

ELIZABETH GASKELL

AND

THE ENGLISH NOVEL TRADITION

By

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ABSTRACT

Elizabeth Gaskell is almost universally considered a minor novelist, one of some charm, but of limited value and interest. Such a valuation can be made, however, only by ignoring the greatness of Gaskell's finest novel, Wives and Daughters (1866). It is the culmination of a writing career marked by an increasing coherence to a tradition of the English novel initiated by Jane Austen. Wives and Daughters develops from and enlarges that tradition.

Gaskell's indebtedness to the tradition of the novel developing from Jane Austen's writings is often assumed by critics, but this indebtedness is usually only cursorily treated. However, Gaskell's development from the Austen tradition can be demonstrated by analysing the use she makes of it in the composition of her own novels.

The influence of the Austen tradition is pervasive but is most clearly shown in Wives and Daughters, in which Gaskell explores the issues which concerned her predecessor in Mansfield Park (1814). Significantly, Wives and Daughters can be seen to have a direct influence upon the composition of George Eliot's Middlemarch (1871-72). Gaskell, by virtue of her finest novel, exists between Austen

and Eliot in "the great tradition"; the judgment of Gaskell as a
minor novelist is an undervaluation.

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I lovingly dedicate this thesis to my wife, Penny,
and my daughter, Jessica.

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INTRODUCTION

1. Tradition and Influence

This thesis has as its purpose a reevaluation of Elizabeth Gaskell's status as novelist: it has as an impetus the following suggestive observation made by Laurence Lerner: "Jane Austen and George Eliot make good starting points from which to converge on the fiction of Elizabeth Gaskell...."¹ Lerner's judgment of Gaskell's place in the history of the English novel is a challenge to her readers to recognize the high quality of her work. But his judgment has much wider implications as well. In Lerner's view, it is appropriate to approach Wives and Daughters by studying its relationship with the novels of Austen and Eliot. That is, seeing in what ways Wives and Daughters is related to the novels of Jane Austen and George Eliot is a good way of determining Wives and Daughters a quality, for it is a novel that suggests specific comparisons with the fiction of Austen and Eliot. I wish to extend Lerner's method by studying Gaskell's five full-length novels² in chronological order -- showing how Gaskell's finest novels develop

¹Laurence Lerner, "Introduction", in Elizabeth Gaskell, Wives and Daughters (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1959), p. 11.

²I study Cranford briefly in Chapter Five as well.

from and enlarge what I will refer to as the Austen tradition of the English novel, and how they can be seen to have influenced, and been influenced by, the novels of George Eliot.

Of course, in putting the argument in these terms, several important critical issues are raised. What do I mean by "tradition"? In what senses do I use the term "influence"? What are the characteristics of the Austen tradition of the novel and in what ways can George Eliot be seen as part of that tradition? Has that tradition influenced Gaskell directly by way of her reading of Austen's novels, or indirectly by Gaskell's assimilation of Austen through early and mid-Victorian culture? What are the nature and extent of Eliot's influence upon the novels of Elizabeth Gaskell? These are issues focussed upon in this thesis as a means of forming an adequate judgment of Gaskell's value as a novelist.

In "Tradition and the Individual Talent", T. S. Eliot attempts to establish, for both creative writer and critic, an understanding of the importance of tradition. Eliot's essay is, in part, a reaction against what he saw to be a modern critical habit of mind inherited from the Romantics -- that of demanding novelty in art as a sure sign of individuality. Thus, Eliot notes "our tendency to insist, when we praise a poet, upon those aspects of his work in which he least resembles anyone else.... [where] we pretend to find what is individual, what is the peculiar essence of the

man."³ For Eliot, then, novelty is not synonymous with individuality, though we may "pretend" it to be so. Rather, "not only the best, but the most individual parts of [a poet's] work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously."⁴

By stressing the importance of tradition in art and criticism, Eliot is attempting to re-establish a conception of the continuity of art, a conception fundamentally abandoned by the Romantics' revolutionary (if misunderstood) insistence upon subjectivity as being derived from inspiration, "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings"⁵ in art. Such continuity, however, is not at all a matter of the mere repetition of the works of the past. Eliot argues, "to conform merely would be for the new work not really to conform at all; it would not be new, and would therefore not be a work of art."⁶

For Eliot, the great artist is compelled "to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that

³T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent" in Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot, ed. Frank Kermode (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), p. 37.

⁴T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent", p. 38.

⁵William Wordsworth, "Preface" to Lyrical Ballads (1800), in English Romantic Writers, ed. David Perkins (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1967), p. 321.

⁶T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent", p. 39.

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the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order."⁷ Similarly, Robert Pinsky argues that

When the network of reference and reliance in relation to the past is visible, and is discussable, and is in fact part of the poem's technique -- a technique which openly or tacitly depends upon the reader sharing the same experience of past writing -- then the term "tradition" applies.⁸

While Pinsky's remarks specifically concern contemporary poetry, his conception of the critical issue of tradition is equally valid concerning novels. Much more insistent upon the need for such a relation to the past to be demonstrable and verifiable than Eliot's, Pinsky's position is, nevertheless, fundamentally the same. The implications of such a view of tradition for the critic are, in Eliot's view, clear:

No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead. I mean this as a principle of aesthetic, not merely historical, criticism.⁹

⁷T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent", p. 38.

⁸Robert Pinsky, The Situation of Poetry: Contemporary Poetry and Its Traditions (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), p. viir.

⁹T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent", p. 38.

Feminist critic Patsy Stoneman outlines essentially the same critical position in Elizabeth Gaskell (1987). She argues that literary production is "'made' not of ink and paper, but of other books", and that different aspects of a specific artist's fiction are revealed when his or her work is seen as part of different traditions. Thus, she continues, "Elizabeth Gaskell, who is normally compared with Dickens, Kingsley and Disraeli, shows differently when related to Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley, and Charlotte Brontë." 10

Indeed, Stoneman cites two of the traditions into which Gaskell's novels are most often placed. Marxists view Gaskell as primarily a "social-problem novelist", whose novels are concerned with the socio-economic oppression of the working class. From this perspective Mary Barton (1848) and North and South (1855) are seen as being her most important works, and Gaskell's fiction is read in relation to the works of Disraeli and Kingsley. Feminists view her work as explorations of "the interaction of class and gender" 11, thus preferring to see her in relation to the "feminist tradition" of Wollstonecraft, Shelley and Charlotte Brontë. These two approaches are in some ways similar. The Marxist concern with social and economic oppression is taken up by feminist critics in

10Patsy Stoneman, Elizabeth Gaskell (Brighton: The Harvester Press Ltd., 1987), p. 11.

11Stoneman, p. ix.

their studies of how Victorian novelists concern themselves with the lot of the single most oppressed group in a paternal society -- women. If Gaskell "shows differently" when seen in each of these closely related "traditions", seeing her in relation to the Austen tradition of the novel must show her differently still. It is with such a critical assumption (one I will attempt to justify in the relevant chapters of the thesis) that this dissertation studies Elizabeth Gaskell's indebtedness to the Austen tradition of the novel.

It is not unusual to study a novelist by analyzing the various ways she seems to be "traditional". Resemblances in plot, theme, subject, character development, moral outlook, and so on, are bound to exist between many novels. Avrom Fleishman, in his eclectic A Reading of Mansfield Park: An Essay in Critical Synthesis (1967), ties Jane Austen's work, not to "George Eliot and Henry James", but to Fielding and Smollett -- whose novels are concerned with a "young man (or girl) from the provinces" who finally makes good in his or her new surroundings.¹² Later, Fleishman ties Mansfield Park (1814) to a pattern which includes "the outraged orphans in the novels of Dickens, from Oliver to Pip"¹³ as well as Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre (1847). Still later,

¹²Avrom Fleishman, A Reading of Mansfield Park (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1967), p. 71.

¹³Fleishman, p. 72.

we find Mansfield Park fitting into a different pattern, which includes Thackeray's Vanity Fair (1848), Eliot's Middlemarch, and Thomas Hardy's Tess of the d'Urbervilles (1891).

Fleishman's view of the tradition of the English novel includes almost any and all novels. Having already made the connection with the most popular eighteenth-century novelists, Fleishman offers the following to connect Mansfield Park with all nineteenth-century fiction:

...Mansfield Park offers a vision of reality which is, to my knowledge, unprecedented in English fiction, but which becomes the dominant note of the nineteenth-century novel. Nineteenth-century realism is the tradition founded by Jane Austen, by virtue of her steady grasp of human imperfection, her heroic commitment to a world riddled with personal aggression -- and touched occasionally by love.¹⁴

Here is no meaningful delineation of a tradition in which Jane Austen's novels can be seen significantly to exist, for the description of the tradition is too general.

Other critics have taken a different route. Austen, argues Henry H. Bonnell, must be placed in a pattern that includes Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot. It is "fundamentally, because of the womanhood that the subjects attract our notice"¹⁵, he argues in his study of these three novelists. Similarly, R. B. Johnson in The

¹⁴Fleishman, p. 79.

¹⁵Henry H. Bonnell, Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot, Jane Austen: Studies in the Works (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1902). p. 326.

Woman Novelists (1918) argues that of the very many women novelists included in that study, Fanny Burney, Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, and George Eliot comprise "The Great Four" because of the "peculiarly feminine elements in their work."¹⁶ More recently, feminist critics have begun to define what, in their view, comprises the feminist tradition of the English novel. Hazel Mews sees this phenomenon as historically inevitable, arguing that the end of the eighteenth century saw the emergence of a feminine tradition set apart from the masculine tradition of the novel:

In a period when the tradition of the novel was largely masculine, women writers who tried their prentice hands at writing fiction had either to write as men wrote (if they could) or to write as women with a woman's different awareness of life; by doing the latter they gradually worked out their own tradition. At the end of the eighteenth century in England there were several groups of women writers beginning to engage in just such pioneer activities and their efforts prepared the soil in which greater work could flourish and in which Jane Austen's and George Eliot's novels had their roots.¹⁷

Mews argues that the role of women in society changed radically and quickly from the publication of Mary Wollstonecraft's Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792) to J. S. Mill's The Subjection of Women (1869), and that "it seems at least probable

¹⁶R. B. Johnson, The Women Novelists (London: W. Collins Sons & Co. Ltd., 1918), p. 1.

¹⁷Hazel Mews, Frail Vessels: Woman's Role in Women's Novels from Fanny Burney to George Eliot (London: The Athlone Press, 1969), p. 1.

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that the upheaval in old ways of thought in the minds of women should provide some release of power for works of the imagination".¹⁸

Mews sees Austen as central in this tradition of fiction concerned with women's roles in society (along with George Eliot, Maria Edgeworth, Fanny Burney, the Brontë sisters, and Elizabeth Gaskell).¹⁹ Other feminist critics, however, do not consider Austen to have consciously treated a woman's role in her society as an issue in her novels. In Patricia Thomson's view, the essential characteristic of nineteenth-century novels is that they deal with the limitations placed upon a woman's role and potential in society -- limitations that set them apart from their male counterparts. Thus there is, underlying such novels, the attitude that

Only a woman could know the chafing disquiet felt by other intelligent women at the narrow bounds of female knowledge and do justice to the mental conflicts of those oppressed by their own ignorance. And as for the broad basis of likeness between the sexes -- the coping stone of the novel for over a century had been the essential dissimilarity of the hero and heroine.²⁰

But, Thomson continues, there had been

¹⁸Mews, p. 5.

¹⁹Patricia Meyer Spacks is in substantial agreement with Mews. In fact, Spacks relates the fiction of Austen and Gaskell in their treatment of the "feminine situation". See Patricia Meyer Spacks, The Female Imagination (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1975).

²⁰Patricia Thomson, The Victorian Heroine: A Changing Ideal 1837-1873 (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 58.

a notable exception in the novels of Jane Austen, in which all the characters moved easily about on the same plane and, men and women alike, were judged entirely on their merits and foibles. There could, for instance, be no point of precedence between Lady Bertram's torpor and Robert Ferrar's "strong, natural, sterling insignificance", no doubt about the absurdity of giving Mr. Collins unlimited power in marriage over Elizabeth Bennet -- or even over Charlotte -- because of the fortuitous circumstance of his sex.²¹

Thus, in Thomson's view, Austen is not concerned with differentiation between men and women and the social limitations placed upon their conduct. Rather, Austen "effortlessly" proved "that the resemblance between the sexes was greater than their disparity".²² So, while often spoken of as belonging in the feminist novel tradition, she exists in one way outside of the feminist tradition that, for Thomson, includes preeminently Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot -- novelists whose conscious concern was largely to establish and expand the woman's place in her world. What was natural and effortless for Austen, became a didactic point of departure for Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot.

Recently, Stoneman has argued that the treatment of women's roles need not be conscious: "any piece of writing will be imbued with assumptions about gender which it is the business of feminist criticism to make visible." Thus, while acknowledging that "of all the enormous output of feminist literary criticism during the last

²¹Thomson. pp. 58-59.

²²Thomson. p. 59.

fifteen years, none has been concerned to any major extent with Elizabeth Gaskell"²³, and that Gaskell's novels do not seem to explicitly "address themselves to the problems of 'women's lot'". Stoneman takes the latter as the single issue which unifies Gaskell's whole output.²⁴ Such a critical position would seem to imply that Austen's fiction is amenable to a feminist approach, yet Stoneman does not mention Austen in her study of Gaskell. Her omission implies that Stoneman does not consider Austen as part of the feminist tradition of the novel to which she relates Gaskell's works.

Coming at Austen's work from yet another perspective, Peter L. DeRose vigorously ties her work to an eighteenth-century moral tradition of prose. Indeed, he "places Jane Austen in a specific ethical tradition, that of the eighteenth-century literary moralist, exemplified by Dr. Samuel Johnson"²⁵ DeRose argues that "it is a Johnsonian heritage with which Jane Austen's best work is fully endowed",²⁶ and this heritage is part of the source of her moral background. But surely eighteenth-century novelists had a pervasive

²³Stoneman, p. 7.

²⁴Stoneman, pp. 1-2.

²⁵Peter L. DeRose, Jane Austen and Samuel Johnson (Washington D.C.: University Press of America, 1980), p. vii.

²⁶DeRose, p. 115.

influence on her in this connection as well? Critics tracing a novel tradition by way of Austen's indebtedness to eighteenth-century novelists variously place her in a line with Lord Chesterfield, Fanny Burney, Samuel Richardson, as well as with Fielding and Sterne.²⁷ For the purposes of this thesis, however, each of these groupings is limited in some essential way. Burney is too minor as a writer to be included in the finest tradition of the English novel, Lord Chesterfield's lectures on conduct were too specialized and didactic to influence the creative artist in Austen, and Austen's relation to Sterne, whose experiments in "stream of consciousness" and the use of "time" in novels are historically important, is of a very meagre kind. Richardson and Fielding are more closely related to Jane Austen. Although she differs markedly from them in scope, style and intent, her relationships to these novelists demand closer scrutiny.²⁸

Each of these various patterns of novels into which Austen's fiction has been fitted has its own peculiar validity. What is

²⁷See F. W. Bradbrook, "Lord Chesterfield and Jane Austen" Notes and Queries, CCIII (Feb., 1958), 80-82; C. J. Rawson, "The Sentimental Hero in Fiction and Life: a Note on Jane Austen and Fanny Burney", Notes and Queries, CCIII (June, 1958), 253-254; K. L. Moler, "Fanny Burney's Cecilia and Jane Austen's 'Jack and Alice'", English Language Notes, III (September, 1965), 40-43; B. C. Southam, "Jane Austen and Clarissa", Notes and Queries, X (May, 1963), 191-192.

²⁸I study this relationship more closely in: "2. The Austen Tradition", below.

clear, however, is that simply locating a work within a specific pattern of the English novel indicates little about the novel's quality. Eliot's recognition that "the main current ... does not at all flow invariably through the most distinguished" ²⁹ works suggests that, even were one to recognize a novel as being in "the main current" of the English novel, such recognition is not sufficient to judge that novel as qualitatively "distinguished". While it is one of the purposes of this thesis to establish Gaskell's finest novels as being part of the "main current", there is a corollary purpose as well: to provide a comparative valuation of her novels by studying them in relation to novels which are highly "distinguished" by critical consensus. By scrutinizing the parallels between the novels of Elizabeth Gaskell and those of Jane Austen and George Eliot, I hope to provide the bases for a higher valuation of Gaskell's works than is usual. In doing so, the thesis adopts, in part, the critical method of F. R. Leavis's The Great Tradition (1948). Leavis's method entails attempting to locate a novelist within what he defines as the great tradition of the English novel. When he succeeds in doing so, he reasonably concludes that the novelist is great as well. If the critical evidence for such a placement is convincing, the conclusion concerning the proper valuation of the novelist is inevitable.

²⁹T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent", p. 39.

The difference between the views of Eliot and Leavis reveals a fundamental difference in their criticism. Eliot is concerned with determining major trends in literature; Leavis (following Matthew Arnold) is concerned with determining the tradition of the best works. For Eliot, the value of individual works in the tradition has no necessary bearing on the centrality of that tradition; for Leavis, the tradition is "great" because the individual works that constitute the tradition are great. In my view, the great tradition of the English novel defined by Leavis's criterion is more important (because it contains the best writers) than a trend delineated by Eliot's method. The chapters which follow present the critical evidence which, I hope, justifies Gaskell's placement in the novel tradition which includes Austen and Eliot, and which, therefore, establishes her proper valuation as novelist.

It is the nature of comparative evaluations of novels within a tradition that questions of influence are raised. That Gaskell and George Eliot were mutually influential is clearly attested to in their correspondence. They each read the other's works; each indicates explicitly that the other's novels influenced her own writings. But in the case of Gaskell's relationship with the novels of Jane Austen, the question of influence becomes more problematic. In this connection, it is imperative that the nature of Austen's influence upon Gaskell be defined. My argument is two-fold: first,

Jane Austen's novels begin a central tradition of the English novel of which Gaskell's novels are a part; and second, Elizabeth Gaskell was influenced directly by the novels of Jane Austen. It is difficult to conceive of tradition as completely divorced from a conception of influence. The first portion of my argument -- Austen's novels as representing a distinctive tradition of the English novel -- is necessarily connected with the conception of influence. For how is one to speak of the tradition of the novels of Jane Austen without speaking of her influence upon those novelists who follow her? Can one speak meaningfully of a tradition of one? The critical problem raised is the nature of such influence: was it direct by way of Gaskell's reading of Austen's novels (for which there is no explicit evidence), or indirect by way of Austen's central place in the literary culture of Gaskell's time? Pinsky justly cautions that

"influence" is a problematic concept, in that it assumes a simple causality where such causality can rarely, if ever, be demonstrated. The better the writing, the more likely it is that "affinity" will be a more useful word.³⁰

While I am sensitive to the difficulties in determining direct influence Pinsky points to, while I do not wish to imply a simplistic notion of causality (clearly, there were more forces at work behind Gaskell's writing of novels than her previous reading

³⁰Robert Pinsky, The Situation of Poetry: Contemporary Poetry and Its Traditions, p. vii.

of, for example, Mansfield Park), and while I acknowledge that there are significant "affinities" between the the fiction of Gaskell, Austen, and Eliot, I will argue that "influence", not merely "affinity" accurately describes the close relationship between Austen's Mansfield Park and Gaskell's Wives and Daughters.

Gillian Beer, in attempting to trace the influence of Darwin upon nineteenth-century novelists, confronts, in general terms, the issue of influence:

Reading creates uncertainty as well as satisfaction.... One's relationship to ideas depends significantly on whether one has read the works which formulate them. Ideas pass more rapidly into the state of assumptions when they are unread. Reading is an essentially question-raising procedure.³¹

While Gaskell's novels evidence the kind of general Austenesque characteristics easily ascribed to the influence of Austen upon Victorian literary culture, they also reveal that it is highly probable that Gaskell read Austen. For the presence of Austenesque characteristics in Gaskell's works is not limited to the sort of artistic "assumptions" that, as Beer indicates, may merely be inherited from one's culture. Wives and Daughters strongly suggests that Gaskell is questioning the specific moral judgments Austen makes in Mansfield Park, not responding to the dictates of a generalized novel tradition. It is by virtue of such questioning

³¹Gillian Beer, Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot, and Nineteenth-Century Fiction (London: Ark Paperbacks, 1985), p. 6.

that one is able to conjecture the existence of a direct influence of Austen's works upon the novels of Elizabeth Gaskell.³²

2. The Austen Tradition

In his book Elizabeth Gaskell (1979), Angus Easson outlines Gaskell's childhood reading which he describes as "extensive and imaginative", and then he continues by pointing out that "as she matured, "Novels and belles-lettres she read in vast quantities."³³ The novelists and poets Gaskell read form a comprehensive list of the "classic" authors -- novelists: Cervantes, Defoe, Fielding, Richardson, Sterne, Smollett, Goldsmith, Scott, Dickens, Thackeray, Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot; poets: Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, Dryden, Pope, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, and Tennyson.³⁴

The novelists in this list are of special interest here, for in my view one of the most important influences on the novels of Elizabeth Gaskell is missing. Jane Austen is not mentioned by Easson as having been read by Gaskell. Indeed, Austen is not

³²I deal with this issue extensively in Chapter V.

³³Angus Easson, Elizabeth Gaskell (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), pp. 20-21.

³⁴Easson, pp. 21-23.

mentioned nor alluded to in Gaskell's published letters, and references to Austen's works are very rare in Gaskell's canon.³⁵

It has become, however, a critical commonplace to speak of Gaskell as being in some ways in the tradition of Austen's work. Unfortunately, such judgments are usually peripheral to the critic's central concern. I wish to make the relationship of Elizabeth Gaskell's novels with the Austen tradition of the English novel my central focus.

When I mention "the Austen novel tradition" I raise some important questions. What are the characteristics of the Austen tradition? How is that tradition distinctive? While it is not, in itself, difficult to enumerate the various characteristics of Jane Austen's novels, and, therefore, of the tradition which her novels help define, doing so makes one liable to a criticism which is, in one sense, unanswerable. Any one of the characteristics named forthwith can be found in many other English novels. However, there is a cumulative effect involved in listing several characteristics. For, while any one may be found in many novels, together these characteristics can define only very few novels precisely.

What, then, are the characteristics of the Austen novel tradition? A consideration of the intellectual background which helped shape her fiction is important in coming to understand its

³⁵See Edgar Wright, Mrs. Gaskell: The Basis for Reassessment (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 216, n. 16.

characteristics. Behind the work of Jane Austen were three major intellectual forces: religion, eighteenth-century humanism -- best characterized by the works of Samuel Johnson -- and the rise of English romanticism.

Her brother Henry Austen tells us that "She was thoroughly religious and devout; fearful of giving offence to God, and incapable of feeling it towards any fellow creature her opinions accorded strictly with those of our Established Church."³⁶ A survey of the biographies of Jane Austen quickly reveals the accuracy of Henry Austen's assessment of his sister. And we have the testimony of her letters as corroboration of the centrality of religion in her life. Her father George Austen, until his retirement, was the rector of Steventon. Her brothers James and Henry, and her nephew James E. Austen-Leigh, author of A Memoir of Jane Austen (1870), were all ordained.³⁷ That her religion was central in her life is clear from her letters. Austen describes her home life, in a characteristically humorous letter concerning some nieces and nephews: "In the evenings we had the Psalms and lessons, and a sermon at home, to which they were very attentive; but you

³⁶Henry Austen, "A Biographical Notice of the Author" in The Novels of Jane Austen, ed. R. W. Chapman (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), III, p. 8.

³⁷In this connection, her biography is similar to both Elizabeth Gaskell's and George Eliot's: Gaskell's husband was ordained, and Eliot's father was highly religious. Eliot's movement away from her early Evangelicalism alienated her father for a time.

will not expect to hear that they did not return to the conundrums the moment when it was over." 38

Such light-heartedness does not display any flippancy concerning religion. Her brother Henry informs us that "On serious subjects [he refers here to religion especially] she was well-instructed, both by reading and meditation". 39 Her independence of mind is shown in her condemnation of "pluralities" or multiple incumbencies. In a letter to her sister Cassandra in 1799, she writes:

Yesterday came a letter to my mother from Edward Cooper to announce, not the birth of a child, but of a living; for Mrs. Leigh has begged his acceptance of the Rectory of Hamstall-Ridware in Staffordshire, vacant by Mr. Johnson's death. We collect from his letter that he means to reside there, in which he shows his wisdom. 40

Austen takes it for granted that Cooper's first living will be disposed of. In the same letter Austen speculates about who will receive this living, "We can learn nothing of the disposal of the other living." 41 Austen makes clear her views on two very

38 William Austen-Leigh and Richard Arthur Austen-Leigh. Jane Austen: Her Life and Letters: A Family Record (London: Oxford University Press, 1913), p. 218.

39 Biographical Notice, p. 8.

40 Jane Austen, Jane Austen's Letters, ed. R. W. Chapman (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 55. Such a view concerning pluralities is thematically important in Mansfield Park (1814).

41 Jane Austen's Letters, p. 55.

controversial topics, what Avrom Fleishman calls "a cause célèbre of English national life".⁴² A clergyman should reside with his parishioners, those whose conduct he is to educate and reform, and a clergyman should have only one living. Her independence of judgment is clear, for by this, Austen repudiates her father's "plurality". He held two "livings", visiting the other periodically and on Sundays, while residing at Steventon. The rationale behind this judgment is made clear in Mansfield Park, in which the most important aspect of religion is seen to be the moral edification of the people, and in which the most efficacious way of achieving this end is for the clergyman to reside in his only parish.

From her letters, it appears that Austen was not so nearly decided on another important religious controversy of her time. Her early letters display what Peter DeRose calls "orthodox eighteenth-century English Christianity" as exemplified in "the Anglican Book of Common Prayer".⁴³ Indeed, the moral tenor of much of her work is very much that of the Book of Common Prayer. Responding to the increasing popularity of more fervent forms of Christianity, Jane remarks to Cassandra in 1809 (concerning Hannah More's Colebbs in Search of a Wife), "My disinclination for it

⁴²Fleishman, p. 21.

⁴³DeRose, p. 38.

before was affected, but now it is real: I do not like the Evangelicals." 44

By 1814, however, Austen displays increasing sympathy with the Evangelical movement. Writing to Fanny Knight in November, Austen reveals, "I am by no means convinced that we ought not all to be Evangelicals. & am at least persuaded that they who are so from Reason and Feeling, must be happiest and safest don't be frightened by the idea of his acting more strictly up to the precepts of the New Testament than others." 45 Such a view, expressed during the time of the composition of Mansfield Park, has a great bearing on the significance of that novel, which does indeed seem more fervently and didactically moral than her other mature works.

Two years later, however, Austen was again critical of the Evangelicals. In September 1816, she writes to Cassandra that "We do not much like Mr. Cooper's new Sermons; -- they are fuller of Regeneration & Conversion than ever -- with the addition of his zeal in the cause of the Bible Society." 46 Her revaluation of her religious affinity is clear in Persuasion (1818).

For Austen, religious belief was significant mainly in so far as it was put into practice. Sir Thomas Bertram realizes that

44 Jane Austen's Letters, p. 256.

45 Jane Austen's Letters, p. 410.

46 Jane Austen's Letters, p. 467.

his failure in the rearing of his daughters Maria and Julia was a failure to put his religious beliefs into practice. The works of Dr. Samuel Johnson were explicitly concerned with just this process, and in his works is found an important influence on Jane Austen's novels.

Samuel Johnson helped define the late eighteenth-century English habit of mind. Through Rasselas, his poetry, his Dictionary, his letters, and especially his hugely popular essays in the Rambler, Adventurer, and Idler, Johnson's critical expectations and moral precepts came to be the critical expectations and moral precepts of educated English men and women. Johnson's influence on Austen has long been accepted as indisputable. Henry Austen informs us that his sister's "favourite moral writers were Johnson in prose, and Cowper in verse."⁴⁷ In Jane Austen and Her Predecessors (1966), F. W. Bradbrook argues that "Johnson's periodical essays provided her with a unique type of reading, lay sermons combining the qualities of the real sermons that she enjoyed reading and the lighter, more frivolous entertainment provided by the usual kind of novel. Through her admiration for Dr. Johnson's periodical writings, her art gained a depth it would otherwise have lacked."⁴⁸ To Peter DeRose, Johnson's influence on Jane Austen is even more

⁴⁷Biographical Notice, p. 7.

⁴⁸F. W. Bradbrook, Jane Austen and Her Predecessors (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), pp. 18-19.

pronounced. DeRose argues, in Jane Austen and Samuel Johnson (1980), that the "moral norms, invariably expressed or implied in Jane Austen's novels ... affirm, in particular, the concepts comprehensively developed in the work of 'the first moralist of the age,' Dr. Samuel Johnson."⁴⁹ In fact, most of the studies of Jane Austen's works acknowledge this debt, which is confirmed by warm references to her "dear Dr. Johnson" in Austen's letters.

In the works of Johnson, Austen was able to find a synthesis of the two major ethical philosophies of her age, usually considered contrary, if not antithetical: empiricism and Christianity. DeRose goes to great lengths to show the affinity between Lockean empiricism and Johnson's work. According to Locke, all human knowledge is derived from sensory experience of the physical world. As Locke argues, "All those sublime thoughts which tower above the clouds, and reach as high as heaven itself, take their rise and footing here."⁵⁰ Indeed, Locke made popular the idea that the mind was at birth a tabula rasa. He repudiates any epistemology which views man as being possessed of innate ideas or qualities.

Opposed to this rational empiricism are the moral precepts which are fundamental to a Christian world view. Two of the most fundamental teachings of Christianity are that God is the creator of

⁴⁹DeRose, p. 2. (My underlining).

⁵⁰John Locke. An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, quoted in Jane Austen and Samuel Johnson, p. 16.

the whole material and spiritual world; and that all created things are innately good because created by God -- men and women being the crown of divine creation. But we are also implicated in the original sin of Adam and Eve, and thus are in need of God's grace for us to realize our potential goodness. In such a view, man is not merely a collocation of experiential data, nor is he a collection of behavioural responses. He is, rather, a being whose meaning transcends the purely corporeal.

While Johnson was heavily influenced by Locke's theory of cognition, and attached great importance to human experience, Johnson nevertheless believed that man's knowledge of good is vouchsafed to us from God -- a belief that underlies his entire moral philosophy. In Rambler, 24, Johnson argues that the questions of moral philosophy, "of our original, our end, our duties and our relation to other beings" are sometimes "too extensive for the powers of man", and "require light from above" if we are, indeed, to understand them.⁵¹ Johnson's prayer on beginning The Rambler reiterates the need of God's grace in the attempt to gain wisdom: "Almighty God,...without whose grace all wisdom is folly, grant, I beseech Thee, that in this my undertaking thy Holy Spirit may not be

⁵¹Samuel Johnson, Selected Essays, ed. W. J. Bate (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), p. 56.

withheld from me, but that I may promote thy glory, and the Salvation of both myself and others." 52

DeRose argues that Dr. Johnson is essentially a Lockean empiricist in his view that "we do not know anything except what we have learned from direct or vicarious experience", 53 and that Jane Austen follows Johnson in this belief. I have shown that Johnson is not merely an empiricist, that he unites an empiricist's belief in the importance of human experience with a Christian recognition of man's innate capacity for goodness in being the creation of God. That such is also Austen's view is apparent in Mansfield Park. Both Fanny and Susan Price have the capacity for, and an innate tendency, towards, goodness, and require only their own good sense, the reinforcing of their principles of goodness, and the opportunity of putting these principles into action. 54 Mansfield makes available such an opportunity to both. Robert Scholes argues that this is the legacy of Johnson in Austen, the necessity of uniting "manners and morals". 55 Indeed, Fanny is seen in the novel with a volume of Johnson's Idler essays in front of her.

52 Johnson, Selected Essays, p. xxii.

53 DeRose, p. 17.

54 The issue of "innate capacity" in Austen and Gaskell is dealt with more extensively later in the thesis.

55 Robert Scholes, "Dr. Johnson and Jane Austen", Philological Quarterly, 54 (1975), 381.

Austen was not only influenced by Johnson's "moral" essays, but was also influenced by his critical essays, which are necessarily also moral essays. Johnson's influence on Austen in this connection had an enormous bearing on the development of the English novel. That Johnson valued the novel as a mode of writing is apparent in Rambler, 4. A novel was "precluded from the machines and expedients of the heroic romance, and [could] neither employ giants to snatch away a lady from the nuptial rites, nor knights to bring her back from captivity; it [could] neither bewilder its personages in deserts, nor lodge them in imaginary castles."⁵⁶ The writer of such romances needed only "some fluency of language", with which he could "retire to his closet, let loose his invention, and heat his mind with incredibilities"; but his production would be "without knowledge of nature, or acquaintance with life."⁵⁷ Novels were more realistic, and required "together with that learning which is to be gained from books, that experience which can never be attained by solitary diligence, but must arise from general converse, and accurate observation of the living world."⁵⁸

Johnson acknowledges the popularity of romances in his time, but is bewildered by it: "Why this wild strain of imagination found

⁵⁶ Johnson, Selected Essays, p. 9.

⁵⁷ Johnson, Selected Essays, p. 10.

⁵⁸ Johnson, Selected Essays, p. 10.

reception so long, in polite and learned ages, it is not easy to conceive".⁵⁹ The novel, "with which the present generation seems more particularly delighted"⁶⁰ is here implied to be the more important art form. Its importance bears a direct relation to its popularity with the young, and especially to its potential as moral art. For the fantastic tales of popular romance were, in effect, amoral:

In the romances formerly written, every transaction and sentiment was so remote from all that passes among men, that the reader was in very little danger of making any applications to himself; the virtues and crimes were equally beyond his sphere of activity; and he amused himself with heroes and with traitors, deliverers and persecutors, as with beings of another species, whose actions were regulated upon motives of their own, and who had neither faults nor excellencies in common with himself.⁶¹

while in novels:

an adventurer is levelled with the rest of the world, and acts in such scenes of the universal drama, as may be the lot of any other man; young spectators fix their eyes upon him with closer attention, and hope by observing his behaviour and successes to regulate their own practices, when they shall be engaged in the like part.⁶²

Clearly, the novel's universality renders it an art which can teach us all.

⁵⁹ Johnson, Selected Essays, p. 10.

⁶⁰ Johnson, Selected Essays, p. 9.

⁶¹ Johnson, Selected Essays, p. 11.

⁶² Johnson, Selected Essays, pp. 11-12.

Johnson, in surveying the novel in 1750, recognized that there were two disparate novel traditions developing. W. J. Bate argues that Rambler, 4 "was occasioned by the popularity of Smollett's Roderick Random (1748) and Fielding's Tom Jones (1749)."⁶³ These novels of social panorama are concerned with representing life accurately -- "it is drawn as it appears"--⁶⁴ and such novelists, "engaged in portraits of which everyone knows the original, and can detect any deviation from exactness of resemblance",⁶⁵ fear only censure on these grounds. The other tradition of the English novel is implied in Johnson's criticism of the social panorama novels.

It is censure on other grounds than "deviation from exactness of resemblance" that Johnson levels against the novels of Smollett and Fielding. He recognizes that "the fear of not being approved as just copyers of human manners, is not the most important concern that an author of this sort ought to have before him."⁶⁶ Art exists, Johnson argues, "as lectures of conduct, and introductions into life".⁶⁷ And because the novel instructs as well

⁶³ Johnson, Selected Essays, p. 9, n. 1.

⁶⁴ Johnson, Selected Essays, p. 13.

⁶⁵ Johnson, Selected Essays, p. 10.

⁶⁶ Johnson, Selected Essays, p. 11.

⁶⁷ Johnson, Selected Essays, p. 11.

as delights. the writer must not, "for the sake of following nature, so mingle good and bad qualities in their principal personages, that they are both equally conspicuous".⁶⁸ Otherwise, in our delight with the characters, as "we are led by degrees to interest ourselves in their favour, we lose the abhorrence of their faults, because they do not hinder our pleasure"⁶⁹ Such artists "confound the colours of right and wrong, and instead of helping to settle their boundaries, mix them with so much art, that no common mind is able to disunite them."⁷⁰

The second tradition, and the more valuable in Johnson's judgment, is characterized by an artistic, moral shaping of the "living world" of the novelist's work: "The chief advantage which these fictions have over real life is, that their authors are at liberty, tho' not to invent, yet to select objects, and to cull from the mass of mankind, those individuals upon which the attention ought most to be employed"⁷¹ It is with such a judicious selection of incidents and characters that the true artist invests his work. His purpose is to teach us how to live:

The purpose of these writings is surely not only to show mankind, but to provide that they may be

⁶⁸ Johnson, Selected Essays, p. 13.

⁶⁹ Johnson, Selected Essays, p. 13.

⁷⁰ Johnson, Selected Essays, p. 14.

⁷¹ Johnson, Selected Essays, p. 12.

seen hereafter with less hazard; to teach the means of avoiding the snares which are laid by Treachery for Innocence, without infusing any wish for that superiority with which the betrayer flatters his vanity; to give the power of counteracting fraud, without the temptation to practice it; to initiate youth by mock encounters in the art of necessary defence, and to increase prudence without impairing virtue.⁷²

This moral tradition of the English novel is best illustrated, in Johnson's view, by the works of Samuel Richardson, whose novels he consistently compares with Fielding's. In those comparisons we have Johnson's judgment on the value of the competing novel traditions.

In the most simple form of that judgment, Johnson argues that "there is more knowledge of the heart in one letter of Richardson's, than in all Tom Jones."⁷³ What Johnson means by "knowledge of the heart" is more fully described in another comparison of the two novelists made by Johnson and reported to us by Boswell. The characters of Fielding's novels are "characters of manners" who are "very entertaining; but they are to be understood, by a more superficial observer, than the characters of nature", characters like those found in Richardson's epistolary novels.

⁷²Johnson, Selected Essays, p. 13.

⁷³James Boswell, Life of Johnson, II, ed. G. B. Hill (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1964), p. 174.

These characters demand for their understanding that the reader "dive into the recesses of the human heart."⁷⁴

Perhaps Johnson's valuation of Richardson over Fielding is made most clear when he comments, "that there was as great a difference between them as between a man who knew how a watch was made, and a man who could tell the hour by looking on the dial plate."⁷⁵ Richardson's was a knowledge of the essential workings of man; Fielding's, of appearances.

For Johnson, then, a novelist is required to be more than simply observant. For while the novelist's function is to realistically describe the human world as it is, that function must extend to a consideration of how the human world should be. Jane Austen took this literary judgment to heart. The Biographical Sketch informs us:

Richardson's power of creating, and preserving the consistency of his characters, as particularly exemplified in "Sir Charles Grandison," gratified the natural discrimination of her mind, whilst her taste secured her from the errors of his prolix style and tedious narrative. She did not rank any work of Fielding quite so high. Without the slightest affectation, she recoiled from every thing gross. Neither nature, wit, nor humour, could make her amends for so very low a scale of morals.⁷⁶

⁷⁴Boswell, pp. 48-49.

⁷⁵Boswell, p. 49.

⁷⁶Biographical Notice, p. 7.

In her brother's view, Richardson's novels were extremely influential on Jane Austen.

Most critics agree with Henry Austen's early assessment of the influences upon Jane Austen. F. R. Leavis argues that Fielding is important in that he leads to Jane Austen "by opening the central tradition of English fiction".⁷⁷ In his view, Richardson's "strength in the analysis of emotional and moral states" strongly shaped Jane Austen's art.⁷⁸ F. W. Bradbrook recognizes an affinity in Austen with the "ironical tone and satirical manner of Fielding".⁷⁹ "Where he most resembles Jane Austen", Bradbrook continues, "is in his sense of social distinctions, and in short, dramatic, lightly satirical scenes",⁸⁰ not in a "moral fabric" of his art. And, in Bradbrook's view, although Richardson was "the least ironical and witty" of English novelists, his influence on Jane Austen derived from the fact that he was the "most moral".⁸¹ It was "his detailed study of states of mind and feeling ... that provided Jane Austen with a model."⁸²

⁷⁷Leavis, p. 3.

⁷⁸Leavis, p. 4.

⁷⁹Bradbrook, p. 88.

⁸⁰Bradbrook, p. 89.

⁸¹Bradbrook, p. 84.

⁸²Bradbrook, p. 84.

Avrom Fleishman, however, challenges the usual placement of Austen, preferring to see her in the tradition of Fielding's and Smollett's work -- novels concerning the "young man (or girl) from the provinces", which:

mix moral education with picaresque adventure in such a way that their heroes cannot be said to be educated at all. They simply hear the advice of an Adams or Allworthy, and meanwhile by good fortune and inviolable innocence succeed in doing good for themselves and others.⁸³

This sounds nothing like the moral world of the novels of Q. Jane Austen -- a fact which Fleishman himself verifies, when he argues that Fanny Price in Mansfield Park is the first such heroine "who learns enough of the world to win through to success by moral effort."⁸⁴ In order to make such a judgment, he must banish the works of Richardson to a parenthesis. This judgment is true of Fanny in Mansfield Park, "(if we discount, each in her way, Pamela, and Clarissa)".⁸⁵ So, despite his explicit condemnation of Q. D. Leavis's placing of Austen in a tradition of which Richardson is a central part,⁸⁶ Fleishman cannot help but make the connection.

⁸³Fleishman, pp. 71-72.

⁸⁴Fleishman, p. 72.

⁸⁵Fleishman, p. 72.

⁸⁶See Q. D. Leavis, "A Critical Theory of Jane Austen's Writings", in A Selection From Scrutiny, 2, ed. F. R. Leavis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968).

himself. Despite his "discounting" of Pamela and Clarissa, it is to them that he ties Fanny Price.

As these various critical groupings of Jane Austen's fiction show, she was not an artist in another's image. She was not just a Johnsonian eighteenth-century humanist, imitating his manner and matter. That better describes Fanny Burney, whose novels, as R. B. Johnson argues, are often stilted and pompous in their "Johnsonese". "But here we can only regret the blindness of ignorant hero-worship".⁸⁷ It is Austen's independence of thought, and her keen awareness of the controversies and habits of mind of her time, that are so noteworthy and help to establish our sense of her as a major novelist.

The time between Johnson and Austen was the time of the growth in importance of English romanticism. That Austen was aware of this movement is clear in her contrasting of the two sisters whose main characteristics provide the title Sense and Sensibility (1811). While Austen, in my view, favours the side of Elinor and "eighteenth-century" sense, we have in that novel an Elinor who can yearn after the more romantic "sensibility" of Marianne.

This in itself, however, does not provide us with a clear view of Austen's relationship to romanticism. Critical opinion on this aspect of her work varies. Norman Page argues, in response to F. R. Leavis's The Great Tradition, that "if there is a great

⁸⁷ Johnson, p. 53.

tradition which begins with Jane Austen, there is surely at least one other which begins elsewhere -- with Shakespeare and the Romantic poets, perhaps -- and which includes Dickens and other novelists whose fiction is radically different in kind."⁸⁸ Here, Austen is seen to exist outside the Romantic tradition represented by Blake, Wordsworth and Coleridge. Conversely, F. W. Bradbrook argues that while "the bases of Jane Austen's art were Augustan and eighteenth-century, she was not completely out of sympathy with the new romanticism."⁸⁹ He views Fanny Price as owing her enthusiasm for nature to the "picturesque" theories of Gilpin, as well as to the poetry of Wordsworth.⁹⁰ But he sees the romantic influence as limited to that exerted by Wordsworth: "Burns, Scott, and Byron did not have the same intimate connections with her central interests as Wordsworth and eighteenth-century nature poetry."⁹¹ Bradbrook's argument is confirmed by Austen's critical placing of Byron and Scott in Persuasion.⁹²

⁸⁸Norman Page, "The Great Tradition (Revisited)" in Jane Austen's Achievement, ed. Juliet McMaster (London: Macmillan, 1976), p. 61.

⁸⁹Bradbrook, p. 78.

⁹⁰Bradbrook, pp. 78-79.

⁹¹Bradbrook, pp. 78-79.

⁹²See Jane Austen, Persuasion (Harmensworth: Penguin Books Limited, 1965), p. 121.

Others see the romantic influence as more pervasive, especially in the later novels. Barbara Hardy notes the "rational romanticism of Fanny Price and Anne Elliot",⁹³ and her term "rational romanticism" defines Austen's art. It implies both Austen's "classical sense of order and control",⁹⁴ and "the freedom of emotional expression which", argues D. W. Harding, "could by this time find a place in the mental life of literate people."⁹⁵

The foregoing description of the background of Austen's works helps to define characteristics of her fiction: the essentially religious and moral character of Austen's novels, the conception of the source of a character's moral behaviour and outlook, the conflict of "sense" and "sensibility". Furthermore, Austen herself provides us with important descriptions of her work, descriptions which point to additional important aspects of her fiction:

You [Anna Austen] are now collecting your People delightfully, getting them exactly into such a spot as

⁹³Barbara Hardy, "Properties and Possessions in Jane Austen's Novels", Jane Austen's Achievement, p. 86.

⁹⁴Ian Watt, "Introduction", Jane Austen: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Ian Watt (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice Hall Inc., 1963), p. 3.

⁹⁵D. W. Harding, "The Character of Literature from Blake to Byron, The New Pelican Guide to English Literature, vol. 5, ed. Boris Ford (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1982), p. 51.

is the delight of my life; 3 or 4 Families in a Country Village is the very thing to work on....⁹⁶

What should I do with your [J. Edward Austen's] strong, manly, spirited Sketches, full of Variety and Glow? How could I possibly join them on to the little bit (two inches wide) of Ivory on which I work with so fine a Grash, as produces little effect after much labour?⁹⁷

Austen accurately defines the subject matter of most of her fiction. Her novels generally centre upon one family's relationships with one or two others.

The country village of which Austen writes is, perhaps, misleading as a description of her novels' settings. For none of her novels fails to move the central characters outside of such an initial setting. However, it does indicate another important aspect of her work. Austen's concern with the relationships between several families in a village is really a concern with the bases of distinctions amongst individuals and families determined by class structure. The village allows Austen to examine the social organization of England in microcosm -- its motivations, prejudices, values, and so on. Thus, her "little bit of Ivory" is a minutely detailed work of art upon which the social fabric of England is neatly depicted.

⁹⁶ Jane Austen, Selected Letters, ed. R. W. Chapman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 170.

⁹⁷ Jane Austen, Selected Letters, ed. R. W. Chapman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 188-189.

These issues and interests are, indeed, the issues and interests of the fiction written by Gaskell and Eliot. The later novelists expand their novels' scope, their breadth of social reference in several ways. They include more characters, and more diverse incidents and situations. But the basic issues and interests that were central to Austen remain central to Gaskell and Eliot.

In each of Austen's six novels, she relates social commentary to the maturation of the heroine (or in the case of Sense and Sensibility, heroines). The relationship of these two concerns is manifested in a focus upon the crossing of class boundaries through courtship and marriage.⁹⁸ It is a pattern that pervades her fiction: Catherine and Henry in Northanger Abbey (1819); Elinor and Edward, Marianne and Colonel Brandon in Sense and Sensibility; Elizabeth and Darcy, Jane and Bingley in Pride and Prejudice (1813); Fanny and Edmund in Mansfield Park; Emma and Knightley in Emma (1816); and Anne and Frederick in Persuasion.

The maturation of the heroine thus involves the development of matrimonial relationships, which has a corollary in the individual's movement away from the basic family relationships which lie at the heart of Austen's work. For Austen, the health of family relationships largely determines the success or failure of the

⁹⁸Gaskell attempts a bridging of much greater class and cultural boundaries in Mary Barton, which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter One.

individual's movement away from the family. Mr. Bennet's resignation as a father, his failure to provide the necessary moral guidance for his wife and his children in Pride and Prejudice, allows the youngest three Bennet daughters to behave as whim dictates. The behaviour of Lydia, Kitty, and Mary shows lack of discipline, and an inadequate conception of proper social behaviour, behaviour which must be taught. That Elizabeth and Jane behave well is testament to their greater intelligence and moral superiority. Similarly in Persuasion, Elizabeth Elliot and Mary Musgrove reveal the results of too little moral guidance. Their father is very much like them in his personal vanity (his sense of social prestige is merely a manifestation of this vanity), and they, in turn, lack Anne's sense, and her willingness to accept guidance or persuasion from her elders concerning matters of proper social behaviour.

As the foregoing descriptions suggest, the relationship of private promptings and public expectations is important in the fiction of Jane Austen. This relationship is an important aspect of Austen's portrayal of the often contradictory demands of passion and feelings (sensibility) on the one hand, and reason and control of emotions (sense) on the other, which I described earlier. Austen's characteristic resolution of such contradictory demands in her fiction (usually on the side of sense) reveals that her work is partly an extension of the moral ideals embodied by Samuel Johnson in the Eighteenth Century. However, Harding's perceptive analysis

of Austen's place in her society provides an apt description of the influence of romanticism upon this issue in Austen's fiction:

It is perhaps in the complex attitudes of Jane Austen, whose control may tempt us to overlook her intense vitality, that the gradual change of outlook among people who were neither revolutionary nor defensively reactionary can best be seen. She remained fully committed to the good sense and moral principles of the previous generation but she lightened its ponderousness and checked its moral and sentimental generalities against her own direct observation and spontaneous feeling.

.....
The detachment and autonomy of the individual as a centre of self-responsible moral judgement, which [Jane Austen] maintained unswervingly, was in fact another variant of that reaction against submission to ready-made social codes which marks Blake, Shelley, Wordsworth, and even Byron.⁹⁹

What remains to be considered briefly is her style of writing. Her novels are comic in tone, and they end as comedies traditionally do, with the marriage of the major character(s). This comic pattern was apparently of less interest to Gaskell and Eliot, who largely abandon it in favour of the tragic.¹⁰⁰ Another aspect of Austen's comic style is her mode of narration. Her omniscient narrators characteristically comment ironically upon the characters and incidents of the novels. Gaskell's narration in her early novels lacks the detachment required for such irony. Moreover,

⁹⁹Harding, pp. 54, 61.

¹⁰⁰Gaskell's Wives and Daughters is an important exception here, as it is basically a comic novel. The "tragic" structure of Gaskell's and Eliot's fiction is discussed in more detail later in the thesis.

while her narration comes increasingly to resemble Austen's (especially in North and South (1855) and Wives and Daughters). Gaskell's irony rarely acquires Austen's bitterness, what D. W. Harding calls "regulated hatred".¹⁰¹ The tone of Gaskell's novels is consequently lighter. Gaskell seems less severe in her judgments of her society, which is, perhaps, a reflection of her more intimate and extensive knowledge of the various social strata of England.¹⁰²

Austen was born and raised at Steventon rectory in Hampshire, and lived a relatively quiet life, rarely travelling, and never marrying. This is, of course, an important consideration in accounting for the self-defined, limited scope of her novels. Austen wrote about what she knew, and in some ways she knew less than Gaskell, whose life experiences were much more varied.

Gaskell was born in London, but lived there only fifteen months until her mother died. The infant Elizabeth was removed to idyllic Knutsford, and placed under the care of her mother's sister, Hannah Lumb. When Elizabeth married William Gaskell, they lived in Manchester, witnessing the appalling conditions endured by the industrial poor. The contrast between rural agricultural Knutsford and urban industrial Manchester was to play a large part in Gaskell's canon, and it lies at the very heart of her novel North

¹⁰¹ See D. W. Harding, "Regulated Hatred: An Aspect of the Irony of Jane Austen" in Scrutiny VIII (1939-1940), 346-362. I discuss narration in more detail later in the thesis.

¹⁰² I treat this issue more thoroughly in subsequent chapters.

and South. Surely her political and social consciousness, raised by her active life among the industrial poor, gives her novels a breadth of scope and interest that moves them beyond the novels of Austen in this respect.

Austen did not marry, and had no children, and children are at best peripheral in her novels. They are most prominent in Persuasion, but even there exist primarily to reveal Anne Elliot's character. Elizabeth Gaskell did marry, giving birth to six children -- the first a stillborn daughter, the fifth a son who died of scarlet fever while still an infant. Four daughters survived to adulthood. Unlike in Austen's novels, children and motherhood play a large part in each of Gaskell's novels, and in Ruth she makes the redemptive nature of the mother-child relationship her central focus.

It is partly in accommodating the Austen tradition of the novel to this greater breadth of experience and concern in the personal, economic, and political spheres of life that Gaskell can be seen to expand the novel tradition of Jane Austen and to help prepare the way for a novel like George Eliot's Middlemarch.

I

FAILED INTENTIONS: MARY BARTON (1848)

That Elizabeth Gaskell was of a different world than Jane Austen is clear from reading the opening of Mary Barton, which moves us from the idyllic, rural Green Heys Fields to industrial, urban Manchester by following an outing of the working-class Barton and Wilson families, with whom the concerns of the novel lie. Elizabeth Gaskell was actively involved in Manchester life in her capacity as a minister's wife. Indeed, the genesis of Mary Barton lies in the charitable work she had done,¹ and one of the focusses of the novel, John Barton, is modelled on a person she knew, to the extent that even some of his speeches derive from that source.²

The lives of the working-class families presented in Mary Barton are unlike the lives of "3 or 4 Families in a Country Village"³ Jane Austen was so fond of working on, and demand a

¹See The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell, ed. J. A. V. Chapple and Arthur Pollard (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1967), Letter 36, p. 67; Letter 42, pp. 73-75. Hereafter indicated as Letters.

²Letters, Letter 48, p. 82.

³Jane Austen: Selected Letters 1796-1817, ed. R. W. Chapman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 170.

different style. Gaskell, when treating a similar society to Austen's (for example in the stories collected into Cranford [1853], and, most important, Wives and Daughters), draws heavily upon the novel form created by Jane Austen, but in Mary Barton the failure of the moral construction of her novel is a failure in the very area where Austen achieves her most characteristic successes.

The different style I noted is the style of the English "social problem" novel, novels with a specific didactic moral intention, presented from an ostensibly disinterested position by the novelist who wishes to set a specific problem or problems before the reader's eyes.⁴ But Mary Barton is also a social problem novel in the way that all good novels are, since Gaskell writes of society's effect upon individuals. Her novel is a criticism of life, and it is in her exploration of how family values and the values of love, charity, respect, moral integrity and responsibility can survive despite an oppressive economic and class structure, that we find the novel's worth.

Gaskell would likely have objected to the application of Arnold's term "criticism of life", as it suggests a concentration upon the judging of right and wrong in her world. In the "Preface"

⁴See Kathleen Tillotson, Novels of the Eighteen-Forties (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1954).

to Mary Barton, she explicitly states that her novel is to be non-judgmental:

I saw that the workers were sore and irritable against the rich, the even tenor of whose seemingly happy lives appeared to increase the anguish caused by the lottery-like nature of their own. Whether the bitter complaints made by them, of the neglect which they experienced from the prosperous -- especially from the masters whose fortunes they had helped to build up -- were well founded or no, it is not for me to judge.⁵

But Gaskell does judge. The description of the squalor of the Davenports' cellar dwelling in Chapter 6 is a strong indictment of the society that allows such living conditions to exist. Indeed, the Dives - Lazarus parable (Luke 16: 19-31) which is central to the novel is explicitly judgmental. Dives, the rich man, ignores the plight of the beggar Lazarus, who desires the crumbs which fall from Dives's table. When Lazarus dies, he is carried by the angels into heaven, while Dives is banished to hell, as John Barton says, "with a great gulf betwixt [them]" (p. 45). The obvious parallel John Barton draws -- relating Dives to the factory owners and Lazarus to the workers -- is drawn accusingly by the narrator later in the novel, upon John Barton's disappointment in London: "Does [the Dives and Lazarus parable] haunt the minds of the rich as it does those of the poor?" (p. 142).

⁵Elizabeth Gaskell, Mary Barton: A Tale of Manchester Life, ed. Stephen Gill (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1970), p. 37. Subsequent references to Mary Barton are to this edition and are followed by the page number in parentheses.

It is in the sections of the novel where Gaskell explicitly aims at a non-judgmental stance that we find some of the weakest parts of the novel. At one point, Gaskell presents a passage which is emotionally powerful and convincing:

At all times it is a bewildering thing to the poor weaver to see his employer removing from house to house, each one grander than the last, till he ends in building one more magnificent than all, or withdraws his money from the concern, or sells his mill to buy an estate in the country, while all the time the weaver, who thinks he and his fellows are the real makers of this wealth, is struggling on for bread for their children, through the vicissitudes of lowered wages, short hours, fewer hands employed, &c. And when he knows trade is bad, and could understand (at least partially) that there are not buyers enough in the market to purchase the goods already made, and consequently that there is no demand for more; when he would bear and endure much without complaining, could he also see that his employers were bearing their share; he is, I say, bewildered and (to use his own word) "aggravated" to see that all goes on just as usual with the mill-owners. (p. 59)

But immediately the narrator concludes, "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." (p. 60) The truth she mentions, is that "with" child-like improvidence, good times will often dissipate his grumbling, and make him forget all prudence and foresight" (p. 60), but in Mary Barton, this is certainly not the case. The ritual-like emptying of the Bartons' dwelling in order to buy food is powerful because it is the emptying of acquisitions whose value is in their association with happier times as well as in their utility. We see in the novel too much

outright squalor to assign it to the improvidence of the workers. Gaskell knew what was "really the case", and despite the narrative voice, we have the action of the novel as proof.

Similarly, later in the novel Gaskell describes the owners' misunderstanding of the motives for the strike. The owners "forgot that the strike was in this instance the consequence of want and need, suffered unjustly, as the endurers believed". (p. 232) The final phrase, suggesting that this belief may not be true, is a cheat. Gaskell has already juxtaposed the Davenports' sewer-dwelling to the Carson's mansion in Chapter 6. The reader, too, feels the injustice of the workers' suffering. As the narrator continues, the cheat becomes more pronounced, "for, however insane, and without ground of reason, such was their belief" (p. 232) The workers' belief in the injustice of their situation is neither "insane" nor "without ground of reason". It is, in fact, at the moral centre of the novel, and is addressed by Job Legh in the best single statement of the novel's theme: "'But I'm clear about this, when God gives a blessing to be enjoyed, he gives it with a duty to be done; and the duty of the happy is to help the suffering bear their woe'" (p. 457).

Intention is at odds with achievement, in Mary Barton, and for this reason the novel presents us with a fundamental paradox. Elizabeth Gaskell argues in the "Preface" to the novel that she wishes to explore the thoughts and feelings "of some of those who

elbowed [her] daily" (p. 37) Gaskell wishes to foster in us all the ability to imagine the lot of others, and to sympathize with them in a real way. The exercising of our imaginative sympathy is, indeed, central to the novel's purpose. Yet, the novel itself seems to argue against the very possibility of knowing the suffering of others. John Barton is described as he buys food to aid the Davenports in language reminiscent of the "Preface". The narrator argues for the impossibility of imagining the lot of others:

He wondered if any in all the hurrying crowd, had come from such a house of mourning. He thought they all looked joyous, and he was angry with them. But he could not, you cannot, read the lot of those who daily pass you by in the street. How do you know the wild romances of their lives; the trials, the temptations they are even now enduring, resisting, sinking under? You may be elbowed one instant by the girl desperate in her abandonment, laughing in mad merriment with her outward gesture, while her soul is longing for the rest of the dead, and bringing itself to think of the cold-flowing river as the only mercy of God remaining to her here. You may pass the criminal, meditating crimes at which you will to-morrow shudder with horror as you read them. You may push against one, humble and unnoticed, the last upon earth, who in Heaven will for ever be in the immediate light of God's countenance. Errands of mercy -- errands of sin -- did you ever think where all the thousands of people you daily meet are bound? (pp. 101-102, my underlining)

Here the narration is out of Gaskell's control. John Barton's redemption is the result of his ability to do what, here, Gaskell says is impossible. Redemption occurs as Barton realizes the nature of Mr. Carson's grief at the loss of his son, murdered by Barton:

"The eyes of John Barton grew dim with tears. Rich and poor,

masters and men, were then brothers in the deep suffering of the heart; for was not this the very anguish he had felt for little Tom, in years so long gone by that they seemed like another life!" (p. 435)

Such narrative lapses occur repeatedly in the novel. For the greater part of Mary Barton the third person narrator is omniscient. Yet, at the trial of Jem Wilson, in many ways the emotional climax of the novel, Gaskell refuses to narrate what promises to be some of Mary's most moving thoughts and feelings, claiming simply, "I was not there myself" (p. 389). But we know that she was "there", as the continuation of the trial scene proves. As author-narrator her knowledge of Mary's mind is absolute. The following, in language reminiscent of Adam's resolve to assert his love for Eve in the face of death in Paradise Lost, IX, establishes the omniscience of the narrator:

So, for an instant, a look of indignation contracted Mary's brow, as she steadily met the eyes of the impertinent counsellor. But, in that instant, she saw the hands removed from a face beyond, behind; and such a countenance revealed of such intense love and woe, -- such a deprecating dread of her answer; and suddenly her resolution was taken. The present was everything; the future, that vast shroud, it was maddening to think upon; but now she might own her fault, but now she might even own her love. Now, when the beloved stood thus, abhorred of men, there would be no feminine shame to stand between her and her avowal. So she also turned towards the judge, partly to mark that her answer was not given to the monkeyfied man who questioned her, and likewise that her face might be averted from, and her eyes not gaze upon, the form that

contracted with the dread of the words he anticipated.
(p. 390)

Such lapses in the narrator's omniscience are balanced by other sections of the novel, in which Gaskell is intrusively present in place of the narrator, for we can distinguish Gaskell's voice from the narrator's. The story of her writing Mary Barton in part to alleviate the sorrow she was suffering over the death of her son is well known. That death, and Gaskell's reaction to it, appear in Mary Barton. She speaks of "that land into which no sympathy nor love can penetrate with another, either to share its bliss or its agony ... that land where alone I may see, while yet I tarry here, the sweet looks of my dead child" (p. 327). Again, the death of her son is strongly in the background of the following speech on the failure of sympathy: "Of all mockeries of comfort that were ever uttered by people who will not take the trouble of sympathizing with others, the one I dislike the most is the exhortation not to grieve over an event, 'for it cannot be helped.' Do you think if I could help it, I would sit still with folded hands, content to mourn?" (p. 301). As J. G. Sharps argues, "So far, therefore, Mrs. Gaskell's inventive competence does not appear altogether assured: on occasion the author seems, somewhat incongruously, to mix the subjective with the objective; and at times the woman takes over

from the story-teller, replacing the narrator's impersonality by characteristics of her own."⁶

Gaskell's uncertainty in the handling of her material has serious consequences for the success of the novel. The "moral pivot" of Mary Barton, according to Edgar Wright, is the murder of Henry Carson by John Barton which Wright describes as "centrally pivotal".⁷ Gaskell meant the murder to be considered so, and John Barton dies because of his conscience, his consciousness of the sanctity of life and the suffering he has caused: "He ate, -- but without relish; and food seemed no longer to nourish him, for each morning his face had caught more of the ghastly foreshadowing of Death" (p. 424). As Angus Easson argues, "Barton, certain what he does is evil, is so racked by conscience that he rapidly dies of remorse"⁸ Yet, the murder cannot be seen as the reason for John's death. At the opening of Chapter 15, well before the murder has been conceived, we see the following:

[Barton's] mind became soured and morose, and lost much of its equipoise. It was no longer elastic, as in the days of youth, or in times of comparative happiness; it ceased to hope. And it is hard to live on when one can no longer hope. (p. 218)

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⁶J. G. Sharps, Mrs. Gaskell: Observation and Invention (Fontwell: Linden Press, 1970), p. 78.

⁷Wright, p. 235.

⁸Easson, p. 76.

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. (p. 219)

John Barton is dying under the weight of an oppressive and unsympathetic factory-owner class. His suffering up to this point is profound. He has seen his prosperity dwindle, he has watched his son die of starvation, he has watched his wife mourn the disappearance of her sister Esther, who sought a way out of the life of the workers. He has watched his wife die in maternal labour that did not produce a child. His best friend, George Wilson, dies. Finally, John's spirit is broken by Parliament's refusal to hear the grievances of the Chartists, of whom he was a representative. Surely at this point in the novel we are meant to see all these factors as being the cause of John's "sickness unto death", and Gaskell, in the section quoted above, corroborates such a judgment.

Why does she have John Barton murder Henry Carson? The social and psychological causes of John's impending death have been tellingly portrayed by Gaskell. He is spiritually dead by the novel's midpoint. The murder is unnecessary. Far from being the "moral pivot" that Wright and Easson would have us believe, it is an unfortunate venture into melodramatic "murder mystery" convention, included in order to bring about the sentimental reconciliation of John and Mr. Carson. The murder, as well, shifts the focus of the novel from the plight of the working class in the face of the prosperity of the factory owners (these universal categories are

made convincingly real by the life-like portrayal of each of the major individual characters), to the effects of the murder upon the circle of major characters in the novel.

Gaskell really fails here to consider the moral implications of her title character's actions in this connection. Mary Barton, the only person other than her father who is aware that he is the murderer of Henry Carson, attempts to provide an alibi for the falsely accused Jem Wilson. The moral dilemma in which Gaskell places Mary -- whether or not she will implicate her father in order to free the innocent Jem -- is important. Yet Gaskell does her best to avoid considering this difficulty. The alibi for which Mary searches is Will Wilson, who can prove Jem to have been miles away from Manchester at the time of the murder. This alibi will free Jem without suggesting the real murderer's identity. If Mary is successful, Jem's innocence will be proved, and John's guilt will remain her secret.

Mary is successful. She confesses her love for Jem, and Will shows up in the nick of time to free Jem, allowing Jem and Mary to live happily together as man and wife. John later confesses his guilt to the elder Mr. Carson, the person most affected by the murder. Mary is thus freed from her dilemma. She never has to reveal her father as the true murderer. Angus Easson recognizes this as an evasion in the novel. He argues, "Barton, certain what he does is evil, is so racked by conscience that he rapidly dies of

remorse, and yet no blame is attached to Mary for concealing her father's guilt"⁹ As argued, she is freed from the responsibility of having to reveal his guilt because of his confession.

Her exemption from responsibility, however, occurs too late, for we have already seen that Mary would not have revealed her father's guilt, even to save Jem. The trial scene of Chapter 32 is gripping, moving with the rapidity of a good murder mystery. It moves so quickly from the contemplative narrator to the actual events of the trial, that one can lose track of the chronology of events. Mary confesses her love of Jem, and we suspect that her insistence upon remaining in the courtroom — "No! no!" said Mary, to this proposition [to leave the scene of the trial]. "I must be here, I must watch that they don't hang him, you know I must ..." (p. 392) — is motivated by her intention to confess John's guilt, thus freeing her beloved Jem. Indeed, Mary is painfully aware that the proper course of action is such a confession: "Then again, for a brief second, the court stood still, and she could see the judge, sitting up there like an idol, with his trappings, so rigid and stiff; and Jem opposite, looking at her, as if to say, am I to die for what you know your — " (p. 393). But she will not confess. Growing "fainter and fainter" (p. 392) as the trial concludes, Mary

⁹Easson, p. 76.

finally collapses. Because of "her dread of herself, with the tremendous secret imprisoned within her" (p. 389), Mary had been concerned that she would be compelled to reveal her father's guilt under oath. Like King Lear, Mary chants in her delirium: "'I must not go mad. I must not, indeed. They say people tell the truth when they're mad; but I don't. I was always a liar. I was indeed; but I'm not mad. I must not go mad. I must not, indeed.'" (p. 394) She must not go mad because her doing so would reveal the truth of her father's guilt. Here, again as in King Lear, madness is equated with truth; to confess is madness, to lie is sanity, and as Mary laments, "'[she] must not go mad'". (394) Mary will not save Jem's life by confessing that her father is the murderer of Henry Carson.

Gaskell saves herself from considering the implications of this inversion of the novel's moral world. Jem has realized John Barton's guilt, and is willing to die rather than implicate him. Mary need not save Jem, as Jem is capable of saving himself. However, Will's eleventh hour arrival frees Jem, and John later confesses; the moral order is restored in the sanity of the confession.

For Elizabeth Gaskell, the fundamental unit in society is the family, the importance of which to the moral well-being of the individual and society is movingly shown in the story of John Barton (as well as in the stories of Job Legh and Margaret, and the Wilson family). John is portrayed as a loving husband and father at the

start of the novel, but when his wife dies soon after, "one of the good influences over John Barton's life" (p. 58) is removed, "and henceforward the neighbours all remarked he was a changed man. His gloom and his sternness became habitual instead of occasional" (p. 58).

The union comes to replace his family as the fundamental unit in John Barton's life, with, for Gaskell, predictably terrible results. It is with union members that John spends most of his time. As his involvement there increases, what is left of his family life decays further. He beats Mary for the first time in his life, and though penitent afterwards, he sees less and less of her. Finally, the union "leads" John to become a murderer.

But set against this moral view of life, where family is the central force of goodness in the individual, is what seems to me a more naïve view of the role of society with respect to the moral well-being of the individual. The world of Mary Barton is one in which men and women, individually and in groups, as well as the natural world, have neither a propensity to good nor a propensity to evil. Men and women are morally tabulae rasae, shaped by environment and accidents of circumstance. Thus, Gaskell describes John Barton early in the novel as a character "resolute either for good or for evil" (p. 41). While circumstances are good, "the good predominat[es] over the bad" (p. 41) in John. But, as stated earlier, when his wife dies in labour, one of the good influences

over his life is removed, and the bad predominates henceforth over the good. The drawing of lots to determine who will murder Henry Carson seems to me further evidence of Gaskell's naive moral outlook. It chances to be John's lot in life to be a murderer. For, although it is his choice to draw a lot, chance circumstance determines that he will commit the most abhorrent of crimes.

Implied in this presentation is the idea that the individual cannot be held ultimately responsible for his own actions, since good and evil are accidental. Gaskell's naive moral view repeats itself in almost identical terms through the novel. Just as John is "resolute either for good or for evil" (p. 41), so the unions are "capable of almost unlimited good or evil" (p. 223), and so Alice Wilson's medicinal herbs "have a powerful effect either for good or for evil" (p. 51). There are no innate propensities in this world, certainly no belief in the possibility of the innate moral propensities Jane Austen so movingly defines in Mansfield Park, where Edmund is shown to be morally superior to his brother Tom and his sisters Maria and Julia, each with the same upbringing; and where Fanny Price, though greatly (but not fundamentally) altered by the examples of Edmund and Sir Thomas Bertram, is upon her arrival at the Bertrams shown to have had the capacity for goodness by her gentle, considerate behaviour, as well as by the degree of her love of her family, and her continued longing to return to the home she loves.

To say that Mary Barton is not as fine a novel as Mansfield Park is not to venture a radical judgment. Mansfield Park represents the Austen tradition at its best. Yet the comparison of the two novels is apt. The quality of Jane Austen's novel is defined by the integrity and maturity of its moral vision. Times had changed radically in the thirty-five years that separate Austen from Gaskell. The consciousness of the injustice of economic class division was becoming increasingly acute through the course of the Industrial Revolution, and the social movement toward equality was accelerated by the Reform Bill of 1832. It is with this class division that Gaskell is concerned. The moral of the story is neatly summed up for us by Gaskell in Mary Barton in her hopes "that a perfect understanding, and complete confidence and love, might exist between [the Penguin Edition misprints "been"] masters and men; that the truth might be recognized that the interests of one were the interests of all; and as such, required the consideration and deliberation of all; ... and to have them bound to their employers by the ties of respect and affection," (p. 460) Through mutual understanding and affection, the gulf that separates the owners from the workers must be bridged. Yet much of the novel argues that this very process is misdirected. In fact, the "love story" in the novel supports the perpetuation of this separation. The moral framework of the novel is flawed.

There is the potential for bridging the gap in the coupling of Mary (the working-class girl) with Henry Carson (the factory owner's son). That relationship could join the two classes in what to Gaskell was the most meaningful of relationships -- the family. Indeed, as far as Esther is aware, Mary's feelings for Henry Carson are feelings of love. Mary herself considers that she loves Henry enough to turn down Jem's proposal. If this relationship can be seen to epitomize the movement to bridge the gap between the classes, then Gaskell is shown surely to be against such a movement. Esther argues of Mary that "She is innocent, except for the great error of loving one above her in station" (p. 213), and she implores Jem to "save her" (p. 213). Similarly, Jem argues of Henry Carson (whom he considers to truly have loved Mary) that "It was the wooer, who should die. Yes, die, knowing the cause of his death ... [that] he had left his own rank, and dared to love a maiden of low degree" (pp. 215-216). Mary Barton is a novel divided against itself. The "social problem" portion argues for the efficacy of bridging the cultural and economic gap between owner and worker, while the "love story" judges the bridging of that gap to be wrong.

This attitude is a manifestation of a limitation in the tradition of the English novel of which Gaskell was a part. I am unable to recall a pre-Gaskell novel which portrays a successful love relationship between upper and lower class characters. Intellectually, Gaskell was able to recognize the social problems

created and perpetuated by the separation of the workers from the owners. Further, she was aware of the ways the gap might be bridged. But at this point in her career, she was not sure enough as artist to dramatize such radically original social alternatives.

The force of Gaskell's artistry is felt most strongly where she does not feel compelled to obey the dictates of what had surely come to be a "formula of the novel". In fact, the most moving and impressive parts of Mary Barton are among the most moving and impressive of her canon. As in the novels of Austen, they result from her observation of the daily lives of the men and women inhabiting her world. In the first half of the novel her characters are described with the unmistakable stamp of reality.

Arthur Pollard argues that while Gaskell's "economic thinking may seem very naïve"¹⁰, that is relatively unimportant, "for her chief concern is not with economics, but with human kindness."¹¹ Pollard goes on to note the presentation of Job Legh as deserving praise as an illustration of "the dignity of character in humble life."¹² Even more impressive are the fine touches of

¹⁰Arthur Pollard, Mrs. Gaskell: Novelist and Biographer (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1965), p. 50.

¹¹Pollard, p. 50.

¹²Pollard, p. 50.

insight into the complexities of human reactions, shown repeatedly throughout the novel.

Gaskell's enacting of human responses in her novel is done with a high degree of skill and sensitivity. For example, she presents movingly Jem's mourning the loss of his young twin brothers. The oranges he had purchased as gifts for them are poignantly presented as reminders of the lives that they would have brightened: "Jem went to the cupboard, and quietly extricated from his pocket the oranges he had bought. But he stayed long there, and at last his sturdy frame shook with his strong agony." (p. 118) Mary is affected by Jem's grief just as the reader is, and she places her hand upon his arm, comforting him with her touch and voice. Jem's reaction is unexpected. But Gaskell has already established Jem's love of Mary; his reaction seems to me entirely right:

Jem felt a strange leap of joy in his heart, and knew the power she had of comforting him. He did not speak, as though fearing to destroy by sound or motion the happiness of that moment, when her soft voice was whispering tenderness in his ear. Yes! it might be very wrong; he could almost hate himself for it; with death and woe so surrounding him, it yet was happiness, was bliss, to be so spoken to by Mary. (p. 119)

That such a thrill would occur in one so long hopeful of a return of his feelings is entirely believable, and the circumstances serve to strengthen the reader's conception of Jem's love of Mary.

Another instance of Gaskell's psychological insight occurs in what is surely the finest section of Mary Barton. John Barton's grief upon his wife's death is presented:

...Barton sat on, like a stock or a stone; so rigid, so still. He heard the sounds above too, and knew what they meant. He heard the stiff, unseasoned drawer, in which his wife kept her clothes, pulled open. He saw the neighbour come down, and blunder about in search of soap and water. He knew well what she wanted, and why she wanted them, but he did not speak, nor offer to help. At last she went, with some kindly-meant words (a text of comfort, which fell upon a deafened ear), and something about "Mary", but which Mary he could not tell, in his bewildered state.

He tried to realise it, to think it possible. And then his mind wandered off to other days, to far different times. He thought of their courtship; of his first seeing her, an awkward, beautiful rustic, far too shiftless for the delicate factory work to which she was apprenticed; of his first gift to her, a bead necklace, which had long ago been put by, in one of the deep drawers of the dresser, to be kept for Mary. He wondered if it was there yet, and with a strange curiosity he got up to feel for it; for the fire by this time was well-nigh out, and candle he had none. His groping hand fell on the piled-up tea things, which at his desire she had left unwashed till the morning -- they were all so tired. He was reminded of one of the daily little actions, which acquire such power when they have been performed for the last time, by one we love. He began to think over his wife's daily round of duties; and something in the remembrance that these would never more be done by her, touched the source of tears, and he cried aloud. (pp. 56-57)

His almost desperate attempt to maintain his connection with his wife, is portrayed in his search for his first gift to her, a search that brings him across reminders of their daily life together. It is such family life that Gaskell presents as most important, and the

love that existed between John and Mary Barton is dramatized concretely in those "daily little actions" that represent, as they did to Wordsworth in "Tintern Abbey", "the best portions of a good man's life". John Barton's grief and love are movingly and tellingly portrayed.

In fact, George Eliot was inspired by this portion of Mary Barton. Responding to a letter of praise from Gaskell, Eliot reveals that both Cranford (1853) and Mary Barton influenced Scenes of Clerical Life (1858) and Adam Bede (1859):

I had indulged the idea that if my books turned out to be worth much, you would be among my willing readers; for I was conscious, while the question of my power was still undecided for me, that my feeling towards Life and Art had some affinity with the feeling which had inspired "Cranford" and the earlier chapters of "Mary Barton." That idea was brought the nearer to me, because I had the pleasure of reading Cranford for the first time in 1857, when I was writing the "Scenes of Clerical Life," and going up the Rhine one dim wet day in the spring of the next year, when I was writing "Adam Bede," I satisfied myself for the lack of a prospect by reading over again those earlier chapters of "Mary Barton."¹³

This letter is useful proof of influence, but it does little to indicate explicitly the kind or nature of that influence. However, the references specifically to the earlier chapters of Mary Barton provide some evidence in this connection. The earlier chapters of the novel are those which deal with the dissolution of the Barton

¹³Eliot Letters, Vol. III, p. 198.

family: the death of mother and new-born son, the ever-increasing poverty, and the growing estrangement between father and daughter. In its pathos and the tragic family circumstances described, this section of Mary Barton bears a close affinity with the sections of The Life of Charlotte Brontë (1857) which Eliot found most affecting¹⁴, and the tragic possibilities in life shown so strongly in both of these works help shape the ethos of Adam Bede.

It is difficult to over-emphasize the importance of family life in the novels of both Gaskell and Eliot. And it is clear from her reactions to Gaskell's works that such a concern, when coupled with the possibility of the tragic in everyday life, is of immense appeal to Eliot. Such concerns are manifested in the writing of novels like Adam Bede and The Mill on the Floss (1860). In fact, Gaskell's recognition of the possibility of the tragic in each and every human being is central to Mary Barton. She argues that "[John Barton] could not, you cannot, read the lot of those who daily pass you by in the street. How do you know the wild romances of their lives; the trials, the temptations they are even now enduring, resisting, sinking under?" (p. 101). Such a view of life is central in Eliot's early fiction, and is perhaps best expressed in The Mill on the Floss, in terms that strikingly echo Mary Barton: "The pride and obstinacy of millers, and other insignificant people, whom you

¹⁴See Chapter 6.

pass unnoticingly on the road every day, have their tragedy too; but it is of that unwept, hidden sort, that goes on from generation to generation, and leaves no record".¹⁵

The "earlier chapters" of Mary Barton reveal how the disintegration of family life can lead to the tragic for Gaskell's heroines. The novel opens with a portrait of the Barton family in its relations with the Wilsons. The Wilsons are invited by the Bartons for tea, and Gaskell describes the scene:

The tray was soon hoisted down, and before the merry chatter of cups and saucers began, the women disburdened themselves of their out-of-door things, and sent Mary up stairs with them. Then came a long whispering, and chinking of money, to which Mr and Mrs Wilson were too polite to attend; knowing, as they did full well, that it all related to the preparations for hospitality; hospitality that, in their turn, they should have such pleasure in offering. So they tried to be busily occupied with the children, and not to hear Mrs Barton's directions to Mary.

"Run, Mary dear, just round the corner, and get some fresh eggs at Tipping's (you may get one a-piece, that will be five pence), and see if he has any nice ham cut, that he would let us have a pound of."

"Say two pounds, missis, and don't be stingy," chimed in the husband.

"Well, a pound and a half, Mary. And get it Cumberland ham, for Wilson comes from there-away, and it will have a sort of relish of home with it he'll like, -- and Mary" (seeing the lassie fain to be off), "you must get a pennyworth of milk and a loaf of bread

¹⁵George Eliot, The Mill on the Floss (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1961), p. 174. The resemblance of the two views is clear, although the contrast between Gaskell's "wild romances" and Eliot's "unwept, hidden sort" recalls Eliot's complaint about Gaskell's "love of sharp contrasts".

-- mind you get it fresh and new -- and, and -- that's all, Mary."

"No, it's not all," said her husband. "Thou must get sixpennyworth of rum, to warm the tea; thou'll get it at the 'Grapes'. And thou just go to Alice Wilson; he says she lives just right round the corner, under 14, Barber Street" (this was addressed to his wife), "and tell her to come and take her tea with us; she'll like to see her brother, I'll be bound, let alone Jane and the twins."

"If she comes she must bring a tea-cup and saucer, for we have but half-a-dozen, and here's six of us," said Mrs Barton. (pp. 50-51)

The scene is beautifully evoked. The Bartons are clearly enjoying a time of relative prosperity ("a sure sign of good times among the mills" [p. 50]), but it must be remembered that such prosperity is indeed relative. Mrs. Barton constantly feels the need to economize in their entertaining; John Barton's liberality clearly needs to be tempered. Yet even Barton's intended hospitality is meagre, and attests to a degree of impoverishment.

The major point to be made about this section of the novel, however, is not Gaskell's portrait of degrees of poverty. At the heart of it is the depiction of a family life which is implicitly decent. The decency is not limited to the Bartons here; the comment that the Wilsons in turn "should have such pleasure in offering" (p. 50) such hospitality attests to that. What the scene does show, in the words of John Lucas, "is the struggle there has to be for

gestures of human decency to survive."¹⁶ A further example of Barton's decency is his aid to the Davenports after the Carsons' mill has been destroyed by fire. Barton's own family's economic survival is appreciably more precarious at this point. There is a lull in trade; Barton works "short hours" (p. 96), yet still proffers much-needed support. Again, the point is not the degree of the Bartons' poverty. Rather, Gaskell concentrates upon the human values centred upon the family.

It is when this family effectively disintegrates -- Mrs. Barton dies in childbearing, and her sister Esther runs away -- that such decency disintegrates as well. In John Barton, and his daughter Mary, the remainder of the novel traces a significant moral descent.

Esther's flight is a part of the Barton family's falling-apart, and it plays a large part in Mary's disastrous relationship with Henry Carson. Barton recounts her flight:

"My mind is, she's gone off with somebody. My wife frets, and thinks she's drowned herself, but I tell her, folks don't care to put on their best clothes to drown themselves; and Mrs Bradshaw (where she lodged, you-know), says the last time she set eyes on her was last Tuesday, when she came down stairs, dressed in her Sunday gown, and with a new ribbon in her bonnet, and gloves on her hands, like the lady she was so fond of thinking herself." (pp. 42-43)

¹⁶John Lucas, "Mrs. Gaskell and Brotherhood" in Tradition and Tolerance in Nineteenth-Century Fiction, David Howard, John Lucas, John Goode, eds. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), p. 167.

.....
 "I wonder she ever left you," observed his friend.

"That's the worst of factory work, for girls. They can earn so much when work is plenty, that they can maintain themselves any how. My Mary shall never work in a factory, that I'm determined on. You see Esther spent her money in dress, thinking to set off her pretty face; and got to come home so late at night, that at last I told her my mind: my missus thinks I spoke crossly, but I meant right, for I loved Esther, if it was only for Mary's sake. Says I, "Esther, I see what you'll end at with your artificials, and your fly-away veils, and stopping out when honest women are in their beds; you'll be a street-walker, Esther, and then, don't you go to think I'll have you darken my door, though my wife is your sister." (p. 43)

.....
 "...[Esther] takes Mary in a coaxing sort of way, and, 'Mary,' says she, 'what should you think if I sent for you some day and made a lady of you.' So I could not stand such talk as that to my girl, and I said, 'Thou'd best not put that nonsense in the girl's head I can tell thee; I'd rather see her earning her bread by the sweat of her brow, as the Bible tells her she should do, ay, though she never got butter to her bread, than be like a do-nothing lady, worrying shopmen all morning, and screeching at her pianny all afternoon, and going to bed without having done a good turn to any one of God's creatures but herself.'" (p. 44)

Esther desperately wants to escape the poverty of factory life; she wants to make a better life for herself by escaping, and her dressing up in attractive clothing can be seen to indicate that she wants to achieve both escape and ease by forming a relationship with a relatively wealthy man. Thus, she will be able to fulfil her promise to Mary to make a "lady" of her. There are two important points to be made here. First, Esther recognizes the need to escape this life in order to achieve more economic ease, and she realizes

that, for a working-class woman of the 1840's, this is most likely achieved in relationship with a wealthy man. Second, she clearly wants to share such hoped-for bounty with her family, as represented here by Mary. Mary reveals the influence of Esther's values when she enters into a relationship with Henry Carson, both as an escape from the life of the working class for herself, and as a means of bettering the monetary lot of her father.

Eliot's testimony of Mary Barton's influence is important, and our perception of the exact nature of that influence is aided by Eliot's concentration upon the novel's earlier chapters. The possibility of the tragic in the lives of each of us is one of the most prominent concerns in Eliot's fiction. Mary Barton can be seen to have helped shape that concern.¹⁷ However, these early, finely developed passages Eliot found so appealing give way to passages of narrative confusion and the conventional fare of the mystery novel in Mary Barton. In Arthur Pollard's view, "the imaginative energy resides in a succession of parts rather than in the whole, and as a result passages in which the reader is deeply engaged alternate with passages that fall flat."¹⁸ I have concentrated on the novel's shortcomings, because it is Gaskell's improvement upon these that marks most surely her growth as a novelist. She becomes

¹⁷I treat this issue in more detail in Chapter 6.

¹⁸Pollard, p. 42.

increasingly assured (and, in the case of Ruth [1853], brave) in her handling of plot, the moral framework of her novels, and their narration -- those aspects of the novel that represent "invention" in J. G. Sharps's view of Gaskell's art.¹⁹ Her strength will continue to lie in an Austen-like presentation of family relationships and their effect upon the protagonists of the novels.

¹⁹See Sharps, Observation and Invention.

II

ROMANCE VERSUS REALISM: RUTH (1853)

In a letter to Eliza Fox of May 29, 1849, after the publication of Mary Barton, Elizabeth Gaskell discusses the genesis of what, to her, was that novel's central concern: "Nobody and nothing was real (I am sorry for you, but I must tell the truth) in M. Barton, but the character of John Barton; the circumstances are different, but the character and some of the speeches, are exactly a poor man I know."¹ Similarly, Ruth has its genesis in a "real" character in whom Gaskell had taken great interest. She outlines the situation of a young "fallen woman", Pasley, in a letter to Charles Dickens, in which Gaskell wishes to arrange safe passage to Australia to provide Pasley a new start in life. I will quote at length, as the passage is an important indication of the extent to which Ruth is derived from Gaskell's experience:

I am just now very much interested in a young girl, who is in our New Bayley prison. She is the daughter of an Irish clergyman who died when she was two years old The girl's uncle had her placed at 6 years old in the Dublin school for orphan daughters of the clergy; and when she was about 14, she was apprenticed to an

¹Letters, Letter 48, p. 82.

Irish dress-maker here, of very great reputation for fashion she placed this girl with a woman who occasionally worked for her, and who has since succeeded to her business; this woman was very profligate and connived at the girl's seduction by a surgeon in the neighbourhood who was called in when the poor creature was ill. Then she was in despair, & wrote to her mother ... and while awaiting the answer went into the penitentiary; she wrote 3 times but no answer came, and in desperation she listened to a woman, who had obtained admittance \to the penitentiary/ solely as it turned out to decoy girls into her mode of life, and left with her; & for four months she has led the most miserable life! in the hopes, as she tells me of killing herself, for "no one had ever cared for her in this world," -- she drank, "wishing it might be poison", pawned every article of clothing -- and at the last stole she looks quite a young child (she is but 16,) with a wild wistful look in her eyes, as if searching for the kindness she has never known, -- and she pines to redeem herself ... she agrees to emigrate to Australia, for which her expenses would be paid. But the account of common emigrant ships is so bad one would not like to expose her to such chances of corruption I want her to go out with as free and unbranded a character as she can; if possible, the very fact of having been in prison &c to be unknown on her landing.²

The general circumstances are strikingly similar to Ruth's: effectively orphaned at two, apprenticed to a morally corrupt dress-maker, seduced (Mrs. Mason's reaction upon seeing Ruth and Bellingham together helps bring this about), and so on. The connection with Ruth is as apparent in some of the other details of the letter. Pasley "went to the penitentiary" after the seduction, just as Mrs. Bellingham suggested to Ruth. Pasley is concerned "to redeem herself", as is Ruth. Gaskell, in making a new life possible

²Letters, Letter 61, p. 99.

for Pasley, suggests an action similar to the Bensons' lie -- "if possible, the very fact of having been in prison &c to be unknown on her landing." Finally, Ruth's reencountering the man who was her seducer is suggested in the post-script of the letter to Dickens, where Gaskell describes Pasley's meeting with "her" doctor, who had become the prison doctor at New Bayley.³ It is clear Gaskell had a deep personal interest in the subject of Ruth, an interest so deep, in fact, that she was concerned that she had "lost [her] own power of judging" the novel.⁴ I think there is a failure of judgment in Ruth, a failure of moral conception that lies at the heart of the novel.

As Arthur Pollard points out, Ruth was "probably the most extensively reviewed of all Mrs. Gaskell's writings."⁵ It, too, has received the widest range of judgments concerning it. Gaskell gives evidence of the mixed reception of Ruth in her letters. Soon after the novel's publication in January, 1853, she describes its early public reception in a letter to Ann Robson: "You are mistaken about either letter or congratulations. As yet I have had hardly any of the former: indeed I anticipate so much pain from them that on several instances I have forbidden people to write, for their

³See Letters, Letter 61, p. 99.

⁴Letters, Letter 152, p. 228.

⁵Pollard, Mrs. Gaskell, p. 86.

expressions of disapproval ... would be very painful & stinging at the time. 'An unfit subject for fiction' is the thing to say about it".⁶ In February, she writes to Eliza Fox, concerning a London librarian who withdrew Ruth from circulation "on account of 'its being unfit for family reading'"⁷, (a judgment Gaskell makes for her own home).⁸ Further, the literary reviews echoed such condemnatory judgments of Ruth:

Spectator, Lity Gazette, Sharp's Mag; Colborne have all abused it as roundly as may be. Literary Gazette in every form of abuse "insufferably dull" "style offensive from affectation" "deep regret that we and all admirers of Mary Barton must feel at the author's loss of reputation" "Thoroughly common-place...."⁹

The reviewers' judgments, however, were far from universally negative. Gaskell points out that "The North British Review had a delicious review of 'Ruth' in it."¹⁰ By March she mentions "a precious little packet" of "comforting letters about Ruth"¹¹, and by

⁶Letters, Letter 148, p. 220.

⁷Letters, Letter 151, p. 223.

⁸"Of course it is a prohibited book in this, as in many other households; not a book for young people, unless read with someone older (I mean to read it with MA some quiet time or other;)", Letters, Letter 148, p. 221.

⁹Letters, Letter 151, p. 223.

¹⁰Letters, Letter 149, p. 222.

¹¹Letters, Letter 153, p. 226.

April her account of the reception of Ruth emphasizes "the great difference of opinion"¹² concerning it.

The major studies of Ruth reveal a similar range of judgment. G. D. Sanders places a high valuation on Ruth. He argues that it is "an example of Christianity as it should be applied to life The heroine is a blameless and wholly lovable woman, who reaps in bitterness and death the results of the commission of one wrong and the acquiescence in another. With the heroine is a group of characters who have been equalled only by Balzac and Victor Hugo and Dickens at their best"¹³ This judgment is substantially supported by A. B. Hopkins, who states flatly that "it is a good novel".¹⁴ She continues that Ruth is "far above" the "propaganda" level at which "most English problem novels" rest; indeed, she argues that "by virtue of its character drawing, its descriptive power, the clear presentation of the problem, and the reasonableness with which it is handled"¹⁵ the novel deserves a high valuation. But set against these views the view of J. G. Sharps. He argues that Gaskell's failure to present the seduction represents "Mrs.

¹²Letters, Letter 154, p. 227.

¹³G. D. Sanders, Elizabeth Gaskell (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1929), p. 47.

¹⁴A. B. Hopkins, Elizabeth Gaskell: Her Life and Work (New York: Octagon Books, 1971), p. 119.

¹⁵Hopkins, p. 119.

Gaskell's artistic unsureness, her failure of nerve in regard to the central issue, in regard to the very raison d'être of the novel...." ¹⁶ Similarly, Pollard, who views Benson's lie as the moral pivot of the novel, argues that the treatment of it is a failure: "The lie is 'the pivot on which the fate of years moved'. Unfortunately, the lie does not seem to create sufficient disturbance in the heart of Benson to keep us ever in mind of this fact." ¹⁷ Finally there is W. A. Craik, whose criticism implicitly recognizes the complexity involved in coming to a proper valuation of Ruth. In her view, "Ruth is probably the least read and least successful of all her full-length novels; yet it has some of her greatest writing in it, and stretches the art of the novel far more than Mary Barton". ¹⁸ Craik continues by praising the novel's moral complexity ¹⁹, the character and presentation of Ruth ²⁰, and, surprisingly in the light of the prevailing critical consensus, the plot's construction: "Every choice of material proves an avoidance

¹⁶Sharps, p. 151.

¹⁷Pollard, p. 104.

¹⁸W. A. Craik, Elizabeth Gaskell and the English Provincial Novel (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1975), p. 47.

¹⁹Craik, pp. 49-50.

²⁰Craik, p. 51.

of romance, fantasy and escape, in favour of the probable and, as far as possible, the predictable." ²¹

Ruth was in its time an influential novel, new and brave in its selection of the "fallen woman" as its central concern. But it is in its choice of a topical, sensational subject that Ruth least resembles the novels of Jane Austen, which centre upon more general, abstract ethical issues: sensibility and sense, prejudice and pride, persuasion, and so on. Thus, Ruth is a novel necessarily demanding a new and brave form (one unlike the novels of Jane Austen), for in spite of Craik's view to the contrary, romance and fantasy play a large part in this novel -- even given the realistic strain of the opening pages.

The novel begins with Gaskell painstakingly creating a realistic portrait of a social milieu in flux. The grand old houses deserted, and refitted with false fronts for shops, represent the encroachment of new ways of life: "The body of the houses was too solidly grand to submit to alteration; so people were occasionally surprised, after passing through a common-place looking shop, to find themselves at the foot of a grand carved oaken staircase, lighted by a window of stained glass, storied all over with armorial bearings." ²² The old ways are "too solidly grand" to submit

²¹Craik, p. 52.

²²Elizabeth Gaskell, Ruth, in The Works of Mrs. Gaskell, Vol. 3, ed. A. W. Ward (London: Smith, Elder and Company, 1906), p. 3.--

completely, and Gaskell next invites the reader to see a connection between this social milieu and a character's moral make-up:

The daily life into which people are born, and into which they are absorbed before they are well aware, forms chains which only one in a hundred has moral strength enough to despise, and to break when the right time comes -- when an inward necessity for independent individual action arises, which is superior to all outward conventionalities(p. 2)

This passage marks a change in Gaskell's conception of the formation of moral character. In Mary Barton, each character's moral framework was completely environmentally formed. In Ruth, environment plays only a part in such development for the "one in a hundred" with the required moral strength. The above quotation points to the individual's part in such formation.

The Bradshaw family is especially revealing in this connection. Bradshaw is clearly the precursor of Gradgrind and Bounderby of Dickens's Hard Times (1854) in his conception of character formation: "All children were obedient, if their parents were decided and authoritative; and every one would turn out well, if properly managed." (p. 209) But his own two children belie this view of human nature. Richard and Jemima are raised according to Bradshaw's utilitarian and positivist beliefs. Yet Richard cannot "turn out well". Gaskell points out that "Dick would never have had

Subsequent references to Ruth are to this edition and are followed by the page number in parentheses.

'pluck' enough to be a hardened villain, under any circumstances: but, unless some good influence, some strength, was brought to bear upon him, he might easily sink into the sneaking scoundrel" (p. 402).²³ At best, he is a scoundrel kept under close scrutiny. That Jemima is emotionally uneducated is clear in her reaction to Farquhar's love for her, and the hatred she develops toward Ruth. Her true moral goodness, though, is shown when she overcomes that hatred and speaks on Ruth's behalf against the formidable wishes (and teachings) of her father: "Jemima, all flushed and panting, went up and stood side by side with wan Ruth she spoke out beyond all power of restraint from her father. 'Father! I will speak. I will not keep silence. I will bear witness to Ruth ...'" (p. 335). Jemima is more than the product of her upbringing, as the difference between her father's and her own reactions to the disclosure of Ruth's sin emphasizes.

With a character such as Bellingham, however, Gaskell returns to the simpler conception of character formation found in Mary Barton. Bellingham is truly and simply a product of his environment, raised by a mother more annoyed at "boyish tricks" (p. 32) than at the "grave offences" (p. 32) of which she was aware. Both conspire in the abandonment of Ruth in the chapter with the

²³Cf. Dick Musgrove in Austen's Persuasion. Perhaps this character suggested the name to Gaskell.

ironic title, "Doing the Thing Handsomely". In Pollard's view, "because the story is so simple, some of the characters, Bellingham in particular, seem notably incomplete" (p. 88), existing solely for the moral's sake. Gaskell's return to that naïve conception of character formation is at the root of Bellingham's simplicity as a character. He is different in kind from the other major characters of Ruth, existing partly as the fulfillment of a Cinderella pattern that Gaskell explores.

Our introduction to the beautiful and radiant Ruth comes immediately after the passage (already quoted) concerning the alteration of the old houses into shops: "Up such a stair -- past such a window (through which the moonlight fell on her with a glory of many colours) -- Ruth Hilton passed wearily one January night, now many years ago" (p. 3). The phrase "many years ago", here so reminiscent of a story-teller's "once upon a time", leads us into the fairy tale mode. Much like Cinderella, Ruth is a beautiful orphan in shabby clothing, with internal, though undefined, moral promptings: "a strange, undefined feeling, had made her imagine she was doing wrong in walking alongside one so kind and good as Mr. Bellingham" (p. 39). The early part of the novel is replete with fairy tale set-pieces: the wicked step-mother figure in Mrs. Mason, the ball at which the heroine finds her Prince Charming, eclipsing all the other beauties there, and the elderly but ineffectual guardian in the person of Thomas, who recognizes for the reader, or

corroborates the reader's conception of, the danger into which the heroine is headed.

As Brian Crick argues, attaching such "fairy tale allusions" to the behaviour of a character like Margaret Hale's cousin Edith in North and South is Gaskell's method of disposing of her as an adult character.²⁴ But in Ruth, he adds, "the tolerance for this fantasy world remains extraordinary".²⁵ Fully one quarter of the novel is done in this new (for Gaskell) mode. Mr. Benson too, is a fairy tale character when he is introduced. He appears out of the magnificent Welsh mountain scenery: "[Ruth] looked up and saw a man, who was apparently long past middle life, and of the stature of a dwarf" (p. 66). Crick points out that "his obscure origins (Ruth is unable to place him as either a local man or a holiday visitor), the peculiar 'spiritual' quality of his countenance, and his wide knowledge of folk tales, are all perfectly in accord with fairy tale conventions."²⁶ When Ruth, Thurston and Faith Benson move to the Benson home in Eccleston, Gaskell returns to the realistic mode of fiction characteristic of Mary Barton. That return is signaled by Gaskell: "And now all was over. She had driven in to Llan-dhu,

²⁴Brian Crick, "Mrs. Gaskell's Ruth: A Reconsideration", Mosaic, IX (Number 2, 1976), 91.

²⁵Crick, "Reconsideration", 91.

²⁶Crick, "Reconsideration", 92.

sitting by her lover's side, living in the bright present, and strangely forgetful of the past or the future; she had dreamed out her dream, and she had awakened from the vision of love" (p.130). Surely if Gaskell recognizes a shift in styles, Wendy Craik must be mistaken in her view that in Ruth "every choice of material proves an avoidance of romance, fantasy and escape, in favour of the probable and, as far as possible, the predictable."²⁷ The elements of romance, fantasy and escape are present, and in part their application to Ruth excuses her from being a morally responsible character. The switch to a more realistic mode, though, does not change our conception of the character Ruth, about whom I will say more later.

Even though Mrs. Gaskell has tried something new to her in Ruth, she continues to do well what she did well in Mary Barton, and poorly what she did poorly in Mary Barton. As in her first novel, the characters are psychologically realistic and round. Mr. Benson at Ecclestone, Mr. Bradshaw and his daughter Jemima, and Sally are entirely successful in these respects. So, too, is Gaskell's presentation of Ruth's love both for Bellingham and for her son Leonard.

Leonard is seen by Mr. Benson (and by Gaskell) as the source of Ruth's redemption. Benson sees that, although the child will be

²⁷Craik, p. 52.

condemned as a bastard by society at large, Ruth's sin should be considered "distinct from its consequences" (p. 118). Indeed, Mr. Benson theorizes that the "little innocent babe" may be "God's messenger to lead [Ruth] back to Him If [Ruth's] life has hitherto been self-seeking and wickedly thoughtless, here is the very instrument to make her forget herself, and be thoughtful for another" (p. 118). Such a view reinforces what has already come to be a common thread in Gaskell's novels -- the importance of family responsibility in a person's moral life. Thus Ruth can finally judge Bellingham accurately only after the birth of Leonard.²⁸

The Bartons approach the tragic because of the disintegration of their family. In Ruth, the family life of the characters is seen as having similar importance. Part of Gaskell's explanation of Ruth's behaviour is that she was an orphan, without familial love and guidance, searching for someone to love. Unfortunately, the someone she found was Bellingham: "But Ruth's loving disposition, continually sending forth fibres in search of nutriment, found no other object for regard among those of her daily life to compensate for the want of natural ties" (p. 38). In addition, Gaskell accounts for Bellingham's moral laxity by referring to his family life. He is an only child, as was his mother, so he has been spoiled.

²⁸See Ruth, pp. 161-162.

In Gaskell's view, the family's effect upon a person's moral life is as pervasive as the effect of religion. After Bellingham leaves, Benson attempts to save Ruth from what he thinks will certainly be an attempted suicide:

He thought of every softening influence of religion which over his own disciplined heart had power, but put them aside as useless. Then the still small voice whispered, and he spake --

"In your mother's name, whether she be dead or alive, I command you to stay here until I am able to speak to you." (p. 100)

Only the appeal to her mother's love would have worked. Gaskell reveals how important such love is to a healthy inner life. That Benson is mistaken in his assumption that Ruth is going to attempt suicide at this point -- she is actually running after Bellingham -- serves to point up further the importance of love in family relationships. Here, it supersedes the clearly, erotic love of Ruth for Bellingham. It is the opposite to both acts of self-destruction: suicide and sin.

While Gaskell continues to excel in these aspects of the novel, as she had done in Mary Barton, she also makes errors of construction and conception in the plot of Ruth similar to those which weaken the plot of Mary Barton.

There is that rare thing among literary critics, a critical consensus, concerning the plot of Ruth. The plot is generally thought to be contrived throughout, but most apparently at the ending. G. D. Sanders, who values Ruth highly, nevertheless argues

that "Mrs. Gaskell's technique is often weak. All her earlier novels bear evidence of faulty construction, and in Ruth she is at her worst."²⁹ Despite Gaskell's influence and bravery in writing Ruth, Ruth is an unsuccessful novel. If Sanders is correct in his evaluation of the "faulty construction" of the novel, how can one judge otherwise? That Sanders does judge otherwise does not lessen the insistence that the answer must be "one can't".

What aggravates the impression of contrivance produced by this plot is the fairy tale element of the novel. A sequence of events demanded by this form is the introduction of the dashing villain at the ball, with a later chance meeting and an example of his gallantry. Thus, Ruth meets Bellingham at the ball, and he subsequently is seen bravely galloping into the river to save a drowning child. As Brian Crick argues, "Within the framework of this tradition, to which Mrs. Gaskell's imagination is most responsive, Bellingham's storybook heroics are invariably suspect".³⁰ Gaskell corroborates our suspicions of Bellingham by dramatizing his upbraiding of the saved boy's grandmother, Nelly Brownson, an "old crippled woman" who is "helpless and hopeless" (p. 23): "'My good woman,' said he to Nelly Brownson, 'could you not keep your place a little neater and cleaner? It is more fit for

²⁹Sanders, p. 50.

³⁰Crick, "Reconsideration", 91.

pigs than human beings. The air in this room is quite offensive, and the dirt and filth is really disgraceful." (pp. 25-26) Clearly she cannot keep her dwelling cleaner than she manages. Bellingham's reaction is over-fastidious we suspect; and his attention is misplaced. The proper reaction would have been John Barton's upon viewing the Davenports' cellar dwelling in Mary Barton. While he notices the squalor, he is interested solely by the human condition of the occupants.

A much more serious flaw in the novel is the failure to dramatize the events leading directly to the actual seduction of Ruth. Gaskell provides an astute account of the character of the morally immature, childlike Ruth. As Gaskell continues piecing together Ruth's history, one becomes aware of the preparations being made to excuse her as fully as possible from moral culpability in her relationship with Bellingham. She becomes an apprentice to a rather uncaring and distant employer, Mrs. Mason. Furthermore, Ruth is removed from the only characters remaining from her past who have her best interest at heart -- old Thomas and Mary, Gaskell's stock faithful family servants, who have acquired the former Hilton home at Milham Grange. Thus, when Bellingham tempts Ruth to leave for London with him, she is shown as being incapable of proper moral reasoning. She is powerless to act against Bellingham's wishes, and is unaware of the implications of those wishes:

"Dear old Thomas! He and Mary would take me in, I think; they would love me all the more if I were cast off. And Mr Bellingham would, perhaps, not be so very long away; and he would know where to find me if I stayed at Milham Grange. Oh, would it not be better to go to them? I wonder if he would be very sorry! I could not bear to make him sorry, so kind as he has been to me; but I do believe it would be better to go to them, and ask their advice, at any rate. He would follow me there; and I could talk over what I had better do, with the three best friends I have in the world -- the only friends I have." (p. 59)

Ruth subsequently enters the carriage with Bellingham. We do not see them again until some time later, when they are alone together in Wales.

Ruth is incapable of making a decision about her proper course of action. Gaskell's description of Ruth's feelings presents the dilemma in the right terms:

The room whirled round before Ruth; it was a dream -- a strange, varying, shifting dream -- with the old home of her childhood for one scene, with the terror of Mrs. Mason's unexpected appearance for another; and then, strangest, dizziest, happiest of all, there was the consciousness of his love, who was all the world to her, and the remembrance of the tender words, which still kept up their low soft echo in her heart. (p. 58)

The dilemma involves her indistinct feeling of wrong doing in being with Bellingham, which seems seconded by Mrs. Mason's reaction, set against Ruth's very real love for Bellingham.

After the seduction, we find that Ruth is not changed in any way. She maintains a Wordsworthian responsiveness to nature, and Gaskell repeatedly shows us that Ruth deeply loves Bellingham:

As she rose, she sighed a little with the depression of spirits consequent upon her own want of power to amuse and occupy him she loved (p. 65)

.....
Her existence was in feeling and thinking and loving (p. 73)

.....
Ruth put away every thought of the past or future; everything that could unfit her for the duties of the present. Exceeding love supplied the place of experience she watched, and waited, and prayed; prayed with an utter forgetfulness of self, only with a consciousness that God was all-powerful, and that he, whom she loved so much, needed the aid of the Mighty One. (p. 79)

Ruth has no real conception that her relationship with Bellingham is sinful until the reaction of the townspeople suggests this to her.

The reader tends to side with Ruth's conception of her actions --

the expression of her love of Bellingham. Yet, Gaskell must consider the action as sinful, and must convince us of that, in order to make Ruth seem to need redemption. But what she provides

are Ruth's indistinct feelings of possible wrongdoings juxtaposed with her strong love for Bellingham. In fact, Ruth's utter

innocence is heavily stressed from the start; the very fairy tale conception of the novel's opening emphasizes it. She cannot be held

morally responsible for her actions, whether we consider them sinful or not, because she is too immature a character. Mr. Jones, the

doctor attending Bellingham, sums up the reader's view of Ruth's involvement in the events of the novel: "she is too young to have the responsibility of such a serious case" (p. 78). Gaskell's

narrative voice provides further support for this point, saying Ruth

"was too young when her mother died to have received any caution or words of advice Ruth was innocent and snow-pure" (p. 43).³¹

A similar view of the novel is held by J. G. Sharps, who sees this as epitomizing Gaskell's "failure of nerve in regard to the central issue" of the novel.³² He argues further that "Ruth's re-instatement by means of her typhus-nursing is, in effect, a shrinking from, and a shirking of, the difficulty. Since Mrs. Gaskell (and Mr. Benson) rescued Ruth from suicide only to attend at her death-bed, the novelist virtually confesses her failure to improve upon Goldsmith's advice to the lovely woman who stoops to folly and finds too late that men betray"³³. Sharps here claims that Ruth achieves redemption only upon her death, and is thus submitted to the conventional ending of the fallen woman story -- death, (as is Richardson's *Clarissa*). Pollard argues essentially the same point, claiming that her death is "a concession to the conventional point of view. The price of sin has to be paid in death, at the cost of narrative credibility"³⁴.

³¹White is constantly used in descriptions of Ruth from the start of the novel, emphasizing her innocence.

³²Sharps, p. 151.

³³Sharps, p. 154.

³⁴Pollard, p. 102.

I accept their judgment that the ending of *Ruth* is a failure, but it does not fail on the thematic grounds they suggest. *Ruth's* redemption is achieved very early on in the reader's view (if she ever required redemption), and in the view of Ecclestone society she is redeemed by way of her heroic typhus-nursing. Her death has no thematic or moral bearing upon the success or failure of the novel; it does not occur as the price to be paid for her sin, as Pollard and Sharps would have it. It does, though, represent a succumbing to convention. In *Ruth* we read on uncomfortably, well after Gaskell has made her view clear, while she submits *Ruth* again and again to the hands of moral hypocrites epitomized by Mr. Bradshaw. *Ruth's* death, like *Esther's* in *Mary Barton* and Mrs. Legh's in "*Lizzie Leigh*", is a further instance of Gaskell's comfort within the "fallen woman" tradition of fiction. Her creative involvement in the story effectively ceases in the writing of such an ending.

Gaskell, in failing to dramatize the events leading to the seduction of *Ruth*, or any sort of moral responsibility in *Ruth*, fails to make her sin real for the reader. Her treatment of the other important moral issue of *Ruth*, however, is quite different. The question of the appropriateness of Benson's lie (concocted to protect *Ruth* and her child from the moral censure of Ecclestone society) is placed squarely before the reader's eyes as a moral problem to be considered. The problem is clearly presented. When

Miss Benson suggests the lie as a way of suppressing the truth about Ruth's past, Mrs. Gaskell exclaims, "Ah, tempter! unconscious tempter! Here was a way of evading the trials for the poor little unborn child, of which Mr. Benson had never thought. It was the decision -- the pivot, on which the fate of years moved; and he turned it the wrong way. But it was not for his own sake" (p. 121). Benson's reasoning (despite Gaskell's judgment that it is wrong) is compelling. To suppress the truth about Ruth's past is to save the child she bears from the stigma of being labelled a bastard. Set against this, however, Mr. Benson's view that "'It is better not to expect or calculate consequences.'.... 'The longer I live, the more fully I see that. Let us try simply to do right actions, without thinking of the feelings they are to call out in others. We know that no holy or self-denying effort can fall to the ground vain and useless.'" (p. 127) These are the poles of the moral conflict in Benson. He must either tell the truth, trusting that truth must ultimately be rewarded, or he must try to allow Ruth and her child to escape the suffering and humiliation that would be consequent upon the disclosure of her sin.

Pollard argues, however, that "the lie does not seem to create sufficient disturbance in the heart of Benson to keep us ever in mind of this [dilemma]." ³⁵ I can only answer by stating that the

³⁵Pollard, p. 104.

"disturbance in the heart of Benson" seems evident throughout the period commencing with the lie, and ending in its disclosure. In fact, Gaskell's presentation of it directs the reader's attention away from Ruth, who early on begins to thrive. Concerning Ruth we find that "unconsciously, her love for her child led her up to love to God, to the All-knowing, who read her heart" (p. 207, my emphasis). The conscious moral dilemma of the novel is centred in Benson, who comments, "'My indecision about right and wrong -- my perplexity as to how far we are to calculate consequences -- grows upon me, I fear'" (p. 199). Soon after, the narrator notes "there was something more of nervous restlessness in his voice and ways than formerly" (p. 205). Later, the juxtaposition of Benson's lie with the "one clear, short precept, coming down with a divine force against which there was no appeal" -- "We are not to do evil that good may come" (p. 253) -- occasions the following observation:

But the stinging conscience refused to be quieted. No present plan of usefulness allayed the aching remembrance of the evil he had done that good might come. Not even the look of Leonard, as the early dawn fell on him, and Mr. Benson's sleepless eyes saw the rosy glow on his firm, round cheeks ... could soothe the troubled spirit. (p. 255)

Surely the dilemma is before our eyes throughout Ruth.

The problem, then, is not with the absence of the dilemma from the reader's view, but rather with its resolution. The crisis in Benson can be resolved only upon the exposure of Ruth and the attendant revelation of his part in the lie concealing her past.

The effect of such a revelation on Ruth and Leonard is devastating, yet Benson exclaims, "it is such a relief to have the truth known" (p. 358).

Gaskell dramatizes Benson's moral regeneration, carefully tracing the steps from his definition of his state of consciousness --

"I torment myself. I have lost my clear instincts of conscience. Formerly, if I believed that such or such an action was according to the will of God, I went and did it, or at least I tried to do it, without thinking of consequences. Now, I reason and weigh what will happen if I do so and so -- I grope where formerly I saw." (p. 358) --

to his ridding himself of this "feminine morbidness of conscience"

(p. 374). Now, "he was simpler and more dignified than he had been for several years before, during which time he had been anxious and uncertain in his manner, and more given to thought than to action"

(p. 374). The exposure of Ruth heals Benson's moral illness, and he regains confidence in his ministering. Even the Bradshaws return to the fold.

In some ways, Ruth is a significant advance upon Mary Barton. It is a novel in which Gaskell consciously strives to do something new. She argued that she "could have put out much more power", but she "wanted to keep it quiet in tone, lest by the slightest exaggeration, or over-strained sentiment [she] might

weaken the force of what [she] had to say."³⁶ That quietness is clear; the intense concentration upon Ruth's consciousness is necessarily "quiet". Furthermore, the concentration upon the maturation of a female protagonist is, superficially at least, Austen-like. The novel's quiet tone (though not its lack of comedy) looks forward to that of Wives and Daughters, and mirrors the tone of the Cranford stories (collected as Cranford in 1853), which she was writing as she was writing Ruth.

For George Eliot, however, Ruth was apparently not quiet enough. Eliot's letters provide a useful vantage-point from which to evaluate Gaskell's influence upon her novels, since the letters explicitly and implicitly give testimony to such a literary indebtedness. Eliot's earliest reference to Gaskell's work appears in a letter from February 1, 1853, and it is of interest for several important reasons:

Of course you have read 'Ruth' by this time. Its style was a great refreshment to me, from its finish and fulness. How women have the courage to write and publishers the spirit to buy at a high price the false and feeble representations of life and character that most feminine novels give, is a constant marvel to me. 'Ruth,' with all its merits, will not be an enduring or classical fiction -- will it? Mrs Gaskell seems to me to be constantly misled by a love of sharp contrasts -- of "dramatic" effects. She is not contented with the subdued colouring -- the half tints of real life. Hence she agitates one for the moment, but she does not

³⁶Letters, Letter 148, p. 221.

secure one's lasting sympathy; her scenes and characters do not become typical.³⁷

The first issue one notes is the fact that Eliot denies Ruth only the very highest of praise -- she cannot judge it as attaining the status of a classic. But even this judgment is made with less than her customary assuredness, "[Ruth] will not be an enduring or classical fiction -- will it?" Surely the emphasis of the letter is upon Eliot's high valuation of Gaskell's achievement, especially when seen in the light of the "usual false and feeble representations of life and character that most feminine novels give".

The most telling phrase of Eliot's letter is in some ways the "of course" of its opening sentence. It is clear that Eliot expects Ruth to be read as a matter of course. This is a testament to the furor created by the fallen-woman theme and subject of Ruth. It also suggests the popularity and importance of Mary Barton which may have already established Gaskell firmly in the literary limelight for Eliot. It seems probable that Eliot's knowledge of the importance of Gaskell's prior novel was not secondhand, but that she had in fact read Mary Barton before reading Ruth "of course" in

³⁷The George Eliot Letters, ed. Gordon S. Haight (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954), Vol. II, p. 86. Hereafter indicated as Eliot Letters.

1853.³⁸ What is sure, however, is Eliot's interest in the works of Gaskell.

Another critical issue raised by her assessment of Ruth concerns Eliot's recognition of a profound divergence between Gaskell's intentions in that novel, and those of the future author of Scenes of Clerical Life, Adam Bede, The Mill on the Floss, and so on. Eliot is dismissive of Gaskell's "love of sharp contrasts -- of 'dramatic' effects" in Ruth. Although the incidence of essentially melodramatic events decreases after Ruth (with the notable exception of the final half of Sylvia's Lovers [1863]), the account of Gaskell's influence upon the novels of Eliot must, nevertheless, be founded upon an evaluation of the specific aspects of Gaskell's novels Eliot found most valuable. Furthermore, the fact that there were some aspects of Ruth Eliot found less valuable than others must qualify claims of influence. Eliot was demonstrably influenced by the novels of Gaskell, but not equally by all the novels.

While the chapters of Mary Barton that Eliot found so appealing deal with the slow disintegration of the Barton family, Ruth presents the reader with a young protagonist who is already an orphan. From the beginning of the novel, Gaskell is deliberate in pointing to the ways such a lack of family guidance can be seen at

³⁸Eliot mentions reading this novel as she was going to the Rhine in 1858. See Eliot Letters, Vol. III, p. 198.

the heart of the young girl's lack of full moral awareness. In describing the circumstances which led to the deaths of Ruth's mother and father, one can see why Eliot would complain about this novel's lack of realism. The fairy tale elements of its opening have already been discussed, but even where there are no obvious fairy tale qualities to the story, Gaskell's delineation of these circumstances seems designed to achieve the "dramatic" effects Eliot disparagingly notes:

After [Ruth's mother's and father's] marriage, however, everything seemed to go wrong. Mrs Hilton fell into a delicate state of health, and was unable to bestow the ever-watchful attention to domestic affairs, so requisite in a farmer's wife. Her husband had a series of misfortunes -- of a more important kind than the death of a whole brood of turkeys from getting among the nettles, or the year of bad cheeses spoilt by a careless dairymaid -- which were the consequences (so the neighbours said) of Mr Hilton's mistake in marrying a delicate, fine lady. His crops failed; his horses died; his barn took fire; in short, if he had been in any way a remarkable character, one might have supposed him to be the object of an avenging fate, so successive were the evils which pursued him.... (p. 36)

The problems Eliot might have with such a description are clear, but Eliot surely would have felt the situation -- Ruth suddenly orphaned at twelve, left alone and impoverished in the care of a somewhat unfeeling legal guardian -- to have been moving. As I argue in Chapter Six, the effect of an impoverished family life upon the moral character of the protagonist is an issue in Gaskell's fiction that had a profound effect on the novels of George Eliot.

Unlike in Eliot's novels, however, there is a failure to realize the richness of the social life so evocatively drawn in the beginning of Ruth. In Pollard's view, Gaskell fails to explore all the possibilities of interest in the novel: the Ruth, Jemima, Farquhar triangle for example, or the significance of such public events as the election.³⁹

North and South, Gaskell's next novel, returns to the Manchester of Mary Barton, but broadens the scope of both Ruth and Mary Barton. The two worlds, we might say the two tones, meet in this novel; Eccleston and the dissenting Bensons are very like Helstone and the Hales, and are done in the same quiet manner, and Manchester becomes Milton-Northern, as Gaskell reaffirms her ability to dramatize a complicated, vital social milieu.

³⁹Pollard, p. 91.

III

GASKELL DEVELOPS HER CRAFT: NORTH AND SOUTH (1855)

Mary Barton and Ruth are novels composed with an explicitly didactic moral intention, and Gaskell's letters concerning the composition of these novels reveal that her concern was with alleviating the social problems of class division (in the case of Mary Barton), and the fallen woman and society's double standard in the judgment of sexual behaviour (in the case of Ruth). The letters concerning the composition of North and South (1855), serialized in Household Words between September 2, 1854 and January 27, 1855, reveal a different approach. On May 17, 1854 Gaskell wrote to John Forster, "and besides there's Margaret Hale! I have sent 76 pages to you by Mrs Shaen; all I have written except a very few lines. It is dull; & I have never had time to prune it. I have got the people well on, -- but I think in too lengthy a way. But I can still make it good I am sure."¹ Here, Gaskell is exclusively concerned with the stylistic and formal elements of her novel. Such concern is emphasized repeatedly in subsequent letters:

¹Letters, Letter 195, p. 290.

What do you think of a fire burning down Mr Thornton's mills and house as a help to failure? Then Margaret would rebuild them larger & better & need not go & live there when she's married. Tell me what you think: M H has just told the lie, & is gathering herself up after her dead faint; very meek & stunned & humble.²

.....
I've got to ... where 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. But hitherto Thornton is good; and I'm afraid of a touch marring him; and I want to keep his character consistent with itself, and large and strong and tender, and yet a master. That's my next puzzle.³

.....
... and though I had the plot and characters in my head long ago, I have often been in despair about the working of them out; ... and at last the story is huddled & hurried up; especially in the rapidity with which the sudden death of Mr Bell, succeeds to the sudden death of Mr Hale. But what could I do? ... Just at the very last I was compelled to desperate compression.⁴

Gaskell ruminates over possible turns of plot, the difficulties of consistent character delineation, and the apparent suddenness, occasioned by the space demands of serial publication, of the novel's close. Compare these concerns with those expressed in a characteristic letter concerning the composition of Mary Barton:

²Letters, Letter 195, p. 290.

³Letters, Letter 217, p. 321.

⁴Letters, Letter 225, pp. 328-329.

... I can only say I wanted to represent the subject in the light in which some of the workmen certainly consider to be true, not that I dare to say it is the abstract absolute truth.

That some of the men do view the subject in the way I have tried to represent, I have personal evidence ... my intention was simply to represent the view many of the workers take.⁵

As this letter makes clear, Gaskell's interest in Mary Barton was primarily in social philanthropy -- the conveying of the social attitudes and situation of the working class in Manchester in order to bring to the public eye a particular social dilemma. Ruth too was written to address a specific social problem -- the treatment of the "fallen-woman".

Partly because Gaskell's concern is more artistic in North and South than in her previous novels, it is a better novel. What strikes one upon reading Mary Barton and Ruth is the deeply felt conviction about the overtly stressed problems in each. Yet North and South, though perhaps less deeply felt, is the finest of her early novels. In this connection, J. G. Sharps argues, "one may say that, in North and South, Mrs. Gaskell became artistically aware of herself. Although for some purposes it is sensible to group this novel with Mary Barton, since they both treat the Condition of England Question, a craftsman's concern is revealed in North and South which is not found to the same degree in Mary Barton, or,

⁵Letters, Letter 36, p. 67.

indeed, in Ruth."⁶ Arthur Pollard argues along the same lines that "North and South is both less didactic and less dramatized than Mary Barton. We are much less conscious of the author's own presence. It is more properly dramatic than its predecessor; much more is left to the characters in the book."⁷

Such judgments of literary quality must stem from a recognition of what, specifically, Gaskell does better in North and South than in her previous novels. We have noted above some suggestions in this connection. North and South is less didactic than Mary Barton or Ruth; the narrator is less intrusive -- this novel presents us with a narrator closely allied with the major character (Margaret Hale) in both knowledge and sensibility -- much like the narrator in Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice.

North and South's connection with the fictional tradition of Jane Austen is suggested repeatedly by critics. Wendy Craik argues that North and South is Austen-like in "employing a central heroine as a narrative medium".⁸ A. Hopkins calls North and South "a Victorian Pride and Prejudice".⁹ J. G. Sharps, furthermore, places North and South in the Austen tradition, a tradition which excludes

⁶Sharps, p. 207.

⁷Pollard, p. 118.

⁸Craik, p. 94.

⁹Hopkins, p. 139.

Mary Barton: "Certainly [Mary Barton], especially its first part, was original in a way North and South was not; for North and South was in a tradition -- a tradition which could accommodate Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, and Henry Fothergill Chorley, but not, paradoxically, 'the author of Mary Barton'".¹⁰

North and South is a finer novel than Mary Barton or Ruth because it finds its source and impetus in a stronger tradition of the novel than do her previous two novels. Those novels proceed in part from various conventional novel forms; social problem novels, fallen-woman novels, murder mysteries, fairy tales. Gaskell's habitual use of these conventions usually marked a cessation of real imaginative involvement in the novels -- the murder is not thematically crucial in Mary Barton, and Ruth is killed off as demanded by the convention of fallen-woman fiction, despite the argument for tolerance toward such women. Gaskell recognized the imaginative limitations of those traditions. Indeed, most of Ruth argues against such a conventional resolution to the novel.

Further, in North and South, she places critically the fairy tale elements which were so apparent in Ruth. Edith Shaw, Margaret's

¹⁰Sharps, p. 230.

cousin, is described as "Titania",¹¹ "Sleeping Beauty" (p. 40) and "Cinderella" (p. 41) as a way of disqualifying her for serious consideration as an adult, responsible character in the novel.

This is not to suggest that Gaskell dismissed her earlier work as useless during the conception and creation of North and South. The later novel shows how Gaskell builds upon her previous work. Bradshaw's utilitarianism and empiricism in Ruth find their place, though in a less exaggerated manner, in John Thornton of North and South. The religious and moral ruminations of Mr. Benson in Ruth are manifested in the dissenting Mr. Hale of North and South. Similarly, John Barton's feelings of oppression, and his part in the Chartist movement in Mary Barton, find their place in Nicholas Higgins in North and South. Further, the characters of Edith and Margaret in North and South are later developed into the characters of Cynthia and Molly in Wives and Daughters (1865). Such continual revision and improvement of her characters leads to Gaskell's increasing dependence upon her characters' actions and dialogue as the dramatic means for realizing her central concerns, and away from authorial comment as her means of thematic development and narrative continuity.

¹¹Elizabeth Gaskell, North and South, ed. Dorothy Collin (Harmondsworth: Penguin books Ltd., 1970), p. 35. Subsequent references to North and South are to this edition and are followed by the page number in parentheses.

In North and South, the plot is beautifully symmetrical. It follows Margaret from London, to Helstone, to Milton-Northern, back to Helstone, and ends in London again, with a final removal of Margaret and Thornton to Milton anticipated for the future. Its symmetry is similar to that of Pride and Prejudice, which begins with Elizabeth in Longbourn, follows her to Darcy's Pemberley in Derbyshire, moves back to Longbourn, and ends again in Pemberley, the marriage home of Elizabeth and Darcy.

The symmetry of North and South, however, is somewhat marred by the rushed ending, of which Gaskell was herself aware, as is evidenced in a letter to Anna Jameson from January, 1855 (part of which has already been quoted):

at last the story is huddled & hurried up; especially in the rapidity with which the sudden death of Mr Bell succeeds to the sudden death of Mr Hale. But what could I do? Every page was grudged me, just at last, when I did certainly infringe all the bounds & limits they set me as to quantity. Just at the very last I was compelled to desperate compression.¹²

Gaskell felt this to be such a fault that she rewrote and expanded the concluding chapter of the twenty-first part published in Household Words to form Chapters 44 to 48 in the first edition of the novel.¹³

¹²Letters, Letter 225, pp. 328-329.

¹³Dorothy Collin, ed., North and South by Elizabeth Gaskell (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1970), p. 27.

The novel's conclusion, Margaret's and Thornton's reconciliation, still seems hurried, though I will argue later that the hurried ending is thematically defensible, and the meeting of Margaret and Frederick with both Leonards and Thornton at the train station seems too blatantly coincidental. But citing these is citing exceptions to an otherwise tightly-knit plot -- a considerable improvement in this respect over her previous novels.

Even the social problem aspect of North and South is handled better than it was in Mary Barton. It is more fully treated, representatives of both the working class (Higgins and Boucher) and the factory-owners (Thornton) being sympathetically treated central characters. But in North and South, the social problem does not occupy the reader's primary interest. The title does not define the worker-owner problem -- "North and North" might, since the problem is represented by the opposition of Higgins and Thornton, both definitively "northern" -- but, rather, it defines the love story of John Thornton (North) and Margaret Hale (South).

The resolution of the social problem aspect of this novel recalls that in Mary Barton. But where the reconciliation of worker and owner in Henry Carson's embrace of a dying John Barton is melodramatic and sentimental, in North and South a more reasonable -- and believable -- reconciliation is dramatized. Thornton leases ovens and a dining hall to the workers, enabling them to buy food cheaply in bulk, thereby providing themselves with better meals.

The effect of the venture is subtle and important. Whereas Thornton had usually called his workers "hands", he now, despite that habit, refers to them as men, "'I'm building a dining-room -- for the men. I mean -- the hands.'" (p. 444) The amendment of "men" to "hands" comes as an after-thought. There is a growing respect of owner for worker, and of worker for owner -- and that respect is of man for his fellow man: "'... one day, two or three of the men -- my friend Higgins among them -- asked me if I would not come in and take a snack. It was a very busy day, but I saw that the men would be hurt if, after making the advance, I didn't meet them half-way, so I went in and I never made a better dinner in my life'" (pp. 444-445). The phrase "my friend Higgins" sums up the effect, and it is important that, although Margaret helped to bring about the Higgins-Thornton friendship by suggesting that Higgins might find work at Thornton's mill, Thornton recognizes Higgins's value without knowing of Margaret's intervention. In fact, he is annoyed upon hearing of it:

But if he dreaded exposure of his tenderness, he was equally desirous that all men should recognize his justice; and he felt that he had been unjust, in giving so scornful a hearing to anyone who had waited, with humble patience, for five hours, to speak to him He tried not to be, but was convinced that all that Higgins had said was true. And then the conviction went in, as if by some spell, and touched the latent tenderness of his heart; the patience of the man, generosity of the motive (for he had learnt about the quarrel between Boucher and Higgins), made him forget entirely the mere reasonings of justice, and overleap them by a diviner instinct. He came to tell Higgins he

would give him work; and he was more annoyed to find Margaret there than by hearing her last words; for then 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. (pp. 403-404)

The love story has no essential bearing, then, on the resolution of the social problem aspect of the novel. They are connected (Margaret helps change Thornton's views), not interdependent, aspects of North and South.

I argued earlier that the social problem aspect of the novel does not occupy the reader's central interest. Wendy Craik makes essentially the same judgment when she discusses the use of the fictional Milton-Northern rather than Manchester as the setting of North and South: "A change in the author's purpose is clearly revealed. She is more concerned now with bringing out the universal human issues, of conflicts of groups and pressures of society within itself, and pressures upon the individuals who compose it."¹⁴ While Milton-Northern is merely a disguise for Manchester, the disguise does serve an important purpose. The concentration is no longer, as in Mary Barton, upon issues particular to the peculiar economic and social situation of Manchester at that time, but, as Angus Easson argues, it is upon the individuals who live in this fictional but realistic manufacturing town. In Easson's view, the novel moves from a general view of Milton-Northern to the specific lives of the

¹⁴Craik, p. 93.

individuals there -- where the novelist's interests reside: "The first sights are of scenery en masse, then particular physical conditions of streets with the 'great loaded luries' which 'bore cotton, either in the raw shape in bags, or the woven shape in bales of calico' (p. 67), grim enough, but, Margaret is to learn, inhabited by human beings -- the Higginses, the Bouchers, the Thorntons -- who respond and evoke response."¹⁵

Specifically, the central concern of this novel is revealed by Gaskell's original title, "Margaret Hale". As Easson points out, "'Margaret Hale' insists on a central human drama -- the mental and emotional conflict of a single person, whose fate is bound up with her experience."¹⁶ It is her experience of the relatively static backgrounds of London, Helstone, and Milton-Northern that is of primary interest here, and her maturation is measured by her changing reactions to those static backgrounds. Such a novel is characteristic of Jane Austen as Craik argues: " ... Margaret reveals, responds to and interprets (not always consciously) for the reader the societies in which she moves; while these societies themselves form a setting for Margaret's progress to maturity and wisdom, marking her development Thus in this novel for the first time the influence of the Jane Austen type of novel is clearly

¹⁵Easson, p. 94.

¹⁶Easson, p. 90.

seen in its theme, with Elizabeth Gaskell employing a central heroine as a narrative medium."¹⁷ Gaskell alters the Austen model, however, in that Margaret is not the sole narrative medium. Mr. Hale at times¹⁸, and Mr. Thornton¹⁹, function in similar ways in North and South.

Correspondingly, the narrator becomes less visible and less important in this novel than in Gaskell's previous two. That is Sharps's point when he notes that in North and South "the author's presence is scarcely felt".²⁰ Where there is explicit authorial comment, it is at once Austen-like in its irony and satire, and Eliot-like in its probing of the psychological make-up of characters:

... Mrs Shaw welcomed [Captain Lennox] in her gentle kindly way, which had always something plaintive in it, arising from the long habit of considering herself a victim to an uncongenial marriage. Now that, the General being gone, she had every good of life, with as few drawbacks as possible, she had been rather perplexed to find an anxiety, if not a sorrow. She had, however, of late settled upon her own health as a source of apprehension; she had a nervous little cough whenever she thought about it, and some complaisant doctor ordered her just what she desired, -- a winter

¹⁷Craik, p. 94.

¹⁸See for example Chapter 28 "Comfort in Sorrow" pp. 287-297.

¹⁹See Chapter 7 "New Scenes and Faces" pp. 99-103, where the initial meeting of Margaret and Mr. Thornton is done from his point of view.

²⁰Sharps, p. 229.

in Italy. Mrs Shaw had as strong wishes as most people, but she never liked to do anything from the open and acknowledged motive of her own good will and pleasure; she preferred being compelled to gratify herself by some other person's command or desire. She really did persuade herself that she was submitting to some hard external necessity; and thus she was able to moan and complain in her soft manner, all the time she was in reality doing just what she liked. (p. 44)

Of course we recognize the irony in the statement that, far from being a victim, Mrs. Shaw married the General "with no warmer feeling than respect for his character and establishment" (p. 37), and Gaskell's description of her is impressive in its psychological realism. It sets, too, an important standard concerning love and marriage, against which we measure first Edith's love of Captain Lennox, and then later in the novel, Margaret's developing love of Thornton.

Margaret's conceptions of events are largely the reader's in North and South. Very early on, she is established as a keen observer who, despite the sentimental associations Helstone holds for her, corrects Henry Lennox's jestingly romantic addition to her description:

"... Is Helstone a village, or a town, in the first place?"

"Oh, only a hamlet; I don't think I could call it a village at all. There is the church and a few houses near it on the green -- cottages rather -- with roses growing all over them."

"And flowering all the year round, especially at Christmas -- make your picture complete," said he.

"No," replied Margaret, somewhat annoyed, "I am not making a picture, I am trying to describe Helstone as it really is. You should not have said that." (p. 42)

Margaret clearly prides herself on the honesty and accuracy of her descriptions, and Gaskell, in describing Margaret's return to Helstone with her father, emphasizes that she is to function as the reader's eyes in North and South: "She took her mind away with a wrench from the recollection of the past to the bright serene contemplation of the hopeful future. Her eyes began to see, not visions of what had been, but the sight actually before her; her dear father leaning back asleep in the railway carriage. His blue-black hair was grey now, and lay thinly over his brows" (p. 47, my underlining) We trust Margaret to present "the sight actually before her", but her judgment of those events changes as she matures.

The major portion of North and South is concerned with Margaret's education. The education of the heroine had traditionally been the focus of many English novels, and particularly of Jane Austen's works, all of whose mature works include such a focus. Hopkins's labelling of North and South as "a Victorian Pride and Prejudice",²¹ therefore seems particularly apt. Austen's concern with the maturation of Elizabeth, and her less central but equally well-done portrait of similar growth in Mr. Darcy are very like the treatment of Margaret and Thornton by Gaskell. In both novels, that education consists in characters

²¹Hopkins, p. 139.

having to apply their principles of conduct and judgment to new and increasingly difficult situations. In North and South such is surely the structural basis of the novel. By Chapter 5, that structure is evident:

[Margaret] felt that it [arranging for the Hales to move from Helstone to Milton-Northern] was a great weight suddenly thrown upon her shoulders. 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. Except in the one grand case of Captain Lennox's offer, everything went on with the regularity of clockwork. Once a year, there was a long discussion between her aunt and Edith as to whether they should go to the Isle of Wight, abroad, or to Scotland; but at such times Margaret herself was secure of drifting, without any exertion of her own, into the quiet harbour of home. Now, since that day when Mr Lennox came, and startled her into a decision, every day brought some question, momentous to her, and to those whom she loved, to be settled. (p. 85)

But even prior to this, the reader is aware of what is surely meant by Gaskell to be a serious flaw in Margaret's character -- her social snobbery: "'I don't like shoppy people. I think we are far better off, knowing only cottagers and labourers, and people without pretence I'm sure you don't want me to admire butchers and bakers, and candlestick-makers.'" (p. 50) Thus the plot is well constructed. The good, but proud heroine, with an aristocratic dislike of trade and industry (the presence of similar views in Dixon helps the reader to judge that view), is confronted with life in a manufacturing town, and with the love of a manufacturer. As

she rather grudgingly learns to value qualities of the people of Milton-Northern, so does the reader -- which is Gaskell's intention.

Part of Margaret's education involves her realization of the importance of humility, and its absence in her life. She is repeatedly described as proud in the novel. Appearances and events sometimes conspire to make her appear so:

Margaret could not help her looks; but the short curled upper lip, the round, massive turned-up chin, the manner of carrying her head, her movements, full of a soft feminine defiance, always gave strangers the impression of haughtiness she looked at [Thornton] with proud indifference (p. 100)

.....
When Mr Thornton rose up to go away, after shaking hands with Mr and Mrs Hale, he made an advance to Margaret to wish her good-bye in a similar manner. It was the frank, familiar custom of the place; but Margaret was not prepared for it. She simply bowed her farewell; although the instant she saw the hand, half put out, quickly drawn back, she was sorry she had not been aware of the intention. Mr Thornton, however, knew nothing of her sorrow, and, drawing himself up to his full height, walked off, muttering as he left the house --

"A more proud, disagreeable girl I never saw. Even her great beauty is blotted out of one's memory by her scornful ways." (p. 127)

But these events merely exaggerate a flaw really present in Margaret's character, and that flaw is described in terms highly reminiscent of those used by Austen to describe Mr. Darcy, who it seems suffers from a similar form of pride, in Pride and Prejudice. Darcy's "fine, tall person, handsome features, noble mien" are soon blotted out in the opinion of the observers at the first assembly in the novel -- "His character was decided. He was the proudest, most

disagreeable man in the world, and everybody hoped he would never come there again."²²

In a letter to Catherine Winkworth written between 11 and 14 October, 1854, Gaskell describes Margaret's state of mind after her lie: "M^r H has just told the lie, & is gathering herself up after her dead faint; very meek and stunned and humble."²³ It is such humility that has been absent in her life, crowded out by the self-centredness of pride: "'The way of humility. Ah,' thought Margaret, 'that is what I have missed! But courage little heart. We will turn back, and by God's help we may find the lost path.' So she rose up, and determined at once to set to on some work which should take her out of herself." (p. 426)

Margaret repeats this same message later in the novel, in terms that George Eliot may have drawn upon in Chapter 80 of Middlemarch. Margaret is confronted with the Helstone parsonage alterations, which she finds painful: "A sense of change, of individual nothingness, of perplexity and disappointment, overpowered Margaret. Nothing had been the same; and this slight, all-pervading instability, had given her greater pain than if all had been too entirely changed for her to recognise it" (p. 488).

²²Jane Austen, Pride and Prejudice (New York: New American Library, 1961), p. 11.

²³Letters, Letter 211, p. 310.

The following morning she comes to realize, however, that that pain is selfish:

'After all it is right,' said she, hearing the voices of children at play while she was dressing. 'If the world stood still, it would retrograde and become corrupt, if that is not Irish. Looking out of myself, and my own painful sense of change, the progress of all around me is right and necessary. I must not think so much of how circumstances affect me myself, but how they affect others, if I wish to have a right judgment, or a hopeful trustful heart.' And with a smile ready in her eyes to quiver down to her lips, she went into the parlour and greeted Mr Bell. (pp. 488-489)

This is a realization of essential otherness in the world which the individual must recognize and value.²⁴ That is precisely what Dorothea learns in Middlemarch:

She opened her curtains, and looked out towards the bit of road that lay in view, with fields beyond, outside the entrance-gates. On the road there was a man with a bundle on his back and a woman carrying her baby; in the field she could see figures moving -- perhaps the shepherd with his dog. Far off in the bending sky was the pearly light; and she felt the largeness of the world and the manifold wakings of men to labour and endurance. She was a part of that involuntary, palpitating life, and could neither look out on it from her luxurious shelter as a mere spectator, nor hide her eyes in selfish complaining.²⁵

²⁴Similarly, Yvonne ffrench argues that Thornton must overcome his "dreams of commercial power" (p. 61), that "reserve, distance and haughty pride have to be demolished before [Margaret and Thornton] can be perfectly united." (pp. 61-62) In Yvonne ffrench, Mrs. Gaskell (Denver: Alan Swallow, 1949).

²⁵George Eliot, Middlemarch (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1956), p. 578.

Significantly, Gaskell presents Margaret's realization in the first person. Margaret is shown experiencing it. Eliot, on the other hand, presents Dorothea's realization through third person narration, narration which, in Middlemarch, is often of a probing, psychological nature. Gaskell presents, Eliot explains.

For Margaret, that realization infuses Helstone once again with a sense of the beauty and value of life:

But as she returned across the common, the place was reinvested with the old enchanting atmosphere. The common sounds of life were more musical there than anywhere else in the whole world, the light more golden, the life more tranquil and full of dreamy delight. (p. 489)

In North and South, Gaskell argues that Margaret needs God's grace to find the way of humility. Gaskell emphasizes this fact in Chapter 35, which is among the finest chapters of any nineteenth-century novel. Entitled "Expiation", it establishes the explicitly Christian view of good and evil inherent in most of Gaskell's works; it judges Margaret's proud sense of herself by juxtaposing her with Mr. Thornton; it sorts out the place of Christian love of God and erotic love in Margaret's life; and it resolves the moral question of the appropriateness of Margaret's lie to save her brother, Frederick. It achieves all this without a sense of the didactic emphasis or the heavy-handedness of Mary Barton or Ruth.

"Expiation" begins after the death of Mrs. Hale, and immediately after Margaret's lie to the police concerning her

presence at the train station. It establishes Thornton's religious nature immediately. For Gaskell, that religious nature is revealed in Thornton's ability to understand and imaginatively sympathize with Mr. Hale's suffering:

... Mr Thornton, instead of being shocked, seemed to have passed through that very stage of thought himself, and could suggest where the exact ray of light was to be found, which should make the dark places plain. Man of action as he was, busy in the world's great battle, there was a deeper religion binding him to God in his heart, in spite of his strong wilfulness, through all his mistakes, than Mr Hale had ever dreamed. (p. 348)

In this, Thornton is differentiated from Margaret, with whom Mr. Hale was unable to share his grief in this manner. The differentiation is made explicit when the next we hear of Margaret is that "all at once her faith had given way" (p. 348). If we have been viewing Thornton in the condescending manner suggested by Margaret, here we begin to take stock, and realize that it is really to Thornton that Margaret must aspire in order to mature.

Margaret's faith had given way, and Mrs. Gaskell judges the lie Margaret tells to protect her brother in explicitly religious terms. The chapter's title, "Expiation", suggests a Christian frame of reference, and Margaret speaks repeatedly in terms of "temptation" (pp. 348, 357), "penance" (p. 349), "penitence" (pp. 355, 358), of being "faithless" (p. 358), of "sin" (p. 359) and "absolution" (p. 359).

Early in "Expiation" Margaret, while realizing that her lie must represent sin -- she speaks of "temptation" and "penance" -- does not accept such a judgment of her action. She rationalizes her action, considering that "she had lied to save [Frederick]. There was one comfort; her lie had saved him, if only by gaining some additional time" (p. 349). She mentions that she will "stand in her bitter penance" (p. 349), but only after she hears of Frederick's safe removal from London. She resolves that she will lie again, not having received such news. Margaret at this point cannot view the lie properly as a sin. A sinner who vows to sin again can realize neither the nature of sin -- a transgression against God, or in the common use, a wrongdoing -- nor the nature of penance. One cannot be truly penitent and speak of sinning again and delaying penance.

At this point, Margaret learns of Thornton's part in quelling an inquiry into the death of Leonards, an act comparable to Darcy's payment of Wickham's debts done out of his "wish of giving happiness to [Elizabeth]",²⁶ and she realizes that he is aware of her lie:

Mr Thornton had seen her close to Outwood station on the fatal Thursday night, and had been told of her denial that she was there. 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. She cared not to think, even to herself, of how much of excuse she might plead. That had nothing to do with Mr Thornton, ... what was

²⁶Austen, Pride and Prejudice, p. 307.

really false and wrong was known to him, and he had a right to judge her. (p. 355)

The importance to Margaret of Mr. Thornton's regard is clear, but at this point it stands in the way of Margaret's realization of her action as sinful. Margaret's having "no thought of penitence before God" is clearly meant to be seen as morally wrong. But a process has been begun by Gaskell. Margaret now refuses to rationalize her action, and thus realizes that the lie was "really false and wrong". At this point, she acknowledges Thornton's right to stand in judgment of her. The judgment of the pair implicit in the comparison between Thornton and Margaret at the beginning of "Expiation" is corroborated at this point. Gaskell presents to us the effect of Margaret's realization of such a judgment: "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" (p. 356).

The thought of Thornton's knowledge of her sin no longer blots out her thoughts of contrition to God: "If she had but dared to bravely tell the truth as regarded herself, defying them to find out what she refused to tell concerning another, how light of heart she would now have felt! Not having failed in trust towards Him; not degraded and abased in Mr Thornton's sight " (p. 358). Still, Mr. Thornton's opinion of her maintains its importance to Margaret. While God "could read her penitence" (p. 358) and forgive her, she continues to be disturbed at Thornton's low opinion of her. As

Gaskell says, Margaret "was not good enough, nor pure enough to be indifferent to the lowered opinion of a fellow creature: ...the thought of how he must be looking upon her with contempt, stood between her and her sense of wrong-doing" (p. 358).

That sense of wrong-doing is finally labelled later in the chapter. Margaret calls the circumstances of that evening struggle at Outwood station her "temptation" (p. 359), which leads to "her sin" (p. 359). Only then, Gaskell informs us, can Margaret "go before God, and cry for His absolution." (p. 359) After Mr. Bell's death, Margaret again defines the nature of her sin, and the life one should properly live, as a sort of summation of her education in the novel:

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. (pp. 502-503)

Margaret can finally place her feelings for Mr. Thornton in their proper perspective; she respects him for the very contempt in which she imagines he holds her, and the depth of feeling in Gaskell's prose suggests the love that Margaret has for him:

Oh! she was grateful! She had been cowardly and false, and had shown her cowardliness and falsehood in action that could not be recalled; but she was not ungrateful. It sent a glow to her heart, to know how she could feel towards one who had reason to despise her. His cause for contempt was so just, that she should have respected him less if she had thought he did not feel contempt. It was a pleasure to feel how thoroughly she respected him. He could not prevent her doing that. It was the one comfort in all this misery. (p. 361)

By Chapter 35 we know of Thornton's love for Margaret. He has already proposed and been refused. Further, we have experienced Margaret's growing confusion regarding her feelings for Thornton. In this connection, compare her determination to respect Mr. Thornton, quoted above, with the statement of her feelings immediately after his proposal to her: "I never liked him. I was civil; but I took no trouble to conceal my indifference. Indeed, I never thought about myself or him, so my manners must have shown the truth" (p. 255). The movement of her feelings for Thornton from indifference to respect is part of her finally learning to love him.

At this point as well, Gaskell's novel may owe a debt to Austen's Pride and Prejudice. For surely the movement of Margaret's

feelings described above is strikingly similar to the movement Austen so movingly portrays of Elizabeth Bennet's feelings for Darcy. Margaret is surprised at Thornton's proposal; Elizabeth is surprised at Darcy's. Margaret's claim (quoted in the previous paragraph) that her behaviour to Thornton could not have led to his proposal mirrors Elizabeth's similar claim to Darcy. When Darcy explains "I believed you to be wishing, expecting my addresses", Elizabeth answers immediately, "My manners must have been at fault, but not intentionally, I assure you".²⁷

At this point, two-thirds of the way through North and South, Margaret's "respect" for Thornton who, she realizes, has "reason to despise her" and "cause for contempt" (p. 361) mirrors Elizabeth's attitude toward Darcy at a similar stage of Pride and Prejudice. Elizabeth has become painfully aware that the criticisms of her family made by Darcy in his first proposal and repeated in his letter to Elizabeth have merit: "When she came to that part of the letter in which her family were mentioned, in terms of such mortifying yet merited reproach, her sense of shame was severe. The justice of the charge struck her too forcibly for denial".²⁸

²⁷Jane Austen, Pride and Prejudice, p. 310. Note, too, the great trust both authors place in "manners" in these quotations. Margaret cannot believe Thornton to have misconstrued hers, and Elizabeth judges that, since Darcy had misconstrued hers, her manners were "at fault".

²⁸Jane Austen, Pride and Prejudice, p. 177.

Elizabeth comes to realize the strength of Darcy's feelings for her because of the justice of his criticism of her family. At Pemberley, Elizabeth "thought of his regard with a deeper sentiment of gratitude than it had ever raised before". As she has the opportunity of observing Darcy at his home, she comes to acknowledge that, "She respected, she esteemed, she was grateful to him, she felt a real interest in his welfare".²⁹ The movements of Elizabeth Bennet and Margaret Thornton through similar stages of feelings are clear, then, when comparing Pride and Prejudice with North and South. In both novels, not only is the development presented a development of feelings of love, but also both novelists establish early on the love felt toward the heroine by the hero. Thus, the focus of both Pride and Prejudice and North and South is on the development of the heroine's love.

Pride and Prejudice and North and South are very alike in structure. The plots of both centre upon sets of contrasting marriage proposals. In Austen's novel, Collins's pompous and empty marriage proposal is meant to be compared with Darcy's initial ill-worded and ill-judged declaration, which in turn is meant to be compared with the subsequent letter and final proposal. Similarly, Henry Lennox's proposal in Gaskell's novel is to be compared with the first by Thornton, which contrasts with his final (successful)

²⁹ Jane Austen, Pride and Prejudice, p. 222.

proposal. The potential for love is introduced early in both novels with the proposals of Mr. Collins and Henry Lennox. While Austen's presentation of the proposal is more blatantly satirical, we come to see that Gaskell's Henry Lennox is largely a less ridiculous version of Mr. Collins. While we feel with Margaret that "she could have loved him if he had but been different", we realize as she does that such a difference is "one that went low -- deep down" (p. 64).

Margaret's inability to love Lennox is revealed in her perception of the emptiness of his language. Lennox reacts to Margaret's refusal:

"You should make allowances for the mortification, not only of a lover, Margaret, but a man not given to romance in general -- prudent, worldly, as some people call me -- who has been carried out of his usual habits by the force of a passion -- well, we will say no more of that; but in the one outlet which he has formed for the deeper and better feelings of his nature, he meets with rejection and repulse. I shall have to console myself with scorning my own folly. A struggling barrister to think of matrimony!" (p. 62)

This speech "annoyed her. It seemed to touch on and call out all the points of difference which had often repelled her in him..." (p. 62). Indeed, his speech reveals an uncomfortable blend of flippancy, harshness, and self-consciousness, so that it is difficult to know what he is really feeling. Lennox himself is aware of his "good-for-nothing way of talking" (p. 63) as he terms it. He differs from Mr. Collins only in degree, not in kind.

The reader judges Thornton a better man than Lennox partly because of the way Gaskell contrasts his language with Lennox's. Margaret comments concerning Thornton's conversation after their initial meeting: "He never went on with any subject, but gave little, short, abrupt answers." (p. 101) Mr. Hale sharpens the reader's perception of Thornton, observing what his way of speaking reveals of his character. Thornton's "short abrupt answers" are "Very much to the point though, ... He is a clear-headed fellow" (pp. 101-102). Very unlike Henry Lennox, the reader hastens to add.

That judgment is repeated by a comparison between Lennox's speech upon having his proposal to Margaret rejected, and Thornton's in the same situation. The strength of Thornton's love, his resolve to love, is excellently portrayed by Gaskell:

"One word more. You look as if you thought it tainted you to be loved by me. You cannot avoid it. Nay, I, if I would, cannot cleanse you from it. But I would not, if I could. I have never loved any woman before: my life has been too busy, my thoughts too much absorbed with other things. Now I love, and I will love. But do not be afraid of too much expression on my part." (p. 254)

The speech begins with three curt, strongly stressed monosyllables, expressing his wish to be heard. As Thornton continues, the passion of his language soon peaks in his resolve that he would not "cleanse" Margaret of his love of her -- "I would not, if I could" -- again with three strongly stressed monosyllables at the start. The passion abates and builds once more, and climaxes in the

statement "Now I love, and I will love". Again, single syllable words are employed; six of the seven in the sentence are stressed. Such a speech tells us more of Thornton's love than is possible through a third person narration of his feelings, and we judge the paucity of Lennox's love of Margaret by comparison.

Thornton's romantic interest in Margaret is evident from their first meeting. It develops quickly, and we, already well aware of Margaret's character, are not surprised at his feelings for her. But Gaskell has a considerably more difficult job to show us the movement from Margaret's prejudice against "trade" people epitomized by Mr. Thornton, to her finally loving him. We have seen part of that movement, in Margaret's shift from feelings akin to loathing, to her new respect and approval of what she judges to be Thornton's contempt of her because of her lie. The movement from respect to love, however, is not as smoothly achieved by Gaskell in this novel as Austen manages in dramatizing a similar movement in Elizabeth's feelings for Darcy in Pride and Prejudice.

Gaskell was aware of this fault in North and South, as is revealed in her letters, where she comments upon the suddenness of the final coming together of Margaret and Thornton (due to the space limitations occasioned by serial publication).³⁰ North and South does attempt to reveal a development in Margaret's feelings for

³⁰See Letters, Letter 225, pp. 328-329, already quoted.

Thornton. There is her reiterated desire to have Thornton informed of her brother's presence at Outwood -- of his being the man Thornton saw her with at the station -- so that he will not think of her as having been with a lover, and so that he may understand her motivation for lying. All this despite her feeling that an explanation to Thornton is not as important as her prayers to God for absolution. Further, we are allowed a glimpse of Margaret's love of children, and her sorrow at the unlikelihood of her ever having a child of her own:

She would carry him off into a room, where they two alone battled it out; she with a firm power which subdued him into peace, while every sudden charm and wile she possessed, was exerted on the side of right, until he would rub his little hot and tear-smeared face all over hers, kissing and caressing till he often fell asleep in her arms or on her shoulder. Those were Margaret's sweetest moments. They gave her a taste of the feeling that she believed would be denied to her for ever. (p. 495)

Margaret's and Thornton's coming together occurs almost immediately after this. Margaret hears approvingly of Thornton's dining room experiment and the resulting closer relationship with his men. She hears, too, of his bankruptcy, and decides to finance his business with a loan. We do not hear of that decision, however, until Margaret informs Thornton of it in the novel's final pages. After she does so, they immediately declare their love, and the novel ends.

Their movement toward one another has been slow, almost unwilling. Thornton is prompted to propose by Margaret's actions before the mob. Her reaction, "'Why, there was not a man -- not a poor desperate man in all that crowd -- for whom I had not more sympathy -- for whom I should not have done what little I could more heartily'" (p. 254), shows that her final love for Thornton comes quite unbidden. Because Thornton continues to love Margaret, his movement toward her is shown in a different way, through his reluctant and gradual acceptance of some of Margaret's views of the proper relationship between men and owners, an acceptance which entails his instituting the dining room scheme, and developing his friendship with Higgins.

The suddenness of the declaration of love at the novel's end prompts Edgar Wright to comment that "the conclusion is almost ludicrous in its suddenness"³¹, but it seems to me that Gaskell's delineation of the relationship's growth is adequate to justify such an ending. As Pollard argues, "In an association of this kind there could be no gradual restorative movement, and Mrs. Gaskell is right therefore to conclude the story by a reconciliation that proceeds from a sudden realization, an inrush of enlightenment and understanding."³²

³¹Wright, p. 131.

³²Pollard, p. 135.

That Gaskell was initially uncomfortable with the sudden ending of the novel is suggested in the language of her letters: "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" (my underlining).³³ The uncertainty of her judgment is apparent. Her final judgment, however, must have been that the novel's end is proper, for despite her revisions of the Household Words version for publication in novel form, she let the ending stand as it was.

The developing love of Margaret and Thornton is the novel's major concern. Connected with it, however, are several other themes of great importance in Gaskell's fiction, and in North and South particularly. Once again in her works, Gaskell stresses the importance of one's family life to one's moral well-being. Our harsh judgment of Boucher is mitigated when we come to understand the love which permeated his relationship with his wife and children. We are given a glimpse of that love only after Boucher's death, which occurs immediately following Margaret's and Nicholas Higgins's discussion of Boucher in Chapter 36. We discover there that workers were forced into Unions, that, in frustration at his

³³Letters, Letter 225, p. 329.

family's impending starvation, Boucher refused to follow the Union's orders and incited the riot in which Margaret was injured, and that, in order to feed his family, he later sought employment by renouncing the union. Margaret's challenge to Higgins -- "'Then would it not have been far better to have left him alone, and not forced him to join the Union? He did you no good; and you drove him mad'" (pp. 366-367) -- rhetorically suggests its own answer.³⁴ At this point in the novel, Boucher's drowned body is carried in (it appears almost as a pat answer to the foregoing discussion), and we see what has been destroyed: "'Ay,' said the woman [Boucher's wife], shaking her head, 'he loved us a'. We had some one to love us once. It's a long time ago; but when he were in life and with us, he did love us, he did. He loved this babby m'appen the best on us; but he loved me and I loved him, though I was calling him five minutes ago'" (pp. 370-371). For Gaskell, as we have seen in Mary Barton and Ruth, we attain our highest goodness in our relationships with those we love. Margaret and Thornton, both well loved by their respective families, are both seen as therefore capable of love. Edith, following the example of Mrs. Shaw, is surely incapable of such love.

³⁴Which is surely an indictment of an aspect of Unionism in North and South?

Boucher's complaint concerning the operation of the Union is damning. The union of workers, formed to protect each other's rights and wages, is seen as an unfeeling bureaucracy which fails to do so: "'Yo' know well, that a worser tyrant than e'er th' masters were says, 'clem to death, and see 'em a' clem to death, ere 'yo' dare go again th' Union.'" Yo' know it well, Nicholas, for a' yo're one on 'em. Yo' may be kind hearts, each separate; but once banded together, yo've no more pity for a man than a wild hunger-maddened wolf'" (p. 207). In Gaskell's view, it is each individual's duty to care for his fellows. Such a feeling of personal responsibility to one's fellows is epitomized in Higgins's care of Boucher's children, his strongly felt responsibility toward them.

{ Such personal responsibility for one's fellows is shown in an industrial setting in Thornton's and Higgins's relationship. When their relationship changes from one of factory owner and union member, to one of man to man, a friendship develops that is seen as personally and socially valuable in the novel. "Once brought face to face, man to man, with an individual of the masses around him, and (take notice) out of the character of master and workman, in the first instance, they had each begun to recognize that 'we have all of us one human heart'" (p. 511). Such a relationship enabled "both master and man to look upon each other with far more charity and sympathy, and bear with each other more patiently and kindly. Besides this improvement of feeling, both Mr Thornton and

his workmen found out their ignorance as to positive matters of fact, known heretofore to one side, but not to the other" (p. 513).

A similar philosophy of personal responsibility is manifested in what is the novel's central creed -- do as conscience bids, without measuring consequences. It is a standard to which Gaskell clearly wished us to aspire. Certainly Thornton's "experiments" at "cultivating some intercourse with the hands beyond the mere 'cash nexus'" (p. 525) represent such behaviour, unsure as he is "of the consequences that may result from them" (p. 525). And we judge Henry Lennox as unworthy of Margaret partly because, imbued with a materialist and utilitarian moral philosophy, he cannot recognize the claims of integrity and conscience upon human actions:

"Perhaps I have been wrongly informed. But I have been told, by his successor in the living -- a clever, sensible man, and a thoroughly active clergyman -- that there was no call upon Mr Hale to do what he did, relinquish the living, and throw himself and his family on the tender mercies of private teaching in a manufacturing town; the bishop had offered him another living, it is true; but if he had come to entertain certain doubts, he could have remained where he was and so had no occasion to resign. But the truth is, these country clergymen live such isolated lives -- isolated, I mean, from all intercourse with men of equal cultivation with themselves, by whose minds they might regulate their own, and discover when they were going either too fast or too slow -- that they are very apt to disturb themselves with imaginary doubts as to the articles of faith, and throw up certain opportunities of doing good for very uncertain fancies of their own." (p. 466)

I began by arguing that North and South is the first of Gaskell's novels that belongs in the tradition of the English novel

that originates with Jane Austen. It is in the ways she expands upon that tradition, however, that she leads to George Eliot. One such facet of North and South is Gaskell's treatment of the novel's minor characters. I have already discussed the achievement of Boucher's character, which is important in this connection. His role is minor, but his treatment is well-rounded and elaborate -- he exists in the novel as a believable character, not a character type. Similarly, Dixon, the Hales' servant, is fully realized in the novel. Her loyal protectiveness of Mrs. Hale, her pride in her association with the Beresfords, her condescending attitude to Mr. Hale, are all readily apparent in the following quotation:

"Since your mamma told me this terrible news, when I dressed her for tea, I've lost all count of time. I'm sure I don't know what is to become of us all. When Charlotte told me just now you were sobbing, Miss Hale, I thought, no wonder, poor thing! And master thinking of turning Dissenter at his time of life, when, if it is not to be said he's done well in the Church, he's not done badly after all. I had a cousin, miss, who turned Methodist preacher after he was fifty years of age, and a tailor all his life; but then he had never been able to make a pair of trousers to fit, for as long as he had been in the trade, so it was no wonder; but for master! as I said to missus, 'What would poor Sir John have said? he never liked your marrying Mr Hale, but if he could have known it would have come to this, he would have sworn worse oaths than ever, if that was possible!'" (p. 82)

Thus, although she is the vehicle for some Jane Austen-like irony --

"Master was born, I suppose, for to marry missus. If I thought he loved her properly, I might get to love him in time. But he should ha' made a deal more on her, and not been always reading, reading, thinking, thinking. See what it has brought him to! Many a one

who never reads nor thinks either, gets to be Rector, and Dean, and what not; and I dare say master might, if he'd just minded missus, and let the weary reading and thinking alone" (p. 179) --

she is never that alone. As Craik argues, "Elizabeth Gaskell in this novel continues to treat all characters equally, turning her serious (though far from humourless) regard upon all."³⁵

The characters of North and South, major and minor, interact in various ways. We see characters in their family relationships: Mr. and Mrs. Hale and Margaret; Mrs. Thornton, John and Fanny; Aunt Shaw and Edith; Nicholas Higgins, Bessy and Mary; and the Bouchers. We see characters as representative of locales: the Hales from Helstone, the Shaws and Lennoxes from London, the Thorntons, Higginses, and Bouchers from Milton, Mr. Bell from Oxford. We see them, too, as representatives of their economic and social classes. Mr. Bell and Mr. Hale are teachers, the middle-class Shaws are able to live on unearned income, Henry Lennox and Mr. Thornton are contrasted in the ways in which they attempt to rise in their professions, and in the ideals which underlie their actions. In this, Lennox contrasts too with Mr. Hale and Higgins, who act according to principles the reader is meant to value. The Bouchers and Higginses are representative of the factory workers of industrial England, and in their attitudes to the Union, they embody opposite views of the value of unions.

³⁵Craik, p. 121.

In noting the complexity of character relationships in North and South, Craik argues:

Such elaborate and complex groupings in their changing and merging reveal that Elizabeth Gaskell's art is taking the novel on a last step away from the drama, compared for example with Jane Austen -- whom she often much resembles -- whose characters pair and group themselves very much as in comedies, with marriageable couples, supported by secondary older characters; ... This development is one that George Eliot takes up and pushes even further for her own purposes, notably in Middlemarch, where all characters at some time or other interact, and all are to some degree seriously treated in the ways generally appropriate to main characters.³⁶

The comparison of North and South with Middlemarch suggested here is important, but the Gaskell novel which lends itself most aptly to such a comparison is Wives and Daughters, which more nearly anticipates Middlemarch in complexity, scope and intent -- in giving a sense of life of an entire town.

The comparison with the novels of George Eliot is important in another connection. Characters like Casaubon and Bulstrode in Middlemarch evoke complex responses in the reader. There is both satire and pathos in the presentation of Casaubon. The futility of his scholarship, his knowledge of its futility, and his attempts to save his "small hungry shivering self"³⁷ from that knowledge evoke such responses, as does Casaubon's feeling of necessary isolation which renders his marriage somewhat like solitary confinement, one in which he continually imagines that Dorothea sees the intellectual

³⁶Craik, p. 121.

³⁷Eliot, Middlemarch, p. 206.

futility of his endeavour. Similarly, our reactions to Bulstrode struggling with hope and temptation, rationalizing the murder of Raffles at Raffles's bedside in Chapter 70, vary between pity and contempt. Certainly the major characters of North and South evoke equally complicated responses, and, as in Middlemarch, so do the minor characters. Mrs. Shaw, for example, is very much a target of Austen-like satire at the novel's start, as discussed earlier. As the novel progresses, however, Gaskell reveals more and more of Mrs. Shaw's character. The following, concerning Mrs. Hale's absence from Edith's wedding, reveals a touching generosity in Mrs. Shaw that is unexpected, but not out of character:

[Mrs Hale] had been detained at home by a multitude of half-reasons, none of which anybody fully understood, except Mr Hale, who was perfectly aware that all his arguments in favour of a grey satin gown, which was midway between oldness and newness, had proved unavailing; and that, as he had not the money to equip his wife afresh, from top to toe, she would not show herself at her only sister's only child's wedding. If Mrs Shaw had guessed at the real reason why Mrs Hale did not accompany her husband, she would have showered down gowns upon her; but it was nearly twenty years since Mrs Shaw had been the poor pretty Miss Beresford, and she had really forgotten all grievances except that of the unhappiness arising from disparity of age in married life, on which she could descant by the half-hour. (p. 46)

So while Gaskell is critical of the idleness of the Harley Street group, "where the bare knowledge of the existence of every trouble or care seemed scarcely to have penetrated" (p. 457), the individuals there are invested with warmth.

Another of Gaskell's minor characters, Mrs. Thornton, undergoes substantial development in North and South. Our first

impression of her is of a stout, stern, strong-willed woman, whose "stout black silk, of which not a thread was worn or discoloured" (p. 116) is a fitting emblem of her character. Almost immediately, we are impressed with Mrs. Thornton's pride in and love of her son:

"Despise my son! treat him as her vassal, indeed! Humph! I should like to know where she could find such another! Boy and man, he's the noblest, stoutest heart I ever knew. I don't care if I am his mother! I can see what's what, and not be blind. I know what Fanny is; and I know what John is. Despise him! I hate her!" (pp. 117-118)

As further evidence of her strength of character and her love of John, we have John's account of their life together, an account which certainly evokes a reader's sympathetic response to Mrs. Thornton:

"Sixteen years ago, my father died under very miserable circumstances. I was taken from school, and had to become a man (as well as I could) in a few days. I had such a mother as few are blest with; a woman of strong power, and firm resolve. We went into a small country town, where living was cheaper than in Milton, and where I got employment in a draper's shop Week by week, our income came to fifteen shillings, out of which three people had to be kept. My mother managed so that I put by three out of these fifteen shillings regularly. This made the beginning; this taught me self-denial. Now that I am able to afford my mother such comforts as her age, rather than her own wish, requires, I thank her silently on each occasion for the early training she gave me." (p. 126)

Our sympathy finds a surer and surer stay in Mrs. Thornton as she divides her linen from her son's in preparation (she anticipates) for his marriage. We come to realize the complexity of this mother's love of her son both in her jealousy toward Margaret --

Doubtless he was with Miss Hale. The new love was displacing her already from her place as first in his

heart. . . A terrible pain -- a pang of vain jealousy -- shot through her: she hardly knew whether it was more physical or mental; but it forced her to sit down. In a moment, she was up again as straight as ever, -- a grim smile upon her face for the first time that day, ready for the door opening, and the rejoicing triumphant one, who should never know the sore regret his mother felt at his marriage. (pp. 269-270) --

and in her own triumphant declaration of the divine origin of a mother's love upon Margaret's refusal of John's proposal:

"Mother's love is given by God, John. It holds fast for ever and ever. A girl's love is like a puff of smoke -- it changes with every wind. And she would not have you, my own lad, would not she?" She set her teeth; she showed them like a dog for the whole length of her mouth. He shook his head.

"I am not fit for her, mother; I knew I was not."

She ground out words between her closed teeth. He could not hear what she said; but the look in her eyes interpreted it to be a curse, -- if not as coarsely worded, as fell in intent as ever was uttered. And yet her heart leaped up light, to know he was her own again. (p. 271)

She plays a minor role in the novel. However, in Mrs. Thornton, Gaskell creates a living character, a character treated with the seriousness of the major figures of North and South.

The equal seriousness of treatment of Gaskell's major and minor characters brings to life a broad society in North and South, a treatment of her material which anticipates the work of George Eliot in Middlemarch. In Sylvia's Lovers, Gaskell focusses more exclusively upon a limited segment of a fishing town, but in Wives and Daughters, Gaskell builds on the experience gained in writing North and South and spans the lives of all segments of a representative English town.

IV

GASKELL'S HISTORICAL NOVEL: SYLVIA'S LOVERS (1863)

The argument of this thesis is that, as her career progresses, Elizabeth Gaskell's novels, with one exception, increasingly cohere to an Austen-like model of fiction. However, after the great movement toward the Austen tradition represented by the development of her fiction from Mary Barton and Ruth to North and South, Gaskell's Sylvia's Lovers (1863) represents a peculiar deviation from the pattern. Although the Austen influence is there (as I will show later in the chapter), Sylvia's Lovers reveals a new direction in the fiction of Elizabeth Gaskell -- the historical novel.

After the controversy engendered by her social problem novels, and the uproar occasioned by her excellent The Life of Charlotte Brontë, the lure of an historically removed subject and setting was great for Gaskell. Edgar Wright argues that the novel is an "attempt to disentangle the sense of useful purpose from her creative imagination".¹ That attempt is manifested in a well-established tradition of fiction, popularized by Scott, and later by

¹Wright, p. 175.

Dickens and Eliot. Further, leading to Sylvia's Lovers is Gaskell's interest in the Yorkshire moors of the north of England produced by her exhaustive research for the The Life of Charlotte Brontë, and in the whaling town of Whitby, which she visited in 1859.

The visit to Whitby provided the bare bones of her plot. As Sharps points out, "the author wove together two strands -- a local tale (in fact a variant of what we should now think of as the Enoch Arden theme) and the historically verifiable Whitby riot of 1793."² The fiction, then, is historical, but it is not treated on the large scale of Sir Walter Scott's historical novels. Rather, we look to Scenes of Clerical Life (1857) and Adam Bede (1859) by George Eliot as the representative "types" of this fiction. Gaskell's interest in the novels of George Eliot at this time is obvious in her letters. Between the composition of North and South in 1855 and The Life of Charlotte Brontë in 1857, and Sylvia's Lovers six years later, Gaskell's literary attention was largely focused upon George Eliot's work.

Gaskell is quite proud of her early recognition of Eliot's quality as a novelist. Writing in a letter from late 1857, Gaskell instructs her correspondent to: "Read 'Scenes from Clerical Life', published in Blackwood, -- \ for / this year, -- I shd think they began as early as Janry or February -- They are a discovery of my

²Sharps, p. 376.

own, & I am so proud of them. Do read them. I have not a notion who wrote them." ³ Throughout the next three years, during which there was great public interest concerning the authorship of Scenes of Clerical Life and Adam Bede, Gaskell refers back with pride to "her" discovery.⁴

Gaskell's praise of Adam Bede is quite specific, and therefore revealing of the sort of influence Eliot's novels had on Gaskell's. For example, she comments, the day after receiving the copy of the novel she requested from John Blackwood, "I was brought up in Warwickshire, and recognize the country in every description of natural scenery One of Mrs Poyser's speeches is as good as a fresh blow of sea-air; and yet (it) she is a true person, and no caricature".⁵ In fact, Gaskell is so impressed by Adam Bede, she is moved to write to Eliot, explaining that "the greatest compliment paid me I ever had in my life" occurred when she was mistaken as the author of Adam Bede.⁶

The references to Mrs Poyser's speeches in rural dialect and to the rural setting of Adam Bede suggest that Haytersbank farm and the Robson family who inhabit it may have been in part inspired by

³Letters, Letter 384, p. 493.

⁴See Letters, Letter 431, p. 559; Letter 445, pp. 583-584.

⁵Letters, Letter 417, p. 533.

⁶Letters, Letter 431, p. 559.

Gaskell's reading of Adam Bede. Both Angus Easson and Andrew Sanders,⁷ argue similarly that "Sylvia's Lovers, like Adam Bede, is set in the 1790's and it could be that Gaskell was partly prompted by Eliot's example to write what is strictly her only historical novel."⁸

A novel less often recognized as an influence upon Gaskell is Eliot's The Mill on the Floss (1860). Of the major commentators on Gaskell, only Hopkins and Craik cite a connection between Gaskell's works and The Mill on the Floss. Hopkins is concerned with revealing Eliot's use of Gaskell's early novelette, The Moorland Cottage (1850), in composing The Mill on the Floss.⁹ Craik, however, points to a general similarity in the tragic structures of The Mill on the Floss and Sylvia's Lovers, but she does so to elaborate the differences between the two novels:

Mill on the Floss ends with the end of its heroine, Maggie, herself, drowned with her brother Tom in the Flood. Yet even this is not a tragically inevitable consequence of all that has gone before, but rather a return to the happy days when the two shined in their angel infancy -- poignant, moving, and even emotionally satisfying, but leaving the tragic conflicts of the adult Maggie evaded and unresolved.¹⁰

⁷See Andrew Sanders, "Introduction" to Sylvia's Lovers by Elizabeth Gaskell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. viii.

⁸Easson, p. 160.

⁹Hopkins, p. 330.

¹⁰Craik, p. 142.

There is a significant relationship, however, between The Mill on the Floss and Sylvia's Lovers. Eliot's novel seems to have been a catalyst of sorts. Judging from her letters of late 1859, Gaskell was in the midst of a literary dry spell. She writes: "And after all one gets into a desponding state of mind about writing at all, after 'Adam Bede', and 'Janet's Repentance' choose (as the Lancashire people say,) whoever wrote them."¹¹ Gaskell reiterates this judgment in another letter from the same period, but this time she relates the writer's block she feels to the offer from her publisher for her to compose a new novel:

Smith & Elder have offered me 1000 [pounds] for a three vol. novel, including the American rights etc., which I believe they disposed of to Mr Field, whom I never saw -- Not a line of the book is written yet, -- I think I have a feeling that it is not worth while \ trying / to write, while there are such books as Adam Bede & Scenes from Clerical Life....¹²

The as yet to be commenced novel is presumably what was to become Sylvia's Lovers.

It is less important, however, that her admiration for Adam Bede and Scenes of Clerical Life paralyzed Gaskell's creativity, than that the publication of The Mill on the Floss seems to have cured the paralysis. It was a novel Gaskell anxiously awaited,¹³

¹¹Letters, Letter 444b, p. 903.

¹²Letters, Letter 444, p. 581.

¹³See Letters, Letter 458, p. 604.

and she expresses her happiness upon receiving the novel the day after its April 4, 1860 publication: "only think of having the Mill on the Floss the second day of publication, & of my very own."¹⁴ Gaskell herself gives indirect testimony to the effect of The Mill on the Floss upon her own new novel: "My book is getting on famously, -- 1/4 done of the whole; & only begun 8th of April."¹⁵

It seems clear that Gaskell was immediately inspired by her reading of The Mill on the Floss, for a scant three days after receiving Eliot's novel her apparent writer's block disappears.

Moreover, the two novels bear a close affinity in several areas. Both are concerned with exploring the possibilities of the tragic in everyday life. Central to each novel is the romantic triangle. Although such triangles are common in Victorian fiction, Gaskell's and Eliot's treatments of this commonplace fictional motif are remarkably alike. In The Mill on the Floss, Maggie Tulliver becomes very attracted to the dashing and romantic Stephen Guest. Similarly, in Sylvia's Lovers, Sylvia is attracted to the dashing and heroic Charlie Kinraid. In Eliot's novel, Philip Wakem, the remaining third of the triangle, is much less a physical attraction to Maggie (he is physically deformed, in fact) but he possesses moral qualities which she comes increasingly to value. It seems

¹⁴Letters, Letter 462, p. 611.

¹⁵Letters, Letter 465a, p. 910.

likely that Philip suggested the Christian name for the remaining third of Gaskell's triangle, Philip Hepburn. He, too, is the less physically attractive: he, too, is a central moral figure in the novel. Though Gaskell does expand the role of this third of the triangle in Sylvia's Lovers as compared with The Mill on the Floss, it seems clear that Eliot's novel was influential on Gaskell's. Furthermore, the triangle motif is an important aspect of Austen's fiction. Her novels characteristically centre upon the heroine's choice of a husband from between two suitors.

The influence of the novels of George Eliot upon those of Elizabeth Gaskell is important. For, taking its inspiration from Adam Bede and The Mill on the Floss, Sylvia's Lovers proceeds from Eliot's use and development of the tradition of the English novel defined by Austen's novels.

There is an aspect of Sylvia's Lovers which relates it to the novels of Charlotte Brontë. Craik points out that "Charlotte Brontë's novels all examine the predicament of the passionate nature in isolation, who at some point finds that conventional standards, whether of general morals or of religion, are incapable of supporting it, still less providing adequate room for spiritual fulfilment."¹⁶ Sylvia's Lovers, too, explores passion at odds with prudence, prudence here underscored by traditional Christian values

¹⁶Craik, p. 165.

of truthfulness and temperance. But whereas the reader of Jane Eyre recognizes that Charlotte Brontë's presentation is heavily weighted on the side of passion, Gaskell, as I will show, favours the control and prudence represented by Christianity. This difference is revealed in her letters: "The difference between Miss Brontë and me is that she puts all her naughtiness into her books, and I put all my goodness. I am sure she works off a great deal that is morbid into her writing, and out of her life; and my books are so far better, than I am that I often feel ashamed of having written them and as if I were a hypocrite." ¹⁷ In its upholding of the public over the private, Sylvia's Lovers resembles the fiction of Jane Austen and George Eliot more closely than that of Charlotte Brontë. The difference between Gaskell's novels and Charlotte Brontë's is shown most clearly in Sylvia's changing attitude in the novel towards the Christian duty of forgiveness.

Gaskell's novel is set during the Napoleonic wars, but they exist only in the distance. The concentration in Sylvia's Lovers is upon the effect of these conflicts upon the townsfolk of the fictional whaling town of Monkshaven. The most immediate effect of the conflict on the townsfolk stems from the actions of the press-gangs, but even here, Gaskell concentrates upon the effects of the impressment of sailors on the wives and children -- not on the

¹⁷Letters, Letter 154, p. 228.

sailors themselves. Thus, the seized sailors' exhortations in the following quotation are drowned out by the cries and reactions of the crowd:

One of the men was addressing to his townspeople, in a high pitched voice, an exhortation which few could hear, for, pressing around this nucleus of cruel wrong, were women crying aloud, throwing up their arms in imprecation, showering down abuse as hearty and rapid as if they had been a Greek chorus. 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.¹⁸

Along with this sense of the war's effects upon the people of Monkshaven, Gaskell gives the reader a sense of how the whaling town itself shapes the lives of the characters in it -- unlike Ruth, where the setting is not shown to be important in the characters' lives. Arthur Pollard argues in this connection that Gaskell

enables us to understand how the way of life of the inhabitants is conditioned by the place and by the occupations they have to pursue. She gives us the sense of a people constantly at odds with natural forces, making earth and sea yield up their harvest. From this she establishes the idea of local character, endowed with such qualities as rugged strength,

¹⁸Elizabeth Gaskell, Sylvia's Lovers, ed. Andrew Sanders (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 29. Further quotations will be from this edition and followed by the page reference.

endurance, patience and independence. These people are capable of suffering much, but when they are provoked beyond their patience, their wrath is terrible to behold.¹⁹

Thus, Gaskell creates an ethos in the novel which takes account of the town's situation and source of livelihood, and helps account for the characters who inhabit it. It is an ethos markedly different from those of her previous novels.

In Monkshaven there is little class distinction, any sailor having the capacity to "rise by daring and saving to be a shipowner himself. Numbers around him had done so; and this very fact made the distinction between class and class less apparent" (p. 7). In addition, organized religion is much less a part of the life of Monkshaven, than, say, Helstone or Ecclestone. In Sylvia's Lovers, the monastery is ruined; the old stone cross raised by the monks is no longer esteemed "as a holy symbol, but only as the Butter Cross, where market-women clustered on Wednesday...." (p. 15). People go to attend service, like Molly and Sylvia, to "'see folk's dresses ... and have a look at t'funeral'" (pp. 60-61) in that order. In this respect, there is a similarity to the work of Jane Austen, where Austen is critical of the attitude which makes the chapel a showplace in Mansfield Park. In Sylvia's Lovers, religion exists as moral teaching only in so far as it exists in the common language of the people of Monkshaven:

¹⁹Pollard, p. 203.

[Sailors] who went forth upon the great deep might carry solemn thoughts with them of the words they had heard [at St. Nicholas -- the Monkshaven church]; not conscious thoughts, perhaps -- rather a distinct if dim conviction that buying and selling, eating and marrying, even life and death, were not all the realities in existence. Nor were the words that came up to their remembrance words of sermons preached there, however impressive. The sailors mostly slept through the sermons; unless, indeed, there were incidents such as were involved in what were called 'funeral discourses' to be narrated. They did not recognize their daily faults or temptations under the grand aliases befitting their appearance from a preacher's mouth. But they knew the old, oft-repeated words praying for deliverance from the familiar dangers of lightning and tempest; from battle, murder, and sudden death (p. 64)

The concern with church-going is minimal, but the great moral questions explored in Sylvia's Lovers, Philip's lie and his love for Sylvia, are defined in specifically Christian terms, as we will see.

Gaskell had employed more than one centre of consciousness in North and South, with most of the novel being told from Margaret Hale's point of view, while parts were seen through the eyes of Thornton and Mr. Hale. In Sylvia's Lovers Gaskell employs two centres of consciousness -- Sylvia and Philip -- about equally. Philip's importance to the narrative structure of the novel results in the creation of Gaskell's fullest male character. Sharps calls him "the most complex character in the book" and "the most

successful full-length male character in all Mrs. Gaskell's fiction
" ²⁰

Philip does indeed seem "a wholly sympathetic character", ²¹
 as Sharps calls him. He is the one character in the novel capable
 of foreseeing the consequences of people's actions. He foresees the
 possibility of prosecution for both Kinraid (who resisted the press-
 gang and killed one of its members) and Daniel (who led the riot
 against the press-gang in Monkshaven). ²² Further, he is repeatedly
 shown to be the voice of reasonable self-restraint and self-denial,
 especially in the first half of the novel. Hester, whose love of
 Philip in part vouches for the quality of his character, reveals to
 us much concerning Philip's characteristics. Her "quiet, modest,
 yet observant eyes -- had seen how devoted he was to his master's
 interests, had known of his careful and punctual ministrations to
 his absent mother's comforts, as long as she was living to benefit
 by his silent, frugal self-denial." (p. 119) Philip's pursuit of
 Sylvia is of a piece with this description of him. It is
 characterized by his belief "that by patient self-restraint he might
 win Sylvia's love." (p. 128)

²⁰Sharps, p. 394.

²¹Sharps, p. 394.

²²See p. 73, pp. 271-272.

This, however, is not the full extent of Philip's character. Pollard's view of Philip acknowledges that he is a sympathetic character, but it also recognizes a real baseness in Philip:

The reader must admire many qualities in him, and perhaps with him fear the apparent superficiality of Kinraid. It is necessary for Mrs. Gaskell to show the alloy in the metal, to portray the baseness that Philip's passion can produce. This she does in the single incident of the deception, the failure to convey Kinraid's message at the time of his capture by the gang. That single failure is enough to make Philip unworthy; he gains so much by it. Justice requires, however, even as he enjoys his success, that retribution shall follow; and the reader knows that it will.²³

That "baseness" is suggested throughout the final two-thirds of the novel. Part of it is revealed as an essential selfishness that underlies much of what Philip does. He acts from self-concern even when it seems that he acts altruistically. After Daniel's arrest, Philip arranges for Hester to accompany Sylvia and Bell to his lodgings so that they may visit with Daniel early the next morning. But despite his knowledge of Daniel's probable fate, and despite his sympathy with the suffering of Sylvia and her mother, Philip rejoices: "He had a strong apprehension of the probable fate of poor Daniel Robson; he had a warm sympathy with the miserable distress of the wife and daughter; but still at the back of his mind his spirits danced as if this was to them a festal occasion." (p.

²³Pollard, p. 207.

297) The juxtaposition of "poor Daniel Robson" and "the miserable distress of the wife and daughter" with his dancing spirits on this "festal occasion" jars tellingly.

This aspect of Philip's character is revealed in several additional ways. Philip lacks the ability to imagine the motives for the action of others. Hearing that Kinraid remained four hours after Sylvia's departure from the Corneys' party, Philip "felt as if the yearning after the absent one would have been a weight to [Kinraid's] legs, as well as to his spirits; and he imagined that all men were like himself." (p. 165) Such self-centredness is akin to the selfishness apparent as Philip considers Kinraid's impressment as God intervening on his behalf: "'It is God's providence,' he murmured. 'It is God's providence'" (p. 215), and later, "'Anyhow,' thought he, as he rose up, 'my prayer is granted. God be thanked!'" (p. 222).

Philip's "baseness" is always connected in Sylvia's Lovers with his love of Sylvia, a love that is, in Gaskell's judgment, excessive. That excess is stated in explicitly Biblical terms in the novel:

So this night his prayers were more than the mere form that they had been the night before; they were a vehement expression of gratitude to God for having, as it were, interfered on his behalf, to grant him the desire of his eyes and the lust of his heart. 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. (p. 176)

His overpowering, here sinful, desire for Sylvia leads directly to the central moral crisis of the novel, Philip's lie concerning Kinraid's fate.

The second half of the novel is largely concerned with the resolution of this moral crisis. For Philip, as it was for Margaret in North and South, the resolution involves overcoming the tendency to rationalize the sin, a process which entails a recognition of the nature of that sin. The period during which he rationalizes reasons for withholding his knowledge of Kinraid's impressment from Sylvia is long. There is much circumstantial and hearsay evidence to back up his pretext that Kinraid was a false lover, that he "was not capable of an enduring constant attachment". (p. 251) Coulson tells of Kinraid's courtship of Coulson's sister, his abandonment of her and her subsequent death.²⁴ We hear, with Philip, sailors joking about Kinraid's ways with women.²⁵ Further, after his impressment, both Bessy Corney and Sylvia mourn the loss of their betrothed. Subsequently, his complete devotion to his new wife, (he cries thinking she "might never know he died thinking of her" (p. 430) and the ten thousand pound fortune she represents further suggests his possible fickleness to Sylvia.

²⁴See p. 84.

²⁵See p. 224.

Nevertheless, Philip's view that Kinraid is indeed false is only tenuously held. When three men-of-war appear at Monkshaven, Philip fears that one may hold Kinraid:

the fear of detection awakened Philip to a sense of guilt; and, besides, he found out, that, in spite of all idle talk and careless slander, he could not help believing that Kinraid was in terrible earnest when he uttered those passionate words, and entreated that they might be borne to Sylvia. Some instinct told Philip that if the specksioneer had only flirted with too many, yet that for Sylvia Robson his love was true and vehement. (pp. 250-251)

However, once danger of the detection of his lie has passed, Philip's "previous fancies shrank to nothing, rebuked for their improbability, and with them vanished his self-reproach" (p. 251) at having lied.

The lie is the result of his excessive love of Sylvia. All Philip's energy is expended "to keep her enshrined in the dearest sanctuary of his being, to the exclusion of all the serious and religious aims which, in any other case, he would have been the first to acknowledge as the object he ought to pursue." (pp. 128-129) Philip feels "that have her as his own he must, at any cost" (p. 328), and he "looked forward to placing his idol in a befitting shrine" (p. 341).

The enshrining of his idol reminds us that Gaskell's early title for Sylvia's Lovers was "Philip's Idol".²⁶ This sin of

²⁶See Letters, Letter 493, p. 667; Letter 501, p. 678.

idolatry, here akin to covetousness, leads to Philip's growing jealousy of Sylvia, a jealousy felt even toward Hester²⁷, and the ocean²⁸ over which Sylvia spends so much time watching. It is a sin Philip is unconscious of till the final pages of the novel. When the lie is revealed upon Kinraid's return to claim Sylvia for his bride, Philip is unwilling to remain and face the consequences of his sin (a necessary step toward expiation). He leaves, knowing only the necessity of getting "out of the sight and the knowledge of all who might hear what he had done, and point their fingers at him." (p. 386)

After he has been driven away by his sin, his duties and actions in Egypt are a kind of penance. He saves the life of the man he wronged -- Kinraid --, is horribly disfigured in an explosion on board his ship, returns to Monkshaven unrecognized, knowing he can never reveal to Sylvia his presence -- that revelation being what he most desires, as his interest in the Sir Guy / Phillis story

²⁷See p. 349.

²⁸See p. 360.

bears out.²⁹ The revelation finally comes as the result of Philip's saving his daughter Bella's life, and being himself fatally wounded in the process.

Only at this point, dying from the effects of his heroic rescue of Bella, does Philip recognize the nature of his sin. That recognition is powerfully done in one of the finest scenes of the Gaskell canon. As in North and South, the recognition is expressed in a Biblical idiom, and is insistently expressed:

"I did thee a cruel wrong," he said, at length.
 "I see it now. But I'm a dying man. I think that God will forgive me -- and I've sinned against Him; try, lassie -- try, my Sylvie -- will not thou forgive me?"
 (p. 495)

.....
 "Child," said he, once more. "I ha' made thee my idol; and if I could live my life o'er again I would love my God more, and thee less; and then I shouldn't ha' sinned this sin against thee. But speak one word of love to me -- one little word, that I may know I have thy pardon." (p. 495)

.....
 "I did thee a wrong. In my lying heart I forgot to do to thee as I would have had thee to do to me. And I judged Kinraid in my heart." (p. 496)

²⁹The similarity of the Sir Guy / Phillis and the Philip / Sylvia stories is extensive. Sir Guy goes to fight for his country, is away seven years, and when he returns, his wife Phillis "did not know the poor travel-worn hermit, who came daily to seek his dole of bread at her hands". In the end, as he lies dying, he sends for his wife by a "secret sign" known only to her. She returns to him "and they [have] many sweet and holy words together before he [gives] up the ghost, his head lying on her bosom." Philip "did not quite believe in the truth of [the tale]", but clearly he identifies with Sir Guy, and wishes for his life with Sylvia to be resolved in a similar way. (pp. 465-466)

"... But you and me have done wrong to each other; yet we can see now how we were led to it; we can pity and forgive one another. I'm getting low and faint, lassie; but thou must remember this: God knows more, and is more forgiving than either you to me, or me to you. I think and do believe as we shall meet together before His face; but then I shall ha' learnt to love thee second to Him; not first, as I have done here, upon the earth." (p. 496)

Now God comes first. Once aware of God's forgiveness of his sin of idolatry, Philip can seek Sylvia's forgiveness of his sin against her -- the lie.

Sylvia does forgive Philip, and that forgiveness marks the final stage in the development of Sylvia's character. She is the second centre of consciousness in Sylvia's Lovers, and like Philip, evokes a complicated response in the reader. The novel opens with the innocent Sylvia going to market to buy material for a cloak -- her greatest problem being the choice of red or grey. Having chosen red, she is likened later in the novel to "Little Red Riding Hood" (p. 87).

In presenting Sylvia's dealings with Kinraid, Gaskell repeatedly refers to "her very innocence" mirrored in her "pure eyes" (p. 184). However, like Philip, Sylvia can also display a baseness that is manifested in her apparent self-centredness. Immediately after Sylvia's engagement to Kinraid the specksioneer, Gaskell lets us know the young woman's feelings:

But as soon as [Kinraid and Daniel] had left the house, and she had covertly watched them up the brow in the field, she sate down to meditate and dream about her great happiness in being beloved by her hero, Charlie

Kinraid. No gloomy dread of his long summer's absence; no fear of the cold, glittering icebergs bearing mercilessly down on the Urania, nor shuddering anticipation of the dark waves of evil import, crossed her mind. He loved her, and that was enough. (p. 208)

Her reaction is understandable. Gaskell makes this self-concern seem fitting. But it is important that this aspect of her character be noted by the reader, for it plays an important part in Sylvia's growth in the novel.

That growth entails a movement away from a personal moral code often at odds with a Christian model of moral behaviour, and toward a more impersonal, Christian model of morality. The conflict is seen most clearly in Gaskell's treatment of the concept of forgiveness in Sylvia's Lovers. Sylvia lives by a very strict ethical standard, and is unable to forgive those who do not or cannot live up to it. After Kester berates Sylvia for having forgotten Kinraid, Sylvia retorts: "'If thou wasn't Kester, I'd niver forgive thee. Niver,' she added, with bitterness, as the words he had used recurred to her mind. 'It's in me to hate thee now, for saying what thou did'" (p. 307). She does forgive Kester, because of her love for that faithful family servant and friend. He has a special place in Sylvia's life. Her code of behaviour, however, is clearly expressed. Concerning Dick Simpson, whose evidence helped hang Daniel, Sylvia exclaims "'I'll niver forgive -- niver!'" (p. 319).

Philip, in discussing with Sylvia her refusal to forgive Simpson, presents the Christian view of the necessity of forgiveness. He states simply that, "'It's said in t'Bible, Sylvie, that we're to forgive.'" (p. 333) Set against this is Sylvia's more "selective" view of the topic:

".... I wonder, Philip, if thy feyther had done a kind deed -- and a right deed -- and a merciful deed -- and some one as he'd been good to, even i't'midst of his just anger, had gone and let on about him to th'judge, as was trying to hang him, -- and had gotten him hanged, ... I wonder if thy veins would run milk and water, so that thou could go and make friends, and speak soft wi'him as had caused thy feyther's death?" (pp. 332-333)

She repeatedly says "'It's not in me to forgive, -- I sometimes think it's not in me to forget.'" (p. 332, p. 356, p. 357)

Sylvia's standard of behaviour crumbles before the insistent Christian implications built into the novel. She decides that she will, if Philip asks again, go and tell Simpson that she forgives him, and faced with the task of educating her child, she wishes to understand more clearly the words of the Bible:

If any one would teach her to read! If any one would explain to her the hard words she heard in church or chapel, so that she might find out the meaning of sin, and godliness! -- words that had only passed over the surface of her mind till now! For her child's sake she should like to do the will of God, if she only knew what that was, and how to be worked out in her daily life. (p. 419)

By novel's end, Sylvia recognizes her refusal to forgive as wrong.

It is she who must seek forgiveness, first of God -- "'Will He iver

forgive me, think yo'? ... I think I shall go about among them as gnash their teeth for iver ...'" (p. 496), and finally, in her last words to her husband, of Philip -- "'Oh, wicked me! forgive me -- me -- Philip!'" (p. 500).

Sylvia's suffering is great in Sylvia's Lovers, and this suffering sets her apart from Gaskell's other heroines, and from the heroines of Jane Austen.³⁰ Mary Barton marries Jem and emigrates to Canada. Ruth, though she dies, is redeemed in her society's view -- she becomes a heroine in its eyes. Margaret marries Thornton, and refines his business. Sylvia, though, goes down in the history of Monkshaven as the wife who "lived in hard-hearted plenty not two good stone-throws away" from her husband who "died of starvation" (p. 502). Comparison with The Mill on the Floss is again useful, for Sylvia's suffering, though occasioned by different events, is of comparable intensity with Maggie's, which is only relieved by her death at the novel's close. Angus Easson argues that because Sylvia "suffers more than ordinary folk, and in suffering is set apart", she is a "tragic character".³¹ Gaskell, he continues, provides us

³⁰Austen's heroine who suffers most is Anne Elliot of Persuasion, but the suffering she experiences is finally mitigated by her marriage to Frederick Wentworth.

³¹Easson, p. 173.

with "a sense of Sylvia's difference in kind from others and of the dark end towards which her whole life tends."³²

While Mary Barton and North and South end in the traditional comic mode of marriage, and while Ruth dies a heroine, Sylvia lingers on a "pale, sad woman, allays dressed in black." (p. 502) A further difference is that Sylvia's Lovers is the first of Gaskell's novels to deal at length with marriage.. The marriage, and circumstances leading to it and resulting from it are often called tragic by the critics, a label that seems to me problematic.

In the period before the publication of Thomas Hardy's novels, Sylvia's Lovers and Wuthering Heights (1847) may be the two Victorian novels most often called tragedies. Critics cite the almost incessant suffering of the characters of Sylvia's Lovers as grounds for calling the novel tragic. In Angus Easson's view, "The greater capacity for suffering does distinguish Sylvia and Philip, is what makes them tragic"³³ In the view of Arthur Pollard, this suffering is tragic because "Mrs Gaskell knew the tragic essence, that men and women work in blindness to their own destruction, that neither fate nor character alone constitutes tragic inevitability but that both together work an end beyond all

³²Easson, p. 173.

³³Easson, p. 165.


contriving." ³⁴ Wendy Craik justifies her view that Sylvia's Lovers is "one of the greatest novels in the English tongue" ³⁵ by arguing along the same lines as Pollard. In her view, "Because those who work out their dooms in it have to face the great issues of human destiny, and because they are helplessly in the grip of their own natures and the times that breed them, it must be considered as tragedy." ³⁶

The evidence that each of these critics cites as grounds for his or her judgment of the novel as a tragedy is impeccable. It is a novel of intense suffering, where reason and impulse are set in opposition as possible sources of human behaviour, and where both lead to suffering. The examples of Hester and Sylvia are helpful in this connection, because Gaskell opposes them to each other in terms of principle and impulse. Hester is "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" (p. 488). Both characters, though, suffer immensely; Hester quietly, Sylvia spectacularly.

³⁴Pollard, pp. 198-199.

³⁵Craik, p. 140.

³⁶Craik, pp. 140-141.



Suffering is part of the ethos of Sylvia's Lovers. When, after his son's death early in the novel, sailor Darley's father asks, "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?" (p. 69), he voices a conceivable response to the events of the novel. Indeed, in this novel, the severest of consequences are bound to happen, as Sylvia recognizes in connection with her father's possible punishment. After Philip suggests that hanging is the worst, not the most likely punishment of Daniel, Sylvia responds, "'No,' ... as one without hope -- as if she were reading some dreadful doom in the tablets of the awful future. 'They'll hang him. Oh feyther! feyther!'" (p. 302). Further, citing the possible happiness that might have resulted from the marriage of Hester and Philip, Gaskell recognizes that the characters are faced with "the resisting forces which make all such harmony and delight impossible". (p. 395) Indeed, the recognition by Sylvia that "... if [Hester] an' [Philip] had but been married together, what a deal o' sorrow would ha' been spared" (p. 444), prompts her recognition of "how strange life was, and how love seemed to go all at cross purposes" (p. 445).

The essential sadness of life emphasized in the lives of Sylvia, Philip, and the others is shown, moreover, to be but an extension of suffering in history. Thus, Alice Rose's marriage with Jack Rose and the suffering it caused, is shown as parallel to the

possible marriage of Sylvia and Kinraid; it provides Philip with another reason to keep Sylvia and Kinraid apart. So too, the story told by Bell to her daughter Sylvia of Nancy Hartley, who went mad after being abandoned by her suitor, is meant to suggest a possible outcome of Kinraid's attention to Sylvia.³⁷ As I argued earlier, the Sir Guy / Phillis story which Philip reads has obvious parallels with Philip's and Sylvia's lives. Such continuity of human misery shows that Sylvia and Philip do not "stand out in the apparently repetitive pattern of existence" (p. 165) as Easson would have them do. Each of the characters of Sylvia's Lovers is of the pattern here, a pattern of sadness.

Their being of that pattern is an important consideration. Craik points out their helplessness, caught in this pattern (see her pp. 140-141 quoted above) and unable to foresee the implications and consequences of their actions. This seems proof that Sylvia's Lovers fails as tragedy. In his important article "On Translating Aristotle's Poetics", George Whalley shows that tragedy, even in Aristotle's terms, is not limited to a peculiar emphasis on action to the exclusion of character. Whalley argues concerning the tragic figure:

He knows that we can betray ourselves from within, that when we take the law into our own hands we pass from freedom to mechanism and cease to be human, having cut

³⁷See p. 187.

ourselves off from the law of our inner nature; and he knows that a man can know that he is doing this and yet do it, and watch himself doing it, capable even in his fascination of altering or reversing the action.³⁸

.....
 We could think of the tragic action as a sort of trajectory traced by a projectile, implying a certain amplitude, direction, velocity, momentum, target, and that in every moment of flight all these terms are implied; and the nature of the projectile matters very much, because it is a man who, being morally strong, makes choices, determines the flight; is not simply propelled, is not a mere victim. Aristotle ... is showing us the tragic action as though it were a pure abstract motion traced out with exquisite precision, a precision that is needed to impart the force of necessity to an action that can at no point be predicted for certain because it can at any moment be altered or deflected: it will at once feel both inevitable and free.³⁹

It is this sense of freedom that is lacking in Sylvia's Lovers.

Both Philip and Sylvia are carried along helplessly in the novel; the poles of human action defined in Sylvia's Lovers -- impulse and reason -- both lead to misery. They are, in Whalley's words, characters "simply propelled" by, rather than characters who "determin[e] the flight" of, events.⁴⁰ We never have a sense of

³⁸George Whalley, "On Translating Aristotle's Poetics (1970)", Studies in Literature and the Humanities: Innocence of Intent, eds. Brian Crick and John Ferns (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1985), p. 69.

³⁹Whalley, "On Translating Aristotle's Poetics (1970)", p. 70.

⁴⁰In this respect, Sylvia's Lovers is set apart from Eliot's The Mill on the Floss, where Maggie makes choices with an awareness of the consequences which will result from them.

Philip -- the character in the place of the "tragic hero" -- either as being conscious that his choice to lie must inevitably lead to dire consequences, or as being capable of setting things right in the novel by disclosing his sin. After all, he flees upon the disclosure of his lie. In Whalley's terms, the novel is not tragic. It is pathetic, in the strict, unpejorative sense of that word. It incites pity, but not fear.

Sylvia's Lovers is a new direction in Gaskell's fiction, but of course it cannot be divorced from her other novels. She continues to develop her art along the lines we have come to know. Kester, for instance, is another of the gallery of well-done servants like Dixon in North and South. His character is revealed through his language, which is alive with idiomatic expressions which involve Gaskell's finest use of dialect. He is a comic figure, commenting upon his hunger: "'for a'm like a pair o' bellowses 'wi' t' wind out; just two flat sides wi' nowt betwixt'" (p. 48), and he is friend and confidante to Sylvia, giving her sound advice concerning Philip and Kinraid: "'But dunnot go and marry a man as thou's noane taken wi', and another as is most like for t' be dead, but who, mebbe, is alive, havin' a pull on thy heart.'" (p. 325) Further in Daniel Robson we have a man in many ways similar to John Barton. Both men have a sense of being oppressed by those in power, both act against that power somewhat rashly, and both suffer immensely for their actions. Moreover, Gaskell's novels often

involve triangular relationships between the heroine and two men. In Mary Barton, Mary, Jem Wilson, and Henry Carson formed the triangle. In North and South, it is Margaret, Thornton, and Henry Lennox. In Sylvia's Lovers, of course, it is Sylvia, Philip, and Charlie Kinraid.

The similarities are not limited to the characters of the novels. Here, as in each of Gaskell's novels, there are many deaths; Sylvia loses mother, father, and husband in the course of the novel. And there is the dramatization of a nostalgic return home that has become standard in Gaskell's works. Esther's return to the Barton home in Mary Barton is part of this aspect of the novels, but more alike are Margaret's return to the Helstone parsonage and Sylvia's return to Haytersbank. In keeping with Gaskell's insistence upon change and the passing of time, both find their former homes changed by their new occupants; some of these changes are necessitated by the number of children now dwelling there.

Children are always looked upon as a blessing in Gaskell's works. In Sylvia's Lovers, as in Ruth, a baby in part provides its mother's means to moral redemption. We have already discussed Sylvia's feelings that she must learn the Bible better in order to educate her daughter in its teachings. Bella's presence, moreover, gives value and meaning to the otherwise barren marriage of Sylvia and Philip: "till [Sylvia] held her baby to her breast, she

bitterly wished that she were free from the duties and chains of matrimony. But the touch of its waxen fingers, the hold of its little mouth, made her relax into docility and gentleness." (pp. 374-375)

Despite Wright's claims that Gaskell attempts to separate "useful purpose from her creative imagination"⁴¹, the sense of Gaskell's judgment of a social problem remains in Sylvia's Lovers, removed by the passage of about sixty years, but none the less vehemently made. From early in the novel, the threat of the press-gang permeates. It helps set the somewhat menacing tone of the beginning. The anger Gaskell felt towards such impressment is clear:

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 panics 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

⁴¹Wright, p. 175.

houses and going into the streets, infested by press-gangs. (pp. 6-7)

The vehemence of her indignation is summed up in the final adjective "infested". Gaskell's judgment of the press-gangs is based characteristically on Christian principle. While the laws of man sanctioned their actions (the killing of Darley was legal), the laws of Christ, by implication, do not (the killing of Darley is sinful), and Gaskell presents a touching scene in which "the discord between the laws of man and the laws of Christ" (p. 67) is at the heart of Mr. Darley's grief over his son's death at the hands of the press-gang.

An affinity of views on life and art can be found in Eliot's praise of Sylvia's Lovers: "I hope 'Sylvia's Lovers' is finding a just appreciation. It seems to me of a high quality both in feeling and execution -- so far as I have read."⁴² Eliot's judgment of Sylvia's Lovers is telling in two ways. First, though it is Gaskell's least successful novel, the early part of it does live up to Eliot's high praise. Those portions of the novel which establish Sylvia's family and homelife as having a great bearing upon Sylvia's character are beautifully achieved. Second, it seems clear from the judgment in her letter that Eliot cannot have read to the novel's unsuccessful final volume, to Philip's departure from Monkshaven and his subsequent melodramatic adventures during the Siege of Acre and

⁴²Eliot Letters, Vol. IV, p. 79.

after. Once again, then, Eliot reveals her affinity for fiction (and biography) centred upon the social and family relationships of a central character, and the possibility of the tragic within the confines of everyday life.

Gaskell's dramatization of Sylvia's family life in Sylvia's Lovers presented Eliot with another example of how the failures in family relationships make for the weaknesses of Gaskell's protagonists. Sylvia's familial relationships are afforded a dramatic prominence roughly equal to her more celebrated love affairs. And such domestic life is much more important than the love affairs in the portion of the novel we are sure Eliot read.⁴³

The appeal of a thoroughly realized family ethos to Eliot is clear. In Sylvia's Lovers, one of Gaskell's major concerns is to reveal how Sylvia's upbringing, in part, determines her character. Almost from the start of the novel, Gaskell makes clear the strength and quality of the influence of Daniel and Bel Robson upon their daughter Sylvia: "'Ay! but mother's words are scarce, and weigh heavy. Feyther's like me, and we talk a deal o' rubble; but mother's words are liker to hewn stone. She puts a deal o' meaning in 'em.'" (p. 12) Bell's silent moral earnestness is suggested here, as is Daniel's rather more exuberant behaviour. For the

⁴³See Eliot Letters, Vol. II, p. 86.

remainder of the novel's first half, Gaskell attempts to reveal the ways in which Sylvia's assessment is accurate.

It becomes clear in the course of the novel that Sylvia is very much her father's daughter:

In fact, Daniel was very like a child in all the parts of his character. He was strongly affected by whatever was present, and apt to forget the absent. He acted on impulse, and too often had reason to be sorry for it; but he hated his sorrow too much to let it teach him wisdom for the future. With all his many faults, however, he had something in him which made him be dearly loved, both by the daughter whom he indulged, and the wife who was in fact superior to him, but whom he imagined that he ruled with a wise and absolute sway. (p. 247)

Daniel's preeminence in the household, coupled with his impulsive and child-like behaviour, suggests the kind of influence he must have had upon his only child. Indeed, Gaskell makes it clear that, although they are in many ways his superiors, Daniel's influence does rule both wife and daughter (it is not just his imagining) with absolute sway:

Although Daniel himself was unreasoning, hasty, impulsive -- in a word, often thinking and acting very foolishly -- yet, somehow, either from some quality in his character, or from the loyalty of nature in those with whom he had to deal in his every-day life, he had made his place and position clear as the arbiter and law-giver of his household. On his decision, as that of husband, father, master, perhaps superior natures waited. So now that he was gone and had left them in such strange new circumstances so suddenly, it seemed as though neither Bell nor Sylvia knew exactly what to do when their grief was spent, so much had every household action and plan been regulated by the thought of him. (p. 281)

Again, the behavioural traits are characteristic of Sylvia as well as of Daniel, and his still childish impulsiveness together with his dominance in the household helps enforce his influence upon his daughter's character.⁴⁴

Although authorial comment is limited in Sylvia's Lovers because of the historical mode, one is always aware of someone telling the story, and the narrator of Gaskell's novel is similar to that of Eliot's Middlemarch. In Sylvia's Lovers, unlike in Mary Barton, Ruth, and even North and South, the teller is not usually recognizably Gaskell herself. When we hear the author commenting directly on the action, it is usually an ironic observation on the nature of the reader's society in comparison with that of Monkshaven in the late eighteenth century. Similarly, Eliot's narrator often remarks ironically upon the differences between "then" and "now". I quote two instances at length, because Gaskell develops her irony in a leisurely manner:

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

⁴⁴Perhaps the distinction between the characters of Daniel and Bell is made most clear in their reactions to Sylvia's rather sudden physical maturity. It makes Bell "uncomfortable". She "apprehended the dangers ... by a mental process more akin to intuition than reason" (p. 121). Daniel's reaction is quite the opposite: "But it was quite different with her husband. To his looser, less-restrained mind, it was agreeable to hear of, and still more to see, the attention which his daughter's beauty received. He felt it as reflecting consequence on himself;" (p. 122).

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. (p. 68)

.....
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 Wesleyans, 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. (p. 74)

Such comments are different in degree from Austen's epigrammatic ironic observations, but in their recognition and judgment of the complacency of her society, they are not different in kind.

However, they are much more closely related, as suggested earlier, to the narration of Eliot's Middlemarch:

When George the Fourth was still reigning over the privacies of Windsor, when the Duke of Wellington was Prime Minister, and Mr Vincy was Mayor of the old corporation in Middlemarch, Mrs Casaubon, born Dorothea Brooke, had taken her wedding journey to Rome. In those days the world in general was more ignorant of good and evil by forty years than it is at present. Travellers did not often carry full information on Christian art either in their heads or their pockets; and even the most brilliant English critic of the day mistook the flower-flushed tomb of the ascended Virgin for an ornamental vase due to the painter's fancy. Romanticism, which has helped to fill some dull blanks with love and knowledge, had not yet penetrated the times with its leaven and entered into everybody's food; it was fermenting still as a distinguishable vigorous enthusiasm in certain long-haired German artists at Rome, and the youth of other nations who worked or idled near them were sometimes caught in the spreading movement.⁴⁵

The ironic comparison of the past being "more ignorant of good and evil by forty years", and the present's rather indiscriminate Romanticism is very Gaskell-like.

Because we are constantly aware of the story teller, she attains the status of a character in Sylvia's Lovers. Since the story teller functions as a character (as opposed to an omniscient third-person narrator), we excuse Gaskell's refusal to narrate some crucial events in the novel through the teller. For example, her description of Sylvia's decision not to commit suicide, "No one can

⁴⁵Eliot, Middlemarch, pp. 139-140.

tell what changed her course; perhaps the thought of her sucking child; perhaps her mother; perhaps an angel of God; no one on earth knows, but as she ran along the quay-side she all at once turned up an entry, and through an open door" (p. 378), does not strike us as an evasion of a narrator's responsibility, as it would have in Gaskell's earlier novels. In Sylvia's Lovers, however, the reader often feels that too much is narrated. The final third of the novel -- the description of the siege at Acre -- is an unfortunate venture, into melodrama. As Wright correctly points out, after Sylvia's discovery of Philip's lie, "the novel turns almost completely into melodrama and sentiment as events are forced to a conclusion."⁴⁶ It is this forced quality that is most apparent. The reader witnesses the incredible coincidence of Philip's rescuing of Kinraid, the person whom, apart from Sylvia, he has most wronged. His heroism here is more than a match for any of Kinraid's heroic actions in the novel. His horrible disfigurement in an explosion, his time at St. Sepulchre, and his long tortuous journey home are all of interest in the final section of the novel. But they add nothing substantial to it. Philip's view of his lie does not fundamentally change during his time away from Sylvia. He looks to the Sir Guy / Phillis story as a parallel to his own, and, rather than confessing his sin and

⁴⁶Wright, p. 178.

seeking absolution, Philip wishes only to see Sylvia again, to the exclusion of all else:

He felt as if he were called to Monkshaven, wanted at Monkshaven, and to Monkshaven he resolved to go; although when his reason overtook his feeling, he knew perfectly how unwise it was to leave a home of peace and tranquility and surrounding friendliness, to go to a place where nothing but want and wretchedness awaited him unless he made himself known; and if he did, a deeper want, a more woeful wretchedness, would in all probability be his portion. (p. 466)

The proper recognition of the nature of his sin, of the idolatry of which he was guilty, comes only at the novel's end, as noted. What is of interest in this section of the novel, however, is not Philip's development, but, rather, Sylvia's growing recognition of the love Philip felt for her, and her increasing awareness of how improper is her resolution never to forgive. Hearing of Philip's bravery in rescuing Kinraid occasions part of this development in Sylvia, her recognition of the quality of his character. The reader may wish that, like Sylvia's, his or her knowledge of Philip's actions at Acre were limited to hearsay, that the delineation of this development of Sylvia's regard for Philip was not repeatedly interrupted by the shift back to Philip's adventures.

Gaskell had had the novel's final volume in mind almost from the start. She remarks to George Smith in 1859 that Sylvia's Lovers was already "very clear in [her] head"⁴⁷, and by February 1, 1862

⁴⁷Letters, Letter 451d, p. 595.

she writes to W. S. Williams, who had read the first two volumes:

"I cannot help liking it myself, but that may be because firstly I have taken great pains with it, and secondly I know the end; and cannot help thinking that if you have read it, and don't like it at

present, you will when it is finished and you see how all works up to the crisis. But then authors are so easily deceived about their own things!"⁴⁸ Gaskell was deceived about the quality of the ending of Sylvia's Lovers. She was not to make the same mistake in her final, and finest, novel Wives and Daughters -- in which she returned to the Austen tradition and composed her version of and development from Jane Austen's Mansfield Park.

⁴⁸Letters, Letter 499, p. 675.

v

MANSFIELD PARK (1814) AND WIVES AND DAUGHTERS (1866)

Sylvia's Lovers represented a change of direction for Elizabeth Gaskell. Mary Barton, though viewed by its author as a "tragic poem",¹ is a social problem novel essentially comic in structure, ending with the happy marriage of the title character. Similarly North and South is a comic novel; the comparison of it with Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice is revealing in this connection. Ruth is a moral fable, which explores the social and ethical complexities of the fallen woman issue. In Sylvia's Lovers, Gaskell abandons both the comic and the social problem modes to write what some critics call a tragic novel.² While Sylvia's Lovers is not a tragedy in the literary sense, it does represent a shift from a sense of the possibility of happiness in the early novels, to a sombre sense of inevitable sadness and loss.

Furthermore, Sylvia's Lovers represents a change for Gaskell in another sense. This is her first historical novel. It deals

¹Letters, Letter 39, p. 70 and Letter 42, p. 74.

²See Craik, pp. 140-141; Easson, p. 165, p. 173; Pollard, pp. 198-199.

with a set of actual events which took place in Whitby during Napoleon's time and revolves around the actions of the press-gangs. Clearly, Gaskell's interest in the north of England and its history was awakened during the extensive research undertaken to prepare her excellent The Life of Charlotte Brontë. Sylvia's Lovers owes, I think, both its Yorkshire setting and its atmosphere of emotional fervor to the influence of Charlotte Brontë.

If the spirit of Charlotte Brontë can be said to pervade Sylvia's Lovers, surely the spirit of Jane Austen pervades Wives and Daughters to an extent unknown in Gaskell's earlier novels. In noting the development from the former to the latter, Pollard describes the movement as being from "a story of primal passions" to "a very different and quieter tale whose delicacy and subtlety invites occasional comparison with Jane Austen."³ In Wives and Daughters we return to the comic from the historical mode, to the ironic from the pathetic. The invitation to comparisons with Jane Austen, though, is more than occasional, as will be demonstrated later.

This development from Sylvia's Lovers to Wives and Daughters is perhaps unexpected, but we can account for it. In many ways, Sylvia's Lovers was not a departure at all. Like it, each of her novels had been profoundly Christian in moral conception. John

³Pollard, p. 195.

Barton's descent in Mary Barton is from a character trying to live the gospel, to one whose experiences in life cause him to give up the attempt:

"All along it came natural to love folk, though now I am what I am. I think one time I could e'en have loved the masters if they'd ha letten me; that was in my Gospel-days, afore my child died o' hunger. I was tore in two often-times, between my sorrow for poor suffering folk, and my trying to love them as caused their sufferings (to my mind).

"At last I gave it up in despair, trying to make folks' actions square wi' th' Bible; and I thought I'd no longer labour at following th' Bible myself. I've said all this afore, may be. But from that time I've dropped down, down; -- down." (pp. 440-441)

In Ruth, Bellingham is portrayed as physically coming between Ruth and the Church both before his seduction of her early in the novel, and later during his attempt at reconciliation with her. Further, Leonard, their son, is viewed as part of the cause of Ruth's moral redemption. As Benson considers, Leonard is "'God's messenger to lead her back to Him.... Teach her (and God will teach her, if man does not come between) to reverence her child; and this revering will shut out sin, -- will be purification.'" (p. 118) In addition, Benson's lie to protect Ruth is viewed as being faithless, a calculating of consequences rather than acting truthfully and trusting to God. In North and South a lie is again central, and while Mr. Hale's moving of his family to Milton-Northern is precipitated by a crisis in his Christian faith, Margaret's lie

concerning her presence at the train station is condemned in explicitly Christian terms.

Gaskell's increasing reliance upon dialogue to further the plots of her novels and to reveal their characters, and the corresponding decrease in her reliance upon explicit authorial comment was continued in Sylvia's Lovers. Despite the final portion of Sylvia's Lovers -- which in my estimation is a lapse -- Gaskell had become increasingly adept at constructing her novels, and the plots were better conceived as she grew as a novelist. North and South and Sylvia's Lovers display none of the flaws in their plots that plagued both Mary Barton and Ruth.

Wives and Daughters continues Gaskell's developing capacity as novelist in each of these areas. Such growth can be characterized as an increasing adherence to, yet development of, the Austen tradition of fiction, epitomized by an assured trust in Christianity, by a reliance upon dialogue as character revelation and plot motivation, by the use of irony as a means of criticism, and by impeccably constructed comic plots. Three of the four novels preceding Wives and Daughters are essentially comic in structure. However, it is to Cranford, perhaps Gaskell's most popular work⁴, that we must look to find the comic lightness we associate with each

⁴A. B. Hopkins estimated that by 1947 there were "about one hundred and seventy editions and reprints of Cranford". Hopkins, p. 102.

of the novels of Jane Austen, notwithstanding North and South's similarity to Pride and Prejudice.

Cranford is usually viewed as the most Austen-like of Gaskell's works. But the similarity is of a particular and limited sort. It is a work, as J. G. Sharps argues, in which "there is no complex plot Indeed what remains in the mind is not a consecutive narrative, but rather a series of sayings and situations, related by virtue of being Cranfordesque."⁵ In this connection, it is of course quite unlike the novels of Jane Austen.

Where Cranford does resemble the world of Jane Austen's novels is in, as Arthur Pollard argues, "the Cranford world of lavender and lace, of quarter-hour calls and the right way to address the widows of Scottish peers. It is a world that in its setting and superficial appearance is not far distant from that of Jane Austen."⁶ Indeed, in her biography of Gaskell, A. B. Hopkins points to the similarity of "Knutsford-Cranford, to the Highbury and Longbourne of Jane Austen"⁷

The world presented by Gaskell in Cranford is very like the world of the novels of Austen. But more important, the presentation

⁵Sharps, p. 128. For a corroborating judgement, see Hopkins, p. 18.

⁶Pollard, p. 63.

⁷Hopkins, p. 25.

of, and attitude towards, that world on the part of both authors is essentially satiric. It is in this connection that Winifred Gérin relates the two novelists, arguing that "with Cranford [Gaskell] achieved a conciseness of exact expression, a selectivity of detail, that sharpened the wit to a point that invites comparison with Jane Austen." 8

Her "sharpened" wit can be double-edged, sometimes recalling, for example, Austen's treatment of Mr. Bennet in Pride and Prejudice -- her laughing with him as well as at him. Compare the following from Cranford with Austen's presentation of Mr. Bennet:

But to return to Miss Matty. It was really very pleasant to see how her unselfishness and simple sense of justice called out the same good qualities in others. She never seemed to think any one would impose upon her, because she would be so grieved to do it to them. I have heard her put a stop to the asseverations of the man who brought her coals, by quietly saying, 'I am sure you would be sorry to bring me wrong weight;' and if the coals were short measure that time, I don't believe they ever were again. People would have felt as much ashamed of presuming on her good faith as they would have done on that of a child. But my father says, "such simplicity might be very well in Cranford, but would never do in the world." And I fancy the world must be very bad, for with all my father's suspicion of every one with whom he has dealings, and in spite of all his many precautions, he

⁸Winifred Gérin, Elizabeth Gaskell: A Biography (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1976), p. 124.

lost upwards of a thousand pounds by roguery only last year.⁹

Gaskell's irony is quite complex. Here the narrator, Mary Smith, relates the anecdote in a matter-of-fact way. The reader condescendingly registers, with Mary's father, the naïveté of Miss Matty. But clearly Gaskell values Miss Matty's trusting, forthright demeanor, and as Mary continues, the realization that such trust and honesty are lacking in the world outside Cranford is forcefully brought home. Such criticism without direct authorial comment is unlike Mary Barton, but very much of a piece with Wives and Daughters.

The echoes of Cranford in Wives and Daughters are numerous. The former's two Miss Jenkynses resemble the two Miss Brownings: both are the daughters of the late vicar, and both exist primarily in an all female society whose main activity is gossip. J. G. Sharps points out several instances of their "Cranfordesque conduct"¹⁰: Lady Harriet's surprise visit, "the delicacy of the Hollingford ladies in declining to call a spade a spade"¹¹ -- for

⁹Elizabeth Gaskell, "Cranford" in Cranford/Cousin Phillis (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1976), p. 201. Subsequent references to the story are from this edition and are followed by the page number in parentheses.

¹⁰See Sharps, p. 473.

¹¹Elizabeth Gaskell, Wives and Daughters (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1969), p. 474. Subsequent references to this novel are from this edition and are followed by the page number in parentheses.

example, lies must be called "tally diddles" (p. 560). A more revealing Cranfordism occurs in Chapter 38:

Mrs Goodenough had had a serious illness; and the little society at Hollingford did not care to meet while one of their habitual set was scarcely out of danger. So there had been very little visiting; and though Miss Browning said that the absence of the temptations of society was very agreeable to cultivated minds, after the dissipations of the previous autumn, when there were parties every week to welcome Mr Preston, yet Miss Phoebe let out in confidence that she and her sister had fallen into the habit of going to bed at nine o'clock, for they found cribbage night after night, from five o'clock till ten, rather too much of a good thing. To tell the truth, that winter, if peaceful, was monotonous in Hollingford; and the whole circle of gentility there was delighted to be stirred up in March by the intelligence that Mr Kirkpatrick, the newly-made Q.C., was coming on a visit for a couple of days to his sister-in-law, Mrs Gibson. Mrs Goodenough's room was the very centre of gossip; gossip had been her daily bread through her life, gossip was meat and wine to her now. (pp. 462-463)

The gentle irony, the sense of an existence slightly distanced from what one would call life, the living vicariously, and the nostalgia which the gossiping occasions in Mrs. Goodenough as the scene continues, all typify Cranford, but form only one aspect of Hollingford.

It is significant that Gaskell returned to the Cranford milieu in Wives and Daughters. During the composition of Wives and Daughters Gaskell wrote to John Ruskin: "about 'Cranford' I am so much pleased you like it. It is the only one of my own books that I can read again; -- but whenever I am ailing or ill, I take 'Cranford' and -- I was going to say, enjoy it! (but that would not

be pretty!) laugh over it afresh!"¹² Her comfort with the Cranford ethos is evident, and after the controversy occasioned by her Life of Charlotte Brontë it is understandable that Gaskell would return to home ground: Knutsford and its literary image Cranford.

When J. G. Sharps comments similarly on this "return" to Cranford, he asks "What could be more natural, ... than that in middle-age she should again return to 'Cranford', to recreate in fiction what could seldom be enjoyed in reality?"¹³ But the suggestion that the world of Wives and Daughters is somehow other than "reality" belies the novel and Sharps's view of it as the novel in which Gaskell, more than in any other, "exhibits a social panorama, enabling her readers to comprehend what it was like to live in a country town during the second quarter of the nineteenth century."¹⁴

Gaskell developed greatly as a novelist from the time of Cranford (1853), and her return to that milieu in no way suggests a turning back for the novelist. That Gaskell had advanced as an artist is revealed in the limited role to which the Cranfordesque elements of Wives and Daughters are relegated. Furthermore, although Cranford is Gaskell's work most often mentioned as being

¹²Letters, Letter 562, p. 747.

¹³Sharps, p. 492.

¹⁴Sharps, p. 477.

Austen-like, the similarities are largely limited to a use of irony common to both novelists. More significant are the ways Cranford is unlike the fiction of Jane Austen. In fact, Gaskell's Cranford seems fundamentally different from Austen's novels in the way each novelist envisions the relationship of public custom and private desire. Angus Easson argues that, in Cranford, "Human nature, feeling, often clashes with custom and gains in the confrontation, the ladies usually being at their best when they 'hypocritically' renege on what they declare are sacred principles -- a marked difference from Jane Austen, with whom Gaskell is sometimes carelessly compared, where identification of inner and outer is essential for probity of character."¹⁵ As I argued in the Introduction, a basic aspect of Austen's fiction is her solid foundation in Augustan principles concerning the obligations placed upon the individual in a social setting to conform to a set of well-defined rules of conduct. Cranford, as Easson points out, implicitly argues against such a position. It suggests that such social values are as anachronistic as is the town of Cranford in comparison with the large neighbouring city of Drumble: "the last gigot, the last tight and scanty petticoat in wear in England, was seen in Cranford -- and seen without a smile."¹⁶

¹⁵Easson, p. 103.

¹⁶Gaskell, "Cranford", p. 40.

With Molly Gibson as well, Gaskell returns to familiar ground. She is the last in a line of quite similar heroines in Gaskell's fiction. All of the heroines of her novels are possessed of beauty and innocence, and by an honesty and integrity which are challenged in the course of each novel. Mary Barton must decide upon whether or not to reveal her father as the murderer of Henry Carson. Ruth is repeatedly challenged, both by Bellingham, and by Mr. Bradshaw. Margaret Thornton's lie concerning her presence at the station is the central plot complication in North and South, and Sylvia Robson's promise never to forgive is challenged in Sylvia's Lovers. However, though beautiful, innocent and honest like the other heroines, Molly differs from them in that she does not fall. The gossip spread by the Cranfordesque ladies of Hollingford accuses Molly of improper behaviour, but unlike the other heroines, she does nothing wrong.

In previous chapters Gaskell's increasing reliance upon multiple narrative points of view has been noted. Sylvia's Lovers, for example, is divided into sections told from Philip's point of view, and sections told from Sylvia's. Wives and Daughters represents a change in this technique. Virtually the entire novel is told by an omniscient third person narrator who is closely allied with Molly, in a way that reminds one of the narrator's connection with Elizabeth in Pride and Prejudice and Emma in Emma. Wendy Craik observes, "The rich traditional combination in a heroine of faults

or illusions with the potential for good, whose greatest example is probably Jane Austen's Emma, is here refined and subtilized by division. In Molly Gibson, Elizabeth Gaskell charts the growth of wisdom and maturity, without any attending faults or follies." ¹⁷

The "faults or follies" usually found in the heroine are in Wives and Daughters found in Cynthia Kirkpatrick and are part of the "division" of which Craik writes above. Cynthia is a felicitous creation on Gaskell's part; she allows for the presentation of a much broader range of human characteristics in the centre of the novel. The effect is as if there are two heroines in Wives and Daughters, heroines quite unlike one another. Cynthia, along with her mother, has another important function in the novel as well; together they fulfil the stepsister and stepmother components of the Cinderella archetype -- an archetype that seems to me central in both Austen and Gaskell and about which I will say more later.

Once again in Wives and Daughters, the family unit is seen as central in the formation of character. As the Barton family disintegrates, both Mary and John decline morally. Bellingham's seducing of Ruth, and Ruth's fall, are both traced by Gaskell to flaws in their upbringing -- in Bellingham's case being spoiled by a too lenient mother, in the orphaned Ruth's, her lack of parental guidance. But in Ruth, the sanctity of parent-child relationships

¹⁷Craik, p. 312.

is stressed in Ruth's "redemption", which is, in part, occasioned by her selfless love of her child Leonard. Margaret Hale's moral failure in North and South, the lie, is viewed as a failure to adhere to specific religious principles, principles some of which her father has been shown as unable to adhere to, and principles which her brother, in Margaret's view, abandons in his conversion to Roman Catholicism. Furthermore, the lie occurs immediately following the death of her mother, and the dissolution of the family unit as Margaret had known it. Sylvia Robson's character flaws, too, are presented by Gaskell as being formed in part by the effects of a violently passionate, over-indulgent father. In Edgar Wright's view, "If we look back from Molly Gibson down the line of Gaskell's heroines, we can see that they have a family resemblance in temperament. Differences in character emerge as to a great extent due to differences in environment and upbringing, while misfortunes are directly related to failure in one or both."¹⁸ Molly, alone of Gaskell's heroines, does not fail. In Wright's view, this is because "Molly is par excellence the product of stable surroundings, a secure and affectionate home and a sound upbringing in a well-ordered community."¹⁹

¹⁸Wright, p. 223.

¹⁹Wright, p. 223.

The "stable surroundings" mentioned are clearly Molly's important relationship with her father, Dr. Gibson. In Wives and Daughters, Gaskell re-examines the principal attachment in her fiction, the bond between daughter and father.

Molly's relationship with her father invites comparison with Elizabeth's relationship with her sarcastic father in Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice. Such comparisons with Austen's novel can be taken further. The scheming, egotistical, somewhat vulgar wife and the intelligent though sarcastic husband closely relate Mrs. and Dr. Gibson to Mrs. and Mr. Bennet. It is a comparison that has been noted by several commentators on Wives and Daughters. In Edgar Wright's view, "the shades of Mr. and Mrs. Bennett (sic) seem to nod behind Mr. and Mrs. Gibson."²⁰ Arthur Pollard's view that "Gibson would doubtless have been a match for Mr Bennet in Pride and Prejudice"²¹ suggests a similar relationship between Wives and Daughters and Pride and Prejudice.

There are numerous parallels in Wives and Daughters with other novels of Jane Austen as well. The prominent part a secret engagement plays in Sense and Sensibility is repeated in Wives and Daughters. Furthermore, the contrasting of "sense" and "sensibility" in the sisters Elinor and Marianne in Sense and

²⁰Wright, pp. 215-216.

²¹Pollard, p. 231.

Sensibility resembles the contrast between the stepsisters Molly and Cynthia. The elder Miss Browning in Wives and Daughters is reminiscent of Miss Bates of Emma. But if my thesis about Gaskell's place in the Austen tradition of the novel is justified, more is required than simply pointing to similarities of character and relationships. There is a much broader relationship, though one more difficult to demonstrate, between the two novelists, and it is in this relationship that Gaskell's similarities to Jane Austen are most clearly revealed.

Probably the most widely known attempt to fit Wives and Daughters into the Austen tradition is Laurence Lerner's introduction to the Penguin edition of the novel. In Lerner's view, Wives and Daughters "raises Elizabeth Gaskell to the level when we can compare her with Jane Austen or George Eliot. And the comparison is worth making, for the novel recalls them both. It looks back to Jane Austen, the great writer of serious comedy, and forward to George Eliot, the great writer of witty tragedy, and seems to bridge the gap between them."²²

Mansfield Park may well be a source of inspiration for Wives and Daughters, but the comparison of these two novels has largely been ignored in commentaries on Gaskell. Of all the major critical

²²Laurence Lerner, "Introduction", in Elizabeth Gaskell, Wives and Daughters (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1969), p. 7.

works Arthur Pollard's is the only one that notes the possible points of comparison. Of Wives and Daughters he argues, "we encounter a situation not unlike that which Jane Austen presents in Mansfield Park where Fanny loves apparently hopelessly as Edmund Bertram and Mary Crawford draw nearer together"²³. Pollard continues by pointing out a similarity between the persecution of Molly by Mrs. Gibson and the persecution of Fanny by Mrs. Norris. These points of comparison are important, but Pollard does not explore them in any detail. Graham Handley, in his pamphlet on Sylvia's Lovers, chooses Mansfield Park as the Jane Austen novel that best illustrates the tradition into which both Wives and Daughters and Middlemarch fit: "To read Wives and Daughters is to find oneself, at this moment of critical time, somewhere between Mansfield Park and Middlemarch in the evolution of the English novel. This is not merely historical placing; in spirit and performance it is with the great rather than the good novels, and it underlines that progression."²⁴ This is an important critical observation. But again, nothing further is made of the connection between the novels Handley makes here. A detailed examination will reveal first that Wives and Daughters does indeed develop ideas

²³Pollard, pp. 231-232.

²⁴Graham Handley, Sylvia's Lovers: Notes on English Literature (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 12.

which Jane Austen explores in Mansfield Park, and second, that it helps make possible the writing of Middlemarch. The second issue will be considered in Chapter Six.

As Pollard indicates, there are important similarities between Mansfield Park and Wives and Daughters -- similarities closer and more numerous than previously noted. Fanny Price, the quiet, earnest, moral centre of Mansfield Park suggests a comparison with Gaskell's character, Molly Gibson. However, Molly is much more lively than Fanny, but just as earnest and just as much the moral centre of the novel in which she figures. Mary Crawford clearly suggests Gaskell's Cynthia Kirkpatrick, her moral laxity, her socially accomplished behaviour, as well as the complex determination of the origins of such a character. Furthermore, both Mary and Cynthia attract and almost catch the men best suited for Fanny and Molly. Thus, the central dramatic concern of both novels is the love triangle in which Fanny, Edmund Bertram and Mary have their parallels in Molly, Roger Hamley, and Cynthia.

In fact, the correspondences between Austen's Edmund Bertram and Gaskell's Roger Hamley go further and are more complex than their existence in a similar dramatic situation suggests. They are similar in their staunch characters, in their positions as moral guardians of Fanny and Molly respectively, and in the way they come to replace the respective father-figures of Fanny and Molly, Sir Thomas and Mr. Gibson.

Mrs. Norris, who is the chief tormentor of Fanny in Mansfield Park, and toward whom Austen's most bitter irony is directed, is shaped as Mrs. Gibson, Molly's nemesis in many ways, in Wives and Daughters. Clare Gibson is more sympathetically treated by Gaskell, however, as her character, like that of her daughter Cynthia, is shown as partly the result of a life immersed in a stultifying cash nexus.²⁵ Further, Henry Crawford's presence in Mansfield Park, partly as the occasion of Fanny's falling out with Sir Thomas, finds an echo in Mr. Preston's supposed illicit liaison with Molly, which occasions a falling out, however temporary, between Molly and Dr. Gibson. Finally, Gaskell's portrayal of the Hamley brothers, Roger and Osborne, is strongly reminiscent of Austen's Edmund and his older brother, Tom. Both Osborne and Tom show a proclivity to gambling, the theatre -- London life in general -- and are set against their more upright and reliable younger brothers. As well, severe physical illness strikes both older brothers, and both authors use the illnesses similarly to reveal the mercenary nature of some of the characters in their two novels.

The list is admittedly cumbersome, but it serves to point out how pervasively the plot and characters of Mansfield Park find parallels in Wives and Daughters, and makes it natural to wonder

²⁵In her more sympathetic approach towards the targets of her irony, Gaskell is comparable with George Eliot.

whether, indeed, Gaskell had read Mansfield Park and had wished to explore some of the artistic possibilities it raised.

Elizabeth Gaskell never mentions Jane Austen in her letters. There is no first hand indication that Gaskell read Austen's novels, making the argument for direct influence in this connection a more difficult one to prove than in the case of Gaskell's and George Eliot's influence on each other. Furthermore, the differences between the two novels are substantial, making the claim of direct influence more difficult to substantiate.

Of course, Austen's popularity was, by Gaskell's time, very well established. In an early short story, "Mr. Harrison's Confessions" Gaskell mentions three novelists' works -- Austen, Dickens and Thackeray -- as belonging to the narrator.²⁶ Moreover, Austen's works were of artistic interest to Victorian novelists in general and to her friend, the subject of her biography, Charlotte Brontë in particular. The latter's correspondence with George Henry Lewes is well known and shows a concern with Austen's novels that is likely to have stimulated Elizabeth Gaskell's interest, even if she had not read Jane Austen before.

²⁶It is with these novelists specifically that De Wit Sanders ranks Gaskell. Wives and Daughters "lifts her to a level with Jane Austen, Thackeray, Dickens, and the other great novelists of the century." Sanders, p. 139.

Edgar Wright's cautiously worded conjecture that, "It is difficult not to believe that Jane Austen was an influence on Mrs. Gaskell"²⁷ expresses my judgment as well, based on a close comparison of Mansfield Park and Wives and Daughters. The similarities are clear; the differences are of two sorts: revisions of Austen's novel which amount to Gaskell's criticism, whether deliberate or fortuitous, of Mansfield Park, and characteristics of Wives and Daughters that represent habits of mind demonstrated elsewhere in Gaskell's canon. Such differences are quite consistent with the results we would expect if Gaskell consciously set herself to explore the possibilities suggested to her by Mansfield Park. The issue is one of considerable interest, though, without further documentary evidence, likely to remain a matter of conjecture only. However, one can confidently conjecture a direct relationship of the two novels in question. Richard D. Altick, in The Art of Literary Research, deals specifically with the critical dilemma presented in making such a judgment of influence -- strikingly similar novels, but no direct reference by the later novelist to the earlier novel:

The assumption of direct borrowing ordinarily can be well sustained if the internal evidence is sufficiently large and striking to rule out casual resemblance and

²⁷Wright, p. 215.

if external evidence makes it sufficiently probable that the one author knew the other's works.²⁸

It is highly likely that Gaskell read Austen, and several parallels between the novels have already been discussed. The question remaining for this chapter is the degree of similarity between the two novels in question.

The concentration in the commentaries on Wives and Daughters has been largely on the excellence of Mrs. Gibson and her daughter, Cynthia as literary creations. Molly, however, is the novel's central character, the one character with an interest in (and who also unites) all of the novel's major actions: the love triangle, the Gibson marriage, the Hamleys, and the Cynthia-Preston intrigue. Each of these actions, in turn, reveals Molly's maturity and development in the course of the novel. (Such development is, among the characters here, the province of Molly and Roger alone.) This development runs parallel to Molly's progress to love.

In such a general outline, the affinity of Molly with Fanny Price in Mansfield Park is clear. Austen's novel concerns Fanny's development and maturity, and charts the progress of her love for Edmund (while, rather abruptly, abandoning the reciprocal charting of Edmund's progress to love of Fanny). But it is by no means immediately apparent upon reading the two novels that these two

²⁸Richard D. Altick, The Art of Literary Research (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1981), p. 105.

characters share more than a similarity of situation. The novels begin with Fanny and Molly as children. Fanny is, early on, plain, shy, and awkward:

Fanny Price was at this time just ten years old, and though there might not be much in her first appearance to captivate, there was, at least, nothing to disgust her relations. She was small of her age, with no glow of complexion, nor any other striking beauty; exceedingly timid and shy and shrinking from notice; but her air, though awkward, was not vulgar, her voice was sweet, and when she spoke, her countenance was pretty.²⁹

Fanny never really gets beyond her awkward shyness. Molly, on the other hand, while clearly afraid and intimidated during her accidentally prolonged stay at the Towers, is normally neither plain, shy, nor awkward:

Though her papa laughed at her, quizzed her, joked at her, in a way which the Miss Brownings called 'really cruel' to each other when they were quite alone, Molly took her little griefs and pleasures and poured them into her papa's ears sooner even than into Betty's, that kind-hearted termagant. The child grew to understand her father well, and the two had the most delightful intercourse together -- half banter, half seriousness, but altogether confidential friendship. (pp. 63-64)

It is this relationship that underlies the fundamentally happy childhood of Molly. Her love for her father provides strength

²⁹Jane Austen, Mansfield Park (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1966), p. 49. Subsequent references to this novel are from this edition and are followed by the page number in parentheses.

and security, the strength and security of the forged chain that she imaginatively conjures up as joining them:

"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." (p. 58)

At the start of Mansfield Park, Fanny enjoys no such security. She has been separated from her parents and from her home, and even the insensitive and selfish Mrs. Norris sees this as, in part, mitigating Fanny's supposedly poor behaviour upon her arrival at Mansfield:

"I wish there may not be a little sulkiness of temper -- her poor mother had a good deal; but we must make allowances for such a child -- and I do not know that her being sorry to leave her home is really against her, for, with all its faults, it was her home, and she cannot as yet understand how much she has changed for the better; but then there is moderation in all things." (p. 50)

Mansfield Park is a novel clearly patterned after Cinderella, with Fanny in the principal role. Cousins Maria and Julia Bertram act here as the evil stepsisters, while Mrs. Norris fills the role of the wicked stepmother, and Edmund plays Prince Charming. This pattern, which pervaded Jane Austen's novels, as D.

W. Harding so tellingly demonstrates,³⁰ is also adopted by Elizabeth Gaskell in Wives and Daughters. From the opening paragraph of the novel we are clearly invited into a nursery-rhyme world by Mrs. Gaskell's elaborate "once upon a time":

To begin with the old rigmarole of childhood. In a country there was a shire, and in that shire there was a town, and in that town there was a house, and in that house there was a room, and in that room there was a bed, and in that bed there lay a little girl; wide awake and longing to get up, but not daring to do so for fear of the unseen power in the next room -- a certain Betty, whose slumbers must not be disturbed until six o'clock struck, when she wakened of herself "as sure as clockwork", and left the household very little peace afterwards. It was a June morning, and early as it was, the room was full of sunny warmth and light. (p. 35)

Given the expectations encouraged by this opening, the reader expects that Molly's nemesis in the story will be the crotchety old servant Betty who, as the female guardian of Molly, takes the stepmother role.

This expectation is thwarted, however, when Molly visits the Towers. There, in commonplace fairy tale fashion, she falls asleep (Sleeping Beauty) missing her ride home, only to be awakened by the kind-sounding but gently evil Clare who, in fact, will become Molly's stepmother to fulfil the demands of the Cinderella plot.

³⁰D. W. Harding, "Regulated Hatred" in Scrutiny, VIII, 4 (March, 1940), 346-362. See especially pp. 355-362.

Clare is "gently" evil, for surely her behaviour is not immediately threatening to Molly in any way, and Clare is treated comically by Gaskell. Clare arrives with a tray of food to help revive Molly:

"Look how kind Lady Cuxhaven is," said she who was called Clare. "She chose you out this little lunch herself; and now you must try and eat it, and you'll be quite right when you've had some food, darling. -- You need not stop, Edwards; I will bring the tray back with me."

There was some bread, and some cold chicken, and some jelly, and a glass of wine, and a bottle of sparkling water, and a bunch of grapes. Molly put out her trembling little hand for the water; but she was too faint to hold it. Clare put it to her mouth, and she took a long draught and was refreshed. But she could not eat; she tried, but she could not; her headache was too bad. (p. 47)

.....
 "You see, I don't know what to do with you here if you don't eat enough to enable you to walk home. And I've been out for these three hours trapesing about the grounds till I'm as tired as can be, and missed my lunch and all." Then, as if a new idea had struck her, she said: "You lie back in that seat for a few minutes, and try to eat the bunch of grapes, and I'll wait for you, and just be eating a mouthful meanwhile. You are sure you don't want this chicken?"

Molly did as she was bid, and leant back, picking languidly at the grapes, and watching the good appetite with which the lady ate up the chicken and jelly, and drank the glass of wine. She was so pretty and so graceful in her deep mourning, that even her hurry in eating, as if she was afraid of someone coming to surprise her in the act, did not keep her little observer from admiring her in all she did. (p. 48)

Clare's guilt-hurried meal suggests to the reader something of her character, a suggestion corroborated by her complicity in letting Lady Cuxhaven think Molly had eaten the food on the tray. Surely

Molly's response -- she "could not help wishing that her pretty companion would have told Lady Cuxhaven that she herself had helped to finish up the ample luncheon; but no such idea seemed to come into her mind" -- places her morally above her future stepmother.

The fairy tale elements of the novel continue throughout this section. Lord Cumnor treats Molly's visit to the Towers as if it were a fairy tale:

"Oh, ho!" said he. "Are you the little girl who has been sleeping in my bed?"

He imitated the deep voice of the fabulous bear, who asks this question of the little child in the story; but Molly had never read the "Three Bears", and fancied that his anger was real; she trembled a little, and drew nearer to the kind lady who had beckoned her as to a refuge. Lord Cumnor was very fond of getting hold of what he fancied was a joke, and working his idea threadbare; so all the time the ladies were in the room he kept on his running fire at Molly, alluding to the Sleeping Beauty, the Seven Sleepers, and any other famous sleeper that came into his head. He had no idea of the misery his jokes were to the sensitive girl, who already thought herself a miserable sinner for having slept on, when she ought to have been awake. (p. 53)

Lord Cumnor's language, though, is frightening to Molly. Thus, Gaskell shows the overt fairy tale elements of her own novel as inappropriate from this point on. She modifies the Cinderella archetype that is so strongly present in Mansfield Park. Molly is still a Cinderella, though accompanied by a not-so-wicked stepmother, and a not-so-wicked stepsister. Although it is the characters in the stepmother and stepsister roles in each novel who act as challenges to the moral character of Molly and Fanny, the

pattern is transposed into a gentler, less archetypal form in Wives and Daughters.

Molly's rescue from the Towers by her father largely signals the end of the fairy tale mode in this novel. However, the moral qualities the fairy tale mode establishes in the "Cinderella" character of both novels are identical. Fanny early on proved to be an exacting judge of moral character and of how flaws in character are subtly revealed through one's words and actions:

"...But was there nothing in her conversation that struck you Fanny, as not quite right?"

"Oh! yes, she ought not to have spoken of her uncle as she did. I was quite astonished. An uncle with whom she has been living so many years, and who, whatever his faults may be, is so very fond of her brother, treating him, they say, quite like a son. I could not have believed it!"

"I thought you would be struck. It was very wrong -- very indecorous."

"And very ungrateful I think." (p. 94)

As this conversation continues, it becomes clear that Edmund is unable to maintain such high principles; his judgment of Mary is clouded by his infatuation with her.

Fanny's moral strenuousness is exercised disinterestedly. She is otherwise timid, but even faced with the strong encouragement to take part in the theatricals at Mansfield Park (an encouragement given double strength from her enjoyment of the acting), she staunchly refuses to take part (and again, Fanny's moral sense shines; Edmund's is dulled):

Fanny looked on and listened, not unamused to observe the selfishness which, more or less disguised, seemed to govern them all, and wondering how it would end. For her own gratification she could have wished that something might be acted, for she had never seen even half a play, but every thing of higher consequence was against it. (p. 156)

Molly's moral sense, even as a child, is similarly acute. Her sense of justice is made clear in her reaction against Betty's berating of Miss Eyre:

...Miss Eyre's only defence came from the quarter whence it might least have been expected -- from her pupil; on whose fancied behalf, as an oppressed little personage, Betty always based her attacks. But very early in the day Molly perceived their injustice, and soon afterwards she began to respect Miss Eyre for her silent endurance of what evidently gave her far more pain than Betty imagined....Betty would offer Molly all sorts of small temptations to neglect Miss Eyre's wishes; Molly steadily resisted, and plodded away at her task of sewing or her difficult sum. Betty made cumbrous jokes at Miss Eyre's expense; Molly looked up with the utmost gravity, as if requesting the explanation of an unintelligible speech....Occasionally Betty lost her temper entirely, and spoke impertinently to Miss Eyre; but when this had been done in Molly's defence, the girl flew out in such a violent passion of words in defence of her silent trembling governess, that even Betty herself was daunted, though she chose to take the child's anger as a good joke, and tried to persuade Miss Eyre herself to join in her amusement. (pp. 66-67)

It should be recalled that it is against a rather intimidating Betty, "whose slumbers must not be disturbed until six o'clock struck, when she wakened of herself 'as sure as clockwork', and left the household very little peace afterwards" (p. 35), that Molly judges her governess, much as Fanny judges the actions of her cousins' participation in the theatricals.

Furthermore, just as Fanny must uphold her moral standards against those in a more secure social position than herself, so must Molly. Her judgment of Lady Harriet's name-calling of the Miss Brownings reveals Molly nervously, but steadfastly doing so:

"I shall come some day soon, and bring you a load of Miss Edgeworth's tales, and make further acquaintance with Pecksy and Flapsy."

"No, don't, please." said Molly, taking hold of her, to detain her. "You must not come -- indeed you must not."

"Why not?"

"Because I would rather not -- because I think that I ought not to have any one coming to see me who laughs at the friends I am staying with, and calls them names." Molly's heart beat very fast, but she meant every word that she said. (p. 199)

Molly and Fanny display an essential identity in their expressions of their feelings concerning the relationships of Roger and Cynthia, and Edmund and Mary respectively. Molly unconsciously feels a jealousy of Cynthia as does Fanny toward Mary. Moreover Molly's evaluation of the relationship, noting Roger's apparent blindness --

...Mrs Gibson was constantly making projects for throwing Roger and Cynthia together, with so evident a betrayal of her wish to bring about an engagement, that Molly chafed at the net spread so evidently, and at Roger's blindness in coming so willingly to be entrapped. She forgot his previous willingness, his former evidences of manly fondness for the beautiful Cynthia; she only saw plots of which he was the victim, and Cynthia the conscious if passive bait....(p. 390)--

mirrors exactly Fanny's feelings concerning the start of Edmund's relationship with Mary:

She was a little surprised that he could spend so many hours with Miss Crawford, and not see more of the sort of fault which he had already observed, and of which she was almost always reminded by a something of the same nature whenever she was in her company; but so it was. (p. 96)

Both heroines see themselves, and are seen by the novelists and readers, as fundamentally different from their rivals. Fanny's responsiveness to nature, coupled with her Wordsworthian wish "to share the transport", clearly sets her above Mary:

[Fanny's] thoughts and reflections were habitually her best companions; and in observing the appearance of the country, the bearings of the roads, the difference of soil, the state of the harvest, the cottages, the cattle, the children, she found entertainment that could only have been heightened by having Edmund to speak to of what she felt. That was the only point of resemblance between her and the lady who sat by her; in every thing but a value for Edmund, Miss Crawford was very unlike her. She had none of Fanny's delicacy of taste, of mind, of feeling; she saw nature, inanimate nature, with little observation; her attention was all for men and women, her talents for the light and lively. (p. 110)

Gaskell's statement of the similar distinction between Molly and Cynthia recalls Austen in more than its resemblance to Mansfield Park. In a letter, Austen had judged Pride and Prejudice as "too light, and bright, and sparkling"³¹, stating her intention to write a more serious novel in Mansfield Park. Gaskell's comparison of Molly and Cynthia recalls both Mansfield Park and that letter, and points to an identity of interest between Gaskell and Austen:

³¹Jane Austen, Selected Letters, R. W. Chapman ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), Letter 77, p. 134.

Molly struck [Mr Kirkpatrick] as a delicate-looking girl, who might be very pretty if she had a greater look of health and animation: indeed, looking at her critically, there were beautiful points about her face -- long soft grey eyes, black curling eyelashes, rarely-showing dimples, perfect teeth; but there was a languor over all, a slow depression of manner, which contrasted unfavourably with the brightly-coloured Cynthia, sparkling, quick, graceful, and witty. (p. 467)

In Mansfield Park, Fanny is better than the more physically appealing Mary Crawford. Wives and Daughters makes essentially the same judgment by awarding Roger to Molly instead of to Cynthia.

Such a judgment leads to a consideration of the extent to which Gaskell might have taken Mary Crawford as a model for Cynthia Kirkpatrick. Of course, superficially they are quite similar characters, possessed of beauty and liveliness, of a gift for behaving well and easily in social situations, and of a tendency to act coquettishly. But their affinity runs much deeper. Gaskell's description of Cynthia's attractiveness places her as a consummate actress: "Perhaps it 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; 'being all things to all men'. At any rate, Molly might soon have been aware that Cynthia was not remarkable for unflinching morality" (pp. 254-255). It is this aspect of her character that is most emphasized by Gaskell. She later describes Cynthia's behaviour to Roger in terms that similarly emphasize her acting:

The grave eyes that the latter raised when she had to be presented to Roger had a sort of childlike innocence and wonder about them, which did not quite belong to Cynthia's character. She put on her armour of magic that evening -- involuntarily as she always did; but, on the other side she could not help trying her power on strangers. (p. 277)

Later, Gaskell emphasizes that "with all Cynthia's apparent frankness, there were certain limits beyond which her confidence did not go; where her reserve began, and her real self was shrouded in mystery." (p. 461)

The similarities of Cynthia and Mary Crawford are clear. She first comes to prominence in Mansfield Park during the planning of the theatricals, the time she later nostalgically looks back upon as her happiest. Austen carefully draws a portrait of a chameleon-like character, one who changes opinions to suit the situation just as that reptile changes colours to blend into the environment. Thus, Mary can argue at one moment (concerning the convention of a girl's coming "out" socially when she comes of age): "They sometimes pass in such very little time from reserve to quite the opposite -- to confidence! That is the faulty part of the present system" (p. 81), and then contradict herself at the next: "It is much worse to have girls not out, give themselves the same airs and take the same liberties as if they were, which I have seen done. That is worse than anything -- quite disgusting!" (p. 83).

One of the most telling distinctions between Fanny and Mary is the distinction between one who holds absolute moral values, and

one who is a moral relativist. Mary's chameleon nature suggests such relativism, and it is found as well in her counterpart in Wives and Daughters. Cynthia's statement: "'I almost hate the idea of Roger judging me by his own standard, which wasn't made for me, and graciously forgiving me at last'" (p. 601), emphasizes the distinction between absolute and relative moral values.

Such relativism is the way of the social world of both novels, and fittingly their authors' judgments of Mary and Cynthia are similar. Mary, clearly, is neither wholly good nor wholly bad. Austen, in describing her goodness, immediately undercuts our idea of its being an absolute judgment of her, claiming that Mary "was almost purely governed" by "really good feelings" (p. 170 my underlining). Cynthia as well exists somewhere between virtue and vice:

"Now I won't have you classing Roger Hamley and Mr Preston together in the same sentence. One was as much too bad for me as the other is too good. Now I hope that man in the garden is the juste milieu -- I'm that myself, for I don't think I'm vicious, and I know I'm not virtuous." (p. 657)

The difference between the two is that Austen judges Mary for us; Cynthia's judgment comes by way of self-analysis, the accuracy of which argues, in part at least, for a favourable judgment of her character on the reader's part.

In this connection, Angus Easson argues that judgment of Cynthia "is through herself; it is one of the subtleties of the

writing that the author never condemns, hardly comments upon her nature." ³² Surely that is one of the ways Gaskell's novel can be seen as a criticism of Austen's. Some of the values represented by Cynthia -- her liveliness, her social charm -- are upheld by Gaskell as desirable. Austen, however, in her harsh judgment of Mary, who is summarily dismissed from Mansfield Park in the guise of a siren-like temptress, dismisses these characteristics with her.

Both Gaskell and Austen recognize the importance of society in the formation of moral character. Cynthia is repeatedly described in Wives and Daughters as a product of her upbringing: "Oh, Molly, you didn't know how I was neglected just at a time when I wanted friends most. Mamma does not know it; it is not in her to know what I might have been if I had only fallen into wise, good hands" (p. 486). ³³ In almost identical terms, Austen describes the formation of Mary's character: "[Edmund and Fanny] continued to talk of Miss Crawford alone, and how she had attached him, and how delightful nature had made her, and how excellent she would have been, had she fallen into good hands earlier" (p. 445). But there is a difference in the conceptions described above. In Austen's view, characters have innate tendencies. Fanny, William and Susan are better than their other brothers and sisters, and are better

³²Easson, p. 192.

³³See also p. 518, and p. 602.

than their environment,³ and Mary, too, is made "delightful" by nature. In Gaskell's view, however, characters are almost solely formed by their environment. Cynthia describes her nature, her "angry heart", as environmentally determined -- "Oh, sir, I think if I had been differently brought up, I shouldn't have had the sore angry heart I have" (p. 602) -- a judgment with which Gaskell surely agrees.

Many readers have reacted against the severe judgments of Mansfield Park. Gaskell's treatment of a similar situation marks a significant difference, a conscious or perhaps unwitting "criticism" of her predecessor's moral views. We have come to expect Gaskell to be tolerant and understanding of people. Very few of her major characters -- perhaps only Henry Carson in Mary Barton,³⁴ and Bellingham in Ruth -- are judged as harshly as Austen judges Mary Crawford. The comparison of the treatment of Cynthia and Mary is an indication of a change in the habits of mind of the English from the comfortable moral severity of the late eighteenth century, to the moral upheaval caused by Darwinism, and the decline of the tradition of Christian faith and an increasing tolerance for different views

³⁴Note the similarity of name and function of Henry Carson in Mary Barton, and Henry Crawford in Mansfield Park -- perhaps a further indication of Gaskell's knowledge of Austen's novel.

of life that developed during the nineteenth century. Gaskell's implicit criticism of Austen reveals such a development.³⁵

In one important sense, Mary Crawford is closer to Mrs. Gibson than to Cynthia, and it is in this connection that Gaskell approaches the severity of Austen's judgment of Mary. Mary's mercenary reaction to news of the severity of Tom Bertram's illness --

"...To have such a fine young man cut off in the flower of his days, is most melancholy. Poor Sir Thomas will feel it dreadfully. I really am quite agitated on the subject. Fanny, Fanny, I see you smile, and look cunning, but upon my honour, I never bribed a physician in my life. Poor young man! -- If he is to die, there will be two poor young men less in the world; and with a fearless face and bold voice would I say to any one, that wealth and consequence could fall into no hands more deserving of them...." (p. 423) --

looks forward to Mrs. Gibson's reaction to the news of Osborne's heart condition, information she receives eavesdropping on her husband's consultation with Dr. Nicholls. She is questioned by her husband:

"The point I want to be clear about is this. Did you or did you not alter your behaviour to Roger in consequence of what you overheard of my professional conversation with Dr Nicholls? Have you not favoured his suit to Cynthia since then, on the understanding gathered from that conversation that he stood a good chance of inheriting Hamley?"

³⁵In addition, Gaskell's tolerance suggests a temperament which differs from that of Jane Austen. Gaskell is largely without Austen's "regulated hatred".

"I suppose I have," said she sulkily. "And if I did, I can't see any harm in it, that I should be questioned as if I were in a witness-box. He was in love with Cynthia long before that conversation, and she liked him so much. It was not for me to cross the path of true love. I can't see how you would have a mother show her love for her child if she may not turn accidental circumstances to her advantage...." (p. 428)

In both cases, the author's judgment is one of unqualified moral condemnation.

Cynthia's engagement to Roger is a parallel to Mary's hoped-for engagement to Edmund; thus Roger and Edmund from the start occupy basically similar positions in the novels. Edmund's blindness to Mary's moral laxity is apparent in Austen's ironic observation of Edmund "looking after Mary in an ecstasy of admiration of all her many virtues, from her obliging manners down to her light and graceful tread." (p. 139) Under the spell of Mary's presence, virtues have become for Edmund "obliging manners" and "graceful tread". Gaskell's treatment of Roger's comparable blindness toward Cynthia is much more straightforward:

It was only the thought of Cynthia that threw Roger off his balance. A strong man in everything else, about her he was as a child. He knew that he could not marry and retain his Fellowship; his intention was to hold himself loose from any employment or profession until he had found one to his mind, so there was no immediate prospect -- no prospect for many years, indeed, that he would be able to marry. Yet he went on seeking Cynthia's sweet company, listening to the music of her voice, basking in her sunshine, and feeding his passion in every possible way, just like an unreasoning child. He knew that it was folly -- and yet he did it.... (p. 391)

Whereas the irony of Austen's observation suggests that Edmund is unaware of his blindness concerning Mary's true character, Gaskell makes it clear that Roger is fully aware of his blindness, but is compelled to ignore it in his desire for Cynthia.

A central irony in both novels is that the Edmund-Roger figure acts as moral guide and guardian of the Fanny-Molly character. Austen stresses this aspect of Edmund's relationship with Fanny repeatedly; the following serves as a representative example:

He knew her to be clever, to have quick apprehension as well as good sense, and a fondness for reading, which, properly directed, must be an education in itself. Miss Lee taught her French, and heard her read the daily portion of History; but he recommended the books which charmed her leisure hours, he encouraged her taste, and corrected her judgment; he made reading useful by talking to her of what she read, and heightened its attraction by judicious praise. (p. 57)

Roger's relationship with Molly in this connection is similar though perhaps less apparent. During the most important and distressing crisis up to that point in Molly's life, her father's remarriage, it is Roger who comforts Molly and provides her with the right outlook. He tells her a tale resembling Molly's present dilemma, which shows the possibility of a happy ending. Molly asks:

"How was it?" she sighed out at last.

"Harriet thought of her father's happiness before she thought of her own," Roger answered, with something of severe brevity. Molly needed the bracing. She began to cry again a little.

"He must believe that it is. Whatever you fancy, give him a chance." (p. 151)

Like Edmund, Roger provides Molly with books for her education (in this case, fittingly, books of natural science).

Their function as moral guardians is, in Edmund's case, connected with his intention of being ordained. We learn of Roger that he at one time intended to enter the clergy as well: "Roger was to be a clergyman; steady, slow Roger was just fitted for that" (p. 297). Times, though, had changed from the time of Austen. Now, Roger represents these traditional virtues, but they find their expression partly in his work as a scientist.

The focus of interest in each novel is the love triangle. Of course, conceptions of what constitutes human love and marriage are central in each novel. As Wright argues concerning Wives and Daughters: "Mrs. Gaskell distinguishes clearly between the emotions of love and the state of marriage, and Wives and Daughters is at least as much about the latter as the former."³⁶ Indeed, marriages and engagements are at the heart of the various crises in the plot of Wives and Daughters. Mr. Gibson's marriage to Clare occasions the first of these. Subsequently, Cynthia's engagements to Roger, Preston, and Henderson complicate the lives of each of the Gibsons. The novel's conclusion was clearly intended to revolve around the engagement and marriage of Molly and Roger.

³⁶Wright, p. 220.

The similarities in this connection with Mansfield Park are again striking. Cynthia's relationship with Roger parallels Mary Crawford's with Edmund. Cynthia's other engagements find their predecessors in Maria Bertram's relationships with Rushworth, whom she marries, and Henry Crawford, with whom she runs away. It seems likely that Gaskell had Henry Crawford in mind when she penned the following description of Preston: "He taught young ladies to play billiards on a wet day, or went in for the game in serious earnest when required. He knew half the private theatrical plays off by heart, and was invaluable in arranging impromptu charades and tableaux." (p. 188) Preston even flirts with Molly much as Henry Crawford does with Fanny. Molly's assumed final relationship with Roger is the parallel of Fanny's unseen relationship with Edmund -- as Austen abandons the fleshing-out of that relationship.

The love triangle functions in Mansfield Park to condemn Mary and the values she comes to represent. Austen (and Fanny as well) is much harsher on Mary than Gaskell (and Molly) is on Cynthia, for condemning Cynthia is not the primary function of Gaskell's novel. Thus, the tone of severity of Mansfield Park, which is caused by the fact that its primary concern is condemnation of characters who are morally lax (Fanny's final relationship with Edmund, as I argued earlier, is not in the novel) is not present in Wives and Daughters, which was intended to work its way to the happy union of Molly and Roger. Because Cynthia is never fully condemned

in the novel, neither can Roger be for his infatuation with her. In Mansfield Park, however, Edmund clearly is meant as an example of a particular sort of shortcoming -- a biased moral sensibility.

Gaskell, then, softens the edges of Mansfield Park. In her novel's judgment Cynthia is a better person than a Mary Crawford. Likewise, Molly is more appealing than Fanny. Roger is blameless, as Gaskell refuses to pass a negative judgment on her "Edmund" character. Furthermore, there is no Maria Bertram-like adultery in Wives and Daughters. That is softened in the form of Cynthia's various simultaneous engagements. But all this is not necessarily to say that Gaskell's novel is less rigorously moral than Austen's, nor that Gaskell has a less strict moral outlook. For her code of conduct is severe. Take, for example, Dr. Gibson's absolute horror and outrage at Mrs. Gibson's eavesdropping. The fineness of Gaskell's moral sense is apparent here:

"Don't you know that all professional conversations are confidential? That it would be the most dishonourable thing possible for me to betray secrets which I learn in the exercise of my profession?"

"Yes, of course, you."

"Well! and are not you and I one in all these respects? You cannot do a dishonourable act without my being inculpated in the disgrace. If it would be a deep disgrace for me to betray a professional secret, what would it be for me to trade on that knowledge?"
(p. 429)

Like Austen, Gaskell saw herself as being at odds with the morality of some members of her society -- those whose gossip nearly ruins Molly's reputation. Gaskell, however, was no radical. Like Austen,

Gaskell had to live within the very society she was criticizing. Therefore, in the above-named incident, Molly has her reputation saved by Lady Harriet, a respected member of society, by her simply being seen with Molly in public. Gaskell thus brings the best of her society to bear upon the worst.

In Mansfield Park there is a similar valuation of the best of society, represented from the start by Sir Thomas Bertram and Mansfield Park. It is by attending to what Fanny is sure would be his view of the theatricals that she is enabled to make the correct judgment in refusing the pleading entreaties of her cousins to act. Just as her resolve is about to be broken, Sir Thomas arrives home to save her. In this connection, Wives and Daughters differs from Mansfield Park only in that the centre of values is more clearly located by Gaskell in the middle class. For surely Mr. Gibson is the centre of the novel at the start, when he "saves" Molly from Lord Cumnor -- the Sir Thomas Bertram of Gaskell's novel.

In Mansfield Park the values Sir Thomas represents are shown to fail Fanny when he argues that she should accept Henry Crawford's proposal, and that her refusal shows her to be "self-willed, obstinate, selfish and ungrateful" (p. 319). The reader is, of course, aware of Henry's game, and Sir Thomas himself, Austen hints, is well aware of Henry's moral laxity:

A day, and a very early day, was actually fixed for the Crawfords' departure; and Sir Thomas thought it might be as well to make one more effort for the young man

before he left Mansfield, that all his professions and vows of unshaken attachment might have as much hope to sustain them as possible.

Sir Thomas was most cordially anxious for the perfection of Mr Crawford's character in that point. He wished him to be a model of constancy; and fancied the best means of effecting it would be by not trying him too long. (p. 342)

For Sir Thomas, it is Henry's wealth and social position that are his primary recommendation. In his view, a consideration of these comes before a consideration of desire:

"The advantage or disadvantage of your family -- of your parents -- your brothers and sisters -- never seems to have had a moment's share in your thoughts on this occasion. How they might be benefitted, how they must rejoice in such an establishment for you -- is nothing to you. You think only of yourself; and because you do not feel for Mr Crawford exactly what a young, heated fancy imagines to be necessary for happiness, you resolve to refuse him at once, without wishing even for a little time to consider of it -- a little more time for cool consideration, and for really examining your own inclinations -- and are, in a wild fit of folly, throwing away from you such an opportunity of being settled in life, eligibly, honourably, nobly settled, as will, probably, never occur to you again." (pp. 318-319)

From this point on in Mansfield Park, the reader never feels as if Sir Thomas is redeemed, for the cruelty of his treatment of Fanny is irredeemable. Edmund comes to replace Sir Thomas as the centre of moral knowledge in Fanny's life.

In much the same way, Dr. Gibson fails Molly by entering into an ill-conceived marriage meant to benefit Molly. From this point on in the novel, Molly's relationship with Dr. Gibson decays. The language he uses to describe marriage emphasizes his separation

from Molly: "...he forced himself to dwell on the positive advantages that had accrued to him and his through his marriage. He had obtained an unexceptionable chaperone, if not a tender mother, for his little girl; a skilful manager of his previous disorderly household...." (pp. 364-365) It is the language of acquirement and business: "advantages", "accrued", "obtained", "manager". It is this view of marriage that puzzles Molly, as it removes all moral considerations from the conception of marriage. Her confusion, and her resultant alienation from Dr. Gibson, are made explicit by Gaskell:

Something or other had happened just before she left home that made her begin wondering how far it was right, for the sake of domestic peace, to pass over without comment the little deviations from right that people perceive in those whom they live with. Or whether, as they are placed in families for distinct purposes, not by chance merely, there are not duties involved in this aspect of their lot in life -- whether by continually passing over failings, their own standard is not lowered -- the practical application of these thoughts being a dismal sort of perplexity on Molly's part as to whether her father was quite aware of her stepmother's perpetual lapses from truth; and whether his blindness was wilful or not. (p. 416)

Just as Edmund comes to replace Sir Thomas for Fanny in this connection, so Roger replaces Dr. Gibson for Molly, by counselling her before Dr. Gibson's marriage, and by falling in love with and marrying her.

There remains one final aspect of the two novels to be compared. Both Austen and Gaskell reveal a fundamental trust in the

complete intelligibility of the language both of narration and dialogue. George Whalley voices a view of language that is applicable here:

...behind every utterance there is a person. It is not simply the words that mean; it is a person who means, and what that person means, intends to convey or declare or conceal and for what reason, is physically imprinted into the structure and texture of his language, unless he is using language very badly. The "imprint" of intention is not seldom at variance with the content of the words; to the perceptive ear an utterance becomes not only a declaration by the writer but also a disclosure of the writer.³⁷

Such a conception of language is shared by both Austen and Gaskell in their employment of a complex irony that reveals a character by what he or she says. The narrator's assessment of Mrs. Gibson's language in Wives and Daughters -- "her own words so seldom expressed her meaning, or if they did, she held to the opinions so loosely, that she had no idea but that it was the same with other people" (p. 44) -- is shown repeatedly to be accurate. Indeed,

her words were always like ready-made clothes, and never fitted individual thoughts. Anybody might have used them, and, with a change of proper names, they might have served to describe any ball. She repeatedly used the same language in speaking about it, till Molly knew the sentences and their sequence even to irritation. (p. 349)

³⁷George Whalley, "'Scholarship', 'Research', and 'The Pursuit of Truth'", in Studies in Literature and the Humanities: Innocence of Intent (Kingston and Montreal: McGill - Queen's University Press, 1985), p. 82.

The narrator's observation of, and Molly's response to, Mrs. Gibson's language evinces the norm -- where language expresses the person's thoughts and being. Honesty in language reveals honesty in person.

In Mrs. Gibson, Gaskell shows that misuse of language reveals a flawed personality. Austen, in her presentation of Mrs. Norris, presents essentially the same view. Mrs. Norris remarks concerning having Fanny removed to Mansfield Park in order to lessen the financial burden on the Price family:

"Is not she a sister's child? and could I bear to see her want, while I had a bit of bread to give her? My dear Sir Thomas, with all my faults I have a warm heart: and, poor as I am, would rather deny myself the necessaries of life, than do an ungenerous thing." (p. 45)

Austen's comment on this succinctly places Mrs. Norris for the reader:

Sir Thomas was fully resolved to be the real and consistent patron of the selected child, and Mrs. Norris had not the least intention of being at any expense whatever in her maintenance. As far as walking, talking, and contriving reached, she was thoroughly benevolent, and nobody knew better how to dictate liberality to others: but her love of money was equal to her love of directing, and she knew quite as well how to save her own as to spend that of her friends. (p. 45)

The ironic mode employed in defining Mrs. Norris by her way of speaking demands that the reader be able to see through the apparent opaqueness of Mrs. Norris's use of language. However, the language is only apparently opaque. Austen reveals the inability of language

to deceive, however hard one may try to make it opaque. Austen is aware that all language is transparent, as she reveals in her description of Fanny, and of Edmund's reaction to her: "Fanny's feelings on the occasion were such as she believed herself incapable of expressing; but her countenance and a few artless words fully conveyed all their gratitude and delight, and her cousin began to find her an interesting object. He talked to her more, and from all that she said, was convinced of her having an affectionate heart, and a strong desire of doing right...." (p. 53)

Wives and Daughters is Gaskell's finest novel. It derives its greatness in part from the same moral concerns as Mansfield Park. Gaskell's criticism of the views implicit in Austen's novel, though, is incisive and thorough-going. It reveals the movement of mind from Regency England to Victorian England, from strictly-followed Church of England moral precepts to the more lenient views of the dissenting Unitarians, from agricultural to industrial, from pre-Reform Bill elitism to a country in which the centre of power and interest was increasingly located in the middle class.

VI

WIVES AND DAUGHTERS (1866) AND MIDDLEMARCH (1871-72)

While most of the major commentaries on Gaskell's fiction cite the early novels of George Eliot as having an influence upon Gaskell's later work, few have recognized Gaskell's central place between the works of Austen and Eliot, and even fewer have recognized that such a placing suggests Gaskell as an important influence upon the novels of Eliot. Graham Handley, in his pamphlet on Sylvia's Lovers, argues for such a view of the literary relationship of the three novelists. He states initially that "Mrs. Gaskell appears to occupy a midway position between the intellectualism of George Eliot on the one hand and the febrile imaginations of the Brontës on the other".¹ He alters slightly this view of Gaskell's place in the tradition of the English novel, however, when he comes to consider Wives and Daughters as intermediate between Austen and Eliot "in the evolution of the English novel."²

¹Handley, p. 7.

²Handley, p. 12.

Laurence Lerner³ and Handley suggest that the connection between the fiction of Austen and Gaskell can be extended to include that of George Eliot. Moreover, according to the usual view of literary influence, whereby the earlier novels affect the later, Gaskell's novels should logically have been influential on Eliot's. Such a view is contrary to that commonly espoused by critics of Victorian fiction, which sees influence as all running in one direction -- from Eliot to Gaskell. As argued in my chapter on Sylvia's Lovers, this consensus stems both from the similarities of this novel to Scenes of Clerical Life, Adam Bede and The Mill on the Floss, and from Gaskell's letters praising Eliot's works (most of these date from the time of her composition of Sylvia's Lovers).

I pointed to Eliot's interest in Gaskell's novels in the preceding chapters of this thesis. That interest is revealed most strongly, perhaps, in a series of letters from April to June of 1857. Gaskell's The Life of Charlotte Brontë occupied a central place in Eliot's thoughts during this period. Her praise of Gaskell's work is very warmly expressed in a letter of April 16:

But there is one new book we have been enjoying -- and so, I hope, have you. The "Life of Charlotte Brontë"! Deeply affecting throughout: -- in the early part romantic, poetic as one of her own novels; in the later years tragic, especially to those who know what sickness is. Mrs. Gaskell has done her work admirably,

³See p. 1 of this thesis.

both in the industry and care with which she has presented it.⁴

Eliot's interest in the biography continues through the end of June at least. In early June she recommends the reading of it to a friend, "Do -- it will deeply interest you."⁵ At the end of the month she is reading (rereading?) The Life of Charlotte Brontë aloud during her journey to the Scilly Isles.⁶

Eliot's high valuation of The Life of Charlotte Brontë is perhaps best shown in her defense of the work against such charges as those brought against it by John Blackwood in a letter to George Henry Lewes: "I am greatly disposed to have a walk into the biographer of poor Charlotte Brontë, and a friend has proposed a paper to me. There is execrable taste in the book, and I detest this bookmaking out of the remains of the dead which must be so grating to the feelings of all whom the dead cared for".⁷ It seems clear that Eliot had been informed by Lewes of this specific criticism, and she comments on the validity of such judgments of

⁴Eliot Letters, Vol. II, p. 319.

⁵Eliot Letters, Vol. II, p. 337. It is clear that George Henry Lewes shared Eliot's high valuation of Gaskell's The Life of Charlotte Brontë, writing to Gaskell that it "afforded exquisite delight", commenting on its "skill, delicacy and artistic power", and judging that "the book will ... create a deep and permanent impression". (Eliot Letters, Vol. II, p. 315).

⁶Eliot Letters, Vol. II, p. 358.

⁷Eliot Letters, Vol. II, pp. 322-323.

Gaskell's work: "Tell me when you have read the life of Currer Bell. Some people think its revelations in bad taste -- making money out of the dead -- wounding the feelings of the living etc. etc. What book is there that some people or other will not find abominable? We thought it admirable -- cried over it -- and felt the better for it."⁸

What were the qualities of the biography that Eliot found so appealing? An indication of the answer is to be found in another of Eliot's letters: "What a tragedy -- that picture of the old father and the three sisters, trembling day and night in terror at the possible deeds of this drunken brutal son and brother [Branwell]! That is the part of the life which affects me most."⁹ Eliot's high valuation of this part of the biography is revealed in Middlemarch, in which she appropriates an important part of the story of Branwell and Mrs. Robinson into her novel, as will be discussed. What is of importance here, however, is that Eliot is most deeply engaged by the tragic in the biography. That the sensibility of the author writing "The Sad Fortunes of The Rev. Amos Barton" from Scenes of Clerical Life (written during this same year), and of Adam Bede (written one year later) should find inspiration in Gaskell's The Life of Charlotte Brontë is not surprising. Furthermore, Mary

⁸Eliot Letters, Vol. II, p. 330.

⁹Eliot Letters, Vol. II, p. 320.

Barton, which Gaskell thought of as a tragic poem, had a similar appeal to Eliot.¹⁰

Another work by Gaskell which Eliot specifically cites as an influence is Cranford.¹¹ There are few aspects of this work to which one would attach the label "tragic"; clearly the influence of this work upon the novels of Eliot is, therefore, of a different kind. What Eliot evidently found so appealing in Cranford is indicated in the letter on Ruth previously cited:

But how pretty and graphic are the touches of description! That little attic in the minister's house, for example, which, with its pure white dimity bed-curtains, its bright green walls, and the rich brown of its stained floor, remind one of a snowdrop springing out of the soil. Then the rich humour of Sally, and the sly satire in the description of Mr Bradshaw. Mrs Gaskell has certainly a charming mind, and one cannot help loving her as one reads her books.¹²

Eliot points to Gaskell's humour, as well as to her ability to recreate the warmth and ambience of a family home. Furthermore, it is when Gaskell apparently fails in the faithful recreation of such a home life with all its gentle comic touches, when she "is not

¹⁰See Chapter One, above.

¹¹Eliot Letters, Vol. III, p. 198.

¹²Eliot Letters, Vol. II, p. 86.

contented with "the subdued colouring -- the half tints of real life",¹³ that Eliot feels Ruth fails.

It is in the realm of "the half tints of real life" that Cranford exists; and while "dramatic" effects (the love of which Eliot claims misleads Gaskell)¹⁴ are a problem in Mary Barton, they are limited almost exclusively to the second half of the novel. It is the earlier chapters that count as influence, the chapters which present a very moving portrait of the Barton family circle. Thus, when Eliot writes of her "feeling towards Life and Art [having] some affinity with the feeling which had inspired 'Cranford' and the earlier chapters of 'Mary Barton'",¹⁵ one can conjecture what that feeling towards life and art is: both novelists focus their works on a realistic portrayal of a very highly particularized family ethos, while emphasizing the importance of family and social relationships for the moral well-being of the central characters of their novels.

However, it is in the tragic possibilities of life that Gaskell and Eliot attach to this characteristic focus that they depart from the comic novel tradition of Austen. While death is a major factor in each of Gaskell's novels before Wives and Daughters (where the most important death takes place before the novel opens),

¹³Previously quoted. See Eliot Letters, Vol. II, p. 86.

¹⁴See Eliot Letters, Vol. II, p. 86.

¹⁵Previously quoted. See Eliot Letters, Vol. III, p. 198.

and while Scenes of Clerical Life, Adam Bede, and Felix Holt, The Radical (1866) all contain elements of the tragic, such concerns are never central in the novels of Austen. As I have argued, however, Wives and Daughters represents a development in Gaskell's fiction moving her closer to the Austen model of the novel. This movement, moreover, expands the possibilities of the novels of this tradition, and can be seen as an influence upon the similar development in the art of Eliot which led to the writing of Middlemarch.

A close comparison of important aspects of Wives and Daughters and Middlemarch will reveal the ways in which Gaskell's novel had a direct influence upon Eliot's. My argument presupposes that Eliot, indeed, had read Wives and Daughters; but the evidence already presented of Eliot's knowledge of, and high valuation of, the novels of Gaskell gives credence to this presupposition. Given the clear expectation on Eliot's part that Gaskell's works will have been read as a matter of course, it seems safe to assume that Eliot had read Wives and Daughters before she wrote Middlemarch.

Gaskell's final novel is not the sole source of her influence upon Middlemarch. I mentioned earlier that Eliot appropriated an aspect of the story of Branwell Brontë from The Life of Charlotte Brontë. In her biography, Gaskell describes the relationship of Branwell and Mrs. Robinson. In Gaskell's version of it, Mrs. Robinson was guilty of attempting to seduce Branwell. Upon his return home, ostensibly for a holiday, Branwell was informed of

the termination of his employment by Mr. Robinson. After Mr. Robinson's death, his will was read. He bequeathed all of his goods to Mrs. Robinson on the condition that she never again see Branwell.¹⁶ Of course, a similar action occurs in Middlemarch in Casaubon's will prohibiting Dorothea from marrying Will Ladislaw.¹⁷

There are several other echoes of Gaskell in Eliot's finest novel. Together, they indicate that Eliot had, indeed, read and admired Wives and Daughters. Such indications are the sole evidence of influence, however. In attempting to substantiate the influence of Wives and Daughters upon Middlemarch, one faces the same difficulty confronted in attempting to substantiate the influence of Mansfield Park upon Wives and Daughters. In both cases, there is no mention by the author of the later novel of ever having read the earlier. The correspondences of character, plot and structure which exist between Austen's novel and Gaskell's novel point strongly to such a relationship, however, despite the lack of specific reference. The case for the influence of Wives and Daughters upon Middlemarch is very similar in both its character and its problems.

The nature of the appeal of Gaskell's novels for Eliot should by now be clear. Eliot was strongly affected by Gaskell's

¹⁶Elizabeth Gaskell, The Life of Charlotte Brontë (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Limited, 1975), pp. 273-283.

¹⁷Eliot, Middlemarch, p. 359.

realism, complaining when Gaskell failed to present "the half tints of real life". Further, the specific portion of "real life" which most interested Eliot in Gaskell was Gaskell's portrayal of the life of a protagonist centred in highly particularized family and social relationships. This seems clear in Eliot's valuation of the first chapters of Mary Barton, along with Cranford, and Ruth. Her high regard for novels so centred is revealed as well in Eliot's high praise of the first half of Sylvia's Lovers.

Given Eliot's quite specific judgments of these novels, one can validly conjecture about precisely what she found so affecting in Gaskell's works. For example, while a close scrutiny of the family life of the protagonist is a significant part of each of the works Eliot mentions, three of those works deal with the failures of family relationships, and the manifestations of those failures in a troubled maturing of each novel's heroine.

The sections of Gaskell's novels Eliot most admired reveal, then, Eliot's high valuation of novels evoking the familial relationships of a protagonist in order to account for that protagonist's moral character. In Wives and Daughters, one of Gaskell's major concerns is just this development in the characters of Molly and Cynthia. Cynthia is very much in the pattern of heroine in part adversely influenced by her familial milieu. Molly, on the other hand, is the first of Gaskell's heroines whose family

remains intact throughout the novel.¹⁸ Significantly, she is the most perfect of Gaskell's heroines.

Related to this aspect of Wives and Daughters is Gaskell's portrait of the Hamleys. Squire and Mrs. Hamley differ in temperament and attitude in much the same way that Daniel and Bell do, and their two sons, Osborne and Roger, owe their very different characters to the kind of influence each derives from both parents. Roger's physical vigour, and Osborne's obstinacy and impulsiveness represent differing aspects of Squire Hamley's influence. Roger's moral earnestness and Osborne's physical languor and effeminacy testify to the influence of their mother.

In Wives and Daughters, then, life is done in "the half tints" which Eliot saw as necessary in a realistic depiction of life. As well, the qualities Eliot implicitly and explicitly admired in Gaskell's earlier novels come to the fore in this novel. Middlemarch centres upon the importance of a family milieu in achieving mature adulthood. Furthermore, as in Wives and Daughters, there are several family centres created -- most notably the Brookes, the Garths, and the Vincys. For both novelists, this expansion of focus to include a significant concentration upon

¹⁸Mrs. Gibson's death has little effect on three year old Molly. For all intents and purposes, her family is her father, and I have dealt with the centrality of their relationship in Chapter Five.

several centres of moral interest is a new development, and a departure from their previous novels. This development occurs six years earlier for Gaskell than for Eliot. Wives and Daughters was written during 1864-1865, Middlemarch during 1870-1871.

A similar extension in their art can be seen when one compares the expanded social breadth of Wives and Daughters as against Gaskell's previous novels, and the similar development from Eliot's early novels to Middlemarch. In obvious ways, both novels are larger, they involve a much more thorough delineation of provincial society than their authors' previous novels had attempted.

In Wives and Daughters this broadened perspective is revealed in Gaskell's very detailed dramatization of the social gradations which are to be found in middle and upper class segments of society. In Middlemarch there is a similar rendering of these portions of society in addition to a vision of life which includes the entire social spectrum.

For Gaskell, the movement from her previous novel, Sylvia's Lovers, with its concentration upon three or perhaps four major characters from a very particularized social milieu, to Wives and Daughters, with its concentration upon three or four groups of characters -- each highly distinctive and particularized, yet each seen as a part of a larger social ethos -- is striking. Moreover, a similar development can be traced in Middlemarch, which expands upon

the limited social scope of the pastoral Adam Bede, with its presentation primarily of the craftsmen Bedes, of the yeoman Poyzers, of Hetty Sorrel the social climber with Mary Barton-like ambitions, and of Arthur Donnithorne who is presented more as the means for Hetty to achieve her social ambitions and as the occasion for her tragedy, than as a portrait of a higher stratum of society. Similarly, Middlemarch expands upon The Mill on the Floss, which concentrates primarily upon the miller Tullivers, and the middle-class Dodsons.

Wives and Daughters and Middlemarch, then, represent similar developments in the art of the novel. Furthermore, such developments can be seen in particular aspects of subject and treatment that these two novels have in common. It is in the surprising similarity of these specific aspects of the two novels that the case for Gaskell's influence upon Eliot is most telling.

Perhaps the simplest example of such a similarity of subject is the prominence of doctors in both novels. In one sense, it is expedient for the novelist to focus attention upon such a figure in a novel of such expanded social inclusiveness. One notable aspect of the position of doctor in both novels is the social freedom that the position affords. In Wives and Daughters, Dr. Gibson (whose attention to his patients is reminiscent of Chaucer's Parson's attention to his parishioners) attends to members of all social strata:

He used to reckon that he rode the world around in the course of the year. There were not many surgeons in the county who had so wide a range of practice as he; he went to lonely cottages on the borders of great commons; to farmhouses at the end of narrow country lanes that led to nowhere else, and were overshadowed by the elms and beeches overhead. He attended all the gentry within a circle of fifteen miles round Hollingford; and was the appointed doctor to the still greater families who went up to London every February -- as the fashion then was -- and returned to their acres in the early weeks of July. (p. 87)

In many ways, then, his position as doctor renders such class distinctions irrelevant. Although Lydgate, a gentleman's son, is more definitely located in a specific class, he is certainly seen as free to deal professionally with each level of society. Indeed, part of Rosamond's difficulty in understanding her husband derives from his preference for treating the actual illnesses of the poor as opposed to the imagined maladies of the gentry. And a portion of the tragedy of Lydgate's character in Middlemarch is his being forced to adopt the more lucrative, but less professionally stimulating and important, of these alternatives. He dies at the age of fifty, and Eliot is explicit about his having failed, while acknowledging the public conception of him as a success:

He had gained an excellent practice, alternating, according to the season, between London and a Continental bathing-place; having written a treatise on Gout, a disease which has a good deal of wealth on its side. His skill was relied on by many paying patients, but he always regarded himself as a failure; he had not

done what he once meant to do.... In brief, Lydgate was what is called a successful man.¹⁹

Potentially able to move freely among all levels of provincial society, this doctor is frustrated and condemned by the demands of social distinction and monetary ease.

Another similarity between Wives and Daughters and Middlemarch is that, in the course of each novel, both doctors marry women who view them as an opportunity for personal social advancement. In "The Widower and the Widow", the chapter in which she prepares the way for the eventual engagement and marriage of Dr. Gibson and Mrs. (Clare) Kirkpatrick, Gaskell dramatizes Clare's concerns: "I wonder if I am to go on all my life toiling and moiling for money? It's not natural. Marriage is the natural thing; then the husband has all that kind of dirty work to do, and his wife sits in the drawing-room like a lady." (p. 131) And when Gibson does finally propose, Clare's first and therefore most honest reaction is entirely of a piece with this concern:

She hid her face in her hands.
"Oh! Mr Gibson," she said; and then, a little to his surprise, and a great deal to her own, she burst into hysterical tears: it was such a wonderful relief to feel that she need not struggle any more for a livelihood. (p. 140)

Clare's relief is also connected with the feeling that marriage to Dr. Gibson will allow her to maintain her ties with the highest part

¹⁹Eliot, Middlemarch, p. 610.

of Hollingford society -- Lord and Lady Cumnor. For Rosamond Vincy, there is no question of maintaining ties already made. Rather, she is out to forge new social connections, and this may, in part, account for her steadiness of purpose. Eliot makes her ambition an issue many times in Middlemarch; the following may serve as a representative example of her habit of mind: "No one quicker than Rosamond to see causes and effects which lay within the track of her own tastes and interests: she had seen clearly Lydgate's pre-eminence in Middlemarch society, and could go on imaginatively tracing still more agreeable social effects when his talent should have advanced him...."²⁰ Although Rosamond's concentration upon status and Clare's concern with money and security are not identical, Rosamond and Clare bear a great likeness in their expectations of marriage. As well, their characters are markedly similar in their obtuseness when it comes to questions of proper moral behaviour, in their intellectual and emotional shallowness, in their materialism, and in their essential egotism that allows them to be unscrupulous in their behaviour in order to have their own way.

The marriage of Dr. Gibson and Clare can be seen as a model of sorts for the marriage of Lydgate and Rosamond, and even for Casaubon and Dorothea. Gibson's marriage is one of the major events

²⁰Eliot, Middlemarch, p. 427.

of Wives and Daughters. Gaskell is concerned primarily with the effect of Clare's guidance and manipulations upon Molly and Cynthia. However, Gaskell is very careful as well to point out the ways in which Dr. Gibson's attitude to marriage is deficient. For him, marriage becomes a matter of expedience, and his views are seen as a falling away from a constantly implied better attitude, an attitude most promisingly apparent in the impending marriage of Molly and Roger at the novel's close.

The deficiency in Dr. Gibson's attitude to marriage is best described as an essential "objectivity" toward the most intimate of human relationships. For example, the reason most often given by Gibson for his decision to marry Clare is that he remarries for his daughter's better welfare. Since young Coxe's declaration of his love for Molly, Gibson had been deeply concerned with the fact of Molly's maturity, and with his own constant absence from home:

He was, of necessity, a great deal from home, and on this soft and pleasant summer evening, he felt the absence as a great evil. He was startled at discovering that his little one was growing fast into a woman, and already the passive object of some of the strong interests that affect a woman's life; and he -- her mother as well as her father -- so much away that he could not guard her as he would have wished. (p. 87)

Later, it is Clare's reference to her situation with her daughter, which is a tacit reminder of Gibson's anticipated difficulties in raising a maturing Molly, that helps prompt his proposal. And it is clear from his proposal that his prime interest is in providing a

mother for Molly, not a wife for himself. When Clare asserts her desire to see Molly, Gibson responds:

"I hope you will. I should like you to see her. I should like you to love my poor little Molly -- to love her as your own" -- he swallowed down something that rose in his throat, and was nearly choking him.

..."Could you love her as your daughter? Will you try? Will you give me the right of introducing you to her as her future mother; as my wife?" (p. 140)

And when he tries to explain to his daughter his reasons for remarriage, Gibson again reveals his primary motivation to be Molly's better welfare:

"She has been accustomed to housekeeping -- economical housekeeping, too -- for of late years she has had a school at Ashcombe, and has had, of course, to arrange all things for a large family. And last, but not least, she has a daughter -- about your age, Molly -- who, of course, will come and live with us, and be a nice companion -- a sister -- for you." (p. 146)

This concern for his daughter, while it seems to express a selflessness that we might expect to be sanctioned by Gaskell, is actually revealed by her to be, essentially, selfishness. From the moment immediately following his proposal, Gaskell carefully introduces Gibson's doubt about it -- "the question as to its wisdom came into his mind the instant that the words were said past recall" (p. 140). The inequality of intelligence and temperament between the partners in this marriage is enough to suggest Gaskell's skepticism about the marriage's value. But more explicit evidence as to the unsuitability of the match, and the blame Gibson must bear in it, is readily found. Gibson's thoughts after his marriage, his

attempts to justify it, reveal for the reader the extent of his error in marrying. Furthermore, his thoughts have enough accuracy and truth in them to remove them from the realm of mere rationalization:

On the whole, it was well that Mr Gibson spent so much of his time from home. He sometimes thought so himself when he heard his wife's plaintive fret or pretty babble over totally indifferent things, and perceived of how flimsy a nature were all her fine sentiments. Still, he did not allow himself to repine over the step he had taken; he wilfully shut his eyes and waxed up his ears to many small things that he knew would have irritated him if he had attended to them; and, in his solitary rides, he forced himself to dwell on the positive advantages that had accrued to him and his through his marriage. He had obtained an unexceptionable chaperone, if not a tender mother, for his little girl; a skilful manager of his previous disorderly household; a woman who was graceful and pleasant to look at for the head of his table. (pp. 364-365)

The diction of this section, the dry and unfeeling language of business and commerce, reveals an essentially business-like, utilitarian approach to the marriage. He points to having "accrued" "positive advantages" from it -- he has "obtained" a "skilful manager" for his "disorderly household". He views his wife as merely domestically useful, and this judgment is sufficiently close to the reasons for marrying that I pointed to earlier -- Clare's supposed utility for the raising of Molly -- that we must conclude that his view at this point is not the result of demoralization or disappointment in his match. Rather, it accurately describes an

attitude to marriage held from the start, an attitude that indicates a selfish dependence upon the utility of another.

In Middlemarch, Casaubon shares in such selfishness in his approach to marriage to Dorothea. "The implications of his statement during his proposal, "The great charm of your sex is its capability of an ardent self-sacrificing affection, and herein we see its fitness to round and complete the existence of our own" (p. 37, my underlining) are made explicit later when the narrator describes his attitude upon entering the engagement:

...when he had seen Dorothea he believed that he had found even more than he demanded: she might really be such a helpmate to him as would enable him to dispense with a hired secretary, an aid which Mr Casaubon had never yet employed and had a suspicious dread of. (Mr Casaubon was nervously conscious that he was expected to manifest a powerful mind.) Providence, in its kindness, had supplied him with the wife he needed. A wife, a modest young lady, with the purely appreciative, unambitious abilities of her sex, is sure to think her husband's mind powerful. Whether Providence had taken equal care of Miss Brooke in presenting her with Mr Casaubon was an idea which could hardly occur to him. (pp. 205-206)

Once again, the husband's expectations as to the fruits of marriage are limited to the anticipated utility of the wife.

Lydgate's initial attitude to marriage is of the same sort as Gibson's and Casaubon's. And as Gaskell does in Gibson's case, Eliot slowly reveals Lydgate's attitude to have been inadequate from the start:

"The fact is, you would wish me to be a little more like [Captain Lydgate], Rosy,"....

Those words of Lydgate's were like a sad milestone marking how far he had travelled from his old dreamland, in which Rosamond Vincy appeared to be that perfect piece of womanhood who would reverence her husband's mind after the fashion of an accomplished mermaid, using her comb and looking-glass and singing her song for the relaxation of his adored wisdom alone. He had begun to distinguish between that imagined adoration and the attraction towards a man's talent because it gives him prestige, and is like an order in his button-hole or an Honourable before his name. (p. 425)

In Lydgate's case, as in the cases of Gibson and Casaubon, there is an emotionally impoverished and selfish approach toward marriage, an approach that helps lead to frustration in Gibson's case, to an overwhelming fear of the revealing of his character in Casaubon's, and to the self-confessed failure and tragedy of his marriage and professional life in Lydgate's. The consequences of the characters' similar approaches to marriage are much harsher in Middlemarch than in Wives and Daughters. At no time does Gaskell's treatment of the Gibson marriage approach the tragic implications explored by Eliot. But what must be remembered is that these marriages differ in degree only, not in kind.

Lydgate's attitude toward marriage early in the novel is tied up with his scientific interests. Marriage is reserved for his future; his attention now is all to science:

"I should never have been happy in any profession that did not call forth the highest intellectual strain, and yet keep me in good warm contact with my neighbours. There is nothing like the medical profession for that: one can have the exclusive scientific life that touches the distance and befriend the old fogies in the parish too...." He was an ardent fellow, but at present his

ardour was absorbed in love of his work and in the ambition of making his life recognised as a factor in the better life of mankind -- like other heroes of science who had nothing but an obscure country practice to begin with. (p. 123)

Eliot's description of Lydgate could just as accurately describe Roger Hamley in Wives and Daughters. They have a common attitude to marriage as occurring at some obscure future time. As important, perhaps, is the attitude to science they share:

He looked forward to an active life; in what direction he had not yet determined. He knew what were his talents and his tastes; and did not wish the former to lie buried, nor the latter, which he regarded as gifts, fitting him for some peculiar work, to be disregarded or thwarted. He rather liked awaiting an object, secure in his own energy to force his way to it, when once he saw it clearly. He reserved enough of money for his own personal needs, which were small, and for the ready furtherance of any project he might see fit to undertake; the rest of his income was Osborne's.... (p. 391, Wives and Daughters)

Both Gaskell and Eliot consider the place and importance of scientific advances in their society. In Wives and Daughters, Gaskell reveals such an interest in Roger's education and work abroad. But further, her interest in science extends to both Dr. Gibson and Lord Hollingford, and to its social ramifications. Such ramifications are hinted at from near the novel's start:

From time to time [Gibson] met the leaders of the scientific world; odd-looking, simple-hearted men, very much in earnest about their own particular subjects, and not having much to say on any other. Mr Gibson found himself capable of appreciating such persons, and also perceived that they valued his appreciation, as it was honestly and intelligently given. Indeed, by-and-by, he began to send contributions of his own to the more scientific of the medical journals, and thus

partly in receiving, partly in giving out information and accurate thought, a new zest was added to his life. There was not much intercourse between Lord Hollingford and himself; the one was too silent and shy, the other too busy, to seek each other's society with the perseverance required to do away with the social distinction of rank that prevented their frequent meetings. But each was thoroughly pleased to come into contact with the other. Each could rely on the other's respect and sympathy with a security unknown to many who call themselves friends; and this was a source of happiness to both.... (p. 70)

At this point in the novel, the "social distinction of rank" Gaskell speaks of is still a huge barrier preventing easy intercourse between Gibson and Lord Hollingford. But by the novel's end, such intercourse is seen as occurring both more frequently and more easily. Indeed, even the long-standing social feud between the Hamleys and Cumnors is circumvented by the shared scientific interest of Roger and Lord Hollingford. The importance of science for Gaskell in Wives and Daughters is its tendency to render social distinctions irrelevant.

What Gaskell cannot manage, however, is to make such scientific interest meaningful in itself. She treats science in only the most general of terms, and, as Lerner argues, has no thorough grasp of the dramatic possibilities inherent in the social phenomena I have pointed to: "There is no hint of industrialism; there is no hint that Molly's future as a scientist's wife will be more demanding than, or even different from, the happy marriage that always awaits the heroine. That is what I mean by saying that

science is tamed; the book is aware -- but not fully aware -- of change" (p. 23).

Eliot is neither so obscure, nor finally so positive concerning the beneficial social effects of science, as Gaskell. Eliot is quite specific about the exact nature of Lydgate's scientific research. As Leavis points out:

It is remarkable how George Eliot makes us feel his intellectual passion as something concrete. When novelists tell us that a character is a thinker (or an artist) we have usually only their word for it, but Lydgate's "triumphant delight in his studies" is a concrete presence: it is plain that George Eliot knows intimately what it is like, and knows what his studies are.²¹

We have only Gaskell's word for Roger's and Gibson's science. Eliot makes fully real Lydgate's, all the while suggesting that the anomalous social position of a doctor, along with a scientific interest he shares with many others, renders social distinctions irrelevant.

Eliot is not as positive about the social benefits of science -- specifically its dissolving of class distinctions -- as Gaskell had been. Rosamond's attitude toward her husband's science, and the social use she makes of it, present another possible attitude to the social effects of science: "...but for her, his professional and scientific ambition had no other relation to these

²¹F. R. Leavis, p. 66.

desirable effects [of social advancement] than if they had been the fortunate discovery of an ill-smelling oil" (p. 427). For Gaskell, science prompted a levelling of social distinctions. Eliot is aware of this possibility. However, as this quotation reveals, Eliot is well aware of the possibility of utilizing scientific interest for the sake of gaining personal social advantage.²² In this way, the large process of social levelling is undercut. Eliot's understanding of the implications of science and the development of a scientific profession is much more profound than Gaskell's. However, one should note that all the elements of this understanding are anticipated in Wives and Daughters.

The complexity of Eliot's attitude to science is repeated in some ways in the complexity of response demanded of the reader by her characters. And in this as well, Gaskell can be seen as Eliot's precursor in developing and extending the kinds of response invited by Austen's characters. In the previous chapter I detailed the complex response some of the characters of Wives and Daughters evoke, and how they differ from Austen's treatment of the parallel characters in Mansfield Park. For example, whereas Austen is severe

²²Mrs. Gibson's use of the information concerning Osborne's illness, garnered by eavesdropping on her husband's private professional consultations, has a different significance. Mrs. Gibson's actions are those of an opportunist who happens across information. Rosamond's are those of a premeditating social schemer.

in her judgment of Mary Crawford, Gaskell's judgments of both Cynthia and Clare, who so closely resemble Mary in many respects, reveal no animus toward them. Similarly, Austen's judgment of Thomas Bertram is much harsher than Gaskell's judgment of Osborna Hamley.

In Middlemarch, this sort of complexity is much more widespread than in Wives and Daughters, but again it is a difference in degree, not in kind. Eliot is building upon this specific development, which Gaskell initiates, of the Austen novel tradition. While Rosamond Vincy is treated with as severe a judgment as Austen's Mary Crawford, others among Eliot's characters elicit the sort of complex reader response demanded by the characters of Wives and Daughters. Leavis suggests that such a response is evoked by Eliot's dramatization of Bulstrode:

Unengaging as Bulstrode is, we are not allowed to forget that he is a highly developed member of the species to which we ourselves belong, and so capable of acute suffering; and that his case is not as remote from what might be ours as the particulars of it encourage our complacency to assume. When his Nemesis closes in on him we feel his agonized twists and turns too much from within -- that is the effect of George Eliot's kind of analysis -- not to regard him with more compassion than contempt....²³

Lydgate, whose essential nobility and intelligence are tainted both by "commonness"²⁴ and by circumstances arising from

²³F. R. Leavis, p. 70.

²⁴Eliot, Middlemarch, p. 111.

his marriage, and even Casaubon as well, whose life is spent denying his inner knowledge of the futility of his considerable intellectual endeavours, elicit similar complex and sympathetic responses. It is easier for Gaskell to make us feel sympathetic towards the flirtatious Cynthia, and towards the morally lax Clare. Thus Eliot's achievement in Middlemarch is more demanding and difficult, but it does not differ fundamentally from Gaskell's in Wives and Daughters.

Eliot's knowledge of Gaskell's works, and the specific nature of her comments on them, suggest that the two artists worked within the same tradition of the novel. Furthermore, the kind of growth in Gaskell's art, her movement to increasingly Austen-like novels and her development of that tradition in Wives and Daughters, may well have suggested possibilities which encouraged the further developments in that tradition that are manifested in Middlemarch. The similarities noted between these two novels in this chapter strongly suggest such influence. The socially anomalous position of the doctors, their remarkably similar attitudes toward women and marriage, the similarities of their wives, the place of science in a modern society, characters evoking a very complex, sympathetic response on the part of the reader, each of these major likenesses argues for Gaskell's influence upon Eliot.

One may legitimately question how direct such an influence is. I suggest that, given Eliot's habit of reading Gaskell's

novels, and her consistently high, if qualified, regard for them, the influence may be direct. But in another sense, direct influence is not the issue. For surely Gaskell can be seen to have expanded upon the characteristics of a very influential novel tradition. The usual critical placement of Eliot within that tradition and her creative engagement in it point to her having been affected by the developments in the tradition which were pioneered by Gaskell, even without the direct knowledge of Wives and Daughters that I have suggested.

CONCLUSION

It is in North and South and Wives and Daughters that Gaskell reveals most clearly the influence of the tradition of the novel in which Jane Austen and George Eliot were major figures. Gaskell's use of, development from, and contribution to, that tradition have been analyzed for the purpose of arriving at a revaluation of her place in the tradition of the English novel.

Commentators on Gaskell's work consistently judge her as a minor novelist. Cecil's judgment of Gaskell's work (made in 1935) is condescendingly stated:

Ugly, dynamic, childless, independent, contemptuous of the notion that women should be confined to that small area of family and social interests which was commonly regarded as the only proper province of their sex, fiercely resentful of the conventions that kept them within it -- at every turn. [Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot] flout the standards which were set up before the women of their day. In the placid doves of Victorian womanhood, they were eagles.

But we have only to look at a portrait of Mrs. Gaskell, soft-eyed, beneath her charming veil, to see that she was a dove. In an age whose ideal of women emphasized the feminine qualities at the expense of all others, she was all a woman was expected to be: gentle, domestic, tactful, unintellectual, prone to tears, easily shocked.¹

¹David Cecil, Victorian Novelists (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), pp. 183-184.

In 1949, French argued similarly, "there is nothing spectacular about her work or personality. In an age of literary brilliance this unassuming yet steadfast luminary tended to be dimmed by the proximity of the great surrounding planets, her contemporaries." ²

After her centenary in 1965, critics were generally more favourable, expressing their dissatisfaction with such judgments as those made by French and Cecil, arguing for a higher valuation of Gaskell's works. In Pollard's estimation, "as a writer she lacked the highest imaginative power, as a thinker and teacher the highest realms of moral vision were beyond her reach. In these respects she falls below George Eliot. She remains, however, a considerable artist of the moral imagination, whose works possess unique flavour and provide unique reward." ³ More recently, however, there has been a return to a more modest valuation of Gaskell's fiction. Easson has argued that, "much of her work is now readily available and she has been rightly assessed as amongst the most interesting of the Victorian novelists of second-rank -- attempts to place her with Dickens and George Eliot are only likely to provoke an excessive counter-reaction." ⁴

²French, p. 107.

³Pollard, p. 262.

⁴Easson, p. 46.

Higher praise is afforded Gaskell by Craik: "Like Jane Austen, she begins with excellence and proceeds to greatness."⁵ For Craik, however, the comparison of Austen and Gaskell implied in her judgment does not indicate a real literary relationship:

Though [Gaskell] is admired, it is for a few of her works, and for reasons not central to her art. The general reader knows Cranford, the student of literature reads Mary Barton and North and South as novels of social concern, while Wives and Daughters, probably by general critical consensus felt to be her greatest novel, is seen as the rich nineteenth-century descendant of the art of Jane Austen.⁶

The aspects of Gaskell's work that allow it to be seen as a "descendant of the art of Jane Austen" are "not central" to Gaskell's art, according to Craik.

Part of the argument of this thesis is that Gaskell's indebtedness to Austen, whether directly or indirectly owed, is, indeed, central to her art. Gaskell's fiction increasingly embraces the tradition of the novel initiated by Austen. Moreover, Gaskell's finest (and final) novel, Wives and Daughters, is an exploration of issues raised in Mansfield Park, and may even have been initiated by a reading of that novel. Gaskell's talent appears particularly amenable to this novel tradition, for her own novels become more critically successful as they move closer to it.

⁵Craik, p. 266.

⁶Craik, p. x, my underlining.

The possibility of George Eliot's indebtedness in Middlemarch to Gaskell's Wives and Daughters has already been discussed. The shared concerns of Gaskell and Eliot, and the quality of Gaskell's last novel, place Gaskell's Wives and Daughters firmly between Austen and Eliot in the tradition of the novel. Furthermore, this placement has implications for one's valuation of Gaskell as a novelist. I have argued that Wives and Daughters is a great novel. The corollary must be a judgment of Elizabeth Gaskell as being a great novelist. By virtue of Wives and Daughters, Gaskell merits comparison with Austen and Eliot, despite Easson's fears that such a comparison will lead to an "excessive counter-reaction."⁷

Admittedly, the comparison proposed must recognize that both Austen and Eliot have more works one would deem "great" than does Gaskell. Nevertheless, to deny Gaskell the high standing warranted by Wives and Daughters amounts to critical sleight of hand, a separation of the novel from the novelist.

Edgar Wright observed that:

"criticism of Mrs. Gaskell in the past has largely neglected to consider her technical artistry, and in neglecting it has ignored also a good deal that would give more insight into her aims and themes. Certainly the nature of her achievement has not yet been evaluated. There is evidence for believing that the view, still widely held, that she is an intuitive

⁷Easson. p. 46, previously quoted.

novelist, relying on her natural insight and a natural gift for story-telling, is a very mistaken one.⁸

Wright's observation is also a challenge to the critic of Gaskell's novels. This thesis is a response to that challenge to critically scrutinize both the "intuitive" and traditional aspects of the fiction of Elizabeth Gaskell.

⁸Wright, p. 22.

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