

**SECRET AGONIES, HIDDEN WOLVES, LEPER-SINS:  
THE PERSONAL PAINS AND PROSTITUTES OF  
DICKENS, TROLLOPE, AND GASKELL**

A Dissertation

by

CLAIRE ILENE CARLY-MILES

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of  
Texas A&M University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

May 2008

Major Subject: English

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May 2008

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**ABSTRACT**

Secret Agonies, Hidden Wolves, Leper-Sins:

The Personal Pains and Prostitutes of Dickens, Trollope, and Gaskell. (May 2008)

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This dissertation explores the ways in which Charles Dickens writes Nancy in Oliver Twist, Anthony Trollope writes Carry Brattle in The Vicar of Bullhampton, and Elizabeth Gaskell writes Esther in Mary Barton to represent and examine some very personal and painful anxiety. About Dickens and Trollope, I contend that they turn their experiences of shame into their prostitute's shame. For Gaskell, I assert that the experience she projects onto her prostitute is that of her own maternal grief in isolation. Further, I argue that these authors self-consciously create biographical parallels between themselves and their prostitutes with an eye to drawing conclusions about the results of their anxieties, both for their prostitutes and, by proxy, for themselves.

In Chapter II, I assert that in Nancy, Dickens writes himself and his sense of shame at his degradation and exploitation in Warren's Blacking Factory. This shame resulted in a Dickens divided, split between his successful, public persona and his secret, mortifying shame. Both shame and its divisiveness he represents in a number of ways in Nancy.

In Chapter III, I contend that Trollope laces Carry Brattle with some of his own biographical details from his early adult years in London. These parallels signify Carry's

personal importance to her author, and reveal her silences and her subordinate role in the text as representative of Trollope's own understanding and fear of shame and its consequences: its silencing and paralyzing nature, and its inescapability.

In Chapter IV, I posit that Gaskell identifies herself with Esther, and that through her, Gaskell explores three personal things: her sorrow over the loss of not one but three of her seven children, her possible guilt over these deaths, and her emotional isolation in her marriage as she grieved alone. In her creation of Esther, Gaskell creates a way both to isolate her grief and to forge a close companion to share it, thus enabling her to examine and work through grief.

In Chapter V, I examine the preface of each novel and find that these, too, reflect each author's identification with and investment of anxiety in his or her particular prostitute.

For

Polly Carly and Roger Carly, beloved Mama and Papa

and for

Vivian Miles and George Miles, beloved daughter and husband

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Between 1855 and 1865, Charles Dickens kept a “Book of Memoranda” in which he recorded ideas, lists of boys’ and girls’ names, possible chapter and book titles, and character sketches for future novels. Among these memoranda appear these fascinating sentences, written in the first person: “I am a common woman, fallen. Is it devilry in me--is it a wicked comfort--what is it--that induces me to be always tempting other women down, while I hate myself” (Forster 2: 378). Many of the other character sketches preceding and following this one are written in third person or with quotation marks around the language of the character in order to set it off from the narrator’s or author’s own voice. This sketch is not one of these. Dickens’s use of the first person “I” here illustrates a conflation of author and fallen woman. It is as if Dickens is trying on a persona--briefly (or perhaps not so briefly) imagining what it feels like to be a fallen woman, degraded and humiliated--feelings to which he felt himself to be no stranger, as anyone familiar with his childhood experience of Warren’s Blacking Factory will recall. The conflation of author and prostitute exhibited by Dickens in these two provocative sentences lies at the heart of this dissertation.

I have always been fascinated by the idea that authors may transmute parts of their own lives into their fictions, that they may conflate aspects of their own identities with their characters, and that they may do so in a self-conscious way by incorporating their own biographical details in their works. This dissertation indulges that fascination in positing that

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This dissertation follows the style of The MLA Style Manual.

Charles Dickens, Anthony Trollope, and Elizabeth Gaskell write parts of themselves in the prostitutes they create, specifically in Dickens's Nancy of Oliver Twist (1837-39), Trollope's Carry Brattle of The Vicar of Bullhampton (1868/1870), and Gaskell's Esther of Mary Barton (1847-48).

When I first began the work of exploring the creation of prostitutes by these three Victorian writers, I was describing it to a friend who exclaimed, "What fun to write about sex!" What struck me at the time and still holds true, years later, is that this dissertation has very little to do with sex. Just as the novels I discuss here contain little or no description of the actual act or acts responsible for their prostitutes' falls, so too do my arguments contain little or no discussion of these fictional prostitutes as sexual or sexualized characters.<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, this work certainly makes no claim to offer any insights about real-life Victorian prostitutes.<sup>2</sup> Rather, I am primarily interested in the ways in which Charles Dickens, Anthony Trollope, and Elizabeth Gaskell use the prostitutes they create as a way to

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<sup>1</sup> Discussions of fictional prostitutes, sexuality, and gender are manifold. I provide here a very brief sampling. Useful for broad catalogues and overviews of the appearance of fallen women including prostitutes in the nineteenth century are George Watt's The Fallen Woman in the 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Novel and Tom Winniffrith's Fallen Women in the Nineteenth-Century Novel. More complex arguments about prostitutes are offered by more recent critics. In Tainted Souls and Painted Faces: The Rhetoric of Fallenness in Victorian Culture, Amanda Anderson explores the fixed nature of the representation of fallen women--their immutable downward trajectory and the ideological work Victorian writers attempted to accomplish by employing prostitutes and such fixity in their fictions. In Walking the Victorian Streets: Women, Representation, and the City, Deborah Nord discusses the ways in which fictional prostitutes function as Victorian authors' public doubles as well as agents of connection and carriers of contamination between the public and private spheres. Deborah Logan's Fallenness in Victorian Women's Writing: Marry, Stitch, Die, or Do Worse offers a comprehensive overview of types of perceived fallenness, including prostitution, as well as an analysis of these types as presented by Victorian women writers. Two dissertations--Margaret C. Wiley's The Fallen Woman in the Victorian Novel: Dickens, Gaskell, and Eliot and Marcy A. Hess's Discursive Decontamination: Domesticating the Great Social Evil in Early Victorian Novels--are of particular interest in their contextualization of fictional prostitutes within the broader social context and medical debates of the nineteenth century.

<sup>2</sup> Prostitution in the Victorian Age: Debates on the Issue from 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Critical Journals offers an interesting collection of nineteenth-century writings on prostitution from the Westminster Review. For historical reviews and analysis of Victorian debates on prostitution, see Eric Trudgill's Madonnas and Magdalens: The Origins and Developments of Victorian Sexual Attitudes; Helsing, Sheets, and Veeder's The Woman Question: Society and Literature in Britain and America, 1837-1883; Françoise Barret-Ducrocq's Love in the Time of Victoria: Sexuality and Desire Among Working-Class Men and Women in Nineteenth-Century London; Sally Mitchell's The Fallen Angel: Chastity, Class, and Women's Reading, 1835-1880; and of course, Judith Walkowitz's Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, class, and the state.

represent and examine something very personal and painful for themselves. About Dickens and Trollope, I contend that they turn their experiences of shame into their prostitute's shame. For Gaskell, I assert that the experience she projects onto her prostitute is that of her own maternal grief in isolation. Applying the lenses of close reading, biographical criticism, and psychological studies on shame and grief, I hope to demonstrate not only that these authors use their prostitutes to represent these anxieties, but also that they do so self-consciously through their creation of biographical parallels between themselves and their prostitutes.

In writing this dissertation, I am deeply indebted to the work of three critics in particular--Amanda Anderson, Deborah Nord, and Laurie Langbauer. Each of these critics offers some argument on the Victorian novelist's use of the prostitute as a way to displace and contain anxiety. Nord writes specifically about Dickens, claiming that he "uses the barrier of gender to introduce and yet quarantine urban misery" (68). Anderson argues that for Victorian male authors in general, "fallenness displaces threats to autonomy and discrete identity, to cherished forms of masculine selfhood" (41). Similarly, Langbauer states that in English novels, "The status quo defines itself by gesturing to its (debased) mirror opposite, whose lacks and problems seem to point to its own completeness and strength" (Women and Romance 2). All three of these critics argue that Victorian authors attempted to accomplish this "quarantining" and "displace[ment] [of] threats to autonomy and discrete identity, to cherished forms of masculine selfhood" through their use of the fallen woman. Anderson's, Nord's, and Langbauer's arguments are, of course, far more complex, but these selected quotations represent the ideas that have been the most helpful to me in my own work. Without the labors of these critics, my own efforts would have been spent in trying to figure out why the prostitute presented these authors with such an appealing figure for the

representation of anxiety, rather than in noting and exploring the biographical parallels each author creates within his or her prostitute and what these parallels might then signify. I argue in this dissertation that all three authors' inclusion of personal links between themselves and their prostitutes points to their self-aware examination of anxiety, as they craft their own experiences into their art, with an eye to drawing conclusions about the results of these emotions, both for their prostitutes and, by proxy, for themselves.

Such readings of Nancy, Carry Brattle, and Esther are vital for two reasons. First, my dissertation provides a catalogue of hitherto unnoticed or under-examined parallels between these authors and their prostitutes, filling in gaps in existing biographical criticism on these novels. For instance, while the importance of Warren's Blacking Factory to Dickens has been well-researched and explored, and while critics have also noted the parallels between Dickens and his streetwalkers, to my knowledge, no critic has noted at length the biographical parallels between Dickens and Nancy, or examined their potential significance.<sup>3</sup> These specific biographical details point to Dickens's on-going sense of shame rooted in his time at Warren's Blacking Factory, an understanding which then enables us to perceive Dickens as representing and examining shame and its effects through Nancy. Writers interested in the biographical details of Anthony Trollope's fiction have noted the clear parallels in many novels between the author and the awkward hobbledhoys he creates such as Johnny Eames of the Barsetshire novels. As I observe in Chapter III, only the critic George Watt suggests a connection between Trollope and Carry Brattle; however, Watt's discussion of the link is brief, as well as biographically limited to Trollope's childhood, whereas I explore at length the parallels Trollope creates between himself during his first

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<sup>3</sup> In "Dickens's Streetwalkers: Women and the Form of Romance," Laurie Langbauer draws a parallel between Dickens's performances of Nancy's murder and the toll these performances took on his own life, what Langbauer refers to as his "self-murder," as well as connects Dickens's well-known night walks, or "streetwalking," as Langbauer dubs them, with those of prostitutes ("Dickens's Streetwalkers" 427).

years in the London Post Office and his prostitute. For Elizabeth Gaskell, as a woman writer, the links between female author and female prostitute are more obvious and have been pointed out by several critics, as I detail in Chapter IV. Biographical aspects of her first novel have also been examined: the death of her son Willie as the impetus for the writing of the novel is well-known and many critics have noted the importance of this loss in Gaskell's portrayal of John Barton and the many other grieving parents in the novel.<sup>4</sup> Less attention has been paid to what I argue is Gaskell's specific identification with Esther, and the way in which Gaskell may have been examining and working out her own personal feelings of grief for the loss of not one but three children and the intensification of her grief in her emotional isolation from her husband. This dissertation attempts to point out some additional biographical ties between these authors' "facts" and their fictions.

Second, my analysis of the significance of the biographical connections between these authors and their prostitutes contributes a greater understanding of novels which hitherto have often been condemned as flawed. For Dickens, the criticism has been of Nancy's inconsistent and unrealistic character--that in her, Dickens does not portray a "real" or even believable prostitute. In 1840, Thackeray wrote that "Miss Nancy is the most unreal fantastical personage possible" (Thackeray 46). In the twentieth century, Philip Collins points out that "many aspects of Nancy's conduct are implausible and cliché-ridden" (96). Further, Larry Wolff observes that "there is no 'hiring' of Nancy in the novel" (235). And yet in his preface to the novel, Dickens claimed about his representation of Nancy that "IT IS TRUE" and that he "painted [that truth] in all its fallen and degraded aspect" (Oliver Twist 6). In Chapter II, I argue that Dickens uses Nancy for something more than a realistic portrayal of a prostitute and even for something besides a sentimental and sympathetic

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<sup>4</sup> See in particular Rosemarie Bodenheimer, Felicia Bonaparte, and Robin B. Colby. Their comments on Mary Barton and Gaskell's grief for her son are detailed in Chapter IV.

portrayal. Although he never shows Nancy loitering on the street or soliciting customers, Dickens does represent aspects of degradation in Nancy, aspects which reflect not so much his knowledge of real-life prostitutes as his identification of Nancy's fallenness with his sense of his own. I argue that in Nancy, Dickens writes himself and a part of his identity--specifically his sense of shame--that he could neither relinquish nor reveal.<sup>5</sup> Further, I posit that Dickens' sense of degradation and exploitation in the blacking factory resulted in a Dickens divided, split between his successful, public persona and his secret, mortifying shame. Like his hero Oliver, Dickens went on to make "something" of himself; on the other hand, like Nancy, he feared that his life had been irrevocably tainted by that time. Fractured by the shame he felt at his servitude in Warren's Blacking Factory, Dickens's was a divided self and in Oliver and Nancy he recreates those fragments as the boy who represents "the principle of Good" and "the girl [who] is a prostitute" (*Oliver Twist* 3). Thus, neither Oliver nor Nancy is meant to be realistic. Rather, each embodies an idea: Oliver is the fantasy of incorruptible purity for Dickens; Nancy is his nightmare of shame.

Critics have, for the most part, approved Trollope's representation of Carry as more "realistic" than those of other nineteenth-century fictional prostitutes. For instance, she neither dies in misery at the end of the novel (like Dickens's Nancy and Gaskell's Esther) nor does she live happily ever after without consequences (as many of the sensation novel heroines/villainesses do). Rather, Carry is taken back in by her family where she lives out the rest of her days in health and unhappiness. The criticism of Carry, however, is that she is all but absent in the novel and is thus unimportant or at least significantly less important than the other characters. Trollope himself clearly doesn't think she's irrelevant; instead, on

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<sup>5</sup> Gwen Watkins sees Dickens as unconsciously reworking and examining his sense of self throughout many of his novels, especially those written late in his career. Watkins comments, in what is perhaps too sweeping a generalization, that "it is the exploration of the self that concerns [Dickens] in his books, not the exploration of social problems" (151).

her behalf, as well as his own in imagining her, he makes an exception to his rule never to write prefaces for his novels and devotes an entire preface to a discussion of her and the sexual double standard by which she suffers such misery. Furthermore, in his autobiography, Trollope continues to emphasize Carry's importance in the novel; he repeats most of the preface and then declares:

For the rest of the book I have little to say. It is not very bad, and it certainly is not very good. As I have myself forgotten what the heroine does and says--except that she falls into a ditch--I cannot expect that anyone else should remember her. But I have forgotten nothing that was done or said by any of the Brattles. (An Autobiography 333)

Critics, however, disagree with Trollope's implication here that Carry is of significant importance to the book.<sup>6</sup> Among these critics perhaps the most dismissive of Carry is Tom Winnifrith, who proclaims that "Carry Brattle is not all that important in a novel which also includes a murder, in which her brother is involved; an ecclesiastical quarrel, in which the vicar is involved; and a more decorous love story, in which the squire of Bullhampton is involved" (137). And so we find a seeming chasm between Trollope, for whom Carry and her family are "well told" and "true," and critics who believe that Carry herself at least, if not the rest of her family, is irrelevant. My argument about Carry's biographical significance to Trollope attempts to bridge this gap. In Chapter III, I posit that what we do see of Carry is significantly laced with some of Trollope's own biographical details from his early adult years on his own in London. Noting these parallels then enables us to understand Carry's personal importance to her author, and her silences and her subordinate role in the text as

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<sup>6</sup> I provide a more detailed overview of this criticism at the beginning of Chapter III.

representative of Trollope's own understanding and fear of shame and its consequences: its silencing and paralyzing nature, and its ineffability.

About Mary Barton critics have noted Gaskell's shift from writing a novel of social concern focusing on the plight of Manchester workers and their families to writing a romance, all but dropping the social aspect in favor of Mary Barton and Jem Wilson's love story. This shift in focus is often pointed to in discussions of the title Gaskell claimed she initially wanted for the novel--that of John Barton--and the title that her publisher recommended for the book and under which it was published, in the end. This change in novel's focus has at times been seen as a flaw. I argue in Chapter IV, however, that the novel's shift from John Barton and class despair to Mary Barton and romantic hope can be understood partly as reflecting Gaskell's own personal transition from grief, guilt, and isolation to relative peace of mind. I posit that Gaskell identifies herself with Esther, and that through her, Gaskell represents and explores three personal things: her sorrow over the loss of not one but three of her children, her possible guilt over these deaths, and her emotional isolation in her marriage as she grieved alone for her babies. In her creation of Esther, Gaskell creates not only a way to isolate her grief but also a close companion to share it. Through such sharing, Gaskell is then able to examine and work through grief. As I detail in Chapter IV, in Esther, Gaskell represents many of the stages of grief and in this we may perceive Gaskell using her prostitute to work through and partially resolve her own sorrow. This reading offers a different perspective on the novel's shift from social concerns to romance, from despair to hope, from John Barton to Mary Barton. If Gaskell achieved some peace of mind by the end of the novel, then the transition from representations of grief to those of new beginnings is not so much a social failing as an emotional triumph.



My argument about Gaskell's identification with and use of Esther also offers a response to critics who argue that, in spite of her pleas for understanding and sympathy for Esther, Gaskell follows convention in punishing her prostitute with death. I maintain, however, that rather than a penalty for her sins, Esther's death functions in at least three other ways. First, as I discuss above briefly and in Chapter IV at length, Esther's death is actually a symbolic laying to rest of Gaskell's anxieties about herself. Second, Esther's death may also be seen as a reward in its reunion for her with her beloved, deceased daughter. And third, I argue that Gaskell creates in her prostitute not only a way to isolate and resolve her own personal grief but also a commentary on the results of grief in isolation--disease/dis-ease and death. Esther dies not because of her fallenness but because of her isolated grief, something from which, at least emotionally, Gaskell may have found some relief for herself by writing Esther.

I stated at the beginning of this introduction that my methods include the application of biographical criticism, and my discussion above has made it clear that this dissertation relies very heavily on these authors' biographies. This approach is, necessarily, a risky one, relying as it does at times on speculation about and interpretation of limited biographical information, as well as on authors who are not always honest, with us or with themselves, about what their work may "mean." This said, however, reading novels within the framework of biography continues to offer compelling perspectives on both author and text. In his review essay "Biography and Criticism," Peter Casagrande declares that biographical criticism "exists probably because it must, because no matter how unconcerned a critic may be with matters of source, cause, or intention, the really individual, the really personal aspects of literary art--stylistic and substantive--assert themselves and beg for commentary" (197). In the same vein, Steven Marcus notes about Dickens's use of the blacking factory

experience in his fiction, “It provides us . . . with an unsurpassable instance of how in a great genius the ‘impersonal’ achievement of art is inseparable from an engagement on the artist’s part with the deepest, most personal stresses of his experience” (364). Both Casagrande’s and Marcus’s observations strike a resounding chord for me. In my readings of the prostitutes created by Dickens, Trollope, and Gaskell, the “personal aspects” and “personal stresses” of these characters--the details that resonate with echoes of their authors’ own lives--seemed to be so many and were certainly so fascinating to me that, while they may not have “begged” for my commentary, I could not resist giving it. And I haven’t, as the following pages testify. What I offer here is one interpretation, supported as much as possible by biography, some psychology, and close readings of the texts. While I attempt to root my own readings in these authors’ biographies, my claims for biographical connections between author and prostitute do not inevitably dismiss other readings of these characters. Rather, this dissertation offers one perspective on Dickens, Trollope, and Gaskell, and their secret selves, their hidden wounds, their very “personal” pains and prostitutes.

## CHAPTER II

### “THE SECRET AGONY OF MY SOUL”:

#### DICKENS, SHAME, AND SELF IN NANCY OF OLIVER TWIST

Oliver Twist begins with the birth and immediate orphaning of Oliver in a workhouse. The novel then skips ahead approximately ten years to follow Oliver’s progress from the workhouse into the London underworld, where he meets the pickpockets the Artful Dodger and Charley Bates, Fagin the Jewish fence for stolen goods, the bully Bill Sikes, and the prostitutes Nancy and Bet. Remaining innocent and untainted no matter what his environment, Oliver is shuffled back and forth between this criminal element and the novel’s respectable characters Mr. Brownlow, Rose Maylie, and Mrs. Maylie. By the novel’s conclusion, most of the criminals introduced have been expunged. Nancy has been murdered by Bill Sikes for what he thinks is her betrayal of him to the authorities on behalf of Oliver. Because of Nancy’s death, Bill is hunted by a mob and finally, accidentally killed. Fagin is imprisoned and hanged. As for Oliver, he is finally restored to his legacy of name and fortune, despite all the circumstances against him, including his nefarious half-brother Monks’s attempts to ruin him. By the novel’s end, Oliver Twist assumes his rightful place in the respectable middle class among the Maylies and Mr. Brownlow.

From first to last, Oliver Twist concerns itself with questions of identity and what constitutes the self. Dickens makes this clear in chapter 1, as he observes:

What an excellent example of the power of dress, young Oliver Twist was! Wrapped in the blanket which had hitherto formed his only covering, he might have been the child of a nobleman or a beggar; it would have been hard for the haughtiest stranger

to have assigned him his proper station in society. But now that he was enveloped in the old calico robes which had grown yellow in the same service, he was badged and ticketed, and fell into his place at once--a parish child--the orphan of a workhouse--the humble half-starved drudge--to be cuffed and buffeted through the world--despised by all, and pitied by none. (19)

While the novel nominally focuses upon seeing Oliver's identity recognized and his inheritance (based upon his identity) recovered, Dickens's desires are by no means limited to this. While Oliver's identity may be withheld from him, as he is "badged and ticketed" in the workhouse, and while the novel is driven by whether or not he will recover his rightful identity and thus his legacies of name and fortune, Oliver's self seems to be hermetically sealed from his birth, with little or no chance whatsoever of being penetrated by any evil impulse. While the path leading to the *recognition* of Oliver's identity proves to be a tortuous one, Dickens's representation of Oliver's pure character never wavers.<sup>1</sup> While the narrator tells us that Oliver's "days had been spent among squalid crowds, and in the midst of noise and brawling" (215), Dickens never illustrates the effects such experiences, beginning with Oliver's birth and ending approximately eleven years later, must inevitably have had upon Oliver. Instead, as Dickens writes explicitly in "The Author's Preface to the Third Edition (1841)," he "wished to show, in little Oliver, the principle of Good surviving through every adverse circumstance, and triumphing at last" (3). Dickens explains, even before the novel begins, that Oliver will "survive through every adverse circumstance, and triumph" in the end. No matter what his situation or environment, Oliver will never fall, will never be degraded or shamed, and will overcome all obstacles.

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<sup>1</sup> According to Steven Marcus, "Essentially detached from social preconditions, and achieving definition and identity--his birthright--by remaining impervious to the inferior and degrading circumstances into which he was born, Oliver is virtually pure self" (88).

The question of why Oliver remains so entirely unmarked by his environment is an easy one to answer: Oliver is Dickens's fantasy--the fantasy of the child who endures shame and suffering and comes through it all with his self intact, with no psychological scarring, and with no inclination to dwell on the first decade of his life, which was spent "among the noisy crowds and brawls." Oliver is not real, nor was meant to be, even according to his own author: he represents a principle, not a person, and, perhaps more importantly, he represents Dickens's own fantasy for himself of a pure, never-to-be-degraded self.

And yet Dickens espouses another perception of character throughout the novel, as well--a view that is not consistent at all with Oliver's uncorruptable character or his triumphant end and that does far more to reflect Dickens's fears about his own self and its integrity. This very different view Dickens illustrates in his prostitute Nancy. She forms the only other character in this novel who Dickens specifically describes as being raised in a neglectful and abusive manner similar to Oliver's upbringing (similar also, significantly, to Dickens's perception of part of his own childhood). In its diction and syntax, in fact, Nancy's account of her early years forms a striking parallel to the narrator's description of Oliver's childhood. She laments that she has grown up "in the midst of cold and hunger, and riot and drunkenness, and--and something worse than all. . . ." (267), clearly mirroring the "squalid crowds" and "noise and brawling" surrounding Oliver. Unlike Oliver, however, Nancy has been heavily and tragically influenced by her childhood circumstances: instead of remaining unmarked and pure, she has become a prostitute and, initially, one of the most tainted characters in the novel.

Although neither critic discusses Nancy specifically, both Deborah Nord and Amanda Anderson find in Dickens's creation of fictional prostitutes a distinct attempt to control anxiety. In examining Dickens's sketch "The Old Pawnbroker's Shop," which

presents a prostitute watching a young woman pawn her things and recalling that she too was once respectable, Nord comments on Dickens's need to protect respectability while still showing what is not so respectable. Nord states that the sketch

perfectly illustrates Dickens's urge to represent the familiarity and closeness of social suffering while at the same time keeping it sufficiently remote and isolated so as not to threaten his audience's sense of their distance from social taint. In this case . . . he uses the barrier of gender to introduce and yet quarantine urban misery. (68)

Nord identifies Dickens as employing this "barrier of gender" specifically in his creation of a prostitute. I would argue that this is neither the last time nor the most striking example of Dickens's use of the barrier of gender in the form of the prostitute in an attempt to quarantine something that causes discomfort to both readers and himself. While Nancy does serve as one of the characters in Oliver Twist who embodies and contains urban misery for the middle-class reader, I argue that, rather than using Nancy and the "barrier of gender" solely to "introduce and quarantine urban misery," Dickens also employs his prostitute to represent and examine his anxiety about the integrity of his own self. As I will illustrate in this chapter, beneath the image he projected of the talented and successful man, Charles Dickens maintained a far different perception of his self as tainted by his past at Warren's Blacking Factory, where he worked shoulder to shoulder with common men and boys, and where he felt powerless, penetrated, tainted, and defined by his surroundings, very much as Nancy feels tainted and defined by hers.

In this way, my argument initially resembles that of Amanda Anderson, who theorizes that the representation in nineteenth-century discourses of prostitutes as overdetermined by environmental and social conditions helped men to assuage anxiety about subjectivity and the self's vulnerability to environmental and social determinants. According

to Anderson, male writers projected their fears about their ability to control and shape their own destinies onto the figure of the prostitute. Anderson tells us that her “purpose is to isolate and describe a pervasive rhetoric of fallenness in mid-Victorian culture, one that constitutes sexually compromised women as lacking the autonomy and coherence of the normative masculine subject” (2). Anderson posits that “fallenness displaces threats to autonomy and discrete identity, to cherished forms of masculine selfhood. Fallenness, with its insistent emphasis on a self driven or fractured by external forces, challenges the very possibility of a self-regulated moral existence” (41). Thus, Anderson finds in nineteenth-century discourse that the prostitute, once-fallen-always-fallen and seemingly without control over herself and her destiny, comprises the comforting antithesis to the ideal of a “self-regulated moral existence.” Though she focuses her argument on the contrast between David Copperfield and the fallen figures of Little Em’ly and the prostitute Martha Endell, Anderson’s theory about the “self-regulated moral existence” whose comforting opposite is the fractured prostitute also sheds light on Dickens’s contrast between Oliver and Nancy. While hardly a powerful figure, Oliver still fits Anderson’s description of “autonomy and coherence” in that he remains unaffected by, and thus independent of, his surroundings and so represents the ideal of a “self-regulated moral existence.” In direct contrast to Oliver, Nancy serves to embody all of Dickens’s anxieties about self-control and the effect of one’s childhood on one’s character. That these two characters are meant to complement one another emerges in Dickens’s own description of their respective childhoods, which I have outlined at the beginning of this chapter. While Nancy and Oliver have been raised in similar situations, Oliver’s purity reflects Dickens’s wish that his own childhood should have no affect on him, while Nancy’s degradation represents her author’s continuing anxiety that

he can never be cleansed of the social taint of his time in Warren's Blacking Factory--that he is, like his prostitute, once fallen, forever fallen.

Applying Anderson's theory, then, because the prostitute has no control over her own fate, supposedly Dickens can project his own fears about having no control over himself onto her and preserve his explicit alter ego, Oliver, as intact, pure, whole, undivided, no matter what befalls him. Akin to Amanda Anderson, Laurie Langbauer also writes about the ways that Victorian authors used the figure of the prostitute to assuage their own fears. Langbauer states:

The status quo defines itself by gesturing to its (debased) mirror opposite, whose lacks and problems seem to point to its own completeness and strength. Yet it actually constructs this other out of elements within it that threaten its position, projecting them outward in hopes of escaping them. (Women and Romance 2)

Langbauer's point about projecting anxieties outward onto the fallen woman in order for the ideal self to escape these anxieties also works out quite beautifully in the plot of Oliver Twist. Dickens represents his ideal self as the pure Oliver and projects his anxieties about degradation and control onto his and Oliver's "debased mirror opposite," Nancy. In her efforts to save Oliver, Nancy literally makes possible the escape of the pure self (Oliver) at her own expense, as Sikes murders her for what he believes to be her betrayal of him to Rose Maylie and Mr. Brownlow. Obviously, Dickens does displace and "quarantine" his anxieties about social taint in Oliver's "debased mirror opposite" Nancy.

Nord, Anderson, and Langbauer argue that Dickens uses prostitutes to quarantine misery and displace anxiety about selfhood, that he creates comfort for his own fears about self-control by overdetermining the figure and fate of the prostitute, who was perfect for this job since she, fallen and over-determined, is the antithesis of the Victorian "autonomous"



and “self-regulating” masculine self. For these critics, the prostitute functions as the reassuring Other for Dickens. While I certainly agree that Dickens finds at least a transient comfort for his own fears by projecting them onto the prostitute, I also believe that he uses at least one of his fictional prostitutes--Nancy--far more self-consciously than these critics seem to imply. Laurie Langbauer states, “Because these elements [anxieties] are part of the status quo, it can never elude them, *and in its very denial is even able to dwell on without admitting them*” (Women and Romance 2, my emphasis). Contrary to Langbauer’s argument, however, I find that Dickens not only dwells on his anxieties, but also *does* admit them. Amanda Anderson argues that Dickens “engages . . . in the Victorian cultural practice that wards off perceived predicaments of agency by displacing them onto a sexualized feminine figure” (107). Enticingly, Anderson also notes that while he engages in this practice, he also does so “with an almost undermining legibility” (107). I argue that what Anderson perceives to be Dickens’s “*almost* undermining legibility” (my emphasis), may actually be perceived to be Dickens’s purposeful legibility. That he was not only displacing anxiety about selfhood but also *consciously* recreating and examining aspects of himself (in particular, his quintessential experience of shame at Warren’s Blacking Factory) through Nancy, Dickens demonstrates through his incorporation of specific biographical parallels between her childhood and his own, as I will discuss below. Furthermore, in his examination of shame, Dickens creates in Nancy the single most divided character in the novel, envisioning her at first as the hardened, careless prostitute who ensures Oliver’s return to Fagin’s den, and coming, at last, to make her the character upon whom Oliver’s eventual salvation most depends. In her dividedness, Nancy represents not only Dickens’s anxiety about the integrity of his own self, but also about what happens to the self when shame enters into it: shame splinters the self. In her many divisions within the novel, in her brutal death at the end of the novel, and in all

of the public readings of her murder that Dickens performed at the end of his own life, Nancy represents not only the self divided by shame but also the conclusions Dickens would eventually and fatally realize (both for his prostitute and himself) about the impossibility of survival for such a divided self.

Unlike his fantasy subject Oliver and very much like his nightmare subject Nancy, Dickens's identity was neither whole nor uncomplicated: rather, it was fractured and he had an inclination, until the very end of his life, to dwell on the time that marked that fracturing for him, the time when, like Nancy, his own life was in danger of being "squandered in the streets" (Oliver Twist 266) and, more specifically, in Warren's Blacking Factory.

When I initially think of Charles Dickens, he emerges as the self-assured, proud, frequently pompous, often vain, always prolific, well-off, middle-class author. He was father to ten children, editor of several different serial publications such as Household Words and All the Year Round, prolific author, promoter of domestic harmony, propagator of those supposedly separate Victorian spheres (domestic femininity and public masculinity), and benevolent supervisor of Urania Cottage, the "Home for Homeless Women" at Shepherd's Bush. This is Dickens's "ideal" self. But upon closer inspection, a palimpsest begins to emerge. Akin to the painted women he includes in almost every one of his works, Dickens proves to be a painted man. Stripping back the layers that show the patriarchal, well-to-do, famed and beloved Victorian author, one begins to discover the portrait of another Dickens who was not so firmly grounded after all in the ideal image I have just described.<sup>2</sup> Rather, Dickens strongly identified with those who were not well-to-do or well-loved, feeling himself to have been among them once and, in his memories, among them still. Fred Kaplan makes

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<sup>2</sup> Commenting on Dickens's split self, Gwen Watkins observes that, while he identified with the downtrodden, "in order to win the world over to his side, he had had to create a second self which was precisely *not* feeble, neglected and helpless, but in its very nature had to be firm, authoritarian and in control of every situation" (86).

an observation about Dickens's "morbid enthusiasm for variations of misery and its institutional treatment," as he visited numerous prisons and hospitals, and refuges for fallen women (142). Kaplan posits that these visits

spoke deeply of his fascination with alternative lives that he could imagine vividly and present dramatically in his fiction. The poor, the imprisoned, the physically and emotionally deprived, were the familiar other, what he had the potential to be but had not become. They were alternative versions of himself. . . . (142-43)

Dickens's strong sense of identification with these "alternative lives" stemmed from what he perceived as his own experience of degradation: shortly after his twelfth birthday in February 1824, he was put to work in Warren's Blacking Factory, for twelve hours a day at six shillings a week (Marcus 361). Within two weeks of his employment there, his father John Dickens was incarcerated in the Marshalsea debtor's prison and, soon after, Charles's mother Elizabeth and his siblings set up house there with John (Marcus 361). The memory of this time of family visits at the Marshalsea and his keen sense of the humiliation he suffered in being sent to work among common men and boys at Warren's were very bitter to him, forming what Steven Marcus calls "the chief episode of [Dickens's] childhood" (360) and, as Peter Rowland notes, "a matter for profound shame" (16).

In "The Hero's Shame," an article which explores Dickens's time in the blacking factory, Robert Newsom succinctly distinguishes shame from guilt, thus providing a better understanding of Dickens's shame during those months at Warren's and his inability ever to forget them, in all the years that would follow. To begin, Newsom quotes Gerhart Piers: "Guilt anxiety accompanies transgression; shame, failure" (qtd. in Newsom 6). Based on Piers's definition, Newsom proceeds to characterize shame, as follows:

Such a definition stresses that the sense of guilt is aroused when one does something one knows to be wrong (the superego here being for most purposes synonymous with “conscience”), whereas one feels shame when one is aware that one has not met the requirements of the ego-ideal, which is an idealized image of the self one would like to be and in some sense believes oneself to be. . . . (6)

In his account of the blacking warehouse memory and its effect on him (written in an attempt at autobiography between 1847 and 1849), Dickens exposes the feelings of failure he experienced at Warren’s. While he was to explore compulsively these feelings in his novels, this was the only time he was to expose them directly, without veiling them in his fiction.

He identifies

the misery it was to my young heart to believe that, day by day, what I had learned, and thought, and delighted in, and raised my fancy and my emulation up by, was passing away from me, never to be brought back any more. . . . (“The Autobiographical Fragment” 768)

Analyzing this passage, Newsom notes that here Dickens describes “several characteristics of shame,” among which emerges a sense of his own failure. Newsom argues that this passage illustrates the “sense of personal shortcoming (‘what I had learned and thought and raised my . . . emulation by, was passing away’) that characterizes shame” (9). Further, Newsom observes:

What is especially poignant here is not only the sense of loss of the protecting parent, but of abandonment in a sense by his very *own* self, all he has learned and thought and aspired to. Not only has he, in other words, fallen short of the ego-ideal--what he has raised his “emulation” by--but the very sense of identity is jeopardized. (9)

Dickens was no longer who he thought he was--a young man meant for middle-class respectability and success. Newsom's observation here about jeopardized identity clearly reverberates with Dickens's own sense of selfhood deeply threatened. Dickens writes further about the experience:

No words can express the secret agony of my soul as I sunk into this companionship; compared these every day associates with those of my happier childhood; and felt my early hopes of growing up to be a learned and distinguished man, crushed in my breast. ("The Autobiographical Fragment" 772; Johnson 6).

As Steven Marcus notes, "Coupled with the emotions of betrayal and desertion [by his parents] were those of social disgrace and humiliation--the young prince suddenly discovers that he may be the swineherd's son, and not the other way around" (362). From the moment he set foot in Warren's Blacking Factory, Dickens felt his ego-ideal to be frighteningly in jeopardy and was never again sure of himself or sure of his self, no matter how self-assured his public persona appeared to be. Dickens explicitly identifies the feelings he experienced in the blacking factory as ones of shame, referring to "The deep remembrance of . . . the *shame* I felt in my position" ("The Autobiographical Fragment" 768). This shame functions, as Newsom describes, to compromise Dickens's stable, unified sense of himself.

Amanda Anderson also examines a passage from the Autobiographical Fragment that deals with the blacking factory, but she focuses on it as it appears in David Copperfield, where Warren's is disguised as Murdstone and Grinby's Warehouse and where David stands

in for his author, allowing Dickens the comfort of exposing parts of his autobiography while concealing them as fiction.<sup>3</sup> Anderson observes that David,

[f]eeling himself to have been “thrown away,” experiencing a profound degradation at the factory, . . . fears being slowly drained of all knowledge, memory, imagination--in effect, all interiority. What “cannot be written,” we are told, is “what misery” it was “to believe that day by day what I had learned, and thought, and delighted in, and raised my fancy and my emulation up by, would pass away from me, little by little, never to be brought back any more.” (100)

Like Newsom, Anderson discusses this passage in terms of identity and finds in this experience of humiliation a threat to David’s (and, I would add, Dickens’s) very sense of self. As Dickens’s alter-ego, David’s feeling of being “drained of . . . all interiority”--of losing himself--is also Dickens’s. For Dickens, the time spent in the blacking factory represented not only his loss of confidence in his parents but more importantly, his loss of confidence in his ideal self, a loss of confidence which was not confined to the twelve-year-old but which continued to haunt the seemingly self-assured adult Dickens throughout his entire life.

For instance, also in the Fragment, Dickens reveals his perception of the threat his experience of past shame continues to pose to his public identity in the present. He writes:

My whole nature was so penetrated with the grief and humiliation of such considerations, that even now, famous and caressed and happy, I often forget in my dreams that I have a dear wife and children; even that I am a man; and wander desolately back to that time of my life. (“The Autobiographical Fragment” 768)

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<sup>3</sup> This passage from the Autobiographical Fragment is one I have quoted already in this chapter: “No words can express the secret agony of my soul as I sunk into this companionship; compared these every day associates with those of my happier childhood; and felt my early hopes of growing up to be a learned and distinguished man, crushed in my breast” (“The Autobiographical Fragment” 772; Johnson 6).

Here, Dickens articulates the continued menace that even the memory of such humiliation poses for him. In Dickens's immediate present, an anxious sense that his ideal self is by no means a stable one clearly emerges. His continuing shame over the incident holds such power over him that his current sense of identity also proves unstable. He is no longer husband and father or, one might add, successful writer, but is instead forever tainted by this experience, forever ashamed and degraded: forever fallen. The very memory renders him helpless and strips him of the "myth of total self-sufficiency," his ego ideal which, according to his biographer Fred Kaplan, he worked so hard to cultivate (82). The shame Dickens suffered at Warren's would compromise his sense of self for the rest of his life, dividing him between his hidden shame and his carefully cultivated public persona, and surfacing in much (if not all) of his fiction, especially, as examined in this chapter, in his prostitute Nancy.

According to Newsom, in threatening and destabilizing a unified sense of self, shame can also actually rupture the self: "In experiencing shame, . . . the self becomes estranged or divided from itself" (7). Dickens himself points to this fracturing of his self in his Autobiographical Fragment, in the same passage quoted above, wherein he reveals that he found his identity to be jeopardized in two ways, each involving a sense of being "estranged or divided." First, he is no longer a unified adult self. His memory of shame renders him a child. He states that "in my dreams I often forget . . . even that I am a man." Literally, Dickens seems to mean that he often forgets that he is a successful adult man and perceives himself to be, again, a vulnerable twelve-year-old boy. Albert Hutter observes that when Dickens "later remembered this time, that memory rendered him helpless and childlike; to use the appropriate Victorian expression, it 'unmanned him'" (10). This sense of being unmanned accounts, as critics have pointed out, for Dickens's identification of himself with Oliver Twist. Oliver is the utterly helpless child in whom Dickens sees himself at age twelve,

a fact which many critics have noted and examined at length.<sup>4</sup> This said, however, Oliver is also the utterly *pure* subject--what Dickens wanted to believe about himself but could not because his sense of shame would not allow him to do so, which brings us to the second split inherent in this passage from Dickens's aptly named "Fragment."

Dickens implies that the shame he experienced unmans him in another way. Not only does his shame cause him to forget his adulthood and return to vulnerable childhood, but it also causes him to forget his masculinity altogether, causing his self to fracture not only along the lines of adult and child, but also along the lines of man and woman.<sup>5</sup> Recall that Dickens writes, "My whole nature was so penetrated with the grief and humiliation . . . I often forget in my dreams . . . even that I am a man" ("The Autobiographical Fragment" 768). Here, Dickens indicates that the experience of shame strips him even of his gender. Steven Marcus states that Dickens, "[t]he boy himself, and the man after him, felt utterly violated" by this experience (361). The adult Dickens's continuing shame is so severe that, when he remembers Warren's, his ideal self dissipates and he no longer identifies himself with patriarchy and power, but is unsexed altogether. Another self emerges--one that identifies itself as the feminine object and victim of power: a woman--penetrated, shamed, deprived of any power to control its self or its fate, utterly fallen. And this is not the only time that such a feminized second self emerges in Dickens's thinking. In 1851, he pointed

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<sup>4</sup> Among these critics, in *From Copyright to Copperfield: The Identity of Dickens*, Alexander Welsh explores in depth the effect of the blacking factory on Dickens throughout his life, noting that the episode "partially explains why, in the midst of his success with *Pickwick*, he should begin a fairy tale of the workhouse child, *Oliver Twist*" (4). Welsh notes further that Dickens's memory of the blacking warehouse "explains the vein of self-pity that crops up again and again in the novels" (4).

<sup>5</sup> Hilary Schor identifies the blurring of gender in this passage, as well, discussing this blurring in terms of David Copperfield's Scheherzade-like imagination and authorship (13). Alexander Welsh also quotes this passage and speculates that Dickens's statement that "No words can express" his feelings about the blacking factory accounts for Dickens's shift from writing an actual autobiography, in which he may have believed that "his confession of feeling was too strong," to writing a fictional account of his experiences in *David Copperfield* (3).



obliquely to a ruptured and bi-gendered self yet again, in a speech at the General Theatrical Fund, one of his several favored charities. Here, Dickens remarked upon

how often is it with all of us, that in our several spheres we have to do violence to our feelings, and to hide our hearts in carrying on this fight of life, if we would bravely discharge in it our duties and responsibilities. (qtd. in Forster 2: 116)

These words reverberate with great significance in Dickens's life. He felt that one must repress certain painful feelings and, necessarily, memories in order to be successful in life, and in his own particular case, in order to be a successful Victorian gentleman author. His feelings of shame and his memories of the blacking factory and of his parents' exploitation of him must have qualified for suppression. And, as discussed above, such a suppression must have led to some fracturing of the self, as one set of feelings, perhaps constituting one self, must have violence done to it in order for the other self to carry on bravely and successfully. Notice also the seeming incompatibility between one's "feelings" and "heart" on the one hand, and the "brave discharge" of one's "duties and responsibilities" on the other. Dickens's distinction between these two categories--emotional interiority as opposed to public expectations and performance--strikingly reproduces the notion of Victorian separate spheres: the feminine domestic and the masculine public--and indicates that we all of us are made up of these different selves, even if one of them must be suppressed.

According to Forster, Dickens not only commented on the necessary existence of a divided self in Victorian society, but he himself embodied it. Forster makes the following observation about Dickens's personality: "a stern and even cold isolation of self-reliance [existed] side by side with a susceptibility almost feminine and the most eager craving for sympathy" (qtd. in Slater 106). Again, and even more clearly, Dickens's subjectivity manifests itself as a divided one, encompassing a self-reliant masculine self (Dickens's public

persona reliant upon, as Kaplan notes, a “myth of total self-sufficiency” [82]) and a vulnerable feminine self--that “susceptivity almost feminine and the most eager craving for sympathy.” Dickens’s was a divided subjectivity, split between public ideal and secret shame, implicated as masculine and feminine selves. These various fragments of his self Dickens represented quite clearly in Oliver Twist, not only in the difference between his alter-egos Oliver and Nancy--masculine integral self and feminine vulnerable self--but also within Nancy alone, as she too embodies the hardened public self and the compassionate self.<sup>6</sup> Nancy allows Dickens to represent shame while also safely distancing himself from an association with it, as Amanda Anderson, Deborah Nord, and Laurie Langbauer point out in their studies of Dickens’s prostitutes. To briefly review the arguments of these critics, in Victorian discourse, the prostitute is peculiarly suited to represent such anxiety because she is both deeply degraded and also denied any agency in controlling her own fate. Anderson finds in Dickens’s representation of the prostitute Martha in David Copperfield a figure who is wholly determined and degraded by her environment, and thus representative of David Copperfield’s own fears of being determined by his. Anderson observes:

What tends to remain constant in depictions of fallenness . . . is the attenuated autonomy and fractured identity of the fallen figure. In fact, some of the most familiar epithets for sexually immoral Victorian women--the “painted” woman, the

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<sup>6</sup> In Dickens in Search of Himself, Gwen Watkins gives an exhaustive account of all of the images of Dickensian split selves--what Watkins terms real, inner selves and artificial, constructed, second selves. In most cases, according to Watkins, Dickens’s own split self--his division between shamed, neglected child and the mask of confident, competent, controlling adult--is usually represented by two separate characters and these are usually either children or adult males. Watkins posits that “there is one scene in which feminine split selves indubitably confront each other,” and this scene is between Dombey and Son’s Edith Dombey and Alice Marwood (Watkins 129). Furthermore, according to Watkins, Dr. Manette of A Tale of Two Cities is “Dickens’ [sic] first attempt to bring two separate selves together in one character without the use of fantasy” (129). However, my argument about Nancy herself undermines both of Watkins statements: rather than representing the split self as two adult males and rather than waiting until the end of his career to represent a split self as inhabiting one character, Dickens represents the split self in one adult woman as early as 1837, in the character of Nancy.

“public woman,” the woman who “loses her character”--succinctly express the larger informing assumptions about the nature of the fallen state, its failure to present or maintain an authentic, private, or self-regulating identity. (2)

Anderson’s reference to “the woman who ‘loses her character’” resonates with Dickens’s own account of his feelings in the blacking factory about himself--of losing his thoughts and his self. To quote Robert Newsom again, in Dickens’s severe shame, his “very sense of identity is jeopardized” (9) and he is split between ideal self and shamed self, represented in Oliver Twist by Oliver and Nancy, respectively.

It is widely understood that Dickens creates in Oliver an alter-ego for himself. An orphan, Oliver is put to work at a coffin-maker’s shop and then is later exploited by Fagin, who surrounds him with low company and attempts to ruin him by leading him into a life of crime in the streets. Oliver’s experiences clearly parallel some of Dickens’s perceptions of his own childhood. He too felt himself to be an orphan, although his parents were a physical presence in his life until well into his successful adulthood. Like Fagin, they exploited him for money by placing him at work in the now-infamous Warren’s Blacking Factory. The connection between Dickens’s own childhood and Oliver’s is forged most strongly by the naming of Fagin. Bob Fagin was a real-life boy with whom Dickens worked at Warren’s Blacking Factory (Marcus 364). While Bob Fagin was kind to Dickens, he was also very much a part of Dickens’s experience and thus inseparable from the degradation that Dickens associated with it. Dickens’s use of this name makes clear the parallel between the degradation he associated in real life with the blacking factory and the degradation of Fagin and his gang of thieves, as well as revealing Dickens’s wish that he, like Oliver, could have escaped unscathed from the experience and regained what he felt to be his rightful inheritance of middle-class respectability. Although Dickens did gain that respectability, he

also carried with him a deep sense of shame, of being tainted and of having to conceal that taint, feelings that Oliver never experiences since his past is fully known, accepted, and sympathized with by the Maylies and Mr. Brownwood. Oliver's childhood reflects not only the experiences that Dickens felt himself to have suffered in the blacking factory, but more importantly, Oliver represents Dickens's fantasy of escaping the shame of that period of his life. Dickens's childhood experience of exploitation and its consequential shame is reflected not by Oliver, Dickens's overt alter-ego, but by Nancy.

Anderson, Nord, and Langbauer hit the nail on the head when they talk about Dickens's use of the prostitute as a figure upon which to displace his anxieties about his own shame, and yet he includes many signals that he is consciously doing more than simply assuaging shame by pinning it all on the fallen woman. To Anderson's and Nord's and Langbauer's arguments about displacement, I would add that Dickens's inclusion of a striking number of autobiographical parallels between his shamed self and Nancy evoke a strong sense that he was *consciously* using Nancy both to represent his shame and, further, to attempt an examination of the effects of this emotion.

Dickens felt himself to be emotionally and financially abandoned by his own parents. U. C. Knoepfelmacher states, "Though not a literal orphan, Charles Dickens . . . continued to regard himself as similarly 'deprived'" (78). Nancy, too, is orphaned and abandoned to the streets early on and at about the age of five, she is taken in by Fagin and quickly ruined, becoming a thief and a prostitute. While Oliver only lives among Fagin and his associates for a few months at most, Nancy has spent almost twelve years in Fagin's company. Nancy vehemently states to Fagin: "I thieved for you when I was a child not half as old as this!" pointing to Oliver. "I have been in the same trade, and in the same service, for twelve years since. . . ." (116). This number of years is well worth noting. On 9 February 1824, two days

after Dickens's twelfth birthday, his father secured the job at the blacking factory for him (Dickens, *My Early Years* 233). The number twelve is associated explicitly only with Nancy in the novel. Oliver is anywhere from ten to twelve years old when he falls in with Fagin; calculation of his age is difficult since Dickens only makes overt mention of it once in the novel (Noah Claypole asks Oliver, "How old are yer?" and Oliver replies, "Ten, sir" [42]). Only Nancy's background clearly resonates with what must have been a significant number of years in Dickens's mind. Nancy's twelve years with Fagin parallel Dickens's own first twelve years with his parents, culminating in the blacking factory episode, the height of what he felt to be their exploitation of him--what we could, in fact, call their prostitution of him for money to support themselves. While Fagin may act as a temporary bad parent to Oliver, he has been the only father and mother known to Nancy for twelve years; he has turned his dependent charge to prostitution and has benefited from her labor, while appearing to do very little himself. As such, Fagin comes to represent John and Elizabeth Dickens in their exploitation of their twelve-year-old son, in their sending him off to the blacking factory while they themselves continued to live, as long as was possible, a leisured life.<sup>7</sup> Even when imprisoned in the Marshalsea, John Dickens still continued to receive a pension and neither John nor Elizabeth worked. According to John Forster, Dickens's parents

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<sup>7</sup> Steven Marcus implies a parallel between Fagin and Dickens's father, saying that Fagin "threaten[s] to ruin, castrate, and destroy Oliver" and similarly that John Dickens "appeared to [Dickens] as destroyer and betrayer" (376). Marcus also picks up, if ever so briefly, on the idea that Dickens identifies Fagin with his mother, Elizabeth Dickens, saying that Fagin's is a "treacherous maternal care" (367). In her essay "Elizabeth Dickens: Model for Fagin," June Foley makes the explicit argument, as her title indicates, that Fagin is heavily based on Dickens's mother. Foley traces many strong parallels between Fagin and Elizabeth Dickens. Among these is Fagin's ability to imitate others, which Foley very convincingly connects to Elizabeth Dickens (230). Foley also draws attention to the fact that Fagin is in charge of "caring for the children, cooking, cleaning, sewing, and greeting visitors" and he is also "interested in clothing and jewelry, and addresses others with endearments," all of which demonstrate a feminized character (231). While Foley discusses Dickens and his mother in terms of the parent-child relationship between Oliver and Fagin, I arrive at my own conclusions that Fagin may represent Elizabeth Dickens through Fagin's relationship with Nancy, which seems to point more emphatically to a parent-child connection in that Nancy has been with Fagin for twelve years, since she was five, whereas Oliver is only with Fagin for short periods of time, beginning at around age ten.

had no want of bodily comforts there. [Dickens's] father's income, still going on, was amply sufficient for that; and in every respect indeed but elbow-room, I have heard him say, the family lived more comfortably in prison than they had done for a long time out of it. (1: 31)

And while his family was living in this relative comfort, Dickens was suffering “shame,” “grief and humiliation” (Forster 1: 26). In his one explicit attempt to break the silence with which his time in the blacking factory would forever remain veiled, Dickens writes:

That I suffered in secret, and that I suffered exquisitely, no one ever knew but I. How much I suffered, it is, as I have said already, utterly beyond my power to tell. No man's imagination can overstep the reality. (“The Autobiographical Fragment” 30)

While no man's imagination could fully envision his agony, and thus no man could sympathize with it, perhaps a woman's imagination could, in suffering that fate worse than death; as such, Nancy's degradation may be seen to parallel Dickens's own, as an agony that is both beyond a *man's* imagination and sympathy, as well as being beyond the power of words to reveal. When Nancy attempts to tell Rose that she is a prostitute, she finds that this information is, to use Dickens's words for his memory of the blacking factory, “beyond [her] power to tell.” She can only say that she has been brought up “in the midst of cold and hunger, and riot and drunkenness, and--and something worse than all. . . .” (267). Like Dickens, Nancy has been abandoned to the streets and in her refusal to allow Rose and, later, Mr. Brownlow to “rescue” her from this degraded life, Nancy once again embodies Dickens's own fears for himself during his months in the blacking factory. Dickens states about that time, “My rescue from this kind of existence I considered quite hopeless, and abandoned as such, altogether” (Forster 1: 30). Nancy's inability to leave her humiliation

results, as she herself states, from having lived this life for too long. After Rose pleads with Nancy to leave the streets, she replies that if anyone had spoken these words to her earlier, if she “had heard them years ago, they might have turned me from a life of sin and sorrow; but it is too late--it is too late!” (*Oliver Twist* 270). Dickens, in looking back at his time in the blacking factory, reveals a sentiment closely akin to Nancy’s; in the midst of his humiliation, he too felt that “rescue from this kind of existence [was] quite hopeless, and [that he was] abandoned as such, altogether” (Forster 1: 30). Shoring up Amanda Anderson’s observation about Dickens’s use of the prostitute Martha in *David Copperfield* to displace his own anxiety, here Dickens uses Nancy, abandoned and beyond rescue, to reveal the fears he had held for himself had he remained in the blacking factory, fears which, although he had literally escaped them, he could never forget, and thus could never figuratively escape.

The one responsible for Nancy’s degradation, shame, and confinement to the streets is Fagin, that character in whom Dickens most clearly evokes, both through Fagin’s name and his actions, a connection between Dickens’s novel and his own experiences at Warren’s. In particular, Dickens’s representation of Fagin’s relationship with Nancy reflects specifically on his own relationship with his mother, the figure whom Dickens held responsible for his humiliation and “servitude” in the blacking factory, just as Nancy holds Fagin responsible for her degradation. In June of 1824, John Dickens quarreled with the owner of the blacking factory and soon after removed his son from employment there. Kaplan refers to this event as “Charles’s deliverance from the blacking factory” but also tells us that “it was a redemption that his mother opposed” (43). Although John Dickens may have been responsible for finding Charles the job at the blacking factory, Elizabeth was responsible for

trying to send him back to it, trying to thwart his “redemption,” as Kaplan words it, and thus maintain his fallen condition. Dickens writes:

My mother set herself to accommodate the quarrel, and did so next day. She brought home a request for me to return next morning. . . . My father said I should go back no more, and should go to school. (qtd. in Kaplan 43)

Dickens also writes that “I never afterwards forgot, I never shall forget, I never can forget, that my mother was warm for my being sent back” (“The Autobiographical Fragment” 771-72). As twelve years had finally culminated in Dickens’s fall into the blacking factory, twelve years has culminated in Nancy’s becoming what she is, fallen woman and thief, in the lowest of company, utterly humiliated and ashamed of herself. Fagin is responsible for Nancy’s condition, just as Dickens felt his mother to be responsible for his own brush with degradation.<sup>8</sup> In her anger at him and resentment of him, Nancy screams at Fagin, “[Y]ou’re the wretch that drove me to [the streets] long ago; and that’ll keep me there, day and night, day and night, till I die!” (116). It must have seemed to Charles that Elizabeth Dickens would have done the same thing to him, not missing a single day in her attempt to send him back to the streets, the blacking factory, and shame. As Nancy feels that she is trapped with Fagin and Sikes forever, so too did Dickens feel that rescue from the blacking factory “was quite hopeless” (Forster 1: 30). If, in the end, his father hadn’t refused to send him back, some form of Nancy, good at heart but condemned to live out her life with Fagin and the gang and be “abandoned, as such, altogether,” must have seemed to be a possible

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<sup>8</sup> Dickens creates this link between maternal exploitation and prostitution in other of his works as well. In his sketch “The Old Pawnbroker’s Shop,” a mother and daughter are pawning the daughter’s love trinkets while a prostitute watches with a look of recognition, as if recalling that just such a situation of maternal exploitation led to her own eventual fall. And in *Dombey and Son*, Alice Marwood’s mother Mrs. Brown is certainly represented as responsible for her daughter’s sexual fall, and Edith Dombey’s mother is held responsible for her moral fall in marrying Mr. Dombey for money. The mother as responsible for fallenness is only implied in the sketch mentioned above, whereas the theme is much more explicitly represented in the later novel *Dombey and Son*.



and very terrible reality for Dickens. As Michael Slater observes, “An enduring sense of horrified dismay and ultimate betrayal . . . must, at the deepest level, have been those of Dickens towards his mother for the rest of his life” (11).

Dickens felt himself to be, like Nancy, the victim of careless and exploitative adults. He felt that his parents, who should have seen to his proper education and good breeding, instead ensured his shame and humiliation in the blacking factory. As Kaplan tells us, Dickens’s “companions were lower class and ignorant. Though they provided fellowship, he felt keenly the humiliation, the humbling of middle-class self-identity and self-worth” (39). In writing of this experience, Dickens himself chooses language which highlights his sense of having fallen, referring to “my descent” into the blacking factory and to the painful memory of “what I was once” during that time (“The Autobiographical Fragment” 767, 772). Remarkably, Oliver, as a reflection of Dickens himself among the den of degraded boys, does not express this sense of fallenness or humiliation; he is too innocent and too grateful to be taken care of, at first. Furthermore, Oliver escapes not only the physical degradation of Fagin and his gang, but also (and most importantly) he eschews any sense of shame at ever having been associated with them since he is seen only as their victim and since his new, respectable friends know all of his history and fault him for none of it.

Dickens preserves Oliver’s innocence and “purity” by displacing physical degradation and the self-conscious knowledge of it onto Nancy. In telling contrast to Oliver and in parallel to Dickens’s perception of himself, Nancy is mired in both physical degradation and emotional shame. More than once, Nancy voices a painful awareness of what she has become because of her surroundings and companions. When, in defense of Oliver, Nancy openly defies Sikes and Fagin, Sikes says contemptuously to her, “Do you know who you are, and what you are?” (116). Nancy responds, “Oh, yes, I know all about

it,” and she “laugh[s] hysterically and shak[es] her head from side to side, with a poor assumption of indifference” (116). Like her author and *for* him, Nancy knows and feels the humiliation of her situation.

Nancy’s sense of humiliation is demonstrated even more explicitly when she seeks out Rose Maylie’s help in saving Oliver from a life of crime and degradation. As Nancy waits for Rose, she “thought of the wide contrast which the small room would in another moment contain, she felt burdened with the sense of her own deep shame: and shrunk as though she could scarcely bear the presence of her with whom she had sought this interview” (Oliver Twist 266). Nancy and Rose are about the same age, they are the same sex, and although Nancy cannot know it, she and Rose are both orphans. And yet Nancy suffers a painful awareness of the difference between them, a difference based on her own taint as a prostitute and Rose’s “purity.” Nancy has been so long among such companions that she immediately recognizes “the wide contrast” between herself and Rose, and feels explicitly a sense of shame and fallenness.

Sometime after writing Oliver Twist (1837-38) and before writing David Copperfield (1849-50), Dickens attempted to represent his feelings of shame through autobiography, but in the end, he couldn’t do it. He never finished his overt attempt to reveal his humiliation; he shared the fragment he had written of it with John Forster alone; what we have of the fragment exists only in Forster’s biography of his friend. Instead of revealing himself directly, Dickens turned from a “true” account of his life to a disguised and partial account of it in David Copperfield; but more than ten years before his attempt at autobiography--either “real” or fictional--Dickens had already demonstrated in Oliver Twist (1837-38) his impulse to use his fiction to represent and displace his own pain. Dickens can write explicitly about shame because it belongs overtly to Nancy. The degrading associations with

the blacking factory and the Marshalsea that in his autobiographical fragment he confesses cause him “shame,” “grief and humiliation,” and strip him of his gender, making him “forget . . . even that I am a man” (768) become the shame, grief, and humiliation of a figure who is *not* a man, his prostitute Nancy.

About Dickens and the blacking factory, Steven Marcus observes: “Dickens could never forget the entire episode, but neither could he in certain senses confront it” (363); “he was at once virtually unable to speak about it and obsessively drawn to it” (364). Robert Newsom’s discussion of shame proves indispensable to an understanding of how Dickens’s sense of self was jeopardized and fractured, which in turn led to his great anxiety about self and his conscious displacement of this anxiety onto his prostitute Nancy, as detailed above. Newsom also posits that because shame “estrang[e]s or divid[e]s” the self from itself, the self “thus is open to examining itself” (7). As shame leads to a divided self, that split self then leads to self-examination. As implied by Dickens’s own words on the subject, his shame effected a fracturing of his self. In the estrangement of one fragment from the other, Dickens was then “open to examining [his] self.” This opportunity for self-examination may account for why Dickens was “obsessively drawn to” the memory of his shame and felt the need to recreate it in Nancy, as a way of examining shame and its effects on the self--Nancy’s self and, by proxy, his own.

Specifically, Dickens uses Nancy to represent one of the major consequences of shame, as he knew it. As the only shamed character in a novel that draws heavily upon Dickens’s own personal and quintessential experience of shame, Nancy serves as the embodiment of what happens to a shamed character--the self is split, just as Robert Newsom proposes about Dickens’s own shamed self and what Dickens recognized when he implied that his memories of shame fracture his identity. While Oliver proves to be the

fantasy of wholeness for Dickens, Nancy epitomizes for him not only shame (as Anderson, Langbauer, and Nord find prostitutes to do in general for Dickens), but also shame's result--the divided self--and, finally, the frightening and mortal consequences of such fragmentation. Using Nancy as his representative of shame, Dickens continually creates numerous images of division within and around her throughout the novel, indicating that the shamed self is always a ruptured one.

Nancy's first appearance in the story occurs immediately after the first major division within the novel's publication history. In May of 1837, Dickens's beloved sister-in-law Mary Hogarth died suddenly and unexpectedly. Dickens was devastated; he missed the installment of *Oliver Twist* for June of 1837; in July, he introduced Nancy, a clever, callous prostitute and seemingly a static character. When we first meet her in chapter 9, Nancy appears with another prostitute, Bet, as the two arrive at Fagin's lair:

. . . a couple of young ladies called to see the young gentlemen; one of whom was Bet, and the other Nancy. They wore a good deal of hair: not very neatly turned up behind; and were rather untidy about the shoes and stockings. They were not exactly pretty, perhaps; but they had a great deal of colour in their faces; and looked quite stout and hearty. Being remarkably free and agreeable in their manners, Oliver thought them very nice girls indeed. As there is no doubt they were. (70)

Bet's and Nancy's unkempt hair, painted faces, and "remarkably free and agreeable. . . manners" instantly mark them as prostitutes, and Dickens's tone in that final brief sentence fragment concluding this paragraph marks them as objects of irony, akin to Mr. Bumble or Mrs. Mann of the workhouse, and as such, hardly sympathetic characters.

Throughout the rest of this first third of the novel, Nancy appears again during the scene in which Fagin plans to recover Oliver from the magistrate where he has been taken

on charge of picking pockets. Here, once again, Dickens presents Nancy as an object of irony and as the stereotypical prostitute. He refers to her often as “the young lady” (92, 93), by which he means that she is anything *but* a lady. In this scene, she also proves herself to be a skilled actress in pretending to be Oliver’s poor sister on the lookout for her lost brother, as she rehearses the act before Fagin and Bill Sikes:

“Oh, my brother! My poor, dear, sweet, innocent little brother!” exclaimed Nancy, bursting into tears, and wringing the little basket and the street-door key in an agony of distress. “What has become of him! Where have they taken him to! Oh, do have pity, and tell me what’s been done with the dear boy, gentlemen; do, gentlemen, if you please, gentlemen!”

Having uttered these words in a most lamentable and heart-broken tone: to the immeasurable delight of her hearers: Miss Nancy paused, winked to the company, nodded smilingly round, and disappeared. (93)

Fagin and Sikes sing her praises and the narrator calls her “the accomplished Nancy,” once again marking her as an object for the narrator’s own knowing winks to the audience about Nancy’s accomplishments, in acting as well as in other professions. The narrator makes similarly ironic gestures several times more throughout this scene, attributing to Nancy the streetwalker a delicacy in walking unaccompanied in the streets: “that young lady made the best of her way to the police-office; whither, notwithstanding a little natural timidity consequent upon walking through streets alone and unprotected, she arrived in perfect safety afterwards” (93). With continuing irony, the narrator alludes to Nancy’s delicacy of constitution, as she seems to suffer a shock upon hearing that her “dear brother” has been taken home by some gentleman: “In a dreadful state of doubt and uncertainty, the agonised young woman staggered to the gate, and then: exchanging her faltering walk for a good,

swift, steady run: returned by the most devious and complicated route she could think of, to the domicile of the Jew” where she faithfully reports her findings to Fagin and Sikes (94).

While Dickens admires Nancy’s acting abilities, he also clearly views her as just another criminal--smart, clever, but not sympathetic and, as such, neither a complex character, nor one with whom he identifies himself--at least, not yet.

Dickens continues to construct Nancy as simply a common prostitute and member of Fagin’s gang when, in chapter 15, Nancy appears again, and is again knowingly dubbed “the young lady” (106).<sup>9</sup> After a brief exchange with Fagin, Nancy leaves the den with Sikes accompanying her and the two then happen to run across Oliver. Once again, Nancy assumes the role of the hysterical sister, overwrought now by the recovery of her brother. Oliver is “startled by a young woman screaming out very loud, ‘Oh, my dear brother!’ And he had hardly looked up, to see what the matter was, when he was stopped by having a pair of arms thrown tight round his neck” (107). Oliver resists Nancy’s grasp and cries out, “‘Who is it? What are you stopping me for?’” (107). The narrator tells us, “The only reply to this, was a great number of loud lamentations from the young woman who had embraced him” (107). Nancy, in her feigned passion, makes quite a scene. She cries out, “‘I’ve found him! Oh! Oliver! Oliver! Oh you naughty boy, to make me suffer sich [sic] distress on your account! Come home, dear, come, Oh, I’ve found him. Thank gracious goodness heavins [sic], I’ve found him!’” (107). Nancy’s performance is entirely convincing:

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<sup>9</sup> Karin Lesnik-Oberstein makes interesting observations about Dickens’s use of ironic language in *Oliver Twist*, saying that the narrator is “most involved with this strategy [of] saying what is not meant and meaning what is not said” (90). Lesnik-Oberstein theorizes that “the narrator’s play with these strategies. . . reveals that he is the producer and user of *all* languages present [which then] necessitates his building in of protective moves to attempt to preserve his own moral position within those carried in the languages of hypocrisy. However, protective moves cannot erase the revelation of the narrator’s knowledge and command of all the languages used in the novel. . . . [W]hile claiming the moral higher ground, he is also always already contaminated and contaminating” (91). This idea of the narrator’s attempting to inhabit “the moral higher ground” while simultaneously revealing himself to be “contaminated and contaminating” dovetails with my arguments about the numerous divisions within the novel, among which is the split between purity and degradation, as represented by Oliver and Nancy.

With these incoherent exclamations, the young woman burst into another fit of crying, and got so dreadfully hysterical, that a couple of women who came up at the moment asked a butcher's boy . . . whether he didn't think he had better run for the doctor. (107)

And so, thanks to Nancy's whole-hearted performance of hysteria, Oliver is "recovered." As the curtain drops on the September installment of the novel and as Nancy and Sikes march their charge back to Fagin, Oliver weakly utters a "few cries," but, we are told, "It was of little moment, indeed, whether they were intelligible or no; for there was nobody to care for them, had they been ever so plain" (108). Nancy has accomplished her mission for Fagin and shows not an ounce of compassion for Oliver here. After this section of the novel, Dickens missed the October installment and no new material appeared until the beginning of November.

On 3 November 1837, Dickens wrote to John Forster, "I am glad you like Oliver this month--especially glad that you particularize the first chapter. I hope to do great things with Nancy. If I can only work out the idea I have formed of her, and of the female who is to contrast with her, I think I may defy Mr. Hayward and all his works" (Letters, 328).

While Dickens is here referring to the contrast he hoped to form between his prostitute Nancy and Rose Maylie, the pure and innocent girl who could have been ruined had not Mrs. Maylie saved her early on from poverty, Dickens's words to Forster resonate with another contrast, as well. Just like the palimpsest that Dickens himself proves to be, his words to Forster prove to have more than one layer of meaning. The November break in publication marks a new contrast for Nancy--that between her old self and the new idea Dickens began to form of her. With the resumption of the novel after a month's break, the November 1837 installment signals the beginning of a break or division within Dickens's

representation of Nancy, as she abruptly changes from hardened prostitute intent on recovering the orphan Oliver to forlorn woman, grieving over an unrequited love for and abusive relationship with Bill Sikes. After the missed October installment, Nancy begins to sympathize with Oliver and further, she becomes willing to sacrifice herself to maintain his purity (his integrity and wholeness). Also new to her character, she suffers from shame over her fallen condition, and finally she dies a horrible death, having sacrificed herself for Oliver and having failed in protecting herself at all, in the end. In November 1837, then, Dickens begins to paint Nancy with far different colors than he had in the first third of the novel, and in this way she proves to be two selves: the initial Nancy, hardened and bold, and the shamed and compassionate Nancy who forms such a stark contrast to Dickens's first portrayal of the character. In the first chapter of the November installment, the chapter Dickens was "especially glad" that Forster "particularize[d]," Nancy undergoes some radical changes which yield scenes directly antithetical to the ones described above. Suddenly, in only the second sentence of chapter 16, Nancy is no longer "the young lady" and "Miss Nancy," but "the girl" (109). This shift in diction is an important one for Dickens, heralding Nancy's goodness and vulnerability, and appearing always when Dickens wishes to evoke sympathy for her, as in this scene, where Nancy begins to exhibit a far different character from that of the stereotype presented in those chapters preceding the missed October installment. Now, instead of being able to maintain a "good, swift, steady run" (94) as she had in chapter 13, Nancy is "quite unable to support, any longer, the rapid rate at which they had hitherto moved" (109). Hers is no longer the hardened body capable of physical endurance but a softer, weaker, more fragile body deserving of sympathy. In this scene also, not only her physicality but also her personality changes. Here, her behavior runs counter to



that of earlier scenes as she evinces for the first time her tender feelings for Bill Sikes, telling him that, if he were in prison,

“I wouldn’t hurry by, if it was you that was coming out to be hung, the next time eight o’clock struck, Bill. I’d walk round and round the place till I dropped, if the snow was on the ground, and I hadn’t a shawl to cover me.” (110)

This passage establishes a much different tone for Nancy. No longer the hardened prostitute, she is now a sympathetic woman tragically in love with a hardened criminal. When Sikes responds roughly to her speech, she tries to assume her former careless character but she fails:

The girl burst into a laugh; drew her shawl more closely round her; and they walked away. But Oliver felt her hand tremble; and, looking up in her face as they passed a gas-lamp, saw that it had turned a deadly white. (110)

Even before Nancy’s trembling and blanching make clear that she suffers from Bill’s reply, Dickens’s reference to her as “the girl,” instead of “the young lady” or “Miss Nancy” signals the way in which we are to understand her character now, as one radically divided from what she was just a short time before and now deserving of readers’ sympathy instead of their contempt.

Also worth noting in the sudden shift in Dickens’s representation of Nancy is the contrast between her performance of hysteria that finally culminates in the retrieval of Oliver, and her genuinely hysterical behavior in an attempt to protect Oliver after returning him to Fagin’s den. Recall that earlier in the novel, when she adeptly enacts the role of the distraught sister, worried to distraction over her poor lost brother, she is so convincing that witnesses to the scene consider sending for a doctor for her (107). Nancy’s performance of hysteria is perfect there; however, in chapter 16 (again, the first chapter of the November

installment), her hysteria is no longer performed but is instead very real. Nancy “screams” and “struggle[s] violently” with Sikes when he threatens to set his dog upon Oliver (114). She turns “pale and breathless from the struggle” to defend the helpless child (114). Her face is “quite colorless from the passion of rage” she experiences at the thought of any harm coming to Oliver and at her own part in bringing him back to the thieves’ den (115). She “laugh[s] hysterically” and “pour[s] out the words [against Sikes and Fagin] in one continuous and vehement scream” (116). And finally, having exhausted words entirely, she

said nothing more; but, tearing her hair and dress in a transport of frenzy, made such a rush at the Jew as would probably have left signal marks of her revenge upon him, had not her wrists been seized by Sikes at the right moment; upon which, she made a few ineffectual struggles: and fainted. (116)

Utterly gone is the prostitute who winks knowingly at the gang during her preparations for recovering Oliver for Fagin; gone is the hardened woman who tosses back her glass of liquor, dons her costume of propriety, the little bonnet and shawl, and equips herself with her props, the respectable little basket and set of keys, all for the sake of restoring Oliver to the criminal underworld of London; and gone is the woman who paid no attention to Oliver’s pathetic “few cries” at the end of the September installment. No longer is she simply playing the part of the angst-ridden sister; now she *is* that girl, and her genuine hysteria is far more severe than ever was her performance of it, so much so that even before Nancy’s hysteria reaches its highest pitch, Sikes observes to Fagin, ““The girl’s gone mad”” (114). Interestingly, even Nancy’s hysteria contributes to the imagery of division in the novel as her “madness” here calls into question the integrity of her sanity.

Of further interest, while Nancy’s sanity may be called into question by Fagin and Sikes here, her behavior in this scene is in no way divided but is, instead, wholly concerned

with protecting Oliver from shame, and specifically, from the shame that she herself has endured by living among the gang and thieving for Fagin and Sikes. She has moved from the entirely unconcerned, hardened prostitute who delivers Oliver back into degradation to the wholly concerned and anxious woman who flies to Oliver's rescue. As Dickens continues to develop Nancy, she will no longer be either/or in this way (either wholly loyal to Fagin or wholly concerned for Oliver) but will come to be both/and (both loyal to Fagin and Sikes and anxious to save Oliver), leaving her a divided figure, a split self, divided between her degraded and better selves--still in love with Sikes and still working to save Oliver.

In the first third of the novel, when Nancy puts on a performance, the character she assumes is a respectable one--Oliver's poor hysterical sister, a role she assumes in order to mask the hardened crafty prostitute beneath. Throughout the rest of the novel, however, whenever Nancy plays a role, she pretends to be bold and brassy and careless in order to fool Fagin and Sikes. What Dickens had originally depicted her as--the hardened prostitute--she now performs in order to help Oliver. When she assumes this role, Dickens once again refers to her as "the young lady" and as "Miss Nancy," those signal phrases which he had used initially to indicate her real hardness and which now note her donning of the costume of hardened behavior. When Fagin sees Nancy for the first time after her genuinely hysterical outburst over Oliver, she is once again "Miss Nancy" and she

burst into a loud laugh; and, swallowing a glass of brandy, shook her head with an air of defiance, and burst into sundry exclamations of "Keep the game a-going!" "Never say die!" and the like. These seemed at once to have the effect of re-assuring both gentlemen; for the Jew nodded his head with a satisfied air, and resumed his seat: as did Mr. Sikes likewise. (136)

Nancy's role-playing has reversed itself. What she pretended to be in the first part of the story in order to advance Fagin's designs she now really is, a sister-like figure who feels great compassion for Oliver and is concerned for his well-being; what she really was--hardened prostitute--in the first part of the novel, she then pretends to be at key points in the rest of the novel in order to protect Oliver.

Tellingly, the next chapter (chapter 17) in the November installment also draws attention to this radical change in Nancy's character. Chapter 16 closes with Nancy in a faint, her friend and fellow prostitute "Miss Betsy"<sup>10</sup> entering just in time to "throw water over her friend, and perform other feminine offices for the promotion of her recovery," and with Oliver, "sick and weary, . . . soon [falling] sound asleep" (117). Dickens then opens chapter 17 with a discussion of the "custom on the stage" of alternating between tragic and comic scenes, and gives examples of the possible content of these scenes. While Dickens never states it overtly, in the examples he gives of the first tragic scene, Dickens alludes to Oliver as he was last seen but a few sentences ago at the end of chapter 16. At the end of that chapter, Oliver is "sick and weary; and he soon fell asleep" (117). Now, at the beginning of chapter 17, Dickens refers to the "hero" of "all good, murderous melodramas," saying that "the hero sinks upon his straw bed, weighed down by fetters and misfortunes" (117). The shift between Oliver's exhausted state at the end of chapter 16 and this melodramatic hero's sinking under "fetters and misfortunes" at the very beginning of chapter 17 clearly, although indirectly, establishes Oliver as the hero of the novel (although some critics would have a great deal to say in opposition to this idea) (117). If, then, Oliver is the hero of the novel (and Dickens certainly meant him to be a hero of some sort since he is "the principle of Good surviving through every adverse circumstance, and triumphing at

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<sup>10</sup> Notice the marker "Miss" here used to denote Betsy as a prostitute in the same way that Dickens marks Nancy with the title earlier.

last”), then the passage that follows this description of the stage hero and that goes on to describe the stage heroine may lead us to ask, who is the heroine of the novel? The next tragic scene Dickens describes runs thus: “We behold, with throbbing bosoms, the heroine in the grasp of a proud and ruthless baron: her virtue and her life alike in danger; drawing forth her dagger to preserve the one at the cost of the other” (117). Just as Oliver is the hero sinking down on his bed of straw at the end of chapter 16, Nancy is the heroine in the grasp of Fagin and Sikes at the end of that chapter, as well, and so this first passage of chapter 17 implicates not only Oliver as the hero of the novel, but also Nancy as its heroine. While Sikes and Fagin are not barons, they are certainly “proud and ruthless”; and while Nancy, as a prostitute, has already lost her “virtue” as it applies to chastity, she exhibits a different kind of virtue which, by the end of the novel, she will sacrifice her life to preserve: the virtue of her compassion and concern for Oliver, Dickens’s innocent self.

Further emphasizing Nancy’s crossing of the divide between caricature and sympathetic figure, chapter 17 also presents most of the biographical parallels between Nancy and her author that I have discussed above, establishing between Dickens and his prostitute a new sympathy based on shared experience. In addition, Nancy not only represents Dickens’s shamed self but also the consequences of shame. As the novel progresses, she, like her author, exhibits a divided self.<sup>11</sup> After the missed October installment, Nancy not only changes into a radically different character, divided between

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<sup>11</sup> William Axton identifies such internal division in the character of Esther in *Bleak House*, saying that “Dickens designed the inconsistencies [in Esther’s character] to illustrate an inner conflict between her sense of an inherited moral taint and personal worthlessness, prompted by the circumstance of her illegitimate birth, and a contrary awareness that she is a free moral agent, responsible for her quality and identity through her own acts” (546). As I find in Nancy, Axton also sees in Esther that the effects of shame (“moral taint”) are divisive to one’s sense of self. While he never mentions any relationship between Dickens’s own shame and Esther, I find it fascinating that Axton echoes Dickens’s autobiographical fragment in saying of Esther that “even now, a mature and happy woman, she cannot look back on those days [of her childhood with her horrible aunt] without tears” (549). Recall that Dickens writes that “even now, famous and caressed and happy, I . . . wander desolately back to that time of my life” (“The Autobiographical Fragment” 768). Surely, Axton must be alluding to Dickens’s own childhood here or, at the very least, to that of David Copperfield.

sections of the novel, but she also becomes a character divided within herself, thus illustrating the results of shame as Dickens understood them.<sup>12</sup>

Fagin is the first to identify, explicitly, this split within Nancy, saying about Nancy's violent reaction to the mistreatment of Oliver, "The worst of these women is, that a very little thing serves to call up some long-forgotten feeling; and the best of them is, that it never lasts. Ha! ha! The man against the child, for a bag of gold!" (139). This passage occurs in chapter 19, wherein Fagin and Sikes have just laid their plans to use Oliver in the burglary of the Maylie house. Here, Fagin divines that Nancy is torn between her compassion for the child and her love for the man, and Fagin predicts that Nancy will choose Bill over Oliver. What Fagin fails to foresee, however, is that Nancy, true to her newly divided self, will figure out a way to choose both Bill and Oliver as she eventually warns Rose Maylie that Oliver must be protected and, simultaneously, refuses to name Bill (or turn in Fagin, for that matter) as the criminals plotting against Oliver, thus protecting all of them.<sup>13</sup>

Images of Nancy divided within herself continue into chapter 20. Oliver finds himself alone in Fagin's den and, after frightening himself badly in looking at a book on "the history of the lives and trials of great criminals" and their "dreadful crimes" that Fagin has left him, he drops to his knees and prays "that he might be rescued from his present dangers; and that if any aid were to be raised up for a poor outcast boy, who had never known the

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<sup>12</sup> Several critics have briefly noted divisions within Nancy as part of their larger arguments. Among these critics, George Watt observes about Nancy that she "is both pure and corrupt at the same time" in her attempt to help Oliver and in her status as a prostitute (16). Patricia Ingham states that Nancy "represents the two conflicting versions of the prostitute," hardened whore and the whore with the heart of gold (50). John Romano says of Nancy that she is "a mixture. . . of 'hard' and 'soft' elements. If she is a more unflinching realist than Sikes, on the one hand, she is also, on the other, joined to the positively ethereal Rose Maylie by a bond of 'original nature'" (134). Vincent Newey writes, "The presentation of Nancy inaugurates a thematic tension between the self experientially projected and the self ideologically consumed that will, in one form or another, pervade the corpus of Dickens's writings" (94-95).

<sup>13</sup> Ironically, Nancy's intentions are thwarted by both of the men she struggles to protect, as Fagin tells Bill Sikes that she has betrayed him and as Bill murders her, actions which lead to the inevitable demise of both Fagin and Sikes.

love of friends or kindred, it might come to him now: when, desolate and deserted, he stood alone in the midst of wickedness and guilt “ (141). Oliver then hears “a rustling noise behind him” and turns to find that Nancy is now in the room with him (141). The narrator never tells us how long she has been there or how much of Oliver’s prayer for salvation she has heard, but her response to Oliver in this scene indicates that she has heard a great deal of it and that, if she had previously made up her mind to side unconditionally with Fagin and Sikes in their machinations, she is now, once again, torn. Her voice is “tremulous,” as if her resolve is now shaky, and she is “very pale” (141). She cries, “God forgive me! [. . .] I never thought of this!” (141). The reader is never told explicitly what “this” is, but if she has just heard Oliver lamenting his outcast state and pleading for help, perhaps Nancy is identifying her own outcast state with his and once again, as she did in her genuinely hysterical scene, she feels the need to protect him and save him from becoming the degraded and lost character that she is now. Her divided mind manifests itself physically as she “caught her throat; and, uttering a gurgling sound, struggled and gasped for breath”; she “beat her hands upon her knees, and her feet upon the ground; and, suddenly stopping, drew her shawl close round her: and shivered with cold” (141). Whether she intentionally tries to strangle herself or whether she suffers a panic attack that renders her short of breath here, one thing is clear. Nancy is so torn between her old, hardened life and her “better feelings” for Oliver that physically she is turned against herself, struggling with herself, either to extinguish her life with her own hands or to recover her breath in the face of her own anxiety (142). Here, through her actions, Nancy implies her divided state of mind which is made manifest in her assault upon herself. Later, in chapter 26, she speaks explicitly of her self-division. After Oliver has gone missing and is supposed by all to be dead after the botched burglary, Nancy tells Fagin: “I shall be glad to have him away from my eyes, and to know that the worst is

over. I can't bear to have him about me. The sight of him turns me against myself, and all of you'" (175). Turned physically against herself earlier in the novel by her feelings for Oliver, Nancy's emotional division continues here as she is torn between her better feelings for the helpless child and her attachment and loyalty to Sikes and, in part, to Fagin.<sup>14</sup> She implies here that Oliver's absence will save her from these conflicting emotions, by sparing her anymore thought on the subject of his well-being; however, this is not to be. The catalyst for her split--Oliver--resurfaces in the conversation between Fagin and Monks as they plot to recover and corrupt him; Nancy overhears them and must act to save Oliver once again. And here again, Nancy's very actions indicate her division of inclination. After she leaves Fagin's den to return to Sikes, she evinces yet another struggle with herself. Out in the street, she is at first

wholly bewildered and unable to pursue her way. Suddenly she arose; and hurrying on, in a direction quite opposite to that in which Sikes was awaiting her return, quickened her pace, until it gradually resolved into a violent run. After completely exhausting herself, she stopped to take a breath; and, as if suddenly recollecting herself, and deploring her inability to do something she was bent upon, wrung her hands, and burst into tears. It might be that her tears relieved her, or that she felt the full hopelessness of her condition; but she turned back; and hurrying with nearly as great rapidity in the contrary direction: partly to recover lost time, and partly to keep pace with the violent current of her own thoughts; soon reached the dwelling where she had left the housebreaker. (262)

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<sup>14</sup> Vincent Newey reads Nancy's statement here differently, stating about these lines that "it is not only because she hates the cruelty she is implicated in and might be tempted to expose but because Oliver reminds her of her own abuse" (93).



She runs first one way and then the other, torn between old loyalties and new compassion. When she finally returns to Sikes, her dividedness continues, as Dickens calls attention to her “abstracted” manner and implicitly suggests that she has reached her decision to help Oliver and that such a step has cost her “no common struggle” (262). Even Sikes, who seems mostly unaware of her torn state of mind, pinpoints her divided self, telling her, ““You look like a corpse come to life again”” (263). Nancy’s character has been divided between sections of the novel as Dickens paints her first as tainted prostitute and then as heroine; she has been divided within herself between illicit love and unmerited loyalty for Fagin and Sikes, and life-saving compassion for Oliver.<sup>15</sup> And finally, in her decision to help the good boy and protect the bad men in her life, she represents the ultimate division of and from herself--someone who has died and risen again--leaving behind an old self and assuming a new shape.

Images of division continually dog Nancy’s steps through what little remains of her life after she has reached her decision to help Oliver. When Nancy first approaches Rose, Dickens spends quite some time detailing her split self, torn between shame and pride. He writes of Nancy:

The girl’s life had been squandered in the streets, and among the most noisome of the stews and dens of London, but there was something of the woman’s original nature left in her still; and when she heard a light step approaching the door opposite to that by which she had entered, and thought of the wide contrast which the small

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<sup>15</sup> Gwen Watkins identifies a strong pattern in Dickens’s later novels of “death and rebirth plots and sub-plots” (135), seeing these as representative of Dickens’s attempt to come to terms with his own divided self as he creates scene after scene in which a false self dies so that the true, inner self may return to life. For instance, Watkins identifies John Rokesmith and John Harmon, and Eugene Wrayburn and Bradley Headstone, of Our Mutual Friend, as doubles for each other, respectively, and sees the death of one man in each pair as the rebirth of the other.

room would in another moment contain, she felt burdened with the sense of her own deep shame. . . .

But struggling with these better feelings was pride,--the vice of the lowest and most debased creatures no less than of the high and self-assured. The miserable companion of thieves and ruffians, the fallen outcast of low haunts, the associate of the scourings of the jails and hulks, living within the shadow of the gallows itself,--even this degraded being felt too proud to betray a feeble gleam of the womanly feeling which she thought a weakness, but which alone connected her with that humanity, of which her wasting life had obliterated so many, many traces when a very child. (266)

As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, Dickens had marked this contrast between Rose and Nancy as one of great importance to him. And yet here, as I also stated earlier, Dickens creates not just a contrast between Nancy and Rose but one between Nancy and Nancy--between what she is at the beginning of the novel and what she becomes by its end. In the passages above, describing Nancy's initial feelings at meeting Rose, Dickens again illustrates the division within Nancy herself, as she is torn between shame and pride. And what's more, Dickens draws an implicit comparison between fractured Nancy and himself here, stating that Nancy's "pride [is] the vice of the lowest and most debased creatures no less than of the high and self-assured"--i.e., of himself. The comparison between Nancy and himself is an obvious one only if one knows, as we do, that he shared not only Nancy's pride but also her shame, that like his prostitute he too was torn between putting on a mask of confidence and control while all the while, his own "better feelings" of shame and vulnerability--those feelings that "connect [him] with that humanity, of which [his] wasting life had obliterated so many, many traces when a very child" in the blacking factory--call out

for sympathetic understanding from others. But this understanding can only be reached if one reveals one's pain and shame, something Dickens could never bring himself to do in his lifetime with anyone but John Forster. Like his prostitute, Dickens perceives his degradation and shame as a "weakness," something that had to be painted over for his entire life, which in turn leads him to yearn for sympathy and reject it, simultaneously, as Nancy does in her scenes with Rose. While Nancy presents her shamed history to Rose and plaintively tells her, "Oh, lady, lady! . . . if there was more like you, there would be fewer like me" (267), Nancy also refuses to allow Rose to help her. She tells Rose that "you *are* the first that ever blessed me with such words as these, [words of kindness and compassion], and if I had heard them years ago, they might have turned me from a life of sin and sorrow; but it is too late--it is too late!" (269-70).

An interesting shift in emotions occurs in this scene, however. While like Dickens, Nancy is initially split between shame and pride, unlike her author, she does swallow her pride in order to reveal her story to Rose and get some sympathy for it. She overcomes her pride, however, only to encounter yet another division which still causes her to refuse the redemption Rose offers her--not out of pride but out of love. Nancy goes on to say that she cannot be rescued because she cannot bring herself to abandon Bill Sikes. She says to Rose, "I must go back. Whether it is God's wrath for the wrong I have done, I do not know; but I am drawn back to him through every suffering and ill usage: and should be, I believe, if I knew that I was to die by his hand at last" (270). Nancy is divided within and against herself, yet again. Drawn back to Bill and torn by her inability to choose wholly him or wholly Oliver, she attempts to choose both. This is the split decision that leads to Nancy's death. She can neither leave Bill nor can she refuse to try to help save Oliver, and in attempting to do both, she effectually commits suicide.

While it was not “too late” for Dickens to turn his life around after his time in the blacking factory, his inability to swallow his pride, expose his shame and find relief from the memory or simply to dismiss it dictated that in some senses, recovery *was* too late for him, although he would not realize this until the end of his life--if even then. Dickens suggests through Nancy--and, by implication, for himself--that the self that remains divided in any major fashion--whether by pride and shame, or by shamed love and compassionate love--is bound for destruction.

Interestingly, Nancy’s divided state is reflected not only in her actions and emotions but in the very specifications of time and place with which Dickens surrounds her, as her final fragmentation draws ever closer. After their first meeting, Rose asks how she will be able to find Nancy and Nancy replies: “Every Sunday night, from eleven until the clock strikes twelve . . . I will walk on London Bridge if I am alive” (270). Nancy appoints as their meeting place the bridge, symbolizing her own movement back and forth between two sides as she goes between Fagin and Sikes, on the one hand, and Rose and Mr. Brownlow, on the other. Nancy’s choice of the last day of the week and the last hour of that day--signifying the death of the old week and the birth of a new day--also symbolize division as Nancy is torn between her two selves--her old self in love with Sikes and bound for death, and her new self committed to saving Oliver and redeeming herself; her proud self and her shamed self; her fallen self and her better self; the old Nancy and the new.

All of Nancy’s fragmented feelings and actions culminate in her final decision to do two things: to help Oliver and to protect Sikes and Fagin. Because she chooses this divided decision, because she remains divided until the last, she cannot survive. Everything we have seen her do--her attempts to recover Oliver for Fagin and her attempts to save him from Fagin; her loyalty to Fagin and her hatred of him; her simultaneous attempt to save Oliver

and to save Bill--all have reflected a fractured self. After showing the reader what such a self looks like, Dickens then goes on to illustrate what he believes to be the consequences of the split self: in the end, it simply cannot survive. In her final living moments with Sikes, Dickens demonstrates what all of Nancy's divisions inevitably come to--the ultimate splintering of the self in its death.

Numerous critics have offered a wide range of interpretations of Nancy's murder and of what Dickens is trying to accomplish with it. These readings seem to fall within three broad categories: the murder as 1. punishment of illicit sexuality; 2. punishment of female sexuality and empowerment; and 3. redemption and transcendence of the purified Nancy. In the first of these categories, J. Hillis Miller says of Nancy's murder and Sikes's death, "The tragic end of the Sikes-Nancy liaison is final judgment on the futility of the attempt to keep love alive within a society which is excluded from the daylight of law and convention. . . . Sikes and Nancy are inevitably destroyed by their guilty love, a love that is guilty because it is outside social sanctions" (51). In the second category of criticism, David Holbrook sees Nancy's murder as Dickens's fantasy of "avoiding the murderous dangers of aroused female sexuality" as it is represented by his prostitute (20). Laurie Langbauer interprets the murder as Dickens's "need to beat wayward women into line" (*Women and Romance* 153) and Brenda Ayres states that "women like the fiery Nancy pose a threat to men intent upon holding their superior position of authority within domesticity" (134). For Ayres, since Nancy is "a woman of passion--thus a social aberrant--she is doomed to die a fitting violent death" (135) and in killing her, Dickens seeks to maintain his own "superior position of authority" over her. Finally, in the third general group of interpretations of the murder, George Watt states, "Nancy's death is the ultimate fall, yet she rises through it. It is the confirmation of her moral advancement" (17). Furthermore, Watt declares that "Nancy dies

a pure woman [since she] dies in the act of saving, not in the act of destroying or corrupting” (17). As I see it, Nancy’s murder serves a two-pronged purpose (thus, a divided purpose, like everything else about her and her author). First, by murdering her, Dickens shows that the divided self cannot survive. And second, if Dickens sees in her his own divided self (as I have tried to show through the parallels that he constructs between himself and his prostitute), her murder may be his attempt to suppress that divided self. In this attempt at suppression, however, he denies his divided self which then leads to even greater division for him at the end of his own life and, eventually, to his own death. In his inability to reconcile the fragments of his divided self, he brings upon himself the very end he had envisioned for Nancy--death.

Throughout Oliver Twist, Dickens has consistently portrayed Nancy’s inconsistency, in her abrupt metamorphosis from one character into another, in her struggles within herself, in her feelings as she is torn between Oliver and Bill Sikes, and in the imagery which surrounds her, as well. Dickens’s construction of her murder scene is no different: images of doubleness and fragmentation accompany her here, and extend even beyond her death. Her murder occurs right before dawn--again, a time which, like midnight, implies a dividing line between old and new and, ironically, death and life, suggesting that Nancy’s coming demise is actually a release for her, perhaps from her divided struggles (316).

When Sikes bursts in upon Nancy in their shared room, she is “lying half-dressed” upon the bed (315). As Bill grapples with her, she pleads with him to let her go to Mr. Brownlow and Rose, saying,

“[T]he gentleman, and that dear lady, told me to-night of a home in some foreign country where I could end my days in solitude and peace. Let me see them again, and beg them, on my knees, to show the same mercy and goodness to you; and let us

both leave this dreadful place, and far apart lead better lives, and forget how we have lived, except in prayers, and never see each other more. It is never too late to repent.

They told me so--I feel it now. . . ." (316)

Gone is the Nancy who cries to Rose, "it is too late--it is too late" for Rose to rescue her (270). While it may be "never too late to repent," it is too late to be rescued (270). Nancy's split decision to choose both Oliver and Bill Sikes leads to Bill's striking her down with two blows (one for each part of her divided self, perhaps). Then, finally, he takes a club and extinguishes her life entirely (316-317). Dawn comes and sheds light on "the body" and the reader might think that this is the end of Nancy and that in her end, she finally reaches some kind of integral state of being and some kind of relief from division, but this is not the case. Fascination with Nancy's fractured self doesn't end for Dickens with her murder. At first, she continues as a ghost to haunt Sikes, but even this wholeness is finally denied her as she becomes only a pair of "widely staring eyes" that follow him everywhere:

They were but two, but they were everywhere. If he shut out the sight, there came the room with every well-known object--some, indeed, that he would have forgotten, if he had gone over its contents from memory--each in its accustomed place. The body was in *its* place, and its eyes were as he saw them when he stole away. He got up, and rushed into the field without. The figure was behind him. He re-entered the shed, and shrunk down once more. The eyes were there, before he had lain himself along. (322)

Nancy has exploded into any number of parts now--the dead body in their shared room, the ghost that haunts Sikes's every step, and the disembodied eyes that, although only two, are "everywhere." Sikes discovers that simply killing Nancy will not lay her to rest. It would seem that for Dickens, the divided self can never be made whole, even in her death, nor can

she ever be escaped. As she haunts Sikes until his death in the novel, she would also haunt Dickens until his.

Nancy's death results from more than her passion or her waywardness or her sexuality or her ability to transcend her fallen state and be redeemed. In addition to all of these motivations, Dickens murders Nancy to show the final end of the divided self: it can neither survive, nor can it be entirely dissolved; it remains forever fragmented. Because Nancy represents Dickens's shame and his own divided self, in murdering her, he may have been attempting to rid himself of these haunting aspects of his identity. However, in the same way that he could never forget his shame and humiliation, he also could never forget Nancy.

In 1841, three years after the publication of Oliver Twist, Dickens returned to Nancy in the preface to the third edition of the novel. Here, Dickens chooses to conclude his protests for the realism of the novel by discussing Nancy. He writes in the final paragraph of the preface:

It is useless to discuss whether the conduct and character of the girl seems natural or unnatural, probable or improbable, right or wrong. IT IS TRUE. . . . From the first introduction of that poor wretch, to her laying her bloody head upon the robber's breast, there is not one word exaggerated or over-wrought. It is emphatically God's truth, for it is the truth he leaves in such depraved and miserable breasts; the hope yet lingering behind; the last fair drop of water at the bottom of the dried-up weed-choked well. It involves the best and worst shades of our common nature; much of its ugliest hues, and something of its most beautiful; it is a contradiction, an anomaly, an apparent impossibility, but it is the truth. I am glad to



have had it doubted, for in that circumstance I find sufficient assurance that it needed to be told. (*Oliver Twist* 6-7)

In devoting his final thoughts solely to the defense of his representation of Nancy's complex and contradictory (in other words, divided) character, Dickens indicates both how crucial she is to him and how critical it is that his Victorian readership recognizes "the truth" about character--that it is not static or pure, that it encompasses "a contradiction, an anomaly, an apparent impossibility." After writing that he represents "the truth" about Nancy's character, he then states that this truth "involves the best and worst shades of *our common nature*." His reference to "our common nature" may be read as Dickens's desire to represent not just "the truth" about prostitutes but "the truth" about us *all*, and perhaps especially about himself and his own tainted past: that one can be both tainted and good, both disgraced and redeemed, both divided and whole, that no one is static and uncomplicated, including especially himself, and that one can contain many impulses, many of which are at odds with one another and that these many impulses may fragment the self into many pieces; in other words, that we are all of us split selves.<sup>16</sup>

This then leads us to an overwhelming question: if we are all split selves and Dickens recognized this and wanted his readers to recognize it, why should he then kill Nancy, and not only kill her once, in the novel, but many times, in his performances of the murder? If Nancy truly does represent "the truth" about us all, why must she then die in such a brutal fashion? Perhaps the answer is that, while she does represent the truth about us all, this truth, for Dickens, was too much to bear about himself and in attempting to kill

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<sup>16</sup> In "Dickens's Streetwalkers," Laurie Langbauer writes that in the Preface, Dickens "simultaneously brands Nancy as vicious and attempts a denial of her viciousness that informs his attitude to her throughout the novel" (420). Dickens may "brand Nancy as vicious," but also here he brands us all by referring to "our common nature." Also, although this is not her argument, Langbauer's very words here once again point to Nancy's as a divided self.

her, over and over again, he was actually trying to suppress his own divided self and finding that he couldn't as he resurrected her with each performance, as well.

In his autobiographical fragment, Dickens wrote about the blacking factory experience:

From that hour to this at which I write, no word of that part of my childhood, which I have now gladly brought to a close, has passed my lips to any human being. I have no idea how long it lasted, whether for a year, or much more, or less. From that hour until this, my father and mother have been stricken dumb upon it. I have never heard the least allusion to it, however far off and remote, from either of them. I have never, until I now impart to this paper, in any burst of confidence with anyone, my own wife not excepted, raised the curtain I then dropped, thank God. . . . (My Early Times 131-32)

With his writing of Nancy in Oliver Twist at the beginning of his career and then with his return to her in his public performances at the end of his life, however, Dickens did raise the curtain on his past, and he did so because his split self compelled him to do it. While he desperately wanted to conceal his childhood shame, the experience also divided him and that division clamored for attention. His own fractured identity wouldn't be denied and, as long as the division remained unresolved, as Robert Newsom posits, Dickens's self was open to self-examination, and examine it Dickens did. His self was split by shame, and in denying his shame, he also ensured that it would never disappear but continue to divide him until it finally killed him.

In 1863, Dickens resumed his examination of shame and his identification of himself with Nancy by returning to her murder. Thirty-six years after he wrote Oliver Twist, he began to shape the murder scene into a reading for his public tours (Kaplan 444). Its

importance to him was evident in a letter that he wrote on 24 May 1863: “I have been trying, alone by myself, the Oliver Twist murder, but have got something so horrible out of it that I am afraid to try it in public” (qtd. in Mackenzie 373). Perhaps the “something so horrible” was not only the horror of the murder itself and his worries about its being too terrible for his audience to endure, but what it represented for Dickens in his own mythology--the murder of himself--something he was not quite prepared to enact in 1863, as he set the reading aside in favor of other selections. Five years later, however, he was ready, making the reading a part of his “farewell tour from October 1868 to May 1869” and which was extended into 1870, because of ill health caused by the strain of the readings, especially of the murder of Nancy (Kaplan 532). In the fall of 1868, then, about a year and half before his death, Dickens began to relive Nancy’s murder, on the stage, in public. He was still attempting to suppress his shame and escape from his fallen past. Clearly, he had reached no resolution with regard to his shame, and so he felt compelled to revisit it and recreate it. He performed the scene of her murder obsessively, with no regard for the toll that the reading was eventually to take on his health. According to Kaplan, Dickens,

Though worried that [the reading of Nancy’s murder] might prove too upsetting, even revolting, to his audiences, . . . loved the experience of being absorbed in it, of acting it out, of being both murdered and murderer. (532)

The scheme and its satisfactions became like a drug to Dickens. The pain of the rigorous performance was nothing to the pleasure he derived from it. Kaplan writes that Dickens “went on ‘murdering Nancy’ with a regularity that became addictive” and when Dickens was finally forced to cease the readings for a time because of severe lameness, “the enforced withdrawal was even more painful than his swollen foot” (533). When it was suggested that

the performance was too strenuous and should be omitted, “Dickens was angered, smashing a plate and shouting at Dolby [his agent] for his ‘infernal caution’” (Mackenzie 377).

Before his last public performance of Nancy’s murder on 8 March 1870, Dickens himself stated that “I shall tear myself to pieces,” implying that, divided between Nancy and Bill, he recognized that the consequences of that division would be his death—as it finally was (Ackroyd 1065). As Laurie Langbauer observes, Dickens’s “obsessive murdering of [Nancy] was self-murder: he enacted the scene against the advice of doctors, who told him the excitement on top of his ill health was suicide, as indeed it was” (“Dickens’s Streetwalkers” 427). Hilary Schor gives further details, recounting,

When he performed the reading, his pulse-rate rose from 72 to 124; after reading it, he would collapse on a sofa, unable to speak; Wilkie Collins, among others, believed that this reading “did more to kill him than all his work put together”; his physician forbade him to continue it—and yet, a friend reports that a day or two before his death, he was discovered in the grounds around Gad’s Hill performing the death of Nancy. (30-31)

On 8 June 1870, almost two months to the day after his final public performance of Nancy’s murder, Dickens himself was finally struck down. On 9 June, he died of “brain haemorrhage” (Kaplan 555).

Why was Dickens so obsessed with this particular reading? Perhaps because in it he embodied and performed in public the very split that he had tried so hard to hide and yet that he wanted so badly for people to recognize and sympathize with: the split between his vulnerable shamed hidden self and his hardened public self, as represented by Nancy and Bill

Sikes.<sup>17</sup> In his book, The Stories We Live By: Personal Myths and the Making of the Self, Dan P. McAdams puts forth a theory of the self as a myth that each individual narrates for him- or herself. Comprising each person's myth are the elements common to most stories: tone, imagery, plot, theme, setting, and characters or "imagoes," as McAdams titles them. McAdams explains these imagoes as follows:

An imago is a personified and idealized concept of the self. Each of us consciously and unconsciously fashions main characters for our life stories. These characters function in our myths as if they were persons; hence, they are "personified." And each has a somewhat exaggerated and one-dimensional form; hence, they are "idealized." Our life stories may have one dominant imago or many. (122)

McAdams's concept of imagoes that inhabit each individual's personal myth easily contributes to an understanding of Dickens's repetition of particular types of characters throughout his many novels.<sup>18</sup> In particular, McAdams's theory of the self and its imagoes provides a compelling way to understand Dickens's compulsion to imagine prostitutes.<sup>19</sup> In

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<sup>17</sup> Karen Elizabeth Tatum argues for a different reason for Dickens's compulsion to repeat this scene, saying, "In playing both murderer and victim, both Sikes and Nancy, Dickens continues to display his inability to reconcile the child's Oedipal conflict of love/hate toward his mother" (258). In conversation, Maura Ives has also pointed out the idea that Dickens may also have been murdering his mother as envisioned in Nancy.

<sup>18</sup> For instance, easily discernible within Dickens's novels is the victimized but always pure and good child (Oliver Twist, Little Nell, and David Copperfield, among many others). In addition to the good child, there are also the angel women and the bad mothers. In Dickens in Search of Himself: Recurrent Themes and Characters in the Work of Charles Dickens, Gwen Watkins examines not only the many children and the "theme of childhood" (83) in Dickens's novels but also his good mothers and bad mothers, saying, "All the women in [Dickens's] books, with a few exceptions, are aspects of the mother as the child sees her" (60) and specifically as Dickens either remembers his own mother's neglect of him during his childhood or creates a fantasy of a mother who would have saved him from such neglect. And, of course, there are the prostitutes. There are prostitutes in "A Visit to Newgate," "The Hospital Patient," and "The Old Pawnbroker's Shop," vignettes collected in Sketches by Boz. The unnamed woman whom Little Nell meets briefly at the races in The Old Curiosity Shop is either a prostitute or someone's mistress. Nancy and Bet in Oliver Twist are, from their first introduction, defined as prostitutes by their painted faces and by their "rather untidy" hair and dress (70). Alice Marwood in Dombey and Son is a prostitute. Martha Endell in David Copperfield is a prostitute and Little Em'ly is being forced towards prostitution when Mr. Peggotty rescues her from the brink. Dickens creates prostitutes even in his Christmas stories, "The Haunted Man" and "The Chimes."

<sup>19</sup> Falling in between the repeated patterns of the children and women of his novels, the prostitute occupies an odd place for Dickens, according to Watkins, since she is both adult woman and victimized child. Watkins finds that the prostitute, for Dickens, "has been wronged, and wronged in the one way that touched his deepest

addition to the “stock character” of the helpless and pure child, as embodied by Oliver and many others, the figure of the prostitute may be seen to function as a central imago in Dickens’s own personal myth, as well. She is, to use McAdams’s language, “a stock character” representative of a part of Dickens’s self that he wrote and rewrote among the pages of his many novels (123). Furthermore, about imagoes, McAdams also observes, “Our life stories may have one dominant imago or many. The appearance of two central and conflicting imagoes in a personal myth seems to be relatively common” (122). Two of the “central and conflicting imagoes” in Dickens’s own personal myth would seem to be the very selves he mentions in his 1851 speech, above: the public persona that must “do violence to” the vulnerable self. We see Dickens represent these conflicting imagoes as, among many other characters, Oliver and Nancy--Oliver who is pure and untainted and will eventually be able to discharge his public duties because his self has never been colored by his experiences and then Nancy, who has been indelibly tainted by hers. By sacrificing Nancy to save Oliver, Dickens ensures that the acceptable imago or self survives in the novel. While Oliver himself never commits overt violence against Nancy, his survival does depend on her and does lead to her death. But Dickens has another pair of conflicting imagoes which far better represent the split that he identifies in his 1851 speech, and these he returned to in his public performances of Nancy’s murder at the end of his own life. These conflicting imagoes are Bill and Nancy. In them, Dickens plays out his own inner conflict between his split selves--what Forster called “a stern and even cold isolation of self-reliance [which existed] side by side with a susceptibility almost feminine and the most eager craving for sympathy” (qtd. in Slater 106).

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feelings--she has been loved too little, or loved and abandoned. She represents, then, an aspect of the child rather than of the mother” (68).

McAdams divides imagoes into the particular camps of the “communal” and “agentic,” imagoes which split along gendered lines (something that we definitely see Dickens’s imagoes doing). According to McAdams, communal characters “personify stereotypically feminine sex roles” and fall into “four common types”: “the lover, the caregiver, the friend, and the ritualist” (148). The lover and the caregiver are significant for my purposes in that these are the two roles that Nancy herself is divided between as Sikes’s lover and Oliver’s caregiver. Antithetical to communal characters are what McAdams calls agentic imagoes, which

are characters who seek to conquer, master, control, overcome, create, produce, explore, persuade, advocate, analyze, understand, win. They are described by such adjectives as aggressive, ambitious, adventurous, assertive, autonomous, clever, courageous, daring, dominant, enterprising, forceful, independent, resourceful, restless, sophisticated, stubborn, and wise, among many others. (134)

One only has to glance at Dickens’s biography to see how many of these adjectives immediately and emphatically apply to him: the clashes he had with publishers, his bullying and unsanctioned editing of Elizabeth’s Gaskell’s works for Household Words, his self-appointed moniker of “Bully” to his wife Catherine’s nickname “Meek,” the ironfisted regimen he maintained over his household, to name only a few examples. Bill Sikes also fits neatly into the category of agentic character. As Nancy describes him, he is “the boldest and has been so cruel” (270). During his performances, Dickens was enacting both of these characters and making them so real that he became them. According to Norman and Jeanne Mackenzie, the Duke of Argyll declared that Dickens “had the faculty which many great actors have had, of somehow getting rid of their own physical identity, and appearing with a wholly different face and a wholly different voice. I never saw this power so

astonishingly exerted as by Charles Dickens” (qtd. in Mackenzie 376). Dickens transformed himself into Nancy and transformed himself into Sikes. He identified so much with Sikes that he said, “I have a vague sensation of being ‘wanted’ as I walk about the streets” after each performance (Johnson 1107). He wrote of the audience’s response to the reading, “There was a fixed expression of horror of me, all over the theatre, which could not have been surpassed if I had been going to be hanged. . . . It is quite a new sensation to be execrated with that unanimity; and I hope it will remain so!” (qtd. in Johnson 1107). In the performances, he became Bill Sikes and he liked it, perhaps because he was attempting, time after time, to club down Nancy, the divided self, his self.

In his identification with both Nancy and Bill, in Dickens’s frenzied compulsion to perform the murder, to be both victim and murderer, night after night and at the expense of his own failing health, he vividly reveals his failure to reconcile these two strong aspects of his own personal myth. McAdams states, “Integrating and making peace among conflicting imagoes in one’s personal myth is a hallmark of mature identity in the middle-adult years” (37). According to McAdams,

In his or her twenties and thirties, an adult explores and develops the various characters that personify the different needs for power and love and the often conflicting demands of work and home. The problem of “the many and the one” is resolved by dividing up different aspects of the self into the personified characters of a single personal myth. The resolution, however, is only temporary. In mid-life, we come to identify fundamental conflicts in the myth. As the story develops, tension builds. In our forties, we identify the tension and begin to address it. We may seek to resolve the tension by reconciling opposites. Or we may learn to live with the



tension. . . . Or we may despair over our inability to handle the tension effectively.

(202)

One can see this very progression throughout Dickens's life. He wrote Oliver Twist in his twenties and split up the various parts of his self among its characters--pure Oliver, tainted Nancy, the bully Bill Sikes. By the time he reached his fifties, however, Dickens returned to two of these characters--the most extreme opposites--and, through his performances, began to enact his inability to reconcile these two major fragments of himself, with the result that such failure to find unity then inevitably led to his own utter dissolution. In examining the split self of Nancy in the pages of his novel, Dickens seemed to reach the conclusion that because she is a character of such division, she cannot survive. In returning to Nancy and her death at the end of his own life, Dickens then realizes for himself the same vision--that if the self is fractured, that if the center cannot hold, things fall apart.

While Dickens was attempting to kill Nancy, the self that represents division for him in Oliver Twist, he was also embodying her own very dividedness as he tore himself between contradictory impulses, between Nancy and Bill, night after night. He himself recognized what he was doing, saying before the performance one night, "I will tear myself to pieces" (qtd. in Ackroyd 1065). Shame and the blacking factory, what Dickens called the "secret agony of my soul," became the very real agony at the end of his life. Dickens's return to Nancy's murder and his obsession with performing it reveal that his split self could never be resolved, that the central conflicting imagoes could never be reconciled and eventually resulted in the ultimate fragmentation for Dickens--death--the same fragmentation that he envisioned for Nancy because she, too, is a divided self.

Nancy serves as one of Dickens's most complex figures of shame. As Dickens's first fictional prostitute in a novel heavily laced with autobiographical allusions, Nancy is his first

and perhaps his most honest attempt to create and explore the affects of shame on the self. Later prostitutes Martha Endell of David Copperfield and Alice Brown of Dombey and Son are unified characters, wholly shamed and never divided, and very different from the torn Nancy of Oliver Twist. These later prostitutes represent nicely what Amanda Anderson and Deborah Nord discuss as Dickens's comforting displacement onto and quarantine within the prostitute of those parts of himself which he may have wished to deny. And for a time, he may have succeeded in this displacement and quarantine; however, during the last years of his life, he returned to Nancy, his first figure of shame and his honest figure of a divided self, revealing that no matter how much one may wish to escape one's past and ignore one's shame, the divided self will not be laid to rest.

### CHAPTER III

**“SOME WOLF TO GNAW US SOMEWHERE”:  
TROLLOPE, SHAME, AND SILENCE IN CARRY BRATTLE  
OF THE VICAR OF BULLHAMPTON**

In his preface to The Vicar of Bullhampton, Anthony Trollope implies about the book that its whole purpose is to draw attention to the plight of his “castaway” Carry Brattle. The novel, however, recounts not one but three main plot lines, all tied together by Bullhampton’s Vicar Frances Fenwick, and thus accounting for the title of the book. The first story involves the Vicar’s and his wife’s friends Mary Lowther and Squire Harry Gilmore. During a visit to the Fenwicks, Mary discovers that they are earnestly angling for her marriage to the squire, a union which would secure her financial and social future, as well as Gilmore’s happiness since he is in love with her. Mary, however, does not love him and resists his proposal. Her visit with the Fenwicks draws to a close and she returns to her home with her maiden aunt. At home, she meets and falls in love with her cousin Captain Walter Marrantable to whom she quickly becomes engaged, but Mary soon releases him from the engagement because Walter has no money to support a family. After agonizing over the choice of remaining single or marrying Harry Gilmore, Mary accepts the squire but only after telling him that she doesn’t love him and, should her cousin find himself able to marry her, she will break off the engagement and return to Walter. In the end, this is exactly what happens: Walter Marrantable is recognized as the heir to a title and comfortable property, Mary returns to him, and Harry Gilmore sinks beneath his despair and self-pity. The second plot line of the novel concerns Sam Brattle, son to the miller Jacob Brattle and former friend of

the Vicar. After falling away from his friendship with the Vicar and into bad company, Sam has been falsely accused of murder but is absolved by the novel's end. The third story thread is that of Sam's sister, Carry Brattle. The account of Carry actually begins well after she has been seduced by a lieutenant in the army, abandoned by him, and disowned by her father. The novel suggests that, after being cast off by the miller but before the novel proper begins, Carry fell even further, possibly becoming a prostitute, but Trollope is careful rarely to state this explicitly, whether for fear of offending Victorian readers or, as I will argue later in this chapter, as a means of dismissing Carry's responsibility for her fallen state. The novel details the Vicar's attempts to rescue Carry and find a home for her. In the preface, Trollope declares that his aims in writing this story are two-fold: he wants to make his readers aware of Carry's misery not only so that they themselves may avoid it, but also so that they might discover some real sympathy for Carry and no longer view her as an outcast and untouchable. These aims seem standard enough among the pages of nineteenth-century literature dedicated to the Fallen Woman, prostitutes in particular.

I find two things, however, to be very curious about The Vicar of Bullhampton. First, Trollope creates between himself and Carry a number of biographical parallels, both large and small, through which he is clearly identifying himself with her. Second, in this novel, whose preface speaks only of Carry and of none of the other characters, Trollope surrounds his prostitute with silences--silences about her, silences on behalf of her, silences by her. So many silences associated with a character who was so important to her author that she inspired him to write one of only two prefaces in his very prolific career must actually speak in some way. And they do speak. When they are added to those passages which, at varying volumes, establish parallels between Trollope and Carry, these silences suggest ways in which one can both perceive Carry to be a more complicated and vital

character than at first she appears, as well as better understand Trollope's perception of a part of his own life, specifically, his seven years in London, working for the General Post Office and holding, as he writes in his autobiography, "a full conviction that my life was taking me downwards to the lowest pits" (*An Autobiography* 58). As I will explore in detail in a moment, Trollope's language here evokes one of the Victorians' favorite images for the fallen woman--that of the pit--and reveals a provocative identification of himself with those who are fallen. I argue that the connections--this as well as others--which Trollope establishes between himself and Carry invite the reader to understand Carry, her silences and those associated with her, and her subsidiary role not as flaws or "propaganda," conclusions to which many critics have been altogether too quick to leap, but in terms of speaking for Trollope in two important ways. First, in the almost complete absence of naming her a prostitute, Trollope attempts to relieve her guilt (and by proxy, his own), and second, her voicelessness and passivity actually speak for Trollope of what he personally understood and feared about the state of being fallen (whether guilty or not) and thus about shame--that it is paralyzing, silencing, and inescapable.

Instead of hearing these silences around Carry Brattle as significant in any way, let alone one of personal importance to Trollope, critics who have discussed *The Vicar of Bullhampton* have generally created further silences around her, either dismissing or completely ignoring Carry. Michael Sadleir says of the novel that it is "Ostensibly. . . written in defence of the 'fallen woman'" but "the book itself fails admirably to fulfill its proclaimed intentions" (397). Sadleir sees the novel instead as "a vigorous story of village life" which "presents a delightful parson, several charming ladies, a gruff miller, a pompous marquess and some aggressive nonconformity" (398). Sadleir fails to name Carry at all and dismisses outright Trollope's defense of her, as well as his preface, calling Trollope's prefatory words

“self-conscious propagandism” and “uncharacteristic” (398). Clearly, for Sadleir, Carry is irrelevant both to the story and to her author. More surprising than Sadleir’s perspective, which was published in 1927 and revised in 1945, is the limited amount of attention Victoria Glendinning devotes to Carry. In her 1992 biography of Trollope, Glendinning comments only on Carry’s being called a “castaway,” saying that “in modern parlance, she slept around, though not always for money” and that “Anthony made Carry blonde and pretty” (386). Glendinning mostly ignores Carry in favor of the other main female of the book, Mary Lowther. Like Glendinning, David Skilton also turns his attention away from Carry and towards other characters. He mentions her only in relation to Mary Lowther, saying that though “they never come across one another. . . , they have points in common” (xv). Then Skilton turns even from Mary Lowther in favor of a discussion of the titular Vicar, Frank Fenwick, saying that “Frank Fenwick gives the name to the book because it is essentially a book about men assessing the behaviour of women and having problems with it” (xvi). While Skilton returns to a discussion of Mary, Carry is never mentioned again, dropping silently away, apparently of little consequence in a book “essentially. . . about men . . .” (xvi). Margaret Markwick also sees Carry only and very briefly in relation to other characters, again Mary Lowther, as well as Carry’s sister Fanny. According to Markwick, “Carrie [sic] is a lovely girl, with a pretty face, and this is her downfall” (42), which sentence yields nothing new, simply restating Trollope’s final overt observation about Carry at the end of the novel that she has been “doomed by her beauty” (526). Also, tellingly, Markwick fails to spell Carry’s name correctly, writing her as “Carrie,” renaming and thus effacing her (38). In his book Fallen Women in the Nineteenth-Century Novel, Tom Winnifrith doesn’t even attempt to see Carry as worthy of interpretation, stating dismissively that “Carry Brattle is not all that important in a novel which also includes a murder, in which her brother is

involved; an ecclesiastical quarrel, in which the vicar is involved; and a more decorous love story, in which the squire of Bullhampton is involved” (137). According to Winnifrith, Carry and her silences contribute very little, if anything at all, to the novel.

Among the critics who do spare more than a few brief sentences for Carry are Nina Rinehart and George Watt. Rinehart takes Trollope at his word when he says in his preface that he could not make Carry the novel’s heroine because to do so “would have been directly opposed to my purpose” (qtd. in Rinehart 143). Rinehart argues that because Trollope feels that for propriety’s sake he can’t make Carry his heroine or give the sordid details of her fall, he “solves [this] problem. . . by shifting the emphasis from Carry to the people around her, which is entirely appropriate to his avowed purpose: changing people’s attitudes towards ‘fallen women’” (144). While this argument, like the ones above, mostly ignores Carry herself in favor of an analysis of the other characters in the book, Rinehart, unlike Skilton, does include an analysis of *all* the characters who react to Carry--including not just “men assessing” Carry’s behavior but also the women who do so--a very important aspect to notice, since Trollope himself was very concerned with the way respectable women seemed to react so harshly to their fallen sisters. In addition, Rinehart’s argument that Trollope leaves Carry silent and shows her through others’ perceptions of her is supported nicely by what Trollope himself says about his inability to make Carry the novel’s heroine.

George Watt spends more time on Carry’s role in The Vicar of Bullhampton than many critics but he, too, tends to ignore her in favor of a discussion of the other characters in the novel. His chapter on Trollope’s fallen women includes Carry really only in order to establish that she is a “conventional look at the type,” before moving on to what Watt feels to be “the more original” treatment of the fallen woman in An Eye for an Eye (42). Of

greatest interest to my own argument, however, Watt proves to be the one critic who notices, albeit briefly, a possible parallel between Trollope and his prostitute. Watt notes:

Anthony Trollope's adolescent loneliness and the fear he had of isolation, when combined with his acute memory of these miseries, made it easy for him to empathise [sic] with human suffering, especially the type of suffering caused by expulsion from society. The fallen woman was a type with which he could identify, despite the gap caused by his sex, his pecuniary success, and the social popularity which he experienced late in life. . . . At Harrow, Winchester, and the lesser-known Sunbury, he was always in disgrace--to use his own word he was a pariah. The fear of being an outcast was one of his Achilles' heels throughout his life. . . . His fallen women could well be anima figures from his own subconscious mind. . . . (42)

I agree entirely with Watt's observation that Trollope, in writing about Carry's disgrace, exclusion, and suffering, could well be drawing on his own experiences of these miseries. I differ, however, in seeing not so much Trollope's schoolboy miseries represented in Carry but his experience of guilt and shame during the seven years he spent as a clerk in the London Post Office.

We know why Carry might provide Trollope with such a rich avenue for expressing his own shame. George Watt argues, in part, that "despite the gap caused by his sex," Trollope could "identify" himself with his fallen women because of his own experiences with "being always in disgrace" (42). According to critics Amanda Anderson, Deborah Nord, and Laurie Langbauer, however, it is not *in spite* of but *because* of the difference in gender that Victorian male authors could and did identify themselves with fallen women. Anderson, Langbauer, and Nord focus variations of this argument on Dickens, in particular. A review of these critics's arguments as I presented them in Chapter I reveals their currency



for Trollope, as well. Nord claims that Dickens “uses the barrier of gender to introduce and yet quarantine urban misery” (68); Anderson argues that for Victorian male authors in general, “fallenness displaces threats to autonomy and discrete identity, to cherished forms of masculine selfhood” (41); in a similar vein, Langbauer states that in English novels, “The status quo defines itself by gesturing to its (debased) mirror opposite, whose lacks and problems seem to point to its own completeness and strength” (Women and Romance 2).

All three of these critics argue that Victorian authors accomplished this “quarantining” and “displace[ment] [of] threats to autonomy and discrete identity, to cherished forms of masculine selfhood” through their use of the fallen woman. While none of these critics mention him, Trollope fits very nicely into their arguments, as he very clearly and more than once expresses a desire for “cherished forms of masculine selfhood.” In The Vicar of Bullhampton, the Vicar, Frank Fenwick speaks of just such an ideal of manhood to his close friend, Harry Gilmore, who is wallowing in pain and sorrow after being jilted by his fiancé, Mary Lowther. The Vicar asks:

“Have you no feeling that, though it may be hard with you here,”--and the Vicar, as he spoke, struck his breast,--“you should so carry your outer self, that the eyes of those around you should see nothing of the sorrow within? That is my idea of manliness, and I have ever taken you to be a man.” (490)

Here, Trollope’s Vicar espouses an ideal of manhood that denies any expression of painful emotion, and this is not the only time Trollope has a character promote this exact concept of masculinity. In The Small House at Allington, in which Trollope creates Johnny Eames, who is very clearly an alter-ego for himself, Trollope once again makes a similar observation about manhood. After Johnny Eames, for a second time, has proposed to and been refused by Lily Dale, his sympathetic friend the Earl of Guestwick tells him:

“You know the story of the boy who would not cry though the wolf was gnawing him underneath his frock. Most of us have some wolf to gnaw us somewhere; but we are generally gnawed beneath our clothes, so that the world doesn’t see; and it behoves us so to bear it that the world shall not suspect. The man who goes about declaring himself to be miserable will be not only miserable, but contemptible as well.” (640-41)

Thus, the man (most tellingly, in the above instance, the Trollopian alter-ego) who shows his pain and sorrow (or shame and guilt) to the world is worthy only of contempt, not of compassion or sympathy. Trollope wants his men “to be men”; he wants to preserve “manliness” and eschew contempt, and yet at the same time, painful feelings of shame and guilt still exist. We know that Trollope did not have a happy childhood or young adulthood, and we know it by his own admission. That admission, however, came only after his death, with the publication of his autobiography which, during his lifetime, he had kept locked up in a drawer of his desk. Up until his death, the face that Trollope showed to the world was a very different one--not a miserable or guilty or shamed face but a combative, aggressive, and brusque face, which frequently surprised people who met him in person after knowing him only through his books. Trollope “so carr[ied] [his] outer self, that the eyes of those around [him] should see nothing of the sorrow within”; he clearly felt that it “behove[d] [him] so to bear it that the world [did] not suspect” that beneath that rough and “manly” public persona, the wolf of shame, guilt, and misery gnawed at him constantly. He had to find a different way to express the feelings that he wanted to hide. This is where, applying the theories of Anderson, Nord, and Langbauer, the fallen woman comes in handy as a vehicle for quarantining and displacing threats to “cherished forms of masculine selfhood” (Anderson 41). By dint of her fallen state, she seems to be the “mirror opposite” of her author and so,

when an author creates a fallen woman and projects his own anxieties onto her, those anxieties seem far removed from him, rendering him safe and secure by means of his seeming distance from her. The threat, whatever it may be, appears to be safely contained. For Trollope, the threat lay in the expression of painful emotions such as shame and guilt. And he found his solution (just as the aforementioned critics argue, although not about Trollope in particular) in his fallen woman.

But I see Trollope as being far more self-conscious about his art than Anderson's, Nord's, and Langbauer's arguments would credit a Victorian male for being. First, Trollope himself acknowledges the desire for someone to express pain and sorrow for the man who is experiencing it. What Nord calls quarantining and Anderson calls displacement, Trollope calls "fretting [. . .] by deputy." As he writes in The Vicar of Bullhampton, "How happy is he who can get his fretting done for him by deputy" (427). Trollope writes this sentence a little tongue-in-cheek, as he makes gentle fun of a character who is constantly getting himself in trouble by being too hasty and foolish. In his autobiography, however, Trollope expresses a similar concept quite seriously and more clearly related to how he uses his fiction. Of Plantagenet and Lady Glencora Palliser, Trollope declares:

By no amount of description or asseveration could I succeed in making my reader understand how much these characters with their belongings have been to me in my latter life; or how frequently I have used them for the expression of my political and social convictions. They have been as real to me as free trade was to Mr. Cobden, or the dominion of a party to Mr. Disraeli; and as I have not been able to speak from the benches of the House of Commons, or to thunder from platforms, or to be efficacious as a lecturer, they have served me as safety-valves by which to deliver my soul. (180)

While Trollope uses the Pallisers to express his “political and social convictions,” he needed other “safety valves” to express and examine personal issues such as shame. Critics writing about The Vicar of Bullhampton have pointed out one alter ego for Trollope--his Vicar, Frank Fenwick. In his biography of Trollope, T. H. Escott states that “Frank Fenwick . . . might well pass for a study of the author” (240). David Skilton, in his introduction to the novel, sums up critical perceptions of the Vicar as follows: “The character is often taken to be some sort of Trollopian self-portrait, and so indeed it may be, particularly when Fenwick takes delight in doing battle with the Marquis of Trowbridge, or says of himself that ‘the possession of a grievance is the one state of human blessedness’” (Introduction, xvi). Like *Oliver Twist* for Dickens, Fenwick is the obvious alter ego for Trollope in the novel. While Frank Fenwick may be “a study of the author,” it is a study of manliness, which includes the expression of acceptable manly emotions such as aggression, anger, the blessed state of “nursing a grievance,” and the ensuing righteous indignation over that grievance. Shame and its painful results are saved or, to use Nord’s terminology, “quarantined” for expression and examination through Trollope’s other, far less obvious alter-ego, Carry Brattle.

As I observe above, Langbauer, Nord, and Anderson imply that this strategy of anxiety displacement was not an entirely conscious one for Victorian male authors. Langbauer states, “Because these elements [anxieties] are part of the status quo, it can never elude them, *and in its very denial is even able to dwell on without admitting them*” (Women and Romance 2, my emphasis). Similarly, Anderson argues that Dickens “engages . . . in the Victorian cultural practice that wards off perceived predicaments of agency by displacing them onto a sexualized feminine figure” and that he does so “with an almost undermining legibility” (107). As I argued about Dickens’s Nancy in Chapter II, so do I also find to be the case with Trollope’s Carry Brattle. In creating her, Trollope demonstrates not an

“almost undermining legibility,” but a self-conscious legibility as he draws attention to his displacement of anxiety onto Carry by the number of parallels he creates between himself and his fallen woman.

That Trollope writes parts of himself into certain of his characters is quite clear. The parallels he forges between himself and Johnny Eames, among others, are unmistakable. In his autobiography, Trollope writes the following of his life in London as a postal clerk:

I went into lodgings, and then had to dispose of my time. I belonged to no club, and knew very few friends who would receive me into their houses. In such a condition of life a young man should no doubt go home after his work, and spend the long hours of the evening in reading good books and drinking tea. (51)

Trollope writes a similar passage for Johnny Eames in The Small House at Allington:

And then so little is done for the amusement of lads who are turned loose in London at nineteen or twenty. Can it be that any mother really expects her son to sit alone evening after evening in a dingy room drinking bad tea, and reading good books? (556)

Among critics who have observed the parallels between Trollope and Johnny Eames is Julian Thompson, editor of the Penguin edition of The Small House at Allington. In his notes on the above passage on Johnny Eames, Thompson quotes the tea-drinking passage from An Autobiography and observes, “The whole of this chapter of An Autobiography should be set against [the] account of Johnny Eames’s dissipation” (691, n. 3, ch. 51). For the most part, however, Johnny is a comic figure, and Trollope wants the reader of his autobiography to understand that there was another, darker side to his life at this time. He declares the following about these seven years in London:

I have said something of the comedy of such a life, but it certainly had its tragic aspect. Turning it all over in my own mind, as I have constantly done in after years, the tragedy has always been uppermost. And so it was as the time was passing. (52)

To represent and examine something of this tragedy and the pain and misery of it, Trollope turns away from his well-meaning, mostly comical hobbledehoy Johnny and towards his prostitute Carry, instead. Sandwiched in between his writing of Johnny Eames in 1864 and his overt writing of himself in 1875 is the following passage that Trollope writes in 1868 for Carry:

When it is found that a young man is neglecting his duties, doing nothing, spending his nights in billiard rooms and worse places, and getting up at two o'clock in the day, the usual prescription of his friends is that he should lock himself up in his own dingy room, drink tea, and spend his hours in reading good books. (The Vicar of Bullhampton 368)

While critics easily and often identify the echoes between Johnny Eames and Trollope himself, I have found that no one has observed that Trollope uses the same language here for Carry, as well. This passage may be so difficult to associate with her because in it, Trollope clearly states that it is about “a young man.” Trollope continues in The Vicar of Bullhampton:

It is hardly recognised [sic] that a sudden change from billiards to good books requires a strength of character which, if possessed, would probably have kept the young man altogether from falling into bad habits. If we left the doors of our prisons open, and then expressed disgust because the prisoners walked out, we should hardly be less rational. The hours at Mrs. Stiggs's house had been frightfully heavy to poor Carry Brattle, and at last she escaped. (368)

The passage is an odd one, shifting abruptly from discussing a young man who “spend[s] his nights in billiard rooms and worse places” (the latter of which certainly seems to imply brothels and the like) to Carry. One moment, the subject is the young man on his own in London; the next moment, it is Carry, a reformed fallen woman who has been staying with Mrs. Stiggs, spending her days sewing and waiting for the Vicar to find a home for her with some member of her family, and who has just “escaped” from Mrs. Stiggs’s because she has been called to testify on behalf of her brother, a scene which would require from her the painful confession of her fallenness. The young man of the preceding passage simply blends into Carry by the paragraph’s end, almost as if they are one, signaling a strong identification between the two, and thus between Carry and Trollope himself. Furthermore, as I mentioned above, Trollope strengthens the connection between himself and his prostitute by then reusing very similar language in the same tea-drinking passage in An Autobiography. About “a young man” and related to Carry, he states in The Vicar of Bullhampton: “It is hardly recognised [sic] that a sudden change from billiards to good books requires a strength of character which, if possessed, would probably have kept the young man altogether from falling into bad habits” (368). Writing overtly about himself seven years later, Trollope declares:

Of course if the mind be strong enough, and the general stuff knitted together of sufficiently stern material, the temptations will not prevail. But such minds and such material, are, I think, uncommon. The temptation at any rate prevailed with me.

(An Autobiography 51)

Neither Carry nor Trollope has possessed the “strength of character” or a “mind strong enough” to resist temptation. Trollope’s use of such similar imagery and language for his prostitute and for himself in these two passages establishes a connection far stronger than

simply one of general sympathy for fallen women, and the parallels linking author and prostitute continue to abound.

Providing more evidence that years earlier he may have identified himself with Carry, Trollope applies to himself language usually reserved for fallen women, as he proceeds with his account in his autobiography. He observes:

A lad brought up by strict parents, and without having had even a view of gayer things, might perhaps do so [i.e., spend his evenings drinking tea and reading good books]. I had passed all my life at public schools, where I had seen gay things, but had never enjoyed them. Towards the good books and tea no training had been given me. There was no house in which I could habitually see a lady's face and hear a lady's voice. No allurements to decent respectability came in my way. It seems to me that in such circumstances the temptations of loose life will almost certainly prevail with a young man. (51)

Not once but twice here Trollope implies that the life he is leading in London is “gay,” a term often used for nineteenth-century prostitutes. Further, Trollope succumbs to “the temptations” not of a debauched life but of a “loose” one, another word usually applied not to men but to women who go astray. Throughout this entire section of *An Autobiography*, the language of the fall proliferates. The fallen woman is often spoken of as having compromised or lost her character. Trollope writes of his own character at the Post Office, “I know that I very soon achieved a character for irregularity. . . .” (44); he continues, “My bad character . . . stuck with me, and was not to be got rid of by any efforts within my power. I do admit that I was irregular” (45). He explicitly aligns his own trouble with the image of a fall when he writes, “I wonder how many young men fall utterly to pieces from being turned loose into London after the same fashion” (51). With regard to this fallen life,



Trollope queries, “Could there be any escape from such dirt? I would ask myself; and I always answered that there was no escape. The mode of life was itself wretched” (52).

Trollope often describes Carry as “wretched” (282, 331, 369, 487), and certainly it was no secret that prostitution was considered to be a life filled with “dirt.” Finally, as I mentioned earlier in this chapter, Trollope employs the imagery of fallenness even more explicitly by using the familiar Victorian “fallen” image of the pit. As he brings this chapter of his autobiography to a close and just before he finds his escape in being transferred to Ireland, he states, “I was at the time in dire trouble, having debts on my head and quarrels with our Secretary-Colonel, and a full conviction that my life was taking me downwards to the lowest pits” (58).

All of these allusions and outright references to fallenness are accompanied by Trollope’s description of where he lived during these years, which also strengthens the connection between himself and Carry. Trollope tells us that his lodgings were in “Northumberland Street by the Marylebone Workhouse, on to the back-door of which establishment my room looked out--a most dreary abode” (53). When Carry is staying with Mrs. Stiggs in Salisbury, Trollope’s description of the house and of Carry’s room echo his own account of his London lodgings. The house is “miserable” and the Vicar finds her in “the back room up-stairs” (279), which resonates with Trollope’s own “wretched” room overlooking the back door of the workhouse.

The connections between himself and his prostitute continue with Trollope’s repetition in his autobiography of most of The Vicar of Bullhampton’s preface, sending up another red flag that in writing Carry Brattle, he is writing about more than just another fallen woman. After all, he makes the preface, in particular, a part of his own written life. At least two critics have suspected that this inclusion of the preface in his autobiography is

important in some way but both have stopped far short of speculating why it might be so significant to Trollope. In her 1975 dissertation, Nina Rinehart says that Trollope “must . . . have attached considerable importance to [the preface], and by implication to his crusading effort, because he quotes the entire preface in the Autobiography” (143). As far as I know, however, Trollope never made more of a “crusading effort” on behalf of fallen women than his writing of The Vicar of Bullhampton and An Eye for an Eye, a slim novel set in Ireland and telling the tale of a young woman seduced and abandoned by her lover, and living still with her mother. Unlike Dickens and his work with *Urania Cottage*, or Gaskell and her effort on behalf of the real-life prostitute Pasley, Trollope’s sympathy with fallen women never noticeably extended past his fiction. Seventeen years after Rinehart, a critic again notes the repetition of the novel’s preface in the autobiography but, again, simply takes Trollope at his word that sympathy for the fallen woman is his main goal in including it. Biographer Victoria Glendinning writes that “Anthony . . . felt compelled, in his autobiography, to restate his sympathy for women like Carry Brattle who became ‘castaways’” (387). Glendinning’s use of the word “compelled” indicates that she suspects that the inclusion of the preface in its entirety is somehow uniquely important to Trollope but she doesn’t pursue the idea. Trollope states vaguely and provocatively about his choice, “I do not know that anyone read it [the Preface]; but as I wish to have it read, I will insert it here again: . . .” (An Autobiography 330). The implication here is that while readers may have disregarded the preface when it appeared in the novel, since it now appears as part of Trollope’s own life, its reading is assured. In general, Trollope thought “[t]hat the writing of prefaces is, for the most part, work thrown away” (The Vicar of Bullhampton xxiv). And yet this preface is so crucial to him that he has it published in not one but two forms. I argue that he includes the preface in his autobiography, that he has such a vested interest in having

it read and noticed, because it is about himself and serves as yet another invitation to understand Carry as far more complex than she has hitherto been credited with being. As I discuss below, Trollope uses his preface to declare his overt reasons for writing Carry but the implications of what he says about Carry here, when juxtaposed with his own life, reveal his far more personal investment in the dismissal of her guilt, and set the stage not just for a greater understanding and sympathy for prostitutes in general but for an understanding of Trollope and his own perceptions of shame and its silences.

Out of the staggering number of novels that Anthony Trollope wrote and published, he includes a preface only for a very early novel (his third, La Vendée) and The Vicar of Bullhampton. Trollope says he writes the preface for The Vicar because he is “desirous . . . of defending myself against a charge which may possibly be made against me by the critics” that “bring[ing] on [the] stage such a character as that of Carry Brattle” is inappropriate for a writer whose audience is both old and young, male and female (xxiv). Trollope reassures readers and critics that while he “endeavoured to endow her with qualities that may create sympathy, and [has] brought her back at last from degradation at least to decency” (xxiv), because Carry is a fallen woman or “castaway,” she is not portrayed “as the noblest of her sex” or “as one whose life is happy, bright and glorious” (xxx). Trollope states that because of her fall, “things could not be with her as they would have been had she not fallen,” and this is why, although he makes “possible for her a way out of her perdition” of abandonment and alienation, Trollope has “not married her to a wealthy lover” by the end of the story (xxx).

By 1870, however, when the novel was published in book form with the preface attached, the idea that presenting a fallen woman, or even a prostitute, in literature, would be shocking was largely a moot one, as long as one followed certain long-established

conventions, almost all of which Carry fulfills.<sup>1</sup> As David Skilton observes, “Novelists had for decades mastered the art of presenting prostitutes without causing moral offence, and Trollope seems to have been overcautious about his reputation” (Introduction viii). With the exception of actually killing Carry off, Trollope observes all the standard requirements for presenting her that would ensure that no one would be shocked by her or would condemn him: Carry is miserable, “draggled,” suicidal. Not a hint of her “gay” life is given. Hers is a cautionary tale and requires no author’s preface to indicate that it is such or to defend the author from the critics. In fact, these critics about whom Trollope seemed so concerned found the book completely innocuous. According to the Times, the novel is “a nice, easy safe reading book for old ladies and young ladies” and “the general safeness of the story will make Bullhampton Vicarage welcome in all well-regulated families” (qtd. in Rinehart 143).

After his defense of his subject matter, Trollope states his second reason for the preface--the evocation of sympathy for Carry from his readers. This, however, is also not a radical position. As Clinton Machann states about the preface’s goal, in it Trollope “joins generations of novelists who have made similar claims” (76). Not only is the preface’s call for sympathy for the fallen woman far from surprising, it is also a moot point. The novel does the job of showing Carry’s situation quite clearly, without any need for prefatory remarks to direct the reader in how her author wishes her to be perceived. Carry is absolutely miserable, and the narrator, as well as the Vicar, Frank Fenwick, who attempts to save her, and her sister, Fanny, all sympathize with her misery vociferously, clearly appealing to the reader and indicating the way in which Carry is to be viewed as a pathetic creature in desperate need of love and assistance. Carry does depart from her predecessors in one very

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<sup>1</sup> Conventionally, the prostitute must be remorseful, she must be miserable, and she must die by the book’s end, regardless of said remorse.

important way: she is alive at the end of the novel, and perhaps this is why Trollope felt the need to justify himself in his preface about her and evoke sympathy for her since she has escaped the usual punishment and sympathy-evoking ending of most fictional fallen women. And yet, who could really believe that Carry's is in any way an ending to begrudge her? She has been taken back into her family's home and her father speaks to her as he would to a daughter, but he hasn't forgotten her fall or the disgrace he has felt and still does potently feel from it. Furthermore, the last sentence Trollope writes of her in the novel makes it clear that Carry's situation is a very bleak one even if (or rather because, as I will argue in a moment) she has been accepted back into her family's home: she is "doomed by her beauty . . . to expect that no lover should come and ask her to establish with him a homestead of their own" (526-27). She may not be dead but she certainly won't be living a "normal" or even a happy life.

In addition to Trollope's two overtly stated reasons for the preface--defense of his subject matter and the evocation of sympathy for "castaways"--I see a third, and less directly stated objective: the dismissal, or at the very least, the diminishing of Carry's guilt. Trollope declares in the preface, "It will be admitted probably by men who have thought upon the subject that no fault among us is punished so heavily as that fault, often so light in itself but so terrible in its consequences to the less faulty of the two offenders, by which a woman falls" (xxx). Trollope's statement here, as well as at several additional points throughout the novel, that the woman's sexual transgression is "so light in itself" forms the really radical part of the book and, amazingly enough, seems to have been overlooked by his contemporary audience and reviewers. Pleas for sympathy for the fallen woman and her misery were not unusual by 1868, the date of the novel's commencement; Dickens's Nancy, Little Em'ly, and Martha Endell, and Gaskell's Esther Summerson and Ruth, to name a few, all testify to this.

Direct, sympathetic declarations of the sexual double standard applied to men and women, however, were certainly not as frequent or mainstream, and Trollope's attempt to diminish the fallen woman's perceived guilt here is very striking.

Further diminishing her guilt, what may at first appear to be a plea for sympathy for the fallen woman's misery can also be heard as Trollope's plea for sympathy for her because she is not entirely responsible for her fall--she didn't know what the consequences would be, or that they would be so harsh. Trollope writes in the preface about the fallen woman's outcast state: "It may be said, no doubt, that the severity of this judgement [sic] acts as a protection to female virtue,--detering, as all known punishments do deter, from vice. But this punishment, which is horrible beyond the conception of those who have not regarded it closely, is not known beforehand" (xxx). Trollope holds responsible for the fallen woman's disgrace and misery both the double standard of punishment and her ignorance of the consequences, and not any inherent or unusual flaw in her own character. Both of these perceptions are admirable enough and fit in with revised critical perceptions of Trollope as actually sympathetic to the women he creates. I believe, however, that there is more to this particular situation with his fallen woman than simple sympathy. I find, instead, empathy, as well, and an investment in dismissing Carry's guilt that has to do with far more than a general outrage over the sexual double standard applied to men and women. The inclusion of the preface in his autobiography, where he "wish[es] to have it read" as part of his own life, makes a new kind of sense if Trollope is dismissing or diminishing Carry's guilt in order to relieve himself of his own feelings of guilt, as well, a point to which I will return in a moment.

In the novel itself, Trollope tries to dismiss Carry's guilt in two main ways--by the importance he attaches to naming and not naming Carry as a prostitute outright and by

creating at least two characters who attempt to set aside her guilt. Trollope omits the word prostitute from his preface, instead calling Carry a “castaway” and claiming that he does so “for want of a truer word that shall not in its truth be offensive” (xxiv). Thus, it would seem that he omits the word for fear of offending his respectable readers. He continues in the preface to refer to women like Carry as “unfortunates” and as “fallen” (xxx). Once the novel begins, Trollope again and again refuses to use the word “prostitute.” There are only two exceptions to this rule. The first is the Marquis of Trowbridge who twice refers to Carry as a prostitute (122, 181). The Marquis, however, is clearly an unsympathetic, foolish character, mistaken in everything else about which he states an explicit belief in the novel. His statements about Carry, seemingly based only on village gossip and his own prejudice against the entire Brattle family, do nothing to make him any more likable or reliable, and thus are meant to do little to condemn Carry in the reader’s eyes.

In addition to the Marquis, one other character comes closest to calling Carry a prostitute. When Carry has been taken back into the Brattle home, her father Jacob Brattle declares, in front of Carry but “looking round upon his wife and elder child” and not actually upon Carry: “In all the world . . . there is no thing so vile as a harlot” (382). This use of a more explicit word may seem to undermine my argument about Trollope’s avoidance of the word “prostitute” in order to avoid the guilt attached to it. However, Brattle, like the Marquis, is not an entirely sympathetic character here. Again and again, Trollope tells us how stubborn he is, what a pagan he is, how there is no reasoning with this man, how he has discarded his daughter because of her first, ignorant fall, and yet he fails to discard his son when Sam is accused of murder--all of which, instead of lending credibility to his application of the word “harlot” to Carry, act to subvert it.

Outnumbering the Marquis's and Jacob Brattle's explicit uses of the word "prostitute" or "harlot," however, are the blanks and euphemisms that Trollope uses to stand in for these words. The blanks occur when one character is about to call Carry a prostitute or something similar and another character interrupts before the word can be spoken. For instance, in the scene in which Carry's younger brother Sam Brattle and the Vicar, Frank Fenwick, are discussing finding a home for Carry, Sam says bitterly, "The likes of you won't likely have a sister the likes of her. She's a ----." Fenwick prevents Sam from speaking the word: "Sam, stop. Don't say a bitter word of her. You love her" (253-254). When Carry's father, Jacob Brattle, is speaking of her with his other daughter, Fanny, he says, "She is a----." Fanny interrupts him, "stopp[ing] his mouth with her hand before the word had been uttered" (380). Again, when Jacob Brattle is speaking with the Vicar, an interruption occurs to prevent the word "prostitute" or "whore" from being said/written. Brattle says, "There ain't one in all Bul'ompton as don't know as Jacob Brattle is a broken man along of his da'ter that is a----" (450). And the Vicar jumps in, saying, "Silence, Mr. Brattle. You shall not say it. She is not that; --at any rate not now. Have you no knowledge that sin may be left behind and deserted as well as virtue?" (450). The Vicar's response indicates an agreement with Brattle that Carry was once "that" but is no longer, and yet still, the absence of the word leaves what "that" is in question, to be filled in by the reader. The absence may seem to speak the word, and yet the word remains unspoken/unwritten. And interestingly enough, these interruptions are always the work of the two Franceses in the novel--Carry's sister, Fanny, and the Vicar, Frances Fenwick--a point which I will discuss at greater length below.

More often than the blank, however, Trollope chooses euphemisms instead of the actual word "prostitute." Carry is frequently called a "thing." The narrator tells us at the



beginning, after Carry had fallen, “Now she was a thing, somewhere, never to be mentioned” (37). Her sister-in-law calls her ““a vile thing”” (288). Her sister Fanny marvels that Carry is “a thing said to be so foul that even a father could not endure to have her name mentioned in his ears!” (378). In addition to being called a “thing,” Carry is also called ““one of the unfortunates”” by the lawyer who examines her (502). These refusals on Trollope’s part to call her a prostitute may turn out to be a double-edged sword--allowing readers to fill in the blanks themselves and giving them the power to reconvict Carry. And yet at the same time, the word has never been stated *explicitly* here except by characters whose credibility is questionable, as well. *Is* Carry a prostitute? Or is her guilt less than this? Has she fallen only the one time and then only through ignorance of the sin and its consequences? Even in the preface, in which Trollope calls her “a castaway,” the word prostitute is avoided. In the end, we just don’t know for sure. The author in the preface and the narrator in the text eschew it very carefully.

In resounding counterpoint to these blanks and euphemisms for and unreliable uses of the word “prostitute” is Trollope’s own way of referring to Carry. Rarely is she simply Carry; rather, she is constantly “Carry Brattle.” Most obvious among the possible reasons for this, Trollope seems to be reiterating that she will always belong to her family and be their responsibility. Also, perhaps he does not want her dismissed too easily with some generic word that fails to take into account her own individuality. Like a negotiator in a hostage crisis, Trollope is constantly reminding the reader that this character has a name; she is not simply a “prostitute,” a figure of guilt and shame and nothing else. She is a Brattle--a daughter, sister, former parishioner, and so on. She is a person who deserves to be helped.

In addition to reiterating her individuality, Trollope may have a more personal investment in reminding the reader so often of Carry’s full name. Present squarely within

the middle of the name Brattle are Trollope's own initials--A.T.. When one recalls (and if one trusts) Dickens's statement that he didn't realize that his alter-ego David Copperfield's initials were his own, in reverse, until after the novel was written and the "coincidence" was pointed out to him, the idea that Trollope has subconsciously used his own initials in Carry's name is not a far-fetched one. In fact, when Carry first comes on the stage, she bears a pseudonym which also signals the parallel between author and prostitute--she is Anne Burrows, the Anne of Anthony right out in front, the initials A.B. easily echoing Trollope's own A.T., and her adopted last name alluding to the A.T. burrowing into the middle of her true last name, Brattle.<sup>2</sup> And finally, of course, there is the inescapable fact that Trollope's own last name is what Carry may be, but is never called in the novel.

In addition to the ways in which Trollope either refuses to name her as an actual prostitute or undercuts the naming of her as such, he also attempts to diminish or dismiss Carry's guilt outright. He undertakes to do so even before the novel begins, stating in the Preface that the fallen woman's "fault" is "often so light in itself" (xxx). Since this appears in the preface, Trollope goes on record as believing this himself and then he proceeds to express this perception again, through different and obviously sympathetic characters. The Vicar, Frances Fenwick, goes to see Carry's father, Jacob Brattle, in an attempt to evoke some sympathy for Carry and find a place for her at home again. Fenwick declares to Brattle: "Think how easy it is for a poor girl to fall, --how great is the temptation and how quick, and how it comes without knowledge of the evil that is to follow! How small is the sin, and how terrible the punishment!" (191). Here, through Fenwick, Trollope restates his

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<sup>2</sup> There is another possible interpretation of Carry's pseudonymous last name that may also indicate her personal significance for Trollope. George Watt argues that The Vicar of Bullhampton was written during "one of the most depressing periods Trollope experienced" in his adult life when he ran for a seat in Parliament and lost (43). The place he hoped to represent was the borough of Beverly. In giving Carry the last name Burrows, Trollope could be suggesting that she represents yet another fall for him, yet another experience of rejection and shame.

argument from the preface that the girl is, in fact, a victim of her own ignorance and that the “sin” is a very “small” one. And this certainly is not the only time Trollope voices this belief through Fenwick. When discussing her with his wife, the Vicar refers to Carry as “this poor creature, who fell so piteously with so small a sin” (276) and later, to Carry’s brother-in-law, he comments on “how very small an amount of sin may bring a woman to this wretched condition” (331). All of these examples point to Trollope’s diminishment of Carry’s guilt but, even more tellingly, he goes even further and dismisses it outright, as well. When recounting Fenwick’s thoughts on Carry, the narrator refers to Carry’s fall as “the sin which had hardly been a sin” (283). Later, on the first night that Carry, without her father’s knowledge, is back at home, Carry’s sister Fanny expresses a similar sentiment. The narrator tells us Fanny’s thoughts as she watches Carry sleep: “And yet, how small had been [Carry’s] fault . . .” (378).

What emerges from these examples is not only Trollope’s desire for the reader to understand Carry’s sin as “small” or even nonexistent, but also a very personal investment in such a perspective, as well. The two characters who deliver these lines or have these thoughts are the Vicar, Frances Fenwick, and Carry’s sister, Fanny (Frances) Brattle, both of whose names repeat that of Trollope’s mother, Frances Trollope. Fanny Brattle and Frank Fenwick are also, as mentioned above, the only two characters to prohibit the use of the word “prostitute” in their hearing. Surely, it is no coincidence that the only two characters to diminish or dismiss Carry’s guilt share Trollope’s own mother’s name, revealing Trollope’s wish for protection and forgiveness of his guilt from his mother. This would make sense in terms of one aspect of Trollope’s guilty feelings during those London years. He writes in his autobiography:

I had often told myself since I left school that the only career in life within my reach was that of an author, and the only mode of authorship open to me that of a writer of novels. . . . But the months and years ran on, and no attempt was made. And yet no day was passed without thoughts of attempting, and a mental acknowledgement of the disgrace of postponing it. What reader will not understand the agony of remorse produced by such a condition of mind? (52-53)

Trollope feels “disgrace” and “the agony of remorse” for his failure even to begin to try to write, and thus extract himself from his fallen situation. In stark contrast, his mother was getting up in the wee hours of every morning, producing pages like mad in order to support her family, and then nursing that family into the wee hours of the night, as husband and various children grew ill and died, one by one, of tuberculosis. The guilt Trollope must have felt at making no effort to write and make a name for himself, in addition to the misery of living “a wretched life” (54) with no hope of “any escape from such dirt” (52) must have been terrible. Added to this, his mother was often the one to pay off some of his debts: “She paid much for me,—paid all that I asked her to pay, and all that she could find out that I owed. But who in such a condition ever tells all and makes a clean breast of it?” (50).

Trollope reveals not only guilt but also his shame here, concealing the full extent of his trouble from his mother. Through Carry and her treatment by Fanny and Frank Fenwick, we have Trollope’s attempt not only to dismiss Carry’s guilt but to hear that dismissal from the mouths of two characters evoking his own mother. As I will discuss in a moment, the shame of these years for Trollope, however, proves much harder to escape--something he acknowledges through Carry, as well.

After the completion of the novel, Trollope reiterates his stance on fallen women, and prostitutes in particular, in a letter dated 25 May 1870, to a friend, Mrs. Anna Steele. He

calls these fallen women “the most terrible sufferers of this age [.] . . . a class who suffer heavier punishment in proportion to their fault than any other, and who often have come to their ineffable misery almost without fault at all” (Letters 523). Again, and even more clearly than in his preface to the novel, Trollope relieves the fallen woman of any responsibility for her situation, a gesture that he often repeats for himself when describing his years on his own in London.

When Trollope’s attempts to diminish or dismiss Carry’s guilt are juxtaposed with his identification with her of himself and his own “guilty” time in London, what begins to emerge more and more clearly is an attempt to diminish not only Carry’s guilt but his own. In his identification with her, what is at stake for Trollope in dismissing his fallen woman’s guilt is his attempted dismissal of his own guilt and shame. He does this overtly in his autobiography, as well, filling the chapter on his seven years in London with accounts of its low points and how he was not to blame for them. He writes of his job at the Post Office: “I got credit for nothing, and was reckless” (45). He states, “I was always on the eve of being dismissed, and yet was always striving to show how good a public servant I could become, if only a chance were given me. But the chances went the wrong way” (46). Of some sort of affair with a young woman, Trollope recounts:

I was always in trouble. A young woman down in the country had taken it into her head that she would like to marry me. . . . I need not tell that part of the story more at length, otherwise than by protesting that no young man in such a position was ever much less to blame than I had been in this. The invitation had come from her, and I had lacked the pluck to give it a decided negative; but I had left the house within half an hour, going away without my dinner, and had never returned to it.

(47)

He was constantly in debt, finding it impossible to live on 90£ a year. He observes:

That I should have thought this possible at the age of nineteen, and should have been delighted at being able to make the attempt, does not surprise me now;--but that others should have thought it possible, friends who knew something of the world, does astonish me. A lad might have done so, then, no doubt or might do so even in these days, who was properly looked after and kept under control,--on whose behalf some law of life had been laid down. . . . No such calculation was made for me or by me. It was supposed that a sufficient income had been secured to me, and that I should live upon it as other clerks lived. (35)

Trollope also writes the following:

And now, looking back at it, I have to ask myself whether my youth was very wicked. I did no good in it; but was there fair ground for expecting good from me? When I reached London no mode of life was prepared for me,--no advice ever given to me. . . . Towards the good books and tea no training had been given me. There was no house in which I could habitually see a lady's face and hear a lady's voice. No allurements to decent respectability came in my way. (51)

Again, Trollope dismisses his own guilt: he went to London with no advice, without training in self-restraint, without proper company arranged for him, with no "allurements to decent respectability."

Finally, when the texts around Trollope's two tea-drinking passages from the autobiography and The Vicar of Bullhampton are juxtaposed once again, they reveal yet another parallel between himself and his fallen woman which dismisses guilt on both of their parts. About "a young man" and leading up to Carry's flight from the respectable house of Mrs. Stiggs's where the Vicar has stashed Carry, Trollope states:

It is hardly recognised that a sudden change from billiards to good books requires a strength of character which, if possessed, would probably have kept the young man altogether from falling into bad habits. If we left the doors of our prisons open, and then expressed disgust because the prisoners walked out, we should hardly be less rational. The hours at Mrs. Stiggs's house had been frightfully heavy to poor Carry Brattle, and at last she escaped. (368)

About himself in his autobiography, Trollope declares:

Of course if the mind be strong enough, and the general stuff knitted together of sufficiently stern material, the temptations will not prevail. But such minds and such material, are, I think, uncommon. The temptation at any rate prevailed with me.

(An Autobiography 51)

Both Trollope and Carry fall because they are lacking in strength of character, strength of mind, and strength of "general stuff." Of far more importance to Trollope than this lack, however, is how commonplace it is. As Trollope says in the preceding passage, "But such minds and such material are, I think, uncommon" (51). Neither Trollope nor Carry is unusual in falling and, in fact, are hardly even guilty of having done so.

Trollope accomplishes through all of these gestures--through his refusal to call Carry a prostitute and through his calling her "sin" such a "small one"--at least a partial denial of Carry's responsibility and guilt, which resonates with his attempts at dismissing his own responsibility and guilt. Further than this, Trollope may also be demonstrating through Carry the shame that is and forever will be attached to her and, by proxy, to himself. About shame, H. M. Lynd posits that it is

almost impossible to communicate. . . . [T]he minute, concrete detail . . . the actual thorn in the wound . . . is almost unbearable to admit to recollection or to express in

words to another. The possibility of having to communicate to another person a past experience of shame may bring into throbbing awareness of detail what one has attempted to shroud in general phrases. (qtd. in Shapiro 42)

Trollope's use of the phrase "ineffable misery" when speaking of Carry in his preface (xxix) and again when speaking of prostitutes in his letter to Anna Steele of 25 May 1870 points to his strong association of silence with Carry, prostitutes, and fallen women in general. Their misery and, by implication, their shame is unspeakable, indescribable, beyond words. For Trollope, the ineffability of shame results not only in the prostitute's silence but in her author's silence as well--both in his depictions of her shame and of his own. Just as Trollope is unable to detail the actual points of his own disgrace in London, stating vaguely that he feared that "from such dirt . . . there was no escape" (52), so too does he avoid giving many details about Carry's past life or calling her a prostitute, outright. This refusal not only attempts to relieve Carry of guilt but also highlights her shame, illustrating that for Trollope, while the burden of guilt may be lightened, that of shame cannot. Once it attaches to a person, no matter what the circumstances, it is not only ineffable, it is inescapable and its effects are most miserable.

The Vicar, for all of his unwillingness to call or hear Carry called a prostitute and in spite of all of his attempts to relieve her of responsibility for her situation, is the character who best illustrates one of the characteristics of shame--its inescapability. Trollope demonstrates through Frank Fenwick's reactions to Carry that once a person has experienced shame, that person is forever perceived with that shame in mind. When the Vicar first finds Carry, he asks that she write to him before leaving her current location. On his next visit to her, he finds that Carry has left suddenly and he is told by one of Carry's female neighbors, "Her young man come and took her up to Lon'on o' Saturday" (196).



Carry's brother Sam has known of her whereabouts, in fact was responsible for settling her in this first place, and yet the Vicar never once considers that Sam may be the "young man" who has taken Carry away. Rather, he immediately thinks the worst of her--that she is sleeping with yet another man and has now run away with him rather than allow the Vicar to save her. Trollope writes of Fenwick:

It did not occur to him not to believe the woman's statement [about Carry], and all his hopes about the poor creature were at once dashed to the ground. His first feeling was no doubt one of resentment, that she had broken her word to him. [. . .] And then the nature of the statement was so terrible! She had gone back into utter degradation and iniquity. [. . .] The moment that there was a question of bringing her back to the decencies of the world, she escaped from her friends and hurried back to the pollution which, no doubt, had charms for her. He had allowed himself to think that in spite of her impurity, she might again be almost pure, and this was his reward. (196-197).

The immediate severity of Fenwick's thoughts are a clear indicator that no matter what Carry does, because she has been shamed once, she will forever be perceived first and foremost as fallen. If even her champion is so quick to condemn her, based on one sentence from a neighbor who knows nothing of Carry herself, what chance does Carry stand in the eyes of those who do know that she has fallen? Fenwick's misunderstanding is soon straightened out, however, when he receives a letter from Carry telling him that she has gone away with her brother, Sam, who soon finds a place for her in Salisbury with a Mrs. Stiggs. The Vicar agrees to pay for Carry's room and board until he can convince one of her family members to take her in again but in the meantime, he also tells a constable of Carry's whereabouts so that she may be subpoenaed to appear in court to testify on behalf of her brother, who has

been accused of involvement in a murder in Bullhampton. Carry is so afraid of appearing in the court and having to admit her shame that as the time approaches for her to do so, she flees Mrs. Stiggs's. When the Vicar comes to visit and finds her gone, once again he immediately thinks the worst of Carry: "and who could believe aught of her now but that she would return to misery and degradation?" (364). Clearly, once shamed always shamed, even by those who are sympathetic to her and would relieve her of her misery.

Carry's flight from Mrs. Stiggs's for which the Vicar is so quick to condemn her results in another scene in which Trollope illustrates yet another effect of shame--the utter passivity that results from it. According to Janet Shapiro's summary of theorists on shame, "In shame, one feels bad about one's essential character and, because one feels powerless to alter or improve one's painful state, one becomes passive" (45). This passivity Trollope illustrates vividly in the chapter "Carry Brattle's Journey," detailing what happens to Carry after she has left Mrs. Stiggs's house. Trollope tells us that Carry must choose "either to go to London, or not to go to London" (386). But rather than actively decide that she will not go to London and back into degradation yet, Carry seems to be almost entirely passive. She "weakly, wistfully, with uncertain step, almost without an operation of her mind" passes the railway station which would take her back to the city and instead she heads towards Bullhampton and home (368). Trollope continues about her:

Nothing could be more truly tragical than the utterly purposeless tenour of her day,-- and her whole life. She had no plan,--nothing before her; no object, even for the evening and night of that very day in which she was wasting her strength on the . . . road. It is the lack of object, of all aim, in the lives of the houseless wanderers that gives to them the most terrible element of their misery. (369)

While Trollope himself was not a houseless wanderer during his time in London, there is something about Carry's passivity which resonates here with his own state of mind at the time. To reiterate, he would ask himself about his life in London, "Could there be any escape from such dirt? . . . and I always answered that there was no escape" (An Autobiography 52). Furthermore, he writes of his perception that his "life was taking him downwards to the lowest pits" (58). The sentence construction alone in this sentence reveals Trollope's sense of passivity as life "takes him downwards"; he has no power to stop it and from "such dirt there [is] no escape." Shame seems to be a mire from which escape is well-nigh impossible, and its inescapability is further compounded by the passivity that results from it. Carry spends the night at a house along the road and the next day, her passivity continues: "She paid for her breakfast, and, as she was not told to go her way, she sat on the chair in which she had been placed without speaking, almost without moving till late in the afternoon" when she again begins her journey (370). The second night she sleeps outside and the next day, she continues moving towards Bullhampton and home but, Trollope tells us, "even then her mind was not made up [and] as she went on towards her old home, through the twilight, she had no more definite idea than that of looking once more on" her childhood home (370).

To this utter passivity is added yet another effect of shame--voicelessness. Carry may at first seem to be unimportant to the novel because she so rarely speaks. She is absent from the novel until chapter 25, roughly over one third of the way through; she has few direct quotations--rather the narrator often paraphrases or summarizes what she says; and on those few occasions when she does speak for herself, she speaks only the cliché for fallen women that she would be better off dead. The fact that she has little or no voice in the novel indicates not her unimportance or even Trollope's inability or unwillingness to discuss

such a risky subject as a fallen woman/prostitute. Instead, if one understands her in terms of representing Trollope himself, her silence reveals what Trollope understands about the effects of shame--it renders one unable to express oneself, either figuratively, as shame undermines the person's credibility, or literally as it leaves the person unable to speak at all, both of which result in the perpetuation of shame. Carry is silenced figuratively in that, even if she speaks, she knows that the word of a fallen woman counts for nothing. I have mentioned that she has few direct quotations in the novel but among those words that are directly hers, she very often says that what she says means nothing or that she herself has no presence or voice. When the Vicar first finds her, she tells him, "What's the use o' living? Nobody'll see me, or speak to me" (174). When he asks her to testify on behalf of her brother's innocence in the matter of the murder at Bullhampton, Carry tells him that "as for me, I ain't no business to speak of nobody. [. . .] If I said as how he'd come to see his sister, it wouldn't sound true, would it, sir, she being what she is?" (175). When the Vicar's wife goes to see Carry, all that is said of the visit is given in hindsight by the narrator: "Mrs. Fenwick, on her return home, had reported that Carry was silent, sullen, and idle; that her only speech was an expression of a wish that she was dead, and that Mrs. Stiggs had said that she could get no good of her" (346). After she leaves Mrs. Stiggs's, drifts homeward, and is taken in finally, her father refuses to name her or speak to her other than he would to any servant. Carry feels the sting of this and complains of it to her sister, Fanny. Even Fanny, who has been sympathetic, indicates that Carry has no right to speak. Fanny says to their mother, "[T]he less she says and the more she does, the better for her" (444). And when Carry finally appears in court to testify on behalf of her brother's innocence, her voice fails her entirely. At first, she answers the defense lawyer's questions in "so low a voice that a man was sworn to stand by her and repeat her answers aloud to the jury" (500). The

prosecuting lawyer then begins his examination of her, immediately asking her to confess herself to be a fallen woman: “My dear, I believe you have been indiscreet?” (500). Carry can make no reply at all: “She struggled to make an answer, and the monosyllable, yes, was formed by her lips. The man who was acting as her mouthpiece stopped down his ears to her lips, and then shook his head. Assuredly no sound had come from them that could have reached his senses, and had he been ever so close” (500). The lawyer, sensing that the court is sympathetic to Carry’s embarrassment, then says, “It is my duty to prove to the jury . . . that the life of this young woman has been such as to invalidate her testimony” (501). Carry still cannot answer--she has no voice here and even if she were to speak, the lawyer states that her answer would simply confirm that what she says has no meaning.

Shamed silences also undercut the very project of dismissing guilt which Trollope has tried so hard to achieve on Carry’s (and his own) behalf. Speechlessness renders one guilty and defenseless, not only in the subversion of credibility but also in what meanings can then be projected onto one’s silence. Finally, in the face of Carry’s utter inability to answer his final question about her “indiscretion,” the lawyer tells her, “Your silence tells all that I wish the jury to know” (502). This statement works in at least two ways, neither of which is to Carry’s advantage. First, one may understand the lawyer to mean that Carry’s silence speaks in itself of her guilt--by remaining speechless, she is actually confessing her guilt and shame as a prostitute. Second, the lawyer’s words may also be understood to mean that because she is unable to speak, she is also unable to offer any defense of herself and thus, the lawyer can use her silence to tell the jury all that *he* wishes them to know--which is not at all the same as what Carry herself might wish to say.

Perhaps the worst effect of shame’s silencing effect is the ensuing intensification of shame. A vicious circle results: shame leads to silence leads to more intense shame and so

on and on. Trollope knew what silence could do and he knew what relief there was in being able to express emotions. He wrote of it in at least one of his novels, Framley Parsonage. Trollope writes of Lady Lufton, concerned for her vicar Mark Robarts who seems to be heading for a fall by associating with infamous and debt-ridden characters: “All these things she knew, but as yet had not [mentioned], grieving over them in her own heart the more on that account. Spoken grief relieves itself” (181). Again in Framley Parsonage, Trollope emphasizes this anguish even more by the contrasting comfort he writes of when grief (or shame) is finally expressed. When Mark Robarts finally confesses his troubles to his wife, Trollope tells us:

She was so glad she knew it, that she might comfort him. And she did comfort him, making the weight seem lighter and lighter on his shoulders as he talked of it. And such weights do thus become lighter. A burden that will crush a single pair of shoulders, will, when equally divided--when shared by two, each of whom is willing to take the heavier part--become light as a feather. Is not that sharing of the mind's burdens one of the chief purposes for which man wants a wife? For there is no folly so great as keeping one's sorrows hidden. (Framley Parsonage 389-400)

Trollope writes so understandingly about this need to express ones sorrows in order to relieve them and yet he also wrote about the necessity to conceal sorrow. As I stated earlier in this chapter, Trollope espouses, time and again, the belief that a man *must* keep his sorrow hidden in order to be manly. Behind the mask of Carry--unable to speak of her shame--Trollope is able to reveal how painful such silence is and how self-perpetuating. Her sorrows remain hidden, and she is compelled to silence by the very shame that would be relieved in the telling of it.

Trollope's final commentary on shame and its misery is that they are inescapable. This conclusion he represents through Carry's ending. Her father claims that he has forgiven her; he accompanies her to the trial and seems to stand by her during her painful testimony (or lack of it); he finally begins again to call her by her name, something he had refused to do when she first returned. Trollope tells us, however, that "on the third day" after the trial has ended, a report of it appears in the local newspaper. Jacob Brattle read all through, painfully, from beginning to the end, omitting no detail of the official occurrences. At last, when he came to the account of Sam's evidence, he got up from the chair on which he was sitting . . . and striking his fist upon the table, made his first and last comment upon the trial. "It was well said, Sam. Yes; though thou be'est my own, it was well said." Then he put the paper down and walked out of doors and they could see that his eyes were full of tears. (525)

Sam's evidence that was so "well said" was his refusal to say anything that would convict his sister of being "disreputable" (503). This scene serves three important purposes for Trollope's representation of shame. First, it reinforces Trollope's attempt to deny Carry's guilt--once again, there is silence instead of any actual words declaring her to be a prostitute. Second, it illustrates the kind of life Carry has ahead of her. Trollope declares that after this scene, "there came a great change in [Jacob Brattle's] manner to his youngest daughter" (525). He calls her by name, greeting her "with as much outward sign of affection as he ever showed to any one," and allowing her to kiss him at night before bed. However, the fact remains that Brattle, in reading the trial scene aloud to his family, has forced Carry to relive it. Her father has "omit[ed] no detail of the official occurrences" which means that the questions put to Carry about her fall and the reasons given for those questions--the attempt to prove that since she is fallen, her word is worth nothing even if she were able to speak it--

as well as Carry's debilitating silence are all brought, "painfully," before her again. And more chilling even than the reading and reliving of the trial is Trollope's concluding comment on Jacob Brattle. After stating that "a great change" has come over Brattle in the way he treats Carry, Trollope then undercuts it, concluding,

Nevertheless, they who knew him . . . were aware that he never for a moment forgot the disgrace which had fallen upon his household. He had forgiven the sinner, but the shame of the sin was always on him; and he carried himself as a man who was bound to hide himself from the eyes of his neighbours because there had come upon him a misfortune which made it fit that he should live in retirement. (525)

While this seems to be about Brattle's pain, one can easily understand what this means for Carry. Shame and all of its effects are inescapable. Trollope's final words on Carry leave no doubt that she will remain in this situation for the rest of her years: "As for Carry, she lived still with them [her family], doomed by her beauty, as was her elder sister by the want of it, to expect that no lover should come and ask her to establish with him a homestead of their own" (526-27). She is condemned to remain in a household where her shame is "never for a moment forgot[ten]" and where the whole household--"they who knew" her father--knows that this is so. Trollope may appear to buck convention by leaving his fallen woman alive at the end of the novel, but her ending is one of never-ending shame, a fate perhaps worse than death.

Thus, Trollope shows in Carry that shame cannot be escaped. Lynd argues that to escape shame, one must change one's entire self (paraphrased in Shapiro, 42). S. Levin agrees with this. Shapiro paraphrases Levin as follows: ". . . overcoming shame . . . requires changing one's self image" (20). When Trollope was transferred from London to Ireland and became a surveyor for the Post Office, he seems to have undergone just such a



transformation, just such a change of self image. From the do-nothing, “reckless,” debt-ridden young man of “irregular” and “bad” character to the competent, energetic surveyor soon to become a married man and writer in Ireland, Trollope seems to have changed his self entirely. Trollope writes of this move as “the first good fortune of my life” (An Autobiography 59). One of his biographers, N. John Hall writes that “Ireland was to transform him. . . . To [Trollope] it was a miraculous metamorphosis” (81). However, what really seems to have occurred was a splitting of the self for Trollope. Both people who met him for the first time, after having known him only through his novels, as well as those who had known him much longer remarked on how startling was the difference between his self in person and his self in his writing. In his biography of Trollope, N. John Hall gives a summary of such perceptions of Trollope:

Many of Trollope’s contemporaries were puzzled or intrigued by the apparent incompatibility between the man they knew and the story-teller; other novelists--Thackeray, George Eliot, Dickens--did not give rise to similar questions. The contrast was especially surprising to those who knew him only slightly. . . . But friends also remarked the contrast between author and his novels: James Bryce said that at first “you were disappointed not to find so clever a writer more original,” and even when, on further acquaintance he appeared more of a piece with his books, one still “could never quite recognize in him the delineator of Lily Dale”. . . . Frederic Harrison . . . was mystified as to how “such a colossus of blood and bone should spend his mornings, before we were out of bed, in analyzing the hypersensitive conscience of an archdeacon, the secret confidences whispered between a prudent mamma and lovelorn young lady, or the subtle meanderings of Marie Goesler’s heart.” W. P. Frith, an intimate of Trollope’s, said, “It would be impossible to

imagine anything less like his novels than the author of them. The books, full of gentleness, grace, and refinement; the writer of them, bluff, loud, stormy, and contentious, neither a brilliant talker nor a good speaker.” (507-508)

This split self seems to indicate that instead of achieving an escape from the shamed self through transformation, Trollope submerged shame beneath the illusion of a transformed self. It’s difficult to tell if, like Carry, Trollope was also unable to express his shame. What he told his wife and sons about his seven years in London is unknown to us but we do know that Trollope’s certainly seemed to be a divided self and one might speculate that this division was caused, at least in part, by continuing and unexpressed feelings of shame. His autobiography, in which he attempts to express these feelings, was published, by his own wishes, only after his death. As Clinton Machann points out, Trollope speaks “from a posthumous position-- . . . *ex morte*” (77). From the relative safety of the “further shore” (367), he states in the first paragraph of his autobiography that “it will not be so much my intention to speak of the little details of my private life, as of what I, and perhaps others round me, have done in literature” (1). In other words, relative silence will be observed on those “little details” like his life as a London postal clerk, about which he lets slip the fact that, when “Turning it all over in my own mind, as I have constantly done in after years, the tragedy has always been uppermost” (52). Trollope sums up his shame and his continuing fear of it in the following passage, which appears in his autobiography right between the end of his time of degradation in London and the beginning of his career in Ireland, a time of seeming metamorphosis but, as the following passage reveals, really only a temporary submersion of shame for shame can never be fully escaped:

In the preceding pages I have given a short record of the first twenty-six years of my life, --years of suffering, disgrace, and inward remorse. I fear that my mode of telling

will have left an idea simply of their absurdities; but in truth I was wretched, -- sometimes almost unto death, and have often cursed the hour in which I was born. There had clung to me a feeling that I had been looked upon always as an evil, an encumbrance, a useless thing,--as a creature of whom those connected with him had to be ashamed. And I feel certain now that in my young days I was so regarded. Even my few friends who had found with me a certain capacity for enjoyment were half afraid of me. I acknowledge the weakness of a great desire to be loved,--of a strong wish to be popular with my associates. No child, no boy, no lad, no young man, had ever been less so. And I had been so poor; and so little able to bear poverty. But from the day on which I set my foot in Ireland all these evils went away from me. Since that time who has had a happier life than mine? Looking round among all those I know, I cannot put my hand upon one. But all is not over yet. And, mindful of that, remembering how great is the agony of adversity, how crushing the despondency of de-gradation, how susceptible I am myself to the misery coming from contempt, --remembering also how quickly good things may go and evil things come, --I am often again tempted to hope, almost to pray, that the end may be near. Things may be going well now--'Sin aliquem infandum casum, Forutna, minaris,/Nunc. O nunc liceat crudelem abrumpere vitam' [But if, Fortune, you threaten some dreadful disaster, let me now, oh now, break off this cruel life. Virgil, Aeneid, viii. 578-79]. There is unhappiness so great that the very fear of it is an alloy to happiness. (60-61)

Just like Carry, Trollope, after having known "degradation" and "the misery coming from contempt"--in other words, shame--fears that he cannot escape it, and almost wishes for death before having to endure those feelings again. Like Carry, he is condemned to live with

a remembrance of “unhappiness so great” that there is no escape from it, and he is doomed not by beauty but by “manliness” to keep this wolf of shame hidden.

For the sake of time and space and, more importantly, because of the link between Carry and himself as a young adult which Trollope explicitly forges by including the tea-drinking/book-reading anecdote in both The Vicar of Bullhampton and An Autobiography, I have focused only on his first years in the Post Office as a source of shame and I have all but ignored his schoolboy years, when shame was an everyday experience for him. Those years played their part, too, of course. I think the reason the first Post Office years may have taken their toll in a different way, a way which would make Carry a likely figure in which to examine the shame of that time, lies in the fact that as a postal clerk, Trollope was finally an adult. His sense of shame seems to have been compounded by the sense of responsibility he was then forced, if not to accept it, then at least to acknowledge, even as he attempted to dismiss that responsibility, and thus dismiss feelings of guilt. The shame, however, could not be dismissed, and neither could the guilt, as exhibited by Trollope’s portrayal of Carry as forever on the edge of being deemed guilty based purely on the fact that she is forever shamed. The result for Trollope was, as it was for Dickens, a split self and a never-ending fear of what living constantly with shame might mean. Yet unlike Dickens with Nancy, Trollope does not use Carry to illustrate a split self; rather, for Trollope, Carry represents the shamed self who never escapes, who never transforms, whether it’s to leave the shamed self behind entirely or, as for Trollope, to burrow a hole and bury that shamed self underneath a façade of bravado and brusqueness, beneath the appearance of having escaped. Instead of division or transformation, Carry represents the forever-shamed self.

Trollope declares in his autobiography that the Brattles are, for him, the most important part of the novel:

As regards the Brattles, the story is, I think, well told. The characters are true, and the scenes at the mill are in keeping with human nature. For the rest of the book I have little to say. It is not very bad, and it certainly is not very good. As I have myself forgotten what the heroine does and says--except that she tumbles into a ditch--I cannot expect that anyone else should remember her. But I have forgotten nothing that was done or said by any of the Brattles. (333)

I argue that Trollope has forgotten nothing that was said or done by the Brattles--Carry's fall, her shame, her sister's attempt to protect her from it, her father's continued remembrance of it, her doom at having to live with that continued remembrance and thus with never-ending shame--because they are another way of thinking of his own shame and its continued effects. Deputizing Carry Brattle to carry shame provides Trollope with another way of "Turning it all over in my mind, as I have constantly done in after years," and showing that, despite attempts to hide these feelings, the wolf continues to gnaw and "the tragedy has always been uppermost" (An Autobiography 52).

## CHAPTER IV

### “HERS IS THE LEPER-SIN”:

#### THE QUARANTINE AND COMPANIONSHIP OF GASKELL’S GRIEF IN ESTHER OF MARY BARTON

Mary Barton presents the story of John and Mary Barton, father and daughter, living in Manchester and suffering from low wages and poor working conditions. The novel sets up Mary’s potential fall when the mill owner’s son, Harry Carson, takes an interest in her and begins an attempt to seduce her. At the same time, Mary’s childhood friend Jem Wilson declares his love for her and she refuses him. Almost immediately after, however, Mary realizes that she is in love with Jem and any threat of a fall for her at the hands of Harry Carson is dismissed. Meanwhile, after Harry Carson humiliates the working men in a meeting with their union, John Barton and his fellow workers decide to assassinate him and John draws the short straw appointing him to do it. He uses a gun borrowed from Jem Wilson, abandons the weapon at the scene of the crime, and Jem is accused of the murder. Also important to this plot, Mary’s maternal aunt Esther, who has not been heard from since her initial fall years earlier, reappears with the mission of saving Mary from Harry Carson’s seduction. When Esther resurfaces, we learn that during her years away, she has been abandoned by her lover, she has had and lost a child, and she has become a prostitute. Although Esther’s fears for Mary--that she will fall and be condemned to the same miserable fate as her aunt--turn out to be unfounded now, Esther helps her niece in another way, providing evidence from the scene of Carson’s murder that dismisses Jem’s guilt and convicts John Barton. This evidence, paired with the alibi of Will Wilson, provides the impetus for Mary to travel to Jem’s trial and deliver him. By the end of the novel, Esther

and John Barton both die and are buried in an unnamed grave, and Mary and Jem marry and immigrate to North America where they begin their lives anew.

In Chapters II and III, I examine how Dickens and Trollope use the prostitutes they create as a means through which they may express and self-consciously examine feelings such as shame which they tried to suppress in order to protect some concept of “masculine identity” as autonomous, self-sufficient and self-controlled. In Chapter IV, I argue that Elizabeth Gaskell was also influenced by this constricting ideal of masculinity, and that she too created a prostitute in partial response to it, as well. For Gaskell, this masculine identity and its requirements did not apply directly to herself, of course, but when she married she found that she was affected by it, nonetheless. While the expression of emotion would not have been condemned in a woman and would, in fact, have been expected of her, Gaskell found that within her marriage, something less than full and free expression was required of her in order that her husband, William Gaskell, might suppress his own anxieties. Over the years, as she suffered the loss of 3 of her 7 children, she discovered that her husband could not allow her to express her grief as fully or as cathartically as she would have liked because it exacerbated his own grief and worry. The one person whom Victorian ideals of matrimony declared to be her all-in-all and whom Unitarian ideas of marriage declared should be able to give and take equally could not handle her intense emotions, could not even listen to them, and so could provide no comfort or outlet for his wife, who desperately needed such a release. Like her male contemporaries, when one avenue of self-expression was closed to her, Gaskell forged another in her creation of a prostitute. However, unlike Dickens and Trollope, Gaskell uses Esther not just as a way to quarantine unacceptable feelings--a way to express and examine her grief without upsetting her husband--but also as a figure in which she can show what the denial and suppression of grief--the restricting of a

strong emotion that should be expressed--does to the person thus isolated. For Dickens and Trollope, the emotion is the thing to be feared. For Dickens, shame splinters the self; for Trollope, shame is paralyzing, silencing, inescapable. For Gaskell, however, it is the quarantine of the emotion--the requirement of its suppression--that devastates. In her prostitute Esther of Mary Barton, Gaskell creates a partner with whom she can identify as a mother and as a woman, and with whom Gaskell can share her grief. Gaskell uses her prostitute to quarantine grief, displacing her own grief onto her prostitute, as her contemporaries Dickens and Trollope do with their feelings of shame, but beyond this, I argue that Gaskell uses Esther also to express grief, to show what its effects may be on the sufferer who finds herself isolated from those who should best understand her but refuse even to try, to illustrate to what constructive uses grief may be turned when sympathy and love, rather than alienation and suppression, accompany it, and finally Gaskell creates in Esther a way to assuage her own sorrow.

As critics Amanda Anderson, Laurie Langbauer, and Deborah Nord have argued, for male authors the prostitute figures as their “debased mirror opposite” (Langbauer, Women and Romance 2); as such, she provides these authors with a space to project, displace, or quarantine their fears and anxieties.<sup>1</sup> For Gaskell, however, while the prostitute would certainly seem to be very different, she is not a “mirror opposite” and does not provide as covert a space for a woman author to project and examine her fears and anxieties as the prostitute may do for male authors. Indeed, critics have noted the identification between Gaskell and her fallen women far more often than they have noted any parallels between

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<sup>1</sup> The concept of the prostitute as a type of “quarantine” upon which I rely heavily in this chapter comes directly from Deborah Nord’s discussion of Dickens. As I have summarized in Chapters II and III, Nord posits that in writing a prostitute, Dickens “uses the barrier of gender to introduce and yet quarantine urban misery” (68); Anderson argues that for Victorian male authors in general, “fallenness displaces threats to autonomy and discrete identity, to cherished forms of masculine selfhood” (41); Langbauer observes that in English novels, “The status quo defines itself by gesturing to its (debased) mirror opposite, whose lacks and problems seem to point to its own completeness and strength” (Women and Romance 2).



Dickens or Trollope and their prostitutes. Elsie Michie argues that Gaskell parallels her fallen women because, “[a]s a domestic woman who became a professional writer, Gaskell, too, crossed the boundary between private and public, [finding] as she did so, that it was impossible for her to be out in public and not have her behavior characterized in terms of deviance, waywardness, or impropriety”; thus, as a woman writer, Gaskell was also a fallen woman of sorts (82).<sup>2</sup> Publishing her work at about the same time as Michie, Jennifer Uglow mines a similar vein, implicitly comparing Gaskell to her prostitute Esther of Mary Barton and stating that in writing the prostitute’s controversial story, Gaskell “was making herself the voice of the outcast, deliberately confronting revulsion and fear” (202). This ability to identify Gaskell with her prostitute works in Gaskell’s favor. Even as Gaskell was projecting her grief onto Esther and expressing herself through her prostitute, any attempt at truly displacing and quarantining her grief must have been incomplete. This very inability of Gaskell’s to disconnect herself completely from her prostitute may have been part of what makes Esther so therapeutic to her author: Esther really does provide a way to self-expression for Gaskell, a more obvious self-expression which can then lead to a more ready understanding and sympathy for Gaskell, while at the same time providing just enough distance (Gaskell, in the end, was not a prostitute) to fulfill William’s need from his wife that she suppress her emotions in order to “protect” him from them.

In addition to identifying with her prostitute in confronting the trials of being a “public woman” as a professional writer and to sympathizing with Esther in the drawing of attention to social problems such as prostitution, Gaskell was also navigating some very

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<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Starr also sees an identification between Gaskell the writer and Esther the public prostitute. After describing the parallels between Gaskell’s and Esther’s narratives, Starr writes, “While Gaskell’s text attempts to gather sympathy for Esther, then, it also requires the removal of the inappropriately commercial and public woman. The novel ultimately severs connections between Gaskell’s authorship and Esther’s debased labor, asserting the skill and value of its own narrative work” (391).

personal terrain, representing and exploring through Esther her own experiences as a mother who has lost children and is ravaged by grief--what Gaskell calls, when writing about the death of her son Willie, that “wound [that] will never heal on earth” (Letters 57). The idea that Mary Barton in its entirety is a novel about Elizabeth Gaskell’s own grief for the loss of her son Willie has been well-explored. Gaskell herself states in a letter, “The tale was formed, and the greater part of the first volume was written when I was obliged to lie down constantly on the sofa, and when I took refuge in the invention to exclude the memory of painful scenes which would force themselves upon my remembrance” (Letters 42). In addition, in the preface to Mary Barton, she writes, “Three years ago I became anxious (from circumstances that need not be more fully alluded to) to employ myself in writing a work of fiction” (Mary Barton xxxv). Even though these are relatively veiled allusions to the reason for her grief, all Gaskell scholars agree that the “painful scenes” and the anxiety-causing “circumstances” she is referring to here are based on the loss of her son Willie, and a number of scholars have carefully polished this biographical facet of Gaskell’s first novel. Felicia Bonaparte claims that because of Gaskell’s loss, “what we see [in the novel] is pain and suffering. There is almost nothing else” (145). Robin Colby states, “The painful personal circumstances that led to the writing of Mary Barton--the loss of a much-loved child--were, by her own admission, the wellsprings of Gaskell’s fiction. The death of her ten-month-old son of scarlet fever is frequently cited as the event that prompted Gaskell to write” (34). Rosemarie Bodenheimer observes more emphatically, “So many episodes are devoted to the anatomy of grief that it is nearly impossible to forget that Mary Barton was part of Gaskell’s grieving process” for her son and that “writing Mary Barton was [Gaskell’s] kind of ‘bodily and mental action in time of distress’” (214). Further, Bodenheimer argues that Gaskell often recreates her lost son in other works as well. Bodenheimer observes,

“Countless characters lose their sons, and Gaskell seems to relive with each a different moment of Willie’s death” (225).

While these critics state that Gaskell is grieving in Mary Barton specifically for her lost son Willie, I posit that there is present even more grief than this, grief for not only one but three lost children and grief for the marital isolation in which these losses had to be endured. Gaskell’s prostitute Esther, the only character to lose a young daughter instead of a son, serves as the lens through which we may view Gaskell’s extended and terrible sorrow over not just one child but three: not only for Willie, the one lost child upon whom critics mainly focus when discussing Gaskell’s representation of personal loss in Mary Barton, but also for her firstborn daughter and for her first and unnamed son. Furthermore, Mary Barton highlights Gaskell’s grief not only for all of these children, but also for the fact that she could not openly express her anguish. Gaskell’s husband, William, the one person who shared her loss most closely, did not grieve in the same way as she and so could not provide her with the solace she desperately sought, a solace she tried at first to find through expressing her feelings to others and which, perhaps, she only really conceived by writing herself through Esther. One passage in particular in Mary Barton stands as a beacon for this reading of Esther, illuminating Gaskell’s recognition of the prostitute as a figure whose isolation and silence make grief for a lost child that much harder to bear. Gaskell writes of Esther: “To whom shall the outcast prostitute tell her tale? Who will give her help in the day of need? Hers is the leper-sin, and all stand aloof dreading to be counted unclean” (185). Of course, the “sin” to which Gaskell refers here is Esther’s extreme sexual fallenness as a prostitute and the usage of the adjective “leper” here indicates that the prostitute is a contaminated figure who requires quarantining; however, when one juxtaposes the treatment Esther endures as a prostitute--the way all of her family and friends whom she approaches

recoil from her, “dreading to be counted unclean”--with the treatment of Gaskell and her grief by her husband, a different “leper-sin” may be seen to emerge--that of too intense emotion which threatens to contaminate and corrupt those who come into contact with it. Gaskell herself was not afraid of grief; she believed in and desired to express it. Her husband, however, required its restriction and so, when faced with the cumulative grief of the losses of three children and the inability to find comfort for her sorrow from her helpmate, Gaskell turned instead to Esther. In her isolation and alienation, mirroring Gaskell’s own, Esther provides the perfect character for the representation, examination, and alleviation of that leper-sin, grief.

Before even a single year of her married life had passed, Gaskell already knew the heartache of losing a child. Elizabeth and William were married on 30 August 1832, almost one month to the day before her twenty-second birthday on 29 September. By 10 July of 1833, she had given birth to a stillborn daughter, for whom no name was recorded but for whom Gaskell sorely grieved for quite some time. Winnifred Gerin observes that Elizabeth was “long in getting over” this loss and that it proved to be “the first of many griefs and cares that darkened her early married life” (52). Apparently, Gaskell’s outward suppression of grief began as early as this first loss, as well. Jenny Uglow points out that Gaskell “kept the misery of her baby’s loss to herself, but inwardly she chose to remember rather than forget. Three years later, after marking the day by visiting the baby’s grave, she wrote this sonnet. . . .” (91). The poem Uglow then quotes was first printed in 1906 by A. W. Ward:

ON VISITING THE GRAVE OF MY STILLBORN LITTLE GIRL.

Sunday, July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1836

I made a vow within my soul, O child,  
When thou wert laid beside my weary heart,

With marks of Death on every tender part,  
 That, if in time a living infant smiled,  
 Winning my ear with gentle sounds of love  
 In sunshine of such joy, I still would save  
 A green rest for thy memory, O Dove!  
 And oft times visit thy small, nameless grave.  
 Thee have I not forgot, my firstborn, thou  
 Whose eyes ne'er opened to my wistful gaze,  
 Whose suff'rings stamped with pain thy little brow;  
 I think of thee in these far happier days,  
 And thou, my child, from thy bright heaven see  
 How well I keep my faithful vow to thee. (Ward xxvi-xxvii)

As Uglow points out, Gaskell did not forget her very first child. Three years later, she still mourned for her, choosing to memorialize her grief in an English sonnet, emphasizing in the final rhymed couplet her devotion to her first daughter and her commitment to remember her child always.<sup>3</sup>

This first tragedy was to be followed by another within the decade that followed. Although no sonnet has been found to commemorate the birth or death of Gaskell's first son, he did exist prior to the birth in 1845 of Willie, who until recently was thought to be Gaskell's only son. To Harriet Carr Anderson, Gaskell writes on 15 March 1856, alluding explicitly to a son, born between her daughters Meta (b. 7 February 1837) and Florence (b. 7 October 1842), which would position this first son's birth somewhere between mid-to-late

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<sup>3</sup> Felicia Bonaparte states about this sonnet that "although it commemorates loss, the poem's theme is really fidelity. Gaskell is thinking of her father. He had allowed his new children to drive from his mind all thought of the old. Gaskell promises in the poem that she will never do as he did. Much as she loves her second daughter, she will not let the 'living infant' displace her love for her dead child" (29).

1837 and late 1841--well before the birth of Willie on 23 October 1844. In this letter, Gaskell mentions “the death of a little son while yet a baby”; this child is then distinguished from her son Willie by the rest of Gaskell’s sentence: “then came another boy [William, a.k.a. Willie], who also died, just as he had made himself a place in the hearts of all who knew him” (Chapple, “Two Unpublished Letters from Burrow Hall, Lancashire” 71).

Finally, after the loss of her first son came that of her second, as she states above. Towards the end of July 1845, Elizabeth, William, their 11-year-old daughter Marianne and nine-month-old son Willie traveled on holiday to Ffestiniog in Wales. According to Jenny Uglow:

the mountain villages were . . . full of infection . . . and within days Marianne fell ill with scarlet fever. She soon recovered and ten days later they took her to convalesce at Portmadoc, but there, just as the danger seemed over, Willie suddenly showed alarming symptoms. [T]he disease was fatal to so small a baby. On 10 August Willie died. (152)

The type of fever that took Willie is the same that takes John Barton’s son Tom in Mary Barton. Depression descended upon Gaskell, leaving her prostrate. As Winifred Gerin notes, “Her sorrow crushed her” (73). Gerin adds to this the observation that anything Gaskell may have written of Willie during and immediately after his illness and death was destroyed after Gaskell’s own death, as per her request (73). Gaskell’s grief for Willie, however, would not be effaced as easily as paper could be burnt. Just as three years after the death of her first child she wrote a sonnet to her after visiting her nameless grave, up until at least 1856, Gaskell continued to express her grief in writing, this time in her letters to her close friends. Reminiscing about Willie to her friend Annie Shaen in 1848, Elizabeth wrote:

I have just been up to our room. There is a fire in it, and a smell of baking, and oddly enough the feelings and recollections of 3 years ago came over me so strongly --when I used to sit up in the room so often in the evenings reading by the fire, and watching my darling *darling* Willie, who now sleeps sounder still in the dull, dreary chapel-yard at Warrington. That wound will never heal on earth, although hardly any one knows how it has changed me. (Letters 57)

Two years later, on 26 April 1850 in a letter to her dear friend Eliza (Tottie) Fox, Gaskell wrote poignantly of Willie again, saying that in her room,

*here* there is the precious perfume lingering of my darling's short presence in this life --I wish I were with him in that 'light, where we shall all see light,' for I am often sorely puzzled here--but however I must not waste my strength or my time about the never ending sorrow; but which hallows this house. (Letters 111)

By far, the most detailed account of her grief over a lost child is to be had here in her letters concerning the death of Willie, the tragedy which is generally accepted as the catalyst for Gaskell's writing of Mary Barton and for whom so many critics see Gaskell grieving in the novel.

Gaskell not only suffered from grief over her multiple lost children, but she also suffered from isolation in her grief. Her sorrow was intensified because she felt that she grieved alone, without the emotional support or sympathy of her husband, William. From almost the very beginning of their marriage to the very end of Gaskell's life, it would seem, William was unable to be the kind of confidant his wife required. Elizabeth's strong need for affection, sympathy, and understanding--for someone to listen to her--conflicted with William's own reserve and his own anxiety about intense emotions. This incompatibility between Elizabeth and William seems to have occurred not because he was intolerant or

unkind but in part because her anxieties exacerbated his own. As Jenny Uglow points out, William's "reticence was not due to lack of feeling. . . . It was the dwelling on such worries that he disliked. Finding it hard to express his own feelings, he discouraged introspection" (138). Elizabeth herself acknowledges this when she writes to her sister-in-law Anne Robson that William "does rather hate *facing* anxiety; he is so *very* anxious when he *is* anxious, that I think he always dislikes being made to acknowledge there is cause" (Letters 760-61). Elizabeth Gaskell, on the other hand, felt better in acknowledging anxiety--expressing it, seeking sympathy for it, and perhaps finally purging it. This letter to Anne Robson is tentatively dated by Chapple and Pollard, the editors of Gaskell's letters, as having been written on "10 May 1865," which would place it almost exactly six months before Gaskell's death on 12 November 1865 (Gaskell, Letters 760). Even at her life's close, then, she was conscious of and articulate about the fact that her partner-for-life could not handle worry. As Winnifred Gerin observes, "It was a characteristic that puzzled her, as did his apparent self-sufficiency. She could not make him adapt to her swift changes of mood or penetrate his defensive guard. She had reached the stage in their relationship of realizing that she did not wholly understand him" (68). Gerin points out that in Gaskell's correspondence, she often complained of William's emotional inaccessibility when, as their life together proceeded, "the basic differences of their temperaments would be ever more defined, her expansive nature needing the constant reassurance that his reserved character found it hard to give" (69). These observations about William and his inability to deal with or to exhibit anxiety bolster the argument made by Amanda Anderson about Victorian men and "cherished forms of masculine selfhood," in which the concept of masculinity was defined in terms of autonomy and self-control, ideas which, as Anderson also argues, were threatened by feelings of anxiety and loss of control (41). As a seemingly innate worrier



herself, and one who found relief for anxiety in talking about it, Gaskell was forced to find other confidants, other audiences for her fears, besides her husband. At first these were her correspondents, her sisters-in-law Eliza and Anne, and other female confidants. Unable to tell her worries to William and, in fact, having to conceal them from him, she turned to her friends in an attempt to express herself, her depressed feelings, her anxieties for her children, and her worries about her reserved husband.

In those letters that survive, Gaskell early establishes both her need to express herself spontaneously, as well as William's attempt to curb her spontaneity, as he criticized her for her violation of conventional rules (of grammar and sometimes of propriety), a situation which again demonstrates William's attempt to restrain Gaskell's expression of feeling in the interest of some valued idea of self-control as opposed to uncontrolled and threatening self-expression. Passages from a letter, whose estimated date is 19 August 1838 (written a little over a week before the couple's sixth wedding anniversary) is pregnant with Gaskell's urgent need for self-expression, and with her sense of William's inability to satisfy that need. Gaskell writes to her sister-in-law Eliza Gaskell (soon to be Eliza Holland):

My very dearest Lizzy,

When I had finished my last letter Willm [sic] looked at it, and said it was '*slip-shod*'-- and seemed to wish me not to send it, but though I felt it was not a particularly nice letter I thought I wd [sic] send it, or you would wonder why I did not write. But I was feeling languid and anxious and tired, & have not been over-well this last week, and moreover the sort of consciousness that Wm may any time and does generally see my letters makes me not write so naturally & heartily as I think I should do.

Don't begin that bad custom, my dear! and don't notice it in your answer. (Letters

34)

In this passage, Gaskell clearly establishes her discomfort with William's overseeing her letters which results in her writing "not so naturally or heartily" as she could wish. She must restrain her self-expression in light of her husband's supervision and criticism of it. She warns Lizzie not to "begin that bad custom" after her own upcoming marriage to Charles Holland; she should attempt to preserve some freedom from such a stifling situation.

Gaskell also requests that Lizzie "not notice" or remark upon her mention of the effect that William's supervision has upon her. Based on this final sentence, one might safely assume that Gaskell makes this request of Lizzie because William reads not only the letters his wife sends but the ones she receives as well. No matter how well she may have loved him, this supervision by one who required her to suppress her anxieties in order to protect him from his own and who critiqued her letters for style when Gaskell clearly cared more for content over form was oppressive for her and must have clearly curtailed the pleasure and relief she might have derived from her letter writing.

Also of interest here, Gaskell trusts to William's own sister to conceal things from him, thus demonstrating a faith in the bonds of sisterhood (whether by blood or no) over those of marriage. Gaskell finds both a way to convey her thoughts more freely, in spite of William's wishes, and an accomplice in doing so. In this way she uses her writing to undermine his authority over her self-expression. Gaskell is clearly aware that she is doing just this when, in the same letter, she writes the following to Lizzie: "Still I chuckled when I got your letter today for I thought I can answer it with so much more *comfort* to myself when Wm [sic] is away which you know he is at Buxton" (Letters 34). Not only does she imply that William's absence will enable her to answer Lizzie's letter just as freely and in just as "slipshod" a manner as she pleases, but Gaskell also "chuckle[s]" over this subversion of her husband's attempts to curb her. Gaskell relied quite heavily upon the comfort derived

from telling her anxieties to a sympathetic listener and she clearly states that without William's supervision, she is able to derive "so much more comfort" from the act of writing.

Only a few sentences later in the same letter, Gaskell refers a second time to her desire for companionship and comforting:

Thank you dear Lizzy for telling me so nicely all about your feelings &c--you can not weary by so doing, for I take the greatest interest in every particular, and I heartily wish you were here, with your sweet comforting face, and I would listen, and talk, & talk, & listen. I feel lonely from comparing this absence of Willm's [sic] to those old absences when I had dear Aunt Lumb [who had died over a year earlier] to care about, and open my heart to--times that can never come again! However I hope I am not complaining, for I *am* very happy. (Letters 34)

Yet again, Gaskell stresses the importance of expression and the "comfort" she finds in being able to speak about herself without constraint--without having to quarantine her feelings, as it were.

Interpreting this same letter, Jenny Uglow reads Gaskell's mention of her loneliness during William's absence as loneliness for *him*. There is, however, another possible meaning. Gaskell has already established earlier in this letter that in her husband's absence, she can express herself as freely as she pleases, and here she states that when he has been gone from home in the past, she was able to "open [her] heart" to her beloved foster mother Aunt Lumb. With William gone to Buxton now, she finds herself with the opportunity of "opening [her] heart" to someone and is lonely for a sympathetic listener like Lizzie or Aunt Lumb, but not for William. In her own words, she finds "so much more comfort" in unfettered expression, something that seems only to take place in her husband's absence. The last statement in the passage above ("... I *am* very happy") functions as an attempt to

convince both Lizzie and Gaskell herself of her happiness, in spite of all she has just implied to the contrary. In her own words, she writes more “naturally and heartily,” and takes “so much more comfort” in being able to write when William is gone.

Although Gaskell did love her husband (and there are plenty of examples throughout her letters and her life that attest to this), he was not the one to whom she could always most explicitly “open her heart,” especially when her heart was filled with grief. Elizabeth continues to Lizzy:

Well but to answer your letter more especially--Sam gave it [the letter] to me as I took refuge and dined with him at the Infirmary during a heavy shower coming from chapel--so I read bits out to him, and can give you ‘counsels opinion’ on various subjects. I believe I am more open with Sam than I dare to be with William, and I love Sam as a dear brother. (Letters 34)

Gaskell takes refuge from more than just a rainstorm when she visits her cousin Samuel Holland, demonstrating that she could find sympathy and comfort among men as well as women.<sup>4</sup> Jenny Uglow states that Gaskell “could only talk and write freely to other women. With them she could laugh and cry, gossip and worry, share longings and ambitions as well as problems” (164). And yet Gaskell herself attests to something different in her mention of Sam Holland here. Gender does not necessarily dictate in whom she is able to confide and find comfort. Rather, the ability to listen is the real measure, and Sam proves himself to be a man in whom Elizabeth finds a confidant for her thoughts. Her final statement, “I believe I am more open with Sam than I dare to be with William,” her husband of almost six years at this time, indicates that although there are roles William does fulfill, acting as his wife’s sympathetic confidant in all things is not one of them.

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<sup>4</sup> Gaskell’s long-time friendship and correspondence with Charles Norton attests to this, as well.

Several years later, Gaskell's anxieties and her need for comfort, paired with her husband's inability to provide an audience for her, again cause her to take up her pen and turn to a sister-in-law, this time to Anne Gaskell Robson, whom she calls Nancy (again, as with Lizzy, preferring the affectionate intimacy and informality of a nickname). On 23 December 1840, Gaskell writes:

My dearest Nancy,

I am sitting all alone, and not feeling over & above well; and it would be such a comfort to have you here to open my mind to--but that not being among the possibilities, I am going to write you a long private letter; unburdening my mind a bit. And yet it is nothing, so don't prepare yourself for any wonderful mystery. . . I am so glad to say MA is better;. . .though still I fear she is not strong. . . but one can't help having 'Mother's fears'; and Wm[,] I dare say kindly [,] won't allow me ever to talk to him about anxieties, while it would be SUCH A RELIEF often. So don't allude too much to what I've been saying in your answer. William is at a minster's meeting tonight, --and tomorrow dines with a world of professors and college people. . . ." (Letters 45)

Yet again, Gaskell openly acknowledges that while doing so would bring her great "comfort" and, in fact, "RELIEF," William prohibits her expression of her worries to him, revealing what Patsy Stoneman calls "his almost pathological avoidance of anxiety about his children's health" (29). Here, as Elizabeth anguishes on behalf of one of her children, she again relies on one of William's sisters, both to allow her to "open her mind" and, as she did with Eliza (Lizzie) in 1838, to conceal her expression of anxiety from William, by whom the articulation of such emotions is not allowed. As Jenny Uglow states about the final sentence of the preceding passage, "Once again, with William away, [Gaskell] could say what she felt, while

keeping it a secret from him” (137). I would alter only a single word in Uglow’s observation: with William away, Gaskell could *write* what she felt, while keeping it a secret from him--a strategy that she would employ in her first novel, Mary Barton, by containing her grief within her prostitute Esther, as well as illustrating the results of such suppression.

Importantly, not only did William’s inability to cope with her emotions worry Gaskell, his reservedness actually contributed to her anxieties for their children. As Stoneman observes, William’s “unavailability created in her not only present stress but also fears for the future” (29). In other words, the requirements of suppressing anxiety exacerbated anxiety for Gaskell. In the same letter of December 1840 quoted above, Gaskell writes about her daughter Marianne, saying,

. . . I am more & more convinced that love & sympathy are very *very* much required by MA. The want of them would make MA an unhappy character, probably sullen & deceitful--while the sunshine of love & tenderness would do everything for her. She is very conscientious, and very tender-hearted--Now Anne, will you remember this? *It is difficult to have the right trust in god almost, when thinking about one’s children--*and you know I have no sister or near relation whom I could entreat to watch over any peculiarity in their disposition. Now you know that dear William feeling most kindly towards his children, is yet most reserved in *expressions* of either affection or sympathy--& in case of my death, we all know the probability of widowers marrying again,--would you promise, dearest Anne to remember MA’s peculiarity of character, and as much as circumstances would permit, watch over her & cherish her. The feeling[,] the conviction that you were aware of my wishes and would act upon them would be *such* a comfort to me. (Letters 46)

Already often worried about Marianne's health, Gaskell's anxiety for her daughter is increased by her husband's inability to cope with or express his emotions. He feels "kindly" towards his children but this hardly seems to say much for him. Rather, in spite of kindness, he is "reserved" and not expressive towards them, and for Gaskell this creates yet another source of anxiety. Gaskell's word choice--"kindly," "reserved"--in describing William poses a sharp contrast to her reference to her own feelings a few sentences before, as she states, "It is difficult to have the right trust in God almost, when thinking about one's children," and even earlier in this same letter when she refers to "mother's fears"--feelings which she clearly perceives to be more intense and not to be confused with the fears experienced by others (including, perhaps even especially, those of "reserved" fathers).

Tellingly, Gaskell's description of William as being "most reserved in *expressions* of either affection or sympathy" towards their children fits consistently with her earlier observations about his inability to listen to her express her own fears to him about their children. She knows from first-hand experience just how "most reserved" her husband is. The only person Gaskell feels she can turn to to ensure that Marianne will be lovingly nurtured--listened to, loved openly, and sympathized with--is her sister-in-law Anne. And again, Gaskell draws "*such* a comfort" for her anxieties, not from a reassurance that her husband will take care of her children's emotional lives but from the thought that Anne Robson will try to do so. Gaskell continues in this same letter:

Now don't go & fancy I am low-spirited &c &c. . . . I do often pray for trust in God, complete trust in him--with regard to what becomes of my children. Still let me *open my heart* sometimes to you dear Anne, with reliance on your sympathy \and secrecy/. (Letters 46)

As with Eliza Gaskell, and even employing the same phrase, Gaskell desires to “open [her] heart” and tell her worries, tell her *story*. In doing so, she finds a source of comfort and relief, and yet also a cause for “secrecy,” inserting this last word in her letter as an afterthought, a realization that she has violated her husband’s wishes and must conceal this act of unburdening herself, of opening her mind and heart, of committing her fears to paper where they may survive to turn traitor against her. Yet at the same time, she *must* do so--she must tell her fears and worries in order to find some relief from them. Although it appears that she is acting against her husband’s wishes in expressing herself, she must do it and she will do it, relying on the loyalty and discretion and, above all, upon the sympathy of her sisters-in-law.

In spite of deriving some comfort in those of her letters which somehow escaped William’s supervision, Gaskell was beginning to qualify and restrain her feelings there as well. While she often took comfort in writing to her friends and sisters-in-law, even here the relief Gaskell found seems to be restricted. Notice how she begins this same letter to Anne Robson Gaskell in 1840. Gaskell writes:

I am sitting all alone, and not feeling over & above well; and it would be such a comfort to have you here to open my mind to--but that not being among the possibilities, I am going to write you a long private letter; unburdening my mind a bit. And yet it is nothing, so don’t prepare yourself for any wonderful mystery. . .

(Letters 45)

She writes that she is feeling poorly. She is clearly depressed because conversation, rather than medicine, “would be such a comfort,” and yet she reassures Anne that “it is nothing” and at the end of the letter she writes, “Now don’t go & fancy I am low-spirited &c &c. . . .” (Letters 45). When writing as herself, Gaskell had to qualify her grief or conceal it or both.



Eventually, she would seek to express her grief in some other way, still writing it but, like Dickens and Trollope with shame, displacing it onto her fictional characters, her prostitute Esther, in particular.

By August of 1845, Gaskell found herself in a situation she would soon re-envision for Esther in Mary Barton. Like Esther, who has lost a daughter and who is completely alone in her grief, Gaskell suffered not only from the loneliness which accompanied the loss of her baby, but with a sense of what Patsy Stoneman calls “painful isolation” (29), which must have greatly contributed to her “never ending sorrow” and the “wound [that] will never heal on earth.” By the loss of her third child, and married to a man to whom she could not tell her worries, Gaskell must have felt more isolated and more in need of a way to express her loneliness and grief than ever. Her letters, laced with covert references followed by exhortations to secrecy, could not ease the pain of losing three children in the space of a little over a decade and in 1845, her grief became so large and so intense that, for a time, it paralyzed her with depression. Rather than a panacea for her worries, some other outlet for her grief was desperately needed and the only way she would find this would be by writing it in her first novel, both as the larger social grief of the starving Manchester workers, as critics have pointed out, and more especially as the individualized pain of the most desolate of all bereaved mothers in Mary Barton: the grieving mother-in-exile, her prostitute, Esther. As Gaskell wrote to Tottie on 29 May 1849, “I told the story according to a fancy of my own; to really SEE the scenes I tried to describe, (and they were as real as my own life at the time) and then to tell them as nearly as I could, as if I were speaking to a friend over the fire on a winter’s night and describing real occurrences” (Letters 82). As real as her author’s own life at the time, the scenes of Esther’s loss, her grief, her exile, her relationship to a man who

should share her grief but refuses, and her constructive responses to grief reflect Gaskell's own experience more strikingly than any others in the novel.

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, in Mary Barton Gaskell writes the following of Esther: "To whom shall the outcast prostitute tell her tale? Who will give her help in the day of need? Hers is the leper-sin, and all stand aloof dreading to be counted unclean" (185). In 1845, Gaskell found herself in a similar situation. Although not constituting anything like the stigma attached to sexual fallenness for the Victorians, Gaskell's anxiety and depression did have a similar effect in isolating her from the one person Victorian convention would have dictated should be her closest confidant: her husband William. In his inability to listen to her worries and grief, William could be said to "stand aloof" from Elizabeth. When tragedy struck yet again and the couple suffered the loss of a third child, Gaskell must have felt very much alone, a feeling which, given her need for comfort from friends and family, must have further intensified her sorrow. Like her author, Esther also is alone in her grief for her daughter and cut off from her family. Attempting to tell her story in order to find some release in the telling, as well as in order to save her niece Mary Barton from a fate similar to her own, she is silenced by John Barton and by society in general. Gaskell understood first-hand what suppressing one's grief felt like, as well as what telling it might accomplish. With reference to her title character, Mary Barton, and her grief over Jem Wilson's wrongful incarceration for the murder committed by Mary's own father, Gaskell writes, "Now Mary cried outright; she was weak in body, and unhappy in mind, and the time was come when she might have the relief of telling her grief" (166). Gaskell well knew what it was like to be "weak in body" and "unhappy in mind," and she also knew the relief that telling her grief could bring. Unfortunately, she also knew the pain of being unable to do so. Initially, during the first years of her marriage, she found

some comfort for her anxieties in writing letters to her female friends and sisters-in-law, but even in these she had to qualify her feelings; later, when grief and isolation grew too large, even threatening to consume her, she turned to fiction, writing Mary Barton and, more specifically, Esther.

Interestingly, however, Esther is not the first prostitute that Gaskell wrote, nor is she the only prostitute to represent Gaskell's own grief for the loss of a child. One other exists: Lizzie Leigh. In Gaskell's creation of only two prostitutes who are both bereaved mothers, we may see her association of them with isolation and undying grief, even as the differences between the prominence of Lizzie Leigh in her story and of Esther in Mary Barton indicate a progression and intensification of Gaskell's own grief. A brief detour into an account and analysis of "Lizzie Leigh" is worthwhile here.

The writing of the story "Lizzie Leigh" may shortly have followed the death of Gaskell's first child, thus signaling that the prostitute is a figure that Gaskell strongly associates with her own personal loss and ensuing anguish, as she creates not only Esther after the loss of her son William, but also Lizzie Leigh after the loss of her first daughter. Some critics speculate that although "Lizzie Leigh" was published in 1850, two years after Mary Barton, Gaskell wrote this short story well before her first novel. Winnifred Gerin thinks that the story "may in fact have been a first draft of that of Esther in Mary Barton" (106). Jenny Uglow narrows the period for the creation of "Lizzie Leigh" by positing that the story was "probably begun in the late 1830s, although not published until 1850" (125). Margaret Homans states outright that "the first short story [Gaskell] wrote, in 1838, was 'Lizzie Leigh'" (224). If we accept these critics' sense of when the story was written, then Gaskell created her first prostitute well before she suffered the loss of her third child, perhaps even the loss of her second. Willie's death, the terrible event that she explicitly

acknowledged as her reason to seek escape through writing, had yet to occur; thus, the deaths of earlier children were already causing her to turn to fiction and to the figure of the prostitute to articulate her sorrow, well before Mary Barton.

Already present in “Lizzie Leigh” are the seeds of Gaskell’s identification of her own grief with that of the forlorn and grieving prostitute, an identification that would come to fruition in her first novel. In his introduction to the Knutsford edition of Mary Barton, A. W. Ward states that “the impression is not easily resisted that ‘Lizzie Leigh,’ not published till 1850, was a first sketch, rather than a reproduction of one of the most pathetic episodes in ‘Mary Barton,’ and thus Mrs. Gaskell’s earliest literary utterance of that infinite pity for the fallen which was always near to her heart” (xlix-l). To Ward’s statement I would add that “Lizzie Leigh” is also one of the earliest expressions of Gaskell’s infinite grief for her dead children and her representation that a husband and father might be incapable of sympathizing or participating in that grief. Interestingly, Homans draws a connection between the story and the sonnet Gaskell wrote for her stillborn daughter, observing that “Lizzie Leigh” is

a story about mothers and daughters that hinges on the death of a little girl. The writing of this story suggests that the poem’s vow not to forget the dead daughter continues to provide the impetus to write, even if the child is memorialized by a reenactment of her death. Thus, behind the myth of the writer as mother grieving over her son and directed by her husband’s wisdom, who writes novels and publishes them immediately, lies hidden another writer who grieves alone over a daughter and writes a poem and a story she is reticent to publish. (224)

I agree with Homans in everything except her initial statement that “Lizzie Leigh” depends on “the death of a little girl.” Although the death of Lizzie’s daughter Nanny is a tragedy, it

is does not lie at the heart of the story; neither do Gaskell's examination of Lizzie Leigh's life on the streets or Lizzie's feelings at having to abandon her daughter to another woman's care. Rather than being a story primarily of a prostitute's heartbreak and tragedy, "Lizzie Leigh" recounts another mother's triumphal recovery of her daughter. Although Gaskell may well remember the death of her first daughter in Nanny's demise, Anne Leigh's recovery of her daughter Lizzie appears to be Gaskell's primary concern.

Homans's point about Gaskell's "grieving alone over a daughter" is an apt one; however, Gaskell chooses to represent this side of herself not in her creation of Lizzie, who occupies very little of the actual story, but in Lizzie's mother, Anne. From the story's very beginning, Gaskell establishes not Lizzie's but Anne's isolation and her suppressed voice. Although Lizzie has been cast off by her father after he learns of her fall, Gaskell's vision focuses on Anne's reaction to the situation. Gaskell tells us:

for three years the moan and the murmur had never been out of her heart; she had rebelled against her husband as against a tyrant, with a hidden sullen rebellion, which tore up the old land-marks of wifely duty and affection, and poisoned the fountains whence gentlest love and reverence had once been for ever springing. (48)

Anne's rebellion has been a secret, "hidden" one because she has been silenced by the husband whom Gaskell describes as "hard, stern, and inflexible" (48). James Leigh has exacerbated and then silenced Anne's grief for Lizzie. He has "forbidden his weeping, heart-broken wife to go and try to find her poor sinning child, and declared that henceforth they would have no daughter; that she should be as one dead, and her name never more be named at market or at meal time, in blessing or in prayer" (53). On his deathbed, however, James Leigh repents of his hardness and asks his wife's forgiveness, in a scene through which Gaskell illustrates that not only is suppressed grief horrible for a wife to bear but that

the husband who feels compelled by masculine pride and fear of emotional pain to command such suppression is also wounded by it. When her husband dies, however, Anne is freed from his tyrannical rule and empowered to do and say what she pleases. As Joanne Thompson notes, James Leigh's death "giv[es] Anne the power to find her daughter" (23). Also of importance, Gaskell's specification that Anne has mourned for Lizzie's absence for three years resonates with the number of elapsed years between Gaskell's first daughter's death and the writing of the sonnet memorializing that death. Through writing a husband's death after three years of suppression, Gaskell liberates a grieving wife and mother, empowering her to recover her lost daughter. Through writing her sonnet for her daughter and herself after three years of grieving and possible suppression of that grief by her husband, Gaskell may also have begun to liberate herself from silence.

Furthermore, Gaskell not only frees Anne to search for her daughter but also gives Anne a voice after these years of silent mourning. As Patsy Stoneman observes, Anne speaks out and stands up to her son Will, who opposes her going to seek Lizzie (63). Considering her own silencing by William, Gaskell's creation of Anne's voice and her new-found ability to act functions as the first indicator that Anne is a fantasy of wish-fulfillment for Gaskell.

Reflecting Gaskell's grief for her own daughter, "Lizzie Leigh" presents the fantasy not only of a mother's freedom but of her recovery of a dead daughter. The first "dead" daughter in the story is, metaphorically, Lizzie, but Anne refuses to accept her death, saying, "God will not let her die till I've seen her once again" (53). And she speaks the truth. After leaving the Leigh farmstead and searching for many nights through the streets of Manchester, Anne discovers first Lizzie's daughter, who dies tragically soon after, and then, in the final pages of the story, Anne reunites with Lizzie herself. Although Lizzie grieves

terribly for her lost daughter, the scene that Gaskell creates between Anne and Lizzie emphasizes not Lizzie's sorrow but Anne's joy in the fulfillment of her search for her daughter. Lizzie, condemned by her father for the past three years to be thought of as one dead, is not only recovered, but seemingly brought back to life by her mother. The picture Gaskell paints of their reunion resembles a birth scene, as Anne cares for her suddenly infant-like daughter: "The instant [Lizzie] awoke, her eyes were fixed on her mother's face"; "Her mother hushed her on her breast; and lulled her as if she were a baby; and she grew still and quiet" (74-75). After Lizzie's rebirth, Anne then nurses her daughter back to health, "feed[ing] her sick, unwilling child, with every fond inducement to eat which she could devise. . . . That night they lay in each other's arms" (75-76). Clearly, although Nanny's death causes much sorrow and even though the story ends ultimately with a scene of Lizzie grieving for her daughter, the overriding fantasy of "Lizzie Leigh" is that of a mother's recovery of her daughter, itself a fantasy of recovery for Gaskell. Although Lizzie clearly represents the ever-grieving mother and thus establishes Gaskell's early association of the prostitute with never-ending grief, Gaskell was not yet as hopeless as Lizzie. Rather, she identifies with Anne who, set free by her husband's death, manages to regain her "dead" daughter and seems to be living in a kind of perfect paradise of sorts, even if Lizzie is miserable. Anne has no guilt over lost children; she has done her duty, recovered her daughter, and is now reaping her reward. In the 1830s, then, Gaskell's identification lay with Anne Leigh and the story is Anne's. Even as "Lizzie Leigh" also contains the undying grief of a prostitute mother who can never recover her daughter and thus foreshadows Gaskell's later use of Esther to express her greater sorrow for three lost children instead of one, the story turns out to be Gaskell's wish fulfillment. In it, she expresses her anger at a husband for denying sorrow and pain, her understanding that such denial hurts both wife and

husband, her fantasy of recovery after loss, and her hope that grief can be shunted into the background. By the time Gaskell had lost her son Willie in 1845, this fantasy of liberation from suppression and recovery of the departed must have died as well, causing Gaskell to foreground her grieving prostitute in Mary Barton, examining her grief and her isolation from any sympathetic partners in her sadness, and then laying her to rest.

In “Lizzie Leigh,” Elizabeth Gaskell offers the reader two grieving mothers, one a prostitute, both yearning for their lost children. But the prostitute does not function for Gaskell in the same way in “Lizzie Leigh” as she does in Mary Barton, a difference that, I maintain, has to do with Gaskell’s own intensification of grief and grieving and the requirements of its suppression, a shift that occurs between her first short stories, of which “Lizzie Leigh” certainly may be one, and her first novel. Both of Gaskell’s prostitutes are lonely and grieving outcasts, but in “Lizzie Leigh,” Gaskell seems to be far more concerned with the good mother’s search for and recovery of her lost daughter than with that prostitute daughter’s devastating loss of her own child. By the time Gaskell created her second and final prostitute, Esther of Mary Barton, however, she herself had lost a third child, her beloved son Willie. Thus, by the end of 1845, maternal loss and grief and their suppression were far greater, informed by her sense that lost children could not be recovered--a feeling that must have reached its zenith as she herself slipped to a nadir of depression and prostration. Again, she chooses a prostitute to represent isolation and heartbreak, but unlike Lizzie Leigh, Esther has no mother seeking her and her story is no wish fulfillment of a lost child’s reclamation. Instead, hers is the story of the aftermath of a dearly loved child’s death: the misery of irrevocable loss and the isolation of overwhelming depression without any sympathetic listener to ease the pain. No other character in Mary Barton suffers the intense loneliness and grief that Gaskell figured in her prostitute Esther. No other character shares



her author's need to be heard, to tell her grief in hope of some relief for it, and to find that there is no comfort to be had for a silenced and exiled mother.

Gaskell stated that, in addition to her need to relieve herself from anxiety, further inspiration for the novel was provided by her identification with one particular worker (representative of so many others) who had also lost a young son. Jenny Uglow recounts:

Elizabeth allegedly told Travers Madge of the moment which inspired Mary Barton. One day, visiting a poor family, she was trying . . . to argue against their suspicion of the rich, "when the head of the family took hold of her arm, and grasping it tightly said, with tears in his eyes, 'Ay, ma'am, but have ye ever seen a child clemmed to death?'" (192-93)

On 29 May 1849, Gaskell wrote to Eliza (Tottie) Fox that John Barton was based upon this man: "the circumstances are different, but the character and some of the speeches, are exactly a poor man I know" (Letters 82). Writing in a letter in early 1849<sup>5</sup> Gaskell also declared that John Barton (and by implication the real-life grieving father) was the character with whom she herself identified most closely:

'John Barton' was the original title of the book. Round the character of John Barton all the others formed themselves; he was my hero, *the* person with whom all my sympathies went, with whom I tried to identify myself at the time. . . . (Letters 74)

Gaskell's sympathies lie with John Barton in part because he represents, in his grief over his lost son Tom, her own grief over her lost son Willie. Both children die of scarlet fever; both are deeply loved and sorely missed.

While Gaskell identified herself with John Barton, however, she also identified *in* him the stern, reserved, repressed father figure that was her husband, William Gaskell. While

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<sup>5</sup> This date appears in brackets with a query beside it in J. A. V. Chapple and Arthur Pollard's edition of Elizabeth Gaskell's letters.

Barton's grief for his lost son is clearly painful to him, as Gaskell's was to her, he is not a figure in whom she can really represent herself. Barton grieves terribly and he grieves in silence for his son--in this Gaskell must have sympathized greatly with him; however, his suppression of sorrow leads to much terrible anger and destruction in the story, as well as to the expectation that others must suppress their sorrows, as well. No matter what the similarities between Gaskell's own situation and Barton's in their loss of a son to scarlet fever, in him she could not figure herself. Rather, she creates another character who has also lost a child to a fever and who resembles and represents Gaskell far more closely than Barton ever does. Gaskell writes herself in Esther: in Esther's grief for her child, in her desire to express it, in her isolation and thus her inability to find a sympathetic listener, in her guilt, in her state of mind and body--depressed and consumed by disease as Gaskell was depressed and consumed by the dis-ease of grief and anxiety--and finally in Esther's desire to do good, in spite of (or perhaps because of) these obstacles.

Whereas both John Barton and his wife, while she is living, grieve for their son Tom who has died of scarlet fever as Willie Gaskell died, Esther grieves alone for the loss of a daughter<sup>6</sup>--the only female child to be lost in the entire novel.<sup>7</sup> The Wilsons mourn the death of their twin boys (chapter 7) and Mr. Carson mourns for his adult son Harry (chapter 18). The novel is rife with the deaths of sons (by my count, at least four) and the parents who grieve for them. But as for mothers who grieve for lost daughters, only Esther fits this bill. Only Esther's daughter Annie dies. This single dead daughter and so many dead sons might seem to emphasize more than ever that Gaskell was writing a novel about the death of

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<sup>6</sup> In her study dedicated to Gaskell, Felicia Bonaparte states incorrectly that Esther's child is a boy (76), a fascinating slip that perhaps demonstrates a critic's desire to see in the novel only Gaskell's grief for her recently lost son, Willie.

<sup>7</sup> I distinguish Esther's daughter, who can't be more than a few years old, from Job Leagh's adult daughter, whose death many years prior to the opening of the novel Job recalls, along with his trip to London to retrieve his infant granddaughter Margaret.

her son Willie and about her grief for him; however, Gaskell's very first experience of losing a child was that of her first daughter, stillborn on 10 July 1833. Her loss of this first daughter evoked a written response from Elizabeth in the form of the sonnet discussed above, "ON VISITING THE GRAVE OF MY STILLBORN LITTLE GIRL. Sunday, July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1836," written three years after the death and clearly memorializing this first child, as well as Gaskell's grief for her. Although more evidence exists of her continuing sorrow over the loss of Willie in 1845, this sonnet for her daughter marks the beginning of Gaskell's use of her writing as an outlet for her grief, as well as a memorial for her all of lost children and her intense emotions, as well.

By making Esther's deceased child a girl, Gaskell begins to work through her earlier heartaches, as well as that for her recently lost son. In his study of grieving parents, John Bowlby states that with the death of stillborn child, "Often little information is given the parents and the whole episode is veiled in silence" (123). Gaskell found ways through this veil of silence by turning to writing of her lost children, first in her sonnet to her stillborn daughter and then in Mary Barton, with its proliferation of dead little ones. More specifically, in Esther, Gaskell created a way to express her grief over her lost children. Esther's child embodies all of Gaskell's dead children: she is a daughter; like Gaskell's son Willie, she becomes ill and dies (whether from scarlet fever or from the tuberculosis which later consumes her mother remains unclear); like Gaskell's first, unnamed son, we have no sense of the exact age at which Esther's daughter dies, and the exact date of her death remains unknown.

Robin Colby also notes the relevance of Gaskell's first daughter to her first novel. Colby states, "Grief over a daughter lies underneath the narrative of Mary Barton. A writer--who is also a mother--attempts to assuage her own pain--and the pain of other women--by

expressing it” (34). Although she does not mention Esther, Colby’s observation about Gaskell’s grief for more than Willie illuminates why Gaskell’s first novel suffered from what Gaskell herself noted as “the great fault of gloominess” (Letters 120). Gaskell states, “It is the fault of the choice of the subject; which yet I did not *choose*, but which was as it were impressed upon me” (Letters 120). Gaskell refers here to the terrible conditions of the workers all around her in Manchester, and yet her statement also applies to her own condition of loss and grief. She did not *choose* her anguish; rather, it impressed itself upon her after the loss of not one but three children. Writing Esther provided a way to grapple with the recurring sorrow of loss--to examine it and eventually come to terms with it. In the same letter of April 1850 which Gaskell wrote to Eliza Fox and in which she discusses the loss of Willie, Gaskell observes:

I think that is one evil of this bustling life that one has never time calmly and bravely to face a great grief, and to view it on every side as to bring the harmony out of it. --  
Well! I meant to write a merry letter. (Letters 111).

In this brief passage, Gaskell both acknowledges the silences that surround her sorrow as well as directly succumbs to those silences in her final sentence. Touching first on her pain, she then retreats from it, seemingly shaking herself out of her sadness and, in returning to forced merriment, demonstrating the very “evil” she has just critiqued: a denial of her grief and thus an inability to examine it fully and come to terms with it. Clearly, in her letters she felt that she could not really “face a great grief” or “view it on every side as to bring the harmony out of it,” especially when those letters were being supervised by a husband who didn’t want to face (or read) her anxieties. In creating Esther, however, Gaskell found a way to represent her grief and loneliness, facing her heartache, viewing it on a number of sides,

and finally finding some relief for it, while also, just barely, concealing it and quarantining it as belonging to her prostitute.

Of all the women who mourn for their lost children in Mary Barton, Esther is the only one who talks about her grief for any length of time. Mrs. Barton only cries and hides her face over the loss of her son Tom; an account of Mrs. Wilson's response to the death of her twin boys is oddly absent from the text; only Esther articulates her feelings, expressing her pain in a way that Gaskell must have longed to emulate, but could not because of her husband's prohibition on such expression. Before she finally tells her story, however, Esther is at first prohibited from speaking, just as Gaskell was. Tellingly, the one who silences her is the working-class patriarch of the novel, John Barton. Esther seeks him out in order to warn him about the dangerous situation of her niece and his daughter Mary's flirtation with the mill owner's son Harry Carson. Esther "whisper[s]: 'I want to speak to you,'" but John, not recognizing her at first and mistaking her approach for sexual solicitation, refuses to listen: "He swore an oath, and bade her begone" (142). Esther persists, saying, "I really do. Don't send me away. I'm so out of breath, I cannot say what I would all at once" (143). When Barton finally recognizes her as his "long-lost" sister-in-law, his refusal to allow her to speak becomes even more adamant. He "ground his teeth, and shook her with passion," and takes the opportunity to castigate her for her sexual fall into prostitution (143). She cries out to him, "Oh, mercy! John, mercy! Listen to me for Mary's sake!" but he refuses to heed her because her words threaten to cause him pain (143). When Esther refers to Mary, John Barton anticipates that she is about to speak of his dead wife of the same name, for whose death he blames Esther, finding an easy scapegoat in the one who is least powerful of all the people whom he holds responsible for suffering and death throughout the novel. The threat of his own pain coupled with his anger at Esther send him into a rage: "He flung her,

trembling, sinking, fainting, from him, and strode away. She fell with a feeble scream against the lamp-post, and lay there in her weakness, unable to rise" (145-46). Thus ends Esther's first attempt to speak in the novel as she is thwarted in her effort to tell John Barton about his daughter's danger. Although of course not identical, Barton's position as unheeding father echoes that of Gaskell's own husband William, refusing to hear Elizabeth's anxieties about their children for fear that they will exacerbate his own. John Barton refuses to listen to anything Esther has to say, whether it be her own sorrow or her concern for his daughter's welfare. Esther is effectively silenced here. Her story is prohibited because it increases Barton's own anxiety. In such prohibition, Esther's own anguish increases. Tellingly, however, so does Barton's. He regrets his actions almost immediately, revealing that no peace is to be found in denying painful emotion. Gaskell writes of him, "Barton returned home after his encounter with Esther, uneasy and dissatisfied. [. . .] Her look, as she asked for mercy, haunted him through his broken and disordered sleep. . . . Now, too late, his conscience smote him for his harshness" (146). Barton's remorse causes him to spend "evening after evening" looking for Esther in the streets but he never sees her again (147). In response to his failure to find her, Barton "trie[s] to recall his angry feelings towards her, in order to find relief from his present self-reproach" (147). In other words, Barton tries to resume a more masculine stance--that of anger at Esther--to protect himself from the pain his new sympathy for her causes him. Barton is caught in a vicious circle--silencing Esther does nothing to protect his own feelings and instead leads to increased disease which in turn leads once again to the very state of mind that caused him to deny Esther in the first place. Nothing comes of Barton's denial of pain but more pain and less sympathy, which casts an interesting light on how Gaskell may have viewed her own husband's inability to cope with anxiety. While William Gaskell may have thought he was

protecting himself by requiring his wife to keep her worries to herself, he may have made himself worse off, in the bargain.

In spite of Barton's refusal to hear her, Esther will not be denied a voice forever. If John Barton, unapproachable father, will not listen, perhaps another man will. She seeks out Jem Wilson instead: "It now flashed across her mind that to [Jem], to Mary's playfellow, her elder brother in the days of childhood, her tale might be told, and listened to with interest, and some mode of action suggested by him by which Mary might be guarded and saved" (186). This passage recalls Elizabeth's own relationship with her cousin Samuel Holland, about whom she wrote: "I believe I am more open with Sam than I dare to be with William, and I love Sam as a dear brother" (Letters 34). As Elizabeth was forced to turn from William to Sam and to others in order to tell her tales of anxiety and suffering, so is Esther forced to seek out another besides John Barton.

In Jem Wilson, Esther finds a sympathetic listener for her "tales," both of Mary's danger and of her own misery and grief. She begins to tell him her history, saying "if the story of my life is wanted to give force to my speech, afterwards I will tell it you. Nay! don't change your fickle mind now, and say you don't want to hear it. You must hear it, and I must tell it" (187); before telling Jem of Mary's situation, she must relieve herself of her own tale. She does this primarily to show Jem the sexual danger that Mary may fall into but Esther's telling is also spurred on by her desperation to relate her story to a sympathetic listener.<sup>8</sup> As she says above, "I must tell it" and so she begins to recount the story of what happened to her, telling Jem of how she followed her lover's regiment to Chester and lived happily with him there for three years until he abandoned her and her child (187-88). Then Esther comes to the heart of her grief--the loss of her daughter Annie: "I had a little girl,

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<sup>8</sup> Amanda Anderson points out that "Esther obsessively shifts to her own story" (118).

too. Oh! the sweetest darling that ever was seen!” (188). Just as Elizabeth Gaskell felt overwhelmed by her sorrow after the loss of her children so too does Esther, as she says, ““But I must not think of her . . . or I shall go mad; I shall”” (188). At this, even Jem hesitates to give audience to Esther’s own tragic story: ““Don’t tell me any more about yourself,” said Jem, soothingly” (188). Unlike John Barton, Jem moves to silence Esther not out of anger or inability to bear what she has to tell, but for fear of causing her pain in the recalling of it. Suppression, however, is still suppression, no matter what its motivation, and even as the memory of her daughter and her grief for her threaten to swallow Esther, she will not be silenced: ““What! You’re tired already, are you? But I will tell you; as you’ve asked for it, you shall hear it. I won’t recall the agony of the past for nothing. I will have the relief of telling it”” (188). More than once she emphasizes here that she will speak, and that she will be heard. She says to Jem, ““I will tell you . . . you shall hear . . . I will have the relief of telling it.”” Any attempts throughout the novel to silence Esther result in her increased urgency to express herself and to make another listen to her.<sup>9</sup> She has a voice and she must use it. Like her author, Esther desperately wants to tell the story of her loss, no matter what the cost, in order to have the relief of expressing it. Esther continues:

“We should have done well, but alas! alas! my little girl fell ill, and I could not mind my shop and her too; and things grew worse and worse. I sold my goods any how to get money to buy her food and medicine; I wrote over and over again to her father for help, but he must have changed his quarters, for I never got an answer. The landlord seized the few bobbins and tapes I had left, for shop-rent; and the person to whom the mean little room, to which we had been forced to remove, belonged, threatened to turn us out unless his rent was paid; it had run on many weeks, and it

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<sup>9</sup> Patsy Stoneman observes that “Esther’s attempts at speech . . . are born of a ‘monomaniacal’ compulsion like the Ancient Mariner’s, to tell her ghastly tale with its moral of love” (78).



was winter, cold bleak winter; and my child was so ill, so ill, and I was starving. And I could not bear to see her suffer, and forgot how much better it would be for us to die together; --oh, her moans, her moans, which money could give the means of relieving! So I went out into the street one January night--Do you think God will punish me for that?" (188-89)

Here, Gaskell clearly attributes Esther's fall into prostitution to her great love for her daughter and her desperate desire to help her suffering child. In the letter to her sister-in-law Anne Robson which I have already discussed above, Gaskell, writing of her fear for her daughter Mary Anne's well-being and requesting that Anne watch over her daughter should she be left motherless, observes, "It is difficult to have the right trust in God almost, when thinking about one's children" (Letters 46). Unlike Esther with her physically ill daughter, Gaskell is here preoccupied with Mary Ann's emotional health, which she feels would be neglected should she be left motherless. How much harder would it have been for Gaskell to trust in God had her daughter been suffering from bodily deprivation and illness--starving, freezing, moaning in pain? Like Esther, Gaskell too has felt alone and has, in emotional isolation, watched a beloved child, or rather three beloved children, die. What would Gaskell herself have done to save Willie had such a thing been in her power as he lay dying of scarlet fever and had she been *truly* alone in the world, without kind sisters-in-law and friends to whom to turn for support? When Gaskell herself writes that "it is difficult to have the right trust in God almost, when thinking about one's children," Esther's actions become even more understandable and her forgetting "how much better" it might be for her and her daughter to die together seems perfectly normal--what any mother, including even Gaskell herself, would do if there was any chance of saving her child's life. Margaret C. Wiley makes a similar point about Gaskell's sympathies in "Lizzie Leigh." Wiley quotes

Susan Palmer's speech about the money Lizzie Leigh leaves on the doorstep for Nanny,<sup>10</sup> her daughter:

“. . . I've often thought the poor woman feels near to God when she brings this money. Father wanted to set the policeman to watch, but I said No, for I was afraid if she was watched she might not come, and it seemed such a holy thing to be checking her in, I could not find it in my heart to do it.” (qtd. in Wiley 149)

Wiley states, “In a radical move, Gaskell not only excuses Lizzie Leigh's prostitution, she elevates it into a sacrament. It is a ‘holy thing’ which makes her feel ‘closer to God’” (Wiley 149). While I do not agree that Gaskell “elevates” the actual act of prostitution “into a holy sacrament” (after all, it is the sharing of the money and not the act that was performed to get it that Susan Palmer celebrates as “a holy thing”), she certainly does understand and sympathize with Lizzie's participation in it because it is done out of mother-love, as is Esther's prostitution. Gaskell's sympathy and identification are unmistakable. As Jennifer Uglow points out about Esther's history, her “tale of her seduction shows her not as sinner but victim, her prostitution an act of maternal unselfishness” (203).

As Esther finishes her tale, again the memory of her beloved daughter and her child's suffering threatens to overwhelm her, as Gaskell's grief did her. Esther concludes “with wild vehemence, almost amounting to insanity” (189) and says in despair, “‘But it's no matter! I've done that since, which separates us as far asunder as heaven and hell can be.’ Her voice rose again to the sharp pitch of agony. ‘My darling! my darling! even after death I may not see thee, my own sweet one!’” (189). Esther's exclamation about her daughter

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<sup>10</sup> I find it fascinating that Gaskell uses versions of the same name--Anne, Annie, Nanny--so often in connection with her prostitutes. Lizzie Leigh's mother is Anne, her daughter is Nanny, a derivative of Anne, and Esther's daughter is also Annie. Gaskell's first daughter appears to have been unnamed but her first living daughter was Mary Anne. The name must hold some significance for Gaskell and, while it is pure speculation, I wonder, since her first daughter was supposedly unnamed and Anne appears as the middle name of Gaskell's first living daughter, if the name Anne may have been the intended first name for that first, stillborn daughter.

anticipates what Gaskell would write to Annie Shaen in April 1848, just a few months after finishing Mary Barton in December of 1847. She mourns her son, calling him “my darling *darling* Willie,” and states about his death and her grief, “That wound will never heal on earth, although hardly any one knows how it has changed me” (Letters 57). Esther, mourning her darling darling child, her grief for her daughter forming a wound that will never heal on earth, is also drastically changed. And although “hardly any one knows how” grief may have changed Elizabeth Gaskell, the change she represents in Esther is unmistakable: when John Barton sees Esther after the passage of only a few years, she is so changed that at first he doesn’t recognize her (142).

Esther lives in agony with the memory of her dearly loved and lost daughter. She is the quintessential grieving mother of Mary Barton--the only one who speaks of her grief, who expresses her agony and her spiritual doubt, who mourns aloud for her darling child and who, by her very degradation as a prostitute, proves herself in possession of a fierce mother-love that will sacrifice anything for her child. Like her author, she is a grieving mother. Also like her author, she hopes to find some comfort in expressing her grief. She exclaims to Jem that telling her story will bring her some relief and yet if it does, it is only partial and fleeting, because Esther remains in isolation, believing herself to be utterly abandoned, an outcast,<sup>11</sup> with no help and no hope of ever being accepted back into her family.

Without any sympathy or compassion shown to her, with the exception of Jem’s distracted, and thus half-hearted, attempt to offer her refuge with his mother and aunt after their first meeting, Esther has no one to comfort her. She has no friend to whom she can open her heart and mind, a resource that Gaskell recognized as invaluable and one she sadly

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<sup>11</sup> Hilary Schor dubs Esther “the novel’s chief outcast” (30).

regretted not finding in her own husband. Unlike any other character in Mary Barton, Esther is utterly alone, representing a magnified version of Gaskell's own sense of isolation, which must have felt very great indeed as she slipped into the deep depression which followed the death of her third child, a depression from which she perhaps managed to extract herself by writing the grief of Esther.

Gaskell felt herself to be isolated in her grief, alone and suppressing her sorrow because her husband couldn't bear to hear it. Esther--as fallen woman, prostitute, outcast--represents this isolation and alienation better than any other figure in the novel. Monica Fryckstedt observes about Esther that she is "a stereotype outcast," but a stereotype "drawn with great sensitivity and perception" (112). While Fryckstedt implies that Gaskell's view of Esther is a philanthropically sympathetic one, when one considers Gaskell's own personal experiences with isolation and loneliness, it becomes clear that the "great sensitivity and perception" that Fryckstedt observes illustrate Gaskell's identification of herself with this grieving, exiled mother.

Gaskell emphasizes her view of Esther as utterly isolated by referring to her a number of times throughout the text as "the outcast" and by prefacing the chapter in which Esther first appears with an epigraph from a poem entitled "The Outcast" (130). Esther epitomizes isolation in the novel.<sup>12</sup> As Gaskell observes, "Hers is the leper-sin" (185). No other character is so utterly, hopelessly alone.<sup>13</sup> Esther's complete alienation from the community to which she once belonged is clearly demonstrated as the narrator observes that, three or four years after the beginning of the novel, which opens with a discussion of

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<sup>12</sup> Constance Harsh refers to "the outcast agony of Mary's aunt Esther" (67) and observes that "Gaskell does not let us forget that [Esther's] condition has its roots in large-scale social injustice" (68). Thus Esther's outcast condition deserves the reader's sympathy.

<sup>13</sup> In speaking of fictional representations in general, Nina Auerbach conjures quite a picture of the exiled figure that the prostitute represents for the Victorians by dubbing her "the titanic outcast" (159).

Esther's disappearance, she "was still mysteriously absent, and people had grown weary of wondering, and began to forget" (29). Furthermore, not only has Esther been effaced from the community, she is also very much alienated from her family, even before she falls and subsequently leaves Manchester with her lover. John Barton recounts to his friend and neighbor George Wilson that he told her in no uncertain terms:

"Esther, I see what you'll end at with your artificials, and your flyaway veils, and stopping out when honest women are in their beds; you'll be a street-walker, Esther, and then, don't you go to think I'll have you darken my door, though my wife is your sister." (6)

John's is the final word in the Barton household and he threatens Esther with exile if she should become a prostitute, regardless of her relation to his wife and no matter how much his wife loves her like a daughter.<sup>14</sup> And Esther is exiled, left alone, more than any other character in the novel. Even though John Barton is in a situation similar to Esther's, as he struggles to express his grievances to the manufacturers and finds no sympathy there, he is still very much a part of a community of others who suffer as he suffers and with whom he has a common bond. In stark contrast, Esther stands alone, outside of community, pining for her daughter, representing Gaskell's own sorrow for the loss of her children and her isolation within her bereavement. The contrast between John Barton and Esther in their grief once again mirrors that of William and Elizabeth Gaskell. Recall the letter of December 1840 that Gaskell writes to her sister-in-law Anne Robson, which I quoted earlier:

My dearest Nancy,

I am sitting all alone, and not feeling over & above well; and it would be such a comfort to have you here to open my mind to--but that not being among the

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<sup>14</sup> Interestingly, Barton's speech to Esther may actually have been the catalyst for her fall since she leaves the household and shortly after that, departs with the officer.

possibilities, I am going to write you a long private letter; . . . Wm . . . won't allow me ever to talk to him about anxieties, while it would be SUCH A RELIEF often. [. . .] William is at a minster's meeting tonight, --and tomorrow dines with a world of professors and college people. . . ." (Letters 45)

As Elizabeth sits alone, haunted by anxieties which her husband "won't allow" her to express, he occupies himself with meetings and dinners, with public life. While Esther grieves in isolation and silence, John Barton diverts himself from grief with union meetings and factory unrest.

Immediately after their meeting, Barton's rejection and suppression of Esther again directly result in an even greater isolation for her in that she is soon taken up for disorderly conduct by the police and confined to prison for a month. Her failed attempt to speak to John Barton sends her into a fever of anxiety during her imprisonment.<sup>15</sup> The narrator states:

The superintendent of that abode of vice and misery was roused from his dozing watch through the dark hours, by half-delirious wails and moanings, which he reported as arising from intoxication. If he had listened, he would have heard these words, repeated in various forms, but always in the same anxious, muttering way:

"He would not listen to me; what can I do? He would not listen to me, and I wanted to warn him! Oh, what shall I do to save Mary's child! What shall I do? . . . . God keep her from harm! And yet I won't pray for her; sinner that I am! Can my prayers be heard? No! they'll only do harm. How shall I save her? He would not listen to me." (145)

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<sup>15</sup> Tellingly, Gaskell uses the word "imprisonment" to refer to her own limited mobility during depression or illness, referring in one letter to her "sofa imprisonment" (Letters 130).

Esther repeats the words “He would not listen to me” three times in this passage, the third time concluding her feverish worrying. In her own words, Gaskell loved to “listen, and talk, & talk, & listen” and she derived great comfort when she was at full liberty to do so (Letters, 34). To be deprived of a voice is to be denied that comfort. Silenced and left alone by John Barton, Esther suffers terribly from this deprivation, as Elizabeth suffered the prohibition of expression placed upon her by her own husband.<sup>16</sup> Silenced by and cut off from her husband, enduring alone the torture of her grief for her lost children, Elizabeth found a way to represent her suffering: in Esther she creates a mother who also endures the torture of silenced and lonely grief, and a figure in whom grief can be quarantined for “safe” expression.

Also of interest in Esther’s words, the “He” of the last sentence has an unclear reference: is “He” John Barton, as has been the case earlier in the passage, or is “He” God, to whom Esther claims she cannot pray because her prayers will “only do harm”? Esther feels herself to be cut off from both household patriarch and spiritual patriarch, making her isolation all the more severe. This confusion of reference for the masculine pronoun also recalls Gaskell’s own blurring of patriarchs. At the same time that she writes to her sister-in-law Anne Robson about Marianne and her own inability to have the “right trust in God” when it comes to her children, she also expresses her inability to trust her husband with her children as well. Here, Esther epitomizes for Gaskell her own doubt and extreme isolation from two should-be major sources of comfort--husband and God.

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<sup>16</sup> Many critics point to the importance of speaking out in Mary Barton. According to Hilary Schor, “Mary Barton contains within it the story of Gaskell’s learning to speak, a rewriting of stories of female heroism and female authorship played out in a world of spectacle and silencing in which Gaskell finds for her herself a language ‘expressing her wants’ . . . and for her heroine, a chance to speak openly, choose her life, and overcome some of the plots that have been written for her” (37).

After being confined for a month, Esther's term of imprisonment is over and "she was turned out" (186). Again, she becomes a literal outcast: "The door closed behind her with a ponderous clang, and in her desolation she felt as if shut out of home--from the only shelter she could meet with, houseless and penniless as she was, on that dreary day" (185). She has nowhere to go, as she tells Jem a few pages later, when he asks where he might find her if need be: "[D]o you think one sunk so low as I am has a home? Decent, good people have homes. We have none. No; if you want me, come at night, and look at the corners of the streets about here" (193). And yet Esther, who is far more destitute than any other character in the book, leaves her month's imprisonment with only one thought on her mind: how best to help Mary. Gaskell writes of her that "when she was turned out, her purpose was clear, and she did not feel her desolation of freedom as she would otherwise have done" (186). Regardless of her homelessness and friendlessness, Esther finds comfort in the thought of acting to help her niece, and in this she embodies her author's own belief in action as an escape from pain, although it proves to be only a temporary refuge for Esther. Still, like her author, Esther turns her grief to good use.

Gaskell claims that she identified most closely with John Barton while she was writing Mary Barton, even viewing the story as more his than Mary's and thus initially titling the novel John Barton, a choice which was quickly overruled by her publishers. Although Gaskell openly identified and sympathized with the desperate father and perhaps covertly empathized with his murderous grief,<sup>17</sup> Gaskell chose a different route to allay her own maternal sorrow: she chose an act of construction rather than one of destruction, the writing of a novel which was meant to draw attention to a situation that could be remedied, would someone only listen and act in turn to do what she, all alone, could not do.

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<sup>17</sup> According to Deborah Nord, Barton's crime "places Gaskell imaginatively in two conflicting positions: as fearful middle-class victim of working-class violence and as enraged perpetrator of that violence" (146).



According to Coral Lansbury, Gaskell believed that “[t]he suffering she saw around her could be alleviated; there was no need for children to die of hunger when the city shops displayed every variety of food. If her own child could not be saved then it was possible for others to grow up in health and comfort” (46). She chose to tell a story that needed to be told in order to help others avoid the pain that she had suffered.<sup>18</sup> In this way, Gaskell identifies not with the grieving father John Barton, in his anger and murderous action, but yet again with the heartbroken mother, Esther. Like John, Esther also loses a child and is devastated by her grief. As she slips further and further into despondency over her loss, she has no sympathizing ear into which to pour her anguish. And yet, like Gaskell, she sees a situation--her niece Mary’s imminent fall--that may be alleviated by her action and, even in the depths of her own despair for herself, she takes that action. Furthermore, in the end, Esther’s attempts to help Mary result in the production of evidence that is responsible for saving the life of Jem, who stands falsely accused of murder. As Esther’s speaking out and attempting to help result in saving another, so too may we perceive Gaskell doing with the writing of Mary Barton and her own drawing of attention to the conditions of the Mancusian working-class poor and their children.<sup>19</sup>

In the much-quoted passage in which Mary Barton sets off to find an alibi for her lover Jem Wilson in order to rescue him from prison and certain death, Gaskell slips into one of the striking first-person passages in which the reader feels that she is speaking not only about her characters but, more importantly, about herself. She writes:

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<sup>18</sup> Hilary Schor states that Gaskell “is making use of her own unhappiness to reach outward, much as her own experience of loss, the loss of parents and of children, gives her an emotional vocabulary to draw on in the novel, to express the alienation and empty desire of the workers she depicts” (42).

<sup>19</sup> Bodenheimer also observes that Mary Barton “was its author’s first assumption of a public voice, raised on behalf of other private grieving voices” (195-96).

Oh! I do think that the necessity for exertion, for some kind of action (bodily or mentally) in time of distress, is a most infinite blessing, although the first efforts at such seasons are painful. Something to be done implies that there is yet hope of some good thing to be accomplished, or some additional evil that may be avoided; and by degrees the hope absorbs much of the sorrow. (288)

This passage occurs in chapter 22, about two thirds into the novel Gaskell had begun in order to lift herself out of grief and depression. Gaskell's call to action is illustrated not only by Mary, to whom this passage directly applies, but by Esther, who takes action, as Gaskell herself did, in order to bring good out of suffering, and who does so at some cost to herself. Sadly, Esther fears that she can do no good: "How could she, the abandoned and polluted outcast, ever have dared to hope for a blessing, even on her efforts to do good? The black curse of Heaven rested on all her doings, were they for good or for evil" (276-277).

However, Esther *does* bring good out of suffering. Unlike John Barton who, in his grief, destroys life in killing the mill owner's son, Esther saves a life.

Critics often emphasize the ways in which Gaskell draws parallels between John Barton and Esther. For instance, Deirdre D'Albertis states that "both Esther and John Barton . . . alienate themselves from the domestic sphere" (50). D'Albertis further posits, "The homology between John and Esther's fates is made utterly clear by the conclusion of Mary Barton: both die, physically broken and dehumanized, and find their final resting place in a common grave" (50-51). Jill Matus also argues for a parallel between the two, claiming, "In tracing the book's representation of social transgressions, we can see Esther as John Barton's structural counterparts. . . . The degradation of each, the text suggests, springs from strong feeling unguided by education and wisdom" (74-75). Perhaps most emphatically, Elsie Michie claims that "Esther's and John's life stories follow an almost

identical pattern” (115). Michie delineates this pattern, concluding with the following: “Both eventually respond to the unbearable pain of their lives by giving in to the deadening effects of a drug” (116). While there is no doubt that Esther and John bear many resemblances to one another, Gaskell pairs these two as much in order to expose and examine some crucial differences as to show similarities.<sup>20</sup> Gaskell begins chapter 10, in which Esther first appears, with the following two epigraphs:

My heart, once soft as woman’s tear, is gnarled  
With gloating on the ills I cannot cure.

--Elliott

Then guard and shield her innocence,  
Let not her fall like me;  
‘Twere better, oh! a thousand times,  
She in her grave should be.

--*The Outcast* (130)

While the source of the second quotation is listed and clearly gestures to Esther (as I have discussed earlier in this chapter), the first epigraph bears only its author’s name. The title of the source, “The Village Patriarch,” is provided in a footnote by Edgar Wright. The sentiment of these lines about the village patriarch’s growing anger and bitterness clearly applies to John Barton as he becomes more and more disillusioned and angry about working conditions and the state of the poor. This forms a marked contrast to Esther and her actions in this chapter, as she seeks out Barton in an effort to help Mary, and later as she continues in her mission to assist her niece. In spite of her misery, Esther evinces no

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<sup>20</sup> Catherine Gallagher notes the contrast between John Barton and Esther, as well: “Barton’s tragic perspective, therefore, contrasts sharply with Esther’s and, later, with Mary’s romantic fantasies” (71). Gallagher’s overall discussion, however, focuses on differences between the genres Gaskell adopts for each character and the split within the novel between realistic and melodramatic representation.

“gloating on the ills [she] cannot cure”--no hatred or jealousy or murderous rage; instead, she channels her grief into acting on behalf of another, as she attempts to protect her niece and as she is largely responsible for Mary Barton and Jem Wilson’s happy ending.

Paralleling Gaskell’s own impetus for writing the novel and following Gaskell’s advice that “Something to be done implies that there is yet hope of some good thing to be accomplished, or some additional evil that may be avoided” (288), the motivation behind Esther’s effort to help Mary stems from her sorrow for her own lost child and an attempt to save another’s daughter while there is still time. As drawing attention to the plight of starving children in Manchester may have eased Gaskell’s own grief for Willie and her lost children before him, Esther’s desire to save Mary is a way of easing the grief for her daughter, as well. Gaskell emphasizes the connection for Esther between her daughter Annie and her niece Mary several times in Esther’s statements about and to Mary. When she pleads with Jem to help Mary and she tells him of her own sad history, Esther comments to him that Mary “is so like my little girl” (190). And later, in her meeting with Mary, Esther sees that Mary’s “face bore a likeness to Esther’s dead child”; this moves Esther to say again, using the same words she spoke to Jem, “You are so like my little girl, Mary!” (283).<sup>21</sup>

Sadly, however, Esther is denied the narrator’s prophecy that in doing good acts, “by degrees the hope absorbs much of the sorrow” (288). When Esther dons the disguise in which she will visit Mary in order to comfort her after the murder of Harry Carson, the narrator observes that Esther

looked at herself in the little glass which hung against the wall, and sadly shaking her head, thought how easy were the duties of that Eden of innocence from which she

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<sup>21</sup> Mark Hennelly misreads this line to mean that Esther’s daughter was named Mary, after her sister and niece. This is not the case, however, as Gaskell makes clear when Esther recounts that while imprisoned, she sees visions of the deceased females of her life, “My mother, carrying little Annie (I wonder how they got together) and Mary [Esther’s sister]” (192).

was shut out; how she would work, and toil, and starve, and die, if necessary, for a husband a home,--for children,--but that thought she could not bear; a little form rose up, stern in its innocence, from the witches' cauldron of her imagination, and she rushed into action again. (279)

The "little form" that Esther recalls is her dead daughter and in order to cope with the pain of this memory, she seeks refuge in action, and specifically in acting for another's good, as does her author in the writing of Mary Barton. Interestingly, while Esther does remain forever "shut out" of earthly happiness, an outcast to the novel's end, the Eden that Esther thinks of here foreshadows the Eden that Mary and Jem eventually find in Canada and which is made possible by Esther's "hope of some good thing to be accomplished" even as she herself is racked with grief (288).

While it turns out that Mary does not need her aunt's help in learning the truth about Harry Carson's intentions to seduce her, Esther does help Mary in a different way. Chapter 21, "Esther's Motive in Seeking Mary," begins with yet another telling epigraph:

My rest is gone,  
 My heart is sore  
 Peace find I never,  
 And never more. --*Margaret's Song in 'Faust'*

Applying this epigraph to Esther, we are to understand that she will never find peace for herself, that she is utterly cast down, and yet in this chapter, even in a state of hopelessness, with no promise of relief from her misery, she continues on her mission to assist Mary. Esther provides (albeit, without knowing she does so) the evidence (the bit of crumpled Valentine used for wadding in the murderer's gun) that will reveal the truth to Mary that her father and not Jem murdered Harry Carson and will thus provide Mary with the reason for

her own mission of salvation as she seeks to clear Jem's name. While Esther does provide the impetus for Jem to be seen with Harry before the murder (when Jem is warning Harry to stay away from Mary) and thus to be accused of killing Harry, she also gives Mary the reason to take action and save Jem. Many critics focus on Mary's bravery and boldness in stepping out of the house and out of Manchester in order to prove her lover's innocence. Esther, however, galvanizes Mary's action. As Jill Matus points out, "Esther does prove to be the means by which Mary is empowered to rescue Jem" (74). Without Esther's visit and the evidence she provides which indicates Jem's innocence, Mary would not have acted to find his alibi or publicly declared her love for him. Esther sets in motion the chain of events that leads to Mary's testimony, her reunion with Jem, and their future happiness.<sup>22</sup>

Gaskell also identifies with Esther in that in her attempts to help Mary, Esther demonstrates some very admirable and maternal traits. These shed a less-than-conventional light on the figure of the prostitute and forge yet another intimate link between author and streetwalker. In her actions, Esther proves herself to be a mother who is intelligent, sympathetic, loving, and capable of self-restraint and self-sacrifice, all of which Gaskell would have deeply respected. Esther clearly proves her intelligence when she visits the scene of Harry Carson's murder and is able to piece together a recreation of what must have taken place there. She estimates where the murderer stood, and she becomes aware that "she had been standing just where the murderer must have been but a few hours before" (275). Here she finds the wadding for the gun--the bit of valentine that will prove Jem's innocence to Mary. Gaskell's portrayal of Esther's intelligence forms a marked contrast with that of Esther's sister, the senior Mary Barton, about whom the narrator observes in the first

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<sup>22</sup> Some critics fail to see that Esther's actions result in good. For instance, Amanda Anderson refers to Esther's "misguided attempt[s] to help" (113). And although Angus Easson acknowledges the good of Esther's actions, he does so rather grudgingly, saying, "Out of her corrupted life . . . comes the final happiness of the young couple" (80).

chapter, “She had the fresh beauty of the agricultural districts, and somewhat of the deficiency of sense in her countenance, which is likewise characteristic of the rural inhabitants in comparison with the natives of the manufacturing towns” (4). Esther is no native of Manchester and yet neither is she devoid of sense, like her sister. Rather she demonstrates a sharp mind in her ability to envision the crime and in her logic in going to the crime scene itself to see what it may have to tell her, as she finds the scrap of evidence that has been overlooked by the police.

In addition to her intellect, Esther also demonstrates a deep and persevering concern for her niece. She evinces sympathy and compassion for Mary, and she behaves in a way that costs her much effort, all in order to spare Mary any pain. When Esther first hears of Harry’s murder, her thoughts are immediately of Mary and the heartache Esther imagines she must be feeling for her dead lover: “Poor Mary! who would comfort her? Esther’s thoughts began to picture her sorrow, her despair, when the news of her lover’s death should reach her; and she longed to tell her there might have been a keener grief yet, had he lived” (275). After she visits the crime scene, Esther is still worrying about Mary: “Esther wondered till she was sick of wondering, in what way [Mary] was taking the affair. In some manner it would be a terrible blow for the poor, motherless girl; with her dreadful father, too, who was to Esther a sort of accusing angel” (278). Esther not only sympathizes with her niece but she empathizes with Mary. Esther herself has been a poor motherless girl with nowhere to turn, grieving over the loss of a lover. She knows what Mary must be feeling and she longs with a maternal heart to provide solace for this young woman who reminds her of her own daughter. Esther’s compassion for Mary runs deep and in the end, she must overcome her shame at her own fall and go to see Mary in person, even at the risk of again encountering John Barton’s humiliating contempt and wrath.

Esther goes to Mary for the sake of pure love, and for the sake of love she also disguises her desire to tell Mary of her own tragedy. For fear that she may shock or repulse her niece, Esther keeps silent about herself with the only family she has left. Although Esther states to Jem that telling him of her griefs will bring her relief, such telling does not because his is not the yearned-for presence of sympathetic family. Could she tell her tale to Mary, Esther might find that sorely needed comfort for which she longs but this is unlikely, as well, because Esther shoulders the role of mother to her niece in this scene and as such, she must sacrifice rather than serve herself. Gaskell emphasizes Esther's role as mother as Mary even thinks that her mother has returned to her and she calls out when she sees Esther, "Oh! Mother! Mother! You are come at last?" (273). As mother, Esther can find no relief with Mary. To derive any comfort for herself, Esther needs a partner, not a dependent, in her suffering, and this means that she needs John Barton--the only other character who shares her grief as a parent and who is connected to her through family. However, this is denied to her and Esther, rather than brooding over the denial, continues to attempt to do good, in spite of and motivated by her grief.

In keeping with her role as substitute mother for Mary, for the sake of her niece's peace of mind and out of her own fear of rejection, Esther feels that she must "put on an indifference far distant from her heart, which was loving and yearning, in spite of all its faults" (279). So that her point about her prostitute's character won't be mistaken, Gaskell tells the reader of Esther's "striving after the hard character she wished to assume" (280), implying that Esther's is not naturally a hard character at all, but a tender one, "loving and yearning" for her niece (279).<sup>23</sup> Esther disguises herself in this "hard character," which is

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<sup>23</sup> Also of interest here, the "hard character" Esther strives to assume in order to cover up her shame is that of a respectable woman, implying that respectability without compassion is far worse than fallenness with



quite unnatural to her, strictly for the sake of her niece's security, for fear that Mary may be overwhelmed and further aggrieved by the truth about her aunt. In doing this, Esther shows a great deal of self-restraint: "And all the time poor Esther was swallowing her sobs, and over-acting her part, and controlling herself more than she had done for many a long day, in order that her niece might not be shocked and revolted, by the knowledge of what her aunt had become: --a prostitute; an outcast" (281).

This restraint causes Esther a great deal of pain, both physically and emotionally, during her interview with Mary. Although her "thinly-covered bones and pale lips" tell a different story, she refuses the food Mary offers, pretending that she has just eaten and that very well, which inadvertently hurts Mary who hasn't had enough to eat in some time (280). As well as denying herself bodily sustenance, Esther sacrifices emotional relief as well, refusing to tell Mary her story for fear of her niece's reaction, even though Esther "had longed to open her wretched, wretched heart to one who had loved her once" (281). When one recalls how Elizabeth Gaskell felt it "such a comfort" to "open [her] heart" to her friends and sisters-in-law (Letters 46), Esther's sacrifice in denying herself any expression of her pain becomes all the more appreciable and heroic. She leaves finally without having said a word about herself, as well as believing that she has done no good for the niece whom she loves like a daughter. Thus, Esther continues to grieve because she does not know that her actions have resulted in any good. And she doesn't know this because she is so completely isolated. With no one to speak to and no one to comfort her, she continues to suffer for the loss of her daughter, and to suffer so much more because she is so utterly alone. So many of the aspects which characterize Esther--her sympathy and concern for Mary, her love for her, her intelligence, her restraint and self-sacrifice--are exactly what Gaskell would have valued

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compassion, yet another way that Gaskell shows her own clear sympathy and identification with her fallen woman.

most in a mother. Undeniably, Esther is a good mother, and she is *the* mother with whom Gaskell clearly identifies most closely, given not only Esther's many maternal qualities, but most especially the experience of isolated grief with which Esther lives and will always live until she dies.

Towards the end of the novel, Gaskell writes the following of Mr. Carson, the millowner and bereaved father:

There are stages in the contemplation and endurance of great sorrow, which endow men with the same earnestness and clearness of thought that in some of old took the form of Prophecy. To those who have large capability of loving and suffering, united with great power of firm endurance, there comes a time in their woe, when they are lifted out of the contemplation of their individual case into a searching inquiry into the nature of their calamity, and the remedy (if remedy there be) which may prevent its recurrence to others as well as to themselves. (457)

Gaskell refers above to "the contemplation and endurance of great sorrow, which endow men" with the will to help others, and yet the one who best illustrates this theory is not a man, but a woman: in fact, Gaskell herself. During and after her sorrow and depression, she transforms her grief for her lost children into a novel that brings the misery of many children and many people to the attention of the well-to-do middle classes. As Margaret Ganz points out, "There was no remedy for the death of her son, no way to bring him back to life, but all around her in Manchester children were dying of hunger and disease, men were driven to violent crimes, and all this could be remedied if only the reader would understand the need for work, wages, and a little pleasure after work" (13). Although Gaskell creates many characters who attempt to help their deprived fellows, the one character who best illustrates her theory of right action born of suffering is her prostitute

Esther. Although she may lack the “searching inquiry into the nature of [her] calamity,” Esther certainly does seek to save others from the misery she has endured. In fact, Esther is far nobler than Carson in that she is never vengeful or angry. When Jem speaks out against her lover’s leaving her, she pleads with him: “Oh, don’t abuse him; don’t speak a word against him! You don’t know how I love him yet; yet, when I am sunk so low” (188). And further, in her great unassuageable grief for her lost daughter, she turns not to thoughts of sacrificing another but to self-sacrifice in order to help the ones she loves, Mary and Jem. Her attempts to help Mary echo the description stated above in reference to Mr. Carson. Esther may not contemplate a remedy for a large number of people, the way Carson will eventually do, but in enduring great sorrow, she too has contemplated what actions will best help Mary and she performs them with no ill-will or resentment in her heart. The passage concludes:

Hence the beautiful, noble efforts which are from time to time brought to light, as being continuously made by those who have once hung on the cross of agony, in order that others may not suffer as they have done; one of the grandest ends which sorrow can accomplish; the sufferer wrestling with God’s messenger until a blessing is left behind, not for one alone but for generations. (457)

Esther’s efforts have not helped all the poor motherless girls in Manchester who face a possible seduction and fall into prostitution; however, she has “hung on the cross of agony,” and perhaps more importantly, she still hangs there, and she has sought out first John and then Jem and finally Mary with the sole purpose that Mary “may not suffer as [she] has done.” In Esther, Gaskell illustrates what she felt to be “one of the grandest ends which sorrow can accomplish”: Esther has taken those actions which leave “a blessing behind, not for one alone but for generations,” as illustrated in the novel’s end with the picture of Jem

and Mary and their son, the next generation, in a new Eden and with a second chance at security, health, and happiness, as well as the promise of these things for future generations.

But in the end, despite what she sets in motion and the good that comes of it, action proves to be no cure for Esther herself. As I mention briefly above, although Gaskell claims, “Something to be done implies that there is yet hope of some good thing to be accomplished, or some additional evil that may be avoided; and by degrees the hope absorbs much of the sorrow” (288), sorrow is never “absorbed” for her prostitute. Esther’s actions redeem her, demonstrating her compassionate and self-sacrificing nature, but the hope of saving Mary does not “absorb much of the sorrow” for Esther because she is denied knowing that, in fact, she *has* contributed to Mary’s safe and happy future. Rather, after her interview with Mary, Esther departs without the knowledge that she has done any good whatsoever, leaving her more desolate and aggrieved than ever, as it seems that yet again, she has failed to save a child from harm. Since Mary reminds her so much of her own daughter, this must be akin to losing her child all over again. Observing that “her desolation of hope seemed for the time redoubled,” the narrator implies that Esther continues to hang on the cross of agony, in spite of her best intentions (284).

After strongly identifying herself and her grief with her prostitute and after illustrating Esther’s many admirable qualities, why does Gaskell proceed to deny her any comfort for her sorrow, any solace for it or relief from it? The answer may lie in the following oft-quoted passage from Mary Barton, again one of those passages where the narrator clearly comes to the fore and clearly is Gaskell herself:

It is the woes that cannot in any earthly way be escaped that admit least earthly comforting. Of all trite, worn-out, hollow mockeries of comfort that were ever uttered by people who will not take the trouble of sympathizing with others, the one

I dislike the most is the exhortation not to grieve over an event, “for it cannot be helped.” Do you think if I could help it, I would sit still with folded hands, content to mourn? Do you not believe that as long as hope remained I would be up and doing? I mourn because what has occurred cannot be helped. The reason you give me for not grieving, is the very and sole reason of my grief. Give me nobler and higher reason for enduring meekly what my Father sees fit to send, and I will try earnestly and faithfully to be patient; but mock me not, or any other mourner, with the speech, “Do not grieve, for it cannot be helped. It is past remedy.” (288)

Gaskell seems to speak more about herself and her own grief here than about her characters and theirs. She understands all too well (and three times over) the irretrievable loss of a child’s death and the helplessness that follows. This passage reveals not only her grief but also her anger and frustration at this helplessness and at the trite words said to her in facile attempts at comfort. One wonders if William said anything like this to his wife during her grief after any (or all) of the deaths of their three children. He certainly could not “take the trouble of sympathizing” with her, not in the sense that he didn’t sympathize at all but in that he seems to have been afraid to take on the trouble--the pain and the threat that such pain posed to his own self-control--that listening and sympathizing would inevitably mean for him. Gaskell states, “It is the woes that cannot in any earthly way be escaped that admit least earthly comforting.” Esther’s grief for her daughter is so terrible because it can never be escaped on earth. Her daughter is dead and Esther is helpless to do anything to change the fact.

On two different occasions, once for herself and her own heartache over the death of Willie, and once in sympathy for another despairing mother, Gaskell uses the same

metaphor for the grief suffered by a woman who has lost a child. On 24 April 1848, she wrote to her friend Annie Shaen:

I have just been up to our room. There is a fire in it, and a smell of baking, and oddly enough the feelings and recollections of 3 years ago came over me so strongly--when I used to sit up in the room so often in the evenings reading by the fire, and watching my darling *darling* Willie, who now sleeps sounder still in the dull, dreary chapel-yard at Warrington. That wound will never heal on earth, although hardly any one knows how it has changed me. (Letters 57)

And again, on 24 January 1850, almost two years after the preceding letter and four and half years after Willie's death, Gaskell wrote to Tottie of a woman who had lost all of her children in one fell swoop:

. . . but the poor little Knutsford children! And the desolate nursery swept bare. That is indeed mysterious--their sweet *childless* mother is full of faith, and stills her heart by saying God's will be done, and is a comfort and support to all around--but I know how long her heart will bleed with an unhealed wound. (Letters 102)

For Gaskell, the loss of children and the ensuing and overwhelming sadness delivered a mortal wound to a mother, threatening even her existence, as it did Gaskell's as she slumped into depression following Willie's death. In *Esther*, Gaskell creates a character whose entire state epitomizes this wound, both in her suffering for her dead daughter and in her bodily degradation, sickness, and eventual death. Echoing her author's sorrow, *Esther* is the one mother in the novel whose heart bleeds and bleeds for her dead daughter. A wound that will not heal proves, more often than not, to be a mortal wound; thus, *Esther* can find relief for the wounds of her grief only in death. And through her attempts to help Mary, *Esther* has, in Gaskell's belief system, redeemed herself and therefore has ensured a reunion with her

daughter in heaven, marking an end to her exile. Note too that Gaskell claims about her own grief that it “will never heal on earth,” implying that while there is no earthly balm for it, there is relief to be had in the afterlife in reunion with the beloved dead. Seen in this light, death then becomes a reward for the grieving and exiled mother.

Some critics speculate that although Gaskell sympathizes with her prostitute, she still considers her a sinner and punishes Esther for her fall, burying her in the same grave as John Barton in order to emphasize the parallel between two lost souls.<sup>24</sup> That Gaskell would punish Esther is unlikely since she establishes her sympathy for her fallen woman many times over. Perhaps one of the most striking of these instances may be found in the poem, “Street Walks,” that Gaskell appends as an epigraph to chapter 14, “Jem’s Interview with Poor Esther” (also note the sympathetic tone of Gaskell’s chapter title). The last five lines of the poem read:

So, could we look into the human breast,  
 How oft the fatal blight that meets our view,  
 Should we trace down to the torn, bleeding fibres  
 Of a too trusting heart--where it were shame,  
 For pitying tears, to give contempt or blame. (184)

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<sup>24</sup> Jenny Uglow states that “Gaskell, their creator, must punish their guilt. . . . The deeper implications of the ending are expressed . . . through the deaths of John and Esther, a psychic catharsis which clears the stage and allows the living to start afresh. Only by annihilating one side of their natures--the violent father and the sexual, narcissistic ‘mother’--can men and women be freed from the maze to escape to a ‘New World’” (210). While I agree, in part, with Uglow’s statement about Gaskell’s “psychic catharsis,” I do not believe that Esther represents the “narcissistic ‘mother.’” Rather, she is the self-sacrificing mother who is consumed by grief and who serves as a marker of Gaskell’s own grief, allowing her to put it behind her but also to remember it through Esther’s pain. Also of interest is Mary Elizabeth Hotz’s argument about the shared, unmarked grave of Esther and John Barton. Hotz argues that “despite their redeemed condition, both persons are denied histories, effaced, buried in an unmarked grave without notice of names or dates. [. . .] If they did not live by the rules, they must die by the rules--repentant and buried in a single grave with no named plot. The grave indicates that these people existed outside time and history” (52). As I argue above, I disagree with Hotz’s perspective that Esther must “die by the rules” and I find that her unmarked grave may actually echo the “small, unnamed grave” of Gaskell’s first unnamed daughter, as well as that of her first, unnamed son. If this is the case, then for Gaskell the image of an unmarked grave is connected not so much to punishment but to terrible, killing grief.

Clearly, "Poor Esther" has fallen and suffered greatly from "a too-trusting heart," rather than because of some inherent corruption or taint or selfishness. Others may view her as a "leper-sin," but those who do so, Gaskell implies, should be ashamed of themselves.

Esther's death is not a punishment for her fallenness but, like her life, reflects several important things about Gaskell's own grief. Gaskell suffered from anxiety and bouts of depression for much of her life. In Esther, Gaskell created a character in whom she could represent her own dis-ease, caused by grief and the emotional disorder of her marriage--ailments which manifest themselves both in Esther's own grief, as discussed above, and in Esther's bodily disease. While Esther is spiritually redeemed in the novel through her attempts to help Mary, her physical body cannot be saved. As a consequence of her isolation, of her exile from home and family, from help and sympathy, Esther contracts tuberculosis. Gaskell never states outright (nor does Esther) that this is the case, but almost every time Esther appears, she exhibits the telltale signs of consumption. She pleads with John Barton to listen to her, saying "Don't send me away. I'm so out of breath, I cannot say what I would all at once" and she "put her hand to her side, and caught her breath with evident pain" (143). When she meets with Jem, she tells him, "I was laid up for a long time with spitting blood; and could do nothing. I'm sure it made me worse, thinking about what might be happening to Mary" (190-91). And finally, in her interview with Mary, the narrator observes, "The very action of speaking was so painful to [Esther], and so much interrupted by the hard, raking cough, which had been her constant annoyance for months, that she was too much engrossed by the physical difficulty of utterance, to be a very close observer" (282). All of the signs--shortness of breath, a pain in her side, spitting of blood, a hard raking cough--point to consumption and an inevitable and early death for Esther.



However, is tuberculosis an inevitable product of life on the streets? TB certainly was not limited to the homeless or the poor but infected many well-to-do Victorians, as well. In addition, Gaskell's first prostitute, Lizzie Leigh, lives on the streets for some time and yet manages to maintain her health. Why can't Esther be a Lizzie-Leigh-like character, who lives a long life, spending her days in good works, even if she does still grieve for her lost daughter? As I discussed earlier, there is every possibility that "Lizzie Leigh" was written in the late 1830s, before Gaskell lost two more children. The short story is concerned with a mother's fantasy of recovery of her lost child and it is clear that, although Gaskell sympathizes with Lizzie and her grief, she identifies far more with Anne Leigh, who has regained her daughter and seems quite satisfied with life by the end of the story. In contrast, Gaskell created Esther after she had lost almost half of all the children born to her.<sup>25</sup> Esther's disease speaks not only of her life on the street but of her severe maternal dis-ease--grief, sorrow, isolation--which were Gaskell's own and which she takes great pains to represent in her prostitute.

I have already examined the close parallels Gaskell creates between herself and her prostitute in their lonely anguish, and in their attempts to assuage this through beneficial action. In addition, Esther's feelings of guilt provide a wider view of Gaskell's state of mind during her grief, and again pose an emphatic contrast with the guilt Gaskell creates in John Barton, the character with whom she claimed to identify most closely. Jenny Uglow speculates that when Gaskell lost her second child sometime between 1837 and 1841, she once again must have felt "the buried guilt of the mother who is helpless to save" her child

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<sup>25</sup> By 1845, when she began writing *Mary Barton*, Gaskell had lost her first daughter, her unnamed son, and her son Willie. Mary Anne, Meta, and Flossie had survived. Julia was born in 1846 and survived as well. I find it fascinating that in her chapter on Gaskell, Deborah Nord effaces three of Gaskell's children, stating that "in the industrial North, . . . [Gaskell] bore four children. . . ." (138). The births and deaths of her first daughter and her two sons are completely ignored.

(Uglow 26). Gaskell must have felt that bitter sting of grief mixed with guilt yet a third time and probably far more intensely when, a few years later, Willie died of scarlet fever while the Gaskells were on holiday. In his study, Loss, Sadness and Depression, John Bowlby states that in the case of stillborn infants and infants who die early, “parents, especially mothers, may be burdened by a sense of shame at not having been able to give birth to a healthy infant and/or guilt at having failed to care successfully for one who died” (123). Bowlby adds that “the value of helping the parents to grieve together” is especially important (123). Given William Gaskell’s inability to listen to Elizabeth’s anxieties and fears, and the isolation from him that this caused her to feel, Gaskell’s attempts to come to terms with feelings of guilt over the deaths of her children must have been very difficult. How telling, then, that in the novel she writes to assuage her grief and guilt, perhaps even her shame over the deaths of her children, she should place her most intense expressions of these feelings in the mouth of her prostitute Esther—who is tainted with guilt and shame even before the novel begins and who grieves most intensely for her dead child. Barbara Thaden argues, “In Gaskell’s fiction, the mother’s role is to be her children’s primary protector from harm, their spiritual and moral guide, their reason for upholding the values of the family, and their reason for attempting to overcome adversity and resisting despair” (47). If this is true, then Gaskell, in her inability to save her children from death and then in her own periods of despair, must have felt very guilty indeed. In these two “failings,” Esther reflects Gaskell yet again. She has failed to save her child and she has sunk so low into despair that she can envision no way out of it. And yet, through Esther, Gaskell may have written her own way out.

In each instance in which Esther expresses a feeling of guilt or responsibility for some situation, her author dismisses that guilt, and in this way Gaskell may have begun to face and work through her own. John Barton blames Esther for his wife’s death, holding his

sister-in-law responsible for the shock that the doctor speculates may have sent Mary Barton, Sr., into premature labor. Gaskell, however, provides evidence to the contrary. When Esther appears to John Barton later in the novel, he accuses her of murder, saying, “Dost thou know it was thee who killed her, as sure as Cain killed Abel . . . and at the judgement-day she’ll rise, and point to thee as her murderer; or if she don’t I will” (144). This is irrational, however, and Gaskell makes sure we know it. In the first chapter and according to John Barton himself, Mrs. Barton has been fretting terribly over their son Tom’s death from scarlet fever. In addition to this, Barton earlier has contributed to his wife’s distress in that he has had words with Esther over her coming home late and behaving too independently; he recounts to George Wilson that his wife “can’t abide words in a house” (6) and had become upset by the scene. This results in Esther’s quieting down and trying to comfort her sister while Barton does nothing to comfort his wife. And when John recalls Esther’s last visit to see them, he says that his wife “was rocking herself, and in rather a poor way” (7), even before Esther enters the house, thus demonstrating that Mrs. Barton has not been having an easy time of her third pregnancy (which has occurred who knows how quickly after her last). While her sudden and questionable disappearance may contribute to her sister’s grief, Esther is by no means solely responsible for her distress or her problem pregnancy and subsequent death in childbirth. In fact, when one recalls John Barton’s behavior to Esther before she leaves his house and how this upsets his wife, responsibility seems to fall far more squarely on his shoulders. His patriarchal dictates and anger not only exacerbate grief, as they increase Esther’s sorrow when he refuses to speak to her in the street years later, but these behaviors actually cause grief, contributing to his wife’s death in the first place, once again demonstrating how destructive a man’s lack of sympathy can be, both to his family and to himself.

As the novel progresses, Gaskell continues to absolve Esther of guilt. After Esther seeks Jem's assistance in protecting Mary from Harry Carson, she again feels pangs of guilt which are easily dismissed by her author. When she hears of the murder of Harry Carson, Esther feels responsible for Jem's action, thinking, "Was it not she who had led him to the pit into which he had fallen?" (271). And again, when she learns that Jem has been taken up and charged with the murder, Esther is riddled with guilt, thinking that she is responsible for all the tragedy that is befalling Mary, whom she loves dearly:

Oh! if it was so, she understood it all, and she had been the cause! With her violent and unregulated nature, rendered morbid by the course of life she led, and her consciousness of her degradation, she cursed herself for the interference which she believed had led to this; for the information and the warning she had given to Jem, which had roused him to this murderous action. How could she, the abandoned and polluted outcast, ever have dared to hope for a blessing, even on her efforts to do good? The black curse of Heaven rested on all her doings, were they for good or for evil. (276-77)

Again, Esther views herself as guilty but is exonerated implicitly by the facts of the story, although she herself never knows it. Gaskell, however, makes sure that the reader understands that Esther's guilt is unfounded, even if Esther never realizes this. Jem is taken up not because of his interview with Esther but because the murder weapon belongs to him, borrowed from him by John Barton who then left it at the scene of the crime (rendering Barton doubly guilty rather than Esther guilty at all). And not only does Gaskell dismiss Esther's guilt, she also sympathizes with the despairing state of mind that makes such self-castigation possible, explaining, "Poor, diseased mind! and there were none to minister to thee!" (277). The syntax here is interesting. Gaskell refers not to Esther's diseased mind but

to Esther in her entirety *as* a diseased mind, as if her guilt and grief have utterly consumed her. All of her, body and mind, are consumed not only by disease but by *dis-ease*, and this is so because, as Gaskell herself laments, “there were none to minister to thee!” Esther is utterly alone, disconnected from her family and from the unfolding details of Jem’s trial that would exonerate her of feelings of guilt.

Esther’s dis-ease also manifests itself in terrifying visions of the women of her family castigating her for her sins. Esther tells Jem of the nightmares she had during her month-long incarceration:

“It is so frightful to see them. . . . There they go round and round my bed the whole night through. My mother, carrying little Annie (I wonder how they got together) and Mary [Esther’s sister]--and all looking at me with their sad, stony eyes; oh Jem! It is so terrible!” (192)

Esther’s visions of her loved ones--her mother, her daughter, and her sister--accuse her “with their sad, stony eyes.” In truth, however, it seems unlikely that the females of Esther’s family would have treated her in this way. Judging from her niece Mary’s sympathetic response to Jem, when he tells her of her aunt’s dire situation, Esther’s mother and her sister would have behaved with similar compassion. Given Gaskell’s representations of motherhood in general as sympathetic and understanding, Esther’s sister Mary would have forgiven her for her fall and understood a mother’s desperation to save her child. And Esther’s own daughter would have understood that her mother’s fall was a sacrifice made in a desperate bid to save her. But instead, Esther has internalized society’s (and its representative, John Barton’s) round condemnation of her and the result is truly terrible. These women who loved her in life and who would have helped her, as she certainly tries to help first her daughter and then her niece, are turned into stony-eyed judges in her own

mind because of the guilt and shame of which society has told her she can never be rid. Esther's misplaced guilt denies her any relief, even in her dreams.<sup>26</sup> Ultimately, Gaskell shows us once again how alone Esther is and how isolated from any comfort, even comfort from within. Esther's guilt is unjustified here and, like her self-castigation at other times, these visions too are the product of "a diseased mind" (and, interestingly enough, here the disease Esther has been infected with is society's perception of her and not the truth). While Gaskell projects her own feelings of guilt about the deaths of her child onto her prostitute, she also implies that Esther's feelings of guilt are unfounded, which may in turn have led Gaskell to an understanding of her own guilt as unfounded, as well. Embodying her own uneasy mind as Esther's guilt, Gaskell can examine and dismiss it. And in Esther's death from physical and emotional consumption, Gaskell may finally have eased her own consuming grief and despair while simultaneously showing what happens to one who is forbidden to purge herself of these feelings.

By the time Jem finds Esther and brings her home, she is near death. With her last breath, Esther grieves unconsolably for her lost child. She embodies Gaskell's own grief, what she called "this wound that cannot heal on earth." Such a mortal wound cannot heal nor can it be borne in exile. Ultimately, death seems to be a relief for the grieving mother, a relief that even Gaskell herself had expressed a wish for in her letter about Willie to Eliza Fox on 26 April 1850, saying, "I wish I were with him in that 'light, where we shall all see light,' for I am often sorely puzzled here" (Letters 111).

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<sup>26</sup> Elizabeth Starr draws attention to the way Esther's dream connects her with Gaskell's own loss of Willie. Starr writes that when Alice Wilson is dying, the narrator interrupts the scene to refer to "that land where alone I may see, while yet I tarry here, the sweet looks of my dear child" (qtd. in Starr 390). Starr says about this scene that it is "often read as an insertion of Gaskell's private tragedy" and that it "echoes Esther's dream in which her mother, sister, and child circle her bed. Esther's child, the evidence of her fallenness and the impetus for her tainted profession, serves as a powerful tie between prostitute, narrator, and, once Gaskell's identity became known, the author herself" (390).

When Jem Wilson stands accused of Harry Carson's murder and faces hanging if found guilty, his mother states that "if he dies, why, perhaps, God of His mercy will take me too. The grave is a sure cure for an aching heart" (329). Gaskell did eventually come to terms with her grief but perhaps the "sure cure" she found was not her own grave but Esther's. Esther dies, consumed by a fatal cough and taking to her grave inconsolable grief for a daughter lost to her forever. In creating a fatal disease as well as a "diseased mind" in Esther, Gaskell represents her own dis-ease, composed of her sorrow for her lost children, her guilt over their deaths, and her enforced silence about these things within her marriage. Esther's ailments of mind and body together comprise "that wound [that] will never heal on earth" (Letters 57). Jenny Uglow observes about Gaskell, "When she was forty [in 1850], Elizabeth would tell Tottie Fox that she had a great number of 'me's,' and lament: 'How am I to reconcile all these warring members?'" (93). In making her anguish manifest itself both physically and emotionally in Esther, Gaskell reconciles one of her "warring members"-- the grieving, guilt-ridden, lonely mother--by absolving her and laying her to rest.

Although Esther does not derive any relief from telling her tale, Gaskell may have, telling parts of her own "leper's" story through and in Esther. In her own isolation, Gaskell forged not a "mirror opposite" but a companion for her pain by writing Esther. By displacing onto her prostitute her own wounds of grief, guilt, and suppression, Gaskell may have saved herself. Esther does not go on to make a new life for herself in the new world because she memorializes for Gaskell a particular time in her own life and perhaps one of Gaskell's "warring members." In Esther, Gaskell examines this period of intense grief and in doing so, may have been able to make her peace with it.

After Esther completes her visit to Mary, and the motive for action passes from aunt to niece,<sup>27</sup> Esther disappears entirely from the text until its final chapter. Significantly, right after Esther disappears, Gaskell includes an odd passage, yet again making her own presence felt in the text. She begins the passage by writing of Mary's arrival in a different city in hopes of providing an alibi to save Jem:

The hard, square outlines of the houses cut sharply against the cold bright sky, from which myriads of stars were shining down in eternal repose. There was little sympathy in the outward scene, with the internal trouble. All was so still, so motionless, so hard! Very different to this lovely night in the country in which I am now writing, where the distant horizon is soft and undulating in the moonlight, and the nearer trees sway gently to and fro in the night-wind with something of almost human motion; and the rustling air makes music among their branches, as if speaking soothingly to the weary ones, who lie awake in heaviness of heart. The sights and sounds of such a night lull pain and grief to rest. (290)

This passage marks an abrupt shift from Mary's city surroundings to the writer's own immediate ones, where grief is eased by pastoral peace. Clearly, the meditation at the end of this passage has little to do with Mary and everything to do with Gaskell herself. It would seem as if grief is beginning to ease for her at this point in the writing of Mary Barton. This easing accounts not only for the disappearance of Esther (who is the embodiment of grief, pain, and isolation) from the story but also for the novel's shift in focus from the plight of the Manchester workers to Mary's own love story and quest to rescue Jem, a shift which some critics have seen as a glaring flaw in the novel. Although she had not and would not

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<sup>27</sup> Patsy Stoneman states, "By bringing Mary the valentine/gun-wadding, [Esther] raises her from the posture of prostrate suffering to the 'necessity for exertion'" (79).



forget Willie, Gaskell was beginning to move on with life. In Attachment and Loss, John Bowlby delineates four phases of grief:

1. Phase of numbing that usually lasts from a few hours to a week and may be interrupted by outbursts of extremely intense distress and/or anger.
2. Phase of yearning and searching for the lost figure lasting some months and sometimes for years.
3. Phase of disorganization and despair.
4. Phase of greater or less degree of reorganization. (85)

While Esther clearly and simultaneously embodies the first three stages (numbing herself with drink and exhibiting extreme distress; yearning constantly for her daughter; and mired deeply in despair), by the end of the novel Gaskell seems to have moved into the fourth stage.<sup>28</sup> As exhibited by the passage above, grief is being lulled to rest. Having expressed and even memorialized her grief in her prostitute, Gaskell then begins to turn away from it, detaching herself from it, as well as from both Esther and John Barton. She begins to reorganize, shifting her attention away from the past and to the next generation, Mary and Jem and their future together. And as Elizabeth Gaskell began to let go of her griefs, she let go of her prostitute as well.

Gaskell proceeded to live a long, relatively happy life; it was also a prolific one. Perhaps she did so because Esther and the great unhealed wound of her (Gaskell's *and* Esther's) grief and guilt were expressed and finally buried in her first novel. Although Gaskell would continue to examine Victorian sexual mores in later novels, she never again wrote another prostitute. Despite the claims of many critics that Ruth is just a step away

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<sup>28</sup> Note too that Gaskell herself has demonstrated all of these stages. In fact, in "Lizzie Leigh," stage three, "yearning and searching for the lost figure," may be clearly demonstrated in Anne Leigh's search for her daughter and final wish-fulfilling recovery of her.

from being a prostitute, in the end, she most certainly is not and she resembles Esther not at all. Gaskell herself states, “I myself, don’t see how Mary B. and Ruth can be compared. They are so different in subject, style, number of characters &c.--everything. . . .” (Letters 222). Ruth is never on the street, she does not lose her son, she dies knowing that she sacrifices herself for another, and one who is unworthy of such sacrifice, at that. Ruth does not carry the burden of grief and guilt that Esther does because Gaskell has already laid these feelings to rest in Esther’s grave. In his discussion of grief and its stages, Bowlby specifies that the “reorganization” stage “entails a redefinition of [the bereaved person] as well as of [her] situation” (94). For Gaskell, I posit that this redefinition occurs, at least in part, with the writing of her first novel. By the time she began to write Ruth, she had redefined herself as an author; no longer only wife and mother, she was now a lionized writer. This redefinition was made possible by her first novel Mary Barton and by purging her grief through Esther. In Ruth, Gaskell does not create a figure to express her own personal grief and guilt; Ruth’s story is not about Gaskell but about Pasley, the young prostitute whom Gaskell aided in emigrating to Australia. Gaskell, her lost children, her grief, and her guilt are not present here. These she leaves behind her with Esther. In creating Esther’s will to speak and her refusal to be silenced, Gaskell finds a voice for many of the emotions she must have felt after losing three children and having a husband who could not deal with what she was feeling and dying to express: helplessness, depression, guilt, grief, loneliness. Only through Esther--both quarantine and companion--does Gaskell find a way of telling the tale--*her* tale--of a mother’s tragedy of losing beloved children, and in this telling, Gaskell may finally have found a salve for her wounds, and perhaps a cure for the “leper-sin” of her grief.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION:

#### **REVISITING THE PROSTITUTE IN THE PREFACES TO OLIVER TWIST, THE VICAR OF BULLHAMPTON, AND MARY BARTON**

In addition to their creation of prostitutes and, as I have argued in this dissertation, their use of these characters to explore their own anxieties in Oliver Twist, The Vicar of Bullhampton, and Mary Barton, Charles Dickens, Anthony Trollope, and Elizabeth Gaskell each attached a preface to these novels. Each preface was written after the completion of the novel to which it was then appended and each is worthy of a close reading for the way in which it may reveal its author's concepts of their novels in hindsight. In my conclusion, I argue that these prefaces highlight, both in what they say and what they don't, how fallen women function within these novels for Dickens, Trollope, and Gaskell.

All three authors' prefaces, ostensibly discussing their choice of topic, also illustrate in some way these authors' identification with their prostitutes, as well as hint at what issue each author will use the prostitute to represent and explore. Charles Dickens and Anthony Trollope both use their prefaces to draw attention to their prostitutes, clearly indicating the importance of this figure in social or charitable terms. In addition to the prostitute's social importance, each author's identification with her slips through as well, although it does so covertly, in keeping with Anderson's, Nord's, and Langbauer's observations about the use of the prostitute in order to displace and quarantine anxieties. In the preface to Mary Barton, on the other hand, Gaskell omits any mention of her prostitute Esther. In the following examination of Dickens's, Trollope's, and Gaskell's prefaces as reflective of their underlying

concerns about their prostitutes, Gaskell's strategy is tellingly different, something I discuss at length below, following my analysis of Dickens's and Trollop's prefaces.

Dickens gives several signs in his 1841 preface that Nancy is of particular consequence to him. His stated purpose for his preface is a defense of his choice to portray less than respectable subject matter--the lives of thieves and prostitutes. Dickens states, "I confess I have yet to learn that a lesson of the purest good may not be drawn from the vilest evil. [. . .] I saw no reason, when I wrote this book, why the very dregs of life, so long as their speech did not offend the ear, should not serve the purpose of a moral" (3). In keeping with this defense of his characters in terms of general moral lessons rather than as individuals, Dickens discusses these figures mostly in very general terms, mentioning specific characters only occasionally. Throughout the preface, he mentions by name Oliver once, Fagin once, Sikes twice, the Dodger once, and Nancy once. While he names her only this single time, Dickens devotes far more space in the preface to Nancy than to any other character, and it is not only in the quantity of attention given to her but in its content that I find several signs indicating her personal importance to Dickens. First, in this 1841 Preface, Dickens tells a lie (or what would, by 1846, become a lie) about Nancy. He states:

Now, as the stern and plain truth, even in the dress of this . . . race, was a part of the purpose of this book, I will not, for these [overly-fastidious] readers, abate one hole in the Dodger's coat, or one scrap of curl-paper in the girl's dishevelled hair. I have no faith in the delicacy which cannot bear to look upon them. [. . .] I have no respect for their opinion, good or bad; do not covet their approval; and do not write for their amusement. (5)

And yet, somewhere between the novel's initial serial publication in 1837-1839 and its subsequent edition of 1846,<sup>1</sup> Dickens certainly did "abate" a "scrap of curl-paper" and more about Nancy. In subsequent editions, he toned down her language in general, and in particular, in the scene in which we see Nancy and Bet for the second time at Fagin's den, chapter 13, Dickens eventually clothed Bet in the garments in which Nancy had appeared, giving Bet what had, in 1837, been Nancy's "red gown, green boots, and yellow curl-papers," describing none of Nancy's attire, and focusing only on her attempted refusal to go and look in on Oliver at the prison (92).<sup>2</sup> Apparently, Dickens succumbed to the supposed objections of his readers. Or did he? Dickens's desire to portray the "truth" of Nancy conflicts with his desire to illicit sympathy for her in her painful degradation and shame, and I posit that he abates her dress not only as part of a social agenda to encourage compassion for fallen women in general, but as a part of his own identification with her. In Chapter II, I argued that for Dickens, shame splits the self, and that he represents not only shame but its divisiveness and fragmentation in Nancy. Here, in the preface, Dickens displays the division he associates with Nancy in the novel as he claims one purpose and set of standards for her and yet finally implements something different. Torn between his claim for "realistic" representation and his sense of the misery associated with shame, Dickens wants Nancy to be "true" and yet the very truth is too painful and he must back away from it, especially if Nancy does, in some ways, represent himself.

Dickens continues to emphasize Nancy's importance to him by devoting his preface's ultimate paragraph to a defense of his representation of her while simultaneously

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<sup>1</sup> Fred Kaplan, editor of the Norton Critical Edition of *Oliver Twist*, says about the 1846 edition that it was "a new, substantially revised edition," and that it "is the last edition that Dickens himself revised substantially, and it represent the author's final wishes in regard to the text" (Preface, x).

<sup>2</sup> Patricia Ingham sees in this transfer of clothing and in Nancy's inconsistency of speech yet another split. Ingham states that Nancy "represents the two conflicting versions of the prostitute," the hardened whore and the whore with the heart of gold (50).

continuing his association of division with her. The paragraph is so slippery that before I begin an analysis of its parts, it should be presented first in its entirety:

It is useless to discuss whether the conduct of the girl seems natural or unnatural, probable or improbable, right or wrong. IT IS TRUE. Every man who has watched these melancholy shades of life knows it to be so. Suggested to my mind long ago--long before I dealt in fiction--by what I often saw and read of, in actual life around me, I have, for years, tracked it through many profligate and noisome ways, and found it still the same. From the first introduction of that poor wretch, to her laying her bloody head upon the robber's breast, there is not one word exaggerated or overwrought. It is emphatically God's truth, for it is the truth He leaves in such depraved and miserable breasts; the hope yet lingering behind; the last fair drop of water at the bottom of the dried-up weed-choked well. It involves the best and worst shades of our common nature; much of its ugliest hues, and something of its most beautiful; it is a contradiction, an anomaly, an apparent impossibility, but it is a truth. I am glad to have had it doubted, for in that circumstance I find a sufficient assurance that it needed to be told. (Oliver Twist 6-7)

The entire paragraph is a chaotic one, as the singular pronoun "it" progresses further and further away from its initial (and plural) referent--the "conduct and character of the girl." To begin with, Dickens states, "It is useless to discuss whether the conduct and character of the girl seems natural or unnatural, probable or improbable, right or wrong. IT IS TRUE" (6). Here, he seems to be responding to criticisms that Nancy is "unnatural," "improbable," and "wrong." He sidesteps these criticisms by declaring that, in the end, they are irrelevant because Nancy's "conduct and character" are "TRUE." After establishing himself as one who has experience in observing the "conduct and character" of prostitutes in general ("I

have, for years, tracked it”), Dickens then goes on to defend his conception of Nancy as true, stating about her “conduct and character” in particular that “It involves the best and worst shades of our common nature; much of its ugliest hues, and something of its most beautiful; it is a contradiction, an anomaly, an apparent impossibility, but it is a truth” (7). Here, Dickens turns away from his representation of Nancy as a “true” portrait of a prostitute and instead states that his portrayal is “true” of all of us. And not only does his portrayal of her include the “best and worst” of us but suddenly “it” refers no longer to the “conduct and character” of the prostitute but to “our common nature.” The very pronoun in this sentence is divided, squinting from Nancy’s “conduct and character” (“It involves”) to the readers’ and author’s “common nature” and then finally slipping between Nancy and author/readers in the final usage of “it” where the referent is unclear. Is “it” Nancy’s conduct and character or our common nature? And in the midst of this division, there is also conflation as prostitute/author/reader collapse into one another--all are “it” at some point here.

And the tension continues in this sentence. Nancy’s portrait represents “best and worst,” “ugliest . . . and most beautiful”; at first, Dickens seems to be arguing that these things are normal for all of us--they are “common” to all of us--but then he complicates this by declaring Nancy “a contradiction, an anomaly, an apparent impossibility.” Apparently, what is “common” or usual is also unusual. Furthermore, the word “common” can be seen as split in its meaning here, perpetuating the images of division implicit in Dickens’s discussion of Nancy. On the surface, Dickens seems to intend “common” also to mean “shared” in this context--not only does Nancy represent aspects of our usual nature but also of our shared nature. But “common” splits into yet another possible and apt meaning here, as well: “common” can also mean “fallen.” This meaning for “common” would not have

been unknown to Dickens. In fact, he employs the word with this explicit meaning in an interesting context over a decade later in his “Book of Memoranda” in which, as I point out in Chapter I, he conflates himself with his prostitute, adopting the first person perspective and stating, “I am a common woman, fallen” (Forster 2: 378).

The conflation Dickens exhibits in his “Book of Memoranda” is foreshadowed in his preface to Oliver Twist. When Dickens writes about Nancy’s “conduct and character” that “It involves the best and worst shades of our common nature,” he implies that we are all of us fallen. Moreover, while his use of “our” would at first seem to refer to himself and his readers, it may also be used in the sense of the royal “we” and apply only to himself. If “our” refers to Dickens alone, then here in his preface, he indicates what Nancy’s personal importance may be to him--she represents “our common nature”--both a fallen one and one shared in common with her author. Further, the divided meaning of the word “common” indicates an identification with Nancy that extends beyond a shared nature and specifically to a shared shame, which is what I argue Dickens builds into his representation of her by including biographical parallels in his portrayal of her in the novel. As I argued in Chapter II, Dickens identifies his own shame with Nancy’s and uses her to examine and represent the effects of that shame, characterizing her in the novel as fractured. And in his preface, written after the novel’s completion, he continues to demonstrate both his identification with her, as well as his association of division with her.

In his final sentence of the preface and still employing that maddeningly elusive pronoun “it,” Dickens writes, “I am glad to have had it doubted, for in that circumstance I find a sufficient assurance that it needed to be told” (7). Again, the referent for “it” is unclear--is “it” his portrayal of Nancy or our common nature? Or is “it” both at the same time, a collapse of the two enabled by the very confusion of the sentence? When the phrase



“our common nature,” with its implications of Dickens and his prostitute’s shared shame, is considered alongside his repeated and slippery usage of “it,” the “truth” that “needed to be told” could well be about Dickens’s own shame as much as “it” is Nancy’s.<sup>3</sup> And as I argue in Chapter II, regardless of society’s perception of Nancy’s probability, what turns out to be “true” about Dickens’s prostitute is what he may have feared to be true for himself, as well: shames splits the self. In part, Dickens needs to tell this “truth” of her degradation and fragmentation because in it he represents his own shame and rupture.

Like Dickens, Trollope uses his preface to argue for the social necessity of his subject matter. He writes of the sexual double standard applied to sons and daughters, and indicates the need for general sympathy for and familial reclamation of fallen women and prostitutes. Also like Dickens, Trollope includes in his preface a veiled subtext indicating his prostitute’s personal importance to him, as well. I posit in Chapter III that Trollope connects his own sense of degradation and shame during his initial years working for the Post Office in London to Carry Brattle, and that he uses her to represent that shame and to explore its effects--its misery, silence, paralysis, and inescapability. Trollope’s preface to The Vicar of Bullhampton demonstrates his identification with his prostitute and hints at its significance, as well. The preface’s first paragraph is as follows:

The writing of prefaces is, for the most part, work thrown away; and the writing of a preface to a novel is almost always a vain thing. Nevertheless, I am tempted to prefix a few words to this novel on its completion, not expecting that many people

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<sup>3</sup> In her analysis of Bill Sikes’s flight after murdering Nancy, Karen Elizabeth Tatum also notes a telling way Dickens uses the pronoun “it” with reference to Nancy. Tatum writes, “Here the pronoun *it* refers back to “the corpse” of Nancy. Just as Sikes grows more and more disturbed and haunted by the corpse he cannot face and conceals it under a rug, Dickens linguistically conceals the corpse by referring to it as *it*” (254). Tatum concludes, “Significantly, as Sikes gets close and closer to his own practical suicide, the referent (the body) gets closer and closer to its pronoun in Dickens’s sentence constructions. [. . .] [W]hen the referent is separated from the pronoun by a mere dash, Sikes becomes even more paranoid and desperate. . . . When Sikes realizes he cannot rid himself of the corpse, he accidentally hangs himself” (255-56).

will read them, but desirous, in doing so, of defending myself against a charge which may possibly be made against me by the critics,--as to which I shall be unwilling to revert after it shall have been preferred. (xxix)

From its first sentence, Trollope's language in this paragraph establishes a connection between himself and the figure of the prostitute. He writes that prefaces in general represent an effort "thrown away" and that a preface to a novel is "almost always a vain thing." And yet, he is "tempted" (and, as evidenced by the preface's very existence, he succumbs to the temptation) to write it--to do something he considers "vain," and to create something that is usually "thrown away." Later in the preface, Trollope refers to his prostitute Carry Brattle as a "castaway" and the echoes between the "thrown away" preface and the "castaway" Carry resound. Further, as I mentioned in Chapter III, Trollope often refers to Carry as a "thing," which links the thrown-away thing, the preface, even more closely with the castaway thing, Carry Brattle.<sup>4</sup> Both preface and prostitute are fallen and as such, they are things full of shame. In writing the preface, Trollope, like Carry, commits a transgression; in this particular case, however, it is a transgression of his own ideals (never to write a preface, always to let the book speak for itself) and such a transgression is the essence of shame--a failure to live up to one's own ideal of oneself.<sup>5</sup>

The double meaning of the word "vain" in the first sentence of the preface also deserves a moment of examination. The word appears to mean "futile" in the context in which it appears here; and yet, he doesn't say that the writing of a preface is "*in vain*" but that the preface itself is a "vain thing," as if it has a life of its own and a fallen life at that. Vanity was often cited in the nineteenth century as one of the leading causes of a woman's fall, her choice to indulge her love of appearances and love of self leading her to step outside

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<sup>4</sup> See, for instance, pp. 37, 288, and 378 in *The Vicar of Bullhampton*.

<sup>5</sup> See Newsom, p. 6, for a quotation of this definition by Gerhart Piers.

of the safety of her home and pursue, as Trollope himself writes in this preface, “the false glitter of gaudy life” (xxx). If a preface and its writing, like the prostitute, is a vain thing--self-indulgent and egotistical--then Trollope’s language about prefaces here, in his own preface, reveals that he perceives himself as fallen, a state of mind in which he was perhaps particularly able to identify himself with his prostitute and use her to explore his own experiences of shame.

Shame for Trollope inevitably leads to defensiveness. The final sentence of the first paragraph reveals this defensiveness as Trollope states that he writes this preface “not expecting that many people will read [it], but desirous, in doing so, of defending myself against a charge which may possibly be made against me by the critics,--as to which I shall be unwilling to revert after it shall have been preferred” (xxix). The language here is telling. Trollope wants to defend not his choice of subject matter or his skill in portraying it but himself, revealing a collapse of his own identity with his representation of his prostitute, as both are fallen in some way and subject to castigation. Furthermore, he does not clearly state, here or later in the preface, what the actual “charge” against him will be. Using rhetorical questions, he only implies that the accusation will be that he has chosen to write about an unsuitable topic for a general audience. To this he responds that the “existence of such a condition of life” as Carry Brattle’s is no longer unknown to “our sisters and daughters” (xxix) and that surely “women, who are good, [may] pity the sufferings of the vicious, and do something perhaps to mitigate and shorten them, without contamination from the vice” (xxx). About this “charge” of impropriety of subject matter, however, Trollope is not even sure that it will be made at all--it only “may possibly be made.” And, in fact, it was *not* made. Critics found no fault with his choice of writing about a prostitute. By 1870, this reception should have come as little or no surprise--plenty of fallen women,

including prostitutes, had been included in novels by this time, especially after the rise of the sensation novel in the 1860s. Trollope's defensiveness and his need to write this preface really seem to be about something else--not prostitutes in particular but shame and his own connections to it. Finally, the last part of the last sentence reveals Trollope's defensive stance most clearly. He states that in writing the preface, he is "desirous, in doing so, of defending myself against a charge which may possibly be made against me by the critics,--as to which I shall be unwilling to revert after it shall have been preferred" (The Vicar of Bullhampton xxix). Not only is he defending himself/Carry against a criticism which may never come but he states that, if the criticism does come, he will not answer it any differently or any further. He anticipates the charge, gives his response to it, and then declares the case closed, in a gesture that indicates his discomfort with and need for control of criticism about not just his novel but about himself as the author of a prostitute.

I argue that Trollope's defensiveness here is directly connected to his own sense of shame. Trollope was a prolific writer. For his feelings of defensiveness to be called out so clearly in reference to this single novel, one of only two novels for which he ever wrote a preface, seems to indicate that something more than a call for sympathy for prostitutes is at stake here. The Vicar of Bullhampton makes Trollope's sympathy for the prostitute clear. The novel needs no preface, or at least, the preface which Trollope attaches to it adds little to what Trollope already conveys in the novel itself. The writing of this preface is evoked not by a need to explain and defend the actual work, but a need to defend against what this work represents for him. Recent biographies on Trollope indicate that a characteristic defensiveness arose as a way to protect himself from feelings of inferiority and shame. That he adopts a defensive stance in his preface and in relation to his representation of a

prostitute implies a connection between himself and Carry Brattle--between his own shame and his representation of hers.

Of further significance in establishing Trollope's identification of himself with Carry is his inclusion of this preface as part of his account of his own life. In his autobiography, he writes, "To this novel I affixed a preface,--in doing which I was acting in defiance of an old-established principle. I do not know that any one read it; but as I wish to have it read, I will insert it here again" (330). He then commences the repetition of the preface, beginning with what is, in the original, the second paragraph. Gone entirely is that initial paragraph on thrown-away vain things and temptations; gone is the defensiveness. The only hint of that first paragraph remains in his remark that he wrote the preface "in defiance of an old-established principle." In Chapter III, I discussed parts of the remainder of the preface as it appears in An Autobiography. My concern here is to point out the autobiography's censoring of that one paragraph which seems to blur, if not efface, the line between Trollope and trollop. While there are still connections between author and prostitute in the preface, without its original first paragraph, it is now far more believable as simply a plea for sympathy for the prostitute. Of course, by the time Trollope wrote this part of his autobiography, years after the novel's publication, he knew that his fear of public criticism of it, and of him, had not come to pass. His defense of himself was unnecessary and perhaps this is why he chose to omit that initial paragraph. On the other hand, he edits his recapitulation of the preface in his autobiography in one other way that makes it difficult to dismiss his omission of the first paragraph so simply. In the concluding sentence of his original preface and about the fallen woman, Trollope writes: "It may also at last be felt that this misery is worthy of alleviation, as is every misery to which humanity is subject" (The Vicar of Bullhampton xxxi). Here, in his autobiography, where he describes the sufferings

and shame of his own childhood and young adulthood, the lack of sympathy shown to him, and the absence of any efforts to alleviate that misery, he chooses to omit from the preface the very passages that connect to his own condition most clearly. His silences here speak more loudly than the words he includes, pointing to an identification with Carry and her shame that, as I argued in Chapter III, is characterized in part by silence.

When juxtaposed with the prefaces of Dickens and Trollope, Gaskell's preface to Mary Barton seems to adopt a different approach. Unlike her two contemporaries, Gaskell refers immediately to her personal motivation for writing the novel, declaring in the very first sentence of the preface, "Three years ago, I became anxious (from circumstances that need not be more fully alluded to) to employ myself in writing a work of fiction" (xxxv). In this approach, she reveals herself to be more open about her motivations for writing than either Dickens or Trollope, who never state in their prefaces that they may be writing about something personally painful for themselves. For Gaskell, the writing of Mary Barton begins with anxiety--anxiety "that need not be more fully alluded to" in the preface but which *is* fully alluded to in the text of the novel, and in particular in Gaskell's representation of Esther. Also unlike Dickens and Trollope, Gaskell does not single out her prostitute or even mention her in the preface. While I argue that Dickens's and Trollope's compulsions to revisit their prostitutes outside the confines of their novels emphasize their heavy personal investment in the figure, Gaskell's omission of Esther here indicates not a lack of identification with her prostitute but perhaps a concealment of that specific identification. Explicitly closer to her prostitute in terms of gender, motherhood, and grief, Gaskell may have avoided singling Esther out in the preface because, while she does use Esther to contain her grief, she does so without the protective "barrier of gender" (to use Deborah

Nord's term) available to Dickens and Trollope in their partial self-portraits in *Nancy* and *Carry*.

Furthermore, Gaskell may avoid drawing attention specifically to Esther in her preface because by the time she wrote it, after the novel's completion, Esther had served her author's purpose. I argued in Chapter IV that in *Esther*, Gaskell creates both a quarantine and a companion for her own grief, representing her own sorrow, emotional isolation, and guilt in Esther and, in doing so, also coming to terms with these feelings. I showed that by the end of *Mary Barton*, Esther dies and the tenor of the novel shifts from an account of working-class misery to one of new romantic beginnings because in *Esther*, Gaskell perhaps created a way to alleviate her own misery, as well as renew hope.

Finally and most importantly to my discussion, Gaskell's preface differs from those written by Dickens and Trollope because she was compelled to write it not by her own desires but by those of her publisher. In response to Edward Chapman's suggestion that she add a preface to the novel, Gaskell declared, "If you think the book requires such a preface I will try to concoct it; but at present, I have no idea what to say" (qtd. in Uglow 191). The preface's existence testifies to the fact that she did find something to say and the preface itself has been well-examined for the ways in which, among other things, it reveals both Gaskell's investment in and ambivalence about her presentation of the Manchester working classes. Past its first revealing sentence, however, the preface is of less concern to me here than is the fact that the impetus for it lay with someone else, rather than with Gaskell herself. In Chapter IV, I have tried to establish that Gaskell creates Esther in part as a way simultaneously to contain, express, and examine personal anxieties that had to be cordoned off from her husband. If her quarantine of her own grief was to be maintained, then speaking at any length about it in the preface where she was writing from a more vulnerable

position, referring not only to her reasons for writing but necessarily to herself as writer, would perhaps have violated that quarantine. Without the protection of gender difference, any gesture in the preface towards Esther might have been too revealing. It is also possible that Gaskell does not mention Esther in her preface because she uses it instead to write about the literal subject of the work--the Manchester workers and their perception that no one cares for their sufferings. To paraphrase its first sentence, no further allusions will be made in the preface to her own private grief. Those she reserves for the novel itself and for Esther.

In addition to the differences of its preface, Mary Barton stands apart from Oliver Twist and The Vicar of Bullhampton in yet another critical way. While I posit that all three authors use their prostitutes to quarantine personal anxieties, I find in the end that Dickens and Trollope seem to find no comfort in doing so. Their representations of Nancy and of Carry seem to confirm their anxieties rather than relieve them, and that affirmation of anxiety seems to exacerbate it. Dickens shows in Nancy his fears about shame and the shamed, split self. Then he returns to her compulsively throughout the rest of his life, writing the preface to Oliver Twist three years later, revising his portrayal of Nancy in the years between the original publication and the 1846 edition of the novel, and finally returning again and again to her in his performances of her murder. In those performances where he relived Nancy and his anxieties about shame and the split self that he represented in her, and where he attempted to “murder” that anxiety, over and over again, Dickens exhibits a compulsion for resurrecting and repressing his anxieties in a never-ending cycle. As is often true of anxiety, the anxious attempts to repress may actually lead to its increase, and Dickens’s fears about the shamed, split self that cannot survive turned out to be self-fulfilling as his compulsive performances led eventually to his own death.



Trollope, too, demonstrates that his prostitute stands for something more to him than concern for a general social problem and that the anxiety she represents continues for him. As I argue in Chapter III, Trollope's final image of Carry Brattle as alive and taken back by her family instead of dead may have been a radical one but it is far from comforting. Her physical misery may be eased but happy she is not and Trollope makes it clear that she never will be. A representative of Trollope's own sense of shame and its miseries, Carry lives on, unhappily ever after. Furthermore, after the completion of the novel, Trollope, like Dickens, compulsively revisits his prostitute, creating a vain, thrown-away preface and then showing his investment in it to be great, repeating most of it in his autobiography and silencing the very parts of it which point to his own personal connection to Carry.

In contrast to Dickens and Trollope, Gaskell creates in her prostitute not only a figure upon which she can project her anxieties, but also a way to alleviate them. In Esther, Gaskell represents her own maternal grief and the intensification of that grief when it is endured alone. Further, Gaskell uses Esther to work through the stages of grief and to dismiss maternal guilt, as well, all of which point to Esther's therapeutic value for Gaskell. Such therapy, however, seems to be off-limits to Dickens and Trollope.

The question then arises, why should Esther alleviate anxiety for Gaskell while Dickens's and Trollope's prostitutes seem to perpetuate theirs? A full exploration of this issue is beyond the scope of this dissertation and I offer here only a very brief and very speculative response. The beginnings of an answer may lie in the idea of quarantining grief by displacing it onto a mirror opposite. Nancy and Carry are Dickens's and Trollope's mirror opposites. Esther is not so clearly distanced from Gaskell. In terms of the results of displacement, quarantining appears to work differently for each gender. The distance achieved between male author and female prostitute--the very distance that makes her an

appealing figure in which to quarantine anxiety--may also result in a failure to identify with her completely, thereby rendering the comfort of sympathetic understanding inaccessible to the male author. Or perhaps the divergence between these authors--between Dickens's and Trollope's inability to find comfort for their anxieties in Nancy and Carry while Gaskell does find it in Esther--lies not only in gender difference but also in the particular kinds of anxieties these authors choose to represent in their prostitutes. For Dickens and Trollope, the anxiety is shame, a feeling of inadequacy and inferiority, and it is something which they wish to keep quarantined from the world's perception of them as successful, self-controlled men. For Gaskell, the anxiety is lonely grief, which she wishes to express and for which she wishes to find sympathy but which she is forced to quarantine because of a husband who could not face what grief did to his own sense of self and self-control. For Dickens and Trollope, the prostitute serves as a way to hide and express something which threatened their masculine self-image. For Gaskell, the prostitute functions to hide and express something which threatened Gaskell only insofar as she was not allowed to express it by her husband. For Dickens and Trollope, the danger lies in the emotion and its expression. For Gaskell, it lies in the suppression of the emotion. The implications here are numerous and complicated, and they open up a wide avenue for future study.

Within this dissertation, however, I am satisfied with drawing attention to the connections between these authors and their prostitutes, connections which demonstrate each author's identification with his or her prostitute and through which each author then examines something very personal and very painful about his or her own life. In the end, I return to those two sentences Dickens wrote in his "Book of Memoranda": "I am a common woman, fallen. Is it devilry in me--is it a wicked comfort--what is it--that induces me to be always tempting other women down, while I hate myself" (Forster 2: 378). I argue

that what induces Dickens and Trollope and Gaskell to create and conflate themselves with their prostitutes is anxiety--these authors' own personal pains--the secret agony of a soul, some wolf to gnaw us somewhere, some leper-sin.

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### Education

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M.A., English, Southern Methodist University, May 1995.  
B.A., English and History, University of Texas at Austin, May 1993.

### Honors and Awards

Melbern G. Glasscock Center for Humanities Research Graduate Student Fellowship, TAMU, September 2002-May 2003.  
Melbern G. Glasscock Center for Humanities Research, Graduate Student Conference Travel Award, TAMU, November 2001.  
Forrest Burt Memorial Award (for dissertation research in Victorian literature), TAMU, March 2000.  
Women's Studies Graduate Research Fellowship, TAMU, November 1999.  
English Department Travel Grants, TAMU, February 1998, March 1998, November 2000, March 2001, August 2001.

### Selected Conference Papers

"Lady Audley's Resistance to the Red Room, the Schoolroom, and the Attic: Mary Elizabeth Braddon's Reflections on Charlotte Bronte's Jane Eyre," British Women Writers Association, Lawrence, KS, March 2001.  
"Reflecting 'the Inimitable': Nancy as Dickens's Double in Oliver Twist," South Atlantic Modern Language Association Annual Conference, Birmingham, AL, Nov. 2000.  
"Lady Audley's Defeat and Lady Coventry's Triumph: Alcott's Debt to and Revision of Mary Elizabeth Braddon's Lady Audley's Secret in Behind a Mask," South Central Women's Studies Association Annual Conference, Houston, TX, March 1998.

### Selected Teaching

Lecturer Full Time, Baylor University, 2003-2005.  
Assistant Lecturer and Graduate Assistant Lecturer, Texas A&M University, 1996-2003.

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Graduate Assistant and Research Assistant, Melbern G. Glasscock Center for Humanities Research, TAMU, September 1999-August 2002.  
Assistant to the Conference Director, "Silence and Expression: Histories of Permission and Censorship," Glasscock Center for Humanities Research, TAMU, September 1999-March 2000.  
Editorial Assistant, Virtual Gender: Fantasies of Subjectivity and Embodiment (U Michigan P, 2000), TAMU, August 1999. Wrote the index for a collection of essays.  
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