



Elizabeth Gaskell's Smaller Stories

Carolyn Lambert

palgrave
macmillan

Elizabeth Gaskell's Smaller Stories

Carolyn Lambert

Elizabeth Gaskell's Smaller Stories

palgrave
macmillan

Carolyn Lambert
Independent Scholar
Seaford, UK

ISBN 978-3-030-79704-1 ISBN 978-3-030-79705-8 (eBook)
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-79705-8>

© The Editor(s) (if applicable) and The Author(s), under exclusive licence to Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2021

This work is subject to copyright. All rights are solely and exclusively licensed by the Publisher, whether the whole or part of the material is concerned, specifically the rights of translation, reprinting, reuse of illustrations, recitation, broadcasting, reproduction on microfilms or in any other physical way, and transmission or information storage and retrieval, electronic adaptation, computer software, or by similar or dissimilar methodology now known or hereafter developed.

The use of general descriptive names, registered names, trademarks, service marks, etc. in this publication does not imply, even in the absence of a specific statement, that such names are exempt from the relevant protective laws and regulations and therefore free for general use. The publisher, the authors and the editors are safe to assume that the advice and information in this book are believed to be true and accurate at the date of publication. Neither the publisher nor the authors or the editors give a warranty, expressed or implied, with respect to the material contained herein or for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The publisher remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG.

The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is said that it takes a village to raise a child and it takes a community to make a book. I am deeply grateful to my colleagues for their insightful comments and encouragement at various stages of the evolution of this book, particularly Victoria Margree at the University of Brighton, who read early drafts of the chapters, and the peer reviewers who helped to shape the final version of the manuscript.

Members of the Gaskell Society listened to iterations of some of the chapters both in very outline form and as—I hope—more polished and formal lectures. Peter Jenkyns’s story of shooting the cherubim and what it might mean made its appearance one balmy evening on a Gaskell Society trip to Venice and the ‘marriage’ of Dickens and Gaskell was first mooted at a conference of the Research Society for Victorian Periodicals. As always, Gaskell Society members have been invaluable both in their encyclopaedic knowledge of Gaskell’s texts and in their astute comments and in providing a nurturing environment in which small thoughts could sprout and grow. Is there another literary society that better reflects its author? My husband, unofficially adopted as a Gaskell Society groupie, displayed his usual patience as the creative cogs cranked slowly and reluctantly into action, and provided caffeine and chocolate at regular intervals to help the process.

Finally, Tanya Izzard has yet again provided a comprehensive index of wondrous utility, and the team at Palgrave Macmillan have been both prompt and professional, and also very encouraging in delivering this finished product.

My heartfelt thanks to all of you.

CONTENTS

1	Introduction	1
	<i>Elizabeth Gaskell's 'Smaller Stories'</i>	1
	<i>Women and Short Story Writing</i>	3
	<i>Gaskell's Short Story Publishing History</i>	10
	<i>Gaskell and Dickens</i>	18
	<i>Male Mentors</i>	22
	<i>Publication Post Dickens</i>	24
	<i>Money and the Market</i>	25
	<i>Morality and the Market</i>	28
	<i>Conclusion</i>	31
	<i>Bibliography</i>	33
2	The Gothic and the Ghostly	37
	<i>Gaskell and the Gothic</i>	37
	<i>Gaskell and Violence</i>	45
	<i>Female Self-Harm</i>	47
	<i>'The Grey Woman' (1861)</i>	50
	<i>Holy Self-Harm</i>	58
	<i>Conclusion</i>	67
	<i>Bibliography</i>	68

3 Fairy Tales	71
<i>Gaskell and the Fairy Tale</i>	71
<i>The History of the Fairy Tale</i>	72
<i>French Women Writers of Fairy Tales</i>	75
<i>Gaskell's French Connections</i>	77
'Curious, if True'	82
<i>Witchcraft</i>	90
<i>Women and Witchcraft</i>	91
<i>The Role of Rumour and Gossip</i>	93
<i>Nineteenth-Century Attitudes to Witchcraft</i>	94
'Lois the Witch'	96
<i>Bibliography</i>	104
4 Narrating Sexuality	107
<i>Cranford (1853)</i>	108
<i>The Doom of the Griffiths (1858)</i>	120
<i>Conclusion</i>	130
<i>Bibliography</i>	131
5 Narrative Architecture	135
<i>Narrative Time</i>	137
<i>Narrative Ghosts</i>	145
<i>Frame Stories</i>	149
<i>Interpolated Stories</i>	155
<i>Bibliography</i>	160
6 Conclusion	163
<i>Bibliography</i>	169
Appendix: Elizabeth Gaskell's Publications and Publishers	171
Bibliography	175
Index	187



Introduction

ELIZABETH GASKELL'S 'SMALLER STORIES'

Elizabeth Gaskell is one of the major novelists of the nineteenth century yet the short stories that make up a large proportion of her published work have not received the critical attention they deserve. A single collection of essays (Marroni et al. 2011) is devoted to Gaskell's short stories, and there are a number of essays in both the *Gaskell Journal* and in other overviews of Gaskell's writing (e.g. *The Cambridge Companion*, Matus ed, and *Essays for the Bicentenary*, Jung ed). Storytelling, in the form of communal oral narrative, was intrinsic to Gaskell's character. Her letters and other writings are replete with descriptions of storytelling round the fire, tales of 'wild enchanted spicy islands in the Eastern Archipelago, or buried cities in farthest Mexico; [...] wonderful discoveries, strange surmises, glimpses into something far away and utterly dream-like' (Gaskell, ed Shattock, 1, 2005: 304). Contemporaries bear witness to the power of her oral performance and the charisma of her personality that informed the stories she told. The anonymous 'M' in the *Blackstick Papers* comments on the 'remarkable *charm* of her presence' (Ritchie, 210, italics in original) as she told 'legends of smugglers as well as of ghosts, adventures too, stories with weather in them, wild snowstorms rising and dying away' (213). She seems to have been possessed of an almost inexhaustible supply of tales and of an instinctive ability to shape them in a way that captivated her audience. This intensity, as Ritchie notes, found its way into her written

stories where '[s]he seems for a time almost to *be* the character she is creating' (218, italics in original). Yet Ritchie also notes the lack of attention paid to her short stories (228).

This book examines what Gaskell described in a letter to Louis Hachette as her 'smaller stories': 'It is very difficult, almost impossible for me to judge which of my smaller stories would please French readers'.¹ It relocates them in the literary and cultural context of the nineteenth century, reclaiming them as an indispensable part of her literary output that enables us to better contextualise and assess her achievement holistically as a highly skilled woman of letters, who tackled some of the most controversial topics of the day with creativity and flair. I build therefore on Joanne Shattock's important assertion that 'the two strands of her writing, the novels and the shorter works, which include her journalism, were much more integrated than had been previously thought, [and], her writing life was a much more seamless and coherent one than had been recognised' (Gaskell, Shattock ed, 2005, 1: xxxi).² The short stories that I examine in this book are part of a complex creative synthesis in which threads from her journalism and other writing are woven into a wide variety of her 'smaller stories' in ways that are not always easily resolvable by simple considerations of genre or theme. Gaskell's creativity, her narrative genius, rests on this very fluidity, this refusal to be constrained by convention.

In this introductory chapter, I outline the contribution women writers made to the development of the short story in the nineteenth century through publication in periodicals, including examining the associated financial concerns and rewards. I examine the publishing history of Gaskell's short stories, including her relationship with Charles Dickens, and I consider the reasons for Gaskell's choice of the journals in which her stories were published and how this was influenced by the moral and ideological ethos embedded in the specific periodical.

I begin with an examination of women writers and their use of the short story.

¹ Elizabeth Gaskell to Louis Hachette, April 26, 1855. *Further Letters*, 134.

² Margriet Schippers (2017) similarly takes a holistic approach to Gaskell's writing, arguing that, taken as a whole, it consistently chronicles a notion of citizenship and good government as a means of transforming society.

WOMEN AND SHORT STORY WRITING

Shorter fiction from the nineteenth century is the subject of increasing scholarly interest as a form that, far from being the inferior relation of the novel, has its own distinctive aesthetic and discursive possibilities. The qualities that led to the short story's marginal status—its relative brevity, immediacy and potential ephemerality, together with a lack of critical attention—provided writers with scope for formal narrative experimentation and for exploring different ways of representing social reality. Women writers, in particular, were quick to seize the opportunities offered by placing short stories in the plethora of periodicals that flooded onto the market from mid-century onwards. The scale of the periodical industry was huge. Harold Orel notes: 'The number of journals published between 1824 and 1900 exceeds 50,000' (3). Women writers, as Barbara Caine notes, exploited the full range of forms available within the periodical—journalism poetry, reviews—to make their voices heard in the public discourse and to bring 'an explicitly female voice to bear on these various debates' (102). However, women who wrote on 'masculine' subjects, such as political economy, were regarded as popularisers of serious topics, often masking their own competence and knowledge in order to successfully negotiate gendered boundaries. Gaskell's friend Harriet Martineau, for example, made an early contribution to the debate on industrialisation in her didactic *Illustrations of Political Economy* published in twenty-five parts from 1832 to 1834. The *Illustrations* were published under Martineau's name and were an immediate success, although her use of fictional narratives to illustrate principles and how they operate within communities was an amalgamation that was controversial at the time. Women writers of short fiction were less constrained, less observed, their texts less commented on. They were therefore freer to create stories untrammelled by gendered expectations, or indeed by expectations of form and structure. Their growing confidence and professionalism is reflected not just in the myriad ways in which they contributed to the content of periodicals, but in publishing pieces under their own names as Caine notes: 'in the first half of the century they mostly used male pseudonyms or published their work anonymously. In the mid-century, women writers became more and more visible as they published under their own

names' (102).³ This was paralleled by the variety and quantity of contributions they made to journals that included factual and opinion pieces as well as fiction.

The development of periodicals as a publishing format has been well documented.⁴ The short story has been part of periodical history since the launch of *Blackwood's Magazine* in 1817 which, as Wendell V Harris notes, 'provided the century's first steady and respectable market for short fiction' (22). This market was driven initially by the need to regularly fill the pages of the periodicals, and tales were used during the first half of the century as a way to entertain readers and to animate the longer pieces amongst which they were interspersed. As Orel notes, '[n]ovels were the central commodity, and short stories a by-product, filler material; the latter did not pay well and printers and publishers often preferred works with lapsed copyrights, for which the payment of fees were unnecessary; books that collected short stories of a single author were chancy undertakings throughout the entire century' (1). This perhaps explains in part the varied length of the short story and the problems of definition. Edgar Allan Poe's much-quoted attempt to define the short story in his 1842 review of Hawthorne's *Twice Told Tales* did not achieve traction with Victorian authors for most of the century, meaning, as Harris notes, that Victorians never satisfactorily defined the distinction between 'factual accounts, imaginative essays, and fictional narratives' (1979: 10). Various terms were used in the nineteenth century to describe shorter fiction, such as 'sketch', 'tale' and 'story'. The volatility of the genre is further complicated by the inclusion of semi-fictionalised travel accounts, re-workings of oral or folk tales, and translations and adaptations of French and German stories. The length of these pieces also varied widely. Elizabeth Ludlow and Rebecca

³ Margaret Beetham notes that anonymity and the use of multiple and cross-gender pseudonyms, although a device employed by both men and women could be detrimental as well as beneficial. 'Anonymity enabled complex developments of the first-person voice. [However], [f]or women who had become well known as novelists or poets, cashing in on the value of their names in journalistic and editorial work made sense' (226). Equally, 'the use of multiple pseudonyms was also a double-edged weapon, enabling the exploitation of different market niches but distorting or, in some cases, preventing the development of a recognizable authorial voice' (227).

⁴ See, for example, Wendell V Harris, *British Short Fiction in the Nineteenth Century*, Wayne State University Press: Detroit, 1979, *Nineteenth-Century Short Stories by Women*, ed. Harriet Devine Jump, London and New York: Routledge, 1998, and *The Oxford History of the Novel in English, Volume 3: The Nineteenth-Century Novel 1820–1880*, ed. John Kucich and Jenny Bourne Taylor, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.

Styler, for example, point out that Dickens's 'definition of a short story was one which was fewer than four instalments' (2). This 'notoriously slippery form', as Jenny Bourne Taylor notes, nevertheless became a vital crucible for the forging of narrative technique and experimentation (2012: 240). For the purposes of this book, the short story is considered as any piece of prose which is under the length required for a three-volume novel.

The very flexibility and lack of constraint of the short story throughout most of the century therefore made it an important genre to enable women writers to infiltrate the male-dominated world of the published author. Just as the novel became an increasingly feminised form, so the short story became what Harriet Devine Jump describes as 'a publishing phenomenon [with] the birth and proliferation of large numbers of annuals and albums, aimed specifically at female readers' (2). Between 1823 and 1832, the number of these annuals rose to sixty-three, an indication of the demand and size of the market and an important outlet for women writers of both poetry and short stories. Charles Dickens was quick to see the potential for these celebratory publications, issuing his own Christmas annuals 'which were aimed at the whole family rather than just at female readers' (2). These again offered well-paid authorial employment to women writers, including Elizabeth Gaskell. Women edited their own periodicals as well as contributing to other publications. Mary Elizabeth Braddon, for example, edited the *Belgravia* and *The Belgravia Annual*, and Ellen Wood edited *The Argosy*.

It can be argued therefore that the short story acted as a kind of training ground for female novelists. As Bourne Taylor states, 'It is hard to imagine the careers of Charlotte Brontë, [...] Elizabeth Gaskell, Harriet Martineau, or George Eliot developing as they did without the vital resource of various kinds of shorter works' (2012: 239). Short stories are often located at the intersection of fact and fiction, sometimes functioning as practice pieces to try out narrative themes, to explore issues on the cultural and social margins, and to experiment with form, tone and the mixing of genres. They existed, as Bourne Taylor notes, in creative tension with the novel, helping us to track the development of narrative ideas which are transmuted into larger works and illustrating 'perhaps more clearly than novels themselves—the active interrelationships among the key elements that make up a work of fiction: its narrative form and adaptation of genre, its immediate and subsequent publishing contexts, and its position within an author's developing career' (240). Despite the publishing risks associated with short story collections identified by Orel, several

women novelists, including Gaskell, had collections of their short stories published, and this too formed an important progression in the development of an author's writing technique when the stories were nested together within a framing narrative. Collections presented in this way—such as Gaskell's *Round the Sofa* (1859)—enabled the development of more complicated storytelling with the author having to manage multi-voice narration and a range of contrasting plots, differing tones and genres embedded within a coherent framework.

The roots of the short story lie in the oral tradition, in collective tales told around the fire shared with an intimate audience. Stories told in this way, at the end of the day, with the darkness outside, encouraged both the performative aspect of the tale (which Dickens capitalised on in his own readings of his texts) and the destabilising nature of the subject matter.⁵ Tales often focused on the supernatural as the accounts of Gaskell's oral storytelling discussed earlier illustrate, moving listeners into what Bourne Taylor describes as 'marginal and subversive spaces—both imaginative and cultural' (2012: 241). This liminal and transitional imaginative space challenged the cultural rationality and scientific orientation that apparently underpinned nineteenth-century society. Gaskell was fully aware of this aspect of the tale, as is apparent from her earliest letters when she describes how her days ended on a trip to Germany: 'we all told the most frightening & wild stories we had ever heard—some *such* fearful ones—all true'.⁶ The strong narrative aspect of the spoken tale is evident: the storytellers had to convince their audience of the truth of what they were saying. The oral tales performed here were on the margins of fact and fiction, and on the borderline of day and night, interstitial, difficult to place and unsettling. The 'tale of terror' was a regular feature in *Blackwoods* and as Bourne Taylor notes, 'was the crucial means by which elements of Gothic fiction

⁵ Gaskell loved the intimacy of firelight, in particular, a woodfire which 'has a kind of spiritual, dancing, glancing life about it. It is an elvish companion, crackling, hissing, bubbling: throwing out beautiful jets of vivid many-coloured flame' ('Company Manners' in Gaskell, ed Shattock, 1: 304). For a discussion of the ways in which Gaskell used fire in her narratives, see Lambert, *The Meanings of Home in Elizabeth Gaskell's Fiction*, pp. 105–108. The oral tradition, as Gaskell explains, was the influence behind *Mary Barton* (1848), her first novel: 'I told the story according to a fancy of my own; to really SEE the scenes I tried to describe, (and they WERE as real as my own life at the time) and then to tell them as nearly as I could, as if I were speaking to a friend over the fire on a winter's night and describing real occurrences' (Elizabeth Gaskell to Eliza Fox, May 29, 1849, in *Letters*, 82).

⁶ Elizabeth Gaskell to Elizabeth Holland, [Late 1841] in *Letters*, 44.

could be developed and transformed' (2012: 242). In particular, as my consideration of Gaskell's use of the gothic and the ghostly in Chap. 2 shows, it was a way of exploring areas of psychological instability and the often fragile carapace that contained an unstable personality within a socially and culturally acceptable framework.

The short story as Gaskell recognised also challenged the moral purpose demanded of novels: 'we can't always be high flown and moral in our stories', she tartly observes.⁷ She recognised the need of the storyteller to engage the audience, to hold their attention and to entertain, even when this was controversial as she explains to Catherine Winkworth:

I had the Sunday School girls here last Sunday, [...] and I thought we went off gloriously, only [...] in repeating our subjects of conversation, I named an accidental five minutes conversation with one or two of the girls about Sir Walter Scott's novels [...] and Mrs J. J. Taylor is shocked at such a subject of conversation on a *Sunday*,—so there I am in a scrape,—well! It can't be helped, I am myself and nobody else, and can't be bound by another's rules.⁸

Gaskell's insistence on her individuality has implications for both her novels and her short stories. It is closely linked to her insistence on truth-telling as a fundamental testament of her Unitarian faith which, in turn, made her willing to tackle controversial subjects. As Coral Lansbury states: 'Truth to a Unitarian was the torch that would eventually illuminate the whole of mankind' (14). This is clear from her reaction to the publication of *Mary Barton* (1848):

Some people here are very angry and say the book will do harm; and for a time I have been shaken and sorry; but I have such firm faith that the earnest expression of any one's feelings can only do good in the long run,—that God will cause the errors to be temporary [,] the truth to be eternal, that I try not to mind too much what people say either in blame or praise.⁹

Speaking out as a published writer was always, for Gaskell, a site of conflict between her creative need for expression, her religious beliefs and her struggle to conform to social expectations. Increasingly, this conflict became pathologised, resulting in constant low-level illness (headaches,

⁷ Elizabeth Gaskell to Anne Shaen [?24 April 1848] in *Letters*, 57.

⁸ Elizabeth Gaskell to Catherine Winkworth, November 29, 1848 in *Letters*, 63–4.

⁹ Elizabeth Gaskell to Miss Lamont, Jan. 5 [1849], in *Letters*, 70.

exhaustion) and a desire to escape.¹⁰ Death, illness and, in particular, the somatic figuring of illness on female characters found its way into her fiction, including her short stories.

Just as short stories could act as test pieces in which to try out themes, genres and narrative techniques which could be developed at further length in novels, so letters also provided a context in which to develop ideas for fiction.¹¹ Shattock notes that Gaskell differentiated her letter writing from her other writing pointing to the theoretical arguments about the self-consciousness, or otherwise, of the letter writer and the extent to which the letter is a performance. I concur with the view put forward by Shattock that '[t]he 'me' presented by the surviving and collected Gaskell letters is [...] a self-consciously constructed, social persona' (2005: xxix) but suggest further that letter writing for Gaskell, at least in part, formed part of her writing apprenticeship. In her letters, she began not only to work through ideas for fiction (phrasing, language and tone), but also to disentangle her own complex feelings about the act of writing and the implications of publishing her work. Gaskell, along with her contemporaries, viewed letters as a form of community narrative: 'Don't you like reading letters?' she asks John Forster, 'I do, so much'.¹² In their performative aspect, letters read out loud and shared with a group of friends, like oral stories, were an entertainment as well as a means of bonding social groups. For women in particular, they were also a way in which to develop intimacy and to build sympathetic networks which could be used to reflect on pieces of writing both as they progressed, and when they were published and in the public domain. Gaskell's correspondence with Eliza (Tottie) Fox is a case in point. Gaskell's intimacy with Tottie developed rapidly and the surviving letters to her show that the length and content of the correspondence increased and developed along with the trust in the

¹⁰This is not, of course, to deny the physical reality of Gaskell's ill-health. Jenny Uglow, for example, points out that the '*Ruth* fever' from which Gaskell suffered after the publication of *Ruth* (1853) was a case of life imitating art: Gaskell had 'a five-week bout of severe flu' (Uglow, 338). James Drife also notes that 'she was often ill with migraine, neuralgia and lassitude, [...] Even in retrospect, it is hard to know how serious these illnesses were. [...] Some of her symptoms were brought on by stress (for example, when she read critical reviews of *Ruth*) but some may have been the first signs of her fatal heart trouble' (4).

¹¹See also Lambert, *The Meanings of Home in Elizabeth Gaskell's Fiction* for a further discussion of the use of letters in Gaskell's fiction.

¹²Elizabeth Gaskell to John Forster, [17 May 1854], in *Letters*, 289.

relationship.¹³ Letters also illustrate, in a domestic context, the wider gendered conflict between the public and the private, illuminating issues of power, control and the struggle of many women to make their voices heard in a published form. For example, Gaskell writes to her sister-in-law explaining that William saw her previous letter and complained that it was ‘*slipshod*’—and ‘seemed to wish me not to send it’.¹⁴ Later, she writes ‘a long private letter; unburdening my mind a bit’ to her other sister-in-law, Anne Robson, asking her not to ‘allude too much to what I’ve been saying in your answer’.¹⁵ Privacy was paramount for Gaskell, and the exposure of her published work to reading and criticism, and indeed the writing process itself, despite her determination to present the truth, as she saw it, to a wider public, was often a painful invasion of her innermost self. After the publication of *Mary Barton*, she told Edward Chapman, ‘I am not thinking of writing any thing else; le jeu ne vaut pas la chandelle [the game is not worth the candle]’.¹⁶ Her irritation at speculation about her writing is made clear in a further letter to Chapman: ‘Simms had no right whatever to say that he had been told by any friend of mine that I was writing again. *No one* in Manchester, (except my husband of course) knows of it or can do more than suspect it’.¹⁷ The intimacy of writing for Gaskell and the cost of speaking out in public through a published text is apparent. Nevertheless, she continued to write and to publish her work. In the section that follows, I examine her short story publishing history in more detail.

¹³ Gaskell’s letter to Tottie Fox of 24 May 1849, for example, includes a carefully constructed description of a stay at Shottery, shared tales with ‘the rural inhabitants staying in the house, who believed in ghosts, and told some capital stories thereupon’ and a detailed description of William and the children (*Letters*, 80–82). It is to Tottie Fox that she writes the well-known letter about her ‘many mes’ (Elizabeth Gaskell to Eliza Fox, [?April 1850] in *Letters*, 107–110) discusses the gendered domestic expectations of women and the consequent conflict with creativity (Elizabeth Gaskell to Eliza Fox, [c. February 1850] in *Letters*, 106) and Tottie that she confides in after the critical reception of *Ruth* (Elizabeth Gaskell to Eliza Fox, [?Early February] 1853 in *Letters*, 222–3). Their physical meetings also echoed the shared narrative of the letters and continued the atmosphere of oral storytelling. Gaskell tells Tottie that when she comes to visit ‘[y]ou must bring me details when we have our *coute*; a *coute* is—a *coute*—two or three people, - sitting by firelight, in a very confidential open-hearted mood, talking of everything that comes uppermost’ (Elizabeth Gaskell to Eliza Fox, [Monday] Nov. 26, 1849 in *Letters*, 89–90).

¹⁴ Elizabeth Gaskell to Elizabeth Gaskell, [19 August 1838] in *Letters*, 34.

¹⁵ Elizabeth Gaskell to Anne Robson, [23 December 1841] in *Letters*, 45.

¹⁶ Elizabeth Gaskell to Edward Chapman, [9 March 1849] in *Letters*, 72.

¹⁷ Elizabeth Gaskell to Edward Chapman, [? December 1850] in *Letters*, 140.

GASKELL'S SHORT STORY PUBLISHING HISTORY

Many women, for example, George Eliot, Harriet Martineau and Margaret Oliphant, launched their writing careers through the periodical press. Like a number of other women, Gaskell used her personal networks to get her writing published. Gaskell's publishing history began with a letter she wrote to the publishers William and Mary Howitt (unknown to her at the time), thanking them for the pleasure two of their works had given her.¹⁸ She included an account of a visit to Clopton Hall in Warwickshire, which Carol Martin speculates 'was perhaps a schoolgirl's exercise done some years earlier' (1985: 95). William Howitt incorporated this, unattributed, into the third chapter of his book, *Visits to Remarkable Places* (1840). In a further letter to Mary Howitt, Gaskell responds to William Howitt's *The Rural Life of England* (1838) and by virtue of 'my country customs, by which I earn the privilege of again writing to you' fills her letter with a description of those very Cheshire customs.¹⁹ Howitt again incorporates material written by Gaskell, but unattributed to her, in the second edition of his book. Gaskell's early published works therefore raise a number of issues which reflect more widely on the gendered nature of publishing, discussed in more detail later in this chapter. Although her contribution to Howitt's work is unattributed, it illustrates the flexibility and variety of her work as an author and the way in which she could produce effective pieces of non-fiction as well as fiction, using these early contacts and experiences to ease her way into finding further opportunities for publication. Second, the importance of the editorial relationship is established in these examples, as Martin's detailed examination of the texts of Gaskell's letter and Howitt's revised, published text demonstrates. Gaskell's lively prose, as Martin notes, has been flattened in tone and style by Howitt's interventions, and her personal connection with the reader of her letter distanced by his superior attitude towards country people, an attitude consistent with his later lofty aims to educate 'the million' through *Howitt's Journal*. Gaskell's first published pieces, as Martin notes, appear therefore under the name of William Howitt, an example perhaps of a literary 'femme

¹⁸ Elizabeth Gaskell to William and Mary Howitt, [May 1838], in *Letters*, 14. Gaskell did have a poem 'Sketches Among the Poor, No. 1' published anonymously in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 41, (January 1837). However, this was written jointly with William, and not published as an independent piece written solely by Gaskell.

¹⁹ Elizabeth Gaskell to Mary Howitt, [18 August 1838] in *Letters*, 28.

couverte' pre-shadowing aspects of Gaskell's relationship with Charles Dickens discussed later in this chapter.

Gaskell went on to have three of her short stories published in *Howitt's Journal*.²⁰ Despite the correspondence with Mary Howitt and the Howitts's use of the material in her letters, Gaskell only met Mary Howitt and her daughter in person for the first time at Heidelberg in 1841. The Howitts were Quakers, but Gaskell's expectations of a 'simple Quaker' were confounded by a vision of 'a lady in a gay-coloured satin, black satin scarf & leghorn bonnet with a plume of drooping white feathers'.²¹ Mary Howitt's surprisingly worldly appearance, however, was an indicator of her prominent role in the public, masculine world of the periodical: she was no reticent appendage but a full partner with her husband in their publishing ventures. Her involvement was an intimate, domestic example of the way in which the periodical press acted as a space for public discourse on the cultural, social and political topics of the day as Hilary Fraser et al. explain: 'Relations between the so-called public sphere and the private domestic sphere were considerably more intimate and dynamic than prescriptive upholders of the 'separate spheres' gender economy maintained. The periodical press, offering a liminal space between public and private domains, was a critical mediating agent between these two worlds' (5). *Howitt's Journal* was run from home and was a family affair. The Howitts's personal and business relationship, intimately intertwined, offered a microcosm of the external struggles that were being conducted in the public world of the periodical press and presented Gaskell with an example of the ways in which women could make their voices heard.²²

Howitt's Journal of Literature and Popular Progress had a convoluted history not untypical of the crowded and fluid publishing environment of the nineteenth century which saw shifting inter-relationships between publishers as the literary marketplace developed and diversified. As Alexis

²⁰ See table in Appendix for a chronological breakdown of Gaskell's writing and where it was published.

²¹ Elizabeth Gaskell to Elizabeth Holland, [Late 1841] in *Letters*, 43.

²² Hilary Fraser et al. point to the complexity of gendering in periodical writing. '[t]he world of journalism was a predominantly masculine one. Indeed, the very genre of the periodical in the nineteenth century was itself gendered, in ways that meant the work of women for the press was largely obscured by the cultural identification of the 'journalist' as a signifier of masculinity. But whereas journalism was gendered masculine by those who regarded it as having a lofty status in the modern profession of letters, it was just as insistently feminised by those who denigrated periodical writing' (5-6).

Easley et al. note, '[d]espite the neat definitions proffered by the newspaper press directories to potential advertisers, periodicals occupied complex and shifting positions in the literary marketplace' (12). The Howitts initially became financially and intellectually involved with John Saunders who edited the *People's Journal* and with whom they shared their political ideals.²³ Late in 1846, they had a major disagreement with Saunders over what they felt was his mismanagement of the journal, including the associated finances. The Howitts set up their own eponymously named *Howitt's Journal* in 1847, with the aim of meeting the 'enormous need of aid, of comfort, of advocacy, and of enlightenment' (*Howitt's Journal*, 1, 1). The Howitts were both prolific and well connected, and their weekly journal, as Shattock notes:

had an initial circulation of 30,000 [...] The sixteen-page weekly's social and political agenda made it one of the most influential of the "magazines of popular progress," which reached out at mid-century to embrace the newly literate readerships located mainly in urban centers, as well as to address a more educated liberal readership that was in sympathy with its principles. (2016: 54)

Their ambitious aims to work 'amongst the million [...] to promote their education, and especially their self-education' (ibid.: 1) were short-lived, however, and the journal folded in 1848.²⁴

The three short stories that Gaskell published in *Howitt's Journal* were embedded among the plethora of articles, poetry, reviews and short stories that made up the periodical under the masculine pseudonym of Cotton Mather Mills, Esq. The emphatic addition of the 'Esq' firmly underlines the gender of the author even if the name itself, as Shattock notes, playfully alludes to Gaskell's geographical location as well as 'the American divine associated with the Salem witch trials' (2005, 1: 47).²⁵ The issue of

²³ For a more detailed account of the Howitts's publishing history, see Fraser et al., pp. 114 et seq. For an account of collaborative working between the Howitts (including the collaboration between Mary Howitt and her daughter), see Linda Peterson (2009).

²⁴ Saunders won the court case brought by the Howitts and brought out a periodical with the combined title of *The People's and Howitt's Journal* (1849–1851). Although the Howitts's name is in the title, they never contributed to it. For a detailed discussion of the Howitts and their careers in periodical and other publishing, see Joanne Shattock (2016).

²⁵ A number of scholars have commented on Gaskell's rather curious choice of pseudonym. Cotton Mather was the notorious American witch-finder who Charles Upham blamed for the Salem witchcraft accusations and trials. Gaskell's choice of pseudonym indicates her early

anonymity, or otherwise, is one which continues to be debated. Fraser et al. point to the editor's role in controlling the overall style and tone of the periodical which, in turn, was closely related to an awareness of the need to attract and keep readers in a highly competitive, fluid and consumer-driven market. Periodical journalism became a microcosm of the debates that raged over ideologies of gender and class.²⁶ The style and content of *Howitt's Journal* reflected their political and ideological views as Fraser et al. explain: '[m]any of the articles, stories and poems they accepted or commissioned also appear under each individual author's name' (147). This policy aligns with their collaborative and egalitarian approach, and possibly also reflects opposition to paternalistic and gendered conventions about suitable subject matter on which men and women could write. In the case of Gaskell's short stories, her contributions appear somewhat haphazardly placed in the journal with some episodes being more coherently framed than others.²⁷ Nevertheless, her

interest in witchcraft and the events in Salem. Deborah Wynne notes that Mather features as a character in 'Lois the Witch' and that one of his speeches is quoted verbatim (88). Christine Krueger notes the unsettling juxtaposition between the 'two worlds comprised in this name [evoking] on the one hand spiritual fanaticism, delusion and witchcraft trials, and on the other materialism, political economy, and exploited labour' (29). Felicity James on the other hand argues that the adoption of this name at the beginning of Gaskell's writing career

might [...] be seen as an attempt to re-inhabit particular Dissenting histories, yoking seventeenth-century debates to a new Mancunian, industrial context to emphasize the ways in which the past might be read alongside the present. Her appropriation of Cotton Mather's name, along with his witchcraft narratives, suggest a dual attempt both to remember and to re-interpret the past, to lance it of its potential for harm by a sympathetic re-reading and contextualization. (470)

²⁶ For a further discussion of these issues, see Fraser et al., p. 11 et seq.

²⁷ Part 1 of 'Libbie Marsh's Three Eras' starts at the top of the second column on page 310 of Volume 1 of *Howitt's Journal* preceded by a letter from F. Y. Hurlstone, president of the Society of British Artists, describing his picture 'The Mountain Piquet' (a shelter for shepherds in the Arbruzzi mountains). Part 1 is followed by an article by Philip P. Carpenter: 'On the Evils Indirectly Connected with the Temperance Reformation'. Part 2 follows an article by William Howitt 'Visit to O'Connell at Derrynane in the autumn of 1845'. Part 3 is preceded by an article by Goodwyn Barmby on 'United Service Family Associations' which obliquely picks up the themes of community and social problem in the story as does the article that follows 'Penny Wisdom by a Man of No Party: No III—Tempers for Trying Times'. 'The Sexton's Hero' starts on the second column on page 149 of Volume 1 of *Howitt's Journal* preceded by two short poems, 'To a Redbreast Singing in August' by

involvement with the Howitts provided valuable experience in becoming a published author.

Gaskell's next published text was her first novel, *Mary Barton* (1848). William Howitt claimed the credit for launching her writing career. About 1848, Howitt wrote to an unknown correspondent: 'Have you read *Mary Barton*? The book was written at my suggestion and disposed of by me. The authoress never wrote a book before'.²⁸ Nevertheless, despite Howitt's patronising tone, he proved an able mentor, capable of negotiating a successful path through the masculine-gendered network of interlocking contacts and relationships, both personal and professional, that formed the environment of nineteenth-century publishing. The question of the name under which the novel was to be published was raised. Jenny Uglow notes that the contract was made in Gaskell's name, but that she was conflicted as to the appropriate gender of the supposed author: 'it is clear, from her search for a male pseudonym up to the time of publication, that she was reluctant to be identified with the book, and did not want it to seem 'the work of a lady'. Authority meant more to her than 'popularity' (1999: 183). *Mary Barton* was eventually published anonymously.

Between 1849 and 1850 Gaskell published three short stories and one piece of journalism. 'Hand and Heart' (1849) appeared in the *Sunday School Penny Magazine*, 'The Last Generation in England' (1849) and 'Martha Preston' (1850) in *Sartain's Union Magazine*, and 'The Moorland Cottage' (1850) in Chapman and Hall's Christmas book. Gaskell also published a further story in the *Sunday School Penny Magazine*, 'Bessy's Troubles at Home' (1852) and a novella, *Mr. Harrison's Confessions* (1851) in *The Ladies' Companion*.²⁹ Gaskell's growing confidence and

Richard Howitt and 'Sonnet to the Castle of Donegal' by William Allingham and followed by a further short poem 'How May Was First Made' from the Poetical Language of Flowers by Thomas Miller. 'Christmas Storms and Sunshine', the final story that Gaskell contributed to the journal, on the other hand, is the first fictional contribution to this issue, starting on page 4, following an unsigned opening piece, probably by the Howitts, on 'New Year's Eve in Different Nations'.

²⁸ Quoted in Carol Woodring, 141. Jenny Uglow notes that it is also quoted in the *Manchester Guardian* and the undated cutting is in the Shorter collection, Brotherton (Uglow, 640, n. 16).

²⁹ Shirley Foster notes that this novella, published between February and April 1851 in *The Ladies' Companion*, was 'a journal to which Gaskell contributed only once, and for which she seems to have had little regard' (2009: 117). Alan Shelston notes that *The Ladies' Companion* was edited by Mrs Jane Loudon. Both she and her husband were involved in periodical publishing. 'Loudon was succeeded as editor in May 1850 by Henry Fothergill Chorley, a writer