# Adapting Gaskell

# Adapting Gaskell:
# Screen and Stage Versions
# of Elizabeth Gaskell's Fiction

Edited by

Loredana Salis

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The idea for a volume dedicated to adaptations of Elizabeth Gaskell's work first came to me in March 2011. At the time, I was on a ten-day teaching exchange program at the University of Ulster, campus of Coleraine, where I had been a student in the past, and where I was to deliver a few lectures on Victorian literature to undergraduate students of English. Gaskell's *North and South* was to be the main focus of my addresses, and on one occasion I planned to screen the 2004 version of that novel by the BBC. Katherine Byrne, their lecturer, joined me for that class and took part in the discussion with the students. Later that day, I invited Kate to contribute to a volume of which I was going to be the editor. Mine was not a formal, academic approach, but it worked nevertheless, as she accepted with no hesitation. The same occurred with the other scholars involved in this project, whom I approached shortly afterwards and in a more or less casual manner. To my surprise (and huge delight), they all took up the challenge, showing, from the start, great interest and devotion. Being their editor was never a hard task for me, and this I am bound to acknowledge especially in this context.

Coleraine was where this book was first conceived and it was also there and then that I decided that I would dedicate it to a special, dear person, Bob Welch, and to his son Egan, who had died in 2007. Bob passed away earlier this year; I like to think that he has gone to the place where Egan is. This is in memory of them.

Loredana Salis

# FOREWORD

Elizabeth Gaskell has been accorded her due place among writers of literature in English only in recent years. Things appear to have changed significantly for her towards the end of the past century, in fact, and she has now and finally reached a central position in the British canon. This is well reflected in the approval of both academics and readers worldwide, and, symbolically it is confirmed by the fact that a window panel is dedicated to her among writers in the Poets' Corner at Westminster Abbey. Such an achievement, the attainment of what may be termed as literary celebrity, both at home and abroad, has various reasons, which will be discussed at length and from different perspectives in the seven chapters of this collection.

The relatively recent recognition of Gaskell's literary status from scholars as well as people working outside academe, but with an interest of some sort in her work, is inextricably linked to the emergence, production, and circulation of numerous TV and theatre adaptions of her fiction. Following her success on screen and stage, the need to make Gaskell's stories accessible also to non-Anglophone readers has consequently resulted in the translation of her major works into other languages; meanwhile, back home, in her native Knutsford and her adoptive Manchester, the heritage tourism market has also developed significantly around her literary persona. This volume investigates the enduring appeal of Elizabeth Gaskell's life and works and how this is attested by the reworking of some of her stories for TV and theatre productions, mainly in the UK, but also in the USA. Scholars and practitioners contributing to this collection present their valuable insights into Gaskell's worlds, and thereby demonstrate that, though her stories are rooted in Victorian culture and values, they can be, in fact, they *are* also well at home in our present time and with contemporary audiences worldwide. The critical paradigm followed here is essentially analogical as opposed to categorical; it explores and focuses on the prolific and effective interaction between visual and verbal forms of representation, and the extent to which one's knowledge of a medium can contribute to the analysis of another. Adaptations are seen like metaphors looking back to their source text as a way of remaining faithful to it while at the same time

allowing translators/adapters the possibility to reinterpret and innovate Gaskell's texts.[1].

The adaptation or transposition of canonical texts is the staple of much modern and contemporary literature: standing on the shoulders of giants, writers have traditionally emulated, imitated or copied their predecessors. In this respect, Amedeo Quondam's observations on plagiarism in classical and modern literature equally apply to the work of contemporary cultural operators adapting Gaskell. The Italian classicist recalls Seneca's letter to Lucilius in which the Roman writer insists on the moral obligation to imitate bees – "apes debemus imitari" – a notion that has since extended from ethics to aesthetics, and thereby been used to explore modes and aims of creativity in literature. In other words, writers *must* do as bees do, and like them they ought to gather the best from the 'flowers' they pluck (namely, the literature they read). Once this has been done, writers should make the most of their experience and creatively turn it into something different, a new type of food for the mind which is as good and nourishing as honey is for the body. The practice of plagiarism can be seen under a different light, indeed it becomes necessary for the artist whose work has a responsibility towards the past and tradition, while also seeking to address and please contemporary audiences.[2]

The "apes debemus imitare" approach rethinks adaptation work as the carrier of good values which ought to be preserved; it also repositions the cultural value of new versions of canonical texts in the face of post-structural and postmodern theories on authorship, originality and the capacity for language to be a viable means of expression of human experience. These are on-going debates in our day and age, especially among academics and artists, who constantly address the question of the persistence of myths, as well as the necessity and use of intersemiotic and intrasemiotic translations. Thus, it is one of the objectives of this study to participate in current discussions on the validity, the significance and the politics of representation in adapted texts. Each chapter presented here explores and seeks to assess the work of contemporary authors and how these mediate between our past, the canon, and present audiences. More specifically, it looks at the way in which some stories by Elizabeth Gaskell have been rewritten for theatre and television productions, and what the outcomes of extant adaptations are. It should be noted that for clarity and for simplification reasons, the terms 'adaptation', 'transposition', 'version', 'reworking', 'recasting' are used interchangeably in the various chapters, unless otherwise stated, and they indicate film and theatre forms of representation of Gaskell's fiction.

The first two chapters introduce the cultural and literary context in which Gaskell began her career as a writer and where she became attentive to the requirements of the fast growing and always changing literary market and public. Chapter One charts Elizabeth Gaskell's reputation and gradual professionalization as a literary author and how these aspects have been exploited by publishers and adaptors of her work. Gaskell's history as a writer runs parallel to the history of publishing in mid-nineteenth century England: Alan Shelston relates the communications revolution and the development of Victorian publishing to show how the availability of a faster and more efficient postal service helped facilitate contact between writers and publishers. In Gaskell's case, this relationship became at times personal and problematic. Dickens, for instance, determined the publishing history of *North and South*, which first appeared in serialised form in *Household Words*, and certainly suffered from the editor's frequent advice on matters such as its title and narrative development. The same holds true for *Cranford* and other pieces which Gaskell published for Dickens, so that the initial dispute gradually led to a fracture between the writer and her editor. This was a rupture that would have probably occurred sooner or later however, since Gaskell's career was to reach a turning point in the late 1850s, when she turned from popular and exclusive fiction to 'a more leisured middle-class readership'. Special attention is devoted to the use of illustrations as these appeared in the various editions of Gaskell's work: these, as Shelston argues, are to be seen as adaptations proper, since they propose and represent interpretations of the text in their own right. Furthermore, Gaskell's place in the publishing arena of the time shows her entrepreneurial skills; it reflects her work's openness to adjustment, and this is a crucial aspect for our understanding of the adaptability of her novels and stories for theatre and TV–the fact that new versions are 'the ultimate expression of a process' and they can easily adapt to new audiences with priorities of their own.

Gaskell's literary reputation and the author's multiple identities–a 'great number of mes', which include an (un)intellectual writer as well as a social, a feminist, and a canonical Victorian novelist are the focus of Raffaella Antinucci's investigation in the following chapter. Gaskell's complex, fascinating personality are unveiled here through an in-depth analysis of the long process of revision which has characterised both the writer's work and her public profile. Changing perceptions of her have shaped the perception of her work, and thus they help to explain the reception of Gaskell's fiction across time. Antinucci begins by providing a meticulous evaluation of the nature and content of academic work produced both in the UK and overseas as waves of popularity and oblivion

of Gaskell followed one another; she then concentrates on the criticism published from the 1950s onwards. This careful excursus takes into account the crucial roles of the Gaskell Society, on the one hand, and, on the other, of the BBC in the refashioning of Gaskell's literary persona. Academic and non-academic works have subsequently and mutually influenced one another, and this has led to the demand for and dissemination of new editions and new translations of Gaskell's novels, along with criticism spreading through disparate fields of research and a host of commemorating events and special publications to mark the bicentenary of the writer's birth in 2010. All of this has converged in her formal canonization that year, when a dedicated window panel was added to the Poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey. The history of Gaskell's reception and her aptness to appropriation and adaption suggest that new readings of her work will inevitably continue to be proposed.

The adaptability of Gaskell's work is central to Thomas Recchio's analysis in Chapter Three, which considers the sparse history and scholarship of stage and screen versions of *Mary Barton*[3] before it proceeds to explore how the fear of class violence and the exploitation of sensational, personal violence is reproduced in stage adaptations of Gaskell's debut novel. Changes in representation reflect changes in Gaskell's priorities, so that here too the shift from working-class to middle-class entertainment is seen as pivotal to the reworking of Gaskell's tale of Manchester life for the stage. Recchio addresses the gap in scholarship by tracing a history of dramatizations of *Mary Barton* which includes literal adaptations as well as 'adaptations in disguise'. The latter were produced both during Gaskell's lifetime and after, up to the celebrated stage version by Rona Munro in 2006 (Royal Exchange Theatre, Manchester) which provided a visual and vocal memory of the past as it echoed the effects of economic austerity for the needy and helpless people of the day. The uneven history of televised versions of *Mary Barton* is Recchio's focus in the second part of his study, which highlights current, often insurmountable obstacles for scholars who wish to do research on this topic and have to face the unavailability of material apparently gone missing or partially accessible. A new film adaptation is now needed which recreates that sense of community and of shared humanity at the heart of Gaskell's first novel.

The BBC has played a crucial role in the emergence and development of period drama. An important vehicle of culture, the British national television company has contributed to introducing contemporary audiences to the work of Elizabeth Gaskell and thus to reinstate her value as a creative writer. These aspects are investigated in Chapter Four, which

reflects upon the cultural impact of works reinterpreted and with a particular agenda in mind. Brenda McKay argues that literature is often used as a template for good manners and in the most unlikely places such as the American mid-west, for instance, and her native South Africa, but also any culture which has looked at English literature as a linguistic model and has been inspired by its depiction of a social etiquette for young ladies. Adaptations also reflect nostalgia of a fading or idealised past. In this respect, the use of 'received English' by the BBC was crucial to early televised versions of classical literary works. The 1972 adaptation of *Cranford* by Michael Vosey is thus read against the backdrop of a proliferous decade, the 1970s, which saw the flowering of dramatizations of fiction by Austen, Dickens, the Brönte s, George Eliot alongside Dostoevsky, Balzac, Flaubert, Henry James and Sartre. Largely conservative and dated, Vosey's *Cranford* is nevertheless defined as a radical, modern symbol: compelling in its attempt to relate nineteenth-century culture to twentieth-century analogous issues, the film deals with gender issues such as sexual liberation and cross dressing, all of which can be found, though obliquely at times, on the page, but find their place also on the screen where Gaskell's all-female community is given a more optimistic representation.

In 1999, the BBC presented a dramatized version of *Wives and Daughters*, largely considered to be Gaskell's greatest literary achievement. In Chapter Five Katherine Byrne argues that the production contributed to saving Elizabeth Gaskell from popular, if not literary, obscurity and certainly paved the way for later adaptations of *North and South* and *Cranford* by the BBC, and also for the creation of a Gaskell industry in recent years. A distinctive trait of the 1999 production of *Wives and Daughters* (the second BBC version of that novel) is its contemporariness, and the pursuit of a modern relevance for Gaskell's plot. The BBC authors focussed on the changing nature of family life following remarriage, and the negotiation of the complicated parent-child and sibling relationships. Anxiety about sexuality is pervasive and the family is seen as a preferable alternative. Byrne maintains that his adaptation expands and foregrounds Gaskell's suggestion that the really important love stories are between family members as she further explores the adaptation's feminist agenda, thereby suggesting how movement and freedom are made explicit and visually contrasted to confinement and domesticity. Unlike the novel, the film reinterprets the female protagonist as a post-feminist heroine who finally exchanges the claustrophobia of provincial life for travel, and unlike conventional heritage drama, the 1999 BBC *Wives and Daughters*

does not see marriage as the only reward for its heroine, but one of many options for a woman who finally sets off towards modernity.

Chapters Six and Seven are both dedicated to the adaptation of *North and South*, first published in serialised form and later adapted by Gaskell for a two-volume edition in 1855. Marcia and Patricia Marchesi provide their insiders' view on the theatrical reworking of the novel for a musical first produced and staged in the USA in 2008. The dilemma of a teacher who tries to render literature of the canon palatable for young generations of students is not altogether different from the dilemma of a playwright and a musician seeking to reach or shape a contemporary theatre audience. The Marchesi project poses questions of adaptation and adaptability of the page to the stage, and of the way in which the written word gives way to music and dialogues. Changes are an integral part of adaptations, since theatre does not, and cannot, develop characters, plot, and themes in the same way as novels do. The novel is necessarily placed in a new frame by way of alterations to its plot – the dialogues may be shortened, sections could be omitted, and conflict is made more visible on the stage so as to enhance the relationship between characters. The key to a successful musical theatre version of *North and South* lies in the adaptors' full understanding of what the novel evokes and of the adaptation's capacity to evoke the power of its source. Along the same lines, the concluding chapter also reflects on the relationship between Gaskell's prose and its reworking for fruition for a contemporary audience. The chapter looks at the transition of the artwork from one medium to another: firstly, it recalls Gaskell's embryonic works–the original short stories that appeared in Dickens' *Household Words*–and how these were adapted by Gaskell herself into a full-length novel which was published later in 1855. Gaskell was thus the first to adapt her own fiction, prompted by the need to 'remediate' the defects of her first version of the tale, which suffered from the editor's demands and the genre's requirements. The notion of remediation is replicated in the chapter and applied to the analysis of the transition of Gaskell's story from its novel status to the screen, when the BBC commissioned and broadcast a new version of *North and South* in 2004. The double significance of a theory of remediation allows for the comparative study of two or more texts and of their different cultural contexts; it helps to explain how translation works when different media are involved and also reminds us that, though something inevitably gets lost in translation, something else is equally gained. In the spirit of remediation, this is what makes a work of literature always appealing, suggestive and relevant to new audiences. The BBC's *North and South* is a distinguished and successful work of adaptation which modernises the

conventions of heritage drama, and which relies on the compression of the plot, as well as additions and other minor alterations, but never betrays the essence of Gaskell's tale. A story of cultural encounters thus easily adapts itself to the present; it echoes and interacts with it while also entertaining a public of TV viewers somehow nostalgic of the past, who are, perhaps, also partial to the looks and manners of a well-designed cast and plot.

Adaptations transform existing stories. That is simply what they do. When they are good works of adaptation they aim to find potential new meanings for an old tale so that it can speak to, entertain and nourish different and contemporary audiences. In this respect, Elizabeth Gaskell's fiction clearly provides raw material for the artist who will handle dense plots full of characters and strong emotions to mould a matter of infinite value. At least that is the case where the transformed stories considered in this volume are concerned. The hope remains that film and theatre authors will not break Gaskell's enduring spell.

Loredana Salis
Sassari, June 2013

## Notes

[1] The debate between the categorical and analogical approaches has traditionally shaped the course of Adaptation studies. See, in this respect, Kamilla Elliot, *Rethinking the Novel/Film Debate*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

[2] Amedeo Quondam, 'Note su imitazione, furto e plagio nel Classicismo', in *Furto e plagio nella letteratura del Classicismo*, edited by Roberto Gigliucci, Roma: Bulzoni, 1998 (373-400), p. 380. Seneca's citation: 'Apes, ut aiunt, debemus imitari, quae vagantur et flores ad mel faciendum idoneos carpunt, deinde quickquid attulere, disponunt ac per favos digerunt' is taken from Letter 84 (Seneca Lucilio suo salutem).

[3] What Recchio observes in relation to Mary Barton equally applies, and sadly so, to other works, as scholars conducting research on lesser known texts, often unavailable or poorly documented know all too well. In this respect, Bolton's inventory represents an invaluable reference and research tool. See especially the section dedicated to adaptations of Gaskell's fiction in H. Philip Bolton, *Women Writers Dramatised. A Calendar of Performances from Narrative Works Published in English to 1900*, London: Mansell Publishing, 2000 (pp. 206-210).

# CHAPTER ONE

# ELIZABETH GASKELL AND HER PUBLISHERS

ALAN SHELSTON

Elizabeth Gaskell's literary persona went through many adaptations during the course of her career, and it is appropriate to introduce the essays in this volume by considering her publishing history. During the years from the completion of her first novel, *Mary Barton* in 1847 up until her death in 1865, with the remaining pages of *Wives and Daughters* still to be written, the Victorian novel established itself as the major literary form of its time. For novelists it was a time of both experiment and accomplishment, and Gaskell, who has come to be so readily defined as the proponent of industrial realism, or alternatively of the "elegant economy" of the ladies of *Cranford*, is arguably the most diverse of the earlier Victorian novelists. She is also the novelist who "adapted" most readily to the contemporary publishing culture, and this is reflected in her dealings with her publishers. At that time, the novel was a form with flexible traditions and without rules: as Henry James was to write in 1889, "every sort of mind will find what it looks for in it, whereby the novel becomes truly multifarious and illustrative … Give it its head and let it range."[1] These comments are not inapplicable to the process of adaptation. Furthermore, her post-mortem reputation was both reflected in and influenced by the tendency of publishers to produce elegant and sometimes illustrated editions that have reinforced that title of 'Mrs' that was always given to her, and that even now has not been shaken off. Both publishers and adaptors of her work have had a common interest in exploiting this aspect of her reputation. Here I shall approach Gaskell's work primarily via the question of its publication, and throughout I shall consider the related question of adaptation, since both involve matters of presentation that have affected the way in which her work has been read.

## The publishing context

Gaskell, who was in her late thirties when she published *Mary Barton*, was to become one of the pre-eminent literary Victorians. But we are mistaken in thinking of her as exclusively Victorian: her formative experience, like that of Dickens, born two years before her, and who outlived her by just five years, was very much pre-Victorian. The novelists available to her as a young woman would have been eighteenth century figures like Fanny Burney, Ann Radcliffe, or the long forgotten Selina Davenport, a resident of Gaskell's Knutsford, whom she tried to help when she fell on hard times in her old age.[2] Jane Austen wrote most of her fiction in the first decade of Gaskell's life, but there is no reference to her in Gaskell's early correspondence. When she came to writing her own novels, Gaskell had very few predecessors of her own generation to appeal to. What is equally to the point is that, when she was taken from London to Knutsford as a baby, she endured a three-day journey by stagecoach; as a young married woman living in Manchester, she would experience the transformations that followed the coming of the railways. In *Mary Barton,* the heroine's life is transformed by her train journey from Manchester to Liverpool: in the 1830s Gaskell herself would have been an early passenger on the new Manchester-Liverpool line. The communications revolution of the early nineteenth century was a major factor in the development of Victorian publishing. The expansion of the railway network facilitated distribution and made possible a fast postal service, enabling rapid communication between writers and publishers. Furthermore, the invention of new machinery for the production of paper together with faster printing facilitated the processes of publication.[3] All of this made possible the production and distribution of books and journals, many of them reprints, in large numbers. Charles Knight, a contemporary observer, gives these figures in his book, *The Old Printe*r, published in 1856: "In the eleven years from 1792 to 1802 there was an average publication of 372 books per year"; in the years from 1800 to 1827, according to Knight's calculations there were 15,888 new books published, giving an average of 588 per year, and this excluded the rapid rise in the publication of journals and magazines; formats very significant for the publication of fiction.[4] Knight's account in *The Old Printer* begins with a biography of William Caxton, whose introduction of the printing press to England he saw as establishing British freedoms, and it is dedicated to Charles Dickens, "one of those earnest labourers in that popular literature that elevates a people." Caxton became an iconic figure for the Victorians,

as indeed did Dickens: Knight's linkage of ancient and modern was in that sense entirely appropriate.

Nineteenth-century fiction saw the development of three popular formats: volume publication, serial publication in journals, and monthly part publication. Knight himself was somewhat critical of what he called the "number-trade", which, however, proved to have considerable financial advantages. It was calculated that *Pickwick Papers,* when first published in monthly numbers in 1836-7, gained £14,000 for Dickens's publisher. Forster, in his biography, testified to the unpredicted speed of Dickens's success: "Of part one, the binder prepared four hundred, and of part fifteen his order was for more than forty thousand."[5] Knight dates the publication and circulation of cheap literature as having started in 1827, the year of the foundation of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, with its "Library" series. Richard Altick is more circumspect, although in general terms he confirms Knight's assertion that the 1820s was a significant decade. The publications of religious and other improvement societies were instrumental in the spread of literacy. When "useful knowledge" was seen to lose its attraction, it was replaced by "entertaining knowledge", but as Altick suggests, "entertaining" is a comparative term. At about this time, "printers", a term signifying the technicalities of production, increasingly came to call themselves "publishers" (as indeed did booksellers like Chapman and Hall, Dickens's first publishers), while these "publishers", once traditionally distributed amongst the provinces, came to consolidate themselves as major city-based operations, and to amalgamate as they detected the possibilities of financial advantage.

We can get some sense of how the literary culture changed if we consider Gaskell's own experience, both as a reader and a writer. Jane Austen's novels in their first printings ranged from 750 copies in the case of S*ense and Sensibility,* to 2,000 (*Mansfield Park, Emma*) at the height of her fame: as far as we know, Gaskell did not read Austen until later in her life. In a letter of 1831, she wrote from Knutsford to her friend Harriet Carr that she had "not a book but which we have all read hundreds of times." The only fiction she mentions in her early letters is that of Bulwer Lytton.[6] We can set that against the profusion of the Victorian novel: 30,000 copies printed of the opening number of *David Copperfield* in 1849 and scarcely a month going by between the early 1840s and Dickens's death in 1870 without a part or an instalment being issued of one of his novels, or Trollope's vast output of nearly forty novels in thirty years, leading to his calculation in his *Autobiography* that "I have made by literature something near £70,000".[7] Dickens, whose popularity Trollope

regarded with suspicion, earned considerably more in the same period, although given the proliferation of editions of his works, exact figures are difficult to calculate where he is concerned.

## Beginnings: *Mary Barton* and Chapman and Hall

The first time Gaskell saw herself in print was in a short poem she wrote with her husband, "Sketches among the poor", published in *Blackwood's Magazine* in 1837. She referred to its authorship with the plural pronoun: "we once thought of *trying* to write sketches among the poor"[8] and it is not possible to tell how much of the poem was hers, and how much her husband's. We then have her unacknowledged contribution to William Howitt's *Visits to Remarkable Places,* published in 1839. Howitt included an account of Clopton House, an old manor house in Warwickshire, which is always attributed to Gaskell, although it is not clear how much of the writing is hers. Howitt and his wife Mary met the Gaskells on their visit to Heidelberg in 1841 when the Howitts were living in Germany. They were important literary contacts. Quakers, if of a very flexible kind, they were strong advocates of the provision of suitable reading matter for working people. They produced, and sometimes distributed an enormous number of titles of their own on subjects as diversely improving as history, natural science, geography and the like– every kind of "useful knowledge" in fact. William specialized in topography and popular history; Mary wrote poems and novels and translated fiction not only from German but from Swedish and Danish sources as well. As well as works by Hans Christian Andersen, Mary translated the writings of the Swedish novelist Fredrika Bremer and arranged for their publication in England. All of this literary activity, which resulted in over a hundred titles between them, was prompted by the highest motives. This was "literature that elevates a people" in their own terms. Given her own pace of output, it is perhaps ironic to find Mary Howitt complaining about poets and novelists who "hurry out their trashy volumes before the ink of the manuscript is fairly dry." She continues "thus it is a thousand books are published, and nine hundred and ninety are unreadable."[9]

By Mary Howitt's account, her husband was instrumental in the publication of *Mary Barton*. There were publishing houses in Manchester that a little known writer living in the city might have been expected to approach, but Gaskell had given William Howitt the manuscript of the first volume to read and he was so enthusiastic that he immediately passed it on with his recommendation to John Forster, reader and negotiator for the

London publishers Chapman and Hall. This was a propitious connection to have made: Forster, who was a lawyer, was an ally and friend of Dickens, and his concurrence with Howitt's enthusiasm meant that *Mary Barton* was published in October 1848, albeit anonymously. It was an overnight success and Gaskell's larger career was launched.

*Mary Barton* ran to four editions by 1850, at which point Dickens recruited her for the opening number of *Household Words*.[10] The result was another Manchester-based story, *Lizzie Leigh*. Stage adaptations of both *Lizzie Leigh* and *Mary Barton* were produced in London in 1850 and in 1851, the latter with its full title, *Mary Barton, a tale of Manchester life*. A later adaptation of *Mary Barton*, by Dion Boucicault, was produced at the Lyceum Theatre under the title *The Long Strike* in September 1866, the year after Gaskell's death.[11]

*Mary Barton* was published in the United States by Harpers just two months after its first appearance in England, and all of Gaskell's major works–and most of her minor ones–would be published there almost concurrently with their English publication. Indeed where her work appeared serially, as in the case of *North and South*, *Cousin Phillis*, and *Wives and Daughters*, the American volume publication actually preceded the English, the texts being taken from the serials. When "Lizzie Leigh" was published in America, directly after its appearance in *Household Words*, it was attributed there to Dickens since all of his contributors remained anonymous, and it was assumed there that he had written it.

*Mary Barton* thus provided Gaskell with her breakthrough in various ways. She was fortunate with her publishers and the networks they provided. Forster quickly became a friend and influential confidante. Chapman and Hall can be said to exemplify aspects of the publishing boom in the early nineteenth century. Edward Chapman was a literary man; Edward Hall was a business man: this became something of a pattern for the division of labour amongst publishers. Hall's great stroke of business had been to recruit the young Dickens in the mid-1830s. The unforeseen success of *Pickwick Papers* effectively established Chapman and Hall, and from then until Dickens left the firm in 1844 after a rancorous dispute, his sales did much to establish them. Gaskell thus came to Chapman and Hall at a propitious moment: she was not Dickens, but *Mary Barton* had a topical success which ensured that it was very extensively reviewed for a first novel. Reviews were an influential part of the literary culture, and works on topical themes, like *Ruth* and *North and South*, both published by Chapman and Hall, also attracted extensive notice.

From the outset then, Gaskell was drawn into a world of commercial values, and also into a world where adaptability was a condition of

survival. Correspondence between Gaskell and the Chapmans reveals some of the ways in which Victorian publishers worked. Titles were important to the publisher; they were after all the main opportunity to brand the book. Dickens, with his commercial instincts appreciated this, and the records show that for his novels he invariably prepared lists of alternative titles, especially where they were thematic. Gaskell too was very conscious of the significance of titles: this was an issue that would contribute to the difficulties which later came between the two novelists. She always considered John Barton to be the protagonist of her first novel but Edward Chapman, perhaps more aware than she realised of Barton's ultimate exclusion from the story and the way in which the narrative increasingly comes to revolve around its heroine, advised a title that would identify her by name. In this case the sub-title was changed as well–"A Manchester Love-story" became "A Tale of Manchester Life". It was first published anonymously, but its successors were advertised as being "by the author of *Mary Barton*", in itself a sign of its success. Gaskell was certainly aware of the advantages of topicality: in April 1848 she writes to Edward Chapman "I think the present state of public events may not be unfavourable to a tale, founded in some measure on the present relations between Masters and work people" and requests "an immediate answer". She follows it up with an expression of "fear" of Chapman's delay in answering her letter that "you have thought it desirable to defer the appearance of my work".[12] Comparative novice she may have been, but from the start, she recognized that she would have to be firm with her publishers.

Following *Mary Barton* there was the little illustrated Christmas book, *The Moorland Cottage*. Again, there was a preliminary dispute over the title. This was followed by *Ruth*, then *Cranford,* and then *North and South*, both of the latter having first been published in instalments in *Household Words*. *Ruth* was Gaskell's first work in the more prestigious three-volume format and she seems to have found herself still completing the third volume while its predecessors were being printed. In November 1852, she is anxious about the reception of *Ruth*. She writes: "I hate publishing because of the talk people make"; nevertheless Ruth "is done–utterly off my mind and gone up to the printers" in the week before Christmas. *Ruth* was published in the New Year in 1853".[13] Gaskell, who once remarked that heaven was a place without books, rarely completed a work without difficulty. All this suggests considerable speed of production: the pace at which Victorian publishers worked could be remarkable. It also shows Gaskell as an author open to all the various opportunities offered by Victorian publishing, while struggling with the pressures involved.

*Cranford* appeared at irregular intervals in *Household Words* while *Ruth* was being completed, and in the case of *North and South* she would have just three months to make substantial revisions to her *Household Words* text for the volume publication.

As both a perfectionist and a very busy woman, Gaskell almost invariably found herself battling against time with her major works; furthermore, the relationship between publisher and author could become an extremely personal and sometimes problematic one. The parties usually acted in direct contact with each other; but these were the days of the publisher as personality; men like the Chapmans, and later George Smith, made themselves figures of considerable public substance. Publishers needed to treat their authors with understanding, but also with firmness over matters like deadlines and payment; equally there were occasions when authors needed to stand up to them. Contractual arrangements could be complicated. Initially authors were usually paid on some version of the copyright system, whereby the publisher would retain the copyright and thus be entitled to all the profits accruing from the work, including profits arising out of reprints. With an author who was frequently reprinted, like Dickens, this system obvious benefited the publisher, and the only recourse for the author was to buy back the copyright, as both Dickens and Gaskell on occasion tried to do. In 1856 Gaskell wrote to George Smith listing her published works, and enquiring about their present status: "Mary Barton & Ruth were I know sold out, and North and South was sold *by the edition* … Should I enquire as to the number remaining? Or would you? Or would it be worth while?" The questions suggest both uncertainty and anxiety, and she continues with similar queries about the disposal of her stories.[14] Relationships between author and publisher were close, but disputes could be frequent. When Gaskell found "her dearest child, *Cranford* 'worth gold being out of print'"[15], she jumped to the conclusion that Frederic Chapman was somehow deceiving her. In fact this turned out not to be the case, but oil was needed for the troubled waters. To redress the imbalance that the copyright system of payment created, a "half-profits" system of payment developed, whereby publisher and author shared the profits, and this led ultimately to something similar to the present day system of royalties, where the author is paid an agreed percentage of the profit from sales.

## Charles Dickens: the weekly periodical

The publishers of *Household Words* were Dickens's new publishers, Bradbury and Evans, but Dickens was the commissioner, editor, copy-

editor, and ultimately paymaster, so it is reasonable to think of him as the effective publisher. Gaskell's involvement with *Household Words* began propitiously with her story "Lizzie Leigh", which was given pride of place at the head of the opening number, published on 30 March 1850. However, *North and South,* appearing from 2 September 1854 to 27 January 1855, was to prove problematic.

On the opening page of his new venture, Dickens declared that his aspiration with *Household Words* was to "live in the Household Affections, and to be numbered among the Household thoughts of our readers." In what is a clear marketing statement, he appeals to that positive, if somewhat sentimentalized, notion of family and home that we find in his *Christmas Books*: he is thinking here of the Cratchits of *A Christmas Carol* rather than the Higginses of *North and South.* The families Dickens wants to appeal to are the literate working class–"the hardest workers at this working wheel of toil." The tone was to be of the upbeat kind that would inspire the Great Exhibition in the following year: "We seek to bring into innumerable homes, from the stirring world around us, the knowledge of many social wonders."[16] Anne Lohrli, in her study of *Household Words*, lists the kind of subjects that found their way into the magazine: "natural history, articles on science for the layman medicine, physics physiology, astronomy, geology … natural resources … inventions, trade, commerce, business, descriptions of cities, towns, localities" as well as material on the colonies abroad, and prisons and punishment at home.[17] Fiction actually played a smaller part in Dickens's plan: apart from his own *Hard Times* and Gaskell's *North and South* there were no full-length novels of any significance in the magazine.

*Household Words*: "A weekly journal", was printed cheaply in double columns and without illustrations. Its contributors were paid one guinea (twenty-one shillings) for a two-column page. Gaskell, received £20.00 for "Lizzie Leigh"; since her story ran to twelve pages, this was slightly above the usual rate. From the outset Dickens treated Gaskell as a privileged case: he said that there was no-one he would rather recruit for his project. His admiration for *Cranford* when it appeared in *Household Words* was unbounded, as he made clear when Gaskell had to put it to one side in order to finish *Ruth*, for which she received a full £500 from Smith and Elder. Dickens was perhaps less generous where *North and South* was concerned, although he sent her the sum of £50.00 in addition to the two hundred guineas (£210.00) for the copyright contracted at the outset of the instalments.[18] He followed this with a further £50.00 as a generous gesture probably aimed at regaining her goodwill. Dickens could be astute as well as generous in financial matters. She later received a payment of £100.00

from George Smith of Smith, Elder in respect of the copyright of *North and South* when he proposed to reprint it.

Dickens was an obsessive task-master. He would frequently offer advice about titles, narrative development and endings–it was only advice, but his contributors were expected to remember who was giving it. If they didn't, they would find their material revised, sometimes completely re-written, when they actually found it in print. Gaskell didn't suffer that, but she did get the advice from time to time, and she tended to resist it. Their differences over *North and South* reflected a disagreement about priorities. *North and South* is a novel with a dual narrative: whereas Dickens had expected a novel with an industrial theme to follow his own *Hard Times* and her *Mary Barton*, for Gaskell the industrial material was more a matter of context for a story about a young woman growing into adult responsibilities. It was Dickens who gave her work its title, taken from a speech by one of the book's working class characters, whereas during the writing process Gaskell invariably referred to her novel as "Margaret". The differences between them came to a head over the book's ending. Once the industrial material was concluded, Dickens wanted the novel finished as soon as possible, whereas Gaskell needed more time to substantiate the development of the relation between Margaret and John Thornton. When *North and South* was published in two volumes a few months after it had been completed in its instalment form, it included an additional long chapter, devoted to the heroine's return to the scene of her childhood, together with some adjustments anticipating the ending. It also carried a rather sharp explanation that previously it "was obliged to conform to the requirements of a weekly publication" and had had "to confine itself within certain advertised limits." To describe a publication as "weekly" was to make a social distinction as well as one of format: to this effect it is to the point that, according to Gaskell, she "seldom" saw "the *Households Words*"; this was in May 1853, while she was contributing the final instalments of *Cranford.*[19] She would later define *Cranford* as her favourite work, but the implication must be that, while she would write for Dickens's journal, she rarely read it. Gaskell's troubles with *North and South* continued after its conclusion in *Household Words* at the end of January 1855. In the haste of production of the first volume edition (26 March 1855), substantial errors were made, and these had to be corrected for the second edition, issued just three months later.[20]

The publishing history of *North and South* shows the instability of fictional texts in the mid-nineteenth century. This is reflected too in the publication of *Cranford*, with its uneven gaps between the appearance of the *Household Words* instalments to accommodate the writing of *Ruth*, and

its ultimate appearance in a single volume, again with alterations. Despite increasing differences between them, Gaskell continued to write for Dickens and surprisingly, in a letter to an unknown editor who had approached her a few years after *Household Words* had closed down, she wrote "I am not in the habit of writing for periodicals, except occasionally … except as a personal mark of regard & respect to Mr. Dickens. But half a dozen papers in H.W. are all I ever wrote for any periodical."[21] This is very odd–more than that, it simply isn't true. She had altogether twenty titles in the journal by this time; leaving aside *Cranford* and *North and South*–if we include their individual instalments she appeared in the journal on more than fifty occasions. Furthermore, in 1863, she published a long novella, *A Dark Night's Work* in the successor to *Household Words, All The Year Round*, which she had first offered to George Smith. She also published for Dickens an article on the Neapolitan Camorra─a somewhat unlikely topic.[22] What the dispute with Dickens had identified was that Gaskell was at a turning point in her writing career. She had come to the fore as a writer of social problem fiction, who seemed to fit ideally into the philanthropic literary culture of Dickens and the Howitts. But as Gaskell discovered herself as a writer, she increasingly took as her subject the social and psychological histories of her heroines–Mary, Ruth, Margaret, later Sylvia, Phillis and Molly, those "'frail vessels' who have borne onward through the ages the treasure of human affection" as Henry James, citing George Eliot, puts it in one of his prefaces.[23] Or to put it another way, she moves, as indeed the Victorian novel moved in its preoccupations, from the world of Dickens to the world of George Eliot, whose early work Gaskell admired. In the last analysis there is a status dimension to all of this. I mentioned earlier the division between popular literature and the exclusiveness of more elevated forms of fiction, and it can be argued that in the later 1850s Gaskell was moving from the kind of readership aimed at by Dickens and the Howitts to a more leisured middle-class readership–the readers not of weekly magazines but of three and on occasion two or four volume novels, set in the provincial world which she knew from childhood. In a letter of 1860 to Frederic Chapman she wrote, "how excellent & good & clever Framley Parsonage is.─I never read anything in the way of fiction so true and deep!"[24] This was the kind of territory she now wanted to occupy herself.

## The professional author

During the next decade we see Gaskell increasingly professionalizing herself as a successful author. She negotiates the financial terms and looks

for new outlets for her work. She has disputes with Chapman and Hall over delayed payments, and decides to recover her copyrights from them. She approaches publishers overseas, completing a transaction with the German firm of Tauchnitz, publishers of paperback novels for railway reading, and she has her novels translated for the firm of Hachette in France, which also paid her to recommend other English authors for translation. Translation, while itself a form of adaptation, had its pitfalls. Gaskell records that a French "translation" of *Jane Eyre* contained its first volume only, and had been published under a facetious pseudonym; she took care to have her own work translated by a translator that she approved of. [25] Hachette's lists and Gaskell's advice show the range of Victorian fiction below the peaks. *Jane Eyre*, she admits, is "remarkable" but she has misgivings–she always did–about *Wuthering Heights*, and recommends works by Charles Reade and Geraldine Jewsbury. There is also "a young writer**,** a friend of Mr. Dickens**,**" whose "style is very good [but] I do not admire his books myself [although] many good critics do." It is Wilkie Collins. (His first novel, *Basil*, is dismissed in a word–"detestable").[26] During this time, she produced collections of her stories with a London firm, Sampson Low, thus profiting from their appearance in volume form, but she had no new novel immediately in mind. All this reflects an increasing awareness of her status. She had difficulties with her publishers in America, but nevertheless was led to consider the improbable strategy of writing exclusively for the American market, although how she thought that might help is difficult to tell.[27]

## George Smith of Smith Elder

Five days after the publication of *North and South* on 31st March 1855, Gaskell's "dear friend" Charlotte Brontë died. Gaskell was in Paris, taking a deliberate break from the stress of work–this was a habit she was to cultivate–but on this occasion she returned immediately to begin her research for a possible memoir of her friend. This brought her into contact with George Smith of Smith Elder, whose great coup, some years earlier, had been the publication of *Jane Eyre*. It was Gaskell who first contacted Smith, with a letter from Charlotte's father Patrick recommending her, and it was Smith who offered her a contract to write a full scale biography. He offered her £600; she asked for a further £200 to cover, as she said, the expense of her research, and she got it.

The episode was pivotal for Gaskell, and to a lesser extent perhaps for Smith, as *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, despite the furore over the first edition, was one of his most successful productions, running into five

separate editions in the first three years of its publication. Of these the first two had to be abandoned under threat of legal action. The third edition was "revised and corrected" with the alterations that can be seen in her husband's hand, amongst others, on the manuscript.[28] The fifth edition was a one volume "popular" edition, bound in orange cloth, which Gaskell referred to as "my orange Charlotte Brontë".[29] The American edition, printed from advance sheets and published simultaneously, did not have to be revised, the laws of libel not crossing the Atlantic.

Smith was a publisher who liked to establish personal relationships with his authors. He not only recruited the Brontë sisters, he cultivated them, offering Charlotte in particular hospitality and entertainment. Smith's extensive correspondence with Gaskell shows him as a sympathetic but nevertheless business-like character. Where Gaskell's biography was concerned, there had been less than two years from commission to publication, and she had again found herself writing against the clock. The speed at which the revised edition was ready, just five months after the appearance of the first, is another indication of the speed at which Victorian publishers could work. Considering what they had to decipher from their author's manuscripts their skills seem even more remarkable. They had a product which they needed to get into the market place, and speed could be of the essence.

Smith selected his authors with care and paid them well. Gaskell's first novel for him was *Sylvia's Lovers*, published in three volumes in 1863: it was both historical and provincial in subject-matter. Gaskell had been approached by a publisher, Sampson Low, whom she did not entirely trust with an offer of £1,000 for the work, including profits from the American sales, but she wrote to George Smith offering it to him: "I would much rather have £800 from you than £1,000 from them." Smith complied, and a receipt exists showing that Gaskell received £1,000 for the completed work.[30] At the last minute Gaskell wrote to Smith asking him how many pages he needed to complete the final volume, but while the novel had a long gestation period its production seems to have been reasonably trouble free.[31]

The back cover of the "orange Charlotte Brontë" carries an announcement about Smith's new venture, the *Cornhill Magazine*, to be edited by "W. M. Thackeray": this was to be the vehicle for fiction by the most distinguished writers and illustrators of the 1860s. Thackeray was paid generously for services that he soon became reluctant to undertake. Smith gave George Eliot £7,000, a quite astonishing sum, for *Romola*, which began in the *Cornhill's* opening number. Other early contributors included Anthony Trollope, Wilkie Collins and of course Elizabeth Gaskell;