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“What could she do next?”

Margaret’s Power and Control Through Failed Emotional Labor in Elizabeth Gaskell’s *North and South*

Cianna Alano

Though Elizabeth Gaskell was one of the most prolific female writers of her time, outward success often came at the expense of inward failure. While writing her infamous novel, *North and South*, in 1854 and 1855, Gaskell struggled with a “frustrating lack of control” over authorship as Elizabeth Starr notes (393). Because Gaskell wrote *North and South* for Charles Dickens’s *Household Words*, serialization and editorial changes instead of personal preference often controlled and limited her work. Although Gaskell was the named author of *North and South*, she could not control the length of her chapters, when she had to have sections written by, and what actually got printed. During its serialization, *North and South* was controlled primarily by Dickens and the constraints of his journal. Although Gaskell eventually reprinted her own version of the novel with additional chapters and personal editorial changes, her original experience first writing *North and South* was especially formative and frustrating. Gaskell’s vexation over her lack of control over authorship bleeds clearly into similar themes of frustrated labor throughout *North and South*, particularly through Margaret Hale, a fictional female parallel

of Gaskell herself. Margaret is often persuaded into performing unwanted duties, but she willingly adds a secondary responsibility and nuance of emotional labor, changing attitudes through these tasks. Gaskell suggests that although Margaret fails at this self-assigned responsibility, she is successful in gaining control over her circumstances, a victory that Gaskell longed for while writing *North and South*.

Margaret as an Emotional Laborer

Critics have written extensively on themes of women's lack of control over the type of labor they perform and their responsibility to perform emotional labor in Gaskell's social problem novels like *North and South*. Emotional labor, as Janice Schroeder explains, is any work in which a female "laborer helps produce desired feelings in another while suppressing her own" ("Clearing" par. 2) that is often tied to "Victorian keywords such as *sympathy*, *duty*, and woman's mission" ("A Thousand" 461). This type of work is generally associated with femininity because emotions are linked with domestic spheres and conversations, feminine spaces, rather than the corporate or industrial male-dominated spheres. Just because this labor is not tied to traditional "hard-working" spheres does not mean, however, that it is easy or desirable. A key component of emotional labor is that it does not benefit the laborer at all. A successful emotional laborer helps to sway the emotions of others by "suppressing her own," taking on the taxing responsibility of resolving others' complex issues without addressing personal emotional health.

In *North and South*, male masters and other men are granted the agency to resolve or at least tackle their own complex issues unlike their female counterparts. These men all "tak[e] control of their lives," as Pearl Brown points out, through tangible actions such as physical labor, strikes, business plans, proposals, and other executive decisions (346). Some of these actions have adverse consequences, like Nicholas Higgins's wife dying because of a failed strike and Mr. Thornton facing serious bankruptcy towards the end of the novel. Although these failures seem far from success, Mr. Higgins, Mr. Thornton, and other men in *North and South* still successfully take charge of their lives and serve their own desires at first, so the fates they meet are merely the consequences

of their decisions. Female emotional laborers like Margaret, on the other hand, are never allowed to put their feelings, agency, and desires first. Margaret only takes on emotional labor because has been “socialized to do [so] by class and gender norms” as Schroeder puts it (“Clearing” par. 4). As a moderately well-off young woman from the idyllic Southern town of Helstone, Margaret doesn’t have to experience paid, physical, structured labor like many of her fellow male characters. Instead, Margaret is only expected and allowed by Victorian society to perform emotional labor, removed from the factories and literal economic industries. Throughout *North and South*, Margaret is constantly put to work by those around her, expected to deal with unwanted tasks through suppression, sympathy, and duty.

Margaret’s Acceptance of Unwanted Tasks

Margaret is continually persuaded into tasks she doesn’t want to do by a range of people she is close to or barely knows, suggesting that she is powerless in these undesirable circumstances and motivated by a conditioned habit to please others. Her subsequent actions draw parallels to Gaskell’s yielding of authorial power to outside sources. Despite the unpleasantness of unwanted tasks, Margaret’s actions further crucial parts of the plot such as her family’s move from Helstone to Milton. Although Margaret’s father, Mr. Hale, first ideates their move north because of his new profession, he does not take responsibility for telling Mrs. Hale and initiating the move as a family despite his role as a spouse and patriarch. According to Laura Alexander, this is one instance of Mr. Hale breaking from masculine stereotypes and becoming “weak” and “effeminate” because of his unassertiveness (4). In the same conversation that he dumps the plan of an imminent move on Margaret, Mr. Hale also pleads with her like a damsel in distress, “Only help me to tell your mother” (Gaskell 38). Mr. Hale’s use of “only” belittles the gravity of his request, trying to convince Margaret that he is not shrinking from a significant spousal duty. Unconvinced by her father’s reduction of the responsibility, Margaret immediately “shrink[s] from it more than from anything she had ever had to do in her life before” (39). At this point in her life, the responsibility of telling her mother of their imminent move is the most detestable thing Margaret has ever been tasked with. She

cannot help but “shrink from it,” physically withdrawing from the task because of her strong dislike. However, Margaret “conquer[s] herself” immediately and accepts the task (39). While Margaret succeeds in controlling her initial reaction through a “conquering” of herself, she fails to control her actions for her own good.

A similar gut reaction takes over when Margaret is asked in Milton to visit the dead body of her new friend, Bessy Higgins, who was a poor factory worker with lung disease. When asked to take on this task by Mary, Bessy’s sister whom Margaret was never extremely close to, Margaret “turn[s] a little pale” and “[shrinks] a little from answering” (Gaskell 213, 214). Evident through her negative physical reaction and body language, Margaret does not wish to visit Bessy’s dead body. Gaskell even suggests a feeling of inadequacy or smallness in relation to this task resulting in Margaret “shrinking” from taking ownership of or from even speaking about it. However, as in other instances in the novel, Margaret quickly overcomes “her own cowardice,” agreeing at once to visit Bessy’s body (214). Margaret acts to overcome something within herself—a weak will or “cowardice”—but she does so to serve other people’s interests rather than her own. A person with true agency and control over their actions would follow their gut reactions to refuse an undesirable responsibility. Margaret’s agency, then, is complex since she technically agrees to visit Bessy but does not truly want to. Although Margaret is not forced into this responsibility, she is very easily persuaded into it.

Even in instances when Margaret is not explicitly asked to take on undesirable tasks, Margaret still chooses to do so of her own will because of a sense of duty she feels, exercising her agency for the good of others. When Boucher commits suicide, the men present when he is found are hesitant to take on the burden of telling his wife. Even Higgins, who already knows Mrs. Boucher, and Mr. Hale, a former vicar probably well-experienced in giving uplifting advice during distressing times, both shirk the responsibility. Margaret, a quiet bystander in the situation, volunteers herself to break the news to Mrs. Boucher when she sees “her father [is] indeed unable” to fulfill the task and is “trembling from head to foot” (Gaskell 289). Her father’s inability to step up—literally “trembling” and unstable when asked to talk to Mrs. Boucher—is what ultimately pushes Margaret to take on this undesirable task. Though she has no personal connection to Mrs. Boucher, Margaret assumes herself more “able” to deal with her than a more qualified person like her father. Margaret only takes on this task to save her father in his inability—an ironic subversion of feminine

and masculine roles.

Margaret continues to reject her traditional feminine roles to undertake more unwanted, masculine responsibilities in the riot scene outside Mr. Thornton's house. During this tense moment, Margaret “forg[ets] herself” and throws herself in the middle of an “angry sea of men” to protect Mr. Thornton (Gaskell 173, 176). Although this moment seems progressive because Margaret is acting so quickly and solitarily, she is only using her agency for the sake of another person. Margaret's physical “motion [is] inherently productive” and progressive as Laura Hayes notes (96). Her movement to fling herself, a single woman, into a riot appears very out of line with traditional female Victorian characters and more similar to assertive actions of male Victorian characters. Alexander argues that *North and South* “forces” readers to see Margaret as having a “masculine’ role in the novel, for it is Margaret who will effect change in Milton-Northern” (11). However, while Margaret breaks many molds of how female Victorian protagonists behave, she acts out of a duty to please duty those around her—progressive actions for conservative reasons. Thus, Margaret's “masculine’ role” is truly just a “role”—a played, fictional part that does not replace her actual feminine role in society. Though she has no sufficient physical capacity to stop an angry mob, Margaret's conditioning to take on undesirable tasks even when not properly qualified or experienced persuades her to step up in this situation, assigning and accepting her own responsibility without being asked.

Margaret's Added Responsibility

Although Margaret is often persuaded against her own will into completing an undesirable task, she freely chooses to add a secondary responsibility of changing others' attitudes in the process. By doing so, she rewrites her own chain of events instead of sticking to the narrative expected of her by others around her. Margaret's reappropriation of the tasks allows her to gain control in seemingly disadvantageous situations. For example, Margaret is not asked to get Mrs. Hale to think favorably of their move to Milton, but Margaret recognizes this issue and personally seeks to change Mrs. Hale's perspective. Quickly recognizing Mrs. Hale's revulsion at the idea of moving to Milton, Margaret

admits she hoped Mrs. Hale would be “glad to leave Helstone” on account of her “never being well in [the Helstone] air” (Gaskell 46). Continuing with her swift comments defending Milton, Margaret notes that the Gormans—their “nearest neighbours” in Helstone—“have been in trade just as much as . . . Milton-Northern people” (47). When Mrs. Hale scoffs even at that, Margaret relents that they “shall have little enough to do with [Milton people]” (47). These comments speaking favorably of Milton are not scripted by Mr. Hale but are Margaret’s pure invention in attempts to change Mrs. Hale’s attitude about the move. Though imperfect—since Milton certainly doesn’t have the best air quality, Milton neighbors will not be the same as the Gormans, and the Hales will inevitably interact with Milton people—Margaret’s comments are genuine attempts to alter her mother’s attitude. For Margaret, simply telling her mother about the move is not enough; Margaret wants also to mold her mother’s emotional response into an ideal, favorable one.

Not only does Margaret attempt to improve Mrs. Hale’s attitude about the move to Milton, but she also tries to improve her mother’s attitude about Mr. Hale’s behavior. Margaret admits that her father’s failure to tell Mrs. Hale about the move was “cowardly,” yet she cannot “bear to hear it blamed by her mother” (Gaskell 46). Her immediate attempts to assuage her mother are to remove the “blame” Mrs. Hale associates with Mr. Hale’s cowardice. Even though Margaret has only had a few days to swallow the shock of her father’s dishonesty, she pushes aside her feelings to focus her efforts solely on changing her mother’s attitude about his behavior. At the first detection of her mother’s “jealousy” and ill feelings, Margaret exclaims, “‘Poor, papa!’—trying to divert her mother’s thoughts into compassionate sympathy for all her father had gone through” (46). Though Margaret’s actions and words here ultimately serve her father in trying to get his wife to view the move and his character with more “compassionate sympathy,” Margaret herself assigns the agenda of changing her mother’s attitude to the original task. Margaret herself cannot “bear to hear [her father] blamed,” so she sets out to change her mother’s attitude towards Mr. Hale to something she *can* bear. Consequently, Margaret is not a mere puppet, acting out exactly what her father envisions as he hides behind the curtains. Instead, Margaret herself moves some of the strings, deciding how exactly to carry out the will of others with her own flair.

Attempting to appease Mary’s will to see Bessy’s dead body, Margaret also tries to change Nicholas Higgins’s attitude about his daughter’s death in the process. Immediately after seeing Bessy’s body, Margaret feels that she has “no

business being there” in the midst of such a serious family tragedy since she has only recently met Bessy and her family (Gaskell 215). Yet Margaret takes it upon herself to prevent Higgins from going out and drinking, “[standing] in the doorway, silent yet commanding” (217). Although Margaret is neither an actual relative nor a close friend of Higgins, she decides it is her “business” to take command in the doorway of his own household. By doing so, Margaret attempts to usurp the power of Mary Higgins, the remaining daughter of the household, but also of Nicholas Higgins himself, the patriarch who should ultimately control the home during the Victorian period. Going even further than just silent efforts, Margaret struggles aloud to change Higgins’s despondent attitude about Bessy’s death, insisting to Higgins that Bessy has passed on to “the life hidden with God” that Higgins “should have heard her speak of” during her lifetime (218). Here Margaret justifies her attempts to change Higgins’s negative attitude by implying that she knew Bessy better than her own father. Because Margaret knows things Bessy believed that Higgins “should have heard” as her father, Margaret subtly suggests her authority and responsibility to change Higgins’s attitude.

Margaret oversteps her bounds after yet another death by trying to change the Boucher children’s attitudes after their father’s suicide. Disheartened by Mrs. Boucher’s “selfish requirement of sympathy” from her children, Margaret tries to “turn their thoughts in some other direction; on what they [can] do for mother” rather than just mourning and being horrified by their father’s lifeless body (Gaskell 294). The main attitude Margaret is truly opposed to in this situation is selfishness—particularly Mrs. Boucher’s—which aligns with Margaret’s other opinions about “negative” or cynical attitudes like her mother’s or Nicholas Higgins’s. However, what Margaret fails to recognize here—as Kathleen R. Steele points out—is that Mrs. Boucher “loses the identities . . . of wife *and* mother” because her children are taken away from her following her husband’s suicide (26, emphasis added). Thus, left alone with no husband or children to immediately care for, Mrs. Boucher has no one else to mourn but herself, logically leading to what Margaret concludes are selfish attitudes. Surprisingly, Margaret does not take it upon herself to change Mrs. Boucher’s selfish attitude. Her solution is instead to tangentially root out any selfish, self-sympathizing attitudes in the Boucher children, urging them to serve their mother instead of wallow in grief. Though Margaret doesn’t approach the issue by changing Mrs. Boucher’s perspective, she still attempts to change the overarching problematic attitude of selfishness.

Margaret uses a more direct approach of changing others' responses to problems when she confronts the angry rioters outside of Mr. Thornton's house. She implores them, "Oh, do not use violence! He is one man, and you are many" (Gaskell 176). Margaret's intervention in this situation is neither proposed nor welcomed by Mr. Thornton. But even after Mr. Thornton commands Margaret to "go away" since the impending riot is "no place for [her]," she turns defiantly towards the mob of men, reiterating, "For God's sake! do not damage your cause by this violence" (177). Neither Mr. Thornton nor the rioters want Margaret there, but she insists that it is her "place" to change the rioters' minds so they will abandon violence. The way Margaret words her plea shows that her endeavor to change the rioters' violent attitudes is actually an attempt to change their minds about their cause. She doesn't want violence to "damage [their] cause," meaning that she doesn't want violent measures sabotaging their chances of higher wages and better working conditions. Instead, Margaret urges the rioters to change their attitudes towards striking and pick a more peaceful and effective method of voicing their concerns.

Margaret's Failure

Attempting to be a peacemaker in both her society and interpersonal relationships, Margaret puts considerable extra effort into fulfilling her personally added responsibility of changing people's attitudes but fails nearly every time, rendering her labors conventionally useless. Mrs. Hale, for example, immediately rips apart Margaret's quickly fabricated attempt to ease her aversion to Milton. In response to Margaret's optimistic comments about Milton air, Mrs. Hale scoffs, "You can't think the smoky air of a manufacturing town . . . would be better than [Helstone] air, which is pure and sweet" (Gaskell 46). Mrs. Hale has a more realistic and informed perspective on Milton air, pragmatically noting that its factories result in "smoky air," so her unchanged attitude towards the move is understandable. Similarly, in response to Margaret's remark about their Helstone neighbors, the Gormans, Mrs. Hale notes that they were "brought into some kind of intercourse" with "half the gentry of the county," which is not at all the kind of relationship Milton "factory people" have with gentry because of their lower-class work (47). Margaret's attempts to change her mother's mind about Milton are unsuccessful because she uses unsound logic. Instead of focusing her remarks on actually appealing or true elements of the manufacturing

town, Margaret chooses to fabricate her own image of Milton using assumptions and roundabout reasoning.

Margaret's underlying endeavor to remove Mrs. Hale's anger towards her husband for not telling her about the move likewise fails, proving Margaret is powerless to change even relational attitudes within her own family. After talking with Mrs. Hale, Margaret notes her lingering "jealous annoyance" for the rest of the day (Gaskell 48). This ill feeling eventually explodes with Mrs. Hale "[throwing] herself on [Mr. Hale's] breast, crying out:—'Oh! Richard, Richard, you should have told me sooner!'" (48). Though several of Margaret's main personal objectives include mitigating Mrs. Hale's anger towards and assignment of blame on Mr. Hale, Mrs. Hale's extremely negative emotions—"jealous annoyance," "[throwing] herself on [Mr. Hale]," and "crying out"—following their conversation indicate Margaret's failure in those aims. Mrs. Hale's articulation of what Mr. Hale "should have" done also suggests that she blames him for not adequately fulfilling his duty as her husband. All Margaret truly accomplishes through talking with her mother is the original task—informing her about the move. Though Margaret wishes to change her mother's negative attitude towards her father, this attitude cannot be altered because it deals with Mrs. Hale's identity as a wife. Mrs. Hale's "emotional expression of [her discontent] is not irrational," as Steele points out, because it indicates how she has "lost her place as her husband's confidante" (27). This betrayal shakes her standing as a wife and "confidante," making it too big a problem for Margaret to fix on her own. Thus, Margaret's personal plans of changing Mrs. Hale's attitude about Milton or Mr. Hale and his failure to tell her himself do not come into fruition despite her innovative efforts.

Despite Margaret's blatant blunder so early on, she chooses not to view her conversation with Mrs. Hale as a failure, persevering in trying to change deeper grievances like Higgins's despair over Bessy's death. Though Margaret uses more informed reasoning to change Higgins's attitude, she is still unsuccessful. After Margaret notes that Bessy often talked about God and heaven, proposing that she has now gone on there, Higgins silently disagrees, "[shaking] his head" (Gaskell 218). Margaret's talk of heaven is heartfelt, meaning to bring comfort to Higgins, but he cannot change his beliefs or even bring himself to explain aloud why he disagrees with Margaret's sentiments. Higgins silently sticks instead to believing only in "what [he] see[s], and no more," a sentiment he had shared with Margaret during one of their first conversations with each other (91). Higgins chooses to make that sentiment explicitly clear to Margaret during

one of their first encounters, revealing that it is a well-known and core belief of his. Knowing this, Margaret still attempts to comfort him after Bessy's death using doctrine that he doesn't believe in. However bold Margaret is in thinking she can change one of Higgins's fundamental beliefs, Higgins refuses to change his disbelief in deity and spirituality even during an unsteady time of his life.

When dealing with the Boucher family following Boucher's suicide, Margaret is even worse at providing help since she fails to tell Mrs. Boucher entirely about the suicide. Though Margaret was brave enough to volunteer herself for the unwanted task, she admits that she "could not tell her all at once" because Mrs. Boucher fainted (Gaskell 292). Here, Margaret herself points out her obvious failure of the task she took up but was obliged to do because of social pressures. Margaret further acknowledges her inadequacy and inability to fulfill the responsibility when the neighbor asks if either Margaret or her father should continue telling Mrs. Boucher about the suicide once she wakes, insisting, "No; you, you" (292). In Margaret's reply, she pushes the responsibility to the neighbor. Not only does Margaret emphasize that "no," she herself cannot tell Mrs. Boucher more about the suicide, but she also articulates that it must be the neighbor to do so, by saying "you" twice. Margaret fails at this responsibility even though no one forced her into it in the first place.

Margaret is partially successful in fulfilling her second self-assigned responsibility at the Boucher household—wanting to get rid of selfishness—but she fails to completely eradicate that attitude within the family. Margaret combats selfishness in the Boucher children, seeing some success as they each use "their little duties . . . to do something that [Margaret] suggested" to help their mother (Gaskell 294). The ultimate culprit and perpetuator of selfishness in this situation, however, is not the children but Mrs. Boucher herself who "could only look upon [her husband's suicide] as it affected herself" (294). Mrs. Boucher continues with this unchanging selfish attitude—the only attitude she "can" have, according to Gaskell—even after her children start selflessly serving her through "little duties" around the house. Therefore, though Margaret may think she is rooting out selfishness by shifting the Boucher children's perspectives, Mrs. Boucher's overpowering selfishness runs rampant in the background. The Boucher children's selfishness originally began in response to their mother's selfishness, so it is likely that selfish attitudes will continue to prevail in the Boucher household as long as Mrs. Boucher's tendencies remain unchanged. In targeting the children's negative attitudes, Margaret fails to reach the true source of selfishness.

Margaret's most obvious failure to change others' perspectives is when she explicitly states her personal agenda to stop the rioters' violence and instantaneously falls short of her goal. In this instance outside Mr. Thornton's house, Margaret clearly states that the rioters should not use violence to express the gravity of their message and concerns. However, "her words die . . . away, for there [is] no tone in her voice; it [is] but a hoarse whisper" (Gaskell 176). Furthermore, immediately after her reasoning, Margaret is hit by a "sharp pebble" that instantly leaves her incapacitated, lying "like one dead on Mr. Thornton's shoulder" (177). Despite her immense bravery to willingly step in between the mob of angry men and Mr. Thornton, Margaret's valor does not change the fact that she is powerless to ultimately shift the rioters' minds from violence. Her plea for nonviolence and changed attitudes has barely escaped her lips when the violence resumes, easily taking her out. Margaret's strength of spirit is overwhelmed by her weakness of body: her words "die," her voice is "but a hoarse whisper," and her body succumbs to one "pebble." Her physical frailties result in her ending up "like one dead," completely incapable of effecting any change from an unconscious state. In this scene, Gaskell suggests that every part of Margaret—from her words to her physical body—is powerless to change the deep-rooted attitudes of others.

Margaret's Success Despite Failure

Margaret is indeed powerless to changing attitudes no matter what verbal or physical means she uses, but she successfully gains power through her attempts to do so. Because her agency to "act for herself" in choosing whether or not she will take on these undesirable tasks is revoked, Margaret instead uses her "influence" to "act upon others," according to Sarah Dredge (87). Essentially, Margaret gains power in unlikely ways by choosing to exercise her agency within the bounds of undesirable tasks; she makes the most of poor situations. As Jessie Reeder correctly observes, there needs to be a "move away from the restrictive category of agency/nonagency" (par. 5). Margaret cannot be classified simply as an agent or a non-agent because she doesn't choose originally to do the tasks unloaded on her, but she does choose to try to change attitudes in the process. Her attempts to change deep-rooted attitudes is a reappropriation of emotional

labor to serve her own needs of controlling undesirable situations. Through Margaret, Gaskell proves that conventional failure does not always equate with overall failure; there can be personal success in conventional failure.

When tasked with telling her mother about their move to Milton, Margaret severely fails at her self-assigned responsibilities of helping Mrs. Hale have a positive attitude about Milton and Mr. Hale. However, Margaret tries anyways because “she knew” that her father’s conduct “had originated in a tenderness for her, which might be cowardly, but was not unfeeling” (Gaskell 46). Margaret is personally invested in her parents’ relationship with one another, so she decides to use her advantage—her knowledge that her father is acting out of “tenderness,” “cowardly, but . . . not unfeeling”—to try to sway Mrs. Hale’s attitude. Margaret’s knowledge of her father’s intentions grants her power to attempt to direct the conversation and its outcomes. Ultimately, Margaret doesn’t succeed in helping her mother welcome the move to Milton, but Margaret controls how she presents the move.

At the Higgins household, Margaret uses her knowledge of their family to assert control by inserting herself further into the private familial grieving that is initially very uncomfortable for her to intrude on. She stands in the Higgins’s doorway, “silent yet commanding” as Higgins “acknowledge[s] her power” when she won’t move to let him go out to drink (Gaskell 217). Because of her own actions, Margaret goes from being a pawn going to see Bessy’s dead body against her own will to a “commanding” force whose silent power demands to be acknowledged by even a grieving patriarch in his own home. Margaret hungers after this silent yet effective power, desperately scheming “what . . . she [could] do next” to keep command of the situation (217). Though Margaret is initially very reluctant to visit Bessy’s dead body, she relishes in feeling like she decides what will happen next as she attempts to assuage Nicholas Higgins’s attitude towards Bessy’s death.

Margaret is only tasked with telling Mrs. Boucher her husband has committed suicide, but she takes control yet again in this situation of familial death by trying to manipulate the Boucher family’s emotions. Margaret could have stopped at breaking the news to Mrs. Boucher, but she didn’t want to do that in the first place, so that would have made this task very undesirable. Furthermore, Margaret notes another unpleasant aspect of this situation: it is “unsatisfactory to see how completely [Mrs. Boucher’s] thoughts [are] turned upon herself” (Gaskell 293). Not only is Margaret unsatisfied with the original task of breaking the news, but she is also unsatisfied with the selfishness prevailing in this

situation. Margaret ultimately fails to eliminate Mrs. Boucher's selfishness, but Margaret meets her own needs in the situation through influencing the Boucher children to perform more generous and serving acts. In doing so, Margaret is "more successful than Mr. Hale"—who attempts to deal with Mrs. Boucher's faith crisis and selfishness head-on—"in her efforts" (294). "Her efforts," the things Margaret chooses to do completely of her free will, are what succeed and provide her with slight control over the chaotic situation.

Though Margaret is only one woman feeble enough to be taken out by a pebble against an entire mob of men during the riot scene, she gains control of the situation by choosing to intervene and attempting to change violent attitudes. Margaret is urged to act by her femininity, believing she can "exercise moral power" over the angry men, as Dredge puts it (87). For a moment, Margaret's moral power proves very effective as "her eyes smit[e]" the angry rioters "with flaming arrows of reproach," causing the "clogs . . . [to be] arrested in the hands that held them" (Gaskell 176). Margaret's feminine morality is so influential that it takes only a single look from her smiting eyes to make the rioters hesitate in their violence. Even before speaking to the mob, Margaret commands their attention and halts their violent attitudes using her unspoken feminine influence. Without words, Margaret is powerful enough to hold off dozens of men who are physically stronger than her. Despite her early success in pausing the violence, Margaret stands her ground longer at the riot. Although Margaret's physical capacity to help Mr. Thornton is questionable, she adamantly believes that Mr. Thornton "did not see what [she] saw," so her added perspective and presence are invaluable (177). Even if Mr. Thornton might not buy this reasoning, Margaret believes it herself. By simply believing she has the power to help, Margaret increases her actual power over the situation.

Conclusion

Whether or not Margaret's power is only self-perceived or accepted by other characters in and readers of *North and South*, her failed attempts to change others' attitudes redefines the meaning of success. Margaret fits the mold of Victorian women doing emotional labor and being tasked with unwanted responsibilities, but she subtly reappropriates these responsibilities by adding her own agenda. In addition to overcoming her obvious "shrinking" from and initial abhorrence of these requested tasks to fulfill them properly, Margaret

attempts to change people's hearts and minds—their very ingrained attitudes—in the process. Margaret is essentially adding extra emotional labor, something that she should be adept at, to these laborious tasks. Her added extra emotional labor, however, is included of her own free will in efforts to better control the situations she is placed in. Margaret, then, despite her many failures—including continued rocky relationships between her parents, botched comfort for relatives of deceased persons, and physical injury and fainting from a pebble—still comes out victorious. She is the author of her own fate and in control, at least, of what she chooses to do in undesirable situations—a fortune not even Gaskell was privileged to have as the author of Margaret's story.

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