PERFORMANCE AND PERFORMATIVITY IN ELIZABETH GASKELL'S *CRANFORD* AND *RUTH*

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PERFORMANCE AND PERFORMATIVITY IN ELIZABETH GASKELL'S *CRANFORD* AND *RUTH*

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Abstract

This thesis analyzes the aspects of performance and performativity in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Cranford* and *Ruth.* Gaskell shows through her characters how gender and class intertwine, involving the notions of cultural, social, and economic capital. Although contested concepts, performance and performativity can be significant tools in analyzing how Victorian narratives such as *Cranford* and *Ruth* could subvert dominant assumptions about gender and gender roles. The first chapter discusses Elizabeth Gaskell, the concepts of performance and performativity, and Victorian doctrine of separate spheres. The second chapter analyzes how the Cranford ladies in *Cranford* perform stylized repetition of certain acts to maintain their identity. The third chapter shows performances in *Ruth* and how the heroine acquires her gender by accreting its behavior, strengthening the understanding of Ruth by using the notion of performativity. The fourth chapter consolidates the main points that performance and performativity help to show: how *Cranford* challenges the stereotype of a "redundant woman," and *Ruth* challenges the stereotype of a "fallen woman."

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Dedication

For my parents and my husband.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

The word "performance" has an array of meanings depending on the context in which it is used. It is often associated with theatrical act involving actors on a stage and their audience. It may simply mean an action or deed, the completion of something undertaken, the executing of an action, or the capabilities of a person or machine. It can also mean the presentation of a work of art. Any other event involving someone doing something (a performer) and someone observing it (a spectator) can also be called a performance. Anthropologists use the term to cover ceremony, rite, and ritual. Performativity is not the same as performance. The latter is an old word commonly used in everyday language, while performativity is a contemporary theoretical term with a more precise meaning. Though performativity has layers of meanings, its simplest meaning is "the fact or quality of being performative; the fact or quality of performing,"[1]. In performance studies, according to Richard Schechner, performativity "points to a variety of topics, among them the construction of social reality including gender and race, the restored behavior quality of performance practice to performance theory" (110). Therefore, it is possible to analyze a variety of topics in terms of performance and performativity.

A number of narratives are open for the discussion of the performance in theatrical sense because they have main characters that are characterized as actors, such as the Romantic narrative by Mary Robinson entitled *The Natural Daughter.*

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[1] *Oxford English Dictionary Online*. 2007. Oxford English Dictionary. 24 November 2007. <http://dictionary.oed.com.www2.lib.ku.edu:2048/cgi/entry/50175368?single=1&query_type=word&queryword=performance&first=1&max_to_show=10>.

Elizabeth Gaskell's *Cranford* and *Ruth* do not have characters who are literally actors, although there is a visiting conjuror character in *Cranford*. The other performance that is closest to theatricality is the cross-dressed Peter in *Cranford.* Elizabeth Gaskell may not intentionally structure her narratives to serve the notions of performance and performativity, yet *Cranford* and *Ruth* can be usefully analyzed in terms of performance and performativity to show how such narratives challenge dominant assumptions about gender and class.

Elizabeth Gaskell (1810-1865) wrote seven novels, a number of essays and short stories, and a biography of Charlotte Bronte. Some of Gaskell's novels, especially the earlier ones, such as *Mary Barton* (1848), *Ruth* (1853), and *North and South* (1854-5) are considered to be social-problem novels. Set in Manchester during the 1830s and 1840s, *Mary Barton* deals intensely with the problems faced by the Victorian lower class. *North and South* portrays the disparity between the way of life in the industrial north of England and the agrarian south as well as between mill-owners and workers. Gaskell earned praise as well as condemnation for *Ruth,* a novel that makes a fallen woman its heroine and deals with Victorian views on sin and illegitimacy. Gaskell's favorite was *Cranford* (1853)*,* which was first published in 1851 as a serial in *Household Words,* a magazine edited by Charles Dickens. *Cranford*'s opening sentence, "Cranford is in possession of the Amazons; all the holders of houses, above a certain rent, are women" (1), introduces its readers to lives in a small town whose primary residents are aging spinsters and widows. Gaskell's later novels: *Sylvia's Lovers* (1863), *Cousin Phillis* (1864), and *Wives and Daughters:*

An Everyday Story (1865), elicited more ordinary responses, according to critic Angus Easson, because Gaskell no longer explored social problems in them (1). The later novels, however, still explore gender issues.

Gaskell wrote *Cranford* and *Ruth* in tandem, although their subject matters are different. Both have unmarried women as the central heroines. As a serial in *Household Words, Cranford* enjoyed warm reception from its readers. The lives of the Jenkyns sisters and their friends, all of whom are either spinsters or widows, in *Cranford* are humorously narrated by Mary Smith, a character as well as the narrator of the story. The heroine of *Ruth* is an innocent, poorly-educated young orphaned girl who does not realize that she is being seduced but has to live the rest of her life with its consequences. Outraged by *Ruth* because it makes a fallen woman the center of its story, some readers literally burnt the novel. Both *Cranford* and *Ruth,* in different ways illustrate what it meant to be an unmarried woman in Victorian England.

Though most assume that Victorian England had clear views on the roles of both man and woman, Victorians had conflicting ideas about gender roles. John Ruskin, Sarah Ellis, and Margaret Oliphant were prominent thinkers who believed that men and women are basically different, and therefore each should occupy different spheres. Ruskin spoke for a majority of Victorians when he wrote: “The man’s power is active, progressive, defensive. He is eminently the doer, the creator, the discoverer, the defender. ... But the woman’s power is for rule, not for battle, -and her intellect is not for invention or creation, but for sweet ordering, arrangement, and decision” (77). Based on that logic, Ruskin and many of his contemporaries

believed in the doctrine of separate spheres, although not everybody agreed. John Stuart Mill, who struggled for equality between man and woman, asserted: “What is now called the nature of women is an eminently artificial thing – the result of forced repression in some directions, unnatural stimulation in others” (1065-6). In his famous essay, “The Subjection of Women,” Mill said:

> That the principle which regulates the existing social relations between the two sexes—the legal subordination of one sex to the other—is wrong in itself, and now one of the chief hindrances to human improvement; and that it ought to be replaced by a principle of perfect equality, admitting no power or privilege on the one side, nor disability on the other (1061).

In spite of the struggles of people like Mill, however, the subordination of women in Victorian England remained striking. One of the signs of women’s subordination was the stipulation in matrimonial law that gave the husband the ownership of all properties including those of his wife.

The wide belief in the doctrine of separate spheres led to the labeling of women. There were a number of available stereotypes, such as “the angel in the house,” a “new woman,” a “redundant woman,” and a “fallen woman.” The “angel in the house,” a phrase borrowed from the title of Coventry Patmore’s long poem, refers to the Victorian feminine ideal woman: a wife and mother who was selflessly dedicated to her children and submissive to her husband. The “angel in the house” emphasized women’s place in the domestic sphere. In the late nineteenth century,

however, a number of women started to enter male domains of education, business, and the professions. These independent women, many of whom became novelists, playwrights, journalists, pamphleteers and political thinkers, were pejoratively labeled “new women.” Women who happened to be unmarried but did not have a job would not fill either the “angel in the house” or “new women” roles. They were dismissed as “redundant women.” Another category, obviously a negative one, was a “fallen woman,” that referred to a woman who had sexual relations with a man to whom she was not married. Victorian sexual morality demanded that women not have any sexual experience until they were married.

Although Elizabeth Gaskell was of course aware of the doctrine of separate spheres and gender roles, her depiction of the characters in *Cranford* and *Ruth* hints at the possibilities for subverting these roles. *Cranford* was written based on Gaskell’s earlier essay “The Last Generation in England” published in the American *Sartain’s Union Magazine of Literature and Art* in 1849. The essay recorded the life in the Cheshire town of Knutsford where Gaskell spent her childhood. Though in the essay Gaskell chose to conceal her identity and the name of the town, she asserted that “every circumstance and occurrence which I shall relate is strictly and truthfully told without exaggeration” (*Cranford* 189). She started by describing the inhabitants of the small town based on class stratification, from the top to bottom: the landed proprietors, the widows of these families, the professionals, single or widow ladies, and the shopkeepers and working class. Gaskell noted that people from the upper class were not necessarily richer than those below them, who nevertheless respected

them for their superior status. The society had many regulations that were strictly attended to, such as the calling hours, dinner manners, and customs of matrimony. The ladies were described as having nothing to do with earning a living, which men were usually expected to do and started doing when they were young.

The details of the recurring traditions that the members of the society in “The Last Generation in England” strictly follow imply the notion of performance. Although acknowledging that performance is a contested concept, Marvin Carlson says, “The recognition that our lives are structured according to repeated and socially sanctioned modes of behavior raises the possibility that all human activity could potentially be considered as ‘performance,’ or at least all activity carried out with a consciousness of itself” (4). “The Last Generation in England” shows that Gaskell recognized how country life was structured in a certain way. Using “The Last Generation in England” as the raw material for Cranford, Gaskell makes Miss Jenkyns of *Cranford* tell Mary, a visitor from a neighboring city: “It is the third day; I dare say your mamma has told you, my dear, never to let more than three days elapse between receiving a call and returning it; and also, that you are never to stay longer than a quarter of an hour" (6). Informing and reinforcing the strict rules for social visits, the passage suggests the continual and endorsed modes of behavior that structure the lives of people in Cranford, the so-called performance of daily life.

Richard Schechner says, “Performances – of art, ritual, or ordinary life – are made of ‘twice-behaved behaviors,’ ‘restored behaviors,’ performed actions that people trained to do, that they practice and rehearse” (22). The making of art clearly

involves training and conscious deeds. But even everyday life, Schechner asserts, "involves years of training, of learning appropriate bits of behavior, of finding out how to adjust and perform one's life in relation to social and personal circumstances" (22-3). Gaskell applies this notion of performance as restored behavior in *Cranford,* and she also engages with the notions of gender and class by placing the Cranford ladies in a middle-class social position. The Cranford ladies belong to the gentry, or upper-middle-class families, and they try their best to sustain their genteel status by maintaining certain habits, rules, and regulation such as the rules of social visits mentioned above. In *Ruth,* on the other hand, Gaskell situates the heroine in a lower-middle-class social position, enabling her to perform charity for the lower class and to have at least a limited education that helps her improve her life after being seduced by a man from the upper class. Juxtaposing the characters of Ruth and Jemima, a girl from an upper-middle-class family, Gaskell points out the way women learn and perform their gender appropriately for their class. Set in Victorian England – *Cranford* in 1830s to early 1850s and *Ruth* probably earlier[2] - both narratives show how crucial it was for women of that time to properly perform the gender roles prescribed for them by both their gender and their class position.

Simone de Beauvoir believed that women were constructed to be feminine through social indoctrination. She laid the foundation which distinguished sex from gender when she said, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (267). This

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[2] Angus Easson in the Introduction to the Penguin edition of *Ruth* argues that the opening of the novel implies that the action begins in "the eighteenth century rather than (as the novel's strict chronology would suggests) about 1840" (xiv).

suggests that a woman gradually acquires her gender, a key aspect of her identity, through a socially constructed experience. Richard Schechner echoes Beauvoir's idea when he says, in terms of performance, "Each individual from an early age learns to perform gender-specific vocal inflections, facial displays, gestures, walks, and erotic behavior as well as how to select, modify and use scents, body shapes and adornments, clothing, and all other gender markings of a given society" (131). In this sense, gender identity is a social construct.

In his posthumous book *How to Do Things with Words, J. L. Austin* coined the term "performative" to refer to "another class of utterances that are not true or false and that actually perform the action to which they refer" (Culler 504), or using Austin's words, "to say something is to do something; or in which by saying something we are doing something" (12). Words spoken on a stage, in a poem, and in a soliloquy, according to Austin, are not performative because they are not serious. Derrida criticizes this exclusion. He argues, "Could a performative statement succeed if its formulation did not repeat a 'coded' or iterable statement?" (185). Derrida asserts that all speech is "iteration," the repetition of a statement that has been said before.

Judith Butler offers an even more radical stance on gender performativity when she says:

> Gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time – an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts;*…a

> constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief ("Performative" 519-20).

Butler does not believe in innate identity, not even in biological sex, because sex is not "a bodily given on which the construct of gender is artificially imposed, but ... a cultural norm which governs the materialization of bodies" (*Bodies* 2-3). For Butler, "Gender reality is performative which means quite simply, that it is real only to the extent that it is performed" ("Performative" 527). Although she would not have completely agreed with Butler's notion of gender performativity, Gaskell challenged Victorian concepts of gender in *Cranford* and *Ruth,* showing that to some extent gender was performed.

How does the narrative structure of the novels help to demonstrate the performance and performativity in them? How do performance and performativity benefit the analysis of Victorian narratives such as those of Elizabeth Gaskell's? My goal is to examine performance and performativity in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Cranford* and *Ruth,* and demonstrate how the narrative structures of both novels help to define aspects of performance and performativity in them. Using textual evidence from the novels, and informed by Victorian doctrine of separate spheres, I will examine how Gaskell challenged the notion of Victorian gender through her fictional characters. Ultimately I will show how performance and performativity can be significant tools in analyzing how such narratives could subvert dominant assumptions about gender and class.

Chapter 2 Performance and Performativity in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Cranford*

It is the only one of my own books that I can read again; - but whenever I am ailing or ill, I take 'Cranford' and – I was going to say, *enjoy* it! (but that would not be pretty!) laugh over it afresh!

Elizabeth Gaskell's letter to John Ruskin (Easson 199)

The Cranford ladies primarily consist of the Jenkyns sisters – Miss (Deborah) Jenkyns and Miss Matty – Miss Pole, Mrs. Jamieson, Mrs. Forrester, Mrs. Fitz-Adam, Miss Jessie Brown, and Mary Smith. All of them are either spinsters or widows, although later on Miss Jessie Brown is married to Major Gordon. They are the leading figures in Cranford, as the opening sentence of the narrative suggests: "Cranford is in possession of the Amazons; all the holders of houses, above a certain rent, are women" (1). This opening sentence not only associates Cranford ladies with the Amazons, female warriors in Greek mythology, but also establishes their middle-class status. As the notes inform us, the word "rent" refers to "the precarious middle-class status of the impoverished Cranford spinsters" (233). Rent or income was one of a number of factors that defined social status in Victorian England. Although the Cranford ladies are not well-off, they are remarkably genteel. To maintain their status in spite of their scarce resources, the ladies perform certain acts that constitute not only their gender but also their class identity as upper-middle-class women. The Cranford ladies often dissociate what they do from reality, performing certain acts that do not always correspond with their actual situation.

In his book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), noted sociologist Erving Goffman coined the sociological term "dramaturgy," to suggest that all social life is theatrical. Goffman considers all interpersonal interaction to be "performance" with its actors, scripts, stages and props:

> Performance may be defined as all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants. Taking a particular participant and his performance as a basic point of reference, we may refer to those who contribute to the other performances as the audience, observers, or co-participants. The pre-established pattern of action which is unfolded during a performance and which may be presented or played through on other occasions may be called a "part" or "routine" (15-16).

Goffman uses the theatrical terms as metaphors to think about what people do in daily life. In Goffman's terms, each and every one of the Cranford ladies can be seen as participating in "performances" of daily life in Cranford. That Gaskell situates her principal characters in the middle-class social standing is important in building her narrative to present lives in a small town where gender and class matter. Although the ladies acquire their middle-class status from their (deceased) fathers or husbands, they think that they need to perform it properly to keep it. Gaskell shows through her characters how gender and class are intertwined, involving the notions of cultural, social, and economic capital.

Gaskell employs Mary Smith, a visitor and friend to the Cranford ladies, as the narrator as well as one of the characters. Gaskell uses Mary's first person point of view to narrate and inform the readers all that happens in Cranford. Mary reports the events from her perspective; everything is filtered through her. Mary tells the reader what the other characters are feeling or thinking based on what the other characters tell her or her guess of what the other characters feel or think, thus enabling the reader to share the events from the other characters' point of view. The technique that Gaskell employs enables the readers to experience the dynamic of lives in Cranford. Angus Easson points out Mary's double role as "commentator and communal autobiographer" (*Cranford* xx). Mary observes, explains, comments, and records the lives of the Cranford ladies. Mary conducts her activities concerning the Cranford ladies in such a methodical way that Borislav Knezevic compares her to an ethnographer, although more of a "concerned and empathetic amateur" rather than a "professionally disinterested observer" (409). Mary is from the commercial town of Drumble, yet she is considered as part of the Cranford ladies during her temporary visits in Cranford. This enables Mary to tell the story from within, participating and yet also commenting as a person who is not a native Cranford.

Whether she is called a commentator, communal autobiographer, or ethnographer, Mary participates in the performances of the Cranford ladies. Mary fits into a number of roles that Goffman categorizes in his definition of performance: she is an audience, observer, and co-participant. The first chapter immediately points to Mary's multiple roles. Coming from the neighboring town Drumble, Mary is the

audience of the performance of the Cranford's people. Since she is not formally part of the Cranford society, she acts as an observer who can observe and comment. Here is how she observes the Cranford ladies:

> For keeping the trim gardens full of choice flowers without a weed to speck them; for frightening away little boys who look wistfully at the said flowers through the railings; for rushing out at the geese that occasionally venture in to the gardens if the gates are left open; for deciding all questions of literature and politics without troubling themselves with unnecessary reasons or arguments; for obtaining clear and correct knowledge of everybody's affairs in the parish; for keeping their neat maid-servants in admirable order; for kindness (somewhat dictatorial) to the poor, and real tender good offices to each other whenever they are in distress, the ladies of Cranford are quite sufficient (5)

Mary's observation above shows her understanding of the details of lives in Cranford, from the very little details of everyday lives (the gardens with the flowers and the geese) to the details that mark the middle-class status of the ladies (managing servants and assisting the poor). She is both an audience and an observer when she addresses the reader, "Have you any red silk umbrellas in London?" (6). She is an audience together with the little boys who mob the umbrella, yet she is observant in noticing that such an umbrella is possibly peculiar to Cranford. When she is asked by Miss

Jenkyns to apply the rules of social visits in Cranford, she becomes a participant in the performance of these visits.

Goffman asserts that everybody is an actor who has both a "front" stage behavior and a "back" stage behavior. The "front" is:

> That part of individual's performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance. Front, then, is the expressive equipment of a standard kind intentionally or unwittingly employed by the individual during his performance (22).

A front is comprised of multiple parts: setting (where the performer is acting - scenery, props, location), appearance (how the performer looks), and manner (how the performer acts).Operating as the medium of standardization, the front allows others to understand the individual and his/her assumed social role based on the projected character traits that have normative meanings. In the front, some aspects of an activity that might discredit the fostered impression are suppressed. These suppressed facts can appear at the "back" stage, which Goffman defines as "a place, relative to a given performance, where the impression fostered by the performance is contradicted as a matter of course" (112). This definition indicates that back stage behavior is a more "truthful" type of performance.

The Cranford ladies put a front stage behavior when they expect people to see them. When they do not expect to be seen, they comfortably put on their back stage behavior. These ladies belong to the gentry, or upper-middle-class families, and they

try their best to sustain their status as genteel by maintaining certain habits, rules, and regulations. For example, these ladies have strict rules for the timing of social visits. Calling hours are between twelve and three PM. After being called upon, a person has to return the call within three days at the latest. Each visit, either paid or received, should be finished within fifteen minutes. Mary is amazed when the rules are explained to her by Miss Jenkyns:

> "But am I to look at my watch? How am I to find out when a quarter of an hour has passed?"
>
> "You must keep thinking about the time, my dear, and not allow yourself to forget it in conversation" (6).

Everyone is informed of the rule and practices it repeatedly so that everybody has come to internalize it. With the rule in mind, they will only involve themselves in small talk and always keep the time. This kind of societal rule serves as a script to recite for the ladies in playing their roles. It is also a part of the front stage behaviors that mark their identity, allowing others to understand their middle-class status because lower-class people presumably do not have such a rule. The Cranford ladies practice the rules over and over because they are an essential part of their idea of class division and their idea of themselves.

There are many instances of “back” stage performances in *Cranford,* however. After the death of her old lover, Miss Matty orders a certain kind of cap. In ordering the cap, Miss Matty excludes Mary from her back stage performance. Yet Mary observes:

> Miss Matty made a strong effort to conceal her feelings - a concealment she practised even with me, for she has never alluded to Mr Holbrook again, although the book he gave her lies with her Bible on the little table by her bedside. She did not think I heard her when she asked the little milliner of Cranford to make her caps something like the Honourable Mrs Jamieson's, or that I noticed the reply -
>
> "But she wears widows' caps, ma'am?"
>
> "Oh! I only meant something in that style; not widows', of course, but rather like Mrs Jamieson's" (50).

Miss Matty always puts on the widow's cap when she expects to be seen. For her back stage, Miss Matty comfortably puts on her old cap with yellow ribbons. When visited at an unusual time, Miss Matty hurries to change her cap and accidentally puts a cap on top of the other. Miss Matty does not realize she is wearing double-caps, and apparently neither does Betty Barker, who is very much engaged in delivering the invitation for a tea party at her house. A daughter of a clerk and an ex-shop owner, Betty is trying to pave her way to be a member of Cranford elite. Mary observes that the invitation is delivered "with an oppressive modesty that found vent in endless apologies" (75). Mary functions as an observer and a co-participant in the performance. Miss Matty engages in a front performance by changing her cap before meeting Betty, in spite of the fact that Betty does not even notice it. Betty also performs a front part by acting modestly, acknowledging Miss Matty's higher position. Betty also extends the invitation to Mary, who thinks to herself, "I could see

she had a little fear lest, since my father had gone to live in Drumble, he might have engaged in that 'horrid cotton trade,' and so dragged his family down out of 'aristocratic society'" (75). Not getting involved in trade, of course, is one of the front stage behaviors that Cranford elite is expected to perform.

Although they are genteel, the Cranford ladies are not aristocrats, but they clearly distinguish themselves from those who are below them in class. In fact, as the upper-middle class they are right on the dividing line between the middle class and the upper class. They model their attitude after their idea of the upper class, the aristocrats. They are indeed "the aristocrats" in Cranford because nobody has a higher social status than they do in that small town. The Cranford ladies uphold aristocratic values as if they were real members of the upper class. However, one of the markers of the upper class is wealth and having no necessity to work for a living. Therefore, although their real financial condition is apparently the opposite, the ladies act as if they were wealthy. In terms of economic reality, they split between their affective and affected life.

For the Cranford ladies, one of the best ways to deny a fact is by not talking about it. If they do not talk about the thing, this very thing does not exist. The following passage best represents the ladies' constructed identity:

> I imagine that a few of the gentlefolks of Cranford were poor, and had some difficulty in making both ends meet; but they were like the Spartans, and concealed their smart under a smiling face. We none of

> us spoke of money, because that subject savoured of commerce and trade, and though some might be poor, we were all aristocratic (7).

People in the higher rank of middle class in England were not to be involved in trade and commerce. The Cranford ladies obviously consider themselves gentry because every one of them has some property or investment to support their life, however small. They present themselves as free from economic necessities, just like the leisure class they imitate.

On the one hand, the above passage shows how these ladies construct their identity by being negative about something, by performing ignorance of any fact that does not support their assumed aristocratic status. On the other hand, since everybody seems to agree to act the same on that matter, the ladies here represent what Goffman calls a team, that is:

> a set of individuals whose intimate co-operation is required if a given projected definition of the situation is to be maintained. A team is a group, but it is a grouping not in relation to a social structure or social organization but rather in relation to an interaction or series of interactions in which the relevant definition of the situation is maintained (104).

As a team, each of the Cranford ladies is "in the know," and all are conspirators in putting on the show for the audience. Everybody plays her part in acting out their idealized upper-class position.

The Cranford ladies act as a team in not talking about genteel poverty. Since poverty always has its ways to show itself, the ladies find their ways to overlook the signs of it:

> We had tacitly agreed to ignore that any with whom we associated on terms of visiting equality could ever be prevented by poverty from doing anything that they wished. If we walked to or from a party, it was because the night was *so* fine, or the air *so* refreshing, not because sedan-chairs were expensive. 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 moderate means (8).

For these ladies, poverty "was a word not to be mentioned to ears polite" (8) not a subject to discuss among "aristocratic" women who have inherited enough to not have to work for living, and are thus enabled to associate with the upper class. Even if they are as poor as some of the lower class, they at least do not have to work for a living, unlike their lower-class counterparts. Visiting and partying together with sedan chair and summer silk are activities and things typical to aristocratic ladies. The Cranford ladies manage to perform their activities and pretend they do not need the things they do not have. Nobody ever talks about poverty and all ignore the signs of it in their peers. This act of intentional ignorance and silence is a part of their performance as genteel women.

Another instance of a back stage performance occurs when the ladies arrive at Betty Barker's house for a party. They can hear Betty asking her servant not to open the door until after she has run upstairs and wash her hands, in which time she will cough as a signal to open the door. When the ladies are already upstairs, they saw Betty "sat, as stately and composed as though we had never heard that odd-sounding cough, from which her throat must have been even then sore and rough" (80). At this moment, Betty's back stage performance "leaks" and hinders the front. In discussing the many performances in everyday life, Richard Schechner differentiates them into two: "make believe" and "make belief" performances. He says: "**Make-believe** performances maintain a clearly marked boundary between the world of the performance and everyday reality. **Make-belief** performances intentionally blur that boundary" (35). Theaters and movies are examples of make-believe performances because people can draw a clear distinction between what is real and what is pretended. In everyday life, there are many performances that make belief, i.e. "create the social realities they enact" (35). Betty is performing a make-belief performance, yet the "There she sat, as stately and composed as though we had never heard that odd-sounding cough" (80) shows that on the one hand she does not quite succeed in performing her performance. On the other hand, the fact that the ladies proceed with what they are doing show their participation in Betty's make-belief performance.

Cranford gives an interesting illustration of the notions of make-believe and make-belief performances. Peter Jenkyns is the youngest of the Jenkyns siblings. Miss Matty describes Peter: "He was like dear Captain Brown in always being ready

to help any old person or a child. Still, he did like joking and making fun; and he seemed to think the old ladies in Cranford would believe anything" (63). The only son, Peter is also a practical joker. He likes to make fun of people. One day Peter dresses up as a woman and meets his father, the Rector of Cranford, saying that (s)he is interested in Mr. Jenkyns' sermon. Peter succeeds in his performance, yet he himself is surprised by his success.

> Peter said he was awfully frightened himself when he saw how my father took it all in, and even offered to copy out all his Napoleon Bounaparte sermons for her-him, I mean, no, her, for Peter was a lady then .... As it was, he was none so glad of it, for my father kept him hard at work copying out all those twelve Bounaparte sermons for the lady – that was for Peter himself, you know. He was the lady (63).

For Peter, what he is doing is a make-believe performance, although he might have expected it to be a make-belief. His father takes Peter's performance seriously, transforming it into a make-belief.

Up to this point in the narrative, Peter has never been mentioned before. By telling the story of Peter, Miss Matty is performing a certain relationship to gender. Through the family letters, Miss Matty shows how gender is performed. As an only son, Peter is equipped with formal education and is expected to conquer the world. However, Miss Matty also tells Mary that Peter cross-dresses a second time. Wearing his sister Deborah's clothing, Peter "went and walked up and down in the Filbert walk – just half hidden by the rails, and half seen; and he cuddled this pillow, just like

a baby; and talked to it all the nonsense people do" (65). The clothes that Peter wears are known everywhere as Deborah's, so Peter starts to attract a crowd of people who gather and peep into the family garden to watch him. Peter acts a role and is equipped with the props to support his performance. He turns the family garden into a stage and makes people his audience in theatrical sense. Unfortunately, his father comes along, and he eventually recognizes that it is Peter. Getting very angry, he tears Peter's clothes off, throws the pillow, and flogs him, after which Peter leaves the family for good. Mr. Jenkyns' anger makes sense because Peter has turned a family garden that is supposed to be a private space into a public stage. Plus, when Mr. Jenkyns approaches the crowd peeping into his garden, he thinks that they admire his garden and tries to make a speech to them in the occasion. Therefore, Peter's performance makes a fool not only of his sister but also his father. His father makes a fool of Peter by undressing him and revealing his acts as a false performance.

Peter tells Miss Matty afterwards that his performance is just "to make something to talk about in town: he never thought of it as affecting Deborah" (65). Peter's performances, whether intended or not, complicate gender norms. Young and ignorant, Peter does not seem to realize that "the talk" that he intends from his jokes will have devastating effects on Deborah. A Rector's daughter being seen walking down the street carrying a baby would signify on many different levels. If the baby were Deborah's, it would be an illegitimate one. If she had a baby, she must be fallen since she did not have a husband. It would be unthinkable, of course, for the honorable Rector to have a fallen daughter and an illegitimate grandchild, and it

would ruin Deborah. Until Mr. Jenkyns reveals Peter's real identity, people believe that the cross-dressed Peter is a woman, and supposedly Deborah.

On the one hand, Peter's performances (though temporarily) blur the boundary between the real and the pretended. On the other hand, these two events show how changes in clothes result in people believing in the change of gender. That people take his performance at face value confirms Butler's notion of gender as an act. Butler says:

> The act that one does, the act that one performs, is, in a sense, an act that has been going on before one arrived on the scene. Hence, gender is an act which has been rehearsed, much as a script survives the particular actors who make use of it, but which requires individual actors in order to be actualized and reproduced as reality once again (Performative 526).

Therefore, Peter's practical joke temporarily makes him a woman. He acts out a "script' of femaleness in his given society, the script that the given society understands. As an adult, Miss Matty finds herself having difficulty getting her pronoun right when she refers to Peter, who was disguised as a woman, "for her-him, I mean, no, her, for Peter was a lady then" (63). The reading of Peter's performances serves as a background in looking at how Cranford ladies perform their gender and identities in accordance with Butler's notion of gender performativity. In addition to the social status that they inherit from their fathers or get from their husbands, the ladies are also recognized by the acts that they perform.

The importance of class and gender performativity is evident in deciding who should be considered as the privileged leaders of Cranford. There is much debate among the Cranford ladies whether Betty should be given the privileges of their society. Of the Barker sisters, Mary says, “They only aped their betters in having "nothing to do" with the class immediately below theirs. And when Miss Barker died, their profits and income were found to be such that Miss Betty was justified in shutting up shop and retiring from business” (75). Now that she does not have to work and dresses finer than any lady in Cranford, Betty’s social position is reconsidered by the Cranford ladies. Betty herself tries her best to act as one of them by inviting the Cranford ladies for a party in her house. Mary observes how Betty acts in the presence of the ladies, how she expects her maid to keep a distance. Yet, since they are usually “on very familiar terms in their every-day intercourse” (80), Peggy, the maidservant does not realize what she should do to help Betty define her status as a lady:

> Now Peggy wanted to make several little confidences to her, to which Miss Baker was on thorns to hear; which she thought it was her duty, as a lady, to repress. So she turned away from all Peggy’s asides and signs; but she made one or two very mal-apropos answers to what was said (80).

It is more crucial for Betty to act as a lady since she is not yet admitted as one of the Cranford ladies. As a trade woman, Betty was a middle class woman. She is now trying to be accepted into the aristocracy of the town, although the ladies are really

only gentry at best. Betty even draws the line by not inviting Mrs. Fitz-Adams to her party because, as she said, “I cannot think her fit society for such ladies as Mrs. Jamieson and Miss Matilda Jenkyns” (76-7). Miss Fitz-Adams is a sister of a surgeon and the widow of Mr. Fitz-Adams. In considering whether Mrs. Fitz-Adam “should be called upon by “the old blue- blooded inhabitants of Cranford” (78), the Cranford ladies have two considerations in her favor: “Fitz meant something aristocratic,” and she lives in a large rambling house that used to be inhabited by the daughter of an earl. The more flexible reason is given by Miss Pole: "As most of the ladies of good family in Cranford were elderly spinsters, or widows without children, if we did not relax a little, and become less exclusive, by-and-by we should have no society at all" (78). Miss Pole’s statement implies the challenge that the Cranford ladies have to face in maintaining their gentility.

The discrepancy between social class and economic class is especially apparent in an incident at Mrs. Forrester’s house. Having servants defines somebody as a part of the middle class. It is crucial for Mrs. Forrester to have a servant, and everybody knows that she is only capable of hiring a little charity-school maiden, the lowest-paid kind of servant. It is also necessary for Mrs. Forrester to perform another marker of her status: that she does not work. However,

> When Mrs Forrester, for instance, gave a party in her baby-house of a dwelling, and the little maiden disturbed the ladies on the sofa by a request that she might get the tea-tray out from underneath, everyone took this novel proceeding as the most natural thing in the world, and

> talked on about household forms and ceremonies as if we all believed that our hostess had a regular servants' hall, second table, with housekeeper and steward, instead of the one little charity-school maiden, whose short ruddy arms could never have been strong enough to carry the tray upstairs, if she had not been assisted in private by her mistress, who now sat in state, pretending not to know what cakes were sent up, though she knew, and we knew, and she knew that we knew, and we knew that she knew that we knew, she had been busy all the morning making tea-bread and sponge-cakes (7).

Here the Cranford ladies play their roles as audience and co-participant to Mrs. Forrester's front. Together with the maid, they work in acting as if the display did not represent the plain truth of the poverty that betrays their genteel status. The "though she knew, and we knew, and she knew that we knew, and we knew that she knew that we knew" (7) shows how they, as the actors, know that they are acting, and they succeed in performing in the mode of belief which overlooks all the real facts of their situation.[3] Butler affirms: "the action of gender requires a performance that is *repeated.* This repetition is at once a reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; and it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation ("Performative" 140). For these ladies, being known as genteel ladies is not enough; they have to maintain their acts to strengthen their belief that as

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[3] I am indebted to Prof Dorice Williams Elliott who introduced me to the concept of performativity. This passage was discussed in terms of performativity in Prof Elliott's class "Women of Victorian England" at the University of Kansas in spring 2007.

long as they act as ladies and embody some traits of the upper class, they are what they act. The Cranford ladies perform their stylized repetition of acts to maintain their gender and class identity.

Ideally, social class is tied to economic class. Yet there are times when social class does not go along with the economic class. Having closed her store and not having to work, Betty is financially better off than the Cranford ladies, but that does not automatically make her a part of the Cranford elite. The Cranford ladies, on the other hand, practice elegant economy. Yet they are still respected for their higher social status. Although they perform ignorance and silence about their own poverty, they do talk about other people's poverty. Members of the working class are supposedly the ones likely to experience poverty, and the Cranford ladies not only talk about it but show their sympathy and offer their assistance. Helping the poor reinforces their social status, such as when the Cranford ladies lend their hands to help Signor Brunoni (aka Samuel Brown), the poor conjuror, when he becomes ill.

In a shop one day, Miss Matty hears a rumor that the bank where she invests her money has become bankrupt. When the shopkeeper refuses a man's bank note, Mary tries to no avail to distract Miss Matty from the incident, but observes Miss Matty "put on the soft dignified manner, peculiar to her, rarely used, and yet which became her so well" (145) before she insists on replacing the note from her bank with the only money she has at that time. When Mary reminds her that she will lose her money if the bank is indeed bankrupt, Miss Matty decisively says, "Why, then it will only have been common honesty in me, as a shareholder, to have given this good man

the money" (146). The way Miss Matty deals with the incident shows that she is aware of certain acts that she needs to perform to support her identity. She holds the responsibility as a shareholder, a position that upholds her social status, so she must fulfill that responsibility.

For the Cranford ladies, their gender identity is inextricably tied to their class identity. Not having to work, these ladies occupy the domestic sphere. The belief that the domestic sphere was the best place for women was promoted by a number of Victorian female thinkers such as Sarah Ellis, who said, "Their sphere of action was at their own firesides, and the world in which they moved was one where pleasure of highest, purest order, naturally and necessarily arises out of acts of duty faithfully performed" (15). The ideal stereotype of a Victorian woman then was the "angel in the house" who waited for and served her husband after he went out and worked the whole day. It was believed to be so much in the course of nature, that Margaret Oliphant said, "Eve would have done it had Mr. Mill been there ever so distinctly, shaking his head at her, and bidding her to remember the rules of equality" (173). The fact that both of the Victorian thinker quoted above were women suggests that most Victorian women were happy themselves with the idea of separate spheres.

The "angel in the house" stereotype, as Elizabeth Langland suggests, refers to middle-class women who "cooperated and participated with men in achieving middle-class control through the management of the lower class" (294). This depiction of gender and class applies well in the upper-class and well-off middle-class household management in which the mistress of the house manages a big house with a number

of servants and helps her husband to maintain their social and political status. In *Cranford,* none of the Cranford ladies has a big house with a large number of servants; however, they act as if they did, as in the passage where they are invited to Mrs. Forrester's house for a party (7). However, the Cranford ladies do exercise control over the lower class. Both Deborah Jenkyns and Mrs. Jamieson do not allow their servants to have followers. Only after Mr. Holbrook died does Miss Matty consent to Martha, her servant, having a follower.

Another example of how Miss Jenkyns exercises her power upon the lower class is her ceremony of giving dinner and some money to the postman when he comes to deliver letters on Christmas day:

> Miss Jenkyns standing over him like a bold dragoon, questioning him as to his children - what they were doing - what school they went to; upbraiding him if another was likely to make its appearance, but sending even the little babies the shilling and the mince-pie which was her gift to all the children, with half-a-crown in addition for both father and mother (140-1).

Although Miss Matty continues what Miss Jenkyns did after her sister died, Miss Matty does not find it comfortable to follow the details of such ceremony, which Miss Jenkyns regards as "a glorious opportunity for giving advice and benefiting her fellow-creatures" (141). Instead of giving "each individual coin separate, with a "There! that's for yourself; that's for Jenny," etc" (142), Miss Matty gives the money

all at once. This instance shows that the ladies do not have to be a wife to perform their responsibility to the poor.

The Honourable Mrs Jamieson, a widow to the late Earl of Glenmire, and thus a real aristocrat, is the most respectable and the richest among the ladies, and the only one who has immediate relations with the titled class. Upon hearing that Mrs. Jamieson's sister-in-law, Lady Glenmire, is coming to stay with her, the Cranford ladies are busy trying to find out the right etiquette to deal with the Peerage, such as the proper way to address Lady Glenmire. Yet, Mrs. Jamieson at first does not allow them to call on Lady Glenmire, an exclusion which upset the ladies, especially Miss Pole because it suggests that they are not worthy as landed gentry to associate with a titled lady such as Lady Glenmire. Although later on Mrs. Jamieson invites the ladies to meet Lady Glenmire, an invitation which Miss Pole persuades Miss Matty to accept on the basis of "Christian principle of 'Forgive and forget'" (89), the previous exclusion has challenged these ladies' performative identities. Among themselves and to their lower-class audience, they succeed in performing acts that maintain their superior status. Yet, in opposition to the real upper class, their performative identity is not as stable as they have pretended.

Mrs. Jamieson presents a similar challenge when she asks the ladies, who are about to leave her house, "Don't you find it very unpleasant walking?" to which Miss Matty answers, "Oh dear, no! it is so pleasant and still at night!" "Such a refreshment after the excitement of a party!" "The stars are so beautiful!" (96). Mrs. Jamieson knows that the ladies to whom she asks the question cannot afford a sedan-chair. She

asks the question anyway as if they indeed had the choice of using a sedan-chair. By asking the question, Mrs. Jamieson challenges the other ladies' front stage behavior. By denying the real truth of their situation, the ladies are excluding Mrs. Jamieson from their back stage performance. Moreover, expressing the truth would also mean betraying their mode of belief. Therefore, Mrs Matty, representing the other ladies, finds an excuse to justify their not taking sedan chair to go home. However, the ladies, including Mrs. Jamieson, know that they are acting. She plays her part in the performance. On the one hand, the fact that Mrs. Jamieson's question is "a pretty regular question" strengthens the notion of stylized repetition. On the other hand, it serves to remind the other ladies of Mrs. Jamieson's superiority. Because of her superior position, Mrs. Jamieson can violate their rules a little bit to act her own position as a rightful leader of the group. By giving their stylized answers, the others reinforce their own right to associate with the (almost) titled and rich. The repeated question, however, also forces them to act their role as her inferiors.

The Cranford ladies do exercise control over their household and manage the lower class, yet they are no "angels in the house" in its strict sense. The households that they manage are not their husbands' but their own. Therefore, although they stay in the domestic sphere, they do not necessarily represent the binary of separate spheres ideology. Their independence from husbands differentiates them from the middle-class "angel in the house." Not married, these ladies do not have to lose their property to their husbands. In England, it was not until the passage of the Married Women's Acts of 1870, 1882, and 1830 that married women had the same property

rights as unmarried woman (Brown 73). Therefore, the Cranford ladies have a stronger legal position than middle-class wives in terms of property owning, although their financial position might not be better, as seen from the elegant economy that they practice. Having no necessity to work also enables these ladies to be associated with the upper class. However, it is tricky to say that they are independent from men, since they have inherited what they own from their dead fathers or husbands.

Miss Matty was prevented from being married because the only suitor that she had "would not have been enough of a gentleman for the Rector and Miss Jenkyns" (38). If Miss Matty had married Thomas Holbrook, she would have had to give up her genteel status. In Victorian England, women's social standing was still based on their fathers' or husbands'. Therefore, Lady Glenmire, who acquires her ladyship from her marriage to Lord Glenmire, loses her genteel status when she marries Mr. Hoggins.

Although the Cranford ladies are either spinsters or widows and do not work for a living (Miss Matty opens a tea shop only after her investment fails her), Gaskell shows that they are not "redundant women." The Cranford ladies are financially independent. They are not a burden for society, and they are even the elite society in Cranford. The Cranford ladies prove their ability to support themselves and help one another. When Miss Matty loses all her investment and her regular income, the Cranford ladies help her to survive. Not married and not having children does not prevent Miss Matty from exercising motherhood. She helps nursing Martha's baby who "was as much at home in her arms as in its mother's" (181). Miss Matty also

does not mind if Martha wants ho have more babies. The Cranford ladies are able to create a community of women that is able to support themselves.

The Cranford ladies' specific performance of overlooking things is challenged when Miss Matty finds herself with no financial security after the bank where she invests all her money has gone bankrupt. Mary suggests that Miss Matty sells tea to support her life. Upon hearing the plan of selling tea, Miss Matty is rather shocked: "not on account of any personal lost of gentility involved, but only because she distrusted her own powers of action in a new line of life" (167). Miss Matty understands that being a shopkeeper means being involved in trades, and it means that she will lose her genteel position. However, Mrs. Jamieson answers the challenge by arguing Miss Matty's right to retain her status as a Cranford gentlewoman: "whereas a married woman takes her husband's rank by the strict laws of precedence, an unmarried woman retains the station her father occupied" (168). Here Mrs. Jamieson chooses to retain Miss Matty's status as the daughter of the Rector of Cranford, whereas she chooses to assume that Lady Glenmire loses her rank by marrying a surgeon. The Cranford ladies make arbitrary choices in this case. They cannot rely on repeated acts but have to choose how to perform in a new situation.

By being involved in trade and having to work for a living, Miss Matty is breaking the pattern that the Cranford ladies try to maintain. Yet these ladies once again try to ignore the fact. Being a shopkeeper is definitely not a job for a genteel woman, and Miss Matty is not good at it. She is slow in counting the change. She often adds to the weight and gives away candies to the children, which means

damaging the prospect of obtaining profit from the trade. She consults the other shop owner in town, making sure that her trade does not harm the existing trader. However, being bad in trade for Miss Matty does not signify weakness. She is performing the genteel woman's non understanding of trade. Therefore once again Miss Matty performs her identity well. Fortunately, this challenge to the performativity of the Cranford ladies does not last very long. About one year after Miss Matty opens the tea shop, Peter Jenkyns comes back to Cranford from India, and "he had enough to live upon 'very genteelly' at Cranford; he and Miss Matty together" (179). Therefore, Miss Matty is able to return to her customary, unchallenged role.

In terms of the narrative, Peter's cross-dressing forces him to leave the narrative and enables the narrative to create an Amazonian society. If Peter had had stayed in the narrative, Miss Jenkyns and the Cranford ladies would not have been the leaders of Cranford. When Peter comes back, not only does he restore Miss Matty to domesticity from trade, but he also becomes the leader of the society. Even Mrs. Jamieson follows Peter's lead. Mrs. Jamieson is still enraged about her sister-in-law's decision to become Mrs. Hoggins. But Peter arranges for an event to foster reconciliation between Mrs. Jamieson and Mrs. Hoggins. Peter tells Mary: "I intend to enter the Assembly Room tonight with Mrs Jamieson on one side, and my lady, Mrs Hoggins, on the other. You see if I don't" (187). Peter succeeds in his intention, and he manages to get both involved in a conversation. The re-establishment of Miss Matty's and Mrs. Hoggins' gentility assures the continuity of the performance of

gentility among the Cranford gentlewomen. Yet with all the challenges their performances have sustained, it is evident that the performative acts that maintain their gender and social status might not work forever. *Cranford* subverts the stereotype of a "redundant woman," yet the subversive element is only a part of the larger narrative. Unlike *Ruth, Cranford* still pretty much upholds the normative conventions on gender.

Chapter 3 Performance and Performativity in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Ruth*

Elizabeth Gaskell was not the only Victorian author to write a narrative about fallen woman. To name a few, Charles Dickens has a fallen woman character in *Oliver Twist* (1838) and *David Copperfield* (1850); Wilkie Collins has a fallen woman in three of his novels, *Man and Wife* (1870)*, The New Magdalen* (1873)*, and The Fallen Leaves* (1879); the heroine of Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Ubervilles* (1891) is also a fallen woman. Therefore, the narrative of the fallen woman is not uncommon in Victorian period, even though as Nina Auerbach notes, "the Victorian myth of the fallen woman seems even more harshly degrading than its literary archetype in *Paradise Lost*" (29). One of the degrading qualities that Auerbach discusses is the Victorian convention that commands the death of the fallen woman.

Ruth, Gaskell's heroine, is seduced by Bellingham, who impregnates and abandons her. To save Ruth, the siblings Thurstan and Faith Benson take Ruth to Eccleston and give her a new identity as a widow. Ruth starts a new life in Eccleston, but Gaskell does make her die a few years later. Gaskell's fellow women writers, Charlotte Bronte and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, did complain about Gaskell's decision to kill her heroine.[4] Gaskell apparently conforms to the Victorian

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[4] Although both appreciated Gaskell's choices for her narrative, Charlotte Bronte and Elizabeth Barrett Browning complained. Bronte wrote Gaskell a letter saying, "Yet – hear my protest. Why should she die? ...Yet you must follow the impulse of your own inspiration. If *that* commands the slaying of the victim, no bystander has a right to put out his hand to stay the sacrificial knife; but I hold you a stern priestess in these matters" (Easson 200). Elizabeth Barrett Browning said in her letter to Gaskell, "I love & honor your books, especially 'Ruth' which is noble as well as beautiful, which contains truths purifying and purely put, yet treat of subjects scarcely ever boldly treated of except when taken by unclean hands. I am grateful to you as a woman for having so treated such a subject. Was it quite impossible that your Ruth should die? I had that thought of regret in closing the book" (Easson 316).

convention of penitential death, but from the title of the chapter, Gaskell suggests that Ruth's death is less a punishment than a reward.

According to George Watt, Ruth's death, which is described as her union with light, "is a permanent reminder that a human being can achieve a spiritual victory in a world where pragmatism, political corruption, petty vice and self-righteousness, all form the foundations of national institutions from the family to parliament" (39). Similarly, Deirdre D'Albertis says, "The heroine's death, however, serves two distinct and yet complementary narrative functions: exaltation of Ruth's infinite moral superiority through apotheosis and reparation through Benson's social extrusion for the Bensons' lie about Ruth's fallen nature" (98). Both critics emphasize Ruth's inherent innocence and purity manifested in good deeds that bring her glory in her death despite her one-time mistake. Through the course of the novel, Gaskell suggests that Ruth is inherently innocent and virtuous despite what she does or what people think of her, but I argue that the depiction of Ruth strengthens the notion of performativity because in societal term, she is defined by what she performs.

An orphaned Ruth is sent to be an apprentice to Mrs. Mason, a dressmaker. Mrs. Mason chooses Ruth to be among the four girls to accompany her to a ball to mend torn dresses. Ruth protests because she does not think that she is diligent, but Mrs. Mason insists. The other apprentices besides Ruth immediately know that although Mrs. Mason says that she looks for the most diligent, she actually looks for the presentable ones. Not only is Ruth ignorant of what it means for a girl to be

beautiful, she also does not understand the convention of social nicety and modesty. Her friend is surprised when she overhears Ruth saying that she knows she is pretty.

> "Did you hear Ruth Hilton say she knew she was pretty?" whispered one girl to another, so loudly that Ruth caught the words.
>
> "I could not help knowing," answered she simply, "for many people have told me so." (14)

There is no arrogance involved when Ruth acknowledges her beauty; it is just a naïve statement. Ruth is conscious that she is pretty, but at the same time she is also not conscious of what it means to be a pretty girl and acknowledge it in front of people. Ruth perceives her beauty as if it is the same as the beauty that she enjoys from the weather, the house covered by snow, and the flowers painted on the wall in the house where she works. When she sees her own reflection on the water, Ruth is even delighted by her own beauty, but she disassociates it from herself because “her existence was in feeling and thinking, and loving” (64). Therefore, Ruth does not have the slightest suspicion that people around her may use her beauty for their own purpose. For Mrs. Mason, Ruth’s beauty is “such a credit to the house” (14). That is why Mrs. Mason insists on Ruth coming to a ball with her in spite of Ruth’s protest. In Ruth’s relationship with Bellingham, “Her beauty was all that Mr. Bellingham cared for, and it was supreme. It was all he recognised of her, and he was proud of it” (64). It is her beauty that leads Bellingham to seduce Ruth.

Gaskell presents Ruth’s beauty from other characters’ perspectives. Mrs. Mason sees remarkable beauty in Ruth “with her waving outline of figure, her

striking face, with dark eyebrows and dark lashes, combined with auburn hair and a fair complexion" (14). For Bellingham, other girls may be equally beautiful, but Ruth's beauty is particular:

> There was, perhaps, something bewitching in the union of the grace and loveliness of womanhood with the *naivete*, simplicity, and innocence of an intelligent child. There was a spell in the shyness, which made her avoid and shun all admiring approaches to acquaintance. It would be an exquisite delight to attract and tame her wildness, just as he had often allured and tamed the timid fawns in his mother's park (24).

Ruth is like an open sign that people can easily read. Her innocence and ignorance make her an easy prey for Bellingham, her seducer. Ruth thinks that Bellingham possesses a genuinely kind and sympathetic heart when he presents her with a camellia after she mends the dress of one of the ladies at the ball. She also does not know that Bellingham saves a little boy from drowning only to attract her more. Bellingham exercises his power over Ruth because he recognizes Ruth's "naiveté, simplicity and innocence" (24).

Simone de Beauvoir asserts that a woman learns to perform her gender through a socially constructed experience. When the narrative starts, Ruth is described as a fifteen-year-old girl. At the age of fifteen, Ruth should already understand her gender, but Gaskell presents Ruth as not having an appropriate sense of her gender. She does not know the appropriate social conducts expected from a

girl. Mrs. Mason tells Ruth the importance of both appearance and performance. She says, "Dress, young ladies, you know, is a very secondary consideration. Conduct is everything" (14), yet she is not satisfied with Ruth's shabby dress and suggests that Ruth ask her guardian for a new gown. Later, however, Mrs. Mason insists the importance of conduct for a girl. She commands Ruth, "Don't attempt to show your face at my house again after this conduct. I saw you, and your spark too. I'll have no slurs on the character of my apprentices. Don't say a word. I saw enough" (48). Being seen holding hands with a lover in the evening miles away from home, Ruth is violating the code of conduct and has to bear the consequence. Yet Ruth does not exactly know that what she does is wrong. Earlier, after several afternoon walks with Bellingham, Ruth is puzzled by her feeling:

> "How strange it is," she thought that evening, "that I should feel as if this charming afternoon's walk were, somehow, not exactly wrong, but yet as if it were not right. Why can it be? I am not defrauding Mrs. Mason of any of her time; that I know would be wrong; I am left to go where I like on Sundays. I have been to church, so it can't be because I have missed doing my duty" (37).

The passage implies that Ruth is vaguely aware of social rules that do not allow a girl to spend too much time in public with a man who is not her husband. But nobody has ever directly told her of such rules, so that she immediately concludes, "I can thank God for the happiness I have had in this charming spring walk, which dear mamma used to say was a sign when pleasures were innocent and good for us" (37). This

conclusion leads to another meeting with Bellingham that takes her further away from home and results in her being expelled by Mrs. Mason.

Having nobody and being left alone every Sunday since everybody else goes to visit their friends or relatives, Ruth is yearning for the companionship and attention that Bellingham gives her. Ruth does not know that she is being seduced. Gaskell supplies a reason for Ruth's ignorance:

> She was too young when her mother died to have received any cautions or words of advice respecting *the* subject of a woman's life--if, indeed, wise parents ever directly speak of what, in its depth and power, cannot be put into words--which is a brooding spirit with no definite form or shape that men should know it, but which is there, and present before we have recognised and realised its existence. Ruth was innocent and snow-pure. She had heard of falling in love, but did not know the signs and symptoms thereof; nor, indeed, had she troubled her head much about them (39-40).

The passage suggests that had Ruth's mother been alive, Ruth would not have been that ignorant of "the subject of a woman's life." Hilary M. Schor argues that the subject is either love or sex, and that "by its very unmentionability, sexuality becomes very dangerous to women" (63). Victorian sexuality demands a woman not to have sexual knowledge or experience until she gets married. Therefore, even parents cannot speak about sex directly, although they might speak about it indirectly. Yet when not having sexual knowledge causes a woman to make mistakes, she is still to

blame. That means that the subject is there whether one recognizes and realizes it or not, and one is forced to comply with it.

The "subject of a woman's life," however could also be read as gender, which the Oxford English Dictionary defines as "a euphemism for the sex of a human being, often intended to emphasize the social and cultural, as opposed to the biological, distinctions between the sexes."[5] That it exists even before people recognize and realize its existence confirms the nature of gender in Judith Butler's view. Butler says, "There is no 'one' who takes on a gender norm. On the contrary, this citation of a gender norm is necessary in order to qualify as 'one,' to become a viable 'one,' where subject-formation is dependent on the prior operation of legitimating gender norms" (*Bodies* 232). Jonathan Culler explains Butler's example, "When one is constituted as a subject one is already constituted as a boy or girl. As soon as a child is spoken to or about, for example, he or she receives a gender" (513). Ruth may be innocent and snow pure, but she is already interpellated as a girl. Therefore, she is constrained by her gender whether she knows it or not.

Ruth is not completely unaware of social norms. She knows that she does not belong to elite society. She can only watch when the ladies and gentlemen dance in the middle of extravagance in the shire hall. While her dress is being repaired, one of the ladies at the ball immediately changes her tone when she addresses Ruth: "So far she spoke sweetly and prettily. But now she addressed Ruth. 'Make haste--don't keep

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[5]*Oxford English Dictionary Online.* 2007. Oxford English Dictionary. 24 November 2007. <http://dictionary.oed.com.www2.lib.ku.edu:2048/cgi/entry/50175368?single=1&query_type=word&queryword=performance&first=1&max_to_show=10>.

me an hour!' And her voice became cold and authoritative" (16). Despite this rudeness, Ruth knows that she should stay humble in the presence of a person of a higher class. At home, Ruth thinks to herself about people of a higher class who seem to have everything and are removed from the world of the poor. Unfortunately, her thoughts lead her to believe that Bellingham is different: "What did they know of the meaning of the word, so terrific to the poor? What was winter to them? But Ruth fancied that Mr. Bellingham looked as if he could understand the feelings of those removed from him by circumstance and station" (18). Ruth's lack of experience prevents her from knowing that what she sees as a sympathetic gesture from Bellingham is merely his attempt to attract her. He is intentionally performing kindness to attract Ruth, but she fails to interpret him as she should – she is a victim of Bellingham's "make-belief" performance.

Gaskell's presentation of Ruth's innocence and ignorance may seem unrealistic for a sixteen-year-old girl, since even a little boy that Ruth meets in Wales knows the social meaning of what Ruth does with Bellingham. This little boy prevents Ruth from kissing her sister and hits Ruth's face because "She is a bad, naughty girl – mamma said so, she did" (62). However, Audrey Jaffe argues:

> Far from being unusual, however, Ruth in her ignorance exemplifies the "conspiracy of silence" within which Victorian girls were generally raised: the "state of repressed consciousness" identified by the critic Martha Vicinus that rendered it effectively impossible for

> women to act as responsible agents with regards to sexual behavior (55).

Gaskell provides sufficient background of Ruth's upbringing that results in her innocence and ignorance. Ruth's mother died when Ruth was twelve, but even before that her mother had been ill and "was unable to bestow the ever-watchful attention to domestic affairs so requisite in a farmer's wife" (33). Ruth's father passed away three years later, and Ruth was left to a guardian who immediately sent her to be an apprentice for Mrs. Mason. None of those important figures in Ruth's early life provide her with proper knowledge of womanhood. When Ruth visits her parents' house with Bellingham, the old servant Thomas tries to warn Ruth, "My dear, remember the devil goeth about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour; remember that, Ruth" (45). Thomas uses Biblical allegory to warn Ruth of the danger awaiting her in her relationship with Bellingham, but Ruth does not understand: "The words fell on her ear, but gave no definite idea" (45). Here Gaskell supplies another instance of the lack of practical language to make a girl understand gender and sexuality.

Judith Butler argues, "To be a gender, whether man, woman, or otherwise, is to be engaged in an ongoing cultural interpretation of bodies and, hence, to be dynamically positioned within a field of cultural possibilities" ("Sex and Gender" 36). This notion applies well in the narrative in which Ruth has to cope with what Gaskell calls "labyrinths of social ethics" (98). George Watt equates these labyrinths of social ethics with "a complex network of interacting traditions, habits, and individuals"

whose forces engage both physical and abstract forms. The physical forms are embodied in a number of characters who condemn Ruth for being a great sinner. The abstract form is "the cruel social mores which demand scapegoats in the forms of fallen women and their cursed offspring" (33), which are promulgated as part of religion and community values.

While Ruth is still ignorant of the meaning of her conduct, everybody else around her has already formed their judgment. When Ruth follows Bellingham to live in Wales, she still does not know that she furthers the social mistake that caused her to be expelled by Mrs. Mason in the first place. Gaskell situates the ignorant Ruth among people who are fully aware of social norms: "Ruth was quite unconscious of being the object of remark; and, in her light, rapid passings to and fro, had never looked at the doors and windows, where many watchers stood observing her, and commenting upon her situation or her appearance" (61). On the one hand, Gaskell points out that Ruth is ignorant because she does not know, but the society is also ignorant because they do not care. Nobody wants to know why and how a girl like Ruth can do what she does. Nobody cares to educate Ruth on the social meaning of her conduct. People simply condemn, such as a Welsh housewife who tells her husband, who comments on Ruth's modesty and innocent look, "I do think it's a shame such people should be allowed to come here. To think of such wickedness under the same roof. Do come away, my dear, and don't flatter her by such notice" (61). On the other hand, Gaskell shows that Ruth is judged for what she does despite her intention and innocence. Gaskell thus hints at one notion of performativity.

Ruth is performing certain acts, and people perceive the acts based on their understanding of social mores. Judith Butler says:

> The act that one does, the act that one performs, is, in a sense, an act that has been going on before one arrived on the scene. Hence, gender is an act which has been rehearsed, much as a script survives the particular actors who make use of it, but which requires individual actors in order to be actualized and reproduced as reality once again ("Performative" 526).

The social mores, the scripts are already there, enabling people to name the reality that they see. When Mrs. Bellingham finds out the relationship between Ruth and her son, she forces Bellingham to abandon Ruth. In her letter to Ruth, Mrs. Bellingham says: "I wish to exhort you to repentance, and to remind you that you will not have your own guilt alone upon your head, but that of any young man whom you may succeed in entrapping into vice" (78). Although she is innocent and seduced, Ruth is constructed as the kind of woman who would deceive a man into vice. Mrs. Bellingham recommends Ruth to go to a penitentiary. In Victorian England, a penitentiary was an institution to rehabilitate female outcasts or fallen women, many of whom were prostitutes. Susan Mumm, in her essay on penitentiary and fallen women, states: "Who were these 'low and repulsive' women? Candidacy for a penitentiary was simple: to have fallen was to have had sexual intercourse with a man to whom one was not married" (529). Obviously, based on the scripts that exist in the society, Ruth has now become a fallen woman, and she is considered degraded and

thus in need of reform. Mrs. Bellingham simply materializes what she thinks is the appropriate thing to do based on social conventions.

Through the character of Bellingham, Gaskell not only presents a carefree, irresponsible young man but also raises the issue of class. When his mother asks him, “I suppose you are not so lost to all sense of propriety as to imagine it fit or desirable that your mother and this degraded girl should remain under the same roof, liable to meet at any hour of the day?" (77), Bellingham understands that Ruth is even less presentable because of her social class. When Ruth and Bellingham first arrive at a Welsh inn, Jenny Morgan the innkeeper suspects that Ruth is not Bellingham’s wife because she knows that the wife of a gentleman would not dress plainly and act humbly, and a gentleman’s wife would have a servant with her. The latter is a key part of the social script that helps Jenny distinguish Ruth’s inferior position because, as Duncan Crow says, “the main distinguishing mark between the middle-class woman and those who were considered socially inferior was the attitude of mind which demanded that she should have at least one servant to wait on her” (49). Interestingly, knowing those facts, Jenny immediately takes the situation lightly: “Indeed, and young men will be young men; and as long as their fathers and mothers shut their eyes, it's none of my business to go about asking questions” (62). Jenny’s statement presupposes that it is normal for an upper-class gentleman to seduce a lower-class girl. This also defines the girl of a lower class as insignificant – her virtue is of no value or concern. The inequality between classes is another aspect of social mores that Ruth fails to understand in her relationship with Bellingham.

Gaskell emphasizes Ruth's naiveté, innocence and ignorance in building her narrative. When Bellingham deserts her, the narrator says that Ruth: "had no penitence, no consciousness of error or offence; no knowledge of any circumstance but that he was gone" (80). Ruth might be too overwhelmed with what has happened, but she also has little knowledge that she has committed wrong conduct. Ruth's reaction on discovering herself to be pregnant strengthens the notion of her ignorance of social norms and expectation. Faith Benson tells her brother, Thurstan Benson, "She did not seem to understand how it ought to be viewed, but took it just as if she had a right to have a baby. She said, 'Oh, my God, I thank Thee! Oh, I will be so good!' I had no patience with her then, so I left the room" (99). As a member of a society carrying a certain gender, Ruth is expected to understand its expectations of her gender which includes being penitent because of her "sin." In terms of performativity, Ruth performs acts that are perceived as representing a "fallen woman," yet she also performs ignorance of such naming and the consequence of it.

Borrowing Judith Butler's terms, Ruth is like an actor who realizes and reproduces the script into reality, and in Ruth's case the script is that of a "fallen woman". Several characters in the novel point out the existence of such a script. When asked about Ruth's whereabouts, Mrs. Pearson, who heard about Ruth from her sister-in-law, Mrs. Mason, says:

> "The girl? Why, ma'am, what could become of her? Not that I know exactly--only one knows they can but go from bad to worse, poor

> creatures! God forgive me, if I am speaking too transiently of such degraded women, who, after all, are a disgrace to our sex." (264)

Mrs. Pearson does not even know Ruth personally, yet she is certainly aware of the social script of what happens to a woman who is considered fallen. The script tells her that having no chance of being accepted by society after becoming fallen, a woman will certainly be a prostitute for life. Bellingham also shares the same script. He never tries to find Ruth and does not know what happens to her after he abandons her. He simply assumes that Ruth ends up like the other women who commit the same mistake she did:

> Poor Ruth! and, for the first time for several years, he wondered what had become of her; though, of course, there was but one thing that could have happened, and perhaps it was as well he did not know her end, for most likely it would have made him very uncomfortable (229).

It does not even occur to Bellingham that there could be a different possible script for Ruth. To save Ruth from her social fate, however, it is necessary to stoop to deceit in order to modify the supposedly inevitable script.

In 1850, Gaskell wrote a letter asking for Charles Dickens's assistance regarding a girl that she met in prison. This sixteen-year-old girl was seduced by a young surgeon, and Gaskell wanted to help her to migrate to Australia. Gaskell said in her letter, "I want her to go out with as free and unbranded a character as she can; if possible, the very fact of having been in prison &c to be unknown to her landing"

(Chapple 99). Gaskell tried her best, with the help of her friends, to create a new script for Pasley, the seduced girl, who happily landed in Australia. In *Ruth,* Gaskell creates Thurstan Benson, a dissenting minister, who does not believe in the script that a so-called fallen woman must necessarily end up in a penitentiary or being a prostitute. Yet he also understands that the existing script will not let society accept Ruth after what has happened. Mr. Benson convinces his sister, Faith Benson, to act out of Christian love and save Ruth. George Watt argues that Benson, with his unconventional Christianity, "is the personification of the new morality Gaskell would have her readers accept....If Benson represents the true moral stance, then Faith represents the converted" (31). The Bensons write a different script for Ruth to perform. They will take Ruth to Eccleston and give her a new identity as Mrs. Denbigh, a widow, so that she and her son can be accepted by society. The Bensons and Ruth are a team in a performance then. They agree on what role Ruth has to play, and the Bensons help Ruth in performing her role.

Before they leave for Eccleston, Faith buys Ruth a black gown to match her new identity. The performance is enhanced once they arrive in Eccleston. Sally, the Bensons' servant, joins the team, even before she is told the truth of Ruth's situation and still doubts Ruth's status: "Missus--or miss, as the case may be--I've my doubts as to you. I'm not going to have my master and Miss Faith put upon, or shame come near them. Widows wears these sort o' caps, and has their hair cut off; and whether widows wears wedding-rings or not, they shall have their hair cut off--they shall" (121). Earlier that day, Faith has just given Ruth a wedding ring. Sally cuts Ruth's

hair that night, because as she tells the Bensons later, Ruth's long hair "was fitter for a bride in lawful matrimony than for such as her" (124). Sally also buys Ruth widow's caps the following day. The Bensons, Ruth and Sally are then ready for what Erving Goffman calls performance since all that is required is there: actors, scripts, stages and props. Faith even adds to the performance by telling Mrs. Bradshaw that Ruth's husband was a young surgeon. When her brother protests, Faith replies, "I do think I've a talent for fiction, it is so pleasant to invent, and make the incidents dovetail together; and after all, if we are to tell a lie, we may as well do it thoroughly, or else it's of no use" (126). On the one hand, all of these characters realize that they are acting out a performance. On the other hand, the preparations that they make, so that people believe what they perform, also suggest the nature of performance in everyday life. Once Sally says "Yon girl's secret is safe enough for me," (126) she becomes part of the back stage performance; she has access to what other people in Eccleston do not know and/or see about Ruth. They all perform a "make-belief" performance for other people in Eccleston.

Gaskell's focalization strategies allow readers not only to know all that happens to Ruth when most of the other characters do not but also Ruth's perspective on what happens to her.[6] Therefore, readers know that Ruth more often does not share the perspectives that other people have about her. Often times in the narrative,

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[6] Gerard Genette coined the term focalization in his book *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method.* It refers to the perspective through which a narrative is presented. Alan Palmer summarizes the concept: "it must be distinguished from the act of narration in the following way: When you read a discourse and ask "Who speaks?" or "Who narrates?," you are concerned with narration. When you ask "Who sees?" or "Who thinks?" then you are concerned with focalization" (48).

Gaskell employs internal focalization, letting the reader see the narrated events through the eyes of the characters.[7] Yet there are times when the events are focalized through the narrator. These focalization strategies enable readers to see Ruth's character development. At the beginning, Ruth is so unbelievably ignorant that even Gaskell calls her "a beautiful ignoramus" (65). Ruth sees herself and the world around her with her innocent and ignorant eyes. Ruth, for example, does not tell Bellingham about the incident with the little boy although it makes her feel dreadful. The reason is simple and naïve: "She thought he would be as much grieved as she was at what had taken place that morning; she fancied she should sink in his opinion if she told him how others regarded her; besides, it seemed ungenerous to dilate upon the suffering of which he was the cause" (63). Ruth's thought not only shows her innocence but also her generous nature. When Bellingham complains about her looking dreadful, Ruth immediately decides to be cheerful so that Bellingham can be happy. At this point, Ruth unconsciously starts to learn to perform for other people. Later in Eccleston, she learns and succeeds in performing respectability.

The encounter with the little boy and his sister initiates Ruth's new understanding of herself and the world around her. The letter from Mrs. Bellingham that she rereads after finding out that she is pregnant also helps her to see things from

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[7] Palmer also summarizes Genette original types of focalization: "*zero focalization* occurs in the traditional novel of the omniscient narrator where the events are not focalized through a single character but clearly focalized through the narrator; *internal focalization* occurs when the events are, in general, focalized through a single character or characters in turn; and *external focalization* occurs when descriptions are limited to characters' external behavior (in what is called behaviorist narrative)" (48). The focalization strategy employed by Gaskell helps to frame the performance aspects in the narratives.

different perspectives. Ruth's rapid development, however, starts the day she arrives in Eccleston. In Eccleston, Ruth performs in a literal sense the role of a respectable widow. The Bensons have Ruth literally acting a script that they write for her own good, and she does it well. When people see and treat her as a "fallen woman," Ruth does not see herself as one. In Eccleston, when people see her as a respectable widow, she perceives herself as a sinner. Gaskell lets readers look through Ruth's perspective when Mr. Benson is reading his sermon about saving a sinner: "Ruth's heart was smitten, and she sank down, and down, till she was kneeling on the floor of the pew, and speaking to God in the spirit, if not in the words, of the Prodigal Son: 'Father! I have sinned against Heaven and before Thee, and am no more worthy to be called Thy child!'" (129). Through internal focalization, Gaskell shows how Ruth sees herself and how everybody else in Eccleston, not knowing Ruth's past, perceives her differently.

Although a hardly educated farmer's daughter, Ruth educates herself so that she is able to educate her son. She performs her new identity so well that people see her as a respectable, educated woman. Even Mr. Bradshaw asks Ruth to teach his two younger daughters how to perform their roles properly, and that is because Ruth is a convincing performer. When they consider whether or not Ruth should become a governess in Mr. Bradshaw's family, and whether Mr. Bradshaw should be told Ruth's past, Faith asks her brother:

> "Don't tell of her sin and sorrow to so severe a man--so unpitiful a judge. But here I ask you, Thurstan, can you or I, or Sally (quick-eyed

> as she is), say, that in any one thing we have had true, just occasion to find fault with Ruth? I don't mean that she is perfect--she acts without thinking, her temper is sometimes warm and hasty; but have we any right to go and injure her prospects for life, by telling Mr. Bradshaw all we know of her errors--only sixteen when she did so wrong, and never to escape from it all her many years to come--to have the despair which would arise from its being known, clutching her back into worse sin?" (165)

In terms of performance, the Bensons and Sally are co-participants with Ruth. They are both in the front and back stage of the performance. Ruth performs acts that are in line with the society's expectation of her assumed role.

Ruth's pretended situation creates a ground for people to interpret her conduct. Ruth satisfies Mr. Bradshaw's need to patronize: "Indeed, Ruth altogether found favor with him. Her quiet manner, subdued by an internal consciousness of a deeper cause for sorrow than he was aware of, he interpreted into a very proper and becoming awe of him" (133). His daughter, Jemima is also fascinated by Ruth because "the pretended circumstances of her life were such as to catch the imagination of a young romantic girl" (153). At one point, Mr. Farquhar, who is looking for a wife, considers Ruth as a candidate: "Mrs. Denbigh, if not many months older in years, had known sorrow and cares so early that she was much older in character. Besides, her shy reserve, and her quiet daily walk within the lines of duty, were much in accordance with Mr. Farquhar's notion of what a wife should be" (199).

These three characters are important figures in the narrative when Ruth's past is revealed.

Ruth acquires a gender identity that conforms to what Butler calls "an identity instituted through *a stylized repetition of acts."* The narrator says of Ruth:

> But, perhaps, in Ruth herself there was the greatest external change; for of the change which had gone on in her heart, and mind, and soul, or if there had been any, neither she nor any one around her was conscious; ...six or seven years ago, you would have perceived that she was not altogether a lady by birth and education, yet now she might have been placed among the highest in the land, and would have been taken by the most critical judge for their equal" (173).

This passage represents how the other characters in the narrative see Ruth, and by addressing the readers, the narrator seem to also direct the readers on how to see Ruth. The narrator emphasizes the external change that people see; therefore it is consistent with Butler's notion of gender performativity. Ruth's identity is instituted through her outward performance, from the repeated acts that she performs. So well does Ruth perform her new identity that people see her as not only capable of being a governess but also suitable to be more than a governess. Even Bellingham, who thinks that Mrs. Denbigh looks like Ruth, sees her as a different person, "A governess in Mr. Bradshaw's family! Why, she might be a Percy or a Howard for the grandeur of her grace!" (229). Ruth as Mrs. Denbigh is no longer the innocent, naïve girl that he seduced and abandoned several years ago. Ruth has acquired, in Butler's terms, "a

performative accomplishment"; her acts define for her a new gender and class identity.

The Bradshaws are a perfect example of the ideology of the separate spheres and its performance. The manufacturer Mr. Bradshaw occupies the public sphere. Mrs. Bradshaw attends the household, takes care of her husband and children, manages her servants, and cooperates with Mr. Bradshaw in controlling the lower class. Mr. Bradshaw performs his superior social standing by being the patron for those that he considers below him, such as the Bensons and Ruth. Mr. Bradshaw gives regular financial support to the church presided over by Thurstan Benson. Gaskell places Jemima in such an environment that enables her to become a respectable woman. Jemima appropriately acquires her gender through a socially constructed experience. Mr. Bradshaw is a strict husband and father. He shapes his wife to be an ideal "angel in the house" and demands that Jemima take her mother as a role model.

In order to perform his own superiority, Langland says, "the mid-Victorian husband depended on his wife to perform the ideological work of managing the class question and displaying the signs of the family's status – duties to which he contributed a disposable income" (291). What Langland says goes well with what Mrs. Bradshaw does. On behalf of her husband, she visits Ruth. She invites Ruth to dinner and gives Ruth the gift from her husband. She also manages to decorate the house so that it becomes presentable for the arrival of Mr. Donne, the candidate for Parliament. Mrs. Bradshaw is an example of a woman who fits the social script of an

"angel in the house." She always makes sure that she and her children attend to all that Mr. Bradshaw wishes.

Mr. Bradshaw asserts the need to keep up certain rules in regards to what women should and should not do and the consequence of certain actions performed by them. Ironically, Mr. Bradshaw hires Ruth to teach his younger daughters how to perform their roles properly, and that is because Ruth herself is a convincing performer. Of the typical Victorian family with its "angel in the house," Elizabeth Langland says, "The domestic sanctuary overseen by its attending angel can be decoded as a theater for the staging of a family's social position, a staging that depends on prescribed practices" (291). Mr. Bradshaw ensures that his wife and daughters perform what is expected of their gender. For instance, he is pleased when he finds that Jemima acts submissively after her previously rebellious acts. When he assumes that Jemima's change of conduct is due to Ruth's influence, he immediately thinks of giving Ruth a gift. Mr. Bradshaw's act is like that of a theater-goer who pays an actress for a fine performance.

> With the fragrance of Ruth's sweetness lingering about her, Jemima was her best self during the next half-hour. Mr. Bradshaw was more and more pleased, and raised the price of the silk, which he was going to give Ruth, sixpence a yard during the time (195).

Prior to that moment, Jemima has been a bad girl by always contradicting Mr. Farquhar and her father. She does not perform a script that demands a girl to be submissive and insists on having opinion of her own. Assuming that Jemima's change

is due to Ruth's example, Mr. Bradshaw is rewarding Ruth for her performance as if Ruth were an actress on the stage.

Juxtaposing Ruth and Jemima, we can see how Jemima is privileged to be taught how to perform her gender properly. When Jemima first finds out about Ruth's real background, she ponders whether if she were in Ruth's position, which is without home, parents, and careful friends, she would likely be tempted as well. The narrator says of Jemima: "she had never shaped her conviction into words and sentences, but still it was *there*, that all the respectable, all the family and religious circumstances of her life, would hedge her in, and guard her from ever encountering the great shock of coming face to face with vice" (266). Ruth, on the other hand, does not have "the respectable, all the family and religious circumstances." Gaskell points out that a girl can fail to perform well because nobody teaches her to perform her gender in a socially acceptable way. A character who is supposed to teach Ruth is Mrs. Mason. Yet the narrator says of Mrs. Mason:

> Mrs. Mason was careless about the circumstances of temptation into which the girls entrusted to her as apprentices were thrown, but severely intolerant if their conduct was in any degree influenced by the force of these temptations. She called this intolerance "keeping up the character of her establishment." It would have been a better and more Christian thing if she had kept up the character of her girls by tender vigilance and maternal care (48).

Mrs. Mason represents a social attitude that leads Ruth to her "fall." Mrs. Mason's supposedly maternal figure fails Ruth. Another character, though showing sympathy, Jenny Morgan does not help Ruth either, "Not but what I am sorry for her, for she's an innocent, inoffensive young creature. I always think it right, for my own morals, to put a little scorn into my manners when such as her come to stay here; but indeed, she's so gentle, I've found it hard work to show the proper contempt" (67). Jenny Morgan sees the discrepancy between Ruth's appearance and what she understands as a script of a "fallen woman." Yet she chooses to follow the script that guides her on how to act when she encounters a "fallen woman."

Through those women, Gaskell shows a double standard in society in regards to what happens between Bellingham and Ruth: when a man and a woman commit a social mistake, the blame is imposed on the woman. Years later, Bellingham himself still considers his seducing Ruth as his youthful folly and offers money as compensation, to which Mr. Benson sharply counters: "Men may call such actions as yours, youthful follies! There is another name for them with God!" (371). Mr. Benson believes that men should be responsible for what they do. Benson also believes that society should give a second chance to women whom they construct as fallen. While Bellingham can continue his life as if nothing has happened, Ruth has to bear the consequence for the rest of her life

Previously interested in Jemima, Mr. Farquhar later thinks that Ruth will make a better wife because: "lovely, quiet Ruth with her low tones and quiet replies, her delicate waving movements, appeared to him the very type of what woman should

be – a calm, serene soul, fashioning the body to angelic grace" (254). Ruth is obviously seen for what she performs. The phrase "fashioning the body" implies that this is an active deliberate performance. What Mr. Farquhar, and everybody else in Eccleston, sees in Ruth as Mrs. Denbigh is clearly gender as a performed social construct. There are certain characteristics and expectations imposed on certain genders, and one has to acquire those and perform them well to be considered proper in being one's gender.

Bellingham, who changes his name to Donne for some property, know Ruth's past, and having the script in his mind of what could have happened to Ruth after what he has done to her, Bellingham wonders how Ruth can even be a respected governess: "It certainly was Ruth; only how the devil had she played her cards so well as to be the governess--the respected governess, in such a family as Mr. Bradshaw's?" (229). The game image that Bellingham alludes to suggests the discrepancy between reality and appearance. Bellingham sees Ruth's performance more as a deceit on Ruth's part because apparently Bellingham considers that Ruth does not deserve what she has become after what she has done. Mr. Bradshaw obviously shares the same perspective with Bellingham. He immediately accuses Ruth of intentionally corrupting his daughters. However, Ruth does not see herself as playing a game. She is seeing herself as doing her best with the Bensons' advises.

Gaskell uses a number of foreshadowing devices, such as when Jemima asks a question, that Faith intentionally does not answer, during Leonard's christening. Jemima wonders why Mr. Benson in his sermon calls for people not to rebuke the

baby. The narrator says, "The circumstance seemed to die away, and leave no trace; but in after years it rose, vivid and significant, before Jemima's memory" (153). Later on in the narrative, Jemima picks up the pieces to draw a conclusion about Ruth's past that makes Leonard an illegitimate child. After the Bensons and Sally, Jemima is the first person in Eccleston who finds out about Ruth's past.

When she first hears about Ruth having done things that normally place a woman as being considered a fallen woman, she thinks:

> Now, and here, there was no hypocrisy; but some time, somewhere, on the part of somebody, what hypocrisy, what lies must have been acted, if not absolutely spoken, before Ruth could have been received by them all as the sweet, gentle, girlish widow, which she remembered they had all believed Mrs. Denbigh to be when first she came among them! (267-8)

The Greek word *hypokrisis* means act of playing a part on the stage, from which the Merriam Webster defines hypocrisy as "a feigning to be what one is not or to believe what one does not; *especially***:** the false assumption of an appearance of virtue or religion." [8] Jemima understands that hypocrisy is a word for a discrepant performance, but Ruth's performance does not seem to be discrepant. Gaskell makes her point in Jemima's puzzlement: "Who was true? Who was not? Who was good and pure? Who was not? The very foundation of Jemima's belief in her mind were shaken" (268). Once fallen, a woman is believed to be forever fallen. Should Ruth's

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[8] *Merriam Webster Online.*2007-2008. Merriam Webster. 24 November 2007. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/hypocrisy>.

one-time sexual experience make her fallen? If Ruth is fallen, why does she look naturally angelic and perform none of the acts that a fallen woman is supposed to perform? On the one hand, Gaskell seems to emphasize that Ruth is naturally and inherently good. In this sense, she does not fit the notion of performativity, when it means that she has an innate identity. Ruth does not seem to deliberately perform her identity. She falls into the new script as passively as she did into her role as a seduced and fallen woman. On the other hand, the previously ignorant Ruth does learn how to perform her gender. Although her sense of self is always at odds with what she performs, Ruth performs her gender well in Eccleston because she now has the knowledge and tools to perform her roles.

Years of learning constructs Ruth to perform the scripts of motherhood and to be a respectable woman. She knows what to do and is able to judge for herself what is right from wrong. Ruth knows that she cannot deny her past with Bellingham, just like the fact that Bellingham is the father of her son. Yet Ruth decides not to let her son knows his father, to prevent his son from becoming like his father. Ruth even rejects Bellingham's offer to marry her. She rejects Bellingham with dignity:

> "To save Leonard from the shame and agony of knowing my disgrace I would lay down and die ... --but to go back into sin would be the real cruelty to him. The errors of my youth may, be washed away by my tears--it was so once when the gentle, blessed Christ was upon earth; but now, if I went into willful guilt, as you would have me, how could I teach Leonard God's holy will? I should not mind his knowing my

> past sin, compared to the awful corruption it would be if he knew me living now, as you would have me, lost to all fear of God----" Her speech was broken by sobs. "Whatever may be my doom--God is just--I leave myself in His hands. I will save Leonard from evil. Evil would it be for him if I lived with you. I will let him die first!" (247-8)

Ruth emphasizes that she commits her youth mistake because she was ignorant, and she will not commit the same mistake over again. She is also performing her role as a good mother by teaching her son what he needs to know to stay in the right path and preventing him from wrong conducts. Ruth also shows her independent when she asserts: “You shall have nothing to do with my boy, by my consent, much less by my agency. I would rather see him working on the roadside than leading such a life--being such a one as you are” (249). Although Bellingham threatens Ruth with his power, Ruth persists in doing what she thinks is the best thing to do for herself and her son.

The all-time respectable Mr. Bradshaw considers himself as a role model for society. He separates people into two large groups:

> to one of which, by the grace of God, he and his belonged; while the other was composed of whom it was his duty to try and reform, and bring the whole force of his morality to bear upon, with lectures, admonition, and exhortations – a duty to be performed, because it was a duty – but with very little of that Hope and Faith which is the spirit that maketh alive (266).

Therefore, when he feels that he has committed bribery in the process of Donne's election to be a Member of Parliament, he performs sterner acts of imposing virtue. He disavows his son when his son commits fraud. He immediately expels Ruth when he finds out about Ruth's past conduct. He, who strongly believes in the necessity of punishment for those who violate social rules and norms, confronts Mr. Benson who defends Ruth by alluding to Mary Magdalen. Mr. Bradshaw declares:

> The world has decided how such women are to be treated; and, you may depend upon it, there is so much practical wisdom in the world, that its way of acting is right in the long-run, and that no one can fly in its face with impunity, unless, indeed, they stoop to deceit and imposition (288).

In Ruth's case, Mr. Bradshaw reinforces the existing social script that demands punishment for a "fallen woman." Therefore, once he finds out that Ruth holds the role of a fallen woman, he immediately fires her and withdraws his support from her. Ironically, Mr. Bradshaw, who used to see Ruth as a role model for his daughters, now sees Ruth as no more that a degraded woman who corrupts his daughters' morality.

When her past is revealed, Ruth loses her job and her place in society. Her son all of a sudden has to also bear the burden of being a bastard. Mr. Farquhar, who once thought to take Ruth as his wife, is relieved that he has never made his intention public. At a certain point, people pay attention more to her fall than her performance. Butler asserts: "as a strategy of survival, gender is a performance with clearly

punitive consequences. Discrete genders are part of what 'humanizes' individuals within contemporary culture; indeed, those who fail to do their gender right are regularly punished" ("Performative Acts" 522). Ironically, Ruth has to bear these punitive consequences because she does her gender right when she is not entitled to because of her past.

After her past is revealed, Ruth apologizes to Leonard and tries to prepare him to accept bad treatment from the society, now that he is known as an illegitimate child. Ruth is still trying to find the right words when Leonard gets her point.

> "Were not you married? Are not you a widow?" asked he abruptly, for the first time getting anything like a clear idea of the real state of the case.
>
> "No! May God forgive me, and help me!" exclaimed she, as she saw a strange look of repugnance cloud over the boy's face, and felt a slight motion on his part to extricate himself from her hold. It was as slight, as transient as it could be--over in an instant (282).

Out of the blue, a six-year-old boy understands the meaning of a fallen woman and an illegitimate child. It is hardly as plausible as a sixteen-year-old girl who does not understand that she is being seduced and carrying what the society called an illegitimate baby. Leonard immediately understands his mother's and his own situation and what he must suffer from it. Yet it takes so many things for Ruth to finally understand the situation that her son can immediately see.

Ruth, however, wins back her society because she does not give up performing her respectable gender. As if representing Gaskell's belief, the narrator earlier says:

> People may talk as they will about the little respect that is paid to virtue, unaccompanied by the outward accidents of wealth or station; but I rather think it will be found that, in the long run, true and simple virtue always has its proportionate reward in the respect and reverence of every one whose esteem is worth having. To be sure, it is not rewarded after the way of the world, as mere worldly possessions are, with low obeisance and lip-service; but all the better and more noble qualities in the hearts of others make ready and go forth to meet it on its approach, provided only it be pure, simple, and unconscious of its own existence (87).

From a governess, she turns to become 'an angel of mercy' by nursing sick people, especially those from the lower class. By doing so, Ruth manages to turn around society's judgment. Ruth's mistake is still there, but people see Ruth in a different light. Leonard overhears people talk about his mother in a way that allows him to proudly present himself as Ruth's son:

> "Such a one as her has never been a great sinner; nor does she do her work as a penance, but for the love of God, and of the blessed Jesus. She will be in the light of God's countenance when you and I will be standing afar off' (351).

The quotation above suggests that society sees a fallen woman as having a certain nature, but Ruth demonstrates that she does not have that nature. By the time Ruth dies, people regard her as an angelic woman.

In "Philosophy and Literature: The Fortunes of the Performative" Jonathan Culler points out that Judith Butler makes two claims about gender performativity:

> "First, that there is not a subject, already constituted, prior to gender, who chooses.... The second issue is that of choice. Butler (ibid.: 22) writes, "gender performativity is not a matter of choosing which gender one will be today. Performativity is a matter of repeating the norms by which one is constituted: it is not a radical fabrication of a gendered self. It is a compulsory repetition of prior and subjectivating norms, ones which cannot be thrown off at will but which work, animate and constrain the gendered subject, and which are also the resources from which resistance, subversion, displacement are forged" (513).

The large number of people who attend her funeral to pay their last respect shows Ruth’s success in her performative accomplishment. Even Mr. Bradshaw, together with his whole family, attends the funeral sermon conducted by Mr. Benson, showing his respect to Ruth and Mr. Benson, whom he previously opposed. Ruth’s identity is replaced because she is able to perform a role society values, and society believes her performance. Ruth proves that the way of behaving is the most important thing in society. She is seen for how she behaves, i.e. what she performs.

Chapter 4 Conclusion

Through her characters in *Cranford* and *Ruth,* Elizabeth Gaskell shows how gender and class identity intertwine. The depiction of the daily lives of the characters in both narratives demonstrates the notion of performance in daily life. The Cranford ladies are conscious of the activities that they carry out. They perform certain acts and apply certain rules to sustain their gender and class identity. In *Ruth,* lives are also structured in a certain way based on the social mores. The main characters in *Ruth* perform in a literal sense when they participate in making Ruth perform a different identity to conceal her previous identity. Both narratives also show the notion of performativity in terms of the characters' gender and class identities that are constituted by stylized repetition of acts.

Making unmarried women as the heroines of the narratives, Gaskell challenges Victorian concepts of gender and the doctrine of separate spheres. Although the Cranford ladies are spinsters and widows, Gaskell shows that they do not necessarily become redundant women. The ladies are able to create a community of women whose members are capable of helping one another. With the help of the Bensons, Ruth is also finally able to support herself and her son. Not only does she show that a so-called "fallen woman" has choices other than staying in a penitentiary house or becoming a prostitute, Gaskell also demonstrates that a "fallen woman" can perform respectability. Gaskell makes Ruth reject Bellingham's offer of marriage because Ruth understands that marriage would not erase the mistake that she has

made. Gaskell also gives Ruth agency in deciding the best for her son and not letting him have anything to do with his corrupt father to prevent him from being corrupted.

Since both *Cranford* and *Ruth* are Victorian narratives, their characters are placed in a certain social class based on Victorian conventions. The Cranford ladies consciously perform certain acts and reinforce certain rules to maintain their genteel status. The Cranford ladies perform their gender and class identity in the mode of belief. In *Ruth,* however, Ruth does not seem to perform her gender identity in the mode of belief. Ruth's identity is always constructed, not by her own choice.

Gaskell presents Ruth as always constituted: as a girl, a fallen woman, and an angelic woman despite what she thinks about herself. She cannot and does not choose her identity. She is constituted based on what she performs. What she performs is perceived based on "a compulsory repetition of prior and subjectivating norms" (Culler 153). Therefore, she is constituted as a fallen woman because her acts conform to - through repetitions that are recognized as - a model of a fallen woman. When she considers herself as fallen, she is not constituted as one because her acts do not conform to the image of a fallen woman. She is constructed again as a fallen woman when her past is revealed. Yet, she challenges it by not performing a fallen woman. Soon she is constituted based on what she performs, an angelic woman. Gaskell seems to suggest that Ruth is innately innocent and angelic. Yet, it does not matter what her innate identity is, if there is one, because it is what norms she repeats, what she performs, that construct her identity. There are two points that the novel makes that are in line with performativity: 1) It challenges the notion that once fallen

(which is also a constructed identity) a woman is forever fallen or was even fallen, or pure. 2) Identity is constructed, and one becomes one's identity through stylized repetitions of conventional procedures.

The ideas of performance and performativity would not occur to Gaskell, but as the analysis shows, her narratives hint at such notions. The analysis of performance and performativity in *Cranford* and *Ruth* shows how the narratives subvert the dominant assumptions about gender and class in Victorian England. The female characters in each novel are described as capable to stand up for themselves. The notions of performance and performativity in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Cranford* and *Ruth* are still applicable to the present situation. In many cases, women of twenty-first century are judged by what they perform in society. If the heroines of Gaskell's narratives are able to challenge social conventions that disadvantage women, modern women would surely be able to perform better.

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