (April 1862): 434–60. *Google Books*. Web. 1 May 2012.

- Herman, David, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007.
- Hughes, Linda K., and Michael Lund. *Victorian Publishing and Mrs. Gaskell's Work*. Charlottesville: U of Virginia P, 1999.
- Ingham, Patricia. "Introduction." *Cranford*. By Elizabeth Gaskell. xiii–xxx.
- . Note on the Text. *Cranford*. By Elizabeth Gaskell. xxxiv–xxxviii.
- Keen, Suzanne. *Victorian Renovations of the Novel: Narrative Annexes and the Boundaries of Representation*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998.
- Rev. of *Mary Barton*. *British Quarterly Review* 9 (1 February 1849): 117–36. Rpt. in Easson, ed. 102–18.
- Rev. of *Mary Barton*. *Economist* 6 (25 November 1848): 1337–38. Rpt. in Easson, ed. 77–78.
- Matus, Jill L. *Unstable Bodies: Victorian Representations of Sexuality and Maternity*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1995.
- Michie, Elsie. *Outside the Pale: Cultural Exclusion, Gender Difference, and the Victorian Woman Writer*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1993.
- Mulvihill, James. "Economies of Living in Mrs. Gaskell's *Cranford*." *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 50.3 (December 1995): 337–56.
- Niles, Lisa. "Malthusian Menopause: Aging and Sexuality in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Cranford*." *Victorian Literature and Culture* 33.1 (2005): 293–310.
- Page, Norman. *A Dickens Companion*. New York: Schocken Books, 1984.
- Price, Leah. *The Anthology and the Rise of the Novel: From Richardson to George Eliot*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000.
- Recchio, Thomas. *Elizabeth Gaskell's "Cranford": A Publication History*. Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2009.
- Schaffer, Talia. "Craft, Authorial Anxiety, and 'The Cranford Papers.'" *Victorian Periodicals Review* 38.2 (Summer 2005): 222–39.
- Schor, Hilary. "Dickens and Plot." *Palgrave Advances in Dickens Studies*. Ed. John Bowen and Robert L. Patten. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2006. 90–111.
- Scott, Sir Walter. *Redgauntlet*. Oxford and New York: Oxford World's Classics, 1998. *Amazon*. Web. 1 May 2012.
- Stoneman, Patsy. *Elizabeth Gaskell*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1987. *Google Books*. Web. 1 May 2012.
- Trollope, Anthony. *An Autobiography*. Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 1999.
- Vlock, Deborah. *Dickens, Novel Reading, and the Victorian Popular Theatre*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998.
- Woloch, Alex. *The One vs. the Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2003.