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THE DISSONANT BIBLE QUOTATION: POLITICAL AND NARRATIVE DISSENSION IN GASKELL'S *MARY BARTON*

BY JON SINGLETON

"The Bible is the only book well enough known to quote . . . sure that the quotation would go home to every reader," Matthew Arnold wrote to his mother in 1862, "and it is quite astonishing how a Bible sentence clinches and sums up an argument. 'Where the State's treasure is bestowed, [there will its heart be also]' saved me at least half a column of disquisition."¹ Arnold's words can be taken several ways, as, for example, suggesting that a line of scripture communicates ideas with unparalleled clarity because of its universal familiarity, or, alternatively, that scripture's presumed truth stupefies readers into accepting any argument onto which it is tacked. Arnold uses biblical quotation as a shortcut to assumed agreement. Yet his observation inadvertently points out that the way scripture "clinches" an argument, winning over readers who might otherwise disagree, is more complicated than it first appears. The biblical quotation generates a similar affective response in diverse readers, even when their particular contexts invest the same words with widely different, even mutually hostile, meanings. I want to suggest that it would be profitable to view the scriptures one finds in Victorian texts of all sorts in this light: as contentious bits of text that produce an inevitable diversity of meanings as they circulate through an uneven, tumultuous, and evolving social terrain. Such quotations can elicit the violent clash of meanings seen in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848) when a Chartist agitator tears off part of a paper bearing religious lines meant to console the laborers—"God will yet arise and help the poor!"—and ensures that the message will "go home" (to borrow Arnold's phrase) by using it as bullet wadding in the assassination of the factory-owner's son.²

In this essay I examine the dissonant biblical quotation in Gaskell's novel, and in the working-class Chartist movement to reform Parliament that surrounds it, as a case study of the multivalent force religious and specifically biblical language could exert in Victorian society. I argue Gaskell makes Bible quotations dissonant through her use of character and narration in order to challenge the boundaries of her

readers' political sympathies. The particular strategies I examine should not be understood to be representative of the politics of Victorian biblical quotation in general, but neither is this an exceptional case. In literature alone—not to mention the political, scientific, artistic, philosophical, and critical texts where scripture regularly crops up throughout the period—one finds a startling diversity of scriptural politics: the tailor Teufelsdröckh's scripture-laden social critique in Thomas Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* (1833), young Jane's subversive taste for the vengeance-oriented narratives of Daniel and Revelation over the demure Psalms in *Jane Eyre* (1847), Miss Clack's hilarious proof-texting in Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone* (1868), Jude's bitterly ironic quoting of the Bible against religion in *Jude the Obscure* (1895).

Much recent scholarship has gone a long way to break up monolithic views of Victorian religion by demonstrating the diversity of positions and motivations it contained in nineteenth-century English society and culture.³ Even regarding Victorian Christianity alone, as Frederick S. Roden has argued in a survey of new scholarship on religion and gender, one finds religious language serving a remarkable range of political and discursive functions, many of them libratory or counternormative.⁴ Victorians' varied and contestatory uses of the Bible have started to gain some critical attention, with key recent work examining the way writers interacted and appropriated biblical authority from marginal social and gender positions, although this rich area is still relatively unexplored.⁵ Given the diversity of religious positions existing in Victorian England, it stands to reason that the shared text of the Christian Bible carried many different meanings for different readers. What has not been examined, however, is the way that biblical text could signify multiply for the same reader. I argue that some writers, Gaskell among them, quoted the Bible in order to tap into readers' awareness of, and uneasiness about, ongoing social conflicts where scriptural authority was being used as a cultural and even political weapon.

Such findings challenge the still too often unexamined assumptions that the importance of religion to Victorian culture gradually and steadily wanes after mid century, and that Victorian religious discourse was in itself hegemonic and residual—that writers quote the Bible out of mere force of habit, echoing phraseology drilled into their heads in childhood, unreflectively perpetuating the discursive power of the middle class.⁶ While this opiate-of-the-masses view lines up nicely with Élie Halévy's thesis (that turn of the nineteenth-century Methodism defused the revolutionary energy of the working class) and with Louis Althusser and Antonio Gramsci's insights into religion's function as an

ideological state apparatus, it simply does not do justice to the actual rhetorical versatility of individual writers quoting scripture in unique social, political, and historical contexts.⁷ Gauri Viswanathan, one of a growing number of scholars who call for a rethinking of the secularization process, argues that “characterizations of secularization in terms of religious decline are misleading” because they rely on deceptively monolithic concepts of religion.⁸ Viswanathan recommends that the historical development of literary forms might give us a better understanding of the ways that “oppositonality [is] internal to religion.”⁹ This is precisely what *Mary Barton* shows us so clearly: religious utterance was neither the sole property nor directly in line with the political interests of any class—even in a single instance of enunciation—and its conflicting resonances could heal, kill, or destroy.

I. FORMAL FRACTURES AND SYMPATHETIC DISSONANCE

The way Gaskell uses biblical texts becomes visible only when one realizes that the reformation of political sympathies she sets out to accomplish in *Mary Barton* is based on, not undermined by, the novel’s formal fractures. Writing her preface in 1848, the year of revolutions, Gaskell urges her readers that true sympathy with “the state of feeling” among the working class should prompt political reform, as well as personal benevolence: it should urge “all parties” to accomplish “whatever public effort can do in the way of legislation, or private effort in the way of merciful deeds” to alleviate the suffering of the English working class (*MB*, 3–4). Yet the solidarity expressed here seems to get lost amid the discontinuities of the narrative that follows.

These formal fractures include a dual plot in which the story of John Barton’s political struggle is gradually crowded out by his daughter Mary’s love story; a narrator, ostensibly sympathetic to radicalism, who describes the working class condescendingly as “childlike” (*MB*, 24) and “untutored” (*MB*, 95); competing generic modes (tragedy, farce, melodrama, romance) that undermine its claims to authentic representation; and contradictory explanations of the central politically-motivated act of violence.¹⁰ For Raymond Williams, as for many other critics working from a political-economic perspective, these fractures are evidence that Gaskell found her sympathies “arrested” and “diverted,” mid-composition, from the laborers’ political cause to the love story less threatening to her bourgeois sensibilities.¹¹ Feminist critics like Patsy Stoneman, Jill Matus, and Susan Johnston have demonstrated that the domestic and sexual elements of the narrative are extensions

and complications of Gaskell's political critique, not displacements of it.¹² Their readings mend the fractures of *Mary Barton* so that it can be read as more uniformly critical of masculinist middle-class economic exploitation, more uniformly sympathetic to the interests of the working class. Yet their readings, too, are made problematic by a wealth of recent scholarship that shows how often the concept of sympathy itself—especially sympathy based on classification and identification—serves as a cover for nefarious economic, nationalistic, and ideological functions.¹³

In this vein, critics have tended to view the novel's religious elements (such as a later scene in which reading the Bible brings the wealthy factory owner to tears of sympathy for his son's assassin) as a hegemonic layer of the text running at odds with its purported radicalism.¹⁴ Angus Easson takes this view when, despite acknowledging the dissonant class-based meanings Christian language carried in the 1840s, he reads the novel's use of the Bible as uniformly in line with middle-class politics.¹⁵ Similarly, Catherine Gallagher sees the religious as the most pernicious of the novel's several failed attempts to find a narrative mode proper to expressing the suffering of the working class. Once Carson the factory owner turns to the Bible, Gallagher claims, we are

reassured that ultimately it does not matter how we interpret Barton's [Chartist] story. . . . [A]ll versions of John Barton's life thus become irrelevant to the novel's concluding and redeeming action: Carson's forgiveness, which is a foretaste of the Christian spirit that the narrator assures us will allow Carson to effect industrial social change.¹⁶

Gallagher faults Gaskell for a too-easy sympathy—a sincere feeling but a sham political remedy, a depoliticized set of emotions without actions. Like other cultural materialist critics, she assumes that if a novel works politically it must prompt readers to side with or to understand the political agenda of the working class.

These formal inconsistencies, however—the dual plot, the inconsistencies of voice, the alternation of narrative modes—are actually the mechanisms, not the symptoms, of Gaskell's political project, which too often has been read the wrong way around.¹⁷ Gaskell's primary goal is not to prompt the middle class to identify with the Chartists, or even (as Gallagher supposes) to “satisfactorily reveal the realities of working-class life.”¹⁸ Rather, Gaskell uses inconsistencies of fictional form to represent the inconsistencies of political representation in nineteenth-century England and to present them as an ethical problem

without any easy solution. And far from being a stop-gap employed when all more trusty narrative modes have failed, what Gallagher calls the “religious homily” (*MB*, 70) surrounds and splices together the novel’s formal fragments, enabling the juxtaposition of irreconcilably different points of view that Gaskell needs to model a sympathy that leads to social and political change—a sympathy based not on similarity, but on difference.¹⁹

This notion of sympathy comes from Adam Smith, an author whose works Gaskell had read and critically digested.²⁰ In his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), Smith theorizes sympathy based on the universality of human nature.²¹ Because all people share the same nature, Smith says, they can share similar feelings—this is crucial—even when it is impossible for them to share the same experiences. One who has “no fellow-feeling for the misfortunes [of another]” begins by “endeavour[ing], as much as a he can, to put himself in the situation of the other” who is suffering.²² The sympathizer must imagine himself in a third position, then—neither his own nor that of the sufferer, but rather himself in the sufferer’s situation. Even in this third position, says Smith, “the emotions of the spectator will still be very apt to fall short of the violence of what is felt by the sufferer”; but the sufferer, aware of this dissonance yet unconsciously seeking commiseration, reflexively moves himself into the third position as well by “flatten[ing] . . . the sharpness” of his emotion “in order to reduce it to harmony and concord with the emotions of those who are about him.”²³ Smithian sympathy, then, is an exchange of feelings made possible by the universality of human nature and the transcendent power of the imagination, and through which sympathizer and sufferer meet themselves—in the guise of the other—at a third position in the middle.

For Gaskell as for Smith, real sympathy comes by recognizing that complete sympathy is impossible, and that both parties must meet on some middle ground. Yet by the time Gaskell was writing, Smith’s nature-based model of sympathy had been displaced by a concept of political sympathy based on shared circumstances.²⁴ Appeals to emotion too easily could be used for political manipulation, argued political thinkers as different as Thomas Paine and Edmund Burke; the concept of a universal human nature often covered over real differences in material interests between members of different nations or classes. By the early nineteenth century, English political theorists had lost faith in sympathy as a moral force, unless it were to act as an unconscious (and therefore uncalculating) influence.²⁵ The first Reform Act of 1832, which extended the franchise to more accurately

reflect England's population distribution, could be seen as a result of this shift, a revision of parliamentary structure according to the logic of political sympathy. But in the social upheaval of the 1840s political sympathy was failing, too. By returning to the older model, Gaskell seems to suggest that the existing political process—within which the Chartists were so desperately fighting for a place—is not adequate, by itself, to meet the needs of a torn society because it is based on a fundamental principle of self-interest. It must be supplemented by an active sympathy based not on commonality but on difference, one that causes people to act outside of their own interests.

Gaskell sees the need for the intentional, imaginative acts of sympathy that Smith's model allows. Yet she also accepts the insight of political sympathy theorists that different environments may produce radically different perceptions, and therefore prevent imaginative identification. Most situations cannot be imagined from most other situations; any act of sympathy must take place between two historically specific subject-positions, without the aid of any universal situation of feeling to ensure that the sympathetic exchange goes right. Yet Gaskell strengthens Smith's model by prompting her readers to imagine the Smithian third position precisely as an impossibility, a space that only a godlike being could inhabit—the kind of position necessary to know all the thoughts and feelings of those one passes in a crowd at the same time. That position itself, from which the feelings of a sufferer with whom one shares no political sympathy would make sense, remains inaccessible to the sympathizer. Yet the hypothetical possibility of such a position makes one feel the limits one's own position within the field of political sympathies. Gaskell encourages her readers, that is, to see and feel the limits of their political sympathies as a basis at once for their politics and their sympathies.

Gaskell's notion of sympathy is not free of the ethical complications analyzed by critics like Audrey Jaffe and Julia M. Wright: it might be seen as offering a privatized, apolitical solution to a systemic political problem, or as verging toward the sacrifice of individual rights for the sake of national solidarity. But to lump it in with standard critical accounts of sympathy in this way overlooks how Gaskell attempts to resist the coercive tendencies of sympathy, of which she is well aware. The formal fractures of *Mary Barton* are part of an attempt to maintain the reader's awareness of differences that normally would be filtered out, reduced to an artificial homogeneity, or automatically disavowed by the sympathetic subject. Gaskell uses the purported Word of God within her own narrative discourse, I argue, in an attempt both to

construct a third position (God's) that enables sympathy and, simultaneously, to keep it inaccessible—to keep it from enabling a sympathy that merely assimilates, as Jaffe argues, the other into the self.²⁶ The biblical quotations' dissonance likewise prevents any one class from claiming sole possession of the Bible's authority.

II. DISSONANT SCRIPTURES IN THE NOVEL

The novel's biblical language gives all that formal irreconcilability its political force by focusing attention on realities—suffering, injustice, and rational arguments for radicalism—that middle-class readers might prefer not to acknowledge. Its most systematic use of scripture centers on two parables that address class differences of experience and perception. These first appear at the very beginning of the novel, where John Barton rails to fellow-laborer George Wilson about the state of the rich and poor in Manchester:

“What good have they [the wealthy] ever done me that I should like them? If I am sick do they come and nurse me? If my child lies dying . . . 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? . . . No, I tell you it's the poor, and the poor only, as does such things for the poor. . . . We're their slaves as long as we can work; we pile up their fortunes with the sweat of our brows, and yet we are to live as separate as if we were in two worlds; ay, as separate as Dives and Lazarus, with a great gulf betwixt us: but I know who was best off then,” and he wound up his speech with a low chuckle that had no mirth in it. (*MB*, 10–11)

The power of this passage, for its Victorian readers, would have come from its adaptation of the two biblical parables commonly known as “The Sheep and the Goats” (Matt. 25:32–46) and “Dives and Lazarus” (Luke 16:19–31). The first relates a scene at the Last Judgment, when “the Son of Man . . . will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.”²⁷ After welcoming the righteous “sheep” (25:33) into his kingdom on the basis of their care for “the least of these my brethren” (25:40), he condemns the wicked “goats” (25:33) to “everlasting punishment” (25:46) by the same standard:

Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: . . . naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. (Matt. 25:41–45)

Gaskell has Barton draw on this parable for several reasons. It addresses sympathy and a kind of class difference (between the destitute and those with the resources to help them). It also holds the rich accountable for their failure to act sympathetically towards the poor. Most importantly, though, it centers on the problem of how the same objective phenomena, “the least of these” (Matt. 25:40, 25:45), can signify in fatally different ways—as the hungry, starving, and sick, or as the vicarious representatives of swift-falling judgment. In its narrative context within Barton the radical’s speech, the biblical passage is dissonant: Barton upholds what a middle-class Christian reader would recognize as the spirit of the original text, but in applying the scripture to contemporary conditions in Manchester he invests his antagonism towards the middle class with the moral authority of the Bible.

The second parable Barton uses here, “Dives and Lazarus,” likewise focuses on sympathy, class difference, and competing perspectives on reality. The original text tells of a rich man who feasted every day while a beggar, Lazarus, starved at his gate, “full of sores, and desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table” (Luke 16:20–21). After both men die, the rich man finds himself in hell, where he can see “Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom” (16:23). The rich man requests that Lazarus be sent to bring him even a drop of water, but he is told,

Son, . . . thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence. (Luke 16:25–26)

Death creates a rupture in the significance of each man’s earthly state: the poverty that in life seemed a curse becomes a sign of a state of blessing, while earthly wealth is unveiled as a harbinger of alienation and torment. The point is not merely a role reversal, but rather a change in perception. Barton’s representation of the rich and poor of Manches-

ter as “separate as Dives and Lazarus, with a great gulf betwixt us,” (*MB*, 11) emphasizes the unjust separation between rich and poor and the irreconcilable perspectives that separation produces. But it also points out their fundamental similarity and the arbitrariness of circumstances that have placed the rich above the poor. One of the more dissonant registers of this passage, as Barton uses it, is its deconstruction of one of the middle class’s most common rationalizations of urban poverty. Contrary to the common wisdom of Victorian piety, the passage suggests, the rich are not rich because of some providential reward for superior virtue. As Gaskell’s narrator claims elsewhere, “There may be some difference as to chronology” between those who prosper and those who suffer, but “none as to fact” (*MB*, 166).

The themes introduced by “The Sheep and the Goats” and “Dives and Lazarus” resurface throughout *Mary Barton*: the neglect of the poor by the rich; the equal shares of good and evil ultimately experienced by each person, regardless of their social rank; and the “great gulf” not only between prosperity and poverty, but between middle-class and working-class perceptions. Gaskell’s interweaving of these biblical passages with the disjointed forms of genre and narration that make up her narrative spin off diverse and often conflicting class-based meanings. All these meanings are nevertheless at some level consistent with the meaning of the original texts, and at least within the range of meanings these texts could have for the current political crisis of 1848.

Other biblical quotations scattered throughout the novel carry a similar dissonance, by which the Bible (an authority nominally recognized by the middle class) comes to resonate with working-class as well as middle-class perspectives. Some quotations sugar-coat radical political ideas, as when Gaskell makes Barton’s proto-Marxist arguments more credible to middle-class readers by causing them to hinge on the golden rule, “All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them” (Matt. 7:12):

How comes it they’re rich, and we’re poor? I’d like to know that. *Han they done as they’d be done by for us?* . . . You’ll say (at least many a one does), they’n gotten capital an’ we’n gotten none. I say, our labour’s our capital, and we ought to draw interest on that. . . . why the very land as fetched but sixty pound twenty year ago is now worth six hundred, and that, too, is owing to our labour: . . . Can you say there’s nought wrong with this? (*MB*, 64; emphasis added)

Other quotations seem to favor the claims of the factory owners, while still others give authority to the perceptions of common laborers,

seamstresses, and working-class housewives. Gaskell's narrator and several of her characters see the world through their understanding of the Bible, as if it were a pair of spectacles that can bring morally blurred phenomena into crisp focus. In the broadest sense, the biblical quotations help the reader to weigh competing points of view fairly. But because of the individual and collective dissonance of the scriptures cited, the Bible seems to simultaneously support the rightness of every side.

For many readers, however, this would amount to a transfer of authority in favor of working-class logic, as well as a disruption of the Bible's unquestioned and uniform support of middle-class norms. The combination of narrative and embedded biblical quotations evokes competing middle-class and working-class ways of understanding scripture. The reader is not required to accept one or the other as universally true. Instead, the reader is led to imagine the kind of person and situation for whom and in which each reading would become true. The suspension of disbelief required for reading any novel does the rest: the reader comes to sympathize with both understandings despite their irreconcilability, and his or her ear grows accustomed to hear dissonance whenever the Bible is employed in class-based political arguments.

This tiny, sentence-level insight will lead us to see how the novel's larger structures—the unresolved dual plot, the narratorial instability, and the rest—work in a similar way. Instead of synthesizing competing forms or ideologies, Gaskell insists that one keep the differences in mind. This, I want to suggest, is the key to the reformist project of the novel. Even though uttering doubly signifying biblical quotations may not sound like a promising form of activism, a look at the interpenetration of the political and religious in Gaskell's historical context reveals why, in 1848, quoting scripture was a highly political act.

III. THE POLITICS OF RELIGIOUS DISSONANCE

The Chartist movement was always a struggle to gain a political voice. In the mid-nineteenth century most laborers were not allowed to participate in parliamentary elections, and despite the concise and specific demands of the People's Charters submitted to Parliament in 1839, 1842, and 1848, society characterized the working class as incoherent and mute. Even the ostensibly sympathetic Thomas Carlyle spoke of the Chartists' "wild inarticulate souls" as if their vocalized political demands could not be taken seriously.²⁸ The "upper classes of society," Carlyle wrote in *Chartism* (1840), had to gain

a genuine understanding . . . [of what] the under classes intrinsically mean; a clear interpretation of the thought which at heart torments [them] . . . struggling there, with inarticulate uproar, like dumb creatures in pain, unable to speak what is in them! Something they do mean; some true thing withal, in the centre of their confused hearts,— . . . to the Heaven it is clear what thing; to us not clear.²⁹

Mary Barton suggests that the problem lies in the ear of society, however, not in the articulation of the working class. After hearing the “bitter complaints made by [laborers], of the neglect which they experienced from the prosperous,” Gaskell writes in her preface, she has set out to “give some utterance to the agony which . . . convulses this dumb people” (*MB*, 3). The characterization of the people as “dumb” can be read as condescension on Gaskell’s part, but it can also be read as a kind of free indirect discourse, a parroting of the way the neglectful and prosperous talk about the working class. Such dissonance works throughout the novel to make audible to those upper classes what Carlyle claims is theoretically already clear to Heaven. This is where doubly-signifying biblical quotations become useful. By investing them with echoes of the political grievances of the working class, *Mary Barton* uses a shared religious language to work around the problem of political deafness.

Victorian religious discourse had plenty fractures of its own, of course, so its value as a shared language had to be carefully negotiated. Both the High Church and Evangelical wings of the Church of England—the only religious establishment, strictly speaking, and therefore the church with the most Parliamentary clout—tended to see Chartism as symptomatic of a fundamental lack of respect for authority, a tendency antithetical (in most of its clergy’s opinion) to godliness and true religion.³⁰ Nonconformist churches held political positions as varied as their doctrines.³¹ The non-participatory Quakers cared nothing for reforming the political system, while Dissenting Methodists drew many of their members from the working class and intermittently supported radical activism.³² Yet Chartists themselves tended to consider radical politics as the only mark of authentic religion.³³ “Christianity [is] the soul of which Chartism is the body,” wrote William Hill, the powerful first editor of the Chartist newspaper *The Northern Star*, “and I cannot consent to separate them.”³⁴ Radicals in several towns set up “Chartist chapels” or preached “Chartist Christianity.”³⁵ The problem was that Chartists’ political stance (which could be read as ungodly rebellion), their nonconformity to middle-class codes of domesticity (immorality or lack of character), and their poverty (the will of Providence) made

it easy for the religious establishment to dismiss them as irreligious out of hand.

As a Unitarian and the wife of a Unitarian minister, Gaskell came from a church that was philosophically inclined to support reform. Several of *Mary Barton's* passages borrow directly from Manchester poverty reports collected by her own congregation.³⁶ Yet Gaskell's sympathy with working-class politics was often at odds with the religious climate surrounding her. A letter to her friend Eliza Fox bears witness to that dissonance through its self-muting punctuation, the interruption of the dash doubled by parenthesis: "One of my mes is, I do believe, a true Christian—(only people call her socialist and communist)."³⁷ At the same time, the way that she plays with points of view ("I" / "mes" / "her") shows her sensitivity to the extremely different meanings that various religious groups might read in the same social phenomena.

And diverse religious groups certainly did find different meanings when they searched the Bible for answers to social problems. On the one hand, the state-backed Church quoted the Bible at the Chartist ad nauseum in sermons, pamphlets, and the public press. Their favorite text for denouncing Chartism was Romans 13:1—"Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers"—but they also invoked passages from the Proverbs, the Prophets, the Gospels, the Epistles, and the book of Revelation to remind the working class of their duty to submit.³⁸ "We must learn in whatever station of life in which our lot is cast," preached the Bishop of Norwich to an audience of laborers on Philipians 4:11, "to be content."³⁹ Humphrey Price, a rare Anglican with radical sympathies, found the situation intolerable: in his view, the Church "never teaches [the laborer] to read the Bible, but to prove to him from Divine testimony that he is a slave, and should learn to submit with all humility and peace."⁴⁰ The working class, on the other hand, used scriptures to authorize and rally support for radical activism. Banners at Chartist rallies coupled the words of Jesus to his disciples, "he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one," with the Old Testament wisdom that it is "Better to die by the sword than to perish with hunger."⁴¹ Working-class men and women staged demonstrations by flooding the pews of local Anglican churches and demanding sermons on texts like James 5:1, "Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries shall come to you."⁴²

Despite their different interpretations and habits of selecting texts from the Bible, practically all the religious groups on both sides of the Chartist conflict shared a common reliance on the Bible as an authority for dictating moral, social, and even political matters. Gas-

kell was sensitive to this fact, and to the possibility that the shared language of biblical authority might be used to the advantage of the working class. The problem was that each side habitually used the Bible in ways that locked the working class into the disempowered position of a binary power struggle. The Church's readings, backed by the weight of education—at this time Oxford and Cambridge were still purely Anglican universities—tended to emphasize the working class's lack of religion or its disrespect for authority, giving the upper classes biblical excuses to remain deaf. On the other hand, when self-proclaimed "Chartist Christians" insisted that they were more genuinely faithful than the hypocritical, tyrannical legislators of class inhabiting the Church, or when radical activists invoked biblical authority to call for armed resistance, they lost as much ground as they gained.⁴³ Both approaches merely reinforced the stereotypes that propped up middle-class hegemony—that all members of the working class who push for political reform are infidels or insurrectionists—or cut ties to the religious communities and institutions where the authority of their readings of the Bible could be translated into actual political force.

In *Mary Barton*, Gaskell works around this problem by selecting biblical texts that resonate with both working-class and middle-class meanings, and by stripping her religious language of any sectarian rhetoric or doctrine so that each quotation can maintain both levels of significance in tension. Despite their radical implications, her interpretations of biblical texts like "Dives and Lazarus" would seem acceptable to Church Evangelicals, working-class Methodists, and Chartist Christians alike. Thus her quotations mediate class perspectives, even where they cannot reconcile the classes; they do not so much give authoritative answers as remind partisans on both sides of a domain in which irreconcilable differences can be recognized and respected. This is why the novel's radicalism is subtle, rather than overt; whatever power the novel has, Gaskell maintains it precisely by remaining neutral. Refusing to take up either side of the political question, she criticizes the way the dominant classes refuse to act sympathetically in the interest of those with whom they do not share political sympathy. Her primary goal is not to prompt the middle class to identify with the Chartists, but to explore what ethical political action from any position looks like when identification is impossible.

IV. FORMAL DISSONANCE

Evidence for this reading of dissonance as the governing principle of *Mary Barton* is found, first of all, in the irony that tinges Gaskell's apparently condescending passages. As with her characterization of the "dumb people" in the preface (*MB*, 3), Gaskell drops subtle hints that her representations of the working class as "childlike" (*MB*, 24) and "untutored" (*MB*, 95), and even her indictment of the "rabid politics" (*MB*, 83) of Chartism, might be read as imitations of the way her middle-class readers habitually talked about the working class. Take for example her notorious comparison of the working class to Frankenstein's monster:

The actions of the uneducated seem to me typified in those of Frankenstein, that monster of many human qualities, *ungifted with a soul*, a knowledge of the difference between good and evil.

The people rise up to life; they irritate us, they terrify us, and we become their enemies. . . . Why have we made them what they are; a powerful monster, yet without the inner means for peace and happiness?

John Barton became a Chartist, a Communist, all that is commonly called wild and visionary. Ay! but being visionary is something. *It shows a soul*, a being not altogether sensual; a creature who looks forward for others, if not for himself. (165, emphasis added)

This passage may reveal an unconscious contradiction in the author's thinking, as some have claimed, or it may show Gaskell splicing together middle-class and working-class ways of interpreting social reality in one narrating voice.⁴⁴ The rhetoric of the whole passage depends on a subtle perspectival dissonance between "me," "us," and "them." The passage begins with a particularized perspective on the working class—the way they "seem to me"—that characterizes the "uneducated" as monstrous and soulless. This is a middle-class view of the working class. From this perspective, the workers are utterly dependent on their middle-class masters; "we" give them life, and if they do not conform to "our" wishes they irritate and terrify us. Yet when the narrator asks "Why have we made them what they are[?]" there is a rupture in perspective, and two new points of view emerge. From one, the middle class is to blame for making the working class monstrous; from the other, the middle class's perceptions themselves are skewed. The middle class does not in fact give the working class life, soul, and the "inner means for peace and happiness." These are gifts that can only be given by God, even a middle-class Christian would maintain, gifts that are

given prior to, or without regard to, social stratification. Perspective splinters further in the sentences that follow as the narrator presents competing ways of seeing John Barton (“a Chartist, a Communist”), challenges what these working-class types are “commonly called,” and then dismantles those stereotyped characterizations. What the middle class commonly views as “wild” in the laborer, making him like the soulless Frankenstein monster, might also be seen as evidence of inner resources and vitality—the very kind of humanness that demands an ethical and sympathetic response. Although the working class appears monstrous from “our” perspective, then, not knowing good from evil, the very terms “we” use to describe them are, from their perspective, evidence of their deep humanity.

The same strategy seems to be at work in the novel’s foregrounding of gaps between languages, dialects, and specialized vocabularies. There is the fastidious representation of Lancashire dialect in the speech of working-class characters, the reader-alienating effects of which Gaskell chose to preserve by carefully reinserting them in the second edition of the novel—and adding her husband’s lectures on the dialect as an appendix—after her publisher had edited them out of the first.⁴⁵ There is the frequent tracking of how terms signify differently to different classes of people: for example, what Mrs. Carson calls a “head-ache” is called by the servants a “Wind in the head,” and would more rightly be called a “luxury . . . the natural consequence of . . . mental and bodily idleness” (*MB*, 196). Along with Mary Barton’s debates with Sally Leadbitter and Harry Carson over the languages of love and seduction (*MB*, 134–35) and Job Legh’s debate with Will Wilson over scientific and mythological epistemologies (*MB*, 149), these would be unremarkable passages, except that they draw attention to the faction and class-based interpretive frameworks that keep people separated and at odds with each other.

Along the same lines, Gaskell points out the radical disjunctions between different people’s perspectives in crowd scenes where the narrator speculates on the inability of John Barton, Mary Barton, and Mr. Carson to perceive the realities experienced by the people brushing past them. “He could not, you cannot, read the lot of those who daily pass you by in the street,” the narrator reflects as Barton pushes his way through a crowd:

How do you know the wild romances of their lives; the trials, the temptations they are even now enduring, resisting, sinking under? You may be elbowed one instant by the girl desperate in her abandonment, laughing in mad merriment with her outward gesture, while her soul is

longing for the rest of the dead . . . as the only mercy of God remaining to her here. You may pass the criminal, meditating crimes at which you will tomorrow shudder with horror as you read them. You may push against one, humble and unnoticed, the last upon earth, who in heaven will for ever be in the immediate light of God's countenance. Errands of mercy—errands of sin—did you ever think where all the thousands of people you daily meet are bound? (*MB*, 61–62)

The importance of crowded streets in *Mary Barton* marks this novel's difference from the conventional Victorian social novel, in which the political subject is usually constituted amid the sympathetic relationships of the home.⁴⁶ But here the crowd is the site of sympathetic relationships, which are predicated on the impossibility to fully sympathize. As in the Frankenstein passage quoted above, one sees here how much religious language helps Gaskell to bring out the sharp differences between class-based perspectives. It provides a ready-made language (virtue, sin, soul, heaven) for conceptualizing how invisible (working-class) realities might exist in the midst of mundane (middle-class) perceptions. Such passages open up the ears of middle-class readers, making them more sensitive to the working-class meanings of language, helping them to hear members of the working class on their own terms.

The sympathetic relationships established in this crowd scene are underwritten by a Smithian third position that Gaskell describes explicitly as the perspective of God. It is an imaginary, nondiegetic point of view that summons up a ghostly double vision. The reader is encouraged to imagine the “errands of mercy—errands of sin” encountered in the crowd, “the trials, the temptations [others] are even now enduring”; the “soul . . . longing for the rest of the dead . . . as the only mercy of God remaining”; another, “humble and unnoticed, the last upon earth, who in heaven will for ever be in the immediate light of God's countenance.” These lines are spoken by the narrator, but the shift into a religious tone is accompanied here by a shift in the narrating perspective into something very much like God's point of view: one that can see past and future, the physical and the spiritual, heaven and earth at once. The passage implies that one would have to inhabit a divine perspective in order to perceive the situations of those one passes in the street accurately. More to the point, it also suggests that anyone could sympathize appropriately if only he or she keeps that divine perspective in mind. Even as an imaginary or theoretical proposition, the idea of God's point of view calls the conventional perceptions of individuals into question. It opens up the blind eye and the deaf ear to sympathy.

We are now talking about omniscience, of course, and so it is worth noting yet another level of formal discontinuity in *Mary Barton*. The narration oscillates strangely between several third-person and first-person narrating positions, all with different degrees of omniscience. Some passages are clearly related by a character narrator, a middle-aged woman living in Manchester who mourns a dead child.⁴⁷ Most of the narrative is related in conventional third-person narration. But in several passages that systematically compare the perspectives of the rich and poor, narration shifts into the specifically God-like mode of omniscience noted above. It represents what James Phelan would call a “noncharacter” (nondiegetic yet still characterized) point of view.⁴⁸ It is God-like not only because it sees interiorities and exteriorities of multiple people at the same time, but because it describes phenomena with a language of souls, heaven, sin, mercy, and judgment.⁴⁹ Most interestingly, it is marked by a high frequency of biblical references. In chapter fifteen, where the narrator presents the contradictory perspectives of the factory owners and the striking laborers, she evaluates the strikers’ view on the basis of a whole string of scriptural judgments:

It was bad enough to be poor, while by the labour of their thin hands, *the sweat of their brows*, the masters were made rich; but they would not be *utterly ground down to dust*.⁵⁰ No! They would *fold their hands and sit idle*. . . .⁵¹

[The striking laborers] had no right to tyrannise over others, and tie them down to their own Procrustean bed. *Abhorring what they considered oppression in the masters, why did they oppress others?*⁵² Because, when men get excited, *they do not know what they do*.⁵³ *Judge, then, with something of the mercy of the Holy One*, whom we love.⁵⁴ (*MB*, 167–68; emphasis added)

The scriptures used here produce dissonance: they justify, indict, and exonerate the laborers by turns. Yet in such instances that dissonance allows for and even projects an absolute moral standard which is, however, not reducible to the judgments of any social class. Gaskell several times uses this technique to invest the narrator’s judgments about the class conflict in Manchester with absolute moral authority. After the workers’ first petition to Parliament is rejected, for example, the narrator describes the ensuing “distress which was riding like *the Conqueror on his Pale Horse* among the people; which was crushing their lives out of them, and stamping woe-marks over the land” (*MB*, 95; emphasis added).⁵⁵ “The people had thought the poverty of the preceding years hard to bear,” the narrator explains in the following chapter, “and had *found its yoke heavy*; but this year added

sorely to its weight.⁵⁶ *Former times chastised them with whips, but this chastised them with scorpions*" (*MB*, 111; emphasis added).⁵⁷ In such passages, scripture subtly implies that the narrator blames the upper classes for the suffering of the poor, just as it invests her omniscient perspective with the authority to make accurate ethical judgments about the class conflict.

Yet that authoritative point of view never quite belongs to the narrator, much less to the reader, and certainly not to the characters or institutions within the story. Where scriptural dissonance is sacrificed for the sake of authoritative judgment, the narrative discourse itself becomes dissonant. God-like omniscience blossoms forth at certain points, but at others the narration suffers lapses of particularity, limitation, and ignorance. "It is so impossible to describe, or even faintly to picture, the state of distress which prevailed in the town at that time," says the narrator, "that I will not attempt it" (*MB*, 83). "Think of Mary and what she was enduring," the narrator remarks elsewhere; "Picture for yourself (for I cannot tell you) the armies of thoughts that met and clashed in her brain" (*MB*, 261). And most strangely of all, when Mary stands up to give her testimony in court, the narrator pleads ignorance of the event: "I was not there myself; but one who was, told me" (*MB*, 312). This denial comes from the same narrator who has just given all the prior courtroom proceedings verbatim, and who, on the following page, describes Mary's internal experience of the trial in highly subjective language. The numerous formal fractures contained in the trial scene communicate a deep ambivalence about the kind of "justice" that the court can produce—an ambivalence reinforced by the way that to the end of the novel Gaskell lets Mary get away with aiding and abetting a murderer.

In all these ways, Gaskell undermines her own literary representations lest they obscure the needs of actual people outside the novel. The Bible carries the weight of authority that no subjective point of view—neither of the middle class, nor of the laborers, nor of a law court, nor even of a narrator who simulates omniscience—can support. However, the Bible carries moral authority in the novel chiefly by virtue of the dissonant meanings it has picked up amid social conflict. At the same time, the novel's competing plot lines and narrating perspectives establish multiple interpretive frames and so enable the twists and turns on conventional, politically deaf readings of scripture that retrain the reader's ear.

Mary Barton depends on the Bible, then, but at the same time it serves as a supplement or even a replacement to Bible reading. The

way the novel builds upon pre-existing religious ideologies, interpretive practices, and authority structures points to the continuing diversity and vitality of the mid-Victorian religious world. But the novel also encourages readers to read the Bible differently. It augments their understanding of biblical texts, unsettling the coherence of traditional readings and investing scripture with new, class and group-based resonances. *Mary Barton* complicates the accepted history of religion in Victorian culture by revealing not a decline of the religious and the emergence of purely secular discourses, but rather a discursive field where the lines between the religious and the political are not as clearly drawn as secular criticism (looking backwards) has subsequently drawn them. At the same time, it signals the emergence of new forms of religious knowledge and power, a shift or dispersion from the centralized and institutional toward the particular and individual. In this case, the shift is as much about resacralizing secular politics as it is about undermining middle-class religious authority. The status of the Bible changes in the Victorian period, but in more complicated and multivalent ways than those for which the crisis of faith master-narrative allows. Novels that quote the Bible, as *Mary Barton* does, partly reflect and partly effected that change.

V. HE WHO HAS EARS . . .

In the end, *Mary Barton* is a modern parable about not knowing and yet listening. Gaskell signals this much by putting a subversive twist on two flippant lines from Carlyle in her initial epigraph:

“How knowest thou,” may the distressed Novel-wright exclaim, “that I, here where I sit, am the Foolishest of existing mortals; that this my Long-ear of a fictitious Biography shall not find one and the other, into whose still longer ears it may be the means, under Providence, of instilling somewhat?” We answer, “None knows, none can certainly know: therefore, write on, worthy Brother, even as thou canst, even as it is given thee.”⁵⁸

In the original context, Carlyle humorously argues that one cannot be certain that the “vacuity [of the novel] is absolute,” since the heads of novel-readers are likely to be even more vacuous.⁵⁹ Read according to Gaskell’s straight rather than Carlyle’s ironic meaning, however, the lines present a model, based on the rhetorical function of biblical parables, for how Gaskell expects her novel to change the thoughts and behavior of her readers. At the end of the “Dives and Lazarus” story,

the rich man in hell asks Abraham to send Lazarus back to earth to warn his brothers about the judgment to come. “They have Moses and the prophets,” Abraham replies; “let them hear them” (Luke 16:29). The speakers of parables issue the same challenge to their hearers: anyone can hear a parable’s superficial and entertaining narrative, but only insightful hearers also comprehend its ethically challenging message. For this reason many biblical parables end with the phrase, “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.”⁶⁰ Gaskell draws directly on this tradition in *Mary Barton*: the sympathetic middle-class reader is called to account by his own dissonant doctrines, but those who do not sympathize receive it only as an entertaining, moralistic didactic tale told in the tones of politically deaf religious orthodoxy.

If the most subversive scene in *Mary Barton* is that in which Barton uses Bamford’s poem for bullet-wadding, the most subversive line in the novel is the one quoted above, “Former times had chastised them with whips, but this chastised them with scorpions” (*MB*, 111). Many Victorian readers would have been aware that this was an echo of the biblical King Rehoboam’s stubborn refusal to relieve the economic distress of his people, which immediately led to his kingdom being torn apart: “When all Israel saw that the king hearkened not unto them,” relates the verse following the one Gaskell has quoted,

the people answered the king, saying, What portion have we in David?
neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse: to your tents, O Israel:
now see to thine own house, David. So Israel departed unto their tents.⁶¹

Gaskell’s more attentive readers also may have caught the echo of a more recent speech, this one given by the Chartist agitator Henry Vincent to a cheering crowd of laborers in Newport on 22 April 1839. “When the moment for resistance to Government arrives,” Vincent had shouted, “let your cry be To your Tents O Israel—and then with one voice one heart and one blow—Perish the privileged orders—Death to the aristocracy—up with the people and the Government they have established.”⁶² Vincent was arrested some weeks later for making the speech; his imprisonment at Monmouth sparked the infamous Newport Rising of 4 November 1839. Vincent was a celebrated radical leader, and it was partly to free him from confinement that a mob stormed the Westgate Hotel and came into armed conflict with the soldiers stationed there. The bloodshed of the Newport Rising haunted the imaginations of the middle class throughout the following decade, as time and again the government refused the Chartists’ demands.

By publishing *Mary Barton* in 1848, just as Chartist agitation was once again reaching a boiling point for the third time in a decade, Gaskell offered a parable to the predominantly middle-class, Anglican public, a narrative space in which Christian readers in particular would be faced with the revolutionary implications of their own theology. Gaskell certainly did not support physical-force Chartism, but in her novel, in which a murder brings about the moral transformation of the murdered boy's father and the redemption of the murderer, she casts a vision of divine justice that can, in extremity, work even through human violence and around legal authority. If society does not listen, Gaskell's quietly threatening biblical references imply, the prophecies of the Chartists might come true and the working class might violently tear itself away from the rest of the nation—not through human agency alone, but as part of the avenging judgment of God. He who hath ears to hear, Gaskell seems to say, let him hear.

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NOTES

¹ Matthew Arnold, *Letters of Matthew Arnold, 1848–1888*, ed. George W. E. Russell (London: Macmillan, 1896), 191. Arnold leaves the phrase unfinished in his letter to his mother; the complete passage to which he refers appears in his article about funding legislation for public education, "The Twice-Revised Code," *Fraser's Magazine* 65 (1862): 347–365.

² Elizabeth Gaskell, *Mary Barton*, ed. Shirley Foster (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2006), 109. The incident must be pieced together from clues given in three separate passages: see 109, 227, 236. Hereafter abbreviated *MB* and cited parenthetically by page number.

³ See for example Andrew Hass, David Jasper, and Elisabeth Jay, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of English Literature and Theology* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2007); Mark Knight and Emma Mason, *Nineteenth-Century Religion and Literature: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2006); Timothy Larsen, *Contested Christianity: The Political and Social Contexts of Victorian Theology* (Waco: Baylor Univ. Press, 2004); Michael Ragussis, *Figures of Conversion: "The Jewish Question" and English National Identity* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 1995).

⁴ See Frederick S. Roden, "Review: Gender and Religion in Recent Victorian Studies Publications," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 31 (2003): 393–403.

⁵ See Marion Ann Taylor and Heather E. Weir, ed., *Let Her Speak for Herself: Nineteenth-Century Women Writing on Women in Genesis* (Waco: Baylor Univ. Press, 2006); Larsen, *A People of One Book: The Bible and the Victorians* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2011).

⁶ For recent works providing valuable correctives, see Rebecca Lemon, Mason, Jonathan Roberts, and Christopher Rowland, ed., *Blackwell Companion to the Bible in English Literature* (Oxford: Blackwell Press, 2009); John Maynard, "The Brontës and Religion," *The Cambridge Companion to the Brontës*, ed. Heather Glen (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2002); Michael Wheeler, *The Old Enemies: Catholic*

and Protestant in Nineteenth-Century English Culture (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2006).

⁷ See Élie Halévy, *History of the English People in 1815*, trans. E. I. Watkin and D. A. Barker (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1924); Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes Towards an Investigation," in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1978), 127–186; Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, 3 vol., ed. Joseph A. Buttigieg, trans. Joseph A. Buttigieg and Antonio Callari (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1992–2007).

⁸ Gauri Viswanathan, "The Changing Profession: Secularism in the Framework of Heterodoxy," *PMLA* 123 (2008): 466–476; 467.

⁹ Viswanathan, 470. Viswanathan's article constitutes a useful survey of many other scholars who are helping to revise the concept of secularization. See also Colin Jager, *The Book of God: Secularization and Design in the Romantic Era* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 201–215; David Martin, *On Secularization: Towards a Revised General Theory* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 3–8.

¹⁰ See Amanda Anderson, *Tainted Souls and Painted Faces* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1993), 125–130; Catherine Gallagher, *The Industrial Revolution of English Fiction: Social Discourse and Narrative Form, 1832–1867* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1985), 69–87.

¹¹ Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society 1780–1950*, 2nd ed. (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1983), 89.

¹² See Patsy Stoneman, *Elizabeth Gaskell*, 2nd ed. (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 2006), 69–70; Jill Matus, *Unstable Bodies: Victorian Representations of Sexuality and Maternity* (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 1995), 56; Susan Johnston, *Women and Domestic Experience in Victorian Political Fiction* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001), 8.

¹³ On sympathy displacing or distracting from class and economic violence, see Rachel Ablow, *The Marriage of Minds: Reading Sympathy in the Victorian Marriage Plot* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2007), 29; Audrey Jaffe, *Scenes of Sympathy: Identity and Representation in Victorian Fiction* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 2000), 20–23. On sympathy's sexist interpellation of gendered subjects, see Nancy Roberts, *Schools of Sympathy: Gender and Identification Through the Novel* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Univ. Press, 1997), 10, 25–26. On sympathy implicitly supporting a version of nationalism that de-emphasizes individual rights, see Julia M. Wright, "'Growing Pains': Representing the Romantic in Gaskell's *Wives and Daughters*," in *Nervous Reactions: Victorian Recollections of Romanticism*, ed. Joel Faflak and Wright (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 2004), 163–186.

¹⁴ Williams, *Culture and Society*, 88–89, paves the way for many subsequent readings. See also Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1987), 177–78; Carolyn Lesjak, *Working Fictions: A Genealogy of the Victorian Novel* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2006), 30–35, 59–60; Mary Poovey, *Making a Social Body: British Cultural Formation, 1830–1864* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1995), 147, 150–51. Wheeler offers the most sustained examination of the novel's biblical quotations in *The Art of Allusion in Victorian Fiction* (London: Macmillan, 1979), 44–58, but unfortunately does not take up theoretical issues of class or discursive power.

¹⁵ See Angus Easson, *Elizabeth Gaskell* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), 57–58.

¹⁶ Gallagher, 87.

¹⁷ A notable exception is Deirdre D'Albertis, *Dissembling Fictions: Elizabeth Gaskell and the Victorian Social Text* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), whose provocative study of what she calls formal dissembling in Gaskell's corpus of writing makes an argument similar to the one I make here. Unfortunately, D'Albertis gives only a cursory look at *Mary Barton* and leaves Gaskell's engagement with sympathetic, religious, and class discourses largely unexamined.

¹⁸ Gallagher, 67.

¹⁹ Compare Gallagher, 70.

²⁰ See Gaskell, *The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell*, ed. J. A. V. Chapple and Arthur Pollard (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 1966), 148; Anne Thackeray Ritchie, preface to *Cranford*, by Gaskell (London: Macmillan, 1891), xvii.

²¹ Adam Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1853).

²² Smith, 22.

²³ Smith, 22–23.

²⁴ On the displacement of Smithian sympathy by notions of political sympathy in English debates over the French Revolution, see Ablow, 3–4; Esther Schor, *Bearing the Dead: The British Culture of Mourning from the Enlightenment to Victoria* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1994), 74–114.

²⁵ See Schor, 111, 114.

²⁶ See Jaffe, 23.

²⁷ Matt. 25:31–32, Authorized King James Version. Subsequent passages from the Bible are quoted from this version and cited parenthetically by chapter and verse number. Gaskell's personal Bible from 1847 onward was an Authorized Version (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1823), which is currently in the collection of Gaskell's descendent Mrs. Trevor Dabbs of Manchester. (I am grateful for this information to Joan Leach, a representative of the Gaskell Society, who provided it in an e-mail message to the author, 8 October 2008.) However, most of what I am calling Gaskell's biblical "quotations" are not direct quotations but rather paraphrases in the dialect of her characters or in the speech of her narrator. Nevertheless, where they are not immediately self-evident, as they are in the case of "Dives and Lazarus," quotations can be identified by striking diction and syntactical structures that imitate the biblical text.

²⁸ Thomas Carlyle, *Chartism* (London: James Fraser, 1840), 6.

²⁹ Carlyle, 6–7.

³⁰ The repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts allowed non-conformists to sit in the House of Commons, but in the House of Lords twenty-six permanent seats for "Lords Spiritual" drawn from the leadership of the Church of England maintained Anglican dominance over other religious groups in the government.

³¹ See Eileen Yeo, "Christianity in Chartist Struggle 1838–1842," *Past & Present* 91 (1981): 109–139.

³² See Yeo, 115.

³³ On Chartism's complex identification with Christianity, see Harold U. Faulkner, *Chartism and the Churches: A Study in Democracy* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1916), 19–23; David Jones, *Chartism and the Chartists* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1975), 49–50; Dorothy Thompson, *The Chartists: Popular Politics in the Industrial Revolution* (New York: Pantheon, 1984), 116.

³⁴ Quoted in Jones, 52.

³⁵ See Thompson, 116–17. On the Chartists' tactical exploitation of Church codes and structures to propagate radicalism, see Eileen Groth Lyon, *Politicians in the Pulpit: Christian Radicalism in Britain from the Fall of the Bastille to the Disintegration of Chartism* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), 198–202.

³⁶ On Gaskell drawing on Unitarian poverty reports, see John Chapple, "Unitarian Dissent," in *The Cambridge Companion to Elizabeth Gaskell*, ed. Jill Matus (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2007), 167; Matus, *Unstable Bodies*, 62.

³⁷ Gaskell to Eliza Fox, ? April 1850, *Letters*, 108.

³⁸ For an extensive and meticulously documented catalogue of these Evangelical polemics against Chartism, see Lyon, 213–18.

³⁹ Edward Stanley, *A Sermon Preached in Norwich Cathedral, On Sunday, August 18th, 1839, By the Right Reverend The Lord Bishop of Norwich, Before An Assemblage of a Body of Mechanics Termed Chartists* (London: 1839), 7.

⁴⁰ Humphrey Price, "An Address on the People's Charter, by the Reverend H. Price, to His Fellow Townsmen, the Operatives of Kidderminster" [n.d.], reprinted in *Chartist and Anti-Chartist Pamphlets* (New York: Garland, 1986), 6. See also Joseph Stephens Rayner, "The Political Preacher" (London: A. Cobbett, 1839), reprinted in *Chartism and Christianity*, vol. 10 in Dorothy Thompson, ed. *Chartism: Working-Class Politics in the Industrial Revolution* [facsimile series], 1838–1848, 22 vol. (London: Garland, 1986).

⁴¹ *Northern Star*, 20 October 1838 and 17 November 1838; quoted in Yeo, 113. The biblical quotations are from Luke 22:36 and Lam. 4:9.

⁴² Demonstrations based on this text took place in Blackburn and Sheffield in August 1839 (Lyon, 211). For an excellent discussion of Chartist church demonstrations, see Lyon, 207–216.

⁴³ On Chartists claiming to be more faithful than non-Chartist Christians, see Faulkner, 23–26.

⁴⁴ For contrary interpretations of this passage, see Gallagher, 74–75; Margaret Ganz, *Elizabeth Gaskell: Artist in Conflict* (New York: Twayne, 1969), 64–65; Stoneman, 48–49.

⁴⁵ See Shirley Foster, introduction to *Mary Barton*, by Gaskell (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2006), xxvii.

⁴⁶ Compare Ablow, 3–5.

⁴⁷ Gaskell wrote *Mary Barton* while recovering from the death of her own child, and several passages in the novel implicitly or explicitly depict this as the narrator's situation as well: see especially 157, 238, and 260.

⁴⁸ James Phelan, *Living to Tell about It: A Rhetoric and Ethics of Character Narration* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 2005), 110–12.

⁴⁹ On the relation between inevitable limits of a narrator's knowledge and "omniscient narration," see Jonathan Culler, "Omniscience," *Narrative* 12 (2004): 22–34; Linda Shires, "'And I was Unaware': The Unknowing Omniscience of Hardy's Narrators," in *Thomas Hardy: Texts and Contexts*, ed. Phillip Mallet (London: Palgrave, 2002), 31–48. The case I present here, where an author employs "omniscience" not merely as a loose theological analogy for the creative imagination but as a direct reference to—and critique of—contemporary theological beliefs that themselves impinge on cultural formations and social power structures, would productively complicate both analyses.

⁵⁰ The first italicized passage is a direct quotation of Gen. 3:19. The second echoes phraseology found throughout the Hebrew Bible; see especially Job 21:26 and Ps. 44:25.

⁵¹ An echo of Prov. 6:10, which implies the foolishness of the laborers' course of action.

⁵² An echo of the syntax and rhetorical argument of Rom. 3:21–22.

⁵³ A quotation of Luke 23:24.

⁵⁴ An echo of James 2:13.

⁵⁵ See Rev. 6:2.

⁵⁶ A contrast to Jesus's light and easy yoke in Matt. 11:30.

⁵⁷ 1 Kings 12:14.

⁵⁸ Carlyle, *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays* (1839; repr., Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Library, 2005), 312.

⁵⁹ Carlyle, 312.

⁶⁰ See Matt. 11:15, 13:9, 13:15, 13:16, 13:43; Mark 4:9, 4:23, 7:16, 8:18; Luke 8:8, 14:35. The phrase draws on the Old Testament “hearing with their ears,” a figure of speech for openness toward God (for example, Deut. 29:4, 2 Sam. 7:22, 1 Chron. 17:20, Ps. 115:6), which develops into the characteristic challenge of the prophetic tradition: for example, Jer. 5:21, “Hear now this, O foolish people, and without understanding; which have eyes, and see not; which have ears, and hear not.” See also Is. 6:10, 32:3, 42:40; Ezek. 12:2, 40:4, 44:5; and Zech. 7:11. This long biblical tradition emphasizes the way an unjust society has a skewed perception of reality which must be corrected before hearers can comprehend truth or justice.

⁶¹ 1 Kings 12:16–17.

⁶² [Report of a meeting in Newport], 22 April 1839, Public Records Office: Home Office 40/45 fols. 58–9; quoted in Lyon, 196.

