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Notes from the Motherland:
Global Mothering and Othering in the Works of Elizabeth Gaskell

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Notes from the Motherland. Global Mothering and Othering in the Works of Elizabeth Gaskell

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Mothering and its power dynamics have often been commented on in Elizabeth Gaskell’s works. However, critics seem to ignore the fact that mothering has global implications and uses for Gaskell. When looking specifically at groups of people that a Victorian middle class woman would classify as Other, we see that Gaskell’s mothering takes on a global trend.

In Gaskell’s industrial novels mothering provides a way for class reconciliation to replace the antagonisms and labor unrest that characterized the thirties and forties in England. Both *Mary Barton* and *North and South* show that paternalism is very often too harsh. The workers are Others for Gaskell and under paternalism they often pose a threat to the physical and ideological well-being of the middle class. However, both these novels show a member of the middle class, generally a factory owner, assuming a maternal role towards the workers. When this happens, immediately, the threat that the worker posed disintegrates and the reader is left with a happy ending and a clear indication of the responsibilities of the middle class. However, this pattern applies to different groups of Others as well.

Gaskell uses this same pattern of mothering to neutralize the threat of more exotic Others in her fiction. The Irish and the Welsh are treated in this same way. The Celtic cultures, however, are shown to be incapable mothers. They cannot perform the duties of motherhood as seen by Victorian culture. They especially lack in moral instruction. Without this moral instruction, they give in to their inferior nature which results usually in sorrow or violence. Eastern or colonial Others also pose a threat until brought under the protection of an English mother. In Gaskell’s historical novels it is clear that the eastern Other, as represented by Syria, and the colonial Other, as represented by the Native Americans, both pose a serious threat until mothered by English representatives.

Gaskell treats all groups which she considers inferior to herself in the same way. They are at the same time children, and dangerous adults. It is only through mothering that the danger can be eliminated and the true child-like character of the other become subservient to English middle class ideology.
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David Cecil once referred to Elizabeth Gaskell as a dove. He was comparing her to female authors of the nineteenth century that he considered less conventional, for instance George Eliot and the Brontes. This label, unfortunately, clung to Gaskell's name and image for many decades. Unfortunately, because nothing could be further from the truth. Though at first glance, Elizabeth Gaskell's novels appear to support conventional Victorian ideologies, critics today are finding more and more evidence that her opinions were not quite as conventional as had previously been thought. For instance, Elizabeth Gaskell received much attention both from her own contemporaries and from later scholars for her industrial novels which seemed to simply echo the sensibilities of her time. Her first novel, *Mary Barton*, received much attention because of its realism and its sympathy with the lower working classes. As more critics examined this novel, however, they began to see a sharp critique of class responsibilities and boundaries. Marxist critics were indeed some of the first to revive interest in Gaskell's novels. However, the feminist critics soon followed suit as they recognized that there was more to Gaskell's heroines than blind adherence to social norms. Today many critics from different fields have taken an interest in the writings of this Manchester minister's wife.

One field that is beginning to explore Gaskell's work is Postcolonialist theory. Recently critics have written a number of articles and theses that provide insightful analysis of Gaskell's attitude toward the British Empire. These writings and their Post-colonial theory form the roots of this piece of work. I found the implications of
Orientalist theory on Gaskell’s work particularly fascinating. In Edward Said’s seminal book *Orientalism*, he states “The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe’s greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other” (1). What started as an attempt to map Gaskell’s perception of this Oriental Otherness soon became a project that encompassed her entire perception of those who were different from her. Reading through Gaskell’s work, a pattern began to appear. In the instances where colonial subjects appeared, they were represented in much the same way as the lower class. This representation also seemed to fit with the Irish and Welsh figures in Gaskell’s fiction. It can be concluded that Gaskell treats all groups which she sees as Others in the same manner.

The term “Other” is, of course, problematic. The term originates with Lacan’s theory of the conscious and the unconscious. “That which is unconscious for the Subject is that which is unknown, alien to him or her.” For Lacan, therefore, the notion ‘unconscious’ lends itself at once and in turn to the idea of *otherness*” (Meltzer, 157, emphasis original). This otherness, as Meltzer points out, becomes exteriorized until it not only encompasses the unconscious but also groups and things that are exterior to the psyche. In other words, the Other is something or someone “where the Subject does not recognize himself” (Meltzer, 158). Even though, by Lacan’s definition, the Other really is part of the Subject, the Subject knows it and labels it at foreign. The Subject then begins to define herself in terms of what she is not. Gaskell, for instance, was not lower class, or Catholic, or Syrian. By giving a certain character to these groups, she characterizes herself. As Said states, “…the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its
contrasting image, idea, personality, experience” (1-2). However, Others are not limited
to the Orient or to imperialism. There are many different levels of otherness based on
many kinds of difference. This sort of generalized definition of what is not the Subject is
how I will use the term.

I am examining Gaskell’s treatment of those groups of people which she classifies
as different from herself. They are “not me” for Gaskell. This is obviously a very broad
sense in which to use the term, and I mean it to be so. This representation includes
diverse groups with almost nothing in common except that representation and the fact
that they are all groups which could pose some sort of threat to the Victorian British
middle class. She manages to treat all these groups in the same way. Though there are
subtle differences, the initial representation remains remarkably consistent.

Gaskell’s mass generalization seems stunning; however, many Victorians did find
a way to link all groups that were considered inferior to the British upper and middle
classes. Anne McClintock speaks about the Victorian “Family of Man” in which
colonized races were seen as earlier or immature versions of Europeans. “In the poetics
of degeneracy we find two anxious figures of historical time, both elaborated within the
metaphor of family. One narrative tells the story of the familial progress of humanity
from degenerate native child to adult white man” (49). By placing grown natives beside
Europeans and labeling them as childlike or less developed, the Victorians could trace a
linear progression from the least to most advanced races. All people were grouped
together in a single family with the upper and middle class European as the most
advanced. Every other group was inferior; there remained only the question of degree.
McClintock’s study focuses on how an imperialist discourse spilled over into gender and
class discourse. "Increasingly, these stigmata (racial and otherwise) were drawn on to identify and discipline atavistic ‘races’ within the European race: prostitutes, the Irish, Jews, the unemployed, criminals, and the insane" (50, parentheses mine) All of these groups began to represent Otherness for the Victorian middle and upper classes. This tendency on the part of middle class Victorians to categorize certain groups as inferior is the basis of their ideology of the Other.

Victorian middle class perception about these groups was, as McClintock points out, tied quite strongly to the British Empire and colonialism. As the English compared themselves to groups of people whom they considered Other a dominant ideology of superiority began to evolve. A good example of this is the anthropologists of the era. One Victorian anthropologist describes the marriage practices of the aborigines of Australia as "one continued series of ‘ghastly wounds’ and ‘captivity to different masters’" (Stocking 84). Another anthropologist calls the aborigines "all of them equally vain, crafty, cruel, superstitious and improvident" (Stocking 113). The aborigines serve as a prime example of Othering. The English perceive themselves to be everything that these people are not. Englishmen are kind, humane, civilized, Christian and, in general, good. The aborigines, on the other hand, signify all that is sinful, evil, violent and cruel. However, as McClintock suggests, these qualities were also associated with other groups beside colonial subjects. She specifically names prostitutes, Jews, and criminals, while I would have to include, from my reading in Gaskell, the lower classes. These groups were all seen in similar ways by the Victorian upper and middle classes. Victorians generalized quite frequently, especially about those who they considered different and therefore inferior to themselves. This ideology of moral, intellectual, and
temporal superiority would necessarily understand any of these groups as threatening, especially when they show signs of violent or supernatural power.

However, Gaskell recognizes the common ground that she shares with these groups of Others. They are, for Gaskell, very like Lacan’s Other because although she classifies them as different, she recognizes their similarity to herself also. Especially with the lower class, Gaskell makes an effort to emphasize these groups’ common humanity. Thus these Others become, for Gaskell both “not me” and “me” at the same time. This recognition alters a conventional portrayal into a unique representation of Others.

Gaskell’s representation of the Other coincides with, but also modifies, typical Victorian ideology. She views Others as both dangerous and innocent children that need to be taught morality in order to become as good or civilized as the English middle class. They have an inferior understanding of morals that makes them a threat to the middle class either physically or in terms of hierarchical power relationships. This threat is often embodied in characters with violent or supernatural powers. In the face of these powers the English middle class Christian is powerless, and sometimes even dominated. This danger is representative of the fallen state of that character. It is this fallen state that both empowers Others and makes it childlike. Their lack of moral education and mentorship makes them a threat while also facilitating their characterization as children. To control the threat caused by these supposed children, Gaskell advocates maternal authority. She creates a situation where maternalism keeps Others as children, thereby acknowledging and suppressing the threat they pose. If Others sometimes act badly, it is only because they are ignorant of right and wrong and thus need the care and instruction that only a mother can provide.
Thus Gaskell, while characterizing Others as both violent and dangerous at times, simply refuses to adhere to a singular view of them as entirely dangerous or innocent. Her incorporation of both of these tropes reflects a dualistic vision of these groups; they have a dual or contradictory nature. For Gaskell the Other is both exotic and dangerous and a child who needs nurturing and protection by a parental figure. These people had no concept of laws or morals. They existed in the state of fallen man—exemplifying all sorts of sin and evil, the very things that Victorian middle class had attempted to ban from their own society. The colonial examples are perhaps to be expected; however, these sorts of characterizations also pertained to the lower class at times. For instance, for the sanitary, middle class Victorian, the dirt and filth in lower class homes seemed to imply moral degradation. John B. Lamb states that “In terms of the middle-class culture from which most Victorian social investigators sprang, moral well-being or order was inseparable from ‘material well-being or comfort’” (41). Gaskell simply connects the colonial Other with the more familiar Others which she saw around her everyday. For her, both seemed to embody strange and threatening values and goals.

Gaskell’s characterization of Others shows them to have not only these values mysteriously opposite to those of middle class English Christians, but also unnatural powers that the rational middle classes lack. Not only are these groups of people in a state of sin, they sometimes have supernatural powers. Most of the time in Gaskell’s fiction these powers are a result of witchcraft or the worship of the devil, and this is the ultimate state of depravity. This power, coupled with their strange values, often poses a mysterious threat. This threat, however, coexists with a childlike nature. She adopts the Other as a child, for only then can they learn to become civilized. At the same time, their
dangerous powers are reinterpreted as childlike waywardness.

Gaskell accepts the trope of intellectual childhood because she does not believe that Others are irredeemably fallen. This belief in the potential rehabilitation of these groups stems from her Unitarian religion. Monica Correa Fryckstedt writes that the Unitarians “repudiated the doctrine of original sin and refused to accept that man’s nature was basically depraved” (65). If Unitarians did not believe in the doctrine of original sin, then Others, no matter how threatening and dangerous, could not be totally depraved anymore than English Christians could. Not even humans of the lowest orders could be completely evil. Yet Gaskell also believes that Others can be dangerous. Her solution is to interpret this violent side of their nature as deriving from ignorance and lack of instruction rather than inherent evil. They are children because they do not have the moral and religious knowledge that would lead them to live in a more civilized and less violent manner. Moral instruction is a way of training anyone to behave civilly. It also keeps or contains the Other in a childlike role.

In order to be taught the basic civilized way of living and reasoning, as I have previously mentioned, they must figuratively enter the Victorian domestic space and become obedient children, most of the time under the strict control of an English father. This domesticating of the Other in the Victorian age was not limited to Gaskell’s novels, or even to novel writing itself. For most Victorians the idea of inducting Others into a family-like structure where they would supervised by a English father-figure was fairly familiar. To illustrate this paternalism, Anne McClintock, in her book *Imperial Leather*, conducts an analysis of Victorian advertisements for various household products, such as Pear’s Soap, that definitively associate the domestic, and more specifically paternal, with
imperial space and thus with colonial otherness. The Pear’s Soap advertisement is a picture of an English admiral dressed in white washing his hands in the bathroom aboard his ship. This associates cleanliness and domesticity as part of the realm of the white male. In a corner below this picture is a sketch of a white man giving soap to a native, who seems very happy to receive it. The soap advertises itself as a part of the male colonizing efforts of the British Empire yet is targeting the British middle class home, thus making the home part of the psychology of the colonial project. By placing domestic products in a direct relationship to an Other, the advertisement both internalizes and domesticates that Other under a stern male authority.

This domesticating process, entailing an interaction between colonialism and English ideals of the domestic, places colonial Others in a fixed position in relation to English. “Through ritual of domesticity, increasingly global and more often than not violent, animals, women, and colonized peoples were wrested from their putatively ‘natural’ yet ironically ‘unreasonable’ state of savagery and inducted through the domestic progress into a hierarchical relation to white men” (McClintock, 35).

Domesticity, according to McClintock, is one of the primary ways in which the Other is civilized. The sort of domesticity that McClintock describes, however, is a violent and harsh paternalism that inducts the Other into English domestic space. The middle class English middle class citizen is then given the means to both define and control the Other. Ania Loomba states, “The white man’s burden was constructed as a parental one: that of ‘looking after’ those who were civilisationally underdeveloped (and hence figure as children) and of disciplining them into obedience” (217). This paternalism, though most obvious in regards to the colonial project, also can apply to different groups of Others.
The Irish as well as the lower classes were often characterized as having inadequate domestic skills. For most Victorians this meant the patronizing, but strict rule of paternalism. For Gaskell, however, the domestic space was rather one that was under the mother’s control and authority. Gaskell represents Others as children to bring them into the domestic space so that they may peacefully exist under the care of the mother of the house.

It is the duty of the English middle class, according to Gaskell, to neutralize this threat with proper mothering. The mother’s role in the institution of family was the most idealized and the most important to the Victorians. Coventry Patmore’s extraordinarily popular poem *The Angel in the House* is a good example of this idealization. Patmore captures the Victorian idealization of the woman of the home: she makes it a sacred and pure sphere. The woman’s position was that of a moral angel sent to watch over the family, keeping it from sin. E. Holly Pike says, “the woman’s duty and powers are still in the moral rather than the physical sphere and in both the family and society it is [for many Victorians] the moral sphere that has real power and responsibility” (2). For the Victorians, the woman, and especially the mother, was the moral focus of the home. She taught the children to distinguish between wrong and right, and she kept her husband from picking up the sinful traits from being so much in the world. Thaden quotes J.A. Froude as saying that childhood was “all we have ever known of heaven on earth” (qtd. 52). But childhood was perceived as idyllic especially because it was during childhood that people were immersed and protected within the moral atmosphere of the home and cultivated by the love and care of a mother.

Mothers, especially those of the middle class, not only made the home sacred and
moral, as already mentioned, but they also provided children with a moral education. They had the duties of loving, nurturing and protecting their children as well as seeing to their spiritual well-being. “The ‘Angel in the House’ or ‘Female Savior’ role assigned to mothers the duty not only of nurturing children but of providing them with religious training” (Thaden, 53). This emphasis of religious instruction increased during early Victorian times. Thaden identifies the shift in the role of mothers that occurred during the nineteenth century. In the eighteenth century, the father had been the spiritual leader of the home, but although this is still nominally the case during the nineteenth century, the mother is now held responsible for the moral health of her family. It is she who is supposed to impart the Christian moral code to the children, not the father. This particular image of the mother, “ideal, ever-present, ever-loving, all-responsible” (Thaden, 3) is a popular invention of the Victorians. As part of her own society and being a mother herself, Elizabeth Gaskell could not help being touched by this phenomenon. This maternal authority that keeps childlike Others in a docile and benign role of a student is precisely what Gaskell prescribed for Others as a cure for the threat their fallen nature poses.

Critics have often delineated the effect of the maternal influence upon Gaskell’s work, although not in regard to Others. For example, Patsy Stoneman, a well-known Gaskellian scholar, insists that Gaskell’s thinking is fundamentally maternal. She defines the maternal thought process as a state in which, first of all,

Women tend to see people as actually constituted by their relationships.

Secondly, while men tend to see relationships as a hierarchy in which some people are more important than other, women see relationships in
terms of a network of connections. And thirdly, whereas men conceptualize moral problems in terms of individual rights which may have to be curtailed to avoid harm to others, women tend to see moral problems in terms of responsibilities to others (84).

All three of these characteristics of women are evident in Gaskell’s work. By accepting that relationships with other people constitute a person’s identity, a person then judges other people by their relationships with those around them. If a person is unkind or cruel to others, his or her character is judged to be cruel or unkind. This need to view moral problems as symptomatic of conflict within relationships clearly leads to a maternal form of responsibility on the part of the Victorian middle class. As Stoneman says, Gaskell “introduces the analogy of parental responsibility which allows her to talk of human relationships and care rather than categories of value” (86). What makes a person valuable, for women, is not where they rank in a hierarchy, but whether or not they care about people. Gaskell’s maternal philosophies in her novels reflect this definitely maternal perspective.

While many critics have examined the maternal tendencies of Gaskell’s fiction, none have examined her sense of maternalistic responsibility for Others. For many, England was the mother of the world. Ania Loomba, in Colonialism/Postcolonialism, says that “the identification of woman as national mother stems from a wider association of nation with the family. The nation is cast as a home; its leader and icons assume parental roles” (216). The conceptualization of the nation as a home and its leaders as parents was very popular in the Victorian era, during which a queen and mother sat on the throne. “The queen herself was saluted as ‘Mother, Wife, and Queen’ after fifty years
of rule by crowds who seemed to agree that the queen’s position as supreme mother and wife elevated her even more than her position as a political head of her country” (Thaden 3). Such mother/leader roles were easily transferable to not only the colonial situation, but to the social situations which existed throughout England. For Gaskell, the maternal responsibility of the middle class included the responsibility of caring not only for colonial Others, but also for the lower class Others that existed in England itself. 

Paternalism suggests the European heads of state and all their representatives were to act as parents to the unfortunate, be they foreign or domestic, and as such discipline them into obedience. However, Gaskell again, figures Others as children needing the care of a loving and caring parent; thus England should be a mother to these groups.

In particular, Gaskell’s Unitarian religion made it impossible for her to advocate a violent or harsh form of authority. She believed the Christian should teach different or sinful people so that they would become better, more civilized, and more like English Christians. Fryckstedt notes that Unitarianism is a religion that urges its followers to fulfill their social duties. For Gaskell, teaching those who are ignorant was a social responsibility, as was visiting and helping the poor. This social responsibility was seen as a specifically female vocation and tied to the maternal instinct: “The belief in women’s particular suitability for philanthropic work was based in part on contemporary domestic ideologies which assumed women’s domestic expertise, their ‘natural’ sympathy and their ability to distinguish the ‘deserving poor’ from the dissimulators” (Parker, 323). It is clear that women were to assume a nurturing role while they helped the poor. In Parker’s statement women have the basic attributes of the ideal mother. They have domestic skills that make the most humble home comfortable and they also possess
natural sympathy. They give the hurting or poor the emotional support that they need. The ideal woman described in this quotation is also a moral guide or judge. Because of her expertise in the moral field, the female philanthropist is easily able to discern who deserves and needs help and who is merely in search of a free meal. This idea of the mother’s role as an ideal outlet for social work, combined with Gaskell’s emphasis on the importance of nurturing and her religious doctrine of innate goodness, provides the structure for Gaskell’s ideal mode of controlling the threat of Others—that of mothering. It is mothering that can control Others that are both dangerous and children, reducing the threat that their violence represents to Victorian Christian civilization.

Pam Parker also emphasizes the civilizing or redemptive nature of Gaskell’s maternal viewpoint. In her article about the power of giving in Gaskell’s *Ruth*, Parker points out that Benson, the Dissenting preacher who takes Ruth in after she has been deserted by her lover, “is frequently described in feminine and maternal terms we are told that his quiet authority and gentleness are characteristics inherited from his mother” (59). Parker uses the maternal Benson to illustrate Gaskell’s resistance to the paternalistic and aristocratic politics of giving, expressed by her creation of a gift economy that operates in terms of maternal, emotional and moral modes of giving. The importance of the mother’s role is to find an alternative to a paternalistic system through moral influence.

Barbara Thaden, who argues that Gaskell’s position as both a mother and an author influences her writing and the way that she portrays mothers, also identifies maternal influence as central to Gaskell’s fiction. As an example of this influence, she refers to *Mary Barton*, in which Mary’s mother provides an influence that upholds
Christian morals in an atmosphere that seems to inevitably promote thoughts of violence and revenge. In this novel "Maternal influence always counsels against revenge, against violence to effect social change, even against injustice. Gaskell contrasts maternal pity with man’s version of justice" (Thaden 56). The death of Mary’s mother leaves Mary without any moral guidance, leading to Mary’s near seduction by the factory owner’s son. It also leaves Mary’s father without moral guidance, the one thing keeping him from taking revenge on the masters. In both of these cases it is clear that maternal influence is an important theme in Gaskell’s work.

I will argue that Gaskell’s fiction enacts a central philosophy of living based on her religion and Christian worldview. Although very few critics have examined Gaskell’s attitudes towards Others, it is clear that she applies this same philosophy of Christian obligation and maternal love to the treatment of groups that she considered inferior to the English middle class. Gaskell accepts the perceptions about different groups of people that were popular during her lifetime, but her vision of correct power structures is colored by her experience as a mother and her vision of religious and social responsibility. Thus Gaskell’s ruling authority is a maternal authority rather than a paternal one, harsh and disciplinarian.

Indeed, Gaskell is in many ways protesting against paternalism in favor of a more loving and nurturing way of dealing with Others. Several critics have noticed that although Gaskell might seem to advocate paternalism, in many of her novels there is in fact a subtle but perceptible protest against it. Kristin Flieger Samuelian, for example, argues that though Mary Barton outwardly supports paternalism, Mary’s resistance to her father’s class loyalties and her power over his life at the end of the novel show that
Gaskell is offering a subtle resistance to the law of the father. Pam Parker also presents *Ruth* as a protest against the old paternalistic and feudalistic power structures because Ruth herself invents a new maternal economy of giving. Gaskell’s subtle protest applies to social conditions in England and to those abroad.

Typical paternalistic notions during the Victorian period focused on teaching through punishment. Anne McClintock notes the violent methods used in domesticating Others (35). This is the paternalism that Gaskell rejects. Her perception of England’s role is not paternalistic because it does not focus on discipline or force. Gaskell’s authority figure is the mother who loves, nurtures, protects, and most importantly, teaches the childlike Other correct morals.

Gaskell’s dual vision allows her to portray Others as dangerous and mysterious while also allowing her to express her perceived social obligation and Christian morality. Gaskell’s emphasis on maternal experience and her consistent adherence to her religious values and duties leads her to assume that England ought to be a loving mother to all the Others over whom she has influence.

* * *

In this introduction I have attempted to map out Gaskell’s perception of groups she considers as different or Other, including how she perceives them and the roles Christian England ought to play in the civilizing process. In Chapter Two I will analyze what Anne McClintock calls the “empire at home”. For Gaskell, the poor and working classes were the most present and therefore most threatening groups of Others. Gaskell
describes them many times as both as dangerous and children. Though at times Gaskell appears to go out of her way to characterize the working class as sensible and noble, they often become dangerously threatening to the middle class characters in her novels. Gaskell characterizes the working class as children, but also as potentially dangerous and Other due to their ability to take on violent and savage characteristics when they become desperate. However, when they reach this point, they are to be mothered rather than disciplined. Gaskell seems to imply that if only workers were taught Christian morality, strikes and labor violence would not exist. I will examine *Mary Barton* and *North and South* principally in this second chapter, focusing on the characterization of the lower classes as Other and Gaskell’s perception of the maternal responsibility of the upper and middle classes for the lower

Chapter Three will examine Gaskell’s perception of two Celtic cultures—the Welsh and the Irish. The sub-cultures that surrounded the main culture of England were also seen as inferior races that were definitively Other. Gaskell’s portrayal of these people, especially the Irish, demonstrates much the same attitude that Gaskell adopts towards Others who are closer to home. I will specifically examine *North and South*, with its poor Irish strike breakers, and its overview of the factory owner’s duty toward them, Gaskell implies that the factory owners have a maternal responsibility to the Irish workers they bring in, who are characterized as being helpless. I will also examine the Welsh culture in both “The Doom of the Griffiths” and “The Well at Pen-Morfa.” Gaskell characterizes the Welsh as peripheral and therefore inferior to the English and needful of their maternalistic sponsorship. The most telling point in Gaskell’s portrayal of both the Irish and the Welsh characters is their complete lack of mothering skill.
Because the Celtic cultures are unable to mother themselves, the English must interfere and provide them with a surrogate mother. For Gaskell, the members of these Celtic cultures are “younger” than the English and need their sponsorship.

Chapter Four will illustrate Gaskell’s perception of the Empire and colonized peoples by examining several novels and short stories which contain tableaus from and references to the empire or the East. In *Sylvia’s Lovers*, for example, a pivotal scene in the novel takes place in Syria. The British assist the Turks in fighting the French in this particular novel. By examining Gaskell’s portrayal of French and British attitudes toward the natives in the novel it becomes clear that Gaskell supports a more maternalistic approach to Others in the East. Gaskell’s maternalistic views also inform “Lois the Witch,” which takes place during the Salem witch trials. Of particular interest here is Lois, the displaced English vicar’s daughter, and her actions and attitudes toward a native servant who is accused of witchcraft. Lois obviously steps into the role of mother and both teaches and comforts the poor woman, who on some level represents the moral retardation of native peoples. As Lois assumes the role of mother she neutralizes the threat that this native Other poses. Lastly, I will examine the curious case of Signor Brunoni, the Turkish magician, who comes to Cranford in the novel of the same name. Signor Brunoni’s assumed character and the ladies of Cranford’s reaction to it, especially after the magician’s true identity is discovered, reveal maternalistic tendencies within the ladies of Cranford as well.

Chapter Five, the conclusion, will sum up my argument and also examine the way in which Gaskell deconstructs the typical Victorian assumption of ruling male and subservient female. By advocating a maternal rule over all groups of Others, Gaskell is
critiquing current Victorian English ideological patterns. Her protest against patriarchal rule over Others then can be contended to a protest against male authority in general.

In each of these chapters it will be clear that Gaskell’s perception of inferior races is formed by popular opinion but complicated by her emphasis on motherhood, and by her position as a Unitarian minister’s wife who believes in the goodness of man and social duty. She rejects the concept of paternalism because it does not focus on the humanity of Others, nor on the care and nurture that such peoples need in order to become responsible, civilized adults. Gaskell’s vision of English responsibility toward Others is unique because she views them as both childlike and savage while rejecting the popular paternalism in favor of a more caring and nurturing method grounded in maternalism.
Chapter 2

The Familiar Other: the Working Class in England

Gaskell has always been most famous for her social problem novels, such as *Mary Barton* and *North and South*, which won her much critical acclaim and recognition. It was with *Mary Barton* that she first became famous for her portrayal of the working class. Margaret Ganz quotes a contemporary critic as saying that Mrs. Gaskell “has evidently lived much among the people she describes, made herself intimate at their firesides” and that her dialogues “approach very nearly, both in tone and style, to the conversations actually carried on in the dingy cottages of Lancashire” (52). Though most contemporary critics praised the novel, and especially its accurate descriptions of the working class in the industrial districts, some criticized *Mary Barton* for being prejudiced in favor of the working class and for not giving the mill owners the consideration that they deserved. Gaskell’s second industrial novel, *North and South*, is her attempt to represent both sides of the relationship between masters and men as equally and objectively as possible. Despite Gaskell’s many forays into other genres, it is her industrial novels and her sympathetic but realistic portrayal of the working classes of Victorian England that first captured the public’s attention and that continue to engage readers and critics today. I will argue that Gaskell’s treatment of the working class in her industrial novels provides a pattern for her description of groups she construes as Others.

Gaskell’s portrayal of the working class clearly identifies them as different from the middle-class which Gaskell herself represented. Although what Gaskell is attempting, I believe, is both a realistic and sympathetic look at the working classes, there are certain images and characteristics that surround the working class that identify them
as both inferior and threatening to middle-class Victorians. Gaskell says in her preface to *Mary Barton* that she is attempting to “give some utterance to the agony which, from time to time, convulses this dumb people” (xxxvi). I do not mean to discount Gaskell’s obvious humanitarian motives in writing *Mary Barton*. It is clear that she wanted to illustrate the misery of the poor, just as it is also clear that the novel itself is a plea for the middle class to come to their aid. Yet in the same introduction where she speaks of giving voice to the voiceless, Gaskell also mentions the timeliness of *Mary Barton*. The novel was published in 1848, at the end of the hungry forties, which are known for their many protests and riots. She also cites the recent attempted revolutions in Europe and the political movements that were then active in Britain itself. Edgar Wright, in the introduction to the Oxford edition to *Mary Barton*, mentions a murder connected with a strike which could very well be the model for the action in this novel. Thus, while Gaskell is protesting that the poor are human and ought to be treated with respect, there is a threatened undercurrent to her plea. She may be speaking for a class that has no voice, but that voiceless class has a violent, savage power of its own. In Gaskell’s fiction that power seems to subvert her message, and respond more to the threat of violence from these people who were so different from the middle class. Schor writes that Gaskell’s preface is a hysterical response to the times, and that the novel is Gaskell’s solution to the unrest both in England and abroad. “readers who might fear the ‘recently occurred among a similar class on the Continent’ ought to read *this* book now” (27 emphases original). As always, the working class occupies an ambiguous space for Gaskell. They may be disturbingly like the middle and upper classes, but at the same time they are also threateningly different from them. Gaskell acknowledges this difference even while
trying to emphasize their familiarity. However, she not only describes the problematic nature of their difference, but posits a solution for it.

Many critics have noticed Gaskell’s tendency to describe the working classes as dual, and it is on this doubling that I believe Gaskell bases her description of the Other. Margaret Ganz says that Gaskell’s very nature is paradoxical (21) and that there are many aspects of her work that show a doubleness or extant dichotomy. Many have commented on Gaskell’s characterization of the lower classes not only as reasonable humans but as irrational animals. Hilary Schor states that Gaskell’s version of patriarchy makes men into animals (27). Violence, in *Mary Barton* at least, is the direct response of the workers to the harsh and unfeeling way in which they are treated by the factory owners. They are at times characterized as animals forced to do some terrible deed in order to ensure their survival. However, in line with Gaskell’s standard practice, they are also simultaneously characterized as children. E. Holly Pike says that Gaskell presents a “constant characterization of the workers as children and frequent references to children, childhood, birth, and parentage” (25). Although there are clearly two ways of understanding Gaskell’s portrayal of the working class, I suggest that these are not two separate ways of viewing the workers but rather one way that is decidedly dualistic. Gaskell describes the working class simultaneously as benign children and as dangerous adults.

This doubleness that seems to characterize the lower class and make it distinct from the middle class, to which Gaskell belongs, is the crux of the problem for Gaskell. How does the middle class simultaneously neutralize the violence of the working class Others and humanely help them? Her solution to this, as discussed in the introduction, is the role of mothering. Many critics have also remarked upon this maternal role. Hilary
Schor, for example, says, “Elizabeth Gaskell imagined a maternal authority that would make of England a home; that would cure the condition of England; that would feed the hungry workers; that would redeem the lost children” (34). Some critics insist that Gaskell advocates a paternalistic system of discipline and punishment that would cure the ills of England, but critics like Schor look deeper and see that it is emphatically not paternalism which Gaskell wishes to rule England, but rather maternalism. This maternalism is essentially feminine in that it focuses on nurturing and supportive relationships rather than discipline and punishment as a paternalistic system would. Both *Mary Barton* and *North and South* show the dualistic characterization of the workers and a maternal response to the threat that they pose.

*Mary Barton* was Gaskell’s first novel, written as a distraction from the grief caused by the death of her son William, which places it in a particularly poignant position with regard to mothering. The first and foremost motivation behind *Mary Barton* is to show the basic middle class citizen in England the dignity and humanity of the working class. Gaskell attempts to do this with positive descriptions of several characters associated with the two protagonists. Each of these characters possesses one or two traits which separate them from the negative stereotypical images that surround the working poor. One such character is Alice Wilson, who came from the country when she was young girl to work in service. Alice presents the ideal woman of the rural country working class. She is old when she enters the novel, and is known for her kindness to the sick and her skill with herbs in nursing them. She brings the wisdom of the country with her to the streets of Manchester. She identifies herself with the family whom she works for, and she will not absent herself, even though she wishes to, when her mistress has
need of her Alice’s scrupulously clean basement rooms, her piety, and her skill and compassion in nursing all show her to be a worthy example of a working class woman.

Another character who illustrates the dignity of the lower classes is Job Legh. He is described as part of the working class among whom “Newton’s *Principia* lies open on the loom, to be snatched at in work hours, but reveled over in meal times, or at night” (40). When Mary first enters the apartment where Job and his granddaughter Margaret live, she asks Margaret if her grandfather is a fortune teller because of all the strange specimens of animals that she sees there. He appears as an archetypical, self-educated, working class man of science. Through his inclusion in her novel Gaskell shows the middle class reader that working class people are not constantly on the verge of regressing to a savage state. Such a statement would be a gross generalization. But both Alice Wilson and Job Legh serve as a frame for John Barton, the focal point for Gaskell’s criticism of the working class’s social condition. They are sympathetic characters, the “us” of the working class that is unsettled by the Other of the working class, namely John Barton. It is John Barton who cannot be content with his and his neighbor’s circumstances. He broods over the injustice he sees in the economic system, and eventually he is driven to violence. By surrounding Barton with idealized and dignified examples of the working class, she emphasizes his difference from them. He is an example of the sort of Other the working man can become when threatened.

It is not just John Barton who represents the working class Other. All the factory workers have characteristics that clearly separate them from their social superiors, however; John Barton is chief among these. He is Gaskell’s man of the people. Gaskell
at the same time portrays them and John Barton as children, especially in their relationship with the British government, whom they look upon as a parental figure:

They could not believe that government knew of the misery; they rather chose to think it possible that men could voluntarily assume the office of legislators for a nation who were ignorant of its real state; as who should make domestic rules for the pretty behavior of children without caring to know that those children had been kept for days without food (97).

The workers naturally assume the role of children in their relationship with the government. They presume that the government exists to take care of them. By assuming the role of the child, the workers refuse to acknowledge that the government has other interests to promote and that even if Parliament were aware of the state of the working classes, they would by not necessarily take action on the workers’ behalf. However, this is a simplistic view of the government and its purposes. They assume the government exists solely to take care of their needs the same way that a child assumes that a parent’s only responsibility is to care for them. E. Holly Pike points out that this reasoning of the working classes is the same as that of a child. “Gaskell says that the workers believe it is possible that the government simply does not know of their misery, and suggests that that is a naïve (childish) notion for it implies that the government is not a good parent” (32). Pike is speaking of the different complaints that neighbors share as they stop by to visit with John Barton before he goes to London. They want him to tell the queen and Parliament about their current state of misery. Not understanding the true workings of government, they are naïve in their assumption that it is only ignorance which keeps the government from acting. Nevertheless, however childlike these workers may be, they
also have the potential for strong emotions and violence. Gaskell’s character, John Barton
most clearly elucidates the threat that is inherent in the childlike working classes.

It is when the working classes are desperate that they assume a violent, dangerous
colorature, and John Barton is a desperate man. We first see that there might be a trace of
violence in John Barton’s character after his wife dies: “One of the good influences over
John Barton’s life had departed that night. One of the ties which bound him down to the
gentle humanities of earth was loosened, and henceforward the neighbors all remarked
that he was a changed man” (22). Gaskell emphasizes that without the tempering
influence of his wife, John Barton is free to indulge the baser parts of his nature. His
very identity changes, regressing to an almost primitive state, and he is no longer
identified with humanity but with the dangerous, emotional Other “The loss of his wife
is an appropriate psychological step in his alienation from the ‘the gentle humanities of
earth’ for he now lacks a restraining influence on that emotionalism whose positive
attributes almost imply negative ones” (Ganz 58). Ganz speaks of Gaskell’s description
of Barton as an emotional man. Barton’s wife stabilized him and made him more
civilized. With her presence removed he will now follow the whim of his emotions and
become dangerous and unpredictable. This release from female moral constraint and
emotional stability eventually lead him to commit murder Once again Gaskell expresses
her uncertainty about the stability and trustworthiness of the lower classes, an uncertainty
that always elicits a maternal response to threats.

John Barton’s murder of the son of Carson, the factory owner, is the culmination
of a long string of events. After his wife dies he becomes a member of the Chartist
movement and goes to London with a petition, the failure of which does much to embitter
him. When this failure is added to the misery he sees around him, he joins a union and becomes a leader in a town-wide strike. After a meeting between the union members and the factory owners, the workers find a mocking caricature of them drawn by the younger Carson. It is this insult that finally pushes John Barton to violent and savage behavior. Instead of either being characterized as the dignified, almost middle class worker or even the childlike worker, John Barton enters a space where he becomes a threat to the middle class and their values. He is desperate enough to advocate violence and murder aimed solely at the middle class. There is something of the cornered wild animal about him, and when trapped he turns into a sort of savage monster. Mary Barton’s narrator says: “The actions of the uneducated seem to me typified in those of Frankenstein, that monster of many human qualities, ungifted with a soul, a knowledge of the different between good and evil” (199). John Barton is an uneducated, emotional, working class man, far removed from his social superiors in the middle class, and his desperation has driven him to act like an animal, or worse, as a parentless monster without a soul. However, the narrator specifically stresses the fact that the workers and John Barton in particular, do not know the difference between right and wrong. The man is dangerously savage because he lacks moral cultivation. And it is this lack that provides a means of neutralizing this threat to the stability of the English nation.

Although John Barton is the central figure of Gaskell’s depiction of the working man, the threat posed by the working class can also be seen in the other members of the union. When Barton first starts getting involved with the union, Gaskell describes Mary’s vision of these men. “Strange faces of pale men, with dark glaring eyes, peered into the inner darkness and seemed desirous to ascertain if her father was at home. Or a
hand and arm (the body hidden) was put within the door, and beckoned him away” (136). These men are described as mysterious, almost ethereal. Through this description, Gaskell is able to “Other” them completely. They are disembodied, with only a hand or a head to show that they are there. They are only partially there, thus implying that they are not fully human. They are also spectral. They have pale faces with dark eyes, almost as if they were dead or entranced. They seem to be ghosts and thus exist outside the realm of the living. The men of the union usually, as the name implies, attempt to provide a sense of community or belonging. Gaskell negates this by having them appear as a very threatening Other to a member of their own class—Mary, who through her attempts at social climbing and aspirations to middle-class respectability is identified more closely with the middle class than with her own.

This Othering adds significantly to the amount of mysterious and almost supernatural power coupled with violence evident in the lower working classes, and it only intensifies in the working class as the novel proceeds. For example, when the masters meet to hear the union delegation speak, they discuss the brutal beating of a knobstick (a strikebreaker). That the union members would take to unsolicited violence against a man who was merely looking for work to feed his family illustrates how the workers become more and more threatening as their desperation grows. This violent action culminates in a weird ritual deciding who is to murder the master’s son. They tear up a piece of paper and make a mark on one of the pieces. Whoever picks the paper with the mark must kill the young Carson. This scene is filled with ritualistic and mysterious imagery, and again we see cruel violence and supernatural power paired together. E. Holly Pike says: “The work of the union on behalf on the factory hands is presented as
coercive and violent" (27). When pushed, the members of the working class become violent, a threat to the middle class ideology and social constructs. This apparent threat, then must be neutralized, and Gaskell posits maternalism as the correct tool with which to accomplish this.

The working class needs a mother figure in order to diffuse the threat that their supernatural power and violence poses to middle class social order. It is mothering which draws the worker back into the child’s role, leaving them passive in the hands of the middle-class. Perhaps the most telling example of this redemptive mothering power is Barton’s relationship at the end of the novel to the mill-owner, Carson. Carson becomes a mother figure to the child Barton. As he assumes this role, the threat Barton embodied is neutralized because he retreats back into the space of childlike dependence on the mother.

He [Carson] raised up the powerless frame; and the departing soul looked out of the eyes with gratitude, He held the dying man propped in his arms, John Barton folded his hands, as if in prayer. No other words would suggest themselves than some of those he had read only a few hours before: “God be merciful to us sinners,—Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us” (438).

With imagery that is more suited to a Pieta than a death-scene Carson becomes a maternal Christ. He is a savior, giver-of-grace, that is performing the maternal tasks of comfort, and love. Carson holds Barton, the offending worker, and gives him a sort of blessing before he dies. This Pieta imagery clearly places Carson in the role of an ideal Christian mother, and John Barton accordingly assumes the role of the child. As he does so his threat to the mill-owner is completely negated.
Critics have found this scene fascinating for its strange characterization of Carson as forgiving and Christ-as-mother. Hilary Schor says, “Barton must become like [a] child and be forgiven for not knowing what he is doing. For Carson to be Christ-as-mother, Barton’s autonomy . . . must be denied” (36). The forgiveness and class reconciliation at the end of the novel are achieved through this moment, when Barton lies like a helpless child in the elder Carson’s arms. Schor says this is necessary for forgiveness, and that Barton must give up his opinions and autonomy to be able to live in peace with the masters. For Barton to become a child, he must also become a dependant of the middle-class parent. A child is not autonomous. He must give up the threat, with all of its violence and weird, almost supernatural power that he poses to society and take on a child-like and dependant role.

We have seen that at the end of the novel Carson is portrayed in the same manner as a sort of Christ-as-mother figure. It is clear from this idyllic representation of the relationship between the mill owner and the working class that Gaskell considers the solution to class estrangement and violence to be that of maternal rule over the lower classes. Indeed, it is only when the mill owner assumes a maternal role that the threat posed by the violent form of Otherness the working classes possess becomes neutralized and their true, innocent, childish nature reasserts itself. The workers may be monsters, violent and strange Others, but they need not stay that way. When they are under the care and influence of a good mother, the threat they once posed is neutralized. Uglow describes Gaskell’s threatening worker as “the monster we remember has no mother only a father” (Uglow, 204). The mother acts as a civilizing force, not the father. Love, comfort, forgiveness and moral teaching are maternal qualities which bring out the child
in the potentially dangerous Other. The harsh treatment that the factory owners first used to subdue the workers belongs to paternalism. They assume that the workers are ignorant and willful, therefore they will have to be punished. However, the mill-owners harsh refusal to meet the demands of the union forces the working man closer to violent, regressive behavior. As Uglow says, “The ‘mother’ is at once the sword of conscience and the fountain of mercy, who gives to a child ‘tender words of comfort, be her grief or error what it might” (205). This is the role that Mr. Carson steps into at the end of the novel. He forgives John Barton and comforts him at his death with the mercy and forgiveness that only a mother can give, despite the fact that Barton has killed his son.

The way in which Carson is brought to a realization of his nurturing role is significant. He understands his correct role, according to Gaskell, through the observation of children. As he is walking back to his house, preparing to turn Barton in to the police, he sees an errand boy brush past a small middle-class girl, causing her to fall and cut her face. Her nurse, who is walking with the little girl, immediately threatens the boy with calling the police. The girl replies, “Please dear nurse, I’m not much hurt; it was very silly of me to cry, you know He did not mean to do it He did not know what he was doing, did you, little boy? (434, emphasis original) The little girl echoes words that Carson has just heard in John Barton’s house as he asked for forgiveness. The scene touches Carson and makes him take down his Bible when he returns to his house and come to the conclusion that he ought to forgive Barton. He realizes the importance of forgiveness by watching this scene in the street, and comes to a full knowledge of his responsibilities as a master to take care of the workers that he has under his care. Hilary Schor points out that “The parent previously in this novel has been the angry father,” but
that "maternal wisdom suggests a way of watching over that protects, nurtures, bonds, connects—that restores what has been lost" (32-33). Gaskell is clearly rejecting the role of a paternal guide for the masses, in favor of a parental role that is sympathetic, understanding and loving; in other words, a maternal role. The role of the mother is the one which Gaskell seems to be advocating in *Mary Barton*.

Gaskell emphasizes the role of mothers in this novel, but strangely, there are relatively few actual mothers present in it. Mary's mother dies early on, and Jem's mother is a querulous and bitter woman by the end of the novel. But while there are few mothers, men often assume a maternal role. The novel opens, in fact, with a scene in which fathers are carrying their children while the mothers walk with their arms free. Also, critics have sometimes noted that John Barton and his friend Wilson nurture and comfort the Davenport family while their father is dying and unable to work. This male mothering seems odd, especially as it takes place in the lower classes, but it actually fits well into Gaskell's idea of social harmony. First, she is implying that the ability to be a mother or have mother-like qualities is not simply woman's work, but rather a role that society in general and the mill owners in particular need to assume. Second, the reason why John Barton and Wilson, representing the working class poor, show these qualities is because the higher classes have refused to assume their proper role toward the lower classes, and so they must try to mother themselves. Consequently, in Barton's passionate speech at the beginning of the novel, he says

> If I am sick, do they come and nurse me? If my child is dying, does the rich man bring the wine or broth that might save his life? If I am out of work for weeks in the bad times, and winter comes, with black frost, and keen east wind,
and there is no coal for the grate and no clothes for the bed, and the thin bones are
seen through the ragged clothes, does the rich man share his plenty with me? (8).

The middle class are not providing or being proper mothers to the lower class. If they
were, the poor would not have to rely on each other, but could be sure that the upper
classes would help them and nurture them should they need it. The masculine mothers in
Mary Barton are mothers out of necessity, but their presence proves that men can and
should be mothers. The working class men are always characterized as kind and good,
responsible men while they perform maternal duties. However, we see that despite the
best efforts of Barton and his friend, Davenport dies, and the condition of the working
class does not improve despite the strike. The irresponsibility of the middle class forces
the poor to attempt to mother themselves, and although it is obvious that Gaskell
applauds the attempt, it is ultimately a failure. The lower classes of England need the
mothering of the more powerful middle and upper classes.

Lisa Surridge, in her analysis of the problematic masculinities in Mary Barton,
suggests that one reason for the political unrest in the novels is the failure of manhood.
She identifies Barton’s inability to save his child from starving to death and the other
images of starving children that are prevalent in the novel. She says “John Barton returns
to die in front of his fireless hearth, the poignant symbol of his deserted and barren home.
This passage suggests that Gaskell’s ‘tragic poem’ is centered around a tragedy of failed
manhood” (333). What fails in John Barton, however, is not so much his manhood but
his acceptance of middle class ideology. Certainly he has failed to live up to the
Victorian conception of manhood, but more fundamentally, he has failed to be a
“civilized” human being at all. The images of men who are desperate and unable to
provide for their families constitute not so much a critique of their masculinity, but rather a critique of their Otherness, which is articulated through a violent and amoral savageness that renders them unable to provide for their family.

Through Gaskell’s treatment of the lower classes in *Mary Barton*, it is clear that she was attempting a sympathetic and positive representation. However, this is complicated by an almost unconscious characterization of the working class as Other. Gaskell’s middle class prejudices are not, despite her best efforts, totally obscured. It is clear that while she writing a criticism of the middle-classes disregard of the plight of the lower class, the working class itself remains something of an enigma to her. While she was very active in philanthropy, and saw and knew the poorer classes first hand, it is clear she did not understand them very well. Despite her familiarity they were still something of an Other. We can see this in the way that she portrays their violent and savage nature. Such a quality is foreign to the middle class to which she belonged. For Gaskell, the workers were something like violent and uneducated children. Gaskell’s response and solution to this Otherness is mothering. Through mothering the threat of the Other is negated. Mothering places the lower class Other firmly in the category of children who can be taught and controlled. In a sense they are made into poorer versions of the middle class themselves, while also completely under the control of the middle class. This characterization of the lower classes is also apparent in Gaskell’s other industrial novel.

*North and South*, Elizabeth Gaskell’s second industrial novel, has been seen by most critics as both better structurally and worse politically than *Mary Barton*. Margaret Ganz, for example, says, “She is no longer challenging the social order as she had done to
a certain extent both in Mary Barton and Ruth. . . Her social message is essentially less valid” (82). This is an unjust accusation, however, for while North and South does not have the social urgency of the two earlier pieces, it still contains a defensible opinion based on personal experience. Gaskell’s social critique is far from disappearing in this second industrial novel. Instead its critique becomes more complicated and subtle as Gaskell attempts to examine the issues from both the mill-owners’ and the worker’s point of view. In Uglow’s terms it is a novel that “rejects absolutes in favor of accommodations” (371). Despite its more complicated and mature view of the social situation in England, Gaskell’s view of Others remains the same. In North and South as well as Mary Barton, the English working class evinces a tendency toward violence when pushed too far, but is also portrayed as fundamentally childlike. Gaskell’s solution remains maternalism despite her more educated and circumspect view of the industrial situation in this second novel. Like Mary Barton, North and South does not so much advocate paternalism as a love and authority based on the mother figure. Patricia Ellen Johnson speculates that Gaskell wanted to portray England’s development as a nation. “As an emerging industrial nation, it must reconsider its aristocratic, paternalistic past, and at the same time must take on new responsibilities in order to fully mature” (132). This maturation, however, must occur through the nation’s taking on maternal responsibilities. Elliot says, “Significantly the model for the paternalist relationship portrayed . . . is not the landed estate, but the middle class home” (384). This emphasis on the home focuses on the domestic, female space which is presided over by the mother. This female space is accompanied by mothering roles: those of love, forgiveness, and moral teaching. The old, feudal, paternalistic authority does not apply to the new
industrial England and to the new industrial poor; it must be revised, and Gaskell’s revision is motherhood.

In *North and South* it is clear that the working classes have not fully matured and are considered childish in comparison to both the mill owners and the gentry from the south. The novel’s political rhetoric is carried on by an implicit debate between the novel’s two main characters. Margaret Hale, the minister’s daughter from the south of England, and Mr. Thornton, the self-made mill owner. These two oppose each other in a tacit socio-political debate. Margaret first takes the side of the old paternalistic relationship of the gentry, while Thornton represents hard-core capitalism. While Margaret, as the debate develops and she becomes more educated about the industrial districts, changes her view to advocate a maternal rather than a paternal authority, it is the debate itself that most clearly characterizes the workers as children. Margaret first uses this analogy. She suggests that “the masters would like their hands to be merely tall large children with a blind unreasoning kind of obedience” (119). She seems to imply that to characterize the workers as such is to deny them their freedom and autonomy as adults. Yet it is not so much the analogy that she minds (after all, it is her own) but the fact that the masters are not trying to help these large children learn, but rather wish to keep them in the same state.

This point is illustrated further when she tells a story about a man who wished to keep his son from temptation, so he locked him in the house. After the man died the son did not know how to live in the world and so had to be rescued from starving by the authorities. The problem, she tells Thornton, is “his father has made the blunder of bringing him up in ignorance and taking it for innocence” (121). In Margaret’s view the
workers are children, but they are educatable children who must to be taught how live in
the moral and civilized world of middle-class England. Education, especially of morals,
in the Victorian era, was attributed almost solely to the mother. However, it is the duty of
the manufacturer and the middle class to act as a mother and to teach these children. As
Uglow points out, it is Margaret’s father at this point who sums up Gaskell’s opinion:
“Hale suggests that the ‘wise parent humors the desire for independent action’ and that
what is lacking is the ‘equality of friendship between the adviser and the advised class’”
(379). For Gaskell it is not that the advising class should stop advising, but that they
should take a more understanding and maternal stance. However, it should be noted that
while both Margaret and her father seem to advocate a system that would allow the
workers to eventually become the equals of the middle-class, there is, in reality, a stasis
in the mother-child relationship that they advocate. The dynamic will always remain the
same, the mother constantly teaching the child, but the child never growing into an adult.
This particular mode of mothering allows for a degree of change and growth, but never
complete maturation from child to man.

There are instances, however, in North and South, where the worker does break
out of this childlike role for a short time. Just as in Mary Barton, when the working class
is still seen as Other, they are not children, but something much more threatening. In
Gaskell’s first industrial novel, she places her sympathies solidly with the working class,
and as a result of this investment the more negative aspects of the workers are difficult to
perceive. This is not so in North and South. In this novel the scene of the riot is replete
with dangerous images. The cry of the mob as it first sees Thornton, the source of all
their despair, is one of the most chilling descriptions in Gaskell’s fiction: “As soon as
they saw Mr. Thornton, they set up a yell—to call it not human is nothing—it was as the
demoniac desire of some terrible wild beast for the food that is withheld from his
ravening” (176). Gaskell’s description of the workers clearly Others them. They become
desperate because of the lack of food, and like the workers in Mary Barton, once they are
desperate they begin to show the violence that lies latent in their nature. Gaskell’s
description places the workers down with the beasts. The beast imagery continues
throughout the scene. It is only when a maternal authority is exerted that the workers are
described as humans again. Thus Gaskell’s workers, in North and South, are represented
most often as children, but when they are desperate they are stirred to violent action
which reduces them to the level of dangerous, yet powerful animals, which must not be
trusted.

How are these middle class figures and their dualistic lower classes to relate to
one another? They cannot, without a powerful female agency. One example of this
female agency in North and South is Margaret Hale. Many critics see Margaret as a
bridge between the classes. Hilary Schor argues that “As she [Margaret] is initiated into
Milton . . .she becomes increasingly fluent with the vocabulary she must learn there—and
increasingly, she serves as a translator to other characters” (129). Schor focuses on
language, for it is language that allows Margaret to relate to and communicate with both
the rich and the poor in the novel. Through this relationship she is able to assume
maternal authority and make others assume it also. Elliot also places Margaret in the role
of mediator. She says that Margaret Hale “show[s] that sympathy is not enough
middle-class women [should] intend to fulfill the important role allotted to the as
mediators of class relations” (387). Indeed, Margaret becomes the central mother figure
of the text. Her mothering involves both nurturing and protection; however, it is not necessarily this part of her mothering that is crucial. Rather, it is the moral teaching which a mother supplies to her children, along with a degree of tangible or maternal assistance. Pam Parker says, “Margaret views her intervention in the Higgins family as primarily moral, but she also provides Mary Higgins with much-needed employment as a household servant” (328) Margaret’s mothering appears most prominently in her moral teaching, but she also fulfills the other roles of a mother as is illustrated by her taking Mary on as a servant.

Margaret’s role of mediator and mother is most prominent and most crucial during the riot scene, in which she takes on the maternal role in an attempt to show the rioters the immorality of their behavior and to force Thornton to accept his role as a maternalistic authority figure. Margaret attempts to show the workers their immorality when she protects Thornton in front of the mob. She appeals to the crowd. “For God’s sake! Do not damage your cause by this violence. You do not know what you are doing!”(179) She attempts to teach them the moral, nonviolent, and hence non-threatening way to go about having their complaints addressed, using Biblical language to try to force them back into the role of children open to lessons that teach the difference between right and wrong. As members of a savage mob, they do not know what they are doing. As Margaret increasingly assumes a maternal attitude toward the workers, the descriptions of them change. They are no longer beasts but rather “reckless boys” and “lads.” The threat is lessened by Margaret’s attempt at maternal authority which teaches morality, not the right of power. Margaret’s cries go unheard, but when the crowd sees
this vision of moral authority hit by a rock, the sight is sobering, and like guilty children they disperse and go home.

Margaret as mediator also makes Thornton assume a maternal authority over his workers. When the riot begins and Thornton is safe in his house, Margaret tells him, "Save these poor strangers, whom you have decoyed here. Speak to your workmen as if they were human beings. Speak to them kindly. Don't let the soldiers come in and cut down poor creatures who are driven mad" (177). She tells him that he must give up the old patriarchal way of doing things. He must not use deadly force with the soldiers or play at hunting by setting decoys for men. These are all harsh, punitive measures used by the paternal system. Margaret forces Thornton to see the other side of the workers, the childlike, needy side. He is to save and protect them, and speak to them kindly rather than punish them. Thornton first accepts this role by going down to face his men. However, he does not relinquish it after the riot is over; for example, at the end of the novel he constructs a place for his workers to eat lunch. He continues his mothering by not only protecting the workers, but eventually by nurturing them. The friendship that springs up between Thornton and Higgins, a factory hand, shows Gaskell's approval of Thornton's assumed role. He no longer needs Margaret to mediate for him since he has assumed the role of mother himself. Thornton is Gaskell's ideal factory owner/mother.

Many critics, however, believe that Gaskell failed to present an adequate solution in maternal authority. Patricia Ellen Johnson says, "Although the metaphor of the family remains near the center of the novel, Gaskell, in using it, is careful to emphasize modes of growth rather than of authority... The image of the family that emerges from the novel is neither patriarchal nor matriarchal" (154). Johnson seems to be ignoring a major
theme in this novel. While Gaskell rejects paternalism, it is clear she believes that some sort of family-oriented solution can be found to the social problem. Gaskell advocated a matriarchal authority where a mother’s love will guide the child and not punish and limit as a paternal control would.

E. Holly Pike, on the other hand, stresses the patriarchal authority that she sees inherent in the text. "Since Gaskell seems to be advocating a paternalist model of master-worker relations, authority is an important element of the form of society she envisions. The problem she has to try to deal with, and apparently cannot quite resolve, is what option the subordinate class has when authority is misused" (77). But the reason that Gaskell cannot resolve what to do when authority is abused is because she is not really advocating a paternalistic system at all. Margaret rejects that system, as does the author, when she accepts her life in the manufacturing town and realizes the paternalistic ways of the countryside are not functional in the city. It is only the love and authority of a mother that will not abuse power, but use it to ensure the morality of the people under its care.

Gaskell’s industrial novels clearly attempt to familiarize the lower classes while also definitively Othering them. She attempts to make them seem, especially in Mary Barton, as if they are very similar to the middle class, however, she also undermines the representation by characterizing them as completely Other. They are Other in two ways: they are violent and have a sort of supernatural power for violence, and they are also children who have not been taught the correct way to live. Gaskell’s solution to the violent and supernatural threat that these Others pose is maternalism. By acting as a mother to the lower classes, the middle class can control and contain the threat that they as Others pose. This characterization and solution to Otherness is most plain in
Gaskell’s industrial novels. However, this is not the only instance of it. Gaskell applies this same dualistic characterization and maternal solution to more distant and less familiar Others. It is my argument that Gaskell treats both members of Celtic cultures and actual colonial subjects, groups that are very often associated with the “Other,” in the same manner she treats the lower class Other in her industrial novels. This association of the lower classes with more exotic and distant others has been noticed by many critics of Victorian culture.

In discussing the lower classes of Victorian England in her book on imperial discourse, Anne McClintock cites a well-known lawyer, Mundy, who made the obsessive study of working women his hobby. It was Mundy’s goal to completely catalogue all types of working-class women. McClintock calls this “an imperial genre, for the notation of types and specimens was characteristic of the travel ethnographies being written at the time by men who were taking a good look at the marketplace of empire” (81, emphasis original). McClintock’s investigation places Mundy’s obsessions in clearly imperial space. Mundy wanted to classify working women just as many pseudo-scientists spent their time classifying the different physical traits of various colonial peoples. McClintock is suggesting that the same sort of motivation drove both studies. That motivation was the need to classify and control the Other.

Elsewhere in McClintock’s study, she discusses the creation of the “family of man” myth. This myth argues that all of humanity is part of a family, some of whose members are older and wiser than others. All classes and races were positioned within this family in relationship to each other. For instance, an African adult male was said to have the intellectual capacity of a European male child. She says that “domestic workers,
female miners and working-class prostitutes (women who worked publicly and visibly for money) were stationed on the threshold between the white and black races, figured as having fallen farthest from the perfect type of the white male and sharing many atavistic features with ‘advanced’ black men (56). McClintock clearly connects the working-class female and the colonial subject. The female public worker is not a colonized class, but is, as McClintock says, somewhere between the colonized peoples and the British race. They occupy that dangerous space which is not wholly self or Other. Such a position, fraught with startling similarities to and threatening differences from middle-class England, is what causes the fascination of both the lawyer Mundy and his fellow scientists.

McClintock focuses solely on the female worker as a threshold figure, but I will argue that the working class as a whole can be seen as occupying this same threshold position. The working class in general can be harmless, but they are more closely related to racial Others than the middle and upper classes. They rate low enough on the racial hierarchy to take on colonized people’s behaviors and characteristics, reinforcing the notion that they represent a threat to middle-class superiority.

Gaskell, though her focus was on the lower classes and abused groups in Victorian society, associated the lower classes in England with various groups of Others throughout the British Empire. Her representation of the lower class Other bears a remarkable resemblance to her representation of the colonial or racial Other. Gaskell assumes that all groups that are not middle class British Victorians can be characterized in a certain way. She tends to see them all in the dualistic manner in which she sees the lower classes. They are both dangerously and supernaturally violent, and they are also children who are violent because they have not been taught the better, more Christian
way to live. Her solution for the more distant Others remains the same as her solution for the lower class. With correct mothering, the threat will subside and the middle class will retain full beneficent control over the uneducated Other. It is important to note here that while a crucial part of mothering for Gaskell is moral teaching, this moral teaching does not lead to moral and physical independence. For Gaskell, the Other will always remain a child forever under the beneficial care and guidance of the middle class mother.
Chapter 3

The Celtic Other: Part of England, not English

In his essay, "Our Inland": Shakespeare’s "Henry V" and the Celtic Fringe

Christopher Ivic reminds his readers that "the Englishries in Wales and Ireland, it is crucial to recall, did not always retain those cultural traits that were viewed as the constitutive elements of Englishness" (88). He says that the use of the phrase “our Inland” in Shakespeare’s Henry V reveals a continuing negotiation between England and its peripheral cultures in the Elizabethan era. This negotiation was a problematic relationship between several different cultures, three supposedly subservient to the English culture, attempting to act as one nation. These cultures are strangely part of England and yet separate from it. They are domestic Others, contained in the English homeland and yet subject to it. This negotiated relationship is clearly illustrated in Gaskell’s fiction. Often Gaskell subscribes to Victorian ideology, and from her fiction it appears that she feels the members of the Celtic Fringe to be inferior to the English. These sentiments are most clearly apparent in regards to the Irish and the Welsh. Gregory Paul Winch calls them “England’s indigenous barbarians” (2). Yet she rejects an absolutist stance. In fact, in Gaskell’s fiction, the Celts are treated in much the same way as the lower classes living in England proper. If, as we have seen, Gaskell characterizes the lower classes as Other, then the fringe cultures, specifically the Irish and Welsh, would be even more Other. Not surprisingly then, we find that Gaskell deals with these two cultures in the same way that she deals with the lower classes. They are portrayed as having the same childlike/savage nature, and they are in need of mothering to neutralize the threat posed by the more violent or Other part of their nature. There are not as many
examples of overt mothering in regard to the peripheral cultures as there are to the lower classes, but the need for a mother nevertheless is implied by the lack of correct mothering on the part of both the Irish and the Welsh. In Gaskell’s fiction, they seem incapable of mothering themselves.

The relationship between England and these two peripheral cultures remained problematic in the Victorian era. With an extensive overseas empire and the prevalence of ideologies that supported imperialism, along with the continuing threat of the Irish potato famine, English interactions with Ireland and Wales came under intense scrutiny. Many Victorians traveled to Ireland to see and opine about the relationship between England and her oldest colony, especially during the famine years. The nineteenth century also saw the Welsh cultural movement in which prominent Victorians encouraged cultural traditions and festivals in Wales as a sort of resurgence of ancient English culture. Wales, according to these authorities, had a culture that was similar, if not identical, to early medieval England’s and was thus inferior to modern, advanced Victorian England. In some way both of these fringe cultures had to interact with England as a dominant and ruling force. These were inferior cultures in the sense that they were subject and subordinate to England itself. They were an empire within the homeland.

Most English Victorians, according to Winch, considered themselves culturally superior to the members of Celtic cultures that include both Ireland and Wales (2). They were commonly stereotyped as dirty, lazy, poor housekeepers, very seldom sober, mean tempered, and incredibly superstitious. The Englishman who accepted these stereotypical images could point to the poorest English cottager as hardworking, sober, and pious, and
therefore vastly superior to the slothful, nearly heathen peoples. This is especially true of the Irish. In a letter, Carlyle describes the Irish as “aimless, restless, senseless, more like apes than men; swarming about leaping into bean-fields, turnip-fields and out again” (MacKenzie, 225-6). Carlyle describes a nation of people more like animals than humans—leaping aimlessly and purposelessly, having no reason and no sense. Trevelyn, another contemporary, writes to imply that Peel’s attempt to relieve the famine is not practical because it will keep the Irish in their current state—that of savagery—and prevent them from becoming part of England’s advanced economic system (Bigelow, 161).

Elizabeth Gaskell’s opinions were no exception to this rule. She too thought the Irish inferior to England and English culture, an attitude that for centuries had existed in England.

Despite her egalitarian leanings, Gaskell accepted both Ireland and Wales as inferior to the English, even if she does not particularly stress the issue. They are later additions to England, not England proper. Ireland was still a colony during the Victorian era, however, Wales also had at one time been conquered by the English. Even though Wales existed as part of Britain and Ireland was under English control, their history as separate nations and conquered peoples added to their inferior status. Gaskell not only considers these two cultures inferior, she portrays them as Others just as she does the lower classes living in England proper. This Othering, however, is not particular to Gaskell. “For Englishmen at home and abroad, domestic class and overseas colonial society were linked by the ‘internal colonialism’ of the Celtic Fringe” (Stocking 234).

The Irish especially were often Othered by identification with the colonial races—for example, Africans. Anne McClintock describes a Victorian cartoon where Irish
characters are made to look simian-like in order to establish their inherent relation to the inferior or colonized peoples, and ultimately to the apes from which humans evolved (53). We have seen from Gaskell’s portrayal of the lower classes in England that she characterizes them dualistically—as both innocent children and dangerous savages, she portrays both the Irish and the Welsh in the same way. Their homes are crude and very often dirty; their emotions are also primitive and thus violent and dangerous. They resemble the savage and childlike working class rather closely.

For instance, in Wales, there is a sense in which the culture itself, not just the people, represents a younger, immature England. Like the Welsh, the British were once savages, though they are now civilized. In the words of Conrad’s narrator in Heart of Darkness, “And this also has been one of the dark places of the earth” (63). The Victorians often classified races into a hierarchy that measured civilization with more primitive (immature) races at the bottom and the fully civilized English at the top. Anne McClintock says that “Racial stigmata were systematically, if often contradictorily, drawn on to elaborate minute shadings of difference in which social hierarchies of race, class, and gender overlapped each other in a three dimensional graph of comparison” (54). So it is with Gaskell’s representation of Wales and Ireland. They rate lower than the English on the racial ladder. Many times the Victorians justified their racial hierarchy by pseudo-scientific classification. For instance, the skulls of white middle class male children were supposed to resemble those of the white female working class adults (McClintock, 55). McClintock’s example of the white female working class is one of the many ways in which the Victorians used social stigmata to establish hierarchy. Gaskell uses the same system to place both the lower classes and the Welsh and Irish.
below the English middle class. Because of this, Gaskell, as well as many other
Victorians, thought these cultures should be treated as children, or immature beings. The
culture as a whole appeared inferior to England.

This patronizing attitude was balanced with a fear of the irrationality and
unpredictable violence of what the Victorians perceived to be the Celtic character. For
instance, the strange combination of pity and fear shown in Gaskell’s description of the
Irish is also common in contemporary accounts of the Irish famine. Margaret Kelleher, in
her book *The Feminization of Famine*, describes a famine narrative where the narrator is
clawed by hungry women. In this sketch, the victim who narrates this incident describes
the women in such a way as to invoke pity for the Irish in their famished state. There is
also an incredible fear on this narrator’s part, for they grab his clothing as if to reduce
him to their present naked and helpless state, but it seems as if the fear of and loathing for
the desperate Irish are stronger than the pity that he attempts to invoke.

Gaskell differs from her contemporary in that although the Irish do pose a threat
in her novels, they do not evoke the sort of personal fear that Kelleher’s narrator feels.
He fears being pulled down to the level of the starving females, and their violence against
him nearly accomplishes this. For Gaskell the threat is general and associated with
unnatural power, not as intimately threatening as the narrator’s contact with the starving
women was. For her, the main characteristics of this power are that it is violent and very
often supernatural. Aside from the differing interpretations of threat, Gaskell’s pity also
varies slightly from Kelleher’s narrator’s in that her pity turns the Irish into children, not
simply miserable beings. When they are portrayed as children, then the threat which the
Irish posed completely melts away under the corrective influence of the mother.
It would seem to follow, then, that if Gaskell characterizes these Celtic cultures in the same manner as she does the working classes of England, her conception of England’s responsibility to the Irish and the Welsh would also be the same. Since the fiction dealing with these cultures is not the open social rebuke that it was in the industrial novels, Gaskell’s advocacy of a solution or responsibility on the part of England is much more subtle. In Gaskell’s fiction, the need for a mother is articulated by the absence of successful or sufficient mothering in both the Irish and the Welsh cultures. By characterizing these cultures as unable to mother themselves correctly she implies that they need an imperial mother to replace their fumbling attempts at mothering and to teach them to live in England’s civilized, moral world.

The dual nature of the Irish is illustrated by contrasting the way that they are portrayed in *Cranford* and in Gaskell’s short story “The Poor Clare” to their characterization in *North and South*. The first two texts depict the Irish as dangerous and unpredictable, but also pitiable. However, they pose a threat and must be narratively neutralized and often erased via the death and tragedy which results from their violence and inadequate mothering. In *North and South*, however, the Irish are infantilized. They are unable to do anything for themselves and must rely solely on the English mill-owner to provide for them. In the first two examples, the threat is not counteracted by proper mothering and so the characters remain violent and savage, but in the third it is neutralized by the correct mothering behaviors of the English mill-owner.

In *Cranford*, we are introduced to the character of the mysterious and exotic magician Signor Brunoni, who causes anxiety about the Irish in the English village of Cranford. This is especially so when Miss Pole relates to Miss Matty the appearance at the door of
an Irish beggar-woman. "An Irish beggar-woman came not half an hour ago, and all but forced herself past Betty, saying her children were starving, and she must speak to the mistress. You see, she said 'mistress' though there was a hat hanging up in the hall, and it would have been more natural to have said 'master.' But Betty shut the door in her face" (141). With all the rumors of violence and chaos circulating about the traveling magician, it is not difficult to understand why this elderly lady becomes frightened, but this incident reveals several generally accepted assumptions about the Irish. Miss Pole assumes the dishonesty and treachery of the Irish woman. To her, the fact that the Irish beggar-woman said "mistress" instead of "master" implies not that the Irish woman is familiar with the community of Cranford, but that she has an uncanny interest in and knowledge of the house. The woman comes to beg for food and is automatically assumed to be part of a gang that wishes to rob Miss Pole. Gordon Bigelow says that many attitudes toward the Irish during the famine period were informed by a Protestant work ethic, "Where poverty was punishment for sinful waste and irrational habits, and where wealth was a sign of a contrite soul" (158). Miss Pole assumes that the Irish woman is sinful and therefore dangerous and violent because she is poor. The fact that the woman's children really might be starving never occurs to her. Later, as Miss Pole repeats the story, she exaggerates until the Irish woman becomes an Irish man dressed in women's clothing in order to figure out how best to rob Miss Pole. Through this exaggeration we see how Miss Pole typifies the Irish as a powerful threat to the safety and continuity of life in Cranford. The threatening aspect of the Irish character also is here connected with a lack of or inability to mother or nurture correctly.

In many of Gaskell's portrayals of the Irish and the Welsh, a decided lack of
mothering is apparent. This lack of proper mothering is an indication that the Celtic cultures are unable to care not only for their own young, but for themselves. The incident of the beggar-woman in Cranford is an effective illustration. The woman comes to the door to beg for food. She says that her children are starving. This was not uncommon in Ireland while the potato famine was at its worst; however, this is England, where the Irish were supposed to be able to find jobs that would at least allow them to survive. In an attempt to find some food for them she takes to begging. Even this effort is unsuccessful despite her push to get through Miss Pole's door. The Irish mother, even when reduced to asking others for food, is unable to feed her own children. Margaret Kelleher, in her book The Feminization of Famine, observes that "famine scenes are very frequently depiction of the failure or collapse of this primal shelter, of the mother's inability to nourish or protect her child. In this regard, the maternal image develops a much moreunsettling and threatening quality" (7). The inability of mothers to provide for their children is intricately tied into the imagery of famine, which Gaskell uses to depict the Irish as helpless. This image of the ineffective mother underscores the Irish need for the help of the English.

Gaskell, in Cranford, and elsewhere, therefore implies that the English should become substitutes for the inadequate mothers who do not know how to nurture their children. She would like to see the ladies of Cranford step in and become mothers for the poor Irish woman. However, instead of mothering her, Miss Pole had the maid shut the door in her face. If Miss Pole had let her in she would have ascertained that the beggar held no threat. With proper English mothering the threat would have disappeared and the woman would have lost the dangerous aspect of Otherness and become merely a peaceful
inferior However, Miss Pole refuses to take on the role of mother and the poor Irish
ownan remains a threat. Miss Pole is afraid of robbery and she is certain that the woman
only came to scout the house for valuable things to steal. However, if she had brought
her in and fed her and her children, she would have not only been a mother to the woman
but neutralized her threat.

Gaskell's short story "The Poor Clare" also expresses concern about the violent
and unpredictable side of the Irish. In this story the Irish character becomes an even
more powerful and dangerous figure; she is associated with strange and threatening
powers and ultimately, witchcraft. When Gaskell first introduces her Irish characters,
the Irish mother, Bridget, walks with a firm step beside the wagon instead of riding on it.
Everyone else is either riding a horse or on the wagon, so the reader is immediately
struck by her great strength and endurance. As the story continues, the reader learns that
the woman who walks beside the wagon is a companion to the new Irish bride. This
companion ends up ruling the house and Gaskell describes her as having the "magic of a
superior mind" (53). Almost immediately the woman is characterized as despotic and
magical. That she has usurped her mistress's place as the ruler of the house clearly
characterizes her as a threatening figure. She has power over her mistress partially
because she takes that power and partially because she has a supernatural power of
intelligence that makes others obey and fear her. Both of these tendencies make her a
threat to English power structures. This is only a foreshadowing of the figure of danger
that Bridget will become. As an old woman, she lives in her little cottage with the dog
that her daughter had once loved. A hunter wandering in the area shoots this dog in a fit
of passion. Bridget responds, "Those never throve that did me harm... You shall live to
see the creature you love best, and who alone loves you become a terror and a loathing to all, for this blood sake” (59). She curses the man that killed her dog. She embodies a threat that is both violent and supernatural. Her curse causes real pain to the Englishman, and her supernatural potency make this possible. She, like the violent working classes, seems to represent a Otherness that is threatening to English middle class ideology

Bridget’s Irish heritage and the fact that she is a Roman Catholic lend to this strange supernatural character. To the average Unitarian Dissenter, Roman Catholicism and its ritualistic worship seemed dangerously close to idolatry. This, combined with the potential for supernatural danger, makes Bridget a striking example of the threat that Ireland presents in Gaskell’s fiction. The strength of this power is shown by the fact that Bridget’s curse remains even after Bridget becomes a nun and confesses her sin. Her curse is only lifted with her death.

Bridget exemplifies not only the dangerous aspect of the Irish, but also the failed mother. Bridget’s failure is not in being unable to provide her child with sustenance, but in not fulfilling another, more sacred duty of Victorian motherhood—that of moral instruction. This is seen in Bridget’s problematic relationship with he daughter. It is the departure of her daughter that first sends Bridget into the despair that eventually pushes her into witchcraft. Bridget’s daughter wants a change from the life that she led, and so she obtains a position as a lady’s maid abroad. Bridget is hurt by her daughter’s seeming rejection of her, but instead of either loving the child and convincing her to stay at home or giving her good and constructive advice before she left, she refuses to show any correct motherly behaviors and in a sense rejects her child just as she assumes her child
has rejected her.

It was Mary who clung to her mother with passionate embrace [declaring] that she would never leave her; and it was Bridget, who at last loosened her arms and grave and tearless herself, bade her keep her word, and go forth into the wide world. Bridget was as still as death, scarcely drawing her breath, or closing her stony eyes; till at last she turned back into her cottage (54).

At the time of separation it is Mary, the child, who shows the most affection and regret. Bridget’s stiffness seems unnatural next to her daughter’s emotional departure. She is described as deathlike, tearless and stony, certainly not motherly. This lack of emotional and moral support has dire consequences for Mary. Mary writes her mother about her prospective marriage to a man high above her in station, and later we learn that her fate was, in the words of her child’s nurse, Mrs. Clarke, that of “some beautiful young woman whom he had lured away from her protector while he was abroad. I have heard he practiced some terrible deceit upon her” (81). The Victorian reader, like the modern, could have little doubt as to what this deceit was, and the poor girl’s suicide comes as no surprise. But had her mother given her the proper moral teaching and fulfilled her duty as spiritual guide, this sin could have been avoided. Bridget’s mothering was inadequate; first because she refused to give her daughter the response that might have kept her from going away altogether and secondly, because she failed to morally instruct her daughter so that she might not be seduced by such men. Her daughter’s disappearance and the despair that results from it are what finally pushes Bridget into witchcraft. Gaskell directly indicates a lack of mothering as the cause of the threat that Bridget has become,
but had her mistress been a mother figure to her it might have rendered her powerless.

The characterization of the Irish as dangerous and supernatural is qualified by Gaskell’s portrayal of them as children in her novel *North and South*. When the Irish are depicted as children who receive the proper mothering from English people, they do not become a threat. If “The Poor Clare” presents a negative image of the Irish without mothering, then *North and South* shows a positive situation in which the Irish receive proper maternal care and do not become violent or dangerous. In *North and South*, a critical moment occurs when the workers find out that the mill-owner, Thornton, has brought in Irish workers to fill the orders that were unfilled because of the strike. These Irish workers are childlike—easily frightened and unable to care for themselves.

“They’ve frightened these poor Irish starvelings so with their threats, that we daren’t let them out. You may see them huddled in that top room in the mill—and they’re to sleep there to keep them safe from those brutes who will neither work nor let them work. And Mamma is seeing about their food, and John is speaking to them, for some of the women are crying to go back” (173).

Thornton, the mill-owner, has a sister that is little more than a child herself, and in this quote she is addressing her comment to Margaret, the heroine of the novel. She prefaces her comments by calling the Irish poor, and while they were undoubtedly poor because of the famine, the word, I believe, denotes an expression of pity as well as a reference to monetary worth, placing the Irish on a level below a character that is little more than a child herself. What makes them even more child-like is that they are easily frightened by the threat of the men who are going on strike. Their fright seems ridiculous, especially as
Margaret, the heroine of the novel, has just walked through the streets where a riot was brewing. The Irish are grown men and women from the working class in Ireland, but Gaskell apparently feels the need to characterize them as children in order to highlight their weakness and their utter dependence on the motherly qualities of the mill owner.

Margaret Kelleher says that the English saw Irish women in particular as more hardy than the English working class because of all the hardships they suffered. However, in Gaskell’s novel, the mill owner must speak to them and comfort them, as one would calm little children in the midst of a thunderstorm. Furthermore, they are portrayed as unable to provide themselves with the necessities of life. The mill-owner must do this for them. He provides them with a place to sleep, and his mother looks into the matter of getting them food. This portrayal of the Irish contrasts both with the strangely powerful image of the Irish Catholic witch whom everyone fears and with the dangerously violent robbers who steal at night. In *North and South* the Irish cannot support themselves, let alone effectively oppose English domination, but then they are provided with adequate mother figures in Thornton and his mother. Throughout the novel, whenever the Irish are mentioned, the word Irish is either prefaced with the word poor or they are referred to as Thornton’s Irish, or “his Irish.” They have absolutely no agency themselves, but instead rely on the mill owner for protection, shelter, food, and even their identity.

*North and South* contains the most obvious suggestion of England’s maternal responsibility to the Irish and the Celtic Fringe. As we saw in the previously quoted passage, the Irish, unable to care for themselves, rely upon the English mill owner and his mother to provide for them. Thornton and his mother fulfill most of the roles that a
proper Victorian mother filled. They nurture the Irish by providing them with food and
shelter, and they protect them from the men outside. More than this, Thornton attempts to
comfort and teach the people that he brought over from their homeland. He must teach
them not only that there is nothing to be afraid of, but also how to do the work which they
were brought over to do. When Gaskell portrays adequate mothering (*North and South*)
of those she considers her social inferiors, then the violent and dangerous nature is
contained. Where there is no mothering on the part of the English ("The Poor Clare"),
then the Celtic Fringe’s own inadequate mothering is shown and their violent nature is
unrestrained. This pattern does not apply only to the Irish; the Welsh in Gaskell’s fiction
also occupy the inferior position.

Gaskell wrote two short stories that are set in Wales. In these stories, the Welsh
also lack mothering skills and hence are in need an imperial mother. There are numerous
examples of Welsh child savages and of an extensive inability to mother themselves. The
Welsh, though they lack the fearful and threatening images of famine that are frequently
associated with the Irish, are nonetheless characterized in the same way. The Welsh have
two aspects, one mysterious and very often dangerous and the other child-like. The
child-like qualities are seen in their individual personalities, which tend to be childish,
and a certain naiveté in their actions, particularly regarding their moral decisions. The
more dangerous aspect of their character is established in much the same way as it is with
the Irish; there are curses and a certain wild, moody character which make them
unpredictable and dangerous. These supernatural powers are frequently associated by
Victorians with the Gaelic cultures in Gaskell’s fiction.

A good example of this dangerous and child-like nature of the Celts is Gaskell’s
short story, “The Doom of the Griffiths.” The story opens with a discussion about a famous Welsh hero who had for many years opposed English rule. Owain Glendwr was betrayed to the English by someone he considered his best friend. Glendwr’s response to this is to tell his betrayer, Rhys ap Gryfydd or Griffith,

Thy race shall be accursed. Each generation shall see their lands melt away like snow; yea their wealth shall vanish, though they may labor night and day to heap up gold. And when nine generations have passed from the face of the earth, thy blood shall no longer flow in the veins of any human being. In those days the last male of the race shall avenge me. The son shall slay the father (104).

The national hero offers a specific and elaborate curse against the man that betrayed him. Once again Gaskell assigns supernatural power to the peripheral British cultures. The story that Gaskell tells is the successful fulfillment of this prophecy, confirming the power of Owain Glendwr, who as a national hero and rebel is a figure that contains a very real threat to British authority. The son does indeed kill the father, and the fact that it happened accidentally rather than by a premeditated act gives even more credit to the supernatural power of this enemy of England. Not only do the Welsh possess supernatural powers, but they have other qualities which identify them with Gaskell’s portrayal of the working class.

The characters’ paradoxical personalities portray them as both dangerous and childlike. In describing the cursed father of the ninth generation, Gaskell says, “His was a not uncommon character. In general he was mild, indolent and easily managed, but once thoroughly roused, his passions were vehement and fearful” (106). The father is
generally mild and tractable, characteristics that one would usually attribute to a particularly obedient child. This is a good example of the way in which Gaskell sees the Welsh both as children, innocent and good, but also as a potential danger. When the man is roused, he is fearful. The fact that this is a story about the fulfillment of a Welsh curse centuries after it was pronounced, as well as about the two opposite sides of the father’s character, illustrates Gaskell’s dualistic view of the Welsh subject. Gaskell implies that most Welsh men have this character. Indeed, she describes the son in much the same terms. The Welsh temperament, for Gaskell, was clearly one of extremes, and not to be trusted.

It is also clear that Gaskell believes there is a lack of adequate mothering in Wales. In Gaskell’s brief narrative of the father’s youth, she mentions Robert’s mother as an heiress and then as having borne two sons. After this Robert’s mother completely disappears from the narrative, establishing her ineffectiveness as a mother. We learn later that her older son died from an illness brought on by a drinking bout. Later she mentions that Llewellyn, as the oldest, received preferential treatment, while Robert was mostly ignored. It is clear that whatever mothering that Robert and Llewellyn had was inadequate. A good Victorian mother would love her children equally and provide them with moral guidance. However, this lack of mothering and its unfortunate effects are even more clearly seen in the next generation.

The lack of mothering in the second generation is the most tragic, for its consequences are death and violence—the eventual fulfillment of the curse. Owen’s mother died shortly after his birth, and from that moment on he becomes the favorite in his father’s eyes. The father completely ignores Owen’s sister. “Augharad was almost
neglected, while little Owen was king of the house; still next to his father, none tended
him so lovingly as his sister” (107). The parenting is unequal and therefore not the
unconditional loving care that a mother should have given her child. Also, we see that
Owen’s father has neglected to step fully into the mother’s role as he makes no attempt to
teach Owen right from wrong, but indulges his every whim. Gaskell says that he was
king of the house. Augharad, the older sister, attempts to stand in as mother for the little
Owen, but she is virtually powerless to do anything that really makes a difference, for she
cannot wield more power than her father Gaskell says that “She had performed so many
thoughtful, noiseless little offices, on which their daily comfort depended” (109).
Augharad does her best to be the ministering angel that the mother is supposed to be, but
she can only perform on the margins and never fully enters into the family dynamic that
exists between the father and the son. This inadequacy in the youth of both the father and
the son lets them indulge their violent temper Gaskell seems to imply that without the
tempering presence of a true mother who teaches morality, self-control and other
Protestant virtues, furious tempers and selfish natures result.

This is even clearer when the father, Robert, remarries. The new wife, the step-
mother who should have assumed the role of mother for the now teenage Owen, instead
works to set his father against him. When the narrator describes the overly sweet way in
which this new wife initially acts toward Owen, she says, “There was a watchful glance
of the eye that Owen once or twice caught when she had imagined herself unobserved,
and many other nameless little circumstances, that gave him a strong feeling of want of
sincerity in his stepmother” (110). The new wife, instead of accepting Owen as a son and
attempting to teach and love him as a mother should, flatters him, all the while trying to
thwart his wishes and present him in a negative light to his father. Owen's lover is one of which his father would not approve, and eventually it is his stepmother who reveals to his father Owen's secret marriage to the lovely Nest, also implying that Nest was less than faithful to his son. This and the scenes that ensue are the final fulfillment of Owain Glendwr's prophecy. Robert rushes to the house where Owen's wife and son live and rips his grandson out of his son's arms and throws it to its mother, its head accidentally hits the side of the table, and the baby dies. While Robert and his wife attempt to flee, his father follows and is accidentally drowned. The prophecy is fulfilled.

This catastrophe is an example of how inadequate mothering releases violent, supernatural powers. If both Robert and his son had proper maternal care, this would not have happened. Instead there was indulgence where there should have been moral teaching. They were both raised to indulge in their tempers, with a mother they would have learned selflessness from her example. They would both have learned temperance, and the women would have been a calming and moral influence among them. The Victorian mother was supposed to be a moral example to her children, yet this stepmother deceived and lied, making it impossible to learn from her example. It is improper maternal care that keeps these Welsh men slaves to the baser and more fearful parts of their characters. Like John Barton, without the proper mothering influence, they lapse into a violent and threatening nature. If a mother had been provided, perhaps then even the curse of Owain Glendwr would have been powerless to oppose her moral and angelic presence.

This same dualistic vision of the Celtic cultures occurs in Gaskell's other Welsh short story, "The Well of Pen-Morfa." Here Wales is presented as a younger England,
resulting in a more patronizing stance for the English representative and more child-like one for the Welsh. Gaskell immediately attempts to make the village of Pen-Morfa as foreign as possible. She says, “I think they might call Pen-Morfa a Welsh Welsh village; it is so national in its ways, so different from the towns and hamlets into which the English throng in summer” (123). She comments on the difference between it and even the Welsh villages that the English go to in the summer. This emphasis on difference suggests that Gaskell is attempting to set her story in what she would like her readers to think of as a different country. She truly seems to wish to make them as much of an Other as possible. This country is more primitive and less civilized than England. Anne McClintock says, “The stubborn and threatening heterogeneity of the colonies was contained and disciplined not as socially or geographically different from Europe and thus equally valid, but as temporally different” (40). This is precisely what Gaskell is doing with her depiction of the Welsh. They are inferior and controlled, just like the colonies that McClintock mentions, because they are characterized as being similar to primitive civilizations. Gaskell says, “I could tell you of a great deal which is peculiar and wild in these true Welsh who are what I suppose we English were a century ago” (124). These people are children compared to the English. As such they are just as dangerous and wild as the English had been before they became civilized. As she deliberately Others them, she treats them in the same way as she has treated different groups of Others.

There is a lack of adequate mothering in this story typical of Gaskell’s characterization of these internally colonized people. The heroine, a Welsh beauty named Nest, does have a mother with whom she lives and is very close to. Here, as in the
previously discussed story of a Welsh parent, the child is indulged instead of taught.

Gaskell, as we have seen, does not advocate a harsh discipline for those she considers inferior, but she does believe that they cannot become truly civilized until they are taught the difference between right and wrong according to Christian morality. This is where Nest's mother fails just as Owen's father failed.

Nest knew she was beautiful, and delighted in it. Her mother sometimes checked her in her happy pride, and sometimes reminded her that her beauty was a gift from God. . . but when she began her little homily, Nest came dancing to her, and knelt down before her, and put her face up to be kissed, and so with a sweet interruption, she stopped her mother's lips (126).

We see an attempt at correct mothering, but just as little Owen was king of the house, so is Nest, and the correct hierarchy of parent over child is disrupted. Nest is able to control her own mother and refuses to hear the moral wisdom that she attempts to teach her. Nest is later characterized as a flirt and a vain girl, a character trait that leads to the sorrow of the story. Nest insists on wearing all her best clothes and shoes to go to the well, and because of the slipperiness of the rocks, she falls and is paralyzed for life. It is ultimately the mother's failure to teach Nest Christian morality and humility that leads to the subsequent sorrow, even though the story itself is a story about a girl overcoming bitterness in order to lead a truly godly life. Nest, however, is unable to accomplish this until she is ministered to by the English Dissenting preacher who comes to visit her. It is not until the teaching that should have come from the mother comes through an English minister that Nest can truly leave behind her childish and vain ways. The Welsh inability
to properly nurture and raise children leads to sorrow, but it is the teaching and comforting (two motherly qualities) of a Dissenting preacher that finally heal Nest. Consistently, in Gaskell’s fiction, the Welsh are unable to provide the proper mothering for themselves. There are very few examples of good mothering among the Welsh, and given this, they need an English substitute in order to make them into a good, civilized people.

Jo Pryke, in her article about Gaskell’s fiction, says that Wales symbolizes both sorrow and sex for Gaskell due to her personal experiences there. Gaskell honeymooned in Wales, and it is also the place where her son William died (Pryke 75). It seems to be true that sorrow and sex are emphasized in the Welsh stories. Perhaps Gaskell felt guilty about the death of her son and therefore associates inadequate mothering with Wales; however, I associate this phenomenon with Gaskell’s view of subordinate groups or Others as needing an English mother to help them. This perceived need also could have ties to Gaskell’s own personal experiences in Wales as a mother. Wherever this phenomenon of sorrow and sadness stemmed from, it is a continuation of the pattern of Gaskell’s characterization of the lower class as both children and savages, and England’s proper role as mother to these cultures.

As demonstrated by Gaskell’s fiction, both Wales and Ireland though more foreign than the working classes, still contain the characteristics of these more familiar Others. They, like Gaskell’s working class, are viewed as both childlike and violently threatening. They are a people who can quickly turn savage if provoked, but mostly they are portrayed as children. Gaskell sees these Celtic cultures as a younger or earlier version of the English; they are primitive Englishmen. The Welsh are especially seen as
such, but the Irish, too, fall in this category. Gaskell tempers this view of these two peripheral cultures with a tendency to view them as not only savage, but youthfully innocent. They need a mother's care and moral guidance. Gaskell then responds to people in need, rather than to the dangerous, savage side of these cultures. She acknowledges this side, but instead of focusing on the fear that this generates, she concentrates on the unfortunate consequences of inadequate mothering and how this damages the Welsh and Irish cultures and keeps them in their savage state. For Gaskell, the correct response for England and all English people, especially those of the middle class, should not be fear, anger or disgust, but a gentle love and acceptance, i.e., England should love and morally guide its subject cultures. In Gaskell's opinion, as England adopts this role these cultures will lose their threatening aspects and they will become more and more like the true citizens of the mother country.
Chapter 4

The Colonial or Eastern Other: Similarities hid in Differences

There are relatively few examples of colonized or colonial peoples in Gaskell’s fiction. Gaskell’s vision was far more often focused on her homeland than the peoples and places of the Empire. However, the instances where colonized people do appear are particularly illustrative of Gaskell’s treatment of Others, for they continue the pattern that was set by her treatment of both the lower classes and the Celtic cultures. Here also the dualistic vision and the maternal solution are clearly defined and examined.

As I have argued throughout this thesis, Gaskell characterizes the colonized (Eastern or Western) races as having a double nature: that of both a child and a savage. Though the average member of the subject race is both a child and a savage, without the proper moral authority, the savage or sinful nature assumes control and very often poses a threat to the colonizer, who in this case occupies the same position as the English middle class does to the working class in Gaskell’s industrial novels. In response, the authority that Gaskell advocates is, once again, that of a mother. Maternal authority not only nurtures and cares for the people under its protection, but teaches them Christian morals which are crucial to civilized development. When the moral authority, or the colonizer in this case, is harsh and unloving, Gaskell characterizes them negatively as neglectful of their duty as middle class English Christians. This particular depiction of both the colonized and the colonizer illustrates that Gaskell’s attitude toward what she considers subservient or inferior groups is the same whether they be in England or on the other side of the earth. Because Gaskell herself knew little about the empire, when she portrays colonial peoples she does so with a frame of reference that ties them closely to groups,
like the lower class, with which she had more experience. Her representation of them is not based on a study of history or empire but rather on her own concepts of the unknown or other. Gaskell’s characterization of colonized races echoes that of the Welsh and Irish and the lower classes in England itself. She considers them both childlike and dangerous.

There are three particular episodes from Gaskell’s fiction which I would like to examine. Each of these demonstrates her conflicting vision of the subject peoples and her solution to their lack of civilized or Christian behavior. Two of my examples come from Gaskell’s historical fiction. There she discusses the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized as it exists in her historical interpretations, for example, in a short story about the Salem witch trials set in sixteenth century colonial America. In these discussions of empire as it existed in the past, whether in America or Syria, Gaskell’s dual vision and her response of maternalistic authority are clear. My third example, Gaskell’s short novel, Cranford, set in a small English village, illustrates this maternalism even more than the historical fiction.

However, it is in one of the historical novels, Sylvia’s Lovers, that we find the clearest and most complete description of the responsibilities of the English in regards to inferior races. Gaskell places a pivotal scene in the development of the novel in Syria, where the British are helping the Turks fight the French. By isolating her characters in a setting that is completely Other, Gaskell is able to examine what it means to be English among those who are less civilized and the responsibilities that accompany such a presence. Nancy Henry states that the novel examines “ultimately what constituted a coherent sense of Englishness at the turn of the century, [this] pervades this tragic narrative of unforeseen encroachment of national event on individual lives” (xxiv). This
examination of Englishness also allows Gaskell to explore what it means to be subject to the English. Some of the most interesting relationships in the novel are those between the Syrians, whom the English are helping, and the English themselves. The Syrian chapter in *Sylvia’s Lovers* provides an example of what Gaskell would describe as a successful relationship where the English are helping those inferior and Other to themselves.

The nature of the British presence in Syria is crucial. In Gaskell’s representation they are not present as conquerors, though their position is superior to that of the natives. They are present in Syria to prevent the French from taking control of Syria. The British therefore perceive themselves as defenders and helpers of the Syrian people. They fulfill a more maternal role as contrasted to the harsh, violent, and more paternal French who force their authority on the Syrians. Kinraid, the sailor hero of the novel, and other British forces have been sent to Syria to help defeat what Nancy Henry calls the “modern infidel” or the French. In fact, Gaskell draws a parallel between the English and the old Crusaders. Speaking of Kinraid she says, “His heart was like a war-horse and said Ha! ha! as the boat bounded over the waves that were to land him, under ancient machicolated walls where the Crusaders made their last stand in the Holy Land” (383). The English are modern Crusaders trying to save the Holy Land from French power. Their quest is characterized as just and holy and thus moral, and they are willing to risk their lives in order to ensure its success. The characterization of the British as Christian warriors reinforces the moral purpose of their presence. This morality points to Gaskell’s maternal loving authority. The British are not aggressors here, but rather defenders and protectors. These are more maternal than the strict disciplinarian acts of the paternal Europeans, in this case, the French. Having justified the British presence in Syria,
Gaskell goes on to describe the ideal relationship that exists between them.

The role of the British in Syria is a holy duty just as motherhood is, and it is indeed a maternalistic and protective role that Britain plays there. The Syrians are children or innocents who desperately need the protection and the help of the British, just as the lower classes and the Celtic cultures also need the middle class Christian to teach and protect them. This is best seen in the character of the governor of Syria. When he first appears in the text he is sitting under a terebinth tree listening to the advice of the British soldiers. "the old Turk sat on his carpet, listening to the interpreter, who made known to him the meaning of the eager speeches of Sir Sidney and the colonel of the marines" (384). An old, venerable and wise Turk, the ruler of a country, is portrayed not as a thinking leader, but rather as an ignorant child. He is merely the recipient of knowledge; he does not participate as a thinking subject in the war council, but merely listens to the superior knowledge of the British. The Pacha is dumb and also deaf. His inability to even comprehend the speeches of the English without assistance reduces him to an even lower status. Like the lower classes and the Irish, he seems on the verge of bestiality. The British are truly in control of the city and it is they who tell the ruler what is going to happen and where and when. The Pacha is the child who is being instructed. He listens and learns through his interpreter, just as children learn through a teacher, what is best for his city.

The purpose of the English speaking with the governor is to teach or inform him of some truth. This role of teacher is one that Victorians usually assigned to the mother. It is crucial to Gaskell and the pattern of maternal authority that appears in her work. This motherliness does not carry with it the threat of punishment, as a paternal relationship...
would, because both parties know that the purpose of the British presence is to help the
Syrians overcome the evil French. The relationship therefore is one of mutual affection
and understanding. “When Djezzar Pacha heard that the British sailors were defending
the breach, headed by Sir Sidney Smith, he left his station in the palace garden, gathered
up his robes in haste and hurried to the breach; where with his own hands and with right
hearty good will, he pulled the sailors down from the post of danger saying that if he lost
his English friends, he lost all!”(385). The British are protecting and defending the city
with the understanding that the governor has perfect trust in them. Like the mother/child
relationship, this is an unspoken and understood assumption of roles. The British
automatically assume the role of mother and Gaskell’s infantile Pacha naively accepts
and assumes his own role as child. The Pacha’s confidence, like a child’s, depends so
much upon the English presence that he tries to pull the British sailors out of danger, but
they ignore him because he has no real authority. Even the deck hands have more
authority and therefore the right to ignore the old man. They pay no more attention to
him than a mother would to a child trying to dissuade her from doing her work. The
implication here is that all British people know better than the Turks, and what they do,
they do for the good of the Turkish people. The governor therefore relies on the British
to protect him and his country so much that he will lose everything if he no longer has the
instruction and protection the British.

This mother/child relationship is complicated, of course, by Gaskell’s dual vision
of these Others. The governor and his city represent the childlike qualities of the East.
The Turks can and should be taught and protected, but there is also the dangerous and
violent side to this group of Others. For Gaskell, the East and the people in it are merely
another group of people who need to be civilized. They may be children, but they are also dangerous and a threat. Like the Celtic cultures and the lower class, only proper mothering can neutralize this threat. The Pacha and his relationship with the British is an example of this mothering; however, the English are not mothering all of Syria. Outside the fortified town where they hold sway lies the landscape, representative of the untouched East. It is a land of death and violence. The atmosphere of unmothered Syria is illustrated in Gaskell’s description of the men’s walk to the site of the battle with the French invaders, “but now in the midst of hot smoke, with former carnage tainting the air, and with the rush and whizz of death perpetually whistling in their ear, they were uncomplaining and light-hearted” (384). The scene is a battle, but the environment seems to feed and thrive on violence and death. Even Gaskell’s descriptions of the squalid poverty and filth of the Manchester slums do not approach this description of war-time Syria for its graphic repulsiveness. Gaskell is emphasizing the violence, death and decay of the dangerous and mysterious side of Syria. Instead of a light breeze to blow away the smoke and smell of rotting bodies, the air is stagnant and reeks of killing and smoke.

This violence of the East is intensified by the experience of Kinraid, Sylvia’s lost suitor. After having been press-ganged into the navy and rising to the rank of lieutenant, Kinraid had returned to claim his lover’s hand, only to find her married because of the treachery of her cousin, who wanted her for himself. After discovering this Kinraid rejoins the navy and is sent to Syria. His romantic disappointment, however, does not affect his courage, and he ventures farther out from the city than any Englishman had dared to go. A French bullet breaks his leg and he is left on the battlefield. Wounded and
unable to move, Kinraid lies helpless on the Syrian landscape. Though no human touches
Kinraid, he nearly dies simply because of the inherent deadliness of Syria.

Yet how he longed to turn, if ever so slightly, so that the cruel slanting sun
might not beat full into his aching eyes. Fever too, was coming upon him;
the pain in his leg was every moment growing more severe; the terrible
thirst of the wounded, added to the heat and fatigue of the day, made his
lips and tongue feel baked and dry, his whole throat seemed parched and
wooden (386).

It is as if Syria itself slowly drains the life out of the stalwart English sailor The sun
attacks first by blinding, then by inducing fever, and finally by thirst. If the land of Syria
can be so dangerous to the Englishman, then how much more dangerous are the people
who can actually survive in, or who take their character from, such an environment.
Kyonghwa Park illustrates the ability of the English to acclimate themselves to foreign or
tropical climates in Gaskell’s work. She uses Cranford as an example, but this is even
more apparent here in Sylvia’s Lovers, for it is clear that it is the uncivilized environment
as well as the uncivilized peoples who live there that pose a threat to the usually hearty
and strong Englishman. It is the climate itself which is an enemy; it attacks and slowly
kills the Englishman. Syria, left unattended poses a serious threat to even the Englishman,
as is seen in the battle scene. However, if Syria is properly mothered as in the example of
the Pacha, the threat disappears in the face of an understanding and beneficial
relationship.

Gaskell’s Syrian scenes do much to explain her view of the East and the Empire
in general. That Gaskell is writing from general knowledge about the Empire and not
specific and researched information is obvious. Gaskell characterizes the Eastern peoples in the same way that she does the lower class and Ireland and Wales. It is clear that in *Sylvia’s Lovers* the inferior culture is represented as having two natures. The governor of Syria represents the good Other who is, in a sense, a child who affectionately responds to the maternal authority of the English. The Syrian landscape itself takes on the more dangerous and mysterious aspects of the opposite of Gaskell’s child/Other. It poses a violent and physical threat to the English. The English are given the role of protectors and teachers. This is the role of a mother, for moral education as well as basic education was a mother’s duty. A mother will also protect a child from the evil and violence of the world outside the domesticated space. It is this maternal role that Gaskell seems to advocate as the correct one for England’s relationship with her colonies and other groups whom she is responsible for.

Gaskell does not confine her vision to the East, however. Her characterization of colonial Other is a blanket characterization and remains the same whether the tale is set in the East or the West. For example, in Gaskell’s short story “Lois the Witch,” which takes place in Salem during the witch trials, she describes the Native Americans in the same way as she does the Syrians and the lower class in England. They are both supernaturally threatening and childlike. As in the previous examples, the threat that they pose to the English is neutralized once the proper mothering roles are fulfilled. This is especially apparent in one pivotal character in “Lois the Witch.” The character Nattee, a Native American, poses the ultimate threat of witchcraft until she receives proper mothering from an English girl. The story also critiques colonialism when not conducted along maternal lines in this short story. In “Lois the Witch,” the Puritan’s harsh
punishment and severe manner mark them as paternalists rather than maternalists. Because of their harsh paternalistic way of the dealing with the natives, the natives become a threat, supernatural and powerful. It takes an Englishwoman who steps into the role of mother to neutralize the threat posed by the ill-treated native. This follows the pattern set not only in Syria, but also in Ireland and Wales and with the lower classes in England. In order to help these groups of people, and keep them from threatening the middle class English and their ideology, proper mothering is needed. Once this is provided, according to Gaskell, the threat will diminish.

The character in “Lois the Witch” that represents the colonized people as a whole is Nattee, the old Indian servant that works for the Hicksons, the family that Lois is forced to travel to America to live with after the death of her parents. In Nattee there exists both sides of the dual nature that Gaskell projects onto colonized peoples or Others. She is characterized in turn as an ignorant and innocent child and as a dangerous being with supernatural power. When she is characterized as a child, she rarely speaks. However, when she represents the more dangerous aspect of natives, her words are supernaturally powerful. It is this latter element in her character that ultimately leads her to be executed as a witch.

Generally, Nattee behaves precisely as a good seventeenth century servant should. In this guise she is portrayed as a large, obedient child. The first example of this is her reaction to being tormented by the youngest daughter of the house, Prudence: “Prudence lolled against the door-frame, between kitchen and keeping-room, playing tricks on the old Indian woman as she passed backwards and forwards, till Nattee appeared to be in a strong state of expressed irritation, which she tried in vain to repress, as whenever she
showed any sign of it, Prudence seemed excited to greater mischief” (157). Nattee cannot yet hide her emotions, like a child who has not yet learned emotional control. Prudence is only playing tricks on Nattee, but even these infantile games have the power to reduce Nattee to strong irritation. She attempts to control her emotions, because she knows that any show of emotion will only incur more pranks. She is, however, unable to do so due to her lack of maturity. She is on the same level as Prudence herself, reacting in kind to what the young girl does to her. Also, Nattee is not allowed to act as an adult and reprimand or discipline the child who is torturing her. Denied an articulate, adult voice, she is reduced to helplessness and cannot assert power over the child. She has no authority to do so and is again left on Prudence’s level. They must squabble behind the mistress’s back. The adults in the family refuse to settle the dispute as they would were Nattee a European child. Instead, they ignore her suffering and their responsibility. The result of this is that Nattee’s childlike qualities wane as the story develops. Because of the lack of adequate care, she changes from the childlike obedient servant to a more dangerous and sinister native.

This more threatening aspect of her nature first begins to manifest itself as she tells tales to the girls about the “wizards” of her race, as Elizabeth Gaskell calls them. As soon as she begins to articulate for herself, she begins to demonstrate sinister and mysterious traits.

There ran through these stories always a ghastly, unexpressed suggestion of some human sacrifice being needed to complete the success of any incantation to the Evil One; as the poor old creature, herself believing and shuddering as she narrated her tale in broken English, took a strange,
unconscious pleasure in her power over her hearers—young girls of the oppressing race, which had brought her down to a state little differing from slavery, and reduced her people to outcasts on the hunting grounds which had belonged to her fathers (160).

While Gaskell shows some insight into the feelings of colonized people, this passage emphasizes the threat that Nattee is soon to become. This seems to be a pivotal point for Nattee. While she is story-telling there are still aspects of the child in her character. She believes as much of her story as the young girls who are listening to her do. She shudders and shivers beside them. There are, however, some important changes that occur here. She begins to take pleasure in the power that her stories give her over her hearers. If Nattee’s maturity is measured in part, as I have been arguing, by her ability to speak or articulate herself as an adult, then this story-telling, with all of its implications of power for the native race, is an attempt to step out of the subservient role that has been assigned to her. When she does, immediately she becomes a threat to those who supposedly have authority over her. Not only does she revel in the fact that she has them in her power, the power that holds them captive is that of the supernatural abilities of her native race. As yet the pleasure is unconscious and the threat is not serious, but Nattee’s anti-English sentiments clearly indicate the threat that she will eventually embody. Again we see the supernatural power of those who are not given proper mothering in Gaskell’s fiction, just as the Irish turn to witchcraft if not mothered, so will Native Americans.

As the tension in Gaskell’s story builds and more and more references to witchcraft are made, Nattee’s character becomes more and more threatening. She is seen mixing strange looking concoctions in pots over the fire, and reacting and speaking in
strange ways. As the threat she represents becomes more powerful, Nattee’s power and freedom of speech grows. She tells Lois, “Old Indian woman great mystery Old Indian woman sent hither and thither; go where she is told, where she hear with her ears. know how to call, and then white man must come, and old Indian have spoken never a word, and white man have hear nothing his ears” (176). Nattee represents a supernatural native threat, and as such she rejects the language of her conquerors and adopts one they cannot understand. The native language cannot be heard, and yet it is so much more powerful than spoken English. Nattee controls an American colonists through this call that cannot be heard. The English language kept Nattee a young child, but in her refusal to accept that language as a dialogue of power she has taken on the supernatural power of the language of her own people.

Witchcraft is also implicit, and this common representation of fallenness is specifically associated with Others in Gaskell’s works. For example, at one point Lois asks Faith about Nattee and the close conferences that the girl and the servant have been holding. Faith does not reply at first, but then responds, “If Nattee has powers beyond what you and I have, she will not use them for evil, at least not evil to those whom she loves” (187). By this point in the story it is clear that Nattee has been using witchcraft to help Faith in her romantic pursuit of a minister. Nattee mysteriously calls the minister back to Salem with her powers and since then has been attempting to rid him of his rival pastor so that he might be free to marry. What this action of Nattee’s addresses is the fear that the dangerous and sinister side of the colonized native might not only refuse to be controlled, but also would be able to control the colonizers themselves. It is at this point in the story that Nattee is at her most powerful. She is no longer characterized as an
innocent child, but instead as evil and wholly Other. However, this threat to the English must be contained. It is neutralized by maternal attention to the catalyst in Nattee’s emergence as a threat in the first place.

In this story, Gaskell is openly criticizing paternalistic authority. It is this harsh paternalism based on discipline and punishment that pushes Nattee to assume a threatening role. Gaskell never states that the Europeans should not have come to America, she simply questions the methods of colonizing that the Puritans used in America. The paternal system in this story is incorrect because it makes the natives regress back to their uncivilized state rather than guiding them into Christian civilization. They do not educate and protect as the British did in *Sylvia’s Lovers*. Rather they exploit and take advantage of the natives. This is seen in Grace Hickson’s reaction to Nattee’s reassumed magical brewing: “Nattee is at her heathen ways again, we shall have some mischief unless she is stayed” (174). The emphasis is on making sure that Nattee does not do wrong, and Grace’s words imply punishment, or at least a reprimand.

The Americans are going about the colonial project incorrectly. Instead of treating Nattee like she was one of the family—guiding, loving, correcting her as a mother should, the automatic reaction to heathen ways is to violently and forcefully put a stop to them. Nattee has gained no spiritual or moral knowledge by living with the Puritans. She is not baptized and knows only a few phrases of the Lord’s Prayer, which mean nothing to her. The Puritans have neglected to teach the colonized peoples morality. They have neglected one of the most important duties of a mother, and of the English in a savage land. The Hicksons also fail in the motherly virtue of protection when they do not protect Nattee after she has been accused of being a witch. When she is thrown into prison she is
described as “dirty, filthy indeed, mud-pelted, stone-bruised, beaten and all astray in her wits with the treatment she had received from the mob outside” (222). If Nattee’s Puritan family had been conducting the colonial project correctly, they would have protected Nattee from the cruelty of the mob whether or not she was guilty of witchcraft. This paternalism is criticized and revised in this story. The Americans failed to properly mother the natives, and as a result they became a threat to the civilized.

Lois, the Anglican from England, is Gaskell’s answer to the problem of paternalistic authority. It is Lois that first expresses concern over the fact that Nattee has not been baptized. And it is Lois who plays the critical role of educator, comforter, and protector, or the mother, of Nattee after she has been accused of being a witch. Lois is accused first and is accordingly thrown into jail. She seems to be slipping into insensibility until Nattee is thrown into the prison cell with her. After she recognizes Nattee, “Lois held her in her arms and softly wiped the old brown wrinkled face with her apron, crying over it, as she had hardly yet cried over her own sorrows” (222). Shortly after this Nattee is called a poor savage creature by the narrator. Lois, as the good and beneficent English Christian, assumes the role of mother to Nattee, and Nattee slips back into her former role as a child. Lois comforts and helps Nattee, and in doing so neutralizes the threat that Nattee had posed. Lois does this by assuming the role of a teacher of Christian morals:

When all was quiet through the prison, in the deep dead midnight, the goaler outside the door heard Lois telling, as if to a young child, the marvelous and sorrowful story of one who died on the cross for us and our sakes. As long as she spoke, the Indian woman’s terror seemed lulled; but
the instant she paused, for weariness, Nattee cried out afresh, as if some wild beast were following her close through the dense forests in which she had dwelt in her youth,” (222).

Lois begins to teach Nattee about the gospel as if she were a little child. With each new aspect of sacred motherhood that Lois assumes, Nattee becomes less of a threat. Nattee receives Lois’s teaching as a child, and she even regresses further into infancy as she cries out when she can no longer hear the sound of her mother’s voice. Lois does not want to punish Nattee for being a witch. Gaskell does not advocate the discipline of paternalism, but rather the care and forgiveness and Christian mercy associated with maternalism. She performs the duty that the Americans failed to perform. When England becomes a mother, the colonized people cease to be a threat to English Christians. Instead the native begins to benefit from her colonized position.

“Lois the Witch” could be read as a cautionary tale. The destruction caused by Nattee’s witchcraft is the consequence of colonization not carried out with the love and sacred duties of motherhood in practice. Though the Hicksons had authority over Nattee, they did not provide the care and nurturing that she so desperately needed. With this care, Lois also provided spiritual instruction which completely contained the savage side of Nattee’s nature. More generally, this story follows the pattern in which maternal care fixes various groups of Others into a childlike position of harmlessness, neutralizing their savage potential.

Gaskell’s short novel, Cranford, is set in rural England, but even in the heart of England, she follows much the same pattern in dealing with Others. This shows how groups of Others blend together in Gaskell’s fiction, and are all dealt with in nearly the
same way. Most telling are the incidents surrounding the mysterious Signor Brunoni. The town begins to hum when the residents learn that a magician is going to perform. The scene in which they go to the show is filled with mysteriousness and carries a bit of the threat of the savage colonial Other, since the magician’s dress and show are full of Oriental touches. However, he is never associated with one specific culture but rather with many different sorts of threatening groups including the Turks, the East Indians, the French, and the Italians. His presence, coupled with minor incidents in town, touches off a major panic which everyone ascribes to the mysterious Signor Brunoni. The ladies first react with fear of the Other, but eventually, after the Signor falls ill, there is a change in their attitudes. Kyonghwa Park says that this change “was facilitated by [their] meeting and thus knowing and sympathizing with the Brunonis” (179). The good ladies of Cranford then step into a nurturing role that will continue to control the threat which he embodies.

In this incident, however, Gaskell refuses to specify the exact identity of the character she is presenting as Other. He is many different groups and cultures in one character. Signor Brunoni is an Italian name, yet he presents himself as a Turk traveling through England doing magic tricks. The ladies of Cranford also associate him with the French. Fenwick says, “By conflating France with the turban-wearing East, Gaskell is able to point toward the consequences of England’s imperial adventures in India while invoking wars with the French” (411). By making a connection to the French, Gaskell merely adds another layer of Otherness to the character of Brunoni. Yet Brunoni is an Italian name and makes the magician logically associated with the Italians. Kyonghwa Park also contends that this identifies the Brunonis with the gypsies: “Signor Brunoni
receives the same treatment as gypsies usually do; he is categorized into the group of vagabonds” (188). There seem to be several different kinds of overlapping Othering going on in the text, each different and yet all intertwined in Signor Brunoni’s character. By making Brunoni foreign in so many different ways she heightens his very difference.

Even after Brunoni’s true identity, that of a English soldier home after a long stint in India, is revealed, the ladies of Cranford continue to call him Signor Brunoni. In doing so they continue to associate him with the Otherness he embodied as the magician, classifying him as Other even though they have found out that he is really British and his name is Samuel Brown. He represents the Other in Cranford and his characterization as such, and the ladies’ consequent reaction to him, are particularly important in understanding Gaskell’s concept of the Other.

When Brunoni first comes to Cranford he is a traveling magician, and the magic show where the ladies of Cranford first see him defines their relationship with his Otherness. When the ladies first arrive on the scene they take seats near the front. The narrator, Mary Smith, says that she sees nothing but the “weariness of the obstinate green curtain that would not draw up, but would stare at me with two odd eyes seen through holes” (134). Thus the image of the Other is veiled and unknowable to the ladies of Cranford. With this hidden quality is the hint of a threat, for although the ladies cannot see what is behind the curtain, whatever is behind the curtain can see them. The narrator is the subject of the gaze of the Other and thus subjected to something that she knows nothing about. This is only the first hint of the threat that Brunoni, in the guise of an Other, embodies for the ladies of Cranford. As the curtain rises and the ladies are permitted to gaze at him, they see “a magnificent gentleman in the Turkish costume,
seated before a little table gazing at us... with calm and condescending dignity, 'like a being of another sphere'” (134). The Turk seems even more quintessentially Other than even the Cranfordians expected him to be. He is in Turkish costume and even now, though he is revealed to the ladies, he is gazing at them with condescending dignity. The Other is clearly threatening here. The magician has advertised himself as a sort of spectacle at which the ladies of Cranford can gaze and thus assert their superiority, but instead of consenting to be looked at, he looks back and seems to project himself into their space. He is the Other that invades the safe and untouched realm that Cranford has managed to remain.

Signor Brunoni’s characterization as a threatening and penetrating Other has necessary consequences. He is immediately seen as a savage and therefore dangerous. When he looks angry at Miss Pole for attempting to discover his trick she replies “what could be expected but unchristian looks from a Mussulman?” (135). His scowl and his characterization as a barbaric Muslim both imply a threat and violence. Park says, “Here again one is reminded of the stereotypical images of gypsies as thieves and Muslims as ‘martial races’” (189). This threatening image is reinforced as the ladies of Cranford begin to attribute all sorts of local crimes to Signor Brunoni. A panic ensues and small accidental mishaps are magnified to major crimes because Brunoni is supposedly the source of them all. The narrator says, “I think a series of circumstances dated from Signor Brunoni’s visit to Cranford, which at the time seemed connected in our minds with him” (138). The supposed crimes that have been perpetrated in the town seem connected with Brunoni because he is Other. As Jeffery Cass says, “Fear of the Oriental Other also undergirds general reports that two ‘real bonafide robberies’ in Cranford are
associated with the ‘Grand Turk’ magician, Signor Brunoni” (427). The odd threatening
gaze of the magician and the automatic connection of him with a small string of robberies
in Cranford clearly show the Cranfordians’ fear of the savage and violent side of the
Other. Yet this fear does not last long, as the ladies come to realize that Signor Brunoni
and his family need mothering.

The attention of the ladies of Cranford to this other trait of the mysterious
Brunoni is first drawn by a small child whom they have some conversation with. They
are very taken with her and are surprised to learn that she is the child of the dreaded
Signor Brunoni, who lies ill in the very inn where they are resting. It is the impulse to
mother that first brings the ladies of Cranford to an acknowledgement of Signor Brunoni
as a child who needs nurturing. Even though the ladies find out that he is not Turkish or
Italian, they insist on calling him Signor Brunoni, thus keeping him, at least obliquely, in
the place of Other, though they say that “it sounded so much better” (153). Now this
dangerous Other is an ill man who is unable to do anything for himself. He is described
as “pale and feeble, and with heavy filmy eyes” (155). This is not the threatening
man that faced the ladies on that first night in Cranford, despite the fact that he is still the
Other. He is an Englishman who spent a long time in India and has taken to playing a
Turk to earn a living. Instead of being dangerous, he is as helpless as a child.

It is the mothering of the Cranford ladies that transforms him into a child and
neutralizes his threat. Once the ladies of Cranford condescend to help him, they are no
longer afraid of him, although they still consider him quite exotic and Other. After the
description in the previous paragraph, the narrator says, “Somehow we all forgot to be
afraid. I dare say it was that finding out that he who had first excited our love of the
marvelous by his unprecedented arts, had not sufficient every-day gifts to manage a
shying horse, has made us all feel ourselves again”(155). The magician still has an
element of the mysterious Other in his character, and still has the potential of
supernatural power, yet he cannot even manage a horse. It is seeing Brunoni as an object
to be mothered that keeps the ladies from being afraid. Afterwards, they busy themselves
with small mothering duties for him and his family Miss Pole finds lodgings for them,
and the narrator and her maid air out the sedan chair for his journey from the inn to his
new abode. Mrs. Forrester even makes some bread jelly, for which she was famous. This
is known to be a high sign of her favor. The ladies of Cranford nurture and provide for
the childlike Brunoni; their sponsorship of him makes him familiar and therefore less of a
threat. Although Signor Brunoni’s true Englishness makes moral teaching unnecessary
with him, it is still this mothering instinct which neutralizes the threat he had posed for
the ladies of Cranford.

Jeffery Cass speaks of other ways in which Cranford domesticates the Empire.
He says that there is a “simultaneous fear and appeal of the Oriental Other as well as the
impending social, cultural, and economic reconfiguration of that results from its
infiltration into mainstream life.” (425) Cranford, a novel about an old-fashioned
English town, is in fact about change. As the Other penetrates into the enclosed world of
Cranford, Cass maintains, the town must come into modernity and forget to old
feudalistic ways and traditions. “They simply do not perceive that by domesticating an
alluring Oriental Other they signal the success of outside forces in reshaping Cranford”
(Cass 424). What Cass fails to notice is the domestication of the Other in Cranford is
essentially mothering, the way in which the Other is brought under control. Its violent
side becomes repressed and the childlike side ready and grateful to be nurtured and protected.

There is an obvious pattern in Gaskell’s representation of the colonial Other. Whether that Other be a Syrian, American Indian, or a ‘Grand Turk,’ the colonial peoples are, like the lower classes, and the Irish and Welsh, both children and savages. They are violent, dangerous, and mysterious, as well as ignorant, innocent, and childlike, in need of a mother’s care. This mothering is a civilizing force. The role of mother is crucial, for without that care these savage Others would regress to a truly fallen state. They are not entirely fallen, and always with the correct treatment they can be brought to into civilization, though they will always be children compared to their English sponsors.
Chapter Five

Conclusion. The Motives and Consequences of Mothering

Patsy Stoneman notes that “Victorian reviewers rapidly forgot the impact made by *Mary Barton* and began to praise Gaskell only for qualities in keeping with her status as wife and mother, she is allowed to have ‘plenty of heart... and little head’” (81). For many years critics ignored Elizabeth Gaskell because her work so often seemed merely conventional. It was considered sentimental, didactic, and supposedly reinforcing of Victorian ideologies. However, recent critical work has shown that Gaskell was much more than that. “There is, however, a group of feminist writers on motherhood whose theories may be the means to of rescuing Elizabeth Gaskell from the ranks of the second-rate” (Stoneman 82). Motherhood was crucial for the Victorians, and Gaskell’s use of mothering in her novels is more than mere homage to convention. Gaskell builds a societal structure based on the concept of mothering.

It was not uncommon for the Victorians to characterize the colonial Other as a child. Tylor, a Victorian anthropologist, says that the “‘oft-repeated comparison of savages to children’ might be applied ‘as fairly to their moral as to their intellectual condition’” (qtd. Stocking 223). The savage seemed so immature to the Victorian British that characterizing them as children was almost natural. However, for Gaskell, not only were colonial peoples children, but also other groups of people perceived as inferior. These Others are only children when they have proper mothering. When the English are in a proper domestic relationship with their inferiors, the acting-out that any of these
peoples might attempt is merely attributed to ignorance. But mothering is essential to Gaskell’s perception of a successful society.

Without the moral influence of the mother, Others become quite different from children. Gaskell portrays them as having a double nature. When they are not contained as children they will immediately act in such a way that they are a danger and a threat. They are sinful peoples who have not been taught Christian morality. Monica Correa Frykstedt says, “For Elizabeth Gaskell, religion was not only the origin of her strong reaction to social injustice which permeates *Mary Barton* and *Ruth*, but also the solution she envisaged for the many social evils of mid-nineteenth century England” (54). Moral or correct behavior was taught through religious instruction. Only with the moral teaching of the Victorian mother could the Other become a docile child. When not restrained by her presence, they become not only primitive but also violent and supernaturally powerful. Others who do not have a maternal authority figure are a threat to England and civilization. A successful society, whether it is at home or in the colonies, is ruled by a maternal influence.

That mothering is essential to dealing with the colonial Other is obvious from Gaskell’s colonial references. Colonial characters are described as savage and dangerous as well as childish and immature. It is only when they are under the care of a mother that the threat that they posed is neutralized. Very often this threat comes in the form of supernatural powers often associated with witchcraft. In “Lois the Witch” the Native American servant becomes a witch in order to serve the purposes of her favorite mistress. This mysterious power is not only able to control the English colonists, but also manifests itself as the perfect embodiment of evil. Nattee is an example of a child/savage who has
received no moral training from the people who colonized her land. However, when she is provided with a mother in the figure of Lois then immediately the reader can see how the threat that she once posed is neutralized. This neutralizing influence of the mother figure is also seen in both *Sylvia’s Lovers* and in *Cranford*. Both describe Eastern threats which must be neutralized. Once there are British women, in the case of *Cranford*, or military, in the case of *Sylvia’s Lovers*, to assume the role of mother the threat is effectively defused. It is important to note that mothering, in Gaskell’s fiction, consists not only of love and mercy, but moral instruction as well. It is this variable that changes savage Others into Christians and thus into civilized men and women.

There are other groups besides the colonized peoples that need to be civilized. In her fiction, Gaskell very often depicts the Welsh and the Irish as uncivilized and inferior to the English race. These cultures had an ambiguous relationship with England proper. They were supposedly part of Britain but they had their own cultures and histories. They were once colonies, although Ireland and Wales were perceived somewhat differently, for most English people they still carried the characteristics of colonized peoples. Nevertheless, the peripheral cultures portrayed in Gaskell’s fiction retain the dual nature that Gaskell usually ascribes to Others. These cultures have the same supernatural power that implies the uncontrollability and depravity of any inferior culture, but they are also portrayed as children. They are in general tractable but can also be roused to a great and dangerous danger. These people need strong mothering in order to contain their threat and civilize them. This is illustrated by the Irish relationship with the mill-owner in Gaskell’s novel *North and South*. Thornton, the mill-owner is Gaskell’s ideal of English ruling force. He mothers the Irish workers by protecting, teaching, and nurturing them.
Gaskell also implies the need for mothering by the absence of good mothering in these cultures. Gaskell’s Welsh short stories demonstrate a decided lack of mothering on the part of the Welsh. It is not, however, a lack of parental love that the Welsh fail in, but rather a lack of moral teaching that was thought to be the particular duty and responsibility of a mother. This lack always leads either to violence or tragedy. Gaskell implies that with good mothering such tragedies would never have happened. Good mothering would have taught Christian principles to the characters and thus kept them from the improprieties or outright violence that ends these stories. Gaskell advocates the same system for dealing with the Welsh and the Irish as she does with the colonized peoples. It is a maternal authority that will contain their threat and successfully assimilate the Welsh and Irish into a larger English society.

Another group that Gaskell deals with in the same way as colonized Others is the working class. In general, Gaskell portrays the working class as good citizens. They are hard working and have viable complaints against the mill owners. But they are also Others; though they seem familiar, they show the same problematic characteristics of both the Celtic cultures and the colonial Others. Whenever Gaskell describes a strike or any other violent action on the part of the workers, they suddenly have great power and potential for violence. They become a threat to the middle classes. They are described as violent and dangerous, but they are also portrayed as children. Gaskell reduces their reasoning abilities to those of a child and also shows how they expect to have the government take care of them in a parental sort of way. As the workers are getting ready to strike in *North and South*, the heroine and the mill owner debate political economy within an extended metaphor in which the workmen are cast as children and the factory
owners as their parents. Thornton, Gaskell’s ideal mill-owner, effectively mothers the working class men, eventually even providing them with a mid-day meal. At the end of both novels, when the mill owner assumes a mother-like role, the tension between the classes dissipates.

An important distinction to make when looking at Gaskell’s maternalism is that what Gaskell advocates is not paternalism, but rather maternalism. Both are parental roles, but the difference between Victorian perceptions of these roles contains Gaskell’s real opinion about the correct way to conduct a society. Both Ania Loomba and Anne McClintock associate ideas of harsh discipline and punishment with a paternal system of authority. However, Gaskell rejects these ideas and with them rejects a paternalistic society. What Gaskell is advocating is an authority based on the qualities of an ideal Victorian mother. “The ‘Angel in the House’ or ‘Female Savior’ role assigned to mothers the duty not only of nurturing children but also of providing them with religious training” (Thaden 53). Mothers were expected to nurture, love, and also to be a moral and religious influence. This is the difference between maternalism and paternalism.

Paternalism was known for its discipline; it was a sort of tough love philosophy of ruling society. Gaskell, however, rejects the paternalistic pattern as too harsh. She wishes to bring inferior cultures to civilization through a nurturing, loving relationship. Paternal relationships in Gaskell’s fiction, early in North and South, for example, seem only to foster hate and discord, while maternal systems tend to encourage love and mutual support.

Gaskell advocates a maternal authority which she appears to deem better than a paternal system. She presents this relationship as one in which Others are the only
beneficiaries. However, despite maternalism’s humanitarian leanings, it is still a system in which one race or group of people can control and rule another. Gaskell’s maternalistic authority keeps adult people in the role of children in order to control them and neutralize the threat they pose to Victorian middle class ideology. By assuming a mothering role towards groups of people whom Gaskell may classify as inferior, she reinforces her power over them. The motive behind this maternal power structure is consciously benevolent and altruistic, while its unconscious motives reinforce dominant English power structures and social ideologies.

Perhaps there is something more substantive behind Gaskell’s motives in advocating maternalism. We have seen that Gaskell presents maternalism as a solution to threatening situations both at home and abroad. She also does not restrict mothering to the female sex. In Gaskell’s works, mothering can apply to nearly every situation and can be adopted by both males and females. Gaskell is not merely advocating mothering as a solution to particular societal problems, but is suggesting an entire restructuring of society along maternal lines.

This restructuring, while still keeping in place certain hierarchies such as race and class, would displace the dominant structure of patriarchy. In advocating maternalism as a system on which to base society, Gaskell also promotes a more powerful position for women. It is women who are doing the actual mothering, despite the fact that men can also assume the role, and a society that is based upon the politics of mothering would give these women (white, upper and middle classes) considerably more power than they were given in traditional Victorian society. Thus while Gaskell seems to be among one of the most conventional Victorian female novelists, her work contains a subtle protest.
against the limited power that women possess within traditional power structures. From Gaskell’s fiction, it seems clear that she believes social relations that are based on maternal relationships are superior to paternalistic ones. Perhaps what Gaskell is really advocating here is a society that is run by women and mothers. It seems, from her work, that if women defined the dominant ideology of society, there would be less war and unhappiness and more moral behavior and kindness. In short, colonies and inferior races or groups would not be the threat that they appeared to be in the Victorian era.
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