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A Deep Lead-Coloured Cloud:
Smoke and Northern English Space in the Industrial Novel

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Abstract:

When Margaret Hale, heroine of Elizabeth Gaskell's 1854 novel *North and South*, first sights the distant smoke of a Northern English industrial town, she mistakes the 'deep lead-coloured cloud' for rain. Her confusion is pointed: industrial smoke was not of nature. Nor, indeed, was this the homely smoke of warm hearths. Industrial smoke was a disorienting and other atmosphere. It was also an atmosphere that featured prominently in emergent geographies of the North. For Charles Dickens, whose *Hard Times* was also published in 1854, the industrial North echoed fearful geographies of distant lands; smoke-stained brick was "red and black like the painted face of a savage", and smoke itself made "monstrous serpents". In this article, I explore the smoky atmospheres of Northern England in industrial-era novels. Visiting both Gaskell's "Milton" and Dickens' "Coketown" - which turn real places into archetypal industrial spaces - I show how industrial smoke's striking materiality became at once definitive of Northern English space and redolent of socio-political change. And, I wonder how Milton and Coketown's smoky geographies might still be with us.

Keywords: Northern England; Dickens; Gaskell; smoke; industry.

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[S]moke is perhaps the most obvious single indicator or symbol of the North. It is ubiquitous, being the first to greet the visitors and the last visible sign on the horizon at departure; it has darkened the landscape and assails the senses.
D.C.D. Pocock (1979: 68). 'The novelist's image of the North'.

For his tenth novel, Charles Dickens, intimate observer and iconic commentator on Victorian London life, turned his literary gaze to a different atmosphere. He looked North, to another England – a region that laid claim to the industrial revolution and was growing materially and stereotypically smokier for it. Dickens' fictive Northern town had a duly industrial moniker: Coketown. 'It was a town of red brick,' he writes, in a passage now well-worn with recitation:

> or of brick that would have been red if the smoke and ashes had allowed it; but as matters stood it was a town of unnatural red and black like the painted face of a savage. It was a town of machinery and tall chimneys, out of which interminable serpents of smoke trailed themselves for ever and ever, and never got uncoiled. It had a black canal in it, and a river that ran purple with ill-smelling dye, and vast piles of buildings full of windows where there was a rattling and a trembling all day long, and where the piston of the steam-engine worked monotonously up and down like the head of an elephant in a state of melancholy madness. It contained several large streets all very like one another, and many small streets still more like one another, inhabited by people equally like one another … and to whom every day was the same as yesterday and tomorrow. (Dickens 2012 [1854]: 23-4)

Dickens' novel of Northern smoke and drear was serialised in 1854, in the magazine he edited, *Household Words*. It was succinctly titled *Hard Times*. The times were also the mid-century peak of that classic 'condition of England' genre, the industrial novel (Simmons 2002), and just a few weeks after Dickens' tale reached a depressing end, readers of *Household Words* met another smoky industrial town (Schaub 2013). Like Coketown, and as descriptively named, Milton-Northern did not blot any real map. This was a Northern mill town of Elizabeth Gaskell's creation – though it was Dickens who editorially offered her novel a geographical name: *North and South*.

 While London's 'unwholesome' atmosphere had offended nostrils from John Evelyn's *Fumifugium* (1661) to Dickens' own 'London Particular' (Corton 2015; Taylor 2016), rising industrial smoke signified that something at once social and economic was afoot. London's smoke made the guzzling consumption of the world's then most populous city atmospherically legible, yet the smoke of Northern England's growing industrial spaces was of a different and new manufacture (Taylor 2016), at once the incidental emissions of production and its proclamation. Beneath the cloud, amidst the smoky serpents, *Northern* industrial space was not just something else, but some*where* else: Coketown, Milton. In this article, I visit them both, in their industrial smoke and manufactured geographies – in their literary atmospheres. Through the making of Dickens' and Gaskell's industrial plots and the plotting of maps both monstrous and enchanted, I reveal the unsettling ambivalence that marked the Northern smokescape. As I argue, the North could be known by its

atmosphere, yet the meaning of smoke, despite its all-too-breathable materiality, could never quite be made stable.

Atmosphere, Ben Anderson (2009) observes, is dually that which is apprehended, or sensed, and that which emanates, is produced. This is atmosphere as affect, the kind of moody and palpable, not material, meaning that has typically dominated literary readings (Hsu 2017). But if reading through atmosphere as geography might instead offer 'a more visceral understanding of how 'air conditioning' works' (4), then smoke, I suggest, is particularly good to read with. In his own smoky reading of London's fog, ecocritic Jesse Oak Taylor (2016) calls for a 'resuscitation' of the metaphor of literary atmosphere, in which breathed backgrounds might be drawn animatedly to the fore. Similarly, anthropologist Timothy Choy (2010: 22), investigating urban air pollution, asks after 'a material poetics … in which air enters into human and geographic life'. These authors make clear that while smoke may be a 'haunting allegory' (Connor 2008: n.p.), atmosphere is also and always a breathable reality – though a reality 'explicated', as Simone Dennis (2016: 19) argues, through 'ideas, morals, values and hierarchies'. Thus, in Dickens and Gaskell, industry's atmospheres may waft poetically upon the page, and smoke's materiality snake and stain, yet more than this is made manifest in manufactured plots. As I explore here, the clouded cartographies of Coketown and Milton are written through the arresting – indeed, atmospheric – contemporary experience of apprehending *and* breathing rapidly industrialising Northern spaces. These are geographical texts, explicating airy contours.

Of course, both *Hard Times* and *North and South* are well-thumbed, by popular and analytic readerships alike. Though geographers have been exhorted not to pluck and plonk spatially evocative prose (e.g. Brosseau 1995; Thrift 1978), I have begun with Dickens' most dog-eared description of Coketown – and will quote the equivalent view of Milton below – because these passages evince an enduring socio-spatial fascination with the industrial novel's smoke-signalled atmospheres. After all, the dog-ear, materially marking re-reading, recalls Sheila Hones' (2008) insistence on text as (rather like smoke) an always emerging event, brought into being through spatial practices of writing *and* reading. Were they to bear the material traces of all their re-readings, *Hard Times* and *North and South* would not just be dog-eared, but densely written upon. There is no shortage of Dickens and Gaskell scholars, some of whom I cite here, but whose erudite ranks I make no claim to join. So, too, does the spatial argument I write through this article entail choices in reading companions; theoretical readings of smokescapes through, for example, ecocriticism or new materialisms, do beckon, but I leave them consciously (and a little wistfully) as marginalia here, instead following Dennis (2016) in attending to atmosphere without seeking to either to clear or to thicken it. I will return to my own readerly practice, in the contemporary ambivalence of a Northern space without smoke, in this article's conclusion. But let me first draw nearer to the smokescape.

Smokescapes

The textile industry, sparking Coketown and Milton, was initially water-powered. But coal-fired steam engines soon rose to dominance, generating what Gaskell (2008: 523) evoked as 'a ceaseless roar and mighty beat and dazzling whirl of machinery [that] struggled and

strove perpetually' – generating smoke. By 1830, industry's 'dazzling whirl' had outstripped households as Britain's biggest coal consumer (Mosley 2008). Industrial development was, however, geographically uneven, clustering near transport, coal and ready labouring bodies (Malm 2013). Hence the industrial smokescape emerged as a distinctive type of space, attracting attention – and aspersion. Though these spaces were neither exclusively nor uniformly Northern, the North furnished strikingly iconic examples. Manchester, at mid-century, consumed five times more coal per capital than London, and emitted the billowing by-product from some five hundred industrial chimneys (Mosley 2008). This swelling city was, according to one real-life observer, 'the chimney of the world … the entrance to hell realised' (21).

Such words perhaps echo in Connor's (2008) belief that it was less smoke – ever signalling human settlement – than chimneys that distinguished an emergent industrial geography. Industrial chimneys were built broad to carry smoke in quantity, and they were tall as 'totem poles' (Briggs 1982) in the Victorian scientific conviction that the natural atmosphere's upper reaches could purify the particular air of human manufacture (Mosley 2008). These convictions engineered, in Dickens' (2012: 77) words, multiplying 'tall chimneys rising up into the air like competing Towers of Babel'. Totem poles and Towers of Babel: the alterity of the language used to describe industrial chimneys evokes the strangeness of urban 'verticality', a startling skyward reaching that, re-engineered as the following century's skyscrapers, would entrance the science fiction imagination (Hewitt and Graham 2015). If the industrial city represented a new kind of production in a new kind of space, it was also a space that production pushed upwards, a vertical spectacle (Goodwin-Hawkins 2018).

Dissatisfied with the earthward focus of Heideggerian dwelling, Luce Irigaray (1999) has, alternatively, called the geographical gaze *up*. Indeed, it is by looking up that Gaskell's heroine Margaret Hale makes her first, now much-quoted, encounter with Milton's industrial atmosphere:

> For several miles before they reached Milton, they saw a deep lead-coloured cloud hanging over the horizon in the direction in which it lay. It was all the darker from contrast with the pale grey-blue of the wintry sky … Nearer to the town, the air had a faint taste and smell of smoke; perhaps, after all, more a loss of the fragrance of grass and herbage than any positive taste or smell. Quick they were whirled over long, straight, hopeless streets of regularly-built houses, all small and of brick. Here and there a great oblong many-windowed factory stood up, like a hen among her chickens, puffing out black 'unparliamentary' smoke, and sufficiently accounting for the cloud which Margaret had taken to foretell rain. (Gaskell 2008: 69-70).

Milton, mill town, proclaims itself. Visually signifying Northern spatial alterity from a far-off distance, the smokescape is an atmosphere at once material and portentous. Yet, Margaret's first, mistaken apprehension of the 'cloud' is particularly pointed: the skies foretold of no natural climate, but an atmosphere of human manufacture.

It was flaws in the theory of chimney exhaust that produced the portentous atmospheric conditions that became bluntly known as the urban industrial 'smoke

nuisance' (Brimblecombe 1987; Mosley 2008). Instead of being pumped from chimneys' engineered heights and swept efficiently away by cleansing, inexhaustible air currents, smoke defiantly hung around. Smoke did not dissipate into infinite skies but lurked in bricked-up streets, assailing, for example, the Hale family's new Milton home, where 'outside a thick fog crept up to the very windows, and was driven in to every open door in choking white wreaths of unwholesome mist' (Gaskell 2008: 77-8). This wreathing substance proved as scientifically uncontainable as it nevertheless remained spatially contained, unmistakably mapping industrial space through the visible, breathable 'evidence of all that which had been put into it' (Dennis 2016: 146). That evidence did not just swirl, but settled, coating surfaces in black soot and corrosive particulate (Mosley 2008). Within the smokescape, even homely intimacies were challenged by an atmosphere that made it 'impossible to keep the muslin blinds clean … above a week together' (Gaskell 2008: 99). From coal to furnace, chimney to cloud, atmosphere to soot, industrial smoke was all too material.

But materialities are, of course, made meaningful, and smoke is a *particular* material substance, sensory stuff (Choy 2010; Connor 2008; Dennis 2015; 2016). Smoke's suspension (Choy and Zee 2015) in atmospheres pulls them into consciousness, resuscitates the background (Taylor 2016). Such a breath of changed awareness is what Peter Adey (2013) urges a geography of the air to attend to. Reflecting on pollution, building and breathability in his own reading of the modern megacity – spatial successor to nineteenth century smokescapes – Adey (2013) identifies the urban atmosphere as at once a signal of itself and a differentiating substance. The new Northern smokescapes were declaratively other, cartographically elsewhere (a point I reprise later in this article). And, in that atmospheric elsewhere, industrial plots were manufactured.

Manufactured plots

Real air filters into literary geography. On the page as in the world, space is no inertly simple 'setting' or 'backdrop' against which action is staged (Anderson 2014; Hones 2011). Further, as Angharad Saunders (2013: 286) observes, 'geographies of inspiration, influence and intention … coalesce in the writing process and enmesh themselves within the written form'. Just as the smokescapes represented by Coketown and Milton were a new kind of Northerly space, so were *Hard Times* and *North and South* a new kind of novel. As a distinct subject and genre, the industrial novel came into being in the 1830s, pressed into the service of growing concerns over child labour in factories (Simmons 2002). As progressive legislation removed this originating affective object, industry found literary form in other ways. James Richard Simmons explains that industrial novelists of the 1840s and 1850s:

> had to produce works that would interest readers through other means than merely appealing to their sympathy: a dirty, cold, poor child living in the streets excites sympathy, while a dirty, cold, poor adult living in the streets is a ne'er do well who needs to get a job … [thus] the industrial novels of this later period were more complex and significant as works of literature, because they aimed at portraying and

understanding the condition of England question in all its complexity, and not merely at getting the Ten Hours Bill passed. (2002: 344)

Dickens and Gaskell penned their industrial prose at just this juncture, and I want to suggest that the aims of apprehending industrial atmospheres and interesting contemporary audiences coalesce in *Hard Times* and *North and South* as manufactured plots. Jon Anderson (2014) nudges at the complexity of literary geographies through a triple word play on 'plot': plots, of course, structure fictional narratives; plots, too, parcel land; and, plots are far from innocent, involving scheme and intrigue. Through plot, Anderson (2014: 18) writes, 'places are epistemologically involved in the fictions we read and write, and fictions are active in constructing the geographies around us'. In the spatial practices of becoming text, Coketown and Milton manufacture tangible industrial geographies into tripartite plots.

Most obviously, narrative plots both novels, and thrummed through their serialisation. *Hard Times* spools stories of the middle class Gradgrind family, industrialist Josiah Bounderby, and labourer Stephen Blackpool. Louisa Gradgrind marries Bounderby, logically yet lovelessly, while Stephen's own failed marriage prevents a new romance. Things end badly: Stephen dies, and a postscript leaves Bounderby also dead, Louisa alone, and utilitarian caricature Tom Gradgrind disgraced. Only circus foundling Sissy Jupe – notably the novel's least geographically affixed character – earns a happy ending. Though deaths, not least of heartstring-tugging mill worker Bessy Higgins, do punctuate *North and South*'s plot, the novel ends on a decidedly romantic and redemptive note. Gaskell's heroine, Margaret Hale, moves with her parents from the rural South to the industrial North of England. Margaret immediately takes against smoky Milton and its human manifestation in proud mill-owner Thornton, but as the novel progresses she slowly rethinks the town and the man, with marriage and mutual economic ventures the suitably happy end. It would be fair to observe that the plots of both novels bear the rather melodramatic marks of stringing a magazine readership along to the next instalment. But the anticipatory rhythm of thwarted hopes and flared desires, building inexorably to an end in either misery or marriage, is just one kind of manufactured plot.

The second of Jon Anderson's (2014) plot types parcels land, and *North and South* – as even its geographical title declares – is particularly plotted by spatial demarcation. For much of the novel, Margaret Hale compares smoky Milton to 'that beloved place' (Gaskell 2008: 44), her childhood home of rural Helstone. Her parting view of Helstone parcels an idyll, which will stand in nostalgic distinction to the smokescape:

[T]hey had seen the last of the long low parsonage home, half covered with China-roses and pyracanthus – more homelike than ever in the morning sun that glittered on its windows, each belonging to some well-loved room … A sting at Margaret's heart made her strive to look out to catch the last glimpse of the old church tower at the turn where she knew it might be seen above a wave of the forest trees (Gaskell 2008: 66).

Homely Helstone is light and airy; industrial Milton is plotted into distant 'Darkshire'. Margaret plainly perceives the spatial and atmospheric difference between the two as she looks upon them. From her open window in Helstone, 'clustering roses and the scarlet honeysuckle came peeping round the corner; the small lawn was gorgeous with verbenas and geraniums of all bright colours (Gaskell 2008: 24). Yet in her Milton bedroom, 'the heavy smoking air hung about' and the sealed window 'looked to the blank wall [outside] … It loomed through the fog like a great barrier to hope.' (Gaskell 2008: 78-9).

Both plots of land are more than mere settings. They tug against each other, clearly reflecting a rural-urban contrast that was long established in England but cohering anew for the industrial era (Williams 1973). In Williams' (1973: 1) account, if industrial smokescapes represented the toil and despair therein, then rural landscapes promised a contrastingly 'natural way of life: of peace, innocence, and simple virtue'. The rural idyll is, of course, its own fictive plot. Gaskell knowingly suggests just this in a conversation between Margaret and her London suitor Henry Lennox: she waxes lyrical over Helstone's roses; he scoffs that it sounds 'like a village in a tale' (Gaskell 2008: 10). This will be the plot indeed, with Margaret later revisiting Helstone to find a less rosy reality.

Coketown, Milton. In plotting land, names – like smoke – signify. I have already noted how these evocative place names explicitly reference industry spaces that are made distinctive by their smoke, yet are generic in their Northern mapping. Coketown and Milton are manufactured geographies, parcelled from and standing for smokescape alterity. Plot stands out in these spaces – after all, Dickens' London is always called London; Gaskell named Manchester in her earlier novel *Mary Barton* and identifies London and Oxford in *North and South*. Coketown and Milton are not the coyness of anonymisation, or a clue to solve, but the conscious manufacture of a literary geography, through which to write and in which to read. Contrary, then, to analytic pinnings of Coketown and Milton onto the real maps of Preston (which Dickens visited for research) and Manchester (where Gaskell herself lived), I want to insist on the intentionally *other* cartography of smoky, fictive space. These manufactured plots of land are not available to be visited, and yet they do exist in material form in an emergent industrial geography in which smokescapes loom to the North – growing, rising, producing, emitting. I will return to such clouded cartographies in the following section.

The off-the-map materiality of Coketown and Milton further recalls what Ben Anderson (2009: 78) grasps as the simultaneously indeterminate and determinate nature of atmosphere, qualities that enable atmosphere to 'interrupt, perturb and haunt fixed persons, places or things'. Smokescapes certainly perturbed, but the nascent industrial order was intriguing, too. And, the industrial novel needed to manufacture intrigue (Simmons 2002). Peering into the spaces of production and the characters therein, industrial novels plotted their way to a new knowing of the smoky, Northern unknown. This third type of manufactured plot nags at Coketown, in the regularly restated message that a town technologically embodying modern production and progress is really locked in a kind of self-consumptive stasis (Taylor 2016). In Coketown's industrial monotony, to reprise the passage with which I began this article, 'every day was the same as yesterday and tomorrow' (Dickens 2012: 24). It is as though smoke's 'temporal disobedience' (Connor 2008), so spatially marked by engineering's ultimate incapacity to hasten away the

fumes of past production, hangs as a metaphor over a foreclosed future. As Patricia Johnson (1989) points out, the name 'Coketown' itself evokes a place that consumes its people with the unfeeling ease of burning fuel. In long gazes at fires and furnaces – the molten core of the smokescape – Dickens' Louisa sees the reflection of her own inexorable consumption. Watching the 'red sparks dropping out of the fire, and whitening and dying', she knows 'how short my life would be, and how little I could hope to do in it' (Dickens 2012: 53). Dickens (276) plots to have his reader apprehend this devouring atmosphere, concluding the novel by enmeshing Coketown into our reading space and addressing us at hearths of our own, where 'we shall see the ashes of our fires turn grey and cold'.

While Dickens is certainly Dickensian, repeatedly overlaying facts, factories and matter-of-fact attitudes into an industrial-utilitarian dystopia that eviscerates futures and feelings alike, Gaskell transposes the much more romantic intrigue of *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) into industrial space. Londoner Dickens, as Northern tourist, had boasted of visiting 'the best' and 'the worst' factory (Brantlinger 1971), but Gaskell writes not as a visitor but a rare regional writer at home in the industrial North. The insider perspective that her heroine Margaret is plotted into occupying is surely Gaskell's own. Surely, too, the reader is urged along with the scheme; as Melissa Schaub (2013) points out, to real-time readers of *Household Words*, Margaret's Milton-redeeming happy ending would have capped a long-running industrial serialisation that began in Coketown's drear. Gaskell writes Milton after Coketown – and in plotted response. She refuses Coketown's foreclosed future, and at the last her chimneys smoke with promise and possibility. If Gaskell thus subverts Dickens' othering, Northward gaze, she also re-plots her first novel, the Manchester naming and shaming *Mary Barton* (1848). In the manufacture of Milton's plot, industrial prejudice is intriguingly revised. Three types of plot so weave into industrial novels that scheme readers into their smoky geographies. Once more, now, into the cloud.

Clouded cartography, attuned enchantment

'Seen from a distance', Coketown 'lay shrouded in a haze of its own, which appeared impervious to the sun's rays' (Dickens 2012: 105). Like Margaret's first view of Milton as a cloud on the horizon, Northern smokescapes are mapped as atmospheric blots. Their signifying atmospheres can be apprehended from a distance, while close up they are, like walled cities, smoke-ringed against intrusion and wreathed, perhaps, as a great unknown. Like the unknown blanks on explorers' maps, the North's clouded cartography demands to be filled in. The industrial novel, as I noted above, duly approached the interpretive task. The literary geographies of *Hard Times* and *North and South* served to map new frontier spaces, and they did so by writing new textual atmospheres.

For Dickens (2012: 23, quoted above), venturing into Coketown's clouded cartography reveals monstrous smoke serpents, brick exotically stained 'like the painted face of a savage', and machinery animated into melancholy elephants. In her extended reading of this deeply othering depiction, Tamara Ketabgian (2003: 659) observes that Dickens 'populates Coketown with wild, uncontrollable and potentially destructive creatures … beyond the reach of discipline and domestication'. Twisting the familiar smoke of the hearth into a distant space of savages and monsters, Coketown's cartography

is far from domestic – and far from home. Early maps and travelogues had once filled in their unknown blanks with sea monsters and anthropophagi; Dickens does much the same, drawing on the contemporary imagery of colonial encounter to plot a map of Northern, industrial otherness. The smokescape is no intimately known 'London particular', but marker of a kind of internal Orient, as weirdly intriguing as it is atmospherically horrifying. When serpents writhe in the streets and the inside of a factory feels 'like the breath of the simoom' (Dickens 2012: 106), Coketown does not have to exist on a real map to be read cartographically.

And yet – maps ground but plots thicken. As Margaret Hale's travelling carriage rolls into Milton (again, quoted above), clouded cartography reveals neither rain nor fearsome monsters. Rather, there is an absence of smell; the breath is foregrounded through what it does not sensorily draw in. There is still much unfamiliarity, still a Northern cloud confounding a Southerner's gaze, but in a hint at the plotted possibility of homeliness amidst the smoke, each factory standing prominent in streets of brick uniformity resolves itself into a domestic 'hen among her chickens' (Gaskell 2008: 70). In Gaskell's plotting after Dickens, Milton's mistakable atmosphere portends the simplicity of believing in a map's markings; judgments, too, can be clouded.

Within Northern industrial space's clouded cartography, factories become hens, smoke becomes serpents. For the theorist Jane Bennett (2001: 5), 'One might say that such a world where things cross back and forth over the nature/culture divide, is a monstrous world', and surely Dickens does. But such crossings 'also could be sites of enchantment' (Bennett 2001: 50). Bennett takes issue with the oft-rehearsed modern narrative that precisely an urban, industrial, order has 'disenchanted' the world, leaving us, in Dickensian terms, all drably rationalist Gradgrinds. Not so, Bennett contends: 'enchantment never really left the world but only changed its forms' (91). There is surely some modern enchantment in Margaret's mistaken identification of Milton's manufactured smoke cloud as a natural formation. In Bennett's reckoning, such enchantments can become re-known through somatic attentiveness to 'magical sites already here' (8). Even Dickens, otherwise plotting to reveal the drear *dis*enchantment amidst the smokescape, cannot resist attending to the strange magic of industrial smoke by writing it into a hybrid, serpent animism.

In Coketown, the enchanted serpents are combatted by a kind of natural magic: the weather. During a heavy downpour, the industrial atmosphere is transformed as,

> The rain fell, and the Smoke-serpents, submissive to the curse of all that tribe, trailed themselves upon the earth. In the waste-yard outside [the factory], the steam from the escape pipe, the litter of barrels and old iron, the shining heaps of coals, the ashes everywhere, were shrouded in a veil of mist and rain. (Dickens 2012: 67)

If the smokescape is a cartographic elsewhere, replete with serpents and savagery, then only the weather has the atmospheric capacity to press in through the cloud. More so, weather can also magically resolve into unsettling human form. For Dickens' labourer Stephen Blackpool, a 'thundering surging' storm seems 'as if his late angry mood were going about trying to get at him'; hybrid and human-like, the storm 'rattled at the door below, and went about the house clamouring and lamenting' (2012: 80-1). In this charged

atmosphere, meteorological tumult tips into the affect monotonous smoke had seemingly screened. Stephen is pursued by the weather as he gives vent to his feelings. For Margaret in Milton, feelings *are* the weather. Initially so cartographically dislocated she could not distinguish smoke from rain, Margaret herself manifests meteorologically, with Gaskell repeatedly describing her face in weather patterns of brightness and cloud, dark gloom and wet tears. Other characters even look to Margaret as if to check the forecast, an expressive surfacing she shares with her absent brother: 'I could find it in my heart to put you in a passion any day just to see his stormy look coming like a great cloud over your face' (Gaskell 2008: 161). Conversely, mill owner Thornton's feelings are revealed in industrial metonymy; his growing attachment to Margaret becomes 'a fierce experience, in the midst of whose flames he was struggling! but, through that furnace he would fight his way out' (Gaskell 2008: 419). But, as his stoic mother counsels, 'A girl's love is like a puff of smoke – it changes with every wind' (Gaskell 2008: 161).

Interestingly, material atmospheres entered scientific purview at the same time as the affectively atmospheric novel came into writing and reading practice – yet, there was no initial overlap between these two meanings (Lewis 2012). Atmosphere was breathed, or atmosphere was felt, not both at once. By the new textual atmospheres of the industrial novel, however, the boundaries between smoke-clogged air and clouded weather, emotional outbursts and simmering moods, seem to have become far more permeable. In the smokescape, atmospheres material and affective commingle. This bears out Adey's insistence that urban air 'is more than just air but constitutive of the material affective relations that animate the experience of the city in a way which we might say is atmospheric' (2013: 293). Thus, affect is again as weather when Margaret walks through Milton on the verge of violent strike, sensing, 'a restless, oppressive sense of irritation abroad among the people; a thunderous atmosphere, morally as well as physically' (Gaskell 2008: 212-13). Immaterial atmosphere fills the smokeless space left by the stopped chimneys of an industrial strike. Just as visible smoke serpents can animate brick-built streets, affect can seep unseen through and between labouring bodies. Plotted on the page, each can provoke a readerly unease, each fill in cartographic blanks.

Attending, like Bennett (2001), to bodies and sensoria, anthropologist Kathleen Stewart (2011) argues that atmosphere and affect 'attune'. Hence, as she moves through Milton's streets, Margaret attunes to the atmosphere of unrest; atmosphere as affect exceeds the labouring bodies it emanates from (Anderson 2009), becoming something Margaret can feel. Margaret herself is plotted into a growing affective attunement to Milton and, significantly, *North and South* bustles with street encounters (Zemka 2009). Milton's streets are, for Margaret, sites of apprehension, recalling Adey's (2013) notion of atmospheric urban inhabitance. The chapter titled 'Home Sickness' actually marks a shift otherwise; when Margaret befriends the working class Higgins family after a street encounter, the atmospheric shift is such that 'From that day Milton became a brighter place to her' (Gaskell 2008: 88). As the strange serpents of cartographic blanks give way to an affective remapping, the Northern smoke cloud settles into intimate familiarity.

Conclusion: Re-reading in post-industrial affect

Contemplating Raymond Williams' fictions, David Harvey (1995: 79) muses that 'The novel is not subject to closure in the same way that more analytic forms of fiction are. There are always choices and possibilities, perpetually unresolved tensions and differences, subtle shifts in structures of feeling'. Nor, indeed, can the novel be contained within its covers: the serialised forms of *Hard Times* and *North and South* already open writerly dialogues which only continue in the ongoing spatial event of reading. My own reading of these two novels is not as a Gaskellite or Dickensian scholar, nor as a Victorianist, nor, even, as a literary scholar. I read and write as an ethnographer, my field the very non-fictional, now post-industrial, smokescapes of Northern England. As Dave Russell (2004) observes, Coketown and Milton remain iconic representations of the real North, and the continued popularity of *Hard Times* and *North and South* has settled into an enduring imaginative geography of what the North is and can be. Margaret Hale's happy marriage never quite redeemed the North from a grimly clouded cartography. The smoke stains painting savage brick faces have proved lingering remnants, all too difficult to scrub out in both material and representational terms. Yet smoke has at once coagulated and dissipated in ways that neither Dickens nor Gaskell ever attuned to.

One hundred and fifty years after the industrial novel grew too trite, too unintriguing, for its audience (Simmons 2002), industrial smokescapes are still very much with the world. But capital mobility has relocated the cloud and the serpents from the North to new spaces of alterity – the megacities (Adey 2013) of what is sometimes described as the 'global South'. For Harvey (2010), such shifting geographies of production and capital can even be summarised in atmospheric terms: as a weather map. The cloud has hurried on from Northern cartography; the local textile industry is now some forty years dead. In the old smokescapes of capital abandonment, smoke does not snake, machines do not strive, and melancholy elephants do not monotonously move. There are still tall chimneys, which, now smokeless, turn to cenotaphs of a sort. 'You will see Milton without smoke', Gaskell's (2008: 144) mill owner, Thornton, had ominously announced on the eve of a strike. It was not meant to prophesy. Victorian atmospheric engineering may have proved futile, but the connection between chugging smoke and busy manufacture was always evident. As the historian Steven Mosley (2008) illustrates, Manchester's 'entrance to hell' smoke was just as equally a sign of prosperity, and rendered especially positive in the industrial textile economy, where trade, and hence work and fortunes, fluctuated. A plume of smoke trailing from a tall chimney signified that the mills had orders and workers had wages. Now, chimneys can promise neither, and post-industrial Northern lives are lived less in smoke than beneath the bricked up shadows of a shut down past. This is the smokeless atmosphere of post-industrial affect. Re-reading old atmospheres, apprehending present-day shadows, I can only attune to ambivalence.

Reading and writing today, I do so in a contemporary socio-political atmosphere which extols smokefree virtues, associating the air with public health and often registering a consciousness of respiratory pollutants in olfactory ways (Dennis 2015, 2016). While the 'smoke nuisance' was certainly debated in Dickens' and Gaskell's time, and state efforts to address the problem appear in Gaskell's (2008: 70) allusion to 'unparliamentary' smoke,

most measures were confined to London, and there was no nationally enforced smoke abatement legislation until 1956 (Brimblecombe 1987; Corton 2015; Mosley 2008). More so, the respiratory effects of industrial smoke were more often neglected because, as Mosley (2008: 58) notes, 'the protracted and mundane nature of respiratory conditions, with victims often taking many years to die, helped to obscure their importance as major killers.' Re-reading the respiratory in Milton and Coketown does show an absence of coughs. While Dickens writes of ladders laid ready to bring out the dead of Coketown's slums, his labourer Stephen Blackpool does not expire with emphysema but falls down a mine shaft. In *North and South*, Bessy Higgins *does* meet a messily pulmonary end, but the substance that clogs her lungs is not smoky particulate but: 'Fluff … little bits, as fly off fro' the cotton, when they're carding it, and fill the air till it looks all fine white dust. They say it winds round the lungs, and tightens them up.' (Gaskell 2008: 124). While there are also worries about Milton's air ruining Margaret's mother's health, the doctor does not recommend a change of air, and, besides, she had equally complained about 'damp' air in idyllic Helstone. Milton's 'breathers' (Choy 2010) more often choke with emotion than respiratory affliction.

Although, not quite. Analysing air, as Adey (2013: 294) reflects, 'reveals who belongs and who does not … in a constellation of … [urban] inequality'. Even in the nineteenth century, atmospheric difference classed its breathers. Some could afford to breathe easily beyond the chimneys, many could not (Mosley 2008). Down in the 'hardest working part' of Coketown, Stephen Blackpool breathes out his class position amidst 'the innermost fortifications of that ugly citadel, where Nature was as strongly bricked out as killing airs and gases were bricked in' (Dickens 2012: 61). By contrast, the middle class Gradgrind family breathe better, at a convenient remove a few miles from Coketown, in a house with green gardens free of soot and, notably, with 'ventilation' (Dickens 2012: 13). Meanwhile industrialist Bounderby anticipates the politics of present-day urban verticality (e.g. Choy 2010), living high on a hill, overlooking the smokescape of his manufacture, in a house with conspicuously clean 'white steps' (Dickens 2012: 67). Hierarchies were not just spatially displayed, but could manifest in 'the peculiar cleanliness required to keep everything so white and pure in such an atmosphere' (Gaskell 2008: 137), as the growing household labour necessitated by atmospheric pollution spurred a middle class desire to seal domesticity from smoky contamination (Mosley 2008). Now, that classed concern has shifted to the equally intimate domain of cigarette smoking, and it is those who might once have filled chimney-topped factories who might now themselves dangerously 'off-gas' atmospheric pollutants into carefully sealed space (Dennis 2016). The inheritors of Stephen and Bessy still live, and perhaps light up, in the hardest working parts of Northern industrial space, yet they live in smokescapes without smoke, without labour, and in the ambivalent atmospheres of post-industrial affect.

Aerography. Enchantment. Verticality. Theoretical tools promise their own attunements to modern atmospheres. But without the cloud, in spaces apprehended perhaps more by the 'loss of the fragrance of [smoke] that any positive taste or smell' (Gaskell 2008: 69), how will we make space to read and write geographies of smokeless inequality?

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