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In *The Ladies’ Book of Etiquette and Manual of Politeness*, Florence Hartley writes,

A lady’s conduct is never so entirely at the mercy of critics, because never so public, as when she is in the street. Her dress, carriage, walk, will all be exposed to notice; every passer-by will look at her, if it is only for one glance; every unlady-like action will be marked; and in no position will a dignified, lady-like deportment be more certain to command respect.¹

Walking was a common topic in conduct books during the Victorian era, as demonstrated by this example. It highlights how walking left women in a vulnerable position and provides insight into their character. Massay also argues that ‘space and place, spaces and places, and our senses of them (and such related things as our degree of mobility) are gendered through and through. Moreover, they are gendered in a myriad different ways, which vary between cultures and over time.’² This fact can be observed in Elizabeth Gaskell’s *North and South*. This article aims to bring attention to the possible dangers of walking, while also pointing out the numerous benefits that female walkers experienced.

From the beginning, Margaret Hale is shown to enjoy walking and it plays an integral part in her life. As this article argues, walking helps her adjust to her new surroundings in Milton and promotes personal growth. I will mainly focus my analysis on Margaret’s life in Milton, but to get an understanding of her life and walking habits there it is important to first look at her life in Helstone. In Helstone Margaret enjoys the rural life and walks in nature. ‘Margaret used to tramp along by her father’s side, crushing down the fern with cruel glee, as she felt it yield under her light foot, and send up the fragrance peculiar to it ... This life—at least these walks—realised all of Margaret’s anticipations. She took pride in her forest. Its people were her people.’³ Margaret uses walking not only as a means to move around but also to feel more connected to her surroundings. She enjoys caring for people which can also

¹ Florence Hartley, *The Ladies’ Book of Etiquette, and Manual of Politeness*. (Boston: J. S. Locke and Company, 1876), p. 111.

² Doreen Massay, *Space, Place and Gender*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), p. 186.

³ Elizabeth Gaskell, *North and South*, ed. by Angus Easson, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 17.

be seen in her philanthropic work which she later does in Milton too; she visits ill villagers on foot, brings them food and tries to support those in need.

Walking in the countryside follows different rules than walking in the city; this is something that Margaret must learn. A young woman ‘could have gone between the houses of friends and relations on her own with complete respectability when she was in the country’, as Mallory James explains.⁴ Margaret’s respectability is not immediately called into question in Milton, but it later becomes a significant plot point.

Margaret is an experienced walker, but she dislikes that her aunt requires her to have a footman accompany her and Edith whenever they go out in London. Her aunt’s supervision is not surprising. Martha Vicinus observes that ‘a lady was simply not supposed to be seen aimlessly wandering the streets in the evening’.⁵ Mrs Shaw tries to keep her niece’s reputation intact. But for Margaret, her aunt’s wish for propriety interferes with her independence which leads to her preferring her walks in Helstone. Walking in and around Helstone means walking without supervision and experiencing the pleasure that goes hand in hand with exploring nature. Margaret describes her walks in the hamlet to Mr Lennox as ‘beautiful’ and declares ‘it would be a shame to drive—almost a shame to ride.’⁶ Here it becomes clear that nature is best to be enjoyed while walking and not being rushed and carried by a horse or carriage. Gaskell also describes that Margaret is appreciative of the nature that surrounds her in Helstone.

And walk Margaret did, in spite of the weather. She was so happy out of doors, at her father’s side, that she almost danced; and with the soft violence of the west wind behind her, as she crossed some heath, she seemed to be borne onwards, as lightly and easily as the fallen leaf that was wafted along by the autumnal breeze.⁷

The idea that walking was a means of appreciating nature came up in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. ‘Romanticism changed walking. It took it from being a lower-class necessity and an upper-class select activity, and transformed it for those with means and a certain subjectivity into an elevated vehicle for experiencing nature, the world and the self.’⁸

⁴ Mallory James, *Elegant Etiquette in the Nineteenth Century* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword History, 2017), p. 28.

⁵ Martha Vicinus, *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women 1850-1920*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), p. 297.

⁶ Gaskell, p. 13.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.19.

⁸ Joseph A. Amato, *On Foot: A History of Walking*, (New York: New York University Press, 2004), p. 102.

In Helstone Margaret can recharge her energy and connect to the world around her which is important for self-perception.

Margret's walking experiences in Milton are vastly different. Milton with its 'smoke and fogs' does offer her no nature to enjoy and instead challenges her with different rules for walking.⁹ Her walks no longer have the purpose of recharging her energy, but they initially drain her. Margaret's first walks in Milton are concerned with finding a house for her family to rent – an enterprise that turns out to be more difficult than expected – and after the house is secured, she is the one who walks through the city streets looking for a maid – another search that turns out to be difficult. Margaret does not hold any power in these interactions. She tries her best to make suggestions to adapt the house they have found to their liking, but the only way to influence the decision is through womanly ways: 'by inspiring men to live up to her ideals of good and right'.¹⁰ How ineffective this actually is can be seen when one looks at the issue of the unwanted wallpaper in their new home. It is not she who inspires the landlord to change it, but actually Mr Thornton. Overall, Margaret who was used to and reliant on her independence must adapt to the different conventions in Milton and this can be seen in her walking habits too.

A significant difference between Margaret's walks in Milton and Helstone can be seen in who is paying attention to her while she is out walking. Her walks in Helstone are described as freeing and bringing her happiness. She often walks alone or with her father. There is no mention of anyone paying her any attention. This is drastically different in Milton. Here, workers pay attention to her. They comment on how she dresses and moves and the women 'comment on her dress, even touch her shawl or gown to ascertain the exact material'.¹¹ The men's 'unrestrained voices, and their carelessness of all common rules of street politeness, frightened Margaret a little at first' and make her feel uncomfortable.¹² Margaret is struggling to adjust to the customs in Milton, which are vastly different from what she's used to. She finds it easier to connect with the women and girls who are curious about her but is uncomfortable with the way the men focus more on her appearance than her clothing. Her dislike of being perceived as a woman at a marriageable age can be seen when Henry Lennox proposes to her. Her first reaction after hearing the declaration of love is "I

⁹ Gaskell, p. 76.

¹⁰ Elizabeth Holly Pike, *Family and Society in the Works of Elizabeth Gaskell*, (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1995), p. 92.

¹¹ Gaskell, p. 71.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 71.

don't like to be spoken to as you have been doing”'.¹³ There is no doubt that Margaret does not reciprocate the feelings and that hearing them is a shock to her. This is rather telling of how she perceives herself. 'Often indicated by blushing and feelings of shame, Margaret's knowledge and awareness of herself as sexually attractive is repeatedly denied even as it is simultaneously recognized and commented on by others.'¹⁴ The workmen are aware of her good looks too and some of them even wish that Margaret was their sweetheart. 'In public, women were presumed to be both endangered and a source of danger to those men who congregated in the streets. In the mental map of urban spectators, they lacked autonomy: they were bearers of meaning rather than makers of meaning'.¹⁵ Both the fact that Margaret is walking in the public sphere and her appearance tempt the men. She perceives these episodes as harassment, but Janssen is right to point out that '[r]epresenting the harassment as a genuine threat, moreover, would lead readers to question Margaret's wisdom in walking the streets as boldly as she does, which would compromise her position as the free agent of class rapprochement.'¹⁶ The reaction of the workers can rather be read in connection with the different social norms in the North and the South.

Not only do the workmen see Margaret walking on the streets but Mr Thornton does so too. Without her knowledge, he follows her along the streets 'admiring her light and easy walk, and her tall and graceful figure'.¹⁷ Gaskell demonstrates here that the way a person walks is an important aspect too. Conduct books advise the female reader on what to wear when they went out walking and they also included advice on how to walk.

Do not walk so fast! you are not chasing anybody! Walk slowly, gracefully! Oh, do not drag one foot after the other as if you were fast asleep—set down the foot lightly, but at the same time firmly; now, carry your head up, not so; you hang it down as if you feared to look any one in the face! Nay, that is the other extreme! Now you look like a drill-major, on parade! So! that is the medium. Erect, yet, at the same time, easy and elegant.'¹⁸

¹³ Ibid., p. 29.

¹⁴ Jill L. Matus, 'Mary Barton and North and South', in *The Cambridge Companion to Elizabeth Gaskell*, ed. by Jill L. Matus, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 27-45 (p. 42).

¹⁵ Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight – Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 21.

¹⁶ Flore Janssen, "'Common Rules of Street Politeness'?: The Clash of Gender and Social Class in Representations of Street Harassment by Elizabeth Gaskell and Eliza Lynn Linton', *Nineteenth-Century Gender Studies*, 12.3 (2016), <<http://ncgsjournal.com/issue123/janssen.html>> para. 13.

¹⁷ Gaskell, p. 327.

¹⁸ Hartley, p.111.

It becomes evident that walking on public streets was not to be taken lightly. These rules for walking mirror the expectations that were placed on Victorian women in all life situations. They have to perform as the angel in the house in and outside of it. Not adhering to these rules means endangering their reputations. Judging by Mr Thornton's reaction Margaret performs according to society's rules and as a well-mannered Victorian woman. He admires the way Margaret walks, but history shows that walking did not make all women seem more attractive. Thomas de Quincey writes about Dorothy Wordsworth, William Wordsworth's sister, who was a seasoned walker, that walking made her 'ungraceful' and 'unsexual'.¹⁹ This was partly because of her stooping while walking²⁰, but it also indicates that walking can make women unattractive in the eyes of men. The reasons for this are various. Walking placed women outside of the domestic sphere which displaced them in the eyes of some men and Kerri Andrews explains that 'proper women were not supposed to be physically strong. When walking, De Quincey suggests, Dorothy loses her sex, even her personhood.'²¹ Women who appeared physically strong did no longer need a man to protect them which seemed threatening to men and their role in society. Walking supported a woman's agency and 'a woman with freedom of movement signified a potentially unfettered female agency, which might pose a danger to the stability of social and familial order'.²² This display of agency was able to frighten men. Walking made it possible for women of every class to leave the house and explore the public sphere. This already challenged the concept of separate spheres. Women were faced with a dilemma – society expected them to stay in the domestic sphere, but when they ventured outside, they were expected to be delicate and elegant to be admired and not seem too independent, which would threaten men. Women who had the confidence to navigate through life on their own challenged the notion that they needed men to protect them. If they did not need protection, they could possibly have been on the hunt for men which was how prostitutes were sometimes seen. It was a fine line between admiration and repulsion.

Margaret may frown upon the workmen's missing 'street politeness' but scholars such as Zemka argue that 'Victorian streetwalking thus conformed to gendered protocols, and, as everyone from the characters in *North and South* to its critics observe, Margaret Hale ignores

¹⁹ Thomas de Quincey, quoted in Kerri Andrews, *Wanderers - A History of Women Walking*, (London: Reaktion Books, 2020), p. 21.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

²¹ Andrews, p. 21.

²² Wendy Parkins, *Mobility and Modernity in Women's Novels, 1850s-1930s – Women Moving Dangerously*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 2.

them.²³ Margaret's upbringing taught her to be wary on the streets and to whom to talk. She knows that walking with a man alone at night can put her reputation at risk. One of the novel's central conflicts happens while Margaret is out walking – at night with her brother. It is essential for Frederick to leave Milton as quickly and quietly as possible, but for Margaret, this means putting her reputation in danger. Not only is she walking with a young man at night, but she is seen doing so by Mr Thornton and a shopkeeper. The obvious explanation for this is that she was walking with her lover. Margaret wants to safeguard her brother, so when questioned by a police officer about that night, she denies being present at the train station. However, her lie is apparent to Mr Thornton, who then assumes that the young man he saw was her lover. This assumption quickly turns into a fact in the mind of Mrs Thornton.

‘You would not have approved of Fanny’s being seen out, after dark, in rather a lonely place, walking about with a young man. I say nothing of the taste which could choose the time, when her mother lay unburied, for such a promenade. Should you have liked your sister to have been noticed by a grocer’s assistant for doing so?’²⁴

Mrs Thornton here highlights that there is more than one problem. Walking alone with her presumed lover is one of the issues, but the other one lies in the fact that a shopkeeper recognised her. Mr Jennings, the shopkeeper, recognises Margaret because she visited his shop before. Here, walking is closely associated with shopping and shopping is in turn closely associated with prostitution. For the male watchers, it is a possibility that Margaret might not only be out buying but that she might be selling herself too.²⁵ In the Victorian period, female shoppers were no rarity, but women who crowded the streets were often either shoppers or prostitutes and these were ‘indistinguishable both in terms of their adherence to fashion and their uncontrolled desires.’²⁶ This also depicts how women were perceived: they were weak-willed and could not even control themselves; it is not far-fetched for a Victorian woman to be afraid of being mistaken as a prostitute. Patricia Murphy describes how Joanna Traill, a philanthropist like Margaret, was mistaken as a prostitute.²⁷

²³ Sue Zemka, ‘Brief Encounters: Street Scenes in Gaskell’s Manchester’, *ELH*, vol. 76 no. 3 (2009), 793-819 <www.jstor.org/stable/27742959> p. 809.

²⁴ Gaskell, p. 377.

²⁵ Anne Longmuir, ‘Consuming Subjects: Women and the Market in Elizabeth Gaskell’s *North and South*’, *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, vol. 34 no. 3 (2012), 237-252 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/08905495.2012.691821>> p. 239.

²⁶ Deborah L. Parsons, *Streetwalking the Metropolis – Women, the City and Modernity*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 29.

²⁷ Patricia Murphy, *The New Woman Gothic – Reconfigurations of Distress*, (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2016), p. 39.

Mr Jennings easily identifies Margaret – once again, it is her appearance and more specifically her beauty that causes her problems – which in turn makes the police officer question her honesty. She ‘compromis[es] her own morals’ which ‘opens Margaret to allegations of a specifically sexual nature, as those who hear the story mistake Frederick for Margaret’s lover.’²⁸ Shopping brought Victorian women into the public sphere and as more and more women came to the cities it made them more visible. Women could become observers of the busy life in cities, but they also could be watched. This became a wider problem from the middle of the century on. Cities brought together women who wanted to go on shopping trips but also women who worked in the city as clerks or shopgirls. Street harassment became a social issue and ‘emerges as a subject of concern when unaccompanied middle-class women and the new class fractions of clerks and “smartly-dressed” shop assistants became a massed presence in the city, thus entering the privileged spaces of politics and commerce and, especially, consumption.’²⁹ While Margaret is shopping for food or rather assessing his goods, Mr Jennings assesses her and her looks. The innocent act of shopping can quickly become a perilous situation when viewed through the lens of the male gaze. For Victorians, ‘women’s roles as consumers in the commercial marketplace and as commodities in the sexual marketplace are inextricably linked’.³⁰ By being in public and being a woman Margaret is seen as sexually available. ‘The term “public woman” was used interchangeably with the terms prostitute, streetwalker and actress; they all implied that the public world excluded respectable women.’³¹

The link between women walking alone and prostitution is not a new concept, as evident in the term ‘streetwalking’. A streetwalker is seen as ‘the poorest, least prestigious, most dangerous of prostitutes, who signals her willingness to stray sexually by walking.’³² But the term streetwalker is not the only term that connects walking with sexual availability. The term ‘walking out’ denotes rural courtship and ‘often was understood to include sexual intercourse’³³. Wallace declares that ‘the latent sexual content of the activity combined with its class content and standard prejudices about women’s “nature” and proper roles in society’

²⁸ Longmuir, p. 247.

²⁹ Judith R. Walkowitz, ‘Going Public: Shopping, Street Harassment, and Streetwalking in Late Victorian London.’ *Representations*, no. 62 (1998), 1–30. <<https://doi.org/10.2307/2902937>> p 2.

³⁰ Longmuir, p. 246.

³¹ Lucy Bland, *Banishing the Beast: English Feminism and Sexual Morality 1885-1914*, (Penguin, 1995), p. 118.

³² Anne Wallace, *Walking, Literature and English Culture – The Origins and Uses of Peripatetic in the Nineteenth Century*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 30.

³³ Wallace., p. 30.

made women's walking 'unusually perilous to their reputations'.³⁴ This is something that Margaret will discover herself too.

Mrs Thornton may have a negative bias towards Margaret due to her rejection of her son, but she still does not think it possible that Margaret was seen walking alone with a young man at night until her son confirms it. This highlights how Margaret is viewed in Milton as someone who is independent but also highly respected. Additionally, it emphasises that walking alone with a man in the dark is considered a serious matter. It almost seems impossible for Mr Thornton that Margaret was seen 'at such an hour—in such a place'.³⁵ Being out at night even without her brother would have caused Margaret problems. 'Solitary strolling at night in the city by both men and women has, from time immemorial, been interpreted as a sign of moral, social or spiritual dereliction.'³⁶ As a solitary woman out at night she would have been associated with prostitution. Moreover, the location is significant. Margaret is at the train station, which means she is in a public space and not confined to the private sphere that was deemed appropriate for women during the Victorian era.

It is not only Mrs Thornton who disapproves of Margaret's walking habits, her own relatives frown upon them too. "I can't think," she went on, pettishly, "how my aunt allowed her to get into such rambling habits in Milton!"³⁷ Edith is not only concerned about her cousin's reputation but sees the street as a danger to Margaret's health too. "I'm sure I'm always expecting to hear of her having met with something horrible among all those wretched places she pokes herself into. I should never dare to go down some of these streets without a servant. They're not fit for ladies."³⁸ The quote highlights two problems connected to women walkers. It does matter where women are walking as Edith seems to be thinking about a specific area in London and she also mentions that these places are not fit for ladies. Margaret's cousin suggests that social class is a factor, as working-class women may not have the option of choosing where to walk and may simply walk as a means of transportation.³⁹ Margaret is in the position to have a servant walk with her or go by coach,

³⁴ Parsons, p. 30.

³⁵ Gaskell, p. 279.

³⁶ Matthew Beaumont, *Nightwalking: A Nocturnal History of London*, (London: Verso Books, 2015), p. 3.

³⁷ Gaskell, p. 426

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 426.

³⁹ See Charlotte Mathieson, *Mobility in the Victorian Novel: Placing the Nation*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2015), p. 22 for more information on the connection of class and mobility.

but the important fact is that she chooses not to. She likes to walk as her preferred mode of mobility.

The incident at the train station is not the first time Margaret makes a spectacle out of herself. During a visit to Thornton's mill, there was a riot among the workers. Margaret believes that it was possible to calm the workers and urges Mr Thornton to find a peaceful solution. However, after he left, she realises that she may have put him in danger and goes after him. Margaret tries to calm the angry workers and encourages them to leave before the police arrived – it is to no avail. Margaret attempts to read the situation and acts without thinking when she ‘threw her arms around him; she made her body into a shield from the fierce people beyond.’⁴⁰ Mr Thornton shakes her off, but the damage to her reputation is done. The whole crowd of mill workers and servants from the Thornton household see her and they all conclude that Margaret must have acted out of love for Mr Thornton. She has made a spectacle out of herself and “spectacle” has related to the “feminine”; presumably due to the idea of women in the nineteenth-century city as displaying themselves as objects of an erotic gaze (as prostitutes, performers, debutantes) and “for sale”.⁴¹ Gaskell is no stranger to the dangers of walking in Victorian cities nor to women making a spectacle out of themselves. In *Mary Barton* walking also plays a significant role. In Gaskell's first novel, she is concerned with the working classes and the connotations of walking and sexual availability can be found there too. The titular heroine Mary uses walking to meet her lover and the book also includes an actual streetwalker, her aunt Esther. ‘As in the riot scene in *North and South*, ... the heroine claims for herself a public role in order to bear witness to what is just, and in so doing struggles painfully with the sexually charged image she unwillingly creates.’⁴² Margaret did not anticipate the impression her conduct gives to the onlookers and tries desperately to downplay her actions.

I have argued that walking is significant for Margaret, but she also admits that walking in Milton was ‘something of a trial’ when she first moved there.⁴³ This changes as the novel progresses. ‘Margaret went out heavily and unwillingly enough. But the length of a street—yes, the air of a Milton Street—cheered her young blood before she reached her first

⁴⁰ Gaskell, p. 179.

⁴¹ Parsons, p. 38.

⁴² Deborah Nord, *Walking the Victorian Streets – Women, Representation, and the City*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), p. 155.

⁴³ Gaskell, p. 70.

turning.’⁴⁴ It is apparent that being outside—even if it is the air of Milton—and walking play a crucial part in Margaret’s life. Walking has the ability to change her whole mood as this passage suggests. This activity is good for Margaret’s well-being and indicates that she is growing used to and fond of her new hometown.

The importance of walking for Margaret can also be seen in another scene. I argue that walking, on the one hand, is a way for her to think and on the other, to deal with her emotions. In the countryside, Margaret feels connected to nature where she can frolic and, in the city, walking takes a seemingly more practical role. This assumption is deceptive as I will show. While walking Margaret can forget about the city and just ponder her own perceptions and thoughts. After meeting Betsey for the first time Margaret promises to visit her one day but forgets about it. When she sees Betsey again on the streets she is reminded of her promise and wants to fulfil it. Both women walk first in silence which gives Margaret the mental space to ask Betsey a difficult question. “Bessy, do you wish to die?” For she shrank from death herself, with all the clinging to life so natural to the young and healthy.’⁴⁵ Margaret needs the walk to overcome her own feelings regarding death and to voice a question that is important to her. Deborah L. Parson argues that the city ‘is labyrinthine, and, although mappable, is a place of numerous trajectories, along which one can wander. An extension of this city/consciousness metaphor is to imply that the mind is also somewhere one wanders’.⁴⁶ Margaret’s mind is free to wander to difficult topics and according to the metaphor places which she would prefer to avoid. Tom Ingold addresses the connection between walking and the imagination in one of his articles and concludes that ‘[t]o walk is to journey in the mind as much as on the land: it is a deeply meditative practice.’⁴⁷ The concept of mobility is closely linked to ideas of freedom. Generally associated with masculinity, mobility is seen as liberating.⁴⁸ However, for Margaret, it is not just physical movement that offers liberation, but also walking in her mind.

The interrelation of walking and emotions is depicted in *North and South* too. When Margaret realises that Mr Thornton has also mistaken Frederick for her lover, she grows anxious. She values his opinion but feels powerless because she cannot disclose the truth. She

⁴⁴ Gaskell, p. 131.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 89.

⁴⁶ Parsons, p. 70.

⁴⁷ Tom Ingold, ‘Ways of mind-walking: reading, writing, painting’, *Visual Studies*, vol. 25, issue 1, (2010), 15-23 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/14725861003606712>> p. 18.

⁴⁸ Parkins, p. 11.

reluctantly accepts that she must bear the burden of this shame. Katherine Hallemeier explores the theme of shame in Anne Brontë's *Agnes Grey* and argues that 'interest or joy is integral to being ashamed ... an individual feels shame whenever she or he encounters "any barrier to further exploration" in her or his relationship with another.'⁴⁹ Margaret has not admitted it to herself yet, but she cares about Mr Thornton thus she feels shame in this situation. She does not regret her actions, but she feels shame because people judge her differently after this episode which affects her identity and life in Milton. Kelly Oliver points out that 'shame is about identity while guilt is about action' which applies to Margaret's situation.⁵⁰ To quieten her feelings '[s]he went out, going rapidly towards the country, and trying to drown reflection by swift motion.'⁵¹ The quick motion which Margaret disapproved of when she talked about Helstone as it meant that she was not able to enjoy her surroundings is here supposed to help her to forget about her own problems. This comes close to mindless wandering, which was disapproved of, thus Margaret is checked by her father upon her return and reminded of her responsibilities. Gaskell demonstrates that the speed of walking matters and changes the purpose of walking. Emotions are linked to the society a person lives in⁵², and during the Victorian era, people were discouraged from displaying strong emotions. Thus, Margaret needs to find a way to work through her emotions without showing the world how she is affected by past events. Walking is also Margaret's solution after she left Mrs Thornton earlier in the novel. 'She began to walk backwards and forwards, in her old habitual way of showing agitation'.⁵³ Here Margaret is walking inside but nevertheless, it indicates that walking helps to cope with emotions. After she turns down Mr Thornton's proposal, she becomes highly agitated and needs to lift her spirits. Margaret promptly decides to take a walk and visit Bessy. This demonstrates that walking can also provide emotional support and emphasises the strong connection between walking and social components.

Margaret first meets Bessy while out for a walk with her father in the fields outside of the city. Despite having different expectations and social norms between the South and the North, their friendship blossomed due to this chance encounter. 'Social relations always have a spatial form and spatial content. They exist, necessarily, both *in space* (i.e., in a locational

⁴⁹ Hallemeier, Katherine. 2013. 'Anne Brontë's Shameful Agnes Grey', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 41.2 (2013), p. 251–60 <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S106015031200037X>> p.252.

⁵⁰ Kelly Oliver, *The Colonization of Psychic Space: A Psychoanalytic Theory of Social Oppression*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), p. 112.

⁵¹ Gaskell, p. 323.

⁵² Gesa Stedman, *Stemming the Torrent: Expression and Control in the Victorian Discourses on Emotions, 1830-1872*, (Ashgate, 2002; repr. New York: Routledge, 2018), p. 9.

⁵³ Gaskell, p. 321.

relation to other social phenomena) and *across* space.’⁵⁴ By walking, these two characters with distinct backgrounds have the opportunity to meet and establish a friendship that holds great significance to Margaret. Regular visits to Bessy became an integral aspect of her daily routine. ‘As she went along the crowded narrow streets, she felt how much of interest they had gained by the simple fact of her having learnt to care for a dweller in them.’⁵⁵ The description of the ‘crowded narrow streets’ is intriguing. Murphy writes about New Woman novels that ‘[n]arrow streets, dark passageways, concealed byways, hidden mews, and serpentine avenues can all be assessed as signifiers of the sexual and reproductive canal of the female body’.⁵⁶ I argue that the choice of ‘narrow’ in connection with ‘crowded’ is striking here. If ‘narrow’ already carries a sexual connotation, then the addition of ‘crowded’ calls to mind prostitutes. The sentence can be read as a foreshadowing of the later accusations against Margaret. While the sentence indicates what will happen later in the novel, it also emphasises that walking and the city are strongly connected to emotions. Gaskell implies that Milton becomes a better place for Margaret when she realises that she cares for its people. It is due to walking that she could make this connection. Strong emotions can alter the sense of reality,⁵⁷ and here Gaskell demonstrates that the positive emotions towards the Higginses already alter how Margaret perceives the city as a whole. The topic of emotions and how to control them is a topic that is discussed in the novel itself too. Margaret states that middle-class women usually do not go to funerals because they are not able to control their emotions.⁵⁸ This shows that social class affects not only physical activities, such as walking but also emotional experiences.

While walking Margaret finds solace in processing her emotions and regaining control over her life. Scholar Doreen Massay writes,

[t]he limitation of women’s mobility, in terms both of identity and space, has been in some cultural contexts a crucial means of subordination. Moreover the two things – the limitation on mobility in space, the attempted consignment/confinement to particular places on the one hand, and the limitation on identity on the other – have been crucially related.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Massay, p. 168.

⁵⁵ Gaskell, p. 99.

⁵⁶ Murphy, 107.

⁵⁷ Matus, p. 38.

⁵⁸ Gaskell, p. 266.

⁵⁹ Massay, p. 179.

Margaret might be watched (and judged) by the other city-dwellers, but it gives her the opportunity to shape her life on her own terms. She is no longer in a domestic space where she could not even decide how to decorate but while out walking, she can move freely according to her own rules (it has already been established that Margaret does not adhere to common street etiquette). She is also no longer under the watchful eye of her aunt who wants her to take a servant with her everywhere she goes. As Nord indicates, London is seen as the city where Margaret's freedom dies and where women fall into passivity while Helstone in the South comes to represent the conservative aspect of the country.⁶⁰ Margaret might not have chosen Milton, but the city offers her more freedom and space to grow than she anticipated. This growth does not come easy though. Margaret does not love Milton when she moves there and must live through several hardships. Margaret 'long[ed] for a day of Edith's life—her freedom from care, her cheerful home, her sunny skies.'⁶¹ These are all things that Milton does not offer her. Even the weather is different to what she is used to. Instead of 'silver mist' Milton offers 'heavy fog' and the weather even affects the streets: 'where the sun could only show long dusty streets when he did break through and shine.'⁶² The weather in Milton might not be what she was used to from the South, but it aligns with her grief.

The last aspect that I want to highlight in connection to walking is exercise. Queen Victoria was famous for her walking habits and was even shown as a striking example in conduct books. Those conduct books often criticise the habit of remaining too much indoors and presented this as a fault among English women and girls.⁶³ While in Helstone and Milton Margaret does plenty of walking, but after her father's death she returns to London and there her walking habits change due to being back under her aunt's roof and her grief. Henry Lennox recognises that Margaret does not look well, but he blames Milton for her sad looks. "Last autumn she was fatigued with a walk of a couple of miles. On Friday evening we walked up to Hampstead and back."⁶⁴ Margaret needs time to adapt to her new life. Walking here helps her once again. It connects her to her environment as "the limbs are put to work, the body's strength is drawn upon, and every step brings the traveller into contact with the space around them."⁶⁵ Walking takes energy as Mathieson here rightly demonstrates but it

⁶⁰ Nord, p. 168-9.

⁶¹ Gaskell, p. 235.

⁶² Ibid., p. 251.

⁶³ Charles Peters, 'Introduction', in *The Girl's Own Outdoor Book – Containing Practical Help to Girls on matters relating to Outdoor Occupation and Recreation*, ed. by Charles Peters, (London: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1889), pp. 5-6 (p. 5).

⁶⁴ Gaskell, p. 429.

⁶⁵ Mathieson, p. 19.

can also give the person energy as is the case with Margaret. *The New Female Instructor or, Young Woman's Guide to Domestic Happiness* declares that walking is exercise which 'is the parent of health'.⁶⁶ This conduct book also includes a section on illustrious females and one example is Elizabeth Smith who was a frequent walker and always returned 'more cheerful than usual' from her walks.⁶⁷ It should be noted that these walks took place in the countryside which once again emphasises the significance of location.

Although walking may appear to be a simple means of mobility, it holds significant importance, particularly for women. Walking allowed women to enter the public domain, providing exposure but also autonomy over their own movements. I have shown that walking comes with its own risks. Margaret risks harassment on the streets and puts her respectability at risk.

In [Gaskell's] novels women work outside the home, give public testimony, intervene in class strife, flout laws and social convention, venture opinions about politics and the management of business, and enter forbidden or restricted areas of the city. All such public gestures in Gaskell's fiction offer women satisfaction, even triumph, and yet they also expose women to trauma and nearly irreversible disgrace.⁶⁸

Above, Nord shows that while Gaskell is often seen as a rather conservative author there is more to her characters than one might see at first. Margaret risked her reputation and happiness to first protect Mr Thornton and then to protect her brother. These instances showcase the risks associated with women who walk on public streets. They were in the public sphere and exposed to harassment and unwanted associations. *North and South* illustrates how easily a woman could be associated with prostitution. Despite this, Margaret continues to walk as a form of exercise and to connect to her own thoughts and emotions. She also uses it as an opportunity to visit friends. For Margaret, walking is a choice rather than a necessity. It reveals not only the characters' social class but also their respectability and sense of agency.

⁶⁶ *The New Female Instructor or, Young Woman's Guide to Domestic Happiness*, London, 1824, p. 36.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 318.

⁶⁸ Nord, p. 142.

In the end, the positive outcomes of walking outweigh the risks. Without her walking habits, Margaret would never have become friends with the Higginses and she could not have shaped her life the way she did. It is through walking that she explores the city and gets to know its inhabitants and its language. Margaret's sense of agency is beautifully expressed through her love for walking. It's a simple yet effective way for her to take control of her life and shape her own destiny. Thus, the activity of walking is an aspect of Elizabeth Gaskell's depiction of Margaret's struggle for autonomy.

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