

‘Do the duty that lies nearest to thee’: Elizabeth Gaskell,
Philanthropy and Writing

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Abstract

This thesis examines the relationship between Gaskell's philanthropy and her three social problem novels. Examining Gaskell in the context of Victorian philanthropy, I will argue that this is a relationship of far greater complexity than has previously been perceived. Gaskell's Unitarian faith will be of particular relevance as different denominations often had unique approaches to philanthropy, and I will begin by examining Gaskell's participation with philanthropy organised by her congregation, taking the charity bazaar as my example of this. Examining Gaskell's three social problem novels in chronological order I will demonstrate that Gaskell rejects these forms of organised Victorian philanthropy, referred to as 'associated philanthropy,' in favour of developing her own vision of philanthropy in her novels. I will examine how Gaskell's participation with 'associated philanthropy,' and the individual pursuit of her own philanthropic interests, shapes the development of her philanthropic vision in her fiction. I perceive her first novel, *Mary Barton*, as a tentative exploration of this vision, and by examining Gaskell's three philanthropic novels in chronological order, I will demonstrate how Gaskell rewrites the traditional philanthropic relationship to offer a reciprocal form of philanthropy which has the ability to cross class boundaries in both directions. I argue that Gaskell's rejection of associated philanthropy was an integral part in the development of this vision, as inspired by her faith, she founds her own vision in a more personal approach.

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1 Introduction

‘She has a purpose in life; and that purpose is a holy one’¹

1.1 Gaskell and Philanthropic Writing

Any discussion of Elizabeth Gaskell, however brief, will nearly always allude to her many philanthropic acts, so it was perhaps not surprising in the early 1990s when her writing itself was redefined as a philanthropic act. In particular, critics such as Dorice Williams Elliott and Pamela Corpron Parker, in their important essays on Gaskell’s philanthropic writing, focused on Gaskell’s early novels, *Mary Barton* and *North and South*, those previously defined as social problem novels, or social fiction.² Kathleen Tillotson’s *Novels of the Eighteen Forties*, published in 1954, initiated the study of the social problem genre, and the fact that she was soon followed by Marxist critics Arnold Kettle and Raymond Williams reinforced Gaskell’s reputation as a social problem novelist.³ Joseph Kestner revived the field in 1985 to argue that women played a far greater part in this tradition than previously assumed.⁴ Kestner locates these social novelists within the context of ‘intervention’: the number of ‘social investigations’ available, plus the publication of Blue Books in 1836, provided writers wishing to offer an accurate portrayal of life in their chosen setting with a wealth of information.⁵ It would appear that Gaskell belonged firmly in this context, especially with her first novel; Monica Correa Fryckstedt discovered that the language of *Mary Barton* had been significantly influenced by the reports of the Domestic Home Mission.⁶

¹ Elizabeth Gaskell, “Libbie Marsh’s Three Eras,” *The Works Of Elizabeth Gaskell Volume 1*, ed. Joanne Shattock (London: Pickering, 2005) 69. Referred to hereafter as *LM*.

² Dorice Williams Elliott, “The Female Visitor and the Marriage of Classes in Gaskell’s *North and South*,” *Nineteenth Century Literature* 49.1 (1994); Pamela Corpron Parker, “Fictional Philanthropy in Elizabeth Gaskell’s ‘Mary Barton’ and ‘North and South,’” *Victorian Literature and Culture* 25.2 (1997).

³ Arnold Kettle, “The Early Victorian Social-Problem Novel,” *From Dickens to Hardy*, ed. Boris Ford (Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1958); Kathleen Tillotson, *Novels of the Eighteen Forties* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1954); Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society, 1780-1950* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1958).

⁴ Joseph Kestner, *Protest and Reform: The British Social Narrative by Women, 1827-1867* (London: Methuen, 1985).

⁵ Kestner 12.

⁶ Monica Correa Fryckstedt, *Elizabeth Gaskell’s Mary Barton and Ruth: A Challenge to Christian England* (Uppsala, 1982) 90-93.

Definitions of the social problem novel vary, but Josephine Guy provides a good working definition as an “attempt to comment on, and stimulate debate about matters of general public and political concern.”⁷ From this we can position the social problem novelist as an observer, a commentator; whereas from Deirdre D’Albertis’ definition of the philanthropic novel we see that the novelist takes on a more active role, with the novels functioning as “literary interventionism.”⁸ Whilst Williams and Parker focus on Gaskell’s industrial novels, Guy’s definition offers a broader spectrum of social problems and I will also be examining *Ruth*. Elliott’s and Parker’s critical discussion of Gaskell’s philanthropic novels was from a feminist perspective, focusing on debates surrounding woman’s entry into the public sphere. Whilst Dorice Williams Elliott was also interested in Gaskell’s creation of a defensible form of public woman by rewriting the traditional Lady Bountiful role for an urban setting in *North and South*, equal, if not greater, attention has instead been focused on the novelist herself. The novel becomes a form of philanthropy through the ability of the narrative structure to mediate between the classes, with some arguing that this also allows the un-enfranchised female novelist to participate in debates concerning legislation.⁹ D’Albertis argues that the narrator of *Mary Barton* functions as a social worker, and Elliott takes a similar position to argue that the narrative of *North and South* enacts the process of female visiting demonstrated by Margaret Hale within the novel itself.¹⁰ According to Pamela Corpron Parker’s “Rhetoric of Fictional Philanthropy,” *Mary Barton* and *North and South* are a “benevolent gift,” offering instruction to one class, and providing sympathy and empathy for the other.¹¹ Parker argues that the failure of feminine duty demonstrated by *Mary Barton*’s middle-class characters provides Gaskell with the opportunity to demonstrate the sympathy and compassion sought by the working classes, whilst simultaneously urging her middle-class readers to demonstrate that sentiment through philanthropy.¹²

⁷ Josephine M. Guy, *The Victorian Social Problem Novel* (Hampshire: Macmillan, 1996) 4.

⁸ Deirdre D’Albertis, *Dissembling Fictions: Elizabeth Gaskell and the Victorian Social Text* (Hampshire: Macmillan, 1997) 59.

⁹ Elliott 43; Kestner 13.

¹⁰ D’Albertis 58; Elliott 25 & 43.

¹¹ Parker 322.

¹² Parker 326.

While such studies make a valid point in redefining Gaskell's work as an act of philanthropy, few have taken the time to consider this in the context of her other philanthropic acts. This becomes particularly relevant when we consider Gaskell's Unitarian faith, since not only was philanthropy significant to many sects during the nineteenth century, but as historians such as G. M. Ditchfield have demonstrated, a 'denominationalism' of philanthropy was also occurring at this time: Ditchfield, John Seed and Howard M Wach have identified philanthropic trends which were unique to the Unitarians.¹³ As is well known, Gaskell came from a Unitarian family; she was born in Chelsea to parents William Stevenson and Elizabeth Holland. Following the death of her mother in October 1811, Gaskell went to live with her aunt, Hannah Lumb, in Knutsford, where she spent her formative years living with her mother's Holland relations, who hailed from an old dissenting congregation in Knutsford, Cheshire.¹⁴ In 1832 she married William Gaskell, the assistant minister at Cross Street Chapel in Manchester. When we consider that Gaskell's philanthropic impulse is often linked to her faith, or her position as minister's wife, then the possibility of a peculiarly Unitarian form of philanthropy must have implications for our interpretation of any philanthropic act performed by Gaskell. Before examining Unitarian philanthropy it is first necessary to examine the Unitarian faith itself.

1.2 Unitarian Background

Unitarianism can be characterised primarily by its rejection of the Doctrine of the Trinity and the divinity of Christ, though there were certainly other denominations denying the Doctrine of the Trinity; in 1531 Servetus had published his criticism of the Doctrine of the Trinity.¹⁵ As man Jesus became more of an example to mankind than a Saviour, and so other doctrines such as Atonement and Predestination were also lost. Unitarians' rejection of one of the central doctrines of Christianity

¹³ G. M. Ditchfield, "English Rational Dissent and Philanthropy, c.1760 – c.1810," *Charity, Philanthropy and Reform From the 1690's to 1850*, eds. Hugh Cunningham and Joanna Innes (London: Macmillan, 1998) 195; John Seed, "Unitarianism, Political Economy and the Antinomies of Liberal Culture in Manchester, 1830-50," *Social History* 7.1 (1982); John Seed, "Theologies of Power: Unitarianism and the Social Relations of Religious Discourse, 1800-50," *Class, Power and Social Structure in British Nineteenth-Century Towns*, ed. R. J. Morris (Leicester: Leicester UP, 1986); Howard M. Wach, "Unitarian Philanthropy and Cultural Hegemony in Comparative Perspective: Manchester and Boston 1827 – 1848," *Journal of Social History* 26.3 (1993).

¹⁴ Jenny Uglow, *Elizabeth Gaskell: A Habit of Stories* (1993; London: Faber and Faber, 1999) 12.

¹⁵ Earl Morse Wilbur, *A History of Unitarianism, Socinianism and its Antecedents*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard UP, 1947) 3.

meant other denominations were often hostile towards them. Reading Gaskell's letters this may seem almost surprising, since her many friends were not confined to Unitarian circles and her social engagements were wide. However, several incidents in Gaskell's life reveal much about the position the Unitarians occupied in society in relation to other denominations. Gaskell feared that the Church of England clergyman Arthur Nicholls would not consent to Charlotte Brontë's remaining "intimate with us, heretics" after their marriage, and after meeting Gaskell and her daughters in Heidelberg, Charles Bosanquet required time to get "over the 'shock' of coming in contact for the first time with Unitarians."¹⁶ (He had assumed that Gaskell belonged to the Church of England, as like many Unitarians, she occasionally attended orthodox services). On their returning to England, Bosanquet wished to continue the friendship, despite the trepidation of his friends. His father could see no harm in this, but "advised him to have no doctrinal (as distinct from religious) conversation" with the Gaskells.¹⁷ In a chapter examining the social relations of Unitarianism, John Seed has explained how the hostility faced by Unitarians from other sects served to reinforce their sense of community dependency, "probably the most important factor in the strength of sectarian identity was its integration with kinship ties."¹⁸ Families such as the Hollands, Stevensons and Gaskells were often interconnected over several generations. Jenny Uglow notes that Gaskell was related to William Turner through three separate marriages: "His mother was the eldest sister of her grandfather, Samuel; his first wife Mary was her mother's cousin (the daughter of Thomas Holland of Manchester); his second wife, Jane Willetts, was the sister of her Uncle Peter's first wife."¹⁹

The Toleration Act of 1689 allowed some dissenters greater freedoms, but excluded those who denied the Doctrine of the Trinity, and the Blasphemy Act of 1698 made this a penal offence.²⁰ The last two people to be executed for heresy in Britain, in 1612 and 1697 respectively, had been convicted

¹⁶ *The Letters of Mrs Gaskell*, eds. J. A. V. Chapple and Arthur Pollard (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1966) 280, 648. Referred to hereafter as L followed by page numbers, rather than Letter numbers, unless stated otherwise.

¹⁷ L 648-49.

¹⁸ Seed, *Theologies* 130-31.

¹⁹ Uglow 56.

²⁰ C. G. Bolam et al, *The English Presbyterians From Elizabethan Puritanism To Modern Unitarianism* (London: Allen, 1968) 229.

of anti-trinitarian utterances.²¹ There would be no relaxation for rational dissenters until after the French Revolution when the Tories had succeeded the Whigs to power.²² In 1812-13 the Conventicle Act, passed in 1664, and Five Mile Act, passed in 1665, were both finally repealed.²³ Then in 1813 William Smith's Unitarian Relief Act finally abolished the penalties faced by those who denied the Doctrine of the Trinity, and the first Unitarian chapel in Essex-Street, London, was admitted as non-conformist.²⁴ It is no wonder then that in 1810, the year of Gaskell's birth, there were only 20 declared congregations.²⁵

The opening of the Essex-Street Chapel is considered an important moment in the emergence of the Unitarian movement in eighteenth-century England. The minister, Theophilus Lindsey, was a former fellow of St John's College, Cambridge; one of a group of men who organised the failed petition to Parliament in 1772 for the abolition of the necessity to subscribe to the Thirty Nine Articles.²⁶ Following this rejection they founded the Essex-Street Chapel as a rational model of an Anglican place of worship. Lindsey is credited with coining the term 'Unitarian,' referring to himself as a 'Unitarian Christian' at a time when the Toleration and Blasphemy Acts were still enforceable.²⁷ However, from 1779 dissenting ministers were not required to subscribe to the articles stipulated by the Toleration Act, and this alongside the fact that Lindsey faced no punishment began to create a desire for advancement. Joseph Priestley is perhaps the most instrumental figure in defining what is referred to as the old school of Unitarianism, a religion of "emphatic rationalism, completely Newtonian, determinist and materialist."²⁸ Priestley's influence continued to last well into the first quarter of the nineteenth century, however the rationalism of the eighteenth century was giving way to romanticism.²⁹ The 'new school' of Unitarianism was led by James Martineau; born in 1805 in Norwich, he trained for the ministry at Manchester College, then located in York, before first

²¹ Raymond V. Holt, *The Unitarian Contribution to Social Progress in England* (London: Lindsay, 1938) 16.

²² Bolam et al 219-20.

²³ Bolam et al 85-86; Ruth Watts, *Gender, Power and the Unitarians in England 1760-1860* (London: Longman, 1998) 7.

²⁴ Bolam et al 238, 245.

²⁵ Uglow 7.

²⁶ Bolam et al 228-29.

²⁷ Bolam et al 228-29.

²⁸ Bolam et al 229-30.

²⁹ Bolam et al 253-54.

accepting a post in Dublin and then Liverpool. In 1839 the Anglican clergy of Liverpool preached a series of anti-Unitarian sermons to which Martineau and his colleagues John Hamilton Thom and Henry Giles responded with “Unitarianism Defended,” in which Martineau rejected Priestley’s doctrine of philosophic necessity.³⁰

As noted earlier, historians have found that Unitarians, like other denominations, were unique in their approach to philanthropy; G M Ditchfield explains that with regard to Unitarianism at the end of the eighteenth century this unique approach can be characterised by their perception of the state and their attitude towards the poor. The hostility demonstrated by rational dissenters towards a Trinitarian state greatly informed their attitude towards poor relief; whilst many of them agreed with popular opinion that the Poor Law was excessive, some such as Priestley even arguing for its abolition, they tended to blame the government for this state of affairs rather than the poor themselves.³¹ Rational dissenters held a far more favourable view of the poor at this time than many of their contemporaries did, “the general tendency was to represent the poor as victims; inasmuch as they had moral failings, that was the fault of their rulers.”³²

1.3 Victorian Philanthropy

Irrespective of denomination, philanthropists faced huge challenges during the later decades of the eighteenth century as it became apparent that they would be required to adapt their endeavours to suit a rapidly changing society. The Church of England had been slow to adapt to a population that was changing in size and distribution, and at the end of the eighteenth century industrialisation was progressing in areas that were often outside of existing parochial structures.³³ In these changing times the Evangelical revival was soon to make a tremendous impact on Victorian philanthropy, to the extent that evidence of its influence is still visible today.³⁴ The philanthropic institution or society was

³⁰ Bolam et al 255.

³¹ Ditchfield 195-97.

³² Ditchfield 199.

³³ Richard J. Helmstadter and Richard W. Davis, *Religion and Irreligion in Victorian Society: Essays in Honour of R. K. Webb* (London: Routledge, 1992) 9.

³⁴ Ian Bradley, *The Call to Seriousness: The Evangelical Impact on the Victorians* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1976) 20. The starting point of Evangelical theology was the doctrine of the total depravity of man; to avoid eternal damnation individuals must achieve regeneration of the soul by repenting of their sins and fully

considered the ideal method of dealing with poverty and Ian Bradley has argued that this dramatic rise in “associated philanthropy” can be attributed to the Evangelical revival.³⁵ By 1850, three quarters of voluntary charitable societies in existence in England were Evangelical in character and control.³⁶ By the nineteenth century the philanthropic society was certainly not a new initiative; however, the Victorians were soon to witness an explosion of committees and societies aiming to alleviate all manner of human conditions. The increase in philanthropic institutions should also be viewed within the context of the more cautious approach to philanthropy emerging at the end of the eighteenth century. Greater care was taken to aid only deserving cases. Philanthropists “judged charitable efforts by their success in encouraging recipients to stand on their own feet” and so the society could function as an intermediary between the beneficiary and the philanthropist.³⁷ It was impractical to translate traditional rural methods to the developing industrial towns. In urban areas it was simply not possible for the philanthropist to seek out and familiarise themselves with those most in need, causing concern that almsgiving might simply encourage the professional mendicant.³⁸ Reviewing *Mary Barton*, the industrialist and writer William Rathbone Greg whined of the “Immense difficulty...experienced by the rich, when they attempt to discriminate between cases of imposture, and cases of real destitution.”³⁹ At the beginning of the nineteenth century Unitarians were particularly suspicious of institutional charities, perceiving the primary function of these charities as the imposition of their Evangelical values upon the poor;⁴⁰ and as Ian Bradley explains, this was a fairly common accusation

accepting Christ’s death as an atonement for them. The fear of accountability and judgement which awaited them at death prompted Evangelicals to regard their time on Earth as preparation for the Day of Judgement; so whilst the fulfilment of good works played no part in the Evangelical scheme of salvation, they were, however, considered the only conclusive evidence of conversion, the doctrine at the very heart of Evangelical theology. See Bradley 21-22.

³⁵ David Owen, *English Philanthropy 1660-1960* (London: Oxford UP, 1964) 3, 11. David Owen defines “associated philanthropy” as a new philanthropic technique emerging in the late seventeenth century and early eighteenth century; whilst people continued to donate money as individuals, groups of people increasingly worked together in voluntary societies to achieve specific charitable aims.

³⁶ Bradley 123.

³⁷ Owen, 97-98.

³⁸ Owen 92.

³⁹ Angus Easson, *Elizabeth Gaskell: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1991) 169. The Greg family came from Styal in Cheshire, where sons Robert Hyde, John, Samuel and William Rathbone all joined their father in the family’s cotton mill business Samuel Greg & Co. Gaskell was well acquainted with the Unitarian Greg family; in 1854, she wrote of William, “he has reviewed and abused ‘Mary Barton’; and we are none the less friends” (L 275).

⁴⁰ Ditchfield 201.

levelled at the Evangelicals by other denominations.⁴¹ Ditchfield found that at the beginning of the nineteenth century the Unitarian mistrust of the state means that their philanthropy can be characterised by an emphasis on ‘private exertions.’⁴²

As will become evident in the following chapters, Manchester Unitarians donated large sums of money to cultural and educational projects during the first part of the nineteenth century, in the belief that education of the rational intellect could redeem the individual from immorality.⁴³ By this time, the dominant middle-class view of poverty was that the poor were responsible for their own situation; Greg continued in his review of *Mary Barton* to write that “the want is moral, not material,” and that the poor must be the “principal, almost the sole, agents, - in their own rehabilitation.”⁴⁴ Therefore, many philanthropic schemes early in the century offered opportunities for self improvement, rather than material or monetary aid.⁴⁵ Through the American minister William Ellery Channing’s 1838 lecture “Self-Culture” we can see the belief that Unitarianism was particularly suited to impart these lessons, as the Unitarian rejection of the Calvinist doctrine of sin allowed for the possibility of a universal capacity for self improvement.⁴⁶ By the middle of the century, this philanthropic ideology was transforming from a concentration on the poor’s self improvement, to a more interventionist strategy. John Seed has suggested the depression of the late thirties as a possible catalyst for this change.⁴⁷ This may certainly have been a contributory factor, but several philanthropic schemes reflecting these changing ideas were already in place by the early thirties. The Manchester and District Provident Society, established in 1833, and the Manchester and Salford Sanitary Association, established in 1852, were visiting schemes, initiatives which divided the city into districts and assigned volunteers to visit the poor in their designated district.⁴⁸ As Michael E. Rose explains, the purpose of these schemes was threefold: firstly, they aimed to improve the lot of the poor through their

⁴¹ Bradley 131.

⁴² Ditchfield 202.

⁴³ Seed, *Unitarianism* 12.

⁴⁴ Easson, *Critical Heritage* 177.

⁴⁵ Seed, *Unitarianism* 13.

⁴⁶ Wach, *Unitarian Philanthropy* 545.

⁴⁷ Seed, *Unitarianism* 13.

⁴⁸ Michael E. Rose, “Culture, Philanthropy and the Manchester Middle Classes,” *City, Class and Culture: Studies of Cultural Production and Social Policy in Victorian Manchester*, ed. R. J. Morris (Leicester: Leicester UP, 1986) 105-06.

moral and cultural education; secondly, they educated the middle classes who volunteered as visitors, and finally they provided the facts and figures necessary to create a picture of poverty in the city.⁴⁹ The early 1830's saw the emergence of a Unitarian-led visiting scheme; Domestic Home Missions were established in Bristol, Liverpool, Birmingham, Manchester and the East End of London. Their inspiration is generally attributed to the Boston Unitarian minister Joseph Tuckerman, who visited England in 1833. Tuckerman had been appointed Minister at Large to the Poor of Boston in 1827, after the Executive Committee of the American Unitarian Association became alarmed by the rapid spread of poverty.⁵⁰

John Seed explains that for Unitarians, their religion always emphasised the duties of their position; wealth was considered a gift from providence, not the sole property of the individual and therefore the idea of stewardship was a recurring theme in Unitarian sermons.⁵¹ From this emerged a concern with the master-servant relationship, explains Seed; this formed a contract which should be entered into freely by both individuals. Whilst both should benefit from the arrangement, it was still a contract between unequal persons.⁵² It was effectively a 'division of mental and manual labour' and this was reflected in the duties of both; the servant was obliged to perform tasks with "diligence, honesty, obedience to the rules of the household, loyalty to the interests and reputation of their masters. The duties of the master included an attention to the health, comfort and education of his servants. He had to care for their moral welfare."⁵³

1.4 Women and Philanthropy

The Industrial Revolution is commonly considered to be the biggest contributory factor in the redefinition of women's roles throughout the nineteenth century, forcing working-class women to leave their homes and enter the workplace in factories and workshops, whilst enforcing a more

⁴⁹ Michael E. Rose 106-07.

⁵⁰ Wach, *Unitarian Philanthropy* 540. David Turley "The Anglo-American Unitarian Connection and Urban Poverty," *Charity, Philanthropy and Reform From the 1690's to 1850*, eds. Hugh Cunningham and Joanna Innes (London: Macmillan, 1998). Turley explores other influences such as the City and Town Mission initiated by David Nasmyth in the 1820s & 30s, and the projects of Thomas Chalmers in his Glasgow parish during the 1820s. 233.

⁵¹ Seed, *Theologies* 136.

⁵² Seed, *Theologies* 136.

⁵³ Seed, *Theologies* 136.

restrictive role on middle-class women who were required to remain within the home.⁵⁴ A middle class woman was her “husband’s helpmate and inspirer, soul of the home, and mother of a family,”⁵⁵ and one of her most important tasks was the moral development of her family as described by writers such as Sarah Lewis and Sarah Stickney Ellis.⁵⁶ As the nineteenth century progressed increased incomes meant that traditional domestic duties performed by women were now assigned to servants. Middle-class women assumed the role of administrator, managing the domestic staff.⁵⁷ They now had far more leisure time in which to indulge in painting, music, literature and other elegant arts. Few forms of paid employment were considered acceptable for middle-class women, and opposition from society was strong: in seeking work, a lady effectively forfeited her gentility. Less than one quarter of the 36% of financially independent women polled in the 1851 census were middle class.⁵⁸ Young ladies were educated with the assumption that they would marry upon reaching an eligible age. If circumstances forced them to seek work, their options were severely limited, as their education and training had prepared them only for a life as a wife and mother.⁵⁹ Paid work was perceived as a threat to the middle-class home and family, as the sense of personal reward and increased economic independence it offered were considered irreconcilable with a woman’s capacity to be entirely selfless.⁶⁰ Philanthropy, then, was the ideal vocation for middle-class women. It utilised the skills attributed to women, which were so essential to their role as wives and mothers, and provided them with an outlet for self expression, as opposed to a life of ‘idle refinement.’⁶¹ As Anne Summers and Martin Gorsky note, the increase in households employing servants meant that women were at this time establishing residential contact with a new class of employees at a time when male employers were withdrawing from residential contact with their employees, possibly stimulating a desire to

⁵⁴ Elizabeth K. Helsinger et al, *The Woman Question: Society and Literature in Britain and America, 1837-1883 Vol 2 Social Issues* (London: Garland, 1983) 109.

⁵⁵ Francoise Basch, *Relative Creatures: Victorian Women in Society and the Novel 1837-67*, trans. Anthony Rudolf (London: Allen Lane, 1974) 26.

⁵⁶ A. J. Banks and Olive Banks, *Feminism and Family Planning in Victorian England* (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 1965) 62.

⁵⁷ Banks and Banks 67.

⁵⁸ Helsinger et al 134.

⁵⁹ Helsinger et al 134.

⁶⁰ Helsinger et al 113.

⁶¹ Frank Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1980) 5.

“recreate the harmoniously regulated nature of the mistress/servant relationships of middle-class households in the wider environment.”⁶²

However, the task of measuring and assessing women’s contributions to nineteenth-century philanthropy is almost impossible. Men would often subscribe to a philanthropic institution on behalf of the whole family; after receiving £20 from her publishers for her short story “Lizzie Leigh,” Gaskell writes “W[illia]m has composedly buttoned it up in his pocket. He has promised I may have some for the Refuge.”⁶³ The “Private efforts” Gaskell urged her readers to fulfil in the Preface to *Mary Barton*, of which there are countless examples in her own letters, would remain unknown without the letters, diaries and autobiographies left behind by philanthropically minded women.⁶⁴ However, in a survey of 50 societies for which subscription lists remain for two or more years, Frank Prochaska found that contributions made by women dramatically increased throughout the century.⁶⁵ Such documents also reveal that women preferred to contribute to societies concerned with problems affecting women and children, such as lying in charities and blanket clubs; institutions concerned with problems considered inappropriate for male involvement.⁶⁶ Writing to his recently married daughter, Mary Robberds, in 1812, the Rev William Turner encouraged her involvement with the Lying In Charity, stating “you may also contribute to those personal services which it will be out of your husband’s line to offer.”⁶⁷

Whilst ladies of the landed classes continued in the traditional role of Lady Bountiful, making “the personal contacts so crucial for maintaining the system of patriarchal control and deference,” middle-class ladies were becoming an integral part of the philanthropic institutions rapidly growing in urban

⁶² Anne Summers, “A Home From Home – Women’s Philanthropic Work in the Nineteenth Century,” *Fit Work for Women*, ed. Sandra Burman (London, 1979) 39; Martin Gorsky, *Patterns of Philanthropy: Charity and Society in Nineteenth-Century Bristol* (Suffolk: Boydell, 1999) 162.

⁶³ L 113. Jenny Uglow rightly warns against drawing conclusions about the Gaskells’ marriage from this statement, perceiving it instead as an instance of William teasing his wife, p251.

⁶⁴ Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and women of the English middle class, 1780-1850* (1987; London: Routledge, 1987) 432. Frank Prochaska has provided a list of about 400 such memoirs and autobiographies in the bibliography of *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century England*.

⁶⁵ Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy* 29.

⁶⁶ Davidoff and Hall 434; Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy* 30.

⁶⁷ William Turner, “William Turner to Mary Robberds, Newcastle, 29 January 1812,” *Private Voices: The Diaries of Elizabeth Gaskell and Sophia Holland*, eds. J. A. V. Chapple and Anita Wilson (Keele: Keele UP, 1996) 118.

areas.⁶⁸ It should be noted that it was not unusual for ladies listed in the subscriptions to be uninvolved with the actual work, and upper-class ladies would often participate in this way, donating money to the cause or lending their names as patronesses. An event patronised by a member of royalty would guarantee a good attendance.⁶⁹ However, women were an integral part of the success of the philanthropic institution, and having more time than men they did “much of the routine and thankless labour,” whilst men administered the societies.⁷⁰ It was quite normal in philanthropic societies for the ladies’ committee to be assisting a committee composed of men, presumably owing to the codes governing public behaviour which also discouraged women from attending public meetings or making a public speech. Of the fifty institutions examined by Prochaska, all were administered by committees composed entirely of men, though women were involved as patronesses or in sub-committees in some of them.⁷¹

Opinions vary widely as to just how liberating philanthropy was for women. Martin Gorsky explains that “socialist-feminist critics point to the conservatism, anti-feminism and ‘collusion with masculine power structures’ of female philanthropy.”⁷² Maria Luddy offers a rather different perspective. Focusing on women’s active engagement in philanthropic work, she argues that “the power women wielded is often obscured in the trivial sentimentality of the annual reports which in some sense deny the very difficult and often arduous tasks that faced philanthropic women.”⁷³ Luddy argues that we should not forget the many tasks fulfilled by women, such as the keeping of accounts, use of resources and maintenance of buildings.⁷⁴ Whilst such societies were in the minority, there were actually a few female run societies in existence in the nineteenth century, including a Dorcas Society in Bristol and the Lewin’s Mead Working and Visiting Society, both of which had a female treasurer, and in Liverpool a Ladies’ Charity, established to visit the sick poor, which was

⁶⁸ Jessica Gerard, “Lady Bountiful: Women of the Landed Classes and Rural Philanthropy,” *Victorian Studies* 30.2 (1987): 183-84.

⁶⁹ Frank Prochaska, “Women in English Philanthropy 1790-1830,” *International Review of Social History* 19 (1974): 431.

⁷⁰ Prochaska, *Women in English Philanthropy* 432.

⁷¹ Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy* 28.

⁷² Gorsky 163.

⁷³ Maria Luddy, *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth Century Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995) 3.

⁷⁴ Luddy 3.

administered by women.⁷⁵ Two of these philanthropic societies were also Unitarian initiatives. Martin Gorsky and Kathryn Gleadle have noted that it was often Unitarian women leading the way in the movement from philanthropy to reform; Mary Carpenter, Octavia Hill and Florence Nightingale all shared some Unitarian connection.⁷⁶ With their progressive attitudes to issues such as female education, we could be forgiven for assuming, as Coral Lansbury does, that Unitarian women enjoyed greater freedom than many of their female contemporaries.⁷⁷ However, Kathryn Gleadle has argued that their activities in the public sphere were similarly restricted: “Perhaps because of the opprobrium Unitarians faced for their religious views, they appear to have been very concerned to adhere to conventional etiquette.”⁷⁸ Some Unitarian women certainly found that this diminished their contributions to philanthropy: Catharine Cappe expressed regret in her memoir that women were unable to participate in the legislation and administration of philanthropic institutions, and Mary Carpenter was faced with the prospect of having to overcome her reservations about public speaking in order to further her philanthropic interests.⁷⁹ Carpenter, daughter of Unitarian minister Lant Carpenter, played an integral part in establishing the first ragged school in Bristol in 1846, and went on to open the Kingswood Day Industrial School in 1852.⁸⁰ This later became a reformatory for convicted juvenile boys, and her work there drew her into discussions surrounding the government proposal of reformatories as the solution to youth crime.⁸¹

Gaskell, however, found public speaking to be “such noisy obtrusive ways of doing good,” and preferred to express herself through her fiction.⁸² After publishing *Ruth*, she wrote to Mary Green, “you know I can tell stories better than any other way of expressing myself.”⁸³ As she explained to Frederick Furnivall in 1853, “It is different when speaking as the character in a {s} story-or even as

⁷⁵ Gorsky 169-70; Summers 39.

⁷⁶ Kathryn Gleadle, *The Early Feminists: Radical Unitarians and the Emergence of the Women Rights Movements, 1831-51* (London: Macmillan, 1995) 30; Gorsky 174-75.

⁷⁷ Coral Lansbury, *Elizabeth Gaskell: The Novel of Social Crisis* (London: Elek, 1975) 11.

⁷⁸ Gleadle 30.

⁷⁹ Helen Plant, “Unitarianism, Philanthropy and Feminism in York, 1782-1821: the Career of Catharine Cappe,” *Borthwick Papers* 103 (2003): 25.

⁸⁰ Gorsky 175.

⁸¹ Gorsky 175.

⁸² L 187.

⁸³ *Further Letters of Mrs Gaskell*, eds. John Chapple and Alan Shelston (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2003) 79. Referred to hereafter as FL, followed by page numbers.

the author of a book. Do you think I cd say or write in a letter...what I have said both in M B and Ruth?"⁸⁴ (sic). This statement implies that Gaskell felt she could be bolder in her fiction than she would otherwise be; that in speaking through a character or narrator, she could potentially be more controversial whilst shielding herself from responsibility. It is evident from her letters at this time of her writing career that Gaskell is also concerned that her writing should serve some useful purpose. In a letter to Eliza Fox written in 1850, Gaskell discusses the conflict arising between "home duties and individual life," concluding that "If self is to be the end of exertions, those exertions are unholy."⁸⁵ Robyn Warhol explains that "In Victorian novels written by women, earnest direct address evolved as an alternative to public speaking "in person," which was forbidden to respectable females."⁸⁶ In Gaskell's case it has been suggested that the religious philanthropic impulse impedes artistic development: "The didactic element springing from the desire to do something for people through religion, militates against the interest in people and conduct for their own sakes which has developed as the legitimate material for the novelist."⁸⁷

I will examine the articulation of Gaskell's own vision of philanthropy through her fiction; this will include not only representations of philanthropic acts within the fiction, but also the role of the novelist in recommending philanthropy to her readers. A timeframe of 1832 – 1855 has been selected: these 25 years encompass Gaskell's marriage and move to Manchester and the writing and publication of *Mary Barton*, *Ruth*, and *North and South*. During this time Gaskell participates in both Unitarian and non-sectarian forms of 'associated philanthropy,' whilst also pursuing her own philanthropic interests, and demonstrating an interest in the Christian Socialist movement. Whilst I will focus primarily on these three novels, I will also consider any relevant short stories published during this time. Gaskell's short stories have not received the critical attention of her novels, but she often explored ideas and themes in them which would later become important in her novels. We can also find in them ideas regarding Gaskell's own philanthropic vision; for example in "Libbie Marsh's

⁸⁴ L 255-56.

⁸⁵ L 106-7.

⁸⁶ Robyn Warhol, *Gendered Interventions: Narrative Discourse in the Victorian Novel* (London: Rutgers UP, 1989) vii.

⁸⁷ E. Wright 46.

Three Eras,” the narrator speaks of the “the fears, the hopes and the self sacrifices-all, perhaps small in the tangible effect as the widow’s mite, yet not the less marked by the viewless angels who go about continually among us.”⁸⁸

Within this timeframe we can perceive not only a change in attitude towards philanthropic practice, but also the development of her own philanthropic vision. This is a broader vision of philanthropy than that typically ascribed by historians to Victorian ladies; moving beyond organised philanthropic societies, it is this vision that her novels articulate. Her changing attitude towards philanthropy is evident in her letters; the 20 year old Elizabeth was happy to demonstrate benevolence with a charity ball, whilst a mature Elizabeth condemned her Manchester contemporaries for their ‘chequebook philanthropy.’⁸⁹ Charity bazaars, balls and banquets were a popular way of raising funds and awareness, and were of course also very enjoyable for those involved; Brian Harrison has observed that “the very organisation of the philanthropic world itself ... ensured that such redistribution of the national income as did take place in the nineteenth century gave pleasure to and even financially profited the not-so-poor before it finally filtered down to those in real need.”⁹⁰ Providing a contemporary perspective, a member of the Manchester Athenaeum wrote in his “Preface” to Leon Faucher’s *Manchester in 1844*: “It is to be feared that our public charities are more creditable to the donors than beneficial to the recipients.”⁹¹ In 1859 Gaskell wrote to Elizabeth Holland: “The best mode of administering material charity seems to me to be by giving employment and taking thought in adapting the kind of employment and in helping to find out who can do it.”⁹² Whilst the young Gaskell obviously enjoyed participating at philanthropic events that were also pleasant social occasions, a mature Gaskell had been considering the best mode of assisting individual people, and the offer of employment helps individuals to achieve self sufficiency.

⁸⁸ LM 53.

⁸⁹ FL 7; L193.

⁹⁰ Brian Harrison, “Philanthropy and the Victorians,” *Victorian Studies* 9.4 (1966):363.

⁹¹ Member of the Manchester Athenaeum, “Preface,” *Manchester in 1844*, by Leon Faucher (London & Manchester, 1844) xi.

⁹² L 548-49.

The timeframe in which her three philanthropic novels were written also places Gaskell's fiction within the context of the Unitarian mid-century shift in philanthropic thinking. Her faith has been considered an important factor in the interpretation of her work since the reappraisal of her status on the centenary of her death. At the time, Edgar Wright wrote: "a redefinition of their [the Victorian novelists] empirical world is under way, with consequent adjustments to the distinct worlds of the novelists who interpret it."⁹³ Wright examines the possibility that it may be religion shaping the 'world' of Gaskell's novels.⁹⁴ It should also be noted that from this point onwards critics interpret her contributions to the Condition of England debate in her social problem fiction as religious. "Her emphasis is on the need for religion, not for social reform; she sees the latter as one desirable outcome of the former" writes Wright.⁹⁵ Since the early 1980s historians have been exploring the changing middle-class ideology of poverty within Unitarianism, but Gaskell scholars are yet to apply this fully to her work. John Wyatt initiated this field of study in 2006 with an article for the Gaskell Society Journal, focusing on the reflection of 'inoffensive philanthropy,' the theme of an 1858 sermon by William Gaskell, in *North and South*.⁹⁶ Wyatt suggests that whilst the term 'inoffensive philanthropist' may appear to complement the separate sphere ideology, this is not the case: "A major theme of the novel is indeed the emerging individuality for the female philanthropist."⁹⁷ However, as Wyatt is keen to distinguish between Gaskell's public life and her writing, he fails to draw the obvious analogy here with Gaskell herself.

In 1850 Gaskell wrote to Lady Kay-Shuttleworth "I could not write about virtues to order," suggesting that whilst she felt that her writing should serve some useful purpose, she also required some external inspiration to suggest a theme to her.⁹⁸ In a separate letter to Lady Kay-Shuttleworth she explained that she did not choose the subject matter of *Mary Barton*, it was 'impressed' upon

⁹³ E. Wright 23.

⁹⁴ E. Wright 23.

⁹⁵ E. Wright 29. See also Arthur Pollard, *Mrs Gaskell Novelist and Biographer* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1965) 60; Wendy A. Craik *Elizabeth Gaskell and the English Provincial Novel* (London: Methuen, 1975) 4; and Enid L. Duthie *The Themes of Elizabeth Gaskell* (London: Macmillan, 1980) 162.

⁹⁶ John Wyatt, "The Inoffensive Philanthropist: the way of humility in *North and South*," *Gaskell Society Journal* 20 (2006).

⁹⁷ Wyatt 109-10.

⁹⁸ L 132.

her.⁹⁹ I will explore the relevance of Gaskell's public life in her writing, examining the relationship between her philanthropic activities and her writing, taking into account the way in which she engages with Unitarian philanthropic ideology. Previous studies of Gaskell's philanthropic writing have perceived her writing as an extension of her other philanthropic pursuits, when, as I will demonstrate, Gaskell's engagement with philanthropy is an issue of far greater complexity than has previously been assumed.

Whilst she sometimes felt a preference for the countryside, Gaskell felt that the 'work' appointed for herself and her husband lay in Manchester, and this is certainly relevant to the philanthropy of her public life.¹⁰⁰ Alan J. Kidd explains that Manchester in the nineteenth century was an exception to other cities such as Birmingham, in that it lacked inherited influence: instead an 'urban aristocracy' emerged from the businessmen.¹⁰¹ Unitarians were playing an important part in the creation of a new urban culture, and Cross Street chapel was where many of Manchester's bourgeois millocracy worshipped. Richard Wade's list of the "remarkable body of men," who served as trustees for the chapel, includes several M.P.s, Manchester's first Mayor, and a president of the Literary and Philosophical Society; alongside barristers, merchants, and bankers.¹⁰² It would appear that philanthropy was an important part of the chapel community, and Gaskell's faith here becomes particularly relevant as it will become apparent that Gaskell's views about philanthropy are at variance with some of those from her congregation.

I will begin by examining Gaskell's involvement with the charity bazaar, a form of 'associated philanthropy' organised by the Cross Street congregation. I will argue that Gaskell's disapproval of the manner in which the bazaars had become middle-class social events, with little, or no, contact between philanthropic donor and recipient, inspires the development of her own philanthropic vision in her fiction. In the second chapter I will examine Gaskell's participation with another form of

⁹⁹ L 120.

¹⁰⁰ L 139.

¹⁰¹ Alan J. Kidd, "Introduction: The Middle Class in Nineteenth-Century Manchester," *City, Class and Culture: Studies of Social Policy and Cultural Production in Victorian Manchester*, eds. Alan J. Kidd and K. W. Roberts (Manchester University Press, 1985): 5.

¹⁰² Richard Wade, *The Rise of Nonconformity in Manchester, with a Brief Sketch of the History of Cross Street Chapel* (London, 1880) 60-62.

associated philanthropy, arguing that this influences Gaskell to further develop her own vision as a reciprocal relationship. The third chapter examines Gaskell's interest in the Christian Socialist movement as the inspiration behind her decision to once again examine class relations in industrial cities. I will demonstrate also in this chapter how Gaskell's final philanthropic novel sees the fulfilment of her philanthropic vision; with Gaskell offering a form of reciprocal philanthropy with the ability to cross class boundaries in both directions.

2 *Mary Barton* and the Charity Bazaar

How little can the rich man know

Of what the poor man feels,

When Want, like some dark demon foe,

Nearer and Nearer steals

Manchester Song, *Mary Barton*

2.1 ‘lavish expenditure’: Gaskell and the Charity Bazaar

The philanthropic intent behind Gaskell’s first novel is by now well known: through *Mary Barton* she examines the conflict between the classes, between employer and employee, under the assumption that the middle classes were unaware of the depth and degree of poverty that existed in industrial cities. Whilst Gaskell had written, and published, several short stories, this was her first novel, and writing was a relatively new form of philanthropy for her. When considering her entire oeuvre, it has usually been noted that the strong didactic element of *Mary Barton*, and her early short stories, gradually diminishes; as Edgar Wright has noted: “The early work contains a good deal of direct exhortation.”¹ This has been linked to Gaskell’s religion, with Wright noting that the transformation of a character through the influence of religion is a recurring element of the plot in Gaskell’s early work.² I would suggest that we can also perceive the strong didactic element as a result of Gaskell’s tentative exploration of her own vision of philanthropy, in this first novel, which she develops in her successive philanthropic novels. This vision was of a more personal approach compared with the

¹ E. Wright 44.

² E. Wright 44.

forms of associated philanthropy that she had been participating in with other Cross Street congregation members, as an example of this I will examine her involvement with two charity bazaars.

The novel had originally been named after her hero, John Barton, but Gaskell was persuaded by her publisher to change it to *Mary Barton*.³ The plot surrounding John Barton perhaps better encapsulated what to Gaskell was the central theme, as she told Mrs Greg: “Round the character of John Barton all the others formed themselves.”⁴ But Mary’s plot runs parallel, with the romantic rivalry between her two lovers complicating the drama surrounding the antagonistic relations between the mill workers and their employers. Barton is a mill worker who is turned off during a period of slack trade. Struggling to survive, his sense of bitterness towards the masters for his present predicament increases and is channelled into the Chartist movement. After an unsuccessful meeting with the masters, the men decide to take revenge by murdering the son of mill owner Mr Carson, and it falls to Barton to fulfil the task. Mary’s working-class lover, Jem Wilson, is charged with the crime after a previous altercation with Harry Carson is witnessed by a policeman.

Gaskell had originally begun writing a tale of rural life, set one hundred years previously on the borders of Yorkshire, but at some point this was abandoned, and the reason soon becomes evident in her preface; she explains that “a little attention to the expression of feelings on the part of the work-people with whom I was acquainted, had laid open to me the hearts of one or two of the more thoughtful among them; I saw that they were sore and irritable against the rich, the even tenor of whose seemingly happy lives appeared to increase the anguish caused by the lottery-like nature of their own.”⁵ As Carlyle had noted in “Chartism,” “all battle is misunderstanding” and Gaskell positions herself in the Preface as mediator between the classes.⁶ It is evident from the “Preface” that it is personal contact with the workmen that has led her to a deeper understanding of their lives and it is this knowledge that she wishes to impart. She addresses her readers personally, asking them to

³ L70

⁴ L74

⁵ Elizabeth Gaskell, “Preface” *Mary Barton* (London: Penguin, 1996) 3.

⁶ Thomas Carlyle, “Chartism,” *Selected Writings*, ed. Alan Shelston (London: Penguin, 1971) 155.

show empathy and understanding and urging them individually to make a difference through “merciful deeds.”⁷

Her motivation for beginning *Mary Barton* is widely considered to be the death of her son William from scarlet fever in August 1845, when he was only nine months old. In the “Preface” she explained that “Three years ago I became anxious (from circumstances that need not be more fully alluded to) to employ myself in writing a work of fiction.”⁸ The campaigner against contagious diseases, Josephine Butler, had been similarly affected by the death of her daughter Eva. She wrote:

I became possessed with an irresistible desire to go forth and find some pain keener than my own—to meet with people more unhappy than myself....I had no clear idea beyond that, no plan for helping others; my sole wish was to plunge into the heart of some human misery, and to say to afflicted people, “I understand. I, too, have suffered.”⁹

At this most difficult time of her life, when she was in need of some ‘employment,’ Gaskell chose to focus her efforts on helping those less fortunate. The inspiration for the plot supposedly occurred during an encounter with an artisan and his starving family; she allegedly reported to Travers Madge that whilst arguing with the man against his suspicions of the rich, he “took hold of her arm, and grasping it tightly said, with tears in his eyes: “Ay, ma’am, but have ye ever seen a child clemmed to death?”¹⁰ Whilst this incident is not reported in any of her surviving letters it seems quite plausible; Thomas Cooper, a reporter for the *Leicestershire Mercury*, converted to Chartism after a similar experience. He was shocked to discover that hosiery workers actually earned four shillings and sixpence per week, not, as he had assumed, per day.¹¹

⁷ Gaskell, “Preface” 4.

⁸ Gaskell, “Preface” 3

⁹ qtd. in A. S. G. Butler, *Portrait of Josephine Butler* (London: Faber, 1954) 54.

¹⁰ Mat Hompes, “Mrs Gaskell,” *The Gentleman’s Magazine* 279.1976 (1895): 130-1. *Proquest*. 16 July 2011.

¹¹ Ian Haywood, *The Literature of Struggle: an Anthology of Chartist Fiction* (Aldershot: Scolar, 1995) 8.

People often write enthusiastically about Gaskell as a philanthropist, listing her work at the Sunday Schools, participation at bazaars and visiting the homes of the poor;¹² but what if philanthropic writing arose out of a sense of dissatisfaction with the philanthropy she was already participating in? In December 1855, Gaskell had encountered a ‘poor pale stunted workman’ who was apparently unimpressed with the philanthropy practised by Gaskell and her contemporaries, and felt no compunction in reproaching her: “You benevolent ladies! Why you ladies all play at benevolence – Look at Florence Nightingale – there’s a woman for you”. Gaskell wrote to Florence’s sister, Parthenope, of this encounter, admitting to her “it was so true that I could say nothing but keep humble silence.”¹³ The accusation that the ladies only ‘play’ at philanthropy provides an interesting insight into middle-class charitable enterprise and working-class reception of it.

Using Gaskell’s letters and contemporary newspaper articles reporting on bazaars and other philanthropic activities I will trace Gaskell’s involvement with the charity bazaar, a popular form of Victorian philanthropy, prior to the publication of *Mary Barton*.¹⁴ It is regrettable that fewer than fifty of Gaskell’s letters survive from this period of her life, providing only a sparse representation of her activities, but they do provide some evidence, and refer to two charity bazaars she was involved with alongside her fellow congregation members: the 1838 Popular Education Bazaar, and the 1842 Lyceums Bazaar. I will demonstrate that Gaskell had felt increasingly doubtful about the purpose and efficacy of the ‘associated philanthropy’ practised by her fellow congregation members, and that this not only influenced the subject choice for her novel, but more importantly helped to define her own form of philanthropy. In *Vocational Philanthropy and British Women’s Writing, 1790-1810: Wollstonecraft, More, Edgeworth, Wordsworth*, Patricia Comitini has defined the philanthropic writing practised by these writers as ‘vocational philanthropy.’¹⁵ ‘Vocational philanthropy’ differs from ‘associated philanthropy’ in that it aims to promote love of mankind through the instruction of

¹² See Parker, *Fictional Philanthropy* 321.

¹³ L 377, 383.

¹⁴ The main source I will be consulting is the *Manchester Times*, between the years 1838 and 1845 inclusive.

¹⁵ Patricia Comitini, *Vocational Philanthropy and British Women’s Writing, 1790-1810: Wollstonecraft, More, Edgeworth, Wordsworth* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005) 1.

individuals, rather than addressing philanthropic issues through the donation of money.¹⁶ The didactic element of *Mary Barton* suggests that Gaskell is instructing her readers in creating better class relations, so it is possible through her rejection of ‘associated philanthropy’ that we may be able to perceive her alongside the ‘vocational philanthropists’ examined by Comitini.

Assuming that Gaskell began writing in the mid forties, she had by this time been living in Manchester for 23 years, and had been involved with various philanthropic acts organised by her middle-class contemporaries, particularly amongst the Cross Street congregation. During this time it would appear that her ideas regarding philanthropy had changed quite remarkably: at the age of 21 Gaskell wrote of her preference for a ball rather than a bazaar, suggesting that perhaps the young Gaskell enjoyed charitable events for their entertainment value; her interest lay with “people & people’s dresses, and people’s partners, and people’s flirtations, and what people’s partners said to people, & what people said to people’s partners.”¹⁷ However, life in Knutsford must have been very different to that encountered in Manchester after her marriage in 1832. In this year there were 96 cotton mills at work in Manchester, and the population was 200,000, of which 15,000 lived in cellar dwellings. A boom in 1836 had been shortly followed by a depression, and out of these circumstances grew the Chartist movement, supported by men who were still bitterly disappointed that the 1834 Reform Act had only enfranchised the middle classes. *Mary Barton* was set during the ‘hungry forties’ when thousands of mill workers were out of work and their families were starving.

Her involvement at the bazaars steadily declines, and in 1853 she wrote emphatically to Lady Kay Shuttleworth, “I never give anything to any Bazaar and never go to one.”¹⁸ The Manchester bazaars appear to be very much middle-class social events and afford little opportunity for contact between the classes. Whilst the intention behind the bazaars is charitable, Gaskell’s own reappraisal of the bazaars raises questions about what philanthropy is actually achieving in the mid nineteenth century, especially as in the mid forties the Anti Corn Law League adapt this form of fundraising for their own

¹⁶ Comitini 4.

¹⁷ FL 7.

¹⁸ L 228.

purposes. *Mary Barton* was Gaskell's own form of philanthropy and can be perceived as having arisen out of her dissatisfaction with the philanthropy practised by her contemporaries.

Cross Street perceived itself as a philanthropic congregation, and my research has established that the names of Cross Street families such as the Potters, Heywoods, Marslands and Marsdens can often be found on the subscription lists of philanthropic organisations.¹⁹ However, it would appear that Gaskell was dissatisfied with the manner in which many of her peers practised philanthropy; for Gaskell philanthropy involved much more than subscribing to a charitable organisation, as she explained to James Crossley, "We would rather have a man's interest and appreciation of our plan than his money; indeed we should despise the latter unless his hearty feeling went with it."²⁰ However, in Manchester the Gaskells were struggling to persuade people to commit their time to philanthropic causes. Elizabeth complained to Mary Cowden Clarke that in "Manchester when you \or I/ want a little good hearty personal individual exertion from any one they are apt to say in deeds if not in words 'Spare my time, but take my money' –a sort of 'leave me, leave me to repose' way, handing you their purse in order to be spared any trouble themselves."²¹

Contemporary accounts of the Victorian middle classes and their philanthropy are also unfavourable; Carlyle of course deplored the cash nexus system which formed the sole relationship between the mill owners and their workers,²² and Engels claimed never to have seen such a demoralised social class, particularly the 'liberal' section of the middle classes who supported the repeal of the Corn Laws.²³ Engels is dismissive of their many subscriptions to philanthropic institutions: "It never occurs to these Pharisees that they are returning a hundredth part of that which they have previously taken away from the broken-down workers whom they have ruthlessly exploited."²⁴ He observes that the philanthropy of the bourgeoisie is very different to that of a starving

¹⁹ For example see "Night Asylum for the Destitute and Houseless Poor," *Manchester Times* 24 Feb. 1838. *Gale*. 26 Mar. 2008; "School For The Deaf And Dumb," *Manchester Times* 14 Nov. 1840. *Gale*. 26 Mar. 2008; "Manchester & Salford Soup Charity," *Manchester Times* 29 Apr. 1843. *Gale*. 26 Mar. 2008.

²⁰ L 103.

²¹ L 192.

²² Thomas Carlyle, *Past and Present* (London, 1897) 277.

²³ Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, Trans. and ed. W. O. Henderson and W. H. Chaloner (Oxford: Blackwell, 1958) 313.

²⁴ Engels 313.

worker sharing a crust with another starving worker, and his opinions here coincide remarkably with those expressed by Gaskell in her letter to Mary Cowden Clarke, as he states that through their philanthropy, “The middle class make a bargain with the poor and say: ‘if I pay so much to charity I am purchasing the right not to be troubled any more.’”²⁵ Engels has obviously observed, as Gaskell had, that some of the middle classes were simply not interested in the lives of the poor; he completes his rather damning indictment of the Manchester bourgeoisie by stating that it is a poor form of charity where “he who gives is more degraded than he who receives.”²⁶

Gaskell’s rejection of ‘associated philanthropy’ can be considered on two levels: alongside her concerns about the efficacy of this philanthropy are debates centred around women’s agency, and the extent of their role within philanthropic organisations. Ladies were at this time excluded from the administration of philanthropic institutions, they were unable to act as treasurer, and presumably would have been unable to vote at committee meetings. In the case of the bazaars examined in this chapter, it will be seen that whilst the ladies’ committee undertake the actual organisation and operation of the bazaars, they are actually assisting a male committee. Gaskell’s rejection of this philanthropy can also be perceived as a rejection of a system which prevented her from voicing her concerns about how such events were managed. Through her fiction she could illustrate an alternative form of philanthropy.

As tension between the classes continued to increase, Gaskell wrote to her publisher in spring 1848 urging publication as present circumstances were favourable to a novel such as hers.²⁷ Gaskell was not the first author to examine class relations in industrial cities; Disraeli’s *Sybil*, published in 1844, explores Chartism through the relationship of Charles Egremont with Sybil Gerard, the daughter of a Chartist. In writing *Sybil* Disraeli made use of the same sources as Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna and Harriet Martineau, such as Blue Books, and it is presumed that much of the novel derives from this rather than personal observation.²⁸ Manchester had also previously received attention from the writers

²⁵ Engels 315.

²⁶ Engels 313.

²⁷ L 55.

²⁸ Kestner 110.

of social fiction: Harriet Martineau's "A Manchester Strike" in *Illustrations of Political Economy* was published in 1832, and Elizabeth Stone's *William Langshawe: The Cotton Lord*, published in 1842. Like Gaskell, Stone had been a Manchester resident, she was born there in 1803 and her brother was the author of "Manchester: Its Political, Social and Commercial History," published in 1836.²⁹ Her novel is set earlier than Gaskell's, during the period 1828-31, but as in *Mary Barton*, the plot centred around the murder of one of the mill owners by a union. It would appear that Stone's intentions were similar to Gaskell's; she writes that her novel was conceived in response to "a periodical work [that] was in circulation which defeated its own benevolent and honourable ends by the exaggerations of its statements."³⁰

Stone's novel also produced a similar reaction from the Manchester Millocracy to that received by *Mary Barton*; *William Langshawe* was criticised by the *Athenaeum* as an "attack on the social circles of Manchester."³¹ However, many of Gaskell's reviewers believed *Mary Barton* to be an accurate depiction of life in Manchester at this time; Maria Edgeworth wrote to Mary Holland that if it were not for the author's denial of political knowledge, she would have attributed the authorship to Harriet Martineau.³² Those who disliked the novel felt that Gaskell's focus on working-class life provided an unrealistic representation of life in Manchester. One of her harshest reviews came from the *Manchester Guardian*, and criticised Gaskell for unfairly portraying the mill owners.³³ Their criticism focuses in particular on Gaskell's failure to include in her novel any of the benevolent schemes implemented by the masters in Manchester, such as the introduction of day and Sunday schools, and public parks. A public meeting had been held in 1844 to plan the formation of public parks, Manchester MP and Unitarian Mark Philips subscribed £1000.³⁴ Whilst it seems strange today that such philanthropic schemes should not address the primary issues affecting the poor in Manchester, this is just another example of the changing attitudes towards philanthropy which occurred at the end

²⁹ Kestner 69-70.

³⁰ qtd. in Kestner 74.

³¹ qtd. in Kestner 69.

³² Easson, *Critical Heritage* 89.

³³ See Easson, *Critical Heritage* 119-130.

³⁴ William E. A. Axon, *Annals of Manchester: A Chronological Record From the Earliest Times to the End of 1885* (Manchester, 1886) 229.

of the eighteenth century. As the early Victorians tended to define social problems in moral terms, ascribing poverty to individual weakness, many people therefore believed that indiscriminate charity would only increase society's problems, and so many philanthropic schemes ultimately aimed at the self cultivation of the poor, with the hope that this would promote self-sufficiency.³⁵ This new ideology of self cultivation is evident in this review as they applaud the public park scheme for the invigoration it provides for mind and body.³⁶ Whilst this is an admirable scheme, it would be of little benefit to those who were 'turned off' from the factories during the hungry forties.

One of the most popular forms of fundraising for philanthropic purposes during the Victorian period was the charity bazaar; throughout the century bazaars raised money for a wide variety of philanthropic institutions through the sale of interesting and unusual objects. The first bazaar, opened in Soho Square, London, in 1816 was more of a commercial than charitable enterprise. Widows and orphans of army officers could rent counter space and sell items they had made.³⁷ Within a few years charity bazaars, lasting only a few days or weeks, began to appear.³⁸ Axon's *Annals of Manchester* records bazaars held in Manchester in aid of the School for the Deaf and Dumb (1836); the Female Penitentiary (1839); and the Manchester Athenaeum (1843).³⁹ An extensive survey of Victorian Print Culture leads Frank Prochaska to conclude that the charity bazaar came to prominence during the early 1820s, and proceeded to grow rapidly in popularity owing to the manner in which it made charitable enterprise entertaining. Prochaska explains that "if the London newspapers advertised over one hundred charity bazaars each year during most of the century, the provincial press probably advertised over one thousand annually."⁴⁰

The first example of Gaskell's participation at a charity bazaar that I will examine is the 1838 Popular Education Bazaar, which was held on the 17th and 18th of April in Manchester's Town Hall. At this time William's sister Eliza paid the Gaskells a visit, and it is from Gaskell's letters to Eliza that

³⁵ Owen 136.

³⁶ Easson, *Critical Heritage* 125.

³⁷ Gary R. Dyer, "'The Vanity Fair' of Nineteenth-Century England: Commerce, Women, and the East in the Ladies' Bazaar," *Nineteenth Century Literature* 46.2 (1992):196-97.

³⁸ Dyer 208.

³⁹ Axon 196, 205, 223.

⁴⁰ Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy* 52.

we learn of Gaskell's involvement. Eliza had been living in Manchester with William as his housekeeper before his marriage, returning home to Warrington when the Gaskells returned from their honeymoon; many of Gaskell's early surviving letters are addressed to her sister-in-law, presumably Eliza would have enjoyed hearing news of her Manchester acquaintances, and Gaskell's letters to Eliza frequently contain news about Cross Street congregation members.⁴¹ The bazaar was in aid of the schools in Lower Mosley Street, which were established in 1835 by the congregations of Cross Street and Upper Brook Street, after the 1833 Factory Act outlawed the employment of children under the age of nine in the textile industry. The emphasis Victorians placed on self-improvement schemes is evident here as they claim that the "beneficial influence on the conduct and character in domestic and social life" is the principal aim of the education they provide.⁴² The Mosley Street schools offered not only a school for infants but also schools for boys and for girls over the age of seven.⁴³ The schools were supported by subscriptions and a small weekly payment from the children who attended; however, this income fell short of the annual expenditure, and a bazaar was the ideal way to raise money quickly.

The Popular Education Bazaar provides a good example of the 'denominationalism' occurring in philanthropy during the early nineteenth century. This was a Unitarian event, and thus provides an opportunity to examine Gaskell's participation in philanthropy alongside other people of her own class and denomination. Whilst not referred to in any of the articles advertising the bazaar, both congregations were Unitarian, and those involved, whom it has been possible to identify, are Unitarian. An article from November 1837 stressed that the schools had 'no other object' than to provide the working classes with a good and cheap education, and "The scriptures are read for practical application but not for controversial or sectarian comment."⁴⁴

The preparation for a bazaar took up a considerable amount of time. Eliza was due to arrive several days before the bazaar began, but in a letter dated 30th March 1838 Gaskell was wishing she

⁴¹ L 4-5.

⁴² "Popular Education Bazaar," *Manchester Times* 25 Nov. 1837. *Gale*. 13 Mar. 2008.

⁴³ Wade 66; "Popular Education Bazaar," *Manchester Times* 25 Nov. 1837. *Gale*. 13 Mar. 2008.

⁴⁴ "Popular Education Bazaar," *Manchester Times* 25 Nov. 1837. *Gale*. 13 Mar. 2008.

could arrive sooner.⁴⁵ Despite the hard work, though, she could look forward to the teas they would enjoy, and the girlish frivolity of the letters surviving from before her marriage is also still apparent, as she informs her sister-in-law that they preside over their stalls wearing bonnets rather than caps, exclaiming “I have a beauty coming for the occasion & your pink will be exquisite.”⁴⁶ Just as she had been unable to resist repeatedly trying on the new bonnet she was to be married in six years earlier, she is still concerned with fashions, and an occasion warranting a new bonnet was cause for excitement.⁴⁷ Such a sentiment, however, would hardly gain approval from Margaret Hale, the heroine of Gaskell’s 1855 novel *North and South*, who asked her mother: “how am I to dress up in my finery, and go off and away to smart parties, after the sorrow I have seen today?”⁴⁸ It would appear that at 28 Gaskell still enjoyed philanthropic occasions for their entertainment value, but then the hungry forties were soon to bring suffering much closer to home.

The organisation and operation of a bazaar was usually undertaken by a committee of ladies; Frank Prochaska found no evidence to suggest that the organisation of a bazaar was ever undertaken by men, explaining that the word bazaar was interchangeable with ‘ladies’ sale.’⁴⁹ Gaskell certainly seems to be embracing the role of minister’s wife as she participates fully at this bazaar. An article published in the *Manchester Times* on 25th November 1837 names Mrs Gaskell of Dover Street as one of the ladies to whom contributions can be sent.⁵⁰ Gaskell is again named in articles appearing on 10th March 1838 and 14th April 1838, so she was obviously involved from an early stage.⁵¹ Of the other ladies receiving contributions, almost half are known to have been married to either a Cross Street Trustee or a Unitarian minister: Mrs S. Alcock is presumably the wife of Samuel Alcock, a trustee of the chapel; Mrs R. B. Aspland was the wife of Robert Brook Aspland, the Unitarian minister at Dukinfield; Mrs

⁴⁵ L 13.

⁴⁶ L 13.

⁴⁷ FL 19.

⁴⁸ Elizabeth Gaskell, *North and South*, ed. Patricia Ingham (London: Penguin, 1995) 156. Referred to hereafter as *NS*.

⁴⁹ Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy* 57.

⁵⁰ “Popular Education Bazaar,” *Manchester Times* 25 Nov. 1837. *Gale*. 13 Mar. 2008. The Gaskells lived at 14 Dover Street from the beginning of their marriage until the Autumn of 1842 when they moved to 121 Upper Rumford Street. Uglow, 78,150.

⁵¹ “Popular Education Bazaar,” *Manchester Times* 10 Mar. 1838. *Gale*. 28 Feb. 2008; “Popular Education Bazaar,” *Manchester Times* 14 Apr. 1838. *Gale*. 5 Mar. 2008.

Robberds, of course, was the wife of John Gooch Robberds, senior minister (at this time) of Cross Street Chapel; Mrs Beard was the wife of John Relly Beard, Unitarian minister at Strangeways; and Mrs Lea Birch, Mrs Darbshire and Mrs J. A. Turner were also the wives of Cross Street trustees. The patrons of the bazaar include five M.P.s, four of the chapel's trustees, and Mrs Thomas Potter, who would become Lady Potter in 1840.

As these names along with other Cross Street trustees are mentioned infrequently in Gaskell's letters to Eliza, these ladies do not appear to be a part of her own immediate social circle. Mr and Mrs Birch are encountered one day in the rain, and the Alcocks and Turners are encountered at a dinner party, which Gaskell condemns as 'stupid.'⁵² Other invitations are received, presumably, in deference to William's position. For example, they are invited to trustee Sydney Potter's to meet Noah Jones, a Unitarian minister.⁵³ The patrons receive even fewer references in her letters; a dance at MP Mark Philips' and a children's dance at Mr Henry's would suggest that whilst belonging to Manchester's middle-class Unitarian society, they were not intimate acquaintances.⁵⁴ At a dinner party at the Fairbairns Gaskell was taken in to dinner by Mark Philips, but it was a "very yea nay kind of affair" she told Meta.⁵⁵

Gaskell complains on more than one occasion that she found dining out, or drinking tea with members of the congregation 'dull.' Perhaps this was due to the "want of spiritual mindedness" that she complained about, or their tendency to gossip.⁵⁶ Gaskell explained to Mary Green in 1852 that her awareness of this would always increase on her return from Ambleside in the Lake District, and the society she participated in there.⁵⁷ Having been so unprepared for the reactions of her acquaintances when her authorship of *Mary Barton* became common knowledge, Ambleside must have been a welcome change from Manchester. The relevance of Gaskell's interactions with her fellow Cross

⁵² L 23.

⁵³ L 24.

⁵⁴ L 182, 854.

⁵⁵ L 848.

⁵⁶ FL 75-76.

⁵⁷ The Gaskells first visited the Lake District in July 1849, staying at Skelwith in Little Langdale, two miles from Ambleside. Here Gaskell met Eliza Fletcher, an old acquaintance of her father's from Edinburgh, and her daughters Margaret Davy and Mary Richardson. The Fletchers were friends of the Arnolds and Wordsworths, and it was in Lady Richardson's home, Lesketh How, that Gaskell met Wordsworth, a meeting arranged by Edward Quillinan. The Gaskells returned to Manchester in late August.

Street congregants will gradually become apparent through this and subsequent chapters as it becomes evident that there was some disparity between Gaskell's ideas about philanthropy and those shared by her acquaintances. Despite participating fully, Gaskell is already beginning to resist involvement even at this first bazaar. Marianne had been ill and Gaskell was beginning to feel the strain: "when I told Mrs Robberds I feared it would be too much for me & that I had rather stay & take care of MA she said they had had such difficulties in getting standers, that I must."⁵⁸

Unlike the Gaskells, many of the patrons and standers resided in the suburbs of Manchester, in the "higher and remoter parts of Chorlton and Ardwick or on the breezy heights of Cheetham Hill, Broughton and Pendleton,"⁵⁹ as observed by Engels in the early eighteen forties, and confirmed by Manchester resident Sir James Phillips Kay in "The Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Classes Employed in the Cotton Manufacture in Manchester," 1832.⁶⁰ At the heart of the bourgeois dream is the idea of gracious living, symbolised by the country house; in *Mary Barton* Wilson walks almost two miles to Mr Carson's house which is almost in the country, to obtain an Infirmary order.⁶¹ This scene as Lisa Surridge notes, not only contrasts the Davenports' cellar dwelling with the middle-class Carson home, but also contrasts the family and community relationships of the two classes.⁶²

Engels explained that due to the layout of the city and the distinct boundaries between middle-class and working-class districts, it was quite possible for those living in the wealthier suburbs to travel to and from their place of work in the city without having to see the working-class areas.⁶³ Visiting Manchester in 1844, Leon Faucher also noted the distinct class boundaries within the city: "This mode of existence within the somewhat contracted horizon of the family circle, excludes social intercourse, and leads to a local absenteeism."⁶⁴ Angus Easson argues against such deliberate class segregation;

⁵⁸ L13. Finding bazaar patrons and standers, as stallholders were known, was a common problem for bazaar organisers. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy* 65.

⁵⁹ Engels 55.

⁶⁰ James Phillips Kay, "The moral and physical condition of the working classes employed in the cotton manufacture in Manchester," *Bristol Selected Pamphlets* (1832): 20. *JSTOR*. 18 May 2011.

⁶¹ Walter Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830-1870* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1957) 190.

⁶² Lisa Surridge, "Working-Class Masculinities in *Mary Barton*," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 28.2 (2000): 337.

⁶³ Engels 54.

⁶⁴ Leon Faucher, *Manchester in 1844*, trans. Member of the Manchester Athenaeum, (London and Manchester, 1844) 26.

suggesting that Gaskell challenges this assertion through her novel, Easson argues that her preface suggests this side of the city could not be avoided.⁶⁵ However, whilst Engels' statement may be somewhat of a broad generalisation, Gaskell's depiction of the Carson family home, and Mr Carson's admission that he makes no effort to even familiarise himself with the names of the men he employs, would suggest that such a class of people did exist in Manchester and it is presumably these people whom the novel was aimed at.

The class separation employed by some of the inhabitants of Manchester in their everyday lives, seems also to have become a feature of their philanthropy. The Popular Education bazaar was an event organised by, and patronised by Manchester's Unitarian bourgeoisie; unfortunately the articles reporting on the bazaar fail to provide any information about the bazaar itself. However, the second bazaar referred to in Gaskell's letters received greater media attention, and it will become apparent through these articles that there was little possibility for class interaction at these events. In a letter dated 23rd December 1840, presumed to have been written to her sister-in-law Anne Robson, Gaskell writes "Evrybody very eager about bazaar – to begin on Jany 11th" (sic).⁶⁶ Articles in the *Manchester Times* reveal that this was the Lyceums' Bazaar, held from 11th – 14th January 1841 in the Town Hall in aid of the three Lyceums established at Ancoats, Chorlton-upon-Medlock and Salford.

The Salford lyceum had opened in September 1838, the Ancoats lyceum followed in October, and Chorlton-Upon-Medlock in December; they were intended to be institutions of 'Improvement and Recreation for the Industrious Classes.'⁶⁷ The lyceums provide further evidence of the desire to encourage an ideology of self cultivation amongst the working classes, which was prevalent in philanthropic schemes at this time. The lyceum at Chorlton-upon-Medlock provided a newsroom, a library, a gymnasium and a coffee room. Classes were held in Reading, Writing, Arithmetic, Grammar, Drawing, Geometry, French and Music. Great value was placed on the promotion of female education, and classes in Reading, Writing, Arithmetic, Grammar, Sewing and Knitting were

⁶⁵ Angus Easson, *Elizabeth Gaskell* (London: Routledge, 1979) 54.

⁶⁶ L 47.

⁶⁷ Axon 203; "The Lyceum," *Manchester Times* 20 Oct. 1838. *Gale*. 23 Mar. 2008.

superintended by a female teacher.⁶⁸ The subscription fee of 8 shillings per annum, however, implies that this facility may not have been accessible to all the working class. Entrance to the lectures that were regularly held at the lyceums was by ticket only, for which there was also a small charge.⁶⁹ As with the Popular Education bazaar, the three lyceums were failing to meet their annual expenditure, and the bazaar aimed to liquidate their debts.

It would appear that on this occasion Gaskell did not play a significant role in the organisation or operation of the bazaar. In the *Manchester Times* report she is not listed amongst the ladies presiding over stalls, though Mrs Robberds and Mrs J. J. Tayler are; Gaskell is the notable absentee amongst the Manchester Unitarian ministers' wives. Mrs Robberds presided over a stall with an embroidered pillow (the fabric of which was part of the dress of an African King), and a 'splendid' herbarium of Swiss plants which was purchased by Manchester MP Mark Philips for five guineas. Mrs J J Taylor, the wife of Brook Street Chapel's minister, had a stall with a painted Chinese screen, and Gaskell's friend Mrs Schunck presided over a stall with a basket of barley from Pompeii and an elegant chiffonier of rosewood.⁷⁰ The stalls themselves had been "tastefully fitted up in pink and white draperies," and as we know already, the ladies were expected to wear bonnets rather than caps.⁷¹ These are obviously luxurious, expensive (and unnecessary) items; such fancy goods could perhaps have been purchased by the Carsons, whose home is adorned by "many articles chosen for their beauty and elegance."⁷²

The items on sale were not the only feature of the bazaar which may have left the working classes feeling excluded. The admission price on the opening day was 2s 6d per person, which would surely ensure that this was predominantly a middle-class event. The admission was lowered to 1s. the following day and in the evening £19 was collected from the working classes.⁷³ Whilst the admission charge would ensure that even those attending only for the musical promenade or performance of

⁶⁸ "Lyceum, Chorlton-Upon-Medlock," *Manchester Times* 8 Dec. 1838. *Gale*. 23 Mar. 2008.

⁶⁹ "Lyceum, Chorlton-Upon-Medlock," *Manchester Times* 8 Dec. 1838. *Gale*. 23 Mar. 2008.

⁷⁰ "The Lyceums' Bazaar," *Manchester Times* 16 Jan. 1841. *Gale*. 5 Mar. 2008.

⁷¹ "The Lyceums' Bazaar," *Manchester Times* 16 Jan. 1841. *Gale*. 5 Mar. 2008.

⁷² Elizabeth Gaskell, *Mary Barton*, ed. Macdonald Daly (London: Penguin, 1996) 67. Referred to hereafter as *MB*.

⁷³ "The Lyceums' Bazaar," *Manchester Times* 16 Jan. 1841. *Gale*. 5 Mar. 2008.

natural magic would still contribute, the bazaar was not an outstanding success. At the end of the week the bazaar had only raised £1012. 9s. 8d, and it was necessary on the final day to hold an auction in an attempt to sell the considerable amount of stock left over, however, this only added £22 to the total. In comparison, a bazaar and ball for the Deaf and Dumb school raised £3,848; the Ladies' Bazaar for the Female Penitentiary raised £1000 in just two days and the Popular Education Bazaar of 1838 had raised £1127 15s. 8d., also in two days. However, these were all eclipsed by the 1842 Anti-Corn Law Bazaar, which raised £9000.

Lowering the admission charge for the Lyceums' Bazaar to one shilling on the second day raised £19 from the working classes in the evening.⁷⁴ The lowering of the price would suggest that the working classes were encouraged to attend, and Frank Prochaska argues that bazaars had the potential to promote interaction between the classes, with middle-class and working-class ladies 'standing' side by side.⁷⁵ However, Gary R. Dyer suggests that the bazaar "strengthened class demarcations in regard to both whom it benefited financially and what it combated on the figurative level."⁷⁶

Gaskell offers no explanation for her absence at the Lyceums' bazaar in her letters, of which there are few from 1841 and 1842, and the fact that she was not a 'stander' does certainly not imply that she did not attend at all. However, the Lyceums' bazaar occurred only six months before Gaskell wrote to John Pierpont of the great trouble that the manufacturing classes were currently suffering, and in July of the same year Edwin Chadwick's report for the Poor Law Commission was published, describing the terrible conditions in which the poor lived. The following year the Manchester and Salford Soup Committee reported in the *Manchester Times* that "so anxious are the poor to avail themselves of its benefits that they come as early as four o'clock in the morning and by five or six o'clock the place is literally besieged."⁷⁷ Viewed in this context, the opulence of the bazaar begins to seem unjustifiable.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ "The Lyceums' Bazaar," *Manchester Times* 16 Jan. 1841. *Gale*. 5 Mar. 2008.

⁷⁵ Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy* 65.

⁷⁶ Dyer 204.

⁷⁷ "Manchester and Salford Soup Charity," *Manchester Times*, 4 Jun. 1842. *Gale*. 13 Mar. 2008.

⁷⁸ FL 25.

The admission charge at the Lyceums' bazaar presupposes the fact that the working classes have disposable income. Presumably those able to attend would be those members of the working classes able to afford the subscription fee to use this facility. In the novel, Mrs Davenport is at a loss as to how to manage her son who is "rampaging about the streets," she cannot afford to send him to school, and he is too young to work in a factory.⁷⁹ It has been noted before that the Unitarian faith placed emphasis on the practice of philanthropy by individual example and private exertions.⁸⁰ The bazaars in contrast seem to encourage people to participate in philanthropy passively. The bazaars were middle-class social events, Gary Dyer found that unmarried young ladies would often take the opportunity to flirt with gentlemen; with the suggestion that for some the greater interest lies there, rather than with the cause they are supposedly aiding.⁸¹ Whilst some members of the working classes did attend, only those with money to spend on leisure activities would have done so, thus severely limiting the potential for the bazaars to promote class interaction. Gaskell's main message in *Mary Barton* was the necessity for greater communication and empathy between the classes, it does not seem likely that an extravagant event such as these bazaars would help lower the growing resentment harboured by the working classes. After all, Gaskell's hero John Barton feels only bitterness and resentment when the wife of his 'failed' employer emerges from a shop laden with purchases for a party.⁸² Barton has no work owing to the failure of Hunter's mill, he has no money to even buy bread, and returns home to "see his only boy a corpse."⁸³ As Job explains to Mr Carson towards the end of the novel, "I never see the masters getting thin and haggard for want of food; I hardly ever see them making much change in their way of living, though I don't doubt they've got to do it in bad times. But it's in things for show they cut short; while for such as me, it's in things for life we've to stint."⁸⁴ Mr Carson had attempted to argue that the masters suffer equally as much as their when trade is poor, yet earlier in the novel the narrator confirms Job's observations. Following the fire at their mill in Chapter

⁷⁹ MB 88.

⁸⁰ R. K. Webb, "The Gaskells as Unitarians," *Dickens and other Victorians: essays in honour of Philip Collins*, ed. Joanne Shattock (Basingstoke: Macmillan 1988) 147; Micheal Wheeler, "Elizabeth Gaskell and Unitarianism," *Gaskell Society Journal* 6 (1992): 29.

⁸¹ Dyer 208-09.

⁸² MB 24.

⁸³ MB 25.

⁸⁴ MB 384.

5, ‘Messers Carson’ are not too concerned, as the present state of trade has provided no market for the cotton and goods are piling up in the warehouse. The temporary closure of their mill means they will not have the “weekly drain of wages given for labour.”⁸⁵ They can look forward to the greater leisure time that this disaster will allow them, and make plans for ‘pleasant excursions’ with family. Barton also has far more time for ‘leisure’ than he has been used to, and it is at this point that he becomes interested in the Chartist movement, spending increasing amounts of time away from his home and family as he attends Trades’ Union meetings. Not only would the bazaars have the potential to increase the resentment felt by the proletariat, they would certainly not increase communication between the classes, one of Gaskell’s main messages behind the novel. This was not a form of philanthropy that would foster a greater understanding between the classes, in the way that Gaskell’s meeting with the ‘poor pale stunted workman,’ did.

Gaskell’s engagement with this popular form of Victorian philanthropy reveals much about the way women participated in philanthropy and how the middle class interacted with those their philanthropy aimed to help. The Lyceums’ bazaar was again organised and operated by a committee of ladies, so considering Prochaska’s lack of evidence to suggest that men ever undertook the organisation of a bazaar, it may at first seem a little strange to discover that the ladies were assisting a committee composed of men. This is suggested by Secretary Edward Herford’s thanks to the ladies who assisted, perceiving the success of the bazaar to be “proof of the value attached by the ladies of Manchester to the extension of FEMALE EDUCATION.”⁸⁶ The 1842 Anti Corn Law Bazaar was a much larger affair than either of the bazaars discussed here and received greater media attention. The articles reveal details about the administrative structure of this kind of philanthropic event which may add greater depth to our consideration of the bazaars which Gaskell participated in. Whilst the ladies’ committee of the Anti Corn Law Bazaar has their own President, Vice-President and Honorary Secretary, there was also a ‘General Committee’, which was followed by the word ‘Gentlemen’ in parenthesis. Unlike the ladies’ committee, the ‘General Committee’ had a treasurer, a Mr Alderman

⁸⁵ MB 57.

⁸⁶ “Lyceums’ Bazaar,” Under the Patronage of Her Majesty,” *Manchester Times* 23 Jan. 1841. Gale. 23 Mar. 2008.

Brook.⁸⁷ It is worth noting here that amongst Manchester's Unitarian ministers' wives, Gaskell is the notable absentee. On Saturday November 13th 1841 Mrs Beard and Mrs Robberds are listed as members of the ladies' committee, and by Saturday November 27th 1841, Mrs J J Tayler had also joined the committee.⁸⁸

2.2 'so lazy a way of doing good': Middle-Class Philanthropy in *Mary Barton*

Gaskell offers no example of organised middle-class philanthropy in the novel, but the Carsons, her example of the middle-class industrialist and his family, express very little concern for the plight of those less fortunate than themselves. Pamela Parker Corpron has noted that the absence of sympathetic middle-class women in the novel actually becomes a presence; noting, for example, that "Mrs Hunter's quick retreat into the privacy of her carriage represents both the broader abdication of social responsibility by the wealthy industrialists and the specific failure of feminine duty."⁸⁹ I would like to note that Mrs Carson's presence is also felt predominantly through her absence during both scenes within the Carson household, it is easy to forget that she actually physically appears only once within the whole novel. Despite the fact that this essentially selfish woman has taken to her bed with a headache, her frequent demands ensure that she is still the centre of attention below stairs. In the privacy of her dressing room the cares of the outside world are of little consequence to Mrs Carson, she appears to have little to occupy her days except the odd lecture which she attends in a 'closely shut up carriage.' On the evening of her son's murder, she is again "indulging in the luxury of a headache."⁹⁰ The reality presented in this domestic scene is not so far removed from that imagined by Barton, Mrs Carson does indeed 'worry' her servants with her headaches as Barton presumes that rich ladies must spend their days 'worrying' shopmen.⁹¹ Commanding the resources of wealth and leisure, Mrs Carson lacks the education to value either, notes the narrator.⁹² Downstairs her daughter falls

⁸⁷ "The Great National Anti-Corn-Law Bazaar," *Manchester Times* 4 Dec. 1841. *Gale*. 13 Mar. 2008.

⁸⁸ "National Anti-Corn-Law-Bazaar," *Manchester Times* 13 Nov. 1841. *Gale* 13 Mar 2008; "National Anti-Corn-Law-Bazaar," *Manchester Times* 27 Nov. 1841. *Gale* 13 Mar 2008.

⁸⁹ Parker, *Fictional Philanthropy* 326.

⁹⁰ *MB* 201.

⁹¹ *MB* 10, 68.

⁹² *MB* 201.

asleep whilst attempting to read “Emerson’s Essays.”⁹³ As Jenny Uglow suggests, Gaskell is certainly dismissive of those who read the latest book merely for appearance sake.⁹⁴ However, this scene also implies an unconscious unwillingness to accept Emerson’s message. Published in two volumes in 1841 and 1844, Emerson’s first series of essays are concerned with the relation of spirit and human behaviour. Whilst we cannot know which of the ‘Essays’ Sophy was reading; “Spiritual Laws” contains some interesting ideas about benevolence. Emerson appears to perceive benevolence as being opposed to Nature, believing that it is preferable to achieve the aims of philanthropy through an individual’s acceptance of the nature of their own character rather than through subscriptions to philanthropic institutions: “Farmers will give corn; poets will sing; women will sew; labourers will lend a hand; the children will bring flowers.”⁹⁵ Similarities are apparent here with Gaskell’s own vision of philanthropy, as the working-class characters in the novel can be observed utilising their skills in this manner to help one another. After Davenport’s death, Mary uses her skills as a seamstress to alter her own old black gown so that the widow may wear mourning whilst following the coffin. This is perhaps the best form of sympathy Mary could offer the grieving widow, as it allows her to offer a mark of respect to her deceased husband, “a satisfaction to her poor heart in the midst of her sorrow.”⁹⁶ Alice also frequently uses her knowledge of plants and herbs to provide medicine for her community. In this manner, individuals are able to render far greater service to those in need, than that achieved by the casual philanthropy practised by the Carsons, as will shortly be discussed. It seems likely that Gaskell would have read “Emerson’s Essays”; when Emerson lectured in Manchester in 1847, Elizabeth and William attended the second lecture with friends, and the authorship of an article reporting on these lectures has been attributed to Gaskell.⁹⁷ Such a passage would certainly resonate with Gaskell if she had the opportunity to read it; she too was embracing Nature in utilising her particular talents for philanthropic purposes.

⁹³ *MB* 201-2.

⁹⁴ Uglow 180.

⁹⁵ Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Spiritual Laws,” *Emerson’s Prose and Poetry* (New York: Norton, 2001) 151-52.

⁹⁶ *MB* 73.

⁹⁷ Joanne Shattock, ed., *Works of Elizabeth Gaskell Volume 1: Journalism, Early Fiction and Personal Writings* (London: Pickering, 2005) 81.

Fifty years after *Mary Barton* was published another literary character felt sleepy reading Emerson; however, unlike Sophy Carson, for Edna Pontellier in “The Awakening” this is part of a process of re-evaluation. This ‘sleep-waking’ metaphor appears in the work of the transcendentalists, through the emergence of the self or soul into a new life, explains Donald A. Ringe.⁹⁸ Ringe argues that Emerson’s theory of correspondence supports this reading; as with Emerson’s theory, ‘The Awakening’ posits a double world, one within and one without which meet through the eyes and influence one another.⁹⁹ However, the ‘sleep-waking’ metaphor could certainly not be applied to Miss Carson, her role within the narrative is almost complete and she shows no signs of undergoing this transcendentalist process of self-discovery.

Gaskell stated quite explicitly that it had not been her intention to create further class conflict, but she is critical of the indolent lifestyle led by some of the bourgeoisie. The Carsons are almost always portrayed in a state of inertia; reading a newspaper over breakfast, asleep in the dining room after a good meal, or falling asleep over a book. The only member of the family to display any energy is Amy, the youngest daughter, who ‘bounds’ into the room “fresh and glowing.”¹⁰⁰ Known to her family as “little Miss Extravagance,” she has clearly not been taught the value of money, requesting only the most expensive scents and flowers. There is a sense also that Amy has been sheltered by her parents from life’s harsher realities, she dances off into the conservatory before Wilson enters, and so does not have to confront the vision of a “gaunt, pale, unwashed, unshaven weaver.”¹⁰¹ Gaskell takes this opportunity to present a starker picture of poverty by here contrasting the Carson home with the destitution of the Davenports’ cellar dwelling. As Barton and Wilson enter the Davenports’ cellar, the two men are greeted by a smell so “foetid as almost to knock the two men down.”¹⁰² “The fire-place was empty and black” and “there was not an article of furniture” in the room;¹⁰³ these are the “homes

⁹⁸ Donald A. Ringe, “Romantic Imagery in Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening*,” *American Literature* 43.4 (1972): 581.

⁹⁹ Ringe 582.

¹⁰⁰ *MB* 69.

¹⁰¹ *MB* 70.

¹⁰² *MB* 60.

¹⁰³ *MB* 64.

of those to whom leisure was a curse.”¹⁰⁴ As Barton offers food to the Davenport children, they descend upon him in an almost animalistic manner: “they clustered round Barton, and tore from him the food he had brought with him. It was a large hunch of bread, but it vanished in an instant.”¹⁰⁵ In comparison, Mr Carson and his son sit down at a “well-spread breakfast table,” whilst Mrs Carson requests the leftover Partridge for her breakfast, and “plenty of cream in her coffee.”¹⁰⁶

Carson came from humble origins and his wife, too, had been a factory girl; but if the reader supposes from this that they might show greater sympathy to those worse off than themselves he is very much mistaken. Their son, Harry Carson, is described as “neat and well appointed, and his manners far more gentlemanly than his father’s.”¹⁰⁷ Presumably Carson’s wealth has enabled him to provide his son with a better education than he himself would have enjoyed, yet he has failed entirely to instil any sense of social responsibility into his son. Young Carson, “unfettered by working hours,” has little to amuse him but the pursuit of a dalliance with Mary, after he first spotted her whilst “lounging” in a shop.¹⁰⁸ As Wilson leaves he is handed five shillings by the young Carson, and it has often been noted that this is the same amount that Barton obtains from selling his coat and silk handkerchief, which comprise “his jewels, his plate, his valuables.”¹⁰⁹ Barton pawns the only things he possesses that are worth anything, whilst Harry Carson’s donation is a rather careless gesture. As he finishes his review and leaves the breakfast table he pulls the five shillings out of his pocket and hands it to Wilson as he passes. With the money he receives for his handkerchief and coat, Barton manages to buy meat, a loaf of bread, candles, coal and medicine for Davenport and his family.¹¹⁰ In comparison Amy requests a rose from her brother prior to Wilson’s arrival, the cost of which is half a guinea (there were twenty one shillings in a guinea), justifying the cost through her belief that flowers are one of life’s little ‘necessaries’; the articles Barton purchases could perhaps better be considered as

¹⁰⁴ *MB* 58.

¹⁰⁵ *MB* 60.

¹⁰⁶ *MB* 68.

¹⁰⁷ *MB* 68.

¹⁰⁸ *MB* 80-81.

¹⁰⁹ *MB* 60.

¹¹⁰ *MB* 61.

life's 'necessaries.'¹¹¹ Wilson leaves the Carson home feeling perplexed, they had all spoken kindly to him, yet they had taken no real interest in the Davenports' case. Gaskell points to the Carsons' failings through Wilson's unrealised hope that the Carsons might later enquire into the case and help Davenport. The Carsons embody the deplorable philanthropic attitude that Gaskell described in her letter to Mary Cowden Clarke, they do indeed have a 'lazy way of doing good.' As young Harry Carson carelessly hands Wilson the five shillings as he hurries out of the room, it is almost as if he too is saying 'spare my time, but take my money.' His only thought at that moment is to be away from the house in time to encounter Mary on her way to work. Gaskell's annoyance originated from personal experience; knowing that Samuel Dukinfield Darbshire knew a great many people of influence in Manchester she had requested his help regarding the case of a Miss Elton, but felt disappointed by the assistance that he was actually willing to offer.¹¹²

As Patsy Stoneman has noted, Gaskell contrasts two ethical systems in *Mary Barton*, "that of the working class, based on caring and co-operation, and that of the middle class, based on ownership, authority and the law."¹¹³ Gaskell offers countless examples in the novel of the working classes offering mutual aid: Barton and Wilson helping Davenport and his family; Mrs Davenport caring for Alice when she falls sick, as Alice had done for many before her. When Mary travels to Liverpool she is entirely reliant on the help the working classes offer one another. Mary had never been on a train before, or travelled away from her home, but only Will Wilson, who is due to sail to America, can provide Jem with an alibi. As she arrives at Will's lodgings in Liverpool his landlady, Mrs Jones, addresses her coldly, as "young woman," and is inclined to shut the door in her face.¹¹⁴ However, Mary's exhaustion, and apparent distress, call forth Mrs Jones' kind nature, despite the fact that she remains dubious about the nature of Mary's relationship with Will: "the distress of the pale young creature before her was so obvious and so pitiable, that, were she ever so sinful, Mrs Jones could no longer uphold her short, reserved manner." Mary instantly becomes "my poor girl," and "my dear,"

¹¹¹ *MB* 69.

¹¹² *L* 192-93.

¹¹³ Patsy Stoneman, *Elizabeth Gaskell* 2nd ed. (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2006) 45.

¹¹⁴ *MB* 285.

Mrs Jones immediately invites her in.¹¹⁵ Mrs Jones and her son Charley take an interest in Mary's emotional well being as well her predicament, and offer their help: "The sympathetic 'we' gave her heart and hope."¹¹⁶ After engaging a boat to row her out to the mouth of the estuary where the 'John Cropper' sits awaiting the tide, Mary returns to the docks once again alone in a strange town. Having forgotten Mrs Jones' address she simply sits down on the docks despite the fact that night has fallen. However, one of the boatmen has been watching her, and offers his assistance, almost against his will: he was "interested in her in spite of himself, and his scoldings of himself."¹¹⁷ The boatman takes her home, where his wife is "sorely puzzled as to the character and history of the stranger," yet willing to offer her help.¹¹⁸ The old woman determines to offer Mary hospitality for the night, be she the "worst woman in Liverpool."¹¹⁹

In comparison when middle-class mill-owner Mr Carson is offered the opportunity to help, not only a member of the working class, but also one of his own employees, he effectively declines. After Davenport contracts the fever, Wilson walks the two miles to the Carson home to request an infirmary order. When he is ushered into the Carsons' library, Mr Carson cannot even recall Davenport, despite the fact that he has worked for him for three years.¹²⁰ After requesting an in-patients order, Mr Carson informs Wilson that "I doubt if I've an in-patients order to spare at present; but I'll give you an out-patient's and welcome."¹²¹ His response is interesting; he states that he does not have an in-patients order 'to spare,' which almost seems to suggest that he is actually just reluctant to give it to one of his factory hands. Looking in his desk, he "pondered a minute," as if considering, before handing Wilson an out-patient's order.¹²² Neither does he 'spare' a second thought for the dying man. In comparison, Barton, who has so little to give, acts almost against his will; like the boatman: he "tried not to be interested, but he could not help it in spite of his gruffness."¹²³ He gathers up the remains of his

¹¹⁵ *MB* 285.

¹¹⁶ *MB* 287-88.

¹¹⁷ *MB* 300.

¹¹⁸ *MB* 313.

¹¹⁹ *MB* 313.

¹²⁰ *MB* 70.

¹²¹ *MB* 70.

¹²² *MB* 70.

¹²³ *MB* 59.

dinner, some bread and a slice of bacon, that he was saving for his supper, and by denying himself a meal offers it to the sick man's starving children.

Alongside this absence of the middle classes practising philanthropy is an absence of the middle-class philanthropic institutions provided for the benefit and improvement of the working classes. The bazaars highlight the importance placed by the Victorians on philanthropic self-improvement schemes such as Lyceums, and we can again perceive Gaskell's rejection of this form of philanthropy in the novel. The Lyceums, Mechanics' Institutes, and public parks, all funded by the middle class make only very rare appearances in *Mary Barton*, if they even appear at all; Margaret sings at the Mechanics' Institute, though this is reported rather than witnessed and Mrs Carson's maid reports that she will require the carriage to attend a lecture at the Royal Manchester Institution. These institutions do not actually appear within the novel, and the working men of the novel do not frequent these institutions established for their improvement. By alluding only rarely to such institutions in the novel Gaskell creates a "virtual portrait in negative space."¹²⁴

The 'diffusion of knowledge' was founded in the idea that education could raise the lower classes and maintain social order. By mid century Manchester had three venues for this purpose; the Royal Manchester Institution had been founded in 1823, followed by the Mechanics' Institution in 1824, and the Manchester Athenaeum established in 1836.¹²⁵ These institutes would offer classes and lectures, and William Gaskell lectured there on many occasions. The Royal Manchester Institution and Mechanics' Institute form two parts of what Howard M. Wach terms a 'cultural trinity,' the subscription fee for the Royal Manchester Institution was forty guineas, whilst the members of the working classes could become members of the Mechanics Institute for twenty shillings.¹²⁶

For David Thiele, Gaskell's omission of self-improvement schemes addresses a working-class crisis of confidence in such institutions.¹²⁷ R. G. Kirby explains that whilst more than 700 students

¹²⁴ David Thiele, "'That There Brutus': Elite Culture and Knowledge Diffusion in the Industrial Novels of Elizabeth Gaskell," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 35.1 (2007): 266.

¹²⁵ Howard M. Wach, "Culture and the Middle Classes: Popular Knowledge in Industrial Manchester," *The Journal of British History* 27.4 (1988): 376.

¹²⁶ Wach, *Culture* 382.

¹²⁷ Thiele 267.

were enrolled for its classes during the 1840s, the majority of subscribers were clerks and shopkeepers from the lower middle class, and the Mechanics' Institute was failing to attract the class of men for whose benefit it had been established.¹²⁸ Kirby points to several causes which may have contributed to this such as, the subscription fee of £1 being too expensive for the labouring classes and long hours of work making attendance of lectures difficult; however, the principal reason was the increasing social gulf between the classes.¹²⁹

This omission of philanthropic institutions is highlighted by Gaskell's devotion of an early chapter to that "class of men ... who may yet claim kindred with all the noble names that science recognises."¹³⁰ In his article 'The Culture of Self-improvement: Real people in *Mary Barton*,' Terry Wyke has noted that through references to real people such as Sir James Edward Smith, William Roscoe and Samuel Bamford, within the novel, Gaskell not only highlights her acknowledgement of this culture but also adds credibility to this.¹³¹ Job Legh is Gaskell's example of such men; he is a "wizard-like" little man, "wiry-looking", with eyes gleaming with intelligence, who spends his time collecting and preserving insects.¹³² His introduction to the narrative by his granddaughter Margaret, is accompanied by the amusing tale of the scorpion. Job paid two shillings for the scorpion, presuming it is already dead. However, the creature is revived by the heat of the fire and proceeds to run amok in the house. Margaret's flight to the public house to buy gin to preserve the scorpion, once Job has caught it, perhaps provides a contrast with middle-class perceptions of working-class intemperance.¹³³

This incident occurs as early in the novel as Chapter 5, and may initially seem to have little to do with the plot. However, Job is important in articulating Gaskell's vision of philanthropy towards the end of the novel; and it is interesting that Gaskell not only allots this task to a man so interested in self

¹²⁸ R. G. Kirby, "An Early Experiment in Workers' Self Education: the Manchester New Mechanics' Institution, 1829-35," *Artisan to Graduate*, ed. D. S. L. Cardwell (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1974) 87-88.

¹²⁹ Kirby 88.

¹³⁰ *MB* 38.

¹³¹ Terry Wyke, "The Culture of Self Improvement: Real People in *Mary Barton*," *Gaskell Society Journal* 13 (1999): 85.

¹³² *MB* 40.

¹³³ *MB* 42.

culture, but begins this process by inverting middle-class assumptions about the working classes. As Wyke notes, the inclusion of men such as Job also shows the working classes as individuals, and reflects the middle-class values that the working classes ought to hold.¹³⁴ For Gaskell, self-improvement is vitally important, but her praise is for the man who has pursued this himself, rather than for middle-class self-improvement schemes. Job has gained his knowledge from his own pursuit of a subject that interests him, rather than from middle-class instruction, so this omission does seem rather deliberate and Gaskell may well be addressing a crisis of confidence in these institutions as Thiele suggests. This further highlights the disparity between Gaskell and her contemporaries regarding philanthropy, for Gaskell the emphasis should be on aiding individuals rather than institutions.

Job Legh has often been misconceived as a peripheral character in the novel, when, however subtly, he is of great importance to the plot, and even the closing line of the novel is dedicated to Job: “‘Dear Job Legh!’ said Mary, softly and seriously.”¹³⁵ Job is present at many of the major plot turns within the novel: he provides a voice of reason as the workmen discuss their petition; he explains to Mary how she can prove Jem’s innocence, and finds Jem a lawyer; he travels to Liverpool to aid Mary in her search for Will; and finally through his discussion with Mr Carson following Barton’s death, he articulates Gaskell’s vision of philanthropy.

Others have certainly noticed the importance of this character, for Kathleen Tillotson, “he is more than a minor character; he is the point of rest in the narrative,”¹³⁶ and for Danielle Coriale he is the “only character in *Mary Barton* that can move across the very class divide on which the novel is premised.”¹³⁷ This is certainly an important point, and Gaskell makes a point of demonstrating how this is possible before even introducing Job. Gaskell describes Sir James Edward Smith’s visit to Manchester to seek information from a hand loom weaver about a rare plant. Arriving in Manchester, Smith asked the porter if he knew the weaver, and discovered that the porter was also a botanist, and

¹³⁴ Wyke 97.

¹³⁵ *MB* 393.

¹³⁶ Tillotson 219.

¹³⁷ Danielle Coriale, “Gaskell’s Naturalist,” *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 63.3 (2008): 374.

able to provide him with the information he desired.¹³⁸ This seems an unusual anecdote to include in a novel examining class relations in an industrial city, but Gaskell is here adding validity to the assertion that cultivated men such as Job possess the ability to cross class boundaries by including a true story as example; and Gaskell referred her readers to Smith's *Memoirs* as evidence of this.¹³⁹ James Crowther has been identified as the porter in this anecdote,¹⁴⁰ and Danielle Coriale also suggests that he was the inspiration for Job Legh.¹⁴¹ She notes that Crowther's biography detailed how important natural history was in "bringing men of different classes together on a footing of equality."¹⁴²

2.3 'the Spirit of Christ as the regulating law': Gaskell's Vision

Gaskell begins to outline her ideal form of philanthropy early in the novel, when Barton draws upon the parable of Dives and Lazarus. As Wilson attempts to reason with him he rejects ignorance as an excuse for middle-class indifference, stating that if they do truly know nothing of the trials of the poor, then they ought to know.¹⁴³ As Michael Wheeler has noted, Barton's application of Biblical texts is rather one sided, it is "ominously restricted to the condemnation of the rich."¹⁴⁴ Barton's argument is a long list of ways in which the rich have failed to help the poor, claiming that only the poor help each other. Through Barton's speech, though, we can see the potential for a form of philanthropy that crosses class boundaries. Envisaging that one day he will die before his wife, he asks Wilson "will a rich lady come and take her to her own home if need be, till she can look round, and see what best to do?"¹⁴⁵ This is of course voiced by a fictional character, but regarding the novel's message to its readers, it would appear that Gaskell practised what she preached. Gaskell herself helped a woman in a similar situation. Joseph Wainwright Hodgetts was a manufacturing chemist and chairman of the Manchester Political Union. His first and only reference in Gaskell's letters occurs as she communicates the news of his death to Marianne in 1851, following an explosion at the Naptha

¹³⁸ *MB* 39.

¹³⁹ *MB* 39.

¹⁴⁰ Wyke 87.

¹⁴¹ Coriale 352.

¹⁴² qtd. in Coriale 352.

¹⁴³ *MB* 11.

¹⁴⁴ Michael Wheeler, *The Art of Allusion in Victorian Fiction* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1979) 53.

¹⁴⁵ *MB* 11.

works in Salford.¹⁴⁶ Whilst the family may not have been mentioned in relation to any of Gaskell's social engagements, she invited Hodgetts' widow and daughter to stay with them. She told Marianne, "I am afraid they are very badly off; and we want them to come & visit us till they can fix what to do, & where to set up a school."¹⁴⁷ The Hodgetts are mentioned in seven of Gaskell's letters in relation to this event; there are no previous references to them, and none following these seven letters, so it is uncertain how Gaskell became acquainted with them. However, it seems likely that they met through Unitarian circles as Hodgetts' widow, Sarah, came from a Unitarian background.¹⁴⁸ Regardless of their connection, Gaskell offers support rather than just financial assistance to the widow and her daughter. Gaskell demonstrates the kind of benevolence so often practised by her working-class characters.

In Gaskell's early fiction it is "the poor, and the poor only, as does such things for the poor."¹⁴⁹ In "Libbie Marsh's Three Eras," a short story published the year before *Mary Barton*, Gaskell demonstrates the importance of working-class community, and of the small acts of kindness performed within such communities. The story opens as Libbie moves to a different part of town; she feels displaced in her new home, and Gaskell emphasises her loneliness by surrounding her with people who, whilst not cruel, are "too rapidly twirling round on this bustling earth to have leisure to think of the little work-woman."¹⁵⁰ In her loneliness Libbie becomes aware of a little crippled boy who lives across the street; he appears to be bedridden, and as his mother has gained a reputation as a "termagant" in the neighbourhood, the little boy does not receive any visitors. Libbie perceives the boy's need for company and saves up to buy him a canary as a valentine's gift. Through these actions she eventually earns the respect of his mother and the two women become friends. In *Mary Barton* Gaskell's vision of philanthropy has progressed to potentially cross class boundaries, though this begins to appear only very briefly towards the end of the novel, following Mr Carson's forgiveness of Barton. We learn then that Mr Carson has by now realised that "a perfect understanding, and

¹⁴⁶ L 145.

¹⁴⁷ L 180.

¹⁴⁸ Alexander Gordon, "Parkes, Samuel (1761-1825)," rev. Frederick Kurzer, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Oxford University Press. 17 July. 2011.

¹⁴⁹ MB 11.

¹⁵⁰ LM 50.

complete confidence and love, might exist between masters and men; that the truth might be recognised that the interests of one were the interests of all.”¹⁵¹ The workmen’s desire to understand their master’s motives had previously been considered as an affront to middle-class authority, perceived by Mr Carson as ‘bullying.’¹⁵² If Gaskell is at all critical of institutions for the ‘diffusion of knowledge,’ it is perhaps because men such as Mr Carson attempt to exercise the right to determine when the men may pursue knowledge. It would not occur to him that his men may have thoughts and ideas regarding the state of trade that may be of benefit to him.

In *Mary Barton* it takes a shared sense of suffering to make ‘brothers’ of the masters and men. Carson’s forgiveness of Barton comes after he witnesses a little girl’s forgiveness of a boy who has roughly pushed her to the ground, as her nurse prepares to summon a policeman, the girl tells her “he did not know what he was doing.”¹⁵³ The child’s choice of phrase strikes a chord with Carson and he returns home to seek the passage in his seldom used Bible. On the following day he returns to Barton’s home, as Barton is on his deathbed, and comprehending the situation he holds Barton in his arms as he draws his last breath.¹⁵⁴ Kristin Flieger Samuelian has observed that Carson’s embrace of the dying Barton is prefigured by Barton carrying a baby in his arms in Chapter 1,¹⁵⁵ whilst Lisa Surridge argues that whilst this is true in terms of the novel’s structure, “Gaskell fails to show how this quality of nurturance is transferred to the middle class.”¹⁵⁶ As Surridge rightly points out, Carson’s previous actions fail to convince the reader that he is capable of the paternal nature on which his conversion relies.¹⁵⁷

This does, to some extent, seem an overly dramatic event with which to bring masters and men together, and Gaskell acknowledged in a letter to Mrs Greg that there was “too heavy a shadow over the book.”¹⁵⁸ At times the deathbed scenes seem to follow one after the other, and this tone was partly

¹⁵¹ *MB* 388.

¹⁵² *MB* 172.

¹⁵³ *MB* 368.

¹⁵⁴ *MB* 372.

¹⁵⁵ Kristin Flieger Samuelian, “Lost Mothers: The Challenge to Paternalism in *Mary Barton*,” *Nineteenth Century Studies* 6 (1992): 20-21.

¹⁵⁶ Lisa Surridge, “Working-Class Masculinities in *Mary Barton*,” *Victorian Literature and Culture* (2000): 341.

¹⁵⁷ Surridge 341.

¹⁵⁸ L 75.

due to the circumstances in which she began writing.¹⁵⁹ However, Mr Carson here has something in common with the author, both having lost a child, and perhaps Gaskell hoped that Mr Carson would channel his grief towards contributing something positive to society, just as she and Josephine Butler had. In Chapter 37, ‘Details Connected with the Murder,’ he is described as “searching for motives which should be effective to compel him to exertion and action once more.”¹⁶⁰ He has finally realised that the pursuit of riches and social distinction is hollow. Gaskell’s message is finally fully articulated as Job informs Mr Carson that “them that is strong in any of God’s gifts is meant to help the weak.”¹⁶¹ Job argues that if it is part of God’s plan to send suffering to bring out a higher good, then it is surely also part of his plan that the burden of suffering should be lightened by those who by God’s pleasure are happy. We could certainly perceive Job and Jem as helping Mr Carson to move forwards after tragedy. It is through their influence that he is inspired to make the many “improvements now in practice in the system of employment in Manchester.”¹⁶²

The solution to class conflict offered by Gaskell in the novel, symbolised by Carson’s forgiveness of his son’s murderer, has often been criticised. Peter John Keating perceives industrial novelists as offering “limited social philosophies” by demanding a revolution in class relationships without addressing the balance of power;¹⁶³ and for John Lucas, empathy and compassion as a solution to the problem, is “grotesquely inadequate.”¹⁶⁴ Her denial of political knowledge in the “Preface” has further complicated the matter. For some time this statement was considered an acknowledgement of her own unsuitability to fulfil the task she had undertaken. However, in the early 1820s Gaskell’s father, William Stevenson, had contributed several articles on political economy to *Blackwood’s*; established in 1817 *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* was the first journal to provide extended discussion of economic matters and maintained a very critical stance towards economists.¹⁶⁵ F. W. Fetter explains

¹⁵⁹ L 74.

¹⁶⁰ MB 380.

¹⁶¹ MB 385.

¹⁶² MB 388.

¹⁶³ Peter John Keating, *The Working Classes in Victorian Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1971) 227.

¹⁶⁴ John Lucas, “Mrs Gaskell and Brotherhood,” *Tradition and Tolerance in Nineteenth Century Fiction*, ed. David Howard et al (London: Routledge, 1966) 174.

¹⁶⁵ Frank Whitson Fetter, “The Economic Articles in Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine and their Authors, 1817-53,” *Scottish Journal of Political Economy* 7.1 (1960): 85, 88.

that at this time the term ‘economist’ really encompassed only those who believed that the economy should be guided by market mechanisms, and who accepted the social and political changes that would inevitably follow.¹⁶⁶ Gaskell’s statement is now considered to be a rejection of this, rather than an admission of ignorance. For Valentine Cunningham this is a natural reaction to the pressures she faced from the Cross Street congregation,¹⁶⁷ and for Jenny Uglow it is evidence of Gaskell’s belief in truth above systems.¹⁶⁸

Lucas’s criticism takes two parts: firstly, Mr Carson’s reform is an individual matter, and secondly Lucas perceives the emigration to Canada, as Raymond Williams does, as an all too easy escape.¹⁶⁹ To take the first of these criticisms, we can presume that Gaskell was influenced here by her Unitarian faith, which emphasised individual works. Her choice of a novel as her format supports this; the relationship between author/narrator and reader is personal and private. Where petitions to parliament failed in the novel, Gaskell hopes to reach each mill owner individually. During his interview with Job and Jem, Mr Carson asks: “but how would you bring it to bear upon the masters’ conduct, - *on my particular case?*”¹⁷⁰ (my emphasis).

If we perceive Job as articulating Gaskell’s own ideas about philanthropy, then it is perhaps not surprising that Job should also deny having any specific knowledge of political economy. In her “Preface” Gaskell wrote “I know nothing of political economy, or the theories of trade,”¹⁷¹ and in Chapter 37, ‘Details Connected with the Murder,’ Job echoes this statement as he tells Mr Carson “I’m not given to Political Economy, I know that much.”¹⁷² As Job attempts to explain what he believes to have been Barton’s motives to Mr Carson, Carson instinctively counters with an argument founded in political economy:

¹⁶⁶ Fetter 90.

¹⁶⁷ Cunningham 136.

¹⁶⁸ Uglow 192.

¹⁶⁹ Lucas 174; Williams 103.

¹⁷⁰ *MB* 386.

¹⁷¹ Gaskell, “Preface” 4.

¹⁷² *MB* 384.

Two men live in solitude; one produces loaves of bread, the other coats, - or what you will. Now, would it not be hard if the bread-producer were forced to give bread for the coats, whether he wanted them or not, in order to furnish employment to the other.¹⁷³

We can again perceive Job's lack of knowledge as a rejection of this system; Job struggles to articulate his ideas, and is at pains to explain to Mr Carson that "I can't rightly explain the meaning that is in me."¹⁷⁴ By assigning the task of conveying her vision of philanthropy to Job, Gaskell ensures that the characters are unable to converse in terms of political economy. Job's lack of knowledge means that Mr Carson is unable to use this argument, he must meet Job on another level, and it forces him to address his own conduct. When arguing in terms of political economy there is a temptation to assume that change could only occur through government legislation, what Gaskell achieves by addressing this on a personal level, is to ensure that individuals should be responsible for their own actions. As Job informs Mr Carson:

The masters has it on their own conscience, - you have it on yours, sir, to answer for to God whether you've done, and are doing, all in your power to lighten the evils that seem always to hang on the trades by which you make your fortune.¹⁷⁵

Those critics who condemned Gaskell for her denial of political knowledge mistook her intention. *Mary Barton* is not concerned with reforming the existing political and economic structures or with erasing the division between rich and poor, which after all, in Gaskell's view, is God's will. As Job informs Mr Carson: "we take our trials straight from God, and we know enough of His love to put ourselves blind into His hands."¹⁷⁶ As Mr Carson presumes that Job is apportioning blame to him for the present hardships endured by the working classes, Job replies that the fault is not in want of power to remedy such evils, but rather in want of inclination to at least even try to make a difference. Gaskell urges her readers to demonstrate the kind of humanity expressed in her favourite passage of Wordsworth's "The Old Cumberland Beggar:"

¹⁷³ *MB* 384-85.

¹⁷⁴ *MB* 385.

¹⁷⁵ *MB* 386.

¹⁷⁶ *MB* 386.

man is dear to man; the poorest poor
 Long for some moments in a weary life
 When they can know and feel that they have been
 Themselves, the fathers and the dealers-out
 Of some small blessings; have been kind to such
 As needed kindness, for this simple cause
 That we have all of us a human heart.¹⁷⁷

Writing to Mary Howitt in 1838 Gaskell evoked this passage in respect to a particular district in Manchester. She had witnessed the poetry of *Humble Life* for herself, and the novel's predominant focus on the working classes of Manchester further aligns her with Wordsworth. As Stephen Gill notes, the "conviction that beauty and poetry lie hidden in common things lays on the artist the duty of disclosing them."¹⁷⁸

Perceiving Gaskell's intention in this context we can also better understand the reactions of some of Gaskell's Cross Street contemporaries, and her reviewers. Gaskell herself was surprised at the reactions aroused amongst her readers, writing to tell John Seely Hart "I neither expected the friends nor the enemies which it has made me."¹⁷⁹ However, this does to some extent illustrate why some of Gaskell's contemporaries failed to understand the real purpose behind her novel. We can perceive the novel arising partly out of her dissatisfaction with the 'associated philanthropy' with which she had been participating, such as the charity bazaars. This form of philanthropy appears to have become a form of middle-class entertainment, without personal contact with the people whom the philanthropy benefits.

¹⁷⁷ 147-153.

¹⁷⁸ Stephen Gill, *Wordsworth and the Victorians* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998) 122.

¹⁷⁹ L115. See also Letters 35 & 37 in particular for the reactions of the Manchester mill-owners.

Through *Mary Barton* Gaskell begins advancing a vision of a philanthropy which has the potential to cross class boundaries, rather than the rich helping the poor, Gaskell's philanthropy simply has the strong helping the weak. This is not fully explored in *Mary Barton*, demonstrated by the fact that it is articulated by a character who struggles to express his ideas. However, this was only Gaskell's first philanthropic novel, and she would begin to develop this idea within a few years.

3 Ruth and Dressmakers

Glad hearts! Without reproach or blot;

Who do thy work and know it not¹

3.1 “stitching away as if for very life”: Gaskell and the Victorian Seamstress

Ruth is arguably Gaskell’s most philanthropic novel, despite being largely overlooked by previous discussions of Gaskell’s fiction and philanthropy.² In *Ruth* Gaskell examines how individuals practise philanthropy through the vehicles of the ‘fallen woman’ debates and the figure of the seamstress, offering an alternative vision of philanthropy. All of *Ruth*’s principal characters are observed engaging in philanthropy to varying degrees, and Gaskell shows no mercy to those who think offering a little money is sufficient. For Gaskell, philanthropy should not create a relationship of dependence or a reciprocal exchange of financial help for gratitude. In *Ruth* Gaskell portrays a family practically assisting a girl by taking her into their home. The home sphere was of course important for all Victorians, but can also be linked to Gaskell’s Unitarian faith.

In *Ruth*, Gaskell tells the story of a young dressmaker who is seduced and then cruelly abandoned by her lover; she is one of the girls who “fall from pure unknowingness,” as described by William Rathbone Greg in his essay “Prostitution.”³ Alone and friendless with no job to return to, Ruth contemplates suicide, until she is helped by dissenting minister Thurstan Benson. He and his sister take Ruth home with them; they provide a loving, supportive environment in which Ruth, portrayed as a widow, brings up her illegitimate son. When her secret is revealed some years later, Ruth redeems herself within the community through her work as a nurse during the typhus outbreak. Gaskell is often credited as being the first writer to use the fallen woman as the heroine of her novel.⁴ It was a brave

¹ William Wordsworth, *Ode to Duty* 1 13-14.

² 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.

Parker, Pamela Corpron. “Fictional Philanthropy in Elizabeth Gaskell’s ‘Mary Barton’ and ‘North and South,’” *Victorian Literature and Culture*. 25.2 (1997): 321-331.

³ William Rathbone Greg, “Prostitution,” *Westminster Review* 53 (1850): 459. *Proquest*. 27 Mar. 2011.

⁴ Easson, *Elizabeth Gaskell* 114.

decision: some of her own friends and acquaintances thought the novel an “unfit subject for fiction”; and, as she told her sister-in-law, Anne Robson, the book was even prohibited in the Gaskell household, though she planned to read it with Marianne “some quiet time or other.”⁵ Through her fiction Gaskell contributes to a debate which at this time had captured public interest.

In the introduction a picture began to appear of Victorian philanthropy as more cautious, concerned with helping only the poor who demonstrated that they were deserving of receiving middle-class assistance. The Industrial Revolution had created new problems for philanthropists coupled with an increasing population, and the philanthropic society was one way in which Victorians often attempted to address these problems. Such societies could act as an intermediary between donor and recipient, investing money where they thought wisest, with the unfortunate outcome that contact between donor and recipient (between the classes) was curtailed. As discussed in the previous chapter, philanthropic societies often raised money through bazaars or balls.

In *Ruth* Gaskell rejects the prevalent form of philanthropy; when people go to Mr Benson for help, it is for “help of which giving money was the lowest kind.”⁶ One of the novel’s earliest examples of philanthropy sees Mr Bellingham behave generously to the boy he has rescued from the river primarily to impress Ruth. His desire to give Ruth more money to look after the boy is only an attempt to manipulate her feelings and contrive another meeting with her. After the initial rescue from the river he does not offer any further help himself, and manages to offend the boy’s grandmother by criticising her housekeeping skills. It is important to note that Ruth is also taking on the role of philanthropist in the novel; she has already waded out into the river before Bellingham arrives. However, at this stage of the novel she is awed by Bellingham’s hollow gestures, and is indulging in “Alnascher visions of wise expenditure.”⁷ As a beggar in *The Arabian Nights’ Entertainment*, Alnascher dreamt of marrying the Vizier’s daughter after making his fortune from his trade in glassware. Imagining how he might spurn the Vizier, Alnascher accidentally overturns his stock; and so the tale is proverbial, suggesting that Ruth’s daydreams are constructed on foundations as unstable as

⁵ L 220-1.

⁶ Elizabeth Gaskell, *Ruth* ed. Angus Easson. (1997; London: Penguin, 2004) 113-14. Referred hereafter as *R*.

⁷ *R* 27.

Alnascher's. Ruth seems to be envisaging herself as a sort of Lady Bountiful character here: she later discovers, when acting as a nurse that "it was astonishing how much she was able to do without money."⁸

In *Ruth* Gaskell demonstrates a form of philanthropy that enables the recipients to in turn contribute to society. In rescuing Ruth the Bensons allow her to discover new depths to philanthropy. As Susan Morgan notes, the Angel in the House becomes the angel in the town; "Unless the community is changed by Ruth's story, it remains a personal history. What is impressive about the novel is that it does not merely pit fake public progress against substantial private progress but examines how private progress can become public."⁹ This chapter will examine this model of philanthropy offered by Gaskell through a Unitarian framework; the Victorian distinction between public and private spheres had particular relevance for Unitarian philanthropy, and I perceive this as being the principal factor behind Gaskell's choice to rehabilitate Ruth within the home sphere. The chapter will examine this by exploring the way in which the novel's characters interact with one another. It has previously been remarked that an important theme of the novel is how individuals adapt to shifting economic systems;¹⁰ characters such as Bellingham and Bradshaw interact with Ruth in economic terms, providing a contrast with the private sphere of relations offered by the Bensons.

Following the publication of *Mary Barton* Gaskell proclaimed to her publisher "I am not thinking of writing any thing else; le jeu ne vaut pas la chandelle. And I have nothing else to say."¹¹ However, as Jenny Uglow has noted, Gaskell's fiction was "invariably recast to bring out the ideas that most preoccupied her," and between publishing *Mary Barton* and beginning *Ruth*, Gaskell was involved with two forms of philanthropy which appear to have provided experiences from which she drew whilst writing *Ruth*. It surely cannot be coincidental that both examples involve dressmakers in Manchester. On the first occasion Gaskell intervened in the case of a young dressmaker she met in the

⁸ R 320.

⁹ Susan Morgan, "Gaskell's Heroines and the Power of Time," *Pacific Coast Philology* 18.1/2 (1983): 50.

¹⁰ Linda K. Hughes and Michael Lund, *Victorian Publishing and Mrs Gaskell's Work*, (Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1999); Pam Parker, "'The Power of Giving': Elizabeth Gaskell's *Ruth* and the Politics of Benevolence," *The Gaskell Society Journal* 13 (1999):

¹¹ L 72.

New Bailey around the end of 1849, beginning of 1850. The second example is a form of ‘associated philanthropy’ aiming to improve working conditions for dressmakers and milliners. Ruth may be employed as a dressmaker for only a relatively small section of the novel, yet it is an important context in which to begin examining the novel. Further investigation into these two forms of philanthropy Gaskell became involved with will reveal influences that may have had an important effect on the novel, for instance, her treatment of the importance of family and parental care for young people.

By the mid-nineteenth century the seamstress had become a common figure in fiction. The publication on 30th January 1843 of R. D. Grainger’s “Second Report to the Children’s Employment Commission” brought to the public’s attention the plight of dressmakers, comparing working conditions in dressmaking with those of women’s factory work investigated by other Employment commissions.¹² The metaphor of slavery used in the report was a powerful image, prompting responses such as Thomas Hood’s “The Song of the Shirt” in 1843, Camilla Toulmin’s *The Orphan Milliners* in 1844 and Richard Redgrave’s painting “The Seamstress,” also in 1844. Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna quoted directly from it in the first part, “Milliners and Dressmakers,” of *The Wrongs of Woman*, published 1843-44.¹³ The seamstress became something of a working-class symbol because unlike female factory workers, she retained her femininity despite entering the workplace; needlework was an occupation associated with the home sphere, a task traditionally performed by women for their husbands and children. This was also an occupation often chosen by middle or upper class women whose altered circumstances forced them to seek employment, adding an air of refinement and vulnerability to the seamstress, who became symbolic of hardship and suffering.¹⁴ This also allowed the writer of social fiction to portray workers in a less offensive manner to their middle-class readers, therefore creating empathy; writers such as Elizabeth Stone in *The Young*

¹² Helen Rogers, “‘The Good are not Always Powerful, nor the Powerful Always Good’: The Politics of Women’s Needlework in Mid-Victorian London,” *Victorian Studies* 40.4 (1997): 590.

¹³ Kestner 83.

¹⁴ Beth Harris, *Famine and Fashion: Needlewomen in the Nineteenth Century* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2005) 5.

Milliner, 1843, and Tonna in *The Wrongs of Woman*, appealed directly to their female readers to exert their influence with the dressmakers whose establishments they shopped at.¹⁵

By the time of *Ruth*'s publication a transition had occurred in the way the figure of the seamstress was used within social fiction; with the adoption of the seamstress as a working-class symbol, the focus changed to the use of the seamstress to explore other social issues affecting the working classes as a whole.¹⁶ Gaskell uses the figure of the seamstress to explore the cultural assumption that a seduced woman would only ever descend further into a life of depravity. In the fiction of the time the 'fallen woman' would commonly descend into prostitution, poverty and eventually death, usually by suicide; as Mrs Pearson tells Jemima, "only one knows they can but go from bad to worse."¹⁷ *Ruth* was not Gaskell's first examination of the 'fallen woman,' her short story "Lizzie Leigh" had been published in the inaugural numbers of *Household Words* in 1850.¹⁸ Lizzie, like Ruth, had moved to the city, in this case Manchester, from her childhood home in the countryside because her father felt "she mun go among strangers, and learn to rough it."¹⁹ Lizzie was not much older than Ruth, 'barely seventeen,' and after her seduction she is also turned away by her employer. Lizzie, though, is not so fortunate as Ruth; alone and unable to support her child she leaves her on Susan Palmer's doorstep, returning occasionally in the dead of night to leave parcels of money for the child. Following her husband's death, Lizzie's mother moves to Manchester to find her daughter. Reunited at last, Lizzie returns with her mother to the country where she leads a quiet, secluded life:

if the cottage be hidden in a green hollow of the hills, every sound of sorrow in the whole upland is heard there - every call of suffering or of sickness for help is listened to by a sad, gentle-looking woman who rarely smiles (and when she does, her smile is

¹⁵ Lynn M. Alexander, "Creating a Symbol: The Seamstress in Victorian Literature," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 18.2 (1999): 30.

¹⁶ Kestner 104; Alexander 32.

¹⁷ *R* 264.

¹⁸ Jenny Uglow suggests that it was probably begun much earlier, though, in the late 1830s. 125.

¹⁹ Elizabeth Gaskell, "Lizzie Leigh," *The Works of Elizabeth Gaskell Volume 1* ed. Joanne Shattock (London: Pickering, 2005) 142. Referred to hereafter as *LL*.

more sad than other people's tears), but who comes out of her seclusion whenever there is a shadow in any household. Many hearts bless Lizzie Leigh.²⁰

As in *Ruth*, Gaskell challenges the cultural assumption that a 'fallen woman' would only ever descend further, and instead demonstrates that she still has much to contribute to society.

Frances Trollope's *Jessie Phillips*, published 1842-43 is one of the earlier novels from this transition; in it Trollope explores the implications of The New Poor Law, which placed responsibility for the support of an illegitimate child solely with the mother. Jessie Phillips is a dressmaker seduced by a man whom she wrongly believes will marry her. Like Ruth, Jessie is also pregnant and her loss of reputation means she can no longer obtain work. Gaskell, however, offers a more optimistic life for Ruth, with the chance to redeem herself, not only in her work for the community but in the life she is able to offer her child. Jessie, in contrast, gives birth alone. Falling unconscious she wakes to find the child has disappeared, the father is revealed as the murderer but it is Jessie who is convicted of the child's death. It seems quite likely that Gaskell would have read *Jessie Phillips*: in 1832 she had read the recently published *Domestic Manners of the Americans* by Mrs Trollope, writing to Harriet Carr, "It is so very amusing, and by abusing the Americans has won my heart."²¹ After publishing *Mary Barton* Gaskell was certainly aware of other novels dealing with similar subject matter to her own (see Letters 62 & 72) so it seems likely.

An article from the *Manchester Times* reveals that Gaskell was possibly involved with 'The Association for the Improvement of the Condition of Dressmakers, Milliners, &c.' at the time when she was beginning work on *Ruth*. A Mrs Gaskell is listed as a member of the ladies' committee in March 1851,²² and Jenny Uglow confirms that Gaskell had been discussing *Ruth* with friends from March of that year.²³ Unfortunately her letters from this time offer no evidence to support her involvement with this Association. Whilst there is no certainty that the Mrs Gaskell referred to was

²⁰ LL 154.

²¹ FL 18.

²² "The Association for the Improvement of the Condition of Dressmakers, Milliners, &c." *Manchester Times* 8 Mar. 1851. Gale. 24 Mar 2008.

²³ Uglow 278.

Elizabeth, this was clearly a social problem that interested her deeply at the time. The fact that several of her philanthropic friends and acquaintances, such as Mrs Schwabe and Mrs Beard, were also involved would seem to increase the probability that it was indeed Gaskell.²⁴ In March 1851 Gaskell was actually having a gown made for herself by a Miss Daniels of Manchester, though, unfortunately she offers no opinions here of the dressmaking trade.²⁵ Rather than campaigning for a change in legislation, the association aimed to influence the dressmakers themselves and the ladies of Manchester who shopped at such establishments. Firstly, they aimed to achieve a limitation to working hours, including a proper interval for meals, and a weekly half holiday on Saturday afternoon. During the nineteenth century the number of dressmakers had increased dramatically owing to a new market for cheaper clothing. Previously the upper classes had their clothing produced bespoke by a tailor, in the nineteenth century clothes production became an organised industry; new machinery produced larger quantities of cheaper materials, and new printing techniques with cheaper paper led to an increase in women's magazines which resulted in fashions changing more rapidly.²⁶ The association's other aim, therefore, was to persuade ladies to place their orders with consideration, avoiding Saturdays and shopping late at night, as ladies would place orders as late as possible for fear that fashions may change before they wore the dress. Ruth and her fellow dressmakers managed only three hours rest the night prior to the hunt ball, and while compiling his report Grainger found that during the two Seasons it was not unusual for dressmakers to work eighteen hours a day: "The only limit set to their work is the absolute physical inability to hold the needle another minute."²⁷ The success of the Association is difficult to gauge; an article from the *Manchester Times* in 1854 proclaims the publication of their Second Report, but no further articles could be discovered. However, Christina Walkley states that it continued to exist until 1864, when according to one of its

²⁴ Mrs Beard, wife of Strangeways Unitarian minister John Relly Beard, participated alongside Gaskell at the 1838 Popular Education Bazaar discussed in the first chapter, and Mrs Schwabe went on an 'expedition' to the New Bailey with Gaskell in 1853. See FL 84.

²⁵ L 147.

²⁶ Christina Walkley, *The Ghost in the Looking Glass: The Victorian Seamstress* (London: Peter Owen, 1981) 3-5.

²⁷ qtd. in Walkley 22.

members there was no longer any need for it; though Walkley suggests that lack of money was probably the more likely reason.²⁸

A similar scheme had been attempted in 1843 following Grainger's report. Based in London, the 'Association for the Aid and Benefit of Dressmakers and Milliners,' was concerned with dressmakers in the capital, though its aims were very similar to those of the association that would be established in Manchester the following decade. As well as limiting working hours and requesting ladies to allow sufficient time for the execution of orders, they also aimed to improve ventilation and offer medical advice and pecuniary assistance to those who needed it.²⁹ Christina Walkley considers the association to have been successful, as conditions had improved by the fifties even though they may still seem shocking today, and the Gentleman's committee certainly considered the Association to have been a success.³⁰ In a letter to the editor of *The Times* in 1853 they stated working hours had been considerably curtailed, young persons were rarely kept up at night, and very few now worked on Sundays.³¹ As Helen Rogers notes, such associations "countered economic individualism by insisting on the obligations of the rich to provide subsistence to the poor," however, this did not address the pastoral care that the girls received whilst they resided at such establishments. Mayhew's reports provide enough evidence to suggest that Gaskell's portrayal of Mrs Mason was not inaccurate or exaggerated. Mrs Mason chooses to believe that her apprentices have family or friends who will feed them on Sundays so that she will not have to provide food, whilst Mayhew interviewed a first hand whose employer would enjoy a secret breakfast with her family before allowing the apprentices to join them.³² The food provided for the apprentices was certainly not of the standard consumed by the family, she told Mayhew; "The bread was as hard as if it had been a week old; it was all cut ready for us with the least scrape of rancid butter on it. I could not eat the bread, and felt quite ill from want."³³

²⁸ Walkley 101.

²⁹ "Dressmakers and Milliners," *The Times* 6 May 1844: 8. Gale. 20 Apr. 2011.

³⁰ Walkley 94.

³¹ R. D. Grainger and Shaftesbury, "To the Editor of the Times," *The Times* 11 Apr. 1853: 4. Gale. 20 Apr. 2011.

³² R 31.

³³ Henry Mayhew, *The Unknown Mayhew: Selections From The Morning Chronicle 1849-50*, eds., E. P. Thompson and Eileen Yeo (London: Penguin, 1984) 531.

Improved working hours or better ventilation etc, would unfortunately have made very little difference to the life of the young woman Gaskell had met several years previously.

Examining the genesis of *Ruth*, it would be impossible to ignore the philanthropic story of Gaskell's meeting with Pasley. Possibly the most well known example of Gaskell's benevolence, this is often considered the inspiration for *Ruth*.³⁴ Pasley was the daughter of an Irish clergyman who died when she was two. Neglected by her mother, she was apprenticed by her uncle to an Irish dressmaker in Manchester when she was 14. When the business failed Pasley was placed with another dressmaker who connived at her seduction by a surgeon when she fell ill; she subsequently fell into a life of prostitution and theft and was imprisoned in Manchester's New Bailey. Gaskell visited Pasley in prison at the request of Thomas Wright, a prison visitor who helped many hundreds of prisoners in Manchester to begin a new reformed life. Believing that prisoners would be shunned by all except criminals once released from prison, he established a network of potential employers, and even used his own money as a guarantee for the former prisoner. Wright believed that an individual's descent into crime occurred progressively, originating from poor parental care.³⁵ Gaskell had observed first hand the detrimental effect poor parental care could have in a young girl's life, and in Chapter XXVIII of *Ruth*, Jemima tells Mr Benson "it made me think of myself, and what I am. With a father and mother, and home and careful friends, I am not likely to be tempted like Ruth; but oh! Mr Benson...I might have been just like Ruth, or rather worse than ever she was, because I am more headstrong and passionate by nature."³⁶ Gaskell realised she would require further assistance if she were to successfully help Pasley; she wanted her to emigrate to Australia but had heard poor accounts of the 'common emigrant ships.'³⁷ Gaskell was right to be concerned: when the "Culloden" arrived in Australia on 6th July 1850, reports were heard of the male passengers passing alcohol to the female

³⁴ For example see Winifred Gerin, *Elizabeth Gaskell: A Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976) 128; Lansbury 52; and Uglow 245-246.

³⁵ L 98-9; Bill Forsythe, "Wright, Thomas (1789-1875)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Oxford University Press. 21 Mar. 2011.

³⁶ R 299.

³⁷ L 99.

emigrants.³⁸ Emigration was at this time particularly popular. Gaskell wrote to ask for help from Charles Dickens, who she knew to be involved with Urania Cottage, a refuge for fallen women he had established with philanthropist Angela Burdett Coutts.³⁹ Urania Cottage attempted to provide a unique solution to the fallen woman problem at this time. Offering rehabilitation through the “healing powers of domesticity,” it was a home rather than a penitentiary.⁴⁰ Urania Cottage would actively oppose the prevalent ideas regarding ‘fallen women’; outlining his idea to Angela Burdett Coutts in 1846, Dickens wrote: “Never mind society while she is at that pass. Society has used her ill and turned away from her.”⁴¹ A penitentiary was of course Mrs Bellingham’s suggestion to the abandoned Ruth; Maria Luddy found that to gain entry to a penitentiary, women would often require a subscriber to recommend them, which may explain why Mrs Bellingham’s maid thought Ruth fortunate to have a lady who would take an ‘interest’ in her.⁴² Her characterisation of Ruth as a “degraded girl” and “vicious companion” demonstrates the typical Victorian attitude towards such girls.⁴³ It was usual at this time for the inmates of such institutions to endure a life of abjection, employed in industrial work such as large scale laundry.⁴⁴ Life at Urania Cottage was far more optimistic; they would become a family, and neither the owner of the building nor its neighbours should know anything of the girls’ history.⁴⁵ It was Angela Burdett Coutts rather than Dickens who focused a little too much on the spiritual salvation of the girls.⁴⁶ The girls were not to remain there indefinitely, though, instead the future offered emigration and marriage, a new start where the girls’ past misdemeanours would be unknown. Gaskell wrote asking if Pasley might be included in one of these emigration schemes, but Dickens felt they could offer no assistance; they had no matron to send with the girls on their voyage to Australia, and so the temptation to return to their previous life whilst on board was considerable.⁴⁷

³⁸ Jo Chimes, “‘Wanted: 1000 Spirited Young Milliners’: The Fund for Promoting Female Emigration,” *Famine and Fashion: Needlewomen in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Beth Harris (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2005) 238.

³⁹ L 98-99.

⁴⁰ Jenny Hartley, *Charles Dickens and the House of Fallen Women* (London: Methuen, 2009): 14-16.

⁴¹ Charles Dickens, *The Letters of Charles Dickens. Vol 4 [1844-1846]* ed. Kathleen Tillotson (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977) 553.

⁴² Luddy 111; R 91.

⁴³ R 77-78.

⁴⁴ J. Hartley 16.

⁴⁵ J. Hartley 14, 32.

⁴⁶ J. Hartley 32.

⁴⁷ Charles Dickens, *Letters of Charles Dickens. Vol 6 [1850-1852]* eds., Graham Storey et al (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987).

This was a particular concern for Gaskell as “there are two of the worst women in the town who have been in prison with her, intending to way-lay her” upon her release.⁴⁸ Gaskell instead arranged for her to emigrate to the Cape on the Royal Albert,⁴⁹ with a man and his wife who would take “loving charge” of her, where her history would be unknown on landing.⁵⁰ A parallel that can be drawn with Ruth, who begins a new life with the Bensons as the widow Mrs Denbigh.

Unsurprisingly, Dickens’ interest in helping these women is also evident in his fiction at this time. In his Christmas Book “The Chimes” from 1844, the protagonist Toby (Trotty) Veck is presented with a terrifying vision of what the future may hold for his daughter Meg and her companion Lilian; unable to earn a sufficient living as needlewomen, Lilian turns to prostitution and Meg considers drowning herself and her baby. Meg works long into the night and still struggles to pay her rent. This could easily have been Ruth’s fate if the Bensons had not intervened; when Leonard is about a year old Ruth makes plans to find lodgings for the two of them where she could earn money dressmaking, however, Faith soon points out that Leonard would be neglected and no doubt “have the croup and the typhus fever in no time.”⁵¹ Several years later, and subsequent to the opening of Urania Cottage, Dickens presents a fictional account of emigration. *David Copperfield* (published 1849-50) presents prostitute Martha Endell and Little Em’ly, who, like Ruth, is seduced and then abandoned. Em’ly is engaged to marry Ham Peggotty but runs away with Steerforth. She has perhaps more in common with Mary Barton here as she dreams of becoming a lady in order to ensure the comfort and security of those she loves. Critics are divided regarding Dickens’ attitude towards the ‘fallen woman’ in this novel, with Catherine J. Golden arguing that emigration is a “banishment” and “punishment,”⁵² whilst Michael

⁴⁸ L 99.

⁴⁹ Several writers such as Winifred Gerin and Coral Lansbury have assumed that Pasley emigrated to Australia. Jeanette Eve explains that this was probably due to the misdating of Letter 55 to Eliza Fox; originally dated Nov. 26 1849, with the publication of the *Further Letters of Mrs Gaskell* it was re-dated 3-24 February 1850. Eve’s article published prior to the *Further Letters* provides evidence of this, and also discovered that The Cape of Good Hope Government Gazette of 6 June 1850 confirmed that the Royal Albert arrived in Table Bay on 31st May 1850. See Jeanette Eve, “A Misdated Gaskell Letter and the Background Story to *Ruth*.” *Notes and Queries* 34.1 (1987): 37.

⁵⁰ L 101.

⁵¹ R 143.

⁵² Catherine J. Golden, “Late-Twentieth Century Readers in Search of a Dickensian Heroine: Angels, Fallen Sisters, and Eccentric Women,” *Modern Language Studies* 30.2 (2000): 12.

Slater perceives Dickens as attempting to portray Em'ly sympathetically.⁵³ It would seem that Slater is closest to the truth as Dickens wrote that he wished to bring the plight of such women "before the thoughts of people, in a new and pathetic way, and perhaps do some good."⁵⁴ Gaskell expressed a similar sentiment when she wrote to Mrs Mary Rich "if I have but got the smallest edge of the wedge in, any how, I will be thankful to God."⁵⁵ Marriage was Dickens' ultimate aspiration for the Uranians, he wrote "I would have it understood by all-I would have it written up in every room-that they were not going through a monotonous round of occupation and self-denial which began and ended there, but which began, or was resumed, under that roof, and would end, by God's blessing, in happy homes of their own."⁵⁶ It does seem strange then that only Martha is permitted this conclusion; despite many offers Em'ly devotes her life to teaching and caring for the sick, she is "sowt out by all that has any trouble."⁵⁷ This does, as Michael Slater argues, seem to undermine what Urania represents.⁵⁸

We could surmise that Gaskell may have found both of these philanthropic endeavours to be ultimately inadequate in addressing the problems faced by needlewomen and society's 'fallen women.' In order to begin a new life Pasley had been forced to emigrate. Whilst Pasley showed contrition and an earnest desire to leave her former way of life behind her, Gaskell seemed to feel that some form of supervision was necessary at all times. Urania Cottage was obviously an admirable scheme for rehabilitating young women, and it continued to flourish for fifteen years. The total number of emigrants is unknown; however, if the numbers of the first five years continued throughout Urania's longevity, Hartley estimates the figure to be approximately one hundred women.⁵⁹ Whilst this is not a considerable number, the small scale was after all crucial to their creation of a family environment. The Bensons' rehabilitation of Ruth also operates on a small scale, but Gaskell is demonstrating a form of philanthropy that anybody could practise. The Bensons are certainly required to make sacrifices in order to accommodate Ruth, but she does not remain dependent upon them, when

⁵³ Michael Slater, *Dickens and Women* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1983) 346.

⁵⁴ Charles Dickens, *The Letters of Charles Dickens. Vol 5 [1847-1849]* eds., K. J. Fielding and Graham Storey (Oxford: Clarendon, 1980) 682.

⁵⁵ FL 84.

⁵⁶ Dickens, *Letters Vol 4* 554.

⁵⁷ Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield* ed. Jeremy Tambling (1996; London: Penguin, 2004) 874.

⁵⁸ Slater 347.

⁵⁹ J. Hartley 245.

Leonard no longer requires constant attention Ruth is able to work and thus contribute economically to the household. Gaskell is arguing for a change of attitude across society.

The Associations were obviously successful in achieving their specified aims, and as Helen Rogers and Nicola Pullin point out, such schemes addressed economic factors in moral terms, asking wealthy women to demonstrate social responsibility for their poorer sisters.⁶⁰ However, this did not address the pastoral care the women received whilst they resided at such establishments. Mrs Mason is Gaskell's example of the kind of establishment that the Association aimed to influence. Mrs Mason certainly does not treat her apprentices cruelly, she was after all "a very worthy woman, but, like many other worthy women, she had her foibles."⁶¹ One of the aims of the Manchester Association was the introduction of a weekly half holiday on Saturday afternoon, Mrs Mason allowed her apprentices a day off on Sunday but she takes no interest in what becomes of them during this time and certainly does not make them welcome in her home. She provides no food for them and no fires are lighted in any of the rooms they would normally inhabit, "they breakfasted in Mrs Mason's own parlour, after which the room was closed against them through the day by some understood, though unspoken prohibition."⁶² In this light the limitations of the Associations become apparent. Mrs Mason's relationship with her workforce does not extend beyond the bounds of political economy; she proffers an excursion to the hunt ball as a treat for the most diligent workers, but secretly chooses the prettiest girls, as those most likely to do credit to her establishment.⁶³ Ruth is as Pam Parker notes a 'commodity of exchange.'⁶⁴ It is hardly surprising then that Ruth begins to internalise the language of political economy and perceive herself in relation to her employer in these terms; she cannot comprehend why it would be wrong to meet Bellingham as she is not "defrauding Mrs Mason of any of her time."⁶⁵

⁶⁰ Rogers 604; Nicola Pullin, "A Heavy Bill to Settle with Humanity": The Representation and Invisibility of London's Principal Milliners and Dressmakers," *Famine and Fashion: Needlewomen in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Beth Harris (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2005): 220.

⁶¹ R 10.

⁶² R 31.

⁶³ R 10.

⁶⁴ Pam Parker, "'The Power of Giving': Elizabeth Gaskell's *Ruth* and the Politics of Benevolence," *Gaskell Society Journal* 13 (1999): 57.

⁶⁵ R 37.

Mrs Mason's indifference is inexcusable to Gaskell, who herself enjoyed a friendly relationship with those she employed, even finding Barbara Ferguson, her "dear household friend," an alternative position with James Aspinall Turner's family when she was no longer able to satisfactorily manage the Gaskell girls.⁶⁶ However, Mrs Mason is concerned primarily with the character of her establishment, and her behaviour is condemned by the narrator who states that it would "have been a better and more Christian thing, if she had kept up the character of her girls by tender vigilance and maternal care."⁶⁷ From the reference to 'maternal care' it seems obvious that Gaskell suggests that Mrs Mason should have created a domestic atmosphere, both protective and supportive, for her apprentices. It is perhaps not surprising then that Mrs Mason is also one of the many inadequate biological mothers to be found in Gaskell's work. Whilst occurring too late to have influenced the writing of *Ruth*, we can gauge Gaskell's opinion following her visit in 1853 to a printing business established by two Mr Spottiswoodes, she exclaims "they are like a large & happy family-and it seems such a beautiful life."⁶⁸ The solution Gaskell offers in *Ruth* then, as Elsie B Michie points out, is the reclamation of the 'fallen woman' within the domestic sphere, an idea almost incomprehensible to many Victorians as the home was a haven of morality, with woman at the centre of the home creating and maintaining this atmosphere.⁶⁹ When the truth about Ruth is revealed, Mr Bradshaw's principal concern is that his own children may have been contaminated or corrupted through their interaction with Ruth and Leonard.⁷⁰ Gaskell's solution is significant not only in its opposition to the current perception of 'fallen women,' but also because of the significance of the home sphere for Unitarian philanthropy.

3.2 The Unitarian Influence

Unitarian philanthropy was characterised in the introduction as being particularly suited to what has been referred to as the 'civilising mission,' or philanthropy aiming to help the working classes improve and enrich their lives. John Seed and Howard M. Wach have detailed the development of a new urban culture devoted to the 'diffusion of knowledge,' in the belief that such education would

⁶⁶ FL 34.

⁶⁷ R 48.

⁶⁸ L 237.

⁶⁹ Elsie B. Michie, *Outside the Pale: Cultural Exclusion, Gender Difference, and the Victorian Woman Writer* (London: Cornell UP) 81.

⁷⁰ R 286-87.

counter immorality amongst the working classes and maintain social order.⁷¹ This included institutions such as the Athenaeum and the Mechanics' Institution, which, unlike the Church or Chapel were perceived as neutral ground, yet they were still vehicles through which discourses such as “conceptions of social and political organization, hierarchies of knowledge, and prescriptive foundations of public and private morality” entered the public realm, the latter of which will be the focus for this chapter.⁷² Such institutions were established on a foundation of stewardship; as discussed in the introduction, the stewardship of wealth was important for Unitarians in their strict adherence to social hierarchy. Unitarian ministers would endorse such social relations in their sermons and remind their middle-class congregants of their obligation and responsibility to the working classes. Whilst maintaining the social structure Unitarianism promoted a mutuality between moral or spiritual equals, an idea founded in the language of the personal.⁷³ The Victorian distinction between the public and private spheres offers an insight into how they attempted to achieve this; the family was a sphere in which relations were not dictated by market forces and could assume larger metaphorical dimensions within society.⁷⁴ As Michie notes, Gaskell seems to be imagining a breakdown of the barrier separating the public and private spheres, and one of the questions this chapter will attempt to address is the extent to which that spiritual equality was offered to women such as Ruth.⁷⁵ Amanda Anderson has also noted that “domestic harmony” provides the ideal sphere for redemption in *Ruth*, however, noting the influence of Gaskell's Unitarian faith in her emphasis on “the transformative potential of direct contact between different classes,”⁷⁶ neither Anderson nor Michie connects the redemptive powers of home with Gaskell's faith.⁷⁷ Yoko Hatano has argued that Ruth's rehabilitation within the home sphere should be attributed to the influence of Evangelicalism.⁷⁸ Hatano argues that other elements of the novel are comparable with the Evangelical established

⁷¹ Seed, *Unitarianism* 12; Wach, *Unitarian Philanthropy* 541.

⁷² Wach, *Unitarian Philanthropy* 541.

⁷³ Lauren M. E. Goodlad, “‘Making the Working Man Like Me’: Charity, Pastorship, and Middle-class Identity in Nineteenth-Century Britain; Thomas Chalmers and Dr. James Kay Phillips,” *Victorian Studies* 43.4 (2001): 596.

⁷⁴ Seed, *Unitarianism* 20; Wach, *Unitarian Philanthropy* 546.

⁷⁵ Michie 98.

⁷⁶ Amanda Anderson, *Tainted Souls and Painted Faces: The Rhetoric of Fallenness in Victorian Culture* (London: Cornell UP, 1993) 108-09.

⁷⁷ Michie 127.

⁷⁸ Hatano, Yoko. “Evangelicalism in *Ruth*,” *The Modern Language Review* 95.3 (2000): 634.

magdalenist movement. In her heroine Ruth, Gaskell portrays exactly the type of girl that Evangelical rescue workers tended to choose for their rescue work. They would often target women from respectable backgrounds who had ‘fallen’ through seduction rather than choosing prostitution, such women were considered morally superior to their seducers.⁷⁹ The peaceful and pastoral atmosphere of the Benson household is demonstrative of the sort of environment preferred by Evangelicals as opposed to penitentiaries; and Ruth’s submission and her adoption of a new name, Hatano explains, fits the model of magdalenism practised at Anglican penitentiaries.⁸⁰

The home sphere was important for all Victorians, regardless of denomination; the home was a moral haven offering shelter from the public world of commerce.⁸¹ Hatano rightly asserts that Victorian domestic ideology derived from Evangelical theology, promoted in the writing of Samuel Cowper and Hannah More.⁸² However, as different denominations demonstrated unique approaches to philanthropy they could perhaps also be perceived as ascribing differing significance to the home sphere; Howard M. Wach suggests that the significance Unitarians attached to the home sphere can perhaps be attributed to the hostility they faced from other denominations.⁸³ Their kinship ties became one of the distinguishing features of their denomination, and intermarriages between the Cross Street and Mosley Street Chapels were common.⁸⁴ Their business success, political opinions and sense of identity were all to some degree attributable to these kinship ties, and are perceived by V. A. C. Gatrell as the source of their greatest strength.⁸⁵ Whilst fear of religious or political persecution faded as the century progressed, this was replaced by class based upheavals, so home must have provided a sanctuary from more than just the commercial world. It would seem logical that Gaskell would draw

⁷⁹ Hatano 635.

⁸⁰ Hatano 636.

⁸¹ Elizabeth Langland, “Nobody’s Angels: Domestic Ideology and Middle-Class Women in the Victorian Novel,” *PMLA* 107.2 (1992): 291.

⁸² Hatano 636.

⁸³ Howard M. Wach, “A ‘Still Small Voice’ from the Pulpit: Religion and the Creation of Social Morality in Manchester, 1820-1850,” *The Journal of Modern History* 63.3 (1991): 434.

⁸⁴ V. A. C. Gatrell, “Incorporation and the Pursuit of Liberal Hegemony in Manchester 1790-1839,” *Municipal Reform and the Industrial City*, ed. Derek Fraser (Leicester: Leicester UP, 1982) 25.

⁸⁵ Gatrell 25.

greater inspiration from her own faith. Dissent is evident in this novel more than in Gaskell's other work; *Ruth* has been described by Monica Correa Fryckstedt as Gaskell's most Unitarian novel.⁸⁶

The importance of the home sphere for Unitarians can be perceived through their establishment of Domestic Home Missions, whilst the missions were non-sectarian, other denominations were reluctant to join them so it was very much a Unitarian led initiative.⁸⁷ Their purpose was to create personal contact between the classes and bring religion and middle-class morality into the homes of the poor.⁸⁸ Manchester's Home Mission was established in 1833, after Unitarians there were inspired by the visit of Boston Unitarian minister Joseph Tuckerman.⁸⁹ Howard M. Wach suggests that the Unitarian minister "Tayler never completely relinquished the belief that the working classes participated in their own ruin,"⁹⁰ and it would seem that in Manchester these were difficult ideas to dispel. Dr. James Phillips Kay visited the poor in their homes with the District Provident Society, and wrote in "The Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Classes Employed in the Cotton Manufacture in Manchester": "It is melancholy to perceive, how many of the evils suffered by the poor flow from their own ignorance or moral errors."⁹¹ If even a minister such as Tayler could express such a sentiment, this could perhaps explain why Gaskell over emphasises Ruth's innocence and naivety, despite her status as a 'fallen woman,' Ruth is "innocent and snow pure."⁹²

Pam Parker examines the social relations of the Benson household in terms of "gift economy." For Parker, gifts highlight the tension between market relationships and personal relationships in the novel.⁹³ Parker borrows the term 'moral economy' from David Cheal's *The Gift Economy*, defined as a "system of transactions which are...socially desirable (i.e. moral) because through them social ties

⁸⁶ Fryckstedt 149.

⁸⁷ Alison Twells, *The Civilising Mission and the English Middle Class, 1792-1850; the 'Heathen at Home and Overseas* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2009) 169.

⁸⁸ Wach, *Still Small Voice* 444.

⁸⁹ Wach, "Unitarian Philanthropy and Cultural Hegemony in Comparative Perspective: Manchester and Boston, 1827-1848," *Journal of Social History* 26.3 (1993): 540.

⁹⁰ Wach, *Still Small Voice* 445.

⁹¹ Kay 5.

⁹² R 40. Nataalka Freeland examines the link between moral and material purity in *Mary Barton* and *Ruth*, suggesting that Gaskell undermines the idea that cleanliness can be an indicator of morality. See Nataalka Freeland, "The Politics of Dirt in "Mary Barton" and "Ruth"," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 42.4 (2002): 799-818.

⁹³ Parker, *Power of Giving* 59.

are recognised, and balanced social relationships maintained.”⁹⁴ Applying this to Benson, Parker argues that this moral economy “encourages those voluntary personal relations not motivated by either capitalist exchanges of goods and labour or paternalist exchanges of mutual aid.”⁹⁵ The opportunity for Benson to demonstrate this alternative form of social relations is provided by Bellingham’s abandonment of Ruth, which Parker perceives as his failure to fulfil the role of patron, having previously promised that he “would go through fire and water” for Ruth, and shelter her from harm.⁹⁶ Parker perceives characters such as Bellingham and Bradshaw acting under a system of paternalism whereby individuals adopt a position of either patron or dependent, where patronage is repaid by gratitude and loyalty.⁹⁷ For Gaskell, this is a little too similar to the system of philanthropy she is attempting to counteract. As Terence Wright notes, the first few chapters of the novel are concerned with highlighting the “falsity of appearances,” and Gaskell paves the way for Bellingham’s abandonment by contrasting his actions with those of Mr Benson.⁹⁸ Bellingham initially dismisses the deformed Benson based merely on his slightly shabby appearance; he declares that Benson cannot be a gentleman because “a man’s back - his tout ensemble has character enough in it to decide his rank.”⁹⁹ Their interaction with the little community in Wales tells much about the two men; upon arrival Mr Bellingham immediately pressures Mrs Morgan into evicting some of her guests to avoid staying at an inferior inn, whilst Mr Benson’s circumstances force him to lodge at a house described as “horrible” by Bellingham, yet he had lodged with Mrs Hughes for three years, and “she knew and loved him.”¹⁰⁰

However, the difference is nowhere more apparent than in the two acts of rescue performed by them, when both are acting philanthropically. Mr Benson’s attempt to save Ruth as she rushes towards suicide initially fails to live up to the grand heroism perceived by Ruth as Bellingham gallops into the river to save a drowning boy. It is important to note that Bellingham does not hesitate to save the boy, the fundamental philanthropic impulse is present within him, however, he does little to help

⁹⁴ qtd. in Parker, *Power of Giving* 59.

⁹⁵ Parker, *Power of Giving* 59.

⁹⁶ R 50; Parker, *Power of Giving* 58.

⁹⁷ Parker, *Power of Giving* 55.

⁹⁸ Terence Wright, “*We are not Angels*”: *Realism, Gender, Values* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995) 73.

⁹⁹ R 60-61.

¹⁰⁰ R 60, 84.

afterwards. He is impatient with the other people helping, insults the grandmother's housekeeping skills and informs Ruth that he has "no more time to waste here."¹⁰¹ Ruth is eager to help, she asks repeatedly if he is alive, whilst Bellingham is more concerned with establishing who he is and whether he is any relation of Ruth's, presumably his importance would increase then.¹⁰² Ruth's care of the boy is tender, when Bellingham orders someone else to carry the boy she does not wish him to be disturbed as he is nervously clutching at her dress.

Benson's rescue of Ruth is remarkably different, it seems almost as if he will fail when he falls; however, Gaskell here demonstrates the reciprocity of philanthropy, Benson is able to rescue Ruth because she also rescues him. His pain calls out her own philanthropic impulse which is stronger than the urge for self destruction: "It did what no remonstrance could have done; it called her out of herself. The tender nature was in her still."¹⁰³ As Deborah Denenholz Morse has noted, Benson's fall aligns him with the 'fallen' Ruth, signalling that all mankind is fallen and in need of succour.¹⁰⁴ Benson is helpless as he faints from pain, he is entirely reliant on Ruth; a stark contrast with the speed and strength of Bellingham's rescue, which leaves Ruth "dizzy and sick," presumably also from attraction to Bellingham as well as the excitement of the moment.¹⁰⁵ Benson's "short cry" and "sharp utterance" has an animalistic quality about it, and the narrator explains that "In the old days she could never bear to hear or see bodily suffering in any of God's meanest creatures."¹⁰⁶ Benson's deformity is crucial to his rescue of Ruth, and it is important to note that he was not born with this deformity, it was owing to someone else's mistake. Sally had dropped Benson as a child, however, she does not lose her place, she remains with the family and is able to offer them help in the future, as will be discussed later. After persuading Ruth to remain at Mrs Hughes' overnight he worries about how to proceed; sleep eludes him as "the coming events kept unrolling themselves before him in every changing and fantastic form. He met Ruth in all possible places and ways. And addressed her in every manner he

¹⁰¹ R 23.

¹⁰² R 22.

¹⁰³ R 82.

¹⁰⁴ Deborah Denenholz Morse, "Stitching Repentance, Sewing Rebellion: Seamstresses and Fallen Women in Elizabeth Gaskell's Fiction," *Keeping the Victorian House: A Collection of Essays*, ed. Vanessa D. Dickerson (London: Garland, 1995) 59.

¹⁰⁵ R 22.

¹⁰⁶ R 82.

could imagine most calculated to move and affect her to penitence and virtue.”¹⁰⁷ However, he worries needlessly as Ruth falls ill during the night, with the narrator noting that “God works in his own way.”¹⁰⁸ It would seem that for Gaskell man’s ‘calculations’ are futile in the face of a higher authority, and Benson could certainly not have succeeded in his initial rescue of Ruth through design: it occurred entirely by chance.

Both men offer Ruth assistance at a time when she is alone and friendless, but the manner in which they interact with Ruth at this time is remarkably different. Bellingham emphasises the fact that she is “an orphan, with only one person to love you” and attempts to persuade her by accusing her of being indifferent to him.¹⁰⁹ He implies that Ruth has no other option but to trust him, whereas Benson offers Ruth trust when he pleads with her to stay.¹¹⁰ Parker suggests that Benson speaks to Ruth as he would do to a social equal.¹¹¹ Social equality is a somewhat problematical term to use here as we know that Unitarians believed in maintaining the social hierarchy. However, I would argue that the Unitarian belief in spiritual, or moral, equality is certainly evident, if not promoted, in the novel. In fact, for Howard M. Wach the promotion of hierarchical co-operation underlies the Unitarian advancement of spiritual equality.¹¹² This was a recurring theme in Tayler’s addresses to the parents of the Sunday school children, and he encourages them to profit by their children’s opportunities.¹¹³ For Tayler it is the material distinctions creating social unrest that moral equality attempts to bridge. Gaskell seems to be extending this in her treatment of the ‘fallen woman.’ When Ruth asks Faith if she may pray for her, she is humbled and replies: “My dear Ruth, you don’t know how often I sin; I do so wrong with my few temptations. We are both of us great sinners in the eyes of the Most Holy; let us pray for each other.”¹¹⁴ It certainly does not seem likely that those members of Gaskell’s congregation who burned

¹⁰⁷ R 86.

¹⁰⁸ R 86.

¹⁰⁹ R 50.

¹¹⁰ R 49, 86.

¹¹¹ Parker, *Power of Giving* 59.

¹¹² Wach, *Still Small Voice* 441.

¹¹³ Wach, *Still Small Voice* 437.

¹¹⁴ R 109.

the novel, would ever rank their own sins on a level with a girl such as Ruth's, their disapprobation was after all severe enough to make Gaskell feel "improper."¹¹⁵

For Parker this occurs within a framework of Christianity, not specifically Unitarian. However, Parker's definition of moral economy is remarkably similar to the Unitarian distinction between the public and private spheres. John Seed explains that the family represented "a sphere in which relations were not structured by abstract labour and the mechanisms of the market."¹¹⁶ Whilst Parker does not relate her 'moral economy' to Gaskell's faith, the feminization of Mr Benson, which has so often been remarked upon,¹¹⁷ can arguably link this model of social relations to the domestic sphere, which held special significance to Unitarians. The maternal element of Benson's rescue of Ruth compounds this. The importance of the domestic sphere, and in particular, woman's role within this sphere, was a recurring theme in the sermons of the Rev. John James Tayler. Tayler was minister at the Mosley Street Chapel, which became Upper Brook Street Chapel in 1839. In an article examining Tayler's construction of middle-class morality by employing the language of commercial and political concerns familiar to members of his congregation, Howard M. Wach explains that for Tayler "the sanctity of homelife remained central to his understanding of the social world. Home was the root and source of moral goodness."¹¹⁸ In a sermon from 14 March 1847, "On the true Administration of Benevolence, Material and Moral," Tayler preached to his congregation:

Home-that word of unspeakable power-that centre of delightful associations for all the educated and respectable classes of society, expresses no idea to the dark and imbruted minds of thousands; it is a bright element of human happiness, which can only dawn upon them, when better influences and higher cultivation shall have substituted affection and moral feeling for the instincts of the animal, and awakened a sense of order and decency.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ FL 81.

¹¹⁶ Seed, *Unitarianism* 20.

¹¹⁷ See T. Wright 77

¹¹⁸ Wach, *Still Small Voice* 433.

¹¹⁹ qtd. in Wach, *Still Small Voice* 436.

Taylor continues by elevating the education of women above that of men, because they as the “natural sovereigns of home” have an integral role to play in the construction of social morality.¹²⁰ Mr Benson’s feminine nature contrasts with characters such as Bradshaw and Bellingham who stand for authority, power, and instead aligns him with the home sphere over which women presided. As Ruth flees towards the river, Benson’s “pitiful look, or his words, reminded her of the childish days when she knelt at her mother’s knee and she was only conscious of a straining, longing desire to recall it all.”¹²¹ Benson recalls in Ruth memories of her childhood home; despite being in a delicate state of health, Mrs Hilton’s influence pervades the home, acting on husband as well as daughter. “While his wife lived, all worldly misfortunes seemed as nothing to him; her strong sense and lively faculty of hope upheld him from despair; her sympathy was always ready, and the invalid’s room had an atmosphere of peace and encouragement, which affected all who entered it.”¹²² The power of the mother, even the dead mother cannot be overestimated; for Barbara Z. Thaden “The good dead mother can be a source of strength—a reason to live.”¹²³ The memory of her mother halts Ruth in her rush to commit suicide, whereas Pasley, whose neglectful mother lives, thinks “of killing herself, for ‘no one had ever cared for her in this world’.”¹²⁴

3.3 ‘the power of giving’: Social Exchange Theory and the theme of money

Linda K. Hughes and Michael Lund have pointed out that for Ruth, money is one of “the established textures of English society...that construct her status as female, working class, and fallen”; as Hughes and Lund point out, money becomes ‘confining’ for Ruth, as characters attempt to ‘entangle’ her in relationships established on economic terms.¹²⁵ After fully perceiving Ruth’s beauty for the first time, Bellingham’s concern for the boy is diminished by his increasing interest in Ruth: “Ruth was looking at him with her earnest eyes ... her whole thoughts bent upon rightly understanding and following out his wishes for the little boy’s welfare; and until now this had been the first object in

¹²⁰ qtd. in Wach, *Still Small Voice* 436.

¹²¹ R 82.

¹²² R 33.

¹²³ Barbara Z. Thaden, *The Maternal Voice in Victorian Fiction: Rewriting the Patriarchal Family* (London: Garland, 1997) 35.

¹²⁴ L 99.

¹²⁵ Linda K. Hughes and Michael Lund, *Victorian Publishing and Mrs Gaskell’s Work* (Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1999) 76.

his own mind.”¹²⁶ He ensures that he will see Ruth again by giving her little commissions which she feels obliged to perform. After rescuing the boy from the river Bellingham insists on leaving Ruth with more money than she requires, so that he will have the opportunity to see her again when she returns it, despite her unease with this situation: “she saw some gold between the net-work; she did not like the charge of such riches.”¹²⁷ In “The Chimes,” Dickens signals Lilian’s prostitution to his readers through the chinking of coins, so it is quite possible that Gaskell too is signalling to her readers the future nature of their relationship.¹²⁸ Bellingham may not here be envisaging a time when he exchanges money or gifts for sex; he merely ensures the continuation of their relationship by asking after a painting at Mrs Mason’s that he wishes to purchase. However, in Wales he ends their relationship with the knowledge that “his mother, always liberal where money was concerned would ‘do the thing handsomely’” and his final words, “Dismiss her, as you wish it” suggests an economic relationship of employer and employee.¹²⁹

We can better understand Gaskell’s portrayal of philanthropy in *Ruth* by examining closely the theme of money in the novel. The interaction of the characters can be further examined by applying the principles of Social Exchange Theory. At the heart of Social Exchange Theory lies the principle that an individual who supplies ‘rewarding services’ to another individual places him under an obligation, to discharge this obligation the second individual must reciprocate in turn.¹³⁰ For psychologists such as Peter M. Blau, social exchange theory differs from economic exchanges as the obligations are unspecified, the transaction is not based around a formal contract.¹³¹ However, writing from an anthropological perspective Alan J. Kidd argues that the two are comparable because individuals may attempt to manipulate the transaction for their own self-interest.¹³² This is perhaps a slightly cynical viewpoint, but certainly applicable to characters in the novel such as Mr Bellingham and Mr Bradshaw. Mr Bradshaw, whose “favourite recreation was patronising,” gives principally to

¹²⁶ R 24.

¹²⁷ R 24.

¹²⁸ Charles Dickens, *The Christmas Books Volume 1 A Christmas Carol/The Chimes*, ed. Michael Slater (1971; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976) 220.

¹²⁹ R 77-78.

¹³⁰ Peter M. Blau, *Exchange and Power in Social Life* (New York, 1974) 89.

¹³¹ Blau 93.

¹³² Alan J. Kidd, “Philanthropy and the Social History Paradigm,” *Social History* 21.2 (1996): 184.

receive, and in particular it is social esteem within the community that he seeks.¹³³ Planning to buy Ruth a new dress he thinks she “perhaps, would not object to tell people that it was a present from Mr Bradshaw.”¹³⁴

Ruth’s innocence and ignorance has been noted many times since the novel was first published,¹³⁵ and she seems entirely ignorant of how social relationships are conducted whilst other characters demonstrate an awareness of this: the grandmother of the boy Bellingham rescues is “anxious to diminish as much as possible the obligation she was under to one who had offended her”; and of the Bellinghams’ attempt to ‘pay off’ Ruth, Faith says “They don’t deserve to have the power of giving.”¹³⁶ Rosemarie Bodenheimer has defined Ruth as a “presocial being” to whom she attributes a “‘natural’ chastity without knowledge of it as a social concept.”¹³⁷ For Bodenheimer, Ruth has some intuitive social conscience but lacks the concepts to which to attach the feelings, so they hold no value for her.¹³⁸ Ruth’s ignorance ensures her obligation to Bellingham, her inability to pay for a cup of tea means she cannot leave the inn after her dismissal from Mrs Mason. Bellingham leaves Ruth behind at the inn while he returns home to fetch the carriage; while she is waiting Ruth is given a cup of tea by a girl at the inn, as she is suffering with a headache. Ruth is aware that it would be better to return to Thomas and Mary to seek their advice but is instead forced to wait for Mr Bellingham’s return as she cannot pay for the tea and the landlord is standing by the door smoking.¹³⁹ The whole scene serves to highlight Ruth’s utter powerlessness. The girl does not request payment, so it is quite possible that this is an act of kindness originating in her empathy for the headaches her mother used to suffer. However, just as Ruth had internalised the language of political economy whilst working at Mrs Mason’s, here she can only perceive this gesture in terms of commodity exchange. In her innocence Ruth believes her ‘friend’ Bellingham will take her to Thomas and Mary when he hears her reasons, however, her inability to reciprocate means she is obliged to follow his wishes. “In intrinsic love

¹³³ R 174.

¹³⁴ R 194.

¹³⁵ For example, see Fryckstedt 164; Lansbury 57.

¹³⁶ R 26, 107.

¹³⁷ Rosemarie Bodenheimer, *The Politics of Story in Victorian Social Fiction* (London: Cornell UP, 1988) 156.

¹³⁸ Bodenheimer 156-57.

¹³⁹ R 52.

attachments...each individual furnishes rewards to the other not to receive proportionate extrinsic benefits in return but to express and confirm his own commitment and to promote the other's growing commitment to the association."¹⁴⁰ This is clearly Ruth's understanding of her relationship with Bellingham; as she explains to Miss Benson: "While he...loved me, he gave me many things...and I took them from him gladly and thankfully because he loved me – for I would have given him anything – and I thought of them as signs of love."¹⁴¹ However, when one individual is more deeply involved in the love relationship than the other, they assume a disadvantageous position of dependence, they are forced to accede to the other's wishes and make greater effort to please the other.¹⁴² Ruth adapts herself to Bellingham's "tastes and habits," such as a late breakfast hour, she laments over her inability to amuse him with card games and checks emotions which might annoy him.¹⁴³ The social rewards Ruth offers, such as her intrinsic attraction for him, cannot be bartered in exchange, because the significance of such rewards is derived from their being spontaneous reactions, rather than a calculated means of pleasing the other person.¹⁴⁴

On Ruth's arrival in Eccleston she feels wary when Mr Bradshaw makes her a present of some muslin, as when Bellingham gave her the camellia, she would be signalling approval of Bradshaw's motives by accepting the present. She tells Miss Benson "I cannot see why a person whom I do not know should lay me under an obligation," and Benson confirms her suspicions by informing her that he may be "only anxious to gratify his love of patronising."¹⁴⁵ He explains that something similar has happened to him also; during their previous disagreements Mr Bradshaw would often speak contemptuously to Mr Benson, but he would then later send him a present. It would seem that Mr Bradshaw perceives Benson's acceptance of the present as acceptance of his behaviour, and approval for it to continue in the future. However, according to Blau, the person who initiates the exchange cannot stipulate the return, nor can it be bargained over; the exchange creates a future obligation that is unspecified, it must be left to the discretion of the second individual and so trust is an important factor

¹⁴⁰ Blau 76.

¹⁴¹ R 106.

¹⁴² Blau 78.

¹⁴³ R 57.

¹⁴⁴ Blau 99.

¹⁴⁵ R 131-32.

in the exchange relation.¹⁴⁶ What develops therefore, between Bradshaw and Benson, is repeated interaction, which as George Caspar Homans explains, can affect future behaviour by creating expectations.¹⁴⁷ Benson is unhappy with the initial exchange of a present for his acceptance of Bradshaw's behaviour so he begins to withhold this acceptance (the reward of the exchange). He continues to accept the gifts but offers only a cool thanks in return; Benson here complicates the exchange process by stating that to refuse the gift simply to deny the person the exchange they are expecting would be selfish. He therefore continues the exchange by attempting to alter the balance of power between them, he tells Ruth: "This omission of all show of much gratitude had the best effect – the presents have much diminished; but if the gifts have lessened, the unjustifiable speeches have decreased in still greater proportion."¹⁴⁸ Homans confirms that "the person who sets a higher value on exchange with the other than the other does on exchange with him is the one more likely to change his behaviour so as to increase the reward of the other," in this case Mr Benson.¹⁴⁹ Observing Mr Benson and Mr Bradshaw interacting, Ruth notes how meekly Mr Benson submits when "an honest word of affection, or a tacit, implied acknowledgement of equality, would have been worth everything said and done."¹⁵⁰

Where then do the Bensons' benevolent actions towards Ruth fit into the politics of giving? In an act of remarkable kindness they take Ruth, a stranger to them, into their home and offer to look after her and her child on their already tight household budget. Alan J. Kidd explains that the "closest social psychology gets to a theory of altruism or the free gift is the concept of pro-social behaviour, defined as voluntary actions designed to benefit others carried out without expectation of an external reward."¹⁵¹ Pam Parker notes that "Benson makes no ostentatious displays of social or economic superiority calculated to oblige Ruth to future service"; and whilst this may be true, their plan to take Ruth home with them is part of a plan for her to work out her redemption, and is suggested with the

¹⁴⁶ Blau 93-94.

¹⁴⁷ George Caspar Homans, *Social Behaviour: Its Elementary Forms* (New York: Harcourt, 1961) 58.

¹⁴⁸ R 132.

¹⁴⁹ Homans 62.

¹⁵⁰ R 174.

¹⁵¹ Kidd, *Philanthropy* 185.

expectation of the achievement of this.¹⁵² As Kidd notes, there is no such thing as a free gift, and even tasks performed out of a sense of duty (as Benson attributes their actions to) gratify the superego, the reward is internalized.¹⁵³ After discussing their plans with Ruth, Faith tells her brother “I think she has a cold heart: she hardly thanked me at all for my proposal of taking her home with us.”¹⁵⁴ Benson cautions against calculating consequences, saying “Let us try simply to do right actions”; however, it transpires that he is “thinking of the feelings they are to call out in others” rather than his own expectations of their actions.¹⁵⁵ Faith replies “I would rather have had one good, hearty ‘Thankyou’, now, for all I have been planning to do for her, than the grand effects you promise me in the ‘sweep of eternity’.”¹⁵⁶ However, others remain dubious of this altruism believing that reciprocity remains central. For Gaskell this is constructed in Biblical terms; of Mrs Hughes, Benson says “She has been so good. ‘Doing good, hoping for nothing again’,” (Luke 6:35) and we could assume that Gaskell herself may have been dubious of ‘pro-social behaviour.’¹⁵⁷ It is certainly not my intention to undermine the benevolence of the Bensons and the many sacrifices they make to look after Ruth; as Kidd notes, “to write of ‘reciprocity’ is not to denigrate the innumerable acts of compassion and generosity of spirit which can often bring meaning to individual lives”; of greater interest here is the mode in which the Bensons help Ruth rather than their motivation.¹⁵⁸ The Bensons have very little materially to offer Ruth, their system of social relations is based as Parker notes primarily on emotional rather than economic exchanges, yet their “humble home” is credited with the changes wrought in Ruth after six years.¹⁵⁹ When it is determined upon that Ruth should remain within the Bensons’ home until Leonard is at least twelve months old, the Bensons promise to treat Ruth as a daughter, a member of the family, and the emphasis here is very much on the responsibilities of such a role.

¹⁵² Parker, *Power of Giving* 59.

¹⁵³ Kidd, *Philanthropy* 184-85.

¹⁵⁴ R 107.

¹⁵⁵ R 107.

¹⁵⁶ R 107.

¹⁵⁷ R 96.

¹⁵⁸ Kidd, *Philanthropy* 186.

¹⁵⁹ R 173.

Philanthropy in the novel is often attributed to duty; however, it would seem that characters interpret this differently. When Faith first suggests taking Ruth home with them, Mr Benson thanks her for reminding him of his duty. This is clearly a Christian duty as Benson reminds his sister “We must think of a higher than Mr Bradshaw.”¹⁶⁰ Ruth’s decision to nurse typhus patients is framed within similar terms, she explains to Mr Benson her decision originates from a ‘feeling’ that she must go: “I will not be afraid, she replied, lifting up her face, over which a bright light shone, as of God’s radiance.”¹⁶¹ Mrs Bellingham and her son consider the fulfilment of duty to be complete with a donation of money; and for Mr Bradshaw philanthropic duty seems almost distasteful:

He drew a clear line of partition, which separated mankind into two great groups, to one of which, by the grace of God, he and his belonged; while the other was composed of those whom it was his duty to try and reform, and bring the whole force of his morality to bear upon, with lectures, admonitions, and exhortations – *a duty to be performed, because it was a duty* – but with very little of that Hope and Faith which is the Spirit that maketh alive.¹⁶² (my emphasis).

All seem to act from a sense of duty, yet we can distinguish the difference from their willingness to actually involve themselves with their philanthropy. Bellingham provides money to aid the recovery of the little boy but offers no further assistance himself, and whilst the Bradshaws pay old Maggie’s rent to rescue her from the prospect of the workhouse, it is Ruth who sits with Ann Flemming after she breaks her hip-bone, keeping her company. For Gaskell it was never enough to participate in philanthropy merely by offering money, she wrote to Mary Cowden Clarke: “The numbers of people who steadily refuse Mr Gaskell’s entreaties that they will give their time to anything, but will give him or me tens & hundreds. That don’t do half the good that individual intercourse, & earnest conscientious thought for others would do!”¹⁶³ Philanthropic institutions and societies may have been perceived as an effective way of managing the new challenges faced by philanthropists during

¹⁶⁰ R 105.

¹⁶¹ R 348-49.

¹⁶² R 266.

¹⁶³ L 193.

industrialisation, yet they also encouraged this tendency to donate money rather than time, and contact between the classes decreased. The Victorian preoccupation with the ‘deserving poor’ is symptomatic of the fundamental problem with this approach to philanthropy, and Gaskell was certainly aware of this; in the same letter to Mary Cowden Clarke she continued to tell her “I have real cases in view, both of this kind, & of the kind where, having given money largely & from a really generous feeling at the time, a most bitter sense of ingratitude has been felt & expressed by the donor, if any difference of opinion, or resistance to what the donee thought wrong afterwards occurred.”¹⁶⁴ Reading Gaskell’s letters to Charles Dickens concerning Pasley there is a sense that Gaskell had consulted with the girl about her future, she is to emigrate because she has agreed to this.¹⁶⁵

Gaskell was aware that in simply donating money there was always a possibility that the donor might not feel that they were getting their money’s worth. This adds a rather negative connotation to the idea of reciprocity presented in the novel, as some characters seem to feel that their return should be quantified in accordance to what they have given. Mr Bradshaw’s gifts to Ruth increase from muslin to a silk gown in accordance with the service he feels she has rendered him. However, his esteem for her is not measured in such terms as he refuses to accept that there could be any extenuating circumstances affecting her ‘fall.’ Hilary M. Schor links money and morality in *Ruth* by noting that “Putting a price on everything, of course, saves one from having to decide the value of individual souls and individual actions,” and an excellent example of this in the novel can be drawn from the Bensons’ and Bradshaws’ respective attitudes towards household management.¹⁶⁶ After the death of their mother, Mr and Miss Benson decide to raise Sally’s wages to an amount comparable with other servants in the town.¹⁶⁷ Sally resists at first but eventually agrees, deciding that she will save the money and leave it in a will to Mr and Miss Benson. Mr Bradshaw on the other hand, advises them that they could get a younger and more efficient servant for the same money.¹⁶⁸ However, what Bradshaw fails to comprehend, is that Sally is practically a member of the family; she has worked for

¹⁶⁴ L 193.

¹⁶⁵ L 99.

¹⁶⁶ Hilary M. Schor, *Scheherazade in the Marketplace: Elizabeth Gaskell and the Victorian Novel* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992) 70.

¹⁶⁷ R 160-61.

¹⁶⁸ R 105.

the family since Mr Benson was only a few years old, and it was she who was responsible for Mr Benson's disfigurement, having dropped him as a child.¹⁶⁹ To many people such an act would seem unforgivable, and presumably if she had been judged by Mr Bradshaw's code she would have been promptly turned out of the house. However, not only does Mr Benson's mother forgive her, she teaches Sally that each individual must perform his duties in the right spirit, rather than indulging in self pity, a lesson that Sally will in turn impart to Ruth. In her remorse after dropping Mr Benson, Sally takes to "praying and sighing," and through her lack of concentration she produces puddings that are inedible, thinking that she is still fulfilling her duty to the family.¹⁷⁰ However, she is informed by her mistress that "everything may be done in a right way or a wrong; the right way is to do it as well as we can, as in God's sight; the wrong way is to do it in a self-seeking spirit, which either leads us to neglect it to follow out some device of our own for our own ends, or to give up too much time and thought to it both before and after the doing."¹⁷¹ When Sally sees Ruth falling into "trains of reverie, and mournful regretful recollections which rendered her languid and tearful" she is reminded of this incident and draws on her own experiences to help Ruth.¹⁷² So through domestic matters Gaskell demonstrates that there is a correct way to fulfil duty; if not performed in the correct spirit, it is hardly worth bothering with at all as it is of little use to anybody. However, to return to the money Sally had saved, she returns this money to Mr Benson following Ruth's loss of employment after her secret is discovered by Mr Bradshaw.¹⁷³ In their time of need Sally is able to offer help to her employers, and it would seem that Gaskell shared a similar relationship with her own servants; in a letter to Marianne from 1864 she writes "Hearn would let us have her wages for a week or two, I am sure: if needed."¹⁷⁴

As Hilary Schor notes, characters such as Bellingham and Bradshaw live in a world which they always know how to interpret, their actions are always right because they have already set the moral code and no longer need to make judgements.¹⁷⁵ Bellingham is the only character to remain

¹⁶⁹ R 146.

¹⁷⁰ R 146.

¹⁷¹ R 147.

¹⁷² R 144.

¹⁷³ R 311.

¹⁷⁴ L 728.

¹⁷⁵ Schor 70.

unchanged at the end of the novel. Meeting Ruth again at Abermouth he assumes their relationship can resume exactly as it was, but when Ruth refuses he determines to “bid a higher price” and offers to marry her.¹⁷⁶ He fails to perceive how events have shaped and altered Ruth’s life in the years since they have parted, whilst he seems to have learned nothing. After Ruth’s death he first attempts to repay Sally’s kindness to Ruth by offering her a sovereign, demonstrating that he has no knowledge of the familial relationships that bound these people together.¹⁷⁷ He then attempts to discharge his duty to his son by offering to place a sum of money (two thousand pounds is the value he places on his son’s life) in trust for him, and persists in believing that Ruth sacrificed herself for him because she still loved him. When he reviewed *Ruth* for the *North British Review*, John Ludlow questioned whether Ruth had the right to reject Bellingham/Donne’s offer of marriage, because of the advantages he could provide for Leonard.¹⁷⁸ Gaskell wrote to Ludlow: “You have convinced two of my dear friends (Mr & Mrs Bonamy Price) that Ruth ought to have married Mr Bellingham. – I am shaken, - not yet convinced, quite out entirely.”¹⁷⁹ However, it seems fairly clear that even if Ruth had married Bellingham/Donne his interaction with his son would have been limited. He offers only the advantages that can be purchased, such as education; he does not seem to desire a relationship with his son. At the end of the novel it is revealed that Mr Donne’s servant is the boy he rescued from the river, but it appears that Donne did little for him afterwards. He is described as faithful, but ‘ignorant’; after rescuing him Mr Donne put him to work in the stables at Bellingham Hall “where he learnt all that he knew.”¹⁸⁰

3.4 ‘the tender exchange of love’: Gaskell’s vision

Since the novel was first published readers have struggled to understand why Ruth must die at the end of the novel, after she has already successfully redeemed herself within the community and earned their respect through her work as a nurse. Charlotte Bronte wrote to Gaskell “hear my protest! Why

¹⁷⁶ R 248.

¹⁷⁷ R 369.

¹⁷⁸ Easson, *Critical Heritage* 281.

¹⁷⁹ FL 90.

¹⁸⁰ R 362.

should she die? Why are we to shut up the book weeping?”¹⁸¹ Today this is still a problematic scene for readers and has provoked many theories; Patsy Stoneman perceives this is a result of the novel’s ‘ideological impasse’: Ruth is “Unable to see herself as ‘virtuous’ because aware of her sexuality, unable to accept her sexuality because unwilling to be ‘sinful.’”¹⁸² For Terence Wright, Ruth’s death is a final triumph over her seducer; achieved by “making a sacrifice which he does not deserve and cannot repay.”¹⁸³ However, there is a certain bitter tone in Ruth’s achievement of triumph through death, and I would instead contend that Ruth’s death fully articulates Gaskell’s philanthropic vision. It was a device she had also used several years earlier in “Libbie Marsh’s Three Eras.” The death of crippled little Franky Hall in the third Era, ‘Michaelmas,’ seems terribly sad, as does Ruth’s death. However, by this point in the narrative, the “termagant” Mrs Hall has been fully reintegrated into the community through her friendship with Libby; the once ‘proud’ woman has been “touched and softened by the two purifying angels, Sorrow and Love.”¹⁸⁴ Through death the full extent of the philanthropic network becomes visible. Leonard and Ruth are about the same age when they lose their mother, however, it is evident that Leonard will be far better cared for. Following Ruth’s social redemption, the good-will she receives from the community is extended to Leonard; the philanthropic reciprocity widens to incorporate her son. Mr Davis offers to educate the boy as successor to his surgery, informing Ruth “his being your son is his greatest recommendation to me.”¹⁸⁵ The reader may close the novel feeling assured that Leonard will be well cared for following Ruth’s death; like Ruth he may be facing a future devoid of parental care, but he has many other people to guide and support him as Ruth did not. Bradshaw typically attempts to show respect for Ruth through material gifts, a tombstone from the ‘first stonemason’ of the town, yet the novel’s final scene sees him demonstrating the kind of ‘moral economy’ practised by the Bensons as he offers the greatest service to Ruth by comforting her son.

¹⁸¹ qtd in Uglow 323.

¹⁸² Stoneman 76.

¹⁸³ T. Wright 94.

¹⁸⁴ *LM* 69.

¹⁸⁵ *R* 358.

In *Ruth* Gaskell rejects what is now termed ‘pro-social’ behaviour. Whilst it may be perceived as selfish to expect a return, for Gaskell reciprocity is necessary as it has the power to change individuals. We can imagine that Gaskell could not possibly have left the New Bailey after that initial meeting with Pasley, unmoved, or unaltered, and *Ruth* is perhaps testimony to that fact. One of the novel’s key messages appears at the end of Chapter IX following Mr Benson’s rescue of Ruth. She falls ill at his lodging house; as he leaves to find the doctor, Mrs Hughes tends to Ruth, and the chapter closes with a quotation from *The Merchant of Venice*:

It blesseth him that gives, and him that takes¹⁸⁶

The line is taken from Portia’s speech on the Quality of Mercy from A IV S I, the trial of Shylock, where Portia pleads with Shylock to forsake justice and instead show mercy. From this line chosen by Gaskell we can see that Mercy is ‘twice blest,’ it is reciprocal. The speech continues:

’Tis mightiest in the mightiest, it becomes
The throned monarch better than his crown.
His sceptre shows the force of temporal power,
The attribute to awe and majesty,
Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings:
But mercy is above this sceptred sway,
It is enthroned in the hearts of kings,
It is an attribute to God himself;
And earthly power doth then show likest God’s
When mercy seasons justice¹⁸⁷

In the novel as in the play, there is conflict between mercy and justice, as to be merciful implies that justice has not been fully served. As Portia explains to Shylock: “in the course of justice, none of us / should see salvation.”¹⁸⁸ Mr Bradshaw’s justice is inflexible, Mr Farquar argues that “charity (in your

¹⁸⁶ R 87.

¹⁸⁷ L 184-91.

¹⁸⁸ MV 1195-96.

sense of the word) degrades; justice, tempered with mercy and consideration elevates.”¹⁸⁹ Bradshaw, though, persists in attempting to judge everyone by the same code of conduct, believing that ‘maxims’ rather than ‘feelings’ should be the guide in every situation, regardless of circumstances. However, this is ultimately at the cost of his emotional well being. In *Ruth*, Gaskell demonstrates that we each have the propensity to make mistakes; whether this be a young girl who allows herself to be seduced by the man she believes cares for her, or the servant who drops the baby in her care. It seems typical of the Unitarian emphasis on spiritual equality that Gaskell should demonstrate time and again that with merciful treatment these individuals still have much to offer to their society. It seems evident from Portia’s speech that mercy operates in a different realm from that of the law; more like “the higher spirit” that Gaskell writes of in *Ruth*, it is perhaps not something that the Mr Bradshaws of the world can, or should, exercise power over.¹⁹⁰ Gaskell is continuing this theme from “Lizzie Leigh,” where she wrote “Goodness is not goodness unless there is mercy and tenderness with it.”¹⁹¹ For Gaskell there is always a sense that the performance of duty, for duty’s sake is no recommendation of the individual, it should flow from the heart rather than the head.

In *Ruth* Gaskell is again drawing on her own experiences of philanthropy to examine how individuals can practise philanthropy in their communities. Before writing *Ruth* Gaskell had been involved with a philanthropic association aiming to improve working conditions for dressmakers, and she had personally assisted a girl who had fallen into a life of crime after being seduced outside of marriage. Both issues were of great public concern at this time and both were very closely connected in the public consciousness, Gaskell makes use of these two issues to begin considering how individuals approach philanthropy. The theme of money is important in the novel, and is closely connected to morality, as the form of philanthropy Gaskell advocates can be perceived in opposition to the ‘chequebook philanthropy’ practised increasingly in the nineteenth century. Philanthropic institutions had become increasingly popular, but for Gaskell this was inadequate. Gaskell instead demonstrates a form of philanthropy where individuals are personally involved and interested in the philanthropy they participate in, as this can be empowering for both donor and recipient. We can see

¹⁸⁹ *R* 198.

¹⁹⁰ *R* 233.

¹⁹¹ *LL* 152.

in the novel that not only does the Bensons' redemption of Ruth allow her to contribute to society, in turn, their lives are enriched through their relationship with Ruth and her son Leonard.

4 *North and South* and Christian Socialism

One of my mes is, I do believe, a true Christian-(only people call her socialist and communist)¹

From insignificant, contemptible beginnings, all works, which have done good to mankind have proceeded²

4.1 Christian Socialism

Through *North and South* we can perceive Gaskell's interaction with a very different form of philanthropy from that which had influenced her previous philanthropic novels. In 1849 Gaskell became interested in the recently formed Christian Socialist movement. John Malcolm Ludlow, Frederick Denison Maurice and Charles Kingsley were troubled by the working-class upheavals prompted by the current economic and political situation; they formed a brotherhood with the aim of alleviating class dissension. In *North and South* Gaskell returns to the theme of human relations in an industrial city, moving from her portrait of working-class life in *Mary Barton*, to provide a fuller picture by providing the mill owners' perspective also; this time engaging with ideas forming an integral part of the Christian Socialist manifesto.

In *North and South* Margaret Hale and her family move from the rural village of Helstone in the South, to the industrial town of Milton in the North, after her father resigns his position as a clergyman. Arriving in Milton, Margaret is confronted not only by harsh, unfamiliar surroundings, but by an unfamiliar way of life. As she begins to explore her new home Margaret becomes aware of the hardships faced by the working-class population who labour in the town's mills, particularly through the friendship she forges with Nicholas Higgins, who works in one of the mills. Her father's new occupation as a tutor also brings her into contact with one of the mill owners, John Thornton, whose sole relationship with his workers is based on the law of supply and demand.

¹ L 108.

² Frederick Denison Maurice, "On the Reformation of Society, And How All Classes May Contribute to it. A Lecture Delivered in the Town Hall of Southampton, on the Opening of the Working Tailors' Association, 18 Bernard Street, On Monday, March 31st, 1851." 40.

The previous two chapters have examined Gaskell's interaction with two different forms of Victorian 'associated philanthropy;' and whilst Christian Socialism can perhaps not be defined as philanthropy, in the sense that a bazaar, or a committee to aid dressmakers, embodied the Victorian perception of philanthropy, the aims of the movement were philanthropic and their ideals appealed directly to Gaskell. Gaskell was not directly involved with the movement, her participation is more inadvertent than when she joined the ladies' committee for the Popular Education bazaar, or when she joined the committee for the 'Association for the Improvement of the Condition of Dressmakers, Milliners, &c.' However, she keenly read their publications, and the influence of their ideas is apparent in *North and South*, particularly in the manner that Christian Socialism offered an alternative form of human relations under the existing capitalist system. The influence of Christian Socialism gave Gaskell the courage to once again address the relations between men and masters in industrial cities. Her inability to comprehend "the unhappy state of things between those so bound to each other by common interests" provided the motivation to write *Mary Barton*, but she faced harsh criticism from the Manchester mill owners.³ In January 1849 she wrote to her publisher Edward Chapman of the "angry feeling induced towards me among some of those I live amongst;" confiding to him: "when I am not quite well this \angry talking/ troubles me in spite of myself."⁴ As we have seen with *Ruth*, Gaskell was not afraid to confront controversial subjects if she felt that public attention could improve the situation, but it was certainly brave to again risk the censure of her friends and acquaintances.

After the publication of *Mary Barton* friends suggested that Gaskell write a novel from the perspective of the mill owners to demonstrate the great good that they had the power to provide, a sentiment Gaskell agreed with wholeheartedly:

I cannot imagine a nobler scope for a thoughtful energetic man, desirous of doing good to his kind, than that presented to his powers as the master of a factory. But I believe

³ "Preface" 3.

⁴ L 69.

that there is much to be discovered yet as to the right position and mutual duties of employer, and employed⁵

However, at this time Gaskell felt herself unequal to the challenge and stated categorically that if such a novel were to be written, it must be by somebody else: “How could I suggest or even depict modes of proceeding, (the details of which I never saw,) and which from some error, undetected even by anxious and conscientious witnesses, seems so often to result in disappointment?”⁶ However, by 1853 she had changed her mind. After finishing *Ruth* she was looking for a new subject, “something good and virtuous”; she told Eliza Fox “I don’t mean to stir from home this long time when I get back, but write, write, write.”⁷ In May 1853 she sent an outline of the novel to Dickens, who thought it ideal for *Household Words*, and began writing in early 1854. She had by this time been acquainted with members of the Christian Socialist brotherhood for five years, and the influence of their ideas in the novel is apparent.

Gaskell’s interest in Christian Socialism began very early in the movement’s history; she wrote to her new friend Eliza Fox in November 1849 to ask if she or her father had heard anything about a co-operative tailor’s shop established in London on Louis Blanc’s principles by Maurice, Ludlow, Kingsley, and Hare.⁸ By this time Gaskell had already met Maurice and Ludlow, if not more of the brotherhood, whilst visiting London in March/April 1849; Emily Winkworth recalled a breakfast at the home of Richard Monckton Milnes on May 12th where she observed Gaskell talking ‘at length’ with Maurice and Ludlow.⁹ Gaskell’s visit to London was a temporary escape after the publication of *Mary Barton*; many of her Manchester acquaintances did not appreciate her portrayal of the masters, and after a third edition was published at the end of February 1849, the *Manchester Guardian* attacked the novel as being unjust and untrue in its representation of the mill owners.¹⁰ As in *Mary Barton*, Gaskell had already been discussing ideas which were now forming an integral part of the Christian

⁵ L119.

⁶ L 120.

⁷ L 219.

⁸ L 90.

⁹ qtd. in Uglow 225.

¹⁰ Easson, *Critical Heritage* 125.

Socialist manifesto, and *Mary Barton* had been read and appreciated by at least one of the brotherhood; the opportunity to speak at length with like minded people must have been a welcome change. Charles Kingsley praised her novel's attempt to highlight the suffering endured by many of the working people to a nation 'calling itself Christian.'¹¹ The review was published in April 1849 in *Fraser's Magazine*, and whilst it is not known whether Gaskell was acquainted with Kingsley at this point, she had read and admired the *Saint's Tragedy*, published in 1848.

The 1840s were a time of insecurity for many people. The poor were concerned by low wages, hunger and poverty, whilst those better off worried about the social unrest fuelling Chartism and trades unions. Thomas Carlyle is probably most frequently associated with the Condition of England debate, having coined the phrase in his 1839 essay "Chartism," a bleak appraisal of the insecurity of the current social order, returning to this theme in late 1842 when he wrote *Past and Present*. His work greatly influenced writers concerned with the social and industrial problems of Mid-Victorian England, particularly Dickens, Kingsley, Ruskin, Morris and Gaskell. Carlyle rejected the utilitarian element of political economy, the 'greatest happiness principle,' attained through the worship of Mammon. It seemed to him that the current conception of hell had become the fear of 'not succeeding,' not making money. Carlyle opposed the view proposed by the political economists that society comes together to divide work, "We call it a Society, and go about professing openly the total separation, isolation. Our life is not a mutual helpfulness."¹² The laws of political economy forced men to compete so that cash payment was becoming the sole relation between human beings.

Those perceived by the Victorians as Political Economists are today referred to as the 'classical school'; Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* was considered the masterpiece of the school, and during the early nineteenth century writers such as Malthus, Ricardo, J. B. Say, James Mill, Nassau Senior, Robert Torrens and J. R. McCulloch attempted to develop and update Smith's theories.¹³ Smith's work was a reaction to two prevalent views of economic life in the eighteenth century, mercantilism

¹¹ Easson, *Critical Heritage* 153.

¹² Carlyle, *Past and Present* (London, 1897) 146.

¹³ Elizabeth Jay and Richard Jay, *The Critics of Capitalism: Victorian Reactions to 'Political Economy'* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986) 2.

and the physiocratic school; the Physiocrats popularised the phrase *laissez-faire, laissez passer* (let it be, let it go), as opposed to the mercantilist state intervention.¹⁴ The physiocrats designated agriculture as the most productive sector of an economy capable of generating economic surplus, while the mercantilists focused on a favourable balance of overseas trade to create a surplus of economic growth.¹⁵ Smith's most important innovation was to replace agriculture with industry as the creator of economic surplus.¹⁶

Like *Mary Barton*, *North and South* can be considered alongside other industrial novels published mid-century, such as Disraeli's *Sybil*. However, in examining the influence of Christian Socialism in the novel, it can also be considered alongside the works of Charles Kingsley. *Alton Locke*, the "most provocative document produced by the Christian Socialists," was published in two volumes in August 1850 by Chapman and Hall, after first being refused by Parkers, who had sustained losses after publishing *Politics for the People*, an early Christian Socialist publication.¹⁷ The novel may at first appear to have more in common with *Mary Barton* with its focus on Chartism; it takes the form of literary autobiography, and as Allan John Hartley has demonstrated, there are quite clear parallels between the life of Alton and that of Chartist Thomas Cooper.¹⁸ Prompted by Mayhew's articles for the *Morning Chronicle*, Kingsley visited Jacob's Island in Bermondsey to see for himself the conditions in the slums. The novel follows the life of Alton, a tailor and poet, as he becomes increasingly involved with the Chartist movement; an important theme of the novel is the contrast of moral and physical force, and Alton becomes increasingly involved with radical Chartists before experiencing a religious conversion at the end of the novel. However, there are certainly similarities between *Alton Locke* and *North and South*, particularly on the emphasis both writers place on the civilising influence of women and the importance of individual personal reform. Whilst Kingsley may focus on the sweat shops and Gaskell on cotton mills, we can see that both write about issues relevant in their own sphere, of which they have personal experience; just as Mackaye advises Alton, "if God

¹⁴ Jay and Jay 4.

¹⁵ Jay and Jay 4.

¹⁶ Jay and Jay 4.

¹⁷ Allan John Hartley, *The Novels of Charles Kingsley: A Christian Social Interpretation* (Folkestone: Hour-Glass, 1977) 62, 73.

¹⁸ Hartley 64-5.

had meant ye to write about Pacifics, He'd ha' put ye there – and because He means ye to write about London town, He's put ye there – and gien ye an unco sharp taste o' the ways o't.”¹⁹

Like Carlyle, the Christian Socialists held the current system of political economy accountable for the misery being endured by many of the working people. Christian Socialism was very much a middle-class movement; established to alleviate the sufferings of their fellow men, it initially grew out of a fear of revolution. Maurice wrote: “if we value it [co-operation] for any lower object than that of carrying out what seems to us the only law of fellowship among Christian men, it is as a means of averting an English Revolution.”²⁰ When revolution broke out in Paris on 24th February 1848 it was a cause of little concern for most people in England; however, for young barrister John Ludlow, whose sisters resided in Paris, it was a matter of grave concern and he made plans to travel there immediately. On arriving in Paris it became apparent to Ludlow that the situation was not as dangerous as he had imagined, the revolution was a social upheaval rather than political.²¹ Taking the opportunity to observe the situation, Ludlow did not doubt that the hand of God lay behind the revolution and concluded that the attempt to regenerate society through improved social machinery meant that the French people could not possibly succeed. Ludlow returned to England at the onset of a Chartist uprising prompted by the economic crisis of 1847. News of the revolution in Paris provided a stimulus to the Chartists, and the National Convention assembled on Kennington Common on 10th April to present the national petition to Parliament. The government took the precaution of stationing troops throughout the city, but the demonstrators acted in accordance with the police order and returned home instead of marching on Westminster. Ludlow, Maurice, and Kingsley felt that the day's events had only served to defer the outbreak of a revolution in England.

During 1849 they formed a brotherhood by recruiting friends and acquaintances. However, they lacked any knowledge of the thoughts and feelings currently motivating the working classes. They made new acquaintances such as Walter Cooper, a tailor and active Chartist, and learned that here as

¹⁹ Charles Kingsley, *Alton Locke, Tailor and Poet. An Autobiography* (London, 1878) 93.

²⁰ Frederick Denison Maurice, “Reasons for Co-operation: A Lecture, Delivered at the Office for Promoting Working Men's Associations, 76, Charlotte Street, Fitzroy Square, On Wednesday December 11th 1850.” 7.

²¹ Torben Christensen, *Origin and History of Christian Socialism 1848-54* (Universitetsforlaget I Aarhus, 1962) 59.

in France it was social concerns rather than political behind the recent Chartist uprising. At this time their ideas about how to begin Christianising socialism were still rather vague; Home Colonies, Associative workshops and a National Health League were several ideas discussed but never executed. It was not until the very end of 1849 that an idea presented itself; in December, Henry Mayhew's reports on needlewomen in the *Morning Chronicle* drew attention to the slop system, whereby manufacturers would distribute an order to a sweater, who would then give the work to the lowest bidding tailor or needlewoman and keep the greatest share of the profit.²² In a letter to the *Morning Chronicle* the following day, Sidney Herbert recommended mass emigration as the most viable solution. However, some of the Christian Socialists, in particular Ludlow and Archibald Mansfield, preferred to address the problem at home. Ludlow was convinced that the operative associations he had witnessed in Paris were the ideal way of avoiding the exploitation inevitable in a system based on competition. The brotherhood met at the end of December and made plans to establish a Working Association for Tailors; a committee was established to raise the £350 necessary for providing a shop and workrooms and on January 18th a lease was signed on a house in Castle Street.²³

Throughout the movement's lifespan the Christian Socialists produced several short lived publications reflecting their vision, and Gaskell read them keenly. The first, *Politics for the People* ran from May to July 1848, and seventeen numbers were published altogether. This paper was aimed at the working classes and addressed issues such as the extension of the suffrage, the relation of the labourer to the capitalist and what a government can or cannot do to find work, or pay for the poor. When Ludlow met Gaskell in 1849 he found her to be 'eager for a revival' of Politics.²⁴ From the very beginning of the movement Maurice had been keen to publish a series of tracts aimed at the middle classes and the first of these was finally published in 1850; it was entitled "Christian Socialism. Dialogue between Somebody (a person of respectability) and Nobody (the writer)" and effectively formed the movement's manifesto. Gaskell sent the tracts to William Robson and Philip Carpenter in

²² Christensen 124.

²³ "Tracts on Christian Socialism. No. II *History of the Working Tailors' Association*, 34, Great Castle Street. 1850." 3.

²⁴ A. D. Murray, ed. *John Ludlow: The Autobiography of a Christian Socialist* (London: Frank Cass, 1981) 150.

Warrington, requesting that they would help by distributing them to the working men.²⁵ Gaskell specifically requested that Robson ask any shops selling working men's papers if they would accept the tracts. The following year she wrote to Marianne, "Mr Ludlow has lent me some numbers, but I have lent them so widely about that I have lost them I am afraid."²⁶ This was presumably the *Christian Socialist*, the first number of which appeared on 2nd November 1850. Gaskell contributed two of her own short stories to the *Christian Socialist*; "The Sexton's Hero" and "Christmas Storms and Sunshine" appeared in March and April 1851, both having previously been published in *Howitt's Journal* in 1847 and 1848 respectively.

The movement was initially not well received. For many people the very name Christian Socialism was a contradiction in terms. The *Quarterly Review* found it 'strange' and 'lamentable' that they should attempt to invest the 'miserable delusions' of the French Socialists with the authority of Christianity and the sanction of the gospel.²⁷ The *Daily News* accused them of 'revolutionary nonsense,' and the *Guardian* of 'pious fraud.'²⁸ For too long the Church had been preoccupied with 'other worldly' matters and shown little interest in secular issues, Maurice in particular was concerned that a lack of confidence in the Church was increasing; he addressed the third 'Tract on Christian Socialism' to the clergy, urging them to "regard them [the working people] as brothers...claim those very rights for them which they are snatching at for themselves."²⁹ Ludlow explained that far more problematic than the criticism, though, was the silence; they struggled to circulate their publications, many newsvendors refused to supply them, and literary institutions refused to accept them even as a gift.³⁰ Gaskell's commitment to promoting the ideas of the movement would presumably have been greatly appreciated. These attitudes to the newly emerging movement are evident in Gaskell's letter from 1850 as she asks Robson to forward the publications; "Even if you differ considerably from them, by helping to circulate their views, and have their plans discussed, you will be helping them in

²⁵ L 105.

²⁶ L 837.

²⁷ "Revolutionary Literature," *Quarterly Review* Vol. LXXXIX. (London, June & September 1851) 526.

²⁸ qtd. in Murray 191.

²⁹ Frederick Denison Maurice, "Tracts on Christian Socialism, No.III An Address to the Clergy, by a Clergyman. What Christian Socialism has to do with the Question which is now Agitating the Church." 8.

³⁰ Murray 191.

their earnest loving search after the Kingdom of God, which they hold far above any plan of their own.”³¹ The movement endured for about six years altogether and ultimately failed because of the divergences of opinion held by the brotherhood. Edward Neale for instance, was predominantly interested in establishing co-operative stores, whilst Maurice wished to devote himself to the Working Men’s College. Whilst the movement was never formally dissolved, it was effectively ended with Maurice’s report that the Association for Promoting Working Men’s Associations had become superfluous with the advent of the committee appointed by the Co-operative conference.³² Ludlow finally realised that he and Maurice had never actually shared the same vision, and as he declined to take up the leadership of the movement himself, it simply disappeared.³³ Despite this, Ludlow always believed that Christian Socialism had profoundly influenced the literature and thought of the nineteenth century, and whilst Gaskell may not have promoted their associative workshop in her novel, the influence of their ideas is evident in *North and South*.

As noted earlier, Gaskell’s involvement, or participation with the movement, was limited. During the early 1850s Gaskell maintained a regular correspondence with Ludlow, and in 1854 visited him at The Firs, the home he shared with Thomas Hughes. Here she attended a ‘Conventicle,’ where “the two households used on Sunday mornings to meet in the library common to both houses, and Hughes and [Ludlow] to read a somewhat shortened service, followed by a sermon, generally Maurice’s, or Kingsley’s.”³⁴ At this time Gaskell began corresponding with several other members of the brotherhood, collecting signatures for them, and suggesting possible venues for an event they wished to hold in Manchester.³⁵ Despite the new friendships she had formed, Gaskell’s participation in the movement remained fairly minimal; as we have seen she chose two of her ‘moral and sensible stories’ for one of their publications, and helped to distribute them through her connections. One reason for her low level of participation could certainly be location, as the main members of the group lived and

³¹ L 105.

³² Christensen 359.

³³ Christensen 364.

³⁴ Murray 281.

³⁵ L 240. This was most likely the Co-operative Festival held at the Mechanics’ Institution a month after Gaskell had replied to Furnivall’s letter. See “Co-Operative Festival,” *Manchester Times* 20 Aug. 1853: 2. *Gale*. 2 Mar. 2009.

met in London. They also considered themselves a brotherhood, and it does not appear that women were ever invited to join. As women did not form part of the immediate brotherhood their contributions to the movement have also been largely overlooked by historians. Christensen refers only briefly to a female housekeeper appointed for their first project, the school in Little Ormond Yard. Raven provides a fuller picture in his inclusion of initiatives other than the associations. Female as well as male philanthropists formed the committee for the East London Needlewomen's Home and Workshop, and Mrs Caroline Southwood Hill, mother of housing reformer Octavia, was appointed manager of a Ladies' Guild to help the sufferings of distressed gentlewomen.³⁶ Octavia wrote later in life that "it yet remains true that it was the early connection with that body of "Christian Socialists," to which much of my present work must owe its spirit."³⁷ Whilst these details may not add much to what is presumably still an incomplete picture, Ludlow felt justified in saying "I think it may be claimed for Christian Socialism that it has been a powerful leaven in the work of both sexes."³⁸ The chapter will later explore how Gaskell envisages women contributing to social reform.

In gauging Gaskell's participation in the movement we should also consider Gaskell's opinion of their solutions to the Condition of England problem, in particular the associative workshops. In her letter to William Robson she tells of her admiration of how they "run right ahead into the infinite unknown possible, and will stop at nothing short of 'God's kingdom come.'"³⁹ It is interesting that Gaskell here praises their intentions rather than their achievements. She may simply have been reserving judgement; alternatively she may have felt that aspirations were a little impractical or even utopian. Utopia can be defined as an image of a future world still unfulfilled, it is perceived as a desirable change requiring additional effort to bring about, rather than something that is certain. It is critical of the existing society and represents a system different from the existing order.⁴⁰ Christian Socialism certainly fulfils some of these criteria; however, whilst "the socialism of Marx calls into question the present order, and projects the possibility of a qualitatively new society as an alternative

³⁶ Charles E. Raven, *Christian Socialism 1848-1854* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987) 213-14.

³⁷ Octavia Hill, *Life of Octavia Hill as in Her Letters*, ed. C. Edmund Maurice (London: Macmillan, 1913) 330.

³⁸ Murray 186.

³⁹ L 105.

⁴⁰ Zygmunt Bauman, *Socialism: the Active Utopia* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1976) 17.

to capitalism,” Christian Socialism was instead aiming to transform the current system.⁴¹ In his lecture “On the Reformation of Society, And How All Classes May Contribute To It,” Maurice carefully defined the term reform to imply “that it has a form, and that somehow that form has suffered an alteration, has been warped or twisted.”⁴²

The Christian Socialists then were not aiming to change the existing relationship between capital and labour: “We are not setting at nought the principles of political economy, but are vindicating them from a mean and dishonourable perversion of them,” wrote Maurice.⁴³ Rather, it was the manner in which the current system forced men to compete with one another for capital, rather than dealing with one another in brotherly love as the Christian faith taught, that the brotherhood condemned. Maurice in particular felt that the current system of political economy was actually damaging the existing relationship between master and servant, as it had become “impossible for the master to look upon his servant except as one who is wanting wages he is not disposed to give, or the servant upon the master, except as one who is offering wages upon which he cannot exist.”⁴⁴ A relationship of mutual suspicion and hostility between master and servant had been created, and obedience had become impossible because government was equally impossible. The laws of supply and demand were beginning to regulate the ties connecting human beings.⁴⁵ The Christian Socialists felt that it was wrong that a man should starve simply because the supply of labour exceeded the demand for it. They felt that many of their fellow men had forgotten the Church’s teaching ‘love thy neighbour as thyself’:

If it be the duty of the capitalist to love his neighbour as himself, he is bound to see that those whom he employs enjoy a fair return for their labour...as he enjoys for his own labour...He is bound so far as he is able to see that they are well housed, well clad, well fed, well taught, honest, truthful, God-fearing; and when he has paid them and

⁴¹ John Joseph Marsden, *Marxian and Christian Utopianism: Toward a Socialist Political Theology* (New York: Monthly Review, 1991) 13.

⁴² Maurice, *Reformation of Society* 4.

⁴³ Frederick Denison Maurice, “Reasons for Co-operation: A Lecture, Delivered at the Office for Promoting Working Men’s Associations, 76, Charlotte Street, Fitzroy Square, On Wednesday December 11th 1850.” 22-23.

⁴⁴ Maurice, *Reasons for Co-operation* 17-18.

⁴⁵ Maurice, *Reasons for Co-operation* 18.

cared for them, it is all nothing if he do not really love them. And in like manner if it be the duty of the labourer or operative to love his neighbour as himself, he is bound fairly to give his labour for his hire, to respect and tend that property in another which he would fain possess himself, to do unto his employer which in his sphere he is able to do himself.⁴⁶

As Carlyle condemned society for constructing their theory of human duties on the ‘Greatest-Happiness Principle,’ Ludlow too felt that men were far too concerned with their rights rather than their duties. Extending the idea of neighbourly love, Ludlow suggests that men should first look to fulfil their duties, as “from those duties spring the rights of others.”⁴⁷

The Christian Socialists’ solution to the problem was to found associative workshops. Associations would preserve the existing relationships between capital and labour, whilst teaching men to work in fellowship.⁴⁸ The associations would still work on the principles of obedience and government, but remove the element of competition through co-operation.⁴⁹ In a lecture given in 1851, Ludlow explained in greater depth why they believed associations could work where political economy had failed.⁵⁰ The lecture was given in response to articles published in the ‘Reasoner,’ the *Edinburgh Review*, and the ‘Eclectic’; however, time restricted Ludlow to the objections raised by the ‘Edinburgh Review’ only, namely their initial alliance of Socialism with Communistic associations. Ludlow argued that the associations established by the Christian Socialists could not be defined as communistic as members divide the profits rather than living together or sharing private property, though the origins of socialism derive from communism as men must have something in common before they associate.⁵¹ Associations would ensure that all men were treated fairly and received fair recompense for their labour, something political economy had failed to achieve because it did not account for the men behind the machinery of the production and distribution of wealth: “Wealth, be it

⁴⁶ John Malcolm Forbes Ludlow, “Rights And Duties,” *Politics for the People No 6* (1848): 106.

⁴⁷ Ludlow, *Rights and Duties* 106

⁴⁸ Maurice, *Reasons for Co-operation* 15-17.

⁴⁹ Maurice, *Reasons for Co-operation* 18.

⁵⁰ John Malcolm Forbes Ludlow, “Christian Socialism and its Opponents: A Lecture Delivered at the Office for Promoting Working Men’s Associations,” (London, 1851).

⁵¹ Ludlow, *Christian Socialism and its Opponents* 11.

observed, in its narrow sense of riches, not in its wider one of weal or welfare...that in the sense in which our great writers of the sixteenth and seventeenth, and even of the eighteenth centuries, were accustomed to speak of the ‘commonwealth,’ where we should use the Latin word ‘society’.”⁵² For Ludlow Socialism was a science of the relations of men; “wider than that which regulates the mere production and distribution of wealth, a science of which that plutonomy is only a branch; which asserts that before production comes the producer, before distribution the distributor, and that which binds producer and distributor together, viz, association.”⁵³ Without a knowledge of the wants and failings of the men, the passions and affections, even their vices, it is pointless to presume what the results of their actions as producers or distributors would be.⁵⁴ For Ludlow, such an omission meant that the Political Economists were inaccurate in describing the very laws that regulated political economy. By analysing only the economic processes of the competitive world they failed to fulfil the true potential of Political Economy.

It is almost certain that Gaskell read this lecture, having received her copy from the author himself; in a letter dated March 18th from that year Gaskell thanks Ludlow for receipt of a lecture of his. Owing to the date of the letter the editors of Gaskell’s ‘Further Letters’ have suggested that this may refer to one of the ‘Tracts on Christian Socialism,’ but there is sufficient evidence in Gaskell’s letter to suggest she is actually referring to Ludlow’s lecture.⁵⁵ Gaskell writes “I like exceedingly the distinction you draw between communism and socialism, and the part where you say that enjoyments should be in common, affections and duties should belong to the individual.”⁵⁶ In this lecture Ludlow explained that in his opinion communism could never be an entirely negative concept as enjoyment of music or scent is communistic. The danger was if communism should enter the home, “when once from property the claim extends to persons, from enjoyments to affections and duties, the heart rebels against the fallacious logic of the intellect.”⁵⁷ The influence of this lecture is evident in *North and*

⁵² Ludlow, *Christian Socialism and its Opponents* 22-23.

⁵³ Ludlow, *Christian Socialism and its Opponents* 25.

⁵⁴ Ludlow, *Christian Socialism and its Opponents* 25.

⁵⁵ The first of the Tracts was published in February 1850, a further six were published in 1850 and the eighth and final Tract was published in the autumn of 1851.

⁵⁶ FL 54.

⁵⁷ Ludlow, *Christian Socialism and its Opponents* 10.

South, particularly as Gaskell paraphrases Ludlow's theory of the relations between men; "The workmen's calculations were based (like too many of the masters') on false premises. They reckoned on their fellow-men as if they possessed the calculable powers of machines, no more, no less; no allowance for human passions getting the better of reason."⁵⁸ However, whilst Ludlow condemned the political economists for their failure to account for the men behind the machinery, Gaskell alters this to include the workmen as well, as for her change is required across the classes, not just the political economists. Deirdre David criticises Gaskell for trying to "have it all ways," by restoring Thornton to his former financial position without questioning the current economic structures.⁵⁹ For David, this is a good example of how "novels often create fables which mediate between a distressing social reality and the desires of and fantasies of their authors and readers."⁶⁰ However, if we read the novel as a Christian Socialist text, then Gaskell does not need to provide a solution to the existing inequality between capital and labour; whilst the manner in which Thornton is restored to his former position may be somewhat convenient, Gaskell is merely ensuring that he is able to begin governing his men in a manner more suited to a Christian Socialist. In *North and South* Gaskell takes a much more confrontational approach to political economy, moving from her previous denial of having any knowledge of the subject in the "Preface" to *Mary Barton*, to actively engaging with the debate.

4.2 'the owners of capital': The Political Economist in Manchester and the novel

Having chosen an issue so close to home as the subject of her novel, Gaskell has often been suspected of also choosing a Manchester mill owner as her inspiration for Mr Thornton, a mill owner referred to by his men as a 'bulldog,' who eventually begins to appreciate the benefits of building better relations with his men; and there were certainly a number of mill owners amongst Gaskell's Cross Street acquaintances. When Ludlow visited Manchester in 1851 Gaskell was able to introduce him to mill owner David Morris; however, Ludlow was disappointed to discover that Mr Morris was not interested in considering ideas beyond the limits of benevolent mastership.⁶¹ Critics have often

⁵⁸ NS 225.

⁵⁹ Deirdre David, *Fictions of Resolution: Elizabeth Gaskell and the Victorian Social Text* (Hampshire: Macmillan, 1997) 20.

⁶⁰ David 12.

⁶¹ Murray 201.

looked, however, to Gaskell's immediate circle of friends for the inspiration for Mr Thornton, for example, James Nasmyth, the inventor of the steam-hammer, and the partner of William Gaskell's brother Holbrook.⁶² Valentine Cunningham has also suggested Greg's elder brother Samuel; Mr Sam Greg was an exception amongst the Manchester Millocracy, being a philanthropist who introduced libraries, gymnasiums and baths at his cotton mill in Bollington.⁶³ However, when he introduced new machinery for stretching cloth in 1846 his workforce came out on strike, causing Greg to suffer a nervous breakdown. Samuel Jnr had taken over the running of Lower House Mill at Bollington in 1832; Bollington was one of the five mills that by 1833 comprised Samuel Greg and Company, the original being Quarry Bank Mill at Styal.⁶⁴ For seven years after the death in 1834 of Samuel Snr, founder of the company, his sons had continued to manage the five mills as a partnership; however, differences of opinion prompted them to break up the partnership in 1841.⁶⁵ Taking on Bollington as an independent enterprise, Samuel Jnr saw mill ownership as an opportunity for social experiment; however, he lacked the business acumen of his elder brother Robert and "never paid much attention to profits."⁶⁶ Despite his desire to improve living conditions for his workforce, he had very little idea about what was really important to them, such as secure employment, resulting in the strike of 1846. For these reasons Greg seems an unlikely candidate for Gaskell's fictional hero, who she felt should be "tender, and yet a master."⁶⁷ Stephen Gill has suggested a candidate outside of Manchester, James Wilson, managing director of Price's Patent Candle Company in Belmont. Gaskell visited the factory in May 1853 after her friend Lady Hatherton had seen an article in the *Quarterly Review* reporting on the "Special Report by the Directors to the Proprietors of Price's Patent Candle Company."⁶⁸ Gill argues that "Wilson sees in the extension of the factory system the creation of a new estate of the realm, offering enormous opportunities for social responsibility and good,"⁶⁹ a sentiment remarkably

⁶² E. H. Chadwick, *Mrs Gaskell: Haunts, Homes and Stories* (Pitman, 1913) 148.

⁶³ Cunningham 136.

⁶⁴ Mary B. Rose, *The Gregs of Quarry Bank Mill: The Rise and Decline of a Family Firm, 1750-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986) 40.

⁶⁵ Mary B. Rose 65.

⁶⁶ Mary B. Rose 65.

⁶⁷ L 321.

⁶⁸ Stephen Gill, "Price's Patent Candles: New Light on *North and South*," *The Review of English Studies* 27.107 (1976): 313.

⁶⁹ Gill, *Price's Patent Candles* 316.

similar to Ludlow's vision of manufactories, where "all improvements in the condition of the working classes, whether material, intellectual, or moral, can be introduced on the largest scale, and a whole factory may become one living body, animated with one spirit of mutual good-will and zeal."⁷⁰

During the same visit to London she had also met the two Mr Spottiswoodes, printers, who lived together in a house with their apprentices. Gaskell described how they would daily "take their meals, their work, their walks & pleasures all under the guidance of this Mr S. as if he were their elder brother."⁷¹

A further possible candidate who has not previously been suggested is Edmund Potter of the Dinting Vale calico print works. Potter was born in 1802, the eldest son of James Potter, a merchant in Manchester; in 1825 at the age of 23 he established a print works at Dinting Vale near Glossop with his cousin Charles.⁷² Gaskell had been delighted by Potter's response to *Mary Barton*, writing to tell Catherine Winkworth that "Mr Edmund Potter thinks it so true he is going to buy it for his men."⁷³ However, Gaskell's triumph was limited; Potter's later actions would suggest that he had not fully assimilated the message in *Mary Barton*. For example, whilst Potter introduced various self-improvement schemes at Dinting Vale, in January 1853 he wrote a letter to the Royal Commissioner expressing his opposition to a government training scheme for calico print workers, suggesting that he too was only interested in 'benevolent mastership.' He qualifies as a candidate, not through his having, like Greg, inspired Gaskell by his philanthropy, but rather through his having disappointed her. Whilst we cannot definitely know whether Gaskell was aware of this letter, a response was published in the *Manchester Times*.⁷⁴ In a lecture given in 1856 Potter also expresses sentiments remarkably similar to one of Thornton's speeches; whilst this lecture is obviously too late to have had any influence on *North and South*, it does certainly seem to suggest that Gaskell has quite accurately captured the character of the Manchester mill owner. Potter remarked that "society will ever remain composed of classes. Some are born with fortune; more are born without any, and the struggle for it is

⁷⁰ John Malcolm Forbes Ludlow, "Labour and the Poor Part I," *Tracts by Christian Socialists III* (1850): 3.

⁷¹ L 237.

⁷² J. G. Hurst, *Edmund Potter and Dinting Vale* (Manchester: Edmund Potter, 1948) 2-4.

⁷³ L 66.

⁷⁴ "Mr Edmund Potter's Letter to a Royal Commissioner on Calico Printing," *Manchester Times* 9 Feb. 1853: 4. *Gale*. 16 Jun. 2009.

very serious. It is the best educated of these, the most talented and industrious who take the prize.”⁷⁵ Similarly, Mr Thornton informs Mr Hale that “It is one of the great beauties of our system, that a working-man may raise himself into the power and position of a master by his own exertions and behaviour; that in fact everyone who rules himself to decency and sobriety of conduct, and attention to his duties, comes over to our ranks.”⁷⁶

In retrospect Potter certainly appears to have been a benevolent man; however, it would appear that he was only involved with ‘associated philanthropy.’ His name appears on many subscription lists printed in the *Manchester Times*; amongst these are the funds for Public Parks, the Lancashire Public Schools Association, the Anti Corn Law League, and the Manchester Free Library.⁷⁷ He signed various petitions, including an appeal to the Mayor of Manchester to call a public meeting to discuss the possibility of petitioning the House of Commons for the abolition of the Corn Laws, and at the print works he established a day school on the upper storey of the Dinting Mill which he supported at his own expense.⁷⁸ Cleanliness, reading, writing, arithmetic and drawing were taught by schoolmaster Thomas Bailey, and once a year Potter presented book prizes for good work and attendance. Adult education was certainly not neglected either, a library and reading room were provided for the mill workers, and an article celebrating the first anniversary of the library in 1852 reveals that the library contained 630 volumes and took nearly 1200 newspapers and periodicals a year.⁷⁹ After the completion of the Manchester and Sheffield railway Potter arranged a trip from Glossop to Manchester and back as a treat for the workpeople.⁸⁰ Examining newspaper articles from North Lancashire, Dutton and King found that with the arrival of the railways, daytrips, particularly to the seaside,

⁷⁵ A. H. Birch, *Small Town Politics, A Study of Political Life in Glossop* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1959) 22.

⁷⁶ NS 84.

⁷⁷ See “Public Parks, & Subscriptions,” *Manchester Times* 14 June 1845. *Gale*. 20 Aug 2009; “Lancashire Public Schools Association.-List of Subscriptions to September 3rd, 1850,” *Manchester Times* 12 Oct. 1850. *Gale*. 20 Aug. 2009; 14 Dec. 1850; “National Anti Corn Law League,” *Manchester Times* 10 Mar. 1852. *Gale*. 20 Aug. 2009; “Manchester Free Library.-Additional Subscriptions,” *Manchester Times* 7 Aug. 1852. *Gale*. 20 Aug. 2009.

⁷⁸ Hurst 28; “Glossop,” *Manchester Times* 28 Nov. 1840. *Gale*. 10 Mar. 2009.

⁷⁹ Hurst 28.

⁸⁰ “Treat to Workpeople,” *Manchester Times* 7 Aug. 1846. *Gale*. 15 Mar. 2009.

became increasingly common, and by the 1850s the annual factory trip had become a routine demonstration of the masters' benevolence.⁸¹

Potter's benevolent actions are remarkably similar to those of the newly emerged town patron of the 1830s, as described by Anthony Howe.⁸² Prior to 1830 associations of masters within the textile industry had taken two forms; firstly, within the domestic manufacturing sector, a paternalism based on the vertical tie between master and weaver still existed; secondly, masters within the cotton spinning and finishing trades would form associations to defend their interests against the operatives.⁸³ The former is closest to the paternalism practised by the Greg family, whereby rural industrialists would develop a sort of colony providing chapels, schools and recreational facilities for the workers and their families, in addition to housing.⁸⁴ Both forms of associations were regulated by the state; the former regarding wages, and the latter in the prohibition of combinations of workmen. By the 1830s political economy had replaced state intervention and paternalism and the laws of supply and demand were now forcing labour and capital to compete.⁸⁵ By the 1840s the textile master's involvement in philanthropy had completely changed. No longer a patriarch, concerned with the welfare of his workers, he became rather a patron of the town's culture.⁸⁶ This philanthropy predominantly took the form of the self-help ethos, with initiatives such as clothing societies and savings banks. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, many of these charitable enterprises raised money through subscription lists and banquets, but did not promote personal interaction with those requiring help. It seems unlikely that the philanthropic enterprises Potter supported through subscriptions would require him to give up much of his time, and he was not present at the celebrations for the anniversary of the library and reading room. Instead he sent a "kind and encouraging letter...in the name of the firm," which was of course accompanied by a donation of £5. Gaskell may have interpreted his resolve to buy *Mary Barton* for his workers as a positive step towards a reinvention of the relations between

⁸¹ H. I. Dutton and J. E. King, "The Limits of Paternalism: The Cotton Tyrants of North Lancashire, 1836-54," *Social History* 7.1 (1982): 60-61.

⁸² Anthony Howe, *The Cotton Masters 1830-1860* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984).

⁸³ Howe 163.

⁸⁴ See Mary B. Rose pp.102-120

⁸⁵ Howe 163.

⁸⁶ Howe 272.

masters and men. However, the publication of Potter's letter demonstrates that he had perhaps not become the benevolent master that Gaskell had hoped. The letter was published in response to a recommendation that a government training scheme for calico workers be implemented, a suggestion that Potter vehemently opposed. Potter argued that a state education would force the industry to adopt a particular standard of taste and design, whereas at this time it was common practice for manufacturers to employ their artistic skill in adapting their products to suit a variety of tastes.⁸⁷ For the calico printer then it was beneficial to have workers who had been trained in his own workshops. We can see a contrast here between the kind of training offered by Potter, which was more in his own interests than his workers; and the kind of work ethic advocated by the Christian Socialists. Ludlow pointed out that competition prevented men from doing anything other than the one occupation they were trained for, meaning that they would be unable to abandon this labour if the supply exceeded the demand and the price of labour fell.⁸⁸

By showing concern for the educational and recreational needs of his workers Potter may have considered himself to be a benevolent employer. However, for the Christian Socialists, a political economist could not be a philanthropist; the two were not compatible, for "Philanthropy, or the love of men, must have its ground in feeling, and not in thought."⁸⁹ Like Gaskell, the Christian Socialists also disapproved of subscription lists, Ludlow wrote "anything which tends to bring benevolence in close, personal, permanent contact with its objects, tends to make benevolence wiser; because every case thoroughly *relieved* erases one from the list, whilst a hundred such cases *assisted* are but maintained upon it."⁹⁰ Discussing the administration of charity in the fourth of the *Tracts by Christian Socialists*, "Labour and the Poor Part II," Ludlow expresses sentiments remarkably similar to those pertaining to Engels discussed in the first chapter.⁹¹ For Ludlow, as for Engels, the prevailing form of philanthropy is grossly hypocritical, Ludlow writes:

⁸⁷ "Mr Edmund Potter's Letter to a Royal Commissioner on Calico Printing," *Manchester Times* 9 Feb. 1853: 4. *Gale*. 16 Jun. 2009.

⁸⁸ Ludlow, *Christian Socialism and its Opponents* 39.

⁸⁹ Ludlow, *Christian Socialism and its Opponents* 17.

⁹⁰ Ludlow, *Christian Socialism and its Opponents* 18-19.

⁹¹ John Malcolm Forbes Ludlow, "Labour and the Poor Part II," *Tracts by Christian Socialists IV* (1850).

To go to these martyrs of labour with hands full of gold, and play the bountiful with them, would be at bottom only an insult to them and a lie to God. By their eighteen hours a-day of lifelong toil they have earned the *right* to a maintenance, - the money we think to give them, so far as by beating down tradesmen, by the idolatry of cheapness, by the mere neglect to inquire, and protest, and fight with the demon of competition, we have helped to bring them where they are, - the money we pretend to give them is *their own*.⁹²

If the failure of political economy can be traced to its failure to take into account the men and their needs, rather than considering them as part of the machinery, then Potter's letter places him firmly on the side of political economy; and his benevolence, in this light, certainly appears inadequate.

It is evident then that at the time Gaskell was about to begin writing she had been presented with several models of factory ownership. Some mill owners were actively promoting fellowship and brotherhood in the workplace, whilst others believed a more traditional, patriarchal form of benevolence was sufficient. It seems likely that Gaskell would be wary of choosing any one particular mill owner as a model for Mr Thornton, particularly as her Manchester contemporaries had been her harshest critics of *Mary Barton*, and only the previous year she had suffered dreadfully after the responses of her fellow Cross Street members to *Ruth*. No doubt Gaskell would also recall the bitter sting of having been falsely accused of using the murder of Thomas Ashton, brother of Mrs Thomas Bayley Potter and a member of the Cross Street Congregation, as the inspiration for the murder of Harry Carson in *Mary Barton*.⁹³

When Margaret first meets Mr Thornton, his relationship with the men he employs does not extend beyond that of the cash nexus. Margaret struggles to understand how two classes so dependent on one another could regard the interests of the other as opposed to their own. Thornton's only explanation for refusing to explain to his men his motives for lowering wages is that: "We, the owners of capital

⁹² Ludlow, *Labour and the Poor Part II* 7.

⁹³ See Letter 130, p196, for Gaskell's apology to Sir John Potter that she may have unintentionally caused any grievance to his family.

have a right to choose what we will do with it.”⁹⁴ Margaret’s response that “there seemed no reason but religious ones, why you should not do what you like with your own” provokes a discussion about stewardship, duty and dependence.⁹⁵ Thornton absolves himself of any duty towards his men other than the payment of their wages, and Margaret accuses the masters of desiring “their hands to be merely tall, large children – living in the present moment – with a kind of blind unreasoning kind of obedience.”⁹⁶ Margaret extends the analogy of the parent/child relationship to demonstrate how Thornton is failing in his duty towards his men; for Thornton it would be an impertinence to interfere with the lives of his men outside of factory hours, and he does not desire any independent action from them during factory hours.

In tracing Thornton’s development to enlightened master, the dining room scheme can be perceived as a form of the paternal philanthropy practised by Potter. The idea originates from his closer association with Higgins and the Boucher children, whilst visiting them at dinner time he happens to notice that their “miserable black frizzle of a dinner” is not particularly nourishing.⁹⁷ He initiates the scheme believing it to be beneficial to his workers, but he has not considered their ideas or wishes. It is unsurprising then that the dining room does not find favour with the workmen and is abandoned; however, Higgins later suggests a scheme so similar to Thornton’s that he is unable to tell the difference between them. As Coral Lansbury has also noted, it is not the canteen itself that is significant, the difference actually lies in the fact that the men have been allowed to contribute to the plan. For Lansbury the new relationship between employer and workers signifies “an unspoken agreement that amenities within the factory are not privileges to be magnanimously conferred by the owner, but rights to be secured by the men.”⁹⁸ Whilst the former part of this statement may be correct the latter is certainly in conflict with Ludlow’s theory of human duties, as the men should not need to

⁹⁴ NS 117.

⁹⁵ NS 118.

⁹⁶ NS 119.

⁹⁷ NS 353.

⁹⁸ Lansbury 127.

‘secure’ their rights if the mill owner is fulfilling his duties, according to Ludlow, the measure of human duty is ‘love one another.’⁹⁹

If we return to Mr Hale’s wise parent model we can see that Thornton has come to realise that humouring his children in their desire for independent action does not mean interfering with their lives outside of working hours, but rather, listening to their ideas and opinions and taking these into consideration. During the initial stages of the dining room plan, Thornton is still referring to his workmen as ‘hands,’ it is not until after he has failed in business that he comes to realise that he must cultivate a relationship with his men beyond that of the cash nexus. Gaskell makes it clear in Chapter L, ‘Changes at Milton,’ that it is Thornton’s actions as a political economist that have brought him to the point of failure, and the influence of Ludlow’s lecture is again evident; Ludlow stated that “As it is wrong for a man to bring a child into the world which he is unable to support; so it is wrong for an employer to bring labour into the world which he is unable to support, whether by the introduction of machinery or by going in search of cheap hands”.¹⁰⁰ It transpires that it is through these actions that Thornton has been brought to the point of failure; he had locked up his capital in new, expensive machinery and purchased a large amount of cotton under contract. A period of bad trade follows and the market value of large stock fell significantly. With no new orders coming in Thornton struggles to cover the day to day expenses of running the business, and at that point the bills for the cotton he had purchased arrive. An opportunity arises in which Thornton could secure his future, however, having no available money of his own it would be his creditors’ money with which he speculated. If he had continued to act as a political economist then he would have avoided failure; however, it suits Gaskell’s purpose for him to fail, it is necessary for him to fail for him to fully understand what a loss the new relationships he is cultivating with his men will be. Describing Thornton’s association with Higgins, the narrator explains: “Once brought face to face, man to man, with an individual of the masses around him ... they had each begun to recognize that ‘we have all of us one human heart’.”¹⁰¹ Whilst Gaskell constructs this in a Wordsworthian framework, quoting directly from her favourite

⁹⁹ Ludlow, *Rights and Duties* 106.

¹⁰⁰ Ludlow, *Christian Socialism and its Opponents* 29.

¹⁰¹ *NS* 409.

passage in “The Cumberland Beggar,” Maurice invokes a similar sentiment as he explains the necessity for men to co-operate. “If they could be urged to work as friends and brothers with each other, they would be more likely to feel as friends and brothers to the members of all classes, than while each regarded the man professing his craft as a rival and a foe.”¹⁰² Gaskell, however, perceives the limitations of such a sentiment, perceiving in it the potential to be “the point Archimedes sought from which to move the earth.”¹⁰³ At a dinner party during his visit to London, subsequent to his failure in business, Mr Thornton explains to the MP Mr Colthurst that he and his men will presumably like one another more and understand each other better: “My utmost expectation only goes so far as this – that they may render strikes not the bitter, venomous sources of hatred they have hitherto been. A more hopeful man might imagine that a closer and more genial intercourse between classes might do away with strikes. But I am not a hopeful man.”¹⁰⁴

For political economists such speculative actions may be perfectly usual; earlier in the novel Thornton had explained to Mr Hale that fluctuations of trade might result in failure for the mill owner, as well as loss of income for his employees; “He spoke as if this consequence were so entirely logical, that neither employers nor employed had any right to complain if it became their fate: the employer to turn aside from the race he could no longer run, with a bitter sense of incompetency and failure – wounded in the struggle – trampled down by his fellows in their haste to get rich – slighted where once he was honoured – humbly asking for, instead of bestowing, employment with a lordly hand.”¹⁰⁵ However, Norman Russell notes that nineteenth century authors often manipulated the everyday realities of commerce to create the essential setting for their character.¹⁰⁶ Through Thornton’s failure Gaskell also shares Carlyle’s criticism of the division of labour; “Only when the Political Economist’s sense of liberty based on “social isolation” has been supplanted by a “new definition” of liberty which takes into account the social interconnectedness necessary for healthy communal organization of

¹⁰² Maurice, *Reasons for Co-operation* 15.

¹⁰³ *NS* 420.

¹⁰⁴ *NS* 421.

¹⁰⁵ *NS* 151.

¹⁰⁶ Norman Russell, *The Novelist and Mammon: Literary Responses to the World of Commerce in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986) 188.

labour which Carlyle called for to replace the economists' division of labour begin to be realizable."¹⁰⁷ At Edith's dinner party Thornton explains his plan to conduct a few 'experiments' when he finds a new situation in Milton; the nature of the experiments is not expanded, and neither is it necessary as Thornton is beginning to realise that communication between the classes is of greater importance. The round-robin from his workmen, stating their wish to work for him in the future, is symbolic of Thornton's move towards a reformed system of political economy. Thornton's decision not to speculate with his creditors' money also marks him out as a potential Carlylean Captain of Industry, as nobleness is the primary characteristic they require.¹⁰⁸ Opinions on Thornton's eligibility as a Carlylean Captain of Industry vary; Deirdre David sees him as a 'fit' candidate, but Rosemarie Bodenheimer warns against this.¹⁰⁹ However, the reformed Thornton that Gaskell presents is far closer to Carlyle's Captain of Industry than to the Christian Socialist solution of associative workshops, or even Maurice's vision of a clergy that would once again promote social harmony.

4.3 'we have all of us one human heart': Gaskell's vision

Gaskell greatly admired the Christian Socialists and so it may at first appear strange that in the novel she ignores their solutions to the Condition of England problem. The most important Christian Socialist initiative was the associative workshop and whilst Gaskell may utilise the principles on which the workshops are founded she certainly does not suggest that Thornton may ever establish his own association. However, her omission of an associative workshop in the novel should not be perceived as a rejection of this fundamental Christian Socialist initiative. As we know, Gaskell was overwhelmed to discover during her visit to the Mr Spottiswoodes' printing establishment that the relationship they shared with their employees was familial. Instead we should perceive in this Gaskell's Unitarian emphasis on 'private exertions.' Gaskell has been criticised by David Roberts for having "moved no further in search of a remedy for industrial strife" between publishing *Mary Barton* and *North and South*.¹¹⁰ However, as in *Mary Barton*, Gaskell demonstrates how individuals can

¹⁰⁷ Philip Rosenberg, *The Seventh Hero: Thomas Carlyle and the Theory of Radical Activism* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1974) 159.

¹⁰⁸ *NS* 271.

¹⁰⁹ Bodenheimer 56; David 21.

¹¹⁰ David Roberts, *Paternalism in Early Victorian England* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1979) 91.

make a real difference within their communities. Anticipating such a criticism, James Wilson of Price's Patent Candles, argued that a company does have responsibilities to its employees beyond the payment of wages, and that recognition of this by even one well known company would be an event of great importance.¹¹¹ Gaskell makes it clear after Margaret first meets Higgins that the reason her homesickness has slightly abated is because she has found a 'human interest,' and the Christian Socialist definition of society as a partnership or fellowship lies at the heart of her code of social relations.¹¹² We could imagine also, that after the reactions of the Manchester mill owners following *Mary Barton*, Gaskell may well have felt wary in offering instruction with regard to the operation of their businesses.

As a clergyman Mr Hale also has the potential to demonstrate a reformed clergy and become the Christian Socialist hero of the novel, yet Gaskell has him leave the clergy to embark on a new career as a tutor. At one point the narrator does explain that Mr Hale also has his acquaintances amongst the working people, however, Gaskell chose instead to focus on his daughter. The workmen are eager to tell Mr Hale of all they have to endure: "here was this man, from a distant county, who was perplexed by the workings of the system into the midst of which he was thrown, and each was eager to make him a judge, and to bring to witness of his own causes for irritation."¹¹³ Mr Hale carries these grievances to Thornton, just as Margaret does, but Mr Thornton merely explains all on "sound economical principles."¹¹⁴ As noted earlier, the Church's apparent lack of interest in secular affairs meant that many people had lost faith in the Church. Ludlow saw the Church as "the skeleton of a great army, the battlefield of a holy warfare; all the strongholds are occupied – officers to command them there are plenty, but the privates are nowhere."¹¹⁵ This criticism of the Church also appears in Kingsley's writings; such is the importance of personal reform for Kingsley, argues Hartley, that he highlights this through the use of false conversion, namely Alton's cousin George.¹¹⁶ George is exemplary of all that the Christian Socialists felt was currently wrong with the clergy. He sees in the clergy his

¹¹¹ Gill, *Price's Patent Candles* 316.

¹¹² *NS* 75.

¹¹³ *NS* 151.

¹¹⁴ *NS* 151.

¹¹⁵ Ludlow, *Labour and the Poor Part II* 16.

¹¹⁶ Hartley 71.

opportunity to rise in the world, and unhesitatingly signs the Thirtynine Articles, commonly believed to form the basis of Mr Hale's 'doubts.'¹¹⁷ Both *Alton Locke* and *North and South* share a rejection of the possibility of a reformed clergy achieving the Christian Socialist vision of society. Instead both authors offer this opportunity to their heroines. Coral Lansbury has referred to Margaret as a 'middle-class Christian Socialist,' claiming "She is not a woman devoted to family duties alone, her kingdom is not the hearth where she can reign enshrined by the love of her family; in effect the whole reach of society is within her grasp."¹¹⁸

Margaret's philanthropic role within the novel predominantly takes the form of mediation; "she had formerly been the peacemaker of the village" at Helstone.¹¹⁹ However, to mediate successfully in Milton Margaret must first learn the language of industrialisation; Margaret is initially as ignorant of this as some of the novel's readers might be, and asks the questions that a reader might want answered, such as "What are they going to strike for?"¹²⁰ Hilary Schor notes that Margaret's 'adventure' in Milton is "largely linguistic ... enlisting a new vocabulary, offering itself as a dictionary, and using its heroine's consciousness to achieve all this."¹²¹ Margaret's willingness to learn provides her with a new perspective, often confronting her long held prejudices. When Mrs Hale rebukes her for using the phrase 'slack of work,' Margaret replies "if I live in a factory town, I must speak factory language when I want it. Why mamma, I could astonish you with a great many words you never heard in your life."¹²² Dorice Williams Elliott argues that Gaskell created a new social space in which women could operate, a space in which they are able to intervene in industrial matters, one which is neither wholly private or public.¹²³ Gaskell achieves this by rewriting the traditional role of the Lady Bountiful, creating a new model of social relations that is based on neither rural paternalism nor capitalism; this new social space requires women to apply their knowledge of household management to their

¹¹⁷ Easson, *Elizabeth Gaskell* 33.

¹¹⁸ Lansbury 117.

¹¹⁹ *NS* 380.

¹²⁰ *NS* 115.

¹²¹ Schor 129.

¹²² *NS* 233.

¹²³ Elliott 138.

philanthropic work, though it should not be considered as merely an extension of the home sphere.¹²⁴ Elliott argues that through Margaret Gaskell attempts to educate her female readers in the theory of political economy through the education of her heroine. Visiting that requires theoretical knowledge is not merely an activity of the home, but of the social sphere that recasts the home as a public space.¹²⁵ One of the roles Elliott assigns to women in this new social space is the interpretation of signs, Margaret's success as a mediator is partly owing to her willingness to learn the unfamiliar languages of the North, something that she begins early on in the novel. Throughout the course of the novel, Gaskell also offers and rejects several other possibilities for her heroine; during the riot outside Thornton's mill, Gaskell examines the possibility that women could publicly mediate. The riot had been provoked by Thornton's decision to import Irish workers when his own men go out on strike over a proposed reduction in wages, and at this point in the novel class relations are in imminent danger of breaking down altogether. As the working men break through the gates, Margaret urges Thornton to go down and speak directly to them, when she realises that they mean to resort to violence she rushes outside. To protect Thornton she steps between him and the men.

This scene has often been examined as a metaphorical sexual violation; with Deirdre David arguing Gaskell is demonstrating the extent to which the middle class is under threat from the working class by placing Margaret under direct attack. Margaret's pale face and the dripping of blood suggests that the threat is one of symbolic defloration, whilst Barbara Harman argues that Margaret's willingness to use her body as a shield suggests that she is prepared to risk exposure because she believes that she can manage and control her intercourse with others, even in public.¹²⁶ For David, Margaret as a woman represents the centre of family life, perceived as the protectress of middle-class values; as it is the sight of Margaret bleeding, rather than the arrival of the soldiers that subdues the men, they are obviously susceptible to middle-class notions about the protection of women and are thereby capable of moral regeneration by the proper middle-class leadership.¹²⁷ However, she

¹²⁴ Elliott 138, 144.

¹²⁵ Elliott 144.

¹²⁶ David 42-43; Barbara Leah Harman, "In Promiscuous Company: Female Public Appearance in Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*," *Victorian Studies* 31.3 (1988): 367.

¹²⁷ David 43.

succeeds only in revoking the protection she believes her sex will afford her; in claiming the ‘sanctity’ of her sex, Margaret is suggesting that the very helplessness of women calls out the male instinct to protect, the very fact that Margaret cannot protect herself is the reason she believes she can protect Thornton.¹²⁸ However, as Harman notes when Margaret emerges outside, a power struggle ensues between her and Thornton as to who will take the stage.¹²⁹ As Margaret positions herself between Thornton and the men, “he had moved away from behind her, as if jealous of anything that should come between him and danger.”¹³⁰ Margaret emerges the victor but in doing so she forfeits the “immunity of weakness” designated to the female sex.¹³¹

Harman argues that whilst Gaskell’s identification of private with public throughout the novel would appear to confirm the Victorian fear that led them to separate the two worlds and punish those who transgressed, Gaskell’s response to this erosion of the boundaries between the two is actually celebratory.¹³² Harman’s belief in this assertion lies in the fact that whilst Margaret’s personal sufferings are great she is not really publicly punished, what she eventually gains is far greater than what she loses: “Gaskell seems to be saying that the experience of being tainted is oddly beneficial, that it is in fact positive and educative: it reduces Margaret’s excessive sense of moral superiority, eradicates her snobbishness (class and otherwise), and makes her truly able to connect with others.”¹³³ For Harman, Gaskell is successful in legitimizing public action for women through her transformation of private sexual shame into an opportunity for self-recognition; however, whilst this may be instrumental in terms of Margaret’s personal development, Harman does not consider the success of Margaret’s motive for appearing publicly. Margaret is attempting to mediate between Thornton and the workmen, yet when she appears outside “her words died away, for there was no tone in her voice, it was but a hoarse whisper.”¹³⁴ As Harman correctly points out, Margaret forfeits any immunity afforded to her as a woman, it is only after she is hit by the stone and is by force reverted to

¹²⁸ Harman 368.

¹²⁹ Harman 367.

¹³⁰ *NS* 177.

¹³¹ Harman 367.

¹³² Harman 372.

¹³³ Harman 372.

¹³⁴ *NS* 176.

a helpless woman, that she has any effect on the mob. It is the sight of her blood that sobers them rather than her attempts to reason with them. I would argue that rather than legitimizing public action for women, Gaskell is actually rejecting this, by demonstrating that public actions will always be perceived by society as having sexual connotations. The very fact that it is a stone hurled by the mob which casts Margaret as a Magdalene figure, often associated with the stoning of the woman taken in adultery from the Gospel of John, reinforces the idea that Gaskell is linking this scene with sexual shame. As further proof, we have already seen earlier in the novel that Mrs Thornton had also attempted to help a mill owner who was under threat from a riot. She too had believed that only a woman could perform the task, yet was only partially successful; after pushing her way through the crowds of men to reach Makinson's factory, she was unable to help defend it as she wished to after fainting from the heat. In the novel Gaskell provides two examples of women appearing publicly, both believing that only they could help and neither is successful in the way they wished to be.

Gaskell not only rejects the possibility of public action for women, she also rejects the more traditional forms of female philanthropy. Margaret's offer of a philanthropic visit, accompanied with a basket of food to the Higgins household, is rebuffed. Similar examples throughout the novel would suggest that Gaskell is rejecting this form of philanthropy for women: Margaret and her mother question whether it would be right to send a parcel of food to the Boucher family, after Mr Thornton informs them that "those were no true friends who helped to prolong the struggle."¹³⁵ Towards the end of the novel, Margaret is attempting to "settle that most difficult problem for women, how much was to be utterly merged in obedience to authority, and how much might be set apart for freedom in working," and is begged by Edith not to be strong-minded.¹³⁶ So what possibilities does Gaskell envisage for women? Gaskell here again shares something in common with Kingsley's novel, as both promote the civilising influence of women. In *Alton Locke* it is Lady Eleanor Ellerton who is responsible for Alton's conversion to Christianity at the end of the novel; like Gaskell, Kingsley rebukes the clergy by assigning the role of social harmonizer to a woman instead. Hartley has argued, though, that Kingsley has undermined the importance of this scene by assigning Eleanor only a minor

¹³⁵ NS 157.

¹³⁶ NS 406.

role in the novel and by portraying her unsympathetically; “To have been effective, her theology ought to have been integrated into the narrative so that her teaching, like that of Mackaye, could have operated in its own right.”¹³⁷ In contrast Gaskell provides her heroine with the authority she needs to actively intervene in the lives of those around her through her willingness to learn about industrial capitalism.

Once again, Gaskell ably demonstrates that philanthropy need not be confined by class or gender boundaries, or to those with economic power. Margaret’s philanthropy initially takes the form of the lady Bountiful, taking a “kindly interest in a stranger.”¹³⁸ As she begins exploring her new home she forms an acquaintanceship with the weaver Nicholas Higgins, initially they simply acknowledge one another with a smile, but when Margaret offers her flowers to Higgins’ daughter Bessy, they begin forming a lasting friendship. Bessy is sickly as the cotton fluff from the carding-rooms has got onto her lungs, and whilst Margaret’s flowers are only “hedge and ditch” flowers, the simple gesture cheers Bessy.¹³⁹ Completely foreign to the customs of the North, Margaret assumes that she can transfer the rural philanthropy she practised in Helstone, where she would read to the sick or take broth, and enquires after their name and address.¹⁴⁰ However, whilst her offer of a visit would have been graciously accepted in the South, Higgins finds her offer slightly impertinent, telling her: “I’m none so fond of having strange folk in my house.”¹⁴¹ As Bodenheimer has noted, Gaskell here overturns the paternalist model from the working class point of view as Higgins turns Margaret’s offer of a philanthropic visit into an invitation to his home.¹⁴² Margaret is affronted by this rejection of her benevolence, and so Higgins extends the invitation, partly as Bodenheimer argues, because she is lonely, but also because he perceives her embarrassment.¹⁴³ In a chapter entitled “Home Sickness,” Margaret presumes to offer her assistance to a family because they occupy a poorer situation than herself. However, Margaret is equally in need of aid, she is friendless in an unfamiliar town, and she

¹³⁷ Hartley 77.

¹³⁸ *NS* 74.

¹³⁹ *NS* 73.

¹⁴⁰ *NS* 42, 74.

¹⁴¹ *NS* 74.

¹⁴² Bodenheimer 58.

¹⁴³ Bodenheimer 58.

had previously found the mill workers intimidating, as they freely passed comment on her clothing and her person.

The reciprocity of philanthropy between Margaret and Higgins has previously been overlooked, Pamela Corpron Parker, for example, argues that Margaret's "philanthropic relationship with the Higginses is necessary to bolster her own sense of class superiority" which has been displaced by her relocation to a society that values economic hierarchy over family connections and birth.¹⁴⁴ It is true that Margaret's philanthropy certainly operates within class boundaries; she provides company for the sick Bessy and provides employment for Mary Higgins, thereby extending her domestic role into the public arena. In preventing Higgins from excessive drinking after Bessy's death she successfully impresses middle-class morality onto the working-class Higgins. However, their relationship is not solely that of philanthropic donor and recipient; their friendship is cemented throughout the novel as they help one another through difficult times, and towards the end of the novel it becomes apparent that Higgins has become more of a parental figure in Margaret's life. It is a mistake to perceive Higgins primarily as a peripheral character who functions "to provide Margaret with the human interest that will begin to integrate her into Milton society and allow her to interpret it."¹⁴⁵ In a conversation with Mr Thornton it is revealed that Higgins had been aware that Margaret's brother Frederick, who is in exile in Spain after his involvement in a mutiny on his ship, was visiting the family in secret. He had not even told Margaret that he knew. Higgins is also responsible for informing Thornton about this and simultaneously restoring Margaret's damaged reputation, a task which she had charged Mr Bell with, but which he fails to fulfil.

Ultimately it is Higgins who comes to Margaret's rescue, rather than family friend Mr Bell. Mr Bell is perceived in the light of long standing family friend having been an acquaintance of the family for many years. However, at the beginning of the novel Margaret had never actually met him, and he seems to occupy this position in title only. He had formerly been Mr Hale's tutor at Oxford, and now godfather to Frederick, and he is also instrumental in Hale's decision to relocate his family to Milton

¹⁴⁴ Parker, *Fictional Philanthropy* 329.

¹⁴⁵ Schor 122.

Northern, having heard of an opening for a private tutor which he thought would suit Mr Hale. Mr Hale was perhaps not wise in his choice of confidant, he feels sure of sympathy from Bell, but admits to Margaret that he did not gain much “strength” from him.¹⁴⁶ Mr Bell owns numerous properties in Milton Northern, though he no longer lives there himself, disliking the busy bustling nature of the town; Mr Hale explains to his daughter that for this reason “he is obliged to keep up some sort of connection” with the town.¹⁴⁷ Mr Hale’s emphasis on obligation suggests also a sense of reticence or reluctance on the part of Mr Bell, and this seems a rather apt description for his relationship with the Hale family as well, particularly Margaret whose need for a strong parental figure increases as the novel progresses. Following the move to Milton, Margaret loses both her mother and father; her brother resides in Spain and her Aunt Shaw in London. She may be the primary beneficiary of Mr Bell’s will, but his visits are infrequent and he makes little effort to really understand Margaret or her needs. Margaret is obviously distressed at the thought that Thornton may believe her to have been meeting a lover that night at the station, she is “nervously twisting her fingers” whilst she entrusts this story to Mr Bell, yet he presumes that she is merely tired.¹⁴⁸ He does not even appear to be paying attention to her tale; after Margaret informs him that Mr Thornton witnessed her with Frederick at the station, he later asks who the witness was. Margaret believes it to be “well understood between them” that Mr Bell should vindicate her in Thornton’s eyes, so it is disappointing that he makes no plans to travel to Milton and set the matter right for her, and the failure of Mr Bell to fulfil this task is further increased by the fact that he had earlier suspected that Margaret and Thornton “have what the French call a tendresse for each other.”¹⁴⁹

Higgins may not be aware of the sense of shame Margaret feels, but he realises from the manner in which “the wintry frost-bound look of care” disappears from Thornton’s face at the mention of her name that Thornton is in love with her.¹⁵⁰ Whilst it may occur somewhat inadvertently, Higgins is instrumental in not only protecting Margaret’s reputation but also in helping to secure not only her

¹⁴⁶ *NS* 40.

¹⁴⁷ *NS* 40.

¹⁴⁸ *NS* 387.

¹⁴⁹ *NS* 329.

¹⁵⁰ *NS* 411.

future happiness but also Mr Thornton's. Gaskell here demonstrates the truth of Margaret's earlier assertion concerning the interconnectedness of all human life; in Chapter XV, 'Masters and Men,' she had argued with Thornton that "God has made us so that we must be mutually dependent...The most proudly independent man depends on those around him for their insensible influence on his character – his life."¹⁵¹ In each of the preceding chapters it has been possible to identify a short passage encapsulating Gaskell's own vision of philanthropy; in *Mary Barton* she advocated the need for the strong to help the weak, in *Ruth* she talked of the reciprocity of Mercy, and in *North and South* she demonstrates the 'interconnectedness' of human life. Gaskell demonstrates that to some extent we are all reliant on one another, emphasising this by reminding the reader of Thornton's now fading dream that his name alone should be known in other countries and command power. Initially, Thornton is concerned by the Carlylean fear of "Not succeeding." Of "not making money, fame, or some other figure in the world."¹⁵² Thornton's impending failure teaches him a new appreciation of the new relations he has formed with his men.

What distinguishes *North and South* from *Mary Barton* is the potential for philanthropy to operate across class boundaries in both directions. Margaret initially attempts to frame their relationship within the traditional philanthropic relationship; however, as the novel progresses, Higgins is able to render Margaret service, he pays Margaret the kind of attention that she is lacking from her parents. It has often noted that Mr and Mrs Hale allow much of the family responsibility to fall on Margaret, often needing to shield one parent or the other from the full truth of a situation. She takes responsibility for breaking the news of their move to Milton to her mother, and makes all of the more practical arrangements for the move; once settled in Milton, Margaret arranges Frederick's secret visit without her father's knowledge, and subsequently lies to the police-inspector to protect her brother. As Terence Wright has noted, Mr Hale's "whole life appears to have been a retreat from the larger world into his parish, and from his family into his study."¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ *NS* 122.

¹⁵² Carlyle, *Past and Present* 146.

¹⁵³ T. Wright 102.

This form of philanthropy requires individuals to “find means and ways of seeing each other.”¹⁵⁴ In this scene then we can see that Higgins also possesses the ability to interpret signs that Dorice Williams Elliott perceives as being the crucial factor to Margaret’s success as philanthropic mediator. Just as Margaret is willing to learn the ‘unfamiliar languages of the North,’ Higgins is also willing to learn from his new southern friend. Even during this initial meeting their relationship is one of quality and reciprocation, as he perceives that the reason for her irritation is his rebuff of her offer to visit, he tells Bessy: “I can read her proud bonny face like a book.”¹⁵⁵

This vision of philanthropy appears in the short stories Gaskell chose for the *Christian Socialist*, and also Kingsley’s *Alton Locke*, where it is expressed in far clearer terms than in Gaskell’s work. As Alton travels into the country to seek out his cousin, he sees a family: “the fair wife threw after me a pitying glance, which I was afraid might develop itself into some offer of food or money – a thing which I scorned and dreaded.”¹⁵⁶ He hurries by, in order that they will not have the opportunity to offer charity, but soon regrets his actions:

as I walked on once more, my heart smote me. If they had wished to be kind, why had I grudged them the opportunity of a good deed? At all events, I might have asked their advice. In a natural and harmonious state, when society really means brotherhood, a man could go up to any stranger, to give and receive, if not succour, yet still experience and wisdom.¹⁵⁷

Alton’s speech then takes a more political turn, as the future Chartist considers his duty to “preach the cause of my class.”¹⁵⁸ Gaskell’s short stories demonstrate individuals setting aside their differences to work together. As noted earlier, they had both been previously published elsewhere, so whilst she did not write them specifically for the Christian Socialists, it would appear that she chose them carefully. “Christmas Storms and Sunshine” tells the story of the ‘chief compositors’ from rival newspapers, Mr

¹⁵⁴ NS 421.

¹⁵⁵ NS 74.

¹⁵⁶ AL130.

¹⁵⁷ AL 130.

¹⁵⁸ AL 130.

Hodgson and Mr Jenkins, who, with their families, lodge in the same house as one another. The drama occurs on Christmas Eve when Mary Hodgson beats the Jenkins' cat after he gnaws the cold mutton she had set aside for her husband's dinner. The attack is witnessed by Mrs Jenkins and a bitter argument follows between the two women. When Mrs Hodgson's baby suffers an attack of croup later that same day she is forced to beg Mrs Jenkins for hot water and is promptly turned away. However, Mrs Jenkins soon relents and through her ministrations, the baby recovers, and the two women become friends. In "The Sexton's Hero" two friends are discussing the definition of a hero, when the sexton interrupts to offer Gilbert Dawson as the true definition of a hero. Years previously Dawson had lost the affections of the woman he loved to the sexton, when he refused to engage in a fight with him; however, he later rescued them both from an incoming tide, sacrificing his own life. Both stories demonstrate selfless actions being performed by ordinary people who arguably have good reason to resent those who are in need. In 1855 Gaskell was delighted to hear that these 'moral and sensible' stories were so well liked by working men and women.¹⁵⁹

In *North and South* Gaskell again returns to the theme of human relations in an industrial city, this time her sense of purpose increased through her affinity with the Christian Socialist movement. Whilst *North and South* was not written as a Christian Socialist text, in the way that *Alton Locke* was, and should certainly not be considered as propaganda, it does reflect many of the ideas and values of the movement. Gaskell certainly does not promote the solutions proposed by the Christian Socialists, such as the associative workshops, but she is keen to promote the principles of brotherhood and fellowship on which they were founded with the aim of motivating individual men towards change. In her final philanthropic novel she again portrays individuals acting philanthropically, and in this novel further develops a vision of philanthropy that has the potential to cross class boundaries.

¹⁵⁹ L 365.

5 Conclusions

This thesis has examined the relationship between the philanthropy Gaskell participated in during the mid 1830s to mid 1850s, and her first three novels, *Mary Barton*, *Ruth*, and *North and South*; demonstrating that Gaskell's engagement with Victorian philanthropy is an issue of far greater complexity than has generally been assumed. By examining Gaskell within the context of Victorian philanthropy, I have demonstrated that Gaskell's philanthropic writing originates in her dissatisfaction with the philanthropy practised by her contemporaries in Manchester. An examination of Gaskell's philanthropic activities has revealed the extent to which her own philanthropic ideas were at variance with many of her acquaintances, prompting her to define her own vision of philanthropy in her novels.

Typically these three novels have been referred to as social problem novels, but were redefined as philanthropic novels in the early 1990s. Through this interpretation the writer can be perceived adopting the role of mediator, with the text enacting the process of female visiting. However, these studies examined Gaskell's philanthropic writing within the context of her other philanthropic activities only very briefly, if at all. All too often, critics simply refer to her letters, citing her involvement with the Sunday Schools, participation with bazaars, and visits to Manchester's poor, as proof of an unquestioningly benevolent spirit. The influence of Gaskell's own philanthropic interests has rarely been pursued, except in the case of Pasley, who is generally considered to have been an influence, if not the inspiration for her second philanthropic novel, *Ruth*. Whilst the depth of Gaskell's benevolence is certainly not in question the danger in assuming Gaskell to have participated willingly and gladly with all of her philanthropic endeavours is to perceive her writing as an extension of this philanthropy. My thesis has demonstrated that we should instead perceive Gaskell's philanthropic writing as a reaction against some of her other philanthropic endeavours.

Placing Gaskell within the context of Victorian attitudes to philanthropy is revealing. Industrialisation had created many varied and new problems for philanthropists, existing methods of administering philanthropic aid were no longer considered sufficient. 'Associated philanthropy'

became increasingly popular during the Victorian period as a mode of addressing the many problems faced by the poor. Using newspaper articles, my thesis has explored Gaskell's participation with several examples of 'associated philanthropy,' which has revealed Gaskell's belief in the inadequacy of this form of philanthropy. 'Associated philanthropy' is the term assigned by David Owen to the manner in which groups of individuals joined together to achieve philanthropic purposes. In terms of organisation this usually took the form of committee, and fundraising was achieved through banquets, balls and bazaars; all of which were lavish events designed for middle-class entertainment. My research has shown that frequently the level of contact between philanthropist and recipient was minimal.

An investigation of an example of 'associated philanthropy' and an examination of her letters, reveals that Gaskell's ideas regarding philanthropy were at variance with those of her contemporaries in Manchester, many of whom were acquaintances from the Cross Street congregation. A brief examination of Unitarian attitudes towards philanthropy revealed that as a denomination they encouraged the wealthier classes to act as stewards, looking after the moral and physical well being of the poor. However, this seems to have encouraged people to place too great an emphasis on simply donating money, and Gaskell felt that many people in Manchester had a 'lazy way of doing good,' it was all too easy for them to offer money without demonstrating any interest in the philanthropic cause. For Gaskell, it was far worthier to offer time and commitment, than money. Simply offering money, had also its own attendant dangers, the donor may not have felt they were getting their money's worth, and the recipient would only be maintained in their current situation. Instead Gaskell favoured 'private efforts' and 'individual exertions,' her letters concerning Pasley reveal just how much time and effort she was willing to take to help an individual.

Examining Gaskell's three philanthropic novels chronologically we can see a rejection of associated philanthropy, and we can perceive a closer relationship between writing and philanthropy when she is pursuing her own particular interests. Whilst *Mary Barton* can be perceived as arising out of Gaskell's rejection of 'associated philanthropy,' there is no direct link between that form of philanthropy and the novel; and whilst *North and South* engages with and articulates the ideas of the

Christian Socialist movement, Gaskell is utilising their ideas to promote her own form of philanthropy rather than the associative workshops advocated by the Christian Socialists. In *Ruth* a much closer relationship is evident: prior to beginning her novel, we can see Gaskell actively engaging with the form of philanthropy she advocated to her readers. She is personally involved with assisting an individual case; we are fortunate that letters detailing this survive, and her involvement with a form of ‘associated philanthropy’ aiming to improve conditions for dressmakers provides a fuller picture. We can see how this philanthropy would have seemed entirely inadequate to Gaskell. ‘Associated philanthropy’ served to continue the traditional relationship between philanthropist and recipient, that of gratitude and conformity in return for financial or material assistance. My research has revealed that for Gaskell, philanthropy involved reciprocity. A rejection of ‘associated philanthropy’ can also be perceived more generally, as each of her novels portrays individuals acting philanthropically. In her first novel, *Mary Barton*, Gaskell portrays the many ways in which the working classes help one another. In her two subsequent novels Gaskell demonstrates the potential for this philanthropy to cross class boundaries in a reciprocal manner. In *Ruth*, in particular, Gaskell demonstrates the potential for a reciprocal form of philanthropy to transform individuals; if philanthropy were reduced to merely subscribing to an institution, or offering a donation, this relationship would cease to exist.

As well as a development of her own philanthropic vision across the three novels, we can perceive alongside this a development of her style. Her first philanthropic novel is very instructive, and it has often been noted that the didactic element impedes aesthetic development; however, the didactic element decreases across the three novels, yet the message behind them remains clear. It seems fair to say that to some extent in each of the three novels, the philanthropic impulse does impede artistic development. Gaskell was engaging with difficult, and at times, controversial, social issues in each of them. Approaching such debates must to a certain extent have made her wary, and there is certainly a sense of this in her letters. She often prevaricates, attempting to deny, either that she is writing, or that

publication is imminent. In 1852 she wrote to Marianne: “I hate publishing because of the talk people make, which I always feel as a great impertinence.”¹

We can arguably perceive the clearest articulation of Gaskell’s philanthropic vision in *Ruth*. Firstly, as the relationship between her writing and her other philanthropic pursuits is strongest here, she was involved not just with a social issue, but with an individual case. As Sally Mitchell has noted: “Fiction extends the personal, it turns problems into people,”² and Pasley was not just a philanthropic case, she was a young, helpless girl who had suffered terribly. Furthermore, Gaskell’s vision is more effective in the small community she has chosen as the setting for *Ruth*, rather than in an industrial setting. The solutions Gaskell offered to industrial problems have often been criticised as inadequate, and this seems somewhat unfair; Gaskell was after all, a novelist, not a politician. Perhaps also her attempts to demonstrate her philanthropic vision within the bounds of political economy (rather than reforming the system), proved an impediment to the articulation of her vision in the industrial novels. However, whilst her philanthropic vision is perhaps not deployed as effectively as in *Ruth*, her personal belief in the power of individuals to effect change is evident. We can imagine that the novels would have been considered a success by Gaskell if even one mill owner assimilated their message, and adapted his working practices accordingly.

North and South was Gaskell’s final philanthropic novel, yet she continued to write, producing two more novels; *Sylvia’s Lovers* (1863), and *Wives and Daughters* (1864-66); the novella *Cousin Phyllis* (1863); a biography of Charlotte Brontë (1857); and numerous short stories. Whilst Gaskell moves beyond what can be considered as philanthropic writing, the main elements of her philanthropic vision are still evident in her writing. Gaskell’s philanthropic vision was as deeply rooted as her faith; it was individual, personal, attentive, adaptable, reciprocal, and also impulsive. In practice, it did not require the sanction of a philanthropic institution, but could operate at any time, anywhere. Through her fiction Gaskell demonstrates how individuals assist one another, as she did herself, and make a real

¹ L 209.

² Sally Mitchell, *The Fallen Angel: Chastity, Class, and Women’s Reading, 1835-1880* (Bowling Green: Bowling Green UP, 1981) 22.

difference. In this light, we can truly perceive how remarkable her philanthropic vision was in comparison with ‘associated philanthropy.’

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