

A Survey of Gaskell Scholarship, or Things Written Recently about Gaskell

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The body of Things Written about Elizabeth Gaskell and her works continues to increase by some geometrical proportion so that each new year sees well-crafted reviews, articles, books, book introductions and book chapters appear to delight -- and perhaps overwhelm -- the Gaskellian reader. One piece of evidence of the enormous interest in Gaskell is this fact: when in the fall of 1997 Mitsuharu Matsuoka posted an e-mail message giving a list of recent dissertations on or including Gaskell written for doctoral degrees in the United States, the list came to 64 theses completed between 1992 and 1997. What such a statistic tells us is that there is plenty of new scholarship being done and written up. Some researchers have new biographical or bibliographical information to report; others offer new interpretations of Gaskell's works based on their expertise in related fields. Still other writers provide new insights into the literature we already thought we knew, insights that renew our own readings.

New primary materials, like newly discovered letters, always catch our interest, most certainly two full-length volumes recently published. One is a relatively slight but fascinating edition: *Private Voices: The Diaries of Elizabeth Cleghorn Gaskell and Sophia Isaac Holland*, edited by J.A.V. Chapple and Anita C. Wilson (Keele UP, 1996), and reviewed by Jo Pryke in the *Gaskell Society Journal* in 1997. The other "primary" volume is Professor John Chapple's biographical study, *Elizabeth Gaskell: The Early Years*, (Manchester UP, 1997). Combining a graceful narrative with an amazingly complete mass of detailed information, this lengthy work will be enormously useful to students and scholars interested in Gaskell's family background and youth, because of Chapple's authoritative organization and interpretation. (Readers should note the perceptive review of this book by Andrew Sanders in the 1998 *Journal* issue.)

1997 also welcomed the reprinting of all xxxiii plus 1010 pages of the original 1966 edition of *The Letters of Mrs Gaskell*, edited by J.A.V. Chapple and Arthur Pollard, in an accessible paperback edition produced by Mandolin (the paperback imprint from Manchester UP, the original publishers). Satisfying though this paperback reprinting is, Gaskellians who have followed the discovery of many more letters since the 1966 volume went to press (some have been published in the *Gaskell Society Journal*) can now look forward to

a completely new collection of the additional Letters. As of the fall of 1998, Alan Shelston and John Chapple were hard at work on the great task of editing this Volume II. Something to put on your wish-list for birthday or Christmas presents in future years!

Besides primary materials, we have seen a host of new interpretations of Gaskell's works in recent years. Whether based in traditional methodology or in new theoretical approaches to reading literature, these well-crafted studies light up the novels and stories they discuss and stimulate readers' enthusiasm for Gaskell. Much is what we call "scholarship," including both the examination of previously unknown or unexamined texts, and critical interpretations of texts. We might mention, however, the welcome torrent of many other writings and the music of other new voices in the international Gaskellian conversation. An example of an accessible non-scholarly contribution is the paper titled "Elizabeth Gaskell: 'Offering Readers Escape and a Public and Private View of Victorian Life'" by Brenda M. Brandt, posted on the Professor Matsuoka's Gaskell website on the Internet at: <http://www.lang.nagoya-u.ac.jp/~matsuoka/EG-Brandt.html>. (Internet users who have already bookmarked the Gaskell website can go there and click on "What's New" to find the Brandt paper). Brandt does not claim to have anything new for professional scholars, but she does offer a pleasant sharing, aimed at students like herself, at of how Gaskell's writings "reach out" to her "on three levels--escapist literature, social protest literature, and biographical literature." Student papers have not usually achieved international recognition, but placed on the website, Brandt's survey may be helpful to other students on several continents -- and to their instructors.

For a full listing of Things Published about Gaskell's life, works and influence since 1992, readers can look forward to the new bibliography by Gaskell Society member Nancy S. Weyant, now planned to cover the ten years from 1992 to 2001. This will continue her previous bibliography, *Elizabeth Gaskell: An Annotated Bibliography of English-Language Sources, 1976-1991*, published in 1994 by Scarecrow Press and reviewed in the 1995 *Gaskell Society Journal*. Since Scarecrow Press has decided to wait until the next book can cover the whole of this productive decade, Nancy expects a very full volume. As of the middle of 1998, she had 354 items listed for the new bibliography, and she commented that she had found "more published in six-seven years than . . . in the fifteen years of the original." Since many of the sources she is tracking "simply don't show up in the MLA or other standard indexes," she is willing to be contacted by scholars -- seasoned and neophyte -- who need to identify resources on particular topics by accessing the

information she has collected since 1992. Nancy S. Weyant's address is: Coordinator of Reference Services, Harvey A. Andruss Library, Bloomsburg University, Bloomsburg, PA 17815, USA. Her e-mail address is: nweyant@bloomu.edu.

When we do get to see Weyant's new *Bibliography* in print, it will include ten years' worth of full length studies, chapters in multiple-author studies, book reviews, new editions of Gaskell's works, long and short articles of historical reportage and criticism, and dissertations. Another item for that wish-list!

Meanwhile, readers of the *Gaskell Society Journal* have been kept aware of full-length scholarly studies of Gaskell published in recent years. We have welcomed Jenny Uglow's thoroughly competent biography, *Elizabeth Gaskell: A Habit of Stories* (Faber and Faber, 1993). In the year before Uglow's publication, two significant -- and very different studies came out and were both reviewed in the 1993 *Journal* issue. Felicia Bonaparte's *The Gypsy-Bachelor of Manchester: The Life of Mrs. Gaskell's Demon* (U of Virginia P) analyzes "Gaskell's life and fiction as one continuous metaphoric text" in the attempt to "explore Elizabeth Gaskell's inner existence." (1). *Scheherezade in the Marketplace: Elizabeth Gaskell and the Victorian Novel* (Oxford UP), by Hilary M. Schor, is a solid and creative study of Gaskell as female author. In turn, Uglow's biography was reviewed in the 1994 *Journal* -- and in many other publications, both scholarly and popular. Since Uglow's watershed, other book-length contributions continue to include primary and historical material or offer further biographical analysis or critical readings.

Among the new books on Gaskell are two astute surveys of appealing brevity. 1993 saw the efficient and perceptive overview of Gaskell's life and major works, with insights from feminist theory, in Jane Spencer's *Elizabeth Gaskell* (Macmillan/St. Martin's, 1993, reviewed in the *Gaskell Society Journal* by Kathryn Sutherland in 1995. Similarly helpful is Kate Flint's *Elizabeth Gaskell*, (Writers and Their Work series), noted for its usefulness for the "general student" by Christine Lingard in the *Gaskell Society Newsletter's* March 1996 issue, and more completely reviewed by Alan Shelston in the 1996 *Journal*. A somewhat longer evaluative biography is Anna Unsworth's *Elizabeth Gaskell: An Independent Woman*, published by Minerva Press in 1996 and reviewed by Irene Wiltshire in the 1997 *Journal*. Unsworth's expertise includes detailed treatment of Gaskell's relationship to (among others): German Romanticism, Unitarianism, Ruskin, Christian Socialism, and French feminism.

Three book-length studies of Gaskell's fiction all bear 1995 as their publication year. Terence Wright's *Elizabeth Gaskell: "We Are Not Angels": Realism, Gender, Values* (Macmillan) was reviewed by Alan Shelston in the *Gaskell Society Journal's* 1996 issue. Wright straightforwardly discusses his close reading of each of the novels in turn, with a chapter on the short fiction.

One full-length publication not reviewed in the *Gaskell Society Journal* is *Family and Society in the Works of Elizabeth Gaskell*, by E. Holly Pike (#174 of the publisher's "American University Studies, Series IV," Peter Lang, 1995). Pike analyzes Gaskell's shift through her major works from support for traditional social structures to questioning paternalism in family and society and suggesting alternative relationships. Another book tracing development of a particular theme to show how Gaskell's works challenge Victorian assumptions is *"Some Appointed Work to Do": Women and Vocation in the Fiction of Elizabeth Gaskell* by Robin S. Colby (Greenwood, 1995). Colby's work about "work" was described in Christine Lingard's "Book Notes" in the *Gaskell Society Newsletter* of March, 1998.

Particularly interesting as a forceful and creative study of complexities in Gaskell is *Dissembling Fictions: Elizabeth Gaskell and the Victorian Social Text* by Deirdre d'Albertis (St. Martin's, 1997), reviewed in the current *Journal* issue. Those intrigued by d'Albertis's insightful scholarship might also like to see Patsy Stoneman's review of this book in the September 1998 issue of *Nineteenth Century Literature*. D'Albertis has cited Stoneman's own book on Gaskell (*Elizabeth Gaskell*, 1987) as one of the "recently offered feminist accounts" which she is actually "reading against" (p. 12), and Stoneman counters that d'Albertis is not quite so original or revolutionary as she claims to be. In fact, d'Albertis follows paths already opened by her foremothers in feminist-oriented criticism, and thus, with reference to previous studies by Coral Lansbury (1975) and Jane Spencer (1993), Stoneman judges D'Albertis's work as "well researched but badly argued and ultimately ungenerous" (p. 253). Meanwhile, Stoneman does praise d'Albertis's work for its thorough research and its usefulness both as a study of Gaskell and as a "guide to Victorian debate on a range of issues" (p. 251).

These recent years have seen the publication of quite a number of new editions of Gaskell's works, and the reader wanting guidance among them should see Shirley Foster's article, "Gaskell in Paperback" in the 1997 issue of the *Gaskell Society Journal*. Foster's study offers excellent advice, not only by evaluating various editions of Gaskell's works available at the time of writing, but also by analyzing some of the possible differences in purpose and ideology demonstrated in their introductions and notes. Thus Foster's

observations might also aid readers in navigating among still newer editions that were “in the pipeline” when she wrote her article. Further, readers should look at Alan Shelston’s review of three new paperback editions, including one by Foster herself, in the following year’s *Journal* (1998). Shelston’s comments also evaluate the editions under scrutiny and reflect on the duties and contributions of editors.

Also recently published are a number of impressive full-length “multiple author studies” that include chapters on or other substantial treatment of Gaskell. Several using feminist theory to give sometimes challenging interpretations were all published in 1995, including: Ruth Y. Jenkins, *Reclaiming Myths of Power: Women Writers and the Victorian Spiritual Crisis* (Associated University Presses); Elizabeth Langland, *Nobody’s Angels: Middle-Class Women and Domestic Ideology in Victorian Culture* (Cornell UP); Jill Matus, *Unstable Bodies: Victorian Representations of Sexuality and Maternity* (Manchester UP,); and *Walking the Victorian Street: Women, Representation and the City*, by Deborah Epstein Nord (Cornell UP). The book by Jenkins was reviewed by Charlotte Crofts in the *Gaskell Society Journal* of 1996; Christine Lingard wrote a brief review of the book by Jenkins for the *Gaskell Society Newsletter* of August, 1995, and of the book by Nord for the August 1996 *Newsletter*.

An earlier study based in feminist theory is *Outside the Pale: Cultural Exclusion, Gender Difference, and the Victorian Woman Writer*, by Elsie B. Michie (Cornell UP, 1993). And among more recent feminist studies with Gaskell among the multiple authors treated are two intriguing books published in 1998: Deborah Anna Logan’s *Fallenness in Victorian Women’s Writing: Marry, Stitch, Die or Do Worse* (University of Missouri Press); and Barbara Leah Harmon’s *The Feminine Political Novel in Victorian England* (University Press of Virginia).

Moving on from full-length books, we often find new ideas arriving in the research published as individual essays in scholarly, peer-reviewed journals. It must be admitted that this very *Journal* has been consistently publishing articles of solid scholarship. Generally conservative, they have offered new information or interpretations to Gaskell’s readers, usually without the use of distinctive theoretical approaches such as Marxist, New Historicist, deconstructionist or feminist readings. But theory does guide interpretation here, as elsewhere. For example, feminist theory underlies Siv Jansson’s article about Gaskell’s challenge to the “cultural construction of womanhood” (the “Angel in the House”) in the 1996 issue, and Ruth McDowall Cook’s study of women’s work in *My Lady Ludlow* in 1997.

Other articles provide new historical information to illuminate Gaskell's life and works. In the 1998 issue, Marie Fitzwilliam uses her detailed study of the social status and professional role of the village general practitioner to explicate "Mr. Harrison's Confessions." By analyzing the variations in the training and practices of the medical practitioners in the story, she gives us a new reading of characters and themes. In "A Crisis of Liberalism in *North and South*" in the 1996 issue, Andrew Sanders explains the career change of Margaret Hale's father early in the novel by his wide-ranging and detailed study of the history and the contemporary climate of theological and political liberalism. Several scholars report on their studies of previously unused contemporary accounts and private papers. Examples are seen in the 1997 issue, with the article by Heather Sharps using new biographical information about Sir James Kay-Shuttleworth for her study of his relationship with Gaskell, and in Marianne McLeod Gilchrist's article on "The Shaw Family of Staten Island: Elizabeth Gaskell's American Friends" in 1995. Meanwhile, some of this *Journal's* articles simply offer new careful readings of the text, such as Harumi James's study of *Cousin Phillis* in the 1994 issue.

Undoubtedly much fine scholarship is shared with colleagues and students and is perhaps presented and discussed at professional meetings, yet goes no further. As mentioned earlier, many papers are printed but not indexed; indexed journals are not available to all searchers. But the well-written articles that do get published in refereed academic journals with wide circulations and considerable prestige are sought by readers because they report new information, demonstrate new methodology, and/or argue for new interpretations. Some articles published in recent years in *Nineteenth Century Literature* may illustrate the kind of new ideas developed in such scholarly writings.

In *Nineteenth Century Literature's* 49th volume (in 1994), in "The Female Visitor and the Marriage of Classes in Gaskell's *North and South*," Dorice Williams Elliott offers a new analysis of the novel that follows but disagrees with the previous interpretations of its social commentary by Cazamian, Minogue, Lucas, Gallagher, Bodenheimer and Schor, and particularly with the traditional notion of an either-or dichotomy between the public and the private sphere. Distinguishing hers from earlier readings, Elliott develops her concept of the "social sphere" as a new location of both ideological and material space in 19th century culture between the public and private spheres.

Elliott argues that *North and South* spoke to mid-19th century concerns about female visitors to the poor in a way that explains some of its

complexities, including the problematic happy ending. She says that in *North and South* Gaskell does “cultural work” by making marriage analogous to class cooperation. While the 19th century social sphere was sufficiently feminized for women to enter it, they found themselves competing with clergymen and other male professionals for authority over it, in particular in the project of healing class divisions. Middle class women’s contacts with both their own servants and with poor families they visited were seen as having “crucial ideological significance” (p. 30).

While the 19th century woman visitor was expected to promote tranquility and morality in the homes she visited, as in her own home, Gaskell sees the woman’s real work as mediating separate interests by representing those interests and managing their signification. Citing Patricia Johnson and Catherine Gallagher, Elliott develops the idea of a “crisis of signification that inevitably occurs with rapid social change” (p. 39) Language differences, confusion of signals as well as speech, separate people in the novel’s many alternating scenes of dialogue, actually debates. The novel does what it recommends, constructing a new social space for the separate classes to come together in discourse.

However, as Elliott details Margaret Hale’s particular position in charitable visiting and the particular results of her autonomous activity in the social sphere, she also treats the cost of a woman’s access to the social sphere; she settles for love and marriage instead of revolution. But, says Elliott, the happy ending in *North and South* is not Gaskell’s collapse into convention, nor does it signify a renewed division between family and society. Rather, she reads Margaret’s marriage as “Gaskell’s metaphor for the newly constructed social sphere” (p. 49).

In Volume 50 (1995) of *Nineteenth Century Literature*, Philip Rogers gives us a truly new intertextual reading of *Cousin Phillis* in his study of what Phillis actually reads in the novella. Titled “The Education of Cousin Phillis,” the article, like Gaskell herself, identifies Phillis’s love experience with her unusual education in languages and texts usually taught only to males. Although her young male cousin believes such an education makes her less womanly, Rogers argues that the education confirms Phillis’s Victorian femininity. He asserts that Phillis’s father and lover control her reading of Virgil, Dante and Manzoni, so that her unusual study can never masculinize or liberate her, but actually makes her more feminine -- and damages her.

Rogers notes that learning here is the province of men; the men in *Cousin Phillis* are all teaching and learning from each other; but Phillis is only

pupil, never teacher. Phillis is taught Latin and Greek, not for her own sake, but because her father has no son. Men's shared learning is utilitarian, Phillis's seems to have no purpose. Further, as Rogers tracks Gaskell's allusions to Virgil, Ovid and Renaissance pastoral traditions, it seems that the purpose of Phillis's readings is to teach her classical patterns of female self-destruction. The male characters have no insight into Phillis's desires for self-fulfillment. Rogers sees her study of *Inferno* as an attempt to escape the constraints of Hope Farm -- like, of course, her interest in Holdsworth. But Phillis is not liberated; Holdsworth intrudes into her Italian vocabulary and manages her reading of Dante. Rogers connects Phillis not with Dante the pilgrim, but, given the signification of the Manzoni novel, with Francesca di Rimini in the *Inferno*, led by reading into damnation.

Rogers also tracks the symbolism in men's learning; it is incomplete, like the railroad line that Holdsworth surveys. The metaphor of the bog-that-cannot-be-tracked suggests that in the novella's ending is not Phillis's failure to hold onto her man, but the men's failure to understand Phillis's depths. Rogers also says Holman's two voices as minister and as farmer are "unharmonious," and that his favorite texts, the Bible and the *Georgics*, have conflicting messages for his daughter. While Minister Holman thinks that Virgil tells the "living truth" about the life around him, he fails to see that Virgil represents the power of female desire and that parents cannot control children who have fallen in love. Phillis's father does not notice her sexual maturing; her lover would reduce her to an object as the figure of Nature or Ceres, and in telling Phillis what little he understands of Holdsworth's feelings, Paul accepts the male myth of passive female availability. Even the burnt stick with which Manning writes on Mrs. Holman's dresser signifies intrusion and violation.

In his intertextual study, Rogers traces the name "Phyllis" through Virgil's Eclogues, in Horace, and Ovid, in Renaissance and 18th century pastoral texts, and in an Isaac Watts hymn; these connect Gaskell's Phillis with images of foliage, with sexual availability and freedom, with denial of the girl's individuality, and the possibility of her betrayal and destruction. He then analyzes what Manzoni's *The Betrothed*, Holdsworth's choice for her, has to teach; he describes the plot as centering on a pretty girl as the sexual object of a predatory man. Yet after her education by these demeaning texts, Phillis recovers at the end by rejecting self-destructive models and reclaiming life.

Another scholarly article in *Nineteenth Century Literature* in 1995 is "Economies of Living in Mrs. Gaskell's *Cranford*" by James Mulvihill. This combines a historical study of the notion of "economy" with narrative theory. Mulvihill shows that Gaskell, like William Cobbett and John Ruskin, uses

“economy” to mean “management” in general, not only of wealth, products and exchanges, in all her works and especially in the “elegant economy” of *Cranford*. Her characters manage their financial affairs, but more importantly, their emotional, social, and moral resources. “Narrative, too, is a matter of economy,” Mulvihill writes, and he discusses how Gaskell manages the resources of her narrative.

Two more recent articles in this same journal offer revitalized readings of the works they discuss. In Volume 52 (September 1997) is “Mothers without Children, Unity without Plot: *Cranford*’s Radical Charm,” by Margaret Case Croskery. The novel’s fabled charm is not only a critical challenge (how can any work so charming be worth discussing?) but also the key to its complex relationship to fiction as genre, novel as form, and plot as expected component of the definition. Croskery discusses *Cranford* as a novel of maternal sympathy and reform which expands narrative tradition. In the next year (1998, still volume 52 of *Nineteenth Century Literature*), Clare Pettitt published “‘Cousin Holman’s Dresser’: Science, Social Changes and the Pathologized Female in Gaskell’s ‘Cousin Phillis.’” Pettitt asserts that Gaskell deals with scientific discourses and theories in the novella, using the “somatic figuring” of Phillis to enact on her body the pain of contemporary rapid social change.

Further examples of the illuminating creativity in recent scholarly publications can be seen in the highly regarded professional periodical *Victorian Newsletter*; In 1997 this journal published three articles of Gaskell scholarship, all discussing *North and South*. The Spring issue has two Gaskell articles. Pamela Corpron Parker’s “From Ladies’ Business to ‘Real Business’: Elizabeth Gaskell’s Capitalistic Fantasy in *North and South*” argues that Gaskell believed in the interdependence of domestic and political economies, and in the fiction moves Margaret Hale into both emotional and economic power. Catherine Barnes Stevenson’s “Romance and the Self-Made Man: Gaskell Rewrites Brontë” demonstrates that *North and South* is a *bildungsroman* about John Thornton’s growth as well as Margaret Hale’s. Stevenson asserts that in Thornton Gaskell is “rewriting” the character of Robert Moore in Charlotte Brontë’s *Shirley*. Reading the novel as Thornton’s romance too, we see Gaskell critiquing and redefining Victorian notions of manhood and the “masculine achiever.” Then in *Victorian Newsletter*’s Fall issue, Bonnie Gerard’s “Victorian Things, Victorian Words: Representation and Redemption in Gaskell’s *North and South*” uses discourse theory and a comparative analysis of Wordsworth’s Neoplatonism in the *Prelude* to explain

Margaret Hale's ideological reversal and "symbolic redemption of industrial materialism."

Finally, two new currents in Gaskell scholarship are exemplified in a 1996 article by Thomas E. Recchio, who has published on Gaskell (including in the *Gaskell Society Journal* of 1991) and on reading and composition theory (with a recent article in *College English* on Bakhtinian theory in pedagogy).

He uses Gaskell's fiction in a new way in "A Monstrous Reading of *Mary Barton*: Fiction as 'Communitas.'" The word "Monstrous" in the title refers to Frankenstein's monster in Mary Shelley's novel; the monster tries to use what he reads to understand himself. "Personal application" has not been a respectable approach to literature in recent decades, but Recchio suggests that teachers listen to recent research in cognitive psychology, some of it impelled by feminist theory, to developments in personal or autobiographical criticism and to reader-response theory, rather than commit the kind of "interpretive violence" he remembers in his own student years. To ground his theory of "communitas," taken from anthropologist Victor Turner, Recchio tells of his own reading of *Mary Barton* in 1974. Having revised Turner's model, Recchio offers his own three types of "communitas": *spontaneous communitas* was his immediate response of instinctive sympathy in reading *Mary Barton*; *normative communitas* was the position he forced himself into to write the expected academic paper based on a Marxist analysis of what Gaskell failed to confront, and *ideological communitas* is what he strives for as reader, writer and teacher now, a revisionary process of integrating the other two.

Recchio discusses W.R. Greg's review of *Mary Barton* in April of 1849 in the *Edinburgh Review*. Greg feared the disruptive challenge of the spontaneous communitas in its powerful scenes, and he refers his own readers to structures of normative communitas, that is, to established laws of economics and society. As the "cultural life" of the novel is extended by every new reading, Recchio pursues how the novel would lead him to a better, if not final, sense of his own identity, class and values. In his explication, he details his own autobiography as the son of an Italian-American and an Anglo-American of the lower middle class, with family life "defined by cultural, religious, and personal conflict." His personal details authenticate his appreciation for Gaskell's work, and in particular for the way in which *Mary Barton* explores the conflict between spontaneous and normative communitas. Further, by experiencing the text, he discovers that a naive sense of simply participating in Gaskell's sympathy is complicated by the facts of his real identity. Thus Recchio is not calling for exploiting texts to soothe personal

pains, but for helping our students to read so as to understand the various patterns and relationships that shape human lives.

Recchio's article differs from others described above in two major ways. First, his primary concern is not *Mary Barton* but rather the notion of reading as an individual process with both individual and communal significance. The discussion of *Mary Barton* offers no new understanding from inside Gaskell's text, but the contrasted responses that Recchio explains will enliven any reading of the novel.

Second, this is an example of a scholarly article accessed via the Internet. It was first published in *College Literature*, a professional journal with a much smaller circulation than *Victorian Studies* or *Nineteenth Century Literature*. But Recchio's article has also been made available to a broader audience through EBSCOhost's Academic Search, one of the online full-text databases available through the reference libraries that subscribe to them. The usual citation facts would be given as "College Literature 23:3 (October, 1996), pages 2-21." But to cite Recchio's article located through this database, one lists that information and then: "Online. EBSCOhost. Academic Search. Item 9611140942. [Date of accessing the text]."

Although the goals of scholarship remain the same, our methods are changing with both primary and secondary sources available in various electronic media. Gaskell's works are available on Professor Matsuoka's Gaskell website; secondary sources like Recchio's article may or may not be available online too. Electronic whole-text databases, and other systems offering merely citations and abstracts, give scholars with access to subscribing reference libraries a whole new set of tools. Now or soon, some journals publish online only; some printed journals are putting some of their articles online; and journal aggregators, like wholesalers, connect publications and libraries. Source availability is inconsistent, but rapidly expanding. For example, in fall of 1998, the home page for the University of Witwatersrand in South Africa states, "The library is in the process of providing access to various electronic journals," and "access methods may vary according to the publishers' requirements."

But whether a whole text or merely a citation or abstract is available depends on many deciding forces, including the original journal, the database, and the subscribing library. In general, though, the systems providing the databases require subscribing libraries to restrict access to regular clientele only. Thus, in the fall of 1998 the library home page at the University of

Manchester lists “Rybase,” the “John Rylands Electronic Resource Services,” but states that access is for University of Manchester members only.

Certainly the Internet will offer increasing opportunities for publication and scholarship. Scholars using reference libraries to access full-text databases may open up journals previously overlooked or unexplored. As more peer-reviewed journals are available electronically, as more professional and student papers are posted on Internet websites like our own Gaskell webpage, and as more databases carry more texts and references, the future promises more resources, more conversation, and surely yet more interest in Gaskell. Today’s “Things Written” about Gaskell give witness to a robust and constantly growing body of Gaskell studies.