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**“Is this article a lady’s petticoat or a bird’s cage?”:  
the function of toilette in *Cranford***

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Elizabeth Gaskell’s sketches, published in Dickens’s *Household Words* between 1851 and 1853 before appearing in novel form in June 1853, were inspired by Southey who wanted to write a “history of English domestic life” and by the author’s own experience of provincial life in Knutsford. In the rather static female society of the town of Cranford, ruled by the principle of “elegant economy” (27)<sup>1</sup> and the obsession with decorum, trivial elements play a central role. Social rituals, mostly centered on food and dress, regulate the lives of widows and spinsters, the “Amazons”, as Mary Smith, the narrator, who lives in the industrial city of Drumble and frequently stays in Cranford, calls them. Yet Gaskell’s focus on dress goes further than a reflection on the dialectical interplay between seeming and being: the multiple references to clothes and hats function as a narrative device and a structuring principle. The emphasis on fashion brings into play complex relationships to time, change and otherness and the foregrounding of toilette appears as a means to address fundamental issues such as the tension between the tyranny of etiquette and the free play of desire and fantasy, while also involving a process of collecting and recycling both things and words.

**Importation, hybridity and disfigurement: the resistance to change**

“Have you any red silk umbrellas in London?” (26), an anonymous narrator (whose identity is to be revealed much later) asks the reader at the start of the narrative, a question which sets the basis for the opposition between here (provincial

and old-fashioned Cranford) and there (the modern and industrialized capital). Right from the outset, dress is discussed in its relationship with fashion, or rather the absence of fashion, and introduced as an insignificant element:

Their dress is very independent of fashion; as they observe, 'What does it signify how we dress here at Cranford, where everybody knows us?' And if they go from home, their reason is equally cogent, 'What does it signify how we dress here, where nobody knows us?' (26)

It becomes clear that the incipit revolves around clothes even while it dismisses them – through the Cranfordians' own words – as objects devoid of meaning. The text thus opens on a paradoxical process of erasure which in fact highlights what it claims to discard. If, through references to dress, the first chapter underlines the timeless or frozen nature of existence in Cranford, Mary Smith's narrative also relates the intrusion, through fashion and the characters' interest for it, of modern life in this secluded world. Articles of dress have a dual function: on the one hand they are evidence of the unique quality of Cranford, of its being "independent of fashion"; on the other hand they testify to the desire to import, adopt (and adapt) elements of modernity and thus reveal the characters' aspirations to go beyond the confines of their provincial life. Miss Betty Barker, formerly a successful milliner working with her sister and introducing out-of-date items as fashionable ("Lady Arley, for instance, would occasionally give Miss Barkers the pattern of an old cap of hers which they immediately copied and circulated among the *élite* of Cranford" 81), embodies this strange combination:

She dressed finer than any lady in Cranford; and we did not wonder at it; for it was understood that she was wearing out all the bonnets and caps and outrageous ribbons which had once formed her stock-in-trade. It was five or six years since she had given up shop, so in any other place than Cranford her dress might have been considered *passée*. (82)

Yet, in Cranford, things – especially clothes – can't be considered as belonging to the past since Cranford itself represents an enclave of the past, a location where time is frozen, though the narrator's comment here reintroduces the sense of time passing, of past and present, for she belongs to the modern world and also gauges the Cranfordians from the vantage point of modernity.

To the eyes of Mary Smith, shuttling between Drumble and Cranford and standing as half-participant, half-observer, it is through clothes that the immutability of things is best embodied:

My next visit to Cranford was in the summer. There had been neither births, deaths, nor marriages since I was there last. Everybody lived in the same house, and wore pretty nearly the same well-preserved, old fashioned clothes. (37)

The narrator's in-between position turns her into a guide for the reader, an interpreter who is also able to consider Cranford's idiosyncrasies from a distance, as shown by Natalie Kapetanios Meir who stresses the value of in-betweenness in "'Household Forms and Ceremonies': Narrating Routines in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Cranford*": "This narrative position of insider-outsider poises Mary to possess reliable knowledge regarding the social intricacies of Cranford, while, at the same time, questioning their logic and function" (3). Routine, undisturbed by any of the events that introduce radical change and rupture in life, goes on "pretty nearly the same". Yet when death hits the community, the changes it brings about also affect dress; routine is disrupted and so are the immutable codes that regulate the choice and the wearing of garments. The event is then not so much death itself (the tragic end of Captain Brown, run over by a train when heroically saving a child) but the alteration some articles of clothing undergo as the characters go in mourning:

I was full of sorrow, but, by one of those whimsical thoughts which come unbidden into our heads, in times of deepest grief, I no sooner saw the bonnet than I was reminded of a helmet; and in that hybrid bonnet, half-helmet, half-jockey-cap, did Miss Jenkyns attend Captain Brown's funeral. (41)

The sight of Deborah Jenkyns, a stern spinster, "equipped in her helmet-bonnet" (41), is a source of humour: reality is modified, an article of clothing – an everyday little black silk bonnet which its owner has trimmed with a piece of crape – is turned into a hybrid object (hence the coining of the semantic hyphenated hybrid "helmet-bonnet"), closer to the idea of war than to the idea of mourning. The code of dress applying to mourning (the necessity to wear a piece of crape) is turned upside down and the crisis – the basic component of plot – is not so much death itself as dress, which provides diversion and digression.

Hybridity, the consequence of the recycling process “elegant economy” implies, also raises the issue of the assimilation of difference and otherness, since this process does not simply amount to making old clothes larger or simply gayer, but also to grafting foreign elements on them: “I was helping to decide whether any of the new assortment of coloured silks which they had just received at the shop would do to match a grey and black *mousseline-de-laine* that wanted a new breadth” (52). The French term in italics and the insertion of a foreign language introduce the idea of importation (of Indian silks and of Parisian fashion) and of exoticism. The opportunities offered to the Amazons are so limited that the choice of a piece of fabric in Cranford’s shop – a strategic place referred to as “the shop”, which is a way to foreground it as a key location, a place akin to Ali Baba’s cave – is a climactic moment when Miss Matty experiences “the delights of perplexity”: “[A]nd, as for Miss Matty, she smiled and sighed over each fresh bale that was brought out; one colour set off another, and the heap together would, as she said, make even the rainbow look poor” (138). Faced with a wide display of silks, she invests mere fabrics with an aesthetic value exceeding the beauty of the natural world and the lure of exoticism exerted through some items of clothing turns them into objects of desire. Garments tend to be associated with desire and even play a role in love relationships, while bodies are outstandingly absent and replaced by their envelopes. When Mary and Matty read the letters of Matty’s deceased parents, they discover that while the father asked for expressions of love, the mother insisted on being given a white “Paduasoy”<sup>2</sup>, later transformed into a cloak for their first-born:

She was evidently rather annoyed at his demands upon her for expressions of love, and could not quite understand what he meant by repeating the same thing over in so many different ways; but what she was quite clear about was a longing for a white ‘Paduasoy’ – whatever that might be; and six or seven letters were principally occupied in asking her lover to use his influence with her parents (who evidently kept her in good order) to obtain this or that article of dress, more especially the white ‘Paduasoy’. (65)

Miss Matty, who writes to Mary (connecting the old world and the new world and importing new fashionable items) to ask for a sea-green turban, gets an ordinary cap: Mary, who recurrently underlines the eccentricities etiquette in dress

paradoxically produces, thwarts Matty's aspirations in an attempt to curb her longing for exoticism: "I was [...] most particularly anxious to prevent her from disfiguring her small, gentle, mousy face with great Saracen's head turban; and accordingly, I bought her a pretty, neat, middle-aged cap" (100-101). Mary checks Matty's attraction for coloured material and "counteract[s] the dazzling fascination of any yellow or scarlet silk" (134). For Mary, what is at stake here is disfigurement, as if foreign elements could not be grafted on an English body. In "'The Scraps, Patches and Rags of Daily Life': Gaskell's Oriental Other and the Conservation of Cranford"<sup>3</sup>, Jeffrey Cass addresses the issue of the Oriental Other and of its domestication in *Cranford*: the men who intrude in this community of Amazons "represent the simultaneous fear and appeal of the Oriental Other as well as the impending social, cultural, and economic reconfiguration of the town that results from its infiltrations into mainstream life" (425). The fascination for turbans is a manifestation of this attraction for the Oriental Other yet the hybridization of West and East is resisted and feared by Mary who envisages it as "disfigurement". Besides, as Cass points out, the incursions of otherness remain limited and superficial:

The Cranfordians fail to foreclose profound social and cultural change because they have only 'hybridized' themselves cosmetically. They adorn Cranford with oriental fashion and suffuse it with oriental literary tastes, but they do not internalize a new ideology or advocate a politics of change. (426)

Another form of hybridity entailing disfigurement occurs when characters choose disguise and cross-dressing which are first and foremost means of reinventing themselves yet which also arouse shock and fright. Dress becomes a central feature in what turns out to be a crisis caused by a distortion of codes. Samuel Brown, the English soldier back from India, takes on a new identity when donning a turban, but his performance as an oriental conjurer occasions panic among the Cranfordians, a crisis which is over as soon as he removes his Turkish costume. In the chapter entitled "Poor Peter", Matty relates an episode in which her brother Peter mischievously decides to wear the clothes of their sister Deborah and walks up and down the front garden holding a pillow dressed in white clothes and meant to represent a baby. "It was only, as he told me afterwards, to make something to talk

about in the town" (73): and Peter's venture is a success in so far as a crowd of passers-by gathers outside the house and stands gaping at this sight, taking Peter for Deborah and therefore believing she is now a young mother. The rector walking up the street first thinks that the crowd peeping through his garden rails is admiring "a new rhododendron that was in full bloom, and that he was very proud of" (73) but soon realizes that what these passers-by are watching is his own son pretending to be Deborah nursing a baby (hence the comic effect of the equation between the girl and the blossoming plant). A boy's prank then turns into a familial tragedy: Peter is flogged by his father, flees from home to go to India, and the mother then fades away and is finally buried wrapped in a shawl sent from India by her son but delivered too late or, in fact, just in time to be used as a kind of shroud. Clothes come to be linked to time and, in Peter's case, to mistiming, for it is the same Peter who returns, an elderly man, in the last but one chapter, and who brings his sister an Indian gown and a pearl necklace she cannot wear because she is too old for them and is conscious of their "unsuitableness" and "incongruity" (166).

### **From the humdrum to the freakish**

If the subversion of dress codes entails crises, the observance of etiquette and the clinging on to the outmoded can paradoxically lead to absurd situations involving a radical departure from the very routine they are meant to maintain. Through dress codes, Gaskell explores the contradictions implied by them, as already seen with Deborah Jenkyns's trimmed cap becoming half-bonnet, half-helmet, a process which turns etiquette upside down. The barrier separating the two spheres of public life and private life influences the choice of clothes so much so that Miss Matty, Deborah Jenkyns' sister, wears in private a cap with yellow ribbons and in public a different headgear similar to a widow's cap. Yet, one day, when surprised by a chance visit, she hastily puts on the "public" cap and forgets to take off the "private" one, hence a comic result which turns her into an eccentric figure displaying a juxtaposition of caps, one fanciful and the other austere. Not only does this juxtaposition reveal the coexistence of two selves, private and public, emblemized by the contrast in colours (yellow and black) but it also testifies to the

fact that strict observance of decorum can paradoxically generate eccentricity and a departure from routine.

Every activity in Cranford being governed by strict codes of conduct, existence is deprived of surprises and the unpredictable is ruled out, as explained by Natalie Kapetanios Meir: "The social activity of paying visits has been regularized in Cranford such that there is no element of surprise. The speaker, in turn, renders this social situation predictable for the visitor and for the reader" (4). Yet Gaskell also "consistently tests conventions and examines their implications in her characters' lives" (5) and such testing is mostly carried out in situations in which dress codes are unwillingly transgressed by the characters, which leads to the unpredictable and supplies the reader with original and humorous situations. Anecdotes about dress and forms of deviance springing from the very fact of abiding by the rules of etiquette provide the narrative, mostly concerned with the representation of rituals and itself based on repetition, with "a series of unique social scenarios, or singulative narratives, that challenge the women's adherence to routine" (6).

The duality between routine and decorum and the opposite need to go beyond the restrictions of life in Cranford mirrors the tension in Gaskell's text which combines the representation of dull rituals with, at some points, a surprisingly fanciful picture of reality which has its origins in routine itself. The red silk umbrella under which a spinster goes to church on rainy days is seen by little boys as "a stick in petticoats" (26), a transformation which is emblematic of the poetic processes at work in Gaskell's vision. For John Chapple, who wrote the introduction to the 2006 Wordsworth Edition of *Cranford*, the realism Gaskell sets at the basis of her vision oscillates between the extraordinary and the ordinary, "choosing the freakish as well as the humdrum" (Introduction 9). As dictated by the necessity for "elegant economy" prevailing in Cranford, the choice of clothes is first and foremost limited by modest means yet it has to abide by the rules of gentility: "If we wore prints, instead of summer silks, it was because we preferred a washing material; and so on, till we blinded ourselves to the vulgar fact that we were, all of us, people of very modest means" (28). Putting forward the practicality of prints (made of washing

material) serves to hide the real reason, namely the need for economy, silk being too expensive.

The phrase “elegant economy” – a motto for the Cranfordians – expresses the rather perilous exercise with which the Cranfordians are confronted in everyday life, as they strive to coordinate their limited income and the maintenance of genteel life. Yet if clothes reveal these financial strictures, they are also invested with the power to transcend other limitations and to make the barriers set by decorum totally collapse. “Do you ever see cows dressed in gray flannel in London?” (29): an old Alderney cow, becoming hairless after having tumbled in a lime-pit, goes to her field wearing flannel, after somebody urged her owner to “get her a flannel waistcoat and flannel drawers” in order to keep her warm (29). Mary’s address to the reader, echoing her previous question about red silk umbrellas, aims at underlining oddity and eccentricity paradoxically resulting from common sense: it is from the “humdrum” that the “freakish” comes and, once again, dress (be it for a cow) is the focus.

Similarly, elements of Cranfordian fashion are explained to the reader but these explanations, based on exaggeration and unexpected similes, generate a metamorphosis of human bodies:

Do you know what a calash is? It is a covering worn over caps, not unlike the heads fastened on old-fashioned gigs; but sometimes it is not quite so large. This kind of headgear always made an awful impression on the children in Cranford... (85)

Her focus on caps and bonnets even results in a sense of fragmentation of the body, for instance when she sees “four ladies’ heads, with niddle-nodding caps...” (87), a comic though disturbing vision of caps as autonomous entities with a life of their own. Descriptions of clothes often revolve around this process of fragmentation itself linked with a form of erasure of the body. For Mary, the old ladies’ obsession with headgears displaces any other concern about how their bodies themselves are clad. She relates another episode when the characters dress up for an evening which is to be a great social event, yet it is their being arrayed with an excessive display of brooches which becomes the real event in her own narrative:



The expenditure on dress in Cranford was principally in that one article referred to. If the heads were buried in smart new caps, the ladies were like ostriches, and cared not what became of their bodies. Old gowns, white and venerable collars, any number of brooches, up and down and everywhere (some with dogs' eyes painted in them; some that were like small picture frames with mausoleums and weeping willows neatly executed in hair inside; some, again, with miniatures of ladies and gentlemen sweetly smiling out of a nest of stiff muslin), old brooches for a permanent ornament, and new caps to suit the fashion of the day – the ladies of Cranford always dressed with chaste elegance and propriety, as Miss Barker once prettily expressed it.

And with three new caps, and a greater array of brooches than had ever been seen together at one time since Cranford was a town, did Mrs Forrester, and Miss Matty, and Miss Pole appear on that memorable Tuesday evening. I counted seven brooches myself on Miss Pole's dress. Two were fixed negligently in her cap (one was a butterfly made of Scotch pebbles, which a vivid imagination might believe to be the real insect); one fastened her net neckerchief; one her collar, one ornamented the front of her gown, midway between her throat and waist; and another adorned the point of her stomacher. Where the seventh was I have forgotten, but it was somewhere about her, I am sure. (93)

Mary's description foregrounds the usual combination of old and new, the transformation of the female body through fragmentation and through a bizarre display of items representing it and affixed on it. Heads are "buried" and the comparison with ostriches entails metamorphosis. The numerous brooches the Cranford women wear disturbingly connect human bodies to animals (by exhibiting dogs' eyes fastened to bosoms and insects pinned on caps they come to be linked with the animal kingdom) but also to death (with mausoleums), and the material used for some of these brooches – hair – is a disturbing reminder of the erased body and of sexuality, while the miniatures sported amidst folds of muslin seem to turn bodies into portrait galleries.

Built on the contradiction between the "chaste elegance and propriety" which is said to be the rule and the sense of excess and bad taste which is conveyed here, this description is based on stylistic fragmentation as it locates the various brooches on Miss Pole and points out fragments of her body separated by semi-colons and added up through parataxis. It also reveals the importance of collections in the novel and their connection with commodity culture. Lorna Huett<sup>4</sup>, examining the link between commodity and collectivity, contends that Gaskell's work is "dominated by possessions and collections, and by anxieties about commodity culture, to an extent

that is remarkable even among nineteenth-century novelists" (37). Stressing the Cranfordians' "compulsion to hoard brooches, hats, letters and other artefacts and their uneasy relationship with the modern world" (38-39), she asserts that it conforms to Foucault's concept of "archive heterotopia" which he defines as "the idea of accumulating everything [...] the will to enclose in one place all times, all epochs, all forms, all tastes; [...] and the idea of constituting a place of all times that is itself outside of time and inaccessible to its ravages" (37).<sup>5</sup> Besides, the focus on dress takes precedence over the story itself and the description of the setting, hence a disruption of narrative order and codes which Mary herself points out just after indulging in this long evocation of eccentric display: "But I am getting on too fast, in describing the dresses of the company. I should first relate the gathering on the way to Mrs Jamieson's" (94).

### **Collecting and recycling hoops and strings: the conversion of "arrant nonsense" into meaning**

"The Cage at Cranford"<sup>6</sup>, written by Gaskell a few years after the publication of *Cranford* and published in *All the Year Round* in November 1863, relates an episode which takes place after the close of the novel. Paris and fashion are brought back to the fore, together with the question of the adaptation of foreign objects to the Cranfordians' lives. Mrs Gordon, formerly Jessie Brown, present at the beginning of the novel, acts as a link between two worlds, and her presence also serves as a framing device. This episode focuses on an obsession, that of headgear, and has its origins in a misunderstanding: Jessie sends one of the newest items sold in Paris which Mary, who wants to give it as a gift to Miss Pole and who yearns for something original, expects to be "a kind of cross between a turban and a cap" (169). Her own longing for a hybrid object blending the exotic and the ordinary is frustrated since what Jessie sends is – or at least seems to be – a cage, even though it has no bottom and is made of hoops and calico. So instead of admiring Miss Pole's new cap (Mary finally buys one for her, but in Cranford), the characters are supposed to see her cockatoo, Polly, comfortably settled in a new cage.

"This French thing" (177), which is neither a cap nor a cage but in fact a petticoat with hoops (as one of the servants guesses), throws the characters into

abysses of perplexity: Miss Pole even dreams of Polly “with her new cap on his head, while she herself s[its] on a perch in the new cage and admire[s] him” (172) and it is no wonder that a piece of undergarment linked with privacy and the female body should trigger so much questioning and such “arrant nonsense” (172). This “cage for an angel” (178), as a male character calls it (a phrase clearly asserting the link between clothes and confinement and evoking the corsets and petticoats imprisoning the body of the angel in the house), first a source of disturbance, finally gets assimilated into the system of “elegant economy”. By being transformed into “two good comfortable English calashes [...] with the aid of a piece of dyed silk” (178), it is recycled into pieces of headgear, that is to say that it finally becomes what it was initially expected to be. An item of clothing meant to cover the body, be in contact with it and remain hidden is thus converted into an object which can be exhibited and is associated with surface and not depths.

Similarly, Mary’s narrative incorporates this unprecedented event, and so does Gaskell’s narrative by offering a new form of closure, a new “cage” for her novel. This final anecdote revolves around the subversion of established codes which are temporarily abolished by Gaskell’s satire to be finally reinstated. As shown by Natalie Kapetanios Meir, codes are central to the novel yet Gaskell, by showing their excessive power, undermines them and even succeeds in reversing their effects:

Gaskell satirizes the extent to which the most minute behaviors of her fictional town are regulated by established codes, and she consistently unmasks the comical contradictions involved in maintaining the fiction of gentility. (2)

It represents a departure from the fear of cultural hybrids expressed in Mary’s refusal to see Miss Matty “disfigured” by a turban. The Oriental Other has now been domesticated or, in the words of Jeffrey Cass, “safely ensconced in the lives of the Cranfordians” (428), yet it is only by undergoing disfigurement that the Parisian cage is altered into a truly Cranfordian object, an English calash perfectly integrated into the process of recycling, like the Indian muslin gown bought by Miss Pole a very long time ago and finally converted into a blind adorning a window.

“Elegant economy” does not only apply to objects but also to words. Mary, who boasts of an odd taste for collecting pieces of string, is also a collector of words:

“String is my foible. My pocket gets full of little hanks of it, picked up and twisted together, ready for uses that never come” (62). This idiosyncrasy has to be related to Mary’s function as a narrator and to her narrative constructions, as if the unused string, considered from a metafictional viewpoint, were turned into a metaphor : like Miss Pole who visits shops not to buy things but “to see the new articles and report upon them, and to collect all the stray pieces of intelligence in the town” (101) and who becomes a story-teller (be it a gossip) instead of a consumer, Mary associates fabrics and storytelling. Her narrative, built on time shifts and the vagaries of memory, connects events which would otherwise have remained unconnected, as if tying them with bits of string, a process of weaving and assembling which finds its equivalent in reality, Mary being an expert at crochet. The old fashion books she browses through when she is in Cranford are a *mise-en-abyme* of her own narrative as she herself leads the readers (clearly identified as Londoners) through a series of old-fashioned vignettes of provincial life. Her father being in the cotton trade, it seems that she transforms his own activity, linked with the industrial world thought of as destructive and alienating, into a more creative process.

In her discussion on the dichotomy between needle and pen in Gaskell’s work<sup>7</sup>, Maria A. Fitzwilliam shows its centrality in Victorian culture and in the artistry of women writers, the idea of giving up “the needle for the pen” being a metaphor Harriet Martineau and Margaret Oliphant use in their autobiographies: “The needle/pen dichotomy draws a parallel between women as fabricators, workers of cloth, and as writers, dealers in words that fabricate lives” (3). Fitzwilliam’s contention is that Gaskell, aware of the difficulty women writers were faced with when trying to balance their function as angel in the house and their profession, “recognized that the safest and most expedient attempts at self-expression and interpretation come through domestic subversions” (4). Gaskell therefore explores the subversive and creative potential of dress and uses fashion as a form of self-expression, while remaining within accepted boundaries since fashion, restricted to the feminine sphere, is considered as relatively unimportant and does not pose a challenge to the ideological status quo:

If the needle, used for domestic rather than commercial ends, is assumed to be the natural instrument of feminine creativity, then representation via this medium – fashion – might flourish, unchecked and almost unnoticed. (4)

The shift from needle to pen is performed by Mary who, while making her father's shirts and carrying on with her "plain sewing" (46), listens to Miss Pole's stories and collects the material necessary for her future narrative. A combination of filial duty and observance of the tasks reserved for women, Mary's activity contains in embryo her future as a writer and a creator.

The recurrent mention of toilette is not restricted to a thematic function and though it stresses the characters' limited concerns and their obsession with codes together with their contradictory need for and dread of originality and novelty, it also serves as a structuring device: for John Chapple, "turbans are foregrounded in a way that picks out themes and incidents" (Introduction 15), and Tim Dolin sees the novel as "organized like a collection of anecdotes, printed on cards and bundled together".<sup>8</sup> If toilette and fashion are both one of the strings which tie the work into a bundle and a means of self-expression, they also enable Gaskell to articulate important paradoxes and dialectics, to connect the humdrum and the freakish, the pen and the needle.

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## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Gaskell. *Cranford*. London: Wordsworth Classics, 2006. All references will be to this edition.

<sup>2</sup> "thick corded silk" (see note 73, 178).

<sup>3</sup> Jeffrey Cass. "'The Scraps, Patches and Rags of Daily Life': Gaskell's Oriental Other and the Conservation of *Cranford*", *Papers on Language and Literature. A Journal for Scholars and Critics of Language and Literature*, 35 (4) (Fall 1999), 417-433.

<sup>4</sup> Lorna Huett. "Commodity and Collectivity: *Cranford* in the context of *Household Words*", *Gaskell Society Journal*, 17 (2003), 34-49.

<sup>5</sup> See Michel Foucault. "Of Other Spaces", *Diacritics*, 16 (1986), 24.

<sup>6</sup> Published in the Appendix to the OUP edition. New York, Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1972, 168-178. All references to "The Cage at *Cranford*" will be to this edition.

<sup>7</sup> Maria A. Fitzwilliam. "The Needle not the Pen: Fabric (Auto)biography in *Cranford*, *Ruth*, and *Wives and Daughters*", *Gaskell Society Journal*, 14 (2000), 1-13.

<sup>8</sup> Tim Dolin. "Cranford and the Victorian Collection", *Victorian Studies* 36 (1993), 193, quoted in Natalie Kapetanios Meir.

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