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# LITERARY GEOGRAPHIES

## *North and South* and the Sea: Geography, Labour, and ‘Condition of England’ Fiction

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**Abstract:**

This article explores the literary geographies through which Elizabeth Gaskell negotiates ethical and social questions in *North and South* (1854-55). Specifically, it examines the novel’s (dis)connecting of maritime and urban spaces, characters, concerns, and languages, as well as how gendered and class identities are forged within these spheres. The industrial-dispute plot of *North and South* is mirrored, in complex ways, by the sub-plot concerning Frederick Hale’s mutiny on the *Orion*. Heroic figures succeed by applying the lessons of seafaring craft which the novel’s naval personnel seem unable to compute, or to bring to bear upon the plot. The protagonist Margaret Hale’s absorption of these heroic traits also is complicated by the novel’s conception of the gendered limitations of a female protagonist. By focusing on the novel’s ambivalent explorations of seafaring and its relevance to life on dry land, this article reveals the occlusion of maritime work from the narrative economies that formulated the Victorian ‘condition of England’. It presents a complex case study of how the Victorian realist novel assigns weight and importance to certain terrestrial contexts of labour over maritime ones.

**Keywords:** *North and South*; Elizabeth Gaskell; the sea; condition of England; mutiny.

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### The Introduction: From Ship to Shore

‘Oh, Bessy, I loved the home we have left so dearly! I wish you could see it. I cannot tell you half its beauty... [T]here are billowy ferns—whole stretches of fern; some in the green shadow; some with long streaks of golden sunlight lying on them—just like the sea.’

‘I have never seen the sea,’ murmured Bessy. ‘But go on.’ (Gaskell 1854-55: 116-17)

The confusion caused by Margaret Hale’s evocation of the sea in describing her rural home to the mill-worker’s daughter, Bessy Higgins, in Chapter XIII of Elizabeth Gaskell’s *North and South* (1854-55), is temporary and seemingly inconsequential, but resonant. As with the novel’s title, Margaret’s saltwater simile tells of the mental distances she will travel to comprehend the society that she encounters in the industrial town, Milton-Northern, a proxy for Manchester. Hilary M. Schor explains that the passage demonstrates how ‘even the metaphors we most take for granted (“like the sea”) are class- and geography-bound; to a reader dying in a Manchester slum, nothing can ever be like the sea; she can never quite “see” what Margaret does’ (1992: 137). Margaret’s comparison of the terrestrial to the aquatic also has more specific connotations. Her conversation with Bessy enacts in miniature the enunciation of urban industrialisation in maritime terms that is a recurring, productive, and problematic tension in *North and South*’s locating of the ‘condition of England’.

*North and South* is the story of Margaret Hale, a young woman who travels with her parents from her rural southern home to the rapidly industrialising north of England. In her encounters with the labouring classes she develops sympathies that test an emerging relationship with the proprietor of a mill, John Thornton. In a tale of urban labour unrest, the novel plots Margaret’s maturation. Or is that the story of *North and South*? This conventional retelling of the plot focuses on metropolitan incidents at the expense of a maritime subplot which is also concerned with labour exploitation. It follows the logic of the novel itself, and much of its criticism, in foregrounding one set of labour relations at the expense of the other. As Edward W. Said contends, however, literary critics of the domestic novel must show ‘awareness both of the metropolitan history that is narrated and of those other histories against which (and together with which) the dominating discourse acts’ (1994: 59). To literary geographers, the following analysis is intended to provide, in a close analysis of Gaskell’s novel, which draws upon literary theories of narrative in the novel form, a detailed case study of the aesthetic and formal processes through which work and unrest at sea was and is imagined as remote, intangible – *de-territorialized* in many senses beyond the literal – despite what scholars of labour history have identified as the centrality of maritime labour in global capitalism and its resistance (Rediker 1987; Sekula 2002; Featherstone 2012; Campling and Colás 2021). The ‘condition-of-England question’ that *North and South* famously helps articulate was itself conditioned by saltwater capitalism, yet that labour is marginalised by the novel. By reading against its grain, this essay locates in *North and South* an alternative story about what, following David Featherstone (2012: 9), we might term the ‘hidden geographies’ of maritime work from the narrative economies that formulated the ‘condition of England’.

The discussion of labour in *North and South* begins at sea. The mutiny that Margaret's brother Frederick Hale leads on HMS *Russell*,<sup>1</sup> after Captain Reid's obsessive and violent exercising of his crew leads to the accidental death of a sailor, is introduced in the second chapter. Not until Chapter IV does Mr. Hale announce his decision to renounce the church and move his family to Milton—a choice which Margaret immediately assumes is linked to Frederick's court-martial and subsequent exile from England. The early, integral introduction of Frederick undermines Edgar Wright's assessment of his role as 'pure plot-spinning' (1965: 24). Rather, it is possible to follow the ship-to-shore course of *North and South's* discussion of labour, and to emphasise the importance of the maritime world in shaping this fiction, even as it ultimately and ostensibly prioritises metropolitan society. While studies by Stefanie Markovits (2005) and Julia Sun-Joo Lee (2010) take comparable approaches to mine in re-situating *North and South* in the contexts of the Crimean War and transatlantic slavery, respectively, here I offer a more thorough-going reassessment of the novel's structural, thematic, and ideological derivation from the sea adventure genres that Frederick represents, and I uncover the maritime literary geographies that underpin this novel. I begin with Frederick, considering how his characterisation and role in the plot establish a 'moral compass' against which the actions of the domestically situated characters are tested. Crucial to my argument is Frederick's status as an officer rather than a common seaman. This class positioning leads Gaskell to represent Frederick's mutiny not in the melodramatic tradition of sailors' revolts, as is evident in Gaskell's novel of 1848, *Mary Barton* (Burroughs 2016), but as an act of romantic self-realisation. His is a philosophical rebellion rather than one motivated by material needs. Frederick is in consequence excommunicated from the plot as it valorises the kinds of practical and public resourcefulness displayed by metropolitan figures such as Thornton, Higgins, and Margaret. As I show in the second half of the essay, drawing upon the work of Margaret Cohen, heroic figures succeed by applying the lessons of seafaring craft which the novel's naval personnel seem unable to compute, though Margaret Hale's absorption of these heroic traits is complicated by the novel's conception of the gendered limitations of a female protagonist.

### **An Officer, a Gentleman, and a Mutineer**

The mutiny plot is undeniably marginal in *North and South*. Frederick's portion of 'character-space', to use the terms of Alex Woloch (2003), is small compared to that of his sister or the other central actors in the mill-workers' strike. This imbalance only intensifies as the narrative works towards its resolution, in which Frederick is strikingly absent, remaining in exile. The novel prioritises land, not sea: narrative time and space centralise the strike, which occurs in the diegetic 'present', whereas the mutiny is related in retrospect and largely through textual fragments and second-hand opinions. Even though the mutiny has clear consequences for the would-be heroine, Margaret, the strike calls upon her to *act* the heroine. As a result of these narrative allocations, it is commonplace for readers to view the mutiny not as one of the novel's metonymic subjects in its own right but as a metaphor, or a kind of mirror against which the ethical actions of other characters are reflected and evaluated (Stoneman 1987: 58; Bonaparte 1992: 173-75; Uglow 1993: 377-79). True as

these readings are to the prioritisation of metropolitan concerns in Gaskell's novel, they typify how in literary studies events at sea are read not on their own terms but allegorically in their relation to processes on dry land (Cohen 2010: 14). Instead, I want to consider how the narrative function of naval mutiny as a subplot and metaphor – a demotion, at least within the narrative economies of the mid-nineteenth century realist novel that privileges metonymic description – both shapes and is conditioned by the representational modes in terms of which the sailor is depicted. In doing so, my analysis shares in and extends Elaine Freedgood's (2022: 34-52) recognition of romanticisation as a key means by which the violence and exploitation of labour at sea was never quite seen as real once the realism of terrestrial novels found favour.

Where critics have focused on the mutiny subplot of *North and South*, they disagree as to whether the insurrection on the *Russell* either cautions against or validates the responses to the labour exploitation that threatens to embroil Milton. For Deborah Denenholz Morse, Frederick's fiery response to the overbearing captain is irresponsible, in contrast to Margaret's more measured handling of the Milton uprising (2011: 130; see Bodenheimer 1988: 60). In contrast, Michael D. Lewis concludes that Gaskell blames not Frederick but the unbending naval penal codes that guarantee the execution of mutineers regardless of circumstance. Lewis situates *North and South* in contemporary press and parliamentary debates on cruelty in the navy to argue for the 'radicalism and relevance' of the mutiny as a device through which Gaskell posits 'her belief in the necessity of revolt after all other actions have failed' (2010: 90-107). Indeed, by situating Gaskell's work among criticisms of military despotism in liberal commentaries by the likes of J.S. Mill and Mary Howitt, of which Gaskell would have been aware, it becomes untenable to regard Frederick's mutiny on HMS *Russell* as an anachronism, or a safely remote topic, especially since similar controversies were raised in regard of the war in the Crimea, during which *North and South* was published (Horne 1846; Howitt 1847; Horne 1848; Mineka 1944: 266-67, 345-47; Markovits 2005).

In his comment that '[t]he mutiny cannot be read as the action of an impassioned individual but as a collective action born of universal frustration' (2010: 99), however, Lewis overlooks two interlinked aspects complicating both the 'relevance' and the 'radicalism' of the novel's representation of mutiny: class, and the romantic depiction of the officer-mutineer. Frederick is not a common seaman, but a lieutenant. He does not represent a 'universal frustration' firstly because the one common seaman characterised in the narrative, Leonards, remains loyal to Captain Reid, and secondly because as an officer Frederick's motives for, and perspective on, mutiny are different than those who follow his lead. 'It was not for himself, or his own injuries, he rebelled', his mother testifies, 'but he would speak his mind to Captain Reid... and you see, most of the sailors stuck by Frederick' (Gaskell 1854-55: 124, 126). His primary and express motivation is the protection of others from the physical violence against which, as an officer, he is almost certainly protected. It is an impressive show of solidarity, but he is also motivated by personal revenge, having been the victim of Reid's petty cruelties.

Margaret eloquently elaborates upon her mother's point: 'Loyalty and obedience to wisdom and justice are fine; but it is finer to defy arbitrary power, unjustly and cruelly used—not on behalf of ourselves, but on behalf of others more helpless' (Gaskell 1854-

55: 127; see 307). Margaret's explanation of Frederick's actions is crucial to understanding the representation and narrative function of naval insurrection in *North and South*. Jenny Uglow calls these words of Margaret's 'the central belief of the novel' (1993: 379). They provide the moral compass with which the reader is steered through the personal and social quandaries raised in the context of the strike in Milton, most apparently in Margaret's lie to the police to protect her brother. As I proceed to detail, Frederick's pursuer, Leonards, and the rebellious Milton worker, Boucher, show the dangers of loyalty to allegedly unjust institutions, in the naval ship and the trade union, respectively. The millworker Nicholas Higgins, on the other hand, is obedient to John Thornton once the manufacturer displays the wisdom and justice of a good captain. As such, Margaret's interpretation highlights how central Frederick's mutiny is to the novel. Yet Frederick's specific positioning as an officer-mutineer enables Margaret's construal of his character. The key point about Margaret's words is that they apply to both masters and workers, but they draw a clear line between the values and motivations of the two groups: once the masters, such as Frederick and Thornton, have displayed wisdom and justice, then it is 'finer' for workers to show 'loyalty' and 'obedience' toward them.

If Margaret's words frame Frederick's rebellion as a high-minded stance against oppression, then they are supported by another element of his representation, one which is neglected in recent discussions of the mutiny in *North and South*: the representational mode in which Frederick is depicted. Mutiny was historically depicted in melodramatic terms by sailors and supporters of the rebellious 'Jack Tar' figure (Burroughs 2016), but when it came to be absorbed into Romantic-era literature then this most incendiary of topics took on different properties. Byron's 'The Island, or Christian and His Comrades' (1823), for example, casts Fletcher Christian as a tragic hero, doomed by his pursuit of individual liberty. Byron elevates the act of mutiny while avoiding straightforward approval of it (Fulford 2003-04). Douglas Jerrold (n.d.), who knew 'The Island' well, having adapted it for the stage in the 1820s, sees the Nore agitator Richard Parker similarly, mixing melodrama and tragedy to conjure a tormented soul fated to seek personal revenge on the officers who have mistreated him in *The Mutiny at the Nore* (first performed 1830). Jerrold was responding in part to the conservative novels of Captain Marryat, in which mutiny becomes associated with the worst aspects of naval society. In Marryat's fictionalised account of the Nore mutiny of 1797 in *The King's Own* (1830), the mutineers are infantilised: they are said to have been visited by '[t]he same feeling which so powerfully affects the truant schoolboy—who, aware of his offence, and dreading the punishment in perspective, can scarce enjoy the rapture of momentary emancipation' (11). Comparably, the rebels in Marryat's picaresque *Mr Midshipman Easy* (1836), having been driven simply by 'the sensual gratification of intemperance' (122), are easily outwitted by the novel's sailor-heroes. Like Byron, Marryat reserves some sympathy for the Nore's déclassé ringleader, Edward Peters, 'a man of talent and education' (1830: 2) whose rebellion is regarded as an understandable reaction to severe and unjust corporal punishment. Yet in one melodramatic tableau symbolising his lack of moral foresight Peters nearly fires a cannon at his own son. Once captured, moreover, Peters regrets his actions and sees justice in his execution. His moral teleology depends upon acknowledgment of his crime. The real leader of the mutiny, Parker, is denied even this character development by Marryat: he, 'like a meteor darting

through the firmament, sprang from nothing, coruscated, dazzled, and disappeared' (7). Romanticisation of mutinous feelings is legitimated by the class of the officer-mutineer. Understanding Peters as 'a man of talent and education' allows Marryat to see his rebellion as a tragic fall. In Byron, Christian's striving 'to be/In life or death, the fearless and the free' (1823, 3, vi: 163-64) is the condition of the mutineer 'of a higher order' (139), and it sets him apart from his accomplices, such as the common seamen Ben Bunting and Jack Skyscape. The very names of these characters, stemming from nautical melodrama, signal their inferiority, although they conform to positive stereotypes of the common seaman or 'Jack Tar', embodying bravery, loyalty, and prowess.

In *North and South*, Gaskell draws upon the romantic model of the mutineer to depict Frederick, so that his uprising is narrated as an act of individual and intuitive self-realisation. Gaskell thereby disassociates Frederick's mutiny from the materially compelled resistance of the mill-workers of Milton. As the novel is diverted from maritime to urban industrial conditions, problems of labour in these two spheres take on different narrative properties, with the latter assuming the central and defining ground as 'the condition of England'. In consequence, Frederick's mutiny appears 'unrealistic and outmoded' in contrast to 'the modern world of the strike' (Markovits 2005: 480). The novel thereby narrates the 'uneven geographies' of labour exploitation and resistance (Featherstone 2012: 62).

As Markovits notes, Frederick's romanticisation is achieved in part through chapter epigraphs (2005: 480). Chapter XIV, 'The Mutiny', in which Mrs Hale and Margaret discuss Frederick's past, is headed by an epigraph from Southey's 'The Sailor's Mother' (1798; 1823). In Southey's poem, the mother laments that she will never see her son again, considering his conscription to the navy for poaching a fair punishment of him but a cruel one of her. The poem explores a theme of *North and South*, and many of Gaskell's other novels: the trials of men's lives at sea as they impact upon mothers, sisters, wives, and wives-to-be left at home. Chapter XXV of *North and South*, 'Frederick', is prefaced by lines from Byron's 'The Island':

Revenge may have her own;  
Roused discipline aloud proclaims their cause,  
And injured navies urge their broken laws. (Byron 1823, 1, x, 351; 234)

According to Sarah Wootton, this epigraph 'strenuously supports' the mutiny and the strike despite the mitigating mention of 'discipline' and 'the semantic indeterminacy' (2008: 30). In fact, these lines, which foresee the capture and execution of the mutineers, are somewhat equivocal choices on Gaskell's part. Insofar as they do support mutiny, they do so by internalising and intellectualising Frederick's defiance by associating it with Christian's, as an expression of the romantic imagination, whitewashing it of the material motives attributed to mutineers by the likes of Marryat, but which will be crucial to the subsequent labour revolt in *North and South*.

Besides the chapter headings, Margaret is key in the representation of Frederick's rebellion. She provides the most articulate philosophical defences of his actions. Also significant is her recollection of childhood memories of Frederick 'being in some great

disgrace ... for stealing apples. We had plenty of trees of our own – trees loaded with them; but some one had told you that stolen fruit tasted sweetest, which you took *au pied de la lettre*, and off you went a-robbing' (Gaskell 1854-55: 303). Juicy with Edenic imagery, the tale explains the mutiny in transcendent, tragic terms. In Margaret's interpretation, mutiny becomes what W.H. Auden calls 'a symbol of the original rebellion of Lucifer and of Adam, the refusal to accept finitude and dependence' (1950: 64). Conjoining two of Frederick's quite disparate literary precursors, the apple-stealing anecdote at once connects to the Edenic imagery of Byron's 'The Island', and to the domestic milieu that provides the pathos of Southey's 'The Sailor's Mother' (1798; 1823).

Further, Frederick is not only the Byronic mutineer; he also comes to resemble another Romantic figure, the Byronic pirate. In his validation of self-destructive rebellion against institutionalised authority, Frederick, like Christian, aligns with what Wim Tigges in his study of the Byronic hero more precisely refers to as the 'pirate chief': 'larger than life, demon-driven, fatal to himself and to others, an angry rebel against all authority except his own, an individualist, undaunted, but with the polished manners of an aristocrat or "grand seigneur", albeit a Satanic one'. Referring to Thorslev's taxonomy of the Byronic hero, Tigges sees the pirate chief as a mixture of the Gothic Villain and the Noble Outlaw (2003: 1156). Byron is crucial to the 'the re-imagining of the pirate as a gentleman with interior, hidden treasure' (Lutz 2011: 37). By standing voluntarily apart from polite society, the Byronic pirate questioned social norms and the political and economic systems that underlay them (Harty 2011). Nonetheless, this pirate is wedded to no overt political cause of his own. Embodying instead 'the existential pursuit of freedom', he represents the 'more elevated strivings of the modern spirit' (Cohen 2010: 113; see 118).

Mrs. Hale informs her daughter that after Frederick seized the *Russell*, and despatched Reid and his followers in a boat, the authorities 'supposed' him 'to be a pirate' (Gaskell 1854-55: 125). The mother's aversion to this idea is evident, and yet Frederick is cleansed of its negative connotations as he takes on the properties of the 'pirate chief'. While the novel makes no suggestion that Frederick moves into illegitimate business after leaving the navy, he relocates to Iberian territories that were associated, in British writers' minds, with piracy, primarily through piracy's complex legal relation to slave-trading, in which many Spanish, Portuguese, and South American merchants persisted, in defiance of British naval and diplomatic opposition to it, in the 1830s and 1840s. Perhaps it is this persistence in the face of British imperial might that encouraged some authors, particularly those critical of Britain's anti-slavery policies, to pen admiring depictions of Iberian pirates and slave-traders as Byronic rebels (Scott 1836; Kingston 1847; Anon, 'Short Notice' 1847-48). In a fleeting reference, *North and South* possibly joins other texts published in Charles Dickens's *Household Words* in the 1850s in criticising the navy's anti-slave-trade cruisers: the futility of the African Squadron is hinted at as Reid's overzealousness is explained by his having previously 'been nearly three years on the station, with nothing to do but keep slavers off, and work [his] men' (Gaskell 1854-55: 124-25).

When first introduced in the narrative Frederick is thought to be in 'Rio', having served in the 'Spanish army'. He is later situated in Spain, in or near Cadiz, where he says he has 'credit'. After returning to England he gives his family 'vivid, graphic, rattling accounts of the wild life he had led in Mexico, South America, and elsewhere' (Gaskell



1854-55: 19-20, 40, 127, 295, 296). Frederick's is an all-encompassing embrace of the land in which he is exiled. He marries Dolores Barbour, the eighteen-year-old daughter of the merchant in whose business he finds employment. He even adopts Catholicism (409-10, 484). After their marriage Dolores and Frederick write a letter to the other Hales, she in Spanish-English 'as was but natural, and he with little turns and inversions of words, which proved how far the idioms of his bride's country were infecting him' (409). This use of 'natural' and 'infecting' queries the appropriateness of Frederick's conversion, and yet the cultural transformation of Frederick takes place at the same time as a physical and psychological deracination which suggests his fitness for the stereotypically Iberian lifestyle (see Lee 2010). His 'delicate features' are said to be 'redeemed from effeminacy by the swarthy complexion, and his quick intensity of expression'. His countenance gives 'such an idea of latent passion, that it almost made [Margaret] afraid'. He is further reported to display 'the instantaneous ferocity of expression that comes over the countenances of all natives of wild or southern countries' and 'the violence of the impulsive nature' (Gaskell 1854-55: 293). Morse beholds these hints at violent passion as warnings against Frederick's ferocious temperament, which implicitly endorse Margaret's more measured response to violence (2011: 122). Certainly, the difference they forge between Frederick's 'southern' temperament and that developed by Margaret in her time in Milton advise that the meanings of the novel's title extend beyond the national horizon. But the more significant point is that these descriptions explain and apologise for Frederick's rebellion as the consequence of his romantic sensibility. As with Byron's Christian, Frederick can countenance 'no master save his mood' (Byron 1823: 1, ii: 38). In inviting these comparisons, the chapters describing Frederick transform his motives for mutiny from collective and material considerations to private and emotional ones, as if his mutiny has connected Frederick to inner, transcendent truths about his being. He is excused of his rebellion, since, as the expression of his 'latent passion', it is more intrinsic to his character than the duty required of him in the navy. In excusing Frederick, the novel also excuses itself from following up the questions of material conditions in the navy that are raised by his mutiny.

Byron's mutineers were 'Men without country, who, too long estranged,/Had found no native home, or found it changed' (1823: 1, ii: 29-30). The realisation of his 'too passionate' character likewise transforms Frederick's relation to his family and his homeland (Gaskell 1854-55: 125). When Frederick returns to Milton to visit his dying mother, his outpouring of grief eclipses that of his father and sister, and promises his reintegration in the domestic sphere. Like the Byronic mutineer and pirate, however, home has become alien to him. Or rather, as with the pirates in *The Corsair*, home is 'the glad waters of the dark blue sea' (1814, 1, i: 1). Quickly his strangeness becomes apparent: he paces the floor 'as if he were on the quarter-deck'. 'Wherever I feel water heaving under a plank,' he tells Margaret, 'there I feel at home' (Gaskell 1854-55: 295, 309). His wanderlust enables Frederick to reject identification with the nation that banishes him. When he learns that he has no hope of reprieve Frederick writes to Margaret a letter 'containing his renunciation of England as his country; he wished he could un-native himself, and declared he would not take his pardon if it were offered him, nor live in the country if he had permission to do so... In the next letter, Frederick spoke so joyfully of the future, that he

had no thought for the past' (409). He makes no further attempt to meet with Margaret; his exit from England is total.

Frederick goes pirate. He develops the extra-territorial consciousness ascribed to the seafaring outlaw in accounts ranging from Byron's poems to the historical research of Marcus Rediker. For Rediker, in the eighteenth century '[p]irates constructed a culture of masterless men... Beyond the church, beyond the family, beyond disciplinary labour, and using the sea to distance themselves from the powers of the state, they carried out a strange experiment' (1987: 286). Within British military contexts, Gillian Russell identifies the 'dislocating effect' of service (Russell 1995: 181-82). Isaac Land glosses official fears 'that sailors, rather than joining the nation-building project, could easily become emigrants or renegades; although most were born in Britain, they denaturalized themselves through exposure to sea breezes and foreignclimes. Underlying this, of course, was a presumption that a degree of rootedness was required in order to be truly national' (Land 2009: 161). Combining these insights with Gauri Viswanathan's (1998) study of the critical meanings of religious conversion, an alternative story suggests itself concerning Frederick's radical rejection of secular ideologies and national causes. However, the novel keeps these possibilities at a subtextual level. Instead, by romanticising Frederick's mutiny, the novel retreats from political questions about maritime labour. Crucially, Frederick's piracy is only a state of mind: in his exile he lives the genteel life that he might also have expected in England. The 'preux chevalier of a brother turned merchant, trader!', as the narrator, reporting Margaret's thoughts, notes (Gaskell 1854-55: 410). Whereas for other fictional sailors mutiny is the culmination of a lifelong disavowal of class privilege, for Frederick mutiny awakens aspects of his identity which are harmonious with privilege. It is telling that Frederick continues to receive financial help from his family as he prospers in business. His comfortable exile, comparable to the Edenic rewards of Byron's mutineers, contrasts the travails of Margaret, and, as I will later discuss, Margaret is more meaningfully altered by her brother's and her own encounters with maritime spaces.

### **The Other Face of Mutiny**

Even if Frederick must remain displaced in his defiance of the Admiralty courts, the novel sympathises with him as Margaret articulates the higher principles that led him to mutiny. To reinforce this point, the novel introduces, in Leonards, a figure whose failure – self-serving allegiance to Captain Reid's tyrannical power – is the opposite of Frederick's accomplishment. The less agreeable, material considerations of mutiny are projected away from Frederick, and onto Leonards, the common seaman who served under Frederick and remained loyal to Reid. In Leonards, the novel once again shows an ambivalent interest in maritime labour, complicatedly connecting it to the urban plot.

After the mutiny, to settle old scores and to claim the bounty on Frederick's head, Leonards tracks down Frederick in Milton. Both Frederick and Leonards had joined the navy after rebellious childhoods, and they served together not only on the passage that ends in mutiny but also on an earlier voyage under Reid. Leonards surfaces in Milton at around the same time as Frederick, and both depart from the narrative in the same scene at the train station in which Leonards suffers fatal injuries in a short skirmish with

Frederick. Their fates interlocking, Leonards is the dark double of Frederick, representing the moral corruption of one who is obedient to unjustly exercised authority for reasons of self-interest. Despite their similar beginnings, the two characters are opposites. The servant Dixon contrasts them as soon as Leonards is introduced in the narrative, and her descriptions of Leonards' 'ugly face' further distinguishes him from Frederick's 'swarthy' good looks (Gaskell 1854-55: 301).

Along with his avarice, Leonards' drunkenness associates him with the mutinous 'Jack Tars' appearing in other fictions such as Marryat's. Leonards' inebriation even exonerates Frederick from his part in Leonards' death: according to the policeman who interviews Margaret, the push Frederick gives him was exacerbated, 'the doctors say, by the presence of some internal complaint, and the man's own habit of drinking', a point confirmed by Thornton in his role as magistrate and later stressed by the narrator's assertion that only 'unwittingly and unwillingly' did Frederick have a hand in Leonards' demise (Gaskell 1854-55: 323, 340). Leonards is unusual among Gaskell's characters in suffering an entirely ignominious death. Even Boucher, whose self-interested spoiling of the Milton strike makes him Leonards' moral equivalent, receives some sympathy when he is found drowned (350). '[H]alf-mad with rage and pain', Leonards dies drunk and lamenting financial losses (324). As the magistrate overseeing the inquiry into his death, Thornton colludes with Margaret in concealing facts about its circumstances, and both Margaret's and Thornton's actions are represented as moral: the defiance of arbitrary authority in defence of the helpless Frederick. In Ch. XLVI, 'Once and Now', Margaret's actions at the train station are again worked over in detail, and pardoned, by the narrator.

The mutiny is at the root of these characters' oppositions. Frederick explains to Margaret that Leonards' loyalty to Reid is for unprincipled reasons of self-interest, or 'to curry favour' (Gaskell 1854-55: 302). Thus, having romanticised Frederick's rebellion, Gaskell assigns negative traits of a mutinous sailor to the non-insurrectionary Leonards. Leonards is the common seaman whose failure to mutiny, and subsequent attempts at capturing Frederick, stem from the weak character and mercenary, material wants from which Frederick is clearly disassociated but which were sometimes attributed to mutineers in nineteenth-century fictions. Whereas the novel explains Frederick's actions as the realisation of his *true* character – as in the anecdote involving apples plucked in Edenic innocence – Leonards' criminality, lacking intellectualisation, is the result of grubby self-interest. In terms of narrative function and representation Leonards compares to the more famous figure of Orlick in Dickens's *Great Expectations* (1861), Pip's 'distorted and darkened mirror-image' (Moynahan 1960: 67; see Woloch 2003: 224-43).

In fact, the novel creates potential for an unsettling comparison of the materially motivated and self-interested Leonards, on the one hand, and Frederick, on the other, given his subsequent career as (possibly) a mercenary soldier in South America and a trader in Spain. No such comparison is afforded by the discourse of *North and South* even if it can be extracted from the story, however, for Leonards is the double of a minor character in Frederick. While the representation of Frederick implies that his is a tortured soul, he lacks interiority. Indeed, the ethical quandaries of his position are transferred to the novel's major characters, in Margaret, Higgins, and Thornton, as I discuss shortly. Alongside the romanticisation of Frederick from without, then, the novel's distribution of character-

space within the ‘character system’ of the realist novel which, as Woloch explains, equates minoriness with social alienation, also works geographically to mean that questions of maritime labour are diverted into a *minor minor* character in Leonards. Woloch’s comment on Orlick, that he ‘is a condensation of alienated consciousness, and the text is unforgiving of him’ (2003: 231), redoubles when applied to the real Jack Tar of *North and South* (see Lee 2010: 104).

Leonards is Frederick’s double, but he is also the test-case against which the actions of the novel’s other working-class male characters, the representative mill-workers, are evaluated. As ‘a bad sailor’ (Gaskell 1854-55: 303), Leonards cannot steer according to the moral compass of *North and South* which commends ‘loyalty and obedience’ in service of wise and just authority. While this representative of the maritime working class falls, the challenge is picked up by the novel’s two exemplary factory operatives, Boucher and Higgins, with differing outcomes. Boucher enlists blindly in the trade union, which the novel claims to be open to intimidation and exploitation of its members, or what Margaret labels ‘tyranny’ (276). The problem with the union, according to Gaskell, is that of HMS *Russell*: steered by firebrands, it lacks wise and just command. Boucher’s rebel-rousing during the strike helps turn it into a riot, and he subsequently attacks Higgins. In its ignominy, Boucher’s decline and death is, as I mentioned, second only to that of Leonards, which it quickly follows.

The difference in the readers’ response to Leonards and Boucher, on the one hand, and Higgins, on the other, is determined by narrative focus. Higgins is introduced in a series of lengthy sympathetic sketches of his domestic environs that qualify his misjudged loyalty to the union (Gaskell 1854-55: 102-06, 115-20, 174-78), an aspect of him which even then is only gradually revealed. Higgins is one of the novel’s primary reported speakers, whereas Leonards barely speaks and is represented mainly in a series of brief descriptions of his physical ugliness. As Stoneman notes, like Thornton, Higgins speaks of the opposition of ‘men’ and ‘masters’ in terms of warfare (1987: 121-22; see Markovits 2005). Over the course of the narrative, however, and particularly following the death of Boucher, Higgins develops the advised loyalty and obedience to the increasingly wise and just Thornton. His abandonment of the union signals his personal moral growth, as does his embrace of religion, another suitable source of authority, following his atheism. His cap-in-hand turn to Thornton to seek work to pay for his and Boucher’s families is represented as a moral act. In his defiance of the union, Higgins matches Frederick in his defiance of Reid. Differences in their respective social stations, however, mean that while Higgins’s character development is toward appropriate loyalty, Frederick achieves just authority. And in this respect, he compares most readily to Thornton, as I will now discuss.

### **‘Masters and Men’: Seafaring Craft and the Condition of England**

Frederick and Thornton are another pair who operate as doubles, inflecting one another’s characterisation. Wootton identifies traces of the Byronic hero in Thornton, an aspect of his characterisation I suggest is the imprint of Frederick’s heroism, or rather Margaret’s interpretation of his heroism, upon the manufacturer. This influence helps to resolve the romance plot as Margaret’s yearning for her brother finds its acceptable outlet in his

metropolitan counterpart (see Bonaparte 1992: 174). It furthermore enables the resolution of the industrial strand of the narrative, for just as the problem posed by Leonards' misplaced obedience is worked out in the actions of representatives of the urban working class, so too are the dilemmas of authority that Frederick and Captain Reid pose responded to in the actions of Margaret and Thornton in the novel's denouement. These characters do not retreat into romantic self-contemplation, moreover. They instead recover the practical, social resources and progressive attitudes required to mend the bonds damaged by unwise command.

Specifically, Margaret and Thornton employ a language of craft which derives from maritime adventure. In doing so they recall the novel genre's fundamental dependence on narrative conventions acquired from sea adventure. Margaret Cohen postulates the importance of sea adventure narrative in the mid-nineteenth century context of labour degradation: '[i]n depicting a heroism of labor in the form of know-how, sea fiction compensates for the degradation of the labour process' as it is described in 'condition-of-England' novels (2003: 496). Close examination of *North and South* reveals that even this formulation does not go far enough in describing the relatedness of these two genres at this historical juncture. I argue that Thornton comes to display what Cohen calls 'the mariner's craft', a set of 'skills and demeanors [that] comprise the mariner's excellence', which not only provide the 'poetics' of seafaring adventure fiction, but also are translated into other subgenres of the novel. The 'skills and demeanors' that make up craft, enabling the mariner's 'complete knowledge', are 'prudence' ('caution and aversion to risk' but also 'foresight, care for detail, and nuanced attention to the specificity of the situation'), 'sea legs' ('bodily participation' to demonstrate strength and agility), 'protocol' (the timely and methodical execution of manoeuvres), 'endeavour' ('patience, determination, and persistence'), 'resolution' ('the bold, opportune manoeuvre'), 'jury-rigging' (imaginative improvisation), 'reckoning' (informed but improvisational navigation), 'collectivity' (co-operative labour within a rigid hierarchy), 'plain style' (the clear and concise language of command), belief in Providence, and a willingness to test these attributes 'at the edge of experience and even imagination' (Cohen 2010: 19-55). Craft was essential in overcoming what seamen's logs euphemistically referred to as 'remarkable occurrences', the misadventures at sea that provided both instructional and entertainment value to seafaring narratives.

In its transition from the mutiny on HMS *Russell* to the strike at Milton, *North and South* provides an unusually manifest, if inexplicit, acknowledgement of this generic inheritance, even as it works to foreground the industrial city – 'at the edge of experience and even imagination' at least as far as realist novel was concerned in the 1850s – over maritime space. The key point I wish to underline is that this novel, as an exemplary 'condition-of-England' fiction, establishes an 'edge of experience' which is located on land, not sea. Of course, the transfer of seafaring knowledge to metropolitan society is not only owing to Gaskell's or other novelists' efforts, but is ingrained in the English language. For example, the term 'strike'—so elemental to Gaskell's novel that its seventeenth chapter asks, in its title, 'What is a Strike?'—stems from the collective decision in 1768 of London seamen to 'strike', or lower, their sails in defiance of their masters (Rediker 1987: 205). Gaskell is far from alone among nineteenth-century novelists in drawing upon this

language in metaphorical descriptions of crises, often figured in terms of the shipwreck, both personal and national. Symbols of maritime misadventure recur in numerous contexts besides those typically examined in the social-problem novel; *North and South* itself provides evidence of this by heading its fourth chapter, on Mr. Hale's spiritual crisis, with poetic imagery of a shipwreck from William Habington. Mrs. Hale's dreams of her exiled son again summon the image of the storm at sea (Gaskell 1854-55: 33, 123). But as Sophie Gilmartin (2012) has argued, it is mistaken to disregard this language, so quotidian as to be almost inaudible, as a distraction from the seemingly more meaningful encounters with the sea in literature and culture. The saltwater imagery in passages of *North and South* describing the strike are reminders of a deeper-running indebtedness to the history of maritime labour which this novel both summons and sublimates.

This transmission of craft to the urban sphere is also traceable through the word 'master'. While the *OED*'s earliest examples of the specific nautical and mercantile usages of the term date from around the same time, the late fourteenth century, the nautical is preceded by the post-classical Latin *magister*, denoting the captain of a vessel in early thirteenth-century sources. As in *North and South*, we find masters at sea before we find them in factories. The question of what makes a good master, first raised by HMS *Russell*, is continued in the conversations between the Hales and Thornton. While these talks relate to the commercial question of Milton, in one exchange Thornton's spurning of a classical education raises the figure of the original crafty mariner. Mr. Hale asks his pupil:

'Did not the recollection of the heroic simplicity of the Homeric life nerve you up?'  
'Not one bit!' exclaimed Mr Thornton, laughing. 'I was too busy to think about any dead people, with the living pressing alongside of me, neck to neck, in the struggle for bread'. (Gaskell 1854-55: 98)

In competition for business, Thornton has been inattentive to the example of Odysseus, who 'evinces his practical resourcefulness' by 'calling on his ability to assess situations and manipulate the psychology of men, of monsters, and of the gods' (Cohen 2010: 1). Over the course of the novel, having imbibed Frederick's example through his conversations with Margaret, Thornton learns craft, and the 'heroic simplicity' of the labour relations it represents.

All mariners' tales feature 'remarkable occurrences at sea' by which their craft is tested. Frederick's challenge is the cruel master who forces his revolt. Thornton begins the narrative at risk of becoming a ruthless captain, if indeed he is not already this figure. As with Captain Reid, he is unreceptive to progressive attitudes to command, such as Lord Collingwood's view 'on the art of naval discipline... that violent tyranny was uncommonsensical and ... that captains brought on their own mutinies' (Denning 1992: 143). The challenge that he faces, the strike, in its analogousness to the mutiny that Frederick leads, surfaces the novel's generic underpinnings. The strike and events preceding and following it are aptly described in nautical metaphors. Of the masters' retrenchment, Thornton states: 'We see the storm on the horizon and draw in our sails'. When the riot breaks out because of Thornton's ill-advised hiring of Irish workers, the narrator describes Margaret watching 'the first slow-surfing wave of the dark crowd come,

with its threatening crest, tumble over, and retreat, at the far end of the street' (Gaskell 1854-55: 137, 203). Margaret here is on lookout on HMS Milton, in a metaphorical encounter with the raging sea – 'that angry sea of men' (211) – that leads to her vocal and physical intervention, a display of what Cohen might call her 'sea legs', to which I return anon.

'Condition-of-England' writing equates the working-class mob with nature in such a way as to suggest the former's impulsive, inscrutable, and wild character. Metaphorical description of the strike as shipwreck risks confusing a human labour problem with uncontrollable elements of the natural world. As Rosemarie Bodenheimer notes, however, the passage also 'works against those conventions by focusing on Margaret's identification of human faces and individual sufferings in the crowd' (1988: 60). Toward the end of *North and South*, moreover, shipwreck metaphors are usurped in a return to the literal issue of relations between 'masters and men'. Thornton then exhibits some of the attributes of craft. He realises the value of Margaret's suggestion that what he later calls the 'cash nexus' has alienated 'the adviser and advised classes' (Gaskell 1854-55: 515, 142). His factory anachronistically takes on properties of the pre-industrial 'heroic phase' of capitalism that helped give rise to seafaring craft. He seeks to instil in his workers a sense of 'common interest' and explains this is best achieved by 'becoming acquainted with each others' characters and persons, and even tricks of temper and modes of speech'. Although by 'each other' Thornton refers to classes and not individuals, he stresses the need for 'actual personal contact' (515). He and Higgins are repositioned at the novel's close as exemplifying collectivity, 'living by the same trade, working in their different ways at the same object', in realisation of the 'Homeric simplicity' that Mr. Hale had advised.

When another storm arises in the form of a period of bad trade, Thornton shows skills of prudence and endeavour: 'he did not despair; he exerted himself day and night to foresee and to provide for all emergencies'. Thornton too develops the 'plain style' of communication that inspires men to work overtime in meeting his 'command' (Gaskell 1854-55: 503): 'he was as calm and gentle to the women in his home as ever; to the workmen in his mill he spoke not many words, but they knew him by this time; and many a curt, decided answer was received by them rather with sympathy for the care they saw pressing upon him'. Thornton's business suffers again when, in another demonstration of his prudence, he opts out of risking again 'the wreck of his fortunes' by joining his brother-in-law in what turns out to be a lucrative speculation. Nonetheless his new approach to the handling of business—a 'complete plan ... fitted for every emergency' (502, 509, 515) which echoes the mariner's 'complete knowledge' enabled by craft—inspires the confidence in Margaret to invest in his business.

Thornton acquires new understandings under Margaret's influence, though his trajectory ultimately affirms the value of what he describes, early in the novel, as 'wise despotism' (Gaskell 1854-55: 140). To explain the novel once again in terms of Margaret's words, in his work Thornton allows for the loyalty and obedience to wisdom and justice that the likes of Higgins supposedly want to offer their masters, if only conditions allow them to, and which the mutineers on the *Russell* show Frederick in joining his mutiny. Thornton's progressiveness lies in seeking to make known that his 'intense mental labour'

enables their physical labour (515). The idealised factory that Thornton establishes involves him giving orders in the disciplinary ‘plain style’ of the crafty mariner, a good master.

### **Margaret on the Waterfront**

What about Margaret? How are we to understand the central character of *North and South*'s role in or relation to these transmissions between ship and shore? As the link between Frederick and Thornton, is Margaret simply and passively the medium through which Thornton acquires attributes from the maritime world, or does she take a more active role in the novel's attainment of seafaring ‘craft’? Margaret is of course the novel's protagonist. She not only gives the chief financial support for Thornton's venture, but it is also in conversations with Margaret that Thornton gains the kind of education which he vainly seeks from her father, one which impels him to change his views on the workers. To an extent, Frederick's uprising appears to have a decisive influence upon Margaret's development of a principled stance against tyranny. Her above-quoted ‘loyalty and obedience’ speech, for instance, which I have argued provides a moral compass for the characters in Milton, is first formulated about the mutiny. Later, Margaret tells Frederick:

You disobeyed authority—that was bad; but to have stood by, without word or act, while the authority was brutally used, would have been infinitely worse. People knew what you did, but not the motives that elevate it out of a crime into an heroic protection of the weak. (Gaskell 1854-55: 307)

Her words again prefigure her own morally motivated crime of lying to the police to protect Frederick, a lie that Thornton learns of and colludes in.

Yet the extent of Frederick's influence upon Margaret is debatable. As I have shown, Margaret articulates the principles behind, and romantic aspects of, Frederick's mutiny. She is more evidently the author of Frederick's Byronic image than he is the spur behind her actions. As the central and dominant character, the lessons of craft are hers to learn, and in her bodily protection of Thornton from the riotous mob, Margaret performs the kind of heroics that the novel inherits from seafaring narratives. Bodenheimer notes that her physical protection of Thornton, and her lie to the police to protect Frederick, are Margaret's two main interventions ‘in the world of men’ (1988: 64). But, as Bodenheimer continues, the translation of Margaret's intelligence and morality into action is troubled. Crucially, neither of these actions is appreciated as heroics at the time: both are confused, by onlookers and to some extent by Margaret herself, as indiscretions undermining her womanly propriety. In the face of such pressures Margaret must claim the supposedly natural feminine instincts that prompt her acts of daring rescue. Even if ‘Margaret's most significant experience is to become a human agent in her own right—a process that means living with the doubleness of her actions, rather like the men who act and decide in the public sphere’ (64-65, 67) – then the social consequences of her particular, sexually defined doubleness are that Thornton, not Margaret, must take on the public role of good master at the novel's close. The problem that *North and South* confronts, however unconsciously, here, is that the heroics of the mariner's craft were always grounded in and articulated



through technical and social possibility. The reader's delight stems not from Crusoe's ingenuity *per se* but his careful delineation which shows how the reader too might have reached the same solution (Cohen 2010: 72-87). In Margaret's heroics, the novel pushes at the boundaries of what was perceived to be realistically feasible and socially desirable. Genre conventions expose social limitations imposed upon realist characterisation, as the narrative questions how a woman might be its Homeric protagonist.

In the end, Margaret's own encounters with the sea enable her actions, and yet these encounters are determined by the romantic representation of the sea that the novel associates with Frederick, more certainly than they are determined by the practical lessons of craft. Margaret makes two journeys to England's coasts. These passages are analysed by Wendy Parkins as instances of Margaret's travel which mark her as a participator in rather than simply a watcher of processes of modernity. Parkins also notes romantic constructions of the seaside as they are invoked by Margaret's Cromer holiday (2004: 515; see Burroughs 2015; Carruthers 2020: 125-26.). I want here to draw upon these observations in explaining the negotiations of gender and genre by which the novel adapts the conventions of sea adventure to its focal, metropolitan plot.

Early in the novel, prior to arriving in Milton, Margaret ventures to Heston with her parents. Toward its conclusion she joins Aunt Shaw and the Lennoxes at Cromer. The positioning of these two journeys at opposite ends of the narrative is important to understanding their meanings for Margaret and their role in the plot. These passages, which form the novel's other main acknowledgement of its maritime moorings besides Frederick's mutiny, expose the gendered limitations placed upon its constructions of agency by the conventions it inherits from sea adventure narrative. At Heston, Margaret feels little more than Mrs. Hale when the latter looks toward 'the pleasure and delight of going to the seaside' (Gaskell 1854-55: 57). Heston provides her simply with 'rest':

There was a dreaminess in the rest, too, which made it still more perfect and luxurious to repose in. The distant sea, lapping the sandy shore with measured sound; the nearer cries of the donkey-boys; the unusual scenes moving before her like pictures, which she cared not in her laziness to have fully explained before they passed away;... the white sail of a distant boat turning silver in some pale sunbeam;-it seemed as if she could dream her life away in such luxury of pensiveness, in which she made her present all in all, from not daring to think of the past, or wishing the contemplate the future. (Gaskell 1854-55: 65-66)

Parkins likens the passage to 'modernist texts that record the fleeting sensory experiences of the observing subject' (2004: 514-15). Margaret's experience of Heston is testament to the tourist beach's ability to de-materialise experience, and erase questions of history and labour, be they personal or social, in the promotion of indolent pleasure. The waterfront setting records the difficulty for middle-class women restricted to tourist experience of the waterfront in perceiving such problems of labour at sea as Frederick encounters. As Bodenheimer writes, 'Margaret's struggles to define her life is ... a battle against forms of idleness', to which women, more so than men, are prey (1988: 63). We could go further and say that Margaret's waterfront idling also represents the challenge faced by *North and*

*South* itself in truly perceiving question of maritime labour that might also form the ‘condition of England’.

The passage describing Margaret’s time at Cromer contrasts the account of her spell at Heston. At Cromer, Margaret reflects upon the past, and decides on the future, in the mental space she finds at the waterfront. While her relatives indulge in seaside pasttimes, ‘her time is described as follows:

She used to sit long hours upon the beach, gazing intently on the waves as they chafed with perpetual motion against the pebbly shore, – or she looked out upon the distant heave, and sparkle against the sky, and heard, without being conscious of hearing, the eternal psalm, which went up continually. She was soothed without knowing how or why... [N]urses, sauntering on with their charges, would pass and re-pass her, and wonder in whispers what she could find to look at so long, day after day... [This time] enabled Margaret to put events in their right places, as to origin and significance, both as regarded her past life and her future. Those hours by the sea-side were not lost, as any one might have seen who had the perception to read, or the care to understand, the look that Margaret’s face was gradually acquiring. (Gaskell 1854-55: 494-95)

Although Edith comically attributes the improvement in Margaret’s appearance to the new bonnet that Edith has bought for her, the real reason for Margaret’s awakening is that in her time by the sea she determines to reject a suitor, and the life of comfort that he offers her, to return to Milton. This moment of self-determination depends upon the construction of the beach as a site of self-contemplation, even self-discovery (Parkins 2004: 515), which, in its dependence upon the writings of Byron among other poets, including Shelley and Tennyson, and artists such as Turner, takes Margaret back toward the introspection associated with Frederick and other cerebral mutineers. It is the transcendent quality of the sea, its ‘perpetual motion’ and ‘eternal psalm’, which appear to soothe and then energise Margaret, and in ways that are obscure to her.

Her time by the sea leads Margaret to her much-quoted attempt ‘to settle that most difficult problem for women, how much was to be utterly merged in obedience to authority, and how much might be set apart for freedom in working’ (Gaskell 1854-55: 497). In its concern with obedience and authority, this problem echoes the moral dilemma which Margaret extracts from the mutiny and extends to the Milton strike. Yet, especially in its suggestion of ‘freedom in working’, this passage reworks the problem faced by ‘masters and men’ to her own situation, in which social agency stands to be confused for sexual immodesty. Unable or unwilling to overcome this hurdle, the novel finds (re)solutions for Margaret by drawing upon the romantic modes that distance Frederick from the practically minded heroics of Thornton by regarding mutiny as an intuitive, transcendent act. The romanticism that bars Frederick from the novel’s central narrative ground finds acceptance as the expression of Margaret’s feminine autonomy and individuality, which she ultimately brings into union with the resourcefulness of craft by marrying Thornton.

## Conclusion

Gaskell too frequented the waterfront as a tourist. She took several holidays on the British coast, above all in Morecambe Bay, which she describes in personal correspondence appreciatively if belittlingly as an escape from the strains of modern life (Burroughs 2015). Gaskell's time close to the sea must have provided painful memories of the loss of her brother, John Stevenson, who was apparently drowned while working as a merchant licensed by the East India Co. Rather like Margaret's, Gaskell's memories of her departed brother were sustained by correspondence that he sent to her and her family prior to his disappearance. The parallel extends into the content of the letters, which suggest the two enjoyed a close relationship bordering on flirtatiousness (Stevenson to Gaskell, 8 June 1827). Like his fictional counterpart, John renounces England (after failing to gain work there), calling himself 'a banished man' and lamenting in particular 'to quit you who are all to me' (Stevenson to Gaskell, 30 July [1827]; see also Stevenson to Gaskell 16 August [1828]). Yet the most compelling echo of Gaskell's private life in her novel is the excerpt from Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1812-18, III, 2), which John offers as an epigraph to his letter headed 'At Sea, Lat. 38-30N, Long. 15-10W, July 16<sup>th</sup>'. After the line 'Swift be their guide, wheresoe'r it lead', Stevenson self-deprecatingly inserts the comment: 'Only to Bombay though'.<sup>2</sup>

The pathos that this note took on after John's vanishing, apparently en route to India, goes far in accounting for Gaskell's treatment of Frederick in *North and South*. It sheds light on her earlier depiction of the relationship between a rebellious, seafaring youth and his sister in the provincial confines of *Cranford* (1851-53), and on later depictions of seafaring men in her fiction. To limit Gaskell's waterfront perspective to personal pain, however, is to overlook the engagement with literary and other discourses that shaped not only her fiction, and arguably her understanding of her brother, but also the broader cultural and social attitudes toward maritime peoples and places in the mid-nineteenth century. Specifically, *North and South* both contributes to and epitomises a process by which maritime labour came to be disassociated from the social effects of industrialisation. Critics such as Allan Sekula have explained this wider phenomenon by pointing to mid-nineteenth-century nostalgia for the age of sail, and what, in his discussion of Engels, Sekula terms an 'implicitly romantic attitude toward the sea and seafaring – his [Engels'] sense of a heroic and even redemptive potential to the sea' (2002: 45). Recently, Freedgood (2022) has examined the valorisation of realism within the novel form at the expense of other modes, including the sea adventure, which came to be regarded as romantic and irrelevant even as it focused on violent and exploitative labour. To these insights, this study of *North and South* contributes in significant ways. First, I have shown that, as well as depicting characters and events in a romanticising mode, and drawing upon a number of literary precursors to do so, Gaskell's novel is more fundamentally shaped in its form by its occlusion of the sea (the projection of material questions attached to mutiny onto a minor character, in Frederick, and a very minor character, in Leonards, who does not develop beyond the role of alter-ego) and in its very sense of its ability to dissect the 'condition of England' (the transference of moral questions raised by the mutiny, as an exemplar of the mariner's 'remarkable occurrences' at sea, into the sphere of the urban

industrial dispute). Second, I have highlighted the complexities and paradoxes by which the text draws seafaring geographies into its frame of reference, only to have them eclipsed by other concerns. As a result, in its denouement Gaskell's *North and South* projects the imagined heroism of seafaring onto her urban labour dispute, finding solutions to the inter-class alienation that provides the drama of her narrative in the 'heroic' pre-industrial labour performance and relations epitomised by craft. But by virtue of her doing so, the argument that realist novels relegated the maritime world simply by painting it in romantic terms is complicated. Heroic figures, such as Frederick and Margaret in particular, find their own answers to the dilemmas of labour exploitation through romanticising representations, of a kind which is denied to the one common seaman depicted by Gaskell (Leonards). In helping define 'the condition of England', *North and South* reveals through its linguistic, thematic, and other narrative conventions a debt to sea fictions that the text itself disassociates from the ongoing reality of maritime labour. Read from the perspective of the historian, geographer, or literary critic seeking to understand the links between labour on shore and at sea – and indeed as cities such as Manchester, the inspiration for Gaskell's novel, and their institutions acknowledge their historic debts to enslaved seaborne labour – Gaskell's work is valuable in explaining both the literary roots of our forgetting, and how the sea nonetheless mattered, even to a mill-working girl who had never seen it.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> HMS *Orion* is mentioned as the ship that Reid and Hale first sailed on together, with HMS *Russell* the subsequent site of the mutiny. See Gaskell (1854-55: 124-25). However, a later reference to the *Orion* (308) suggests it is the mutiny ship. This apparent mistake, which is not unusual in novels written under the strain of serialization, has caused confusion among critics, with Morse (2011) calling the mutiny ship the *Orion* and Lee (2010) calling it the *Russell*.

<sup>2</sup> For further comparison of the Stevenson siblings to the Hales, see Bonaparte 1992: 176. For clarification of the years in which these letters were most probably written I consulted Chapple (1997: 219-24, 228, 230-32).

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