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### Master of Your Domain: Descriptions of Interior Space in the Works of Charles Dickens and Elizabeth Gaskell as Social Justice Commentary

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State University of New York  
College at Buffalo  
Department of English

Master of Your Domain: Descriptions of Interior Space in the works of Charles Dickens  
and Elizabeth Gaskell as Social Justice Commentary

A Thesis in  
English

by  
Ryan P. Bowers

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements  
for the Degree of  
Master of Arts  
May 2012

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I have spent some time recently trying to understand the means by which, with the development of a modern class society, working-class people, their image and their appurtenances, were inscribed to tell other people's stories: to tell some kind of story of the bourgeois self.

- Carolyn Steedman, "What a Rag Rug Means"

### *Overview*

Throughout *Hard Times*, Charles Dickens depicts Coketown as Utilitarian dystopia; a dreary, harshly mechanical space that deprives most of its inhabitants of happiness or any meaning to their lives, except what the state deems necessary for them. It is almost the entire world of the novel, with the small exception of the jaunt outward during the climax. In *North and South*, Elizabeth Gaskell's portrayal of the industrial town of Milton is a less harsh depiction of the period's booming cities than Dickens, but it is still a place where the wheels of business drive the construction and conception of factory walls and towers. Like Dickens, Gaskell is not lionizing the urban; rather she is moving towards a different end, contrasting the city spaces of her novel with Helstone, an at times idealized, idyllic vision of home for the Hale family. The use of these external spaces as criticisms of society is overt in *Hard Times*, with Dickens dedicating an entire chapter to Coketown's layout, and plays a major role in *North and South* as well, as the title implies.

However, for the purposes of this paper, the most telling of the respective social justice mores of these two novels are the depictions of the *interior* spaces. Dickens criticizes the Utilitarian vision of England via the sullen homes of the Gradgrinds, in the

hovels of the “Hands”, embodied by Stephen Blackpool, and in the ideology and its physical manifestations in the schoolroom. Gaskell, meanwhile, defends Helstone’s flaws, criticizes the nouveau riche of Milton, and shows the Hale family’s struggle to hang on to their identity, all through details as specific as the wallpaper and furnishings of living rooms and studies. Additionally, while giving out little in terms of description, Gaskell still makes it clear the Higgins family home as a place desperately in need of guidance, and by proxy so does the family itself.

In the introduction to *Domestic Space: Reading the nineteenth-century interior*, Inga Bryden and Janet Floyd that “Nineteenth-century commentators had, for example, theorized the relationship between individual perception and objects within the interior, gauging the extent to which domestic space was an invention of the mind.” (Bryden and Floyd 10). The description of interior spaces in these two novels is the reinforcement of the two authors’ respective thoughts on social justice: Dickens uses interior space as a metaphor for the tyranny of Utilitarianism while Gaskell uses it to defend English Paternalism. Dickens is challenging the mastery class holds over class while Gaskell it attempting to improve upon it via championing its need and reaffirming the value of sympathy.

The following chapters will describe some of the historical and social factors that influenced these two texts. First, it is important to examine the specifics of the Preston Strike of 1853-54, as that Dickens and his *Household Words* covered the conflict in detail. The succeeding chapter after the Strike will describe some of the prevailing philosophies of the time and couch Gaskell’s and Dickens’s respective social justice beliefs in reference to them. The final two chapters will then analyze the respective

author's industrial novels and their descriptions of interior spaces as social justice commentary.

### *Chapter 1: The Preston Strike*

Essential to understanding the roots of *Hard Times* and *North and South* is the industrialization and urbanization that occurred in England from the late eighteenth century through the nineteenth century in the form of the Industrial Revolution. During this time period, England saw a shift in the location of work and the workplace, from the pastoral to the urban, as well as a corresponding shift in population. This is noted by Warren C. Robinson in his article "Population policy in Early Victorian England":

Population in 1801 was some 9 million, rose to 10.5 million by 1811 and to 18 million by 1851. This growth was accompanied by shifts in population, as there occurred the dramatic economic and social transformations which accompanied the rise of the factory system. The new industrial centers of Manchester, Leeds and Birmingham doubled in population in the first decade of the 19th Century and then doubled again in the next two decades. The sprawling, unplanned density of the new centers increased public awareness of the growing numbers. (157)

The reception to this was mixed, as there was a romanticizing the pastoral in light of the harsh realities of city life. However, this ignores the dichotomy at work between the respective classes in this new social organization. As Raymond Williams points out in his book *The Country and The City*, "It was no moral case of 'God made the country and man made the town'. The English country, year by year, had been made and remade by men, and the English town was at once its image and its agent" (Williams 54).

The essential work in understanding this shift is Friedrich Engels' *The Condition of the Working Class in England*. Engel describes the speed of the growth of this period with the following: "as soon as the immeasurable importance of mechanical power was

practically demonstrated, every energy was concentrated in the effort to exploit this power in all directions” (Engels 58). However, in terms of direction, Engels focuses his work on the harsh, dehumanizing elements of exploiting this power:

people regard each other only as useful objects; each exploits the other, and the end of it all is, that the stronger treads the weaker under foot, and that the powerful few, the capitalists, seize everything for themselves, while to the weak many, the poor, scarcely a bare existence remains. (Engels 69)

The result of this was, as Annette Federico points out in “David Copperfield and the Pursuit of Happiness,” that in most cities like London, it resulted in a “populace so intent on their own private errands of happiness that they fail to recognize their common humanity--which is, appropriately enough, exemplified by their shared human desire for happiness and fulfillment” (Federico 76).

In full and laborious detail, Engels’s work describes the brutal working and living conditions that the poor faced in these rapidly growing major cities and industrial centers:

In truth, it cannot be charged to the account of these helots of modern society if their dwellings are not more cleanly than the pig-sties which are here and there to be seen among them. The landlords are not ashamed to let dwellings like the six or seven cellars on the quay directly below Scotland Bridge, the floors of which stand at least two feet below the low-water level of the Irk that flows not six feet away from them...where the ground floor, utterly uninhabitable, stands deprived of all fittings for doors and windows, a case by no means rare in this region, when this open ground floor is used as a privy by the whole neighbourhood for want of other facilities! (Engels 91)

As noted in this section and elsewhere, Engels lays the blame for these deplorable conditions squarely on the shoulders on those who are at the top of the social food chain. Referring to the plight of the poor, Engels criticizes that “Society, composed wholly of atoms, does not trouble itself about them; leaves them to care for themselves and their families, yet supplies them no means of doing this in an efficient and permanent manner” (Engels 108). Thus, in the eyes of Engels, the guidance of the upper classes has failed.

They have not effectively provided for or prepared the working class to survive in society, much less to thrive.

A noticeable if unintended result of industrialization was a social estrangement between the classes. In “Thomas Carlyle, Chartism, and The Irish in Early Victorian England”, Roger Swift points out that “The rapid growth of industry and the increasing concentration of an expanding population in industrial and manufacturing centers served to both exacerbate and magnify the depressed social condition of the working classes and to highlight the growing gulf between the rich and the poor” (Swift 67). Additionally, Mary Lenard notes in her book *Preaching Pity: Dickens, Gaskell, and Sentimentalism in Victorian Culture*, “By the eighteen-forties, the idea that the rich and the poor were two opposing camps, isolated from each other, dominated cultural discourse” (Lenard 53). The issue of guidance and self determination is at the heart of many of the strikes that occurred with increasing frequency and in growing size throughout the middle of the nineteenth century.

The agreed upon inspiration for both *Hard Times* and *North and South* was the Preston Strike of 1853-54. Strikes were common enough at the time, with mixed results as to their outcomes and people’s sympathies. In his studies, Engels asserts that “Of all the workers in competition with machinery, the most ill-used are the hand-loom cotton weavers” (Engels 163). The Preston strike was the end result of nearly a decade of wage battles between the workers and their masters. The striking Preston cotton workers were after a ten percent raise in wages. They saw this request as justified, in that there was a sense of general prosperity pervading the land at the time. While the level of actual prosperity was a matter of speculation and debate, there is some evidence for the



justification of this perception, as H.I. Dutton and J.E. King note the words of a factory inspector of the time in their book *Ten Percent and No Surrender: The Preston Strike, 1853 – 1854*, when he stated “at no period during the last 17 years that I have been officially acquainted with the manufacturing districts of Lancashire have I known such general prosperity...new mills are going up everywhere” (Dutton and King 12). The would-be strikers expected a portion of that perceived economic boom. However, the factory owners and masters felt that the market should dictate wages. This belief was reinforced with the reality of falling profits due to international issues such as the uprising of the Small Sword Society in China, which shrunk the market for English goods.

In terms of strike technique, for the union, the prevailing wisdom of the time was to have strikes in only a few of the mills, so that other workers could still be employed and financially support their striking brethren. In order to defeat this strategy, the Preston factory owners locked out their workers. This response on the part of the mill owners led to a domino effect of closed factories and unemployed workers. As noted by Geoffrey Carnall in his article “Dickens, Mrs. Gaskell, and the Preston Strike”:

Skilful organisation, and the sheer scale of the strike (well over 20,000 people were out of work) made it into something like siege warfare between capital and labour. In Preston, the massed resources of the masters confronted the massed resources of organised labour; and although there were other lock-outs at Burnley, Wigan, and Bacup, outside support was concentrated on Preston alone, as the place where success would be decisive. (Carnall 33)

Additionally, as noted by Dutton and King, mills “frequently blacklisted those who were active in disputes and allegedly provoked conflict in depressions in an attempt to exhaust union funds” (Dutton and King 186). This tactic was an effective weapon against the union, as much of the strike’s survival was dependent on donations from other unions and

workers. Despite this, the organization of donations for other workers, and their system of support was unquestionably one of the reasons for the duration of the strike.

Due to its duration and size, the strike was therefore national news and Charles Dickens covered the event in his *Household Words*, the weekly journal he founded, with an article on December 10<sup>th</sup> of 1853 by James Lowe, and another by himself on February 11<sup>th</sup> of 1854. Lowe's article opens with a less than flattering depiction of Preston as a city:

As we glide into the station-yard, our first exclamation is, "What a dirty place!" Well, it is a dirty place that station-yard of Preston, and it doesn't do justice to the town: How her Majesty contrives to eat her luncheon within its precincts, when she passes through from her Highland home, we cannot imagine. (Dickens 345)

While this seems harsh, this depiction would fall in line with the stated goals of the paper. As noted by Anne Lohrli in the introduction to a compilation on *Household Words*, while none of the issues of social justice that the journal catalogued were new, the periodical "brought them attention that their sober presentation in specialized journals and in upper-class journals did not give them" (Lohrli 5). The Preston Strike represented a choice opportunity to describe the unfortunate conditions of the lower classes and why these conditions existed.

While not written by Dickens, there are several connections between this first article and *Hard Times*. There is a decided focus on education in Lowe's piece, specifically the lack of it in the lower classes. Looking at the machinery that runs these factories, he notes:

When you enter one of these vast workshops, you see a world of complex machinery alive and busy; every wheel illustrating the dominion of the human intellect; yet it is a mournful subject of reflection, but it is nevertheless an undoubted fact, that nine-tenths of the human beings tending and controlling the

wondrous creature, are so ignorant they cannot read and write, while more than one-half are destitute of either accomplishment. (Dickens 346)

He attributes the “pernicious” sway the “mob-orators” (whom are represented as largely distasteful in this article as well as Dickens’s novel) have over the hands to the workers’ lack of formal schooling. Additionally, the control the masters have is rooted in the same problem. “Indeed, it is no uncommon thing to find an overlooker, a man in authority, and exercising proportionate influence over his fellow workmen, who can neither read a newspaper, nor sign his own name” (346). According to Lowe, the result is that the working man is continually pulled in two different directions, toward both the union and the masters, but unable to judge wisely between the two. However, Lowe closes with a hard criticism of the masters as the larger of the two problems, ending with “Ignorance of the most deplorable kind is at the root of all this sort of strife and demoralizing misery. Every employer of labour should write up over his mill door, that Brains in the Operative's Head is Money in the Master's Pocket” (348). The belief on display here by Lowe was shared to a degree by Dickens and Gaskell; that better knowledge would lead to better relations.

Claire Tomalin, in her biography of the author entitled *Charles Dickens: A Life*, points out that one of Dickens’ writing jobs was reporting for the *True Sun* and the *Mirror* in the summer of 1837. “The most important debates that summer were on proposed amendments to the Poor Law. Conditions were very bad all over the country” (Tomalin 52). Thus, Tomalin surmises that covering these debates as a parliamentary reporter gave impetus to *Oliver Twist*. The novel *Hard Times* likely followed a similar track. For his article “On Strike” that appeared on February 11<sup>th</sup> of 1854, Dickens’ time there was notably brief, spending only two days in Preston and visiting one of the mass

meetings of workers for all of ten minutes, according to some accounts (Dutton and King, 111). Despite the shortness of this stay, Dickens' feelings as expressed in the article were by no means out of line with the thinking of the general public at the time. Dickens opens his article by reproducing a conversation he had with a man on his way to Preston whom Dickens named Mr. Snapper:

“Mr. Snapper's rising opinion of me fell again, and he gave me to understand that a man must either be a friend to the Masters or a friend to the Hands.”  
“He may be a friend to both,” said I.” (Dickens 553)

This is the beginning of Dickens's attempt to represent a middle ground on the issue.

However, most of Dickens' reporting focused on the strikers. This was done with a specific goal in mind. As Michael Slater notes in his biography of Dickens, “‘On Strike’ is essentially an impressionistic piece of reportage, concerned to reassure his middle class readers that the Preston strikers were nothing like the revolutionary, industrial-town mobs he had once described in *The Old Curiosity Shop*” (Slater 370). However, despite his focus on the lives of the factory worker, this wish for friendship for both sides is Dickens' final desire, to see the strike ended as peaceably and quickly as possible. As Dickens states in the article “I believe that into the relations between employers and employed, as into all the relations of this life, there must enter something of feeling and sentiment...otherwise those relations are wrong and rotten at the core and will never bear sound fruit” (553). As Geoffrey Carnall points out in his “Dickens, Mrs. Gaskell, and the Preston Strike”, Dickens “emphasized his belief that the strike was deplorably mistaken, but insisted also that the virtues of the working people were clearly visible in their conduct. The strike was sustained by the good in them, not by the evil”

(Carnall 33). That sense of the virtuous good drives the emotion of *Hard Times*, and its main characters.

Dickens' own conflicts about the strike are evident in the article, and later manifest themselves in *Hard Times*. One of the most obvious indications of this is that the book gives us the character of Slackbridge, the union leader, based largely on the real-life figure of Mortimer Grimshaw, who, in the opinion of Dickens, represented the worst characteristics of the strikers. Dickens desired the entire situation to find its end in negotiation, ideally by an outsider or outside group. "Gentlemen are found in great manufacturing towns, ready enough to extol imbecile mediation with dangerous madmen abroad...Can none of them be brought to think of authorized mediation and explanation at home?" (Dickens 557-8) Unfortunately for Dickens and anyone with a concurring opinion, this was not to be, as the Preston Strike was seen as a battleground in the struggle between masters and workers by both sides. At the end of this article, Dickens returns to the thinking of the beginning, stating:

In any aspect in which it can be viewed, this strike and lock-out is a deplorable calamity. In its waste of time, in its waste of a great people's energy, in its waste of wages, in its waste of wealth that seeks to be employed, in its encroachment on the means of many thousands who are laboring from day to day, in the gulf of separation it hourly deepens between those whose interests most be understood to be identical or must he destroyed, it is a great national affliction. (Dickens 557)

This reflects his earlier premise, that Dickens was a friend to both sides, and both were mistaken.

As noted by Tomalin, after *Household Words* was begun, "Mrs. Gaskell was one of the first approached...Dickens told her that there was no other writer he was keener to enlist" (Tomalin 227). Much of Gaskell's writing was published in *Household Words*, however, this was primarily short stories until *North and South*. While never herself

entering Preston during the strike, Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* is seen by many as a decidedly more nuanced perspective, though perhaps lacking the emotional punch of *Hard Times*. In her book, Mary Lenard states "Married to a Unitarian clergyman and a resident of Manchester, Gaskell had a fairly intimate acquaintance with factory issues, and was a natural candidate for writing a novel that... would arouse audience sympathies for the factory workers and help to reconcile the 'two nations' of the rich and the poor" (Lenard 113). However, this seems a bit naïve in the face of the harsh personal and professional criticism leveled at *Mary Barton*, the book that called Dickens' attention to Gaskell. Writing the novel allowed Gaskell to espouse the values of a well-defined role for women. "The perceived need to construct affective bonds between the two groups created a new function for many women authors, who, because of their culturally sanctioned roles as guardians of 'sympathy' and 'mutual understanding' came to figure prominently in the arena of social reform literature" (Lenard 53). "Constructing affective bonds" is also true to *North and South*, with some noteworthy qualifiers. While she does not produce an outright villain such as such as Dickens' Slackbridge, and does provide a noble worker character, the largely sympathetic Nicholas Higgins, her alliances seem to trend towards the upper classes, precisely due to the issue of mastery. The question of mastery is essential to the strike itself, as noted by Dutton and King, who repeatedly point out that as far as those who ran the mills were concerned, "Mastery, not wages, was the issue as they saw it" (Dutton and King 147). The Preston manufactures "regarded trade unions as a form of dictation, and considered claims for wage increases to be an unwarranted interference with the conduct of their business" (4). Gaskell's view is paternalistic, accepting the rightness of this mastery. Her philosophy is reflected in the

words of Sir J.P. Kay-Shuttleworth, a politician and governmental official, who stated in 1854 that:

Every master must...improve his cottages; make his schools models of order and intelligence; diligently work his benefit societies...and give constant, earnest and practical proofs of the presiding influence of his sympathy and intelligence. Before such a system socialism will disappear like a mist before the sun. (84)

This same idea was echoed by John Goodair, one of the few manufacturers who refused to join the lockout. He believed the main cause of strikes “is a want of cordial feeling – the absence in fact, of a good understanding between the parties to the labour contract...It is our duty to lead them, and if we do not perform it, the consequences will recoil upon ourselves” (85). Gaskell has these same sentiments enunciated by John Thornton in *North and South*. Indeed much of the characterization of Thornton seems to come directly from John Paley Senior, who “was a self made man...the architect of his own fortune, raising himself from the humble rank of an artisan to that of a wealthy employer” (79). This is markedly similar to Thornton’s back-story in *North and South*.

The Preston Strike was not a culmination of the social tensions rampant in Victorian England, but rather a noteworthy indication of the direction of struggle between classes. To return to Robert Swift momentarily, in looking at the forces running through the industrialization of the time period he notes:

In particular, the social issues of poverty, crime, ignorance, low standards of public health and housing, and harsh working conditions provided the focus for an intellectual and political debate between those who argued that industrialization...was a progressive development, the genesis of unbounded wealth and the mark of an advancing civilization, and those who held that it was essentially regressive, the harbinger of social disharmony and environmental decay, and the potential source for political conflict between the propertied and privileged sectors of society...and the disenfranchised masses. (Swift 67)

Neither Gaskell nor Dickens favor abandoning industrialization. However, what this social shift did throw into sharp relief was the efficacy of English Paternalism. Both Dickens and Gaskell poise that same issue as the crux of their novels, however, each develop a different answer to the problem. In *Hard Times*, Dickens is arguing that the government has failed to guide its people adequately. On the other hand, in *North and South*, Gaskell is not questioning the ability of the upper classes to provide guidance. She is insisting that this guidance must be tempered with mercy. The following chapter will delineate the social justice theories and practices relevant to the writers and the time period.



## *Chapter 2: Philosophical Underpinnings*

Fundamentally, both of these novels are social justice texts. As Mary Slater points out, “Elizabeth Gaskell and Charles Dickens share at least two significant qualities as novelists: namely, an interest in social issues and a corresponding conviction that fiction could change society for the better by influencing the audience” (Lenard 109). For Dickens, the industrialization of England was something that he had shifting ideas about. However, as noted in their article “Hard Times and the Factory Controversy: Dickens vs. Harriet Martineau”, K. J. Fielding and Anne Smith point out that, “As far as Dickens's own response to the wonders of the industrial revolution goes, there is no doubt that he welcomed them at the beginning of the 1850s. Dickens had a pride in progress even though he opposed any mechanization of the spirit” (Fielding and Smith 405). It is that “mechanization of the spirit” that drives *Hard Times* as a story and a work of Social Justice.

The Utilitarianism that drives the twisted thinking of *Hard Times* stems from *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* by Jeremy Bentham. Federico states that “Bentham's theory in fact asked the individual to subordinate his own desires in the interest of the greater good” (Federico 74). It was Bentham’s belief that governance should be guided by the battle between what we, as humans, desire and what we find distasteful:

Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do, as well as to

determine what we shall do. On the one hand the standard of right and wrong, on the other the chain of causes and effects, are fastened to their throne. They govern us in all we do, in all we say, in all we think: every effort we can make to throw off our subjection, will serve but to demonstrate and confirm it. (Bentham 14)

As noted by Eugene Black in *British Politics in the Nineteenth Century*, Jeremy Bentham's philosophy was a major influence on Edwin Chadwick, a member of the English Royal Commission on the Poor Laws, who codified it, and it became one of the pillars of the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834. "Benthamite-utilitarian in conception and execution, the measure swept away two centuries of independent parochial administration... Habits of deference and authority could be and were maintained in spite of elections" (Black 79). As noted by Annette Federico, "Bentham's utilitarian emphasis on human happiness as the most important criterion for making moral choices in the context of the greater good intersected historically with the liberal idiom of the subjective, individualist pursuit of happiness" (Federico 73). In practice then, Bentham's philosophy worked against individual self governance. This Paternalism insured a rigid class structure. As noted by Valerie Wainwright in her article "Discovering autonomy and authenticity in *North and South*: Elizabeth Gaskell, John Stuart Mill, and the Liberal Ethic":

Earlier paternalist ideologues had reasoned that the grateful deference of subordinates was a just return for the protection and patronage of their social superiors, an idea in keeping with their vision of society as fundamentally static and strictly hierarchical, a society in which inequalities were seen as sacred, natural or inevitable. (Wainwright 152)

Dickens's critique of the Utilitarian ethos is that in trying to weigh the two factors of pain and pleasure, the result provided nothing of value or sentimental meaning to those living under it. In his article "On Strike" for *Household Words*, Dickens states that "Political Economy was a great and useful science in its own way and its own place: but

that I did not transplant my definition of it from the Common Prayer Book, and make it a great king above all gods” (Dickens, *Household Words* 556). He fleshes this idea out further in a letter to Charles Knight on the subject of *Hard Times*:

My satire is against those who see figures and averages, and nothing else—the representatives of the wickedest and most enormous vice of this time--the men who, through long years to come, will do more to damage the real useful truths of political economy than I could do (if I tried) in my whole life. (Dickens, *Letters* 351)

This critique is reflected in the dystopia of Coketown, a land driven by averages, where “what you couldn’t state in figures, or show to be purchasable in the cheapest market and salable in the dearest, was not, and never should be, world without end, Amen” (Dickens, *Hard Times* 31). Dickens criticizes the factual, numerical obsession of the Benthamite thinking through the interior spaces of the school where the poor are educated and where the rich reside, and undercuts it by showing how the poor live without the influence of Government.

The other view of Utilitarianism comes from John Stuart Mill, a version that comes closer to the views of Gaskell and Dickens. To a certain extent, Mill himself was a real life Louisa Gradgrind; strenuous homeschooling on the part of his father James Mill and separation from other children led to a nervous breakdown in early adulthood, eerily echoed in the one Louisa suffers toward the end of *Hard Times*. Mill’s own version of Utilitarianism is tempered by several important caveats. The first is Mill’s focus on individual liberty, detailed in his treatise *On Liberty*. As noted in “Utilitarianism without Consequentialism: The Case of John Stuart Mill” by Daniel Jacobson:

Mill introduces his principle of liberty in the most uncompromising terms, with a forceful rejection of paternalism that seems in obvious tension with the injunction of orthodox utilitarianism to maximize net happiness, impartially considered.

‘Over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign.’  
(Jacobson 175)

This sovereignty flies in the face of paternalism. As Wainwright notes, “Mill had repudiated the theory of responsibility and protection essentially on two counts: it encouraged on the one side desires to encroach or coerce and, on the other, habits of dependency which enervated or stupefied” (Wainwright 153). This point seems especially clear in the Utilitarian paternalism demonstrated in *Hard Times*. Dickens’s opening scene in the schoolroom is a demonstration in thought control. Conversely, in the case of Mill’s vision of Utilitarianism, he “repeatedly insisted on recognizing a class of supererogatory action, and he held that it is impermissible to violate certain basic rights for the sake of maximizing the good” (Jacobson 170). Jacobson attributes this emphasis on individual liberty in part to Mill’s sentimentalism.

However, in *Preaching Pity*, Lenard proposes that both Dickens and Gaskell were both arguing on behalf of a return to Sentimentalism, “the idea that social benevolence had to come from the heart rather than the head,” (Lenard 11) as the means to bridge the cultural divide between the rich and poor. As a philosophy, it was derived “from the Lockean assumption that the individual human experience...is the source of all knowable knowledge and values” (11). Certainly, the mores of *Hard Times* and *North and South* demonstrate, at least to a degree, Lenard’s assertion that “the growing physical separations between social classes made sentimentalist social values even more desirable, if not necessary” (Lenard 23).

One of the overarching themes of Lenard’s book is the complicated relationship between Sentimentalism and femininity. “The purpose of sentimentalist discourse was to influence the reader not only through pathos but through the whole ‘feminine’ system of

moral and religious values that the pathos epitomizes, a value system exemplified by both the urgent preaching of a narrator and emotional enactments of Christian eschatology” (Lenard 47). This is echoed in *Elizabeth Gaskell: A Habit of Stories*, where Jenny Uglow noted that “Gaskell believed that much of the harshness of society could be overcome if men would only free the feminine side of their nature” (Uglow 123).

There was an entire tradition of philanthropic activity by women of the middle and upper classes. As Corpron Parker noted, “Because charitable organizations traditionally justified their work by the number of cases they helped rather than the number of caseworkers employed, we can't enumerate exactly the women involved in philanthropic work” (Corpron Parker 322). However, this was a serious, wide-spread and socially expected activity:

Yet, women's philanthropic work became more than a logical extension of their cultural role as domestic angels; it was another of the significant economic and political functions performed by middle- and upper-class wives. While genuine compassion, religious faith, and concern for social stability prompted many women into philanthropic activity, it also became a social imperative for those of the upper and middle classes. (Corpron Parker 323)

Gaskell herself engaged in this tradition as the wife of a Unitarian minister, and it was common to her social circle.

In the nineteenth century Unitarian women were as influential as men in social reform. Florence Nightingale, Harriet Martineau, Barbara Bodichon, Bessie Parkes, Emily Shaen, and Mary Carpenter all shared a Unitarian background to some degree, and most were Elizabeth Gaskell's personal friends. (Uglow 7)

The same Benthamite thinking that Dickens reviled worked against Gaskell as well.

Again, in the words of Lenard, “In a sense, therefore, the rejection of the sentimental also meant a turn against women, against the special qualities of feeling and emotion associated with women, and against women's writing, particularly where it exhibited

those writings” (Lenard 19). However, what Lenard does not discuss is the issue of mastery. In the words of Corpron Parker, “Gaskell's most basic assumptions were grounded in the essential differences of gender and class” (Corpron Parker 330). In *North and South*, Gaskell does not question the need for people to be guided. Ultimately, Gaskell’s vision in the novel is a kinder, gentler Paternalism, guided by Christian moral principals. In *Hard Times*, Dickens is challenging mastery itself, and defending people’s right to know what is best for themselves. The following chapters will analyze how both of these novels express these beliefs in their depictions of interior spaces.

### *Chapter 3: Dickens*

As a Dickens' novel, *Hard Times* is a bit of an anomaly, dramatically shorter than the author's works preceding and following it. In her article, "Manufacturing Novels: Charles Dickens on the Hearth in Coketown" Elizabeth Starr points out, "While previous novels had demonstrated the author's commitment to fiction's social uses, *Hard Times*, written at the suggestion of the *Household Words* publishers, is overtly framed by Dickens's mingled commitment to social commentary and circulation" (Starr 320). Starr additionally points to the fact that, in an unsigned 1855 Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine essay, novelist Margaret Oliphant criticized the work on those grounds, stating, "It is a thousand pities that Mr. Dickens does not confine himself to amusing his readers, instead of wandering out of his depth in trying to instruct them" (Starr 317). On the issue of the book's form, Michael Slater surmises that "using this more circumscribed and – to most of his readers – quite unfamiliar industrial setting would help to focus attention on his message. The tighter format of this serial, with its stripped-down narrative, sparseness of detail, and strong, rapidly-sketched contrasts of scene and character, would also help to convey his meaning to the reader with great immediacy" (Slater 368).

Charles Dickens had very real first-hand experience with the effects of poverty on a family's home. Tomalin noted that Charles lost a great deal of what was important to him as a young man both emotionally and materially when his father was in debtor's prison:

Charles, as the man of the family, just twelve years old, was sent out to a pawn broker in the Hampstead Road, first with the books he loved, then with items of furniture, until after a few weeks the house was almost empty and the family was camping out in two bare rooms in the cold weather. (Tomalin 23)

This clearly gnawed at Dickens as, just a short time later, Dickens sadly expressed to his then restored family “how much he hated being separated from the family all week, with nothing to return to each evening but ‘a miserable blank’” (25). These incidents clearly had long lasting effects on Dickens, as that interior space of his childhood is reflected in the homes of Stephen Blackpool and Sissy Jupe.

Additionally, Dickens’ experience with social reformation goes all the way to near-first-hand experience. As noted by Tomalin, in as early as 1841, Dickens had access to prostitutes, to what degree is a matter of mystery. However, his sympathies were always with girls forced into this terrible predicament, “with no prospect other than deepening misery before them, and seemingly without any power to save themselves” (203). Dickens’ solution was to found a house for these girls, eventually settling on a small place by Shepherd’s Bush, which he referred to as simply “the Home, the idea that it should feel like a home rather than an institution being so important to him” (204). Bankrolled by Angela Burdett Coutts, a wealthy friend and philanthropist, Dickens was intimately involved in the planning of the establishment:

Bedsteads and linen had to be bought, kitchen and laundry equipment, crockery and cutlery, books and a piano, all from good suppliers: Dickens paid for everything and sent the receipts to Miss Coutts. He loved planning, purchasing, and fitting up rooms, his imagination was engrossed, and he gave his time and energy happily. (204)

Along with this, Dickens arranged for training in domestic skills as well as music and reading. As noted by Tomalin, Dickens specifically pushed for lighter reading to be provided, because, in his words “if their imaginations are not filled with good things, they will choke them, for themselves, with bad ones” (207). In looking at Dickens as a social reformer, it is important to note the emphasis he puts on the home space, as well as the



power of thought. His belief was a person who led a rich emotional life would be able to better him- or herself if provided the right environment and training. Both of those themes are present in *Hard Times*, perhaps most clearly in negative examples. Louisa and Tom Gradgrind, the children of Thomas Gradgrind, are deprived of entertainment in the Utilitarian home their father has created, and are incapable of thriving in the world. By the end of the novel, Tom has resorted to robbery and is subsequently banished to America where he dies, while Louisa breaks down at her father's feet desperate for guidance after facing temptation during her loveless marriage to Josiah Bounderby.

Dickens opens his novel with the "mechanization of spirit" realized in the harsh interior space that is the classroom. Dickens refers to it as a "plain, bare, monotonous vault of a school-room" (11). The word "vault" reflects the basis of the educational philosophy on display. Children are to be filled up with facts and information like an account, and are kept in a vault until they become storehouses of knowledge themselves. The design of the "intensely white washed room" is in fact, a controlling factor, as Dickens subtly points out:

For, the boys and girls sat on the face of the inclined plane in two compact bodies, divided up the centre by a narrow interval; and Sissy, being at the corner of a row on the sunny side, came in for the beginning of a sunbeam, of which Bitzer, being at the corner of a row on the other side, a few rows in advance, caught the end.  
(14)

The layout of the room directs attention on students, making them in the case of Sissy Jupe, an unwilling target, while influencing Thomas Gradgrind's attention towards Bitzer. There is nothing healthy about this light, as the same beam that highlights Sissy's darkness sucks the little life out of Bitzer, drawing "out of him what little colour he possessed" (14). The room, by directing light in this fashion, is literally bringing out the

worst characteristics in Blitzer. This is the very beginning of the failed spaces Dickens discusses throughout the rest of the novel. These failed spaces are the interior rooms and places that are unsuccessful in their intended purposes: school rooms in which students are not improved, homes which do not nurture, studies in which no one can study, each of which is an example of the manifestation of what Dickens believes is the failed philosophy of Bentham's Utilitarianism. The aesthetics of interior space becomes a metaphor for the oppression of the government on the people.

Stepping in for Gradgrind and Mr. McChoakumchild, the normal instructor of the students, is an unnamed Government Officer. The officer begins with questioning the students as to whether or not they would use wallpaper with pictures of horses in their rooms. The class is mixed in their response to this, but half of them manage to be wrong, and one of them, most note-worthily, for thinking independently:

One corpulent slow boy, with a wheezy manner of breathing, ventured the answer, 'Because he wouldn't paper a room at all, but would paint it. 'You must paper it,' said the gentleman, rather warmly. 'You must paper it,' said Thomas Gradgrind, 'whether you like it or not. Don't tell us you wouldn't paper it. What do you mean, boy?' (15)

In this conversation, Dickens is satirizing the desire for choice on the part of the lower class, something to which they are not entitled, as that it would be "fancy", the dirtiest of all dirty words in the eyes of Thomas Gradgrind and the government officer. Both characters verbally castigate Sissy Jupe for doing just that when she expresses an interest in carpeting her room with a flower print. "'But you musn't fancy,' cried the gentleman... 'You are never to fancy.' 'You are not, Cecilia Jupe,' Thomas Gradgrind solemnly repeated, 'to do anything of that kind'" (16). Leona Toker, in her article "*Hard Times and a Critique of Utopia: A Typological Study*" notes that "Thus, the surface form

of Gradgrind's Utopianism is its total valorization of factual knowledge and total exclusion of anything that can fall under the heading of 'fancy'" (Toker 219). Sissy has violated this vital precept.

To have desires is a freedom not permitted to the poor in the dystopia Dickens presents in this novel, a point made overtly clear by the Government Officer when speaking to the class. "'You are to be in all things regulated and governed,' said the gentleman, 'by fact'" (Dickens 16). Dickens gives added emphasis to this line by that division of the quote. In the eyes of the government, the poor need to be ruled because they cannot rule themselves. In the words of Toker, "A Utopian temperament is totalitarian" (Toker 223). Dickens, in this depiction, agrees.

Dickens gives several views of interior home spaces in *Hard Times* that tellingly demonstrate the failings of that Government Officer's guiding principle. The first is that Thomas Gradgrind's own house is not successful as a home. When Gradgrind checks on his children:

[H]e opened the door of the children's study and looked into that serene floor-clothed apartment, which, notwithstanding its bookcases and its cabinets and its variety of learned and philosophical appliances, had much of the genial aspect of a room devoted to haircutting. Louisa languidly leaned upon the window looking out, without looking at anything, while young Thomas stood sniffing revengefully at the fire. (Dickens 29)

Despite Gradgrind's stated desire that children's heads be filled up with facts, the study of his own home seems ill-suited to that end, as the children are pointedly doing nothing. As noted by Dickens, it is a study that is not perceived to be a study, nor is anyone studying in it. Dickens give a contrast in the form of the home in which Sissy Jupe had previously resided. While not described in laborious detail, it is a functional space:

It was a mean, shabbily furnished room, with a bed in it. The white night-cap, embellished with two peacock's feathers and a pigtail bolt upright, in which Signor Jupe had that very afternoon enlivened the varied performances with his chaste Shakspearean quips and retorts, hung upon a nail; but no other portion of his wardrobe, or other token of himself or his pursuits, was to be seen anywhere. (37)

While the room gives clear evidence of the relative poverty of Sissy's family, it is primarily a room, not a testament to a belief structure, as Stone Lodge is. The only evidence of her father's work is spoken of positively with the word "enlivened", but otherwise the room is simply a room, in which Sissy Jupe is able, however shabbily, to seat her guests. This is in direct contrast to the Stone Lodge study, in which no one seems to be able to study. The reason for this is the negative influence of Utilitarian thinking in the home space. As Sarah Milan notes in "Refracting the Gaselier", "These domestic spaces are like factories rather than homes; unnatural and unhealthy setting for the raising of children" (Milan 99).

Also telling is another element of the interior of Stone Lodge, described when the home is visited by Josiah Bounderby, a factory owner and faux hero, continually extolling the virtues of his own (false) self-improvement tale. Bounderby is shown (at the start of Chapter IV) standing in front of the fireplace of Stone Lodge, "partly because it was a cool spring afternoon, though the sun shone; partly because the shade of Stone Lodge was always haunted by the ghost of damp mortar" (24). Damp mortar smells of rot and decay, and, in construction, is the indicator of flawed design, especially at the foundation. This mirrors Bounderby directly: a man with a false foundation, obsessed with describing himself as rising out of the muck when none of that is in fact founded in reality.

Again, Dickens provides an opposing parallel; the home of Stephen Blackpool, one of the “Hands” of Coketown and an employee of Mr. Bounderby, is well maintained. It was, as Dickens points out, “as neat, at present, as such a room could be. A few books and writings were on an old bureau in a corner, the furniture was decent and sufficient, and, though the atmosphere was tainted, the room was clean” (74). The contrast between the two is stark. Bounderby, who has all the advantages of upper class wealth, is depicted along with the Gradgrind family, in an unhealthy atmosphere, while Blackpool, who lives in the heart of the choking industrial center, maintains a clean space. In the only space that he can control, Stephen is then capable of living without the government oversight that is represented in the flawed, poisonous underpinning of Thomas Gradgrind’s home.

Charles Dickens dedicated *Hard Times* to his friend, essayist and historian Thomas Carlyle. As noted by Roger Swift in his article on Carlyle, “*Chartism* presented both a radical and incisive critique of the impact of industrial capitalism on contemporary society and a savage indictment of the ruling class for allowing such human suffering to materialize” (Swift 68). In *Hard Times*, Dickens is not attempting to argue in favor of Chartism. However, the novel bears out one central truth of Carlyle’s argument: “it was misgovernment that lay at the root of social distress and discontent” (Swift 70).

Accepting the premise made by Inga Bryden and Janet Floyd in their introduction to *Domestic Space: Reading the nineteenth century interior*, that “Nineteenth-century culture, in response to modernity, acknowledged a new, unstable interdependency between the body and space: between the inner psyche and outward aesthetics” (Bryden and Floyd 11), then Dickens’s focus on the interior spaces of the homes and schoolrooms of Coketown allows him to sharply criticize the negative impact of Utilitarianism in its

application. The inadequate spaces created by the ruling classes of Coketown lead to misery and despair, while the lower classes, when left without interference, are able to survive, if not thrive. Ultimately, Dickens is then questioning the authority of mastery.

#### Chapter 4: Gaskell

What originally brought Elizabeth Gaskell to Charles Dickens's attention was *Mary Barton*, an earlier novel on the lives and struggles of mill workers. Both that book and *North and South* share an interest in the betterment of the working class. As noted by Pamela Corpron Parker in her article "Fictional Philanthropy in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* and *North and South*," "these novels attempt to 'speak comfort' by assuring the suffering workers that the upper classes are not without compassion, even as she challenges her readers to more explicitly philanthropic enactments of that compassion" (Corpron Parker 322). This theme is drawn from Gaskell's own life:

Elizabeth Gaskell actively supported her husband's socially-engaged Unitarian ministry in Manchester and involved herself in many charitable projects of her own. Her letters record her teaching at the ragged schools, participating in plans to reform fallen women, soliciting funds for charitable causes, and making visits to the homes of the poor. (321)

However, *Mary Barton* and *North and South* are fundamentally very different novels.

Again, as noted by Parker, "In *Mary Barton*, Gaskell does little to dispel John Barton's assertion that the poor alone care for the poor. Poor men and women, rather than the rich, provide the most charitable responses to their neighbors in times of crisis" (327).

Gaskell's descriptions of the plight of the poor in *Mary Barton* are unflinchingly grim and wide in scope:

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 the 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. (Gaskell 76)

The masters, meanwhile, are savagely cruel, mocking the members of the union's delegation with a hand-drawn caricature of scarecrows, which they proceed to pass about

like schoolboys, as the delegation stands by silently. Despite or perhaps due to the book's popularity, Gaskell faced a significant backlash. "In February, a third edition had brought fierce criticism of that 'one-sidedness' in the *Manchester Guardian*, and at the same time the expected blast came from the *British Quarterly*, which called *Mary Barton* 'mischievous' and complained of the exaggerated picture of industrial misery and strife and the 'very great injustice to the employers'" (Uglow 218). The book's reception was felt on a personal level as well, as Corpron Parker points out that Gaskell was "painfully aware that her novel [*Mary Barton*] was deeply resented by many of the wealthy mill owners, some of whom were in her husband's congregation" (324). This awareness is seen in her letters as "She confided to Katie Winkworth 'some say the masters are very sore, but I'm sure I *believe* I wrote the truth', and wrote defensively to Mary Ewart: 'No one can feel more deeply than I do how *wicked* it is to do anything to set class against class, and the sin has been most unconscious if I have done so'" (Uglow 216).

Perhaps in response to all of this concern, *North and South* is different, defending the idea of mastery by showing the inability of people to govern their own actions without the direction of their social betters. This change is noted directly in the article "From Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* to Her *North and South*: Progress or Decline for Women?", when Pearl Brown points out that:

The interior of the Higgins's house is described much less extensively than that of the Bartons or of Alice Wilson, for example. In *Mary Barton*, the houses become homes. Gaskell invites the reader into these dwellings, observing 'the smallest details of household decoration and routine and the texture of daily life' before moving 'outward into the contended area of 'social problems' (Brown 353)

What Brown accurately represents is awareness on the part of Gaskell of interior space and what it can connote. However, the limited detail of the Higgins home that Gaskell



does provide is all the more telling because of its scarcity. Conversely, the detail spent in the homes of the Thorntons as well as the shifting life of Helstone carry a similar impact. As noted by Brown, “more important to Gaskell than the actual changes is the emergence of a new culture which the second novel also mirrors, along with the ways that culture shaped values and attitudes” (Brown 346). Dickens’ sharp interrogation of society for its failure to provide for the less fortunate are subjugated in *North and South* by Gaskell’s fears of society’s direction. As noted by Brown, “more important to Gaskell than the actual changes is the emergence of a new culture which the second novel also mirrors, along with the ways that culture shaped values and attitudes” (Brown 346). This new culture was one that placed a greater importance on commerce than on station, and valued progress over class.

To an important extent, *North and South* is a compromised novel. As noted in the Patricia Ingham’s introduction to the 2005 Penguin Edition, Gaskell’s originally intended title was *Margaret Hale*. And while she does not directly attribute this change to Dickens, Ingham does include a comment on the subject from Dickens’s letters, noting “*North and South* appears to me [Dickens] to be a better name than *Margaret Hale*. It implies more, and is expressive of the opposite people brought face to face by the story” (Gaskell, xii). Dickens’s editorial hand was not a positive influence in the eyes of Gaskell. As Jerome Meckier points out in the article “Parodic Prolongation in *North and South*: Elizabeth Gaskell Reevaluates Dickens’s Suspenseful Delays,” Gaskell decries these edits, sounding desperate in her letters to her friends. “For once nearly as histrionic as Dickens, Gaskell makes it sound as if the editor stood over her desk, compressing her physically along with her manuscript. She pleaded for each additional page as if it were a starving person’s last

morsel” (Meckier 226). Published originally in *Household Words*, Gaskell included a preface before the first volume of the complete book, stating:

Although these conditions were made as light as they well could be, the author found it impossible to develop [sic] the story in the manner originally intended, and, more especially, was compelled to hurry on events with an improbable rapidity towards the close. (5)

Additionally, Gaskell closes with a line from John Lydgate’s poem “The Chorle and the Bird”: “Beseking hym lowly, of mercy and pite,/ Of its rude making to have compassion.” Meckier argues that Gaskell turns the final part of the novel into a parody, taking “the opportunity to get even with Dickens for his editorial interference by ridiculing the popular novelist’s stock in trade: alleged unrealistic delays that artificially increase suspense” (Meckier 220). If this argument is in fact the case, it serves to highlight the importance of some of the imagery that Gaskell does in fact use, as well as how she uses it. Even if we ignore the parodic argument, there is still the fact that Gaskell was to some degree looking to mend some personal fences. “The idea of another book on Manchester had been simmering in her mind since the furore over *Mary Barton*, when friends suggested she should write something to show the masters in a better light” (Uglow 344). Either way, *North and South* exists in the shadow of many external influences on the author that may have forced her to compromise her original vision.

Elizabeth Gaskell’s emphasis and tone on the interior spaces of *North and South* is markedly different from that of Dickens. The self-made man of her novel John Thornton, unlike Josiah Bounderby, actually *did* raise himself up by his proverbial bootstraps to become a captain of industry. As opposed to the Gradgrinds, the Hale family fits well into the gentility of Southern England, and when they are uprooted, they struggle to survive, much less relate, in the commercial North. These changes from *Hard*

*Times* are due to a philosophical belief in governance differencing from Dickens. Deidre D'Albertis discusses this difficulty to relate in *Dissembling Fictions: Elizabeth Gaskell and the Victorian Social Text*. D'Albertis studies Gaskell's life and work by tying the events of Gaskell's novels and biographies to Gaskell's personal experiences and those of Victorian women as a whole. She states that "in fashioning her social problem novels, Gaskell found herself torn between individualistic solutions and systemic analysis" (D'Albertis 6). In *North and South*, Gaskell resolves this conflict by accepting and promoting a Paternalistic attitude towards dealing with the working poor. "By 1854 Gaskell no longer felt, as she had implied in *Mary Barton*, that mutual awareness would remove confrontation – the battle-lines were too firmly drawn – but she wanted to suggest that dialogue could soften hostility and counter alienation" (Uglow 370). Gaskell's movement towards shared sympathy between the classes is in opposition to Dickens's rejection of upper class mastery in *Hard Times*. Dickens is throwing away the traditional of paternalism that mastery entails, while Gaskell tries to preserve it through better understanding on the part of both masters and hands.

This attempt at reconciliation is demonstrated in the lives of the Hale family. Richard Hale, a pastor in the South, takes on the role of tutor in the North, as that serving as a mentor is the only function left to him after departing from his vicarage due to his theological doubts. Margaret, like many women of her situation in that period, takes on the role of mothering angel to a poor family living in Milton, the Higginsons. It also appears in the business philosophies of John Thornton:

In our infancy we require a wise despotism to govern us. Indeed, long past infancy, children and young people are the happiest under the unfailing laws of a discreet, firm authority. I agree with Miss Hale so far as to consider our people in

the condition of children, while I deny that we, the masters, have anything to do with the making or keeping them so. (Gaskell 120)

The source of agreement is essential for understanding the dynamic of paternalism. As Sarah Dredge points out in her article “Negotiating ‘A Woman’s Work’: Philanthropy to Social Science in Gaskell’s *North and South*”, “Though in her disputes with Thornton, Margaret criticizes his autocratic authority over his workers, her own earlier attitudes towards the poor as a class needing to be guided are only a softened version of the same basic assumptions” (Dredge 91). While Margaret and John are divided by social class, they are joined by their shared belief: in the eyes of Thornton and Hale, people are children to be governed. The question is only how best to do so.

Part of Gaskell’s answer to this question of how to exercise benevolent paternalism is to reaffirm the social strata of English life by detailing Helstone’s shifting stewardship and its implied degradation because of this change. When initially pressed for a description of the place by Henry Lennox, Margaret describes it as a picturesque pastoral landscape. Henry teases her, to which she responds, “‘No,’ replied Margaret, somewhat annoyed, ‘I am not making a picture. I am trying to describe Helstone as it really is’” (Gaskell 13). However, the romanticized elements are essential to understanding Helstone, as Margaret eventually concedes and states, “Helstone is like a village in a poem—in one of Tennyson's poems. But I won't try and describe it any more. You would only laugh at me if I told you what I think of it--what it really is... 'Oh, I can't describe my home. It is home, and I can't put its charm into words’” (14). As Gaskell makes clear throughout the rest of the novel, charm is essential to happiness, and that charm can only come from someone of Margaret’s social class.

Gaskell returns to and reinforces this idea of “charm” the end of the novel, as, when Margaret sees Helstone in the hands of the new vicar’s family, it is in the process of being fundamentally changed. “The parsonage was so altered, both inside and out, that the real pain was less than she had anticipated” (383). These changes include the house itself being reformatted to add a nursery and additional windows. While these are signs of new life, Margaret rejects them as lacking a certain something. “A great improvement it was called; but Margaret sighed over the old picturesqueness, the old gloom, and the grassy wayside of former days” (384). Ultimately, the problem is that Helstone has fallen into commoner hands, those of the teetotaling, sprawling Hepworths, and it is now lacking its former grace. Additionally, the Hepworths also seem to violating a precept of the new idea of a home. As employment moved from houses to factories, the dwelling place became a more focused instrument. In “Victorian Interior,” Steve Dillon points out that in response to changing times, “architecture responds by becoming, generally, more and more specialized. The home is *not* the office; the home itself is divided into differentiated private spaces, each with its own complex of objects” (Dillon 90). This change is echoed by Judith Flanders, as she notes in *Inside the Victorian Home: A Portrait of Domestic Life in Victorian England*, “That work was moving outside the home was [an] essential factor in the creation of nineteenth century domesticity” (Flanders 6). The Hepworths are figuratively standing at the church pulpit from inside their house, examining the townspeople, in effect ministering from their home, and in part defeating the purpose of the space.

The interior spaces of the industrial North also fail to live up to Margaret Hale’s standards. As the Hale family heads towards their new residence, they stop in the town of

Heston, which is described as “purposelike.” A telling example of this failing is in the contrast made in by Gaskell between the shop workers of this town and those of the

South:

In such towns in the south of England, Margaret had seen the shopmen, when not employed in their business, lounging a little at their doors, enjoying the fresh air, and the look, up and down the street. Here, if they had any leisure from customers, they made themselves business in the shop--even, Margaret fancied, to the unnecessary unrolling and rerolling of ribbons. (59)

The implication here is much the same as what the problem was at Helstone when it fell into “commoner” hands. There is something important about being scenic in Margaret’s eyes, and the example of how to do so is given by the grace of one’s social betters. As they have no guides or compasses as they would in the South, the shopkeepers of the North fail to govern themselves correctly, and engage in something “unnecessary”. Here the interior space, “in the shop”, is again made unseemly.

The house the Hale family is forced to settle on once they reach the North is in desperate need of guidance, which Margaret can provide:

We must go back to the second, I think... But I have planned it all. The front room down-stairs is to be your study and our dining-room (poor papa!), for, you know, we settled mamma is to have as cheerful a sitting-room as we can get; and that front room up-stairs, with the atrocious blue and pink paper and heavy cornice, had really a pretty view over the plain, with a great bend of river, or canal, or whatever it is, down below. (61)

Margaret is able to overcome whatever is wrong in the space by what she refers to as her “own genius for management”, and is confident that her father can “charm” (61) the landlord into repapering some of offending rooms, and covering the others with her father’s books, the physical manifestation of his current role as a teacher, a paternal figure. And while this repapering occurs not at the request of Mr. Hale but rather Mr. Thornton, it should be noted that Mr. Thornton is Mr. Hale’s student. There is a slight

echo of the opening scene of *Hard Times* in this scene, as in both novels wallpaper becomes a symbol of one's relationship to interior space. In the case of Dickens, wallpaper is something expected, as evidenced by the repetition of the line "You must paper it" by both Gradgrind and the government official present in the school room. Additionally, there are expectations of taste as well--in *Hard Times* there are "right" and "wrong" ways to paper a room. In *North and South*, Margaret's choice to repaper the room rejects the decision made by the lower-class owner, and replaces it with her superior vision. Margaret's sense of interior space is then shown to be superior to the sensibilities of the industrial North.

The battle over taste also plays an important part in the relationship between John Thornton and Margaret Hale. As Flanders points out:

The attractive, tastefully appointed house was a sign of respectability. Taste was not something personal; instead it was something sanctioned by society. Taste, as agreed by society, had moral value, and therefore adherence to what was considered at any one time to be good taste was a virtue, while ignoring the taste of the period was a sign of something very wrong indeed. (Flanders 18)

When Thornton comes to visit the Hales, he is struck by the decoration of their new home. He acknowledges that his own home, which he has recently left, has "no convenience for any other employment than eating and drinking" (79). By contrast, the Hales have decorated "with country habits", the result being a home that, in his estimation is "twice--twenty times as fine; not one quarter as comfortable." However, he acknowledges that "all these graceful cares were habitual to the family" (80), thus conceding its value. Conversely, when Margaret pays a return call to the Thorntons, she is unable to appreciate the fashion of his home. Upon entering the drawing room, Margaret's impression is that "It seemed as though no one had been in it since the day

when the furniture was bagged up with as much care as if the house was to be overwhelmed with lava, and discovered a thousand years hence” (112). Again, returning to Flanders, it is important to appreciate the importance of the drawing room as a space. “The drawing room was the center of the house, literally and spiritually. It was the status indicator, the mark of gentility, the room from where the woman governed her domain” (Flanders 168). However, in looking at the Thorntons’ drawing room for the first time, the narration focuses on the house’s more garish elements, including color scheme of pink and gold, and “colourless” coverings:

The whole room had a painfully spotted, spangled, speckled look about it, which impressed Margaret so unpleasantly that she was hardly conscious of the peculiar cleanliness required to keep everything so white and pure in such an atmosphere, or of the trouble that must be willingly expended to secure that effect of icy, snowy discomfort. (112)

The room is, in Margaret’s opinion, a failure because it lacks warmth or charm, the elements, in her estimation, that create a sense of home. When Margaret visits Thornton later in the novel, shortly before the riot outside his doors, Gaskell returns to this same idea. Sitting in the drawing room, the combination of windows and blinds with the outside light “threw all the shadows wrong...to make even Margaret’s own face, as she caught it in the mirrors, look ghastly and wan” (171). Given that a drawing room is intended to be a reception area for guests, the Thornton’s drawing room leaves their guest appearing ill and unwell. Because of Thornton’s social standing, he is incapable of providing the element of charm necessary, and ultimately, can only find it in his eventual love for Margaret. Likewise, Margaret’s charm and taste give her a moral superiority.

However, in *North and South*, the need for an improved paternalistic attitude is not limited to the interactions between the genteel and the industrious. Like Dickens in



*Hard Times*, Gaskell does give us a look into the homes of the working poor, although her version of them is markedly different. As Geoffrey Carnall points out in his “Dickens, Mrs. Gaskell, and the Preston Strike”; “But as is clear from *Mary Barton*, Mrs. Gaskell knew that the parable of Dives and Lazarus haunted the minds of the poor, and it is a fine touch to show the fact in the context of such a convincingly affectionate relationship” (Carnall 44).

*Mary Barton* touched and shocked its middle-class readers to an unprecedented extent because it showed how the poor suffered not in the mill or the factory but in their homes...Gaskell described their furniture, their crockery, their trivial family arguments, their small moments of pride or hurt feelings...she insisted that they were not so different: rich and poor were not two nations but one, split by ignorance and misunderstanding. (Uglow 194)

However, to use this depiction of *Mary Barton* as a guideline, *North and South* is relatively barren in terms of interior description. By not going into greater detail, Gaskell is indicating the changed focus of this *North and South* from *Mary Barton*. Because *Mary Barton* is so concerned with the daily life of the poor, the condition of that daily life requires depiction. In *North and South*, Gaskell grapples with the delicate issue of arguing on behalf of helping the poor without going into so much detail as to indict the upper classes for how the poor must live. Her answer to this problem is to leave a largely blank space with the exception of details that demonstrate the need of the lower class to be guided.

As mentioned previously, in going to visit the Higgins family Margaret is participating in a long tradition of social improvement on the part of middle-class women. Again, Gaskell’s depiction of the working-class home is sparse at best. Interestingly, Gaskell gives no sense of entry: Bessy warns Margaret of the threat of a gruff greeting from her father but there is none, nor is there any description of the

exterior of the home whatsoever. As Martin Hewitt points out in “District visiting and the constitution of domestic space in the mid-nineteenth century”, this was a common feature of literature of the time:

It is possible to go further and suggest that the working-class home was constructed not only with permeable walls but also without threshold and even doors...in middle-class accounts of the working-class home the door tends to disappear; if it is mentioned at all it is only to note that it is ajar, that the house is thus open to scrutiny from the outside. (Hewitt 127)

This sense of openness is certainly the case here. However, in *Mary Barton*, a book in which Gaskell lavishes description of the working class home, Gaskell includes a moment in the early section of the book which deserves scrutiny by comparison.

Discussing John Barton’s motivation to move to his present house to distract his grieving wife after the loss of their child, Tom, Gaskell writes “So he seemed to know every brass-headed nail driven up for her convenience. Only one had been displaced. It was Esther's bonnet nail, which in his deep revengeful anger against her, after his wife's death, he had torn out of the wall, and cast into the street” (Gaskell, *MB* 102). Esther, sister to Mrs. Mary Barton is a fallen woman. Gaskell is depicting John’s anger and moral outrage by showing him throw the nail into the street, but the key here is the location, not the action: he throws it outside the house. John Barton is attempting to control the morality of his home. The scene makes an overt contrast between inside and out, a defined interior life of a working class home and the ability to keep things out of it. This is different than the normal perception of the period, as Hewitt notes that “the working-class home was considered as pollutant in moral as well as sanitary terms, opened out to the public world of the slum into which it was so readily aggregated” (Hewitt 129). In this scene from *Mary Barton*, Gaskell is defying that precept. However, the Higgins family lacks that

power in *North and South*, and thus is in need of a master as that they lack mastery themselves.

D'Albertis notes that Margret Hale is "ill-equipped to deal with the class structure, social attitudes, and, most tellingly, the physical dimensions of the city" (D'Albertis 65). The result is a heroine conflicted in her role, who still sees herself as a rescuer. This unease seems evident by her relative discomfort moving through Milton, and may explain why there is so little description given of the interior space during her first visit to the home of Bessy Higgins, the sickly daughter of Nicholas. What Margaret first observes is that "A great slatternly girl, not so old as Bessy, but taller and stronger, was busy at the wash-tub, knocking about the furniture in a rough, capable way, but altogether making so much noise that Margaret shrunk, out of sympathy with poor Bessy" (Gaskell 91). While the room is somewhat of a blank slate, its inhabitant, Mary, is unclean. Additionally, the implication is that the noise is part of what ails Bessy. Mary proceeds to set the home into disorder by knocking down furniture in her pursuit of a glass of water for her infirm sister. This sense of disorder is more evident in Margaret's later, more formal visit to the home:

Mary Higgins, the slatternly younger sister, had endeavoured as well as she could to tidy up the house for the expected visit. There had been rough-stoning done in the middle of the floor, while the flags under the chairs and table and round the walls retained their dark unwashed appearance. Although the day was hot, there burnt a large fire in the grate, making the whole place feel like an oven. Margaret did not understand that the lavishness of coals was a sign of hospitable welcome to her on Mary's part, and thought that perhaps the oppressive heat was necessary for Bessy. (100)

Again, the implication is that the Higgins's home is a failed space due to a lack of guidance. The Higgins family is incapable of keeping it properly cleaned and maintained, and it does not suit as an entertaining space. As noted by Judith Flanders, an important

consideration for the interior spaces of the Victorian period was the idea that there was a relationship between cleanliness and morality. The Higgins family is, like the poor as a whole in the novel, in need of superior direction, which, for Nicholas, will come from John Thornton and Richard Hale. In *Scenes of Sympathy*, Audrey Jaffe points out that “in *Mary Barton* and *North and South*...individual sympathy is her [Gaskell’s] solution to class conflict” (Jaffe 78). The above scene demonstrates the source of this sympathy: the need for order to be restored by those who know best.

Despite its fixation with the issues of industry, the novel *North and South* does not spend a great deal of time inside of the factory. There is no question this life was a difficult one, as Dutton and King point to the “Harsh discipline, the systematic use of fines, corporal punishment, the threat of dismissal and excessively long hours” (Dutton and King 98) common to the factory setting. Gaskell steadfastly avoids all of these issues apart from the long hours, perhaps because they would call into question the suitability of the masters as supervisors of other’s lives. However, Gaskell does not spare the readers another of the realities of factory life as the conversation between Margaret and Bessy on the subject of Bessy’s ill health focuses on the fluff as the likely culprit. The fluff, as Bessy explains, is “Little bits, as fly off fro' the cotton, when they're carding it, and fill the air till it look all fine white dust”(102). Bessy attests to its danger, plainly stating that she had seen many people die spitting blood from breathing in the fluff. However, this issue is looked at matter-of-factly by both master and worker, as Bessy explains after Margaret asks if anything can be done:

Some folk have a great wheel at one end o' their carding-rooms to make a draught, and carry off th' dust; but that wheel costs a deal o' money--five or six hundred pound, maybe, and brings in no profit; so it's but a few of th' masters as will put 'em up; and I've heard tell o' men who didn't like working places where

there was a wheel, because they said as how it mad 'em hungry, at after they'd been long used to swallowing fluff. (102-3)

What is most telling here is that awful conditions for workers are given by both sides of the partnership.

However, Thornton's dining room enterprise flies in the face of the accepted reality of unhealthy conditions in the factory space. Thornton's motivation in building a dining room is altruistic, as he goes to the home of a worker and sees him and his family at a meal. He states, "I saw such a miserable black frizzle of a dinner--a greasy cinder of meat, as first set me a-thinking" (352-3). Again, as has been the case before, Gaskell gives virtually no description of the room, but still delivers the message that it is failing to meet its purpose and in need of supervision. Thornton is inspired in this process by the dual thought of how "much money might be saved, and much comfort gained" (353). While Thornton is somewhat bothered that he loses the credit for the idea by having it bandied about by Higgins and the rest of the workers, he continues on with the plan because it represents too good an opportunity to improve the efficiency of the factory via improving the workers' lives. Also, Thornton's logic is echoing the thoughts of Margaret Hale earlier when she was first confronted with the vast machinations of the North:

The question always is, has everything been done to make the sufferings of these exceptions as small as possible? Or, in the triumph of the crowded procession, have the helpless been trampled on, instead of being gently lifted aside out of the roadway of the conqueror, whom they have no power to accompany on his march? (70)

Inside this expression of sympathy, Margaret states a clear lack of agency for the less fortunate. They cannot lift themselves, they must be lifted by the more powerful. The strong have a responsibility to the weak. As Dredge points out, "Both Thornton's and Margaret's early opinions remove any agency from the worker; whether fixed in poverty

by divine ordinance or by the vicissitudes of the market, the workers are left alienated from the power bases of society that decide their fate” (Dredge 92). In an earlier conversation, Thornton states that he is proud to live in a town where there is upward mobility, even if it means “toiling, suffering” (82). Margaret responds to this point by stating of South. “If there is less adventure or less progress...there is less suffering also.” Here in this later section, in arranging and organizing the dining room, Thornton is operating with lessening suffering as a large part of his credo.

Altruism aside, for Thornton, this dining experiment is largely a business arrangement, one that allows him to remain in his supervisory role. When Bell, who is so impressed with the plan that offers a donation in order to arrange feast for the workers, Thornton refuses, stating “They [the workers] pay me rent for the oven and cooking-places at the back of the mill: and will have to pay more for the new dining-room. I don't want it to fall into a charity” (354). Additionally, when asked about how much involvement he has in the day-to-day operations of the establishment, Thornton chooses to demur in part:

I was very scrupulous, at first, in confining myself to the mere purchasing part, and even in that I rather obeyed the men's orders conveyed through the housekeeper, than went by my own judgment. At one time, the beef was too large, at another the mutton was not fat enough. (353)

While Thornton is giving the workers governance over the dining room, he includes the errors in the meat. This detail ties back to the original issue, the men are in need of guidance which he must provide.

Gaskell then reinforces the idea of the need for a autocratic master-worker dynamic with the detail that after Thornton is forced to give up his mill, he declines “having any share in a partnership...He would sooner consent to be only a manager,

where he could have a certain degree of power” (415). Thornton needs to manage, and Gaskell validates this belief by making it clear that the workers need to be managed.

Later, when asked he is so desirous of a position as master, Thornton states that he wants to further test his theories:

I have arrived at the conviction that no mere institutions, however wise, and however much thought may have been required to organise and arrange them, can attach class to class as they should be attached, unless the working out of such institutions bring the individuals of the different classes into actual personal contact. (421)

While, Thornton acknowledges that he does not believe this will end strikes, it can at least make the two sides “like each other more.” Here Thornton is making it clear that the need for supervision has to happen on a personal and direct level, mirroring the supervision done by Margaret Hale in the homes of the Higgins. The accuracy of Thornton’s beliefs is testified by the detail that “I had a round-robin from some of my men--I suspect in Higgins' handwriting--stating their wish to work for me, if ever I was in a position to employ men again on my own behalf. That was good, wasn't it?” Here in the final pages of this novel, Gaskell hints at the natural order of the Paternalism she is espousing in this novel. Thornton is given mastery over the workers and Margaret Hale, as Thornton’s social better, has guidance over him, as shown by his seeking approbation from her with his question. In their very first meeting, Gaskell writes, “Mr. Thornton was in the habits of authority himself, but she [Margaret] seemed to assume some kind of rule over him at once” (63). In these final scenes, we see that rule realized. As pointed out by Valerie Wainwright, “Thornton’s love for Margaret Hale induces him to become an archetypal paternalist employer: secure in his sense of superiority yet more conscious of his social responsibilities” (Wainwright 149). In *The Subjection of Women*, John Stuart

Mill depicts “the ideal of marriage” as one in which “each can enjoy the luxury of looking up to the other, and can have alternately the pleasure of leading and of being led in the path of development” (Mill 110). In the final section of *North and South*, Thornton is being led by Margaret.

To view Gaskell as a social justice writer, it is important, especially in *North and South*, to consider what she believed to be the implied authority of her position. As Elizabeth Starr points out in her article, “‘A great engine for good’: the industry of fiction in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* and *North and South*,” “Calling her readers to collective and individual action, she [Gaskell] identifies herself as an authority on the basis of her familiarity with the working classes and her understanding of the measures that should be taken to help them” (Starr 388). While *North and South* is not autobiography, there are clearly parallels between Margaret and Gaskell. Margaret’s authority, like Gaskell’s as a writer comes from social standing, thus the validity of social standing as part of mastery must be defended. By focusing on interior spaces, Gaskell can demonstrate that need for direction as tempered by sensitivity and emotion.



## *Conclusion*

Fundamentally, *Hard Times* and *North and South* are not that far apart in terms of their aims. As works of social justice, the differences of these two texts emanate not from their source material, nor from their desired outcomes, but rather from motivation. Both writers aspire to better treatment for the poor, but the difference is why. Dickens's answer comes from what he perceives to be the negative role played by the guiding philosophy of the government in the lives of ordinary people. In the failed classrooms and homes devised under the vision of Bentham's Utilitarianism, Dickens shows an upper class unable to lead. His response is to question mastery and reassert personal liberty. Gaskell's focus, conversely, was on her main character, Margaret Hale, the erstwhile titular character, and on the need for proper and compassionate guidance. As Sarah Dredge points out, "The independence of the Milton poor is something that disconcerts Margaret and threatens the conception of fixed and identifiable class difference and inequality upon which her philanthropy depends" (Dredge 90). As is shown in Gaskell's sparing looks into the lives of the working poor, they cannot guide themselves. Thus, Dickens is arguing in favor of increased liberty, while Gaskell is arguing in favor of increased compassion.

As noted by Inga Bryden and Janet Floyd, "The domestic space is never just private; it is a sign for public and cultural interaction, a space which 'outsiders' or strangers can enter, a site of encounter" (Bryden and Floyd 12). Both Dickens and Gaskell deal with this "site of encounter" differently. The interiors of Dickens's novel show an upper class that has failed in its responsibilities: beyond the fact that it cannot create a world for the poor that betters their living conditions, the domestic world of *Hard*

*Times* is mentally, physically and spiritually unhealthy. *North and South* is very much a rebuttal. Gaskell's interiors exemplify the need for the guiding hand of the upper class; while Margaret Hale is deeply sympathetic toward the poor of the industrial North, the novel makes it clear that left to their own devices, the lower classes cannot adequately manage themselves. In Steve Dillon's "Victorian Interior", he notes that once the forces of modernity and industrialization forced an increase of life indoors, "The interior void must be filled" (Dillon 88). Dickens and Gaskell give the respective options of filling that void, either through freedom or through kindness.

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