



Elizabeth Gaskell and the short story

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Abstract

Elizabeth Gaskell was the author of over forty short stories. Despite the resurgence in Gaskell criticism over the past three decades, these stories have only recently begun to receive the attention they deserve. Following an account of how the Victorian short story has been re-evaluated by literary critics, this introductory survey illuminates Gaskell's key contributions to the development of the genre. Our discussion is structured around several areas of critical investigation that have been at the forefront of Gaskell studies over the past few years. These include: the position of Victorian short fiction in relation to predominant accounts of the form's development; Gaskell's engagement with the periodical press and the Victorian literary marketplace; her response to the connection between short stories and the Christmas season; and her deployment of

supernatural and sensational tropes. The image that emerges is that of a professional woman of letters who used shorter fiction as a space to experiment with new narrative methods, unusual characterisation, and contentious themes. Concluding with some reflections on the two-part review in *All the Year Round*, newly attributed to Gaskell in July 2015, we suggest how Gaskell's engagement with the 'ungodly spinnings' of French ballad and narrative tradition might have helped shape her own practice as a master of the form.

Keywords: Elizabeth Gaskell, NotOAChecked

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