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"A Din of Angry Voices" at Home: England's Class Conflict within *North and South*'s Thornton House

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In *North and South,* Elizabeth Gaskell's heroine, Margaret Hale visits the Thornton House at Marlborough Mills during the pivotal scene of the novel: the workers' rebellion and riot. Curiously, as the danger increases, Gaskell creates auditory confusion by contradicting herself. For example, Gaskell writes that the sound from the crowd is not only a "din of angry voices" but that these voices increase in volume, only to follow in the next paragraph with the idea that the crowd is speechless. While it might be easy to argue that Gaskell simply made mistakes regarding the sound descriptions of the riot, the fact that the scene remains the same in the heavily-edited first and second two-volume editions published in 1855 and the original, serialized version published in *Household Words* from September 1854 to January 1855, indicate that Gaskell intended these auditory contradictions to express confusion in the face of revolution.

Yet, while these auditory distortions dominate the scene of the workers' riot, they exist throughout the novel within the confused class space of the Thornton house which indicates that Gaskell intended the novel as a whole to be about pervasive class conflict. Even before the climatic scene, the space of the Thornton house exists within the novel as a location lacking clear class boundaries, a space teeming with contradiction and discord, and therefore overwhelming to Victorian visitors who were accustomed to

spaces coded according to class.[1] Yet significantly, the idea that the traditionally-viewed, and usually clearly-labeled as feminine, area of the house is a confused class space directly contradicts what critics have said of the novel, specifically that "class conflict is part of the masculine world, with working-resistance represented by male characters" (Gray 155). Further, the notion that Margaret and other women do not participate in the world of class-conflict helps contribute to the idea that the novel is the "least controversial" (153) of industrial and condition-of-England novels published in the 1840s and 1850s. In *Culture and Society: 1780-1950,* Raymond Williams writes that "*North and South* is less interesting [than other industrial novels like *Mary Barton*], because the tension is less" (91). On the contrary, the Thornton house with its shared space with Marlborough Mills allows for the house itself to become a site of class conflict as the sounds and sights of the factory pervade the traditionally private space of the house. In doing so, Gaskell brings the unresolved issues from the Chartist Rebellion and workers' rights to the realm of the home, a space her contemporary Victorian writers saw as "the crystal of society–the nucleus of national character."

Critics[2] of *North and South* complain about the novel's ending (and therefore discount the book as a political novel) because of its concentration on the marriage plot. Yet, the confused class space of the Thornton house at Marlborough Mills allows for the ending to be more complicated and more revolutionary than previously interpreted by scholars, such as Catherine Gallagher in *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction, 1832-1867*. Gallagher writes that Gaskell establishes a "disconnection between the family under consideration and the society needing reformation" and in spite of Gaskell's "attempts to make social relations personal, to advocate that relations between classes become like the cooperative associations of family life," *North and South* "ultimately propose[s] the isolation of families from the larger society" (148). In my close reading of the Thornton house at Marlborough Mills, I take the opposite contention. While Gallagher writes that *North and South* "emphasize[s] thematically the very thing [it] cannot achieve structurally: the integration of public and private life" (149), I argue that the Thornton house achieves the consolidation of the public and the private. It serves as

a space of social confusion which allows it also to be the perfect location for revolutionary thought regarding class and gender relations.

After all, according to the end of the novel which leaves Margaret as the heiress to the fortune of Mr. Thornton's landlord, Margaret will be mistress of the house *and* mill (now that Mr. Thornton, her future husband, is *her* tenant) which adds another revolutionary gender dimension to the already confused class space of the Thornton house.[3] By complicating the issues of gender and ownership of the mill and its products, Gaskell does not allow the characters simply to retreat into the private realm, as scholars, such as Gallagher, argue. In choosing marriage, Mr. Thornton and Margaret do not move away from the confused class space of the Thornton house at Marlborough Mills, but they will inhabit the space together. This significant fact underlies that *North and South* is not a novel about public issues refashioned at the end into a story of traditional marriage. Instead, in focusing on the Thornton house, a space invaded by the outside sights and sounds of the street and the mill, the ending further emphasizes how Margaret's life after marriage will continue to be one in which class issues will be ever-present in her daily life. In fact, if we are to accept Hilary Schor's assessment that Margaret "serves as translator for the Babel that is industrialization" (121), then it is essential for the future of Milton's working-classes that Margaret live in the confused class space so that she can serve as a listener to and speaker for the views and wants of the working-class men and women who work in Marlborough Mills and convey the desires of the middle-class mill owners and masters to the working-class people.

The Thornton house exists in the middle of a neighborhood clearly designated for factories and mills, yet even this seemingly-clearly coded space is class-related confusion. Friedrich Engels describes Manchester, the basis for Gaskell's fictional town, Milton, as a city geographically segregated based on separating middle-class dwellings and working-class quarters:

> The town itself is peculiarly built, so that a person may live in it for years, and go in and out daily without coming into contact with a working-people's quarter or even with workers, that is, so long as he confines himself to his business or pleasure walks. This arises chiefly from the fact,

> that by unconscious determination, the working-people's quarters are sharply separated from sections of the city reserved for the middle class. (57)

But the Thornton house does not exist in the middle class or the working-class sections of the city. Instead, Gaskell places it at the center of the city, "at its heart" as Engels describes, in "a rather extended commercial district, perhaps half a mile long and about as broad" (57). In the area of the Thornton House, "nearly the whole district is abandoned by dwellers, and is lonely and deserted at night; only watchmen and policemen traverse its narrow lanes with their dark lanterns" (58). In other words, the physical location of the house at the center of the town is excessively populated (and very loud) during the day. At night, it is abandoned (and very quiet). It achieves being on the outskirts of civilization and being in the center of the city at the same time. While the Thornton house exists as a private space, in being so close to the mill and being geographically located in the city's industrial and decidedly un-residential district, it cannot be clearly coded as either middle or working-class. The Hale family residence is in the suburbs, while the Higgins's house is in the working-class district. The Thornton house exists with neither group; instead, it is in the very space that allows for sensory stimulation: the center of the town, the same space that also feels stifling to characters. Interestingly, historians, such as Lewis Mumford have referred to cities such as Manchester as "insensate industrial towns" (143), a label that my reading of the city resists. Instead of lacking in sensation, the center of the city as represented by the Thornton house draws together aural sensations from the city's outskirts. As evidenced by the way sound travels before the workers' uprising at Marlborough Mills, sound funnels in from the residential districts of the city into Milton's industrial center. Gaskell's narrator explains, "From every narrow lane opening out on Marlborough Street came up a low distant roar, as of myriads of fierce indignant voices" (172). Sound converges on the space of the Thornton house even when the mills are out of production during the riot. Gaskell writes, "There was no near sound,–no steam-engine at work with beat and pant,–no clank of machinery, or mingling and clashing of many sharp

voices; but far away, the ominous gathering roar, deep-clamouring" (173). Much like the dashes which hold Gaskell's unusually choppy yet lyrical sentence together, the space of the mill serves as a place for sound and ideas to meet.

As Margaret and her family approach Milton for the first time, they notice the air becomes thicker, a "lead-coloured cloud" hangs over the center of the city and "the air had a faint taste and smell of smoke" (59) the farther inside the city they venture. The heavier, polluted air at the center of the town contributes to why the mills' sights and sounds cling to the Thornton house at Marlborough Mills. In the nineteenth-century work *Wonders of Acoustics; or, The Phenomena of Sound*, Rodolphe Randau writes that air, as a "light and elastic fluid," acts as "an invisible bridge" (42) that allows for sound to move. In a different environment, such as the space at the center of the town, sound and light, says Randau, both of which "radiate freely" in the air in "concentric spheres" (54) cannot move and dissipate with ease. The thicker air of the center of the city creates a restricted space. This constrained space–according to William Cooke Taylor's 1842 *Notes of a Tour in the Manufacturing Districts of Lancashire*–is full of the "masses of human beings which have been accumulated round the mills," and that one "cannot contemplate these 'crowded hives' without feelings of anxiety and apprehension almost amounting to dismay". This issue of bodies crowding into a small space contributes to the sensation that there is limited air within the space of the mill and mill-yard: "It would be absurd to speak of Factories as mere abstractions, and consider them apart from the manufacturing population" (6). In other words, the space of the mill and its adjoining house should not be considered without the fact that the space is normally confining masses of working-class people. According to Randau, "in a confined space sound is exaggerated" (49). It's true: a small portion of the "discomfort" experienced in the "uncomfortable" and confusing drawing room does have to do with the family's decorating tastes; but, the startling nature of the drawing room has to do with the house's location within a space that is unclearly labeled and filled with industrial air unusually heavy for a residential space.

Concentrating on the discomfort visitors feel in the Thornton house and associating this distress with the room's decorations, Mary Ann O'Farrell ignores the house's physical location in Milton's industrial center. O'Farrell comes close to addressing the confused class space of the house when she calls "The 'painfully spotted, spangled, speckled look' about the room and its unleisured 'evidence of care and labour,'" a "misdirected" "aesthetic marker of class". But she misses the mark when she writes that "Mrs. Thornton's drawing room enforces good behavior" (62). On the contrary, the house itself does not serve as a space where social boundaries are to be reinforced, but a place where they can be torn down.

Before the potentially deadly workers' uprising and the near-destruction of the Thornton house and Marlborough Mills, Margaret cannot "imagine" why the Thornton family would choose to live so close to Mr. Thornton's mill with its "continual clank of machinery" and the steam engine's "long groaning roar", if they obviously have the financial means to live elsewhere. Gaskell continues, "Margaret only wondered why people who could afford to live in so good a house, and keep it in such perfect order, did not prefer a much smaller dwelling in the country, or even some suburb; not in the continual whirl and din of the factory" (Gaskell, 111). Significantly, it is "the continual whirl and din of the factory" that creates a physical –and potentially moral– effect on Margaret. The Thornton house's shared space with Marlborough Mills creates a moral as well as physical effect on those who inhabit it. According to popular nineteenth-century thought, the space one occupies influences one's mental and physical state.[4] In *Self-Help,* Samuel Smiles writes, "The home is the crystal of society – the nucleus of national character; and from that source, be it pure or tainted, issue the habits, principles, and maxims which govern public as well as private life" (361). Similar in theme, yet specifically referring to a different socio-economic class, Engels writes of the working-class housing area in Manchester as a "whirlpool of moral ruin which surrounds them [the working-class people]". Every moment they spend in these surroundings, according to Engels, they are "sinking daily deeper, losing daily more and more of their power to resist the demoralizing influence of want, filth and evil

surroundings" (40). While Engels writes of those who live in the working-class area, the same idea can be applied to those who visit sites of labor, like Margaret. As she stands on the steps of the Thornton residence, her "unaccustomed ears" cannot hear her father's voice. Even before the workers' uprising, the sounds of the factory indicate a certain aural space for rebellion that transcends the walls and mill-yard space which separate the house and the factory. In muting her father's voice, the factory noise serves as a potential catalyst for Margaret to break free from her father's control, however briefly, and no longer obey his instructions.

Supporting this notion, Jo Pryke argues that Gaskell employs the "conversation method" (29) to allow Margaret to learn and grow as a character. The conversation method emphasizes that Margaret learns by listening to men such as her father. According to Pryke, Margaret gathers knowledge from what she hears in conversations, not from the sights she sees in Milton. The fact that Margaret learns best from listening to others, demonstrates that she has the capability to think differently than those who came before her.[5] In an effort to emphasize the important didactic function of the home and the significance of parents setting a good example for children, Samuel Smiles in *Self-Help* writes:

> All persons are more or less apt to learn through the eye rather than the ear; and whatever is seen in fact makes a far deeper impression than anything that is merely read or heard. This is especially the case in early youth, when the eye is the chief inlet of knowledge. Whatever children see they unconsciously imitate. They insensibly come to resemble those who are about them—as insects take the color of the leaves they feed on. (360-1)

According to Smiles's assessment of the eye versus the ear debate, the eye is the more fundamental and basic way that children and adults process information, so that in using her ears as her primary source of knowledge, Margaret does not "unconsciously imitate" but uses logic to process the information around her. Further, if we accept Margaret as an auditory learner, then we do not need to limit her capacity to learn from conversations, but we can include her ability to gain knowledge from sounds such as labor's resonances emanating from Marlborough Mills. In fact, in learning from non-

traditional sounds and not her father's voice, Margaret, even in engaging in the traditionally feminine pursuit of house visiting, can be influenced by other "voices". The idea that the "whirl and din" of the factory allows for rebellion is particularly of interest since the sound is a by-product of traditional class structures which accompany industrialization. But these sounds are not only the sounds of production, but serve in the text as a means of allowing for the "voice" of the oppressed masses to be heard.

A "din," according to the *OED,* is "a loud noise, particularly a continued confused or resonant sound, which stuns and distresses the ear."[6] Coupled together, the verb definitions of "din" –"to utter continuously so as to deafen or weary, to repeat *ad nauseam*" and "to assail with din or wearying vociferation"– signify a perpetual assault that creates deafness out of repetition. In a way, a din interrupts the status quo and creates a stunning distress that allows for new sensations to be established different than conventional norms. A whirl, on the other hand, in its associations with a wheel and the perpetual turning connected to the word "continual" (repeated a few times in the scene), has figurative associations with a "dizzying," or "confused" effect on the mind and senses which can even be associated with a "tumult" or a "violent movement."[7]

Gaskell explicitly makes the association of the "din of the factory" and the revolutionary sound of the workers' voices during the riot when she uses the word "din" to describe the sound of the workers' riot from the vantage point of the Thornton drawing room. She writes, "an increasing din of angry voices raged behind the wooden barrier, which shook as if the unseen maddened crowd made battering-rams out of their bodies [. . .] till their great beats made the strong gates quiver, like reeds before the wind" (174). But even as Gaskell's narrator emphasizes the "increasing din of angry voices" which "raged behind the wooden barrier," in the next paragraph, she stresses that the rebelling workers were speechless until Mr. Thornton spoke to them, an apparent contradiction to the previous idea that their angry voices created the continual, wearying sound. And yet, even though the crowd has been "voiceless," it has not been silent. Recalling the din of the factory that served as an educating force for Margaret, the "din of angry voices" while not articulate speech, does have the power to change

Milton's minds and landscape. Gaskell's narrator writes, "Hitherto they had been voiceless, wordless, needing all their breath for their hard-labouring efforts to break down the gates. But now, hearing him speak inside, they set up such a fierce unearthly groan, that even Mrs. Thornton was white with fear as she preceded him into the room" (174). The "fierce unearthly groan" combined with the notion that individuals "made battering-rams out of their bodies" dehumanizes the crowd. Instead of individuals fighting for their right to a fair wage, the people in the crowd become a supernatural force that slowly will break down the figurative and metaphoric "strong gates" through perpetual assault and individual sacrifice. Disturbingly, the people have become like the factory, their source of oppression. Yet, in taking on the factory's ability to penetrate the walls of the Thornton house, the workers can be heard by the Thornton family. Even the seemingly impenetrable Mrs. Thornton becomes "white with fear". What used to be a safe and comforting "din" for Mrs. Thornton has now become alarming.

Since the Thornton house allows for revolutionary ideas to penetrate its walls, it is far from the ideal mid-Victorian home. A decade after the serial publication of *North and South*, John Ruskin, in *Sesame and Lilies: Two Lectures Delivered at Manchester in 1864,* writes that a house can only be defined as a home, if it does not allow the outside world to come inside:

> This is the true nature of home—it is the place of Peace; the shelter, not only from all injury, but from all terror, doubt, and division. In so far as it is not this, it is not home; so far as the anxieties of the outer life penetrate into it, and the inconsistently-minded, unknown, unloved, or hostile society of the outer world is allowed by either husband or wife to cross the threshold, it ceases to be home; it is then only a part of that outer world which you have roofed over, and lighted fire in. (147-8)

The Thornton House is anything but a shelter "from all terror, doubt, and division". But the house is clearly a "home" to the characters, not just "a part of that outer world". After all, Margaret will not enter the factory space itself, but she will repeatedly visit the Thornton family at their home. She also prides herself on her charity work visiting families such as the Higgins family at their home. [8] According to how other characters interact with and socially refer to the space, in the world of *North and South,* the

Thornton House is a home despite the "hostile society of the outer world" within its walls. But at the same time, it is also an industrial site of production.

While visitors, such as Margaret, are disturbed by the "continual din of the factory," Mrs. Thornton finds the sound reassuring. Perhaps, her ears and eyes have adjusted to the dizzying effect of living so close to the mill, similar to the effect physician James Henry Clark discusses in 1859 of the eye and ear becoming "accustomed to the shock" (287) of bright light and loud sound. In fact, Mrs. Thornton equates the sounds of Marlborough Mills which invade her home with the sound of bees producing honey when she says:

> 'I have heard noise that was called music far more deafening. [. . .] as for the continual murmur of the work-people, it disturbs me no more than the humming of a hive of bees. If I think of it at all, I connect it with my son, and feel how all belongs to him, and that he is the head that directs it' (Gaskell, 161)

The sound of the factory does not create a confused, even deafening, effect on Mrs. Thornton's senses, as it does on Margaret's. Instead, she finds the "continual murmur of the work-people" to be a comforting, reinforcing sound. She interprets the "humming" not as the "murmuring" of rebellion or dissatisfaction, but as the fortifying sound of the workers' labor and her son's amassing wealth. For Mrs. Thornton, the factory is her "hive of bees". She does not need a lady's hive to tend to in her garden, as women were told they needed from household management guides. Instead, she has one in her own backyard with living, human workers. And unlike an actual hive with the queen as its female head, the factory appears on the surface to reinforce gender roles for Mrs. Thornton with its sound emphasizing her son's power over his workers and the Thornton household. Even away from the home, Mr. Thornton is the "head" that "directs" the household's actions. At the same time, in positioning her son inside the hive, Mrs. Thornton allows herself power over her son's business and the household despite labeling him the "head" and master. In *The Apiary; or, Bees, Bee-Hives, and Bee-Culture*, Alfred Neighbour suggests to women who wish to keep bees in their gardens to always keep the beehive within a spatial proximity to one's person. He

writes, “Much watchfulness is needed to prevent the loss of swarms” and that there exists “a necessity of having hives so located as to be constantly within view, either from the dining-room, or of those whose duties oblige them to be near the apiary. [. . .] Many swarms and colonies are lost simply because the departure takes place without anyone witnessing it” (227-28).

Mrs. Thornton’s position in her house is one especially designed for “witnessing” and controlling from the windows of the Thornton house. In fact, the narrator’s physical description of Mrs. Thornton as “tall, massive, handsomely dressed” sets her up to be a figure that dominates the house and the mill structure. The narrator, with insight into Margaret’s thoughts, observes “the street did not look as if it could contain any house large enough for Mrs. Thornton’s habitation. Her son’s presence never gave any impression as to the kind of house he lived in; but, unconsciously, Margaret had imagined that tall, massive, handsomely dressed Mrs. Thornton must live in a house of the same character as herself” (Gaskell, 111). Based on Margaret’s perceptions of Mrs. Thornton, the mother is capable of physically dominating the son and defining the home space.

Along these lines, according to Ruskin’s definition of a home, Mrs. Thornton is the reason for the house not feeling like a “home”. In enjoying her house’s proximity to the mill space and the sense perceptions that go along with it, Mrs. Thornton “seeks” the “danger,” “temptation” and “cause of error or offense” that no home naturally has within its walls “unless she [the woman of the house] herself has sought it” (Ruskin, 147). But the confused class space of the Thornton House cannot be blamed on Mrs. Thornton. Instead, its proximity to the mill and the “offensive” sounds of labor speak more to the cultural issues surrounding the separation of labor and the enjoyment of the products of that very industry. Regarding cultural conflict reflected within the home, Thad Logan writes, “In the domestic interior, powerful (and contested) oppositions of male and female, public and private, self and other were being symbolically negotiated. The decorative complexity of the Victorian home mirrored the intensity of the issues being articulated around it” (xiii). In other words, no matter how Mrs. Thornton

decorates the drawing room, the issues of class would be present in the house because of its shared space with the mill and its location in the center of a city of class conflict.

One could argue that even further away from the mill, the Thornton house still would be a place where one was reminded of the working-classes with the products of their labor on display in its drawing room. As Engels writes of "the great towns" such as Manchester,

> everywhere social warfare, every man's house in a state of siege, everywhere reciprocal plundering under the protection of law, and all so shameless, so openly avowed that one shrinks before the consequences of our social state as they manifest themselves here undisguised, and can only wonder that the whole crazy fabric still hangs together. (37)

With social warfare "everywhere" pervading "every" corner of the town, then perhaps the Thornton house as a confused class space is more obvious and upfront as a space of social confusion, but that all houses in the town exhibit similar issues, however veiled.[9] More camouflaged and less obvious than the sights and sounds of the mill invading the space of the house, other spaces (including Margaret's own home) create physical reactions in Margaret making her have repeated "headaches" or other physical reactions throughout the novel when she becomes over-stimulated by the sights and sounds around her.[10]

Traditionally, mid-Victorian novels, such as this one, are fraught with narrative confusion because, according to Robert L. Patten, they focus on urban spaces which "frustrate narrative" (197). Unlike the novels of the late-eighteenth century and early-nineteenth century, mid-Victorian novels concentrate on urban "de-centered" spaces different from the country houses of Jane Austen where the plot hinged on "getting the right inhabitants into possession of the right rooms" (193). As Patten writes, "If lives, now, are often more circular than telic, and if houses are temporarily inhabited de-centered spaces rather than centers of economies and texts, then journeys are more difficult to narrate because they are so uncertain" (196). But the Thornton house serves a different function than the average "temporarily inhabited de-centered spaces" typical of Patten's assessment of space in mid-Victorian novels. It is true that its geographical

location meets the qualifications of Patten's evaluation of the city in the mid-Victorian novel with its ability to "frustrate narrative" by "overwhelming the senses" (197), but the location of the house within the center of the city allows for the house to be a space not displaced from the economic and narrative center of the text as other homes, such as the Hale house, are in *North and South*. Instead, the Thornton house with its continuous reminder of production allows for an access point for Margaret (and the reader) to learn about the plight of the mill workers. After all, without the space of the house which enabled Margaret to experience the riot, she would not have faced the importance of utilizing both what she sees and what she hears.[11]

It may seem counterintuitive that a home space decorated with the spoils of the mill worker's labor could speak to the ills of mismanaged industrialization, but the pervasive mid-Victorian ideal that the home should be a place of comfort significantly appeared *after* the industrial revolution. Therefore, a link between the home and industrialization is not reductive. John Tosh examines the shift from pre-Victorian living spaces, which served both domestic and business purposes concurrently, to the mid-Victorian ideal domestic space which emphasized comfort as a refuge from the outside world (14). Tosh writes, "Taking the middle class as a whole, the pace of change was particularly pronounced during the first half of the nineteenth century– the period of most intensive industrialization in Britain" (16). Is the Thornton house at Marlborough Mills, then, a throw-back to pre-Victorian notions of home life? Instead of a reversion to an older way of life, the space of the house attached to the mill was one of the last remnants of a changing era, a space that if Margaret was not emotionally invested in the plight of the mill workers she as owner could easily demolish for profit. After all, as Tosh explains, mill houses were popular with "first-generation manufacturing entrepreneurs" (16) who wished to supervise the mill from home (like Mrs. Thornton). Yet, these spaces were few and far because the owners of the mills preferred to demolish the houses and sell their lots because the price of land at the center of town continued to rise in value. In allowing Margaret to inherit the space of the Thornton house, Gaskell secures that the house will not be torn down and sold, but that it will continue to be

lived in. The Thornton family will not move to a de-centered space outside of town where it will become harder for Margaret to enact her narrative function as translator between the classes and as one who will witness to social change, furthering *North and South*'s place among mid-Victorian Industrial novels.

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[1] Daphne Spain in *Gendered Spaces* writes that British "dwellings reflect cultural values as well as the technological and geographic characteristics of the societies in which they are built"(111). She continues, "In Victorian British country houses, separate wings for the servants were created to enable the gentry to minimize family contact with the lower classes. The larger the estate, the greater specialization of rooms and the more telling of social customs of the day [. . .]"(111).
[2] Comparing *North and South* to *Mary Barton,* Louis Cazamian writes, "In *North and South* the industrial question is no longer the whole of the novel" (226). Cazamian sees the marriage as the resolution of the novel's "main plot" and the "industrial drama" as a subplot to the romance (228-229). To that end, A. B. Hopkins writes, "*North and South* is Mrs. Gaskell's second novel on an industrial theme, but unlike *Mary Barton,* the problems of industry are here made to take second place. The author's interest is primarily in moulding her characters. It is emphatically a story of growth, of the gradual alteration in views and attitudes that takes place in the minds of two central persons. It could, in fact, be described as a Victorian *Pride and Prejudice*" (139). Also equating *North and South* with Jane Austen's novels, Arnold Kettle argues that while at times the novel goes outside the realm of an Austen novel when it raises questions customary to a social problem novel, for the most part, *North and South*'s "tone and sensibility belong to Jane Austen's world" (176). Kettle places Gaskell as an author in a gray area "between Austen and George Eliot" (176). Gerald DeWitt Sanders does not place Gaskell as a writer on a spectrum between Austen and Eliot, but he does argue that *North and South* "is Mrs. Gaskell's transition novel. It is her 'last novel with a purpose'; her last effort to set straight a world which seemed to her out of joint" (71). And yet, Sanders clearly states that even though *North and South* might be Gaskell's "last effort" to create reform, "the love story of Margaret Hale tends to absorb most of the attention of the reader" (74). More recently, Rosemarie Bodenheimer argues that *North and South* is not "exactly a 'social-problem novel,' for it does not identify a clear version of industrial crisis and cry for a solution" (282). In "The Female Visitor and the Marriage of Classes in Gaskell's *North and South*," Dorice Williams Elliott argues that "Gaskell's novel offers love and marriage instead of revolution, socialism, or feminism" (47). Yet in line with my argument, she contends that Gaskell "uses marriage, the conventional novelistic ending, as a statement of her proposed social agenda. The very conventionality of the 'happy ending' serves as a mask that naturalizes what is *un*conventional in her vision of women's role" (47). While I agree with the notion that Gaskell utilizes the marriage of Mr. Thornton and Margaret as a means of advancing her own social agenda, I disagree with the notion that the ending "serves as a mask".
[3] Of course, the Married Women's Property Act of 1870 and the Married Women's Property Act of 1882 were not yet passed during the publication of *North and South* from 1854-1855. Nonetheless, at the end of the novel, Henry Lennox (the voice of the law in *North and South*) calls Mr. Thornton "'Miss Hale's tenant'" (434). Further emphasizing Margaret's ownership of the mill, before she accepts Thornton's advances, Margaret discusses a proposal she has drawn up with her lawyer's help to invest in the managing of Marlborough Mills (435). One could argue

that Margaret, in presumably marrying Thornton after the end of the novel, technically loses control over her property to her husband. At the same time, their engagement began only after the financial aspects of their relationship were agreed upon. In other words, Mr. Thornton's position as "tenant" to Margaret's landlord has been established and even as the property were to pass to Mr. Thornton, their power dynamic has been established in certain economic terms.

[4] Interestingly, Gaskell writes that not only the space of the Thornton house at Marlborough Mills could have a moral and physical effect on those who occupy the home, but specifically, the noise from the working-class people on Marlborough Street can have an effect on Margaret. Before the riot, "there was a restless, oppressive sense of irritation abroad among the people; a thunderous atmosphere, morally as well as physically, around her. From every narrow lane opening out on Marlborough Street came up a low distant roar, as of myriads of fierce indignant voices" (172).

[5] Other older adult characters in *North and South* only see and listen to certain people. Mrs. Thornton, for example, is not a good listener to anyone but her son. When he comes home, though, "her eyes and ears were keen to see and to listen to all the details he could give " (188). Both of Margaret's parents are either too infirm or too depressed to truly engage with listening to others apart from their intimate social circle.

[6] "din, n.[1]." The Oxford English Dictionary, 2nd ed. 1989, OED Online, Oxford University Press. 8 October 2009 <http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/ 50064334>.

[7] "whirl, n." and "whirl, v." The Oxford English Dictionary, 2nd ed. 1989, OED Online, Oxford University Press. 8 October 2009 <http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/50284640> and <http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/ 50284641>.

[8] As Dorice Williams Elliott demonstrates in her article "The Female Visitor and the Marriage of Classes in Gaskell's *North and South*", mid-nineteenth-century thought was divided on the issue of middle- and upper-class women engaging in charitable visiting. Elliott writes, "The position of the female visitor [. . .] is one of double danger: it would be 'dangerous' to 'check' their dealings with the poor, but those very dealings are fraught with 'other dangers'. However well-intentioned, visitors may antagonize the poor who will 'come to regard themselves as the inspected' and who may pretend to be worse off than they are in order to receive charitable donations. Proper visitors, on the other hand, can foster much goodwill between classes" (21-22). Further, Elliott demonstrates how contemporary writers of *North and South* praised the novel for providing in Margaret Hale a example for readers of a "good" visitor, one who can mediate between the mill masters of Milton and the working-classes.

[9]Along with the house's shifting social status, the Thornton family experienced significant shifts in wealth before the novel's beginning and Margaret's arrival. Mr. Thornton's father "speculated wildly, failed, and then killed himself, because he could not bear the disgrace" (87). The family left Milton without any money, and the young Mr. Thornton began to work in a draper's shop in order to support his family. When he had saved enough money, Mr. Thornton returned to Milton and paid his father's debts, and began his work at Marlborough Mills. The family's decision to live so close to the site of their wealth does allow Mrs. Thornton to monitor her son's progress, as one would a bee-hive. At the same time, the constant din of the factory within the home allows for the family to be aware of the source of their wealth both in a humbling and comforting manner.

[10] Margaret, for lack of a more appropriate word, is a "sensitive" person in terms of how she reacts to others' actions and specifically how her body and mind react to the sense stimulation surrounding her in Milton. As Victorian doctor Edmund Gurney writes in *The Power of Sound,*

“doubtless the sensations of higher senses may often be to the sensitive persons a source of acute distress” (2-3). While some who are not “sensitive” (as the Victorians called those who were connected with their senses) find that “over-stimulation” “deadens,” others, such as Margaret find that it “*excites and annoys* a sense organ” “by cultivating the sensibilities”(4, 2). John M. Picker in *Victorian Soundscapes* writes that George Eliot “invoked a motif of acute hearing to suggest the perceptive capacity a truly sympathetic character might possess”(6). Unlike Mrs. Thornton, who has seemingly become used to the sounds of the mill, Margaret will remain sensitive to the sounds of labor and the plight of those who are producing that labor. In fact, according to Gurney’s experience and Victorian popular medical thought, those who are sensitive to sight and sound, as Margaret is, will continue to experience “increased wakefulness with continually growing discomfort” as long as the stimulation continues (5). In other words, when Margaret becomes the mistress of the Thornton house and even after she has lived in the house for many years, she will still be sensitive to the sounds she hears and the discomfort might even increase. At the same time, Gurney argues that “there are possibilities of great variation in the same individual at different times” and equates in an individual’s ability to adapt to overwhelming sense stimulation to changes in one’s food preferences (2). But as indicated by Mr. Hale’s playful pinch of his daughter’s ear (on page 309), Margaret always has been sensitive to what she hears and this trait will most likely not change.

[11] During the workers’ riot, Margaret, who usually depends on her sense of hearing in order to learn, must employ her eyes to distinguish individuals in the crowd. As “the fierce growl of low deep angry voices” becomes stronger within the house, Margaret must look out the window and individualize the workers: “’'Oh, God!’ cried Margaret, suddenly; ‘there is Boucher. I know his face, though he is livid with rage’” (176).

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