IN A MANNER OF SPEAKING

Some aspects of structure, including narration, in the novels of Elizabeth Gaskell.

by

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CONTENTS

C H A P T E R O N E

INTRODUCTION

i) The Approach

This study undertakes to describe and analyse some of the formal arrangements of Elizabeth Gaskell's last three novels, *North and South* 1855,[1] *Sylvia's Lovers* 1863 and *Wives and Daughters* 1864. It emphasises the duration of these works, the arrangements which occupy time, unfolding in a leisurely manner to work gradually on the reader. All narrative has such temporality of its own, as distinct from the passing of time, which it may seek to portray. But nineteenth-century novels, which James (1962) saw as "large loose baggy monsters" (p 84) in his Preface to *The Tragic Muse* 1906 are usually even more extensive and "loose" than other narrative forms. Although James thought that they lacked a firm structural principle, their amplitude may be taken as deliberately created, as a principle in itself. If the Aristotelian approach of 'why is it as it is?' is adopted, then the apparent sprawl may reveal itself as purposive, and, for its own purposes, as well designed.

In order to bring out the way the design of a Gaskell novel unfolds in time, this study has divided each novel into stages so that the sequential purposes and effects of each stage, and its interaction with other stages, may be identified and analysed. These divisions have not been imposed arbitrarily on each novel, but are an effort to identify arrangements, groupings, that are built into the narrative and governed by an overall purpose. What can be observed in the narrative is that in depicting events, their causation and consequences, the narrative's immediate purposes modulate as the events evolve, and that these changes in the local purpose allow the recognition of divisions in the work. As Gaskell's narratives are usually chronological, the sections of each novel have a relationship in which the concatenation of fictional events also governs the sequence of the narrative's sections. Their sequence is not complicated by, for example, a temporal dislocation of events, a

1. The use of dates after titles and after authors' names has been explained at the beginning of the Bibliography.

move which might throw emphasis onto the thematic relationship of the sections rather than on the causality of the events which they depict. The temporal continuity of Gaskell's narrative can pose some difficulty for division, for it usually means that the critic has no obvious breaks in sequence to rely on when identifying sections; on the other hand, once the sections have been identified, their causal continuity makes their relationship a comparatively straightforward matter to approach. But here too, actually accounting for a series of changing, related purposes cannot be a mechanical matter. As the plot of each novel determines its inner divisions differently from other novels and as the plot is recognised by the critic's interpretive activity, the accuracy and usefulness of proceeding by the perceived stages of a narrative is an approach which must also win assent in the actual analysis of each novel.

The plot[1] of each novel is what guides this account of a related series of changing local purposes; it is each work's governing purpose, its final cause. Once the plot has been identified, the sequential purpose of each section can also be identified for its contribution to the complex ruling purpose of the whole. This procedure implies an assumption fundamental to the analysis of Gaskell's novels: all the parts are made to cohere in an observable way so that a completeness of design will be felt in the whole.

In some ways Gaskell's novels do not propose themselves immediately or obviously as being suited to an analytical approach, for her characteristic narration[2] has an ease and fluidity about it which may serve to mask each novel's design. Es-

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1. The concept of 'plot' is distinguished on pp 30 - 34 of this chapter from that of 'structure' and of 'story'.

2. "Narration", the act of narrating, is to be distinguished from "narrative", that which is being narrated. Although these two words can be used interchangeably in English the distinction between the act and the product of the act is a valuable one. It was first pointed to by Genette and is pointed out again by the translators of Genette (1976)

pecially in the later works, characters come forward and matters develop with a life-like indirection which, while it should properly be taken as the achieved effect, may serve to distract critical attention from the considerable technical control being exercised. For example, Craik (1975), admiring the effect she describes, says:

> Her method has always been one of aggregation, juxtaposition and intermingling and merging of events and moods, rather than of separating into large sections or episodes, bringing out dramatically the prevailing mood and contrasting it with what precedes and follows: *Wives and Daughters* is her most agglomerate, least dissectible of novels. It does not fall into neat sections, or move to climaxes of undivided attention. Clear, coherent and perfectly connected as is all the action, structurally it is near-indivisible. Always concerned to produce the movement of life - with its mixture of the portentous with the apparently trivial, the unusual with the routine - even at the expense of obvious form, recognizing that what in the abstract appears momentous may when experienced give way to the more immediate, she succeeds, in *Wives and Daughters*, in preserving a near-perfect balance.
>
> (p 227)

As an account of the effect of Gaskell's narration this is so accurately evocative that the observation that *Wives and Daughters* is structurally "near-indivisible" and that some effects have been achieved "at the expense of obvious form" may look like sufficient reason to stop at such a description. But if the muddled "movement of life" is seen as a structural principle in itself, then the apparent absence of form becomes a formal quality in its own right. The argument that will be developed here is thus a two-fold one: that novels generally are formal achievements demanding as one of the critic's tasks the analysis of how their form works,[1] and that Gaskell's own formal achievements are more considerable than has been recognised.

Gaskell's technical achievement has, in fact, had some recognition. Its discernible development was one of the reasons for reassessing her stature given by Wright (1965), but on

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1. As Friedman (1975) says, the aim of analysis is "to be able to say that this is there because of that." p 54.

the whole the judgements made by Cecil (1948) in 1935 seem to have persisted. The judgements he makes are not a fair reflection of Gaskell's work, but, more dangerously for the novel as a genre, many of the assumptions on which they seem to have been based have also shown signs of persisting. Cecil is insistent that Gaskell's achievements and shortcomings are typical of her age.

> Her talent, too, is a Victorian talent, fertile, intuitive, uncritical. Her rambling, unequal, enthralling novels, full of providential chances and comic character-parts and true love rewarded in the last chapter, are typical Victorian novels. (p 153)

And, extending the pronouncement of "typical", he says:

> ... she too was the instinctive, uncritical child of an instinctive, uncritical age, ignorant alike of the laws governing her art and of her particular capacities and limitations. (p 179)

Cecil condescends to the Victorians as only someone conscious of recent escape can; but it becomes clear that his general assumption that there are laws governing all novels alike is as questionable as his accuracy about the Victorian age, when he continues:

> When her imagination was fired, she had no idea that she ought to find a form appropriate to it. She just fitted it as best she could into the form commonly used by the novelists of her day. (p 179)

Cecil's "it" seems to refer to the concept or idea that had taken hold of Gaskell's imagination, an idea for which it seems she could then have consulted a list to find the appropriate form. Perhaps this is to be unfair on Cecil in turn, but he seems to have in mind a dangerous distinction between form and idea.

The major problem in the division Cecil assumes is that it is Gaskell's own treatment of her idea, of what fired her imagination, which has put him in touch with the idea in the first place. In the reading experience, the idea and the form are not separable, and their common identity must be seen to control the critical response to the work's embodiment of its central ideas. As the specific idea

which shapes a novel is a matter to which the reader has access only through its treatment, it must be assumed that an objection to the form is also an objection to the shaping idea, and *vice versa*. A critic interested in the achieved work of art must work from this premise. A smaller, more recent example of the problems which arise in criticism which says 'this is a fine idea, but badly executed', comes in Ganz's (1969) comments on the treatment of Mrs Gibson in *Wives and Daughters*. Ganz finds the comedy of Mrs Gibson at its best in the character's own monologues, but feels that Gaskell's "own descriptive comments veer towards moral judgements" (p 167). The distinction between the character's words and Gaskell's comments widens when Ganz compares Mrs Gibson's actions with her speech:

> If Mrs Gaskell's own comments rarely illumine Mrs Gibson's personality as effectively as does that lady's conversation, the actions devised for her do not, as we have said, subtly suggest her limitations. (pp 167 - 8)

While readers will agree that characters like Mrs Gibson can, in their way, become old friends, a comment like this is dangerous in suggesting that Mrs Gibson is a real person whose own utterances give her away, while the author is someone else standing to one side and commenting on her. Ganz can only have formed her conception of Mrs Gibson through Gaskell's treatment of the character, and therefore, logically, Mrs Gibson's liveliness or limitations cannot be spoken of as a matter to which her creator is failing to respond or to portray accurately. Inconsistency of treatment is another matter, for it does not pose a separation between form and content, but points to certain contradictions within the form itself.

Insisting that the specific content of a work is only knowable through its form, means, as Friedman (1975) argues, that the proper question to ask about a work is

> not what is the relation between form and content, nor how does a poem mean, but what are the parts, and how do they relate to the whole? (p 49)

When "parts" are conceived of like this, they are equally form

and content, which is how the reader experiences them.[1] It is in this way that the sections of Gaskell's novels are being approached.

Another fundamental assumption to be made in an analysis of a novel's formal achievement is that the form of the work has emerged from the need to engage the reader in a certain way with the ideas being given shape in the action. Gaskell herself was conscious of these matters: of the identity of form and content, and of the need to engage her readers in specific feelings about her subject matter through the form of her work. Shortly after the publication of her first novel, *Mary Barton* 1848, she wrote to a friend justifying her purposes in writing the work and the sombre tone that it had taken.

> The whole tale grew up in my mind as imperceptibly as a seed germinates in the earth, so I cannot trace back now why or how such a thing was written, or such a character or circumstance introduced. (There is one exception to this which I will name afterwards.) I can remember now that the prevailing thought in my mind at the time when the tale was silently forming itself and impressing me with the force of a reality, was the seeming injustice of the inequalities of fortune. Now, if they occasionally appeared unjust to the more fortunate, they must bewilder an ignorant man full of rude, illogical thought, and full also of sympathy for suffering which appealed to him through his senses. I fancied I saw how all this might lead to a course of action which might appear right for a time to the bewildered mind of such a one, but that this course of action, violating the eternal laws of God, would bring with it its own punishment of an avenging conscience far more difficult to bear than any worldly privation. Such thoughts I now believe, on looking back, to have been the origin of the book. 'John Barton' was the original title of the book. Round the character of John Barton all the others formed themselves; he was my hero, *the* person with whom all my sympathies went, with whom I tried to identify myself at the time, because I believed from personal observation that such men were not uncommon, and would well reward such sympathy and love as should throw light down upon their groping search after the causes of suffering, and the reason

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1. This emphasis on the common identity of form and content is not to deny Friedman's (1975) other major argument, that the *theory* of form can be held and discussed separately from the connected matters of form, content and meaning in any particular work.

> why suffering is sent, and what they can do to lighten it .... It is no wonder then that the whole book seems to be written in the minor key; indeed, the very design seems to me to require this treatment. I acknowledge the fault of there being too heavy a shadow over the book; but I doubt if the story could have been deeply realized without these shadows. The cause of the fault must be looked for in the design; and yet the design was one worthy to be brought into consideration.
>
> (*Letters*; No 42)

Gaskell identifies her "prevailing thought" as being the conjunction of the way in which injustice and suffering would strike a temperament like John Barton and the truer account (in her belief) of "the reason why suffering is sent". Then, in "I fancied I saw how all this might lead ... " she describes how, from this "prevailing thought" came the way in which John Barton's reactions to injustice would lead him into "a course of action which might appear right for a time" (Carson's murder), but which would, because of the "eternal laws of God", inevitably destroy him. The way in which the action is said to have grown out of the "prevailing thought" is the important point. It is why it must be remembered that for the reader, the action and its treatment is what gives access to the "prevailing thought". In the same way that the action emerged, the tone of the novel, its "minor key", was "required" by the "prevailing thought". All aspects of the novel are governed, in Gaskell's account, by the original idea. By the end of the passage, Gaskell calls both the original idea and her finished work, her "design". The concepts of idea, purpose and treatment meet in her word "design". It is true that in acknowledging the "shadow over the book" Gaskell is also saying that her personal griefs when writing *Mary Barton*, she had recently lost her infant son, may have coloured it unduly. But although diffident enough to say this about her work, she returns with confidence to her point that her "design", her purposes and the form to which they gave rise, controlled everything, even the degree of gloom in the narrative.

The later letters contain very little comment on her working principles; reference to her novels is relatively infrequent and usually no more than a hasty progress report or complaint,

but as a starting point, this insight to Gaskell's notion of the unifying design of her work is invaluable. In the analysis of her later works, it will be shown that she developed in her ability to realise the unity of which she was always conscious; in the meantime, the value of her comments lies in the picture they give of her approach to form, an approach which gives encouraging support to the premises of this study.

The assumption that a novel is the creation of shape by a willed effort underlies what has been said so far about analysis showing how the parts relate to the whole. The concept of intention must form the basis of formal analysis as well as of interpretive criticism. It may be said that a snow flake, in its delicate, intricate symmetry, is a thing of beauty; but while the ingredients of its design can be listed and described, its beauty cannot be interpreted. It cannot be analysed as purposive form. The snowflake does not intend to be beautiful, it simply is so; it is an example of an intentionless design whose properties will yield only to description. In Friedman's (1975) terms, it cannot be said of the snowflake's form that "this is there because of that" (p 54).

The attribution of intention which is entailed in formal analysis is not a matter which has been explicit in much recent criticism. Wimsatt and Beardsley's 'intentional fallacy'[1] may have led critics to avoid the concept, but to postulate an intention is not necessarily to run the risk of fallacious analysis. To pose the presence of a governing purpose is not to suggest that this purpose can then be turned on the work as a criterion which the work, the treatment, has to reach. This would be to make the same set of false distinctions between form and meaning as have been pointed to between form and content. What the attribution of intention means is that a purpose is assumed to have been present in the shaping of the plot and in its subsequent control of all the parts of the work. The critical process of

1. Wimsatt (1954) pp 3 - 18.

discerning the plot and observing its shaping power is a circular one - as the parts of the work are felt to cohere, so their governing principle reveals itself more clearly, and with this clarity comes greater understanding of the functioning of the parts. It is this experience of a circular interaction between parts and whole which confirms for the critic the initial assumption of an intention.

It is worth pursuing the possible reasons for an avoidance of this concept of intention a little further, especially as Gaskell's comments in her letter about *Mary Barton* point to one of these possible reasons. The opening sentence of the letter, "The whole tale grew up in my mind as imperceptibly as a seed germinates in the earth" uses a simile which usually forms part of the vocabulary of a Romantic critic's valuing of works of art for their organic wholeness. This valuing can in turn lead to the creation of a work being thought of as a spontaneous growth in the author's mind, as a natural, effortless process. Such emphasis on spontaneous, effortless growth would be misleading and would probably be denied if put explicitly to the imaginary critic being evoked here, but nonetheless its effects can often be seen in criticism. When the emphasis of analysis on intention and so on achieved meaning goes by default, notions of organic growth may become limiting ones. They may, for example, help to limit a critic to a simple re-exposition of the work's meaning. The Romantic critic's pleasure in the beautiful completeness of a great work must be a real experience for all critics and is a quality of art which must have full recognition. But not at the expense of attention to the means of its achievement. A novel, like language itself, is an artefact and the creativity in the system of its being also demands recognition, demands formal analysis. Such analysis need not be the sole critical activity; attention to what the work means and why that meaning is important will always need to be given, but if this entails a drift away from the assumption of achieved meaning on which analysis rests, then delight in that meaning itself may be diminished. The intention to construct a

meaning which underlies all literary works as it underlies all speech acts must remain an active critical tenet.

Gaskell's use of the simile of a seed's imperceptible germination may therefore reflect Romantic assumptions about art which are the origins of a critical reluctance to write from the observation of deliberate construction in a work of art. Like many other post-Romantic artists, Gaskell is reporting her feeling that her idea took on a life of its own and that she was not particularly conscious of developing it by an effort of will. This is a report which must be respected, but, as Friedman (1975) points out, the notion of the intended construction of an artefact which an analytical critic must hold, does not contradict the kind of report Gaskell has given. Intention is a logically necessary assumption about the nature of the finished product, and not about the creative experience itself. As he says:

> ... in order for the work to have reached (relatively) its completed state, it is logically necessary for there to have been *something* which told the writer that he had gotten everything together as well as possible under the circumstances. The creative process, in other words, must be organized by some principle in order to reach completion. This principle is the work's intention.
> (p 51)

Thus, although an idea may fire an artist's imagination to the extent that he or she is conscious only of its spontaneous germination (a state often spoken of as 'inspired'), it must still be assumed that the result is an achieved one, that it was governed by a principle that was either consciously recognized or unconsciously adhered to.

As well as Romantic assumptions which close off literary works in general from analysis, a reason why Gaskell's work has not encouraged formal analysis may lie in its specific nature. She is a formal realist, seeking to give her readers an illusion of the reality of what they encounter in her work. In addition, serving the realism, her narrative effects are particularly conducive to the 'slice-of-life' assumptions which formal realism may encourage in the unwary. Her narration

seeks to be as natural, as unobtrusively familiar as it can. It speaks to the reader in a relaxed, every-day voice. Gaskell herself said of the narration of *Mary Barton*:

> I told the story according to a fancy of my own; to really SEE the scenes I tried to describe, (and they WERE as real as my own life at the time) and then to tell them as nearly as I could, as if I were speaking to a friend over the fire on a winter's night and describing real occurrences. (*Letters*;No 48)

The ease and familiarity at which she aimed may be one of the reasons why she is treated as a natural story-teller, rather than as one who achieved the quality of naturalness. The realism which this letter declares was her aim may be what encourages notions of the authenticity of effortless achievement, it may encourage a tendency to conceive of Gaskell's material as a series of snap-shots, ready-made scenes to which she had simply to raise her camera (were it possible in the 1840's) to record.

Watt (1972) describes the general means by which formal realism creates the apparent authenticity of its material (attention to the particular individual's responses, and the careful location of events in time and space) and in doing so, makes it clear that such works are artificial constructs which seek in their own special way to re-present life. He too recognises the danger that realism's way of achieving authenticity may encourage critics to ignore the artifice.

> Formal realism is, of course, ... only a convention; and there is no reason why the report on human life which is presented by it should be in fact any truer than those presented through the very different conventions of other literary genres. The novel's air of total authenticity, indeed, does tend to authorise confusion on this point ... (p 35)

He also acknowledges that realism has been felt to give novels a too easy and even a spurious claim to authenticity, and that this may have led to a widespread "distaste for Realism and all its works" (p 35). A similar observation of "distaste" led Lodge (1971) to a vigorous defence of the discipline that the mode of formal realism can exercise on a writer. He compares features of its "code" (p 32) such as "consistency

with history, solidity of specification" (p 32) with the discipline of "metrical or stanzaic form in verse" (p 32) and says that the writer's struggle with the realistic novel's own forms of discipline may yield

> ... results superior to spontaneous expression ... the conventions of realistic fiction prevent the narrative writer from telling the first story that comes into his head - which is likely to be either autobiography or fantasy - and compel him to a kind of concentration on the possibilities of his *donnée* that may lead him to new and quite unpredictable discoveries of what he has to tell. In the novel personal experience must be explored and transmuted until it acquires an authenticity and persuasiveness independent of its actual origins; while the fictive imagination through which this exploration and transmutation is achieved is itself subject to an empirical standard of accuracy and plausibility. The problem of reconciling these two opposite imperatives is essentially rhetorical and ... requires great linguistic resourcefulness and skill for its successful solution.
> (pp 32 - 3)

It is the claim for the discipline of the mode of formal realism that is important to this study of Gaskell's novels, rather than an argument about its inherent superiority or weakness, but the acknowledgement in Watt (1972) of contemporary distaste and Lodge's (1971) subsequent defence of the mode suggest that a detachment from realism is now sufficiently pervasive to make acceptable the cool enquiry of formal analysis. Delight is indeed the crucial first response in a reader, but beyond that must come a certain cool curiosity about the creation of that delight.

As this welcoming of detachment indicates, the primary aim of an analysis of form is not to give a stirring new reading of a work, or of an artist's body of work, but to show, in part at least, how what has been achieved, has been done. As Culler (1976), arguing a different cause, has said:

> ... fulfillment of the interpretive task has come to be the touchstone by which other kinds of critical writing are judged, and reviewers inevitably ask of any work of literary theory, linguistic analysis, or historical scholarship, whether it actually assists us in our understanding of particular works. In this critical climate it is therefore important, if only as a means of loosening the grip which interpretation has on critical consciousness, to take up a tendentious position and to maintain that, while the experience of literature may be an experience of interpreting works, in fact the interpretation of individual works is only tangentially

> related to the understanding of literature. To engage in the study of literature is not to produce yet another interpretation of *King Lear* but to advance one's understanding of the conventions and operations of an institution, a mode of discourse. (p 246)

Although Culler's "linguistic analysis" does not specifically include formal analysis, and although Culler may not agree with this claim, what formal analysis undertakes is sufficiently a part of his sense of what the study of literature should be aimed at (the understanding of 'literature' as a mode of discourse) to warrant inclusion here. An understanding of the nature of literature will be served by an understanding of the formal operations of individual works.

Having said this, it is necessary to recognise that the analysis of form cannot be undertaken independently of interpretation. At the simplest level (so to speak), reading is an interpretive act. But, as in Culler's polemic, it must also be said that interpretation is not an end in itself for the formalist. Deciding what a work means, what its effect on the reader has been, is a necessary step prior to an analysis of how that meaning and effect has been achieved. For this reason, much of the discussion of Gaskell's novels has had to start from, and to develop, a reading of these works so that the salient formal features and their purpose can be identified. In the same way that certain decisions that a writer makes at the outset of the work will be its major shaping forces, decisions such as the way the work will be narrated, who is to be its central character, and what kind of story it is to be (about moral development, say, or about a change in fortune), so it is a primary interpretation of the work that will enable the critic to identify the decisions made. For example, a fairly extensive argument about Margaret Hale's centrality has been given in the discussion of *North and South* because seeing the novel as her story affects very substantially the analysis of its achievements. The analogy with linguistics holds here: it is the fact that a sentence has been understood which enables questions to be asked about the means within the sentence which made understanding possible.

The relationship between an analytic concern with technical methods and the interpretation of the work itself that is being envisaged here is really one of stages: the work has to be understood as fully as possible before analysis can be undertaken. The primary effort to understand may well lead the critic to search very widely in other literary works and among all branches of criticism. At this stage, all the information and guidance available to the critic is invaluable, and it is here that different critical approaches and emphases will be felt to be complementary and to interact. Although at a later stage a distinct approach may wish to raise only certain kinds of questions about literary works, at the outset, all approaches count. They too, all rely on a basic interpretive reading of the text. This idea of a common starting point and of interdependence seems obvious enough when stated, but it is a point which has to be re-asserted constantly. Richards (1960) gave considerable clarity to the critical activity when he described the critical and technical parts of criticism, showing that they are distinct but overlapping and therefore sometimes indistinguishable aspects of the critical task. He wrote in 1924:

> It will be convenient at this point to introduce two definitions. In a full critical statement which states not only that an experience is valuable in certain ways, but also that it is caused by certain features in a contemplated object, the part which describes the value of the experience we shall call the *critical* part. That which describes the object we shall call the *technical* part. Thus to say that we feel differently towards wooden crosses and stone crosses is a technical remark. And to say that metre is more suited to the tender passion than is prose would be, as it stands, a technical remark, but here it is evident that a critical part might easily be also present. All remarks as to the ways and means by which experiences arise or are brought about are technical, but critical remarks are about the values of experiences and the reasons for regarding them as valuable, or not valuable. (p 23)

Although Richards's comment on crosses demands modification in that such a comment can only be a technical one if the critic is showing either that the author concerned actually creates the different feelings about wooden and stone crosses or employs the reader's pre-existing disposition to feel

differently about them, the passage does place the distinct but related nature of the evaluative and analytical tasks.

As was said earlier, evaluative criticism has tended to dominate the last three decades, but, in seeking to alter this emphasis and assert the importance of theory, recent criticism has again tended to neglect the necessity of a balanced interdependence of emphasis. This is often done deliberately, as Culler (1976) does in the passage quoted above, but even on occasions when the critic is not as embattled, the theory of criticism being advocated does not give due recognition to its dependence on other, related activities. For example, Chatman (1978) cites the efforts of Structuralists and Formalists to concentrate on questions about the nature of literature, rather than on a reading of individual works, and, in definition of this task, he quotes from Todorov's essay 'Litérature et Signification' in which a distinction between theory and what Todorov calls 'description' is drawn:

> Literary theory ... is to discuss and transform the theoretical premises themselves, after having experienced the object described. (p 17)

It would seem that the distinction which Chatman is reporting does not sufficiently recognise the basis of theory in the initial act of interpretation. Todorov seems to pass over this stage rather hastily and to hurry onwards in his phrase "after having experienced the object described". The question of how general statements are to be arrived at from interpretative reading of individual literary works does not raise an insuperable difficulty, but it will not be surmounted by assuming that it is not there.

The relatedness of critical activities is a matter which has been introduced here mainly so that the place being envisaged for formal analysis will be clear. But before leaving the issue, inter-relatedness may be used to suggest why formal analysis need not be seen as the arid activity it is often presented as, and also to suggest that analysis is not blindly guilty of a simplifying conception of art in which all works are held to be happily self-enclosed objects. Formal analysis

may, after establishing a preliminary understanding of a work, assume the self-containedness of individual works for its particular purposes (works are intentional creations), but it need not rest there. The relationship between life and art which has concerned the formalist in the act of understanding a work, may well re-engage attention when the analysis reveals aspects of the world from which the work emerged which are of particular interest. The profundity with which an analysis of form may be related back to its originating context, may be seen in Miller (1968).

> A Victorian novel is, finally, a structure in which the elements (characters, scenes, images) are not detachable pieces, each with a given nature and meaning, each adding its part to the meaning of the whole. Every element draws its meaning from the others, so that the novel must be described as a self-generating and self-sustaining system, like the society it mirrors.
>
> These characteristics of the form of many Victorian novels are related to the historical situation in which the novels were written. The development of Victorian fiction is a movement from the assumption that society and the self are founded on some superhuman power outside them, to a putting in question of this assumption, to the discovery that society now appears to be self-creating and self-supporting, resting on nothing outside itself. (p 30)

This account of the relationship between formal characteristics and historical context will take discussion away from the problems of interrelated critical approaches to matters like the Victorian period's characteristic subject matter and its treatment in novels. Miller says that from the developing realisation that society rests "on nothing outside itself" comes the concentration on "interpersonal relations as the only remaining arena of the search for authentic selfhood." (p 33), and the perception that society is "generated and sustained by individual acts of self-denying, self-creating love." (p 123). This last observation describes Molly's story in *Wives and Daughters* particularly well. The same perception of society produced, says Miller, a narrator who is omniscient, not in a god-like way but as one who expresses the "collective mind" (p 63) of the community. Such a narrator has "pervasive

presence" rather than a "transcendent vision" (p 64), and a perfect knowledge of a world he did not create (p 65). This kind of omniscience is different from that of eighteenth century narrators who drew attention to their complete power as the creators of a fictional world and its characters.

The account Miller gives of a narrator who has complete knowledge of a world he did not create, of the collective mind implied in such a narrator and of the possibilities, seen in Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend* 1864, of this mind's becoming "aware of itself" (p 78) is what is most germane to this study of Gaskell's novels. It will lead the argument on to new matters, to questions of the specific purposes and effects of narrating voices, and to the narration's creation of its reader.

The Victorian omniscient narrator is, says Miller:

> the most important constitutive convention for the form of Victorian fiction, the convention easiest to take for granted, and the convention which is the oddest of all, the one requiring the most analysis and explanation. (p 11)

The narrator's operation is one which Miller describes as "indirect discourse"[1] through which the narrator

> relives from within the thoughts and feelings of a character and registers these in his own language, or in a mixture of the character's language and his own language. (p 3)

In describing the value of this narrative mode, Quirk (1962) says:

> The value of the technique lies not only in the subtlety with which fast flowing narrative can be coloured by the characteristic idiom of a particular speaker, but also in the ability to convey the unspoken reflection of the speaker in the suggested language of his reflection - and even the suggested impact of one speaker upon another - without the clumsiness of explanation which would coarsen and oversharpen the impression, and fatally simplify what the author would prefer to leave equivocal. (p 247)

The technique is thus a simultaneous telling and showing. The narrator tells the reader about events and the characters

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1. Pascal (1977) has made a valuable study of this narrative mode which he terms 'free indirect speech'.

involved and, in the same act of telling, shows the reader, through an immediate, dramatic rendering of thought and feeling, what happened.

Narration is one of the major structural means of controlling the reader's relationship to the work; it helps to create the necessary feelings about the fictional world being presented. Its steady but unobtrusive working has been analysed by Gibson (1966) who demonstrates its presence in all forms of writing: in journalism, advertisments, memoranda, scholarly writing and in novels. He concentrates for the latter part of his demonstration on Hemingway's rhetoric to show how the tough-talking narrator figure which Hemingway created establishes a particular bond of unarticulated familiarity with the reader, thereby insinuating that reader and character-narrator have much in common, especially their experiences and their values.

Although Hemingway's narrator's overt attention is given to his experiences rather than to his feelings, the insinuation of a bond between reader and narrator is used to create a sympathetic belief in the sensitivity, the underlying humanity of the hard-bitten narrator. Implicit in Gibson's analysis is the fact that even the most unlikely reader can take on the experience and attitudes that such techniques create. As Ong SJ (1977) writes:

> A reader has to play the role in which the author has cast him, which seldom coincides with his role in the rest of actual life. An office worker on a bus reading a novel of Thomas Hardy is listening to a voice which is not that of any real person in the real setting around him. He is playing the role demanded of him by this person speaking in a quite special way from the book, which is not the subway and is not quite "Wessex" either, though it speaks of Wessex. Readers over the ages have had to learn this game of literacy, how to conform themselves to the projections of the writers they read, or at least how to operate in terms of these projections. They have to know how to play the game of being a member of an audience that "really" does not exist. And they have to adjust when the rules change, even though no rules thus far have ever been published and even though the changes in the unpublished rules are themselves for the most part only implied.
> (p 61)

A further argument about narration which underlies this study is that the complexity of the role that is created for the reader is (potentially) as great in Thackeray's eighteenth century style of narration in *Vanity Fair* 1848, which constantly comments on its creation of a reader, as it is in narrative which works in a more dramatic way - as in Hemingway's narration of *A Farewell to Arms* 1929 or in the later twentieth century examples of unreliable, tough-talking narrators whose effects Gibson analyses. That there are matching degrees of complexity will be seen in the account of the varied effects of the narrative modes of the three Gaskell novels analysed in their respective chapters where considerable attention has been given to Gaskell's narrating voices. In this discussion, the term 'reader' has been used in order to point to the creation of effect; it is not used in order to report on this reader's responses (although they are obviously in question) but as a way of recognising that a response is being created and controlled by the narration.

The equivalent complexity of the reader's role in different modes of narration is not always recognised in critical discussion. It certainly was not felt by Henry James, although it was he who asserted so strongly that the reader is created as part of the fiction.[1] He felt that his methods of creating his reader had reached a peak in *The Ambassadors* 1903 for, as he says in the Preface, he was able to make the reader feel himself entirely within Strether's perceptions but not at their mercy as would have been the case had he used the "terrible *fluidity* of self-revelation" (1962: 321). The subtleties of point-of-view narration which he established were then canonised by Lubbock (1926) so that it was accepted that point-of-view narration, as showing, was to be preferred to the apparently simpler telling of the omniscient narrator. Despite the achievements of Wayne Booth (1961) in getting the function of the omniscient narrator understood after its eclipse, the value judgements made by Lubbock are persistent.

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1. James (1866b) in his review, 'The Novels of George Eliot.'

They can be seen, for example, even in Wright's (1965) comments on Gaskell's narrative techniques. Although he recognises that different narrative modes are suited to different narrative purposes, he does not allow that the narrator's adopting a first-person presence, as Gaskell does in *Mary Barton* and again in *Sylvia's Lovers*, may be a dramatic device rather than the clumsy intrusion of the author herself. He writes of Gaskell's developing narrative control:

> The most important development is probably in the gradual shift away from the use of authorial commentary ... Mrs Gaskell, when writing *Mary Barton*, accepted and used the convention to the full to expound her views about social and individual understanding as well as for narrative links, character analysis, and comment on action and emotion. But this method is unsuitable to the presentation of a community through the behaviour and speech of its members, particularly if behaviour and speech are themselves to carry ironic implications ... she concentrates more and more on letting the scene and its occupants speak for themselves, and on absorbing herself in the subject. The attempt to persuade, guide and influence her readers went against the grain of her natural abilities. (pp 18 - 19)

Wright probably does not mean to imply that only overt, first-person comment is an attempt to "guide and influence" the reader, which is what he says in the last sentence quoted, but the major problem in his argument is that it does not recognise the dramatic potential of a first-person narrator. Gaskell herself understood this, as is clear from her return to a first-person narrator, and comment, in *Sylvia's Lovers*. Thus the claim for her must not be that she improved by abandoning the narrative mode of *Mary Barton* but that she refined her control of its dramatic possibilities in her penultimate novel.

All three novels that are analysed in this study are in the authorial mode. The categories being used here are those proposed by Stanzel (1971) in his account of three fundamental types of narration. He argues that all narrative modes are a mediation through which the reader apprehends the fictional world, and identifies three typical mediating modes, or "situations". The first is the authorial mode

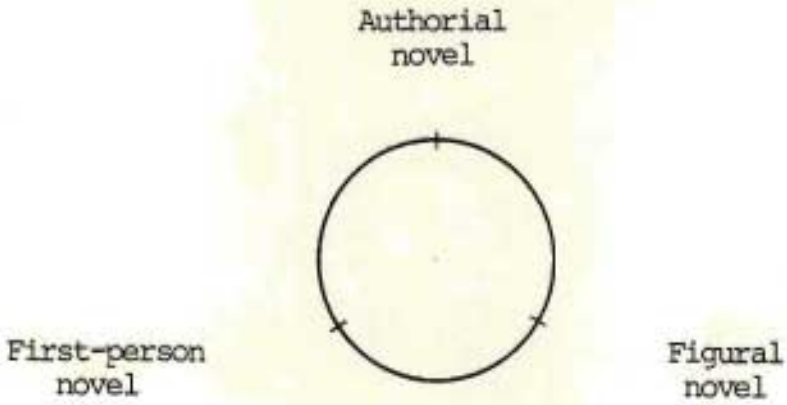
which has as its distinguishing characteristic, not the narrator's authorial omniscience, but the way that the narrator's stance is temporally and spatially separated from the fictional world being presented. Thus, the narrator's voice identifying itself as being that of a mid-Victorian sensibility formed in the south of England is the crucial factor in placing the narrative mode of *Sylvia's Lovers*. In the figural mode, which is what was once called point-of-view narration, the apprehensions of a single character (or more, as in Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* 1929) determine everything that the reader learns about the fictional world. This mode does not demand that the central intelligence actively presents itself as a narrator. As Stanzel says:

> In an authorial narrative situation the mediacy of narration is, as it were, dramatised: the author, in the figure of the authorial medium, takes up a definitive stance toward the narrative. In the figural narrative situation, the narrator withdraws; the mediacy of presentation is concealed from the reader. The realisation of a figural narrative situation in the reader's imagination is in this respect similar to the realisation of a staged drama in the imagination of the audience. (p 25)

Thus, *What Maisie Knew* 1897, is, like *The Ambassadors*, figural. The third mode is that of first-person narration by one of the work's protagonists, or by an onlooker who has been or is part of the fictional world. Obvious examples here would be *David Copperfield* 1850 and *Great Expectations* 1861. In this case, first-person speech is not the defining characteristic (the authorial narrators of *Tom Jones* 1749, *Vanity Fair* 1848, and *Sylvia's Lovers* 1863 all use the first-person), but the narrator's membership of the fictional world.

Stanzel does not see these modes as absolute or mutually exclusive, but rather as being, at their most typical, nodal points on a continuum. To emphasize their contiguity, he presents them in circular relationship, and says that the mode of a particular novel may be located at any point on the continuum. He uses this diagram to illustrate his

argument (p 164) :



Thus a novel's narration may be mid-way between the nodal points of, say, authorial and figural narration. One of the valuable features of Stanzel's scheme is that it makes clear the way in which authorial narration can be, at the extreme closest to the figural node, markedly subjective in its effect, for the "mediacy of presentation" will be all but concealed from the reader. At its other extreme, authorial narration (taking on the quality of first-person narration) can set up a strongly developed dramatic interaction between narrator, characters and reader. In arguing this interaction, Stanzel says of the authorial narration in *Tom Jones* that "The reader is almost always aware that the claim of universal validity of this commentary is really an irony." (p 51).

The subjective extreme of authorial narration is to be seen in *North and South* 1855, where the narration is done so much from within Margaret Hale's point of view that her perceptions are dominant. In fact, the claim that this is still authorial narration is in need of support here; it is the occasional glimpses of a controlling voice like this which demonstrate an authorial presence:

> The next afternoon, about twenty miles from Milton-Northern, they entered on the little branch railway

> that led to Heston. Heston itself was one long straggling street, running parallel to the seashore. It had[1] a character of its own, as different from the little bathing-places in the south of England as they again from those of the Continent. To use a Scotch word, everything looked more 'purposelike.' (7: 95)

It is clearly another voice which makes reference to the bathing places of the Continent and which appears even more distinctly in "To use a Scotch word". It is never very different in its outlook from the perceptions of Margaret Hale, or of Mr Hale and Mr Thornton when their consciousnesses are used, but the slight distance created is important, particularly for Margaret Hale. This distance works firstly to remind the reader of a more widely-ranging, more experienced outlook than that of the characters, and secondly it is a reminder that the use of a character's point of view does not necessarily give authorial sanction to everything that character feels and thinks. The occasional signals in the narration of *North and South* that Margaret Hale's outlook does not carry complete authority are very important, as will be seen when Furbank's (1973) criticisms of that novel are discussed in Chapter 2 of this study.

The narration of *Sylvia's Lovers* presents the authorial mode at its opposite extreme, where the narrator speaks in the first-person, directly to the reader, identifying its voice as belonging to the reader's place and time rather than to Monkshaven. In the first volume in particular, the reader is constantly made aware by this voice that he or she is crossing a considerable gap in time and entering a new cultural *milieu* in the Monkshaven world. By Volume Three, when the reader is most fully engaged in the personal sufferings of the protagonists, this gap is not as insistently pointed to by the narrator although its existence is a key means by which the final tragic isolation of Sylvia is established.

Although the narrating voice of *Wives and Daughters* 1864 does not use the first person, it does use frequent small touches

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1. The Penguin edition prints "has" in place of "had" in the *Household Words* text. The change to the present tense is a substantial one as it alters the temporal distance between the narrator and the fictional world and so alters the reader's response to Margaret Hale's perceptions. Easson (1973) prints "had"

to distance the fictional world and establish that the narrator's stance is co-temporal with that of the reader. Such touches are particularly evident when the genial comedy of the opening is introducing Molly Gibson's childish charm, and the similar charm of the old-fashioned but still familiar ways of life in Hollingford. The joint enterprise is clear in:

> Five-and-forty years ago, children's pleasures in a country town were very simple, and Molly had lived for twelve long years without the occurrence of any event so great as that which was now impending.
> (1: 36)

What lies before Molly is the annual visit made by the ladies of Hollingford to Cumnor Towers, and as they feel pretty near as excited as Molly does about it, the same tone can embrace both town and child. This tone disappears gradually as the gap between the fictional world and the reader is decreased when Molly's personality develops through the suffering brought about by her father's re-marriage. The shift is a gradual, unheralded one, made possible by the freedom of the authorial mode to modulate its relationship to the fictional world - its "situation" can be moved, within limits, along the continuum without creating a contradictory orientation for the reader. One account of how such flexibility is possible for the authorial mode comes in Genette (1976) who, in discussing the possibility of establishing the boundary between narration and discourse (discourse being the author speaking in his own voice from outside the fictional world), observes that:

> The insertion of narrative elements into the fabric of discourse is insufficient to emancipate the discourse, for the narrative elements remain most often linked to the reference of the speaker, who stays implicitly present in the background and who can intervene anew at any time without considering this return an "intrusion".
> (p 10)

Discourse can include and even be temporarily effaced by narration (and this might include scenic presentation, although Genette does not suggest this) without damage to the implicit presence of the narrator.

> ... we know that the narrator, whose person was momentarily effaced ... didn't go far away, and we are neither surprised nor disturbed when he again assumes the act of speaking ... (p 10)

But the same is not true of narrative when discourse is introduced into it. Using a passage from Balzac, Genette argues that:

> any intrusion of discursive elements into the interior of a narrative is perceived as a disruption of the discipline of the narrative portion ... Evidently, the narrative does not integrate these discursive insertions ... as easily as the discourse accepts narrative insertions. Narrative inserted into discourse transforms itself into an element of discourse, but discourse inserted into narrative remains discourse and forms a sort of cyst, easily recognised and localised. One might say that the purity of narrative is more obvious than that of discourse. (pp 10 - 11)

Although Genette's language might imply value judgements (as in "cyst"), this does not seem to be his intention as he clarifies the inclusive lack of purity of discourse (which corresponds to the authorial mode of narration) by observing the reader's propensity to require little reinforcement of the continuing presence of a discoursing narrator once such a mode has identified itself. This was behind the comments made about the passage quoted above from *North and South*. The psychology of this propensity would be an intriguing question to follow, but for the moment, Genette's observation is valuable for its clarification of the flexibility of authorial narration, and for the support its implications give to the claim that the reader's role in authorial narration can be as strenuous and satisfying as that demanded by the subtleties of figural narration.

At this point, it is possible to return to the suggestion made by Miller that the omniscience of the typical Victorian narrator is not that of the all-powerful creator of the fictional world, but that of the collective mind of the community. When applied to Gaskell's novels, the suggestion seems something of a simplification, for although the narration of *Sylvia's Lovers* and *Wives and Daughters* establishes a bond between narrator and reader, a common experience and

common attitudes, it should be remembered that this community of feeling is as much of a fiction as is the world being depicted in the narrative. What reader and narrator are assumed to hold in common by the narrative mode does not necessarily exist prior to the narrative act, but is being created by it. The relationship is as complex as is that between the actual author and the authorial presence in the narrator. Stanzel says:

> The author only rarely puts his entire personality into the manifestation of the authorial medium. It is usually only a partial self-portrait in which often very striking traits of the author are absent or to which new traits are added.[1] (p 55)

As this implies, the values expressed by the narrator cannot automatically be assumed to be identical with those of the actual author, let alone with those of the reader prior to the act of reading. As will be argued for *Sylvia's Lovers*, the attitudes expressed by the narrator may well be those demanded by the need to create an interaction between the narrator's world and the fictional one and not a simple expression of the author's opinion. Thus the narrator's use of a communal set of attitudes or experiences which are apparently shared by all, may not be voicing anything which has prior existence in the actual world. Like an appeal to attitudes which the reader supposedly holds, it may be another technique for creating such attitudes for the purposes of the fiction.

Although Miller's observation demands qualification, the value of the distinction that he makes between the self-declared creative omniscience of eighteenth century authorial narration and the "pervasive presence" of a narrator who knows all about a world he did not create, should not be overlooked. Culler (1975) points to Balzac who works in ways aimed at

> evoking and solidifying the contract with the reader, insisting that the narrator is only a more knowledgeable version of the reader and that they share the same world to which the language of the novel refers. (pp 195 - 6)

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1. This comment is also an important sign that in calling one of his types of narrative mediation 'authorial', Stanzel did not mean to undermine the distinction between the actual author and the implied author which Booth (1961) has established.

It is because the narrator and reader are made to share so much by her narration, that the created interactions in a writer like Gaskell can easily be overlooked.

This fairly lengthy introduction to Gaskell's narrative method has been necessary because narration is one of the primary structural means by which the reader's interest in the fictional world is created and controlled, and will therefore form a major part of the analysis of Gaskell's novels. But narration is obviously not the only aspect of structure which has been attended to in the analysis of the evolving shape of each of Gaskell's novels, and so some mention must be made of the other structural factors that have been considered.

As was said earlier, the plot, the causal sequence of action which emerges from the novelist's original idea (Gaskell's "prevailing thought") is seen as the final cause of all the work's arrangements. Friedman's (1975) presentation of the theory of form in fiction is a demonstration of the logical primacy of plot, and, in the discussion of Gaskell's novels, it is this teleological nature of the plot which has determined the attention given to aspects of structure such as character, patterning (between events or between characters) and setting. To take an example of the role of setting, it can be said that the cliff-side setting of *Sylvia's Lovers* is an integral part of that novel's plot in that it is the essence of the originating idea. This is that the opposition of land and sea in Monkshaven is a particularly harsh one, and that it produces two different kinds of people: the out-going, intuitive type seen in Daniel and Sylvia Robson, or the self-restrained, careful type seen in Philip Hepburn and Alice Rose. The cliffs in *Sylvia's Lovers* are thus a distinctive part of Gaskell's original conception. The same is true of the setting of *Wives and Daughters* although this novel has nothing as dramatically symbolic as cliffs. The church spire of Hollingford becomes an important means to Molly Gibson herself of recognising her rootedness, and as the reader has to grasp the structural function of a comparison of rooted and rootless

(Cynthia and Mr Preston, for example) characters, the spire moves beyond being Molly's private symbol to take on a larger structural function. It can be said of the setting of both novels that had it been different, then the action of each novel could not have been as it is.

The structurally controlling relationship of plot to character becomes clear if *North and South* is compared with *Wives and Daughters*. In the former, Margaret Hale is the central figure so that the plot conveys her development, allowing it to reveal the significance of the comparison between the North and the South. The plot was conceived of as a change in circumstances which led to a change in moral outlook. But in *Wives and Daughters*, Molly is not central in the same way because the ruling idea, the formation of the social self, demands that she be held in a comparative balance with other characters in a way that is structurally different from Margaret's simpler centrality. It will be argued that at some stages of *Wives and Daughters* Molly *is* placed as the central figure and that movements away from her become possible at other stages because of Mr Gibson's place in the early chapters. As he dominates much of the early action, the focus on Molly is a gradually established one so that subsequent moves away from her are not felt as disruptive changes in intention.

The concept of plot is not complete without a recognition of its purpose to engage the reader in appropriate feelings about the action. It is in this way that the plot can be seen to govern even the smaller details of the structure: although some details will be structural and others will be representational,[1] all are governed by the same intention which is given form in the action. Broadly speaking, the pattern of feelings which have to be created by the plot are either those of comedy or those of tragedy. As was seen in Gaskell's letter about *Mary Barton*, the feelings that the author had about the original idea determined the nature and outcome of events and the responses to be created in the reader.

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1. Friedman (1975) p 172.

In recognising the likely feelings that workmen would have about the injustice of their suffering, Gaskell felt simultaneously that these feelings were a mistaken rejection of suffering and would therefore lead to disastrous, self-destructive deeds. Her perception of the circumstances she was portraying determined the tragic outcome of events - not the clash between masters and men, but John Barton's despairing, self-destructive murder of Harry Carson. In the same way, in *Sylvia's Lovers*, the proposition that that world would produce two very different personality types is accompanied by the feeling that these types would find themselves in an irreconcilable opposition and that Philip's attempt to possess Sylvia could only have a tragic outcome. Had Gaskell so chosen, had she felt differently about Monkshaven life, she could have shown Sylvia's and Philip's suffering as susceptible to the resolutions of comedy, just as the division between Margaret Hale and Thornton would not have been bridged had Gaskell felt differently about Milton. The alternatives of comedy and tragedy being suggested here are, of course, of the broadest kind, and the suggestion that these alternatives depend on the original feelings of the novelist does not overlook the fact that the novel is an impure narrative form. It compasses too much time to be otherwise; Gaskell had to show that Sylvia knew some happiness in her marriage. It is unlikely that a novel could attempt the tragic concentration of *King Lear* or *Antigone*, or the comic purity of *Twelfth Night* (*pace* Malvolio), but, on the other hand the novel's formal impurity has obvious value. Without the moment of happiness that Sylvia and Philip know, their subsequent estrangement would lose much of its poignancy, and unless Molly had suffered the pain of witnessing Roger's first love for Cynthia, her love would seem easy and shallow rather than a matter of growing strength in self-knowledge, a matter which is central in Gaskell's plot.

It should be clear that 'structure' is not being used synonymously with 'plot', but is being seen as a concept closer to the novelist's treatment of the material, a treatment which is governed by the need to present the plot as effectively as

possible. It will be helpful to clarify three distinct concepts at this point: that of plot, that of structure and that of story. As has been said, plot is the ruling idea embodied in action; it is the logically necessary concept needed to denote the purposes which govern the interactions of character, thought and action. These purposes underlie everything that the reader actually encounters. This, the various arrangements encountered by the reader in the ordered words which constitute the text, is the structure. The final concept is that of story which can be defined as the result for the reader of the encounter with a structure which has been determined by a plot. The story is the completed material which the reader has in mind when the act of reading is over. It is obviously different from the structure, for the story is constituted by the results of the structuring of the material, by its effect rather than by the structuring itself. A reader will hold in mind how he or she feels about Molly, not the structures which created that feeling. The difficult distinction is that between plot and story, and one which not all critics use. Chatman (1978) refers to the suggestion that the story is what may be presented in another medium (p 20). For example, *North and South's* story could be filmed or it could conceivably be presented on stage as a mime-dance. Conversely, someone who has seen the film could relate its story to another person. This would be to reproduce the visual and verbal means of communication of film by purely verbal means. But if, in filming *North and South*, the precise purposes of the written narrative are changed, then the two works cannot be said to have the same plot although the elements of their story may be the same. The term 'plot' includes the need to engage the reader in specific feelings about the actions which emerge from and embody the original idea (and the author's feelings about that idea), while 'story' does not.

Plot, as the logically necessary way of thinking about the factor which governs the narrative, which causes it to be as it is, comes first in the sequence of creation and reception of the artefact, the novel. Following this line, it may be

said that structure comes next in the sense that it is the result of the author's particular purposes and is what the reader encounters and from which the plot can be ascertained. It is the point of contact between author and reader. Story comes last in that it is the consequence of the structure on the reader, what the reader holds in mind after the encounter with the structure.[1] In novels where realism and chronological narration go hand in hand, the differences between these entities will not seem very great, but Gaskell's *Wives and Daughters* does provide an illustration of their differences and of how the distinctions being made can be useful. Gaskell's feelings about Molly, about the subject of the creation of the social self, necessitate the reader's understanding that she is the most important character in the work. To accomplish this, Gaskell places the visit to Cumnor Towers before the account of Mr Gibson's life begins. But in the reader's recalling the story, this event would take its place in the familiar, chronological sequence of events. Plot is what determines all the details of work's structure and story is the result for the reader of the shape so determined.

Culler (1975) argues what appears to be a contradictory point when he says that:

> A study of plot cannot be a study of the ways in which sentences are combined, for two versions of the same plot need have no sentences in common ...
>
> (p 205)

But the contradiction disappears if the term 'story' is substituted for Culler's 'plot'; alternatively, it could be said that if Culler were to agree that the concept of plot includes the author's need to create the appropriate feelings about the action presented, he would not argue as he does here.

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1. The distinction made here is not quite the same as that proposed by Sternberg (1974) who outlines a four-way distinction between plot, story, *fabula* and *sujet*. The difference rests in the concept of the plot. Sternberg uses Forster's (1962) concept of plot - a sequence of events in which causality is clear, and of story - a sequence of events linked only by time, and therefore has to make a four-way distinction. In this study, plot, as the governing principle of the whole, includes both causally and temporally linked sequences of events and therefore a three-way distinction is made.

The distinction between the story and the structure is one which the Russian Formalists made. In 'Thematics' Thomashevsky (1965) says that the *sujet* (the structured events) is distinct from the *fabula* (the story); both include the same events, but the *fabula* is the action itself while the *sujet* is the form in which the reader learns of the action. The *fabula* may well be the rearranged, chronological sequence of events in which the reader has also supplied many of the causal connections between events which were not given explicitly in the *sujet*. For example Conrad's treatment of events in *Nostromo* 1904, beginning with the Capataz de Cargadores and presenting the events of the Costaguana rebellion in a series of temporally dislocated scenes, may well be rearranged by the reader into a causally coherent sequence beginning "Once there was a silver mine ...". Tomashevsky's purposes did not lead him to distinguish between the concept of the action which the reader has after reading the work (what he termed the *fabula* and what has been called the story in this study) and the governing concept which the author had in writing it - the plot. Probably for this reason Lemon and Reis (1965) in translating Tomashevsky used the term 'plot' for *sujet* and 'story' for *fabula* (p 67), but in a discussion which is using the Aristotelian concept of 'plot', such an overlapping of terms would prove extremely confusing. Thus, when the Formalists' terms have been used in the analysis, the French version of them has been kept.

These distinctions may seem at first to be a cumbersome way of clarifying the use of 'structure' in this study, but the emphasis on the difference between that which governs what the reader encounters, the ordered material itself, and the way in which it is subsequently recalled, can be justified on two counts. The first is less important and arises from what has been said of Culler's use of 'plot' and of the translation of Tomashevsky. Terms like 'plot' and 'structure' have been used with so many slightly different meanings that they can be imprecise and confusing. At the same time, these terms are so familiar that the confusion may easily be overlooked and the real complexity to which an accurate, consistent use

of them can point, may be lost. For this reason, the redefinition that is forced by a three-way distinction between 'plot', 'structure' and 'story' is valuable. The possibly confusing familiarity of these terms leads into the second justification of the distinction, and this is one that is more specifically related to a study of Gaskell's novels. As Gaskell's formal realism and the style of her narration undertake to encourage the reader to accept the familiarity of the presented fictional world, and this familiarity includes the belief that that world is an explicable, understandable one, her technique can deliberately lull the reader into a comparatively passive reception of her material and purposes. It attains a naturalness which masks its artifice. It is on this score that Gaskell's novels are particularly challenging to an interest in narrative structure, and for the same reason the critical debate which defamiliarises what has come to seem natural is a valuable one.

As the earlier discussion of the intentionality of creation implied, a work has to be considered as artificialand in that sense as strange, before it can be analysed. As the reading process is a normalising one, an ordering and a making familiar of what is being presented, a dissolving of its strangeness, critical approaches which free the familiar for fresh study are particularly stimulating, especially when the material being studied has done all it could to disguise its artifice. Evaluative, interpretative criticism often takes on an explanatory role which extends the normalising inherent in the reading process, but in this there is a danger that that which has been understood, which is possessed, will become an habitual presence rather than the constant source of wonder that it should be. The Russian Formalists saw the defamiliarisation[1] of the known world as a major function of art; it may be suggested that in turn criticism should undertake this function for art.

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1. Lemon and Reis (1965) p 12 and p 85.

ii) The Early Novels

The decision to concentrate on Gaskell's last three novels for analysis was made because in them she has largely overcome the difficulties posed by *Mary Barton* 1848 and *Ruth* 1853, and has consolidated the achievement of *Cranford* 1851. The analysis of success (however relative) can be a more searching undertaking and is naturally more rewarding for the critic than is attention to difficulties and partial failure. Nevertheless, in order to indicate the achievement of the later novels, the problems posed by the early works have to be outlined. This can be done quite briefly, and the partial failures in *Mary Barton* and *Ruth* soon show themselves to be structural matters. In *Mary Barton* the "prevailing thought" is not allowed to play a sufficiently central role in the structure, and in *Ruth* a contradictory attitude towards Ruth's sinfulness leads to a lack of clarity in the significance of certain events, particularly in Ruth's feelings about her death.

When the difficulties in *Mary Barton* are discussed, Gaskell's letter to Mrs. Samuel Greg (*Letters*; No 42) in which she explained that her interests and sympathies had begun with John Barton and that that was where she wished the work's focus to be, is often cited, as is her other remark that it was her London publisher who persuaded her to use "Mary Barton" as her title (*Letters*; No 39). Although the admissions in these letters may not explain the flaw in *Mary Barton*, they show that Gaskell herself was much troubled by her novel's inability to sustain the idea and feelings with which it had begun, and that she saw that the shift from John to Mary was the damaging factor.

Once John Barton has murdered Harry Carson, he virtually disappears from the action, which moves to Mary's efforts to establish an alibi for Jem Wilson who has been accused of Carson's murder. This shift to Mary is not unprepared for in the early chapters. Her response to Harry Carson's interest, her way of rejecting Jem Wilson, her attitudes to the

widowed Mrs Ogden in Chapter 5 and to Margaret's blindness in the same chapter all indicate that she has a damaging incapacity for sympathy and is given to novelettish fancies about future grandeur as Mrs Carson. Her affection for her father is genuine but warped in its effectiveness by her silly romancing about herself. She is callow rather than fundamentally unfeeling, as her pain when Margaret tells her of her approaching blindness indicates. Mary welcomes the distraction of the fire at the mill in much the same way that her dreams for her father's happiness hinge on escaping present trouble rather than facing it. For this reason, she has to understand her responsibility for Jem's plight, to feel that her rejection of him rather than her father's role in Harry Carson's murder is why she must take up Jem's cause.

There is further evidence that the shift to Mary probably formed a significant part of Gaskell's original idea, and this comes from the later novels. They show that Gaskell had an abiding interest in the way that consequences of an action devolve on other people, especially on the immediate members of the actor's family. What is being pointed to may, of course, have been an interest that Gaskell developed after *Mary Barton*, when she saw what the structure of that novel presented her with, but this is unlikely in view of her basic charge against the mill owners: that they did not recognise their responsibility for their workers. As this responsibility is demonstrated by showing the consequences of their actions on the workers' lives, an interest in devolving consequences must be regarded as an integral part of Gaskell's earliest understanding of life in community with others. In *North and South*, the interest in devolving consequences shows itself early when the effect of Mr Hale's decision to leave the church is followed more closely for its effect on Margaret than for what it does to him. *Wives and Daughters* reveals a similar motif, now under much more polished control, when Mr Gibson's marriage is seen as the event which pitches Molly into self-awareness, thereby allowing her story to begin. This example is Gaskell's most characteristic use

of the motif, for the fact that Mr Gibson re-married for his daughter's sake allows her to employ the comic irony which is her richest way of apprehending life. It may be said that the study of devolving consequences in the charged, tragic world of *Sylvia's Lovers* helped Gaskell re-define the gently ironic note of *Cranford* for her purposes in *Wives and Daughters*. In its treatment of the tragic nature of devolving consequences, *Sylvia's Lovers* can similarly be seen as a reworking of some of the problems presented by *Mary Barton*. In *Sylvia's Lovers* the power to act on the future is not as strongly placed in an individual parent as it is in members of the same generation. In the tragic approach to Monkshaven, it is Philip's sin which is visited on Sylvia, especially his silence about Kinraid's capture, and in its presentation of Sylvia's suffering, the novel bears out Gaskell's interest in consequences.

This means that structurally *Mary Barton* is flawed by Gaskell's attempt to reflect one of her most serious perceptions of life; the shift from John to Mary is an unsuccessful effort to show that the governing condition of social life is that of interdependence, of having to live through the consequences of other people's actions as well as through the more usually recognised matter of the consequences of one's own actions. It would seem that Gaskell wanted her readers to be very conscious of this latter aspect of consequences in *Mary Barton*, for the narrator addresses the reader on the "heavy price" (15: 219)[1] that John Barton and others paid for taking opium to relieve their misery and asks, in defence of their foolhardiness, "But have you taught them the science of consequences?" (15: 219). That the first aspect of consequences was also integral to her thinking can be seen from Mr Carson's discovery of the workmen's power to affect his life, a power that is finally, melodramatically, presented as equal to his power over them. The death-bed confrontation of Mr Carson and John Barton comes from this governing aspect of the plot, but the more important part of the thinking about consequences, structurally and humanly,

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1. Page references for *Mary Barton* are to the Penguin edition, 1970.

speaking, is the fact that John Barton's actions rebound first on those dearest to him, on Mary, and in ways that he could not have foreseen.

Gaskell's interest in consequences raises more forcefully than ever the question of what went wrong in the shift to Mary. The concentration on Mary in Chapters 20 - 31 can be seen as disruptive for two reasons: with Mary the novel seems to change gear, to move into another, lighter and inappropriate mode, and secondly, the need to know how John Barton's destruction came about is left unsatisfied. In a work which gains its authority from its power to reveal the largely unknown experiences of a body of people and which poses a common humanity, the brotherhood of man, silence on this count is fatal.

There are many signs that Gaskell believed that the horror of murdering would destroy John Barton. One comes in her letter to Mrs Greg, where she speaks of his "violating the eternal laws of God" (*Letters*; No 42); in the text itself there are similar ideas expressed. For example, when the account of the unsuccessful meeting with the mill owners begins, the narrator offers a comparison between John Barton's brooding desperation and a Borgia torture chamber in which the walls of an apartment gradually close in on the prisoner. The narrator comments:

> And so day by day, nearer and nearer, came the diseased thoughts of John Barton. They excluded the light of heaven, the cheering sounds of earth. They were preparing his death. (15: 219)

Again, when the decision to kill Harry Carson is taken, the narrator concentrates on its effect on the plotters, stressing the self-destructive nature of their resolve.

> And so with words, or looks that told more than words, they built up a deadly plan. Deeper and darker grew the import of their speeches, as they stood hoarsely muttering their meaning out, and glaring, with eyes that told the terror their own thoughts were to them, upon their neighbours. Their clenched fists, their set teeth, their livid looks, all told the suffering their minds were voluntarily undergoing in the contemplation of crime, and in familiarising themselves with its details.

> Then came one of those fierce terrible oaths which bind members of Trades' Unions to any given purpose. Then, under the flaring gaslight, they met together to consult further. With the distrust of guilt, each was suspicious of his neighbour; each dreaded the treachery of another.
> (16: 241)

Murder destroys the community of men as well as the individual. When John Barton reappears in Chapter 33, these hints are all seen to have been fulfilled, but the actual experience of destruction is not treated. In one sense, his story is over when he demonstrates the lengths to which unalleviated suffering and injustice have driven him, but the failure to show his destruction undermines the work's implicit claims for common humanity and its power to treat authentically a hitherto neglected part of humanity. Because the John Bartons of the world have been neglected by society and in literature, the humanity of what is not shown in their experiences cannot be assumed.

When Mary's pursuit of the *John Cropper* to the Mersey mouth replaces this need to know about John Barton, it appears particularly inappropriate and lightweight. The more familiar anxieties (in the literary experience) of an adventure story come to the reader as something of a relief after the terrible pressures of Manchester life, but they also feel like a betrayal of the seriousness with which that life has been presented. In themselves the chapters are well paced; and after the novel's slow, apparently directionless opening in which lives are gradually entwined and the forces of destruction placed, the explosion into action is aesthetically pleasing. A depiction of John Barton's slow agonies would have been rhythmically much more difficult to manage. But it is the literary conventionality of Mary's action, echoing all the pursuit episodes in plots of romanticised adventure, that is wrong. Although for Mary the journey to Liverpool means a recognition of responsibility, for the reader the change of scene is too much like an escape from the unbearable conflicts of Manchester for it to sustain the novel's serious themes.

The account of the flaw in *Mary Barton* given here seeks only the literary explanation of what can be observed. This is

what Gill (1970) does in his Introduction to the Penguin edition. He sees the problem as one of "form and content", suggesting that while the form in which she was writing, the novel, demanded a resolution of the issues raised, the material itself, Manchester's problems, did not permit resolution.

> She is writing in the full flow of a historical process which was to transform England, its countryside, its wealth, above all the relationship between its peoples. Of course she could not rise to a great vision which should somehow at once deal justly with the facts as they were and offer a way to the future ... No analysis could equal in emotive power the simple revelation of what life was like for a John Barton. But Mrs Gaskell could not just give what we would now call a 'slice of life', partly because she wanted to offer more, but also partly because the novel as a form was felt to require movement, the progress of a story. This is the problem of form. (p 22)

He continues to say that in allowing Mary's adventurous efforts to provide an alibi for Jem to dominate the second part of her work, Gaskell yielded "gratefully" to a merely conventional way of providing an active resolution of the story. The explanation Gill suggests is a literary one - that Gaskell relied on long established conventions and so turned her novel into a romance when her material would yield to no other mode of resolution.

In accounting for Gaskell's failure, Gill has not moved beyond a re-description of it as an unsuitable marriage of two literary modes. Although he is very conscious of Gaskell's writing within an historical context, he does not assume an external knowledge of the nature of her relationship to her world in order to explain her failure. The desirability of a work's formal integrity is a criterion which exists independently of *Mary Barton* and has, in that sense been imposed on it, but it is not as questionable a use of a preconception as the one which Williams (1963) applies in order to account for Gaskell's failure in her first novel. His account of *Mary Barton* works from an observation which seems right. He says of John Barton:

> In committing the murder, he seems to put himself not only beyond the range of Mrs Gaskell's sympathy (which is understandable), but, more essentially, beyond the range of her powers. (pp 100 - 101)

This turning away from John Barton is attributed by Williams to Gaskell's middle-class fear of violence (p 102) which he says was widespread at the time and which "penetrated, as an arresting and controlling factor" even "a Mrs Gaskell's sympathy" (p 102). It is difficult to know how accurate an explanation of *Mary Barton* this can be, for it seeks to explain something that is absent from the novel, the non-treatment of Barton's disintegration. But as a test of Williams's claim about Gaskell's attitudes, there are scenes of violence in other novels which can be examined, and these do not seem to display the kind of fear that Williams attributes to Gaskell. She certainly distrusted violence, but the element of fear present in the feeling revealed is for those who engage in violence rather than for those on whom it might be turned. It is an outgoing rather than a selfish fear and makes Williams's explanation a matter he has imposed from his own pre-conceptions about nineteenth-century middle-class feelings. This passage from *North and South* represents Gaskell's attitude to violence:

> 'The soldiers will be here directly, and that will bring them to reason.'
> 'To reason!' said Margaret, quickly. 'What kind of reason?'
> 'The only reason that does with men that make themselves into wild beasts. By heaven! they've turned to the mill-door!'
> 'Mr. Thornton,' said Margaret, shaking all over with her passion, 'go down this instant, if you are not a coward. Go down and face them like a man. Save these poor strangers, whom you have decoyed here. Speak to your workmen as if they were human beings. Speak to them kindly. Don't let the soldiers come in and cut down poor creatures who are driven mad. I see one there who is. If you have any courage or noble quality in you, go out and speak to them, man to man!'
> (22: 232) [1]

Margaret Hale's passion springs from the way that the workmen's dehumanising anger, as in *Mary Barton*, a result of despair, is being taken by Thornton as licence to treat them with disrespect, even treachery. Thornton too has been dehumanised in his anger, and Margaret Hale speaks to try to bring him to

1. Page references to *North and South* are to the Penguin edition, 1970.

his better self and speak to the workers "man to man". There are other factors at work in the scene but the attitude to violence is clear: violent men become dehumanised, which is bad enough in itself, but is more widely dangerous in that it allows others to maltreat them further. This is clearest in Margaret's plea "Don't let the soldiers come in and cut down poor creatures who are driven mad."

The personal damage done to those who are themselves driven to violence is evident again in this comment from *Sylvia's Lovers* on the women who have been forcibly separated from their husbands by the press-gang.

> Their wild, famished eyes were strained on faces they might not kiss, their cheeks were flushed to purple with anger or else livid with impotent craving for revenge. Some of them looked scarce human; and yet an hour ago these lips, now tightly drawn back so as to show the teeth with the unconscious action of an enraged wild animal, had been soft and gracious with the smile of hope; eyes, that were fiery and bloodshot now, had been loving and bright; hearts, never to recover from the sense of injustice and cruelty, had been trustful and glad only one short hour ago. (3: 25)[1]

The sympathy here lies with those who have been abused, and not the least part of the abuse rests in the women's having been driven to damaging reactions. Both these scenes of violence arise because of the strong passions Gaskell gives to her characters and communities. In *Sylvia's Lovers*, when the town's resentment against the press-gang does erupt in violence, the ferocity of what happens is not shirked, nor is it condemned. As the attack on the Randyvowse is done through Daniel Robson's experience of it, a quality of elated release from pent-up injuries is dominant in the narrative, and stands counter to the narrator's later comment that such violence had to be punished by the authorities. The confirmation that the treatment of violence in *Sylvia's Lovers* gives to the attitude towards it in the scene from *North and South* is important as a counter to the claim sometimes made that Gaskell could be more open in *North and South*

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1. Page references to *Sylvia's Lovers* are to the Everyman's Library edition, London, 1964.

because, as Williams says when he compares it with *Mary Barton*, "the tension is less" (p 103).

The problems in Williams's explanation of the flaw in *Mary Barton* are worth pursuing further so that it can be said, emphatically, that it is not an historical interest as such that is objected to, but the automatic imposition of conclusions about the Victorian period in general on an individual member of that society. Although general characteristics can undoubtedly be noted, and although it may be fair to say that a middle-class fear of violence was prominent, it does not necessarily follow that Gaskell shared all the characteristics of her class. It seems more reasonable to assume that she had as much critical insight into her age and her class, and as much power to free herself of prevailing attitudes as anyone would claim for themselves today. What often seems to happen when the history of the age is used as a starting point for an account of its novels, is that a prescriptive interest in past events dominates the literary judgements made. There seems to be an undercurrent of feeling in the critic's observations that if the writer in question had had different attitudes (closer to his or her own, usually) things might have gone better. In making value-judgements, it is a necessary part of the critical task to distinguish contemporary socio-political beliefs from those that operate in works of another age. While this seems a very obvious caution, it is remarkable how easily a non-historical attitude may enter an historical approach. Something akin to Williams's contemporary feeling that Gaskell was insufficiently radical a thinker to write a good novel, also enters Carnall's (1964) interesting study of the probable background of *North and South*.

Carnall discusses the way Dickens and Gaskell drew on the Preston cotton workers' strike of 1853 - 4 for their novels which were published in the same year, 1854, in *Household Words*. Dickens had travelled to Preston to observe conditions there for his journal and for *Hard Times*, and it is certain that Gaskell too knew a good deal about Preston. Carnall shows that Dickens ignored what he had learned of the actual strike leader, George

Cowell, in his picture of the orator Slackbridge. Cowell was a sensible man whose advice was respected and followed by the crowd. The town's nearest equivalent to Slackbridge, one Mortimer Grimshaw, could not earn the strikers' respect and the Preston men chose their leader well. Gaskell is true to the Preston example in this respect, for Nicholas Higgins is a careful member of a responsible committee, but she does make a significant change from Preston when the demonstrators at Thornton's mill ignore their committee's instructions and turn to violence, injuring Margaret Hale. Carnall says that both authors had

> ... the difficulty of grasping an unfamiliar idea: in this case, the idea that working people could be both radical and responsible, subversive but not violent. Even Mrs Gaskell finds it difficult to take in. In making Higgins' strike collapse in violence, she evades the most disconcerting challenge which the Preston strike made to received opinions. (p 48)

Dickens's alterations to the Preston precedent are said by Carnall to be "the effects of inadequate knowledge and class prejudice" (p 48) and, while the same is not said directly about Gaskell, the explanatory diagnosis hangs over her too, and is reinforced by a footnote reference to Williams's comments on her sharing the middle-class fear of violence.

Carnall's article is fair-minded, but does not consider the fact that the treatment of the strike may have been shaped by structural matters within *North and South* itself rather than by Gaskell's reluctance to accept a challenging new view of working class power. In the detailed analysis of this novel, it is argued that the betrayal into violence which both Thornton and the demonstrators experience is necessary to Margaret Hale's development. Briefly, she considers herself above such lapses and has to learn, through an equivalent mistake of her own (the lie for Frederick), that she is not perfect either. What she learns leads her to greater compassion and respect for others different from herself, a lesson for which the whole novel is arguing. The novel *is* about a strike, but it is also about other matters,

particularly Margaret Hale's development and it is this which governs the contribution which all the material used must make. Considerations of what actually happened at Preston must be secondary in the created literary context.

The relationship between the shaped material and the historical example is always a delicate question for the literary critic. It is one which Williams's (1963) criticism of *Mary Barton* also raises when he says that as political assassination was rare in England and the people's response "even in times of grave suffering, was not one of personal violence" (pp 101 - 2), the presentation of Barton as a man driven to murder makes him unrepresentative of his class.[1] It is a serious charge against a novel which, as was said before, claims the essential truth of what it is presenting. The issue raised by this aspect of Williams's and Carnall's objections is the extent to which a novel must report an actual series of events in order to be truthful about its subject; whether the sum of what actually happened is likely to enable the novelist to capture the essence of an event or a period. The murder is Gaskell's projection of the outcome of the antagonism dividing Manchester, a way of demonstrating just how deep feeling was running. Whether she did her subject a disservice in failing to confront her middle-class readers with the workers' restraint must remain a moot point. Certainly if the narrative had stressed Barton's self-restraint, it would not have shown how the consequences of his deed destroyed him, almost destroyed Mary and Jem, and would not have seen Mary forced out of her shallow irresponsibility as Mr Carson is from his blindness.

To say that Gaskell concentrated on these last matters because she was the kind of woman she was, a middle-class minister's wife, is so probable that it is a truism. It is very different

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1. Easson (1979) provides a different kind of counter to Williams's argument when he says:

> The violence was real enough, if sporadic, as often individual initiative as union action, though any manifestation tended to militate against labour organisations. The 1831 murder of young Thomas Ashton, a consequence of a dispute with the union ... is drawn on for Henry Carson's murder in *Mary Barton*. Fiction and fact reflect each other. (p 60)

from saying that she could not write a valid novel about Manchester (the claim here being for *North and South*) or that she could not complete successfully the novel she had undertaken (*Mary Barton*) because of her class. Before leaving these difficulties with socio-political criticism, the case about precedents can be further illustrated through the possible origins of Margaret Hale. The precedent for a character in this novel is likely to be less involved with political sympathies, than is a precedent for its events. While she was working on the second half of *North and South*, Gaskell stayed at Hurst Lea, the Nightingale family's holiday home in Derbyshire. She had known the family for some time and had met Florence Nightingale, the elder daughter, on occasion. She wrote a letter from Hurst Lea giving an account of the nation's saintly heroine in which she shows herself critical of features of Florence Nightingale, features which can also be seen in her heroine, Margaret Hale.[1] The relevant parts of the letter and the similarities between the two figures have been set out in an appendix to this study as the details of the similarities are not important here. The point that emerges is that just as it will be conceded that a novelist is free to adapt actual people to a fictional purpose, so events should be susceptible to such change. It may be objected that as Gaskell did not want Margaret Hale to be recognised as a Florence Nightingale, she was free to do as she wished, but that as she wanted the Manchester case recognised in both *Mary Barton* and *North and South*, she could not simply treat either her workmen or the events as she wished. There is considerable truth in this, but the question still remains of how she could best get "Manchester" understood and of how that purpose related to her governing fictional purposes in each novel. It seems that Florence Nightingale presented herself to Gaskell's imagination as a representative of a general case that she wanted her readers to see, and that she could achieve this either by a photographic faithfulness to the particular example or by using certain aspects of that example to create

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1. Pikoulis (1976) also suggests that Florence Nightingale stands behind Margaret Hale. His comments are brief and come in a discussion of how *North and South* vindicates Charlotte Brontë's essential goodness. He too draws on Gaskell's "double-edged verdict" (p 184) in her letter to Emily Shaen. (*Letters*; No 217)

another example of the general case. In the same way, the events in Preston could be used wholly as they happened, or, if a change suited the general case of which they were an example, then they could be altered. (Discussion of the need to follow an actual precedent is ignoring, in the interests of the point at issue, the complicating question of whether Preston was the only strike which could have guided Gaskell, as well as the fact that any account of historical events must necessarily be a subjective one. Whether it is an eye-witness's account or a later historian's reconstruction, history does not attain absolute, objective truth.)

As long as the critic agrees that the novel's plot, the original idea and feelings, is what governs the treatment of the material, then the case for a novelist's legitimate alteration of actual events and people will be clear. If the consistency of the plot and its treatment is recognised by the critic, but the original idea is unacceptable, then the critic must agree to differ with the author, but cannot, in doing so, judge the work to be a bad novel.

Once it is said that in order to evaluate the achievement the critic cannot legitimately ask whether a novel has presented a specific historical event or person accurately, the question arises of how the novel can win assent to its presentation of the general case through particulars. Novels are referential and they have to convince readers that they can present a fictional world which seems, in its workings, to be a possible one when judged from the reader's knowledge of his or her own world.[1] For the validity of the fictional world to be recognised, it would seem that it must conform to a common experience of the operations of cause and effect, of how the particular events with which it deals would probably come about. This does not mean that a novel cannot present events that are new to a reader's experience, for what happens then is that if the reader is persuaded of the equivalent truth of those events which are known, then the novelist will also be trusted in the new matter.

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1. Friedman (1975) pp 194 - 5.

Assent to a novel (whether the novel itself declares that it is presenting the known world or a fantastic one) comes from a flexible application of experience to it, an application which it is the novelist's task to guide afresh in the unique world of each novel.

As well as the unsuccessful shift to Mary, there is another structural problem in *Mary Barton*. This is a certain awkwardness in the narrator's voice which sometimes shows itself. It can be inferred that Gaskell chose to use the first person for her narrating voice because the note of actual, authentic experience that it could give would help to make the new and probably uncongenial material acceptable to her readers. The personal note in the narration is used to gain the reader's trust. The problem in doing this is that it is the attitudes of actual readers that the narrator tries to accommodate rather than the trust of the created reader. At times the narrator seems to speak to actual, current attitudes towards the tensions between Capital and Labour rather than to create in the reader an acceptance of the equal humanity of men and masters that is needed for a sympathetic comprehension of the work. A comparison between the narrator's confident creation of reader attitudes and an anxious, unsuccessful attempt to conciliate actual, pre-existing attitudes will clarify the point.

To create her readers, Gaskell has her narrator assume the voice of common sensibility. It is at its most confident and delicate when using details of daily domestic life, as in this passage from Chapter 2 where the narration works through the signs of Mrs Barton's housewifely pride.

> Beneath the window was a dresser with three deep drawers. Opposite the fire-place was a table, which I should call a Pembroke, only that it was made of deal, and I cannot tell how far such a name may be applied to such humble material. On it, resting against the wall, was a bright green japanned tea-tray, having a couple of scarlet lovers embracing in the middle. The fire-light danced merrily on this, and really (setting all taste but that of a child's aside) it gave a richness of colouring to that side of the room. It was in some measure propped up by a crimson tea-caddy, also of japan ware.
> (2: 50)

What this account has to accomplish is the recognition that a workman's idea of comfort will be different from the probable reader's, and that this difference is not grounds for condescension or condemnation. The narrator's comment introduces the first caution, these are poor people, and the parenthesis the second, these people have a child-like taste for brilliant colours. Once the description of the room creates an acceptance of its inhabitants, and the self-dramatisation in the narrator's comment is the important technique for this task, then the larger point in Chapter 2, that the improvidence of the meal is to be seen as a natural expression of joy at having friends to visit, can emerge for readers already made receptive to it. This larger point is doubly important for it has to stand counter to the prevailing criticism of working-class habits: that their improvidence in good times is the reason for their suffering in the bad. In this way Gaskell could lead her readers, quietly and almost imperceptibly, to see her characters differently from the way that they would otherwise have done.

But Gaskell is not always as confident of her narrative ability to accomplish her declared intention: to show "what the workman feels and thinks" (3: 60). She is considerably less happy when she has to defend the workmen's angry sense of injustice when they compare their suffering with their employers' apparently unabated luxury in times of poor trade.

> Carriages still roll along the street, concerts are still crowded by subscribers, the shops for expensive luxuries still find daily customers, while the workman loiters away his unemployed time in watching these things, and thinking of the pale, uncomplaining wife at home, and the wailing children asking in vain for enough of food, of the sinking health, of the dying life of those near and dear to him. The contrast is too great. Why should he alone suffer from bad times?
>
> I know that this is not really the case; and I know what is the truth in such matters: but what I wish to impress is what the workman feels and thinks. True, that with child-like improvidence, good times will often dissipate his grumbling, and make him forget all prudence and foresight.
>
> But there are earnest men among these people, men who have endured wrongs without complaining, but without ever

> forgetting or forgiving those whom (they believe) have caused all this woe.
>
> Among these was John Barton ...
>
> (3: 59 - 60)

The problem is that although the validity of the workman's feelings is asserted, the narrator makes too much concession to another way of looking at the mill owners' lives. The wording of the second paragraph suggests that this other, established view is "the truth" and in doing so it prevents the workmen's view from being even a part of "the case", in fact their view gets discounted altogether. The anxiety to accommodate her probable readers' point of view has made Gaskell destroy her own purposes. The damage is a temporary matter for the narration soon regains its hold on the fact that the workers' response is valid in its authenticity, but the false note strikes so deeply at the "prevailing thought" that it undermines the plot.

So far, the problem has been put as Gaskell's making concessions to her actual readers, rather than actively creating the readers that her work needed, but it could be put in another, complementary way. The "I" which enters this passage is an un-dramatised one, insufficiently self-conscious to achieve its narrative purposes. In addressing actual readers as directly as it does, it loses the distinction between the narrator and the author on which most nineteenth-century authorial narration works. Many critics make the simplistic assumption that any first-person comment is Gaskell speaking directly in her own person, as Wright (1965) does, and although mistaken in principle, such assumptions would seem to be justified in this passage. But the first-person narration is not always Gaskell speaking in her own right as the analysis of the narration of *Sylvia's Lovers* will show. There, as in the passage quoted from Chapter 2 of *Mary Barton*, Gaskell presents Monkshaven through the first person address of an omniscient narrator who is clearly not Gaskell the author. As Miller (1968) says, what comes across is that the narrating voice is reporting and commenting on a world about which it knows everything but which it did not create. The fiction on which this suggestion works (the masking of the author-creator by the narrator-reporter) is why the narrator must be seen as a

dramatised presence in the work.

As was said at the outset, the main problem with *Ruth* lies in the conception of Ruth herself and a consequent failure in that character to bear the weight of the case that rests on her. *Ruth* takes its energy from the same source as Gaskell's first novel, a desire to plead the cause of a misunderstood part of society, but, as Cockshut (1977) has argued, the attitudes to Ruth herself are too confused for the argument against the automatic depravity of the fallen woman to be convincing. Cockshut writes:

> Mrs Gaskell wished to make Ruth sympathetic, to show that the 'fallen woman' could be a sweet, affectionate person and much more sinned against than sinning. But she never quite settled in her own mind the question 'Do I want to make her a noble penitent, or do I wish to show her purity unsullied throughout?' She knew very well that the second alternative was sentimental and unreal. However deceived, Ruth is a consenting party, no victim of rape or abduction. But she does not really show the upheavals of repentance. Ruth is much the same all through, except for growing up a little. (p 91)

Cockshut then suggests that current attitudes to repentance (the Evangelical churches saw it as a momentous prelude to religious conversion, a complete change in the state of the soul) would have made repentance unsuitable for Gaskell's purposes in *Ruth*. This may well be the explanation for Gaskell's failure to treat Ruth's own attitudes to her sin, but there can be no certainty of this without Gaskell's own comments. Because of the omission of Ruth's attitudes towards her own sinfulness, her readiness to accept her death as a punishment for that sin is very puzzling, especially as her services to the community have apparently been an act of penance.[1]

The secondary story in *Ruth*, that of Thurstan Benson and his sister, is much more successfully handled. Gaskell evidently felt herself to be more free to establish that a lie (the Bensons' claim that Ruth is a widow) can be both right and wrong than she did to show that Ruth was both innocent and guilty. The strength of the Benson story possibly came from Gaskell's not

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1. The confusion which arises is discussed more fully in the chapter on *North and South*, see pp134 - 135.

feeling embattled as she wrote it; she was not deliberately challenging firmly established social and moral precepts and so was able to allow the Bensons to be their own best advocates. It may also be that the experience of writing *Cranford* was what gave Gaskell confidence in handling this part of *Ruth*, for *Cranford* has no overt argument and yet there emerges from its affectionate documentation a coherent, subtle presentation of how life might be lived. While it concentrates on the daily reality of Cranford, the narrative incorporates other possibilities; Miss Matty's story represents gentler ways in contrast to Miss Jenkins's stern rigidity, and while a contrast within Cranford is growing, Mary Smith's Drumble presence forms a reminder that there is yet another reality against which Miss Matty's achievement may be set. Tarratt (1968) points to the gradual replacement of a rigid moral code, that of Miss Jenkins's gentility, by the gentler humanity of Miss Matty who faces financial ruin with a courage and humility which inspires the whole town to give her its tactful support. In this way the two approaches to life are placed in time and so can be treated in narrative form. As is well known, *Cranford* was originally conceived of as a single piece for *Household Words*, and its development into a coherent long narrative means that the process by which Gaskell, continuing the series at Dickens's request, found thematic unity and a novelist's terms for treating an idea from within her material itself, is a remarkable one. This process is what seems to have secured her future as a novelist and shown her that a wish to plead a cause was not her only source of a "prevailing idea".

Two major strains show themselves in Gaskell's earliest writings: a talent for social documentation, and an inclination for rather didactic moralising. The interest in customs and manners remained with Gaskell all her life, as may be seen in the fine journalism of *French Life* (1864), while the didacticism changed from being a wish to teach new ways of understanding a specific problem to a more diffused wish to show her readers fresh ways of looking at already familiar features of life. In the poem which she wrote with her husband, *Sketches Among the Poor, No 1* (1837), they attempted, as Gaskell said, to write like Crabbe

but with a more "seeing-beauty spirit" (*Letters*; No 12). This spirit also extended to places, as in the account of Clopton House which William Howitt (1840) published, and in the representation of Manchester life in *Mary Barton*. As Gaskell says in her Preface, "I bethought me how deep might be the romance in the lives of some of those who elbowed me daily in the busy streets of the town in which I resided." (p 37). Another approach to experience may be seen in a sonnet written in 1836 which was probably never intended for publication, "On Visiting the Grave of My Stillborn Little Girl".[1] Its reaching for emotional truth is also to be seen in *My Diary* (1923)[2] where Gaskell enquires into her youthful, maternal hopes and fears for her first two daughters. But it is not until *Cranford* and the Benson story in *Ruth* that the different lines in the early writing achieve integration.

The suggestion that *Cranford* was Gaskell's discovery that she could find her "prevailing idea" in a portrait of a society's *mores* and that she did not have to take up a cause as she had done in *Mary Barton* and would do again in *Ruth*, should not be taken to imply that there is greater intrinsic value in the portrait than in the cause as a literary purpose. It is often said that didacticism is to be avoided in novels as any undertaking to plead a cause will necessarily prove damaging, but this in its turn seems to be an unduly prescriptive approach. The criticism made in this study of Gaskell's attempt to champion the workman in *Mary Barton* is a judgement of the way that she carried out her task, in particular of the failure to control the narrator's comments. It is not a condemnation of the novel's wish to change peoples' minds, for all novels seek to affect their readers even if they do not address themselves to a very specific, topical question as Gaskell did in *Mary Barton* and *Ruth*.

When there is a prevailing tendency to feel that certain fictional purposes and certain techniques are in themselves superior to others, considerable problems for formal analysis can result. An equivalent problem was seen in the earlier discussion of the various narrative modes and the way that point-of-view narration

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1. Printed in Ward's (1906) Introduction to *Mary Barton*, Vol I, xxvi - xxvii.
2. Posthumously published.

found special critical favour at one time. Formal analysis must work from the assumption that a narrative mode is as good as is the use that is made of it in a particular work and that one mode is not inherently more valuable than another. For this reason, Stanzel's (1971) typology which concentrates on the characteristics and capacities of each narrative mode is particularly valuable to analytical criticism. The typology makes the narrative modes value free and the analytical critic needs to do the same for the various narrative purposes a novelist may have. The assumption about a novelist's didactic or other purposes must be that judgement can only be made of the execution of such purposes and that no prior assumptions of value can operate. In this study, such an approach has been greatly assisted by the scheme suggested by Scholes and Kellogg (1966) of the nature and relationship of the various strains in narrative. These strains or impulses may also be termed the novelist's purpose[1]; as they seek to engage the reader in a particular way with the material being presented, they are part of the plot. Scholes and Kellogg propose that the two major impulses in narrative are the empirical (truth to fact) and the fictional (truth to ideal). In turn, these divide: empirical narrative into historical (truth to actual events) and mimetic (truth to personal sensation and environment); fictional narrative into romance (truth to the aesthetic ideal, to poetic justice) and fable (truth to ideas and values). In general, the fictional impulse aims at the reader's delight, at affecting the reader with beauty and goodness, while truth about the external world is the primary concern of the empirical impulse. Scholes and Kellogg see the novel as a powerful but necessarily unstable compound of these major strains.

> The least formal of disciplines, it offers a domain too broad for any single work to conquer, and it continually provokes literary compromise and subterfuge.
> (p 16)

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1. The typology that Scholes and Kellogg suggest is one of purpose or impulse; it is not quite the same as the typology of literary genres which Stanzel invokes. He turns to Goethe's classification of lyrical, epical and dramatical genres and relates his narrative situations to these genres in Chapter 7.

The major division that Scholes and Kellog propose, between empirical and fictional purposes, does suggest that a wholesale move from one purpose to another would be a very difficult change for a novelist to control. *Mary Barton* illustrates the kind of problems likely to arise. Mary's discovery of a sense of responsibility and Carson and Barton's recognition of their common humanity express Gaskell's vision of what ought to happen for the general good of Manchester. In their different ways, these scenes are equally didactic, Mary's scenes being romance and Barton and Carson's being fable. Although the developments in these scenes are not entirely unexpected in the novel, they have a tone which diminishes the mimetic impulse of the first half. Gaskell has been unable to depict successfully what she feels ought to happen because it involves abandoning the picture of what is happening. But these are problems arising from a wholesale change from one impulse to another, and as Scholes and Kellogg say, the novel is usually compounded of several strains.[1]

It has already been said that in *Cranford* Gaskell incorporates her recommendations for a social code in her portrait of a specific society and its foibles. This work demonstrates that a mimetic novel can, in its way, have a didactic impulse too; there is a distinct quality of poetic justice in the happiness Miss Matty finds in selling tea. *North and South* is also primarily a mimetic novel which gives a portrait of an emergent society and its considerable self-awareness, but within that portrait Gaskell's own wishes for the principles on which future relationships in that society will be based are clear. They are not present just as implicit values in the narrative but are made part of the action when Thornton and Higgins learn to know and respect one another. The subtlest way in which this novel blends didacticism into its study of a society and so allows Gaskell to exercise the

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1. There is an interesting but not necessary similarity here with Stanzel's (1971) typology for, by placing the narrative modes in a circular relationship, he suggests how it is possible for one mode to incorporate the characteristics of the other modes without being untrue to its own nature.

full range of her impulses is in the role of its central character, Margaret Hale. Her story covers her discoveries about herself in a new society and is thus a parallel for the discoveries that the society itself is seen to be making and to need to make in the future.

In shaping this novel as a *bildungsroman*, Gaskell takes another important step forward in her development of her own characteristic strengths as a novelist. The emphasis on her central character's development involves her in a careful presentation of the gradual process of cause and effect by which Margaret Hale develops; the careful placing of related events in time is involved and this charting of large and small matters in the growth of an individual psyche is what becomes Gaskell's distinctive mark in her later novels. Within the strongly linear direction that Margaret Hale's centrality gives to the novel is placed another feature of experience to which Gaskell always shows herself responsive - the full flavour of the immediate moment. What might be called the local colour of Manchester is beautifully given in the first part of *Mary Barton* but is something that Gaskell does not successfully sustain once the key action begins. In her later novels the tension between the fullness of the present moment and the onward movement of the whole is under much better control. In fact the tension becomes a matter that she makes Molly Gibson herself register in *Wives and Daughters*. When Roger is consoling her in her grief over her father's coming marriage by saying that she must concentrate her thoughts on the benefits that may come from the marriage and remember that one day she will look back on her trial as a light one, she rejects such consolation with "But we are ourselves you know, and this is now" (11: 170). Gaskell gives full recognition to her character's claim that the moment matters as much as the larger design of life, and it is pleasing to imagine that she did so helped by her own experience as an artist in controlling the tension between the moment and the design.

CHAPTER TWO

NORTH AND SOUTH

i) Introduction

North and South presents the reader with a picture of the national and local divisions within English society of the mid-nineteenth century. Its fundamental observation is that England was a doubly divided country for the South refused to understand the emerging phenomenon of the industrial North, and, within the North itself, a similarly prejudiced division operated between masters and men. Although division is seen as the nation's condition, the action of the novel is designed to reflect what had already begun in the North, the forging of a new consciousness demanded by new circumstances. For this reason, the meeting of Southern attitudes (the tradition-bound social forms produced by an older world) and the unformed, emerging concepts of the new North, is shown to be one where the representatives of these worlds are themselves aware of what is happening. As Nicholas Higgins's comment to Margaret Hale suggests, self-awareness is acute in this new society.

> 'Yo're not of this country, I reackon?'
> 'No!' said Margaret, half sighing. 'I come from the South - from Hampshire,' she continued a little afraid of wounding his consciousness of ignorance if she used a name which he did not understand.
> 'That's beyond London, I reackon? And I come fro' Burnley-ways, and forty mile to the North. And yet yo' see, North and South has both met and made kind o' friends in this big smoky place.'[1]
> (8: 111 - 2)

As a title, the phrase 'North and South' suggests that Milton represents the North and stands in comparison with the South, represented by London and by Helstone. And yet Higgins's words suggest that Gaskell saw Milton differently: as a meeting place for both North and South. This view of Milton gives further validation to the suggestion that the men and women of Milton have considerable insight into their needs in a new world, and that her novel records what was already being accomplished as well as suggesting what might be desirable developments.

The fact of national and local division gives the novel a complex pattern of contrasts and similarities to handle as

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1. Page references to *North and South* are all to the Penguin edition, 1970.

it depicts how much of traditional customs and values has continued into the new society and how much has been made to change. The complexity of the patterning inherent in the Northern scene has been underscored by Gaskell's decision to use relatively few characters to depict Northern life (there are really only three families, Hale, Thornton and Higgins which are handled with inwardness) but to create from these figures a complex series of parallels which involve both their character-type and their actions.

These parallels and their functioning will form a major part of the discussion of *North and South* which follows. The focus will be on the tightness of this novel's organisation, because in it Gaskell successfully devises a plot which gives her structural principles which help her to overcome many difficulties which have been observed in her earlier works. As well as finding a structural principle in the parallels which grew out of the nature of the material she was handling, Gaskell places her heroine, Margaret Hale, at the centre of the action in such a way as to make the novel her story. This enables Gaskell to use a linear plot structure for her novel which gives momentum to what might otherwise have been a statically patterned picture of a divided society. The heroine's centrality enables a natural concentration on the development of the characters' quest for a new understanding of themselves and for concepts which will adequately reflect their world and help to guide it. As Margaret's centrality gives the work a vital temporal momentum, the discussion of structural arrangements starts from the proposition that the thematic patterns and the linear plot are handled in four clearly demarcated phases.

a) <u>The novel's Four Phases</u>. The emergence of distinct phases in the narrative suggests that in her linear plot, Gaskell consciously employed a systematic temporal arrangement for what was already a highly patterned subject matter. Patterning creates spatial relationships in matter and this control, coupled with the temporal discipline of a linear plot in *North and South*, allows the claim that in this novel,

Gaskell is to be seen as a conscious artist, a craftsman as well as a naturally gifted story-teller who was stirred by a lively social conscience. The novel's phases are:

i) the move from London and Helstone to Milton

ii) the Hale family observes Milton

iii) the demonstration at Thornton's mill and Margaret's lie to save Frederick

iv) Margaret's recognition of her real self and her feelings for Thornton.

As is to be expected, these four phases fall naturally within the novel's chapter divisions, and, until the last chapters which Gaskell re-wrote for the two-volume book publication, follow the instalment divisions of serial publication as well.

i)	London/Helstone/Milton	Chapters 1 - 7	Instalments 1 - 4
ii)	Milton observed	Chapters 8 - 21	Instalments 5 - 11
iii)	demonstration and lie	Chapters 22 - 35	Instalments 12 - 17
iv)	recognition	Chapters 36 - 52	Instalments 18 - end.

The division for the two-volume publication in 1855 was made between chapters 25 and 26, which means that Gaskell split an episode as well as ignoring the natural narrative division between phases two and three. Obviously this was done so that each volume would have an equal quantity of material in it, and as a decision made after the main structuring arrangements had been completed, it is of minor importance. The main point to be noted about the work's shape is the use of a four-fold construction for *North and South* as compared with the three-fold shape of *Sylvia's Lovers*, a shape which was suggested to Gaskell by the three-volume publication of that novel, and with the more expansive five-fold structure in *Wives and Daughters*.

The four phases are also distinguished by the narrative emphasis in each. There are no absolute changes of narration from phase to phase but certain alterations in emphasis have been used to match the dominant experience of each.

i) (Chapters 1 - 7). In the move to Milton, the authorial narrative voice is strongly present, especially in the Helstone scenes. There is some scenic presentation of events and some direct entry into Margaret's inner, reflective life.

ii) (Chapters 8 - 21). As Milton issues are presented, extended, formal, set-piece discussions between Mr Hale, Margaret and either Higgins or Thornton dominate.

iii) (Chapters 22 - 35). The climactic scenes make equal use of the narrating voice and of scenic presentation.

iv) (Chapters 36 - 52). Long sequences of Margaret's part-narrated and part-dramatised reflections are used.

The main effect of these narrative variations is to establish an alternation between action (in Phases One and Three) and reflection (in Phases Two and Four). But as the summary suggests, the symmetry is not overly schematic for the reflections in Phase Two are conveyed in formal conversations, whereas the reflections of the final phase are largely given in the narration of Margaret's inner life. What the alternations do achieve is a rhythm, a matched tempo in the action's phases, which gives discernible shape to it and which underwrites the persuasive power of the closure. All the changes in narration occur within the authorial narration of the whole work. The unifying characteristics of this mode stem from Margaret Hale's centrality and will be further described when that is discussed.

b) The quest for new concepts. The industrial north was producing a "race of people strange, shrewd, ignorant; but above all, full of character and strong human feeling" (50: 512), a race of which Thornton and Higgins are both characteristic members and equally in need of an understanding of themselves and the relationship in which economic developments have placed them. In the same way that the emergent society is seen to need a fresh understanding of the roles people play in it, so on a national scale the phenomenon of industrial development and the changes it has brought needs to be reassessed. New concepts are needed locally and nationally to comprehend this new society.

This is a summary of the urgently felt regional and national quest which *North and South* takes as its subject matter, and from which it derives both its plot of personal quest and its tone. Its intensity and even its moments of solemnity come from Gaskell's wish to impress on her readers the importance of the individual and communal search for new concepts, while the novel's vitality and subtle, racy presentation of this new breed of men busy creating their world is made possible by the fact that the society observed is not caught blindly in ill-comprehended processes but is one where the vigour which produced material advances is also being shown in its responses to these advances. As has been said, the novel was written both to record an emerging spirit and to urge more men to take the path which Thornton and Higgins are treading at its close. This means that the impulse is not wholly fictional, in Scholes and Kellogg's (1966) terms, and even the most didactic moments are grounded in possibilities which Gaskell had evidently observed germinating in the world she was portraying. They have the toughness and the humour which flows from observed life rather than from the simple wish to guide others to the desirable path. Although the novel's mimetic scenes are chiefly given to the conflict between masters and men, to the fact of division, the scenes of potential reconciliation where Higgins asks Thornton for work once the strike has broken and where Thornton comes to Higgins's home to offer him work, demonstrate convincingly that a spirit of mutual recognition was alive in that society. These men's pleasure in taking the measure of a worthy opponent as well as a future colleague speaks of what could be seen and felt in the new society rather than of something devised for the novel's didactic purposes.

The change from the atmosphere of *Mary Barton*, where John Barton feels himself hopelessly trapped in a crushing opposition between masters and men, is very great. And it is a change which reflects what had happened during the eight years between the two novels. As Easson and Lansbury both

point out,[1] trade unions had become a more widely accepted part of the nation's economic processes by 1854, and their growing power could be portrayed as potentially constructive. From the events in *North and South*, it is evident that Gaskell saw their power as cruel and arbitrary in the way it could coerce individual lives, but not as a sinister force in the national life.

While Gaskell felt that there were signs of future health within northern society itself, she obviously also felt that her novel needed a Southern presence to kindle those possibilities, and so Margaret Hale is on the scene to promote the self-awareness that the North needs as well as to enact the discovery of the real North that the nation needs. The search for new concepts in which Thornton and Higgins are involved is stimulated to conscious, vocal expression by Margaret and her father. The articulation of conflicting concepts forms the material of Chapter 15, for example, where the Hales, father and daughter, engage in an examination of the manufacturers' ethos, first with Mrs Thornton and then with her son. The mother's concepts are dominated by a picture of her son as the proud, princely and autocratic ruler of a far-flung empire of trade. The wider its horizons, the greater her son's stature will be seen to be. Thornton's own concepts have equally autocratic political implications, for he uses "servants", "children" and "wise despotism" to express the principles and expectations which guide him in his relations with his employees. Margaret suggests "steward" in place of ruler or prince, and her father uses the analogy of family relationships to suggest that workmen must be seen as adult rather than infant progeny. He speaks for "the equality of friendship between the adviser and the advised classes" (15: 169) and Margaret tells Thornton that he should conceive of his social obligations as arising from the fact that he is a man among men rather than

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1. Easson (1979) p 94 and Lansbury (1975) pp 97 - 8. But Lansbury finds the novel a more accurate picture of the nation's future processes than does Easson.

a capitalist wielding power over labour.

This chapter comes in the novel's second phase which is dominated by set-piece discussions of Milton conditions, but the intensity with which all the characters engage in debate is not one that Gaskell has had to create for her didactic purposes, nor are its terms ones which suggest her (rather than her characters') diagnosis of developments which have hitherto remained unrecognised in the North. The whole phase reflects the strong self-awareness and questing spirit of that new world, the tenacity with which it could be blind about itself and the honest courage with which it could be brought to assess its achievements and failures.

Margaret arrives in the North with a concept of herself in which the aristocratic ideal of serving and leading others is tinged with raw snobbery, a blend which makes her personal pride a fair match for that of Mrs Thornton and her son. Margaret and Thornton are therefore to find themselves caught in a personal clash which is charged by their similarly faulty and valuable qualities. Margaret encounters an equally strong self-respect in Nicholas Higgins, a self-respect which first shows her the possibilities of personal equality and mutual respect in the new society. Higgins's ideals are also to be challenged as the action unfolds, but not because he personally has attitudes which damage others. In his case it is the nature of institutionalised power that is questioned when it is shown that the collective action of the Union is often more inhumane than would be that of its individual members. As with Thornton's role as a mill owner, this questions the degree of autonomous power which may properly be granted to individuals or to groups in society. Higgins is shown to regret the collective inhumanity of his Union, but the novel does not attempt to suggest an alternative as it does for Margaret and Thornton. This would seem to be because Gaskell felt that the fresh understanding of equality which she depicts in her main protagonists was more important nationally than was questioning the nature of collective power.

c) Margaret Hale at the novel's centre. Although Margaret Hale's conscience and tastes are distinctively Southern, she is not simply a representative of the genteel world for she has, when she arrives in Milton, already found life in Harley Street trivial and unable to offer her a future. Henry Lennox cannot be her husband. Helstone delights her for the freedom of the forest which it offers, but there too she has discovered that personal relationships are marred by dissatisfactions. Her parents have retreated into separate lives; of studious meditation for her father and querulous hypochondria for her mother. The fact that she will not find herself in either Southern world to which she has access is important for it makes her a character with her own story, her own quest. She is not simply a cipher representing the traditional values which the North is in danger of losing or a means congenial to Gaskell's own temperament through which the new world can be viewed. She is not only a full character in her own right, but she occupies the novel's centre, able to generate the interest that that position demands in a realistic novel of the nineteenth century.

The fact that the central character is engaged in a search for herself in a world which can both challenge and fulfil means that *North and South* is to be read as a *bildungsroman* in which Margaret Hale's quest parallels that of the world into which her life moves. The setting for her quest is one of great sociological interest, but, for all that has just been said about the Northern quest for new concepts, its import is seen through and because of Margaret Hale. Pikoulis (1976) considers two possible, opposed readings of the novel, that which sees its social-problem subject matter as paramount and that which sees it as Margaret Hale's love story, and concludes that "There is ... no need to play off the private against the public, or *vice versa*. Rather they are complementary aspects of an overriding theme" (p 183). His comment indicates the importance of Margaret Hale's centrality and points towards the further claim being made here that personal and public issues are fused in Margaret

so that the wider world is seen through and because of her actions. Her centrality determines both the plot and the narrative method.

To take the plot first: if the implications of Dickens's thematic title[1] are simply followed, the plot must seem to have an unsatisfactory shape, for its significant events will be felt to reach their climax in the strike and near-riot at Thornton's mill and then subsequent events, Thornton's proposal and the lie told for Frederick, will be felt as secondary, as anti-climatic or even as uninteresting padding. It is this reading which seems to inform Williams's (1963) judgement that "Mrs Gaskell's second industrial novel, *North and South*, is less interesting, because the tension is less. She takes up here her actual position, as a sympathetic observer." (p 103). The comparison is with *Mary Barton*. It is a judgement which does not acknowledge that the observer figure, Margaret Hale, is herself engaged in a complementary quest, that Milton's tensions not only match hers but have the power to determine the course of her own life. Gaskell's own working title was "Margaret Hale" which indicates that her attention was on the linear plot where the action is important for its power to shape a character, and that through such action the national issues were revealed.

The thematic coherence of the linear plot and the shape it imparts to Margaret Hale's story will be argued fully in the section of this chapter which deals with the novel's double climax, but the relevance to Milton issues of her lie (which might appear only a private matter) can be indicated briefly here to show that the plot has an essential unity. It is through her lie that Margaret is forced to see herself as an imperfect, sinful woman and to take into account Thornton's similar knowledge of her being so. The drastic reassessment of herself into which she is forced is a particular challenge

1. A B Hopkins (1952) and several critics since her have commented on Dickens's choice of title.

to the stance of perfect, maiden purity which she had adopted when Thornton proposed and which she had used to excuse herself from accepting responsibility for the consequences of her interference in the demonstration at his mill. Her proud refusal to accept full responsibility (covering Thornton's tribute of love and Fanny's gossiping slur on her character as well as the workmen's shamefaced retreat) matches Thornton's own refusal to take full responsibility for the consequences of his actions as mill-owner, and in matching this it moves into the realm of politically significant action. It is in this way that Margaret's deeds and the reassessment which follows are analogous to the wider developments in Milton and form the "complementary aspect" of "an overriding theme".

This reading of the plot is at variance with that of Edgar Wright (1965) who feels that the plot, "built on her inherently powerful sense of contrast and balance" is one which

> acts like a zipper to the two sides of the pattern, interlocking them while moving forward. It cannot have the inevitability in its conclusion that can be contrived for the history of one central character; we know the two sides will come together at a convenient point, but there seems no good reason why any particular point is chosen, other than convenience or a desire to finish. (p 234)

In a footnote to this judgement, Wright adds that Gaskell "sees the conclusion but has to jump to reach it". His reading sees Margaret Hale and Thornton as representatives of distinct regional values, and suggests that the North and South are awkwardly united in their marriage; whereas what is being argued here is that the regional conflicts are enacted in the figure of Margaret Hale. While her marriage to Thornton does not suggest that perfect and permanent resolution is achieved, it is proper for the plot to reach its end there, for it represents the heroine's recognition of her new self, her own completed move to Milton, the meeting ground of North and South.

If the role that is being argued for Margaret Hale is accepted, it means that *North and South* represents a considerable

technical advance over *Mary Barton* where Mary's role in sustaining the action of the novel's second half is unsatisfactory. Although Mary's moral development is established in the first part as important and is significantly related to Manchester issues, her development in the later chapters is not treated in the same category of seriousness with which socio-political issues are first presented. In other words, Mary functions as the novel's aesthetic heroine in the second half whereas the tone of the beginning demands that the question of her moral stature and development is what is sustained. As Scholes and Kellogg (1966) point out, the terms "hero" and "heroine" carry both aesthetic and moral connotations, but both possibilities will not necessarily coincide in a novel's major characters;[1] Mr Blifil and Sophia Western are aesthetic types who have "great emotional value within the fictional world but no intellectual connection with reality." (p 103). What follows from this for *North and South* is that Margaret Hale needs to be a figure of moral interest as well as of aesthetic appeal in order to carry her function. The opening chapters establish her joint qualities as heroine with great delicacy: from Henry Lennox's proposal Margaret takes on the emotional appeal of an aesthetic heroine destined for love, but her refusal of him joins with her response to the fuss of Edith's wedding to indicate that this is an independently minded young woman, set to make her own choices in the world.

The narrative mode of *North and South* which also flows from and sustains Margaret's centrality, is equally carefully used by Gaskell. It works to convey the characters' own sense of what is happening to them in the new society of the North and does so in what Stanzel (1971) called the authorial mode of narration. In this novel the narrating voice positions itself so close to the main characters' own outlook that it often affects the reader as figural rather than

1. Use is made of this possibility in *Sylvia's Lovers*. In the early chapters, Sylvia has a largely aesthetic role while Hester is the figure who points to the moral questions awaiting Sylvia.

as authorial narration. For example, when Margaret's attitudes to "shoppy" people and to the Northern mill-owners emerge in the early chapters, they cause her parents to demur a little but they are neither placed nor controverted by the narration. They remain effectively unchallenged for the reader until the action presents Thornton in his own right, and they are sustained in Margaret herself until her own stock-taking after her lie makes her see that she has come to regard Thornton very differently. Generally, Margaret's treatment is extended to characters like Mr Hale and Mr Thornton whose own point of view is, at times, used to give a largely subjective account of matters, an account which is only challenged when an event or a change of scene enables a different point of view to come forward. The constant presence of a narrating voice allows the narration to enter other points of view besides Margaret's without ever becoming figural narration. It also allows the narration to indicate that there are limitations to the point of view being entered without necessarily controverting it.

> Margaret only knew that her mother had not found it convenient to come, and she was not sorry to think that their meeting and greeting would take place at Helstone parsonage, rather than, during the confusion of the last two or three days, in the house in Harley Street, where she herself had had to play the part of Figaro, and was wanted everywhere at one and the same time. Her mind and body ached now with the recollection of all she had done and said within the last forty-eight hours. The farewells so hurriedly taken, amongst all the other good-byes, of those she had lived with so long, oppressed her now with a sad regret for the times that were no more; it did not signify what those times had been, they were gone never to return. Margaret's heart felt more heavy than she could ever have thought it possible in going to her own dear home, the place and the life she had longed for for years - at that time of all times for yearning and longing, just before the sharp senses lose their outlines in sleep. (2: 47)

The narration is placed explicitly inside Margaret's feelings as she leaves Harley Street for Helstone, and yet the narrator is also there to indicate more to the reader than Margaret herself is conscious of. The word "only" in the first sentence refers beyond Margaret's knowledge (to her mother's reasons for not attending the wedding) and while it is

Margaret who characterises herself as Figaro, there is no reason to suppose that the generalisation about longings being felt most acutely just before falling asleep, is hers. The narrator's presence here is working to support and extend Margaret's conscious experiences but it could just as easily be used to criticise them. It is this vital presence of a narrator which confirms that the novel is to be seen as working in the authorial rather than the figural mode.

The collaboration of narrator with character has received hostile criticism from Furbank (1973). He describes the narrative method as one in which Gaskell "pretends to be writing 'from the outside' when really writing 'from the inside'" (p 52). He finds the method an interesting one in itself but says that in *North and South* Gaskell does not "play fair" with it (p 52). This, he says, is because using a character's subjective presentation of events involves the narrator in bearing "false witness" (p 53) if the narrator does not correct the limitations or distortions inevitable in a subjective point of view. (The argument which this study presents is that such correction is undertaken in the events and not by the narrator.)

The specific charge against Gaskell is that the narration goes along with the heroine's glamourising view of herself to the extent of foisting a series of untruths about her on the reader. Furbank points out for example that when Margaret first meets Thornton she is clearly not as poised as she would like to be, but, because the narration uses her consciousness, the account she would like to give of their meeting, the cold disdain in her manner is not seen for what it is. Furbank says that this would be a minor charge, but for the fact that one of the heroine's key actions is blurred by the narration's mendacity. The issue comes to a head, he says, over the lie that Margaret tells about Frederick and in particular over her attitude to Thornton's supposition that Frederick was her lover. He finds an immoral collusion in the way that Margaret is allowed to get away with her claim that she had never bothered about that aspect of Thornton's

judgement, when clearly she had. Furbank quotes these passages in evidence against Gaskell and her heroine:

> Then, as a new thought came across her, she pressed her hands tightly together:
> 'He, too, must take poor Frederick for some lover.'
> (39: 400)
>
> 'There was first your walking out with a young man in the dark - '
> 'But it was my brother!' said Margaret, surprised.
> 'True. But how was he to know that?'
> 'I don't know. I never thought of anything of that kind,' said Margaret, reddening, and looking hurt and offended.[1] (46: 486)

As will be explained in the discussion of the novel's final phase, Gaskell's treatment of Margaret is puzzling in this instance, and if all the novel's developments were handled in this contradictory way, then Furbank's criticisms would be justified. But, as was said earlier, the action is used to provide a dramatically treated counter to a character's possibly mistaken point of view, a view which the narration often seems to endorse at the moment of using it. The misunderstanding over Frederick's relationship to Margaret comes in the phase where she is made to undergo a major reassessment of herself and has to accept the fact that she is not as perfect as she had thought. This means that although Margaret's statements are contradictory and although the narration does not acknowledge this, Furbank cannot really say that in general Gaskell is working to leave her reader under an illusion about the heroine, unduly influenced by Margaret's own "painful self-consciousness" (p 54). If a major subterfuge were being resorted to, then Margaret's reassessment itself would appear unwarranted and contradictory.

Furbank's unease about the effect of the narrative method serves to indicate how complex a convention Gaskell is using when she makes the authorial narration collaborate very fully with her character's subjective responses. As the passage

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1. As Gaskell added this chapter when she was preparing the work for two-volume publication, it is possible that she had forgotten the earlier passage, but if the duplicity really were characteristic of the novel, then this would, of course, excuse nothing.

from Chapter 2 quoted above indicates, the narration can slip imperceptibly into a character's point of view and then leave it just as unobtrusively to make a reliable, objective observation, or to provide information to which only the narrator has access, or to generalise in a way that is free of the character's own awareness. The narration is indeed simultaneously inside and outside the characters, and it is a stance which places considerable onus on the reader to provide a concurrent commentary on what is given from inside a character's perceptions, feelings and actions while enjoying the luxury of inwardness with that character. The reader's responsibility is very like that entailed in figural narration, to "translate", as Furbank says, what the character needs or wishes to feel into the unbiassed, dependable view of things which the total action makes it possible to reach. It is a translation which any reader of Jane Austen, for example, will be used to making and which most readers of nineteenth-century novels would perform without question.

The positive case for the narrative method used lies in its formal furtherance of the theme of self-discovery, for it enables a relatively dramatised handling of the theme which places the reader in a role of active discovery akin to that of the characters. Creating such a relationship for the reader gives the process of self-discovery a status quite different from that which it would have if handled in either first person narration, as in *Great Expectations*, or in authorial narration of the kind that Thackeray used in *Vanity Fair* where the distancing effect of the narrator's voice reinforces the point that none of the characters is capable of a growth in self-knowledge. The acute self-awareness that Margaret Hale is given can be justified on the grounds that Gaskell needed a central character who would be as responsive as possible to the demands of her world. Thus Margaret Hale has a conscious wish for excellence which means that she is all the more profoundly challenged by Milton life to understand herself afresh and to re-mould her old-world strengths to serve the new world. This argument gives a very sympathetic account of Margaret Hale but is closer to the effect

of the whole novel than is the scornful note in Furbank's response to her sensitivity. He writes at the end of his article, (pp 54 - 5), "We need to be told of every flush and tremor of hers because there is a virtue in them, they *prove* her to be a right-thinking and right-feeling girl. It is no mean task to be such in her walk of life."

Furbank has objected to the narration's collaboration with Margaret, to its positioning itself within her consciousness and (he might have said) suggesting a smug sensitivity. But, interestingly enough, the point at which the narration does verge on embarrassing approval is when other characters observe Margaret's thorough-bred refinement, and not when her own perceptions are being used. For example, after his first visit, Dr Donaldson reflects:

> 'Who would have thought that little hand could have given such a squeeze? But the bones were well put together, and that gives immense power. What a queen she is! With her head thrown back at first, to force me into speaking the truth; and then bent so eagerly forwards to listen. Poor thing! I must see she does not over-strain herself. Thought it's astonishing how much those thorough-bred creatures can do and suffer. That girl's game to the backbone. Another who had gone that deadly colour, could never have come round without either fainting or hysterics. But she wouldn't do either - not she! And the very force of her will brought her round. Such a girl as that would win my heart, if I was thirty years younger.'
> (16: 174 - 5)

The fulsomeness of this could be attributed to the doctor's own garrulous sentimentality, but it is awkward to do so as he is not given a sufficiently clearly realised personality to ensure that his thoughts illuminate his character, and so they act as simple tribute to Margaret. In fact a preceeding paragraph asserts the unclouded accuracy of his responses.

> He paused. Margaret went very white, and compressed her lips a little more. Otherwise not a feature moved. With the quick insight into character, without which no medical man can rise to the eminence of Dr Donaldson, he saw that she would exact the full truth; that she would know if one iota was withheld; and that the withholding would be torture more acute than the knowledge of it.
> (16: 173)

Although self-aware, Margaret is never indulgent of herself in this way.

Perhaps the strongest counter to Furbank's objection to the collaborative, lying narrator in *North and South* is the fact that other major characters are treated, though less frequently with the same blended inner and external view. Mr Thornton's bus ride into the country after Margaret has spurned him is one example, another comes towards the novel's end when the reassessment of himself which matches Margaret's more fully treated efforts is sketched in.

> But the truth was, Mr Thornton was hard pressed. He felt it acutely in his vulnerable point - his pride in the commercial character which he had established for himself. Architect of his own fortunes, he attributed this to no especial merit or qualities of his own, but to the power, which he believed that commerce gave to every brave, honest, and perservering man, to raise himself to a level from which he might see and read the great game of wordly success, and honestly, by such far-sightedness, command more power and influence than in any other mode of life. Far away in the East and the West, where his person would never be known, his name was to be regarded, and his wishes to be fulfilled, and his word pass like gold. That was the idea of merchant-life with which Mr Thornton had started. 'Her merchants be like princes,' said his mother, reading the text aloud, as if it were a trumpet-call to invite her boy to the struggle. He was but like many others - men, women and children - alive to distant, and dead to near things. He sought to possess the influence of a name in foreign countries and faraway seas, - to become the head of a firm that should be known for generations; and it had taken him long silent years to come even to a glimmering of what he might be now, to-day, here in his own town, his own factory, among his own people. He and they had led parallel lives - very close, but never touching - till the accident (or so it seemed) of his acquaintance with Higgins. (50: 511)

As in the treatment of Margaret, the narrating voice moves almost imperceptibly in and out of Thornton's thoughts and feelings. The voice is most fully authorial, furthest from Thornton, at the point where the concept of merchant power is raised and Mrs Thornton's role in her son's efforts is evoked. It is difficult to say that the memory is to be seen as Thornton's own active recollection especially as the next sentence has a directly distancing comment aimed both at the contents of the memory and at the fact that the ambition

it has inculcated in Thornton is like that of too many men, "dead to near things". The re-entry into Thornton's mind is via a swift account of the changed outlook that time has brought. The narration finally merges most fully into Thornton's active, conscious feelings with the repeated word "own" and his deictic phrase "now, to-day, here." There is nothing pure about this authorial voice, but it does, in Forster's (1962) word, "bounce" (p 86) the reader into the character's experience. Its power to do so demonstrates that in *North and South* Gaskell has found her distinctive realm, the processes of inner change and growth.

d) Parallels as a structural principle. The last sentence quoted of Thornton's reflections accomplishes an aesthetically exciting move: the narration gives him explicit awareness of a key feature of the fictional world - their "parallel lives". This was a feature of the actual world which Gaskell took into her novel and made a major organising principle. The novel looks at the ignorance and hostility which keeps individual lives and whole regions "very close, but never touching", and this concern leads not only to the reflection of divisions within society, but to the use of parallels of a more complex kind. For example, Frederick, long before he appears in the action, is felt to match Margaret in her impulses to an idealistic championing of the oppressed. In fact the reader may well feel that knowledge of her brother's past has actively guided Margaret in her attitudes. But once this parallel is felt, it has also to be recognised that Frederick acts as a parallel to Higgins when the latter helps to organise the Milton strike, for the naval precedent supports Higgins's implicit claim that it may be necessary to act dangerously or unlawfully in protecting the interests of the oppressed. Higgins himself does not know about Frederick so that when he argues that he will die at his post like the brave, patriotic soldier rather than yield to the masters (17: 183) the parallels with Frederick's case act with dramatic irony for the reader's insight alone.

In the realist novelist's hands, the extensive use of paral-

lels becomes acceptable through a careful creation of the complexity of an individual personality in the main characters. This allows a certain aspect of the personality and of the character's history to be mirrored in another character without a complete match being implied. In fact the comparisons work as metaphors do, so that the reader is conscious of similarity in dissimilarity. An example of the way only certain facets of one character touch another in a created parallel comes in the near simultaneous deaths of Bessie Higgins and Mrs Hale. The differences in their material circumstances are as much part of the parallel's significance as is the fact that however different, both are Milton-caused deaths. The similarities and differences make the interest which these two sufferers feel in each other all the more telling. Thus, while Frederick can be a parallel to both Margaret and Higgins in his idealist's care for others, he is also matchable to Thornton in being the object of his mother's loving pride and her feelings that he is wrongly judged by the influential world at large. (Mrs Thornton says in Chapter 15 that her son is wrongly scorned by the genteel world.) On this score the two men are linked in the reader's responses. The same might be said of the two mothers who love and admire their sons. For all the differences between Mrs Thornton and Mrs Hale, and they embody the distance between North and South more strongly than any other two characters, the point they have in common links them in the reader's mind in an embracing sympathy. In this way the reader's responses are opposed to the social fact that lives in Milton are not allowed to touch. Thus what the use of parallels accomplishes in *North and South* is the simultaneous presentation of the great social divide with the emotional, the moral counter to this condition. Such silent persuasion through the novel's structural features is vital to a novelist engaged in persuading her readers to see things differently. Had the argument against division been left simply to Margaret, for example, her words might or might not have gained the reader's assent. Even the endorsement of her outlook in the novel's action might not have affected a

determinedly metropolitan, mid-nineteenth century vision. Success could well depend, as George Eliot said in her essay on Riehl (1856), on prior sympathies. But when Northern circumstances and attitudes run counter to unvoiced experience and attitudes which have been drawn on in the structural forms, then a more profound response than assent to an argument, even to a demonstrated argument, is created. The appeal in these forms is to the reader's personal experiences and pre-conceptions (a tenderness for maternal love and pride, for example) and when those are gratified in the forms, then assent to the invitation to see things differently is most likely to follow. Long-standing personal attitudes usually have the appeal of seeming natural and therefore right, and it is in an appeal to established attitudes in the course of creating new ones that the novelist has a very powerful weapon.

The intellectual rigour with which parallels may be used can be seen in Jane Austen. Gilbert Ryle (1970) has described Jane Austen's method as "her wine taster's technique of matching them (her main characters) not only against one another, but also against nearly all the other characters in their little world." (p 78). The insight and judgements which follow from these comparative sips are most delightful for their generous yet unremitting clarity and it may fairly be said that Gaskell too achieves honest clarity in her parallels.

Finally, much of the critical attention that this novel has received has come from scholars interested in those nineteenth-century novels which tackled directly the major economic and political issues of the age. Williams (1963), Kettle (1958), Lucas (1966), Ganz (1969) and Lansbury (1975) have written about Gaskell's novels in this way. One of the first critics to pursue this interest was Cazamian (1973) who grouped Gaskell with Kingsley and Dickens and classified their response to the state of the nation as part of the idealist intervention which arose in reaction to the harsh individual-

ism of utilitarianism. His classification is a suggestive one for it emphasises the belief these writers had that an appeal to the heart was a first step in alerting men to their power to alter social conditions.

> Grass roots interventionism, like the industrial statutes it provoked, was intimately bound up with a deep, sensitive understanding of distress. The great psychological event which led to industrial legislation was the softening of John Bull's heart. (p 97)

and of Gaskell in particular he wrote:

> ... like Dickens, she knew how to evoke a passionate response to dismal and demanding conditions which would produce immediate action, and subsequently a new ideology. (p 214)

It is certainly true to say that *North and South* sought to persuade its readers that a wilful denial of interest in others could be broken down and that by a loving effort, society could move from the uneasy cash nexus which marked human relations in the North to a vigorous harmony of interests. But to see a moral crusade as the novel's primary feature and purpose is misleading. As has been said, the narrative focuses on the characters' own awareness of their circumstances and their needs, as can be seen in Higgins's comments when he first meets Margaret. When she comes North she has already embarked on her quest for a more satisfactory understanding of herself and for fulfilment. The North's challenges mean that her quest takes on greater drama and urgency as she is extended and developed in ways that would have been impossible in the South. It is in this way, and chiefly through Margaret, that Gaskell actually demonstrates the development of a new consciousness and in doing so goes far beyond the task of evoking a "passionate response" of sympathy for suffering which is what Cazamian recognised in her work.

The consequences of Margaret's intervention at Thornton's mill indicate that Gaskell was acutely aware of what she herself might be doing as an intervening author. The sense in which Margaret's story can be read as Gaskell's own self-

examination of her role in intervening in society's affairs must counter the inclination either to see her as a naïve social reformer, or to feel that only when novelists commit themselves to a social crusade are they fulfilling their role. In *North and South* Gaskell reaches the self-awareness which marks her as a considerable novelist rather than a natural story-teller bent on doing good.

ii) Phase 1 (Chapters 1 - 7): Margaret Hale at the centre.

The main purpose of the opening chapters of *North and South* can, for this discussion, be taken to be that of establishing Margaret's central role in the plot and in the narration, and of showing how the family's move to Milton comes about. The precipitation of the move North poses some problems so that the subject of Mr Hale's religious crisis demands discussion in its own right as well as for the temporary effect it has on Margaret's centrality. But this problem does not arise until Chapter 4 and in the meantime much is done in the narration to establish Margaret's role as heroine. The collaboration between narrator and character which Gaskell uses has already been described, but more can be said about the specific function of the element of uncertainty that the narrative technique creates in the opening chapters.

When events are narrated through a character's point of view, the reader may not have immediate access to factors which confirm or correct that point of view. Indeed it is open to novelists not to supply certainty at all and to challenge the reader to come to conclusions aided only by attitudes held prior to and independently of that work. Such deliberate uncertainty may go as far as forcing the reader to conclude that conclusions are as impossible in that specific work of art as they are in the life being portrayed. Gaskell never places her readers in such a degree of uncertainty, but she does make judgement a less assured affair than might at first be recognised - as Furbank's unease indicated. This can be demonstrated if *North and South* is compared with *Emma*.

As Craik (1975) has pointed out, the two novels are very alike in their narration, for each heroine is made the narrative medium, although Margaret is not the novel's single consciousness as "Emma virtually is" (p 95). The works are also significantly alike for the way that the heroine exposes herself to public censure and severe self-criticism, with the enforced reassessment of self leading eventually to reconcil-

iation and a successful marriage. It might seem surprising to say that *Emma*, a novel which has a single mediating consciousness, offers greater certainty than does *North and South*, which often uses the contrasts between the characters' points of view to guide the reader. But the difference lies in the degree to which the empathetic[1] narration of each collaborates with the characters concerned. This term is being used to distinguish within Stanzel's (1971) authorial narration between those narratives where the mediating narrator is being effaced but not replaced by a character's inner life and those where the narrator's report of such matters remains dominant. *Emma* and *North and South* both use empathetic narration, but between them further important differences can be demonstrated from a comparison of their opening sentences. *Emma* begins:

> Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition, seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence; and had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her.[2] (p 5)

while *North and South* begins:

> 'Edith!' said Margaret gently, 'Edith!'
> But as Margaret half-suspected, Edith had fallen asleep.
> (1: 35)

It is obvious that the narration of *Emma* does not start inside the heroine's experience of events as does *North and South*. Not only does the narrator's summary place Emma's excellence and advantages before the reader for contemplation; the assumptions in the information itself are also held up for consideration. The apparent certainties identify themselves later as Emma's somewhat complacent view of herself which is increasingly allowed to dominate the narration, but in the sentence itself the confident note is already being questioned, most concisely in the word "seemed". This pivot-

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1. This term was used by Mrs S M Woolford in a lecture on linguistics and narrative in Cambridge in January 1980. Its usefulness within Stanzel's concept of authorial narration was not under discussion in that lecture.

2. Austen J (1972) ed Chapman.

al word prepares for the second clause's undermining the confident note of the first, and for the indication in the third clause that only in Emma's inexperienced view can her undoubted excellence and advantages prove as infallible as the tribute at first seems to suggest. The delight afforded by the ironic possibilities in the gap between Emma's own estimate and reality has been widely acknowledged, but the important point for this discussion is that Jane Austen indicates this ironic gap in the first sentence of her novel. In other words, before inveigling her readers into participating in the mistakes of Emma's immaturity, she attributes to them the common possession of the poised judgement and certainties that they are to regain and Emma to attain by the end of the novel.

By contrast, Gaskell's opening is much closer to Margaret, and her heroine's happy-regretful musings preclude the reader's moving to judgement. Not even Edith is to be judged for falling asleep rather than listening to Margaret's thoughts about her future and nor is the general expectation of a precisely placeable range of attitudes and actions created as it is in *Emma*. This range does eventually emerge in *North and South* but in such a way that the reader participates in the discovery of something new (the potential excellence of the northern industrialist, for example). It seems that Gaskell does not want to work through irony or to evoke agreed standards of judgement when she presents Margaret in any of her worlds. This is perhaps because the rapidity of change in the Victorian era left her feeling the inappropriateness of older models of behaviour. Certainly Margaret is not, at first, fitted to comprehend the new world, let alone judge it, although her attitudes are less hide-bound than most. What the narrative technique helps to establish is that Margaret is to be the figure who will lead readers into a largely unknown territory (morally as well as geographically) and for this journey her perceptions have to be shared rather than contemplated. As with Emma, the reader is to participate in Margaret's often prejudiced responses, but

without the guiding note of commonly held standards being sounded at the outset.

After the flurry of wedding preparations, Margaret's point of view continues to dominate the account of her return to Helstone, her recovery of its delights and her discovery that all is not well in her parents' lives. When Margaret refuses Henry Lennox, all must seem very familiar to novel readers. But Gaskell is in fact preparing a traditional vehicle to carry her readers into new territory. Of the expectations aroused by the marriage proposal, what remains is that in the new world successful entry is also confirmed by marriage as it would have been in Jane Austen's world. That the world Margaret moves into is otherwise very different, is first signalled by the fact that her departure from the traditional South is not precipitated by anything she does but by her father's staggering announcement that he is to leave the Church and take his family North, an announcement which is made to coincide with and thus deliberately overshadow Margaret's own decisive refusal of Henry Lennox.

Mr Hale's decision is clearly meant to confound his family but the transferring of decisive action to a secondary figure and the religious nature of the crisis which brings about the move North to a city which promises to raise economic and political issues rather than religious ones, are structural decisions which tax the reader considerably. Charlotte Bronte (1932) was one of the first readers of this work to record the kind of problem posed by its opening. She wrote to Gaskell:

> The subject seems to me difficult; at first I groaned over it. If you had any narrowness of views or bitterness of feeling towards the Church or her Clergy, I should groan over it still; but I think I see the ground you are about to take so far as the Church is concerned; not that of attack on her, but of defence of those who conscientiously differ from her, and feel it a duty to leave her fold.
> (Vol IV, p 153)[1]

1. Letter dated 30 Sept., 1854.

The implications of Mr Hale's decision are so great that it has presented itself to Charlotte Bronte as the novel's central subject rather than as a means to an end that Gaskell chose to use. It may be that Charlotte Bronte was pre-disposed to feel alarmed when her Unitarian friend raised issues connected with the established Church, but it must have seemed to many other mid-Victorian readers that Gaskell was about to join the contemporary debate on matters of faith.

Part of what Gaskell probably wanted to accomplish has been touched on: she needed a decision sufficiently staggering to overshadow Margaret's own power to shape her life. This is confirmed in the wording of Margaret's reflection on her father's announcement, "Mr Henry Lennox's visit - his offer - was like a dream, a thing beside her actual life." (5: 76), a reflection which places the event squarely within one of Gaskell's abiding interests - the power others have to shape our lives. But as well as being one of Gaskell's recurrent interests, the shaping power of others' decisions has particular relevance to Milton issues. Margaret is seen to feel coerced, that her future is being shaped for her, in much the same way that Milton workers must have felt when suddenly told of mill owners' decisions to reduce wages. What Gaskell is dealing with in both cases is, of course, the inter-relatedness of individual lives and the struggles people have to comprehend and cope with the apparently arbitrary and heartless pressures which devolve on them from others. Although Margaret cannot resent her father's decision as workers did those of the mill owners, and although Gaskell explicitly (in Chapter 15) rejects the concept of a parental relationship between masters and men, it is clear that Margaret has had a taste of the psychic problems which underlie life in Milton.

Her first reaction to her father's announcement is to feel that:

> The one staid foundation of her home, of her idea of her beloved father, seemed reeling and rocking. What could she say? What was to be done? (4: 67)

Thus when the workers react to imported Irish labour with bewildered, furious despair, or when Thornton speaks more coolly of Northerners as "men groping in new circumstances" (40: 414), it becomes clear that Margaret's having to cope with the consequences of her father's decision is a parallel for Milton's inhabitants having to cope with arbitrary power and, in the more general term, having to shape their society in circumstances for which their cultural traditions have hardly prepared them. Thus the magnitude and the repercussions of Mr Hale's decision ensure that Margaret herself is, for the reader, a sympathetic window on Milton. For the mid-nineteenth century reader, Mr Hale's crisis possibly also meant that the nature of life in the new society and the demands that it made on people could be perceived through the analogy of a more widely discussed and therefore more easily imagined form of crisis.

There is, of course, a significant difference between Margaret and the workers of Milton: although her life is suddenly completely recast by her father's decision, she is never led to feel that an alien power has constant and capricious control over her. In fact, once she begins to take practical charge of the move North, she begins to enjoy a sense of responsibility for her family's well-being. At first the decision-making is burdensome, but from the beginning Margaret is shown to appreciate the difference between it and the emptiness of the demands that Harley Street life had made on her.

> Four months ago, all the decisions she needed to make were what dress she would wear for dinner, and to help Edith to draw out the lists of who should take down whom in the dinner parties at home. (5: 85)

The new self-respect that is implied here makes possible one of the most subtle accomplishments of this phase of the novel: the understanding of how Margaret, despite her suffering, comes to enjoy the authority given her by her new-found responsibilities. As well as the psychological interest in this development, it leads Margaret to take on a three-fold thematic function as she stands in parallel to the workers of

Milton, to Thornton and to her father. In the first two cases it is the possibility of similarity that is being used. From an event reported briefly in Chapter 50 (when Higgins and a friend work overtime to try to help Thornton) it would seem that Gaskell felt that as with Margaret's growth into responsibility, the workers would, if given the chance, develop in like manner. The similarity that Margaret and Thornton take on as she gains in authority is obvious and is pointed to immediately they meet.

> Mr. Thornton was in habits of authority himself, but she seemed to assume some kind of rule over him at once. He had been getting impatient at the loss of his time on a market-day, the moment before she appeared, yet now he calmly took a seat at her bidding. (7: 99)

Such a passage introduces the future tensions of their personal story but it also works to persuade the reader that for all this mill owner's harshness, his decisive self-reliance has, like Margaret's personality, its attractive side.

Margaret's role in thus acclimatising the reader to Thornton is only part of the means used and it is her father's weaknesses which are to be even more effectively used. The burden of Mr Hale's indecisiveness in daily matters has already made itself felt and has been carefully created. As Gaskell wrote to a friend:

> Mr Hale is not a sceptic; he has *doubts*, and can resolve greatly about great things, and is capable of self-sacrifice in theory; but in the details of practice he is weak and vacillating. (*Letters*; No 249)

The difference between those who can cope in theory and those who actively shoulder the daily burden is central in Mr Hale's own apology as he fails the test of the everyday.

> 'No: we must go to Milton. That is settled. I can always decide better by myself, and not influenced by those whom I love,' said he, as a half apology for having arranged so much before he had told any one of his family of his intentions. 'I cannot stand objections. They make me so undecided.' (4: 71)

He is shirking what the novel sees as the primary fact of social life: that he must take responsibility for the power he has to affect other lives by allowing them due say in his

decision making. In his coercive power, Mr Hale is very like Mr Thornton, but in his weaknesses he is an obvious contrast with both the mill owner and his own daughter and serves to make their different assumptions of authority similarly attractive.

To complete the interactions on the theme of authority which occur between these three figures, it remains to say that a similarity between Mr Hale and Thornton enables Gaskell to introduce her essential, moral criticism of the Northern capitalist: in his trading activities he ignores the plight of those most affected by his decisions. The charge will be felt as commonplace today and it is the way it is reflected in Mr Hale's life that is likely to be found more interesting, but it is significant that in 1855 Gaskell felt that she had to move from the clergyman's case to that of the mill owner in order to be sure that her readers would understand her criticisms.

In picturing the scene where Margaret agrees to tell her mother that they are to leave Helstone, Gaskell uses the phrase "she conquered herself":

> 'Would you dislike breaking it to her very much, Margaret?' Margaret did dislike it, did shrink from it more than from anything she had ever had to do in her life before. She could not speak, all at once. Her father said, 'You dislike it very much, don't you, Margaret?' Then she conquered herself, and said, with a bright strong look on her face:
> 'It is a painful thing, but it must be done, and I will do it as well as ever I can. You must have many painful things to do.' (4: 70)

In what may be called the first of Margaret's heroic deeds, this phrase points to the presence of another of Gaskell's recurring preoccupations. As well as the power that others have over the individual, most of her novels treat the subject of the sacrifice of self that is demanded in the process of becoming a constructive member of society. It is a central subject in *Wives and Daughters* where Molly's entry

into her world demands sacrifices of self[1] (they begin when her father remarries) similar to the effort that Margaret makes here. These two novels treat of very different worlds and so it is to be expected that beyond the constant issue of self-denial, circumstances and consequences will change. In her lie for Frederick and in Thornton's involvement, the issue takes on a shape that Margaret could not have anticipated. By contrast, when she sees that Cynthia is to capture Roger, Molly is not taken unawares. This is partly because she herself is responsive to Cynthia's charm but also because the tone of life in Hollingford could not be characterised by abruptly untoward developments. In this it differs from Milton life which is, and must be, full of the unexpected and the ironic. Lessons in self-knowledge and one's obligations to others cannot be completely, permanently mastered in that fractured world.

This account of structural, thematic parallels began from the question of the effectiveness of having Mr Hale's religious doubts precipitate the family's move North. What has been said so far to demonstrate that the crisis is richly related to the novel's developing social themes stands as more of a justification of the way that the father's and daughter's personalities manifest themselves in the crisis, than as a justification of its being a crisis of faith which sets things going. On this score, the usefulness of religious doubt's being a sufficiently momentous subject to overshadow Margaret's refusal of Henry Lennox has already been mentioned. The gravity of Mr Hale's problem provides in addition to his powers as paterfamilias, justification for his making the startling decision to move North. Mention has also been made of the fact that seeing the North as a place arrived at in such seriousness will indicate to

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1. Literature's treatment of selfhood and the problem of reconciling individual autonomy with the demands made on the self by others is very helpfully discussed by Black (1975). He defines his interest as being in the question of "what it is to be a self among selves" (p 13) and in "the uniqueness of every individual and that which he or she holds in common with every other" (p 14). It is this dual aspect of selfhood, uniqueness and similarity, and of duty to that individuality and to others, which constantly preoccupied Gaskell and which also seems to have contributed to her extensive, complex use of parallels in *North and South*.

the reader the comparable earnestness with which Gaskell wanted its local issues contemplated. Finally, and underpinning all these connections, seems to be one of her most profound beliefs: all crises in society have at their base moral, religious questions which arise and have to be resolved in individual lives. *North and South* constantly demonstrates that in all walks of life, social problems are a question of moral relationships and that the right conduct of these relationships is ultimately governed by religion. Therefore the resolution of problems lies ultimately in the capacities of the individual conscience. It is a belief which may well be questioned today and which Gaskell obviously knew would be questioned in her own day, particularly by those who held that economic forces, impersonal and material forces in society, were the major determining factor in mens' lives. When, in her Preface to *Mary Barton*, Gaskell disclaimed knowledge of Political Economy, she was not offering an excuse for her ignorance. In fact it is reasonable to assume that in a general way she knew as much as most people about contemporary economic theory. What her disclaimer does is to point modestly but firmly to what she felt was important about the nature of life in Manchester: the kind of individual moral blindness which was creating antagonisms that were literally killing people. In *North and South* the issue of moral responsibility is not the urgent life-and-death matter that it had been in the later 1840's, in *Mary Barton*, but as the examples of Mr Hale's decision and his wife's death, of Margaret's intervention at the mill and Thornton's proposal, of Frederick's return and Margaret's lie, and of Higgins's membership of the Union and Boucher's death all demonstrate, the issue was one of abiding seriousness for Gaskell.

For this discussion of the novel's design, the important feature of her belief is that Gaskell chose to demonstrate it chiefly through her heroine's gradual recognition of its truth. This means that only when Margaret herself sees her damaging pride as sinful and realises that it has affected her public and her private actions, can the concept of the

religious basis of all social action come into its own and so justify starting the novel's action with a religious crisis. Mr Hale's doubts do in fact directly foreshadow future actions but this can only become evident at the novel's close. Perhaps the fact that the religious aspect of the work's precipitating crisis only comes into its own in the last phase of the story is more of a problem for a discussion which seeks to handle development phase by phase than for a judgement which draws simply on the completed effect, but it is also the case that Gaskell herself was worried by an apparent lack of direction in the opening chapters. She wrote to John Forster, "still I feel it to be flat and grey with no bright clear foreground as yet." (*Letters*; No 192) and her unease joins significantly with Charlotte Bronte's being misled into thinking that conflict with the Church was to be central in the story.

When Gaskell does begin to demonstrate that Margaret must understand her mistakes as stemming from a want of proper faith, she draws a deliberate parallel between Mr Hale in his earlier crisis and what Margaret does in her anguish. Both father and daughter are shown to turn to the writings of others for guidance and consolation. The daughter's echoing of her father's action is a significant directive to the reader in itself. It is made more so by the fact that each passage chosen is, in its way, appropriate to the crisis of the other person. As Margaret comes to terms with her sinfulness, she learns what Mr Hale had read, that "When God will not use thee in one kind, yet He will in another" (4: 68). Similarly her father, in going to Milton, chooses the "chemin de l'humilité" of which Margaret reads (41: 426). The parallel is further underlined in Mr Hale's words, "I suffer for conscience' sake" (4: 68). The fact that the deed for which Margaret is suffering, her lie for Frederick, did not occur in an obviously religious context demonstrates Gaskell's belief that all human action, however different it may appear, must ultimately be judged by the single standard of faith.

The decision to use Mr Hale's religious crisis to precipitate

the move to a new city with its set of political, economic issues, and its apparently wholly secular nature, can thus be seen to spring from Gaskell's most deeply held beliefs, beliefs which are most fully demonstrated when Margaret's own crisis unfolds. But while its nature can be justified in this way, the treatment of that crisis has still to be questioned, for it may be that the intended effectiveness of the crisis in the action and for the themes would have been more immediately clear had Gaskell treated Chapters 4 and 5 a little differently. The treatment of Frederick's role in the mutiny (it matches Mr Hale's crisis) presents an alternative which suggests that the scenic immediacy with which Mr Hale's decision is treated is perhaps why *North and South* seems to make a slightly false start.

When Frederick's story is first told to Margaret in Chapter 14, her mother concentrates very naturally on the effect of the way in which news of their son's actions had reached them in Helstone. She is made to read from Frederick's letters so that enough of his personality is felt to make his impassioned actions ring true, but in the main the emphasis is on her responses and so the exact relationship of the mutiny to present developments is kept clear. In Mr Hale's crisis, emphasis on Margaret's reactions might have sustained her centrality and the story's direction, but perspective is not as carefully created in the narration of Chapter 4 as it is in Chapter 14. In Frederick's crisis it is the co-presence of a past and a present event which necessitates a created perspective in the narration, but in Mr Hale's case it is the distinction between the character who is to remain central and one who is not, whose story is an adjunct to the main events, which exerts this demand. Dickens's requests that Gaskell prune the material for Chapters 4 and 5 have been discussed by several Gaskell critics, most recently by Easson (1980) who has outlined very clearly the problems which her treatment of Mr Hale's doubts raised - problems both in understanding the nature of his doubts and in appreciating their plot and theme function. The clarity which Easson's research gives to the probable nature of Mr Hale's doubts ("they

involve the Thirty-Nine Articles ... and therefore the institutions and doctrines specifically of the Church of England." p 33)[1] makes it the more regrettable that Gaskell did not, as George Eliot might well have done, put the nature of her character's anguish and therefore its precise effect on Margaret beyond question. What Easson goes on to suggest about the function of Mr Hale's ordeal supports the suggestions already made here that specifically religious doubts were thoughtfully chosen when Gaskell devised the reasons for the Hale family's move North. He writes that Mr Hale becomes a figure who has "won the right to comment on the behaviour and opinions of others which could not be conceded to Margaret or Thornton or Mr Bell." (p 39). Having said this, Easson has also to acknowledge that the subsequent lack of emphasis on Mr Hale's judgements means that his potential was "subsequently modified or inadequately handled" (p 32). But if Mr Hale's ordeal is seen as a clarifying prelude to what Margaret herself is to undergo and the right to enter actively into Milton life which she is to win, then the difficulty of his potential being apparently ignored is diminished. Had Chapter 4 been written with a fulness which also sustained a concentration on Margaret's responses, then its larger functions might have remained clear. It is of course presumptuous for a critic to correct an author's work, but the correction is one which suggests itself from the treatment of Frederick's parallel crisis in the novel.

In Chapter 4, Mr Hale does promise to speak explicitly "this once" (4: 66), but instead of speaking personally, he begins to read from Mr Oldfield's meditations. Easson demonstrates the relevance of this action very convincingly but his argument brings home more sharply the fact that it is the treatment of the scene which leaves the reader in some puzzlement about the exact nature and function of the crisis. In the overshadowing of Margaret, in dislodging her temporarily from

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1. This forms an important corrective to Lansbury's (1975) comment that "Mr Hale's crisis has not arisen from doctrinal doubts but from his inability to understand and minister to human suffering." (p 103).

her rightful place in the narrative, Gaskell does a strange thing in these two chapters. The responsibility of the move to Milton restores Margaret to her central role so that the portentousness of her first meeting with Thornton feels right, but, as will be described in the following pages, Gaskell still does not allow her heroine to emerge into full, self-aware presence in Phase Two. There her antagonism to Thornton will be used to keep her overshadowed, this time in the sense that she does not fully know herself in her new world, and consequently she will be precipitated into the Milton crisis ill-equipped for the consequences of her involvement.

iii) Phase 2 (Chapters 8 - 21): Milton Issues Revealed.

After the swift build up of the move to Milton in the opening chapters comes a period of relative inaction; the momentum of events is suspended while the Hale family get to know their new world. To record this process of discovery Gaskell has created a series of set piece conversations between Margaret, her father and the representatives of Milton's antagonists, Thornton and Higgins. Their conversations are all quite formal and represent a particular way of getting to know a new world: a debate in which already held standards meet those created or demanded by the new world. It is in scenes of formal discussion that Gaskell is able to display most directly the encounter with new concepts and the interactions between the three families who represent old ideas and generate new ones. Margaret's attitudes are most stirred by her growing affection for Nicholas and Bessie Higgins who have considerable power to make her conceive differently of herself, but it is also evident that for as long as her cold disdain keeps Thornton's influence at bay, not all of Milton can reach and affect her. This means that she sustains many of her Southern attitudes, particularly her aristocratic, chivalric notions of herself, beyond their usefulness. It therefore becomes appropriate that she is precipitated into active involvement in all areas of Milton life only when she interferes in the demonstration at Thornton's mill and is thereby forced into painful encounter with the self which presents itself to others. The sudden eruption of action in the third phase of *North and South* grows convincingly out of the relative stasis of this, its second phase, where the debates about Milton demonstrate both the issues and the process of response and resistance by which Margaret is absorbed into her new life and by which she can help the necessary new attitudes to gain currency.

Halting the momentum of events in the story and emphasising the created pause by the use of set-piece conversations serves several purposes. The most obvious one is that of informing readers about the conditions which prevailed in Milton. The series of debates enable Milton issues to be set out very

concisely and to be seen from more than one perspective, but this furthering of the novel's didactic purposes becomes really interesting when it is seen to merge with and affect the personal development of the heroine, when the didactic is felt to fuse with the mimetic. As a structural feature, these relatively static chapters have a further importance. In the first place they create a lull before the storm which matches Margaret's personal blindnesses, thus giving the plot a lively shape or rhythm. In the second place these chapters help to create rhythm in the *sujet*, for their subdued tempo matches that of phase four in which the protagonists are engaged in the slow processes of self-assessment. This correspondence helps to give a palpable aesthetic shape to the work, a shape in which its phases bear that ordered relationship to each other which is one of the clearest distinctions between life and art.

As Margaret's development is the chief structural principle of *North and South*, the mimetic undertaking in these chapters is what must receive most attention, and as Milton is playing a role akin to that of a character, consideration must also be given to the effectiveness of these chapters in illuminating its nature. This is not to suggest that Gaskell personifies Milton or any part of it in the way that Dickens often treats place in his novels, but that as a new environment, Milton has power to reshape a personality much as an encounter with a challenging new character would do.

Division is what dominates life in Milton, a division in which the antagonists, masters and men, have been held so long and so firmly that they have come to believe it to be natural, to enjoy perpetuating it and to draw a kind of energy from its challenges, or its perversities. The idea of communicating across the divide seems an impossible one to the men of Milton, and even more so the notion that a productive trust might be created. For this reason, the slender opportunity for communication that the Hale family's presence in Milton might afford is not one that either Northern side would consciously consider using to reach the other. What does occur

in the way of airing their opposed views is thus determined by the Hales' own interest in understanding the world into which they have moved, and while this interest is undoubtedly stimulated by Margaret's friendship with the Higgins family and by Mr Hale's own friendships amongst the workers,[1] it is simultaneously dampened for Margaret by her refusal to warm to the Thorntons. In other words, it is her conception of her role in countering poverty and suffering which is first challenged when she finds that a patronising compassion, her version of the traditional form of charity, is out of place. Higgins's attractive if brusque self-respect is what enables her to comprehend the attitudes appropriate in Milton, but it is only much later that she is able to see that his strengths have their equivalent in Thornton, the other half of Milton. The ordering Gaskell has given these changes seems designed both to explain Margaret's own story and to indicate what she thought was the most important national recognition that should be given to Milton.

The tensions in the formal conversations which spring from Margaret's mixed interest and hostility will take the discussion into the question of how these chapters further the unfolding personal lives of the characters, but before that is pursued, further evidence of the intention to convey deadlock in Milton can be adduced from the chapter headings which Gaskell devised for the two-volume publication of *North and South*. As there is no evidence to the contrary, it seems reasonable to assume that these chapter titles were of her devising; they certainly bear her stamp.

One of the strengths of the title which Dickens chose for the work is that the phrase "north and south" can express polarity, entities that have separated and are being held apart. When she came to give titles to the chapters in 1855, Gaskell seems to have been particularly responsive to this aspect of the title phrase's construction, for she repeated it many times. Of

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1. The fact of Mr Hale's friendships allows Gaskell to establish that the workmen are perfectly willing to explain to him as a stranger the sufferings that they "would have scorned to speak of ... to anyone who might, from his position, have understood it without their words." (19: 204)

course the co-ordinating "and" may express connection and not division in a phrase like "north and south" and it is the narrative context which must determine its semantic force, but once that force has been established, then it is bound to echo in the phrase structure's repeated use in the chapter titles. Polarity is obviously present in "Roses and Thorns", "Masters and Men", "Likes and Dislikes", "Men and Gentlemen", "False and True", "Once and Now" as well as in a negative form of the construction such as "Ease not Peace", or even in a longer version like "Union not always Strength". Opposition is less certain in "Mother and Son" and "Doubts and Difficulties", for customary expectations rise to suggest harmony or at least balance in the related entities of these phrases. Opposition is definitely, deliberately disappearing in "New Scenes and Faces", "Wrought Iron and Gold", and "A Blow and Its Consequences". The deadlock of opposed entities is most obviously broken in this last phrase where "and" introduces an additional, consequent factor rather than a polar opposite. The possibility of sequence, of action, is introduced into the stalemate of the phrase and, of course, this is exactly what happens in the chapter itself when the tensions of the strike culminate and are broken at Thornton's mill.

These title phrases are not ordered in a sequence which conveys a simple movement away from deadlock; indeed some of most locked of the phrases occur towards the end of the novel when Margaret's own conflict seems incapable of resolution. What the continued use of the form suggests is that Gaskell wanted to emphasize the fact of her heroine's story continuing the theme of conflict and division which first sprang from Milton itself.

In returning to the role that Margaret's personal attitudes play in the Milton conversations, a term which McVeagh (1968) has used about Gaskell's narration will be useful although McVeagh's judgements which accompany the term "tableau narrative" are not acceptable. What the term points to is particularly clear in this phase of the work: the absence of momentum in events. As little more than an exchange of

polite visits brings about these conversations, the stillness of a tableau is indeed what makes itself felt in the phase as a whole. But as has been suggested, this stillness is deliberately that of calm before the Milton storm breaks. For the Hale family, stillness is both a consequence of their strangeness in Milton, their misery in having lost Helstone and of their being increasingly imprisoned by Mrs Hale's illness and approaching death. McVeagh does not use the phrase "tableau narrative" for its applicability to this phase of the novel alone, but sees it as describing Gaskell's narration in general. He might have had *Cranford* in mind when he says that the stillness of tableau comes from her inability to sustain either movement or several simultaneous themes for any length in her novels, and that tableau narrative could at the same time be the source of a characteristic strength in her structureless stories - their triumphs being contrast, irony, vividness and moral firmness. Ostensible reasons why *Cranford* might warrant such a judgement can be found: it was originally conceived of as a single piece for *Household Words* and was then developed as a series of relatively self-contained scenes. But as has been argued in the introduction to this study, *Cranford* does develop. It becomes an account of the emergence of a new morality, a new attitude to life under Miss Matty's example, and as such it displays the power which McVeagh (1966) denies Gaskell, the ability to "make a novel move" (p 464). Problems with the story's moving do not spring to mind in connection with any of the other major works, indeed the latter half of *Mary Barton* displays almost too much natural ability to tell a story full of the excitement of fast movement. The term "move" also applies in McVeagh's argument to the coherent unfolding of the plot, to its organisation. That Gaskell achieves plot coherence in all three of her last novels is being argued in some detail in these chapters.

While McVeagh's general judgement does not seem valid, it is clear that the novel utilises, for particular local reasons and for controlled effect in the novel's larger rhythms, the stillness of tableau narrative in this phase. As well as an

overall stillness in Phase Two, there often is, within the scenes themselves, a tension which makes the stillness of the formal conversations resonate. It usually comes from Margaret's silent antagonism to Thornton. This opposition is what keeps her centrality effective in Phase Two but her resistance to Thornton is something she never examines herself, for its class-based sexual disdain demands that even if she allowed her feelings occasional, brief expression, she attempt to ignore them. In view of later developments, the narrating voice does not give the reader occasion to examine Margaret's feelings either, and it is this silent, unexamined current of hostility which gives a static energy to many of the characters' formal discussions. Even in the gentler scenes, when Margaret's opposition to Thornton does not vibrate, Gaskell concentrates on the ways in which people may fail to understand others. In one of the earliest of the discussions of Milton, Margaret sits inspecting her father's and Thornton's faces and understands from the contrast she observes why the two men should be so attracted to each other. The scene continues:

> She rearranged her mother's worsted-work, and fell back into her own thoughts - as completely forgotten by Mr Thornton as if she had not been in the room, so thoroughly was he occupied in explaining to Mr Hale the magnificient power, yet delicate adjustment of the might of the steam-hammer, which was recalling to Mr Hale some of the wonderful stories of subservient genii in the Arabian Nights - one moment stretching from earth to sky and filling all the width of the horizon, at the next obediently compressed into a vase small enough to be borne in the hand of a child.
>
> 'And this imagination of power, this practical realization of a gigantic thought, came out of one man's brain in our good town. That very man has it within him to mount, step by step, on each wonder he achieves to higher marvels still. And, I'll be bound to say, we have many among us who, if he were gone, could spring into the breach and carry on the war which compels, and shall compel, all material power to yield to science.'
>
> 'Your boast reminds me of the old lines -
>
> "I've a hundred captains in England," he said,
> "As good as ever was he." '
>
> At her father's quotation Margaret looked suddenly up, with inquiring wonder in her eyes. How in the world had they got from cog-wheels to Chevy Chase?
>
> 'It is no boast of mine,' replied Mr Thornton; 'It is plain matter-of-fact. I won't deny that I am proud of be-

> longing to a town - or perhaps I should rather say a district - the necessities of which give birth to such grandeur of conception. I would rather be a man toiling, suffering - nay, failing and successless - here, than lead a dull prosperous life in the old worn grooves of what you call more aristocratic society down in the South, with their slow days of careless ease. One may be clogged with honey and unable to rise and fly.'
>
> 'You are mistaken,' said Margaret, roused by the aspersion on her beloved South to a fond vehemence of defence, that brought the colour into her cheeks and the angry tears into her eyes. (10: 121 - 122)

In this phase of the novel, Gaskell is at her best in scenes such as this for they enable her to demonstrate her understanding of relationships between self, other people and the world which all are inhabiting. For example, it is Margaret's pleasant reverie, rather than any consciousness of antipathy to Mr Thornton which leads to her failure to hear the case he makes to her father for the North's achievements. Thus, when her attention returns to their conversation she is unable to accept his enthusiasm or his accompanying critisism of the South because she has had no insight into his way of conceiving of Milton and its possibilities. This is not to suggest that if Margaret had heard Thornton's praise of the steam-hammer she would have agreed with him, but at least she might have had grounds for understanding him. As it is, her father's way of presenting Thornton's claims to himself strikes Margaret as very strange. Mr Hale is of course teasing his friend when he quotes 'Chevy Chase', but beyond this the response is a beautifully conceived one, for it allows Gaskell to place the cultural continuity as well as the divisions between men of the country's two regions and thereby to demonstrate what Margaret denies in her resistance to Thornton. Mr Hale, the dreamy scholar, would naturally reach for a traditional, romantic expression of the spirit he begins to see in Thornton, and his conceptual effort gives him considerable, accurate sympathy for the new world as well as a chance to place its provocative boastfulness much more effectively than his late-arriving daughter can do. Mr. Thornton's half-hidden quotations when he is carried into a defensive attack on the South and its "slow days of careless ease ... clogged with honey" suggest that he too has a stock of concepts about that world

which may or may not serve him well in the understanding of his own. The possibility that pre-conceptions will hinder an understanding of something new is mostly demonstrated in Margaret, but when the narration gives a glimpse of Mr Hale's bemused reaching for notions like "subservient genii in the Arabian Nights"[1], he too is seen to fail to grasp what is happening in this new world. From the difference between this whimsical notion of magical powers and the bite with which he can place Mr Thornton's proud boast, it is evident that Gaskell felt that sympathetic responses to individual people in Milton was what would give the new family its reliable apprehension of their surroundings. It is to be expected that Mr Hale will be more adept at placing the human spirit in the Milton enterprise than at comprehending its technical achievements, just as it is right that Margaret, who has had the move North forced on her, should have less inclination than her father, at this stage, to attempt to reach an understanding of her new world. The "fond vehemence of defence" with which she is propelled into the conversation is a perfect match for the limited vision evident in the pride with which Thornton has presented his world. These two, defensively resting within their own preconceptions, make the outward movements of Mr Hale's mind, for all his limitations, appear really striking.

By contrast with this passage, a later chapter which presents important comments on the key Milton issue, the relationship of the masters and men, does not succeed when judged by the standards set by Gaskell herself. As discussion of Chapter 15 in the introduction to this chapter has indicated, the points touched on in the conversation it presents are vital ones for the novel, but they are not infused with the active presence of the characters as is the scene just discussed.

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1. Edgar Wright (1965) sees this romanticising as part of Gaskell's own attempt "to justify Manchester" (p 138), and says that she is glamourising what she does not herself really care for.

The conversation in Chapter 15 between Margaret, her father and Thornton about authority and rule is too long to quote in full here, but it can be seen that from the point where the analogy of family relationships is introduced (p 167), the scene goes flat. The flatness is ironic in view of the didactic importance of the discussion and the courage it must have taken to write a challenge like this from within Manchester itself:

> God has made us so that we must be mutually dependent. We may ignore our own dependence, or refuse to acknowledge that others depend upon us in more respects than the payment of weekly wages; but the thing must be, nevertheless. Neither you nor any other master can help yourselves. The most proudly independent man depends on those around him for their insensible influence on his character - his life.
> (15: 169)

Perhaps the closeness of this speech to the work's fount of didactic energy is what led to its flatness, for what seems to be missing is the mimetic ingredient so well realised in the passage from Chapter 10, the sense of characters' having only partial success in reaching for the concepts which will enable them to understand their world. The concepts that Gaskell obviously felt would be valuable to the new Northern life are indeed present in Chapter 15, but without a created insight into the characters' relationship to them.

The flatness of this scene can also be felt if it is compared with Margaret's visits to the Higgins family. The greater imaginative firmness of these scenes comes initially from Higgins's challenge to Margaret's condescending sense of her social role and is later supplemented by the growing insight that her mother's suffering gives her into Bessie's plight. It is this which enables Margaret to give her own counter-challenge to the Higgins family when Bessie says:

> 'It's all well enough for yo' to say so, who have lived in pleasant green places all your life long, and never known want or care, or wickedness either, for that matter.'
> 'Take care,' said Margaret, her cheek flushing, and her eye lightening, 'how you judge, Bessy. I shall go home to my mother, who is so ill - so ill, Bessy, that there's no outlet but death for her out of the prison of her great suffering; and yet I must speak cheerfully to my father, who has no notion of her real state, and to whom the know-

> ledge must come gradually. The only person ... who could sympathise with me and help me ... (17: 186)

Margaret's evocation of Frederick reminds the reader that the middle-class family is, like the workman's, also crippled by society's laws and that Margaret's bond with Bessie rests on an actual experience of lawful injustice as well as on the emotional bond of shared suffering. It is in this way that Margaret's acceptance of the Higgins-challenge to reconceive of herself is an obvious source of the vitality of their scenes. Here, her responsiveness makes itself felt in her efforts to clarify, in the language that Bessie herself might use ("the prison of her great suffering"), the tensions produced in her own family by their suffering. This generosity accompanies a natural wish to appear well before her new friend and is an impulse which finds no equivalent in her encounters with Thornton. On a personal level his evident admiration is not one that Margaret could yet experience as opening new horizons (as does Higgins's friendship) because her snobbery about his class leads Margaret to feel that Thornton's admiration is impertinent. Her growing interest in Milton issues is slowly making her more responsive to the man, but for most of this phase, Thornton's admiration is both too familiar and too great a challenge for Margaret to admit. The psychological interest of this phase thus lies in the fact that what is ostensibly the greater challenge, to enter a personal friendship with a workingman's family on a basis of greater equality than was usual, is the one that Margaret finds it easier to accept. It is clear why, from Margaret's point of view, she should resent the admiration of a man who claims his social equality in giving her that admiration, and why she should find personal friendship with Higgins and his family much more attractive. What Margaret's responses to Milton's men amount to for the reader is a clear reason for her being presented as repressed and even hostile when she meets Thornton. But deliberate self-restraint is not quite what the stilted formality of Chapter 15 communicates. Its narration conveys little recognition of Margaret's developing frame of mind, and when it is remembered how adroitly this could be

indicated for all three characters in Chapter 10, then its absence becomes the more to be regretted here. The conclusion that the ideas themselves exerted such pressure on the narration of this chapter that the characters holding the ideas in question were neglected, seems unavoidable.

Whatever its local failures, it seems clear that this phase of *North and South* has as a major undertaking the exploration of the characters' relationship to the concepts being created and used in their lives in Milton. The conversations in which these matters are explored are often deliberately tense, and it is through these local tensions that a larger picture of growing but handicapped understanding of Milton can be observed. This movement culminates in the conversation between Margaret and Thornton at Mrs Thornton's dinner party, which, brief as it is, works as an appropriate climax to the phase. The pleasure of mutual understanding to which their exchange seems to be progressing works as the appropriate confluence of the many private and public currents which have been forming during these chapters. The terms they debate, "man" and "gentleman", summarize the Northern and Southern values which are colliding in Margaret and Thornton and also crystallize the questioning of self in society which Milton is provoking. As it occurs, the conversation offers the pleasure of a growing wish for accord, and in retrospect, after the demonstration at the mill and Margaret's lie, it takes on the poignancy of a moment replete with the promise of an understanding which has, apparently, been lost for good.

> 'I could see you were on our side in our discussion at dinner, - were you not, Miss Hale?'
>
> 'Certainly. But then I know so little about it. I was surprised, however, to find from what Mr Horsfall said, that there were others who thought in so diametrically opposite a manner, as the Mr Morison he spoke about. He cannot be a gentleman - is he?'
>
> 'I am not quite the person to decide on another's gentlemanliness, Miss Hale. I mean, I don't quite understand your application of the word. But I should say that this Morison is no true man. I don't know who he is; I merely judge him from Mr Horsfall's account.'
>
> 'I suspect my "gentleman" includes your "true man." '
>
> 'And a great deal more, you would imply. I differ from you. A man is to me a higher and completer being than a gentleman.'

> 'What do you mean?' asked Margaret. 'We must understand the words differently.'
>
> 'I take it that "gentleman" is a term that only describes a person in his relation to others; but when we speak of him as "a man," we consider him not merely with regard to his fellow-men, but in relation to himself, - to life - to time - to eternity. A cast-away, lonely as Robinson Crusoe - a prisoner immured in a dungeon for life - nay, even a saint in Patmos, has his endurance, his strength, his faith, best described by being spoken of as "a man." I am rather weary of this word "gentlemanly," which seems to me to be often inappropriately used, and often, too, with such exaggerated distortion of meaning, while the full simplicity of the noun "man," and the adjective "manly" are unacknowledged - that I am induced to class it with the cant of the day.'
>
> Margaret thought a moment, - but before she could speak her slow conviction, he was called away by some of the eager manufacturers ... (20: 217 - 8)

This is one of those landmarks which novelists can sometimes provide for their readers when issues which have been under gradual definition suddenly crystallize in the feelings of the characters. Margaret has been cerebrally involved in her arguments with Thornton until now (compared with her more complete response to Higgins) but in this conversation an accompanying personal response begins to colour her comments as she comes perilously, attractively close to articulating what has been the substance of her resistance to his challenge. Such a moment has great emotional, aesthetic satisfaction for the reader in its power to give shape to the narrative. A momentary plateau (not of resolution, but of clarity) is reached as matters begin to fall into place in the characters themselves. Because it is the recognitions, or attempted recognitions of the central characters which create this sense of arrival, the pleasure is in the fusion of the characters' aesthetic and moral functions. It is obviously more important and gratifying that Margaret and Thornton should be able to reassess themselves through a conversation that they have with each other than that any other characters should attain these insights,or that they should reach their insights independently of each other. The fact that the chances of real understanding are overtaken by events and that Margaret is soon forced to retreat into an icy rejection of Thornton, serves to make this momentary plateau even more sweet a resting place in retrospect. Memory of it colours Phase Four when

Margaret, now alone, is compelled to review her actions and the attitudes which have let her down, chiefly by preventing her full recognition of the new conception of relationships demanded by the North.

The recognitions which are lurking in this conversation would have been climactic ones had there been time for their full arrival. Had Margaret admitted Thornton's word "man", the last verbal remnants of her inappropriately Southern standards would have disappeared as they have already disappeared in practice in her friendship with Higgins. Had "manly" become her criterion for Thornton as well as for Higgins, she would have had no grounds for the defensive feeling that Thornton's interest in her was socially improper and would have had to confront her personal reasons for resisting him. As it is, Milton's pace is too swift and too drastic for comfortable forms of change to occur and Margaret is swept into painfully coerced reassessments. Right is not, of course, all on Thornton's side and their conversation takes its appeal from the fact that Margaret's meanings have equal validity as standards which her opponent, Thornton, needs for himself. The day when he can see that his relationship to himself is not a purely private affair but is also expressed "in his relation to others" will be a moment signalling great change for Milton.

Although Gaskell's protagonists cannot, in this phase of Milton life, move smoothly and gradually into the necessary recognitions, they are destined to attain them and to be able to act effectively for their larger society from the personal insights which they gain. Margaret and Thornton's reconciliation means a brighter future for Milton. This movement outwards is one that many modern critics challenge. For example, Lucas (1966) writes:

> ... it is still the case that Mrs Gaskell too readily assumes that Margaret's victory over prejudice will be a victory for industrialism as such. (p 194)

His challenge is not just a modern refusal to recognise Victorian social values, but is based on the verdict that a rather shallowly optimistic and self-preserving liberal notion of

brotherhood was current. He quotes Carlyle's use of it in *Past and Present* 1843 where the Humane Physician asks about a woman who has spread typhus, "Would it not have been *economy* to help this poor Widow?" to show how much self-interest underlay conciliatory thinking and argues that novelists like Gaskell had, in their weaker moments, recourse to such notions at the expense of the more profound and challenging grasp of a common humanity that they had attained. Lucas writes:

> The truth is that Mrs Gaskell is not interested in the idea of brotherhood that Kingsley half dared to believe existed, and which Disraeli probably knew did not. If she can be said to believe in the idea at all, it is not as a conscious thesis to which her characters are bent, but as something which can be sensed in the imaginative exploration that presupposes their autonomous existence. But that, it should be obvious, is a very different sort of brotherhood, one indeed that wrecks the hopes on which the other concept is built. (p 161)

Therefore, Lucas argues, an abyss which yawned before Gaskell was the recognition that the values she advocated may actually have served only the interests of a small, already influential section of society (p 172), and that at some moments she is in evident retreat from the recognition. He is very convincing on the point that recourse to an easy liberalism and its recommendations damaged many social problem novels, but two things must be said in Gaskell's defence. The first is that Margaret's change of heart is a real one that she herself needs; it is hard-won and difficult, never an easy or convenient transition to attitudes which are obviously in the interests of a united society. The second is that many Victorians believed, sincerely and not just defensively, that a change of heart such as Margaret achieved was the growth point for change in society.[1] Such a belief may be seen in the conclusion of *Bleak House* 1853. When Mr Jarndyce builds the second Bleak House for Esther and Alan Woodcourt, he is doing more than creating personal happiness for his ward. The house is a tribute to her virtues which, having swept the cobwebs from the first Bleak House, are now free to join Woodcourt's professional skills in bringing gladness to the whole society. Esther's effectiveness is not the result of her own change of heart,

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1. As Cazamian recognised (1973: 97).

but rather of a resistance to corruption which can purify other hearts, and her example shows that Dickens had the social effectiveness of the loving individual firmly in mind.

In some ways the movement away from this belief that is reflected by novels is the clearest way of pointing to what had had real existence in society.[1] This movement can be seen in Gaskell's own later work and in the work of her near contemporaries, indicating that she was participating in a general shift in belief in her later work. The social effectiveness of virtue is still present in *Wives and Daughters* where Molly's attainment of self-knowledge is vitally linked, through Roger, to key points of development in her larger world. But it is a much more modest attainment than Margaret Hale's. Molly is more like Dorothea at the end of *Middlemarch* 1871 - 2, able to affect her immediate circle but not as important a source of social achievement as Margaret Hale. Dorothea's having to abandon her youthful, romantic dreams of social usefulness is simultaneously George Eliot's correction of her heroine's personal folly, a recognition that women were unlikely to play a directly visible role in social processes, and, perhaps, her sense that the individual had not the same potency as before. *Daniel Deronda* suggests that George Eliot still hoped that men could attain a vision from which to lead society, but on the whole, her novels seem to corroborate a trend that is also evident in Henry James's *Portrait of a Lady* 1880 - 1 . Isabel Archer's satisfactions as a result of her hard-won insights are yet more personal and limited than are Molly's or Dorothea's. Her return to Rome and Pansy is an act of great determination, made possible by her achieved self-knowledge, but her courage in meeting her obligations has neither the scale nor the largeness of consequence which Gaskell felt able to claim for her protagonists in *North and South*.

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1. The movement is one outlined by Miller (1968) pp 30 and 33, and quoted in the introduction to this study.

iv) Phase 3 (Chapters 22 - 35): <u>The Two-Fold Crisis</u>.

The issues which have been set out in the conversations of the second stage of *North and South* are tested in this, the third phase of the novel. As the strike reaches its climactic breaking point in Milton, Margaret finds herself suddenly swept into events, and the plot expands to encompass both the public confrontation between masters and men, and Margaret's personal crisis. Besides being two-fold in this sense, the crisis has two stages: the demonstration at Thornton's mill which is accompanied by Thornton's proposal and the clash at Outwood station which is followed by Margaret's lie. The account of the crisis which follows attempts to show that Margaret is the central figure in whom events cohere. This discussion seeks to emphasize the created connections between public and private events which the plot achieves, as well as the moral criticism of the heroine - a criticism which has had little attention from critics. The novel's design so far has been to preclude explicit critical examination by either the reader or the heroine of her attitudes so that the question can erupt very dramatically when matters in Milton itself reach crisis point. This design means that the reader can feel the causal impetus in events to be strong and that thematic coherence is sustained. The patterned relationship between the two stages of the crisis also helps ensure this coherence, a coherence which can be presented most forcefully in diagrammatic form, thus:

	Stage 1		Stage 2
(action)	the demonstration at Thornton's mill	-----	the clash at Outwood station
(consequence)	Thornton's proposal scornfully rejected	-----	Margaret's lie and her shame

→ = sequence of events
--------- = correspondences which give thematic unity.

The correspondences are designed to give coherent development to Margaret's education. After the first crisis, she erects

a defensive barrier against Thornton which is forcibly destroyed by the new vision of herself afforded by her lie. The significance of events for Margaret can be described in this way: she challenges Thornton to face the mob at his mill because she feels that he must take responsibility for having goaded the Milton workmen beyond endurance by importing Irish labour and that he is treating them as less than human in not warning them that the soldiers have been summoned. She then rushes to protect him from the mob for similar reasons: in its frenzied anger the mob has in fact become less than human and so cannot take responsibility for its actions. There is equal emphasis on respect for one's fellow human beings and responsibility for one's deeds in the motives for both her actions, and it is this emphasis which gives such ironic power to the nature of her rejection of Thornton when he proposes, for in denying him the right to love her passionately she explicitly denies his humanity and refuses to admit that she must accept responsibility for all the consequences of her intervention at the mill. Thornton's love is not a product of her attempt to protect him from the mob, but his decision to propose is, like Fanny's malicious interpretation of Margaret's actions, prompted by what she did. Because Margaret denies this, the second stage of the novel's crisis is designed to correct her by bringing home the truth of what she has already asserted so vigorously to Thornton in argument. As she said in Chapter 15, a society is an interdependent body of men and women who must share responsibility for each others' lives as well as for the consequences, expected and unexpected, pleasant and unpleasant, of their actions. The lesson is not a new one, and in its Southern forms is one to which Margaret would readily have assented, but although responsive to Higgins's claims, she is not yet prepared to recognise her own teaching in all aspects of its new, Northern guise. Her blindness is clear in the attempt she makes to dismiss Thornton's right to love her, an attempt which contrasts with her readiness to endanger herself in her brother's interests. (Self-sacrificing responsibility is naturally much easier for her when the claims on her are familial ones.) Thus, it is only when her lie for

Frederick forces her to see herself through Thornton's eyes that she understands that she was wrong to dismiss him in the manner that she had used.

The general bearing of events on Margaret's moral development which Gaskell creates should be clear from this summary. A closer look at Margaret's crucial action, at the way she dismisses Thornton's love, will indicate the extent to which her responses are shown to be wrong. When Thornton declares his love, Margaret's response is:

> 'Your way of speaking shocks me. It is blasphemous. I cannot help it, if that is my first feeling. It might not be so, I dare say, if I understood the kind of feeling you describe. I do not want to vex you; and besides, we must speak gently, for mamma is asleep; but your whole manner offends me - ' (24: 253)

"It is blasphemous" is a crucial accusation in Margaret's manner of spurning her suitor. Fanny's petty suppositions have been enough to stir her to a defensive snobbery, and her failure to comprehend the full implications of her demand that men take responsibility for each other leads her to deny that she must see Thornton's proposal as a consequence of her actions, but her words go far beyond either of these forces. She asserts that his passion violates a religious standard, one which she has already erected in order to shelter herself from possible misinterpretations of what she did at the mill. She has already consoled herself with the thought that:

> 'If I saved one blow, one cruel, angry action that might otherwise have been committed, I did a woman's work. Let them insult my maiden pride as they will - I walk pure before God!' (23: 247)

Margaret has always held a heroic ideal of action before herself and now she infuses it, defensively enough, with the concept of maiden purity in order to avoid both Fanny's and Thornton's picture of herself. She is not content to tell Thornton that she does not return his feelings, but is driven to deny him the right to have any feelings at all for her, particularly a passion of such intensity. She fears that anything less would be an admission of her responsibility and so she retreats into accusing him of sinfulness, of blasphemy.

Her second phrase, "your whole manner offends me", is more collected and normalises her rebuke. It is to this phrase that Thornton responds, so leaving the accusation of sinfulness to be one Margaret will have to contend with alone, once she sees that she is no better than the man she has rejected. The novel suggests that in valuing her maiden purity as she does, Margaret herself is sinful. For its effect on the plot, the error is one which is usefully seen as hubris. Once made, there is a tragic inevitability that her error will come home to her. That a recognition of her own sinfulness was always in store for Margaret is signalled in a remark that Bessie Higgins makes, "I wonder how she'll sin. All on us must sin." (17: 188).

In rejecting Thornton because she considers him her social inferior, Margaret is being used by Gaskell to create an indirect extension of the novel's examination of the country's failure to recognise the North. In this way, in the midst of her personal crisis, her function for the reader as a representative of Southern attitudes is sustained. But in her retreat into a dehumanising self-idealisation, Margaret also acts in a way that is independent of the examination of the country's plight. What she does supports the contention that it is her story; a damaging idealisation of the self is an integral part of the thought-change plot, a plot through which the country's needs can be seen. Self-idealisation as a source of energy and moral strength is not peculiar to Margaret in this novel, for Thornton has an equivalent passionate regard for himself, as does his mother. But the issue does not enter the novel simply to illustrate the nation's plight. It comes also from Gaskell's interest in the concepts through which people relate to their world and through which they find the incentive to act well or badly within that world.

Margaret's idealistic, heroic bent is indicated early in the novel, when she responds with ardent pride to the account of Frederick's part in the mutiny. There is considerable moral fervour in her praise of Frederick:

> 'I am sure I am,' said Margaret, in a firm, decided tone. 'Loyalty and obedience to wisdom and justice are fine; but it is still finer to defy arbitrary power, unjustly and cruelly used - not on behalf of ourselves, but on behalf of others more helpless.' (14: 154)

which suggests that heroic intervention is a heady notion for Margaret and that she is likely to involve herself somewhat impetuously in any cause she chooses. The actual crisis at the mill does not, of course, permit any character the safeguard of reflection on its likely consequences, but nonetheless it is clear that Margaret's idealism has not prepared her for taking responsibility for what she does. Frederick's being punished might have warned her, but she is not responsive to that part of the parallel between them. It is a perfectly understandable blindness, but is one which goes against Margaret's own declared principles of shared responsibility. It is also a blindness that she has maintained in the face of what Higgins's actions could have taught her. When he tells her about the strike in Chapter 17, she cannot at first see that his cause is "the cause of others" (17: 183) and needs to be convinced that he has taken up "th' cause o' justice" before she can recognise the workings of her own principles. In the subsequent action, both Higgins and Margaret are to be shown very harshly that they have not conceived adequately of how their principles may actually work in society. When Boucher's corpse is carried in, Higgins sees that that man's interests have not been furthered, and Margaret receives an equally dramatic challenge to her right to intervene at the mill and then refuse Thornton's right to make personal claims on her. This happens when she feels that, morally, her lie has placed her beneath Thornton's feet (35: 356).

It might seem that in designing a plot which would bring Margaret to see her own sinfulness, Gaskell was engaging in criticism of her century's inclination to idealise women, but in fact the novel's critical attention is given to idealisation of the self as an inviolable, ideal quality rather than to any reverence that women might claim for themselves as women. The difference is a subtle one and made particularly

difficult to establish in this case as Margaret herself calls on the social usefulness of what she calls the "reverenced helplessness" of womanhood to justify her actions to Thornton.

> '... any woman, worthy of the name of woman, would come forward to shield, with her reverenced helplessness, a man in danger from the violence of numbers.'
> (24: 253)

It is also a concept of womanhood implicit in Thornton's rebuke to the mob for the injury Margaret has received.

> '... when a woman comes before you, to ask you for your own sakes to be reasonable creatures, your cowardly wrath falls upon her! You do well!'
> (22: 235)

They are responsive enough to steal away "ashamed". But the problem examined in the novel arises when the woman who claims to be taking on the role of reverenced helplessness attempts in doing so, to deny that she has any relationship or personal obligations to others. The distinction may be more clearly seen if a more acceptable instance of Margaret's using a woman's customary power is looked at. When Higgins seeks to drown his sorrow at Bessie's death, Margaret preventshim from going to drink.

> But Margaret stood in the doorway, silent yet commanding. He looked up at her defyingly.
> 'It's my own house. Stand out o' the way, wench, or I'll make yo'!' He had shaken off Mary with violence; he looked ready to strike Margaret. But she never moved a feature - never took her deep, serious eyes off him. He stared back on her with gloomy fierceness. If she had stirred hand or foot, he would have thrust her aside with even more violence than he had used to his own daughter, whose face was bleeding from her fall against a chair.
> 'What are yo' looking at me in that way for?' asked he at last, daunted and awed by her severe calm. 'If yo' think for to keep me from going what gait I choose, because she loved yo' - and in my own house, too, where I never asked yo' to come, yo're mista'en. It's very hard upon a man that he can't go to the only comfort left.'
> Margaret felt that he acknowledged her power. What could she do next? He had seated himself on a chair, close to the door; half-conquered, half-resenting; intending to go out as soon as she left her position, but unwilling to use the violence he had threatened not five minutes before. Margaret laid her hand on his arm.
> 'Come with me,' she said. 'Come and see her!'

> The voice in which she spoke was very low and solemn; but there was no fear or doubt expressed in it, either of him or of his compliance. (28: 282)

The narrator's language stresses the idealised femininity which is to be effective against Higgins in phrases like "her deep, serious eyes", "her severe calm" and "her low solemn voice". Although her womanly might is to triumph, it is not an easy victory and there are tense moments before Higgins yields to the standards that Margaret deliberately seeks to embody as she stands before him. But when Higgins recognises Margaret's right to exert the authority she claims "because she loved yo'", he underlines the difference between this scene and the kind of self-idealisation involved in Margaret's rejection of Thornton. He makes a different point from that in the narrator's language when he recognises that Margaret stands effectively before him because of her friendship with Bessie and the responsibilities which grow from it. Through this friendship she is entitled to use her "reverenced helplessness" to attempt to control Higgins, and the stature that her society was inclined to give womanhood is rightly available to her only because she and Higgins have shared feelings which inform the idealisation. When Margaret invokes the ideal in order to reject Thornton, she acts quite differently, demanding that he respond to the role she played and that he ignore the person playing that role. In other words, she overlooks the question of her personal right to step into a role of maiden purity.

The novel's primary case against Margaret is thus that in refusing Thornton as she does, she is hardening her purity into an unapproachable, irreproachable selfhood and refusing to live by one of the principles she herself had preached - the mutual responsibilities of inter-related lives. The connection between this hardening of the self and the novel's picture of the tough, Utilitarian individualism characteristic of the North is clear enough. In both cases the moral criticism to be made is the same: self-reliance is chosen and used at other people's expense.

Besides the relevance of Margaret's errors to the novel's diagnosis of the nation's plight, Gaskell's own development

as a novelist would have been likely to lead her to an interest in the dangers of self-idealisation. In the introduction to this chapter it was suggested that by her fourth novel Gaskell was much more critically aware of the implications of "interventionism" than a writer like Cazamian recognised, and it may be that she consciously chose to incorporate an examination of her own role in writing directly about the problems of her society, into her heroine's story. The proposition that Gaskell would take on in fictitious form, in the elements of her story, the issues which have been occupying her personally also seems to be supported by the fact that in the first of her novels to attain a convincingly free treatment of its heroine, Gaskell also leads the heroine herself to re-examine the concepts of heroic action with which she has inspired and consoled herself. She is to encounter the ironic truth that even in disinterested service of others, the self cannot remain a pure, discrete entity.

While the case against Margaret is being built up, Thornton's own passionate nature and his divided love for the haughty Southern girl forms the Northern parallel to her problems as well as affecting the form that they take. The central feature in Thornton's nature, his swift, passionate intensity, must have come as something of a surprise to nineteenth-century metropolitan readers, especially to thosewho took their line on the Northern character from novelists like Dickens. As Bounderby and Gradgrind are a satirist's exaggerations, it is impossible to find any fresh vitality lurking in them. Even in Mr Rouncewell, Dickens's more admiring portrait of an industrialist, there is a solid, level-headed reasoning power, a practicality that is unlikely to captivate a reader. When Gaskell gave her industrialist a capacity for intense, passionate enthusiasm, she did not create a character who looks improbable against other fictional portraits of Northerners, but in emphasising his passion, she did indicate an attractive potential hitherto overlooked by her contemporaries.

As the novel opens, Thornton has little more insight into his own nature and the place of passion in his personality and

and actions than has Margaret, but as his feelings have to act as the trigger for her development, it is necessary that their nature is displayed more openly than hers can be at first. When Thornton is lifted out of his habitual reserve by his attraction to Margaret, Gaskell portrays his feelings more directly than her purposes allowed her to do with her heroine, and more openly than it was customary for a novelist of the Victorian age to do.

> She had a bracelet on one taper arm, which would fall down over her round wrist. Mr Thornton watched the re-placing of this troublesome ornament with far more attention than he listened to her father. It seemed as if it fascinated him to see her push it up impatiently, until it tightened her soft flesh; and then to mark the loosening - the fall ... She handed him his cup of tea with the proud air of an unwilling slave; but her eye caught the moment when he was ready for another cup; and he almost longed to ask her to do for him what he saw her compelled to do for her father, who took her little finger and thumb in his masculine hand, and made them serve as sugar-tongs. (10: 120)

The empathetic narration creates a very useful ambiguity here. It is not at first certain whether the narrator is observing something that Thornton himself is unaware of in the sentence beginning "it seemed as if it fascinated him to see her push it up impatiently ...", or whether Thornton is observing his own growing attraction to Margaret, and its physicality, with some surprise. Similarly it is not clear whether he conceives of her demeanour as being that of "an unwilling slave" or whether it is the narrator's suggestion. But by the end of the passage, Thornton is himself clearly aware of his responses as he "almost longed" to ask Margaret to serve him his sugar as she does for her father. As Dodsworth (1970) insists in his Introduction to *North and South*, Margaret's accepting her own responsiveness to sexual passion is a major issue in the novel; in the emergence from ambiguity in this passage, it is clear that Gaskell felt able to have her hero recognise the nature of his feelings very rapidly indeed.

The presentation of Thornton's passionate nature and of his response to Margaret contributes both to the analysis of the divided nation and to Margaret's story. As has been said, his nature is Gaskell's deliberate challenge to her readers

to see that while there is truth in the familiar criticisms of the coarse materialism of the industrial North, there is another, more attractive side to its fierce energy. As she uses Thornton's passionate response to the superb Margaret as the natural counterpart in personal relationships of the extraordinary, practical yet visionary intensity with which the North is engaged in material production and vast trade empires. What this means for the novel is that Gaskell's sense that she was handling a new kind of man, and her decision to familiarize his spirit by demonstrating his capacity for love,enabled her to handle sexuality with a greater directness and freedom than was usual in her age.

The fact that Thornton loves Margaret (as distinct from his physical passion) engages the reader in a proposition that is a familiar one in novels, at least since Jane Austen. That is that a man's love is an index of his capacity to serve his society. But, although it is clear that an equivalent intensity informs Thornton's manufacturing role, Margaret's anger at being loved by a man who treats his workmen with such inhumanity indicates why his love and his social value do not yet match. While Thornton's love is used to indicate that the North is not as joyless as the South would suppose, the ugly incongruity that Margaret sees between Thornton's feelings for her, for his mother, even for the invalid Mrs Hale, and his indifference to his workmen's daily suffering is an indication that the customary correspondence between love and social value cannot operate. It is clear that the division in Thornton is produced by the prevailing Northern ethos, an ethos in which the conception of the self in relation to others is even more faulty than it is in Margaret. The local ideal of a proud self-reliance can be seen when Mrs Thornton speaks of her son as a merchant prince, and he himself attributes an equivalently sturdy, isolating self-regard to his workmen in declining personal contact with them. That self-reliance is a virtue is not denied by the novel, but before the capacity to love can correspond to his social value, Thornton has to

learn, through Margaret, that personal regard and co-operation do not necessarily entail a loss of independence and self-respect.

The case built up against Margaret and Thornton is a severe one and in clarifying the novel's criticisms of its heroine, this study may well have given the misleading impression that she is unsympathetically treated, an impression which would obviously be false. As the action unfolds, circumstances are designed to create the greatest possible sympathy for Margaret's acting as she does. The wounds that Fanny's petty conjectures made were bound to make Margaret defensive, and that she wrapped a protective cloak of purity round herself speaks most immediately of her great need to continue to believe in herself in the face of such unexpected, painful developments. Similarly with the recall of Frederick: given the history of her relationship with her mother, she cannot be expected to resist the dying woman's plea and once Frederick's return places his life in jeopardy, it is inevitable that Margaret act in any way that she can to save her brother. In short, circumstances have been designed to make the reader feel about Margaret's actions exactly as Mr Bell does when she confesses her sins to him, "I hope I should have done the same." (46: 484). It is left to Margaret to expose her own culpability alone, and to judge herself by standards of absolute right and wrong.

In this sense the novel rests on the generally accepted attitude that individual lives are so complex that sympathy rather than judgement is the appropriate response to error. But beyond this the argument about moral action is specifically related to life in the North through several scenes which have been designed to illustrate how difficult it was to do right in that society. One such scene occurs in Chapter 20 when Mrs Hale first hears about the starving Boucher family and determines on sending expensive provisions to them immediately. Once this kindness is performed, the Hale family cannot

find its way round the possibility that they have acted so as to prolong the strike and the agony of those locked in conflict. Mr Hale reaches the humane but logically unsatisfactory conclusion that both points of view are right, just as he does when Margaret tells him that she has written to summon Frederick home, and he both fears for his son and rejoices for his wife.

As well as the story's circumstances being designed to create sympathy for Margaret, the narration is used to reinforce the powerful appeal which rests in any hero or heroine's point of view. This is done through the ambiguous orientation of the empathetic narration which was discussed in the introduction to this chapter. Because the narrating voice is positioned so close to the characters, it can supply observations which it is difficult, if not impossible to distinguish from a character's own thoughts. This means that while observations which place, correct or even judge a character's thoughts or deeds may be given in the narration, these are not likely to be felt very sharply as outside comment by the reader, whose absorption in the character remains relatively undisturbed. Thus, at the point when Margaret makes her most serious moral mistake and erects the vision of her pure maidenhood, the narration presents the moment so that Margaret's feelings are all-powerful. This does not come about because the narrator is absent, although Margaret's thoughts are largely dramatically handled as speech, but because the narrator sides so fully with Margaret that the reader is unaware of any mediating presence.

> 'I, who hate scenes - I, who have despised people for showing emotion - who have thought them wanting in self-control - I went down and must needs throw myself into the mêlée, like a romantic fool! Did I do any good? They would have gone away without me, I dare say.' But this was over-leaping the rational conclusion, - as in an instant her well-poised judgment felt. 'No, perhaps they would not. I did some good. But what possessed me to defend that man as if he were a helpless child! Ah!' said she, clenching her hands together, 'it is no wonder those people thought I was in love with him, after disgracing myself in that way. I in love - and with him too!' Her pale cheeks suddenly became one flame of fire; and she covered her face with her

> hands. When she took them away, her palms were wet with scalding tears.
>
> 'Oh how low I am fallen that they should say that of me! I could not have been so brave for anyone else, just because he was so utterly indifferent to me - if, indeed, I do not positively dislike him. It made me the more anxious that there should be fair play on each side; and I could see what fair play was. It was not fair,' said she, vehemently, 'that he should stand there - sheltered, awaiting the soldiers, who might catch those poor maddened creatures as in a trap - without an effort on his part, to bring them to reason. And it was worse than unfair of them to set on him as they threatened. I would do it again, let who will say what they like of me. If I saved one blow, one cruel, angry action that might otherwise have been committed, I did a woman's work. Let them insult my maiden pride as they will - I walk pure before God!' (23: 247)

The power of Margaret's own thoughts to engage the reader directly is evident, and it remains undisturbed by the narrator's presence in the two sentences at the end of the first paragraph, largely because the language used in them places the reader inside Margaret's sensations. In the narrator's first sentence, an observer's picture of the girl is given in a phrase like "she covered her face with her hands", but Margaret's own sensation of her burning cheeks rather than an outsider's observation of their colour is contained in "one flame of fire". Similarly in the second sentence, subjective sensation is reinforced by "scalding" which is an even stronger evocation of Margaret's experience of her tears. Thus, although the narrator supplies an external, third-person picture of Margaret, the mediation is imperceptible; it does not remove the reader from her subjective state because a word like "scalding" is necessarily inside it, and not an account of the tears' observable appearance. The narrator is briefly present in the second paragraph, in "vehemently", to the same effect. Thus if the reader feels apprehensive at the direction matters are taking, it is not because a guiding narrator stands between character and reader, but because Margaret's thoughts are being responded to dramatically. As well as sustaining sympathy for Margaret, this collaboration between character and narrator is important for the novel's structure in the way that it prepares for the intensity with which Margaret is to embark on self-critism in the novel's final phase.

Before moving on to a discussion of this last phase, a little more attention to Frederick's part in the two-fold crisis needs to be given because Gaskell runs such a risk of making him into a merely convenient plot device when she engineers his return as she does. Gaskell's critics usually comment adversely on Frederick, being doubtful either about his creation as a whole or about the management of his appearance and departure.[1]

Frederick's existence as a character is justified largely by the thematic clarity he can bring to the novel's issues. His value as a figure who questions authority has already been suggested: through him Gaskell can indicate that the Hale family is one where conscience plays an active role, and, by locating Mr Hale's confrontation in religious life and Frederick's in an ancient branch of the state's power, the navy, she can also indicate the scope of the questions that Milton life raises. The decision to place Frederick in the wings for the first part of the novel also works. Its effectiveness can best be seen through Margaret and the difference between the days when he is merely a symbolic, inspiring figure in her thoughts, and those when he is actually present. Then the complexity of his actual personality prevents her from seeing him as the pure, and dangerous, inspiration that he once was. She is taken by surprise when many of his reactions and opinions differ from hers, and as the processes of her reassessment begin, he serves to show her how much she has already been changed by Milton, particularly when he takes Thornton for a shopman. But the most profound effect that Frederick has on Margaret is one which occurs gradually and which Gaskell does not bring to explicit statement. This is the process by which Margaret feels the pleasures of having present in her brother a kindred but very different spirit against whom she can measure and understand herself. She has learnt what it is to feel the obligations of love for her parents, but this is her first experience of fraternal love.

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1. For example, Wright (1965: 144), "The introduction of Frederick is pure plot spinning " and Craik (1975: 103), "This plot however is a minor element in the whole, and a curious last survival of Elizabeth Gaskell depending on conventional material of the stock kind for her

Like most Victorian novelists, Gaskell suggests that the step from fraternal to connubial love was not a great one and that the yielding of the self that Margaret has felt towards her equal, Frederick, will be encouraged to transfer itself to Thornton.

On the whole, Frederick's presence is used to sustain sympathy for Margaret. He enables an important shift in sympathy back to Margaret after the alienating effect of her rejection of Thornton, a shift by which her heroism in accepting a condemnation of her lie appears much greater than did her grand deed in rushing to the defence of the antagonists at the mill. The most pointed indication of what is being done for Margaret through Frederick's return comes when his motto, "Do something, my sister, do good if you can." (30: 315), is contrasted with her more rigidly idealistic code of "Fais ce que dois, advienne que pourra." (25: 257). The easier, more realistic imperatives in Frederick's code are an important counterpoint both to Margaret's earlier idealism and to the later sternness of judgement which she imposes on herself.

The conception and treatment of Frederick is thus carefully worked into the novel, but the handling of his hasty departure from Milton *is* unsatisfactory. It is chiefly the introduction of Leonards which is disruptive. His being a shiftless character who suddenly turns up to create trouble is obviously useful in creating sympathy for Margaret's dilemma - no one could wish to see Frederick trapped by such a man - but generally the coincidence of the meeting on Outwood station is too out of keeping with the world Gaskell has created to be acceptable. The device of Leonards is Dickensian in nature, and the episode on the station has been praised for its Dickensian vividness,[1] but the comparison with Dickens serves to clarify why the scene comes so awkwardly in the novel, rather than providing support for it. These two novelists have a major proposition about mankind in common: that lives in society

1. Pollard (1965) p 116.

are so inter-related that enforced divisions between people are wrong and extremely dangerous. But their way of embodying this proposition is quite different. Dickens demonstrates it through the unexpected or coincidental events in his plots, both in the novels with several, interwoven plot strands, like *Bleak House*, and in those with single, linear plots like *Great Expectations*. The connections between Esther, Lady Deadlock and Jo are very like those between Pip, Magwitch and Estella in their purposes. But Gaskell's characteristic demonstration of the same point is more homely and more subdued. Despite the fact that she handles sensational material like strikes and mutinies, Gaskell's strongest perceptions are of the mundane, the ordinary details of daily life, and she is at her best when she can show that the grander sweeps of national life are reflected in domestic life in such a way that her smaller scenes can give moral illumination to the larger. Although *North and South* handles society at its most strained and fractured, and it is a world in which the extravagance of Dickens's techniques might well be appropriate, Gaskell has established the more tranquil norm of the everyday so strongly by the point where Frederick has to leave, that the sudden, coincidental meeting with the sinister Leonards looks merely convenient. The event was obviously designed to give Margaret every reason for lying to the Inspector, and is somewhat supported by the other, more acceptable coincidence of Thornton's riding past, but nevertheless, the feeling is that Gaskell has resorted to uncharacteristic methods in handling Frederick's departure.

It is clear that Gaskell devised such drama so as to have her heroine feel her sudden solitude and her anxiety for Frederick as sharply as possible. Her situation when she lies to the Inspector is as pitiable as possible. What is being managed is the infusion of truth into this sentiment:

> Altogether she looked like some prisoner falsely accused of a crime that she loathed and despised, and from which she was too indignant to justify herself.
>
> (24: 252)

The sentence actually comes from the account of Margaret's

reception of Thornton's proposal and at the time it records her defensive, reproachful sensations as she hears his declaration. In that context the words have a melodramatic quality which Gaskell uses to indicate her heroine's misperceptions, but, when transferred to the encounter with the Inspector, the heroic suffering implicit in Margaret's self-concepts becomes something the reader is prepared to grant her. The comparison leads straight into Margaret's rude awakening to herself. Once she has told the lie, she sees herself afresh, through Thornton's eyes, and sees that she has little claim to the self-admiration of her earlier thoughts. The novel's final phase depicts the courage with which she confronts the disparity she has seen, thus allowing her to earn, on moral as well as sympathetic grounds, the heroic stature she had once too easily claimed.

v) Phase 4 (Chapters 36 - 52): Reflection and Reconciliation.

As the last sixteen chapters trace the process of Margaret Hale's accepting her sinfulness and her love for Thornton, they move the reader into strong expectation of a satisfying close to the work in which matters will be happily resolved. Yet, simultaneously, the experience of process, of development, is kept open and constant for the reader. The movement towards closure is fostered by the use of moments of clarity which are increasingly placed within the characters' own awareness. This means that the language of Margaret's thoughts, the setting of her meditations and the imagery that she herself draws on to shape her feelings, takes on a new importance in Gaskell's writing. For the first time, in these passages Gaskell is to be felt using language with a poetic force as well as with her usual easy accuracy.

Discussion of the novel's final phase will also attend to its subtly qualified championing of the North and the way that Boucher's death crystallises what is horrific in that new society but also leads to an understanding of the spirit that Gaskell felt was, potentially, to be admired.

As the novel's conclusion has to carry both the love story and the Milton issues to a resolution, both aspects of the plot are given their share of the growing clarity. In Margaret's story, the first of these clarifying moments comes in Chapter 35, 'Expiation', which, following the stages proposed for *North and South*, means that it actually belongs to Phase Three. It can perhaps be seen as a bridge passage between the crisis and the reflections enforced on Margaret by that crisis, for it occurs in Margaret's realisation that Thornton, having stopped the inquest on Leonards's death, must know that she has lied to Inspector Watson. This gives rise to her perception of the sudden change in their relative positions.

> ... had anyone such just cause to feel contempt for her? Mr Thornton, above all people, on whom she had looked down from her imaginary heights till now! She suddenly found herself at his feet, and was strangely distressed at her fall. (35: 356)

This sensation of a sudden, ironic reversal also points very clearly to the idea which shapes the narrative of the last section of the novel. The sudden fall which Margaret perceives here will gradually be offset by her courageous acceptance of her new self as she rises again to a more accurate sense of the balance proper between Thornton and herself.

When Margaret visits Helstone and confesses to Mr Bell what has happened over the lie, Gaskell uses a phrase about the effect of the poignant visit on her heroine's feelings, "She had found her level" (46: 489), which strengthens the suggestion that the overall movement of these chapters has been conceived of as the gradual restoration of equilibrium within Margaret as well as between her and her lover. The phrase is given in such a way that it could easily be part of Margaret's conscious assessment of what visiting Helstone has done for her.

> A few days afterwards she had found her level, and decided that she was very glad to have been there, and that she had seen it again ... (46: 489)

As the last two clauses are a direct report of the form of Margaret's conscious thoughts, it is likely that the first clause is also to be felt as coming directly from her. As the perception of her fall before Thornton is similarly handled, the effect of these moments is to foster the reader's sense that it is Margaret's own grasp of her recovery of her place that is being traced.

A similar moment of potential clarity occurs in Chapter 20 when Margaret and Thornton disagree over the concepts 'man' and 'gentleman'. There their effort to achieve understanding of one of the key issues in Milton is spontaneous and, as it turns out, serves to heighten the sense of disruption and dislocation which follows the incident at the mill. The moment of clarity in Chapter 20 affords considerable aesthetic pleasure but because these later moments in Phase Four show a consciously sought, a willed clarity, the aesthetic pleasure

is deepened by the moral suggestion that a stable understanding can be actively achieved by individual people. There are many other indications of Margaret's deliberate search for "her level" in this last phase; her reading in her father's book about the "chemin de l'humilité" (41: 426) has already been mentioned, and later, when she tells Mr Bell about her disgrace in Thornton's eyes, she uses the phrase "perhaps you could put me to rights" (46: 483).

The accompanying task which Gaskell's purposes give to her narrative is to show that personal change in Margaret continues what has happened to her in Milton. For this the narrative uses the developments in Thornton as a very clear parallel to what has happened to Margaret in Phases Two and Three. When these changes are summarized diagrammatically, this is what emerges:

	Phase 3 easy and spontaneous	Phase 4 difficult but willed
Margaret's development in feeling	for Higgins (ie. Milton)	for Thornton (ie. personal)
Thornton's development in feeling	for Margaret (ie. personal)	for Higgins (ie. Milton)

What was relatively easy for Margaret (a response to the workman Higgins) could only be undertaken by Thornton after events in his personal life have shaken him out of complacency about the public world. Conversely for Margaret, in Phase Four she takes what is for her a difficult private step in recognising her feelings for Thornton. It is a step which her responses to the public world of Milton in Phases Two and Three now make possible. The diagram inevitably forces a certain simplicity on the novel's design which is not felt in reading, for there all the uncertainty of actual daily life makes itself felt. This uncertainty is less felt in Thornton's case because his development is complementary to Margaret's and can therefore be more rapidly and more directly treated than hers. Through

his acquaintance with Higgins he is brought to a feeling for Milton which corresponds to the pleasure Margaret has felt in her relationships there. At the point where his mill is about to fail, Thornton reflects that:

> ... he had never recognised how much and how deep was the interest he had grown of late to feel in his position as manufacturer, simply because it led him into such close contact, and gave him the opportunity of so much power, among a race of people strange, shrewd, ignorant; but, above all, full of character and strong human feeling. (50: 512)

Gaskell's didactic intentions are inescapable in the clarity given to Thornton's reflections, but they are not unduly disruptive of the novel's mimetic nature, and do not damage the dynamic tension between different strains of narrative which a novel can contain. The element of convenience in Thornton's responses is subdued by the fact that in Phases Two and Three Margaret went through a parallel, fully shown process of discovery in her friendship with Higgins which Thornton's experiences now echo.

As well as having to keep her characters' personal movement towards resolution in balance with a continuing sense of development in them and their relationships, Gaskell has also to exercise a restraint on the suggestions she makes about the possible sources of future harmony in Milton. Having once had Thornton express the need to know "the next day's duty", she can continue to give him the necessary voicing of qualified hope for Milton. It is Mr Bell's genial, direct probing which is used to force Thornton into precise utterance of his need for immediate guidance as a Milton manufacturer.

> 'It is fine when the study of the past leads to a prophecy of the future. But to men groping in new circumstances, it would be finer if the words of experience could direct us how to act in what concerns us most intimately and immediately ... People can speak of Utopia much more easily than of the next day's duty ... ' (40: 414)

His phrase "men groping in new circumstances" crystallizes everything the reader has felt about Milton life, and his concern with "the next day's duty" indicates how the dining

scheme which he initiates with Higgins's help is to be seen.

Having spoken in this way, Thornton is the obvious one to voice Milton's possibilities to the outside world. Thus at a London dinner party when he is asked about industrial developments and whether his adventurous new relationship with the workmen will prevent strikes, he can say:

> 'Not at all. My utmost expectation only goes so far as this - that they may render strikes not the bitter, venomous sources of hatred they have hitherto been. A more hopeful man might imagine that a closer and more genial intercourse between classes might do away with strikes. But I am not a hopeful man.' (51: 526)

He has come a long way from the battle-light which shone in his mother's eyes when the power struggle erupted in Chapter 22, but Thornton's common sense doesn't allow him to swing to an optimistic extreme and so he can put forward a neat disarming of the critics. What makes his words formally interesting is that while they qualify the claims for resolution in Milton, they also contribute to the feeling of closure. This is because of the concept of marriage implicit in what he says. The trust between himself and Higgins is like that on which marriage is built and thus evokes what loving Margaret may have taught him. It carries no guarantees but provides the only possible basis for industrial relationships, or, indeed, for any other relationship.

Although Higgins's role is primarily that of the Milton workman figure, his personal responses have been quite fully enough established for Gaskell to use him too as a source of one of the moments of clarity in this last phase. His words clarify the kind of tolerance on which new relationships can be built and are also interesting for their attention to qualities in Thornton that once repelled Margaret - "The discord jarred upon her inexpressibly" (19: 205).

> He did not speak easily of Mr Thornton.
> 'To tell the truth,' said he, 'he fairly bamboozles me. He's two chaps. One chap I knowed of old as were measter all o'er. T'other chap hasn't an ounce of measter's flesh about him. How them two chaps is bound up in one body, is a craddy for me to find out. I'll not be beat by it, though.' (40: 418 - 9)

Nicholas's note is new. His observations also suggest that an atmosphere of greater general trust is being established in Milton because, while Higgins does not have disturbingly intense, personal feelings about Thornton to overcome, the deterioration in conditions in Milton since the strike gives him as much ostensible reason for antipathy and impatience with Thornton as Margaret has ever had. Through Higgins's will to understand, social and personal change is suggested.

As well as reflections which clarify the novel's themes and their formal treatment, Gaskell allows her characters occasional moments in which their reflections correspond to the reader's own probable thoughts about the role of such characters in the work. Such moments afford a rare and particular pleasure, for in them two worlds, that of the novel and that of the reader, touch in a way that is different from the analogous relevance to their own lives that readers can ordinarily expect to find in novels. Just before Mr Thornton's earnest declarations about his role as a manufacturer and his next day's duty, Mr Hale introduces a question which hangs over all the conversations about Milton issues:

> 'No!' said Mr Hale; 'don't let us be personal in our catechism. You are neither of you representative men; you are each of you too individual for that.'
> 'I am not sure whether to consider that as a compliment or not. I should like to be the representative of Oxford, with its beauty and its learning, and its proud old history. What do you say Margaret; ought I to be flattered?'
> 'I don't know Oxford. But there is a difference between being the representative of a city and the representative man of its inhabitants.' (40: 412 - 3)

The exchange is filled with Milton life; Mr Thornton is not likely to be pleased by Mr Bell's levity about representing Oxford but it allows Margaret to tease him in return while making a vital Milton point about the separation which has occurred between the community's interests and its inhabitant's lives. As its local life is strong, the passage can also safely invite readers into special aesthetic affinity with characters who themselves reflect on their right to occupy the very roles which the reader has been asked to grant them from the start. The novel's turning in on itself

in this way is beautifully controlled and gives support to the suggestion that Gaskell's awareness of her own role as a novelist engaged with topical issues informs her heroine's confrontation with the consequences of intervention in other lives.

It is in Margaret's subjective sense of her plight that the novel's openness is chiefly sustained and it is the plotting which manages this. One by one, all possible chances of clearing her name with Thornton and so restoring something of his lost respect (she cannot allow herself to contemplate love) are destroyed so that she is forced to accept the permanence of her lonely regrets and then to begin to reshape her life in accordance with her new, humbled sense of herself. Although her heroic efforts to accept her sinfulness are ultimately to be productive, and rewarded in the way of comedy's happy reconciliations, she herself has to feel that not her own will but slow time is what heals her wounds. In this way, the novel's moral scheme of virtue rewarded is held in balance with a more true-to-life picture of experience.

Before pursuing Margaret further, it must be said that openness in developments is also sustained in the Milton strand of Phase Four although not as vigorously as it has to be in Margaret's story. This is done in scenes which show that not all of the issues of which the characters are aware reach clarity, let alone resolution. For example, at the end of the second stage, Margaret and Thornton have, in their argument about the values implied in 'man' and in 'gentleman', embarked on a debate about the virtues demanded by Milton (and scorned by the South) which, of all the novel's issues, seems to demand explicit verbal resolution. But this is never given. What is implicit in the action is made to be sufficient to resolve the debate. There is no narrative comment, and, what is more, Gaskell shows through an echo of the very issue that at the end Thornton is still filled with probable inconsistencies of attitude - inconsistencies which a lesser novelist might have been tempted to smooth out in the portrayal of understanding and resolution. When Thornton

calls on Higgins to learn more about the children who are to be supported, and to tell him that there is work for him, he learns that Higgins has applied for work at the mill on Margaret's suggestion.

> ... he understood that she was the woman who had urged Higgins to come to him; and he dreaded the admission of any thought of her, as a motive to what he was doing solely because it was right.
>
> 'So that was the lady you spoke of as a woman?' said he indignantly to Higgins. 'You might have told me who she was.'
>
> 'And then, maybe, yo'd ha' spoken of her more civil than yo' did; yo'd getten a mother who might ha' kept yo'r tongue in check when yo' were talking o' women being at the root of all the plagues.' (39: 404)

Higgins is used to point to the injustices produced by the class attitudes behind Thornton's outburst, but he cannot be used to take up the inconsistency into which Thornton has fallen in the confusion of his feelings about Margaret. The question that his demand for the word 'lady' leads to is, why, if he rejects the class-laden implications of 'gentleman' for himself, and for Milton, will he not recognise that Higgins's way of referring to Margaret as a 'woman' might have its virtues too? The moment is given, not so that the debate might be resumed, but so that the reader might enjoy Thornton's inconsistency.

Within the overall movement towards clarity and resolution of the final section is Margaret's battle to come to terms with the lie she has told Inspector Watson and her knowledge that Thornton knows that she has lied. It is this struggle which dominates the action.

At first the realisation that Thornton knows about and must have judged her lie, fills Margaret's responses.

> She stood as a liar in his eyes. She was a liar. But she had no thought of penitence before God; nothing but chaos and night surrounded the one lurid fact that, in Mr Thornton's eyes, she was degraded. (35: 355)

The narrator's presence makes it possible to indicate what Margaret overlooks in her shock, "But she had no thought of penitence before God", without suggesting that she herself

can see it. The fact of a greater judgement than Thornton's is to reach her gradually until her lie represents to her an "instinctive want of faith and clutching at a sin to keep myself from sinking" (46: 485). It is a deed which she cannot alter or obliterate.

> 'It is done - my sin is sinned. I have now to put it behind me, and be truthful for evermore, if I can.'
> (46: 487)

Her father's death, her pilgrimage to Helstone and Mr Bell's death are the events which help Margaret along the way to acceptance of an immutable, heavenly judgement of her sinfulness, thereby restoring her to an understanding of what it is to be mortal.

In one sense, Gaskell did not pose her heroine with problems any greater than those of a wholly secular heroine like Emma, who has to learn to live with a new sense of herself after her gratuitous rudeness to Miss Bates in Chapter 43 of *Emma*. Both heroines demonstrate in public that they are less than perfect. But Gaskell was also writing, as she had done in *Ruth*, from her belief that human affairs are to be seen *sub specie aeternitatis*; they will be judged absolutely, as well as by the necessarily more flexible, more relative standards of human society. In *Ruth*, Gaskell tries to show that while Ruth may atone to society for her lapse in being seduced, she cannot escape final judgement of her sin, but the case produces some confusing effects. Gaskell evidently wants to argue for a necessary humility in men's judgement, and against her contemporaries' absolute condemnation of fallen women. The case for Ruth is therefore argued in the novel on both its humane and its religious grounds; the religious argument being that only God's judgement may have the finality and power which men tend to claim for themselves, and the humane side being that men must recognise their inability to judge by being brought to see the value of what their condemnation might be destroying. Thus Ruth's services to her fellow men in the outbreak of cholera make everyone realise that they have no right to judge her for an earlier mistake, and her son is reconciled to his illegitimacy when he sees

his mother anew, as a figure of popular acclaim. But the counterpart of the argument, the absolute power of God's judgement, is given a disconcerting presence in the form it takes in the action, in Ruth's death. The confusing conclusion suggested by it appears to be that while Ruth may atone in men's eyes, this is not possible before God.

In *North and South*, Margaret's lapse is not given the same magnitude, and the novel's attention to the way in which the protagonists themselves will come to understand and judge their own action means that Gaskell presents her argument through Margaret's apprehension of the primacy of God's judgement rather than demonstrating it in events, as she had tried to do in *Ruth*. In fact the action of *North and South* is designed so that it forms, in one way, the opposite case from the argument in *Ruth*. In the later novel, it is the leniency of man's judgement that the heroine has to be armed against, rather than the harshness of man's condemnation. It is fairly certain that most readers would feel with Mr Bell's assertion:

> 'I say it was right. I should have done the same. You forgot yourself in thought for another. I hope I should have done the same.' (46: 484)

But the dangers in this very proper human sympathy are that if Margaret adopts the uncritical view of her actions, she will be uncomfortably close to the self-idealisation, to the pride with which she once rejected Thornton. There are spiritual pitfalls for Margaret in Mr Bell's indulgent sympathy.

Before examining the process by which Margaret understands her sinfulness, an interesting difficulty in her attitudes towards Thornton's judgement of her warrants attention. This is the question which Furbank (1973), in his criticism of Gaskell's relationship to her heroine, took as representative of the novel's entire treatment of Margaret Hale, but, as was said in the introduction to this chapter, the difficulty is more of a momentary lapse than indicative of a deep-rooted problem. It comes about when Margaret refuses to

concede that Thornton's probable suspicion that Frederick was her lover and that she had behaved with impropriety in going alone to the station with him, deserves some sympathetic recognition. In her immediate anger and distress it is natural that she should refuse to acknowledge Thornton's suspicions, but it is puzzling that her lofty disdain is never really challenged in the novel.

Gaskell clearly felt that suspicion of Margaret was indeed ignoble - Thornton finds his better self in continuing to believe in her rectitude, and there is a vindictive strain evident in Mrs Thornton's visit to Margaret when she carries out her promise to Mrs Hale and rebukes Margaret for her behaviour. But to say that Margaret deserves trust is not to say that she herself should see her behaviour as above reproach, particularly the reproach that her actions have caused someone else pain. If the purpose of Margaret's fall and corrected vision of herself was to restore her to an understanding of her proper place with mankind, then it seems strange that the inhumanity in her contempt for Thornton's possible pain in thinking Frederick to be her lover should have passed unchallenged in the novel. The case against the Milton masters, that they are cruelly indifferent to the feelings of their employees, is so close to Margaret's lack of imaginative insight at this point that it appears contrary to the novel's argument to allow Margaret to escape a firm confrontation with Thornton's point of view.

Only once, when bidding farewell to Mrs Thornton, does she acknowledge the need to consider the possibility that wounded feelings might lie behind other peoples' misjudgements of her.

> 'And', said Margaret, blushing excessively as she spoke, 'will you do me justice, and believe that, though I cannot - I do not choose - to give explanations of my conduct, I have not acted in the unbecoming way you apprehended?'
> (43: 453)

Mrs Shaw's London surprise at what she hears is used to indicate the rightness of Margaret's impulse, but the impulse isn't enough to meet all needs and is one that Gaskell allows

Margaret to have forgotten when the issue of Thornton's suppositions next arises. This occurs in Chapter 46, when Mr Bell suggests that Mr Thornton, who warrants even more of Margaret's concern than his mother does, may have misinterpreted Frederick's presence, and Margaret denies that the possibility has ever occurred to her.

If Margaret's inconsistency (her apology to Mrs Thornton shows that she *had* thought of it) is an oversight on Gaskell's part, then it suggests that she herself had not considered fully enough the implications of Margaret's rather inhumane disdain, especially its implications for the argument about Milton relationships. It seems that the charge of inconsistency in argument must stand against Gaskell here. Margaret longs, even after Mr Bell's death, for the knowledge that Thornton might know "how much she had been tempted" (49: 506) to lie, but her wish does not include wanting to have him released from the burden of suspicions about her companion at the station. Margaret could not of course give her brother's secret to others, but she is not really made to recognise any need to relieve Mr Thornton of his probable misery. Her blindness is also strangely at variance with her belief that it is reasonable to ask for explanations as they are what create trust between men. In Stage Two, Margaret argues with both Thornton and Higgins that explanations are called for in Milton and would help heal the rift between masters and men, (15: 164 and 17: 183). In rebutting the application of this argument to herself, Margaret might well have said that the reasons for her actions could not be made public by explanation, but she does not move even this far, for she does not see the need to explain Frederick's presence to Thornton at all.

The process by which Margaret comes to judge her lie as a sin does not really begin until she has the solitude needed for reflection. There are moments of attempted soul-searching (as at the beginning of Chapter 39) while Margaret is still embroiled in family and Milton life, but these can only be hurried and confused. Thus in the same chapter Margaret longs

for the "stagnation" of Harley Street life so that she can "regain her power and command over herself" (39: 408). Her father's departure for Oxford is welcomed by Margaret as affording her the liberty she needs to contemplate her "personal cares" (41: 425) but when he dies, Margaret has the added grief of discovering that the solitude she has at first welcomed, leaves her without a kindred spirit to provide contact with Milton which now absorbs her interest. Gaskell has been felt to use death too conveniently and too sentimentally,[1] but it would seem that in Mr Hale's death and in the one which follows shortly after, Mr Bell's, she is giving serious recognition to the magnitude of what it takes to lead Margaret to the necessarily lonely confrontation with the fact of sin which is needed for a redemptive recognition of what she has done.

The major passages of reflection come in the visit to Helstone (46: 481 and 487 - 8) and after Mr Bell's death (48: 502). These are all sequences which Gaskell added[2] when the work was published as two volumes in 1855 and indicate what she felt she had lost control of in having to rush the ending for serial publication. The necessary condensation meant that she could not present the inner development of her heroine, a development which has its implied parallel in Thornton, and so in the serial version, their reunion carries an inevitably sentimental emphasis on love's triumphing rather than on the meeting of two changed spirits.

In writing to Mrs Jameson about the serial ending, Gaskell said:

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1. As in Dickens's (1938) famous remark "I wish to Heaven her people would keep a little firmer on their legs " made in a letter to W H Wills (Vol 2, p 250). In *Letters*; No 220 Gaskell evidently felt defensive and amused by Dickens's response to frequent deaths in her work - "a better title than N & S would have been 'Death and Variations'." And in *Letters*; No 225, her own criticism of the speed with which the end had been reached, "bad and hurried up though it be", must refer in part to Mr Bell's death following so rapidly on Mr Hale's.

2. The Helstone Chapters, 45 and 46, are wholly new. The passage which concludes Chapter 48 is new in itself.

> Just at the very last I was compelled to desparate compression. But now I am not sure if, when the barrier gives way between 2 such characters as Mr Thornton and Margaret it would not go all smash in a moment, - and I don't feel quite certain that I dislike the end as it now stands. But it is being republished as a whole, in two vols; - and the question is shall I alter & enlarge what is already written, bad and hurried-up though it be? I can not insert small pieces here & there - I feel as if I must throw myself back a certain distance in the story, & re-write it from there; retaining the present incidents, but filling up intervals of time &c &c. (*Letters*; No 225)

In the re-writing which she undertook[1] Gaskell did fill out intervals of fictional time. Mr Bell's death happens in the revised ending at the same chronological moment that it did in the earlier version, but, because his visit to Helstone with Margaret is very fully narrated, the interval between his and Mr Hale's death feels much longer. Gaskell kept to the sudden breaking of barriers between Margaret and Thornton but their union feels different in the revised version because the processes of Margaret's change have been more fully attended to. Because Margaret's reassessment of herself has not been wholly in response to Thornton's place in her thoughts, because she has come to see her reckoning as primarily with God, the focus is not solely on the triumph of their love when she and Thornton are united. They come together as people changed by Milton affairs rather than simply by each other. This means that their story carries Milton with it, and what might have otherwise have been solely a lovers' reconciliation now contains the promise of wider social change.

The actual passages in which Margaret meditates on her self as she is learning to perceive it to be, have a figurative quality which, in this sustained form, is something new in Gaskell's writing. The extensive and flexible parallels which she has used as a structural principle throughout *North and South* demonstrate one aspect of her ability to create a

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1. *Letters*; No 227 records her decision to attempt reworking the end, and *Letters*; No 229, written in Paris, indicates the speed with which she was working, whenever and wherever she could.

figurative enlargement of significance, but the controlled use of imagery in the novel's last phase is something new. Gaskell does not, as George Eliot or Dickens did, construct an entire novel on a figurative correlative of the insight or judgement of the world being presented (as in the web of *Middlemarch* or the fog of *Bleak House*). Her figurative language usually works to enrich a moment rather than to build a theme so that the reader's attention usually remains with the actual, daily experiences of her characters rather than extending itself to the dimensions which imagery supplies in other novelists. But what can be seen beginning in *North and South* is to be continued in *Sylvia's Lovers* and *Wives and Daughters* where complete scenes in the narrative (as distinct from the metaphors used to reflect on events) take on symbolic force.

An overall control of the imagery which charts Margaret's soul-searching can be seen beginning in Chapter 41. While she is still absorbed by the question of Thornton's judgement of her, her longing for solitude and peaceful examination of her sorrows is given a strongly domestic flavour.

> For months past all her own personal cares and troubles had had to be stuffed away into a dark cupboard; but now she had leisure to take them out, and mourn over them, and study their nature, and seek the true method of subduing them into the elements of peace.
> (41: 425)

Margaret is not prompted to similar reflection again until her visit to Helstone brings the inevitability of change home to her. She goes with Mr Bell in a mood of regret, conscious of all that she has endured in the swift changes of the last two years. In that time she has continued to yearn for Helstone's beauties so that the experience of finding it an unchanged natural world, and yet seeing from its inhabitants that people are, wherever they are, unstable, mutable creatures, is one of personal pain. But the tenor of this recognition is philosophical rather than emotional; it is like that of *Cousin Phillis* 1863 - 4. Helstone's enduring beauty is the first of the natural world's timeless aspects against which

Margaret is moved to measure herself and mankind.

> It hurt her to see the Helstone road so flooded in the sun-light, and every turn and every familiar tree so precisely the same in its summer glory as it had been in former years. Nature felt no change, and was ever young. (46: 472)

The effect is to throw the instability of human kind into relief so that, curiously, Milton, as a wholly man-made environment, can look differently attractive rather than simply worse as it would once have seemed to Margaret.

Later, after supper with Mr Bell, she sits reflecting on the day's impact.

> And, somehow, this visit to Helstone had not been all - had not been exactly what she had expected. There was change everywhere; slight, yet pervading all. Households were changed by absence, or death, or marriage, or the natural mutations brought by days and months and years, which carry us on imperceptibly from childhood to youth, and thence through manhood to age, whence we drop like fruit, fully ripe, into the quiet mother earth. Places were changed - a tree gone here, a bough there, bringing in a long ray of light where no light was before - a road was trimmed and narrowed, and the green straggling pathway by its side enclosed and cultivated. A great improvement it was called; but Margaret sighed over the old picturesqueness, the old gloom, and the grassy wayside of former days. (46: 481 - 2)

The narration of this passage does not stay as firmly within Margaret's apprehensions as did the earlier, domestic one from Chapter 41. The narration begins in Margaret's consciousness but swiftly moves out to a wider reference when it invites "us" to join in the generalisations about "natural mutations". It would seem that Margaret's grasp of change is too recent for her to provide the full acceptance of it that the Helstone episode requires, and so the narration supplements Margaret's understanding. Its generalising range also helps to ensure that the mood of experience in these chapters is a philosophical rather than a purely personal one.

As she sits alone at her window seat that night Margaret's gaze moves upwards from the trees which had provided her first yardstick, to the "purple dome above, where the stars arose" (46: 488). This time her reflections are given as actual

speech, more directly than those of the early evening, and their rendering combines with the change in imagery to suggest that she herself is beginning to generate the vision needed to understand herself and her role in a mutable society.

> 'That sky above me looks as though it could not change, and yet it will. I am so tired - so tired of being whirled on through all these phases of my life, in which nothing abides by me, no creature, no place; it is like the circle in which the victims of earthly passion eddy continually. I am in the mood in which women of another religion take the veil. I seek heavenly steadfastness in earthly monotony.' (46: 488)

As her mood engulfs her, Margaret herself provides perspective. She knows its transience and that the distortions it brings run counter to her real nature. A refuge in timelessness is not for her.

> '... I might become a nun. But I should pine after my kind; no, not my kind, for love for my species could never fill my heart to the utter exclusion of love for individuals. Perhaps it ought to be so, perhaps not; I cannot decide tonight.' (46: 488)

The climax to Margaret's reflections comes in another new passage, at the end of Chapter 48, as she sits alone after Mr Bell's death.

> But when night came - solemn night, and all the house was quiet, Margaret still sate watching the beauty of a London sky at such an hour, on such a summer evening; the faint pink reflection of earthly lights on the soft clouds that float tranquilly into the white moonlight, out of the warm gloom which lies motionless around the horizon. Margaret's room had been the day nursery of her childhood, just when it merged into girlhood, and when the feelings of conscience had been first awakened into full activity. On some such night as this she remembered promising to herself to live as a brave and noble a life as any heroine she ever read or heard of in romance, a life sans peur et sans reproche; it had seemed to her then that she had only to will, and such a life would be accomplished. And now she had learnt that not only to will, but also to pray, was a necessary condition in the truly heroic. Trusting to herself, she had fallen. It was a just consequence of her sin, that all excuses for it, all temptation to it, should remain for ever unknown to the person in whose opinion it had sunk her lowest. She stood face to face at last with her sin. She knew it for what it was; Mr Bell's kindly sophistry that nearly all men were guilty of equivocal actions, and that the motive ennobled the evil, had never had much real weight with her. Her own first thought of how, if she had known all, she might have fearlessly told the truth, seemed low and poor. Nay, even now, her anxiety to have her character for truth partially excused in

> Mr Thornton's eyes, as Mr Bell had promised to do, was a very small and petty consideration, now that she was afresh taught by death what life should be. If all the world spoke, acted, or kept silence with intent to deceive - if dearest interests were at stake, and dearest lives in peril, - if no one should ever know of her truth or her falsehood to measure out their honour or contempt for her by, straight alone where she stood, in the presence of God, she prayed that she might have strength to speak and act the truth for evermore. (48: 502 - 3)

It is this passage which crowns Gaskell's examination of the heroic and confirms that in placing Margaret at the centre of her novel, she chose to examine simultaneously the technical and the moral implications of heroic action. The narration continues to be authorial but, as is fitting for a climax to Margaret's development, it stays, after the second sentence, inside her thoughts. Her concentration is chiefly inward, directed at her past self, and so makes little call on the world at which she gazes. But the narrator's phrases ("solemn night", "the beauty of a London sky" and "the faint pink reflection ... horizon") at the opening do establish that the scene before Margaret is one which holds man and the natural world in complementary harmony. The idea provides a natural lead into the subject of Margaret's endeavours and her new understanding that she must work for the right relationship with her world (which means with God too) through prayer rather than through will. The new factor in Margaret's thoughts is that she has been "taught by death what life should be", a lesson which leads to the crucial difference between this and an earlier passage which it is so clearly designed to echo. The earlier passage culminates in a resolve, "Let them insult my maiden pride as they will - I walk pure before God!" (23: 247) which is sufficiently like the last sentence of this passage to indicate that the key development in Margaret is that which has taken her from her earlier defiant confidence to her present humility. Both are solitary positions but whereas the first has a proud rejection of others as its main source of energy, the second is solitary because it recognises the individuality of ultimate responsibility. There is no question of Margaret's forsaking heroic action, but the promise is that in future

she will know that her services come from an inevitably flawed but more kindly self.

Although this is the climactic passage of reflection it is not the last. In the next chapter there is a passage where Margaret gazes at the sea and hears "the eternal psalm" (49: 506). This report on her inner life is the only passage of such a kind which was included in the serial publication of *North and South*. Gaskell's decision to leave it in the 1855 edition, and to allow it to be the last of such passages, seems justified. In another writer the passage might feel anti-climactic, but as Gaskell does not, as a rule, shape her narrative into clearly modulated and sustained movements from high to low, preferring to allow a relatively even note to develop, expressing cumulative rather than dramatic change, this final passage is not felt as contrary to the discernible development which has been established through the imagery and the narrative methods. As it stands the passage suggests that Margaret's growth will be a continuing process, in which she may move away from the achieved moments of great and serene clarity to lesser, more ordinary achievements. Her last reflections can also be seen to be of the kind which serve to keep the narrative open-ended with several possibilities alive (Henry Lennox's renewed interest in Margaret does this too), even while a triumphant movement towards reconciliation is gathering force.

The novel's comparison of two ways of life begun by the Hales' move North reaches evaluation in the last phase. One event which forms the centre of a complex series of parallels involving Margaret, Higgins and Thornton and through which Gaskell's own judgements of the North is suggested, is Boucher's death. The fact that the fate of a minor Milton character has such an important function in this last phase suggests that Gaskell was creating as many ways as possible of anchoring Margaret's story, now moving towards personal resolution, to the larger context. The preparation for this event in the novel's preceding phases is clear. In Phase Two, Gaskell establishes that the sharing of responsibility is man's primary social obligation; the action of Phase Three brings home to Margaret

the responsibilities of intervention (that she cannot remain free of its consequences); and finally, the action of Stage Four enables Gaskell to raise further questions about the nature of social responsibility. In particular she is able to draw attention to the irony that even the conscious assumption of responsibility may not be enough to guarantee the desired or deserved outcome of events.

Boucher's suicide is introduced so that its shock value is emphasized. As his corpse is being carried home, Margaret is saying to Higgins:

> 'Don't you see how you've made Boucher what he is, by driving him into the Union against his will - without his heart going with it. You have made him what he is!'
> Made him what he is! What was he?
> Gathering, gathering along the narrow street, came a hollow, measured sound; now forcing itself on their attention. (36: 368)

Besides Margaret's assertion, the narration's tone emphasises Higgins's responsibility for Boucher's weakness and then for his suicide. The note is much more dramatic than is usual in *North and South*, making it reminiscent of the intrusive narrating voice of *Mary Barton*, but the purpose here is not the conciliatory explanation of the first novel but that of shock tactics. Their melodrama becomes acceptable in their power to demonstrate ironies of responsibilitiy to Higgins which he could hardly have foreseen.

The event establishes a thematic link between Higgins and Margaret most obviously in the fact that it confronts Higgins with his responsibility for what has happened (a distinction between responsibility and blame emerges very clearly here) thus echoing both Margaret's unintended assumption of responsibility at the mill and her conscious agreement to summon Frederick. Higgins is later to take care of the children, but for the moment it falls to Margaret to break the news of the man's death to his family. She and Higgins are thus also complementary figures in the domestic consequences of the suicide, but the thematic link with Margaret's

recalling Frederick is the more profound one. Higgins's guilt over what has happened (again, this is responsibility rather than blame) is evident - he cannot face the dead man's wife. This burden of guilt makes him very like Margaret who has also been imprisoned in the knowledge that she acted wrongly, for reasons which, at the time, seemed right. She was obliged to summon Frederick back to England and, having once done so, had a more than ordinary pressure on her to protect her brother from discovery. Therefore she lied. In a similar way, Higgins's obligations to the Union have led to Boucher's death. The effect of this aspect of the parallel which emerges between Margaret and Higgins through Boucher's death is to confirm that what Margaret has to learn about herself in her private life, applies quite directly to what men need to learn in their public, social lives too.

The point that Higgins's intervention in Boucher's life (forcing him to join the Union) has had horrifying repercussions is off-set, but not diminished in importance, by one of the other consequences of the suicide; Thornton is sufficiently moved by Higgins's plea for work to take an interest in the case, and so begin his own education in humane fellowship. In this way Thornton too is drawn into the set of parallels created by Boucher's death; he too gains further understanding of his social responsibility.

The larger significance of Thornton's response to Higgins can be traced in this way: when Margaret goes to tell Mrs Boucher of her husband's death, she finds a woman too cowed by misery to be able to understand her husband's act as anything but another of the injuries she has to suffer. Under the blow, she simply sinks further into a torpor which subsequently carries her out of life. There is no condemnation in the account of this defeat, and her death, which is not really needed in the plot,[1] stands as recognition of

1. Had Higgins found work for the sake of fatherless children, the effect would have been sufficiently similar to the case as it stands - his taking responsibility for orphaned children.

the overwhelmingly deadening effect of poverty and suffering on human nature. As such, it is part of the novel's case against the inhumanity of the North[1]. For as long as life in Milton is shaped by the masters' indifference to their workers' lives, such deaths will result. But the Boucher deaths also reveal another contrary aspect of life in the North which can be seen through both Margaret and Higgins. Margaret happens to be visiting Higgins when Boucher's corpse is carried up the street because she and her father have gone to thank Nicholas and Mary for their attention to the late Mrs Hale, knowing that the visit would afford both families some light in their grief. This is a familiar, unquestionable example of the value of fellowship and is followed by a similarly acceptable proposition: as Margaret attends to Mrs Boucher, her own griefs and guilts are given the relief of a fresh perspective. From these familiar instances, Gaskell moves to a related but less readily acceptable idea. Higgins's sense of guilt moves him to a new determination to assert himself, to find work for the sake of the children. Just as grief for others took Margaret out of herself, so Higgins's burden lightens the oppression he had first felt on failing to find work after the strike.

The mood of bitter, self-pitying defeat is strong in his first comments:

> 'Strike's ended. It's o'er for this time. I'm out o' work because I ne'er asked for it. And I ne'er asked for it, because good words is scarce, and bad words is plentiful.'
> (36: 364)

And Higgins is right. As a known union man and strike leader, he would be unlikely to be re-employed in any mill, but the way he accepts his lot is, for the moment, dangerously like Mrs Boucher's apathy. The fact that the additional burden, the orphaned children, gives him fresh determination

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1. The Boucher family have a function in this novel very like that of the Davenports in *Mary Barton*, but the subject of the psychic evils of poverty seems new and to be integrated with the themes of *North and South* in a way that was not attempted in the earlier novel. There the Davenport case has to be effective through its documentary impact.

to seek work is an unexpected break in the gloom, expressive of a quality in Northerners which was what Gaskell most admired in her subjects: their upright, stubborn hardihood of spirit. One aspect of this quality, a shrewd independence of mind, was one of the first qualities to which she drew attention in John Barton, and its reappearance here in Higgins is coupled with some insight into its origins. These, it is suggested, are to be found in the very circumstances which make for hardship in the North, the possibility of each man's being his own master. The circumstances which produce such self-reliance and self-respect have deteriorated under the employers' indifference until even men like Higgins are in danger of the Bouchers' defeat, but potentially the challenge of Milton is seen to be a productive one, creative of a new breed of men as well as of machines. Both represent a moral, imaginative power peculiar to that world. Although it is its hard vulgarity which has had most attention in the narrative, the creative force of this new industrial world is always present too. Sometimes it is given negative force, as in the comment on Mrs Boucher's attitude to her husband's death.

> She could not rouse her torpid mind into any vivid imagination of what her husband's misery might have been, before he had resorted to the last terrible step; she could only look upon it as it affected herself ... (37: 376)

And sometimes, more rarely, it can be given more positive statement, as in Margaret's telling Higgins not to go to South to look for work.

> You would not bear the dulness of the life; you don't know what it is; it would eat you away like rust. Those that have lived there all their lives, are used to soaking in the stagnant waters ... The hard spadework robs their brain of life; the sameness of their toil deadens their imagination; they don't care to meet to talk over thoughts and speculations, even of the weakest, wildest kind... You could not stir them up into any companionship, which you get in a town as plentiful as the air you breathe...' (37: 382)

The source of imaginative life is identified here as that form of independent companionship which the North offers and which provides men with a readiness to meet in the exploration of

ideas. And from such imaginative contact comes the will and energy which informs the North's technological and mercantile success. What is suggested here about the value of imagination gives it a creative energy first and then a moral force very like that which George Eliot (1856) claimed for sympathy which, she said, was the capacity to see into lives which were "apart" and which thus formed the "raw material of moral sentiment." These claims for imagination and sympathy derive from a common Romantic heritage, but Gaskell is unusual amongst nineteenth-century novelists in suggesting that the much criticized industrial world could have its sources of imaginative vigour.[1]

Through Boucher's death, Gaskell establishes that the individual imaginative capacity is the source both of social cohesion (Thornton's involvement) and personal well-being. Thus the concentration on Margaret's reflections, the ordering of her perceptions of herself and her world, which follow her departure from Milton, carry in them general as well as personal weight. The fusion of Margaret's private life and Milton's public issues is continued.

The resolution which Margaret reaches has already been discussed, but its implications for the evaluation of Milton need to be considered. As Gaskell's evaluation of Northern life is to be found in Boucher's death and its consequences, it is obviously a highly qualified 'Yea' that she gives to the North, for the event speaks simultaneously of the destructive and the creative power of that world. The fact that Thornton actually gives Higgins a job and that mutual understanding grows from their association belongs to the idealism of the novel's didactic strain, but the truth in the claims made for an imaginative vitality emerging from the harsh conditions of Northern life does not depend on any happy outcome to Higgins's renewed determination to seek work. Nor does his success disturb the careful poise created

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1. The community of Lantern Yard in *Silas Marner* 1861, is George Eliot's recognition of how the imaginative capacity could be nourished in a form of religious fellowship common in urban life at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

between Higgins's courage and Boucher's defeat.

The success element in Margaret's story, the happy ending to her love, is qualified so that the reservations in the final assessment of the new industrial world are not forgotten. The qualification to her happiness is not lodged in her own love story, but in that of her brother who has, at several points, functioned as her *alter ego*. While Margaret's story is perhaps as Utopian as comedy often is in allowing her to have her love and the world she wants, Frederick's is not. His name cannot be cleared, and he loses England. Frederick's marriage also entails the painful issue of his conversion to Catholicism which seems to function as a way of indicating how much is lost, or how much he has to reject in accepting exile from his home. Because his story is seen from the Hale family's point of view, the emphasis remains on the loss rather than moving to the gain. When Dixon questions her about Frederick's conversion and the likelihood of also being converted if she were to go to Spain, Margaret explains her own lack of danger by saying "'I fancy it was love that first predisposed him to conversion,'" (47: 494). As Dixon had reacted to the family's settling in Milton and losing their gentility with the same degree of pain that she now shows about Frederick's religious conversion, her questions indicate that both changes are to be seen as equally great and equally disturbing. Gaskell is using the same tactic that she uses at the beginning of the novel with Mr Hale. His religious crisis forms an analogy for Margaret's secular crisis; Frederick's conversion does the same to Margaret's acceptance of Milton and Thornton. But there remains a difference between Margaret and Frederick. As Margaret says, his love for Dolores inclined Frederick to complete the break with his origins, but with Margaret, her acceptance of a new world is what enables her to love one of its representatives. The inversion justifies the important claim that Margaret's final choice is a reasoned one in response to her wider experiences rather than a submission made possible simply by love.

As a post-script to this argument for the qualified optimism expressed in the novel's conclusion, the reactions of one nineteenth century reader of *North and South* are interesting. It is a response which goes further than the argument above in that it suggests that Margaret's story itself promises limited future happiness, but it starts from the reading which was argued for at the outset of this discussion of the novel - *North and South* is primarily Margaret Hale's story. The testimony comes from Gaskell's friend, Parthenope Nightingale, and is quoted in Haldane (1931).

> It has instructed me exceedingly. You hold the balance very evenly and it must be a hard task. I am quite sorry to part with it, and wish it had not ended so soon, or so abruptly, but I am afraid you are right, for I am afraid Margaret will not be happy, tho' she will make him so; he is too old to mould, and the poetry of her nature will suffer under the iron mark which has compressed his so long. And then Mrs Thornton will never forgive her for having reinstated her son, that hard, coarse, ungenerous woman will never consent to take an obligation, as he does so beautifully (for I think that is one of the best things you have done - he is too proud to be annoyed at being obliged to his wife and loves her too deeply to know that it is a burthen). They (Mrs. T. & M.) cannot live together and be happy and yet she cannot be turned out of the house, but when do one's friends' marriages satisfy one? (p 105)

The last sentence seems to carry a deliberate recognition in it of the sentimentality of the reading ("one's friends"), and it certainly is uncritical of Margaret in a way that Gaskell did not intend - "I did not think Margaret *was* so *over* good" (*Letters*; No 223). But it is an interesting illustration of the fact that even at the personal level, the novel's happy ending can be felt to carry strong qualification in it.

C H A P T E R T H R E E

SYLVIA'S LOVERS

i) Introduction.

The plot of *Sylvia's Lovers* is built on two equally balanced central figures, Sylvia and Philip, who represent the two very different types produced by the harsh world of Monkshaven. The other characters all belong to one or other type; there are no intermediary types, and it seems that Monkshaven allows no half-measures and no compromises. Sylvia, Daniel Robson, Kinraid and the Corney family belong to the impulsive, adventurous, gregarious, passionate type who tend to live their lives intuitively without developing reflective habits of thought. Bell Robson and Kester can also be placed in this group, although its characteristics are not as strongly developed in them. Bell, from Cumberland, is least typical, for she is a careful, silent woman who is somewhat critical of the careless ways of the pleasure-loving Corney family, but the glimpses given in Chapter 12 of her pleasure in the dare-devil Daniel who courted her with tales of adventure suggest that her spirit is fundamentally responsive to her husband's. Kester's dourness is part of his being an inarticulate shepherd and cow-hand, and it is always made clear that his sympathies lie with the Kinraid type rather than with Philip. With Philip stand Hester and Alice Rose, Coulson and the Foster brothers. They are all devout, disciplined, self-denying people, governed by a strong sense of duty, inclined to solemnity, to introspection and to other-worldliness. It seems that in Monkshaven, the dangers of life at sea, the uncertainties of life for those left ashore and the difficulties of life on the land lead the personality to develop in one of two ways, and that the types produced are alien to each other. The difficulty of one type's being able to understand the other is the major barrier with which the narrative is concerned; when Hester believes that Philip has returned and wonders if she can help reconcile Sylvia to him, the narrator says:

> What could ever bring these two together again? Could Hester herself - ignorant of the strange mystery of Sylvia's heart, as those who are guided solely by obedience to principle must ever be of the clue to the actions of those who are led by the passionate ebb and flow of impulse? [1] (45: 418)

Natural affinity for a kindred spirit takes the form of believing that as that person's actions are spontaneously, intuitively understood, they are natural and therefore right. Conversely, antipathy develops towards those less easily understood. At its best in Monkshaven, this antipathy does not surface and feelings are subdued, even tolerant. Although his wife's nature is not alien to him, Daniel enjoys teasing her about her family's being different, about their social pretensions; as he says to Sylvia, "Thee an' me, lass, is Robsons - oat-cake folk, while they's pie-crust." (12: 113). At its worst, a sense of being different can produce the baffled rage that Philip feels when he sees that Kinraid has effortlessly captured Sylvia's heart. Their rivalry would have been intense anyway, but the particular enmity which develops in Philip (it leads him to feel that his hatred has caused Kinraid's capture by the press-gang) is a product of his antipathy to Kinraid's type and his belief that such a man cannot love Sylvia as she deserves.

This division into types does not mean that all the characters in one group differ absolutely from all those in the other, although the possibility of important similarities across the division is one that Sylvia, for example, does not readily recognise. She and Philip have in common a depth of feeling and a capacity for faithfulness which she learns to value only when she knows that Kinraid has married soon after losing her and thinks that the absent Philip has given up his life in despair. What Sylvia learns to see, points to the fact that the novel is dealing with the tragic potential in the difficulties of responding to another type, and not simply with the

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1. Page references to *Sylvia's Lovers* are all to the Everyman's Library edition, London, 1964.

differences in type produced by Monkshaven. When Gaskell's subject is expressed this way, *Sylvia's Lovers* can be seen to have grown out of the concerns of *North and South* as well as to be breaking important new ground in her development.

The two Monkshaven types have, naturally, different centres to their lives, different ways of living; Philip, used to rigorous self-examination, lives by his will, while Sylvia lives intuitively and knows much less about herself. Her type yields to what life brings while Philip's attempts to mould and direct its course. When Philip, about to be made a partner in Fo^sters' shop, is sent to London on business and away from Sylvia, he thinks:

> He had meant to shape his life, and now it was, as it were, being shaped for him ... (17: 176)

The action which evolves from this opposed approach to life is the disastrous consequences of Philip's determination to win Sylvia, "have her for his own he must, at any cost." (29: 282). The disaster does not stem from Philip's loving Sylvia, but from the corruption wrought by his will to possess her. Gaskell thought at one point of calling her novel 'Philip's Idol' (*Letters*; No 493) and in their final meeting Philip explains the nature of the wrong he has done Sylvia by saying "I ha' made thee my idol" (45: 424).

For the first part of the novel, the action creates a relationship between Philip and Sylvia that is of the wrong-doer and victim kind, but once Sylvia has taken her momentous vow never to forgive Philip for what he had done (Chapter 33) this changes, and once they have "done wrong to each other" (45: 425) the balance between them is more even. The steps taken in the early part of *Sylvia's Lovers* to sustain the balance of interest between Philip and Sylvia while they are in the rather simplifying relationship of sinned-against and sinner will be a major focus in the analysis of the novel, especially as their relationship's potential detraction from interest is heightened by the fact that the victim, Sylvia, belongs to the Monkshaven type in whom the inner life is not strongly

developed. It will be shown in later discussion that until a character himself can actively reflect on the significance of events, the narration can make little direct use of that character's point of view. This means that the potential passivity of Sylvia's role as victim and the non-availability of her consciousness to the narration has to be circumvented by the narration so that she can exert sufficient claim on the reader's interest to balance Philip. Unless her case were specially sustained, her power to interest would not be enough for a novel dealing with the parallel development of two central characters.

The decision that the consequences of Philip's pursuit of Sylvia should be disastrous, that the novel should be tragic, also forms part of the novel's governing principle, the plot. When the Monkshaven innkeeper's attitude to his allowing the press-gang to use his inn is described, he is said to be like those men who excuse themselves on the grounds that

> in the misfortunes of their friends they seemed to see some justification of their own. It was blind fate dealing out events, not that the events themselves were the inevitable consequences of folly or mis-conduct.
> (23: 219)

Although "blind fate" is being seen as an easy escape from responsibility in this man's attitudes, it is a force that operates in the lives of the protagonists of this novel more strongly than in Gaskell's other novels. The narrator of *Wives and Daughters* refers to a similar force in Hollingford, but there it is characterised as being rather charmingly sly and domesticated, "fate is a cunning hussy" (7: 107), and not the implacable, unfeeling force of a tragic world evoked in "blind fate".

The tragic nature of the novel's action means that the reader is made particularly conscious of missed opportunities, as when Philip does not learn that Sylvia's feelings have softened towards the dying Simpson (29: 287); of misunderstandings caused by chance, as when Sylvia refuses Philip's greeting at the Corney party because Molly Corney has been teasing her

about her cousin (12: 120); and of unhappy coincidences, as when Philip overhears the sailors discussing Kinraid's many love affairs when he is wondering whether to send Kinraid's message to Sylvia (19: 193). As well as the evidence of a fateful force in events themselves, the reader is made conscious of fate by the way that the unhappy triangle of Sylvia, Philip and Kinraid is mirrored in Hester, Coulson and Philip. Philip's failure to recognise, let alone return Hester's love, serves to heighten the inevitability of his failure to win Sylvia's spontaneous affection. He never recognises his part in the equivalent triangle, but he is led to wonder about the similarity between his experiences and those of Alice Rose, Jack Rose and Jeremiah Foster (21: 207), and whether life is a simple, dreary repetition of suffering from one generation to the next. What Philip does recognise about his life never leads him to a self-exculpatory sense of the forces which have shaped his life; his development is towards the recognition that because he and Sylvia can see how they were led to wrong one another, they "can pity and forgive one another" (45: 425). In this way the characters understand their suffering as "the inevitable consequences of folly or misconduct" while the reader is also aware of the tragic workings of "blind fate" (23: 219).

Unlike the other two novels being analysed in this study, *Sylvia's Lovers* was not written for serial publication. It was always conceived of as a three volume work,[1] and this seems to have been a major influence on Gaskell's structuring of her narrative. Besides the coherence of the whole, distinct, unifying purposes are discernible in each volume and have been described by McVeagh (1970) and Easson (1979). McVeagh's sense of the volumes' relationship is that the design had great clarity in Gaskell's original conception, and that its execution led her into problems.

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1. Volume One, Chapters 1 - 14; Volume Two, Chapters 15 - 29; Volume Three, Chapters 30 - 45. It seems from *Letters*; No 511a, that a chapter was moved from the third to the second volumes, and that this was Chapter 29, (Easson 1979: 170).

> ... if we divide the novel into its original three parts we shall see how Mrs Gaskell constructed it and what problems the construction involved her in.
>
> Volume One was to deal mostly with Charley Kinraid, who was probably the original hero. In Volume Two Kinraid disappears and prominence was to be given to the Hepburn-Sylvia relationship. Volume Three was to bring these so far fairly independent stories together in Kinraid's unexpected return, and her intention to do this and thus resolve all that had happened in the tragic climax is what enabled Mrs Gaskell to advise her critics to wait until they had read the whole work before passing judgement. (pp 272 - 3)

Gaskell's faith that the third volume would reveal the coherent design of the whole is expressed in a letter to W S Williams (*Letters*; No 499), and in an earlier letter to George Smith she refers to the novel as 'The Speksioneer' (*Letters*; No 451a), allowing the supposition that Kinraid was the original hero. But McVeagh's way of describing the volumes' focus, "Volume One was to deal ...", is awkward as he can only be inferring this intention from the finished work; no independent account of Gaskell's intentions has survived but McVeagh's wording reads as though the work is a failure to realise a design that he is describing from another source. McVeagh's wording probably arises from his feeling that he can locate in the early part of the book reasons for the failure in Volume Three (the use of extraneous material such as the battle of Acre), but his feeling has led him to a doubtful expression of procedure and into a slightly inaccurate picture of the focus of each volume. Although Kinraid is an important figure in Volume One, this section cannot be said to deal mostly with him - neither in quantity nor in qualitative emphasis. The contrast between the types produced by Monkshaven life is the narrative's concern from the beginning, and Kinraid takes his place in the first volume as part of a study in contrasts.

Easson (1979) describes the three volume design of *Sylvia's Lovers* more briefly as he is not using it for an extended critical purpose. He sees the design as being much more successful than McVeagh does, comparing its success with the difficulties evident in *Ruth* (pp 170 - 171). He concentrates

on the representative action of each volume, saying that the first

> ends with Sylvia committed to Charley Kinraid, and Philip at a height of his business career in the Fosters' offer of partnership; the second, after Charley's disappearance and Robson's death, ends with Philip engaged to Sylvia ... emphasis (is) on Philip having achieved what ought to be his personal ideal, as the partnership was his worldly one. And the third volume shows the destruction of both his public and emotional life. (p 170)

With only a slight change of emphasis, this is the account of the three volume structure that will be used in this analysis. The change is that although the New Year party at the Corney farm does reveal Sylvia's responsiveness to Kinraid, their actual engagement is kept for Chapter 16, in the second volume. If this is noted, then the way in which all the essential events in the love story occur in the second volume will be clearer - all the events except Kinraid's return and Sylvia's vow against Philip, that is. What this emphasis seeks to clarify is that the volumes have the simple and familiar relationship to each other of preparation, action, and consequences. The scheme of *Sylvia's Lovers* does not come across as badly as this, but the suggestion allows the first volume to appear in the light of a long, leisurely introduction to Monkshaven and its types, an account of Sylvia's girlhood and of Philip's constant but increasing love for her. It is only towards the end of this volume that Sylvia begins to see Kinraid as more than a fascinating, heroic figure. In the second volume, Sylvia is forced by a combination of accident and deception into a marriage with Philip who is fundamentally alien to her nature, and in the third, when the truth has been revealed, expiation for the wrongs committed becomes possible. Sylvia's own wrong (her vow against Philip) occurs in the third volume, but as her action is a consequence of the lie that Philip has allowed in order to possess her, consequences and expiation can be seen as the unifying purpose of this volume.

As a prologue to the love story, Volume One concentrates on the whole community in which events are to occur. Its major

events are Darley's funeral which brings all of Monkshaven to the church on the cliffs overlooking both land and sea - "types of life and eternity" (6: 55) - and the Corney's New Year party. This too brings members of the community together in celebration, matching the ceremony of the funeral, but the party is a joyous celebration of the renewal of life, and the setting is much more prosaic than the cliff-top church. In each scene, Sylvia, Philip and Kinraid meet (they have only one other meeting, in Chapter 10), and the tensions generated can be felt to increase steadily from meeting to meeting. Through the correspondences between these two scenes, it is established that the extremes of joy and sorrow are what characterize Monkshaven life, and that momentous personal experiences occur during and because of community events. At Darley's funeral Sylvia first awakens to the significance of mortality and its connection with morality (7: 65) and she also discovers in Kinraid an heroic embodiment of man's power to resist what is destructive in mens' actions. She never expresses his attraction in this way, but his bravery in resisting the press-gang clearly represents to Sylvia the possibility of challenging cruel and unjust forces. At the party Sylvia responds to Kinraid's admiration but also finds his attentions distressing as they are made under the eyes of the assembled guests. Previously she has been responsive to his dashing gallantry alone and the public discovery that he can mean more to her, and that her girlhood is at an end, is difficult for Sylvia. Her distress is matched by Philip's dismay as he sees, in public, his cherished hopes of stirring Sylvia's affection dashed by Kinraid.

Volume Two also has two major events: the press-gang's capture of Kinraid and the attack on the Randyvowse which leads to Daniel Robson's death. The interaction between personal and communal experience is continued in these events although the thematic connection is not a matter of discoveries as it was in the first volume, but of intervention. The press-gang intervenes in Kinraid and Sylvia's love, and Philip, a witness to the capture, does the same in failing to carry Kinraid's

message back to Sylvia. He, of course, is acting so as to further his own cause with Sylvia. In the later event, Robson leads an attack on the press-gang's activities and his intervention, leading to his execution, also serves to direct the course of Sylvia's life. These parallels also allow a comparison between the sudden, harsh and public punishment which Robson suffers and the long private agony Philip undergoes. Kinraid too fits the emerging pattern, for he and Daniel are placed in enforced captivity while Philip, once his lie is exposed, offers himself as a soldier, which is a kind of voluntary impressment of himself.

The third volume is divided in two parts: the first presents the exposure of Philip's lie and culminates in Sylvia's vow, and the second presents the expiation of Philip and Sylvia for the wrongs they have done one another. At first Philip submits himself to the hardships of army life hoping that such service will be some reparation for his wrongs. His first foolish hope of gaining some of Kinraid's glamour soon disappears, but once the rigours of action are over for him, he discovers that he has still to submit himself to the painful self-examination which has been Sylvia's lot while alone in Monkshaven. In a tragedy like *Sylvia's Lovers*, the resolution of the temperamental, cultural divide which lies at the root of the disasters, is properly found in such a period of matched self-examination and the death-bed moment of forgiveness that it makes possible; events can lead to nothing more enduring than a moment of reconciliation.

When the novel's action is put as schematically as this, it can be seen to bear a striking similarity to the design of *North and South*. Although that novel's action was discussed as occurring in four phases, the first two are a result of Gaskell's decision to establish the two major settings separately; thus the South is dealt with at some length before the move North, and the scene-setting occupies two phases. The action proper begins after the two-part opening with the demonstration at Thornton's mill, and, as in *Sylvia's Lovers*,

the essential action all occurs in the middle section, leaving the last for expiation and resolution. Gaskell's inclination to use an expansive, slow lead-in to the main action is evident from her first novel onwards, for in *Mary Barton* the action's kernel is reached only when Barton is chosen to kill Harry Carson. In *Wives and Daughters*, the opening sequences are also a development of this method, for, while Mr Gibson's re-marriage is an event in its own right, his decision and Molly's responses are a vital preparation for Cynthia's advent and its consequences.

North and South demonstrates the forging of a new consciousness demanded by the new society of the industrial North; *Sylvia's Lovers* continues Gaskell's interest in the problems of achieving understanding between members of a society whose lives and attitudes are significantly different. In the former novel the differences were those of economic groups, of masters and men, but in the latter the differences are those of response to the challenges of a hostile environment: differences in temperament. One of the most interesting features of the evident continuity in Gaskell's concerns is that she chose to write *Sylvia's Lovers* as an historical novel. It is quite possible, as Easson suggests (1979: 159), that writing *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* 1957 had reawakened Gaskell's interest in Yorkshire which she said, in the Preface to *Mary Barton*, she had put aside when she began that novel. Her continuing interest in Yorkshire and its past is evident in a letter to George Smith, her publisher.

> I like to write about character, & the manners of a particular period - for the life of a great Yorkshire Squire of the last century, I think I could have done pretty well; but I cannot manage politics. (*Letters*; No 370)

Gaskell is explaining her refusal to write a biography of Sir George Saville, but these signs of continuing interest cannot, of course, explain the specific creation of *Sylvia's Lovers*. The critic has rather to redirect the enquiry and look at what was achieved in the form given to the material.

What Gaskell has created by setting in an historical novel

a study of tragic failures to understand others is the opportunity to make her readers conscious that they are in the same problematic relationship to the *mores* of a past society as are the contrasted members of that society to each other. The creation of this awareness is accomplished by the narration of *Sylvia's Lovers*, and in the analysis of the narrative method which follows, it will be suggested that there are three aspects of the plot which shaped the narration. The first is the need to bridge the sixty year gap between reader and the fictional events; the second is the need to create a perspective on events which will embrace both the role of "blind fate" in the tragic suffering of the protagonists and a belief in Divine Providence, a belief which places a moral responsibility on man for his own actions; and the third is the fact that in the early stages of the action, Sylvia has very little awareness of herself, she has little inner life which the reader can enter and therefore the narration has to sustain the balance of interest between her and Philip. The first and second tasks are in some ways similar, for the reader's historical distance will, when controlled and united with a warm interest in the individual protagonists, provide a dual perspective which is comparable to that needed to see that events are shaped both by fate and by actions for which man must bear responsibility.

The narration which results from these aspects of the plot is a complex one which exploits the full range of the authorial mode, extending from its most subjective capacities to the creation of a detached, apparently objective authorial commentary. To clarify the way in which the narration's complex task has been met, the discussion which follows proposes that four voices can be distinguished within the authorial mode of *Sylvia's Lovers*: the story-teller's voice, the explicit narrator's voice, the implicit narrator's voice, and that of point-of-view narration.

ii) The Narration of *Sylvia's Lovers*.

The description of the four voices in the narration and the account of their functions which follows draws on examples from the opening chapters of the novel, for this is where the varied effects of the narration are most striking. The relationship of the voices is best thought of as Stanzel (1971) thought of that of the different modes of narration: as circular. A diagrammatic representation of them would therefore be:

1. story-teller

4. point-of-view

2. explicit narrator

3. implicit narrator

The circular relationship is used to suggest that transition occurs easily and smoothly from one voice to another, usually in the order suggested by the numbering, although the transition can sometimes omit one or more of the voices. Thus the story-teller's voice may be immediately followed by either the explicit narrator or the implicit narrator, but a direct transition from the story teller to point of view narration has not been observed. As the most usual transitions are from the first to the second voice, the second to the third and so on, the analysis of the characteristics of each voice is followed by an example of transition from that voice to the next. The numbering on the diagram also indicates the order in which the voices and their function will be described.

An example of the first voice, the story teller's, comes in the novel's opening sentences:

> On the north-eastern shores of England there is a town called Monkshaven, containing at the present day about fifteen thousand inhabitants. There were, however, but half the number at the end of the last century, and it was at that period that the events narrated in the following pages occurred. (1: 1)

The characteristics of this voice are that it locates itself in the present tense, and this tense governs its deictic phrases indicative of time and place. A phrase such as "at the present day" is more usually rendered as "now" by this voice, and the weightier formulation used here is probably a result of this being the novel's opening sentence. This voice's present coincides with that of the reader, allowing a direct communication which sets apart the fictional world that is being presented. For this reason, the time of the narrated events is spoken of as being in the past, as being "at that period". Although it is not present in the sentences quoted above, the first person pronoun is usually used by this voice. In Chapter 1 the narration soon moves into the obviously more exclusive form of address to the reader in the phrase "At the time of which I write ..." (1: 2). Because the voice calls attention to its co-temporality with the reader and to its activity in relating past events, it has been termed the story-telling voice. But two points must be made which qualify some of the possible implications of this term. Firstly, although the story-teller alludes overtly to the telling of a story, "the events narrated in the following pages", the fictionality of these events is not stressed. The material handled is presented as a chronicle (as in the use of "occurred") rather than as a fabulation. Secondly, although this narrating voice identifies its presence very vigorously, it does not assert an individual personality for itself. The voice remains that of the chronicler who is temporally distanced from the material but who seldom exploits this distance by, for example, putting personal opinions forward or by running to ironic observation. The important identity which this voice implies is that of the average nineteenth century reader; in this it corresponds to Miller's (1968) idea of a community's collective consciousness.

The second voice, that of the explicit narrator, may be heard in this sentence:

> And in the moorland hollows, as in these valleys, trees and underwood grew and flourished; so that, while on the bare swells of the high land you shivered at the waste desolation of the scenery, when you dropped into these wooded "bottoms" you were charmed with the nestling shelter which they gave.
> (1: 3)

While the story teller's voice draws attention to the temporal and cultural gap between reader and Monkshaven, this voice is used to bridge that gap, and to bridge it overtly so that the reader is aware of its activity. It describes, explains and comments but, unlike the first voice, it does not usually use the present tense. Its use of the past tense (usually the imperfect) places its activity within the fictional world so that the reader does not feel that world recede when it speaks, as happens when the story-teller comes forward. Further, because the explicit narrator's voice positions itself within fictional time, the use of "you" in the passage above does not lead the reader to a distinguishing self-awareness as would happen if the story-teller were to use that pronoun. Instead, it invites the reader into the setting being described, offering an imaginative experience of the landscape, confident that what may be new to the reader in those "moorland hollows" will take on familiarity through the already known pleasure of finding a "nestling shelter". This use of outside experience is not disruptive of the fictional world because, as with the explicit narrator's comments on events and characters, the assumption that the reader can be transported into the fictional world is at work. This world does not fill the sentence (the punctuation of the dialect word "bottoms" is enough to prevent this), but the possibility of being absorbed into it is present in a way that the story teller's voice excludes. In the combination of these two voices Gaskell is handling a slightly contradictory activity (the reader both is and is not absorbed into the fictional world) that is familiar throughout authorial narration.

Occasionally the explicit narrator does adopt the present tense, but its use exerts a different control over the reader's relationship to the past fictional world from that which the story-teller creates. The explicit narrator's voice uses the present tense in order to distinguish the general case on which its comments are based from the particular example in the fictional world.

> People speak of the way in which harp-playing sets off a graceful figure; spinning is almost as becoming an employment. A woman stands at the great wool-wheel, one arm extended, the other holding the thread, her head thrown back to take in all the scope of her occupation; or if it is the lesser spinning-wheel for flax, - and it was this that Sylvia moved forwards to to-night - the pretty sound of the buzzing, whirring motion, the attitude of the spinner, foot and hand alike engaged in the business - the bunch of gay coloured ribbon that ties the bundle of flax on the rock - all make it into a picturesque piece of domestic business that may rival harp-playing any day for the amount of softness and grace which it calls out.
> (4: 36)

The past tense, "and it was this that Sylvia moved forwards to", has been used for the particular action in the fictional world about which a series of present tense claims such as "spinning is almost as becoming an employment", are made. But, although particular and general are placed in different temporal categories, transition from one to the other is almost imperceptible because the explicit narrator uses no other means of distancing itself from the fictional world. Its closeness may be seen in the deictic "tonight" which, belonging both to Sylvia and to the explicit narrator, unites the fictional action with the time of the generalisation being made. The story-teller's voice could not have used this word without seeming confused in its orientation; a phrase such as 'on that night' is what it would have to use. By linking Sylvia in time with the generalisation, the explicit narrator cancels the usual effect of temporal distancing that the story-teller's use of the present tense achieves, and the pause to comment does not diminish Sylvia's presence.

These two voices are sufficiently alike for the job of narrating to pass quite easily, even unobtrusively, from one to the other.

> Somehow in this country sea thoughts followed the thinker far inland; whereas in most other parts of the island, at five miles from the ocean, he has all but forgotten the existence of such an element as salt water. The great Greenland trade of the coasting towns was the main and primary cause of this, no doubt. But there was also a dread and an irritation in every one's mind, at the time of which I write, in connection with the neighbouring sea.
> (1: 4)

This passage begins with the explicit narrator, "sea thoughts followed the thinker far inland", and ends with the story-teller, "at the time of which I write". The transition is controlled in two ways: in the first place the reader is asked to join the comparison between Monkshaven where sea thoughts accompany life inland, and the southern, familiar world where sea thoughts have less influence; in the second place, the past fictional world ("followed") is linked to the present act of narrating ("I write") by the present perfect of "he has all but forgotten", a tense which places the recognition of a past act in the present moment. The smooth transition probably does not rise into the reader's conscious experience, but it is part of the means by which Gaskell gives her reader direct, immediate experience of Monkshaven while also creating an intuitive awareness of the difficulties entailed in entering a strange world. As this passage ends, it is the story teller's voice which introduces the new factor in Monkshaven life, the press-gang, as part of the forgotten cruelty of that world to which the reader must respond carefully.

It is the activities of the third voice, the implicit narrator, which do most to give actuality to this unknown fictional world. The use of characters' point of view might well have played the major role here, but, especially in the first volume, Gaskell makes comparatively infrequent use of the fourth narrating voice. This is the implicit narrator's voice:

> Every now and then they wandered off from the one grand subject of thought, but Sylvia, with unconscious art, soon brought the conversation round to the fresh consideration of the respective merits of grey and scarlet.
> (2: 10)

The verb tenses remain within the fictional past so that the comment and explanation offered does not draw attention to itself. The quiet observation "with unconscious art" does remind a reader who stops to reflect that there must be an observing narrator present who has privileged access to what transpires, but what this voice conveys is always unobtrusively given. This narration is very close to what Stanzel (1971)

called "neutral narration" where no mediating narrative presence is felt by the reader. The proximity to the characters which this voice affords the reader is often helped by the use of a phrase such as "the one grand subject" which may not actually claim to be the character's own expressed thoughts or feelings but which is strongly evocative of his or her personality.

The task of reporting the thoughts and feelings of the characters falls to the implicit narrator who may use report so as to fuse a character's feeling with the additional information that a swiftly moving narration needs to convey, as in this sentence:

> The girls felt as if they should never come to the market-place, which was situated at the crossing of Bridge Street and High Street. (2: 13)

But report is often used in circumstances where more intimate forms of rendering a character's feelings might have been used. When Philip, inclined to see himself as his young cousin's mentor, is annoyed by Sylvia's teasing of him, his feelings are handled largely by the implicit narrator although they remain private to Philip and could have been rendered in point-of-view narration throughout.

> Philip's face flushed. Not because of the smuggling; everyone did that, only it was considered polite to ignore it; but he was annoyed to perceive how quickly his little cousin had discovered that his practice did not agree with his preaching, and vexed too to see how delighted she was to bring out the fact. He had some little idea, too, that his uncle might make use of his practice as an argument against the preaching he had lately been indulging in in opposition to Daniel. (4: 37 - 8)

The second sentence of this passage has the characteristics of point-of-view narration, characteristics which will be described next, but after the second semi-colon it moves away from imitating the active workings of Philip's mind to report from a greater distance what he is feeling. This distance allows the narration access to a vocabulary, in words such as "preaching" and "indulging", which convey a greater clarity about Philip's activities than he actually has himself and which indicate that one of the narration's undertakings

here is to give the firmest, most economical account of Philip's nature that it can.

There are other reasons why characters' thoughts and feelings are more extensively conveyed through this voice than through point-of-view narration, but first this voice must be described, and even before that, the transition from explicit to implicit narration needs to be demonstrated.

As with the differences between the story teller and the explicit narrator, there is a grey area between the second and third voices which makes an easy transition possible. In fact, this movement can be much less noticeable than that between voices one and two. In this passage, for example, both voices are present, and yet their individual contributions hardly distinguish themselves.

> Philip, who sometimes pursued an argument longer than was politic for himself, especially when he felt sure of being on the conquering side, did not see that Daniel Robson was passing out of the indifference of conscious wisdom into that state of anger which ensues when a question becomes personal in some unspoken way. Robson had contested this subject once or twice before, and had the remembrance of former disputes to add to his present vehemence.
> (4: 35)

The implicit narrator has the main clause, "Philip ... did not see ..." and the explicit narrator has the subordinate one, "who sometimes pursued ...". But, as the implicit narrator is handling a negative fact, something that neither man consciously comprehended, it is giving the reader privileged information that is very like the kind of information that the explicit narrator gives about Philip. The similarity of the two pieces of information is what allows the implicit narrator to move into generalisation, "that state of anger which ensues ...", something it cannot normally do without becoming unsuitably obtrusive. Although the first sentence ends on a normally distancing generalisation, the return to Robson in the second sentence is smooth and instantaneous.

One of the earliest examples of the fourth voice, point-of-view narration, comes when Hester's annoyance at Sylvia's behaviour is presented.

> What business had the pretty little creature to reject kindly-meant hospitality in the pettish way she did, thought Hester. And oh! what business had she to be so ungrateful and to try and thwart Philip in his thoughtful wish of escorting them through the streets of the rough, riotous town. What did it all mean? (3: 29)

Its chief characteristic may be seen in the second sentence of this passage, where the enactment of Hester's thoughts allows the narrator and Hester to be co-present in the sentence.[1] The exclamation comes directly from Hester while the past tense, "had", comes from the narrator's presence in the fictional world. If the verb had been in the form of Hester's actual thoughts, it would have been given the immediacy of the present tense, "has". The final question is given in the form that Hester actually puts it to herself, and, although the verb is in the narrator's past tense, a mediating presence does not make itself felt. As with the implicit narrator's rendering of a character's immediacy, there is an evocation but not an exclusive use of the character's own language.

In the early chapters, when point-of-view is used, it is usually for the swift evocation of a minor character's impassioned thoughts, as when the Captain's letter to Dr Wilson is echoed (6: 57 - 8) or when Darley's father's grief is presented (6: 59). As the example of Hester indicates, the narration only uses point-of-view for one of the major characters when he or she consciously steps aside to commune with the inner self. Because Sylvia is not accustomed to extensive reflection and because she hardly understands the processes of her inner life until she learns to understand Philip's having lied to her about Kinraid's capture, there is little occasion for her point of view. But, being unusual for Sylvia, this mode is suited to brief use when she first meets Kinraid, "the nearest approach to a hero she had ever seen" (6: 61).

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1. This is what Pascal (1977) calls Free Indirect Speech.

> ... Sylvia ... went away, wondering how Molly could talk so freely to such a hero; but then, to be sure, he was a cousin, and probably a sweetheart, and that would make a great deal of difference, of course.
> (6: 62)

Her own reasoning establishes her child-like innocence perfectly. Although Sylvia's thoughts are reaching the reader directly, the verb tense remains that of the narrator. This helps the smooth transition to the implicit narrator's telling observation in the next sentence, "Meanwhile her own cousin kept close by her side." The change in voice ensures that Sylvia herself remains unaware of the attitudes that she has to Philip which she is drawing on in order to understand Molly's behaviour to her cousin, Kinraid.

In point-of-view narration, the deictics are usually those of the character and not the narrator, but, especially in Volume One, when Gaskell uses point-of-view narration she does not always use deictics which give full strength to her character's presence. When, for example, Philip reflects on Sylvia's behaviour at the Corney's party, the phrase used for the temporal location of the party sustains the narrator's presence too.

> There was not a sign of Sylvia's liking for him to be gathered from the most careful recollection of the past evening. It was of no use thinking that there was.
> (13: 138)

Point-of-view narration would allow Gaskell to use "the most careful recollection of last night" in the first sentence,[1] and would thereby give Philip's orientation very strongly. But the phrase used, "the most careful recollection of the past evening" works to sustain the narrator's co-presence; it is a deliberate toning down of Philip's presence which serves two structural considerations at this point. The first is the balance between Sylvia and Philip and the second is the way in which this balance has to take its place amongst

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1. An example of such a use of the character's deictic comes in Chapter 7:

> Today he was anxious to show his sympathy with Sylvia as far as he could read what was passing her mind; but how was he to guess the multitude of tangled thoughts in that unseen receptacle? (7: 66)

other important factors in Volume One such as the hisory of Monkshaven and its place in national events.

The process by which Philip disregards what he can see of Sylvia's feelings and persuades himself of the rightness of his pursuing her is beginning at the Corney's party, and is to culminate in his silence about Kinraid's capture. Within this process, the degree of honest self-examination which informs his dishonesty is remarkable, and remarkably convincingly done. It presupposes a rich inner life which could have afforded the narration extensive, direct use of his thoughts and feelings (it is a narrative method expecially suited to the subject of self-deception), but had this been done, Sylvia would have been overshadowed. Her actions are not yet accompanied by the careful reflection that is characteristic of Philip, and so the implicit or explicit narrators' voices have to be used when her unrecognised motives and feelings are conveyed to the reader. But, as these voices cannot bring the character as close to the reader as can point-of-view narration, Sylvia's capacity to hold the reader's interest would be threatened if Philip's potential had been thoroughly dramatically explored in the first volume. Once the circumstances which produce the tensions between Sylvia and Philip, and once the nature of Monkshaven, its daily life, its history, and its place in the national life, have been established, then the narration can concentrate on the immediate presentation of characters' personal, individual ways of experiencing events. The diminishing attention to Monkshaven affairs in Volume Three accompanies Sylvia's growing awareness of her inner life and the liberation of point-of-view narration for more extensive use.

The smooth transitions from one narrating voice to another give an overall effect of varied but homogeneous narration. It is to this effect that Craik (1975) is referring when she says that when "compelled" to use the authorial tone, Gaskell "does so most sparingly, and intermingles it with the other parts of the novel's technique" and that Gaskell establishes

a position "of near-invisibility relative to both the narrative and the reader" (p 147). Craik's attitude in "compelled" comes partly from the fact that she herself seems to dislike authorial intervention, and partly from her judgement that it is remote from Gaskell's own strengths.

> ... concerned though she is with assessment, judgement and proportion, she always prefers to allow these to emerge through the closest possible contact between the reader and the experience, uncoloured by the sense of a narrator as a medium. (p 147)

This comment would certainly be true of *North and South* but it is misleading to suggest that the aspect of authorial narration being termed the story-teller's voice in this study plays as small a part as possible in *Sylvia's Lovers*. In view of the difficulties evident in Gaskell's use of a first-person, commenting narrator in *Mary Barton*, the return to this kind of authorial narration in *Sylvia's Lovers* is an important one in her development as a novelist, and within the novel itself the possibilities of external comment which the story teller and explicit narrator share, play a vital role in establishing the kind of relationship between reader and fictional world which the theme of misunderstanding needs. There are many instances in the narration where such an abrupt cut is made to a commenting voice that the reader is forced to be aware of the presence and power of an outside voice. Here, for example, the reader is pulled up sharply by the different ways of seeing the same event:

> Darley had been resisting the orders of an officer in his Majesty's service. What would become of due subordination and loyalty, and the interests of the service, and the chances of beating those confounded French, if such conduct as Darley's was to be encouraged? (Poor Darley! he was past all evil effects of human encouragement now!)
> (6: 57 - 8)

The three sentences in this passage come, in this order, from the implicit narrator, from point-of-view and from the explicit narrator. The last move (backwards to voice three) is an unusual one and is made to be as obvious a jump as possible. Gaskell is establishing a narrative mode that allows her reader both an intimacy with her characters and a distance from them, a perspective which can operate for the reader as

a simultaneous overall effect although the narration obviously has to achieve it sequentially.

It is the story-teller's and the explicit narrator's voices which do most, especially in the first volume, to control the reader's relationship to the fictional world. It was suggested earlier that Gaskell's major purpose in establishing control was to make the reader aware of the delicacy needed in relating to a distant fictional world, and to understand from such a demand what it is like for characters in that world to have problems in relating to one another. Three steps to further this purpose which are taken by these two voices can be shown: the story-teller's voice is used to give the reader a suitable set of attitudes with which to approach Monkshaven; it also draws explicit attention to the problems involved in viewing the past; lastly, the explicit narrator demonstrates the presence of similar problems in Monkshaven itself as the community tries to account for its own current developments.

In the first of these steps, the story-teller leads the reader into appropriate ways of viewing the press-gang's activities at the end of the eighteenth century.

> Now all this tyranny (for I can use no other word) is marvellous to us; we cannot imagine how it is that a nation submitted to it for so long, even under any warlike enthusiasm, any panic of invasion, any amount of loyal subservience to the governing powers. When we read of the military being called in to assist the civil power in backing up the press-gang, of parties of soldiers patrolling the streets, and sentries with screwed bayonets placed at every door while the press-gang entered and searched each hole and corner of the dwelling; when we hear of churches being surrounded during divine service by troops, while the press-gang stood ready at the door to seize men as they came out from attending public worship, and take these instances as merely types of what was constantly going on in different forms, we do not wonder at lord mayors, and other civic authorities in large towns, complaining that a stop was put to business by the danger which the tradesmen and their servants incurred in leaving their houses and going into the streets, infested by press-gangs. (1: 6)

The insistent use of "we" ensures that the reader adopts the attitudes being presented. It is not a display of the story-

teller's personal responses so much as indirect instruction to the reader on how to feel about the information conveyed; and it is instruction given in the guise of already shared feelings. The creation of a reader is not a process that is likely to draw attention to itself as the information and the response suggested form a readily acceptable package, but if the tactic does make itself felt, it will probably serve to give the reader a heightened awareness of the values which are part of his or her cultural identity.

It is to changes in values wrought by time that the story-teller is attending in this next passage as the voice comments on the problems arising from the apparent clarity with which the past can be viewed. To the viewer who is seeking some share in the experiences of that past, such clarity may be an obstacle to the desired rapport.

> In looking back to the last century, it appears curious to see how little our ancestors had the power of putting two things together, and perceiving either the discord or harmony thus produced. Is it because we are farther off from those times, and have, consequently, a greater range of vision? Will our descendants have a wonder about us, such as we have about the inconsistency of our forefathers, or a surprise at our blindness that we do not perceive that, holding such and such opinions, our course of action must be so and so, or that the logical consequence of particular opinions must be convictions which at present we hold in abhorrence? It seems puzzling to look back on men such as our vicar, who almost held the doctrine that the king could do no wrong, yet were ever ready to talk of the glorious Revolution, and to abuse the Stuarts for having entertained the same doctrine, and tried to put it in practice. But such discrepancies ran through good men's lives in those days. It is well for us that we live at the present time, when everybody is logical and consistent.
>
> (6: 58 - 9)

The story-teller is attempting to come to terms with the fact that although Dr Wilson preaches a miserably inadequate sermon at Darley's funeral, a sermon which could do nothing to reconcile the man's grieving father to the injustice of his loss, "our vicar" loses none of the respect that the community gave him by virtue of his office. He is a kindly man who is often willing to overlook aspects of the official teaching of his church in order to extend his generosity to

others, but Dr Wilson cannot cope with the discord between "the laws of man and the laws of Christ" (6: 58). At the same time, the community itself makes no attempt to judge the office by the performance of its incumbent and is content to allow him the dignity of his office rather than that which his funeral sermon deserves. Recognising these inconsistencies, and that the passage of time has given them particular clarity, the story-teller has to warn the reader not to judge Monkshaven with the rigour that such clarity might encourage, but to seek to understand that world with the same sympathy that "we" would ask for for ourselves.

The discretion with which passages such as these seek to equip the reader will make all the more enjoyable a recognition that Monkshaven comprehends itself little better than "we" comprehend our own world. Such enjoyment is well to the fore in the explicit narrator's account of the community's speculations about John and Jeremiah Fosters' wealth.

> The story went that John and Jeremiah Foster were so rich that they could buy up all the new town across the bridge. They had certainly begun to have a kind of primitive bank in connection with their shop, receiving and taking care of such money as people did not wish to retain in their houses for fear of burglars. No one asked them for interest on the money thus deposited, nor did they give any; but, on the other hand, if any of their customers, on whose character they could depend, wanted a little advance, the Fosters, after due inquiries made, and in some cases due security given, were not unwilling to lend a moderate sum without charging a penny for the use of their money. All the articles they sold were as good as they knew how to choose, and for them they expected and obtained ready money. It was said that they only kept on shop for their amusement. Others averred that there was some plan of a marriage running in the brothers' heads - a marriage between William Coulson, Mr. Jeremiah's wife's nephew (Mr. Jeremiah was a widower), and Hester Rose, whose mother was some kind of distant relation, and who served in the shop along with William Coulson and Philip Hepburn. Again, this was denied by those who averred that Coulson was no blood-relation, and that, if the Fosters had intended to do anything considerable for Hester, they would never have allowed her and her mother to live in such a sparing way, eking out their small income by having Coulson and Hepburn for lodgers. No; John and Jeremiah would leave all their money to some hospital or to some charitable institution. But, of course, there was a reply to this; when are there not many sides to an argument about a possibility concerning which no facts are known? Part of the reply turned on this: the old gentlemen had, probably,

> some deep plan in their heads in permitting their cousin to take Coulson and Hepburn as lodgers, the one a kind of nephew, the other, though so young, the head man in the shop; if either of them took a fancy to Hester, how agreeably matters could be arranged!
>
> All this time Hester is patiently waiting to serve Sylvia, who is standing before her a little shy, a little perplexed and distracted, by the sight of so many pretty things.
> (3: 20 - 21)

The mimicry of the town's gossipy debate about the brothers' plans for their employees is formally equivalent to the story-teller's evocation of how the reader will view, say, the activities of the press-gang. As the reader works from the attitudes of his age, so the townsfolk work with the generalisations and speculations available and appropriate to their world. The liveliness with which their debate can be heard is one of the narration's major sources of interest, and it means that when present opinion about the past is expressed or alluded to by the story-teller, such comment must take its place as one of the several possible ways of viewing that world.

One further example of the story-teller's instructing the reader how to approach Monkshaven is needed, for it combines the information about past attitudes that the reader needs with the problems of finding a possible explanation for those attitudes. When Sylvia and her mother listen, in Chapter 9, to Daniel and Kinraid boasting about their smuggling adventures, and do not find the men's glorying in their dishonesty at all disturbing, the story-teller has to intervene. After praising contemporary honesty in trade, the story-teller points out that if Sylvia had ever practised dishonesty in her own life equivalent to that which she was hearing praised, she would have broken her mother's heart. The disjunction between personal honesty and communal cheating is then explained through the injustices of the salt tax, an explanation about which the story-teller says:

> It may seem curious to trace up the popular standard of truth to taxation; but I do not think the idea would be so very far-fetched. (9: 85)

The purposes of the whole passage are in one sense simple - to make sure that the reader does not condemn the women unjustly for responding to smuggling in a way which may now seem immoral. And yet, as the quotation shows, the narrator undertakes more than this in offering an explanation of why matters were once seen differently. With the explanation comes an acknowledgment of its possible inadequacy. It would seem that the story-teller wants the reader to contemplate for a moment both the difficulty of understanding observed behaviour and the diffidence with which any account of it must be given. Inevitable cultural limitations on comprehension are being suggested and in such a way that although the warning is made to fit the attitudes of the mid-nineteenth century reader (as in the story-teller's praise of current honesty in "whatsoever we do" 9:85), the modern reader will also find valid the questioning self-awareness that it provokes. Because of the story-teller's asserted diffidence, and because the story-teller sometimes shows an incomplete knowledge[1] of Monkshaven people, these warnings are not felt to be imposed by a superior personality but to come from a voice which is engaged in the same efforts of comprehension on which the reader has embarked. Of course, it remains true that it is this same, professedly diffident voice which has set the reader on such a course.

The tact in which the story-teller unobtrusively instructs the reader means that this voice, apparently the one closest in quality to those characteristics that Stanzel (1971) gives to authorial narration, is not sufficiently typical to be completely represented by his comments. Describing the effect on the reader of the distance between the authorial narrator and the fictional world, Stanzel says, "In the case of the authorial narrative situation the centre of orientation is always identical with the now-and-here of the author in the act of narration." (p 27). This is obviously so in

1. As in "indeed I believe Sylvia was not more than seventeen at this time." (2: 12).

Sylvia's Lovers, but Stanzel says further that:

> The structure of meaning in an authorial novel is thus constructed mainly from the references and relationships between the fictional world and the figure of the authorial narrator and from the resulting tensions in values, judgements, and kinds of experience. (p 28)

There is an indication of an irony in the created tension which is not really applicable to *Sylvia's Lovers*. In *Tom Jones* and *Vanity Fair* the authorial narrator does deliberately set himself at odds with the characters at times and challenges the reader to side with one or the other. But Gaskell does not set out to exploit an ironic potential in this distance. Her narration is designed to recognise that there are inevitable differences in outlook and, within that recognition, to alert the reader to the tact needed when unfamiliar ways of life are explored. She is concerned to fill out the reader's comprehension rather than to set up a tension in values, judgement and experience.

It may well have been the experience of writing *Mary Barton* which enabled Gaskell in her later novel to control the distance between her readers and her subject matter with such subtlety and to instruct them in a corresponding delicacy of expectation. As was argued in Chapter 1 of this study, the first person authorial narrator in *Mary Barton* reveals a damaging anxiety in Gaskell herself that her characters and her settings may not have sufficient power to convince her readers of their authenticity and of the validity of their outlook. But in *Sylvia's Lovers*, the story-teller is able both to draw attention to the strangeness of many Monkshaven attitudes and to assert their naturalness in that particular world. In accepting this, the reader also accepts the story-teller's lesson that when such differences are felt, they and any explanation of them must be approached with great care. Just as it is characteristic of Gaskell's relatively self-effacing narration that her story-teller should not assert a distinctive personality, it is also characteristic that she should demonstrate the difficulties of accounting for what is observed through the story-teller's efforts rather than

supply a passage of exposition. Her techniques allow her readers to feel that the questioning of responses is a continuing obligation, resting on reader and narrator alike.

The self-awareness that the story-teller promotes is valuable in the reader of any novel, but it has special importance in *Sylvia's Lovers* for it matches one of the central issues which face the protagonists of this work. Recognising the limited insight into people of another age which a cultural identity allows, is equivalent for the reader to what Sylvia and Philip are finally made to understand about their different temperaments and the tragedy in which they have been caught. It is one of the novel's *données* that Monkshaven would produce types as different as Sylvia and Philip, the one gay, high-spirited, impulsive and even reckless before the harshness of that world, and the other sober, reflective, careful and narrow. The temperamental divide between these main characters is, especially in its power to produce misunderstandings, equivalent to the temporal, cultural one between reader and the fictional world, and it is this equivalence that the story-teller's voice helps to create. Eventually Sylvia understands the cruelty of her rejection of Philip and of her failure to accept his very different nature, while Philip recognises that in trying to yoke to his own nature the gaiety which he so loved in his cousin, he was violating and destroying just what he wanted to cherish in her. Corresponding to this lesson in respecting differences is the gentle injunction that is placed on the reader to enter a new world with care and not to judge too simply from within a cultural norm, as Philip does when he misunderstands Kinraid because he "imagined that all men were like himself." (13: 142).[1]

In this way it can be seen that Gaskell needed the device of direct address to the reader in *Sylvia's Lovers* in a way that she did not in either *North and South* or *Wives and Daughters*. While *North and South* handles very similar issues of compre-

1. Other examples of this mistake come in 30: 297 and 37: 362.

hending with justice and what is culturally new and strange in the industrial world of the North, the difficulties are handled dramatically through the protagonist Margaret Hale. *Wives and Daughters* takes the readers back in time to what may have become unfamiliar, but the feeling in this novel is generally that the *mores* of its fictional world were still sufficiently directly connected to the time of writing for them to be sympathetically apprehended. A much more conscious bridge is needed into the cruelty and violent contrasts of Monkshaven and its fierce inhabitants than is called for by the slow-moving serenity of Hollingford.

But there is yet another factor which may have entailed the use of the two commenting voices in *Sylvia's Lovers*, and that is that unlike the other two novels, it is tragic. Although Philip and Sylvia finally understand what they have done to each other, their reconciliation comes too late to achieve change. Philip is on his deathbed, and Sylvia, although she seeks his forgiveness, cannot escape the loneliness she has known in her marriage. The insight she gains does not even affect her community's attitude to her and, after her death, she is quite wrongly remembered by her world. Tragedy springs naturally from Monkshaven's harshness, but, as Kinraid's story shows, tragedy is not inevitable. It is a deliberate choice on Gaskell's part to write tragedy and to do so she created protagonists who, unlike Kinraid, could not surmount life's blows. They have not his agility, nor have they the power to withstand or soften the collision of their temperaments. It is against the feeling that the tragic outcome is being too relentlessly pursued (as it sometimes is in Hardy's novels) that the story-teller's voice can, if necessary, protect Gaskell. For example, when Daniel faces arrest for his part in the burning of the Randyvowse, he remains at home and does not attempt to flee. It is a moment at which the reader could well have felt that the management of events is somewhat loaded in favour of tragedy if the story-teller and the explicit narrator had not been able to comment on the probability of such behaviour at that time in

that place.

> So things went on till twelve o'clock - dinner-time. If at any time that morning they had had the courage to speak together on the thought which was engrossing all their minds, it is possible that some means might have been found to avert the calamity that was coming towards them with swift feet. But among the uneducated - the partially educated - nay, even the weakly educated - the feeling exists which prompted the futile experiment of the well-known ostrich. They imagine that, by closing their own eyes to apprehended evil, they avert it. The expression of fear is supposed to accelerate the coming of its cause. Yet, on the other hand, they shrink from acknowledging the long continuance of any blessing in the idea that when unusual happiness is spoken about, it disappears. So, although perpetual complaints of past or present grievances and sorrows are most common among this class, they shrink from embodying apprehensions for the future in words, as if it then took shape and drew near.
>
> They all four sate down to dinner, but not one of them was inclined to eat. The food was scarcely touched on their plates, yet they were trying to make talk among themselves as usual; they seemed as though they dared not let themselves be silent, when Sylvia, sitting opposite to the window, saw Philip at the top of the brow, running rapidly towards the Farm. (25: 238)

The explicit narrator begins this passage, introducing the story-teller's explanation that people like the Robsons were ill-equipped to face disaster, especially as they were inclined to a superstitious feeling that to comment on either joy or trouble might be to intervene wrongly in its course. These observations are unusually coldly made - the fear of disturbing joy is sufficiently familiar to have allowed the story-teller's usual suggestion of a common humanity underlying all observed differences - but despite the slight uncertainty of tone, the narration recovers its poise as soon as it brings the Robsons into focus again and the explicit narrator's voice returns.

The uncertainty of this passage, its failure to sustain similarity while difference is being explained, is not a matter which usually affects the narration of *Sylvia's Lovers* even in the difficult kind of generalisation which moves from the general inwards to the particular example in the fiction. The other direction, from the particular out to the general,

is usually much less risky in narrative but is one which Gaskell's material does not allow her to employ from the beginning. Once Monkshaven has been firmly established, the narrative is able to move from its characters out to the reader as it generalises, giving Gaskell a readier, less obtrusive means of accommodating her reader to tragedy than the use of the commenting voices that has just been discussed. When Philip is walking home from the Corney's party, filled with despair by Sylvia's evident liking for Kinraid and by the loss of a chance to escort her home, his state of misery becomes the occasion of a generalisation which expands from him to the reader.

> Yet he went clear and straight along his way, having unconsciously left all guidance to the animal instinct which co-exists with the human soul, and sometimes takes strange charge of the human body, when all the nobler powers of the individual are absorbed in acute suffering. (12: 132)

As is to be expected of a novel which takes for its subject the tragedy arising from a refusal to respond to an alien character type, *Sylvia's Lovers* also shows a counter possibility to the tragedy it depicts. It occurs in Sylvia herself and, less predictably, it is the story-teller's voice which introduces the key element of spontaneous generosity in Sylvia's nature. She is shown as sometimes capable of an innocent openness of response to people who are different and, she feels, better than herself. It is in this openness that the work places a vital sense that tragedy in Sylvia's relationships, even with Philip, is not inevitable. Hester calls forth Sylvia's open, generous admiration when they meet after Darley's funeral and Sylvia learns that she has been to sit with the dead man's crippled sister. As an introduction to their meeting, the story-teller expands on a past absence of self-consciousness which made such wholesome admiration of virtue in others possible.

> In the agricultural counties, and among the class to which these four persons belonged, there is little analysis of motive or comparison of characters and actions, even at this present day of enlightenment. Sixty or seventy years ago there was still less. I do not mean that amongst thoughtful and serious people there was not much reading of such

> books as *Mason on Self-Knowledge*, and *Law's Serious Call*, or that there were not the experiences of the Weslyans, that were related at class-meeting for the edification of the hearers. But, taken as a general rule, it may be said that few knew what manner of men they were, compared to the numbers now who are fully conscious of their virtues, qualities, failings, and weaknesses, and who go about comparing others with themselves - not in a spirit of Pharisaism and arrogance, but with a vivid self-consciousness, that more than anything else deprives characters of freshness and originality.
>
> To return to the party we left standing on the high-raised footway that ran alongside of the bridle-road to Haytersbank. Sylvia had leisure in her heart to think "how good Hester is for sitting with the poor bed-ridden sister of Darley!" without having a pang of self-depreciation in the comparison of her own conduct with that she was capable of so fully appreciating. She had gone to church for the ends of vanity, and remained to the funeral for curiosity and the pleasure of the excitement. In this way a modern young lady would have condemned herself, and therefore lost the simple, purifying pleasure of admiration of another.
> (7: 64)

The relevance of Sylvia's "purifying pleasure" to her own refusal to respond generously to Philip makes her an obvious character in whom to place this capacity for selfless admiration. Kinraid is the other character in whom it could have been placed, but as he glides rather superficially over adversity, he is suggestive of a shallowness which might have counteracted the value of Sylvia's response. It could not have been placed in Philip, as his character already shows a tendency to allow his comparison of himself with others to be limited by his own interests. It is obvious that if Philip had been open to this "purifying pleasure" he might have had a means of resisting his powers of self-persuasion. As it is, he can find no counter to his will to possess Sylvia. It is his very capacity for self-examination which lets him down as he persuades himself all too easily that Sylvia's interests justify his silent lie about Kinraid's capture.

The thematic importance of Sylvia's openness is very great, but, as has been said, it is the story-teller's introducing the matter which makes its presence really arresting for the reader. As the subject of openness constitutes an argument

for intuitive, unmediated responsiveness, the implicit narrator's voice would seem to be the natural one to handle it. But this apparently contradictory allocation of subject matter to voice resolves itself in the value of utilising the story-teller's capacity to place matters directly before the reader for explicit personal consideration. This in turn enables a further refinement of the reader's responsiveness, for the story-teller does not leave the reader free to observe Sylvia's behaviour, but forces the reader to apply its example to his or her relationship to other people and to these characters. The emphasis in this passage on selfless responsiveness enjoins on the reader the understanding that a heightened self-awareness before remote or strange characters should not transcend a response to them, but should balance it. Heightened self-awareness in the service of the fictional world and not as an end in itself, is Gaskell's aim.

It is unlikely that many twentieth century readers will feel as open to self-reproach as the "modern young lady" evoked by the story-teller. But it is by no means certain that all nineteenth century readers would spontaneously have seen themselves in this picture either. What was being placed before them was a familiar, recognisable type which the reader would be prepared to adopt for the purposes of the novel and which the present-day reader, while being less familiar with a burdening self-consciousness, can also accept. Because the narrative is creating its reader, the passage's implicit instructions can still be effective today. In the later stages of the novel, the point emerging from the comparison made here between Sylvia and the reader is absorbed into the fictional world and is established as one applicable to Sylvia and Philip's relationship, but the story-teller's having first introduced responsiveness to others as a matter for the reader to consider personally, ensures that when the issue operates in the fictional world, the reader will continue to be personally constrained by it.

Support for the argument that on the whole Gaskell would tend

to direct her readers' attention to what is outside them in the fictional world rather than to extensive self-examination, comes from the advice that she gave to a would-be novelist in a letter written early in 1859, the year she went to Whitby to begin her researches for *Sylvia's Lovers*. The advice is phrased so as to correct the faults she had perceived in her correspondent's work, but it obviously reflects her own beliefs and practices.

> ... but I think you must observe what is *out* of you, instead of examining what is *in* you. It is always an unhealthy sign when we are too conscious of any of the physical processes that go on within us; and I believe in like manner that we ought not to be too cognizant of our mental proceedings, only take note of the results. But certainly - whether introspection be morbid or not, - it is not a safe training for a novelist. It is a weakening of the art which has crept in of late years.
> (*Letters*; No 420)

Gaskell is writing of the novelist's own activity in creating material, but it is reasonable to suppose that the activity that she was inclined to view as "unhealthy" and "morbid" in the artist would be one that she would view in the same way in daily life. That she herself practised earnest self-examination is evident from the pages of *My Diary* (1923) that she kept from 1835 to 1838, the early years of her two eldest daughters' lives, but her diary also shows that a major concern was that she should never impose her own wishes on their natures, that her childrens' personalities and capacities should never be obscured by her expectations, that, in short, she should never be so self-absorbed as to do to her children the equivalent of what Philip persuaded himself to do to Sylvia. If it is true that Gaskell was temperamentally unlikely to encourage extensive self-consciousness in her readers, the implications for *Sylvia's Lovers* are that she must have embarked on its narrative method, particularly the use of the story-teller's voice, because she felt that her tragic, historical subject matter exerted very strong demands for such treatment.

iii) Volume I: Discoveries.

Discussion of this volume will concentrate on Chapters 6 and 12 because they crystallize the major purposes of the volume. They are both climactic chapters, not in the sense that lengthy developments culminate there, but in the way that key moments in Sylvia and Philip's lives occur in them. The formal arrangements of these chapters are sufficiently similar to repay comparison and particularly attractive to an analysis of what Gaskell is doing in the first section of *Sylvia's Lovers*.

One of the chief accomplishments of this Volume that will be examined is the way Gaskell is able to establish Sylvia as an attractive, pervasive presence in the narrative while giving Philip, in his awkward strengths and his hopeless love for his cousin, a more fully defined presence which captures the reader's respect and interest. Sylvia is able to command affection but not, yet, the deeper responses that Philip demands, and the technical interest of Volume One lies in Gaskell's establishing this balance in such a way that its probable development is also indicated. There is frequent indication that Sylvia's charm is to be extended so that it can command the same quality of response that Philip is given.

The theme of this volume is to be located in Sylvia's emerging from childhood, her discovery of mortality, morality and love, discoveries which are counterbalanced by Philip's patient restraint on his own passionate hopes. The material that this volume has to introduce is thus extensive and complex. The contrasting types produced by Monkshaven are introduced; local attitudes to the question of the press-gang's authorised but unjust interference in their lives are established; relationships between national, public events and personal experiences are indicated; and finally, a way in which personal and communal tragedy can be comprehended is suggested. These last two matters are directed more fully at the reader in Volume One than they are seen to engage the

characters themselves, and the last issue is not given sustained development until the crises of Volume Two.

The first three chapters describe the press-gang's activities on the north-eastern coast of England at the end of the eighteenth century and show the first of its operations in Monkshaven itself. As this happens while Sylvia and Molly are in the town, the public calamity is mixed in with the first glimpses of Sylvia's childish hostility to her cousin's admiration. Philip's accompanying the girls back to Haytersbank enables the narrative to demonstrate the different, representative abilities of the townsfolk to comprehend and evaluate what the press-gang has done. As Philip and Daniel argue, the narration is able to clarify the issues of personal freedom and constituted authority raised by the event and to show how the people involved are inclined to respond. As Easson (1979) says:

> For Gaskell, though the great events of history do influence people's lives and one time is not like another, the significance of history is that most of us are not excitingly involved in its great events ... Gaskell commands the detailed unfolding of a way of life confined in space and time, but none the less passionate for that; her drama is of the interior rather than upon the stage of empire. (p 160)

Philip's attempts to champion the law and Daniel's angry individualism demonstrate that few of the Monkshaven characters are able to have national events play an actively reasoned part in their lives. While in *North and South* Gaskell did give her characters themselves an awareness that they were active in the shaping of a new national consciousness, her characters and their world do not allow any such emphasis in *Sylvia's Lovers*.

When Donkin, the tailor, completes the account of the press-gang's activities in Monkshaven, the story has become one that will provide interest for a sick man; the long standing anger it evokes in Daniel and Donkin's swift return to his stitching as he completes his story suggest that a degree of fatalism and brooding resentment is the town's usual response to such disasters. The gang's presence becomes one of the

large, external forces which shape people's lives in a tragic world. In Chapter 6, Darley's funeral, Sylvia is first brought to an awareness of the issues with which the other characters have been grappling, and then, in the following chapter, the narration returns to its study of the contrasting character types in Monkshaven when it presents the different responses of Molly Corney, Sylvia and Philip to the funeral and then juxtaposes these with Alice Rose's drawing up of her will. The chapter draws attention to its patterning in:

> That same evening, a trio alike in many outward circumstances sate in a small neat room in a house opening out of a confined court on the hilly side of the High Street of Monkshaven. A mother, her only child, and the young man who silently loved that daughter, and was favoured by Alice Rose, though not by Hester. (7: 68)

But it leaves the reader to place the contrasts thus indicated within the pattern of the different responses to life which is emerging. In Chapter 8 the comparison continues when Sylvia is attracted to the potency of Kinraid's wounded, heroic figure and then repelled by Philip's demands that she subject herself to a disciplined activity, book-learning, in which she can find no meaning. Kinraid's power to attract Sylvia by enlarging her world and implicitly reassuring her that man's natural, spontaneous abilities will sustain him, is amplified in the next chapter when he and Daniel swop increasingly improbable adventure stories. Sylvia, Philip and Kinraid are brought face to face in Chapter 10 and Sylvia's recognition that she has hurt her cousin gives her a foretaste of the pain and struggles to come. At the New Year party the tensions between the main characters begin the collision course that the reader already feels is inevitable, and in the last two chapters of this volume, the life to which Philip is naturally suited but which he must to some extent deny in his pursuit of Sylvia exerts its claims on him.

Although the overall direction of Volume One places primary emphasis on Sylvia's discoveries at Darley's funeral, the actual narration of the chapter gives her a relatively small place in the scene as it introduces several other, related

matters. The oppositions between Philip, Alice and Hester on the one hand, and Sylvia, Daniel and Kinraid on the other, oppositions which have so far been presented as a varied series of individual personalities, are brought together and given fairly explicit connection with the nature of life in Monkshaven. They are related to its economic base in the whaling industry and to its cliff-side setting. In this world, no quarter is given to its landsmen or to its seamen and so the alternatives for its people are either to meet its challenges head-on or to deny them in a life of submission to another vision - of the world to come. Those who respond directly to life's challenges in Monkshaven seem to be both the sailors and the farmers, while it is the town's traders who focus on the life to come. It is a distinction which reflects historical reality but does not play a larger structural role in the narrative. The structure of the chapter itself is directed at another contrast: that between personal experiences and communal events. It begins with a fairly lengthy scenic presentation of Sylvia's visit to the Corney farm, a matter which Gaskell could have treated briefly, subduing it in the narrator's report, but which she uses to remind the reader of the trivia of daily life within which events of some magnitude are occurring. Similarly, the chapter closes on a brief close-up of Molly, Sylvia, Kinraid and Philip at the grave-side in order to indicate how the feelings generated by momentous events affect those areas of life usually thought of as private. Within the chapter's central scene, another opposition comes forward as its major import - "the discord between the laws of man and the laws of Christ" (6: 58). This discord is most intensely registered by Darley's father who is pictured climbing the hill to the graveyard, his heart filled with angry, bewildered doubts.

> How came God to permit such cruel injustice of man? Permitting it, He could not be good. Then what was life and what was death, but woe and despair?
> (6: 59)

This man's anguish strikes the note which dominates the whole chapter. These are the questions that Sylvia gets her first glimpse of, and they are the spiritual equivalent of the secular debate about government and authority that Philip and Daniel

have in Chapter 4. For the characters, varied forms of encounter with these questions are what the narrative presents, but for the reader something more is done in the way of providing perspective for the experience, and it is on the way the narration creates this containing perspective that discussion will now concentrate.

One of the most striking features of this chapter is that the work's protagonists are virtually over-shadowed as the significance of its events is registered in the feelings of two very minor characters, Dr Wilson and Darley's father, neither of whom appears in person again. As part of this unexpected focus, the father's anguish and the minister's momentary wish that his sermon could be a more effective one, are both given in point-of-view narration.

> Had he nothing to say that should calm anger and revenge with spiritual power? no breath of the comforter to soothe repining into resignation? (6: 58)

The narration seeks to give as intense an immediacy as it can to the feelings of two men who are not to feature again after this chapter. There are several probable reasons why Gaskell used representative Monkshaven figures for the centre of the novel's first climactic chapter rather than the protagonists themselves. The first is that of the protagonists, Sylvia is the one to be most forcibly affected by the sailor's funeral, for it is her first encounter with these dimensions of life and is one which has profound effect on her. But as she is still a child, her undeveloped responses would not, had they been used, have taken the narration very far, and they are far more suitably treated as they are, as part of the whole town's responses. Philip is the other protagonist who might have been used, but he would have over-shadowed the degree of emphasis on Sylvia that is appropriate. The undertaking would also have been complicated by the fact that Philip is not as simply responsive to the injustice of Darley's death as are most Monkshaven people. What Gaskell gains in the use of two minor figures is a way of rendering the whole community's involvement in events and an opportunity to extend specifically Monkshaven matters until the funeral scene

becomes one which celebrates all human mortality as the long line of mourners is pictured climbing the cliff-side to the graveyard. Sylvia has been placed as part of this crowd, but had her consciousness been allowed to dominate its presentation, had the questions provoked by the event been given through her, then the majestic, impersonal sweep of the scene on the cliff-side would not have been possible. The impersonal sweep is done chiefly by the explicit narrator in a direct address to the reader, an invitation into the panorama so that individual human failures become insignificant and the procession takes on a grandeur which is consolatory while it sustains the occasion for grief.

The narration is working for a dual perspective on the scene which will allow the reader to feel both the pathos of individual suffering and the power that the scene takes on in presenting all human griefs in the context of a church overlooking town and sea, "types of life and eternity" (6: 55). The sweep into the impersonal is prepared for by the narration's use of two figures, Darley's father and Dr Wilson, who become representative types much more readily than the protagonists would do, and is also supported by numerous other features of the narration. For example, when Sylvia is pictured climbing the steps, awed by the occasion and annoyed by her vulgar friend's chatter, the scene culminates in this comment from the explicit narrator:

> The two mounted the steps alongside of many people; few words were exchanged, even at the breathing places, so often the little centres of gossip. Looking over the sea there was not a sail to be seen; it seemed bared of life, as if to be in serious harmony with what was going on inland. (6: 56)

The narration moves effortlessly beyond the details of Sylvia's experience carrying characters and readers to a shared glimpse of "serious harmony", a vision possible only on occasions like this. The particular peace which comes with a harmony of purpose is also indicated in the opening account of the season in which the funeral occurs.

> The wished-for day seemed long a-coming, as wished-for days most frequently do ... the weather cleared up into a dim kind

> of autumnal fineness, into anything but an Indian summer as far as regarded gorgeousness of colouring, for on that coast the mists and sea fogs early spoil the brilliancy of the foliage. Yet, perhaps, the more did the silvery greys and browns of the inland scenery conduce to the tranquility of the time - the time of peace and rest before the fierce and stormy winter comes on. It seems a time for gathering up human forces to encounter the coming severity, as well as of storing up the produce of harvest for the needs of winter. Old people turn out and sun themselves in that calm St. Martin's summer, without fear of "the heat o' th' sun, or the coming winter's rages," and we may read in their pensive, dreamy eyes that they are weaning themselves away from the earth, which probably many may never see again dressed in her summer glory.
> (6: 54)

The twin processes of resistance and resignation, of "gathering of human forces to encounter the coming severity" and of old people's "weaning themselves away from the earth", is what the chapter as a whole seeks to put the reader in touch with. The funeral is an end, but for Sylvia it is a beginning, an awakening into the collisions which the volume as a whole is establishing.

The larger serenity within which the individual sufferings of the moment occur, is also reflected in the story-teller's departure from Dr Wilson's sermon to comment on the different ways in which his inadequacies appear to himself, to Monkshaven's inhabitants and to the reader looking back on events. When this passage ("In looking back to the last century ..." 6: 58), was discussed in the section on the narration of *Sylvia's Lovers*, the warning to the reader about understanding the past was emphasized, but in Chapter 6 itself, the awareness of different ways of looking at events on which the passage insists also takes its place in the narration's establishing a metaphysical context for the tragedy. The literal distance from which readers view the events of sixty years ago may cause distortion, but it may also be valuable in being akin to the dispassionate viewing of individual tragedy and human injustice which the narration seeks to sound here.

As well as using the season, the cliff-top churchyard, and

the treatment of Dr Wilson's inadequacies to establish this larger view of a cruel and harsh world which is, nonetheless, governed by a benevolent Providence, Gaskell uses her commenting narrators to indicate future developments in such a way that the reader has an over-arching sense of certainty while sharing the characters' experience of the sorrow of Darley's funeral. This glimpse forward is actually the first indication of the context of certainty that the reader is given in Chapter 6 and is one which exerts an important influence on responses to Gaskell's other methods. It is one of the very few indications given in the narration of future developments, and comes when Sylvia catches sight of her waiting mother as she is coming home from the Corney farm.

> But Sylvia had noted the watching not three minutes before, and many a time in her after life, when no one cared much for her out-goings and in-comings, the straight, upright figure of her mother, fronting the setting sun, but searching through its blinding rays for a sight of her child, rose up like a sudden-seen picture, the remembrance of which smote Sylvia to the heart with a sense of a lost blessing, not duly valued while possessed. (6: 53)

It is not a passage which offers any overt reassurance about suffering, nor does it suggest that Sylvia's later life is to be anything but desolate, but in as much as it indicates a known and understood shape in her life, the passage is an important part of the consolatory note which sounds throughout the chapter. This may seem a strange claim to make for sentences which predict loss and suffering for Sylvia, but it is in their ability to predict that a containing perspective for the tragedy lies, not in what they say. It is natural to feel that what can be seen as complete can also be understood as being meaningful.[1] However horrifying or pathetic events may be, if they are felt to be meaningful, there is a certain pleasure to be had from witnessing their occurrence. Until the novel's close, those who endure the tragedy themselves can see little shape or meaning in their lives. While both Sylvia and Philip finally attain an understanding of their part in the tragedy, neither, at the height of their

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1. This point is central to Kermode's (1968) argument about why man gives shape to his experiences.

suffering, has access to the breadth of vision made available to the reader.

In giving this glimpse forward, the explicit narrator's voice does not disturb the claims for the actuality of events which have been constant in the narration, the claims that a report on real events is being given. This is because the events are set back sixty years in time and so all the commenting voices are able to work within their role of chronicler, the role of one who can comment, with reliable insight and extraordinarily privileged access to its workings, on what is now history. The faith which the narration demonstrates in the world's being, for all its humanly caused suffering, one in which the workings of Providence can be felt, is one to which the authorial narration of an historical novel is particularly well suited. And, at this stage of the novel, it has to be those narrator's voices which have external reference which take on this function. In Volume Three, when Sylvia and Philip are themselves working towards an understanding of their responsibility, the perspective becomes one implied by the characters' own efforts.

Although the narration of Chapter 6 works to give majesty to the funeral scene and to use this quality to indicate the larger perspective within which individual suffering may be seen, the indications of a benevolent Providence are never allowed an easy presence in the character's experiences. In fact the reverse is true, and what is a reassuring sense of Providence for the reader is, when characters themselves reach for it, seen to be so allied with a need to get their own way that the very act of reaching for guidance or confirmation of right becomes a contribution to the tragedy. The most obvious example of this is Philip's exclamation when he sees the press-gang that is bound to capture Kinraid - "It is God's providence," (18: 185), but there are many earlier indications of the perils of a self-justificatory sense of Providence's support. The most complete of these comes at the opening of Volume Two when Philip is filled with gratitude

for the Fo^sters' offer of partnership in the shop and the belief that he can now win Sylvia. The explicit narrator says:

> He was like too many of us, he did not place his future life in the hands of God, and only ask for grace to do His will in whatever circumstances might arise; but he yearned in that terrible way after a blessing which, when granted under such circumstances, too often turns out to be equivalent to a curse. And that spirit brings with it the material and earthly idea that all events that favour our wishes are answers to our prayer; and so they are in one sense, but they need prayer in a deeper and higher spirit to keep us from the temptation to evil which such events invariably bring with them. (15: 152)

The passage is interesting for the clear picture it gives of Gaskell's sense of tragedy. It is the Christian view that evil and suffering are a consequence of man's uncontrolled will, and it shows that in Philip, a man in whom the habits of disciplined self-examination that his religion has taught him have become at the same time an instrument of his will, making infinite self-deception possible, Gaskell has chosen a study of tragedy which springs from her own deepest beliefs.

The passage is also interesting as an indication of how Gaskell's outlook, or her ability to render it in her novels, has broadened since her early works. Very similar circumstances come about in *Ruth* when Ruth is praying for strength to resist Bellingham who has reappeared in her life. The narrator says:

> It sometimes seems a little strange how, after having earnestly prayed to be delivered from temptation, and having given ourselves with shut eyes into God's hand, from that time every thought, every outward influence, every acknowledged law of life, seems to lead us on from strength to strength. It seems strange sometimes, because we notice the coincidence; but it is the natural, unavoidable consequence of all, truth and goodness being one and the same, and therefore carried out in every circumstance, external and internal, of God's creation. (23: 282)[1]

The claims made here do not contradict the comment made on Philip, but the note is quite different in the earlier work.

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1. The reference is to the Everyman edition, London, 1967.

Of course, the different purposes of the two novels do not permit a simple comparison of the two passages, but it is possible to see from them why tragedy should have been an undertaking of Gaskell's artistic maturity.

Chapter 12, which presents another kind of awakening in Sylvia, has a very similar structure to that of Chapter 6 in that it begins and ends away from the main action. It looks first at Daniel's extension of the Corney's invitation to Sylvia and to Philip, and when Philip leaves the party, the narration stays with him to end the chapter on the misery of his disappointments. Once again the structure emphasises the daily context in which momentous events occur, and although the intensity of Philip's particular misery is a new kind of context, the glimpses of customary daily life used in the other parts of the frames of these chapters, return at the end of Chapter 12 when Philip is reminded by Alice Rose's curtness that his way of welcoming the New Year should have been at the watch service. Beyond this structural similarity and the fact that the party is another communal celebration which has its focus on life and death, the two chapters are differently treated, chiefly in the narration's concentration in Chapter 12 on the novel's two protagonists.

As the funeral scene establishes the spiritual dimensions of Monkshaven, so the party establishes the social context for Sylvia's development and Philip's love. What the later chapter also establishes is that the characters' feelings generated in the social world can be just as intense and profound as those consequent on events of national importance and of metaphysical scope. As the protagonists are more fully developed than they were in the funeral scene and as events move in a more familiar sphere, much greater concentration on the characters' individual responses is appropriate: accordingly, the narration is done chiefly by the implicit narrator with some contributions from point-of-view narration.

There is one point at which the story-teller's and the explicit narrator's voices are used for sustained comment and

it is a passage which matches the effect in Chapter 6 of the glimpse forward to Sylvia's future unhappiness and her memories of her mother's love. The chapter's opening sequence ends with Philip's struggling against Daniel's jovial reference to the differences in tastes between Philip and Sylvia (12: 114) and against his own knowledge that in going to the party he is going against his "natural inclination", "lured ... by the thought of meeting Sylvia" (12: 114). The narration steps back from Philip for a moment to take a kindly look at his folly and self-deception.

> At this hour, all the actors in this story having played out their parts and gone to their rest, there is something touching in recording the futile efforts made by Philip to win from Sylvia the love he yearned for. But, at the time, any one who had watched him might have been amused to see the grave, awkward, plain young man studying patterns and colours for a new waistcoat, with his head a little on one side, after the meditative manner common to those who are choosing a new article of dress. They might have smiled could they have read in his imagination the frequent rehearsals of the coming evening, when he and she should each be dressed in their gala attire, to spend a few hours under a bright, festive aspect ... (12: 115)

The reminder that "this story" is now complete and that the follies of the day diminish in impact with the passage of time is structurally like the earlier reference to Sylvia's mother, but, in the context of the New Year party, the passage of time rather than an additional perspective on events is what is used to remind the reader of the reassuring power of a known shape. This passage also builds on the acknowledgement implicit in the comments on Dr Wilson's sermon in Chapter 6 that a distanced view, as long as it is not distorted by the effects of time and change, is important in its dispassionate inclusiveness. The point is made here in that Philip's peers, restricted to the social comedy of the immediate act, would see only the vanity of his interest, in waistcoats and be merely amused by it, but a reader in command of the whole will see his quest for Sylvia as a tragic failure.

Philip's hopes fill the time between the invitation and the party - "And she would in a way belong to him: her cousin, her mentor, her chaperon, her lover!" (12: 115) - so that the narration can move without a break into the party itself.

Through keeping the narration with Philip and the ribbon that he sends to Sylvia, Gaskell is able to indicate that the major interest of the scene will be the collision between Philip's hopes of joy and what actually happens to Sylvia. Philip's continued presence is structurally important, for, as the emotional interest of the scene is placed in Sylvia's responsiveness to Kinraid's admiration, it enables him to be kept in view at the party itself by making the reference to his feelings as he observes what is happening fulfil the created interest in his presence.

As the gap between his expectations and actual events widens and Philip finds himself increasingly excluded from the general gaiety, so his thoughts and feelings become more and more extensively used for point-of-view narration. The direct appeal to the reader of this narrative mode is how Gaskell controls the balance between her protagonists, for Sylvia's inner life is always handled by the implicit narrator's report, and report always implies an external, ordering perception of inner processes. The way in which authorial narration can compass both a near-dramatised, direct presentation of a character's inner life and an external, ordered report on that (or another) life shows why it is especially suited to a novel which has equally balanced central characters whose relationship is in some tension. The way in which Philip becomes available for an extended use of his point of view also indicates something important about that aspect of the overall narrative mode. It has to use the reflections of a character who is in some way cut off from his or her immediate surroundings and is aware of that separation. If a prior awareness of separation is not used then the movement into point-of-view, with its strong suggestions of self-consciously undertaken reflection, will distance the character from the context. It is a curious feature of this mode - it can give the reader very immediate access to a character's inner life, but at the same time it removes the character very slightly from the context, from the external sources of that life. This indicates why, in creating a world that is largely populated by characters not given by nature to such

reflections, Gaskell would have to take great care in the use of point-of-view narration.

Such care is evident at the moment of Sylvia's forfeit kiss. For her it is a critical confrontation with the nature of Kinraid's admiration but when she refuses to "play any more at such-like games" (12: 125), the narration cuts immediately to the watching Philip and his misunderstanding of her refusal.

> Philip's spirits rose, and he yearned to go to her and tell how he approved of her conduct. Alas, Philip! Sylvia, though as modest a girl as ever lived, was no prude, and had been brought up in simple, straightforward country ways; and with any other young man, excepting, perhaps, Philip's self, she would have thought no more of making a rapid pretence of kissing the hand or cheek of the temporary "candlestick," than our ancestresses did in a much higher rank on similar occasions. (12: 125 - 6)

After the previous use made of Philip's point of view, a cut to his responses could have diminished Sylvia's importance unduly, but as the explicit narrator's address to him is used, any over-shadowing of Sylvia is counteracted, for the address changes him from a source of information into one of the actors in the scene. His reactions are not allowed undue claim on the reader's sympathies. In addition to the control of the characters' status in the scene, the commenting voice also takes on a new function at this point which facilitates an important development in *Sylvia's Lovers*. It is now becoming an arbitrator between the characters; not an arbitrator that can affect either character, but one which underlines for the reader the gap that misunderstandings are creating between Sylvia and Philip. It is in this way that the distance between the characters begins to replace the distance between the reader and the fictional world, and the reader's own, created awareness of misunderstanding analogous to those which will shape the protagonists' lives, comes into play.

The first of these misunderstandings occurs earlier in this chapter when Molly's vulgar teasing of Sylvia about her cousin's ribbon leads Sylvia to refuse Philip's greeting when he arrives at the party. It is moments like this which are to collaborate

with the characters' own shaping of their misfortunes and give direction to the tragic aspects of the story. In Volume Two, lives continue to be shaped by the larger events in Monkshaven, especially by the press-gang's presence, while the domestic nature of the tragedy is sustained through misunderstandings like the one for which Molly is responsible in Chapter 12.

iv) Volume II: Interventions.

The action of this volume compasses a great alteration in Sylvia's life: it begins with her engagement in Chapter 16 to Kinraid and ends with her marriage to Philip in Chapter 29. Two scenes of violence dominate this line of development and contribute significantly to Sylvia's change from one man to the other. They are Kinraid's capture by the press-gang and the town's attack on the Randyvowse. As well as their effect on Sylvia's life, these two events are linked by the gradual process by which Philip is drawn into wronging Sylvia. The nature of Philip's sinful decision is given definition by its contrast with Daniel Robson's impetuous intervention when the press-gang tricks Monkshaven men into captivity. Philip's crime against Sylvia is a gradual process by which his initial omission hardens into a deliberate deception of the girl he wants to marry while Daniel's is a selfless, unconsidered leap into law-breaking. In these similarities which allow comparison of the two actions, Volume Two can, like Volume One, be seen to be constructed on two climaxes to the developing action.

In the movement from the first to the second volumes, the key issues underlying the early action begin to be played out in the personal lives of the protagonists. Issues at the root of social life such as self-government and the government of self by others continue on the level of public action and also take shape in Sylvia's personal life as she lives out the consequences of Philip's and her father's deeds. As has been said, this concentration of the tragedy within the personal lives of the protagonists is one of the reasons why the narration of Volume Two needs to remind the reader less frequently of the spatio-temporal distance at which Monkshaven lies. In addition, by Volume Two, the story-teller's shaping of the reader has now had sufficient time to be effective so that its commenting can be replaced by the explicit narrator, and, in particular, by one who generalises from the fictional world outwards to the reader. This generalising outwards begins at the end of Volume One when Philip is walking

home from the Corney's party, and it is used again to open Volume Two.

> Philip went to bed with that kind of humble penitent gratitude in his heart, which we sometimes feel after a sudden revulsion of feeling from despondency to hope.
> (15: 151)

Sympathy for the temptation which Philip faces in Chapter 18 when Kinraid is captured, is created in the preceding chapters by having each scene of Kinraid's successful courtship of Sylvia introduced by a reference to Philip's ignorance of what is occurring. In Chapter 15 comes the remark, "Philip little knew how Sylvia's time had been passed that day." (15: 152) and in Chapter 17, "Philip knew little of all this." (17: 163). These references to Philip's ignorance culminate in:

> Philip wished that it was not so late, or that very evening he would have gone to keep guard over Sylvia in her mother's absence - nay, perhaps he might have seen reason to give her a warning of some kind. But, if he had done so, it would have been locking the stable-door after the steed was stolen.
> (17: 166)

In the short term, these methods create sympathy for Philip, but in the long run, the repeated emphasis on what Philip could not know about Sylvia joins with what he chooses not to acknowledge, thereby indicating the emotional distance between them and the inevitability of profound misunderstanding. It prepares for the horrifying fact that Philip's hold on Sylvia is eventually built on two deaths, her father's and what she believes about Kinraid. The creation of a union built over such an abyss, but one in which both characters retain their powerful claims on the reader's sympathies, is a remarkable achievement.

The pathos of the growing distance between Philip and Sylvia is also controlled by Chapter 17 where Coulson's small-minded jealousy of Philip, who he believes is unduly favoured in being sent to London, presents in different guise the subject of the distorting power of jealousy. Once Kinraid is in captivity, Chapters 19 and 20, which handle Philip's journey to London, present the process by which Philip's silent lie is

turned into a positive cruelty to Sylvia. As the build-up towards the attack on the Randyvowse begins, the narrative concentrates on Sylvia's numb misery over Kinraid's death and counterpoints this with Hester's refusal of Coulson. Coulson is refused in Chapter 21 and the reference at the end of that chapter to his fairly swift marriage to someone else, allows the narration to place the relatively eventless Chapter 22 within its compass. The emphasis is on the slow passage of time as external forces gather to enjoin a further change on Sylvia's life.

Once the attack on the Randyvowse has been made, Philip's role as the family's only support in their time of distress begins. It is this role which is to win Sylvia for him and there is no doubt that, despite his lie, he is to be seen as deserving his reward, but the scant joy that Sylvia will bring him as well as the unhappy foundation of his marriage is what the narrative first presages. He comes to Haytersbank knowing nothing of his uncle's role in the riot and so with considerable alarm and very little tact he has to put the authorities' view of events to the hitherto proud family. It is a duty which his convictions about social responsibility support and the scene in Chapter 24 echoes the first scene of Philip at Haytersbank when he argues with Daniel about the press-gang's right to impress men. What had been a question of principle for them has become a hideous reality.

Chapter 25, when Daniel is arrested and Philip consults lawyers about his defence, continues to point to Philip's claim on Sylvia being a consequence of her suffering and her isolation. This feature of his claim is further emphasized in the following chapters as Kester, the last representative of Sylvia's old life, is used to register doubts about her coerced agreement to marry Philip. Daniel's trial occurs, off-stage, in Chapter 27 and his execution in the next. In the same chapter, Sylvia tells Kester that she has agreed to marry her cousin and the volume ends with the wedding and Bell's confused horror of "this cruel place" (29: 292) where she and her daughter are now to live.

The overall direction of Volume Two shows that Philip's lie about Kinraid forms one of a series of factors which coerce Sylvia into marriage with him. His guilt takes its place in a tragic world in which events combine cruelly with natural human error, and it seems particularly appropriate that the volume's two climaxes should point, in the first, to the peculiarly tragic combination of factors for which Philip must be held responsible and, in the second, to those for which he cannot. The nature of responsibility is what will form the connection on which the comparison of Chapters 18 and 23 rests, and is also the particular content of the action of the first climax. Chapter 18 is built on the process by which Philip moves from an irrational sense that his hatred of his rival has brought about Kinraid's capture to his positive guilt in deciding not to carry the man's message to Sylvia.

As Philip walks northwards along the beach, the narration establishes two points at which he feels, irrationally enough, that his thoughts have the power to bring sudden results. The first instance occurs when he thinks of taking flowers to Sylvia, and, apparently in an ironic retort to his idea, Kinraid appears on the beach having obviously just left Sylvia. The second instance is, at first, more gratifying for Philip, for it comes when he sees the press-gang who are still hidden from Kinraid's view. It seems to Philip that the soldiers have materialized in response to his unexpressed wish to do away with his rival. Through the apparent power of coincidence which these events have for Philip, Gaskell is depicting the easy route by which irrationally felt guilt can lead a man into real, chosen guilt. Once Philip feels responsible for Kinraid's capture there is little to prevent the next step, his silence to the Haytersbank family.

As with the narration of the climaxes to Volume One, the narration of this chapter undertakes to give the reader the most intense involvement possible in each character's part in the crisis and a simultaneous, detached observation of all facets of the event. The range of authorial narration is

obviously well equipped to do this, especially as the voices can be used to blend unobtrusively into each other or to stand against each other in sharp distinction. Two points at which the narration is working for very special effect - the point at which Philip's observations are abruptly abandoned as Kinraid turns the corner into captivity (18: 186), and the unexpected use of personification (18: 191) - will be discussed for their effectiveness in serving the multiple perspective, but first, as a way into their effect, the scene on the beach as Philip stalks Kinraid demands a little more attention.

It is a memorably symbolic scene, this picture of Philip retreating into the cliff's shade and stumbling along at a constant distance from his rival. It must fuse with the reader's memory of the resonance given to the cliff-side setting in Chapter 6, Darley's funeral. There, it was seen that on this margin between "life and eternity" (6: 55), matters of mortality and morality present themselves most starkly to Monkshaven's inhabitants. With Philip's action, the recognition of the setting's symbolic power moves into the character's own ken, in the sense that actions of a practical nature (Philip does not want to be seen by Kinraid) can also contain an involuntary recognition of what the conscious mind will eventually have to admit. In Philip's case it is that he and Kinraid are caught in mortal rivalry, a rivalry appropriately manifesting itself in the shadows of the cliff. His recognition is soon recorded by the explicit narrator in a suitably portentous glance forwards for the reader.

> But the last hour had pinched Hepburn's features into something of the wan haggardness they would wear when he should first be lying still for ever. (18: 185)

Philip's actions show that, somewhere, he too knows that Kinraid has dealt him a death-blow.

The use of such powerfully symbolic settings as the cliff's division of life and eternity is a new element in Gaskell's narration. The conclusion of *North and South* achieves much of the effectiveness of Margaret Hale's reassessment of her-

self through her growing responsiveness to the symbolic power of the settings for her meditations, but here Gaskell has taken the shaping power and the expressive power of an environment even further. The creation of a setting which will rise clear of what is circumstantial in the narrative and take on the burden of what is recognizably universal is something that Gaskell may have felt able to do because she was handling a wholly tragic story for the first time. The ability to convey accurately the way that the cliff's import would enter the experience of a character such as Philip also reveals a power and a willingness to risk locating symbolic experience in daily life that makes *Sylvia's Lovers* a major work. Once tragedy has opened the possibilities of symbolism within the discipline of the realistic novel to Gaskell, she shows an equally full mastery of symbolism in her following comic novel, *Wives and Daughters*, where its portentous nature is shown not to be an inevitable disruption of the novel's comic tone.

Once Philip's gaze is concentrated on Kinraid's back, the narration gives no overt attention to his inner turmoil. It can be inferred from his actions, but the way that the paragraph leading up to his first sight of the press-gang mentions only his efforts to keep out of sight becomes really striking when the narration also omits to say what it is that Philip has seen when he murmurs, "It is God's providence". In the next paragraph, Philip attempts to hide from the still unnamed "coming event" (18: 185) and what happens is explained only when Philip's perceptions cease to be the filter through which the reader receives the scene on the sands. The last paragraph on page 185, "Kinraid had taken ...", cuts away from Philip as the implicit narrator presents the full scene of Kinraid's capture. Philip is still present in "It steeled Philip's heart ..." but after this there is no reference to him for a whole page of narration. This very selective use of Philip followed by the cut away from him suggests that Gaskell had two simultaneous objectives in mind: to engage her readers as directly as possible in Philip's experiences and to

give as full an account as possible of what occurred so that Philip's view is not felt to limit what can be understood. The method of a selective concentration on Philip's actions rather than on his sensations as he follows Kinraid plus the scenic presentation of Kinraid's capture is particularly well suited to the central significance of the whole episode, for it dramatises the way in which Philip is hardly able to acknowledge what is too painful for him to bear, either as recipient or as witness. Once the narration returns to Philip, who is crouching behind the rocks, his pain and his irrational guilt are fully evident: Kinraid's resistance to the press-gang is given wholly through what Philip hears (18: 187) so that his inner conflict is once more strongly implied.

When Kinraid's struggles cease, the silence forces Philip to peep out from behind his rock, and the narration moves immediately into the implicit narrator's detailed description of the captive's movements and feelings; it does not do the scene through Philip's eyes. In this way an unexpected parallel is set up between the two men whose fortunes have so suddenly been reversed. This parallel is another consequence of the scenic presentation of Kinraid's capture, for when the implicit narrator says of Kinraid:

> His soul was beating itself against the bars of inflexible circumstance; reviewing in one terrible instant of time what had been, what might have been, what was.
> (18: 187 - 8)

the words could equally well have been used to describe Philip's sensations when he first saw Kinraid running down the Haytersbank gully. The sudden exchange of fortunes which allows Philip to feel that Kinraid's capture releases him to pursue Sylvia once again is something the narration itself dramatises in its careful cutting from one man to the other.

Such feelings do not take shape immediately in Philip, for once Kinraid sees him, events move too fast for him to be sure of anything until he sees Kinraid being rowed out to the waiting ship and he is free to ask himself whether he is

bound to give the message to Sylvia with which Kinraid has charged him. As Philip's crisis of conscience becomes the narration's subject, Gaskell uses personification to dramatise his inner life - a move that is unique in *Sylvia's Lovers*.

> And then the dread Inner Creature, who lurks in each of our hearts, arose and said, "It is as well: a promise given is a fetter to the giver. But a promise is not given when it has not been received." (18: 191)

The allegorist's mode, allowing temptation to speak directly to the reader as well as to Philip, might at first seem inappropriate in the hands of a realistic novelist as interested in the psychology of actions as Gaskell was. The technique might be accommodated on the grounds that allegory is traditionally used in narrative to render inner conflict as vividly as possible, and also on the grounds that Philip himself would suppress conscious awareness of the processes by which he creates the all-too plausible arguments for lying to Sylvia. But, on the whole this single occurrence of personification seems intended to foreground itself as much as possible, and to remain startling, probably so that the reader will be acutely aware of the moment at which Philip actively collaborates with the opportunities that external forces have thus far put in his way.

It is in the matter of intentional versus unintentional shaping of the future, the extent to which a character may be aware of the way his actions affect his destiny, that the other climactic chapter of Volume Two is most closely related to this one. Chapter 23 continues, this time in a more public arena, the issues raised by Philip's part in Kinraid's capture and by his subsequent silence when it presents Daniel's impulsive participation in the burning of the Randyvowse. His execution follows relentlessly from his thoughtless part in the community's revenge on the press-gang, as does Sylvia's agreement to marry her cousin and so provide a home for herself and her mother. In as much as Kinraid's type is sustained by Daniel, the contrast between types which gives such force to the scene of Kinraid's capture and Philip's apparent triumph continues in the burning of the Randyvowse, especially when Philip appears at Haytersbank and suggests to the proud family

that not everyone will view Daniel's achievement as they do. Because the climactic chapters of Volume Two are complementary in this way, the later chapter will be discussed chiefly for the aesthetic and technical comparison with Chapter 18 that it provides.

Because Daniel's involvement in the attack on the Randyvowse is impulsive and thoughtless, the narration cannot rest too heavily on his perceptions or on his reflections on events. In order to sustain its characteristically full account of what happens, much of the narration stays outside Daniel with the explicit narrator's comments supplementing the implicit narrator's picture. The need for a constant explanatory presence in Daniel's scene is made clear quite early on.

> For, in the breasts of many, revenge for the misery and alarm of the past winter took a deeper and more ferocious form than Daniel had thought of when he made his proposal of a rescue. To him it was an adventure like many he had been engaged in in his younger days ... (23: 222)

The relative neglect of Daniel's point of view entailed by his inability to comprehend much of the event's significance, also enables the narration to imply his relative innocence in what transpires. It suggests how little planned malice there is in Daniel's actions, how little intention to cause any harm in rescuing the wrongfully impressed men, and as his intentions must be a consideration in any moral judgement made of him, it is fair to say that the narration is designed to establish Daniel's innocence.

In the earlier climax, Philip's perceptions have been sufficiently extensively used for a cut away from them (when Kinraid's capture is treated) to be noticeable; Daniel's comparative absence from the narration is not, however, one that the reader would notice. This difference in treatment springs primarily from the difference between the two men, but it is also one of the factors which suggests that the comparable design and treatment of these two chapters has been carefully established by Gaskell and used to shape her readers' responses.

A remarkable similarity in the narration, within the overall difference, will help to support this contention. At the height of the attack, Daniel falls and is put temporarily out of action. As he lies excluded from the fighting, the narrator makes brief use of his perceptions in order to present the liberation of the impressed men.

> He saw the stones torn up; he saw them used with good effect on the unguarded back-door; he cried out in useless warning as he saw the upper windows open, and aim taken among the crowd ... And now the sounds came veiled by the walls as of some raging ravening beast growling over his prey; the noise came and went - once utterly ceased; and Daniel raised himself with difficulty to ascertain the cause ...
> (23: 224)

Once the crowd returns, Daniel hobbles over to join them and the narration makes little further use of his sensations. For a brief moment, while he was out of action, his excitement had made him a useful observer, and it is a moment which unmistakeably echoes the use of Philip's listening to Kinraid's fight in Chapter 18.

> Hepburn heard loud pants of breath, great thuds, the dull struggle of limbs on the sand, the growling curses of those who thought to have managed their affair more easily; the sudden cry of someone wounded, not Kinraid he knew, Kinraid would have borne any pain in silence at such a moment; another wrestling, swearing, infuriated strife, and then a strange silence. Hepburn sickened at the heart; was then his rival dead? (18: 187)

Hepburn's perceptions draw attention to themselves here because he has been conspicuously absent from the narration for the previous page; Daniel's are remarkable because he is not usually used in the narration of his chapter. As was said before, the initial effect of the comparison of the two passages is to give definition to the two men's characters. In addition, it forms a reminder that the thematic purpose of each chapter is, in part, to extend the question of responsibility for action, for both omissions and commissions. But there is a matter beyond this that the similarity seems to serve: the novel's being a tragedy as well as an account of a community's experiences at a certain point in history. The community's history is carried in Daniel while Philip's

story concentrates on his individual, private tragedy. Philip is strongly connected to the town's fortunes by the press-gang's power to affect his life, but it is in Daniel that Monkshaven issues are sustained and brought to a head.

Whether or not Gaskell had of necessity to use two protagonists to sustain both elements of her narrative, tragedy and history, is difficult to decide. Easson (1979) points to the distinction between characters who are capable of individual, moral recognitions, thereby becoming "ahistorical, tending towards the great comic or tragic figures" (p 175), and those who remain "ordinary folk" (p 173), and he relates this distinction to the rendering of history. "I said earlier that Sylvia is part of the generations of history, and in that typical; I have also suggested that she is tragic, and in that sense exceptional." (p 177). The question which arises is whether the "exceptional" character can, at climactic moments, represent the larger community and its history. "Exceptional" people can, of course, be those who populate familiar spheres of life and remain externally "ordinary", but the inner difference required by tragedy would seem to have certain consequences for narrative. Even if the tragic hero is a bank clerk, tragedy, by its nature will demand that he or she have unusual capacities of response and reflection, of emotional and ultimately of moral strength. Tragedy cannot be made from dumb misery. Consequently, as the narration draws on this responsiveness, any representative function such as a community's history might demand will be somewhat over-shadowed by the hero's unique way of thinking and feeling. Even at the other extreme of tragic heroes, a protagonist such as a king in whom the public function is completely fused with the personality and so with the tragic issue, or again in an action where the events involve public rather than personal issues (such as a power struggle), when the moment of full tragic climax is reached, because so much of the pity and fear has to be aroused by the protagonist's particular response to circumstances, the unique individual in his private being is likely to command the fuller response. The public

issue or the protagonist's representative function is likely to be over-shadowed.

This could mean that Gaskell had perforce to use two protagonists for her purposes in Volume Two, but whether there is a formal necessity for her decision or not, she chose to concentrate on personal tragedy in Philip's love story and on a community's suffering in Daniel's impulsive retaliation against the press-gang's trick. The narration takes care to establish that whatever leadership Daniel gives to events is a chance, momentary affair. He suggests the rescue in the first place, but he conceives of it as a daring escapade, unlike many of his townsfolk who are glad of a chance to strike back at the soldiers; he comes forward to demand entry to the inn and he finds the way in through the shippon, but his leadership is only momentary for as he falls he is almost trampled underfoot; he suggests burning the inn but again it is a chance remark which appeals to the mood of the crowd. It is not the command of a leader. In this way Daniel embodies the town's spirit and is not a singular figure in any way. He has no wider understanding of the event and the reader too is carried through most of Chapter 23 by the sheer excitement of the action. There are comments on Daniel's restless obsession with the press-gang (22: 218) which cause some foreboding to loom over the event, but it is not really until Philip comes to Haytersbank the next day that the reader, like the shocked Robson family, is made aware of the other ways of seeing the event. Thus the narration of the attack places it as a community event with Daniel as the kind of central figure who sustains this emphasis. If Philip had been the protagonist here, it is doubtful if the same effects could have been achieved without distorting or ignoring his way of participating in events.

In Philip's chapter, when Kinraid is captured, the reader is kept aware of the process by which he consciously chooses to intervene in the lives of others for his own purposes, but in Daniel's chapter, the reverse is true. Philip's tragedy

lies in his witting collaboration with cruel fate while Daniel's pathos lies in his understanding so little of what he is doing. Daniel can command pity but not fear. But, even as this is said, the effect of the comparison asserts a similarity between the men. Philip, although comparatively far-seeing, is also a figure of pathos; he is as blind to the full nature of his actions as Daniel is.

The point at which both men are used as witnesses to the events for which they will bear responsibility reinforces the argument that one is a tragic figure and the other is not. Philip hides behind the rocks because he cannot bear to see what he so desired (seeing Kinraid's capture would force him recognize the nature of his desire), and so the fight is narrated through what Philip hears but cannot see; Daniel, on the other hand, is kept out of a fight he dearly wishes to lead because his fall, his physical fraility, excludes him. His account is thus primarily visual and when the fight moves indoors, his distress at having to guess what is happening from the sounds of the fight is quite different from Philip's. Their cases meet in the fact that, differently involved as they are, they will each have to bear complete responsibility for what happens. Daniel's society hangs him, while Sylvia, when she learns the truth, takes her passionate vow against Philip.

Chapter 23 concludes with Daniel's rescue of the cow and his rather imperceptive charity to Simpson so that his non-malicious, kindly intervention is stressed. The final word is given to him as he views the fire from the hill above Monkshaven:

> Danield looked and chuckled. 'That comes o' ringing fire-bell,' said he to himself; 'It were shame for it to be telling a lie, poor oud story-teller.'
> (23: 227)

The pungent wit of dialect speech is used so that Daniel's spirit will dominate the whole event. It is a note which makes Eagleton's (1976) reaction to the story-teller's later

comments on the event very understandable, but finally he is wrong. There are two comments to which Eagleton objects, quoted here at slightly more length than he uses:

> So the authorities were quite justified in the decided steps they had taken, both in their own estimation then, and now, in ours, looking back on the affair in cold blood. But at the time feeling ran strongly against them ... (25: 244)
>
> Philip had never told her the causes for despondency; she was young, and she, like her father, could not understand how fearful sometimes is the necessity for prompt and severe punishment of rebellion against authority. (27: 265)

Eagleton takes these comments, especially the first, as Gaskell's own view and says that Daniel's execution is an event which "the novel seems actually to endorse" (p 25). He feels that Gaskell could not be sufficiently radical in her sympathies and finally retreated into a cold legalism, "uphold the law whatever its content" (p 26), but that at the same time the novel's achievement is to put into question "its own controlling ideology" (p 27). Because Eagleton takes the story-teller's comment to be Gaskell's own final view, he feels that the novel upholds authority's right to maintain itself and that the comment about Sylvia's inability to grasp what is likely to happen to her father is presented as a matter "merely to be regretted" (p 25). Previous discussion of the nature of the story-teller's voice, its function and its interaction with the other voices, has established that it has limited authority in the text and that it certainly is not Gaskell herself commenting directly on the events. Its evocation of contemporary views cannot even be taken as a use of attitudes which actually exist, but as the creation of a possible way of looking at fictional events which is needed for its dramatic interaction with other views. The narration works for a fullness of understanding (in the face of the novel's theme of misunderstanding) rather than a single, fixed judgement. The authorities' view of the matter is one which must, for the completeness at which the narration aims, be acknowledged along with "ours", so that they take their place as factors within the strong current of sympathy for Daniel and for his family which the narration is creating.

The effect of the other voices, of the whole view, is such that it is impossible for the reader to adopt only the cold blooded view of the affair which the story-teller invokes, or to feel that at that point the story-teller speaks for Gaskell herself.

Within the fictional world itself, an inclination to side with authority is placed through Philip, whose sense of shame when Daniel is arrested is seen as timorous compared to the warm respect for Daniel that the townsfolk feel. Gaskell herself is impartial, representing the collision between people and authority as faithfully as she can. If her personal view is to be sought in one specific moment (and this is a risky procedure anyway) it is more likely to be found in the text she chooses for the sermon preached before the York assize, "Execute true judgement and shew mercy" (27: 266). The ironic contrast between this text and the judgement given is not likely to have been lost on one who created Dr Wilson, a kindly man but one unable to transcend his class loyalties when his Christian conscience demanded that he do so.

v) Volume III: Forgiveness.

The issue of this volume is that of forgiveness, and the concentrated challenge to Sylvia to find an understanding of herself and of Philip from which she can forgive him is very strongly signalled in the closing chapters of Volume Two. Sylvia is challenged three times in the last three chapters. The first comes when Kester angers her by suggesting that she has forgotten Kinraid too easily; when he asks her pardon for his accusation, she forgives him because he is "dear old Kester after all" (27: 264). Kester brings her the second challenge too but this time Sylvia is obdurate because the wrong she feels is one that was done to her dead father. She is told about Simpson's pelting by the townsfolk and reacts with violent pleasure at the idea of his suffering.

> 'Them as was friends o' father's I'll love for iver and iver; them as helped for t' hang him' (she shuddered from head to foot - a sharp irrepressible shudder!) 'I'll niver forgive - niver!'

Sylvia's passion is a product of her intensely loyal nature as well as of her youthfulness, but, as Kester's musing indicates, it produces a resistance that will have to soften. When Philip puts the third challenge to Sylvia, again to do with Simpson, her cold fury frightens him.

> 'Thee and me was never meant to go together. It's not in me to forgive, - I sometimes think it's not in me to forget.' (29: 286)

Sylvia's refusal to forgive Simpson is coupled with a rejection of her husband's ways because she is angered that he could plead the man's cause at all, but it is also a sign that their differences in outlook are already challenging her and that it is from Philip's example that she will one day learn the tolerance and the understanding for which she does not yet feel a need. The process begins almost immediately, and the fact the Philip never learns that "her heart grew sad and soft in comparison to what it had been" (29: 287) gives the necessary pathos to his being unable to ask for forgiveness for himself and to Sylvia's remaining trapped in the vow she has taken until his death releases her.

The action of Volume Three through which the theme is pursued falls into two parts. In the first part, Chapters 30 - 36, Philip's lie is revealed and Sylvia is confronted with the specific wrong that he has done her; in the second part, Chapters 37 - 45, the changes which make forgiveness possible are charted. Again the volume has two climaxes, for the first part culminates in Kinraid's return and the vow which Sylvia takes never to forgive her husband, and the second in Philip's return and Sylvia's own request for forgiveness. The second part handles the processes by which Sylvia changes in her feelings about Philip's lie and those by which Philip comes to understand how he can make amends for it. As this part of the novel has had more adverse criticism than any other, especially from McVeagh (1970a), a slightly different approach will be taken in the discussion of it from that followed for the first two volumes. As the design of the whole volume has been questioned, more general attention will be given to it than was done for the first two volumes. Two chapters have been singled out for specific discussion, Chapters 32 and 39, but this time in order to show the preparations made in the narration for the climaxes in Chapters 33 and 45 and to suggest that, despite one or two local failures in treatment, the design of the volume remains clear and purposive.

McVeagh's strictures are worth quoting as they introduce many of the questions about the volume's structure which have to be considered.

> The predominance of serious characters and sombre themes brings about a dilution of the conflict between type and type, and attitude and attitude, which the contrasting first two volumes had led one to expect, a slackening of the speed and tension of the narrative and consequently a turning to adventitious melodrama: the sea rescue which is so unnecessary (Chapter 32), the siege of Acre which is flat and alien (Chapter 38), Hepburn's irrelevant sojourn at St Sepulchre's (Chapter 41), his sentimental saving of his own child from the waves (Chapter 45) ... Those incidents at Acre and St Sepulchre's are a searching after excitement; they show the wish for a tragic heightening in a writer who ... had neither the time nor the inclination to create a genuinely tragic climax.
>
> (pp 275 - 276)

When McVeagh writes of a contrast in the first two volumes, he is posing one between the predominance of joy in the first and of sorrow in the second. While this does not accord with the suggestions made in this study, the contrast in types to which he refers is roughly the same as has been described here.

All but one of the examples of "adventitious melodrama" and "a searching after excitement" which McVeagh cites come from the second half of the volume and so may be left for that discussion. Sylvia's part in the rescue of the Newcastle smack which he finds "so unnecessary" does come in the first part of the action, and, while refutation of McVeagh's illustrations is not the main point of this discussion, it can be shown that the events of Chapter 32 have been made to play an important part in Sylvia's development and in shaping the reader's responses to the tragedy. The chapter has a threefold sequence which Gaskell often uses in *Sylvia's Lovers*: as with Darley's funeral in Chapter 6 for example, the central action of rescuing the ship is framed by domestic scenes against which it makes an important contrast, and, like Chapter 6 again, the significance of the structural contrast is largely left for the reader to ascertain. Sylvia herself is partly aware of a contrast when she lapses into "all the despondency of her life" (32: 319) immediately on returning home after the rescue. But she does not comprehend all that the chapter's structure implies; as she does not, like the reader, suspect that Kinraid is aboard the rescued ship, her feelings do not carry any awareness of the larger significance which the thematic contrast of Kinraid and Philip supplies for the reader. What the scene does for the reader is to re-dramatise the contrast in types, in approaches to life, on which Volume One is built and it does so just before Kinraid re-enters Sylvia's own life.

The domestic scenes in Chapter 32 which precede the rescue concentrate on the novel's major theme: Hester's attempts to accept and understand Sylvia are contrasted with the long-standing, petty quarrel between Philip's housekeeper, Phoebe,

and the nursemaid. The triviality of their dispute over some hot water is also a necessary lead-in to the storm which blows up when Philip finds that his wife has not come home and that his tea is not ready for him. A quarrel at this point between Sylvia and Philip is so obvious a preparation for Kinraid's return that if Gaskell had not connected the petty form of Philip's expression of his deep-rooted anxieties about his marriage with another example of simple daily pettiness, the management of events would have appeared too heavy handed. As it is, the way in which Sylvia's natural inclinations are constantly thwarted in the circumstances of her marriage and the reasons why she feels that her spirit is intolerably confined are beautifully established as daily realities. And the attention is not all on Sylvia's suffering. Nothing could be more familiar than Philip's using cruel accusations in an attempt to cross the divide separating him from his wife (32: 315) and nothing could be more painful than knowing that even as he does this, he cannot afford to recognize that the injury he has really done to his wife is much more serious than the petty blows he is now striking.

When Sylvia escapes to give her spirit temporary relief out of doors, she climbs up to the parish church, a route which actually brings Kinraid and Darley's funeral to her mind again. The narrative uses this reference to Darley to indicate that Sylvia is not just lamenting a lost lover but is reaching for the brief vision of human endeavour in the face of mortality that she had had among the "sad, earnest faces round the open grave" (32: 316). Although regret is uppermost in Sylvia, she is starting to try to understand her plight at the more impersonal level which the chapter's unspoken comparison of Kinraid and Philip provides for the reader; she is beginning to attain that vision which will make her a tragic figure and not just one of pathos like her father. The relief that Sylvia finds in the "tempest of the elements" (32: 316) and then in joining the crowd's effort to save the ship takes her conscious thoughts away from her plight, but it is clear to the reader that in helping to pull the rope holding the ship off the rocks,

she is performing the kind of deed that she so admired in the heroic Kinraid. This fighting spirit and determination to withstand disaster is the opposite response to life from that which she has known in Philip with his concentration on restraint, discipline and submission, and so her action constitutes her own recovery of what she has lost in her marriage. But at the same time her earlier thoughts join with her action to promise something more: that she may combine Kinraid's kind of heroism with Philip's capacities for reflection and understanding.

The fact that Kinraid is among those rescued is incidental to Sylvia's actions and operates only for the reader, giving the episode a poignant excitement and crystallizing the significance of what Sylvia has been led by chance and by instinct to do. The enormous coincidence in her being part of the crowd which rescues a ship which has Kinraid on board is one which passes almost unnoticed. As Sylvia never connects the event with Kinraid's return, the coincidence is kept subdued, showing that Gaskell could control the device with perfect conviction. But while the coincidence is not a startling one, the fact that Gaskell brings both Sylvia and Philip to rescue Kinraid at different points in this volume suggests that her design for it is a strongly patterned one of matched rescue scenes, followed later by matched scenes of penance leading to reconciliation. It suggests too that in this volume, Gaskell was concentrating on Kinraid's symbolic significance in the lives of her protagonists more than on his own actual life. He is a factor in both their lives with which they need a second encounter before they can come to terms with each other, thus they each have to rescue him.

If the design is seen this way, then Tillotson's (1978) judgement of the use of coincidence must be questioned. He points to two major coincidences in Philip's rivalry with Kinraid, the first being his witnessing of Kinraid's capture and the second his rescuing Kinraid at Acre, and says of the second:

> The second we cannot grant, nor is it vital to the story. After years have passed, Philip and Kinraid are brought together on the battlefield, when Philip saves Kinraid's life, with resulting complications. Would it not have been simpler to have let Kinraid return by more probable means? All that the saving of his life contributes to character is that to Philip's already sufficient virtues it adds that of heroism. (p 240)

The suggestion that Philip's rescue of Kinraid is designed to match Sylvia's does make it "vital to the story" in a way for which Tillotson does not allow. He feels that Philip's courage is shown mainly so that it will appeal to Sylvia, enabling him "to win back the respect and love of his wife." (p 240), but if it is seen that the confrontation is one that Philip needs for his own moral development, then matters look a little different. Craik (1975) has also pointed to the problem of the coincidence here and to Gaskell's troubling decision to use scenic narration. This involves, says Craik, "the creation in a very short space of a new world" (p 146). The coincidence is really the lesser of the two problems, for the action has been employing coincidence fairly steadily and the incident could have had the effect of a tragic concentration of forces. The patterning of the rescues already mentioned could have served to prevent the feeling of arbitrary contrivance which the chapter has. It is the decision to treat the episode scenically which seems to be the major reason for the chapter's failure to convince. Report of the rescue reaches Monkshaven in Chapter 40 and its treatment there makes it clear that the effect on Sylvia is not the primary purpose of the presentation of Philip's courageous act. All Sylvia ever learns about it is what Kinraid's wife can tell her, so Chapter 38 is not intended to add to her development. This suggests that Gaskell felt the need to establish something that would be important for her other protagonist in Chapter 38, and this must be the moment at which Philip actually says to Kinraid, "I niver thought you would ha' kept true to her!" (38: 370). His confession is more courageous than the rescue itself. The chapter's title, 'The Recognition' and the use of dialect to make Philip's speech stand out from the account of his actions supports the idea that Gaskell felt a need to show the moment of recognition actually happening

to Philip, thereby indicating its importance to him. This way of marking the actual point at which Philip begins to understand what he has done to Sylvia is formally equivalent to the use of personification in Chapter 18, and suggests that Gaskell wanted a very clear point in Volume Three from which she could begin the matched processes in which Sylvia and Philip seek to understand what they have done to each other.

But, even if this purpose is recognised for Chapter 38, the need to create a whole new world for it demanded an effort which completely over-shadows the purpose. The problem does not lie just in the amount of writing that had to be done to establish Acre and the Turkish, French and English contest, but in the fact that hitherto the action has never moved away from Monkshaven. Until the battle, the focus has been entirely a Monkshaven one, and the steps taken to keep the narration's centre with Sylvia in Monkshaven are noteworthy ones.

Easson (1979) comments that "Sylvia is the undoubted centre of the novel ... a still centre ... who by her very being draws men into ... (an) emotional identity." (p 172). To sustain her controlling presence, when Philip is sent to London for example, the narration, although it has to follow Philip on his journey, presents only his thoughts about the girl and her family. Although Philip's mission is explained, his transactions and their outcome are never clarified because only his letters to Haytersbank and his feelings about Sylvia are relevant. In the same way, Daniel's trial and execution at York are treated only through Philip's report to the family, and although they all go to take farewell of Daniel, only Kester's memory of the last meeting is touched on. Such focus has various local purposes, but in the work as a whole its effect is to establish an orientation, a disposition to see everything through Monkshaven eyes that cannot easily be disrupted. What happens to Daniel is made to count for the demonstration it gives of what it meant to live in that part of the world in those days, and as Volume Three presents Sylvia's growing, conscious effort to understand herself and

her husband in a similar way, the move to exotic scenes and to an alien treatment of them in the battle of Acre scenes is a damagingly false one. As has been said, the narrative has also to suggest a parallel development in Philip as he reflects on the harm he has done Sylvia, and on this score the scenes in Chapters 41 and 42, at St Sepulchre's, are less alien to the purpose and spirit of the narration than is the Acre chapter. Although the setting is still an exotic one, the second part of Philip's sojourn at the hospice, especially when his thoughts turn relentlessly to his wife and child, allows the narration to recover much of its direction. When it shows the workings of legend on Philip's mind, it has all the subtle power to render the uncertain workings of the inner being that Gaskell at her best can command. The way in which Philip is forced to abandon his guiding fable of Sir Guy, Earl of Warwick, on his return to Monkshaven, and to abandon it even as its promises of forgiveness and reconciliation are ironically coming true for him, is a particularly nice demonstration of the distorting power of hope which has operated throughout the novel.

This analysis of the Acre and St Sepulchre chapters has swept the discussion into the material of the second half of the volume but, before proceeding with its treatment of the protagonists' efforts to understand what they have done, it is necessary to return to the climax of the first part of the volume, to Kinraid's return and Sylvia's vow against her husband. It is here that Sylvia's role in events changes from being the wronged wife to one where she in turn wrongs Philip. However understandable her anger, the vow she takes is seen as sinful and means that eventually she has to understand herself this way and not just as a woman deceived into marriage. Her vow drives Philip away, but what is worse, it traps Sylvia in attitudes from within which she cannot hope to come to terms with her life. Sympathy for Sylvia as she makes the vow is beautifully controlled in that her words contain not only her anger against Philip but also her reproaches to herself for having been misled by him.

> 'I'll make my vow now, lest I lose mysel' again. I'll niver forgive yon man, nor live with him as his wife again. All that's done and ended. He's spoilt my life, - he's spoilt it for as long as iver I live on this earth; but neither you nor him shall spoil my soul.'
> (33: 328)

The poignancy comes from Sylvia's accurate sense of her plight and her despairing attempt to rescue herself, to establish some stronghold from which she will not again be led into self-betrayal.

Sylvia's return to the world after her loss and her mother's death is a slow one, but Chapter 37 indicates the way in which she perceives her plight and her efforts to sustain herself. She has been warned by Jeremiah Foster that what she has done against Philip will harm her child and at first it is a concern for the child, her one counter to "a terrible sense of desolation" (37: 359), which prompts her to try to understand more. She longs to be taught to read and to earn Hester's affection, but when Alice Rose offers her the consolation of religion and teaches her to read from the Old Testament, it is clear that such stern measures cannot really reach the now docile Sylvia. It is not until Molly visits Monkshaven again, bringing news of Kinraid's marriage, that Sylvia is given the means of penetrating her plight. In making her vow, she unwittingly exchanged the imprisonment of her marriage for another, more lonely state in which she can make none of the concessions to Philip that are needed to understand and forgive him. Only when Kinraid's actions show her the nature of Philip's constancy (39: 374) can she take a first step, but here again, even as Molly's news allows Sylvia, Hester and Alice to understand each others' griefs more fully, Sylvia finds that the vow she has taken to give herself strength and direction hinders the move she is beginning to want to make for her own sake.

> 'I'd do a deal for yo', I would, but I daren't forgive Philip, even if I could; I took a great oath against him. Ay, you may look shocked at me, but it's him as yo' ought for to be shocked at if yo' knew all. I said I'd never forgive him; I shall keep to my word.'
> (39: 381)

The next chapter, which brings Sylvia the news of Philip's bravery in rescuing Kinraid, shows a still bewildered girl, but one who is more conscious than ever of the need to find a new way of thinking about her husband and herself. This, of course, she does not get until he is on his deathbed.

Chapter 39 gives Sylvia's life important new possibilities and confronts her with the tragic impenetrability of her rejection of Philip; it is thematically important, but what makes it memorable is that Gaskell has set these developments in a scene of considerable social comedy. Molly Corney is now a large, vulgar, married woman and her rapacious interest in the gossip she brings and the gossip she wants to collect (about Philip's disappearance) colours her news about Kinraid. His easy poise, once so attractive, now looks shallow, partly because his is indeed a slight nature compared with the intensity in Sylvia and Philip and partly because it is Molly Brunton (she is well named) who recalls him to mind. As well as drawing Kinraid into her ambit, Molly serves the important function of holding the tragic unfolding of Sylvia's wrongs and mistakes within the ordinary world. The fact that she hears about Kinraid from the garrulous, imperceptive Molly is both a kindness to Sylvia and a reminder to the reader of the form such shocks usually take in daily life. Molly's vulgarity does not always act as a comfortable buffer between her words and their impact, as when she blunders into comment on Daniel's death, but her very callousness is salutary for Sylvia. In the self-denying world of Alice and Hester, Sylvia's spirit has lain dormant,but now Molly provokes her into self-defence. Indeed Molly provokes everyone present and it is actually Alice's outburst on Philip's behalf which leads Sylvia to expose her own suffering and to earn Molly's rebuke of "vixen" (39: 379). The spectrum of womanhood which this scene presents is an amusing one to contemplate, but at this point in the novel it also performs an important thematic function in reminding the reader of the original clash of Monkshaven types out of which Sylvia's tragedy has developed. Molly stands at one end of the range (and Kinraid with her)

while Hester and Alice occupy the other. Between them is Sylvia, forced out of her natural habitat but unable to find a proper place in the other half of her world. It is clear that Philip's affectionate care might have been the means of creating such a place for her.

He, however, will return to Monkshaven only to die there. He has no means of knowing that there might be a place for him again and feels too much remorse to ask for it. The changes that are occurring are to be too late for the reconciliation to affect life in this world. Although Sylvia's own request for forgiveness means that she has understood their tragedy as a joint tragedy, her insights are won too late to alter anything. They cannot even gain for her the relationship with her community that she deserves and she dies alone and misunderstood.

As a final way of pointing to the control that Gaskell maintains over most of the last volume, the different routes by which Sylvia and Hester re-discover Philip make a telling comparison. He is living with Kester's sister, unrecognisable after the accident and in his present state of poverty, so that he remains unknown to anyone until he rescues his child from the sea. But while he has been in the town, the two women have made very characteristic forms of near-contact with him. Sylvia's comes when she sees the man on the bridge and is touched by his evident suffering and by her own assumed hardness in advising the Widow Dobson to send him away as soon as possible. If the child's imagination had not been caught by her part in giving the man food, it is likely that Sylvia would have thought no more about her impulsive charity, but the brief, voluntary contact she makes with Philip captures completely what is kindly yet elusive and confused in her nature. Hester's approach to Philip is also characteristic of her and utterly different from Sylvia's. It comes when Hester recognises Philip's family watch in the watch-maker's shop and tries to find out how it came there. Her self-effacing patience and her hopes of what might be achieved if

Philip were found are characteristic of her schooled generosity, just as the child and the watch are perfect objects through which each woman could approach Philip.

C H A P T E R F O U R

WIVES AND DAUGHTERS

i) Introduction.

More than any of Gaskell's previous novels, *Wives and Daughters* turns in on itself to declare its exploration of its themes and to signal the design through which this exploration is conducted. Its major, recurrent subject is one which Roger first expresses, "One has always to try to think more of others than of oneself" (10: 152), and to which Mrs. Gibson returns in the last completed chapter, in "You should learn to understand the wishes of other people." (60:705). The overall structure within which these lessons unfold is one implied in this description of causation:

> But fate is a cunning hussy, and builds up her plans as imperceptibly as a bird builds her nest; and with much the same kind of unconsidered trifles. (7: 107)[1]

The narrative imitates this imperceptible structuring, and its attention is characteristically given to the "delicate alterations of relative conduct" as described in:

> These changes in humour and disposition, here described all at once, were in themselves a series of delicate alterations of relative conduct spread over many months - many winter months of long evenings and bad weather, which bring out discords of character, as a dash of cold water brings out the fading colours of an old fresco. (38: 462)

The clarity with which the narrative presents its own procedures makes *Wives and Daughters* the most self-conscious of Gaskell's novels and, in its control of tone and sustained shaping of event through narration, it is her most assured achievement.

As learning "to understand the wishes of other people" suggests, the subject matter of this novel represents a development of that handled in *North and South* and *Sylvia's Lovers*. Here too the discovery of self and the relation of self to others is the major subject, but in constructing this story, Gaskell does not use her central character, Molly, in quite the same

1. Page references to *Wives and Daughters* are to the Penguin edition, 1969.

way as in the two preceding novels. The phrase "relative conduct" indicates why: the narrative is designed to convey the importance of interaction, of relationships and their mutually shaping power. It is Molly's story but she does not dominate the action or the narration as, for example, Margaret Hale does. The early action establishes how and why Molly is to be seen as the novel's central consciousness and the touchstone for events and her point of view remains central in the narration, but at the same time there are long sequences which unfold independently of her. Even when she is central, events are not of her making; she is a heroine who responds to the needs and wishes of others. Her judgement is one in which the reader places increasing confidence, but as a protagonist, and compared with Margaret Hale and Sylvia Robson, she initiates very little. This means that Gaskell gave herself a new structural challenge in this novel: that of having to sustain the interest of a plot in which her chief protagonist is not the main instigator, and not always the chief recipient, of events.

The work was written for *The Cornhill Magazine* and first published in monthly parts from August 1864 - January 1866. The instalments are not uniform in length (they vary from 30 - 40 pages which fill 3 or 4 chapters) but monthly publication on this scale did allow Gaskell to develop an even narrative pace, a relaxed unfolding of events which seems best suited to her interests. The treatment of the subject of selves in relationship is ample, generous and leisurely in design and in tone. There is nothing of the rushed closure of *North and South* and, as Gaskell is creating comedy, there is little call in the overall effect for the tragic intensity of event and emotion which was created for *Sylvia's Lovers*. Within the broad, steady unfolding of events it is possible to discern a sequential organisation comparable to that of the earlier novels, but as is to be expected from the text's own emphasis on imperceptible plans and relative conduct, this organisation is relatively hidden in the depiction of daily life. It is the contingency of lives, their inter-

relatedness that is stressed rather than a single clear line of development. Within the story, individual states of mind are never treated, even in themselves, as absolute. It is true that they may be shown to overwhelm a character subjectively for the moment (as happens to Molly when she learns that her father is to remarry), but what is characteristically demonstrated is that experience teaches that such moments pass and relatedness is restored. This relatedness is of two varieties: it operates within one character's experience so that in moments of suffering, past experience can be summoned in memory to give a clarifying perspective to states of mind which are seen to be fluid, relative matters; and it operates between characters, so that even when the interests of self are felt to be all consuming, the needs of others may present themselves and break the absolute hold of the self. The moral outlook which flows from such a sense of life naturally permeates the design, but here it must be said that the apparent lack of organisation, the seemingly effortless flow of the narration as detail is piled on detail without taking immediate direction, is to be seen as created to convey this concept of relatedness in life. It is not stretching the complementary nature of subject and design in this novel too far to say that just as the self is not autonomous, so the treatment of events draws attention to their fluidity. Nothing is allowed to stand out too dramatically. Time flows evenly in this narrative and, unless a special factor (like Molly's being yet a child when her father remarries or Osborne's being ill when he sits at home guarding his secret marriage from his father) is seen to intervene, no one way of looking at experience is allowed to dominate even the most climactic of events.

As *Wives and Daughters* has neither the distinct phases of *North and South* nor the three-fold design of *Sylvia's Lovers*, a new term, sequences, has been used in describing the temporal organisation of its narrative. The clearest indication of a movement from one sequence to the next comes from the question of which character dominates the action and which the narration. As will be seen from the outline which follows,

emphasis in the narration does not always correspond to centrality in the action. Each sequence has been demarcated by specific chapters in the outline below, but as the movement from sequence to sequence is gradual, imperceptible rather than clear-cut, these allocations must be taken as approximate ones.

	Chapters	Action and Narration
Sequence 1	a) 1 - 2	Prologue: Molly visits Cumnor Towers.
	b) 3 - 10	Mr Gibson drifts into marriage. (Authorial voice strongest.)
Sequence 2	11 - 18	Molly learns to accept. (Her point of view dominates.)
Sequence 3	19 - 26	Molly and Cynthia in a new regime; Hamley affairs. (Authorial voice plus several points of view.)
Sequence 4	27 - 40	The younger generation chooses (Molly's point of view dominates.)
Sequence 5	a) 41 - 54	Consequences and the community.
	b) 55 - 60	Epilogue: The second chance. (Authorial voice strong.)

Although movement from one sequence to the next does not occur in distinct steps, a certain patterning of events does emerge in the general flow. What can be observed is that in the novel's opening and closing sequences there is an emphasis on the life of the larger community and its role in shaping the main characters' lives. In the first sequence, Mr Gibson's community unintentionally and unobtrusively guides him into a second marriage, while in the last, the Hollingford gossips subject Molly to their cruelty (over Mr Preston) and then, when she has cared for the Squire in his loss of Osborne, reinstate her as "a darling of the town" (54: 642). In the middle sequences, concentration is stronger on the interactions of specific characters, on the fortunes of the Gibson and Hamley families in particular, but because of the emphasis of the opening, this concentration does not have the effect of dispelling the sense that each life is part of a larger community life. The prologue chapters indicate the central

role that Molly is to assume once she has taken her place in the adult world. They do not stand out very strongly from the narrative which follows but the way that they, as an opening, match Molly's second, happy visit to Cumnor Towers in the concluding chapters, suggests that Gaskell wanted to signal a deliberate rounding-off of her story. This complements the way in which Roger and Cynthia are granted a reprieve from their mistaken choices made in Sequence Four and marks the fact that the novel closes with the intentions and conventions of comedy.

Molly's point of view dominates the narration of Sequences Two and Four but she is not central in the action of both sequences. In the processes of accepting her father's re-marriage, in Sequence Two Molly's consciousness is the natural focus of event as well as of narration, but in the later sequence she is left to observe the needs and actions of others. The separation between her point of view and her place in events in this sequence underlines the fact that once again Molly is having to come to terms with what others do rather than with what she herself initiates. In Sequence Three, the Gibson household, which is settling into its new shape, is matched with the Hamley family and the narration cuts rapidly and quite frequently from one family to the other.[1] These chapters culminate in the Hollingford Charity Ball, an event which brings the whole community into focus again but without suggesting that at this point it has a shaping power over the protagonists' lives. In the middle of the novel, the community is used for choric purposes rather than as an agent in events.

In a novel which concentrates as strongly as *Wives and Daughters* does on the community's life, the value of authorial narration will be obvious. Only such a voice can span the many lives incorporated in a community and, when the subject

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1. Basson (1979: 184) notes that Chapters 22, 23 and 24 were inserted after Gaskell had begun the account of the preparations for the Ball. As an apparent second thought which came during the writing, it is interesting that these chapters continue the cutting from household to household, Chapters 22 - 3 being set at Hamley and Chapter 24 in the Gibson household.

of relatedness is what demands the presentation of several lives, then a disengaged voice, free to enter all sides of corporate experience and able to bring them together is what is demanded. In the narration of *North and South* it can be seen that the narrating voice is able to collaborate with the heroine's perceptions to such an extent that the narrative takes on some of the qualities of figural narration, especially that of allowing the subjective point of view to fill the fictional horizons. In *Wives and Daughters* the authorial narrator also merges, for considerable stretches, with the point of view of the heroine, but this is never done to quite the extent of the earlier novel because the matter of the heroine's mistaken apprehension and concepts does not have to engage the reader in the same way. Thus even in the second and fourth sequences, when Molly's point of view is well to the fore in the narration, the authorial narrator's presence is sustained. This has the effect of holding Molly firmly in the world to which she belongs and of sustaining in the novel's form the balance between self and community which the story examines.

Co-operation between point-of-view and the authorial voice continues in all the sequences of *Wives and Daughters* but the reasons which can be inferred for the balance created between the subjective and objective poles of the authorial mode are not the same for each sequence. They can be summarized in this way:

Sequence 1 : the authorial voice dominates so that its distancing effect can create the appropriately affectionate tone for the social comedy of Mr Gibson's second marriage. The same tone embraces childhood and the "pretty amount of feudal feeling" (1: 36) which lingered in Hollingford.

Sequence 2 : the narration moves much closer to Molly in her suffering as she is precipitated into the adult world, but her point of view is still that of an inexperienced child and so has to be placed and supplemented by the narrator's voice.

Sequence 3 : the equal interaction of the Gibson and Hamley households necessitates a narration which moves equally into all points of view. Molly's perceptions are still treated

as most important, but much is narrated that is beyond her knowledge.

Sequence 4 : the relative nature of lives continues but observation of characters' influences, interactions and choices is given chiefly to Molly so that her point of view is felt to dominate.

Sequence 5 : Molly takes a more active role, attempting to rescue Cynthia and supporting Squire Hamley. Solitary reflections are less in evidence as social comedy returns. The affectionate distance of the narrator's voice in Sequence One is not needed as its function is taken on in the perceptions of the characters themselves.

As this summary seeks to suggest, the apprehension of life as comedy is what the characters themselves attain. In the early chapters, the narrating voice evokes the pre-Reform Bill era with considerable nostalgic affection, as in:

> ... their fathers' grand-fathers had always voted for the eldest son of Cumnor Towers, and following in the ancestral track, every man-jack in the place gave his vote to the liege lord, totally irrespective of such chimeras as political opinion. (1: 36 - 7)

Such pastoral innocence is explicitly connected with Molly's child-like outlook in:

> Five-and-forty years ago, children's pleasures in a country town were very simple, and Molly had lived for twelve long years without the occurrence of any event so great as that which was now impending. (1: 36)

Her excitement at a visit to Cumnor Towers is compared directly with the feudal loyalties of the towns-folk and their "whispered and fussy admiration" (1: 38) of the great family, but this nostalgic view of innocence is not created simply for escapist pleasure. What it makes possible is comedy's long view. In this passage, the amused detachment is smoothly transferred to other, potentially more painful matters such as the Miss Brownings' disappointment when the young Mr Gibson married Mary Pearson and from there to the circumstances of Mr Gibson's second marriage. The comic voice's detachment from individual pain, its long view, gives the reader confidence that all human griefs ultimately take their place in the

scheme of things and as such are not, even when their duration has been acutely rendered, cause for grief. In a novel which concerns itself with relatedness and contingency, such benign distance is to be expected but it is not felt as easy complacency. This is because the characters themselves, especially Molly, are seen to grow into a capacity for this view of life too. Viewing life as comedy is thus demonstrated to be a serious and valuable capacity and when, in the novel's conclusion, Lady Harriet speaks mockingly of her interest in Roger and Molly as being like watching a fairy-tale romance (58: 676) the reader feels that just as Lady Harriet controls the self-mockery in what she says, so Molly and Roger would see and accept its application to them. It is perhaps going too far to say that Molly has command of such poised distance from herself, but not too far to say that she is en route.

Thus the creation of a broad sweep of events which illuminates the inter-relatedness of lives is the subject of genial comedy. Set back five-and-forty years, the world is one still held in living memory. Hollingford is not like Monkshaven, distanced by a strangeness of milieu and customs as well as separated by time, nor is it like the contemporary world of *North and South* which, with its tensions and difficulties of self-comprehension, has to be treated with wary respect. Hollingford is known and beloved, as was Cranford. This affection is reflected in the narrating voice which does not, like that used for *Sylvia's Lovers*, need to be given a distinct identity so that the time that its observations span may be both acknowledged and bridged. In *Wives and Daughters* Gaskell can rely on her readers themselves to recall the world being presented.[1]

While social comedy is a familiar achievement for Gaskell, she combines it in *Wives and Daughters* with an interest which was apparently clarified for her in *North and South* and *Sylvia's Lovers*: the personal suffering of the self as it is subjected

1. Easson (1979: 189 - 190), points out that the evocation of childhood is such that all readers' memories of childhood and of its rendering in story form will respond to the opening chapters.

to enforced definition. The decision to treat this subject in the tranquil atmosphere of a familiar English rural town and its traditional ways is heralded by *Cousin Phillis* in its picture of a cruel but inevitable invasion of Phillis's idyllic world of rural, childish seclusion. Molly's life is less completely fused with the natural world, but as in *Cousin Phillis*, it is the naturalness, the rightness, of seasonal cycles which is felt to measure her development and to sanction the viewing of it as comedy.

The events of *Wives and Daughters* are narrated chronologically except for the two opening chapters which lift Molly's first visit to Cumnor Towers out of sequence and treat her brief unhappiness in some detail. In addition, the task of demonstrating the interactions of concurrent lives has been met by the use of smaller detours in the narration. Some of these are explicitly signalled by the narrating voice. For example, the explanation of why Mr Gibson first sent Molly to stay at Hamley begins "And the cause for the change in Mr Gibson's wishes just referred to was as follows:" (4: 77), and there follows a long, scenically treated account of Mr Coxe's youthful passion. In the same way, when Mr Gibson approaches the point of proposal to Clare, the narrating voice explains the circumstances in a similar detour which begins "It happened in this manner:-" (8: 122), and which recounts how it was that Clare came to be staying at Cumnor Towers at that time. Other detours are not as clearly signalled. When the circumstances of Lord Cumnor's inviting Molly to join the Hollingford ladies in their annual visit to the Towers are given (1: 39), or when Lady Cumnor's sudden fatigue with these same visitors is used to explain why they left hurriedly and why Molly was overlooked (2: 49), the detour is incorporated into the narration without comment. It seems that Gaskell wanted her readers to be conscious of the inclusiveness of the narrative (hence the signals), and to feel that its scope is naturally all-encompassing and that its easy winding in order to include all the interactions of the lives of the community is of a piece with the ample, slow-moving world being depicted. Whether or not the narration signals its detours, its moves

back and forth become part of a slow, steady movement onwards, an all-inclusive, broadening progress of which Molly's life is a special but not necessarily remarkable part.

ii) Sequence 1. a) Chapters 1 - 2. The Prologue.

Although these prologue chapters give special prominence to Molly's first visit to Cumnor Towers by lifting it out of its chronological place, and although the purpose seems to be to indicate that she is to be the centre of future developments, the effect is not to give undue prominence to Molly herself. This is because, as has already been said, her childish perceptions are treated with the same affectionate but distancing voice as is used for the town's somewhat anachronistic feudalism. This means that although childhood's perceptions are given their due, they do not become a subject in the narrative in their own right[1] and Molly is kept, despite the attention given to her, in her place in the wider community.

That these two chapters can rightly be termed a prologue to events is to be seen in the way that they foreshadow Molly's first major conscious step in life - that of leaving her childhood security. When her father re-marries, Molly experiences sudden emotional desolation.

> It was as if the piece of solid ground on which she stood had broken from the shore, and she was drifting out to the infinite sea alone. (10: 145)

Her ordeal at Cumnor Towers, when she feels herself alone and exposed to a different and disapproving category of people, when she experiences social desolation, is much less intense but is an obvious foreshadowing of what is to come. Clare is not an agent in Molly's social ordeal, as she becomes in the full-scale traumatic severance from childhood security, but her presence at the Towers makes the connection of the two events very clear. It is Clare's failure to acknowledge that she had eaten Molly's lunch which makes the child feel that her behaviour is misjudged, and it is Clare's failure to wake the child in time to go home which makes Molly feel unwanted and out of place. When her father announces his coming marriage, unwanted is precisely what Molly feels, and as she protests, misjudgement (hers and his) follows.

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1. As they are for example in *David Copperfield* 1849 - 50 and *What Maisie Knew* 1897.

As well as the forthcoming event, the significance that the reader is invited to give to Molly's suffering when her father re-marries is indicated in the prologue chapters. As his wife, Hyacinth Kirkpatrick has, officially, first claim on Mr Gibson's affections and so can usurp Molly's claims. For the young girl, this experience of being apparently unwanted is a sudden, serious challenge to her rights, to the way that she has known herself and so to her identity, and it is a challenge which this brief scene in the prologue foreshadows. Molly has come down with the other children to dessert:

> Each dainty little child ran up to its mother, or aunt, or particular friend; but Molly had no one to go to.
> 'Who is that tall girl in the thick white frock? Not one of the children of the house, I think?'
> The lady addressed put up her glass, gazed at Molly, and dropped it an instant.
> 'A French girl, I should imagine. I know Lady Cuxhaven was inquiring for one to bring up with her little girls, that they might get a good accent early. Poor little woman, she looks wild and strange!' And the speaker, who sat next to Lord Cumnor, made a little sign to Molly to come to her; Molly crept up to her as to the first shelter; but when the lady began talking to her in French, she blushed violently, and said in a very low voice:
> 'I don't understand French. I'm only Molly Gibson, ma'am.'
> 'Molly Gibson!' said the lady, out loud; as if that was not much of an explanation.
> Lord Cumnor caught the words and the tone.
> 'Oh, ho!' said he. 'Are you the little girl who has been sleeping in my bed?' (2: 52 - 3)

It is a suitably complex rejection. The supposition that she was a French child had given Molly an identity which made the lady guest feel quite kindly towards her, but once Molly's actual identity is asserted (and here Mr Gibson's preference for plain names is doubly effective) the guest lets her haughty surprise appear and hurt the child. The moment is revealing of aristocratic attitudes to social inferiors - Molly was to be explained by her usefulness - but it is more important for its effect on Molly. She finds that she has few reserves from which to counteract the confirmation of what she fears, that she is an unwanted intruder. And it is just such a threat to her presence that she experiences when her father remarries, although the later shock is an emotional before it is a social ordeal. She feels that this marriage

undermines her right to loving confidence in her father and so to existence itself.

Placing the first of Molly's experiences of rejection in the hands of an unnamed guest at Cumnor Towers enables Gaskell to give the incident a clarity and singleness of focus on Molly's responses which she could not have managed as simply through an already known character. Even Lord Cumnor's participation begins to blur the issue, as indeed it should, for Gaskell's interest is in the ironic complexities of interaction. The focus on Molly is also one designed to affect the reader more fully than it does the child herself who never refers to the significance of her visit in later life and only remembers her unhappiness in a general way. As Molly rides home from Cumnor Towers with her father she does report to him, as a result of her experiences:

> 'Do you know, papa, I think lady's-maids are worse than ladies. I should not mind being a housekeeper so much.'
> (2: 59)

Obviously she has reached some conclusions about what happened, but these conclusions are not to recur in Molly's consciousness even when she learns that Clare is to be her step-mother and remembers her questionable actions with slight alarm. The thematic relevance of the visit is one reserved for the reader as the prologue's dislocation of the temporal sequence suggests. This demarcation between characters and readers is something that the presence of the narrating voice also helps to establish by pointing constantly but unobtrusively to the limits on what the child understands of what she sees and feels.

The subtlety of the creation of the child's insights and of their being held in suitable check can be seen in the examination of a further achievement in the narrative - the use of moments which take on symbolic resonance without disrupting

the dailiness[1] of the novel's formal realism. Gaskell's writing shows from the first an acute sensitivity to the power of a scene, an atmosphere. Her second piece of published writing, 'Clopton Hall' (1840), demonstrates her vivid, delicate responsiveness to places. In the later novels she shows a developing capacity to use this responsiveness as a structural part of her narrative. The power to give settings and actions a poetic force begins in *North and South* in the scenes where Margaret Hale reflects on her Milton experiences. There the domestic and natural settings for her self-examination are carefully chosen to indicate the growing scope of the inner development in process. In *Sylvia's Lovers* this poetic capacity[2] informs Monkshaven's cliff-side setting. In the scene where Philip Hepburn follows Kinraid along the beach, the cliffs play an active part in Philip's awareness of what is happening once he instinctively uses them to conceal himself from Kinraid. Now, in her last novel, Gaskell demonstrates a further refinement in the way poetic sensibility serves her narrative purpose, for there is an active exploration of the way Molly's childish but developing awareness will seek symbolic expression for itself. In the first moment where this is done, in Molly's escape from Lady Agnes's botanising in the greenhouses, the child's feelings simply respond to the sensations of the moment and she does not seek to convey their significance. But in the second symbolic moment,

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1. "Dailiness" is the word Kathleen Tillotson (1961) uses to point to Gaskell's great strength, her "reverence for average human nature" (p 221) and her acceptance of "the ordinariness of people and the dailiness of life." (p 222).

2. James's (1866a) estimate of Gaskell in *Wives and Daughters* heralds Tillotson's praise of her "dailiness". He praises the scene in Chapter 23 where Roger comforts his father and says:

> We have intimated that this scene is prosaic; but let not the reader take fright at the word. If an author can be powerful, delicate, humorous, pathetic, dramatic within the strict limits of homely prose, we see no need of his "dropping into poetry," as Mr. Dickens says. It is Mrs. Gaskell's highest praise to have been all of this and yet to have written "an everyday story" ... in an everyday style. (p 159).

The claims being made for Gaskell's developing poetic capacity do not quarrel with James's comments on her "everyday style" for it is precisely this register which allows Gaskell to enter Molly's imagination so effectively.

as she rides home with her father and formulates her wish never to be separated from him again, Molly's own imagination is the source of the image created although she almost certainly does not grasp its full suggestiveness.

Molly is delighted by the gardens at Cumnor Towers. Hers is the observing eye which conveys the picture of flower beds, lawns and trees, and when the narrator says that "the melting away of exquisite cultivation into the wilderness had an ex-explicable charm to her" (2: 45) it is clear that the reader is to share the child's innocent delight in the landscape's finely achieved balance. This enables Gaskell to range the reader with Molly against Lady Agnes's learned interest in horticulture and against the Hollingford ladies' obsequious admiration for such knowledge. The reader shares Molly's feelings in the hothouse as she finally

> caught at Miss Browning's hand, and gasped out:
> 'May I go back, out into the garden? I can't breathe here!'
> 'Oh, yes, to be sure, love. I daresay it's hard understanding for you, love; but it's very fine and instructive, and a deal of Latin in it too.' (2: 45)

Molly's instinctive affinity to natural beauty thus becomes an ally of the narrative voice's recording of the comedy of manners as Hollingford meets Cumnor Towers, although Molly is not yet able to place these things for herself. This is the first time that her responses have been shown as valuable in their own right and such support for her instinctive, pre-social self comes at a carefully chosen point: just before she is challenged by her isolation among the aristocrats.

When she escapes from the greenhouse, Molly is reacting mainly to the oppressive heat, but her flight is also that of innocence from manners which are an obstacle to truth (Lady Harriet is to call her a "famous little truth teller" (26: 335) and of the pre-socialized being from the unbalanced relationship between the classes to be seen working in Miss Browning's admiration of "a deal of Latin". Molly is conscious of none of this of course, and although she has been the narrator's ally in some respects, it is for the reader

alone to perceive all that the moment means.

The same is true of the second of the prologue's symbolic moments although the image used is one of Molly's own creation. As she and her father ride home, she says:

> 'Oh! I am so glad to feel you,' squeezing his hand hard. 'Papa, I should like to get a chain like Ponto's just as long as your longest round, and then I could fasten us two to each end of it, and when I wanted you I could pull, and if you didn't want to come, you could pull back again; but I should know you knew I wanted you, and we could never lose each other.' (2: 58)

The touching absurdity of Molly's wish (for which her father duly teases her) speaks eloquently of the child's alarm on discovering what isolation is like and conveys very suggestively the relief with which she would settle back into recovered security. Her father's teasing is used to place what is fanciful in the child's wish, but it is not clear that he perceives the prophetic element in what she says. His wife's early death has thrown Mr Gibson into an "altogether confidential friendship" (3: 64) with his child, a closeness which he half seriously wants to perpetuate by preventing her from growing up - as his instructions to Miss Eyre about her education indicate (3: 65). The dangers in perpetuating Molly's childhood are all suggested for the reader in her picture of how she would keep permanent hold on her father, but it is not certain that even he can see fully what is conveyed in Molly's imaginative picture. In this way the narration combines both Molly's point of view and an insight into events which goes way beyond her capacities, while doing full justice to the charm and validity of her outlook.

This power simultaneously to convey the child's imaginative capacities and to distance the reader from them so that perceptive insight into their poetic force is possible, is an extension of the capacities of Gaskell's previous work. The tenderness with which the child is placed in these prologue chapters changes in the following part of Sequence One as the comic ironies of Mr Gibson's decision to remarry are given with a similar balancing of inwardness and distance, but one that is much more sharply attained.

Sequence 1. b) Chapters 3 - 10. Mr Gibson's Marriage.

After the scenic glimpses of Hollingford life given in the prologue, the narrative then goes back on itself to establish the fictional world more fully by tracing its inter-relationships and their effect on Mr Gibson's life. This involves a distinct move away from the concentration on Molly in the prologue, but although attention moves to Mr Gibson, the novel's having begun with Molly ensures that his story is read for its effect on Molly even when the narrative does not actually assert such focus of significance. Gaskell's ability to control a tangential opening to her novel had developed since the use of Mr Hale in the opening chapters of *North and South*.

Chapters 3 and 4 go back in time to place Mr Gibson's sense that his life has already been shaped, and that little can now happen to disturb him.

> Several years before the opening of this story, Mr Gibson's position seemed settled for life, both socially and professionally. (3: 63)

The narration has a genial detachment which seems at first to be supporting Mr Gibson's complacency, but gradually events and the narrating voice set themselves in ironic counterpoise to Mr Gibson's confidence that all is smoothly under control and even his assumptions about himself, let alone about others, are questioned.

> He deceived himself into believing that still his reason was lord of all, because he had never fallen into the habit of expression on any other than purely intellectual subjects. (3: 63)

The illusions on which Mr Gibson rests present themselves to the reader long before he realises that his life is not proof against vicissitude, or, in the novel's more homely terms, against the well intentioned mistakes into which he drifts and is led. Although the narrative is to propose that the reader sees Fate as conspiring against Mr Gibson (7: 107), it is to treat the question of his power to resist external influences and to shape his own life with such gentle comic irony that a term like 'vicissitudes' and its tragic associations is not appropriate here. But as causality in community

life is seen as the ironic confluence of unintentional interference by others, the gentle evocation of an outside force has to be acknowledged so that the narration's concentration on the human reality behind 'fate' can become evident.

But while the comedy of this sequence works more and more at Mr Gibson's expense, his generally sardonic eye and pleasure in life's ironies is also of great service to the tone which these chapters seek to establish. The doctor's naturally dry outlook means that Gaskell is felt to be justified in treating his mistakes largely through comedy's detached view. Although the discovery that he is still as capable of the very mistakes which amuse him in others is a painful one for him, Mr Gibson recovers his customary poise rapidly enough for the narrative's tone to remain relatively undisturbed. In this, he is unlike Molly. In the next sequence, her acute, formative experiences demand a quite different tone from the comic detachment appropriate to Mr Gibson.

The narration's implicit invitation to the reader to adopt Mr Gibson's view of his community is furthered by the fact that it is largely his movement from household to household in his capacity as neighbourhood doctor which is used to take the reader from scene to scene. His movements create the geography of Hollingford and his point of view is used to introduce many of its families. This reliance on him is confirmed as natural and proper once his outlook is seen to complement the narrator's tone as fully as does this account of how he obtained confirmation of Lord Cumnor's suggestion that Molly might visit Cumnor Towers.

> He chose his time, with a little natural diplomacy; which indeed, he had often to exercise in his intercourse with the great family. He rode into the stableyard about twelve o'clock, a little before luncheon time, and yet after the worry of opening the post-bag and discussing its contents was over. (1: 40)

"The worry of opening the post-bag" suggests Mr Gibson's own phrase and the judgement of self-importance it conveys co-operates beautifully with the narrator's benevolent view of the "generally condescending" (1: 37) great family. This

means that when Mr Gibson's riding on his rounds is the chief means by which the reader is introduced to and comes to understand the workings of the neighbourhood, his power is felt to be quite proper. In as much as Mr Gibson's movements constitute the narrative's initiative in introducing its material and in as much as his crossing space[1] reinforces the sense of a sinuous narrative line whose windings and detours comprehend all of the community's workings, his function in the narrative becomes a very important one. But, like the ironic outcome of the apparent support given to his complacently sardonic view of life, so the power which Mr Gibson's role in the narrative's opening gives him is, in the event, not present in his own life. Although he can, in his professional capacity, lead the reader through his world, it turns out that he does not have quite the power that this function would suggest. Like the picaresque hero, he is somewhat the victim of chance and other people, especially in the most personal of his decisions - that he should marry again. His apparent freedom from life's tricks has been all the while a preparation for a fine blunder.

It is Molly's needs which bring the thought of re-marriage to Mr Gibson's mind, but even while his child's well-being occupies him, the winding narrative establishes the near invisible part played by the community in his actions, especially in his choice of Clare. The metaphor that the narrator uses is that of a current on which Mr Gibson is carried (8: 122). He is presented as quite willing to float with the current as far as he is aware of it and may in this sense be said to be acting of his own volition, but it is also clear that many pressures of which he is not aware are swelling the current. For example, Lord Cumnor's letter which Clare reads aloud to Lady Cumnor (9: 137) undoubtedly does its bit to pre-dispose Clare to Mr Gibson's offer and perhaps leads her to encourage her suitor a little. In this sense his life is in what the narrator sometimes refers to as "fate's" control (the "cunning

1. This emphasis is different from that in the prologue which in itself is a detour in time and within which the narrative's windings are chiefly temporal.

hussy" who builds her plans of "unconsidered trifles" 7: 107), a power which the reader may otherwise recognize as the unintentional power that inter-related lives have to shape an individual life.

The care with which Gaskell worked the subject of causation in communal life into her narrative may be seen if the cumulative pressures which guide Mr Gibson to his decision are listed. There are thoseof which Mr Gibson is aware such as Mr Coxe's youthful passion for Molly; Miss Eyre's nephew's scarlet fever which keeps the governess away from her role as Molly's chaperone longer than is convenient; the domestic disarray when Lord Hollingford comes to lunch and, having had an unsatisfactory, cold meal, advises his host to re-marry. All of these factors lead Mr Gibson to look with particular conscious interest on Clare when he sees her at Cumnor Towers again; but her visit to the Towers is, at the same time, one of the factors which the narration presents as the mysterious contribution to individual decisions that the inter-relatedness of lives produces. She is there entirely at the convenience of Lady Cumnor, so her meeting Mr Gibson's needs may be said to be due to chance. But on the other hand, there has been sufficient comment at Cumnor Towers on the suitability of a marriage between Clare and the doctor to create a wave of expectation, not least in Clare herself, who naturally sees marriage as the answer to her own problems. This wave then plays its part in bringing Mr Gibson to the point of proposing. A corresponding wave of expectation has been created in Molly at Hamley by the Squire's remark that everyone had expected her father to remarry, a remark which led Molly to repeat her requests to return home with an anxious intensity which no doubt made her father more conscious than ever of the need to settle his domestic problems.

Once Mr Gibson has proposed, both Squire Hamley and Lord Cumnor assume a degree of proprietary interest, of responsibility for the decision. This indicates their half-conscious sense of the arrangement's being a corporate, community matter rather than one of purely individual choice (11:

171 and 12: 172). Lord Cumnor goes furthest in congratulating himself on his part, and, although his wife pours her usual cold water on his claims, she too remembers that his letter had indeed had some influence in the proceedings.

The narration goes no further in explaining the causal power of a factor such as Lord Cumnor's letter than to present the occasion (9: 137) and then to leave the reader to assume the connection between it and Clare's subsequent behaviour (10: 138 - 40). It is a connection which Mr Gibson himself is reluctant to explore once Lady Cumnor reveals the happy coincidence of his proposal and Clare's having read the letter (10: 142), for the possibilities of manipulation suggested are more than he is willing to contemplate. But manipulation is what has to be acknowledged, not necessarily as an undue, immoral interference but as the kind of accidental nudge which the interdependence of lives usually produces. The narration's reticence on the causal power of Lord Cumnor's letter is a necessary part of the treatment of Mr Gibson, and is also interesting for the general questions it raises about authorial narration's entry or non-entry into the inner lives of its characters. The narration could have located the letter in Clare's thought in the proposal scene, but it did not, and so not everything is explained. Full explanation is often given in *Wives and Daughters*, as when Mr Coxe's giving Mr Gibson cause for worry is recounted in an account which begins appropriately with the phrase, "And the cause for the change in Mr Gibson's wishes ... was as follows:" (4: 77). The difference in intention in the proposal scene is evident in the phrase which introduces the account of Clare's presence at Cumnor Towers, "It happened in this manner:-" (8: 122). As this wording suggests, events will be described rather than explained, and the description is one that leaves the reader to make certain inferences. That the letter was partly instrumental is a normal, everyday inference, and Gaskell's methods never extend the reader beyond such customary making of connections, but the narration's reticence when it could so easily have pinned the matter down, is significant. It is an acknowledgement that certain matters can

only be presented, described, demonstrated but not explained. All fiction may, by convention, go beyond the bounds of what is knowable in daily life when it establishes and explains matters like individual motivation or the chance, causative gathering of events. Even if the causative connection between two events is not given, their juxtaposition has a certainty, a reliability in fiction which is not present in life's events. As this passage beyond daily limits of perceptions is most easily and customarily undertaken by the authorial voice, reticence in a novel like *Wives and Daughters* is especially interesting.

There would seem to be two major purposes served by this instance of reticence: the desired illusion of the characters' autonomous existence and a recognisable presentation of causation in closely inter-related lives. The exact influence of Lord Hollingford's advice or of Molly's pleas to return home cannot be known, nor can Lord Cumnor's letter's influence on Clare be explained if these characters are to remain to some degree representations which suggest an autonomous inner life. (Thackeray's seeing his characters as puppet-figures is the obvious contrast here.[1]) And for the interactions of these lives to appear familiar, the need for the reader to draw inferences rather than receive explanations is vital.

There is a third factor which the narration's reticence seems to serve here: this sequence's comic tone. Had Gaskell used the convention of an explanatory presentation of Mr Gibson's inner life very extensively, then the tone and nature of his interaction with his community would have been different. This can be seen by contrast with Sequence Two when Molly's examination of her feelings and motives, or her attempts to fathom what she observes in others, is being handled. There the degree of explanatory power assumed by the narration increases because its stance is much closer to

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1. Especially in the prologue 'Before the Curtain' to *Vanity Fair* 1848

Molly, as befits the greater emotional intensity of the sequence. What matters is her responses, how she comes to understand events, and in this concentration on Molly, the equal, independent life of the other characters is slightly reduced. The difference between the two sequences indicates that the mode of the first with its reticences was necessary to Gaskell for the presentation of her concept of a community's workings. The narrative's methods have philosophical implications, for its reticence on certain points is what enables Gaskell to demonstrate the ironic confluence of numerous wishes, chance expressions, random events, varying needs and interests which go to shape an individual decision made in communal life. There is a link in Gaskell's work between her concept of a community and her sense that comedy's detachment is the right mode for presenting it.

The probability of a link is born out by a comparison with *Sylvia's Lovers*. There the community is also important, especially in the first volume, for it provides the formative context of Sylvia's and Philip's different natures. But if the two main community scenes of Volume One are considered further, it will be seen that Darley's funeral and the Corney's party show that forces much greater than the confluence of individual needs and wishes are at work on the protagonists. This is especially clear in the funeral scene which presents Sylvia's first, momentous encounter with mortality and the fact (which she only half sees) that her feelings and actions will be measured against that implacable scale. The nature of her world is given sudden, sharp definition by Darley's death and the reader knows that in this novel human interaction is to occur within shaping forces much greater than the sum of individual lives. The Corney's party is somewhat closer to the comedy of *Wives and Daughters* but even in that boisterous seasonal celebration, the elemental forces of the Monkshaven world and its tragedy are to be felt.

The tendency that causation in community life has to swamp the individual power to choose is perfectly recognised in the structure of Chapter 8 where Gaskell gives expression to Mr

Gibson's relation to the slowly gathering pressures which are leading to his proposal to Clare. Although he is the chief figure in events, he is hardly the chief participant, and this is all the narrative attention he gets:

> During this absence of hers Mr Gibson was drifting into matrimony. He was partly aware of whither he was going; and partly it was like the soft floating movement of a dream. He was more passive than active in[1] the affair; though, if his reason had not fully approved of the step he was tending to - if he had not believed that a second marriage was the very best way of cutting the Gordian knot of domestic difficulties, he could have made an effort without any great trouble, and extricated himself without pain from the mesh of circumstances. (8: 122)

As is usual with Gaskell's authorial narration, it is not clear whether the last sentence is simply echoing Mr Gibson's views or whether its effect is to endorse what he thinks. It is in this uncertainty that the comic possibilities lie, possibilities which have already been strongly suggested in the gap between Mr Gibson's own certainties and actuality. In view of this gap, his thoughts immediately after his impulsive proposal come as no surprise to the reader.

> There! he had done it - whether it was wise or foolish - he had done it! but he was aware that the question as to its wisdom came into his mind the instant that the words were said past recall. (10: 140)

The images of gradual, liquid movement and of the "mesh of circumstances" in the passage from Chapter 8 give insight into Mr Gibson's subjective experience of the inner and outer processes at work. The narration's commenting on his state in the first part of the passage also indicates that in its mode and organization it is seeking to convey his limited control over the whole process. In this way, the placing of this passage in Chapter 8 reinforces the substance and mode of the narration. The chapter is called "Drifting into Danger" but, although it is obviously Mr Gibson who is drifting, the eleven lines quoted above constitute all the explicit mention he gets. Before them, Roger's arrival at Hamley and its

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1. The Penguin edition prints "of" here.

effect on Molly is given with a scenic immediacy which allows the narrative's linear momentum, the subject of Mr Gibson, to fade completely for the time; after these lines the narrative moves immediately to the circumstances of Clare's visit to Cumnor Towers. Mr Gibson forms a very slender waist indeed, but his overshadowing once again demonstrates the importance Gaskell gave to other, apparently unconnected events in his decision-making.

The relationship between Mr Gibson at the middle of the chapter's duration but overshadowed by its other subjects, those other subjects themselves and the overall direction of the narrative is carefully established. The chapter has, in itself, a delicate thematic unity which both adds to the obscurity in which Mr Gibson is placed and illuminates the issues which his approaching decision will encompass. When Roger arrives home bringing news of Osborne's unexpected failure at Cambridge, Molly finds herself in considerable confusion. She has imbibed all the family's feudal feelings about its sons and added to them some romantic notions of her own about knights and troubadours, so that she is ill-prepared for what follows Roger's arrival. The consolation that she tries to give Mrs Hamley is charming in its one-sided loyalty and its anger with Roger for being the bearer of such bad news. Her resentment is deepened when she finds that Roger has, unconsciously, taken her place in the library and failed to think of including her in his daily rides. The issues which show themselves here as part of Molly's experience come forward again, though very differently treated, in the Cumnors' rambling conversation about Clare as they decide that she should be invited to the Towers as a companion for Lady Cumnor. In this way duty, loyalty, respect, affection, love and sentiment are established both in their own right in the lives of several characters and as preparation for the issues which are to be so uncomfortably at stake in Mr Gibson's approaching marriage.

The climax to this sequence comes in Chapter 10 when Mr Gibson

proposes to Clare. The chapter is called, appropriately enough, "A Crisis", but its structure indicates that Gaskell wanted her reader to feel the impossibility of seeing the climactic moment simply as a proposal which involves two people alone. Such a moment certainly exists and is treated scenically at the beginning of the chapter, but then the action moves swiftly to Lady Cumnor's "observant eyes" (10: 141) and the comedy of her husband's letter. The betrothed couple have little privacy in which to feel the happy satisfactions of having taken an important step, but even more powerful than this comic diminishing of their importance is the fact of Mr Gibson's obligation to his child and the immediate need to break the news to her. Accordingly, the greater part of the chapter (almost two-thirds) is given to Molly's response to her father's decision and the chapter's title is seen to apply even more strongly to her than it does to the lovers.

Once Molly's reactions become its subject, the chapter changes key as well as focus. This change means that it really belongs to Sequence Two of the scheme proposed for the novel and therefore the second half of the chapter will be considered in the next section of this discussion.

iii) Sequence 2. Chapters 11 - 18. Molly Learns to Accept

The fact that the climactic chapter of Sequence One also marks the shift into Sequence Two draws attention to the fluid ease with which Gaskell moves her readers from one stage of her narrative to the next. With this shift comes a new tone, a new set of purposes and a newly central character, Molly, who now takes the place promised by the prologue. As she becomes central, the narration concentrates on her feelings, her way of perceiving and struggling to accept her social obligations and her increasing power to interest the other characters (as well as the reader) in her own right. As the sequence changes tone, it takes on a near tragic intensity at first as it allows Molly's grief to dominate, and then the comedy of inter-related lives gradually returns, but this time with less of the satirical quality of the earlier scenes and a more romantic concentration on life as comedy.

Another way of expressing this shift is to point to the fact that Gaskell is gradually moving the second generation of her characters to centre stage to present their choices, how these are shaped by a "mesh of circumstances" (8: 122) and how they will, in turn, interact with other lives and other choices. In Mr Gibson's generation, choice in community life is treated largely for its ironies, but in the second generation, once the nature of choice and its attendant pains has been established, the inflexibility of satirical comedy's view on human foibles and fallibility is relaxed, the second generation is given a chance to rectify its mistakes, and poetic justice accompanies the good sense of comedy.

The concentration on Molly which begins in the second half of Chapter 10 establishes almost immediately that it is her inner life that is to occupy attention. Her father leaves almost as soon as he has broken the news of his decision to remarry because Molly accuses him of an underhand management of matters, "So I was sent out of the house that all this might be quietly arranged in my absence?" (10: 146). She is

horrified herself by what she has said and her apology is heartfelt, "Oh, papa, papa - I'm not myself - I don't know what to say about this hateful - detestable - " (10: 146). These words are also structurally important for, from here on in Sequence Two the question of being "myself", of Molly's self in competition with and then in relation to the challenge of her father's second marriage is to engage all of her attention, and most of the reader's.[1]

As soon as her father rides away, Molly retreats to weep in privacy. The narration does something unusual in depicting this scene, for while it gives full expression to her "tumultous" sobbing and her self-pitying, accusatory thoughts (10: 148), it places a passage which suggests the origin and growth of the inner resources before the actual outbreak of Molly's sobbing. This means that even while her grief is depicted, the factors which will enable Molly to cope with her personal sorrows and become a heroine of some potential profundity of experience are introduced so that the reader can follow their subsequent consolidation.

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1. The reader is asked to engage with Molly to an extent which makes it strange that Lucas (1977) should find this novel a series of "grievings over a lost pastoral world" (p 3) and see Gaskell's historical imagination as merely given over to lament and nostalgia (p 16). In his introduction, Lucas writes that his interest in the novels he discusses lies in their depiction of social change, how it happens and how it affects individual lives and communities. He writes of the individual's struggle "to retain an undivided sense of selfhood" and of the failure to do so because "a sense of self isn't finally separable from a sense of community or family, and yet change enforces separation from both." (p ix). His description of the challenges to selfhood is so close to that which Molly experiences that his dismissal of *Wives and Daughters* is puzzling. It may be that Lucas does not see Molly's experiences as connected with social change, but in as much as Mrs Gibson is a comparatively rootless woman, (Cynthia is an even clearer case), her introduction into the Gibson household means that they experience what is part of a wider social change. The contrast between Molly and Cynthia is repeated in Gaskell's portraits of two kinds of new men, one rooted (Roger Hamley) and one rootless (Mr Preston). Lucas praises *Cousin Phillis* for the connections between Phillis's suffering and social change that is made through the figure of the new man, Mr Holdsworth, and, while such connections are not as direct in Molly's story, they certainly form part of it.

In the passage quoted below, Gaskell is able to use her authorial narration so that it is poised between the thoughts and sensations that Molly consciously has as she weeps and the nascent insight which is gradually to grow in her. The valuable grey area in the narrative mode between actuality and possibility, between 'is' and 'ought', and between articulated thought and the probable development of feelings is utilized to the full in a passage like this.

> She went out through a side door - it was the way by which the gardeners passed when they took the manure into the garden - and the walk to which it led was concealed from sight as much as possible by shrubs and evergreens and overarching trees. No one would know what became of her - and, with the ingratitude of misery, she added to herself, no one would care. Mrs. Hamley had her own husband, her own children, her close home interests - she was very good and kind, but there was a bitter grief in Molly's heart, with which the stranger could not intermeddle. She went quickly on to the bourne which she had fixed for herself - a seat almost surrounded by the drooping leaves of a weeping-ash - a seat on the long broad terrace walk on the other side of the wood, that overlooked the pleasant slope of the meadows beyond. The walk had probably been made to command this sunny, peaceful landscape, with trees and a church spire, two or three red-tiled roofs of old cottages, and a purple bit of rising ground in the distance; and at some previous date, when there might have been a large family of Hamleys residing at the Hall, ladies in hoops, and gentlemen in bag-wigs with swords by their sides, might have filled up the breadth of the terrace as they sauntered, smiling, along. But no one ever cared to saunter there now. It was a deserted walk. The Squire or his sons might cross it in passing to a little gate that led to the meadow beyond; but no one loitered there. Molly almost thought that no one knew of the hidden seat under the ash-tree but herself; for there were not more gardeners employed upon the grounds than were necessary to keep the kitchen-gardens and such of the ornamental part as was frequented by the family, or in sight of the house, in good order.
> (10: 147)

The unusual element in the passage is the evocation of the past generations of Hamley and their possible delight in the terrace walk to which Molly retreats. The narration is deliberately not clear about Molly's conscious possession of the ideas thus introduced; the deictic "this" which leads into them is hers ("The walk had probably been made to command this sunny, peaceful landscape ...") but the vocabulary and constructions which follow do not suggest Molly's thoughts again until her "now" in "But no one ever cared to saunter there now." That the ambiguity is deliberate can be seen

in the wording of "Molly almost thought that no one knew ...", the sentence which begins the explicit return to her inner processes. But the way that the narrator's voice has been used means that Molly's potential possession of these ideas is established and with it, the probable way in which she will gain a sense of perspective on events, a perspective which history can bring to even the most personal of suffering. It is at moments like this that the narrative is able to suggest the processes of Molly's own discovery that no state of mind is absolute, and, growing from this recognition, an understanding of the self in relation to others. The suggested process is that as the girl recognises the different possession of her retreat by earlier generations, she feels less enveloped in her grief and consequently better able to cope. It is not a discarding of feeling that is suggested, but a means by which all experience can be accepted as part of process, of history. The brief evocation of past lives implies that Molly's set-back must, and can, take its place as one of the many such painful challenges to its members from which a society is built. What Molly is to have to surmount is the great hurdle of social life, which is, in Roger's words, "to try to think more of others than of oneself" (10: 152) and the movement outwards in this passage, from self to history indicates her nascent capacity to absorb just this lesson.

This passage is placed before the "suppressed passion of grief" (10: 147) actually breaks out. It is an ordering which gives an important insight into the probable connection in Gaskell's thinking between the natural world and the self which is socialized. It enables the natural setting of Molly's tears to incorporate both the attitude conveyed in "that natural throne for violent sorrow" (10: 148) and Wordsworth's concept of Nature as:

> ... the nurse,
> The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
> Of all my moral being.[1]

To the already familiar Romantic sense of the combined reflec-

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1. Wordsworth (1936) *Tintern Abbey* lines 109 - 111. Wordsworth's influence on Gaskell has been pointed to by several critics. See Craik (1975: 231) for example.

tive and instructive interaction of sympathy between man and the natural world, Gaskell adds, in this passage, socio-historial man's contribution to the processes of individual growth. The historical and the natural contexts for the self come together with an ease which the passage itself points to in its use of "sauntered" and which indicates the foundation of the novel's confidence in its evocation of an on-going, ever-changing yet continuous life.

But despite the effective presence of past Hamley generations in this passage, the continuity of the imagination's means was not altogether assured for Gaskell, as can be seen from her treatment of Margaret Hale's crisis in *North and South*. Her contemporary heroine is not able to turn to the natural world around her in Milton and find that it offers constructive sources for her imagination, her moral being. There is no equivalent vision of socio-historical man's enjoyment of his world available in Milton. It is only when Margaret Hale goes South again that she finds settings for her meditations which will give definition to the emerging self and supply a proportion-giving context to it. It may be said that Margaret Hale's personal story (she had to discover that Helstone was not the perfection she was inclined to remember) took her South, but her journey is also a comment on the Milton world. That world is socially and geographically too new and too fractured, as yet too unselfconscious of its values and processes to offer occasions or places in which its heroine can reassess and reconstruct herself. There are no "natural thrones" or "nurses" of the kind available to Molly. This lack of continuity between *Wives and Daughters* and *North and South* is inevitable in view of the great break in English social history which followed the Industrial Revolution and was manifest in the new manufacturing cities of the North. But the break in these novels' continuity is also a matter of literary history. At the same time that Gaskell's novels reflect the discontinuity in man's imaginative resources, Dickens was forging a sense of how the imaginative spirit could find new, wholly urban resources. Marlow (1975) argues that Dickens's art could confer on the city what

Coleridge termed "the charm of novelty to things of everyday" (p 23) and that

> it was Dickens, with his proclivity towards animism, perhaps, and his need to make the city romantic, who was most thoroughly to exhibit objects influencing the mind; and then, instilling real objects with associations from his works, he filled London with expressive symbols, infiltrating the finite with agents of the human spirit. (p 31)

In this Dickens was his society's seer, for it is from achievements like this that man can begin to recognize and understand what, in his society, is replacing past sources of the imaginative energy vital to daily life. Although in *Wives and Daughters* Gaskell was able to picture man's role in her vision of finding the imagination's resources (those sauntering Hamley figures) her contemporary world did not allow her to do the same for it. It was Dickens who could make the greater step away from the traditional pictures of imaginative growth and invest the often sordid city with the associations needed to make its objects sufficiently rich in significance to begin to act as reflective, instructive agents of the human spirit.

Wives and Daughters is not, of course, dealing with the plight of a society without recognised embodiments of its experiences and value, for it is set in a period and a place which has not yet felt the break with tradition. This is coming even in Hollingford as Roger's and Mr Preston's stories indicate, but for Molly, traditional resources are available in abundance. The novel has already indicated the spontaneous ease with which Molly would turn to the natural setting of her life for guidance by including, quite unobtrusively, details like her habit of gazing out of the window in order to orient herself when she arrives anywhere new. She establishes her relationship to what she knows in her world, embodied in objects such as the church spire of Hollingford (57: 669), on her second visit to Cumnor Towers. In the same way, Molly goes immediately to the window of her room at Hamley to gaze out. Her gesture enables the narrative to give the reader a rapid picture of the scene (Molly's gazing out of her bedroom window on the gala-day visit to the Towers was used to open the novel), but

it also establishes that the girl's youthful sensibilities find themselves most easily when she can assess the setting for her experiences.[1] Molly's first action at Hamley establishes something else which is important in a consideration of the novel's presentation of the growth of her inner life, and that is that at this stage Molly is largely unconscious of what such contemplation, such stock-taking, means to her.

> The deliciousness of the early summer silence was only broken by the song of the birds, and the nearer hum of bees. Listening to these sounds, which enhanced the exquisite sense of stillness, and puzzling out objects obscured by distance or shadow, Molly forgot herself, and was suddenly startled into a sense of the present by a sound of voices in the next room - some servant or other speaking to Mrs Hamley. (6: 95)

She simply loses herself in sensation, but the delight she takes thoughtlessly here is what she is beginning to turn to deliberately when she weeps on the unused garden walk, and which she consciously uses a year later when Mrs Hamley is dying.

The loss of her surrogate mother is quite clearly placed in the narrative to match the earlier loss of her father, a correspondence which is underlined when Molly has to cope with the knowledge that as she sinks from life, Mrs Hamley no longer wants her presence (18: 240 - 1). This could have been grounds for a sense of rejection, such as she had had with her father, as well as of loss, but when she walks in the garden thinking of her sorrow, Molly spontaneously assesses her feelings, seeing more clearly now the nature of her grief. It is comparison with past experience which enables her to do this. She herself sees more clearly the relative nature of her feelings and is strengthened in her perceptions by their being reflected in the winter setting.

> The last afternoon of her stay at the Hall came. Roger had gone out on the Squire's business. Molly went into the garden, thinking over the last summer, when Mrs. Hamley's sofa used to be placed under the old cedar-tree on the lawn, and when the warm air seemed to be scented with roses and

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1. When Molly comes home from a walk to find that Roger is with Cynthia and has probably proposed to her, she goes straight to her bedroom window to find strength in "the landscape she had known and loved

> sweetbriar. Now, the trees leafless, there was no sweet odour in the keen frosty air; and looking up at the house, there were the white sheets of blinds, shutting out the pale winter sky from the invalid's room. Then she thought of the day her father had brought her the news of his second marriage: the thicket was tangled with dead weeds and rime and hoar-frost; and the beautiful fine articulations of branches and boughs and delicate twigs were all intertwined in leafless distinctness against the sky. Could she ever be so passionately unhappy again? Was it goodness, or was it numbness, that made her feel as though life was too short to be troubled much about anything? Death seemed the only reality. She had neither energy nor heart to walk far or briskly; and turned back towards the house. (18: 245)

The development in Molly since she wept over her father's decision is made explicit in the sentence beginning "Then she thought of the day her father had brought her the news of his second marriage:". After the colon, the sentence continues with Molly's observations, "the thicket was tangled with dead weeds and rime and hoar-frost; and the beautiful fine articulations of branches and boughs and delicate twigs were all intertwined in leafless distinctness against the sky."[1] The colon places her observation of the natural world in apposition to her thoughts, but their interaction is not explained. Their relatedness is placed before the reader in much the same way that the inferences to be drawn from Lord Cumnor's letter were made available without being explained. This means that the reader is invited to construct a process in imagination, to see the effect of the natural world's sympathetic reflection of Molly's suffering and then to see the further definition of its meaning that she finds in the beautiful articulations of the winter trees. That Molly is now more fully aware of these processes is clear from the next sentence, "Could she ever be so passionately unhappy again?"

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1. DeLaura (1976) points to the similarity of Hopkins's *Spring and Fall: to a young child* and Chapter 46 of *North and South*. In doing so he suggests that both Hopkins and Gaskell felt that the growing "colder" in the face of griefs was a sad loss of innocence. Molly's development suggests that sadness was not quite what Gaskell felt, for the guidance Molly finds from the winter trees is a growing colder which produces the capacity to see and feel more widely and with greater accuracy. Molly's development is closer to that which Wordsworth presents in *Tintern Abbey* where he refuses to mourn the loss of youthful, luxuriant passion.

where she uses her memory to measure her present sorrow.[1] This is different from the earlier passage where the narration's ambiguously placed evocation of the past was used to indicate how Molly might grow. Now she has grown and can consciously call on her personal history in order to place the meaning of her experiences. But the perspective she is actively creating is not shown to be a completed process, she cannot yet see or feel beyond the fact of Mrs Hamley's death. Memory has not yet given her confidence in the future and so her sorrow still contains the numbness she had feared on being asked to yield her self to her father's needs.

> Thinking more of others' happiness than of her own was very fine; but did it not mean giving up her very individuality, quenching all the warm love, the true desires, that made her herself? Yet in this deadness lay her only comfort, or so it seemed. Wandering in such mazes, she hardly knew how the conversation went on ... (11: 169)

But that the self is not necessarily obliterated by its duties to others or by its griefs is promised by the functioning of Molly's memory, by the evident strength of her recently created conscious inner life. Molly is not yet out of the maze, but is learning to find her way. In this she is fortunate. One of the functions that Cynthia will fulfil in the following sequences is to demonstrate that not everyone has the strength to find a way out of the maze, and in this sequence itself, Mrs Hamley's fading from life demonstrates the fact that yielding to others can indeed be connected with death.

Discussion has concentrated so far on the novel's picturing of Molly's inner growth as this is the dominant subject of Sequence 2, but the setting of this subject at Hamley means that this family's role in the novel demands consideration too. The Cumnor family also have a part to play in this sequence and to do justice to the whole, something must be said of the new arrivals, Mrs Gibson and her daughter Cynthia.

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1. The importance of memory in the formation of the self is pointed to by Watt (1972), who quotes Hume, "Had we no memory, we never should have any notion of causation, nor consequently of that chain of causes and effects, which constitute our self or person." on p 22.

These other families, especially the Hamleys, are not placed in the novel as a sub-plot but form a complementary, interacting strand of action which is fully treated in its own right. Their narrative status does mean, however, that they can be used to echo or introduce matters important in the Gibson family in a clearer, more sharply defined form. Placing Molly's emergence from childhood and her crucial imaginative growth at Hamley, away from the securities of home, seems to belong to Gaskell's sense that a severance equivalent to Molly's literal, physical separation is entailed in the creation of the self. Cumnor Towers was used in the prologue to foreshadow this idea, but for aesthetic reasons and in the interest of sociological accuracy, the same setting could not be used for the crucial experience itself. Had Cumnor Towers been used again, its clarificatory capacities in the prologue would have been diminished and the narrative would have incurred the charge of being socially improbable. Molly's social status is too far removed from the Cumnors' for her to find her essential experiences with them; they can only define what is already happening or suggest what is likely to happen. But while Hamley is more suited to Molly's narrative needs, its features do not appear to have been chosen simply with her in mind. It is shown as an ancient family, gradually failing to hold its place in the county as new ways, especially in the management of land, reach the area. Squire Hamley protects himself from the recognition that he is socially and technically behind the times by concentrating on his lineage. His self-respect is bound up with his family's antiquity and therefore, feeling threatened and ignoring the fact that he had married for love rather than for prestige, he insists that his eldest son marry as befits a Hamley of Hamley. His temperament and his pocket lead him to cling to outmoded notions of how his sons must do justice to their family, but for all his obstinate pride, the man has a sense of honour and a natural shrewdness which allow Mr Gibson to find in him a kindred spirit. His roughness is offset by his wife's delicacy and sentiment, and the contrast is carried through into the two sons, Osborne being talented, sensitive and refined while Roger is like his father,

clumsily built and apparently rather slow. In this way Gaskell has woven into the family the same issues (personality and social role, parental influence on taste and character, obligations to the self and to others) which affect Molly, but has given them a unique form which allows the family an equivalent rather than a subsidiary place in the design. The subtlety of the interactions possible between the two story lines can be seen in the way that Molly's imaginative glimpse of past Hamleys sauntering along the garden walk, is both central to her own development and illuminating of her host's story.

The kindly, bluff Squire with his anachronistic attitudes seems to have appealed personally to Gaskell's interests and affections, as did his family's social plight to her wider, impersonal interest in patterns of social change. Lord Cumnor's gossipy ways are treated in the comedy with affection too, but the Squire clearly engaged Gaskell more deeply. His power to do so and the role of his house and family in the narrative can be seen in this beautiful extension of the staircase at Hamley into a symbol of all that they represent personally, sociologically and technically in the novel.

> Suddenly there was the snap of a shutting gate; wheels crackling on the dry gravel, horses' feet on the drive; a loud cheerful voice in the house, coming up through the open windows, the hall, the passages, the staircase, with unwonted fulness and roundness of tone. The entrance-hall downstairs was paved with diamonds of black and white marble; the low wide staircase that went in short flights around the hall, till you could look down upon the marble floor from the top storey of the house, was uncarpeted - uncovered. The Squire was too proud of his beautifully-joined oaken flooring to cover this staircase up unnecessarily; not to say a word of the usual state of want of ready money to expend upon the decorations of his house. So, through the undraperied hollow square of the hall and staircase every sound ascended clear and distinct: and Molly heard the Squire's glad 'Hallo! here he is,' and madam's softer, more plaintive voice; and then the loud, full, strange tone, which she knew must be Roger's.
> (8: 116 - 7)

Roger's cheerful vigour is to be the new factor in the family's history and it is significant that despite the Squire's own failures, revitalisation is to come from his image rather than from the mother's - Osborne. Roger's cheerful voice carrying

up the stair-well is a sign of hope for the family's future as well as a confirmation of how Gaskell conceived of the Hamleys' role in her novel. In the same way the "undraperied hollow square of the hall and staircase" indicates why the family can be used to pinpoint the issues of survival and continuity in society, for the Squire's combined pride and poverty have produced what is a perfect sounding-box for his family's troubles and joys. There is none of the cushioned comfort of Cumnor Towers, but its absence also allows the floorboards to proclaim the soundness of the family's origins.

Parental expectation is a central issue in the Hamley family's story, as is indicated in the first glimpse that Molly gets of the sons in their childhood portraits hanging in Mrs Hamley's rooms. The presentation of the boys in the crayon sketch expresses and has helped to form the mother's view of her children. The picture is used to raise the question of the formative power of such expectations, a power to which Molly shows herself responsive in her first gesture after her conversation with Mrs Hamley about the picture's revelation of the boys' characters. She examines herself in a looking glass (6: 98), trying, for the first time in her young life, to see herself as others might see her.

Molly's story in this sequence is concentrated on the formation of her independent being, and her successful emergence really means that once this sequence is complete, the novel will not again be concerned in quite this way with Molly. A detailed following through of these issues is reserved for the Hamley story and especially for Cynthia, so that it becomes one of the factors which sustains their stories equally with Molly's. She is used as an observer of these developments in Cynthia, but before Cynthia arrives and gives definition to Molly's achievement of self, Molly has to be prepared for the role that Cynthia will take in her life. Through Cynthia, Molly gains the experience of a loving but not uncritical friendship with a peer (very different from her father's friendship and roughly the counterpart of Roger's

interest in her), and for this she is prepared by her observation of Roger and Osborne.

> Molly intercepted a glance between the two brothers - a look of true confidence and love, which suddenly made her like them both under the aspect of relationship - new to her observation. (14: 204)

The concentrated attention which is given to Molly in the chapters where she has to cope with her father's decision to remarry is sustained in the account of his wedding, and in Chapters 12 - 14 Molly becomes the central figure in the work's expanding again into social comedy. Her centrality in the wedding chapters ensures that Mr Gibson, overshadowed as he was in the decision-making, remains so in the wedding scenes, but, more seriously, it suggests that Molly is now able to command attention in her own right and it is Lady Harriet's interest which is the chief means of indicating her new power. After her first unhappy encounter with the Cumnors, attention from them is not automatically attractive to Molly, but she does find herself beginning to enjoy exposure to Lady Harriet. In this she is like Margaret Hale who finds a certain pleasure in the painful responsibilities she has to assume when her family moved North. As well as forming a way of recognising Molly's growth, Lady Harriet is used to introduce some of the challenges facing Molly. Her function is never obviously signalled in the narrative, as the significant conversations are placed unobtrusively within the broadening action, but Lady Harriet is used in this and other sequences[1] to raise vital issues. For example, Molly has so far been conscious that her step-mother's advent has been an intrusion on her emotional domain, but she is soon to find that Mrs Gibson's major challenge is on the moral front. It is one to which the girl is already receptive, alerted no doubt by memories of Clare's silence about who had eaten the chicken lunch at Cumnor Towers (2: 49), so that when Lady Harriet remembers with some amusement that Clare was a skilful manipulator, Molly is not a little alarmed.

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1. In Sequence 4, when Mrs Gibson is at her most dishonest, Lady Harriet asks her opinion on the matter of telling lies (32: 403).

> 'I used to think I managed her, till one day an uncomfortable suspicion arose that all the time she had been managing me. Still it's easy work to let oneself be managed; at any rate till one wakens up to the consciousness of the process, and then it may become amusing, if one takes it in that light.'
> 'I should hate to be managed,' said Molly indignantly. 'I'll try and do what she wishes for papa's sake, if she'll only tell me outright; but I should dislike to be trapped into anything.'
> 'Now I,' said Lady Harriet, 'am too lazy to avoid traps; and I rather like to remark the cleverness with which they're set. But then, of course, I know that if I choose to exert myself, I can break through the withes of green flax with which they try to bind me. Now, perhaps, you won't be able.'
> (14: 195)

Molly's youthful indignation and wish to believe that matters can be clear-cut ("if she'll only tell me outright") are beautifully caught, as is Lady Harriet's own understanding of the possibilities for amusement that the security of her class, her age and her temperament give her. Although, or perhaps because, Clare's own expectations of the marriage have been very sympathetically and fully prepared for in the account of her genteel poverty as she tries to run a school at Ashcombe (in Chapter 9) and more indirectly, in the glimpses of the indignities of pleasing others in a governess's role,[1] this glimpse into Molly's future problems is especially valuable. As Mr Gibson has found, his bride has a superficial, mirror-like mind (11: 168) which is penetrated by little except her own petty purposes. She conducts herself from a rag-bag collection of precepts, any one of which may be trotted out to meet the moment, regardless of its suiting or contradicting the previous moment's sentiment. Her vanity and her financial struggles have made her a poor mother for Cynthia, as Molly, happily the product of a stable, loving childhood, is to find for herself. The regime which she establishes in the Gibson household is marked by petty snobberies and dishonesties, none of which amount to a major problem until Cynthia is on the scene and they combine with that charming girl's spontaneous wiles and deliberate falsehoods.

Held within the account of the expanding comedy of Mr Gibson's

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1. While she likes her romantic name Hyacinth, and finds her married name Kirkpatrick pleasing for the memories of devotion that it evokes, even this willingly complaisant woman will, on occasion, assert her

new household is a third, equally unobtrusive indication of future developments which deserves attention before discussion of this sequence is closed, for it further crystallizes the problems created by the advent of the new Mrs Gibson and her daughter, although it comes from a quite extraneous source, from Osborne Hamley. When Molly accidentally learns, because of Roger's carelessness, that Osborne is married, Gaskell is able to underline both the kind of honesty that Molly's childhood has given her and the problems she is to encounter because of her new relatives. The issue is expressed through Molly's thoughts when she meets Osborne at breakfast on her last day at Hamley before Mrs Hamley's death.

> Molly had expected Osborne to look something different from usual - conscious, or ashamed, or resentful, or even 'married' - but he was exactly the Osborne of the morning - handsome, elegant, languid in manner and in look; cordial with his brother, polite towards her, secretly uneasy at the state of things between his father and himself. She would never have guessed the concealed romance which lay *perdu* under that every-day behaviour. She had always wished to come into direct contact with a love-story: here she had, and she only found it uncomfortable; there was a sense of concealment and uncertainty about it all; and her honest straightforward father, her quiet life at Hollingford, which, even with all its drawbacks, was above-board, and where everybody knew what everybody was doing, seemed secure and pleasant in comparison. (18: 249)

As well as being a sign of things to come, it is an insight into her own nature and preferences which, in coinciding with the loss of her surrogate mother, marks the completion of a process begun by her father's severance of childhood's bonds when he decided to re-marry. As can be seen from Molly's certainty that she finds Osborne's secret merely "uncomfortable" rather than romantic and that the mystery and deception involved are less pleasing than the quiet, every-day certainties of her Hollingford home, her father's remarriage and Mrs Hamley's death have forced a degree of release on her. It can now be seen that she has been liberated into moral certainty which makes her feel immediately that Osborne's action is exotic and clashes with the reality she has consciously learned to know and depend on. It is the liberation of a firmly created self, rather than the deprivation

she once feared, and she recognizes her growing certainty with a relief which goes some way to counter the pain she feels on losing her old connections with Hamley Hall. It is probably her brief encounter with the new Mrs Gibson which has given such conviction to Molly's rejection of mystery, however glamorous, but at the same time her step-mother's awaiting her return to the Hollingford home is a reminder that Molly is still a child, naive not to see that Osborne's kind of "concealment and uncertainty" has already entered her own home. Beyond this, the unexpected development by which her affection for Cynthia will lead her into an equally dubious escapade (in retrieving Cynthia's letters from Mr Preston) is one that neither she nor the reader could really foresee. Cynthia's charms make the encounter with Mr Preston absolutely credible as well as right for the study of Molly's moral development, but as Cynthia's arrival produces so much that is new to Molly, and therefore to the novel itself, she has been kept for the discussion of the next sequence.

iv) Sequence 3. Chapters 19 - 26. Molly and Cynthia.

The limits of this sequence have been set as Cynthia's arrival in Hollingford at its beginning and the Charity Ball at its end, but in some ways the sequence could be seen as beginning with the new Mrs Gibson in Chapter 15. She does mark the start of a new era in Molly's life, but despite this, it seems better to regard Cynthia's arrival as the beginning of the third sequence because she is more significantly new in the work's structure and in Molly's particular experience. This argument rests on the kind of impact that Cynthia is felt to have on Molly's life, on the way that she clarifies and intensifies in Molly's own awareness the problems that began with Mrs Gibson's regime. As Cynthia brings new possibilities of relatedness into Molly's life, especially that of critical affection, her advent is a more important precipitating event than her mother's. This evaluation of Cynthia's importance is supported by the narration, for there is an evident change from Chapter 19 onwards. In Chapters 15 - 18 the new Mrs Gibson's arrival does not bring a new element to the narration in that the winding continuity of the previous chapters is sustained when formal visits to the bride become the source of action. These are sufficiently like Mr Gibson's professional visits as a source of action to suggest that the most significant changes in the Gibson household have not yet occurred. In Chapter 17 Molly goes to Hamley, but again, this means of moving the narration is essentially like the established mode. It is after Cynthia's arrival that change comes in the narration, for the action begins to cut much more abruptly from Hollingford to Hamley and back, creating a matching and contrast between the two families in place of the sinuous continuity of the earlier chapters. This comparative juxtapositioning of the two families is further underlined when the opening of Chapter 24 states explicitly that the Hamley scenes in the two preceding chapters (22 and 23), occurred before the Miss Brownings' little party in Chapter 21. In other words, events in Chapters 19 - 21 are to be understood as being co-temporal with those in Chapters 22 - 23, thus inviting a comparative

interest in the two families.

This cutting from one family to another is complemented by the equality between Molly and Cynthia that is created within the Gibson household and which makes the comparison with Roger and Osborne at Hamley more effective. Cynthia's taking an equal, comparative role alongside Molly, means that Molly's centrality is diminished and a new balance created. Thus a comparative balance between the step-sisters emerges as the structural principle of the sequence, and its interest for the reader is reinforced both by the similar balance at Hamley and by the narrative's cutting from Hamley to the Gibson household. Although Molly is no longer central to the action of Sequence Three her consciousness continues to dominate and most developments are still seen from her point of view. As this would suggest, Molly is vigorously aware of the processes of which she has become part and so she remains a lively centre of consciousness. For example, her sense of Cynthia's attractions is strong, as is her awareness of how she has been affected by her new sister's arrival, especially when the Hamley brothers' responses are in question. As this simile suggests, Molly has developed a proprietary sense of her interests at Hamley:

> If Molly had not had the sweetest disposition in the world she might have become jealous of all the allegiance laid at Cynthia's feet; but she never thought of comparing the amount of admiration and love which they each received. Yet once she did feel a little as if Cynthia were poaching on her manor. (20: 267 - 8)

The effect of keeping Molly's point of view strong in the narration of this sequence although she is no longer central in the action, is to make her observations and responses become the norm for the inner life. Her conscientious efforts to accommodate her new mother, to understand her new sister, to acknowledge her feelings and to act honestly on them, become the standard by which other characters are to be measured. Using her as a moral touchstone could have been a somewhat deadening device had Molly's qualities been like Roger's, one of the givens in the narrative, but after the second sequence, the reader knows that Molly has struggled to

achieve the strength she possesses. Roger's being a relatively secondary character means that his unexplored, quiet excellence can be accepted for its function in directing and echoing Molly's achievements. And, as with Margaret Hale and Thornton in *North and South*, her effort stands for his. Although, as the passage quoted above indicates, Molly's formative inner debates continue to be an urgent matter, by this sequence both she and Roger are established as being relatively stable, inwardly strong personalities so that they can be used to off-set the fluctuations and weaknesses in Cynthia and Osborne.

Cynthia has usually attracted more interest and praise from Gaskell critics than Molly, for her charm and her faults are felt to demonstrate Gaskell's powerful insight, delicate judgement and new creative capacities,[1] whereas the quieter Molly is felt to be an easier achievement. Cynthia is indeed a perceptive psychological study which shows Gaskell's acumen and her dispassionate generosity, but to overlook Molly would be a mistake, especially as she and Cynthia are so carefully used to define each other's qualities. It is Cynthia's arrival which enables a new balance and disposition of interest in the Gibson household and which enables the Gibson and the Hamley households to become entities which repay their formally arranged comparison.

Cynthia is thus both striking in her own right and, more important for this study's purposes, the means by which complex changes in the novel's focus of interest are accomplished. It would seem that Gaskell herself was conscious of the novelty and structural significance of her character from the careful, unusual steps she took in the narrator's introductory account of Cynthia. As Molly waits to show Cynthia

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1. Craik (1975) puts such praise of Cynthia very clearly in saying that Gaskell " ... creates and examines personalities who are quite new to the novel, both in themselves and their situations. These mainly radiate from the remarkable Cynthia ..." (p 212). And "She represents not only a new kind of character in literature, but also the height of Elizabeth Gaskell's power to render dispassionately, without passing judgement, qualities that any novelist before her would find reprehensible ..." (p 250).

downstairs for the first time (19: 254), the narrator takes advantage of the natural pause to comment, not so much on Cynthia herself as on the type that she represents. It is this comment on the type that is unusual in the presentation. Other characters like Mr Gibson and Squire Hamley are also introduced through the narrator's comments, but these form part of a résumé of their personal histories and not of the type, as is done for Cynthia. Perhaps the generalisation about her type ("A woman will have this charm, not only over men but over her own sex; it cannot be defined ..." 19: 254) are there to reassure the reader that what is claimed for Cynthia's power to fascinate is observable in actual life and has not been exaggerated, but they also have the effect of leading the reader to provide abstractions about Molly which will match those being located in Cynthia. This happens in particular when the narrator reflects "Perhaps it[1] is incompatible with very high principle; as its essence seems to consist in the most exquisite power of adaptation to varying people and still more various moods;" (19: 254 - 5), and the contrary case of an inner strength and high principle which might present itself with a certain inflexibility, crystallizes as Molly when the narrative proceeds to describe Cynthia's beauties through Molly's eyes.

Another important feature of this presentation of Cynthia is the implicit suggestion that Cynthia can be known in essence by the reader who is, as it were, fore-armed by the generalizations. Cynthia is to be observed from an already comparatively settled attitude, whereas Molly's development is to be shared, to be participated in. This is not to suggest that Cynthia does not offer the reader the pleasure of discovery but that the introductory passage has the effect of allowing her revelations to fall into place within an already known outline, whereas the cumulative process of Molly's growth is, however familiar, freer to take its own direction. If it is agreed that Molly is a familiarly virtuous heroine, then Gaskell's technical reasons for working this way will be evident - they allow her to sustain the perfect balance beween

1. i.e. charm.

what is familiar and what is new in her two characters. She ensures that the reader will not be unduly captivated (or repelled) either by Cynthia's novelty or by Molly's familiarity.

The account of Cynthia's beauty, her taste and dexterity in dress, is done through Molly's eyes. The specific circumstances which produce Molly's reflections, she is waiting to take Cynthia downstairs, are allowed to fade and a summary of several observations is conveyed. This summary then allows the subject of the reflections to move easily to Cynthia's relation with her mother and the "kind of complete indifference" (19: 255) with which she receives Mrs Gibson's petty complaints and barbs. As Molly's observations combined with this shift in the narrated subject suggests, the nature of Cynthia's charm and its problems has its origin in her relationship with her mother. This is something of which Cynthia herself is well aware as her first substantial conversation with Molly shows, and it is from the degree of self-insight revealed in this conversation that further interest in Cynthia is to be developed.

When she finds Molly grieving over the news of Mrs Hamley's death, Cynthia is led to compare Molly's capacity for affection, for being related, with her own.

> 'I wish I could love people as you do, Molly!'
> 'Don't you?' said the other, in surprise.
> 'No. A good number of people love me, I believe, or at least they think they do; but I never seem to care much for anyone. I do believe I love you, little Molly, whom I have only known for ten days, better than anyone.'
> 'Not than your mother?' said Molly, in grave astonishment.
> 'Yes, than my mother!' replied Cynthia half-smiling. 'It's very shocking, I daresay: but it is so. Now, don't go and condemn me. I don't think love for one's mother quite comes by nature; and remember how much I have been separated from mine!' (19: 257)

Cynthia has considerable awareness of her own inadequacies and, even before Molly's astonished question, of their origin. She is to show the same insight and, eventually, the same honesty about what she has seen in herself when it comes to

the question of her capacity to love Roger, so that her final jilting of him is both a confirmation of her shallowness and her own momentarily courageous recognition of it. It is in these partial insights and honesties that Cynthia's power to command serious attention lies, but, at the same time, what she recognises is also used to give renewed liveliness to the balance maintained between her and her stepsister. For example, the main issue for Molly and the reader in Sequence Two was Molly's sense that the denial, the yielding of self demanded of her, might represent too great a loss of self to be possible or proper. Now, Cynthia's observations reverse the question so that the gains which can result from such a yielding come to the fore. Cynthia has never been encouraged to love her mother, so her sense of the emotions on which relationships are built is that a capacity for them has to be learned, "I don't think love for one's mother quite comes by nature;". Comparison of her case with Molly suggests that this is not quite how Gaskell herself saw matters, her view probably being closer to the idea of an inborn, natural propensity for affection which then has to be nurtured in the child.[1] Thus Molly's early life gave her reason enough to want to put her father's happiness before her own when he remarried, whereas Cynthia has never known the nature of the rewards of such love. In this sense, Cynthia's remarks introduce the next stage in

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1. There are several comments in *My Diary* (1923) which suggest that this is how Gaskell viewed her own children and their up-bringing. For example, the idea of nurturing and guiding inborn abilities is present in:

> But in general she is so good that I feel as if I could hardly be sufficiently thankful that the materials put into my hands are so excellent and beautiful. And yet it seems to increase the responsibility. If I should misjudge from carelessness or negligence! *wilfully* is not in a mother's heart. (p 5)

And again in:

> When young, their feelings, especially those under the direct control of the senses, are so acute, while the powers which will eventually, it is to be hoped, control their feelings are in a dormant state. (p 14)

what Molly comes to understand about herself, and a lively interaction between the two characters' significance is demonstrated.

Cynthia proceeds to sketch in for Molly the years of neglect in childhood in which she learned what really being unwanted was like, and it is clear that she has a sharp understanding of her mother's vanities, ambitions and hypocrisies ("Mama went to stay at grand houses ..." 19: 257). This helps to explain the indifference that Molly has already noted as well as to indicate the other comparative balance that Cynthia's introduction makes possible. She is used to define her mother's qualities and their implications, particularly the fact that unlike her daughter, Mrs Gibson is incapable of self-insight, however limited, and therefore of seeing herself as others see her. Thus Cynthia becomes the pivot of a three-way, developing comparison and active inter-action between the women of the Gibson household.

Once Cynthia has drawn attention to her damaging childhood and her incapacity to love, she moves, in the same conversation, to the next issue in her personality which defines Molly's own achievements.

> 'Nonsense, Molly! You are good. At least, if you're not good, what am I? ... I am not good, and I never shall be now. Perhaps I might be a heroine still, but I shall never be a good woman, I know.
> 'Do you think it easier to be a heroine?'
> 'Yes, as far as one knows of heroines from history. I'm capable of a great jerk, an effort, and then a relaxation - but steady, every-day goodness is beyond me. I must be a moral kangaroo!' (19: 258)

The effect on her self-estimate of what she sees in Molly is clear and the honesty with which she has first spoken about herself is still operating, although by now she shelters in some playfulness. The directives this gives to the reader on what to expect and how to see the two girls functioning in the narrative are also clear. If, as was suggested earlier, Gaskell had some historical awareness of what she was doing in creating Cynthia, then Cynthia's words about heroines are indeed interesting comment on the novels

of the day. They suggest that Gaskell knew very well the risks she ran in placing as unglamorous and quietly virtuous a figure as Molly at her novel's centre. As a heroine she is given little of the queenly appeal of Margaret Hale or of the wild charm of Sylvia Robson, but, thanks to the definition that her qualities get from Cynthia, she can hold her own with her precursors. The contrast between the feckless, charming, occasionally good 'heroine' and the steady, reliable Molly is one which probably came to Gaskell from *Sylvia's Lovers*, where Sylvia and Philip form a similar moral contrast. But Cynthia probably derives most directly from Charlie Kinraid rather than from Sylvia herself. He too is attractive by instinct, mercurial, somewhat feckless and always charming. For as long as he believes that Sylvia is waiting for him he remains constant, but once she is beyond his reach, he moves on quite easily. The purposes of *Sylvia's Lovers* did not allow a detailed examination of his case, but it reappears in Cynthia, who has a propensity for lovers and a capacity for virtue (seen especially in her real admiration of Mr Gibson) which makes her very like Kinraid. In her it becomes possible to suggest the origins of such a personality and to raise the question of change, of whether her type could be re-moulded late in life to the strengths that Molly is learning. It will become clear that Cynthia's very adaptability, the source of her charm, is what prevents real change.

The concentration in the Gibson household of women in a structured comparison is matched by the men at Hamley, and there are signs that Gaskell wanted her readers to be aware of the symmetry that has been created. The chief one is that Mr Gibson is kept a relatively shadowy figure in this sequence where most of the Hollingford action falls within the traditionally feminine sphere of interest - arrangements of dress, visiting friends and, chiefly, the Ball. But, once the symmetry is recognized, it must also be said that the formal potential of these comparable groups is as restrained in the narration of this sequence as are the possibilities of explanatory detours in the first sequence. It was

said of those chapters that Gaskell signals some detours while allowing other explanations to enter the text unheralded, so that the reader will be both aware of the steps being taken and feel that Hollingford life naturally contains such fullness of account. The same may be said now of the formal symmetry of the two families. The comparison is set up and pointed to with each cut from one family to the other so that the reader is conscious of the formal device, yet, at the same time, the narration does little else to draw attention to the symmetry, so that the reader also feels that such comparisons arise spontaneously in the easy amplitude of that world.

The symmetry Gaskell uses helps to keep the focus of this sequence on the question of relationships, for both groups of characters are having to accommodate either new family members or, as the Squire finds, family members who have estranged themselves and for whom the usual means of approach, Mrs Hamley, is gone. This similarity in the internal working of each family becomes particularly significant in Chapters 20 - 23 where two contrasted processes become apparent. The first, in the Gibson household, may be summarized in Mr Gibson's own hope, "We shall shake down into uniformity before long," (10: 143), and the second, in the Hamley household, is pointed to in the narrator's sentence, "But the keystone of the family arch was gone, and the stones of which it was composed began to fall apart." (22: 286). One household is having to reshape itself because of an addition, because of a marriage, and the other because of a loss, a death. Put like this, the contrast is very stark and diagrammatically obvious, but the scheme is embedded so naturally in the easily unfolding narrative that its elements do not stand out unduly schematically. As has been said, the narration draws attention to its own arrangements, as in "All this had taken place before Roger's first meeting with Molly and Cynthia at Miss Brownings'; and the little dinner on the Friday at Mr Gibson's, which followed in due sequence" (24: 306) which opens the chapter. But such guidance only provides

enough direction to make the reader feel that certain key concepts are being compared in these scenes but that it is the reader's responsibility to abstract and assemble them from their natural place in the unfolding scene. The differences between the two phrases quoted above are interesting for a further light that they shed on the way these two families function at this point. The families' processes are sufficiently similar to be compared yet their conception is somewhat differently treated. Mr Gibson's phrase creates the expectation that development, growth or change will be chronicled as the family succeeds or fails in shaking down into uniformity. Circumstances in the Gibson household are placed in time for observation of their gradual processes of change, a treatment which the narrative's frequent use of Molly's perceptions facilitates. But the Hamleys' situation is seen in spatial terms, as a disintegrating arch. Although their story too unfolds in time, matters are a good deal foreshortened in the narration of their plight, and the reader is invited to see the family as an object rather than a process. Once again, the immediate, visual clarity of the Hamley metaphor, the arch, illuminates by contrast the often imperceptible taking of direction in the narration of Molly's family.

In describing the limits decided on for this sequence, it was said that its processes are rounded off in "Mrs Gibson's Little Dinner" and the Hollingford Ball of Chapters 24 - 26. That there is a slight element of closure, of rounding-off in these chapters is clear from the way that all the recently assembled characters are brought together in public. The scene has been fully set, the younger generation have been moved forward, and now all is ready for the romantic comedy of their mistakes and second chances. Mrs Hamley's recent death quite naturally prevents the Hamley sons attending the Ball, but this is compensated for by the dinner party which precedes the big public event. There are two obvious advantages to this arrangement: the developing relationship between Roger and Cynthia can be shown in a quiet setting,

and then, immediately afterwards, the significance of personal relationships can be shown in the public arena. This is a vital second dimension in view of the novel's concern with the questions of duty to self and to "a larger system of duty". The Hamleys' absence also means that Mr Preston's mysterious place in Cynthia's life can become more evident as it runs the risk of attracting the attention of the Hollingford gossips. The choric function of the gossips is outlined in the narrator's amused tones as:

> ... all the kindly old maids who thronged the country towns of England ... aired their old lace and their best dresses; they saw the aristocratic magnates of the countryside; they gossiped with their coevals, and speculated on the romances of the young around them in a curious yet friendly spirit. (26: 322)

The narrator gives comedy's view of the fact that women were their society's moral custodians, watching and commenting on all developments, public and private. The intrusive power of such gossip is not to become functional until the novel's last sequence when Molly falls temporary victim to it, and so, at present, it is seen only as a kindly force.

The mystery of Mr Preston's relationship to Cynthia which comes forward at the Ball has already been hinted at in her mother's consternation when he first called, in Cynthia's readiness to oppose him when he doubted the Hamleys' excellence, and by the fact that he had called again, despite such cool treatment. The mystery shows itself again when Cynthia throws his posy in the fire, and yet again when, despite her evident annoyance, she goes to dance with him at the Ball. It is possible to conjecture at this stage what the mystery is all about, but, unlike the secret of Osborne's wife, the reader is really in the dark because Molly knows nothing of the connection. Because Molly has stumbled across Osborne's secret marriage, it is not experienced by the reader as a mystery but as the hidden factor affecting Osborne's relations with his father and as the unknown obstacle to Mrs Gibson's designs for Cynthia. Unlike this secret which the reader shares with Molly, Cynthia's connection to Preston is

experienced as a mystery, as is the other line of strange behaviour that is to emerge: Mrs Gibson's sudden willingness to encourage Roger's visits to the house. Until Molly is drawn into the first and Mr Gibson into the second, the reader has to remain content with the narration's hints that something strange is afoot. The function of the exposed secret in relation to the other two mysteries that are developing would seem to be to ensure that the reader understands, and to some extent shares, Molly's dislike of such matters. But the participation in her reactions has to be qualified, and this is achieved by Roger's comment when Cynthia's song unwittingly touches rather closely on Osborne's secret, "He won't mind it long; and a man must take the consequences when he puts himself in a false position." (24: 310). Roger's good sense is needed to temper Molly's over-anxious pain for Osborne as a preparation of the reader's growing feeling that she needs to be drawn into slight impropriety for her own as well as for Cynthia's sake. As the novel's moral norm, Molly would otherwise be in some danger of having an outlook that was too rigid in its inexperience, too inflexible for being untested itself, and therefore too unrealistic to be attractive. The refinement of Molly's hard won strengths has to continue.

The structural interest for Chapter 26 of what has been said here of the three mysteries that are beginning to play their part in the action,lies in the ease with which Osborne's secret is sustained in the reader's awareness while the second one, Cynthia's connection with Preston,is brought to the fore. In other words, the seeds of future development are evident in a chapter which is clearly designed to round off the picture of the first generation's shaping of circumstances. Apart from the glimpses of Preston's evident hold over Cynthia, the Ball scene is used to give re-expression to several of the themes that have taken shape earlier in the action. One of these themes is the concept of duty and it is given to Lady Harriet to elaborate on the Cumnor family's public obligations. In doing so, she reveals, with a fair insight of her own, the extent to which this sense of duty is

determined by the family's own purposes of ensuring that Lord Hollingford is returned at the forthcoming elections. It is in this kind of scene that Gaskell is able to suggest how the issues that have been pursued very closely in Molly's experiences extend into the public, the national sphere. At the same time the circle of interaction within a community is completed in the glimpse of Molly's ability to temper Lady Harriet's somewhat worldly cynicism. In her role as a "famous little truth teller" she can enable Lady Harriet to feel that the community's rights and expectations are worth caring about with some personal warmth. Prompted partly by Molly's outlook, Lady Harriet works for the community's regard because she cares for it even while she sees what is politic in her actions and what is facile in the community's judgements.

The accuracy of Lady Harriet's grasp of herself and her community is beautifully placed by the glimpse given of Mrs Gibson's hopelessly confused feelings as she sits with the hoi-polloi watching her step-daughter dancing with an earl.

> It would be so much more agreeable to be sitting even at the fag-end of nobility than here on a bench with everybody; hoping that everybody would see Molly dancing away with a lord, yet vexed that the chance had so befallen that Molly instead of Cynthia was the young lady singled out; wondering if simplicity of dress was now become the highest fashion, and pondering on the possibility of cleverly inducing Lady Harriet to introduce Lord Albert Monson to her own beautiful daughter, Cynthia.
> (26: 338)

This reading of events has as much right as anyone's to be recorded, and, as the narrative method allows such glimpses, it forms a reminder of the variety which the interaction of community life encompasses. Within the question of a community's cohesion, which is where the action of Sequence One began, Mrs Gibson's view of things is intensely selfish. It is a selfishness which could lead to the comedy of disaster or to the tragedy of disaster, or to success. In this way, her view points forward to the multitude of possibilities with which the next sequence, with its focus on the younger generation's choices, is to begin.

v) Sequence 4. Chapters 27 - 40. The Younger Generation Chooses.

In one sense the main event of this sequence is Roger's proposal to Cynthia, but the narrative is so designed to create an uneasiness in the reader that the usual feelings about engagements, even secret ones, cannot come into play. It is not simply the content, the personal confusion of the characters which is in question, as it is in Molly's responses in Sequence Two where her state was seen by the reader with clarity and certainty. The reader's problem comes from the fact that in this sequence Gaskell undertakes what she did in Volume One of *Sylvia's Lovers* and creates in her readers an experience that is analogous to that of her characters. Thus the characters' confusions in this period of general indirection, gloom and tedium are matched by the uncertain relationship to the material in which the reader is often deliberately placed. The way that the narrative undertakes to convey a mood which sometimes reaches the strength of stultification is remarkable in a novel which usually upholds the norms of sequential narration, keeping the reader in a familiar, secure relationship with the characters and in a position of having reliable insight into their inner lives and actions. The methods of this sequence do not constitute an extensive or abrupt departure from the novel's familiar methods, but the created reading experience is none-the-less one of slight, pervasive uncertainty and puzzlement.

What the narration accomplishes is the feeling that Roger's proposal, a climactic event which should have cleared the air one way or the other for everyone, including Molly, serves rather to heighten the uncertainties of the sequence. This is achieved partly by the ordering of events, for the discovery of Mrs Gibson's scheming is used to overshadow the proposal, and partly by the characters' own responses to it. In particular, Cynthia's attitude to her engagement furthers uncertainty when she demands secrecy and then speaks to Molly almost immediately of the unlikelihood of her ever marrying Roger. Besides these local means of spreading uncertainty,

the narration of earlier chapters is used to create a general feeling that the months in which the proposal occurs form a period which is one of unease, confusion and tedium. The means by which this feeling is created in the reader in Chapters 29 - 31 will be described later; in the meantime it can be said that the emotional current which carries Roger into his declaration of love is counteracted in the narration by a distinct lack of momentum which reflects the tedium of confusion, both moral and emotional, in which most characters are caught. Only Roger emerges from this period feeling that he has achieved something, and that feeling about Cynthia is, of course, illusory.

Roger's being carried into proposing to Cynthia partly as a result of her mother's scheming is a distinct echo of Sequence One where Mr Gibson drifts into marriage on a current partly outside his control. The differences between these two movements, particularly between the kinds of currents on which the two men are carried, are instructive. Most obviously they help to define Gaskell's sense of the natural participation of the community in an individual life compared with the improper kind of interference which Mrs Gibson undertakes. Then the way that such insight emerges from the comparison is also a clear revelation of the technical purposes of a novel like this, of how it aims at coherence in the interactions of its sequences.

While similar features in Roger's and Mr Gibson's proposals emerge, the tone of what happens in the sequence is very different. The emphasis in Mr Gibson's story is on the social comedy of a community's involvement in his decision, but with Roger the intensity has shifted to that of romance and consequently, or appropriately, the interference in Roger's life is much more deliberate and the scheming rather more alarming. Mrs Gibson's delinquencies as she manoeuvres her daughter into marriage with the probable Hamley heir are in themselves trivial enough, but taken together they amount to her dealing in death. As she herself cannot understand

the gravity of what she has done, its exposure is handled in a comic scene reminiscent of the tone of the opening sequence, but in this scene, Mr Gibson's chagrin is enough to sustain the romantic, emotional intensities of the whole sequence. Because Mrs Gibson's scheming has utilised all of Roger's natural gravitation towards Cynthia, once it is revealed, it is felt to have been the real impetus in the narrative, and, although it is only retrospectively known, to be a current that is stronger than the course of Roger's spontaneous affections.

As has been said, the eavesdropping which leads to Mrs Gibson's sudden encouraging of Roger's obvious love for her daughter, was a trivial enough misdemeanour in itself, but the callousness with which she shifts her attentions away from the dying Osborne reveal a cold-heartedness which is anything but trivial. Investing an apparently insignificant action with such seriousness reflects the belief that life's crucial decisions can often be buried in the profusion of life's daily details. Thus, even the making of a decision may only reveal itself in retrospect, when the consequences of that decision begin to gather together.

It is a view of life which declares itself from the novel's opening pages onwards, but the particular sharpness with which Mr Gibson encounters it through his wife has been especially carefully prepared for in the narration. The preparation rests in the key word, "trifle". When Mr Gibson promised himself that in his marriage he would "yield in trifles, and be firm in greater things" (15: 214), he was exposing himself to all the future pain and comedy of the realization that life does not make such distinctions very readily. Such comedy has also been prepared for in the narrator's observation that fate herself (the "cunning hussy") works by means of accumulated "unconsidered trifles" (7: 107) a remark that is enough to alert the reader to all the approaching comic ironies of Mr Gibson's story. But the hidden seriousness of trifles is not limited to Mr Gibson's

story. It is what gives pathos to Molly's fear that in accepting her new step-mother, the yielding of self called for would in fact amount to a complete loss of self (11: 169). Cynthia too has a revealing command of the nature of trifles, as is shown when she returns home to find Mr Preston in her mother's drawing room. She uses her trifles for conscious dissimulation.

> 'Look at my purchases,' said she. 'This green ribbon was fourteenpence a yard, this silk three shillings,' and so she went on, forcing herself to speak about these trifles as if they were all the world to her, and she had no attention to throw away on her mother and her mother's visitor. (20: 265)

The coolness of comic irony and the intensity of such moments come together in Mr Gibson's recognition of what his wife's unprincipled nature, trivial in so many ways, has led to. Mr Gibson's insight into the damage that can be done emerges forcefully when he instructs his own daughter, after Cynthia has carelessly encouraged Mr Coxe into proposing to her. His instructions turn the key noun into a verb for the first time in the text.

> 'Molly, you must never trifle with the love of an honest man. You don't know what pain you may give. (37: 451)

Mr Gibson's feeling the full weight of "trifles" and "trifling" holds together the two aspects of comedy, ironic and romantic, on which the narrative is built; it also justifies the claim that Mrs Gibson is to be seen as dealing in death in her scheming for Cynthia. The romantic comedy does not go as far as exploring the implications of what she does, and even as she schemes, the reader knows that she is to be thwarted by the comic irony (as it is in this context) of Osborne's being already married. But while the full implications of acting according to one's expectations of others' dying have to be reserved for a novel like *North and South* where Margaret Hale is "taught by death what life should be" (48: 502), the comedy of *Wives and Daughters* offers plenty of opportunity for Gaskell to indicate that the same criterion, the same scale against which to judge actions and intentions,

continues to operate. In fact the first moment of friction on her step-mother's arrival home after the wedding, occurs when Molly explains her father's absence by saying " Mr Craven Smith couldn't put off his dying" (15: 209). Her rather childish presentation of the standards by which she and her father live is supported on his return home by an exchange which specifically links the question of yielding over trifles with the prospect of death.

> 'Papa, I will call her "mamma"!'
> He took her hand, and grasped it tight; but for an instant or two he did not speak. Then he said:
> 'You won't be sorry for it, Molly, when you come to lie as poor Craven Smith did tonight.' (15: 211)

While the revelation of Mrs Gibson's scheming brings to a head one of the lines of thought in the novel, it is not intended to form a clarifying climax to the sequence any more than Roger's proposal to Cynthia could accomplish this. Mrs Gibson's own blindness ensures that little will come from her exposure, and in Cynthia's case, her puzzling attitude to her engagement sustains the general confusion and unhappiness. For this reason, although Mrs Gibson's actions form the main impetus in events, they do not serve to define the shape, the extent of this sequence. It is rather Cynthia, because she extends the confusion so effectively, who gives it an appropriate boundary. This comes in Chapter 40 when she and her mother go to London, escaping with some relief from the confusion they have spread and leaving Molly and her father alone for the first time in months, free to recall the old clarity and ease of their relationship. In this way the chapter presents a brief ray of light which offsets the period of dragging discontent and marks the end of the lull before the storm.

Throughout this period, Molly has been the chief observer of the confusion, but at the same time her own feelings are such that the confusion rests as much within her as it exists around her. At first she cannot allow herself to recognize her own feelings for Roger, and then her difficulties are increased by the suspicion that Cynthia does not love him but

is encouraging him for some purpose of her own. Molly has a similar problem with her step-mother, for she cannot be sure whether her father sees the kind of woman he has married, nor whether she should attempt to enlighten him. Thus the narration has to accomplish two things: to show Molly's emotional cloud and to distinguish it from the moral confusion being created around her. A simple reliance on her point of view would not necessarily have achieved both purposes: the effect might have been either to give definition to Molly's state of mind or to convey what she sees around her. In order to convey both, the narration works to give the reader a direct experience of indistinctness which will corroborate Molly's confused perception of confusion. This is done chiefly in the narration and ordering of apparently insignificant matters, but while putting the reader slightly off balance, the narration also uses many phrases which guide the reader through the difficulties being created. For example, a phrase already quoted gives an important indication of the sequence's purpose: to chart "a series of delicate alterations of relative conduct spread over many months" (38: 462). As the phrase implies, the immediate experience of such a process will not be of clearly discernible directions. The mood which dominates these delicate alterations is indicated in "So runs the round of life from day to day: (32: 398) while the individual experience of tedium and confusion is clarified in "seeing the wrong side of the tapestry" (31: 390). In this way, the confusion created by the techniques to be described is one designed to be partial, contained within an overall faith that the unfolding story has direction and purpose.

The chief means by which the narration engages the reader in a first-hand experience of unease analogous to the malaise being depicted is by what may be termed a heightening of its fluidity. What is created here is not the same as the fluidity of the first sequence although it is sufficiently like it to enter the work imperceptibly. The main difference is that in this sequence the fluidity is a temporal one (some lack of definition of space is naturally involved too) where-

as in the opening sequence, the fluidity is rather that of a flexibly inclusive, progressive line of narrative. It wound with Mr Gibson's professional journeys to bring in all the families of the neighbourhood, gradually placing their involvement in his decision making. For all its windings, the narrative line of the opening is clear and feels purposeful in its progressions, whereas in this sequence, although things are taking an inevitable, even predictable course, there is simultaneously an ominous, brooding impasse which counters the lift that perceptible development can give to narrative.

The care with which the indirection of the sequence has been created can be seen in the way that the single focus on an event in Chapter 30 has been used to off-set the created indirection of Chapters 29 and 31.[1] In Chapter 30 Squire Hamley has a heated encounter with Mr Preston in which traditional oppositions flare up over the issue of land drainage. The clash is handled scenically and forms the sole subject of the chapter so that it comes across with great vividness, a vividness which is very different from anything in the surrounding chapters. In these chapters, by contrast, it is difficult to say quite what forms the main focus of the narration; there is a refusal in the narration to rank the events covered, or to give them a causal relationship. The opening sentences of Chapter 29 indicate that the mood of confusion and unhappiness is to be its main subject matter, and, in the opening phrase, hints that an imprecise rendering of a period of time is to be one of the means by which the reader will share the prevailing mood.

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1. The fluid structure of only two chapters in the sequence is described here, but other chapters have the same gliding organization. They are Chapters 32, 37, 38 and 39. These fluid chapters thus form a cluster at the beginning and at the end of the sequence, an introduction to and a confirmation of its purposes. An effect related to this fluidity is created in Chapters 27 and 33, for they have a single centre, but it is one of place rather than action. They are both set at Hamley, but it forms a setting for otherwise disparate material. In a similar way, Chapter 28 is given coherence by Cynthia, in whom different kinds of rivalry find their focus.

> During all the months that had elapsed since Mrs Hamley's death, Molly had wondered many a time about the secret she had so unwittingly become possessed of that last day in the Hall library. It seemed so utterly strange and unheard-of a thing to her inexperienced mind, that a man should be married, and yet not live with his wife ... that she felt occasionally as if that little ten minutes of revelation must have been a vision in a dream.
> (29: 362)

As is usual, the co-presence of character and narrator in this report of Molly's thoughts allows an ambiguity about the extent of her insight. It is possible that "her inexperienced mind" is Molly's own judgement of herself, but it is also possible that the narration is reminding the reader of the reasons for her perceptions and responses being confused. It is an ambiguity through which the narration can promise to sustain the orientation given to the reader by Molly's point of view (in the last section of this chapter it was suggested that her responses became a norm for the reader) while frequently moving away from it in a way that will create small, nagging uncertainties for the reader. Molly's thoughts about Osborne and his marriage move naturally and easily to her observation of his brotherly treatment of Cynthia, but then, as the narration settles on the fact of Osborne's preference for Molly in his present mood, a significant but delicate shift is seen to have occurred. The point of view has transferred almost imperceptibly from Molly to Osborne. In authorial narration, such freedom of movement is not unusual, but it becomes a significant matter in view of the next step: the narrative moves into direct speech as Osborne predicts that one day Molly will be better looking than Cynthia. In one sense the shift into scenic directness of presentation is not at all disturbing, for it gives a prominence to a comforting prophecy, a prophecy which comes into its own when Roger remembers his brother's words on seeing Molly again after his travels (55: 648). But, on the other hand, the immediate effect of the direct speech comes as part of a gradual temporal disorientation which is mildly disturbing. The shift from Molly to Osborne joins here with a temporally unlocated conversation which takes

on a vividness of meaning without being given an accompanying vividness of setting. In a realistic novel like *Wives and Daughters*, this is unusual, but it is a very carefully taken step. The conversation (which could so easily have been reported and so placed in the general past in the conventional way) is introduced simply by the narrator's word "sometimes" (29: 363), a word which helps to create the feeling that this period of time, "the months which had elapsed since Mrs Hamley's death" (29: 362), cannot, if the narration is to remain true to its temper, be presented as having a coherence such as linear continuity or even a patterned arrangement of time[1] would give. Thus the movement away from Molly is simultaneously disorienting (especially because of the use of direct speech) and an accurate creation of the essential experience.

It may be felt that too much is being made of the narration's use of direct speech at this point, but as the technique is repeated almost immediately in the narration, a specifically intended effect does seem to lie in its use. The narration proceeds from Osborne's praise of Molly to the fact that he and Roger have gone away from Hamley, and thence to Mrs Gibson's missing their attentions because her husband is too busy to attend to all her little daily needs. This drifts imperceptibly into an explanation of his popularity as a doctor, an explanation which involves the evocation of long past events when the Cumnor family first patronised Mr Gibson. Once again the narration does the unexpected with its temporal sequences when it lifts Lady Cumnor's comment out of the past and gives it the immediacy of direct speech.

> Of itself the money he received for going to the Towers would hardly have paid him for horse-flesh, but then, as Lady Cumnor in her younger days worded it:
> 'It is such a thing for a man just setting up in practice for himself to be able to say he attends at this house!' (29: 364)

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1. For example, the co-temporality of Chapters 22 and 23 with Chapter 24.

Allowing Lady Cumnor's voice to sound with such strength at this point forms the useful reminder that long existing forces are gathering in the shaping of events, but at the same time it tends to rob the present of its immediacy. The reader's experience of an elusive narrative present becomes, in this way, analogous to Molly's own confused perceptions.

Once the analogy between the readers' temporal uncertainty, Molly's emotional state and the general moral confusion becomes clear, then the narrative's purposes reveal themselves as consistent throughout. The narrative line in Chapter 29 moves on from Lady Cumnor into Mr Gibson's thoughts as he reflects on his new household. His wife's moral flimsiness is very much in his mind as he thinks of his child's newly "undemonstrative" (29: 365) behaviour, but such thoughts are painful and he chases them away, first with an old Scotch air and then by immersing himself in his work. The paragraph traces what is both a retreat from his problems and the corrective placing of them in the perspective of general human suffering, "the hard reality of this hopeless woe." (29: 365). In this way the ambiguity is akin to that treated in the word "trifles" (the same word occurs here) and is a reminder of why the central characters themselves cannot be used to provide a clarity of perception in the treatment of these months. Neither of the narrative's usual centres of consciousness, Molly and her father, are prepared to or capable of bringing their full attention to bear on events and processes, so it must remain a period of carefully created confusion in the narration. As the sequence draws to a close, these carefully created difficulties join with Cynthia's deliberate mystification of Molly, and then, as the problem of her relationship with Mr Preston comes to the fore, the mystery itself becomes the factor which breaks the dominant stultification.

From the point in Chapter 29 which has been reached in this description, the narration moves into less freely floating scenic presentation. Osborne's meeting with Mr Gibson is

given spatial location ("in one of the lanes near Hamley" 29: 365) but its point of time is still left slightly vague. It is indicated as occurring by chance at some point in the narrative present and, as it sets up action which is then followed through for the rest of the chapter, the reader's uncertainties cease to stem from the treatment of space and time. Osborne stays for lunch after his consultation with Mr Gibson and the next passage of the narration is given to his conversation in the garden with Molly and Cynthia. It begins as a sufficiently desultory conversation to continue the mood of inconsequentiality, but an item of information (that Mr Preston is coming to live in Hollingford) is given in it which alarms Cynthia. When Molly finds her in her bedroom she is obviously disturbed and drops hints to Molly which indicate that it is her mystery, her unexplained fear of Mr Preston, which will round off the sequence. In this way an actual mystery replaces the scenic uncertainty which has been used to draw the reader into the prevailing confusions.

The chapter then moves to Roger and his receiving Mrs Gibson's invitation to re-enter the web that she is weaving. As the narration reproduces the text of her note, it takes on a directness sufficiently reminiscent of the effect of the direct speeches at the beginning of the chapter to remind the reader of earlier disorientation. The moment at which Roger receives Mrs Gibson's note and succumbs to her scheming is only vaguely related to preceding events, and this time the lack of temporal clarity contrasts with the note's immediate rendering to reflect the moral uncertainty of what Mrs Gibson is up to.

Chapter 31, coming after the familiar effects of the scenic immediacy of the Squire's clash with Mr Preston, is much shorter than Chapter 29, but it too uses a series of free floating events to create a sense of temporally indeterminate but relentlessly gathering forces. The chapter moves from Mr Preston's pursuit of Cynthia in Hollingford society

(presumably this has been happening throughout the period), to Molly's dejection and thence to Roger's perception of his feelings and his duties. The treatment of its three subjects is not causally related and so its structure is like the fluid, drifting quality of Chapter 29. But it has a thematic organization which makes it different from the earlier chapter too. The two men on whom it focusses are to emerge as rivals for Cynthia; as yet such a connection between them is unrevealed although hinted at often enough. Between them stands Molly with all her difficulties of understanding her own feelings and of making sense of what she sees around her. It is a shape which may well return to the reader's memory once all Cynthia's connections are revealed, and if it does it will provide one of the central themes of the sequence - a recognition of the way unperceived forces have been at work throughout a period of confusion and discontent.

vi) Sequence 5. a) Chapters 41 - 54. Consequences and the Community.

As with the opening sequence, the final one may be seen as divisible into two sections in which the last chapters (55 - 60) form an epilogue. The use of Cumnor Towers for Molly's scene of quiet triumph is one of the ways in which these chapters match the novel's first two prologue chapters, but the claim that these last chapters may be discussed separately as an epilogue, has been argued more fully in the second part of this section. It is in the first part of Sequence Five that the real climax and resolution of *Wives and Daughters* is placed. In these chapters the emotional stalemate of Sequence Four is broken and Molly is able to regain, in new and appropriate form, the centrality she lost on her father's remarriage and again when Cynthia overshadowed her.

The mysteries which have darkened the emotional lives of all the characters seem to be uncovered in Chapters 41 - 42 when Molly finally discovers that Cynthia had once promised to marry Mr Preston and that since her arrival in Hollingford, he has been trying to hold her to her word. The chapter titles, "Gathering Clouds" and "The Storm Bursts", encourage the reader to feel that these chapters contain the climactic revelation which really will clear the brooding uncertainty which has trapped the protagonists, and that the solutions of romantic comedy will now arrange themselves. But, however important Molly's discovery, such expectations are soon dispelled when the incorrigible Cynthia compels Molly to secrecy, and so to complicity, before accepting that upright girl's offer of help. Cynthia's demand for secrecy fits easily into the sympathetic understanding of her that has been created (43: 516), but at the same time it becomes clear that it will effectively prevent Molly from doing more than providing her with temporary respite from her problems. Although Molly gets the letters back from Mr Preston, her efforts can do nothing to clear Cynthia of her other entanglements. As the momentary relief of the letters is all that Cynthia wants, the failure is only a

relative one, but none-the-less it does not clear the way for resolution.

Molly's failure is entirely in keeping with her view of Cynthia's engagement to Roger, for she has not allowed herself to judge it as a mistake, and so would not be capable of intentionally leading Cynthia to disentangle herself there too. Cynthia has not the courage to conceive of a clarifying confrontation with her problems and so their alleviation is all she is able to hope for. And she never moves beyond such hopes. When the letters are returned, her reaction is "It is the most charming relief" (45: 538) and similarly, when she finds that Roger has left hurriedly after discovering that he has been replaced by Mr Henderson, she exclaims "Gone. Oh, what a relief!" (56: 656). Cynthia is too much her mother's daughter to care deeply about her integrity and therefore her natural wish is simply to escape from her problems. Being a governess in Russia is a far more attractive prospect than is confessing to Roger, and, as she tells Mr Gibson, he is the only man to whom she has ever cared to explain herself and her faults. Even to him, she could not have excused herself if she had thought that she was to continue living in his house for long (51: 601).[1]

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1. The reading given here is contrary to what Gaskell appears to have written. *The Cornhill Magazine* (November, 1865) and all subsequent editions of *Wives and Daughters* have Cynthia saying to Mr Gibson, as she explains her refusal to exculpate herself to Roger Hamley despite the fact that she has just done so to her step-father:

> Yes! but I love you better than Roger; I've often told Molly so. And I would have told you, if I hadn't expected and hoped to leave you all before long. I could see if the recollection of it all came up before your mind; I could see it in your eyes; I should know it by instinct.
> (51: 601)

As Cynthia is explaining that her confessing to Mr Gibson and seeking his forgiveness is something that she could not do to anyone else, and could not have done to him if she had not "expected and hoped to leave you all before long", the first part of her sentence should read "And I would *not* have told you ...". It has not been possible to check the manuscript of *Wives and Daughters* to see whether Gaskell herself was inconsistent or whether the apparent error crept in on first publication, but there does seem to be a case for correction here.

Thus, when the storm does burst, it is in keeping with Cynthia's character and with Molly's stage of development that little substantial progress can be made, and that despite the revelations, the uncertainties of Sequence Four are to continue a while longer.

Molly's participation in Cynthia's slightly underhand ways is important in her moral development for it makes her purity less innocent when it demonstrates to the girl that sometimes it is possible to do wrong for the best of reasons, and, at least, that it is not always possible to act as well as good judgement would suggest. Molly knows that her father should handle the problem but she also understands that Cynthia's nature will not allow her to bring matters into the open, and her concern for Roger's interests leads her to feel that protecting Cynthia on her terms is more important than following her own best instincts. As she says to her father:

> 'And Roger - for Roger's sake, you will never do or say anything to send Cynthia away, when he has trusted us all to take care of her, and love her in his absence.'
> (48: 572)

Although Mr Gibson may be assumed to know from his own experiences of his wife and her daughter, that Cynthia will not behave entirely honestly with Roger, he sees sufficient force in Molly's plea to acquiesce, contenting himself with his partially self-mocking complaint that women "plague the life out of one." (48: 572).

But while Molly's complicity is an important part of her moral development, and while it shows the care with which events have been designed to grow out of the girls' characters, her failure to disentangle Cynthia is even more important in this discussion for the subsequent structuring of the sequence. It has been clear since Sequence Four that Roger and Cynthia have made wrong choices and that unknown factors as well as Roger's youthful mistakes are holding them in a false position. The feeling that her world is not giving Molly her due has

been strong for some time, but, as this is a comedy, the reader's faith that matters will somehow be put right is equally strong. This means that once it is apparent that the heroine's intervention will not achieve the necessary changes, the choice of what will be the effective agents of change becomes particularly interesting; and once these agents are identified, their role in the sequence of events becomes equally interesting.

The first agent of change, of the denouement, is the scandal that grows around Molly's meeting with Mr Preston. When the Hollingford gossips turn their attention to the reports of Molly's meetings with Mr Preston and create a fine scandal of them, they force the uncovering of connections that Molly has tried to help to hide, and thereby lead the protagonists to rearrange their lives more appropriately. In the novel's opening chapters, the community has also participated in Mr Gibson's decision-making and so its active re-entry here establishes the same fundamental context for the shaping of the romantically treated lives as for those of the opening comedy. In this way, the reader sees matters come a full, aesthetically and morally pleasing circle.

But the community's gossip is, like Molly's intervention, not an immediately corrective force. It is too familiar a feature of communal life to accomplish change immediately. Only when it becomes destructive scandal and is sufficiently wide-spread to provoke others to interfere, does gossip become an agent of change. Accordingly, gossip functions in two stages in this sequence and the narrative sets out with care the two aspects of gossip which match these stages. The first aspect is already familiar from Chapter 26 (the Charity Ball) and is re-presented in this sequence as a natural, seasonal element in Hollingford life.

> Scandal sleeps in the summer, comparatively speaking. Its nature is the reverse of that of the dormouse. Warm ambient air, loiterings abroad, gardenings, flowers to talk about, and preserves to make, soothed the wicked imp to slumber in the parish of Hollingford in summer-time. But when evenings grew short, and people gathered

> round the fires, and put their feet in a circle - not on the fenders, that was not allowed - then was the time for confidential conversation! Or in the pauses allowed for the tea-trays to circulate among the card-tables - when those who were peaceably inclined tried to stop the warm discussions about 'the odd trick', and the rather wearisome feminine way of 'shouldering the crutch, and showing how fields were won' - small crumbs and scraps of daily news came up to the surface, such as ...
> (46: 549 - 550)

No particular causal power is suggested for the chatter which follows. This, it is implied, is reserved for the kind of revelations which have to wait for Miss Browning's departure, and which have a power which Mr Gibson dreads, "You don't know, Molly, how slight a thing may blacken a girl's reputation for life." (48: 569). This aspect of gossip has its part to play too for it is a punitive way of restraining improper behaviour. So, when the village gossips change their function from that of choric commentary to generating scandal about Molly, their action is to be seen as both seasonal and cruel. Their intentions have become sharper than those of seasonally recurring chatter, but, although their cruelty is potentially able to generate consequences which lead to change, these are shown to depend not on the gossip itself but on others' reactions to it. This means that gossip may become effective quite by chance.

The chance which collaborates with gossip is to be seen in the very carefully arranged responses to the scandal in Chapters 48 - 50, responses which make it appropriate to see gossip as working in two stages. The first important response depicted is that of Molly and her father. He learns of the town's gossiping from a stricken Miss Browning who has been completely vanquished by the rumour's apparent force. But then Molly persuades her father, partly because of the need to shelter Cynthia, to ride out the scandal. They undertake to treat it as a seasonal outbreak, as a storm which can be weathered. This is a painful process, but it is clear that Molly could have prevailed, especially when she is assisted by Lady Harriet. Her public championing of the young victim in Chapter 49 would have been, in itself, enough

to vanquish rumour and eventually to restore Molly to her rightful place at the centre of everyone's affectionate approval.

> 'Hollingford is not the place I take it to be, if it doesn't veer round in Miss Gibson's favour after my to-day's trotting of that child about.' (49: 585)

But assisting the natural subsidence of scandal, keeping it to its seasonal nature, is not enough for all the narrative's purposes. It still would not have allowed the second generation to rearrange their lives, and Molly would not have known the triumphant restoration to her place that she deserved. To bring about gossip's power to affect change, aristocratic intervention is again used, (in Chapter 50 and immediately following Lady Harriet's efforts for Molly) when Lady Cumnor tells Mrs Gibson what Cynthia has been responsible for. Lady Cumnor acts, as always, from full confidence in her right to judge and instruct, but her intervention is effective in ways upon which, strictly speaking, she cannot depend. Her repeating her daughter's intervention in different form is partly one of the novel's pleasantries about the aristocracy, but its structural function is to draw attention to the chance (despite Lady Cumnor's certainties) by which change is achieved. The community's intervention in the second generation's lives is much more deliberate than it ever was in Mr Gibson's, but its effect is equally a matter of chance. Lady Cumnor plays a small part in a cumulative process which is strongly reminiscent of that which formed Mr Gibson's decision to remarry. It is echoes like this which temper the novel's romantic conclusion with the insights of its opening comedy, and which give a completeness of design to the whole.

The chance which allows Lady Cumnor's intervention to generate change is, of course, the fact that Mrs Gibson has little of the charity and forbearance of her husband and stepdaughter. Cynthia is immediately exposed to reproaches and forced to explain herself. The mystery that Molly had helped to sustain is now out in the open and Cynthia's renunciation of Roger follows swiftly, making second choices possible.

Like scandal, Molly's intervention falls into two stages. Her first intervention is out of character and accomplishes little in the long run; the second call on her, which comes with Osborne's death, is more within her capacities. This means that in Molly's story, death is the other agent of change. (Its function is obviously this in the Hamley story too.) Death is the means by which the second mystery (Osborne's marriage) which has imprisoned Molly is cleared away and by which Molly is restored to her true colours. Death is an even more dramatic agent of change than is scandal, but as the reader has long expected Osborne's death, the shock is one to be observed affecting the family rather than directly experienced. Its use in the Hamley story is also consistent with the long established structural relationship of the two families whereby processes which happen with due slowness and confusion in the Gibson family come with the clarifying swiftness of event for the Hamleys.

But, although death is a carefully introduced element in the plot, when Gaskell placed it, she made Osborne's death coincide with Cynthia's renunciation of Roger. This bringing together of the two forces of resolution suggests that Gaskell was consciously working for as sensational a climax as the novel's mode would tolerate. As Geoffrey Tillotson (1978) has argued, Gaskell often shows a predilection for the sensational in her work (pp 233 - 241); she uses melodrama[1] in

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1. Pritchett (1941) provides a lively defence of the general Victorian use of violent plotting. He writes:

> The very complications of the plots and sub-plots, the stagey coincidences, the impossible innocence and the impossible vice, are photographs of the Victorian mind which carried its characteristic doctrine of survival of the fittest even into the reader's task as he sat down to be tortured by the latest serial instalment into taking life still more seriously. (p 630)

His defence, that the moral violence of Victorian plotting reflected the way the age felt about its problems, is helpful, but it still leaves the question of how overtly extraordinary events could be contained and justified in an avowedly realistic presentation of ordinary life. The sub-title of *Wives and Daughters* is, after all, "An Everyday Story".

the plotting of her novels and the bizarre or the supernatural in her short stories. But it is clear from the denouement of *Wives and Daughters* that Gaskell was consciously extending her ability to keep potentially sensational elements in her plotting under appropriate control. In her last work she handles the agents she employs so that they do not appear unduly sensational, so that they rest comfortably within the overall mode of her work. As agents of change, scandal and death have both been so accurately placed in the dynamics of community life that their final appearance has none of the uncomfortably convenient aspects of plotting which affects both *North and South* and *Sylvia's Lovers*. Leonards's coincidental appearance at the railway station is too convenient in the former and, as it is treated, Philip's meeting with Kinraid at Acre too improbable in the latter. But, although flawed, the use of sensation in the climax of these works is much better controlled than it is in either *Mary Barton* or *Ruth*.

The intention to use the full shock of a climax built on coincidence in *Wives and Daughters* can be seen in the careful preparation for it earlier in the last sequence. For example, at the point where Mr Gibson first learns of Molly's apparent involvement with Mr Preston, he says:

> 'It's all a mystery. I hate to have you mixed up in mysteries.'
> 'I hate to be mixed up. But what can I do? I know of another mystery which I'm pledged not to speak about. I cannot help myself.' (48: 571)

Molly's veiled reference to Osborne's secret indicates the double weight on her mind. It also contains the hint that because two mysteries have been imposed on Molly, because she is doubly burdened, the appropriate form of release for her will be a climactic clearing of both in one simultaneous coup. Release as dramatic as this would actually be inappropriate to the fictional world of Hollingford, but the form of coincidence that is used comes as near as possible to it, for although Cynthia's entanglements are gradually exposed,

she renounces Roger at the same time as news of Osborne's death reaches the doctor's family.

The reader's emotional gratification is one of the grounds on which the use of coincidence may be justified. There are two others: the first is common to all novels - its power to generate plot excitement; the second is particularly relevant in novels about emotional and moral growth - the psychic significance that coincidence may achieve.

The excitement which coincidence gives in a denouement is obvious. The concurrence of vital events gives them a seriousness or a power, as well as a speed, which will, if used properly, give the revelations involved a feeling of causal rightness. The excitement generated will carry readers used to such plot conventions through the events depicted with a pleasure which permits of no awkward questions. But of course, the attractive power of such a device makes it potentially dangerous, especially in the realistic novel. As D H Lawrence (1936) might have said in this context too, it can reveal the novelist's thumb in the pan and lead the reader to feel that events are being manipulated beyond the bounds of probability, beyond what can be tolerated by the conventions of formal realism. What makes Gaskell's decision to use coincidence in *Wives and Daughters* acceptable is firstly the emotional rightness of the convergence of events. As has been said, Molly has been put upon by others' mysteries and she deserves the drama by which she is freed of her obligations of silence. Besides serving Molly's status in the reader's affections, the emotional release created in the coincidence is also validated by its power to set in motion the long awaited resolutions of romantic comedy. As has also been said, the novel's mode has led the reader to expect resolution so that those factors which hinder what is desired will seem to warrant an unusually dramatic confluence of events to dispel them.

It must be said that while the emotional gratification provided

by the coincidence is probably enough to win the reader's assent to its use, the narrative also has many features which work to restrain the drive towards resolution which the coincidence is serving. These are present in the events themselves and in the narration of the climactic moments. For example, once she has renounced Roger, Cynthia's flightiness allows her to see and speak of the probability of Roger's turning to Molly. Her prophetic flash allows Gaskell to have Molly react with anger at the thought of such an easy change ("'Your husband this morning! Mine tonight! What do you take him for?'" 51: 602). Thus Cynthia is used to point towards the resolution and Molly to remind the reader that the changes desirable in the story cannot happen too swiftly. In the same way, when Molly rides to Hamley to help the grieving Squire and then finds that her services are needed by the widowed Aimée too, she is faced with an exacting form of service which takes its toll on her. In other words, the means by which Molly gains recognition and is restored to her place in Hollingford ("All the Hollingford people forgot that they had ever thought of her except as a darling of the town;" 54: 641 - 2) have no glamour. What Molly does is not dramatically heroic, for she can only let the Squire and Aimée "feel the sympathetic presence from time to time" (53: 629), so that her restoration is by means sufficiently subdued to control the potential melodrama in the coincidence which called her to Hamley.

Before returning to the third of the grounds on which the use of coincidence can be examined, its psychic significance, the discussion must stay a while longer with the question of the restraints on the excitement of the denouement which Gaskell has built into the narrative, for they too are part of the general tone which makes the use of coincidence acceptable. As well as events exercising restraint, the narration itself is often used as a restraint. For example it can control the way in which Molly is seen at what is possibly her single most exciting, heroic moment - her confrontation with Mr Preston. The scene is reminiscent in its ingredients and its

purposes of the one in *North and South* where Margaret Hale confronts Nicholas Higgins in order to prevent him drinking after Bessie's death. In both scenes it is the feminine power of the heroine which is pitted against the baser purposes or wishes of the man, a confrontation of a kind which is particularly likely to be uncongenial to twentieth-century readers. It has been argued that in *North and South* Gaskell is able to control the possibility of Margaret's seeming too idealised in the effect she has on Nicholas by showing that it is the memory of Bessie's affection which gives power to Margaret's appeal, and not, as it might have been in the hands of a lesser nineteenth century writer, the force of Margaret's feminine purity alone. The risks which Gaskell surmounts successfully in this scene are ones which she incurs again in the later novel, as can be seen in the account of Molly's stumbling across Cynthia and Preston in the woods.

> Mr Preston let go Cynthia's hands slowly with a look that was more of a sneer than a smile; and yet he, too, had been strongly agitated, whatever was the subject in dispute. Molly came forward and took Cynthia's arm, her eyes steadily fixed on Mr Preston's face. It was fine to see the fearlessness of her perfect innocence. He could not bear her look, and said to Cynthia ...
> (42: 509)

The force of Molly's look, and the narrator's declared admiration of the "fearlessness of her perfect innocence" would not seem to bode well for a restrained treatment of her second, even more tense encounter with Mr Preston. But, in the first meeting, praise is tempered by the narrator's willingness to understand Mr Preston's sneer from his having been "strongly agitated", and so what is "fine" in Molly is set against an equivalent attention to the man, rather than singled out for simple fulsome attention. It can be argued that even while Molly's essential strength, her innocence, is being identified and praised, it takes its place as one of several strong feelings operating in the meeting under the autumn trees.

When she meets Mr Preston a second time, Molly's fearless

innocence is again singled out for considerable attention. This time, however, it is not the narrator's observing eye that records it, but Mr Preston's own. At the height of their clash, when he has exposed her simple hope of justice as roughly as he can ("Have you never heard of revenge" 44: 532), he is struck by her courage.

> He forgot himself for an instant in admiration of her. There she stood, frightened, yet brave, not letting go her hold on what she meant to do, even when things seemed most against her; and besides, there was something that struck him most of all perhaps, and which shows the kind of man he was - he perceived that Molly was as unconscious that he was a young man, and she a young woman, as if she had been a pure angel of heaven. (44: 533)

What is potentially lurid in the confrontation and in the praise which Molly earns, is carefully, explicitly placed as coming from Mr Preston himself - "which shows the kind of man he was". There is no doubt that the reader is invited to share the admiration of Molly, but not quite in Mr Preston's terms. As it is already clear that Molly's efforts are not going to achieve all that a complete denouement requires, the reader will be inclined to oberve her with some detachment, watching the brave effort of an innocent girl hampered by factors into which she has little insight. As the reader is already somewhat detached from Molly, the use of Mr Preston's point of view serves to throw into greater relief the innocence of Molly's heroism. And as his perceptions are so strongly sexual, in keeping with the nature of the social success he has had, they too stand as something quite distinct from the view towards which events have inclined the reader who is thus distanced from both the actors in the drama. The narration's creation of an emotional space between reader and characters is important for future events, for it means that Molly's efforts, like her suffering, will be seen as are Margaret Hale's in the earlier novel. She too is simultaneously admired and kindly, critically understood.

The treatment of Molly's uncharacteristic and unsuccessful intervention in events is an appropriate point from which to return to the question of the coincidence of Osborne's death

and Cynthia's renouncing Roger, for the coincidence is what marks Molly's being restored to an appropriate functioning in her world. It calls forth her best, hard-won qualities of loving self-denial and places her in the position that has been described for Mrs Hamley as the "keystone of the family arch" (22: 286). It is not a family group that Molly has around her at Hamley after Osborne's death, but its members depend on her as if she were wife or daughter. It is in marking Molly's release into her best function that the coincidence may be said to have a psychic validity. The greatest example of the mastery of this potential in coincidence in the nineteenth-century English novel is probably Dickens's treatment of Magwitch, especially his reappearance in Chapter 39 of *Great Expectations*. This reappearance is not obviously a coincidence until it is noticed that Dickens has taken care to make the storm recall to Pip's mind vague memories of other stormy, dangerous nights, so that Magwitch's climbing the stairs affects Pip immediately as the ghostly manifestation of all his unrecognized fears. Magwitch's presence in the novel is a constant, darkly coincidental contradiction of all that Pip has grown to assume about his world and his circumstances. Gaskell does not attempt anything on this scale in the denouement of *Wives and Daughters*, but she does validate the coincidence with its psychic implications. It takes Osborne's death to complete the restoration of Molly's world; Cynthia releases Roger and at the same time Molly comes into her own.

This account of the coincidence's implications runs the risk of heightening the quality of melodrama over which the narration has exercised such careful restraint, but it is an emphasis necessary for the argument. Once it is seen that Molly's participation has been as carefully arranged in the sequence of events as are the workings of scandal, then the control of undue sensation is clear. Scandal has to work in two stages so that its chance effectiveness can be seen, and in the same way, Molly's interventions are not auto-

matically successful. Only when she is called on by people who understand her capacities, can she be effective. The use of two stages by which gossip becomes effective, and of a similar two stages for Molly, suggests very strongly that Gaskell had patterns of action in mind which would hold back the powerful drive towards a swiftly satisfying conclusion that denouement naturally tends to generate. The comparison with *Great Expectations* helps here too, for that novel does not present itself as pure realism, but works often at the level of symbolic drama, a level at which coincidence is not as obviously a plot device as it may be felt to be in formal realism. In a realistic presentation of an actual world, resolution must be reached by means appropriate to the characters and to the reader's general sense of probability in an every-day world. Thus the denouement needs the balance of excitment and restraint which has been described.

Although the discussion of the structuring of the novel's climax is really complete, it is tempting to add yet another point about restraint, for this leads into the discussion of the balance between openness and closure in the epilogue chapters. The two stages in the workings of scandal in Hollingford and the two kinds of heroism in which Molly is engaged in the denouement mean that this sequence of the novel is much more tightly patterned than any other in *Wives and Daughters*, and yet the full, easy unfolding of events characteristic of the early chapters is sustained in the highly organized climax. That is, although the climax is carefully designed and although its events come as close to a sensational ordering as is possible in Hollingford, the general tenor of that world, so carefully created in the opening sequence, is never lost. A glimpse of how this note has been sustained may be had from the fact that while the narrative concentrates on those matters which are to dominate the climax, matters such as the mysteries created when Osborne and Cynthia insist on secrecy, a qualification of the view taken of secrecy is simultaneously achieved. This means that while the

reader feels the exciting concentration on an issue demanded by a denouement, the narrative's view of that issue is not an unduly simplified one; the ample view of life achieved in the opening comedy is sustained. For example, when Cynthia impedes Molly with her demand that the liaison with Mr Preston be kept secret, that secrecy, while it emerges as the cause of much suffering is also placed as a natural, understandable wish on Cynthia's part and, in its allied form of discretion, as a necessary ingredient of social life. Secrecy and discretion have silence in common. It makes them sufficiently akin for discretion to provide, on the one hand, some endorsement of the occasional emotional need for secrecy and, on the other, to define the point at which discretion differs from improper silence. Once again, the corresponding case at Hamley shows the matter with clarity. Roger agrees to Cynthia's wish that their engagement be kept a secret, and therefore when his father hears about it from Mr Gibson, the Squire is hurt by his son's failure to inform him. But, at the same time, Roger has been negotiating a loan that will enable his father to resume draining his land, and here the silence that he maintains before matters are settled is obviously a proper, kindly discretion on his part. The protective element in both of Roger's silences provides some sympathetic insight into Cynthia's and Osborne's wish to protect themselves. The novel's strongest example of a necessary secrecy in social life is the professional discretion that Mr Gibson has to exercise for his patients. He is also the source of an example of a due discretion in purely personal matters when he refuses to give Molly any indication that Roger loves her. Mr Gibson refuses twice (60: 699 and 701) to take Roger's message to Molly. He is refusing to interfere: his respect for his daugher's right to choose for herself leads him to a proper silence. Unlike his wife and step-daughter, he is not conspiring to conceal anything, for Roger is quite free to declare his love; rather, he is working to keep Hollingford relationships true to their nature, to keep them "above-board" (18: 249) as Molly herself feels they should be when she first learns Osborne's secret.

The care with which these cases of discretion and secrecy define the criticism being made of Osborne and Cynthia and with which they all form part of the climax, is one of the factors which enables that climax to achieve a necessary concentration in events (both their speedy occurrence and their intensified nature) without a concomitant loss in the fullness of the life being presented.

It is also this attention to the significance of the lives around Molly which allows the epilogue to round off her life in an emotionally satisfying way while suggesting that, like the other lives involved, Molly's will continue to develop.

Sequence 5. b) Chapters 55 - 60. The Second Chance.

Molly's story began with her discovery that she was to lose the central place in her world, especially in her father's life, that she had with child-like egocentricity assumed she would hold forever. The question which confronted her then was whether, in yielding her immediate interests to that of her father's happiness, she would lose an essential part of her self. In this sense of her story, the question may be seen to be resolved when she regains her place in the community; when she is once again Hollingford's darling and when her personal strengths have been properly appreciated during her stay at Hamley with the bereaved Squire and Aimée. It may be said that what she lost as a child is more than compensated for by the status she gains in communal life, a status which is particularly clearly defined by Cynthia's decision that she cannot and does not wish to live by the same high standards. Such a rounding off of Molly's story means that gaining Roger's love is really an additional blessing, a bonus rather than the essential confirmation that her efforts at self-denial have been rewarded. This reading of the shape of Molly's story would account for the fact that despite its missing last chapter, *Wives and Daughters* does not feel incomplete; in fact it feels satisfyingly complete as it stands. This is not just to say that Roger's marriage to Molly is a foregone conclusion in the work in its incomplete form, but that their marriage rests outside the essential moral and emotional scheme, and that the promise of such a conclusion is a bonus rather than an essential ingredient in the design.

This suggestion would seem to be confirmed by certain features of the last few chapters, features which make it seem appropriate to suggest that the last visit to Cumnor Towers acts as an epilogue to the action in something of the way that the first visit was presented as a prologue to Molly's story. In particular Molly's reaction to the pleasure her visit has brought her seems to be used to place the chapters presenting that visit as corresponding to, as answering the intentions

of, the prologue chapters.

> The next day Molly went home; she was astonished at herself for being so sorry to leave the Towers; and found it difficult, if not impossible, to reconcile the long-fixed idea of the house as a place therein to suffer all a child's tortures of dismay and forlornness with her new and fresh conception. (58: 677)

The old fear, the loss of self which was so strongly associated with Cumnor Towers, has been laid and Molly has found a place in communal life and an understanding of that place, that can never be taken from her.

The other feature of these chapters which serves to give them the character of an epilogue is the tone of a conversation Lady Harriet has with her brother about Molly and Roger. In it she points with pleasure to the interest their protégées are taking in each other, and at the same time laughs at the patronising involved in her interest.

> 'But, after all, we're like the genie and the fairy in the "Arabian Night's Entertainment", who each cried up the merits of the Prince Caramalzaman and the Princess Badoura.' (58: 676)

Lady Harriet has always had the capacity to laugh at herself in this way, but here the withdrawal from the immediate self which her wit demands, matches a withdrawal which seems to be occurring in the narrative too. As the protagonists' lives take on a satisfactory shape, it is time for the reader to withdraw a little and to regard them with the distant, genial eye of comedy as Lady Harriet does.

But as with so much in the design of this novel, the effect of withdrawal and closure is carefully balanced by its contrary, by the sense of an on-going life and even by the sense of its continuing urgency. It is this balance which sustains the novel's opening note, its attention to the demands made on the individual by community life and to the way that different lives interact. The continuity of these processes means that closure cannot be a complete matter, and in this sense, although Roger's love is additional to Molly's story, it is a vital source of the elements of continuity in the narration. Above all it allows Gaskell

to indicate that gossip has not lost its power to influence events, for Molly's last visit to Hamley is quite spoilt by her overhearing Mrs Goodenough's speculation that Mrs Gibson has designs on Roger for Molly. This recognition that while the central strands of the story may be rounded off, there is an openness in daily life which also demands to be recorded is seen chiefly in the treatment of Cynthia and Mrs Gibson. What has been pointed to in Molly's story is the means of sustaining its elements beyond the resolution of its essential issues, rather than a way of showing that fundamentally it will not reach closure. But with Cynthia matters are different, and different in a way that gives *Wives and Daughters* a distinctive formal quality. Cynthia and her mother are incorrigible. Cynthia, although she can see the value of what Molly has attained, abandons her effort to achieve moral excellence when she renounces Roger and settles for the less demanding Mr Henderson. The anecdote which had been intended by Gaskell for the final chapter and which is related in Frederick Greenwood's conclusion, in which it is revealed that Cynthia has never told her husband of her former friendship with Roger Hamley, shows that although Cynthia knows how damaging her secretive tendencies have been, she has not been changed by what she has seen. In the same way, although Mrs Gibson has felt the full force of her husband's displeasure at her eaves-dropping on his prognosis for Osborne and her having acted on what she knew of Osborne's probable death, she is unable to attempt to correct her nature. Her willingness to contemplate death while jockeying for material advantage and status in life, makes a final reappearance in comic form when she speculates that the Hamley heir's death "would be a boon" (60: 695). As her attitudes are now unlikely to affect anyone's life, her reflections are merely another amusing revelation of her complete lack of moral sense, but they also join with Cynthia's incorrigibility to provide an important counter-weight to the attractive rounding off of Molly's story. Like *North and South* and like *Sylvia's Lovers*, Gaskell's last novel is a *bildungsroman*, an account of the lessons of experience, the moral shaping of the protagonist's life. But unlike the

preceding novels, the heroine of this one is held within her community's life in a way which demands recognition that the proposition on which her story rests, that she can benefit from her experiences, is not necessarily true for the other characters.

C H A P T E R F I V E

AFTERWORD

This study of Gaskell's last three novels has undertaken an analysis of certain formal features of their design. It seeks to elucidate the internal organization of a particular work by examining the control exercised by the plot: that complex of ideas, feelings and purposes which can be seen to be the final cause governing the whole. Because the plot determines the way that a reader will be led to feel about developing events, its control can be seen to extend to the smallest detail in the actual arrangement of words that the reader encounters.

The discussion of structure in the formal analysis of Gaskell's novels is in many ways close to the enquiry in which Structuralist critics are engaged, but, because of the role played by the concept of plot, the analysis in this study is finally different from the Structuralists' enquiry. They concentrate on the relationship between *sujet* and *fabula*, on the reader's encounter with the text and on the processes of response to features of the text (the *sujet*) which enable the reader to make the experience of it a meaningful one. The analogy in Structuralist criticism is with linguistic competence, with a speaker of a language having absorbed a set of rules which enable him to make and understand meaningful utterances. In seeking, for example, to establish a grammar of narrative, Structuralist criticism attempts to define those features of narrative which are characteristically operative in all reading experiences. As a first step, it attempts to identify the assumptions a reader has made in order to understand the workings and significance of fictional forms, and then to establish the nature of the signals in the text itself which have indicated these appropriate assumptions to the reader. The search seems to be for those operative characteristics of narrative which are related to each other as a set of family likenesses, and not for the essential, necessary features of each and every narrative; but, nonetheless, there is a fundamental assumption that each encounter with a narrative enables the reader to imbibe part of the set of rules which governs narrative.

The hope is that by patient enquiry, these rules will be uncovered and understood. Such a quest leads Culler (1975) to place emphasis on "the novel as structure". He says:

> By focussing on the ways in which it complies with and resists our expectations, its moments of order and disorder, its interplay of recognition and dislocation, it opens the way for a theory of the novel which would be an account of the pleasures and difficulties of reading. In place of the novel as mimesis we have the novel as structure which plays with different modes of ordering and enables the reader to understand how he makes sense of the world. (p 238)

There is obviously much in common between such an approach and the analysis of form undertaken here, and therefore much Structuralist criticism has proved illuminating and suggestive for this study. But the similarity cannot be complete because of the role of the concept of plot from which the formal analysis of Gaskell's novels begins.

Formal analysis which proceeds from the concept of plot as a final cause[1] must necessarily concentrate on the relationship between the *sujet* and the plot, the governing principle, which can be inferred from that *sujet*. This means that attention is given to the other end of the reading experience from that investigated by Structuralism which looks, in effect, at what the reader does with the artefact, the narrative, before him. 'Plot' ensures that attention is given to the achieved coherence and clarity of meaning within the terms established by the original purpose of that work: by what Gaskell called her "prevailing thought". As the governing purpose of each narrative includes the need to lead the reader to feel in a particular way about characters and events in the narrative, the *sujet* must also be seen as a unique object although it may have many features in common with other narratives.

The *sujet*, the structure, has been discussed as those features of the design which the reader encounters as the words on the page and which lead him to the specific responses appropriate to a particular narrative. In addition, structure has been studied as an arrangement which works in time.

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1. Friedman (1975: 57 - 60)

It is not only the spatial entity to which James's architectural metaphors in his Prefaces seem to point, but a guided journey through the series of arrangements. The author's task is not simply the creation of an appropriate set of rooms, it is also the directing of the reader's walk, march, run or meander through those rooms.

In formal analysis, the assumption of the active presence of a plot is made for analytical rather than evaluative purposes, but the ability of each work to reveal itself more and more fully as the workings of the plot are followed, is a source of aesthetic pleasure for the analyst which does introduce a measure of evaluation to the activity. That it is desirable for narratives to have the coherence which stems from a clearly discernible working out of the plot does become a standard of evaluation, an expectation which the formal analyst places before each narrative. The expectation that a work, however incoherent its surface may declare itself to be, will ultimately reveal a coherence of purpose, is one which can be placed before all narrative which attains the rank of art.

This expectation of formal coherence is also one which forms a preliminary stage in the critical activity which seeks to rank the works of different authors, in that the demonstrable functioning of a plot is what ensures that it is worthwhile comparing one narrative with others which have achieved similar coherence of design. As well as serving comparative criticism in this way, the analysis of plot can illuminate the development within an author's *oeuvre*. This is particularly clear if, for example, a certain plot type is used more than once, or if similar larger narrative structures are evident in several works. Such comparisons between Gaskell's works have been made from time to time in this study, and as one of its primary contentions is that Gaskell shows considerable technical development in the body of her work, some of these points can briefly be drawn together here.

Analysis of *North and South*, *Sylvia's Lovers* and *Wives and*

Daughters has revealed that the subject matter of each has certain constant features, and it is the relation of the self to other individuals and to the community that has emerged as the most important of Gaskell's constant interests. The moral and emotional growth of the protagonist in response to the demands of others is central to all three novels. Such a matter is not, of course, unique to Gaskell's novels; it is one which Miller (1968) identifies as characteristic of all Victorian novelists, and which Kermode (1968) and Culler (1975) say is the concern of all literature in as much as it raises the question of how man understands his world and his position in that world. But, once the self in society is seen as one of Gaskell's constant subjects, and her treatment of it is compared from novel to novel, the growing delicacy of control that she is able to exercise over an increasingly more complex handling of her subject matter emerges with some force. For example, Margaret Hale as a single central protagonist enables Gaskell to locate her interest in current national divisions within one character, but at the same time, control of the reader's relationship to that character is a less demanding exercise than is the task of controlling the reader's relationship to two, equally balanced protagonists. In turn, the complexity of Sylvia's and Philip's related places in the narrative is increased in *Wives and Daughters* as Mr Gibson, Molly and Cynthia are used to refine the reader's understanding of similarities and differences in the way each character interacts with the community.

Many ways of pointing to Gaskell's developing narrative skills have emerged during the analysis of her novels and, while they do not all need to be recalled here, the complex interaction between plot, broad structural design and narration that she achieves is worth rehearsing because it pinpoints Gaskell's right to the formalist's serious critical attention. A comparison between *North and South* and *Wives and Daughters* which has already been touched on in the analysis of these novels, demonstrates how Gaskell learned

from her own difficulties. For reasons which have been examined[1], the move North is made by the Hale family because of Mr Hale's decision to leave the Church. As Margaret Hale is the novel's central character and as the authorial narration places itself almost within her point of view for most of the narrative time, this tangential start to the real action is a disturbing one for the reader. A similarly tangential start is made in *Wives and Daughters* with the concentration in Sequence One on Mr Gibson's re-marriage, but in this novel, Molly's place and the nature of the reader's interest in her is clarified, not disturbed, by the oblique beginning. The greater expansiveness of the authorial narration and its control of tone, the use of a prologue which establishes the nature of Molly's future experiences and the thematic relationship of Mr Gibson's action to his daughter's story, all ensure that the reader remains confident in the gently determined direction of a narrative that is apparently unconstrained by any purpose other than gliding at its own sweet will.

In the process of extending control of the structural complexity of her novels, Gaskell's distinctive strengths become clearer because better served. Her signature is more and more confident in her last three novels. Its development is perhaps most evident in her power to establish exactly the relationship with her reader that each of her novels and her particular talent demands. The problematic relationship between the narrator, the reader and the author of *Mary Barton* is one of the novel's major difficulties.[2] But after this novel, Gaskell's ability to create and control the responsiveness she requires develops swiftly, and by her last novel, there is not a touch out of place. In all her novels, the narrator adopts an informal, chatty note, a style that is perfectly judged for the authorial narration's use of the community's collective awareness. The connections between such a voice and Gaskell's own temperament are

1. See pp 83 - 93.

2. See pp 48 - 51.

evident in a letter she wrote in 1861 to her Roman friends, W W and Emelyn Story. She is telling them about a volume of tales with which she is finding it difficult to proceed:

> I could *tell* the stories quite easily. How I should like to do it to you and Mr Story and Edith, sitting over a wood-fire and knowing that the Vatican was in sight of the windows behind! (*Letters*; No. 498)

The wish to have her listeners before her in a cosy, relaxed setting echoes her account, written in 1849, of the narration of *Mary Barton* where she tried to

> ... really SEE the scenes I tried to describe ... and then to tell them as nearly as I could, as if I were speaking to a friend over the fire on a winter's night and describing real occurrences. (*Letters*; No 48)

It is amusing and significant that Gaskell should, in letters separated by twelve years, use the same fire-side setting to picture the atmosphere of friendly trust that she aimed to create in her narration.

Henry James (1903) who quotes the later letter also pays tribute to Gaskell's charm and her gift for friendship,[1] and it is this personal touch leading to a relaxed intimacy that she seeks to establish in her narration. Her sense of the power of her own speaking voice accounts for the colloquial note in her narrator's voices and, at the other extreme, for the extensive literary allusions and buried quotations that she uses.[2] She undertakes to captivate her listeners, not to impress them, by persuading them that she is unfolding for their delight those matters with which they are already familiar and the expression of which they already half know.

This last claim is perhaps most obviously true of the structuring of *Wives and Daughters*, but if the narration of the preceding novels does not immediately answer to it,

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1. See also James (1866 a)

2. See Rubenius (1950), Appendixes II and III; Wheeler (1974); and Handley (1967).

some reflection will show that Gaskell's purposes (her subject matter as well as her techniques) are always informed by her wish to gain her reader's trust and, more particularly, by her interest in the processes that such an endeavour involves. In *North and South*, the created relationship with the material in hand is experienced by the reader as a tension between the action of the novel which reveals a critical understanding of Margaret Hale, and the narration which works to reinforce the reader's natural inclination to identify with the heroine and so to treat her somewhat indulgently. It was suggested in the discussion of this tension[1] that the partisan relationship with Margaret is created so that the reader will share both her mistakes about the North and her subsequent recognition of its potential. In the next novel, *Sylvia's Lovers*, there is a marked step away from the narration's intimacy with Margaret Hale, for Gaskell uses one facet of her authorial voice to steer the reader to a self-consciousness about his or her relationship with the fictional world. The full range of authorial narration is used to make the reader aware of the temporal distance of the historical material, and the strangeness of many customs and attitudes in Monkshaven, while also making an unselfconscious participation in the characters' lives possible. The complex purposes of the narration coincide in *Sylvia's Lovers* with the use of two, equally matched central characters and with Gaskell's own developing certainty about her special talents.[2]

The recurring subject of the self in relation to others in Gaskell's novels means that there is a similarity in the type of plot that she uses in each novel. This suggests that her development should not be seen as adventurous experimenting but rather as a constant refinement of her abilities. *North and South* marks her finest achievement using a single, central character, a task which was imposed on her by the problems of form in *Mary Barton*. *Sylvia's Lovers* is a significant break away from this form, a change

1. See pp 68 - 75.

that was perhaps signalled to Gaskell by the commanding figure of John Thornton and his interest as a figure balancing Margaret Hale. Following the matched central figures of *Sylvia's Lovers* (and the interesting question of centrality posed by a story like *Cousin Phillis*), *Wives and Daughters* demonstrates further exploration and refinement of the formal possibilities of using two or more central characters in whom the thematic material is worked out. It is pleasing to speculate that, had Gaskell lived to write another novel, it would have shown a further technical exploration within the abiding subject of self in community with others.

Appendix I : Gaskell's Account of Florence Nightingale.

The account of Florence Nightingale which suggests that Gaskell might have been using her own criticisms of the national heroine to inform the case she builds up in Margaret Hale is given in a long letter to Emily Shaen dated October 27th, 1854, and written from Lea Hurst, the Nightingale family's Derbyshire holiday home (*Letters*; No 217).[1] Gaskell had gone there alone to work on *North and South*. The whole letter shows that she was very sensitive to the dangers of an inhumanity which can enter the dedicated personality and that she was critical of the concept of self which was needed to sustain the remarkable achievements of Florence Nightingale's career. Gaskell reports that Florence Nightingale did not care for individual people, "but for the whole race as being God's creatures" and she recounts an instance of apparently heartless indifference to special calls on her sympathy and an absence of any sense of continuing responsibility in cases where intervention had once been made.

> That text always jarred against me, that 'Who is my mother and my brethren?' - and there is just that jar in Florence Nightingale to me. She has no friend - and she wants none. She stands perfectly alone, half way between God and His creatures. She used to go a great deal among the villagers here, who dote upon her. One poor woman lost a boy seven years ago of white swelling in his knee, and Florence Nightingale went twice a day to dress it. The boy shrank from death; Florence Nightingale took an engraving from some Italian master, a figure of Christ as the Good Shepherd carrying a little lamb in His arms, and told the boy that so tenderly would Christ carry him, etc. The mother speaks of Florence Nightingale - did to me only yesterday - as of a heavenly angel. Yet the father of this dead child - the husband of this poor woman - died last 5th September, and I was witness to the extreme difficulty with which Parthe induced Florence to go and see this childless widow while she was here; and though the woman entreated her to come again she never did.

"Parthe" is Florence Nightingale's younger sister. From Gaskell's references to the Bible, it is clear that she was fully aware of what she was taking on in making criticisms, and her account of Florence Nightingale's dedication is never without admiration. She says later in her letter that "anything like a judgement of her must be presumptuous", but it is

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1. Unless otherwise indicated, all the quotations which follow are from this letter.

also clear that Gaskell's own religion led her to feel that obligations and duties are given primarily to individuals. She had grave reservations about a detachment from individual people even if it was in the interests of a grand ideal.

The letter also reports Florence Nightingale's admiration for heroic leadership.

> Mr. Nightingale said that that was a finer state of society when individuals were not so much ahead of those about them, etc., and she took up the other side very warmly, and said that her admiration of the heroic was of itself so fine a quality, and was lost - along with epic poetry, etc., where heroes were none etc. etc. etc.

The second part of the sentence seems to blur what was admired with the way it was admired, but the interesting factor for *North and South* is the observation that an admiration of heroism and a concern with mankind in general seem to produce an inability to respond to individual claims on attention and sympathy. It may well have been Gaskell's reaction to what she had observed in Florence Nightingale which led her to have Margaret Hale say explicitly, as she is reassessing herself, "love for my species could never fill my heart to the utter exclusion of love for individuals." (46: 488).

While recording opinions which were obviously uncongenial to her, Gaskell was ready to recognise the enormous value of Florence Nightingale's spirit.

> She is, I think, too much for institutions, sisterhoods and associations, and she said if she had influence enough not a mother should bring up a child herself; there should be crêches for the rich as well as the poor. If she had twenty children she would send them all to a crêche, seeing, of course, that it was a well-managed crêche. That exactly tells of what seems to me *the* want - but then this want of love for individuals becomes a gift and a very rare one, if one takes it in conjunction with her intense love for the *race*; her utter unselfishness in serving and ministering.

But as a novelist concerned with the wholeness of a society, she was also disturbed by the cost, both to the heroic personality itself, and to others, of such single-mindedness. Gaskell would, it seems, not have given much support to Carlyle's faith in the solitary, heroic leader, or to Disraeli's wish for a new aristocracy which would guide the country.

She seems by temperament to have been on the side of those who valued the possibilities of shared endeavour that nineteenth century moves towards democracy were bringing.

The wish to institutionalise life which this passage reports also disturbed Gaskell, and what she relates, in the next extract, of the use made of Parthenope Nightingale indicates that she saw a considerable, if unwitting, hypocrisy in a dedication to "grand things" alone.

> She is devoted - her sense of existence is lost in Florence's. I never saw such adoring love. To set Florence at liberty to do her great work, Parthe has annihilated herself, her own tastes, her own wishes in order to take up all the little duties of home, to parents, to poor, to society, to servants - all the small things that fritter away time and life, these Parthe does, for fear if anything was neglected people might blame Florence as well as from feeling these duties imperative as if they were grand things.

The self-denial that Florence Nightingale's imperious will imposed on other members of her family is something that Gaskell felt and resisted very keenly. It would seem to be from such feelings that the concurrence of two features of Margaret Hale's life stem: her recovery of the joys and difficulties of intimate filial responsibilities, and her denial of Thornton's right to make any personal claims on her. Continuing the picture of the selfishness of a strong, dedicated will, Gaskell reports the cool determination with which Florence returned to London despite her own illness and her parents' anxiety, and she comments:

> it struck me that, considering how decidedly this step of hers was against their judgement as well as against their wishes, it was very beautiful to see how silently and diligently they all tried 'to speed the parting guest.'

Florence Nightingale's sense of her own duties and requirements was obviously one that Gaskell, in picturing a similar *noblesse oblige* in Margaret, had to show to be inappropriate in someone whose task is to find her place in a new society such as Milton. Thus it is that the plot of *North and South* entails a forcible demonstration to Margaret Hale that her retreat into a self-concept of isolated purity and service is both wrong for the needs of her society and foreign to her own better nature.

That Gaskell had Florence Nightingale's case (as she saw it)

actively in mind while writing *North and South* must remain conjecture, but it is possible to establish that her letter to Emily Shaen was written while she was working on the part following Margaret's rejection of Thornton. Its date, (October 27th, 1854) is two days before Gaskell left Lea Hurst, and the same letter records the progress that she had made on her novel while there.

> I've got to ... when they've quarrelled, silently, after the lie and she knows she loves him, and he is trying not to love her; and Frederick is gone back to Spain and Mrs. Hale is dead and Mr. Bell has come to stay with the Hales, and Mr. Thornton ought to be developing himself - and Mr. Hale ought to die - and if I could get over this next piece I could swim through the London life beautifully into the sunset glory of the last scene.

A letter to Catherine Winkworth written at the beginning of her time at Lea Hurst mentions that "Margaret Hale has just told the lie" (*Letters*; No 211), so it is certain that Gaskell was occupied, while writing about Florence Nightingale to her friends, with the beginnings of her heroine's recognition of her sinfulness in rejecting Thornton as she did.

There is a further piece of evidence in the text of *North and South* that Gaskell had the Florence Nightingale example consciously before her as she worked, and this comes in the title to Chapter 19. In it Margaret visits the dying Bessie Higgins and witnesses the suffering of starving men like Boucher. The title is "Angel Visits" and echoes a tribute that Gaskell heard paid to Florence Nightingale by the mother of a child whom she had nursed and comforted when his fears of death grew: "The mother speaks of Florence Nightingale - did to me only yesterday - as of a heavenly angel." But as Gaskell appears to have given titles to the chapters expecially for the two-volume publication in 1855, the phrase must be taken as a confirmatory echo of a similarity that can be observed on general grounds. Gaskell's letters give the last indication that will be used here that Florence Nightingale informs part of Margaret Hale's case, and this is where she is evidently responding to comments on her novel made by Charlotte Bronte.

> I'm glad she likes 'North and South'. I did not think Margaret *was* so *over* good. What would Miss Bronte say to Florence Nightingale? I can't imagine! for *there* is intellect such as I never came in contact with before

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(i) Page references to *Mary Barton*, *North and South* and *Wives and Daughters* are to the Penguin editions of these works; those to *Ruth* and *Sylvia's Lovers* are to the Everyman editions of these works. When a page reference is given, it is preceded by the chapter number.

(ii) Dates in brackets after an author's name are a reference to this Bibliography; if there is a second number in the bracket, it is a page reference. A date not in brackets after a title is the date of first publication.

(iii) The list of Gaskell works below does not attempt to be complete; it gives only the collected editions consulted and those works which have been specifically referred to in discussion. For these, details of the original publication are given, followed by the text used for this study. Other editions consulted have been listed in the second part of the Bibliography under the editor's name.

(iv) The edition of Gaskell's letters referred to as *Letters* is that of Chapple and Pollard (1966). The number given in each reference is to the number of the letter in this edition.

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