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WORKING-CLASS MASCULINITIES IN *MARY BARTON*

By Lisa Surridge

IN CONSIDERING THE SUBJECT of masculinity in *Mary Barton* (1848), it is perhaps well to remember that Elizabeth Gaskell conceived the novel as being about a man. "'John Barton' was the original title of the book," she wrote to Mrs. W. R. Greg early in 1849. "Round the character of John Barton all the others formed themselves; he was my hero, *the* person with whom all my sympathies went . . ." *(Letters* 42: 74). Gaskell's letter of 5 January 1849 to Miss Lamont reaffirms this: "'John Barton' was the original name, as being the central figure to my mind . . . in writing he was [?] my 'hero'; and it was a London thought coming through the publisher that it must be called *Mary* B" (*Letters* 39: 70). While the "London" title of *Mary Barton* focuses on the romance elements of the plot (and, by extension, on the female gender role), Gaskell's original title of *John Barton* focused on working-class protest (and, by extension, on the male gender role). Indeed, there is much to suggest that the novel is as much concerned with masculinity as it is with industrialization and class strife.

Not that these can effectively be separated. Recent studies of nineteenth-century masculinities by James Eli Adams and Herbert Sussman identify the 1830s and 1840s as a time which "marked the loss of a central point of identity and social reference" for men (Adams 6; see also Sussman 1). The industrial revolution caused massive shifts in the organization and control of work and family life, resulting in adjustments of class and gender relations across large sections of English society. As Thomas Carlyle wrote in "Characteristics" (1831), "The old ideal of manhood has grown obsolete and the new is still invisible to us, and we grope after it in darkness, one clutching this phantom, another that" (29). His statement applied both to the dominant middle class and the emergent and vocal working class of the early nineteenth century. For while the middle class needed to refashion the idea of manliness[1] in a world "transformed by industrialization and by *embourgeoisement*" (Sussman 2), the period of the first Reform Bill prompted a surge of debate on masculinity from the working class. As David Rosen observes, the "connection between masculine potency and social and economic power seems to have been alive in the minds of many marginalized men" (20). In the political arena, the debate on manhood suffrage frequently devolved into a question about who belonged to the "privileged" category of "man" (Rosen 21). In the domestic sphere, the shift from home-based industry to the factory system meant that supervision of labour and production moved from the

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male head of the family to the male factory supervisor, causing working-class men to resent losing control over their dependents' work, over their own working hours, and over their dependents' sexual conduct (Schwarzkopf 43–44).

What does it mean to be a father and not be able to feed one's child? What does it mean to be a man when one's child feeds the family? When one's wife feeds the family? In what does manliness consist when work is unavailable and/or control over work impossible? These, as Dorothy Thompson and Jutta Schwarzkopf observe, were key issues in the Chartist movement (Thompson 114–15; Schwarzkopf 3, 6, 7, 39–45). And while numerous critics have noted that *Mary Barton* gives the six points of the Charter short shrift (see, for example, Flint 13–14), it is equally noteworthy that the novel vividly represents these crucial Chartist issues surrounding home, work, and masculinity. The text is filled with working-class voices speaking urgently about the nature of work and family life in the new industrial society. As Marjorie Stone argues, the discourse of *Mary Barton* embraces "a heteroglossia of multiple languages — languages understood in Bakhtin's stipulative sense . . . as 'ideologically saturated' embodiments of 'socio-linguistic points of view'" (177). In particular, Stone points out, Gaskell weaves into her text a "plentitude of working-class discourse" (187) — passages from Chartist poems, working-class ballads, proverbs, maxims and nursery rhymes, as well as John Barton's radical discourse, Ben Davenport's deathbed curses, and Job Legh's language of Christian submission (Stone 180, 186–87). Within this heteroglossia of working-class discourses, Gaskell richly represents the contemporary debate concerning working-class manhood.

"Father does not like girls to work in factories" (139; ch.10); "Wife o' his'n will never work away fra' home" (140; ch.10); "*We* want it for daily bread, for life itself; and not for our own lives neither" (221; ch.16); "I've seen a father who had killed his child rather than let it clem before his eyes" (220; ch.16); "Mary, my darling, they've made me blind because I wanted to work for you and our own baby" (222; ch.16) — in *Mary Barton*, working-class characters voice impassioned convictions about men and their families, their labour, their pay, and their loss of control over these. John Barton's objections to women working in factories, Jane Wilson's anecdotes about factory girls' ignorance of cookery and domestic chores, John Barton's enraged grief at not having been able to feed his son Tom, and George Wilson's shame at "spunging" on his son Jem (73; ch.6) — these represent a broad range of contemporary views on the nature of manliness and the erosion of masculine power in the contemporary working-class family.

Most saliently, Gaskell draws on Chartist discourse which represented working-class manhood as being under threat. That Gaskell draws on the language of Chartism in the novel has already been demonstrated: Angus Easson has remarked that John Barton's speech "quotes" the frequent Biblical references typical of Chartist oratory (*EG* 58). But Gaskell also quotes a Chartist discourse which represented the working-class home as a site of manhood under siege. This discourse was exemplified by the Chartist orator and leader Joseph Raynor Stephens, who strongly associated lack of economic power with loss of manliness. Under the factory system, Stephens argued, the supervisor had replaced the man as household head:

> The holy headship of his own household has passed away from the man. He is no longer king and keeper, good shepherd and feared father over those, who by the ties of blood and kinship ought to have belonged to him. They are his and not his. (qtd. in Schwarzkopf 49)

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The link between economics and manliness was captured succinctly by George Harney in a letter to the Yorkshire Chartists: "a [Malthusian] pretended philosophy," he wrote, ". . . crushes, through the bitter privations it inflicts on us, the energies of our manhood" (qtd. in Clark 62).

Gaskell, then, wrote her novel about a working-class hero when the very nature of working-class manhood was perceived to be under threat. And Jem Wilson's glimpse of the "phantom likeness" (408; ch. 33) of John Barton in chapter 33 suggests that Barton symbolically embodies this threatened manliness:

> [A] form had glided into sight; a wan, feeble figure, bearing with evident and painful labour a jug of water from the neighbouring pump. It went before Jem, . . . passed into the broad, calm light; and there, with bowed head, sinking and shrunk body, Jem recognized John Barton.
>
> No haunting ghost could have had less of the energy of life in its involuntary motions than he . . . (407; ch.33)

"[H]imself, yet not himself" (408; ch.33): failed father and man, John Barton returns to die in front of his fireless hearth, the poignant symbol of his deserted and barren home. This passage suggests that Gaskell's "tragic poem"[2] centred around a tragedy of failed manhood.

But the vision of John Barton's life as a tragedy of failed manhood captures only one aspect of Gaskell's portrayal of her "hero" (*Letters* 42: 74). Less politically palatable to her Manchester contemporaries and other middle-class readers would have been the novel's emphatic identification of manliness with its lower-class characters. This is a key difference from *North and South* (1854–55), written to redress the perceived imbalances of *Mary Barton*. As Gaskell wrote *North and South*, she struggled to create in the middle-class industrialist Mr. Thornton a character at once "large and strong and tender, and *yet a master*" (*Letters* 217: 321). In *Mary Barton* this exemplary manliness — this ideal combination of largeness, strength and tenderness — rests unequivocally with working-class characters such as John Barton and Jem Wilson. If there is a crisis in masculinity in this novel, it lies in two areas: first, in the middle-class men, who have lost their links with their families; and second, in the extreme poverty of the lower class, a poverty so extreme that it crushes and corrupts the energies of working-class men.

Mary Barton *and Working-Class Manhood*

AS A STUDENT in one of my classes exclaimed about *Mary Barton*, "The men literally walk into the novel carrying babies." In the opening chapter of the novel, George Wilson carries one infant, John Barton another. To some extent this represents practical necessity: obviously working-class families could not afford nurses to carry their children. But the novel emphasizes the connection between men and nurturance in the general as well as in the particular: chapter 1 describes the infants "carried for the most part by the father" (3; ch.1) in working-class families out in Green Heys Fields, and celebrates this in the "Manchester Song" of the chapter motto:

> There's Richard he carries his baby,
> And Mary takes little Jane,
> And lovingly they'll be wandering
> Through field and briery lane. (1; ch.1)

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This pattern of working-class men caring for children recurs throughout the novel. In vivid and concrete images of male nurturance, Gaskell depicts Jem cooing to his young brother, George Wilson feeding and hushing the Davenports' child, Wilson carrying his dead child with "tender strength" (86; ch.7), Jem weeping as he puts away in the cupboard the oranges he had brought for the now dead twins, and John Barton soothing the lost Irish boy with "tender address" as he sets out to commit the murder of Henry Carson (233; ch.17). Critics have suggested that the dominant visual image of the text is the industrial *Pietà* created by Carson's embrace of the dying John Barton (see Stoneman 83). But the novel's repeated depiction of men cradling infants suggests instead a re-visioning of Gaskell's favorite painting of sacred motherhood, Raphael's *Madonna della Sedia*.[3]

Nor is manly nurturance restricted to the care of children. George Wilson is as "tender as a mother" with his injured bride (102; ch. 8); Wilson and Barton serve as "rough, tender nurses" to the Davenport family (68; ch. 6); Job silently rearranges furniture to help Margaret in her blindness; the crusty old boatman looks after Mary in Liverpool; Jem and Job nurse Mary in her illness. Throughout *Mary Barton*, this manly nurturance is shown to be a major strength of working-class family and community life. Charles Kingsley, reviewing *Mary Barton* in *Fraser's Magazine*, unerringly identified the unique quality of the working-class men of the novel, whom he described as "kind and sympathising as women to each other" (Easson *CH* 153).

Set against this ethos of care, the deaths in the novel — especially those of children — stand out in sharp ironic relief. Critics have traditionally seen this emphasis on child mortality as autobiographical, memorializing the death of Gaskell's son William in 1845 and the earlier death of her stillborn daughter in 1833. The novel's preface and epigraph foster this autobiographical interpretation of the novel, as does Gaskell's letter to Mrs. Greg, written in early 1849:

> The tale was formed, and the greater part of the first volume was written when I was obliged to lie down constantly on the sofa, and when I took refuge in the invention to exclude the memory of painful scenes which would force themselves upon my remembrance. It is no wonder then that the whole book seems to be written in the minor key. (*Letters* 42: 74–75)

But as John Lucas points out, the novel's high mortality rate is also part of Gaskell's documentary realism: "The sub-title of *Mary Barton* is 'A Tale of Manchester Life' and one of the inescapable facts about Manchester life was that it was soon over . . . the average age of death for mechanics, labourers, and their families" in Manchester in 1842, Lucas notes, "was seventeen" (42). Gaskell's repeated emphasis on infant and adult mortality, Lucas argues, accurately represents working-class reality (42).

If the number of deaths in the novel reflects Gaskell's documentary realism, the trope of the dead or dying child reflects Gaskell's knowledge and evocation of Chartist discourse. This image captured both the dire economic conditions which produced such a mortality rate, and the Chartists' perception that capitalism had robbed them of a "natural" right of fatherhood. This was articulated by Joseph Raynor Stephens, who conflated the right to vote with the right to care for self and family: "[I]f any man ask him what he meant by Universal Suffrage, he would answer, that every working man in the land had a right to have a good coat to his back, a comfortable abode in which to shelter himself and his family, a good dinner upon his table" (qtd. in Royle 89). Similarly, the manifesto of the

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Barnsley Chartists worked by invoking and then imagining the violation of "natural" paternal feeling:

> Did you ever feel that holy pride, that parental tenderness, that inward adoring of God for having made you a father which arises in a father's breast at hearing his little boy read the Scriptures, or any other pleasing book to his little brothers and sisters? . . . if you have, can you ever allow the idea to enter your minds that others of your children . . . are doomed by poverty to be brought up like the wild ass's colt. (qtd. in Thompson 114)

The motif of the dying child, then, is infused with the Chartists' political conviction that a working-class man should have a right to support and protect his own family members. A powerful example of this trope occurs in the Chartist Richard Pilling's speech in his own defense at his trial at the Lancaster assizes in March 1843, which demonstrates a masterful use of autobiography as political rhetoric:

> My Lord, and gentlemen of the jury, it was then a hard case for me to support myself and family. My eldest son but one, who was sixteen years of age, had fallen into a consumption last Easter and left his work. We were then reduced to 9 3/4 *d*. a cut, which brought our earnings down to something like 16 *s*. a week. That is all I had to live on, with my nine in family, 3 *s*. a week going out of that for rent, and a sick son lying helpless before me. I have gone home and seen that son . . . lying on a sick bed and dying pillow, and having nothing to eat but potatoes and salt. Now, gentlemen of the jury, just put yourselves in this situation, and ask yourselves whether seeing a sick son that had worked twelve hours a day for six years in a factory — a good and industrious lad — I ask you, gentlemen, how you would feel if you saw your son lying on a sick bed and dying pillow, with neither medical aid nor any of the common necessaries of life? . . . Gentlemen, my son died before the commencement of the strike . . . Gentlemen of the jury, it was under these circumstances that I happened to call at Stockport, excited I will admit by the loss of my son, together with a reduction of twenty-five per cent.; for I will acknowledge and confess before you, gentlemen of the jury, that before I would have lived to submit to another reduction of twenty-five per cent., I would have terminated my own existence. (Wallis 1100–02)

Here the dying child functions as the motive and justification of political action and the point at which relative differences in wages become absolute loss. Pilling's meticulous account of his income, which commences at his earning 16 shillings a week by himself in 1810 and culminates in the whole family earning this amount in the early 1840s, ceases abruptly when he comes to the account of his son's death. Wage loss is relative, Pillings implies; death is not. His appeal from father to father ("[G]entlemen . . . put yourselves in this situation. . . . I ask you, gentlemen, how you would feel if you saw your son lying on a sick bed") establishes the death of the child as a violation of a common right of fatherhood and inheritance.

In *Mary Barton*, John Barton commands this powerful rhetorical trope. Indeed, it is difficult to see the motif of the dead child in the novel as predominantly autobiographical when almost every political speech Barton makes includes a reference to a dying child. The first chapter of the novel introduces Barton through his command of the powerful rhetorical combination of personal anecdote and biblical echo (two techniques which were

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hallmarks of Chartist rhetoric). John Barton's speech to George Wilson fuses the trope of the dying child with Christ's vision of the Last Judgement (Matt. 25:32–36):

> If I am sick, do they come and nurse me? If my child lies dying (as poor Tom lay, with his white wan lips quivering, for want of better food than I could give him), does the rich man bring the wine or broth that might save his life? If I am out of work for weeks in the bad times, and winter comes, with black frost, and keen east wind, and there is no coal for the grate, and no clothes for the bed, and the thin bones are seen through the ragged clothes, does the rich man share his plenty with me, as he ought to do, if his religion wasn't a humbug? (8; ch. 1)

John Barton's later speeches reiterate the trope of the dying child: "Han they ever seen a child o' their'n die for want o' food?" (74; ch. 6), he asks George Wilson as they nurse the starving Davenport family. When Barton is leaving for London as a Chartist delegate, he shows that he is conscious of the rhetorical power of this trope. Like the Chartist Pillings, he uses the dying child as symbol, evoking "Children born on wet flags, without a rag t' cover 'em or a bit o' food for th' mother" (101; ch. 8). And as the Chartists suffer rejection in London, Barton returns to this motif: "And why are we to be molested," he demands of a police officer, "going decently about our business, which is life and death to us, and many a little one clemming at home in Lanchashire?" (116; ch.9). The motif of the dying child, then, is not politically neutral, but alludes to the Chartist concern with the right of fatherhood as a crucial aspect of working-class manliness.

Chapter 9 is central to the novel's treatment of masculinity because it juxtaposes the tragedy of John Barton's failed manliness with the triumphant comedy of Job Legh's manly nurturance. Traditionally, the two London journeys have been seen as belonging respectively to the political and domestic domains of the novel. Catherine Gallagher argues, for example, that Job's domestic comedy acts to suppress the tragic story of the rejection of the Chartist petition (82). But as Marjorie Stone points out, the stories are strongly linked by the common motif of the hungry or dying child (182). John Barton goes to London to speak on behalf of "many a little one clemming at home in Lancashire" (116; ch.9); Job Legh goes to London to find his daughter and her husband dead of fever and finds a baby hungry for its dead mother's milk. At stake in both stories is the ideal of the nurturing man, comically represented by the bearded old Frank Jennings as he dons a woman's nightcap, and tragically represented by John Barton as he returns, defeated by a middle class which does not share his understanding of paternal obligation, nurturance, and care.

John Barton, then, functions as both exemplar of ideal manliness and the symbol of its defeat. Laurie Buchanan argues that Barton fails because he is shaped by "masculine codes of conduct that prohibit integration of feminine feeling with masculine rationality" (98); however, I would argue instead that at the beginning of the text Barton exemplifies the ideal nurturing man, at once "large and strong and tender" (*Letters* 217: 321). Later in the text, his shift away from nurturance to isolation and violence symbolizes the vulnerability of this ideal manliness in the climate of the 1840s. Gaskell, like George Eliot later, insists that individual destiny results from a combination of character and social conditions. John Barton's character, Gaskell suggests, is misshapen by a poverty which denies him manly strength in nurturance, by removing his avenues for spousal love and paternal care of his son. (She quotes Ebenezer Elliott in the motto to chapter 10: "My heart, once

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soft as woman's tear, is gnarled/ With gloating on the ills I cannot cure" [130; ch. 10]). Barton is also defeated because the ethos of manly nurturance to which he appeals is not acknowledged by the middle class. The traditional division of the novel into two plots thus obscures key links between the domestic and the political. First, John Barton's domestic anecdotes about the death of his son Tom are highly political, being infused with the Chartist trope of the dying child. Second, the motif of the dying child invokes the contemporary political debate on manhood suffrage and its relation to manliness and the right of fatherhood. Third, until the failure of the Chartist petition, John Barton's motive for political action is vested in the domestic and in this perceived right of fatherhood. Only when the Chartist petition fails does he take the morally wrong but diabolically logical step of depriving another father of such a right.

Middle-Class Manliness in Mary Barton

THAT JOHN BARTON'S VIOLENCE should deprive Mr. Carson of his enjoyment of fatherhood is heavily ironic because Gaskell depicts the middle-class industrialist as an inadequate father in the first place. One reason for the very hostile reception of *Mary Barton* may have been that, while it depicts the poor as rich in manliness and in family and community life, the novel shows the new industrial middle class as effete and unable to sustain family life. On two occasions in the novel, Gaskell gives us glimpses of the Carson home: when George Wilson comes to ask for the infirmary order, and second, when Harry Carson's body is returned to his home. On both occasions, she depicts warmth without moral substance, self-indulgence without generosity, women without strength, and men without manliness.

Superficially, the first episode contrasts the extreme poverty of the Davenports' slum dwelling with the leisured wealth of the Carson home. But much more profoundly, the chapter juxtaposes the family and community relationships of the working and middle class. The Davenports' desperation prompts a kind of heroism from George Wilson and John Barton which the narrator describes as "self-denial, among rude, coarse men, akin to that of Sir Philip Sidney's most glorious deed" (64; ch.6). The practical help given by Barton (who gives his dinner and pawns his clothes to give the starving family five shillings) and by Wilson (who pays for his generosity with the lives of his twin sons)[4] are matched by the self-denial of Mrs. Davenport, who offers her withered breast to her child although her milk has gone, and the loving and devout gesture of Ben Davenport, who fumbles to bless his wife as he dies. Sandwiched in the middle of this heroic drama of working-class domestic life is Wilson's glimpse of the Carson home, where Amy's girlish sweetness is by implication dimmed by Mary Barton's courage, Henry Carson's donation of five shillings is outweighed by the enormous generosity of John Barton's gift of the same sum, and Mr. Carson's perfunctory help is outshone by the "heart service, and love-works" of John Barton and George Wilson (68; ch. 6).

The second episode reverses the first; this time, it is the Carsons who face tragedy and death, and how they do so is implicitly compared with the behavior of the working-class families, who in the course of the narrative have faced tragedy so often. Gaskell frames the episode by depicting the household before the news arrives. We see Mrs. Carson "indulging in the luxury of headache" and the three girls listless and idle (237; ch. 18). Sophy rouses herself to make a moral judgement on Harry as vain, flirtatious, and self-in-

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dulgent just before the nurse enters to break the news of his death. This frame for the death scene is not calculated to create sympathy either for the dead son or for the family. And when the news is announced, the inadequacies of that family are palpable. Mrs. Carson has hysterics, as do two of her daughters; Mr. Carson takes refuge in revenge. Sophy alone rises to the occasion, but without any of the high courage or self-sacrifice shown by numerous working-class characters in the novel.

Self-indulgence, thoughtlessness, too much leisure — Gaskell depicts all of these as contributing to the moral spinelessness of the Carson family. But in a novel where manliness and fatherhood are so much at issue, Gaskell suggests strongly that the emotional poverty of middle-class families arises from their absent fathers. The factory owners are so immersed in work, she suggests, that a work stoppage comes as a benefit to their families:

> The partners had more leisure than they had known for years; and promised wives and daughters all manner of pleasant excursions. . . . It was a pleasant thing to be able to lounge over breakfast with a review or newspaper in hand; to have time for becoming acquainted with agreeable and accomplished daughters, on whose education no money had been spared, but whose fathers, shut up during a long day with calicoes and accounts, had so seldom had leisure to enjoy their daughters' talents. There were happy family evenings, now that the men of business had time for domestic enjoyments. (63–64; ch. 6)

Yet even with this leisure, the manly nurturance which is so noteworthy a feature of the working-class men in the novel is nowhere elaborated. Mr. Carson may be proud of Harry and charmed by Amy, but their relationships are shown as superficial. The richness of fatherly care in *Mary Barton* is threatened by poverty and death in the working-class families, but in the middle class it is simply absent.

Gaskell was not alone in pinpointing a crisis in the middle-class industrial family in the 1830s and 1840s. *The Half Sisters*, published in the same year as *Mary Barton* by Gaskell's Manchester contemporary Geraldine Jewsbury, makes a sweeping denunciation of industrialists as inadequate husbands and fathers. Like Gaskell, Jewsbury depicts the middle-class industrialist as severed from family life:

> The men engaged all day in business operations on a large scale, frequently with several hundred workpeople to manage, were not likely to feel any interest in small refinements and elegancies for which there was no tangible use. Consequently female society went for very little . . . [The men] were tired and harassed when they came home from business, and were in no mood for any thing more exalted than to make themselves comfortable; their energies were all engrossed in *one* direction, namely, towards their business, which was the object "first, last, midst, and without end" of their life. (42)

As the industrial middle class moved their homes away from their factories and workshops, the working lives of men were increasingly removed from those of their families. In *The Women of England, Their Social Duties, and Domestic Habits* (1839), Sara Stickney Ellis saw the industrial man becoming like the machine he owned: "[E]very morning brings the same hurried and indifferent parting," she writes, "every evening the same jaded, speechless, welcomeless return — until we almost fail to recognize the man, in the machine" (55). In *Mary Barton*, a novel so noted for its rich scenes of working-class family life — of singing, eating, telling stories, responding to birth and death, mourning, sewing,

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reading poetry — Gaskell portrays the middle-class father's place as empty, and the middle-class family as emotionally poor.

Not that Gaskell was incapable of imagining tenderness in middle-class men. Peter Jenkyns of *Cranford*, Mr. Gibson of *Wives and Daughters*, Mr. Benson of *Ruth* — all show a capacity for nurturance similar to that of George and Jem Wilson and the early John Barton. But these characters are all slightly out of the ordinary. Peter is exiled from home and country, Mr. Benson is disabled, and Mr. Gibson's profession requires that he nurture others. In her own marriage, Gaskell feared that William Gaskell was not as outwardly gentle as her daughters might need him to be if she died young: "Now you know," she wrote to Anne Robson in December 1841, "that dear William feeling most kindly towards his children, is yet most reserved in *expressions* of either affection or sympathy — & in case of my death . . . would you promise, dearest Anne to remember MA's [Marianne's] peculiarity of character, and as much as circumstances would permit, watch over her & cherish her" (*Letters* 16: 46). Little wonder, perhaps, that Gaskell experienced a struggle when she tried to create the character of John Thornton in *North and South* — "large and strong and tender, and *yet a master*" (*Letters* 217: 321).[5]

Manhood on Trial

CRITICS HAVE TRADITIONALLY seen the conclusion of *Mary Barton* taking refuge in melodrama, turning away from a realistic consideration of class conflict to the simpler drama of the court case. But I would suggest that the trial scenes are intrinsically and essentially related to the novel's central theme of manliness. Jem Wilson's trial is as much about his masculinity as it is about his innocence. Leading up to the court scenes, the drama is about Jem's alibi and Mary's conflict between loyalty to her father and loyalty to Jem. But in the trial scenes themselves, what is at issue is not murder but manhood: whom did Mary love?: "[W]hich was the favoured lover? You say you knew both of these young men. Which was the favoured lover? Which did you prefer?" (382; ch. 32). The "pert" (382; ch. 32) barrister's question represents the culmination of a series of scenes posing questions about masculinity: who is a man? who is manly? These questions run through and link the so-called "industrial" plot with the "romance" plot of the novel.

The romance triangle of the novel pits Jem Wilson against Henry Carson for Mary's love. And the central question posed by this love triangle is not just whom Mary loves but who is a man. When Jem meets Henry in chapter 15 ("A Violent Meeting Between the Rivals"), this is at issue in both men's minds. Jem sees Henry as being "so elegant, so well appointed," that he feels emasculated: "he felt the superiority in externals, strangely and painfully, for a moment" (207; ch. 15). Henry similarly focuses on Jem's manhood: "Could this man be a lover of Mary's? And (strange stinging thought) could he be beloved by her, and so have caused her obstinate rejection of himself?" (207; ch. 15). Gaskell uses synecdoche to juxtapose the "black, working, right hand" of the artisan to the glove of the "haughty young man" (208; ch.15). In this confrontation of working-class with middle-class manhood, the reader abruptly sees Jem through Henry's eyes:

> He looked at Jem from head to foot, a black, grimy mechanic, in dirty fustian clothes, strongly built, and awkward (according to the dancing master); then he glanced at himself, and recalled

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> the reflection he had so lately quitted in his bedroom. It was impossible. No woman with eyes could choose the one when the other wooed. It was Hyperion to a Satyr. (207; ch.15)

Henry quotes Shakespeare (*Hamlet* I.ii.139–40), reassuring himself through the cultural capital of his class, just as he later uses Shakespeare to satirize the strike committee during the confrontation between masters and workmen. But the episode which asks its readers to contrast the manliness of Henry Carson and Jem Wilson finds the new middle class as effete in comparison to the working class. Jem's strong arm and hand function as a metonymy for his strong moral courage in facing Henry and in defending Mary's chastity; Henry's gloved hand represents both his wealth and his fatal separateness from the community in which he lives. Just as the novel shows Mr. Carson, ironically, as less of a father than the murderer John Barton, it finds his son as effete and morally vacant in comparison to the working-class man. In this context, Jem Wilson's anxious appropriation of Robert Burns' aphorism — "a man's a man for a' that" (207; ch.15) — suddenly stands out as a powerful political statement.

Jem Wilson's trial replays this confrontation between Jem and Henry and poses again its key questions: which of these is the man? which of these is a man? The court drama is not about Jem's innocence, about which the reader is never in doubt. It is partly about whether he will hang for a murder he did not commit. But Jem's triumph occurs before the "Not Guilty" verdict, and before Will arrives to produce his desperately sought alibi. All of these are anti-climactic after Mary's speech, which vindicates Jem's manliness in the face of the "fixed idea in the minds of all, that the handsome, bright, gay, rich young gentleman must have been beloved in preference to the serious, almost stern-looking smith, who had to toil for his daily bread" (380; ch.32). In contrast to the ballad heroines to whom she has been compared (girls of humble origin who are tempted by wealth or who reject a lover of humble origin in favor of a wealthy man)[6], Mary chooses Jem: "Perhaps I liked Mr Harry Carson once — I don't know — I've forgotten; but I loved James Wilson, that's now on trial, above what tongue can tell" (382–83; ch. 32). Mary's statement does not vindicate Jem as to the murder charge; on the contrary, it "strengthen[s] the supposition of his guilt" (383; ch.32). But it vindicates his manliness, and after it Jem stands "erect and firm, with self-respect in his attitude" (384; ch.32). The real issue of the trial has been resolved.

It only remains for Jem to exercise the manly nurturance modeled by his father and John Barton. This inheritance is symbolically passed to Jem in the first chapter of the novel, when Barton hands over one of the twin boys to the "rough, cubbish" youth (11; ch.1). Jem enters into this inheritance in full when he and Job Legh (the other surviving exemplar of the strong yet gentle man) nurse Mary back to health after the trial. Mary wakes from her illness in an infantilized state and looks on Jem "as a baby does when it sees its mother tending its little cot" (410; ch.34). The novel has come full circle.

But not quite, for Gaskell attempts to close the circle by endowing the factory owner with this quality of manly nurturance, and here she fails to convince. Crucially, she stages Mr. Carson's "conversion" through his interaction with a child. Mr. Carson's redemptive encounter with the little girl who teaches him Christ's forgiveness on the cross — "*He did not know what he was doing*" (434; ch.35) — is intended to recall John Barton's encounter with the lost Irish boy as he sets off to commit murder. In Barton's case, his care of the small boy functions in a convincing and complex manner, both to recall Barton's nurturing

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character (and portray the murder as a violation of that character) and to locate the murder's motive in Barton's loss of the right of fatherhood, a crucial political impetus. But Carson's revelatory encounter with the young girl, and his final gesture of forgiveness — holding the dying John Barton in his arms — have left most readers cold. One reason for this is probably because Carson has done nothing up to this point in the book to convince us that he is capable of the paternal nurture on which his conversion relies. Kristin Flieger Samuelian observes that the closing image of the novel (that of the mill owner holding Barton in his arms) is prefigured by Barton carrying a baby in his arms in chapter 1 (20–21). Structurally, this analysis applies, but Gaskell fails to show how this quality of nurturance is transferred to the middle class. John Barton, Jem and George Wilson, Frank Jennings, and Job Legh all variously carry, talk to, care for, feed, and nurture children. Mr. Carson shows no such instinct or interest. In a novel which locates manly nurturance firmly in the working class, the final scene of Carson embracing the dying Barton simply does not ring true.

This scene of embrace has long exasperated Marxist critics who feel that it envisages a paternalistic resolution to class struggle. But the issue of paternalism was, as we have seen, a vexed one for Gaskell. First of all, the novel goes far towards establishing working-class men as exemplars of a new model of fatherly care. This care is shown by working-class fathers to their children, but also, and most saliently, is seen to extend into family relationships (in the care shown by husbands to wives) and community relationships (in the "heart service" [68; ch.6] given by the working class to its own members). Gaskell represents the Chartists' political demands in terms of an affirmation of and appeal to this right of fatherhood. But she also shows her own class embracing a paternalism which does not include this ethos of manly care; indeed, she shows true manliness as lacking among the factory and mill owners. "The old ideal of manhood has grown obsolete and the new is still invisible to us," so wrote Thomas Carlyle in 1831 (29). Gaskell does envisage a new ideal of manhood; she succeeds in portraying Jem as "large and strong and tender" (*Letters* 217: 321). But her imagination fails when she tries to portray her own class embracing this ideal.

One aspect of the projected novel which did not reach publication might have alleviated this. Until the last weeks before *Mary Barton* was published, Gaskell was still considering a male pseudonym for herself. On October 19, 1848 she wrote to Edward Chapman, asking if he would "have any objection to the name of 'Stephen Berwick' as that of the author of 'Mary Barton'" (*Letters* 28: 59). As Jenny Uglow notes, the name is a fatherly pseudonym, being a tribute to Gaskell's father, William Stevenson, and Berwick, his birthplace (187). This suggestion came too late, as *Mary Barton* was published anonymously on October 18, the day before Gaskell sent her letter. But this change to a male pseudonym would substantially have changed the depiction of middle-class masculinity in the novel. In chapter 24 ("With the Dying"), when contemplating Jane Wilson sleeping, Gaskell's narrator makes a revealing statement. The narrator describes sleep as "that land where alone I may see, while yet I tarry here, the sweet looks of my dear child" (316; ch.24). Had this been "Stephen Berwick" writing, as Gaskell seems belatedly to have intended, this passage would have aligned the middle-class male narrator with John Barton and Mr. Carson as another father who has lost a child. The adoption of the male pseudonym, which Uglow describes as a "retreat" (187), would have strengthened Gaskell's theme of fatherhood by creating a triptych of loving and mourning fathers in the

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text. This would not have resolved Gaskell's essential and significant failure to imagine Carson as capable of manly nurturance, but it would have created some evidence of this nurturance existing in the middle class. Gaskell's new ideal of middle-class manhood — "large and strong and tender" — might then have found some voice in *Mary Barton*.

University of Victoria

NOTES

1. For the purpose of this article I adopt the terminology suggested by Sussman in *Victorian Masculinities* (1995). "Male" is used "in the biological sense;" "maleness" "for that which the Victorians" saw "as innate in men." "Masculinity" and "manliness" refer to the "social constructions of the male current within the society." The term "manhood" is reserved for "the achievement of manliness," a process for Victorians difficult both to achieve and to maintain (Sussman 12–13).
2. Her original conception of the novel. See *Letters* 39: 70.
3. A print of this painting hung in Gaskell's daughter Marianne's room (Easson, *EG* 26); it also appears in *Cranford* as the talisman carried by Mrs. Brown as she takes her child to Calcutta.
4. The narrator establishes a direct link between the Davenport children's survival and the death of the Wilson twins: "THE ghoul-like fever was not to be braved with impunity, and balked of its prey. The widow had reclaimed her children. . . . Her plan of living was so far arranged, when she heard, with keen sorrow, that Wilson's twin lads were ill of the fever. They had never been strong" (83–84; ch. 7).
5. It is noteworthy that when Gaskell did set out to create an ideal middle-class industrialist, she showed his house and family — anachronistically — in his factory yard. Mrs. Thornton is a living anachronism, a woman who looks from her drawing room into the mill yard, and experiences a daily connection with the male sphere of work. And Margaret Hale's dramatic appearance in that same mill yard during strike violence shows her determination not to be relegated to the drawing room. Sussman has argued that at the end of *North and South* Gaskell envisages Thornton building a male community, "an industrial St. Edmundsbury, within the walls of the mill" (65). I would argue instead that in *North and South* Gaskell looks with nostalgia to an earlier period when the innovation of the suburb had not yet severed men's working lives from their families, and tries to envisage a model which would reunite men with their family in business and home concerns.
6. See Wheeler 45.

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