

DISOBEDIENT BODIES:
THE INTERSECTION OF CLASS AND SENSATION IN
THE VICTORIAN NOVEL

Bella Book
April 24, 2015

Presented to the English Department of Mount Holyoke College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a degree of Bachelor of Arts with Honors.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My biggest, and grandest, thanks go to my project advisor, **Jenny Pyke**. How you managed to be so kind, forthright, and clear-sighted from the beginning of this project right until the very end absolutely astounds me. Thank you so much for the wonderful leadership and example that you have been throughout my time at Mount Holyoke. Your insight and kindness have made this experience transformative. The ways you engage with text and ideas are so amazing and humbling. You changed the way I view words. Such a gift. Thank you for teaching me. Thank you!

A huge thank you to **Amy Martin**, not only for assigning *Bleak House* and being so present in my third chapter, but for always being supportive and engaging and positive. I am so glad to have met and begun working with you this past year!

How lucky am I to have two such wonderful role models in scholarship, leadership, and living kindly? Answer: Extremely lucky.

To **Liz Markovits**, thank you for finding the time to read and consider this work and thank you for your wonderful dedication to student experience at Mount Holyoke!

I would like to thank **Meghan Healy**¹¹ and the women of the John Portico Library in Manchester. The time spent exploring the city, especially touching the original doors in Elizabeth Gaskell's home, was unreal, and jump-started my research and enthusiasm for this project. In this vein, I would also like to thank **Katherine Inglis** for the talk she gave in the spring of 2014 on *Ruth* and contagion and **Gayle Davis** for her course *Making of the Modern Body*, which inspired my academic interest in the body. The insights gained in that course provided an invaluable framework for this project.

A huge thank you to all of my lovely friends who have been so positive and supportive in relation to this project, and in life generally, even in the midst of this hectic year. I would especially like to thank **Hallie Saber**, whose support, friendship, and steady stream of "it's going to be great" and quiet confidence was at once inspiring and stabilizing. To **Rachel Lovett**, **Leah Brooke**, and **Sarah**

Martin, whose support was so quiet and gentle and perfect, thank you! And to **Kay Heffernan**, who listened and mentored and checked in with such kindness. I owe a lot of my growth, and the growth of this project to one twenty minute conversation we had at the end of January. Thank you thank you thank you!

I would also like to thank my little brother, **Joseph Book**, and my dad, **Dewayne Book**, who now intimately know the plot of four Victorian novels and who were always willing to listen. A big special thanks to my dad, who gave me the chance to relax and defrost this March while I wrote that last all-consuming chapter, and who always picks up when I call and who can sense, whether from across the room, the eastern seaboard, or the Atlantic, when I need him.

I would like to thank my mom, **Connie Book**, for being a role model and inspiration in all things and for always being available to watch BBC Victorian adaptations in her bed on a Saturday afternoon. Thank you for always encouraging my interests and for being so kind-hearted and so strong and so fearlessly open. When I grow up, hopefully, I will be like my mother.

This project is dedicated to my grandfather, **Clarence Ledoux**, who would have so disapproved of my obvious love for Marx, and many of the ideas present in this thesis, but whose belief in the power of education has now changed the lives of two generations.

Thank you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Seeing and Narrative Sympathy in <i>Mary Barton</i>	17
Moral Femininity, Narrative Control, and Margaret Hale's Body in <i>North and South</i>	52
Female Sexuality, Motherhood, and the Fallen Woman in <i>Bleak House</i> and <i>Mary Barton</i>	80
Disease, Exhaustion, and the Worker in <i>North and South</i> and <i>Hard Times</i>	112
Dear Reader: Articulating the Worker's Body in the Twenty-First Century	149
Works Cited	153

It is a consequence of the wonderful complexity of our organism, in which each part plays on another, that remote and unsuspected influences produce important results. Mental agitation will suddenly arrest or increase the secretions; imperfect, or too abundant secretions will depress or confuse the mind. An idea will agitate the heart, and disturb the liver...So indissolubly is our mental life bound up with our bodily life.

George Henry Lewes, *The Physiology of Common Life*, 1859

How can a human being enter into a narrative world
and *not* disrupt the distribution of attention?

Alex Woloch, *The One vs The Many*, 2003

INTRODUCTION

Charles Dickens, writing to the emerging author of *Mary Barton* on January 31, 1850, asserted that the aim of his magazine *Household Words* “would be the raising up of those that are down, and the general improvement of our social condition” (Letter from Dickens to Gaskell, 31 January 1850). Elizabeth Gaskell, the then anonymous author of *Mary Barton*, was living and writing in Manchester, the definitive industrial city. Both authors were united by a common desire to “raise up those that are down.” To do this, they drew from their own observations and beliefs in how the different classes in England, separated by ideological, if not geographic, distance could be made aware of their interdependent economic and social relationship. Both Dickens and Gaskell sought to connect a privileged readership to the lives of the workers through sympathy. Gaskell’s short story “Lizzie Leigh” would be the leading story in the first issue of *Household Words* (Michie 88).

With the growth of industrial cities and the fluctuating ideas about femininity and the factory, bodies became physical receptacles for ideological concerns. Gaskell and Dickens, among others such as Benjamin Disraeli, began to use fiction as a way to understand and reform ideas about how class and social

issues impacted their society. This genre of fiction had a social conscience and an explicit purpose. Mary Poovey, in her foundational text *Making the Social Body*, traces the motives that fueled this form of the novel. She writes, “Novelists’ contributions to the debate about the condition of England tended to challenge the modes of representation that political and social economists deemed adequate to contemporary woes” (153). These social reform novelists sought to personalize in a time when “the emergence and consolidation of modern domains entailed the productions of abstractions alongside and throughout the establishments of institutions” (7). Detailing Britons’ ordinary living conditions, these novels typically follow a set formula in which a character moves from self-interest, or limited social vision, to altruism (Cazamian 8). These novels, written for a mostly middle-class readership, emerged from the 1840s to the middle of the 1850s. Robin Gilmour, in *The Novel in the Victorian Age*, argues that the central task of the social reform novel was mediatory, seeking always to reconcile and synthesize (11). The story of the Victorian social reform novel is the story of how novelists’ attempt to interpret their changing world and to hold onto a hopeful, and more socially cohesive, vision of the future. The social reform novelist, then, follows a specific rhythm in his or her writing. The writer says: This is what is and this is what could be.

Unlike political and social economists who, as Poovey notes, dealt largely with abstraction, writers like Dickens and Gaskell focused their narrative on the individual. Relying on the conventions of the novel, “they turned from

quantifiable features of the urban landscape to the toll that dirt, disease, and debility extracted from the poor” (Poovey 153). As Catherine Gallagher notes in her work, *The Making of the Modern Body*, “Imaginative texts gave the ‘social body’ a local habitation and name” (3). Fiction, specifically the realist novel,¹ becomes a uniquely effective vehicle for social reform. In her collection of essays *Unstable Bodies*, Jill Matus notes, “working-class domesticity, it can be argued, was *the* social problem that gave birth to Victorian social science...Victorians believed that the ‘condition of England’ was to be seen, accounted for, and modified in the home” (57). By writing these stories of working-class lives, social reform writers sought to bring the working-class character into the mind and the private home of the middle-class reader in order to reveal the social relationship that was obscured by the visibility of the middle class and the invisibility of the working class. Fictional representations of the worker became a way for the mass of new bodies to be translated and made more accessible and legible for the middle class.

Though united in their desire to bring about social reform, Gaskell and Dickens had a complicated relationship. Dickens was at once a supporter, a fellow writer, and Gaskell’s editor for *North and South* when it first appeared in *Household Words* in 1854. *Hard Times* was being written, and published, simultaneously and within the same magazine. These two novels are in

¹ Pamela Gilbert argues that the novel deals with “a secret self” (Disease, Desire, and the Body in Victorian Women’s Popular Novels 47), because of the insight the reader gets into the character’s interiority.

conversation with one another. They were both responding to a strike in the industrial town of Preston in Lancashire that, by January 1854, was already in its fourth month. Negotiations between worker and factory owner had come to a standstill as working-class families starved. These writers were interrogating the relationship between factory worker and factory owner while literally in conversation with one another, often going back and forth about how many columns *North and South* could be allotted. This uneven partnership brought forth two texts that are central to the discussion of Condition-of-England novels. How they chose to represent not only the worker but also the middle and upper-class characters become central to our understanding of this historical moment. Like the writers themselves, these novels, though similar in story, differ in the way some social identities are articulated and alternately policed or validated.

The Body

At once stable and permeable, tangible and capable of sensation, the body holds a particular position in these Condition-of-England novels as it navigates social structures that can both control and subsume it. The body also asserts a physical reality that cannot be elided or erased. The body has needs. The body falls ill. Unlike machines, bodies can grow tired. By running unpredictably, the body becomes a means of asserting an intensely physical and human need for nourishment, respite, and connection at a time when the worker was increasingly viewed as a laboring extension of the factory. The body becomes key to

understanding how Dickens and Gaskell's texts navigate the politics of difference, domesticity, and disease when addressing class-based problems. Poovey highlights the body's centrality to nineteenth-century texts. She writes, "while gender and race are often obvious factors in the way individuals were treated, these differences tended to imply that identity is a function of some deeper determinant, like the body" (3). It is by collapsing and interrogating external signifiers, such as race or gender, that are generally understood to divide and control that the construction of having a body becomes expansive and fluid, changing based on whose body is put into a specific social setting.

Scholarship

Nancy Armstrong's revision of Foucault in *Desire and Domestic Fiction* is central to understanding how power structures influenced how bodies were portrayed in the nineteenth-century novel. She writes on power and the social order:

The idea of order which Foucault sometimes calls "discourse" or "power" and at other times names "sexuality" or "discipline" is indeed a ruling idea...but in a world that is ruled more surely by ideas than by physical or economic means...the power of the system depends upon the production of a particular form of consciousness that is at once unique and standardizing. (570)

Power was centered on ideas that could be categorized and reconciled. This ideological construction shows how the body could become understood as a marker for a social category. This reading connects to Judith Butler's discussion

of gender, when she writes about how the body becomes a performative space for socio-ideological constructions. In “Performative Acts and Gender Constitutions” she examines how the body becomes a performative marker of ostensibly natural identities. Butler argues, “One is not simply a body, but in some very key sense, one does one’s body...the body is a historical situation” (902). Sexuality and class, then, can be performed using a body. It becomes a signifier, referring back to a larger social construction within that society.

Scholarship surrounding the body as signifier has been widespread and multifaceted, especially when it comes to understanding and interpreting writing in the nineteenth-century. In her opening of *The Making of the Modern Body*, Catherine Gallagher notes, “The Victorians managed to win for themselves the reputation of the most sexually and indeed physically, repressive society in history precisely by bringing the body even more fully into discourse” (vii). In the nineteenth-century, as the body was coming under more legal and social control it also became more visible, assuming a central role in public discourse surrounding disease and filth. In his book *Filth*, William Cohen argues that “filth represents a cultural location at which the human body, social hierarchy, psychological subjectivity, and material objects converge (viii). In *The Citizen’s Body*, Pamela Gilbert explains how state interest in sanitation reform and housing developments were articulated using a rhetoric of contagion. The body became a repository for social anxiety, and this rhetoric of communicable disease was placed onto the working-class body and its exposure to unsanitary living

conditions. Similarly, Mary Poovey traces how the body became a narrative device for Victorian journalists, novelists, and social theorists, allowing them to express anxieties surrounding non-native and working-class bodies. These bodies were collapsed into signifying labels such as “the Great Unwashed.”

Following a line of thinking that comes from Marx’s construction of labor and capital, Catherine Gallagher uses the phrase “somaeconomic” when discussing how the body became a part of the larger system of labor and capital in the nineteenth century. In her introduction, Gallagher defines somaeconomic as “the theorization of economic behavior in terms of the emotional and sensual feelings that are both causes and consequences of economic exertions” (3). Somaeconomics becomes a bridge to understanding how, in the nineteenth century, the body as signifier was linked to the body as sentient subject. The novel’s form presents the individual bodies as they are affected by the economic system they inhabit.

Writers such as Kaja Silverman, William Cohen, and Elaine Scarry complicate readings of the body as signifier by emphasizing how the body, as a feeling, sensing, and communicative being, can be articulated via narrative attention to sensation. As Cohen writes in *Embodied: Victorian Literature and the Senses*, “Victorian writers...posed the body against or athwart the self, decentering the human subject by focusing on its materiality” (xiii). Here Cohen is differentiating a history of the intellectual metaphysical “self” by bringing this self into conversation with the material, objected, body. Similarly, Silverman

analyzes the way in which being the object of a gaze affects the subjectivity inherent in having a body. Scarry traces pain's power to isolate, separating an individual subject from a community via the inexpressibility of that pain. In a reading of Hardy's treatment of the rural workers in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, Scarry describes how laboring bodies are permeable and become inherently open to the materials of their labor. In her discussion of the body's openness, Scarry also traces how community and setting come together in the permeability of the body. In *The Body in Pain* she writes, "If one were to move through all the emotional, perceptual, and somatic states that take an object—hatred *for*, seeing *of*, being hungry *for*—it would be throughout its entirety a consistent affirmation of the human being's capacity to move beyond the boundaries of his or her own body into the external shareable world" (italics mine 5). While the body exists as a bounded subject, Scarry notes that it does not do so in isolation. Rather, the body exists with other bodies, bumping up against them: connecting, loving, catching illnesses. Shared and embodied subjectivity, or the individual's capacity for sensation and connection that is inherent in the human experience, links bodies together through their bounded and shared openness.

Constructions of sympathy hinge on this notion of shared subjectivity. Adam Smith in *The Theory of Moral Sentiment* notes that when we see a suffering man "we enter as it were into his body, and become in some measure the same person with him" (I.I.2). Amit Rai in *The Rule of Sympathy* echoes this, writing, "There are at least two bodies that must be present at the scene of

sympathy...sympathetic identification, as an embodied form of subjectivity then, writes itself on the body” (47). Rae Greiner locates the production of sympathy within nineteenth-century realism: “Nineteenth-century realism is a sympathetic realism for at least one considerable reason: because mediation (temporal and imaginative) is central to its formal process” (299). In the Victorian novel sympathy is mediated on multiple levels; among them is the sympathy shared between characters and the sympathy felt by the reader for the characters. In both instances, the imagined connection that is built on shared sensation is fundamental to building this relationship.

The framework of my analysis relies heavily on the constructions of embodiment and subjectivity that Cohen and Silverman outline, while also pulling from the constructions of maternity that is central to Carol Mavor’s articulation of that term and from Pamela Gilbert’s analysis of sensation and the body in popular fiction. Elaine Scarry’s construction of the worker as permeable and vulnerable allowed me to further examine how bodily openness can interact with the industrial landscape. Mary Douglas’s reading of materiality and matter is similarly foundational to how I encounter the social anxiety surrounding industrial waste.

Alex Woloch’s construction of how characters function in the realist novel is pivotal to my own understanding of how, within this literary moment, bodies became larger in both narrative and discussions of narrative. In *The One vs The Many* he writes:

This tension between the one and the many becomes particularly pressing in the realist novel, which has always been praised for two contradictory generic achievements: depth psychology and social expansiveness, depicting the interior life of a singular consciousness and casting a wide narrative gaze over a complex social universe. (19)

I argue that by using the body, of both protagonist and minor character, Gaskell and Dickens anchor the psychological and social expansiveness that is unique to the body in the physical sensations of illness, sensuality, and maternity. While Woloch notes that each character enters the narrative with a specific function to fill in relation to the protagonist (22), each character also comes to the narrative referencing the sense of a “real” person outside of that narrative. Woloch’s construction of character space and character system also influences how I encounter the ways minor characters’ bodies navigate limited narrative space. Woloch quotes Harry Berger when he discusses a character’s subjectivity and a character as signifier. Berger writes:

When the poet states or suggests that Woman A stands for Idea B, a dilemma is forced on us. Does Woman A disappear completely into Idea B?...doesn’t a fable by its very nature have some elements of concreteness (belonging to the “image of human life”) that cannot be translated. (quoted in Woloch 15)

This formulation, that a human element persists whenever bodies and subjects are presented, is closely linked to my own analysis of the body as I argue that the body disobeys the structure of not only social systems but the narrative system as well by asserting its own needs and the person’s subjectivity.

Disobedient Bodies

My formulation of disobedience functions in two ways: the body, in its physical functions and trajectory (attraction, pregnancy, exhaustion, illness, death), will always “disobey” essentialized or metonymic constructions that attempt to reduce it to a single function and the novels and novelists can use bodies to disobey the cultural constructions that efface subjectivity and rely on abstraction. The factory workers become more expansive than the label of “hands.” In *North and South*, Margaret moves from a signifier of moral femininity to an embodied subject, capable of desire.

In my research, I look at bodies facing erasure and how the body becomes disobedient within systems that promote reduction. The body asserts a physicality that cannot be elided.

Many of the protagonists of these novels are young women. While some constructions of women’s intellectual and artistic discourse portray such discourse as *only* happening through sensation, that is not the intention of my work or my analysis. Rather, I argue that the body will always disobey the reductive abstraction and essentializing discourse that attempts to contain it in any single, metonymic function or identity. Pregnancy and illness do this through asserting a physicality that cannot be elided or completely erased.

Terms

Pathology can be used in relation to how specific diseases impact a certain part of the body. I use this term differently in relation to my discussion of illness and the materials of industry. In my work, pathology comes to refer to the illuminating of the whole body via illness. In *North and South*, the polluted air in the factory infects Bessy Higgins's lungs. This disease, however, does not only impact her lungs but incapacitates and immobilizes her entire being. In the industrial setting, then, the pathological and consuming nature of illness becomes a means of illuminating a body that, while diseased, becomes visible because it has immediate and minute needs.

Maternity, as constructed in Carol Mavor's book *Pleasures Taken: Performances of Loss and Sexuality in Victorian Photographs*, becomes the enactment of maternal attitudes and behavior. These social markers of maternal behavior signify the larger ideological construction of "Mother."

Dirt, according to Mary Douglas, is matter out of place. In the nineteenth century, dirt was not only a reality of urban living but also a marker of class. In *Mary Barton*, Esther, who works as a prostitute, uses dirt as a means of disguising her body, allowing her to move in working-class circles without being singled out as "other." Alternately, dirt becomes a constant source of anxiety for the middle-class homes in *North and South* as the domestic workers in those homes seek to expunge it, erasing dirt from the middle-class consciousness.

Class and Sensation

As Jill Matus notes in *Unstable Bodies*, “Ideas about the openness of sexuality to cultural and environmental influence are nowhere more evident than in middle-class constructions of class difference” (56). This project moves the discussion surrounding the body as sensing subject into the intensely class-conscious mid-century Victorian industrial setting. Examining the writings of both Gaskell and Dickens affords a broader textual space in which to examine bodies that disobey. These writings contain malfunctioning bodies that disobey the institutions seeking to erase or essentialize them. These bodies are perpetually broken by a harsh industrial system. The representations of these bodies, which get sick and die, are not triumphant. Rather, these representations are painful but crucial in these social reform novels. The works’ generic attention to the urban industrial setting, with its essentializing construction of worker and the sensorily painful space of the factory hold these representations. In a narrative space where the body as signifier and the body as subject take on a particular sense of urgency, I argue that the embodied industrial worker, for Gaskell and Dickens, becomes a narrative space that allows them to push back on the abstraction of “worker” and the assumed subjectivity of the middle-class protagonist. In a genre that was looking to reform and renegotiate how a society perceived difference and viewed middle-class culpability, the body becomes a narrative space for these constructions to be investigated and problematized.

Structure

My work is structured into four chapters, each exploring a different aspect of how bodies, and the ideas represented by them, appear in these novels. My first chapter discusses the politics of seeing as a means of bearing witness and generating sympathy in relation to the spectacle of the working-class body. While socioeconomically and ideologically segregated from the factory owners, Elizabeth Gaskell's narrator in *Mary Barton* tracks the importance of seeing working-class suffering. The text generates insight and sympathy by following her working-class characters into their homes and communities. The working-class body as it moves between spectacle and subject—often within the same scene—not only encourages the reader to see but alternately seeks to capture the sensation of being looked at. *Mary Barton* follows how the sensory subject is reduced to object under the middle-class gaze and how working-class autonomy can be experienced by the sympathized object looking back at its sympathizers and can come to be articulated through violence.

My second chapter turns to the middle-class protagonist Margaret Hale who, I argue, moves from the idealized construction of contained middle-class maiden with moral femininity into a sentient and embodied representation of character. Ostensibly protected by her “maiden pride,” Margaret becomes increasingly engaged with the urban setting of Milton and the people who live and work there (Gaskell 188). This engagement, and the representation of the

physicality of the workers and the factory owner Thornton change how Margaret encounters her own body and its subjectivity. The narrative pushes her to sensation and by focusing on the middle-class protagonist in this chapter, I trace how these social interactions influence and alter not only the bodies of the working class but those of the middle class as well. Margaret's path, from passive model to engaged subject, mirrors the agenda that is both implicit and explicit in the Condition-of-England novel: a change from unawareness or apathy to sympathy and a desire to reform on the part of the reader.

The third chapter explores the fallen woman as mother in Dickens and Gaskell. Using Carol Mavor's construction of Victorian motherhood as a space of ambiguity, conflict, and anxiety, I apply the vocabulary and argument Mavor brings to Julia Margaret Cameron's photographs, to the textual representations of motherhood in *Bleak House* (1853) and *Mary Barton* (1848). Dickens attempts to isolate woman as mother from woman as sexual transgressor. He separates his character Esther as the ideal mother whose body has been explicitly de-eroticized from that of her mother, Lady Dedlock, who had Esther before she was married. Dickens ends *Bleak House* by locating Lady Dedlock outside of the upper and middle classes. She becomes an anonymous working-class mother who is expelled from the narrative through her death. *Mary Barton* investigates this fallen woman in the character of Mary's aunt who became a prostitute to provide for her own daughter. Maternity, then, becomes something much more fluid within the working class; it is able to temporarily occupy socially-othered bodies

in response to emotional need. Of all my chapters, this one focuses the most on the construction of the body as signifier, as I am interrogating the label of mother when it is placed on socially divergent bodies.

My final chapter looks at these socially divergent bodies in relation to illness and industry. Drawing on Elaine Scarry's construction of the agricultural workers' body as both intimately connected to the materials of labor and vulnerable to the exchange inherent between laborer and setting, I translate this idea of permeability to the factory workers' bodies. Once these permeable bodies have been placed in the setting of the factory, the materials of production become deadly, pathologizing both the workers' bodies and their minds. Illness, while debilitating the worker, becomes a means for these writers to push back on the reductive use of the term "Hands." Working-class illness becomes a means of highlighting the human body in a system that reduces it to its productive capacity while also changing how we, as readers, interact with the illness and death of middle-class characters. These socially diverse bodies, then, create a dialogue between classes that happens on a structural and narrative level; they reveal how industry elides the humanness of the workers' body and how the body disobeys this elision by asserting its physicality.

CHAPTER ONE

Seeing and Narrative Sympathy in *Mary Barton*

When the title character of *Mary Barton* (1848) goes to Liverpool in a frenzied attempt to save her would-be lover Jem, Charley, the young boy meant to help her, tries to point out the important sights of Liverpool:

“I heard you say to mother you had never been in Liverpool before, and if you'll only look up this street you may see the back windows of our Exchange. Such a building as yon is! with 'natomy hiding under a blanket, and Lord Admiral Nelson, and a few more people in the middle of the court! No! come here,” as Mary, in her eagerness, was looking at any window that caught her eye first, to satisfy the boy. “Here, then, now you can see it. You can say, now, you've seen Liverpool Exchange.” (268)

In this moment in the text, the call to look, or the choice to bear witness, becomes a pivotal narrative refrain in *Mary Barton*. Wrapped up in her own narrative—her struggle to save Jem while protecting her murderous father—Mary Barton cannot see the other stories surrounding hers as she navigates *around* the Liverpool Exchange. Until 1807, when the British slave trade was abolished, Liverpool was a center of buying and selling enslaved people, exporting textiles and transporting an estimated 1.5 million lives to the Americas and the Caribbean (“Liverpool and the Atlantic Slave Trade”).¹ The statue Mary passes without seeing is the Nelson

¹ Nancy Henry is working and researching Mary Barton and its connection to the slave trade. This line of research was influenced by a talk she gave summer 2014 at SUNY.

Monument, where the body of Admiral Nelson is encircled by the bodies of the men who are chained to the base of the statue.

In his book *The Rule of Sympathy* Amit Rai locates such chained bodies as instruments of sympathy. He writes, “sympathy needs an object of pathos, and in abolitionist discourse the spectacle of the slaves’ suffering body...would be that horrid but ideal object” (xi). It is the spectacle of the exploited body in pain that becomes this object that draws the look. As Rai notes, “there are at least two bodies that must be present at the scene of sympathy.” While one of those bodies is the object of pathos, embodying suffering as a stimulus for sympathy, this other body is “the body of the sympathizer” (47). Rai anchors this relationship between viewer and viewed in his understanding of abolitionist discourse. This relationship is textually echoed in the relationship between working-class bodies and middle-class sympathizers in social reform literature. Gaskell, Nancy Henry has argued in the *Cambridge Companion to Elizabeth Gaskell*, would have been aware of this larger economic dialogue between commerce and the selling of human bodies. The Nelson statue that Charley points out has bodies chained against its base but these bodies, and the larger global story of the relationship between human exploitation and commerce, goes unnoticed by Mary as she navigates her nineteenth-century melodrama.

Seeing plays a fundamental role in the creation of sympathy and connection. Adam Smith in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) argues that for man:

Some principles in his nature, which interest him in the fortunes of others, and renders happiness necessary to him, though he derives nothing from it except the pleasure of seeing it...by the imagination we place ourselves in his situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter as it were into his body. (I.I.2)

Seeing a body becomes a place where the viewer can imagine, and create, a connection with the object of their look.² William Cohen in *Embodied* argues that “if the body that encloses the self is a building, then it is not entirely sealed shut: sight itself is a means of egress and contact” (63). Thus, seeing is not an act devoid of sympathy but rather an initial moment of contact. Without a decision to pause and see stories that, though different, are no less urgent or important, those unseen stories go unnoticed and unacknowledged. Without a look there cannot be an emotional connection. This moment in Liverpool perforates the chase scene, offering the chance for connection, as it interrupts both Mary and the readers’ journey. Charley begs Mary to see this economic history. She cannot see or connect to the slaves’ suffering because she is lost in her own story. Her next line, her “Yes, to be sure—it’s a beautiful window... But are we near the boats? I’ll stop as I come back, you know; only I think we’d better get on now,” highlights how her own story impedes her sympathetic vision (Gaskell 268). As the reader discovers, after the search for Will and her testimony, Mary is too

² Smith ultimately asserts that this act of looking and imagining is still limited, as the viewer will never be able to actually understand how the viewed feel. Audrey Jaffe highlights this sympathetic disjunction, arguing that they will displace their own imagined experiences onto bodies of those they encounter. Rae Greiner argues against the emphasis on seeing and calls for a return to understanding Smith’s “seeing” as part of the imaginative process of sympathy in her article “Sympathy Time: Adam Smith, George Eliot, and the Realist Novel.”

fragile to see the signifiers of slavery's history in Liverpool. She does not stop as she comes back; her narrative has already carried her past the point in which she could pause and look at the Liverpool Exchange and therefore bear witness to a history of exploitation.

The gaze in *Mary Barton* functions as a means of both alienating and generating sympathy. In *On the Threshold of the Visible World*, Kaja Silverman notes, "the gaze is the 'unapprehensible' agency through which we are socially ratified or negated as spectacle. It [the gaze] is Lacan's way of stressing that we depend upon the other not only for our meaning and our desires, but also for our very confirmation of self. To 'be' is in effect to 'be seen' " (133). The gaze, therefore, functions as a means of calling a reality into being through the look. Silverman's defining the gaze as "unapprehensible" speaks to the multiple ways the gaze can function. For Rai, looking at the spectacle of the suffering body becomes a means of generating sympathy through pain; it asserts an embodied subjectivity that draws the viewer and the viewed. It connects them, though in a pain that is only imagined for the former and actual and immediate for the latter.

This utilization of the spectacle of the suffering body operates in a particular way in literature. Elaine Scarry in "The Difficulty in Imagining Other Persons" argues that literature "is most helpful not insofar as it takes away the problem of the other...but when it instead *takes as* its own subject the problem of imagining others" (287). Mary-Catherine Harrison, in her article "How Narrative Relationships Overcome Empathic Bias: Elizabeth Gaskell's Empathy across

Social Difference” affirms this connection. She writes, “Mid-century authors were remarkably cognizant of the affective and imaginative obstacles to empathy as their primary rhetorical strategy and purpose. Their deliberate treatment of cultural difference...can be especially useful for subverting similarity bias” (259). Similarity bias, or the idea that the “affective bonds and ethical motivations that accompany bias are significantly diminished in relationships with outgroups,” is present but then problematized in *Mary Barton* (255).³ Mary enacts similarity bias when she unconsciously turns away from the suffering bodies on the statue in Liverpool. This marks a moment in the text where a character does not identify with an outgroup and where sympathy is not generated. The novel, however, highlights this turning away, creating a call to the reader to look and have sympathy.

Similarity bias is problematized by the nature of literature, especially within nineteenth-century social reform novels. Harrison argues, “a complex model of empathy is needed to account for multifaceted narratives like the Victorian novel” (284). *Mary Barton*, she continues, is “a key text in the study of empathy across difference, because it offers a self-conscious treatment of perspective-taking that reflects the difficulty of such empathy” (271). *Mary Barton* is effective in negotiating similarity bias not because the text evacuates difference but because the text is aware of the difference between reader and character. This narrative of self-awareness utilizes these differences in order to

³ Those groups whose identities exist outside of the observer’s own experiences.

investigate the politics of seeing and the choice to bear witness to suffering in both the working-class protagonists and Manchester's larger community.

The text's ability to focus on the working-class protagonist and Gaskell's focus on working-class domestic life, as Alex Woloch has argued in *The One vs. the Many*, "tries to extend the parameters of characters *topically* through a focus on working class individuals (who may appear only as minor characters)" (34). Using the telescopic form of the nineteenth century realist novel, with its emphasis on a central protagonist, Gaskell pushes through the isolating effects of similarity bias by designating a young working-class woman as protagonist. This protagonist, and the character-system created within the text, allows the sympathetic narrator to showcase the spectacle of the body, suffering or otherwise, not of an enslaved people who were being sold in Liverpool, but of the Manchester working class.⁴ *Mary Barton* macroscopically mirrors Mary's movement in Liverpool, as it asks the reader to pause and see lives that are not obviously visible within their own middle-class stories. *Mary Barton* includes several pivotal and expansive instances where working-class characters are viewed, either by their own community or those outside of that insulated network, with a call from the narrator to pause and *see* this representation of the working-class community. Literary representation becomes a key element in generating

⁴ Character system is a term Woloch defines in *The One vs the Many*. Woloch writes, "the realist character-system is always oriented in two directions: towards each uniquely delineated character-space (and the implied human figure that it amplifies or obscures) *and* toward the unified structure, the symbolic or thematic edifice, the interconnected plot that is being constructed through—and often helping to delimit or distort—these character-spaces" (33).

sympathy. In *Mary Barton*, Gaskell represents the worker as both embodied subject and protagonist in order to generate sympathy. She places the characters and narrator within her representation of Manchester so that they may bump up against one another and gain a better understanding of their shared subjectivity.

In the politics surrounding seeing, hinging on a recognition of shared subjectivity, there can be clashes within that recognition. Rai marks this tension, writing:

If sympathy was a practice elaborated out of a broader civilizing mission, there are moments throughout its history when the suffering object of sympathy...the slave, the prostitute, the criminal, the insane, the colonial other—throws back the gaze of pity, redirecting it as, at once, a critique of Eurocentrism and an instance on a shared history, and the demand for a more just future. (xiv)

The suffering body can look back. In this body's looking back, the body pushes against constructions of itself as only a sympathy-generating spectacle by asserting its subjectivity. This body is a body that can forcefully affirm its humanity. It can generate violence and make the inter-class system of dependence visible. There are several moments in *Mary Barton* where either the individual or the collected workers return the look of the middle-class characters in the text. Looking, for middle-class characters, does not become an emotional space for sympathy. In "Sympathy Time: Adam Smith, George Eliot, and the Realist Novel," Rae Greiner writes, "seeing can be inimical to sympathetic investment" (296). Other characters' narratives—from Harry Carson's caricature of the working-class men's starving bodies, drawn onto them during their serious oratory, to the barrister's disrespectful questioning during Mary's testimony—

force themselves onto the bodies of the working class and effectively halt sympathy. Like Mary in her journey through Liverpool, the signifiers of suffering surround the middle-class characters but they do not recognize those signifiers because they are not part of their own middle-class narratives.

Seeing in *Mary Barton* happens textually and extra-textually. There are the moments where one character or group of characters looks at another, highlighting either a lack of sympathy or a shared subjectivity. Alternately, there are other powerful moments in the text where the narrator encounters spectacles of poverty, such as in the Davenport's home or in John Barton's suffering, where middle-class characters are excluded, leaving only sympathizing narrator and middle-class reader whom the narrator directly addresses. This exclusion of middle-class characters, especially in the role of protagonist, destabilizes the text by removing the typical narrative anchor for the social reform novel. Woloch refers to this re-centering of the narrative as a "topical" extension of the parameters of the character-system.

However, as Mary Poovey notes in *Making a Social Body*, "Although the main characters of *Mary Barton* are working class, Gaskell constructs a narrator closely aligned with her own experience—middle-class and yet alive and sympathetic to the plight of the worker" (274). Middle-class ideology, therefore, becomes the paradigm that controls the working-class narrative. This viewpoint acts as a guide for readers, signaling to them where they should direct their sympathetic gaze. Poovey writes:

The “you” the narrator addresses is “we,” her middle-class readers, and in speculating about our “bewilderment” she implies that the scene she describes—the working-class street of industrial England—is foreign to us. She thus makes the difference between her audience and her characters integral to her narrative. (274)

In this text generating sympathy does not mean eliding difference. Rather, difference becomes a way for Gaskell to defamiliarize the readers to their urban industrial landscape, allowing them to re-enter it through the viewpoint of the workers. This recognition of difference becomes a means of drawing attention to the isolated working-class community. Rai also articulates difference as a paradox in sympathy, writing, “sympathy is that paradoxical mode of power that writes itself on the body, that reinscribes inequality at the very moment it seems to obliterate it” (89). In order for sympathy to be generated the narrator must navigate this power-filled dynamic, at once articulating the subjectivity readers share with workers while using the difference in situation and class to reintroduce Manchester to the reader. The “you” to which the narrator directs the reader becomes a space in which the narrator highlights difference while also encouraging the reader to connect with these foreign characters.

The reader is asked to sympathize with Esther as she watches the working-class people whom she knew before becoming a prostitute. The narrator directly addresses the reader:

You may easily imagine that a double interest was attached by her to the ways and companionships of those with whom she had been acquainted in the days which, when present, she had considered hardly-worked and monotonous, but which now in retrospection seemed so happy and unclouded. (147)

Esther sees the life that she once had and the text mediates this seeing through multiple layers. There is Esther seeing the people and domestic behaviors from her past, and there is the narrator watching Esther looking and inferring her thoughts, and then there is the reader being asked to look through Esther's eyes. In this moment of the text, with the "You may easily imagine," the reader is encouraged to assume Esther's vantage point, not only to bear witness to her isolation but to psychically enter into it as well. As a character, Esther's character-space, especially when it geographically collides with Mary's, is carefully controlled. In "Brief Encounters: Street Scenes in Elizabeth Gaskell's Manchester," Sue Zemka notes that for Esther, "home is a dark street from which she intermittently emerges" (804). Gaskell's initial locating of Esther on the street removes her from the home, isolating her both geographically and within the narrative.

The narrator generates sympathy for this isolated character in different ways throughout the narrative. Esther holds her own story, separate from the larger narrative. The narrator brackets her origin story to Jem, asking, "To whom shall the outcast prostitute tell her tale? Who will give her help in her day of need? Hers is the leper-sin" (147). While Esther is allowed to articulate herself, she is textually isolated from the larger story. The narrator designates character-space within the narrative-system where Esther can articulate her self but this space is in the exposed city street, rather than the private domestic space. When Mary runs to kiss her, which Zemka notes is a moment in which "Mary owns the

prostitute as belonging inside” (802), Esther rebuffs her, saying, “Not me. You must never kiss me. You!” (225). She is complicit in her own isolation, regulating herself to the street. Notably, touch becomes a means through which perceived social immorality can be transmitted and, not wanting to contaminate Mary, Esther pushes her away.

What does it mean, then, that the narrator is directing the reader to enter Esther’s disjointed mindscape? In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Smith writes, “Persons of delicate fibres and a weak constitution of body complain, that in looking on the sores and ulcers which are exposed by beggars in the streets, they are apt to feel an itching or uneasy sensation in the correspondent body part of their own bodies” (1.1.3). Because bodies are permeable, sympathy can have a bodily effect on the viewer, transmitting not only the sensation of illness, but also the sensation of the physical signifiers of social exclusion. In *Scenes of Sympathy*, Audrey Jaffe articulates this physical reaction, writing “the act of looking...fills the spectator with the anxiety of bodily contagion, the fear of inhabiting the beggar’s place” (5). While Scarry and Harrison’s analysis hinge on recognition of difference, for Jaffe, the act of looking is a reminder of social instability; the difference ostensibly affirmed in sympathy is not as stable as it is presented. Silverman refers to this type of visibility—visibility as touch— as “haptic visibility.” She writes, “through the body’s sensory channels and orifices, the material world comes into and goes out of the self, altering and affecting mind, soul, and heart...looking ceases to be remote and distant, becoming instead

proximate and intersubjective (95)...Sight itself as a form of incorporation and touch” (112). This form of narrative seeing and sympathizing becomes a means of touch. It draws the reader closer to Esther in order to assert the mutual subjectivity of both reader and character.

In some cases, this form of addressing the reader directly as “you” was in response to journalistic prejudices that formed degenerate images of the poor. Discussing data from 1848, the same year *Mary Barton* was released, Henry Mayhew wrote in *London Labour and the London Poor*, “One in every twenty-two individuals of the labouring class was charged with being drunk...whereas the average number of drunkards in the whole population of London is one in every 113 individuals” (as quoted in Woloch 162). As if in response to these statistics, the narrator asserts John Barton’s relationship with hunger and opium. In a letter to Mrs. W.R. Greg, Gaskell wrote “Round the character of John Barton all the others formed themselves; he was my hero, *the* person with whom all my sympathies went” (74). The character-system that Gaskell envisioned, then, revolves around the original title character of *Mary Barton*.⁵ In the text, Gaskell writes:

Before you blame too harshly this use, or rather abuse, try a hopeless life, with daily cravings of the body for food. Try, not alone being without hope yourself, but seeing all around you reduced to the same despair, arising from the same circumstances; all around you telling (though they use no words or language), by their looks and feeble actions, that they are suffering and sinking under the pressure of want. Would you not be glad

⁵ Both Hilary Schor and Catharine Gallagher have argued that Gaskell’s romantic plots shift focus away from the political agenda of her novels.

to forget life, and its burdens? And opium gives forgetfulness for a time.
(157)

John Barton's embodied subjectivity, which generates sympathy and seeing in this excerpt, becomes central to the sympathetic reading of Barton and his own heightened proclivity for sympathy. The narrator provides a chance not only to see but also to feel the spectacle of the working-class suffering body and to experience their fellow-feeling. This change in perspective is an invitation to engage with Smith's construction of sympathy in which "by the imagination we place ourselves in his situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, *we enter as it were into his body*" (italics mine). Not only does the narrator invite the reader to enter into John's starving body, it encourages the reader to *see* the suffering, suffering that Barton encounters on a daily basis. His use of opium is an understandable response to being both helpless and perpetually exposed to so much hunger and suffering.⁶ The drug deadens sensation, turning off the realities of so many bodies being effectively, and suffocatingly, erased by their hunger. Barton's body becomes both an embodied sign of working-class conditions and a witness to the suffering of others. This relocates the readers, situating them directly inside the narrative.

Unlike Mary in Liverpool, Barton cannot hurry past this spectacle, and his frustrated sympathy becomes contorted. Gaskell writes, "bewildered and lost,

⁶ Working-class substance use is represented differently in *North and South*, in which Bessy argues that for Higgins it brings him some sensation. When Margaret asks Bessy if Higgins' drinks, Bessy says the he does because he is "longing for a bit of a change...It's little blame to them [the male workers] if they do go to the gin-shop for to make their blood flow quicker" (136).

unhappy and suffering, the only feeling that remained clear and undisturbed in the tumult of his heart, was hatred to the one class and keen sympathy with the other” (157). Disoriented by the perpetual suffering, melodrama and sympathy reciprocate each other. His “keen sympathy” acts as his moral guide. In “Melodrama and the Production of Affective Knowledge in *Mary Barton*,” Thomas Recchio writes, “suffering in this formulation produces a form of knowledge that ties morality to the body rather than to abstract precepts; the melodramatic presentation of suffering, then, evokes feelings that emerge from intense bodily experience” (294). The sympathy that Barton feels is melodramatically described as “keen,” a word that suggests his sympathy for the other workers is sharp, penetrating, and experienced on the body; it has a physical reaction. This echoes Rai’s argument: “the process of sympathy...properly performed it should be legible on the very body of the sympathetic subjects: one should be able to read immediately the tracks of another’s tears” (20). Barton “properly” feels sympathy for his fellow workers, but his ability to sympathize does not extend to the factory owners or the wealthy classes.⁷

Similarly, in *North and South*, Higgins names the worker’s assumption of outside communities’ sympathy as one of the strike’s mistakes. Gaskell writes, “believing that the representations of their injuries would have the same effect on strangers far away, as the injuries (fancied or real) had upon themselves” (225).

⁷ This “fellow-feeling” articulates the working-class community that is echoed in both *North and South* and *Hard Times*.

The workers' belief that their suffering will translate to and be understood by outside observers becomes an inverse of similarity bias; because within their community they see and experience suffering so acutely, they erroneously take for granted that others will also identify with, and be moved by, their suffering. As the narrator highlights, Barton is powerless in this dynamic; he cannot choose to ignore or to not see the suffering bodies of his fellow-workers. This frustration of sympathy becomes dangerous. In "Sympathy and Discipline in *Mary Barton*" Melissa Schaub argues that "sympathy...posed the danger of loss of control in the sympathizer, brought about by excess of feeling" (15). For Barton, as he is continuously subjected to the hypervisibility of the starving workers, this excess leads to drug use and a vitriolic hatred for the rich.

Hypervisible in their suffering, the workers become reduced to caricature when they meet with the factory owners, who do not sympathize with them, but rather essentialize and deride, referring to the workers as "wild beasts": "‘Ay, for one won't yield one farthing to the cruel brutes; they're more like wild beasts than human beings.’ (Well who might have made them different?)" (169). The narrator's editorializing in the parenthetical situates the narrator in opposition to the factory owners. It creates a pause within the narrative, punctuating the preceding line of dialogue almost right before the men are admitted into the meeting. This pause allows the narrator's question to resonate for the reader, enabling them to feel the narrator's frustration, which is so strong that the narrator interrupts its own narrative to respond directly to the unnamed factory owner.

This is an explicit moment of what Jill Matus terms the “emotional policing of the novel on the reader” as it clearly shows where the readers are not meant to align their sympathy (21). Gaskell is also responding to representations of the working class as lacking in personal development and self-restraint. Nancy Armstrong in *Desire and Domestic Fiction* argues:

By representing the working-class in terms of these deficiencies, middle-class intellectuals effectively translated the overwhelming political problems caused by rapid industrialization into a sexual scandal brought about by the worker’s lack of personal development and self-restraint. (20)

The construction of the worker as animal, which I discuss in more depth in Chapter Four, enables the middle class to choose not to see the working class as embodied subjects. By representing them as un-evolved beings, who rely on sensation and impulse, the middle class were able to ignore and dismiss the workers’ suffering bodies because such suffering could be seen as an insulated and inherently natural event.

In this meeting between masters and workers, the spectacle of the workers’ suffering is made visible to both the reader and the masters, but the masters then ridicule and dismiss it. The description of the workers’ physical bodies push back on the representation of the worker as “cruel brutes.” Their bodies instead signal that they are starving and exhausted but still thinking men, selected to be on this delegation because of their intelligence. The narrator describes the delegation’s bodies as if their intellects are a part of their embodiment. The narrator says:

Had they been larger-boned men, you would have called them gaunt; as it was they were little of stature, and their fustian clothes hung loosely upon their shrunken limbs. In choosing their delegates, too, the operatives had had more regard to their brains, and power of speech, than to their wardrobes...It was long since many of them had known the luxury of a new article of dress...Some of the masters were rather affronted...but what cared they? (169)

The evocation of the weight they would have had, with the image of “larger-boned men,” asserts the physicality that has been erased by the lack of food. Clothing is separated from the narrator’s reading of their bodies. Rather, their “brains and power of speech” become physical descriptors of intellectual strength, but the factory owners do not recognize these physical markers because speech and intellect require an awareness of the worker’s subjectivity. The scene is also made into a spectacle by the gothic and macabre language used to describe their bodies; the images created by “gaunt,” “hung loosely,” and “shrunken” are corpse-like, filling the scene with a sense of urgency for the reader as it implies that these men are starving to death within this moment of the narrative.

These images highlight the inability of the existing factory system to adequately nurture the working-class men’s bodies. While highly emotional for the reader, as the gothic placed in the industrial and urban setting highlights the unnaturalness of the circumstance, the masters are not affected. Rather, the wane bodies of the workers mute their attempts to get understanding and sympathy from the masters. Conversely, because of the narrator’s retelling, this same body generates sympathy for the reader and highlights how the workers’ situation has not been created by animal desires but by a lack of adequate food. The absence

of the workers' voice in this section articulates how their bodies communicate without the workers' consent; because of the level of the worker's exposure in this polarized political setting, their bodies are so public that they cannot control who sees or misrepresents their bodies. Though these delegates were chosen because of their ability to verbally communicate, crossing into the polarizing space of socio-political discourse, they remain bodies on display. The narrator has made it clear that their clothes have nothing to do with who they are, but to the factory owners they are reduced to the holes in their clothes.

The distance between the narrator's textual representation of the worker and Harry Carson's representation can be felt by the reader in the words that the narrator uses to describe Harry's drawings. The narrator says:

Mr. Harry Carson had taken out his silver pencil, and had drawn an admirable caricature of them—lank, ragged, dispirited, and famine-stricken...he passed it on to one of his neighbours, who acknowledged the likeness instantly, and by him it was sent round to the others, who all smiled and nodded their heads. (171)

The bodies and faces of the workers become compressed, reinterpreted, and recreated as one-dimensional caricatures by Harry. While he does *see* the workers, the encounter does not fill him with sympathy or affirm their shared subjectivity. The descriptors used by the narrator: lank, dispirited, famine-stricken, are then immediately juxtaposed with the nodding and smiling of the owners, creating discord in the narrative. Unlike Barton, who intensely feels the suffering of the other workers, Harry strips them of their subjectivity to render them depthless. If, as Smith notes, seeing suffering leads to the viewer feeling

suffering, if sympathy echoes contagion, in this scene so the lack of sympathy is also contagious. As Harry passes around his representations of the workers, more and more of the owners, seeing but not sympathizing with the factory laborers' suffering bodies, agree with him.

Carson, because he inserts himself into a place of authorship, situates himself at odds with both Gaskell and the narrator who is directing the reader to sympathetic representations of the workers. By having the workers violently assassinate him, the novel punishes him for this lack of sympathy. The caricature, which the workers take from the hotel, becomes the piece of paper that is divided and marked to decide who will kill Carson. The caricature he created is torn apart and then weaponized in a violent assertion of the workers' power. This instance becomes a pivotal moment in which the suffering body, the object of sympathy, looks back and asserts his own subjectivity. Rai writes "what becomes audible in the history of sympathy is the demand of the other for a certain justice" (xiv). Interestingly, in the altercation between the masters and the workers, speech had little importance because, as the narrator highlights, "No one thought of treating the workmen as brethren and friends, and openly, clearly, as appealing to reasonable men" (169). The worker's suffering body becomes the means of communicating and, if that unspoken but urgent move towards sympathy goes unrecognized, then the denial of shared subjectivity creates a vacuum filled with anger and a desire for justice. This looking back does not only happen within the text, but extra-textually as well. In this moment, the working-class object of

middle class sympathy is looking back, not only within the novel at the middle-class characters, but also at the middle-class reader. This is a look that can become threatening in its desire for recognition and understanding.

The looking back and decision to assassinate Harry happens within a public house, spatially a respite for the workers from the middle-class gaze. However, this erasure and assertion of subjectivity also happens to Jem Wilson and Mary Barton in the courtroom. Their bodies are read and re-written into a sensationalized narrative about class transgression, sexual desire, and murder. In the trial scene, Jem loses ownership of his body in the legal setting where his form functions as a spectacle. He becomes re-imagined at the whim of the middle-class observer. In “*Mary Barton and the Disassembled Dialogue*,” Roland Vesgo traces an interaction between two men looking at Jem. Vesgo writes, “the center of discussion between these two figures is a physionomical reading of the criminal” (176). One man says, “I have seldom seen one with such marks of Cain on his countenance as the man at the bar...Only look at his low, resolute brow, his downcast eye, his white compressed lips. He never looks up—just watch him” (296). This representation of Jem as criminal, however, is subverted by the observer’s companion who disagrees, saying, “His forehead is not so low if he had that mass of black hair removed...if others are to be influenced by such trifles as you are, it would have been much better if the prison barber had cut his hair a little previous to the trial” (296). Vesgo highlights how changeable and flawed representations and readings of the body can be. He writes that what this

(mis)reading of Jem's body "takes for organic and immutable signs of evil character is actually representation open to manipulation" (177). Thus, the text calls attention to the body as something that can be translated, and more importantly, something that can be translated incorrectly.

Rather than a site of spectacle for the criminality of the working-class body, Mary's female body is read for sensation, with her story becoming commodifiable. In "Glazed Expression: *Mary Barton*, Ghosts, and Glass," David Ellison highlights this, writing:

The marketability of Mary's narrative is literally realized not only by the newspapers that cover the story of the crime and trial but also by the entrepreneurial Mrs. Simmonds, Mary's employer at the dress shop who, in Sally Leadbitter's words: "[Would] be glad to have you back, after all this piece of business, by way of tempting people to come to her shop. They'd come from Salford to have a peep at you, for six months at least." (427)

Called as a witness to a murder she did not see but one that is thought to be Jem's crime motivated by jealousy, Mary's role as a witness is already unstable. Her beauty and sexuality become criminalized. In "Expert Witnesses: Women and Publicity in *Mary Barton* and *Felix Holt*," Laura Struve argues that "the onlookers treat Mary as a sexual spectacle presented for their own enjoyment" (19). Her story is something to be consumed. The narrator writes, "many who were looking for mere flesh and blood beauty, mere colouring, were disappointed; for her face was deadly white, and almost set in its expression" (300). Exhausted and mentally breaking, Mary is pale and her expression is set. Being an embodied subject leads her body to disobey the narrative the courtroom has constructed in

its reading of her body; she is not an object of beauty because she is tired and caught between testifying against her lover while trying to protect her father. This subjectivity only happens for a moment before she blushes. Struve notes that “Once Mary is aware of herself as a public spectacle, she...[provides] the onlookers with the kind of fleshly beauty they originally wanted; the crowd’s desire to see Mary as a sexual spectacle makes her one” (21). Like Jem as criminal, Mary’s body changes how it can be read based on what other characters want to see. The onlookers do not look at the physical markers of her psychic suffering sympathetically; they subject her to their gaze. Her exposure in the courtroom as a young and beautiful working-class woman complies with this misreading of her body and she blushes, becoming complicit in the narrative that the viewer wishes to construct.

The objectification and spectacle of Mary’s body is inherent in her being called as a witness. Mary’s body is being used to explain the “why” of the murder and to show what the woman who inspires murder looks like. Mr. Carson simultaneously dreads and desires to see Mary, whom he terms a “fatal Helen” (Gaskell 299). Similarly, Job remarks on her lack of importance as an actual witness to the murder, saying:

Yo cannot have much to tell ‘em...maybe thou may do him a bit o’ good, for when they set eyes on thee, they’ll see fast enough how he came to be so led away by jealousy; for thou’rt a pretty creature Mary, and one look at thy face will let ‘em into th’ secret of the young man’s madness, and make ‘em more ready to pass it over. (238)

Mary's assumed passivity becomes implicit and acceptable in the eyes of the courtroom. Access to her is taken for granted. She is ostensibly a part of the public domain, functioning as a piece of evidence. Jem's presumed guilt is as much written on her body as it is on his. She becomes essentialized in this re-writing of her to suit the sensationalist narrative, falling into the trope of a "fatal Helen."

Mary, however, becomes an objectified body that looks back, thereby disobeying this sexualization of her body and transgressing the sensational script written for women of her class and age within the legal setting. The barrister that questions her takes her passive objectification for granted. He invades her emotional privacy, asking her "which was the favoured lover?"(300). In "The Female Witness and the Melodramatic Mode in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton*" Alison Mould argues that this is not so much "a spar between professional representatives as between Mary and the prosecuting counsel" (71). The narrator lets the reader into Mary's head, saying, "And who was he...that he should dare so lightly to ask of her heart's secrets?...a look of indignation contracted Mary's brow, as she steadily met the eyes of the impertinent counsellor...*now* she might own her fault, but *now* she might even own her love" (original italics 30). The contraction of her brow, this switching of the gaze, functions within the scene as a signal. It indicates that Mary is an embodied subject who can return the gaze that has been thrown upon her. By looking back she asserts her own narrative and pushes against this perception of her as

eroticized body. She rewrites herself into the narrative, affirming both a sexual purity and her subjectivity, while simultaneously diverting attention away from her knowledge of the real murderer, her father.

Though ultimately both victim and perpetrator of class-based violence, John Barton initially serves as a model of sympathy put into action. He brings the reader into the scene that Louis Cazamian argued in *The Social Novel of England*: “There is no scene in any novel of the time which more powerfully evokes the condition of social distress than that in which Barton and Wilson go to the aid of their comrade Davenport’s family” (220-221). The narrator tells us:

Our friends were not dainty, but even they picked their way, till they got to some steps leading down to a small area, where a person standing would have his head about one foot below the level of the street...you went down one step even from the foul area into the cellar in which a family of human beings lived. It was very dark inside...the smell was so foetid as almost to knock the two men down...see three or four little children rolling on the damp, nay wet brick floor, through which the stagnant, filthy moisture of the street oozed up. (56)

Barton and Wilson descend into this corrupted domestic space, shrouded in darkness and disease, which lies under the city. In her contribution to *The Cambridge Companion to Elizabeth Gaskell*, “Mary Barton and North and South,” Jill Matus argues, “the suffering of the poor is for the most part to be read on starving or diseased bodies or metonymically represented through the home.” This scene utilizes both the setting and the Davenports’ bodies to create a spectacle of working-class suffering for the reader. Dirt and waste mark these bodies as both other and as changed by hunger and material lack. The language becomes swamp-like with words such as “foetid,” “damp,” “stagnant,” and the

mention of “moisture” that oozes. These descriptions imply that this setting cannot support the “family of human beings” who live here. Disease is linked explicitly to the living conditions; the fear of contagion is mentioned in this scene and then derided. While Gaskell writes, “The ‘fever’ was (as it usually is in Manchester) of a low, putrid, typhoid kind; brought on by miserable living, filthy neighborhood, and a great depression of mind and body,” it is then dismissed, with the narrator noting “the poor are fatalists with regard to infection; and well for them it is so, for in their crowded dwellings no invalid can be isolated. Wilson asked Barton if he thought he should catch it, and was laughed at for his idea” (56). Unlike the middle class, who Jaffe argues avoid the gaze of the beggar so as not see himself or herself represented, in this scene, Barton is not afraid of “catching” the poverty of the Davenports. His sympathy overrides any sense of self-preservation. Just as he is not worried about catching any illnesses from the Davenports, he also empties his small savings in order to buy them food.

Like the setting, the Davenports’ bodies become central to the spectacle of suffering. The scene the narrator captures becomes almost gothic: “Barton was now left alone with a little child, crying (when it had done eating) for mammy; with a fainting, dead-like woman; and with the sick man, whose mutterings were rising up to screams and shrieks of agonised anxiety” (57). Auditory sensation plays a pivotal role in the description of this scene, with the crying baby and the mutterings, shrieks, and screams of Mr. Davenport. These details make the scene vibrate and the sounds become literal cries for help, reaching through the text to

resonate with the reader. The positioning of this scene becomes key to what Harrison articulates as *Mary Barton*'s navigating around sympathy bias. Evacuated of every identity but that of the working-class man, John Barton, and the dying poor, the person most similar to the middle-class reader is Barton because he becomes the actor in this scene. Barton, still having some material income in this early scene, sees suffering and immediately buys food for the family. In this emotionally charged moment, he becomes the behavioral model for the reader. As he acts out the urgent sympathy that this scene generates, he transforms both himself and his surroundings because he is willing to halt his own narrative and see this suffering. The spectacle of suffering, then, has multiple layers. Though Barton is deprived, the text posits that his sympathy leads him to help others that are even more deprived. Choosing to see becomes a social action within this setting of material suffering.

This call to social action is rearticulated, and made more complex, in the industrial setting of the urban street. Zemka argues that this geographical setting has heightened importance in nineteenth-century writing: "In the Victorian novel, the road is often a city street...they are crowded, bringing passing strangers into physical intimacy."⁸ In Zemka's reading of the street, the street mimics the inherent fragmentation of urban life because of the sheer volume of people, most of whom, Zemka notes, would be working class (793). This sheer volume of

⁸ In "Forms of time and the Chronotype of the novel" Mikhail Bakhtin writes that the road "is a type of image that fuses spatial and temporal concreteness in a manner that is "saturated" with significance. (84-85)

people inhibits an ability to see all of their passing stories. After leaving the spectacle of suffering that is the Davenport household, Barton enters into the busy street and into the spectacle of middle-class consumption. The narrator notes:

It is a pretty sight to walk through a street with lighted shops; the gas is so brilliant, the display of goods so much more vividly shown than by day, and of all shops a druggist's looks the most like the tales of our childhood...he felt the contrast between the well-filled, well-lighted shops and the dim gloomy cellar, and it made him moody that such contrasts should exist...He wondered if any in all the hurrying crowd had come from such a house of mourning. He thought they all looked joyous. But he could not, you cannot, read the lot of those who daily pass you in the street. How do you know the wild romances of their lives; the trials, the temptations they are even now enduring, resisting, sinking under? You may be elbowed one instant by the girl desperate in her abandonment, laughing in mad merriment with her outward gesture, while her soul is longing for the rest of the dead, and bringing itself to think of the cold-flowing river as the only mercy of God remaining to her here. You may pass the criminal, meditating crimes at which you will to morrow shudder with horror as you read them. You may push against one, humble and unnoticed, the last upon earth, who in heaven will for ever be in the immediate light of God's countenance. Errands of mercy—errands of sin—did you ever think where all the thousands of people you daily meet are bound? (58-59)

In “Trials of Embodiment: Being a Gothic Body in *Mary Barton*,” Lucy Sheehan notes, “Both Barton and the narrator undergo bodily disintegration and reintegration in the crowd...they become a part of a homogenous grouping of bodies and in the process lose track of themselves in a way that denies a bounded separation between individuals” (43). The narrator and Barton become a part of this moving bodily mass and so the narrator, whose narrative vision is “clearer,” must direct both Barton and the reader through the thoroughfare. This moment of

entry into the public street, filled with people who do not, and cannot, see the stories outside their own narrative, becomes a rupture in which the narrator addresses both reader and Barton in the direct address of “he could not, you cannot read.” This address equalizes character and reader in an inability to see the individuals living in Manchester. The reader’s physicality is called into being as the girl who is performing happiness but remains unhappy elbows “you.” Barton’s story, and that of the Davenports, becomes absorbed into the fragmenting current of the city street. This moment in the text anticipates the busy Liverpool street and the Exchange through which Mary rushes. The reader, who unknowingly bumps up against the characters and their hidden subjectivity, is similarly absorbed into the narrative. As Zemka notes, “The human mass imposes itself kinesthetically” (802). In this moment, we are unknowingly alongside a criminal in the sympathizing John Barton. The articulation of both the reader and the character’s body differs from the reading of sympathy that Rai and Smith propose, where we feel because of an imagined emotional connection. In this instance, we feel because we are textually crowded into an over-saturated narrative that the narrator is translating. We are getting a momentary glimpse into the stories we cannot see because of the heavily populated urban setting.

The setting, then, becomes central to the Victorian novel’s production of sympathy because it creates an imagined space in the city street that allows the narrative to telescope in on the outgroup that might be rendered invisible on the actual physical street. In *Atlas of the European Novel, 1800-1900*, Franco Moretti

argues, “without a certain kind of space, a certain kind of story is simply not possible” (100). Social reform fiction, with its emphasis on the other, utilizes the city street in order to make visible this “certain kind of story” that Zemka argues “seem[s] destined by the nature of textual narrative to a pattern of expansion (out into the many) followed by reduction (back into the few).⁹ As Barton enters into the city street, *Mary Barton* reverses this pattern, moving out of the starving Davenport household into the other lives stumbling upon one another in the city street.

Zemka notes that the city street, and the bodies of those who pass through it, is, on a narrative level, haunted by the deaths of other characters. She writes: “people are moved to charity or forgiveness by the mental transposition of a stranger with a dead child” (803). When John Barton enters the city street in order to find Harry Carson and assassinate him—thereby becoming the criminal that we earlier unknowingly encountered on the street—he meets a lost Irish boy and in that anonymous body, he actually sees his own dead son. Gaskell writes:

A child's cry caught his ear. His thoughts were running on little Tom; on the dead and buried child of happier years. He followed the sound of the wail, that might have been *his*, and found a poor little mortal, who had lost his way, and whose grief had choked up his thoughts to the single want, “Mammy, mammy.” (184)

This moment, where it is not the body of the person but the memory of another, which brings out sympathy, is also echoed in Gaskell’s later novel, *North and*

⁹ This idea is also traced extensively in Woloch’s *The One vs. The Many*.

South. When Mrs. Hale asks Mrs. Thornton to look after Margaret, Gaskell writes:

But that the eyes of the sick woman were growing dim with the slow-gathering tears, she might have seen a dark cloud cross the cold features. And it was no thought of her son, or of her living daughter Fanny, that stirred her heart at last; but a sudden remembrance, suggested by something in the arrangement of the room—of a little daughter—dead in infancy—long years ago—that, like a sudden sunbeam, melted the icy crust, behind which there was a real tender woman. (237)

Seeing moves inward in both scenes, interrupting the viewer's narrative in order to call forth an interiority that infuses the spectacle of the suffering body with the viewer's memory. Jaffe writes about this process in the Victorian novel:

“Sympathy in these scenes takes shape as a constellation of images in which a threat to individual identity is both imagined and theoretically, overcome, with the spectator's identity emerging as an effect of the sympathetic encounter itself” (11). This displacement of actual bodies adds a history to the characters that encounter these spectacles of suffering. It thereby bridges viewer and viewed into a shared, if unconnected, subjectivity, becoming two narratives that intermingle and cooperate but are ultimately separate.

Mary Barton's narrative is also interrupted on the street, but rather than taking on a constellation of her own memories, her interaction is recognized as another story pausing her own suffering. The narrator tells us:

She saw a little Italian boy...The setting sun cast its red glow on his face, otherwise the olive complexion would have been very pale; and the glittering tear-drops hung on the long curled eye-lashes. With his soft voice and pleading looks, he uttered, in his pretty broken English, the words:

“Hungry! So hungry.”

Mary answered him impatiently, “Oh, lad, hunger is nothing—nothing!”

And she rapidly passed on. But her heart upbraided her the next minute... she hastily entered her door and seized the scanty remnant of food which the cupboard contained, and retraced her steps to the place where the little hopeless stranger had sunk down by his mute companion in loneliness and starvation...With the elasticity of heart belonging to childhood he sprang up as he saw the food the girl brought; she whose face, lovely in its woe, had tempted him first to address her... She stood an instant, diverted from the thought of her own grief by the sight of his infantine gladness; and then bending down and kissing his smooth forehead, she left him, and sought to be alone with her agony once more. (213)

The text emphasizes the image of the little boy’s own suffering, the “glittering tear-drops” and his “soft voice and pleading looks,” brings Mary out of her own story for a moment. Zemka writes that in this scene, “in effect we move out of the present of melodramatic suspense into a present human exigency which, in this case, has no connection to the plot” (803). Mary sees the boy and so she stops to help him, bearing witness to his suffering though she has to pause her own narrative in order to do so. Zemka argues that “in fact all acts of charity and recognition which takes place on roads are interruptions...Narratives of direction, and the larger direction of the narrative, are intersected by other lives moving in other directions”(803). The children from other countries that both Barton and Mary meet on the city street become expansive textual representations, allowing alternately for a displacement of memory or for a call to sympathize within a larger narrative of immigration and the displacement of children. These narrative interruptions anticipate the one that is unsuccessful in Liverpool when Charley

asks Mary to stop and look at the slaves' suffering. Because Mary, after initially resisting, *does* stop and bear witness in this moment, the narrator and the reader also pause on this street. They see the suffering and subjectivity that *Mary Barton* can only glimpse for a moment so that the text can focus on English working-class conditions and suffering.

The street is an ambiguous textual space as it can bear witness to suffering and anonymous violence. Barton kills Carson in the street. The narrator writes:

The policemen looked at each other. Then one began, and stated that having heard the report of a gun in Turner Street, he had turned down that way (a lonely, unfrequented way Mr. Carson knew, but a short cut to his garden-door, of which Harry had a key); that as he (the policeman) came nearer, he had heard footsteps as of a man running away; but the evening was so dark (the moon not having yet risen) that he could see no one twenty yards off. (193)

As Zemka has noted, the urban street is a space of anonymity. In this moment, John Barton's vision of his dead son becomes replicated in his killing of Mr. Carson's son and therefore, his action continues a pattern of inter-class loss. That Barton encounters the specter of one dead body and then creates another asserts what Schaub, in her discussion of sympathy as it relates to narrative power, argues is a duality of the body. She writes, "The body, in short, was capable either of eroding the discipline necessary to an industrial society, or of preserving it" (16). Whereas in other parts of the novel, as in Barton's use of opium, the reader and the character share a visual perspective, this act of violence is anonymous. The scene is not dramatized for the reader; rather the murder is unraveled and slowly revealed through several mediated layers of the narrative: a

policeman is telling it to Mr. Carson and the parentheticals, unlike the moment before the confrontation between worker and owner, belong to Mr. Carson and the police officer rather than the narrator. Violence deadens Harry's subjectivity in an assertion of the worker's subjectivity.

As a textual space where stories are alternately seen or erased, the ideological construction of the urban street within the Victorian novel is ambivalent. It is alternately an opening for momentary sympathetic connection or for anonymous violence. The street, like *Mary Barton* itself, is crowded, filled with the bodies and stories of not only the workers but of the middle-class unsympathetic characters such as Harry Carson. What becomes necessary for the street to generate sympathy, the novel ultimately decides, is an awareness of mutual subjectivity. Following Mr. Carson into the street after he angrily leaves the Barton's house, the narrator recreates John Barton's walk to kill Harry, filling Mr. Carson with visions of "phantoms." The narrator notes that Carson's pain leads him to look out, in an attempt to forget his own story:

So he tried to banish the phantom voices and shapes which came unbidden to his brain, and to recall his balance of mind by walking calmly and slowly, and noticing every thing which struck his senses.

It was a warm soft evening in spring, and there were many persons in the streets. Among others, a nurse with a little girl in her charge, conveying her home from some children's gaiety...

Suddenly up behind her there came a rough, rude errand-boy...in some awkward way he knocked the poor little girl down upon the hard pavement as he brushed rudely past, not much caring whom he hurt, so that he got along...

The child arose...blood was dropping down from the face...

"I'm not much hurt; it was very silly to cry, you know. He did not mean to do it. *He did not know what he was doing.*" (Original emphasis 340-341)

This moment in the story, coming towards the end, is heavily controlled by the text. The desire to forget his pain draws Mr. Carson to look outward and so he sees the tension between himself and Barton mirrored in this microscopic moment in which one character, following his own trajectory, does not see another person and causes them pain. Because this is a narrator that consciously engages with both the text and the readers, inserting itself into situations in order to make sure that sympathy is generated, I argue that this moment of unseeing, while overtly relating to Barton's violence, also functions for the readers. It absolves them from both the guilt of not seeing the suffering of the working class and coaching them to pause and look outward. Within the urban street, the text argues that the readers have not seen the suffering of others because they have been too caught up in their own middle-class narratives. Like Mary in Liverpool, the text argues that readers have looked away and, by not seeing, have inadvertently erased other people's suffering.

If the "complex model of empathy," which Harrison argues is found in the Victorian novel, does push against ideas of similarity bias, then that literary space mirrors the urban street. Multiple people, and their attached stories, bump up against one another. The genre of Mary's story at times hinders her ability to see a larger narrative, such as the story of global violence and exploitation she rushes past in Liverpool, thereby obscuring the reality of suffering bodies that became key to generating sympathy in abolitionist discourse. Gaskell's narrator in *Mary Barton* re-articulates this moment of seeing again and again throughout the novel,

allowing not only the characters, but also the reader, to choose to see, and therefore make real the spectacles of suffering and consumption that were to be found in Manchester.

Echoing the realities of urban life, *Mary Barton* encapsulates larger narrative devices that coach the reader on how to encounter the story. Larger ideas of not only sympathy, but gender, class, and subjectivity become integral to how the body is experienced and articulated. Looking at the body, examining how it interacts as simultaneously object and subject, becomes an initial moment for sympathy and cross-class discourse. In *Mary Barton*, these are discourses that are played out on the body of the worker because in this text that is the body that is being erased by the essentializing perspective of the factory owners. The body becomes a site of negotiation as the physical self pushes back against the self that has been misread and misrepresented so it can be more easily dismissed. *Mary Barton's* ending, with both its call to see and the ability of the viewed to look back, creates a tension between subject and subjected. John Barton is a working-class character that is oversaturated with sympathy. His sympathy becomes frustrated and then violent once his material lack prohibits action. The text calls the reader to sympathy but this call comes with a warning and an assertion of working-class subjectivity. Sympathy—if unable to be expressed peaceably, but still intensely felt—as in the case of John Barton—can rot, mobilizing the worker against the middle class.

CHAPTER TWO

Moral Femininity, Narrative Control, and Margaret Hale's Body in *North and South*

Bodies are what sensation has in common with the love story.

Pamela Gilbert, *Disease, Desire, and the Body in Victorian Women's Popular Novels*, 2005

Sensation plays a central role, not only for Margaret in *North and South* (1854) but, as Cohen argues in *Embodied*, for the paradox of the human subject within nineteenth-century literature. Cohen writes, "Bodily sensation affirms the status of the human subject as an object in the world" (111). Skin and touch become instrumental in this understanding of the body as "both tactile membrane and enclosure." Skin holds the body and connects it to the sensorily rich world.

Cohen writes:

The skin is a permeable boundary that permits congress between inside and outside, whether that interior is conceived in material or metaphysical terms. The skin thus forms the border not only between the bodily interior and exterior but also between psychical and physical conceptions of the self. (65)

Margaret's psychical relationship to her identity is mediated through her relationship with her body. The romantic plot of the novel, with Margaret ultimately falling in love and agreeing to marry the factory owner Mr. Thornton is

mediated through both of their bodies. Their bodies are not only signifiers of class and gender but rather Thornton and Margaret exist as embodied characters. Embodiment, as Cohen articulates it, is the ability of the body to be both boundary and gateway. It therefore allows for the ideological differences of Margaret and Thornton to be reconciled through a shared physicality. The happy ending of this novel, with the love interests joining hands in a marriage of industrialization and morality, hinges on their ability to connect through bodily sensation. While in Chapter Four I focus on *North and South*'s representation of workers and its critique of the factory system; here I trace how Margaret moves from occupying the constructed ideal of moral femininity to that of an embodied subject capable of sensation. I also argue that this sensation is somewhat forced upon her in order for the text to reclaim the middle-class woman's right to sensuality.

Margaret Hale's conflicting relationship with sensuality and what Susan Ostrov Weisser has termed "Moral Femininity" is articulated early in *North and South* in her rejection of Mr. Lennox's marriage proposal. The narrator traces the complex relationship between Margaret and her body, as in this moment:

The strong pride that was in her came to conquer her sudden agitation...it was poor and despicable of her to shrink from hearing any speech, as if she had not the power to put an end to it with her high maidenly dignity.

"Margaret" said he, taking her by surprise, and getting sudden possession of her hand, so that she was forced to stand still and listen...

"I had been hoping for these last three months past to find you regretting London...enough to make you listen more kindly" (for she was quietly, but firmly, striving, to extricate her hand from his grasp)...

She made a strong effort to be calm...and then said, "I don't like to be spoken to as you have been doing. I cannot answer you as you want me to do."

He was gone...Margaret felt guilty and ashamed of having grown so much into a woman as to be thought of in marriage. (30-34)

In "Gwendolen's Hidden Wound: Sexual Possibilities and Impossibilities in *Daniel Deronda*," Weisser argues that "one of the mythic paradigms in nineteenth-century British Literature," what she terms "Moral Femininity," is a narrative construction in which "a heroine is empowered and achieves self-definition by restraining her own strong desires, as well as those of her lover" (3). At the beginning of *North and South*, Margaret, like Gwendolen Harleth in *Daniel Deronda*, "functions by *not* desiring" (Weisser 3). Initially, in Margaret's constructed self-image, with her "high maidenly dignity," desire goes unarticulated. Margaret's self-image as a restrained, respectable, young woman precludes Mr. Lennox's reading of her body as marriageable and, by extension, as sexually available.

Sensuality has been evacuated in this proposal scene. The text sets up a dichotomy between Margaret's sense of autonomy and the shame she feels at the implication of desire. She is ashamed that her body could be associated with marriage in any capacity. While she does say, "how she could have loved him if he had been but different" (33), the ambiguity of that difference indicates that while Margaret knows what she does not want, what she does want is much more nebulous. She has the ability to define what she wants in a partner but only by

encountering and then rejecting the negative. Therefore, this moment creates a picture of female autonomy that functions by repressing and rejecting male desire.

Her rejection surprises Mr. Lennox, who thinks that her acceptance has already been signaled by her body. In the middle-class urban setting of this novel, there are social codes in place, built on hidden meanings and subtext, of which Margaret, socially and sexually naïve, is unaware. Before his failed proposal, Mr. Lennox compliments Margaret, thinking, “A regular London girl would understand the implied meaning of that speech” (28). Margaret’s body becomes the unwilling site of this covert flirtation, with Mr. Lennox literally drawing her body on his sketch pad during their walk in the woods and thereby displacing her self-definition with one he has constructed for her. He then physically restrains her, forcing her to hear his full proposal.

Margaret’s relationship with her body, sublimated by the external markers of her class and gender, becomes the paradigm through which both she and the other characters engage with her body. Margaret’s body becomes a textual space of conflict, not only between Mr. Lennox and Margaret or between Margaret and her body, but also between the text and Margaret. While at the beginning of the novel the social signifiers placed upon her body are in tension with her perception of her identity, both of these constructed identities are fragmentary: Margaret sees herself as maidenly and non-eroticized, signifying a middle-class purity, while Mr. Lennox reads her as a signifier of marriage and middle-class domesticity.

Margaret Hale's body, and its place within both *North and South* and wider discourses on the middle-class Victorian heroine, has generated an archive of discussion and scholarship. "In Promiscuous Company: Female Public Appearance in Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*," Barbara Harman has argued that Gaskell consciously displaces Margaret's middle-class, ostensibly private, female body into the chaotic and violent world of industrial strife in order to reconcile the protected middle-class women's presence with the male-dominated sphere of manufacturing and economy. In "The Female Visitor and The Marriage Of Classes In Gaskell's *North And South*," Dorace Elliot argues that this same body and same intra-class movement was a declaration of women's belonging in the emergent social sphere as Margaret's presence brought the "civilizing presence" of the domestic into the new urban social space. Meanwhile, Nancy Mann argues in "Intelligence and Self-Awareness in *North and South*" that it was only through moving into these socially scripted and yet discursive spaces that Margaret was able to gain the self-knowledge that is "a crucial problem for the development of the novel in the 19th century...the relationship between abstract intelligence and self-awareness" as the industrial workers and setting come together to educate her (24). Thus, while scholars locate her body, and its placement, as significant to the larger social reform agenda of the novel, Margaret's self-image, her agency, and her subjectivity all collapse, unevenly, on to her body. This body becomes a site where the physical relationship to sensation cannot be controlled or erased.

Erasure, specifically through the image of the working-class Hands, is part of a wider social discourse in the novel. Margaret often objects to Mr. Thornton and the other mill owners referring to the workers as Hands. While this metonymic use of hands erases the workers,¹ Margaret's growing self-awareness, which Nancy Mann argues is one of the major concerns of the novel in the book (30), can actually be traced through Margaret's relationship to her own hands. Unlike the workers, her hands become visible in the physical domestic labor she performs. In *Elizabeth Gaskell: A Habit of Stories*, Jenny Uglow highlights the multiple meanings hands have in *North and South*. She writes:

The bodily pressure of the streets, the pain of illness... the stifled desire of Margaret and Thornton: all insist *physical* awareness. The close interweaving of bodily and emotional responses with criticisms of social codes is seen in the smallest detail—the imagery of hands. (373)

Hands are thus complexly interlinked within this story, resting at the crossroads of the social reform and romantic components of the novel. The reality of her family's finances in Milton makes Margaret undertake more domestic labors and she becomes empowered by the work that her hands can do. She tells her father, "I felt like a great hypocrite tonight, sitting there in my white silk gown, with my idle hands before me, when I remembered all the good, thorough, house-work they had done today" (166). In " 'Taught by Death What Life Should be': Elizabeth Gaskell's Representation of Death in *North and South*," Mary Hotz has suggested, "The experience with her dying mother forces Margaret to become 'a

¹ The relationship between metonymy and the worker is discussed more in depth in Chapter 4.

hand' herself as she must stand in the kitchen and do the ironing, and provides the opportunity for her to wake up to the working world of Milton" (171). Margaret, then, links her hands' capacity with the working-class' ability to create and to perform hard physical work. It is a realization of a physical power that Margaret recognizes is absent in middle-class women's assumed passivity.

Initially, Margaret is upheld as a literal model of a middle-class woman. The novel opens with Margaret's body being displayed, wearing the shawls intended for her cousin Edith. The narrator says that her aunt had:

Asked her to stand as a sort of lay figure on which to display them... Margaret stood right under the chandelier, quite silent and passive, while her aunt adjust the draperies... She touched the shawls gently as they hung round her, and took a pleasure in their soft feel and their brilliant splendor—enjoying it much as a child would do... Mr. Henry Lennox was suddenly announced... Margaret stood perfectly still, thinking she might be yet wanted as a sort of block for the shawl; but looking at Mr. Lennox with a bright amused face, as if sure of his sympathy. (11)

Margaret is passive as she stands still in the well-lit room so the older women can better observe her body. Her body is used as signifier, filling in for her cousin Edith, who is sleeping. Margaret is separated from her own identity and body as she is meant to be "a sort of block for the shawl." The text describes her tactile engagement with the shawl as child-like. Similarly, her "bright amused face" and how she misreads Lennox's sympathy also echoes a certain childishness and naiveté that she retains despite her body in this moment being recognized as adult.

Childlike in this moment of "dress-up," Margaret assumes that Mr. Lennox's gaze matches her own in a shared sympathy. While Elodie Neuville in

“Women, Cloth, Fluff and Dust in Elizabeth Gaskell’s *North and South*” equates this eye contact with mutual recognition, where the feminine space of the drawing room becomes a space for relationships, I argue that it is instead an interaction grounded in the misreading of Margaret’s body. Since she does not see herself as physically a woman “to be thought of in marriage,” she reads sympathy in Mr. Lennox’s gaze. The reader, however, soon learns that he is reading her body, covered in the sensorily rich shawl, as more object than subject. Margaret becomes unknowingly exposed to the erotic male gaze as it ascribes meanings and motivations onto her body.

This misreading is especially significant in the context of Mr. Lennox. Elliot notes in “The Female Visitor and the Marriage of Classes in Gaskell’s *North and South*” that he is “the male character most insistent on maintaining the separation of private and public spheres and keeping women securely within the home and out of social space” (37). He says to Margaret once he has entered the drawing room, “I suppose you are all in the depths of...ladies’ business...Very different to my business which is the real true law business.” (Gaskell 12). This ordering of “legitimate” work implies an abstraction of the separate spheres that Margaret does not heed in her later movements through Milton. Lennox’s attitude towards both “ladies business” and his own “real true business” implies that the sympathy Margaret reads on his face is merely a projection of her own feelings, just as his later misreading of her body and behavior is a projection of his wish to marry her. Bodies, then, when objectified, can become illegible, exclusively

reflecting the thoughts of the observer and leading to a contorted power dynamic that is grounded in a lack of understanding.

The power dynamic of Margaret and Thornton's relationship is introduced through his fascination with her hands. Gaskell writes:

She looked as if she was...solely busy with the tea-cups, among which her ivory hands moved with pretty, noiseless daintiness. She had a bracelet over one arm which would fall down...Mr. Thornton watched the replacing of this troublesome ornament with far more attention than he listened to her father. It seemed as if it fascinated him to see her push it up impatiently, until it tightened her soft flesh; and then to mark her loosening—the fall.

Later in this same moment, the narrator notes “she handed him his cup of tea with the proud air of the unwilling slave” (80). The imagery of subjected slave, with the bracelet evoking images of the slave band that was used to mark ownership, embodies the ideological struggle for control that creates tension between these two characters. Margaret does not wear this slave band well, and the description of the band, falling and then tightening her skin, eroticizes not only Margaret's subjugation as a middle-class young woman but also how poorly she—literally—wears this subjugation. This invocation of slavery also occurs when Mr. Thornton proposes to her and she rejects him. He asserts his own capacity for emotion, saying, “I, though a master, may be oppressed” (193). This forceful language, invoking the image of master and slave, in a novel that investigates the relationship between power and control within the industrial setting, recreates a political power dynamic within the home. Once in the home, however, both Thornton and Margaret become subjected by their love for one another and that

final scene, where Margaret asks for his hand in marriage, is saturated with sensation.

Throughout the majority of the novel, Thornton is frustrated in his desire to get Margaret's hand, and this frustration manifests itself in her refusal to engage in the socially loaded and nuanced handshake. In the text shaking hands becomes a moment for negotiating subjectivity. When Dr. Donaldson shakes Margaret's hand, he is impressed by her firm handshake. The narrator says, "That's what I call a fine girl!" thought Dr. Donaldson, when he was seated in his carriage, and had time to examine his ringed hand, which had slightly suffered from her pressure. 'Who would have thought that little hand could have given such a squeeze?' (127). Margaret's strength, felt from her handshake, signals both a subjectivity and an interior will that is not necessarily shown on her external body. Her refusal to shake Mr. Thornton's hand though it is "the frank familiar custom of the place" (86) angers him, and he understands it as a result of Margaret's not reading him as a gentleman. In "Gaskell, Darwin, and *North and South*," Carol Martin notes that this refusal captures Margaret's symbolic rejection of Northern manufacturers as social equals. She writes:

Despite Thornton's attraction to Margaret's beauty, he is subsequently repulsed by a physical gesture, her unwillingness to shake hands with him...as Terry Eagleton has argued, the Shaftesburian combination of ethical conduct and aesthetics [is] "most evident in the concept of manners...that meticulous disciplining of the body which converts morality to style." (204-205)

Margaret's refusal to shake his hand leads to a question of access and recognition within the class system of Milton. Shaking hands becomes not only a moment to validate subjectivity but an invitation to touch and thus an invitation to sensation.

Margaret's interaction with the working-class women brings touch and sensation into the narrative via these women's interactions with her body. Shortly after she arrives in Milton, the narrator notes that her body is once again put on display. Gaskell writes:

In the back streets around them there were many mills, out of which poured streams of men and women two or three times a day...the girls, with their rough, but not unfriendly freedom would comment on her dress, even touch her shawl or gown to ascertain the exact material...there was such a simple reliance on her womanly sympathy. (72)

In this moment, Margaret's body is framed for the working-class women in this scene by her clothing and, by extension, her self-presentation as a middle-class woman. Neuville notes that the connection that Margaret has with working-class women often leads to touch, as with Bessy who "needs to make sure of Margaret's realness through touching her" (279). Unlike with Bessy, the anonymous working-class woman's touch is presented, though benign and situated in both curiosity and gendered sympathy, as an intrusion.

Working-class women's interest in Margaret brings her subjectivity into the narrative before her attraction to Thornton does so more explicitly. The women do this through touch, feeling the materiality of her clothes. Bessy also talks about Margaret's subjectivity. Once, after Margaret leaves her home, Bessy

thinks, “Who’d ha’ thought that face—as bright and as strong as the angel I dream of—could have known the sorrow she speaks on? I wonder how she’ll sin. All on us must sin” (138). This moment holds the dichotomy of Margaret as signifier and as subject. Bessy sees her beauty, comparing her to an angel of charity who has come to visit her. This is the same beauty that Mr. Lennox reads as marriageable. Like the factory women, Bessy, brings the reader back to Margaret’s subjectivity but, in this moment, she does not do so by touch but by the reminder that because everyone misbehaves. Margaret, as a subject rather than a signifier, will also sin and act outside of her prescribed social boundaries. Like the worker discussed in Chapter One, Bessy looks back at Margaret, whose interest in working-class living conditions led her to visit the sick Bessy in her working-class home. This looking back, happening as it does between Bessy and the reader, reminds the reader that underneath the facade of moral femininity, Margaret is human and will therefore transgress.

Margaret’s focus on understanding the worker’s humanity and Mr. Thornton’s focus on Margaret’s hands creates a dialogue between social reform and freedom of movement as the narrative that uses the sensing bodies of both characters does so in order to collapse difference into unity. Uglow writes:

The romantic, intensely physical tension between Margaret and Thornton becomes a way of suggesting other oppositions —between nature and industry, sympathy and authority, passion and reason. From the moment Margaret arrives in Milton physical currents vibrate through the texts... Their love is not blocked, as in more conventional novels, by circumstances or by the intervention of others; they are their own enemies, kept apart by pride, and by a clash of deeply internalized values. (372)

In a text where the two lovers are ideologically opposed, belonging to different schools of thought, it is the body, rather than the mind, that becomes the site for connection. Long before they may possibly reconcile each other to their opposing viewpoints, the text highlights how their perceptions of one another are similar; their sensory bodies are attuned to one another's.²

This connection manifests itself initially in Thornton's observing Margaret. He is intensely aware of her presence at his family's party. The narrator says:

He never went near her himself; he did not look at her. Only, he knew what she was doing—or not doing—better than he knew the movements of any one else in the room. Margaret was unconscious of herself, and so much amused by watching other people, that she never thought whether she was left unnoticed or not. (161)

The object-subject relationship undergoes a unique revision as it is navigated through the lens of both the theoretical construction of "the gaze" and sensation. As mentioned in Chapter One, Silverman formulates Lacan's theory of the gaze as "To "be" is in effect to "be seen" (133). Gaskell's narrative emphasizes how Margaret's view of her maidenly body—how she chooses "to be"—conflicts with the eroticized image that the men's gaze creates. This clash is why there are moments in the text, as during Mr. Lennox's proposal, where two different interpretations of Margaret's body, one reading her as sexual, and her own, which

² Cohen traces how this understanding was inherited from eighteenth-century ranking of the senses.

reads her as nonsexual, can rest uneasily in the same moment. The text differentiates Lennox from Thornton as Thornton creates a gaze that is a look without looking, a connection so rooted in sensation that Margaret is no longer called into being by being seen but by being felt.

The body, coupled with sensation, then, becomes a means of rewriting the subject-object model of the romantic relationship that was initially modeled and rejected with Mr. Lennox's failed proposal. Thornton recognizes her body's active capacity in a way that Mr. Lennox doesn't. He notes her "superb way of moving and looking" and the reader follows his reading of her, as he notes:

Her full beauty met his eye; her round white flexile throat rising out of the full, yet lithe figure; her lips, moving so slightly as she spoke, not breaking the cold serene look of her face with any variation from the one lovely haughty curve; her eyes with their soft gloom, meeting his with quiet maiden freedom. (64)

Motion and agency are infused in this representation of Margaret's body: her beauty meets his eye, her throat is flexile, her lips move. Thornton is not merely watching Margaret; he is reading her face as she moves about the world and noting a dynamicity that emphasizes Margaret's power.

Though Mr. Thornton gazes, but doesn't look, at Margaret, she actually gazes at him intently. The narrator describes her gaze, writing:

On suddenly looking up from her work, her eye was caught by the difference of outward appearance between her father and Mr. Thornton...in Mr. Thornton's face the straight brows fell low over the clear, deep-set earnest eyes, which without being unpleasantly sharp, seemed intent enough to penetrate into the very heart and core of what he was looking at...the lips, which were slightly compressed over a set of

teeth so faultless and beautiful as to give the effect of sudden sunlight when the rare bright smile...Margaret liked this smile. (81)

Though not charged with the same eroticism as the falling bracelet that “tightened her soft flesh,” Margaret is still reading his face. In contrast to her father, whose facial lines “were soft and waving, with a frequent undulating kind of trembling movement passing over them, showing every fluctuating emotion; the eyelids were large and arched, giving to the eyes a peculiar languid beauty which was almost feminine,” Mr. Thornton is read as emphatically masculine (81).

Margaret, liking his smile, finds pleasure in reading his face. In order to remain a respectable middle-class woman, Margaret cannot articulate sexual attraction but rather sublimates it and focuses attention on the workers.

Her attention on the workers, however, does not enable her to escape being sexualized. In the same section where Margaret encounters the working-class women, the narrator says:

She alternately dreaded and [was] fired up against the working men who commented not on her dress, but on her looks, in the same open fearless manner. She, who had hitherto felt that even the most refined remark on her personal appearance was an impertinence, had to endure undisguised admiration from these outspoken men. (72)

These instances of male working-class looking, however, do not lead Margaret to the same internalized feeling of shame and bodily betrayal that she felt during Mr. Lennox’s proposal. Rather, despite her discomfort, she continues to go out into the street, entering into an even more public arena in the strike scene. In this pivotal moment of the narrative, Thornton’s body, which I also discuss in Chapter

Four, is presented as apart and impenetrable while Margaret's, ultimately, is not. In "Varieties of Love and Power," John Pikoulis writes, "Thornton faces the crowd 'as a statue' and they threaten violence to crack him into human shape, to bring him within the range of their understanding" (183). Margaret believes that she is also impenetrable, thinking that her gender will prevent any violence but the literary moment of moral femininity is unable to protect her. The narrator says, "If she thought her sex would be a protection...she was wrong." Margaret is consciously relying on the construction of herself as a signifier of respectable femininity to protect her from political violence as she enters into this angry industrial scene. She "made her body into a shield from the fierce people beyond" (177) to protect Mr. Thornton, but the workers' anger hits her instead. The narrator says:

Their reckless passion had carried them too far to stop...a sharp pebble flew by her, grazing forehead and cheek and drawing a blinding light before her eyes. She lay like one dead on Mr. Thornton's shoulder. Then he unfolded his arms, and held her encircled in one for an instant. (177)

This moment signals a shift in how Margaret interacts with her body and her self-image.

While in the narrative, this shielding is seen consistently as a declaration of her love for Mr. Thornton, scholars discussing *North and South* have interpreted this scene as a decisive moment of self-determination for Margaret. Uglow writes, "Gaskell returns here to Margaret's conspicuous presence, to her willingness to use her body, and to her sense of its powerful instrumentality...she

is willing to risk unwanted intrusion even while she feels she can deflect it” (367). Meanwhile, Hotz suggests that “Margaret associates power with her body, an intriguing move because she has just been shuttling between her dying mother and the consumptive Bessy...they have taught her, by default, that the body instantiates the lineaments of power and gender” (177). As both Uglow and Hotz note, Margaret’s movement into the scene signals a recognition of the female body as a means of asserting power. In this moment, she relies on her body as signifier and, while it fails to protect her, this is because the body cannot exist as only signifier. The body disobeys such an essentializing construction and Margaret dies, if only for a moment, waking up with a wound she needs to hide. Thus, this associating of her body with power moves away from her body as signifying middle-class passivity, and links it to sensation and embodiment in the appearance of her “hidden wound.”

This “hidden wound,” which Weisser argues becomes “the power and threat of female sexuality”(8), appears once Margaret’s idea of herself as impenetrable is shattered. As the rock hit her head, breaking her skin, she and the reader are reminded that she can feel; this feeling is brought about by pain, echoing the spirals of pleasure and pain used to describe her and Thornton’s eventual attraction to one another. When she wakes up, after the scene has ended, she draws “her ruffled, luxuriant hair instinctually over the cut” (182). Margaret decides to hide her wound so as not to upset her ailing mother and by

repositioning her hair, she effectively denies not only the political events of the day but also the reality of her human, and therefore vulnerable, body.

This body, however, has been “woken up” after this moment of intrusion. When Mr. Thornton comes and proposes to her, Margaret’s language, rejecting this advance, is much stronger than in the initial proposal with Mr. Lennox. She says, “Your way of speaking shocks me. It is blasphemous.” As she calls his expression “blasphemous,” echoing Bessy’s religious image of her as angel, she blushes “a deep carnation blush...eyes kindling with indignation.” Margaret’s own representation as signifier is interrupted by her bodily reactions. While she situates her behavior as gendered, saying, “ ‘You seem to have imagined, that I was not merely guided by womanly instinct, but’—and here the passionate tears (kept down for long—struggled with vehemently).” Her body is interrupting her with physical markers of her embodied subjectivity. As their conversation comes to an end and Mr. Thornton accuses her of not understanding him, the narrator says: “ ‘I do not care to understand,’ she replied, taking hold of the table to steady herself; for she thought him cruel...and she was weak with her indignation” (193). Margaret and Thornton’s conversation is happening between her, him, and her body, which is forcefully asserting itself in this moment, interrupting both their conversation and any abstraction of her.

Contrasting this moment with Margaret’s rejection of Mr. Lennox, in which she replies only, “I don’t like to be spoken to as you have been doing. I cannot answer you as you want me to do,” it is clear that, as Margaret becomes

more embodied, her body has become more verbal and outspoken. The tension now comes to be between Margaret's own self-image, with its lack of physical sensation, and her body's subjectivity. Uglow writes, "Margaret's code stresses sympathy, but denies the feelings of her own body" (372). The code that Uglow cites echoes Weisser's articulation of "Moral Femininity." The force of this tension, between body and self highlights an ideological tension as well.

Margaret, in this moment, is expressing a physical power that is about ability rather than about using her body as a socially constructed signifier of femininity. Her gripping of the table, with her hands, becomes a moment that highlights her capacity for active agency. She can steady herself; she can ground herself in the reassuring sensation of touch.

After Thornton proposes to her, when he vows to himself and her that he will continue to love her, she responds with equal strength, thinking:

That he had loved her; that he would love her. And she shrank and shuddered as under the fascination of some great power, repugnant to her whole previous life...*his strong idea wandered through her thought*. She disliked him the more for having mastered her inner will. How dare he say that he would love her still, even though she shook him off with contempt...And so she shuddered away from the threat of his enduring love. What did he mean? Had she not the power to daunt him? She would see. (196)

Margaret, in this moment, is aware of their respective power. His misreading of her offends her, as did Mr. Lennox's. The difference is that now she is not ashamed of her body for being womanly, rather, she reads his declaration of persistent love as a challenge to her own will and power. With her assured "She

would see," it is a challenge that she feels, within her construction of self-identity, capable of meeting.

This capability changes after the accidental death of Leonards causes her to lie to the police in order to protect her brother. She must reconstruct herself outside of the maidenly, and ostensibly pure, object-body with which she has previously identified. Uglow cites Margaret's decision to lie to protect Frederick as the moment when, having complicated her self-image as righteous, she can begin to recognize and articulate her own desires. Her lie to save Frederick becomes the sin that Bessy foreshadowed. The narrator says:

A deep observer of human countenances might have seen the momentary agony shoot out of her great gloomy eyes, like the torture of some creature brought to bay. But the inspector though a very keen, was not a very deep observer. He was a little struck, notwithstanding, by the form of the answer, which sounded like a mechanical repetition of her first reply—not changed and modified in shape so as to meet his last question. "I was not there," said she, slowly and heavily. (268)

Though, as the narrator notes, Margaret is under deep emotional distress, it does not register for the police officer who cannot see the depth of her emotion. She becomes mechanical in this moment, and then, once the police officer has left, she "went into the study, paused—tottered forward—paused again—swayed for an instant where she stood, and fell prone on the floor in a dead swoon (269). This is second time that Margaret dies in the novel; in the first it was from an actual blow that showed both her and the reader that her body was penetrable. This fall is double-sided, as Uglow notes, it is a "fall from the high moral ground [but] also,

very noticeably, a fall into the world of sensation. With disgrace comes desire” (383). If Margaret wakes up from her first fall having become awakened to her physicality, this fall, into “sin,” brings about an awareness of her desire.

Other scholars have linked Margaret’s fall to her realization that she loves Thornton. Nancy Mann argues, “When innocence is equated with ignorance even *mental* self-revelation assumes a sexualized character” (32). Uglow also argues, “The romantic plot provided the vehicle Gaskell needed to deal with a woman’s ‘fall’—from icon to sexual being” (372). Once she has “fallen” the text begins to describe her feelings for Thornton, echoing his feelings for her. The narrator says, “But Mr. Thornton - why did she tremble, and hide her face in the pillow? What strong feeling had overtaken her at last?”(280). The use of the word “overtaken” and the phrase “at last” changes the reading of the earlier text because now the reader can understand that she has desired Thornton throughout the novel but repressed it. Her desire announces itself physically and though it is not explicitly articulated in the text, Margaret, hiding her face in her pillow, is aware both of her strong desire and her subjectivity. Both are announced non-verbally, through her body, via the sensation of her trembling.

Margaret’s earlier verbal assurance, her “She would see,” before her fall into sensation is perhaps why the realization that she loves Thornton becomes somewhat hollow for the reader, reading as an aggressive moment in the narrative in which Margaret’s body is disobeying her self-image in order for the text to

assert sensation and her subjectivity. Margaret struggles and ultimately fails to control her body. She thinks:

But I won't care for him. I surely am mistress enough of myself to control this wild, strange, miserable feeling, which tempted me even to betray my own dear Frederick, so that I might but regain his good opinion—the good opinion of a man who takes such pains to tell me that I am nothing to him. Come poor little heart! be cheery and brave. (321)

Margaret does not consent to her love for Thornton and the text undermines her will through her body and its desire for him. The “I won’t care for him” is forceful, and Margaret ties her ability to own herself to her ability to control “this wild, strange, miserable feeling.” Uncomfortably, Margaret loves him but she does so unwillingly. There is violence in this struggle for self-control with pain coming right after love, just as Thornton’s proposal follows the blow in the strike scene.

The intersection between love and pain is also threaded throughout Thornton’s love for Margaret. When Margaret rejects his initial proposal, he feels this rejection physically. Gaskell writes:

He was dizzy as if Margaret instead of looking and speaking, and moving like a tender graceful woman, had been a sturdy fish-wife, and given him a sound blow with her fists...He had positively bodily pain,—a violent headache, and a throbbing intermittent pulse...He loved her, and would love her; and defy her, and this miserable bodily pain. (204)

This experience of love and rejection, rooted in physicality, is built on the paradoxical and sensory nature of their relationship. Uglow notes that the text, “Often [through] contrast... evokes a specific kind of erotic submission—queen

and vassal, master and men, God and saint. Such imagery powerfully suggests the contrary human desires for separateness and intimacy, for selfhood and loss of self” (375). I build on this by arguing that Cohen’s reading of the body as sensory and the body as category is similarly enacted in this relationship. The narrator says, “It was a pleasure to feel how thoroughly she respected him. He could not prevent her doing that, it was the one comfort in all this misery” (282).

Margaret’s frustrated love for Thornton expresses itself through her bodily pain towards the end of the text. When her aunt reluctantly proposed remaining in Milton a few days, Margaret “writhed her body as if in acute suffering, and said: Oh! let us go” (361). This mirrors the pain that Mr. Thornton experiences. The narrator says, “For all his pain, he longed to see the author of it...he was in the Charybdis of passion” (265). The text stresses this paradoxical sensation of loving as pain, and the narrator argues that it knows more about Mr. Thornton’s feelings than he does. Gaskell writes, “He thought he disliked seeing one who had mortified him so keenly; but he was mistaken. It was a stinging pleasure to be in the room with her, and feel her presence. But he was no great analyser of his own motives, and was mistaken, as I have said.” (235).

This similarity in expression, while situated in the body, does not end there. Rather, the text recognizes a sameness in character that is rooted in physicality, and extends to a similar way of engaging with the world. Mrs. Thornton also recognizes this sameness. Margaret reacts angrily when she comes to warn her about the presumed impropriety of Margaret being seen late at night

with an unknown man (though the reader knows this is her brother). In seeing this reaction, where Margaret storms out of the drawing room, Mrs. Thornton thinks, “My young lady...you’ve a pretty good temper of your own. If John and you had come together, he would have had to keep a tight hand over you, to make you know your place” (310). While this is rooted in the language of gendered marriage politics, there is still a recognition of similarity in temperament. The anger that Margaret expresses by physically removing herself from the room—by removing herself from Mrs. Thornton’s gaze and, by extension, her misreading of her—is recognized by Mrs. Thornton as similar to her son.

Like Thornton, Margaret explicitly states that she is not a “great analyser of her feelings” when she is in Helstone with Mr. Bell. Not only do Mr. Thornton and Margaret encounter their love as both pain and pleasure, they are the same in how they physically perceive their environment. Mann argues that this relationship is filled with such sensory and paradoxical language because “it is obvious that the personal struggle between Margaret and Thornton represents, not only the eternal agons of male and female and of past and future, but a variety of class, economic, religious, intellectual, and ethical conflicts: gentry against manufacturers, agriculture against industry, orthodoxy against dissent” (34). Rather than coming to a clear ideological compromise, which would have been nearly impossible within the genre and politics that Gaskell is examining, the site of connection between these two characters is in the body.

The text reinforces this connection between Margaret and Thornton at its close: the proposal scene. Touch plays a central role in the final scene of *North and South*. Margaret comes to Mr. Thornton with a business proposal to buy his factory and to fund his social experiments. Overcome with feeling, she hides her face in her hands, and the placement of her body mirrors her fall in the strike scene. The narrator says:

She turned her face, still covered with her small white hands, towards him, and laid it on his shoulder, hiding it even there; and it was too delicious to feel her soft cheek against his, for him to wish to see either deep blushes or loving eyes. He clasped her close. But they both kept silence. (424)

Sight and voice, which Cohen argues were perceived as the higher, more separate, senses in Victorian writing, thus dissolve in this instance, leaving only touch, the most intimate of the senses.³ Sight, the definitive sense in a subject-object relationship that is mediated through the gaze, is then subsumed by the connection of tactility. It is the intimate link of skin to skin, the epitome of the sensory relationship, which connects and ultimately closes *North and South*, leaving the two central characters meeting through touch, intertwined through a physicality that at once situates them within a wider social discourse while enabling Margaret to fully enter into a relationship with both Mr. Thornton and her body, where sensation and connection override the disembodied internalized representation of herself as an desensitized image.

³ Some scholars, such as Catherine Gallagher, have argued that their ideological differences are never reconciled and that the narrative does a disservice to the social reform plot by ending with the domestic marriage plot.

The ending of *North and South*, with the marriage of northern manufacturer to southern lady, rings hollow for many scholars. Catherine Gallagher argues that Gaskell, after an ambitious initial focus on social reform, retreats into the domestic sphere, solving a public problem with a private marriage. Uglow defends this retreat to the body. She writes that “the fusion of politics and love is too simple, but Gaskell knows this: she never expected that all the old battles could be ended by a marriage” (386).⁴ Uglow reads the ending as the beginning of a longer discussion, providing as it does, “an intensely intimate, accessible way of arguing the need to tear down the high, thorny barriers between self and others” (370). The barriers that Uglow argues are torn down are those of the subject-object relationship. The other subject-object relationship, that of the worker and the factory owner, while being repaired, does not explicitly figure into the final scene of the novel. Instead, everything but sensation, the physical closeness of skin touching skin, is evacuated.

In many ways, the novel escapes to the newly united middle-class bodies, postponing discussions of the workers’ subjectivity by focusing on Margaret’s instead. By taking a character whose moral femininity and emotional self-control are central to her identity and bringing her into sensation, this text works to reclaim the middle-class woman’s subjectivity via its representation of Margaret’s powerful embodiment. However, the text’s ultimate ending, collapsing onto the

⁴ Uglow argues that this bodily language makes way for sympathy for physical suffering. She writes, “This is one of the earliest novels of industrial alienation, telling linked to the plight of the nineteenth century women...the novel’s very physical vocabulary gives a bodily suffering to the virtue of ‘tenderness’, a ‘soft place’, an openness to suffering” (386).

body and sensation, evacuates the discussion of the worker and the industrial setting that has been central to Margaret's own journey to embodiment. While the relationship between worker and body are discussed in more depth in Chapter Four, *North and South* ultimately places Margaret into a tense narrative position. There is a certain violence in how she is forced to realize her embodied subjectivity through desire. In order for the text to assert that middle-class women can have both sensation and self-determination, Margaret's ability to exist outside of the marriage plot is elided. She cannot stay within her limited self-image, defined by her "high maidenly dignity." The relationship between Thornton and Margaret, then, grounded as it is in the body, becomes a narrative space in which differences in identity, awareness, and situation are all collapsed onto the sensory relationship that the characters have with one another. This relationship is complicated in its sensation, which, while more realistic, also requires the text to serve as mediator and aggressive translator. The text elides its initial attention to a protagonist with the ability to self-define in order to assert that the body will disobey the essentialized construction of a social label.

CHAPTER THREE

Female Sexuality, Motherhood, and the Fallen Woman in *Bleak House* and *Mary Barton*

Two years after the publication of her first novel, *Mary Barton* (1848), in 1850, Elizabeth Gaskell wrote to Charles Dickens asking for his help with a young “fallen woman” named Palsey. “My dear Sir,” she wrote:

In the first place I am going to give you some trouble, and I must make an apology for it...I am just now very much interested in a young girl, who is in our New Bayley prison. She is the daughter of an Irish clergyman who died when she was two years old; but even before that her mother had shown most complete indifference to her...when she was about fourteen, she was apprenticed to an Irish dress-maker here...but once this dress-maker failed...Then she was in despair, & wrote to her mother, (*who had never corresponded with her all the time she was at school and an apprentice;*) and while awaiting the answer went into the penitentiary...in desperation she listened to a woman, who had obtained admittance...solely as it turned out to decoy girls into her mode of life, and left with her; & for four months she has led the most miserable life!...she pines to redeem herself; her uncle (who won't see her, but confirms fully the account of the mother's cruel hardness,...what I want you to tell me is, how Miss Coutts sends out her proteges?... and might she be included among them?...Pray don't say you can't help me for I don't know any one else to ask, and you see the message you sent about emigration some years ago has been the mother of all this mischief. (“Letter from Elizabeth Gaskell to Charles Dickens”)

Gaskell’s application to Dickens highlights a struggle to situate the prostitute’s body within larger social power structures. Like the character Esther in *Mary Barton*, Palsey has both fallen into prostitution and been imprisoned. Her

downfall, Gaskell implies, was in part a result of her mother's indifference and negligence even before her circumstances led to her to working as a prostitute. Gaskell suggests that had her mother intervened—had she been more nurturing—Palsey would not have become a prostitute. The mother's role and her choice not to nurture Palsey become intertwined with a larger conversation surrounding the perceived tainted sexuality of the “fallen woman.”

For both Gaskell and Dickens, the assertion of female sexuality outside of the marriage contract was a threat within their writings and in the urban areas they were working to reform. Operating with Angela Burdett-Coutts in 1846, Dickens started Urania Cottage, a “home for homeless women,” in London. Urania Cottage sought to rehabilitate the “fallen woman” before procuring their emigration to Australia.¹ Alternately, Gaskell believed that the prostitute could be rehabilitated via the feminine domestic setting. Gaskell's social worry, with the invocation of the maternal, and maternal lack, in this historical interaction highlights the cultural ambiguity of maternity and female sexuality within nineteenth-century constructions of the woman's body. Gaskell is at a loss as to where she can acceptably situate Palsey and her body, hence this appeal to Dickens. While this exchange comes two years after *Mary Barton* was released and three years before *Bleak House* was published, it highlights the links between maternity, or the performance of motherhood, class, and the sexual downfall of

¹ A reading of this interaction, and the power dynamics between Gaskell and Dickens in their professional relationship can be found in Chapters Three and Four of Elsie Michie's *Outside of the Pale: Cultural Exclusion, Gender Difference, and the Victorian Women Writer*.

the daughter. This interlocked relationship, I argue, traps the middle-class woman and *Bleak House* in a system that cannot reconcile maternity with female sexuality. In the working-class setting of *Mary Barton*, though social ambiguity persists, maternity can be articulated based on emotional need. In both *Mary Barton* and *Bleak House*, the maternal body, which is both maternal and sexual, disobeys the social constructions of appropriate and acceptable femininity, even when the texts seek to separate one version of the woman's body from the other.

Bleak House encounters and explores an ambiguous space for "respectable" middle and upper-class maternity, as it attempts to separate the sexual reality of motherhood and the social construction of middle-class mother as sexless nurturer. The irreconcilable sexual component of maternity, embodied in Lady Dedlock, literally devolves into a working-class body. This image of the fallen working-class woman is also embodied in *Mary Barton*'s Esther, a former factory worker who has become a prostitute. Like Lady Dedlock, Esther signifies tainted sexuality and maternity. Both women, once they have performed their function of sensation, are taken out of the novel. Woloch writes on this evacuation of minor characters' suffering. He posits that this evacuation is due to the "misalignment of individual interests within the seething whole" (263) of the novel. Lady Dedlock and Esther, therefore, die in order for the female-protagonists, the next generation of women, to exist in the narrative.

In *Mary Barton*, Esther's maternity, and her relationship to the protagonist, punctuates emotional parts of Mary's narrative. These moments reconfigure the mother's body. Gaskell and Dickens, though writing for similar audiences, and in conversation with one another, negotiate the body of both the fallen woman and the mother by different means and to different ends. In *Mary Barton*, the text links Mary to her aunt Esther and a spectral mother-daughter relationship emerges that is tied to female sexuality. This relationship is echoed, and made more explicit in *Bleak House* where Lady Dedlock is Esther Summerson's biological mother as opposed to her visually similar aunt. Both novels highlight and then negate the mother-daughter relationship; it is a relationship that at once is and cannot be. Dickens, in *Bleak House*, attempts to separate motherhood from female sexuality in his representation of Esther's non-biological mothering. In *Mary Barton*, at Esther's death, it is the role of mother that the text returns to and affirms. *Bleak House* therefore attempts to distance maternity from sexuality while *Mary Barton* uses maternity to rehabilitate and problematize constructions of working-class female sexuality as illicit and transgressive.

Transgressive female sexuality plays a central role in several of Dickens and Gaskell's other texts. In *Oliver Twist*, Nancy, a prostitute, befriends Oliver and is depicted sympathetically before her eventual death while *David Copperfield*'s Emily survives the novel and immigrates to Australia. Similarly, while Esther in *Mary Barton* adopts a mothering attitude towards Mary, in *Ruth*,

published contemporaneously with *Bleak House*, the protagonist is a fallen woman who gives birth to a son. *Ruth* links motherhood and sexuality explicitly by having a sexually transgressive woman reproduce and then provide for her son. Whereas Esther in *Mary Barton* is haunted by the death of her daughter, Ruth's son survives and flourishes, ultimately becoming a doctor. I chose to focus on *Bleak House* and *Mary Barton* because of the textual emphasis on the mother-daughter relationship and the fear present in both texts that the sexual contamination of the mother will be passed on to the daughter. These texts track how anxiety surrounding maternity and sexuality become embodied in female characters whose sexually transgressive bodies were thought to be socially dissonant with motherhood.

As Mary Poovey has noted in *Body/Politics: Women and the Discourses of Science*, the female body was stripped of a sexuality in Victorian social thought, where sexual desire was assumed to be exclusively male (Chapter Two: "Speaking of the Body: Mid-Victorian Constructions of Female Desire"). Female sexuality, though requisite for motherhood, was represented as unnatural and illicit. The body of the daughter becomes a space of heightened anxiety and Elsie Michie traces the texts' relationship to one another through the naming of *Bleak House*'s protagonist Esther and the eventual situating of Lady Dedlock's transgressively maternal and sexual body. Michie writes:

Mary Barton may have influenced Dickens, who read it while working on *David Copperfield*; both novels contain representations of prostitutes. Esther, the prostitute from Gaskell's earliest novel, also seems to haunt *Bleak House*, not only in the name of its heroine but also in the scene in

which Lady Dedlock's body is found on the threshold of the paupers' burial ground clad in the clothes of Jenny, the bricklayer's wife. (113)

By beginning my analysis with *Bleak House* and working backwards, I hope not only to show but to follow Dickens's representation of female sexuality and mothering as he moves Lady Dedlock into the working-class. I argue that this representation inhabits an ambiguous space within the text. By examining *Mary Barton*, where the body of the fallen woman is once again linked to maternity in a still ambiguous but now somewhat rehabilitating manner we can then follow the transformed body of Lady Dedlock into the working-class. Gaskell's representation of her Esther as mother complicates *Bleak House*'s reading of female difference as something that irrevocably taints motherhood. The theater of the mother, for the working-class fallen woman, becomes a space that is at once complicated, performative, and perhaps, for Gaskell, redemptive.

The climactic encounter between Esther Summerson and Lady Dedlock captures the ambiguity of the mother in *Bleak House*. Meeting in the woods after Esther's scarring illness, Lady Dedlock laments:

My child, my child! ... For the last time! These kisses for the last time! These arms upon my neck for the last time! We shall meet no more. To hope to do what I seek to do, I must be what I have been so long. Such is my reward and doom. If you hear of Lady Dedlock, brilliant, prosperous, and flattered; think of your wretched mother, conscience-stricken, underneath that mask! That the reality is in her suffering, in her useless remorse, in her murdering within her breast the only love and truth of which it is capable! And then forgive her, if you can; and cry to heaven to forgive her which it never can! (486)

This pivotal exchange, taken from Esther and Lady Dedlock's only meeting, becomes highly dramatized. It relies on a performance of maternal love in the

absence of an already established mother-child relationship. Esther and Lady Dedlock's embrace becomes a space in the narrative where the theater of the mother is compacted and embodied.

In *Pleasures Taken*, Carol Mavor defines her concept, the "theater of the mother," as the drama of performed maternity ("To Make Mary").² While Mavor writes on visibility, Lady Dedlock's maternal relationship is similarly performed, textually, within this scene. These two layers of tension, the simultaneous assertion and negation of maternal identity, realize the contradictions in middle-class Victorian constructions of motherhood. This contradiction, Mavor argues, is implicit and yet omnipresent in Victorian visual depictions of mother and child. It is made explicit in *Bleak House*, as Esther was not conceived within the approved sexual relationship of marriage. The sexuality and lack of restraint that led to Esther's creation now separates her and Lady Dedlock and traps Lady Dedlock in an endless cycle of guilt and artifice. On the one hand, she is seen as a model of prestige and privilege, the companion to Sir Leicester in a companionate and passionless marriage. Alternately, she is denigrated by her sexual misconduct and her inability to mother her child.

The theater of the mother complicates the stage of the child in which the mother provides a safe and stable environment for children to develop. This moment between Esther and Lady Dedlock calls the mother into being through

² The edition of *Pleasures Taken* used in this research was an e-book published by Duke University Press. It does not have page numbers, but all quotes can be found via a search function. All quotes from Mavor are taken from her second chapter "To Make Mary: Julia Margaret Cameron's Photographs of Altered Madonnas."

love and physical connection to her child. In *Bleak House*, this connection centers on the child's love acting upon the mother. It thereby emphasizes the dynamic and transient role of the mother, as Lady Dedlock speaks within Esther's narrative only for a moment before being evacuated. She mourns the moments of childlike affection she cannot have, saying, "These kisses for the last time! These arms upon my neck for the last time!" It is the child's embrace and acceptance of the mother that creates a momentary tableau of maternal love within the text. In "'Til Follow the Other': Tracing the (M)other in 'Bleak House'," Marcia Goodman traces this physical affection, writing that "the unconscious expression of needs and demands characterizes the earliest connection to mother" (150). Though Esther is meeting her mother as an adult, the text is visualizing an alternate reality, one of her as loved child. While Esther as unloved child is an image the text has already established, Lady Dedlock's identity as a mother is explicitly articulated for the first time in this moment. Esther's embrace calls it into being; it is her affection and the performed relationship this embrace alludes to that names Lady Dedlock as mother.

Mary Barton also dramatizes this theater of the mother. Exhausted and alone, Mary wakes to a knocking at her door. She hears:

"Mary! Mary! Open the door!" as a little movement on her part seemed to tell the being outside of her wakeful, watchful state. They were the accents of her mother's voice; the very south-country pronunciation, that Mary so well remembered; and which she had sometimes tried to imitate when alone, with the fond mimicry of affection.

So, without fear, without hesitation, she rose and unbarred the door. There against the moonlight, stood a form, so closely resembling her dead mother, that Mary never doubted the identity but exclaiming (as if she

were a terrified child, secure of safety when near the protecting care of its parent): “Oh mother! Mother! You are come at last?” She threw herself, or rather fell into the trembling arms of her long-lost unrecognized aunt Esther. (215)

The chapter ends with this embrace, the text pausing to create a tableau. Similar to the one in *Bleak House*, this tableau emphasizes the mother-daughter relationship as the daughter collapses in relief on the would-be mother figure. Though different in setting and context, the embrace that Goodman connects to the performativity of the mother in *Bleak House* is reversed here. In a dream-like state, Mary, like Dickens’s Esther, clings to her mother figure, mistaking the body of her fallen aunt for the body of her mother. Mary’s emotional need calls the mother into being in the body of her aunt. The needs of the daughter bring out the performance of motherhood on the unstable body of the prostitute. The text condones this movement to the mother figure with the confident phrasing, “without fear, without hesitation.” This strong repetition implies a certain rightness in Mary’s need bringing forth the mother, regardless of what body or form the mother takes. This misrecognition is complicated by the sensory connection that Esther has with Mary, able to sense, through the barriers of the home, that Mary is awake and in need of a mother’s love.

While in *Bleak House* Esther’s embrace performs the child’s love, and by extension calls Lady Dedlock as mother into being, in *Mary Barton* Mary resurrects her mother in the body of her aunt, whose own daughter died from starvation. This evocation changes not only how Mary initially sees her aunt but how the text treats Esther’s maternity. In “*Mary Barton* and the Dissassembled

Dialogue,” Roland Vesgo argues that not only does Mary’s misreading of her aunt bring her mother into momentary being; it also allows Esther to enter into the text as a mother, rather than a prostitute. He writes, “In Gaskell’s depiction, however, Esther does have a real self that is none of her socially constructed selves. Her real self is a loving maternal one...the prostitute with a mother’s heart” (173-174). Motherhood and aberrant female sexuality are not mutually exclusive in *Mary Barton*. This lack of exclusivity is not in *Bleak House*, where the sexual misconduct of the mother makes maternity impossible outside of the momentary connection in the woods.

This moment of connection where mother and child are held together in a physical bond of mutually returned affection is ambiguous in *Bleak House*; as it is named it is simultaneously rejected as impossible. Lady Dedlock calling Esther ‘my child’ establishes the family tie and belonging that Esther craves. This naming, however, links Lady Dedlock’s shame to her maternity as it confirms her sexual misconduct. Her claiming of Esther, while providing an identity and definite origin, signals Esther’s illegitimacy and Esther is glad this newly established tie has been rendered invisible by her disfigurement. In this same section, she reflects that she “felt...a burst of gratitude that I never could disgrace her by any trace of likeness” (484). Thus, while the tie between Esther and Lady Dedlock is confirmed, that connection has also been rendered invisible and untraceable. This moment of motherly love cannot exist outside the shame of illicit female sexuality.

Motherly love is also a space of psychic violence for both Lady Dedlock and Esther. The line “in her murdering within her breast the only love and truth of which it is capable” effectively pinpoints this frustration and confusion; the gerundive form of the verb “murder” emphasizes perpetuity. Lady Dedlock is constantly killing off the natural maternal love she feels for Esther while also yearning for a daughter she believed to be dead and now feels she must abandon. The use of the third person to refer to herself highlights this internal separation and conflict. It shows a frustrated cycle in which Lady Dedlock’s maternity and love are continually highlighted and negated, present and denied.

Her cry to be absolved from the stain of misconduct, forgiven first by Esther and then by Heaven, is also spoken and instantly negated. Lady Dedlock asks for divine forgiveness while acknowledging that it will not be given. Though it confirms her maternity, the text also traps her in the shame of her sexuality. She becomes one side of the double bind that artistic depictions of Victorian motherhood encountered: “having to be a mother (her ultimate achievement) without acting upon her sexuality so as announce her sexual difference” (“To Make Mary”). Because Esther’s birth happened outside of marriage, Lady Dedlock’s sexual difference is not subsumed by respectable Victorian maternity. Her maternity is exclusively linked with her having acted upon her sexuality. Lady Dedlock cannot be the “angel of the house” and thereby move into the non-sexual role of mother. She must live a double-life, hiding a shame and despair that is coated in superficiality and artifice. The text never allows Lady Dedlock to

move into the nurturing stage of motherhood that she mourns in this passage and so she is caught in the irreconcilable paradox of woman as both sexual agent and mother.

This paradox, of negating motherhood while articulating it, is translated in the relationship Esther develops with her typically absent mother. Mother and daughter are both trapped in a relationship based on shame and guilt as Miss Barbary, her godmother, tells a young Esther:

Your mother, Esther is your disgrace, and you were hers. The time will come—and soon enough—when you will understand this better, and feel it too, as no one save a woman can...Forget your mother and leave all other people to forget her who will do her unhappy child that great kindness.
(65)

This moment between Miss Barbary and Esther highlights the closed system of shame where mother and child are linked by the taint of the mother's inappropriate sexuality. In "Broken Mirrors and Broken Words: Autobiography, Prosopoeia, and the Dead Mother in 'Bleak House'," Carolyn Dever writes on this isolation, "The body of Lady Dedlock ...presents its own vexed issues...for it is impossible to separate the maternal body from the dangerous body of the sexually transgressive woman" (49). "No one save a woman" means that men in this narrative are incapable of understanding this sexual shame. The text, then, links transgressive or unregulated sexuality with the female body. Similarly, the use of woman, rather than mother or daughter, connects inappropriately placed sexuality with "Woman" rather than with specific groups within that identifier, such as Mother. Esther's own female body becomes the signifier of this misconduct.

Mary Barton renegotiates this mother-child system, where the child becomes symbolic of the mother's past sexual misbehavior, in its telling of Esther's turn to prostitution. While her daughter was born out of wedlock, the text points to the limited non-sexual means that working-class women had for generating income and stability. A distraught Esther tells Jem Wilson:

My child was so ill, so ill, and I was starving, and I could not bear to see her suffer, and forgot how much better it would be for us to die together, – oh, her moans, her moans, which money could give the means of relieving! So I went out into the street one January night. (150)

Mary Barton, therefore, imagines a different cause and effect relationship than the system of shame that Miss Barbary creates for Esther Summerson. This relationship is not built on sexual desire but material need. While the child is still the mother's downfall, she is not the signifier of the mother's sexual shame in the way *Bleak House* presents. Rather, it is because Esther is a mother, and because she has a drive to provide and nurture that she becomes a prostitute. Gaskell anchors Esther's decision in an economic reality. She and her child were both starving. Esther's fall into the ostensibly sexually transgressive occupation of prostitution becomes about material need as opposed to sexual desire. The repetition of "so ill" and "her moans" create a spectral echo. Her dead child's suffering haunts Esther. Like Lady Dedlock, this Esther is caught in a cycle where her maternity is affirmed as it is denied. Rather than any sexual deviancy on her part, her work as a prostitute is the result of a failed economic system that has not afforded her the means of providing for her child. Thus, being a mother

leads to Esther's falling. Though she is no longer the mother to a living child, her identity as mother cannot be erased or negated by her identity as a prostitute.

In *Bleak House*, the call to erase her mother seeks to negate Esther's existence. It reduces her to the nothingness she fears her Dolly sees when it looks at her (30). Theorist Nancy Chodorow argues "it is through perceived identity with the mother, through seeing herself as the mother's mirror image that the girl comes painfully to construct a self" (quoted in Helena Michie 202). Esther writes, "But why her face should be, in a confused way, like a broken glass to me... associated with the lonely days at my godmother's...to the days when I had stood on tiptoe to dress myself at my little glass, after dressing my doll" (250). Lady Dedlock's face serves as a *fractured* mirror for Esther. When she looks at Lady Dedlock, Esther sees her isolated and lonely childhood staring back at her. Inscribed onto Esther's face, so similar to the beautiful Lady Dedlock's, is a history of maternal absence. Esther's initial reflection, mirroring as it does Lady Dedlock's, shows a person who was neither loved nor seen. Once her beauty has been impaired by her disfigurement, Esther is able to re-encounter a reflection that is not a reminder of childhood trauma. However, she does feel that this changed face makes her an non-erotic entity, arguably precluding her from marriage.

Sexuality and erotic beauty permeates representations of the working-class female body in a way that it does not in the middle or upper classes. In "Expert Witnesses: Women and Publicity in Mary Barton and Felix Holt", Laura Struve

writes on working-class women: “It seems almost impossible to look at a woman in public without being made uncomfortably aware of her sexuality” (10). Mary Barton’s identity as a working-class woman means she is perpetually in the public eye. This exposure, and her beauty, invites a sexual reading of her body that permeates the story. Her beauty is read as motivation for murder and the exposure of her body, and its labor, is commodified in Miss Simmonds dress shop.³ After she has been linked to Harry Carson’s murder, a fellow seamstress tells Mary, “You may come back to work, if you’ll behave yourself...I told you she’d be glad to have you back, after all this piece of business, by way of tempting people to come to her shop...to have a peep at you” (235). While Esther can choose when and where to display her face via her use of a veil, Mary does not have these class-based shields because of the realities of having a working-class body. Her privacy is limited and, as a prostitute, her aunt lives solely in the public realm.

Mary Barton’s face, while mirroring her aunt Esther’s, is a history of anticipated sexual misconduct, not maternal absence. The narrator notes that her father “often looked at Mary, and wished she were not so like her aunt, for the very bodily likeness seemed to suggest the possibility of a similar likeness in their fate” (118). Mary’s body functions in a way that is similar to Esther’s in *Bleak House* as their appearance links them to a legacy of fallen women and an anxiety

³ Mary’s objectification and assertion of subjectivity in the court-room scene are discussed in Chapter One.

that they will re-enact the maternal downfall. In Esther Summerson's case this prophecy is precluded by her disfigurement. For Mary, her father's reading of her aunt's image on her body is translated to a wider audience in the trial scene, where her beauty is used as evidence against Jem for the murder of Harry Carson. When Mary's body is in danger of "falling," her already fallen aunt works to intervene. In a way that is similar to how Mary misrecognizes Esther as her mother, Esther sees her daughter in the body of her niece. She says, "You are so like my little girl, Mary!" (223-224). Esther's interest in Mary can then be read as an extension of the motherly interest that led to her prostitution, thereby making the act of mothering more ambiguous for working-class women.

While Mary's beauty and its attached sexually transgressive power is explicitly discussed and debated, in *Bleak House* the reader can only learn about Esther's beauty after it is gone. Struggling to construct an identity that is divorced from the contamination of female sexuality, Esther's body paradoxically comes into being through her disfigurement (Michie 202). In "'Who is this in Pain?': Scarring, Disfigurement, and Female Identity in 'Bleak House' and 'Our Mutual Friend'," Helena Michie tracks this dichotomy, writing, "Nowhere is Esther's narrative more informed by the paradox of erasure and assertion than in the discussion of her own physical appearance: her body and its desires" (203). This same face, though a signifier of her mother's sexual transgression, is now linked to Esther's own sexuality and desires. These desires are repressed in Mr. Woodcourt's imagined rejection of her and her new, scarred, face. This

scarring both erases the visual link between Lady Dedlock and de-eroticizes Esther's young female body through an illness she contracted through mothering Charley and Jo. Thus, her act of mothering at once visually separates her from Lady Dedlock and de-eroticizes her body.

It is Esther who links her new face with a lack of sexual desirability. Thankful that they had no formal attachment, she writes of Mr. Woodcourt, "What should I have suffered, if I had had to write him, and tell him that the poor face he had known as mine was quite gone from me" (476). This is especially noteworthy because at this point in the narrative Esther has not looked at her new face. She has, however, already linked her altered appearance to a change of self. Because she feels that her mutilated appearance means that she is not desirable, this change, ostensibly, releases Mr. Woodcourt from any commitment to her. Esther writes about meeting her new face, mourning a beauty that she has never explicitly owned. She says, "I was very much changed...at first, my face was so strange to me...I had never been a beauty and had never thought myself one; but I had been very different from this" (478). Esther's previous beauty, while negated by the first person narrative, is verified by Mr. Guppy when he sees Lady Dedlock's portrait at Chesney Wold and recognizes it because of his interactions with Esther. Not only was Esther beautiful, her unscarred face reflected the mother that she perpetually lacks.

Her interactions with her doll show a nascent desperation to repair this lack by both giving and receiving love. At the beginning of her narrative, the doll

serves as a mother figure to her. Esther writes, “It almost makes me cry what a relief it used to be to me...to run upstairs to my room and...then to sit down on the floor, leaning on the elbow of her great armchair and tell her all that I had noticed since we parted” (30). The perspective in this instance highlights Esther’s construction of her doll as a mother figure. She places herself below the doll in the scene so that she is looking up at her, mimicking the spatial relationship of a mother and child while confiding to a stable and present, though silent and inanimate, maternal figure. This perspective shifts once her godmother has told Esther that she is her mother’s shame. Again, Esther runs upstairs and seeks out her doll. Esther writes, “Holding that solitary friend upon my bosom...Imperfect as my understanding of my sorrow was, I knew that I had brought no joy, at any time to anybody’s heart, and that I was to no one upon earth what Dolly was to me” (32). The perspective in this encounter is switched; it is Esther who is larger than her doll and who holds her against her breast, like a mother nurturing a baby.

Esther is performing motherhood in this instance, but this performance, rather than soothing the doll is designed to soothe herself through the act of loving another. In this instance, the young Esther enters into the theater of the mother and telescopes in on the enactment of the maternal experience of nurturing. The placement and situating of Esther and her doll emphasizes the comfort it gives to the mother rather than the child. This parallels the comfort Lady Dedlock feels in their meeting in the woods. The line that follows this action, “I knew I had brought no joy, at any time to anybody’s heart... I was to no one upon Earth what

Dolly was to me” places Esther in the role of the mother while simultaneously mourning the space of loved child that she cannot inhabit. The person who would love her as she loves her doll is absent.

In *Bleak House*, Esther’s characterization and her narrative can be read as Dickens’s attempt to textually reconcile the ambiguities surrounding Victorian motherhood and the female sexuality necessary for the reproduction of children. Esther’s status as not quite orphan and not quite mother allows her to perform both roles as she moves throughout her sections in *Bleak House*, looking to give and receive maternal love and acceptance. In Esther, Dickens creates a female character who, while not a natural mother throughout most of the work, is persistently mothering and self-negating. In this novel that interrogates and attempts to rewrite the role of mother, Esther fills the void of the absent mother for many characters. In “Esther Summerson Rehabilitated,” David Zwerdling writes, “She is the unconscious representative of the many characters in *Bleak House* who have not known parental love” (432). Her role as mother can be seen in heightened contrast with Mrs. Jellyby who, while present, is too preoccupied to nurture her children. Esther immediately enters into the role of mother when she enters into the Jellyby house. She writes:

Peepy (so self-named) was the unfortunate child who had fallen downstairs...Ada and I did not know which to pity most—the bruises or the dirt...As she [Mrs. Jellyby] proceeded with her dictation and as I interrupted nothing by doing it, I ventured quietly to stop poor Peepy as he was going out and to take him up to the nurse...[he] soon fell asleep in my arms. (52)

In this instance, Esther is more maternal than the biological mother, capable of seeing the overlooked and ill-cared for child within this home, whereas Mrs. Jellyby, their biological mother, can only see Africa. Esther criticizes the dirt that covers the house and children. The text shows that this filth is a reflection of Mrs. Jellyby as housekeeper and absent mother. Acting as an angel of the house, Esther becomes a space of order, attention, and respite for the Jellyby children.

This attention holds special meaning for the oldest Jellyby daughter, Caddy, who actively seeks out Esther. She comes to Esther and collapses under her anger at her mother. Esther writes:

“I wish I were dead!” she broke out... In a moment afterwards, she knelt on the ground at my side, hid her face in my dress, passionately begged my pardon and wept. I comforted her, and would have raised her, but she cried, “No, no”...she wanted to stay there! (59)

The narrative freezes here, with the situating of Caddy and Esther mimicking that of young Esther and her doll. Unlike Lady Dedlock, who cannot feel the love and connection between a mother and child without the shame and censure of her sexual misconduct, a child’s need calls Esther to nurture. The child, even one who is not much younger than Esther, can feel safe in a non-biological but still maternal embrace. In performing the non-sexual, nurturing, aspect of the theater of the mother Esther becomes a stable stage for the child that allows Caddy to enact a performance of childhood. Esther’s stability allows Caddy to articulate feelings of anger while meeting only a unilaterally accepting embrace.

Mary Barton, unlike the *Bleak House* protagonist, does not enter into the theater of the mother but, like Caddy, re-enacts the stage of the child. This is

evidenced both by the self-soothing she does in trying to recreate her mother's voice and when she misreads her aunt as her dead mother. While embracing her aunt, Mary feels "as if she were a terrified child, secure of safety when near protecting care of its parent" (215). The stage of the child here calls on the fallen Esther to perform maternity. After Mary's mental collapse, it is her lover, Jem who becomes the stabilizing theater of the mother, nurturing a childlike Mary. The narrator writes, "She smiled gently, as a baby does when it sees its mother tending its little cot; and continued her innocent, infantine gaze into his face, as if the sight gave her much unconscious pleasure" (229). Mary's sexuality is eclipsed by her performance of childhood, transforming Jem into a site of maternity. Thus, Mary's emotional need calls forth a performance of motherhood, regardless of the gender or the pre-existing relationship she has with the object of her call. This elides the sexual identity that has followed Mary in her physical similarity to her aunt and in society's reaction to her beautiful working-class female body. This calling forth of the mother underscores a love that is markedly non-erotic. Though this maternal moment changes soon after, with Mary blushing—a "look of memory and intelligence" (229) entering her expression—for a moment, Mary's need to be nurtured renders Jem a maternal stage for the child.⁴

In *Bleak House*, Esther as an asexual mother extends to the middle-class domestic setting. She becomes Mr. Jarndyce's housekeeper. He, Ada, and

⁴ Lisa Surridge's "Working-Class Masculinities in *Mary Barton*," discusses the relationship between working-class men and maternity in more detail.

Richard assign her nicknames that erase her age and desirability. Esther describes them, writing, “Old Woman and Little Old Woman, and Cobweb, and Mrs. Shipton, and Mother Hubbard, and Dame Durden, and so many names of that sort that my own name soon became quite lost among them” (107). These euphemisms for Esther both age and mythologize her within the Jarndyce household. She fulfills the role of ideal housekeeper at a time when middle-class constructions of the “Angel of the House” emphasized the maintenance of the domestic space. Though she is not even twenty-one when she comes to Bleak House, her constructed family creates a fiction in which she is “the image of an old, married drudging” (Zwerdling 431). For a character whose relationship to her identity is fraught with feelings of guilt and unworthiness, this erasure is at once desired and feared. It provides her free movement within the house and allows her to “win love.” Alternately, as Judith Wilts notes in “Confusion and Consciousness in Dickens’s Esther”:

The other side of the independent, active, old-maidish identity she chooses is that of sexual sleep, a self-contradiction half-known to her through the bouts of tears that come every time she resists marriage proposals and fancies, even Guppy’s. (300)

In Dickens’s locating of Esther as an ideal mother figure, Esther, as a person capable of sexual desires and sensation, is subsumed by what “Dame Durden represents. The narrative of domestic stability swallows up her personhood.

Esther’s role as a first person narrator in *Bleak House*, in which Dickens grants her “the ‘I’ of the bildungsroman” (Helena Michie 200), creates a larger textual space upon which her relationship with her mother and her own

performance of maternity collide and confront each other. Motherhood and artistic expression are inherently linked, not only in Esther's writing of herself, but in theories of autobiography and artistic expression. Mavor connects the process of art and artistic depictions of maternity, writing, "the difficulty of revealing, finding, and releasing the mother in art is curiously inherent to the metaphors of artistic production itself." She expands on this by including Susan Suleiman's argument that in artistic expression "the mother is the essential but silent other, the mirror in whom the child searches for his own reflection, the body he seeks to appropriate" ("To Make Mary"). Dever has explicitly linked Esther's writing of herself with her relationship to her largely absent mother, arguing that, "there is a direct relationship between abandonment, articulation, and specifically between the death of the mother and the birth of an authorial subject" (42). Esther's writing is a result of this absent relationship as she seeks to give birth to herself and her own legitimate identity. *Bleak House* argues, then, in both the narrative structure and the story itself, that there is a new non-sexual space for the mother to be found.

Consequently, when Esther's narrative collides with Lady Dedlock's letter detailing her birth, only one narrative is allowed to leave the woods at Chesney Wold. Esther discusses the contents of the letter, and the origin they provide for her, writing, "I clearly derived from it...that I had not been abandoned by my mother...the godmother of my childhood, discovering signs of life in me when I had been laid aside as dead...reared me in rigid secrecy" (487). Esther

then burns the letter, per Lady Dedlock's request that it be destroyed. In her book *Dickens and the Despised Mother: A Critical Reading of Three Autobiographical Novels*, Shale Preston argues that this burning illustrates the anger and violence that Esther, and by extension Dickens, has for mothers. An alternate reading, however, would be that burning the letter, in a textual space where words have been historically circulated and manipulated is the only way to ensure that Esther both controls her origin story and tries to protect her mother's already doomed reputation.⁵

Both of these motives can be read before and after Esther's burning of the letter. She writes, "What more the letter told me needs not be repeated here. It has its own time and place in my story." This assertion of editorial control, especially "my story" allows Esther to remain in control of her relationship with the reader. The pain she feels after burning the letter is not anger at the mother but a remembrance of the rejection and erasure that Esther felt as a child. She writes, "I hope it may not appear very unnatural or bad in me, that...I was so confused and shaken as to be possessed by a belief that it was right...that I should die in my birth...and not intended that I should then be alive" (487). The violence in this scene becomes against Esther and her role as child. Esther, who loves through service, obeys her mother by deleting the confession of her sexual difference. By erasing the physical evidence of the sin of her mother, Esther attempts to release the mother from the sexual shame attached to her, and be at

⁵ Such as in the legal document in Nemo's handwriting that causes Lady Dedlock to fall ill and Mr. Tulkinghorn to investigate her.

once the dutiful daughter and her own mother, giving birth to herself through narrative. The psychic pain she feels in this moment can be read as the trauma of attempting to divide herself, so she can inhabit the role of both asexual mother and obedient child.

While the first person narrative of *Bleak House* provides a vehicle for Esther to move past the contamination of her mother's sexual misconduct—to write and articulate a self that is separate from problematic female sexuality—the third person narrative style of *Mary Barton* does not allow the same freedom. The narrator directly addresses the reader, asking, “To whom shall the outcast prostitute tell her tale? Who will give her help in the days ahead? Hers is the leper-sin, and all stand aloof, dreading to be counted unclean” (147). Paradoxically, the narrator, by giving Esther an opportunity to trace her fall through storytelling, negates the individuality of her tale. While Esther Summerson is able to give birth to herself through the use of the first person, the Esther in *Mary Barton* is essentialized, becoming a symbol that tells not only her story, but that of “the Prostitute.” The direct address to the reader affirms the fictional nature of the story. The evocation of contagion also shows that even her maternity and nurturing, while complicating, cannot completely elide the social marker of her illicit sexuality.

By the end of *Bleak House*, Esther has been able to achieve the angelic construction of motherhood that elides not only Lady Dedlock but also the philanthropically minded Mrs. Jellyby with her overlooked and angry children.

Esther's marriage to Woodcourt is presented in asexual terms, emphasizing her continued non-erotic role as the housekeeper of Bleak House, rather than her sexual role as wife. Devers argues that in the character of Esther, the "paradoxical condition of the mother as both necessary and impossible is appropriated and reconfigured" (52). By the end of the narrative she has married Woodcourt and has given birth to two daughters, but when she refers to them it is in connection to their calling Jarndyce 'guardian' like Esther's darling, Ada. This situates her biological children outside of their relationship to Esther, highlighting instead the closeness of her family to Jarndyce's. This way of articulating the family dynamic effaces the female sexuality that must have existed in order for these children to be born. In order to erase her sexuality, Esther's biological children become part of the larger group that she has mothered.

Female sexual difference is localized to Lady Dedlock, whom Esther does not mention in the final moments of the narrative. Lady Dedlock has become unrecognizable in her anonymous death. Esther finds her mother's body with Inspector Bucket. She writes, "I saw before me, lying on the step, the mother of the dead child...I lifted the heavy head, put the long dank hair aside, and turned the face. And it was my mother, cold and dead" (756). Esther approaches the body thinking that it is the lower-class woman Jenny. The ultimate anonymity of Lady Dedlock's body, marked as it has been throughout the novel by her sexuality, punishes her for her transgression. Stripped of her title and her relationship to Sir Leicester, Lady Dedlock becomes solely the threat of female

sexuality she represents. This final moment implies that female sexuality is a class-based behavior and the text, in death, situates Lady Dedlock within the lower class. This is the social place that her unregulated sexuality would, the text argues, naturally situate her.

Esther Summerson's confusion about whose body she finds also conflates working women such as Jenny, who is married and has had a child in wedlock, with the body of the prostitute. In "Glazed Expression: Mary Barton, Ghosts and Glass," David Ellison notes that within social reform novels there exists a "visual system that routinely fails to see the poor" (484). The social category in which Dickens ultimately places Lady Dedlock is investigated and made more visible in *Mary Barton*. Elsie Michie notes that:

When Esther Summerson exclaims, "It was my mother, cold and dead," the scene is reminiscent of the one in Gaskell's novel in which Esther, the prostitute, returns home disguised in the clothes of a respectable working-class woman, and Mary Barton sees in her "a form, so closely resembling her dead mother that [she] never doubted the identity, but exclaimed... 'Oh! mother! mother! You are come at last'." (113)

In *Bleak House*, depictions of the working class don't fully realize the diversity in social positions that existed within the strata of working-class society. The scene in which Mary misrecognizes her aunt as her mother highlights their differences even as both identities collapse onto Esther's body. She is not Mary's mother. Rather, as the reader and Esther recognize, she is the prostitute, excluded from private domestic space. She can only exist as mother in Mary's dream-like psychic space. In Elsie Michie's reading, Lady Dedlock similarly becomes a part

of this pattern of misrecognition; the body of the working-class woman becomes conflated with the body of the mother and the prostitute.

While Lady Dedlock's death situates her outside of the home, in *Mary Barton*, Esther's final scene affirms that her maternity allows her to enter the domestic sphere. At the end of the novel, Mary and Jem find the sick Esther literally fallen on the street where she works. In "Brief Encounters: Street Scenes in Gaskell's Manchester" Sue Zemka traces the resonance of this movement, arguing that Mary and Jem bring her in from "a hostile space of public judgement (the streets that Esther walks as a pariah...) into a private interior, ruled by love" (802). Once in the home, the sick Esther wakes up and is confused by the domestic setting. The text traces this:

"Has it been, a dream then?"...Then with a habit, which came like instinct even in that awful dying hour, her hand sought for a locket which hung concealed in her bosom, and, finding that, she knew all was true which had befallen her since last she lay an innocent girl on that bed...she held the locket containing her child's hair still in her hand. (363)

This moment begins with temporary relief, with Esther thinking that she has not actually become a prostitute. The locket with her daughter's hair, however, reminds her of her occupation and, by extension, her sexual deviancy. The text does not separate the two but links them together; Esther cannot inhabit the theater of the mother without also being grounded in the body of the prostitute. Motherhood, in this final scene, becomes the identity that complicates the reading of Esther's prostitution as a signifier of tainted female sexuality. Whereas *Bleak House* separates motherhood from the sexually transgressive female body, *Mary*

Barton presents a character whose sexual transgression is intimately related to her identity as a mother. Like Lady Dedlock, however, Mary's aunt Esther dies. These women are given, to use Alex Woloch's phrase, limited "character space" and are evacuated from the narrative's structure in order for the novels' protagonists to fully realize themselves. While the text can visualize a body that is at once mothering and sexual, it does not fully rehabilitate aunt Esther's sexually transgressive identity. Rather, her burial with John Barton, in an unmarked grave, renders her and her story anonymous in a way that is similar to Lady Dedlock's death.

The actual and constructed daughters of these sexually transgressive women, then, become bearers of maternity, re-envisioning it in a more respectable and nonsexual way. Dickens, at the end of his novel, tries to argue that motherhood holds an un-erotic form of female beauty. Esther ends her narrative by writing:

I know that my dearest little pets are very pretty, and that my darling is very beautiful, and that my husband is very handsome, and that my guardian has the brightest and most benevolent face that was ever seen; and that they can do very well without much beauty in me—even supposing—. (817)

At the end of *Bleak House* it seems that everyone is explicitly beautiful, except Esther, the ideal mother. Ending ambiguously as it does, the text implies that she is made beautiful because of her role as ideal mother. This maternal beauty is in opposition to the initial beauty she had that replicated the tainted and sexualized beauty of her mother. The novel's close seeks to reconcile the dichotomy

inherent in maternity by separating the paradox of middle-class mother as domestic angel and as sexual actor. Dickens, however, finds himself somewhat caught by the interplay between the sexuality of the mother and the angel of the house. His implication with the denigration of Lady Dedlock is that female sexual difference is based on class. This distancing of contaminated female sexuality does not explain how Esther can excise the sexual transgression that has been linked directly to her birth and then so easily reproduce her own legitimate children. In order to be a successful wife, Esther and Woodcourt's marriage must be fertile, but the existence of biological children alludes to the existence of a female sexual difference that has been, by the end of the novel, all but erased. The text ends so ambiguously in part because the reality of Esther's body as a mother's body cannot fully escape the concurrent reality of female sexuality.

Mary Barton also ends ambiguously in relation to sexuality and maternity. Like Esther Summerson, Mary reproduces, having a son named Johnnie. This text, then, elides the problems of female sexuality by the birth of a son as opposed to a daughter. Mary will not see her aunt Esther reincarnated in the body of her son in the same way that Esther saw herself replicated in Mary. While Dickens locates transgressive female sexuality in the working-class female body, *Mary Barton* locates the working-class protagonists outside of England. Moving to Canada has enabled Mary to move outside of the tradition of transgressive female sexuality that was first enacted by Esther's unmarried relationship and then her fall into prostitution. Jenny Uglow, in her reading of

Mary Barton, argues that it is “only by annihilating one side of their natures—the violent father and the sexual, narcissistic ‘mother’ that the text can envision a future in which Jem and Mary’s hereditary link to criminality is overridden by their own characters” (210). While different from the nebulous space of the woods in which Lady Dedlock and Esther Summerson were able to enact their moment of maternal connection, Canada becomes a real, but distant, space where the characters can reconcile and reimagine the identities they could not escape in urban Manchester. By ending in this location, *Mary Barton*, like *Bleak House*, ends ambiguously, neither fully reconciling female sexuality to the mother’s body, nor envisioning a space within their own nation where the sexual female body can exist without anxiety.

Both *Mary Barton* and *Bleak House* textually reflect the same ambiguities and complexities that Carol Mavor discusses in Julia Margaret Cameron’s photographs. In *Bleak House*, motherhood becomes an ambiguous space where female sexuality and maternity collide and confront each other in the person who is meant to be the idealized image of the angel of the house. *Mary Barton*, within the confines of the working class, locates motherhood in the body of the prostitute, complicating the reading of the mother as a non-sexual entity. In *Bleak House*, motherhood is at once lauded and idealized while female sexual agency and difference are erased. In the working class, where Dickens ultimately locates problematic female sexuality, economic realities mean that motherhood necessarily functions differently, as Esther only becomes a prostitute to save

herself and her daughter from starvation. Ultimately, the theater of the mother and the stage of the child are read differently across class lines. Esther Summerson becomes a stable and safe space for the other motherless characters to reenact the mother-child relationship, which their own mothers do not provide. Esther, however, in having her own children, cannot efface the direct link between female sexuality and motherhood that is held in the maternal body. Dickens's text rejects the "theater of the mother" as a de-sexualized Esther replaces each maternal figure in the text. While the text does succeed in locating a mother figure outside of female sexuality, it cannot escape the construction of successful femininity as both biological mother and angel of the house. Esther's need to reach the middle-class marker of femininity that is biological motherhood proves that the sexual reality of the maternal body cannot be erased. These paradoxes frustrate *Bleak House* as the text attempts to create a space where the mother can be completely separated from the taint of female sexuality.

In the working class, Mary Barton's emotional need creates theaters of the mother on problematic bodies: that of the male worker and that of the prostitute. Her lover Jem and her aunt Esther alternately provide the comfort, solace, and momentary stability that define the theater of the mother and allows for Mary to enact a temporary stage of the child. In *Mary Barton*, the needs of the child overcome, if for a moment, female sexual difference. In aunt Esther's own narrative, those needs and the material realities of poverty and hunger lead her to the role of prostitute. While *Mary Barton* allows for female bodies to be multi-

faceted and complex in a way that the middle-class constructions of maternity in *Bleak House* does not, it still struggles to visualize a space in society where such bodies can be located and then allowed to survive the experiences that problematize and make the social construction of mother more complex. *Mary Barton*, by allowing the working-class female body to be temporarily both the body of the mother and the body of the prostitute, makes visible a reality of inequalities that Dickens's rhetoric of motherhood and respectability effaces. For *Mary Barton*, psychic pain and emotional and physical need work together to interrogate constructions of the mother. Need ultimately outweighs the sexual politics surrounding women's bodies. This need breaks down, if only for a moment, the social barriers and mores surrounding both maternity and female sexual transgression in order to reclaim the ability of the maternal female body to be at once mother and sexually transgressive.

CHAPTER FOUR

Disease, Exhaustion, and the Worker in *North and South* and *Hard Times*

Capital oversteps not only the moral, but even the merely physical maximum bounds of the working-day. It usurps the time for growth, development, and healthy maintenance of the body...it is the greatest possible daily expenditure of labour-power, no matter how diseased, compulsory, and painful it may be...It attains this end by shortening the extent of the labourer's life, as a greedy farmer snatches increased produce from the soil by robbing it of its fertility.

Karl Marx, "Working Day," *Capital*, 1867

This political investment of the body is bound up, in accordance with complex reciprocal relations, with its economic use: it is largely as a force of production that the body is invested with relations of power and domination...the body becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive body and a subjected body.

Michel Foucault, "On Punishment," *Discipline and Punish*, 1975

One of the inescapable facts about Manchester life was that it was soon over.

John Lucas, *The Literature of Change*, 1977

Bessy Higgins, the factory girl Margaret befriends in Elizabeth Gaskell's novel *North and South* (1854), enters the story already dying. Bleakly, she lays out the rhythm of her life for Margaret:

"When I am in a fever, half-asleep and half-awake—it comes back upon me...And I think, if this should be th' end of all, and if all I've been born for is just to work my heart and my life away, and to sicken i' this dree place, wi' them mill-noises in my ears for ever, until I could scream out for them to stop and let me have a little piece o' quiet—and with the fluff

filling my lungs until I thirst to death for one long deep breath...I think if this life is th' end, and that there's no God to wipe away all tears from all eyes..." said she, sitting up, and clutching violently, almost fiercely, at Margaret's hand, "I could go mad, and kill yo', I could." (102)

With her life coming to a close, Bessy, whom Barbara Hardy has argued was "the most extensive portrait of a factory girl in the mainstream industrial novels" (35), articulates a pattern of perpetual physical exhaustion, working her "heart and her life away." This distinction, between heart, a space for passion and individual desire, and the work that has drained her both physically and mentally speaks to other dichotomies that Bessy, as young woman and factory worker, holds. Her rage, her momentary lapse into violence, her "I could kill yo', I could," highlights her anger. She is split between hope for a revitalizing spiritual afterlife and frustration at the monotonous and exhausting rhythm of her daily life. Caught in a liminal reality, her illness immobilizes her and her senses are overwhelmed by the sounds of industry. The clamor from the factory is perpetual, haunting not only her day but her sleep as well. These sounds cause her to be torn between a desire for peace and the wildness of a wounded animal. Internally, Bessy is also being overwhelmed by another symptom of the factory: the "fluff," or pieces of cotton, that fill and infect her lungs. Suffocating from the inside out, she is unable to inhale a peaceful breath while the unceasing sounds of the factory oversaturate her senses. Her body is striving to reject these results of the industrial revolution, but its effects persist, overwhelming and pummeling her senses.

The factory has changed Bessy's sense of hearing and ability simply to breathe. She is overpowered by "them mill-noises in my ears for ever, until I could scream out for them to stop, and let me have a little piece o' quiet." Bessy is suffocating. The materials of her labor, and the deafening reality of the factory, have not only grafted themselves to her body but penetrated it, affecting her subjectivity to the point that she cannot exist without being haunted by the sensory violence of the mill. Her work, that of a laboring Hand, affects her body, and the malignant effects of the factory call her whole physical body into being, highlighting how the labor she performs has weakened her body and inhibited her ability to breath.

The image that Bessy and her illness paints is one of being overwhelmed by her labor and the industrial factory system. In her essay, "Work and the Body in Hardy and Other Nineteenth-Century Novelists," Elaine Scarry argues, "the human being in work puts himself by his very depth of engagement, continually at risk—that he alters the world only by consenting to be himself deeply altered" (96). The body of the worker becomes a permeable and open boundary, interacting with the environment as the environment acts upon it. Scarry writes, "the materials of labor are grafted to the body of the person who is performing that action" (105). Labor and the body, therefore, have an intimate relationship. Scarry follows this relationship in Hardy's novel *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* where the worker's body interacts with a rural setting. In Hardy's work, hay, dirt, and paint, rather than smoke, dust, and cotton hang on the worker's body.

William Cohen also writes on Hardy, arguing “by means of sensory perception, [he] demonstrates the continuity between an extremely wide spatiotemporal vantage on human action—that of the geological...the historical—and the...one supplied by the individual body” (107). In his book *Embodied*, Cohen argues that the body interacts with its environment. He writes, “This mixture of world and body...the landscape is a body, the body a landscape, each is perceptible to the senses, each capable of sensory experience” (101). For Cohen, the body becomes metonymic with landscape, collapsing ideological movements, social commentary, and historical moments into itself. By placing Cohen and Scarry’s work in conversation with each other, the relationship between the laborer, the setting, and the work performed within that physical space makes visible an expansive network of exchange and representation. I argue that when the worker’s body is transported from an agrarian setting to the soot-covered and dust-filled factory system, permeability persists, but becomes pathologized. The refuse and raw products of industry are ingested, inhaled, and thereby incorporated into the worker’s body. At once ubiquitous and ambiguous, the fluff in Bessy’s lungs is an unspecified signifier of industry that suffocates the worker as he or she operates within an unrelenting factory system.

Once removed from a rural setting and caught in the pollution of the factory system, the permeability of the working body takes on new political and social meaning within both *Hard Times* and *North and South*. Dickens and Gaskell, publishing these works simultaneously, rearticulate and re-envision the

worker's body through illness while interrogating the metonymic and essentializing the term Hand. In the factory, where the exhausting and repetitive work dislocates what Scarry and Cohen perceive as the free exchange between work and worker, this ostensibly symbiotic relationship becomes parasitic. The factory owners feed on the labor of the worker, to the point where the worker becomes diseased, exhausted, and broken. For Dickens, this numbing pattern of labor overlooks the individual humanity of the worker, leading to miscommunication and misdirected anger. By linking the factory and its unforgiving mode of production to illness, Gaskell, meanwhile, argues that the existing factory system is itself diseased, as its products and industrial waste do not nurture but prematurely end the lives of the workers. Eventually, the real setting of the factory must be reimagined as a space of connection in order for its deadly effects to be overridden and replaced.

The factory system and the industrial town are unique in England's northern landscape. Dickens writes, "Coketown lay shrouded in a haze of its own, which appeared impervious to the sun's rays. You only knew the town was there because you knew there could have been no such sulky blotch upon the prospect without a town." For Dickens, the manufacturing town becomes a site within the English landscape that is suggestive only of itself. Viewed from the outside, the industrial setting is simultaneously fantastical, unnatural, and impenetrable. It is a closed system with the smoky haze of industry acting as both a signifier, generating definition and meaning, and a barrier "where Nature

was as strongly bricked out as killing airs and gases were bricked in” (69).

Coketown becomes a space where nature, vitality, and the possibility for growth are not permitted to enter. Rather, that which generates life is subsumed by that which generates labor and profit. In his article, “Melancholia and Machinery: the Dystopic Landscape and Mindscape in *Hard Times*,” Darcy Lewis links the portrayal of Coketown with the psychic pain caused by utilitarianism. He argues, “Dickens's construction of the physical manifestation of industrialism works correlatively to the psychic effects of utilitarianism on the people within” (18). For Lewis, Coketown’s aesthetic sameness and underlying reductive mentality anticipates constructions of the urban dystopic setting. I would add that in its articulation of the emergence of the factory town as a closed and discordant blemish upon a natural, idyllic, landscape, the text creates a dichotomy between the natural, or rural, system and the fabricated, but powerful, industrial town. The text defamiliarizes the industrial setting, making the mechanization of industry an ideology that both infuses the minds of its citizens and permeates the physical structure of the town. Dickens’s *Hard Times*, then, takes the reader outside of the township in order to reintroduce them to the factory town, with his text acting as both a guide and a translator, navigating the physical space where sunlight and fresh air are excluded and penetrating the pollution of the factory.

If the industrial town becomes a closed and unnatural environment for Dickens then similarly, for Gaskell’s *North and South*, the factories in Milton and the physical byproducts of industry—made tangible by the dirt and dust that must

be cleaned—cannot be contained within the established space of the factory but saturate the whole town. Upon entering Milton, the Hales note, “a thick fog crept up to the very windows, and was driven into every open door in choking white wreaths of unwholesome mist” (Gaskell 66). The smoke and dust permeates the homes of both Mrs. Thornton and the Hales. In *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, Mary Douglas traces the anxiety surrounding dirt, writing, “Dirt is never a unique, isolated event. Where there is dirt there is a system. Dirt is the by-product of a systemic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements” (36). Thus, dirt becomes matter that is out of place and infused with social significance. In the instance of Mrs. Thornton’s home, both the refuse of labor and dust from the factory continuously generates labor, as her servants must work to sanitize the domestic space. The text draws attention to this labor, and Margaret notes its futile attempt to generate domesticity. The narrator writes that Margaret:

was hardly conscious of the peculiar cleanliness required to keep everything so white and pure in such an atmosphere, or of the trouble that must be willingly expended to secure that effect of icy, snowy discomfort. Where she looked there was evidence of care and labour, but not care and labour to procure ease, to help on habits of tranquil home employment; solely to ornament and then to preserve ornament from dust and destruction. (112)

The text highlights not only the degree of labor but also the evacuating quality of both the cleanliness of the home and the labor itself; after clearing away the dirt, only an empty and artificial domestic setting remains. Simultaneously, this moment points to the inability to psychically expunge these indicators of industry

without creating a domestic space that is alienating because it is too clean and, consequentially, unsuccessful in its performance of domestic comfort.

Though more successful, the Hales also struggle to keep their home free from the dust and other physical indicators of industry. Though not directly involved in manufacturing and therefore only marginally complicit in the factory system, living in Milton means that they must combat the dust that infiltrates their home in order to preserve a clean, and inviting, domestic space. The text personalizes the relationship between labor and this additional housework by focusing on Margaret's labor and the work that she must exert in order to keep her family's home clean.¹ It becomes an anxiety-filled cycle, in which dust is continually invading the home, and thereby creating work, as its presence and its definitive power, must be made invisible.

In the industrial setting, therefore, it is not only the factory laborer directly involved in work that becomes an open body. As Scarry notes, "the world is forever rubbing up against and leaving traces of itself"(90) on *all* residents, varying only in its degree of saturation and malignancy. While some people, through different amounts of effort, can erase the industrial marker of dust, all spaces, if not all bodies, come to be infused with labor's byproduct, as it settles into the fabric and structures of its environment. Others cannot so easily escape the dust's presence. The dirt that holds so much anxiety for the people who clean

¹ Margaret's relationship to her hands and the work that they produce is discussed in more depth in Chapter Two.

middle and upper-class homes marks the worker, signaling their alienation and separation from the middle-class family and the middle-class home.

The factory worker's relationship with industry is, of course, much more intimate than that of the middle-class citizen of Milton. In contrast to *North and South*, which does not enter the factory, *Hard Times* follows Stephen into the factory where he works. Dickens writes:

Stephen bent over his loom, quiet, watchful, and steady. A special contrast, as every man was in the forest of the looms where Stephen worked, to the crashing, smashing, tearing piece of mechanism at which he labored...Set anywhere, side by side, the work of God and the work of man; and the former, even though it be a troops of Hands of very small account, will gain in dignity from the comparison...The work went on, until the noon-bell rang...the looms, and wheels, and Hands all went out of gear for an hour. (75)

The text links the worker to the machines and mechanization of the factory. In the setting of Coketown, though not in the eyes of the narrator—who is careful to highlight the difference in quality and dignity between man and machine—the laboring body of the worker and the work of the machine, are one and the same. This extension, collapsing worker into machine, anticipates Marx's connection to labor and production in *Capital*. Marx writes, “[Capital] higgles over a meal-time, incorporating it where possible with the process of production itself, so that food is given to the labourer as a mere means of production, as coal is supplied to the boiler, grease and oil to the machinery.” While Thornton and Mary Higgins's creation of a factory mess hall will eventually make a reading of this relationship more complex in *North and South*, in *Hard Times* the work of the laborer fuels the

profits of industry and the laborer is absorbed by the factory, reduced to merely an extension of the machinery.

The laborer, having become part of the machine must then struggle to assert his or her humanity. As Marx notes in his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, “the realization of labour appears as a loss of reality for the worker, objectification as loss of and bondage to the object, and appropriation as estrangement, as alienation” (86-87). In his article “The Political Economy of the Dead: Marx’s Vampires,” Mark Neocleous argues that “in such a system, human beings are alienated...from other human being and thereby also from themselves...in damaging human beings, capital damages them as sensuous creatures” (682). As Neocleous notes, the factory system, by reducing workers to merely laboring mechanisms whose importance comes exclusively from their ability to generate capital, commits an act of psychic violence against the workers. By treating the workers as machines, the workers are forced to separate their ability to be sensing and connecting beings from their physical labor. In *North and South*, Bessy’s labor deprives the worker of her ability to properly reclaim her senses from the power of the factory.

With the clang of the factory in their ears, the bodies of the workers carry the signs of labor both on and within their bodies. When Higgins goes to visit the Hales, he is aware that the dirt from his labor does not belong in the house. He remarks to Margaret, after looking down on his hands and feet, “I should m’appen ha’ cleaned mysel’, first” (Gaskell 219). Higgins removes his shoes in order to

prevent the dirt—an explicit indicator of his working-class identity—from marking the Hales’ middle-class house. He is conscious that he is out of place, “stepping cautiously on every dark mark in the pattern of the oil-cloth, in order to conceal his dirty foot-prints” (219). This is not to say that Higgins and the dirt he brings with him are interchangeable. Dirt is not naturalized in its appearance on his body. The narrator is careful to note that, through more labor, it can be cleaned and washed off.² Higgins is not inherently dirty, but the labor that he performs—which sustains the town—rubs off on him. The anxiety surrounding dirt is underscored here, because, although this performance of work fuels the town’s economy, and by extension enable the Hales to live there, the signifier of this labor, the dirt, is shown to not belong within the middle-class’s respectable home. While Nicholas and Mr. Hale are able to engage in a candid and respectful discussion, unlike the Hales’, Higgins must have this conversation with the dirt from his working body marking him in this home, where the specter of industry has been temporarily expunged. Once Higgins leave their home, Margaret and their domineering servant Dixon will work to remove the mark of labor that accompanied him into the house; any tangible evidence that he entered the middle-class domestic setting will be erased.

Bessy carries the mark of her labor, the fluff, inside of her. It cannot be cleaned or erased. She tells Margaret:

² In *Mary Barton*, dirt functions much differently, becoming a symbol of belonging for the working-class body.

Fluff got into my lungs and poisoned me... bits, as fly off fro' the cotton, when they're carding it, and fill the air till it looks like a fine white dust. They say it winds round the lungs and tightens them up. Anyhow, there's many a one as works in a carding-room, that falls into a waste, coughing and spitting blood, because they're just poisoned by the fluff. (102)

Bessy suffers from the disease *byssinosis* which was first diagnosed in the Blue Book in 1860 (433).³ The harsh reality of a foreign invader entering the body, stifling the lungs, is juxtaposed by the use of the innocuous term “fluff” to describe the cotton particles that fly out into the air during the manufacturing process. By allowing Bessy to explain how she became ill and coupling this explanation with the use of the vernacular, the text allows Bessy to communicate directly with the reader. The narrative paints a sympathetic view of the worker whose body has been “rubbing up against” industry. Not only does this moment in the text explicitly link Bessy’s illness, and eventual death, to the factory system, it also highlights the conflict of ownership that such an illness embodies. In her article “Women, Cloth, Fluff, and Dust in Elizabeth Gaskell’s *North and South*,” Neuville writes, “In Bessy’s life, cotton exists first and foremost as raw material in the process of being transformed, and what this transformation brings about is a violation of the only thing she has got to call her own, which is her body” (283). In exchange for her factory wage, Bessy has inadvertently been forced to unknowingly trade her body. Neocleous notes that “sensuousness is the foundation of our species-being; it is the vampire-like capital that is the death of

³ As cited in the Penguin Classics edition that was edited and introduced by Patricia Ingham in 1996.

true sensuousness” (682). The capital generating system of the factory has afforded her no respite, no instance where, sensorily, she is not inhabiting the role of worker. Rather, even as her body becomes too exhausted to perform work, the sounds of the factory still pervade and overwhelm her.

The factory pervades Bessy’s life socially as well as sensorily. Strikers move in and out of her house, talking to her and Nicholas. Bessy, because of her illness, cannot escape discussion of the strike and the workers’ anger. Instead, she absorbs their *loud* anger. Her helplessness and immobility is highlighted throughout the text and a frequent refrain in her interactions with the privileged Margaret is her jealousy at how Margaret has lived in “pleasant green places all your life long.” Bessy’s body is both weak and permeable; it becomes a repository for the physical and psychic byproducts of the factory. Coupled with her desire to walk in an open, silent, setting, Bessy becomes sensorily trapped in Dickens’s representation of a closed and dystopic Coketown. Thirsting for fresh air, she inhales cotton and it chokes her. While Dickens moves the reader out of the city in order to re-encounter it, Gaskell telescopes into the closed urban setting, tracking the suffocating sensations of industry that are pressing into the workers’ bodies and inhibiting their sensuousness and subjectivity.

Bessy’s illness, and its specificity to industry, expands upon notions of the diseased body as a literary signifier within narrative. In *Disease, Desire, and the Body*, Pamela Gilbert writes that the body, that “fundamental trope of human experience,” becomes othered and alienated through disease. Jacques Sarano

argues “disease defines our bodies as both part of the self and alienated from [the self] through the experience of pain” (quoted in Gilbert 105). Illness divides the body from the person, splicing the self from the physical body that it necessarily inhabits. As noted above, Bessy’s illness serves as a inhibitor, preventing her from moving past the confines of the city and into nature, where she might have a “deep breath o’ the clear air” (Gaskell 102). While Cohen argues that “Gender does not determine the relative permeability or imperviousness of characters’ bodies”(29),⁴ I would argue that class does determine the degree to which that character’s body is vulnerable to material intrusion. It is as a worker, rather than as a woman, that Bessy is inherently exposed to the dangerous exchange between factory and worker. This same class-based vulnerability is seen in Boucher’s body post-suicide and in Stephen’s physical signs of exhaustion. Since, unlike the middle-class body that resides in its sanitized home, the laborer’s body is more open to the materials of work, their bodies are also more vulnerable to physical and psychical disease.

While disease pathologizes this mode of exchange between labor and the laboring body, it also reverses the erasure inherent in the metonymic device that both Boucher and Thornton employ when they refer to their workers as Hands. In *Afterimage of Empire*, Zahid Chaudhary states, “the factory figures in the nineteenth century as a counterphantasmagoria based as it is on principles of

⁴ Cohen, and Silverman, are engaging with, and negating, the pre-existing idea that the woman’s body was more open and fluid because of her assumed passivity. Regardless of a person’s gender, Cohen argues, the body is permeable because it is at once a subject moving in the world and an object upon which the world acts. The biological sex of a body is secondary to its subjecthood.

fragmentation rather than visions of wholeness” (92). While he is writing in relation to the factory system and modes of assembly, this also happens when the label of Hands is used to signify the laboring body. This signifier not only essentializes the worker and their bodies to the labor they produce but, to continue Chaudhary’s logic, it also fractures and inhibits a reading of the complex power relationship between worker and factory. It is Bessy’s lungs rather than her hands that bear the signs of her labor. The narrative surrounding Bessy’s illness, especially her haunting remark, “there’s many a one as works in a carding-room, that falls into a waste,”(102) refuses this construction of the worker as only a functioning pair of hands. It forces, through illness, the whole body to be made visible and argues that the body of the worker is more than an extension of the machine. It is a vulnerable marker of the shared human experience, as the body can break down by falling ill and dying. This metonymic use of the workers’ body, as a signifier for the worker, emphasizes the parts of the worker that are erased in the euphemistic Hands, such as the lungs which can’t respire and the back that has been bent and broken by years operating a machine. Illness lights up the body of the worker, so that hands, as the source of labor power, are not all that is understood to be involved in the labor process. While the hands of the worker may produce the labor, it is the worker’s body that in turn bears the physical sign of that labor.

Bessy’s illness and Stephen’s exhaustion both bear witness to the worker’s body. These physical markers also individualize the worker, marking the passage

of time as he or she toils in the monotony of factory work. Engels highlights this monotony in *Conditions of the Working-Class*. He writes, “[In most branches of industry] the activity of the worker is limited to some insignificant and purely mechanical manipulation, repeated minute after minute, remaining year in and year out” (119). Catherine Gallagher in *Body Economic: Life, Death, and Sensation in Political Economy and the Victorian Novel*, argues that the most pervasive problem in *Hard Times* is, quite simply, labor in its repetitious invariability”(63).⁵ Both Bessy and Stephen corroborate this sentiment, with Bessy telling Margaret, “all I’ve been born for is just to work my heart and my life away” and the narrator noting that Stephen, “looked older but he had had a hard life.” Dickens writes that the factories of Coketown “contained...people equally like one another, who all went in and out at the same hours, with the same sound...to do the same work, and to whom every day was the same as yesterday and tomorrow” (Dickens 29). Illness draws an immovable line between the functioning, machine-like, expectation of the factory workers within this system—where sameness is to be assumed—and the workers as embodied subjects. It does this by emphasizing the vulnerability of the workers’ body and health. While machines can break down, the human body can fall ill, becoming physically exhausted and psychically broken by the industrial system. Illness and exhaustion, then, rewrite the worker’s body, highlighting both this mortality and a

⁵ Gallagher then continues this notion by extending the pervasiveness of labor to Dickens’ writing of *Hard Times*.

need for substance, variety, and engagement. Dickens vaguely describes this idea as “fancy.” Illness bears witness to the passage of time within a system that exists in perpetuity and, by extension, emphasizes how the factory worker cannot survive or subsist on the profits or byproducts of this system.

Subsistence and ingestion create pivotal moments in these texts.

Bounderby says to Mr. Harthouse, “You see our smoke. That’s meat and drink to us. It’s the healthiest thing in the world in all respects, and particularly for the lungs” (132). This statement is made tangible in Gaskell’s work, via Bessy’s illness and the mode of Boucher’s suicide. These workers bring Dickens metaphor to a material reality and it poisons them. They must live, eat, and drink smoke. The text makes this pathologized nourishment explicit when Bessy tells Margaret that she has heard “tell o’ men who didn’t like working in places where there was a wheel, because they said as how it made ‘em hungry, after they’d been long used to swallowing fluff” (Gaskell 102). Neuville traces this in her article, arguing, “Fluff thus replaces both air and food and shows industrial transformation to bring about at least one condition of modernity, which is alienation.” Similarly, Boucher’s suicide becomes visually linked to the ingestion of industry when the runoff dye from the factory pollutes the river in which he drowns himself and turns his skin a macabre purple. These deaths, though radically different in intent and responsibility, function with a similar methodology. They create a dichotomy between the factory setting that is meant to provide wealth and signify innovation, and the reality of what it actually

provides for its workers. Neuville writes, “if on the one hand the modern industrial system permitted a greater penetration of the market by the good produced, it also allowed on the other hand a greater penetration of the human bodies enrolled in the production” (283). What is meant to nurture instead chokes and stifles, filling the lungs of the workers instead of satisfying their actual hunger, and making not only the byproducts of industry toxic, but the people who work there polluted.

Bessy’s specificity in linking her illness to the factory becomes an indictment of the owner’s negligence and the pollution of the industrial system. Her use of language functions differently than Stephen’s refrain of “ ‘tis a muddle.” In “ ‘Melancholy Mad Elephants’: Affect and the Animal Machine in *Hard Times*,” Tamara Ketabigan notes that “tension between affective shallowness and depth is nowhere more apparent than in factory worker Stephen Blackpool” (688). His anger and frustrations of the system exhausts him while linking him to another character that similarly avoids specific language: Mrs. Gradgrind. Peter Bracher traces this in his article, “Muddle and Wonderful No Meanings: Verbal Irresponsibility and Verbal Failure in *Hard Times*,” writing “hers is an existence of completely collapsed communication” (313). The narrator describes how she has been muted by her husband’s philosophy, writing, “whenever she showed a symptom of coming to life [she] was invariable stunned by some weighty piece of fact tumbling on her” (Dickens 22). She tells Louisa and Tom, “Go and be somethingological directly” while the narrator tells us,

“Mrs. Gradgrind was not a scientific character and usually dismissed her children to their studies with this general injunction” (25). While in *North and South* the ability to speak becomes essential to the worker’s ability to articulate herself, as with Bessy, the limitations of words are also acknowledged by Higgins, a skilled speaker. He reflects, “I’m not one who think truth can be shaped out in words, all neat and clean” (227).

This sentiment appears in *Hard Times* in the Gradgrind household where words become weaponized, effectively weakening Mrs. Gradgrind. The narrator writes, “life at Stone Lodge went monotonously round like a piece of machinery which discouraged human interference” (Dickens 62). In this household, the exactness of language, devoid of emotion or feeling, allows for Louisa’s marriage. It also links the domestic system to Mrs. Gradgrind’s eventual death in which “the light, that had always been feeble and dim behind the transparency, went out” (203). Her struggle to articulate, especially in the last few moments before her death, highlights that there is a deeper, non-verbal, language that, as Higgins noted in *North and South*, cannot be contained in words. Asked if she is in pain, Mrs. Gradgrind replies, “I think there’s a pain somewhere in the room...but I couldn’t positively say that I have got it” (202). Mrs. Gradgrind is sensing her daughter Louisa’s unarticulated pain. Buried underneath her fear of exact speech lies a mother-daughter emotional connection that cannot be trapped or fully understood by fact-based language. Moments before her death, she says, “But there is something—not an ology at all—that your father has missed or

forgotten...Give me a pen...It matters little what figures of wonderful non-meaning she began to trace upon her wrappers” (203). As we see with Bounderby’s interaction with Stephen, those who control language can define for themselves and for a wider audience, those who lack that control. By resisting specific language, emotion and connection in *Hard Times*, though subverted by fact, escapes falling under verbal control.

In a novel where exactness plays a pivotal role, Mrs. Gradgrind does not suffer from a specific illness, but rather is portrayed as simply too weak to persist. She suffers a physical death that parallels what Patrick Brantlinger has argued are “other forms of death by science and by intellect” (289). Louisa suffers this temporary but damaging death at the hands of her father. She asks him, “How could you give me life, and take from me all the inappreciable things that raise it from the state of conscious death?” (Dickens 218). The term “inappreciable” speaks of that which fact excludes: sentiment, emotion, sensation, and imagination. These intangible ideas can’t easily be put into words and—because they are less easily expressed—cannot be controlled by the rigid umbrella term of “fact.” Louisa’s emotional collapse at the end of Book Two is “insensible” (221), or illegible, to Gradgrind because his reliance on rigid language excludes truths that are not wholly expressible but still felt.

Bounderby, who does not know about this other language that Mr. Gradgrind has forgotten, uses a violent assertion of language to elide responsibilities for his workers. Bounderby talks over Stephen, saying, “Now it’s

clear to me...that you are one of those chaps who have always got a grievance...that's the business of *your* life, my friend" (157). Though ostensibly bringing Stephen to his home to speak about the unionization of the workers, after Stephen's plea that the system stop "Agreeing fur to mak' one side unnat'rally awlus and forever right, and toother side unnat'rally and awlus and forever wrong" (156), Bounderby circumvents Stephen's reflection on industry and gives Stephen's life a narrow definition. He defines who Stephen is and what his values are. Though this articulation of the worker's reality is seen as transparent and unfounded by the text and Louisa, Bounderby still leaves the interaction with Stephen free from the responsibility of managing or aiding his workers.

Words, therefore, while necessary and intimately related to power in both of these novels, do not suffice when they are isolated from sentiment. Nevertheless, when coupled with emotion, that intangible thing which Dickens does not define, words can convey immense power and responsibility within these texts. This bringing together of language and sentiment is evidenced in Margaret's interaction with Mrs. Boucher when she has to tell her that her husband has killed himself. In this tense scene, where both Higgins and Mr. Hale are too overcome with emotion to assume responsibility for these painful words, Margaret becomes an envoy. Her method of informing Mrs. Boucher of what has happened collapses language and emotion. When Mrs. Boucher refers to her son Johnny as Boucher's favorite, Margaret says, "Poor little fellow! He *was* his father's darling" (Gaskell 290). This is coupled with a "tearful look" that is able

to convey the reality that cannot be fully and completely expressed through words alone. Articulating, or at least attempting to articulate, pain, can make the complete and complex reality of the worker's life more visible.

The text embodies how narrative structure can allow for emotion by creating a textual pause in the industrial landscape. Bessy describes her grief in one continuous plea when she initially lays out her life for Margaret. In one gust of a sentence, Bessy outlines the unceasing hopelessness and exhaustion of her life. Her dread and frustration are expressed in an onslaught, unceasingly, with the bleakness and hopelessness of her life pouring out from her. In one breath, she "thirsts for death" and regrets never being able to tell her mother "how I loved her and all o' my troubles." There are no pauses but, mimicking the continuous rhythm of the factory that haunts her, the truth of Bessy's life is a steady and elongated moment of frustration. Once she finishes speaking, however, the text pauses. If only for a moment, it gives her the silence she has yearned for on a textual level. Gaskell ends the paragraph, writing, "She fell back completely worn out with her passion. Margaret knelt down by her" (102). The text slows down, coming to a full and silent stop after Bessy's long sentence. It creates a momentary scene, where the middle-class young woman kneels before her dying working-class counterpart, bearing witness to her suffering. Bessy's narrative, especially in this moment, interrupts Margaret's, drawing attention to itself, and deviating from the story Margaret has constructed. This deviation is signaled, in this moment, by Margaret's response following Bessy's anger. Her "Bessy—We

have a father in Heaven” is an attempt to diffuse some of Bessy’s frustration at the unforgiving material reality that makes up her life. The move to the religious reinforces Bessy’s argument that her life has been unhappy and unyielding. By highlighting that it is only in an alternate, metaphysical, reality where Bessy can find peace, the only solution that Margaret, and the text, can think to offer her is the promise of something better once she has ceased to be a source of labor.

The text, therefore, allows Bessy to have this narrative space to feel and own her pain and frustration. If, as Scarry writes, “the human being is capable of being wholly immersed in the materials of his work” then Bessy is drowning in the material of hers (113). The text pauses when she describes her illness to Margaret. It notes that Bessy was “clutching violently, almost fiercely, at Margaret’s hand” (Gaskell 102). As Patricia Johnson notes in her book *Hidden Hands*, “Bessy’s clutching hand and momentary desire to kill Margaret are the most ferocious expressions of class antagonism that *North and South* contains” (38). The text, then, allows for Bessy to express her anger and frustration at the hopelessness of her situation and for that anger to find an object in Margaret. By putting these two stories in conversation—Margaret’s story, which dominates *North and South*, and Bessy’s, “whose story is urgent and important” (Hardy 26)—the text creates a contrast on a narrative level between the healthy middle-class nineteen year old and her weak, frustrated, doomed, working-class counterpart. This textual framing allows the systemic failure of the factory system and the pain

and frustration of factory-induced illness to be felt by Bessy, Margaret, and the reader.

Pain and feeling also permeate the second death in *North and South*: Mrs. Hale's. Both Mrs. Hale and Bessy exist as invalids within the text, but Bessy's death changes how we read Mrs. Hale's. Her illness, though initially presented by the text as a sort of perpetual fatigue, is eventually legitimized by Dr. Donaldson. Depicted sympathetically, the text actually anticipates, and engages with, this hierarchy of Bessy and Mrs. Hale's death. Margaret, when Bessy charges her with having an idyllic life, responds:

“Take care,” said Margaret, her cheek flushing, and her eye lightening, “how you judge, Bessy. I shall go home to my mother, who is so ill—so ill, Bessy, that there's no outlet but death for her out of the prison of her great suffering; and yet I must speak cheerfully to my father... The only person—the only one who could sympathise with me and help me—whose presence could comfort my mother more than any other earthly thing—is falsely accused—would run the risk of death if he came to see his dying mother... Have I not care? Do I not know anxiety, though I go about well-dressed, and have food enough?” (137)

While both moments of pain and despair deserve to be felt, Mrs. Hale's death lacks the rage that Bessy is justified in feeling. While Margaret argues for the room to feel her emotional pain, the articulation of material comfort throws the power structures that are directly linked to Bessy's death into sharp relief.

Margaret's sadness surrounding her mother's death is legitimate but the emotional pain that the Higgins family have is necessarily mediated through their material lack. Unlike the Hales, they do not “have food enough,” but like Margaret they still have the anxiety of illness and imminent death.

When Mrs. Hale dies, there is no invocation of the life she could have had; no one highlights, as Higgins does when he says “All men must die...But she were younger than me,”(216) the unnaturalness of a young person dying, or the pain of losing a child. Mrs. Hale dies surrounded by her children. The context of the novel makes her death more digestible and less tragic because, unlike Bessy, she has had the opportunity to live and the health to have children—one journeying from Spain illegally to afford her a good-bye—who can bear witness to her life and death. The text highlights the emotional preparation the Hales are afforded. The narrator says:

Mrs. Hale became more and more of a suffering invalid...with the increase of serious and just grounds of complaint, a new kind of patience had sprung up in her mother’s mind. She was gentle and quiet in intense bodily suffering, almost in proportion as she had been restless and depressed when there was no real cause for grief...Her mother drew more tenderly and more intimately towards her than she had ever done since the days of her childhood. (104)

Thus, her death, though upsetting, is not unnatural in the way Bessy’s is; Mrs. Hale has had time to say good-bye and when she dies, her family surrounds her.

This death is a significant contrast to Bessy’s, who nearly dies alone. The narrative states, “Nicholas Higgins had gone out in the morning, leaving Bessy as well as on the day before. But in an hour she was taken worse...they did not know where to find her father; Mary had only come in a few minutes before she died” (214). In these two instances of death, the text does not necessarily argue that one death is less painful than the other or less deserving of emotion. Both are mourned in the class-appropriate manner with Margaret coming to look at Bessy’s

body and the Higgins family coming to Mrs. Hale's funeral. The text, however, *is* arguing that Mrs. Hale's death was natural and ostensibly the good middle-class death. She was surrounded by family and had the opportunity to say good-bye. Bessy's death was because of the polluted industrial system that has used up her energy and ruined her body.

Bessy's fatal disease, where she has ingested and inhaled the fluff that then suffocates her, is in ironic contrast with Mrs. Hale's miasmatic fears. Dr. Donaldson, and by extension, the text, is careful to highlight the medical reality of Mrs. Hale's illness; it is not caused by industry or its byproducts but, scholars have argued, was most likely cancer (Martha Holmes "North and South"). It was not, therefore, caused by an inhalation of second-hand factory smoke even though Dixon attributes it to the family's relocation to Milton. Meanwhile, Bessy's illness is actually caused by the accidental but inevitable effects of industry permeating and invading her body. The fear of inhaling polluted air becomes an emblem of a middle-class lack of awareness of the working-class work environments. Mrs. Hale and Dixon both struggle to keep their space, and their air, free from the effects of smoke. They worry about its effects without extending their thoughts to factory conditions. The smoke, which for some members of the middle-class is a cause for anxiety, and for others, such as Bounderby, is argued to be economically nourishing, becomes tangible in the fluff that is mistaken for nourishment and inhaled by the working class.

Not only does illness mark the passage of time and industry's effects on a personal level; it also functions macroscopically, differentiating and individuating the individual worker from the many. *Hard Times* notes that while the capacity of the worker is appreciated, calculated, and thus, made visible, the individual worker is erased. The text says:

So many hundred Hands in this Mill; so many hundred horse Steam Power. It is known, to the force of a single pound weight, what the engine will do; but not all the calculators of the National Debt can tell me the capacity for good or evil, for love or hatred...at any single moment in the soul of one of these its quiet servants, with the composed faces and the regulated actions. (75)

The narrative moves from a larger vision to the more specific "soul of one of these," telescoping into the factory and the people who labor there. The phrase "hundred horse Steam Power" moves the worker into a collective, uniform, source of force and power that has been bridled by the factory. As Pamela Gilbert has noted, the working class en masse becomes something that is non-human. She writes in *The Citizen's Body*, "He who is primarily a physical [being]... can only enter the public as an unreasoning and physicalized mass of dangerous flesh, especially when the flesh is corrupt and unhealthy" (33). *North and South* traces this construction of the collected workers right before the mob scene, noting that while the sounds of the factory have ceased, there was "far away, the ominous gathering roar, deep-clamouring" (171). Once collected, the workers become bestial in their rage. When they enter the factory square, the text notes that the workers were "gaunt as wolves and mad for prey" (176). When they see

Thornton, they “set up a yell—to call it not human is nothing—it was as the demoniac desire of some terrible wild beast for the food that is withheld from his ravening” (175). While Marx constructs capital as vampiric, *North and South* creates an image of the worker as animal-like, hungry to destroy the image of the factory owner. Neocleous notes that Marx’s use of the vampire in discussing capital was part of a larger literary technique where the image of the vampire “is the harbinger of category crisis’ resisting easy categorization in the ‘order of things’ ...as simultaneously inside and outside, the monster disrupts the politics of identity and the security of borders” (673). The devolution of the worker into monster when in the mob speaks to the unnaturalness of the categorization of worker when in the capital-driven factory system.

The workers’ anger and frustration becomes translated into a certain animal rage in that controlled space of the factory. In the strike scene, however, their anger is misdirected, hitting the middle-class woman by mistake. Margaret intervenes, blocking their access to Mr. Thornton. The text notes, “she stood between them and their enemy...she threw her arms around him; she made her body into a shield.”⁶ Margaret maneuvers in front of Mr. Thornton, thinking her “sex would be a protection” (176). Gender plays a central role in this scene as once Margaret has been hit, the blood-thirsty workers are stunned. The text follows this moment where they return to themselves: “they were watching, open-eyed and open-mouthed, the thread of dark-red blood which wakened them up

⁶ The strike scene, in relation to Margaret’s subjectivity, is discussed in more depth in Chapter Two.

from their trance of passion” (178). Unlike capital, which is vampiric and would be excited by the leaking of Margaret’s female body, when the worker views her blood, it calls them back to themselves. Neocleous argues that Marx uses the vampire “as a metaphor to capture something very real indeed, namely a particular relation between human beings” (676). Workers are human and the trickle of blood reminds this mob of their subjectivity as their anger can lead to violence. This violence, however, cannot quite reach the factory owner. Even in the setting of the factory, ostensibly the space where factory owner and factory worker generate labor and capital together, they cannot make contact with Thornton because of the social barriers that protect him. Margaret, as a middle-class woman, is one such barrier. The worker is then stuck in their rage, as it cannot quite touch their object but accidentally injures the wrong person. More typically, this rage implodes, hitting the workers themselves as they attempt to exist in an economic system that exposes them and their bodies to illness and exhaustion but protects the factory owner.

This self-destruction is linked psychologically to Boucher’s suicide. For Boucher, drowning himself becomes a means of silencing the cries of his starving children and the judgment of the unionized workers. In “‘Taught by Death What Life Should Be’: Elizabeth Gaskell’s Representation of Death in *North and South*,” Mary Hotz notes this, writing, “John Boucher commits suicide by lying face down in a shallow dye-filled stream after being unable to find work because of his violent participation in union activity” (175). Gaskell links his death to

industry via the dye that permeates his body, changing the color of his skin; it is a system that ostensibly made him unable to provide for his children, exaggerating pre-existing weaknesses until they manifest in his suicide. Thornton and Higgins come together, symbolizing the union and the factory, in order to make reparations for Boucher's children. In this moment, they represent the institutions that failed him while he was alive.

In *Hard Times*, Rachael argues that it is these institutions that don't allow for a man to have his individual conscience, his individual anger. Both she and Stephen have moments in the text where they question institutions. "Can a man have no soul of his own, no mind of his own? Must he go wrong all through wi' this side, or must he go wrong all through wi' that?" Rachael asks (255). For Stephen, it is the soul that is erased in the factory system. He tells Bounderby, "Black unpassable world betwixt yo...rating 'em as so much Power, and reg'ulating 'em...w'out loves and likens, wi'out memoires and inclinations, wi'out souls to weary and souls to hope" (157). The emphasis on the laborers' ability to work, rather than on an internal reality, makes the ideological construction of the factory the "black unpassable world" that separates them, with the mill owner overseeing both the function of the factory and the worker on the ground floor as the worker's body becomes exhausted and overworked. It is a manufactured world that attempts to erase the parts of the worker that can be exhausted.

This erasure of Stephen's individuality causes his anger to be at once inexpressible and internalized. Dickens's description of the "wild waters of his

soul” (82) captures this turmoil. Like the mob of workers in *North and South*, his anger is something otherworldly. His interiority cannot be restrained, even as his love for Rachael and his physical weariness seek to bridle it. Ketabigan argues that “*Hard Times* dwells on [Stephen’s] anger both indirectly and perpetually...Even Blackpool’s fall performs an analogous gesture of containment: here, too, violence is not turned towards others but rechanneled and visited onto himself” (671). Caught by the previous generations’ mining which, like the industrial town, has marked the landscape, Stephen falls into the old mine shaft angry with Louisa because he believes that she was complicit with her brother’s dishonesty. Once he has been rescued, he tells Rachael, “When I fell, I were in anger wi’ her, an’ hurryin’ on t’ be as onjust t’her as oothers was t’ me” (275). Stephen becomes the victim of industry’s caprice. He is coming home to clear his name because of Tom Gradgrind’s theft and dishonesty. He falls into the mineshaft that exists, and was abandoned, because of the pattern of industry. The image that Dickens presents to the reader is of Stephen, alone and trapped, in the shaft, isolated and abandoned by industry with nothing but his powerlessness and anger. When he is able to pause in his fall and reflect on what his life has been, he feels compassion for Louisa, resolving his anger and collecting himself. Right before his death, he is uncontained by the factory and placed in nature, where he finds a star, “shinin’ on me down there in my trouble, I thowt it were the star as guided to Our Saviour’s home” (276). Stephen’s death mirrors the rhetoric surrounding Bessy’s. Both are victims of industry’s indifference to the well-

being of the worker and both can only find a psychic peace outside of the exhausting and repetitive half-lives that are all that industry has afforded them.

Like Stephen, a desire to be really alive and uncontained exists for Bessy, who tells Margaret, “I have always wanted to get high up and see far away, and take a deep breath o’ fullness in that air” (Gaskell 101). While for Bessy this desire to move freely and in open space takes the form of the idyllic and religiously motivated paradisaal spring—an experience that can only occur after death—for Louisa Gradgrind, in *Hard Times*’ emotional stifling, this wilderness is directly linked to the existence of an internal life. A victim of her father’s rigid education, she asks him, “What have you done, oh father, what have you done, with the garden that should have bloomed once, in this great wilderness here? She struck herself with both her hands upon her bosom” (Dickens 218). In this instance, Louisa’s frustration, anger, and longing are turned towards herself; her emotional pain causes her to inflict pain on her body. Both of these women, though picturing and articulating different psychic spaces and expressions, are explicit in designating where this wildness and freedom cannot occur. It cannot exist in the fact-driven industrial setting that seeks to trample, tame, and harness, rather than nurture and facilitate growth or expression.

Bessy’s inhalation of cotton, as it fills her body, also collapses discourses of anger and industry onto her body. Her illness is a central part of her characterization, with her character being introduced by Margaret’s remarking, “I am afraid you are not very strong,” to which Bessy replies “No...nor never will

be” (73). Her death though explicitly foreshadowed with this exchange still comes as a surprise to Margaret. From Boucher to Stephen to Bessy, formal representations of the exhausted and ill worker in these works engage with various degrees of death that can mislead the reader. A distraught Margaret remarks, “I never thought I should not see her again” (Gaskell 213). Higgins is also surprised by her death, as the narrator notes, “For she had been sickly, dying so long, that he had persuaded himself she would not die” (215). Meant to be perpetually dying, her actual death serves as a harsh marker of realism in *North and South*. Bessy dies because that is the reality of her illness, her social place, and her characterization within the genre of industrial fiction. She cannot survive the novel. The picture that Higgins lays out for his daughter’s life is poignant. He tells Margaret and Mr. Hale, “What wi’ hard work first, and sickness at last, hoo’s led the life of a dog. And to die without knowing one good piece o’ rejoicing in all her days!” (216-217). Bessy’s death, then, becomes embedded in a larger and bleaker reality. Workers die in Manchester, often before their lives have been fully realized. By reflecting this in her text, and in the pseudo-Manchester that is Milton, Gaskell does not permit her fiction, or her readers, to efface this working-class reality. Rather, by having Margaret’s working-class foil die, the text implicitly does what Dickens’s closing of *Hard Times* does explicitly. It asks what could have been, what life and what death Bessy could have had if she had been born in a different class, or worked in a different setting while

simultaneously highlighting that such things were never to be because of the inequity of the industrial system.

This reading of Bessy, and the other working-class characters' illness and death, problematizes Carol Martin's argument in her article "Gaskell, Darwin, and *North and South*." Reading reverberations of evolutionary theory in Gaskell's novels, Martin writes that the text becomes a "contrast between the death of those characters who are too rigid to modify in changing conditions and the survival of characters who do adapt to such conditions" (92). The alternate reading I offer is that Gaskell's text, rather than highlighting who can adapt, articulates what situations are adaptable. The rigid and dehumanizing labor-structure of the factory system, as it exists in the beginning of *North and South* is not a system that can be changed or altered from inside of the factory. Rather, it is a system that breaks and annihilates those who work within it. This becomes clear when we look at *how* these characters have died. They do not die from the machines themselves but rather, from the setting and system in which these machines exist. These deaths become an indictment of the capital-driven thought that has created a setting in which someone can die from ingesting seemingly innocuous fluff or drowning in a purple river: it is the pre-existing ideological infrastructure that is diseased and must be changed in order for the factory system to be reconstructed and re-imagined.

Unlike *Hard Times*, whose ending of, "Dear reader! It rests with you and me" (300), is a call to action on the individual level, *North and South* ends with a

shift away from present action to the promise of future change that will result from Thornton and Margaret's economic union. At the end of the novel, Thornton talks about his experiments:

My only wish is to have the opportunity of cultivating some intercourse with the hands beyond the mere "cash nexus"...I name...experiments I would like to try...I am not sure the of the consequences that may result from them. But I am sure they ought to be tried. I have arrived at the conviction that that no mere institutions, however wise...can attach class to class as they should be attached, unless the working out of such institutions bring the individuals of the different classes into actual personal contact. Such intercourse is the very breath of life. (421)

Thornton is suggesting that the system can be adapted. He envisions a factory setting where interaction between worker and owner is ingrained within the functioning of the factory and its operation. This re-articulation of the factory system, built on dialogue, expands the worker past his or her identity as both a hand and a mechanism of the cash nexus. It affords both sides the opportunity to use language as a means of bridging the ideological and class separation that was then instrumental in the running of the factory. Words, coupled with the something else which Thornton mentions, "is the very breath of life," in his experiment, would enable connection and visibility in a system that currently dislocates and erases. His conscious use of "experiment" highlights at once the uncertainty and the hope that such social discourse and reordering of the factory system could bring.

Ultimately, these texts highlight the vulnerability of the worker when their bodies are reduced to function. For both of these texts, illness and exhaustion become assertions of the worker's humanity. While Dickens emphasizes the

setting of the industrial town and the effects of labor on the mindscapes of his characters, Gaskell instead focuses on the effects that industry has directly on the working-class body. By putting Bessy's invalidism in conversation with Mrs. Hale's, Gaskell navigates the difference in degree that dirt impacts how both characters die. Mrs. Hale's death comes from a natural source while Bessy would not have died if she was in a different social class and not persistently overworked. While Mrs. Hale has been afforded the luxury of having a husband and children to mourn her, Bessy leaves behind a father and sister, both of whom must move between working and mourning within the same day. Illness, then, becomes a means by which these authors can argue against the metonymic relationship that factory owners have with their workers, where their whole beings are collapsed onto the function-focused term of Hands. The body, by being worn away by industry, becomes the object that bears witness to the effects of industry and its parasitic relationship to the worker. Their illness and deaths become means of literary protest, enabling the writers to indict a system, and a mentality, that ostensibly promises profit and stability but functions more as a malignant, polluting, force, that breaks the bodies and minds of the laborers.

Elaine Scarry's argument that "the human being in work puts himself by his very depth of engagement, continually at risk—that he alters the world only by consenting to be himself deeply altered" (96) hinges on both an awareness and a well-informed complicity. The worker is at risk, but in Scarry's tracing of Hardy's work, it is a risk—and a permeability—to which he has agreed. The

bodies of Stephen and Bessy, and those of the other workers, are violently impacted, and overpowered, by the labor they performed. They are vulnerable to such an extent that they lost control of their bodies and the parasitic relationship between work and labor invaded and killed them. While writings, such as *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, capture a more reciprocal relationship of exchange between work and worker, something changes, becoming deadly, when this relationship is brought into the unfeeling and calculating industrial setting. This change is brought about by the reliance on a mass of bodies whose value is based on the rate of their production and their silence. The worker in the industrial system becomes the subjected and productive body Foucault tracks in "On Punishment." Because their hands alone are emphasized, their voice and their internality are dismissed. This dismissal renders them politically disenfranchised. The unequal and overpowering relationship between worker and industry becomes a conflict that, while ignored, is being continuously played out on the laborer's body, even after they have ceased to be productive workers and instead serve as reminders of the unthinking and unjust violence of industry when its success is predicated on silencing and essentializing the human body.

CODA

Dear Reader: Articulating the Worker's Body in the Twenty-First Century

I am submitting this work on the second anniversary of an event that made the relationship between work and laborer urgently explicit. On April 24, 2013, the factories housed in Bangladesh's Rana Plaza collapsed, killing more than 1,100 people ("One Year After Rana Plaza"). It was the largest factory collapse in history. The images that emerged from the wreckage, such as Talisma Akhter's "Eternal Embrace," were of the workers literally covered in the materials of industry. These images showed the bodies of the workers who had been killed, having been pummeled and suffocated by the building's unsustainable infrastructure. Dust and dirt were everywhere; covering the Western clothes the workers had been making and obscuring the majority of the workers' bodies. In many instances, the worker was too deeply buried to be discernible, they were hands that only just emerged from dirt and pummeled concrete.

In the beginning of 2015, a collective of Victorianists released a manifesto, titled *V21: Victorian Studies for the 21st Century*, in which they articulated how the discipline needed to change and simultaneously asserted why Victorian Studies were still relevant. The eighth thesis of the Manifesto argues that "In Finance, resource mining, globalization, imperialism, liberalism, and

many other vectors, we are Victorian, inhabiting, advancing, and resisting the world they made” (“Manifesto of the V21 Collective”). If this statement is true—that we are still navigating and understanding how the Victorian era has shaped our lives—then we must acknowledge that the world to which the Victorians gave birth has expanded exponentially. The factory workers no longer live in the same city as the middle-class consumer. Today, those who labor in textile factories are not only erased by the nature of the city street, or substandard living conditions, or the reductive label of “hands.” They can be erased by a wider difference that is both geographic and cultural.

Elaine Freedgood, in her book *The Ideas of Things*, writes, “the knowledge that is stockpiled in...things bear on the grisly specifics of conflicts and consequences” (2). This knowledge of suffering, which Freedgood argues is often overlooked or ignored in readings of Victorian novels, is also present in modern consumption. Western consumers can ostensibly perceive themselves as somehow separate from the people whose work fills their homes. The Bangladeshi worker and Western consumer are separated by nation, language, and physical distance but there is still a shared history of violence and inequity in the outsourced factory labor that has been purchased alongside the cheaply made product.

It is not that “the worker” has become incomprehensible in these differences, because that is absolutely not the case. Rather, consumer and laborer are so detached from one another, mediated through images, distance, and news

coverage, that the suffering in Bangladesh easily becomes seen as far-removed. This distance effaces the reality that consumers create and continue to generate inhuman working conditions through their turning away from the realities of outsourced labor. But of course, the workers' subjectivity still exists. Sensory embodiment—though all but erased in the images of the Rana Plaza—persists. Representations of the worker persist in the Victorian novels we read and with which we engage. The society that ostensibly created and institutionalized this dehumanizing factory-labor system also created these novels, whose central idealistic aim was to break down barriers of difference and assert a shared humanity. Engaging with these historical representations of the worker allows readers to connect, through barriers of time, class, race, and nationality, to a suffering that is very much Victorian in its erasure, just as the nineteenth-century was very much modern in its. We, as readers, bring these books into our homes, we name our children after these characters, and continue to talk about them today because the nineteenth-century Victorian novel's use of embodied subjectivity, that assertion that each person is moving through the world in open yet bounded bodies, is both powerful and resonant.

By placing these novels—and their representations and interrogations of what it means to at once possess, and be, a body when that body is an object of labor—in conversation with the twenty-first century, the working conditions in the textile factories, in nineteenth-century England and in present-day Bangladesh, begin to echo one another. Like the Bangladeshi workers, Bessy

Higgins's body was also filled with byproducts of industry. Like the photos that emerged from the wreckage, Stephen Blackpool was also reduced to his capacity as "hand." Like the workers in the Victorian era, these workers also experienced, and continue to experience, the violent erasure and denial of their whole bodies within the factory system. On some level, the suffering of today's laborer becomes intimately knowable through representations of Victorian workers and so by reading these works, with their emphasis on sympathy and universal subjectivity, we can enter into not only the factory in Victorian Manchester, but into the ones in Bangladesh, and around the world, today. If, in many ways, we as a society, to echo the V21 collective, "are Victorian," then we also have a responsibility to enter into the spaces that they created, spaces that, although outsourced and violently rearticulated, are still present. We have a responsibility to engage in conversation and grow in awareness of the shared subjectivity between laborer and consumer, worker and owner: the shared subjectivity between sentient body and sentient body.

WORKS CITED

- Armstrong, Nancy. *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail. "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope of the Novel." *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004.
- Bracher, Peter. "Muddle and Wonderful No Meanings: Verbal Irresponsibility and Verbal Failure in *Hard Times*." *Studies in the Novel*. 10.3 (1978): 305-319.
- Brantlinger, Patrick. "Dickens and the Factory," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*. 26.3 (1971): 270-285.
- Butler, Josephine. "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution." *Literary Theory: An Anthology*. Ed. Julie Rivkin. 2nd ed. Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2004. Print.
- Cazamian, Louis. *The Social Novel in England 1830-1850*. London: Routledge, 1973.
- Chaudhary, Zahid. *Afterimage of Empire Photography in Nineteenth-century India*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2012.
- Cohen, William and Johnson, Ryan. *Filth: Dirt, Disgust, and Modern Life*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2005.
- . *Embodied Victorian Literature and the Senses*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota, 2009.
- Dever, Carolyn. "Broken Mirror, Broken Words: Autobiography, Prosopoeia, and the Dead Mother in 'Bleak House'." *Studies in the Novel* 27.1 (1995): 42-62.
- Dickens, Charles, and Tatiana M. Holway. *Bleak House*. New York: Barnes & Noble Classics, 2005.
- . *Hard Times*. New York: Signet Classics, 2008.
- . "January 31 1850." Gaskell, Elizabeth Cleghorn, J. A. V. Chapple, and Arthur Pollard. *The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell*. New York: Mandolin, 1997.
- Douglas, Mary. *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. London: Routledge, 2003.
- The Editorial Board. "One Year After Rana Plaza." *New York Times*. 27 April 2014.
- Ellison, David. "Glazed Expression: "Mary Barton" Ghosts and Glass." *Studies in the Novel* 36.4 (2004): 486-508.

- Elliott, Dorice Williams. "The Female Visitor And The Marriage Of Classes In Gaskell's *North And South*." *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 49.1 (1994): 21-49.
- Engels, Frederick. *The Condition of the Working-Class in England in 1844*. Gutenberg Press, e-book. 2005.
- Foucault, Michel. "On Discipline and Punishment," *Literary Theory Anthology*, e.d. Rivkin, Julie and Ryan, Michael. 2008.
- Freedgood, Elaine. *The Ideas in Things: Fugitive Meaning in the Victorian Novel*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006.
- Gallagher, Catherine. *The Body Economic: Life, Death, and Sensation in Political Economy and the Victorian Novel*. New York: Princeton University Press (2008).
- . *The Making of the Modern Body*, London: University of California Press, 1987.
- Gaskell, Elizabeth Cleghorn, J. A. V. Chapple and Arthur Pollard, ed. *The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell*. New York: Mandolin, 1997.
- . "Letters of Elizabeth Gaskell to Charles Dickens." *Letters of Elizabeth Gaskell to Charles Dickens*. The Gaskell Web. Web. 22 Feb. 2015.
- . *Mary Barton*. London: Penguin Books, 2004. Print.
- . *North and South*. London: Penguin Group, 2003.
- Gilbert, Pamela K. *Disease, Desire, and the Body in Victorian Women's Popular Novels*. Cambridge, U.K: Cambridge UP, 1997. Print.
- . *The Citizen's Body: Desire, Health, and the Social in Victorian England*. New York: Ohio State University Press, 2007.
- Gilmour, Robin. *The Novel in the Victorian Age: A Modern Introduction*. London: E. Arnold, 1986. Print.
- Goodman, Marica Renee. "Til Follow the Other': Tracing the (M)other in *Bleak House*," *Dickens Studies Annual* 19 (1990): 147-167.
- Greiner, Rae. "Sympathy Time in Adam Smith, George Eliot, and the Realist Novel." *Narrative* 17.3 (2009):291-391.
- Hardy, Barbara. "Two Women: Some Forms of Feeling in *North and South*." *The Gaskell Journal*. 25 (2011): 19-27.
- Harman, Barbara. "In Promiscuous Company: Female Public Appearance in Elizabeth Gaskell's *'North and South'*" *Victorian Studies* 31.3 (1988): 351-74. Print.
- Harrison, Mary Catherine. "How Narrative Relationships Overcome Empathic Bias: Elizabeth Gaskell's Empathy across Social Difference." *Poetics Today* 32.2 (2011): 255-288.
- Henry, Nancy. "Gaskell and Social Transformation." *The Cambridge Companion to Elizabeth Gaskell*. Ed. Matus, Jill. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007. E-Book.
- Holmes, Martha. "LitMed: Literature Arts Medicine Database." *LitMed: Literature Arts Medicine Database*. NYU, 24 Feb. 2010. Web. 23 Mar. 2015.

- Hotz, Mary. "Taught by Death What Life Should Be": Elizabeth Gaskell's Representation of Death in "North and South." *Studies in the Novel* 32.2 (2000): 165-84. Print.
- Jaffe, Audrey. *Scenes of Sympathy: Identity and Representation in Victorian Fiction*. New York: Cornell University Press, 2000.
- Johnson, Patricia E. *Hidden Hands: Working-Class Women and Victorian Social-Problem Fiction*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2001.
- Ketabgian, Tamara. "Melancholy Mad Elephants": Affect and the Animal Machine in *Hard Times*." *Victorian Stories*. 45.4 (2003): 649-676.
- Lewes, George. *The Physiology of Common Life*. Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1858.
- Lewis, Darcy. "Melancholia and Machinery: The Dystopian Landscape and Mindscape in *Hard Times*." *Dickens Quarterly*. 31.1 (2014): 17-31.
- "Liverpool and the Atlantic Slave Trade," *MARITIME ARCHIVES & LIBRARY*. November 2014. <http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/>
- Lucas, John. *The Literature of Change: Studies of the Nineteenth-Century Provincial Novel*. New York: Branch Line, 1980.
- "Manifesto of the V21 Collective." *V21: victorian studies for the 21st century*. V21 Collective, n.d. Web. 19 April 2015.
- Mann, Nancy. "Intelligence and Self-Awareness in "North and South": A Matter of Sex and Class." *Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature* 29.1 (1975): 24-38. Print.
- Martin, Carol. "Gaskell, Darwin, and "North and South"" *Studies in the Novel* 15.2 (1983): 91-107. Print.
- Matus, Jill. "Mary Barton and North and South." *The Cambridge Companion to Elizabeth Gaskell*. Ed. Matus, Jill. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007. E-Book.
- . *Unstable Bodies: Victorian Representations of Sexuality and Maternity*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995.
- Mavor, Carol. "Chapter Two: To Make Mary: Julia Margaret Cameron's Photographs of Altered Madonnas." *Pleasures Taken: Performances of Sexuality and Loss in Victorian Photographs*. E-book ed. Durham: Duke University Press, 1995.
- Marx, Karl and McLellan, David, e.d., "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts," *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Michie, Elsie B. *Outside the Pale: Cultural Exclusion, Gender Difference, and the Victorian Woman Writer*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993.
- Michie, Helena. "'Who Is This in Pain?': Scarring, Disfigurement, and Female Identity in 'Bleak House' and 'Our Mutual Friend'." *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, 22.2 (1989): 199-212.
- Morretti, Franco. *The Atlas of European Novel 1800-1900*. London: Verso, 1999.
- Mould, Alison. "The Female Witness and the Melodramatic Mode in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton*." *Victorian Network* 5.2 (2013): 67-88.

- Neocleus, Mark. "The Political Economy of the Dead: Marx's Vampires," *History of Political Thought* 24.4 (2003):668-684.
- Neuville, Elodie. "Women, Cloth, Fluff and Dust in Elizabeth Gaskell's North and South." *Textile: The Journal of Cloth and Culture* 8.3 (2010): 274-85. Print.
- Pikoulis, John. "'North and South': Varieties of Love and Power." *The Yearbook of English Studies* 6 (1976): 176-93. Print.
- Poovey, Mary. *Making A Social Body*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.
- . "Speaking of the Body: Mid-Victorian Constructions of Female Desire." *Body/politics: Women and the Discourses of Science*. Ed. Mary Jacobus. New York: Routledge, 1990.
- Preston, Shale. "Miss Barbary, Lady Dedlock and the Disfigurement of Esther Summerson." *Dickens and the Despised Mother: A Critical Reading of Three Autobiographical Novels*. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland Publishers, 2013.
- Rai, Amit. *The Rule of Sympathy: Sentiment, Race, and Power, 1750-1850*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002. E-Book.
- Recchio, Thomas. "Melodrama and the Production of Affective Knowledge in Mary Barton." *Studies of the Novel* 43.3 (2011): 289-305.
- Scarry, Elaine. . *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.
- . "The Difficulty of Imagining Other Persons," *The Handbook of Interethnic Coexistence*. Ed. Eugene Weiner. New York: Continuum Publishing, 1998. pp. 40-62
- . "Work and the Body in Hardy and Other Nineteenth-Century Novels." *Representations*, 3 (1983): 90-123.
- Schaub, Melissa. "Sympathy and Discipline in *Mary Barton*." *Victorian Newsletter*,106 (2004): 6-21.
- Sheehan, Lucy. "Trials of Embodiment: Being a Gothic Body in Mary Barton." *Victorian Review* 38.1 (2012): 35-53.
- Silverman, Kaja. *The Threshold of the Visible World*. New York: Routledge, 1996. Print.
- Smith, Adam. "Of Sympathy." *The Theory of Moral Sentiments (1759)*. Library of Economics and Liberty. 15 April 2015.
- Struve, Laura. "Expert Witnesses: Women and Publicity in Mary Barton and Felix Holt." *Victorian Review* 28.1 (2002): 1-24.
- Uglow, Jennifer S. *Elizabeth Gaskell: A Habit of Stories*. New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1993. Print.
- Vesgo, Roland. "Mary Barton and the Disassembled Dialogue." *Journal of Narrative Theory* 33.2 (2003): 163-183.
- Weisser, Susan. "Gwendolen's Hidden Wound: Sexual Possibilities and Impossibilities in "Daniel Deronda." *Modern Language Studies*. 20.3 (1990), 3-13.

- Wilt, Judith. "Confusion and Consciousness in Dicken's Esther." *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 32.3 (1977): 285-309.
- Woloch, Alex. *The One vs The Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003.
- Zemka, Sue. "Brief Encounters: Street Scenes in Gaskell's Manchester." *ELH* 76.3 (2009): 793-819.
- Zwerdling, Alex. "Esther Summerson Rehabilitated." *PMLA* 88.3 (1973): 429-39. Print.