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**The Storyteller's Voice:
The Dialogic Art of Elizabeth Gaskell**

by

Linda A. Hauch

A thesis presented to the University of Ottawa in partial
fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in the
Department of English



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To David and Nathan

- "I suppose we all *do* strengthen each other by clashing together, and earnestly talking our own thoughts and ideas. The very disturbance we thus are to each other rouses us up, and makes us more healthy."

- Elizabeth Gaskell

Abstract

Elizabeth Gaskell was a gifted storyteller. Her letters and her fiction attest to an imagination rooted in oral narrative, marked by the digressiveness and dispersiveness of living speech. She wrote her first novel, she said, as if she were "speaking to a friend over the fire on a winter's night," and the dynamic of telling and listening, the model of the oral narrative act, is paradigmatic of her own narrative. The incorporation of a listener's response into the telling of her story has both formal and semantic implications in Gaskell's fiction. It leads to what one critic has called that "congenial shapelessness of a voice expecting at any moment to be interrupted," and as such it can account, in part, for the shapelessness that has traditionally been deemed a formal weakness in Gaskell's art. As she tells her stories in anticipation of the active, often resistant, response of her listener, the stories take shape accordingly, and traditional norms of narrative with their notions of unity, shapeliness and authorial control must be reconsidered. Gaskell's approach stresses the dynamic of varying, often conflicting, voices in relationship with one another, suggesting her view of language and narrative as active agents in a process of exchange and contestation which calls for a redefinition of the nature of meaning in narrative. The shaping activity that occurs as voices come in contact with and

question one another shows meaning to be produced through an open movement of relationship and response, not predetermined by finalized definitions; it is constituted through the transforming act of telling and listening.

Traditional critical approaches cannot do justice to Gaskell's reliance upon the oral narrative act, for no single interpretative strategy can accommodate the simultaneous play of order and disorder implicit in this act, organized as it is by a double logic or, as Mikhail Bakhtin has called it, a "dialogic" mode of perception and interpretation. The oral narrative act, based upon a mutual relationship between teller and listener, relies upon the unifying thrust of conventional patterns and means of understanding to lend order and coherence, yet it leaves itself always open to the contingency of a questioning voice, to revision and new possibility. As living discourse, the oral narrative act is necessarily always in flux, and the meaning produced through the play of these opposing forces eludes the closural principles implied in traditional modes of interpretation. As well, the productive tension between coherence and contingency, pattern and possibility, implicit in Gaskell's dialogic form mirrors her own fictional vision, committed as she is to simultaneously maintaining and questioning traditional frameworks of understanding.

Gaskell uses the dialogic mode in various ways and to varying effects in her work, as her stories take shape in response to her listener's presence. In Mary Barton she uses a self-refuting

narrative structure that internalizes the putative objections of her reader into her own discourse. In her second novel, Ruth, she uses what might be termed a mode of concealed dialogic as she attempts to deal sympathetically with the controversial issue of the "fallen woman." The formal restlessness of North and South is the result of her turn to a mode of open dialogic in which she meets the objections of her middle-class audience head on. In Sylvia's Lovers, Gaskell moves into a more displaced dialogic mode in which the associative paths of dream combine simultaneously to maintain and critique conventional frameworks of understanding. And in her final novel, Wives and Daughters, she uses an inner dialogic mode as she explores the double-voiced aspects of human consciousness and identity. In the case of each novel, the dialogic form, with its openness to contradiction and the clash of opposites, provides a source of narrative energy, allowing for expression of what Barbara Hardy has called that "troubled questioning and lack of moral absolutism" which is Gaskell's greatest strength.

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Finally, I thank Gary, *sine qua non*.

A Note on Documentation

All references are taken from the Knutsford Edition of the Works of Mrs Gaskell. 8 vols. London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1906. Each reference includes the volume, chapter, and page number. Where necessary, the edition is referred to as "Works." All references to letters are taken from the The Letters of Mrs Gaskell. Ed. J. A. V. Chapple and Arthur Pollard. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967. References are to the numbered letters.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction: Gaskell and the Problem of Plot

Elizabeth Gaskell was a gifted storyteller. Dickens called her his "Scheherazade," and Charles Eliot Norton praised her as a "wonderful storyteller." Her friends the Howitts commended her ability to tell ghost stories around a fire (Gerin 123), while her own love of a good story is manifested in her letters where she consistently shows an interest in local legends, anecdotes, and reminiscences. But this gift for storytelling also accounts, in part, for the dismissal of Gaskell as a serious writer both in her own century and in much of the twentieth. In calling for a reassessment of her work in 1965, for example, Edgar Wright noted the persistent stereotype of Gaskell as the "moderately cultured amateur . . . with a talent for storytelling" (4). More specifically, the interpolated tales, found primarily in her earlier novels, have been seen as disruptive to the unity of the works and as evidence of her essentially "artless" approach to the novel.¹ When it comes to this point, even Wright is compelled to criticism: "Mrs. Gaskell," he says, "was one of those who find it difficult to resist a digression; to this extent her fondness for reminiscence and local tales affects the mechanics of her art as well as the taut-

ness of her style" (82). "She had to learn," he continues, "to make her skill in narrating an episode subserve the needs of the novel as a whole" (18). Wright's assessment, with its formalist norm of unity, is typical of much twentieth-century criticism of Gaskell, particularly that directed at her handling of plot. This may help to account for the fact that the novel most often remembered in connection with Elizabeth Gaskell is Cranford, an essentially "plotless" work, more a series of episodes held together by a pervasive tone than a story governed by a well-constructed plot. This work, the critics argue, reveals Gaskell's strengths: her affinity for anecdote and her ability to reconstruct local customs and legends. In short, her talent for storytelling is here given reign without the constraints presented by the need to create an integrated linear plotline.²

When it comes to her longer works, however, most critics have noted that Gaskell is unable to sustain a story without digression and that, as a result, she tends to fragment her fictional world and disperse the reader's attention. More recently, feminist critics such as Barbara Weiss and Nina Auerbach have attempted to recuperate the interpolated tales and anecdotes and hence to validate Gaskell's more dispersive narrative mode. These feminist readings have been helpful in challenging the standard of unity which has dominated discussion of plot since Aristotle.³ They have placed in question the concept of the single-focussed, well-constructed plot by drawing attention to the positive function of other, dispersive voices at work

in the text. The interpolated tales, the feminists argue, break up the focus of Gaskell's fictional vision, but they do so in order to express certain truths unavailable to the public, masculine truth of the plot. As dramatic representations of feminine interaction, they emphasize the mutuality of the act of telling and listening as a form of particularly feminine communication. But the recuperative feminist readings ironically end by limiting the scope of Gaskell's narrative, for the logic of their interpretive strategy limits the interplay of possible meanings by reifying and stabilizing the subversive voices it necessarily privileges as the site of "truth." Whether claiming priority for the unity of a single-focus, well-constructed linear plot, then, or for the variety and multiplicity of a more subversive and dispersive reading, the criticism of Gaskell remains indebted to and determined by the monocentric logic of the Aristotelian tradition.

Gaskell's own assessment of her formal weaknesses points to a way of approaching her narrative outside the monocentric norm of classical narrative. Not that Gaskell denied that norm. She recognized a problem with her construction of a plot, as when she faulted herself for longwindedness during the writing of North and South: "It is dull, and I have never had time to prune it. I have got the people well on, - but I think in too lengthy a way" (Letters 195). Gaskell valued a shapely and firm structure, stressing the centrality of plot in the often-cited letter to an aspiring young novelist where she likens it to the "anatomical drawing of an artist," the "skeleton" or "sketch" of a story. Her

first suggestion for good writing is concerned with the construction of the plot: "Think if you can not imagine a complication of events [in the lives of the men and women with whom you come in contact] which would form a good plot. The plot must grow, and culminate in a crisis; not a character must be introduced who does not conduce to this growth & progress of events. The plot is like the anatomical drawing of an artist; he must have an idea of its skeleton, before he can clothe it with muscle and flesh, much more before he can drape it. Study hard at your plot" (Letters 420). And in "Company Manners," the narrator praises what she calls the "art of telling a story": "I believe that the art of telling a story is born with some people, and these have it to perfection; but all might acquire some expertness in it and ought to do so, before launching into the muddled, complex, hesitating, broken, disjointed, poor, bald accounts of events which have neither unity, nor colour, nor life, nor end in them that one some-times hears" (Works III 508). But for all of her interest in form and closure, Gaskell evidences another narrative impulse and allegiance in her fiction, one to which she herself obliquely alludes in references to overgrowth and profusion in her writing. In one letter, for example, she humorously chides herself for the inability to control the telling of a story: "I was writing my third story - but instead of its stopping as it ought to have done at about 40 pages of MS . . . I very soon saw that I could not compress it into less than 200 pages" (Letters

63). Indeed, the letters as a whole are a testimony to her love of oral narrative and digression. They manifest what Edgar Wright calls "a runaway kind of mind" (12); often rambling accounts of daily activity, they convey a sense of genuine conversation and living speech, and their tone and texture often seem to imply a listener. In an early letter to her sister-in-law, Gaskell explicitly invokes a situation of oral communication: "Thank you dear Lizzy for telling me so nicely all about your feelings &c -- you can not weary by so doing, for I take the greatest interest in every particular, and I heartily wish you were here, with your sweet comforting face, and I would listen and talk, & talk, & listen. . . . Pray write again soon, for you can hardly think how constantly I am thinking of you, and longing to be listening and talking to you" (Letters 13). Similarly, in a letter to Lady Kay-Shuttleworth, she apologizes for responding immediately and impulsively, "on the rebound", as it were, "just as if I were talking to you" (Letters 72).

The emphasis upon telling and listening in Gaskell's letters points to an inherently oral imagination that expresses itself in her fiction as well. Angus Easson has described her style as "always colloquial, and at its best that of the informal storyteller" (80), and herein lies the key to much in her narrative. The inclusion of the interpolated tales in her novels, for instance, emerges as an expression of an imagination rooted as much in the pre-literary form of oral storytelling (with its reliance upon the

dispersiveness and digressiveness of living speech) as in the literary form of the novel (with its formalist prescriptions of unity and closure). Seen in this light, the interpolated tales take on a new meaning in Gaskell's work as representations of situations of oral communication, dramatizing the narrative act (i.e., telling and listening) as a source not only of female but of human meaning in general. Gaskell's affinity for oral storytelling can be also felt in her narrator's sense of an implied listener. Especially in her early works, as Edgar Wright has noted, the situation of oral storytelling is a model for her own narrative.⁴ In Mary Barton, for example, she tells her story in anticipation of the active response of a listener, and the story takes shape accordingly. This solicitation of a listener into relation with the telling of the story has semantic implications. The shaping activity that occurs in the narrative act shows meaning to be produced through a movement of relationship and response, not predetermined by stabilized definitions; it is constituted through the transforming act of telling and listening.

The production of meaning that occurs through the confrontation of voices and perspectives in any genuine act of telling and listening is paradigmatic of Gaskell's own narrative. No single narrative or interpretative strategy can accommodate the simultaneous play of order and disorder implicit in this act, organized as it is by a double logic or, as Mikhail Bakhtin has called it, a "dialogic" mode of perception and interpretation. The

oral narrative act, based on a mutual relationship between teller and listener, relies upon the unifying thrust of conventional patterns and means of understanding to lend order and coherence, yet it leaves itself always open to the contingency of a questioning voice, to revision and new possibility. As living discourse, the narrative act is necessarily always in flux. And the productive tension between coherence and contingency, pattern and possibility, implicit in this dialogic form mirrors Gaskell's own double fictional vision, committed as it is to simultaneously maintaining and questioning traditional frameworks of understanding.

In critical study of the novel, the concept of the dialogic is primarily linked to Bakhtin, who proposed the notion of the "dialogical" or "polyphonic" novel to describe the "plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses" he found at work in Dostoevsky's art (Problems with Dostoevsky's Poetics 6). Bakhtin applies these terms to many different aspects of fiction, as he moves from an analysis of individual texts and writers to a theory of the novel (e.g. The Dialogic Imagination). But in every case the important point is the recognition and appreciation of irreconcilable and unresolvable contradictions which cannot be reduced to stable, univocal meanings or synthesized by the process of dialectical mediation.⁵ Rather, these opposing voices, or, as he calls them, "semantic positions", are brought into confrontational relationship, heard and incorporated

into one another, and made to contest and challenge each other's visions in an uneasy movement toward meaning.

Bakhtin's philosophy is essentially a philosophy of language, and it itself stands in confrontational relationship with traditional linguistics. Stressing the communicative rather than grammatical aspects of language, Bakhtin builds his dialogic conception upon the unit of the "utterance" rather than the unit of the sentence as does traditional linguistics. In The Problem of Speech Genres he explores the distinction between the sentence and the utterance: a sentence is a unit of language, while an utterance is a unit of communication, an activity that cannot be restricted solely to verbal boundaries (67-100).⁶ Bakhtin's is a relational model of language that emphasizes the extra-linguistic context of the word as well as its formal text. Moreover, it does not really distinguish between spoken and written discourse. As Caryl Emerson notes, Bakhtin "often modifies the phrase 'speaking subject' with the phrase 'writing subject' in parentheses, and he writes [or speaks] not of periods after statements, but of pauses" (Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics xxxiv; xli). Central to his whole model is the notion of intonation. In intonation, the extra-verbal, unsaid dimensions of meaning are wedded to the formal aspects of language, and in the relationship of the two, the drama of the speech act occurs.

The relational aspect of Bakhtin's linguistics sets it apart from traditional linguistics. The relations that issue from the

context of an utterance cannot be dealt with in terms of the language system alone; they are always determined by the potential response of the other, and thus all language is seen as a dialogic exchange between individuals. To quote Bakhtin: "the word is a two-sided act. It is determined equally by whose word it is and for whom it is meant . . . A word is territory shared by both addresser and addressee, by the speaker and his interlocutor" (Marxism 85-86). Meaning always exists on the boundary between teller and listener as a threshold phenomenon that can never be finalized; it is dependent upon the productive conflict in human relationship and the confrontation of opposing voices. This dialogic sense of meaning answers to a second major criticism of Gaskell's work: that her particular inability to reconcile conflict detracts from a unity of effect in her fiction. Most of her works center around unsettling splits, whether in narrative voice, in development of character, or in formal structure. Various reasons have been given for the inability to reconcile conflict, but it has been seen consistently as a major weakness in Gaskell's art.⁷ I would argue instead that it is precisely Gaskell's dialogic model of narrative, based on contradiction and contestation, that lends to her work its particular energy and strength. Indeed, the power of her vision depends on her acceptance and celebration of conflict as a productive aspect of human experience. Gaskell says it best herself in a letter to Lady Kay-Shuttleworth: "I suppose we all do

strengthen each other by clashing together, and earnestly talking our own thoughts and ideas. The very disturbance we thus are to each other rouses us up, and makes us more healthy" (116). The dialogic form of oral narrative, with its openness to contradiction and the clash of opposites, provides her with a source of narrative energy, allowing for expression of what Barbara Hardy has called that "troubled questioning and lack of moral absolutism" which is Gaskell's greatest strength (183).

Gaskell's belief in the productive power of "troubled questioning" invites a dialogic reading of her work. She herself was wary of the quest for the ideal which, in its monologic thrust, disallows genuine dialogue.⁸ In the same letter to Lady Kay-Shuttleworth cited above, she commented: "What you say of the restlessness of the age, of the 'search after the ideal in some, and morbid dread of the ideal in others', strikes me as very true; and it is difficult to steer clear of these extremes, between which characters seem thrown backwards and forwards like shuttlecocks" (Letters 72). From this perspective, Gaskell's problem with the construction of a unified plot with its implied monologic vision can be viewed more as a strength than a weakness. Wayne Booth, in his own spacious reading of Bakhtin in the Introduction to Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, stresses the rare "imaginative gift" of an author who celebrates conflict, who is able and willing to allow voices into his or her work that are not under the monological control of the author's own

ideology. He stresses Bakhtin's emphasis upon the uniqueness of an author who allows the characters the space to tell their own stories, to exist as subjects in their own right, not as objects under the imposed design of the plot. In such a writer, the characters live, as Bakhtin says of Dostoevsky's characters, "alongside the author's word." Here "the ordinary pragmatic links at the level of the plot are insufficient," for "such links presuppose, after all, that characters have become objects, fixed elements in the author's design" (Problems 7). The words are Bakhtin's, but the idea could well be Gaskell's, for it is precisely this monologic control that she avoids in her emphasis upon the contestatory nature of the oral narrative act in her fiction. Her texts are alive with a myriad voices which consistently strain against each other. This has obvious thematic implications, especially when the concept of "voice" is viewed in the wider Bakhtinian sense of "semantic position" or way of viewing the world. The characters' varying voices and points of view often clash, leading to discontinuities that break up any sense of single-focus in the fictional and moral vision. Nor are the characters the only source of contestation, for the relationship between narrator and character may be conflictual as well.

Moreover, structural principles and plot patterns may also stand in dialogic relationship. In his exploration of the Victorian multiplot novel, Peter Garrett has noted the formal implications of viewing structural principles as semantic positions in themselves.

He extends Bakhtin's argument of the dialogism of "voice" to include the interplay of irreducibly different principles of order. Thus, for example, the progression of the protagonist, with its inherent claims to unity and linearity, is confronted, disrupted and challenged by the protagonist's alternation as expressed through spatial division, repetition, and substitution. For Garrett the two opposing principles of progression and alternation correspond to social and personal perspectives of reality. Progression implies movement in space and thus has a primarily social orientation; alternation occurs within the consciousness of the protagonist and is thus personally and temporally oriented.⁹ In a similar way, I think, plot patterns can be seen to be expressions of the tension between social and individual perspectives, especially when particular plot patterns are viewed as ideologically determined.¹⁰ This dynamic of plot can be seen at work, for example, when the conventional linear plotline, with its socially determined claim to unity and closure, is confronted by a more episodic and open ended plot that features the spatial disruption and repetition of memory and dream. In this case, the spatial and temporal dimensions are reversed in their representation of personal and social perspectives, but they still contest each other, bringing to the foreground questions of interpretation and truth.

Bakhtin emphasizes the entanglement of the temporal and spatial, social and personal, dimensions in the act of oral

communication. He sees orality as a present-tense experience, which brings to the moment a store of past experience through the spatializing effect of memory. And the utterance, although personal in expression, by its very nature presumes a shared social context with one's audience. The speaking voice is by nature dialogic; it calls up a response and creates community with the listener. Similarly, Gaskell's emphasis upon the oral narrative act within her text calls for a constant interplay between social and personal perspectives and between plot patterns.

Consequently, the texture of her narrative resembles less a perfectly woven cloth than a ragged ball of various colored yarns and saved remnants, as she weaves into the present the storyteller's recollecting voice.

Here another Bakhtinian concept may be usefully invoked. In Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, Bakhtin identifies the "double-voiced discourse" that arises from an orientation toward oral speech (190-99). The doubleness of oral speech (and, by extension, all language) lies in its intentional orientation toward the other. Constitutive of every utterance is the mark not only of the speaker but of the listener as well; every utterance consists of an intersection of two voices and two points of view. Thus "discourse becomes an arena of battle between two voices" (193). Every word exists "with a sideward glance at someone else's hostile word" (196). Discourse is shaped by the anticipation of the listener's voice; words respond to the presence of another, and

this "polemical coloration" appears in intonation and syntactic construction as well, leading to what Caryl Emerson, in the editor's preface, has called "that congenial shapelessness of a voice expecting at any moment to be interrupted" (xxxiv). The formal implications of this orientation toward oral narrative accounts, in part, for the shapelessness of Gaskell's narrative. Rosemarie Bodenheimer has suggested that the unsettling splits and shifts of the novels owe something to the "assertions and withdrawals" that attend upon Gaskell's appearance as a public storyteller ("Private Grief. . ." 214), and there is a definite sense in which the shape of her narrative is affected by anticipation of her listener, by what Bakhtin has called the "sideward glance at another's word." We know from her letters, for example, that in her first novel, Mary Barton, Gaskell was intensely aware of the controversial nature of her subject matter and of the difficulty implicit in dealing with the question of industrial relations. "Some say the masters are very sore," she wrote to Catherine Winkworth, "but I'm sure I believe I wrote truth. Thank you, thank you for all you say about it . . . I like you to understand it. It is a painful subject and must be painful, and I felt it all so deeply myself I could hardly be light-hearted any part of the time I was writing it" (Letters 35). In another letter Gaskell mentions that she wrote Mary Barton as if she were "speaking to a friend over the fire on a winter's night" (Letters 48), and the novel itself begins with what Robyn Warhol would call an "engaging" invitation to the reader to enter into the

story. But as Gaskell continues with the representation of controversial circumstances, the text begins to show the strain of that sideward glance at her listener's hostile word. The narrator's voice abruptly shifts point of view, characters develop in self-contradictory ways, and the form of the novel itself seems to split between realistic and romantic conventions.

Much critical discussion has centered around the divided nature of Mary Barton. Almost every critic has noted the shifts in narrative voice between sympathy for the poor and conventional middle-class explanations and platitudes. And most analyses note the formal discontinuities which result from an underlying tension in her work. Explanations for the tension vary. Donald Stone, for example, sees it as a pull between Romantic quietism and rebellion, while Catherine Gallagher sees it as arising out of the conflicting movement between causality and conscience, or predestination and free will, which forms a part of Gaskell's Unitarian heritage. I would argue that it is Gaskell's attempt to work within her dialogic model that makes the splits and shifts inevitable. According to Angus Easson, the formal inconsistencies exist in Mary Barton within the "context of change and debate" (58), and there is a sense in which the dialogic acceptance of conflict lies at the thematic and formal heart of the novel. Thematically, Mary Barton is concerned with the results and ramifications of a sense of the rejected word. In the first half of the text, Gaskell's working-class hero, John Barton, attempts to

tell his own and his people's story to Parliament. Parliament refuses to listen. Like his sister-in-law, the outcast prostitute Esther, Barton is driven to a state of chaos and violence by the lack of a listener to his tale. In a self-refuting narrative structure that holds him accountable for his use of violence, even while sympathizing with the suffering that perpetuates it, Gaskell moves into her dialogic mode, offering no solution to the problem, but holding up the two semantic positions in their ambiguity and allowing them to contest and question one another. Hence she highlights the dialogic model of meaning as productivity, while at the same time foregrounding the deadening effect of the monological act of the rejected word. In a letter to Mary Ewart, Gaskell hinted at a dialogic intent in the writing of Mary Barton: "But independently of any explicit statement of my intention, I do think that we must all acknowledge that there are duties connected with the manufacturing system not fully understood as yet, and evils existing in relation to it which may be remedied in some degree, although we as yet do not see how; but surely there is not harm in directing the attention to the existence of such evils. No one can feel more deeply than I how wicked it is to do anything to excite class against class; and the sin has been most unconscious if I have done so . . . I can only repeat that no praise could compensate me for the self-reproach I shall feel, if I have written unjustly. . ." (Letters 36). The tentative tone of this letter, as well as the imbalance of Mary Barton itself, reflects Gaskell's

insecure relationship with social and literary authority, an insecurity crystallized in her displacement of her hero, John Barton.

Gaskell once described Barton as the character around whom "all the others formed themselves . . . the person with whom all my sympathies went" (Letters 42); yet once his guilt has been secured, Barton is excluded from the plot and he (like Esther) makes only infrequent appearances in the text, wandering in and out, partially hidden in gaslit shadows. Raymond Williams has argued that Barton's displacement is the novel's great failure. In the second half of the novel, he claims, the "flow of sympathy" with which Gaskell began is arrested by the fear of violence that marked the middle-class "structure of feeling" in this period. For Williams, Gaskell moves from an evocation of "everyday life in the working class" in the first half to the "orthodox plot of the Victorian novel of sentiment" in the second as a way of containing this fear of violence (87-91). In more strictly narrative terms, however, the shift that Williams notes may be seen as much as the result of Gaskell's dialogic model of narrative as of her class consciousness, and her own orientation toward her listener can be seen as leading to the often noted generic split in this novel. As she progresses in her realist portrayal of controversial circumstances, her text begins to show formal evidence of the strain caused by a sense of lost audience. Like John Barton and Esther, who are driven to a state of chaos by the lack of a listener to their

tales, Gaskell moves toward a certain narrative chaos in her own text, as she comes to fear being refused a hearing. Rather like her heroine, who moves into action as a means of rescue in the second half of the novel, she turns to the action of conventional romance to contain the narrative and to rescue her own text from contingency and chaos. But Gaskell continues to attempt to regain a balance between coherence and contingency in the second half of Mary Barton, and she does so by relying upon narrative displacement to redeem her text from the static predictability of romance conventions. Far from being the novel's great failing, it is precisely John Barton's and Esther's displacement that rescues the last half of the novel. As they wander in and out of the text, insisting upon telling their stories, their work as figures of errancy saves the novel from a monological formal determinacy. At least at this point in her career, such displacement is the price Gaskell has to pay to gain them a hearing, and although they are destined to namelessness in expiation for their crimes, they are still allowed the space to tell their own stories, stories in which the inconsistencies in their character are neither ignored nor reconciled. Gaskell offers no sense of resolution to these inconsistencies but allows the contradictions to speak themselves, and in so doing she opens up her text (and the reader) to a dialogic space of questioning.

In the remainder of her works, Gaskell uses the dialogic model in various ways and to varying effects, as she shapes her

stories in response to her listener's presence. Perhaps because of the strong negative reaction to Mary Barton, in her second novel, Ruth, she uses what might be termed the mode of concealed dialogic in dealing sympathetically with the even more controversial issue of the "fallen woman". The result of that sideward glance at a hostile word is evident here, as it is in the language and narrative shape of all of her fiction. The formal restlessness of North and South, for example, is a result of her turn to what might be called the mode of open dialogic in which she meets the objections of her middle-class audience head on, as it were. In this novel, both the characters' voices and the plot patterns are brought into direct confrontational relationship and made to question and contest each other. In Sylvia's Lovers, her only attempt at an historical novel, she moves into a more displaced dialogic mode in which the associative paths of dream combine simultaneously to maintain and critique conventional frameworks of understanding. And in her final novel, Wives and Daughters, she uses an inner dialogic mode as she explores the double-voiced aspects of human consciousness and identity.

Gaskell herself was no novel theorist, radical critic, or dabbler in the avant-garde. She was a conventional Victorian middle-class woman who worked effectively (and apparently contentedly) in the domestic sphere and in the part of the public sphere open to a minister's wife. But as the wife of a minister in a working-class parish in the new industrial city of Manchester in

the early 1840s she witnessed much that was closed to the average middle-class woman of her time, and her licensed entry into the public life of the city (especially in times of social crisis) shook many of her middle-class assumptions, moving her to the novel-writing through which she placed those assumptions in question. Her own relationship to and respect for literary and social authority did not allow her to attempt any kind of radical critique, but her belief in the power of troubled questioning found expression in a narrative mode based in relationship and active response that stands counter to a monologic framework of social or literary understanding. It is her sense of language as utterance rather than system and her desire for a dialogic mode of narrative that most clearly ally her with Bakhtin. For Gaskell, as for Bakhtin, language and narrative are active agents in a process of exchange and contestation through which social and personal formation occur. And this places her, as it does the Russian critic, right within the matrix of concerns that are central to current thinking about narrative.

Bakhtin himself, appropriately, developed his theory as a response to the word of others, specifically the Formalists. He frequently drew on the Formalists, as in Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics where he cites critics like Boris Eikhenbaum. Discussing double-voiced discourse, for instance, Bakhtin credits Eikhenbaum as the first to identify "skaz" (individualized narration based on oral speech) as an orientation toward oral speech, but his critique

of Eikhenbaum's position points to a major difference between himself and the Formalists. What Eikhenbaum fails to take into account, says Bakhtin, is that "in the majority of cases, *skaz* is above all an orientation toward someone else's speech, and only then, as a consequence, toward oral speech" (191). At the heart of Bakhtin's critique of the Formalists was his rejection of their purely linguistic definition of language which failed to conceive of language practically or socially as a means of communication and interaction between individual consciousnesses. Separating poetic from everyday language and isolating the work of art from its social occurrence and context, they missed what Bakhtin called the "profound personalism" of any work of art, indeed of any act of human communication. Such a separation presents the literary work as a finalized aesthetic object rather than as the result of an ongoing dynamic process of living values.¹¹ Bakhtin's claim that the orientation toward the conflicting word of the other is constitutive of all language and of every work of art is opposed to the Formalist assumptions of monological authorial control and the value of aesthetic coherence.¹²

When the structuralists renewed critical attention to narrative in the 1960s and 1970s, they were more Formalist than Bakhtinian in their approach.¹³ But the "historical turn" of literary criticism in the last decade or so has led to a resurgence of interest in social definitions of language, narrative, and art. So now Bakhtin is a major voice, and his theories are studied, cited,

and used as the basis for studies in narrative. More specifically, narrative theory has been evidencing an interest in different types of transactive or interactive (rather than formal or structural) models of narrative. Peter Brooks, in Reading for the Plot, is interesting in this respect because he begins with a structuralist model which he somewhat dislocates by adding a Freudian emphasis upon transaction and transference. But his discussion is more an analysis of narrative logic than of narrative language, and so it does not take into account the social and interpersonal context of the act of communication that lies at the heart of Bakhtin's dialogical concept.¹⁴ More recently, however, in "The Storyteller", Brooks has directed his attention specifically toward the constitutive dynamic of the oral narrative act, showing how the dramatization of situations of oral communication can be a linguistic model of understanding. In this respect he resembles Ross Chambers who, in Story and Situation, explores the interpersonal dynamic between reader and text. Studies like these have combined with work on oral narrative by people like William Labov and the narrative pragmatics deriving from speech-act theory (as in Mary Louise Pratt's work on literary discourse) to shift the attention of narrative theory from what is told to the act of telling. And interest in the act of telling means reconsideration of long-standing norms of the value of unity and shapeliness, as well as a redefinition of the nature of meaning in narrative.

This is where Gaskell and Bakhtin prove most useful, for both share an interest in the dispersiveness of telling without surrendering their allegiance to the opposing movement of concentration and structuration. Bakhtin urges the necessity of both the centripetal and centrifugal forces of language: "Alongside the centripetal forces, the centrifugal forces of language carry on their uninterrupted work; alongside . . . centralization and unification, the uninterrupted processes of decentralization and disunification go forward" (Dialogic Imagination 272). Similarly, Gaskell stresses the need for both order and disorder in the dynamic of the oral narrative act. The meaning produced through the play of these opposing forces eludes the closural principles implicit in traditional modes of interpretation. For Bakhtin, as for Gaskell, a monological framework disallows the "happy war" in which diverse perspectives enter into open and productive conflict with each other. In her writing, Gaskell is fond of the strange and resonant oxymoron "gentle violence". She uses it repeatedly in her novels to describe a character's mood or development, but the phrase is peculiarly apt for the process of her own narrative. All of her texts seem to pulsate with a sense of gentle violence, as voice pushes against voice in a dialogic movement that both enacts and asks for a responsive relationship. The closure that produces the discrete, finalized aesthetic object is replaced by the wholeness that marks living relationship, as the voice of her storyteller calls for an active listener to the tale.

NOTES TO CHAPTER ONE

¹ Lord David Cecil voices the traditional view of Gaskell as an "intuitive, uncritical novelist," the writer of "rambling, unequal, enthralling novels" (199). More recent critics like Edgar Wright and Enid Duthie also regard Gaskell as basically artless. Wright sees her "chief fault" as a "fluency not checked by sufficient control" (253). And Duthie writes: "Her fluency had its dangers . . . and when not writing at her best, she could become somewhat diffuse" (198).

² Enid Duthie sees Cranford as "the most distinguished representative in her work of a different genre, the collection of related episodes, held together by a first-person narrator and a common social setting, which she had first essayed in 'Mr. Harrison's Confessions' and to which she returned, the year after the publication of the Life of Charlotte Bronte, in My Lady Ludlow" (190). Because the interest of the thesis is in Gaskell's work within the novelistic tradition, it deals only with her full-length novels, omitting the shorter, more anecdotal, works such as Cranford and Cousin Phillis.

³ Aristotle's discussion of plot assumes unity: "Necessarily, then, just as in other forms of imitation, one imitation is one thing, so also, a plot, since it is an imitation of an action, must be an imitation of an action that is one and whole" (16).

⁴ Wright notes: "The narrative voice in the early work is that of a storyteller talking to her audience, eager to strike up a personal relationship" (242). Predictably, however, Wright sees this aspect of Gaskell's style in negative terms, as a "naive form of narrative commentary which disappears as she gains control

of her work" (282). Both Easson (Elizabeth Gaskell 80) and Duthie (200) make the same point of Gaskell's gain of control.

⁵ Bakhtin makes an explicit distinction between his concept of "dialogic" and Hegelian dialectics: "Dialogue and dialectics. Take a dialogue and remove the voices . . . remove the intonations . . . carve out abstract concepts and judgments from living words and responses, cram everything into one abstract consciousness - and that's how you get dialectics." "From Notes Made in 1970-71," Speech Genres & Other Late Essays 147.

⁶ On Bakhtin's concept of utterance, see Clark & Holquist, Mikhail Bakhtin, chapters 9-10.

⁷ Donald Stone, for example, sees Gaskell's inability to reconcile conflict as part of the Romantic tension between quietism and rebellion (ch. 5). Yvonne Ffrench suggests that the tension arises from the "effort to reconcile the antiquarian with the social reformer," a clash between her "affection for past, and regard for present, conditions" (27). For Margaret Ganz the problem has to do with Gaskell's relationship to the reading public. She was "intensely affected by the attitudes of the reading public and the strictures of the critics to whose conventional standards -- it must always be remembered -- she was herself partially committed" (25).

⁸ In his Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, Bakhtin critiques Hegelian idealism: "In an environment of philosophical monologism the genuine interaction of consciousnesses is impossible, and thus genuine dialogue is impossible as well. In essence idealism knows only a single mode of cognitive interaction among consciousnesses: someone who knows and possesses the truth instructs someone who is ignorant of it and in error; that is, it is the interaction of a teacher and a pupil, which, it follows, can only be a pedagogical dialogue" (81). This

follows on an earlier critique in chapter one within the context of Dostoevsky's work: "Each novel presents an opposition, which is never cancelled out dialectically, of many consciousnesses, and they do not merge in the unity of an evolving spirit . . . Within the limits of the novel the heroes' worlds interact by means of the event, but these inter-relationships . . . are the last thing that can be reduced to thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. . . The unified, dialectically evolving spirit, understood in Hegelian terms, can give rise to nothing but a philosophical monologue" (26).

⁹ Garrett draws upon Edwin Muir's distinction between the novel of character and the dramatic novel. Muir writes: "The values of the character novel are social. . . the values of the dramatic novel individual or universal, as we choose to regard them. . . . These two types of the novel are neither opposites, then, nor in any important sense complements of each other; they are rather two distinct modes of seeing life: In Time, personally, and in Space, socially" (The Structure of the Novel.) Garrett also cites Edward Said's similarly opposing principles of succession and adjacency in Beginnings: Intention and Method.

¹⁰ Rosemarie Bodenheimer has discussed the connection of narrative form and ideology, suggesting that "the fictional 'real' is both contained and created in the structural arrangements of its fantasy" (The Politics of Story 7). For a theoretical exposition of such a critical position, she draws upon Fredric Jameson's discussion in The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act in which he claims an ideological basis for the aesthetic act. For a similar theoretical framework from a feminist perspective, see Nancy K. Miller, The Heroine's Text and her "Emphasis Added: Plots and Plausibilities in Women's Fiction".

¹¹ In an article entitled "The Problem of Content, Material and Form in Verbal Artistic Creation" published in Russian Contemporary in 1924, Bakhtin develops a theory of

communication which places emphasis upon an author's personality, ethical values and social context as the defining features of an utterance, including a literary text. He here counters the Formalist's claim that a work of art should be a finalized aesthetic object by regarding it instead as part of an open-ended and ongoing conversation. See Katrina Clark's and Michael Holquist's discussion of this article in their excellent account of Bakhtin's relationship with the Formalists in Mikhail Bakhtin 186-196.

¹² In The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship, Bakhtin is critical of the assumptions behind the separation of language into the poetic and the practical that emphasizes aesthetic coherence at the expense of the act of communication. See Clark and Holquist 186-196.

¹³ See, for example, Tzvetan Todorov, The Poetics of Prose, and Gerard Genette. Narrative Discourse.

¹⁴ Bakhtin's own critique of Freudianism consists of two points, both centered around Freud's propensity to disregard the interpersonal nature of language. First, Bakhtin claimed that Freud projected the dynamics of the interrelationship between two people (the I and the other) into a single, individual psyche. And second, he failed to give credence to the disparity between official and unofficial consciousness, thus disregarding the restrictive aspect of the analyst and analysand relationship. See Clark and Holquist 171-185.

Closer to Bakhtin's concept of dialogism would be the I-Thou model of Jewish theologian Martin Buber. For Bakhtin and Buber, see in particular, Nina Perlina, "Bakhtin and Buber: Problems of Dialogic Imagination."

CHAPTER TWO

The Refusal to Listen: Doubling and the Monstrous in Mary Barton

In Chapter Nine of Mary Barton, John Barton returns home from London defeated, having been denied the opportunity to tell the story of his people's distress to Parliament. In his despondent talking with his daughter, Mary, Barton evidences a sense of isolation and exclusion from the realm of language and relationship, the result of Parliament's "cruel refusal" to listen: "We mun speak to our God to hear us," he says to Mary, "for man will not hearken; no, not now, when we weep tears of blood" (I ix 111). This interchange is immediately followed in the text by one of several embedded stories, a story designed to offer comfort and consolation to Barton in his distress. Job Legh listens to Barton's tale of aborted narrative and is inspired to tell his own story of a journey to London in a gesture that underlines the way in which tales may serve as a means of human reconnection. Slowly Barton's "gloom is dispelled" through the process of telling and listening, and he finds respite from the outer "pressure of the terrible times" in the enclosed domestic circle of the hearth and the oral storytelling act (I x 128).

Gaskell turns to embedded tales several times in the first half of Mary Barton; without exception, the stories serve in some way to counter the pressure of dehumanizing historical forces. Set within the enclosure of the home and hearth, the oral storytelling act is for her the image of the narrative situation. In its informality and its intimacy built upon mutual respect and interaction, it is a model of human understanding and relationship. In contrast to Parliament's refusal to listen stands the sympathetic listening John Barton finds in Job, Margaret and Mary. In the drama of the oral narrative act Gaskell explores the dialogic movement of mutuality and exchange that Bakhtin counters to the monologic nature of official storytelling--and official listening. Through the telling of stories, Gaskell defines narrative meaning as based on interdependence and produced through the relationship between teller and listener.

In such a structure of meaning, the stories told rely for their form on the active (often resistant) response of their listeners. Will Wilson's tale of mermaids in Chapter Thirteen, for example, is given shape by Job's spoken questions and unspoken gestures of disbelief:

"I were always on the look-out for a mermaid, for that I knew were a curiosity."

"You might ha' looked long enough," said Job, in an under-tone of contempt, which, however, the quick ears of the sailor caught.

"Not so long, master, in some latitudes, as you think. It stands to reason th' sea hereabouts is too cold for mermaids; for women here don't go half-naked on account of climate. But I've been in lands where muslin were too hot to wear on land, and where the seas were more than milk-warm; and though I'd never the good luck to see a mermaid in that latitude, I know them that has."

"Do tell us about it," cried Mary.

"Pooh, pooh!" said Job the naturalist.

Both speeches determined Will to go on with his story. (I xiii 173)

The narrative situation imaged here highlights the productive movement of exchange and the centrality of response in the narrative act. Here different voices clash, play against, question, and contest each other. For Gaskell the relationship between teller and listener is usually at once trusting and tenuous. The characters move from one point to another, allowing each point to generate the next in a tentative movement toward meaning. It is the movement of relationship that carries the meaning; the force of Job's contentious questioning gives shape to Will's story, and the story itself culminates, not in some moment of closural truth, but in the moment of reception and transaction that constitutes its successful passing on. Will "excites the old gentleman's faith and credit at last," says the narrator, with the telling of another story, which is then met by the reception of "Job's grateful handshake."

This embedded tale highlights Gaskell's allegiance to the expansive and dispersive form of oral storytelling and places in

relief the complex of issues around which she shapes the telling of her own story. The concept of relationship, response and responsibility implied in the act of listening serves as a hermeneutical key for the reader of Mary Barton. It is the action of productive listening that motivates and shapes Gaskell's story, opening it up to narrative possibilities lying outside the closural system of literary convention with its established patterns of meaning. Anticipating the social and literary expectations of what she calls in her Life of Charlotte Bronte a "critical and unsympathetic public," Gaskell has her narrator assume the position of a speaking subject herself, an advocate in search of a listener for her characters' stories. Robyn Warhol has termed this narrator an "engaging narrator" and has given a suggestive reading of Mary Barton as dependent on the rendering of a speaking voice explicitly intent upon drawing the reader into a position of listening sympathy and active response.

The assumption of a listener, as Warhol has emphasized, is central to the narration of Mary Barton, for the narrative discourse internalizes the presence of another and hence shapes itself in anticipation of response. Gaskell herself alludes to this position in a letter to Eliza Fox: "I told the story according to a fancy of my own; to really SEE the scenes I tried to describe, (and they WERE as real as my own life at the time), and then to tell them as nearly as I could, as if I were speaking to a friend over the fire on a winter's night and describing real occurrences"

(Letters 48). Within the novel itself, the reader is explicitly invited into a dialogic space. In the early part, the narrator makes frequent appeals to her reader's memory and imagination, actively encouraging a stance of productive listening and drawing the reader into an intimate space with the characters. In Chapter Five, for example, while describing the self-taught working-class men of Manchester, she turns outside the narrative frame to direct a comment to her listener: "If you will refer to the preface to Sir J. E. Smith's Life (I have it not by me, or I would copy you the exact passage), you will find that he names a little circumstance corroborative of what I have said" (I v 41). In a similar way, the narrator's description of Alice's preparations prior to Mary's and Margaret's visit in Chapter Four is interspersed with comments which assume an engaged listener: "[Alice] took one of the chairs away from its appropriate place by the table, and putting it close to the broad large hanging shelf I told you about when I first described her cellar dwelling, and mounting on it, she pulled towards her an old deal box, and took thence a quantity of the oat bread of the north . . . " (I iv 31). "Can you fancy the bustle of Alice to make the tea, to pour it out and sweeten it to their liking . . . ? Can you fancy the delight with which she watched her piled-up clap-bread disappear before the hungry girls. . . ." (I iv 32). Gaskell's relationship with her listener, however, is a tenuous one. Even in this situation of domestic intimacy, the narrative voice shows signs of the

anticipation of possible resistance. At the end of the chapter, she addresses her reader as a stranger in need of accommodation. Before Margaret's singing of the "Oldham Weaver" to Mary and Alice, the narrator turns outside the frame to address the reader directly: "Do you know the 'Oldham Weaver'? Not unless you are Lancashire born and bred, for it is a complete Lancashire ditty. I will copy it for you" (I iv 37). Gaskell then includes a text of the song, written in Lancashire dialect, with the framing comment that it is to be sung "in a kind of droning recitative, depending much on expression and feeling" (I iv 39). Like Will Wilson, Gaskell tells her story in anticipation of possible resistance or need for accommodation, and the internalization of a listener's response gives shape to her own narrative.

In an attempt to elicit a stance of responsive listening in her reader, then, Gaskell structures her own telling around the conventions of the oral narrative act, allowing for the expression of forms of experience typically outside literary convention. In a letter of 1849, she describes John Barton as a man "of rude illogical thought . . . full also of suffering which appealed to him through his senses." "His life is a tragic poem," she says, but one which "cannot take formal language" (Letters 42). Language and established literary convention cannot give voice to the depth of distress of the poor; their suffering lies outside established patterns of signification. Gaskell's expressed intention in the novel, as stated in her preface, is to "give some utterance" to the

agony of this "dumb people," and she sets out to create a narrative environment in which their voice might be heard. Thus the text is filled with the voices of the working class, characters telling their stories and describing the conditions of their life.

I

The digressive telling of embedded stories has traditionally been viewed as a weakness in Mary Barton, for the stories seem to impede and disrupt the action of the plot. Even Edgar Wright, who in Mrs. Gaskell: The Basis for Reassessment makes the most persuasive case for her importance as a major writer, critiques her for her use of interpolated tales. Gaskell's fondness for digression, he says, "affects the tautness of her style" (82). But it is precisely this standard of unity and "tautness of style" that Gaskell resists by including embedded stories in the plotline of her works. Parliament's refusal to listen has its literary analogue in the monological plotline of classical narrative, with its prescriptions of unity, closure and authorial control. And through the telling of stories Gaskell is able not only to image the oral storytelling situation but also to portray the dialogic nature of

narrative in action. By allowing her characters the chance to give voice to their stories, she is able to disrupt the classical plotline with its totalizing prescriptions and to open out and transform existing literary frameworks. The embedded stories function in Mary Barton as part of what D.A. Miller has called the "narratable", the aspects of the story which simultaneously disrupt and generate the plotline of events (xi). Gaskell's dialogic structure works with this dynamic of disruption and itself exists as a response to a closural system of literary and social values that is marked by a refusal to listen to voices different from its own. The first half of Mary Barton consists of a melange of voices; the text is alive with the sound of vibrant dialogue as voices, often in vivid local dialect, contest and cross each other. Against pervading images of external historical pressure, the embedded tales allow the characters' voices a chance to be heard and give a sense of vitality to the otherwise oppressive atmosphere of the plot.

And yet as the story progresses toward its middle, these voices, as well as that of John Barton, fall silent. Barton's earlier faith in the possibility of telling his story and transforming the conditions of his people's life is increasingly eroded, and after Parliament's refusal to listen in Chapter Nine, his ability to respond and enact his own meaning in language is thwarted. Bakhtin has discussed the necessity for response, for contention and questioning as the moment of choice and value which is what

he calls the moment of "answerability" to the world (Clark and Holquist 64-94). When this answerability is denied, the self turns inward in an irrational movement. The narrative contract abused, the self splits and doubles within itself, ending in a state of confusion and violence that Peter Brooks calls "the definition of monsterism" ("Godlike Science" 208).

After John Barton is refused the opportunity to tell the story of his people's distress, the narrator describes his psychological state very much in these terms. His is a condition of "monomania," marked by the "pressing in" of "haunting incessant thoughts," and it reminds the narrator of a punishment about which she has read: "The supposed or real criminal was shut up in a room, supplied with every convenience and luxury; and at first mourned little over his imprisonment. But day by day he became aware that the space between the walls of his apartment was narrowing, and then he understood the end. Those painted walls would come into hideous nearness, and at last crush the life out of him. . . 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" (I xv 194-5). John Barton's response to this state of imposed and oppressive isolation is to become a Chartist, "a Communist, all that is commonly called wild and visionary" (I xv 196). The visionary state is presented as the necessary response to the pressure of entrapment that results from the broken social (and narrative)

contract. It provides a sense of power for the future and a way of forgetting the oppressive historical conditions of past and present signalled by the refusal to listen. In its collapsing of time, the visionary stance serves as a means of escape from the vicissitudes and contingencies of historical existence. Interestingly, the description of Barton's psychological state and the portrayal of his decision for visionary escape are set off from one another in the text by the narrator's intervening comparison of the frustrated masses (and in particular John Barton) to the Frankensteinian monster:

The actions of the uneducated seem to me typified in those of Frankenstein, that monster of many human qualities, ungifted with a soul, a knowledge of the difference between good and evil. The people rise up to life; they irritate us, they terrify us, and we become their enemies. Then, in the sorrowful moment of our triumphant power, their eyes gaze on us with a mute reproach. Why have we made them what they are; a powerful monster, yet without the inner means for peace and happiness? (I xv 196)

As Patsy Stoneman has noted (73), this image of the Frankensteinian monster has been either overlooked or noted with embarrassment by critics of Mary Barton (e.g. Ganz 64). But feminist criticism has centered upon the social significance of Mary Shelley's novel itself, seeing in it Lacanian overtones of

exclusion from the symbolic order that results in violence and alienation (Moers 97). In more specifically narrative terms, the image of forcefully contained potential violence in this passage is suggestive of both the theme and narrative movement of the first half of Mary Barton. And the pressure of containment and hint of potential irrationality take on deeper significance when the reader recalls that Frankenstein's monster loses control of his rational faculties, not because of a lack of moral education, but because of the lack of a listener. Throughout the story the monster begs and pleads for a listener to his tale, and it is the continual refusal of a hearing that eventually turns him upon himself in a specular relationship that leads to violence and destruction. It is the forcefully contained structure of objectification that leads to the image of thwarted aspiration implied in the people's gaze. Their "mute reproach" of silent protest is a result not of their lack of soul, but of their exclusion from the realm of language and relationship.

On a more subtle level, this same forced containment can be felt in the very language of the Frankenstein passage. Inevitably, Gaskell's rhetoric is imprisoned in middle-class convention. The discussion of social reform in this passage, for example, is embedded in a rhetoric of objectification that denies the expression of reality outside its monological structure of meaning. Like the monster, the people are "ungifted" with a soul; they have been "made" by "us". As Catherine Gallagher has pointed out (72-

74), the dichotomy between inner and outer is especially striking in this passage. The people's inner condition, the socializing and civilizing place of the soul, has its origins in the hands of the middle class and the middle-class's prescriptions of what determines morality (see Stoneman 73). Thus John Barton's distrust of the upper class is presented by the narrator as a "widely erring judgement" in the paragraph prior to the Frankenstein passage (I xv 196). Yet it is characteristic of Gaskell's dialogic mode that this moral evaluation serves only as a frame for the dramatic portrayal of the conditions of Barton's life which contradicts that very moral evaluation. These conditions are often made known to the reader through Barton's telling of stories. The sound of his voice contests the power of middle-class rhetoric and morality; the individual circumstances of his life serve to qualify and call into question any facile moral and social pronouncements.

In this presenting of conflicting sides of the same issue, Gaskell works within a tenuous formal tension. On the one hand, she strives for a narrative that allows her characters the freedom of their individual voices; on the other hand, she must contain these voices within the forms of available literary, social, and moral convention. The narrator works within this tension in the same way that Gaskell has her characters work within it: through a simultaneous narrative movement of unity and dispersion. While upholding the need for a unifying structure, she at the same

time explores, through the characters' actions and stories, the conditions surrounding such structures and the oppression inherent in answering only to preconceived patterns and expectations. In a sense, the tension can be seen as one between the forces of coherence and contingency, pattern and possibility, as they simultaneously energize and constrain each other.

It is this tension between the forces of unity and dispersion that accounts for what has been considered the major formal weaknesses of Mary Barton. As Stephen Gill has noted in his introduction to the Penguin edition of the novel, these weaknesses are twofold: an uncertainty vis-a-vis the audience and subject that results in "bewildering shifts of voice," and a generic split halfway through when the novel moves out of realism into "the far less demanding world" of romance (23, 22). These weaknesses, however, seem less distractions from than confirmations of Gaskell's overriding theme in that both the shifts in narrative voice and the generic split manifest the tension which results from a simultaneous desire for and distrust of form. In an attempt to bring these conflicting forces of unity and dispersion into productive relationship, Gaskell turns toward a contradictory, self-refuting narrative structure in the first half of Mary Barton. As in the assertion of John Barton's "widely erring judgement," the narrator's language often seems to shape itself in answer to conventional readerly expectation, while her characters' voices and stories press against and attempt to open up that convention

to question.¹ In Chapter Three, for example, the narrator spends almost a page describing the plight of "the poor weaver" who helplessly watches his employer moving "from house to house, each one grander than the last, till he ends in building one more magnificent than all. . . 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 [sic.] children through the vicissitudes of lowered wages, short hours, fewer hands employed, etc; . . . The contrast is too great. Why should he alone suffer from bad times?" (I iii 23-4). This question is then abruptly undercut by the narrator's disclaimer directed toward her middle-class audience: "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" (I iii 24). This self-refutation continues to manifest itself in the abrupt shifts from concession to conventional expectation to dramatic description as the sequence continues: "True, that with child-like improvidence good times will often dissipate his grumbling, and make him forget all prudence and foresight. But there are earnest men among these people" (I iii 24). And the narrator immediately devotes an entire page to a history of Barton's life, a description of deprivation and sorrow centered on the contrast between rich and poor. The narrator ends with another appeal to the reader: "You can fancy, now, the hoards of vengeance in his heart against the employers" (I iii 25). This disjunction between general theory

and the specific portrayal of circumstances sets up what Bodenheimer calls a "conceptual impasse" (214) in Mary Barton, and nowhere is this impasse more strongly felt than in the character of John Barton.

In the context of his individual circumstances, Barton is portrayed sympathetically as the victim of social forces beyond his control. But when it comes to passages in which he is portrayed as the representative of general social principles, Gaskell's sympathetic imagination can become defensive, as she bows to what Bakhtin would call her listener's "hostile word." Anticipation of that word causes a vacillation between critique of and concession to middle-class values. And Barton's vacillation between rebellion and resignation is another manifestation of the same divided imagination at work. The thematic opposition in Barton's character finds expression in troubled contrasts between him and other characters, such as George and Alice Wilson. In comparison with their subdued resignation, his propensity for rebellion is seen as dangerous. And yet Gaskell's qualified portrayal of both George and Alice as incapable of intellectual comprehension and as prone to regression subtly calls into question her own retreat from critical analysis and generalization. As Bodenheimer notes, while Gaskell fears the arrogance of critical generalization, she simultaneously "dramatizes, with admiration, the superior powers of intelligence that would inevitably reach for it" ("Private Grief" 202).²

John Barton is the main vehicle for Gaskell's double vision throughout the novel. He is the embodiment of contradiction, at once violent and loving, rebellious and resigned. In his work with the union, he simultaneously argues against violence to scabs while he encourages it toward the masters. Mary, unable to reconcile the warring sides within her father, best expresses the contradictions inherent in his character: she "seemed to separate him into two persons--one, the father who had dandled her on his knee, and loved her all her life long; the other, the assassin, the cause of all her trouble and woe" (I xxxiii 402). Barton dies, "still tore in two" (I xxxv 431), and Gaskell's own troubled questioning disallows any final sense of resolution. She simply holds him up in all of his complexity and allows the contradictions to speak themselves. Gaskell never presumes complete understanding. In Chapter Eight, for example, rather than attempting to solve the problems presented by historical circumstances, she has her narrator consider the complexity of the situation: "Even philanthropists who had studied the subject, were forced to own themselves perplexed in the endeavor to ascertain the real causes of the misery; the whole matter was of so complicated a nature, that it became next to impossible to understand it thoroughly . . ." (I viii 94). Recognizing the difficulty, Gaskell offers her middle-class readers no answers, but by building their putative objections dialogically into her own discourse, she is able to show the power

of contradiction and contestation at work, and to engage her readers in a movement toward responsive understanding.

This self-refuting structure emerges in its positive aspect if the novel is seen as a set of three concentric circles in relationship with one another rather than as the linear development of a theme. The innermost circle of the three is the dramatic rendering of the characters' lives and evocation of their voices (often in dialect); the second is the realist plot of events controlled by the narrative voice of middle-class convention; and the third, the circle of the implied reader, understanding and participating in the narrative. Among the three circles, there is a sense of dialogic movement, and their interaction is an expression of Gaskell's preoccupation with the metaphor of listening on a formal, as well as thematic, level.

In the innermost circle of the three, dramatic interest centers around Mary Barton as she makes her way through a series of encounters that lead her from a position of romantic idealism toward an awareness of the need for a social shaping of her own dreams and desires. Yet the tensions implied in this shaping activity are never lost sight of as the story of Mary's development is brought into contact with the realist plot of the second circle. This second circle consists primarily of descriptions of living conditions and the dramatic portrayal of circumstances of deprivation. Mary's flights of romantic fancy, although presented as wrong, are qualified when placed within their context of

historical circumstance. Her unwillingness to find a social frame for her individual dreams and desires has as much to do with the inherent limitations of the available frames as with her own propensity for rebellion.

Gaskell's narrator is ambiguous about Mary's character. The reader is introduced to her as a woman with ambition and "a strong will" who is "little inclined to submit to rules." "Yes, Mary was ambitious," says the narrator, "and did not favour Mr. Carson the less because he was rich and a gentleman. . . Such is the contrariness of the human heart, from Eve downwards, that we all, in our old-Adam state, fancy things forbidden sweetest. So Mary dwelt upon and enjoyed the idea of someday becoming a lady, and doing all the elegant nothings appertaining to ladyhood" (I vii 90). Mary's development in the novel consists of her learning to control these "ambitious" impulses and desires. By the end of the story, she comes to the point of passivity that propriety and decorum call for, but not without first calling that very ethic of propriety into question. Although the narrator couches Mary's romantic fantasies in evaluative judgements such as "the old-Adam state" of self-indulgence, she actually dramatizes them as a very small part of a wider life of social relationship and responsibility. From the start Mary is presented as self-aware in her "earnest, sad desire to do right" (I xi 151). Even her romantic dreams are qualified by the realization that the center of them is not truly "beloved" but "favoured by fancy" (I v 46).

And the narrator notes that Mary "blames herself for being so much taken up by visions of the golden future" (I vii 83) that she forgets her life of social responsibility in the present. Mary does not, in fact, forget such responsibility very often. So Harry Carson, the object of her romantic fantasies, is quickly forgotten in her "anxious desire to comfort" Mrs. Davenport at the death of her husband.

Mary's problem of values is highlighted by the activity of other characters in the first half of the story. Her decision to control and tame her romantic impulses rather than to live them out, for example, is presented as the obvious alternative to the life of shifting meaning and immorality exemplified by Sally Leadbitter. And yet if the "vulgar-minded" Sally is the image of disorder that results from a lack of decorum, Old Alice and Margaret are the image of the opposite: the problem of the order of decorum. Embodying the propriety demanded by middle-class and Christian convention, the two women serve as guides for Mary after the death of her mother. Pure, sober, modest, and faithful, their lives are a model of sanctity and goodness, the paradigm of morality. And yet the depiction of their shaping of experience offers the reader a less certain perspective. Alice's persistent need to contain the vicissitudes of her life by constant nostalgic forays into the past represents more than the reassuring power of memory. Her telling of the past seems to spring more from obsessive need than from expansive desire, and the reader

senses an unhealthy pressure behind her insistent attempt to recover and rework the past in a meaningful way in the present. The oppressive images of enclosure that surround her suggest a more sinister dynamic at work. Submerged in her "cellar home" of the present, Alice makes constant invocations to the hidden and secret places of her childhood, bespeaking a need to escape time and contingency. This perpetual reliance upon the spirit of the past as the only means of living in the present places in relief those circumstances that cannot be borne without the gentling effects of time. Surrounded by disorder and chaos, she can only escape into the enclosing movement of a highly selective memory which, paradoxically, softens the ravages of the past while implying a loss of the self in the present.

Alice's need to integrate time into a personal mythology of "the golden hills of heaven" as a means of protection from the grim present underlines her plight, but it points also to the regressive and deceptive power of nostalgia. Listening to Alice's stories of the past, the reader senses a voice that is not really inhabiting either that past or the present telling of it. In its merging into mythology and ideal vision, Alice's telling seems to leave her listeners behind, and she is brought back to reality only when another's interpretation of her words approaches a questioning of Christian (and middle-class) convention. Mary's identification with Alice's melancholy thoughts on the "dree work of waiting", for example, is met with a petition for forgiveness: "I

ask your pardon, and God's pardon, too, if I've weakened your faith, by showing you how feeble mine was. Half our life's spent in waiting, and it ill becomes one like me, wi' so many mercies, to grumble. I'll try and put a bridle o'er my tongue and my thoughts too" (I xii 168). But the utter self-denial that defines Alice's shaping of experience has already been brought into question by John Barton earlier in the novel when he rejected domestic service for Mary in Chapter Three because "he considered domestic servitude as a species of slavery; a pampering of artificial wants on the one side, a giving-up of every right of leisure by day and quiet rest by night on the other". And the narrator herself is characteristically ambiguous here in her immediate appeal to the reader: "How far his strong exaggerated feelings had any foundation in truth, it is for you to judge" (I iii 26).

The problem of moral authority is brought into further focus by the narrator's portrayal of Margaret, the second model of normative response against which Mary defines herself. Like Alice, Margaret is described in a high rhetoric of purity and goodness; as the image of harmony and restraint, she is the representation of the eternal values defined by middle-class Christian society. She is the "singing angel" filled with holy sympathy, and yet the narrator informs us that Margaret had "no sympathy" with the temptations to which "loveliness, vanity, ambition or the desire of being admired exposes so many; no sympathy with flirting girls, in short" (I xxii 289). These

extremes of sympathetic response highlight the intolerance implicit in the localizing of human values in the eternal realm which denies the reality of conflict and paradox at the heart of historical existence. Margaret "had no idea," we are told, "of the strength of the conflict between will and principle in some who were differently constituted than herself" (I xxii 290). The portrayal of Margaret as the embodiment of the eternal realm is intensified by her association with the worlds of sound and darkness. These worlds, with their mystery and links to pre-conscious association, become paradoxically limiting when faced with the contingencies of historical existence. Living outside the realm of human conflict, Margaret relies upon a monologic frame of reference that itself denies the reality of history. If Alice can only go back, Margaret can only stand still; she is the emblem of a certain inertia of middle-class definitions of Christian value, the perfect individual in whom there is little that can generate and maintain narrative interest. In her portrayal of both Alice and Margaret, Gaskell evidences an ambivalence in relation to the tension between the assumptions of middle-class morality and the contingencies of historical existence. Passivity and propriety emerge as positions that are virtuous, but also limited. In particular, they are distancing principles that remove one from action, and they deny the self its own voice in the realm of language and relationship.

Mary herself is constantly pulled between self-assertion and self-denial, and her internal tension is exacerbated by external pressures.³ As a woman and a member of the working class, she has to make her way in an economy in which she can define herself only in terms of another's expectations. Hers is a world of exchange, and she must operate in its terms. Mary, we are told, had "early determined that her beauty should make her a lady." This determination is doubly motivated in that Mary "coveted" this rank all the more because of her father's "abuse" of the rank and because she believed that her "lost Aunt Esther" had achieved it (I iii 26). The recurrent reference to her "lost Aunt Esther" is the expression of one side of the tension between self-assertion and self-denial within which Mary lives. Esther, the "outcast prostitute" (I xxiv 182), is the embodiment of the extreme of self-assertion, the flaunter of social convention whose spirit "ferments" in Mary's bosom (I vii 90). As Margaret Homans has pointed out, when the tension between self-assertion and self-denial is denied a context for mutuality and interaction, there occurs a splitting within the self, and such splitting often takes the literary shape of a double. The motif of the double lies at the structural and thematic center of Mary Barton. From the earliest pages, the "mysterious Aunt Esther" holds "an unacknowledged influence over Mary" (I iii 26). The two women look the same and share the same "ambitious" spirit. Esther is reminded of her own little girl when she looks at Mary, and Mary mistakes Esther

for her own mother. Mary is unwittingly determined to follow in her aunt's footsteps in order to escape her present circumstances, and Esther is obsessed with saving Mary from a fate like her own. There is a persistent sense of the blurring of the boundaries of identity between the two, a merging which produces a kind of irrationalism. Mary and Esther's relationship (as we will see in the next section) is structured around dream experiences, and Esther's every appearance in the text evokes the Gothic with its sense of darkness and chaos.

Esther is described as the "Butterfly;" she calls herself the "abandoned and polluted outcast" (I xxi 272).⁴ From the first pages she exerts a mysterious influence over the course of the narrative. Her disappearance motivates John Barton's initial story, and the persistent reference to her absence helps to generate Gaskell's story. Suggestively, Esther's every appearance in the text is predicated upon her search for a listener to her own tale. "To whom shall the outcast prostitute tell her tale," asks the narrator. "She must speak, to that she was soul-compelled; but to whom?" (I xxiv 182). As Esther weaves in and out of the text, her persistent attempts to tell her story interfere with the telling of the wider story, and such interference draws attention to her function in the novel as a whole. Upon her discovery of what she believes to be Jem's guilt in Chapter Twenty-one, Esther berates herself for her act of interference in attempting to rescue Mary from a life like

her own. She "curses" herself, the narrator tells us, "for the interference which she believed had led to this; for the information and the warning she had given to Jem, which had roused him to this murderous action" (I xxi 272). Esther's berating herself here for her act of interference highlights the motif of interference in the novel. From its earliest pages, she plays an interfering role, attempting to tell her own story in order to gain understanding for herself and to change the course of Mary's life. The irrational surrounds Esther's frenzied and frustrated attempts to tell her story, and the aura that accompanies her telling suggests another narrative impulse at work, one motivated by the pressure of rigid definitions of place and propriety. Her status as a wanderer, living out of place and denied a listening ear, reminds the reader of John Barton's similar exclusion from the social and narrative contract, leading to the condition of the monstrous. And like her brother-in-law, Esther is linked to the irrational and monstrous in the novel. Commenting on the nineteenth-century connection of prostitution with the monstrous, Peter Brooks observes that, in a culture of propriety, "the monster becomes the figure of displacement, transgression, desire, deviance and instability" (Reading for the Plot 84). Esther and John Barton are precisely such figures of displacement. The narrator calls them "two wanderers," and they are laid in one grave at the end "without name, initial or date" (I xxxviii

456). But their function in the novel belies this nameless end. As figures of errancy, they embody the force of narrative desire and possibility as well. As they wander in and out of the text, partially hidden in gaslit shadows, their voice of desire is heard as they attempt to tell their stories. And these stories, together with the poignant context of their telling, disrupt the notion of proper place in a way that opens up rigid definitions of propriety. Although Esther appears only four times and John Barton is increasingly rendered almost completely silent and absent in the course of the novel, their disruptive influence serves an important narrative function in Mary Barton. John Lucas has identified an "anarchic force" in Gaskell's fiction, an "endlessly rewarding unofficial side" that keeps contesting the official pattern of reconciliation, "revealing different patterns of inevitability, of antagonisms, misunderstandings, hatred" (Literature of Change 12). John Barton and Esther are part of this "unofficial side" of the novel; in their unpredictability and instability, they break up the drive of the linear plot toward the end, at once disorienting and reorienting the reader's perception by raising questions and demanding interpretation. To invoke D.A. Miller's concept of the "narratable," Esther and John Barton function to deprive the classical plotline of events (governed by the code of propriety) of its preordained necessity. Their stories, and the aura that surrounds their telling, demand a deeper, contextual understanding of their

errancy. And yet that errancy is always simultaneously held open to question as well. Gaskell never excuses either John Barton or Esther for their choices; they are at once victims of circumstance and responsible beings. In a characteristic dialogic move, she allows these contradictions to exist in relationship to one another, and it is out of this struggle that her narrative is generated.

II

But Gaskell cannot finally maintain the productive tension that marks the first half of Mary Barton. Whereas the early portion consists in large part of embedded tales designed to give voice to the characters' desires and to engage the reader's memory and imagination, its middle portion suggests an increasing lack of faith in the efficacy of the narrative act. The voices of the characters begin to fall silent; the contradictory, self-

refuting narrative becomes less prominent; and the structure of the novel itself evidences a sense of oppositional splitting as it abruptly moves out of realism into romance and fable.⁵ It is almost as if the mounting pressure of the realist narrative in the early part of the novel can no longer be contained, and the text itself finds relief in an escape into conventional form.

A certain narrative tension has been apparent from the very first pages of the novel. The story opens with a carefully framed picture of idyllic nature in which the Bartons and Wilsons meet to tell their stories, but this pastoral setting is subtly disturbed by a hint of foreboding: "It was an early May evening - the April of the poets; for heavy showers had fallen all the morning, and the round, soft, white clouds which were blown by a west wind over the dark blue sky, were sometimes varied by one darker and more threatening" (I i 2). This sense of foreboding is intensified as John Barton and George Wilson begin to talk. The narrator describes John Barton in images of dormant energy: He has "a sort of latent, stern enthusiasm" (I i 4) and a "latent fire lighting up his eye" (I i 8). The telling of the two men's stories is unsettled by constant references to the mysterious disappearance of Esther and by John Barton's fierce attack upon the upper-class. The intensity of his sense of injustice is captured by his allusion to the story of Dives and Lazarus from the Gospel of Luke, a story that acts as a hermeneutical key. Suggestively, this story--and the gospel in which it appears--is centered around the notion of

listening. The biblical image of Lazarus implies a sense of institutional violence as he sits covered with sores and longing to eat the crumbs which fall from Dives' table, objectified and rendered silent. Dives' refusal to listen is called to account later when the figurative gulf of injustice on earth becomes the literal gulf between heaven and hell. From hell Dives calls to Abraham to warn his still living brothers, and Abraham's response is a call to listen: "They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them" (Luke 16:29). Luke, more than any other gospel, repeatedly emphasizes the connection between listening to and obeying God's Word as a means to the alleviation of social injustice.

The sense of threatening inner violence in the narrator's metaphors of John Barton's latent energy is underlined in the descriptions of the Barton's home in the following chapter. Amidst images of harmonious enclosure--a warm fire and curtains that are drawn "to shut in the friends met to enjoy themselves"--there are unsettling hints and references to the "smouldering ashes" in the breast of John Barton, "sure to break forth again. . . with fresh violence" (I ii: 23). And this sense of barely contained irrationality becomes more explicit and uncontrolled as the reader becomes increasingly aware of the threatening inner and outer chaos indicated by later descriptions of the Barton home. In contrast to its early function as a place of safety and protection, the house later becomes "dingy and comfortless," a place linked to

fear and darkness. Mary learns "to look with dread towards the window, which now her father would have kept uncurtained; for there were not seldom seen sights which haunted her in her dreams." She sees "strange faces of pale men, with dark glaring eyes," peering into the inner darkness, or "a hand and arm (the body hidden)" beckoning her father away (I x 133).

Amidst the narrator's increasingly graphic depictions of physical and emotional deprivation, the characters tell their stories in an attempt to contain the vicissitudes of their present existence. The inner circle of the hearth becomes the place of protection against the increasingly uncontrollable contingencies of the outside world. Alice's nostalgic musings, Will Wilson's doubly distanced retelling of a story of romantic exploit, Job's recounting of his London visit as a means of comforting John Barton—all serve either as a direct means of escape or as a point of respite from the threatening forces of historical existence. Mary's response to Will's story is exemplary. His story, she muses, "had been a pleasant little interlude to think upon. It had distracted her attention for a few hours from the pressure of many uneasy thoughts, of the dark, heavy oppressive times, when sorrow and want seemed to surround her on every side" (I xiii 179).

But the sense of the uncontrollable force of history becomes ever more powerful as Gaskell's narrative unfolds. The characters' framed tales are set off from each other by detailed descriptions of destitution: the Davenports' typhoid-infected

cellar, the death of the Wilson twins, and the breaking loose of irrationality in the fire and the crowd. At such moments the text itself evidences a certain irrationality. The scene of the fire, for instance, is one of the few places in the story where Gaskell allows metaphor to become a structural principle in itself rather than a rhetorical device. The metaphors of the "infernal tongues" of the mill fire and the "sealike moving of the rolling mass" of people, combined with the "bleak east wind" with its "prophecy of evil", merge in an image of uncontrolled passion: "The multitude in the street absolutely danced with triumph, and huzzaed and yelled till you would have fancied their very throats would crack; and then with all the fickleness of interest characteristic of a large body of people, pressed and stumbled and cursed and swore in the hurry to get out of Durham Street, and back to the immediate scene of the fire, the mighty diapason of whose roaring flames formed an awful accompaniment to the screams, and yells, and imprecations, of the struggling crowd" (I v 60). This image of uncontrolled energy, conventional as it may be in drawing on a standard metaphoric cluster generated by the French Revolution, nevertheless threatens to take on a life of its own in the text, and Gaskell quickly places it back within a distancing structure that both contains and diffuses it, the structure of the narrative act. At the scene and still in dread of "trampling and unheeding feet," Mary and Margaret ask each other (and others) questions in order to gain narrative control of the recent event. When they turn

homeward, "without remark or discussion," they encounter the elder Wilson who gives them "an account of his detention in the mill" before he hastens to "tell his missus he was all safe and well" (I v 61). And the series of tellings and listenings concludes with John Barton's eager listening as "Margaret [goes] over the whole story" for him (I v 61).

The overwhelming sense of the first part of Mary Barton is one of an increasing lack of control, both in terms of the world being represented and in terms of the representation itself, and this sense becomes even more pronounced after Parliament's refusal to listen to the working men in Chapter Nine. Job Legh's reading of Samuel Bamford's tightly structured poem about the plight of the poor ("God help the poor") at the end of this chapter is an image of the poignant--and increasingly impossible--attempt to somehow contain the ravaging forces of suffering.

As the novel moves into its middle, it piles up imprisoning images of the despair "settling down like a heavy cloud" in the "dead calm of sufferings" (I x 128). Amidst the "pressure of the terrible times," the voices of the characters fall conspicuously silent. Oppressed and repressed, they now rarely enter into the productive mutual movement of telling and listening. The intersubjective narrative act is replaced by the self-enclosed circular structures of introspection as the place of listening becomes the individual consciousness. With the characters denied their own expression, the narrator becomes increasingly more

controlling, taking on aspects of omniscience and herself contributing to the sense of oppression in the narrative. Increasingly obsessed with the duplicity of language and social convention in general, she seems to lose faith in the possibility of "listening sympathy" in which she had earlier trusted.

As the story moves forward, there is a sense that Gaskell's narrator becomes increasingly imprisoned in her own telling. In Chapter Fifteen, the chapter that is centered around the description of John Barton's feelings of "monomania" and need for visionary escape, the narrator shows signs of the same tendency towards irrationality in her own telling. Like John Barton himself, she seems to lose faith in the efficacy of the narrative act and in the realm of language in general. Her earlier appeals to the reader ("Can you fancy?", "Try to imagine") are here replaced by a polemical structure of refutation ("It is true. . . but"). Where earlier she had attempted gently to engage the reader's memory and imagination through her characters' telling of stories, in this second part of the novel, she tends to confront her reader with an explicit, almost bullying, adjuration to consider another side of reality. The engaging mode of the first part of the story is replaced by a more condemning and accusatory tone: "But before you blame too harshly this use, or rather abuse [of opium], try a hopeless life, with daily cravings of the body for food. Would you not be glad to forget life and its burdens?. . . it is true they who thus purchase it pay dearly for their oblivion; but can you expect

the uneducated to count the cost of their whistle? . . . have you taught them the science of consequences? It is not [God's] will, that [the interests of the masters and workers] are so far apart. Whose doing is it? Why have we made them what they are; a powerful monster, yet without the inner means for peace and happiness?" (I xv 196) Question after question follows in this same tone, creating an atmosphere of courtroom accusation similar to that later represented in the courtroom scene itself. Like Mary trapped amidst the questioning in the court, the reader becomes aware of a "heavy, whirling" sense in the text; the barrage of questions, combined with the portraits of deprivation, produces an image of condensed, chaotic time. This questioning is described by Mary as "a thing to be dreaded above all else" (I xxi 278). It inevitably elicits a sense of defensiveness and distance, a desire to enclose and protect the self. Ironically, Gaskell's narrator responds to the possibility of the refusal to listen exactly in kind, attacking the reader with questions which assume no listener. In a paradoxical twist, Gaskell extends to the reader the same paternalistic and condescending tone whose use vis-a-vis the oppressed she has been critiquing. The sense of a story being told is attenuated by an explicit calling into account whose monologic tone itself discounts the dialogic conventions of the narrative act.

It is almost as if Gaskell is forced to retreat to conventional romance in the second half of Mary Barton in an effort to give a

sense of order and coherence to a potentially chaotic text. Like Mary's decision to frame her imagination in a socially acceptable way, the narrator chooses to turn toward the form of narrative that concedes to convention. What Gaskell calls the "wild romance" of suffering embodied in the lives of her characters is replaced by the literary romance form, and the very convention itself affords a sense of containment to the increasingly chaotic voice of desire that has been threatening the narrative. Like Mary's movement into action to save Jem, Gaskell's narrative moves into the traditional plot of action to rescue her own story from contingency and chaos in the second half. The move entails a more distanced narrative stance, and this stance (like Mary's concession to passivity and decorum) provides an entry point for the reader. Unlike the early section, the narrator's voice is now heard only infrequently, and her direct appeals are in the form of deliberate distancing devices. As Mary searches for an alibi for Jem in Chapter Twenty-two, for example, the narrator describes the surroundings: "The hard, square outlines of the houses cut sharply against the cold bright sky . . . There was little sympathy in the outward scene, with the internal trouble. All was so still, so motionless, so hard! Very different to this lovely night in the country in which I am now writing, where the distant horizon is soft and undulating in the moonlight, and the nearer trees swing gently to and fro in the night-wind . . ." (I xxii 286). Although still addressing herself to a listener, the narrator intentionally

creates a space between past and present, between her story and her listener's world. Moreover, in this half the characters' voices are rarely heard, and the questions are no longer directed toward the reader. The self-refuting structure of the first half disappears, and the realm of questioning and answering becomes the inner consciousness of each individual character. This distanced narrative stance offers a reassuring sense of containment to the narrative. And in the same way, Gaskell's return to the romance plot of action and closure is reassuring in its reliance upon preordained and predictable structure and meaning.

Gaskell turns only twice toward embedded tales in this half. Significantly, these are two stories told by the novel's two "wanderers"--Esther's tale of married respectability told to Mary and John Barton's deathbed confession to Harry Carson. In Esther's tale, Gaskell's bringing together of the doubles in an attempt at understanding is an image of the narrative working of the second half of her own story. Mary's life, the embodiment of propriety and convention, is the force against which Esther structures the telling of her story. The story is a necessary lie, the events a fabrication erected out of her earnest desire to be listened to. The plot of her tale of "married respectability" answers the requirements of middle-class propriety, but the atmosphere and aura surrounding its telling signal another narrative impulse at work. This plot of false events arises from and is constantly disrupted by Esther's voice of desire: "Esther

was so much disappointed in this longed-for dreaded interview with Mary," the narrator tells us, "she had wished to impose upon her with her tale of married respectability and yet she had yearned and craved for sympathy in her real lot" (I xxi 280). Esther embodies the "and yet" of desire in Gaskell's story. As the figure of errancy, she represents the dispersive force of deviance and possibility which disrupts preconceived patterns of meaning and calls for the telling of another story. Indeed, the entire episode of Esther's long awaited meeting with Mary, including the embedded tale of her lie of married respectability, is explicitly presented as a disruption in the telling of Gaskell's story, as it leads the reader away from the straight path of the plot of events into the more tangled paths of desire and dream.

Just before Esther appears at the end of Chapter Twenty, Mary is in a peculiar state of disorientation in which time has lost its linearity. Like Esther, who constantly berates herself for her sinfulness, Mary here turns in on herself: "Oh, why did she ever listen to the tempter? Why did she ever give ear to her own suggestions, and cravings after wealth and grandeur? Why had she thought it a fine thing to have a rich lover?" (I xx 267). From this mode she shifts to a "strange forgetfulness of the present," moving "from remembering to wandering, unconnected thought" and then to the escape of dream (I xx 268). Esther's appearance is preceded by descriptions of the "cold ghastly radiance of the moon", and the "dim, dread forms of the dead

gliding and hovering" around Mary. The doubling and blurring of identity take on nonrational force as Mary mistakes Esther's voice and appearance for that of her dead mother and falls into her "trembling arms" in the final lines of the chapter (I xx 269). The narrator's immediate and abrupt turn toward the rational mode of explanation at the start of the next chapter testifies to Gaskell's uneasiness with the uncanniness and irrationality of this interruption in her text. "I must go back a little," she says, "to explain the motives which caused Esther to seek an interview with her niece" (I xxi 269). Chapter Twenty-one then centers on Esther's plan of intervention and the telling of her story to Mary, highlighting the incongruence between the plot of events and the story of Esther's desire. This kind of mixing of narrative levels exerts particular force in this half of Gaskell's novel; the plot of events is constantly met and checked by the interfering voice of desire. Esther's constructing of her own story on the basis of her act of interference echoes other acts of interference in the novel. Jem is accused by Harry Carson of interfering in Mary's life, and the workmen are warned not to interfere "with the master's powers." Interference comes to be seen in its positive aspect as a means of rescue, both from the threatening force of historical circumstances and from the threatening force of the closural world of values that refuses to listen to the voice of desire. In Gaskell's narrative it serves a disruptive function that breaks up the world of the traditional romance plot, drawing the reader

away from the drive toward the end into pockets of interpretation that question and contest the sequence of expected order. Esther becomes the animating force of the plot in this second half, her own interference rescuing Gaskell's narrative from preordained necessity and predictability and appealing to the possibility of another side to the story.

As figures of errancy, both John Barton and Esther are excluded from the plot at the end of Gaskell's story. The moral structure of the proper plot of events necessarily calls for their deaths. Raymond Williams has claimed that John Barton's displacement is the novel's great failure. His disappearance in the second half as the result of the middle-class "structure of sentiment" that feared violence, says Williams, ruins "the necessary integration of feeling in the whole theme" (99-103). But it can be argued that the split noted by Williams is a consequence as much of Gaskell's dialogic mode as of her class consciousness. Far from being the novel's great failure, the displacement of Barton and of Esther serves to rescue Gaskell's text. Excluded from the plot, these figures of errancy continue to wander in and out, insisting upon telling their stories, and they save the novel from a monological formal determinacy. The sound of their voices continues to reverberate, raising questions that remain unanswered, as in the haunting words that end Esther's life: "Has it been a dream then?" (I xxxviii 456). Like that of Esther, the voice of John Barton also resounds in the reader's

memory, and his deathbed confession acts as a warning against any sense of final ending. Barton dies confused, still "tore in two," between his "sorrow for poor suffering folk" and his attempt "to love them as caused their sufferings" (I xxxv 431). The fuller meaning of the story of John Barton's life and death lies outside that life in the echo of his voice in the listener's (and reader's) memory. Through the hearing of John Barton's story, Harry Carson is compelled to tell his own, a different one from the one he intended and even from the one that he imagines he is telling. Through a reliving of charged past moments and a listening to long silent voices, buried yet still alive, he comes to a knowledge of another story of his own life. He is forced to a moment of revision, and he comes to a place of listening, ("his own voice returning upon him"). Amidst the "phantom voices and shapes" of the past, John Barton's words are brought to remembrance, and Carson is driven to the Bible as the place of association. Gaskell turns to the biblical text to give a sense of structure to Carson's wandering thoughts, yet this promise of structure and finality only opens the text up to more stories. "Thought upon thought, and recollection upon recollection came crowding in," says the narrator, "from the remembrance of the proud day when he had purchased the costly book, in order to write down the birth of the little babe of a day old" (I xxxv 429). Carson's thoughts wander to his childhood and to the comparison of his own living conditions with those of John Barton: "Unaccustomed wonder filled his mind

at the reflection of the different lots of the brethren of mankind". Roused from his reverie, in the stillness and quietness of his study, he turns to the Gospel and "familiar with the events," begins to "comprehend the Spirit that made the Life" (I xxxv 429-30).

In this return to the model of the narrative act near the end of her story, Gaskell attempts once more to underline for her reader the implications of the need for listening-- a listening not only to the plot of events of a life but to the voice of desire that may call that plot into question. One final time at the end of Mary Barton, Gaskell moves the narrative act into the foreground when Mr. Carson, standing "at one of the breathing places of life," tries to make sense of the past and connect it to the present and calls for an interview with Jem and Job Legh. As Carson sits referring to his "slip of paper" on which the facts of the case are written, Job gently underlines the tenuousness of understanding: "You can never work facts as you would fixed quantities, and say, given two facts, and the product is so and so. God has given men feelings and passions which cannot be worked into the problem, because they are forever changing and uncertain"(I xxxvii 448). Mr. Carson comes to the recognition of a "secret of comfort" through a "searching inquiry" into the wider nature of his own calamity. He submits "to be taught by suffering" (I xxxvii 451), and in doing so moves beyond orders of conventional understanding in a "form of Prophecy" that allows him to break

the confines of his own limited vision and hear the voice of another.

It is the opening up of such a space for hearing that Gaskell seeks to effect in Mary Barton, motivated by the desire to bring into the form of the novel the "agony of suffering" that had hitherto been largely excluded from it. And she brings her middle-class reader to a point of response, not through a barrage of questions, but through a movement of listening that engages voices both inside and beyond the boundaries of the text. After Job Legh had told his tale of comfort to John Barton, we recall, the narrator noted that his listeners "were all silent for a few minutes, each following out the current of [their] thoughts" (I ix 124). And in the silence beyond the end lies the meaning of Gaskell's story as well, a meaning which consists of the relationship between teller and listener and which is contingent upon the movement of transaction and reception that constitutes the successful "passing on" of the story.

NOTES TO CHAPTER TWO

¹ The problem of tone/class attitude/narrator has been much discussed in relation to Mary Barton. Gaskell's tendency to vacillate between sympathy for the poor and conventional middle-class platitudes has been seen as a major weakness in the work. See, for example, W. A. Craik's discussion of Gaskell's difficulty with her relationship with her reader "arising from the nature of her subject" (9). Similarly, Enid Duthie claims that Gaskell "contradicts by explicit moralizing statements, the impression given by the work in general" (187). Coral Lansbury discusses Gaskell's deliberate intent to allow the characters to speak for themselves, while simultaneously assuming the narrative stance of a "concerned middle-class reader", fluctuating between analytic and homiletic commentary (Novel of Social Crisis 25). Lansbury's analysis comes closest to what I would call Gaskell's dialogic intent, but her position seems slightly too strategic and self-conscious to account for the structural and thematic tension that underlies all of Mary Barton. Gaskell's dialogism arises from her own confusion and belief in the power and necessity of troubled questioning, while Lansbury would have her consciously inducing a deliberate tension: "In effect, [Gaskell] assumes the role of the reader so that the characters may reveal themselves. Their individualism is preserved because the narrative voice so often contradicts the characters' thoughts and actions. The result is what Elizabeth Gaskell desires: her own voice becomes fiction, while the fictional characters assume reality. The tension is deliberately induced and becomes her most typical narrative technique" (25). For the best discussions of the split in narrative voice, see Ganz (55-66), and Lucas (Literature of Change 161-174).

² By contrast, David Smith overlooks the inherent tension in Mary Barton to see it as a straightforward plea for Christian resignation. Such a reading denies Gaskell's double vision and sees her as simply "patronizing" and "self-righteous" (103).

³ Mary Barton has generally been seen as a "very simple character" (Pollard 56), one whose major role in the novel is as a function of what Raymond Williams has called "the familiar and orthodox plot of the Victorian novel of sentiment" (Culture and Society 89). See, for example, Ganz, Craik, and Lucas. More recently, feminist readings like that of Lansbury or the more Lacanian Stoneman have provided more complex analyses that highlight the pressures of gender (and class) in her narrative.

⁴ For an excellent discussion of Victorian prostitution that draws on contemporary writings, see Calder (89-93). Calder finds that Gaskell's approach to prostitution in her novels was "compromised by convention."

⁵ The generic split in Mary Barton has been much discussed. Stephen Gill sees it as a movement out of realism into "the far less demanding world of romance" (22). Enid Duthie claims that, "Mary Barton has, instead of a wholly integrated action, what is really a combination of two different plots" (181). For more socially oriented critics, the split is typically seen in class terms. Raymond Williams, for example, regards Gaskell as moving from an evocation of "everyday life in the working class" in the first half of the novel to the "orthodox plot of the Victorian novel of sentiment" in the second (Culture and Society 87-91).

CHAPTER THREE

Evasive Telling, Enclosed Listening: Openness and Concealment in Ruth

Five years after the publication of Mary Barton, Gaskell's second full-length novel, Ruth, was published. As with Mary Barton, the subject matter of this novel was undeniably controversial: the story of the seduction, pregnancy and motherhood of a young girl who is rescued and protected from social judgment by the lie of a dissenting minister and his household. Such a plotline gave ample room to Gaskell's characteristic ambivalence and social diffidence. In fact, the novel seems to have been written in an attempt to negotiate two conflicting impulses: affirmation of the moral code of her middle-class audience and criticism of the whole notion of the "fallen woman". Two years before she wrote the novel Gaskell had helped a sixteen-year-old prostitute to emigrate, and her sympathy and call for a sense of mercy is captured in a letter on the subject written to Charles Dickens. "I have been to see her in prison," she says, "and 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 . . ." (Letters 61). The reader senses in this

letter Gaskell's desire to open up rigid Victorian patterns of dealing with the question of the fallen woman, and this desire finds expression in her explicit statement of dialogic intent when she records her satisfaction (after publication of the novel) in "putting the small edge of the wedge in, if only I have made people talk and discuss the subject a little more than they did" (Letters 153).

The self-confidence of this letter, however, stands in contrast to the tone of her other letters concerning this book, for the writing of Ruth was accompanied by great anxiety, especially concerning the portrayal and reception of her heroine. Like John Barton and Esther, Ruth is a socially displaced person, but in her second novel, Gaskell does not follow the laws of narrative displacement as she had done in the first. She attempts to sustain, as well as invent, Ruth as a character, insisting upon placing her at the center of the story and giving her heroic qualities. As the first British novelist in the nineteenth century to treat the familiar theme in such a way, Gaskell was breaking new ground.¹ She felt herself "in a quiver of pain" about the work's reception, and her letters reveal the tension that underlies the writing. "An unfit subject for fiction is *the* thing to say about it," she concedes in a letter to Anne Robson, "I knew all this before but I determined notwithstanding to speak my mind out about it; only now I shrink with more pain than I can tell you from what people are

saying, though I could do every jot of it over again tomorrow" (Letters 148). The ambivalence of this letter ("I knew. . . but I determined not withstanding. . . I shrink. . . though I could do it over again. .") is the logic of Ruth itself. Gaskell's own tentativeness is inscribed in the narrative movement of the novel as she oscillates between open concession to and a concealed critique of middle-class values in her attempt to tell what she knows to be an unacceptable story and to give space to a voice excluded by convention. It would seem that this tension arises from the same fear of refused listening which motivates the telling of Mary Barton, but in this case it can be sensed in a more extreme way.

Perhaps in reaction to the plot rupture in Mary Barton, Gaskell turns to a mode of careful containment in Ruth. In the same letter to Anne Robson, she says that she intended to "keep it quiet in tone, lest the slightest exaggeration or overstrained sentiment" might "weaken the force" of what she had to say. Ironically, however, in her effort to keep the story "quiet in tone", she relies upon the containment of traditional formal patterns that, by their very nature, weaken the narrative force of her effort. The first nine chapters, for example, are told in the form of the pastoral, and this reliance on the pastoral suggests Gaskell's tenuous relationship to her subject matter. Pastoral formally embodies the thematic concern of the novel: the need for an enclosed place of protection, for what Rosemarie

Bodenheimer has called an "alternative interior asocial realm" (150) that separates both Ruth and her creator from immediate social judgment and criticism. Yet there is a strong tension at work here. On the one hand, Gaskell seems to concede to the idealizing demands of the form. Ruth's position as the central character requires that she be portrayed in an inflated rhetoric of purity as an idealized saint. On the other hand, Ruth is simultaneously and contradictorily presented as having clearly sinned, and those critics, such as Arthur Pollard, who claim that Gaskell "insists on the innocence of Ruth" (88) are mistaken. Gaskell does not insist on Ruth's innocence. Every voice in the text is uncompromising as to the wrongness of her act. What is insisted upon is an attitude of mercy which says that her sin can and should be forgiven when viewed within the wider context of her life and circumstances. Such an apparently innocuous attitude was severely criticized, however, and Gaskell's dilemma lay in finding a narrative mode that would allow her to preserve her relationship with her reader by maintaining the given social and literary forms while simultaneously opening up those forms to question and new possibility. Her use of the pastoral in the early parts of the book does provide a place of protection for Ruth, but it also implies certain formal limitations. Within the containment of this mode, Ruth becomes an idealistic caricature of conventional expectations, and more than one reader, from the Victorian G. H.

Lewes to Angus Easson in the present, has touched upon this creation of a pure and untouched heroine as a crucial flaw in the novel's overall moral argument. Moreover, after Ruth's seducer departs from her life, Gaskell turns to the equally limited form of didactic domestic fiction in the remainder of the story. After her abandonment, Ruth is incorporated into the minister Thurstan Benson's household under the pretense of being a distant widowed relative, and in this second turn toward formal containment, her characterization is equally limited. Her only real development is from idealized saint to repentant sinner. Unlike John Barton and Esther, Ruth is unable to tell her own story; her position as central character demands that she be portrayed in these static tropes -- or remain silent.

Not surprisingly, most critics have detected a contradictory "split" in this work as they did in Mary Barton, this time between the early representation of Ruth as idealized saint and the later depiction of her as repentant sinner. Easson has summarized the dilemma well: "Given the tenor of the rest of the book -- not only Ruth's salvation but more importantly her belief, which is her author's too, that she stands in need of salvation after sin -- hasn't Gaskell, in presenting her character sympathetically, contrived to make her sinless in the event and yet react afterwards as though she had sinned?" (118). The contradiction inherent in the formal structure of the book is an irreconcilable one that arises out of the tension between

Gaskell's private sympathy for Ruth and her social sense.² The tension is similar to that in Mary Barton between her explicit condemnation of industrial violence and her sympathy for the suffering that provokes and perpetuates it. Bodenheimer has suggested that the split between Ruth as a private conception and as a public issue is manifested in the text as a formal division between pastoral and social arguments that creates a discontinuity which itself "contains and rebukes" the novel's contradictions (53). The pastoral chapters, she contends, "allow Gaskell to describe Ruth's fall as a naturally emotional event that has a life independent of the social constructs that are later brought to bear upon it" (154). Gaskell's narrative strategy, I would argue, includes not only the division between modes to which Bodenheimer points, but also a division *within* modes. And both acts of division serve to affirm rather than rebuke the novel's inherent contradictions. The first nine chapters, for example, consist of a mixing of the traditional linear single-focus pastoral form with a more discontinuous post-romantic, or what Bodenheimer has called post-Wordsworthian, version of the pastoral in a way that brings the former in conflict with a concealed critique of itself.³ And the latter part of the book consists of a similar mixing of conventional domestic didacticism with an underlying narrative mode that disrupts and calls it into question. This double act of formal containment, with its interplay of centering and decentering impulses, works to allow

the social and moral ambiguities of Ruth's situation a dialogic space of questioning, but in Ruth this dialogic movement rarely operates at the manifest level of the plot. Gaskell's own anxiety of audience (her fear of refused listening) is inscribed in the text as she conducts her dialogic enterprise within an enclosed narrative mode of concealment. A certain infolding movement is at work in the text, set against the unfolding of the plotline of formal expectation, as Gaskell strives simultaneously to affirm and to question accepted frameworks of understanding.

Suggestively, the decision to conceal the truth and tell the lie that protects Ruth is made within the enclosure of a small room in Wales, a place offering protection from the condemning judgments of the outside world. As the minister, Thurstan Benson, and his sister, Faith, meet and conspire on Ruth's behalf, the conflicting forces within Gaskell are inscribed in their dialogic act. For a time, Faith takes on the voice of middle-class convention in her rejection of Ruth's forthcoming child. Acceptance of the "miserable offspring of sin," she claims, would constitute "questionable morality," (III ix 119) and her voice serves as a foil for Thurstan's formation of his own ethic. As Thurstan reluctantly prepares himself to tell his "strange story," he calls for a "seraph's tongue" and a "seraph's powers of representation" (III xi 110). "But there was no seraph at hand," says the narrator, "only the soft running waters singing a quiet tune and predisposing Miss Benson to listen with a

soothed spirit to any tale" (III xi 111). In this dialogic movement, Faith Benson's voice of conventional morality is brought into question and gently broken down in the exchange of words and spirits between brother and sister. Looking at Ruth and listening to the fragmented story of the particular circumstances of her life, a story told with "heart's eloquence" because deeply felt, Miss Benson's powerful "masculine will" begins to break down. "Tell me all about her," she adjures her brother, "You have never told me the particulars" (III ix 113). The hearing of the story and Ruth's own "utterance of gentle words" finally unlock Miss Benson's heart.

Through this interchange Gaskell portrays the subtle emergence of meaning that occurs in the dialogic situation. There is no claim to unequivocal truth; in fact, equivocation is the moving force of this passage. Miss Benson at one moment declares that their decision "is certainly the best plan," but the narrator later allows that "she was not convinced," only "softened and bewildered." And Mr. Benson is moved by the power of memory to forget his previous resolve, made with the "strong power of conviction," to help Ruth face her penance straight on. The memory of the "wild fierceness" and "Cain-like look" of another illegitimate child causes him to enter into the plan of deception. The two of them oscillate between conviction and doubt and only gradually, within the security and enclosure of the home and the knowledge born of long living together, do

they come to a place of "standing on the truth" (III xxvii 338). Even after the decision, Mr. Benson alternates between conviction of right on behalf of Ruth and self-doubt as to his own actions. After a year of living together, a year in which Ruth has proven herself "pure and truthful" in his mind, he confesses to his sister: "My indecision about right and wrong - my perplexity as to how far we are to calculate consequences - grows upon me, I fear" (III xviii 199). He alternates between the desire to "tell the whole story" to Mr. Bradshaw (the embodiment of Victorian social judgment) and the conviction that concealment is necessary. Furthermore, that conviction itself is surrounded by an aura of uncertainty. Such uncertainty could be read as simply a delineation of Benson's character, but the inclusion of other ambivalent voices in the text, at one moment speaking out and the next moment retreating, and reversing judgment, attests to uncertainty as the overall narrative mode of Ruth.

This narrative movement of advance and withdrawal and constant oscillation of perspective characterizes the narrator's voice as well, which makes unequivocal but contradictory statements in support of opposing truths. After Mr. Benson expresses his condition of perplexity to his sister, for example, the narrator concludes: "The scroll of Fate was closed, and they could not foresee the Future; and yet, if they could have seen it, though they might have shrunk fearfully at first, they would

have smiled and thanked God when all was done and said" (III xviii 199). Yet at the time of the decision (the "pivot on which the fate of the years moved"), the narrator had claimed unequivocally that Benson "turned it the wrong way" (III xi 121). Supporting this stand is the telling narrative interjection later in the novel when Bradshaw has discovered Ruth's secret and confronts Benson:

Mr. Benson sat down. But Mr. Bradshaw continued his walk for a few minutes longer without speaking. Then he stopped abruptly, right in front of Mr. Benson; and in a voice which he tried to render calm, but which trembled with passion - with a face glowing purple as he thought of his wrongs (*and real wrongs they were*) he began - " (III xxvii 344) [emphasis added].

The narrator's contesting views are reminiscent of the self-refuting narrative structure of Mary Barton, and a similar purpose is served. By building the anticipated objections of her middle-class readers into her own discourse, Gaskell allows the differing perspectives to counter and call each other into question. And the reader, carried by this tentative narrative logic, necessarily enters into the act of listening and response, becoming part of an oscillating movement of advance and retreat, conviction and reevaluation, as he or she tries to make sense of Gaskell's fictional world. In the end, she achieves her intent to "drive in the edge of the wedge".

I

The oscillating movement is most pronounced in Gaskell's portrayal of her heroine, especially in the first nine chapters. From the earliest reviews, discussion has centered on the unevenness and artificiality of this portrayal.⁴ In her reliance upon traditional pastoral patterns, Gaskell here lapses into sentimentality, melodrama, and strained rhetoric, and the depictions of Ruth become so artificial that they begin to undercut the logic of the entire narrative. But scattered moments in the text centering around the workings of Ruth's inner consciousness reflect a tension between Gaskell's concession to the moral demands and expectations of these traditional patterns and a sympathy for Ruth's emotional investment and involvement. There is an underlying sense of a disruptive and dispersive impulse at work at these moments, as the traditional patterns are almost imperceptibly opened up to question by the imaginative force of another narrative mode based in a post-Romantic or post-Wordsworthian form of the pastoral. As J. E. Congleton has pointed out in his discussion of the history of the pastoral, romantic pastoral theory evidenced

more "freedom to disregard the form and the content of the traditional pastoral" (606). The "cold, unnatural and artificial" emphasis upon a rural life rooted in a static Golden Age and idealized human relationships was replaced by a greater emphasis and value on personal sentiment and feeling.⁵ Nature was regarded with heightened emotion (Congleton 606), and time and space became dynamically interdependent. The traditional pastoral, in contrast, is characterized by the separation of time and space in what Bakhtin has called the "idyllic chronotope." This pastoral form is marked by a "unity of place" which blurs temporal boundaries, bringing together and fusing the cradle and the grave, childhood and old age (Dialogic Imagination 225). As well, Bakhtin continues, in the traditional pastoral, the inner life of the characters is overshadowed by an emphasis upon the basic events of life. The idyllic chronotope is "severely limited to only a few of life's basic realities. Love, birth, death, marriage, labor, food and drink, stages of growth . . . Strictly speaking, the idyll does not know the the trivial details of everyday life" (Dialogic Imagination 226). In contrast, the post-Wordsworthian pastoral, with its implied continuity between the human spirit and the natural universe, allows for a revelation of inner life and character, not openly, but subtly and evocatively through a concealed pattern of imagery which connects inner emotional states with outer landscapes through the associative logic of

memory and dream.⁶ In Gaskell's novel, this form of the pastoral stresses the disjunction between natural impulse and social code, and it indirectly allows Ruth's inner life to be revealed in a way that has very little in common with the conventional treatment of the fallen woman. Rather than openly centering on the manipulation of her emotions and portraying her as the socially and emotionally inferior victim, for example, Gaskell emphasizes Ruth's capacity for strong emotional involvement and satisfaction. Such an emphasis on the individual feelings of a fallen woman carries with it certain social liabilities, however, and Gaskell's tentativeness and ambivalence appear in her need to portray Ruth's feelings within a distanced narrative mode which simultaneously conceals and reveals another side of what were considered unacceptable emotional and social responses. The tension can be read as one between social and individual perspectives, and the uneasy confrontation that ensues between the two pastoral forms, a tension that manifests itself textually as well as thematically, results in a mutual challenge and reinterpretation of both visions.

The psychological dynamic evoked through Gaskell's use of post-Wordsworthian pastoral tends to be overlooked in critical discussions centering around her overheroicizing of her heroine in this first part of the novel. But the importance of this psychological and emotional dynamic is signalled by the

intensity and lucidity of the language she uses at these moments in the text. Gaskell's finest effects appear in scattered passages that stand counter to the traditional pastoral pattern around which the action of the novel is built and which encourages a sense of the staginess and simplicity of Ruth's characterization. Through the moments of post-Wordsworthian pastoral, Ruth emerges as a much more complex character, and the complexity of her consciousness and sensibility is portrayed primarily through her responses to natural scenes and through the movement of her memory. Early on, for example, she is depicted as a child of nature, connected in memory through natural images to her parents and the rural life she has lost. Literally and figuratively imprisoned in the present, Ruth relies on the freedom of memory to offer her imaginative relief from her oppressive circumstances as an underpaid and mistreated seamstress. At one point we are told that she "sprang to the large old window, and pressed against it as a bird presses against the bars of its cage" (III i 4). Through the window she observes an old larch with its "feathery branches" waving "softly to and fro in the scarcely perceptible night-breeze," and this reminds her of herself and her past. Once surrounded by natural life, she is now "pent up and girded about with flagstones." Intensely feeling the disparity between past and present, Ruth muses upon the painted pictures on the wall in front of which she chooses to sit as she works in the seamstress...

shop, pictures which draw her back in memory. The wall is covered with an abundance of flowers, conjuring up visions of flowers from her childhood, and Ruth loses herself in the paths of memory and dream. A similar dream vision defines her mode of perception at the shire-hall when she is chosen as a seamstress for the ball. Disturbed by the enumeration of names and particulars, she prefers to look upon the scene as a "joyous and brilliant whole," to gaze and dream of "the happy smoothness of the lives in which such music and profusion of flowers, of jewels, elegance of every description, and beauty of all shapes and hues, were everyday things" (III ii 14). Through this romantic reverie, the reader gains a sense of Ruth's emotional intensity, and her merging with her surroundings through memory and dream in this early part foreshadows Gaskell's method of depicting Ruth's inner emotional states later in the novel, especially in her responses to Mr. Bellingham.

This indirect representation of Ruth's consciousness is most noticeable in four episodes in the novel where the pressure of her feelings for Bellingham is given voice through her internal responses to natural landscapes that trigger memory. In the first, she accompanies Bellingham to her old home at Milham Grange (III iv 44-50), and her own extreme vulnerability and isolation are captured in the description of her wandering in and out among the garden flowers, lost in a passion of remembrance as she traces the paths of loss. The

morning of their walk is described in natural images that directly connect with Ruth's inner state of mind. The day is brilliant and promising, and Ruth internalizes this attitude of hope "with a beating heart full of joy, longing to stop the hours, which would pass too quickly through the afternoon" (III iv 44). This evocation of post-Wordsworthian pastoral with its implied disjunction between natural and social codes subtly separates Ruth's emotional responses from the social interpretation of them, drawing the reader into a description of the landscape that offers an indirect critique of standard views of the fallen woman. When Ruth and Bellingham leave the cottage, they enter a vast landscape which seems to suggest a moment of full and wide possibility, the merging of past, present and future in a view that integrates all aspects of life. Ruth's unmitigated pleasure in the beauty of her surroundings is extended indirectly to her feelings for Bellingham, and as she moves inexorably toward her "fall", the impulse to merge with her surroundings becomes Gaskell's main way of capturing her emotional intensity.

In the second episode, the lovers' arrival in Wales, Ruth veritably disappears into the wider landscape in her passionate openness to life. The mountain country opens a new sense in her: "vast ideas of beauty and grandeur filled her mind at the sight of the mountains, now first beheld in full majesty. She was almost overpowered by the vague and solemn delight; but

by-and-by her love for them equalled her awe, and in the night-time she would softly rise, and steal to the window to see the white moon-light, which gave a new aspect to the everlasting hills that girdle the mountain village. . . she knew not if she moved or stood still, for the grandeur of this beautiful earth absorbed all idea of separate and individual existence" (III v 64). The evocative nature of the language in this portion serves to mediate judgment of Ruth's responses and, in a sense, to protect her. The untouched simplicity of her inner spirit is captured and conveyed through her responses to her surroundings (made more striking by their comparison to Bellingham's self-dissatisfied boredom): "Even rain was a pleasure to her. . . she saw the swift-fleeting showers come athwart the sunlight like a rush of silver arrows; she watched the purple darkness on the heathery mountain-side, and then the pale golden gleam which succeeded. There was no change or alternation of nature that had not its peculiar beauty in the eyes of Ruth" (III v 64). Here Ruth is portrayed as a child of nature through images that lie outside the general conventions of a fallen woman. The depiction of the depth of her perception and sensibility to her surroundings presents a character with emotions separate from and in contradiction to accepted social definitions.

The contradictions inherent in Gaskell's attempt to negotiate the conflicting impulses within herself and her

readers are made more explicit in the third episode, which occurs in the North Wales section of Ruth as Ruth and Bellingham wander through the mountains together. Again, at certain moments in this section, her imagination seems to break free from established moral demands as she emphasizes the quality of Ruth's emotional bond to her lover. At such moments, her prose takes on an incomparable poetic compression and intensity, as when Ruth is persuaded by Bellingham to observe the reflection of herself in the still water of a pool:

She obeyed, and could not help seeing her own loveliness; it gave her a sense of satisfaction for an instant, as the sight of any other beautiful object would have done, but she never thought of associating it with herself. She knew that she was beautiful; but that seemed abstract and removed from herself. Her existence was in feeling and thinking, and loving.
(III vi 73)

Gaskell's simultaneous desire to move outside of traditional patterns and reluctance to do so is noticeable here in the clear allusion to Milton's Eve. Like Ruth, Eve sees her own reflection in the water, and is both attracted to and in awe of it. Eve's delight in that vision was quickly mitigated by her response to a voice of warning, reminding her of the vanity of desire. In contrast, Ruth's

vision of herself is unselfconscious and depicted in prose which celebrates the vitality of desire. The passage continues by building a highly sensuous picture of Ruth within nature:

She stood in her white dress against the trees which grew around her; her face was flushed into a brilliancy of colour which resembled that of a rose in June; the great, heavy, white flowers drooped on either side of her beautiful head, and if her brown hair was a little disordered, the very disorder seemed only to add a grace. (III vi 73-4)

The hint of sexuality in the passage is quickly contained as the narrator hastens to add: "She became pensive and sad, and could not rally into gaiety" (III vi 74). But the moral qualification cannot eradicate the imaginative force of the passage, which evokes Ruth's emotional and sexual responses through her relationship to the natural surroundings.

The sense of emotional and imaginative possibility in Ruth is intensified in the fourth episode, which comes after Bellingham falls ill and his mother arrives to rescue him. As Ruth waits outside the door of his sickroom, the depth of her emotion is conveyed by her response to her surroundings. No direct mention is made of her feelings for her lover, but the movement of her memory and her reading of the natural

landscape offer an oblique rendering of her inner state. As she anxiously waits for news of Bellingham's condition, Ruth compares the sounds of her beating heart with the "soft wind outside," which "sank with a low, long, distant moan among the windings of the hills, and lost itself there and came no more again" (III vii 82). Moving silently to the open window, she observes the outline of the mountains, veiled in mist, standing "like giants, solemn watching for the end of Earth and Time" (III vii 83). The shadows draw Ruth back in memory, reminding her of "some 'Cwm,' or hollow, where she and her lover had rambled in sun and in gladness," feeling the land "enchanted into everlasting brightness and happiness." But the reality of the present occludes these thoughts, and in a final symbolic gesture, Gaskell describes the garden with the white roses glimmering "out in the dusk all the night through," while the red roses are lost in shadow. The imagery of misty shadows and light is then extended to capture the transformation of Ruth's feelings of loss and grief to a sense of hope. A description of the dawn gradually awakening and moving toward a glorious sunrise foreshadows Bellingham's recovery:

Just above the horizon, too, the mist became a silvery grey cloud hanging on the edge of the world; presently it turned shimmering white; and then, in an instant, it flushed into rose, and the mountain tops sprang into heaven, and bathed in the presence of the shadow

of God. With a bound, the sun of a molton fiery red came above the horizon, and immediately thousands of little birds sang out for joy, and a soft chorus of mysterious, glad murmers came forth from the earth; the low whispering wind left its hiding-place among the clefts and hollows of the hills, and wandered among the rustling herbs and trees, waking the flower-buds to life of another day. (III vii 84)

In a similar way, after Bellingham is carried away, Ruth's absolute sense of loss is figured in the description of the darkening landscape, and her final abandonment is suggested in the desolation and barrenness of the "bare table of moor" on which she stands and watches the diminishing white road as it carries her lover into the distance.

Gaskell's use of the post-Wordsworthian pastoral as a means of capturing Ruth's sensibility disappears after Bellingham leaves. She returns to it only in two brief scenes on the beach at Abermouth in Chapters Twenty-three and Twenty-four when Bellingham reenters Ruth's life late in the novel. Prior to Bellingham's return, her character is contained within the form of a domestic didactic tale in which the depiction of Ruth as the ideal mother absorbed in the natural joys of motherhood draws on the emphasis of traditional pastoral.⁷ In this section, Ruth is docile and demure, reverent and quietly spoken, "unconscious of any false shame". Just as she had earlier lost herself in the natural landscape, so Ruth now loses

herself in a "natural" attitude of motherhood. We are told that her "whole heart was in her boy", and that "unconsciously, her love for her child led her up to the love of God, to the All-knowing, who read her heart" (III xix 207). The independence of character and the imaginative force of perception and feeling allowed to Ruth in the earlier episodes are lost in this sentimental portrayal of her character. In the section dedicated to domestic harmony and bliss, there is only one hint of her concealed, confused feelings for the father of her child, feelings rendered in pastoral language that attempts to mediate moralistic judgement. Ruth, we are told, is aware of "a strange yearning kind of love for the father of the child whom she pressed to her heart, which came, and she could not bid it be gone as sinful, it was so pure and natural, even when thinking of it as in the sight of God . . ." (III xviii 190).

When Bellingham reenters Ruth's life on the beach at Abermouth, the text itself seems to break loose from its moralistic moorings in a passionate metaphoric rendering of Ruth's inner state that connects her through memory to the surrounding landscape. Indeed, in her confusion, that very landscape seems literally to shift beneath her feet, as she loses her hold on the reality of her immediate human surroundings and moves into memory and dream:

The sands heaved and trembled beneath Ruth. The figures near her vanished into strange nothingness; the sounds of their voices were as distant sounds in a dream, while the echo of one voice thrilled through and through. She could have caught at his arm for support, in the awful dizziness that wrapped her up, body and soul. That voice! No! if name, and face, and figure were all changed, that voice was the same which had touched her girlish heart, which had spoken most tender words of love, which had won, and wrecked her, and which she had first heard in the low mutterings of fever. (II xxiii 266)

Back within the house, Ruth gazes into the fire, and the hearing of Bellingham's voice renews the painful conflict and confusion of her feelings as she again reverts to the realm of memory. The tension which fills her being is given release later when she is alone in her room and closes her door, throwing open the window despite the coldness of the night: "She tore off her gown; she put her hair back from her heated face. It seemed now as if she could not think -- as if thought and emotion had been repressed so sternly that they would not come to relieve her stupified brain. Till all at once, like a flash of lightning, her life, past and present, was revealed to her to its minutest detail. And when she saw her very present "Now, the strange confusion of agony was too great to be borne, and she cried

aloud. Then she was quite dead, and listened as to the sound of galloping armies" (III xxiii 270).

The thrust toward melodrama in this passage is the textual response toward what Ruth has already identified as the "repression of thought and emotion" that has been her defining mode of perception for the five years since Bellingham's disappearance. It is almost as if the text itself cannot contain the intensity of desire which has been denied by the adherence to formal patterns prior to this scene. With the rush of Ruth's memory, as Alan Shelston suggests, the reader is "forced to the conclusion that there is more to the Ruth-Bellingham situation than Mrs. Gaskell explicitly admits" (187). Suggestively, Gaskell immediately reverts to conventional patterns to ward off the inherent threat which is posed to both Ruth and the novel by the intensity of emotion which accompanies Bellingham's return. As in Mary Barton, where Gaskell returns to romance forms to rescue her text from impending narrative chaos and contingency, so in Ruth she subdues the intensity of desire threatening the narrative by the plot of domestic didacticism. The reader is abruptly returned to the Benson household and to the public exposure of the lie, thereby replacing the issue of Ruth's intensity of emotion with safer, more manageable subject matter.

At one point in the novel Gaskell refers to the power which comes from the "hidden life and experience of the heart"

(III xix 210), and in these scattered passages the emphasis she gives to the hidden life and experience of Ruth's heart attests to her own acceptance of the power and importance of this necessarily concealed aspect of experience. In fact, the power of repression is felt in these passages in which Ruth struggles with her feelings about Bellingham; they are told with an imaginative force which is unparalleled in the rest of the novel. In the chapter in which Ruth responds to Bellingham's request to meet him on the sands of Abermouth, for example, Gaskell again resorts to the suggestive use of natural imagery to express Ruth's inner feelings as she had done in the early chapters of the novel. Ruth's sense of complete isolation, vulnerability, and tenuousness are subtly and powerfully captured as she approaches the waiting Bellingham. Turning toward the sea, she watches and listens to the receding waves, slowly losing the hold they had "so lately, and with swift bounds, gained on the yellow sands" (III xxiv 292). As in the earlier North Wales section, Gaskell turns to veiled and desolate imagery to capture Ruth's tenuous psychological state. The seascape holds no sight of human life, "no boat, or distant sail, or shrimper. . . Beyond a stretch of waters, a few pale grey hills showed like films; their summits clear, though faint, their base lost in a vapoury mist" (III xxiv 293). And this connection between setting and psychological state occurs one final and very explicit time after Ruth's meeting with Mr. Bellingham.

The "expanse of grey, wild, bleak moors, stretching wide away below a sunless sky," the narrator tells us, "seemed only an outward sign of the waste world within her heart" (III xxiv 302).

In these portions of the novel Gaskell allows a powerful albeit indirect rendering of emotional responses that seem out of keeping with the overt and predictable qualities of self-sacrifice and submission in Ruth, as she follows the conventional path of Christian redemption: guilt, punishment, redemption, and blessedness. These passages serve to rescue Gaskell's novel from static formal predictability. Yet, at the same time, it is also the case that traditional pastoral contains the threateningly disruptive world of inner emotion opened up by the scattered passages of post-Wordsworthian pastoral. The narrative energy of the novel finally comes from the conflicting movement of these two pastoral forms as they simultaneously constrain and energize each other.

II

As Gaskell turns from pastoral to domestic didacticism in the second part of her novel, we witness the same tension between idealized pattern and a more disruptive and dispersive narrative mode. In this case, the disruptive mode is linked quite specifically to the speaking voice, and it is introduced early in the novel through the intimate tone of the narrator, an intimate tone rooted in a relationship of conversational familiarity. "Bend your ear lower," she tells the reader early in Chapter One (III i 2). The narrator's voice is almost a whisper as she calls the reader into a seemingly complicitous relationship. The particular topic of whispering here is nothing more than the turning of houses into shops, an event of no significance to the plot. The telling serves little purpose outside of itself; it is a form of gossip. But for Gaskell such telling serves as a metaphor for the verbal exchange and relationship that stand in opposition to the unilateral, closural voice of the plot of domestic didacticism. In Ruth, this mode of whispering becomes a powerful narrative force. Through attention to various voices and stories, the reader becomes a listener and experiences a secret life of language rustling beneath the surface of the text. The servant Sally's seemingly disconnected

asides and tales, for example, take on new significance as an interwoven texture of talk suggests narrative possibilities officially closed off by the patterns of convention.

Predictably, this talk often takes the form of secrets. Mary and Elizabeth, the Bradshaws' youngest daughters, appear in the story almost exclusively as the sharers of "profound secrets" and "fresh confidences." Their voices form a background of whispering, interpreting and judging the events of the plot. And Sally's voice fills the text with seemingly trivial chatter: the increased price of butter, what was served for tea, and so on. The narrator describes Sally as "the talker" (III xviii 191), and her talk provides the reader with a sense of the standards and assumptions of the community. Bakhtin has noted that a character's position as both servant and storyteller allows the character to engage in "spying and eavesdropping on private life with its secrets and intimacies" (Dialogic Imagination 125), and through the rich linguistic texture of Sally's chatter, her revealing of secrets and disclosure of confidences, the reader is drawn into a world in which all is spoken within the context and consciousness of the community's gossip. Gaskell devotes two entire chapters to Sally's chatter, and she uses these digressive moments both to enlarge narrative possibilities and to offer indirect, often ironic, social commentary as well. For example, Chapter Sixteen, entitled "Sally Tells of her Sweethearts, and Discourses on the Duties of

Life", consists of an indirect critique of conventional definitions of both social place and gender. In a narrative strategy that anticipates her next novel, North and South, Gaskell has Sally offer her story in a rhetoric that contradicts the dramatic context of its telling. Her story emphasizing the passive acceptance of defined stations in life is told within a context of human exchange that opens up and calls into question those rigid categories of social standing. And Sally's own life in the Benson household further challenges the idea of static and proper place. Standard notions of gender are also obliquely questioned in Sally's telling of the story of her sweethearts. To be sure, Ruth confirms Gaskell's relatively conservative position on the "woman question" in that it affirms through Ruth herself that a woman should be valued for her goodness, propriety and meekness of spirit. Indeed, inadequacy and inferiority supply the ethical basis for Ruth's very claim to the reader's attention and sympathy. But if the main storyline asserts these expectations, Sally's story hints at a subtle resentment of the male values that underlie such expectations. Her comic asides -

- "But that's the way with all them men, thinking so much of thirselves, and that it's but ask and have" (III xvi 168)

-- carry with them a more serious intent.

If the content of the interpolated tales serves as an indirect critique of convention, so too does the dramatic context of their telling. Sally's tales are only two of various instances in

which Gaskell embeds tales that foreground the relationship between teller and listener in the act of telling. The narrator turns away from her own story to dramatize Sally's telling and, in the process, to explore the motives behind the act of telling itself. Sally's stories are told for a variety of reasons.

Sometimes they are told as a means of incorporating their listener--as offers of consolation or counsel. At other times they are told as a means of self-indulgence on the part of the teller--for the sheer pleasure of telling. Through Sally, the act of storytelling is ambiguously portrayed as both a form of generosity and a form of egotism, as she herself wryly comments, "I thought I'd lost some of my gifts if I could not talk a body to sleep" (III xvi 169). But for all of its ambiguity, the metaphor of dialogic exchange underlying the act of telling is central to Gaskell's point. Sally's stories not only dramatically embody the centrality of exchange in the narrative act, they also highlight the need for such a movement in the novel as a whole by disrupting the traditional plotline with its thrust toward unity and coherence. They offer another dimension of narrative possibility that counters what Bakhtin would call the "monologic" character of traditional domestic didacticism.

Sally's chatter is inextricably linked to the enclosure of the Benson household and to the "everyday time" (to use another Bakhtinian term) that it represents. The Bensons and Sally, W. A. Craik notes, "are people to whom very little

happens, who are yet full of life and delight" (76). They make their way in what Bakhtin would call "the everyday maelstrom of personal life" (Dialogic Imagination 128), experiencing moments which reveal human nature in all of its contradictory variety and fullness. Ruth herself recognizes the uniqueness of the Benson household: "This household had many failings: they were but human, and, with all their loving desire to bring their lives into harmony with the will of God, they often erred and fell short; but, somehow, the very errors and faults of one individual served to call out higher excellences in another, and so they re-acted upon each other, and the result of short discords was exceeding harmony and peace" (III xiii 142). The Bensons' life within the household, a life filled with the small conflicts, strains and joys of day-to-day existence, intersects, disrupts and disperses the static temporal sequence of the plotline of domestic didacticism. It is no accident that it is the Bensons who intervene in an unconventional way when confronted with the conventional fallen woman.

Equally disruptive is the character of Jemima, the Bradshaws' rebellious eldest daughter. As her subplot becomes the major narrative force of the last part of the novel, Gaskell further disperses her narrative line, disrupting the didactic plot of Ruth's life. Against the closed linear pattern of Ruth's retribution, Jemima insistently and persistently refuses to sacrifice herself to convention. In a narrative move that is

itself a means of oblique critique, she becomes increasingly more secretive and, paradoxically, more self-expressive as Ruth becomes more "open" and silent, and the disparity leads to a moment of narrative doubling which brings both plots into confrontational relationship. While Ruth remains the embodiment of Victorian womanhood, quietly and submissively working out her penance, Jemima becomes the embodiment of rebellion. Headstrong and impetuous, she struggles endlessly with inner conflicts, and Gaskell's portrayal of her is characteristically sympathetic. Jemima's very rebelliousness is presented as an outgrowth of a keen intelligence and perceptive imagination. It is Jemima who consistently sees beneath the surfaces of convention, and she who finally articulates vague uneasiness with the demands of propriety on Ruth that the reader has begun to feel. Ruth's goodness, Jemima muses, "undoubted as it was, was more distasteful than any faults which had more savour of human struggle in them" (III xxi 242). The result of this contrast between the heroines is a thematic opposition between conventional understanding and individual resistance, between propriety and self-will. But the opposition is by no means clear; as the narrative unfolds, categorical outlines become shady and definitions blurred. The question of the propriety of gender is a case in point. Jemima longs "to be a man, to speak out her wrath at this paltering with right and wrong" (III xxii

253). Conventional expectations imply that lying is unequivocally wrong, yet they disallow anything except concealment and deception to a woman. Jemima's stifled voice highlights Ruth's silence, and it points to the debilitating effects of rigid definitions of propriety and gender. Jemima's "silent rebellion" (III xx 213) captures the reader's sympathy, and it is the "human struggle" of her inner drama and the warring of her "fierce energy" against rigid restraints that give the last part of the novel its dramatic interest and narrative impetus. But Jemima's impetuous spirit is also held open to question, for in her Gaskell explores the dangers of individualism. Moreover, Jemima's propensity toward passionate self-expression is persistently contained by the narrative, and in the end she is finally "tamed" by her fiancé, Mr. Farquhar, whose idea of a 'perfect wife' is the exemplary Ruth. Although Jemima voices her intention to disobey him if he disallows her wishes, her very assertion of freedom confirms his power: "The arm around her waist clasped her yet more fondly at the idea, suggested by this speech, of the control which he should have the right to exercise over her at some future day" (III xxviii 371). On the question of female self-will, Gaskell characteristically retreats to what Bodenheimer has called a "psychological paternalism" in which men both cherish and limit the rebellious activities of female minds (52).

If Jemima's rebellious spirit is presented ambiguously, however, it is also presented within the context of her particular family situation, which allows Gaskell to portray her behaviour without the all-inclusive judgment associated with general moral principles. Her self-centered willfulness is presented as simultaneously rebellious and redemptive; if her deviation from the norm is suspect, so is the norm itself. Gaskell's contextual modification of the themes of propriety and willfulness allows an effective play of perspective between general moral principles and individual agency, and between what she calls "outward conventionalities" and "inward necessity for independent individual action" (III 1 2). The importance of contextual understanding underlies Gaskell's ambiguous portrayal of Jemima's need for secrecy and concealment. In the novel, secrets (like lies) are both wrong and right. Jemima must answer for her secret and concealed behavior, yet she must also practise it to survive. The realm of secrecy, consisting of both positive and negative elements, can provide protection from social judgment, but it can also serve as a base for personal power. In the character of Jemima, Gaskell explores both sides of the question. Jemima's refusal to be assimilated to conventional codes highlights the necessity for concealment in the face of the rigid constraints of convention. At the same time, there is an inherent potential for harm in secrecy, and Jemima comes to recognize the "sense of power"

that knowledge of Ruth's secret grants her. In her own response to that power, she points to the need for the safety and enclosure of convention. And yet that very safety and enclosure can easily turn into the destructive force of gossiping public opinion, the "common report" that causes Ruth's downfall. In Ruth, this report is exposed as a "strange perversity" that causes harm to community through its reliance upon secret and private interpretation. The issue of secrecy and the character of Jemima Bradshaw bring to the fore the tension between social and individual perspectives, and the result is a constant interplay between the two that resists either any absolute moral scheme or the relativism of extreme individualism.

The space and narrative force devoted to Jemima points to Gaskell's own recognition of the paradoxical need for both concealment and openness in any attempt at apprehending truth. The two contradictory movements must exist in mutual relationship, as Gaskell emphasizes through her portrayal of Mr. Bradshaw and Thurstan Benson. If Bradshaw is the emblem of openness, Benson is the emblem of concealment, and their conflicting modes emerge most strongly in their differing views of how Ruth should be regarded (Chapter Twenty-seven). Mr. Bradshaw's is the collective, unifying voice of "the world": "The world has decided how such women are to be treated; and, you may depend upon it, there is so much practical wisdom in the world that its way of acting is right in the long run, and that no

one can fly in its face with impunity, unless, indeed, they stoop in deceit and imposition" (III xxvii 347). It is precisely the power of this "world" that brings about the necessity of concealment and secrecy. Whereas Bradshaw stands for society's morality of justice untempered by mercy, Benson represents the notion of a Christian morality that stands not only outside but against the world: "I take my stand with Christ against the world," he answers Mr. Bradshaw. "What have the world's ways ended in? Can we be much worse than we are?" (III xxvii 347).

Benson's unworldliness is set apart from the rest of the world of Ruth, but it evidences a strong tendency to become the novel's compositional center. At their first meeting, Ruth immediately recognizes his singularity when she observes him wandering in the Welsh mountains: "She was struck afresh with the mild beauty of the face, though there was something in the countenance which told of the body's deformity, something more and beyond the pallor of habitual ill-health, something of a quick spiritual light in the deep set eyes, a sensibility around the mouth; but altogether, although a peculiar, it was a most attractive face" (III v 67). The power of Mr. Benson's "peculiar" but "attractive" individuality is heightened by contrast, in this case by contrast with the weak-willed and lethargic Mr. Bellingham, who sees in him only the marks of eccentricity. And the narrator continues to present this play of

perspectives through contrast as the novel unfolds, especially in the explicit contrast between the moral systems of Mr. Benson and Mr. Bradshaw. When they are compared to each other, Benson's inconsistencies and uncertainties emerge as clearly preferable to Bradshaw's moral rigidity. The former's diffidence and vulnerability take on a special resonance when set next to Bradshaw's conventional morality, a morality of abstractions based on a static economy of names and positions in which everything has and keeps its place. As the emblem of openness, ostensibly dedicated to "telling all", Bradshaw has no sense of mutuality. His giving of both gifts and words is motivated by the pleasure of patronizing and a belief in the "benefit of his opinions" (III xvii 187). The narrator describes him as having "wisely proportioned his means to his ends" (III xix 208), and the hollowness of this clear and open economy of cause and effect as a standard of truth and justice is clearly delineated by the failure of Bradshaw's relationships. Defining everything in terms of a morality that looks only at the act without any consideration for circumstance or the nuance of "noticed looks and tones" (III xix 210), he represents an "openness" that necessarily and paradoxically closes off any movement of exchange and mutuality. When his son is caught in the act of forgery, for example, Bradshaw demands that he be immediately publicly prosecuted, and he simultaneously dispossesses him, closing off any further discussion of history or

circumstance. In his expression of open, straightforward intent, Bradshaw limits the narrative possibilities of human relationship.

In contrast to the strong-minded Bradshaw stands the diffident Mr. Benson. Constantly torn between the rightness and wrongness of the telling of the lie to protect Ruth, Benson is the embodiment of Gaskell's narrative mode of enclosure and concealment. Against the plot of literary and social convention with its obvious relationship to the public system of belief and value, he secretly pleads the cause of Ruth's freedom. Within the mode of concealment, Mr. Benson opposes the "openness" of Bradshaw and Victorian convention with what Patricia Spacks has called a "morality of attentiveness" to detail, dialogue and circumstances (20). Such morality, Spacks notes, is based on the value concept of responsibility: "As opposed to the justice standard, it makes no claims of being able to arrive at moral decisions without knowing individual circumstances and specific facts" (43). If J. Hillis Miller is right that anything repeated two or more times in a novel is done so for a significant reason (Fiction and Repetition 2), then it is notable that Gaskell uses the word "circumstance" more than fifty times in Ruth. The events of the plot are judged, amended and interpreted by a narrative of circumstances generated out of the belief in the revelatory power of small particulars: the

tone of a voice, the appearance of a gesture, the ability or inability to remember.

As in Sally's telling of tales, this morality of attentiveness manifests itself formally in a fluid circulation of stories, anecdotes, and memories and in an attention to the dynamics and drama of the act of telling itself. The telling of stories can serve a disruptive function in the narrative as a whole; it can intrude upon and disrupt the formal closural sense of the novel, yet it does so in order to give voice to another narrative mode which affirms the possibility of community without imposing conformity. Gaskell's morality of attentiveness is a relational model grounded in the sound of the human voice. She is intent that her reader listen to the myriad of voices alive in the text - these voices, and the situations in which they are spoken, become indices of character and truth, and they move the plot into a dialogic space of questioning. But it is indicative of Gaskell's characteristic tentativeness in Ruth that she locates her dialogic space within a concealed sphere. It is within the enclosure of the Benson's home that secrets are kept and truth is disclosed. While Gaskell conducts her story within the Benson household, Jemima and Mr. Farquhar bring news from the outside world, and the events of the plot are interpreted and challenged by particular circumstances. "Perhaps one little circumstance which occurred during this time had scarcely external importance enough to be called an event," says the

narrator, "but in Mr. Benson's mind it took rank as such" (III xxxii 417). The reference is to Mr. Bradshaw's quiet return to chapel, the "open withdrawal of the declaration he had once made" (III xxxii 418). Again, it is Benson's sensitivity to circumstance, to the particular and personal needs of a situation, that serves as a guide to morality: "From this day Mr. Benson felt sure that the old friendly feeling existed once more between them, although some time might elapse before any circumstance gave the signal for the renewal of their intercourse" (III xxxii 419).

This respect for the secret realm of the particular determines the relationship between text and reader, as it does the relationship between characters. The drive toward closure at the level of the plot is retarded by these secret stories of individual circumstance. The text has a way of enclosing itself, of holding back (and holding), allowing for freedom within the enclosure of form and against the unfolding of the linear plotline. The increasingly sentimental last third of the book is redeemed by the continuing voices of Jemima, Sally, the Bensons, and other minor characters with their stories to tell. While the social and theological demands call for penance under "God's immutable retribution," a "bearing of punishment with a meek and docile heart," the voices arising with "tales" derived from a knowledge of the tenor and circumstances of Ruth's life offer another perspective. "Such a one as her has never been a

great sinner," says the husband of a woman who died under Ruth's care, "nor does she do her work as a penance but for the love of God, and of the blessed Jesus." It is this man's tale and the "clamour of tongues, each with some tale of Ruth's gentle doings, which finally testify to her true character" (III xxxiii 425). The need for and power of this concealed narrative sphere become more and more manifest as the text reaches toward its end and as the demands of the plot become stronger. As Ruth moves toward her inexorable end of death, she herself finds voice enough to tell Mr. Davis the true circumstances of her situation, and in an offer of comfort, he exchanges her "secret for secret", recalling "the circumstances of his own early life" as an illegitimate child. The movement of exchange that carries this narrative realm of secrecy points to the paradox of openness that the sharing of secrets implies. For it is only when made open that the secret and concealed can have effective public power, as Mr. Benson realizes after Ruth's death. "It was possible," he muses, that the secret "circumstances of [Ruth's] life," which were now known to all, "might be made effective to the end of the conviction of many truths" (III xxxvi 451). As the text reaches toward its end, the events and morality of the plot, couched in melodrama and standard rhetoric, pale in comparison to this hidden narrative realm of concealment.

At the time of the writing of Ruth, Gaskell's own relationship to her reading public was such that she had to

conduct her dialogic mode within the concealment of an enclosed sphere that quietly and indirectly questioned conventional expectations. Although intent upon opening up "the edge of the wedge," she was also aware of the power that wedge wields, and Ruth is written in the intense anticipation of that power, as an act of response to the questions of her invisible, implied listener. The uneven split nature of the novel is a result less of her weakness as a novelist than of her extreme sensitivity to what Bakhtin would call her reader's "hostile word" (Problems 96). In her next novel, North and South, she moves away from the need for concealment, and the challenge to the hostile word of her listener is more pronounced as her questions become more explicit, resulting in a positive textual restlessness that is an open expression of her dialogic intent.

NOTES TO CHAPTER THREE

¹ Angus Easson, among others, has stressed the uniqueness of Gaskell's treatment of the theme of the fallen woman: "Gaskell is the first novelist in nineteenth-century England to take a fallen woman as her central character. . ." (114).

² For a discussion of the split, see Ganz, 105.

³ Bodenheimer defines post-Romantic or post-Wordsworthian pastoral writing as that writing that "asserts or implies a continuity between the human spirit and the natural universe that is distinct from social definitions or placements of character" (Politics of Story 115). It is employed to free characters from their deterministic social circumstances. "Within the whole fantasy of the fiction," she says, "it creates another way of talking, enabling social attitudes and assumptions to be made visible and declared arbitrary" (118). I do not see Gaskell offering such a radical critique, however. Although she uses the post-Romantic pastoral form at times in Ruth, she uses the traditional form more extensively, thereby drawing upon stylized and accepted fictional patterns that carry their own social import. My point is that in Gaskell's dialogic use of both traditional and post-Wordsworthian pastoral, the two forms simultaneously constrain and energize each other.

⁴ G. H. Lewes, in his review "Ruth and Villette," in Westminster Review, discusses Gaskell's treatment of her heroine (447), as he does in his "The Lady Novelists of Great Britain" in Gentleman's Magazine, (22). See also W. R. Greg's "The False Morality of Lady Novelists," in National Review (167). For modern treatments of the same theme, see Pollard, (106), and Easson, (Elizabeth Gaskell 118).

⁵ The quote is from Edmund Gosse, "An Essay on English Pastoral Poetry," Complete Works in Verse and Prose of Edmund Spenser (1882), quoted in Congleton (606). Bakhtin writes of the form of time in the traditional pastoral: "This time possesses its own definite semicyclical rhythm, but it has fused bodily with a specific insular idyllic landscape, one worked out in meticulous detail. This is a dense and fragrant time, like honey, a time of intimate lovers' scenes and lyric outpourings, a time saturated with its own strictly limited sealed-off segment of nature's space, stylized through and through. . ." (The Dialogic Imagination 103).

⁶ J. Hillis Miller has discussed Victorian nature writing as a metaphor for subjectivity in "Nature and the Linguistic Moment," Nature and the Victorian Imagination, ed. U. C. Knoeflmacher and G. B. Tennyson.

⁷ Craik (55-60), Easson (Elizabeth Gaskell 115-117), and Bodenheimer (Politics of Story 153-155) have all noticed Gaskell's reliance upon traditional pastoral.

CHAPTER FOUR

Listening to the Tenor of a Life: Change as "Gentle Violence" in North and South

By the time she wrote her second industrial novel, North and South, Gaskell's relationship with her audience was such that she could engage in an open dialogic mode. In this novel she no longer evidences the need to conduct her questioning in a concealed manner, but rather meets the anticipated objections of her middle-class readers head on, directly contesting established modes of understanding. In contrast to both Mary Barton and Ruth, the theme of her third "social problem" novel demands this open dialogic approach because rather than calling for the possible necessity for change, it portrays the process of change itself. And this process for Gaskell, in contrast to her contemporary George Eliot, is not evolutionary and gradual but rather discontinuous. It assumes a context of struggle and contest as one of the main characters, John Thornton, clearly states near the end of the novel. In talking with Mr. Bell, the embodiment of traditional, classical values, Thornton calls for an active engagement in the conflictual process of change:

"If we do not reverence the past as you do

in Oxford, it is because we want something which can apply to the present more directly. It is fine when the study of the past leads to a prophecy of the future. But to men groping in new circumstances, it would be finer if the words of experience could direct us how to act in what concerns us most intimately and immediately; which is full of difficulties that must be encountered; and upon the mode in which they are met and conquered--not merely pushed aside for the time--depends our future" (IV xl 398-99).

North and South is the story of the change that accompanies this "groping in new circumstances". Throughout the novel, transformations of different kinds affect not only the inner development of the characters and their relationship to others, but the form and structure of the novel as well. What Rosemarie Bodenheimer has termed the "formal restlessness" of the novel is a direct outgrowth of Gaskell's preoccupation with the conflict that accompanies change. The text is filled with instances of process and flux, with the adjusting eye and the abruptly altered landscape, with the moment of metamorphosis that is filled with pain and conflict and so it is not surprising that on all levels of narrative--style, character, plot--North and South is the most jerky and abrupt of her novels. This does not mean that Gaskell has repudiated order, harmony and reconciliation. On the contrary. But the point is that the reconciliation which critics of North and South typically emphasize as its key motive emerges

out of a context of struggle and change that is itself seen as dynamic and productive.¹ The epigraph to the important chapter entitled "Masters and Men" (Chapter Fifteen) makes the point of the productivity of collision and conflict very nicely: "Thought fights with thought; out springs a spark of truth/From the collision of the sword and shield" (IV xv 128). The novel as a whole is motivated by the dialogic insight into truth and understanding here.

The emphasis on conflict can be seen in several aspects of the novel. Gaskell's prose in this text, for example, depends heavily on an ironic juxtaposition of apparently contradictory terms that is designed abruptly to awaken vision. Sometimes this takes the direct form of oxymoron, as when the west wind is described in terms of "soft violence" (IV ii 18), or Londoners are depicted in their "shabby threadbare smartness" (IV vii 67). This rhetorical figure is closely related to the ironic juxtaposition of self-awareness and self-delusion in the characterization, and to the conflicting movements of expansion and enclosure in the plot. The linking of incongruities and contradictions in language, characterization, and action, however, is more than a stylistic technique. It reflects the larger vision that emerges as a central theme in North and South: the sense of change as a process marked by the jarring juxtaposition of conflicting elements but leading to illumination and the productive readjustment of vision.

Gaskell's emphasis upon contradiction and conflict as a means to illumination informs her portrayal of human character and emotional reaction. So at the beginning of the novel Gaskell's heroine Margaret Hale is annoyed and repelled by Henry Lennox's marriage proposal, while simultaneously seeing him as "the pleasantest man, the most sympathetic friend, the person of all others who understood her best on Harley Street" (IV iii 31). Feeling "a tinge of contempt mingle itself with her pain at having refused him," Margaret's "beautiful lip" curls "in a slight disdain." Lennox's emotions are equally mixed, and this whole early episode prepares for the emotional complexity of the central relationship between Margaret and John Thornton. The mixture of conflicting emotions in their relationship is so profound, in fact, that we are told: "It was only their violence that was clear" (IV xxiii 221). Margaret's dawning consciousness of her own love for Thornton comes through a shock of recognition that accompanies a clash of discordant feelings and a disparity between feeling and action. In Chapter Twenty-three, she recalls her action protecting Thornton during the strike the previous day, along with the interpretation of it as a sign of love that she overheard directly afterwards. In remembering, Margaret wanders through an inner dialogue of simultaneous acceptance and denial in an effort to reconcile her undefined feelings of sexual passion with the practical picture of her response as a dutiful act:

'I, who hate scenes--I, who have despised people for showing emotion--who have thought them wanting in self-control--I went down and must needs throw myself into the melee, like a romantic fool! Did I do any good? They would have gone away without me I dare say.' But this was over-leaping the rational conclusion,--as in an instant her well-poised judgment felt. 'No, perhaps they would not. I did some good. But what possessed me to defend that man as if he were a hapless child! Ah!' said she, clenching her hands together, 'it is no wonder those people thought I was in love with him, after disgracing myself in that way. I in love--and with him too!' (IV xxiii 225-6)

Margaret ends this inner dialogue with the pronouncement that she would do it all again, regardless of what others say about her. "If I saved one blow, one cruel angry action that might otherwise have been committed," she tells herself, "I did a woman's work." And her final "I walk pure before God" carries with it even her own recognition of its opposite, a tension which leads to restless sleep and a self-deprecating dream. The constant oscillation of perspective within Margaret's consciousness lends a sense of discontinuity to Gaskell's narrative. And although Margaret comes to an ostensible solution, deciding to move forward without further reflection, the meaning and structure of the passage depend upon the juxtaposition of contradictory emotions that counter each other.

The following morning, Margaret faces Thornton, finding that "hot" and "thick" blushes appear "in spite of herself" as he professes his love. Defending herself against her own unacknowledged feelings, Margaret counters Thornton's implication that she carries a "particular feeling" for him. Claiming that "any woman worthy of the name of woman" would have done the same, she quickly deflects his insinuation. She is paradoxically stirred and offended, offended by his words and manner (as she had been by Henry Lennox's passionate profession) but stirred by "something different and kinder." Margaret locates this feeling as one of self-reproach but Mr. Thornton comes closest to the truth by stating the reason for what he perceives to be her "despising" of him: "it is because you do not understand me" (IV xxiv 232). Indeed, lack of understanding of both self and other precipitates the confusion in this scene. The scene itself is carried by the disparity between feeling and action, and in her depiction of the differences and contradictions, Gaskell rarely attempts to reduce the inconsistency or to explain why actions do not always coincide with their motivations. The inconsistencies or conflicting sides are simply juxtaposed, and the freshness of perception produced by such juxtaposition is her particular strength.

In the scene between Margaret and Thornton following the strike, the emphasis on conflict may be seen as simply a manifestation of the uneasiness of both Margaret and Thornton

with sexual passion. Margaret shrinks and shudders in both repugnance and fascination at the thought of the reality of Thornton's love, and she dislikes him the more for having "mastered her inner will." For his part, Thornton leaves their discussion "blinded by his baffled passion." He calls himself a fool and tells himself that he hates Margaret, but "a wild, sharp sensation of love cleft his dull, thunderous feeling like lightning, even as he shaped the word expressive of hatred" (IV xxvi 245). He takes paradoxical comfort in "hugging his torment" and he vows simultaneously to love and defy her. Confirming his paradoxical approach, he later strives to remember everything about her "by way of finally forgetting her" (IV xxvi 246). Even as such passages underline each character's specific discomfort with passion, they point more generally to Gaskell's sense of the deviousness and complexity of human consciousness. Moving quickly and jarringly between opposing poles of response and emotion, they highlight the ambiguity of mind and emotion and the contradiction between motive, intention and action in a manner that has been compared to that of D. H. Lawrence.²

Largely because of Gaskell's skill in representing the contradictory play of consciousness, critics of North and South (e.g. Martin Dodsworth, Ganz, 100-101; Hopkins, 139; Gerin, 152) tend to argue that the novel is really the story of the relationship of Margaret and Thornton and that the "social problem" subject matter is subsumed by and subordinated to their private romantic

plot. But Gaskell's emphasis upon conflict that leads to change is not confined to the awakening of Margaret's and Thornton's sexual passion; it structures the crucial social relationships as well, both the general relationship between masters and men and the particular relationship of both hero and heroine with the working-class leader Nicholas Higgins. Dodsworth maintains that Margaret's and Thornton's courtship is conducted by means of their discussions on industrial relations, so that the industrial subject matter serves the secondary function of locating the romantic plot in a realistic world and adding a sense of perspective (17). But these discussions serve equally to place in the foreground the necessity of conflict and opposition in producing a genuine readjustment of vision. It is the clash of opposing forces that leads to a real challenge to common assumptions, whether personal or social. Margaret notices early on that the "opposition of character" between Mr. Thornton and her father explains "the attraction they evidently felt towards each other" (IV x 92), and she later defines her own relationship with Mr. Thornton as "one continuous series of oppositions" (IV xxv 234). A disconcerting mix of emotions marks her response to the workers of the north as well. Both the women and the men arouse in her a mixture that includes fear, indignation, condescension, and sympathy. "Out of her fright came a flash of indignation," says the narrator when Margaret feels threatened by the men in an early scene, "which made her face scarlet, and her

eyes gather flame, as she heard some of their comments on her looks. Yet there were other sayings of theirs, which, when she reached the quiet safety of home, amused her even while they irritated her" (IV viii 81). A new idiom and a new culture challenge Margaret's assumptions even as the "quiet safety of home" allows her to domesticate that challenge, at least for the moment. This movement is paradigmatic of Gaskell's narrative: a shock of recognition elicited by conflict is followed by what the narrator here calls "disorderly tumult," and this in turn is immediately followed by moments of reflection. These moments of reflection are depicted in two ways, in the mental enclosure of memory, and in the social enclosure of dialogic exchange, and each serves a slightly different, but equally disruptive function in the narrative.

In the first instance, the plot's movement according to a narrative and sequential order of time is consistently disrupted by the characters' recollection of the past. As they attempt to adapt that past and make it part of their present consciousness, Gaskell highlights the elusive and falsifying aspects of memory. So Margaret's Aunt Shaw tells herself and others a story of sacrifice and selfless devotion in a forced and loveless marriage that she has, in fact, chosen for self-serving ends. The power of denial is manifested as she arranges her memories to create a story based in deception. Aunt Shaw is not an isolated comic or pathetic figure in North and South, however. Her recollection of

time past is only one example of the recurrent pattern of mind in the novel. All of the characters are engaged in the telling of the past and in the process, the gentling and self-deceptive effects of memory become clear. Margaret tells herself a story of duty devoid of passion when she tries to make sense of her past actions regarding Thornton. And Thornton reacts in a similar way, shuffling his memories to present a self-sufficient picture. But it is the second means of reflection, the dialogic exchange of ideas, upon which Gaskell relies most heavily in North and South. While memory can provide order and narrative shape to experience, it is seen as narrowing in its selectivity, glossing over conflict, whereas dialogue provides the arena for the continual collision and opposition of thoughts out of which "the spark of truth" springs.

As people come in contact with one another in North and South, they consistently disrupt each other's preconceived ideas. The reader witnesses the most persistently held beliefs undergo abrupt and sometimes radical change as one person comes to experience the life of another. So Margaret's initial impression of Thornton as a common shopman is changed, and the change is registered for the reader by Margaret's response to her brother's similar perception of him. She is surprised by her own change in perception as she feels amazement and annoyance at Frederick's condescending remark: "He looked like someone of that kind . . . I took him for a shopman and he turns out a manufacturer" (IV xxxi 305). There is no one

definite mode of perception presented in the novel, just as there are no unequivocal statements about individuals or society. As the characters meet and enter into vibrant dialogue, the narrative itself is seen as an experiential process in which contradictory opinions and ideas come in contact with and contest one another. Margaret's contradictory feelings toward the Northern men are strengthened in her first meeting with Nicholas Higgins, for example. At once shocked, attracted, and interested by his words of hopelessness, she enters into conversation with him, and through the give and take of dialogue, her perspective undergoes a readjustment. The dialogue begins on a class-based note of condescension as Margaret fears "wounding [Nicholas's] consciousness of ignorance" (IV viii 82), and she compounds the problem by proposing a charity visit. But Higgins' direct questioning of her motives shocks Margaret into recognition of what her charity assumes, so that her offer "seemed all at once to take the shape of an impertinence on her part" (IV viii 84). Nicholas goes on to reverse the roles and now he invites Margaret to his home because she is kind and new to the area. Margaret is simultaneously "amused and nettled" at his response: "She was not sure if she would go where permission was given so like a favour conferred" (IV viii 84). She continues home in a state of wonder, her class assumptions and her own motives shaken,

challenged and modified by her encounter with this man's words and life.

Similarly, dialogic encounter raises questions about social authority in the important Masters and Men dialogue between Margaret, Mr. Thornton, and Mr. Hale in Chapter Fifteen, but this time at a more general or theoretical level. The discussion centers on the analogy between parents and children, masters and men. Mr. Thornton, a man already described as "in the habits of authority," takes the position of wise despot, seeing the workers as children and arguing the need for a blind obedience to the laws of a discreet, firm authority. Mr. Hale gently challenges this position with another version of the familial metaphor that foregrounds the change in relationship that accompanies growth. Blind obedience may be necessary during childhood, he suggests, but adolescence calls for a relationship based on "equality of friendship between advisor and advised." But Mr. Hale betrays his own traditional paternalism through a rhetoric that calls for "humouring" the desire for independent action in children and, by implication, in workers. Mr. Hale may question Mr. Thornton's interpretation of the familial metaphor, but his weakness lies in extending rather than replacing it. It is Margaret who challenges the hierarchical assumptions implicit in both positions by drawing attention to the inadequacy of the metaphor itself. Recently awakened to the possibility for true equality between classes through her dialogic encounter with Nicholas Higgins, Margaret

points to the inappropriateness of seeing the workers as children in any state of growth. To perpetuate the analogy is to perpetuate a monstrous situation, as she points out in her story of an overgrown man-child who has been denied the right to independent thought and speech.

As in Mary Barton, Gaskell uses this interchange to point to the necessity for listening not only to the facts, but to the tenor of a life. In response to Thornton's empiricist faith in "the facts" divorced from their context, Margaret anticipates his own later observation that "truth is found in the tenor of a life" by insisting on the need for seeing all facts in the context of their particular histories. Making some attempt to account for the facts, she insists, "makes all the difference." And such an account can come only from a knowledge of individual lives and histories that itself derives from the "mutual dependence" signalled by the narrative act. Margaret's position is based on a vague recognition of the "insensible influence" that every human life has on the next, but the whole context of the scene makes clear that the notion of interconnection being affirmed by Margaret is not a sentimental idealism. Rather, it acknowledges and grows out of contradiction and inconsistency. Mr. Thornton finds himself simultaneously liking and being irritated by Margaret's talk, and Margaret herself is less the ideal sympathetic listener than a provocative force whose irony draws out the contradictions of her interlocuters. As well, the position and theory of each man is directly undercut by

his own history and practice. Mr. Hale calls for an equality of friendship based on mutual conversation, and yet his own life has been determined by his inability to share his decisions with those directly affected by them. Claiming that he "cannot stand objections, they make [him] so undecided," he makes all decisions in isolation (IV iv 41). Mr. Thornton, on the other hand, claims that he welcomes objections, but his claim proves a point of empty rhetoric, for his stand precludes a forum for any voicing of views outside of his own. Margaret points out the obvious contradiction in his position by wondering how "to reconcile your admiration of despotism with your respect for other men's independence of character," and she challenges his self-serving claim that "what the master is, that will the men be" by reversing the equation: "When I see men violent and obstinate in pursuit of their rights, I may safely infer that the master is the same. . ." (IV xv 144). Thornton is discomfited by her extension of his logic, and he quickly retreats to the "hasty" contention that she misunderstands the working of the structure. The question of authority finds no clear resolution in this interchange, but the characters end their exchange in recognition of the inadequacy of the familial metaphor as a model of social authority. Margaret's call for a recognition of "mutual dependence" is a call for living dialogue, for a narrative approach that embraces life in all of its contradictions and inconsistencies. Rooted as it is in a movement of response and responsibility for one another, this mutual dependence

challenges established hierarchies and unquestioned assumptions of power, encouraging a sense of the ways in which assertion and response answer to and create each other.³

The depiction of Nicholas Higgins, the worker and union sympathizer, brings into focus the questions touched upon in the *Masters and Men* dialogue. As Margaret realizes in their first encounter, Nicholas defies her conventional class assumptions. Self-possessed and articulate, he refuses to concede to the laws of deference; in fact, he seems to be motivated by a compulsion to reverse the expected roles in any class related encounter. Both literally and metaphorically, Higgins refuses to bow to hierarchical assumptions, notably when John Thornton offers him a job:

'I've been thinking, ever sin' I saw you,
what a marcy it were yo' did na take me on,
for that I ne'er saw a man who I could less abide.
But that's maybe been a hasty judgment; and
work's work to such as me. So, measter, I'll
come . . . ' (IV xxxix 389)

Higgins' ability to counter traditional assumptions of power and social standing is his greatest strength as a character. He consistently sees beyond the accepted definitions, usually pointing out the inherent contradictions of those definitions and stressing the need for a new way of seeing. As well, Gaskell deals with the

contradictions inherent in wider social questions, such as unionization, through her depiction of Nicholas Higgins. As a union sympathizer, Higgins sees unionization as the salvation and hope for the working man; alleviation of the current suffering is possible only by "having faith i the Union". And yet in the practical working out of this statement of faith, as he notes, the question of unionization becomes more complex and ambiguous. The starving Boucher's suicide is evidence that the union itself can be a source of oppression and that even within its ranks, questions of power and class division are rife. The effectiveness of faith in the union is ultimately uncertain in North and South. As Deirdre David points out, "Gaskell is very hedgy on how to manage the union issue." She posits the possibility of unionization and then "plays it both ways," leaving herself and her reader "up in the air" (33). David is less convincing, however, when she claims that Gaskell's ambivalence is finally transcended by a myth of class cooperation which discounts the intractable contradictions implicit in the situation, and this is especially true in her reading of Nicholas Higgins. Higgins is not reduced to the passive and pacified adherent of the middle class that she sees. The position of reconciliation at which he arrives is an uneasy one which allows the contradictions and questions to exist, and its tentativeness is captured in Higgins' final words to Thornton: "I shall need a deal o' brains to settle where my business ends and yo'rs begins" (IV xxxix 389).

The dining room for the workers that Thornton and Nicholas Higgins work together to establish near the end of the story serves as a symbol of Gaskell's dialogic and narrative approach to social change. Based upon an openness to difference and an acceptance of individual histories and stories, the dining room becomes a locus of tentative discussion in which the principles of authority and deference are replaced by a model of mutual dialogue. Gaskell has been criticized for offering simple solutions to social problems, and indeed, simplicity, as Thornton suggests, is the ideal here. But at the same time, she does not avoid the conflict of emotions and action in the practical working out of the scene. Beneath the ideal of simplicity is a level of complexity that gives the model its very strength, as Gaskell demonstrates how Thornton and Higgins simultaneously work together and against each other in an attempt to come to a knowledge and relationship based on tentative trust.⁴ The dining room represents the working out on the public, social level of Thornton's and Higgins' relationship with each other. The inherent pride of their "Darkshire egos" forces them to face each other, and the reader witnesses the gradual awakening of respect for each other's differences. Thornton is initially drawn to Higgins because he speaks "saucily" to him, as Higgins waits outside the factory to gain a hearing. Slowly, Thornton begins to recognize his own injustice in refusing to listen to someone who has "waited humbly" for five hours to talk with him. Even though he resists, he is

"insensibly" convinced of the truth of Higgins' story through his dawning awareness of the nature of the man's character and of the "tenor of his life": "And then the conviction went in, as if by some spell, and touched the latent tenderness of his heart; the patience of the man, the simple 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" (IV xxxix 387). Through a narrative knowledge of Higgins' life which seems to contradict not only his own theory but that of Higgins as well, Thornton begins his movement toward trust and entrustment. The story of the quarrel of Boucher and Higgins and of Higgins' subsequent caring for the Boucher children allows for the beginnings of a readjustment of authority.

Gaskell's sense of conflict and contradiction as the means to revision of traditional notions of authority also informs the two major subplots of the story: Mr. Hale's defection from the established church and Frederick's shipboard mutiny. Mr. Hale's defection is the first event in the plot of North and South, setting the entire narrative in motion. As the embodiment of traditional rural paternalism, Mr. Hale relinquishes his inherited authority in three ways. He declares himself unable to remain true to the established church; he abdicates his pastoral responsibilities; and he surrenders his parental authority, requiring Margaret to take on the duties belonging to him. From the outset, then, Gaskell

undercuts the power of traditional authority, but she does so by means of a sympathetic reading of Mr. Hale that emphasizes some of the pressures of that authority upon those in positions of power. Through narrative gaps and silences, the reader is made aware of the complexity of his ambivalent relationship to established authority. The centrality of paradox is highlighted in Mr. Hale's wrestling with the consequences of his "painful miserable doubts" (IV iv 36). He loves the church but must leave it, he explains to Margaret, for "conscience's sake". No explanation is given, and Margaret accepts her own newly acquired authority dutifully, though sadly and fearfully.

Complexity of emotion and internal conflict carries this scene. Feeling her father a heretic and an "outcast", Margaret longs to ask him the reasons for his doubts and yet she "would not have heard for all the world" (IV v 47). She feels that her father's conduct is mistaken, but she cannot bear to hear it criticized by her mother. Mr. Hale's decision causes great unrest within Margaret. With the disappearance of conventional boundaries, she perceives the world as desolate and void: "never-ending depths of space, mocking in their still serenity; with no sign of God" (IV v 46). Deriding herself for such despair, Margaret slowly accepts the readjustment of boundaries that her particular historical situation demands. This early scene avoids none of the painful paradoxes that accompany a questioning and readjustment of authority, and

it points to the methods and questions of the narrative that follows.

In a slightly different way, the subplot of Frederick's mutiny also touches upon the question of authority by foregrounding the problem of resistance, acting as analogue to the resistance of the workers. The language that Margaret uses for her brother's action in fact recalls that of Nicholas Higgins on the occasion of the strike. In answer to her mother's questions about Frederick's resistance to authority, she responds: "Loyalty and obedience to wisdom and justice are fine; but it is still finer to defy arbitrary power, unjustly and cruelly used -- not on behalf of ourselves, but on behalf of others more helpless" (IV xiv 127). But the practice of resistance is more complex and impure than its rhetoric. If Frederick is noble in his resistance of an abusive authority, his action has meant death for many of his followers. As in the case of the strikers, Frederick's appeal to an authority beyond the law carries with it destructive consequences. In the case of both Frederick's mutiny and the strike, violence and rebellion are portrayed as dangerous alternatives to established authority, even when it is abusive authority. Gaskell offers no solution to the problem; rather, she holds it up in all of its tension and allows the contradictions to speak.⁵

Perhaps nowhere is Gaskell's dialogical approach to conventional order and authority more explicit than in her representation of her heroine Margaret Hale. Described three

times in the striking oxymoronic formula of "gentle violence", she embodies the conflicting movements around which the novel is structured. The novel itself in effect begins three times in three places: in Harley Street, in Helstone, and in Milton. These three beginnings, Martin Dodsworth argues, are Gaskell's way of "setting up the conventions against which she will offend," and they help to generate the "strange jerkiness" of the novel (11). At the same time, all three beginnings are held together through the consciousness of Gaskell's heroine. And the movement in space corresponds to and foreshadows a movement in time, for the itinerary which brings Margaret from London to Helstone to Milton marks her maturation. The construction of gender also enters into this itinerary, for it involves an exploratory movement between the enclosed, separate world of feminine consciousness and the more open, masculine world of action.

London offers Margaret a tedious, enclosed society life of "forms and ceremonies" in which people live in class and gender-bound groups (IV i 8). The characters never seem to leave their prosperous home on Harley Street. Mainly preoccupied with shawls, laces, and weddings, they remain inside, indulging in dinner parties in the large dining room and listening to Margaret's cousin Edith play the piano in the "dimly lighted back drawing room" (IV i 4). This stylized setting is inhabited by appropriately stylized characters. Edith, dressed in white muslim, is compared in the first chapter to Titania, Sleeping Beauty, and

Cinderella. Enclosed in her story book femininity, Edith is "too careless and idle to have a very strong will of her own" (IV i 2), and she presents a strong contrast to Margaret, who came "untamed from the forest" nine years earlier (IV i 2, 5). With her "tall finely made figure" and lack of classical good looks, Margaret is initially presented as outside conventional categories of femininity. She sits uneasily within the enclosure of London life with its suggestion of a separate feminine space, untouched and untouchable by the masculine world of political and economic affairs. Margaret is bored by the superficial chatter and the shallowness and triviality of her surroundings. She is put off by its "never-ending commotion about trifles," and is thus drawn to Captain Lennox's romantic descriptions of a "gipsy or make-shift life" in far off Corfu as a means of escape.

Margaret's bold, romantic imagination is given room when she exchanges the oppressive enclosure of London life for the freedom of her childhood Helstone home, which turns out to be a transition between the soft, superficial South and the hard, challenging North. These Helstone chapters portray another aspect of the South which has formed the early background of Margaret's life. Once in Helstone, the scene changes completely. Margaret describes her childhood home as like "a village in a poem - in one of Tennyson's poems" (IV i 9). In her memory it is a melting of seasons from perfumed roses to flying autumn leaves. In contrast to her enclosed life in Harley Street,

Margaret's days in Helstone are spent outside, where she enjoys nature's gifts, particularly the "broad commons" with its "warm scented light" and "multitudes of wild, free living creatures, revelling in the sunshine, and the herbs and flowers it called forth" (IV ii 16). For all of its idyllic aspects, however, Helstone is not without its ambiguities. The "sun-streaked common" is also "cloud shadowed," and the west wind blows with a paradoxical "soft violence." Margaret's keen sensibilities quickly pick up unspoken tensions within the family that disrupt her otherwise ideal existence. Moreover, the freedom that Margaret enjoys has its darker side, as she comes to realize when she fears being locked out in the garden. Her previous fanciful musings on the "wild adventurous freedom" of the poachers is replaced by an undefined fear, and she feels herself in need of the safety of "familiar walls hemming her round and shutting her in" (IV vi 61).

The internal division in Margaret suggested here, her need for, yet fear of, both enclosure and freedom, is captured by the narrator's paradoxical epithet of "gentle violence." A peculiar phrase for a Victorian heroine, the epithet underlines Gaskell's own ambiguous relationship to conventions of gender. From the beginning of the novel, Margaret is described in terms of an openness that stands counter to traditional feminine modes of concealment and obliquity. In contrast to her Aunt Shaw, for example, who never likes "to do anything from the open and

acknowledged motive of her own good will and pleasure," Margaret is straightforward in her responses. She meets Mr. Lennox's surprise interruption in the midst of her modelling of shawls with a look of bright amusement, and when he approaches her to speak, her face exhibits "honest, open brightness" (IV i 7). Furthermore, Margaret is soon involved in actions outside the feminine sphere, replacing her father as the head of the family, telling her mother of their plans, and arranging their living situation. In the absence of her father's authority, Margaret appropriates his duties in an unusual assumption of masculine powers.

Once the Hales arrive in Milton, the focus of the setting is neither enclosed domestic space nor the space of nature, but social public space. Milton is streets, railway stations, and crowds. And it is here that Margaret comes face to face with her own contradictory and paradoxical nature, enduring a constant internal struggle between inherited definitions of femininity and inner promptings that lead her into the masculine sphere of public action. Most of the action now takes place in the openness of the streets and other public places, and the violence of Margaret's own inner passionate nature (unknown to her) is revealed "outside" as it were, in the social and public realm, through literal or metaphorical dialogue. Even the scenes marked by enclosure in this central part of the novel are most often concerned with the active dynamic of telling and listening in which Margaret moves

abruptly between outspokenness and withdrawal, recalling the "gentle violence" that characterizes her. When Mr. Thornton first meets with the family in Chapter Ten, for example, Margaret begins in the conventional way, sitting quietly in "a corner near her mother with her work" and "abstracted" in her own thoughts (1IV x 91). Yet at Mr. Thornton's deprecation of the traditional values of the South ("One may be clogged with honey and unable to rise and fly"), Margaret's ire is roused, and she enters the conversation with a vehemence that surprises even herself (IV x 93). Predictably, this outburst is followed by her "collapsing into a determined silence. . . angry with herself for having said so much." She sits by, contemptuously listening to Mr. Thornton's further defense of the North until compelled to question him in a tone of "haughty disapproval" which simultaneously piques and humbles him, impelling him to tell the story of his life in an attempt to be understood by her (IV x 97). Margaret's part in this dynamic of active dialogic exchange is intensified in the Masters and Men interchange in Chapter Fifteen. Far from sitting in a corner abstracted in her own thoughts, Margaret makes comments and asks questions that actually carry the conversation in this scene. She introduces the governing metaphor of family and then proceeds to undercut it, entering the masculine world of politics and economics with ease, motivated by a moral and human interest that transcends social and gender boundaries.

Margaret's entrance into the realm of social and public dialogue in this scene is a foreshadowing of her later action. She moves into the conventional masculine realm twice in the novel, and both times her movement is prompted by the same instinctual response to a human need. Her two acts of instinctual prompting -- the attempt to protect Mr. Thornton from the strikers and the lie to protect her brother -- both issue in a paradoxical situation, and once again Gaskell relies on the disparity and conflict between theory and action to point out the moral ambiguities of her heroine's situation. In the first incident, Margaret is forced into action by her sense of justice and responsibility for both the workers and Mr. Thornton. The power of the scene derives from her persistence in rhetorically upholding conventional ideas of authority and dependence, while simultaneously dramatically enacting their opposite. Thus, after throwing herself in front of Mr. Thornton to shield and protect him, she retreats to the rhetoric of a separate woman's sphere in defense of her public action: "If I have saved one blow, one cruel angry action that might otherwise have been committed, I did a woman's work. Let them insult my maiden pride as they will -- I walk pure before God!" (IV xxiii 226). Later, she similarly defends herself to Mr. Thornton: ". . . any woman, worthy of the name of woman, would come forward to shield, with her revered helplessness, a man in the danger from the violence of numbers" (IV xxiv 232). The strength of the rhetoric of "woman"

suggests Gaskell's own ambivalence regarding the crossing of social and gender boundaries, and the ambivalence is reinforced by the representation of Margaret's shame at having left the enclosed woman's place to enter the public eye. Amidst her feverish thoughts, she sees "a cloud of faces" looking up at her. They give her "no idea of fierce vivid anger, or of personal danger, but a deep sense of shame that she should thus be the object of universal regard - a sense of shame so acute that it seemed as if she would fain have burrowed into the earth to hide herself, and yet she could not escape out of that unwinking glare of many eyes" (IV xxiii 227).

In the second incident, the telling of a justified lie to protect her brother, Margaret undergoes a similar split. By telling a lie, she has again violated both external authority and her own private standards. Once again, the narrator enters Margaret's consciousness to render her inner conflict. Going over the events in memory, she takes comfort in the fact that it was her lie that saved Frederick, and she admits that she would do the same again. At the same time, she is in a "state of acute self-abasement," besieged by feelings of guilt for having entered into falsehood: "the lie had been so despicably foolish . . . and faith in the power of truth so infinitely the greater wisdom!" (IV xli 411). Margaret gropes for some kind of answer, but the narrative remains in the space of ambiguity.

The rendering of the aftermath of these scenes of transgression has been much commented upon, usually as a melodramatic lapse on the part of Gaskell (e.g. Dodsworth, 25; Bodenheimer, 296). But there is a sense in which melodrama issues out of the very narrative tensions that disallow resolution. The melodramatic gestures (Margaret's throwing herself before Thornton in an act of protection; her fainting immediately afterwards; her fainting after telling the lie) are, as Peter Brooks notes, "gestures which fill the gap" and "reach toward other meanings which cannot be generated from the language code. They often take the form of the message . . . expressed in an immediate inarticulate language of presence: a moment of victory of pure expression over articulation" (72). Margaret's lapses into melodrama are the response to the tension within which she lives, specifically to her ambivalent challenge to the notion of separate spheres. This sense of melodrama marks Gaskell's narrative strategy of placing fixed definitions of behaviour into question--and her own ambivalence in so doing.

Near the end of North and South, Margaret poses the question of "how much was to be utterly merged in obedience to authority, and how much might be set apart for freedom in working" (IV xlix 497). The question, she realizes, is "the most difficult problem for women," and her formulation of it highlights the centrality of conflict in the novel. As she faces the recurring changes in her life, her dream of a "life sans peur et sans

reproche" is mitigated by the fear of her own will. And the abrupt juxtaposition of action and reflection in the narrative constitutes the text's formulation of the same conflict. Margaret's two acts of instinctual inner prompting are both followed by periods of intense reflection in the enclosure of memory, as she attempts to give some narrative shape and meaning to her actions. In her response to her own actions, there is no sense of the subversiveness of a separate woman's sphere as in Ruth. Nor is there a sense of a rebellious spirit in Margaret as there is in Jemima Bradshaw.⁶ Rather, Gaskell seems to have reconciled herself to contradictions, and she allows them to live within the consciousness of her heroine. Margaret is torn between obedience and freedom in a way that is never resolved, and the novel's formal restlessness is a result not of Gaskell's weakness as a novelist, but of her faithfulness to the intractable contradictions inherent in the matter of her story and to the dialogic dynamic of the narrative act as a model for her own narrative.

In the character of John Thornton, Gaskell continues to explore the tension between social patterns and the possibility of personal freedom. Thornton himself is a character marked by conflict and tension, as Nicholas Higgins remarks: "To tell the truth, he fairly bamboozles me. He's two chaps. One chap I knowed of old as were measter all o'er. T'other chap hasn't an ounce of measter's flesh about him. How them two chaps is bound up in one body, is a craddy for me to find out" (IV xl 404). The

two warring sides of Thornton's character are given voice through his conversations with Higgins. When Higgins comes asking for work, Thornton upholds the master's rhetoric and point of view. Unbending and demanding unyielding respect for justice, he refuses to comply and sends Higgins away. And yet Gaskell has Thornton call his own rhetoric into question by his actions. His rigidity of mind is slowly broken down through the power of recollection and association, as he comes to the realization of the central point of Gaskell's story: the need to listen to the tenor of a life.

Thornton's character has been carefully prepared for from the earliest pages in his own recognition of the need to tell the story of his life as a way of gaining Margaret's understanding. In the drama of their first interchange together, the narrator is careful to point out the inner dynamics of Thornton's consciousness, a consciousness aware of and sensitive to the presence of another. Margaret's anger, for example, is met by his tone of "inexpressible tenderness," for he realizes that "he had really hurt her" (IV x 94). Catherine Gallagher has noted that, in comparison to Margaret, who needs to measure everything by an abstract ethical standard, Thornton continually "subordinates the ethical to the personal emotional issue" (176). The dominant representation of this master of industry is private and personal, and he is marked by his emotional depth and capacity for engagement with another, be it Margaret, his mother, or Nicholas

Higgins. Like Margaret, however, Thornton is uneasy with his desire to live a plot outside of the one available to him, and his development in the novel consists of a constant oscillation between masculine and feminine plot patterns as he too searches for a way to tell his story. In the early scenes he is presented as the embodiment of the masculine quest plot, proudly proclaiming his "Teutonic blood", and seeing life as a "time for action and exertion" (IV xl 398). His romantic Darkshire ego arises out of his own inward strength, and his self-governing instincts are given voice in his insistence upon action and self-reliance. At the same time, Thornton emerges as a man deeply influenced, at first insensibly, by his relationship with others. Even before he consciously comes to the realization of the need to listen to the story of another's life, he is sensitive to the "weightiness" of circumstances that affect a person's choices. Aware of the depth of character in others, he continuously goes beneath surfaces, recognizing and upholding the hidden truths that he senses in another's silence. Convinced of Margaret's truthful nature, for example, he defends her to his mother, recognizing the "weighty reasons" behind her apparently improper conduct. In spite of his surface appearance as unbending and monolithic, then, Thornton is portrayed as the upholder of a tentative frame of mind; he sees the need for a "groping in new circumstances," and he is concerned with the "intimate and immediate" aspects of life,

which he sees as "full of difficulties that must be encountered" (IV xl 399).

Thornton's acceptance of the necessity of conflict is not easy, and it occurs in spite of himself. Moreover, his situation highlights a particular irony: in order for Thornton to come to the point of maturity required of him, he must retreat to the private sphere. Where Margaret moves outward into the public eye, Thornton draws into the private enclosure of his own memory. His mother and others chastize him for it, but on this capacity for reflection depends his development. By listening to himself through the promptings of memory and association, Thornton comes to recognize the need for listening to another, a recognition that is both crucial and disconcerting.

At the end, Thornton himself voices the discovery of a dialogic model of social relationships. In answer to Mr. Colthurst's question about his "social experiments," he responds by pointing out the necessity of "actual personal contact" between individuals of differing classes. "Such intercourse," he recognizes, is the very "breath of life" (IV li 515). Thornton is aware that his "social experiment" must remain active and dynamic. To be vital, it has to be open to conflict and to contest, and it needs to be rooted in a concrete knowledge of others with all their "tricks of tempers" (IV li 515). Thornton suffers from no illusions about his exploratory approach to social relationship, however. In answer to Colthurst's further question of the possibility of his experiment preventing

the recurrence of strikes, he remains tentative and open. Believing in the necessity of debate and challenge, he resists formalization into law or policy. He turns down the offer of donations, sensing the threat of molding his imagined vision into a static charity. "Once let in the principle," he says to Mr. Bell, "and I should have people going and talking (making a "philanthropic fuss") and spoiling the simplicity of the whole thing" (IV xlii 433).

In the course of Gaskell's story, all of the major characters have undergone irrevocable change in their lives as a result of their "groping in new circumstances." Before her final meeting with John Thornton, Margaret muses on the recent "sudden change" in her life. Acutely aware of what Mr. Bell calls the oppressiveness of "the instability of all human things" (475), she tries in vain to comprehend the process that has taken place: "I am so tired," she tells herself, "so tired of being whirled on through all these phases of my life, in which nothing abides by me, no creature, no place; it is like a circle in which the victims of earthly passion eddy continually" (488). In keeping with the tenor of Gaskell's story, as Margaret struggles with this "sense of change, of individual nothingness, of perplexity and disappointment," she comes to a sudden illumination which changes even her own view of change. Recognizing that the pain and conflict she has undergone have also given vitality and meaning to her life, she willingly accepts her "own painful sense

of change" as a necessary and productive aspect of her life (488).

Gaskell ends her novel within the enclosure of the same London mansion in which it began, bringing her reader full circle in more ways than one. The change that has occurred in all of the characters is highlighted in the final meeting of Margaret and John Thornton. As they face each other, talk and listen, there emerges a sense of human understanding that overcomes both social and gender determinations. Both have learned to tell themselves -- and each other -- stories which reach beyond available narratives of gender and social arrangement. The ending does not, as often charged, signal Gaskell's retreat to the romance plot, with her heroine accommodating herself to conventional expectation. Gaskell ends her story on a characteristically ambiguous note, leaving the reader in doubt as to who is the hero, who is the questor, who is following whom. Instead, she offers a sense of two people valuing each other, and mutually educating themselves as they share the energy of work and the exchange of ideas. Their relationship remains in process, not fixed or final, in an ending that reminds the reader that reconciliation and resolution are the paradoxical issue of pain and conflict.

NOTES TO CHAPTER FOUR

¹ John Lucas is typical in regarding North and South primarily as a novel of reconciliation, and he is equally typical in finding the reconciliation unconvincing. See also Margaret Ganz, Deirdre David, and Raymond Williams.

² Gaskell's sense of ambiguity and contradiction in the personality has been compared to that of D. H. Lawrence by Martin Dodsworth (Introduction to North and South 25) and Rosemarie Bodenheimer ("Permanent State of Change" 296, 300). Barbara Hardy makes a similar point in stressing the way in which in Gaskell "feelings are not specialized, not kept in separate compartments" (178).

³ Bakhtin deals with a similar model of social relationship which stresses the productive semantic dimension of dialogue in his The Architectonics of Answerability. See the excellent discussion of this work in Clark and Holquist, Chapter Three.

⁴ John Lucas regards the friendship of Thornton and Higgins as "unlikely," and sees in it evidence of Gaskell's evasiveness. In particular, he finds that she imposes a "notion of reconciliation on matters that can't be reconciled" (20).

⁵ For a more negative reading of Gaskell's handling of Frederick as an evasion of difficult questions, see Deirdre David (14-15).

⁶ It might be added that in North and South Gaskell conducts her dialogic exploration within the consciousness of her heroine. There is no need for an Aunt Esther or Jemima Bradshaw. Margaret Hale is both right and wrong, sexually attractive and morally correct. The resulting tension within her consciousness

makes her one of the most complex and interesting of Gaskell's heroines.

CHAPTER FIVE

Listening to the Past, Transforming the Present: Condensation and Displacement in Sylvia's Lovers

In Chapter Forty-two of Sylvia's Lovers, Philip Hepburn, exiled and disconsolate, takes up lodgings in an old room of the Hospital of St. Sepulchre. Within the enclosure of his room, as he sits alone "in the long winter evenings," the scenes of his past life rise before him. Going round the "mill-wheel circle of ideas in his mind," Philip turns to an old tattered volume of history, and he comes across an old story that moves him into the realm of association and dream. The old room, with its "legacies" of fragments of history, and "the quiet moonlit quadrangle" outside the window "predisposed Philip to dwell upon the story he had been reading" and to lose himself in the world of association (VI xlii 491-2). Gaskell frequently turns to scenes such as this one in Sylvia's Lovers, scenes in which the particulars of a circumscribed framework give rise to a rich and resonant working of the imagination, suggesting the energy of the mind's associative impulses as it is heightened by the shaping power of enclosing space.

In her only attempt at an historical novel, Gaskell works within a complementary tension between energy and

containment, as she faces the elusiveness of memory in her attempt to give form and shape to the events of history. Working within the containment of a traditional literary and historical framework, she consistently shows that framework to be disrupted, and at times transformed, by the energy of association. The evocative and suggestive texture of Sylvia's Lovers is a result of Gaskell's desire simultaneously to give order to the events of the past and to explore the working of the involuntary memory, which can violently disrupt preconceived patterns of historical interpretation and understanding. In her novel of the sea, Gaskell explores the past as what Walter Benjamin has called a "pastiche" of buried but still living "thought fragments" that suffer a sea-change in the depths of time, surviving in new forms and shapes as rich and strange revelations in the present. They interrupt the flow of history as "transmissible tradition," calling it into question and revitalizing and redirecting understanding (38-41). For Gaskell, history consists as much of these forgotten but still living thought fragments that come to light in dreams and intrusive moments of association as it does of the public records and chronological renderings of past events. Official recorded history, with its systematic and sequential selectivity, contains voices never heard, the unofficial history of human stories and memories lost in the moment of recording. This loss inherent in history and memory-- the sense of history as a form of forgetting-- constitutes what Benjamin has called the "root cause of sadness"

(256), and a sense of loss permeates Gaskell's historical novel. Sylvia's Lovers was, she said, the saddest story she had ever written.¹

The framework of standard, orthodox history based on the workings of the voluntary, collective memory provides Gaskell with the structure against which she can show the disruptive powers of association at work and measure the loss of forgotten voices. Gaskell's affinity for association is evident in her choice of narrative technique. Although she makes use of recorded historical sources in the telling of her story, she presents it as a fragmentary piecing together of memories and stories handed down from the past. Sylvia's Lovers begins and ends in oral tradition: "The story went," says the narrator, "that John and Jeremiah Foster were so rich that they could buy up all the new town across the bridge" (VI iii 24). And later she assures the reader that "Old people can yet tell of the hard famine of that year 1800" (VI xlv 508). To present her own story as reconstructed from vague oral tradition means seeing it as part of the densely veiled, yet still living, world of unrecorded history. It is unrecorded history, not large historical events, that shapes the characters' lives in Sylvia's Lovers, and this can be seen in the novel's exemplary teller of history, Donkin the Tailor, whose story of the press gang in Chapter Five mirrors Gaskell's own narrative method. As a tailor and a teller, Donkin is engaged in the art of stitching, "working away at [his] tale wi' his tongue, same time as

[he] works at [his] needle with his fingers" (VI v 55). He stitches together his tale from the scraps and remnants of memory. Out of the "treasured bundle of various coloured cloth," he "selects his patterns" and offers up his story, filled with echoes and voices from the past and carried by the dispersive movement of association (VI v 55). Like Gaskell in the telling of her own story, Donkin relies upon hearsay in his history. His own telling is a re-telling, and his attempt at retrieval of the past highlights the elusiveness of memory:

"But our Greenland captain were noane so poor spirited, and says he, 'She's full of oil, and I ware you of consequences if you fire into her. Anyhow, pirate or no pirate (for t' word pirate stuck in his gizzard), I'm a honest Monkshaven man, an' I come fra' a land where there's great icebergs and many a deadly danger, but niver a press gang, thank God! and that's what you are, I reckon.' Them's the words he told me, but whether he spoke 'em out so bold at t' time, I'se not so sure; they were in his mind for to speak, only maybe prudence got t' better on him, for he said he prayed i' his heart to bring his cargo safe to t' owners, come what might." (VI v 58)

The tenuous logic of the telling of history is set out in this "Story of the Press Gang," which serves as the exemplary scene of telling in the novel.

The same tenuous logic governs Gaskell's own telling. As in Donkin's story, the linear plot of events of her text is often disrupted, and at times disputed, by what she calls the "flash across the mind" (VI xxxii 383), the logic of association that runs counter to the more rational logic governing historical interpretation and even novel plots. The mysterious links of association are triggered unexpectedly, conflating time and disrupting the events of the plot, as when Gaskell offers a flash forward early in the novel when Sylvia is struck by the sight of the figure of her mother, standing on the little knoll at the side of the house watching for her: "Sylvia had noted the watching not three minutes before and many a time in her after life, when no one cared much for her out-goings and in-comings, the straight, upright figure of her mother, fronting the setting sun, but searching through its blinding rays for a sight of her child, rose up like a sudden seen picture, the remembrance of which smote Sylvia to the heart with a sense of a lost blessing, not duly valued when possessed" (VI vi 64). This rising up of an image from the past takes the reader into the aftermath of the tale; past and future conflate, and the crossing of times displaces the events and contributes to a sense of the disruptiveness of memory and association.

In Sylvia's Lovers, history emerges as less linear than configurational, for time is reckoned, in the words of Mary Barton, "by events and thoughts and not by clock or dial plate" (I xxxiii

389). Moving according to the rhythm of the seasons and traditional events, the text is held together by a network of associations, and the linear world of the plot is frequently disrupted by the strange logic of association and dream. As in many of the dreams represented in the text, images break into the sequence of the plot, serving as keys to a hidden history at work in the text, and drawing together the disparate elements of what Barbara Hardy has called the "internal memory" of the novel (86). The subjective worlds of the characters become visible in the patterns of imagery and the concerns of the text. The characters' internal tensions manifest themselves in the events of the plot, and a complex of associations forms which transforms both the historical and literary frameworks. Such projection of a psychological concern into an image, and the resulting associative diffusion of that image, as Freud famously argued, characterizes the activity of dreaming.

Speaking of "associative paths" in On the Interpretation of Dreams, Freud coined the now familiar terms "condensation" and "displacement" in order to discuss the mysterious workings of the involuntary memory, the way in which the unconscious reveals itself to consciousness through reversals, violations, and spatial shifts. In both condensation and displacement, the past becomes known through listening to scattered fragments and traces of memory which are never self-evident. Both processes of unconscious thought are characterized by a movement away from

any centralized understanding; they break up what Freud calls the "manifest content" of the conscious thought to which they refer.² Displacement is a means of diffusing a conscious concern or desire through surrogate images, and condensation is a means of focussing and intensifying remote images with features in common. Although moving in opposite directions, both symbolizing processes share the same quality of calling into question the imposition of one center upon any interpretation of the past. And both serve as means for retrieving forgotten meaning. Freud also explores the peculiar dialogic of association and dream in which contradictions come to light and are explored. In dream logic, he reminds us, "there is no 'either/or,' only 'and'."³ Such a dialogic underlies the telling of Sylvia's Lovers, as Gaskell focusses upon the complexity of various issues. Through the movement of association, she brings different sides and points of view to light, and, as Terry Eagleton has argued, ends by "putting her own controlling ideology into question" (22) by "pressing contradictions to an extreme limit" (17). Through condensation and displacement, then, Gaskell conducts what could be called a displaced dialogic in Sylvia's Lovers. While working within the containment of a traditional literary and historical framework, she activates the energy of association to draw the reader into an oblique critique that quietly questions and transforms, even while it maintains, the accepted framework of understanding.

I

Condensation is the most prevalent symbolizing process at work in Sylvia's Lovers. Specific images or events draw together and concentrate disparate concerns in the text. The episode of Philip's dream in the Hospital of St. Sepulchre mentioned at the beginning of the chapter is itself a point of condensation. Drawn into the scene through association are several other scenes in the text. The fable that Philip reads of Sir Guy, Earl of Warwick, who leaves his wife for seven years, recalls the other story that compelled Philip to action through comparison and identification earlier in the novel: the biblical story of Jacob and Rachel in which Jacob waits and works seven years for Rachel's hand in marriage (VI xxii 261). The conflation of the two stories and Philip's dependence upon them as paradigmatic of his own present life highlight the preoccupation of the text with the notion of the repetitiveness of history as made known through the remembering of stories. This is a point made explicitly by Philip himself much earlier in the narrative when he hears the story of the unhappy fate of Alice Rose told to him by Jeremiah Foster in Chapter Twenty-one. On that occasion, Philip wonders "if the lives of one generation were but a repetition of the lives of those who had gone before, with no variation but from the internal cause

that some had greater capacity for suffering than others. Would those very circumstances which made the interest of his life now, return, in due cycle, when he was dead and Sylvia was forgotten? . ." (VI xxi 254). Turning "the faithful legend" of Guy and Philiss into a model of his own life, as he had done earlier with the story of Jacob and Rachel, Philip turns stories of the past into authorities for his choices in the present. His conduct raises the whole question of fiction, history and interpretation, and Philip's development in the novel consists of a growing awareness of the need for an incorporation of his private associations within a collective memory that can both support and challenge his own interpretations of the past. His fate in the novel stands as a warning against any purely subjective organization of the past which discounts collective memory in favor of private association.

Another node of condensation in the scene in the room of St. Sepulchre is the mirrored image that Philip contemplates. Catching the reflection of his own face in "the small oblong of looking-glass hung against the wall," he laughs at the sight of the sunken, hollow , and gloomy eyes (VI xlii 493). This mirrored image is what Freud refers to as a "composite figure," bringing together a number of other events and figures in the text into the "appearance of a new unity" (432).⁴ Philip's contemplation of himself in the looking glass, for example, draws in the figure of Hester Rose, the self-conscious "observer of all" in Gaskell's story (VI iii 35). Early in the novel she, like Philip, looks at herself in

the looking glass and, as with Philip, the reflection reveals a person bound by repression: a "colourless face", a "mouth compressed with a sense of dissatisfaction", and "eyes that were melancholy instead of smiling" (VI xi 125). These two images of repression suggest the ambivalence of the text toward conventional authority, for Philip and Hester are both bound by a sense of traditional duty and order that discourages spontaneity. Both are portrayed, somewhat poignantly, as rigid upholders of the letter of the law. Of special pertinence in the mirror scenes are the images of the eyes: the description of Hester's "melancholy" eyes specifically parallels Philip's, "hollow and gloomy" eyes. And both stand in contrast to the descriptions of Charley Kinraid's "dark eyes" of "honest brightness" and Sylvia's "flashing eyes" and natural beauty. This moment in Chapter Forty-two evokes an earlier moment in Chapter Thirty-four when, also contemplating himself in a mirror, Philip compares himself to the dashing Charley Kinraid and falls from "passive hopelessness to active despair" (VI xxxiv 408). In this later scene at St. Sepulchre, he laughs "scornfully" at his own image and at the folly of his longing for Sylvia. Hester has a similar moment of self-deprecation in front of a mirror in Chapter Eleven when she directly compares her own reflection to Sylvia directly after observing Sylvia's free-spirited unselfconsciousness. Half-ashamed and disconsolate, she compares her own image, "dark soft hair with no light gleams in it," with the "bright bonny face in

the sunlight outside" (VI xi 125). And the narrator established the comparison between the two women even earlier in Chapter Three, setting Hester's painful selfconsciousness against the unselfconscious Sylvia, "hardly conscious that any one awaited the expression of her wishes, . . . ready to smile or to pout, or to show her feelings in any way, with a character as undeveloped as a child's, affectionate, wilful, naughty, tiresome, charming, anything, in fact, at present that the chances of an hour called out" (VI iii 26). Characteristically, for Gaskell the notion of self-reflection is highly ambiguous. The characters most prone toward self analysis in the text are portrayed as stifled and repressed by their own consciousness of themselves, while the least self-conscious are the most free. Early in the novel, the narrator makes reference to a "vivid self-consciousness that more than anything else deprives characters of freshness and originality" (VI vii 79). However, it is also the case that for all their "freshness" and "originality," such characters are eventually either excluded from the plot (Charley Kinraid) or made to grow into a self-consciousness that becomes the ultimate emblem of maturity (Sylvia).

If self-consciousness is an ambiguous value in Sylvia's Lovers, so is the literacy with which it is connected. As Philip regards his reflection in the mirror at St. Sepulchre's, he muses on the story of Guy and Philiss that he has recently read, and his musing reminds the reader of Philip's role as the major literate character in the story and of the whole problem of literacy with

which the novel has been concerned. More specifically, the image of the repressed Philip recalls the way in which his literacy has usually emerged as a forced and repressive literalism. The other readers in the novel are drawn into the negative image of literacy as well: Hester and Alice Rose, Bell Robson, William Coulson, and, to some extent, the Foster brothers are all associated with the printed word and all have a lack of spontaneity and "freshness". In contrast stand Charley Kinraid, teller of tales, and Sylvia, lover of oral tales and despiser of the written word. But the motifs of orality, literacy, and textuality interweave most powerfully and ambiguously in the character of Daniel Robson. Daniel is presented as the lover of oral tales, a man for whom "reading was no pleasure but listening was" (VI viii 100). Spontaneous and impulsive, he is described by the narrator as childlike, a man "greatly affected by the present" but lacking in analytic processes and self-deceived. Described as a lover of adventure, Daniel is the embodiment of the "freshness and originality" that accompany a lack of self-consciousness. But the lack of self-restraint, both in word and action, that grows out of his lack of self-reflection leads to his death, a warning for Sylvia, who associates herself with her father and his linguistic exuberance early in the novel. "Ay!" she says to Molly Corney on their initial walk to town, "mother's words are scarce, and weigh heavy. Feyther's liker me, and we talk a deal of rubble; but mother's words are liker to hewn stone" (VI ii 13).

In the figures of both Sylvia and Daniel Robson, Gaskell explores the ambiguities of the freedom and spontaneity connected to an oral sense of experience. With the possible exception of Kester, the Robson's hired farm hand, every illiterate character in the story is ultimately portrayed as in need of the containment of experience that comes with reflective and textual distance. Daniel and Charley Kinraid, the two tellers of tales, are excluded from the plot, and Sylvia comes to a recognition of the value of the written word as a necessary means of organizing experience and making judgements: "If any one would teach her to read!," she muses near the end of the tale. "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!" (VI xxxvii 442). At the same time, through characters such as Philip, Hester and Alice Rose, Bell Robson, and William Coulson, the narrator suggests the loss inherent in literate self-consciousness. In comparison to Sylvia, Daniel and Charley Kinraid, these literate characters are all obsessed with order and control, and Alice Rose's literal and rigid application of biblical texts to all aspects of life is only the most extreme example of the repressive power associated with them and with the written word.

The repressive power of textuality is brought into sharp focus by the narrator's centering of the two most arbitrary and irrational moments of the plot around written warrants that allow

for injustice and cruelty in the name of official documentation. The Admiralty "press warrant" is evoked early in the first chapter as the sanction of an oppressive law:

But if the Admiralty became urgent in their demands, they were also willing to be unscrupulous. Landsmen, if able-bodied, might soon be trained into good sailors; and once in the hold of the tender, which always awaited the success of the operations of the press gang, it was difficult for such prisoners to bring evidence of the nature of their former occupations, especially when none had leisure to listen to such evidence, or were willing to believe it if they did listen, or would act upon it for release of the captive if they had by possibility both listened and believed. Men were kidnapped, literally disappeared, and nothing was ever heard of them again. (VI i 6)

The sense of irrational loss in this image is reinforced by the lawyer's warrant for Daniel's arrest after the latter's resistance to the press gang: the warrant containing the authority to hang the offender is written up with a blank left for the name. Not yet realizing the seriousness of the charge indicting Daniel as a felon, Philip asks the lawyer what they can do to him:

"But what can they do to him, sir?"

"Do?" Mr. Donkin half smiled at the ignorance

displayed. "Why, hang him to be sure; if the judge is in a hanging mood. He's been either a principal in the offence, or a principal in the second degree, and, as such, liable to the full punishment. I drew up the warrant myself this morning, though I left the exact name to be filled up by my clerk."
(VI xxv 302-303)

Connected to the complex of issues surrounding the repressiveness of the written word is the notion of official history. Its authority is quietly questioned by Gaskell's own reliance upon oral transmission as a means of retrieving and keeping alive voices silenced and forgotten by the official record. At the same time, however, Gaskell does not lose sight of the elusiveness of the past as it is orally transmitted. The gains of recorded history are set next to the losses of memory when history is the telling of stories, the loosely wrought product of popular legend. In the chapter prior to Philip's dream, the narrator describes the lost history of the Hospital of St. Sepulchre. After a brief description of the building and grounds as dating from the French Wars of earlier times, she goes on to tell how "in process of years the origin and primary purpose had been forgotten by all excepting the local antiquaries" and the history of the hospital had become part of popular legend, allowing the place to lose much of its original reason for being (VI xli 485). The problem of forgetting and the possibilities for misinterpretation implied in oral tradition

and legend are returned to again at the end of Gaskell's tale. "The memory of man fades away," says the narrator. "A few old people can still tell you the tradition of the man who died in a cottage somewhere about this spot,--died of starvation while his wife lived in hard-hearted plenty not two good stone-throws away. This is the form into which popular feeling, and ignorance of the real facts, have moulded the story" (VI xli 530).

The plurality of interpretations that arises from "ignorance of the real facts" lies at the heart of any telling of the past, whether official or unofficial history. And Gaskell's offering up of her own story to the still-veiled processes of time, what she elsewhere in the novel calls the "thick mist of unseen life" (VI x 120), is indicative of her unwillingness to centralize and universalize any interpretation. Along with the idea of history as a chronological ordering and recording of "real facts" and events, then, she presents her reader, through association and condensation in her own text, with the idea of history as the telling of stories, the searching for patterns and meaning amidst the myriad possibilities of understanding. Neither kind of history is complete or sufficient in itself. Sylvia's Lovers stresses the need for listening to the various voices of the past -- both the voice of recorded history, with its claims to centralized truth and authority, and the intrusive voice of association which can disrupt and redirect authoritative understanding.

In the character of Philip Hepburn, this dialogic of unity and dispersion can be seen at work in Gaskell's story in other ways as well. Philip serves as a composite figure for many different aspects of the text. In his own relationship to the past, he brings together the two apparently contradictory historical modes. Through him, Gaskell argues for both the reliance upon the structure of conventional understanding and the necessity and possibility of disruptive reevaluations of the past. His many dream experiences manifest the working of the involuntary memory as a means of breaking into accepted interpretations and transforming understanding. What Peter Brooks has called the "insistent past" (134) makes its voice heard as Philip tries to select and arrange the particulars of the past according to the promptings of his voluntary memory, conventional understanding, and pre-ordained plot of private association. Despite such efforts, "the old life which lives forever" (VI xxxiv 414) makes itself known through dreams and association, and the self-deceived Philip comes to a new understanding of the present through a renewed understanding of the past. In other ways as well, Philip serves as a composite figure. Throughout the text, he provides a point of condensation for pairs of contrary emotional responses: the sacred and the secular, the tragic and the pathetic, the authoritative and the rebellious. Relying upon the both/and logic of dream in her portrayal of Philip Hepburn, Gaskell presents her readers with the complexities of the human condition as known

through the number of disparate selves which come together in any one person.

In his tenuous relationship to his own memory and self, then, Philip condenses the main preoccupations of Gaskell's text: the susceptibility of traditional interpretations of the past to disruption and revision by the promptings of the involuntary memory; the unreliability of "official" history as the only source of interpretation of the past; and the problem of interpretation that arises in acknowledging the multitude of conflicting sides to any person at any point in time. As well, the narrator/historian functions as a composite figure in the novel, bringing to bear on the text questions about orthodox history. Condensed into the image of the teller of history are the "great" English historians, upholders of a long and distinguished tradition beginning with the Venerable Bede (often considered the "Father of English History") whose abbey overlooks the town of Whitby, the setting of and inspiration for Gaskell's story. Along with representatives of this patriarchal tradition, such as the Reverend William Scoreby and the Reverend George Young, is the transmitter of oral tradition, the upholder of "local history" on whom Gaskell also relies in the telling of her story. Gerald Sanders has suggested that her first real interest in the novel began soon after her arrival in Whitby for a visit, "for she was soon interviewing all the old residents, going minutely over the ground, and searching for data connected with the press-gangs" (116). The figure of the oral transmitter of

history can be viewed as a locus for Gaskell's ambivalent feelings about a factual, chronological approach to history as embodied in a written text. Emphasizing the multitude of happenings at any moment, she encourages a more inclusive view of the "events" of the past.

Freud argues that composite figures are human representations of the process of condensation. Composite structures, on the other hand, are its non-human representations (Freud 436).⁵ Sylvia's Lovers contains a number of these structures, and their significance is determined by the logic of the text. The ribbon which becomes an expression of Philip's simultaneous loving and betraying of Sylvia is a striking example. With its briar-rose pattern symbolizing sweetness and thorns, the ribbon becomes an appropriate object upon which Philip can place his own confused and contradictory desires and anxieties. As the representation of both commitment and betrayal, the ribbon allows Philip to project what he both loves and hates into a single figure. As well, the ribbon serves to focus Philip's fears and becomes an outlet for the externalization of his emotional preoccupations, specifically the need to control his environment through the process of denial. Philip's propensity for denial is more and more manifested in his increasing tendency to live in a fanciful world of his own making. Touching the ribbon tenderly in anticipation of giving it to Sylvia, he imagines its meaning for himself and for her: "And she would in a way belong to him: her

cousin, her mentor, her chaperon, her lover! While others only admired, he might hope to appropriate; for of late they had been such happy friends" (VI xii 142). In this propensity for denial and repression in his relationship to his own memory, Philip is the epitome of the selective listener, drawing only upon those aspects of the past that fit his plot of preordained history and destiny.

The power of involuntary association is later brought to bear, however. The sight of the ribbon, compressing what the narrator will call "the miserable complication of love and jealousy, remorse and anger" (VI xxxi 374) into a single figure, compels Philip to tell the lie that leads to his death. It is the recognition of the ribbon in the band of the hat left behind by Kinraid after his abduction by the press gang that provokes Philip's rage and intensifies his denial. Looking at this object of remembrance left to Kinraid by Sylvia, Philip "knew every delicate thread that made up the briar-rose pattern and a spasm of hatred towards Kinraid contracted his heart. He had been almost relenting into pity for the man captured before his eyes; now he abhorred him" (VI xviii 232-233). The ribbon comes to represent the embodiment and the emptiness of Philip's fancy, condensing the feelings of elation and anxiety that plague him. As a composite structure, it serves as a place of focussing vision which calls up a variety of contrary emotional responses: love and hate, commitment and betrayal, remorse and anger-- all held together by the underlying fabric of denial.

In a similar way, Gaskell makes use of another composite structure to embody and externalize Sylvia's emotional state. Whereas Philip is prone to a denial manifested in his need to control his environment, Sylvia turns toward another means of compensation for the conflicting sides of the self. If Philip in his denial is guilty of selective listening to the voices of the past, Sylvia is prone to a passive listening, to a life given up primarily to backward looks. She lives in a retrospective and empty present, relying upon the promptings of the past for meaning. From her "haunt" in the nook of rocks above the sea, she lives, the narrator says, like the distant ships she watches, "in a certain sort of lazy pleasure" with no thought as to where she is bound (VI ix 112). The sea becomes a composite structure that allows Sylvia to wed her subjective emotions with the environment. Her emotional needs are contained by her surroundings: "Once here, she was as happy as she ever expected to be in this world. The fresh sea breeze restored something of the colour of former days to her cheeks, the old buoyancy to her spirits. . ." (VI xxxi 380). Sylvia loses herself by merging into her surroundings. The "peaceful heavens," we are told, "take possession" of her, and her own troubled spirits are "quieted" by the "passionate rush and rebound of many waters" and by the "blustering gusty winds" (VI xxxii 389-390). Identification with this "tempest of the elements" calms Sylvia's own emotional state.

This same identification with what Sylvia calls the "mother-like sea" (VI xxx 370) serves as a means of escaping the divisions of the adult self into the promptings of pre-conscious memory. The sea becomes a metaphor of a primordial unity existing before and beyond all conscious memory and Sylvia's merging with it is an attempt to escape the world of distinction and differentiation: "She was glad occasionally to escape from the comfortable imprisonment of her 'parlour', and the close streets around the market-place, and to mount the cliffs and sit on the turf, gazing abroad over the wide still expanse of the open sea; for, at that height, even breaking waves only looked like broken lines of white foam on the blue watery plain. . . . She used to take off her hat, and sit there, her hands clasping her knees, the salt air lifting her bright curls, gazing at the distant horizon over the sea, in a sad dreaminess of thought; if she had been asked on what she meditated, she could not have told you" (VI xxx 370). At other times, "the rushing waters borne landward by the morning tide" offer Sylvia the hope of oblivion, a "sure hiding place from all human reproach and heavy mortal woe" (VI xxxiii 399). The sea functions throughout the novel as a composite structure, binding together organic life and human emotion, primordial memory and eternity. Through this single element, the human, physical, and spiritual worlds are held together.

At the end of the novel, the rhythmic sounds of the "ceaseless waves lapping against the shelving shore" form the

background for the final scene of death and redemption. Gaskell creates a composite picture of mortality and eternity with Sylvia entering "spirit-like", "stealing in white, noiseless and upborne from earth" to Philip's death-bed. The sound of the sea fluctuates between serving as the object of Philip's consciousness of the present and as the voice calling him to the unseen beyond. And in the final appeal to the reader, the sea becomes a composite of mortality and eternity, alive with biblical resonance and mythical association: "Monkshaven is altered now into a rising bathing place. Yet, standing near the site of widow Dobson's house on a summer's night, at the ebb of a spring-tide, you may hear the waves come lapping up the shelving shore with the same ceaseless, ever recurrent sound as that which Philip listened to in the pauses between life and death. And so it shall be until 'there shall be no more sea'" (VI xlv 529-530).

Condensed into the portrayal of these two characters and their composite structures is the text's preoccupation with the problems of memory and history. In Philip's case, his memory acts as the supreme screener of events, selecting only those that fit a chosen pattern. By writing a prospective history based in denial of the past, he rules out a struggle to redeem the past's failures and so to break free into a new arena of self-knowledge. And Sylvia's immersion of herself into a pre-linguistic state of association is representative of an unbounded and potentially chaotic approach to memory that issues in an equally false state.

In her characteristically retrospective mode, she resists the ordering forces of history, remaining true to past experiences and words that lead to alienation and separation. It is not until the final pages that both characters come to a renewed understanding of their own relationship to the past and to each other in the present.

Still another composite structure works to intensify these different approaches to the past. Returning from his London trip in Chapter Twenty, Philip walks towards the garden of the Robson's farm, having made his decision to "promote Kinraid's oblivion" in Sylvia's memory. Trapped in his denial, he walks "like a man in a dream who has everything around him according to his wish, and yet is conscious of a secret mysterious inevitable drawback to his enjoyment. Hepburn did not care to think -- would not realize what this drawback, which need not have been mysterious in his case, was" (VI xx 243-244). Philip's vision of Sylvia standing in the garden "quite motionless; as if she were a stone statue" (VI xx 245) elicits a variety of emotional responses. Predictably, upon first sight of the garden, his memory centers on his own helping with the arrangement of it in the early years of Haytersbank Farm. Yet the garden serves as a focus for differing perspectives of past and present. Philip's nostalgic picture of a carefully arranged garden, like his own imagined picture of a carefully arranged life with Sylvia, is interrupted by her statue-like silhouette turned toward the sea. For her, the garden of the

present has little resemblance to Philip's remembrance. It "had lost its charm for Sylvia," says the narrator, "as she found the bleak sea-winds came up and blighted all endeavors at cultivating more than the most useful things --" (VI xx 245). Drawn to the sea, Sylvia stands, oblivious to the attractions of her other surroundings. Her statue-like appearance elicits discontented feelings in Philip. He characteristically desires to arrange her responses to him in the same way that he had earlier physically "arranged her in the right position" for his "pleasant plan" of teaching her to read and write (VI viii 92): "He began to wish she would move -- would look at him -- but any way that she would move, and not stand gazing over that great dreary sea" (VI xx 245).

Philip's focussing of his vision on the figure of Sylvia in the garden condenses several of the text's concerns. The differing responses of the characters to the present highlight the mnemonic processes of denial and immersion. Sylvia's statue-like stance, which obstructs Philip's pre-arranged plot of events, is an intimation of future darkness much as was the earlier image of Bell Robson similarly "shading her eyes from the low rays of the setting sun" as she anxiously awaited Sylvia's return from town (VI vi 64); and Philip's desire to control Sylvia in this scene is a prelude to his later irrational, jealous response to her "love of the inanimate ocean" (VI xxxi 381) and the increasing frequency of his dreams of Kinraid's return upon the sea. Through such

moments of condensation, Sylvia's Lovers suggestively draws together varying images and ideas, contributing to the evocative and resonant atmosphere of the text and highlighting the ambiguity inherent in understanding.

II

Whereas condensation binds together a number of associations, displacement moves in the opposite direction by diffusing a particular concern into a number of seemingly unconnected elements. In this way, various preoccupations of Sylvia's Lovers are dispersed throughout the text, often in disguised forms. Although these elements of displacement do not serve the same central interpretative function as the composite figures and structures, they are important because of their ability, through diffusion, to offer a subtle and distanced critique of conventional understanding. Sylvia's Lovers is concerned with the historical, religious, social and literary influence of a patriarchal tradition, and this concern largely displaces itself into comic and

ironic images of authority in the text: the rituals of the established church, the ineffectual vicar of Monkshaven, the accepted commercial practices, for example. Her portrayal of the vicar is exemplary. He is presented in a quietly ironic, comic tone that itself diffuses and diminishes any strong critique, while at the same time connecting the church's authority with that of political and social forces. Caught by the "discord between the laws of man and the laws of Christ" (VI vi 71), the vicar is portrayed as "kindly and peaceable", although ineffectual in his power to offer comfort and consolation. Despite being ineffectual in his talents, he is granted respect for his office from "old tradition and hereditary association" (VI vi 71), and that same tradition and association determine other aspects of his thinking. His admiration for Wesley, for example, is located in Wesley's social and intellectual standing as "an Oxford man" (VI vi 70). Lightly parodied in the portrayal of the vicar is a lineage of intellectual, spiritual, social and political power whose source lies in the hands of the father, and Gaskell's gentle critique in this novel clusters particularly around the diffused image of the father.

There are three major father figures in the text, and all three bring into question the conventional picture of traditional authority. The Foster brothers present an image of this authority. Secure in their place in the line of social succession, they are spokesmen for the Tory cause and rigid upholders of the letter of the law. Imbued with the substance of their Quaker faith, they

embody the best intentions of that patriarchal tradition: uprightness, justice, and exactitude. Yet the scattered scenes that portray them as surrogate fathers to a number of child figures throughout the text evidence a repressiveness that suggests another side to that tradition of authority. During the resistance to the invasion of the press gang in the early part of the story, the Foster brothers' disdain for violence and disorder is expressed through a desire figuratively to "shut out" what is happening both by closing up their shop and by physically removing their shop-boys from the scene in an attempt to "restrain their natural inclinations" and keep them from being "misled into violence" (VI iii 34). The brothers' characteristic caution and restraint moves, almost imperceptibly, from self-repression to the repression of others. The boys' decision to join in the cause of resistance is interpreted in spiritual terms by John Foster: "But when he went to find the shop-boys with a gentle homily on his lips, those to whom it should have been addressed were absent. . . There was no remedy for it, but Mr. John looked rather discomfited. . . All he said on the subject was 'The old Adam! the old Adam!' but he shook his head long after he had finished speaking" (VI iii 34). In the same way, Sylvia's attempt to talk with Jeremiah Foster about Philip's betrayal is met by a refusal to entertain any discordant views. He tries to be a peacemaker, but "he did not go deep enough" in listening and attempting to understand the level of Sylvia's suffering (VI xxxvi 434). To her confused mind he

appears "cool-judging" and "indifferent", incapable of transcending his own standards of authority to hear the voice of another (VI xxxvi 436).

A similar rigidity is passed on to Philip, the major child figure in relationship to the Foster brothers. Raised as a "lonely orphan" (VI xiii 170) and left with no "security, expectations or legacies" in the present (VI xiv 182), he is unofficially adopted by the Brothers and takes on the "whole atmosphere of life among the Friends, the character of self-repression" (VI xi 129). Philip's adopted authority and his own disrupted past combine to create a character uneasy in his own lineage and thus prone to the need for self-aggrandizement and repression of others. After his marriage to Sylvia, Philip becomes another father figure in the text, and his role here continues the novel's subtle undermining of the patriarchal tradition. Philip's own need for control, cloaked under the self-deceived illusion of "placing his idol in a befitting shrine," oppresses Sylvia, and a pattern of violence emerges which disrupts even his own lineage. He comes to be jealous not only of Sylvia's relationship to Hester and her love of the ocean but also of the love of their own child. The self-deceptive nature of power based in repression, fear and denial is contained in the figure of Philip, and the pattern of violence inherent in him extends throughout the text in a series of images which are linked to a patriarchal form of history and society. Philip's repressed memory and the violent eruption of his past in the form of

dreams and irrational association act as an oblique critique of traditional history with its emphasis upon the chronological order of the past. And in his social dealings, Philip also stands as an emblem of a form of authority which, having lost a sense of its own roots, is itself rooted in fear and the oppression of others. It is this form of authority that the people of Monkshaven feel themselves up against in Sylvia's Lovers. The press gang's intrusion into their lives is described vaguely as a "nucleus of cruel wrong", a tyrannous and senseless force with no real sense of meaning, origin, or justified authority.

The question of patriarchal authority is raised, from a different perspective, in the third father figure in the text, Daniel Robson. If Philip is the emblem of cautious containment and repressive order, Daniel is the emblem of what John Lucas has called the "marvelously anarchic force" in Gaskell's fiction (Literature of Change 13). If Daniel's anarchical tendencies lead to his death and expulsion from the plot, his energy and passion (like that of Charley Kinraid) are celebrated in Sylvia's Lovers, especially when he is presented as the spokesman for individual rights. In an early interchange, he meets Philip's cautious defense of the law with a spirited critique: "I only ax 'em to govern me as I judge best, and that's what I call representation. When I gived my vote to Measter Cholmley to go up to t' Parliament House, I as good as said, 'Now yo' go up theer, sir, and tell 'em what I, Dannel Robson, wish to have done.' Else I'd be darned if I'd ha' gi'en my

vote to him or any other man" (42-43). Daniel, however, is less concerned with such rational and political concepts as individual rights versus state rights, than he is with traditional and local notions of freedom and fairness: "It's not fair play to catch up men as has no call for fighting at another man's bidding, though they've no objection to fight a bit on their own account" (VI iv 41). Daniel's critique is less an overt flaunting of authority than an attempt, as John Lucas says, to "push awry" the official pattern of conventional authority (Literature of Change 13).

But Gaskell is characteristically equivocal about Daniel. The freedom for which he speaks is appealing but problematic, and he is presented as at once lovable and exasperating, trustworthy and careless. The narrator describes him as an "imprudent man" who is "possessed by a spirit of adventure and love of change which did him and his own family more harm than anybody else." His wife's "only want of practical wisdom," she wryly notes, "consisted in taking him for a husband" (VI iv 37). Daniel's authority as a father figure is a token one. In his own home "he had a notion of being a kind of domestic Jupiter" (VI v 54), but his authority is dependent for its substance upon his wife and daughter. In short, he is a childlike figure, a "man not in the habit of feeling any emotion at actions not directly affecting himself" (VI xxiii 279). In this childlike spirit, Daniel's resistance to the press gang is seen as something of an anarchical adolescent game. On the other hand, his motives for resistance are affirmed as right and true,

and his act is an act of solidarity and self-sacrifice. As his wife testifies, he "was allays for them that was down and put upon" (285).

Daniel's death may be inevitable in a Victorian novel: anarchical tendencies cannot be condoned and must be expelled. But the conventions of such fiction are called into question by the sympathetic portrayal of Daniel as a popular hero and as a man caught up in irrational historical forces beyond his control. There is a deep sense of the determinism of history and plot in Sylvia's Lovers. As Arthur Pollard has noted, "everything seems to happen too late" (219) in the novel, and the moments of reversal that Robert Caserio claims offer the hope of moral recognition and transformation in novels are lost in a sense of irrevocable choice. The events of the plot cannot be seen as a "curious moral allegory that moves along an intellectual and moral design" (Caserio. 73); rather, the plot represents the irreversible movement of what the narrator calls "inflexible circumstance." Daniel's adolescent, good natured involvement in the rebellion ends in his death, and the disparity between his choice to resist and the extremity of his fate draws attention to the repressive and deterministic plot of conventional authority. It also highlights the lack of an adequate model of patriarchal authority in Sylvia's Lovers. The Foster brothers, Philip Hepburn and Daniel Robson together serve as the displaced focus for Gaskell's own ambivalence toward the question of authority. The narrator constantly equivocates. While

stressing that the courts are corrupt and repressive, for example, she nevertheless insists that the authorities "were quite justified in the decided steps they had taken" to suppress the rebellion (VI xxv 300); later she admits to the "necessity for prompt and severe punishment of rebellion against authority" (VI XXVII 308). Eagleton is right in arguing that in its final attitude towards the hanging of Daniel, Sylvia's Lovers "shares the empty formalism of Hepburn," yet he also highlights Gaskell's ambivalence in noting that "the starved and broken condition to which Philip Hepburn is finally reduced questions, as well as underlines, the narrow perspectives of the novel's 'official' ideology" (26). The lack of an adequate model of patriarchal authority is striking in Sylvia's Lovers, and this has literary, as well as historical and social, implications.

For for all of its seeming determinism, it is not the traditional framework or "family plot" of narrative, with its linear successive movement, that finally motivates Gaskell's story.⁶ The text is pervaded by dream experiences which function not only as particular fantasies and delusions but as part of a dynamic network of association which transforms the literary framework. These dream experiences themselves serve as elements of displacement which disrupt and counteract the force of determinism in the plot. In Sylvia's Lovers, as in dream, symbolic substitution operates as a basic principle. The treatment of dream symbolism in the novel is unusual, however, in that it takes on a

dramatic and literal aspect: that which is private in a dream becomes public spectacle, and the reader witnesses metaphors for inner divisions projected onto an historical stage. It is this movement of literalization, in fact, which finally acts as a counteracting force in the novel, drawing attention away from the conventional and expected movement of the plot into the unfamiliar realm of revelation. In Philip's recurring dream of Charley Kinraid's return and presence, Kinraid eventually takes on metaphoric significance, and what some critics have called the plot's seemingly "riotous" movement (Lerner 24) in the last one third of the novel can be seen as a working out of this movement of substitution. In a displaced sense, Philip "becomes" Kinraid and the unreal, dreamlike quality of the plotline is a result of this displacement. Philip's explicit comparison of himself to Kinraid while viewing his own mirrored reflection is suggestive of the double motif that has appeared in much of Gaskell's work, and the sudden inexplicable (and unbelievable) role reversal is the outworking of this psychic division in the form of an independent figure. Taking on a new name, Philip also takes on Kinraid's identity, and he himself becomes a displaced person. Alice Rose's bewilderment at the news of Philip's life after his disappearance is shared by the reader. The thought of Philip the warrior ("the man of peace becoming a man of war") entering Jerusalem ("which is a heavenly and a typical city") is difficult to grasp. Yet it is the externalization of Philip's divided self in his actual "living

through" Kinraid that eventually acts as the impetus to revelation for the reader. What begins in replication ends in antithesis, and through the forced comparison between the two men, both Sylvia and the reader come to the realization of an unrecognized dimension in Philip's character.

This dramatic and literal displacement is foreshadowed in the scene of Sylvia's dream of Kinraid's return in Chapter Thirty-one. As Philip enters the room, Sylvia mistakes him for Kinraid and, moved by the power of association and his own sense of "guilty concealment," Philip fights to "keep down the miserable complication of love and jealousy, and remorse and anger" that "almost takes him out of himself" (VI xxxi 374). Later, it is the explicit comparison of himself to Kinraid as he views his reflection in the mirror that finally drives Philip "from passive hopelessness to active despair" as he takes on Kinraid's identity as a soldier and adventurer and enters what is for him the unfamiliar realm of romance. The text's own movement into unreality is also foreshadowed in this chapter of Sylvia's dream entitled "Evil Omens". As the repetition of words spoken in the past plays like another theme, Philip remembers Sylvia's resolution to "niver forgive" the man responsible for her father's death. Thinking of her words leads Philip to associate them with himself, and as both he and Sylvia are portrayed as constantly tossed between past and present, the text itself, carried by the logic of association, takes on the contours of irrationality and dream. The sense of

uncanniness that always marks the appearance of the double is unmistakable. As the chapter moves toward its end, the "evil omens" of its title become more frequent and foreboding as dream experiences become increasingly more literal: "But now the old dream of Kinraid's actual presence by Philip's bedside began to return with fearful vividness. Night after night it recurred; each time with some new touch of reality and close approach; till it was as if the fate that overtakes all men were then, even then, knocking at his door" (VI xxxi 381). In the following two chapters, the text (like Sylvia) continues to weave in and out of the realm of association and dream. At the level of the traditional plotline, Sylvia meets all expectations. Having no will of her own, she serves her mother and child for love, obeys her husband in all things, never appearing "to pine after gaiety or pleasure" (VI xxxii 383). But as she becomes more oppressed by Philip's predetermined plot of her life, these traditional patterns are disrupted by her escape into immersion in her surroundings. She flees to the "freedom and solitude" of the sea-shore and there loses herself in the paths of memory and dream. Sylvia's own feelings take on literal force as this internal state is manifested in a drama of the natural world played out primarily in the realm of sound. The text becomes more and more dreamlike, filled with chaotic murmurings and a heightened sense of the voices of the elements, in which "all human voice must be lost in the tempestuous stun and tumult of wind and wave" (VI xxxii 391).

This dreamlike drama of displacement takes on increasingly literal qualities in Chapter Thirty-three as Sylvia falls asleep, and the scene of the previous chapter is repeated. Her dream is a reiteration of the confusion and disorientation she experienced, predicated on the inability to hear and interpret: "the scene of the evening before seemed to be repeated; the cries of the many people, the heavy roar and dash of the threatening waves, were repeated in her ears; and something was said to her through all the conflicting noises, -- what it was she could not catch, though she strained to hear the hoarse murmur that, in her dream, she believed to convey a meaning of the utmost importance to her" (VI xxxiii 394). The centrality of images of hearing and listening here is striking, and the reader is reminded of other such images scattered throughout the text, each serving as an element of displacement, a moment of revelation and interpretation which affects the plotline of events but does not in itself constitute a major part of it.

The "riot" of Philip's plot (Lerner 24) is equally disconcerting to conventional form. The externalization of Philip's inner feelings into a dramatic romance plot provides an arena for the text's own inner preoccupations with the repressiveness of the traditional plots of history, society, and fiction. Through a similar movement of displacement, the reader's interest is drawn away from the events of the plot toward other areas of interpretative meaning. Commenting on Gaskell's propensity for melodrama:

Laurence Lerner remarks that in such moments, "the reader feels that Elizabeth Gaskell has betrayed her best self as a writer. She even seems to know it in the case of Sylvia's Lovers, for the doctor tells the rescued man that he must have imagined the episode, and a sailor tells him a ghost story (a racy ghost story) to show that it must have been a spirit that saved him -- and these conversations are far more convincing than the incident they are commenting on" (24).

The last portion of Lerner's comment ("and these conversations are far more convincing than the incident they are commenting on") is of particular interest. As Philip moves inexorably toward his end in a series of increasingly incredible events, it becomes clear that it is not the events themselves but the telling of and listening to their stories that commands narrative interest. Here Gaskell seems, in George Levine's characterization of realist fiction, to "drive a wedge between plot and narrative" (91), emphasizing the latter in the form of various narrative situations: scenes of gossip, confessions, delivery of "pieces of news". All of these serve as elements of displacement, drawing attention away from the deterministic force of the traditional romance plotline. As Lerner has noted, the events of the plot are less convincing than is the recounting of them, and in this way the reader becomes aware of another level of narrative discourse at work. Gaskell draws upon what Edward Said has called the "humaneness of narrative" as heard and experienced in

the act of narration as a means of overcoming the "negation of narrative" implied in a deterministic plot of written history and fiction.

This emphasis upon the oral narrative act brings into focus Gaskell's own ambivalent relationship to textuality and the related concern with fathers and authority implicit throughout the novel. Through such an emphasis, she offers a diffused critique of conventional literary patterns of understanding, notably of what Said terms the "genealogical connections" that power the sequential plot of patriarchal authority. Gaskell's reliance upon the narrative model of oral transmission and her emphasis on the act of narration suggest her allegiance to an alternative form of narrative discourse. Through incidences of telling and listening-- Molly Brunton's disclosure of Kinraid's marriage, Mrs. Kinraid's story of Philip's heroic rescue, Sylvia's confession to Jeremiah Foster, Hester's confession to Sylvia, and others-- the patriarchal plot of conventional narrative with its centralized and univocal teller of history and story is disrupted and displaced by another form of narrative based in the model of the oral narrative act.

Although emphasis on the narrative act becomes more prominent in the last third of the novel, similar images have permeated the text. In fact, every major event of the plot has been predicated upon the overhearing of a conversation. It is Philip's overhearing of a "conversation not intended for his ears" at the Corney's New Year's party that leads to his decision to

maintain silence about Kinraid's fate. And it is his overhearing of William Coulson's story of Kinraid's past and the sailor's ribald talk in the tavern that provoke his decision to "promote Kinraid's oblivion" in Sylvia's memory. Sylvia's overhearing of her mother's narration of her own overhearing of a conversation between Philip and Phoebe drives Sylvia to confront Philip, and Philip's overhearing of an account of Kinraid's heroic exploits provokes him to become a "reckless recruit" and take on Kinraid's identity. Such scenes of overhearing both disrupt and direct the plot. Like words intended for one place but finding another, the straight line of the plot is rerouted and redirected to other places as well. The concept of plot as linear and authoritative understanding is transformed by what Sylvia has earlier recognized as a strange movement of "cross-purposes" (VI xxxix 469), a movement largely carried by the power of association.

In the last paragraphs of Sylvia's Lovers, the novel comes back full circle to the world of oral tradition in which it began. As Gaskell has her own story fade into the echoes and whispers of legend, its words, like Philip and Sylvia themselves, seem to slip away from the reader into what Andrew Sanders has called a "new framework", at once that of eternity and that of the present telling. As Gaskell casts her own ending upon the still veiled processes of time, the sense of narrative displacement is deepened as meaning is extended indefinitely into both past and future. Rooted as it is in misinterpretation.

this ending serves as a reminder of the essentially mysterious nature of knowledge and interpretation, and it stands as a warning against any ultimate and authoritative version of the events of the past. The possibility of final and authoritative meaning is itself displaced by a narrative discourse of mutuality, which arises from what Hester calls "daily breadliness" (VI xxxix 470). It is "daily breadliness," the mutual interaction that yields "the knowledge born of long-living together" out of which stories and communities grow, stories which offer a rich narrative sphere rooted in association and dream. Through condensation and displacement in Sylvia's Lovers, this sphere is shown to exist outside the rational linearity of the plotline of events, even as it is necessarily subject to it.

NOTES TO CHAPTER FIVE

¹ Quoted in Sanders, 4.

² Freud speaks specifically in terms of what he calls the "dream work." He distinguishes between the "latent" and "manifest" content of the dream: "Latent content" is the "dream-thoughts" that go together to make up the "manifest content" of the dream that is available to conscious memory" (381-382).

³ Freud asks: "When the whole mass of these dream-thoughts is brought under the pressure of the dream-work, and its elements are turned about, broken into fragments and jammed together -- almost like pack-ice -- the question arises of what happens to the logical connections which have hitherto formed its framework. What representation do dreams provide for 'if', 'because', 'just as', 'although', 'either - or', and all the other conjunctions without which we cannot understand sentences or speeches?" (422). A few pages later he comments specifically on either-or: "The alternative 'either-or' cannot be expressed in dreams in any way whatever. Both of the alternatives are usually inserted in the text of the dream as though they were equally valid" (427).

⁴ Freud argues that in composition, the dream-image "contains features which are peculiar to one or other of the persons concerned but not common to them; so that the combination of these features leads to the appearance of a new unity, a composite figure" (432). Composition (as well as every instance of condensation and displacement) takes place in order to evade what Freud calls the "censorship due to resistance" (433). That which is considered objectionable is bypassed by avoiding the direct representation of it. As Freud notes, "Instead of saying 'A has hostile feelings towards me and so has B', I make a composite

figure out of A and B in the dream, or I imagine A performing an act of some other kind which is characteristic of B" (433-4).

⁵ Freud writes: "Composite structures in dreams can be formed in a great variety of ways. The most naive of these procedures merely represents the attributes of one thing to the accompaniment of a knowledge that they also belong to something else. A more painstaking technique combines the features of both objects into a new image and in so doing makes clever use of any similarities that the two objects may happen to possess in reality" (436).

⁶ On the "family plot" of narrative, see Robert Caserio, Plot, Story and the Novel, Chapter Eight. The "family plot" is a genealogical form of narration which consists of strictly dependent and interdependent lines of continuity and is rooted in succession and hierarchy. It is countered by a discourse of mutuality and unresolved openness (see especially Edward Said, Beginnings).

CHAPTER SIX

An Echoing Grove of Voices: Double-voiced Discourse in Wives and Daughters

Wives and Daughters was Gaskell's final novel. It has been almost unanimously praised as her finest work, a novel marked by the realist's eye and ear for detail, for the significant gesture, look, or intonation of a word. Indeed, the novel is a compendium of such detail, and it is here that most critics locate its excellence. The "accumulation of detail," says Angus Easson, "the web or texture of the novel, is essential to its existence" (Elizabeth Gaskell 186). In contrast to her earlier works, Wives and Daughters is only minimally dependent upon the plot. The movement of the novel is more concerned with the interrelationships of individuals, with the close intermingling of the details of their ordinary routines and, more particularly, with the details of their speech with one another. The novel is filled with inner dialogue and social conversation, and the characters are made known less through their actions than through their response either to their own words or to those of another. W. A. Craik has noted the centrality of the characters' speech in the novel, emphasizing the way in which speech becomes "the embodiment of ways of

thought" and a "manifestation of inner nature." Moreover, Craik maintains, Gaskell "virtually ignores the frequent novelist's habit of giving characters '*idees fixes*'" (Elizabeth Gaskell and the Provincial Novel 261). Instead, a varied idiom suggests their differing thoughts and ideas, and it is the interrelationship of those thoughts and ideas that carries the narrative force of the novel. Easson has called Wives and Daughters an "echoing grove" of memories and allusions, but it can also be seen (and heard) as an echoing grove of voices as Gaskell shapes her novel around the relationships of various and varying voices as they come in contact with one another.

Ironically, the voice of the engaging storyteller is absent in this final novel. Gaskell does not directly attempt to engage and accommodate her reader as she had done in her earlier works. In her final novel she uses a more distanced narrative stance that allows the characters more space to speak freely for themselves. "The length of Wives and Daughters," Edgar Wright says, "is partly due to the fact that we spend so much time listening to what people have to say, and how they say it" (243). Wright correctly locates the center of the novel's interest in the speech of the characters. However, he wrongly attributes to Gaskell a reliance upon the impersonal dramatization favoured by James and his school: "She remains also consciously in control of the progress of her narrative, although unobtrusively and for the most part impersonally so,

giving as much as possible of its development over to dialogue" (243). By stressing what he terms Gaskell's "increased control of her medium," Wright threatens to turn her narrative into a monological exercise in authorial control, but in Wives and Daughters, as in her earlier works, she turns to a dialogic mode that allows differing voices and viewpoints the space to be heard and engaged. And in her final novel this mode has deepened and developed to the extent that these varying voices are given equal narrative weight. The characters are allowed full freedom to tell their stories and the turbulent movement of self-definition is rendered for the reader as they make their way amidst the web of human relationship. Craik comes closer to the way in which the narrative works when she notes that in Wives and Daughters Gaskell poses problems and offers speculations "to which she provides no answer" (217). In fact, Craik adds, the novel is pervaded by an atmosphere of the "hopelessness of perfection in human relationships". Ironically, for all of its praise by critics as the most perfect of Gaskell's works, Wives and Daughters is rooted in the value of imperfection. The freedom that Gaskell allows to her characters disallows any ultimately perfect and coherent understanding of the represented world, and in the confrontation and clash of their voices the obscure and tangled movement of human consciousness and relationships is portrayed.

The freedom Gaskell allows her characters lies behind her portrayal of Cynthia Kirkpatrick, one of the most original creations in Victorian literature.¹ This unique personality is a testimony to Gaskell's power to represent with sympathy and tolerance qualities of character that most novelists before her would have condemned. Cynthia is a paradoxical mix of many things, and through her Gaskell explores the ambiguous nature of the self. Cynthia's movement toward self-knowledge is not the predictable progressive curve of the Victorian novel with its smooth increase in virtue and maturity; rather it is wayward and discontinuous. And Gaskell captures this turbulent movement by defining Cynthia largely through an inner dialogic movement in which her perception of self is shaped through the refracted image of herself in the words and perceptions of others. In their Freudian reading of Cynthia, Jacqueline and Laura Berke comment that she "will remain, even as an adult, forever dependent on the image reflected back from other people's eyes" (106). The point of their analysis is that her adult needs are the regressive expression of a neglected childhood, and Gaskell certainly deals with the question of environmental influence on Cynthia. But the more important point here is the centrality of the other person's perception in Cynthia's own understanding of and orientation toward herself, for it is through the interaction of her own voice and point of view with that of the other that Gaskell

captures the formation of Cynthia's personality. From such a viewpoint, Cynthia's need to "see her image reflected back from other people's eyes" can be seen less as the sign of her own particular regressive nature (though it is that) than as a definition of the general condition of selfhood. Not only Cynthia Kirkpatrick but the whole of Wives and Daughters is the result of Gaskell's desire to affirm the condition of personal identity as this imperfect and problematic movement of relation and reciprocity.

This dialogic sense of self and other helps to account for the peculiar elusiveness of this novel. Although it is typically thought to be Gaskell's best work, and has been called "surely the most neglected novel of its century" (Lerner 7), its subject has remained oddly indeterminate. Lerner, for example, notes that the title "announces a theme" but refrains from identifying or discussing it (16). Feminist critics do locate a theme in the structure of families and of gender, but their orientation has to ignore a great deal of the novel. It would seem that the inability to state Gaskell's theme is a result of the novel's own resistance to such statement. A thematic approach presupposes the centrality of the author's voice, and it is precisely this that Gaskell avoids in using the dialogic mode. Bakhtin's discussion of authorial voice in Dostoevsky is helpful as a context for Gaskell's practice in Wives and Daughters. Bakhtin begins with the views of the Russian critic Leonid

Grossman, who recognized Dostoevsky's violation of organic unity but was constrained by his own monological assumptions from seeing the full implications of Dostoevsky's innovation.² For Grossman the polarities and incompatibilities of Dostoevsky's narrative were all finally subordinated to a unity that he identified with the authorial consciousness. In contrast, for Bakhtin the author's consciousness is not the determining factor but only one part of a whole. "That which bound together the whole -," he says, "the pragmatic progression of the plot and a personal style and tone - here becomes only one subordinated element" (Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics 43). In Dostoevsky's work the author's voice is present but not as the governing principle. Rather, it stands alongside and enters into often vibrant dialogue with other voices and points of view as the novel unfolds in an uneasy movement toward an ultimately unfinalizable meaning. Something similar occurs in Wives and Daughters. Gaskell's own voice is not the dominant one, determining the personality of her characters. Rather, she represents the movement of each character's own self-consciousness. Each major character interests her as a particular point of view on the world and on oneself. What is of primary importance is not how Cynthia (or any other major character) appears in the world, but how the world appears to her, and how she appears to herself. By locating what Bakhtin calls the "artistic dominant" in the character's self-

consciousness, then, Gaskell avoids all claims to an overriding authorial voice with a predetermined theme to unite the artistic world. The "theme" of Wives and Daughters consists finally in the dialogic interaction of many themes, the bringing into contact with one another of varying voices and points of view in a way that eventually produces, rather than announces, meaning.

To see the novel in this way is to uncover its subtle complexity. Take the case of Molly Gibson, for example, the novel's proper heroine and Cynthia's foil. Molly is a stranger and more complicated character than she often seems.³ She moves from passivity to heroic activity, from quiet maidenly reflection to willful self-assertion, all within moments and sometimes seemingly in spite of herself. From the first pages, Gaskell's heroine emerges as motivated by various conflicting internal forces. Accompanying her father on his rounds as the town doctor, she is invited to an approaching park party given by Lord and Lady Cumnor, the "Earl and Countess" of the town. After Lord Cumnor has ridden away, father and daughter speak:

Mr. Gibson mounted, and he and Molly rode off. They did not speak for some time. Then she said, "May I go, papa?" in rather an anxious little tone of voice. "Where, my dear?" said he, wakening

up out of his professional thoughts.

"To the Towers -- on Thursday, you know. That gentleman (she was shy of calling him by his title) asked me."

"Would you like it my dear? It has always seemed to me a tiresome piece of gaiety -- rather a tiring day, I mean -- beginning so early -- and the heat, and all that."

"Oh, papa!" said Molly reproachfully.

"You'd like to go then, would you?"

"Yes; if I may! -- he asked me, you know. Don't you think I may? -- he asked me twice over."

"Well! we'll see -- yes! I think we can manage it, if you wish it so much, Molly." Then they were silent again. By and by, Molly said:

"Please, papa -- I do wish to go -- but I don't care about it." (VIII 1 6-7)

From the start, Molly's words are spoken against the backdrop of possible definitions of herself in the mouths of others. The tone of the passage is characterized by the expectation of interruption, by a tentative movement of advance and withdrawal as Molly makes her way amidst the anticipated words of the other. Her own wishes and desires come in contact with, and in this case are immediately subordinated to, what she imagines to be her father's wishes: she would like to go -- but she doesn't care. Mr. Gibson rightly perceives this to be "a rather puzzling speech," and his analysis of it serves as an encapsulation of what will be the framework

of Molly's mode of perception in the novel: "I suppose you mean you don't care to go if it will be any trouble to get you there" (VIII i 7).

The tension between the self's desires and the recognition of other people's claims and expectations is captured in this opening dialogue between father and daughter. And the tension becomes more manifest as Molly arrives at the party and wanders the grounds of the Cumnors' Park. In several scenes that recall Bakhtin's definition of the underground hero, we watch her literally "eavesdrop" on other's peoples' words about her⁴:

Molly saw Lady Cuxhaven say something in a half-laughing manner to "Clare", as she passed her; and the child could not keep from tormenting herself by fancying that the words spoken sounded wonderfully like "Over-eaten herself, I suspect."
(VIII ii 17)

This is but the first of a series of scenes in this episode that capture Molly's sensitivity to the words of others. After a series of mishaps that leave her in a compromising position, Molly's consciousness is filled with the varying interpretations of her actions. Knowing herself to be misunderstood, she

listens and senses "an implied blame" running through the speech of Lady Cumnor that feels "like needle points all over her." At the same time she also senses "the kinder nature" underneath her daughter's, Lady Cuxhaven's, "deep but equally abrupt and authoritative tone" (VIII ii 23). In this series of events, as she eavesdrops on what other people say about her, Molly struggles against the chorus of external voices which attempts to limit and finalize her. Her own imagined voice challenges and contests their definitions as she vacillates between rebellion and concession in her attempt to make sense of what she feels to be misrepresentation. After overhearing Mrs. Kirkpatrick adjure Lady Cuxhaven "not to trouble herself," Molly grows "hotter and hotter" as the words meet her ear. "If they would only leave her alone and not labour at being kind to her; would 'not trouble themselves' about her!" she muses. Her inner conflict is clearly rendered: "These words of Mrs Kirkpatrick's seemed to quench the gratitude she was feeling to Lady Cuxhaven for looking for something to amuse her. But, of course, it was a trouble, and she ought never to have been there" (VIII ii 23). Molly's response to the words of others is the means by which she comes to a consciousness of self, however tentative and halting. Through the movement of her mind Gaskell draws attention to the importance of the words about oneself in the mouths of others. This opening sequence underlines Gaskell's sense of the dialogic nature of human

thought. Ideas do not exist in isolation in one person's individual consciousness but in living dialogue with the ideas of others; they begin to live, take shape and develop only when they come in contact with other, alien thoughts and voices. Molly's power as a character lies in Gaskell's portrayal of the movement of her self-consciousness as she struggles toward understanding amidst the myriad voices in the text. In a later scene, she stands in front of a mirror and observes herself, seeing in her reflection the judgments of others:

"I am afraid they expect me to be very smart," she kept thinking to herself. "If they do, they'll be disappointed; that's all. But I wish my plaid silk gown had been ready." She looked at herself in the glass with some anxiety, for the first time in her life. She saw a slight, lean figure, promising to be tall, a complexion browner than cream-coloured, although in a year or two it might have that tint; plentiful curly black hair, tied up in a bunch behind with a rose-coloured ribbon; long, almond-shaped, soft grey eyes, shaded both above and below by curling black eyelashes.

"I don't think I'm pretty," thought Molly as she turned away from the glass; "and yet I'm not sure."
(VIII vi 72-3)

The passage is based on a narrative movement of assertion and withdrawal ("I'm afraid . . . But . . . "; "I don't think . . . and yet"). Molly's interpretation of her reflection in the mirror is based on anticipating her reflection in the eyes of others, an anticipation that causes her "some anxiety." Craik claims that Gaskell has a special gift for representing and creating anxiety (Provincial Novel 257), and in this passage she does both as she represents the anxious movement of consciousness in her young heroine and draws her reader into that anxiety.

The moment is symptomatic of the narrative's general attention to such small moments and to the conflicts within them, an attention that forestalls any drive to finalization of character. Character in Wives and Daughters is more mobile than in earlier Gaskell novels, and this stems in part from the more minute attention of this late novel to the texture of ordinary life and behaviour. The narrator consistently registers Molly's minutest movements, her gestures, her intonations, and her recognition of subtle nuances in the speech and action of others. Through this involvement in the smallest details, the narrator becomes, in Bakhtin's words "fettered" to the character; "[she] cannot back off from [the character] sufficiently to give a summarizing and integrated image of [her] deeds and actions" (Problems 225). The narrator is not able to present such a generalizing image because she

does not have access to the stable external position that allows it. Rather, she stands in immediate proximity to the character and to the event that is occurring and it is from this close, "aperspectival point of view" that she represents them. In relation to Molly in particular, she typically relies on what Wright has called an "oblique form of interior monologue" that blurs the distinction between narrator and character.⁵ Such intentional lack of perspective may tend toward a more disparate and chaotic fictional vision, but it is a vision called for by Gaskell's entire artistic effort which resists any firm and finalized view of people or events.

Central to that effort is the whole notion of discourse, and here another small moment in the novel offers a telling passage. In Chapter Fifty-eight Molly is asked to relate her previous day's activities to Miss Phoebe and Miss Browning. The narrator tells us: "Molly began an account of their sayings and doings, which she could have made far more interesting to Miss Browning and Miss Phoebe if she had not been conscious of her stepmother's critical listening. She had to tell it all with a mental squint . . ." (VIII lviii 726). In this portrayal of what Bakhtin has called "the intense sideward glance at her listener's hostile word," Gaskell captures the semantic dynamic which underlies the dialogic mode in which she works. Molly sees this anticipation of another's words as the "surest way to spoil a narration" because of the very attitude of unease and

agitation it instills in the speaker. But it is precisely this attitude, the anticipation of response and reaction, the "mental squints" of the characters as they glance sideways at the alien, and possibly hostile, word of their listener, that underlies the logic of Wives and Daughters and makes for the narrative force of the novel. Like Bakhtin, Gaskell is concerned with discourse, with what he terms "language in its concrete living totality, the life of the word" (Problems 181). Understood in this way, language is filled with sideward glances, reservations, and defenses, as words, acutely sensing the possibility of interruption of other voices, move and change from one context to another. Discourse becomes "double-voiced," and Wives and Daughters is marked by such "double-voiced discourse."⁶ All of the major characters' self-utterances are permeated with an intense sensitivity toward the anticipated words of others about them, and this has semantic, as well as stylistic, implications. Thoughts are not presented propositionally but rather developed dialogically through this juxtaposition of differing voices and semantic positions, most often in the form of imagined dialogue. A character begins to speak (internally), but soon the pressure of other voices intrudes and interrupts. This technique is especially striking when it comes to the two flawed major characters, Osborne Hamley and Cynthia Kirkpatrick, for Gaskell's activation of double-voiced discourse

in their representation largely accounts for the depth and subtlety that mark her portrayal.

Osborne Hamley's inner monologue in Chapter Twenty-three makes a good starting point. Standing alone in his family drawing room, without present or future financial prospects, Osborne reviews his position. He begins with a question ostensibly addressed to himself but implicitly addressed to others as well: "What in the world can I do to secure an income?" As he muses, he asks the question again, quoting himself in a strange distancing of himself from his own voice:

"What can I do to be sure of a present income?"
 Things cannot go on as they are. I should need support for two or three years, even if I entered myself at the Temple, or Lincoln's Inn. It would be impossible to live on my pay in the army; besides, I should hate that profession. In fact, there are evils attending all professions -- I couldn't bring myself to become a member of any I've ever heard of. Perhaps I'm more fitted to take "orders" than anything else; but to be compelled to write weekly sermons whether one had anything to say or not, and, probably, doomed only to associate with people below one in refinement and education! Yet poor Aimee must have money. I can't bear to compare our dinners here, overloaded with joints and game and sweets, as Dawson will persist in sending them up, with Aimee's two little mutton-chops. Yet what would my father say if he knew I married a French-woman? In his present mood he'd disinherit me, if that is possible; and he'd speak about her in a way I couldn't stand. A

Roman Catholic, too! Well, I don't repent it. I'd do it again. Only if my mother had been in good health -- if she could have heard my story, and known Aimee! As it is I must keep it secret; but where to get money? Where to get money? (VIII xxiii 298-9).

Osborne's "sideward glance" can be felt from the beginning of his monologue, manifesting itself above all in two stylistic traits: a tentative halting quality to the speech, and its interruption by reservations and anticipated objections. After almost every word Osborne casts his glance at an absent listener: he's afraid of disappointing his parents, and yet resentful of the determining power of their expectations on his life. He can hear the voice of his wife's need and consequently feels guilty and responsible. He recognizes his inability to live up to his own expectations of himself, and then castigates himself for such inner weakness in an ambiguous tone that could also be interpreted as lightness and laziness. The sense of his own ambiguity in relationship to himself, along with the sense of family pressure, is reinforced a page later as he muses on the course his life has taken: "If -- how I hate 'ifs'. 'If me no ifs'. My life has been based on 'whens'; and first they turned to 'ifs', and then they vanished away. It was 'when Osborne gets honours', and then 'if Osborne', and then a failure altogether" (VIII xxiii 301).

Typically, as here, it is to the reproachful voice of his father that Osborne's own voice mainly responds. But other voices motivate him as well, and the key point is the way in which his sense of the words of others determines not only the style and tone of his speech but his very manner of seeing and understanding himself in the world: "If me no ifs." Every word is spoken against the background of another's perception of him, whether it be that of his father, mother or wife. And as his own perception of himself differs in each case, so does his speech, attentive as it is to the traces and shadows of other people's words about him and attitudes towards him. When faced with his father's disapproving word, his response is defensive and distanced; when faced with his mother's compassionate word, his response is vulnerable and appealing; when faced with the prospect of his wife's word of need, his response is one of shame. Osborne's attitude toward himself is inseparably bound up with his attitude toward these people and their attitudes toward him. At one moment he sees himself as trapped and victimized, at the next moment as culpable and responsible. At one moment his speech seeks to simulate total independence from the other's words: "Well, I don't repent it. I'd do it again." At another moment he seeks to avoid the other's voice: "As it is, I must keep it a secret." The force of this hidden polemic accounts for the very structure of his discourse.

Osborne's monologue is marked by interruptions as the other's rejoinder or "accent" wedges its way into his speech, disrupting and redirecting trains of thought. Although not in fact spoken, the anticipated or remembered word actually brings about a restructuring of syntax and accent in his own speech, at times even leaving behind some of its own words: "Yet what would my father say if he knew I'd married a French-woman? In his present mood he'd disinherit me, if that is possible; and he'd speak about her in a way I couldn't stand. A Roman Catholic, too!" (VIII xxiii 299). The phrase "A Roman Catholic, too!" breaks into Osborne's speech from out of his father's potential speech, and he hears it as imbued with his father's accent, an accent which Osborne polemically exaggerates.⁷ He does not accept this accent, but he cannot help recognizing and being affected by its power. He thus tries to evade it in many ways, through defenses and reservations, through replacing it by his mother's qualifying accent, and so on. The embedding of words and accents of the other in Osborne's speech is even more marked in the second passage quoted above where the words containing the other's accent are in fact enclosed in quotation marks: "It was 'when Osborne gets honours', and then 'if Osborne', and then a failure altogether" (VIII xxiii 301). With these phrases pushing against and rippling the flow of his own thought, Osborne enters into combat with them, polemically exaggerating their

accents and countering their claims, often through his own exaggerated use of repetition: ". . . how I hate 'ifs'. If me no 'ifs'." As the other person's accent intensifies, so does Osborne's, and the result is a clash of accents and voices that issues in an intense mutual interruption, an internal dialogic collision which manifests itself in the minutest structures of speech.

In the case of Cynthia Kirkpatrick, double-voiced discourse takes on a different mode and works to a different end. Unlike the secretive and introverted Osborne, Cynthia is an apparent extrovert whose thoughts are manifested in an externalized double-voiced discourse. The reader rarely has access to Cynthia's thoughts before they have been vocalized. Her voice rings throughout the pages of Wives and Daughters, making itself heard and demanding response. Craik claims that Gaskell consistently avoids presenting Cynthia's thoughts because "she makes it a point of Cynthia to avoid self-analyzing a nature which lacks the moral strength to perform the kind of action that would be the consequence" (Provincial Novel 251). It would be closer to Gaskell's dialogic intent to say that the ability to analyze herself has been denied to Cynthia. In a rare moment of self-analysis, Cynthia herself makes this point when she says to Molly, "I've never lived with people with such a high standard of conduct before; and I don't quite know how to behave" (VIII xxxvii 475). Cynthia's upbringing and lack of

necessary nurture have left her without a strong internal voice, and her awareness and knowledge of herself are rooted more strongly in the fabric of her relationship with others than is the case with most of the other characters. She recognizes and voices this fact herself when she says to Mr. Gibson, "I have a fine instinct for reading the thoughts of others when they refer to me" (VIII li 637-8). Awareness of the response of another person is always a part of Cynthia's spoken discourse, so completely dependent is she upon the image of herself as it is contained in that voice, and the structure of her speech strongly bears the syntactic imprint of that sideward glance at her listener's hostile word. In her initial conversation with Molly, for example, the act of anticipating another's response is given special emphasis and shown to be marked by the particular structural trait that Bakhtin has called a "vicious circle":

Cynthia was quite silent. At length she said:

"I wish I was good!"

"So do I," said Molly simply. She was thinking again of Mrs. Hamley:

Only the actions of the just
Smell sweet and blossom in the dust.

and "goodness" just seemed to her to be the only enduring thing in the world.

"Nonsense, Molly! You are good. At least, if you're not good, what am I? There's a rule of three

sum for you to do! But it's no use talking; I am not good, and I never shall be now. Perhaps I might be a heroine still, but I shall never be a good woman, I know."

"Do you think it easier to be a heroine?"

"Yes, as far as one knows of heroines from history. I'm capable of a great jerk, an effort, and then a relaxation -- but steady, every-day goodness is beyond me. I must be a moral kangaroo!"

(VIII xix 253-4)

Highlighting the dialogic mode here, Gaskell shows the same word passing through two different consciousnesses. As the word "goodness" moves through the speech of both Molly and Cynthia, we hear their two distinct voices, each carrying its own nuance of meaning and each equally dependent upon the sideward glance of the other. More important, this interchange highlights in Cynthia what is the central point of the "word with a sideward glance," the movement within a vicious circle. Cynthia is incapable of accepting herself without the affirmation and acceptance of another person. Yet, at the same time, she does not want to accept the other's judgment of her; she wants to retain for herself the final word. Her very initiation of a discussion of goodness is predicated upon her need to hear Molly's response, and when that response does not immediately come, she directly asks for it: "At least, if you're not good, what am I?" However, her fear is sensed as she interrupts Molly's response with her own self-definition, not waiting for an answer. Simultaneously dependent upon

and averse to Molly's response, she fears that her own self-affirmation might appear to be in need of the recognition of another. And so she anticipates Molly's response in this attitude of fear and defensiveness. But it is precisely in this act of fearful anticipation that Cynthia demonstrates to herself her dependence upon Molly's response and her inability to be at peace with her own self-definition. And this elicits a sense of further fear, defensiveness, and even hostility, which leads to the need to retain the final word. Such is the inescapable circle in which Cynthia finds herself, what Bakhtin has termed a "perpetuum mobile," which consists of "an endless dialogue where one reply begets another, which begets a third, and so on to infinity, and all this without any forward motion" (Problems 230).

Cynthia's response to this vicious circle is to attempt to free herself and she does so by becoming both cynical and distressed. She attempts to destroy her own image in Molly's eyes: "I'm capable of a great jerk, an effort, and then a relaxation -- but steady, every-day goodness is beyond me. I must be a moral kangaroo!" Cynthia moves into this self-taunting parodic style frequently in the novel, always as a means of defense against entrapment in the vicious circle of another's expectations. Her simultaneous dependence upon and hostility toward the anticipated word of another create a particular form of discourse. Consistently trying to destroy her

own image in another's eyes, and so to free herself from the power of the other's expectations, Cynthia's discourse about herself is deliberately self-deprecating: "I have grown up outside the pale of duty and 'oughts'," she says to Molly. "Love me as I am, sweet one, for I shall never be better" (VIII xix 257). . . "I never consider myself bound to be truthful, so I beg we may be on equal terms" (VIII xix 254). . . "You ought not to care so much for me; I'm not good enough for you to worry yourself about me. I've given myself up a long time ago as a heartless baggage" (VIII xxix 382). There is a certain poignancy in these desperate attempts at self-definition through self-deprecation as Cynthia struggles with the power of another's consciousness over her. And this poignancy is felt even more strongly in instances when she admits to that power, as in her rejoinder to Mr. Gibson when he offers her a "sweet emulsion" to "disguise the taste of the bitters" that he must give her in place of a discussion of her own sorrows: "Please don't. If you but knew how I dislike emulsions and disguises! I do want bitters -- and if I sometimes -- if I'm obliged to -- if I'm not truthful myself, I do like truth in others -- at least sometimes" (VIII xxviii 361). The tentative and halting tone of this passage attests to Cynthia's inner struggle; two voices can be heard within her, one almost drowned out by the over-protestation of the other. And in entering into her discourse, the reader shares in her struggle as she attempts,

against the contradictory words about her in the mouths of others, to define herself in a cynically objective discourse which relies upon exaggeration and self-mockery. In this attempt to destroy her image as it exists in and for the other person, Cynthia relies upon what Bakhtin has called the "word with a loophole."⁸

The word with a loophole is a word that is forever taking into account the responsive, contrary judgment of oneself made by another. Thus, Cynthia constantly condemns herself, but she does so in the hope of provoking acceptance. She desires that her listener dispute her self-definition, and she consistently leaves herself a loophole in case that person should suddenly agree with her self-condemnation. There are many examples of this word with a loophole in the text, most of them occurring in Cynthia's conversations with Molly.

Speaking of the attention she has received from Mr. Gibson's medical student, for example, Cynthia says, "I knew he liked me, and I like to be liked; it's born in me to try to make everyone I come near fond of me; but then they shouldn't carry it too far, for it becomes troublesome if they do" (VIII xxxvii 472). On another occasion, she tells Osborne: "If any one pays me a compliment, please let it be short and clear. I'm very stupid at finding hidden meanings" (VIII xxix 378). In each of these instances, Cynthia expects the other to dispute her self-definition and reserves for herself the possibility of

changing the final meaning of her own words should that not be the case. The word with a loophole is the most characteristic aspect of Cynthia's speech, pointing toward her need for self-preservation and protection. Loopholes move throughout her speech, accompanying her spoken words. This is especially the case when the question of "goodness" is at issue, as in the following exchange with Molly about Roger:

"Oh, Cynthia, what a great thing it is to be loved by him!"

Cynthia blushed and looked flattered and pleased.

"Yes, I suppose it is. All the same, Molly, I'm afraid he'll expect me to be always good as he fancies me now, and I shall have to walk on tiptoe all the rest of my life."

"But you are good, Cynthia," put in Molly.

"No, I'm not. You're just as much mistaken as he is; and some day I shall go down in your opinions with a run, just like the hall clock the other day when the spring broke." (VIII xl 508)

Implied in Cynthia's discourse is the hope of refutation. She typically defines herself in an assertive tone which sounds definitive but contains a hidden desire for argument on the part of her interlocutor. As she voices her fears, every word spoken carries within it a loophole, the desire for contestation and for the possibility of potential other meaning. In almost

every interchange between the two women, Cynthia evidences the simultaneous dependence upon and fear of Molly's response, and thus the loophole frequently characterizes her discourse, often leading to manipulation, as in the following exchange:

"Open to me, please," pleaded Molly. "I have something to say to you -- I want to see you -- do open!"

"No!" said Cynthia. "Not now. I am busy. Leave me alone. I don't want to hear what you have to say. I don't want to see you. By-and-by we shall meet, and then --" Molly stood quite quietly, wondering what new words of more persuasion she could use. In a minute or two Cynthia called out,

"Are you there still, Molly?" and when Molly answered "Yes", and hoped for a relenting, the same hard metallic voice, telling of resolution and repression, spoke out,

"Go away. I cannot bear the feeling of your being down there -- waiting and listening. Go downstairs -- out of the house -- anywhere away. It is the most you can do for me now." (VIII 1 634)

The word with a loophole makes all of Cynthia's self-definitions unstable and renders her self-awareness and self-understanding ambiguous and elusive. She does not know whose opinion is ultimately the final judgment on her: her own censoring definition or another person's refutation of that definition. Constantly anticipating the unknown word of

another, she vacillates between self-condemnation and self-vindication. The two impulses block one another in a movement of interference that leaves Cynthia ultimately deprived of the self-sufficiency for which she seems to yearn. Despite her ostensibly challenging discourse, she remains vulnerable to and in need of another's response; yet she also remains always hostile to that response as well. When Mr. Gibson accuses her of being a "flirt and a jilt," he offers to listen to what Cynthia has to say, but she refuses to respond: "'No! you have prejudged me; you have spoken to me as you have no right to speak. I refuse to give you my confidence or accept your help. People are very cruel to me' -- her voice trembled for a moment -- 'I did not think you would have been. But I can bear it'" (VIII 1 633). Her refusal to respond is, of course, a response in itself and, as always with Cynthia, it looks to (and manipulates) the response of the other.

The complexity of personality that Gaskell achieves through her use of double-voiced discourse in Wives and Daughters can best be measured in her representation of the flawed Osborne Hamley and Cynthia Kirkpatrick. Although rendered differently, their respective modes of discourse allow for an unusual depth and perception of character by depicting the process of struggle and anxiety that accompanies self-definition. This can be especially seen when they are compared to other characters in the novel whose discourse is

differently oriented. Mr. Gibson, for example, is frequently presented as the embodiment of what Bakhtin has called the "penetrative word," the rare "word without a sideward glance, without a loophole, without internal polemic" (Problems 249). Such discourse can only exist in actual dialogue with another person, however, as it functions to interfere in the interior dialogue of the other person, helping that person to find his or her authentic voice. This discourse is characterized by an authoritative tone which is rendered confidently and calmly, allowing for what Craik has called "the perspective of a sensible, sympathetic, yet detached mind" (Provincial Novel 227). A tendency toward such discourse can be heard in Mr. Gibson's voice, especially when he speaks to Cynthia and Osborne. For example, when he calls Cynthia a "flirt and a jilt," and accuses her of "dragging Molly's name down into the same mire" (VIII 1 632), his words penetrate deeply into Cynthia's consciousness, causing her to reevaluate her actions and consider her effect on others. Her ensuing decision to break her engagement to Roger Hamley is directly related to these words of Mr. Gibson's. Both Osborne and Cynthia initially refuse to acknowledge the truth of Mr. Gibson's words, but the words nevertheless take root in them, leading eventually to a deepened self-awareness. In both cases, this self-awareness is mitigated by further defensiveness, but Mr. Gibson's "penetrative word" remains powerful. However, this

penetrative word is never allowed to harden into a firm monologic discourse in the mouth of Mr. Gibson. Having made its appeal to the voice within another, it immediately retreats, and the internal dialogism of Mr. Gibson's discourse, marked by anxiety, becomes his dominant mode. Even in this interchange with Cynthia, his discourse becomes double-voiced; he fluctuates between direct accusation and self-doubt. After Cynthia's contestation of his words, the narrator allows that Mr. Gibson realizes that "he had spoken too strongly: he knew it. But he could not bring himself to own it just at that moment. The thought of his sweet innocent Molly, who had borne so much patiently, prevented any retraction of his words at the time" (VIII 1 633). A consistent monologically firm and self-confident voice is impossible in Gaskell's fictional world, so committed is she to the ambiguities of human personality and relationship.

Gaskell's use of double-voiced discourse in Wives and Daughters accounts for the subtlety and complexity of characterization in this novel. In particular, her representation of Osborne Hamley and Cynthia Kirkpatrick illustrates the degree to which her dialogic mode has deepened and developed since the writing of Mary Barton. Her awareness of the ambiguities of human personality, and her sympathy and concern for those existing outside of accepted social and moral patterns, are all addressed in this final novel, as they had been

previously. But whereas in her first novel Gaskell had to rely upon narrative displacement and the conventional polarities of melodrama to allow her flawed and faulty characters a voice, in Wives and Daughters she renders both Osborne and Cynthia in the supple double-voiced discourse that grants them full humanity.

NOTES TO CHAPTER SIX

¹ In her Introduction to Wives and Daughters, Rosamund Lehmann emphasizes the originality of Gaskell's creation: "But when we come to Cynthia, we are in another world, a world we visit only with the greatest novelists . . . Mrs. Gaskell never drew any other character like Cynthia. Indeed, we may scan the length and breadth of Victorian fiction and find nothing to compare with her: one wonders from what depth of experience and self-knowledge her creator begot and nourished her" (13).

² Interestingly, one of the few English authors on whom Grossman has also written is Gaskell, and he expresses the same admiration for her work as for the work of Dostoevsky. See Leonid Grossman, "Dostoevsky and Mrs. Gaskell."

³ Winifred Gerin reads Molly as the ultimate Victorian heroine, "never otherwise than true to herself, honorable, kind, sensitive to the moods of others" (276). Similarly, Edgar Wright sees in her "the summation of the qualities that Mrs. Gaskell admired and which appear to a varying degree in most of her heroines. She is affectionate, self-reliant, honest and natural, with vitality and intelligence" (222). Yet Lerner is less sure. "Molly is too intimately tied up with what is conventional in the book to achieve the finest kind of life," he says. "Her feelings are convincing, yet a little too near the expected; her love for Roger is too like the love of a hundred other heroines" (25). Craik sees her as "unusually passive for a heroine" (246), and as "endowed with no outstanding qualities of mind or heart" (245).

⁴ In his chapter on "The Hero in Dostoevsky's Art," Bakhtin writes: "The hero from the underground eavesdrops on every word someone else says about him, he looks at himself, as it were, in all

the mirrors of other people's consciousnesses, he knows all the possible refractions of his image in those mirrors" (Problems 53).

⁵ Wright notes: "The author is present to indicate stages in Molly's reflection, but for most of the time is so closely identified with Molly's disturbed mind that its uneven flow takes over the structure of the English and its direct questions mingle with the stream of thought. Mrs. Gaskell has slipped into Molly's consciousness and speaks from it" (248).

⁶ For an excellent discussion of double-voiced discourse, see Chapter Five of Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, "Discourse in Dostoevsky," 181-269.

⁷ Polemical exaggeration, as Bakhtin observes, is the result of a character's "continuous hidden polemic or hidden dialogue with some other person on the theme of himself" (Problems 207). It points out the profound dialogic and polemical nature of self-awareness.

⁸ Bakhtin notes: "A loophole is the retention for oneself of the possibility for altering the ultimate, final meaning of one's own words. If a word retains such a loophole this must inevitably be reflected in its structure. This potential other meaning, that is, the loophole left open, accompanies the word like a shadow. Judged by its meaning alone, the word with a loophole should be an ultimate word and does present itself as such, but in fact it is only the penultimate word and places after itself only a conditional, not a final, period" (Problems 233).

Afterword

Traditionally, criticism of Gaskell has centered on her increased control of her medium in the course of her career. Whereas she begins in her early work with a form of what Edgar Wright calls "naive narrative comment" which directly addresses her reader, she consistently moves away from this narrative stance in the later works, ending with the "fine central intelligence" of an omniscient narrator who controls the telling of the story (242 246). Enid Duthie also notes Gaskell's "greater control" as a narrator in the later works, leading to an "increase in power and originality shown in the composition which progresses through some initial uncertainty to the structural mastery of North and South and the finished symphonies of the final novels" (199 181). The monological rhetoric and assumptions underlying this type of assessment are characteristic of most traditional criticism of Gaskell. However, both Wright and Duthie also detect an aspect of Gaskell's art that is at odds with these critical assumptions. Wright sees Gaskell as at her best as the informal storyteller, and Duthie locates "the true reason for her versatility" in her tendency to "welcome variety and improvisation" (192). "Spontaneity attracted her more than perfection," she says, in the context of Gaskell's friends' description of her as "a born raconteur" (195). Gaskell's narrative, rooted in the pre-literary

form of oral storytelling, cannot be measured by the norms of narrative that have historically set the standard for study of the novel. The classical notions of unity, closure, and shapeliness necessarily limit the scope of her art. The splits in narrative voice and formal structure in the early works, for example, are viewed as only weaknesses, when they can be seen instead as the expression of the dialogic tension within which Gaskell consistently works as an oral storyteller. As a believer in the power and necessity of troubled questioning, she celebrates the conflict and contestation that informs the act of oral storytelling. As she tells her stories in anticipation of her listener's possibly hostile response, her dialogic mode allows for contestation on all levels of narrative -- characterization, plot, style, narrative voice. From this perspective, the uneven nature of the novels can be read as less a formal weakness than as the result of her more dispersive oral narrative mode, a mode which allows for the celebration of difference excluded by monological approaches to the novel. Even in Wives and Daughters, on the surface the most traditional of her works, Gaskell conducts her enterprise by portraying the dialogic chorus which exists within a character's single consciousness. As every word is spoken in the anticipation of another, the reader becomes aware of the relatedness and reciprocity of all language, and of an open stance toward narrative meaning. The characters in Wives and Daughters resist any finalizing claim to perfect and coherent understanding; they exist

to portray the unsettling and imperfect nature of human identity and relationship. And Wives and Daughters, like all of Gaskell's novels, itself also resists any finalizing tendency toward closure. Rooted in the value of imperfection, it stands against the notion of the discrete, unified aesthetic object. There is little sense of a controlling authorial hand at work. As the reader listens to the varying inner voices of the characters, Gaskell's dialogic mode can be felt. As voice presses against voice in an uneasy movement toward an ultimately unfinalizable meaning, the novel expresses that openness and tolerance that is the characteristic mark of Gaskell's fictional vision.

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