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*North and South* (1854)

Lying is done with words, and also with silence. (Adrienne Rich, *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence*: 186)

With *Mary Barton*, *North and South* is now the most widely-read of Elizabeth Gaskell's works, and we owe its modern rehabilitation to the Marxist critics of the nineteen-fifties, who saw its significance as an 'industrial' or 'social-problem' novel. This critical mediation, however, means that we now receive the text together with a consciousness of its short-comings in Marxist terms: its parent-child analogy for class relations obscures the economic source of class oppression in the appropriation of surplus value, and its 'resolution' is a marriage which at best seems a symbolic reconciliation and at worst a romantic diversion from the industrial theme.

I want to argue, however, that the novel only appears inadequate because of the assumption underpinning Marxist theory, that work relations alone provide the fundamental structures of society. Feminist theory affirms that gender relations are at least of equal, if not primary importance, and that any intelligent analysis of society or literature must orientate itself on not one but two axes of explanation. In Elizabeth Gaskell's novels the gender-perspective is strongly present, but has been discounted because it does not take the recognisable feminist form of concern for women's rights, but instead rises from what Temma Kaplan calls 'the bedrock of women's consciousness... the need to preserve life' (Keohane *et al*: 56).

The parent-child analogy for class-relations, while inaccurate in economic terms, is powerfully suggestive in gender-terms as an ambivalent model for relationships between unequal partners, implying the divergent possibilities of (maternal) nurturance and (paternal) authority, and many Victorian thinkers apart from Elizabeth Gaskell attempted to

solve class conflict by integrating these parental qualities into a benevolent authority. The resulting term, 'paternalist', which is often used dismissively of Elizabeth Gaskell's 'industrial' novels, only properly applies, however, to *Mary Barton*.

Because *Mary Barton* stresses the 'feminisation' of working-class life (see Ch.4 above), it tends to collapse together the axes of class and gender, seeing female/nurturing/working-class as a 'package' in opposition to male/authoritarian/middle-class. The inference from this assumption is that class problems can be solved in gender-terms, by 'maternal' fathers who see that 'the interests of one [are] the interests of all' (*MB*: 388). Although this solution expresses the spirit of female, working-class nurturance, however, it is embodied in men: the reformed capitalist Carson and the incipient capitalist Jem Wilson.

*North and South* offers a sharper analysis by seeing class and gender as axes which intersect rather than coincide. Its male protagonists of both classes are shown as conditioned by masculine codes of conduct which privilege aggression and inhibit tenderness, rendering the notion of the 'benevolent father' suspect. Moreover the novel recognises class struggle as the product of economic conflicts of interest which are not resolvable, though they can be ameliorated, by benevolence. Whereas *Mary Barton* reaches a solution more symbolic than material, which paradoxically excludes the working-class heroine, *North and South* reveals a situation which requires the active and continuing mediation of its heroine to affirm 'the need to preserve life' in a class struggle expressed in terms of masculine aggression.

Margaret Hale's achievement of this role is, however, impeded by the disabling ideology of 'separate spheres', and her relationship with Thornton exposes how each is inhibited from full humanity by codes of conduct which effectively rest on lies. While Thornton enacts the 'masculine lie' that judgment must not be swayed by sentiment, Margaret acts the 'feminine lie' that modesty overrides all other virtues. Their relationship, which conventional criticism reads as a 'romance plot' offering a false 'resolution' to the 'industrial theme', thus proves to be an essential analysis of the ideologies which structure industrial organisation, dictating why, among other things, class struggle is always aggressive. Their mutual partial emancipation from gender-ideology is offered not as a resolution of class-conflict, but as a necessary step in a political reorientation which would give higher priority to human need, and ensure, minimally, that class struggle is conducted in terms of political debate rather than physical warfare.

'The oppressed [are] not slow to learn the lesson of the oppressors', writes Elizabeth Gaskell in *An Italian Institution* (*K6*: 532), and *Mary*

*Barton*, despite its utopian ending, shows accurately how an aggressively masculine concept of authority engenders an aggressively masculine revolutionary socialism. *The Communist Manifesto*, for instance, published in the same year, is informed by images of warfare. Where *Mary Barton* showed the quasi-mythic 'fall' of the workers into class aggression, however, *North and South* shows them entrenched. The bestial imagery reserved for authority in *Mary Barton* is here attributed to the workers; Thornton's voice is 'like the taste of blood to the infuriated multitude' (NS: 173) and the workers' yell 'was as the demoniac desire of some terrible wild beast for the food that is withheld from his ravening' (175). But the violent bestiality is explicitly related to the refusal or inability of both sides to engage in speech, the specifically human mode of communication:

the rolling angry murmur [of]. . . men, gaunt as wolves, and mad for prey [was a]. . . wild beating and raging against the stony silence that vouchsafed them no word, even of anger or reproach. . . their noise [was] inarticulate as that of a troop of animals. (175-6)

There is a play on the word 'reason', which degenerates from meaning 'a logically argued case' to meaning 'an enforced cause'. Before the strike, Thornton complains that "because we don't explain our reasons, they won't believe we're acting reasonably" (117), but in the riot scene he relies on the soldiers to "bring them to reason. . . the only reason that does with men that make themselves into wild beasts" (175). Thus we have a self-perpetuating cycle in which Thornton's refusal to speak creates an adversary whose savage inarticulacy justifies his own substitution of force for reason. Both sides speak of class relations in terms of warfare; Mr Thornton is satisfied that "the battle is pretty fairly waged between us" (84); Higgins looks "forward to the chance of dying at [his] post sooner than yield" (134). Meanwhile, to Bessy, "It's like the great battle o' Armageddon, the way they keep on, grinning and fighting at each other" (150).

Elizabeth Gaskell does not suggest that verbal communication will eliminate class struggle. The reformed Thornton is prepared to try "experiments" to "bring the individuals of the different classes into actual personal contact" (420-1), but his "utmost expectation only goes so far as this" – not that they will "do away with strikes", but "that they may render strikes not the bitter, venomous sources of hatred they have hitherto been" (421). Some readers are disappointed with *North and South* because they assume it attempts more than this (e.g. David: 15, 20). Orthodox Marxists are inevitably disappointed in that they take as 'given' the very premise which the novel seeks to question – that class struggle is necessarily aggressive. For instance:

men ought to be forced apart *in spite* of their feelings for one another; . . . class interests *have* to wreck personal relations. . . . By temperament and conscious conviction [Mrs Gaskell] was incapable of exploring the tragic possibilities her experience exposed her to; the great *North and South* is the novel that never got written. (Lucas, 1966: 201)

The imperatives in this statement derive less from class dialectics than from a masculine relish for antagonism. When 'Mrs Gaskell' speaks out against this aggression she is perceived merely as 'incapable' of seeing the point, taking refuge in 'an absurd piece of evasiveness' (203) and 'laps[ing] into a discreditable sort of paternalism' (204).

Chapter 15 of *North and South*, 'Masters and Men', examines the 'paternalism' argument at some length, discriminating between different patterns of parenthood which might underlie that term. Margaret argues that 'the masters would like their hands to be merely tall, large children. . . with a blind unreasoning kind of obedience' (NS: 119), whereas, as Mr Hale continues the analogy, 'a wise parent humours the desire for independent action, so as to become the friend and adviser when his absolute rule shall cease' (121). This notion of the 'wise parent' as a model of acceptable authority still seems condescending, however, unless we realise that none of the authority-bodies dealt with in the novel measures up to this standard. The church, the universities, the law, the army, the navy and the employers are all exposed as complacent, self-seeking and inhumane. This exposure of the fallible nature of authority is the theme which links a number of plot details which are generally read as 'irrelevant' – Mr Hale's honourable defection from the church (NS: 35; cf W Gaskell: 22–3), Margaret's refusal to marry an ambitious lawyer, Edith's lazy life as an army wife, Mr Bell's comfortable prevarication with truth (NS: 385).

The most forceful and extensive of these parallel situations concerns Frederick Hale, whose justified naval mutiny provides an analogy, more acceptable to middle-class readers with its Robin Hood air of chivalry, for the mutiny of mill-workers. Just as the workers defy their masters for the sake of others – "they mun have food for their childer" (149) – so Frederick defies his captain for the sake of the men under his command (107, 109). The novel's judgment of Frederick is unambiguous; he is 'an outlaw', but he has offended a 'hard, unjust' law (35). Although the newspaper calls him "a 'traitor of the blackest dye'" (108) his mother affirms "I am prouder of Frederick standing up against injustice, than if he had been simply a good officer", and Margaret agrees: "loyalty and obedience to wisdom and justice are fine; but it is still finer to defy arbitrary power, unjustly and cruelly used – not on behalf of ourselves, but on behalf of others more helpless" (109). Nicholas Higgins will use the

same argument; “Dun yo’ think it’s for mysel’ I’m striking work. . .? It’s just as much in the cause of others as yon soldier. . .” (134).

Margaret, in the ‘paternalism’ debate in Chapter 15, draws all these analogies together when she says – surely with Frederick in mind – that in industry masters prefer “‘ignorant workmen – not hedge-lawyers, as Captain Lennox used to call those men in his company who questioned and would know the reason for every order’” (119). Thus authority is perceived as stifling intelligence in workers, soldiers and subjects to the law.

These three aspects of authority converge in Thornton. As a magistrate (272), he controls the police and the army who protect his own class interest: ‘punishment and suffering [were]. . . necessary, in order that property should be protected, and that the will of the proprietor might cut to his end, clean and sharp as a sword’ (186). He calls in soldiers (175) and patronises police officers (272); and his magisterial intervention on Margaret’s behalf (274–5), though welcome, recalls Frederick’s words about the court-martial: “‘evidence itself can hardly escape being influenced by the prestige of authority’” (254).

Elizabeth Gaskell was anything but naive about the relation between power and justice. When Margaret urges Frederick to stand trial, he tells her that a court-martial is not “‘an assembly where justice is administered’” but “‘a court where authority weighs nine-tenths in the balance, and evidence forms only the other tenth’” (253–4). Those who are tried are hanged from the yard-arm (109). Frederick’s story, usually dismissed as ‘pure plot-spinning’ (Wright: 144), provides a powerful argument for working-class solidarity. Frederick is heroic, but impotent; a handful of men cannot effectively challenge the armed forces and the law.

This vulnerability of the individual is, of course, the rationale for Trade Unions, since ‘unity is strength’. Many Victorians, however, like Dickens, who ‘sympathised with the underdog’, could not stomach the transformation of heroic victims into a powerful organisation. Modern critics usually assume that *North and South* is politically ‘soft’ in this way, especially as it questions the authority of the Union as well as other authorities. Boucher, the would-be strike-breaker, sees the Union as “‘a worser tyrant than e’er th’ masters were’” (154), and Margaret agrees (229). Her challenge, however, is not left unanswered. Higgins gives a reasoned defense of the Union as “‘a withstanding of injustice, past, present, or to come. It may be like war; along wi’ it come crimes; but I think it were a greater crime to let it alone’” (229). Margaret later uses the same defense of Frederick: “‘to have stood by, without word or act, . . . would have been infinitely worse’” (254). Higgins also defends the closed shop:

'Government takes care o' fools and madmen; and if any man is inclined to do himself or his neighbour a hurt, it puts a bit of a check on him, whether he likes it or no. That's all we do i' th' Union. We can't clap folk into prison; but we can make a man's life so heavy to be borne, that he's obliged to come in, and be wise and helpful in spite of himself'. (286)

Unlike the other authorities challenged in the novel, the Union is proved a 'wise parent', nurturing even troublesome members like Boucher, who would have "clemmed to death" without Union help (287), giving reasons for its actions and coercing its members only when reason fails. The Union attempts a rational approach to class conflict; the strike is planned as legal and non-violent (197–8) and it is Boucher's dissident faction which provokes the riot. Yet the rioters only act out the aggression inherent in Higgins's own metaphors, which are derived from the dominant ideology; the relationship between classes is "like war" (229) because its terms are dictated by those who maintain their power by force.

It is often said that despite its naive idealism, *Mary Barton* has a raw, indignant identification with the workers which is lacking in *North and South*, which is read as an apologia for the owners. I think that this is very far from the truth, and that *North and South* focusses on mill-owner rather than worker precisely because Elizabeth Gaskell has recognised the workers' impotence to control the terms of the class struggle; heroic and justified as they are, they have no option but to adopt the aggressive, confrontational position forced on them by the dominant class.

It is for this reason that *North and South* not only examines the motives of the mill-owner who does control the terms of the struggle, but also focusses on a woman who is able to challenge him from a position on the intersecting axis of gender. Although Thornton feels no obligation to his workers, he does feel a 'duty. . . to explain' to Margaret (85), and her role as 'mediator' consists largely in urging communication between the two sides (NS: 175, 300). This emphasis on speech only appears facile and sentimental (David: 43; Lucas, 1977: 1) if we read it as a solution to class conflict; there is nothing absurd in Margaret's wish that the conflict be enacted in human, not bestial, ways.

Critics who concentrate on Margaret's role in the novel, however, tend to read it as a 'Bildungsroman' (Dodsworth, 1977: 26), rather than an 'industrial novel', and hence to reverse the 'social' and 'romance' priorities. Dodsworth, for instance, sees 'the theme of industrial unrest. . . [as] subordinate to. . . the lovers' relationship' (18) – a reading which limits the interests of a 'heroine' to 'love'. But Margaret's insistence on 'speaking out' gives her a public role and stature. When she prays,

'alone. . . in the presence of God. . . that she might have strength to speak and act the truth for ever more' (NS: 402), what we hear 'is not the voice of a Victorian heroine but a Christian hero' (Lansbury: 116). Moreover, while the Bildungsroman reading suggests growth from immaturity, the novel presents Margaret from the beginning as a strong woman.

She is explicitly contrasted with Edith, who has fallen asleep on the first page, and like Titania, the Sleeping Beauty and Cinderella (7, 11, 12), waits to be rescued from maidenly inertia by a handsome prince. These early chapters serve to dissociate Margaret from the feminine preoccupations of dress and weddings. Instead of sleeping on sofas, Margaret stands 'upright and firm on her feet' (49); she 'tramp[s] along' (18), 'out-of-doors' (19) 'with a bounding fearless step' (71). She makes decisions not only for herself but for others; she arranges the move to Milton (51) and supplies the 'quiet authority' (51) her parents lack. Her father is described as 'feminine' (81), and throughout her mother's illness, she has 'to act the part of a Roman daughter, and give [him] strength' (238). While father and 'delicate' brother (242) 'were giving way to grief, she must be working, planning, considering' (247). Though her father's fallibility leaves her 'stunned and dizzy' (42), she learns to 'bear the burden alone. Alone she would go before God. . . . Alone she would endure. . .' (281). Although everyone relies on her, Margaret is 'not a static guide for men's behaviour, not an angel in the house. . .' (Lansbury: 115). She is called an 'angel', but always 'a strong angel' (138, 148, 246), and her role is so strenuous that after her mother's death, she finds it 'almost stunning, to feel herself so much at liberty' (336).

It is this strength of character – honest, brave, responsible, straight-looking and straight-speaking – which equips Margaret to urge straight speaking on Thornton and Higgins. Her opportunity comes in the riot scene where she urges Thornton to speak to the men. What happens now is that the smooth flow of the narrative seems to hit a snag, an eddy – what Virginia Woolf calls the 'foam and confusion' which results when a woman novelist dashes against 'something. . . which it was unfitting for her as a woman to say' (Barrett: 61). Seeing that he is likely to be hurt, Margaret flings herself in front of Thornton with her arms around his neck.

Margaret's motive in defending Thornton is humanitarian, and she is outraged by those who can interpret a woman's action only in sexual terms and assume – "what proof more would you have?" (187) – that she is in love with him. In her anxiety to refute this imputation, however, she grossly overstates her indifference, and, as Thornton perceives, she

maintains maidenly dignity at the price of being “unfair and unjust” (193). P.N. Furbank, in ‘Mendacity in Mrs Gaskell’, complains that the author seems to be ‘in collusion with her heroine. . . . This might be some spy-story, so much do we feel that all depends on Margaret’s quick thinking and deceiving the enemy’ (54). The snag in the narrative arises because a heroine who has been praised above all for speaking “plain out what’s in her mind” (NS: 287) now finds herself bound by the duplicitous ethic of the ‘virtuous woman’ who must avoid sexual shame, while not appearing to be aware of what it is she must avoid. As in *Ruth*, the conflict between a general ethic of truth-telling and the deception involved in maidenly modesty, produces extreme imagery. Margaret is so sensitive to the ‘ugly dream of insolent words spoken about herself’ (183), the ‘cold slime of woman’s impertinence’ (196), that she is unable to appraise the situation rationally. Her contradictory speech – “I did some good. . . [by] disgracing myself” (188), reveals the paradox; that the humanly ethical action is sexually disgraceful.

She receives Thornton’s proposal of marriage ‘like some prisoner, falsely accused of a crime that she loathed and despised’ (191). Even when Henry Lennox proposed, she ‘felt guilty and ashamed of having grown so much into a woman as to be thought of in marriage’ (34), but the element of publicity in her relationship with Thornton deepens the shame to the level of nightmare, again recalling *Ruth*:

The deep impression made by the interview, was like that of horror in a dream; that will not leave the room although we waken up. . . . It is there – there, cowering and gibbering, with fixed ghastly eyes, in some corner of the chamber. (NS: 196)

The gothic horror of this imagery recalls Freud’s definition of the uncanny as the heimlich/unheimlich; the familiar which has been repressed (Jackson: 65–6). Margaret cannot allow the knowledge of her sexuality to come into consciousness; her frantic shame is the effort at repression, her nightmare imagery the threatened return of the repressed.

Her denial of a personal motive in defending Thornton is an unacknowledged lie. Her real lie at the railway station, however, becomes the focus for accumulated shame and attracts disproportionate guilt:

nothing but chaos and night surrounded the one lurid fact that, in Mr Thornton’s eyes, she was degraded... Even when she fell asleep her thoughts were compelled to travel the same circle, only with exaggerated and monstrous circumstances of pain. (277)

An explicit denial of sexual shame – ‘she never dreamed that he. . . could find cause for suspicion in . . . her accompanying her brother’ (277) – is

followed by words suggesting just that – ‘her fall’ (278); ‘degraded and abased’ (279); ‘sunk so low’ (388); “‘tempted, . . . fell into the snare”’ (389). It is shame which ‘produced a relapse into. . . depressed, preoccupied exhaustion. She gave way to listless languor’ (282).

‘Shame’, then, has reduced Margaret from a fearless girl with ‘bounding step’ and ‘straightforward look’ to something like a conventional Victorian lady; ‘pallid’, ‘continually on the point of weeping’, she is made to ‘lie down on the sofa’ (280). More particularly it reduces her to silence. With her father’s support she urges Higgins to speak to Thornton (300), but his name causes ‘a strange choking. . . which made her unable to answer. “Oh!” thought she, “I wish were a man, that I could go and force him to express his disapprobation. . .”’ (302). When Thornton ‘stab[s] her with her shame’ by questioning her truthfulness, she ‘neither looked nor spoke’ (327–8). After her father’s death, ‘she lay on the sofa, . . . never speaking. . .’ (345), like a ‘stone statue’ (346).

Instead of speaking she begins to blush (192–3, 252, 254, 315, 324, 360, 365, 425) – a symptom which Helene Deutsch links with fatigue and depression as anxiety responses to repressed sexual consciousness (Showalter, 1977: 268). Blushing was an acceptable sign of modesty in a Victorian woman – ‘a weakness’ in man, but ‘in woman particularly engaging’ (*NFI*: 17) – but it is based on concealment of motives. Ideally the deception is unconscious (Vicinus: 158), but Fredrika Bremer exposes how daughters

learned. . . that marriage was the goal of their being; and in consequence (though this was never definitely inculcated in words, but by a secret, indescribable influence), to esteem the favour of men as the highest happiness, denying all the time that they thought so. (Bremer, 1843: I, 151–2)

Margaret’s denial of any personal motive in protecting Thornton, and her denial of being in a sexually compromising situation with Frederick, derive from prescribed standards of ‘maidenliness’. By ‘gazing straight into the inspector’s face’ and telling her lie – “‘I was not there”” (267) – Margaret enacts the ‘honesty’ required of women: ‘Women’s honor [is]. . . chastity. . . . Honesty in women has not been considered important. . . . we have been rewarded for lying’ (Rich: 186).

The novel suggests that the values of a ‘Victorian heroine’ are directly at odds with those of a ‘Christian hero’ (Lansbury: 116), and that Margaret suffers, psychologically, from having to conform to the former rather than the latter. Yet conventional critics have seen gender as unproblematically polarised in *North and South*. Ganz, for instance, sees Thornton and Margaret as representing ‘the particular merits of the masculine principles of severity, self-reliance and authority, and of

the feminine instincts of tenderness, dependence, and conciliation' (Ganz: 81). We have seen how 'instinctive' these 'feminine' qualities are to Margaret Hale; they are not innate, but socially constructed, as is Thornton's masculinity. The symmetry which Ganz assumes is also false, since 'historically, only the masculine experience of separation and autonomy has been awarded the stamp of maturity' (Abel, 1983: 10). The role of language in maintaining this differential is crucial. Masculine power may appear to rest on 'objective' facts such as the control of capital, but this control is itself vulnerable to intangibles such as a 'crisis of confidence' or 'loss of credit'. Masculine, capitalist authority is maintained in the details of inter-personal discourse by distinct linguistic strategies, such as 'abstaining from self-revelation and withholding personal information' (Spender, 1980: 47). This denial of human weakness constitutes a 'masculine lie' equivalent to the ideological 'feminine lie', again denying part of the speaker's humanity. Mr Thornton is described as a "'hard man," – not so much unjust as unfeeling' (NS: 165), but we know that this is not the whole of his potential. He can be child-like in enjoyment (81) and maternal in longing to give comfort (264), and when he first visits the Hales, he overrides his usual reserve to explain his career in the human terms which Margaret understands (85).

Subsequent meetings reveal, however, that although he is prepared to speak to her 'in a subdued voice, as if to her alone' (118), about religion and personal relationships, he will not respond to her attempt to speak 'in her usual tone' of both the Bible and of "'strikes, and rate of wages, and capital, and labour"' (118). On public matters he maintains a public manner, explaining industry to Mr Hale 'on sound economical principles. . . entirely logical. . . Margaret's whole soul rose up against him while he reasoned in this way – as if commerce were everything and humanity nothing' (151–2). In his *Blackwood's* articles, Elizabeth Gaskell's father exposes the apparent mathematical certainty of 'political economy' as a cheat. Attacking 'political economists' in their own terms, he shows them to be 'blind guides in the mazes of this science' (Stevenson, August 1824: 210). But although Margaret 'silently took a very decided part in the question' (NS: 162), her indignation remains speechless because it can only be expressed in the 'irrelevant' language of ethics.

Dale Spender argues that 'within patriarchal order we have been locked into thought patterns which are based on the premise[] that there is only one reality, . . . based on simple cause-effect relationships' (Spender, 1980: 96–7). The advantage of this world-view is that it is 'eminently controllable' (97), but it means that 'males have been forced to forgo much of their human experience precisely because it is difficult to

impose order on' it (Spender:100). Hence 'human ends have not figured prominently in male meanings because they tend to be disordered, chaotic, inexplicable and beyond control. It is human ends which have traditionally been assigned to women' (100). When Margaret presumed upon Thornton's humanity to tell Higgins to ask him for a job, Thornton tells him to "tell her to mind her own business" (NS: 314). Both men, but especially Thornton, find it difficult to acknowledge sympathy. 'He had tenderness in his heart. . . but he had some pride in concealing it. . . he dreaded exposure of his tenderness' (317). Higgins, too, conceals his concern for Boucher's "childer" behind a masculine bluntness which makes Thornton class him as a 'mere demagogue[], lover[] of power, at whatever cost to others' (312). Although Margaret compares the workmen with 'the wild bird, that can feed her young with her very heart's blood' (152), Thornton cannot believe in this 'tender' motive (313), until he has collected 'evidence as to the truth of Higgins's story' (318). Even then Higgins parades their mutual antagonism as a sort of talisman against womanish sentiment before naming his 'weak spot':

'Yo've called me impudent, and a liar, and a mischief-maker. . . . An' I ha' called you a tyrant, and an oud bull-dog, and a hard, cruel master. . . . But for th' childer, Measter, do yo' think we can e'er get on together?' (319)

Their relationship remains prickly on the surface but an important trust has been established. 'Once brought face to face. . . they had each begun to recognize that "we have all of us one human heart"' (409; see above: 33). Thornton, who controls the material practice of production, is convinced that 'actual personal contact' is a necessary check on 'mere institutions' (421) – in other words that the market mechanism is inadequate to human needs.

Spender argues that the exclusive assignment of 'the human heart' to women

is not just unfortunate, it is tragic, for the dominant group which holds the power is disconnected from fundamental human experience. Yet it is the group which legislates on human experience, which defines reality. . . . We should not be surprised that we are unable to organize technology towards human ends when human ends have never been part of the pattern of male experience and aspiration. (Spender, 1980: 100)

*North and South* suggests that they should be a part of that pattern. The understanding between Thornton and Higgins is not socialism, but neither is it a sentimental 'reconciliation' in the sense of a cessation of hostilities. It is more like a Geneva Convention aimed at minimising civilian casualties. The Geneva Convention, and the Welfare State, are not insignificant achievements in terms of human well-being; yet Elizabeth

Gaskell's cautious moves in this direction have been dismissed with surprising vehemence: 'ridiculous and unworkable. . . . Gaskell's remedy for discontent. . . is a good long talk, preferable round a tea-table' (David: 15); 'human heartedness indeed! If only the matter were that simple. . . .' (Lucas, 1966: 174). Spender, quoting Jean Baker Miller, suggests a reason for all this scorn:

When women have raised questions that reflect their concerns, the issues have been pushed aside and labelled trivial matters. In fact, now as in the past, they are anything but trivial; rather they are the highly charged, unsolved problems of the dominant culture as a whole and they are loaded with dreaded associations. The charge of triviality is more likely massively defensive, for the questions threaten the return of what has been warded off, denied and sealed away – under the label 'female'. (Miller, quoted Spender, 1980: 100–1)

'In this context', Spender argues, 'the need for women's silence in patriarchal order should not be underestimated' (Spender, 1980: 101). Even silently, women have some impact on history. Mary O'Brien speculates that 'the historical tendency of women to insist on the survival. . . of. . . their children' may account for 'Marx's most spectacularly erroneous prophecy – the progressive immiseration of the working class. . . . It has been the subsistence relations of the private realm which have provoked the development of the welfare state' (O'Brien: 166). What remains is for this insistence to become vocal; 'for women to affirm the protection of fragile and vulnerable human existence as the basis of a mode of political discourse,. . . to stand firm against cries of "emotional" or "sentimental",. . . would signal a force of great reconstructive potential' (Jean Bethke Elshtain in Keohane *et al.*: 145).

Margaret attempts this affirmation but her single public act ends in humiliation and prevents further communication with Thornton. After his proposal she retreats into maidenly pride and he into manly self-control. He assures her she need not "'be afraid of too much expression [of love] on my part'" (194), and although he dreams of her, he is 'too proud to acknowledge his weakness' (324). Her actions at the riot and the railway-station confuse him, so that although publicly he defends her – "'Miss Hale is a guardian to herself'" (305) – unconsciously he is unable to accept her 'double' nature – 'maidenly' but also articulate and apparently sexually conscious. In *The Poor Clare* Lucy and her demon likeness appear literally as "'that double girl'" (K5: 373; see above, p. 44) – just so Thornton has nightmares in which 'he felt hardly able to separate the Una from the Duessa' (324). In Spencer's *Faerie Queene*, Duessa, the Double, the daughter of Falsehood, is a vile creature, deformed below the waist, who traps men by assuming the form of Una,

the One Truth, the Christian heroine. Her deformity represents not only women's 'hidden' sexuality, but also all those 'disordered, chaotic' elements 'traditionally. . . assigned to women' because they threaten masculine order. 'Tenderness' is as much an enemy of order as sexuality if it is allowed to motivate significant action. Margaret's intervention in the riot is as unacceptable as a caring act as it is as an act of sexual provocation; both are inappropriate to a scene defined in terms of warfare. Immodesty is, however, the easier label to apply, and Thornton bolsters his 'resolute calmness' when Margaret leaves Milton by summoning a conventional 'spoiled flower' image (361).

Back in London, Margaret 'took her life into her own hands [and] tried to settle that most difficult problem for women, how much was to be utterly merged in obedience to authority, and how much might be set apart for freedom in working'. She claims so much freedom that Edith fears she will become 'strong-minded' (406); the 'work' in question is presumably 'philanthropic activity' which, in novels of this date, 'provides a gateway to fulfilment outside the home' and 'foreshadows the female emancipation of the decades to come' (Bergmann: 85). Like many Victorian women, she finds that implementing traditional female concerns, preserving life and promoting well-being, leads her to demand feminist rights and powers. In order to transform 'tenderness' into 'work' (which is what philanthropy means), Margaret needs to take hold of masculine power. At the end of the novel she controls Mr Bell's capital and the language of finance.

As for Thornton, whereas at the beginning his "one great desire" is "to hold . . . a high . . . place among the merchants of his country" (114), at the end, his "only wish is to have the opportunity of cultivating some intercourse with the hands beyond the mere 'cash nexus'" (420). He wishes to transform work, if not into tenderness, at least into a human activity. Kaplan points out that 'the insights of female consciousness, which place life above all other political goals, have never found expression in a major state or even a political party' (Kochanek *et al.*: 75), but Mr Thornton's name and status give him access to national power, through the M.P. Mr Colthurst, for instance. In this way *North and South* anticipates that strand of modern feminist theory which 'stresses the need to transform society so that men as well as women attribute high value to nurturance' (75).

The ending of *North and South* differs from the paternalism of *Mary Barton* mainly in its stress on Margaret's ongoing involvement in the process of social change. In the course of their separate, but converging transformations, Thornton and Margaret have challenged the ideological lies which polarise gender identity. Margaret is unmaidenly in initi-

ating their final meeting; Thornton replies in an unmanly voice 'trembling with tender passion' (424). Recollecting the riot scene embrace, they each retract their previous ideological positions; his 'honourable' proposal now seems 'insolence', while her 'offended dignity' seems 'wrong' (425). The last words of the novel replace the 'loaded' words 'gentleman' and 'lady' (cf 163, 193, 416) with "'That man!'" and "'That woman!'" (425).

This balanced emancipation seems to be the novel's conscious goal; but the most stubborn problem is still with us. When Margaret lifts her head from Thornton's embrace, her face is 'glowing with beautiful shame' (425).