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Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* presents a tangle of social and relational issues whose persistence suggest epistemological underpinnings that, according to the text, should be considered in her contemporary society because of their implication for the efficacy of the social reform with which the novel is associated. An examination of the novel in the light of John F. W. Herschel's scientific philosophy and of Unitarian thinkers Francis Newman and James Martineau's theologies reveals that the problem for individuals of achieving clear, unbiased insight is at the heart of the issues with which the novel grapples. The field which these theorists each, for their own purposes, call natural history – with its emphasis on accurate sense observation and analysis – provides processes for understanding the natural world which can also be applied to human society. But humans' search for knowledge is often taken off course by errors in judgment which scientific thinking based on external observation cannot correct by itself. In *Mary Barton*, individuals too often fail to reason correctly from empirical observation; only characters who manage to integrate their thinking with processes of conscience and faith are able to navigate away from tragic outcomes. Placing *Mary Barton*, the first of Gaskell's realist novels, in juxtaposition with one of her later Gothic tales, "Lois the Witch," yields further ground for considering Gaskell's fiction from this perspective. Gaskell's fiction, I argue, thus promotes an epistemology that unifies the sense-perceptible discovery valued by natural history with another knowledge process—an understanding developed through faith into a kind of loving-knowing that relies on a reciprocity of the physical senses and other, non-physical "organs" of conscience and soul.

SENSE, CONSCIENCE, AND SOUL: THE HYBRID EPISTEMOLOGY OF NATURAL
SCIENCE AND UNITARIAN FAITH IN ELIZABETH GASKELL'S *MARY BARTON*

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DEDICATION

Dedicated to Ella, Jack, and Jeff.

APPROVAL PAGE

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* presents a tangle of social and relational issues whose persistence suggest epistemological underpinnings that, according to the text, should be considered in her contemporary society because of their implication for the efficacy of the social reform with which the novel is associated. An examination of the novel in the light of John F. W. Herschel's scientific philosophy and of Unitarian thinkers Francis Newman and James Martineau's theologies reveals that the problem for individuals of achieving clear, unbiased insight is at the heart of the issues with which the novel grapples. What these theorists each, for his own purpose, calls natural history – with its emphasis on accurate sense observation and analysis – provides, are processes for understanding the natural world which can also be applied to human society. If they could be used correctly and without prejudice, Gaskell's narrative suggests, these processes would mitigate the original causes of the novel's social issues. But humans' search for knowledge is often taken off course by errors in judgment which scientific thinking based on external observation cannot correct by itself; empirical scientific thinking alone will thus not lead to the kind of empathic human understanding the narrative indicates is necessary for effective resolution. Herschel, Newman, and Martineau seem to agree on this problematic nature of knowledge. Newman and Martineau's branch of Unitarianism, with which Gaskell was aligned, suggests that to know correctly, a free-willed individual must develop equally an intellectual understanding with an awakened conscience and a reverent heart. In *Mary Barton*, while we can observe characters searching after the truth of difficult social problems, individuals too often fail to reason correctly from their sense observations; only characters who manage to integrate their thinking with processes of conscience and faith are able to navigate away from tragic outcomes. The novel, I argue, thus promotes an epistemology that unifies the

sense-perceptible discovery valued by natural history with another knowledge process—an understanding developed through faith into a kind of loving-knowing that relies on a reciprocity of the physical senses and other, non-physical “organs” of conscience and soul.

Over the last several decades, scholarship on Gaskell’s work has tended to exclude any serious consideration of her Unitarianism as a philosophical foundation for her novels. Recent work that does engage her religious beliefs has generally done so through the lens of a trope, such as the pilgrimage or the parable, with perhaps a brief ancillary mention of the ways in which Unitarianism allowed for an integrative perspective on empirical science and belief.¹ Other recent scholarship on Gaskell’s work tends to frame her interest in the natural world in terms of ecocritical theory² and to locate her concern with social reform within a Marxist ideological framework.³ The exception is Amy Mae King, who in her 2019 monograph *The Divine in the Commonplace: Reverent Natural History and the Novel in Britain*, breaks new ground toward a framework for considering Gaskell’s work that unites the streams of empirical science and faith. King suggests that Gaskell’s “realism is informed by the self-same reverent

¹ See for instance M. Joan Chard’s *Victorian Pilgrimage: Sacred-Secular Dualism in the Novels of Charlotte Brontë, Elizabeth Gaskell, and George Eliot* and Amy Coté’s “Parables and Unitarianism in Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Mary Barton*.”

² See for instance Margaret S. Kennedy’s “A Breath of Fresh Air: Eco-Consciousness in *Jane Eyre* and *Mary Barton*.”

³ See for instance Lynn Shakinovsky’s “Christianity and Class in Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Mary Barton*.”

empiricism of natural history” (206).⁴ In her chapter on Gaskell, she calls for further critical attention to the influence of Gaskell’s faith in the rhetoric of her realist novels, suggesting that “Gaskell’s Unitarianism needs to be more fully understood in relation to her realism” (217). Ultimately, though, King’s commentary toggles between the two impulses of science and faith; and her argument (which is more broadly focused on the aesthetics of form) does not take up the epistemological underpinning for one of Gaskell’s major impulses – toward the possibility of achieving greater social awareness and change. Alongside King, we might thus make an additional, related call—for an understanding of how Gaskell’s Unitarian philosophical foundation, in part, paves the way for a more holistic epistemological understanding of her work, such as I have claimed for *Mary Barton*. Read as part of a balanced epistemological framework, we might consider that for Gaskell, correct perception and navigation of her modern social landscape requires a thinking that places empirical science and religious belief not in dualistic opposition or even fluid binary relationship, but rather in unified, boundaryless imbrication.

⁴ King argues that in the first half of the nineteenth century, Victorian realist novels incorporated, through elements of form, theological ideas with the scientific inquiry common to the time – that of natural history, with its focus on exhaustively detailing objects in nature. She suggests the realist novel’s focus on quotidian objects and events, often occurring at the risk of distracting the reader from plot, works as a cognate with the form of the natural history texts that were popular at the time. She alternately uses the terms “reverent natural history” and “reverent empiricism” to invoke what she sees as a mutuality between natural theology and natural history operating in early nineteenth century Victorian realist fiction. King bases her argument on texts by George Eliot, Jane Austen, and Elizabeth Gaskell – focusing in one chapter on two of Gaskell’s later novels: *Sylvia’s Lovers* (1863) and her final, unfinished *Wives and Daughters* (1866). Her argument in that chapter is that these novels “suggest that there is reverence behind the observation and rendering of the details of everyday reality” and that in both texts, “to observe the natural world was a form of reverence” (King 206).

Based on the comments King makes, it seems possible to extend my argument beyond the works I have considered here, making the case that Gaskell has constructed a specific and well-developed rhetorical stance through the body of her novels, based on this balanced epistemology.

Placing *Mary Barton*, the first of Gaskell's realist novels, in juxtaposition with one of her later Gothic tales, "Lois the Witch," yields further ground for considering Gaskell's fiction from this perspective. In "Lois the Witch," we can detect an inverse problem with the same epistemological root, in that characters' fearful, desperate hold on a narrow sphere of understanding, in a society cut off from their past and from intergenerational knowledge, leads them to tragedy. Taken together, the two texts suggest that valid knowledge also relies on a developed capacity for discernment, which depends in part on maintaining a continuous, transmissible temporal lineage with history, culture, and the natural world. Further, both texts suggest that institutional, systemic reform would not alone provide the solutions that could lead to better outcomes for the characters in these fictional societies. In each text, institutional authority – whether religious or economic – is only as effective as the individuals within it are capable of decisions based on correct discernment. Finally, each text is situated in an historical moment during which the society experienced a break from its past – in seventeenth-century Salem, the Puritans had left England to find religious freedom in what was to them a wild, uncultivated, and fearsome land whose inhabitants were often unfriendly toward their presence. In nineteenth-century England, the industrialization of agrarian spaces meant that working class citizens and those in the merchant class were housed away from the natural landscapes on which previous generations based their understanding of the world. In each situation, the texts suggest, the society's knowledge processes need renewal to meet their new social and environmental contexts. Without such renewal, the attempt to know correctly will inevitably go awry – as

though one were trying to read a map that no longer corresponds to the territory one inhabits. To understand how these consilient factors function for Gaskell's texts, we turn to Herschel, Newman, and Martineau to situate the fictions within the philosophical and historical framework that would have been familiar to Gaskell and her contemporary readership.

CHAPTER II: HERSCHEL, NEWMAN, AND MARTINEAU

John F. W. Herschel's 1830 work, *A Preliminary Discourse on the Study of Natural Philosophy*, develops the thesis that humans can discover an apparently limitless knowledge of the natural world when their powers of observation are optimized through learning, when their minds are clear of prejudice, when they make knowledge widely available, and when they are fully aware of the Divinely created natural laws governing the universe.⁵ Herschel's philosophy serves as a useful lens through which to examine the ways of knowing that are engaged in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton*, and it provides the grounds suggesting part of the epistemological solution to the novel's social problems. Herschel wrote the *Preliminary Discourse* as the introductory treatise for a longer series of works on scientific topics written by well-respected authors, the cost of which made the books more accessible to the professional class (J. Secord 82-83). According to James Secord, "Herschel had a high reputation among men of science, not only as the son of the celebrated astronomer William Herschel (discoverer of the planet Uranus, or 'Georgium Sidus') but also in his own right" (84). His introductory work was widely read and influential; in fact, editors of newspapers and annuals so frequently excerpted the text that eventually quotations were often either printed with no mention of their authorship, or only attributed to "a profound philosopher" (100, 101). Later scientific books, notably Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*, refer frequently to the *Preliminary Discourse*, extending its influence (101). Herschel's work, Secord explains, is primarily "an invitation to share, through reading, the scientific frame of mind" so that "readers could vicariously engage in

⁵ I am indebted to Timothy Johnston for recommending Herschel in connection with this line of inquiry into the novel.

the act of discovery and an appreciation of natural truth” (91). Through the disciplined patterns of thinking and observation Herschel outlines, readers outside the English elite classes could participate in scientific study. His work is thus a useful point of reference in establishing the ideals and the boundaries of scientific knowledge for the novel’s epistemology. Gaskell would have known of Herschel through social and familial connections as well as from his popularity and the frequency of printed reference to his work.⁶

Francis Newman and his contemporary James Martineau were Unitarian ministers who wrote and spoke on the theological importance of both free will and of feeling in religious faith.⁷ According to Jenny Uglow in her 1999 critical biography of Gaskell, both Martineau’s and Newman’s ideas were highly influential to Gaskell (Uglow 131-133). Newman, in his 1849 work *The Soul, Her Sorrows and Her Aspirations*, argues that, in addition to the physical sense organs, humans have two other organs for perception: “The soul is to things spiritual what the conscience is to things moral; each is the seat of feeling, and thereby the organ of specific information to us, respecting its own subject” (*The Soul* 3). For Martineau, the practice of religion itself relies on an epistemological trivium of reason, conscience, and faith: “Religion is more than an artificial product of mental instruction; it is the prayer of conscience, the

⁶ William Gaskell was a member of the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society, which listed Herschel among the noted guests at the British Association’s annual meeting hosted in Manchester in 1842 (Uglow 134). And Gaskell’s cousin Henry Holland, with whom she was well acquainted, named Herschel among his close friends (17).

⁷ Newman and Martineau diverge from some of their more rational-tending Unitarian predecessors such as Joseph Priestley – see for instance Francis Newman, *The Soul* 45 and Jenny Uglow, *Elizabeth Gaskell: A Habit of Stories* 133.

vaticination of reason, the natural faith of love” (Martineau, *Hours of Thought on Sacred Things, Second Series*, qtd. Schulman 102).

Martineau was, according to Gaskell biographer Jenny Uglow, “enormously influential” in the Unitarian community of his day, “because he offered a direct challenge to Priestleyan rationalism, the core of Unitarian belief. He . . . insisted that belief, rather than relying on ‘evidence’, sprang from an inner, emotional impulse” (Uglow 130). Faith, according to Martineau, is “trust” in an “Infinite” being “of whom we could have no conception, if our aspirations did not transcend our realities” (Martineau, *Endeavors* 278). Unitarian minister and scholar Frank Schulman writes, quoting Martineau on the value and relationship between reason and conscience as functioning in simultaneous reciprocity in the human being: “Martineau . . . insist[ed] that the means of discrimination are reason and conscience, ‘the living organs for the apprehension of truth and holiness’” (Schulman 79). Further, Martineau places empirical understanding and intuitive perception on equal epistemological ground, at opposite poles: “The thoughts which *science* presents may operate as a telescope to show us what else there is besides ourselves, and persuade us that we are but as the trembling leaf in the boundless forests of existence. But those which are offered by *affection* and natural experience are rather apt to interpose a microscopic medium; and . . . to magnify every part by concentration” (*Endeavors* 314). Thus, he concludes that for the ideal relationship between the study of external nature and humans’ internal processes, “The advance of any one line of human thought demands . . . the parallel movement of all the rest. . . . In particular, the study of external nature must proceed *pari*

passu with the study of the human mind” (*Studies of Christianity* 9).⁸ If conscience, soul, and sense all inform human understanding, then for knowledge to progress, humans must acknowledge these ways of knowing as distinct but interdependent processes in the individual. In alignment with Herschel’s thinking, which indicates that observation of the natural world “stills the confusion of the senses” and prepares a person for scientific inquiry, Martineau comments on value of observing the natural world in revealing spiritual insight: "God has not bound himself all up in the routine of nature, that we should seek him there alone, where is only the material fabric of his hand, and not the spiritual likeness of himself" (Martineau, *Essays III*, qtd. Schulman12). Thus, empirically observable processes in the natural world, for Martineau, again present a need for reciprocity with processes of faith.

⁸ This claim is part of a larger comment Martineau makes in response to Hugh Miller’s remark about religion. Martineau paraphrases his understanding of Miller’s idea: “that religion has lost its dependence on metaphysical theories, and must henceforth maintain itself upon the domain of physical science” (*Timely Meditations* 9). Martineau agrees in large part with Miller’s concept, exhorting clergy to “qualify themselves to take part in the discussions which open themselves with the advance of natural knowledge” if they are to continue to be relevant. However, he comments that

The only fault to be found with this counsel is, that in recommending one kind of knowledge it disparages another, and betrays that limited intellectual sympathy which is the bane of all noble culture. Geology, astronomy, chemistry . . . do but enrich [metaphysics’] problems with new conceptions and give a larger outline to its range; and should they . . . persuade men to its neglect, they will pay the penalties of their contempt by the appearance of confusion in their own doctrine. The advance of any one line of human thought demands . . . the parallel movement of all the rest; and the attempt to substitute one intellectual reliance for another, mistakes for progress of knowledge what may be only an exchange of ignorance. In particular, the study of external nature must proceed *pari passu* with the study of the human mind; and the errors of an age too exclusively reflective will not be remedied, but only reversed, by mere reaction into sciences of outward fact and observation. (*Timely Meditations* 9)

These comments underscore Martineau’s belief in a mutual relationship between the physical sciences and religious thinking.

Newman—whose intellectual approach to religious thinking led him to refer to theology as “a science of God” (*The Soul* 4)—recognizes a relationship between the soul and the conscience—as organs that inform human understanding—and the physical sense organs:

If all human Souls and Consciences felt absolutely alike, we should fitly regard their enunciations as having a certainty on a par with the perceptions of Sense: only, as sense is developed in an earlier stage of humanity and is less dependent on a higher cultivation than the conscience and the soul . . . the decisions of sense are [thus] undoubtedly far easier to ascertain (3).

This idea places the methods for acquiring conscience and soul-informed knowledge alongside those of science, which uses the physical sense organs for understanding. Further, by claiming that the soul and the conscience require “higher cultivation” than the physical sense organs, he attaches a rigor to the pursuit of such knowledge that raises its status above mere sentimentality. The essay in which this quotation appears, *The Soul, Her Sorrows and Her Aspirations*, is subtitled *A Natural History of the Soul, as the True Basis for Theology*; the essay claims a soul-knowing is possible, with rigorous self-development, that exists alongside sense-perceptible knowledge and accesses a realm not permeable by the physical sense organs. The preface to his argument suggests that “in the soul . . . alone is it possible to know God; and the correctness of our knowledge must depend imminently on the healthy, active and fully developed condition of our organ” (ix). He treats eight stages (or rudimentary *senses*, he calls them) of soul development, beginning with awe, wonder, and admiration – essentially, traits a child or an undeveloped adult might possess – and proceeds to a sense of order, design, goodness, wisdom, and finally, reverence. For Newman, this process leads to a developed sense of the Infinite, which he argues prepares the soul for greater spiritual insight and prevents false ideas (not unlike Herschel’s prejudices of opinion) from holding sway over an individual’s thinking.

Martineau, Newman and Herschel converge in choral unity on the value of knowledge for social progress. Herschel states that “increased knowledge and improved art . . . are in their nature diffusive, and cannot be enjoyed in any exclusive manner by a few” (Herschel 13). Newman asserts that “whatever diffuses intellectual light, will ultimately tend to union and harmony” (*The Soul* 10). Martineau urges, “we must *go and teach this people*” (*Endeavors* 287, original emphasis). Martineau quotes Herschel’s comments at a meeting of the British Association at Cambridge in 1845: “we are even yet only at the threshold of that palace of Truth which succeeding generations will range over as their own,—a world of scientific inquiry, in which not matter only and its properties, but the far more rich and complex relations of life and thought, of passion and motive, interest and action, will come to be regarded as its legitimate objects” (Martineau, *Essays, Philosophical and Theological* 1). Herschel’s *Preliminary Discourse* clearly leaves the boundary in place between knowledge gained through external observation and that which arises from humans’ internal, non-physical processes, but in this address, Herschel states these processes are at once knowable and worthy of serious investigation. Martineau expresses appreciation for Herschel’s declaration in a statement on the existing relationship between modes of inquiry at the institutional level: “The distinct recognition of the moral sciences, by the representative of an association which refuses to notice their existence, is at once the sign and promise of an improved conception of Philosophy. Not that such a man as Sir John Herschel can ever have doubted the reality of natural laws, ruling among the phenomena of the human mind and life, just as among the objects of physical research. But so little progress has hitherto been made in ascertaining them. . . . A different feeling is now manifested, and is plainly demanded by the existing state of knowledge” (2). These ideas align with the epistemology which Gaskell’s fictions represent as ideal, where the truth of any

situation must be determined from a reciprocal relationship between sense perception and internal processes – even at the highest levels of institutional learning.

CHAPTER III: GASKELL'S CHARACTERS AS EPISTEMOLOGICAL MODELS –

AN OVERVIEW

In *Mary Barton*, Job Legh's characterization demonstrates the novel's epistemological stance, in that his character displays a balance of head and heart knowledge which guides his actions. Job, a factory worker and also a self-taught naturalist, is a model for a scientific understanding of the natural world which, according to Herschel's reasoning, can also serve as an analog to human society. Yet the novel's characterization of Job indicates that scientific inquiry is made more effective from a clear-sightedness disciplined by a moral conscience and deepened by a purified soul. This way of knowing—a kind of moral insight that correctly guides a person to a sense of social responsibility, combined with an empathic understanding that one earns by developing faith through trials—moves beyond the boundary of what Herschel is willing to consider epistemologically and brings into relief the ways in which the novel works to unite a probing scientific inquiry and an informed, thinking faith. The characterization of Job's granddaughter Margaret Jenkins also supports the notion of a marriage of thinking and feeling by balancing a disciplined awareness of the external world—despite her physical blindness—with a purified soul capacity and a cultivated moral vision. Margaret's character, forced to give up her career as a seamstress because of a condition that impairs her vision, illustrates that suffering provides an opportunity for an individual to develop a subtle insight into the experiences of others—that which we might call empathy—that transforms sorrow into loving action and contributes a powerful element to the prospect of social progress. Job and Margaret are each able to mentor other characters – including Mary Barton – whose thinking is brought to greater clarity because of the disciplined and loving processes their characters bring to others. Though not one

of them could have accomplished it alone, this small circle of interested individuals eventually manages to bring the truth of his case to the light enough to prevent a tragic outcome for Jem Wilson. If Job and Margaret together represent an epistemology to meet the demands of the industrial age, then, according to the novel, the intellect must both inform and receive influence from a well-developed conscience and a reverent soul in mutual imbrication. In *Mary Barton*, as in Martineau's writings, if conscience, soul, and sense all inform human understanding, then for knowledge to progress, humans must acknowledge these ways of knowing as distinct but interdependent processes in the individual.

Alice Wilson is a domestic worker and folk herbalist, aunt to Jem Wilson and Will Wilson, and mentoring friend to Margaret and Mary in *Mary Barton*; Alice's character indexes a kind of knowledge that is passing away in her England, but she is able to influence a new generation who carries her knowledge forward into the industrial era. Alice, who demonstrates both a sense of social responsibility and an empathetic heart, illustrates the kind of thinking that Herschel defines as "passive observation" (Herschel 77) in that her mind does not probe into the laws which govern the phenomena she notices in the natural world. But Alice's child-like reverence and her innate sense of moral duty nonetheless make her a kind of mentor for Margaret, in whom (in a process that parallels Herschel's vision for scientific progress) Alice's childlike wonder comes of age, advancing toward a fuller, more systematic way of knowing that can meet the challenges of the industrial era.

Chartist, widower, and eventual perpetrator of the murder of young Harry Carson, John Barton demonstrates a cautionary example of a person whose lack of healthy thinking leads to tragedy. The novel warns of the risk of not spreading head-heart knowledge through John's character, whose lack of wisdom is associated by the narrator with his road to perdition. John's

downfall points to the moral responsibility of small groups within larger communities in providing education for the intellect and teaching to shape the conscience. In the end—as Job influences Carson to promote education and wisdom among the working classes, the pilgrims build a new life in Canada, and medical science restores Margaret’s eyesight—the novel suggests that progress is possible primarily when knowledge is both widely available and actively cultivated among individuals and small groups. The novel joins the chorus with Newman, Martineau, and Herschel on this point when, in honor of its model proponent of knowledge for all, the narrator closes the novel by having Mary exclaim, “Dear Job Legh!” (Gaskell 325).

In “Lois the Witch,” Widow Smith is a Puritan woman who lives independently at the outer edge of Salem with her daughters; Smith’s character is emblematic – in parallel with Job Legh’s character – of a discerning ability to reason correctly from one’s senses, while Lois Barclay, the orphaned daughter of an English Jacobite minister, mirrors Margaret’s ability to turn suffering into understanding. But Widow Smith remains at the edge of her society and does not influence others’ thinking; Lois, despite a growing integrity of discernment, dies tragically at the hands of misguided religious authorities. Manasseh Hickson is the delusional and sometimes hysterical son of Lois’s uncle Ralph Hickson and his wife Grace Hickson who predicts and then contributes to Lois’s death; in parallel with John Barton, Manasseh’s character indicates the pitfalls of an unhealthy development in thinking processes from lack of mentorship. The isolation of the characters from their own historical, environmental, and generational lineage is attributable in the narrative to the cause of Salem’s problems; the progressive renewal of knowledge that Alice’s mentorship and decline signals in *Mary Barton* comes too late in Salem to save Lois. Together, the novel and its Gothic counterpart thus suggest that humans can hope to progress toward a compassionate, equitable society only when individuals develop and then

teach others to achieve a balanced perceptual framework, in active relationship with the past through intergenerational transmission of information, coupled with continually renewing thinking, toward a contextual framework that meets the demands of the time.

CHAPTER IV: JOB LEGH AND THE VALUE AND LIMITS OF SENSE-PERCEPTIBLE

KNOWLEDGE

Herschel writes that man's potential for empirical knowledge of the natural world is expansive, and that the qualifications for attaining such knowledge are interest and attention: "it is in [mankind's] power to acquire more or less knowledge of causes and effects according to the degree of attention he bestows upon them, which attention is again in great measure a voluntary act" (Herschel 6). Gaskell's narrator observes in the working class a group of men who demonstrate these qualifications: "There is a class of men in Manchester . . . who yet may claim kindred with all the noble names that science recognizes. . . . Mathematical problems are received with interest, and studied with absorbing attention. . . . There are entomologists . . . who pore over every new specimen with real scientific delight" (Gaskell, *Mary Barton* 38). Among these is naturalist Job Legh, whose "eyes absolutely gleamed with intelligence" and whose collection of specimens and books meant that his home "looked not unlike a wizard's dwelling" (39). This description situates Job as an emblematic seeker of knowledge in the novel. Further, Job qualifies as capable of science according to Herschel's definition because he combines this love for learning with what Herschel terms "*active observation*"—a state of mind necessary for knowledge to advance, in which a person is willing to "cross-examine our witness, and by comparing one part of his evidence with the other . . . and reasoning upon it . . . are enabled to put pointed and searching questions . . . to make up our minds" (Herschel 77). Job's initial characterization suggests this kind of probing mind; first, the narrator describes the working-class naturalists as those who, as "earnest seekers after knowledge," are able to come to know flora and fauna that have "escaped general observation" and have thus become reliable informers

of noted scientists (Gaskell, *Mary Barton* 38). The narrator identifies Job as “one of these” naturalists (39); further, in the scene where Mary meets Job for the first time, the narrator notes that Job does not respond to a comment Margaret makes because “he was far too deep and eager in solving a problem” (41). The emphasis in this scientific way of knowing is on using the intellect to interpret correctly physical sense perception; the narrator at once establishes this kind of knowing as a fundamental element of its epistemology and positions Job’s character as a reliable active observer of the natural world.

Strongly linked with Job Legh is his granddaughter Margaret Jenkins, who—influenced by Job’s passion toward an interested attention to the world around her—is described as having “the power of setting a difficult question in a clear light; whose judgement can tell what is best to be done” (41). If such “judgement” can be understood as an ability to interpret correctly one’s sense impressions in order to determine the right course of action, then Margaret’s clarity of perception allows her to overcome one of the frequent obstacles to knowledge for characters in the novel—the error that Herschel defines as a “prejudice of sense” (Herschel 80). Herschel explains,

it is not the direct evidence of our senses that we are in any case called upon to reject, but only the erroneous judgments we unconsciously form from them, and this only when they can be shown to be so *by counter evidence of the same sort*; when one sense is brought to testify against another, for instance. (81)

Margaret demonstrates the process by which one might detect such a perceptual error when her watchful eye leads her to correct Job’s mistake in assuming that a scorpion he has purchased from a sailor is dead. Margaret recounts that the sailor “thought the cold had killed him, for he was not squashed nor injured a bit” (Gaskell, *Mary Barton* 40). By taking the sailor’s claim as fact and confirming the conclusion with his own observation, Job has made an erroneous judgment. Only because Margaret maintains a constant sensory awareness of the

scorpion do they escape its deadly sting: “I was listening hard, but as it fell out, I never took my eye off the creature. . . . [I]n a minute it was wild as could be, running at me just like a mad dog” (40). Job’s senses informed him correctly; the error was in his judgment. Margaret’s ability to set Job aright with her keen eye establishes her role in the novel as one who can correctly interpret her sense impressions. Her vigilance enacts Herschel’s definition of “active observation” because in a sense, she “cross examine[s her] witness” in testing the accuracy of Job’s judgement (Herschel 77). Further, the experience suggests the idea that sense perception is improved when observers are in relationship with one another; Job is an accomplished naturalist, yet he still needs assistance from another keen eye. Not only does Margaret’s ability to observe, through physical presence, make a difference in the scorpion incident; her different perspective also influences her ability to discern the situation. Margaret is not herself a naturalist; she reports to Mary, “I know a bit about some of the things grandfather is fond on; just because he’s fond on ‘em, I tried to learn about them” (39). Margaret’s motivation is thus one of care, not scientific interest for its own sake; she watches the scorpion because she wants to keep them from harm. Further, Margaret’s perspective makes her an effective translator for Job: she’s able to “[come] to the rescue” when Mary cannot interpret Job’s abstruse description of his specimens. Her character makes information from scientific observation accessible to someone outside a naturalist’s practice; much as Herschel himself has done in his *Preliminary Discourse*.

Again, the novel’s epistemology aligns with Herschel’s thinking: “Knowledge is not, like food, destroyed by use, but rather augmented and perfected. . . . [T]here is no body of knowledge . . . so free from error but that it may receive correction in passing through the minds of millions” (Herschel 69). Amy Mae King, in her 2003 article “Taxonomical Cures: The Politics of Natural History and Herbalist Medicine in Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Mary Barton*,” identifies the way in which

this scene emphasizes shared scientific knowledge when she describes the scorpion scene as “a symbol of enlightenment” (King, “Taxonomical Cures” 264). She explains that the scorpion “is situated within a tale of natural history collection, and as such suggests intellectual curiosity and equality” (264). Job iterates the lesson of the scorpion experience when he says to Mr. Carson, “one’s often blind to many a thing that’s under one’s nose, ‘till it’s pointed out” (Gaskell, *Mary Barton* 316). This idea that knowledge should be available across class lines becomes part of an epistemological remedy in the novel for social ills. Indeed, the barrier between masters and workers exists in part because the masters do not share knowledge they are holding relative to the economic challenges they face: “The masters did not choose to make all these facts known. They stood upon being the masters, and that they had a right to order work at their own prices” (145). By withholding their knowledge, the masters prevent their society from progressing. Further, the novel implicates the masters themselves as culpable for contributing to social ills through their one-sided thinking. Herschel mentions the benefits of a scientific habit of mind for those involved “in the most active business,” indicating that “the observation of the calm, energetic regularity of nature . . . tends . . . to tranquilize and re-assure the mind, and render it less accessible to repining, selfish, and turbulent emotions (Herschel 16). The narrator’s description of Carson suggests a resonance with Herschel’s prescription: “Mr. Carson, whose mind, . . . was energetic indeed, whose very energy, having been hitherto the cause of the employment of his powers in only one direction, had prevented him from becoming largely and philosophically comprehensive in his views” (Gaskell, *Mary Barton* 313-14). Thus, the novel suggests that if Carson and others like him followed Herschel’s indication to practice the kind of scientific thinking Job and Margaret’s characters demonstrate, they may avoid the agitation that has led them to such narrowmindedness.

Perhaps in part due to their limited perspective, the masters in *Mary Barton* seem to fall prey to another, more problematic form of prejudice Herschel defines—that of “opinion”—which, if a person will not combat “with all his power,” will render him “incapable of science” (Herschel 81). He defines prejudices of opinion as those ideas which are “hastily taken up, either from the assertion of others, from our own superficial views, or from vulgar observation, and which, from being constantly admitted without dispute, have obtained the strong hold of habit on our minds” (80). To clear the mind of such errors, people must prove to themselves either the factual inaccuracy, or the false explanation of appearances, at the root of their false knowledge. But incorrect opinions tend to “adhere, in a certain degree, to every mind . . . after all ground for their reasonable entertainment is destroyed” (80). In this way, what Herschel has termed prejudices of opinion leave the would-be practitioner of science subject to stubbornly clinging misperceptions. The conflicts in the novel suggest that, as in scientific pursuits, it is difficult for humans to overcome prejudices of opinion in social relationships, because they result from thinking processes other than strict investigation into verifiable fact. Jem Wilson discovers a prejudice of opinion among his fellow workers when he realizes that although he has been proven innocent in his trial, he will have to leave the country to find work: “he might find, in spite of a jury’s verdict, that too strong a taint was on his character for him ever to labour in Manchester again” (Gaskell, *Mary Barton* 289). He uncovers the source of this bias when he recalls having participated in ostracizing a man who had been suspected of a crime: “he himself had thought it did not become an upright man to associate with one who had been a prisoner” (289). Similar biases contribute to the enmity between classes in the novel. The narrator establishes Mr. Carson as subject to prejudiced opinions as the result of his having risen out of the working class: “there is no religionist so zealous as a convert. . . . [T]his would account for

the elder Mr. Carson's determination not to be bullied into yielding" (146). Carson's undisciplined habit of mind contributes to his inability to understand the striking workers' complaints. And as the meeting between the coalition of workers and the group of mill owners breaks down, the narrator explains that it was a failure of the masters to seek the true reasons for the workers' complaints that has led them to the desire "that the workmen might suffer keenly. They forgot that the strike was in this instance the consequence of want and need" (153). Though the cause of the workers' suffering is available for their physical observation, the owners—of whom Carson is emblematic—are incapable of unbiased inquiry into their conflict with the workers.

Jem later identifies both the problem and the solution to this kind of bias when he says to Job, "Folk can't mistake long if once they'll *search* into the truth" (311, emphasis added). The searching, if people can undertake it with objectivity, would correct misperceptions – but the fundamental problem with humans is not their inability to interpret their physical senses. Sensory bias, as Herschel indicates and the novel's scorpion scene illustrates, can be overcome through active observation and sharing of information. On the other hand, the novel suggests the biases Herschel calls prejudices of opinion "adhere" to a person's heart – not to the intellect. The search into the truth thus must incorporate external observation with other forms of knowledge. In their final conversation, when Job asserts that the master class has a duty to help the workers, Carson counters: "facts have proved . . . how much better it is for every man to be independent of help, and self-reliant" (318). Job's reply provides the grounds for a broader epistemological framework in the novel. He explains that "God has given men feelings and passions which cannot be worked into the problem, because they are for ever changing and uncertain" (318). For Job, feelings—the shifting contents of human hearts—complicate the process of reasoning from

empirical evidence. The novel thus suggests that, in addition to the knowledge humans can obtain by applying clear thinking to their physical senses, there are ways of knowing needed for a complete understanding of social problems that require other organs of perception, and therefore different processes, for clear insight. Newman's idea of the soul and the conscience as sense organs, applied to the novel, may provide a basis for such processes. James Martineau suggests that a "pure-hearted will be a right-minded man" (*Endeavors* 292) and that "pure sympathies produce a clear intellect . . . the moral habits and tastes of men form their opinions, much more frequently than their opinions form their habits" (294).⁹ The idea that the heart and its sympathies can be purified, and that the moral condition of a person informs one's thinking, offers a possible solution to bias. If we consider Newman's concept of the conscience and the soul as individual sense organs alongside Martineau's claim that the heart informs the mind, then in order to achieve clear thinking, one must have well-developed conscience and soul capacities in addition to cultivated physical senses.

⁹ Uglow links Martineau and Newman as similarly divergent from the conventional theology of the Unitarians, calling the former "a spiritual radical" (Uglow 132) and the latter "highly unorthodox" (133). She writes, "Like Martineau, Francis Newman stressed the imaginative, intuitive basis of faith explored in his books *The Soul* (1849) and the autobiographical *Phases of Faith* (1850)" (Uglow 133). While it is clear that they did not agree on all points, this essay focuses on ideas on which the two were ideologically convergent.

CHAPTER V: "A PURE-HEARTED WILL BE A RIGHT-MINDED MAN": JOB, WIDOW

SMITH, AND THE CONSCIENCE AS SENSE ORGAN

Job's character emerges in *Mary Barton* as a model for knowing whose free mediation between feeling and sense perception reconfigures the course of events away from the deterministic, entropic outcome that would otherwise have been the result of the conflicts in the novel. As though in support of Job's choices, Newman establishes a "close relation between knowledge and moral sentiment" ("On the Relations" 20). And cultivating a love of truth, according to Martineau, prevents prejudice and allows the physical senses to work in harmony with feeling; he claims that a "mind under the governance of pure and disinterested affections will evince the clearest insight" because, in part, "the pure affections . . . still the confusion of the senses" (*Endeavors* 296-297). These ideas align with Job's characterization; for instance, Job does not support the Union's Chartist activities, which the narrator has cast as founded upon biased thinking and therefore, morally muddled. The narrator critiques the workers' violent reactions toward the strikebreakers, saying that to be effective, the Union "must work under the direction of a high and intelligent will; incapable of being misled by passion or excitement. The will of the operatives had not been guided to the calmness of wisdom" (Gaskell 147). This assessment reflects Newman's and Martineau's claims in that the workers' perspectives are one-sided and do not receive information from entrained consciences, so their passions cloud their ability to perceive correctly; their decision to attack strikebreakers is therefore based on an unquestioned prejudice of opinion. Job later objects to the Union's tactics, aligning his character with the narrator's assessment: "I don't go along with 'em. Yo' see they think themselves wise, and me silly, for differing with them! . . . [T]hey won't let me be silly in peace and quietness. . . ."

I'm forced to be wise according to their notions, else they persecute me" (166).¹⁰ This association of Job's character with the moral certainty of the narrator's evaluation strengthens Job's position in the novel as an epistemological model.¹¹

Newman claims, "the love of knowledge for its own sake, in proportion to its purity and intensity, is truly disinterested, and never fails to promote most directly a love of Truth and of Justice" ("On the Relations" 15). In just this way, Job's earnest drive to discover the truth without personal interest leads him to a belief in Jem's innocence, even after he at first "had no doubt in his own mind that Jem had . . . been the murderer" (Gaskell, *Mary Barton* 208). On hearing Mary's plea for help, Job dutifully commits to her to "pray regular for Jem, and for you" and sets off to find a lawyer (218). Job has no personal investment in Jem's guilt or innocence, only the desire to help; he supports the attorney Mr. Bridgenorth in preparing Jem's case, and after a conversation with the attorney well before the concrete evidence is available to him, the narrator reports that Job "had got to think Jem innocent by imperceptible degrees. Little by little this persuasion had come upon him" (252).¹² Even in the absence of complete physical evidence,

¹⁰ Martineau writes, "In a mind where any selfish end habitually prevails, men are regarded as tools" (*Endeavors* 297). According to this claim, both the union operatives and the masters are emblematic of those who are subject to this bias, in contrast to the "pure affections" which Job's character models.

¹¹ Anne Secord writes, "If there is an exemplary life in the book it is surely that of Job Legh . . . his ultimate role is to act as mediator between the classes" (A. Secord 138).

¹² Uglow quotes from one of Gaskell's letters, in which the novelist writes of her conception of *Mary Barton*: "The whole thing grew up in my mind as imperceptibly as a seed germinates in the earth" (Uglow 212, from L74). This comment seems to be echoed in the way in which Job Legh comes to perceive Jem Wilson's innocence "by imperceptible degrees;" both Job's character and Gaskell herself experience a sort of internal process

Job's earnest seeking after the truth, informed by a healthy conscience, leads him to clear insight into Jem's innocence. Unlike Carson or the Union operatives, Job overcomes his prejudice about Jem's involvement in Harry Carson's murder because his earnest seeking after the truth "still[s] the confusion" (Martineau, *Endeavors* 297) of evidence before him and allows him to perceive Jem's innocence using his own clear thinking. Later, the physical evidence unifies his perception into a balanced understanding that makes him a qualified arbiter between Jem and Carson.

Job's moral insight later puts his character in position to instruct Carson on the concept of social responsibility, or duty, as Job defines it. Martineau examines the relationship between duty and the conscience, which he defines by means of the word's history as "a *knowledge with one's-self* of the worth and excellence of the several principles of action by which we are impelled." He goes on to ask, "Shall we desire to be impelled by them still, only remaining in the dark as to their value and our obligations?" (Martineau, *Endeavors* 277). In this context, we might consider that duty is to the conscience as visual images are to the eyes; therefore, a person with a well-directed conscience could be considered an "active observer" in a moral sense. To Martineau, duty primarily refers to self-responsibility; he argues that "duty implies, in every form, that a man is entrusted with himself; that he is expected to overlook and direct himself; to maintain therefore an open eye on the spiritual world within" (278). To know clearly in a moral sense, therefore, is first to interpret one's duty, as one might interpret a visual image, and then to direct oneself with free will to correct action. In his final conversation with Carson, Job says, "I'm clear about this, when God gives a blessing to be enjoyed, He gives it with a duty to be done; and

toward insight into others, which results in socially beneficial action (for Job, an instrumental role in Jem's release; for Gaskell, an influential novel).

the duty of the happy is to help the suffering to bear their woe” (Gaskell, *Mary Barton* 318). When Carson objects to this notion of duty, Job claims to lack the intellectual power to counter: “I’m not learned enough to argue” (319). Since his character has proven otherwise and since Carson’s one-sidedness has corrupted his empirical conclusions, this may be read as a form of deference to Carson rather than a belief in Carson’s superiority, but the comments that follow support the concept of knowing through one’s conscience to support right understanding: “Thoughts come into my head that I’m sure are as true as Gospel, though maybe they don’t follow each other like the Q.E.D. of a Proposition. The masters has it on their own conscience,—you have it on yours, sir, . . . to lighten the evils that seem always to hang on the trades by which you make your fortunes” (319). Job will not out-reason Carson, but he can detect the bias in Carson’s thinking, and he can come to a self-determined understanding of the masters’ responsibility. Later in this conversation, Job renounces any previously held prejudices of opinion about Carson: “I can see the view you take of things from the place where you stand. . . . I sha’nt think any longer, does he act right on my views of a thing, but does he act right on his own” (319).¹³ These comments suggest the way in which the conscience, as an organ of

¹³ In this conversation with Carson, Job’s character expresses a concept which Martineau explores in his writing. Job is concerned with the way in which an individual apprehends and interprets information through the conscience that translates to a responsibility to other people. In one of his later published books, Martineau comments on the nature of the conscience as at once both inherent to individuals and dependent on a community for its development:

The sacred poem of our own hearts, with its passionate hymns, its quiet prayers, is writ in invisible ink ; and only when the lamp of other lives brings its warm light near do the lines steal out, and give their music to the voice, their solemn meaning to the soul. In this sense of interdependence we do, undoubtedly, owe our moral sentiment largely to others ; but only because they, too, bear that about them which we revere or abhor, and their character serves as the mirror of our own. (*The Seat of Authority in Religion* 54)

perception, can inform a solution to the social conflict between workers and masters in the novel; Job's observation that he will ask himself whether a man will "act right on his own" suggests both that Job understands the necessity of unbiased thinking and that, as Martineau has suggested, the right mind follows the right heart.¹⁴

"Lois the Witch" provides – in shadowy Gothic relief to the realism of *Mary Barton* – helpful alignment with the positive epistemological model Job's character represents. Gaskell's narrator in "Lois the Witch" explains early in the tale that the Widow Smith lives at the outer border of Salem and hosts the orphaned Lois for a couple of days as Lois transitions from her home in England to her new arrangement in the colonies with her uncle. Widow Smith echoes Job's character, over a decade removed in Gaskell's career from the publication of *Mary Barton*; further, the story in which in which Widow Smith's character is located is a tragic account of what results from an absolute breakdown in understanding among individuals in a community. Smith's character, who stands as a possible alternative to the kinds of thinking that lead to Lois's tragic outcome, thus underscores the suggestion that a hybrid epistemology informs Gaskell's fiction. Widow Smith's parlor—much like Job's dwelling—"was more like a small museum of

Frank Schulman explains Martineau's view: "In sum, said Martineau, conscience derives from God, not from socialization, early training, or education. We are in a world morally constituted, and we have within us the means of determining right and wrong . . . Of course, its guidance must be interpreted with reference to the current state of knowledge and conditions" (Schulman 104). Job's character points Carson both to the individually perceptible moral law in which Martineau believed and to the necessity in his time for applying that law to improve social conditions.

¹⁴ I associate this claim with Jill Matus's comment that for the novel, "it is not enough to know with the head; unless the heart has been won, the springs of action will be wavering and unreliable" (Matus 21).

natural history of these days than a parlour” (Gaskell, “Lois the Witch” 9) and we are told that her discernment about individuals’ character “gave her manner a kind of authority which no one liked to disobey” (8). Even amid the tension that leads to the Salem trials, the Widow Smith avoids any censure from the “strict” leader Elder Hawkins because “her known goodness of heart . . . gave her the liberty of speech which was tacitly denied to many” (10). Widow Smith’s character is uniquely able to question Elder Hawkins on his superstition about an incident with pirates in a settlement during which the settlers hid quietly while a woman captive cried out for mercy. When Elder Hawkins makes the claim that perhaps “the whole vision of the pirates and the cry of the woman was . . . a device of Satan’s to sift the Marblehead folks, . . . so to condemn them in the sight of the Lord” (11), the Widow Smith challenges Hawkins with an empirical explanation of events: “‘But, Elder,’ Said Widow Smith, ‘it was no vision; they were real living men who went ashore, men who broke down branches and left their footmarks on the ground’” (12). This challenge “cross-examines” the witness as Herschel urges, and by its implication draws a clear boundary between conclusions based on reasoning from sense observation and those that fall into superstition. Here the Widow Smith challenges Elder Hawkins on the grounds that his conclusion fails to consider the available evidence from the sense-observable world. She also demonstrates Martineau’s claim that a habit of mind leads to the formation of one’s opinions, rather than the other way around. Smith lives during the same era and in the same social milieu as Hawkins, but her character is able to discern what he misinterprets. Her character establishes a model in the narrative for a balanced epistemology informed both by empirical evidence and a developed discernment that stems not from intellectual reasoning but rather from a developed intuitive sense that, as Gaskell’s narrator has put it, we might term “goodness of heart” (10).

Widow Smith's character provides a model for the sort of development Newman outlines in *The Soul* – where a person develops discernment through a growing awareness of the infinite, developing eventually toward wisdom and a mature reverence, keeping her from falling into the pitfalls of fetishism or fancy. Smith's characterization in this way leads her to clear understanding when those around her fall prey to superstitious hysteria. The story's narrator reports that Smith's "pleasant face gave the lie to her dress; were it as brown and sober-coloured as could be, folk remembered it bright and cheerful, because it was part of the Widow Smith herself" (Gaskell, "Lois the Witch" 8). This characterization of Widow Smith's appearance resonates with Newman's claim in *The Soul* that "a pure soul shining through the eye, a self-collected spirit seen in the general harmony of the countenance and in the absence of everything spasmodic, exert a strong *moral* action on the spectator" (19). Positioned as she is on the border of Salem, Widow Smith provides a sort of gate-keeping role for her daughters and her immediate community, using her "instinct" to determine "whether a man's face told her whether or not she chose to have him as an inmate of the same house as her daughters," (Gaskell, "Lois the Witch" 9) in a narrative move that also suggests a person's countenance reflects an inner state of being – and knowing.

Further, the Widow Smith's home suggests that unlike many of her fellow colonists in this shadowy, amorphous new society, she is not subject to the absolute fear of the unknown; it is as though she has incorporated the natural world – that which her pious fellow Salemites fear – into her very hearth, uniting the old and the new worlds and familiarizing the unknown by bringing it to light. The narrator reports, "The logs of which the house was built, showed here and there through the mud plaster, although before both plaster and logs were hung the skins of many curious animals" (9). The house is adorned with "shells, strings of wampum-beads, sea-

birds' eggs and presents from the old country" and is infused with the scent of "the enormous trunk of pinewood which smouldered on the hearth" (9). Smith's home harmonizes the natural world and the human one, the indigenous with the colonizer, the darkness of the forest with the light of the hearth. Newman explains that it is a dim, untrained awareness of the Infinite which makes experiences of unknown places fearful, even for adults, and that a level of soul development is necessary to provide a capacity for discernment between physical shadows and spiritual ones: "Nor will any one wonder at this, who knows what it is to walk alone by night under thick trees. A good conscience, and a heart not unused to pious communings, is only enough to repel painful tremors, except in those whom habit has deadened" (Newman, *The Soul* 6-7). The narrator's description of the road to Salem suggests it as a place that would test one's strength of heart: "The deep green forest, tangled into heavy darkness even thus early in the year, came within a few yards of the road all the way" (Gaskell, "Lois the Witch" 14). The uncultivated land between Widow Smith's house and the town resembles the scene Newman describes as fear-invoking and suggests a tendency toward superstitious fear in those who are not prepared to combat it. But Widow Smith is one whose "good conscience" and her heart-knowing allow her to see past the superstitions that attach themselves to the dim spots in the minds of her fellow community members. Further, her willingness to challenge Elder Hawkins on his conclusions about the Marblehead incident suggests Smith's thinking is not "deadened" by the habit of religious doctrine but is instead informed and updated by active perceptual insight, attuned with the laws and processes of the natural world. Assessed in the light of Newman's argument, Widow Smith's character, positioned at the outset of Lois's experience in Salem, provides a backdrop against which to examine the beliefs and actions of those who eventually execute the witch trials. Widow Smith's development of soul allows her both to discern the

characters of others and to see clearly the difference between superstition and sense-perceptible knowledge. She experiences the fears common to her social group, but she does not fetishize the experience. When she describes a past instance of fear of “wild Indians” during her first harvest season which continues to visit her, she identifies “dreaming” rather than visions or supernatural impositions as the reason for her lingering thoughts over those early experiences (10). Like Job, who avoids the prejudices of opinion against which Herschel warns because he allows his observations to be corrected by a rigorous process of evaluation, Widow Smith is able to come to right conclusions through a healthy process of testing her own perceptions.

As a result of this development, she is also able easily to dismiss the anxiety that erupts after Lois reports her encounter with a “witch” in England: ““And I don’t doubt but what the parson’s bonny lass has bewitched many a one since, with her dimples and her pleasant ways”” (13). In this apparently light comment aimed at mere distraction, Widow Smith’s character points to a kind of intuition about Lois that prefigures her relationship with the delusion-addled Manasseh. Were Widow Smith’s character in a position to mentor Lois or to have influence over church authorities in the way Job is able to influence Carson, the story’s tragic outcome might have been avoided. The Gothic framework for this tale incorporates elements of the supernatural which make the mood of the story feel more like a shadowy after-image than a realistic account – but that Gaskell pegs her story to historically accurate source material reminds the reader that her social commentary is nonetheless just as relevant as in her realistic fiction. Newman writes that it is possible that “even in the midst of enlightened science and highly literate ages, errors fundamentally identical with those of Fetishism may and do exist” (*The Soul* 10). Elder Hawkins’s “gloomy” mood in his pseudo-spiritual reaction to Widow Smith foreshadows the manufactured pall the Puritans bring down over Salem in the days that follow. This reading of

the events, as Gaskell's narrative positions them, suggests that the tragedy of Lois's death results from a problem of knowledge – more precisely, the mistaken assumptions that result from an undeveloped soul capacity that, if brought to its potential for discernment, could shake these prejudices of opinion that pervade individuals' thinking.

It seems more than a coincidence that Gaskell's Gothic tale set in a superstitious age in a misty, faraway past describes Widow Smith as someone whose front room in the dark, fear-evoking woods outside Salem looks “more like a small museum of natural history in these days than a parlour” (Gaskell, “Lois the Witch” 9). The narrator's description to Widow Smith's front room inverts the arrangement we find in the realist, urban, industrial-era *Mary Barton*, where Mary, on seeing Job's displays of specimens (quite literally what one might expect to see at a museum) first finds Job's intelligent eyes to be “almost wizard-like” and wonders to Margaret, “Is your grandfather a fortune teller?” (Gaskell, *Mary Barton* 39). In the novel, Mary's character does not have the kind of education that would familiarize her with entomology, nor does she locate Job within a scholarly community. He is an unlikely practitioner of his craft, and his character stands out even among his community of working-class scientists. She thus understandably assumes his work to be of a superstitious origin – and at the same time, her assumption suggests the ways in which perception lacking rigorous discernment can fall into error. Conversely, the narrator in “Lois the Witch” distinguishes Widow Smith from her contemporary community by establishing her as someone whose very dwelling indicates she stands apart from her society for the inverse reason that she does not participate in the superstitious meaning-making common to her society. Both Job and Widow Smith stand out for their choices to develop a discerning thinking that prevents superstition, while also incorporating an intuitive faith into empirical investigation. We might reasonably conjecture that this exercise

of their free-willed capacity for self-development likely alters the course of each character's life trajectory, in that Job's clear thinking keeps him above the fray of the worker-owner conflict and, likewise, Widow Smith avoids suspicion or accusation in the witch trials. When observed together, the working-class naturalist and the clear-sighted Puritan woman – each an unlikely model, in their respective societies – send a clear message: right thinking requires the free choice to take up a path of individual development that blends sense observation with the knowledge of intuition into a discernment built on consilient insights from various streams of perceptual information.

CHAPTER VI: MARGARET LEGH AND LOIS BARCLAY:

SPIRITUAL TEACHING, SPIRITUAL SIGHT

Like Job's character, Margaret's character also demonstrates a relationship between sense perception and other, less tangible, ways of knowing. While Margaret, like Job, has a developed conscience, perhaps even more notable are the ways in which her character freely allows suffering to develop soul capacities which bring clarity to her understanding (according to Newman's definition of the soul as an organ for perception). Margaret's ability to observe external phenomena through her physical senses becomes temporarily challenged when she begins to lose her sight. Margaret's loss of vision may suggest that, along with the physical senses and the conscience, a person's soul informs another way of knowing in the novel—that of love for the other. Herschel places a clear boundary around one's ability to know *oneself* through his epistemology when he claims that "while he cannot help perceiving that the insight he is enabled to obtain into this internal sphere of thought and feeling is in reality the source of all his power, the very fountain of his predominance over external nature, he feels himself capable of entering only very imperfectly into these recesses of his own bosom, and analysing the operations of his mind— in this as in all other things, in short, 'a being darkly wise'" (Herschel 6). Here Herschel invokes Alexander Pope's commentary on the limits to human knowledge, highlighting the difficulty of Pope's directive to "Know then thyself." Margaret's loss of sight is a useful metaphor for this problem: she says, "if I sew for a long time together, a bright spot like th' sun comes right where I'm looking; all the rest is quite clear but just where I want to see" (Gaskell, *Mary Barton* 46). If a person can only know the external world, and if this "internal

sphere” is yet indeed “the source of all his power,” then one might often find herself unable to see just where she is looking in her pursuit of knowledge.

But while, for Herschel, our internal lives remain inaccessible until death when we shall “drink deep at that fountain of beneficent wisdom” (Herschel 7), Margaret illustrates that for the novel’s epistemology, this challenge of inner sight can be overcome, at least to a degree, with the knowledge which the soul perceives through an active, free-willed process, augmented by the experience of suffering. Indeed, Margaret’s struggle is the inverse of Herschel’s, in that it is physical blindness which brings into relief the clarity of soul that will guide her until, eventually, her physical sight is restored. Newman claims that “spiritual teaching” is meant “to impart spiritual eyesight . . . the nature of which admits of their being directly discerned in the Soul” (*The Soul* x).¹⁵ Further, Newman indicates that suffering is necessary for the soul to develop: he writes, “Sorrow itself is a most essential process for the perfecting of the soul” (44). Indeed, Margaret responds to her blindness by invoking belief in Divine inspiration to direct her; when she pursues her singing, she feels that “a way seemed open to me, of not being a burden to any one, though it did please God to make me blind” (Gaskell, *Mary Barton* 83). Though her physical sense is temporarily impaired, Margaret’s faith provides her a way of seeing that she attributes to Divine guidance. Using the voice which she has cultivated with, as the narrator defines it, a “scientific knowledge,” (37), she combines her faith-knowing with a systematic,

¹⁵ In the preface to his 1849 text *The Soul, Her Sorrows and Her Aspirations*, Newman claims the object of his work is to outline “A Natural History of the Soul” (viii). In a sort of parallel to what Herschel has set out to do in his *Preliminary Discourse* by using the physical senses and the intellect as tools for developing scientific thinking, Newman seeks to examine the ways in which the human soul, as he sees it, can develop into a higher state of cultivation using spiritual “senses”—from awe, wonder, and admiration to wisdom, goodness, and reverence.

reasoned approach to her situation, remaining open to a solution to her blindness that leads her to a renewed sense of purpose and a sound income.

To both Newman and Martineau, suffering can provide an opportunity for developing an internal knowledge that would promote clarity of understanding in social relationships. And as with the conscience in discerning social responsibility, the soul, when purified through suffering, can promote what, in a modern sense, we might call empathy – a kind of knowing of another out of an understanding of oneself. Though she suffers from her loss of eyesight, Margaret’s soul is deepened by her experience. She only complains of her loss when she realizes she cannot serve Alice in her final days: “But oh! Grandfather, it’s now I feel how hard it is to have lost my sight. I should have so loved to nurse her and I did try . . . Oh, grandfather, if I could but see!” (169). But despite this sorrowful declaration, Margaret’s clarity of insight and strength of purpose later leads Mary to observe, “Her blindness almost appears a blessing sometimes; she was so downhearted when she dreaded it, and now she seems so calm and happy, when it’s downright come” (163). Martineau could be describing the novel’s description of Margaret’s character when he writes, “Genial, almost to miracle, is the soil of sorrow; wherein the smallest seed of love, timely falling, becometh a tree, in whose foliage the birds of blessed song lodge and sing unceasingly” (*Endeavors* 102). Martineau speaks of the very medium through which Margaret’s character expresses the results of her loss. The narrator comments on the way in which Margaret’s “voice rang out, like that of an angel,” when she sings “ye, comfort ye, my people, saith your God,” and delivers to Mary that relief which her song requests, as “The old Hebrew prophetic words fell like dew on Mary’s heart” (Gaskell, *Mary Barton* 87). If in Martineau’s metaphor Margaret is the tree, then her voice is that sorrow-enriched gift which visits both her and others. Margaret’s singing is thus itself a representation of an ensouled knowledge.

Margaret serves as both a comfort and a moral compass in the novel, which underscores her well-developed conscience and makes her, like Job, a model for balanced knowing. While Mary is distraught over Jem Wilson's arrest and her father's guilt in Harry Carson's murder, she and Job have a brief conflict over which of them should seek Will Wilson to be Jem's alibi. When Job insists he should be the one to go, the narrator reports, "Now Mary disliked this plan inexpressibly; her dislike was partly grounded on *reason*, and partly on *feeling*" (234, emphasis added). This report indicates that Mary's reaction is informed by two kinds of knowing – thinking and feeling – but she is not able to mediate her own impulses, nor can she convince Job using her own intellect. Margaret's very presence chastens Mary and Job: "But then came in Margaret with her gentleness, like an angel of peace, so calm and reasonable, that both felt ashamed of their irritation, and tacitly left the decision to her" (234). Mary and Job invest in Margaret a belief in her clarity of judgment when they trust her to decide what to do, and Margaret's developed senses of conscience and of soul inform her decision. She declares, "Mary had better go . . . I know what she's feeling . . . do, grandfather, let her" (234). Margaret's understanding of Mary's motives without any logical appeal from Mary indicates Margaret's strength of soul knowledge – her awareness of the condition of another. That the others give her the decision to make signals her character's strong sense of judgment—of clear moral awareness of what should be done.

The narrative framing of both Margaret's and Job's characters suggests that for the novel, both the soul and the conscience as organs of perception, when developed, promote clear thinking in that they help overcome prejudices the physical senses cannot eradicate. During the period of her blindness, Margaret remains vigilant in seeking truth scientifically through observation; for example, she challenges the veracity of Will's mermaid tales, telling him, "You

never saw the mermaid yoursel [sic]" (130). Further, even when she cannot see, Margaret's other physical senses are strong. When Mary returns from Liverpool, she opens the door to Job and Margaret's home "before she knew well what to say," and immediately Margaret declares, "It's Mary Barton! I know her by her breathing!" (293). Margaret and Job's epistemological symbiosis gets support when Job chimes in as Margaret's eyes, examining her as though she were one of his specimens: "Thou hast gotten a bit of pink in thy cheeks,— not much; . . . Thy nose is sharpish at th' end . . . thou'rt more like thy father than ever thou wert before" (294). In addition to allowing her to guide others, the sustaining balance in Margaret's thinking – of faith and science together – allows her to thrive until scientific discovery catches up with her condition and her physical blindness is healed. Margaret's outcome—the healing of her physical sight—points to the positive connection between a complete, balanced head-heart knowing and social progress. Margaret's well-developed senses for knowing signal that for the novel, a clear, unbiased and socially responsible thinking advances scientific discovery, making more possible what Herschel calls the "scientific arts" (Herschel 71) on which Margaret's cure relies. This cure, possible for Margaret in large part because her faith has opened the way to a livelihood that could afford it, supports Martineau's claim that "the study of external nature must proceed *pari passu* with the study of the human mind" (*Timely Meditations* 9). That Margaret belongs to the working class also resonates with Herschel's assertion that such arts "cannot be perfected till their whole processes are laid open, and their language simplified and rendered universally intelligible" (Herschel 70).

Margaret's insight is productive for her and others in part because she belongs to a social framework that both mentors her and then elevates her to a place of respect; Mary reveres Margaret, and Job, having adopted and raised her, invests trust in her judgment when she comes

of age. The successful outcome Margaret's character experiences in *Mary Barton* stands in stark contrast to Lois's character in "Lois the Witch" – another orphaned daughter whose proclivities toward sound head-heart judgment resemble Margaret's, but whose society cannot provide her the support needed to bring her gifts to productive fulfillment in her life. Lois's strong intuitive perception would make her a protégé of Widow Smith, but the widow's character does not permeate the boundary of the Salem community – so when Lois enters Salem, her character falls to the charge of her uncle's wife, Grace Hickson, "a woman of "narrow, strong affections" (Gaskell, "Lois the Witch" 19), whose voice the narrator describes as "almost as masculine as her son's" (16) in a way that suggests she lacks a warmth of feeling the narrator would associate with the feminine. Grace Hickson presides over a family that is "regardless of manifestations of mere feeling" (24); the family thus does not possess or even value an integrative process for discerned knowing, and Lois's actions are thus regularly misinterpreted, sometimes actively. For example, when Lois tells stories of girlhood tricks she played in England, designed to cheer the "gloomy heart" of Faith, Prudence screams "Take her away, take her away!" and claims to see "the Evil One" just over Lois's shoulder (25). In this moment, rather than seek clarity, Grace provides physical comfort to her daughter, rather than to Lois, and goes away "displeased and perplexed" (26). Lois's immediate family tribe is thus not supportive of an integrated knowledge, preferring instead to traffic in half-truths and social expediency. Grace's confusion over Prudence's pretended terror is emblematic of the ways in which the individuals of Salem cannot discern the difference between childish fancy and a soul-informed perception – the very condition Newman suggests will lead to fetishistic belief even in a developed society.

Despite her lack of familial or community support, Lois, like Margaret, grows in her own clarity of insight and integrity of conscience in the course of the story. She detects the false

notion of divine ordination in Manasseh's claim on her as wife: "I do not acknowledge it to be the Lord's will, Manasseh. . . . It is not 'borne in upon me' . . . that I am to be your wife" (29). Like Widow Smith does with the Marblehead superstition, she tries to take an empirical approach to explaining the reports of unnatural events in Tappau's and Elder Sherringham's homes. When Nolan speaks of the untimely death of a horse as part of his narrative of witchcraft in Sherringham's home, Lois interjects in polite cross-examination, "Perchance . . . the horse died of some natural disease" (40). And Lois's clear conscience is able to reject the accusations of witchcraft, even when Tappau and Justice Hathorn – powerful men who represent a faith she believes and a legal code she fears – have told her to confess or die: "Sirs, I must choose death with a quiet conscience, rather than life to be gained by a lie" (66). Lois is influenced by the ideas of her day, which the narrator indicates: "witchcraft was a real terrible sin to her, Lois Barclay, two hundred years ago" (60). But when presented with an individual situation, rather than an abstract, ethereal notion, Lois's character is able to read the matter correctly through her clear, feeling-imbued interpretation of sense-perceptible information. Her clear conscience – like Margaret's character – thus distinguishes her character in the story as a person of integrity. By the morning of Lois's death, she has – like Margaret – also become wiser through her suffering. She spends her last night "saying all the blessed words she could remember" to Nattee, her fellow condemned, until "in strengthening her, Lois was strengthened" (69). As in *Mary Barton*, the narrative does not suggest that perfect understanding, or complete awareness of evidence, is required for knowledge to develop. Like Margaret and Job, Lois's character operates without complete, fully correct information, integrating her intuitive, faith-derived knowledge with her sense-perceptible knowledge to make correct choices in consilient alignment with her conscience.

Lois's character thus stands as a model for correct knowing – but unlike Margaret, Lois is surrounded by persons who do not place value on balanced insight informed by soul, conscience, and physical sense. Her family, and the broader authority figures who influence them, have instead allowed the traps of personal jealousies and fears to undermine their judgment until they have fallen into the fetishism about which Newman has warned. This focus on the complex web of interpersonal misunderstandings of the characters, combined with the fact that Lois – a would-be model for clear insight – does not fully shake her own mistaken belief in witchcraft, suggests that it would not have been necessary for the society at large to disavow the abstract notion that witches may exist in order to prevent the tragedy of Salem. Rather, the real threat lies within the community itself, when individuals fail to place their thinking, as Martineau directs, “under the governance of pure and disinterested affections” (*Endeavors* 296-297). While it may be impossible to know perfectly in the abstract, both *Mary Barton* and “Lois the Witch” suggest that correct knowledge is eventually possible both in an individual and among small groups, where direct personal experience is available and where individuals value and encourage a balanced process for knowing. Lois's character's tragic death points to the mutual responsibility of individual and collective to develop balanced ways of knowing, while Margaret's character signals the way in which such a hybrid epistemological stance creates a positive link between present knowledge and future understanding.

As Jenny Uglow has pointed out, the story of Lois “depicts a cast of mind which might make itself manifest at any time, anywhere, clothed in a shape to fit the age” (476).¹⁶ Herein lies

¹⁶ In a textual note in the Penguin publication of Gaskell's *Gothic Tales*, Laura Kranzler cites A.W. Ward's description of a formative memory of a contemporary brush with a witch hunt Gaskell apparently recalled often to

Gaskell's interpretive intervention. The American Unitarian Charles Upham, Gaskell's main source for historical material on Salem, provides a rational prescriptive for prevention that focuses heavily on eliminating superstitious thinking, learning science, and placing "reason . . . on its throne" (Upham 271) in the collective of minds in a society.¹⁷ Gaskell's narrative seems to align with this assessment generally, though her narrative makes subtle additional comment on the role of knowledge that lies outside sense-perception. Uglow adds, "Lives are controlled, Gaskell implies, not only by 'rational' institutions but through irrational structures of emotion" (Uglow 474). Gaskell places characters in plausible tangles of emotion-laden social conflict in a

her family. Ward cites her mention of a visit to an Essex magistrate in the early 1850s, during which he "was hastily summoned to prevent an attempt to bring to her death an old woman in a neighboring village, who was suspected by the inhabitants of being a witch" (Kranzler, "Notes" 354).

¹⁷ I highlight the resemblance of Gaskell's tale to Charles Upham's narrative, as Uglow and others have noted, but with the important divergence of form, in that she transforms Upham's rational, explanatory aim into a fictional social experiment. Gaskell thus places her versions of Upham's figures into plausible social configurations and allows their misunderstandings to mount into an impossible web of confusion, human foible, and faithless groping for truth among the shadows of an amorphous social organization. The conclusion of this narrative experiment departs from Upham's rationalist claim that "Reason, enlightened by revelation and guided by conscience, is the great conservative principle; while that exercises the sovereign power over the fancy and the passions, we are safe; if it is dethroned, no limit can be assigned to the ruin that may follow" (Upham 275). The different suggestion Gaskell's text makes is that to privilege reason as sovereign in one's epistemology *over* other forms of knowledge is to overlook the inevitability of those other ways of knowing in their influence over human relationships. Abstractly, one could claim that reason itself is ideal in governing human interactions and in preventing mob-like behaviors. But the tangle of social issues in both *Mary Barton* and "Lois the Witch" suggests a mutuality of empirical knowledge with heart knowledge is necessary for clear insight.

way that suggests that wherever one finds oneself, erroneous ideas are always in circulation – and abstract analytical thinking alone will not prevent such ideas from taking hold, since it is neither possible nor desirable to subjugate other organs of perception to a singularly rational mind. Rather, it is only through the recognition of a balanced epistemological framework that a person can hope to avoid tragedies like that of Salem. Considered alongside *Mary Barton*, set in Gaskell’s own day in which the characters narrowly avoid a similar kind of tragic outcome, we see Uglow’s point illustrated – and Gaskell’s hybrid epistemology as the only viable solution.

CHAPTER VII: EPISTEMOLOGICAL RENEWAL AND THE INTERGENERATIONAL TRANSFER OF KNOWLEDGE: ALICE WILSON'S INFLUENCE

In *Mary Barton*, the characterization of Alice Wilson works along with Job as a second mentor figure – but one whose knowledge is of a different sort from Job's or Margaret's. If Margaret's character – in alignment with Job's – possesses a mind prepared for scientific progress, Alice Wilson's character is emblematic of a kind of thinking that, though its legacy is strong, is giving way to a new approach to knowledge. When we encounter Alice Wilson for the first time in the novel, we learn that “She had been out all day in the fields, gathering wild herbs for drinks and medicine” for she possessed “a considerable knowledge of hedge and field simples” (Gaskell, *Mary Barton* 20). Alice's character is immediately associated with the natural world, and her understanding of healing plants heightens her awareness of her surroundings – but her association with the older, rural England makes her representative of a *passive* observer rather than an active one, according to Herschel's definition. To Herschel, the passive observer is a pre-systematic collector of information who “will sit and listen to a tale . . . with our attention more or less awake” but without the penetrating and inquiring eye of the active observer (Herschel 77). Amy Mae King supports this assessment of Alice's characterization; she writes, “Alice's herbal knowledge . . . seems . . . proverbial – as the result of informal exchange networks” and that it might well be “traced . . . back to her rural background” (King 260). Indeed, Alice often remembers her rural home fondly, and her purity of character seems attached to her sense of admiration for the beauty of that place: “I never seed such a bonny bit anywhere . . . I used to think they were the golden hills of heaven” (Gaskell, *Mary Barton* 34). At the supper gathering at which Alice introduces Mary to Margaret, Alice's mind “they suspected had

wandered to the home and scenes of her childhood,” and the narrator says it is “by an effort” that “she brought back her mind to the present time” (35). Mary later notes “how changed” would be Alice’s childhood home, were she to return to it in her old age (133). This thought signals the passing away of the rural England—giving way to the industrial economy—with which Alice is closely associated and with it, the older, passive way of knowing the natural world she practiced, which relies on established traditions rather than seeking new knowledge.¹⁸ Martineau summarizes this idea that industrialized England has left behind the kind of knowing with which Alice’s character would be familiar when he writes, “We are wholly out of reach of the narrow safety of simple and instinctive life” (*Endeavors* 285).

The sense of admiration for beauty which Alice’s character illustrates in her description of her rural home, according to Newman, is present from an early stage in the soul’s development toward a capacity for love. Newman writes that “to call forth the heart into admiration, *and prepare it for love*, is the appropriate function of all natural beauty” (*The Soul* 19). He writes, “The *first* part treats of the Infancy of the Soul, under that rudimentary Religion, which we may possess without conscious reflection on self;—that in which we contemplate the great external realities of Faith, as if we had no personal relations towards them” (xi). This description sounds much like Alice’s character’s approach to her faith – it is a knowing that, like her intellect, is passive. When Alice explains her failure to return to her beloved home, she says, “I sometimes think the Lord is against planning” (Gaskell, *Mary Barton* 69). Though Margaret accepts her suffering, she approaches her situation with a more active mindset than Alice

¹⁸ Further, Alice participates in the superstitious practice of taking a dying child from its mother’s arms – the notion of “wishing” (Gaskell, *Mary Barton* 68) which is also associated with a pre-systematic way of thinking.

exhibits. Indeed, while Alice is going deaf, Mary feels sorry for her one evening, and the narrator reports,

As if Alice understood by some other sense what was passing in Mary's mind, she turned suddenly round, and answered Mary's thought.

'You're mourning for me, my dear; and there's no need, Mary. I'm as happy as a child. . . . [N]ow all noises are hushed and still to me, and the bonny earth seems dim and dark, and I know it's my Father lulling me away to my long sleep. (133)

Martineau writes, "habitual sufferers are precisely those who least frequently doubt the divine benevolence, and whose faith and love rise to the serenest cheerfulness" (*Endeavors* 101). Alice's character is indeed serene in her final days, which suggests Martineau's idea – but, in line with Newman's claim, Alice's character's capacity for internal insight, in parallel with the nature of her intellect, suggest an earlier stage of development than we find in the characterizations of Margaret and of Job.

Alice continues to revert to a childlike state as she fades, until at her death, the narrator remarks that though "a child of a very few months old [would have] more consciousness of what was passing before her[,] . . . [t]he firm faith which her mind had no longer power to grasp, had left its trail of glory" (Gaskell, *Mary Barton* 280-1). This identification with childhood strengthens for Alice's character as her sense perceptions fade, which suggests for the novel that her purity of soul remains as an example for other characters though her intellect has passed with the bygone era of her childhood. That Alice is in the process of dying during and just after Jem Wilson's trial is significant, in that the end of the trial, and John Barton's death, highlight with stark clarity the gravity of the time and the kind of active thinking that will be necessary to meet it. The kind of purity Alice's characterization represents, carried on in others, is called for – but such a mind is of little use in the face of the industrial age. Her death in this moment signals that the traits Alice represents do not fit in the novel's modernity. Interestingly, Alice and Margaret

both suffer the loss of physical senses, but while Margaret's loss of sight is temporary and solved by "scientific art" (Herschel 71), Alice's loss of sense is permanent – a difference which highlights the distance between Alice's orientation to the world and Margaret's. Margaret, we can thus argue, combines Alice's pure heart infused with an ability to reason from sense perception that makes her effective in the novel's modern era. Alice's figuration in the novel, juxtaposed with Margaret's character, thus indexes the need for an epistemological update to meet the demands of the time. The rapid growth of industry, in the novel's present, is eroding access to the elements of the natural world and to the way of life – with its unbroken lineage of relationship with the natural world, deep into the marrow of the society and its individuals – that have allowed for the kinds of knowing Alice represents. For the novel's modern age, a society cannot rely on such a passive transfer of information because it cannot expect individuals to remain in contact with the natural world as they did in the past; instead, other ways of knowing – and of transferring that knowledge – must develop, both among the collective and in individuals.

Though Alice's character herself is not able to transition from a pastoral age to an industrial one, the novel certainly suggests that a continuity with the past is a critical element in the development of balanced knowledge. Alice's character mentors both Margaret and Mary; she is aunt to Jem and to Will, and she has raised Will, whose testimony at Jem's trial is critical in saving Jem from wrongful execution. Though as I have said, Alice herself is not prepared to join this new world, her influence has contributed to the potential for a new generation to flourish – signaling the value of such intergenerational relationships for knowledge transmission.

Herschel's writing sheds light on another way in which Alice's characterization suggests the past is valuable; in his *Preliminary Discourse*, he illustrates a link between reasoned sense perception and intuition by explaining a case in which individuals collaborated to determine the scientific

underpinning for an historical practice that, while effective, was yet unexplained by empirical experimentation. By Herschel's account, it was discovered that iodine is an effective treatment for goiter after a soap-manufacturer complained of a corrosive residue left in his copper boiler which, on examination by a chemist, turned out to be iodine. After a series of further discoveries, he notes, "a medical practitioner then calls to mind a reputed remedy for the cure of one of the most grievous and unsightly disorders to which the human species is subject - the goitre - which infests the inhabitants of mountainous districts . . . which was said to have been originally cured by the ashes of burnt sponge" (Herschel 51). The link was therefore discovered between the ancient treatment for goiter and the presence of iodine in sponge and other sea life containing high salt content, and thus an effective, scientifically efficacious, treatment for goiter. Herschel concludes, "The history of iodine above related affords . . . a perfect specimen of the manner in which a knowledge of natural properties and laws, collected from facts having no reference to the object to which they have been subsequently applied, enables us to set in array the resources of nature against herself" (55). The use of burnt oceanic sponge for treating goiter is documented in ancient Greek medical tradition in the writings of the physician Galen of Pergamum in the second century¹⁹; but the discovery of iodine as the mineral responsible for its effectiveness was not made until the series of events Herschel narrates. Though the original explanations for its effectiveness were either incomplete or incorrect, the discovery of iodine as a treatment, at that moment, would not have been possible had this practice not already been in place. This example suggests that Herschel detected a vital link between past and present understanding; the progress possible in Herschel's present could not occur without the wisdom of the past, however dimly illuminated were those older observations.

¹⁹ See Konstantinidou and Konstantinidou, "The Thyroid Gland in Ancient Greece: A Historical Perspective."

Herschel foregrounds the conclusion we might draw from Alice's characterization in *Mary Barton*, which suggests that though passive observation will not lead to complete understanding, without those persons who can collect information and begin to use it, even without fully knowing the implications of its use, there is no foundation on which those prepare for active observation can build. Likewise, had Alice not mentored the young persons in the novel and then helped bring them into relationship, there would have been no hope for Jem's character in the murder trial.

Like Widow Smith's character in "Lois the Witch," who brings wildness into her log cabin, incorporating the sense perceptible world into her home environment, Alice's character in *Mary Barton* also brings the natural world into her home in the form of foraged wild plants that she makes into medicinal preparations. Her cellar-apartment window is adorned by "hedge-row, ditch and field plants, which we are accustomed to call valueless, but which have a powerful effect either for good or evil, and are consequently much used among the poor" (Gaskell, *Mary Barton* 20). Alice's character acts much like the folk practitioners in Herschel's example of the burnt sponge; she is certainly unaware of the reasons her medicines work, but by noting their effectiveness in practice, she has participated in a process of developing empirical knowledge. Similarly, by bringing the natural world into her home in a way that makes it observable, Widow Smith's character suggests that such an historical and intergenerational lineage would be possible for her society as well; thus, both women are positively associated with the natural world, and both possess traits that would make them valuable mentors. But here the parallel breaks; while Alice's character has access to a full representative generation in *Mary Barton*, Widow Smith's influence does not extend beyond her own home. Further, Alice's character signals a full integration of the natural world into the human world by literally taking in plants as healing

substances. Conversely, rather than finding ways to integrate the natural world into their thinking, the characters outside Widow Smith's home in "Lois the Witch" either seek to annihilate nature or to avoid it – as the narrator suggests of Manasseh's character when she reports that hunting is "almost the only occupation which could draw him out of his secluded habits" (Gaskell, "Lois the Witch" 35). The town, as reported by the narrator, was "surrounded with two circles of stockades" with a grazing space between for domestic animals, "for those who dreaded their cattle straying into the woods, and the consequent danger of reclaiming them" (15). While Alice's remedies are part of a tradition among the working class of Manchester, Widow Smith's active, positive association with the natural world is anomalous in Salem. In this way, Widow Smith might be read as an inversion of Alice; Smith is advanced for her time in her ability to integrate this new world into her old one, with a mind that might fit instead among the "class of men in Manchester," persons who practice active scientific observation, to whom Job Legh belongs. Alice's pastoral England, on the other hand, has been left behind – in favor of an industrial space. The inversion points to a similar issue: while they are on opposite sides of the change, both characters' physical landscapes are in flux, and in each society, the context for knowing has therefore shifted – causing the need for new epistemological frameworks.

Additionally problematic for the narrative of "Lois the Witch," the society of the Puritans is isolated from valuable sources of perceptual information in at least two other ways besides their relationship to the natural world. First, it has already been cut off from its past by the fact of its existence in the New World – apart from its ancestry in England. Second, the narrative indicates that just before the events of the trials began, Salem had lost its leaders. The narrator reports that these were "men of ripe wisdom and sound counsel" and that "one by one the patriarchs of the primitive little community had rapidly followed each other to the grave. They had been

beloved as fathers, looked up to as judges in the land” (38).²⁰ Thus, inside the village of Salem, the people are in a three-fold state of isolation: from their own distant past, as their presence in the New World has required; from the natural world, as we can conclude from the facts that Widow Smith’s influence stops at the borders to her home and that the specimens in her home are described as relics, rather than actively useful objects of observation; and from person-to-person mentorship, as the loss of their elders has indicated. Without these links, the text suggests, the people of Salem lack access to historical, empirical, and generational information that might have provided them a basis for evaluating the events they experienced. The residents of Salem are therefore not able to build the kind of foundational knowledge that Alice’s character represents, which is vital for the narrative of *Mary Barton* in rescuing the younger generation from its potential tragic outcome. This contrast is significant also precisely because of the imperfect, passive state of Alice’s knowledge. The point seems to be that it is not required – nor even possible – to know perfectly; rather, it is important to build levels of consilience into the process of knowing, so that knowledge is both rooted in the past with an unbroken lineage of progress over time and receiving information mutually from physical senses as well as conscience and soul. These knowledge streams, along with a relationship to knowledge over time, work reciprocally to produce an effective epistemology to meet the modern era.

²⁰ Upham also attributes the loss of mentor-leaders as one of the historical causes for the debacle in Salem. Gaskell’s narrator might do well to cite Upham, the comment in the novel is so close to his original: Within a short time the town had lost almost all its venerable fathers and leading citizens, the men whose councils had governed and whose wisdom had guided them from the first years of the settlement of the place” (Upham 15).

CHAPTER VIII: CAUTIONARY TALES: JOHN BARTON, OLD HANNAH, AND

MANASSEH HICKSON

If Alice and Job represent positive links between mentorship and the development of knowledge in *Mary Barton*, John Barton's biography in the novel serves as a cautionary tale for the way in which, without such relationships, the individual mind, lacking access to wisdom, becomes barren. The novel suggests that sorrow, when visited on an uneducated, unfree mind, can prevent understanding rather than promoting it through a growing faith – and lead to prejudices of opinion, rather than clarity of insight. John's character experiences "uncontrollable sorrow" at the loss of his wife (25). When he tries to make sense of his suffering, he blames his sister-in-law Esther for causing his wife's deadly shock; he "bitterly thought of the shock his poor wife had so recently had. . . . His feelings toward Esther amounted to curses. It was she who had brought on all this sorrow. . . . [H]e hardened his heart against her for ever" (25). Martineau provides a useful image for considering the way the novel frames John's response to sorrow when he explains, "There are indeed those who discern nothing sanctifying in sorrow[,] . . . who pass through it, finding therein no waters of life, but only a scorched desert" (*Endeavors* 102). Directly after the narrator's commentary on John's reaction to his wife's death, the narrator links him with the anger held by the working class toward the master class that occasionally flares into violence. The narrator first introduces "the differences between the employers and the employed" as "an eternal subject for agitation in the manufacturing districts" and indicates that when this agitation flares it reveals "that in its apparent quiet, the ashes had still smouldered in the breasts of a few. Among these few was John Barton" (Gaskell, *Mary Barton* 26). Martineau's image of the "scorched desert" aligns with the novel's image of the smouldering heart,

suggesting that John's character has developed an unforgiving view of the master class as an illustration of what befalls one embittered by suffering, disallowing the purifying potential of such an experience. Martineau connects erroneous understandings as to the nature of suffering with a lack of self-knowledge: "And if our complaints of trial and suffering result from a wrong state of mind in relation to God, they no less imply mistake in relation to ourselves" (*Endeavors* (104). Emblematic of this idea, the narrator notes the "diseased thoughts" of John Barton (Gaskell, *Mary Barton* 143) and attributes a lack of wisdom as the cause: "No education had given him wisdom; and without wisdom, even love, with all its effects, too often works harm. He acted to the best of his judgement, but it was a widely erring judgement" (144). This assessment, in the light of Martineau's indication that to complain about one's suffering indicates a wrong state of mind, suggests that for the novel, the "education" the narrator indicates would have helped John's character is beyond that of facts and figures, but rather that which would have developed and purified his soul and directed his conscience. Without such wisdom, John's character demonstrates, a person is unable to draw the correct conclusions from sense perceptible observation; he will, as John has done, persist in holding prejudices of opinion that will prevent resolution of conflict, as with John's conclusion that the best way to address the conflict between masters and workers is to "Have at the masters!" (Gaskell, *Mary Barton* 160).

"Lois the Witch" similarly suggests that only a thinking that seeks conciliation between observation and interpretation at the levels of sense, conscience, and soul will successfully navigate around prejudices of opinion to arrive at correct conclusions. In *Mary Barton*, John Barton's character represents the false path of resentment; "Lois the Witch" uses a Gothic doubling of Old Hannah's character with Lois's character to point out that erroneous conclusions in human social relationships are not only likely, but inevitable and even predictable unless individuals take up the mantle of free-willed and balanced thinking. The story's landscape is clouded over with a haze of

false predictions and judgments based on superstition and one-sided thinking. But two of these prophetic claims turns out to be factually accurate; each comes couched in suggestions from the text that lull the reader into the assumption that everything surrounding the scenes is to be read as misguided superstition, placing the cogent, accurate statements in resonant juxtaposition. The first is Old Hannah's prediction that Lois will be accused of witchcraft, as Lois has narrated it in her answer to Captain Holderness's warning of the dangers of the country where she has landed. Holderness's warning suggests he does not purchase the beliefs about witchcraft Elder Hawkins has put forth; indeed, his character focuses on the sense-perceptible world and ascribes the rest to the imagination, which occurs when, as Widow Smith's character says, "folk get affrighted of the real dangers" (Gaskell, "Lois the Witch" 12). On the other hand, Lois herself clearly invests in a belief about witches, so her hazy, mystery-laden account appears to deliver all the sensation of the gothic in a sort of sepia-toned pathos. But Hannah's comment resonates with Lois on another level: "thy dad hath never tried for to save me, and none shall save thee when thou art brought up for a witch" (13). narrative has set up this comment to read like the confused ramblings of a convicted witch – but read against the backdrop of Widow Smith's character, we might note the value the text has placed on the social power of intuition. We might then consider that Old Hannah's prophetic claim comes from her ability to read the social landscape, as one subject to its most destructive potential. Hannah's character has been destroyed by a social group who fears her instead of taking her in lovingly: "No one knew how she lived, if it were not on nettles and scraps of oatmeal and such-like food given her more for fear than for pity" (13). Her fate is the logical conclusion of the toxic combination of fear and suffering, so that when "many a one fell sick in the village" the villagers, already leery of her, formed the assumption that Old Hannah was the cause. Since no physical evidence presents itself, they commit the error of assuming supernatural causes must be at the root – and when religious leaders, such as Lois's father, defer to authority by remaining silent, the group loses its conscientious efficacy; as Newman has said, even in this "enlightened" age, these individuals have fallen prey to

superstition, “and with the same result” (Newman, *The Soul* 10). Old Hannah’s prophetic comment thus carries a greater significance; she has accurately predicted the inevitable consequences of the social circumstances that took her life, and in noticing the innocence and the precarious social position of young Lois, she correctly interprets the dangers Lois herself will face in a doubling of her character’s own experience. The factual circumstances matter less for the text than does the gesture of Old Hannah’s prophecy – but read in this light, the implications for Gaskell’s own day become clear. The suffering in the village becomes merely the final straw – the central issue is the fear the villagers invested in Old Hannah, and their lack of clear thinking. The text thus suggests that only a loving interpersonal relationship between individuals seeking to know their neighbors would prevent the kind of outcome Old Hannah represents. Read this way, the story’s claim that to assume evil intent in Old Hannah represents the default, predictable outcome of undeveloped thinking seems to extend the commentary we observe through John’s character in *Mary Barton*.

The second accurate prediction in “Lois the Witch,” issued in a similarly dim mood of scene as Old Hannah’s prophecy, is Manasseh’s prediction that “if I wed not Lois, both she and I die within the year. . . . That whole vision grows clearer to me day by day” (Gaskell, “Lois the Witch” 37). Of course, the narrative validates this prediction, in that had Lois married Manasseh, she would likely have been spared from hanging as a witch. The chief reasons for her conviction – namely, Faith’s move to place Lois under suspicion, motivated by her jealousy and Manasseh’s unwitting implication at her trial that Lois has bewitched him – would both have been prevented by a marriage to Manasseh. Like Old Hannah, Manasseh could predict the danger to Lois in his volatile community by assessing the social landscape, noting Lois’s vulnerable social position as an unsupported young woman in Salem; likewise, Manasseh himself needed the protection from social judgment of someone with Lois’s “unconscious wisdom” (48) and her ability to soothe his erratic moods. The text suggests Manasseh has incorrectly assumed that his conclusion about his fate and Lois’s comes from his “imagined gift of prophecy” and that this delusion has resulted partly from an unhealthy tendency

toward an abstract understanding of Biblical scriptures – disconnected from experiences in the natural world and absent a robust mentor relationship to guide his thinking. The narrator claims him to be “indifferent to all outward events” and suggests that his belief in his imaginings “did not tend to . . . the elucidation of the dark mysterious doctrines over which he had pondered too long for the health either of his mind or body” (38). It is this state that leads Manasseh to participate in bringing about the prophecy he has laid out.²¹ Manasseh is thus able to make observations about events and

²¹ A result of this unhealthy state of mind and soul, Manasseh incorrectly interprets Biblical texts to support his delusions. For example, in his attempt to refute Lois’s rejection of his marriage proposal, Manasseh refers to the evil Hazael (*The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 2 Kings 8:13-15), for whom the prophet Elisha has prophesied rule over Aram (Syria). Manasseh assumes that Elisha interprets God’s *will* in suggesting Hazael will murder the king, rule Syria, and commit atrocities against Israel—and he uses this as a basis for his plea that Lois should trust his prediction. The Biblical text, according to Manasseh’s interpretation, suggests God has foreordained it that Hazael will carry out this evil: “because his evil courses were fixed and appointed for him before the foundation of the world” (Gaskell, “Lois the Witch” 30). Read another way, it is also possible to consider that Elisha was not suggesting God has ordained these evil events, but rather that Elisha was correctly intuiting what was to occur based on his assessment of Hazael’s character. The Biblical text says that “[Elisha] fixed his gaze and stared at [Hazael], until he was ashamed. Then the man of God wept. Hazael asked, ‘Why does my lord weep?’ He answered, ‘Because I know the evil that you will do to the people of Israel.’” (*The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 2 Kings 8:11-12). The placement of this cryptic passage in the story at this point privileges this latter reading of Elisha’s prophecy and suggests Manasseh himself is subject to the same error by which he reads the scripture: he thinks he is reading a prophecy of some fore-ordained event, when really he is simply assessing the social landscape. Beyond the mere suggestion that the Puritans misread scripture, as has been the common analysis for Gaskell’s motivation for including Biblical references in the story, I argue this allusion suggests mutual epistemological causality. The prophecy could be read as a warning, but both Hazael and Manasseh himself interpret the information as a directive because they misattribute the source and the value of the information.

people around him, but his conclusions are not founded on a healthy relationship between observation and reasoning from his senses; rather, he uses abstract, doctrinal concepts applied asymmetrically to his observations, ending up with erroneous and disastrous conclusions. The text's framing of Manasseh's character confirms through negative example Herschel's notion that "the observation of the calm, energetic regularity of nature . . . tends . . . to tranquilize and re-assure the mind, and render it less accessible to repining selfish, turbulent emotions" (Herschel 16). Manasseh's character lacks a literal landscape for his mind and body to explore – and the result, the text suggests, is skewed thinking. From this example, we might consider that for the text, the compromised reasoning that comes from a lack of exposure to the "regularity of nature" does not apply only to scientific conclusions, but also to those drawn from observing human society. Manasseh's character thus points to the need faith-knowing has for physical sense observation. Without a connection to the physical, natural world, faith becomes untethered, literally lacking the ground on which to base its belief. Thus, abstract knowledge, without the consilient factors of faith and a relational continuity with the past, will not lead to wisdom.

Manasseh's character becomes obsessed with the concept of free will, claiming at one frenzied moment that "The mystery of Free-Will and Fore-Knowledge is a mystery of Satan's devising, not of God's" (Gaskell, "Lois the Witch" 37). He challenges Dr. Mather during the trial on the basis of his claimed prophetic vision: "Now, reverend sir, if the event be known to the spirit, it must have been foredoomed in the councils of God. If so, why punish her for doing that in which she had no free will?" (59). We might read these remarks as another, related element of Gaskell's epistemological framing of the core issues in the text. Manasseh's character leaves free choice on the table – by which he could have broken the cycle of superstition as cause for the negative outcomes the text outlines. Instead, the text has him follow the course of events as they have been put into motion by the authoritarian, faithless society around him until he helps bring about his own tragic intuition. Here Gaskell's use of Biblical allusion supports this reading in that Manasseh's character

follows a similar trajectory as the Biblical figure of King Manasseh of Judea, son of Hezekiah.²² The Biblical Manasseh assumed rule at age twelve after his father's death; in a parallel move, the text has young Manasseh Hickson's character assume leadership of his household at his father's passing – a role for which his character is unprepared. The Biblical Manasseh “dealt with mediums and with wizards” (*The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 2 Kings 21:6) and, as a result, “shed very much innocent blood” (2 Kings 21:16). Similarly, Manasseh Hickson is described as having a “growing absorption in his own fancies, and imagined gift of prophecy, making him comparatively indifferent to all outward events” (Gaskell, “Lois the Witch” 38). He confesses to his mother his belief that “some evil creature hath the mastery over me” and that “I was, as it were, possessed with a devil” (47). The text's suggestion, underpinned by his Biblical namesake, is that Manasseh's unmentored character is not able to discern the information he receives from his intuition, thus falling into a form of fetishism. The text further indicates that he is able to read the most “abstruse books on theology, fit to converse with the most learned ministers that ever came about those parts” (59), but he is not informed by the kind of mentor that Newman outlines in *The Soul* – one with a developing sense of reverence, able to discern the truth from one's observations in a way that would prevent superstition or other such error in judgment. Instead, in parallel with Manasseh of Judea, Manasseh Hickson has idolized his own visions. At her trial, Lois's character observes “by a process swifter than reasoning” that “[Manasseh] was in such a state that his mother would in vain do her utmost to prevent his making himself conspicuous” (58). But even his mother cannot now protect him from himself: he steps to Lois's side and, in effect, seals her fate by appearing bewitched, “stammering with excitement” and providing “oil to the smouldering fire of that audience” (58). It is in this very moment that Manasseh, lacking the wisdom to discern truth from false reasoning, fulfills both his

²² *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 2 Kings 21

own prophecy and the legacy of his namesake: he causes the shedding of innocent blood on his own behalf, owing to his fetishistic obsession with his own erroneous thinking.

Newman refers to “wisdom” as one of the senses of the soul that leads to an awareness of the Infinite (*The Soul* 4-5, 46-47)—which suggests that in this context, wisdom implies an imbricated epistemological framework informed by sense perception and mediated by spiritual insight. In his deathbed confession to Mr. Carson, John speaks of his own education in a way that indexes the problem of achieving wisdom in his society:

You see I've so often been hankering after the right way; and it's a hard one for a poor man to find. They taught me to read, and then they never gave no books; only I heard say the Bible was a good book. . . . I would fain have gone after the Bible rules if I'd seen folk credit it. . . . I grew to think it must be a sham put upon poor ignorant folk, women, and such-like. (Gaskell, *Mary Barton* 306)

John's experience is the opposite of Manasseh's, in that while Manasseh suffers from too much abstract learning, John has lacked access both to books that might have given him entrance into a collective body of empirically sound thinking, and to moral and spiritual teaching that might have led him to individual, faith-imbued wisdom. He goes on, “I was tore in two oftentimes, between my sorrow for poor suffering folk, and my trying to love them as caused their sufferings (to my mind). At last I gave it up in despair. . . . But from that time I've dropped down, down—down” (307). These lines, spoken just before his death, indicate that John's lack of intellectual and moral education left him without the ability to understand himself; his own suffering thus became embittering to him, rather than leading him to love. His crime of murder is a symptom of this ignorance he later pleads to Job Legh, “I did not know what I was doing”

(303).²³ Martineau's words on the state of knowledge in the working class could be a direct description of John Barton's characterization in the novel. Martineau writes, "the extreme division of employments which characterizes modern industrial operations, is . . . deadening and unhealthy to the mental nature of those engaged in them. . . . [T]he occupation does not educate the man" (*Endeavors* 284). He goes on to explain, "The natural mind, untouched by religious wisdom, always refers its wants and miseries to outward things, which alone it strives to mend and change" (286). Because John's character lacks both moral and intellectual education, and his factory job divorces his daily sensory experience from the natural world, he is, in fact, only able to direct his misery toward the apparent outward cause of his and others' suffering. Alongside Martineau's assessment of the detrimental nature of industrial work, the notion that John's downfall resulted from a lack of wisdom not only points to the novel's call for a unified head-

²³ Martineau quotes Carlyle's doctrine that "'if Adam had remained in Paradise, there had been no anatomy, and no metaphysics'" (*Endeavors* 276); Martineau considers this a wish to return to a state of unconscious life, and he later writes, "Could he realize his dream of perfection, he would stock the world with unconscious activity, and fill it with men who know not what they do" (*Endeavors* 277). This allusion to Christ's statement just before his death is mentioned twice in *Mary Barton*: once when the narrator critiques the workers' decision to attack strikebreakers ("when men get excited, they know not what they do," (Gaskell 146) and again when John Barton says to Job, "I did not know what I was doing" (303). These references each suggest a similar conclusion which Martineau asserts: "To sigh after an unconscious life – what is it but to protect against the very power of thought? To *think* is not merely to have ideas, . . . –but to sit in the midst as master of one's conceptions; to detain them for audience, or dismiss them at a glance; to organize them into coherence and direct them to an end" (*Endeavors* 277). If we read the novel's references to Christ's words in the light of Martineau's claim, we may conclude that, according to the novel, the forgiveness for which Christ asked on behalf of men at his death was for humans' self-imposed epistemological limitations.

heart knowing in individuals, but also to the responsibility of the collective to educate both the conscience and the intellect. Newman writes, as though in response to John's character, that the knowledge which lies outside the physical senses—that of “right sympathies is of the first importance; but there is no formula of teaching by which this can be brought about” and instead “depends on the living contact of spirit with spirit” (“On the Relations” 7). John Barton's experience provides an example of both the difficulty and the necessity of widely achieving the novel's epistemology; to advance in the way the novel recommends would require both the moral example of individuals and broadly available intellectual training. Martineau provides an apt conclusion to this idea of a multi-faceted approach to the problem of education when he claims that “To avert the dangers, and remedy the peculiar evils of our social condition, many conjoint agencies are doubtless required” (*Endeavors* 287).

CHAPTER IX: “A GREAT REVOLUTION OF MIND IS WANTED”: THE PROBLEM OF
SYSTEMIC AUTHORITY AND THE PROSPECTS FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

In alignment with Martineau’s conclusion, *Mary Barton* and “Lois the Witch” together suggest that neither religious nor economic institutions can in themselves productively address the issue Martineau identifies. In the novel’s modernity, the economic authority represented by Mr. Carson and the mill owners replaces that of the church, which held ultimate sway for the Salemites in determining the outcome of individuals’ fortunes. In a description of Mr. Carson’s character, Gaskell’s narrator supplies the link between these two spheres, the religious and the economic: “It is well known, that there is no religionist so zealous as a convert; no masters so stern, and regardless of the interest of their workpeople, as those who have risen from such a station themselves” (Gaskell, *Mary Barton* 146). Carson’s character is here suggestive of a version of the same one-sided thinking that led the authorities in Salem to their disastrous conclusion that mass execution was the solution to their “witch” problem. This parallel, and the failure of both economic and religious authority in the narratives respectively, suggests that for the texts, institutions – economic or religious – tend to insulate those in positions of authority away from the kinds of relationships that might promote balanced thinking – thus only amplifying the kinds of prejudices of opinion that plagues both texts. Carson, having achieved economic success, stands to gain more by protecting his enterprise than by broadening his thinking capacity.

In this way, the character of Reverend Tappau in “Lois the Witch” operates in a similar role to that of Carson. The narrator defines Tappau’s character as “grey-headed, dogmatic,” and says that he is to the parishioners “literally . . . a ‘pillar of the church’” (Gaskell, “Lois the

Witch” 32). This depiction of Tappau’s presence as an *actual* stony column, crystallized by his deadened religious dogma, means he is unable to engender any feeling of reverence in his parishioners. Opposite Tappau in the narrative is the young Reverend Nolan, who is able to offer prayers with such reverential feeling that “each one of his hearers feels as if a prayer and supplication had gone up for each of them,” so that in one instance Lois “rose up comforted and strengthened, as no special prayers of Pastor Tappau had ever made her feel” (34). Nolan is brought to Salem as an assistant to Tappau for his growing congregation, which under ideal circumstances might have provided a balance in the community between the strength of feeling in Nolan’s character and the head-centered interpretation of religious scripture which Tappau favors. But Tappau, through an unrecognized jealousy – or so the narrator hints – marginalizes Nolan. The narrator reports this issue with a winking tone: “a feeling had sprung up on the part of the elder minister, which might have been called jealousy of the younger, if so godly a man as Pastor Tappau could have been supposed to entertain so evil a passion” (31-2). This unrecognized feeling impulse results in a schism in his own parish, which contributes in part to the unrest and lack of stability that provides the conditions for the hysteria of the witch hunt.

The narrator suggests here that Tappau has not entrained, as Martineau has called for, “an open eye on the spiritual world within” (Martineau, *Endeavors* 278). Newman could be describing Tappau’s character when he writes of the way in which the soul organ, in its underdeveloped form, can fall out of insight into superstitious fetishism: “Not satisfied to take God’s world as it is, he makes as it were an artificial darkness in order that he may be more religious” (Newman, *The Soul* 10). Tappau’s heartless religion, rather than developing in him a reverence that would correct misperception, has instead deadened his feeling-knowing capacity, and his beliefs have thus fallen back into a fetishistic unreality. His emotions therefore influence

him outside his knowledge toward unexamined prejudices of opinion; his dogmatic approach to religion privileges abstract intellectual thinking over a feeling-knowing, and his character's responsibility for the trials indicates that such a one-sided understanding cannot lead to clear knowledge in human beings. The hysteria that results under Tappau's leadership, in which sense-observation is perversely used as evidence for fetishistic claims, thus suggests that for correct knowledge, it is impossible to draw conclusions from empirical observation without a balanced epistemological framework. Tappau's character, seen in this light, resembles Carson with his bloodless, pragmatic approach to the worker crisis. In both cases, the men's biases, and their lack of insight from ensouled perception, prevent proper understandings of the different social spheres over which they are meant to preside – in Carson's case an economic enterprise, and in Tappau's a religious community. Thus predictably, they both use incorrect conclusions drawn from empirical observation as a basis for seeking justice – to problematic result.

Herschel writes, "Science . . . like every thing else, has its own peculiar terms . . . and these it would be unwise . . . to relinquish; but every thing that tends to clothe it in a strange and repulsive garb, and especially every thing that, to keep up an appearance of superiority . . . assumes an unnecessary guise of profundity and obscurity, should be sacrificed without mercy" (Herschel 70). In a directly parallel move, Newman asserts, in his address to London's University College, "To intrust (sic) to it [any system of higher learning] a monopoly of knowledge . . . would be to run headlong on the sorcerer's rock, and turn the academic clergyman into a professor of the black art. Every restrictive trade is liable to a moral disease of its own" (Newman, "On the Relations" 12). Here, from their distinct vantage points, both Herschel and Newman assert the importance of broadly available and wide-ranging perspectives from which individuals must be able to draw to ensure that, as Newman states, "the one-

sidedness of individuals promotes the many-sidedness of a nation” (10). Likewise, Gaskell’s Tappau and Carson suggest that any system that privileges such a one-sidedness will ultimately lead to social decline, regardless of its professed mission. The masters in *Mary Barton* do not seek a consilient understanding of the workers’ complaints, bolstered by their economic authority; and Tappau’s character is presented as someone trying to maintain standing within the established systems of the church, which disincentivizes an interest in a complete epistemology in favor of a clinging to dogma. Were Martineau’s concept of “conjoint agencies” applied in Gaskell’s texts, both characters would operate – as Carson’s character learns to do only after Job counsels him – in concert with other individuals from different spheres toward a balanced social framework. But that this shift occurs in Carson only after a tragic outcome in which his successor, his son Harry, is killed does not suggest an optimistic view for the novel of the economic system’s ability to correct itself.

In alignment with the critique of deadened religious authority we observe through Tappau’s character, Newman critiques the churches of his contemporary England because, he claims, “They appeal to the Intellect, not to the Soul, in order to establish a spiritual religion; and try to force propositions into the mind, instead of bidding the heart freely to expand in the light and glory and love of God” (221). Considered in the light of this assessment, Gaskell’s framing of Manasseh’s experience through her allusion to the Biblical Manasseh may serve as a warning to her own contemporary society by suggesting that Manasseh represents the unfortunate product of such a mistaken notion of the role of religion. His character remains focused on a head-centered knowledge of Biblical theology, and where his reason will not provide him understanding, he has substituted superstition – eventually leading to a pathological belief in his own powers of prophecy for spiritual knowledge. Further, he has incorrectly attributed a supernatural source to a kind of social intuition, detectable through observation but only correctly interpreted by a developed soul organ. Manasseh’s

character, with his preoccupation with his lack of free will and his resulting, predictable demise, signals the idea that cause-effect determinism is the default course on which human society runs. The loss of the elders in Salem and the resulting atrophy of moral authority further suggests that the people broadly lacked their own ability to discern truth and thus relied on an external authority. The danger of this reliance is that without an underlying method for consilient, multi-faceted perception, such authority is always subject to corruption, and generational knowledge can be lost – thus cutting individuals off from a lineage of growing understanding and leading to social decline. For this reason, Newman writes, “A great revolution of mind is wanted. The kingdom of God is not meat and drink, nor sermons and sabbaths, nor history and exegesis, nor a belief in the infallibility of any book, nor in the supernatural memory of any man; but it is, as Paul says, righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (221). Put another way, free-willed, balanced thinking in interconnected individuals would shift the track of determinism that relies on abstract, authoritarian systems, thus interrupting the entropic process that such systems promote in human society.

While John Barton’s character certainly points to the need for a system for education, the social challenges in *Mary Barton*, placed alongside the inverted social landscape in “Lois the Witch,” lead us to consider that for Gaskell, an abstract, systemic authority cannot itself solve the most complex social problems. The texts indicate that while, as Herschel has prescribed, scientific observation should be widely available and scientific thinking broadly practiced across class lines, no system – religious or economic – can alone manage or impart the kind of complete epistemological stance necessary to promote a healthy social life. Instead, only interested and engaged individuals who freely maintain both a living continuity with the past and an awakened capacity to discern the relationship between sense observation and ensouled perception can lead to a gradual progression of society. Indeed, as Job’s characterization demonstrates, the freely adopted choice to love others and to seek clear understanding is the first step toward a different

way; models for such a path become available where others have made a similar free choice. Such a discipline results in the humility to refrain from hasty judgments – to wait, as Job’s character demonstrates, for sense observation to come – “by imperceptible degrees” (Gaskell, *Mary Barton* 252) – into alignment with other forms of knowing and to release the tendency to bend empirical “fact” toward an expedient endpoint. By similar gradual accretion, clusters of persons can then form who pursue the same kind of thinking. Thus, while the novel and its Gothic counterpart present a bleak outlook for the possibility of beneficial systemic change, in *Mary Barton*, small groups of individuals can and do make the difference in resolving social issues. The novel’s conclusion further emphasizes the value of human relationships over systemic authority; the newly formed family tribe of Mary, Jem, Margaret, Will, and Job leave England because although the judicial system has found Jem innocent of murder, he understands his professional and personal relationships will be compromised in a way he cannot accept. Instead, the novel extracts these figures from the old society, relocating them to the Canadian colony where they will inoculate their new social networks with the thinking capacities that have brought them to this point.

The closing of Newman’s lecture to the 1847 opening of University College, London, captures the ideal the novel’s hybrid epistemology, if widely realized, would make possible:²⁴

And it is certainly a pleasing hope, perhaps by no means Utopian, that when purer and brighter light has been vouchsafed to future generations—when the mist of controversies has been worked clear by the successive strivings of gallant, truth-loving minds, — disunion may mark only the ignorant and untaught; war between enlightened nations may be morally impossible; wisdom may have more influence over public measures than wealth or faction; and to the men of that day the Baconian maxim [“knowledge is

²⁴ My thanks to Anne Wallace for the use of her term “hybrid epistemology.”

power”] may be supplanted by another, — “Knowledge is Love.” (“On the Relations” 24)²⁵

Alice’s characterization suggests that a passive relationship to knowledge, while appropriate to an earlier age, is not enough to meet the epistemological demands of the novel’s modern era—rather, as Margaret’s characterization demonstrates, rigorous thinking is required if society is to progress toward the “purer and brighter light” Newman believes is possible. John Barton’s outcome highlights the value of education for both the conscience and the intellect. The novel’s Gothic counterpart in “Lois the Witch” stands alongside in shadowy reminder of what befalls a society where the one-sided thinking dominates. For *Mary Barton*, Margaret and Job—whose “truth-loving minds” have led them to wisdom—model the kind of thinking necessary to “clear the mist” of social problems. In Margaret and Job’s characters, a knowledge achieved from active observation of the natural world unites with an understanding available through a healthy conscience and an enlightened soul. Their characters’ identity as members of the working class suggests that for society to progress, balanced knowing involves broadly available

²⁵ In a structurally parallel statement to Newman’s, the narrator says of Carson that “the wish that lay nearest to his heart was that none might suffer from the cause which he had suffered; that *a perfect understanding*, and complete confidence and love, might exist between masters and men; that *the truth might be recognized* that the interests of one were the interests of all, and, as such, required the consideration and deliberation of all; that hence it was most desirable to have *educated workers*, capable of judging, *not mere machines of ignorant men*; and to have them bound to their employers by the ties of *respect and affection*, *not by mere money bargains alone*; in short, to acknowledge the *Spirit of Christ* as the regulating law between both parties” (Gaskell, *Mary Barton* 320, emphasis mine to highlight the conceptual alignment of the two passages).

and empirically sound education coupled with small groups willing to pursue a disciplined relationship between sense-perception and soulful insight. A healthy society, according to the novel, is therefore one in which knowledge is measured not by the power it conveys to the will, but by the love it awakens in the heart.

If we read *Mary Barton* in this light, mindful of Amy Mae King's recent call for critical attention to Gaskell's Unitarianism as a philosophical foundation for her thought, it becomes possible to engage in a broader reevaluation of Gaskell's writing that I suspect would elevate contemporary critical reception of her work. Such an examination might lead us to consider that her body of work develops a cohesive rhetoric that calls for an integrated epistemology as an agent for social change upriver of systemic, institutional (religious or economic), or regulatory efforts at reform. Considered singularly through the lens of religious trope, ecological theory, or social critique, Gaskell's work might seem philosophically thin. But if we consider her writing to be promoting a hybrid epistemological framework that imbricates empirical observation with a metaphysics that improves humans' meaning-making capacity, we need not relegate her to the Sunday school room or read her fiction merely as artifact. Instead, we might discover that not only is there room for both "science" and "faith" in our understanding of her work – but that the apparent boundaries around these ways of knowing are our own, not hers. When we eliminate this false dichotomy in our reading of *Mary Barton*, we might then observe the more important implications of Gaskell's epistemology, strikingly progressive in their relevance to contemporary social issues (both hers and ours: that consilient knowledge streams both verifies correct understanding and helps resolve bias; that knowledge must be renewing, and concepts renewable, to prevent social decline from deadened dogmas; and that systemic, abstract authority is not effective in bringing social progress – rather, small, interested and non-hierarchic groups

are most effective in transmitting the kind of cultural knowledge that can engender a healthy society. It is thus possible that if we pay attention to Gaskell's epistemological framework in a larger study of her work, we might begin to detect an intentional and well-developed rhetorical stance that helps define and address the social challenges of her modern society – which, if valid, may offer something of value to our present-day social organization, as much as to that of her contemporary readership.

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