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Apprentice and Mentor?

The Influence of Victorian Women Writers Analysed Through the Relationship and Works of Elizabeth Gaskell and Charles Dickens

M.A. Thesis

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Abstract

Around the middle of the nineteenth century, the Victorian publishing world – like most of society – was very male oriented. Although Victorians had begun to accept female writers, especially when it came to novel writing, many still believed that women writers showed lack of originality and that they would never be anything other than imitators of men's superior works. This ideology largely persisted throughout the twentieth century and even today, scholars and critics seem more inclined to recognise the influences of males in the works of male authors, while the possibility of women's influence on male writers seems to have been largely ignored.

This M.A. thesis examines the status and influence of Victorian women writers through the relationship and works of Elizabeth Gaskell and Charles Dickens. Biographies and letters are used to examine their evolving work relationship, as editor and contributor to Dickens's magazine *Household Words*, and their interaction with each other and those around them are used to shed a light on their own status in relation to society and their own sense of authorship. By comparing and contrasting Dickens and Gaskell as writers of social novels, it becomes evident that Gaskell's gender and her status as a new author did in fact enable her to challenge accepted novelistic methods in ways that Dickens could not. Gaskell's novels provide readers with a sharp and realistic portrayal of Victorian social problems, unaffected by the excess humour or melodrama that often reduces the power of Dickens's social commentary. Moreover, instead of being unduly influenced by Dickens's own serial style, Gaskell's originality appears to have influenced and inspired Dickens, rather than the other way around. Through a detailed comparison of works such as *Hard Times* and *North and South*, possible evidence of Dickens having borrowed ideas and phrases from Gaskell's works are revealed and throw into question the unilateral notion that Victorian male authors served only as mentors to early Victorian female writers.

Útdráttur

Um miðja nítjándu öldina var hinum viktoríanska útgáfuheimi – líkt og flestu öðru í samfélaginu – stjórnað af karlmönnum. Jafnvel þótt þegnar Viktoríu drottningar hafi að einhverju leyti viðurkennt kvenkyns rithöfunda, sérstaklega þá sem skrifuðu skáldsögur, töldu margir að verk kvenrithöfunda sýndu skort á frumleika og að þær myndu ætíð vera eftirhermur æðri karlkyns rithöfunda. Þessi hugmyndafræði virðist að miklu leyti hafa haldið velli megnið af tuttugustu öldinni og ennþann dag í dag virðast fræðimenn og gangrýnendur fúsari að viðurkenna áhrif karla á verk annarra karlkyns rithöfunda. Á meðan virðist möguleikinn á áhrifum kvenrithöfunda á skrifa karla hundsaður.

Í þessari meistararitgerð er rannsökuð staða og áhrif viktoríanskra kvenrithöfunda í gegnum samband og verk Elizabeth Gaskell og Charles Dickens. Ævisögur og bréf eru skoðuð til að kanna þróun sambands þeirra, og samskipti þeirra við hvort annað og aðra eru notuð til að varpa ljósi á stöðu þeirra gagnvart samfélaginu og þeirra eigin skilningi á stöðu sinni sem rithöfundar. Með því að bera saman Dickens og Gaskell sem höfunda samfélagslegrar gagnrýni kemur greinilega í ljós að kyn Gaskell, auk stöðu hennar sem nýr rithöfundur, gerðu henni kleift að rísa gegn viðurkenndum aðferðum og viðfangsefnum viktoríönsku skáldsögunnar, á þann hátt sem Dickens gat ekki. Skáldsögur Gaskell veita skarpa og raunsæja innsýn inn í félagsleg vandamál viktorísks samfélags og þær eru á allan hátt ósnortnar af þeim broslega og oft melódramatíska stíl sem einkennir samfélagsskrif Dickens. Í stað þess að vera undir óþarflega miklum áhrifum frá hinum einstaka framhaldssagnastíl sem Dickens notaði, virðist frumleiki Gaskell og hugmyndaauðgi ennfremur hafa haft áhrif á Dickens og veitt honum innblástur. Með nákvæmum samanburði á verkum eins og *Hard Times* og *North and South* má finna mögulegar sannanir fyrir því að Dickens hafi fengið að láni hugmyndir og orðtök úr verkum Gaskell, sem vefengir hið einhliða viðhorf að viktoríanskir karlrithöfundar hafi einungis verið lærimeistarar viktoríanskra kvenrithöfunda.

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Introduction – A Tale of Two Authors

The Victorian age was a period of great literary achievements. Whether in poetry, fiction, drama, non-fiction prose or simple everyday letter writing, the nineteenth century was by any standards prolific. Nevertheless, as Maureen Moran states, "[f]iction – particularly the novel" was arguably "*the* most influential and popular Victorian literary form" (78, original emphasis). Great English novelists abound in the Victorian period: the Brontës, William M. Thackeray, George Eliot, Robert Louis Stevenson and Thomas Hardy – these authors and their works are still widely recognised and popular today.

However, the most prominent novelist – if not the greatest – of the Victorian age is without a doubt Charles Dickens (1812-1870). Many view Dickens as second only to Shakespeare as a writer in the English language. His work as author, editor and publisher has ensured him a place as one of the most prominent figures in Victorian culture, as well as one of the best known authors in the world. As Claire Tomalin reveals, Dickens led an active life; he was always preoccupied, whether at work, out walking, writing letters or meeting with friends. His great sociability ensured his association with many of the greatest literary figures of his time, in Britain and elsewhere: H. C. Andersen, Thomas Carlyle, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Alexandre Dumas, Victor Hugo and Washington Irving ranked among his numerous acquaintances. Moreover, his magazines *Household Words* and *All the Year Round* brought Dickens into contact with other fellow authors of the period; one such was Elizabeth Cleghorn Gaskell.

Elizabeth Gaskell (1810-1865) was a Victorian novelist and short story writer and the wife of a Unitarian minister in Manchester. She burst onto the literary scene in 1848 with her first novel *Mary Barton*, a story which focuses on the interactions between the higher and lower classes in the large industrial city of Manchester, bringing to light the often horrid living conditions of the poor and the inequality and indifference that the lower classes faced. As Jenny Uglow accounts, the novel at once "sparked off furious arguments, especially . . . in Manchester" (214). Nevertheless, it received numerous favourable reviews, especially outside the city (Uglow 215-217), and despite Gaskell's longing to keep her authorship hidden, it was soon discovered and "within weeks she found herself in the limelight" (Uglow 215). Like Dickens, Gaskell became acquainted with many of the most prominent figures in Victorian society and she was

on friendly terms with some of the greatest female intellectuals of her time, women like Harriet Martineau, Florence Nightingale and Anna Jameson, with whom she shared a passion for social reform (Uglow 7, 219-220). Gaskell was one of the initial contributors to Dickens's *Household Words*, established in 1850, and she continued publishing her works in his magazines until 1863, when her final contribution appeared in *All the Year Round*, the magazine which "arose from the ashes of *Household Words*" (Drew, "*All*" 9). The majority of Gaskell's works were published in Dickens's magazines, most predominantly short stories and novellas, but also two of her best known novels today, *North and South* and *Cranford*.

The idea for *Household Words* had been brewing in Dickens's mind for quite some years before it eventually emerged in 1850 (Drew, "*Words*" 284). As John Drew explains, each issue of the weekly journal was composed of twenty-four pages ("*Words*" 284), and "Dickens's overriding concern in making up each issue was the stylistic balance and variety of the whole" ("*Words*" 287). Each weekly instalment was composed of pieces from roughly three categories, "literary entertainment . . . informative articles" and articles on "urgent social issues" (Drew, "*Words*" 286), and as editor it was Dickens's role to advice and help Gaskell to adjust her contributions to best suit the needs of the journal.

Despite Dickens and Gaskell's many shared interests and their mutual passion for social reform, their relationship as editor and contributor "was always slightly uneasy" (Easson, *Heritage* 5). From the start, Dickens began suggesting changes to Gaskell's works (Hopkins 359-360; *Letters* 6: 48), which were usually rather lengthy and full of details. Although some of these alterations may have seemed minimal in Dickens's eyes (*Letters* 6: 48, 65), many were in fact, as Hopkins points out, somewhat drastic; alternative titles and endings, and sometimes major changes to the plot were all encouraged by Dickens. At first, Gaskell gave in to Dickens's urging (Hopkins 360); however, she soon showed increased concern for her works and how they appeared in Dickens's magazine.

Hopkins reveals "that from the start [Gaskell] seems to have had reservations on the suitability of her work for magazine publication" (359), and it was not long before she began ignoring editorial advice, which did not sit too well with Dickens. Their divide over Gaskell's contributions and their presentation in *Household Words* reached an all-time height around the serialisation of *North and South* in 1845-1855, when Dickens was willing to allow "the practical requirements" of serialisation to override

"the artistic demands of the book" (Hopkins 369), which was something Gaskell could not allow. Consequently, she resisted changes urged by Dickens and ultimately ended up stepping into his role as editor, arranging and dividing her novel into parts as she saw fit (Hopkins 372). Although Gaskell continued to contribute to Dickens's magazines for almost a decade to come, Hopkins believes that the affair surrounding the publication of *North and South* marked the end of Gaskell's satisfactory involvement with Dickens's journals (375-76). In any case, their work relationship never seemed to recover from the turmoil surrounding *North and South.*

Dickens and Gaskell's interactions during these thirteen years of publication provide insight into the relationship between male editors and contributing female writers during the Victorian era. Simultaneously a contributor, editor and publisher of his own works in *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*, Dickens seems to have been free to do as he pleased, while Gaskell seemingly had little choice but to adhere to Dickens's editorial directions to avoid evoking his indignation. However, as Gaskell began to see herself as a writer in her own right, she started to view her own works "as my own property" (*Letters* 536), and throughout their collaboration Dickens and Gaskell appear to have been fighting for control, trying to establish who had the ultimate choice in the management of a text; not only as writer and editor, but also as an acclaimed and established male author and an up-and-coming female author.

It is significant that during Gaskell's lifetime the publishing business – like most of society – was very male oriented and women writers could only be published in a publishing world ruled by men, until the appearance of women editors and publishers in the latter part of the nineteenth century (Showalter, *Literature* 16). This brings up questions regarding the status of female authors and their works around the middle of the Victorian era. To what extent were women's works being influenced by male opinions during the Victorian period? Victorian critics and Dickens and Gaskell's contemporaries reflected on this; one such was John Stuart Mill.

In his *The Subjection of Women* (written in 1861, but published in 1869) Mill explores, among other things, the status of women's writing in the Victorian age and speculates whether female writers can effectually detach themselves from the overruling influence of male writers (545-549). Mill argues that the main reason for the "inferiority" of women's works can be traced to their "deficiency of originality" (546). Although many of "[o]ur best novelists in point of composition, and of the management of detail, have mostly been women" (546), Mill reasons that due to their lack of

education and disciplined development of the mind, "[w]omen artists are all amateurs" (549). He argues that if "women lived in a different country from men, and had never read any of their writings, they would have had a literature of their own," but unfortunately women writers would always be imitators, "pupils of the great male writers" (Mill 548).

A similar concern about the lack of innovation in the works of Victorian women writers became central to feminists in the twentieth century, especially during the second wave of feminism in the 1970s, which focused on literature written by women and its status in history and culture. Elaine Showalter, one of the leading theorists of second wave feminism, discusses notions similar to Mill's in her book *A Literature of Their Own*, where she suggests three major stages that all literary subcultures – including women's literature – go through; the first being "a prolonged phase of *imitation* of the prevailing modes of the dominant tradition, and *internalization* of its standards of art and its views on social roles" (*Literature* 11, original emphasis). Again, Victorian female writers are put in the role of the imitator. Women writers were usually seen as having influenced other writers of the same sex and male writers constantly influenced other male writers. Surely, it is inevitable for well-read women writers to have been uninfluenced by male writers and as editors and publishers men were indeed in a prime position to exert their authority over women's writing. However, the possibility of women writers having influenced male writers seems to have been largely ignored.

This thesis will explore the relationship between male and female authors, through the study of Elizabeth Gaskell's relationship with Charles Dickens, her long-standing editor and publisher. Biographies and letters will be used to examine Dickens and Gaskell's evolving work relationship, and their interaction with each other and those around them – family members and friends alike – will be used to shed a light on their own status in relation to society and their own sense of authorship. The status of women writers and women in general will be scrutinised through the prevailing ideological debates within Victorian society about women's proper role as seen by patriarchal traditionalists and feminist activists. These, alongside the ideas of John Stuart Mill and Elaine Showalter about the dominating influence of male writers on female authors, will be used to analyse the works of Dickens and Gaskell. To what extent can Gaskell's writing be seen to be influenced by Dickens, both as a major literary figure and as her editor, especially in view of *North and South*? Is Gaskell

merely imitating Dickens and other male authors in her writing, like Showalter and Mill might suggest, or is she pushing the boundaries of the female tradition as viewed by theorists? Does Gaskell's voice stay intact, or is she overruled by Dickens's editorial predilections? This thesis will attempt to answer these questions and more, by comparing and contrasting Dickens and Gaskell as writers of social novels. Two novels by each author will be examined in detail, one having been written before the two authors began working together and the other written during the relative height of their work relationship; these novels are *Mary Barton* (1848) and *North and South* (1855) by Gaskell and *Oliver Twist* (1838) and *Hard Times* (1854) by Dickens. Some other works by the two authors will be touched upon or briefly examined, especially the novels *Cranford* (1853) and *Sylvia's Lovers* (1863) by Gaskell, and *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) by Dickens. Their evolvement as authors will be examined through these specific works, and possible influences considered.

Interestingly, it is Gaskell's style which makes her social novels more effective than those of Dickens. Even though Dickens is usually recognised as one of the greatest social commentators of the Victorian age, it is Gaskell who provides readers with a sharp and bitingly realistic portrayal of Victorian social problems, unaffected by the excess humour or melodrama that often reduces the power of Dickens's social commentary. Gaskell rather aims at a truthful portrayal of real situations, however shocking and uncomfortable they might be. Moreover, instead of being unduly influenced by Dickens's own serial style in the creation of *North and South*, Gaskell rather attempted to construct her own successful serial form. Due to Dickens's editorial influence and restrictions concerning length the latter part of the novel suffered and the balance of the text was only perfected after the novel's amelioration for publication in the three volume form. Eventually, Gaskell's originality seems to have influenced and inspired Dickens, rather than the other way around. Possible evidence of Dickens having borrowed ideas and phrases from those of Gaskell's works that were published under his guidance in *Household Words* can be found and throws into question the unilateral feminist notion that Victorian male authors served only as mentors to early Victorian female writers.

Elizabeth Gaskell and Charles Dickens

Social Concerns and Mutual Affairs

Initially, Dickens became intrigued by Gaskell because of their mutual interest in social problems, such as the conditions of the working classes and of those supressed and marginalised by society (Hopkins 357). According to Herbert Sussman, "the transformation" of society in the early decades of the nineteenth century was not a single colossal transformation, but rather "the coming together of changes dating from at least the later eighteenth century, a confluence of existing technologies and new inventions within a particular economic system" (244). Regardless of this, the apparently sudden changes in society brought about by the rapid industrialisation in Britain caused concern among Victorians, and triggered reactions from social commentators, such as Carlyle and Friedrich Engels, and also from novelists like Dickens and Gaskell, who feared the influences and consequences of industrialisation upon society. Moran reveals that throughout the early period of Victorian culture (roughly defined from 1837-1850), "fear of social unrest and economic instability appeared in public discourse" (2). The debate was largely dominated by "the prosperous middle class" which "enforc[ed] *its* values as the means of satisfying both individual aspirations and the needs of the nation" (Moran 3, original emphasis). Dickens and Gaskell would surely be classified as belonging to that specific group, yet they both employed actions as well as words in their fight for social changes.

As Claire Tomalin notes, Dickens himself was "generous in giving help" (xliii). He is famous for his refuge for the fallen women of London, Urania Cottage – most often referred to as the Home for Homeless Women – which he established in cooperation with the Unitarian philanthropist Angela Burdett Coutts (Tomalin xxviii, 147-148, 203-204; Uglow 246), and which was "a central part of his life for more than a decade" (Tomalin 179).[1] Dickens also frequently arranged benefits and raised funds to assist friends or acquaintances in need, perhaps most famously the Elton orphans, who had lost both of their parents (Tomalin 146-47). Dickens even managed to merge his passion for assisting people in need with his love for the theatre and acting, by putting on amateur theatricals during various points of his lifetime, giving "all the proceeds . . . to charity" (Tomalin 170). As Tomalin explains, Dickens was from early on "fired with

[1] Coutts had inherited a large fortune from her grandfather, which subsequently made her "Britain's richest woman save the Queen;" she became "the first woman to be raised to the peerage" in 1871 (Collins, "Coutts" 127).

anger and horror at the indifference of the rich to the fate of the poor" (149) and he often found outlet for that anger in his works. The earliest example of social commentary in Dickens's works is found in *Sketches by Boz*, Dickens's first book, where it serves as "an important element in many sketches" (Schlicke, "*Sketches*" 545), such as "A Visit to Newgate" (Patten, "Newgate" 405). Dickens is famous for his visits to Newgate Prison, where he viewed the harsh conditions of prisoners first hand. His fascination with prisons is mostly traced back to his father's imprisonment for debt, which is directly linked to his own experience of working in a blacking factory at the age of twelve. This personal experience of child labour explains Dickens's aversion towards the ill-treatment of children, best represented in *Oliver Twist*, his "satire on the workhouse system and the role of the 1834 New Poor Law" (Gill, "Introduction" ix). Later in life, in 1854, Dickens "ran a series of articles on public-health issues in *Household Words*" (Tomalin 227) and social commentary became a central theme in Dickens's *Bleak House*, *Hard Times* and *Little Dorrit*, all published in the 1850s.

While Dickens's own experience can largely be seen as a catalyst for his great social concern, Gaskell's concern stemmed from different reasons. She became involved in charitable work through her religion and her marriage to William Gaskell. A Unitarian minister at Cross Street Chapel, "the major Unitarian chapel in Manchester" (Uglow 75), William was involved in various charitable and social work throughout his life, as befitted a minister of his status. During the "hungry forties" Gaskell witnessed first-hand the miserable situation of many of the poorer classes in Manchester. While the Gaskells, through their involvement with the District Provident Society, "fed long queues of hungry people who came to their kitchen doors each morning" (Uglow 141), Gaskell's main venue of choice during these years became the Mosley Street Sunday school in Manchester (Uglow 90), which according to Cobden Smith seemed the only place where she "gladly played 'minister's wife'" (qtd. in Uglow 90). Still, Gaskell always "rather resisted full involvement" in the charitable work that might have been seen as fit for a minister's wife (Uglow 82). According to a friend of hers, Mary Jane Herford, "[s]he steadily and consistently objected to her time being considered as belonging in any way to her husband's congregation" (qtd. in Chapple, "Unitarian" 172); instead, "[w]hat she did was of her own choice and desire" (qtd. in Uglow 82).

Although "Unitarian women were as influential as men in social reform" during the nineteenth century (Uglow 7), most of Gaskell's social relief may be said to have been in the form of her writing. As a wife and mother of four young daughters by late

1846, Gaskell had to take care of household chores as well as assume the role of hostess to her various friends and acquaintances during visits and dinners. This meant that she would never have the same amount of spare time as her husband, or Dickens, to spend on matters of her own choice; what little free time she had would have to be spent wisely. Therefore, for Gaskell it was either a dedication to social work, or to her writing. Although, as Uglow points out, Gaskell's "writing career was unusual, and a bit embarrassing in a minister's wife" (259), she stood by her choice and writing became "Gaskell's most effective form of philanthropy" (Uglow 318). Once her career took off, Gaskell's "only firm commitment" was to the Sunday school of Cross Street (Uglow 300), yet, despite limited time, Gaskell still managed to help those in need in Manchester, and as John Chapple states, although "[h]er social conscience was randomly exercised" it was "always practical and discriminating" ("Unitarian" 172).

Most of the social help and avid reforms implemented in Manchester during Gaskell's lifetime can be explained by the large numbers of Unitarians in the city. Rooted in British Calvinism, Unitarianism was one of the many dissenting religions in Britain during the nineteenth century. Unitarians saw Christ as human, instead of a divine being, and accordingly rejected the Trinity and believed in one God, while also rejecting original sin, predestination and preelection (Newsom, "Unitarianism" 589; Uglow 5). Chapple explains that "the search for truth was a supreme value," for Unitarians, "consistent with Enlightenment ideals of freedom of rational thought and inquiry, liberty of conscience, tolerance, and self-improvement" ("Unitarian" 165). Thus Unitarians emphasised education and enlightenment of the mind. A good example of the dedicated spirit to reform among many prominent Manchester residents – many of whom were dissenters – can be seen in the action taken during the severe outbreak of cholera in Manchester in 1832. A specially established board of health published the findings of the young doctor James P. Kay in a revolutionary pamphlet, which traced the epidemic to "filth and overcrowding of the cities" rather than "an act of God," and thus "implied that it could . . . be eradicated, or at least ameliorated, by human endeavours" (Uglow 89). Sanitary reform became a matter of heated debate in Britain from the early 1840s onwards, with the Utilitarian Sir Edwin Chadwick and Dr Thomas Southwood Smith in the forefront. Both were members of the Health of Towns Association, along with Dickens himself (Pope 478; Newsom "Chadwick" 70), who was convinced that "[s]earching Sanitary Reform must precede all other social remedies" (qtd. in Pope 477). William Gaskell also became involved in sanitary and

housing reforms in Manchester through his own committee work, for example through the Manchester Sanitary Association, which Gaskell herself supported (Uglow 89, 556).

A Dreary Beginning

It is evident that Dickens and Gaskell shared many of their social concerns. They both saw the importance of improving public education, public health, sanitation and housing and were equally concerned about what seemed to be the ever increasing gap between the classes. Dickens and Gaskell seemed destined to cross paths and their admiration of each other's works eventually brought them together.

Upon the publication of her first novel, *Mary Barton*, Gaskell sent Dickens a copy of her book, "more to satisfy my own feelings, than to receive thanks" (*Letters* 65). As Uglow explains, Gaskell "had asked for copies to be sent to writers she admired, Dickens and Carlyle among them" (216).[2] As Uglow accounts, as a courtesy and in acknowledgement of her gift, Carlyle wrote back to Gaskell "almost at once," praising her novel, "as well as the astute choice of a new and important field" (217). Dickens most certainly received Gaskell's gift, since he mentions it lying on a table in his study, in a short note to his man-servant John Thompson (*Letters* 5: 498), and as Angus Easson concludes, Dickens "was clearly sufficiently impressed to draw [the novel] to the attention of Samuel Rogers in February 1849" (*Heritage* 5). Yet unlike Carlyle, Dickens never mentioned or acknowledged Gaskell's gift in any formal way, which Uglow views as "a poor start to their future relationship" (216). Luckily, Dickens's slight was exceptional; high praise and good reviews made *Mary Barton* "a best-seller" (Easson, *Heritage* 3); Henry Fothergill Chorley, a reviewer at the prestigious *Athenaeum*, even compared Gaskell with Walter Scott and Maria Edgeworth (Easson, *Heritage* 331), since she was "opening up a new region in Lancashire, as they had opened up Scotland and Ireland" to the general public (Easson, *Heritage* 2).

Thanks to swift fame and literary success Gaskell went to London and "was welcomed, with John Forster's help, into literary and social circles" (Easson, *Heritage*

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[2] Gaskell's letters reveal two instances where she fondly discusses Dickens's works. The former is in a letter to her friend Eliza Fox (nicknamed Tottie), dating from May 1849, where Gaskell sends her greatest thanks to Eliza for sending her a copy of *David Copperfield*, which she did "so like" (*Letters* 77). Later, in a letter to her daughters Marianne and Meta, most likely dated in late 1855, Gaskell mentions reading *Little Dorrit* over a man's shoulder on the bus: "Oh *Polly* [Marianne]! he was such a slow reader . . . my impatience at his *never* getting to the bottom of the page [. . .] *We* only read the first two chapters, so I never found out who 'Little Dorrit' is . . ." (*Letters* 373, original emphasis). Any possible references to Gaskell's admiration of Dickens's other works – if ever recorded – are now lost.

4). Dickens and Gaskell presumably met for the first time at a dinner party hosted by the Dickenses on 12 May in the spring of 1849.[3] The meeting does not seem to have sparked any particular interest in Dickens on Gaskell's behalf, if her letter to Anne Green, written on 13 May, is any indication. In the letter, Gaskell mentions having been seated "between Dickens & Douglas Jerrold" during dinner and even though Dickens was notoriously famous for his humour it was Jerrold's wit and "bon-mots" she admires (*Letters* 828). She does seem to have admired Dickens's literary authority and his status as a writer, since she described his study in more detail than anything else in his house (*Letters* 828); however, the description could merely be for Green's benefit, since Gaskell "thought [she] would like to hear about" it (*Letters* 828).[4] Judging by his letters, Dickens seems to have been equally unimpressed with Gaskell. The earliest recorded mention of her is in a letter dated 14 May in 1849 to Mr Talfourd, where Dickens confides that he was "engaged (for my sins) to go with Mary Barton to the German opera, and to dine with her, first" (*Letters* 5: 538-39) – Mary Barton obviously being Gaskell herself. Dickens does not appear to have been overly excited about his meeting with Gaskell, since he claimed to be "in a state of the utmost vexation at not being able to come today" to meet Mr Talfourd (*Letters* 5: 538). Dickens rather appears to have seen his engagement as "a chore" (Uglow 226), and would likely have preferred to meet with a male friend than the up-and-coming Gaskell.

Dickens and Gaskell's first recorded correspondence was not related to literature or publishing, as one might suspect, but rather concerned their mutual interest in helping others. It was Gaskell herself who sent the first letter to Dickens, dated 8 January 1850. Being familiar with Dickens's organised help for prostitutes in London, Gaskell hoped to gain his help in saving an unfortunate girl from Manchester (*Letters* 98-100). Her effort was fruitful; although Dickens himself could not do anything in the matter, he sent Gaskell the first page of a letter from Miss Coutts addressed to himself, which contained helpful advice for Gaskell's girl (Uglow 246, *Letters* 6: 8).

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[3] The exact date of the dinner party in question is rather ambiguous, because of contradicting evidence. According to Uglow, Gaskell received an invitation to a dinner at the Dickenses, taking place on the 31st of March, which she was supposedly unable to attend and thus the visit was postponed. The date on which the latter dinner took place is somewhat questionable. Uglow argues that the 17th of May seems most probable (219, 642-643); however, Forster described a dinner-party which took place on the 12th of May, where Gaskell was among the guests (Storey and Fielding 532). In light of the date of Dickens's letter to Mr Talfourd, Forster's date seems likelier.

[4] Gaskell expresses a similar notion in a letter to Marianne and Meta, dated 17 May 1849 (*Letters* 79).

At the end of January it was Dickens's turn to contact Gaskell, now in an attempt to secure her as a contributor for his new magazine *Household Words*. His letter, dated 31 January in 1850, is very respectful; at the same time hesitant and hopeful, yet also "flattering" and "appealed to her conscience" (Uglow 250):

> I do not know what your literary vows of temperance or abstinence may be, but as I *do* honestly know that there is no living English writer whose aid I would desire to enlist, in preference to the authoress of Mary Barton (a book that most profoundly affected and impressed me) I venture to ask you whether you can give me any hope that you will write a *short* tale, or any number of tales, for the projected pages. [. . .] I should set a value on your help, which your modesty can hardly imagine; and I am perfectly sure that the least result of your reflection or observation in respect of the life around you, would attract attention and do good. (*Letters* 6: 22, original emphasis)

As Hopkins notes, Gaskell's response to this letter – like so many others – is lost (357). Unfortunately, in September 1860 Dickens, in "a ritual act . . . burn[ed] thousands of letters accumulated over the years," thus "ridding himself of the past" (Tomalin 319), and Hopkins believes Gaskell's letters to have been among those which "perished" (357).[5] As Chapple and Shelston reveal, Gaskell was "one of the great letter-writers of the Victorian period" (xi), which makes the loss of her letters – especially those to Dickens – all the more devastating; yet fortunately, some letters survived.

Although Gaskell's reply to Dickens's letter is missing, Hopkins rightly observes that a lot can be deduced about her response to the request from his next letter to her (357). In the letter, dated 5 February 1850, Dickens's tone remains flattering, and he "smartly brushed aside" (Uglow 250) the two main fears that Gaskell appears to have voiced in her response. To begin with, Dickens feels sure that the possibility of a clash between her literary duties with domestic ones was slim; since he is "perfectly confident of [her] power in regard to short tales" she should simply stick to those: "I am morally certain that nothing so true and earnest as your writing, *can go* wrong under your

[5] Dickens's behaviour was not abnormal by Victorian standards. Many Victorians, Gaskell included, shared a fear of publication of their personal correspondence. Uglow points out that "Victorian correspondences, especially those of women, are littered with urgent notes" imploring the recipient to either return the letters or dispose of them in some manner (244), fearing – as Geraldine Jewsbury described it – that they might be "misunderstood" if they got into the wrong hands (qtd. in Uglow 244). Deirdre D'Albertis claims Gaskell "habitually requested that correspondents destroy her letters" (11-12), and her daughters also burned a lot of her correspondence upon her death (Uglow 22).

guidance" (*Letters* 6: 29, original emphasis). In addition, Dickens is not particularly afraid that Gaskell's focus on detail would be an encumbrance to her contributions, since he himself feels that "detail is an indispensable part of the art and the reality of what is written" and thus "cannot be an objection or impediment to any kind in fiction" (*Letters* 6: 29). As it turns out, these two issues which seem to have troubled Gaskell the most at this early stage would become a bone of contention between her and Dickens later on.

Dickens was not the first to appeal to Gaskell to take her on as a contributor to a magazine; after the publication of *Mary Barton* Gaskell appears to have been in high demand. Easson notes a request made by the poet Eliza Cook in early 1849 to enlist Gaskell as a contributor for her own magazine (*Heritage* 5, 101). While Gaskell declined Cook's offer (Easson *Heritage* 5), she appears to have been persuaded by Dickens's reassuring yet firm tone, as he claimed that he would "look forward, with great anxiety, to the receipt of a small packet from you—but with patience too, and in implicit faith" (*Letters* 6: 29). In addition, it is likely that Gaskell was enticed by Dickens's own literary reputation and status in Victorian society; if she was going to publish with someone, Dickens would certainly seem a promising choice.

Whether it was Dickens himself who decided on his own accord to contact Gaskell for his new magazine is not clear. It is true that he claimed to have been "profoundly affected and impressed" by *Mary Barton* in the letter dating from 31 January (*Letters* 6: 22). Uglow points out that this highly flattering passage has often been "quoted to illustrate Dickens's high opinion of Gaskell," yet she goes on to note that "alas, he wrote in this vein to all his potential contributors" (250), which certainly makes one wary of the praise. Moreover, the fact of Dickens's previously mentioned letter to Mr Talfourd and his failure to acknowledge Gaskell's novel, suggests that Dickens was not all that keen on Gaskell. It is possible that John Forster sparked the idea of getting Gaskell to contribute to *Household Words*. Forster had encouraged the publication of *Mary Barton* to Chapman & Hall (Uglow 183; Tomalin 227; Storey and Fielding 497; Easson, *Heritage* 4) and subsequently he and Gaskell quickly became confidants and close friends (Uglow 222-23). According to the history of Chapman & Hall, Forster is described as having "bridg[ed] the gulf between the Patron of the eighteenth century and the Literary Agent of the twentieth" (qtd. in Uglow 183). As Drew points out, Forster had suggested William Henry Wills to Dickens as a suitable sub-editor for *Household Words* ("Wills" 598); therefore the idea that he may have

recommended Gaskell to Dickens does not seem far-fetched, although most likely impossible to prove.[6]

Such speculations aside, Dickens and Gaskell did, as mentioned before, share an interest in "the raising up of those that are down, and the general improvement of our social condition" (*Letters* 6: 22) and thus Gaskell was a logical choice as a contributor to *Household Words*. However, as an editor, Dickens had a clear view of how he wanted his magazine to be and what he wanted to establish through its publication. Once Gaskell sent him "Lizzie Leigh" – her first contribution to the journal – Dickens immediately began to voice his concerns and suggest changes to Gaskell's story.

The short story "Lizzie Leigh" deals with "the 'fall' of a young woman who leaves her farm home . . . to find work in Manchester" (Foster, "Shorter" 113). From the beginning Gaskell chose challenging, if not outright dangerous, social subjects and themes for many of her works, including those published in *Household Words*. Fallen women were certainly a delicate subject in Victorian society, yet it was not the subject matter that triggered Dickens's comments; he thought it "*excellent*"[7] and in fact "it made [him] cry," which he saw as an "indisputable proof of its effect" (*Letters* 6: 48, original emphasis). On the other hand, the length of the story concerned him.

Gaskell's short story is clearly longer than Dickens had anticipated. As Hopkins reveals, "[o]ne of the major policies established for *Household Words*, and, with few exceptions, operating throughout its history, was that of pieces complete in one number or those divisible into not more than four parts" (360). In his letter to his sub-editor William Henry Wills, dated 28 February 1850, Dickens comments that Gaskell's story "is very good, but long" and he foresees that it will have to be divided into three or four instalments (*Letters* 6: 50). Dickens had already suggested some changes to Gaskell's story in a letter dated the day before, along with a nice ending of his own design and a possible title (*Letters* 6: 48). Nevertheless, he is careful not to be too authoritative in his directions, as he twice makes it clear that his ideas are simply suggestions: "I earnestly conjure you not to let me interfere with any idea you may have formed" (*Letters* 6: 48). On 6 March Dickens sent Gaskell another letter, explaining that he intended to specify

[6] Forster is known to have advised Dickens on various other occasions: He suggested that Dickens kill Little Nell in *The Old Curiosity Shop* (Tomalin 114), he discouraged Dickens from founding a new newspaper in the late 1840s (Tomalin 172), he was a "salaried adviser" for *Household Words* (Tomalin 227) and he also helped to negotiate Dickens and Catherine's divorce (Tomalin 295). Evidently, Dickens valued Forster's opinion and trusted his judgement.

[7] This word alone was "[d]oubly underlined" (Storey, Tillotson and Burgis 48), and clearly conveys Dickens's favourable response.

the number of the parts into which her short story would be divided, "in order that the readers may prepare themselves for so much continuation of interest" (*Letters* 6: 55). By this Dickens made it sound as if Gaskell's story was too long to keep readers interested, although Victorian readers were accustomed to having whole novels serialised "in weekly, biweekly, and bimonthly installments as well as in monthly parts" (Hughes and Lund, 107). Nevertheless, Dickens carefully emphasised that the length of the story was not a matter of concern to him: "*Let me particularly beg you not to put the least constraint upon yourself, as to space*. Allow the story to take its own length, and work itself out. I will engage to get it in, very easily, whatsoever the extent to which it may go" (*Letters* 6: 55, original emphasis). These pleas seem to have been a formality or courtesy at the most, as Dickens proves to be rather contradictory in his next letter.

In the letter dated on 14 March 1850 Dickens revealed his editorial claws. Dickens was apparently displeased with how Gaskell executed Lizzie's abandonment of her child, and he was "strongly of opinion that . . . she ought to put that child in Susan's own arms, and not to lay it down at the door," which as he argued – "Observe!" – was a more powerful act (*Letters* 6: 65). He saw this change to the story as "[t]he slightest alteration," which would only be beneficial to Lizzie's story, yet he did not want Gaskell to change it because she felt pressured, but rather because she agreed that his suggestion was better than her earlier intention (Dickens, *Letters* 6: 65). As Hopkins explains, "Mrs. Gaskell very sensibly yielded to his entreaty and made the change" (360), and the short story "was given pride of place in the magazine's first issue, immediately after Dickens's "A Preliminary Word", and, although published anonymously, Gaskell would recognize the compliment" (Easson, *Heritage* 5).

Gaskell's next contribution to *Household Words* included the short stories "The Well of Pen-Morfa" and "The Heart of John Middleton", and while the former story seems to have been accepted without any suggested changes, the latter sparked further editorial interference on Dickens's behalf. He declared to Wills that "[t]he story is very clever," even surpassing *Mary Barton* in quality, yet he believes it destined for failure because of its unhappy ending (*Letters* 6: 231). He seems disappointed and as Hopkins notes, Wills appears to have suggested to Dickens that he might change the ending himself in order to amend the story (361). Dickens refrained from doing so and claimed "I could not think of making so important an alteration in Mrs. Gaskell's story, without her consent. It must therefore stand as it is" (*Letters* 6: 235). Even though this sounds amiable enough, it also clearly indicates that Dickens would not have had any

reservations about making alterations to her story, if they were simply on a smaller scale. Not giving up, Dickens tried to reach Gaskell to get her to change the ending, which he felt brought "an unnecessary infliction of pain upon the reader," which was "not justified by the necessities of the story" (*Letters* 6: 238). Due to a misunderstanding between Dickens and Wills the message reached Gaskell too late, yet her willingness to accept Dickens's reasoning appears evident from his letter to her, dated 20 December 1850, where he explained that the story had already been printed, making any changes impossible (*Letters* 6: 238, 243).

Hopkins reasons that Gaskell appears to have taken Dickens's editorial advice, seemingly without much protest, at this early stage in their relationship and even been "willing to have so important a part as the denouement changed" (362). This might not seem as strange as it first appears; it is important to remember that Dickens was one of the most prominent literary figures of the time and a relatively fresh writer like Gaskell may have felt intimidated or hesitant to challenge his supposedly superior knowledge and literary skills. Still, as Hopkins recalls, Gaskell gave the impression of having been hesitant to contribute to Dickens's magazine from the start, having "reservations on the suitability of her work for magazine publication" (359).

As Shirley Foster explains, most of Gaskell's shorter works first appeared in magazines, "[a]s was common in the period," yet the medium was simultaneously restricting to Gaskell and "to some extent determin[ed] their nature and format" ("Shorter" 109). Foster believes that as Gaskell's "own ideas about what a short story should be became more defined and assured, she increasingly felt the constraints of [Dickens's] editorship" ("Shorter" 110). It is also possible for Dickens himself to have had some doubts about Gaskell's contributions at this point. Hopkins observes that through his contradictory letters to Gaskell and Wills, Dickens seems to have been conflicted "between the intrinsic value" of Gaskell's pieces and their "failure to measure up to the standards of usefulness set up for the magazine" (362), which were "to do some solid good, and . . . be as cheery and pleasant" as possible (Dickens, *Letters* 6: 30). As Uglow states, "Dickens always tried to avoid depressing his family readership" (254) and with the unhappy ending in "The Heart of John Middleton" Gaskell was deviating from the prescribed pattern.

Things Fall Apart

Gaskell may very well have been right in her initial judgement that her works would prove unsuitable for Dickens's magazine. Dickens, however, still voiced his satisfaction with her contributions. When she sent him "Disappearances" in late May in 1851, Dickens was very pleased, claiming that "[i]t is exactly suited to us" (*Letters* 6: 401) and in late November that same year he addressed her as "[m]y Dear Scheherazade" (*Letters* 6: 545), thus making a respectful comparison and acknowledgment of her strength of storytelling (Foster, "Shorter" 108).[8] Gaskell was without a doubt a natural storyteller and "knew the lure of the good story" (Uglow 240). Uglow claims that Gaskell "saw social storytelling as an art" (239), and being talkative by nature she "loved rich, wide-ranging talk . . . full of stories" (237). Incidentally, Dickens's praise rather decreases when one realises that it might be mere flattery to placate Gaskell, since it is used as an opening to a letter written in response to her accusation of him having stolen her ghost story and published as his own.

Gaskell was particularly fond of ghost stories and shared her interest with Dickens (Uglow 244). She was shocked and "furious" when she discovered that he had published one of her favourite ghost stories as his own, under the title "To be Read at Dusk" in the magazine *Heath's Keepsake* in 1851 (Uglow 244-45; Schlicke, "Dusk" 577). Gaskell thought him a "wretch . . . to go and write MY story" and mourned that "I shall have nothing to talk about now at dull parties" (*Letters* 172, original capitalisation). In his response to Gaskell's accusation Dickens made light of her complaint, joking "I never yet met anybody who read the Keepsake" (*Letters* 6: 546).[9] Nevertheless, he fully admitted the theft and Uglow rightly states that "[h]e clearly felt no guilt" (245). Dickens justified his action by saying that he believed ghost stories to be "common-property" (*Letters* 6: 546), which as Uglow reasons is technically valid (245), although the action arguably remains unethical and demeaning for Dickens. He explained that he had himself experienced a similar thing and had his own story published by another writer, "[y]et I never complained" and "have borne it meekly"

[8] As Storey, Tillotson and Burgis explain, Scheherazade is the legendary storyteller from *Thousand and One Nights* (545).

[9] Schlicke brushes Gaskell's accusation aside and reasons that "To Be Read at Dusk" is really composite of "[t]wo brief tales of the supernatural" based on "Dickens's experience with Mme de la Rue . . . whom he tried to cure of a nervous disorder by means of MESMERISM in Genoa in 1844-5" ("Dusk" 577, original capitalisation). However, Dickens's blatant confession speaks for itself.

(*Letters* 6: 546). Incidentally, the word *I* was "underlined twice" (Storey, Tillotson and Burgis 546) and by that Dickens appear to have been emphasising the difference between their reactions, suggesting that Gaskell was being trivial and overreacting – as was a woman's wont. Nevertheless, Dickens tried to conciliate Gaskell by saying that nobody could ever take away her power of storytelling, which was essentially what made each story unique for her (*Letters* 6: 546). In Dickens's mind, the incidence had been dispatched, yet it appeared to mark a pivotal moment in their relationship; from this moment on Gaskell became increasingly resistant to Dickens's editorial changes.

Shortly afterwards, in early December, Gaskell sent Dickens her first chapter for *Cranford*, which Easson reveals would become "immediately successful" (*Heritage* 7). Although *Cranford* would eventually extend into a whole collection of stories, based on Gaskell's recollections from her early life at Knutsford, the first chapter – "Our Society at Cranford" – was "complete in itself" (Uglow 282).[10] Dickens was "delighted" with the story and "put it first in the No." (*Letters* 6: 549). Still, he changed one vital part of the story and Uglow claims that this was the "first time that Dickens ventured to edit without Gaskell's approval" (283). In "Our Society at Cranford" a character carrying a copy of the *Pickwick Papers* is killed and "in perfect good faith" Dickens substituted his novel for Hood's *Poems*, justifying his decision by arguing that it would not be fitting to include a reference to one of his own works in his own journal and hoped "that the substitution will not be any serious drawback to the paper, in any eyes but yours" (*Letters* 6; 549). Gaskell's dissatisfaction with the change was evident and compelled her to request for the tale to be altogether withdrawn from the magazine (Dickens, *Letters* 6: 548-49; Hopkins 363), yet Dickens claimed that the "[n]o. is now made up and in the Printer's hands. I cannot possibly take the Tale out—it has departed from me" (*Letters* 6: 549).

Gaskell's reason for including a reference to the *Pickwick Papers* remains unclear. It could have been designed as a compliment to Dickens's work, portraying it as so involving and entertaining that one might completely forget oneself. The reference could also be seen as an insult, showing that Dickens's works could somehow be downright dangerous, thus slighting Dickens himself. It was possible that Dickens picked up on this; in any case, Dickens's explanation for changing the title of the work appears rather naïve, since Dickens – who "was fiercely proud of his reputation"

[10] As Birch explains, *Cranford* is "rooted in recollections of Knutsford," although "not an autobiographical homage to the past" ("Introduction" vii).

(Roberts, "Reputation" 503) – was not the kind of man to refrain from blowing his own trumpet. Although it is impossible to determine Gaskell's reason for including the *Pickwick Papers* in her story, the reference was obviously an important one to her. Not only was she willing to withdraw the publication altogether because of this single change, but later she would restore the reference when *Cranford* was published as a whole in 1853 (Storey, Tillotson and Burgis 549; Hopkins 363; Uglow 283). This instance of editorial prevention, along with Dickens's publication of her ghost story as his own, seem to have diminished Gaskell's trust in Dickens's abilities as editor and made her determined to resist his further interference in her works.

A slight difference in Gaskell's attitude towards Dickens may be detected through his responses to her letters over the next year or so. He began referring to her as "the most suspicious of women, always looking for soft sawder in the purest metal of praise" (*Letters* 6: 558), and although he claimed to be "anxiously . . . looking for [her] next communication" he kept his replies short and to the point, claiming "[i]f I say any more, you'll call it soft sawdor" (*Letters* 6: 583). Evidently, Gaskell had become more hesitant to believe Dickens's words, perhaps fearing to "be 'wiled by his fause flattering tongue'" as Catherine Winkworth described it (qtd. in Chapple and Shelston, "Notes" 323). Yet Dickens tried to keep the mood light and teasingly pressed Gaskell for another contribution: "O what a lazy woman you are, and where IS that article!" (*Letters* 6: 609, original capitalisation).

Gaskell's first real clash with Dickens occurred when she submitted her ghost story "The Old Nurse's Story" for the Christmas issue of *Household Words* in late 1852. Dickens praised the story as "[n]obly told, and wonderfully managed" (*Letters* 6: 799), yet "for an editor with such itchy fingers" (Uglow 255), he could not resist suggesting an alteration to the story's ending, claiming that his own proposal "would be a very terrific end" (*Letters* 6: 800). Confident of the superiority of his own proposed ending, Dickens clearly felt sure that Gaskell would agree to his reasoning: "If you do quite and entirely approve, shall I make the necessary alteration in the last two MS pages, or will you?" (*Letters* 6: 800). When Gaskell proved to be reluctant, Dickens claimed to "see [her] meaning" (*Letters* 6: 800), yet persisted in his persuasion:

> What I would propose to do, is, to leave the story just as it stands for a week or ten days—then to come to it afresh—alter it myself—and send you the proof of the whole, and the manuscript (your original manuscript) of the altered part; so

> that if you should prefer the original to the alteration, or any part of the original to any part of the alteration, you may slash accordingly. (*Letters* 6: 800-801)

Dickens sent both manuscripts to Gaskell. Eventually, Gaskell did alter some things in the story, yet she retained her original ending.

Dickens had obviously expected her to yield to his reasoning and although he vowed to publish her ending, his frustration was clear as he could not resist mocking her decision: "I have no doubt, according to every principle of art that is known to me from Shakespeare downwards, that you weaken the terror of the story by making them all see the phantoms at the end. And I feel a perfect conviction that *the best readers* will be the most certain to make this discovery. Nous verrons [We will see]" (*Letters* 6: 815, added emphasis). The passage was especially condescending and it simultaneously attempted to inspire qualms in Gaskell's mind about her decision and her artistic skills and revealed how sure Dickens felt about his own creative power. This was clearly an instance where Dickens rose up to his full and intimidating height as the great novelist that he knew himself to be. Later on, Dickens retracted his statement to a certain degree, writing to Gaskell, as if to make amends: "I don't claim for my ending of the Nurse's Story that it would have made it a bit better. All I can urge in its behalf, is, that it is what I should have done myself. But there is no doubt of the story being admirable as it stands . . ." (*Letters* 6: 823). Gaskell did not seem disheartened by the whole affair, judging by Dickens's appreciation of her "kind note" which praised his two Christmas stories in late December 1852 (*Letters* 6: 822). All the same, it was clear that by now she was showing an increasing concern for how her work was presented in Dickens's journal and she had begun to value her own artistic instinct above that of Dickens.

The culmination of Gaskell and Dickens's editorial disagreements surrounded the publication of *North and South* in 1853-1855. As explained before, Dickens's initial "policy was to exclude SERIAL novels from the journal" (Drew, "*Words*" 285, original capitalisation) – most likely due to the relatively small size of each issue – yet at this point in time *Cranford* had been serialised successfully in *Household Words*. Along with the serialisation of his own novel *Hard Times*, which began on 1 April in 1854 to boost sales (Schlicke, "*Hard*" 266-67; Easson, *Heritage* 8), this "signalled an important change in editorial policy, bringing the magazine into line with other cheap weeklies of the period" (Drew, "*Words*" 286).

As Easson explains, Dickens "urged Gaskell to write [a novel], to follow his" (*Heritage* 8); a piece by Gaskell would almost certainly guarantee increased sales, due

to her ever increasing fame as an author. *Cranford* had been "a great success" (Easson, *Heritage* 24) and Gaskell had just finished publishing *Ruth* in January of 1853, which – because of its daring topic of the life of a fallen woman – was debated all over the country and "raised Gaskell's reputation to new heights" (Uglow 342).[11] In a letter dated 13 April 1853, Dickens praised the novel, referring to the characters Ruth and Mary Barton as "[m]y dear friends" (*Letters* 7: 62). He encouraged Gaskell, saying that "[a]s to future work, I do assure you that you cannot write too much for Household Words, and have never written half enough. I receive you, ever, with open arms" (*Letters* 7: 62). Dickens clearly trusted and valued Gaskell's power of storytelling and Storey, Tillotson and Easson argue that Dickens's statement "clearly implies he would be interested in a serial novel on the same scale as these" (62).

Although Gaskell decided to accept Dickens's offer[12], she was "apprehensive about writing a serial" (Uglow 355). Foster reveals that "Gaskell always found the demands of a full-length novel somewhat burdensome and worrying" (Foster, "Shorter" 110) and she preferred to control her own pace, "waiting for the happy leisure hours" during which she could write to her heart's content (*Letters* 328). In addition, it was evident that the division of the novel into weekly installations especially concerned her. However, Dickens was quick to ease her worries: "Don't you put yourself out at all, as to the division of the story into parts. I think you had far better write it in your own way. When we come to get a little of it into type, I have no doubt of being able to make such little suggestions as to breaks of chapters, as will carry us over all that, easily" (*Letters* 7: 278-79).

Dickens seems to have been too hasty in accepting the novel for serialisation and Gaskell too hasty to accept his offer. Uglow states that obviously *North and South* "lacked the suspense required for a successful serial" (360). Although Dickens's own works had been successfully serialised over the years, mostly in monthly instalments (Schlicke, "*Hard*" 266), Dickens and Gaskell have very different plot structure in their works. While Dickens's stories are as a rule full of cliff-hangers, mystery and action from the start – making division into chapters or instalments easy – Gaskell's stories

[11] As Easson points out, "Chapman and Hall paid Gaskell £500 for the 'copyright' of *Ruth*," which compared to the £100 she had received for *Mary Barton* in 1848, is "clear evidence of how her market value had risen since they took the risk of *Mary Barton*" (*Heritage* 8).

[12] According to Uglow, Gaskell "consulted" her dear friend Forster by sending "him her outline" for the story, and instantly pleased with her proposals and "[r]eassuring as ever, he . . . urged her" to continue with the story (355), "whether it be for Dickens or not" (qtd. in Uglow 355).

usually have a more gradual rise, establishing the setting, the society and main characters first, "until at some central point narrative itself takes over" (Uglow 256), thus making them rather unsuitable for publication in the serial form. *Cranford* had been the exception that proves the rule. As Audrey Jaffe points out, *Cranford* is "a series of stories" (46), rather "loose and episodic" and more in line "with the sketch or short story than with the novel" (47), thus making it very different from Gaskell's other works. Although Dickens does not seem to have realised this, Gaskell certainly seems to have, since this is the first apparent instance when the division of her narrative becomes a concern of hers. As is made evident by Dickens's letter to Gaskell dating from 2 July in 1854, Gaskell is unsure whether it might prove too great a risk to begin publication before Dickens had seen the entire manuscript (*Letters* 7: 363). He however felt "happy to begin the publication at once, having so much MS [manuscript] in hand" (*Letters* 7: 378). Dickens may have been encouraged to begin publication so soon to hold onto increased sales and profits from *Household Words*, which had been raised by his own *Hard Times* (Schlicke, "*Hard*" 266-67). Had Dickens waited to have the entire manuscript in hand before proceeding with publication, "he would," as Hopkins claims, "have saved them both from later trouble" (370). As it turned out, the division into chapters would in fact become the ultimate problem in the serialisation of *North and South*.

It soon became evident that Dickens was willing to favour practicality at the expense of Gaskell's artistic freedom (Hopkins 369). His letters revealed a grave concern with following explicitly the "weekly space available . . . in Household Words" (*Letters* 7: 355). As Schlicke notes, Dickens had himself had great trouble fitting the narrative of *Hard Times* into the weekly format ("*Hard*" 266), as he revealed in a letter to Forster: "The difficulty of the space is CRUSHING. Nobody can have an idea of it who has not had an experience of patient fiction-writing with some elbow-room always . . ." (*Letters* 7: 282, original capitalisation). Given his own experience, one might imagine that Dickens would have been sympathetic to Gaskell's difficulties with compressing her own narrative into the allotted space for each instalment, yet he showed no such tendencies. Instead, he attempted to assure Gaskell that he himself had no say in the matter, claiming that "a work for such a purpose [serialisation] *must* be divided" and that he could "no more change [it] than I can change the weather or my tenure of life"

(*Letters* 7: 363).[13] Having "a very considerable respect for my Art and a very considerable respect for myself" (*Letters* 7: 363), Dickens may have felt justified in his demands since he – the editor and publisher of *Household Words* – had had to cut down his only novel yet to be published in his own magazine, while she – a mere contributor – resisted obeying his instructions; "[h]e had wrestled and overcome. Why couldn't Mrs G.?" (Uglow 361).

As editor, Dickens took control of the novel's division into parts and he was very firm as he explained the restrictions to Gaskell:

> I do not apologize to you for laying so much stress on the necessity of its [the narrative] dividing well, because I am bound to put before you my perfect conviction that if it did not, the story would be wasted—would miss its effect as it went on—*and would not recover it when published complete*. The last consideration is strong with me, because it is based on my long comparison of the advantages and disadvantages of the periodical form of appearance. (*Letters* 7: 356, original emphasis)

In addition, although by this time well into her composition, Dickens advised Gaskell that she should consider her narrative from "the weekly point of view" since "[i]t cannot be disregarded without injury to the book" (*Letters* 7: 356). Without a doubt Dickens was right; he had been accustomed to divide his own longer works into magazine serialisation for years and knew what formula worked. Dickens had himself decided which portions of Gaskell's novel should be removed or significantly shortened and in cases where certain instalments needed to be divided into two chapters, he had offered to write the "word or two" which might be wanted "of conclusion" himself; "mak[ing] those arrangements of the text without much difficulty" (*Letters* 7: 355).

Gaskell did not appear to take his suggestions well, and as to his request to condense her narrative, "Elizabeth totally ignored him" (Uglow 360). Dickens responded furiously when he found the text "*unaltered by you*," since it had been "the place where we agreed that there should be a great condensation" (*Letters* 7: 402, original emphasis).[14] As Hopkins puts it, the *we* in Dickens's letter was mostly an

[13] Although perhaps overly dramatic in his statement, Dickens is right – for any kind of serialisation a work must be published in successive parts; their length however, could have been debateable.

[14] One specific portion that Dickens wanted cut out contained religious references, more specifically, Mr Hale's reasoning for his departure from the Church of England (Storey, Tillotson and Easson 356), which Dickens felt to be "a difficult and dangerous subject" (*Letters* 7: 356).

editorial *we* at this point (372); although Gaskell did consent to shorten that part, as Storey, Tillotson and Easson point out, she never did (402).

So close to the start of serialisation Dickens seems to have been stressed: "The mechanical necessities of Household Words oblige us to get to press with this No. *immediately*" (*Letters* 7: 402, original emphasis). He beseeched Gaskell to send a proof which included the prescribed changes "at once," making the portion in question "as short as you can find it in your heart to make it" (*Letters* 7: 402). Dickens's anger at Gaskell's disregard seems evident from his letter to Wills, dated 20 August 1854, the same day as the letter to Gaskell: "It is perfectly plain to me that if we put in more, every week, of North and South than we did of Hard Times, we shall ruin Household Words. Therefore it must at all hazards be kept down" (*Letters* 7: 403). Dickens seemed determined not to give in, exclaiming "[s]he can't take out too much" (*Letters* 7: 404), yet he also appears to have begun to lament his decision to publish Gaskell's novel: "If I had known how it was to turn out . . . I could not, in my senses, have accepted the story" (*Letters* 7: 406).

North and South began serialisation on 2 September 1854 (Easson, *Heritage* 9) and "[i]t soon became clear that in serial terms [it] was not a hit" (Uglow 361). Dickens seems to have given up his fight with Gaskell over the division of the novel, finally allowing her to take the "division into her own hands" (Hopkins 372). Judging from "the discrepancies between the editor's directions for dividing points and the printed divisions," Hopkins infers that it was Gaskell who eventually divided the novel, since "in every divergence . . . the author's breaks are superior to the editor's" (372). Dickens's letter to Wills in mid-October appears to confirm Hopkins's notion: "I am sorry to hear of the Sale dropping, but I am not surprised. Mrs. Gaskell's story, so divided, is wearisome in the last degree. It would have had scant attraction enough if the casting . . . had been correct; but thus wire-drawn it is a dreary business. Never mind!" (*Letters* 7: 439). At this point in time, Dickens obviously did not think much of *North and South* and his final remark seems to imply that he had entirely dismissed any ideas of attempting improvements. Gaskell tried her best to "shorten & compress" the narrative, but eventually she gave up: "*if you will keep the MS for me, & shorten it as you think best for H.W.* I shall be very glad. Shortened I see it must be. (*Letters* 323, original emphasis)

The final instalment of *North and South* appeared in *Household Words* on 27 January 1855 (Easson, *Heritage* 9). Eager to hold onto Gaskell for the sake of his

magazine Dickens sent her a letter, congratulating her on the completion of a "vigorous and powerful accomplishment of an anxious labor" (*Letters* 7: 513). He urged her that there remained no ill-humour between them and claimed that he would "still look forward to the large sides of paper, and shall soon feel disappointed if they don't begin to reappear" (*Letters* 7: 514). Be that as it may, the serialisation of *North and South* appears to have damaged their relationship beyond repair. It is obvious that Gaskell detested the whole affair and she vowed "I will never write for H.W. again" (*Further Letters* 123).

Although Gaskell did continue to write for *Household Words* her contributions in the years of 1855-1863 were reduced to almost a third of what they had been before the serialisation of *North and South* (Uglow 617-619). She seems to have lost faith in the serial form, at least for her longer narratives, and her next novel, *Sylvia's Lovers* – which was published over eight years after *North and South* – appeared in book form only. Rejecting an impressive offer made by Dickens in 1859 of publishing another one of her novels, a narrative of relatively the same size as *North and South* (Hopkins 378; *Letters* 9: 179-80), Gaskell appears to have decided not to risk her artistic freedom any further in what might become another conflict of power.

Around the end of the 1850s, Gaskell seems to have wanted to sever her ties with Dickens's publication once and for all. As Uglow reveals, there had been some trouble at that time; "[i]n 1858 *My Lady Ludlow* had caused tension when [Gaskell] once again overran Dickens's word limit," and in January 1859 she felt "misrepresented" when Dickens "published a short piece in . . . *Household Words*, called 'Character Murder', following up on one of the anecdotes in Gaskell's 'Disappearances' of 1851" (Uglow 460).[15] Despite an angry letter to Wills, Gaskell only "receiv[ed] a curt, noncommittal reply" (Uglow 460). This was the period surrounding Dickens and Catherine's separation and in a letter to her friend Charles Eliot Norton, dating from early 1859, Gaskell explained that Dickens, "on account of matters connected with Mr & Mrs Dickens' separation," was in the middle of establishing a new magazine with new publishers (*Letters* 535). Due to his unpopularity, and most likely due to her own personal feelings, Gaskell feared that Dickens and Wills "would be glad to announce my name on the list of their contributors. And I would *much* rather they did

[15] There had also been "taut correspondence with Dickens about space, divisions and corrections" surrounding the publication of "Half a Lifetime Ago" in 1855 (Uglow 395); which caused Dickens to exclaim in a letter to Wills: "Mrs. Gaskell, fearful—fearful. If I were Mr. G O Heaven how I would beat her!" (*Letters* 7: 700).

not" (*Letters* 535, original emphasis). Gaskell appears to have shared the general "well-grounded feeling of dislike to the publicity he [had] given to his domestic affairs" and the separation appears to have been the straw that broke the camel's back (*Letters* 535).

At the end of 1859 Gaskell evidently began thinking of contributing some of her work to the new *Cornhill Magazine*, founded and published by her good friend and author, George Smith, and under the editorship of William M. Thackeray. As Hopkins explains, the *Cornhill* paid "contributors twice the usual rates" from its inauguration (382), to establish it as a distinguished journal, and it soon boasted of famous and revered contributors like George Eliot, John Ruskin, Matthew Arnold and Lord Tennyson (Hopkins 383). In a late December letter to Smith, Gaskell expressed her opinion that one of the works that she had been working on was good and "intended *for C. M*.," while another work was certainly "*not good enough for the C.M.*—I am the best judge of that, please,—but might be good enough for *H. W.*" (*Letters* 595, original emphasis). Gaskell wanted to publish her works in the *Cornhill*; apparently, Dickens's esteem had greatly diminished in Gaskell's view and she even appears to have lost her respect for his journal, viewing it as second rate compared to the *Cornhill*.

Gaskell's final contribution to Dickens's *All the Year Round* was in 1863, although she did continue to write for the *Cornhill*, until her death in 1865. Gaskell might have felt more comfortable contributing to the *Cornhill*, since it was a monthly – not weekly – periodical and such an arrangement would surely have suited her works better (Hopkins 382-83; Uglow 460). Easson argues that Gaskell's "antipathy to novel serialization, stemming from the experience of *North and South*" (*Heritage* 12), was eventually broken down due to Smith's handling of the serialisation of *Cousin Phillis* in the *Cornhill* in 1863, along with Gaskell's need for money to buy her house at Holybourne (*Heritage* 13). She certainly felt confident enough to serialise her next novel, *Wives and Daughters*, in the *Cornhill*, ten years after the disastrous serialisation of *North and South*. In any case, at the *Cornhill*, Gaskell was certainly free from "Dickens' Procrustean bed of serialization" (Hopkins 375).

Women in the Victorian Age

Dickens and Gaskell's uneasy relationship seems to have started to deteriorate once Gaskell "realize[d] that she had developed into a sounder critic of her work than Dickens was" (Hopkins 384-85) and *North and South* appeared as the culmination of Gaskell's fight for authority as the author of her own works. Gaskell's literary fame reached its height in the 1850s and 1860s, around the time "when women's writing is beginning to be considered seriously as professional writing, perhaps for the first time, at least by women" (Johnston and Fraser 231). However, before the middle of the nineteenth century, women's "relationship to their professional role was uneasy" (Showalter, *Literature* 14).

Women's position in Victorian society – often referred to as "The Woman Question" – was one of the nineteenth century's largest matters of debate, arising in the 1840s. It can be defined as "the cultural upheaval that arose from women's changing expectations about their roles and possible destinies" (Moran 35). Roughly, Victorians could be classified into two categories: Those that favoured old ideas of patriarchy and the traditional domestic roles of women, and those who challenged these ideas and fought for increased rights and independence for women. Men and women alike belonged to both groups, each side arguing for their own cause.

Angels, Children and Sleeping Beauties

The family was one of the cornerstones of Victorian society and Queen Victoria, the head of the "harmonious 'family'" of society, set the example as the dutiful wife (Moran 2). She was a constant reminder to her subjects of the ideal woman, as she "consciously portrayed herself as wife, mother and grieving widow" (Moran 2). Such "domestic saints" became prevailing icons in Victorian Britain (Harrison 30), and as Moran explains, "women were idolized, protected and oppressed" throughout society (35). The idea of the pure, good-natured and innocent domestic woman – whether wife, mother or daughter – was the preferred idol of those who viewed men and women as inherently different and suited for separate social spheres. Passive women were preferred to strong-minded women, and many sectors of society – including religion, the law and the medical world – worked together in an attempt "to impose a single version of ideal femininity in the period" (Moran 35).

According to conventional patriarchal notions, women's proper place was the domestic sphere and their main purpose in life was to marry and have children (Harrison 30). Many writers of both sexes were supporters of the patriarchal traditions and published accounts in their favour, for example Sara Stickney Ellis, John Ruskin and Coventry Patmore – whose poem "The Angel in the House" (1854-62) was almost single-handedly responsible for the era's main catch-word. All three spoke in support of women's domestic role and their subservience to men. Both Ellis and Ruskin argued that women needed to stand firmly by their husbands and attend to their proper sphere, the home, where they would find their "own happiness only in the happiness of others" (Ellis 1585). Ellis and Ruskin saw the home as a haven for the husband, which would provide him with comfort, strength and stability established by the tranquil and tender wife, who served as a stable centre, balancing out the turmoil and dangers of the husband's public life.[16]

Ruskin also saw the home as a haven for the wife. In his famous lecture "Of Queens' Gardens," published as *Sesame and Lilies* in 1865, he celebrated patriarchy and traditional roles by focusing on what women can do for men. Although Ruskin encouraged women to read and stimulate their intellect (155), he stated that a woman's "intellect is *not for invention or creation*, but for sweet ordering, arrangement, and decision" (158, added emphasis). He believed that a girl's education should be almost the same as a boy's, but directed so that it would help "her to understand, and even to aid, the work of men" in the future (Ruskin 161). Ruskin claimed that as "the helpmate of man" (155) a woman's greatest function was "Praise" within the home, "the place of Peace; the shelter, not only from all injury [inflicted through the public sphere], but from all terror, doubt, and division" (158). To become a true wife a woman must:

> be incapable of error [. . .] enduringly, incorruptibly good; instinctively, infallibly wise—wise, not for self-development, but for self-renunciation: wise, not that she may set herself above her husband, but that she may never fail from his side: wise, not with the narrowness of insolent and loveless pride, but with the passionate gentleness of an infinitely variable, because infinitely applicable, modesty of service [. . . she must be] as the *light*, manifold in fair and serene division, that it may

[16] Harrison points out that many of those who shared Ellis's opinion in the 1840s were famous for their "ubiquitous conduct and childrearing manuals" (30), which probably accounts for the idea of the sheltered "child-woman" (Moran 38), living her life according to the rules of the father or husband.

> take the colour off all that it falls upon, and exalt it. (Ruskin 159, original emphasis)

As Ruskin saw it, the pure home was not only beneficial for the husband, but also for the wife. It helped to keep her pure, since the husband "guards the woman from all this [the dangers of the public sphere]; within his house, as ruled by her" and "unless she herself has sought it, [she] need enter no danger, no temptation, no cause of error or offence" (158). Many Victorian women found comfort in the security of the home, yet there were many who did not and the number of women who wanted something more than a life of domestic passions was ever increasing.

"Strong-minded" Women: Intellectuals and Activists

Florence Nightingale was one of those women and fought for her right for independence and an occupation of her own choice. Nightingale is known for nursing British soldiers during the Crimean War (1853-1856), and subsequently reforming medical services in the nineteenth century (Christ and Robson, "Florence" 1598; Moran 38). However, as Carol T. Christ and Catherine Robson state, "Nightingale achieved her dream of an active and productive life only after many years of waiting" ("Florence" 1598). Longing for independence, Nightingale saw "[t]he domestic hearth" as "a place of confinement and torpor, where women's lives [were] broken into fragments and their time stolen from them by social obligations" (Pykett 88). After contemplating suicide, Nightingale found release for her frustration through *Cassandra*, an autobiographical piece written in 1852 (revised by herself in 1859), yet unpublished until 1928, eighteen years after her death (Christ and Robson, "Florence" 1589).

Cassandra voices Nightingale's concerns about women's place in society, with a special focus on marriage. She emphasised the absurdity of women's roles at home by theoretically putting men in the same position, "sitting round a table in the drawing-room, looking at prints, doing worsted work, and reading little books," exclaiming "how we should laugh!" if such were the case (Nightingale 1599). To Nightingale it was incomprehensible why society would view something as not fitting for men, but "all right" for women, and she asked outright, "[i]s man's time more valuable than woman's?" (1600); why are women endowed with "passion, intellect, [and] moral activity" without having "a place in society where . . . the three can be exercised?" (Nightingale 1598).

The ideas about the female angel and the separate roles of the genders "began to come under fire by liberal thinkers" in the 1840s and1850s (Harrison 30). As Anthony H. Harrison reasons, the myth was no longer sustainable. In a census performed in 1851, it was revealed that women now made up the larger part of the population in Britain and only about half of those aged over twenty were married (Harrison 30). While any work outside the domestic area was still generally frowned upon and seen as "unrespectable," the census showed "7 percent of middle-class women as working, most of these as governesses, writers, or artists, and only 3 percent owning business or managing farms" (Harrison 30). As Harrison observes, this meant that "nearly half had no spouse to support them" (30); how could the rest of these unmarried women sustain themselves?

To amend the status of these women and all others, especially legally, "a number of Victorian men and women had begun the effort to remove obstacles to women's equality and advancement" (Harrison 31). The results can be seen in various legal acts, such as the Infants and Child Custody Bill of 1839 – granting women legal access to their children after divorce – and the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857, which both helped to amend women's status in relation to their husbands after divorce. Acts which guaranteed women's legal claims to their property and earnings prior to matrimony and subsequently also those acquired during marriage, were not passed until in 1870 and 1882, respectively (Moran 36; Hughes 38). In addition to focusing on women's legal status, those fighting for increased equality also began focusing on amending women's situation when it came to "education and employment opportunities," which eventually led to the foundation of two women's colleges, Girton College and Newnham College, in 1869 and 1871 (Hughes 38). These things give some indication of the gross inequalities strong-minded women[17] and liberal men fought against during the nineteenth century.

Female activism became prominent in the writings of both women and men who found outlet for reform through the power of words. Florence Nightingale, Harriet Martineau and John Stuart Mill were among those who criticised the existing social structure and the conventional roles of women. As Moran explains, "criticism took a leading role in determining the values needed by a confused society," especially in the

[17] As Shuttleworth and Easson explain in "the term" strong-minded was "applied to intellectual or activist women" around the middle of the nineteenth century ("Notes" 452).

mid-Victorian period, between 1850 and 1870 (128).[18] Caine notes that "[l]arge numbers of women wrote pamphlets, periodicals and books on the broad question of women's emancipation" (100) and the subject soon became "a staple of nineteenth-century serious journals" (102), although men still "had far more opportunities to publish their views on women than women had to write about themselves" (104). At the beginning of the century, it was mostly the "radical journals which contained the most extensive debate and provided the best outlet" for women writers addressing the woman question (Caine 103). The radical Unitarian magazine the *Monthly Repository* was for example the first journal to publish works by Harriet Martineau, who became one of the most prominent feminist writers of the Victorian age (Caine 100, 102-10).

Caine states that Martineau "was unquestionably one of the best-known and most successful writers of the early nineteenth century" (105). Martineau was especially prolific and her writings include various topics, ranging from religion, political economy, women's education and other social questions (Caine 105). Having had her first articles on women's education and religious life published in the *Monthly Repository* at the age of twenty, she quickly began supporting herself through her writing, especially through her highly popular *Illustrations of Political Economy*, first published in the late 1820s (Caine 105-106), which greatly "improved public understanding of politics and economics" (Moran 38). In the 1850s, Martineau's writing emphasised the breadth of women's occupation, in relation to the previously mentioned 1851 census, expressing her longing to "break through the sentimentalizing of women and the popular, but completely erroneous, middle-class belief that most women were financially provided for within their own homes" (Caine 108). Bored with the stereotypical representations of women's work, which were mostly restricted to governesses and seamstresses, her article "Female Industry" (1859) "initiated a whole new debate" on the question of women's work (Caine 108). In Martineau's view, "[t]he independence of women simply had to be accepted . . . especially by men" (Caine 109).

[18] Victorians had not been the first to question women's roles in life and society. In the late eighteenth century Mary Wollstonecraft – one of the earliest feminists – published her *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), which is without a doubt one of the most influential works of feminist criticism. Stillinger and Lynch claim that "Wollstonecraft's views were conspicuously radical" for a woman of her time (169) and although most Victorians would likely have been familiar with her revolutionary work, *Vindication* came to be altogether "avoided" during the nineteenth century, at least in "explicit reference," because of Wollstonecraft's "scandalous reputation" (Stillinger and Lynch 170). However, there is no doubt about the effect of Wollstonecraft's work having lit up public consciousness of the position of women and men subjected in society; as Barbara Caine argues, the "pattern was set by Mary Wollstonecraft" (100).

John Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of Women* (1869) was one of the most influential Victorian works written on behalf of the expansion of the roles of women and "was quickly adopted by the leaders of the suffrage movement as the definitive analysis of the position of women in society" (Christ and Robson, "Subjection" 1060). In *Subjection* Mill argued that while no alternative "social organization" had been tested in Britain – than that of "the mode in which women [were] wholly under the rule of men" – there was no way of knowing "on the testimony of experience" that the present system was the "most conducive to the happiness and well-being of both" (474-475). Being a rational thinker, Mill especially disliked that the present system was not "the result of deliberation, or forethought, or any social ideas," but had merely been passed on through history "from the very earliest twilight of human society" (475). Mill even went as far as to liken women's status in Victorian society to that of slaves, reasoning that as "a single relic of an old world" (491), slavery had merely been "changed into a milder form of dependence," yet it still retained "the taint of its brutal origin" (476). To Mill, it was obvious that women's "legal subordination . . . is wrong in itself, and now one of the chief hindrances to human improvement"; in his mind "it ought to be replaced by a principle of perfect equality, admitting no power or privilege on the one side, nor disability on the other" (471).

Dickens, Women and Control

Like many Victorians, Dickens appears to have had rather complicated attitudes towards women. Even though he is mostly seen as an avid reformer of society in general, Ella Westland observes that his "response to demands for reform was mixed" when it came to women ("Women" 601). As Westland asserts, Dickens was at heart conventional when it came to domestic life, believing "that women were inherently different from men, formed for home-making and a life of the affections" ("Women" 601). Sally Ledger notes that these notions often appeared in his works, where domestic bliss and virtuous wives are portrayed in a favourable light (189-190). In real life, Dickens desired a haven of his own and a lot can be deduced about his true character through his relationships with his wife Catherine, and her sisters Mary and Georgina Hogarth.

According to Tomalin, Catherine herself was not as clever or accomplished as some of her sisters; instead she was "uncomplicated" (57) and had a "gentle manner" (56) and Dickens "saw in her the offer of affection" and "compliance" (57). It seems evident that Dickens was not looking for an "intellectual equal" (Tomalin 57), but rather

an appropriate wife, who did not show signs of "unpredictable behaviour" (Tomalin 56). They were married in 1836, within six months from their first meeting, and according to Tomalin, "[t]here [was] never any doubt who [was] running the relationship" (58). Catherine, however, never appears to have had a chance to fully adjust to her new role as the head of a household and Dickens seems to have found more attachment to Catherine's younger sisters Mary and Georgina, than to his wife.

Mary came to stay with the newlyweds and instantly became a close companion of Dickens's. She frequently accompanied him on his walks, and she "kept house" for him "when Catherine was confined with her first child" (Slater, "Mary" 277-78). However, in May 1837, when Mary was just seventeen, she suddenly fell ill and died. Dickens was deeply crushed; his grief was in fact so intense that he postponed his instalments of both *Pickwick Papers* and *Oliver Twist* (Slater, "Mary" 278; Tomalin 79), which was "an unprecedented (and never repeated) action" throughout the course of his literary career (Tomalin 79). In time, Dickens came to see Mary as "an icon of angelic sweetness and purity" (Slater, "Mary" 278) and she served as a model for many of Dickens's most obliging, delicate and sweet tempered female characters; one such being Rose Maylie in *Oliver Twist*.

Catherine's other sister, Georgina, permanently entered the Dickens household, five years after Mary's death, and she soon became Dickens's "pet" (Tomalin 138). As Slater accounts, Georgina gradually began to manage the domestic affairs of the Dickens household and Dickens even began to address his letters on household matters to her instead of his wife ("Georgina" 277), which seems rather unconventional. Although Slater points out that Catherine still managed some affairs, such as "partnering her husband in public and entertaining his guests at home" ("Catherine" 159), Georgina had managed to a large extent to supplant her own sister as the head of Dickens's household. [19]

Dickens does not seem to have showed any resistance to Mary and Georgina's involvement in household affairs, but rather to have relished it. Meanwhile, Catherine appears to have felt the pressure of domesticity acutely as her role became increasingly "passive" (Tomalin 174). She is known to have experienced post-natal depression (Tomalin 75; Slater, "Catherine" 159), and in 1851 she "suffered a mysterious illness,

[19] After Dickens and Catherine's divorce in 1858 Georgina continued living with Dickens and managing his affairs at Gad's Hill Place, entertaining his guests alongside his eldest daughter Mary (nicknamed Mamie) and she even tended to his correspondence during his absences from home (Slater, "Georgina" 277).

the cause of which is unknown and may have been due to emotional or psychological strain" (Slater, "Catherine" 160). All this might explain why Dickens felt in later years, as Ledger states, that his own marriage did not "match the ideal" of domestic bliss that he longed for (192).

After meeting and falling in love with the actress Ellen Ternan (Nelly) in a production of the play *The Frozen Deep* in 1857, Dickens began contemplating a divorce from Catherine. In a letter written to Forster around the same time, Dickens acknowledged what he now felt:

> Poor Catherine and I are not made for each other, and there is no help for it. It is not only that she makes me uneasy and unhappy, but that I make her so too—and much more so. She is exactly what you know, in the way of being amiable and complying; but we are strangely ill-assorted for the bond there is between us. God knows she would have been a thousand times happier if she had married another kind of man, and that her avoidance of this destiny would have been at least equally good for us. (*Letters* 8: 430)

Although Dickens and Catherine's divorce in 1857-58 appears to have progressed on relatively peaceful terms at first, Dickens's spiteful side soon broke out. Rumours concerning Dickens's extramarital affair spread around society and although Dickens was enraged over the whole thing, he did not link Catherine in any way to the spreading of such slander (Slater, "Catherine" 161).

However, Dickens himself found little reserve when it came to denigrating Catherine to his own close friends. In a letter to Miss Coutts, dated 9 May 1858, Dickens described Catherine as uncompanionable and according to him, Catherine did not love her children, nor they her.[20] He even claimed that "[h]er mind has, at times, been certainly confused besides" and he recalled Catherine's old servant, who "took care of her, like a poor child, for sixteen years" (*Letters* 8: 560). This letter, which focuses on Catherine's "weaknesses and jealousies" (*Letters* 8: 560), seemed aimed at exposing Catherine as "unsound [of] mind" and as Tomalin reveals, Dickens did in fact at one point during their divorce try to get Catherine declared mad, although it came to nothing (465).

[20] As most critics point out, this claim has not found any substantial proof.

Dickens's claims about Catherine's character seem completely absurd, and appear to have been written out of malice rather than any foundation in truth. It seems out of character for Dickens – the avid social reformer – that he would partake in what Elaine Showalter classifies as an old method of male tyranny, in conspiring "to get troublesome wives or daughters out of the way," based on their "female irrationality" or lack of compliance (*Malady* 10). According to Showalter, Victorians believed that madness was not merely "a loss of reason, but . . . deviance from socially accepted behavior" (*Malady* 29) and the "definition could be stretched to take in almost any kind of behavior regarded as abnormal or disruptive by community standards" (*Malady* 29). Showalter explains that "women had become the majority of patients in public lunatic asylums" around the middle of the nineteenth century (*Malady* 3), which might demonstrate how easily the definition of madness could be used against women's own natural behaviour. Moreover, the rising numbers in admission could also indicate that husbands – like Dickens – used the claim for madness as an attempt to solve their troubles with an unyielding or *abnormal* wife; if a wife was unruly and defiant of her husband's rule, a stay in a mental asylum might correct her deviant behaviour and domesticate her into the angel society desired.[21]

As Tomalin affirms, "Dickens had a temper" (113) and during his divorce it seems that he, much rather than his wife, was the one on the verge of losing his mind; unleashing "[a] raging anger . . . at any opposition to his wishes" (292-93). Even his daughter Katey claimed that he acted "like a madman when [Catherine] left home" (qtd. in Tomalin 415) and Miss Gladys Storey, an intimate friend of Katey's, claimed that she had said that her father "did not understand women" (qtd. in Tomalin 415). Tomalin states that Dickens's use of "lies as weapons of attack and defence" along with "[h]is displays of self-righteousness [during the divorce] were shocking," and she finds "[t]he spectacle of a man famous for his goodness and his attachment to domestic virtues suddenly losing his moral compass . . . dismaying" (293).

Although Dickens wanted reform and a better society it may have been tempting for him to resort to old patriarchal notions to justify his own actions. Dickens can thus be accused of the same double moral standard that troubled many Victorians. Despite his dedication to help fallen women through Urania Cottage and his many portrayals of

[21] As Showalter points out, "Victorians hoped that homelike mental institutions would tame and domesticate madness and bring it into the sphere of rationality" and eventually "cure it through paternalistic therapeutic and administrative techniques" (Showalter, *Malady* 17-18).

the sad lives of fallen women in his novels, Tomalin argues that Dickens "accepted that it was normal for men to make use of them" (203). Critics have pointed to a letter written by Dickens to his friend Daniel Maclise as possible evidence of the former having associated with prostitutes. In the letter, written in 1841, Dickens suggested to Maclise that he might visit him to lighten his mood and improve his health, for example by enjoying some "conveniences," which most critics have interpreted as an allusion to prostitutes (Tomalin 124; Westland, "Fallen" 475). Westland finds further evidence in support of this hypothesis in his letters dating from 1859 and she even argues that by keeping Ellen Ternan as a mistress Dickens willingly put her "in the position of the 'fallen woman' condemned by contemporary morality" ("Fallen" 475).

Although it can be claimed that Dickens's fiction "explores the constrictions and contradictions of women's roles" (Westland, "Women" 604), Dickens's real attitudes towards women are perhaps best reflected through his actions in reality. Dickens generally believed that women should leave "the public sphere to men" (Westland, "Women" 601) and even though he associated with many prominent women in society, such as Miss Angela Burdett Coutts, Westland reveals that pieces denigrating women's causes appeared in *Household Words* ("Women" 601-602). One such, a leading piece written by Dickens himself, published in 1851, mocked "women's pretensions to the public platform and public office, and even CHARITY work of an ostentatious kind" (Westland, "Women" 601, original capitalisation).[22] Such articles sparked outrage and Dickens was even attacked by Mill for "ridiculing the rights of women" with his "vulgar impudence" (qtd. in Westland, "Women" 602).

Andrew Sanders reasons that "Dickens never really found himself able to commit to important aspects of women's rights or to women's social, educational, and professional aspirations" (*Dickens* 69). He was only "openly committed to one feminist cause" – the amendment of married women's rights – and although his letters reveal an "admiration for upper-class ladies who played a significant public role," such as Miss Coutts (Westland, "Women" 602), his respect for women in the public sphere emerged almost exclusively through artists, since he did not seem to find any impediment to women as actresses (Ellen Ternan), painters (daughter Katey) or writers. It is however crucial that all these occupations can be seen as nurturing and stabilising – helping men forget the troubles of the public sphere, even if just for a moment. Female artists could

[22] Meanwhile, Dickens's own eagerness to plan benefits and theatricals for charity might certainly be seen as ostentatious, because of his own awareness of his achievements and fame (Tomalin 223, 230-231).

thus provide men with the same essential service as the dutiful wives at home. By offering escape as well as rejuvenation of the self through entertainment, female artists managed to recreate the haven of the home in their works, and simultaneously found their own happiness through the happiness of others.

Dickens appears to have wanted to associate with women on his own terms and he wanted to be the one in control. From an early age Dickens saw himself as a "sensitive and promising child" and he had always had "strong . . . hopes and self-belief" (Tomalin 24). His relationship with his mother was always slightly uneasy, mostly because Dickens never forgave her for having been willing to send him back to the blacking factory at the expense of further education (Tomalin 29; Slater, "Elizabeth" 171). Slater explains that "[t]his sense of having been betrayed by his own mother was a resentment Dickens was to harbour all his life" ("Elizabeth" 171), and it might account for a certain kind of wariness on Dickens's part when it came to having faith in women.

As "the inimitable" (Tomalin xlvii), Dickens certainly had great confidence in his own abilities and he did not like to be opposed, either by men or women. [23] Robert L. Patten explains that Dickens had "quarrelsome relations with his publishers" (10) and as an editor Dickens appears to have been difficult to please. Rewriting of contributions seems to have been a common practice for him, whether they were written by men or women. He is known to have "substantially" rewritten a piece by Mary Boyle before publishing it in *Household Words* (Tomalin 453) and his extreme editorial authority even extended to pieces written by his own sub-editor Wills, which on one occasion extended into nine painstaking hours of rewriting (Drew, "Wills" 599; *Letters* 6: 351). Drew notes that in 1852 alone Dickens and Wills reviewed 900 "unsolicited" manuscripts for the journal, of which in the end only eleven were published after substantial rewriting ("Wills" 599); this might certainly explain why "[a]lmost 200" out of more than 380 writers who contributed to *Household Words* "contributed only once" (Drew, "*Words*" 285).

While Dickens's own artistic talents remained undisputed, some of his contemporaries – including one of his "most valued collaborators" Henry Morley (Smith 593) – seems to have felt that he was not "the right man to edit a journal of

[23] Nevertheless, Dickens appeared more willing to forgive men than women for opposing his actions or decisions. As Tomalin relates, Dickens got into scrapes with Forster on various occasions, yet they always reconciled. However, when another close friend of almost twenty years, Angela Burdett Coutts, "strongly deprecated his decision" to divorce Catherine, Dickens could not forgive her and "[t]heir friendship virtually ended" (Collins, "Coutts" 127).

literary mark" (qtd. in Storey, Tillotson and Burgis 64). Based on Forster's descriptions of Dickens's "hasty opinions" (qtd. in Hopkins 384), Hopkins asserts that Dickens "did not have the temperament for a reliable critic" (384). His contemporaries Crabb Robinson and William Bodham Donne seem to have felt the same way, since they agreed that "Dickens's management of a periodical is bad" (qtd. in Storey, Tillotson and Burgis 64) and even contributors to the journal itself were displeased, claiming that due to anonymity the best pieces were usually credited to Dickens and thus only increased his own reputation instead of the real authors' (Drew, "*Words*" 285-86).[24]

Although Dickens's willingness to edit Gaskell's works can be seen as inherent to Dickens's editorial persona, instead of being focused on her because of her profession as a female writer, it certainly provides insight into the kind of power men had within the Victorian publishing world. Nevertheless, Dickens's traditional outlook towards women certainly adds yet another element of control to "Dickens's editorial attempts to play 'husband' to Elizabeth Gaskell" (Cole xxiii). However, Gaskell was never a readily submissive wife.

Gaskell's Position – The Best of Both Worlds

Although the debate on women's status in society did not begin to gain strength until after Queen Victoria's coronation, there had of course been many women who had defied the traditional paradigm for women's roles earlier, including female authors. According to Showalter, "[f]rom about 1750 on, English women [had] made steady inroad into the literary marketplace, mainly as novelists" (*Literature* 13), and by the middle of the nineteenth century "women's contribution" in the literary field had become "undeniable" (Moran 37). Still, whether driven by the need for money or simply by interest, few women liked to make their vocation known.

Showalter claims that many of the earliest Victorian women writers, including Gaskell, who belonged to "the Golden Age of the Victorian authoress," were somewhat uneasy about their position as novelists (*Literature* 16). Although "[t]hey felt humiliated by the condescension of male critics and spoke intensely of their desire to avoid special treatment and achieve genuine excellence," Showalter states that they were nevertheless "deeply anxious about the possibility of appearing unwomanly" because of their

[24] As Michie points out, even Wilkie Collins, who was one of the biggest contributors to the journal from 1853, "complained about not receiving enough recognition for his work" (88).

profession (*Literature* 17).[25] In the early nineteenth century "women evaded the issue of professional identity by publishing anonymously" (Showalter, *Literature* 14) and Richard D. Altick even argues that the "prejudice against women writers was strong enough to make advisable the adoption of masculine pen names" ("Weaker" 51). The Brontë sisters famously published their first works under male pseudonyms and even Harriet Martineau published her works incognito, not appearing under her real name until in the 1860s (Martineau 1591; Caine 110). Until 1857, Gaskell had also published her works anonymously. Uglow explains that "[u]ntil the late 1840s writing had been a private hobby" in Gaskell's mind; however, after the publication of her first novel, writing became an increasingly important and dominant part of her life.

Gaskell was in many ways a very modern woman and wanted to embrace her roles as a wife and mother, yet also establish a personal career. She was happily married to William Gaskell and like any normal wife she wanted to make her husband happy. Nevertheless, being familiar with patriarchal notions of the proper submissive household angel and the separate spheres of the sexes, [26] some of Gaskell's earliest surviving letters recorded her anxiety over marital obedience. In a letter addressed to Harriet Carr, dated 8 August 1832, Gaskell claimed she was "to learn obedience the 30th of this month" (*Further Letters* 19), which was the day of her wedding (Chapple and Shelston, "Notes" 21). "Never having received a letter from any body similarly situated," she confessed "I don't in the least know how to express myself on the occasion but I fancy 'to learn obedience' is something new – to me at least it is" (*Further Letters* 19).

As Uglow explains, Gaskell's upbringing was rather special. Having been brought up by her maternal aunts, Hannah Lumb and Abigail Holland, in "a house of single women" in Knutsford, Gaskell had become used to relying on her own strength and that of the women around her (14). As she grew older, in addition to receiving a more formal and traditional education at boarding school, her father, William Stevenson, encouraged Gaskell's education and reading during her visits to his Chelsea

[25] During her earliest years as novelist, Gaskell firmly resisted calling herself an author, to avoid being "classed with independent single women like Geraldine [Jewsbury], whom . . . she did not much like" (Uglow 168).

[26] It seems practically unthinkable for any Victorian to have been ignorant about the debate concerning women's proper role and sphere. Uglow notes that during Gaskell's adolescence in the 1820s and 1830s the literary market was full of "countless books of advice to young women and wives" on proper submissive behaviour, including Ellis's *The Women of England* (83), which Gaskell must have been aware of.

home (Uglow 40-41), "coaching her in languages and Latin" (Uglow 41). Uglow explains that "Unitarian families did not, like some sects, take a firm line on the evils of imaginative literature" (40) and William, who "had no patience with the 'submissive' school of girls' education," wanted his daughter to be equal to men in her "intellectual pursuits" (41). Some influence of the more traditional attitudes towards women still retained its influence on Gaskell and "for many years, as an adult, she hid her cleverness," thus assuming the persona of the purely submissive angelic wife (Uglow 44). However, at the time of her marriage, Uglow argues that Gaskell "was already ambivalent about the notion of separate spheres" and she "was to become increasingly resistant to the doctrine" (Uglow 83).

During her first years of marriage to William in the 1830s Gaskell was however still being "pulled by conflicting voices" (Uglow 83). On one hand there was "the Unitarian call to independence" and on the other "the conventional appeal to submission" (Uglow 83), and Gaskell felt drawn to both. These conflicting voices were expressed through what Gaskell called her different "mes" (*Letters* 108), and she was "conscious . . . of having several 'selves' which all needed to find expression" through different means (Uglow 93):

> my 'Mes,' for I have a great number, and that's the plague. One of my mes is, I do believe, a true Christian . . . another of my mes is a wife and mother, and highly delighted at the delight of everyone else in the house, [. . .] that's my 'social' self I suppose. Then again I've another self with a full taste for beauty and convenience whh [which] is pleased on its own account. How am I to reconcile all these warring members? I try to drown myself (my *first* self,) by saying it's Wm [William] who is to decide on all these things, and his feeling it right ought to be my rule, And so it is—only that does not quite do. Well! (*Letters* 108, original emphasis)

Presumably dated in early 1850, this letter was written when Gaskell's literary career had begun, adding yet another *me* – the authoress – to her multi-layered self, and Gaskell found it hard to regulate the time devoted to each self.

Gaskell was not alone in her confliction. Her friend Eliza Fox was a painter and Gaskell knew that for both of them "art was more than a refuge" (Uglow 45). A letter to Fox dated in February 1850 – only two years after the publication of *Mary Barton* and close to the publication of "Lizzie Leigh" – exposes Gaskell's concerns:

> home duties and individual life; it is just my puzzle; and I don't think I can get nearer to a solution than you have done. [. . .] One thing is pretty clear, *Women*, must give up living an artist's life, if home duties are to be paramount. It is different with men, whose home duties are so small a part of their life. However we are talking of women. I am sure it is healthy for them to have the refuge of the hidden world of Art to shelter themselves in when too much pressed upon by daily small Lilliputian arrows of peddling cares; it keeps them from being morbid as you say; and takes them into the land where King Arthur lies hidden, and soothes them with its peace. I have felt this in writing, I see others feel it in music, you in painting, so assuredly a blending of the two is desirable. (Home duties and the development of the Individual I mean). [. . .] I have no doubt that the cultivation of each tends to keep the other in a healthy state . . . (*Letters* 106, original emphasis)

Judging by this letter – presumably written less than a month after Dickens's request to join forces in *Household Words* – Gaskell sensed acutely the difference between male and female writers; feeling that women were constantly trying to find the perfect equilibrium between their many different roles, while men were less constricted and freer to act as they wanted to. This would surely explain her initial reserve to accept Dickens's offer.

To begin with Gaskell's "literary interests were almost a guilty secret, to be hidden away, just as she scrunched her paper and scuttered her pencil out of sight when people came near," because for women, "[t]here were always other priorities" (Uglow 100). Nevertheless, Gaskell seemed determined to hold onto her artist's life alongside the domestic; the only difficult was "where and when to make one set of duties subserve and give place to the other" (*Letters* 106).[27] Gaskell often voiced this concern through her writing. In *North and South* Margaret Hale, after having lost both her parents, realises that she must take "her life into her own hands" (416), yet even though she is

[27] Gaskell clearly admired and respected independent and strong women, yet she also cherished her roles as a wife and mother. Consequently, Gaskell had a certain dislike for women who single-mindedly pursued a career at the cost of family life. As was mentioned before, Gaskell was on friendly terms with many of the foremost female activists of her time, such as Anna Jameson, who at times provided her with invaluable support in her pursuits of a personal literary career. However, Gaskell's respect for these women did not always extend to all aspects of their lives; Geraldine Jewsbury, a fellow Manchester-based novelist, was not in Gaskell's favour due to her "shockingly outspoken and flamboyant" manner (Uglow 168), and Gaskell resented Nightingale's obstinate repugnance towards marriage, which the latter saw as a great hindrance to women's professional advancement (Uglow 362-65).

now an heiress in possession of a large fortune, she is still faced with "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" (416).

Still, despite her doubts, Uglow affirms that Gaskell "was never to play a submissive role" (77). Her independence and anti-conformity was reflected in her insistence on "always sign[ing] herself Elizabeth Gaskell, not Mrs William Gaskell" (Uglow 77), since she felt it was "a *silly piece* of *bride-like affectation* . . . not to sign yourself by your proper name" (*Letters* 40, original emphasis). According to Uglow, "Unitarians believed that marriage should be based on give and take, not rule and submission" (77-78), and William Gaskell was – due to his natural character, as well as his Unitarian upbringing and excellent education – a very open-minded and supportive husband in every aspect. He certainly does not seem to have expected his wife to fall into the role of the stereotypical angel of the house; on the contrary, William had in fact been the one who first encouraged Gaskell to write, as a distraction and a way of releasing her grief at the death of their baby boy in 1845 (Uglow 153; Easson, *Heritage* 3).

William became Gaskell's main supporter as her career progressed: he was "a valued critic, advisor and a stalwart support against the criticism of others, [upheld] her right to publish the truth as she found it" (Uglow 71), and helped "to manage her affairs, signing contracts and receipts" (Uglow 251). He stood by her "when *Mary Barton* enraged the wealthy mill-owners" and "when members of his congregation burnt their copies of *Ruth*" (Uglow 71); his valuable support is also evident during the serialisation of *North and South*, when William himself consulted Dickens to persuade him to consent to his wife's artistic demands to increase the length of the weekly instalments (Dickens, *Letters* 7: 447). Furthermore, although husbands of female writers were legally entitled to their wives' income, including the copyrights of their works (Hughes 38), "William certainly never asserted his legal right over Elizabeth's property" and "many payments were sent straight to her" (Uglow 251). Gaskell's late-life purchase of the house in Holybourne, in the south of England, without William's knowledge seems simultaneously to indicate that he was not at all preoccupied with his wife's personal earnings from her writing, as well as to reveal "[t]he unusual measure of . . . Gaskell's independence" at this point in her life (D'Albertis 21).

Accordingly, Gaskell's concerns about reconciling her role as a woman seem to have unconsciously worked themselves out. As the Gaskells' four girls grew into young

women, Gaskell's worries about allotting the proper time between her writing and domestic chores diminished and she willingly indulged in her own artistic creation. Moreover, Gaskell received great support and help from her family with her writing. When she was preparing *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* her daughters Marianne and Meta helped her to copy letters of correspondence needed for the biography (Uglow 396-97), and as before, when "her English was so bad" (Uglow 397), she turned to William to correct her proofs before sending them off to be published: "in all matters of style and accuracy I have a capital helper in my husband, who has an admirable knowledge of language; and an almost fastidious taste as to style" (*Further Letters* 155). As Uglow reveals, "[t]he manuscript of the *Life* . . . tells its own story" and few of the pages "lack corrections of punctuation, grammar and style in William's neat writing" (402).William's influence on Gaskell's writing should not be ignored. In fact, he might be seen as Gaskell's very own co-editor, when he – as in the case of the *Life* – helped her to adjust her works before publication. Nevertheless, Gaskell turned to William for support, "not to make decisions for her, but to reinforce or question those she made for herself" (Uglow 71).

By the time *North and South* had begun to take form, Gaskell had already successfully published *Mary Barton* and *Ruth* and when *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* was published in 1857, her name appeared on the title-page for the first time (Uglow, 424; Easson, *Heritage* 10).[28] This seems indicative of Gaskell's rising confidence and her awareness and acceptance of her own status as a professional writer. Caine explains that "[i]n the mid-century, women writers became more and more visible as they published under their own names" (102) and Showalter argues that the disappearance of the male pseudonym "signals the loss of innocence" for female writers (*Literature* 15) and "is a strong marker of the historical shift" (*Literature* 16), as women writers became increasingly aware of their own authority within the literary sphere.

According to Elsie B. Michie, during Gaskell's lifetime "the figures who surrounded and influenced [female writers] as they wrote, the individuals who functioned as mentors, literary role models, and gatekeepers to the world of publishing, tended to be men, either family members or literary professionals, often both at once" (2). Showalter claims that publishers such as George Smith and Dickens had "published

[28] With *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* Gaskell revolutionised the genre of biographical writing, by focusing on "private life, relationships and character rather than on public achievement" (Uglow 391), creating what Margaret Oliphant called "a new kind of biography" (qtd. in Uglow 391).

the works of feminine novelists and had exerted direct and enormous power over their contents" (*Literature* 26), and Michie believes that Gaskell herself had only managed to "define her position as a professional writer" under Dickens's "aegis" (2). Yet Gaskell's continued resistance to Dickens's editorial power throughout their cooperation in *Household* Words was a clear challenge of "the monopoly of male publishers" and "the dictatorship of the male establishment" (Showalter, *Literature* 26), which shows that Gaskell was not simply going to bend to a man's artistic will. The same applied to her relationship with Thackeray at the *Cornhill* As Uglow relates, Gaskell had known Thackeray for roughly ten years "but had never felt at ease with him" (460). As Gaskell revealed in a letter to Smith, she believed,

> that somehow or another my *luck* is against me in any intercourse with him, & being half-Scotch I have a right to be very superstitious [. . .] my only feeling about not doing any thing you ask me . . . is because I don't think Thackeray would ever quite like it, & yet you know it would be under his supervision. Please to understand how much I admire him, & how I know that somewhere or another he has got a noble & warm self, —only *I* can't get near it. (*Letters* 576-77, original emphasis)

In Gaskell's mind there seems to have been little difference between Dickens and Thackeray and as Uglow argues, Gaskell was clearly "unwilling . . . to come under the domination of another strong male editor" (459-60); only one of Gaskell's pieces appeared in the *Cornhill* under Thackeray's editorship.[29] As Uglow states, Gaskell firmly believed that female writers should enjoy "intellectual and personal freedom . . . without losing" what she saw and "valued as special to their sex: a lightness, a lack of pomposity, an easy imaginative sympathy, [and] above all a *language* of their own" (Uglow 467, original emphasis).

[29] Gaskell sent her short story "Curious if True" to the *Cornhill* and it "appeared, without complaint from Thackeray . . . in February 1860" (Uglow 461). It was not until March 1862, when Thackeray resigned as editor of the *Cornhill*, that Gaskell begun to contribute wholeheartedly to the magazine (Easson, *Heritage* 12; Fisher 5).

Different Social Criticism

Whether because of their gender or not, it is certain that Dickens and Gaskell approached the subject of social criticism differently. Social criticism and social awareness characterised the "Condition of England" or social problem novels written in Britain in the 1840s and 1850s (Moran 82; Easson, *Heritage* 14). In 1839 Carlyle brought attention to "the human and social cost of industrialism and aggressive economic policies" (Moran 82-83) and many novelists who followed in his steps focused on the effect of industrialisation and other social aspects – such as legal and ideological trends – on the lives of people. For the first time, "the poor, the criminal, and the diseased," along with others "who had previously been socially peripheral," took centre stage and came to life through characters who "captured the reading public's imagination" and evoked their sympathy (Childers 78).

However, as with so many issues in the Victorian age, a double moral standard prevailed when it came to social criticism. While readers liked to have their own social awareness expanded by being exposed to social evils, they did not want the full power of pure realism; the main reason for reading novels was their entertainment value. Patrick Brontë once quoted King Solomon in a letter to Gaskell, claiming that "[h]e that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow" (qtd. in Uglow 432) and he was certainly right. Readers did not want to be overly aware of their immediate surroundings and seem to have desired a beautified version of reality; even prominent figures like John Forster voiced concerns that some social novels were simply "too real to be pleasant" (qtd. in Tomalin 245). Despite the various reforms and intellectual movements there were still certain "core ideals" prevalent in Victorian Britain (Moran 1). As Moran affirms, "Victorians valued stability, tradition, authority and grandeur in public life" (1), thus only permitting social radicalism up to a certain point.

Dickens and Gaskell both valued the core ideals that Moran mentions, yet their social criticism would also spark harsh reaction. Uglow asserts that "Elizabeth's attack on mercantile ethics and callous masters in *Mary Barton* was brave indeed" (87), since she lived in one of the biggest industrial cities of Britain. "As soon as it appeared *Mary Barton* sparked off furious arguments, especially, of course, in Manchester" and Gaskell was accused of "cast[ing] a slur on their whole city" (Uglow 214). Dickens was similarly attacked by Thackeray "for romanticizing crime" in *Oliver Twist* (Schlicke, "*Oliver*" 441) and Philip Collins claims that "the political implications" felt in his later

novels, such as *Bleak House*, were generally viewed as "pernicious" (*Heritage* 13). However, even though Gaskell and Dickens both focused on criticising the various "contemporary social failings" through the novel form (Moran 82), their style was radically different.

Different Styles for Different Mediums

The difference in the style of Dickens and Gaskell's novels can largely be explained by their choice of publication format. As Altick explains, Victorian publishing "revolutionized literary culture" in Britain and evolved into one of the era's "major industry with an annual turnover of several million pounds" ("Publishing" 303, 290). Sales of books reached unprecedented heights in the nineteenth century, instigated by Sir Walter Scott's novelistic success in the first part of the century (Altick, "Publishing" 292), and journalism in particular "experience[d] a revolution," transforming from the substantial number of 129 serial magazines published in 1801 into a staggering amount of 4.819 magazines in 1900 (Moran 113). During the Victorian period these two mediums became central to the publication of novels, which were either published in the three volume format or the serial format and each form "presented authors with a mixture of opportunity and constraint, of flexibility and pressure" (Altick, "Publishing" 295).

As Easson explains, "[t]hree volumes was traditionally the format and length of *serious* fiction and reviewers often use the term (or the more colloquial 'three decker') even of novels that appeared in two" (*Heritage* 52, added emphasis). The three-decker became the standard format of fiction in the Victorian age, yet its expensiveness stood against its wider circulation. The solution was found in circulating libraries and the most famous one, Maudie's Select Library (established in1842), had a crucial role in the circulation of novels during the majority of the Victorian era, allowing people to borrow books at a moderate price (Flint 20-21; Altick, "Publishing" 293). [30] While three volume novels have been criticised for verbosity – traced to authors "extending their stories in order to fill three volumes"– serial novels were more cut and compressed (Flint 23).

[30] Altick notes that the library's greatest disadvantage was its proprietor, Charles Edward Maudie – "a fervent, hymn-writing evangelical moralist" – who virtually had the power to "veto" what he himself thought was improper or immoral for his general readers ("Publishing" 294, 293). Subsequently, Maudie's Select Library had a "near-monopoly on the distribution of original fiction" in book form (Altick, "Publishing" 294).

The main appeal of the serial novel, for authors and readers alike, was its cheapness, which resulted in a larger readership as well as wider distribution (Altick, "Publishing" 295; Patten, "Serial" 530; Flint 22). Serial publication of novels, in magazine instalments or in parts, "burst into view when it was employed for *Pickwick Papers* in 1836-7" (Altick, "Publishing" 295). Each instalment of serial novels was limited to a certain amount, which kept them – along with deadlines and the lack of chance for revisions or alterations – within strict limits (Altick, "Publishing" 296). However, because of its serial nature the authors had to ensure "the purchase of a subsequent issue" (Flint 23) and in that sense, serial novelists "*belonged* to their readers" (Patten, "Serial" 530, original emphasis). Wilkie Collins allegedly coined the formula that authors needed to follow for a successful serial narrative: "Make 'em cry, make 'em laugh, make 'em wait" (qtd. in Altick, "Publishing" 296). Thus, as authors of serial fiction were provided with instant feedback from readers "via correspondence and purchasing statistics," these eventually "shaped the actual process of composition" (Moran 79). To keep readers engaged and interested in the plot, authors often adjusted and changed the narrative to instantly tend to their readers' wishes – for example changing the plot, dropping unpopular characters or introducing new ones, or shifting emphasis.

Without a doubt, Dickens became the master of serialisation. As Joel J. Brattin notes, "Dickens published every one of his novels in serial form" – he even "*composed* serially," unlike many authors (116, original emphasis) – and his style of writing was inevitably shaped by the demands of serialisation. Dickens felt that it was important that "a story-teller and a story-reader should establish a mutual understanding as soon as possible" (qtd. in Flint 22-23) and his effectiveness in doing just that can be seen through the "urgent demand for each new number" of his works (Flint 22). Patten explains how Dickens tended to cleverly insert "two or three plots that intersect" into his novels, which meant that he could develop and expand each plot according to his own desires or those of his readers and simultaneously "parallel and contrast the events and characters, keep all the stories going forward, and provide climaxes to each part" ("Serial" 529). This technique can for example be seen in *Oliver Twist*.

Although perhaps one of Dickens's most accessible and popular novels the peculiar narrative of *Oliver Twist* has been the source of speculation for many scholars. One such is Stephen Gill, who argues that "[w]hat began as a topical satire on the workhouse system and the role of the 1834 New Poor Law in fostering criminality,

marked by a heavily ironic narrative voice, became a moral fable about the survival of good . . .” (“Introduction” ix). Even though “Dickens’s new-found fame from *Pickwick* . . . ensured that *Oliver Twist* was widely reviewed, overwhelmingly with admiration” (Schlicke, “*Oliver*” 441) Gill is certainly right; there is a detectable shift in the novel’s narrative from its early criticism of the workhouses to more melodramatic things, such as “illegitimate births, suppressed wills” and murders (Gill, “Introduction” viii). Yet the shifts can clearly be explained by the novel’s original serial format. Gill claims that “there is little evidence to indicate that Dickens had any vision *of the whole novel*” when he began writing *Oliver Twist* (“Introduction” viii, original emphasis), and rather more evidence that he “substantially altered his plans for the work . . . as it was being published” (Gill, “Introduction” ix). As the story evolves the focus is increasingly shifted from Oliver, the protagonist, to other figures, especially those belonging to London’s lower classes – such as Nancy and Bill Sikes, Fagin and the Artful Dodger – whose introduction enable the narrative to extend into other areas. As in the case of Oliver’s accidental injury during the break-in into the Maylies’ house at the end of chapter 22, Dickens is still able to carry on with the narrative by shifting the focus entirely from Oliver and onto other characters: the evil Monks is introduced in chapter 24 and earlier characters like the beadle Mr. Bumble, Noah Claypole and his companion Charlotte are brought back. Oliver’s injury is thus clearly a climax which keeps the suspense going in the succeeding five chapters, which Dickens uses to move forward with other strands of the plot in preparation for future events and the narrative’s eventual resolution.

At this early stage in his career, Dickens’s narrative changes appear to have been based on his own predilections, rather than those of his readers. As he explained in his preface to the novel’s third edition, published in 1841, Dickens wanted to portray “in little Oliver, the principle of Good surviving through every adverse circumstances, and triumphing at last” (*Oliver* liii), so what began as a criticism of the poor conditions of the workhouses had to be expanded into something greater. This might account for the novel’s “awkward” structure (Gill, “Introduction” vii), although it also seems to stem from the fact that *Oliver Twist* was only Dickens’s second novel. His first novel, the *Pickwick Papers*, had been a work of “episodic miscellany” (Schlicke, “*Pickwick*” 452), and its influence can be detected in the slightly segmented feeling of the narrative in *Oliver Twist*. By the time *Hard Times* was published, Dickens had certainly managed to perfect the serial style for his longer narratives and although the novel was serialised at

a much more rapid pace than *Oliver Twist* (weekly and not monthly), the novel's narrative – despite its various sub-plots – is characterised by ease and perfect fluidity.

Nevertheless, serialisation of novels was less popular than publication through book form and the "practice was not widely imitated" (Flint 23). Eventually it lost out to "the part issue," yet Dickens obstinately "clung to the practice to the very end of his life" (Altick, "Publishing" 295). Patten reveals that the serial form was important for Dickens: "periodically issuing a text in progress gave him money while he wrote; he did not need to wait until a book was completed before selling it. Indeed, throughout his life he counted on the earnings from his current serial to support his increasingly expensive residences and family" ("Serial" 528). Gaskell, on the other hand, did not have to turn to writing for financial support. As Uglow argues, Gaskell did not become an author for the fame and fortune, although she would certainly not come to resent payments for her works as she got more established as a writer; Gaskell turned to writing because she felt that she had something to say.

Gaskell's initial decision on choosing to publish her novels in book form instead of serially seems largely determined by two factors, the first being her style of writing. As has been mentioned before, Gaskell's style is gradual and slow-paced, the complete opposite of Dickens's. "In almost all Gaskell's works, short or long," Uglow affirms, "author and reader slowly approach the subject and learn the lie of the land until, at a moment of crisis, a door suddenly seems to open, like Sesame, and we step into new terrain – melodrama, mystery, intense emotion or fantasy" (256). This is evident in both *Mary Barton* and *Sylvia's Lovers* which, although written fifteen years apart, are very similar in style. Both novels begin, almost languidly, in a bucolic setting which evokes "the delicious sounds of rural life" (Gaskell, *Mary* 2) and "suggests a pleasanter way of living" (Wright xiii), before entering into the towns in which most of the action takes place. Both narratives have plenty of important occurrences in their former halves, which serve to set up the scene and build up for the ultimate turn of events. However, the turning point of each story does not present itself until half-way into each novel; Kinraid's abduction by the press-gang and Harry Carson's murder are the events that catapult each plot into motion.

Gaskell's writing pattern is exactly suited to the two- or three-volume format and it seems likely that her naturally slow-paced style was only strengthened by the demands of the book form. Gaskell herself appears to have realised how well-suited her style was for the standard book form, because she "at one stage planned out *Mary*

Barton in a three-volume division" (Easson, *Heritage* 52). Although it was eventually published in two volumes, the effects can be felt in the text itself. Wright states that "[m]any critics have argued that [*Mary Barton*] divides into two sections; the first centring on John Barton and the events leading up to the murder, the second switching from social realism to the melodrama of chase and alibi centring on Mary" (xiv). Gaskell employs the same pattern in *North and South*, where the scene when Margaret get hits by a small stone as she protects Mr Thornton from the angry mill-workers serves as a turning point. Sally Shuttleworth argues that "[f]rom this point on, the focus . . . shifts decisively to the sphere of gender relations; the romantic possibilities of Margaret and Thornton's union draw attention away from detailed analyses of class conflict" (xxviii). Incidentally, *North and South* was also published in two volumes in 1855, after its serialisation in *Household Words*, thus perhaps reflecting how Gaskell had originally envisioned its publication. Gaskell appears to have realised that her slow-paced style was much better suited for publication in the three volume form than the serial form, and *Ruth* and *Sylvia's Lovers* were both published in three volumes.

Dangerous Subjects

The subjects Gaskell wanted to explore were also a vital determinant in her choice of medium; these subjects were serious and deserved "all the dignity of three volumes" (Easson, *Heritage* 25). As Easson explains, "[t]he controversy over Gaskell's early works stimulated a range of responses, not only from professional reviewers, but from friends, from novelists and other writers, from public figures, and from ordinary people" (*Heritage* 1). Gaskell herself was well-aware of how dangerous and controversial some of her subjects were: "I think I must be an improper woman without knowing it, I do so manage to shock people" (*Letters* 223). In the case of *Ruth*, Gaskell's most controversial novel, she "agoniz[ed] over whether to publish at all" (Easson *Heritage* 26), yet her insistence on a realistic portrayal of Victorian society and her sense of "duty to assert 'truth', however uncomfortable," prevailed (Uglow 602).

Victorians are generally notorious for their "avoidance of sexuality" (Adams 126), yet sexuality, especially in relation to women, was a great concern in Victorian society. Adams explains that in the nineteenth century prostitution "became an ever more visible feature of life in the burgeoning towns and cities" as the "by-product of social mobility and economic insecurity" (133). Prostitution is an excellent example of

the double moral standard prevalent during Victoria's reign, since it was considered normal for middle-class men to seek sexual outlet through prostitutes, while the women themselves – often working-class women "supplementing or replacing the notoriously dismal wages and working conditions of domestic service or piece work" (Adams 133) – were largely condemned by society for unrespectable behaviour. Some conservatives, like William Gayer Starbuck, clearly felt that women were best served and protected by sticking to their conventional domestic roles: "When a woman falls from her purity there is no return for her – as well may one attempt to wash the stain from the sullied snow. Men sin and are forgiven; but the memory of a woman's guilt cannot be removed on earth" (qtd. in S. Mitchell x).[31]

Jeff Nunokawa points out that sexuality had been addressed in novels on various occasions during the Victorian period, in works such as Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (1848), as well as in Charlotte and Anne Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848), respectively. "The fallen woman was," as Easson explains, "a familiar enough character in novels" (*Heritage* 26). Yet in *Ruth* Gaskell "placed the innocent victim of sexual depredation at the centre of the mainstream Victorian novel *for the first time*" (Dolin xi, added emphasis) and when the novel was published "[t]he respectable condemned [Gaskell's] immorality, the liberal praised her courage, the radical regretted her feebleness" (Uglow 342). Some critics and readers again raised a question which had emerged upon the publication of *Mary Barton*, "whether a novel was a fit vehicle for such discussion" (*Heritage* 26). Novels were generally seen as a means of "amusement in moments of idleness, [which] could not hope to treat seriously a topic suited to morals or theology" (Easson, *Heritage* 26), and "[e]ver fearful of losing library business, publishers had an ineradicable phobia against even the faintest suggestion of realism" (Altick, "Publishing" 300).

[31] According to Adams, "[p]rostitution would occasion the single most controversial state intervention into Victorian sexuality" with the passing of the Contagious Diseases Acts in the 1860s, which were meant to secure the health of the British military (133). The Acts forced prostitutes and women suspected of prostitution to undergo "forced medical examination," with the possibility of a further punishment (Adams 133). Female activists argued that these Acts "violated women's civil rights, intruded monstrously on privacy . . . [and] ratified the sexual double standard," in addition to failing "to eradicate venereal disease," since men were not enforced to undergo any sort of medical examination (Hughes 39). As Hughes states, leaders in the military "insisted, [that] enforced genital inspection of men was humiliating and lowered morale" (39), while no such concern was voiced on behalf of the women who had to undergo an inspection – which Josephine Butler, the leader of the protest (Cain 100), likened to "instrumental rape" (qtd. in Hughes 39). The protest proved successful and the Acts were eventually withdrawn in 1886 (Hughes 39).

Gaskell had anticipated such objections to the subject of her novel, but still chose to challenge readers: "'An unfit subject for fiction' is *the* thing to say about it; I knew all this before; but I determined notwithstanding to speak my mind out about it; only how I shrink with more pain than I can tell you from what people are saying, though I wd [would] do every jot of it over again to-morrow" (*Letters* 220, original emphasis). Gaskell admitted: "I had some thing to say about it that I *must* say, and you know I can tell stories better than any other way of expressing myself" (*Further Letters* 79, original emphasis). Although she herself would surely "have been repelled by hearing that a 'tale of seduction' was chosen as a subject for fiction," she "felt *almost* sure that if people would only read what I had to say they would not be disgusted" (*Further Letters* 79, original emphasis).

As Easson states, *Ruth*, like her first novel, was "deliberately meant to be on a controversial subject; Gaskell was establishing herself as a novelist with a purpose" (*Heritage* 7). Evidently, Gaskell strictly followed her own conviction and she appears not to have wanted her readers to influence her in any way whatsoever, as would surely have been the case if she had serialised the novel in a magazine. "Defiance, as well as sympathy," which were central messages of her writing" (Uglow 474), were also definite characteristics of Gaskell as a person, and rather than being a mere imitator of established themes or opinions she spoke out for what she believed in. As Uglow reasons, Gaskell "believed that the witness to truth should be taken, if needs be, to the point of martyrdom" and "[i]n every fierce controversy about her work . . . she would revert to this deep justification: she had to tell the truth" (7). When *Mary Barton* was published Gaskell "fled to Wales rather than face the reaction in Manchester" (Uglow 187) and this practice would become habitual for her as a way to escape both critique and possible controversy following the publication of her bigger works. However, Showalter argues that Gaskell's "unassailable respectability and normality" as a wife and mother – instead of the widely-dreaded unmarried and childless authoresses – eventually "helped win over the readers" of her most controversial novels (59).

Many of Gaskell's publications were risky, yet being a new author also gave her a cutting edge over established writers like Dickens. The *Manchester Guardian* praised Gaskell as a "fresh, untrammelled" author, who was unaffected by "the 'spirit of the age'" (Easson, *Heritage* 485), and Gaskell was indeed free of any restrains, perhaps most importantly because of her gender. Unlike Dickens she did not have to support her family with her writing and having nothing to lose meant that she could take more risks

in her fiction. As Tomalin accounts, Dickens's career had gone through a relative slump in the 1840s, with the publication of *Barnaby Rudge*, *American Notes* and *Martin Chuzzlewit* (143), and although Dickens was certainly the inimitable when it came to the serial format he must have realised that his success was fragile. Keeping in mind that "[s]erial publication shaped *how* writers wrote, as much as *what* they wrote" (Moran 79, original emphasis), Dickens appears to have become increasingly aware of belonging to his readers, and in the late 1850s, when his public readings began, he saw them "as a way of strengthening what he felt to be almost a personal friendship with his readers [. . .] He was after all the nation's entertainer and known as the friend of the people" (Tomalin 295). Tomalin claims that "[t]heir response confirmed to him that he was a star" (355) and as their friend, Dickens knew what kept his audience happy.

In order to maintain popularity Dickens had to choose his topics carefully, so as not to alienate his readers. Sanders states that Dickens "seems at times to have been actively disturbed by any threat to upset the social status quo" (*Dickens* 69) and when it came to delicate and controversial social subjects, Dickens refrained from full involvement. Although Dickens was involved with Urania Cottage for a long time he only dared to write about fallen women and present them in a way that society would not scorn. Westland claims that "Dickens's understanding of prostitutes and the lives of lower-class women had remarkably little effect on his fiction" ("Fallen" 476). According to her, despite the obvious sympathetic elements, his portrayals of fallen women are rather stereotypical, as they "lurk in the shadows . . . a threat to middle-class decency and the DOMESTIC ideal" (Westland, "Fallen" 476, original capitalisation). Although Dickens clearly helped to awaken sympathy for fallen women through his publications in *Household Words* of pieces dealing with the topic, such as Gaskell's "Lizzie Leigh," and through his own works and characters, for example through Nancy in *Oliver Twist* – the "whore with a heart of gold" who was brutally murdered (Westland, "Fallen" 476-77) – Westland points out that Dickens "still punished his fictional women for their fall" ("Fallen" 477). Nancy's final words, "It is never too late to repent. They told me so—I feel it now—but we must have time—a little, little time" (*Oliver* 383), seem an ironic contradiction to Nancy's ultimate fate, which suggests that "good intentions" and good deeds were not enough to save or offer hope for the common fallen woman (Westland, "Fallen" 477).

Oliver Twist was of course one of Dickens's earliest social novels and his portrayal of Nancy might be deemed as the touch of a cautious young author. Yet

Dickens stays his course in *Hard Times* through his portrayal of Louisa's symbolic fall from Mrs Sparsit's imagined "mighty Staircase," with its "dark pit of shame and ruin at the bottom" (*Hard* 188). As Mrs Sparsit watches Louisa's supposedly immoral behaviour in her interactions with the young Mr Harthouse, she envisions Louisa "always gliding down, down, down!" the great staircase and "never turning back" (*Hard* 191, 189). The staircase is clearly symbolic for the moral decline of the fallen woman. Westland notes that "[i]ndeed, mainstream Victorian morality labelled women who had committed adultery or fallen to a single seducer as no better than prostitutes" ("Fallen" 477) and as a married woman, Louisa should not even be seen "leaning on [Mr Harthouse's] arm" (*Hard* 191). Although Louisa never engages in any inappropriate behaviour her fall is nevertheless fulfilled. In a chapter ironically entitled "Down" a semi-hysterical Louisa theatrically swoons at her father's feet, exclaiming "[a]ll that I know is, your philosophy and your teaching will not save me. [. . .] Save me by some other means!" (*Hard* 203). But when Mr Gradgrind tries to "prevent her sinking on the floor" she cries out "I shall die if you hold me!" (*Hard* 203, 204). Louisa's metaphorical fall must be completed with an actual physical one.

Margaret's immoral embrace of Mr Thornton and her physical fall to the ground in *North and South* seem analogous to Louisa's fall, suggesting that both women are now morally debased. Although Louisa will recover from her torpid state, Dickens has no intention of allowing her to be reinstated to full respectability through marriage, like Gaskell's Margaret: "Herself again a wife—a mother—lovingly watchful of her children. [. . .] Did Louisa see this? Such a thing was never to be" (*Hard* 274). Compassion aside, "Dickens still punished his fictional women for their fall" (Westland, "Fallen" 477). Westland claims that "[t]here is no evidence in [Dickens's] novels that fallen women could save themselves or that prostitutes could keep control of their own lives, and he was less successful than his contemporary Elizabeth Gaskell in departing from moral and literary conventions to give the woman's side of the story" ("Fallen" 477). It is almost as if Dickens only chose to attack social matters that would cause limited havoc, but rather inspire favourable responses, and by extension guarantee sales of his novels.

The ideas presented in *Hard Times* are of course not necessarily representative of what Dickens himself felt on the matter; yet they still seem to be. A conservative at heart, Dickens clearly did not feel inclined to go all the way in speaking out against the double moral standard that surrounded the image of the fallen woman – after all, how

could he, if he himself, as was suggested earlier, sought out the services of fallen women? Through Louisa's words, Dickens seems rather to be arguing that words or ideas were of little use when it came to fallen women and that actions like those he performed through Urania Cottage, in collaboration with Miss Coutts, were the only means of rescue for women who had fallen from grace. However, Dickens is careful not to "present illegitimate children . . . like Oliver Twist as tainted by their mothers' fault" (Westland, "Fallen" 477).

In fact, there seems to be a certain kind of affinity between Oliver Twist and a younger Dickens. Although certainly not an illegitimate child, Dickens had himself, at the time when writing *Oliver Twist*, overcome great odds; with little education and less than supportive parents, he had managed to become a prosperous writer. As Schlicke points out, the Utilitarian ideology that served as the basis for the New Poor Law of 1834 and which Dickens criticises in *Oliver Twist*, "made no allowance for noble human qualities" and was "insensitive to the lot of the individual" ("Introduction" x). Dickens's work in the blacking factory as a young boy had most likely conduced "to the greatest happiness of the greatest number of people" in his family (Smith 592), but certainly not his own, and he could not consent to such an ideology. Dickens did not want to suffer for his father's actions; like little Oliver, he wanted to progress and succeed.

Humour

While Gaskell is more determined to point out the wrongs of society in social novels, not for entertainment but for amendment, Dickens's novels – especially his earlier ones – are usually rather designed to entertain readers, with a good slice of social criticism on the side. Although Dickens claimed to portray the lower classes in *Oliver Twist* "as they really are" – by showing them "in all their deformity, in all their wretchedness, in all the squalid poverty of their lives" – he nevertheless admitted, "[n]o less consulting my own taste, than the manners of the age," to have "endeavoured . . . to banish from the lips of the lowest character I introduced, any expression that could possibly offend" (*Oliver* liv, lvi). In that sense, Dickens's early serial success with the comical *Pickwick Papers* can be seen to have shaped the techniques he came to rely on to hold onto his readership and humour became an integral part of Dickens's formula for success.

The entertainment value of his works obviously became Dickens's number one priority, in novels as well as shorter fiction. Although the subjects dealt with in many of his novels, including *Oliver Twist,* were certainly serious enough to be suitable for the respectable three-deckers, Dickens's use of humour and irony, as befitted the serial form – which had to include pathos, humour and suspense – diminishes his treatment of social themes. Even though Tomalin argues that "Dickens was ahead of his time in showing that people with handicaps could be likable, intelligent and perceptive," like Sleary in *Hard Times* (251), his loose eye and lisping rather make him into a comic figure. In both *Hard Times* and *Oliver Twist* humour and irony are frequently used in descriptions and presented through the narrator's remarks. In the former novel, the narrator claims to "ENTERTAIN a weak idea that the English people are as hard-worked as any people upon whom the sun shines," admitting that a "SUNNY midsummer day" would sometimes appear, "even in Coketown" (*Hard* 64, 105, original capitalisation). In the latter, Dickens uses irony in his portrayal of "genteel" places such as Ratcliffe (*Oliver* 98) – which was of course nothing of the sort (Gill, "Notes" 469) – and to describe the small shops in the poorest neighbourhoods, whose "only stock in trade appeared to be heaps of children" (*Oliver* 60). Ample irony is used in both novels to ridicule Utilitarian thinkers, who are usually termed as "sound-judging" or "mighty philosophers" (*Oliver* 91) and the preposterous manner of Mr Gradgrind and Mr Bounderby's friendship is described in the same derogatory manner: "Why, Mr. Bounderby was as near being Mr. Gradgrind's bosom friend, as a man perfectly devoid of sentiment can approach that spiritual relationship towards another man perfectly devoid of sentiment. So near was Mr. Bounderby—or, if the reader should prefer it, so far off" (19).

Dickens's style is usually described as being melodramatic, comic, and ironic, characterised by his very own "Dickensy flavour" (Drew, "*Words*" 286), which came to dominate his works.[32] Dickens had a taste for the theatrical and direct theatrical elements are evident in *Oliver Twist,* when Dickens, describing a scene, includes stage directions in parenthesis for his characters: "You are a humane woman, Mrs. Mann.' (Here she set down the glass.) 'I shall take a early opportunity of mentioning it to the board, Mrs. Mann.' (He drew it towards him.) 'You feel as a mother, Mrs. Mann.' (He stirred the gin-and-water.) 'I—I drink your health with cheerfulness, Mrs. Mann;'"

[32] Drew even points out that some contributors to *Household Words* recalled "the constant pressure placed upon them to strain after the fanciful effects which Dickens desired" ("*Words*" 286).

(*Oliver* 7). Schlicke claims that "[f]or Dickens, the relation between theatre and life was a fascinating mirror image" ("Theatre" 574), and his own justification can be felt through the narrator's explanation in *Oliver Twist* as he informs the readers of his narrative intentions:

> IT is the custom on the stage: in all good, murderous melodramas: to present the tragic and the comic scenes, in as regular alternation, as the layers of red and white in a side of streaky, well-cured bacon. [. . .] Such changes appear absurd; but they are not so unnatural as they would seem at first sight. The transitions in real life from well-spread boards to death-beds, and from mourning weeds to holiday garments, are not a whit less startling; only there, we are busy actors, instead of passive lookers-on; which makes a vast difference. (129, original capitalisation)

This core belief became dominant in most of Dickens's works, evident for example in the well-balanced narrative of *Great Expectations*.

Although Gaskell's social novels are not at all devoid of humour and melodrama, she does not employ these at regular intervals as Dickens advises; she is careful to use them only to lighten the mood during appropriate moments, and never in places that might reduce the power of her social commentary. Gaskell generally appears to try to separate her social pieces and those that have a lighter mood; *Cranford* for example is full of anecdotes and "inimitable feminine charm" (C. Mitchell vii), while the mood in *Sylvia's Lovers*, with its themes of "isolation and entrapment" is filled with a sense of remorse and loss (Foster, "Introduction" xxv). As Uglow reveals, Gaskell was generally light-hearted, "lively and open" (71) and her letters reveal a sharp wit and kind nature. Yet her descriptions of social situations are never light-hearted; "they demanded an effort of sympathy and imagination, a different voice" (Uglow 113).

In *Mary Barton* Gaskell takes on the role of "an objective recorder" (Uglow 211), rather than a composer of a work of fiction, as she describes social conditions similar to those that she encountered every day in Manchester during the "hungry forties". In her preface, Gaskell clearly states that "it is not for me to judge" (*Mary* xxxv) and her social accounts are usually very matter-of-fact as she lets the words speak for themselves: "Whole families went through a gradual starvation. They only wanted a Dante to record their sufferings. And yet even his words would fall short of their awful truth ; they could only present an outline of the tremendous facts of the destitution that surrounded thousands upon thousands in the terrible years 1839, 1840, and 1841" (96).

Dante is of course famous for *The Divine Comedy* (*La divina commedia*), which offers a "penetrating and comprehensive analysis of contemporary [Italian] problems" through the protagonist's travels through Hell and Purgatory (Quinones). By invoking this imagery, Gaskell conveys that not even the flourished language of great poets like Dante could faithfully portray the hellish existence of the many that belong to the poorer classes. Like Dante, Gaskell can only reflect on a small part of the horrid circumstances and in the scene where John Barton and George Wilson rush to the poor neighbourhood of Berry Street to aid their fellow mill-worker Ben Davenport and his family, Gaskell lets her simple yet stark realism shake readers:

> As they passed, women from their doors tossed household slops of *every* description into the gutter ; they ran into the next pool, which overflowed and stagnated. [. . .] You went down one step even from the foul area into the cellar in which a family of human beings lived. [. . .] the smell was so fetid as almost to knock the two men down [. . .] they began to penetrate the thick darkness of the place, and to see three or four little children rolling on the damp, nay wet, brick floor, through which the stagnant, filthy moisture of the street oozed up ; the fireplace was empty and black ; the wife sat on her husband's lair, and cried in the dank loneliness. (*Mary* 66-67, original emphasis)

As Uglow claims, Gaskell "rarely, if ever, wrote about settings she did not know" (64). The starving family of skeletal beings that Gaskell portrays in this passage seems painfully real and evokes sympathy in readers. Furthermore, the condition of the cellar in which they live is abominable and Wright states that realism, such as the one found in this passage, "comes from what is clearly personal knowledge" (xviii). The dwelling, with only one habitable room, had access to another "back cellar, with a grating instead of a window, down which dropped the moisture from pigsties, and worse abominations. It was not paved ; the floor was one mass of bad smelling mud. It had never been used . . . nor could a human being, much less a pig, have lived there many days. Yet the 'back apartment' made a difference in the rent" (*Mary* 71). Although Dickens has "long [been] known for depictions of insalubrious environments (Pope 478), no scenes in Dickens's *Oliver Twist* or *Hard Times* come close to matching Gaskell's brutal description of the living conditions of the Davenports in *Mary Barton*.

Such descriptions were those that "touched and shocked its middle-class readers to an unprecedented extent because [they] showed how the poor suffered not in the mill

or the factory but in their homes" (Uglow 194). In *North and South* Gaskell is less explicit in her descriptions. Instead of focusing on the working-class community, the novel explores the conflict between mill-owners and workers from both sides in the industrial town of Milton, revealing "the question of rebellion," which stands "[a]t the heart of the novel" (Shuttleworth ix). The subject of the novel seems uncannily appropriate in light of the conflict which concurred with the novel's serialisation.

Failed Expectations? – The Serialisation of North and South

As Linda K. Hughes and Michal Lund point out, the serialisation of *North and South* has largely been viewed as a "failure" by scholars, who claim that Gaskell "failed to understand the demands of parts publication" (97, 96). However, this opinion seems largely based on Dickens's own view of the novel's serial failure according to his own standards. As previously mentioned, before *North and South*, both *Cranford* and "Lizzie Leigh" had already been successfully serialised in *Household Words* to Dickens's satisfaction; the latter piece had even been published in America under Dickens's name, thus suggesting that "Gaskell's fiction could fulfill conventional expectations about serial form well enough to be taken for work by the age's acknowledged master of the installment form" (Hughes and Lund 98).

At first it might seem that Gaskell's novel was being forced into something it was not suited for – the serial format. However, *North and South* can in many ways be seen as an experimental piece on Gaskell's behalf, consciously challenging the accepted successful serial design. In fact, Dickens seems to have had little influence on Gaskell's narrative, aside from dictating the limitations of each instalment and the narrative's division into parts. When it came to serialising *North and South* Hughes and Lund believe that,

> The ensuing battle between author and editor about magazine policy involved different narrative aims and rival assumptions about readers' pleasure. Whereas Dickens wanted each part to be self-contained—with a clear climax and resolution—Gaskell wanted a more leisurely pace for the development of plot and the entanglement of her audience. Indeed, what she was attempting in the whole of *North and South* casts the conventional paradigm of the serial's appeal in a different light. (97)

As explained before, Gaskell felt it was important for women writers to hold on to their own voice and write in their own style – not men's style – and "Gaskell resented the fixed way her work would be portioned out to readers" in Dickens's serial style of "self-sufficient units with powerful conclusions" (Hughes and Lund 115, 113). Hughes and Lund observe that when Gaskell had composed *Mary Barton* and *Ruth* "with an eye to their less restricting two- and three-volume appearance, she did not come into conflict with Chapman and Hall and established Victorian publishing practices" (115). However, Dickens "seems to assume that on her own Gaskell would be unable to conceive of an appropriate division into parts" (Hughes and Lund 113) and thus he disliked her resistance of his advice on how to achieve successful serial publication; its success was after all vital to him as the editor and proprietor of *Household Words*. Still, Gaskell wanted the division to be according to her own preferences and her resistance towards Dickens's interference with *North and South* thus reveals Gaskell's strong sense of authorship and control, along with her independence of will.

Gaskell seems to have had her own design for *North and South* all along. In a contemporary review by the *Leader*, *North and South* was deemed "a failure" as a social novel (Easson, *Heritage* 333), but as Jill L. Matus suggests, *North and South* is not merely a social novel. According to Matus, *North and South* "seems as interested in the nature of the psyche as it is in social problems," and she believes that the novel "is profoundly interested in the effect of very powerful feelings on psychic functioning and in the haunting aftermath of intense emotional experience" ("*Mary*" 35). Thus the novel makes Gaskell "unusual among mid-century novelists in exploring the stunning or numbing effects of shock and emotional upheaval" ("*Mary*" 37). Gaskell's own supposed alternative title for *North and South* – "Death & Variations" (Gaskell, *Letters* 324) – seems to suggest that she saw the focus of the novel as the exploration of the emotional and psychological effects of loss, as well as conflicts of ideas.

With its "careful expositions" and reflections on different matters and ideas (Easson, *Heritage* 33), *North and South* is more didactic than *Mary Barton*.[33] Built on the radicalism of *Ruth* – which sought to "re-humaniz[e]" a world of "religious hypocrisy and the social hypocrisy of the sexual double standard" (Dolin xxvi, xvi) –

[33] Didacticism is an inevitable part of all social novels, since they are designed to instruct or critique existing ideologies or customs; the only variation is the degree in which that didacticism is carried out. In *Hard Times* for example, Dickens is careful to state clearly his central message in the novel's penultimate chapter: "People mutht be amuthed. They can't be alwayth a learning, nor yet they can't be alwayth a working, they an't made for it. You *mutht* have uth, Thquire" (*Hard* 269, original emphasis).

Gaskell's aim is to enlighten readers and familiarise them to both sides of her arguments. Incidentally, the style of *North and South* stands out as radically different from Gaskell's other novels. While *Mary Barton* opens with "THERE are some fields near Manchester" (*Mary* 1, original capitalisation), and *Sylvia's Lovers* with "On the north-eastern shores of England is a town called Monkshaven" (*Sylvia's* 7), *North and South* starts with an utterance – "EDITH!" (*North* 5, original capitalisation) – which instantly emphasises the importance of words and arguments in the plot. The opposing opinions are manifested in long reflective passages, such as Mr Hale's resolute recitation of Mr Oldfield's soliloquy (*North* 35) and Mr Thornton's acknowledgement of his altered status in Milton after the changes in his mill – which "enable[d] both master and men to look upon each other with far more charity and sympathy, and bear with each other more patiently and kindly" (*North* 420). "Gaskell had been accused of being one-sided" in her preference to the workers' cause in *Mary Barton*, but as Easson points out Gaskell is careful to take "neither side" in *North and South*, but rather to reconcile opposing beliefs "by offering illumination of each to the other" (*Heritage* 33). Hughes and Lund observe that "[t]he entire novel . . . progressed through a series of stages in understanding, as different or opposing perspectives clashed: North against South, Church of England against Methodism, men against women, worker against employer, servant against mistress. Each installment, then, constituted a debate from different positions" and readers "slowly but steadily moved closer to shared values . . ." (115-16). Simultaneously, this method makes the novel somewhat episodic and thus perfectly suited to the serial form.

Nevertheless, the serialisation of *North and South* proved to be Gaskell's most difficult task. She explained to Anna Jameson, that "though I had the plot and characters in my head long ago, I have often been in despair about the working of them out; because of course, in this way of publishing it, I had to write pretty hard . . ." (*Letters* 328). The pressure of weekly serialisation on such a large scale – described so well in her letter to Eliza Fox in late December 1854[34] – in addition to Dickens's "Che sarà sarà [whatever will be, will be] resignation" and "perpetual grumbling" (*Further Letters* 123). Although the style of *North and South* appears exceedingly well-suited to the

[34] "I've been as nearly dazed and crazed with this c—, d—, be h— to it, story as can be. I've been sick of writing, and everything connected with literature or improvement of the mind; to say nothing of deep hatred to my species about whom I was obliged to write as if I loved 'em. Moreover I have had to write so hard that I have spoiled my hand, and forgotten all my spelling. Seriously it has been a terrible weight on me and has made me have some of the most felling headaches I ever had in my life . . ." (Gaskell, *Letters* 325).

serial form, Gaskell finally admitted "her own inability to work within this mode" (Hughes and Lund 117). She explained in her late December letter to Dickens in 1854, "I send what I am afraid you will think too large a batch. [. . . it] is meant to be crammed & stuffed into Janry 20th; & I'm afraid I've nearly as much more for Jany 27. [. . .] Don't consult me as to the shortenings[;] only help yrself" (*Letters* 323-24). It is evident that by this time Gaskell has become completely dispirited, despising the final task ahead: "I dare say I shall like my story, when I am a little further from it; at present I can only feel depressed about it, I meant it to have been so much better" (*Letters* 323).

Hughes and Lund observe that "what was [eventually] kept out of the narrative by Dickens and *Household Words* was not so much events as commentary and reflection," the continuation of Gaskell's design of presenting opposing ideas in each installation (115). After "desperate compression" (Gaskell, *Letters* 329), Gaskell's "poor story" was "like a pantomime figure, with a great large head, and very small trunk" (*Further Letters* 123). In that sense, *North and South* feels somewhat like Dickens's *Oliver Twist*, which has been criticised for cramming "all the details" necessary for the plot's resolution "into a few explanatory pages, which require the reader to believe things about the circumstances of Oliver's actual birth that are clearly not present—or even possible—in the description of that event in Chapter I" (Gill, "Introduction" viii). Similarly, due to limitations of length, Gaskell had to squeeze "a whole catalogue of events" into the final instalments of *North and South* (Gaskell, *Letters* 323).

While Gaskell had given up on fighting with Dickens about serialisation, she does not seem to have given up on her story. The story needed amendment and after consulting friends – such as Anna Jameson, who stated that "the rapidity of the incidents at the close destroys the proportions of your story as a work of art" (qtd. in Hughes and Lund 116) – Gaskell determined to "try to add something to the separate publication to make it less unnatural and deformed" (*Further Letters* 123). *North and South* was published in two volumes on 26 March 1855 and as Easson explains, the volume edition "differed substantially" from the serial version, with most of the changes appearing "towards the end, which Gaskell felt had been too rushed in the original version" (Shuttleworth and Easson, "Text" xxxv). Accordingly, "[t]he expanded conclusion . . . provide[s] one more stage in the dialectical evolution towards a new, transforming perspective" (Hughes and Lund 116).

Although the serialisation of *North and South* did perhaps not prove to be all that Dickens and Gaskell had desired, the improved volume version of the novel nevertheless "consolidated" Gaskell's literary reputation (Easson, *Heritage* 33), and today the novel is generally perceived as "one of the most intricately structured industrial novels of the Victorian age" (Shuttleworth ix). After the publication of the two volume version of *North and South*, Gaskell did not turn to novelistic fiction writing, until in *Sylvia's Lovers*, begun in late 1859 (Foster, "Introduction" xi). A historical novel, *Sylvia's Lovers* returns to the style Gaskell used in *Mary Barton* and with its "quietness of setting, character, and event," it is generally "felt to be superior in workmanship and to exhibit more artistic power than anything previously of Gaskell's" (Easson, *Heritage* 39).

Interestingly enough, even though Dickens appears to have disliked Gaskell's "style of narration" in *North and South* (Hughes and Lund 121) – supposedly believing it ill-suited for his beloved serial format – he nevertheless approached Gaskell again, in a letter dated 20 December 1859, asking her to consider writing another long narrative for his new magazine *All the Year Round*. Dickens suggested that the story might be serialised in the space of "about five months, or 22 weeks in serial publication of about 5 pages per week" (*Letters* 9: 179); in other words, he suggested another novel of relatively the same length as *North and South*, to be published in the same weekly format. Dickens seems to have intended Gaskell's novel as a follow up to his own historical novel *A Tale of Two Cities*, which had recently finished serialisation in *All the Year Round* (serialised from 30 April to 26 November 1859).

Following Scott's earlier success, the historical novel became popular in the "early and mid nineteenth century" (Foster, "Introduction" xiii) and Gaskell had in fact already begun writing her own historical novel, *Sylvia's Lovers*. Gaskell's first recorded allusion to her new story is found in a letter to the publisher George Smith, dated only three days after Dickens's letter. Although the story was "not far on" Gaskell explained that it was nevertheless "very clear in my head, & what I want to write more than any thing" (*Letters* 595). The fact that Dickens approached Gaskell at this particular point in time, asking her to contribute a longer narrative, seems to indicate that he was aware that she was again writing a novel. Moreover, he may also have known that Gaskell was writing a historical novel set in the same period as *A Tale of Two Cities*. By making Gaskell's historical novel succeed his own in the new magazine, Dickens would thus

essentially be repeating the pattern surrounding the serialisation of their two social novels in 1854-1855.

As has been noted before, *Sylvia's Lovers* was never published in the serial format, yet in some ways Dickens and Gaskell seem to have been uncannily synchronised in choosing the period of the French Revolution (1787-99) as a setting for their historical novels, as well as the contemporary industrial setting for *North and South* and *Hard Times*. In fact, it is possible that one author actually influenced the other.

Influences

Aside from the inevitable influences of Dickens's editorial power – manifested in the occasional shortened story or proposed, or even altered, title[35] – Gaskell's themes and subjects do not appear to have been under much influence from Dickens or his works throughout her years of contributing to *Household Words*. Gaskell seems to have stuck to her own active mind for ideas as well as her own experiences in life, which provided her with ample material for her stories: *Mary Barton* and *North and South* both found inspiration in Gaskell's Manchester life, Welsh landscape inspired her in *Ruth* (Uglow 51-52; Dolin viii), her brother John – a sailor who disappeared (likely at sea) – inspired the numerous sailors in her fiction (Uglow 53-54) and, as previously mentioned, *Cranford* was inspired by her youth in Knutsford.

According to Uglow, "[s]tories could lie in Elizabeth's mind for years" and on occasions she "reworked" her own favourite ideas; "the stone-throwing incident from 'The Heart of John Middleton' becomes a key scene in *North and South*" (255), and the "golden thread" – an element of hope in a gloomy situation – which first appears in *Mary Barton*, reappears in *North and South* (*Mary* 400; *North* 423). On some occasions Gaskell would also turn to historical accounts for inspiration. Her story "Lois the Witch" is closely based on a lecture about Salem witchcraft, written by Charles Wentworth Upham, and Uglow claims that Gaskell "follows it closely, in several places to the extent of merely adapting Upham's words" (663).[36] When Gaskell wrote *Sylvia's Lovers* she would also do some extensive research before writing the story of Monkshaven (Foster, "Sources").

As Joel J. Brattin states, Dickens would likewise resort to the occasional research and he "drew upon a variety of sources when composing his fiction," including his "reading and his experience in the theatre" (118). Nevertheless, Brattin claims that Dickens "primarily . . . drew on his own keen observations and life experiences, as well as his brilliant imagination" as source for his works (118). When it comes to novels such as *A Tale of Two Cities*, Carlyle's *The French Revolution* proved to be an

[35] Dickens reveals that he suggested the name to Gaskell's "The Heart of John Middleton" (Dickens, *Letters* 6: 231), and in 1863 he added the word *dark* to Gaskell's "A Dark Night's Work" (Uglow 536). Moreover, Dickens renamed Gaskell's short story "The Crooked Branch," intended for the Extra Christmas Number of *All the Year Round*, as "The Ghost in the Garden Room," as well as the story "Right at Last," which became "The Sin of a Father"; both titles were reverted to their original form in later publications (Uglow 460, 619, 662).

[36] The lecture by Upham, entitled *Lectures on Witchcraft: Comprising a History of the Delusion in Salem, in 1692*, was published in 1831 (Uglow 663).

invaluable source of information and in the autobiographical *David Copperfield*, Dickens's own experience unarguably serves as a source for his inspiration (Sanders, "Introduction" vii; Schlicke, "*Tale*" 562). Although *Oliver Twist* might, like *David Copperfield*, be based on Dickens's early life, there is however one noticeable controversy which surrounds the source material for the novel.

Borrowed Ideas

Originally, *Oliver Twist* was serialised in *Bentley's Miscellany* in 1837-1839, alongside illustrations made by the magazine's famous artist and illustrator George Cruickshank (Schlicke, "*Oliver*" 438). As Gill points out, Cruickshank and Dickens's collaboration "was not an entirely happy one," and although the two remained friends for some time after the novel's serialisation had come to an end, their relations eventually "became strained" ("Cruickshank" 443). Around 1847 Cruickshank "told a journalist that it was he who [had] given Dickens the story and the characters for *Oliver Twist*" (Gill, "Cruickshank" 444); Cruickshank's claim lay dormant until after Dickens's death in 1870, but when it emerged it caused great controversy. Forster, like most, dismissed the claim as a "monstrous absurdity" (qtd. in Schlicke, "*Oliver*" 438), yet Cruickshank stood firm by his statement and declared that the plot had been "*entirely my own idea & suggestion and all the characters are mine*" (qtd. in Gill, "Cruickshank" 444, original emphasis). According to Gill, Cruikshank's accusation was largely dismissed by Dickens scholars until new evidence was uncovered in the late twentieth century and today "[i]t is now generally agreed that Cruickshank had conceived of a series of designs depicting the life of a London thief years before *Oliver Twist* and so he may have been instrumental, as he claimed, in pushing the movement of the novel's plot towards low-life London" ("Cruikshank" 444).[37]

Cruickshank's claim suggests that although Dickens was surely inimitable when it came to the serial form, he may have felt little reserve when it came to imitating other people's ideas and adapting them to his own works. Although plagiarism had troubled writers such as Charlotte Brontë in the 1840s (Uglow 353), Robert Macfarlane explains that "[f]rom the late 1850s onwards, received notions of originality (as the pre-eminent literary virtue) and plagiarism (as the pre-eminent literary sin) came under increasingly

[37] This might certainly explain the plot's somewhat rapid turn away from Dickens's original workhouse theme to that of London's low-lifes.

sceptical scrutiny" (8). According to Macfarlane, "[t]he representation of literary creativity as origination *ex nihilo* [from nothing], forged in the first decades of the century, was challenged by models which envisaged creativity as a function of the selection and recombination of pre-existing words and concepts" and "unoriginality—understood as the inventive reuse of the words of others—came increasingly to be discerned as an authentic form of creativity" (8).

Macfarlane argues that Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend* is among the first in a series of revolutionary works, appearing from 1859 and onwards (10). He claims that the novel is "preoccupied with questions of priority and previousness" which result in the condemnation of "the meaningless worship of originality" (Macfarlane 10).[38] Dickens's contemporary, Angus Wilson, praised *Our Mutual Friend* as "a novel before its time" (qtd. in Schlicke, "*Mutual*" 446), and as Schlicke points out it later came to influence two great modernist works: Ibsen's *The Doll's House* (1879) and T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922) ("*Mutual*" 446).

However, this turn towards reflections on originality seem strangely new to Dickens's works and a radical turn from the cautioning – even didactic – tone of his most recent social novels. The question of originality is of course inseparably linked to the notion of copyright and Dickens and Gaskell were both very concerned with the unauthorised distribution of their works, especially in America. Unabashedly, American publishers published pirated versions of the works of the most prominent English authors and the process was repeated in England when it came to American authors (Patten, "Copyright" 124). While Gaskell's concerns over copyright were mostly voiced to her friends and family, [39] Dickens was much more vocal.

When it came to originality Dickens seems to have been, yet again, plagued with a double moral standard. Early into his career Dickens resented the unauthorised publication of his works in America, where "no legislation of any kind" protected "the rights of foreign authors" (Tomalin 104), subsequently "depriving him of the income on which he as a writer depended" (Tomalin 127). During his trip to America in 1842 Dickens repeatedly brought up the question of international copyright; at first "his

[38] One of the main instigators of this radical change in the general consensus was the publication of Darwin's *The Origin of the Species*, which "advocated repetition with variation as a paradigm of change leading to newness" (Macfarlane 11).

[39] In a letter to Edward Thurstan Holland, Gaskell stated politely, "[t]hey are great rascals (your dear Americans) to go and pirate 'Lady Ludlow'; but I am afraid their morality is rather slack in several ways" (Gaskell, *Letters* 524).

remarks were politely ignored" (Tomalin 130), yet eventually he would receive "harsh treatment . . . in the press over the copyright question, with accusations of ingratitude and greed" (Tomalin 132). Nevertheless, Patten reveals that "[a]t the start of his career Dickens himself borrowed and burlesqued preceding and contemporary materials; and some of his playwright friends continued to translate foreign—mainly French—drama for the English stage, without paying or even acknowledging the original author, until the 1850s" ("Copyright" 124). Dickens does not seem to have found any shame in borrowing material himself; however, once his works became the centre of attention the matter was entirely different.

Since Dickens had himself had the dreadful experience of having his own works (sometimes inaccurately) published or reworked, [40] it seems strange of him to have "paid [Gaskell] the slightly dubious compliment of stealing one of her best" ghost stories to publish under his own name in 1851 (Easson, *Heritage* 4). Although Gaskell may never have intended the story for publication, the incidence appears to have been the first where Dickens's admiration for her storytelling skills led him to borrow her idea. Occasionally – as with "The Old Nurse's Story" – Dickens obviously felt that Gaskell's treatment of her own ideas was not carried out altogether successfully according to his own artistic predilections. Being her editor, Dickens presumably read Gaskell's pieces with a critical and thorough eye and would most likely have recognised elements or ideas that were worth borrowing, to explore and develop further in his own way. By looking into some of Dickens's works that were published in the 1850s, he appears have found quite a few nice ideas in Gaskell's works; ideas that he seems to have reworked or adapted to his own later works.

Dickens's Novels in the 1850s

In the 1850s Dickens published four novels: *Bleak House* (1853), *Hard Times* (1854), *Little Dorrit* (1857) and *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859). As Tomalin explains, the first three of these novels "have endured as accounts of mid-nineteenth-century life and as extraordinary works of art, poetic, innovative, irradiated with anger and dark humour," yet there was definitely "less laughter [present] than in earlier books" (239). Dickens's earlier novels, such as *Oliver Twist* and *Nicholas Nickleby* (1839), are good examples of his early humorous style and lighter spirit, which was replaced by "the sense of social

[40] According to Patten, *Oliver Twist* was staged "months before [Dickens] had even conceived of the novel's ending" ("Copyright" 124).

'purpose'"; which according to Collins became "increasingly insistent in the novels from *Bleak House* onwards" (*Heritage* 13). Collins goes on to claim that "many critics resented the loss" of Dickens's humour and "found the new 'darkness' gloomy" (*Heritage* 13); even *The Times*, one of the era's leading magazines, "ignored" all four of Dickens's novels published in the 1850s (*Heritage* 12). Dickens's later works – *Great Expectations, Our Mutual Friend* and *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* – which were published in the 1860s, returned in some ways to Dickens's earlier style and were generally, especially the first, "welcomed with vociferous relief, after the decade of grimness" (Collins, *Heritage* 427).

As previously discussed, Dickens had been concerned with the improvement of society from an early age and his immersion in social matters seems consistent with his perpetual involvement with *Household Words* in the 1850s. The journal was the "realization of an aim that had been present in Dickens's mind since the late 1830s" (Drew, "*Words*" 284) and the first novel that Dickens began working on after starting his work as editor of *Household Words* was *Bleak House*. A complete turn-around from *David Copperfield*, which Margaret Oliphant felt to be "the culmination of Dickens's early comic fiction" (qtd. in Schlicke, "*Copperfield*" 154), *Bleak House* was instantly recognised (not necessarily favourably) for its outspoken social didacticism (Schlicke, "*Bleak*" 50).

According to Tomalin, Dickens's earliest idea for the new novel is recorded in 1851 (239), and "almost none of the high-spirited comedy of the early novels [remained]: most of the jokes in *Bleak House* are edged with horror" (240). Interestingly, Robert Weisbuch finds similarities between Dickens's *Bleak House* and *The House of the Seven Gables* by the American author Nathaniel Hawthorne, which was published in 1851(234-235). Weisbuch suggest that Dickens may have borrowed his theme in *Bleak House* from Hawthorne's novel (234-36). As the culmination of Dickens's earlier comic style, could *David Copperfield* have signalled that Dickens had exhausted his sources of inspiration?

Weisbuch believes that Hawthorne's influence on Dickens's novel "is mostly suggestive of a competitive admiration," and he suggests that Dickens may also have influenced Hawthorne, since *The House of the Seven Gables* is Hawthorne's "most British-seeming novel" (236). However, keeping Cruickshank's claim in mind, it is certainly possible that Dickens may have found inspiration in Hawthorne's work, even borrowed some ideas. Since Dickens and Gaskell shared a passion for social reform, a

similar competitive admiration may have led Dickens to seek inspiration in Gaskell's more sober works in the 1850s.

A Tale of Two Cities

In *A Tale of Two Cities* Dickens returns to a genre of novel writing that had not been favourable to him in his earlier attempt. Dickens only wrote two historical novels, the former being *Barnaby Rudge*, which was and is, even to this day, generally "met with little favour" (Schlicke, "*Rudge*" 33). According to Thomas Rice, *Barnaby Rudge* is most likely "the least loved and the least read" work in the Dickens canon (qtd. in Schlicke, "*Rudge*" 33). The novel "had the longest and most troubled gestation of all of Dickens's novels" (Schlicke, "*Rudge*" 29) and according to the *North British Review*, Dickens was "as little at home on the ground of history and philosophical politics, as on that of natural scenery and rustic manners" (qtd. in Collins, *Heritage* 92). Readers and critics alike seemed to dislike the novel: Sales dropped for more than half from the first instalment to the last and "[r]eviews ranged from the negative to the severe" (Schlicke, "*Rudge*" 33). The question therefore arises why Dickens would again write a historical novel, which had not proved successful in his previous attempt.

Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* is set in the time of the French Revolution, alternating the plot between Paris and London. According to Sanders, "[t]he subject of the French Revolution loomed large in the consciousness of nineteenth-century England, not only because it had threatened or changed so many political assumptions, but also because its social violence and blood-letting seemed to undermine the notion of steady and happy progress into the future" ("Introduction" xvii-xviii). The earliest indication that Dickens was contemplating a new novel is recorded in his letter to Miss Coutts, dated 3 September 1857, and concerns the plot of Wilkie Collins's play *The Frozen Deep*, which Dickens had acted in shortly before (Sanders, "Introduction" xvi; Schlicke, "*Tale*" 560). As Schlicke notes, by late January 1858 the story was yet "undefined" and although Dickens contemplated titles for his new work in March, "[a] full year passed before he actually began writing" ("*Tale*" 560). Critics have pointed out that the period of the inception of *A Tale of Two Cities* coincided with great turmoil in Dickens's personal life, including his separation from Catherine and "his growing infatuation" with the actress Ellen Ternan (Schlicke, "*Tale*" 560), thus making the historical setting of the French Revolution especially fitting.

The inspiration for the novel seems to have come from various sources. In his preface to the novel, Dickens admits that he "first conceived the main idea of this story" during the staging of Wilkie Collins's play and he confesses that "[a] strong desire was upon me then, to embody it in my own person" (Dickens, *Tale* 3). Moreover, Dickens implied that Carlyle's celebrated book on the Revolution had influenced his work (Dickens, *Tale* 3), and Schlicke notes that he also "named works by Louis-Sébastian Mercier" and "Jean-Jaques Rousseau . . . as other key sources" ("*Tale*" 562-63). In no other novel by Dickens does France get as prominent a place as in *A Tale of Two Cities* and although the earliest inkling of the novel's plot emerged in the fall of 1857 there is no indication of where Dickens got the idea of his setting. Dickens's attitude to history is at best "described as ambiguous" (Sanders, "History" 274), and even though the inspiration for the novel's setting might surely be traced to Carlyle's work, there was also another author, closely linked to Dickens, who had always displayed a distinct interest in history: Gaskell.

Marion Shaw argues that "Gaskell's fiction is everywhere obsessed by history" (77) and many of her works, such as *My Lady Ludlow* (1858), "Lois the Witch" (1859) and *Sylvia's Lovers*, have a historical setting. Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* may very well have inspired Gaskell to write her own historical novel *Sylvia's Lovers*, after her visit to the town of Whitby in Yorkshire in early November 1859 (Foster, "Introduction" viii), yet Dickens appears to have been swayed by Gaskell in his choice of setting, rather than the other way around. The French Revolution emerges in Gaskell's writing as early as 1853, in her article "My French Master" (Henry 148), which appeared in *Household Words* in 1853. Her novella *My Lady Ludlow* is also set during the time of the French Revolution (Matus, "Introduction" 5; Shaw 79; Hughes and Lund 118) and its serialisation in Dickens's magazine in 1858, from June until September, predates Dickens's commencement on *A Tale of Two Cities*, which was begun in March 1859. It is certainly possible that Dickens was influenced by Gaskell in his own choice of period for *A Tale of Two Cities.*

Although Hughes and Lund mention Dickens's use of the same setting in *A Tale of Two Cities*, only seven months after the appearance of the final instalment of *My Lady Ludlow*, they do not propose any influence in his choice of setting (119). Similarly, Schlicke does not detect any similarity, although he mentions the possibility of influence from a play which shares many similarities with Dickens's novel ("*Tale*" 562). The play, entitled *The Dead Heart* and by Watts Philips, "was not produced until

three weeks before the novel was complete" (Schlicke, "*Tale*" 562), yet Carl Dolmetsch argues that "Dickens might easily have seen the play script much earlier and transformed the materials into superior art" (qtd. in Schlicke, "*Tale*" 562). Despite their work relationship, no critics or scholars appear to have noticed, or even considered the possibility of influences from Gaskell's works on Dickens's novels. However, there is one vital clue in *A Tale of Two Cities* which strengthens the notion that Dickens may also have been inspired by Gaskell.

As mentioned before, Gaskell did occasionally rework her ideas; one such being the idea about a golden thread. The phrase first appeared in *Mary Barton* and again in *North and South* six years later. The phrase also appears in Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities*, not only once but twice, which seems too much of a coincidence to ignore. The golden thread first appears as the title of the novel's second book – which comprises the largest part of the novel – and then in chapter four in the second book, where Lucie Manette is described as "the golden thread that united [Dr Manette] to a Past beyond his misery, and to a Present beyond his misery" (*Tale* 76). As Gaskell's editor, Dickens had of course seen the phrase as it appeared in *North and South*: "It was a little golden thread running through the dark web of his present fortunes; which were growing ever gloomier and more gloomy" (423); and his usage of the phrase – as a symbol of hope and happiness, which is interwoven with darker things – is consistent with the manner in which it is used by Gaskell. This seems to suggest almost unequivocally that Dickens borrowed ideas and even phrases from Gaskell's works; moreover, this is not the only instance where an idea from a work by Gaskell found its way into one of Dickens's novels.

Hard Times

Dickens's *Hard Times* opens in the same manner as Gaskell's *North and South*, with a statement, which instantly establishes what will be the novel's central focus: "NOW, what I want is, Facts" (*Hard* 7, original capitalisation). As for Gaskell, this seems out of character for Dickens's novels, which usually begin on a much wider scale; the opening line from *A Tale of Two Cities* is a prime example: "IT was the best of times, it was the worst of times" (*Tale* 7, original capitalisation). Thus, it seems evident from the start that *Hard Times* is not one of Dickens's usual novels.

In *Hard Times* there are several instances where ideas can be detected that appear to originate in Gaskell's works. One of the most interesting is found in a short essay by Gaskell, entitled "The Last Generation in England". This "social vignette," as Foster calls it ("Shorter" 117), was published in the American *Sartain's Union Magazine* in 1849, at the persuasion of her friend Mary Howitt, whose husband had published some of Gaskell's earliest works (Birch, "Last Generation" 159). Although the essay was only published in America (and was not reprinted until in 1972), which might refute the idea that Dickens read the piece, there is still a possibility that he managed to see it before it appeared in *Sartain's*. When Mary Howitt asked Gaskell to contribute to the magazine, she said "perhaps you can send me the article" (qtd. in Uglow 173), and Gaskell appears to have sent Howitt both of her two articles that were to be published in the *Sartain's* (Uglow 235). William and Mary Howitt were also friends of Dickens (Uglow 170), so it is possible that he may have seen Gaskell' short article before it was sent off to America; after all, the piece was credited to the author of *Mary Barton*, the novel which had so intrigued Dickens.

"The Last Generation in England" is built on Gaskell's recollections from her early life in Knutsford and thus has a lot in common with the *Cranford* sections, published in 1851-53.[41] The article "describes the hierarchy of the small town of [Gaskell's] youth from the top downwards" (Uglow 279-80) and at the bottom of Gaskell's small town there are "the usual respectable and disrespectable poor; and hanging on the outskirts of society were a set of young men, ready for mischief and brutality, and every now and then *dropping off the pit's brink into crime*" (Gaskell, "Last Generation" 160, added emphasis). The difference between the classes is also a central subject in Dickens's *Hard Times* and Gaskell's phrase seems to have inspired Dickens when it came to certain elements in the novel's plot.

Although Stephen Blackpool in *Hard Times* could be described as a respectable poor man – in no way mischievous or brutal like the men on the outskirts of Gaskell's society – he may also certainly be said to be living on the outskirts of his own social group. His fellow workers at Mr Bounderby's mill label him a traitor, for refusing to partake in the Coketown strike. All the hands "bound themselves to renounce companionship" with Blackpool and he senses that their attitude to him has "changed" (*Hard* 136, 137). After being fired from Mr Bounderby's mill, Blackpool is forced to

[41] Today, the essay is sometimes included as an appendix to modern publications of *Cranford*.

turn away from Coketown in search of work. Incidentally, Blackpool's departure coincides with a break-in into Mr Bounderby' bank and the suspicion instantly falls on Blackpool. As Mr Bounderby explains, the bank had been broken into "with a false key" (*Hard* 169) and here Dickens seems to be playing with words. The reference to a key brings to mind Dickens's use of the word "turnkeys" (240) in *Great Expectations*, which is used to talk about the jailors in the Newgate prison. Dickens and other writers during the nineteenth century commonly represented a person through the object or body-part that was most important for his or her job. Consequently, a factory worker was generally referred to as a *hand* and those who opened doors – like jailors – could be called *turnkeys*. The reference to a false key may thus be used as a metaphor for Stephen Blackpool. If he opened the bank he could be seen as a key, yet his usual role as a hand would make him a false key. Once the alienated Stephen Blackpool learns about the accusations made against him, he heads back to Coketown to exonerate himself from the crime; but on his way he falls into a pit, situated on the outskirts of Coketown. When his hat is discovered at the "brink of a black ragged chasm" Sissy and Rachel realise that Stephen has fallen down (*Hard* 246). Although Blackpool is eventually redeemed from Old Hell Shaft, he ends up "a poor, crushed, human creature" and eventually dies (*Hard* 251). All of these element of Dickens's plot – the alienated individual on the outskirts of society, the crime and the fall into the pit – sound altogether too similar to the passage from "The Last Generation in England" to be a mere coincidence.

Dickens was known to have read Gaskell's works, even those that were not published in his magazine. When *Ruth* was published Dickens felt no hesitation in advising Gaskell on appropriate changes in the novel, even though it was not published through his magazine, and as Easson notes, Gaskell "adopted Dickens's suggestion that Ruth would never have called her seducer 'sir'" (*Heritage* 8).[42] The novel also appears to have inspired Dickens when he wrote *Hard Times* and the character of Jemima Bradshaw is certainly very similar to Dickens's Louisa. Uglow explains that,

> When we first meet her, the dark-eyed Jemima has 'a warm, affectionate, ardent nature, free from all envy and carking care of self'. Yet, like her brother Richard, she is in awe of her bullying, sanctimonious father, unable to act independently 'according to her own sense of right, or

[42] The letter which incudes Dickens's suggestion, is dated on 3 May 1853. An earlier letter to Gaskell, dated 13 April 1853 clearly indicates that Dickens had already finished reading *Ruth*.

> rather, I should say, according to her own passionate impulses'. Five years later, she is no longer free from care; in front of her father she is silent, almost reduced to a corpse by the effort of repression. (334)

This description is very reminiscent of Louisa's fate in *Hard Times*. At the beginning she is a lively child, taking her brother to see the circus without permission, but her fiery personality is quickly crushed by her father's strict regime of facts, which "starved [her] imagination" (*Hard* 17). Eventually, Louisa becomes a shadow of her former self – almost a non-entity – left empty and "shut [. . .] up within herself," watching the fire "for an hour at a stretch" (*Hard* 128). Louisa's lack of character is reflected in Mrs Sparsit's inability to call her by her rightful name – she refers to her either as Mrs Gradgrind or Miss Bounderby (*Hard* 182) – and Louisa's own husband, Mr Bounderby, even refers to her as "Tom Gradgrind's daughter," instead of *my wife* (*Hard* 170).

There are further resemblances between the characters of Jemima and Louisa. Jemima also has a strict father, who intends her to marry his "partner" (*Ruth* 155), Mr Farquhar, who is Jemima's senior by seventeen years (*Ruth* 268). Mr Bradshaw explains to Jemima, "[s]urely you must know that I hope he may one day be your husband; that is to say, if you prove yourself worthy of the excellent training I have given you. I cannot suppose Mr. Farquhar would take any unprincipled girl as a wife" (*Ruth* 180). Eventually, her father's plans materialise, as Jemima ends up marrying Mr Farquhar. The whole affair is very reminiscent to Louisa's arranged marriage to her father's best friend, Mr Bounderby in *Hard Times*. Moreover, Jemima visits Ruth – her social inferior – on her own free will, like Louisa when she visits the home of the poor alienated Stephen. Although Mr Bounderby would never have approved of Louisa's visit, the narrator in *Ruth* reveals that "Jemima would not have been allowed to come so frequently if Mr. Bradshaw had not been possessed with the idea of patronising Ruth" (*Ruth* 154). The similarities may be coincidental, but considering the fact that *Ruth* was published in January 1853, only a year before Dickens's began composing *Hard Times*, Dickens's novel may easily have been influenced by Gaskell's plot and characters, which are likely to still have been fresh in his mind. However, what was even fresher in Dickens's mind was the plot of *North and South*.

Critics and scholars have for a long time noticed the similarities between Gaskell's *North and South* and Dickens's *Hard Times*. Gaskell's earliest suggestion to Dickens of the topic of *North and South* seems to have been made in early May of 1853

(Hopkins 366; Uglow 343-44), which would certainly be consistent with Dickens's eager letter to Gaskell, dated 3 May that same year, which opens with his interjection:

> The subject is certainly *not* too serious, so sensibly treated. I have no doubt that you may do a great deal of good by pursuing it in Household Words. I thoroughly agree in all you say in your note; have similar reasons for giving it some anxious consideration; and shall be greatly interested in it. Pray decide to do it. Send the papers as you write them to me. Meanwhile I will think of a name for them, and bring it to bear upon yours, if you think yours improvable. I am sure you may rely on being widely understood and sympathized with. (*Letters* 7: 76, original emphasis)

Dickens's confession to "be greatly interested in" a similar subject (*Letters* 7: 76), seems, as Hopkins indicates, to prove that the subject in question is industry, which is of course the basis for his *Hard Times* and Gaskell's *North and South* (366). However, in light of another letter, his statement seems quite strange.

In August 1853 Dickens finished writing *Bleak House* (Schlicke, "*Hard*" 266), and at that time he did certainly not seem to have constructed any immediate plans for a new novel. In a letter to Mrs Richard Watson, dated 1 November 1854, Dickens professed that he had been quite spent after finally finishing *Hard Times*. He claimed that originally he "had intended to do nothing in that way for a year, when the idea laid hold of me by the throat in a very violent manner . . ." (*Letters* 7: 453). It is important to remember that Dickens began writing *Hard Times* as means of increasing the sales of *Household Words* and the "violent manner" in which the idea for *Hard Times* seemed to grab Dickens by the throat, seems to indicate that it was not Dickens himself who conceived of the idea (*Letters* 7: 453). Incidentally, Schlicke points out that Bradbury and Evans, Dickens's publishers, had "proposed that he write a new novel" to solve the crisis of "precipitous fall in profits" ("*Hard*" 266), and Dickens seems to have had no choice but to write to release his precious journal from the crisis.

By late January in 1854, Dickens had begun preparing for *Hard Times*. According to Schlicke, the novel was begun fairly quickly and finished on 15 July 1854 ("*Hard*" 266). Evidently, Dickens wrote it in a hurry, completing "the whole 100,000-word novel in substantially less than six months" (Brattin 117), which makes it the

shortest period of composition for any of Dickens's novels.[43] Meanwhile, by early January, Gaskell had already started planning *North and South* and sent the outline for her novel to Forster. But by March, as the outline for *Hard Times* began to emerge, Uglow claims that "Dickens's own plans were beginning to alarm her. He seemed to be stealing her material, just as he had pinched her story of 'the face' [the ghost story]" (355).

At first glance, Dickens's *Hard Times* has some things in common with Gaskell's *North and South*, the most obvious being the setting. As Tomalin explains, Dickens was always very interested in his surroundings and used to walk along the streets of London, observing its people and finding inspiration (183). London serves as the main setting for most of his novels, and Schlicke points out that *Hard Times* is in fact Dickens's only novel "set entirely outside London, in a provincial INDUSTRIAL town" ("*Hard*" 266, original capitalisation). On 28 January 1854 Dickens had travelled to the "northern industrial town of Preston, to see for himself the effects of the strike and lock-out" which had been in process for 23 weeks (Schlicke, "*Hard*" 266). Dickens, who had believed Preston to be "a model town," found it "a nasty place" (*Letters* 7: 261). Although he wrote to Forster on the next day, stating that "I shall not be able to get much here" (*Letters* 7: 260), the town nevertheless seems to have served as the model for the novel's main setting, Coketown – a nasty town with its "unnatural red and black [appearance] like the painted face of a savage" (*Hard* 26), but a model town in the eyes of Mr Bounderby and Mr Gradgrind. Moreover, a strike found its way into *Hard Times*.

Schlicke observes that Dickens firmly denied claims made in the *Illustrated London News* on 4 March 1854 that his new story "'originated' in the industrial troubles in Preston" ("*Hard*" 266). In a letter to Peter Cunningham – who Dickens believed to have written the piece for the *Illustrated* – Dickens firmly stated that "[t]he title [for my new story] was many weeks old, and chapters of the story were written, before I went to Preston or thought about the present Strike" (*Letters* 7: 290). As Storey, Tillotson and Easson point out, Dickens was "exaggerating somewhat" (290); he had only begun making a list of possible titles on 20 January ("Working Notes" 275-76) and as his letter to Miss Coutts affirms, he had only finished "the first written page" of his novel on 23 January (*Letters* 7: 256).

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[43] *A Tale of Two Cities* comes closest, being written in just under seven months (Schlicke, "*Tale*" 560-61).

As Uglow notes, Gaskell was evidently very concerned to find that Dickens's plans coincided with her own (355). After she sought reassurance in Forster he responded on 18 March that,

> As to the content which Dickens' story is likely to take I have regretted to see that the manufacturing discontents are likely to clash with part of your plan, but I know nothing yet from him as to how far he means to use that sort of material. Nor do I think he knows himself . . . I am your witness if necessary, that your notion in this matter existed before and quite independently of his. (qtd. in Uglow 355).

Whether Forster was truthful in his claim to be ignorant of Dickens's intentions is not clear. For further reassurance, Gaskell sent Dickens himself a letter and in his response, dated 21 April, he insisted that he was "not going to strike. So don't be afraid of me" (*Letters* 7: 320). However, as Dickens's working notes from 20 January reveal, he had already decided on a "[w]orking men's meeting" for his new story ("Working Notes" 281). Why would Dickens be untruthful to Gaskell? Being her editor, Dickens must have seen her outline for the novel at some point or at least been aware of the gist of her intended plot and could therefore easily have borrowed her ideas for his own narrative. Regardless of this, Dickens's statement put Gaskell utterly "at ease" and she continued with her composition (Gaskell, *Letters* 281).

Although few of Gaskell's existing letters reveal much about the progress of the narrative in *North and South*, some significant details can be deduced from her letters in the spring of 1854. Her letter to Forster, dated 23 April, reveals that by then Mrs Thornton had entered the plot, which meant that Gaskell had at least finished the first nine chapters (*Letters* 281). Gaskell's concerns over Dickens's supposed strike might also indicate that her narrative had already progressed to chapter seventeen entitled "What is a Strike?" which, as the name indicates, gave an account of the strike in Milton. Just under a month later, on 17 May, Gaskell sent Forster 76 pages of her manuscript for *North and South*, all she had written "except a very few lines" (Gaskell, *Letters* 290). Whether the 76 pages sent to Forster comprised of the novel's first nine chapters or more is not clear. Either way, Dickens seems to have received this first batch of pages from Forster, since his letter to Gaskell, dated 15-17 June 1854, provides indisputable proof that by that time he had received, read and edited the first chapters of *North and South* – which he read "with all possible attention and care" (*Letters* 7: 355). He intended to close the sixth number "[w]ith Margaret leaving [the Higginses']

dwelling, after the interview with Bessy when she is lying down" (*Letters* 7: 355). As Storey, Tillotson and Easson point out "Margaret's talk with Bessy Higgins at her home is not reached until Ch. 13" (355), which means that Dickens had definitely read at least Gaskell's first thirteen chapters with a critical eye. Incidentally, the first chapter in the second book of *Hard Times* contains some similarities to these first thirteen chapters of *North and South*. Could Dickens have borrowed some of Gaskell's ideas?

As Shuttleworth and Easson point out, there are at least three instances of textual evidence where similar or almost identical ideas or references appear in both novels ("Notes" 438-441). The first instance is where both Gaskell and Dickens refer to the characteristic industrial smoke, present in both Milton and Coketown (*North* 59; *Hard* 119). Shuttleworth and Easson explain that the Town Improvement Causes Act of 1847 had attempted to reduce the great quantity of smoke in industrial towns, but in reality "the law was ineffective" ("Notes" 440). Gaskell's mention of the "'unparliamentary' smoke" in Milton (*North* 59), is clearly intended as a reference to this act, since a later Act passed in 1853 "applied only to London" (Shuttleworth and Easson, "Notes" 440). Dickens also refers to the industrial smoke in *Hard Times* (105), and he also "published an essay ["Smoke or No Smoke"] in his periodical [in July 1854] which outlined harmful effects of smoke and surveyed proposed schemes for controlling it" (Schlicke, "Notes" 294). Having been a resident of London for most of his life, it seems strange that Dickens would preoccupy himself with the continued presence of smoke in the towns in the industrial north. However, Dickens was well aware of the many social concerns and the increasing smoke of London itself; thus Dickens and Gaskell's similar reference to the smoke many have been circumstantial.

The next similarity, however, does not seem as coincidental. In chapter thirteen Gaskell mentions the "fluff" that could be found in the cotton factories carding-room (*North* 102). The fluff was the "[l]ittle bits, as fly off fro' the cotton, when they're carding [the cotton], and fill the air till it looks all fine white dust. They say it winds round the lungs, and tightens them up. Anyhow, there's many a one as works in a carding-room, that falls into a waste, coughing and spitting blood, because they're just poisoned by the fluff" (*North* 102). Being a resident in Manchester, Gaskell may have been aware of real-life cases of such wasting, yet the reference seems a bit far-fetched in Dickens's novel. In the first chapter of the second book in *Hard Times* Dickens mentions a worker, "who appeared to have been taking a shower-bath of something fluffy, which I assume to be the raw material:— " (*Hard* 114). Although Shuttleworth,

Easson and Schlicke quote this corresponding description of the fluff from Gaskell and Dickens's novels, neither of them finds any reason to suppose that either phrase had been borrowed. Gaskell's long familiarisation with the lives of Manchester's industrial residents accounts for the detail found in Gaskell's passage and seems to indicate that her reference is the original one and Dickens's merely a copy.

Yet the most striking textual similarity is found in a mutual reference to a story from a collection entitled *Turkish Tales*, published in 1708 (Shuttleworth and Easson, "Notes" 438). The story is about a king "who dipped his head into a basin of water, at the magician's command, and ere he instantly took it out went through the experience of a lifetime" (Gaskell, *North* 30). Dickens's *Hard Times* includes a reference almost identical to Gaskell's, about a "[s]ultan who put his head in the pail of water" (*Hard* 113). As Shuttleworth, Easson and Schlicke point out, the story to which Dickens and Gaskell refer had been retold in the *Spectator* on 18 June 1711 ("Notes" 438; "Notes" 294), yet it seems too much of a coincidence that two authors – who were simultaneously writing novels focusing on industrial matters – would refer to a story which appeared over a hundred years ago; one author has to have imitated the other.

Astonishingly enough, all of these three references are found within the first thirteen chapters of Gaskell's novel, while all of Dickens's references appear in the first chapter of the second book. Could it be a mere coincidence? As previously mentioned, Dickens had obviously received at least thirteen of Gaskell's first chapters for editing some time before 15-17 June 1854, and he was editing *North and South* while still writing his own novel. The arrival of Gaskell's manuscript thus appears to have coincided with Dickens's composition of the first chapter in the second book of *Hard Times*. In any case, Dickens felt confident enough about his novel at this point in time to rush to France to complete his writing. By 22 June, Dickens confessed to Wills that he had "written exactly 72 words" of *Hard Times* (*Letters* 7: 361), in five days, which was an unusually small amount compared to Dickens's usual pattern (Brattin 117). Still, Dickens seemed relaxed and not in the least preoccupied about completing his novel. Considering the fact that he eventually finished writing *Hard Times* by 15 July, Dickens seems to have been relatively far into his novel by the time of his letter to Wills. In light of the similarities discussed above, it seems possible that Gaskell's ideas had eased his composition.

The striking resemblance between Dickens and Gaskell's synchronically written *Hard Times* and *North and South* is hard to ignore. Along with the corresponding

elements of *Hard Times* to "The Last Generation in England" and *Ruth* – as well as the similarities found between Gaskell's works and Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* – the homogeneity of the ideas seems to indicate without a doubt that Dickens sought direct inspiration from Gaskell's work. Although Dickens willingly admitted to having been influenced by some of his fellow male writers in his works, including Wilkie Collins and Carlyle, he never acknowledged any influences from a source written by a woman. Perhaps he did not think of it as borrowing as such; as Gaskell's "editorial husband" he may simply have felt entitled to her ideas. Critics and scholars have been meticulous in researching and pointing out the various sources that Dickens may have had at his disposal throughout his career; however, all of these sources are noticeably from male writers. The possibility of any sort of influence or borrowing of ideas from female authors has been largely overlooked and unjustly so. This might suggest that critics and scholars are still stuck in the Victorian mind-set of the supposed unoriginality or even unimportance of female writers; or perhaps Mrs Gaskell – the matron of "motherly fiction" (Showalter, *Literature* 59) – was simply not considered good enough to inspire the national hallmark of English novelistic fiction.

Conclusion

This thesis has examined the relationship between male editors and female contributors to magazines in the Victorian period, through the relationship of Charles Dickens and Elizabeth Gaskell. It has revealed how much power male editors could exert or at least attempted to exert over women's writing, thus taking advantage of the still-vulnerable position of women writers during the Victorian period. Dickens and Gaskell's social novels, especially those written in the 1850s, have been examined in detail and reveal clear instances of influence, not from Dickens to Gaskell, as might be suspected, but the other way around.

By the time Dickens managed to persuade Gaskell to join his magazine in the early 1850s, he was already a prominent writer who had a clear sense of himself as an established author. Simultaneously editor, contributor and part-proprietor of *Household Words* – as well as a patriarchally inclined male – Dickens wanted to rule his magazine according to his own literary principles and well-established methods of serialisation. At first, Gaskell proved to be a complying contributor, perhaps still in awe of Dickens as one of the era's best known literary figures. However, despite being conflicted about her role as an author at first, Gaskell soon began to find and embrace her strengths as a female author; as their relationship advanced, Gaskell became increasingly resistant to Dickens's editorial control, which eventually led to the deterioration of their relationship.

As is evident from Dickens's letters to Gaskell, he clearly felt superior to her when it came to literary evaluation and he felt entitled to exert his control over Gaskell's works, in a similar manner as a husband might over his wife. Gaskell's reluctance to join the *Cornhill Magazine* in 1859, while under the editorship of William M. Thackeray, suggests that Dickens's attitude towards female contributors was characteristic of the majority of male editors, especially those who were also authors themselves. The status of women writers in the middle of the nineteenth century was still fragile, yet women were increasingly challenging the conventional rules of society.

Showalter claims that the early female novelists in the Victorian age – including Gaskell – were "female role innovators" who were "breaking new ground and creating new possibilities" for women in general (*Literature* 16). These women managed to confirm the status of the female writer as a force to be reckoned with, by "pushing back the boundaries of their sphere, and presenting their profession as one that required not

only freedom of language and thought, but also mobility and activity in the world" (*Literature* 23). According to Easson, "women were not only a significant proportion of Victorian novelists," but they also "developed the novel, making it pre-eminently *the* female genre, with its domesticity, its representation of emotion, its 'feminine' qualities of detail and empathy" (*Heritage* 2, original emphasis).

Gaskell was in many ways a very modern woman; she wanted it all. As a wife, mother of four and a successful author, she managed to shape her life around the two spheres of Victorian society, which were usually considered mutually exclusive. Simultaneously making her female voice distinctly heard in matters of social concern, and tending to those she loved the most, she managed to merge the blissful domesticity of the private sphere and the successful public life of an author. Moreover, Gaskell's gender can in fact be seen as a favourable influence on her writing. As a married woman she was not responsible for upholding her family financially and thus her gender enabled her to take more risks in her writing. Many of Gaskell's works, especially *Mary Barton*, provide vivid descriptions of the conditions of the English lower classes. Along with *Ruth* and *North and South*, these novels challenged both previously established novelistic traditions, as well as generally accepted social norms.

Meanwhile, Dickens came to rely on his well-designed serial form and melodramatic style. Brattin reveals that "Dickens cared deeply about the presentation of his text[s]" and he "rarely sought another's opinion of his works" (122).[44] However, with ever increasing family responsibilities, as well as a large group of devoted readers to satisfy, Dickens had less scope to explore more radical subjects in his works. Subsequently, Dickens's social commentary can be, as the French critic Hippolyte Taine suggested in 1856, dismissed as "merely sentimental" (Schlicke, "Criticism" 134). As Taine rightly observed over 150 years ago, Dickens's power is found in his "'lucid and energetic' poetic imagination," which creates his often "'hallucinatory' . . . world" (qtd. in Schlicke, "Criticism" 134).

Today Dickens is read for his humour, his character sketches and his intricate plots and it would not be a slight to any of his contemporary writers to say that no nineteenth century author surpasses him in these aspects. It is perhaps no coincidence why Dickens has so often been likened to Shakespeare. Anthony Trollope said: "No

[44] Noticeable exceptions to this rule are when Dickens consulted Forster and he "revised a few passages on his recommendation" and he changed the ending of *Great Expectations* "at BULWER-LYTTON'S suggestion" (Brattin 122, original capitalisation).

other writer of English language except Shakespeare has left so many types of character as Dickens has done, characters which are known by their names familiarly as household words, and which bring to our minds vividly and at once, a certain well-understood set of ideas, habits, phrases and costumes . . .” (qtd. in Roberts, “Novelists” 428). Trollope is certainly right. Although Dickens’s novelistic serial format, which he skilfully established with his *Pickwick Papers*, was certainly illustrative of his sometimes progressive mentality, Dickens can however – like Shakespeare – be seen as a great adapter, instead of a great original. As Gaskell’s editor, Dickens had an inevitable influence on her works, yet he seems to have found inspiration in Gaskell’s fresh ideas, which he willingly chose to borrow and cleverly adapt to his own novels.

Even though the influence of women authors on the works of male writers has been explored by numerous critics and scholars, Gaskell’s influence on Dickens has been largely overlooked. Not only can Gaskell’s radical yet sober style be seen to be reflected in Dickens’s darker social novels, written during the 1850s, but *Hard Times* and *A Tale of Two Cities* also reveal clear instances of borrowing from several of Gaskell’s works. This simultaneously challenges the notion that early female novelists were mere imitators of men and exposes Gaskell as an innovative and independent novelist with a powerful voice of her own. Undoubtedly John Stuart Mill was right when he speculated, “[w]ho can tell how many of the most original thoughts put forth by male writers, belong to a woman by suggestion, to themselves only by verifying and working out? If I may judge by my own case, a very large portion indeed” (548).

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