“AND I TOO CHANGE PERPETUALLY-NOW THIS, NOW THAT”:
NEGOTIATING SPACE, COMMUNITY, INDIVIDUALITY
AND MOBILITY WITH ELIZABETH GASKELL’S
REALISM AND MODERNITY

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of
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of Master of Arts in English

By
Robert Searway
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CERTIFICATION OF APPROVAL

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DEDICATION

For my Mother.

My first and continuing inspiration.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have numerous teachers who have proved influential in helping me reach this stage of my academic career and helping me produce a project of this scope. Dr. Tuedio helped bring me to Stanislaus by providing an opportunity to join the Honors program as an undergraduate transfer student. Dr. Winter and Dr. Perrello have both offered advice and guidance for numerous projects. I would like to thank members of my thesis committee Dr. Marshall and Dr. Wolfe for taking the extra time required to help me with this project specifically. Both have offered important feedback through the revision process and forced me to think about my purpose for writing. I must especially thank my thesis chair Dr. Schmidt for his continued guidance. As both an undergraduate and graduate student he has provided the perfect amount of oversight and advice while always allowing me the academic freedom to pursue my interests.

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ABSTRACT

Elizabeth Gaskell, as a Victorian realist writer, often focuses on descriptions of settings and the exterior world. Through diverse and varied settings, she reveals the influences of rapid social change after the Industrial Revolution. At the same time, such depictions can actually reveal interior character because individuals must interact with and negotiate with the social construction of social space. While environment impacts character development, the opposite also occurs. Individuals subtly negotiate with the influences of space and community, with the often-unacknowledged influences exerted by a particular area’s culture. The greater scope of Gaskell’s work depicts states of flux and change, where traditional value systems and communal relationships transform and shift with the broader changes of modernizing England. In order to explore the manner in which Gaskell addresses and reveals these alterations, this thesis engages interconnected aspects of spatial conception, community, individuality, and mobility. Gaskell reveals the modernizing effects of new social and physical mobility, and presenting such dual mobility in her work allows a modern perspective for both the characters of Gaskell’s fiction and for her readers. This thesis therefore explores the manner through which she depicts spatial relationships and emphasizes her focus on individual mobility. Mobile individuals negotiate changing spatial and communal dynamics through their ability to inhabit multiple spaces and engage multiple viewpoints.
INTRODUCTION:

THE CONVERGENCE OF MODERN MOBILITY

Through the association of numerous novels with numerous settings, Elizabeth Gaskell presents a broad picture of a changing English landscape during the nineteenth century. Gaskell writes the city and the country, writes both industrial cityscapes and provincial landscapes. Yet she always populates these settings with distinct individuals, with characters that must negotiate or break from traditional influences. A common link emerges for such individuals between different types of mobility. Physical mobility allows an individual a broader sense of the changes across England, because it reveals the divergence among multiple landscapes. Social mobility allows someone a view across contrasting class and social dynamics. Both types of mobility foster a nuanced perspective that acknowledges the inter-relation of disparate places or classes. Gaskell’s fiction develops the possibility of dynamic relationships between the mobile individual and spatial, communal, and social forces.

By including multiple settings and emphasizing mobility, Gaskell’s work reveals the importance of spatial relationships. Spatial relationships incorporate social, political, and economic issues when acknowledging the manner people engage with and respond to their environment. With the term space encompassing both physical landscape and mental attributions people assign to such landscape, space becomes an unspoken arbiter of existence. Space manifests the ideological influences of power structures so that, in philosopher Henri Lefebvre’s terms, social space
represents social product. Lefebvre’s work *The Production of Space* sets about connecting the “mental and social” aspects of space: “the space of philosophers and the space of people who deal with material things” (4). The physical construction of space, the development of the landscape, arises from ideological pressures because social dynamics and economic incentives determine the spatial development of real places. The new factories and mills of the Industrial Revolution shape the landscape in northern England by influencing the rise of industrial cities. With new economic opportunities, the population of England grows and moves to urban spaces. These economic and social influences literally shape the landscape and cityscape. Once developed, space then influences the individual born within such a socially constructed situation. Children born to the industrial relationships of the city grow up with the pressures of such spatial relationships to think in the terms of the cityscape; they can only imagine the possibilities of life as present in the known spatial sphere. The influences that first developed the spaces therefore continue to exert power on the individual in that space.

Community, usually within a particular setting, also exerts influence on the individual. Communities arise within the particulars of space and time, and serve as another manifestation and exponent of social influence. The community exerts the pressures of its own ideology. Often a community may apply the same influences as the spatial relations of the city, but a community might also serve as a counterforce against dominant discourse and ideology. Gaskell’s fictional town Cranford, as a collection of single old ladies united by common bonds, serves alternately as an
example of both potential forces. Either way, communal dynamics influence the individual. The social spheres of both space and community set limits and ideological rules that shape and pressure the individual. These limitations occur in life, and in her fiction, Gaskell explores the negotiation required by individual characters encountering communal pressures and traditions. These boundaries become the bonds and chains that Gaskell openly acknowledges at the beginning of her novel *Ruth*:

> The daily life into which people are born, and into which they are absorbed before they are well aware, forms chains which only one in a hundred has moral strength enough to despise, and to break when the right time comes—when an inward necessity for independent individual action arises, which is superior to all outward conventionalities. (4)

Social spaces reveal these chains through the social relationships and modes of production that determine opportunities and boundaries. Gaskell identifies the difficulty of overcoming such bonds, but also implies the possibility of transformation. In a time of social change, with new social and practical mobility, numerous traditional communities undergo alterations and modifications. In the new modern spaces of an industrializing society, an individual may negotiate modes of behavior with the community.

Against such social pressures, therefore, Gaskell upholds the individual. Individuals inhabit space and community. They may never absolutely break free of such social authority, but may exert their own influence. Despite seemingly
overwhelming ideological pressure, there remains room for subtle negotiation. Against negative public discourse, Ruth perseveres with her gentleness and unshakable sense of self-worth. Such stories fill Gaskell’s work. An individual struggling to fit within the communal space exerts just enough force to negotiate change in accepted traditional dynamics. The ending to *Cranford* serves as the most significant lingering example of such communal change, because Gaskell flips the social dynamics of the community back toward the individual. As Mary Smith moves between industrial Drumble and provincial Cranford, she narrates the true ties of Cranford society. Instead of allowing social traditions, mere rules, to break down the actual community, Gaskell re-asserts the bonds of individuals as forming authentic community: “We all love Miss Matty, and I somehow think we are all of us better when she is near us” (187). Actual kindness and love between people overcome the strict social rules of the communal space.

Amid the social influences of community and space, and in individual negotiation with social discourse, mobility represents further opportunity for raised awareness, for nuanced perspective, and for changing focus. Mobility first provides the opportunity to see different viewpoints. Rather than taking one’s current perspective as absolute truth, mobility allows greater vision about broader social issues, about broader social dynamics and problems. Secondly, mobility also reveals agency against such social pressure. Communal discourse and ideology of space structure boundaries and limits, but individual mobility overcomes these limitations and allows opportunities to traverse new or altered spaces. Such mobility includes
both social and physical dynamics. New opportunities arise with changing class structure and greater social mobility. Technology also transforms modes of travel and breaks down previous physical barriers. Society underwent massive changes during the nineteenth century and the greater potential mobility that resulted allowed the opportunity for modern freedom and agency within the ties and influences of spatial and social relationships.

The first two chapters of the ensuing thesis examine the interplay between the individual and the community in Gaskell’s country and provincial settings. Land relationships remain an issue as the effects of the market economy impact the rural setting. The community thus faces new social and economic evaluations for the provincial space, where previously everyone involved understood their role or situation. Individuals must find ways to fit within the traditions of the community while allowing for the possibility of modern advancement. Gaskell reveals expected behaviors of the traditional community even as she exposes subtle modifications of modern society. With communities in flux an individual may negotiate traditional viewpoints and forge new communal connections. Chapter One explores how the ability of people to move into new spaces forces them to acknowledge and engage traditional relationships of space and community. While Gaskell depicts traditional settings, she also shows that such traditional spaces appear on the brink of, or already undergoing, change. This chapter argues that Gaskell demonstrates how the transformational strength of modernity forces such mobile characters—with access to a broader perspective than those stuck in traditional spatial relationships—to begin
negotiating with the community. Chapter Two asserts Gaskell’s focus on mobile individuals as the manner through which she demonstrates people discovering identity and overcoming social and communal pressures. Mobile characters choose their own community because they move between spaces and evaluate ideologies. This movement may allow someone to negotiate with communal forces in order to influence change or to reaffirm traditional relationships; such an option results from mobility that allows the individual to understand and consider multiple perspectives.

The next two chapters engage the more obvious social and spatial shifts of modernity in the new urban space of the northern industrial city. By depicting spaces of the cityscape itself Gaskell reveals discordant class relationships involved in modern capitalism and the market economy. Spaces become tied to classes of people, with living conditions of the city revealing power relationships in newly constructed industrial districts. Yet even amid these divisions Gaskell upholds individuals and recognizes common humanity. Specific interactions beyond the ideology of spatial relationships prove common bonds between people. Chapter Three examines how Gaskell reveals the disparate spaces of the industrial city as social product tied to class conflict. Instead of continuing to uphold such contrasts, however, Gaskell presents individual mobility as a vehicle to overcome class discord; moving through the city and viewing contrasting spaces reaffirms human connection across demarcated class lines. Chapter Four analyzes Gaskell’s use of individual mobility in the character of Margaret Hale as she travels between country south and industrial north. Her mobility provides her with a modern perspective to understand how she
herself changes in concert with the changing English landscape. Through this recognition Gaskell asserts the power of newly mobile individuals to overcome traditional divisions and shape the cityscape within new modern spaces and using modern economy. Both chapters show how Gaskell presents individual characters overcoming numerous dichotomies, such as country/city and master/laborer, through modern social and spatial mobility. Rather than focus only on generalities or classes of people, she emphasizes the specific interactions of individual characters that move and negotiate between disparate spaces.

The Industrial Revolution led to significant changes at all levels of English society and Gaskell evokes many of these new social shifts in her wide-ranging settings and works. Threads of space, community, individuality, and mobility converge with developing modernity in new spaces like the industrial city, and even in traditional spaces feeling the impact of a shifting economy and a new global market. Gaskell’s work reveals how new mobility brought about by historical shifts during the nineteenth century opened opportunities for a modern perspective outside traditional land based relationships. This thesis explores the manner through which she depicts these changing spatial relationships and emphasizes her focus on mobility. Mobile individuals negotiate changing spatial and communal dynamics through their ability to inhabit multiple spaces and engage multiple viewpoints and perspectives.
In Gaskell’s short story “Mr. Harrison’s Confessions,” a young surgeon, by opportunity and invitation of a distant family relative, takes up a country practice at Duncombe. Upon arrival, Mr. Harrison contradicts the communal self-definition when he thinks, “Duncombe calls itself a town, but I should call it a village” (Lady Ludlow 351). He labels the provincial space only village because he arrives with a Londoner’s perspective. Despite denigrating the size of Duncombe, Mr. Harrison enjoys the “village” feel and calls the street view “a very picturesque place” as he takes in the irregular houses, and makes note of a “bow-window” and “gable” that stand out to him as quaint (351). Many of the dwelling places also have nearby yard-space, “a grass plot” or “a large tree or two,” that adds to his enjoyment of the outdoor setting (352). Having left the city only a day prior, Mr. Harrison describes this picturesque landscape because it contrasts with the houses and residences, with the sights and sounds, of London. Even once indoors, with a window open he smells “only scents from the mignonette boxes on the sill, instead of the dust and smoke” of the city (352). He shifts from the “‘great metropolis’ to a little country village” (259). Leaving behind the city spaces he knew and understood, Mr. Harrison comes to reside in the new spatial relationships of the country town. He must learn to view the spaces of his new town with the proper frame or proper reference in order to join the
community. His comic journey to achieve domestic bliss in the country village reveals the ideology of the new setting.

Mr. Morgan, hoping that Mr. Harrison will take his practice, begins to execute his plans to integrate the new doctor into the country village. First he places Mr. Harrison into “a house of [his] own, which looked more respectable, not to say professional, than being in lodgings” (356). The first step to establishment arises from possessing proper residence in the town, from situating Mr. Harrison within the village space. Furthermore, Mr. Morgan begins to take his new partner on rounds about the town to visit other homes. The elder doctor takes him to see this “lady-like woman” because she “may really be of some help to you [Mr. Harrison] in the little etiquettes of our profession” (356). Mr. Morgan hopes to show Mr. Harrison how to interact with the “lady-like” women who make up a majority of the town’s residents. At the same time, he also begins to plant seeds for positive gossip about the town’s new resident. For this first visit the pair enters “up the narrow carpeted stairs into the drawing-room” (356). Once into that chamber, the doctors have entered the ostensibly domestic female space of the lady’s drawing room. Carolyn Lambert describes the drawing room as “simultaneously one of the most public rooms in the house and yet the most intimate…it was also an essentially feminine and intimate space, used as a private retreat by family members, in which tasteful artifacts made by women could be displayed as signifiers of their skill and ability to create an appropriate domestic situation” (93). The private space in the interior of the house takes on great public significance. Mr. Morgan uses the space because chronically ill
Mrs. Munton receives so many visitors to come sit with her that “her room was the centre of the gossip of Duncombe” (356). The public aspect of the room turns it to a communicative space for the village residents. As country doctor, Mr. Harrison must learn to negotiate the relationship between the greater public spaces of the overall town with the private spaces of a lady’s drawing room. Mr. Morgan consistently reminds him of “the necessity of cultivating the goodwill of the people among whom [he] was settled” in large part through his visits and attendance at parties in these public/private spaces. Mr. Harrison must therefore publicly negotiate these private domestic spaces, beginning with his own dwelling-place and spreading out in rounds to the rest of the village.

The inter-relation of the domestic home and public space also encompasses the relation of the country village to the genteel country house proper. Invoking political relationships, Lambert writes, “the idea of the home as a physical place of shelter and safety is intimately linked to issues of class, wealth and power” (9). The home anchors relationships to the broader community through spatial distribution. Mr. Harrison initiates himself into the village with a proper residence and begins to join the community by visiting the community’s domestic spaces. Another significant relationship of the country village arises with the idea of the nobility’s country house. In “Mr. Harrison’s Confessions” a large contingent from the village go on a picnic “to some old hall in the neighbourhood” (368). Mr. Harrison undermines expected reverence when he notes “the family to whom the place belonged were abroad, and lived at a newer and grander mansion when they were at
home,” but the country house dynamic continues to hold a higher place of appeal to the townspeople (368). A visit by the townsfolk even just to “some old hall” represents a significant excursion and hints at class relationships in the country space. Mr. Harrison does not fully detail, or seem to understand, the importance of these spatial connections, but the excursion indicates the townspeople’s admiration for the grand home and the “county family” (368). Gaskell shows some of these relationships in a humorous manner in “Mr. Harrison’s Confessions,” and begins to present relationships she will further develop in other works of fiction with a greater focus on class relations.

Gaskell also develops the importance of the vicarage, and with it the intimate ties of religious and moral connections among the community. With his introduction to this site, domestic comfort mixes with Christian morality. Upon entering the vicar’s home, Mr. Harrison perceives the scene as a form of domestic bliss:

It was like a picture—at least, seen through the door-frame. A sort of mixture of crimson and sea-green in the room, and a sunny garden beyond, a very low casement window, open to the amber air; clusters of white roses peeping in, and Sophy sitting on a cushion on the ground, the light coming from above on her head, and a little, sturdy, round-eyed brother kneeling by her. (361)

The picture-frame of the narration sets the image as captured ideal. At this moment, Mr. Harrison understands the ideal of “home” and knows “the full charm of the word” (362). While Mr. Morgan grants him a house to live in for professional standing, after this visit to the vicarage, Mr. Harrison further understands the potential
joys of the domestic space. He falls for Sophy at this early moment, and the romance plays out with humor and trial through the rest of the story. Gaskell makes significant connection between Mr. Harrison’s understanding of the domestic, shown through the vicarage, and the public nature of such private matters.

These connections of public and private spaces become significant due to the public way his romance with Sophy develops. Through the various mistakes of small town country life, like buying a feminine work table and proclaiming in jest it might be for an up-coming marriage or even just stating his consideration of valentines, Mr. Harrison comes to be seen as subject of multiple romantic affairs. Discussing the position of general practitioner and Mr. Harrison specifically, Marie Fitzwilliam identifies the new doctor’s dependence on social judgment, and identifies how one’s need to establish a respectable practice becomes “akin to the never-ending scrutiny endured by young women” (32). Such a statement encapsulates numerous connections between communal relations and public and private spaces; the private life of the doctor becomes a matter of public interest. Fitzwilliam also identifies the gender-confusion of the role of general practitioner resulting from the gendered discourse regarding public and private spaces. The drawing room or bedroom, as domestic private spaces, carry feminine spatial attributions, and, as mentioned above regarding the connection of private and public spaces, the practitioner must enter such spaces to go about his work. The confusion of public and private with regards to his practice of medicine also carries over to Mr. Harrison’s romantic endeavors. He becomes scrutinized for his believed, and most certainly gossiped about, multiple
affairs in the town. Mr. Harrison comes to find that his “practice was falling off” and that “prejudice of the town ran strongly against” him (423). His attempts to join the country town community, to establish both his public practice and private domestic situation, become intermixed.

In the manner of a good comedic romance with humorous challenges, everything works out and Mr. Harrison marries Sophy. In order to arrive at this happy ending, Mr. Harrison overcomes public scrutiny with advanced medical science. Through consultation with another doctor, he arrives at a better cure when Sophy becomes ill. Fitzwilliam finds that “the science and technology of medicine must take primacy over the superficial trappings of the profession” (34). The practitioner gains public respect through the advancements of modern medicine rather than by only trying to please patients in the gentlemanly way of Mr. Morgan. Mr. Harrison’s advancement—in medical conflicts with Mr. Morgan his cures prove advantageous—brings to this small country town the potential for change and the continued development of modern science. At the same time, Mr. Harrison also comes to realize and achieve the domestic ideal. His public actions lead directly to his marriage with Sophy and the creation of his own domestic situation. The narrative frame of the story establishes him with wife and child and a fire “burning gaily” (349). In a simple story, Gaskell explores modern changes and the impact they have on traditional communal relationships. Mr. Harrison must negotiate established relationships of society with new scientific advancements in medicine, but his achievements also allow him to re-establish traditional domestic roles in his marriage
and life. Such changes and accommodations, between tradition and new contemporary realities, play out in differing ways in a number of Gaskell’s texts.

Another of Gaskell’s shorter works, the novella “My Lady Ludlow,” further analyzes the way social changes impact communal spaces and communal relationships with a particular focus on the lasting impact of feudal relations. The narrator of the story, Margaret Dawson, moves to live with a distant aristocratic relation, the title character Lady Ludlow. The opening description of her aristocratic representation and demeanor reveals a traditional past in flux: “these ruffles showed, as she said, that her ancestors had been Somebodies, when the grandfathers of the rich folk [rich manufacturers], who now looked down upon her, had been Nobodies” (Lady Ludlow 1-2). The social position, descending from “Somebodies,” also bears connection to land and land ownership. From the nearest town, Margaret rides in a gig, through “the most pastoral country I had ever yet seen” (5). The coachman navigates the rutted lanes through fields and pastureland to eventually reach “Hanbury Court,” a “vast red-brick house” (7). Lady Ludlow stands as the “heiress of all the land that remained to the family, of the great estates which had once stretched into four separate counties. Hanbury Court was hers by right” (11). Lady Ludlow makes special note, and remains proud of the fact, that while she married the aristocratic Lord Ludlow, she herself descended from the line of genteel Hanburys. After her husband’s death, she returned to live on the Hanbury land, “her ancestral home” (11). The people living on the land also recognize her for these old connections: “the tenants one and all called her ‘Madam;’ for they recognised in her
the married heiress of the Hanburys, not the widow of a Lord Ludlow, of whom they
and their forefathers knew nothing” (43). The tenants recognize the continuation of a
family that has owned the land upon which they have lived for generations. Margaret
drives through the pastoral landscape to reach the house, but during her first visit does
not yet realize the significant social relationships involved in Lady Ludlow presiding
over the land and the people. Only later does she come to realize the significance of
tenants calling Lady Ludlow “Madam” and how this connects with the history of the
landscape. Much like Mr. Harrison entering the community for the first time, she
must learn the social negotiations involved in these spatial relationships.

Lady Ludlow owns the land and projects the absolute status of her position in
direct connection with the exterior and interior spaces of the Hanbury property.
Margaret enjoys rides through the countryside with Lady Ludlow in her “coach-and-
four,” especially making note that the Lady considered a “pair of horses…beneath her
rank” (20). While the heavy coach sometimes feels too large and cumbersome for
narrow country lanes, Lady Ludlow commits to the large coach because it signifies
her position in and over the countryside. Margaret details the picturesque country
house set within the landscape when she depicts “the lovely garden, with stretching,
sweeping lawns, and gay flower-beds, and beautiful, bossy laurels, and other
blooming or massy shrubs, with full-grown beeches, or larches feathering down to the
ground a little farther off” (35). She describes this scene as a permanent picturesque
portrait, “set in a frame, as it were, by the more distant woodlands” (35). Margaret
also describes the interior, “modernized in the days of Queen Anne” with “new long,
high windows” (35). Yet against the perfect stability of a picture, Margaret clearly notes, “the money had fallen short that was requisite to carry out all the improvements” (35). Little spoken about, money matters become an issue and begin to reveal economic changes surrounding the picturesque pastoral Hanbury lands.

New changes in the economic environment therefore linger at the edges of Lady Ludlow’s current holdings and begin to influence social change in the area. Behind the scenes, a mortgage was taken on the Hanbury estate to improve Lord Ludlow’s land in Scotland. The steward presents the general response to the situation: “Mr. Horner was silently as much annoyed at the money that was swallowed up by this mortgage as any one; and, some time or other, he had probably spoken his mind out to my lady; for there was a sort of offended reference on her part” (43). This issue of money crops up just behind picturesque scenes. Lady Ludlow takes cautious care with money, such as allowing her carriages to become “old and cumbrous, wanting all the improvements which had been adopted by those of her rank throughout the county” (43). She also sells “all the promising colts bred on the estate…for ready money” (43). The prominent symbol of her aristocratic wealth and status, riding about the countryside in “her coach-and-four,” therefore also represents her lack of ready money, cash not tied up in land ownership, and financial burdens. Edgar Wright describes the social community as undergoing a period of change, but still recognizing Lady Ludlow’s “rank” with “respect for position [and] genuine affection” (36). Like Mr. Horner the servants feel almost angry that Lady Ludlow lacks money, and ashamed that she should have to exercise economy below
her station. There remains interplay between economic change and continued tradition.

As a clear foil to Lady Ludlow, Mr. Brooke represents the impact of changing economies on traditional spatial relationships. Margaret learns the new landowner near the Hanbury property “had earned some money in trade in Birmingham, and had bought the estate…on which he was born, and now was setting himself to cultivate it in downright earnest” (170). Lady Ludlow names him “in her most icy tone” as “Brooke, that dissenting baker from Birmingham” (171). Mr. Brooke disrupts the traditional social order revealed to Margaret in her rides through the countryside. Rather than an heir of land, offspring of generations of former landowners, noble by birth and marriage, Brooke made his money as a baker to buy the land where he lived as a child. He began as the son of a tenant on someone’s estate, began in a similar position to the tenants Lady Ludlow drives around to see who revere her aristocratic position. Rather than staying on the land, harvesting the crops and making money for the noble landowner, he gained his wealth in the marketplace. This marks a clear disruption of the values associated with the old land-owning aristocracy. Lady Ludlow’s “forefathers had lived for six hundred years” on the land, and yet her estate remains in debt and not able to provide ready money, while Mr. Brooke with newfound wealth can buy the land nearby that has no such tradition of family ownership (175). That the old baker also proves a religious dissenter further situates him as representing new social changes against old values. Margaret describes these direct differences between Mr. Brooke and the established community: “the
Dissenter, the tradesman, the Birmingham democrat, who had come to settle in our good, orthodox, aristocratic, and agricultural Hanbury” (194). He serves as a disruption to the established community. Economic changes, such as the rise of market economies, during the time period allow potential disruption. Wright describes the story as fitting within Gaskell’s works addressing “relationships between the world of traditional ways and contemporary realities” (39). The conclusion to the story concerns the ways characters must change and transition within this interplay of traditional and contemporary society. The nouveau riche and new social mobility threaten to impact established relations of old landed communities. Characters must therefore negotiate broad scale societal changes in localized communities.

Much of the Hanbury land has fallen into disarray, while Mr. Brooke’s estate flourishes with the newest agricultural science, forcing characters to transition and accept the new changes of modernity. Mr. Smithson, Lady Ludlow’s lawyer, comments that he “was quite grieved to see the condition” of her nearby farms (170). He further remarks, “all the land that is not waste is utterly exhausted with working successive white crops” and that “a greater contrast could never have been presented than that between Harding’s farm and the next fields [that Mr. Brooke recently bought] - fences in perfect order, rotation crops, sheep eating down the turnips on the waste land” (170). Mr. Brooke, by using modern agricultural knowledge, has the land in a much better state than the traditional pastures of Hanbury. When Lady Ludlow appoints Captain James to take over as steward, he attempts to remedy the
situation with a study of agriculture and new methods (173). After failing in his first year, Captain James visits Mr. Brooke for help and advice in the management of the land. Though Lady Ludlow appointed the Captain due to traditional evaluations (he was a friend of her son and held a gentlemanly position as navy captain) he eventually succeeds because he embraces the realities of the situation and seeks help from Mr. Brooke. In the end, by benefiting from contemporary changes and new agricultural management techniques, he can restore the land and uphold the traditional standing of Lady Ludlow. At the moment of crisis, using Wright’s language, traditional ways stood opposed to contemporary realities, but engaging with such contemporary realities actually allows the re-establishment of traditional ways.

The possibility to overcome traditional values, so tied to past relationships between tenant and aristocratic landowner, develops out of new land management. Agricultural development forces Lady Ludlow to interact with Mr. Brooke. The changes to the land therefore allow for the joyous resolution of the story. Wright analyzes ways the story reveals an emphasis on “individuals” and personal changes, and such a focus allows analysis of the link between the land and the individual (38). Wright explores the way individual action, which may then have social influence, “derives from character” (38). Building from Wright’s focus on the individual, changes in the land, in the management and necessary modernization of the Hanbury estate, thematically mirror changes in Lady Ludlow. Captain James serves as mediator, elevated to his position due to the previously mentioned traditional reasons, but open to new contemporary changes. He serves to unite Lady Ludlow with her
near opposite, the dissenting baker Mr. Brooke, and thus increases social mobility in a traditionally feudal space. Overcoming traditional difference in the contemporary setting then allows economical revival on the Hanbury estate.

Lady Ludlow upholds her continued dignity and aristocratic air, but also comes to give a tea party “just like any plebeian amongst us” (208). Instead of commenting on manners, showing “want of breeding,” when Mrs. Brooke pulls out her handkerchief and spreads it over her dress at the party, Lady Ludlow “takes out her own pocket-handkerchief, all snowy cambric, and lays it softly down on her velvet lap, for all the world as if she did it every day of her life” (209-210). She shows a greater dignity in making Mrs. Brooke feel welcome than in upholding traditional manners. Lady Ludlow’s earlier comment to Mr. Lathom about form versus proper intent proves true in this later more humorous setting: “‘Bah! Who makes laws? … We, who make the laws…may break the mere forms of them, when we have right on our sides, on our own land, and amongst our own people’” (30).

Upholding the spirit of dignified relation makes Lady Ludlow worthy of respect. Lady Ludlow can neglect codes of genteel behavior, the difference between following the code of a law versus the intent, while maintaining her aristocratic position so that traditional ways become modified to continue in the new contemporary situation. The outcome results from individual negotiation with the old traditional land relationships.

In Gaskell’s final novel, *Wives and Daughters*, she continues to explore such themes of tradition versus the change of new modern economic realities. Many of the
communal relationships the novel depicts result from the interplay of space and ideology with emerging modern mobility. Molly Gibson serves as the protagonist of the text in a slightly different manner than Mr. Harrison or Margaret Dawson who enter new spaces as outsiders. Molly grows up in the country town of Hollingford, a setting like Duncombe of “Mr. Harrison’s Confessions” and Knutsford of Gaskell’s actual childhood, fully aware of the social situation and relationships involving different spaces of the nearby countryside. The novel clearly situates Molly, because the second sentence of text narrows the focus on her position: “In a country there was a shire, and in that shire there was a town, and in that town there was a house, and in that house there was a room, and in that room there was a bed, and in that bed there lay a little girl” (5). Molly grows up with this sense of situation, within the social relationships of the country/shire/town. The way she negotiates the space of her childhood and youth, including the class and gender distinctions of the provincial space, comes to significance as she grows into adulthood and realizes her potential mobility to break from traditional relationships.

A description of the land around Hollingford places the town between countryside and country house: “The little straggling town faded away into country on one side, close to the entrance-lodge of a great park, where lived my Lord and Lady Cumnor” (6). Such a description identifies political and social relationships between the provincial town and the great park of the genteel Cumnor family. Gaskell furthermore describes the significance of her setting, England’s recent past in a provincial town, where such a family possesses “the influence of the great
landowners over humbler neighbours in those days before railways” (7). In this small country town, close against the great park of the nearby aristocratic family “a very pretty amount of feudal feeling still lingered” (6). Much like the example of “My Lady Ludlow,” society transitions through a time of change but also clings to traditional values. While the townspeople have the opportunity to vote, “following in the ancestral track, every man-jack in the place gave his vote to the liege lord, totally irrespective of such chimeras as political opinion” (7). Molly grows up in this space, fully understanding the social and political relationships of the town.

The events of Molly’s childhood reveal the traditional orders of society, but also begin to subtly subvert tradition through the changes of contemporary culture. Cumnor Towers offers “aristocratic seclusion” for the family, but once a year “there was a day of honour” when “Lady Cumnor and her daughters received all the school visitors at the Towers” (8). The gala event grants the townspeople an opportunity to visit the aristocratic space. The visitors’ response to their approach, their arrival in the physical landscape, reveals the connection of social relationships and land:

And now they were in the Park; and now they were in sight of the Towers, and silence fell upon the carriageful of ladies, only broken by one faint remark from Mrs. Goodenough’s niece, a stranger to the town, as they drew up before the double semicircle flight of steps which led to the door of the mansion. (14)

The splendor of the park and the steps signifies the social power of the aristocracy. Significantly, only a stranger to the town, not familiar with accepted social relationships of the place and therefore not quite as taken by her entrance to the park,
speaks. The ladies quickly hush her to take in the rest of the grounds. Even Molly, though at first overwhelmed, feels the effects of charming landscape:

Green velvet lawns, bathed in sunshine, stretched away on every side into the finely wooded park; if there were divisions and ha-has between the soft sunny sweeps of grass, and the dark gloom of the forest-trees beyond, Molly did not see them; and the melting away of exquisite cultivation into the wilderness had an inexplicable charm to her. (15)

The splendor of the grounds and park represents, directly correlates, with the splendor of the family’s position. Spending a day wandering the grounds of the Towers proves a great honor for the townspeople of Hollingford.

The experience turns unpleasant for Molly when she grows weary from the day, falls asleep in the garden and then also in the house, and is left behind at the hall. Such a negative event for the young child minimizes her awe and respect for the Towers. Though forgotten and abandoned when the Hollingford party leaves, Mrs. Kirkpatrick tells her, “it is a very fine thing for you to be stopping in such a grand house as this; many a little girl would like nothing better” (20). In the dining room, she sees “large mirrors, velvet curtains, pictures in their gilded frames, a multitude of dazzling lights,” but rather than experiencing awe at such splendor she feels the emotional disconnect and negativity of her position in the room (24). Molly grows “heavier and heavier in the desolation of all this grandeur;” she loses the awe and aspiration of the morning when she first entered the grounds with the Hollingford party (25). Karen Boiko notes how throughout this episode Molly feels “miserable”
or “uncomfortable” and the experiences change her opinion regarding the desirability of joining the upper class (87). While Mrs. Kirkpatrick, who later in the story becomes Mrs. Gibson, continues to revere the upper class family for rank alone, tainted by the experiences of her childhood Molly rejects such an absolute response to social rank. The experience that occurs at the Towers disillusions her about nobility and mitigates her initial respect for the splendor of the grounds and family.

Molly’s visit to another nearby house, the residence at Hamley Hall, brings to the forefront other problems of land ownership and social standing. Much like issues that arise in “My Lady Ludlow,” Gaskell explores inherited ties to land and economic changes in society through the Hamley family. With her father, Molly “drove up through meadow-grass, ripening for hay,—it was no grand aristocratic deer-park this—to the old red-brick hall, not three hundred yards from the high-road” (62-63).

The initial descriptions upon Molly’s arrival immediately separate the Hamley estate from Cumnor Towers. With meadows ripening for hay, the land connects to work, to harvest, instead of aristocratic ease. While the Cumnors own plenty of farmland in the nearby area, they also have the Towers as their place of country leisure. All around Hamley Hall, Molly sees “the old walls and high peaked roofs of the extensive farm-buildings” indicating connections to labor and work (63). At the same time, the Hamley land remains most notable for the age and tradition of the Hamley family. Though not nobility, Squire Hamley considers himself as good or better than any family, because of his family’s ancient ties to the land. The Squire proudly announces the connection between family and land in his declaring the worth of “a
Hamley of Hamley” (75). He further remarks, “all those Cumnor people you make such a do of in Hollingford, are mere muck of yesterday” (75). Squire Hamley makes sure to point out that his family “dates from the Heptarchy,” while the Cumnors represent a much more recent rise to nobility (75).

When Squire Hamley rides out to a more distant piece of land near the Cumnor property, he cannot help but grow angry at what he feels represents inequality: “he knew Lord Cumnor and his family had gone up in the world (‘the Whig rascals!’), both in wealth and in station, as the Hamleys had gone down” (333). Furthermore, he becomes angry because he sees Cumnor workers draining a piece of land near a pasture where Squire Hamley had previously undergone a similar project but ran out of money. The unfinished drainage project represents the Hamley’s lack of wealth and loss of position. Though the squire still owns a great deal of land, he no longer possesses the ready money to pay laborers, to finish the improvements on his land, or to pay back money on the loan he took for the land’s improvement. Like Lady Ludlow, he lacks the ready money of his position, even while he clings to the tradition of a long family line of descent.

At the same time that Gaskell shows these traditional perspectives, she also begins to explore the possibilities of social standing not directly tied to class rank. To emphasize these differences, Boiko draws attention to “repeated comparisons of Roger Hamley and his elder brother Osborne” (96). Osborne represents traditional genteel “delicacy” and faintness, while Roger appears more like a dumb laborer because he looks ugly and plain while bumbling about outdoors (167). Boiko also
identifies how Mrs. Gibson attempts to arrange people on “the rungs of an imaginary social ladder” and to “classify everyone according to an increasingly irrelevant system” (87). Such activities include identifying Osborne as a gentleman worthy of marriage to her daughter Cynthia and Roger as at best perhaps worthy of stepdaughter Molly. When Roger often visits the house and seems attentive to Cynthia, Mrs. Gibson “contrived to pass many slights upon Roger,” in order to block any engagement with Cynthia (313). After a passage of time in this manner Molly realizes that later Mrs. Gibson “had totally changed her behavior to Roger, for some cause unknown to Molly” (344). The mysterious reason becomes revealed when she admits to Mr. Gibson that she overheard him discussing how “Osborne’s life is not so very secure” due to possible illness (378). If Osborne, the eldest and heir to the Hamley estate, were to die, Roger would gain the inheritance and therefore become a worthy partner, in Mrs. Gibson’s mind, for her daughter Cynthia. Characters rise and fall on Mrs. Gibson’s imagined ladder with position, wealth, or new land rights.

In contrast to such traditional social positions, Mr. Gibson’s rise in the community represents a more uncertain liminal status tied to new social mobility in society. After their marriage, the new Mrs. Gibson remarks, “‘Really, Mr. Gibson, it is astonishing to compare your appearance and manners with your tastes’” (178). She holds traditional views of how a gentleman should look and behave, and finds him lacking such honor and respect in behavior. Respect for Mr. Gibson stems from his work in the community, instead of from traditional class behaviors and signs. He represents a character negotiating communal relationships outside strict traditional
land relationships. After the marriage many residents of Hollingford, “ladies from various halls, courts, and houses, who had profited by [Mr. Gibson’s] services,” pay a call to Mr. Gibson because “her husband was much respected” (177). Mr. Gibson connects with a broad range of people and society because he moves about all these spaces due to his work as country doctor with “so wide a range of practice” (55). Though said without particular significance by Mr. Gibson, a phrase he uses reveals significant aspects of his position. When announcing his intent to visit Molly at Hamley Hall, Mr. Gibson says he will “ride round…and see how the land lies” (77). He uses the land-based spatial expression, and it connects with his perspective and position as country doctor. As part of his profession, Mr. Gibson rides around the countryside to see how his patients are doing. He visits and cares for all classes of people in Hollingford and the nearby country areas. His rise as a professional grants him mobility; he can enter a drawing room in Hollingford, Hamley Hall with old antiquated furniture, or a grand room at Cumnor Towers with the same air of service and respect.

Mr. Gibson at first benefits from the communal relationships of the country town, but later proves his continued worth by his own professional merit. Many of his patients sent for him because he was “employed at the Towers,” because he “attends at the [Cumnor] house” (320). Though his establishment in the community occurs before the events of the novel, a minor flashback reveals how his predecessor, Mr. Hall, had “introduced his new partner with fear and trembling with untold anxiety as to his behavior, and the impression he might make on my lord the Earl, and my
lady the Countess” (31). In the same manner as Mr. Morgan introducing Mr. Harrison to the community, Mr. Hall brought Mr. Gibson around to significant members of Hollingford influence. Much like Mr. Harrison’s story, the community relationships then afford opportunity for medical advancement and the rise of professionalism. Liseiux Huelman also notes that “though enjoying a distinguished reputation as a surgeon, [Mr. Gibson] finds intellectual stimulation hard to come by and seeks it out in the home of the county’s aristocratic family, the Cumnors, and through publication in medical journals” (2). Like Mr. Harrison winning acclaim for his treatment of a gardener’s broken arm and eventually publishing the medical cure in a journal, Mr. Gibson begins to publish and interact with the scientific community. Mr. Gibson establishes himself within his provincial community, but also grows to prove himself in new professional ways that extend beyond the local community through newfound means provided by a modernizing society. His professional development as country doctor requires and allows both social and practical mobility. He moves up and down social rankings in his professional interactions and he rides about the physical countryside seeing to his patients.

Lord Hollingford and Lady Harriet, the next generation of the Cumnor family, represent the changing modern perspective of aristocratic characters toward new social developments. At first Lady Harriet reveals an “inclination to ridicule the worship paid by the good people of Hollingford to their liege lord” (163-164). She thinks the townspeople’s awe and respect, and especially their behavior, “so unnatural” and “exaggerated,” toward the grand folk of the Towers, ridiculous (167).
To Lady Harriet, Molly instead appears “simple and truthful” and thus separates herself from the other town residents whom Lady Harriet discussed as playing out the feudal relationship in that exaggerated manner (167). When forced to interact with her by his sister at the Charity Ball, Lord Hollingford likewise comes to think of Molly as “intelligent and full of interest in all sorts of sensible things” (297). Lord Hollingford overcomes class prejudices to value personal worth: “his approbation and admiration [must be] earned” (297). Since he proves a man of science, impressed by scientific exploit and work, he values intelligence rather than the trappings of rank or class. Huelman notes, “it is Lord Hollingford who fosters the intellectual atmosphere [developing at Hollingford] because he is representative of the younger generation of aristocrats and, by using his status with the old system to grant the new system status, he ushers in a new era that privileges learning above birth” (8). Hollingford actually uses his position as young aristocrat, and the respect his position entails, to foster new developments in the scientific community. He engages both Roger and Mr. Gibson because, like Molly, he finds them intelligent and capable. This new system of learning levels the ladder of class rankings in certain scenarios and opens up new possibilities for social mobility, though it does not absolutely abolish traditional viewpoints.

At the same time as she gains respect for Hollingford residents, Lady Harriet also realizes the necessity of performing in ways that re-affirm traditional connections. Although such behavior at first seems paradoxical, it connects with the previously discussed social changes as represented by Lady Harriet’s brother Lord
Hollingford and by Lady Ludlow. Traditional influence becomes a tool for these genteel people to foster potential changes. Lady Ludlow brings Mr. Brooke, his family, and other people who would traditionally be considered beneath her standing, into relationship and makes them feel comfortable. Lord Hollingford uses his traditional prestige to promote scientific advancement, for example, when he brings Roger Hamley into his circle of scientific friends. He sends Roger an invitation to the Towers, as a sign of this acceptance and connection; he invites him into that sphere of influence and association. Likewise, Lady Harriet uses the social/spatial relationships of Hollingford to rehabilitate Molly’s reputation after rumors of her time spent with Mr. Preston circulate, after—in the words of Hollingford ladies themselves—“Molly Gibson has lost her character” (505). Lady Harriet simply calls on Molly and walks with her about the town, “contrived that they twice passed through all the length of the principal street of the town, loitered at Grinstead’s for half an hour” (529). Molly remains puzzled by the day’s events, but Lady Harriet tells her, “‘Never mind, little one. To-day you shall do everything properly, and according to full etiquette,’” and upon parting says, “‘now good-bye, we’ve done a good day’s work! And better than you’re aware of’” (529). Lady Harriet distinctly understands the way gossip spreads throughout the town and the way her presence influences social standing. By condescending to enter the town, to walk the streets in public display, she engages in the spatial/social discourse of Hollingford. Her walking about with Molly in a public manner, in direct relation to the ways Molly was seen on surrounding roads with Mr. Preston, serves as the cure for Molly’s reputation. Lady Harriet thinks to herself,
“Hollingford is not the place I take it to be, if it doesn’t veer round in Miss Gibson’s favour after my to-day’s trotting of that child about” (530). She uses the town’s opinion of her traditional position to raise Molly’s standing by acquaintance and by using the signals of Hollingford discourse in the spaces where such signs make the greatest public impact.

By setting the novel years before the time of her actual writing, Gaskell shows society at a moment of imminent change. Toward the end of the story, Mr. Gibson remarks to Molly, “‘why, you’ve all your travelling to do yet; and if these new-fangled railways spread, as they say they will, we shall all be spinning about the world’” (558). This exchange positions Molly at a moment of arising modern mobility. The arrival of the railway shifts relations between individuals and the traditional associations of space and land. At the end of the novel Lady Cumnor explains, she took “Mary—Lady Cuxhaven—to the railway station on this new line between Birmingham and London” (601). The explanation of her behavior comes as part of her visit to the Gibsons. Gaskell here notes that “Lady Cumnor “had hardly ever paid calls ‘out of her own sphere,’” and that therefore the visit marks a significant event and change (601). For Lady Cumnor to leave the “aristocratic seclusion” of the Towers to visit the small drawing room of Mrs. Gibson bears social significance and Gaskell, not coincidentally, connects the event to the mobility of the railroad. Modern economic and scientific advancements, signified by such developments as the railroad, create social changes.
Molly proves a member of Hollingford, but also an outsider, because she behaves differently than other ladies in the community. The novel ends with the possibility for her future mobility, for her greater negotiation of outdated relationships. Gaskell plays with settings, with both time and space, to reveal societal changes. She presents traditional communities with traditional social and spatial relationships, but shows ways that individuals begin to negotiate and travel within such traditional spaces. Instead of strict class definitions upholding rigid demarcations of social and spatial movement, a merit-based system begins to change such modes of behavior and interaction. As examples, both Mr. Harrison and Mr. Gibson expand their influence through medical innovation and scientific advancement while residing within traditional relations of society that expect gentlemanly behavior. Individual characters that understand and respond to these changes, most often due to their potential mobility and broader perspective, become forced to further negotiate traditions with older communities. Further analysis of social mobility and individual self-negotiation from within such communal spaces will reveal a society laying down track toward future modernity.
COMMUNITY AND THE INDIVIDUAL:
MOVING TO DETERMINE IDENTITY IN SOCIAL SPACES

The narrative structure of “Mr. Harrison’s Confessions” frames the young doctor’s incorporation into provincial Duncombe with a scene of domestic happiness. His wife, only later revealed as love-interest Sophy, takes a baby to sleep upstairs. While Mr. Harrison sits by the fire eating walnuts, his friend asks how he came to reside in this domestic space, how he achieved the relationship and harmony with his wife. During the course of his requested narrative Mr. Harrison relates the first time he sees Sophy with another framed explanation: “It was like a picture—at least, seen through the door-frame…Sophy sitting on a cushion on the ground, the light coming from above on her head, and a little, sturdy, round-eyed brother kneeling by her” (Lady Ludlow 361). While the humorous romance of the story ultimately plays out to achieve this perfect domestic picture set within a provincial English town, the narrative also raises striking questions about the inter-relation of the individual and the community. While Gaskell often concentrates on exterior descriptions and on broadly exploring the connections of community, key moments also show the effects of such communal relations on individuals. In showing communal and spatial relations, Gaskell reveals individual interiority by tracking a character’s response to and interpretation of spaces and relationships. Set within this negotiation of space and community, mobile individuals must decide where to reside and how to engage with social forces and societal changes in communal spaces.
Mr. Harrison’s response to finding himself engaged, according to the gossip of the community, with multiple ladies serves as one exemplary moment of an individual’s reaction to the community. First he blames Mr. Morgan for the initial advice given to him: “It is all Mr. Morgan’s doing, who had lectured me into this tenderly deferential manner” (415). The performance of gentlemanly country doctor, his manner of treating patients enacted to fit the community’s expectations, may have led to his personal romantic problems. After learning about the gossip, Mr. Harrison returns home, but experiences trouble sleeping as his mind turns over his position in town. He narrates how he “fell into a sort of doze” and in that state “could not remember whether [he] was engaged or not” (419). In this waking/sleeping state, a liminal space, his communal position becomes indeterminate. He should know that he was not really engaged, but the gossip of the community places him into such a position and his dozing mind struggles whether to believe that communal opinion.

Movement between public space and private home also marks the liminal space. Mr. Morgan initially gave him behavioral advice, so that as young surgeon he might establish his public practice in the provincial town, within the social relationships of Duncombe. The advice later causes romantic problems because the public sphere mixes with the private in the doctor’s profession. The movement between spheres, in the previous chapter described in terms of entering the private drawing room in a professional capacity, involves the negotiation of public/private space.

Mr. Harrison attempts to determine how he, as individual, actually fits in this community. Upon waking he looks into the mirror, attempting to figure out how the
people of Duncombe see him: “Fascinating I certainly must be; but perhaps I was handsome. As soon as day dawned, I got up to ascertain the fact at the looking-glass” (419). His scene with the looking glass, trying to escape the indeterminacy of the previous night’s dozing, becomes one of self-determination. Though the result of a romantic mix-up, Mr. Harrison’s reflections become serious. He imagines what the community sees, what they must think of him, and against such a communal view determines to consider what “he”—his self-conscious “I”—thinks. While Mr. Harrison considers whether he appears to the townspeople as handsome or not, contrasting the social viewpoint with his individual perspective reveals an individual negotiating with the discourse of the community. Such a moment exposes the potential for a modern individual consciousness. In the latter portions of the story he clings to an identity as learned doctor and trusts his medical knowledge that transcends the limiting factors of Duncombe. Sustained self-determinacy in the face of public scorn allows Mr. Harrison to save the gardener’s arm and to save Sophy’s life. The outcome of these events then changes the social narrative surrounding him. Once changed, however, he marries Sophy, re-integrates into the traditional community, and realizes the domestic ideal within Duncombe. His ability to bring change to Duncombe with modern medical advances, and his break from merely fitting in with traditional society in the mode of Mr. Morgan, actually leads to his new synthesis in both domestic and public spheres.

In her much longer novel *Wives and Daughters*, Gaskell further complicates the negotiation between modern changes and traditional values, and between
communal relationships and individual self-determination. Mr. Gibson initially resembles Mr. Harrison. An elder doctor introduces both into country towns and uses the traditional relationships of such spaces to establish the proper opinion of the new doctor. Mr. Harrison then ends the story with his established country practice and ideal domestic situation. In contrast, Mr. Gibson begins the events of the novel proper as widowed doctor, with something clearly missing from the domestic ideal. After dinner, “a comfortless meal” with Lord Hollingford, Mr. Gibson explains, “‘You see a man like me—a widower—with a daughter who cannot always be at home—has not a regulated household which would enable me to command the small portions of time I can spend there’” (102). Mr. Gibson indirectly apologizes for not being able to provide domestic comforts. Lord Hollingford understands the situation and comments, “‘a man like you ought to be free from any thought of household cares’” (102). Under such traditional roles, a man should not worry about domestic concerns, should fulfill his professional obligations outside the house and return to a well-kept domestic space. Understanding the traditional roles as such reveals something lacking in Mr. Gibson’s home. Hollingford tells him “‘you ought to have somebody’” and then more directly asks, “‘Have you never thought of marrying again?’” (102). Hollingford then explicitly states the convenience and fulfillment of specific roles: “‘It would not be like a first marriage, of course; but if you found a sensible agreeable woman of thirty or so, I really think you couldn’t do better than take her to manage your home’” (102). The domestic bliss ideal, depicted in the
frame narrative of “Mr. Harrison’s Confessions,” becomes a potential marriage of convenience to fulfill traditional roles.

Mrs. Gibson, in actual management of the household, attempts to establish a space that holds up to social scrutiny rather than fits the particular cares of the individual. She responds foremost to the pressures of communal ideology. After her arrival as the new lady of the house, Mrs. Gibson tells Molly of her plan to re-do Cynthia’s room and “‘yours, too, darling; so don’t be jealous’” (182). Molly immediately replies, “‘Oh, please, mamma, not mine’” and insists “‘I don’t want it to look different. I like it as it is. Pray don’t do anything to it’” (183). Mrs. Gibson explains that she must re-do Molly’s room along with Cynthia’s due to concerns with how townspeople would view such an action: “Only think what would be said of me by everybody; petting my own child and neglecting my husband’s…In such a tittle-tattle place as Hollingford! Really, Molly, you either are very stupid or very obstinate, or else you don’t care what hard things may be said about me” (183). The situation seems ridiculous, because Molly merely wants to keep the furniture that belonged to her mother, and yet Mrs. Gibson’s point about the townspeople’s gossip and opinions of her as mother bears truth. The town might gossip about the way she treats her daughter versus her stepdaughter, and Mrs. Gibson quickly reveals herself as someone who cares more for outward social considerations than making Molly happy as an individual. For her societal concerns and attempts to uphold this domestic genteel ideal, Mrs. Gibson becomes a humorous character. Emma Brandin analyzes how Victorian domesticity in Gaskell’s work reveals an “artificial and
performative nature” (30). Humor serves as one way to reveal performance: humorous moments in Gaskell’s domestic scenes reveal the great distance between the attempted ideal and the way her characters play the role. Brandin describes how Gaskell will often “poke fun at the artificiality” of these performative actions (34). Gaskell clearly pokes fun at Mrs. Gibson’s social concern, but she also reveals the intense social pressures placed upon women to adhere to social norms in the domestic sphere.

While Mrs. Gibson remains caught in communal concerns that fit with traditional domestic ideology, as the young heroine of the story, Molly must attempt to more fully explore and negotiate the communal/individual subject position. Like Mr. Harrison, she considers ways she may or may not fit into the traditional spaces of the village society around her. Mr. Gibson sends Molly to stay at Hamley Hall in part to escape the potential romantic advances of his pupil Mr. Coxe, but also because he realizes that he may not have provided the best domestic environment for Molly’s growth as a young lady. Once Molly moves beyond the safety of her home, the private sphere where her father did care for and nurture and protect her, she must further consider how society sees her as a young woman. At Hamley Hall she “looked at herself in the glass with some anxiety, for the first time in her life” (66). After scrutinizing her appearance she considers, “I don’t think I am pretty…and yet I am not sure” (67). For the first time she anxiously contemplates how she thinks of herself and how others must see and think of her. This moment when she looks into the glass reveals both self-conscious construction—she must consider how she thinks
of her ‘self’—as well as social construction because such self-consideration comes in terms of the community. Molly realizes the dynamic at play in living, sometimes performing, for others and quenching her own emotions: “Thinking more of others’ happiness than of her own was very fine; but did it not mean giving up her very individuality, quenching all the warm love, the true desires, that made her herself?” (135). She wonders to what extent she can hold on to what feels like her inner self while fitting within the social role required of her as obedient daughter. Moving outside her home expands Molly’s perspective on the community and causes these self-reflections.

Other mirror scenes throughout the novel reflect the communal signs of outward appearances. Molly continues to wonder about the changing effects of clothes and physical impressions, such as when she puts on a new dress, “looked into the glass and saw the improvement in her appearance” (153). Her thoughts unfold in a similar manner to the first mirror scene, as she “wonder[s] if I’m pretty…I almost think I am—in this kind of dress I mean, of course” (153). Molly also compares the outward appearances of herself and her stepsister Cynthia when she “caught reflections of the two faces in the glass,” and thinks how it is no wonder Cynthia attracts men with her beauty and outward performance of a fine young lady (374). Near the end of the novel, Molly spends some time with Lady Harriet as a guest at the Towers and for an evening allows herself to be dressed up by a servant with “new clothes” and “her hair in some new and pretty way” (610). Once wearing this new outfit, and residing in the genteel Towers’ space, she “looked at herself in the cheval-
glass, [and] she scarcely knew the elegant reflection to be that of herself” (610). This final scene, where she fully determines herself as elegant and pretty, marks the change from the simple uncertain girl who first visited Hamley Hall. When Roger sees her at the Towers “in her pretty evening dress, with her hair beautifully dressed, her delicate complexion flushed a little with timidity, yet her movements and manners bespeaking quiet ease, Roger hardly recognized her” (612). As outsider, he responds to the same visual stimuli as Molly when she looked at herself in the mirror. She undergoes physical changes through the events of the novel, but this fails to influence her interior goodness and the narrative focus on her “quiet ease” marks the new surety of maturation. Molly can move between her own home, Hamley Hall, or the Towers, and find a sense of ease even as outward situations and appearances change. This development through the novel eventually allows her similar social/physical mobility as that of her father who can move between places and social ranks as necessary. Though at first uncertain of herself, these mirror scenes show her conscious development to reach this point of self-assured mobility.

Roger, Molly’s counterpart and romantic interest throughout the text, undergoes a similar transformation. He most clearly marks the societal changes, described throughout the previous chapter, involving traditional values against the contemporary social situation. In the beginning, he compares unfavorably to his genteel brother Osborne. Osborne bears social significance as heir to the Hamley land; he holds his position as “representative of the ancient house of Hamley of Hamley” (83). Around the servants, and even the Squire and Mrs. Hamley, who
consider Osborne the genteel heir, even Molly falls “into the family manner of thinking that nothing was too great or too good for ‘the eldest son’” (83). While Osborne bears all the markers of traditional high social standing and will inherit the land, Roger gives “the impression of strength more than elegance” (87). Upon first impression Molly actually thinks of him as “heavy-looking, clumsy, and a person she was sure she should never get on with” (87). Through the events of the novel, however, Roger reveals an interior strength and self-certainty in the face of such outward social limitations. He enjoys working outdoors and engaging discoveries of natural science. As an individual he remains constant, but his social circumstances change as society fluctuates around him. Huelman notes this focus when he asserts, “the novel is as much about Roger’s professional development as it is about Molly’s personal development” (9). Roger arrives at Cumnor Towers, therefore able to view Molly in all her elegance, as the outcome of his professional development and merited rise in social standing. Both characters reach this moment as welcome guests of the Towers with newfound social mobility, based upon the Cumnor family’s—Lady Harriot’s and Lord Hollingford’s in particular—understanding of their character and legitimate value as individuals. Molly and Roger both navigate the transition of traditional values into current society by clinging to a solid sense of themselves in spite of social difficulties.

While Gaskell did not finish the final chapter of the novel, her editor notes that Molly and Roger were supposed to marry and move to reside in London (646). The concluding remarks note that Roger “becomes professor at some great scientific
institution, and wins his way in the world handsomely” (646). Even though he rises to a position as heir when Osborne dies, his intellectual pursuits based on individual merit lead to his social rise, rather than the traditional values of land ownership. Roger’s individual merit overcomes the limiting traditional social value systems, so that he successfully negotiates the communal conditions surrounding him. That their social rise in the world coincides with a move to London reinforces the influence of mobility in an emerging modern society. Roger’s success as scientist allows him to break from the traditional land relationships of Hollingford, to forgo his place as a “Hamley of Hamley.” His position in a modernizing world, in a society that values scientific advancement, allows him to choose where he will take residence at the end of the novel.

*Wives and Daughters* depicts a provincial town and addresses the negotiations of traditional values and modern changes, and Gaskell’s novel *Cranford* further addresses character mobility when narrator Mary Smith moves between disparate spaces. Though poised at a moment of great social change, where new economic conditions and modern science greatly influence contemporary development, traditional values linger in Cranford. The “new-fangled railways,” feared or at best seeming like an uncertain novelty at the end of *Wives and Daughters*, indeed continued to spread, changing modes and time of travel and shaping spatial development in England (*WD* 558). The men of Cranford appear on the periphery of the town, “accounted for by being with his regiment, his ship, or closely engaged in business all the week in the great neighbouring commercial town of Drumble” (5).
Means of travel allow the men to move beyond Cranford, to leave that provincial space as required by work. At the same time, because the men leave, Cranford becomes an insulated communal space for the women left behind. The ladies have their social circle, and for the general tasks in little country Cranford prove “quite sufficient” (6). The isolation, apart from the economic focus of nearby Drumble, leads to quirks of traditional ideology in Cranford. To uphold the idea of gentility, Mary humorously notes how in Cranford “none of us spoke of money, because that subject savoured of commerce and trade, and though some might be poor, we were all aristocratic” (7). Rather than representing a real aristocracy that can afford to live in leisure due to wealth and power, the ladies of Cranford perform this genteel disposition even when lacking both the accompanying wealth and power. Furthermore, the narrator admits, “we blinded ourselves to the vulgar fact, that we were, all of us, people of very moderate means” (8). The social circle of Cranford perpetuates the ideology of the community.

The customs of insulated Cranford, with fashions well out of date and allegiance to a fading aristocratic system, reveal difference when set against changes occurring in the rapid industrialization of northern England. Borislav Knezevic writes that “Cranford culture” should be “mapped and measured in its relationship to the industrial modernization of the north…[and] in its relationship to the state culture of the south” (408). The relationship of these societal changes versus traditions, as represented by different geographic areas of England, identifies customs and societal roles in Cranford. While the men adapt to worldly change, making money outside
Cranford to support the community of “genteel” ladies, the women themselves oppose change. As one example, Captain Brown, a gentleman with the audacity to invade the ladies’ parties, arrives in town because he works for the railroad and represents numerous vulgar aspects of life: “He was a half-pay captain and had obtained some situation on a neighbouring railroad, which had been vehemently petitioned against by the little town; and if, in addition to his masculine gender, and his connexion with the obnoxious railroad, he was so brazen as to talk of being poor” (8). Captain Brown represents many of the unacknowledged vulgarities of modern life: poor, working for the railroad, and willing to admit to all of it. Knezevic notes how the outside world “hovers on the edges of representation as an immense field of forces affecting the town” (408). Genteel, leisurely, speaking of trade and commerce as vulgar or not speaking of them at all, the women of Cranford uphold a culture opposed to nearby industrializing Drumble/Manchester. According to Knezevic, due to these spatial relationships and changes in society, “the town’s social order is represented as both subject to historical change and a limit to that change” (417). The connection between physical locales, with traditional Cranford twenty miles by train away from changing industrial Drumble, sets social ways of life against each other. Gaskell’s *Cranford*, though focused on the events and society of the provincial town, depicts this relationship between contrasting locations through Mary’s travel, and therefore forces the continued negotiation between traditional ways and modern society.
The negotiation of these ways of life, represented by the importance of the physical relationship between Cranford and Drumble, becomes particularized in the narrator Mary Smith and her movements in and out of Cranford. Mary serves as narrator of the story, detailing and describing the events and places of Cranford, but also remains an active participant and community member in that provincial sphere of life. She must consciously negotiate between two lifestyles, and must understand the required differences in her modes of behavior when residing in Cranford versus her time in Drumble. Within the main text Mary sometimes describes customs as an outsider: “The Cranford ladies have only an occasional little quarrel” (6). At other times, she groups herself in with the women: “we none of us spoke of money, because that subject savoured of commerce and trade” (7). She directly acknowledges how grouping herself with the community changes her language and diction. When Mary resides in the space of Cranford, when she leaves behind that “vulgar” world of Drumble by train, she must take up the discourse of Cranford. Describing the ladies economical habits, Mary calls attention to her own use of language: “‘Elegant economy!’ How naturally one falls back into the phraseology of Cranford! There, economy was always ‘elegant’ and money-spending always ‘vulgar and ostentatious’” (8). In the passage, Mary qualifies her description of economy and associates the language of such behaviors with the ideology of Cranford. The women must behave this way for economic reasons; the majority of women live off very little money from a settled inheritance, but have constructed a discourse that incorporates their lifestyle into a more ideologically based system of “genteel” living. When Mary
returns to Cranford, dwells in the actual provincial space, she must take up the
“phraseology of Cranford” and use the discourse of the community.

Mary’s narrative, detailing the events of her visits to Cranford, reveals her
dual roles, as narrator and participant, as well as her ability to move between physical
spaces and to perform and speak in the modes required of each space. Anna
Koustinoudi analyzes ways that Mary, as narrator, mediates the “gap between the
community [Cranford] and the modern world” (69). As earlier remarked, Cranford
resides in a traditional space where little seems to change, and yet just beyond the
communal space northern England and the industrial cities undergo rapid
transformation. Discussing Mary’s movement between these spaces, Koustinoudi
writes that she “oscillates between two opposing worlds and discourses, those of
urban, industrial Drumble (modeled on metropolitan Manchester), on the one hand,
and those of rural Cranford (modeled on Gaskell’s native Knutsford), on the other”
(69). Mary’s movement between spaces, her returns to Cranford in cycles of
visitations and the recounting of events during those returns, structure the narrative.

With the narrative structure of recorded visitations, Mary both describes and
participates. Mary’s ability to speak the language of Cranford, as well as to recognize
her use of such language, depends upon her position as both insider and outsider. Her
dual modes of living remain contingent upon her ability to move between the two
different spaces. Responding to her movement back and forth, Koustinoudi identifies
the “narrator’s liminal positioning and communal voice” (69). Mary moves between
spaces in this liminal way, to take up both positions as outsider/insider. The narrative
then involves both a “distinct ‘I’” and “communal ‘we’” in this mode of active representation/participation (69). Mary clearly notes the events of community life in Cranford as observer, but she also takes up many of these rules and ways of life to fit within that structure during her time spent there. She rarely remarks on the potential tensions of moving back and forth, although she notes an occasion when Miss Betty Barker extends her “an impromptu invitation, as [Mary] happened to be a visitor [to Miss Matty and Cranford]” (75). Mary identifies the hesitation of the invitation resulting from her visitor/outsider status and from her father’s relation to trade in Drumble: “I could see she had a little fear lest, since my father had gone to live in Drumble, he might have engaged in that ‘horrid cotton trade,’ and so dragged his family down out of ‘aristocratic society’” (75). The moment reveals the tension regarding the relationship between Cranford and nearby industrial Drumble, as well as how Mary must navigate between spaces and lifestyles. In most cases Mary can both perform and call attention to the performance of these Cranfordian ways and behaviors.

The narrative style, with Mary participating but aware of requirements for participation, reveals the performative aspects of residing in Cranford and the performed ideologies, the ways of life, that uphold the communal space. In an early passage, the narrative makes clear the airs of this aristocratic performance:

We had tacitly agreed to ignore that any with whom we associated on terms of visiting equality could ever be prevented by poverty from doing anything that they wished. If we walked to or from a party, it was because the night was so
fine, or the air so refreshing; not because sedan-chairs were expensive. If we wore prints, instead of summer silks, it was because we preferred a washing material and so on, till we blinded ourselves to the vulgar fact, that we were, all of us, people of very moderate means. (8)

The description of performance notes how the language used to discuss poverty turns economic practicality into genteel choice. Discursively, modes of behavior become chosen engagements. The end of this description also notes how the ladies “blinded” themselves to the actual economic situation. The performance becomes real in the minds of the Cranford ladies themselves; they believe the ideology they perform. Though in this passage Mary speaks communally, with “we” and “our,” she can also accentuate the ridiculous contrasts between modes of living, the genteel performance, and such aristocratic ideals. Brandin also notes the comedic ways that Gaskell calls attention to the performance of the women. She explores how Mary’s narrative involves “contrastive language” that comically exposes the differences between genteel domestic ideals and the actual modes of living in poor Cranford (35). Mary herself emphasizes this point when she describes how the ladies overlook requirements to play out their genteel ideals: “The Cranfordians had that kindly esprit de corps which made them overlook all deficiencies in success when some among them tried to conceal their poverty” (Gaskell 7). Mary provides an example when “Mrs. Forrestor…gave a party in her baby-house of a dwelling, and the little maiden disturbed the ladies on the sofa by a request that she might get the tea-tray out from underneath, everyone took this novel proceeding as the most natural thing in the
world” (7). She presents the irony of all the “genteel” ladies standing so the host can remove the tea tray. Mary participates in these performative actions while comically revealing how genteel attitudes contrast with actual ways of living.

Mary’s liminal position as outsider/insider, as narrator/participant, ultimately reveals her as distinct mobile individual within the performative community of Cranford. Brandin identifies how images of “the ideal” do not often allow for “subjectivity or individuality” (31). Theoretically, such a loss of individuality occurs because “individuals [are] conditioned by the normative discourses…of their time” (32). The noted positioning of discourse involved in “of their time” should also include ‘of their space or place.’ The ideological discourse of society exists in a localized position/time. The provincial community of Cranford exerts ideological force. The ladies perform and live out the roles required of their position/community. As outsider Mary can both visit and perform the genteel domestic ideals, but also draw attention to the performance. She does not have to absolutely fit within this community and space because for the majority of her time she still resides with her father in Drumble. Vacations spent as a visitor to Cranford merely serve as excursions, as breaks from her life in the city. She chooses when to reside in either space, within either community, because her individual mobility grants her such capabilities and possibilities. Her ability to move outside the space of Cranford allows her to distance herself mentally from the ideological performance, even as she must participate in the moment
Mary, as narrator, preserves her status as individual and reveals ways that individuals can fit within society without losing subjectivity. She may choose to enter this society and adjust her performance to fit, but she still narrates a potential reversion to more objective outsider. The ending of *Cranford* ultimately reaffirms relationships between individuals as structuring the community, rather than letting the ideology of an imagined community overwhelm and disrupt the actual relationships of individuals. Peter Jenkyns tells Mary, “‘I want everybody to be friends, for it harasses Matty so much to hear of these quarrels’” (187). The narrative ends with Mary remarking, “We all love Miss Matty, and I somehow think we are all of us better when she is near us” (187). The statement reveals both her subjective thoughts on the situation at Cranford, because she qualifies the information as her personal opinion, as well as the ties between the individuals of the community in everyone’s love for Miss Matty. At the beginning of the novel Mary describes how “the ladies of Cranford” can show “real tender good offices to each other whenever they are in distress” and this ultimately comes full circle (5). Mary identifies the ladies treatment of Miss Matty as holding them together in community. Individual merit eventually trumps ideological custom. Such a message also remains inherently connected with the narrative mode of the novel. Koustinoudi finds that Mary’s narrative “I” becomes privileged and establishes her individuality (79). Her status as individual narrator allows her the mobility, involving both performing and interpreting, between different communities. From her liminal position she in turn reveals the communal connections observed in Cranford.
Gaskell’s novel *Ruth* deals with very different subject matter but also reveals ways individuals both move through or within communities and may overcome traditional social ideology to subtly influence the connections of a community. The story of *Ruth* carries the titular character through a number of settings, each with different communal associations. At the beginning of the novel Gaskell inserts a strong authorial remark addressing potential negative influences of society. She identifies the connections between setting, space, conditions, community, and the individual:

> The daily life into which people are born, and into which they are absorbed before they are well aware, forms chains which only one in a hundred has moral strength enough to despise, and to break when the right time comes—when an inward necessity for independent individual action arises, which is superior to all outward conventionalities. (4)

The outward conventionalities include the social bonds that ideologically link communities together. In this passage, Gaskell calls such connections formed chains that many individuals never realize exist and only a few break. The analysis holds true for Molly Gibson who overcomes social stigmas of Hollingford, or for Mary Smith who cares most of all for her friend Miss Matty and less for the rules and requirements of “genteel” Cranford life. Gaskell includes the passage in *Ruth* as she attempts to show how Ruth’s condition, her situation in life, contributes to her “fall” as a woman, and also how her individual character overcomes society’s direct labeling of her as an unredeemable “fallen woman.”
After the death of her parents, the novel begins with Ruth living in the city, an “assize-town in one of the eastern counties” (3). Gaskell depicts an overgrown cityscape, with buildings crammed together forcing narrow dark streets: “streets below suffered from all these projections and advanced stories above; they were dark, and ill-paved with large, round jolting pebbles” (3). The girls among whom Ruth works as seamstress apprentice labor long hours in a degrading environment, and ultimately end up feeling “a deadened sense of life, consequent upon their unnatural mode of existence, their sedentary days, and their frequent nights of late watching” (10). Ruth sees no means of escape from this “deadened” view of life, and therefore begins the novel as an immobile character and subject to negative social forces. Pam Parker identifies how “Gaskell presents Ruth’s fall as the result of economic and social forces rather than innate wickedness or individual impulsiveness” (56). When her Uncle sends her away to the city, Ruth has no protection, socially or economically, for the position in which she finds herself fixed. Compared with Mrs. Mason’s other girls who have friends to visit on Sundays, the narrative questions, “what became of such as Ruth, who had no home and no friends in that large populous desolate town?” (29). The natural answer points to her lonesome neglect and lack of protection from Mr. Bellingham’s advances, which begin merely as “a friend who took an interest in her thoughts and proceedings during the week” (31). Ruth’s alienation in the city leads to her vulnerability. Her social and economic conditions, rather than her moral disposition, eventually lead to her relationship with Mr. Bellingham.
People around Ruth, however, may judge her rather than consider these other social and economic causes. Different settings reveal societal attitudes about her as mistress and “fallen woman.” Mr. Bellingham takes her to vacation in a mountain village in north Wales, ostensibly to retreat and get away from the judgments of society. Rather than escape judgment, through the movement to a new space Ruth actually comes to realize the way people consider her. A little boy hits Ruth when she attempts to kiss his baby sister, and as justification refers to Ruth as “not a lady” (59). The boy continues to explain what he learned from his mother: “‘she’s a bad naughty girl—mamma said so, she did; and she sha’n’t kiss our baby’” (59). At this moment, Ruth realizes the influence of discourse surrounding a “fallen woman.” The innkeeper Mrs. Morgan explains how she normally acts towards women like Ruth undergoing these types of vacations: “I always think it right, for my own morals, to put a little scorn into my manners when such as her come to stay here; but, indeed, she’s so gentle, I’ve found it hard work to show the proper contempt” (64). Her remarks both express the general moral concern with a “fallen women,” and also note how Ruth’s attitude and disposition make Mrs. Morgan behave differently and may start to change the narrative surrounding her.

Under the care and treatment of the Bensons, who give her an opportunity for redemption rather than judgment, Ruth gains a new possible future and a possible new community and place to live. Mr. Benson, a minister, helps Ruth overcome Mr. Bellingham’s desertion, in large part because “he never believed Ruth to be more guilty than she seemed” (96). Faith Benson, his sister, arrives in town and initially
thinks well of Ruth’s character, until finding out Ruth’s pregnancy. Miss Benson tells her brother “‘I was just beginning to have a good opinion of her, but I’m afraid she is very depraved’” (96). Faith says Ruth responded happily to the news “‘as if she had a right to have a baby’” (97). Yoko Hatano connects the taint of the fallen woman with “the domestic ideology prevalent among the middle classes” (637). A child marks the natural culmination of domestic sensibility. The framing scene from “Mr. Harrison’s Confessions” represents this domestic bliss, where the lovely wife brings the child up to bed. A child out of wedlock taints the domestic ideology and delineates clear danger to the domestic sphere. Responding to this societal view, Faith Benson feels affronted that Ruth might feel she has a right to a child outside such a domestic structure. Hatano describes how the ideologically perfect feminine sphere “must not be contaminated by the presence of a fallen woman” (638). Rather than go along with this ideology and denouncement, however, Mr. Benson remarks, “‘the sin appears to me to be quite distinct from its consequences’” (97). He intends to offer Ruth the opportunity for a new life. At the beginning of the tenth chapter, the narrator states, “I rather think it will be found that, in the long run, true and simple virtue always has its proportionate reward in the respect and reverence of every one whose esteem is worth having” (84). This pronouncement establishes the potential for a community of caring individuals rather than one founded on societal ideology and automatic responses. The foundations of simple virtue may allow Ruth the opportunity to find this reward despite past “sin.” The Bensons present her a new opportunity to travel with them and to choose her future community.
The majority of the novel’s events play out in the small factory town of Eccleston, where Ruth, like many of Gaskell’s other characters, must negotiate the spaces of community. A note by Tim Dolin cautions readers not to connect Eccleston with any certain “real” city, because descriptions include similarities with Knutsford but also mark the city as a factory town (Ruth 375). Eccleston first appears with the consequences of industrialization, with a “low grey cloud…the smoke of the town hanging over the plain” (109). The town holds onto some elements of traditional community relations, while revealing the changing economy of modernization.

Rather than a county family and a grand country house holding the dominant place in society, “Mr. and Mrs. Bradshaw were the centre pieces in Ruth’s map” (116). Mr. Bradshaw gained his wealth and position through manufacturing. While he later attempts to involve himself in politics and makes connections to the traditionally higher classes through the election process, his rise and social standing as a manufacturer marks the clear changes in this setting. Mr. Bradshaw also represents a keen judging viewpoint in both wealth and morality:

He was richer and more prosperous than ever; —a keen, far-seeing man of business, with an undisguised contempt for all who failed in the success which he had achieved. But it was not alone those who were less fortunate in obtaining wealth than himself that he visited with severity of judgment; every moral error or delinquency came under his unsparing comment. (172)

Mr. Bradshaw, judgmental and prominent, represents clear danger to Ruth’s position. The Bensons at first decide to give her a different name and pretend that she is a
widow in order to allow her to work and live comfortably in the community. Hatano finds that “although the Benson’s house is in a northern industrial town…it is characterized by a pastoral atmosphere and by peace” and that, furthermore, as “a home of pastoral bliss” it allows time for Ruth’s “rehabilitation” (635). Gaskell describes five comfortable years with “so little turmoil […] passing] calm and tranquil” (164). Ruth ingratiates herself with the Bradshaws, serving as governess to the children, but the truth of her past breaks the respite.

When Mr. Bradshaw discovers the truth about Ruth’s past as a fallen woman it brings about Ruth’s crisis of character, and ultimately her “inward necessity for independent individual action…superior to all outward conventionalities” (4). When Mr. Bradshaw shames her and kicks her out of his house, Gaskell’s depiction of events evokes the individual’s relation to over-generalized societal conventions. Mrs. Pearson calls “such [a] degraded women…a disgrace to our sex,” thus representing the general opinion of fallen women (260). Mr. Bradshaw likewise exclaims, hardly able to finish a sentence in his anger, “‘the more depraved, the more disgusting you’” (273). When Jemima attempts to calm her father, Mr. Bradshaw replies, “‘you have grown more and more insolent—more and more disobedient every day. I now know who is to thank for it. When such a woman came into my family there is no wonder at any corruption—any evil—any defilement’” (273). Denouncing Ruth and identifying her as a source of domestic corruption and evil in the community, Mr. Bradshaw exemplifies the accuser of the fallen women. One tainted woman represents the possible disruption of domestic ideology, and so Mr. Bradshaw
removes her from the house and pushes her out of his domestic situation with a final remark: “If ever you, or your bastard, darken this door again, I will have you both turned out by the police” (276).

Ruth remains with the Bensons in Eccleston despite the community following Mr. Bradshaw’s lead and speaking and behaving harshly toward her, in order to redeem herself through individual effort. Her example represents the potential choice of a mobile individual, and Ruth uses newfound opportunities provided by the Bensons to rehabilitate her image rather than leave the community. Ruth works with the sense that her individual actions will signify her true character rather than the communal discourse and judgment surrounding and tainting her past. Ruth’s “true instincts told her that it was not right to disturb others with many expressions of her remorse; that the holiest repentance consisted in a quiet and daily sacrifice” (297). Ruth becomes a sick nurse and at first mostly works “among the paupers,” as higher society continues to shun her (315). Through the work, Ruth reveals “the true expression of a kind, modest, and humble spirit” and her more positive reputation spreads (316). Her reputation develops not because Ruth performs duties as a nurse with such a positive social outcome in mind, but because she manifests individual strength in the natural caring of her role. Stacey Gottlieb describes how “character development” can result from “an individual’s ability to make moral decisions independent of societal rewards or punishments” (74). Ruth overcomes the ideology of the community, which would define her as depraved, tainted, and corrupted, by demonstrating individual strength.
Ruth works in the fever ward when a typhus outbreak affects the town, and she fulfills her ultimate self-sacrifice when she nurses Mr. Bellingham back to health and dies from the sickness. While at the fever ward, the town’s opinion of her and the dialogue that surrounds her changes. Her son Leonard hears an old man say, “such a one as her has never been a great sinner; nor does she do her work as a penance, but for the love of God” (346). After this pronouncement “there arose a clamour of tongues, each with some talk of his mother’s gentle doings” and Leonard feels “overwhelmed…to hear of the love and the reverence with which the poor and the outcast had surrounded her” (347). Descriptions of Ruth change because lowly work manifests her individual character and innate qualities. When she finishes at the fever ward and nurses Mr. Bellingham, Parker notes how the action “raises her self-sacrifice to the level of Christian martyrdom” (65). Parker further calls this final ending “an ambiguous blend of self-sacrifice, self-abnegation, and self-assertion” (65). In giving up her bodily self, expending her life in caring for her past lover, she re-asserts her self apart from the discourse surrounding a fallen woman. She returns to Mr. Bellingham completely changed and yet the same. During one moment Ruth thinks how she “did not feel much changed from the earliest Ruth she could remember. Everything seemed to change but herself” (317). Her sense of individuality remains constant, while the community, and communal opinion, around her changes. She wins over even Mr. Bradshaw because he feels “anxious to do something to testify his respect for the woman, who, if all had entertained his opinions, would have been driven into hopeless sin” (369). His moralizing, based
upon the Victorian ideology of a fallen woman as threat to domestic life, proves insufficient when faced with Ruth’s actual individual character. Gaskell’s depiction of the fall and rehabilitation of a young woman reveals the great interplay of communal opinion and social ideology with individual character and determined self-assertion. Her movement through differing locations reveals ideology and communal discourse, but she ultimately chooses where to dwell and overcomes negative collective views through her individual effort.

In her initial passage proclaiming that a select few individuals may overcome the chains of situation, Gaskell identifies the potential for an individual to break from the communal position. Individual action may overcome the ideology of a community, and may transform the social relationships of a particular time and space. While revealing a very different subject matter, the events of Ruth fulfill issues of individuality and community that arise in Gaskell’s other narratives. Mr. Harrison, Molly Gibson, Mary Smith, and Ruth all find new ways to interact with the community without giving up their individual merits. Mr. Harrison embraces new medicinal practices that ultimately allow him to return to the community and establish his domestic situation. Molly Gibson overcomes the prejudices of Hollingford gossip and comes to value individual merit instead of the lingering class systems of older traditional society. Mary Smith navigates her way between two very different spaces in post-industrial England; her narrative reveals the mobility of a liminal character moving between particular spaces and playing required roles. Ruth, by holding to what she feels is right and asserting her self-worth, changes the discourse of the town
around her. Gaskell depicts communities in flux, where an individual may overcome traditional viewpoints and forge new communal connections. The inspired change may not always alter the absolute traditions of the community, but often shows the importance of connections between individuals rather than the absolute control of ideology in the spaces of society. Through mobility that allows perspective on society, these characters choose their community, and choose when to negotiate with communal positions. Mobility often develops from the flux of modernization, and individuals may use changes of a modernizing society to influence traditional communities and spatial relationships in positive ways.
CONCEPTUALIZING THE CITYSCAPE:

SPATIAL CONNECTIONS BETWEEN URBAN DWELLERS

The rise of new contemporary spaces, with industrial cities abolishing the traditional ties of country or provincial towns, created new issues for the interrelation of communities. The Industrial Revolution in England caused monumental changes in land use and therefore new dynamics of spatial distribution. Such shifts—of population, of land use, of economy and economic power—inevitably caused changes in the allocations of spatial resources and furthermore in the relationships of the community inhabiting those spaces. Conceptions of space in rapidly changing locales therefore reveal the dynamic changes to life as lived by the individuals inhabiting new places. One major change occurred in the rise of the manufacturing city and the explosion of urban living. In The Country and the City Raymond Williams notes that “by the middle of the nineteenth century the urban population of England exceeded the rural population: the first time in human history that this had even been so” (217).

With the rise of urban centers to house the increasing population, new issues of spatial distribution arose with hastily built, overcrowded working-class districts. An increasing population of working-class poor lived in close proximity in new urban spaces with very different modes of relationship to the land and to the upper classes.

The way of life for this new class of people and new manner of living led to entire new discourses negotiating the construction and effects of such an overcrowded city. With the shifting economy and the growth of industrial cities, new
ideologies arose and influenced conscious and unconscious spatial conception. Elizabeth Gaskell’s early short story “Libbie Marsh’s Three Eras,” published in 1847, joined the conversation of writers depicting life in the city. Her first novel, *Mary Barton*, published in 1848, further addresses spatial division in the northern industrial town of Manchester. Stark divisions between the dwellings of the mill owners and the working laborers influence and reveal class discord. With these depictions of urban habitation, Gaskell reveals ideological conceptions as tied to and even constructing the city as social space. Other contemporary and near contemporary writers attempted to depict the issues of city living or even to fix the overall problems of the new urban space. Social reformers viewed and wrote on squalid living conditions while architects imagined new means of urban planning that might ease the problems of urban population and create better spaces for the work force. The ills of society as seen in these new city spaces became a social problem. In her depictions of the city and working class inhabitants, Gaskell instead reveals the humanity of individuals attempting to live in these squalid spaces. She therefore shows how individuals respond to spatial changes brought about by the industrial city as a modern space and how a person moving about the cityscape and considering the commonalities of human families living within these new spaces might overcome the negativities of class consciousness.

Elizabeth Gaskell moved to Manchester after her marriage to William, and her first published writing concerns the city around her and her reactions to urban conditions. In her poem “Sketches Among the Poor” Gaskell depicts “one dark
house...by gloomy streets surrounded,” with clear reference to new housing districts and to dark streets in the city (Ln 2-3). In the opening she describes how the dank oppressive atmosphere ruins the scent of “the flower / brought from fresher air” within a mere hour (3-4). Yet despite such suppressive air, which she soon describes with its “weight of smoke” and pollution, “men lived there” (9,5). Already, within the first few lines of her early poem, written in 1836 and appearing in “Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine the following January,” Gaskell sets a scene in the poor living conditions of an industrial city (Uglow 101). The central character of the poem works in a factory, “labours task'd her hands all day,” while her mind returns to the idyllic scene of her childhood (75). In a clear contrast of city and country space, the woman’s thoughts turn from the “close and noisy street” to “her childhood's home” (42-43). She shows the oppressive setting and how the city space surrounding the woman affects her perspective and influences the course of her thoughts. Without yet fully depicting all negative aspects of living in this city space, Gaskell begins such a project with this early poem.

Gaskell’s short story “Libbie Marsh’s Three Eras” reveals further developments of the city setting. At the beginning of the story, Libbie changes residences to live at “No. 2, -- Court, Albemarle Street,” (ADNW 167). Gaskell soon after fills in the details of this new residence to describe the house as one of many: “Dixon’s house was the last on the left-hand side of the court. A high dead brick wall connected it with its opposite neighbor. All the dwellings were of the same monotonous pattern” (167). Furthermore, Gaskell directly connects the sparse living
conditions to the family’s economic employment, because “Dixon and his wife, and their eldest girl, worked in factories, and were absent all day from the house” (168). Libbie neither expects nor finds a warm greeting. She gets the key to the house from a neighbor nearby where the youngest Dixon child was “busy making dirt-pies” (168). The nearly abandoned street exposes a working-class district where the majority of people, like the Dixons, leave for a long day’s labor in the factories. Gaskell begins to describe the greater negative aspects of such poor housing when Libbie enters. The young child playing in the dirt, at first a quick reference, bears social and moral weight regarding the state of the working-class poor.

The initial working-class setting reveals different inhabitants in emerging city spaces and depicts new types of communities in the city. Sarina Moore examines the implications of these “courts obscure,” neighborhoods “inconspicuous or unnoticed because…they are hidden away from the middle-class eyes in murky, dirty districts of the city-scape” (73). Moore further describes a court system of housing consisting of “six to fourteen terraced houses arranged in two facing rows with a narrow paved or dirt yard between the rows” (75-76). Libbie enters a street with this court style living to take residence in one such house. The narrow yard between the rows often accumulates dirt and filth. Historically, the living situations were overcrowded, with numerous residents using overflowing communal “privies” that the landlord had little incentive to care for or even keep clean (78). To find ever cheaper rents, families of residents divided and occupied all parts of the house, including damp dirty cellars. The court therefore becomes overcrowded with multiple families in each house. The
numerous tenants dumped human and animal refuse into the narrow open space between their dwellings, into the narrow street of the court’s interior. Thus, the young girl’s dirt pies likely contain worse contents than mere mud.

The housing conditions for the working-class developed in large part from the rapid expansion of northern industrial cities leading inevitably to rapidly, and poorly constructed, housing districts. The situation of the working-class populace also reveals new aspects of class consciousness. Williams references “rates of population increase” in manufacturing towns like Manchester surpassing “forty percent” from “1820 to 1850” (220). Rather than merely citing such data, however, Williams develops the implications of such increase in particular industrial cities. Williams describes how “these were cities built as places of work: physically in their domination by the mills and engines, with the smoke blackening the buildings and effluents blackening the rivers; socially in their organization of homes…around the places of work, so that the dominant relation was always there” (220). New city residents seeking nearby jobs and cheap rent moved close to the mills for labor opportunities. The mill owners, however, cared little for the workers outside of their production and paid very little for the labor. The factory workers then became forced to live in cheap areas of the city where they could afford rent. No one involved who had the economic power to enact change had the incentive. These working relations therefore led to the development of poor living conditions in the northern cities, and clearly fulfilled Henri Lefebvre’s assertion that “(social space) is a (social) product” or, restated in a way that includes the damp filth of the working class cities, “the
spatial practice of a society secretes that society’s space” (26, 38). The cycle of working conditions, with the dominant modes of the mill factories, led to these squalid living conditions.

Gaskell’s first novel, *Mary Barton*, explores working-class spaces. Returning home in an early portion of the novel, the Barton family “turned out of one of these innumerable streets into a little paved court, having the backs of houses at the end opposite to the opening, and a gutter running through the middle to carry off household slops” (15). Moore describes these conditions with reference to “Libbie Marsh”, but *Mary Barton* further expands on the picture of working-class squalor. Gaskell references “one of the oldest thoroughfares in Manchester…there that the first cotton mills were built, [now near] crowded alleys and back streets” (47). She describes a “dingy-looking street, consisting principally of public-houses, pawnbrokers’ shops, rag and bone warehouses, and dirty provision shops” (47). Parts of the city spring up in this crowded manner about the mills, because the economic and ideological forces dictate the city’s construction. The Davenports, a family even worse off than the Bartons, end up forced to live in “a cellar in Berry Street” (55). This street was “unpaved…and down the middle a gutter forced its way, every now and then forming pools in the holes with which the street abounded” (55). Gaskell fully depicts the truth of the dirt and squalor: “women from their doors tossed household slops of every description into the gutter; they ran into the next pool, which overflowed and stagnated” (55). Gaskell then attempts to fully immerse the reader into the scene: “you went down one step even from the foul area into the cellar
in which a family of human beings lived” (55). The Davenports’ home also has a “back cellar, with a grating instead of a window, down which dropped the moisture from pigsties, and worse abominations,” showing how the filth from the street may directly enter the home (59). While revealing the working-class courts and the old crowded parts of the city surrounding the factories, Gaskell reminds her readers that humans, actual people, inhabit these spaces.

Social reformers of the time began to take note of these situations, to survey and write about conditions of working class bodies. Describing one such area of the city, Friedrich Engels portrays, “Everywhere heaps of débris, refuse, and offal; standing pools for gutters, and a stench which alone would make it impossible for a human being in any degree civilised to live in such a district” (51). Placing the inhabitants into a metaphor of livestock, he describes “this whole collection of cattle-sheds for human beings…surrounded on two sides by houses and a factory, and on the third by the river, and besides the narrow stair up the bank, a narrow doorway alone led out into another almost equally ill-built, ill-kept labyrinth of dwellings” (51). The relations of space presented in this passage, with the ill-kept filthy houses near the factory, connect back to Williams’ description of the industrial space as forever upholding the economic relationship. The factory dominates the cityscape and the social relations of the inhabitants of the city. This, in turn, reveals the working-class environment in relation to such space. Engels sums up, “the dwellings of the workers are everywhere badly planned, badly built, and kept in the worst condition, badly ventilated, damp, and unwholesome” (73). His non-fiction account
of life for the working-class in a major city reveals the same problems Gaskell depicts in her fiction.

Writing on the state of the cotton workers in Manchester, James Kay-Shuttleworth describes the negative conditions plaguing workers. As a general remark Kay-Shuttleworth writes, “the houses, in such situations, are uncleanly, ill provided with furniture; an air of discomfort if not of squalid and loathsome wretchedness pervades them, they are often dilapidated, badly drained, damp” (15). Attempting to quantify the situation, he used questionnaires to create inspection reports, and includes the form of the questionnaires in Tables 1 and 2 in his book (14,15). Table 1 lists “inquiries concerning the state of the houses,” and Kay-Shuttleworth includes the table “for the purpose of enabling the reader to form his own opinion of the investigation from which the classified results are induced” (14). Some basic questions ask “Is the house in good repair?”; “Is it clean?”; “Are the rooms well ventilated”; “Is the house damp or dry”; “Are the cellars inhabited”; “Are the inhabited cellars damp or flooded?”; “What number of families or lodgers does the house contain?” (14). The nature of the questions reveals expected issues and conditions of overcrowded houses in disrepair that inspectors believed they might find. The list of questions also contains places for observations on the people: their health, their clothing, their occupation, or their habits (14). Table 2 lists “inquiries concerning the state of the streets, courts, alleys & c.” (15). Specific questions ask “Is the street, court, or alley narrow, and is it ill ventilated?”; “Is it paved or not?”; “Does it contain heaps of refuse, pools of stagnant fluid, or deep ruts?”; “Are the
public and private privies well situated, and properly attended to?” (15). The questions raise concerns regarding general cleanliness in the court structure. The living conditions, as previously described, with overcrowded courts filled with human refuse, here become boxes to mark as problems in the city.

Engels deduces connections between the living conditions of the poor and their direct or indirect treatment by higher society. In a long passage he makes clear claims that such treatment has a negative and direct impact on the health of the working-class population:

The manner in which the great multitude of the poor is treated by society today is revolting. They are drawn into the large cities where they breathe a poorer atmosphere than in the country; they are relegated to districts which, by reason of the method of construction, are worse ventilated than any others; they are deprived of all means of cleanliness, of water itself, since pipes are laid only when paid for, and the rivers so polluted that they are useless for such purposes; they are obliged to throw all offal and garbage, all dirty water, often all disgusting drainage and excrement into the streets, being without other means of disposing of them; they are thus compelled to infect the region of their own dwellings. (98)

Touching again on city problems, Engels notes the lack of ventilation and lack of clean water accorded to these areas of the city. Instead of blaming the working-class inhabitants themselves, he describes how they were “drawn into the large cities,” presumably looking for the new jobs provided by a newly industrialized society’s
need for labor. Once in the cities, due to economic conditions and the owner/worker relationship of the new economy, the laborers move into these poor districts. In the poor districts without pipes and running clean water they are “obliged to throw” refuse and other drainage into the streets. Engels’s passage describes a causal chain leading to the overall negative unclean conditions. Once conditions become established, however, an individual may lose sight of such causes and conceptualize the spaces of the city in differing ways.

In the character of John Barton, Gaskell reveals one individual’s conceptual response to spatial contrasts in the industrial city. Soon after visiting the Davenport’s home, which seemingly fulfills all the negative criteria of Kay-Shuttleworth’s tables, John walks through the economic district of the city, on “a street with lighted shops” (58). Walking through this other space, John “felt the contrast between the well-filled, well-lighted shops and the dim gloomy cellar” (58). While the economic relationships benefit those around him, John realizes the nature of his dwelling place relegates him to a lowly position. In a crowd of people, “he was angry with them” (58). Compared to the earlier claustrophobic and filthy spaces of the working-class courts, these shops and wide thoroughfares display the disparity of wealth in clear spatial representation. John responds to these disparities with anger because he feels forced into his working-class dwelling while others benefit from his labor. The feelings reflect back on earlier statements at the beginning of the novel, namely his claim that the working class are “their slaves as long as we can work; we pile up their fortunes with the sweat of our brows, and yet we are to live as separate as if we were
in two worlds” (12). John Barton further feels that “he and his fellows are the real
makers of this wealth” seen directly in the buildings of the city (23). John knows that
his contributions as laborer directly enable the rise of the economic shopping district,
but due to his low wages he will never shop at such a store, will never belong to such
a world. Williams points to this scene for the way Gaskell’s narration objectively
describes the city space and then describes John’s subjective response to the setting,
his response to “a social contrast” (233). With such a scene and narrative choice
Gaskell shows how the grander social relationships inherent to the space of the city
can change an individual’s perspective on the cityscape. For John, the wide paved
thoroughfares and gleaming shops are not a sign of economic progress and social
advancement, but instead outcomes of a debilitating system that relegates him to the
awful conditions of the poor working-class.

Gaskell also reveals the contrasts and effects of working-class characters
living in one part of the city while the wealthy mill owners live in grander houses.
While John stays with the Davenports after their father suffers injuries in a fire, Jem
Wilson seeks aid from mill owner Mr. Carson. Even the distance Wilson must travel
reveals the contrasts of living conditions, because “Wilson had about two miles to
walk before he reached Mr. Carson’s house, which was almost in the country” (61).
The Carsons can afford to live further away from the crowded dirty sections of the
city near the factory. Such requirements of spatial relationship determine the social
arrangement of the physical space. On the outskirts of the city, in great contradiction
to the working-class houses previously revealed, “Mr. Carson’s was a good house,
and furnished with disregard to expense” (61). Rather than a bare interior of practical concerns “many articles chosen for their beauty and elegance adorned his rooms” (61). The narrative further describes the abundant food and how “in the luxurious library, at the well-spread breakfast-table, sat the two Mr. Carsons, father and son” (63). A servant brings Wilson into the room before the Carsons where “the gaunt, pale, unwashed, unshaven weaver…stood at the door…every now and then stealing a glance round at the splendor of the apartment” (64). The obvious discrepancies reveal the wildly divergent conditions of each class.

The connected settings, with Jem Wilson traveling directly from the Davenports’ cellar home to Mr. Carson’s grand house two miles away, juxtapose spaces of the new industrial city. The two scenes serve to reinforce, as examples, the mindset that John earlier discusses. John acutely feels his suffering while watching “his employer removing from house to house, each one grander than the last, till he ends in building one more magnificent than all, or withdraws his money from the concern, or sells his mill, to buy an estate in the country” (23). Contemplating the suffering of the workers, John thinks of the contrasts in dwellings, where “large houses [of the mill-owners] are still occupied, while spinners’ and weavers’ cottages stand empty, because the families that once filled them are obliged to live in rooms or cellars” (24). Gaskell makes clear that John understands economic conditions that affect the mill owners, “could understand (at least partially) that there are not buyers enough in the market to purchase the goods already made, and consequently that there is no demand for more” (23-24). He laments, however, that while the mill workers
suffer and starve, or move from house to dirty cellar seeking cheaper rent, the
employers continue to reside in grand homes. Tessa Brodetsky comments that such
scenes reveal an “inability of the rich to understand the desperation of the poor”
because “the rich have no conception of the crushing poverty which breaks the spirit
of a man watching his children literally ‘clemming’ (starving) to death” (4). The mill
owners place the problems of the down market onto the laborers while avoiding the
worst of the economic downturn. Furthermore, they avoid the working-class parts of
the city revealing such suffering, so that the courts, as mentioned above, remain
obscure. The disparity of overall wealth leads directly to a disparity of spatial
habitation; the poor reside crammed into filthy courts while the owners keep grand
houses at the edges of the city.

John Barton grows angry at the unfair distribution of wealth leading to such
living conditions, but an individual not directly suffering under such forces can
conceptualize the city space differently and imagine other causes. In a very different
manner from John’s analysis, some reformers describing housing conditions and
working-class inhabitants imply an inability to overcome animalistic functions of the
body. Anthony Wohl explains that in the conceptions of the upper classes, “like
animals, [people in these poor conditions] seemed inured to their own filth.
Illustration upon illustration showed the poorest classes picking over (and the
children playing in) ‘dustheaps’--euphemisms not just for garbage but also for animal
and human excrement” (1). The young Dixon girl making dirt pies encountered by
Libbie Marsh becomes not a child making the best of a situation, but instead the
offspring of an unclean, uncivilized family. Engels, without necessarily assigning blame, references the housing as “cattle sheds,” placing the working class into the role of cattle (51). Kay-Shuttleworth, a contemporary of Gaskell, does go so far as to begin assigning blame and immorality:

…and the habits of their tenants are gross—they are ill-fed, ill-clothed, and uneconomical—at once spendthrifts and destitute—denying themselves the comforts of life, in order that they may wallow in the unrestrained licence of animal appetite. An intimate connexion subsists, among the poor, between the cleanliness of the street and that of the house and person. Uneconomical habits, and dissipation are almost inseparably allied; and they are so frequently connected with uncleanness, that we cannot consider their concomitance as altogether accidental. The first step to recklessness may often be traced in a neglect of that self-respect, and of the love of domestic enjoyments, which are indicated by personal slovenliness, and discomfort of the habitation. (15-16)

Kay-Shuttleworth makes a direct connection between the cleanliness of the street and the uncivilized nature of the inhabitants. He describes them as wallowing like the pigs sometimes found in the courts. Engels may at least have traced the connections leading to such a situation. Due to economic downturn in the economy of the mills, the Davenports become forced to take up residence in a cellar with cheaper rent. The pigs in the pigsties of the neighborhood drop excrement through an open grate into a back room of the house. Kay-Shuttleworth might describe this “intimate connexion”
as a moral failing not “altogether accidental” instead of describing the economic reality of the situation. Savi Munjal refers to the higher society’s “conceptualization …of a class so different so as to constitute an altogether different race” (2). To members of “higher” society, the working-class, “inured” to filth, become cattle, pigs, animals. To a presumed “objective” observer, filling out the table of a questionnaire, the laborers lived in filth like animals, and that made these persons quite different from those of civilized society living in clean, well-kept houses.

The dirty street furthermore becomes a place of immorality, with class conceptions of prostitutes, or “street-walkers,” serving as just one example for the depravity of the city street. The euphemism “street-walker” results from the idea of “stopping out when honest women are in their beds” (Gaskell MB 11). Munjal further develops this connection in the terms of the prostitute figure as “other” compared with the orderly household. She analyzes how a “woman's body becomes the site of articulation of certain anxieties related to the industrial city” (5). Taking such a symbolic representation as revealing latent immorality, the dirty prostitute figure represents a natural progression from the filth of working-class districts. Mary Barton’s aunt Esther fulfills this representative role: “Hers is the leper-sin, and all stand aloof dreading to be counted unclean” (Gaskell MB 140). The sin of the prostitute connects with the stigma of uncleanliness. The filthy conditions of the street may reveal the immorality of the person. In Esther’s mind she upholds a slight distinction between settings; she “must leave the abode of poverty, for the more terrible abodes of vice” (212). Esther marks the distinction of living in a working-
class dwelling, “the abode of poverty,” to that of living on the street (212). The Bartons at least keep a relatively clean household, with a greater disjunction between street/dwelling. The Davenport’s home, with animal filth interpenetrating through open grate, lacks such determined barriers. When these distinctions break down, the immorality of uncleanliness blackens all working-class inhabitants. Esther appears and disappears about the streets at night, therefore becoming at once all present within the dark streets of the poor sections of the city. The shaping of the city, overbuilt in areas to keep up with the rapid rise of manufacturing, perpetuates the unclean quality of working-class districts where anyone might lurk in immoral darkness.

As the places of animals, with uncivilized workers seen or disregarded as less than human, such areas of the city became a problem to solve. The lower class dwellings proved crowded, unclean, and diseased; and conceptually, those parts of the city became a sickness to which reformers offered new solutions. In the opening to his work, Kay-Shuttleworth proclaims, “the evils here unreservedly exposed, so far from being the necessary consequences of the manufacturing system, have a remote or accidental origin, and might, by judicious management, be entirely removed” (1). Rather than a reflection of disparate wealth, as John Barton comes to think of the divide, or consequence of certain economic conditions as Engels describes, Kay-Shuttleworth considers better management and urban planning. Martin Daunton describes how many reformers thought to treat the city like a diseased body: “The need for observation and ventilation meant opening up the city, improving the process
of circulation much as an individual's health depended on the circulation of blood and oxygen” (5). Even Engels treats the poor sections of the city as a problem of disease when he specifically notes “the layout of English towns impedes ventilation” and that “the filth and the stagnant pools in the working class quarters of the great cities have the most deleterious effects upon the health of the inhabitants because they engender just those gases which give rise to disease” (96,97). Such a situation stems directly from the types of housing that developed with the rise and dominance of the factories over the cityscape. Referencing the court housing Engels declares, “the streets of these suburbs are unpaved, with a dung-heap or ditch in the middle; the houses are built back to back, without ventilation or drainage, and whole families are limited to a corner of a cellar or a garret” (63). Rather than fixing the housing issues directly for the sake of the working class inhabitants, cities began to address problems when they inconvenienced the upper-class members of society. Seen as a solution to the problem, opening up the enclosed spaces of the filthy courts could eliminate the “miasma” wafting from the filth and excrement of the gutters and streets. In part, cities began construction of new railroads that would conveniently lead to the demolition of old slums (Daunton 5). Furthermore, new thoroughfares were supposed to bring in the fresher air as relief from the crammed-together bodies and bodily filth of the workers.

Rather than looking down on the working-class as an undesirable problem to solve in this manner, Gaskell presents the Bartons’, as well as other characters’, humanity in contrast to the squalor of the working-class dwellings surrounding them.
When describing the Davenport home, Gaskell forces the reader upon the scene: “you went down one step even from the foul area into the cellar in which a family of human beings lived” (55). Rather than merely revealing the city setting, through this technique of entering the actual home, seeing the living conditions, she attempts to change the reader’s perspective. Like John Barton feeling the contrasts of the city spaces when he walks through the economic district, like Wilson feeling his shabbiness upon entering the Carson home, Mr. Carson experiences the contrasts of disparate wealth through a particular experience in a representative space. Mr. Carson visits John and comes into contact with the conditions he caused in his economic relations with the working-class laborers he employs. Once the mill owner enters the working-class district, enters the home of an actual human being, he realizes his responsibility:

    Stunned by the thought, he sank upon the seat, almost crushed with the knowledge of the consequences of his own action; for he had no more imagined to himself the blighted home, and the miserable parents, than does the soldier, who discharges his musket, picture to himself the desolation of the wife, and the pitiful cries of the helpless little ones, who are in an instant to be made widowed and fatherless. (316)

Here, Gaskell uses a significant comparison with war to emphasize the life or death consequences of economic events. Children literally died from a lack of food, and John responds with such anger towards the mill-owners initially because he suffered the view of such “clemming.” When Mr. Carson enters this district of the city and
views the way his laborers live, he understands their emotions and humanity. The courts no longer remain obscure. While before he could not have even “imagined to himself the blighted home,” the view of such a reality changes his perspective on the workers.

Despite the incredible differences revealed in the dwelling places of the people on both sides of the master/worker economic relationship, at the end of the novel, the idea of home actually serves to unite them. Emily Cuming contends that instead of reading the Victorian slum “home” as pure “other” to the bourgeois domestic space, a “slum interior can be interpreted as less the opposite of the bourgeois interior, a type of negative signifier, but as a strange and meaningful domestic counterpart” (369). The cellar dwelling of the Davenports, or the small, cold space of the Bartons, become less the opposite of the Mr. Carson’s grand house, than a poor version or imitation. Working-class families live in these terrible situations clinging to the slight difference to, and the minimum shelter against, the street and weather outside. Cuming further notes how Mayhew and other writers depict these slum residences in connection to the “firmly established ideology of ‘home,’ and therefore not so wholly different” (370). For upper-class viewers, an uncanny look at the urban slum homes of the Victorian period results from the slum’s relation to the ideal, from the “disjuncture between conventional ways of imagining the relationship between the individual in the home” (385). The houses of the working-class district remain “versions of homes shaped or distorted by material conditions of poverty” (385). An open-minded viewer may see these domestic spaces
as affected by material conditions, and therefore may see the inhabitants as suffering under economic causes. Recognizing such economic causation eliminates Kay-Shuttleworth’s “intimate connexion” between the lack of cleanliness and the dubious moral standing of a working-class laborer in such a situation.

Realizing his connection to John as a fellow human being, Mr. Carson overcomes his earlier lack of knowledge. He readily admits to himself that he had regarded the workers in his mill as something less than human, as little more than the machines of the factory. This recognition develops from seeing John Barton dying in the domestic space. Though different, deviating greatly from his own grand house two miles away towards the country, the Bartons’ dwelling comprises a home. A family lives there. Once Mr. Carson leaves, he fully understands both the contrast and similarity. In his own dwelling, he can reflect on “the grinding squalid misery he had remarked in every part of John Barton’s house, and which contrasted strangely with the pompous sumptuousness of the room in which he now sat” (319). Mr. Carson becomes so affected because the juxtaposed spaces are the same and yet different. People live in such “squalid misery” while he lives in “pompous sumptuousness.” Reflecting on the differences between the houses creates new ideas: “Unaccustomed wonder filled his mind at the reflection of the different lots of the brethren of mankind” (319). Mr. Carson now thinks of human connection; he thinks of John and others like him as his brethren rather than as his mechanistic collection of labor.
In her early poem “Sketches Among the Poor,” Gaskell reveals the negative impact of the city air, an issue to which social reformers and urban planners continually refer. “Libbie Marsh” reveals the negative aspects of the architecture in working-class districts of the city. The young Dixon girl, a child playing in the filth of the street, remains a prominent image representing the dirty working-class poor. In *Mary Barton*, Gaskell fully reflects on the setting of industrial Manchester. Individual characters move between disparate spaces of the cityscape. John travels from squalid, enclosed working-class housing to the wide-open shopping district of the city. Wilson walks the two miles from the filthy Davenport home to the grand house of the Carson family. Mr. Carson, in reverse direction, travels from his dwelling to the Barton home. These spaces exist in relationships encompassing political, economic, and social facets. The cityscape forms from the economic distribution of influence, but once constructed also forms the modes of communal connection. Gaskell shows how individual humans dwell and live in these spaces, and furthermore how such unique individuals conceptualize the spaces and the relationships among spaces. Such spatial relationships therefore serve to signify connections between city dwellers. Individual mobility, that transcends clear delineations and moves between disparate spaces, allows someone to realize this more nuanced perspective acknowledging economic influences and human connections.
TRAVERSING CITY AND COUNTRY LANDSCAPE:
NEGOTIATING MOBILITY, MODERNITY, AND NEW COMMUNAL SPACES

During the second section of “Libbie Marsh’s Three Eras” the workers of Manchester factories escape the city to spend a holiday in the beautiful countryside. White-sun-week gives “the hard-worked crowds the opportunity of enjoying the charms of the country” (ADNW 179). It serves as an escape from the ills of normal life in the industrial city, from the long days of labor and also from the closed, cramped dwellings. Franky Hall, a young crippled boy who has never left the city previously, pronounces his immediate reaction and wonder at the landscape: “Oh, Libbie, how beautiful! Oh, mother, mother! Is the whole world out of Manchester as beautiful as this?” (180). The proclamations and further descriptions establish a contrast between the country and the smoky city in clear spatial relationship. This created contrast fits the traditional dichotomy of disparate country/city. Gaskell’s early short story “Libbie Marsh’s Three Eras” juxtaposes contrasting spaces, and her novel North and South builds upon contrasting difference with protagonist Margaret Hale’s move from beloved country Helstone to Milton, a fictionalized Manchester, in the North. Gaskell describes obvious differences and sharp contrasts between country and city as physical spaces, but also describes how such differences influence the mental attitudes of an area’s inhabitants. Instead of upholding the clear demarcated line and attitudes, however, new technologies of travel and new possibilities for
communal connection allow people to overcome spatial separation and demarcated differences.

The first era of “Libbie Marsh,” as discussed in the previous chapter, establishes the ills of working-class housing districts, with overcrowded dirty courts. In contrast, the second era brings the communal workforce into the country. Franky lies “on the verge of a green area, shut in by magnificent trees,” making note of just the color green set against the previous grays of the city (180). Groups of working class families continue to join the scene: “party after party; old men and maidens, young men and children, --whole families” (180). Innumerable factory workers take advantage of the holiday escape. In a long passage, the narrative description marks explicit contrasts between the country scene and the cityscape left behind:

Its scenery, too, which presents such a complete contrast to the whirl and turmoil of Manchester; so thoroughly woodland, with its ancestral trees…its ‘verdurous walls;’ its grassy walks, leading far away into some glade…this complete sylvan repose, this accessible quiet, this lapping the soul in green images of the country, forms the most complete contrast to a town’s-person, and consequently has over such the greatest power to charm. (180)

The ease and relaxation of the country holiday marks one divergence from the bustle of the working industrial city, woodlands and green trees another. Even the charming view of colored leaves overhead diverges from the smoky grays of the city.

After the implied contrasts of the absent city, Gaskell presents a direct examination of Manchester from a distant viewpoint. The country party carries
Franky up a hilltop to view the city in the distance. Smoke dominates the skyline and the viewers think of Manchester’s factory bustle: “Far, far way in the distance on that flat plain, you might see the motionless cloud of smoke hanging over a great town, and that was Manchester, -ugly, smoky Manchester, dear, busy, earnest, noble-working Manchester” (183). Gaskell does not merely depict the negativity of the space—the men even cry “Hurrah! For oud smoke-jack!”—but contrasts smoke hanging over the town against the fresh air of the “woodland foreground” (183). The detailed descriptions of related spaces—city left behind against country scene—present these clear contrasts and seem to reinforce the differences on each side of the dichotomy.

*Mary Barton*, Gaskell’s first novel to address conditions of industrial Manchester, establishes the juxtaposition of country and city in the opposite order, with the opening scene of the novel occurring outside the city. The narrative begins in “some fields near Manchester, well known to the inhabitants as ‘Green Heys Fields’ through which runs a public footpath” (5). The fields possess a sense of rural beauty compared to the nearby city, so that a charm permeates the view because a viewer “feels the effect of contrast in these commonplace but thoroughly rural fields, with the busy, bustling manufacturing town he left but half an hour ago” (5). The beauty of the rural space stands in direct relation to the ugliness of the industrial city and therefore emphasizes the contrasts. Like in “Libbie Marsh,” the fields become “popular places of resort at every holiday time,” an escape for the working-class inhabitants of the city into fresher country air (7). The rural fields represent open air
and freedom, but the Barton family and their friends the Wilsons soon return to the city. From the open-air freedom of the fields, when they reach the city they enter “many half-finished streets, all so like one another” (15). The family enters the enclosed maze of the hastily built industrial city with the oppressive architecture of working-class districts. The nearby fields serve merely to represent a country setting, in contrast to the city-space of the Bartons’ actual poor housing district.

*North and South* at first only builds on the contrasts of city and country spaces. When Margaret returns home to Helstone after living in London, she walks amid “forest trees…all one dark, full, dusky green” (18). The description diverges in the same manner as “Libbie Marsh,” with the surrounding full color green against the idea of city gray. For Margaret, “this life—at least these walks—realised all [her] anticipations” (18). She finds that her “out-of-doors life was perfect” (18). This life of the green country does not last long. When the family moves to Milton, the city upon approach provides the same view to the Hales as to the Halls and Libbie: “For several miles before they reached Milton, they saw a deep lead-coloured cloud hanging over the horizon in the direction in which it lay” (55). In the air she notes “a faint taste and smell of smoke…more a loss of the fragrance of grass and herbage than any positive taste or smell” (55). She sees “here and there a great oblong many-windowed factory…puffing out black ‘unparliamentary’ smoke” (55). The work of the factories dominates the landscape and the atmosphere. Modes of production determine the allocation of resources and use of physical space, so that the factories and courts of working-class housing districts dominate the cityscape.
The contrasting locales, opposing landscapes made explicit in particular settings, come to represent mental attitudes and ideology. Writing about the rise of the northern manufacturing towns, Williams emphasizes “the dominant relation” of “work” determined the physical construction and social organization of the city (220). In the same manner as identified in *Mary Barton*, the cotton factories dominate the city space, and in the streets Margaret notes how “every wagon and truck, bore cotton, either in the raw shape in bags, or the woven shape in bales of calico” (56). Clearly the factories overshadow the physical construction of the industrial city, but such spatial relationships also come to determine the inhabitants’ mindsets. The absolute focus on work comes to control perspective taken on spatial difference. Mr. Thornton, a mill owner, proclaims even the “toiling, suffering” of the northern manufacturing town a seemingly more noble pursuit and “grandeur of conception” against the “slow days of careless ease” in the South (75). The outdoor walks of the country represent leisurely strolling, while the thoroughfares of the city lead inevitably to work in the factories and efficiently pour fast moving “streams of men and women two or three times a day” (66). From Mr. Thornton’s perspective, these streets, manufacturing processes, and inhabitants’ focus on work lead to effective production and therefore economic benefit for the owners. People do not waste their time in the “careless ease” of the countryside (75). The city does not possess the space or spatial relationships for country-like rambles, and the city-dwellers can hardly conceive of such a retreat because their focus remains work or production.
Despite the inconveniences, however, Margaret does attempt to continue her country mode of living in walking about the city. Even without easy access, she can still walk out “as far as the fields that lay around the town” (67). Out in the fields she gathers “some of the hedge and ditch flowers, dog-violets, lesser celandine, and the like, with an unspoken lament in her heart for the sweet profusion of the South” (67). The journey to nearby fields as fill-in countryside both provides her access to open space and also reminds her of the country she left behind. On the way home from this ramble, she meets Bessy and Nicholas Higgins. Margaret offers to come visit the poor father and daughter in their home; Mr. Higgins seems at first taken aback by the offer and unsure about Margaret when he responds, “‘I’m none so fond of having strange folk in my house’” (68). The request from a lady of seemingly higher class must seem odd for the mill worker. With the great northern focus on work, a visiting request without purpose appears a strange use of time. He first thinks with the perspective of the north, dominated by the factory landscape, while Margaret thinks of the social relation in the terms of her southern country home, where she used to travel about and visit with the poorer members of her broader community.

After Margaret establishes this relationship, “Milton became a brighter place to her” (69). She notes differences because in the town “she had found a human interest” (69). Abigail Dennis finds that after this moment, Margaret begins a “psychic construction of the city as habitable space,” that she becomes aware of the inhabitants of the city and can establish further relations with them (48). Beyond merely social relationship, however, another aspect of spatial relationship tied to
mental conception proves relevant in this instance. Margaret makes these social relationships by living with the manners and mindset of the country south. She visits without economic purpose, without productive benefit, in the leisurely manner of her country home. The city becomes brighter because she carries with her aspects of the country attitude. Even Mr. Higgins comes to recognize her as carrying access to country space when he later remarks, “she’s like a breath of country air, somehow” (127). Her continued mental access to the country pushes back against the overhanging gray gloom of the city.

Creating actual green space in the city became an issue during the nineteenth century with the rapid development of urban spaces. The new open spaces, in part, arose from the believed need for fresher “country” air in the dankest districts of the city. As earlier shown in consideration of the overcrowded working-class quarters of the new industrial city, the enclosed spaces led to public health concerns. The poor air quality, and therefore need for ventilation, caused by such enclosed overcrowded housing became a problem to solve for urban planners and social reformers; both Kay-Shuttleworth and Engels identify such issues in industrializing cities. Engels specifically identifies the problem of disease as tied to air quality when he notes, “the layout of English towns impedes ventilation,” and that “the filth and the stagnant pools in the working class quarters of the great cities have the most deleterious effects upon the health of the inhabitants because they engender just those gases which give rise to disease” (96, 97). Seen as a solution to the problem, opening up the enclosed spaces of the filthy courts could lift the “miasma” wafting from the filth and
excrement of the gutters and streets. City planners and politicians considering such urban fixes inevitably reflected nostalgia for the countryside. The conditions of the city bred these issues, while the country’s open space represented the good health of a previous idyllic time. City planners sought ways to bring “country” air into the city so that they might incorporate these positive benefits of country living while upholding the continued production of modern cities.

Public parks, therefore, became a requirement for the health of the city, because they were seen as providing the fresher air of the countryside. Harriet Jordan notes that “more public parks were opened between 1885 and 1914 than either before or after this period,” but that the “public park movement” did start in the 1830s and sprang from “a desire to improve health in the over-crowded conditions of the rapidly growing industrial towns” (85). In describing the variety of public parks built, Jordan identifies how “new open spaces ranged from small public gardens and children's playgrounds, under an acre in extent, to wide stretches of countryside” (90). Spatial considerations of the city would determine implementation because the small gardens or playgrounds “were most frequently within already densely built-up areas, while the latter [wide stretches of countryside] lay beyond the outskirts of the town” (90). With city planners realizing issues of the dense overbuilt industrial cities, these green spaces were supposed to bring in country-style landscape and fresh air.

In Manchester some of the first public parks opened in 1846, around the time Gaskell worked on her novel *Mary Barton*. In large part a response to conditions of the poor, including the state of working-class housing and public health concerns in
the city, some “Manchester politicians began to urge the purchase and provision of suitable open spaces where it might build parks for the working people” (“Public Parks & Gardens”). The movement started at the end of the 1830s, leading to “seven years of intense campaigning” and ultimately the establishment of the “Committee for Public Walks, Gardens & Playgrounds” around 1846 (“Public Parks & Gardens”). Philips Park became one of the first opened in Manchester, specifically created as a place of retreat for the working classes in the manner of Gaskell’s Green Heys Fields. A description of the park’s historic opening notes how on “holidays these parks were flooded with many thousands of people, it being a convenient, close and cheap day out for working families” (“Public Parks & Gardens”). Alexandra Park opened to the public in 1870 with an innovative circular design and pathways. A history of the park notes how its design by Alexander Hennel was “experimental in its use of oval shaped and curved pathways” (“Alexandra Park”). The design, with such novel pathways for the time, intended to promote rambling family strolls through the open space, therefore mirroring country walks. Promoting the country value of family leisure also served a moral purpose: “to keep families together in shared recreation” (“Public Parks & Gardens”). Social reformers scared that fathers might end up in the alehouses and girls in the street, intended the physical space of the park to promote a moralistic ideology. Through supplementing family unity, the public space of the park served as a physical locale to re-enforce the connections of the domestic sphere. The creation of these specific public park spaces occurred in direct response to the ills of city life.
Responding to the same problems of city planning and construction, by 1902 Ebenezer Howard published *Garden Cities of To-morrow* with designs for incorporating urban elements of the city with country elements of open space and gardens. Howard enumerates a stated goal “to raise the standard of health and comfort of all true workers of whatever grade—the means by which these objects are to be achieved being a healthy, natural, and economic combination of town and country life” (1). These objectives, here stated with an even more direct reference to the idea of combining both town and country, address the same issues as politicians pushing for open space and public parks in the 1830s and 1840s. In the introduction to the work, Howard notes how many politicians, “men of all parties,” have come to agree upon the issues of congested and ill-built cities: “that people should continue to stream into the already over-crowded cities, and should thus further deplete the country districts” (11). With his book, Howard begins to analyze spatial distribution in the manner of city planning as a means to overcome these issues of spatial relationship and workforce mobility. He includes potential diagrams of the city space with circular boulevards and a grid structure that could include housing and manufacturing centers surrounding garden spaces and central parks (22). Though Howard’s specific goals would not come to publication book until much later than the time period of Gaskell’s novel, they align with the issues she identifies. Howard’s objectives represent a distinct attempt at overcoming the clear contrasts presented by the dichotomy of city and country as opposed spaces. He imagines merging the
efficiency and production of the modern industrial city with the open leisure spaces of
the country to benefit all classes of society.

Furthermore, new technologies of transportation made movement between the
city and country possible for a broader number and range of people, allowing for
greater connection between once disparate spaces. The scene from “Libbie Marsh”
when the family spends their holiday in the country outside Manchester becomes
possible due to new canal systems. Gaskell specifically notes within the story that
“for years has Dunham Park been the favourite resort of the Manchester workpeople;
for more years than I can tell; probably ever since ‘the Duke,’ by his canals, opened
out the system of cheap travelling” (180). The new canals create accessibility; the
new method of transportation enables the leisurely holiday. In the 1840s, the
development of the railroads made access even easier and opened up the possibility of
greater mobility between country and city. In *North and South*, Mr. Bell takes
Margaret by train back to visit Helstone. Traveling by rail, Margaret watches the
changing landscape:

> She breathed freely and happily at length, seated in the carriage opposite to
> Mr. Bell, and whirling away past the well-known stations; seeing the old south
country-towns and hamlets sleeping in the warm light of the pure sun, which
gave a yet ruddier colour to their tiled roofs, so different to the cold slates of
the north. (349)

Margaret notices the different tints between spaces, again holding up the notable
change from the grey of the city to the colors of the countryside. With new methods
of travel, traversing the distance, once seen as absolute chasm, becomes realistic possibility. Margaret clearly has not lost her connection to the country, and has the ability to return south easily by rail.

The availability of travel by rail, connected with Margaret’s social mobility, places her into a condition like Mary Smith of Cranford. Both heroines move between spaces and perform in the required manner of each location. Mary grows up in Cranford and therefore easily shifts between actions and behaviors. Margaret must learn this form of performance when she likewise moves back and forth across locales. When meeting Mr. Thornton in the city, he attempts to shake her hand, in “the frank familiar custom of the place,” but unaware of these customs, “Margaret was not prepared for it” (79). As he leaves, Mr. Thornton thinks to himself, “a more proud, disagreeable girl I never saw. Even her great beauty is blotted out of one’s memory by her scornful ways” (79). Margaret’s failure to perform the actions of the new city space causes him to think of her in this negative manner. Later in the novel, however, Margaret begins to learn the customs of the city. Even when Dr. Donaldson tells her the sorrowful news about her mother’s illness, though “Margaret could not speak for crying,” she remembers the previous event and “wrung his hand at parting” (116). Dr. Donaldson departs impressed with Margaret’s strength of character. Riding to his next appointment he thinks, “That’s what I call a fine girl” and also, “who would have thought that little hand could have given such a squeeze?” (116). Margaret proves capable of adjusting to the ways and behaviors of life in the northern city, but she also continues her actions of the south, such as her country rambling and
visits without economic purpose. A new social mobility arises in connection to the physical mobility provided by new technologies. Margaret negotiates between country and city perspective while she moves between physical spaces. Mary and Margaret both move between social spaces and negotiate the proper customs in each community.

When viewing only the clear differences of contrasting physical spaces, the dichotomy of city/country seems to hold. The hill view of “Libbie Marsh’s Three Eras” presents the clear air of the foregrounded countryside and woods against the factory smoke of the city in the distance. With the rise of modern economics and growing markets, the city perspective of work for profit seems at first almost destined to overcome the mindset of the southern countryside. The idyllic country may appear lost forever, overwhelmed by the gray smoke of the factories. The Industrial Revolution and rise of the northern industrial towns brought widespread changes, but the new city does not stand irrevocably against the old country. Through a more nuanced consideration of social spaces without absolute poles, a more modern and reasoned perspective occurs than one upholding absolute contrasts. Raymond Williams cautions against a perspective of irrevocable loss in the opening of his book, when he remarks upon easily taken sentiments that “seemed like an escalator” moving further and further back and each time finding the inevitable ending of “Old England” and a country past (9-10). In North and South, Mr. Bell provides a reasoned perspective. He does remark upon the rapid change of Milton: “I go there every four or five years—and I was born there—yet I do assure you, I often lose my
way—aye, among the very piles of warehouses that are built upon my father’s orchard” (346). The old family orchards have become the factories of Milton, the land indeed far more valuable to him when leased to mill owners. Mr. Bell comes to accept this kind of change, however, and later declares, “the instability of all human things is familiar to me, to you [Margaret] it is new and oppressive” (353). Change does not necessarily mean absolute destruction, and does not mean only loss of country made into city as happens in the instance of Mr. Bell’s orchards. Change instead allows the opportunity to negotiate community in newly accessible spaces with newly accessible perspectives.

The movement between spaces breaks down the absolute categories and allows the possibility for someone to change his or her perspective. Mr. Bell explains his reasonable opinion on change and instability to Margaret as they travel back and forth between Milton, London, and Helstone. All these spaces become accessible with the speed of travel afforded by the new railroads. Wolfgang Schivelbusch describes how the early nineteenth-century “characterization of the effect of railroad travel” considered feats of mechanized travel as the “annihilation of space and time” (41). Railways increased speed of transit, so that “the same amount of time now permits one to cover the old spatial distance many times over,” and thus “shrunk” the landscape (41). In a pre-railroad era the trip to Helstone would feel to Margaret an impossible distance to overcome because travel would consume so much time and prove so difficult. With the faster travel of the rail, “any given distance is covered in one-third of the customary time: temporally that distance shrinks to one-third of its
former length” (41). With the changed perception of travel, Helstone becomes an accessible space. Schivelbusch considers the effect of rail travel in distance and time in this passage, but rather than the straight numerical one-third relationship, the ease of travel in accordance with reduced time opens up the possibility of mobility for people who may not have previously even considered the opportunity. Schivelbusch does further connect the annihilation of time and space sentiment with the shifting perspectives on travel and opportunity: “the idea that the railroad annihilates space and time has to be seen as the reaction of perceptive powers that were formed by a certain transport technology who suddenly find that technology replaced by an entirely new one” (44). The railroad shifts one’s perspective of the world by means of introducing new possibilities, by establishing a network of connections among newly accessible spaces. Schivelbusch includes a map showing the English railways in 1840 and in 1850 and identifies how “the few unconnected lines of 1840 had grown into such a dense railway network a mere ten years later” (36). The new dense network links once disparate, or seemingly impossible to traverse, spaces and changes perspectives on spatial relationships.

Where once communities changed little over long periods of time, the impact of new technologies, and especially new technologies of travel such as the railroads, inevitably changed the conception of community. The country town possessed a distinct character tied to the landscape, where the mere presence of a noble landowner upheld a near-feudal relationship. As seen with Lady Ludlow, even as economies change after the Industrial Revolution, the sense of communal connection in the
landscape remains for a longer period of time with upheld traditions. At the same
time, however, with a greater sense of inter-connection between once divided spaces,
communities begin to change. Gaskell’s work allows the examination of these shifts,
especially in the adjusted settings of Cranford and Wives and Daughters. While
fictional Cranford and Hollingford remain similar in aspects of societal connections,
the change from pre-railroad to post-railroad setting reveals the potential different
perspectives of a more modern society. While Molly grows up a part of the
community, she begins to imagine a broader world of possibility beyond her limited
connections. With Mary Smith’s narrative, the modern perspective, negotiating
between the ‘we’ of community and the ‘I’ of individual identity, arrives at the
forefront because Mary travels so effortlessly between town and country. Societal
shifts of the time period, and the possibility for individual mobility without the
traditional landed connections of society, allow for a more individualized modern
focus.

These shifts therefore culminate thematically in North and South with the
novel’s greater explicit focus on seemingly dichotomous spaces. Examining the
contrast, and ultimate synthesis, of the country/city dichotomy serves to help reveal
the development of a more modern perspective. Building from Williams’s theory,
Wendy Parkins focuses on how “[the] country and the city [as disparate spaces…] 
emphasised the modern experience of dislocation as the subject moves from one
location to the other and back again” (508). The movement between spaces, and even
the mere idea of the opportunity of movement between spaces, allows a more modern
perspective of the world. Parkins further finds that modern development often produces nostalgia for a lost past. The country becomes the idyllic space where communal relationships “make sense” and people connect with the landscape (508). The city becomes a space without communal connection, where the focus on economic profit establishes class discord rather than community. Margaret’s mobility in the novel reveals the alternative perspective that overcomes the dichotomy. While she initially feels the overwhelming difference of spaces, she ultimately comes to reside within Mr. Bell’s accepted sense of change as his heir. She profits from the modern economy, but she also uses her increased wealth to benefit others. Parkins finds that “Margaret is able to accept change by positioning herself within the flux of modern life” (16). That flux and her ability to re-asses her own position in the world develop from her travel. After visiting Helstone, Margaret says, “And I too change perpetually—now this, now that—now peevish because all is not exactly as I had pictured it, and now suddenly discovering that the reality is far more beautiful than I had imagined it” (364). She learns from the movement back and forth between country and city by railway, and from the changes she undergoes when she can experience and reflect upon the changes of the landscape where she travels.

With new social mobility, Margaret also represents a distinctly feminine agency. Her mobility allows her entrance into the public sphere as a woman. Parkins fully identifies that “the mobile woman in the 19th century could also be the woman without a home, exiled from domesticity, the (sexually) wandering woman, the fallen woman” (517). The domestic sphere, in contrast to the public sphere, established the
supposedly stable position for a Victorian woman. The street beyond the home bore the potential disruption of the family unit when detached from the home space. Esther as example in Mary Barton becomes a “street walker” of negative moral character, symbolically and literally detached from the home. Margaret in North and South comes under some scrutiny when Mr. Thornton sees her at a train station one evening with a strange man, but because the man proves to be her exiled brother, the situation upsets clear distinctions of propriety. Mr. Bell understands the full details of the situation and tells Margaret, “I do not like you to rest even under the shadow of an impropriety; he would not know what to think of seeing you alone with a young man” (362). The truth easily proves Margaret’s innocence, but the episode calls into question the strict standards for women in public. The city-space brings these issues into further discussion with women working in the factory and working-class women moving more freely about the city. Margaret’s ability to transcend both the limitations of the country and the limitations of the city, in her traversing of the broader social and physical landscape of England, reveals her agency as an inhabitant of a more mobile society and also as a modern woman. 

Facing intertwined class, gender, and economic issues, Margaret’s ability to enter different social and physical spaces further reveals her modern standing and perspective. Much like Mary Smith moving back and forth between Drumble and Cranford, and subsequently outwardly performing in the required modes of each situation, Margaret also shifts between attitudes and even identities. Parkins describes how “the shifting perspectives offered by Margaret’s experience of different
locations have the potential to undermine the notion of a unified self” (517). When Mr. Bell and Margaret return to Helstone, she notices, “change everywhere; slight, yet pervading all” (358). In this moment of reflection, Gaskell connects the change of the landscape to the changes a person experiences through life: “Household were changed by absence, or death, or marriage, or the natural mutations brought by days and months and years, which carry us on imperceptibly from childhood to youth, and thence through manhood to age, when we drop like fruit, fully ripe, into the quiet mother earth” (358). In this passage a person ages along with the landscape as a natural part of the earth’s cycle. A person develops, like fruit, to eventually drop and return to the land. While Gaskell often emphasizes exterior descriptions, therefore leaving interior character development unstated, Margaret’s realization of change in Helstone also implies the changes she underwent during her time in Milton-Northern. A person changes over time, and not merely as one singular development, but in fits and starts along with exterior stimuli. Margaret must come to realize her own changes in concert with physical spaces as the result of her movement back to the pastoral south from the industrial north. She comes to mentally inhabit both spaces, proves able to move between locales, and can therefore fully embody both locations. As an individual she can respond in the proper manner in each location or upset the status quo of one location with the attitudes of the other. Her personal modern mobility represents another way of overcoming the mental and communal divides of the dichotomy between country and city spaces.
With a more particular individual focus, people can overcome the spatial limitations that affect communities even in new industrial spaces. Modern individuality doesn’t necessarily destroy communal relationship, but can instead re-imagine communities to benefit individuals. Margaret reflects on the restrictions of the city: “in Milton every one was too busy for quiet speech, or any ripened intercourse of thought; what they said was about business, very present and actual” (311). Yet, against these limitations, she re-affirms “the want of man’s intercourse with men” (311). Work relationships do not necessarily define the city community, even if Gaskell has shown up to this point in the narrative that they often do. In the latter events of the novel, Gaskell shows how the influence of one individual may overcome social biases. Like Mr. Carson who overcomes his prejudices by entering the Bartons’ home, Mr. Thornton thinks about new possibilities for social interaction when he enters the home of the Higgins family. He remarks upon “a miserable black frizzle of a dinner—a greasy cinder of meat” and how seeing that meal “first set me a-thinking” (328). He responds to the episode, affected by seeing the actual living conditions of his workers, and decides to build “a dining-room…for the men” (328). Mr. Thornton later describes a new experiment, his building of a dining hall for both masters and workers as a way to “cultivat[e] some intercourse with the hands beyond the mere ‘cash nexus’” (391). The intercourse described here marks the potential for overcoming class differences. Another aspect of the intercourse, however, connects with the perspectives and attitudes of the north versus the south. The north stood for an economic or productive focus, while the south for leisurely interaction outside
profit or monetary concerns. The dining space may come to represent the intermingling, a relational space without pure profit motive. Mr. Thornton overcomes the dichotomy of previous mental attitudes and begins to re-shape the city with his construction project.

Influential individuals have the capability to restructure the landscape with new methods of building. At the same time as the rise of the industrial city, public planners began a movement to include country-like spaces within such cities. As earlier mentioned, the greatest creation of public park space occurred at the end of the nineteenth century. In *North and South* Margaret inherits the land from Mr. Bell and gains some power in controlling possible future development of the landscape. She cultivates a plan to keep Mr. Thornton in business, and, just after the announcement of the business arrangement, the two become engaged. Parkins reflects upon the traditional marriage at the end of the novel, but finds that it does not undermine Margaret’s modern role and agency:

Despite the novel’s conventional hetero-normative ending, in which the heroine’s marriage assures her of a traditional social location as wife and mother, the novel suggests other potential roles and activities for women which were newly available in 19th-century modernity and, in the process, intervenes in the construction of discourses of modernity. (517)

Margaret chooses this outcome precisely at a moment when she gains economic and social independence by inheriting Mr. Bell’s wealth and land. She enters marriage from a position of power, as owner of the land leased by Mr. Thornton and therefore
his economic superior in the public sphere of business. In large part because Mr. Thornton has embraced the opportunity to overcome mere profit motivations by cultivating relationships with workers, he rises in Margaret’s esteem and she agrees to marry him. The marriage and future determinations of the couple at the end of the novel represent an overcoming of the dichotomy of southern/northern perspectives. As a couple they represent the possibility to forego some profit to make people’s lives better and healthier.

In this new relational beginning, other potential changes of land use seem possible. Country spaces and attitudes find their way into the new industrial city. Individuals reconstruct the city space to address the ills affecting society. While this did historically include some further negative treatment of the working classes, such as razing homes or starting new construction projects to level working-class districts, Gaskell depicts the opportunity for overcoming apparently strict differences. Rather than remaining tied to traditional community relationships or letting the negative effects of the Industrial Revolution define public and private spaces, modern mobile individuals had some opportunity to influence and reshape spaces to overcome numerous limitations. New modes of transportation also carry passengers back and forth between city and country and provide a shifting perspective of the world and the landscape. Beyond physical spatial relationships in North and South, the ability of Margaret to move between spaces and carry with her different spatially constructed attitudes allows her to overcome the city/country dichotomy. Her shifting
perspective, tied to both social and physical mobility, permits her to develop a modern viewpoint and self-identity.
CONCLUSION:

REFLECTING ENTWINED SOCIAL AND PHYSICAL MOBILITY

In a letter to Lady Kay-Shuttleworth, Elizabeth Gaskell writes, “I believe what I have said in *Mary Barton* to be perfectly true, but by no means the whole truth; and I have always felt deeply annoyed at anyone, or any set of people who chose to consider that I had manifested the whole truth” (*Letters* 118). Such a statement denounces any one novel as whole truth, because a more nuanced perspective requires access to numerous places and situations. Rather than focusing on one setting in particular, the scope of Gaskell’s work provides a broader picture of nineteenth century England. Physical and social mobility developing out of a rapidly modernizing England allow this perspectival access. The settings of Elizabeth Gaskell’s fiction range across the country, with each different place revealing some different truth about life. The narrative of *North and South* alone involves numerous locations as Margaret Hale moves between Milton in the industrial north, the capital city of London, and country Helstone in the south.

While her greater collection of fiction represents a broad number of locales, Gaskell still may suffer critical simplifications that ignore the scope of her fiction. A reader might take any one novel as “whole truth” and disregard the greater complexity and broader reach of her work. A.B. Hopkins explains how easily one might categorize Gaskell if never venturing beyond her popular provincial novel *Cranford*: “It suggests, too, that she must have led a serene, rural life, for the most
part contented and uneventful” (v). Gaskell, with her experience growing up in rural Knutsford, portrays small-town country life in such an encompassing quaint manner that she might easily have gained literary recognition for just her Knutsford-based work. Her provincial novels invoke a thorough feel of life and community, and thus craft a sense of completion.

At the same time, however, another reader might never go further than labeling Gaskell only a writer of the industrial city. Her depictions of Manchester and the conditions of the working poor contain vivid descriptions of industrial life. Raymond Williams declares her “the only novelist of the mid-nineteenth century who comes as close as Dickens to the intricacies and paradoxes of city experience” (219). Despite high praise for her city settings, he does not reference Gaskell’s rural fiction. Linda Hughes points out that Williams “mentions Gaskell only as a novelist of urban industrialism in The Country and the City” (96). A critic might ignore Gaskell’s provincial novels and still find her worthy of high literary praise. Readers might fall into either trap, recognizing her as city writer or country author, depending upon the extent of their readings rather than Gaskell’s greater body of fiction.

Gaskell’s work extends to numerous settings and places, and through this extension addresses multifaceted issues related to location and community. Attempting to label Gaskell as author of one setting or another, thinking only in terms of whole truth rather than nuance and change over time, proves fruitless. This thesis therefore connects Gaskell’s country and provincial spaces with the new modern spaces of the city to analyze how the landscape of England underwent sweeping
change during Gaskell’s time period and how such change affected the greater scope of her work. The interplay of her texts reveals at all levels the shifting society of a modernizing England. Hughes comments that even one of Gaskell’s seemingly idyllic country novels proves “a complex tale of physiological, individual, and steady cultural change” (106). Traditional communities face the new shifts of a modern economy, and also new communities form as a result of such shifts. Stories of individual characters negotiating their situation and mode of living reveal the encompassing changes of society. Mary Smith moves back and forth by railroad between Cranford and the nearby industrial town Drumble, and thus reveals the modes of existence within shifting industrial society that form and influence community. With new opportunities of modern travel and living, she develops a modern perspective, keenly self-conscious about performative acts required in each locale, to negotiate such drastic changes.

While depicting such societal changes, Gaskell ostensibly focuses on exterior description, on a realistic portrayal of settings and social developments for the time period. In a letter of authorial advice, dated from March of 1859, Gaskell writes, “I think you must observe what is out of you, instead of examining what is in you” and prioritizes “objects not feelings” (Letters 541). Descriptions of diverse settings also prove relevant, however, for raising the theoretical and mental issues of space. With the term space representing the physical material landscape as well as the mental associations connected with that physical locale, Gaskell may raise diverse issues through objective depictions of exterior settings. Behind every objective description
remain ideological forces including the political and economic influences that shape space as social product.Enumerating such relationships of social space invokes individual character within a particular setting. Environment influences character. The constructed spaces around an individual influence social development by defining physical and social boundaries. Both the agricultural laborer living within a traditional feudal relationship and the factory worker in the new industrial cityscape possess limited options. At the same time that Gaskell reveals social relationships in ideological spaces, she begins to undercut the inevitability of succumbing to social forces. A mobile individual sees beyond the ideological boundaries of such spaces by moving outside limiting spatial relationships. Gaskell develops numerous female characters who grow amid the challenges of a social shift toward the modern world. While Gaskell often focuses on exterior description, the modes through which characters move through and engage with the world expose depth of character. Protagonists like Ruth, Mary Barton, Mary Smith, and Margaret Hale reveal a deep interior complexity beneath the surface of external actions. Many of these characters must stand up against traditional structures of power and the influences of traditional spatial relationships in order to form new communal bonds. As clear examples, Mary Smith’s and Margaret Hale’s notable social and practical mobility allows for modern agency and a modern perspective. These women, while performing capably in accordance with traditional gender codes, also traverse a more public sphere and influence new social development.
Alongside social and gender issues, broad technological transformations produce spatial changes in the landscape and therefore in modes of interaction. These disparate shifts join in the ideal of modern mobility. The world changes with the invention of new sciences and new technologies like the railroads. Travel by rail not only decreases time in transit, but also, because of this decrease, provides the opportunity to reach places previously not considered accessible. The railroad then changes a person’s perspective by opening the possibility for access. Along with new physical mobility, these societal changes allow social mobility. With the new market economy produced by the mechanization of the Industrial Revolution, social hierarchies also shift and change. New hierarchies create the opportunity for either reestablishing traditions or exploring new opportunities with the newly accessible world. Social changes in industrial England create new modern spaces as well as influence shifts in traditional spaces. The spatial mobility of modern individuals allows them to negotiate spatial relationships and to create new communal bonds. Two threads of social and physical mobility thus run together.

Ian Watt identifies “modern realism” beginning “from the position that truth can be discovered by the individual through his senses” and relates this philosophical focus to the particularity and individualism emphasized in the development of the novel (12). As Gaskell argued about her first novel, it reveals truth, but not any “whole truth.” Her work fits within general movements associated with the growth of the novel form, such as Watt identifying a new focus on “particular individuals in the contemporary social environment” (19). Within such a tradition, Gaskell also
explores movement in relation to individual subjectivity as characters travel through spaces and communities in flux. Gaskell’s skill in realistic description of any one space belies the depths of converging and shifting interiority just beneath an ostensible surface. Her focus on “particular individuals” allows her to examine the effects of new modern spaces, the effects of the modern flux of life in connection with the changing landscape of England.

As one particular example, Margaret Hale represents the effects of modern mobility provided by changing technologies of travel and by the changing economy and market place. Margaret’s personal growth and maturity reveal a positive outcome of both social and physical mobility. The end of the novel opens new possibilities for her as a mobile woman in the public sphere. Her understanding of both physical and social flux results from her trip back to Helstone, from her ability to view and access multiple spaces. She comes to realize a deep self-conscious truth regarding her state of modern existence: “I too change perpetually” (364). In this moment of realization, Margaret understands the nature of life as constant change and she views her own interiority in concert with the ever-changing landscape of England. Through this particular moment, through one particular character, Gaskell negotiates space, community, and individuality by presenting Margaret’s mobility within an emerging modern society.
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