



Lesa Scholl, Emily Morris, and Sarina Gruver Moore, eds. *Place and Progress in the Works of Elizabeth Gaskell*

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The title of this collection of essays places it squarely amidst a tradition of criticism that considers Elizabeth Gaskell in terms of her contribution to regionalist representations of both city and country. The contents of the volume, however, shift critical focus to Gaskell's representations of blurred boundaries and liminal spaces. Gaskell, the editors contend, uses movement between and within places to think about the possibilities for social, economic, and temporal progress both within and among persons. In this sense, Gaskell is a novelist less of static places than of dynamic places.

The fifteen essays are grouped into four sections: "Home Geographies," "Mobility and Boundaries," "Literary and Imagined Spaces," and "Cultural Performance and Visual Spaces." The finest of these essays offer important contributions to Gaskell criticism by charting unseen connections across persons, spaces, and time. Katherine Inglis, for example, describes in "Unimagined Community and Disease in *Ruth*" how the spread of Typhus undermines distinctions between the pure and the impure, suggesting "the real interconnectedness and broad scope of a fallen woman's community" (68). Josie Billington, in "Gaskell's 'Rooted' Prose Realism," traces the momentary intrusion of past memories and future eventualities—often within parentheses or between dashes—into the persistent present of Gaskell's realism, and places this approach in the context of other Victorian female writers. While the essays most frequently discuss *North and South*, Gaskell's novels, short fiction, letters, and even Greek songs, all receive some attention. The approaches to Gaskell's works represented here are also diverse; essays of general interest to the reader of Gaskell are presented alongside more specialized studies of Gaskell and empire, emigration, ethnography, meteorology, and ekphrasis.

Considering the broad range of methods and perspectives, the view of Gaskell presented in these essays is surprisingly unified. The collection, which originally developed out of a meeting at the British Women Writers' Conference in 2012, overwhelmingly presents Gaskell as an author who transcends boundaries; Gaskell is, the editors note, "global . . . fluid, complex, and open" (3). This point is an important one, but it also means that the limitations of Gaskell's vision are rarely acknowledged or addressed. Mary Mullen alone, in her essay "In Search of Shared Time: National Imaginings in Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*," draws



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attention to Gaskell's role in policing certain boundaries, arguing that even as Gaskell represents the diversity of the nation's present, she pointedly excludes the Irish from her vision of its future. The collection also rarely describes Gaskell in relation to the print culture of the period. Julia M. Chavez, in her essay "Reading 'An Every-Day Story' Through Bifocals: Seriality and the Limits of Realism in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Wives and Daughters*," offers one exception, reading Gaskell's serially published novel in its original context in the *Cornhill Magazine*. Further consideration of the print medium as a space of literary engagement would have enhanced the collection's general aim of demonstrating Gaskell's engagement with social and political issues of contemporary importance.

This collection of essays reenergizes critical discussion about Gaskell's signature emphasis on place by suggesting a wide range of dynamic new approaches to the subject. Far from being a simple observer of city and country, Gaskell, as these contributors show, uses place as a means to illuminate Victorian economic, social, temporal, and personal forms of progress.

Laura Forsberg
Concordia University Texas