Affective Labour in British and American Women's Fiction, 1848-1915

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To my parents, for everything

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INTRODUCTION

A woman who wrote used to be considered a sort of monster. At this day it is difficult to find one who does not write, or has not written, or who has not, at least, a strong desire to do so. Gridirons and darning-needles are getting monotonous. A part of their time the women of to-day are content to devote their consideration when necessary; but you will rarely find one—at least among women who *think*—who does not silently rebel against allowing them a monopoly.

What? You inquire, would you encourage, in the present overcrowded state of the literary market, any more women scribblers? Stop a bit. It does not follow that she should wish or seek to give the world what she has written. I look around and see innumerable women, to whose barren, loveless life this would be improvement and solace, and I say to them, write! Write, if it will make that life brighter, happier, or less monotonous. Write! It will be a safe outlet for thoughts and feelings….

—Fanny Fern, "The Women of 1867" (1867)[1]

The extraordinary woman depends on the ordinary woman. It is only when we know what were the conditions of the average woman's life—the number of her children, whether she had money of her own, if she had a room to herself, if she had servants, whether part of the housework was her task—it is only when we can measure the way of life and the experience of life made possible to the ordinary woman that we can account for the success or failure of the extraordinary woman as a writer….

Strange spaces of silence seem to separate one period of activity from another….

Law and custom were of course largely responsible for these strange intermissions of silence and speech….

Thus it is clear that the extraordinary outburst of fiction in the beginning of the nineteenth century in England was heralded by innumerable slight changes in law and customs and manners.

—Virginia Woolf, "Women and Fiction" (1929)[2]

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[1] "The Women of 1867," *New York Ledger* [New York] 10 Aug. 1867, rpt. in *Ruth Hall and other Writings*, ed. Joyce W. Warren (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1986) 342-3.

[2] "Women and Fiction," *The Forum* [New York] Mar. 1929, rpt. in *Virginia Woolf: Women and Writing*, ed. Michele Barrett (London: The Women's Press, 1979) 44-5.

Why did women face so many difficulties in the literary marketplace during the nineteenth century? Why were they often minimised and invalidated when trying to be considered as serious writers? And why are some women writers still not fully appreciated or adequately represented in canons of literary study? In the passages above, Fanny Fern and Virginia Woolf reveal important sentiments on the subject of the woman writer. For Fern, and for many women, writing was an escape—a way for them to overcome the tedium of culturally prescribed labours and improve the quality of their lives. And yet, despite their popularity and literary output, critics still belittled their abilities and viewed their works as trivial. Although women writers eventually became widely accepted, it is still important to remember that they were once regarded as mere "women scribblers."

I initially began writing this book as a study of neglected British and American women writers who have been excluded from the literary canon. I wanted to revive the largely ignored texts by the "scribbling women" of Britain and America, re-evaluate their works to show their artistry and complexity, and establish that they were of a similar calibre to those of male contemporaries. Over time, and after much research, it evolved into a study that would be inherently stronger if it included women writers who are both part of, and excluded by, the canon; not because the forgotten texts are inferior to those that are now considered classic, but because texts such as Mary Austin's *Woman of Genius*, are as complex as Edith Wharton's *A House of Mirth*. As such, I have examined works by prolific women writers such as Edith Wharton, Elizabeth Gaskell, and Willa Cather, alongside the forgotten novelists, May Sinclair, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps and Mary Austin. By encompassing such a wide spectrum of authors and works, this study has become a comprehensive and transatlantic literary study of women's nineteenth-and-twentieth-century fiction.

Scholarship on nineteenth-century literature continues to be a popular and a burgeoning field of study.[3] Nina Baym, Anne E. Boyd, Susan K.

[3] For studies of British fiction, see Joe Bray, *The Female Reader in the English Novel: From Burney to Austen* (New York: Routledge, 2009); Robert L. Caserio, and Clement Hawes, eds., *The Cambridge History of the English Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012); Terry Eagleton, *The English Novel: An Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2005); Arnold Kettle, *An Introduction to the English Novel* Vol. I & II (London: Hutchinson, 1967); Raymond Williams, *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1970). For studies of American fiction, see Gregg Crane, *The Cambridge Introduction to the Nineteenth-Century American Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007); Earl

Harris, Linda Huf, Karen L. Kilcup, and Elaine Showalter, are just a few of the scholars who have written about the forgotten nineteenth-century novels by American women.[4] Similarly, Gail Cunningham, Ann Heilmann, Ellen Moers, Mary Poovey, and Lyn Pykett have considered various aspects of the Victorian novel.[5] All of these critics have provided many insightful interpretations of literary works within this domain of British and American fiction. However, I am interested in the importance of work, specifically women's work, as represented in these texts.

One of the major developments in the depiction of work is Raymond Williams' study of the English novel. In *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence*, Williams examines the ways in which the Industrial Revolution affected literary tradition. For example, when considering Thomas Hardy, Williams focuses on the depiction of farming and other agricultural labours; similarly, in Charles Dickens' fiction, various patterns of industrial labour and urban settings are of importance. By focusing on a small period of time, the 1840s, Williams comprehensively demonstrates how the changes in economy, urban development, and labour influenced English novelists and their works.

Yarington, and Mary De Jong, eds. *Popular Nineteenth-Century American Women Writers and the Literary Marketplace* (Cambridge Scholars, 2007); Amy Kaplan, *The Social Construction of American Realism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); Robert Paul Lamb, and G.R. Thompson, eds., *A Companion to American Fiction, 1865-1914* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009); Brian Lee, *American Fiction, 1865-1940* (London: Longman, 1987).

[4] See Nina Baym, *Woman's Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and About Women in America, 1820-1870* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1978); Anne E. Boyd, *Writing for Immortality: Women and the Emergence of High Literary Culture in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2004); Susan K. Harris, *19th-century American Women's Novels: Interpretative Strategies* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990); Linda Huf, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Woman: The Writer as Heroine in American Literature* (New York: F. Ungar Publications, 1983); Karen L. Kilcup, ed, *Nineteenth-century American Women Writers: A Critical Reader* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1998); Elaine Showalter, *A Jury of Her Peers: American Women Writers from Anne Bradstreet to Annie Proulx* (London: Virago, 2010).

[5] See Gail Cunningham, *The New Woman and the Victorian Novel* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1978); Ann Heilmann, *New Woman Fiction: Women Writing First-wave Feminism* (London: Macmillan, 2000); Ellen Moers, *Literary Women: The Great Writers* (London: Women's Press, 1978); Mary Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* (London: Virago Press, 1989); Lyn Pykett, *The "Improper" Feminine: The Women's Sensation Novel and the New Woman Writing* (London: Routledge, 1992).

In the past, areas of labour, especially labour in the non-traditional sense, have not always been documented in criticism. Using an approach similar to that of Williams, I will focus on evaluating literary works through the lens of affective labour. I will also examine a range of novels, some well-known, others less so, some part of the literary canon, others excluded, so that enhanced readings will be possible, and new insights will be gained.

It is first imperative to understand the relation between labour and work. In *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, Raymond Williams comprehensively defines both terms. Work refers to anything having to do with "paid employment,"[6] specifically as "'steady' or timed work, or working for a wage or salary."[7] On the other hand, labour has a more complicated meaning. Prior to the Industrial Revolution, labour had to do with "ploughing or working the land, but also extended to other kinds of manual work and to any kind of difficult effort."[8] This definition altered with the start of the Industrial Revolution and the spread of capitalism. According to Williams, "where labour, in its most general use, had meant all productive work, it now came to mean that element of production which in combination with capital and materials produced commodities."[9] Under these definitions, labour correlates to any employment that produces capital. While this may seem a simple demarcation, it is problematic in that it largely ignores the unpaid labours of women, i.e. housework and child rearing. To represent and recognise these labours, I use an entirely separate term: affective labour.

The idea of affective or immaterial labour in relation to capitalism was first defined and discussed by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, in numerous works.[10] According to Hardt and Negri in *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, with industrialization came "what has been traditionally called 'women's work;'"[11] this has been previously

[6] Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Fontana Press, 1988) 335.
[7] Williams 335.
[8] Williams 176.
[9] Williams 177.
[10] For information on a capitalist society and immaterial labour, see Michael Hardt's essay "Affective Labour," *Boundary 2* 26. 2 (1999): 89-100; Michael Hardt, and Antonio Negri, "Value and Affect," *Boundary* 2 26. 2 (1999): 77-88; Michael Hardt, and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (London: Penguin Books, 2006); Michael Hardt, and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (London: Harvard UP, 2000).
[11] Hardt, and Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* 110.

described as "caring labour, kin work, nurturing and maternal activities."[12] In Hardt's essay "Affective Labour," affective/immaterial labour is defined as a "labour…that produces an immaterial good, such as service, knowledge, or communication."[13] Moreover, this labour deals with "tasks that involve 'problem-solving [and] problem- identifying.'"[14] Thus, affective labour also encompasses activities of the mind: that is planning, or strategizing for one's future. Otherwise coined by feminist writers as "labour in the bodily mode,"[15] or even emotional labour, affective labour can also involve "producing affects, relationships and forms of communication and cooperation among children, in the family, and in the community."[16]

A further definition of affective labour is offered by Maurizio Lazzarato in "Immaterial Labour." He describes immaterial labour as "the kinds of activities involved in defining and fixing cultural and artistic standards, fashions [as well as] tastes."[17] As such, activities such as singing, painting, and writing, are all affective because they use the emotional, creative, and imaginative faculties of the mind. Most importantly, they are affective because they create art by exercising skills:

> intellectual skills, as regards the cultural-informational content; manual skills for the ability to combine creativity, imagination, and technical and manual labour; and entrepreneurial skills in the management of social relations and the structuring of that social cooperation of which they are part.[18]

By identifying these unconventional labours and defining them as affective, Lazarrato draws attention to mental, emotional, and domestic labours that have previously been discredited. The concept of affective labour therefore serves to demonstrate that there are other kinds of work beyond the traditional and industrial definitions.

In this study I explore and consider women's affective labours, which in all cases are directed towards attaining self-fulfilment, and in most cases, financial and social independence. Although affective labour is

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[12] Hardt, "Affective Labour" 97.
[13] Hardt, "Affective Labour" 94.
[14] Hardt, "Affective Labour" 94.
[15] Hardt, "Affective Labour" 96.
[16] Hardt, and Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* 110.
[17] Maurizio Lazzarato, "Immaterial Labour," *Radical Thought In Italy: A Potential Politics*, eds. Michael Hardt and Paolo Virno (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996) 133.
[18] Lazzarato 136.

usually unpaid, there are some revealing instances where it goes on in the public sphere and women receive small compensation for their work. Nevertheless, these labours are still considered affective, due to the degree of mental and emotional involvement. It is important to point out that while I initially set forth to study housework and mental labours, in the course of looking at how work is presented, I began to trace a specialised form of affective labour to do with the arts. As my project progressed, affective labour evolved to include creative and artistic labours such as painting, singing, acting, and even writing. Therefore, a major original contribution to scholarship is the identification and development of women's affective labour of the arts. In the literature discussed in the following chapters, women are depicted as using affective labour to attain self-fulfilment and artistic power.

Many studies of nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century writing have focused on American fiction or British fiction exclusively; this study differs in that it considers both kinds of fiction side by side. The dates covered, 1848-1915, are also significant in patterns of work, especially for women. Although no study could ever give a comprehensive social history, through novels we do receive special insights into periods which aren't fully recorded elsewhere. As such, the novels explored depict various women's labours including factory work, teaching, and even labours of the arts.

In the past, extensive research has been done on women and work.[19] However, the scholarship is generally historical, and most of it focuses on women's material (rather than immaterial) labour. For instance, Ivy Pinchbeck in *Women Workers and the Industrial Revolution, 1750-1850* primarily focuses on the agricultural and textile industries.[20] Pam Taylor discusses domestic servitude in *Women Domestic Servants 1919-1939: A Study of a Hidden Army, Illustrated By Servants' Own Recollected*

[19] For studies of women and work, see Jeanne Boydston, *Home and Work: Housework, Wages, and the Ideology of Labour in the Early Republic* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1990); Sandra Burman, ed., *Fit Work for Women* (London: Croom Helm, 1979); Arthur McIvor, *A History of Work in Britain, 1880-1950* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001); June Purvis, *Hard Lessons: Lives and Education of Working Class Women in Nineteenth-Century England* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989); Jane Rendall, *Women in an Industrializing Society: England, 1750-1880* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990); Elizabeth Roberts, *A Woman's Place: An Oral History of Working Class Women 1890-1940* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984); Nicola Verdon, *Rural Women Workers in Nineteenth-Century England: Gender, Work and Wages* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2002).

[20] Ivy Pinchbeck, *Women Workers and the Industrial Revolution, 1750-1850* (London: Cass, 1969).

Experiences, and Alice Kessler-Harris examines women's work in in the labour force in *Out to Work: A History of America's Wage-Earning Women*.[21] Although these are just a few examples, there is an enormous body of work on women and the labour force, and a very limited amount on women's immaterial, unpaid labour. As such, this study contributes to this area of research by examining women's affective labours as depicted in literature.

In the following chapters I reconsider British and American works through the lens of affective labour. The book is separated into two sections, each of which is presented chronologically. Section one (Chapters 1-4) examines British fiction, and Section two (Chapters 5-8) surveys American woman writers of antebellum and post-bellum fiction. Chapter 1 examines two social problem novels by Elizabeth Gaskell. When discussing *Mary Barton: A Tale of Manchester Life* (1848), I introduce the concept of artistic affective labours and consider the plights of Mary Barton and Margaret Jennings on their quest for self-fulfilment. I continue the chapter by exploring the figure of the fallen woman in Gaskell's *Ruth* (1853); I also look at Gaskell's portrayal and critique of the marriage market and the commodification of women.

In Chapter 2, I discuss Mary Elizabeth Braddon's sensation novel, *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862). Here I use the lens of affective labour to explain the motivation behind Lady Audley's criminality, and debunk her supposed madness.

In Chapter 3, I introduce New Woman fiction. I first look at the artistic affective labours of Hadria Fullerton and Beth Caldwell in Mona Caird's *The Daughters of Danaus* (1894) and Sarah Grand's *The Beth Book* (1897), respectively. I then examine Catherine Pirkis' *The Experiences of Loveday Brooke: Lady Detective* (1893) which is considered as one of the first texts to portray a female detective. In all three works the protagonists try to attain self-fulfilment and vocational success through affective labour.

In Chapter 4, the final chapter on British fiction, I discuss the literary affective labours of Jane Holland, Nina Lempriere, and Laura Gunning in May Sinclair's *The Creators* (1910).

In Chapter 5, I begin my discussion of American fiction with the antebellum novel *Ruth Hall* (1854) by Fanny Fern, and Louisa May Alcott's postbellum text, *Work: A Story of Experience* (1873). Here I

[21] Pam Taylor, *Women Domestic Servants 1919-1939: A Study of a Hidden Army, Illustrated By Servants' Own Recollected Experiences* (Birmingham: Centre for Contemporary Studies, 1976); Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: A History of America's Wage-Earning Women* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1982).

briefly discuss the literary careers of Fern and Alcott. I also examine the literary and oratory affective labours of Fern's Ruth Hall and Alcott's Christie Devon respectively.

In Chapter 6, I investigate Elizabeth Stuart Phelps' creation of the female artist in *The Story of Avis* (1877). This is also a text in which the protagonist's affective labours are unsuccessful in attaining self-fulfilment and autonomy: Avis Dobell's artistic aspirations are ultimately thwarted by marital constrictions. Although this is problematic in my examination of affective labour, I argue that it further demonstrates the struggles women faced when trying to proclaim their own independence.

In Chapter 7, I examine Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899), which is the last text of nineteenth-century American fiction to be considered in this study. As with Phelps' novel, this is also a text that doesn't necessarily offer a reassuring narrative: Edna Pontellier attempts and fails to attain financial independence through affective labour.

Finally, in Chapter 8, I survey three texts of early twentieth-century American fiction. The artistic affective labours of Mary Austin's Olivia Lattimore in *A Woman of Genius* (1912) and Willa Cather's Thea Kronberg in *The Song of the Lark* (1915) are discussed. The chapter also investigates the mental affective labours of Lily Bart in Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth* (1900).

In these pages I will consider fourteen different texts by thirteen women writers. As many of these recovered texts are unfamiliar, out of print, or difficult to attain, I will include lengthy passages in an effort to familiarise the reader with the authors' works. I will also provide a succinct reception history of each novel, and survey the changes in critical reception from the date of publication, to the present. By re-examining these novels, I hope to provide valuable insights into the representation of women's lives and their labours in nineteenth-and-early-twentieth-century fiction. I hope that this study will generate further comparative studies between British and American fiction, and motivate others to read and re-evaluate texts that are part of, and excluded from, the literary canon.

PART I.

BRITISH LITERATURE

CHAPTER ONE

ELIZABETH GASKELL'S *MARY BARTON* AND *RUTH*

When one thinks of Elizabeth Gaskell, *North and South* (1855) immediately comes to mind. While this may be partly due to BBC's 2004 adaptation of the novel, Gaskell's reputation is steadily growing as her works are increasingly incorporated in studies of nineteenth-century British literature. Today, Elizabeth Gaskell is appreciated for her efforts in social reform, especially in regards to women. But because her earlier works primarily address nineteenth-century social and political issues and focus on the factory workers in England during industrialisation, she is often considered alongside the group of writers who wrote between the first and second Reform Acts.

Between the 1840s and 1870s, writers started to express their concerns over the social, political, and economic effects industrialism had on the working classes. Novels such as Charles Dickens' *Hard Times* (1854), George Eliot's *Felix Holt* (1866), Benjamin Disraeli's *Sybil* (1845), and Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848) and *North and South* (1855) are just a few that depict the poverty and injustices that existed at this time. As such, these works have been classified as social problem, social protest, industrial, or even "Condition of England" novels, a phrase coined by Thomas Carlyle in *Chartism* (1939).[1] As Lynette Felber asserts,

> The British novels of social protest reflect not only the strikes, massive unemployment, and starvation resulting from poor harvests and depressed trade, but also the social movements which sought to rectify the situation: the efforts of the Anti-Corn Law-League to abolish restrictions on foreign commerce, and the Chartists meetings of the late thirties, which saw the

[1] See Thomas Carlyle, *Chartism*, 2nd ed. (London: James Fraser, 1940) 1. Carlyle used the phrase "The Condition of England," to describe the "condition and disposition of the Working Classes" during this time.

> formulation of the "Six Points" calling for voting rights beyond those provided by the Reform Bill of 1832.[2]

Although *Mary Barton* (1848), *Ruth* (1853), and *North and South* (1855), all offer many insights on women's labours, in this chapter I will focus primarily on *Mary Barton* and *Ruth*.

Gaskell's first novel, *Mary Barton: A Tale of Manchester Life*, was published anonymously as two volumes in 1848. Due to its realistic depiction of industrial Manchester, the novel received positive reviews in the newspapers. For *The Examiner*, *Mary Barton* is "of unusual beauty and merit,"[3] and for *The Morning Post*, the realistic depiction of "humble life in Manchester"[4] is commendable. In *The Athenaeum*, the reviewer asserts, "[the author] is excellent in the anatomy of feelings and motives, in the display of character, in the lifelike and simple use of dialogue:—and the result is, a painful interest very rare in our experience."[5] Lastly, according to *The Morning Chronicle*, the novel is both a literary success and an admirable moral endeavour:

> A work of singular pathos, earnestness, and power—a fiction teeming with salutary and most precious truths—a romance in which the homeliest and vulgarest of realities are shone upon by the light of a thoughtful philosophy, and ennobled by the kindling warmth of generous sympathies … such is *Mary Barton*; and we as unhesitatingly congratulate the author on having achieved a signal literary success, as we respectfully recognize the elevation and generosity of her moral aim.[6]

Recent studies of Gaskell and her works continue to regard *Mary Barton* as a key work in British industrial fiction. For Ellen Moers, *Mary Barton* "is a remarkable work not only for its subject matter, but for its smoothness of execution, its relaxed and confident intermixing of the traditional young-woman-in-search-of-a-husband story of female fiction with illustrations of the particularly brutal political economy of the Hungry Forties."[7] According to Raymond Williams, "*Mary Barton*, particularly in its early chapters, is the most moving response in literature to the

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[2] Lynette Felber, "Gaskell's Industrial Idylls: Ideology and Formal Incongruence in *Mary Barton* and *North and South*," *Clio* 18.1 (1988): 55.
[3] "The Literary Examiner," *The Examiner* [London] 4 Nov. 1848: 708.
[4] "Literature," *The Morning Post* [London] 24 Nov. 1848: 6.
[5] "*Mary Barton: A Tale of Manchester Life*," *The Athenaeum* [London] 21 Oct. 1848: 1050.
[6] "*Mary Barton*," *The Morning Chronicle* [London] 26 Dec. 1848: 3.
[7] Ellen Moers, *Literary Women* (London: Women's Press, 1978) 20.

industrial suffering of the 1840s."[8] Similarly, Annette B. Hopkins finds it to be "the first novel to combine sincerity of purpose, convincing portrayal of character, and a largely unprejudiced picture of certain aspects of industrial life."[9] Due to the novel's realism and its many themes, scholarship continues to offer insightful and varying interpretations of the novel. While Francoise Basch examines the depiction of "female labour,"[10] Macdonald Daly takes a more general approach and focuses on "the relations between labour and capital."[11] On the other hand, Pearl L. Brown suggests that the novel also provides "a companion study of the difficulties nineteenth-century women faced, regardless of class, attempting to negotiate the public sphere typically reserved for men,"[12] while Lisa Surridge discusses the "crisis in masculinity"[13] in the novel. On the whole, most of the criticism on *Mary Barton* concentrates on Gaskell's representation of working-class life, social conflict, and gender relations. In my examination of the novel, I will focus on the affective labours of Mary Barton and Margaret Jennings, and demonstrate how crucial these labours are in achieving self-fulfilment.

The novel begins with a description of Green Heys Fields and the millworkers who inhabit the land:

> Groups of merry and somewhat loud-talking girls, whose ages might range from twelve to twenty, came by with a buoyant step. They were most of them factory girls….
>
> There were also numbers of boys, or rather young men, rambling among these fields, ready to bandy jokes with any one, and particularly ready to enter into conversation with the girls, who, however, held themselves aloof, not in a shy, but rather in an independent way, assuming

[8] Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society: 1780-1950* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1958) 87.
[9] Annette B. Hopkins, "*Mary Barton*: Victorian Best Seller," *Trollopian* 3.1 (1948): 4.
[10] Francoise Basch, *Relative Creatures: Victorian Women in Society and the Novel, 1837-1867*, trans. Anthony Rudolf (London: Allen Lane, 1974) 180.
[11] Macdonald Daly, introduction, *Mary Barton: A Tale of Manchester Life*, by Elizabeth Gaskell (London: Penguin, 1996) viii.
[12] Pearl L. Brown, "From Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* to Her *North and South*: Progress or Decline for Women?" *Victorian Literature and Culture* 28.2 (2000): 345.
[13] Lisa Surridge, "Working-Class Masculinities in *Mary Barton*," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 28.2 (2000): 333.

> an indifferent manner to the noisy wit or obstreperous compliments of the lads.[14]

In this passage, Gaskell is making two important points. Factory work may provide girls with wages, which in turn gives them a sense of independence, but there are significant risks in working in such proximity to men. The girls are not only exposed to the "obstreperous compliments" of the boys, but they are also susceptible to being seduced by wealthy men. Although in this case the girls ignore the boys' advances, Gaskell, through Esther, uses the figure of the fallen woman to demonstrate that dangers do exist. Esther, Mary Barton's aunt, is a working-class woman who uses her appearance to attract a wealthy army officer. Even though their relationship develops, she is unable to secure a marriage, and her suitor deserts her and their baby. As an unmarried woman with a child, Esther has lost her virtue and her innocence, and has become a fallen woman. With no viable way to earn money in a society that shuns her, she resorts to alcohol and prostitution. It is clear that Gaskell is using Esther's demise to serve as a warning for Mary; and while the figure of the fallen woman is important, I will revisit it and explore it further in my discussion of *Ruth*.

Gaskell centres her novel on the lives of Mary and her father, John Barton. At the outset, it is clear that John is determined to protect Mary from repeating Esther's mistakes. Although a second income is necessary, John refuses to let Mary work in the factories, and views domestic servitude "as a species of slavery" (26). The only other field of work available to young women at the time was needlework, and so Mary begins to work for a dressmaker. In addition to labouring for money, Mary assumes all the domestic responsibilities, and even uses her own wages to take care of household needs: "of course all the money went through her hands, and the household arrangements were guided by her will and pleasure" (23). Due to domestic and financial pressures, Mary begins to aspire to live the life she thinks Esther has: one of affluence and leisure. As such, she begins to use her beauty to attract a wealthy suitor:

> She knew she was very pretty; the factory people … had early let Mary into the secret of her beauty. If their remarks had fallen on an unheeding ear, there were always young men enough, in a different rank from her own, who were willing to compliment the pretty weaver's daughter as they

[14] Elizabeth Gaskell, *Mary Barton: A Tale of Manchester Life*, ed. Macdonald Daly (London: Penguin, 1996) 6-7. All future references are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text.

> met her in the streets…. So with this consciousness she had early determined that her beauty should make her a lady…. (26)

Mary, like Esther, aspires to achieve social mobility through marriage. By bartering her beauty and virginity, two assets valued highly in the marriage market, she hopes to attain social and financial success. She rejects Jem Wilson, the workman she really loves, for Harry Carson, a wealthy suitor who has no intention of ever marrying her; the narrator notes, "she had the innocence, or the ignorance, to believe his intentions honourable; and he, feeling that at any price he must have her, only he would obtain her as cheaply as he could, had never undeceived her" (135). However, unlike Esther, Gaskell gives her heroine a "keen practical shrewdness" (81); Mary is aware of the dangers in getting involved with someone out of wedlock, and she abstains from developing her relationship with Harry.

It is at this point in the novel that the concept of affective labour is useful in understanding the significance of Mary's actions. By approaching the novel in terms of affective labour, it becomes clear not only that Mary is actively pursuing marriage for financial security and social mobility, but that her mental calculations are crucial for her success. In her meetings with Harry, Mary often portrays herself in a manner that will accentuate her attributes and attract his attention: "she listened with a blush and a smile that made her look radiant with beauty" (116). And although she "encourage[s]" (123) Harry's attentions, she avoids all sexual advances from him, choosing instead to wait for his marriage proposal. Again, unlike Esther, Mary carefully considers her situation and realises that Harry's intentions were never honourable. After "turning things over in her mind again and again" (132), Mary decides that her love for Jem is stronger and more important than compromising herself to improve her social standing. It is at this moment that the novel takes a complicated, but exciting turn. As soon as Mary rejects Harry, he is found dead, and Jem is the only viable suspect.

Mary is faced with a difficult dilemma. Not only is Jem in danger of being convicted as Harry's murderer, but it is actually John Barton who is responsible the crime. As such, Mary actively devises a scheme to free Jem, whilst protecting her father. In the following passage, Gaskell demonstrates Mary's determination:

> Before [Mary] had finished the necessary morning business of dressing, and setting her house in some kind of order, she had disentangled her ravelled ideas, and arranged some kind of a plan for action. If Jem was innocent (and now, of the guilt, even the slightest participation in, or knowledge of, the murder, she acquitted him with all her heart and soul),

> he must have been somewhere else when the crime was committed; probably with some others, who bear witness to the fact, if she only knew where to find them. Everything rested on her. She had heard of an alibi, and believed it might mean the deliverance she wished to accomplish…. (247)

Here, the phrase, "she had disentangled her ravelled ideas, and arranged some kind of a plan for action," suggests mental labour. Mary is using her mental faculties to find a way to prove Jem's innocence. In the remaining pages of the novel, Mary travels to Liverpool, tracks down William Wilson (who will verify Jem's whereabouts at the time of the murder), and testifies as a witness in court. Thus, through her affective labour, Mary is able to marry her true love, and attain self-fulfilment.

Although Mary's affective labour is successful, it also detrimental to her mental and physical health. Gaskell illustrates the extent of Mary's exhaustion in the following court scenes:

> For she felt the sense, the composure, the very bodily strength which she had compelled to her aid for a time, suddenly giving way, and was conscious that she was losing all command over herself. (326)

> Then she checked herself, and by a great struggle brought herself round to an instant's sanity. But the round of thought never stood still; and off she went again; and every time her power of struggling against the growing delirium grew fainter and fainter. (327)

Mary is having trouble commanding her body because of her physical exhaustion; what's more, she is unable to comprehend what is going on around her, which represents her mental and emotional exhaustion. She regains her composure to give her testimony, but when the judge announces his verdict, she goes mad and is "seized with convulsions" (329). For Deanna L. Davis, the "sources of Mary's anxiety and fatigue are mainly emotional;" [15] and for Craik, the combination of "physical and mental strains Mary endures before and during the trial make her subsequent breakdown entirely natural."[16] Although Davis and Craik offer valuable interpretations, I suggest that it is primarily Mary's affective labour that is the driving force of her exhaustion.

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[15] Deanna L. Davis, "Feminist Critics and Literary Mothers: Daughters Reading Elizabeth Gaskell," *Signs* 17 (1992): 523.

[16] Wendy Ann Craik, *Elizabeth Gaskell and the English Provincial Novel* (London: Methuen, 1975) 537.

Mary's excessive emotional and mental labours have significantly taxed her faculties, and in turn her body. As a result, Mary regresses to a time when she felt safe: "Her mind was in the tender state of a lately born infant's…. She smiled gently, as a baby does when it sees its mother tending its little cot; and continued her innocent, infantine gaze into [Jem's] face, as if the sight gave her much unconscious pleasure" (348-9). Despite temporarily losing her sanity, Mary's health is rehabilitated and the novel ends on a happier note; Mary and Jem marry, have a son, and move to Canada. Although the novel suggests Mary's happiness is a result of starting a family, it is also important to recognize that Mary's affective labour was the driving force of her self-fulfilment. Similarly, Margaret Jennings also attains self-fulfilment through her artistic affective labour.

Margaret is initially described as a "sallow, unhealthy, sweet-looking woman, with a careworn look" (30). Yet, it soon becomes apparent that beneath her haggard appearance lays a powerful singing voice. The reader is acquainted with Margaret's artistic power when she sings for Mary and Alice:

> Margaret had both witnessed the destitution, and had the heart to feel it; and withal, her voice was of that rich and rare order, which does not require any great compass of notes to make itself appreciated…. But Margaret, with fixed eye, and earnest, dreamy look, seemed to become more and more absorbed in realising to herself the woe she had been describing, and which she felt might at that very moment be suffering and hopeless within a short distance of their comparative comfort.
>
> Suddenly she burst forth with all the power of her magnificent voice, as if a prayer from her very heart for all who were in distress, in the grand supplication, "Lord, remember David." (37)

Even though Margaret is singing a simple folk song, she does it with passion; she engages her listeners with her "rich and rare" voice, and gives an incredible performance. In fact, Margaret's emotional connection to the lyrics, and her ability to equally relay this emotion to her audience is so strong that Mary and Alice are still with admiration: "Mary held her breath, unwilling to lose a note…" (37). By defining Margaret's singing as affective labour, we can better understand the process with which she sings, and the purpose of her singing. Margaret uses her mental and imaginative faculties to imagine the circumstances of the song, and authentically portray them through her voice. She is able to express herself, engage her audience, and attain self-fulfilment through affective labour. According to Nicky Losseff, one's voice "can act as a metaphor for authority, for self-expression, and as an instrument of empowerment,

carrying meanings beyond those of speech and language."[17] For Gaskell, Margaret represents the power women can have despite being constrained by Victorian ideals.

When Margaret's eyesight fails and she is no longer able to do needlework for money, she turns to music as a possible career. She begins to study under Jacob Butterworth, and even starts to earn money by singing at various lectures. Moreover, it is through her voice that she unknowingly attracts her future husband, Will Wilson. When Will hears Margaret sing, he immediately views her in a different light:

> So Margaret began some of her noble old-fashioned songs. She knew no modern music (for which her auditors might have been thankful), but she poured her rich voice out in some of the old canzonets she had lately learnt while accompanying the musical lecturer on his tour.
>
> Mary was amused to see how the young sailor sat entranced; mouth, eyes, all open, in order to catch every breath of sound. His very lids refused to wink, as if afraid in that brief proverbial interval to lose a particle of the rich music that floated through the room. For the first time the idea crossed Mary's mind that it was possible the plain little sensible Margaret, so prim and demure, might have power over the heart of the handsome, dashing, spirited Will Wilson. (154)

The entrancement described here resembles a seduction. Will is so absorbed in Margaret's "rich voice" and artistic power, that he sits motionless through her performance. In fact, he is so smitten by Margaret that he later compares her to "an angel from heaven" (193), and announces to Mary that he plans to ask Margaret for her hand in marriage. It is important to establish that, unlike Mary, Margaret has no inclination to marry for social mobility or financial security. Margaret doesn't actively use the power of her voice to attract Will; his attraction to her is merely a by-product of her musical power and passion. For Alice Clapp, however, Margaret is a mere commodity in the marriage market, and as a result, Will views her as "the sexual woman more than the musician."[18] Clapp continues by asserting, "In *Mary Barton*, Job Legh initiates gendered commodification of the singing woman: when Will visits, he thinks 'What

[17] Nicky Losseff, "The Voice, the Breath and the Soul: Song and Poverty in *Thyrza*, *Mary Barton*, *Alton Locke* and *A Child of the Jago*," *The Idea of Music in Victorian Fiction*, ed. Sophie Fuller and Nicky Losseff (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004) 7.

[18] Alice Clapp, "The City, the Country, and Communities of Singing Women: Music in the Novels of Elizabeth Gaskell," *Victorian Urban Settings: Essays on the Nineteenth-Century City and its Contexts*, ed. Debra N. Mancoff and D.J. Trela (London: Garland, 1996) 121.

could he do for him? He could ask Margaret to sing (180).'" Despite Clapp's assertions, Gaskell never represents Margaret as a marriageable commodity; aside from her brilliant voice, Margaret has no marketable assets: she is plain, sickly, and blind. Moreover, Gaskell maintains throughout the novel that Margaret sings for self-fulfilment, and when she goes blind, for financial support as well. By the end of the novel it is revealed that Margaret has married Will and has also regained her eyesight. While Gaskell never addresses whether or not Margaret continues to sing after her marriage, it can be assumed that she doesn't; not because she has no need to do so now that she has financial security, but most likely because she doesn't have time to, due to domestic responsibilities.

In *Mary Barton*, Gaskell gives readers great insights into the conditions of the working classes, particularly issues affecting women. Through Mary and Margaret, Gaskell also touches upon women's unconventional labours; by defining them as affective, we can recognise and understand them more fully. Mary's mental and emotional labours undoubtedly bring her self-fulfilment when she saves, and subsequently marries, Jem. Likewise, although Margaret suffers from blindness, she is still able to express her emotions through her voice; her mental, emotional, and imaginative labours not only fulfil her life, but unexpectedly bring her love as well. Another novel in which the affective labour of the protagonist aids to her financial independence and self-fulfilment, is Gaskell's second novel, *Ruth*.

Published in 1853, *Ruth* is primarily about the fall and redemption of heroine, Ruth Hilton. In contrast with Gaskell's other novels, at the time of its publication *Ruth* was mostly criticised for its sympathetic portrayal of a fallen woman. For example, *Sharpe's London Magazine* writes, "We feel and appreciate the talent displayed in the construction and elaboration of the story … but we protest against such a book being received into families, it would be the certain uprooting of the very *innocence* which is so frequently dwelt upon by the author with pleasure and delight."[19] *The Literary Gazette* takes a different approach and instead focuses on the novel's failure:

> [Ruth] has the worst fault that can attach to a work of the kind,—that of being insufferably dull. The story is meagre, improbable, and uninteresting, and the style is laboured and artificial. It would almost seem as though the English female novelists of the day were fated to write only

[19] "Books and their Authors," *Sharpe's London Magazine* [London] 15 Jan. 1853: 126.

> one first-class book, and then to drop down into the ranks of mediocrity…. The present work exhibits even a worse decline … and it makes one regret that Mrs. Gaskell should have periled her high reputation by a second essay in the same field.[20]

The Spectator has a similar attitude towards Gaskell and her novel, asserting that "Ruth as a whole is not proportioned to the qualities which the writer possesses…. The story ceases to be a general picture of life, and consequently fails in impressing the lesson the author would apparently teach."[21] Despite its controversial subject matter, there were a few newspapers that praised Gaskell's novel. According to *The Morning Chronicle*,

> *Ruth* gives ample evidence of reflection, ability, and exquisite taste; and, although a tale in every way different from the first, few will be found to deny its interest, or refuse their admiration to its rare and varied merits—for humour, pathos, and imagination are qualities found in its pages…. *Mary Barton* is every day life dramatized—*Ruth* is more like an episode, of unusual yet not improbable occurrence, dignified into fiction.[22]

Similarly, for *The Examiner*, *Ruth* is "a work so abounding in pathos, humour and grace." The reviewer further asserts, "We find it difficult to say how much we have been charmed and affected by this book…. No tale of guilt and shame, told without pretence or preaching, has taught more gentle truths of mercy and compassion."[23] *Manchester Times* calls *Ruth* "one of the most charming pieces of fiction this country has produced…."[24] and the review in *The Ladies' Cabinet* concludes,

> Such a novel is not for the day only. It will live we trust to move the hearts and purify the conduct of many readers in times far off. The sorrowing, long, and painful course of an erring woman's life has been often traced before; but the tale of Ruth stands gloriously aloof alike from violations of our moral sense, and from seductive pictures of evil.[25]

Today, *Ruth* is often overlooked by scholars, in favour of Gaskell's more popular novels, such as *Cranford* and *North and South*. One explanation for this occurrence is the unfavourable ending. As Hilary M. Schor asserts, "we resent Ruth's sacrifice to a Christian myth of

[20] "Reviews," *The Literary Gazette* [London] 22 Jan. 1853: 79.
[21] "Reviews," *The Spectator* [London] 15 Jan. 1853: 61.
[22] "*Ruth*," *The Morning Chronicle* [London] 1 Apr. 1853: 3.
[23] "The Literary Examiner," *The Examiner* [London] 22 Jan. 1853: 3.
[24] "Books on our Table," *Manchester Times* [Manchester] 2 Feb. 1853: 3.
[25] "Literature," *The Ladies' Cabinet* [London] 1 Mar. 1853: 162.

martyrdom, in part because it seems too clearly a continuation of her earlier passivity in the face of seduction, and in part because it seems a plot in conflict with the novel we have been reading: it does not satisfy us emotionally or generically."[26] It is true that Gaskell's efforts in rehabilitating the fallen woman are undermined by her heroine's death; nonetheless, the novel is significant in that it challenges Victorian conventions. Despite its unpopularity, the scholars who do discuss the novel offer various interpretations. For Sara Malton, *Ruth* is built on the "two forms of fraud: the heroine's disguise and an event that has received little critical attention, Richard Bradshaw's forgery."[27] According to Jenny Uglow, Ruth "is a novel about confinement and repression in which the truth is buried, particularly the truth about women's emotional history."[28] On the other hand, Yoko Hatano demonstrates "the influences of Evangelicalism on the novel, in its motif and plot."[29] In fact, for Hatano and Wendy A. Craik, Ruth's religious faith makes her redemption possible. Natalka Freeland takes a different approach and discusses the commodification of women, by focusing on Ruth's and Jemima's places in "sexual and market economies."[30] Although I too will discuss Gaskell's portrayal of Ruth Hilton and Jemima Bradshaw as commodities in the marriage market, I will primarily focus on Ruth's affective labours.

Gaskell introduces Ruth with a description of her physical appearance: "But, looking up, [Mrs. Mason] was struck afresh with the remarkable beauty which Ruth possessed; such a credit to the house, with her waving outline of figure, her striking face, with dark eyebrows and dark lashes, combined with auburn hair and a fair complexion."[31] Gaskell continues by depicting the childlike qualities Ruth possesses: "There was, perhaps, something bewitching in the union of the grace and loveliness of womanhood with the *naïveté*, simplicity, and innocence of an intelligent child" (28). As with Mary Barton, Ruth's beauty and virtue are significant because they are valuable assets in the marriage market. However, unlike Mary, Ruth never seeks to improve her station by marrying someone

[26] Hilary M. Schor, *Scheherezade in the Marketplace: Elizabeth Gaskell and the Victorian Novel* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992) 73.
[27] Sara Malton, "Illicit Illustrations: Reforming Forgery in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Ruth*," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 33.1 (2005): 187.
[28] Jenny Uglow, *Elizabeth Gaskell: A Habit of Stories* (London: Faber, 1999) 326.
[29] Yoko Hatano, "Evangelicalism in *Ruth*," *The Modern Language Review* 95 (2000): 634.
[30] Natalka Freeland, "*Ruth's* Perverse Economies: Women, Hoarding, and Expenditure," *ELH* 70.1 (2003): 197.
[31] Elizabeth Gaskell, *Ruth*, ed. Tim Dolan (New York: Oxford UP, 2011) 11. All future references are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text.