

DOMESTIC DINING PERFORMANCES

DOMESTIC DINING PERFORMANCES IN THREE OF ELIZABETH
GASKELL'S NOVELS

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Abstract

This paper examines the everyday details of the domestic dining scenes in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848), *Cranford* (1853), and *North and South* (1855). By viewing dining etiquette in terms of a dramaturgical metaphor, this paper attempts to demonstrate the cooperation, complexity, labour, and significance of the self-aware performances that structure nineteenth-century domestic dining scenes in relation to the sense of pleasure and community care that those scenes produce both for their duration and for the external 'everyday'.

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Abbreviations

In this paper, the in-text citations for Elizabeth Gaskell's novels use abbreviated forms for the titles: 'MB' for *Mary Barton*, 'CR' for *Cranford*, and 'NS' for *North and South*.

Introduction

Viewing dining etiquette in terms of performance is not unusual: Rachel Rich for example considers the nineteenth-century dinner party as “a piece of theatre” interested in attaining “perfection,” with various ‘roles’ for hosts, guests, men, and women (Rich 105); Annette Cozzi suggests that the “very words are scripted” for the middle-class woman idealized in etiquette books (Cozzi 83-84). This common observation and metaphor makes it evident that the nineteenth-century domestic dining scene¹ is highly suited to and in need of close dramaturgical analysis. In this paper, I apply a dramaturgical metaphor to analyze the domestic dining scenes in a selection of Elizabeth Gaskell's realist fiction. If formal dining scenes tend to highlight the importance of strict adherence to convention, domestic dining scenes often call attention to a collaborative etiquette among performers who *make use* of convention to facilitate inter-relationships. Accordingly, this paper provides a close analysis of food choices and social performances in the domestic, including the ways in which gender and class shape these interactions. With examples drawn from Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848), *Cranford* (1853) and *North and South* (1855), I reveal the interpersonal communication that is accomplished through domestic dining scenes for the purpose of collective community care, and I demonstrate the intricacy of

¹ This paper is limited to *domestic* dining scenes because the intimacy and limitations of the performers in such scenes correspond to the limitations implied by the dramaturgical metaphor: in larger venues there are likely to be more people with more room for performance embellishment, and in public spaces there are entirely different systems of etiquette involved.

purposeful performances aimed towards such ethical ends. As I demonstrate, domestic dining scenes are structured by overlapping labour and leisure, specifically labour in performance; every food choice serves a purpose, often personal or interpersonal, even if that food choice is conventional or obligatory; and domestic dining scenes are exceptionally collaborative, as the diners perform together to predict, manage, and adapt to one another's performances. From this analysis I then find that although the domestic dining scenes are themselves enclosed, the dining performances are still related to and bear on the 'everyday' outside of them, as they involve negotiations of gender- and class-oriented roles and expectations, and as the collaboration involved in the performances creates and captures a sense of community. Overall, this paper attempts to demonstrate the complexity of the dining performances that facilitate equally complex nineteenth-century community relations.

There is a triangular structure to my analysis as I consider fictional dining scenes in terms of drama in relation to historical dining scenes. To clarify, I do not use this strategy because the novels can be said to resemble theatre (as a comparable artistic medium). Rather, I use this strategy because Gaskell makes use of everyday details in her novels that reflect the performed and collaborative nature of domestic dining scenes in the era.² In her novels, Gaskell emphasises an

² Enid L. Duthie argues that Gaskell would have understood the efforts of dining and been aware of the importance of improvisation in domestic dining scenes from her own social life (Duthie 61-63), and Gaskell most obviously demonstrates her keen awareness of social performance through Mary Smith's playful, ironic

ethics of interpersonal responsibility, and this ethics is best articulated in the community nourishment (physical and emotional) that occurs through the collaborative performances in domestic dining scenes. This ethics is based on common etiquette, and as such I analyze Gaskell's works with an awareness of this common etiquette in relation to the concessions and compromises that diners might make. To make sense of Gaskell's fictional domestic dining scenes in relation to historical ones, I take up a perspective that prioritizes the drama of the scene and the intentions of the characters over the effects, intentions, successes, or failures of Gaskell's *narratives*. For example, it might be suggested that, narratively in *North and South*, Gaskell awards Mr. Thornton's changed attitude (that is, his developed interpersonal connection to his workers) with Margaret Hale's love and fortune, but in terms of character motives, Margaret and Mr. Thornton rather come to meet each other in their ideas and Margaret comes to love him *for* his change of character. The first perspective considers what Gaskell suggests to the reader in the overarching story while the second, which I prioritize, acknowledges the characters as if they are in control of their actions

narration in *Cranford*. Natalie Kapetanos Meir compares the tone of *Cranford* in particular to advice literature of the era, as does Elizabeth Langland (Langland 293). Marjorie Garson suggests that performance-based analysis, like the kind that I apply in this paper, is indebted to nineteenth-century conduct literature and the period's relative awareness of "the theatrical nature of social interaction" (Garson, Introduction 19). Elizabeth Langland suggests that "[e]ven if we are skeptical about the possibility of anyone's observing such rules [of precise etiquette] in daily life, the very popularity of the etiquette manuals reveals a pervasive awareness of and commitment to the class distinctions they reinforce" (Langland 293).

and have their own motives and intentions.³ I analyze the fictional domestic dining scenes in Gaskell's texts in parallel with historical domestic dining scenes to better understand the ways that the Victorians might be said to have played with their food. As I discuss throughout this paper (and as I detail further below), this 'play' is the play of leisure and the play of performance, and this play is only accomplished through corresponding labour in the preparation and execution of domestic dining scenes.

The goal of this paper is not to prove the realism of Gaskell's works, but to take her "sense of the real" (Foster xii) as a premise for my argument that historical nineteenth-century domestic dining scenes were structured by cooperative, self-aware performances.⁴ Rather than examine Gaskell's narrative arguments, I engage with the everyday details of her novels and what they reveal

³ Certainly, this project might be *read* from two perspectives. To take another example, it might be said that Gaskell uses Alice Wilson's breads in *Mary Barton* to demonstrate Alice's connections to her childhood home and symbolize her work to maintain community – but while such a perspective characterizes the symbolism of Alice's breads to the reader, *the bread is equally symbolic to the present diners in the scene*. Although there is overlap in the resulting analysis of the two perspectives, this paper prioritizes the diegetic world of the novels in analysis because it allows me to parallel the execution of fictional domestic dining scenes with historical ones, which would not have had things like the input of an author, an overarching theme, or thematic symbolism.

⁴ Although it seems commonsensical to instead analyze historical dining scenes or accounts of them for this purpose, such first-hand accounts of nineteenth-century dining are often idealized. Rachel Rich explains that accounts of things like "unhappiness, argument, or violence around the [dining] table" were possibly "later destroyed, or, most likely, were never recorded at all" (Rich 63). Anne Bower similarly argues that cookbooks are not merely instructional or descriptive but must be understood as providing a setting for escapism (Bower 37), and Nicola Humble discusses the fantasy and illusion involved in popular cookery books.

about the intricacy of the domestic dining scene, like the subtle cues and interactions between diners, the reliance on fellow performers to understand their role, the expectation of cooperation, or the improvised adjustments in performance. Realist fiction, like the novels I analyze, occupies a position between the real and unreal (Byerly 5), coming to resemble reality through its details if not also its dramatization of events. As such, realist fiction includes content that in a first-hand account might have been thought objectionable by Victorian readers. Gaskell's novels, like others of the period, still employ narrative gaps, hinting at 'nonnarratable' plots (Langland 290) and 'softened evils' that "avoid obscenity without being false" (Hyde 152). Kent Puckett argues that the nineteenth-century novel is largely dependent on the inclusion of the social mistake to help "give character its depth, narrative its desire, and narration its authority" (Puckett 15). As Puckett explains, social mistakes or 'bad form' are not strictly opposed to 'good form' but are a "messy, sumptuous mix" of good and bad (Puckett 18). It is the details of social mishaps, such as Mr. Holbrook's method of eating peas in *Cranford*, that are necessary to my analysis and that can primarily be found in fictional domestic dining scenes over first-hand accounts. Such social mistakes are necessary to examine how diners adjust for the unpredictable elements (or 'performance risks') of their fellow performers, but they are also important to examine as another tool *in* the performances. In other words, a common etiquette among established friends involves ongoing negotiations that permit imperfections.

Gaskell's narratives are, of course, not without bias. Gaskell has been criticized for her 'conservative' stance (Algotsson 4), which includes her "natural liking for tradition and continuity" and her "acceptance of a social hierarchy" (Duthie 90). However, as Patsy Stoneman argues, "[w]hat looks like acquiescence in Gaskell may [...] also be pragmatic negotiation" (Stoneman, "Gaskell, Gender, and the Family"). In the pragmatic negotiations or "conscious voice of reason" of her novels, Gaskell takes a perspective between seeing societal norms as fully limiting (a kind of victimhood) and full compliance with those norms (complicity), particularly when it comes to gender (Stoneman, *Elizabeth Gaskell* 19). Gaskell's characters take up gender-oriented roles in their domestic dining performances: broadly, feminine roles are overtly community-oriented and have to do with the subtle arrangement of their fellow diners, while masculine roles take on the 'lead' as the centre of attention, as the diner *apparently* arranging the scene, and as the source of conversation. The moral expectations of these roles, however, overlap in the dining objectives centred around care: physical care through food and emotional care through social interactions.

Narratively, Gaskell prescribes an ethics of community responsibility and care for each diner in their role. For example, in *Cranford* Peter Jenkyns uses his position as male lead and centre of attention to repair friendships within the community; in *North and South*, Mr. Thornton gradually learns to take on a position of stewardship and care that is enabled by the power he wields as a 'master'. Instead of outright criticizing or challenging accepted hierarchies of

gender or class, Gaskell subtly opens them up to new possibilities. In *North and South*, for example, while Margaret Hale labours and suffers to support her family, Dixon reminds Margaret of the necessity of her traditionally feminine role as 'director' or caretaker: "There is not another person in the house fit to give a direction of any kind, and there is so much to be done" (Gaskell, NS 252). In addition to supporting her father and brother following Mrs. Hale's death, however, Margaret uses her position to arrange friendships between her father, Nicholas Higgins, and Mr. Thornton that also allow her to influence the arrangement of class relations beyond her immediate reach. In another example, Alice Wilson in *Mary Barton* takes on a traditionally mothering role for her local community, but through this caring role she facilitates a *network* of care, like in the way she connects Mary Barton with Margaret Jennings (Gaskell, MB 28-31). Correlatively, Gaskell demonstrates what her characters accomplish in their domestic dining scenes through the negotiation of existing norms rather than outright dissidence. As I demonstrate throughout the rest of this paper, such subtle performances of gendered hospitality recur throughout Gaskell's novels and highlight the mingling of labour and leisure that Gaskell represents as critical to maintaining community.

Dramaturgical Approach

Erving Goffman's *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* has provided me with several key concepts that help to illuminate the dining performances in Gaskell. In Goffman's terminology, the kitchen and like spaces in the dining

scene comprise a kind of backstage or 'back region' (Rich 81), ideally distinct from the stage or 'front region' that is composed of the dining room and drawing room for the duration of the scene (Goffman 238). The dining room and drawing room are geographically stable, bounded regions that allow the domestic dining scenes to be planned, physically contained, repetitive, and temporally enclosed, as scenes should be (Goffman 22, 106; see also Daly and Forman 371). In terms of the dramaturgical metaphor, foods are the 'props' that come to constitute the main part of a character's 'personal front' as the items most intimately identified with the performer (Goffman 24): as Pirjo Koivuvaara succinctly explains, "to consume food is to analogously consume its properties, both biological and symbolic, and in this way to be what one eats" (Koivuvaara 128).

The performers are primarily composed of the host(s) and guest(s).⁵ The performances of individuals are often embellished in comparison to their 'everyday'⁶ outside of the dining scene, but these embellishments are taken up as

⁵ In dining scenes, Goffman suggests that it is convenient to call the hosts the 'performers', either because they are in control of the setting or because they take a more dramatically prominent part, and therefore to call the guests the 'audience', distinguishing two separate teams (Goffman 92). The roles of host and guest are not, however, so easily distinguished: there is no such distinction, for example, in the meals that Frederick Hale shares with his family upon returning home in *North and South* (Gaskell, NS 246-250), or in the party that Miss Jenkyns hosts for Mary Smith in *Cranford* (Gaskell, CR 8-9). To be a host is not to be on a 'team' but to take on a malleable and shifting role. The alternative to diners all being on the same team is that each performer comprises their own 'team', which would disregard the fundamental cooperation in domestic dining performances.

⁶ In my analysis of the relation between the performances of the domestic dining scenes and the 'everyday' outside of them, I do not presume that the external 'everyday' of the characters involves a more 'real' or distinct self beneath the

part of the scene. To break continuity between the dining scene and outside of it is a kind of performance risk and can bring question to the character of the performance because the domestic dining performance is integrated into everyday life. As in any team performance, the performers in a domestic dining scene are each dependent on the good intentions of the others (Goffman 82). In addition, they seek to alleviate the social barriers between diners. In Goffman's terms, scene management entails the performers' cooperative effort to manage the overall *effect* of the scene.

When performers disagree in a domestic dining scene it is generally not about social norms but how to best uphold them. For example, when in *Cranford* Mr. Holbrook serves peas at his dinner with only knives and two-pronged forks, Miss Matty, Miss Pole, and Miss Smith each attempt to maintain the norm of non-conflict in a different way: Miss Matty participates in the meal by eating her peas slowly on the prongs of the fork; Miss Pole refuses the strain of eating the peas entirely; and Miss Smith follows the lead of her host (Gaskell, CR 34). Although the ladies disagree on the correct action, they each attempt to cooperate with the shared working consensus. Although certainly any etiquette can be read as a performance (and Goffman's work has a variety of applications), I employ the

social performances; I equally do not presume that this 'everyday' is merely equivalent to an extension or continuation of the domestic dining social performances. Such a question is outside my area of interest. I will suggest here that, ideally, there is *continuity* between the self of the dining scene and the self outside of it, and that to break this continuity is a performance risk.

dramaturgical approach here because of its existing common usage as a metaphor for and its particular suitability to ordering the facts of a dining scene.

Many of Goffman's examples, in addition to those taken from domestic dining scenes, come from scenes of traditional labour, with a team of performers labouring for the pleasure and purchase of the audience.⁷ Although I use Goffman's dramaturgical framework, this paper differs from Goffman's work in scope as I focus on the everyday domestic labour involved in domestic dining performances. Langland argues that the middle-class Victorian wife is complicit in "[performing] the ideological work of managing the class question and displaying the signs of the family's status" in the domestic space, especially in relation to managing the lower classes (Langland 291). Along a similar line of thought more particular to dining, Annette Cozzi argues that "the sheer mundanity of eating conceals deeply embedded power structures" (Cozzi 4) and that national identity and ideology is signified and cultivated especially in the home through food, again largely under the purview of the 'angel of the hearth'. The protagonist of *Mary Barton* is an example of how national ideology is cultivated in the home: Mary is brought into a space between her own victimhood and complicity: as she is encouraged by Mrs. Wilson to take on the domestic labour imposed on her by traditional gender expectations, she accepts the masculine roles of Jem and her father that require her to care for them without thanks; at the same time, her active

⁷ Goffman's examples include retail work, the operation of a tourist hotel, and general service occupations.

care enables Jem's eventual verdict of innocence and she eventually finds herself a form of happiness as a housewife, where she presumably rears her son in the same mould of traditional expectations. Particularly relevant to this paper, Mary is drawn into her traditionally feminine and domestic role only as she is brought into the role of hostess. As I discuss later in this paper, the role of hostess is not just coincidental to traditionally feminine gender roles (of daughter, wife, mother): it is integral to familial and communal well-being.

As noted above, this paper also considers the intermingling of domestic labour with the *leisure* that comes with food and free time in domestic dining scenes. In existing literature on the nineteenth century there is a tendency to assume there is pleasure in everyday food and conversation without presenting further analysis (Rich) or to overlook domestic dining scenes as a common form of leisure entirely (Bailey, Baker, Cross, Schlicke). Previous scholarly research suggests that the 'leisure revolution' of the nineteenth century brought about a new form of leisure that was "severed from its traditional moorings in work, community, and common custom" (Bailey, "The Problem of Leisure" 20; see also Cross, "Rational Recreation" 87); however, in this paper I argue that domestic dining performances recollect that traditional model of leisure in which there is labour alongside the cooperative pleasures of dining. Digestion is an individual effort but the performances around eating are highly cooperative, like with the reciprocal performances of Nicholas Higgins and Mr. Hale at tea in *North and South* or the peacekeeping efforts of the diners around Mrs. Jamieson in *Cranford*.

Just as these performances can be laborious there is also pleasure in being at once performer and audience member, and in performing for oneself and one's team. Despite Mr. Hale's misgivings and Nicholas Higgins' bewilderment, they have a pleasant tea together; the efforts around the difficulties at Mrs. Jamieson's tea result in the Cranford ladies befriending Lady Glenmire. The pleasure of performing comes in part from the skill and cooperation required to execute the performances in addition to the pleasant, often embellished effect of the scene itself (whether that effect is of friendliness, financial comfort, or otherwise). The struggle of the echoed self-awareness in performance is summarized in a *Cranford* dining scene as the ladies maintain their performances "though she knew, and we knew, and she knew that we knew, and we knew that she knew that we knew" that it was all a part of the dining scene (Gaskell, CR 5). As I demonstrate in this paper, the diners labour to perform but also have the pleasure of performing; they labour to manage and engage one another in their community but also have the pleasure of engagement.

Structure

This paper covers three novels by Elizabeth Gaskell: *Mary Barton* (1848), *Cranford* (1853), and *North and South* (1855). I will briefly summarize the overarching significance of each novel here. *Cranford*, as one of Gaskell's 'social' novels, is the most relevant: many of the text's 'crises' occur around food, and Cranford society provides a clear demonstration of the cooperation and

careful performances that commonly occur in domestic dining scenes.⁸ The other two novels that I analyze from Gaskell, *Mary Barton* and *North and South*, are known as Gaskell's 'industrial' novels. Although characters in *Mary Barton* (and, to some extent, *North and South*) are more often restricted in their food choices due to poverty, domestic dining scenes still occur, and the management of self and community that occurs within these scenes is still significant. *Mary Barton* demonstrates the active implementation of conventional performance roles as the protagonist learns to take on the role of hostess in the process of managing present adversity and enacting an acceptable femininity; furthermore, the persistent threat of starvation in the novel means that food and dining scenes are of crucial significance to the characters. *North and South* especially speaks to the centrality of domestic dining scenes to the 'everyday' outside of them, with the roles taken on by Margaret Hale and Mr. Thornton inherently linked to their intentions of care.

In the chapters that follow, I demonstrate the cooperation, complexity, labour, and significance of purposeful performances in domestic dining scenes, especially in relation to the sense of pleasure and community care that those

⁸ While the town of Cranford seems eccentric, and therefore irrelevant to inquiries into relative historical dining performances, Stoneman explains that Cranford should be understood as a "sub-culture" of women "delimited from the dominant group" of men, rather than as a different culture entirely (Stoneman, *Elizabeth Gaskell* 94). Furthermore, although Cranford society is primarily women, it is not exclusively women: there are notable male characters that take part in Cranford's 'sub-culture', like Captain Brown and Peter Jenkyns. *Cranford* is included in this paper because its characters engage in an exaggerated but not culturally unsuitable etiquette structure.

scenes produce both for their duration and for the external 'everyday'. Focussing on bread, tea, and desserts and sweets, in the first chapter I argue that food is used by performers as a means of communication: by providing foods with different associations for fellow diners or engaging with foods in particular ways, performers manage things like self-identity, social roles, emotional states, and the personal relationships of oneself or others in domestic dining scenes. In the subsequent 'Dining' section, I analyze the collaborative performances that occur beside and around the central food props, especially regarding the management of the scene. Beginning with an analysis of domestic labour and leisure, in section 2.1 Domestic Labour and Leisure I draw on the work of scholars like Peter Bailey and Monica Cohen to argue that while nineteenth-century leisure in general became more private, more academically-oriented,⁹ and more temporally and spatially distinct from work, domestic dining scenes recall an earlier form of leisure that was community-centric and mingled with domestic labour. In section 2.2 Cooperation and Community I explain that domestic dining scenes are executed through the cooperative performances that common etiquette enables; I then argue that this cooperation fosters a sense of community and interpersonal responsibility. Finally, in 2.3 Roles, I elaborate on the labour and leisure involved in specific dining performances and the intents and effects of those performances. Throughout this chapter I demonstrate how domestic dining scenes involve

⁹ By 'academically-oriented' I mean that leisure activities included things like attending lectures, touring museums, and reading canonical literature.

performances of self to others that are used to manage the scene and the others in it, and how this scene management is then a way of collectively caring for community. Together, these chapters follow through on the dramaturgical analysis of nineteenth-century domestic dining scenes that I have set out here in the introduction.

1. Food

In his book on the meaning of meat, Nick Fiddes observes that “whatever the reason, we routinely use food to express relationships: amongst ourselves and with our environment” (Fiddes 38). In this chapter I analyze how characters use food in Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Mary Barton*, *Cranford*, and *North and South* as a way of expressing self in relation to other performers in domestic dining scenes. Michael Parrish Lee contends that “for many nineteenth-century novelists, the need to eat often represented a confining or overwhelming mode of materiality that threatened to efface individual subjectivity and choice” (Lee, “Introduction” 8); I suggest here that the decision to eat particular foods in particular ways with particular people is then an attempt to manage or evade that threat of materiality by connecting people on a personal, and not just physical, level. Foods do not have an intrinsic symbolism but are “used to symbolize” (Fiddes 41): this is to say that foods are dependent on use and circumstance for significance beyond being edible. Writing on nineteenth-century bourgeois consumption, for example, Rachel Rich explains that “[b]ecause in both France and England there were different foods associated with manual and cerebral work, eating the right foods in social situations could reinforce a person’s social standing” (Rich 44).¹⁰ This chapter regards how performers use food as ‘props’ in domestic dining scenes to

¹⁰ This paper does not comprise a discussion of taste, which has been considered by both Marjorie Garson and John Paul Kanwit at least regarding *North and South*.

communicate and to manage things like self-identity, social roles, emotional states, and personal relationships.

This chapter is divided into three sections by food category. In 'Bread', I explore how performers use the most commonplace of food props to engage their fellow diners on the basis of a fundamental similarity – the need for bread – rather than restricting communication on the basis of things like social status or money. Notable examples taken up in the section include how the elegant economy of *Cranford*, including the serving of bread, facilitates friendliness between diners, and how in *Mary Barton* Alice Wilson subtly manages her tea party with her special breads, which become symbolic and generous gifts from an expert hostess rather than an economical dish from a woman living in poverty. Next, I discuss the use of tea to remind performers of their societal roles – whether those roles are of Englishness, temperance, or femininity – and provide comfort through those reminders. One notable example in this section is a discussion of the working-class characters in *Mary Barton* whose shared holiday tea represents an ideal of British generosity, which Gaskell demonstrates is not limited to the more affluent classes. Other examples include the symbolically feminine power of tea *over food* to both soothe and restore Mrs. Davenport in *Mary Barton* and an analysis of the power of the tea performance to enforce sobriety, at least for Nicholas Higgins in *North and South*. In 'Desserts and Sweets' I analyze the use of dessert aesthetics to indicate social belonging, especially when that belonging is oriented around a fantasy of mutual refinement. Notable examples in this section include Mr. Hale's

pretended denial of fruit as a denial of his childishness in *North and South*; the motherly care that Mr. Thornton learns to enact in the same novel through gifts of fruit to Mrs. Hale; and the management of a 'genteel' community identity in *Cranford* through various sweets. Overall, this chapter is dedicated to an analysis of different foods as powerful and subtle tools of communication in domestic dining scenes. Through analysis I find that as performers communicate through food to manage self-identities, social roles, emotional states, and personal relationships in domestic dining scenes, this cooperative management extends to and is a part of collective community care. In this chapter I demonstrate that performers' food choices are always significant and personal, even when they are conventional or obligatory.

1.1 Bread

In her introduction to bread-making in *Modern Cookery*, Eliza Acton writes: "It is surely a singular fact that the one article of our daily food on which health depends more than on any other, is precisely that which is obtained in England with the greatest difficulty – good, light, and pure bread" (Acton 594).¹¹ Bread, along with other grains and starches, was the staple food generally and historically for the English, especially the English working class (Black 5; Bruegel, "Introduction" 21; Koivuvaara 44). Although Acton's phrasing suggests that only good bread was difficult to acquire, bread in general was increasingly

¹¹ Acton's specification of 'pure' bread likely refers to not uncommon adulteration of bread (Burnett 102).

difficult to afford in ‘the Hungry Forties’, an issue that Gaskell explores in her ‘industrial’ novels *Mary Barton* and *North and South*. As daily foods and foods of necessity (Burnett 63), grains and starches are some of the most frequently used props in domestic dining scenes – but their presence can carry significance beyond their being usual or necessary. Breads and grains in particular are frequently used to produce friendliness by suggesting a fundamental similarity between diners.

Bread as a Staple

As a staple food of all classes, the serving and eating of bread is generally equalizing, though the consistent presence of butter can suggest relative financial comfort. The society in *Cranford* prides itself on serving inexpensive and accessible food when giving parties, like the bread-and-butter even served by Miss Jenkyns and the Honourable Mrs. Jamieson (Gaskell, CR 5, 9), and this communal decision reveals the cooperative and sociable nature of the town. Although the narrator, Mary Smith, tends to make fun of their ‘elegant economy’, the serving of foods like bread demonstrates the ladies’ dedication to maintaining sociability and apparent equality within their society. Mrs. Jamieson, however, who can presumably well afford more, skimps at her tea and serves *thin* bread and butter (among other inadequacies) (Gaskell, CR 77). Rather than adhering to Cranford etiquette, Mrs. Jamieson takes advantage of their elegant economy. Whether her intention is to inform the Cranford ladies that they are not worth the good bread and butter, or merely to save some money on the party, Mrs. Jamieson

makes use of her pre-existing status in the town and refuses to foster a good impression. This is, of course, in line with Mrs. Jamieson's general complacency and sense of self-importance, from denying her friends the pleasure of meeting with Lady Glenmire (and only relenting out of necessity) to later insulting her own relation (Gaskell, CR 70, 141-142). Mrs. Jamieson is not ignorant of proper performance but disregards it in favour of personal economies: rather than managing the scene, Mrs. Jamieson puts the other ladies into the position of managing or compensating for her neglect. As a result, she is tolerated rather than well-liked: when she falls asleep before cards, for example, the other ladies would rather let her sleep than have her join their game (Gaskell, CR 66-67). Their performances are exchanged: Mrs. Jamieson does not want to labour in the scene (to stay awake, for example, or to manage her household), and so the ladies occasionally allow her to be excluded. It is not *only* because of the bread that Mrs. Jamieson is not well-liked, but the thin bread is one way among many that Mrs. Jamieson neglects her relationship to the other Cranford women.

Mrs. Jamieson's inaction contrasts with the decisive performance of Lady Glenmire in the same novel. When Lady Glenmire, who formerly intimidated the Cranford ladies by her rank (Gaskell, CR 69, 76), orders some more bread and butter at a party, the narrator astutely remarks that "this mutual want made us better acquainted with her than we should ever have been with talking about the Court" (Gaskell, CR 78). Lady Glenmire orders the additional bread and butter to satisfy her fellow guests as much as herself: it is not a selfish order but a way to

manage the ease and progress of the scene. As Koivuvaara explains, “[i]t is thus communal hunger, the ‘mutual want’ that the female guests share, which connects them across the rank divide” (Koivuvaara 188). Annette Cozzi discusses ‘ordering’ as an indication of gentlemanly power (Cozzi 48), but in a town of self-sufficient Amazons (Gaskell, CR 3), it works just as well for a lady. While Lady Glenmire maintains her rank above the other ladies by her act of *ordering* the bread, she also draws attention to their fundamental similarity by her choice of food, as the narrator describes: she balances her status with the needs of herself, the other ladies, and the scene in general. Suddenly, the ladies are free to engage with Lady Glenmire as they would in any other dining scene – with cards and conversation. Lady Glenmire is evaluated positively at the end of the evening for her effective management of the scene; “she [has] made a pleasant impression,” not the least because of her contrast with and her ability to counteract Mrs. Jamieson’s ineptitude (Gaskell, CR 79). When Mrs. Jamieson later decides to pretend Lady Glenmire does not exist because of her change in status through marriage, the rest of the Cranford ladies do not feel the need to follow suit – after all, they are all aristocratic, and ‘Mrs. Hoggins’ has proved herself already (Gaskell, CR 141-142).

Bread suggests basic needs and their fulfillment. Although fundamental, bread props can still be intensely personal: for example, Miss Matty’s tendency for nostalgia in *Cranford* means that her bread must be “cut to the imaginary pattern of excellence that [exists] in [her] mind, as being the way which her

mother had preferred” (Gaskell, CR 130).¹² Rich explains that many culinary historians distinguish between the middle and working classes by the ability of the middle class to choose what to eat (12), but, as will become evident throughout this chapter, members of the working class still make decisions about how to treat or use their food. Tamara Ketabgian discusses how simple foods like “fresh butter and new bread” can become “unusual treats” in poor financial circumstances (Ketabgian 126), and this is especially demonstrated at the tea Alice Wilson holds in *Mary Barton* to introduce Margaret Jennings and Mary Barton (Gaskell, MB 28). Alice’s performance as a hostess is characterised by a kind of noble suffering, epitomized by the position she insists on taking in her lofty but, unknown to her guests, thoroughly uncomfortable makeshift chair, “an old board arranged [...] upon two candle boxes set on end” (Gaskell, MB 29, 30). Alice’s preparations prior to her guests’ arrival are thorough, and her pleasure in the work is demonstrated by an exuberant exclamation in the narration: “How busy Alice felt!” (Gaskell, MB 29). She sets the scene with a ‘merry’ fire, and arranges her newly dusted chairs and table, complete with ‘friendly’ cups and saucers, in front of it (Gaskell, MB 29). Alice uses most of her wages on tea and butter for this seemingly casual gathering, purchasing proper black tea instead of the herb tea

¹² Although I do not discuss them in this paper, even when grains or starches are explicitly used as medicine or as foods of desperation, they still hold interpersonal significance as food props. A clear example is Mrs. Forrester’s ‘famous’ bread-jelly (Gaskell, CR 103), which is both a usual dish for the sick (Jewry 329) and, in the town of Cranford, a mark of favour with which Mrs. Forrester welcomes Samuel Brown into the community.

she normally uses for herself (Gaskell, MB 29): this tea is meant to be comforting as it unites the guests in a happy image of participation in the national everyday.¹³ The butter that Alice purchases for the bread is not just for the flavour but becomes a 'flourish' in the performance: it is an extravagance, a decoration, a demonstration of the work that was required to pay for this tea as well as the work put in to make it comfortable (Gaskell, MB 29). Alice arranges the setting to be comfortable and welcoming, but she has also indicated the expense of the tea with butter so that her guests can know upon entering that this is an *occasion* and respond accordingly.

Alice also presents a variety of bread at her tea, and it is largely through these breads that she manages the scene: "a quantity of the oat bread of the north, the 'clap-bread' of Cumberland and Westmoreland" and "a good piece of a four-pound loaf of common household bread" (Gaskell, MB 29). As a staple food, bread is a safe choice for serving, and it is also likely Alice's only food option, but she chooses these particular breads deliberately. Alice's special oat bread and clap-bread are kept in a thin box, in fact a relic from home as much as the breads are (Gaskell, MB 31), which is hidden on a shelf out of view (Gaskell, MB 16). Their usual position relative to the room indicates their value to her, as a tempting treat only fetched on special occasions but perhaps gazed at in moments of homesickness. These breads are made special by Alice's history rather than their price, and part of her reason for selecting them was "the belief that her visitors

¹³ See section 1.2 for further discussion of tea.

would have an unusual treat in eating the bread of her childhood” (Gaskell, MB 29). The provenance of food is significant in general, and as Koivuvaara explains, “Alice connects the bread to her childhood memories in the rural north of England, memories that are sentimentalised by geographical and temporal distance and which present the past almost as a pastoral idyll although it appears to have been poor and filled with hardships” (Koivuvaara 91). Upon seeing her guests eat the bread, furthermore, Alice remarks that she used to be sent such bread by her mother as a gift from home; Margaret, astutely reading Alice’s purpose in presenting the breads, prompts Alice to continue her story and Alice is able to take centre stage for a time (Gaskell, MB 30). Alice’s choice of bread in short allows her to adeptly fulfill her role as hostess: she physically sustains herself and her guests, provides a treat to distinguish the tea as an event, and with the bread’s history she initiates and maintains their pleasant conversation. Alice is generally a mothering figure in her community (Duthie 124) and she continues this role at her tea. By bringing these breads out to be shared between Margaret and Mary, Alice attempts to unite them as if they had known one another from their childhoods because the breads are connected to *her* childhood, and through this community-centred care she figures herself as maternal. It is fitting that the enduring friendship in *Mary Barton* is initiated by Alice at this tea, as Alice uses her position in her local community to form networks of care and support (as discussed further in section 1.2). Alice thoroughly prepares for the tea, but it is through her breads specifically that she manages the scene for its duration,

manages her relationship to her guests (as a foundational connection to their community), and manages her guests' relationship to each other (as if old friends).

1.2 Tea

In *Warnes' Every-Day Cookery*, “Tea, two ounces” is listed first in a week's worth of food for one person, indicating its fundamental and everyday importance (Jewry 1). Tea came to hold a central position in nineteenth-century English minds and homes as “an icon of English domesticity” which, with the rise of domesticity in Victorian discourse (Fromer 531), became “a national emblem” (Koivuvaara 92). Like bread, tea in this period is considered a necessity (Fromer 531), but while bread is a physical necessity that thereby becomes symbolic, tea is a symbolic necessity that becomes physical. As Julie Fromer explains, tea was understood as a uniting aspect of English identity, “temporarily erasing the boundaries between groups to unify the nation into a coherent whole” (Fromer 531-532).¹⁴ Tea was historically a luxury in the eighteenth century; it therefore retained a sense of luxury into the nineteenth century even as it became a symbolic necessity in representing English identity (Ketabgian 3; Rich 79). Fromer argues that, as both necessity and luxury, “tea epitomized Victorian notions that the middle class [had] sufficient wealth to indulge in physical pleasures, plus the moral fortitude to withstand habits of excess or gluttony”

¹⁴ Although Koivuvaara identifies an ideological threat in the foreign origins of tea (Koivuvaara 208), Fromer argues that, once it could be grown in India, “tea is naturalized as English through its status as an imperial commodity” (Fromer 533, 537). Furthermore, as Koivuvaara even acknowledges, the tea-drinkers in Gaskell's novels do not consider tea to be a threat (Koivuvaara 208).

(Fromer 540). Tea (as a drink and as a meal) can therefore be conceptualized within the leisure discourse of the era, which was also concerned with continual moderation. Time spent in leisure or recreation was expected to be for the ‘re-creation’ of strength, to fuel the continuation of labour (Bailey, “The Problem of Leisure” 25), and tea was part of this ‘re-creation’ (Ketabgian 129). There was a concern that unstructured leisure time would threaten the respectable structures of the everyday (Bailey, “The Problem of Leisure” 17, 21), and, as Fromer explains, the physical effect of tea “involves the embodiment of idealized notions of English social practice, such as social charm, personal grace, and lively but polite discourse” (Fromer 533). In short, tea was conceptualized as a way to manage problems of leisure. Drinking tea has therefore been acknowledged in existing scholarship as a necessity, a labour, a pleasure, and a luxury – as I demonstrate in this paper, however, tea is not unique in its position: other foods also follow this pattern of necessity, labour, pleasure, and luxury. Tea is rather the archetypal performance of ease and respectability, the model meal and food prop around which the dining scene is arranged. In this section, I analyze how performers use tea in domestic dining scenes to cooperatively manage leisure time in a way that reinforces community relationships, national identity, and temperance.

Tea, Englishness, and Community

Wolfgang Schivelbusch argues that “[t]he modern hot beverages offer nothing comparable to the communal rites of alcohol consumption,” and that “[c]offee and tea drinkers form no internally united community [as] only an

assemblage of lone individuals” (Schivelbusch 177). It is evident, however, that in nineteenth-century England tea to some extent *replaced* the sociability of alcohol, as it is even the drink of choice for a toast early in *Mary Barton* (Gaskell, MB 18). Furthermore, the inclusion of tea in Mary Barton’s pay as a seamstress indicates the sociable nature of the work (Gaskell, MB 26-27) and effectively encourages friendliness between coworkers as Mary continues to associate with Sally Leadbitter despite not particularly liking her (Gaskell, MB 90-91). To take another example, upon Peter Jenkyns’ return in *Cranford* Mary Smith makes tea for the Jenkyns to reinforce (and parallel) the work she did to retrieve Peter from India and reunite him with Miss Matty in England (Gaskell, CR 149). When Mr. Thornton nearly forgets to have tea with his mother in *North and South*, Mrs. Thornton worries not for the lack of nutrition, but because her son has forgotten this daily social performance with her and the connection it represents (Gaskell, NS 187-189). Taking tea together is a demonstration of openness and amiability towards the other performers in the scene, and serving tea encourages such a relation between performers.

The holiday tea in the opening chapters of *Mary Barton* demonstrates an achievable happiness for the Barton and Wilson families: a happiness that is social, communal, simple, and everyday. The Barton family presumably has regular access to tea, as it is not listed among the items for the younger Mary Barton to purchase (Gaskell, MB 15): tea is a usual beverage that is here elevated by being shared. The Bartons and Wilsons intimately unite in the scene by eating

and drinking these patriotic food props, with the tea-cups and saucers shared in a group effort (whether that means the younger Mary and Jem drinking out of one or Alice bringing her own) (Gaskell, MB 16). Furthermore, their communal effort extends beyond this one event: the Wilsons recognize that this tea from the Bartons is “hospitality that, in their turn, they [too] should have such pleasure in offering” (Gaskell, MB 15). Rather than a system of necessary exchange, the giving and receiving of meals is understood between the Bartons and Wilsons as a pleasurable opportunity to demonstrate one’s capability to serve and the achievable happiness that comes from participating in such a nationalistic and (ideally) daily ritual. This holiday tea sustains the friendships between the Bartons and the Wilsons and supports their immediate, local community; at the same time, however, the Bartons serve tea to reinforce the particularly English character of the scene. Although the Bartons and Wilsons find some solace and hospitality within their immediate community, the fantasy of the tea is that the hospitality of this community extends outwards to a united English population. Through the course of the novel, the idealistic image of a united English community is proved false as men suffer without work, members of the Barton and Wilson families fall ill and die, John Barton grows increasingly desperate, and Jem Wilson is falsely accused of murder. The happiness of the initial holiday tea is in part the happiness of a connection to an imagined English community, but this tea is centred on a kind of consumerism that the Bartons and Wilsons cannot possibly maintain (Gaskell, MB 14-15) and the tea is remembered by John Barton in a sober

moment as an “extravagance” (Gaskell, MB 22).¹⁵ The tragic realization of this initial tea is that, unlike the local working-class communities in *Mary Barton*, the national community is not founded on exchanges of hospitality but on purchase. These working-class families find themselves estranged from their nation through poverty and spend more than they can afford in an attempt to feel connected. Although symbolically fraught, the domestic leisure of tea creates a space for sociability among friends and for a working-class family might be one of few moments when they can feel a part of an idealized nation.

The clearest connection between tea and Englishness in the three novels under consideration occurs for herbal tea rather than the typical black tea. Koivuvaara identifies Alice Wilson's medicinal herbal teas in *Mary Barton* as a familiar “lower-class tradition” that is “rooted in the English nature and the

¹⁵ The intentions of hospitality and care that structure domestic dining scenes rely in part on consumerist habits. Even working-class households are haunted by consumerist tendencies in the novels, such that they engage in what Tamara Ketabgian calls “ceremonial acts of waste” to “convey specific working-class values of comfort, community, and home,” like the tea that Alice Wilson purchases for her guests but can scarcely afford in *Mary Barton* (Ketabgian 2-3; Gaskell, MB 29). Christoph Linder argues that in a desperate mimicry of consumerism some poorer households treat necessities as generous indulgences, like the warm fire that the Higgins light for Margaret Hale when she visits in *North and South* (Lindner 36; Gaskell, NS 99). Although some households might be “[u]nder-furnished and under-decorated” (Linder 36), they continue to pursue a full setting and a full stomach in the mingling of consumerist and hospitable ideals. Acknowledging the link between hospitality and consumerism is not intended as a criticism of the diners who are bound to it: these diners do significant work in connecting their communities through hospitality and fostering networks of care.

English culture” (Koivuvaara 104, 102).¹⁶ Rich explains that nineteenth-century medicine commonly combined cookery and healing in continuity with earlier periods, and nutrition similarly “continued to be made up of a combination of scientific knowledge and traditional customs and beliefs” (Rich 44). Much like her breads, Alice’s preparation of herbal teas suggests her nurturing disposition, produces a communal spirit, and recalls her own rural past. As Koivuvaara explains:

[Alice’s] knowledge of plants and their possible uses as medicine is used to refer back to her childhood in the rural North of England rather than to the proximity of countryside of her present home. She is also a representative of the tradition of neighbourly help for in addition to her occupation as a sick nurse, she also feeds her sick neighbours, poor as she might be [...]. (Koivuvaara 104)

When Alice gives her teas as gifts, she initiates and provides a foundation for domestic dining scenes, linking the scenes and their participants to her and to each other. To take examples in the novel, she collects nettles for ‘spring drink’ to give to Mrs. Mary Barton (Gaskell, MB 17), collects meadow-sweet to make tea for Mrs. Wilson’s cough (Gaskell, MB 119), and dries wild herbs in her cellar room (Gaskell, MB 16). The work of gathering is one that she takes on “when no more profitable occupation offer[s] itself,” and she finds pleasure in the work of helping others – while acknowledging that it *is* work (Gaskell, MB 16, 32). In the same way that Alice attempts to unite Mary Barton and Margaret Jennings through her

¹⁶ Kanwit calls Alice’s use of herbs “almost witch-like” and a recognizable stereotype of poor classes (Kanwit 198), but Alice is described as a warm, caring woman before her use of herbs is detailed to curtail that impression (Gaskell, MB 12).

bread, she works to help and unite her neighbourhood with her healing teas to construct a local network of care. Alice's work is evidently effective: when Will Wilson fantasizes about consoling Margaret Jennings and imagines a future with her, he immediately after recalls Alice Wilson's way of caring for her neighbours, and the herb teas she would make him as a treat on Sundays (Gaskell, MB 187-189). Mary and Jem Wilson, too, might be said to recall and relocate the neighbourly, earthy Englishness that Alice embodied when at the end of *Mary Barton* they move to Toronto with a cottage, a garden, and an orchard (Duthie 72; Gaskell, MB 378). Alice works to define her community as a part of or alongside England as a whole, but between the deaths and desperation of her neighbourhood and the readiness of the courts to prosecute an innocent man, it becomes evident that Alice, too, has an idealized vision of England as cooperative and generous. It is the failure of such a vision that leads to the easily criticized "escapist solution" at the end of *Mary Barton*, as Jem and Mary move to Canada (Duthie 72). No longer seeing values of interdependence and hospitality in the community in which they were raised, Jem and Mary leave England to form a new community instead of attempting to correct the old.

Tea and Leisure

One of the paradoxes of domestic dining scenes that is particularly evident with tea is that the performers must labour to maintain their composure and ease in performance and conversation. In *Cranford*, for example, the topic of Miss Matty's changed circumstances is avoided between Miss Matty and Mary Smith

over tea; instead, Mary “[gives] absent answers to the questions Miss Matty [puts] – almost as absently” (Gaskell, CR 131). Early in *North and South*, the Hales take their tea in near-silence as Mr. Hale thinks about his decision to leave Helstone and Margaret thinks about her unwanted proposal from Mr. Lennox (Gaskell, NS 32). Mr. Hale only discusses the Helstone move with Margaret in his study following tea (Gaskell, MB 32-33). It is not that certain topics are tabooed – there is still gossip (Gaskell, NS 32, 64) – but performers make a conscious effort to not speak about a topic in a way that would make it serious or distressing. At the same time, however, the performers must keep in mind the serious or distressing conversations that must be had later.

The Cranford ladies, of course, have many mid-afternoon teas, which were commonly taken amongst middle-class women (in contrast with the working-class evening teas) (Rich 79). As Rich explains, such afternoon teas were relatively informal, taking place in the sitting room rather than seated around a dinner table (Rich 79), but there was also much collective effort in performance towards ensuring that the apparent ease went undisturbed. Performance errors are usually observed and politely unmentioned, but Mary Smith relates them all in her narration in *Cranford*. Mrs. Jamieson's errors are the most potentially disruptive.¹⁷ Despite Mrs. Jamieson's evident importance to the town when it comes to providing examples of proper action, like with the cherry-brandy or

¹⁷ It becomes evident here that Mrs. Jamieson is a poor performer or ‘performance risk’; see section 2.2 for further discussion of performers who might be categorized in this manner.

Miss Matty's loss of status, Mrs. Jamieson also leaves her guests to compensate for her inadequate hospitality. At the dinner party she hosts for Lady Glenmire, Mrs. Jamieson has either not prepared Mr. Mulliner for his performance or cannot get him to remember it as he neglects to place the ladies in chairs (Gaskell, CR 75-76), and when the ladies struggle with topics for conversation, Mrs. Jamieson fails to provide guidance (Gaskell, CR 76). As a result, Mrs. Jamieson's guest of honour, Lady Glenmire, repeatedly must "[come] to the rescue of her hostess by guiding the ladies to their seats, attempting to initiate conversation, ringing for tea, and ordering more bread (Gaskell, CR 76-78). Besides Mrs. Jamieson's inability to actively play the part of hostess, she nearly mismanages setting out the tea. When the tea at her party is delayed, Mrs. Jamieson "[is] absorbed in wonder why Mr. Mulliner did not bring the tea; and, at length, the wonder [oozes] out of her mouth" (Gaskell, CR 77). While the other diners persist in their conversation and performance of ease despite their hunger, Mrs. Jamieson neglects and interrupts conversation to draw attention to the inadequacy that she should have corrected. Once Lady Glenmire rings the bell and tea is finally delivered, it is delayed again by Mrs. Jamieson's attention to her dog, Carlo, who is treated first and better than the ladies by being given the superior cream, leaving the ladies with milk. The issue is not that Carlo is included in the dining scene – he also attends Miss Barker's tea without incident (Gaskell, CR 66) – but that he is served onstage *first* and *better* than the other, hungrier guests (Gaskell, CR 77). If he had been served backstage, the cream would not have been such an issue.

Furthermore, the sugar-tongs that cannot pick up enough sugar without dropping the pieces ensure that the guest, in this case Mary Smith, is left in embarrassment for her apparent greed rather than the hostess for her frugality (Gaskell, CR 77). Mrs. Jamieson is slow to exert herself in the domestic dining scene, onstage or backstage, except to treat her dog.

Rather than complaining about the delayed tea, drawing attention to Mary's unluckiness, or questioning the size of the sugar-tongs, the ladies cooperate with the purpose of the scene and make the effort to perform ignorance for the sake of peace and ease. As part of the same 'performance team' and the same society, the other diners cooperate to ignore or correct Mrs. Jamieson's performance errors, knowing that failure on her part reflects failure of their own. Furthermore, any negative reaction in the course of the performance creates a new standard for what is allowable by or within this team, resulting in increased pressure to execute individual performances perfectly, criticism rather than cooperation, and increased tension to future domestic dining scenes – all potentially detrimental to the sociability of their society. Accordingly, throughout the text the other Cranford ladies realize they do not *need* Mrs. Jamieson's input when her purported expertise can be substituted by democratic decision, which has managed their community all along (Gaskell, CR 134-135).

Tea and Femininity

Tea, as a drink and meal, maintained connotations of femininity in the nineteenth-century (Rich 79, 112). Not only the Cranford ladies, but also "English

women from all levels of society drank copious amounts of tea” (Rich 79). As explained at the start of this section, tea was also associated with the notably feminine domestic sphere, even to some extent defining it (Fromer 534). Accordingly, performers often use tea to soothe and revive female characters because it re-establishes an ideal sense of self that is feminine, sociable, and taken care of by her community and nation¹⁸. In contrast with the actual medicinal effects of Alice Wilson’s herbal teas, black teas become medicinal because of the strength of their symbolism. There are plenty of medicinal uses of tea in the novels, some of which are more symbolic than physical remedies: when Mary Barton falls ill from stress, Mrs. Sturgis feeds spoonfuls of tea to her regularly during her recovery (Gaskell, MB 303, 336); Mrs. Hale, who, like Mrs. Davenport, is invested in performance and femininity (Gaskell, NS 140, 159), is more than once briefly refreshed with tea in her illness (Gaskell, NS 222, 247); Margaret Hale makes herself a trembling tea to calm herself after her injury and emotional display at the riot (Gaskell, NS 190); Alice Wilson makes tea to soothe Mrs. Wilson when her twins die (Gaskell, MB 76); and Mary Barton makes tea to restore Margaret Jennings’ nerves when she worries about Alice (Gaskell, MB 195). From these myriad examples it becomes evident that tea is drunk by women to energize as often as it is to soothe: because of its association with femininity,

¹⁸ Although perhaps typically women are expected to be self-sufficient even to the point of suffering (like with Mrs. Mary Barton or Margaret Jennings in *Mary Barton* or Margaret Hale in *North and South*), an ideal self would be woven into a caring community and nation.

tea is used as a kind of medicine to bring women back to a 'proper' or 'balanced' sense of self that is neither too active nor too languid.

When John Barton and George Wilson go to take care of the Davenport family, Wilson gets some tea for Mrs. Davenport because she is unable to eat bread. As Wilson explains, “[t]hem women always does best with tea, and such-like slop” (Gaskell, MB 60). Although tea was used as a substitute for food because it provides both the “illusion of a full warm meal” (Koivuvaara 50; see also Burnett 38) as well as energy from the caffeine (Rich 79), that is not the limit of its effectiveness. The tea allows Mrs. Davenport to take comfort in the domestic dining ritual commonly associated with it, though she cannot adequately perform such a scene in the grimy room that serves as her home. Mrs. Davenport is comforted by the tea for the same reason she is comforted by wearing black to her husband's funeral (Gaskell, MB 71): traditions can instill a sense of normalcy and 'everydayness' to strange or difficult situations. Wilson gives tea to Mrs. Davenport to revive her sense of self in order to revive her body.

The poverty that is imposed on Mr. Davenport through lack of work affects his manner in the domestic dining scene, as through starvation he loses the sense of self that would otherwise sustain his performance. In his confusion and desperation, Mr. Davenport “[snatches] at [the tea for his wife] with animal instinct, with a selfishness he had never shown in health” (Gaskell, MB 61). In the starvation brought on by poverty, Mr. Davenport is spurred to a selfish thoughtlessness reminiscent of his employers, becoming in this moment, like the

Carsons, “incapable of imaginative empathy” (Stoneman, “Gaskell, Gender, and the Family”). Yet, ultimately, it is governmental indifference to the plight of the working classes that deprives Mrs. Davenport of her tea, and the symbolic connection between tea and Englishness suggests that, reciprocally, to deny Mrs. Davenport her tea is also to deny her a connection to her country. Mrs. Davenport’s starvation is symbolic before it is physical, as she finds herself abandoned by and isolated from the national community that forms through social structures like tea. Furthermore, rousing Mrs. Davenport with tea ultimately does help her to eat gruel, proving the symbolic power of tea (Gaskell, MB 63). Through Mr. Davenport, who normally provides the food that his family now lacks, the Davenports’ domestic life is transformed in poverty into something unrecognizable and even illogical, nearly disconnected from English community and English ideology.¹⁹

Tea and Temperance

Alexis Soyer asserts (perhaps optimistically) in 1850 that tea “has replaced an unwholesome and heavy drink (ale) which used to be partaken of previously, and has created habits of sobriety” (Soyer 24). Furthermore, citing an 1839 text by G. G. Sigmond, Julie Fromer explains that tea was believed to remedy the body into sobriety (Fromer 533). It is well-documented that there was a shift from beer

¹⁹ Symbolically, through the tea brought by Mr. Davenport’s friends, Gaskell suggests that women are connected to their country solely through their working husbands. Gaskell tactfully overlooks the domestic work done by women that serves to instill ideology in the home (see Langland and Cozzi) in the process of her argument for working-class rights.

to tea as the ‘temperance drink’ in poor and wealthy households alike (Davin 143; Koivuvaara 45, 47).²⁰ It is perhaps unsurprising then that Margaret Hale’s solution to Bessy’s last wish, to keep her father from drink, is to invite Nicholas Higgins to tea (Gaskell, NS 220-221). The circumstances of the tea are not ideal. To begin, the invitation is last-minute, only ventured in desperation to keep a promise and only accepted because Higgins has ““many a thing [he] often wished to say to a parson”” (Gaskell, NS 221). In addition, Higgins himself is already slightly bewildered from alcohol and grief (Gaskell, NS 219), and this is to be the first meeting between him and Mr. Hale. The invitation is presented by Margaret, however, because of her implicit belief in the prop and performance of tea.

Margaret attempts to warn her father that Higgins is not the ideal guest and Mr. Hale seems to assume the worst, but by being treated to tea as a guest Higgins quickly takes up the appropriate role (Gaskell, NS 223). Margaret observes that “the decorous, kind-hearted, simple, old-fashioned gentleman [Mr. Hale], [has] unconsciously called out, by his own refinement and courteousness of manner, all the latent courtesy in the other” (Gaskell, NS 225), but it is not only Mr. Hale’s performance that inspires Nicholas Higgins to change demeanor. Respectability, as Peter Bailey explains, is “a choice of role rather than a universal normative mode” (Bailey, “A Role Analysis” 39), and it is this respectable role that Higgins plays to fulfill the part of guest that he has been given by way of Margaret’s

²⁰ It has also been suggested by Erika Rappaport and Brian Howard Harrison that coffee was another known temperance drink (qtd. in Daly and Forman 368; Harrison 90).

invitation.²¹ The cooperation and reciprocity of the performances in domestic dining scenes are evident here, as Higgins reacts to the invitation to tea, Mr. Hale reacts to Higgins, Higgins reacts to Mr. Hale – and so on (Margaret, meanwhile, merely observes - perhaps bewilderedly). Each man performs respectability in an attempt to manage the action or reaction of the other. Higgins recollects himself upon nearing the Hales' home and wants to clean himself before entering; he also, though taking the servants' passage, 'treads carefully', "stepping cautiously on every dark mark in the pattern of the oil-cloth, in order to conceal his dirty foot-prints" (Gaskell, NS 222). He has slicked his hair back, adjusted his neck-handkerchief, and polished his clogs (Gaskell, NS 225). Mr. Hale, seeing Higgins fulfill the role of guest, treats him as he would any guest: he sets out a chair for Higgins, does not sit until he does, and speaks to Higgins politely and quietly (Gaskell, NS 225). In turn, Higgins adjusts his manner to match his host: he is quiet and composed through to the ending of the tea session with a prayer and is punctual in his leave-taking to the striking of the clock (Gaskell, NS 225-233). Margaret's plan is more effective than she supposed it would be. The invitation to tea – English, normal, everyday – reminds Higgins of the possibilities of performance, and his embellished performance, in turn, gives evidence of the power of the domestic dining scene to foster positive relations. It is not that Higgins' performance has somehow 'fooled' Mr. Hale; rather, Higgins' effort in

²¹ See Bodenheimer for further discussion of Higgins' adept manipulation of social roles in *North and South*.

performance is a symbol of his openness to interpersonal connections – as is Mr. Hale's cooperation. In this instance, tea is not only sobering – it is transformative. It is perhaps in recollection of this tea that Higgins applies himself to Mr. Thornton's dinner-scheme later in the novel, performing as the host or lead of the meals to support Mr. Thornton's apparent role as a guest and equal.²² In any case, Higgins and Mr. Hale form a voluntary friendship on the basis of this obligatory tea: the next time that Higgins visits the Hales for tea, Mr. Hale again treats him with respect and meets him upstairs instead of in the kitchen to have the proper setting for a proper scene (Gaskell, NS 304). On the basis of tea, a friendship is arranged between Nicholas Higgins and the Hale family.

1.3 Desserts and Sweets

To open her chapter on dessert dishes in *Modern Cookery*, Eliza Acton asserts that “[a] well-selected and well-arranged dessert, however simple in its character, may always be rendered agreeable to the eye and to the taste” (Acton 569). While ‘elaborately decorated dishes’ and styled desserts were in fashion (Attar 133; Soyer 305-307), as Acton herself seems to recognize, she suggests that any plain fruit can be made appropriately aesthetic. Aesthetic values were also applied to the sweet dishes that often accompanied fruit desserts at tea.²³ In this section I analyze the application of an aesthetics of belonging to dessert fruits and

²² See section 2.3 for further discussion of Mr. Thornton's ‘dinner-scheme’.

²³ As Dena Attar explains, there was a renewed interest in “[e]laborately decorated dishes” in the nineteenth century (Attar 133) and there were a number of “moulds and frills” available to accomplish the task (Attar 136).

sweets as performers use these foods to maintain a fantasy of refinement in particular social groups.

Fruit, Care, and Aesthetics

Throughout *North and South*, fresh fruit, like the strawberries and cream served at the Helstone inn (Gaskell, NS 387), is suggestive of the arrangement of nature into the aesthetic; to former visitors and inhabitants, a dessert of fresh fruit is also a reminder of Helstone. At Mr. Thornton's first tea with the Hales, he observes a table "decked out for tea, with a white table-cloth, on which [flourishes] the cocoa-nut cakes, and a basket piled with oranges and ruddy American apples, heaped on leaves" (Gaskell, NS 79). Mr. Thornton correctly reflects that "all these graceful cares [are] habitual to the family; and especially of a piece with Margaret," as Margaret herself is brought into the aesthetic display in her "light-coloured muslin gown, which had a good deal of pink about it" (Gaskell, NS 79). As Koivuvaara explains, the setting before Mr. Thornton appears as "an aesthetically constructed scene or even a still-life" (Koivuvaara 136).

The aesthetics of fruit reappear when Mr. Thornton insists on choosing, purchasing, and delivering gifts of fruit to Mrs. Hale. Although the doctor explains that Mrs. Hale's cravings might be *economically* satisfied without Mr. Thornton's contribution, but Mr. Thornton nevertheless purchases "the bunch of purple grapes with the most delicate bloom upon them, – the richest-coloured peaches, – the freshest vine-leaves" (Gaskell, NS 214). Koivuvaara, in addition to

noting the likely expense of the fruit Mr. Thornton chooses, explains that if his careful choice “seems uncharacteristic of him [...] as a businessman whose values are utilitarian rather than aesthetic” (Koivuvaara 141), nonetheless: “[t]he gifts [of fruit] express good taste for they conform to the aesthetic and consumption ideals of the Hales” (Koivuvaara 145). It takes effort to choose and deliver the fruit, but it is work in which Mr. Thornton takes pleasure. In short, Mr. Thornton purchases the fruit only thinking about how to care for Mrs. Hale. Through these gifts, Mr. Thornton initiates domestic dining scenes for the Hales and, while he does not force his presence in the family scene (Gaskell, NS 215, 236), through the aesthetics of the fruit he suggests to the Hales that his presence would not be unsuitable or interruptive. Mr. Thornton demonstrates at once a sympathetic understanding of Mrs. Hale's desire for fruit, Margaret's Helstone aesthetics, and even Mr. Hale's childhood nostalgia, and effectively initiates something like a familial bond between himself and the Hale family as they read and respond positively to these gifts of fruit (Gaskell, NS 215-216).²⁴

Fruit and Maturity

Fruit is a subject of debate early in *North and South* as it is pulled symbolically between childish wants, erotic implications, and adult aesthetics. When Henry Lennox visits Helstone for a meal with the Hales, Mrs. Hale arranges a traditional dessert setting with biscuits and preserves, hoping to

²⁴ See section 2.3 for further discussion of the feminine and symbolic care Mr. Thornton learns to provide in *North and South*.

“[wind] up dinner in the proper way” and follow through with the effort she put into the indoor setting (Gaskell, NS 27). However, “the idea of pears [takes] possession of Mr. Hale’s mind (Gaskell, NS 27): he longs for “a distance from the formalities of dining and responsibilities of adult life,” as Koivuvaara suggests (Koivuvaara 139). For Mr. Hale, the fresh pears from the Helstone garden suggest innocence and the pleasures of childhood, as does the outdoor setting – but this innocence cannot be attained without rejecting the aesthetically arranged dessert from his wife. Mr. Hale’s idea for pears as a treat is, although mostly harmless, in the same selfish vein as his decision to move away from Helstone in that both are at his wife’s expense. Henry Lennox, meanwhile, suggests eating outside to the party, likely so that he can spend more time privately with Margaret (Gaskell, NS 27). Marjorie Garson argues that Henry Lennox demonstrates his inclination towards natural, decadent, and even implicitly sexual pleasures in his description of “the very crisis and summit of enjoyment” of eating a pear (Garson 300). The pears are not a childish pleasure for Henry Lennox but an occasion for implicit eroticism directed towards Margaret. Mr. Hale, in turn, declares to the room, “I shall arm myself with a knife, [...] the days of eating fruit so primitively as you describe are over with me. I must pare it and quarter it before I can enjoy it” (Gaskell, NS 27). If Mr. Hale eats the fruit neatly, it is in the memory of the messiness of youth and it is to mask that memory (Gaskell, NS 30). Although Garson suggests that this is Mr. Hale’s retort to Henry Lennox’s decadence (Garson 300), the ‘primitiveness’ to which Mr. Hale refers is the primitiveness of

childhood rather than of sexuality. Mr. Hale also seems to make this statement with the hope that someone protests his self-restraint. He places the responsibility for his choice of dessert onto someone else, just as he gives his daughter the responsibility of the Helstone move, and masks his decision through his performance. Although he positions himself as head of the household, as someone who orders and makes decisions, he uses other people to veil his choices in and outside of domestic dining scenes.

In the same scene, Margaret manipulates the fruit to save face for her fellow diners. First, Margaret masks the childhood associations of the fruit by “[making] a plate for the pears out of a beetroot leaf, which [throws] up their brown gold colour admirably” (Gaskell, NS 27). Embedding fruit in leaves like Margaret does is conventional for ‘common occasions’ to give fresh fruit an aesthetic place at the table without requiring the preparation of a recipe (Acton 570). Although the pears were not chosen by her, Margaret makes the fruit suit her tastes and personality. Margaret places the fruit on this makeshift plate out of her own inclinations towards aesthetics, nature, and presentation (evidenced by her sketching, her fondness of Helstone, and her attention to teas throughout the novel), rather than in the interest of denying that in which she would take pleasure. At the same time, as Garson points out, Margaret manages to enact a kind of peacekeeping between Henry Lennox and her father through her performance with the fruit, as “[t]he tension between nature and culture so self-consciously addressed by the two men is resolved in her emblematic assemblage,

which brings the two principles together in an elegantly simple presentation” (Garson 301). I would add to Garson’s analysis that Margaret also balances her mother’s preference for ‘proper’ dining etiquette with Henry Lennox’s natural inclinations and her father’s preferences for simplicity. While Mr. Hale suggests through his performance that the pears might still be enjoyable even if they cannot be eaten messily, Margaret is rather demonstrating an alternative, arguably more mature kind of pleasure in her aesthetic presentation, and she demonstrates this pleasure as a subtle attempt at scene management (however questionable her success is).²⁵

Fruit and the Dining Scene

In *Cranford*, Miss Jenkyns and Miss Matty undertake the “curious proceeding” of sucking oranges separately in their rooms in an attempt to balance the pleasure of eating fruit with the refined expectations of domestic dining performances (Gaskell, CR 27). Although it would be ‘proper’ and less messy to eat oranges with a knife and fork (Koivuvaara 194), Miss Jenkyns observes that doing so allows the juices to run out: the oranges must instead be sucked (Gaskell, CR 27). Like the way that Margaret Hale balances the childhood associations of fruit with an appropriately aesthetic wrapping, the Jenkyns allow themselves the pleasures of orange-sucking only in the appropriate setting. Instead of performing an action that has “the unpleasant association” with a nursing infant in the midst

²⁵ See section 2.3 for further discussion of Margaret Hale’s role in domestic dining scenes.

of the domestic dining scene, the Jenkyns ladies customarily withdraw to their separate, private rooms “to indulge in sucking oranges” (Gaskell, CR 27). When the domestic dining performance cannot negate the unpleasant bodily associations of eating, as Koivuvaara suggests,²⁶ the Jenkyns remove eating from the scene to take place ‘backstage’ (Koivuvaara 194). Instead of suiting the fruit to the scene like Margaret Hale does in *North and South*, the Jenkyns remove it from the scene altogether, whether that means moving the orange-sucking ‘backstage’ to the Jenkyns’ respective bedrooms or creating a ‘backstage’ region with Mary Smith’s screen.

Sweets and the Fantasy of Refinement

Not unlike Mr. Hale in *North and South*, Mrs. Jamieson in *Cranford* attempts to manage her own preferences with the expectations of her hostess and fellow guests at Miss Barker’s party. Mrs. Jamieson’s personal tastes are for simpler foods: she usually serves simple Savoy biscuits or sponge fingers at her parties (Gaskell, CR 66), while seed-cake – as served at Miss Barker’s party on an “abundantly loaded” tea-tray of sweets (Gaskell, CR 66) – rather reminds Mrs. Jamieson of “scented soap” (Gaskell, CR 66) with its variety of flavourful ingredients (Merle and Reitch 46). Mrs. Jamieson’s decision to eat the seed-cake “slowly and considerately, as she [does] everything” (Gaskell, CR 66) is a strategic one: after being allowed to bring her dog to the party, Mrs. Jamieson is

²⁶ See Koivuvaara for an alternative interpretation of Jenkyns’ ‘orange-sucking’ that regards its erotic and maternal implications (Koivuvaara 194-195).

“kindly indulgent to Miss Barker’s want of knowledge of the customs of high life” and eats the seed-cake because, with its strong flavours and exotic spices, it was likely made with Mrs. Jamieson’s higher social status in mind (Gaskell, CR 66). The seed-cake, although perhaps more expensive than Cranford etiquette generally allows, is used by Miss Barker to suggest a kind of refinement through that expense. With the allowance regarding Carlo, Mrs. Jamieson cooperates as best she can in the scene and with her fellow performers – and nothing is lost if someone later gently suggests to Miss Barker that seed-cake is not particularly ‘elegant’.

In the evening of the same party as above, Miss Barker serves ‘little Cupids’ to her guests. The narrator explains that this mythologically-named treat consists of “maccaroons sopped in brandy,” which tend to be served only on special occasions because of their expense (Gaskell, CR 67). The extravagantly named dish encodes a justification of its theoretically illicit ingredient, brandy, and elevates the dish to something ‘refined’. Rather than merely being a dish that the ladies enjoy, it is given a title to make it suit the particularities of Cranford etiquette, which generally prioritizes a self-important sense of decorum as much as it does ‘elegant economy’. Miss Barker serves these sweets and implies by them not only the embellished social status of her guests, but also her elevation from ladies’ maid to dining companion (Gaskell, CR 61). It is for this reason, too, that Mrs. Jamieson’s cooperation (discussed above) is so sought by Miss Barker,

as Miss Barker attempts to solidify her new relationship with the Cranford women.

The Lion Pudding and Noble Aesthetics

Elsewhere in *Cranford*, other interpersonal bonds are negotiated through other food-oriented aesthetics. When Miss Matty's economic circumstances are changed, Martha, her maid, insists that she will continue working for Miss Matty, even if Miss Matty cannot afford her (Gaskell, CR 127-128). Martha appears content with the delicately negotiated Cranford etiquette that permits her to be a friend to Miss Matty in private and to act in the role of servant, a complication that is not 'spoken about' (Gaskell, CR 128).²⁷ Martha's resolve to remain with Miss Matty is a gesture that reinforces Miss Matty's aristocratic background by her continued presence, and the pudding that Martha presents to her works in a similar way. The sweet pudding that Martha presents is ostentatiously in the shape of a lion *couchant* with currant eyes (Gaskell, CR 131). Given its ingredients and the fact that it was moulded and later refried, the lion pudding is likely something like a Christmas pudding, usually for special occasions (Gaskell, CR 128, 139; see Preston). The gift is, fundamentally, a symbol of Miss Matty's nobility regardless

²⁷ Gaskell's depictions of servant characters are arguably her least developed. There is Martha's unexplained loyalty and Mr. Mulliner's unexplored regrets in *Cranford*, for example, as well as Dixon's apparent "worship" of Margaret Hale in *North and South* (Garson 313). It is possible that the attitudes of such characters reflect Gaskell's relationships with servants in her own household, which were positive *according to Gaskell* (Duthie 102; Stoneman, *Elizabeth Gaskell* 48-49), but the characters in the three novels examined here remain underdeveloped. As such this paper is limited in its analysis of the servant class in domestic dining scenes.

of her finances; it is, furthermore, a nobility that presides over the domestic, communal, feminine space, as this emblem normally found on a coat of arms is instead fashioned with a sweet dessert. Martha understands that Cranford 'aristocracy' is based on some combination of morality and family history, alongside of apparent wealth, which can be negotiated through performance (like with Mrs. Forrester's "baby-house" of a dwelling" (Gaskell, CR 5)). Lee argues that "*Cranford* reveals a concern that the food-bearing servant might be responsible for a large part of what the middle class believes to be its own subjectivity" (Lee 69). In this case, Martha subtly indicates – yet without malice – that Miss Matty is reliant on her for more than food and company.

Chapter Conclusion

It is evident from the analysis in this chapter that foods hold personal significance and affect social roles, relationships, and emotional states. As a tool of inter-relational communication, food is selected to demonstrate or establish relationships, like with Alice Wilson's breads and teas, Mr. Davenport's tea theft, Margaret Hale's aesthetic presentation of pears, or Miss Baker's 'little cupids' (for example). Food is then reciprocally read and responded to by other diners, like with the Cranford ladies' response to Lady Glenmire's request for more bread and butter, the interaction at tea between Mr. Hale and Nicholas Higgins, or the Hales' response to Mr. Thornton's gifts of fruit (for example). Even when choice is limited, food choices are purposeful and personal rather than merely convenient or conventional. Food brings performers together physically and symbolically,

helping to create and define social roles and community identity. In the next chapter, I move from this analysis of communication through food to draw more heavily on Goffman's dramaturgical framework in an analysis of scene management through performances.

2. Dining

Mealtime sociability was considered a necessity of health alongside food (Bruegel 5; Rich 44). While the previous chapter dealt with food as a central prop, this chapter deals the other general aspects of domestic dining as a performance, with a focus on the influence of social roles on performances, the cooperation required between performers, and the communities that form or are maintained through domestic dining scenes. As explained in the introduction, I employ a dramaturgical approach because of its suitability to ordering the details of a dining scene, and from that order understanding how performers manage things like their identities, relationships, and enjoyment (Goffman 240). It is evident in analysis that domestic dining scenes and their associated performances cannot be generalized by any one result like saving face, making impressions, managing community, negotiating relationships, demonstrating wealth, fulfilling expectations, or creating leisure (to give some examples). Stoneman argues that Gaskell explores how character is formed in the domestic space (Stoneman, “Gaskell, Gender, and the Family”); by extension, learning domestic dining roles, like those analysed in this chapter, is a central part of functioning with others in society.

This chapter is divided into three sections that each regard different aspects of the domestic dining performance. In ‘Domestic Labour and Leisure’ I provide context on the mingling of labour and leisure in the domestic space and the hostess’ role in obscuring labour in the home. In ‘Cooperation and

Community' I discuss elements of the cooperative work of performance, such as scripting, cues, and the use of etiquette, and their purpose in the community-building of domestic dining scenes. In particular, this section includes an analysis of the cooperation in *Cranford* and the work that goes into maintaining the Cranford ladies' small community. In 'Roles', which is the longer of the sections, I analyze examples of the roles that go into domestic dining scenes, particularly of the feminine role of director and the masculine role of lead. Notable examples in this section include: Peter Jenkyns' work as an ideal male lead in *Cranford*; the relation between feminine roles and acceptable femininity in *Mary Barton*; and Mr. Thornton's engagement with the responsibilities of domestic care in *North and South*. Overall, this chapter deals with the intricate and cooperative interactions in domestic dining scenes as performers foster social relations.

2.1 Domestic Labour and Leisure

The combined work and pleasure of domestic dining scenes is implicitly discussed in nineteenth-century etiquette books. As Kolleen M. Guy explains, "[h]omemakers' manuals [...] stressed the importance of the mistress of the house in creating not only an agreeable atmosphere, especially for men, but also a civilized home where the food offered at meals was a source of dignified pleasure" (Guy 186-187). To accomplish such an atmosphere, manuals offered instruction on personal performance. Eliza Cheadle, for example, recommends that an individual be self-aware, but natural, but also not so natural as to be completely at ease: "Perfect politeness requires presence of mind, a quick sense of

propriety, and an ability to form an instantaneous judgment of what is fittest to be said and done on every occasion as it offers” (Cheadle 36; see also Wells 84). As much as a dinner party might be a pleasurable and sociable event, it also required significant instruction and labour to make it so, from cooking and setting the scene to serving and hosting. The domestic dining scene is the culmination of these efforts. As I explore in this chapter, the mingling of labour and leisure in domestic dining scenes marks those scenes as particularly feminine activities that furthermore recall and attempt to recapture slowly disappearing forms of communal leisure.

Popular leisure in the nineteenth century was commonly founded in exclusivity and individual ‘improvement’ (Cross, “Leisure on the Eve of Industrialization” 41, 47; Cross, “Industrialization, Work and Play” 69) and took place in spaces distinct from work (Bailey, “The Problem of Leisure” 20; Cross, “Industrialization, Work and Play” 58).²⁸ Leisure was understood in parallel with work as the ‘re-creation’ of strength for the purpose of labour (Bailey, “The Problem of Leisure” 23). Accordingly, the logic of work and work disciplines were brought into leisure (Bailey, “The Problem of Leisure” 25). The leisure of domestic dining, however, recalls an earlier form of leisure that remains mingled with labour. Cross argues that “housewives were often ‘task conscious’ – organizing their day in accordance with the immediate needs of children, cleaning

²⁸ These ‘rational recreations’ included attending concerts or lectures, reading, and walking (Baker 82; Cross, “Rational Recreation” 95-99).

and cooking” in contrast with the ‘time-conscious’ workday of the male worker (Cross, “Industrialization, Work and Play” 62-63) – but there was an incredible emphasis on *punctuality* both for the general everyday of the domestic household and domestic dining scenes in particular. This punctuality is evident in the opening pages of *Cranford*: the hours for calling are 12:00-3:00pm; a guest is “never to stay longer than a quarter of an hour” when calling; and a call must be returned in fewer than three days (Gaskell, CR 4).²⁹ Such an adherence to time could make any leisure activity *resemble* work (Bailey, “The Problem of Leisure” 17). Still, this emphasis on punctuality in the domestic realm rather indicates that it *is* work, as Monica Cohen argues regarding tea specifically (Cohen 38-39). Domestic punctuality is not just initiated by the industrial time and labour of generally male residents: Cranford is, after all, “in possession of the Amazons,” and the gentlemen whose labour would have to be so accommodated are notably absent (Gaskell, CR 3). This is the everyday work of performed etiquette and the work of serving, arranging, and entertaining.

Domestic labour and management, which was largely women’s labour, was still recognizably mingled with leisure because of the possible or theoretical

²⁹ These instructions are not unique to Cranford but very closely resemble the instructive tone of etiquette books: “After receiving any particular hospitality [...] it is necessary to leave cards at the door or to send them [...] within the few following days. The hours for calling are between two and six o’clock p.m. No call should be paid before luncheon, unless to a very familiar friend” (Cheadle 64).

pleasure of the tasks (Cross, “Gender and Generation” 104).³⁰ Cohen argues that the Victorians were aware of household labour *as labour* and that pay was not understood as a condition of work but “only a condition that makes work recognizable” (Cohen 4). At the same time, however, the home became a shelter from industrial labour and, as Gary Cross explains, “a cult of ‘domestic pleasures’ emerged” (Cross, “Industrialization, Work and Play” 62). As Nicola Humble explains, “because the home was supposed to be a place of calm and succour, a refuge for its master from the rigours of the working world, none of the labour that went into its daily maintenance could be seen” (Humble 323). Concealing domestic labour protects the home against the masculine realm of labour and maintains it as a space of apparent leisure and femininity. This concealment is evident in Goffman’s explanation of ‘make-no-work’ in contrast to ‘make-work’. Make-work is giving the impression of activity (usually in relation to a particular role) to an audience, even if the activity is unnecessary (Goffman 109); make-no-work is then an appearance of ease, for which Goffman takes the performance of receiving calls in the nineteenth-century as a characteristic example (Goffman 110-111). The activity of ‘make-no-work’ however, involves the *scheduling* of apparent labour to make room for the veiled labour of performance. Mrs. Forrester, for example, certainly helps prepare the tea-bread and sponge-cakes she serves at her party in *Cranford*, but she is able to give the appearance of ease and

³⁰ Cross finds generic examples of such labour in Victorian women’s education for sewing, crochet, and music, which all contain elements of pleasure and leisure alongside labour (Cross, “Gender and Generation” 108).

distance from labour because she prepares them offstage, in the morning, away from visitors (Gaskell, CR 5). Similarly, to prepare for hosting her tea in *Mary Barton*, Alice Wilson lights a fire, boils water, and sets out cups, plates, bread, butter, tea, and a candle before her guests arrive – interestingly, however, she leaves the candle “ready to be lighted” (Gaskell, MB 29), as does Mary Smith at her party in *Cranford* (Gaskell, CR 9). This candle-lighting is saved for an onstage dramatization of punctuality and an indication of the hostess's efforts, but it importantly minimizes the amount of labour truly involved. Rather than ‘make-no-work’, Dina Attar terms this strategy a ‘genteel charade’ in the sense that it is a performance of the assumed ease of gentility by way of carefully scheduled domestic labour (Attar 137-138). These charades were not unusual: Cozzi explains that it was a fantasy of conduct manuals and cookery books that middle-class women did not cook, and Rich suggests the same (Cozzi 79; Rich 50, 82). The associations between women and the domestic realm, and the domestic realm and leisure, means that women must take up a performance of middle-class ease that hides the labour they undertake for scenes of leisure.

2.2 Cooperation and Community

Domestic dining scenes recall earlier forms of leisure in the way that they combine work and pleasure, in the cooperation that they require to execute, and the sense of community that they maintain. Although Bailey suggests that the ‘performance culture’ of nineteenth-century popular culture was more individualized than earlier eras (Bailey, “Introduction” 11), cooperation abounds

in the domestic dining scene. The importance of punctuality to domestic dining scenes, as discussed in the previous section, was at least in part to keep individuals “in harmony with the wider community,” whether they were attending meals or visiting between them (Rich 74). Besides punctuality, for performers to cooperate in a scene they must understand their placement in given social hierarchies and communities, how to fulfill their associated social role(s) in tandem with other performers, and how far those social roles can be negotiated in a given scene.

The most distinct examples of cooperation can be found in *Cranford*, where the ladies have a “clear and correct knowledge of everybody’s affairs in the parish” and use this to maintain general good-will (Gaskell, CR 3). In the notable example of Mrs. Forrester’s ‘genteel charades’, her performance is of course evident to the party guests, as the narrator relates: “she knew, and we knew, and she knew that we knew, and we knew that she knew that we knew, [that] she had been busy all the morning making tea-bread and sponge-cakes” (Gaskell, CR 5). Furthermore, although Mrs. Forrester is able to mask her labour, she is unable to mask “her baby-house of a dwelling” or the storage space that resides under her sofa (Gaskell, CR 5). As Lee explains, “[Mrs. Forrester’s] inability to extinguish all traces of her involvement in food preparation means that both her economic standing and her very interiority are exposed to her guests. [...] Mrs. Forrester’s guests do not simply know that she has spent the morning preparing food and helped her maid carry the tray upstairs, but they know that this involvement with

food is what is on her mind” (Lee 67). With this knowledge, the audience aids the hostess in her embellished performance for their mutual benefit and pleasure. Throughout the scene, the guests behave and speak as if Mrs. Forrester’s home “[has] a regular servants’ hall, second table, with housekeeper steward” while Mrs. Forrester conceals (as best she can) that she does not (Gaskell, CR 5). Koivuvaara describes this performance as a way of “preserving the illusion of conspicuous leisure and the group’s social identity as members of the gentry” (Koivuvaara 190). There is labour in maintaining a performance with these layers of knowledge, but the *pleasure* of this scene comes from pretending that it is perfectly elegant, proper, and fitting for a society of ladies – alongside the pleasures of eating and socializing. To use Goffman’s terminology, the party cooperates in the ‘working consensus’ of the domestic dining scene. This cooperation, which is not unique to the Cranford ladies, is for personal and collective benefit: each diner maintains the social scene because their class and social identities are dependent on it.

Scripting versus Observation

Cooperation, as a foundation and goal of the domestic dining scene, is often found in a sort of known, general etiquette. At other times, this cooperation is a part of careful improvisation. Occasionally, this cooperation is scripted beforehand. In *Cranford*, for example, this scripting occurs in “the great Cranford parliament on the subject of the proper mode of addressing a peeress” (that is, Lady Glenmire (Gaskell, CR 78)) between Miss Matty, Miss Pole, and by

extension Mrs. Forrester (Gaskell, CR 69-70). It *is* an unusual compliment to these ladies to attend a party with a peeress, but if any of them were to make an error, it suggests their social inferiority – the very thing Mrs. Jamieson initially indicates (Gaskell, CR 70) – and threatens their collective identity. If Lady Glenmire or Mrs. Jamieson is forced to correct them, furthermore, it is an insult to everyone as an interruption of the scene. As Miss Matty suggests, if they refine their mutual script to be consistent then they are either correct, and all is well, or are mistaken but mistaken *together*, in which case it appears to be a Cranford quirk rather than an error (Gaskell, CR 70). Although Mary Smith mocks the gravity of the Cranford ladies, their attempt to refine their mutual script maintains consistency in their performances, speaking to their solidarity in negotiating social relations. Miss Matty and Miss Pole, for instance, consult before deciding to collectively accept or reject Mrs. Jamieson's belated invitations. As Miss Pole explains, "one would not like Mrs. Jamieson to think that anything she could do, or say, was of consequence to give offence" (Gaskell, CR 73). When the ladies decide to accept the invitation in order to give the impression that a party with Lady Glenmire is of no consequence, they receive the additional benefit of getting to see Lady Glenmire, who certainly is of consequence to them. Their scripting is thorough and effective in promoting their collective sense of well-being.

When scripting cannot be done beforehand, much of the work of socializing has to do with observing and responding to the scene at hand. Although common etiquette helps create a foundation for cooperative

performances, improvisation and intuition are equally required for all performers. Domestic dining performances require not only careful attention, but also tactful inattention: one must hear and pretend not to hear, look and not look at once (Goffman 230). For example, Miss Pole's careful appraisal of Lady Glenmire's dress in *Cranford* – that “ten pounds would have purchased every stitch she had on” (Gaskell, CR 76) – informs the ladies' suspicion that Lady Glenmire's financial state is comparable to the rest of the Cranford 'aristocracy'. To take another example, Mr. Thornton in *North and South* observes with purpose at the dinner party he hosts to ensure that each guest – and Margaret in particular – has a conversation partner (Gaskell, NS 161-162). It is, of course, also beneficial for him to see that Margaret's partner is someone who is not “much inclined to talk to her” (Gaskell, NS 162). Mr. Thornton restrains himself in his role and in a performance of distance as he observes but does not acknowledge Margaret until after dinner (Gaskell, NS 164). Although certainly Mr. Thornton might enjoy observing Margaret, in general the pleasure of observation is seeing the scene go smoothly as connections are facilitated, dinners are returned, and future plans are made. Performers manage the work of observation to judge the appropriate response.

The work of performance also involves observing cues without allowing those cues to appear disruptive. In *Mary Barton*, for example, Margaret Jennings “[hears] the bustle, and the subsequent quiet” of Alice Wilson's preparations and

understands the silence to be her cue to enter for tea (Gaskell, MB 30).³¹ More importantly, however, Margaret does not acknowledge that a cue was given or heard; she cooperates to ensure Alice is found ready and not embarrassed by an early guest or kept waiting by a late one. A cue might also be given by a silence, stance, or look instead of vocalization. To take another example from *Cranford*, instead of rudely interrupting the other ladies' conversation, Miss Pole "sits up aloft in silence, looking down upon all the things [the other ladies] chance to say as trivial and contemptible compared to what [she] could disclose, if properly entreated" (Gaskell, CR 82). The narrator is, of course, exaggerating for comedic effect. In fact, Miss Pole's haughty stance is preferable to an indiscrete interruption or to not indicating her discovery of the conjuror, Samuel Brown. Miss Pole instead allows the ladies to discuss their fill of "minor subjects (such as caps and turbans)" before giving an additional cue by clearing her throat. Mary Smith's recognition of this cue is evidence of its effectiveness, and Mary herself performs a similar cue by audibly shuffling a deck of cards when Miss Pole's interest in conjuration gets out of hand (Gaskell, CR 84). Regardless of how often Mary mocks Cranford sociability and etiquette, she fits in quite well. Contrary to Goffman's suggestion that cues serve to guide performers "without allowing the audience to become aware that a system of control communication is in

³¹ A similar sound-cue is given by Miss Barker prior to her party in *Cranford* (Gaskell, CR 65).

operation” (Goffman 178), in the case of domestic dining scenes cues maintain the *continuity* and *cooperation* of the performances for the performers.

In *Cranford*, even disagreements might signal a cooperative aspect of performance.³² When Mrs. Forrester confesses her greatest fear to be ghosts and “[looks] at Miss Pole, as much as to say she had declared it, and would stand by it” (Gaskell, CR 98), the import is ameliorative. As the narrator explains, “[s]uch a look [is] a challenge in itself,” but rather than initiating an unpleasant argument, it further stimulates the ladies’ conversation (Gaskell, CR 98-99) and creates the kind of Cranford quarrel to which Mary Smith refers at the start of the novel, that is “just enough to prevent the even tenor of their lives from becoming too flat” (Gaskell, CR 3). Though most evident in *Cranford*, cooperation runs through most, if not all, domestic dining scenes as performers attempt to facilitate the ease of the scene, provide entertainment for one another, fulfill any necessary roles, and maintain their collective identity.

Friendliness and Formality

While common etiquette was a foundation for the domestic dining scene, it is not a static factor. Etiquette has local as well as circumstantial variability (Gaskell, NS 73, 77, 86, 99, 159). As Rich explains, social rules “were far too extensive to imagine that anyone actually did everything ‘by the book’, and there is ample evidence that at all levels of the middle class people were happy to be

³² Such disagreements are perhaps comparable to the good-humoured discussions between the male diners at Mr. Thornton’s party in *North and South* (Gaskell, NS 163).

flexible in many circumstances” (Rich 33). This flexibility meant that etiquette, rather than being consistently applied in social interactions, could be taken up as necessary, like when diners were unsure of how to act in a new or uncertain situation. The understood importance of etiquette in such cases does not just restrict: it helps ensure the pleasure of performance. In dramaturgical terms, etiquette is a generic convention, facilitating the coherence and consistency of the various domestic dining scenes taken up by disparate performers. Like conventions of genre, furthermore, rules of etiquette “were [...] useful as a way to shape identity and create reputation, by breaking with traditions and reinterpreting protocols” (Rich 98). There is a notable relation between friendliness and formality in terms of performance: the purpose of etiquette is to maintain at least the appearance of friendliness; if successful, apparent friendliness becomes or facilitates real underlying friendship; friendship leads to trust, which can result in forgiveness for a breach in or a relaxation of etiquette. This relation is most clearly, if cynically, articulated at the beginning of *North and South*: the narrator observes the Shaws host “neighbours whom Mrs. Shaw called friends, because she happened to dine with them more frequently than with any other people” (Gaskell, NS 6).

As the illustrations above indicate, formal etiquette is more rigid in theory than application (as are the gender and class roles with which they align) except when natural friendship is lacking or when performers are unsure of how to act; in these cases, people perform more carefully in their given social role(s) because it

is more likely to be acceptable, even though it is less personal. For example, when Mary Barton visits the Legh household following the scandal of her flirtations with Henry Carson and Jem Wilson (with the latter suspected of murdering the former), she must be asked to enter “where, until now, she had been too well assured to require to be asked to sit down” (Gaskell, MB 240). The performers’ adherence to scripted etiquette indicates the formality of the scene. Formal distance and politeness are imposed both because Mary is ashamed of herself and because Job and Margaret are uncomfortable. Yet in contrast with their temporary reversion to strict etiquette, such formality is a comfort and habit to the Carson daughters in the same novel. The impersonal relationships within the Carson family are indicated by the daughters’ attention to dining: “like many similarly situated young ladies, they did not exactly know what to do to while away the time until the tea-hour” (Gaskell, MB 196). Their time between meals is spent preparing for the next; when the Carson daughters converse, they either talk about their exhaustion, wonder when it will be time for tea, or gossip carelessly about their brother (Gaskell, MB 197). When they rouse their father, Mr. Carson assumes it is for tea because meals are the only occasion for interaction in their home (Gaskell, MB 201). Domestic dining meals and formal events have set rules, etiquette, expectations, and these girls only know such ordered leisure. They have an education in rational recreation, but no sense of unscripted friendliness, sociability, or conversation beyond gossip. The formality of etiquette in domestic

dining scenes can be useful as a generic foundation for interaction, but etiquette alone only fosters superficial or impersonal performances.

Friendship can then be indicated by a cooperative disregard for etiquette, the careful bending of rules, or a kind of tactful inattention to backstage work done onstage. The closeness of the Wilsons and Bartons is evident in the opening of *Mary Barton* both because of the backstage work that the Bartons do onstage – that is, negotiating what they can afford in hosting – and because of how the Wilsons are “too polite to attend” to the conversation, indeed dramatizing their inattention by “[trying] to be busily occupied with the children” (Gaskell, MB 15). It is not just that the families are aware of one another’s financial circumstances, but that those circumstances can be delicately acknowledged between them without fear of scandal. To take an example from *North and South*, Mr. Thornton generously and dangerously ignores etiquette in the midst of his ‘dinner-scheme’ when he speaks of how much he enjoyed the meal to which he was invited (Gaskell, NS 362; Rich 33). Through this admission, Mr. Thornton maintains the façade that this is not his arrangement but Higgins’, and his ‘error’ demonstrates his ease and friendliness towards his fellow guests. At the same time, such an admission from Mr. Thornton is a performance risk: if his comment had instead been taken to indicate his disregard for etiquette amidst working-class men it may have as well resulted in his alienation. Disregarding etiquette (within reasonable cultural limits) can therefore be a tactical though perhaps *risky* demonstration of friendship.

The relation between friendliness and formality is only briefly analysed here but certainly runs through many interactions in nineteenth-century domestic dining scenes. Social performances are not only about adhering to convention but negotiating a position within it and within the society that convention represents.

Performance Risks

A performer becomes a performance risk when they threaten to interrupt the cooperative ease and illusion of a social scene (Goffman 91). Mr. Holbrook's performance errors in *Cranford* might be taken as an example here.³³ Mr. Holbrook is admittedly old-fashioned in his dining habits and draws attention to this eccentricity (Gaskell, CR 34; Koivuvaara 198). His most damning error is in serving green peas with only a knife and two-pronged fork with which to eat them. Puckett explains that peas were readily available, so "[i]f absolutely anyone can eat peas, it is how one eats them that must make all the difference" (Puckett 38). Koivuvaara more elaborately states that "[t]he use of cutlery is one dimension of transforming the fundamentally animal act of eating into a stylised social ceremony" (Koivuvaara 197). The threats to comfortable forms of sociality as posed by Holbrook's dining scene are registered by the wide-ranging reactions of his guests. "Miss Matty [picks] up her peas, one by one, on the point of the prongs" (Gaskell, CR 34), appearing ridiculous but certainly accomplishing her task with "a technique that does not compromise her gentility" or sense of

³³ See also the analysis of Mrs. Jamieson's performance errors in section 1.2 and Captain Brown's performance errors in section 2.3.

etiquette (Koivuvaara 198). Miss Pole, who elsewhere relies on backstage coordination with Miss Matty (Gaskell, CR 69, 73), finds herself utterly at a loss in her confrontation with the peas: she “[leaves] them on one side of her plate untasted; for they *would* drop between the prongs” (Gaskell, CR 34). Koivuvaara suggests that Miss Pole “surrenders to the requirements of gentility” and refuses the necessity of food (Koivuvaara 198) – an exchange not unheard of in female etiquette (Silver 3). Mary Smith, meanwhile, observes all and decides to mimic her host, despite the hardship of doing so (Gaskell, CR 34). Koivuvaara argues that “[t]he narrator’s choice to imitate the host breaks the rules of decorum; it indicates the fact that the narrator is prioritising substance and surrendering to the animal instinct of hunger and desire for food” (Koivuvaara 198). It is not the instinct to *eat*, however, but the decision to maintain the scene that obliges Mary to act: “I saw, I imitated, I survived!” (Gaskell, CR 34). By following the lead of her host, Mary Smith here makes the same sort of safe choice that enables her to sustain her visits to Cranford – and certainly such cooperation is the foundation of a successful dining performance.³⁴ Although these performances are for the benefit of the Mr. Holbrook’s dining scene, and ultimately for Mr. Holbrook as the male lead, Mr. Holbrook neglects his role and is woefully ignorant of his guests’ attempts at saving the scene.

³⁴ Mary, of course, has her own reasons for accommodating Mr. Holbrook, as she imagines rekindling the youthful romance between him and her hostess, Miss Matty (Gaskell, CR 31). Miss Pole meanwhile has no such interest and Miss Matty is not quite self-aware enough to consider it.

As Lee observes, the incompatibility of Mr. Holbrook's eating habits prevents him from renewing a relationship with Miss Matty socially (because Miss Pole deems him eccentric), and physically (because he leaves for Paris without the constitution for the trip) (Lee 65). However, while 'eating peas with a knife' has been used idiomatically to stand in for other social errors (Puckett 31) and might therefore narratively suggest Mr. Holbrook's general ineptitude, Mr. Holbrook's performance errors are not all equal. Mr. Holbrook's other notable error is his endearing request that Miss Matty fill the bowl of his tobacco pipe. Although Mary as narrator explains that the gesture is not strictly appropriate, Miss Matty does not find herself in the uncomfortable position Mary implies. Through this gesture Mr. Holbrook plays to Miss Matty's nostalgia, and the pair briefly perform in mimicry of their remembered, youthful love affair.

In some cases, friendliness and openness becomes a performance risk too, whether between active diners or between diners and servants. In *Cranford*, for example, Miss Barker's party is almost interrupted by Peggy being unable to "keep her distance sufficiently" in the role of servant (Gaskell, CR 66). Miss Barker skilfully makes an excuse to exit to the backstage, ostensibly to give tea to the dog Carlo, but actually to converse freely with Peggy (Gaskell, CR 66). Generally, the Cranford ladies find that friendship is worth the performance risk and they accommodate errors. Mrs. Jamieson's tendency to fall asleep in company (Gaskell, CR 66, 86, 93, 94), for example, is predictable and the ladies prepare for this likelihood so that her absence rather evens out their numbers for cards

(Gaskell, CR 66-67). Mr. Holbrook's guests attempt to compensate for his unfortunate performance with the peas and, as will be discussed below, Captain Brown is excused from some Cranford social norms *but not Cranford society* once his social ignorance is revealed. In the interest of maintaining a community through domestic dining scenes, the power of the collective social image, cooperatively enacted by performers, can account for and correct or pardon individual performance risks.

2.3 Roles

In this section I analyze the execution of various roles in domestic dining scenes with a focus on the roles of the male and female hosts.³⁵ Roles can be understood as the conventional foundations of individual performances. Rich notes that in domestic dining scenes men “were entitled to take the lead, and it was principally towards their enjoyment that both food and conversation were directed” (Rich 111). At the same time, women had the extensive responsibility of managing menus, servants, and guests, either backstage or onstage through subtle

³⁵ There is a distinction between performing and outright lying: performing a false self is not nearly so everyday or easy to accomplish as the performance of an *embellished* self. Esther's ‘disguise’ in *Mary Barton* might be taken as an example of a false performance. While trying to feign indifference and put Mary at ease for being unable to serve food, Esther instead accidentally suggests that she knew about the Bartons' struggles and decided to not help (Gaskell, MB 231). She stumbles in her performance and cannot lose herself in it. Cooperative performances are typically successful when performers have a coherent understanding of their performance and role; this understanding is possible because the performance is normally only an embellished form of the self in the everyday.

cues (Rich 50, 107). If the male host is given 'dramatic dominance' during the dinner itself (Goffman 100), such lead performers "are often merely figureheads," as Goffman contends (Goffman 102), while the female host takes on 'directive dominance' in her quiet responsibility for the scene (Goffman 99). More complexly still, as Gaskell demonstrates, the roles of lead and director may fluctuate between performers both female and male.

Dramatic Dominance and Masculine Roles

Mr. Bell and Mr. Thornton from *North and South* provide typical examples of the role of male host. When Mr. Bell dines with Margaret Hale, for example, he usually orders her to make him tea even though she intends to serve him anyways (Gaskell, NS 375, 394). Elsewhere, as Margaret observes, Mr. Thornton's manner, "as master of the house, and entertainer of his friends, was so straightforward, yet simple and modest, as to be thoroughly dignified" (Gaskell, NS 162). These male hosts take on dramatic dominance in leading their domestic dining scenes, driving conversation, maintaining sociability, and (occasionally) assisting in domestic labour while appearing entirely at ease.

Captain Brown in *Cranford* is then an unusual case in the role of male host. His presence in the Cranford dining scenes is found alternately to be helpful (or even necessary) and disruptive. As Mary Smith describes, "[h]e immediately and quietly [assumes] the man's place in the room; [attends] to every one's wants, [lessens] the pretty maid-servant's labour by waiting on empty cups, and bread-and-butterless ladies; and yet [does] it all in so easy and dignified a manner, [...]"

that he [is] a true man throughout” (Gaskell, CR 9). The reference to Captain Brown’s ‘dignified manner’ parallels with the description of Mr. Thornton in *North and South* (Gaskell, NS 162), but Captain Brown’s dignity is in some ways despite his actions – like brazenly aiding the maid-servant – rather than because of them. Captain Brown is accepted to the Cranford parties because the Cranford ladies believe he has an apparently natural understanding of his place in the scene as a man and he effectively fills an otherwise vacant position. Conversationally, however, he fumbles. Captain Brown initiates a discussion of literature but does not recognize that he has pushed a challenge upon Miss Jenkyns; he then disrupts the scene by engaging in an argument instead of relenting (Gaskell, CR 10). He does not recognize the peculiarities of his hostess, and in conversation fails to read Miss Jenkyns’ “air of resignation” or her “patient gravity” (Gaskell, CR 10). This is not the playful, intellectual argument that Captain Brown was perhaps intending to excite, like those taken up by Mr. Thornton at his dinner party in *North and South*: to Miss Jenkyns, this is a personal affront to her as the daughter of a deceased rector of Cranford, and therefore to her family’s legacy in the community. Mary Smith describes how Captain Brown “[might seem] penitent afterwards, as he [shows] by going to stand near Miss Jenkyns’ arm-chair,” but his positioning might just as well be a result of his obliviousness (Gaskell, CR 11). Captain Brown’s disregard for “all the small slights and omissions of trivial ceremonies with which he had been received” initially commends his character, but it is his same social ignorance that initiates disruption in Cranford (Gaskell,

CR 6). Cranford society still favours Captain Brown for his honest character and for filling the otherwise vacant role of male host; however, while he is still included in society, he is excluded from social ceremony. Being “admitted in the tabooed hours before twelve” is not just a sign of favour, but also one way in which Captain Brown is excluded from some social performances as a solution to his lack of tact (Gaskell, CR 6).

Peter Jenkyns, another male lead in *Cranford*, harmonizes well with his community upon his return in the novel. He, like Captain Brown, easily fulfills the lead role, the man's place in the room, as he tells stories of his time in India (Gaskell, CR 152). More than this, however, Peter performs an embellished character of himself for the ladies' entertainment, and, unlike Captain Brown, he is entirely aware of and adaptable to the expectations of his fellow performers. He tells relatively tame stories to Miss Matty (so as not to worry her) and the Rector (who would be more likely to question him), while he exaggerates for ladies like Miss Pole and Mrs. Jamieson who enjoy a riskier tale (Gaskell, CR 152-153). If he also asks at times to sit cross-legged on the ground and indulges in “ways of eating [that] were a little strange” by Cranford standards (Gaskell, NS 152-153), he benefits the town by using his dramatic dominance to direct and order in ways both feminine and masculine. As he confidentially explains to Mary Smith, he wants friendship amongst Cranford inhabitants for the sake of his sister, Miss Deborah Jenkyns. Following her restorative lead (Stoneman 96-97), Peter arranges a friendship between Mrs. Gordon and Mrs. Fitz-Adam (Gaskell, CR

156), repairs the friendship between the former Lady Glenmire and Mrs. Jamieson (Gaskell, CR 158), charms Mrs. Jamieson with his stories, and influences Mrs. Jamieson to be patroness to Samuel Brown (Gaskell, CR 157). In the role of male lead, Peter is more than *apparently* in control of the scene as he cares for his community by redirecting the positive attention he receives. It is arguable that Peter still subtly imposes masculine control on this town of women, even if that control appears 'kinder', but it is a structure of control that he has inherited from his sisters and his actions are community-oriented rather than selfish.

Directive Dominance and Feminine Roles

Mrs. Mary Barton's directive role as hostess at the holiday tea early in *Mary Barton* might be taken as a well-executed example of the typical feminine role in domestic dining scenes. The space that Mrs. Barton arranges for tea is "John Barton's home" in name only (Gaskell, MB 15): when Mrs. Barton enters the setting prior to the tea, she is "on hospitable thoughts intent," and she orders it to serve her purposes (Gaskell, MB 14). Everything is done carefully and precisely: the cheap candle must be placed "satisfactorily in a tin candlestick," to give it a decorative elevation; the curtains are not arbitrarily drawn but, like the geraniums that block the window, are positioned to create a sense of intimacy between "the friends meant to enjoy themselves"; the crockery and glass are on display in an open cupboard, and the house is "almost crammed with furniture" to demonstrate that the Bartons are ready and well-equipped to host (Gaskell, MB

14-15).³⁶ Mrs. Barton's work, other than pouring tea, is entirely backstage (Gaskell, MB 17-18). Her backstage planning and ordering allows her to forget her sadness for her missing sister and lose herself in the forthcoming script and etiquette of performance, as she hopes to find some enjoyment in her efforts to suggest this a pleasant holiday tea. Mrs. Barton works so that the hosting excludes her family's personal mourning and the economic threats that both her family and their guests recognize.

While Mrs. Barton provides an example of the role of hostess in a working-class Manchester home, in *Cranford* Miss Jenkyns demonstrates the responsibility of a hostess as she manages her community in emulation of middle-classness. A crisis occurs at Miss Jenkyns' party when Miss Jessie Brown admits a relation to a shopkeeper under the eye of Mrs. Jamieson (Gaskell, CR 9): such a relation is too low for the Cranford aristocracy, and is a risk to the class performance of the group. Although Miss Jessie Brown and Miss Pole might form a friendship on the basis of this shopkeeper connection (Gaskell, CR 12), the confession itself is an error in this context. As the narrator relates, "Miss Jenkyns

³⁶ Koivuvaara argues that "the narrator's slightly disapproving view on the uselessness of certain pieces of tableware in the Bartons' household [...] implies both criticism and judgement on the level of consumption of the family" (Koivuvaara 88), but for the present characters, this tableware and furniture suggests the Bartons' *optimism* as they participate in national habits of consumerism, presenting a filled stage that implies the filled stomachs to come. Furthermore, as Koivuvaara explains regarding the furniture in *North and South*, furniture "can be seen as a kind of investment: it is property that can be cashed in when needed" (Koivuvaara 122): Mrs. Barton's dining items accordingly are sold off as the narrative progresses and the hope of further domestic dining scenes vanishes (Gaskell, MB 112).

[tries] to drown this confession by a terrible cough” (Gaskell, CR 9), or perhaps tries to warn the naïve Miss Jessie of her error. In any case, Miss Jessie “*would* repeat the information” and Miss Jenkyns is forced to take the drastic action of requesting a song from Miss Jessie (Gaskell, CR 9-10). Though none of the ladies are ‘musical’, they give due attention to the performance as Miss Jenkyns effectively redirects the attention of the party. Miss Jenkyns herself sacrifices the most in attempt to save face for Miss Jessie, as she beats thoroughly out of time in an attempt to perform musicality (Gaskell, CR 9). Although the circumstances of Cranford conflicts appear trivial, they are certainly of importance to the community and their largely class-based performances. In addition to saving face for Miss Jessie and saving the performances of the ladies as a whole, Miss Jenkyns’ actions maintain the approval of the judgemental Mrs. Jamieson. In some sense, Miss Jenkyns’ actions are also to protect herself: as hostess, she was the one who dared to place Mrs. Jamieson in the same room as a woman who boasts of a relation to a shopkeeper.

Miss Jenkyns’ actions at this initial party are largely characteristic of her careful exertion of directive dominance, but her methods of maintaining peace and community are threatened by people who do not cooperate (like Captain Brown). Through her attempts at community care, Miss Jenkyns finds herself honouring and carrying on her father’s community role as rector. Stoneman criticizes Miss Jenkyns’ community role, arguing that she has “assimilated the conditions of her own subordination” by perpetuating the gender-oriented and

class-oriented codes of her father, who effectively banished his son for his error of gender in dressing up as a woman (Gaskell, CR 53) and Mr. Holbrook for his error of class in expressing romantic interest in Miss Matty (Gaskell, CR 53, 30; Stoneman, *Elizabeth Gaskell* 89-90; see also Duthie 91, 124). I would argue, however, that Miss Jenkyns maintains control through care *within* her community rather than banishing the outliers. I do not deny Miss Jenkyns' class anxieties. She is careful to guard the secret of Miss Jessie's relation to a shopkeeper and she is adamant that Miss Jessie, as the daughter of a captain, should not become a housekeeper or saleswoman (Gaskell, CR 9, 21-22). Miss Jenkyns herself, however, briefly takes on the role of masculine lead when Captain Brown questions her authority (Gaskell, CR 10). Her reaction to Miss Jessie's performance error, furthermore, is not to remove her from the society but to provide greater care for her and her family, from supporting Miss Jessie at Captain Brown's funeral, to ensuring she eats, to arranging an engagement, to watching over her daughter (Gaskell, CR 19-24). Despite her personal irritation with Captain Brown, she of course still renders "many little kindnesses" towards him (Gaskell, CR 17). Although Miss Jenkyns' decisions and reactions can occasionally be extreme to the point of being overbearing, Miss Jenkyns ultimately attempts to care for her community by maintaining and negotiating the relationships within it through her role as director.

Acceptable Femininity and the Role of Hostess

In the course of *Mary Barton*, the titular protagonist changes attitudes from flirtatious to romantically committed, and this change is aligned with Mary gradually learning the subtle role of a director and hostess. Lee suggests that the 'marriage plot' between Mary and Jem overtakes the 'food plot' of John Barton's starvation (Lee 44-45, 47), but the dangers and possibilities of the two plots are intertwined. Learning the feminine duty of performing in a domestic dining scene is central to Mary Barton's character development and maturation into a wife deemed worthy of Jem Wilson.³⁷ While in terms of narrative attention the food plot falls to the side, its implications remain: it is Mary's domestic dining performances that speak to her acceptability to Jem's family before the two are married.

Before Mary Barton realizes her love for Jem Wilson, her performances are self-centred and myopic, and she does not follow the community-oriented ethics that domestic dining roles prioritize.³⁸ At the tea held by Alice Wilson, Mary is late because she spends too much time choosing a dress to make an impression on Margaret Jennings, whom she is to meet (Gaskell, MB 30). Not only does her lateness delay the scene, but her performance is largely of a self-

³⁷ I would note here that there is significant tragedy in Mary Barton's story, as her maturation is linked to suffering for her father and for her future husband. At the same time, fulfilling her role as hostess, daughter, wife, and eventually mother is presented as Mary's only *real* option, lest she follow in the footsteps of her Aunt Esther. Narratively, Gaskell does not present Mary Barton's choices as *ideal*, only as necessary.

³⁸ For other examples, see Mary's reaction to the suggestion of sharing a cup of tea with Jem (Gaskell, MB 16) or when Mary falls asleep while Job tries to make cheerful conversation for her father (Gaskell, MB 107).

interested, decorative role, as “Mary [puts] down her long black lashes with a sort of dislike of the very observation she had taken such pains to secure” (Gaskell, MB 30). Mary bluntly tells Alice, who is in service, that she is glad she is not; in return, Alice makes the astute observation that Mary ““little knows the pleasure o’ helping others,”” both in the sense of traditional labour but also in the sense of giving a polite and accommodating performance (Gaskell, MB 32). Mary also doubts Alice’s life decisions (Gaskell, MB 32) and knowledge (Gaskell, MB 34). Mary’s neglect of performance puts the labour of the scene onto the other performers. Instead of thoughtfully contributing to the comfort of the scene, Mary imposes her self-centred performance and her blunt opinions of Margaret and Alice.

A change occurs in Mary Barton’s demeanor after a discussion with Jem’s mother. Mrs. Wilson expresses to Mary a concern that working-class women might not be able to perform properly the parts of wife, mother, and hostess as necessary in marriage – three roles that are linked by their traditionally feminine duties of care. Mrs. Wilson elaborates, explaining that an inability on the part of a wife – “letting their house go all dirty, and their fires all out” – drives a husband to the public-house and gin-shops (Gaskell, MB 118). Mrs. Wilson explains this concern to Mary because of Jem’s interest in this young woman who appears too preoccupied with marrying well to learn how to direct or take care of a family (Gaskell, MB 116-117). Although it is evident from the opening tea that Mary has “a comfortable portion of confidence in her own culinary powers” (Gaskell, MB

18), this culinary capability is not remembered by Mary following her mother's death until after Mrs. Wilson's warning, when she serves "a comfortable though scanty breakfast for her father" (Gaskell, MB 129). Mary's change in demeanor is also connected to her regret for rejecting Jem Wilson's love (Gaskell, MB 127) and her "unmixed desire to do her graceful duty to all belonging to him," including taking up the role of hostess (Gaskell, MB 219). Mary's sense of duty and right is undoubtedly linked to her domestic dining performance, and it is in her "earnest, sad desire to do right" that she serves a breakfast to her father (Gaskell, MB 129).

Following her discussion with Mrs. Wilson, Mary Barton gains an altered understanding of food and dining as necessary and moral forms of domestic care (see Bailey, "The Problem of Leisure" 23, Bruegel 5, Rich 44). The directive role of hostess, overlapping with the duties of wife and mother, is characterised in *Mary Barton* by self-sacrifice, from Alice's uncomfortable chair to Mary's illness or her mother's death. While her father is out of work, Mary becomes overburdened with work. She works to pay for "one good meal for her father" each day to maintain his health and, although he does not admit anything, Mary is able to see when he is in need of food (Gaskell, MB 137, 190). She similarly forces herself to eat whatever is available to prevent headaches and general malaise (Gaskell, MB 208, 239). When she receives some charity from Margaret, Mary immediately sets out to purchase food for her father and then keeps him company by a lit fire during the meal (Gaskell, MB 141). When Mary suggests

that her father eat, she phrases the suggestions as if they are based on her own desire to serve rather than the necessity of eating: “I wanted to get you something to eat” (Gaskell, MB 190). Not only does Mary come to empathize with and understand the needs of others, she learns to prioritize them above her own. Mary also slowly learns to work in the role of hostess.³⁹ Mary takes on the duties of a daughter-in-law when she visits Mrs. Wilson pending Jem's trial. She is welcomed into the household that she wishes for her future, but instead of being absorbed in her own intentions, she sees that Mrs. Wilson is feeble and determines to provide support (Gaskell, MB 258). Mary prepares breakfast and takes care of other, general domestic duties to give some basic comforts to Mrs. Wilson, though she is also demonstrating her domestic capability through her performance (Gaskell, MB 262). Like her mother at the beginning of the novel, Mary works to conceal her hopes, doubts, and fears for the sake of others; like her mother, too, however, this care takes its toll on Mary's health. Mary Barton learns to enact an acceptable femininity in terms of learning the necessity and burden of care on hostesses, mothers, and wives in their feminine roles; accordingly, she is left at the end of the novel in a role ultimately not unlike her mother's at its opening.

Labour and Cynical Performances

While *Mary Barton*'s protagonist must grow and learn her duty as related to dining and domestic care, Margaret Hale in *North and South* begins the novel

³⁹ For an additional example, see how Mary Barton hosts Job Legh in her father's absence and despite her own sadness (Gaskell, MB 191-193).

with this self-awareness. Margaret knows what domestic dining performances can accomplish and labours in performing, even while scorning and struggling with what she considers its falseness. From the start of the text Margaret is given a high level of domestic responsibility from her father as Mr. Hale begs his daughter to inform her mother that they are leaving Helstone (Gaskell, NS 36-37). This single responsibility largely sets the precedent for others, and throughout the rest of the novel Margaret spends much of her time setting domestic dining scenes, caring for her family's physical and emotional well-being, and, like Mary Barton, masking her emotional turmoil. If the domestic dining scene is usually a combination of labour and leisure, then Margaret Hale only experiences, and in many cases excels at, the labour of it.

As a diner, Margaret Hale does not believe in the impressions that her performances foster but performs nonetheless for the greater good. Margaret finds herself exhausted by performances for their own sake, where “[e]very talent, every feeling, every acquirement; nay, even every tendency towards virtue, [is] used up as materials for fireworks” (Gaskell, NS 407). Henry Lennox is particularly accustomed to manipulating people overly invested in performance and makes the mistake of assuming Margaret is as well. When he visits Helstone to meet with and propose to Margaret, Henry purposely hesitates to let Margaret imagine his meaning, gives veiled compliments for Margaret to guess at, and matches the flowers decorating his suit to the ones decorating Margaret's dress (Gaskell, NS 28, 26). As Henry reflects, ““A regular London girl would

understand the implied meaning of that speech [...]. She would be up to looking through every speech that a young man made her for the *arrière-pensée* of a compliment,” but he continues his charade for Margaret regardless of her apparent disinterest (Gaskell, NS 26). Garson identifies artificiality in Henry Lennox's speech, and “the suggestion of affectation and decadence” as he seems to boast of his own (implicitly sexual) appetite while ostensibly talking about pears (Garson 300; Gaskell, NS 27). Henry Lennox refuses to adjust his script to the country setting or even to the preferences of his conversation partner because *he* prioritizes flirtation. Accordingly, Margaret senses and disapproves of Henry Lennox's superficiality in performance, as following his proposal she thinks about “how she could have loved him if he had but been different, with a difference which she felt, on reflection, to be one that went low – deep down” (Gaskell, NS 32).

When she does not have to take a central role in the domestic dining scene, Margaret performs excellently. She has a thorough understanding of etiquette that allows her to fill gaps in the performance. She quite explicitly understands, for example, that a performance of gladness is expected in return for being hosted with equal gladness; she senses that she cannot make a visit looking for sympathy and is accordingly self-sufficient, if frequently worn down and depressed (Gaskell, NS 57). When Mrs. Boucher faints, Margaret catches her; when Margaret faints, she must rouse herself (Gaskell, NS 297, 275). Margaret is also able to bend rules of etiquette to her use, as she explains to her mother that ““Cold

meat will do capitally for a lunch, which is the light in which Mr. Lennox will most likely look upon a two o'clock dinner” when Mrs. Hale worries about not having freshly-cooked meat (Gaskell, NS 24).

Margaret conscientiously fulfills her role as hostess, but she also tires of the work of entertaining and removes herself at the first opportunity (Gaskell, NS 63, 305). When Mr. Thornton first visits the Hales for tea, Margaret mainly works with the setting. She lights the lamp, arranges the tea-cups, and serves the tea, speaking only “if there [is] any long untoward pause” that might cause Mr. Thornton to think himself neglected (Gaskell, NS 78-80). She performs in a manner that acknowledges Mr. Thornton's value to her father as his “friend, pupil, and guest” (Gaskell, NS 79). When Margaret is drawn into the conversation, however (Gaskell, NS 81, 83, 122), she finds that her frankness is a benefit rather than a hindrance in Milton, as both Mr. Thornton and Nicholas Higgins respect her for it (Gaskell, NS 122, 293). As Margaret reflects, “in Milton every one [is] too busy for quiet speech, or any ripened intercourse of thought; what they [say is] about business, very present and actual” (Gaskell, NS 341-342). Milton, quite like Margaret herself, tends towards business rather than pleasure. Margaret's outspokenness is largely what suits her to the Milton landscape as well as to Mr. Thornton himself. Something about Milton accordingly changes Margaret's ideas about labour and activity: when she reunites with Edith and her family, Margaret performs quietly as expected, but experiences this lazy breakfast as meaningless

labour and misses the problem-solving required of her in Milton (Gaskell, NS 373-374).

Margaret's indifference towards the typical comforts of domestic dining scenes – food, company, idle conversation – is at least in part because of how much she labours to compensate for the hardships of her family, as she continually struggles to keep everyone else comfortable through her father's change of profession, the difficulty of moving, her mother's illness, the strike, and the arrival of her brother Frederick. Margaret only rediscovers the pleasure of performance in the "drama of happiness" she performs with Frederick during his brief stay (Gaskell, NS 247). There is a small, cooperative, dance-like performance, for example, while the siblings set up for tea:

When all was ready, Margaret opened the study door, and went in like a serving-maiden, with a heavy tray held in her extended arms. She was proud of serving Frederick. But he, when he saw her, sprang up in a minute, and relieved her of her burden. It was a type, a sign, of all the coming relief which his presence would bring. [...]

So Margaret went away; and returned; and passed in and out of the room, in a glad restlessness that could not be satisfied with sitting still. The more wants Frederick had, the better she was pleased; and he understood all this by instinct. It was a joy snatched in the house of mourning, and the zest of it was all the more pungent, because they knew in the depths of their hearts what irremediable sorrow awaited them. (Gaskell, NS 246)

This is a drama of the pleasure of a full household, of cooperation, of safety, and of the domestic memory of Helstone. The siblings together set the scene with tea and bread and butter; both eat, and both take part in the simple and fundamental pleasures of dining. Frederick readily fills the masculine lead role, readily giving unnecessary orders to Margaret. The pleasure of filling these orders is not a plain

pleasure of serving but a pleasure in the control over the scene that Frederick represents. Margaret finally has support in easing her parents' depression, even though Mr. Hale does not quite believe the scene before him and does not himself take part (Gaskell, NS 247). At breakfast the following morning, Frederick again takes the lead role and works at a "continual production of kindness" by entertaining his father with stories of his travels, besides watching over his mother and helping Dixon (Gaskell, NS 250). During this brief time, Frederick provides a distraction and an illusion of an untroubled family social life. When Mrs. Hale dies, however, Frederick loses belief in his own performance and cannot continue; Margaret again has to "[rise] from her trembling and despondency, and [become] as a strong angel of comfort to her father and brother" (Gaskell, NS 250). As Margaret sets the scene for breakfast to be "as cheerful as possible," complete with a singing tea-kettle and her own conversation of "little nothings," she is too aware of her own machinations to take pleasure in her work or to trust the façade for temporary comfort. Prior to breakfast, "the contrast between [the scene] and her own thoughts [forces] her into sudden weeping" (Gaskell, NS 252). Yet she valiantly masks these tears, undertaking the necessary work of performance to sustain her remaining family members.

Margaret Hale provides a clear example of the efforts in domestic labour in parallel with traditional labour. Langland explains that "in the same period that proliferating etiquette books, household manuals, and architectural changes spelled out for women the decorum of social interaction from top to bottom, men

were growing more removed from their workers” in part because of the separation of workspace from home (Langland 295-296). While men were more distanced from their workers, women developed relationships with their social inferiors through their *management*, whether that meant the management of servants and household staff or management of the poor (Langland 296). As Algotsson argues, Margaret’s capability in domestic labour and her skill in problem-solving are what drive her to effectively become involved in labour negotiations in *North and South* (Algotsson 11). Margaret Hale evidently seems aware of these two sides as parallel forms of labour as well as their differences: the kind of stewardship for which she argues with Mr. Thornton in fact depends on this parallel between (feminine) household labour and (masculine) traditional or industrial labour. Margaret uses the feminine skills of communication and empathy to affect positively the masculine realm of labour as well as the feminine domestic space, as she encourages personal interaction and understanding between Mr. Thornton and his workers.⁴⁰

Caring and Feminine Roles

At the start of *North and South*, Mr. Thornton is, as Duthie describes, “on his own admission, [...] the advocate of an autocratic system which denies the workers any opportunity to question the masters’ decisions and actions,” but still with a fundamental respect for his men “as individuals” (Duthie 76). After first

⁴⁰ Whether the relationship that Margaret encourages is actually beneficial or just *differently exploitative* is another question.

being irritated by Mr. Thornton's callousness towards working-class men (Gaskell, NS 84), Margaret argues with him about the interdependence of masters, like himself, and workers (Gaskell, NS 118). Margaret also argues, from a biblical basis, that the employers are stewards, in some sense, of their employees (Gaskell, NS 118). Although Margaret drops the conversation and leaves the room, her father agrees with her, saying to Mr. Thornton that he too has been “‘struck by the antagonism between the employer and the employed’” and suggesting that Mr. Thornton look after his fellow Milton men before thinking of grander schemes (Gaskell, NS 119, 123). Mr. Thornton gradually learns to take on feminine roles of care and backstage ordering in domestic dining scenes as a result of further association with the Hales and the adoption of their ideals; this role in turn facilitates Mr. Thornton's sympathy even outside of domestic dining scenes as he learns to expand his circle of care.

Mr. Thornton's care for Mrs. Hale, with whom he has scarcely conversed, is initially incidental to his care for Mr. Hale and then Margaret as he fears the effects of Mrs. Hale's illness on her family (Gaskell, NS 143, 153). Following Margaret's rejection of his proposal, however, Mr. Thornton begins bringing gifts of fruit to Mrs. Hale. He claims to act because “it is simply right,” adopting Margaret's ideals of care and stewardship while trying to convince himself that he dislikes her (Gaskell, NS 214). To console himself after Margaret's rejection, he

enacts the kind of care to which Margaret suggested he was indifferent.⁴¹ As analyzed more thoroughly in section 1.3, Mr. Thornton takes up a personal and symbolic kind of care, distinct from his earlier offering of necessities, in choosing these gifts of fruit and initiating domestic dining scenes for the Hales (Gaskell, NS 153, 214). Koivuvaara suggests that Mr. Thornton performs this gift-giving solely on Margaret's account: he too strongly claims to act for Mr. Hale and "in defiance of her" while being consumed by thoughts of Margaret (Koivuvaara 143; Gaskell, NS 214-215). Upon entering the Hale household, however, "he [takes] no notice of [Margaret], – hardly of Mr. Hale himself; he [goes] straight up with his basket to Mrs. Hale" (Gaskell, NS 215). Regardless of the deliberation leading up to his action, Mr. Thornton ultimately cares for Mrs. Hale herself with these gifts of fruit. Mr. Thornton slowly learns the pleasure of caring for others and, relatedly, the pleasure of quietly directing a scene as he expands his sense of obligation.

The link between the caring role that Mr. Thornton learns and a kind of femininity is made more evident as the novel progresses.⁴² If the maternal

⁴¹ See Koivuvaara or Lindner for alternative, pessimistic readings of Mr. Thornton's gifts of fruit. Koivuvaara argues that these gifts are expressions of power on Thornton's part, and that the fruit acts something like a bribe to Margaret's parents for marriage (Koivuvaara 140-145). Linder suggests that Margaret essentially blackmails Thornton into adopting her ideals in return for marriage (Lindner 54). Although neither reading is verifiably false, neither Koivuvaara nor Lindner seem to acknowledge that years pass between Mr. Thornton adopting Margaret's ideals and their marriage.

⁴² Although I argue that Mr. Thornton learns domestic and feminine care, from another angle, like that from which Stoneman argues, he rather *unlearns*

relationship is, for Gaskell, the acme of a woman's life, then it is also the model ideal for other relationships more typically defined by hierarchy (Duthie 98). Stoneman observes that "[e]verywhere in Elizabeth Gaskell's work the maternal instinct flourishes, inside and outside marriage, with and without biological ties" (Stoneman *Elizabeth Gaskell* 49-50). Although Stoneman cites several examples of individuals caring for children as evidence of this claim, we might also include Thornton's gradually changed attitude, since mothers do not only care for children. Although Mr. Thornton initially asks his mother to look after Margaret (Gaskell, NS 143) – the same request that Mrs. Hale makes of her (Gaskell, NS 241) – he realizes, once the possibility is denied to him, that *he* rather wants to provide this care and mothering to Margaret. When he believes Margaret is being consoled by some other lover, he is bitter that he cannot provide that comfort: "there was selfishness enough in him to have taken pleasure in the idea that his great love might come in to comfort and console her; much the same kind of strange passionate pleasure which comes stinging through a mother's heart, when her drooping infant nestles close to her, and is dependent upon her for everything" (Gaskell, NS 269). When he is later rude to Margaret in a moment of ill-humour, there is again a comparison of his attitude with that of a mother, as "[he feels] like a mother would have done" (Gaskell, NS 336). Patricia Ingham explains that the reference made

masculine authority and reserve, and has always had the potential for the positive actions he undertakes (Stoneman, *Elizabeth Gaskell* 132).

is to an Elizabethan poem [...]. The refrain implies that inflicting pain by showing displeasure to the loved one is a calculated way of deriving pleasure from reconciliation. This is an unfamiliar idea in relation to Victorian accounts of motherhood. The deferral of the longed-for pleasure underlines the fact that the pain inflicted by Thornton is like the 'rating' or chiding spoken by the mother: sexual and maternal pleasure are equated. (Ingham 77)

Although it is debatable whether Mr. Thornton's insult was as 'calculated' as Ingham suggests, the comparison establishes Mr. Thornton's own confusion, as he is caught between his performance of distance and his desire for a caring, almost maternal closeness. He is bitter that he cannot take on a nurturing role in Margaret's life, even if he at first problematically figures that mothering role primarily in terms of a child's dependence. Mr. Thornton eventually admits to himself the "tenderness in his heart," as well as his attempts to conceal or redefine it (Gaskell, NS 324), and by the end of the novel rather finds himself happily in Margaret's debt (Gaskell, NS 435-436). This is the same tenderness that Margaret saw in his care for her mother and in his keeping of her secrets, and the same tenderness that prompted her to suggest that Higgins contact him for work.

Mr. Thornton's 'dinner-scheme' is the culmination of his learning to care. As he explains in private to Mr. Bell, he holds dinners in the dining room of his house for the men he employs (Gaskell, NS 361). Mr. Thornton employs Nicholas Higgins at least in part on Margaret's account, but he respects him on his own, and "starting from a kind of friendship with one, [he becomes] acquainted with many" of the men in his employment (Gaskell, NS 431). It is not from any suggestion of Margaret's but on the basis of Higgins' "'black frizzle of a dinner –

a greasy cinder of meat” that Mr. Thornton forms this dinner-scheme (Gaskell, NS 361). Mr. Thornton purchases food wholesale with money gathered from the men and according to their specifications, then merely provides a cook and the necessary spaces (like an oven, cooking-places, and dining-room) for rent (Gaskell, NS 362-363). The results of Mr. Thornton's experiment, as he explains them, have nothing to do with an increased output of labour and everything to do with how ““much money might be saved, and [how] much comfort gained”” (Gaskell, NS 361). This ‘comfort gained’ is the nutritional comfort of a home-cooked meal, but it is also the sympathy and personal comfort between Mr. Thornton and his workers as he occasionally joins them at their meal.

Some of the novel's critics understand Mr. Thornton's dining arrangements as an opportunistic bid for reciprocity from the workers. Koivuvaara, for example, argues that “[a]s an exchange for his generosity Mr Thornton can expect things back; he can expect loyalty but in the spirit of economic transaction also a more efficient and physically able workforce” (Koivuvaara 134). To some extent, Koivuvaara is correct that well-fed workers will be able to work more, but the results of Mr. Thornton's experiment, as he explains them, have nothing to do with an increased output of labour (Gaskell, NS 361). Mr. Thornton, furthermore, tells Mr. Bell the structure of this dinner-scheme in confidence (Gaskell, NS 363). The men do not know that the idea was Mr. Thornton's, and they rather order him to purchase the food, establishing a temporary relation in which they are in power rather than him. The workers have

no reason to be exceptionally loyal Mr. Thornton for these dinners when they are largely in control of them and believe the idea to have been Higgins' (Gaskell, NS 361-362).⁴³

Lindner argues that workers in *Mary Barton* and *North and South* “[wind] up thinking about social identity and its constituent parts as strictly economic constructions,” where individuals are defined and dehumanized by their economic roles (Lindner 48). Although Lindner identifies general alternatives to this dehumanization in the two novels, including discussion and empathy, it is significant that Mr. Thornton presents the roles of a domestic dining scene in *North and South* as alternatives to those economic roles. Through his work in facilitating these domestic dining scenes, Mr. Thornton creates a space of leisure and friendship in contrast with the animosity and distance of the workplace, but the *continuity* between the spaces of domestic leisure and industrial labour means there is also continuity in the relationships that form. Through this cooperative performance of leisure and friendliness, Mr. Thornton transforms from an impersonal and unfeeling master as the men transform from the animalistic hunger and anger of the strike (Gaskell, NS 176-178). Respect, not simply resources, are exchanged. As Mr. Bell notes, there is “[n]othing like the act of eating” – that is, dining – “for equalising men” (Gaskell, NS 362).

⁴³ Just as Gaskell suggests in *Cranford* that Miss Matty's class status is dependent on the cooperation of her servant, Martha, she seems to suggest in *North and South* that the 'masters' are only in power through the acquiescence of the workers.

It is worth noting that the resulting relations between Mr. Thornton and his workers are not quite 'equal'; although the men are ostensibly in control of the dining scenes and have the pleasure of ordering Mr. Thornton to arrange it, all decisions ultimately require his implicit approval. Garson argues that Mr. Thornton's dinner-scheme is "elaborate, paternalistic, and condescending," and "certainly does not signal the transcendence of class divisions" (Garson 326). I concede that Gaskell does not solve issues of class, but what Garson identifies as 'paternalism' in the dinner-scheme is questionable. Rosemarie Bodenheimer suggests that "[t]he lesson we might anticipate for Thornton in the traditional paternalist mode would be that he treats his workers with kindness, using his power to look after their welfare in return for their obedience" (Bodenheimer 57), and it is this *anticipated* lesson that Koivuvaara and Garson seem to argue. Bodenheimer maintains that Mr. Thornton's dinner-scheme encourages collective effort rather than charity, and communication rather than control, resulting in cooperative, community care (Bodenheimer 58-59). Stoneman also responds to accusations of paternalism in Gaskell's works:

"The [so-called] 'paternalism' practised by [Gaskell's] working-class characters, however, is not only nurturing rather than authoritative, it is functional rather than innate. It can be temporary and *ad hoc*; John Barton feeds Mrs Davenport like a baby when she is sick, but later she becomes a nurse to old Alice. More importantly, it revolves with successive generations. Working-class 'parents' [i.e., people exhibiting parental traits] educate their children to take responsibility. Alice Wilson makes sure Will knows what a seafaring life is like, but then lets him go; when Margaret [Jennings] goes blind, her grandfather watches her down the street and, seeing that she can manage, lets her go [...]. (Stoneman, *Elizabeth Gaskell* 72)

Similarly, the middle-class Mr. Thornton sees and responds to the needs of his workers. The dinners he provides by no means solve the entrenched problems of class hierarchy or poverty but they signal his recognition of equal human vulnerability: all need nourishing food and interaction, and all are interdependent – masters as much as workers. As Stoneman explains, by the end of the novel it is evident that Mr. Thornton “wishes to transform work, if not into tenderness, at least into a human activity” (Stoneman, *Elizabeth Gaskell* 137). Mr. Thornton’s dinner-scheme is a continuation and intensification of the kindness he displayed in providing fruit for Mrs. Hale. In both cases, he follows the requests of others, initiates scenes in which he does not participate, attempts to provide care through food, and, as a result of his actions, is given new respect. His dinner-scheme is noteworthy because it demonstrates how he has expanded his sense of responsibility without Margaret’s presence; with the dinner-scheme, Mr. Thornton fulfills the position of steward that Margaret once set out for him. Instead of favouring cold rationality, furthermore, Mr. Thornton now claims to hate theories and is, like with the basket of fruit, more interested in the simplicity of right action (Gaskell, NS 363).

Chapter Conclusion

It is evident from this chapter that the performances that comprise domestic dining scenes must be analyzed not only in terms of whether they conform to or deviate from convention but in terms of interpersonal communication. Furthermore, while domestic dining scenes encourage pleasant

sociability and cooperation, they only extend as far as the labour put into them. Cooperation is evidently fundamental to domestic dining scenes, like in the efforts of the ladies in *Cranford* to maintain the known fiction of their aristocratic status or in the development of an unanticipated friendship between Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Thornton in *North and South*. There is evident use to engaging with a role-based analysis of domestic dining scenes, as it has provided insight into the differences between Captain Brown and Peter Jenkyns in *Cranford* (as the male leads who bookend the novel), as well as given a greater understanding of how the food and marriage plots intertwine for Mary Barton (having drawn on Lee's analysis). Furthermore, it is evident that the roles taken up in domestic dining scenes are a part of ongoing role negotiations – particularly as those roles pertain to gender – as the interactions within scenes carry through to the everyday outside of them, like with the paralleling of feminine and masculine labour with Margaret Hale and Mr. Thornton in *North and South*. I do not claim that the negotiation of dining roles is revolutionary or ideal, but these roles are important foundations for interpersonal relationships, scene management, and community care.

Conclusion

Although it has been generally accepted that diners would not have always followed formal etiquette, through the analysis in this paper I have provided a demonstration of the complexity of thought and action that structures nineteenth-century domestic dining scenes. By analyzing foods as central props, I have demonstrated some ways that foods are used and responded to as a medium of communication, especially as a demonstration of self in relation to or as connected with others. By analyzing social performances based on social roles and common etiquette, I have demonstrated how scene management and community care are at the base of domestic dining scenes. Although social roles and foundational etiquette are theoretically stable and rigid structures, performers continually negotiate things like gender and class expectations, community care and ethics, relationships, and familial responsibilities in the interest of a given scene and for the benefit of their 'performance team'. These negotiations are ongoing and everyday rather than sudden and radical, and it is important to acknowledge them *in their everydayness*. Domestic dining scenes are ultimately about cooperation, interpersonal connection, and the pleasures of collective domestic care.

I began this project in the interest of analyzing and finding the limits of the commonly and casually applied metaphor of performance in relation to nineteenth-century dining etiquette. Some of those limits might, finally, be outlined here. A thread running throughout this paper is, of course, the mingling

of labour and leisure in the domestic space, but there is also the corresponding mingling of performers and audience in the domestic dining scene, as Mary Barton (perhaps belatedly) learns the necessity of domestic care and labour alongside the pleasures of dining that she already understood, and as Mr. Thornton recognizes the humanity of his workers through the labours and pleasures of his dinner-scheme. While there is some form of script through planning and known etiquette prior to a domestic dining scene, the actual performances are perhaps closer to improvisation in structure, as foods and performances can signify or communicate different things in different circumstances. Consider, for example, the silent interpretation that must occur between performers to fetch tea when Mrs. Davenport refuses food, or the ordering of priorities required when given only a knife and two-pronged fork with which to eat peas, or the ready application of aesthetics that suggests how to use pears to alleviate tension between performers. Quite unlike the performances given in theatre, the social performances of domestic dining scenes are also continuous with the 'everyday' outside of them and, furthermore, are fundamental to maintaining the sociability of that everyday. Numerous relationships are forged in or reinforced by domestic dining scenes – like those between the Cranford ladies, the Bartons and Wilsons, Mary Barton and Margaret Jennings, Mrs. Wilson and Mary Barton, Miss Jenkyns and Miss Jessie, Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Thornton, or Mr. Thornton and his workers – and those scenes continue to affect the performers past their duration. Cooperation and community management are

the foundation and goal of domestic dining scenes in a way far more intense than in theatre. If some of these conclusions are commonsensical, they no less deserved to be given proper consideration.

Nineteenth-century domestic dining scenes in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton*, *Cranford*, and *North and South* illustrate the significant roles of social performances as related to gender, class, and community. It is evident from this paper that domestic dining scenes are complex in their execution, but, even more impressively, they are effective.

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